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**The Contemporary Gadaa Power Transferring Ritual among Gujii  
Oromoo: the challenges and prospects**

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**Abstract**

*The main aims of this paper are to analyze the challenges that the contemporary gadaa power transferring ritual is encountering and identify the opportunities of the ritual. The methodology employed to undertake the study relies mainly on qualitative approach, basically focusing on the observation method. The ritual ceremonies performed among Gujii and Booranaa Oromoo during gadaa power transfer is named Jilaa among the society. In Gujii gadaa system Me'ee Bokkoo serves as the main Ardaa Jilaa center where power transfer is carried out. The inevitability of dynamism has brought forth some positive as well as negative change in the performance of power transfer ritual, particularly in 2016, the period this study focused on. As per the analysis carried out in this study, some of the positive aspects observed during the procession of the rituals include: better media coverage, inclusion of important indigenous laws such as education for women, environmental protection and other issues into the gadaa law passed by the council. From among the challenges observed at the ritual are: selling of alcoholic drinks at the occasion, dominance of electronic music over the indigenous ones, and the overtaking of the role of the Jaldhaabaa by government security force. Therefore, to avoid the negative trends creating challenges and promote the positive parts of the ritual, concerned bodies such as gadaa leaders, government, scholars, young groups, wider community are expected to play their role.*

**Keywords** - Gadaa system; Ardaa Jilaa; Baallii; Gumii; Qorbisa

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## Axeerara

*Kaayyoon qorannoo kanaa walharkaa fuudhinsa aangoo gadaa Oromoo Guji irratti rakkoolee jiran adda baasuufi hegeree isaa xiinxaluudha. Kana galmaan gahuudhaaf mala qorannoo akkamta daawwannaa irratti xyyeeffate faayidaa irraa ooleera. Sirni walharkaa fuudhinsa aangoo gadaa gaggeeffamu Oromoo Gujii Booranaa keessatti Jila jedhamuun beekama. Bakki sirni walharkaa fuudhinsa aangoo kan Gujii itti gaggeeffamu Me'ee Bokkoo jedhama. Jila bara 2016 gaggeeffame irratti jijjiiramoonni hedduu, kan gaariis yaraas tahan mul'ataniiru. Jijjiirama abdachiisoo mul'atan keessaa, sirnichi xiyyeeffannoo miidiyaa argachuu, seerri barnoota dubartootaa jajjabeessu, eegumsa qabeenya naannoo to'atu, seera gadaatti dabalamuufi warren kana fakkaatan yoo tahan. Rakkoolee sirnicha irratti mul'atan keessaa, gurgurtaa dhugaatii alkoolii bakkichatti gaggeeffame, faaruu fi sirboonni sirnichaa waliin jiran kan ammayyaan dhuunfatamuu, akkasumas tikni nageenya sirnichaa kan akka aadaatti Jaldhaabaan taasifamu, humnoota mootummaan harkaa fudhatamuu fa'i. kanaafuu, rakkoolee mul'atan kana hambisuuf, fooyyainsa taasimaa jiran ammo jajjabeessuuf qaamni dhimmi kun ilaallatu hundi: abbootiin Gadaa, qaamni mootummaa, hayyoonni, qeerroofi qarreen gahee isaanirraa eegamu bahuu malu.*

**Jechoota Ijoo:** *Sirna Gadaa; Ardaa Jilaa; Baallii; Gumii; Qorbisa*

### 1. Introduction

Different scholars tried to give the definition of the gadaa system at different times. Among this, the prominent one is Asmarom Legesse, a person who studied the Booranaa Oromoo gadaa system and published different books and articles on the Oromoo Gadaa system. He defines the gadaa system as “a system of Gadaa classes (*Luba*) or segments of genealogical generations that succeed each other every eight years in assuming political, military, judicial, legislative and ritual responsibilities” (Asmarom 2000: 31). According to him, “it is an institution that represents an extreme development of a type of social structure known to anthropologists as age-sets” (Asmarom 1973:50). The Gadaa system is “the systems that organizes the male Oromoo people into groups or sets that give them different responsibilities and social status in the society every eight years” (Gada 1988: 10). It guides the overall aspects of the society like “religious, political, social, economic, philosophical, artistic, historical aspects and provides a method of time-reckoning” (Gada 1988: 10-11) and a calendar system of the Oromoo society. “It is the law of the society, a system by which Oromoo administer, defend their territory and rights; maintain and guard the economy and through which all their aspirations are fulfilled” (Gada 1988: 11).

Different scholars argue on the origin of gadaa system as there is no specific time to say and it served the Oromoo People for the minimum of four centuries. According to Asmarom (2000: 30) “the Oromoo have developed their own variety of a democratic political organization that has endured for at least four centuries of recorded history”. Asafa (2010) expands more on this by saying that “we do not know when and how this system emerged but we know that it existed as a full-fledged system at the beginning of the sixteenth century”. According to him, during that period, the Oromoo people were under one

administration. He also extends his explanation and states that “during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when various peoples were fighting over economic resources in the Horn of Africa, the Oromoo were effectively organized under the Gadaa institution for both offensive and defensive wars”. Dirribi Damuse (2009: 206) also notes that “it is difficult to say that the Gadaa system started at a certain time and was initiated by somebody; rather it is the result of a long period of experiences and it developed through trials of the Oromoo community”.

The gadaa system functions based on the age set and generation sets. According to Asmarom (1973: 51),

The *Gadaa* classes or age sets are the group of people who share the same status and who perform their rites of passage together whereas the *Gadaa* grades are the stages of development through which the groups pass. The former refer to the collectivity, whereas the latter refers to a conceptual scheme that defines the kind of activities, rights, and duties the groups assume successively throughout their active careers.

