

*Addis Ababa  
University*

*(Since 1950)*



**COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES**

**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY**

**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY**

**QUESTIONING THE ROLE OF ETHICS IN OROMO GADAA SYSTEM:  
THE CASE OF BORANA OROMO RITUAL EVENTS AT ARDA JILA**

**BY**

**JIREGNA ASSEFA DERESSA**

**ADVISOR**

**TENNA DEWO (PhD)**

JULY, 2011

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES  
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

M.A Thesis

QUESTIONING THE ROLE OF ETHICS IN OROMO GADAA SYSTEM: THE  
CASE OF BORANA OROMO RITUAL EVENTS AT ARDA JILA

**By: JIREGNA ASSEFA DERESSA**

Approved by: Philosophy Department

1. Chairman

Name-----Date-----Signature-----

2. Advisor

Name-----Date-----Signature-----

3. Examiner

Name-----Date-----Signature-----

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES  
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

M.A Thesis

QUESTIONING THE ROLE OF ETHICS IN OROMO GADAA SYSTEM: THE  
CASE OF BORANA OROMO RITUAL EVENTS AT ARDA JILA

By: **JIREGNA ASSEFA DERESSA**

Approved by: Philosophy Department

1. Chairman

Name-----Date-----Signature-----

2. Advisor

Name-----Date-----Signature-----

3. Examiner

Name-----Date-----Signature-----

## **Acknowledgements**

Praises be to the *Waaqa* the creator of all creation; He, who, gave me life and success to accomplish my study.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor Dr. Tenna Dewo, for his inspiration and academic direction throughout my works. He provided me very important materials generously and gave me his valuable time. He contributed a lot to the accomplishment of this research.

I would like to say thank you to my instructors and colleagues those who encourage me in the course of my study. My heartfelt and deepest gratitude goes to my friend and informant as well, Guyo Doyo Guyo, who provided me with moral and material support for accomplishment of this work. I would like to say thank you. My thanks also go to my Borana informants who provided me with valuable information.

Finally, I am most indebted to my wonderful brother, Gutu Asafa, Who shared burden of life with me.

## Table of Contents

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Pages</b>
Acknowledgment.....	i
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b>	
1. Introduction.....	1
1.2 Historical Background.....	2
1.2.1. Gada as Socio-Political System.....	2
1.2.2. Nagaa as Moral Concept.....	6
1.2.3. Moral Language.....	11
1.3. Research Questions.....	16
1.4. General Objective.....	16
1.5. Specific Objectives.....	17
1.6. Methods of Data Gathering.....	17
1.7. Limitation of the Study.....	17
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b>	
2. The Oromo <i>Gadaa</i> System and Its Ethical Substance.....	19
2.1. <i>Gadaa</i> System and Its Ethical Content.....	19
2.2. Political Dimension of the <i>Gadaa</i> System.....	25
2.3. The Borana Customary Law.....	31
<b>CHAPTER THREE</b>	
3. Ethics.....	34
3.1 Definition of the Concept of Ethics.....	34
3.2 Moral Dilemma and Moral Analysis.....	36
3.3 Political Truth and Moral Ground.....	39
3.4. The Concept of Saala-fokko and Its Implication.....	45
3.5. The Ceremony of <i>Buufatto</i> .....	50
<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b>	
4.1. Philosophical and Moral Reflection on the System.....	59
4.2. Conclusion.....	64
References	

## CHAPTER ONE

### 1. Introduction

A lot has been written about the Oromo *Gadaa* system and its original qualities such as egalitarianism, democratic polity, and its moral value. Oromo society like any society has been conscious of its cultural identity, its relation to nature, and the existence of a powerful force that regulates the connections between nature and society (Asafa 2010). Different scholars also had forwarded and are still forwarding different views on Oromo *Gadaa* system. Punkhurst and Getachew (2008:29) portray the *Gadaa* system as an egalitarian system of governance in which every eight years one generation set (*luba*) consisting of a segment of one fifth of the men of the same generation, becomes responsible of maintaining the peace of the Borana through prayer and sacrifice. Legesse (2000), also states that *Gadaa* institution is one of the famous indigenous African institutions that deals with almost all aspects of human society: economic, political, ritual and military.

Likewise, Tenna (2009) argued that *Gadaa* system is a complex, comprehensive and practical system in which various political, social, philosophical, religious and aesthetic notions of the Oromo people are housed (Tenna, 2009:95). Asafa (2007:48) also argued that the Oromo had an egalitarian democratic system of government known as *Gadaa*. According to him this system was based on the principles of check and balance (such as periodic succession of eight years and division of power among executive, legislative, judiciary branches), balanced opposition (among five parties), and power sharing between higher and lower administrative organs prevent power from falling into the hands of despots.

Other principles of the system, as Asafa writes, include balanced representation of clans, lineages, regions, and confederacies; the

accountability of the leaders; the settlement of disputes through reconciliation; respect for basic rights and liberties.

## **1.2. Historical Background**

### **1.2.1. Gadaa as socio-political system**

'Discussing the philosophy of Oromo democracy', Legesse argues, "what is astonishing about this cultural tradition is how far Oromo have gone to ensure that power does not fall in the hand of war chiefs and despots. They achieve this goal by creating a system of checks and balances that is at least as complex as the system we find in western democracies" [quoted in Asafa 2007].

Furthermore, Gadaa system served as the basis of democratic and egalitarian political system; under it the power to administer the affairs of the nation and the power to make laws belong to the people.....All people have the right to air their views in any public gathering without fear (*Gadaa* Melbaa1988:11).These reveals that the Oromo Gadaa system has strong democratic elements.

Scholars like Baxter and Bassi have also similar conception of the Gadaa system. Thus, there is a general agreement that Gadaa plays a key role in promoting peace (Baxter, 2005a, Bassi, 1996, cited in Punkhurst and Getachew, 2008: 29). Peace had been and still is the leading concept in religions, morality, politics, social life and traditional life [and] the most important thing that Oromo always and everywhere pray for to *Waaqa* is *Nagaa* (peace) (Tenna, 84).

Some of the existing sources witness that the Borana *Gadaa* system, among the others, started by a man called Gadayo Galgalo (Legesse 1973: 2000). According to Helland, Borana people are rightly famous for their being one

of the few Oromo society in which the Gadaa system remains virtually intact (Helland, 1997: 137).

Likewise, Marco Bassi gave an emphasis to Helland's expression by stating that the Borana show the strongest attachment to and observance of the *Gadaa* system among Oromo groups (Bassi, 1997: 153). According to Legesse (2000), Gada system is a political and military system with strong democratic elements manifested through elected political leaders. In fact, there are some individuals, who consider *Gadaa* system as the spiritual practice alone and hence tried to undermine its political significance. Hinnant, for example, viewed this system as politically relevant, playing ritualistic roles only (Hinnant, 1978). Likewise Tache and Irwine (2003) argue that *Gadaa* is more in line with its ritualistic function.

However, contrary to these ideas Mohammed Hassan, (1994:11), writes, the *Gadaa* system existed because of its political importance and the rituals stressed in it were part of the politics. Legesse (2000:236) also argued that, ritual, in Oromo life is an integral part of political activity, in spite of the fact that the personnel who are charged with the responsibility of performing one or the other activity are fairly distinct and the activities themselves are seen as belonging primarily to one or the other domain. He continues to argue that the separation of the ritual and non-ritual spheres becomes absolutely sharp only with regard to warfare, bearing of arms, and the shedding of blood from which the ritual experts and ritual leaders and their lineages are wholly excluded. Thus, in my understanding *Gadaa* is the Oromo Democratic and political system and governance which include ritualistic elements.

And it is a political system in which suppression and exploitation of the ruled society by the ruling is strictly forbidden as immoral.

One important point one has to understand is that, the Borana do make a distinction between ritual and political activity. Participants in rituals speak a ritual argot and carry ritual paraphernalia. The use of argot is one of the clearest indicators that the assembled group is in ritual state (jila) (ibid).

The Oromo *Gadaa* system has fostered democratic traditions (see Legesse, 1973, 2000 and Workineh 2005) and contains provisions for the protection of the rights of both human being and non human species. The *Gadaa* system is a democratic egalitarian system that has its own leaders who conduct government (political, economic, social, judicial, legislative, ritual and military affairs) of the Oromo society for non-renewable eight year terms (Workineh 2005:24).

At the same time people like Dahl Gudrun and Marco Bassi didn't isolate *Gadaa* system from political atmosphere (quoted in Guyo, 2007). According to Marco Bassi (1966), *Gadaa* system became a conceptual abstraction something in terms of which all Oromo are supposed to identify themselves. They recognize it as a root feature of the Oromo culture. Accordingly, the Oromo rightly identify themselves with the *Gadaa* institution that stands at the core of the Oromo social order/reality. Furthermore, the system seems to be one of the universal administrative systems that binds the entire nation into a coherent system and gives people a common political and social basis for understanding each other (Legesse, 1973).

In fact, it is not appropriate to confine *Gadaa* system only to conceptual abstraction. The Oromo use this system as a mirror of political, spiritual, economic and other social networks. In fact, this is a well organized system of administration.

The system has its own administration of social justice and court system which enables it to assume conflict handling in the socio-political life. Beyond being a mirror, it has a practical use for the Oromo. Sharma

(1993:19) also writes, that, today, every political thinker believes that government should be just as well as practical. Thus, *Gadaa* system is not sheer conceptual abstractions that is suspended and remain an ideal; it is rather encompassive system in which the Oromo people enjoy their ethical life as well.

In the *Gadaa* system, we cannot talk of anything by ignoring its ethical side. It is just as the Borana saying goes that everything has its own *Saala fokko* or *aadaa* in the social network. Such an inclusive conception and regulation of both human and non-human environment is manifested through the concept of *Aadaa - seera Borana*. Helland (1997:59-61) translated the 'Aadaa – seera Borana' in a different way.

Accordingly, *Aadaa-seera* is the Borana conception which contains moral ideas about good behavior and specific prescriptions about good behavior and mundanities like dress, grazing practice and environmental right. *Aadaa-seera* on the other hand, is embodied in the set of laws or rules and regulations. Accordingly, *Saala fokko* is social and moral conception developed and governed by the *Aadaa– seera Borana*. Thus, there are strong moral correlations that the *Aadaa–seera Borana* is the only and the right way of doing things and implies a significant moral force with important socio-political activities. Therefore, every person in Borana is expected to learn and recognize *saala-fokko* in accordance with the *Aadaa-seera Borana*.

Hence for me, and perhaps, many agree, that the *Gadaa* system is a political system and an ethical principles contained in this systems are normative principles.

Above all what one could not leave out without owing high consideration is that the *Gadaa* system is grounded on non-anthropocentric ethical ground.

I think this could be also understood from the very concept of *Aadaa-seera Borana*. Here, *Aada-seera Borana* is further divided into *Aadaa seera waaqa* and *Aada-seera nama* (i.e. the laws of God and the laws of human beings). It is from this conception that we can see how Borana treat the environment. In fact, the two sub-divisions are keys for the Borana conception of holistic peace. The Borana have a concept for holistic peace. That is *Nagaa Borana* or Borana peace.

