Full Length Research Paper

The Gadaa System: A Philosophical Appraisal

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In this article I want to explore an appropriate and broad understanding philosophy. We have been used to an impoverished and narrow understanding of philosophy. Such an understanding of philosophy assumes that philosophy originated for the first time in ancient Greece alone and then proliferated in Western Europe. This understanding emanates from an ethnocentric position that overlooks the fact that human beings, wherever they may be, cannot avoid philosophical questions. Since philosophical questions are so fundamental to human kind, human beings will be forced to raise philosophical questions despite their geographical location, level of economic progress and the like. After establishing such a broad understanding of philosophy, I will then turn to the discussion of Oromoo philosophy through its various expressions and particularly as it is exhibited through the Gadaa System. The philosophy of a people can be understood as the self-consciousness of the culture of that people. It hence becomes a means through which they evaluate their lived experience and project their future as it relates to the various human activities and relations, politics, economy, environment and many more.

Key Terms: *Culture, Democracy, Gadaa System, Nagaa, Philosophy*

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Axareeraa

Kaayyoon qorannoo kanaa hikaafi hubbanna falaasamaa akka waliigalaatti sirrifii dhugaa ta'e agarsiisuudha. Hubannaan falaasamaa kan amma ammaatti beekamu gabbataa kan hintaneefi yaada bal'aa sirnaan gahaa ta'ee dhiyaateeru miti. Hubbannaan ture, falaasamni kun biyya Greekitti dhalatee, Lixa Awurooppaa keessatti guddate kan jedhudha. Hubbannaan akkasii eenyummaa warra Awurooppaa giddugaleessa godhatee, ilmaan namaa bakka jiran hunddattii gaaffiiwwan falaasamaa irraanfachu/dhiisuu akka hindandeenyee haaludhaan beekama. Gaaffiiwwan falaasamaa waan gaaffiiwwan bu'uraa ta'aniif, ilmaan namaa bakka jiran hundattii gaaffiiwwan kana gaafachuun dirqama. Haaluma kanaan dhimma hubannaa falaasamaa irratti yaada bal'aaf gabbataa ta'e erga ibsee booda, falaasamaa Oromoo kan akkaataa garagaraatiin ibsamu, keesuumaa kan sirna Gadaa keessattii hamatame ragaatiin ibsa. Falaasamni saba tokkoo akka of-hubbanno (self-consciousness) aadaa saba sannaatti ilaalamu dandaha. Kanaafi falaasamni saba tokkoo waan sabni sun ittiin muuxannoo jireenya ofi xinxalee madaaluufi, egeree ofii ittiin akeekee bocatu. Kunis, sosochii isaa kan akka walitti dhufeenya namaafi uumamaa, siyaasaa, dingdee, naannoofi kkf ilaaludha.

Jechoota Ijoo*: Aadaa, Dimokraasii, Sirna Gadaa, Nagaa, Falaasama*

Introduction

Philosophy is a very honorific term owing to the kind of questions that it raises and the tools it uses to answer those questions. It is not without reason that philosophy is one of the oldest forms of knowledge if not the oldest. The attempt to know oneself both as an individual and community and our place in the world begins by raising philosophical questions. Long before the kind of knowledge that we know today came into being, human kind depended on philosophical reflections/knowledge to come to grips with its lived experience and destiny.

Philosophy is considered to be the parent discipline that nurtured and set free the other forms of knowledge both in the natural sciences, humanities and the social sciences. That is how its status as the parent discipline has to be understood. Such knowledge and its main tool, reason/rationality cannot be the possession of one segment of humanity. Reason has always been the kind of readily available tool to the whole of human kind to understand itself; to make, as it were, a self-inventory of what we have achieved and what we could possibly be in the future depending on our circumstances. Reason is deployed in its own context. What determines the nature of reason is the kind of condition in which it is used**.** There is no a once and for all given overarching reason that has magic powers and that we can use to understand all problems. Reason isunderstood in the context of the time in which it is used and the socio-historical condition in which it is deployed. It is on this basis that E. C. Eze identified six different types of reason, namely calculative, formal, hermeneutical, empirical, phenomenological and ordinary(2008). What we understand from such an understanding of reason isthat, the level and situation of knowledge, experiences ofthe specific society and many other factors determine the nature of reason.Eze wrote,

> …I discuss six varieties of theories of reason. These theories implicitly advocate different ideals – models – of rationality. When I speak about the *theories of reason* and their corresponding*national ideals* I call them *conceptions of rationality*… From

my point of view, reason-on account of these theories and the forms of rationalities they collectively advocate –can be accurately characterized as internally diverse and externally pluralistic (2008:24 emphasis in the original).

