



Annals of Gadaa System: An Ethnographic Perspective

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Abstract

Ethnography has long been recognized as a scientific description of people and culture in their natural setting. A few studies have examined annals of the Gadaa system. This study attempts to contribute to a better understanding of Gadaa system by reviewing related researches at antecedent, present and future levels. The majority of studies were confined to Borana zone but our research work was particularly based on the studies conducted in Guji zone. So it is unique in itself. Drawing on perspectives of records of Gadaa system, the researcher identified the researches year by year and reviewed the items measured, approach used, contribution and research gap. Researchers find that were as “Guji” Gadaa” studies in period between 1977-2007 based on structuralism have a constructivist ontology. Furthermore, the results indicate that from 2010-2020, research approach used in Gadaa studies shifted from natural positive realism to over-positive critical realism and after that to critical theory of historical realism. The author also discussed the further challenges and new approach need to be adopted.

Keywords: Ethnography, Annals, Gadaa System, Ontology, Post-Positivism.

1.1 Introduction

The first inscription belongs to the Gadaa system of the Guji Oromo of Southern Ethiopia written by University of Chicago Anthropologist John Hinnant in 1977. His research work thematic area was Guji (African people) -- Rites and ceremonies and their Ethnology. In continuation of his previous study John H. (1978) studied Guji Gada as a Ritual System through the perspectives of Age, Generation and Time. John H. manifested that “Gada system divides the stages of life, from childhood to old age, into a series of formal steps, each marked by a transition ceremony defined in terms of both what is permitted and what is forbidden. The aspect of Gada system which throws the concept of age-grading into confusion is that of recruitment. Recruitment is based on the maintenance of one socially-defined generation between father and son”.

Before the twentieth century, no significant research work was properly written because of the regional marginalization of Oromia region. At the last of the first decade of twentieth-century study on Ethnicity and Interethnic Relations on Guji and Gedeo manifested by the research thesis of Regassa

(2007). But because of the shadow of regional politics encroachment in the field of literature writing, Regassa research was submitted to the University of Toromso in Norway in 2007 but published recently (2019) in form of the book. Regassa study deals with ethnicity and inter-ethnic relations in African context, with particular emphasis on the new 'Ethiopian Experiment' of ethnic politics. The study challenges the already existing thoughts on ethnicity, which map the concept on contours of polar extremes and suggests an approach to transcend the primordialist/constructivist perspectives. His study makes use of ethnicity both in analytical and political contexts.

Table 1 –Research Review of Studies between years 1977-2007.

Researchers	Items measured	Approach	Contribution	Research Gap
Hinnant J. (1977)	Ethnology	Anthropological view	Rites; ceremonies.	Results remain contingent on the USA experience
Hinnant J. (1978)	Guji Gada as a Ritual System, Age and Generation set	Anthropological view	Age-Set; Generation set.	This research emphasizes only on transition ceremony
Regassa A. (2007)	Ethnicity and inter-ethnic relations	Primordialist and constructivist perspectives, Ethnic political view	Challenges the already existing thoughts on ethnicity	Ethnic Federalism is used in drawing the contours of nationalism based on post-colonial African leadership view. So having Ethnocentric view.

Source: Researcher own framework on the base of review of “Guji” Gadaa” studies (1977-2007)

1.2 Analysis of Advancement in Research Approaches (1977-2007): Before the above researches have structuralism basics as constructivist ontologism believes that realities are constructed in the frame of mental and multiple perceivable structures (i.e. realities come into a variety of forms in societies and they are experienced differently) but they are comprehensible in special places and locations (although reality elements are most common among many people and cultures) and their contents and forms depend on the people or groups who form these structures, even if they are not all correct, but they are informative. Structures and their related realities can change. This situation is because of a lack of idealism and may be overcome by positivism.

1.3 After 2010: Generalized to Particularized

At the start of the twenty-first century first detailed research works on Gada Democratic Pluralism with a particular reference to the Guji Socio-Cultural and politico-Legal System comes by the outstanding efforts of Jemjem and Dhadacha (2011) and published itself in Ethiopia by Addis Ababa Rela Printing Press. The research has proved that the genesis of the Gadaa System was not a spontaneous incident but through processes and experiences. Mythologies trace back the genesis of formal administration to a matrilineal society before which there was unorganized life of humankind

as a social animal where only the fittest can survive. The research found out that, among the Oromo nation, Guji tribe has been ruled by 74 Abbaa Gadaas from 5 luba (party). It is about 665 years since Guji alone started ruling under the Gadaa System as people of a separate territory.