### **1.2.2. Nagaa as Moral Concept**

“Nagaa” as Tenna argued “is the essential key to all cosmic and human order, possessing the highest and most central values for humanity to pursue among the Oromo, the concept of peace is goes beyond the human domain”(Tenna,2008:140,144).Likewise, *Nagaa Borana* is maintained from both human laws and God’s law. Human laws usually enforce and implement all the necessary laws. Most importantly, the maintenance of the common moral order in Borana, that is required to be maintained all the times (Gufu, 1996:119).

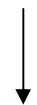
Tenna argued that ‘observations of Oromo ritual and ceremonial activities suggest that peace is the harmony of things or parties involved in certain relations-it is the harmonies relation between the different parts of the human and cosmic order’ (Tenna, 2008:144).Human beings are not to fellow humans but also to nature, even to the spiritual power believed to be super natural (ibid).

This would extremely help us to respond to some narrowly done works of African philosophers such as John Mbiti’s concepts of African Ethical and religious conception. Mbiti, for instance, argued that Africans’ ethical conception is anthropocentric.

Mbiti put his conception of the African ontology as follows. God---- Spirit----  
-Man-----Animal---- Plants...Lower class..... Accordingly, for him man is the  
center of this ontological hierarchy.

I think such a conception is inherited from the historical, philosophical and  
religious displacement of Africans which was commenced by Temples.  
Following the Templesian conception of Africa, Mbiti argued that Africans  
have their own ontology, but it is a religious ontology (Parker English,  
1996:67). Here, placing man at the center, Mbiti stated that the animals,  
plants and natural phenomena and objects constitute the environment in  
which man lives, provide a means of existence and if need be man  
establishes a mystical relationship with them (Parker English, ibid). There is  
ontology which indicated such conception of anthropocentrism.

God —→ as the ultimate explanation of the genesis and sustenance of  
both man and all things



Spirit —→ as what consists of extra-human beings and the spirit of men  
who died a long time ago



Man —→ as what includes human beings who are alive and those about  
to be born



Animal—→ animals



Plant —→ It includes plants and micro-organisms



Phenomena and lifeless objects

In fact, this is the anthropocentric conception of the whole existence of a Judaeo –Christian view of nature and hence it was common before Mbiti's conception of African ontology. According to Odera Oruka, the Judaeo – Christian ethic has placed humans apart from nature, a factor that has contributed to global environmental degradation (Anke Granness and Kai Kress 1997: 119).

Furthermore, Odera Oruka used some verses from the scripture as follows.

*“In the Genesis (1÷27-28), we are taught: so God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them; be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the flows of the air, and every living thing that moves upon earth” (Anke Granness and Kai Kress 1997 :120).*

However, eco-philosophers reversed all those historical and moral exclusion of the non human beings. Eco-philosophy propagates an assumption that we must deal with the totality of both human made as well as non human. It made philosophy to have concern about nature and totality of the universe.

The Borana Oromo's concept of *saala fokko* some informants reported is non anthropocentric. The Borana Oromo have laws of soils, water, forests, and animals which have interconnected functions. The laws for water wells may serve animals and hence, the animal's law and such water laws work together. Accordingly, such laws are environmental laws since soil animals and humans are all parts of the same environment.

Bassi argued that the ritual and political integration obtained by the Gadaa system carries some important economic consequences. Despite strong competition for scarce water resources, clans or other social entities do not physically clash with one another (Bassi 1996:158).

For each aspect, Borana assign a respective clan or individuals who are responsible for laws on that particular but multi dimension functional law.

For instance, *Abba madda* is the head of water well and decision maker of the issues related to madda. *Abba Konfi*, is one who owns ponds which are developed through excavations. *Abbaa Herregaa* is an official responsible for the day to day supervision of watering procedures, including the maintenance and cleaning of wells, enclosures and environmental obligations. All these show us that the Oromo Gadaa system is indigenous to the Oromo and democratic in its nature.

Despite the inevitability of political discussion under such a system, I would like to focus on its ethical side. This will be done with special reference to the ritual events at Arda Jila. This study critically explores, the ethical contents of ritual events undertaken at Arda Jila. Arda Jila is one of the ritual sites in this community, where ethical rules are observed and exercised. In the Borana Oromo, there are many diverse Arda Jila for different purposes.

This paper specifically expounds the moral, philosophical and practical issues observed when ritual practice is undertaken at Arda Jila of Gadamoji.

*Gadamoji* ritual practice is usually referred to as *buufatto*. In the process of *Buufattoo*, Borana Oromo reveal their moral conception through serious steps that bear ethical connotation at each stage. In Borana some of these practices involve: Animal sacrifice which include; *Hoolaa Bacibaci*, *Hoolaa*

*dub-dira, Hoolaa Manoo..... Horii buufata.* According to my informant, *Dabasa, Hoola bacibaci* is a ceremony of slaughtering “sheep” as an indication of individual’s oath not to commit any evil either the individual or to the society.

Once this ceremony is carried out, those who slaughtered the sheep would never engage in any immoral acts. This is the time when these people venture into a new ethical life.

Therefore, *Hoola bacibaci* is the first step for a person to enter into moral commitment throughout his life. The ethical side of Buufattoo can also be observed from linguistic point of view. I will discuss the process of slaughtering the three sheep, i.e. *Hoola bacibaci, Hoola manoo, Hoola duba dira* in the chapter dealing with the findings of my research.

### **1.2.3. Moral Language**

There are ethical concepts called language of *Gadamajji* and hence spoken at the Arda of *Buufattoo*. *Gadamajji* language is *seeda*. *Seeda* means respectful speech. And therefore, *Gadamajji* is expected to speak respectful language. This *seeda* is an important concept in the Borana society. It is a custom that, ‘*waan jechuu malte hin jettu*’ meaning one does not use the word for what one is talking about. S/he can express her/his idea the other way round. Out of *seeda* the word is changed, a euphemism is used.

I think the Oromo ethical conception can contribute to our controversial issue on the role of languages in ethics (conceptions). In my observation, the Borana Oromo do not consider ethical concepts as something devoid of practical contents. According to my informant, *Dabasa*, there is *saala fokko* in the word we daily use. Human communication is not a mere verbal exchange. Moral decision and moral judgments are expressed through concepts. *Dabasa* told me that the Borana Oromo rightly manifest this at

*Arda Jila* and other ceremonies. If anybody violates this ethical and moral rule and says some bad words, then the elders usually say *Afaan si daaraa! Udduun si obeensa* which intentionally mean do not speak some evil thing.

The following table shows some of those moral concepts spoken at *Arda Jila*.

No	Word in ordinary connotation	In Gadamojji language	Translation
1	Qoraattii –thorn	Fixeessa	Dew
2	Ibidda-fire	Bakkalcha	Fire, Brilliant star
3	Billaa-knife	Sulluuda	Knife
4	Waraana-spear	Daaya	Spear
5	Foon-meat	Dhamsa	Meat
6	Harressa- to cry out	Kulleessa	To cry out, call for help
7	Aanan – milk	Silla	The colostrums-rich milk a female produces immediately after giving birth
8	Nadheen – women	Elellee	Women
9	Ija – eye	Bakkalcha	Eye
10	Gubate – fired	Jaatame	To struck by fire
11	Heerumte – married	Gammee buufatte	She has covered her fringe

*Table 1: Sample words that Gadamojji should speak*

One of my informants tried to make moral statements by using moral concept.

*Aanan dhuguu – silla maaquu* - to drink milk – Drinking milk-tasting milk immediately released from the female birth after giving birth to an offspring.

*Harreessi dhufe – kulleessi dhufe* –A loud crying out is heard-somebody is voicing for help.

*Ija dhukkubde – bakkalchi qabbanaa’e*–felt an eye sick-Brilliant star has cooled down

*Manni gubate – manni jaatame* – House fired-house strucked

*Dhukkubsate lubbee – nu gammachiise* – Fail in comma-he let us happy.

(Waaqoo Galgalo, on January 8/2011, Surpha)

Thus, if we critically analyze such moral issues in the structure and bodies of languages, then we would easily find that an ethical theory like emotivism is questionable. Unlike such conceptions of morality based on languages and daily communication, emotivism states that moral propositions and concepts make no claim about any reality. But in the Borana Oromo’s conception, expressions of *saala – fokko* are beyond mere expressions of speaker’s likes and dislikes.

Particularly, if we see moral expressions at arda jila, it seems that Borana consider such expression with facts of their life or something like substantive moral contents. For instance, the statement “*Harreessi dhufe*” or “aloud crying out is heard” has literary no negative connotation. But if we see into what it tends to convey, then we see that it entails the ongoing of some negative social action.

It informs people that something that might have negative consequence is approaching or happening and hence, it has “facts of matter” in itself.

However, if we consider such moral expressions from views of philosophers like Ayer and Stevenson, then we may see that these views reflect no fact of matter of *Arda Jila*. Ayer particularly argued that there is no substantive moral agreement or disagreements in such expressions. Here, we can critically consider what some emotivists called “Boo-hurray” theory. According to this theory, when one says that an object has value, he is in some sense expressing his interest in that object rather than reporting knowledge.

I think the concept of “Boo – Hurray” is equivalent to the Borana concept “*Harressin dhufe*” or “aloud crying out is heard”. There are crucial injections and words that make “harressi dhufe” similar to “boo-hurray”. These are “huu” and “arroy”. These injections can be equivalent to the central and substantial idea in the “boo-hurray”. Therefore, “harressi dhufe” and “boo-hurray” have similar substantial message that reveals and manifest idea of the person from the emotional point of view.

Pouring libation is also another step via which the Borana express their moral and religious conceptions as well. In the case of Borana Oromo pouring libation includes practices like *dhawa-dhibaayyu* and various animals slaughtering at specific and particular ceremonial practice. This indicates ritual values and moral aspiration of the society.

In a nutshell, the moral life of the Oromo people can be summarized as:

Firstly, the *Gadaa* system has a proportionate ethical side which stands against political mistreatment and repulsive human governance. Guyo argued that the Oromo consider a system of governance with the following attributes as inadequate; If, a system is politically good, but ethically repulsive; if it is morally good but politically bad, or if it is politically good; morally sound but economically [unfair] (Guyo, 2007).

Secondly, for those who may ask whether the Gadaa system is anthropocentric or non-anthropocentric; the Gadaa system has ethically a non-anthropocentric conception of the environment. I think it is a kind of eco-centered orientation. This could be a response to the contemporary western conception of African moral and ethical orientations.

The reason why I prefer such a conception to various environmental theories is that it is believed that eco-philosophical conception of the environment is broader than such contemporary subjects as environmental studies and environmental ethics. Those who have already distinguished between the merit and demerit of both environmental studies and environmental ethics argued that environmental studies restricted themselves to the study of the earth and atmosphere. Similarly, environmental ethics, on the other hand, has not gone merely beyond the attempts to consider the possibility of extending ethics from human beings to the non human creatures on earth.

Thirdly, as have been discussed in the previous discussion I think Oromo ethical conception can contribute to our controversial issue on the role of languages in ethics. In my observation, the Borana Oromo do not consider ethical concepts as something devoid of practical contents.

I think some of the events revealed at *Arda Jila* and other conceptual utilization would be proper response to some objections of the logical positivists who usually consider ethical concepts as 'pseudo'. It would be therefore, from such perspectives that I explore the ethics of the Borana Oromo in reference to the events at *Arda Jila*.

### **1.3. Research Questions**

This study raises several questions. Some of questions are listed as follows.