It is with this understanding that I am writing this short article as an appraisal of the Gadaa System as part and parcel of an overall Oromoo philosophy which has the components a philosophy should have. A philosophical thinking cannot be thought of without metaphysical and epistemological underpinnings. There are philosophical systems whose metaphysical assumptions are materialistically oriented and want to understand reality from the material reality itself, while there are also those whose metaphysical assumptions are said to be transcendental, whether the transcendental may in the final analysis be God or some form of idea. Epistemological and axiological assumptions then follow from this. The Oromoo have a philosophy that is the basis of the life-world of the Oromoo people. It is a holistic philosophy in which are to be found the conception of God, nature and the things in it according to God–given laws that enable the existence of harmony/nagaa and order (*nagaa* and *safuu*) between the different components of the cosmos. It is not the purpose of this article to delve into this complex issue. Rather it is to see the Gadaa system as an aspect of Oromoo philosophy which in addition to dealing with the abstract philosophical issues also tries to answer moral and political questions.

The Gadaa system is known more for its elaborate political philosophy in which are contained ideas of the rule of law, the peaceful transfer of power, the limit of term of elected officials and other democratic principles which predate the principles of Western democracy. On the other hand the notion of *safuu* as the moral code is its integral part and derived from the way being and life are understood. The article is an attempt to appraise the Gadaa system as an aspect of Oromoo philosophy which tries to address important philosophical, political and moral issues. I have tried to use the important sources on the Gadaa system. I have tried also to reflect on philosophy and its tasks based on a wide range of sources on philosophy, including those that want to understand philosophy as the exclusive possession of a certain segment of humanity and those that say that humans cannot live without a philosophy, assuming that philosophy appears different forms.

What is Philosophy?

How should we understand philosophy? This is important in delivering a philosophical appraisal of the Gadaa system. In this paper I will try to explore what I consider to be a proper way of understanding philosophy. A proper understanding of philosophy avoids all kinds of centrism and assumes that philosophy emerged in different parts of the world at different times and accepts that philosophy can appear in different forms using different methods. I will then proceed to explore how the Gadaa system can be understood from a philosophical perspective and then conclude by suggesting how we could relate to the Gadaa system in the times ahead.

In the West European sense philosophy is understood as a critical, rational and systematic inquiry regarding what are considered as fundamental questions of philosophy. In doing this the majority of Western philosophers assume that philosophy originated in the West alone.

Regarding the subjects it treats and the methods it uses also they try to limit it to the questions and methods that are central to West European ways. Its logocentrism and adversarial ways of handling issues are taken as the sole markers of philosophy thereby rejecting the multiple *Gestalts* in which philosophy can appear and its multitude sources since they recognize only the written sources. This is a narrow sense of understanding philosophy, because it takes a departure from philosophy as it is understood as wisdom. Also it is narrow because it reduces philosophy to only one way of doing philosophy, namely the European way. Ramakrishna Puligandla addressing this issue wrote, "How does one account for this pervasive attitudeamong Western philosophers? I venture to say that such an attitude is due on the one hand to massive ignorance of alien intellectual cultures, and on the other to inveterate parochialism" (2008:2).

Philosophy is a broad area of knowledge that human beings at different times and places used to understand their destiny, their surroundings, their place in the system of nature, themselves and articulated their interests, aspirations and concerns in different ways and using different media/mechanisms.

There are cultures that have systematically developed one form or the other of philosophy and claim that this is the only way of doing philosophy. It is difficult to agree with such an understanding of philosophy. On the other hand, without systematically elaborating on the methods and the like, we find people/individuals/communities where philosophical questions are raised and answered in some way. Here we may not have elaborate treatises on ontology, epistemology or axiology. But we can have a reflective activity that could have elements of philosophy. Such thoughts may be written or oral, may not be taught to people as the philosophy of so and so philosopher and so on. But nevertheless it is possible to see that the people live their philosophy. Philosophy is wisdom. Wisdom covers a wide range of issues. It is possible to see that this wisdom expresses the peoples' aspirations, their values and norms and giving meaning to their lives.