After the work on Democratic Pluralism, Berisso (2012) comes with his research on Guji-Oromo culture and discusses why nine is considered a special number in Guji Oromo Culture philosophy. In his exceptional work “The Riddles of Number Nine in Guji Oromo Culture philosophy in Africa Philosophy” Berisso depicted that “In Guji-Oromo culture (southern Ethiopia), the number nine has special significance. It is associated with critical times, with ghosts, and with illness and death. This is evident in Guji-Oromo proverbs, in children's games, and when a woman is pregnant with and gives birth to her ninth child.”

Later on Sustainable Development Indigenous practices of Guji Gada, Teshome (2016) in his study manifested Indigenous ecological knowledge in perspectives of pastoralist perception on rangeland management and degradation in Guji Zone. Teshome A. conducted a particular study to explore range management practices and pastoralists’ views on degradation and its impact on local livelihood in south Ethiopia. The study shows the use of enclosure and herd mobility in basic traditional practice as well as the effectiveness of community indigenous knowledge in assessing and monitoring rangeland degradation. After Jemjem and Dhadacha (2011) work on Gada Democratic Pluralism with a particular reference to the Guji Socio-Cultural and politico-Legal System second most prominent work on Guji Gada comes out by the writing of Roba (2019) on the area of Politico-legal systems. His research was conducted to investigate the indigenous mechanisms of preserving sacred natural sites in Guji Oromo, southern Ethiopia. Particularly, the study was conducted in Guji zone, Adoolaa Reeddee and Annaa Sorraa districts. The study demonstrated customary laws and oral declaration, taboos, customary punishment and social banishment that are used as indigenous mechanisms used to preserve sacred natural sites in the study area.

Table 2 –Research Review of Studies Between years 2010-2020.

Researchers	Items measured	Approach	Contribution	Research Gap
Jemjem And Dhadacha (2011)	Socio-Cultural and politico-Legal System; Democratic Pluralism	Mythologies trace	Genesis of Gadaa System	Some part of study is based on Mythologies trace; questioning on modern Oromo scholars
Berisso T. (2012)	Indigenous ecological knowledge	Culture philosophy; Conceptual paper	Riddles of Number Nine in Guji Culture philosophy	Proverbs based study; lacks empirical back-up
Teshome, A. (2016)	Perspectives of pastoralist perception on rangeland management and degradation	Structure questionnaires, key respondents and direct observation.	Sustainable Development; Indigenous ecological knowledge	Lack of empirical analysis; only study three pastoral and agro-pastoral districts of the Guji zone
Roba, G.O (2019)	Guji Socio-Cultural and politico-Legal System	Interview (in depth and key informants’ interview), focus group	Investigate the indigenous mechanisms of preserving sacred natural	subject is highly sensitive, respondents may be inhibited in exchanging beliefs;

discussion and transect walk	sites in Guji Oromo; demonstrate customary laws and oral declaration.	Costly – one group seldom isn't enough.
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Source: Researcher own framework on base of review of “Guji” Gadaa” studies (2010-2020)

1.4 Inter-paradigm analyses (1977-2007 to 2010-2020)

When we move from top to down in table 2, (post-positivism to positivism manifestation is seen) researchers reached from natural positive realism (the issue is to investigate visual external phenomena) to over-positive critical realism (the issue is to study external reality, but it claims that it can be probably understood) and then to critical ethnography (advocates for marginalized groups) and finally, it gets to relative structuralism (which assumes social fact as pluralism and sometimes contrasting and that is the fruit of humans' mind, but it can change as their creators get more awareness). Therefore, the adoption of structuralism after 2010 brings paradigms in Gadaa's researches.

