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Indigenous Federation: The Case of Borana Oromo, Ethiopia

Dejene Gemechu Chala
Jimma University, dejekeno@gmail.com

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Abstract

This article draws attention to the Borana Oromo *gadaa* system as an Indigenous federation. *Gadaa* is an Indigenous democratic political system used by the Oromo in which leaders are elected and their term in office is strictly fixed. Data for this research were generated through interviews, observations, and focus group discussions. The findings of this research indicate that the Borana have three *gadaa* councils at two levels: one at the center for the entire Borana and two named after two Borana clans. The later have relative autonomy under the cardinal law of the Borana *gadaa*. This structure has been serving as a means of managing conflict, maintaining internal unity, and ensuring better governance and power devolution. Finally, suggestions are made on how to support Indigenous governance systems, which in this case includes acknowledging the values and principles of the *gadaa* system, as well as designing a legal framework that retains and protects the integrity and legitimacy of the system.

Indigenous Federation: The Case of Borana Oromo, Ethiopia

The Borana are predominantly pastoralists, inhabiting southern Ethiopia in Oromia National Regional State (ONRS[1]) and Northern Kenya. They are one of the major Oromo groups. Numerically, the Oromo are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia (Central Statistical Authority [CSA], 2007). They occupy a land that extends from northeastern Ethiopia to east central Kenya and from the Sudan in the west and Ethiopian Somali National Regional State in the east. The Oromo consist of many groups, which branch out from the Borana and the Barentu, the two principal moieties[2] (Hassen, 1994; Huntingford, 1955; Megerssa, 1993). In the Oromo origin story, the Borana are the senior division, considered as *angafa* Oromo (first born of the Oromo nation). *Gadaa* and *qalluu*[3] institutions are among the major Oromo institutions still actively working among the Borana. Hassen (1994) showed that the Borana major branch was further divided into Macha-Tulama, the Southern Borana, and the Gujii confederacies. The present article deals with the *gadaa* federation among the Southern Borana, specifically the Sabbo and Goona moieties (hereafter the Borana).

This article aims to depict how *gadaa* is structured among the Borana in terms of power devolution among moieties, sub-moieties, and clans. First, the article draws attention to the prevalence of Indigenous federal arrangements. Next, the article presents an empirical case study for lawmakers to consider *gadaa* as a longstanding form of Indigenous governance that embodies a number of democratic values and has been working parallel to the Ethiopian state institutions.[4] In this article, I do not intend to discuss the Borana *gadaa* in terms of the distinctions between political philosophy, federalism, and institutional and structural techniques of achieving federalism.[5] Yet, as far as I use the term federalism to depict the Borana *gadaa* arrangement, it is fair to see what federalism is and its major features. From this perspective, the article attempts to contextualize federalism in order to show how the Borana *gadaa* is structured as federal system with all its peculiarities. Contextualization of federalism is discussed in one of the later parts. Afterward, I discuss the place of the *gadaa* system in the national and regional contexts of the successive Ethiopian regimes since the establishment of modern Ethiopian State follows.

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[1] ONRS refers to one of the federal units in the present Ethiopian federal structure.

[2] Anthropologists often define moiety as one of two unilineal descent units into which a given community is divided. Usually, they are exogamous groups.

[3] *Qalluu* is a religious institution of the Oromo that believes in one supreme creator called *Waaqa. Waaqa* is believed to be omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient, and communicates with human being from above. The leader of the institution is also called *qalluu*. The office of *qalluu* is hereditary with a lifelong the term in office. *Qalluu* has councillors elected for a single term, which is 8 years.

[4] The post-1991 Ethiopian state structure has provided a drastically improved political landscape. Ethiopia introduced a federal structure and constitutionally guaranteed all ethnic groups in the country the right to speak, to write, and to develop their own language; to express, to develop, and to promote their culture; and to preserve their history. Yet, still a legal framework defining the domains of local governance is missing.

[5] In the study of federal political system, scholars make distinction between federalism and federation. According to Fiseha (2007), federalism refers to a normative principle, while federation refers to the actual system of government or its tangible institutional facts.

The National Political Setting

Gadaa System in Ethiopian Regimes

The advent of modern Ethiopian state was realized during the last quarter of the 19th century through military conquest of areas commonly referred to as Abyssinia[6] (Anyang' Nyong'o, 1991; Baxter, 1994; Markakis, 1991; Gudina, 2003). With this expansion, the Oromo in general and the Borana in particular were incorporated into the Ethiopian state. Subsequent modern Ethiopian regimes, until the demise of the socialist regime in 1991, persistently promoted a policy of assimilation aimed at national integration (Markakis, 1991). These regimes believed that the Ethiopian nation-building project was inconceivable without the imposition of the cultural, linguistic, and religious values of the Abyssinians over the rest of the groups (Gudina, 2006). This assimilation policy was blamed for causing considerable ethnic, economic, and cultural discrimination (Anyang' Nyong'o, 1991).

Like elsewhere in colonial Africa (see Hagmann, 2007; Kyed & Buur, 2007), the Abyssinian rulers used Borana local institutions selectively. As it did not fit into the Abyssinian monarchial system, the *gadaa* system was marginalized. The 1974 socialist revolution brought another political landscape to Ethiopia—the monarchial regime was abolished, but the promotion of local cultures and institutions was not in place either.

Hinnant (1977) indicated that the incorporation of the Oromo into the modern Ethiopian state and resultant policies of assimilation by the successive regimes, together with inevitable internal dynamics, weakened the *gadaa* system in different parts of Oromia. In some cases, *gadaa* has retained many of its rituals, and social symbols and values without significant political roles (Baxter, 1994; Bulcha, 1996; Gemechu, 2012; Legesse, 2006). However, compared to any other Oromo group, in relative terms, *gadaa* has remained a living institution in its original features among the Borana.

The Post-1991 Guarantee of Cultural Rights

Ethiopia introduced an ethno-linguistic based federal state structure in 1991 following the downfall of the socialist regime. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) was established, officially recognizing that Ethiopia is a multicultural state. The new regime underscored that ethnic federalism was mandatory in order to ensure unity by accommodating diversity (Fiseha, 2006; Gudina, 2006). It aimed to reverse existing policies of assimilation and the consequent ethnic inequalities in the country. In the new Ethiopian political landscape, the revival of traditional institutions was constitutionally guaranteed. Article 39(2) of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (1995) reads, "Every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has the right to speak, to write and to develop its own language; to express, to develop and to promote its culture; and to preserve its history." This recognition represents a dramatic change from past approaches with far reaching effects in addressing major grievances related to the former policy of ethnic domination and cultural suppression.