One way of addressing this issue is to understand philosophy as the self-consciousness of a culture. Culture understood in a broad sense shows all what a human community has developed in the form of both material and spiritual tools for managing life. Many people take culture as something that defines them and they want to defend it with whatever means at their disposal and that is understandable. But culture also produces people with the capacity to see this culture critically. It could be the case that some elements of what is known as culture needs assessment, critical evaluation, challenging its prejudices and attitude towards others and the like. It is when a culture is able to have such conceptions and/or people who are able to produce such conceptions that we can talk of philosophy as the self-consciousness of a culture. Philosophy as the self-consciousness of a culture shows how the culture views itself critically. It shows how a culture takes an inventory of its own self, a critical inventory where you see your achievements, your potentials, your shortcomings and so on. Above all you see the problems around you; you ask questions like, is this the way we are supposed to live? Is this what we really deserve? What are our values and what are their merits? Do we need to reform them? What is the ideal and good life for our community? These are questions that require a critical thinking for which answers cannot be found in the cultures. When we raise

these kinds of questions and try to look beyond the culture to answer these questions and seek the assistance of reason to answer the questions, then we have started to engage the issue philosophically. In other words you are trying to produce the self-consciousness of your culture.E, Agazzi said,

> …the philosophy of a given culture comes to light gradually and gives shape to its basic themes, its preferred domains of inquiry and its methodological standards: a philosophical "tradition" consolidates all that which is at the same time the deposit of wisdom and speculation as well as an inspiring source for further investigation. Every philosopher in this culture is unconsciously affected by this atmosphere but, on the other hand, he puts forth his own original contribution which enriches his tradition and deepens the understanding of its "eternal problems", together with the possibility of uncovering new ones and of giving new answers to traditional issues. It is in this sense that philosophies may be understood as stages in a continuous process of developing the self-consciousness of cultures (2008: 33).

Philosophy is known to be a rational and critical intellectual enterprise. Its answers to philosophy's fundamental and important questions are based on reason. The other one is critique. It refers to the point that philosophical investigation proceeds through persistent questioning aimed at avoiding fallacies, ascertaining soundness of judgment and avoiding the acceptance of ideas, claims, assertions, propositions, etc. without examining or scrutinizing. We justifiably use the oral sources of philosophy when we see in these sources rational and critical elements/components. These are what we find in folktales, proverbs and the different forms of fictitious narratives. Such materials [fictitious narratives] are closely linked with peoples'/ communities' lives and concerns. As I wrote elsewhere,

> They relate to different practices and norms approvingly or disapprovingly. Proverbs and maxims, for example, have exhortatory statements containing dos and don'ts. In daily life many people have a tradition and habit of carrying out critique of such phenomena. It is these phenomena that we see when we deal with oral literature. It is to be understood that critique of this nature constitute an important component of wisdom literature. It is logical to assume that where there is domination/exploitation, of some sort, for example, there would be critique. It is impossible to find an aspect of social life that can be insulated from critique. The explorations that we make into fictitious narratives show the role that critique has in social life (Gutema 2019: 4).

Richard Bell says, "Africa's oral narratives actively and *critically* involve their participants in a dialogue in which many questions are posed but for which not all answers are directly supplied. To listen to these narratives even if once or more removed from them shows the critical level of their operation and reveals their significance for philosophy" (2002. p. 110-111, emphasis added).

The answer that could be given to the question, "do all societies have philosophy can be answered variously. As Gene Blocker says, "In so far as each society or culture has its own idea of itself, its own conception of what is important in life, and its own notions of what the

world is like in general terms, there is a sense in which each society or culture can be said to have its own philosophy (or world-view)" (1999: 20).

We can only do justice to philosophy if we are able to save it from a narrow and impoverished way of understanding it by reducing it to the experiences of a limited segment of humankind. Philosophy is based on experiences of different communities not the experience of either Greece or China or Germany and that is why we have plurality in philosophy. Every philosophy or every philosophical concept springs from the specific experiences and concerns of an individual or a group. What wouldn't do justice to philosophy is when a thinking emanating from specific experiences assumes a universal *Gestalt* and claims to be the only genuine philosophy, denying what it claims for itself to other individuals or groups who might have been engaged in similar reflective activity depending on their own specific experiences, concerns and problems. Philosophy does not have any high court than reason. The question, therefore, ought to be, whether somebody has been able to use reason to answer philosophical questions rather than his/her geographical location or whether he/she has a literary culture or whether the culture has recognizable philosophers according to certain norms. It may be essential here to remember the words of the Well-known Portuguese sociologist Santos who said that the understanding of the world far exceeds the West European understanding of the world (2014).

