



## INDIGENOUS DEFENSE FORCE AND WAR DISCIPLINE GOVERNANCE OF GADA SYSTEM: THE CASE OF GUJI-OROMO, SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA

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### Abstract

*Gada is a major indigenous system in East Africa being practiced for about more than 600 years by Oromo people of the largest ethnic in the region which accounts for about half of the Ethiopian population, and lives in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia in Horn of Africa. In Oromo people, the Gada system was the constitution of the Oromo society through which the society administered, defended their territory, maintained and developed their economy. It recorded on UNESCO genius book as World's intangible heritage indigenous knowledge of Oromo people in 2016. At present, it has diffused to and adopted by some neighbor tribes and has been practicing there as their own indigenous governance system. In this study the researcher employed both the primary and secondary sources. This Study's data were described qualitatively. In generally, all data were analyzed and interpreted carefully according to social science disciplines. The findings of this paper indicated out Gada's democratic governance of indigenous defense force and war discipline. Finally, the paper explored how the Oromo nation developed this amazing self-rule that it had functioned as a socio-political institution by preventing oppression and exploitation for promoting relative peace, security, sustainable development, and political sovereignty.*

**Keywords:** Gada system, Indigenous defense force, War discipline governance

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Gada is Oromo indigenous government system based on the principle of power and leadership rotation among five political parties in Oromo people every eight years period. Gada system can also be referred to a set of political, administrative and power timetable for a maximum of only eight years (Geremew, 2012). According to (Endalkashew, 2018), Gada is an indigenous socio-political system that regulated Political stability, Economic development, Social activities, cultural obligations, moral

responsibility, and the philosophy of religious order of the Oromo society.

The crucial age grades (*Gogeessa*), with their peculiar roles, are discussed as follows: Senior Qarre, this is the most important stage in the Gada cycle when the members shoulder family responsibilities and engage in military training. In other words, this period was the period of excitement and military training. In domestic life, they engage in how to prepare and use plowing materials in agriculture, utilization of property, family management

and social life by observing the culture (*Aadaa*) and seeraa of the society (Jemjem, 2014 and 2020). Young boys of this age were also encouraged to work and keep property for their future life. This is why most of their geerarsa convey the quality of hard working and being self-sufficient abhorring poverty life. They were expected to know the custom, habit, tradition, and way of life of the society and obey the laws of Gada system. The members guard the Luba (men in power) and mostly included in military service under the leadership of war minister Abba Dula (Dhadacha, 2006). The Qarre had to develop a quality and capacity of fighting against injustice at least in their clan. Every Qarre except with special physical cases was required to train how to fight and hunt. It is customarily mandatory for indigenous military experts to train members of this stage in Guji Oromo area.

Therefore, the future cavalry in the military segment had to be trained at this stage. This includes the use of spear throwing, handling of shields and defending the group to be fought (Jemjem & Dhadacha, 2011). They obtained military campaign tactics and fighting from their immediate senior stage and military *Gada* officials. The training was supported by recitation of military achievement of brave men. Although hunting wild life is illegal today, killing elephant, rhinoceros, buffalo and lion accounted for forty, thirty, twenty-five and twenty percent respectively in the test for competency. *Kusa*, this was a matured stage for formal military service under the direction of the *Abba Dula* (Geremew, 2012). To the *Kusa*, dual tasks were attached in the society: military service and training for *Gada leadership*. As junior warriors the *Kusa* were purely fighters categorized into sections of cavalry, *lafoo* (soldiers) and *Buttuu* (special fighters). The members of this group continue undertaking military training of the earlier/younger grade. The military organization of the Oromo is said to have made the people one of the strongest ethnic groups in the Horn of Africa between the twelfth and nineteenth centuries (Jemjem, 2020). Male of this *Gada* stage were not allowed to marry and have children as they were serving the nation as military force.

The general objective of this study is to explore the indigenous defense force and war policy as part of *Gada governance*, in the case of *Guji Oromo* tribe, Southern Ethiopia. To explore the *Guji Oromo's* war history as a crucial element of *Gada governance*. To explore the culture and policy of peace and security, and foreign diplomacy in governance of *Gada System*: the implication for conflict and war Types of indigenous war operations and its' purposes. Indigenous defense force: Structural design of Warriors with their roles and responsibilities. Governance system and skills of war operation: indigenous/cultural procedures, norms, values and practices towards maintaining strong defense force and victory battle

More importantly, despite of enormous struggle and heroic war history present with *Guji*, it is yet not sufficiently investigated and documented, as far as my life experiences and so far literature review concerned. That is, therefore, ignites in me the inspiration to consider the title in my study, believing to take my part in filling the gap.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study derives its research methodology from the qualitative approach to conduct this paper on indigenous defense force and war discipline governance of *Gada system* in *Guji-Oromo* for full time study of one year in 2022. Methods of data collection included focus group discussions, Key informant interview, and in-

depth interview. Focus group discussions of two groups of *Senior Qarre* and *Kusa*, and four groups of well experienced elders and adults from Guji area are focuses of the Study. The focus group discussions included forty individuals such as: (*ten Senior Qarre*, *ten Kusa*, ten elders, and ten adults) who participated from both gender. The elders and adults were selected on the basis of their rich knowledge and long experience in the indigenous defense force and war discipline governance of *Gada system* in the *Guji-Oromo* area community. They ranged in age from forty to seventy. While the *senior Qarre* and *kusa* were ages of seventeen to twenty four. Selection of the *senior Qarre*, *Kusa*, adults, and local elders from the local community was based on their long time experiences on the indigenous defense force and war discipline governance of *Gada system* in study area. Members in both categories were eager and active in the discussions on how they understand the indigenous defense force and war discipline governance of *Gada system*. Finally, all data were analyzed carefully in the standardized rules of the social science disciplines accordingly.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Guji's Struggle and War History