Following introduction of federal structure in 1991, the *gadaa* system has been used as symbol of Oromo unity in reconstructing the national feeling of being Oromo (*Oromummaa*). Some basic *gadaa*

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[6] Abyssinia refers to the northern part of present day Ethiopia. Abyssinians are the Semitic groups inhabiting this part of the country.

terminologies and symbols have been used at the regional state level by the ONRS. *Gadaa* regalia have been translated into the state flag. Red, white, and black are the three colors of the state's flag. All were derived from the *gadaa* banner with more or less the same meanings attached to each color. Furthermore, at the center of the flag a sycamore tree (*odaa*) is found, which was traditionally used for shade during *gadaa* gatherings. Similarly, the general assembly of the *gadaa* government, which has decision-making and legislative power, is termed as *caffee* (chafe). This term is now the nomenclature of the legislative organ of ONRS.

In general, the *gadaa* system has survived the former external impositions and internal changes, and has been revived since the 1991 restructuring of the Ethiopian state and as a result of its guarantee of rights for each cultural group. This is evidenced by the recent revitalization of different *gadaa* centers (see Gemechu, 2012). The discussion of the present Borana *gadaa* as an example of Indigenous federation is addressed within this context.

Research Methods

This research uses an ethnographic research method. Data were generated through extensive fieldwork using a purely qualitative methodological approach. I conducted a total of 13 months of fieldwork among the Borana between May 2007 and September 2010 for my doctoral dissertation, which was focused on a different topic. This article focuses on a small segment of the empirical data related to Indigenous federalism that I collected from the field setting during this period. In addition, I observed the last Borana general assembly, which was conducted in the summer of 2012. Ethics approval was granted by the concerned bodies at all levels. These include the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle (Saale), Germany, with which I was affiliated; the Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau; the Oromia Administration and Security Bureau; the Borana Zone Administration; and the Borana Zone Culture and Tourism Office.

Interviews with key informants, participant observation, naturalistic observation, and focus group discussions were employed as instruments of data generation. *Gadaa* leaders, *qaalluu* (religious leaders), partially retired *gadaa* officials of different ranks, Borana oral historians, Borana elites who have close communication with the *gadaa* officials, government officials, and the wives of the ritual leaders were interviewed in several rounds. Some of the informants were identified purposively based on their knowledge about the Borana *gadaa* system and pertinent issues, while others were identified through a snowball sampling procedure.

I made several participant observations, as well as observations at different *gadaa* rituals and meetings. To mention some, I observed the *buttee*[7] ritual in August 2007. *Buttee* ritual is organized by the *gadaa* class coming into power. The ritual directly marks the separation of power among the Borana *gadaa* councils and the establishment of the three mobile power centers (*gadaa* councils), which is the central focus of this article. In the meantime, the ritual defines and redefines the Borana *gadaa* structure into two levels: the level of the entire Borana, or the *gadaa arbooraa* council; and the branches, *gadaa kontoma,* with special autonomy. I physically stayed at the ritual place for a week.

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[7] A class would come to power just after 1 year of *butte* ritual. This ritual is one of the most important *gadaa* rituals performed for several successive days.

Through personal participation and observation, I obtained additional data during the 40th Borana general assembly, conducted in the summer of 2012. I observed this general assembly for 20 successive days between August 20 and September 10, 2012. The Borana general assembly is held every 8 years for several weeks at a place called Gaayo in Dirree district. This assembly is known as *Gumii Gaayoo*. Other similar rituals and meetings were observed over a considerable time period in the field. Furthermore, data were generated from six focus group discussions that were organized on different occasions. Participants of the discussions were Borana ritual leaders, elders, and experienced women. In addition to field notes, data were captured using voice recorder, video recording, and photo cameras.

To analyze the collected data, I employed ethnographic content analysis, particularly what is commonly known as conventional content analysis strategy. The very nature of my data pertinent to the issue under discussion does not lend itself to data presentation supported by direct quotes. For this end, the data were systematically classified, and themes were identified and compiled. In line with this approach, the discussion included a summary of how the findings from this study corroborate or deviate from other similar research works or theories of federalism. It also showed how this particular study contributes to knowledge in the area of Indigenous governance in general and Indigenous federation in particular. Finally, it provided suggestions for future practice.

Credibility was ensured through diverse mechanisms including checking the authenticity of the findings. I tried to use a variety of methods that are appropriate for qualitative research. The different methods employed in generating data for this article aimed at triangulating data to ensure credibility and confirmability. Data, which were generated through interviews, observations, and focus group discussions, were compared and contrasted to ensure insights on the issue under investigation that are more comprehensive.

Furthermore, since I am a native Oromo, speaking the language (with a slight variation in accent), there was neither a language nor a cultural barrier. Through my long stay in the field, I was able to establish rapport to ensure trust among informants who contributed to the data. However, since this study employed a qualitative design, the findings may not be transferable at face value. Nevertheless, the accumulation of findings from this study is still relevant in providing an overall picture of *gadaa* federation, as far as the system is operational among the Borana.

Conceptualizing Federalism

Meanings and History

The question that is important in guiding the present discussion of the Borana *gadaa* system as an indigenous federation is: What kinds of state structure do we call federalism and when federalism did begin? Law (2013) indicated that the political science literature on federalism has seemingly reached a mature state of development in that it has provided a wealth of fruitful insights into the character and execution of federal systems of government. However, there is no common agreement on the exact meaning of the concept.

Law (2013) provided a shorthand definition that academic discourses pertinent to federalism seem to commonly use. Law's definition focused on the division of sovereignty between two levels of government—the central and regional governments—neither of which is legally or politically

subordinate to the other. Federalism is an arrangement in which a certain member state is guaranteed relative autonomy (see Freeley & Rubin, 2008; Law, 2013; Polten & Glezl, 2014; Uhunmwuangho & Ekpu, 2011). In contemporary federal systems, for example in the US federation, a federal government can be understood as an association of states in which powers are divided between a federal government and state governments (Wheare, 1963).

Burgess (2006) indicated that the principle of self-rule and shared rule can be successfully applied in a great many different ways. This flexibility leads to ambiguity and challenges efforts aim at theory building. This leads to the use of the term in a very wide and overarching sense. Burgess (2006), citing Murray Forsyth,[8] showed that the term federalism can be used not only in the range of federal unions, but also in a wide variety of governance arrangements.