1.5 Gadaa Reformist Related Studies (2008-2020)

In his manuscript on Foundations of a State in Oromia, Jalata (2008) tries to apply Gadaa Principles in the Twenty-First Century. In his study, he explores the process of state formation in historic oromia to identify the essence and characteristics of 'Gadaa' (Oromo democracy) and the 'Moottii' (kingdom) system. After that, his work focuses on explaining the impacts of global imperialism, Ethiopian colonialism, and the role of the Oromo clientele class. Finally, he illustrates the urgency of developing a national 'Gumii oromiyaa' (oromo national assembly) to transform the unwritten oromo constitutional order into a written one. Anthropologist Dejene (2009) conducted his research on gender and culture in southern Ethiopia. He ethnographically analyzed the Guji-Oromo women's customary rights. His research demonstrates that Guji-Oromo women have more subtle cultural and economic rights than is immediately apparent. Women actively participate in the ritual aspect of the Gada Generation Grade system, but they are marginally involved in political activities. To understand the position of Guji women in their society, myths and stories about men and women, gender-based division of labor, and the general discourses about gender are analyzed and discussed in his manuscript. In sub-Saharan African countries where are proclaimed but in several circumstances not translated into practice, it appears vital to look into alternatives that can fill governance deficits. Against this backdrop, Tesfaye (2012) works come with a focus on bridging the peripheral Gadaa rule to the mainstream Constitutional Order of the 21st Century Ethiopia. The main objective of his study is to respond to the search for an alternative solution to hurdles the democratization process, Africa as a region as well as Ethiopia as a country faces, through African indigenous knowledge of governance, namely the Gadaa System. Accordingly, institutional and fundamental principles analyzed in this article indicate that indigenous system of governance such as the Gadaa System embraces indigenous democratic values that are useful in 21st century Ethiopia. Later on, Ketema (2015) examines the mediating role of the indigenous Oromo Gada system in the common management of natural resources. The study revealed that the Gadaa system played a significant role in the democratization of nature conservation via the development of different natural resource management institutions and by enacting different rules and regulations under the Oromo Gada system.

In his master thesis, Balli (2015) studied the ethnic conflicts in the Guji and Borana Zones of Oromia National Regional State located at the southern pastoral low land of Ethiopia. The main objective his

study was to investigate, describe, and analyze the major common and newly prevailing causes of the ethnic conflicts, impacts of ethnic conflicts and management mechanisms among them. In peacekeeping attempt made by a formal institution is less effective than the one made by “*Jaarsummaa*” (an indigenous mechanism) in establishing lasting sustainable peace, social relation, and harmonization among the conflicting ethnic groups (Guji, Borana, Gabra and Garri). In their study, Bacha A., Kuto L. and Taye (2016), revealed that participatory governance is rooted in the Gadaa system by focusing on “*Manbadba*” general assembly of the oromo. The concept ‘*Manbadba*’ (literally meaning wide house) is used by the Arsii Oromo to mean Gadaa general assembly. The finding of their research revealed that the Gadaa system is participatory when analyzed from the perspective of roles of age grades, decentralization approach, gender issues and openness for the mass. The result of their study reveals that the current polity of the country shall utilize the Gadaa system of the oromo to boost the democratization process of the country and enhance peoples’ engagement in decision-making.

To investigate Gadaa power transfer, which is performed every eight years among the Oromo society in general and Guji Oromo, in particular, Lelisa (2018) revealed by the study, power (*Baallii*) transfer is a ritual celebration passing through different steps and concluded by sacrificial activities from giving and taking Abbaa Gadaa’s peacefully. In his study, Lelisa indicated that in Gadaa Democracy power transferred peacefully through the fair, free and periodic election. Finally, he explored how the Oromo nation developed this amazing and exemplary philosophy for self-rule, self-determination and sustainable development. Alemayehu et al. (2018), on their study on “*QUTTOO*” traditional practice” among the Guji Oromo tried to reconstruct the history of Quttoo tradition of the Guji Oromo. Quttoo is an ornament material usually worn by the Guji girls before getting married. Generally, the Quttoo tradition is an umbrella for the Guji women particularly, the girls to protect them from different human violence and ideological inferiority.

Gudina (2018), in his LL.M Thesis, studied the Gadaa Indigenous Governance System in Light of Modern Democratic Constitutional Principles. In his study, he tries to analyze Gadaa indigenous governance system which has been formulated and practiced by Oromo people, by comparing it with modern democratic constitutional principles, elements and values.