To complete one gadaa generation it lasts forty years and there are five segments or gadaa classes within it (Asmarom 2000: 31).

The gadaa system has the principles of checks and balances through the periodic succession every eight years, and division of power among executive, legislative, and judicial branches, a balanced opposition among five gadaa classes, and power sharing between higher and lower administrative organs to prevent power from falling into the hands of dictators or to prevent the abuse of power (Asafa 2010). For instance, there are three main assemblies in Tuulama Oromoo which are held to evaluate the power usage and sharing, the division of labor among the three governmental bodies, such as *yaa'ii bantii*, *yaa'ii dagaagaa* and *yaa'ii odaa* (Bayissa 2013: 62). *Yaa'ii bantii* (*Bantii* assembly) is held at the 5<sup>th</sup> years of the *Gadaa* power for the purpose of checking and balancing the power of gadaa of the period and even to take corrective action if necessary where the *yaa'ii dagaagaa* (*Dagaagaa* assembly) is held at the 7<sup>th</sup> years of gadaa power for the same purpose. The *yaa'ii Odaa* (*Odaa* assembly) is held at the end of the eight years of gadaa in power to evaluate the existing laws and if necessary, to amend and to develop additional laws (Bayissa 2013: 62). The Gumii Bokkoo of Gujii gadaa system is similar with that of *Odaa* assembly, which is held for law proclamation, amendment and also for the ritual of power transferring.

The gadaa system had not only the principles of checks and balances, but also the principles of balanced representation of all clans, lineages, regions and confederacies, accountability of leaders, settlement of disputes through reconciliation, and respect for basic rights and liberties (Asafa 2010). According to Asafa (2010), the gadaa government is thus based on democratic principles, but excludes caste groups (such as smiths and tanners) and women. The system only accommodates the male members of the society. On this, Gada (1988: 11) wrote that “every male member of the society who is of age and of gadaa grade has full rights

to elect and to be elected. All the people have the right to air their views in any public gathering without fear”. This shows that even if the women and the caste groups are excluded from direct participation, they have the full right to participate in public gatherings and to ask any questions related to every aspect of the society.

In the gadaa system, there are five gadaa classes in the system, which compete with each other for power according to the indigenous laws of the society. These gadaa classes have different names in different parts of the region, Oromiyaa; which was resulted from Oromoo expansion and the establishment of different autonomous administrative systems (Asafa 2010). For instance, the names of these classes among the Tuulama Oromoo are: *Robale*, *Birmaji*, *Melba*, *Mudana*, and *Halchisa* which have existing in each Tuulama Oromoo moiety which help in coordinating the local community to compete with each other for power (Bayissa 2013: 64). In the political structure of Gujii gadaa system, the members are divided into five parties which are known as *Luba*. These five *Luba* of Gujii are: *Muudana*, *Halchiisa*, *Dhallana*, *Harmuufa* and *Roobalee*. These *Baallii Shanana* (the five powers) are form the *Gadaa* cycle in Gujii gadaa system.

At the end of the power period of one party and beginning of power for other party; there should be a rite of passage held. This rite of passage is held to announce the termination of power for the party in power and also the official announcement for the next party to hold the power. During the power transferring ritual, the general assembly for Gujii Oromoo gadaa, held at the place called *Me'ee Bokkoo*. The transition from one grade to the next is also supported by specified rituals or rites of passage, which legitimize the transition publically. On this, Hailu (2009: 40) states that “the transition from grade to grade is marked by ritual observances similar to the rite of passage ceremonies of age grade organization”. He also notes that the transition from one stage to the next is not physiological rather it is socially accomplished and conducted with ritual on the basis of maturation (2009: 41). Indeed, these rites of passage are not specified on the basis of an individual age or maturation, rather it is based on the generation gap between father and son.

The power transferring ritual that was held at *Me'ee Bokkoo* during 2016 was one among different ritual ceremonies of gadaa system with the particular purpose of power transfer from *Dhallana* gadaa class to *Harmuufa* gadaa class. Therefore, the target of this paper is examining the contemporary gadaa power transferring ritual among Gujii Oromoo with particular reference to its challenges and prospects that was observed at *Me'ee Bokkoo*, Gujii Zone, Oromiyaa regional state.

Any indigenous ritual, including the power transferring ritual of gadaa system, has its own rules and regulation regarding the performance of the rituals. However, due to external and internal factors, different rituals have been vulnerable to change throughout history. As changes are either positive or negative, there were some changes that have been observed at *Me'ee Bokkoo* during the power transferring ritual of Gujii gadaa of during 2016. Therefore, this paper targets to analyze the contemporary gadaa power transferring ritual that were

observed on that power transferring ritual of Gujii gadaa system with particular concern of the challenges and its prospects.

The main objective of this paper is to analyze the challenges that the gadaa power transferring ritual is encountering and also identifying the opportunities of the ritual with particular reference to Gujii Oromoo gadaa system.

## 2. Methods and Materials

This study employed qualitative research design. To gather the basic information about the gadaa system's power transferring ritual, and its contemporary situations, qualitative research design was used. Primary and secondary sources of data were used to gather the necessary data for the study.

Primary data was gathered through observation and informal conversation. To explore the necessary information on the intended topic, field observation was the most important data gathering instrument used by the researcher through his stays in the ritual place starting from the beginning up to the end of the ritual. The researcher was there with the local communities and tried to observe some major ritual events that were held at Me'ee Bokkoo through attending each event. In addition to having observation, the researcher also conducted several informal conversations there with the participants of the events during their stay at the *Ardaa Jilaa* of Me'ee Bokkoo. The data of the observation were also recorded on spot through various means.