- What does the *Gadaa* system mean from ethical perspective?
- What is the role of the *Gadaa* system in Oromo people in general and in the ethical practice of the Borana Oromo in particular?
- How far is ethics grounded in the Borana Oromo lifestyle?
- What is *Saala fokko* or *Ceeraa fokko*? Are the meanings of these concepts equivalent to the meanings of “morality” or “ethics”?
- Does the Borana Oromo have a sound philosophical reason for what they call “*Saala fokko*”?
- What is *Buufatto*?
- What makes the Oromo ethical view non-anthropocentric?

### **1.4. General Objective**

It is true that every society has its own way of life. The veracity of this specific way of life cannot be understood simply from distant observations. Contemporary philosophers have affirmed that ethical and philosophical aspects are the inseparable qualities of human beings. In fact, they do this by observing cultures and traditions in their own right. It is by cognizing this that I developed interest in studying the Oromo ethical conceptions from a particular point of view. This paper intends to expound and reveal the ethical side of the Oromo *Gadaa* System with special reference to the Borana Oromo. In my opinion the whole philosophy of life for the Borana Oromo has emanated from the *Gadaa* system. It is therefore, my objective to venture into this ethical veracity via the specific case of the Arda Jila practiced by Borana Oromo.

## **1.5. Specific Objectives**

The major specific objectives of this research are:

- To describe the concept of Oromo *Gadaa* System from moral, political and social point of views.
- To investigate the ethical concepts in Oromo *Gadaa* System and identify their practical importance from linguistic points of view.
- To explain the concepts of *saala fokko* at *Arda Jila* and to describe the concepts of Buufatto along with their series of steps.
- To describe why the Borana Oromo practice Buufatto
- To find out the role of ethics of the *Gadaa* System in Oromo people; with a particular reference to the Borana Oromo.

## **1.6. Methods of Data Gathering**

The method used to collect important data was qualitative. I believed that it is appropriate to collect primary data for this study and analyze it in relation to the expounded veracities which allow me to look for some secondary data. The primary sources were those individuals who were consulted through observation, focus group discussion, informal discussion, and in depth interviews. The secondary sources were variety of literatures that were reviewed through course of the study.

## **1.7. Limitation of the Study**

The site of my study is geographically far from the center, where I currently, live. To conduct a research of this type needs large amount of money and enough time. Owing to the financial constraints and the short span of time allotted to it, the study may not cover all the pertinent and relevant issues I ought to explore in this project.

The Borana Culture and Tourism Office also became the serious obstacle to the research. The Office asks researchers to come through the governments' ideologues which is a threat to academic activity and freedom. In addition, it has recently re-organized the institution and hired some selected individuals whose work is simply to inform and collect money from researchers.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **2. The Oromo *Gadaa* System and Its Ethical Substance**

#### **2.1. *Gadaa* System and Its Ethical Content**

*Gadaa* System for Oromo is something more than a mere system of socio-cultural administration. One can clearly and effectively understand the Oromo people and their style of life only if he/she understands the concept of *Gadaa* system and see the Oromo through it. This is to mean that every aspects of the Oromo life can be understood through the *Gadaa* system. According to Legesse (2000), *Gadaa* system is a system of generational classes that succeed each other every eight years in assuming political, military, judicial, legislative and ritual responsibilities (Legesse 2000: 31&104).

Among many things contained in the above quotation, I will deal with what Legesse considered as ritual responsibility. Here, ritual responsibility indicates the ethical side of the *Gadaa* system. Oromo practice many ritual ceremonies in which their comprehensive notion of morality is revealed. Moral concepts such as right, wrong, good, bad and others can be understood from this ritual practices. In the Borana Oromo, for instance, the concept of *jila* delivers the idea of moral ritual practices. In the *jila*, what are morally prohibited or allowed can be known from the communities' conception of *ceeraa fokko*. Contents and substantial issues in such concepts are described and prescribed through the very notion of the *Gadaa* system. Accordingly, the *Gadaa* system, as it touched almost all aspects of the Oromo life can be practically understood from this ethical point of view.

Legesse gives his witness about Borana Oromo as follows:

*... from the day they settled at the ceremonial grounds [arda jila] the men were under the regime of taboos for a period of several days. Behavior that was permissible in daily life was now prohibited. One such prohibition was against any kind of expression of pain – verbal, facial, or gestural. If anything happen to raba that caused him pain, he was supposed to remain unmoved. If a thorn pierced his foot, he was required not to flinch (Legesse, 1973:70).*

This shows that the Oromo have their own conception of moral actions along their moral description and prescriptions. Accordingly, the Oromo *Gadaa* system is a system of moral and ethical governance that delivers people's moral conceptions through practical events like ritual practices. But does this mean that the Oromo moral conception and ethical consideration are confined to ritual events alone? What is the scope of morality in the *Gadaa* system?

As one of my informants, Waaqoo, says, the Oromo *Gadaa* system is an ethical system of governance. By this he attempts to demonstrate the scope of moral conceptions in the *Gadaa* system. There is no branch of *Gadaa* governance that is devoid of moral conception. Even, as a political system, the Oromo *Gadaa* has the ethics of war. Waaqoo, further argued that war between the Oromo and others cannot be considered a just war if it is not waged in accordance with the *Gadaa* proclamation. Oromo, as my informant narrated, do not involve in any war unless the Abba *Gadaa* officially proves it to be a threat to the Naga Oromo.

The reason why I considered the specific case of war is that; state of war is commonly considered as the state where law and morality are absent.

However, unlike such common conception and understanding the Oromo have moral consideration that covers such an excluded realm of human life.

Here again I quote Legesse's specific observation of the Borana Oromo:

*The Borana do make distinction between ritual and political activity. Participants' rituals speak a ritual argot and carry ritual paraphernalia. The use of argot is one of the clearest indicators of that the assembled group is in ritual is led by special leader who have authority to bless [ebba]. These leaders are distinguished from political leaders who are paid to have decision making power [mura] (Legesse 2000: 236).*

Accordingly, considering the ethical side of the *Gadaa* system would mean looking at the system as whole. Comprehensiveness of the *Gadaa* system has vital moral content. Thus, it would be wrong to consider or assume that there exists an area within the *Gadaa* system which remains morally intact. In fact, to understand this, one must acquire a clear conception of the *Gadaa* system which I think is beyond the technical concept of "system". *Gadaa*, according to Tenna, is a complex, comprehensive and practical system in which various political, social, philosophical, religious and aesthetical notions of the Oromo people are housed (Tenna: 2009:95). It would be therefore, a kind of pervasive force that reveals itself through all that Tenna included in his above assumption.

If we critically consider its pervasive force, then we would understand that ethical side of the Oromo *Gadaa* system holds the whole Oromo together and gives them a moral, philosophical, political, socio-cultural, historical and spiritual sense of belongingness. Gada Melba may strengthen this point of view:

*Gadaa system is a system that organized the Oromo society into groups or set (about 7-11) that assumes different responsibilities in the society every eight years. It has the religious, social, political and economic life of Oromo for many years, and also their philosophy, art, history and methods of time keeping (Melba 1988:10).*

Accordingly, I understand the ethical side of such a complex and comprehensive system as a kind of practical moral spectacle through which the Oromo reveal their moral conception and live in accordance with it. Thus, despite what the title of this chapter seems when roughly considered, every side of the Oromo *Gadaa* system is ethical.

The Oromo have their concept that holds their moral conceptual frame work together. That is *safuu*. *Safuu*, as Gemachu argued, provides the moral and ethical code according to which events at personal, social or cosmic level take place (Gemechu quoted in Tenna 2009: 166). Emphasizing the place that *safuu* has in the *Gadaa* system, Workineh considered *it* as a moral concept that serves as the ethical bases for regulating practices in order to ensure a high standard of conduct inappropriate to different situations (Workineh 2002: 54, 2005:25).

Here, what I understand from all of my review is that the Oromo concept of *safuu* can be considered from individual members of the Oromo society to the whole administration level.

At individual level, *safuu* is what regulates practice, actions and behavior if the individual in relation to the moral conception of the society. At administration level [i.e. *Gadaa* systems], *safuu* is an ethical and moral system of regulation and governance. Here, I want to show that ethics [*safuu*] is everywhere in the individual and social life of the Oromo people. It would be hard to separate any aspects of the Oromo life (whether politics or

religion, economics or culture) from *safuu*. *safuu* is what holds all aspects in the *Gadaa* system together. Here from this confluence, in which aspects in the Oromo life and *Gadaa* system tied together, we can see the scope of Oromo moral consideration.

Oromo have *safuu* not only for human beings but also non-human beings. One can understand this from the very nature of *Gadaa* governance. The Oromo have laws for both human beings and all other non-humans in the natural environments. In this sense, *Gadaa* system is governance that accommodates non human beings.

Here, what I want to say is that, the Oromo moral consideration is different from the western one. The western concept of ethics is confined to human life, interactions and relation among human beings. Likewise, western political governance revolves around what is purely human and hence different from the Oromo *Gadaa* system.

Accordingly, one may find a considerable difference between the Oromo concept of justice, equality and other moral considerations. I will make clear the concept of *safuu* in Borana context in the next chapter.

Workineh argued as follows:

*The Oromo do not simply consider justice, integrity and respect as human virtues applicable to human beings but they extended them to non human species and mother earth (Workineh, 2005: 24).*

Thus, I think it would be more palatable to say that the Oromo concept of *safuu* is morally broader than western notion of ethics. I equally believe that this basic and fundamental difference can be understood and observed between the Oromo *Gadaa* system and European conceptions of governance. Europeans mostly restricted their concept of relationship and

interactions only to human beings. Accordingly their conception of morality and governance is too much restricted to their anthropocentric conception. Here, Tenna has similar conception to the idea I quoted in Workineh:

According to Oromo belief, human beings have three major relationships-one is that which they have with the system of the natural world, the other is with their fellow humans and the third one is with their creator, i.e Waaqa. They are tied to Waaqa, nature and to one another through infinite number of threads. These relationships are not accidental, chaotic, or juxtaposed; rather integrated and law-governed ones. To each of these relationships certain values are ascribed. For the Gadaa of Oromo *safuu* is the fundamental law of these relationships. It is expressed through the rights and duties that each person has towards Waaqa, nature and another (Tenna, 2009:166).

Thus, in my opinion, the Oromo concept of *safuu* is similar to Sharma's notion of natural law in which he talked about various laws such as the laws of communities, society, state, God etc. If for instance we consider the particular Borana Oromo's conception of *saala – fokko*, then we see;

*Saala – fokko nama* --- human moral consideration

*Saala – fokko lafa* --- moral consideration to earth

*Saala – fokko waaqa* --- moral consideration to God

Here, Sharma's conception of natural laws is similar to the Borana Oromo's conception of *saala – fokko*. Similar to the above conception of the Borana, Sharma divided laws into:

- Moral laws
- Political laws
- Natural laws (Sharma, 1993:115).

## **2.2. Political Dimension of the *Gadaa* System**

This topic is the continuation of the previous topic. In fact, one may inevitably venture into discussion on other aspects of the *Gadaa* system when he/she intends to talk of one of those aspects. Thus, the question about what makes this different from the previous one is reasonable.

Accordingly, when we talk about the Oromo *Gadaa* system from its administrative perspective we are simultaneously talking about the system in which we find the order of socio-political governance. In this case, we can talk of the *Gadaa* system just like when we talk about systems such as democracy, plutocracy, aristocracy, and so on.