The second important question is when and where federalism began. Papillon (2008) indicated that the greatest misunderstanding in the current literature on federalism is the tendency to reduce it to one specific form as exemplified in nation states, like the US, Canada, and Germany. Papillon (2008) showed that the history of federalism predates the creation of the first modern federation in revolutionary America. Söder and Sandberg (2009), on the other hand, traced federalism as far back as ancient times in Greece. The ancient league of Greek cities was established with the basic aim of forming military alliances. The league was something similar to what we call federalism today. Further, Daniel Elazar (cited in Papillon, 2008) provided examples such as covenanted associations of Hebrew tribes, which was started around 1300 AD and the Helvetic confederation of 1291 AD. The Swiss confederation, which was established in the 13th century, finally developed into a federation by the mid-19th century. The Dutch federation, which was established in the 16th century, is worth mentioning here as another early example of a federation (Söder & Sandberg, 2009).

Based on this historical evidence, some writers have argued that the Western world has no monopoly over the concept because federalism developed in other societies earlier (Söder & Sandberg, 2009). Apart from these specific examples, the literature indicates that elements of federalism have been prevalent in different parts of the world and at different times. Reilly (2006) also supports this contention by noting that federalism as a theory of organization is of great relevance to Indigenous governance systems. Similarly, Papillon (2008) showed that, in essence, federalism is found in the institutionalization of a particular set of relationships among participants in political life, rather than in a particular set of institutions. This gives us different opportunities to see how the idea of federalism has been articulated. Consequently, federalism can be translated into various forms of government.

These discussions on the conceptual clarity of federalism and its historical accounts are quite relevant to the issue under investigation. As one of the basic features of federalism, the organizational arrangement characterized by the division of power at two levels is important in determining whether it is appropriate to qualify the Borana *gadaa* as an example of an Indigenous federation. Since the Borana *gadaa* has two levels of councils—the central and the autonomous branches—it satisfies this basic feature of federalism. Furthermore, given the flexibility in the application of the term federalism, the use of the term in the context of the Borana is justifiable.

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[8] Murray Forsyth is emeritus professor of politics at the University of Leicester. He wrote about federal unions and is the author of *Unions of States: The Theory and Practice of Confederation*, published in 1981.

Origins and Types of Federal Structures

Currently, around 70% of the world states are believed to have at least some elements of federalism, although some of them are not formally recognized as federal states. Furthermore, around 20 of the world's nations, which constitute 40% of the world's population, are considered to be federal states (Söder & Sandberg, 2009).

Söder and Sandberg (2009) discussed whether there are common patterns that all these federal countries share or whether federalism is something that is created on an individual basis by country. Scholars have tried to identify certain types of federal structures based on some shared parameters. Citing the Forum of Federations, Móntes (n.d.) classified federalism into three categories according to the context and process of federalization. These are coming together federations, holding together federations, and forced federations. Coming together federations, also called born federations, are formed by distinct political communities that have banded together to form a federation. Holding together federations, on the other hand, refer to countries that become federations with the objective of enhancing peaceful co-existence among political communities within the same country. Finally, forced federation is imposed from outside bodies, such as international organizations and global superpowers, with the aim of keeping a nation intact.

Federations may also be classified according to the manner in which powers are distributed between the center and the constituent units, as well as among the constituent units. These are cooperative, competitive, permissive, symmetric, asymmetric, and consociational federations. According to Móntes (n.d.), competitive federalism specifies separate roles for federal units and constituent units as much as possible and allows the latter to exercise their own rights. Cooperative federalism creates arrangements where both levels of governments share responsibilities and work together. On the other hand, permissive federalism seems more like a unitary state in which the federal government defines the existence and powers of local governments. Another classification of federalism deals with the horizontal distribution of powers among the subnational units, which is labeled as either asymmetric or symmetric. It is symmetric when the same powers and responsibilities are held among the constituent units. It is asymmetric when the powers given differ among the constituent units. In this type of federalism, some constituent units enjoy special privileges or autonomy compared to others. The last model is consociation, which is characterized by power-sharing mechanisms at the federal level as well as in the subnational level. Móntes (n.d.) indicated that these power-sharing mechanisms may involve proportional representation for cultural groups in legislatures and within the bureaucracy, veto powers for minorities, and coalition governments.

Writers divide federalism into dual and cooperative systems based on the borderline between regional power and national power. A dual system is one in which most fundamental governmental powers are shared between the federal government and the state governments. Meanwhile cooperative federalism is a concept of federalism in which the national state government and local governments interact cooperatively and collectively to solve common problems, rather than making policies separately (Söder & Sandberg, 2009).

To summarize, the origins of federal arrangements and the types of federations found in the world are important in guiding the discussion of the *gadaa* federation, which has been used by the Borana since at

least the second half of the 18th century. In order to identify how to classify the Borana federation, it is important to consider how the Borana central *gadaa* council works with the self-autonomous *gadaa* councils, and the horizontal power divisions among the various moieties and clans with all their peculiarities.

The *Gadaa* System: An Overview

Gadaa is a political system that has guided the political, the economic, and the social life of the Oromo since long ago (Bassi, 2005; Hassen, 1994; Hinnant, 1977; Legesse, 1973; Van de Loo, 1991). Different scholars have provided different definitions of the *gadaa* system (see for example Bassi, 2005; Gololcha, 2006; Hassen, 1994; Legesse 1973, 2006; Schlee, 1989). Legesse (1973), who has meticulously studied this system, provided a relatively comprehensive definition of the term:

> The *gada* [also spelled as *gadaa*] system is a system of classes (*luba*) that succeed each other every 8 years in assuming military, economic, political, and ritual responsiblities. Each *gada* class remains in power during a specific term (*gada*) which begins and ends with a formal power transfer ceremony. (p. 8)

The definition indicates that the *gadaa* system has classes called *luba*, which are often referred to as a *gadaa* class. Each class controls political and ritual power for 8 years. This time is a *gadaa* period, which is named after a specific *gadaa* class.

To understand this system, it is important to make a distinction between *luba* and *gogeessa* for they are often confusing. *Gogeessa* is a generational line, which divides all male members of the Oromo into five groups. *Gogeessa* is just like a political party. Regardless of some controversial oral accounts, five *gogeessa* (*gadaa* parties) were established at a certain point in the history of the Oromo by the founding generation of forefathers.[9] The founders were neither from the same clan nor the same family. Membership in a given *gogeessa* is structurally predetermined for they are hereditary. Accordingly, forefather, grandfather, father, and son belong to the same *gogeessa* (*gadaa* party). However, they are of different generations and consequently different *luba*. In this regard, *luba* refers to a specific *gadaa* class of one of the *gogeessa* (political parties). In other words, *luba* is a segment of a *gogeessa*.