Secondary sources of data were also used to gather different information about the Gujii people, Gujii gadaa system, and *Ardaa Jilaa* from documented materials. Based on the secondary sources of data and the primary information, the researcher tried to compare the contemporary power transferring ritual of Gujii gadaa system with that of the past.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. Gujii Oromoo Gadaa System and Me'ee Bokkoo

Gujii society is currently composed of three subsections or confederations called *Uraagaa*, *Maattii* and *Hookkuu*, which possess the political power called *Haaganaa* (*Haaganaa* is the indigenous political power in the Gujii gadaa system that the group or individual in power is exercising). This is why the Gujii's traditional political administration often refers to *Haaganaa Sadiin* (the three regional states: *Uraagaa*, *Maattii* and *Hookkuu*). These different clans of Gujii society have their own territory of political leadership under the gadaa governance system.

Like that of the other Oromoo clans, the Gujii society is also known by the seniority (*angafummaa*) of the clans in the gadaa system. According to Bayissa (2013: 98), Qaalluu is the most senior person in his lineage and clan; as a result, only the great Qaalluu is above all gadaa leaders. The Qaalluu used to guide gadaa initiation ceremonies, handover power and other gadaa ritual practices. According to Jemjem and Dhadacha (2011: 68), the *Alaadduu*

clan is considered as “the great Qaalluu who ratifies and endorses the transfer of powers during seizures of *Baallii*”.

Qaalluu is a religious institution that is regarded among the Oromoo as religious leader and also a person on which the spirit, called *Ayyaana*, descends. According to Gada (1988:19) the Qaalluu institution is one of the most important in the Oromoo culture and society and is believed to have existed since mythical times. It is very important in preservation and protection of the Oromoo culture. Asmarom (2000: 32) states, in his study of the Borana Oromoo, that the Qaalluu institution is the organization at the head of the two great moieties or “societal halves” of the Oromoo nation. In the Oromoo tradition, the Qaalluu is regarded as the most senior person in his lineage and clan (as a result it is hereditary) and the most respected in the society and considered as pure and clean (Bayissa 2013:80). The Oromoo people perceived the Qaalluu as he respects the traditional taboos (*Safu*) and ritual observances in all situations and in all his dealings, and must follow the truth and avoid sins (Gada 1988: 19).

By the virtue of his seniority, the Abbaa Gadaa of *Uraagaa* is taken as the prime leader of the Gujii society (the president of the Gujii society) where each clan has their own *Abbaa Gadaas* who has the political power within their territory.

Me’ee Bokkoo is the place where *Gumii Bokkoo* is held every eight years. Me’ee Bokkoo is currently located around 440 km south from Finfinnee in the Gujii zone, Anna Sorra District, mid-way between Bore and Adola districts (Jemjem and Dhadacha, 2011:18). It is the most respected (*woyyuu*) ritual place in Gujii Oromoo gadaa system. It is the greatest *Ardaa Jilaa*<sup>a</sup> in Gujii gadaa system which the gadaa power transferring ritual is held every eight years. The Gujii people believe that Me’ee Bokkoo is the sacred place and it is the place where the three Gujii confederacies come together every eight years for the purpose of making and amending Gujii gadaa laws and also handing over political power.

Me’ee Bokkoo is also the place where the highest authority in the Gujii gadaa administration system as unit of administration held. It is the highest social setting to those different institutions of the administration in the gadaa system such as political, legal, cultural, social and religious administrative activities are planned, organized, staffed, directed, coordinated, and reported by these channels of social settings.

At this place, the *Gumii Bokkoo* (*Bokkoo* assembly), the ultimate power making organ of the Gujii gadaa system, is held. It is the place where the gadaa power is hand over and where indigenous gadaa law is proclaimed and amended every eight years<sup>b</sup>. For example, in

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<sup>a</sup>The ritual ceremonies that are found in Gujii and Borana Oromoo’s *Gadaa* systems are known as *Jilaa*. *Jilaa* is the indigenous rituals that are held in the place where the *Gadaa* system is practiced. The place where this *Jilaa* is held is known as *Ardaa Jilaa*. There are several *Ardaa Jilaa*’s in Gujii zone which are dedicated for different ritual activities. According to Gujii zone culture and tourism office, there are more than 376 *Ardaa Jilaa*’s only within this zone.

<sup>b</sup>Even if the principle of power handover in *Gadaa* system is every eight years, due to some internal and external factors, in the history of Gujii *Gadaa* system, there were a time at which the power was stayed on the

February 2016, the 73<sup>rd</sup> Abbaa Gadaa of Gujii handed over his power to his successor, the 74<sup>th</sup> Abbaa Gadaa. As a result, Me'ee Bokkoo is the symbolic place for the Gujii gadaa system.

### 3.2. Gumii Bokkoo/Bokkoo Assembly

*Gumii Bokkoo or Bokkoo* assembly is the general assembly of three Gujii *Haaganaas* held each eight years held at *Me'ee Bokkoo*. It is the highest and the ultimate authority in the Gujii gadaa system which submits to develop new laws, revise the existing laws and also to amend some laws if needed. It is legislative organ and Supreme Court for all political administrations, law-rehearsing, and law amendment. It is the congress of the Gujii confederacies (*Uraagaa, Maattii* and *Hookkuu*) and composed of nine authoritative organs called *Haaganaa Saglan* comprising *Gadaa, Doorii* and *Raabaa* from each three *Lubas* in three tribes of Gujii (*Uraagaa, Maattii* and *Hookkuu*) as a law making body.