Despite their substantial, foundational and contextual differences, all these systems are systems of governance in which we basically focus on their administrative (political) context. It would be therefore, in this context that I intend to discuss the *Gadaa* system.

*The Gadaa* as system of governance can be expressed in terms of its core features, i.e. democratic elements or manifestations. At this point, what I want to make clear is the concept of democracy and its elements. They may vary even among various systems of governance that we often consider as “democratic”. Mohammed Salih commented that democracy is not about the mechanical transfer of political experience from one society to another (2001:20). He rather argued that democracy is about political participation, the ability of people to express their preferences freely, and how this is guaranteed according to a given institutional framework and jurisdictional power (ibid). Salih’s conception of democracy would clearly help us to demonstrate the nature of democratic elements and democratic functionality embedded in the Oromo *Gadaa* system. His conception (which

I think is true of the Oromo governance) focuses on values and attitudes of the people that they nurtured over a long period of trial and error exercises to improve their quality. When we consider the Oromo Gadaa system, the period of eight years that is set as the period of one term of presidency has meaning. At the end of every eight years Oromo hold a big and general assembly so as to revisit and revise contents of their laws. Accordingly such a huge and periodic assembly has a power to improve qualities of working laws and the *Gadaa* system.

Legesse has stated the case of assembly (*gumii*) as follows:

The national assembly (*Gumii* or *Caffee*), is made up of all the assemblies and councils of the Oromo, who meet in the middle of the *Gadaa* period, once every eight years, to review the existing laws, and to make new laws. To evaluate the men in power, and to resolve major conflicts that could not be resolved at lower levels of their judicial organization (Legesse, 2000: 100).

In addition to this, different scholars considered the Oromo *Gadaa* System as a highly developed democratic political and legal system. Pankhurst and Getachew, (2008:28), as well as Legesse (1973:31), Similarly argued that the institutional governance and conflict handling in the Oromo people is processed by separate but interconnected organs such as the *Gadaa* judicial or dispute settlement, the *Qalluu* (spiritual leader) and the *Gumii*. i.e. national assembly. These three organs within a system are ethically, politically and functionally interdependent. I think Legesse had such an understanding when he argued that the three systems are interdependent and it is difficult to understand one without the others (Legesse: *ibid*). Thus, often such a through and in depth sociological and anthropological research of some of the above scholars in general and Legesse in particular considered the *Gadaa* system as a political and military system with strong

democratic elements manifested through elected political leaders (quoted in Guyo, 2007).

In my view, what makes the democratic quality of the *Gadaa* system strong differently from various systems of governance (which claim to be democratic) is Oromo people take and internalize *Gadaa* governance as value, identity and ways of life.

Here, let me compare the *Gadaa* system and Modern conception of democratic governance

Gada system	Modern conception of democracy
<p>1. The Oromo community feels a sense of ownership and considers the system as their value. A sense of belongingness is inherent to people's attitude. Thus, it is more than mere political regulation.</p>	<p>1. People consider the system as pure political governance and even opt to see other alternatives. This traced back to Platonic and Aristotelian conception of democracy they externalize rather than internalize it.</p>
<p>2. It has complex interconnection with culture, tradition, values, norms customs and societal belief. Thus, <i>Gadaa</i> leadership is considered as an ethical management than political governance.</p>	<p>2. People do not consider it as societal value. They see it largely as instrumental regulation, legal consideration or constitutional provisions.</p>
<p>3. Political decision, discussions and resolutions are guided by ethical provision and spiritual</p>	<p>3. Social issues are virtually subject to the legal regulation and political calculations.</p>

<p>consideration [From Qallu's points of view].</p>	
<p>4. Easily accessible to the local community and watched out or visited by Gadaa leader moral conceptions.</p>	<p>4. Inaccessible to the local communities it involved as ancient conception of direct democracy since not people all participate with responsibility.</p>
<p>5. Political game (since it is not purely dried politics) emphasizes the reconciliation of protagonists with each other rather than making total winner or loser here. The concept of community palaver may justify this truth. Thus, no social and political conception of win-win outcome</p>	<p>5. Establish right or wrong, winner and loser rather than reconciling the protagonists. Thus, there is a political notion of win-lose outcome or total victory of one party over the other.</p>
<p>6. Socio-political punishment aims not at retaliation but restarting social equilibrium, restitution, apology, reconciliation, forgiveness, tolerance and peaceful co-existence</p>	<p>6. Political punishment precipitates to retaliation and teaching others the "hardest way" rather than reconciliation, forgiveness, tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Hence it is not based on open socio political consensus.</p>
<p>7. Socio-political and economic justice is based on societal</p>	<p>7. Justice is served according to fixed laws.</p>

values. The Borana concept of Buusa Gonafa <sup>1</sup> .	
8. Socio-political, economic and administrative rules and laws do not exist in a written form but in the memory of individuals and embedded in social values.	8. Written laws which are not socio-culturally and psychologically internalized by individuals.
9. The process of justice management is less costly since individuals have strong moral commitment.	9. Costly process for justice management and have less internal moral recognition, and hence based on legal coercion.
10. Affordable to the members of community.	10. Less affordable to this local community and people may feel sense of impositions.
11. Politically smooth and trustworthy process.	11. Complex and ambivalent bureaucratic process.

Accordingly, as I have been discussing the *Gadaa* system from its ethical side which is at the same time its foundation, the political side of the system can be understood from the interconnection among various socio-political aspects. The very nature of *Gadaa* administration forces people to consider its ethical guidance and moral foundation. Accordingly, the Oromo *Gadaa* system has a proportionate and considerable ethical authority which explicitly watches over and guards against socio-political mistreatment and oppressive human and environmental management.

---

<sup>1</sup>It is a traditional social security system between gosaa (clan) members for economic and other contingencies to redress or compensation.

I think Guyo used such foundational conception of *Gadaa* system when he explained what he considered as incomplete and inadequate human governance as follows:

The Oromo consider a system of governance with the following attributes as inadequate; that is if a system is politically good but ethically repulsive, morally good but politically bad, or politically good and morally sound but economically unequal (Guyo, 2007)

### **2.3. The Borana Customary Law**

The Borana customary laws have developed a set of rules that proscribed and prescribed particular actions so as to maintain the peace of the Borana land and keep society in socio-political, economic and cultural harmony. According to my informant Boru Duba, this body of rules and regulations which keeps the well-being and socio-political welfare is known as *Aadaa-seera Borana*. Here, Morco Bassi argued that '*Aadaa*' refers to the wide normative and social-practices and other ambiguous concepts symbolically expressed by ritual. Bassi went on and stated that the non-ambiguous verbally re-elaborated normative rules that guide and regulates the activities of members of society are known as *seera* [customary laws].

Legesse wrote that some elements of these normative and social practices can be developed into rules or customary laws depending on the interests of society at the Gumi Gayo (Legesse, 1973: 93-97).

Despite such clear and comprehensive definitions and explanations of Borana customary law I received from several authors and informants, I encountered some considerable differences among definitions and interpretations of other authors.

For instance, Helland (1997: 59-61) translated the concept of *Aada-seera Borana* in a different way – although I think it holds similar meaning.

Here, Helland argued that *Aada seera* is the Borana conception which contains moral ideas about good behavior and specific prescriptions about mundanities like dressing, grazing practices and water rights. The *aada seera* embodied the laws. But still, I have seen that one thing is common to the works of these authors. That is they affirm the existence of strong moral connotation that the *Aadaa* and *Seera Borana* contains.

Similar to what I have been discussing in the general notion of Oromo *Gadaa* system, they argued that the particular case of *Aada-seera Borana* implies significant and strong moral force which guides political activities. Accordingly, the Borana Oromo consider these customary laws as a moral and correct way of doing things. Furthermore, the Borana moral and ethical considerations are extended to their environments. Watson argued that these customary laws have guided and regulated each and every aspects of Borana life including natural resources management, social relation, food and dress (Watson, 2001: 294).

Thus, Borana customary laws are moral laws that are all accepted and legally recognized among all Borana. The Borana have common and universal consensus upon these customary laws.

Customary laws are embodied in the community's social and moral values. According to my informant, Sora Boru, the Borana have a common social, political and moral consensus over the "Naga Borana". Sora, added that the Naga Borana is a comprehensive political and social, as well as moral concept for which every member of the community strives. Here, like Sora's argument, Mekuria argued that the central concept of *Aada-seera Borana* is Nagaya Borana which is a universal principle among the Oromo communal life [Mekuria, 1996:51].

Above all, Gufu Oba has clearly put the moral force of *Aada-seera Borana* when he argued that the maintainable of the common moral order in Borana, if necessary by the use of force, creates Nagaya Borana that is required to be maintained all the times (Gufu 1996:119). But still the question is how these laws could be enforced and through what mechanisms?

According to my informant, Sora, the Borana accept the existence of individuals who are wise, experienced and have familiarized themselves with the *Aada-seera Borana*. It is therefore, as Sora said, that these individuals who acquire legitimate power as law enforcers all over Borana Socio-economic organization maintain the nagaa Borana. These individuals have titles such as Hayyuu, Licho, Qalluu etc. The Borana assume that those individuals, who are entitled as Hayyuu, Licho and Qalluu, are impartial in making moral decisions and judgments, out lining criteria and distinguish right from wrong and bad from good or truth from false. Thus, it is morally accepted by Borana Oromo that they are given a moral and legitimate power or moral supremacy to handle conflicts in all social units.

## CHAPTER THREE

### 3. ETHICS

#### 3.1 Definition of the Concept of Ethics

In this section, I find it plausible to define the very concept of ethics so as to clearly discuss the Oromo concept of safuu in general and the Borana Oromo's notion of *Saala-fokko* in particular. Here, my reason to focus on such a definition is similar to what forced people like G.E. Moore when he critically engaged in defining the very notion of "good". Thus, the point is, in such philosophical discussions, Moore pointed out, that the difficulties and disagreements arise due to a very simple cause, namely the attempt to answer the basic questions, without first discovering precisely what type of questions it is which you desire to answer. It would be, therefore, reasonable for me to revisit and define the very concept of ethics.

Accordingly, many moral philosophers, used to define ethics as branch of philosophy which helps us to study, analyze, and judge moral problems by providing us with rich insights when dealing with moral issues. Thus, as field of study, ethics provides us with clear and logical theories, conceptual frameworks and guidelines as reliable guides for making choices in life's most trying moments.

I understand that to define ethics inevitably leads us to venture into its subject matter without which our definition remains susceptible. Accordingly, Christopher Hamilton, in his book *Theories of Knowledge* (2003:65) argued that such ethical intervention has to do with a moral dilemma, that is, a situation in which a person feels morally obliged to do two contradicting things- but in which he/she cannot do both.

Thus, from this, we can understand ethics as a special field of study which provides us with theories, principles, methods and techniques for dealing and solving morally tricky situations.

In my view, the notion of ethics itself may vary from society to society since the nature of moral problems may not be necessarily the same across the world. Despite this however, existence of ethics and moral considerations cannot be confined to a certain segment of humanity and taken as the ultimate gauge to talk about or define ethics. Similar to the above definitions, for instance, the Oromo world views and conception of ethics involves most of those moral dilemmas along their own percepts, norms rules and regulations.