Periodic election is basic feature of the system. Each *gogeessa* controls political and ritual power through its elected representatives for only single term in office, which changes in orderly rotation. As a result, each *gogesssa*, but successive generations (*luba*), serves in office for 8 years once every 40 years (see Bassi, 2005; Legesse, 1973, 2006). The 40 years of *gadaa* time is known as *maragadaa*[10] (the *gadaa* cycle) (see Bassi, 2005; Legesse, 1973, 2006). Power is equally divided among the five *gogeessa* and the successive *luba* of each *gogeessa*.

The *luba* of a particular *gogeessa* rules for one *gadaa* period (8 years) before power is transferred to another *luba* of another *gogeessa* for the next 8 years. The *gadaa* period is often named after the *gadaa* leader of that particular *gadaa* period, like *luba* of so and so. Since each *gogeessa* is supposed to assume

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[9] Among the Borana Oromo, we know the names of the founding forefathers of each party, but nobody knows how party members were recruited initially.

[10] The Borana call it *mara gadaa*, whereas the other Oromo groups like the Macha and Tulama call it *marsaa gadaa*.

power only once within a *gadaa* cycle, there is no inter-*gogeessa* (horizontal) and/or inter-*luba* (intergenerational) competition over power. In the *gadaa* system, power is transferred peacefully. The final power transfer ceremony is termed as *baalli ikennuu*[11] (handing over power).

The *Gadaa* Federation

The *gadaa* federation appears to be different from the contemporary notion of federalism—there are some distinct essences in all types of federal systems. Most definitions of federalism include one of its most significant features; that is, division of power between the two orders of government. It is often understood from two angles: the ideological and the institutional. In the Oromo case, the institutional milieu of federation is significant because it is embedded in the holistic socio-economic, political, cultural, and religious institution known as the *gadaa* system.

Various studies indicate that the Oromo *gadaa* system has been taking a form of confederation[12] and/or federation. The *gadaa* system, which has elected leaders within each generation and an orderly succession to various positions of political office, has also been dividing power among moieties, sub-moieties, clans, and sub-clans. Some might call this a *gadaa* confederation (Berisso, 1988; Etefa, 2008; Gololcha, 2006; Hassen, 1994). The Oromo had common *gadaa* government with a relative freedom for the different major groups. For instance, during the 16th century, there had been two powerful confederacies—the Macha and the Tulama. They had a common *gadaa* government and common law. The headquarters of the *gadaa* government was at Oda Nabe in Fatager (Hassen, 1994), about 30 kilometers west of Addis Ababa. Yet, each moiety had relative freedom to deal independently with its own internal affairs.

Later, due to certain internal and external pushing factors, such as an increase in both the human and cattle populations, the Macha established another confederacy. According to Etefa (2008) and Hassen (1994), the first of this kind was the confederacy of the four major Macha sub-moieties—Hoko, Caliya, Guduru, and Liban—called *afree*, meaning the confederacy of four. This confederacy had its headquarters at Tute Bisil Osole between Gedo and Bilbilo in the present West Shoa Zone[13] of ONRS. Furthermore, the groups that occupied the southwestern part of the present ONRS established another confederacy called the *Saddacha Confederacy* (the confederacy of three). The three groups, according to Hassen (1994), were the Suba, the Obbo, and the Hakako (sub-moieties of the Macha moiety). Similarly, the Ballo of the Bacho, Birbirsa Tiya of the Soddo, the Foqa Awas of the Jiddaa, and the Caffee Galaan of the Galaan Oromo are some examples among the Tulama Oromo of fully autonomous sub-moieties who at the same time had close contacts with each other. The *Sadacha Confederacy* of Warra Karrayyu, Warra Ilu, and Warra Noolee of the Barentuu Oromo in the Wallo region in the north was another but similar instance (Etefa, 2008).

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[11]*Baallii* designates the event in which power is transferred. In the ritual, the outgoing *gadaa* leader places an ostrich feather (known as *baalguda* among the Borana) on the head of the incoming leader.

[12] In contemporary political studies, confederation is defined as an association among sovereign states, established for the purpose of serving some of their common interests. Since they are sovereign states, they are not governed under common constitution (Fiseha, 2007).

[13] This zone is an administrative unit next to the national regional state in the Ethiopian federal structure.

The same history holds true among the Gujii Oromo in southern ONRS who are still practicing *gadaa* confederacy. The Gujii have been practicing the *gadaa* system in the form of a confederation among three major clans: Uraagaa, Maattii, and Hookkuu (Berisso, 1988; Gololcha, 2006; Hinnant, 1977; Vande Loo, 1991). Members of the confederacy are all self-dependent and have full authority. The entire Gujii have a common *gadaa* center located at *Me'ee Bokkoo*. Since the beginning of the Gujii *gadaa, Me'ee Bokkoo* has existed as a well-known sacred place. Yet, all three groups have their own independent *gadaa* councils with their respective ritual grounds and leaders.

Each council of the three clans perceives itself as independent, but work closely with each other on common purposes that affect the entire Gujii. Despite their autonomy, the Gujii *gadaa* is governed by the same *gadaa* law, which can only be set by the *Gumii Bokkoo* (often called *Me'ee Bokkoo*) during the power transfer ceremony. This is one of the chief ritual ceremonies in the Gujii *gadaa*.

Pertinent to the principle of power division, a different version of *gadaa* structure is prevalent among the Borana. The Borana have been practicing *gadaa* federation. Consequently, the Borana federation is a typical Oromo federation in its adherence to relatively intact *gadaa* rules that are the result of unique historical and political circumstances. Among the people, political, economic, and sociological perspectives led to the formation of federations.

The Borana *Gadaa* Federation

The structure and power sharing. The Borana have three *gadaa* councils, often called *gadaa sadeen* (see Bassi, 2005; Legesse, 1973). They have *yaa'aa arbooraa (arbooraa gadaa* council) at the center, and two other *gadaa* councils, named after two Borana clans. This structure is strictly guided by the principle of power devolution among moieties, sub-moieties, clans, and sub-clans. The prevalence of these three *gadaa* councils, one at the center and the two branches, are often referred to by the Borana at every occasion involving blessings and praying rituals. It goes as follows: "*Haay haay! Waaqa gadaan yaasi, arbooraa abbaa biyyaa, kontomii dame.*" The translation is: "Let *Waaqa* guide the *gadaa. Arbooraa* is the 'father' to all (meaning the senior among the three mobile power centers). *Kontoma* (the two autonomous *gadaa* councils that are named after two of the Borana clans) are just branches." As the oral history goes, the Borana have been practicing *gadaa* federation since the second half of the 18th century. This time is known as the *gadaa* period of Bulee Dhaddachaa (1776-1783).[14]