*Picture 1: Gumii Bokkoo*

Gumii Bokkoo is the general assembly of Gujii society which can be similar with modern parliament. The Gumii Bokkoo procedurally has two sessions. The first session is the session which held at special place called *Agaalla*<sup>c</sup> for the purpose of law proclamation, rehearsal and amendment. This session is not open to all to participate in making and announce laws except those identified legal experts (*Hayyuu*) who entitled to make and announce laws due to they are considered as law experts of the system. As a result, the task of law proclaim, amend and announce is prominently given to them. During this time, everybody may attend the session, but have no involvement. Abbaa Gadaa is entitled to call session, address open speech by blessing the assembly, whole community, and all natures and by cursing of bad omen. After the blessing, the Abbaa Gadaa invites '*Hayyuu*' to proclaim laws, and

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hands of some *Abbaa Gadaa*'s for more than eight years. The date of *Baallii* transfer may not be changed unless the nation faces natural or man-made problems such as Migration or dislocation, war, famine etc. According to elders, *Baallii* transfer changed due to internal and external challenges and *Abbaa Gadaa*'s stay on power for some consecutive years.

<sup>c</sup>*Agaalla* is the place where Gumii Bokkoo is held under big tree near the current asphalt road to the eastern direction and it is the special place found at Me'ee Bokkoo.

*Jaldhaabaa* who is responsible to keep peace of Gumii session. The second Gumii Session is called *qorbisa*, which is open for everybody and held at *qachaa*<sup>d</sup> of ruling Abbaa Gadaa.

The Gumii have their own communication style only by using four special words: *qophise*, *toggise*, and *qoxise/waabese*. The *hayyuu* use these formal phrases to take turn, interrupt and avoid interruption. The *hayyuu* who are ready are expected to utter the term *qophise*, which literally mean I have something to say or forward for you and then he continue. When he concluded, he is expected to utter the term *toggise* which literally mean now I have this much. Then the one who made himself ready take turns by uttering *qophise*. If two *hayyuu* are once uttered *qophise* together the one who want to be first utter *qoxise* which literally mean I object to be first. The laws that are going to be proclaimed and rehearsed are the laws specified and discussed by *hayyuu* before Gumii is held. Thus, when maybe there is *hayyuu* who go beyond the specified laws, the other *hayyuu* interrupting him to stop by uttering *waabese* which mean he is exceeding, and transfer turn to others.

### 3.2.1. *Bobba'a Gumii/Gumii's Movement to Agaalla*

*Bobba'a Gumii* is the movement of gadaa members towards *Agaalla* (the special place where Gumii is held). It is pre-assembly preparation and movement made towards *Agaalla*. Gumii starts its general meeting under a big tree called *Me'ee*, which found in *Agaalla* the surrounding of which is primarily protected from any trespass. When the members of the Gumii are going for the assembly, they move in organized and well-arranged manner which always moves in straight line forms of travel arranged by order of seniority. This event is called *Bobba'a Gumii* which is the mass movement wherein gadaa members make to center of the assembly. The Gumii *Bokkoo* most of the time takes place for five consecutive days before *Baallii* handover ritual is held. Each day, the member of different gadaa classes and grades move in fellow line to the center of meeting by the lining order of *Gadaa*, *Doorii* and *Raabaa* members in its order of *Uraagaa*, *Maattii* and *Hookkuu* confederation.

There are two travelling roots of *Bobbaa Gumii* which is trisected into three segments. The leading segment belongs to the gadaa members of all three confederacies; *Uraagaa*, *Maattii* and *Hookkuu* respectively. The second segment is that of *Doorii* members of *Uraagaa*, *Maattii* and *Hookkuu* respectively while the third segment of *Bobba'a Gumii* is one of *Raabaa* members of all three confederacies, and the same patterns aforementioned are followed. During *Bobba'a Gumii* various announcements are made, including travelling norms and other laws by the *Yuubaas* to the moving Gumii crowds. This speech continues up to the arrival of Gumii members to the *Agaalla* and formal discussion officially opened.

The first line is that of the outgoing group according to the aforementioned three segments and the other is that of the incoming group as of their leading segments of gadaa of *Uraagaa*, *Maattii* and *Hookkuu* and then followed by *Doorii* of the three confederacies as respective of their seniority and finally followed by *Raabaa* of the three confederacies as respective of

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<sup>d</sup>*Qachaa* is the place where is found in front of the hat/home of the ruling *Abbaa Gadaa* and where the second session of Gumii *Bokkoo*, called *Qorbisa* is held. It is the assemblage of houses of *Yaa'a* attached to one another of ruling *Abbaa Gadaa*.

their seniority. The other member of the people which are not part of the specified three gadaa grades (*Gadaa*, *Doorii* and *Raabaa*) including women and children are not allowed to join this line and they are allowed to follow behind the *Gumii*.