In the Oromo world view, '*Safuu*' provides the moral and ethical codes according to which events at personal, social or economic level take place (Gemechu, quoted in Tenna 2009:166) Accordingly, *Safuu* can be defined in the way I have been defining the concept of ethics. Thus, *Safuu*, like ethics, involves moral issues and deals with the Oromo moral conceptions, frame works, decisions and analysis.

In addition, 'ethics' is occasionally used interchangeably with moral philosophy. This indicates that ethics is a philosophy of morality. Here, why I used a particular case of the Oromo is that, although I have been using a generally accepted definition of ethics, morality still remains universal value, which is inherent to humanity without exceptions. Moreover, despite their particularities, all humanity may engage in their respective moral analysis and moral thinking so long as morality remains inherent human value. I think it is by being critically cognizant of this that personality such as Frankena defined ethics as a branch of philosophy which is a philosophical thinking about morality, moral problems and moral judgment (1995:4).

### **3.2 Moral Dilemma and Moral Analysis**

In the preceding discussion, I have indicated that morality and moral dilemmas are features of human life which may vary from society to society.

Despite such possible variations, however, morality and moral dilemma remain the undisputable subject matter of ethics. Furthermore, in my view, moral dilemmas and ethical controversies have same features that enable us to consider ethics as science of humanity and prevail across human segment without exceptions. But before I venture into this and its important details, I would like to revisit what moral dilemma is.

Accordingly, there are occasions when moral problems in our day to day life become too complicated. When we are faced with overwhelming difficulties in deciding what to do, we are in a state of moral dilemma. This moral dilemma occurs when there is uncertainty or perplexity in selecting the best choice of actions between two or more unfavorable options. Here, the reason, why I said moral conceptions and dilemma exist across all humanity in my previous discussion became clear. Because, given such dilemma, choice, which I think is common features of humanity arise.

In other words, on the top of necessary notion of choice, we could be in a moral dilemma when we are forced to choose between two necessary evils. Thus, it is plausible to say that such complex states of affairs necessarily force us to moral and ethical consideration so as to prefer what we think is right and avert the opposite. It would be therefore, here, where concepts such as laws, rules, norms and regulations come for moral directions implication. For instance, in the case of Oromo people, *safuu* implies both right and duties (Bartels, quoted in Workineh 2005: 24).

This implies in my view, different societies such as the Oromo (in my case) have rules, regulations and conceptions by which they make moral choices when moral dilemma occurs.

However, a moral dilemma is not merely about conflict of choices it is not only a matter of choosing between doing bad to or doing good to whom you favor. Rather it essentially entails conflict of obligation. This moral dilemma complicates persons' obligation to his family, to his community, to his religion and finally to the entire community to which he/she belongs. But this does not mean that human beings solve or deal with their situations (moral dilemmas) in the same way. For such dilemmas, some societies may refer to their laws, rules, norms or constitutions (in modern neo- western way of life) and through different religious conceptions.

For instance, in the case of Oromo people, there exist different entities dealing with complex moral situations. Arguing from the Oromo religious and ethical conception, Mohammed Hassan stated "*Qallu* is a high priest who is the spiritual leader of Oromo traditional religion... Because of his Origin and role the traditional ceremonies, the *Qallu* is the center of Oromo religion" (Mohammed Hassan 1994: 6-7). Accordingly, *Qallu* is one of those entities through which Oromo deal with their moral and religious dilemma.

I would like to discuss this in the following related issues of moral analysis. In fact, moral dilemma and moral analysis are separable. Perhaps, one of the central features that distinguish human beings from other creatures is their ability to make moral analysis, decisions and judgment whenever they face moral dilemma.

However, there I want to discuss moral analysis so as to clearly indicate the existence of moral issues and ethical considerations throughout humanity.

In fact the term “analysis” refers to the abstract separation of a whole into its constituent parts. Thus, studying (considering) such components of problem allows us to see the issues in much better and clearer light. In moral philosophy, we perform a special kind of analysis when we try to solve moral dilemmas and hence consider this as moral analysis.

Thus, moral analysis essentially requires gathering relevant data and empirical facts. It is therefore, a process of moral consideration, in which we break down the moral problem into simpler and clearer component so as to arrive at the possible moral decisions. By moral decision I mean a conclusion which we derive from moral analysis in order to solve certain moral dilemma. In history of western traditions, people follow different ethical theories<sup>2</sup> to deal with moral dilemma and make moral analysis. Followers of such theories might have a belief that it is due to their clear and well defined criterion that theories are preferred to determine morality and moral acts of humanity.

Likewise, in the case of Oromo people, several ethical institutions and moral advisors follow series of principles under the guidance of *Safuu*. *Safuu*, as a general moral percept, guides such individuals and referred as foundational moral ground from which individuals’ derives many guidelines so as to deal with moral dilemma. Thus, when we compare it to such western and neo-western theories, the Oromo have a practical ways of dealing and analyze moral issues.

---

2. By this I mean theories such as deontological, utilitarian’s and other moral conceptual frameworks. History of western morality usually revolves around these theories.

According to one of my Borana informant, Doyo Boru, Borana Oromo has series steps and techniques to deal with moral issues. He argued that given moral dilemma will be solved through socio- politically delegated personalities named as- Jarsa- arara, hayyu- licho- Qallu and other Gadaa leaders. These people, he went on, deal with moral issues (moral analysis) in accordance with Aada-Seera Borana. Aada- Seera Borana provides various means in focusing on basic ethical concept called “Saala- fokko”. It is, therefore, from such perspective that the Oromo deal with moral dilemma and hence engage in what I have been calling moral analysis. Thus, in my view, the Oromo have moral guidelines (*Safuu*) which is not less critical than Kantian ethical conception. For instance, Kant has a maxim that tends to guide human action in a universal and absolute way. His principle of universality says, “act only according to that it should become universal law”.

Likewise, the Oromo concept of *Safuu* provides us with a kind of universal way of approaching both human and non human creatures in a morally acceptable way. There, even one can see what is similar to Kant’s maxim from the particular Borana Oromo’s conception. According to Mohammed Hassan, the Borana Oromo considers *Qallu* as a standard for moral quality, peace and the unity of people. They have a conception that “His path is that of the peace and truth (Mohamed Hassan 1994:6)

### **3.3 Political Truth and Moral Ground**

It would be palatable to begin the discussion with one critical question without which I think the discussion could be of less worthy attention. Can morality in ethics, truth in human life and political claim go together? In fact, in our daily life, we may see different political claims, moral assertions and human conceptions of truth which in turn aim at truth.

This seems that true and objective political goal (if any) is fitting objective moral goal. According to some realists, a proposition (whether ethical or political) is true if and only if it corresponds to something like a fact in believer- independent world (Cheryl, 2002:2).

Thus, regarding the earlier question, these thinkers argue that since truth and objectivity in moral and politics cannot be anything like that, realism seems to lead directly to moral relativism and non- cognitivism (ibid). Their conclusion is that moral and political judgments cannot fall within our cognitive scope- within the scope of truth and knowledge. Accordingly, such conception of truth indicates the possibility and existence of pluralism about truth.

However still, one thing should be clear. Despite such different conceptions, it is true that morality, politics and truth are all issues that we hardly separate from human nature. It would be extremely difficult to think of pure political life or ethical life which is totally independent and exclusively exists. In my view both ethics and politics go hand in hand in dealing with human life. But still, I understand that there exist several political distractions of truth and moral defect in our day to day life. These being the case, however, both politics and ethics explicitly tend toward their projected and framed conception of truth.

Here, the very notion of truth, over which politics and ethics confluence, is grounded on the very social or public- conception of truth. Nonetheless, both politics and ethics are conventional and constructed realities without which the development of human life would be hardly possible. In my opinion, such conception reduces the very notion of 'truth' and labeled truth to social construction via human or collective consent.

In his social contract theory, Locke argued for the following idea:

Locke grasped the idea that political power exists and is exercised only for the public good. The basis for government is consent, and the powers which are wielded by princes and rulers inhere in them, not by any absolute right founded on grant, covenant or otherwise, but on conditions in nature of trust, and under liability to forfeiture if the condition are not fulfilled (1960:V)

Here, the quotation needs critical consideration. Political truth may not necessarily be moral truths. This is because, political truth (the truth at which politics aims) may fail if the working system fail to fulfill the general conception of truth among the people. Thus, in my view, it would be preferable to say that moral truth transcends political truth and hence political truth is judged by the public conception of moral truth. Accordingly, politics and ethics may aim at the same projected truth although politics may fail and or even go against this truth.

Furthermore, in some society, it is extremely a difficult and daunting task to differentiate political truth from moral truth. For instance, Oromo society, it is believed that the *Gadaa* system existed because of its political importance and ritual practices, which in their turn could be part and parcel of politics.

Mohammed Hassan also argued as follows.

However, what is indisputable is the fact that it seems impossible to draw a clear demarcation between the ritual and political function within the *Gadaa* system. Both are under the same body politics since both deals with the good of the society, it is unnecessary to distinguish between them (Mohammed Hassan 1994:11).

Let me come back to my earlier question i.e. whether or not the moral conception of truth and political conception of truth are one and co-exist. I think the moral conception of truth in human life involves existential condition. Existential condition depends on moral condition which is grounded in the existential conception of truth. The above quotation indicates that *Gadaa* system strictly follows existential condition of truth (moral conception) in political administration. Thus, in my view is that political conception of truth is about existential condition and hence morally dependent on moral conception which follows the very existential conception of truth.

According to Schmitt, in the post- enlightenment politics, political truth is a matter of conviction (Cheryl, 2002: 10). He conclude that, politics is a battle ground between self defined friends and enemies where the strongest will win (ibid). Here, Schmitt seems to deny the moral conception of truth entailed in politics:

When a people no longer has the power or will to maintain itself in the political sphere, so politics does not disappear from the world. All that disappears is a weak people (quoted in Cheryl, 2002:11).

Thus, the quotation indicates that political truth in modern conception is not moral truth. It is to say, political truth is only about existential condition. Even, it is the existential negation of enemies and hence devoid of moral ground. However, the Oromo *Gadaa* system seems to be different. The Political truth of the *Gadaa* system is totally different from Schmitt's idea of political truth. Unlike the political truth of modern time, the *Gadaa* system is not simply confined to existential condition.

*The Gadaa* system, as Legesse put, is the system of generational classes which succeed each other every eight year in assuming political, military, judicial, legislative and ritual responsibilities (Legesse 2000:104). Accordingly, I understand the political truth of the Oromo *Gadaa* system as something beyond sheer existential goal. It is not about existential negation as modern political system operates. Legesse, argued, that the *Gadaa* system gives moral consideration and ethical respect for leaders of the system. The *Gadaa* leaders, *Luba*, enter into grade of political retirement. This stage is a sacred grade in which the members of class enjoy great respect as ritual leaders of the society (Legesse 2000:126).

Therefore, my argument is public conception of truth, morality and politics may differ from one human community to the other. Unlike the Oromo *Gadaa* system, some of the western conception of political truth and moral truth are Machiavellian. The king does not have to act in accordance with ethical laws.

I think it is due to such a western and neo- western distortion that today almost every political thinker believes that government should be just as well as practical. This justifies my earlier assumption that western political truth is only about existential condition.

Thus, Legesse's description of the *Gadaa* system is totally opposite to such western and neo- western conceptions and hence involve vehemently opposite notion of political and moral truth.