With this we may invoke the two senses in which philosophy needs to be understood. This will answer the important question of what philosophy is or which one is the culture that has been able to produce philosophy.

According to Dismas A. Masolo,

> There are two senses of the word philosophy, but with a good deal of relation to each other. The first sense is the usually also called the ordinary sense, and refers to some kinds of opinions and commitments to certain ideas or ways of interpreting things…In this sense philosophy can be held by individuals and be assumed of groups – communities, societies, etc. – as part of the covert culture which is made up of reasons behind the observable cultural practices and expressions.

> In the second sense, philosophy is…what appears as the writings of Plato, Aristotle, T. Aquinas, Descartes, Hegel, Wiredu, Hountodji and others. In this sense, philosophy is a commitment to an investigation rather than to any specific idea(s) or opinion(s). It is a study of a variety of subjects from a specific type of approach - an open, rational analysis and synthesis – and can therefore not be expressed in the formula "my philosophy is…" Because it is not merely a body of opinions, and does not aim primarily at formulating workable principles, but rather at understanding, philosophy in this sense becomes primarily an academic practice, a study, a systematic investigation of ideas (ibid: 3).

The distinction between philosophy in the ordinary sense and a strict sense is important if we could overcome its discriminatory implications. If we follow the tenet that philosophy has many faces, can emerge in many cultures, and that we should not reduce it to the

logocentric/ethnocentric philosophy of the West, then understanding it in broad and strict senses is useful. We mean by this that the broad category of philosophy is not less powerful, watered-down version of philosophy. Philosophy in the broad sense has something important that philosophy in the strict sense does not possess. Philosophy in the broad sense has the dimension of being connected with peoples' lives rather than a mere abstract speculation. If we understand philosophy as wisdom and the philosopher as wise person/lover of wisdom, the wise person is dedicated to putting one's knowledge/wisdom to action. He/she understands it in such a way that it has meaning and utility to society. The academic philosopher, abstractly devoted to truth lacks the incentive to live out his/her philosophy, whereas philosophy in the broad sense is the inclination and steady purpose of putting knowledge to good use. While the academic philosopher discusses questions that are usually unrelated to particular problems, the wise person/philosopher in the broad sense discusses real problems of the community. It is a philosophy that takes its ethical responsibilities seriously. The contribution of both types of philosophy to society isan important point that needs to be studied carefully.

It is important to note that philosophy emerged at different times in the different parts of the world. The claim by Europeans that philosophy emerged in ancient Greece alone is no more a tenable idea. Karl Jaspers, a European philosopher himself admitted that philosophy emerged in Eurasia within the difference of a few generations (1982). He had China and India in mind. While he admitted this taking into account the philosophical systems of India and China for they had philosophical literature, he could also conjecturethat there are other cultures with written or oral tradition that could develop/have philosophy.Hence the thesis that philosophy emerged in different parts of the world at different times and not only in Greece.

Philosophy as is well-known uses rational reflectivity and critical inquiry to answer itsquestions. It is a common knowledge that this is among its fundamental attributes. These and similar issues of methodology and principles must be the points with which we distinguish it from other areas of knowledge. It is observable that the Greeks and the other Europeans were largely concerned with ontological and epistemological issues. Right from the very beginning with the so-called Pre-Socratic philosophers up to Plato, Aristotle and up to the contemporary period the preoccupation with ontological issues is clear. We have to be able to explain why this has been the case. To do that we have to recall that we have said that philosophy is the self-consciousness of a culture. It was a philosophy predominantly preoccupied with ontological issues/reality that determined the nature of philosophy in the West. Based on this experience the Europeans have tried to dictate what genuine philosophy ought to be. This is an issue of taking one's own philosophy as the sole model for the philosophy of humankind, but this requires to be considered seriously and closely.

On the other hand Asian philosophers mainly India and China were more concerned with practical philosophy. The philosophies of Confucius, Tao, Buddha and others were concerned more with ethical and political issues. While there were many philosophers in the East i, e, China, India, etc. and werenot exclusively concerned with practical issues, practical philosophy was predominant.

Looking at these differences Western philosophers have taken their own philosophy as *the* philosophy and gave the label thought system to Asian philosophies. This emanates from taking one's own philosophy as the singular model of philosophy and considering that of the others as parochial or not normal or regular. Such a conception has no philosophical/rational ground than self-promotion and self-aggrandizement. We can find reasons why the concerns of the West were more with ontological/metaphysical issues, while that of the Asians was more with practical branches philosophy like morality, politics and the meaning of life. What is appropriate is to explain this taking philosophy as the self-consciousness of a culture rather than judging that of the other as based on prejudices towards what is alien to us.In other words, the important question ought to be why ontological and epistemological issues were so important for the Greeks, while ethical issues of how life should be lived and society be ordered were the basic philosophical questions for the Chinese and particularly Confucius.