Picture 2: *Bobba'a Gumii*

During *Bobba'a Gumii*, various announcements are made by the *Yuubaa* to the moving *Gumii* members and also to the attendants including travelling norms and other laws which continue up to the arrival of *Gumii* members to the *Agaalla* and formal discussion officially opened. On their way to *Agaalla*, the walking approaches, wearing styles, spear holding sides and forms, walking speeds, passing norms, and other relevant issues are popularly announced to all to be respected. These announcements are made by responsible *Yuubaa*, who move forth and back in passing *Bobba'a Gumii*, being in each travelling route. From many announcements that *Yuubaa* made, the following are some examples:

'*Woraana Midda qabatanii beekkadhu*'  
'*Woyaa midda Facaafatanii beekkadhu*'

'*Hayyuun dura deema beekkadhu*'  
'*Gadaa itti aanaa beekkadhu*'  
'*Deemman Gumiiin suuta aadaa*'  
'*Gumii duran qaxxaamuranuu beekkadhu*'

put your spear on right shoulder is proper  
sliding your '*woyaa*' (traditional cloth that the *Abbaa Gadaas* wear) on the right shoulder is rule  
*Hayyu* leads the travel and be careful  
*Gadaa* follows the *Hayyu* and be careful  
the walking style of *Gumii*' is slowly and this is culture  
it is impossible to cross while *Gumii* is passing and be careful about this

Throughout the stay of *Gumii* Assembly, these procedures, orders and norms are always kept and followed. If one misses it, the '*Jaldhaabaa*<sup>e</sup>'.

### 3.2.2. *Qorbisa*

*Qorbisa* is all inclusive and participatory assembly that is held at *qachaa* of the ruling *Abbaa Gadaa*. The session is open for all and anyone who may have questions, doubts, criticisms and suggestions on the laws passed and entertained cases can participate. On this session, any

<sup>e</sup>*Jaldhaabaa* is the peace keeping groups in the *Gujii Gadaa* system and have the responsibility of peace keeping in the society and also during such ritual ceremonies.

one regardless of gender, age or power who has any question, comment or suggestion has the right to speak in front of the ruling Abbaa Gadaa and Yuubaa<sup>f</sup>.

It is a session held after the main assembly of law proclamation, amendment and announcement is completed. The main concern of this session are to adopt those laws proclaimed, amended previous laws and announced during Gumii session, to held a discussion with wider people on it and to entertain cases brought to Bokkoo if any. Therefore, the qorbisa session is held with the target of hearing the comments, complains and also suggestions of the wider people on the proclaimed, amended and announced laws before power is handover.



Picture 3: Qorbisa Session

### 3.3. The Power (*Baallii*) transferring ritual

When the *Bokkoo* assembly completes its law proclamation and rehearsing, there are also several events which are succeeding the assembly until the *Baallii* (political power) ritual event is undertaken. There are different performances of rite of passage to change the role, responsibilities and status in the Gadaa System (i.e. as a person changes its grade every eight years, the role, responsibilities and even the status of the person also changes). Among such rites of passage *Maqbaasa*, *Qarree buufata*, *Hayyoma*, are the most prominent ones. The *Maqbaasa* ritual is the name giving ritual among the Gujii Oromoo which is held to give a name for newly born child. In Gujii culture, to give a name for the newly born child is undertake through ceremonial activity which will invite the neighbors, relatives and others on the ritual.

The *Qarree buufataa* ritual is the ritual of hair shaving that *Dabballee* (the first gadaa grade) are shaving their hair publically which shows their transition to *Qarree Duraa* (the second grade of the gadaa system). In Gujii gadaa system, *Dabballee* is a first age classes which ranges from 1-8 years old. Hence, any children born within a range of 1-8 year are categorized as *Dabballee* and let without cutting off their hairs while within this age classes. However, on

<sup>f</sup>Yuubaa is the retirement stage in the Gujii Gadaa system that comes next to *Baatu* (49-56). There are two types of Yuubaa such as *Yuuba diqqaa* (57-64) and *Yuuba Guddaa* (65-72). Their main responsibility is serving the ruling Gadaa as an advisor.

their last year (8<sup>th</sup>) they cutting off the hairs of head would be performed for the first time since their birth and then they transferred to the next grade, *Qarree Duraa*. The same ritual is also held to transfer from *Qarree Duraa* to *Qarree Duubaa* (the third grade).

The *Hayyooma* ritual is also another ritual that the elected gadaa councilors are performing the ritual of being *Hayyuu* (gadaa councilor). These performances are accompanied with *qalmaa* (slaughtering) ceremony. This is done by slaughtering of cattle in front of their *qachaa*.

Among the several rites of passage held, the most dominant one is the power (*Baallii*) transferring ritual. It is a time when incoming gadaa class takes the socio-political and religious power from the outgoing gadaa class.

The actual *Baallii* handover is carried out when *Hayyuu* transferred the *Baallii Guchii* (ostrich feather) from the outgoing Abbaa Gadaa to the incoming one. The ostrich feather, in Gujii gadaa system, symbolizes the overall power (political, religious, economic, social, cultural, etc.,) of the Abbaa Gadaa. The outgoing and incoming gadaa groups are exchanging milk and blessings which is carried out by slaughtering bulls and the ceremony is accomplished by *Hayyuu*.

On the date of *Baallii* ceremony, early in the morning, groups of *Doorii* from each three Gujii clans come to *qachaa* of the ruling Abbaa Gadaa to take the power. Up on arrival, the incoming Abbaa Gadaa calls them by saying *Yaa Worra kana*- literally meaning 'hello owners of this home'. Then the ruling Abbaa Gadaa keeps silent until the incoming repeatedly calls them three times. At the fourth time, he replays *Yaa*- meaning 'yes' and form of greeting, then, the incoming gadaa groups enter the *qachaa* of the ruling Abbaa Gadaa. The outgoing one gives to the new one fresh milk by saying "*Hoo mi'ii Gadaa tiyyaa*"- meaning 'take fresh milk which was the product of my reign'. And the new one replies "*Gadaa tiyya mi'aawi*" – 'be beloved in my reign'; then the outgoing continues - "*Hoo ittuu Gadaa tiyyaa*" – 'take the yoghurt which was the product of my reign'; then the incoming replies "*Gadaa tiyya sa'aa namaan ititi*" – 'be stable in human and material resources throughout my reign'; then the outgoing say, "*Hoo areera Gadaa tiyyaa*" – 'take the buttermilk which is churned during my reign', then incoming replied, "*Gadaa Tiyyaa kormii sii areeru*" – 'may you have abundance throughout my reign'. Then the outgoing continues, "*Hoo daraaraa Gadaa tiyyaa*" – 'here is the flower-product of my reign' (traditional drinking made of honey), the incoming replies by saying "*Gadaa tiyyaa daraari*" – 'let your hope flourish during my reign'.