To understand the guiding rule of the Borana federation, we need to have an overview of the Borana clan structure. The Borana are divided into two exogamous moieties, Sabbo and Goona (often called *Goona bal'aa*). Goona is the senior moiety and Sabbo is the junior. The Sabbo moiety is divided into three major clans: Maxxaarrii, Karrayyuu, and Digaluu. The Goona moiety is divided into two major sub-moieties: Fulleellee and Harooressa. The first is divided into seven clans. These are Daaccituu, Maccituu, Siraayyuu, Galaantuu, Odituu, Koonnitu, and Bachituu. The second is divided into eight clans, which are Noonituu, Qarcabduu, Harusii, Maliyyuu, Warra Jiddaa, Dambituu, Hawaxxuu, and Halchaayyaa. These are further divided into different smaller kinship categories like sub-clan, lineage, minor linage, and extended families (see Legesse, 1973). Each clan has its own strong clan council that closely manages all aspects of clan issues. Clan councils are in charge of the administration and

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[14] For the chronology of the Borana *gadaa* see Legesse (1973).

utilization of common resources such as deep water wells, supporting needy members of the clan, addressing issues of conflict, and nominating clan representatives in *gadaa* councils at different levels (for details see Bassi, 2005).

In addition to clan structure, an overview of the available *gadaa* offices is equally important. In the system, there are different offices, which vary in their political statuses and importance. Focusing on the *gadaa*, there are three major typologies of *hayyuu*[15] who occupy offices for a particular *gadaa* period (8 years). These are *adulaa, garba,* and *medhicha,* listed in descending seniority order. *Hayyuu adulaa* refers to the top *gadaa* officials. These are the leaders of *gadaa* councils. The *abbaa gadaa fiixee* (prime *gadaa* leader) belongs to this group. They are from the active *gadaa* class (*luba*) of a particular *gogeessa*. They are six in number (see Tables 1, 2, and 3, which show background information for each moiety, sub-moiety, and clan among the top *gadaa* officials for three consecutive *gadaa* periods since 1992). The second is called *hayyuu medhichaa*. This group is drawn from the *luba* and *gogeessa* of the *hayyuu adulaa* (from the same *gadaa* class). This group also constitutes six members (see Table 4). The third one is called *hayyuu garbaa*. Members of this group are drawn from the partially retired *luba* of any *gogeessa*. This means experienced individuals, whose class has already passed through its *gadaa* period, but who have not yet personally held office of this kind from any *gogeessa*, could serve as *hayyuu garbaa* in any other *gogeessa*. *Hayyuu garbaa* are advisors in the *gadaa*. They are also delegates of their respective clans, which they represent at any one of the *gadaa* councils. Currently, there are 18 offices of *hayyuu garbaa,* but given space limits this article focuses on the top *gadaa* officials.[16]

The system divides the six top offices (*hayyuu adulaa*) between the two halves of the Borana (Sabbo and Goona). Each moiety holds three of the six top offices. Further, within the moiety, the available offices are equally shared among the clans or sub-moieties. Accordingly, the Sabbo moiety has three offices for *hayyuu adulaa*. Since the Sabbo has three major clans, each clan always holds one office of *hayyuu adulaa*. Similarly, the Goona hold three offices. Since the Goona has 15 clans, it is not possible for each clan to hold office for a particular *gadaa* period. As a result, the Borana have arranged the division of power among the Goona at the level of sub-moiety (Fulleellee and Harooressa). Each sub-moiety holds at least one office of the *hayyuu adulaa* every *gadaa* period. Since the Goona moiety has three offices at its disposal, the third one goes to either the Fulleellee or Harooressa during different *gadaa* periods.

Data from the field indicated that, in addition to the six offices of *hayyuu adulaa*, the six offices of *hayyuu medhichaa* and 18 offices of the *hayyuu garbaa* are distributed equitably among the Borana clans as much as possible. It is unusual to see two or more people from a particular clan holding any of these offices during the same term of office. Apart from power sharing between the two moieties, and their sub-moieties and clans, the Borana designed a kind of administrative self-government for the *Goona bal'aa*. The two sub-moieties— Fulleellee and Harooressa—are allowed to have relatively self-governing *gadaa* councils. The Hawaxxuu from Harooreessa and the Koonnituu from Fulleellee are privileged with having their own separate *gadaa* councils. Accordingly, in terms of its internal structure, the central council and the branches have different settings as described below.

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[15] *Hayyuu* is the term used by the Borana to refer to an elected office holder.

[16] For typologies of *hayyuu* and the number of *hayyuu adulaa,* see Bassi (2005) and Legesse (1973).

Table 1. Hayyuu Adulaa for the Gadaa Period of Boruu Madhaa (1992-2000)

S.No	Name	Moiety	Sub-Moiety	Clan
1	Boruu Madhaa	Goona	Harooressa	Noonituu
2	Liiban Olkaa	Sabbo	—	Digaluu
3	Dullacha Diidaa	Goona	Harooressa	Hawaxxuu
4	Boruu Doyyoo	Sabbo	—	Karrayyuu
5	Guyyoo Godaanaa	Goona	Fulleellee	Koonnituu
6	Diida Godaanaa	Sabbo	—	Maxxaarrii

Note. Source: Fieldwork.

Table 2. Hayyuu Adulaa for the Gadaa Period of Liiban Jaldeessaa (2000-2008)

S.No	Name	Moiety	Sub-Moiety	Clan
1	Liiban Jaldeessaa	Goona	Fulleellee	Galaantuu
2	Jaarsoo Boruu	Sabbo	—	Digaluu
3	Hiddoo Galgaloo	Goona	Harooressa	Hawaxxuu
4	Halakee Garbichaa	Sabbo	—	Karrayyuu
5	Jaldeessa Borbor	Goona	Fulleellee	Koonnituu
6	Jaarsoo Taarii	Sabbo	—	Maxxaarrii

Note. Source: Fieldwork.

Table 3. Hayyuu Adulaa for the Gadaa Period of Guyyoo Gobbaa (2008-2016)

S.No	Name	Moiety	Sub-Moiety	Clan
1	Guyyoo Gobbaa	Sabbo	—	Digaluu
2	Jaldeessa Diidoo	Goona	Harooressa	Qarcabduu
3	Boruu Jaarsoo	Sabbo	—	Karrayyuu
4	Rooba Jarsoo	Goona	Harooressa	Hawaxxuu
5	Qurii Liiban	Sabbo	—	Maxxaarrii
6	Nuuraa Jiloo	Goona	Fulleellee	Koonnituu

Note. Source: Fieldwork.