With this background we can start to consider the Gadaa system. What is it and where/which are its philosophical elements?

Oromoo Philosophy

The Gadaa system can be understood in different ways. According to TaddeseBerisso "Gadaa system as institution stands for systematically interrelated ideas that refer to various concepts ranging from ritual performances, law-making and adjudication, conflict resolution and political leadership" (2018: 2). The straight forward understanding of it can be that it is a socio-political system that classifies men into different generational sets and assigns different tasks to them with the purpose of leading a harmonious, just and appropriate life. It is a democratic socio-political system that guides the life course of individuals and regulates political, economic, social and religious activities of the community. It embraces wide-ranging activities that incorporate mechanisms of socialization, education, religious expression, the maintenance of peace, social cohesion, and principles of equality (Berisso 2018, Legeesse 1973, Lemmu, 1994, Lencho 2012, Megerssa 2019).

In this sense Oromoo philosophy in general and the Gadaa system in particular fulfill Charles Verharen's understanding of philosophy. He wrote, "The term philosophy … means the most general and foundational guiding principles of life expressed in oral or written form, together with critical reflection upon them" (2012, p. 186). In view of the fact that it incorporates nearly every aspect of the life of the community, it is legitimate to claim that it answers the important philosophical question of "how we should live".The question of how to live is an important ethical question that has implications on other aspects of life including economy, social matters, relations with nature and neighbors and an array of other factors.

It is necessary to reflect upon its philosophical content. This enables us to get out of the definition that serves as a straitjacket of Western philosophy. With some risk of generalization, we can say that Western philosophy is the self-consciousness of Western culture. A number of social, cultural and historical factors play significant roles to make what it really is. The point is that it is correct to understand Western philosophy within the cultural, historical, social, economic and even geographic context of the West. Its principles and methods should be considered as the ones appropriate to a philosophy emanating from the

same context. What wouldn't therefore be acceptable is the assumption that, this is *the* philosophy that serves as model for all philosophies. If we follow what I am suggesting now, we can talk of many cultures that have evolved their own philosophies. As I tried to indicate earlier on, philosophy emerged not only in different places and at different times, but also its concerns, main questions, methods, etc. vary.

What should probably be taken as something common to all philosophies is the attempt to answer questions of how humans should live based on knowledge that is rationally and critically grounded. The fact that the Greeks focused on the idea of being and the Chinese on moral practice should not induce us to reason in such a way that the one is proper philosophy and the other not. What each one of them did is that they attempted to answer the question of how to live in one's own context. We can take Oromoo philosophy in general and the Gadaa system in particular in this sense. We can think of the Gadaa system in which the Oromoo tried to answer the question of how to live depending on their context, life experiences and life-world and above all their worries of how to have a harmonious and peaceful life.

All philosophy must not necessarily follow the same pattern. If a philosopher who comes from a specific cultural context evaluates another philosophy/philosopher by his/her own standards and then does not want to recognize it as a philosophy because it is different, the problem is with the evaluator.

Based on this we may ask about the main features of Oromoo philosophy in general and the Gadaa system in particular. This is not an easy question to answer. It is also possible not to find only one definitive answer as is usually the case in philosophy. However it can be said that with regards to metaphysical issues the Oromoo have a conception of reality that is created by God in an orderly and harmonious way where everything has its own proper place. It is an ordered reality governed by God given laws. The same thing could be said about truth. These are general statements that can be said about what can be called an Oromoo world view. The task of bringing the full content of this philosophy is a task ahead for new generations of philosophers/thinkers. For now we can refer to Gemetchu Megerssa and Aneesa Kassam's characterization of Oromoo philosophy in the following long passage,

> The myth of creation provides the matrix within which the primary and derivative concepts that traditionally defined the knowledge and belief systems are contained. These…are: (1) *Waaqa*, …the Creator; (2) *uumaa*, the manifold aspects of the created universe; (3) *ayyaana*, the sacral time-forces that lie at the heart of all beings…; (4)*safuu,* the moral code that defines the ethical boundaries that exist between all created things; (5) *nagaa*, the principle of peace, harmony and universal order that operates in the world; (6) *finna*, the fluctuating flows of creative energy or 'vital force' which circulate in the world; (7) Horo, the incarnation of the totality of the cosmic principles and of the *Boorantica*, the Ideal First-Born Cosmic Man, and the custodial keeper of sacred laws; (8) *yaayyashanan*, the numerical code and natural law that provide the foundations of the universe; (9*) isaa-isii*, the gendered nature of all things in the universe; (10) *Oromummaa*, the core 'essence' of the Oromoo collective being. (2019, p. 111)