Above all, Legesse's particular focus and description of the Borana Oromo *Gadaa* system justifies this. Here, to be clear and give further insight I would like to quote Legesse as follows:

The Borana do make distinction between ritual and political activity. Participants in rituals speak a ritual argot and carry out, ritual paraphernalia. The use of argot is one of the clearest indicators that the assembled group is in ritual state (*jila*). The ritual is led by special leaders who have authority to bless (*ebba*). These leaders are distinguished from political leaders who are said to have decision making power (*mura*) (Legesse, 2000: 236)

Furthermore, the Oromo idea of rule of law is respected in the nation and who govern the people must also be judged by the same public law. The *Abbaa Gadaa* (president) himself is subject to punishment if he violates it. Accordingly, the Oromo conception of political truth and moral truth are highly interwoven.

In the same way, some eastern philosophers argued that ethics and politics must go hand in hand. According to this view, ethics must guide politics while politics is judged on moral ground. For instance, Sharma stated that politics must be subordinate to ethics and we must endeavor to see ethics not in fragments but as a whole (Sharma, 1993:19).

I think it is from such holistic conception that Guyo discussed the ethical side of Oromo *Gadaa* system and concluded as follows:

Oromo consider any system of governance with the following attributes as inadequate: if a governance system is politically good but ethically repulsive, if it is morally good but politically bad or morally sound, politically good and economically unequal (Guyo 2007).

In a nutshell, given all these, it would be palatable to consider the moral conception, political conception and social conception of truth about

Oromo situation from the following assertion of Tenna: *Gadaa* is an integral system that accommodates the core aspect of human life and relationship. It is a social, political, moral, and religious institution that defines how people should live together (Tenna, 2009: 94).

### **3.4. The Concept of Saala- Fokko and Its Implication**

In this section, I will discuss the Borana Oromo idea of *saala-fokko* as a moral concept. At this point, I find it reasonable to discuss the *saala-fokko* of the Borana Oromo in connection to the Oromo notion of ethical concept of *Safuu*. Despite its particular usage and local conception among the Borana Oromo, the concept of *Saala fokko* carries the same meaning with *safuu*. The concept of 'Saala fokko' needs to be discussed in connection to other crucial concepts such as Aada- Seera Borana (Borana customary law) and the Naga Borana (peace of Borana). As a moral concept *saala fokko* plays pivotal role in the broad socio- political system; i.e. Aada- Seera Borana and the Naga Borana. It is, in this context that I discuss the '*Saala-fokko*' of Borana in this section.

Accordingly, the Oromo *Gadaa* system, which has been discussed as system of governance and socio- political guidance has its foundation in *saala-fokko*. This could be understood from the very concept of *safuu* which can be interchangeable with the concept of '*saalaa fokko*'. The concept of *safuu* of other Oromo has equivalent meaning with *saala fokko* [or sometimes called '*ceeraa fokko*'] of Borana Oromo.

Thus, '*safuu* or *saalaa fokko* is the Oromo moral concept that serves as basis for regulating practices in order to ensure a high standard of conduct appropriate to different situations' (Workineh 2002: 23). Workineh argued that *safuu* helps individuals to relate natural laws to divine laws and to base their activities on the laws (ibid). This is true of the *saala-fokko* or *ceeraa fokko* of Borana Oromo.

One of my Borana informants (Waaqoo Galgalo) argues as follows:

*Boorana Kessatti waa aadaa qaban;*

*aadaa waaqaa fi lafaa qaban*

*aadaa waaqaaf Lafaa Waliin deemiti*

*Saalaa Fokkoon tanuma.*

Meaning, in the Borana Oromo, things have their own ways in which they ought to be treated. This is the way or the manner of God and earth. Thus, things have both manners (Custom of God and Earth) in one; *saala fokko* itself is this one (Waaqoo, 68, Surupha).

Here, in my understanding, although the very concept “*Aadaa*” literally means culture, the above context shows moral manner or ethical ways of treating things. Thus, my informant told me that *saala-fokko* is a moral way of treating things.

Likewise, in other Oromo society, the concept of *safuu* is a manner that describes the human and non human actions and behaviors and prescribes what man ought to do or not to do. Therefore, I think *saalaa-fokko* or *safuu* is the Oromo conception of the moral values which govern human activities, their relationships and togetherness.

Respecting one another and morally treating others is exactly what my previous informant tried to indicate. Moreover, Waaqoo used the concept “things” in his explanation of *saala fokko*. He didn’t say human beings. This indicates that *saala fokko* is not restricted to human relations.

Likewise, in my understanding of it, the very notion of *Safuu* (in other Oromo), is not only limited to maintain the relationship between and among human population and nature rather it includes the very notion of the creator of all creations i.e. *waaqa*. Thus, I think it has been in the

same conception that Waaqoo used the concept *saala- fokko* and extended it to *aadaa-waaqa- lafa* (*the custom of God and earth*).

Moreover, in the *Gadaa* system, *Safuu* is the fundamental law of these relationships and is expressed through the rights and duties that each person has towards *waaqa*, nature and one another (Tenna 2009:166). Here, concepts of right and duties should be understood in relation to what has been said by Waaqoo, my informant about *saala-fokko*. In my view, my informant has implicitly said what Tenna clearly indicated and put as right and duties. Waaqoo argued that things have their own manner or way to be treated. This implies that we have moral duties to treat things in the manner prescribed by *saala- fokko*. Furthermore, Gemechu indicated that *safuu* or *saala fokko* provides the moral and ethical code according to which events at personal, social or cosmic level take place (Gemechu quoted in Tenna 2009:16).

In addition, scholars like Bartels argued that *safuu* implies both rights and duties (Bartels quoted in Workineh 2005: 24). Therefore, in my view the concepts of *safuu* and *saala- fokko* are important not only to explain the Oromo moral life but also to regulate the social and political life of these people. In my opinion, it would be hardly possible to understand the Oromo social, political and economic situation without the concept of *safuu* and *saala- fokko*. Even, in their social and environmental context, for instance, the Oromo give a central place to *safuu* or *saala fokko* in order to consider crucial issues such as justice.

I think it is by critically studying this that Tilahun Gamta argued that the Oromo do not simply consider justice, integrity, and respect as human virtues applicable to human beings, but also they extended them to non- human species and mother earth (quoted in Workineh 2005:24). However, I would like to focus on the Borana Oromo's context and socio-

political life to show the place of *saala fokko* in their socio- political and economic - environmental settings.

My informant, (Dabasa, 90, Yabello) explained issues related to *saala-fokko* as follows:

*Saala yaa jennu Fokka yaa jennu*  
*Booranni walii Saala! Fokka*  
*Saala fokkoon dubbuma afaanillee*  
*keessa jirti. Afaan Seeda, Booranni Waan*  
*jedhaniti jira, Waan seedaniti jira.*  
*Waan tolchaniti jira, waan*  
*lagatanitu jira. Fuula ejjetaniti jira*  
*fuula lagataniti jira.*

Meaning: The Borana respects one another. Such respect may be expressed through speech. They speak respectfully. There are things that are to be avoided in speech, and there are things that are permitted in it. There are things to be done and there are things not to be done. There are places to be landed and there are also places that are forbidden.

Thus, from this explanation, I understand that the Borana use the concept of *saala fokko* as a guiding principle. Accordingly, the Borana social, political and environmental issues are governed by the rules of *saala-fokko*. I asked some of my informants as to how this moral prescription and description are put to practical implementation and guide society.

According to, Dabasa, with whom I discussed several times, the Borana implements all that *saala-fokko* prescribes through *Aada-seera Borana*. *Aada seera Borana*, according to him, is a mechanism through which socio- political administrations and ethical issues are practiced.

Besides, one of my critical informant and colleague as well, Guyo narrated this issues as follows:

*Saala-fokkoon waan cufa waliin qaban tun seeran hojjetti. Booranni seera kana aadaan walitti qaba. Kanaf aadaa-seera Booranaa jedha. Kanaafuu saalaa Fokkoo kan hojjechiisu aadaa fi seera Booranaati. Kaayyoon waan kanaalleen waan waan cufa irra guddo “Nagaa Booranaa” eeguuf. Nagaan Booranaa Waan cufa. Tan Saala-Fokkoonuu ni dubbatti (Guyo Doyo 26, Finfinnee).*

Meaning: Saala – fokko is inherent in everything. It functions through and by laws. The Borana bind these laws with *aadaa*. That is why they name it as *Aada seera Borana*. They have an intended ‘end’ to do this, i.e. the Borana peace which is the greatest thing. The Borana peace is everything. It is the goal of *saala-fokko*.

Guyo underlined that it has been and still is the leading concept in the Oromo religions, moral conceptions, politics, social life and environmental issues.

The question of implementation of *saala-fokko* offered me the notion of *Aada-seera Borana* which I discussed in chapter two. Similar to Guyo’s argument, Helland argued that *Aada- Seera Borana* is the way the Borana live and it indicates the Borana peace and order and contains moral ideas about good behavior and specific prescriptions about mundanties like dress, grazing practices and water rights (Helland 1997: 59-61).

Generally, the concept of *saala-fokko* is the Borana Oromo’s moral category from which individuals understand how to peacefully and

morally live with society and other things such as God and environments. It prescribes and describes the ways in which people should treat themselves and other nature. This moral code is implemented by the *Aada-seera Borana* which ultimately aims at keeping the *Nagaa Borana*.

### **3.5. The Ceremony of *Buufatto***

The word *Buufatto* comes from the Oromo word '*buufata*' which literally mean shavings or to shave. However, in the Borana Oromo, the concept of *Buufatto* has several meanings.

For instance; my informant, Guyo, explained the following indications:

*Mataa haaddachuun mataa buufachuu.*

*Tunuu Buufatto. Umuriin guddattee, aadaa guuttee;*

*Gadamojjummaan duuba*

*Mataa buufachuun Buufatto. Gara biraatiin*

*Booranni dubbii tokko qoree obbaasuun*

*Buufatto (Guyo Doyo: 26 Finfinnee)*

Meaning: Removing head-hair is shaving. This is *buufatto*. Getting old enough and fulfilling all socio-cultural and moral requirements, i.e. undergoing the stage of *Gadamojumma* and undertaking ceremonial and ritual practice is marked by hair shaving.

This is also *buufatto*. On the other hand, the Borana resolve cases and settle situation of disagreement. This is also '*Buufatto*'. (Now not shaving but resolving).

Thus, among these various conceptions of '*Buufatto*', I focus on the one which indicates ritual practice, i.e. ritual and moral practice undergone

by someone in the stage called "*Gadamojumma*". *Gadamojumaa* is one of the Oromo *Gadaa* grades and stages of developments at which individuals engage in a ritual practice called *Buufatto*.

According to Legesse, this event happens on the eightieth year of the Gada cycles when the luba completes the four grades and enter the final ones (Legesse 2000:124-7). Members of the *Gadaa* class enjoy respect as ritual leaders of their society but they are deprived of nearly all political and economic powers (ibid).