Study of Mokona (2018), on Guji Girja Gada System and Contemporary Challenges and Solomon Gutema (2017) study on Prospects and Challenges of Gadaa System as a Black Covenant in Modern Constitutional Administration appraises that the Gadaa system is a covenant for the Oromo people. Since all Oromo, in all age groups will give their consent to select or elect their representatives/leaders. Since the people put limitations on the powers of elected representatives through the principles of Gadaa administration and as the nation have Gadaa system as a guarantee to make their leaders accountable and transparent both legally and politically in their day to day official decisions. Berisso (2018) in his study reveals the Oromo Gadaa system as a democratic system based on periodical elections that are held every eight years with a clear term limit; peaceful transfer of political power; equitable distribution of power across generations and down to the community; rule of law and accountability; separation of politics from religion; social integration and peacebuilding roles; a period of testing and the presence of check and balance system.

Tadesse (2018), studied and showed the Relevance of Gadaa Values and Practices in Current Development by depicting that “Despite their advancement and intensiveness, existing scientific studies did not pay adequate attention to the relevance of Indigenous social values and customary practices in the current societal development context”. His study dedicates to investigating the Gada values and practices associated with socio-economic wellbeing, environmental protection and examining the relevance of Gada values and practices in current societal development. In studying the Gadaa system as a model form of democracy, Jemjem (2020) manifested to the preservation of the

unparalleled features of Guji Gadaa System because of its continuous, relentless and shifting influences on domestic colonizers and still upholding the unprecedented legacy of world's democracy. From extensive assessments, Jemjem experienced several impressions about the Gadaa System of the Oromo nation in general. However, he also observed some exceptions in the Gadaa of Guji Oromo among other Oromo tribes.

Table 3 –Research Review Base on Gadaa Reform Studies between the years 2008-2020.

Researchers	Items measured	Approach	Contribution	Research Gap
Jalata A. (2008)	Impacts of global imperialism, Ethiopian colonialism, role of the Oromo clientele class on the process of state formation.	Radical , Marxist and Ethnocentric approach	'MOOT'TII' (kingdom) system; 'Gumii oromiyaa' ; Refining and adapting of certain 'Gadaa' principles to the state formation	On Ethnocentric approach tries to applying Gadaa Principles in the Twenty First Century
Bacha A., Kuto L. and Taye G., (2016),	Age grades, gender issues	DECENTRALIZATION APPROACH; INTERVIEW, FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION, OBSERVATION; Critical Realism	' MANBADHA '; Investigation of participatory governance embedded in Gadaa system	Lacks empirical back-up. reality is a fact, but it can probably be perceived
Tesfaye Z. (2012)	Democracy and rule of law, indigenous knowledge of governance, namely the Gadaa System.	Futuristic Approach	Bridging the peripheral Gadaa rule to the mainstream Constitutional Order of the 21st Century Ethiopia	Highly criticize the Constitutional Order
Dejene N. (2009)	Gender and culture; customary laws	Ethnographic Analysis	Ethnographic analysis of Guji-Oromo women's customary rights	Ethical issues, especially of confidentiality, may appear
Ketema D. (2015)	Natural resource management; documentation of indigenous knowledge	Meticulous conceptual analysis Critical realism	Mediating role of Gada system for commons management of natural resources	Difficult to get concise and precise conclusions
Balli G. (2015)	Ethnic conflicts, impacts of ethnic conflicts;	Purposive and snowball (non-probable) sampling	Ethnic Conflict and Its Management in Pastoralist	Low flexibility in the response's choice; chain referral

	management mechanisms	techniques; qualitative method	Communities; "Jaarsummaa"	sampling; hidden population
Lelisa E. (2018)	Oromo Indigenous Philosophy ; Case of 74th Gujii Oromo Gadaa Power Transition	Observation, discussion and interview; qualitative method	Power (<i>baallii</i>) transfer	Dependent on the observer's impartiality ; Logistically difficult to organize as many actions are in private and over a long period
Alemayehu D, Bursano H., Wale K., Bekele T., Alemu B. and Kenea A.(2018)	Guji customary laws, QUTTOO traditional practice	local elders, women and youths orally data sources; Reformed dualism and objectivism	Quto tradition role for Guji women in protecting them from different human violence and ideological inferiority.	Not be representative of all population ; Lack validity and reliability
Gudina G. (2018)	71st ballii wal-irra fudhuu (power transfer)	Observation and interviews; Natural realism	Gadaa Indigenous Governance System in Light of Modern Democratic Constitutional Principles	Longer verification process to extract compared information ; Participants biasness
Mokona N. (2018)	Guji Girja Gada System	Epistemological	Guji Girja Gada System and Contemporary Challenges	Temptation at the analysis stage of counting how many said one thing and how many the other (strays into quantitative territory)
Emiru S. (2017)	Gadaa System as a Black Covenant	Sociological and Anthropological; qualitative method; dialects	Gadaa System as a Black Covenant in Modern Constitutional Administration	Longer verification process to extract compared information ; critical