Upon receiving the *Baallii*, the new Abbaa Gadaa drinks all these (milk, yoghurt, buttermilk, *Daadhii* (traditional drink made of honey) presented with his councilors after they go back to their home on horseback to re-join the waiting assembly, *yaa'a* (Jemjem and Dhadacha 2011: 121). These *eebbaa* (blessings) confirm and convey the existence of abundances, peace, and respect during the passing Abbaa Gadaa and ambition of the same by the new Abbaa Gadaa in his gadaa reign.

### 3.4. Some positive aspects of the power transfer ceremony

Despite the past internal and external challenges on the gadaa system<sup>9</sup>, nowadays there are different features that appear as an opportunity. When we compare the 74<sup>th</sup> *Baallii* ritual of Gujii gadaa with that of the past, some positive things are observed. Some of the features that are considered as positive for the system are the following:

#### a. Better Media Coverage

The *Gumii Bokkoo* of 2016 had relatively attracted several national and international journalists to the area and got better media coverage through different radio and television transmissions. It is the conviction of the writer of this paper that the recognition that Gadaa System has got at this time by being one of the world's intangible heritages is partly the result of 74<sup>th</sup> *Gumii Bokkoo*, which was attended by a large number of the citizens and national and international journalists.



Picture 4: Bokkoo assembly session with different journalists

#### b. The increasing number of attendants

The 74<sup>th</sup> *Gumii Bokkoo* attracted thousands of participants from all corner of Oromiyaa region and beyond. The attendants were estimated to be more than half a million. This is an indication for the revival of Gadaa as a system after a long period of political and historical troubling that discouraged it to function as is indigenous political, social, economic, cultural, military and administration system of the Oromoo people.

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<sup>9</sup>The *Gadaa* system was encountered several challenges during the past regimes. The first problem faced by the Oromoo culture was the political and religious domination of the Ethiopian past autocratic regimes. During the past regimes, the governors made proclamations that dominated and even tried to eradicate the indigenous religious systems and the administration system of *Gadaa* (Bayissa 2013: 177-178). Internally, the system was also faced the problem of time interruption for power transfer by some selfish *Abbaa Gadaa*'s, those who refused to transfer the power on time. For instance, Yaya Dale was one of the individual who refused to give power to the next *Abbaa Gadaa*. Additionally, the *Gadaa* system is under the challenge of modernity (education, technology), religion (which undermine indigenous cultural practices including Gadaa system), technology, etc.

*c. Incorporation of some current issues in indigenous Gadaa laws*

Among the several distinctive features of *Gadaa* system, one is its flexibility of law which is amended every eight years and incorporates the contemporary issues in its indigenous law. As a result, the 74<sup>th</sup> *Gumii Bokkoo* proclaimed some new laws which did not get recognition previously. Among these, one was incorporation of education for girls in the *Gadaa* laws. Traditionally, the girls were not officially entitled to attend school equally with men; but *Gumii Bokkoo* of 2016 declared a law that enforce every household to send their daughters to school, which have its own role in ensuring gender equality in the region.

Another very interesting law that got attention was the issue of environmental protection. On the session, the *Hayyuu* formally announced that cutting tree is forbidden and specially selling firewood and other tree products as illegal and would lead to penalty. According to this law, every member of the society is responsible for protecting its environment.

*d. Improvements and strengthening of family laws*

In addition to the above mentioned contemporary issues, the *Gumii* improved and also strengthening the existing family laws. As a result, the *Gumii* declared that marriage shall take the forms of mutual agreement of spouses, both parents, and levirate marriage is allowable. It also declared that the law supports the illegality of abduction by saying that “*Durra humnaan hin butane seeraa*”. According to this law, the levirate marriage is only based on the free and full consent of the widow—“*Fuudhi dhaalaa fedha intala dhaalamtu irratti hunda’a seeraa*”.

Another marriage issues strengthen by law was the marriage payment called in anthropology as bride price. Traditionally, there were expected payments that go from groom’s family to bride’s family. But currently different families started to ask extra payments which make the practice resemble as if girls are on sale. As a result, the *Bokkoo* assembly declared that this act is considered a crime that leads to punishment by saying - “*Intala hin gurguranu seera*”- meaning marriage is not sale so do not sale girls, that is the law.

### **3.5. The challenges encountering the ritual**

As *gadaa* system is the indigenous political, social, cultural, military, and economic organization of the Oromoo people in general and Gujii society in particular. The system has encountered and is also encountering several challenges. Traditionally, the *gadaa* system is an indigenous democratic administration system which ruled the Oromoo people for the minimum of past four centuries. However, due to the past autocratic political system of in the country, the system encountered problems and lost its political, economic, military, social power it used to exercise before. During the past regimes, the governors made proclamations that dominated and even tried to eradicate the indigenous administration and religious systems (Bayissa 2013: 177-178). As a result, the *gadaa* system currently found in the majority of the Oromiyaa region (relatively except Gujii and Borana) is the vestige of its past system.