Table 4. Number of Hayyuu Medhichaa and Hayyuu Garbaa in Each Council

Council	Status of the Council	*Hayyuu Adulaa*	*Hayyuu Medhichaa*	*Hayyuu Garbaa*
Arbooraa	Central	4	0	10
Hawaxxuu/Kontomaa	*Gadaa* branch	1	3	4
Koonnituu/Kontomaa	*Gadaa* branch	1	3	4
Total		6	6	18

Note. Source: Fieldwork (see also Legesse, 1973, Table 3.2 for typologies and terminological distinctions between the Borana *gadaa* councils).

Out of six *hayyuu adulaa*, four of them work within the *arbooraa* council. Three of them are always from Sabbo and one from Goona. The council can be led by any one of them, except the one from Karrayyuu[17] clan of the Sabbo moiety. The reason the Karrayyuu clan is barred from the office of prime *gadaa* leader has to do with the basic philosophy of power division. Since the Karrayyuu clan holds one of the major *qaalluu* offices, which represents the entire Sabbo moiety, this clan is not allowed to hold the leading position in the *gadaa* office in order to avoid any concentration of power in the hands of the clan. As part of their belief system, if the Karrayyuu holds two leading positions, it would result in severe punishment from the supreme deity. The rule also has to do with separation of state and religion.

In this case, the leader of the *arbooraa* council, named *abbaa gadaa fiixee* (prime *abbaa gadaa*), is the leader of the entire Borana *gadaa*. The leader can be from the remaining two Sabbo clans—Maxxaarrii[18] and Digaluu— or the one elected from Goona moiety with the exception of the Hawaxxuu and Koonnituu, which are already allowed separate *gadaa* councils and the Oditu clan,[19] which has a prominent *qaalluu* leader (see Bassi, 2005; Legesse, 1973).

In addition, 10 *hayyuu garba* are elected into the *arbooraa* council for a single term of office. The councils of Hawaxxuu and Koonnituu, which represent the two sub-moieties of Goona, are led by the *hayyuu adulaa* drawn from the two respective clans. In this case, two *adulaa* out of six are always from these two clans. In each council, there are three elected *hayyuu medhichaa* to increase the number of the councilors and to strengthen the *gadaa kontomaa* councils. For each council, four *hayyuu garbaa* are elected as indicated in Table 4 above.

All the three *gadaa* councils are guided by *aadaa* and *seera* Borana (Borana law and custom). They are guided by common *gadaa* rule that is enacted and/or amended every 8 years by the general assembly (*Gumii Gaayoo*). *Gumii Gaayoo* is the assembly of the multitude that convenes every 8 years at Gaayoo (Bassi, 2005; Legesse, 1973). It is organized by the prime *abbaa gadaa* who is the leader of the *arbooraa* council. On the other hand, the two autonomous *gadaa* councils have the mandate to organize separate meetings called *Kora Waarsuu* and *Kora Saddeetaa* among the Hawaxxuu and Koonnituu clans, respectively.

The *Gumii Gaayoo,* Kora *Waarsuu,* and *Kora Saddeetaa* differ not only in terminologies, but also in terms of their functions and power. The general assembly (*gumii*) is the only law-making body for the entire Borana. On the other hand, the meetings (*kora*) organized by *gadaa kontomaa* councils are not focused on law-making. However, they are important in addressing vital societal issues regardless of clan affiliation. The mandate and power of the two self-governing *gadaa* councils in practice go beyond clan

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[17] Karrayyuu clan has two major sub-clans—those who participate in *gadaa* are called *warra bokkuu* (people of *gadaa*) and those who are in charge of the religious institution are called *warra qaalluu* (people of *qaalluu*).
[18] The Maxxaarrii clan too has three minor *qalluus* drawn from three (Garjeeda, Kuukkuu, and Karaara) of its seven sub-clans, which belong to *warra qaalluu*, while the remaining four (Gaadullaa, Maanqata, Doorannii, and Meettaa) are in the *warra bokkuu* division. Since these *qaalluus* are minor ones, the clan is not barred from controlling the office of prime *abbaa gadaa*.
[19] Odituu is the *qaalluu* clan for *Goona* moiety, which is also considered as the senior *qaalluu* of the entire Borana. This clan is not elected at all levels in the *gadaa* system due to the division of roles.

issues. The Borana clans are not territorial clans. As a result, issues are entertained by any *gadaa* council based on geographical proximity to the mobile camp of the *gadaa* council. The situation indicates that the Borana have common laws that are made and amended by the general assembly, which comprises all officials at all levels and any interested Borana men and women. The self-autonomous *gadaa* councils work within the general framework of the *gadaa* law.   These findings are corroborated by Legesse (1973) and Bassi (2005).

The History of the Formation of the Borana Federation

According to the Borana's oral history, a federal structure was adopted in response to Borana inter-clan conflicts. The long run objective was to mitigate any internal unrest caused by conflicting interests among the various clans through the guarantee of self-rule. It was designed to accommodate clan diversity within Borana unity in the framework of a single Borana *gadaa*. Apart from its conflict management role and maintaining internal unity, the system was also justified in favor of administrative convenience, bureaucratic efficiency, and power sharing.

Specifically, the introduction of a relatively self-governing *gadaa* council of the Hawaxxuu (called *yaa'aa Hawaxxuu* or *gadaa kontomaa*) emanated from the dispute between one of the higher officials of *gadaa* from Hawaxxuu clan, by the name of Huqqaa Dooyyoo Maalimoo, and the rest of the *gadaa* and *qaalluu* (religious leader) officials during the *gadaa* period of Walee Waaccuu (1722-1730).[20] The dispute between the two became serious as Huqaa Dooyyoo established a separate ritual camp, which broke the former rule requiring a common ritual ground for *gadaa* leaders. This trend continued for six successive *gadaa* periods and the problem attracted serious attention from the entire Borana. After a long series of deliberations, the disagreement was finally settled during the *gadaa* period of Bulee Dhaddachaa (1776-1783). A relatively self-governing branch of the Hawaxxuu clan was permitted under the umbrella of Borana *gadaa* (see Bassi, 2005).

The Borana oral history still recalls the role of Huqaa Dooyyo in the formation of the Hawaxxuu *gadaa* council, especially in the war song:

Kontoma Huqqaan dhale	Huqqaa founded *gadaa kontomaa* council
Huqquu barbaadan dhale	Long war trek makes one thin
Barbaadaa dhiiraa mataan keessaan bokore	Trophy searcher's hair grows wild but later adorned
Bokoree guyyaa galaa haati deette wallaalte	Even mothers never recognize the decorated brave sons.