This is one way of understanding the Oromoo world-view. It is not possible at this moment in time to think of it as a definitive cosmology of the Oromoo. There could be different interpretations/understandings of the world-view which actually points to the plurality of ways in which philosophy relates to its subject, i. e., God, nature, humankind and its values and so on. We are trying to make sense of the world-view of a people who have not left us many written documents. It is an attempt to reconstruct it from many different oral sources which are now accepted as justifiable sources of different forms of knowledge, without of course forgetting the few written sources dating back from the 19th and 20th centuries and the proliferating Oromoo literature starting in the 1990s when Afaan Oromoo adapted the Qubee (Latin Alphabet). Through this, it is not expected that we arrive at one authoritative interpretation/understanding of the reality, morals, etc. First of all, it is clear that there is no unanimity on any philosophical conception and interpretation. Secondly, the idea of evolving an Oromoo philosophy/world-view is just at the beginning that it takes time until a more or less comprehensive view emerges. It is incumbent up on those interested inOromoo scholarship to undertake research to have access to the different sources of Oromoo wisdom/philosophy/literature.

The Oromoo have a holistic understanding of reality wherein Waaqaa (God) is placed within the world through his creative power. The ontology lays the foundation for the philosophical conception in the different branches of philosophy. Hence ontology and ethics are interconnected in the sense that both have their source in Waaqaa. What is real is what is created. Waaqaa created the reality in an orderly way. It is by the same principle that he made humans as moral agents. Humans live on earth and participate in the natural process of the universe as moral agents. Morality is anchored in the nature of the universe as it was designed by God. Existence and value have to be conceived as inseparable entities. This interconnectedness shows how human laws are derived from natural laws.

In Oromoo ethics,which is an integral part of Oromoo philosophy, harmony is a key concept. The idea of *Safuu* as the moral code is the basic concept in understanding human actions. The idea of *nagaa*/peace as it relates to our relations with God, between human beings and other creatures that have to share nature/the earth with humans depends on *Safuu*. As C. Verharensays, "Oromoo philosophy advocates a philosophy of holism, the conflation of ontology and axiology. That holism underpins the famous democracy of the Oromoo Gadaa system as well as the Oromoo respect for the environment and its inhabitants" (Verharen, 2012, p. 198).

On the other hand the Gadaa system has already gone a long way in answering the question of how we should live. This is, among other things, one of the reasons for its admiration and going into the annals of UNESCO as an intangible heritage of humanity. Most notably its ideas of political philosophy are not only impressive, but also try to answer key questions of how society ought to be organized in a just and harmonious manner that is able to solve the acrimony that could likely happen in matters of political authority, the transfer of power, the roles of different organs of the state and many more. It is this phenomenon that has attracted attention from scholars both at home and abroad.It is a political philosophy, as we all know,

centuries old and has detailed mechanisms of how power can be transferred peacefully from one Gadaa class to another and other principles that show the democratic nature of the system.

Writing about Oromoo democracy which can be considered as the kernel of the Gadaa system Asmarom Legesse wrote, "Oromoo democracy is one of those remarkable creatures of the human mind that developed into an indigenous political system as a result of five centuries of evolution and deliberate, rational, legislative transformation. It contains genuinely African solutions for some of the problems that democracies everywhere have had to face" (2006, p. 195).

It is the result of a deliberative and rational endeavor that has insight into how politics can harmoniously, peacefully and sustainably run. This is one of the issues that are central to political philosophy. The political philosophy of the Oromoo which is about the good ideal society has been able to answer the question centuries ago. One of its achievements is that it has been able to create a mechanism that enables malemembers of the community to participate in the legislation of the laws by which they are governed and also the election of their leaders who are accountable to them. It is a testimony to human ingenuity to think rationally, philosophize about issues necessary for a good society. For those who claim that philosophy can only be done by literate people, where logocentrism in the form of writing and discursive rationality have been the hallmark of philosophy, this is a proof that literacy, writing and the like are only forms of expressing ideas. Philosophical ideas can emanate when the situation calls for them and they could be expressed in writing, orally in the form of songs, poems, paintings, drama and many more.