Legesse put the Oromo *Gadaa* grades and stages of developments as follows:

1. Daballe I: the earliest stage (0-8 Years) and the stage of childhood.
2. Gamme II: Older children (8-16 years)  
They are given the responsibility of looking after livestock, but have no role in political affairs.
3. Gamme, Senior III: years of adolescence (16-24 years)  
They are initiated and elect their six leaders called hayyus and given some experience in political affairs.
4. Kusa- Iv(27-32 years)  
All the members of the luba become junior warriors and begin to take part in raids and military campaigns. They accept order from the older Gadaa class.
5. Raba-V: The Stage of Senior warrior hood (32-40 years). They are allowed to marry but not to have children. They devote a great deal of their time to hunting and warfare.
6. Gadaa- VI: Leader of the entire society (40-48 years). Upon the completion of the fifth grade the members of this group assume power not only as members and/or leaders of a luba, but as the

- leaders of the entire society and of the age sets. Now they are allowed to have children.
7. Yuba (VII, VIII, IX, X) collectively known as Yuba. (3, 8, 8, 8 years respectively). These grades are a period of partial retirement. They oversee the political and military activities of the Luba in power. It has a central role in the pan- Borana conversion called “Gumi Gayo”. The retired Abba Gadaas who oversee the national convention are called Abboti Gada. “The Gadaa leaders.”
  8. Gada Mojji- XI: On the eightieth years of the Gadaa Cycle when the Luba completes the four grades, they enter the final grade. At this stage, the members of the Gadaa class enjoy great respect as ritual leaders of their society but they are deprived of nearly all secular political and economic powers (Legesse 2000:104).

Therefore, ‘*buufatto*’ as ritual practice is the moral practice that the Borana Oromo attains at the last stages (see the above stages) of Gadaa grades and developments. According to my informant, Dabasa, the Borana practice this ritual event at ‘Arda Jila’<sup>3</sup>

According to Dabasa, there are so many Arda Jila at which the Borana conduct this ceremony. He enumerates these ritual places as follows:

*Arda Jila baayeet lafa Borana Kessaa Jira. Ammaas Kan ani yaadadhu.*

- Yaaballootti- Diide Yaaballo
- Borborotti -Gosee
- Hiddilolaatti- Miyoo
- Suruphaatti – Arboora

---

<sup>3</sup> This concept is from two words; arda and jila. Arda is a place at which the Borana practice this ceremony. Jila is a ceremony, ritual or celebration. Therefore, arda jila means a ritual which Legesse translate a ritual ground.

- Dharriitootti – Dharito
- Areerotti- Harbora
- Liibanitti- Aradot
- Meegatti – Diidameega ykn Dolloo

Meaning there are so many ritual places at which the Borana practice this ceremony at this moment, I remember the followings.

- At Yabelo- there is DideYabello
- At Borbor – there is Gose
- At Hiddilola- there is Miyo
- At surupha – Arbora
- At Dharri - Dharito
- At Arero- Harbora
- At Liban- Ardot
- At Mega- Dida Mega or Dollo.

In reinforcing Dabasa's detailed explanation, another informant Doyo Liban argued that it is impossible to put total number of Arda Jila in Borana. Like Dabasa, Liban indicated that Arda Jila is the place, of everything- the place of animals, plants and human beings. And hence, all these should be morally treated (Doyo Liban, 60 Yabelo).

However, since the central theme of my paper, is to examine moral practices performed during the ceremony at *Arda Jila*, I would like to direct my attention to the discussion of these practices.

As I tried to quote Legesse earlier, this practice is undergone at Arda Jila where the Borana people offer specific Gadaa grades with certain engagement in ritual ceremony. This transition by itself has moral implications. Firstly, members of the *Gadaa* grades, or the luba who entered into the stage of *Gadamojji* are expected to turn their lives into moral dedication.

The stage itself is considered as an age at which the luba reconciles with moral life. It is a stage in human life when excuses and forgiveness play vital role. According to Dabasa, the *Gadamoji* takes an oath not to engage in any activities that go against the *saala-fokko*. This oath refers to all members of this Gadaa grade.

Dabasa argued as follows:

*Warri kun nama sa'an walitti araarama;*  
*Waaqaa lafaan walitti araraama;*  
*Muka-buuyyoo fi biyyee Lafaalleen*  
*Walitti araarama. Asiin duuba*  
*Waan hamtuuyyuu hin dubbatu.*  
*(Dabasa, 90, Yabelo)*

Meaning :

People would be reconciled with  
Human beings and livestock;  
Trees (plants) and  
Grasses, even they would  
Never speak evil thing and act, otherwise.

What I find similar to Dabasa's View is Legesse's explanation of the situations that this ritual practices brought to these people right from its commencement as follows:

From the day they camped at the ceremonial ground (*Arda Jila*) these men remain under the regime of taboos for a period of seven days. Behavior that was permissible or tolerable in daily life was now prohibited. One of such prohibition was against any kind of expression of pain- verbal, facial, or gestural. (Legesse 1973:70)

Thus, on top of their insightful explanations I understand that Dabasa and Legesse underlined the Borana ethical grounds and expression from

linguistic<sup>4</sup> point of view. According to Legesse, people under this ritual condition are required to use a rudimentary ritual argot. He went on arguing as:

Such words as (loon) (cattle), warana (Spear), and Billa (Knife) are avoided completely and are replaced by argot vocabulary: mada, sulluda, and Daya respectively (Lesesese: 1973: 71). These are words spoken at Arda Jila. It is not allowed to speak forbidden words at this ceremonial site. To speak that which is forbidden at Arda Jila is considered as immoral act.

Furthermore, in relation to what have been explained informants and scholars, I asked other local elders for how long this ritual practice takes place. In answering my question Waaqoo explained some steps. According to him the first significant step is called “*Qumbi fuudhuu*”<sup>5</sup> which literary means taking Qumbi from.

Qumbi is received from the preceding generational classes that had already undergone the practice before. Waaqoo told me that the process of qumbii fudhuu is a one day practice.

One who went out of his home to receive it would never be anywhere else that night since Qumbi must come to his home. The following morning, that person must slaughter “Hoola baci-baci”.

The person steps over and cross it the blood of the slaughtered sheep. This implies that the person has turned his life from the time when he might commit unethical acts to the time when he devotes himself to his moral obligation. From this time onward the person is totally considered as moral

---

<sup>4</sup> I will discuss in the next section where I will be comparing it with views of logical positivism.

<sup>5</sup> Qumbi a *Commiphora abyssinica*, C. coriacea, C. ellebeckii (H&B), the myrrh trees. It is important ritual item and has been so from the beginning of time. When the first qallu karayu was “born”, he had qumbi with him. It is like a physical blessing, giving strength (qumbi waan eebbaa). Not everyone possesses qumbi, so there is, is always shared.

person. In fact this moral oath is common and uniformly practiced across all people with the same Gadaa grade and generational class.

This practice is also known as “Aagii Qalani”. In his Dictionary “Aada Borana” or “*A Dictionary of Borana Culture*,” Ton Leus explained the events as follows:

Aagii Qalani is Sacrifice of forgiveness of Bacibaci, patting. It is cleansing ritual done by each person (gadamojji) in preparations for jila gadamojji. This Aagii Qalani is the purifying ritual by which the person prepares himself for a major group ceremony, making him ‘*Qulqullo*’ (ritual clean, pure). It cleans him of any sin he has committed against tradition before his peers (Leus, Tone 2006: E450.3 LEU).

According to Waaqoo, this moral oath and initial step to ethical devotion is followed by another ceremony in which another sheep is to be slaughtered. This sheep is called “*Hoola Duba Dirra*”<sup>6</sup>.

In this ceremony, the person undergoes moral practice called “*mataa takalachuu*”<sup>7</sup>. In my view, the very concept of *mataa takaalachuu* itself may entail us how the person involves into moral practice. My informants explained what “*mataa takaalachuu*” means. “*mataa takaalachuu*” is an act of putting round or circular things on one’s head, which implies that a person is morally bound and engaged in act of self- controlling. All these events are done outside *Arda Jila*, and hence it is a moral preparation and moral oath to *Arda Jila*.

Moving to *Arda Jila* needs another sheep- slaughtering ceremony. This third stage is known as “*Hoolaa Mano*”<sup>8</sup>. According to Waaqoo, the meat of this slaughtered sheep must be eaten up within same night since the following

---

<sup>6</sup> This means sheep of pierced tail.

<sup>7</sup> Literary mean bridling head, it is act of putting a concave and round thing on one’s head.

<sup>8</sup> This means sheep of mano, where mano is a curved thing done by Borana women as traditional home items.

morning the *luba* moves to *Arda Jila* and prepare ritual homes there. Once he reaches *Arda Jila*, every activity he performs and every speech he makes must be morally bound. Even people must use what they called” Afaan *Gadamojji*<sup>9</sup>. According to Dabasa, this language is used in the form of *seeda*<sup>10</sup>.

According to my informants, the *Arda Jila* is a moral ground for everything. They reported that even grasses and soil are to be treated morally. Thus, *saala-fokko* stands for all that can be thought of. People of the same grade stay at *Arda Jila* for about two months under self – imposed moral and ethical restrictions.

In fact, they would never be back to their previous life even when they successfully complete this period and return home. It would be therefore, here that the real meaning of the earlier concepts “*Buufatto*” comes.

Accordingly, *Buufatto* implies the acts of leaving all immoral and ethically questionable acts behind and transform one’s whole life morally bound and enlightened one. If we see it from its literal meaning, it refers to an act of shaving and throwing them away all those hairs that grew during one’s life of every acting and indulgence.

According to one informant, Dabasa, all of these people must shave their hair on the last day of their stay at *Arda Jila*. Thus, this *Buufatto* indicates acts of moral transformation and ethical oath after which nobody would behave otherwise.

---

<sup>9</sup> Means moral language, in which every body must speak moral words and act accordingly.

<sup>10</sup> *Seeda* means a respectful speech and refraining from saying something evil.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4.1. Philosophical and Moral Reflection on the System

In this section, I would like to discuss the Borana moral practice experienced at *Arda Jila* from a philosophical point of view. In my view, the Borana Oromo's ritual practice involves some moral issues that are worthy of philosophical discussion. These issues can be discussed in relation to some of the important arguments that have been debated throughout the history of moral philosophy.

In the history of moral philosophy, as we may remember the issues such as morality, moral nature, human behavior and moral applicability have all been seriously debated. Accordingly, several schools of thought such as logical positivism, ethical realism, ethical idealism, emotivism etc have emerged. They all have been concerned with controversial issues of morality, moral statements and their application. Most of them, however, remained within the neo- western conceptions of morality and failed to recognize the indigenous moral conceptions of traditional societies, which may contribute to the universal conceptions of humanity and human moral life.

Despite their origin and theoretical disparities, moral theories and conceptions have similar subjects and topics of debate in dealing with moral issues. These may include; meaning of moral values, places of languages in moral assertions and moral substances as well.

It would be therefore, by acknowledging the importance of these issues that I discuss the particular case of the Borana Oromo moral practice at *Arda Jila*.

The Borana Oromo moral conception is not a mere abstraction that one may discuss independently of their ways of life. For the Borana Oromo morality is the way of life in which one adjusts his/ her whole life and defines himself/ herself, understands his/ her place within the social, political, economic and natural environment. In other words, moral life is not only something to be learnt but also to be lived and experienced. As I understood from most of my informants and scholars as well, the Borana concept of *saala-fokko* does not simply indicate an optional way of life but rather as something mandatory to be followed. In this case, I would rather consider the Borana conception of *saala-fokko* as Kantian conception of categorical imperative which express the unconditional way of pursuing moral life. However, *Saala-fokko* is different from such a mere universal unconditional rule since its implications are practical through social forces. This means the Borana Oromo do have moral agents and practitioners who implement and enforce *saala-fokko*.