The introduction and expansion of different religious organization (Islam and Christianity) to the region is also another challenging factor for the proliferation of gadaa system. Even currently, the expansion of protestant religion in different areas including Gujii, is the worry for Oromoo culture in general and gadaa system in particular. Acquainted well with their doctrine the followers start to undermine and criticize each traditional activities including power transferring ritual of gadaa system.

In the history of the Gujii gadaa system, there was a time at which the system faced the problem of time interruption for power transfer by some unusually egoistic Abbaa Gadaas, who refused to transfer the power on time even if the Gadaa principle does not allow such act. For instance, as data from the study reveals, Yaya Dale was one of the individuals who refused to give power to the next Abbaa Gadaa.

Additionally, the gadaa system is under the pressure of several contemporary issues. Modernity by itself is the major challenge for gadaa system as youngsters are seen to merely follow the western culture in the name of modernity leaving aside gadaa values. The modern education system by itself promotes the western culture and indirectly discourages the indigenous culture including gadaa system. The books in schools appear to promote western culture and lack indigenous examples which could lead to helping the youth indigenous mind-set. The introduction and expansion of modern technologies, directly or indirectly, also undermines the indigenous cultures including the Gadaa system.

Despite the above mentioned challenges of gadaa system, there are also challenges observed on the power transferring ritual of *Me'ee Bokkoo*, which would be a challenge for the prospect of the system. Some of them are the following:

*a. The challenge of increase in the numbers of attendants*

The increasing number of participants may be considered as both positive and negative. On one hand, it is an indication for the revival of the *Gadaa* system; on the other hand, it may result over crowdies which may disturb the smooth flow of the system. When more than unexpected number of attendants came to the area, on one way it may degrade well conserved environment, on the other hand it may result in the introduction of some events and behaviors which are not permitted by the system like alcoholism, adultery, chat chewing, etc. to the place.

*b. Political Intervention*

According to the gadaa rule and regulation the place and date of the transfer of *Baallii* (power) is fixed by *Seera Oromoo*, which may not change unless the nation faces natural or man-made problems such as migration or dislocation, war, famine etc. However, when we look at the 74<sup>th</sup> *Baallii* transferring ritual, the traditional and the original power transferring period was in 2015. According to the information got from elders, due to the election of the country, the gadaa leaders were forced to postpone the power transferring ceremony to the next year, 2016.

Traditionally, on the date of *Baallii* transferring ceremony, the participants expect the new Abbaa Gadaa to forward his first message to the wider people. But, at this particular session, the stage was occupied by government representatives; and the attendants were forced to hear the political message of the county's and the region's presidents on behalf of the new Abbaa Gadaa. On one way, the presence of political delegates on the ritual is good which shows the recognition that is given to it by the government. On the other way, the government bodies or political delegates who are there to attend the ritual have come to convey their political messages and propaganda to the people by using the stage they took from the Abbaa Gadaa. For instance, during this ritual the Ethiopia's president and the president Oromiyaa regional state president of the time were there and what they convey on the stage was about the politics of EPRDF, which has no relation with gadaa system. As such political propaganda has been repeatedly provoked on such indigenous rituals, directly or indirectly it may contaminate the gadaa system.

*c. Selling alcoholic drinks and other materials*

*Me'ee Bokkoo* is the greatest and respected (*Woyyuu*) *Ardaa Jilaa*. It is the place where good things are performed such as bringing reconciliation, blessing, law making, and declaring it, etc. But, now days, as result of the existence of so many thousands of people, different business men and business organizations started to look to the area in the name of service giving. For example, there were several hotel representatives (targeted to sell meals and alcoholic drinks) and alcoholic factory representatives (to sell alcoholic drinks). Currently, some few *Hayyuus* also started to take alcohols which may lead them to the other direction which is not recognized by the system. The *Hayyuu* are the gadaa councilors who are expected to proclaim, amend and announce laws. They expected to make right and fair laws. As they start to drunk the alcoholic drinks they might be misguided due to the intoxication by the alcohol. Many young groups also started to take these alcoholic drinks and get intoxicated, and this may lead them to disturbing the calm and sacred ritual at the place, the act of which deviate from the gadaa rules and regulations. In addition, there are also several materials transported to the area only for the market purpose which are on the way to convert the ritual place (*Woyyuu*) to market place.

*d. Modern singing (electronic music) which dominates the indigenous music*

At the end of *Gumii*, all attendants are expected to involve in the traditional songs called *qeexalaa*<sup>h</sup>. The singing occasions set to be done by all members of attendants or all *Haaganaa* (senates). The dance is performed in unison and collectively. Each grades, especially the active grades such as *Gadaa*, *Doorii* and *Raabaa* dance separately. This means that all perform it deploying as per their respective three confederacies. Generally, the nine *qeexalaa* groups will be established solely to perform *qeexalaa*.

This traditional song is not merely a song done by people; rather it is done with the purpose of conveying different messages. For example, *qeexalaa* that sung by gadaa members deliver

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<sup>h</sup>*Qeexalaa* is the traditional singing among the Gujii people which will be done by different groups in the *Gadaa* system.

the strong performances they performed within the past time of their administration, good or impressive success they brought to the community, problems they solved, the fertility they regulated, and other related components. On the other hand, the *Doorii* members also divulges their readiness to take power, various duties they have discharged to reach this day, good legacy that played by their *Haaganaa* before forty (40) years, and tendency they have to receive and rule people properly. In the same manner, *Raabaa* grades also sung to disclose their strong side, preparation to replace *Doorii*, etc. Therefore, the *Qeexalaa* as one of the ritual performances of gadaa system, it help them to transfer a message from one group to another through smart way.