The Gadaa system's insight and far-sightedness is demonstrated in the principles enshrined in it and are implemented in the political processes and practices. It has such principles like the rule of law, the principle of accountability, supreme authority of the general assembly, limitations of the terms of office for office holders, separation of political and ritual domains and many more. As Legesse says, "the Oromoo idea of the rule of law is reflected in the notion that those who govern the people must also be judged by the same laws they are empowered to enforce. In other words, there are no leaders whose position is so exalted that they stand above the law" (ibid: 200).

The Gadaa system has laws virtually for all things that share the earth with humans. Those who studied the Gadaa system say that the Boranaa is a society of rules referring to the rules promulgated and/or revised by the Gadaa assembly (Gumii Gaayyoo) every eight years. GolloHuka , for example, discusses the various rules in the Gadaa system, which include rules for water wells, marriage, wild-life conservation, dressing, environmental protection, etc. etc.(2020). The *safuu* or moral code is about dos and don'ts. Oromoo environmental ethics based on harmony, order and peace is a key for a sustainable environment as a result of the respect it accords to those animate and inanimate things that share nature with humans.Worth noting in this regard are principles and practices that the Oromoo follow regarding the environment. They just don't cut trees arbitrarily, they cut old ones and they replace the ones that have been cut by seedlings. The way domestic animals are treated has definite principles.

In the pastoral areas of Borana water is provided according to set principles not only for humans and domestic animals but also for wild animal.

As mentioned earlier on,I am trying to understand philosophy within a broadened horizon. Under broadened horizon philosophy refers not only to written sources but also oral ones. We deploy myth, beliefand philosophyto come to grips with life's puzzling problems and questions.Therefore, it may not be wise to draw hard and fast lines between philosophy and belief or myth.In fact it can also be argued that myths and beliefs cannot be dismissed as merely false and useless. As Verharen writes, "We deploy our myths… when we've reached the limits of knowledge, when we are not sure of how to go on with what we're doing, when we must go on regardless and we must seize upon uncertain guidelines for our direction. Myth-making is integral to rationality as its founding and guiding principles" (2012, p. 73).

What Mudimbe says can also be taken as further corroborating how we can deploy myth, as an important knowledge component that can help us understand apeople and its concerns among other things. Mudime wrote,

> If one can look into an African myth or ritual and recognize in it, as in the case of the Dogon myth, a powerful and amazing organization of classifications, filiations, and their transformations and representations, it would be wrong to limit the meaning of the myth to this function. A careful student always goes beyond the formal systems and unveils other symbolic networks, of which the members of the community might be absolutely unaware. Myths are autonomous bodies. (1988, p. 157)

Such a philosophy is more important than the philosophy that is abstractly committed to investigation for its own sake. That is where we see the importance of Oromoo philosophy, where it tries to answer questions that are important in political life, morality, education, the environment, and so on. In this sense philosophy means the most general and foundational guiding principles of life. Such a philosophy can be expressed in both oral and written forms. In raising general, foundational questions, it has already started to produce the self-consciousness of the culture. The other way of understanding such a philosophy is to conceptualize it as the guiding foundation of a culture. In doing so it becomes an important instrument for survival.

It is quite correct to understand the Gadaa system as a system/philosophy that has produced various instruments for survival. This is visible in the way nature, society, human relations, and the environment are explained in the system. Oromoo holistic ontology and the principles necessary for peaceful, harmonious life have given us a philosophy that is a perfect instrument for survival. The attempt of the Oromoo to maintain a peaceful and healthy environment avoiding things that disturb peace and harmony show that the Oromoo have been able to produce a philosophy that is an instrument of survivaland flourishing.

It is also important to note that Oromoo philosophy is the opposite of anthropocentric, monotheistic philosophies and or belief systems. It is a philosophy that understands life in a sustainable environment and is quite the opposite of anthropocentric philosophies that

understand nature as an object of exploitation and are leading to catastrophes in the form of global warming and overall damage to the environment and the total absence of social justice. Such philosophies cannot be instruments for survival and flourishing.