According to Mahammed Hassan, for instance, in the Borana, *Qallu* stands for the moral quality, the peace and the unity for the people. “His path is that of peace and truth”, (Mohammed Hassan, 1994:6). But this does not reduce the Borana Conception of Ethics (*Saala-fokko*) to mere concept of law. I raise this to say something about the notion of freedom which western moral philosophers used to put at the center when they discuss morality. When it comes to the case of Borana, it is difficult to separate individual freedom from social freedom.

Because *saala-fokko* identifies individuals with society and considers them as one and the same; this connection is not mere legal binding in the sense we know today, but rather practical moral binding.

The Borana conception of law has its ground in their moral life. It seems to have embodied the spirit of unity, common identity, and common internal peace. Baxter argued as follows:

The Borana identity, unity and sense of oneness are strongly consist of all those persons who speak the Borana language, call themselves Borana and acknowledge the peace of Borana (quoted in Hassan 1994:16)

Therefore, in my view, the *Borana saala-fokko* is not inconsistent with concept of freedom that moral philosophers advocate. Accordingly, given all these, there are issues that are pertinent to moral discussions. I would like to directly discuss about the particular case of *Arda Jila* in the light of the general notion of ethics.

From the experience of the moral practice at *Arda Jila* we understand that the Borana have non anthropocentric conception of morality. I have informants that Borana believe that *Arda Jila* is the *arda* or moral grounds for all things. Similar to evils inflicted on human beings, the Borana believe that cutting trees, digging the earth and even killing insect such as ants, is equally immoral and hence strictly forbidden. This implies that the Borana moral conception in general and practical events at *Arda Jila* in particular is eco- centered view. Accordingly, this moral event at this particular ritual place is environmentally friendly.

Moreover, if we see this from human point of view, the ritual events play a great moral role in imposing moral rights and obligations between the two living generations which each generation must undergo.

People who undergo this stage (*Gadaa grade*) are totally considered as moral agents' right from their very moral Oath. This stage is the one that Legesse described as the eightieth year of the *Gadaa* cycle in which the

luba completes the four *Gadaa* grade and enter into moral life (Legesse 2000:127).

Furthermore, one can consider these moral conceptions from linguistic point of views: in the history of western moral philosophy issues and places of language have been controversial when it is to discuss about moral issues. Philosophical and linguistic analysis in general and logical positivist in particular used to fight against the validity of moral ground from linguistic point of view. They often argue that moral assertions are pseudo since they are analytically problematic and empirically unverifiable. This means, according to them, moral statements are simply the likes and dislikes of the moral agent.

However, when you come to the Borana concept of *saala-fokko*, language of moral statement have a tremendous role in moral life. It seems that the Borana have a conception that how to act depends on how to say. This reality is clearly observed at *Arda Jila* in which the Borana use “*Afaan Gadamojji*” as I have been discussing. *Afaan gadamojji* is not simply language for communication but rather language to guide and engage in moral life. The Borana called this “*Seeda*” which indicates respectful speech and refraining from saying something evil. Thus, refraining from such speech has an implication that people should act accordingly. Therefore, in my opinion, moral languages are not pseudo but rather a guide for moral actions which the Borana consider as something different from mere likes and dislikes.

Here, my informant, Dabasa enumerated some examples as follow:

1. To say we eat a meat the Borana say *Dhamsa Dhamsina*, which they have been used to say *foon nyaanna* in the original language.
2. To say knife- the Borana say ‘*Sulluda*’ which was called *Billa* before the events

Accordingly, the followings are examples.

To cry out- *kullessa* which was *Harressa*

To be struck by fire- *jatame*, which was *gubate*

Accordingly, I understood that the Borana conception of moral statement is not like that of logical positivists and hence significant in their conception of morality.

#### **4.2. Conclusion**

The Oromo have an all encompassive socio-cultural, moral and political guide unified under the given of Gadaa governance. They constitute their whole ethical life as the mirror of all other aspects; such as economic, norms, politics and conception of truth that holds them together. The Oromo practice all these aspects of life at various stages of socio-cultural practice across generations.

This thesis concerned with the Borana Oromo ritual practice pertaining moral issues experienced at arda jila where particularly they manifest at the ceremony of buufatto. Buufatto is special generation ceremony where the Borana reveals their core moral marks. One may understand these crucial concepts such as the Nagaa Borana, the Aada-seera and Buusa-gonofa under the give of the Borana customary law.

Besides in my discussion of its ethical aspects I consider this from the environmental point of view in which I find them non-anthropocentric, from linguistic point of view in which I find them opposite to contemporary schools such as logical positivism. If we consider this from linguistic aspect we may see Veracity of moral issues that revolve around the concept of seeda. Likewise, existence of crucial laws such as the law of soil, the law of ant, the law of grass justifies its non- anthropocentric dimension.

## References

- Asafa Jalata 2007. *Oromummaa: Oromo Culture, Identity and Nationalism*. Oromia Publishing Company.
- Asafa Jalata 2010. "Oromo Peoplehood: Historical and Cultural over View" in *Sociology Publications and Other Works*. University of Tennessee, Knoxville.
- Aguilar, Mario I. 1996 "Keeping the Peace of the Waso Boorana Becoming Oromo through religious Diversification" in *Being and Becoming Oromo Historical and Anthropological enquires* ends P.T.W. Baxter et al 190-201 Uppsala Nordisk Afrika institutet.
- Bassi, Marco. 1996. "Power's Ambiguity or the Political Significance of Gadaa" in *Being and Becoming Oromo Historical and Anthropological enquiries*, ends Baxter, et al 150-161 Uppsala Nordiska Afrika institute.
- Charyl, Misak 2002. *Experience, Narrative and Ethical Deliberation: Truth, politics, Morality; Pragmatism and Deliberation*. London: Routledge
- Sharma, R.N, 1993. *Introduction to Ethics*. Surjeet Publications.
- Dahl, Gudrun 1996. "Sources of Life and Identity " in *Being and Becoming Oromo*, eds. P.T.W. Baxter, et al 162 -177. Uppsala
- Frankena, William 1995. *Ethics*: New Delhi Prentice Hall of India.
- Gadaa Melbaa (1988). *Oromia: An Introduction*: Khartoum, Sudan.
- Guyo Doyo (2007). "The Laws of warra gola in the Borana Oromo Vis-à-vis the Thought of Modern Animal Rights": Senior Essay; Unpublished.

- Hinnant, John (1977) *"The Gada system of the Gujii of the southern Ethiopia."* PhD Dissertation in social Anthropology, University of Chicago.
- Hinnant, John (1978). *The Gujii: Gadaa as A Ritual System*; in P.T.W. Baxter and Uri Almagor, eds. *Age, Generation and time: Some Features of East African Age Organizations*, 207-244. London: C. Hurst.
- Locke, John, (1962). *Two Treatises of Civil Government*: London J.M. Dent & Sons LTD.
- Legesse, Asmarom (1973) *Gada; Three Approaches to the study of African society*: Asmara. The Red Sea Press
- Legesse, Asmarom (2000) *Oromo Democracy: An Indigenous African Political System*: Asmara: The Red sea, Inc
- Leus, Ton (2006) *Aadaa Boranaa: A Dictionary of Borana Culture*. Addis Ababa: Shama books.
- Mekuria Bulcha (1996) *"The survival and Reconstruction of Oromo National Identity"* in *Being and Becoming Oromo*, eds. P.T. Baxter et al. 48-66 ( Uppsala Nordiska Afrika institutet)
- Mohammed Hassan 1994. *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570-1860*. The Red Sea Press.
- Mohammed Salih, M.A (2001). *African Democracies and African Politics*. London: Pluto Press.
- Graness, A. and K. Kai (eds.) (1997). *Sagacious Reasoning* .Henry Odera Oruka in Memoriam, Peter Lang.

- Gufu Oba 1996. “*Shifting Identities along Resource Borders Becoming and Continuing to be Boorana Oromo*” in *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological enquiries* eds. P.T.W. Baxter, et al 117 -131. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrika institutet.
- Pankhurst, Alula and Assefa, Getachew eds. 2008. *Grass-roots justice in Ethiopia: The Contribution of Customary Dispute Resolution*. Addis Ababa, Centre francais d’etudes ethiopiennes.
- Tenna Dewo 2008. “*The Concept of Peace in the Oromo Gadaa System: Its Mechanisms and Moral Dimensions*”, *Journal of Oromo Studies* Volume 14:1(2008):139-179.
- Tenna Dewo 2009. *Traditional Moral Values of the Oromo of Ethiopia: A philosophical appraisal of gada system*: PhD Dissertation submitted to Panjab University.
- Watson, E (2001). *Inter Institutional Alliances and Conflicts in Natural Resources Management*: Preliminary research findings from Borana, Oromiya Region Ethiopia. Marena Research Project working Paper no 4.
- Workineh Kelbessa (2002). *Indigenous and Modern Environmental ethics: Towards partnership in Gail presby (et al.eds) thought and practice in African philosophy: selected papers of the sixth Annual Conference of international Society for African Philosophy and Studies*, pp.47-61. Nairobi: Konrad Adenauer Foundation.
- Workineh Kelbessa (2005). *The Rehabilitation of Indigenous Environmental Ethics in Africa* *Diogenes*.2007:17-34.

## **BORANA ELDERS INTERVIEWED**

No.	Name	Age	Date of Interview	Place
1	Boru Duba	65	Jan. 8/2011	Surupha
2	Dabasa Galma	90	Jan. 7/2011	Yabello
3	Doyo Boru	62	Jan. 7/2011	Yabello
4	Doyop Liban	60	Jan. 7/2011	Yabello
5	Guyo Doyo	26	Jan. 12/2011	Finfinne
6	Liban Wariyo	70	Jan. 9/2011	Bakkee
7	Sora Boru	56	Jan. 9/2011	Bakkee
8	Waaqoo Galgaloo	68	Jan. 8/2011	Surupha

### **Interview Questions Provided to Borana elders.**

1. What is saala fokko? What is its importance for Borana oromo?
2. What is Borana customary law and its importance?
3. What is Buufattoo? Where and when it takes place? What kind of spiritual items are needed?
4. What is arda Jila and where it is?
5. What is the purpose of the ceremony of Buufattoo? Who would take part in this ceremony?
6. What is Gadamojjii? What is needed from a man in Gadamojjii stage?

### **Hiika gaaffilee kanaa Afaan Oromoo Booranatiin yeroon kaa'u akka armaan gadii kana ta'a.**

1. Saalaa tokkoon maali? Faayidaanisa Oromoo Booranatiif maali?
2. Aadaan seea Booranaa maali? Barbaachisummaan isaawoo?
3. Buufattoon maali? Eessattii fi yoom geggeeffama? Wantootni ayyaana kanaaf barbaachisan maal maali?
4. Ardaan Jilaa maali? Essadhas?
5. Faayidaan sirna kabaja buufattoo kanaa maali? Sirna kana irrattis eenyu eenyuutu qooda fudhata?
6. Gadamojjiin maali? Nama sadarkaa Gadamojjii keessa jiru irraa maaltu barbaachisa?