Similarly, the Borana oral history shows that the Koonnituu clan was granted a separate *gadaa* council after serious conflict between the Koonnituu clan and the rest of the Borana. This time is known as the time of Koonnituu war. The oral history suggests that the Koonnituu men and women were brave

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[20] The oral history unequivocally indicates that the formation of a separate *gadaa* council for Hawaxxuu was caused by inter-Borana conflict. However, there are different versions of the cause of this conflict.

fighters and proved their military supremacy not only over neighboring groups, but also over the rest of the Borana clans. The rest of the Borana clans were not happy with Koonnituu's military position and worked to relegate it.

At one time, the Koonnituu were bamboozled into fighting an unjust war against the Arsi Oromo for which they did not get the support of the remaining Borana clans. Consequently, the Koonnituu lost the war. The then prominent warrior named Waaqolee Boora of the Koonnituu clan made all of the necessary preparations to retaliate, especially against the Borana, in response to the conspiracy. He trained young boys and girls with this aim. Waaqolee Boora finally waged war against the rest of the Borana, as well as other neighboring groups. According to my informants, the Koonnituu won due to their military superiority in the area. One of the famous female warriors who helped win the war against the Borana by the Koonnituu clan was Adii Duloo Willee. The following song recalls that she was a brave fighter who threatened enemies all around.

> *Adii Duuloo Willee gaaltama leenphoo sirii*
>
> *Sirii dhiira wal haatee namni boruu jirutti, hin jirre*
>
> *Sirii yabiyyee deegaa takkaan dhalatte doote.*

The poem is difficult to translate, but roughly it means:

> Adii Duuloo Willee a beautiful young lady
>
> Mystery of a battle, life has no warranty
>
> Mystery of poverty, the only calf dies.[21]

As oral history informs, hostility reached its highest pick and the Koonnituu became outlaws by the Borana standard. After series of negotiations that intended to end inter-clan conflict, the Koonnituu were reintegrated into the Borana *gadaa* with a *gadaa* council that was relatively self-governing. Thus, self-government through the formation of a separate *gadaa* council of the Koonnituu also appeared as a solution to the then existing conflict.

The Konnituu *gadaa* council was also established during the *gadaa* period of Bule Dhaddachaa (1776-1783) in Borana *gadaa* chronology. The first leader of the newly established Koonnituu *gadaa* council was Waaqolee Booraa himself. This is reflected in the *gadaa* praising song in honour of the three leaders of the Borana *gadaa* councils. In remembrance of the major historical events during the Bulee Dhaddachaa's *gadaa* period, the Borana say, "Arbooraa Bulee Dhaddachaa, Hawaxxuu Dhaddacha Yaayyaa, Koonnituu Waaqolee Booraa." Since their establishment, the two *gadaa kontomaa* councils have been working continuously. The establishment of separate *gadaa* ritual camps for the three councils is celebrated every 8 years just one year before a new group takes power.

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[21] Cows were raided by Adii Duuloo and the calves left behind perished.

The Borana elect all the six *hayyuu adulaas* 21 years before a *luba* assumes *gadaa* leadership role. The elected *hayyuu* establish the *raaba*[22] mobile council 8 years after the election. The members of the council stay together for the next 13 years before assuming *gadaa* power. When just 1 year is left in their *gadaa* period, the six *hayyuu* are divided into three separate mobile power centers. The two *hayyuu adulaa* from Hawaxxuu and Koonnituu clans request the prime *abbaa gadaa* (*abbaa gadaa fiixee*) to allow them a separate *gadaa* council by saying "*gadaa nuu kenni.*" The *abbaa gadaa* (leader of the central council) responds as the custom dictates, by saying "*gadaa isanii hin kennu, damee isanii kenne,*" meaning "I do not give you the *gadaa* but a branch." This indicates that the Borana still maintain the unity of the *gadaa* but employ decentralization of *gadaa* power. With the permission of the *abbaa gadaa,* the two *hayyuu* immediately become leaders of their respective *gadaa kontomaa* and establish their own separate mobile *gadaa* camp.

Discussion

This article is an empirical example revealing how a federal arrangement is working in the Indigenous political system of the Borana. The findings indicate that the *gadaa* system has implemented a division of power across the moiety, sub-moieties, and clan levels, which can be referred to as an Indigenous federation. In this particular context, the system is characterized by two prominent council levels: *gadaa arbooraa* and *gadaa kontomaa.* This finding corroborated what other scholars have clearly identified as the shorthand definition of federalism within conventional academic discourses. It is unequivocally agreed that federalism refers to an organizational arrangement that consists of two levels—a federal state and individual member states (Burgess, 2006; Law, 2013; Uhunmwuangho & Ekpu, 2011; Wheare, 1963).

One of the characteristics of federal arrangement is the vertical and horizontal distribution of powers as stated by Móntes (n.d.). Pertinent to the distribution of power, field data for this empirical study indicated that the system of the Borana has implemented an institutional arrangement in which certain activities are given to the center and others are shared between the center and self-dependent *gadaa* councils. *Gadaa* law is made and amended exclusively by the general assembly, called *Gumii Gaayoo,* which is the highest legislative organ in the land. This *gadaa* law is the supreme law that governs the affairs of the entire *Borana.* The power of organizing the assembly is vested in the central *gadaa* council (*gadaa arbooraa*). The legislative body is independent of both the central *gadaa* council and the autonomous *gadaa* councils. Members of the assembly represent the entire Borana including all *gadaa* leaders (the retired, prospective leaders, and those in office at all levels), elders, religious leaders, clan leaders, and interested individuals.

While the central *gadaa* council is the highest executive organ, the law is implemented by each and every Borana institution at all levels, including the central *gadaa* council, the *gadaa kontomaa* council, religious institutions, clan councils, neighborhood councils, age sets, and the like. These institutions also have judicial powers; however, major judicial matters are referred to the council of the guardians of the law (*abbootii seeraa*), which is constituted by experienced former *gadaa* leaders. Within the framework of *gadaa* law and in the context of their respective clans, autonomous *gadaa kontomaa* councils, as well as clan councils and neighborhoods institutions have decision-making powers. They have executive and

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[22] *Raaba* is the fourth *gadaa* grade. *Gadaa* has grades in which every male member has to pass through.

judicial powers on matters falling under their constituencies (issues of their respective clans or sub-moieties or localities). Powers are given neither expressly nor concurrently to any of them with the exception of legislative power, which resides in the general assembly and is organized by the central *gadaa* council. By default, any administrative issues like conflict resolution and/or resource management can be taken as concurrent powers.