However, with introduction of modern electronic singing to the area, this traditional singing is started to be undermined, especially by younger groups, and they prefer the electronic ones to dance. Even if the introduction of electronic music to the ritual is not directly the challenge for the ritual, it is challenging the ritual indirectly on one hand by reducing the *qeexalaa* from the ritual practices which will block one system of message transferring between different gadaa grades. On the other hand, this modern electronic music may introduce an alien culture which have no relation with the system which may result incorporation of the behavior which have not considered the values and the norms of the Gujii gadaa system.

As per the observation made on the spot, the traditional singing practice was mainly done by old group of people, where the youngsters are attending the modern electronic music, especially at night. Therefore, through a time this may result the disappearing of *qeexalaa*, which is one feature of the Gujii gadaa system and substituting with other which is not fitting with the system.

*e. The government security forces overtook the role of Jaldhaabaa*

*Jaldhaabaa* is a peace keeping group in Gujii gadaa system and they are group of people which are responsible in peacekeeping. *Jaldhaabaa* hold a stick which is highly feared by the people due to the belief that if they are lap against by it, it is considered as curse. Therefore, the people have great respect and fear to *Jaldhaabaa*. But, the government security forces overtook the role of *Jaldhaabaa* at *Me'ee Bokkoo* which the people felt not good with it. The government security force did not made communication with this indigenous security force and even they have no information about *Jaldhaabaa*. As a result, security force sent from the government to area have resulted in the intervention of the role the *Jaldhaabaa*. At such Ardaa Jilaa, the *Jaldhaabaa* are sufficient enough to keep the peace and security of the system.



Picture 5: *Jaldhaabaa* –peace keeping group

*f. Inappropriate wearing styles and holding culturally forbidden materials*

Nowadays, so many young groups of the people started to wear different types of traditional costumes. Basically, this experience is very good and should be promoted. However, within this cultural wearing, as each has rules and regulations in any aspect of human life including wearing styles, there are cultural rules of wearing styles in Oromoo in general and among the Gujii in particular. In gadaa system, there are some clothes which are only permitted to *Abbaa Gadaa's* and which are forbidden by other groups of the society. As a result, there are culturally specified materials that should be held merely by gadaa members such as *Kallachaa, Bokkuu, Alangee*, etc. But, nowadays, due to misunderstanding (due to the assumption that clothing cultural clothes is one manifestation of *Orumummaa* or identity) about those materials and due to the concept that the people have towards their culture, many people, especially, the Youngers, started to wear and also held the clothes and materials respectively which is forbidden for them. However, in Oromoo culture in general, there is the norms and values of clothing (i.e. appropriate clothing for appropriate person). Therefore, unless it will be corrected immediately, this may result the more complication of the material culture utilization in gadaa system. Such performance of the people is not going with the principle of right wearing style for right person.

### 3. Conclusion and Recommendations

#### 4.1. Conclusion

Regardless of the past political and historical challenges, the gadaa system was encountered; currently there are several positive and also negative changes that are encountering the system. Among the several positive changes, the major one is the increasing number of attendants, which was estimated to be more than half million. Another positive thing of the ritual is the incorporation of the contemporary issues of the society in the gadaa laws. These important laws which were recently incorporated to the gadaa law are education for girls and environmental protection.

In addition, the Gumii improved some family laws and also amended the others. For instance, the Gumii declared that marriage should be based on the consent of both spouses and parents. The levirate marriage which was traditionally based on the interest of husband's family was restricted by new law proclaimed as it should be performed only through the free and full consent of the widow. On the same law, it also restricts the abduction practices that practiced in the society.

However, as changes are not always positive by their nature, there are also some changes which would be considered as challenge to the system. Some of the challenging trends which were observed on the ritual are over crowdies of the people on the ritual, the political intervention from the government, selling of alcoholic drinks and other materials around the Gumii area in the name of service delivery, the domination of the electronic music over the traditional singing practice called *qeexalaa*, and the replacement of *Jaldhaabaa* by government security force.

#### 4.2. Recommendations

The issues which are discussed as challenges need the intervention of the concerned bodies (gadaa leaders, government, scholars, young groups, and wider community) before it result a negative consequence on the gadaa system in general and *Baallii* transferring ritual in particular. Therefore, the following recommendations are given based on the aforementioned challenges of the gadaa system in general and of the ritual in particular.

Accordingly, Culture and Tourism Bureau of the regional government have to plan on such issues regarding the preservation of the gadaa system in general and the ritual of *Baallii* handover practices which is one important features of the gadaa system. In line with this, Gujii Zone Culture and Tourism office has to work on the preservation of the gadaa system with its ritual performances. In addition, the office needs to identify the contemporary challenges on the system and take remedial action before it result culture loss. Besides, higher education institutions in the region have to conduct a series research on the gadaa system in general and *Baallii* transferring ritual in particular so as to identify more challenges of the system and take necessary corrective action and to promote it to the wider world. It is also eminent that the regional education bureau in collaboration with the higher learning institutions needs to sort out ways of incorporating the system at different levels of education. Provided that the system is inscribed as an intangible heritage of humanity, the Ethiopian government is also expected to promote and preserve the system, and on the way make it a tourist attraction destination. Scholars are also recommended to conduct further study and seek for alternative solutions to combat the challenges encountering the system.

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