Depending on the type of questions that they want to answerVerharen understands African philosophies as being more suitable for survival and flourishing rather than the anthropocentric philosophies which are continually putting survival at danger. Accordingly he said,

> …non-African philosophies have failed the world itself. A philosophy should at the very least be an instrument for survival. Western–style cultures have found it expedient to develop technologies capable of mass destruction. We now confront the annihilation of life as we know it through nuclear winter or global warming. Let us return to Africa herself, as C. A. Diop said to seek an African way out of impending catastrophe that threatens both Africa and the world. And let us see whether within Africa we may discover an already existing philosophy that has the potential … to make Africa one. (2012, p. 187)

Oromoo philosophy as expressed through its various manifestations provides an example of a philosophy that could be an instrument for survival. Worth mentioning are its conception of the idea of the goodness of what has been created by God as it is regulated by *safuu* the moral code which accords a proper place to everything animate and inanimate as well. The fact that there are laws for virtually everything, so that they can survive without undermining *safuu* or better still denying them the right for survival is against *safuu* the moral code indicates that it is an instrument for survival.

Conclusion

In this short article I started up by trying to understand philosophy under a broadened horizon. That enables understanding philosophy as it has been understood by humankind over millennia. Philosophy is wisdom/love of wisdom. The love of wisdom takes different forms. Before it came into being in the form of elaborate theses and treatises philosophy began by asking fundamental questions to which answers were given in the form of fragments where writing was available and addressed orally where there was no writing.

Such an approach is necessary if we are to access the wealth of philosophical knowledge left to us as a treasure of humanity. Taking philosophy as the self-consciousness of a cultureit is desirable to assume that nearly all cultures at different times tried to produce the self-consciousness of their cultures either collectively or individually. I followed an understanding of philosophy that it is the most general and foundational guiding principles of life.

After laying the foundation for a rich understanding of philosophy that does not discriminate against any philosophy on contingent reasons like not being available in writing, and other reasons, I have tried to understand Oromoo philosophy as a holistic philosophy with a conflation between ontology and axiology. I have tried to briefly point out the core ideas of Oromoo philosophy as being constituted in a setting created by God, where there is harmony, *nagaa* (peace), *safuu* (the moral code), that are fundamental for all creatures, not only humans. Laying the foundation for the general philosophy, leads to the understanding of the Gadaa

System which is a politico-social, religioussystem that has laid the principles not only for political and social activities, but the overall human actions and relations between humans and nature, viz. both animate and inanimate things.

There has been a tendency to understand the Gadaa system as being concerned only with political activity and rituals. We have to be able to go beyond such an understanding and see how it can be used to guide all aspects of life. The one dominant attitude towards the Gadaa system is that it has been an old system that functioned in small communities and crumbled because it could not function in modern societies. This idea needs to be challenged.

Western democracy traces its origin to the ancient Greek city states, notably, Athens. While the West has been able to revive this idea of democracy and use it making the necessary changes,we have not been able to do this mainly for two reasons. First of all there is the Eurocentric approach that takes everything which is not European as parochial and tries to copy everything irrespective of whether it is relevant or not. Secondly, there is a bias towards the Gadaa system from indigenous elites.

I would like to challenge everybody concerned that it is incumbent upon us to make it work having made the necessary changes. If Greek democracy was refurbished to guide political life not only in the West, but also all over the world why can't we revive Gadaa democracy making the necessary changes and enabling it to serve today's societies. No theory/philosophy functions in an automatic fashion. They are those who know and want to use it drawing on itsuseful principles and shape it in such a way that can be useful today. If ideas like the rule of law, peaceful transfer of power and the like inhere in the Gadaa system why can't we reappropriate such principles be they political, environmental, peace building, conflict resolution, etc. in such a way that they could be useful today? Along with our enthusiasm for Western democracy can't we give some opportunity for something that is indigenous so that it may be used to address some of the problems that it was not possibleto solve with foreign/alien ideas? Such an approach constitutes a convincing way of building worthwhile/universal philosophical theses. In fact such an approach can point to an important issue of how universal philosophical theses could be crafted. A view of democracy, morality, truth, environmental protection, conflict resolution and justice enriched by ideas from different cultural backgrounds/interculturally could represent the 'universal' meaning of such concepts and serve humanity better. As Wimmer said, "There are good reasons to hold that philosophy today and in the future will have serious shortcomings if it continues to discuss global questions only within the frame work of concepts and methods derived from occidental lore" (2002: 8).

This gives us sufficient reasons to know Oromoo philosophy/the Gadaa system and in fact other systems that have been there but not known to the rest of us because we could not find them in writing or we do not have a system of education that can draw from oral indigenous sources. If we want to solve many of our pressing political, social, environmental, educational and other problems, the proper way to address them is by using knowledge drawn from different sources that try to build understandings arrived at dialogically not monologically.

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