In line with what Móntes (n.d.) stated, the way in which powers are distributed between the center and constituent units within the Borana *gadaa* federation falls under cooperative federalism. Both levels of *gadaa* governments and clan councils share responsibilities and are working together. There is no clearly demarcated power vested only in the autonomous *gadaa* councils or the central *gadaa* council. Moreover, in terms of the horizontal distribution of power, the arrangement can be labeled as asymmetric because only two major clans (the Hawwaxxuu and the Koonnituu) are privileged in leading and hosting the two autonomous *gadaa* councils. Only 3 of the 18 clans —the Odituu, the Karrayyuu, and the Maxxaarrii —have their own *qaalluu* institutions. Except for the Oditu clan, which is fully excluded from the *gadaa,* all the remaining Borana clans can be represented in one of the *gadaa* offices. In addition, each clan has a council that is in charge of addressing every kind of issue affecting the clan. In this way, clan councils are also working as per the rules and regulations of the Borana, which are directly drawn from *gadaa* law.

The arrangement also involves a kind of power sharing in which the available offices are equally distributed between the two moieties, the Sabbo and Goona. For the Sabbo, power is also equally distributed among the three major clans with one office of *hayyuu adulaa* allotted for each clan. Conceptual support for this idea comes from Móntes' (n.d.) work, which stated that power sharing entails proportional representation among cultural groups in legislatures and within the bureaucracy, as well as mechanisms for ensuring the voices of minorities are heard.

This finding clearly indicates that the *gadaa* federation shares some characteristics with contemporary federal systems. A federal government can be understood as an association of states in which powers are divided between a federal government and state governments. The former is independent of the government of the associated states in certain matters like the making of treaties and the coining of money. On the other hand, state governments, in turn, are independent of the federal government in certain matters. As a necessary consequence, the federal and regional governments both operate in ways that directly impact the people; each citizen is subject to two governments (Wheare, 1963).

However, this empirical study indicates that the Borana *gadaa* federation is unique in several respects. Primarily, the executive and judicial powers are not clearly separated because the guardians of the law are former *gadaa* leaders. Judicial powers for routine operations are vested in the elders of the land, the custodians of Borana law and customs, the *gadaa* councilors and leaders, and the *qaalluu* councilors alike. Furthermore, this Indigenous federation does not encompass a territorial boundary, mainly because the Borana clans are not territorial units in both principle and practice. An individual Borana family settles wherever resources are available regardless of their clan affiliation. As a result, the *gadaa* federation, as it has been working among the Borana, is a unique instance in which institutions are not arranged based on an identifiable contiguous territory. Yet, the same institutional arrangement is also ensures the provision of administrative services regardless of clan affiliation and territorial location across the whole Borana territory.

Currently, federalism is often praised as one of the institutional tools that provides room to freely exercise local customs, religious beliefs, and self-governance, and to accommodate diversity (Nikodimos, 2004; Todosijević, 2001). However, referring to the ongoing ethnic conflict in the former socialist countries, writers have argued that identity-based federalism is not the best option in preventing ethnic conflict. Some have argued that it causes conflict (Habtu, 2005; Siegle & Mahony, 2006; Todosijević, 2001;). In spite of these competing approaches, ethnographic data from the Borana shows that the Indigenous federation has been enduring in relative harmony since its commencement in the second half of the 18th century. As oral history suggests, the Borana adopted a federal structure as a means of conflict management to resolve the infighting at the time. This federation has led to harmony because it is based on the Indigenous culture that is an integral part of their life.

This does not mean that the Borana have no experience with in-group conflict; rather, it shows how their political structure has enabled them manage conflicts. Since their establishment, all of the three Borana *gadaa* councils have been governed under a common law, which provides effective provisions for arbitration of internal conflicts, as well as ensuring access to power and resources. These provisions are of the utmost importance. Thus, it can be contended that this institutional setting, the *gadaa*, has been maintaining internal unity among the Borana clans and has enabled them to maintain military alliances in order to protect themselves from hostile neighboring groups. It has also been effective in managing clan diversities and identities under the umbrella of Borana unity. Bassi's (2005) work also depicted these features of Borana society.

Finally, given the constitutional guarantee of one's culture and history in the present Ethiopian political scene, other peoples in ONRS have revived *gadaa*. Furthermore, recently, a new form of *gadaa* council was established at the level of ONRS. Different Oromo groups are represented in the council. However, a very important question is how the *gadaa* political structure is working in parallel with the state administrative structure. Focusing on the Borana, the government is specifically using the *gadaa* for implementing its policies and rules. Practical cases indicate that *gadaa* councils have been working closely with local and regional governments. For instance, in consultation with the concerned government body, the last Borana general assembly amended *gadaa* laws by declaring the prohibition of early marriage and circumcision of girls. Other important issues including female education and environmental protection were among the items on the agenda of the assembly. However, cooperation with government has led to criticism in some cases. A common complaint is that *gadaa* leaders have been co-opted and manipulated into supporting the interests of the ruling party.

Conclusion

The findings of this article indicate that the *gadaa* system with all its unique features has a federal structure. The system established two levels of *gadaa* councils: the *gadaa arbooraa* and *kontomaa*. The latter are named after two major Borana clans. However, security concerns, and administrative and economic performance of the *gadaa* councils are not restricted to the clans, and neither are they territorially confined. They are in charge of issues brought before them or that attract the attention of any other council regardless of clan affiliation. The system allows the Borana to have decentralized political institutions, which provides better governance to the citizens in that area. This Indigenous knowledge and practices could contribute to friendly relations in the new Ethiopian federal system to

ensure peace and stability. It would serve as a "fertilizer" in framing the principles of federalism in a culturally appropriate setting.

Thus, as a first step, I recommend a genuine acknowledgement and preservation of the values and principles of *gadaa* as an Indigenous political system in administrative processes and in processes of democratization undertaken by policy makers and policy implementers. Starting with the introduction of the Ethiopian federal structure, the ONRS has adopted some basic *gadaa* terminologies and symbols in its regional government structures. Beyond adoption of terminologies and symbols, I further recommend that the regional states recognize and implements the basic principles and values of the *gadaa* system, such as processes to ensure the peaceful transfer of power, fixed terms in office, and fair access to power by all citizens. Second, I recommend a healthy policy framework, and norms and standards that will define the place of Indigenous institutions, like the *gadaa* system in the new Ethiopian political landscape, and their role in society. Third, I suggest a legal framework to retain and protect the integrity and legitimacy of the *gadaa* system as an Indigenous federation. Finally, the regional government needs to provide a statutory framework that enables the *gadaa* system to work to its full capacity.

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