				pluralism,
Berisso T.(2018)	Oromoo Gadaa system; periodical elections; Rule of law	Review of literature and his own experiences	Gadaa is considered a democratic and just system	Dependent on the impartiality of experiences
Tadesse E. (2018)	environmental protection; Gadaa values; dialectic between Modern and indigenous elements	Qualitative research method	Relevance of Gadaa Values and Practices in Current Development ; relevance of indigenous developmental values and practices	Difficult to get concise and precise conclusions
Jemjem U. (2020)		Ontological; iterative style of eliciting and categorizing responses	Preservation of the unparalleled features in Gadaa System of Guji	Study design is iterative;

Source: Researcher own framework on the base of review of “Gadaa” Reform studies (2008-2020)

1.6 Analysis of Advancement in Research Approaches used in Gadaa Reformist Studies (2008-2020): When we move from the top to the down of table 3, researches reaches from objectivism and dualism (which enable the researcher that how phenomena are real and how they work) to reformed objectivism and dualism that leads to starting of positivism in Gadaa studies (which is close to fact) and are more extensive in which knowledge is assumed as a phenomenon which is in the interaction between the researcher and test-takers or respondents). It is epistemologically important for the advent of a new Constructivist epistemological paradigm.

1.7 New Approach Need to be Adopted:

Flanagan (2013) claims that the scientific method is the most powerful tool for discovering truths about the world, exploring new theories and performing their empirical validation. Therefore, scientific research is the process of performing systematic and intensive inquisitions, which aims to discover and interpret the facts that are inserted in a certain reality. Regarding its approach, scientific research can be qualitative or quantitative. Qualitative research is concerned with aspects of reality that cannot be quantified, focusing on the understanding and explanation of the dynamics of social relations. Maxwell (2013) advocates that qualitative research works with the universe of meanings, motives, aspirations, beliefs, values and attitudes, which corresponds to a deeper space of relationships, processes and phenomena that cannot be reduced to the workability of the variables. In

qualitative research, the researcher is both the subject and the object of his research. Borrego et al. (2009) analyze the presence of quantitative, qualitative and mixed research methods in engineering education. As in the case of the above works of literature, most of the studies are based on interviews. Alshenqeti (2014) critically assesses the value and limitations of interviewing as a research instrument. He looks at the practical issues of adopting interviews and he discusses the validity and reliability of interviews in research studies. So before the above studies depend on the validity and reliability of interviews.

In the end, qualitative researches fit comfortably into the post-positivist tradition common to many contemporary kinds of research. After the advent of positivism in social sciences, quantitative researches form the basis for objective exploration and complex assumptions. In either approach, intense and fundamental disagreement about both philosophical assumptions and the nature of data. Increasingly, some researchers are interested in blending the two traditions, attempting to get the advantages of each. Social research is richer for the wider variety of views and methods that the analysis generates. The eclectic approach is thus may be an option in social sciences researches.

1.8 Further challenges and Recommendations

It is recommended that, finally, to get benefit from Gadaa system, researches must be given attention to Gadaa System. Gadaa researchers may lose their original taste paradoxically because they may face regional aspiration biases and ethnocentric feelings. Researchers need to work hard to undertake extensive researches more than any time to dig out and preserve the prominent values of the Gadaa System and teach to the world; therefore, it recommends that Universities should include an introduction to Gadaa System as a “common course” in the curriculum and it has to give as one subject starting from elementary to secondary school so that all the generation have sufficient knowledge about Gada to maintain Gadaa values and proper transfer of values down through generations.

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