To start with, I would like to start from the general overview of *Guji's indigenous* administrative system, social norms and values, cultural setups, and geo-political situations; which would lead us to know basically why and how *Guji* involved in struggle and war. To that extent, *Guji* governed by its traditional indigenous social norms and values (called in local language '*aadaa*'). *Aadaa* is enforced into implementation by our indigenous governance organization called '*Gada*'. *Gada* is a system in which Oromo, in general, and *Guji*, in particular, governed by; having its well-designed organizational structure called '*Caasa*' and institutional (i.e. informal) setups called '*aadaa*'. *Aadaa* is, therefore, considered as a 'Constitution' in which *Gada* used to rule community with legal, moral, cultural and spiritual attachment. All the economic activities, social interactions, nature management and foreign/ neighbor relations are ruled according to *aadaa* in *Guji*. More specifically, in *Guji society*, to be involved in a war (i.e. declaring a war on an enemy and or defending a war that has been declared from a conflicting ethnic community in the vicinity) and to be engaged in any struggle actions, all are governed according to the principles of *aadaa* under *Gada rule* and command. Therefore, to know why and how *Guji* engaged in war and struggle actions one should critically understand how it constituted in culture/*aadaa* and culture of *Guji*. For the detail of it, let me pass the speech chance to my colleagues. I'm "*hayyu*". My name is Boko Ganale. I was born in this Western *Guji Zone*, *Dugda Dawa* district, I Came from *Kuraa Kebele (Ganda)*<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> '*Hayyuu*' refers to the last stage of *Gada hierarchy* in which members serve the leader '*Abbaa Gada's* advisor. *Hayyuu* is equivalent to '*Yuba*'. At this stage, individuals recognized as get matured enough mentally and usually called Elders; thereby used as advisor, peace maker (*Jaarsa Arara*), and Key Informant (*Buleessa Dabarsi*).

<sup>2</sup> '*Ganda*' is the least administrative unit in *Oromia Regional State administrative structure*. It is equivalent to *Peasant Association (PA)*.

My name is Bedenu Teke. I was born in *Borana Zone, Gomole district, Gallaba Kebele (Ganda)*. I'm a pastoralist, and currently known as Elder (in local language *Jarsa Biyya*) in *Guji society*.

### 3.1.1. Identity Politics and Associated Struggle and War in History of Guji

When I come to the raised question; in history of this country, *Guji* is known as Warrior. *Guji* is also known by resistance to adopt and let it accept the frequently changing governance system; and often struggle (both peacefully and in violence) to overthrow non-inclusive and undemocratic systems in modern state building history of Ethiopia. From the dynasty of Minelik regime to the currently ruling governance system, none of them accepted within *Guji* unless by iron and blood; in which *Guji Oromo* has paid and still been paying the precious life and resources --losing a vast number of heroes.

The most important reasons beyond the *Guji's continued* resistance to reject and struggle against newly imposed systems are to preserve its identity and to protect its natural resources. From identity preserving perspective, *Guji Oromo* has been struggling and paying an immense cost, for its identity (i.e. '*Oromumma*' and their language '*Afaan Oromoo*'), to stay with its indigenous governance system (i.e. *Gada System*), and, to sustain its cultural values and social norms. This is due to the fact that almost all systems that so far emerged in this country in succession were tribe-based unitary state in which few groups from only one tribe come to power by gun--without the interest and participation of the rest nations, nationalities and people as a result, imposing the identity, economic interest, culture, and religion of ruling tribe on the others by force.

One of the best examples for these is the "One Country, One Flag, One Religion, One Language" proclamation of the Minelik dynasty, who claimed being crowned God; aimed to destroy *Oromumma* identity, *Afaan Oromo* and *Gada System*, against which *Guji*, as of all its other Oromo brothers, employed the bitter struggle, war and sacrifices.

As a best example of these, let us see the history of one occasion as follows: Once upon a time, the war-mongering regime (*Naftegna*) enforced *Guji* to bring his *Abba Gada* to office. Tuke Guye Kule was the ruling *Abba Gada* at that time. It was a time when the regime working to destroy all other culture, religion and any informal institutions, including *Gada System*; and instead enforced Traditional Christianity (Orthodox) by gun on all nations, nationalities and peoples of the country. Consequently, many *Abba Gada's* were jailed and killed thereby functionality of the *Gada System* was already broken in many other regions of *Oromia*. In that situation, *Guji* knows well why they want to see *Abba Gada* at their office; obviously either to kill or jail, as it was in other regions. Then *Guji* gathered secretly and decided how to preserve their *Abba Gada*; in which they presented the former *Abba Gada*, called Usho Jilo Ware, by lying as he was the timely ruling *Abba Gada*. Instantly, Usho proudly replied to those killers, saying "Yes, I'm a currently ruling *Abba Gada*"; in which he proved himself with strong commitment and readiness to pay whatever sacrifice it requires from him to save *Gada System*.

Usho must be mentioned in pride in *Guji history*; he is really heroic and symbolic example of *Guji's struggle* and sacrifice in history of preserving and protecting our *Gada System* and our identity. In fact, the regime servant didn't kill Usho accordingly; rather they took him here and there, tried to put him under pressure not to run

administration activities of the *Gada System* anymore; while the real *Abba Gada* keeps running his activities without being interrupted and disappointed.

In general, in its history of war and struggle to protect and preserve its identity and *Gada System*, *Guji* identified and proved as a winner and productive, being able to preserve its identity and culture up to present, under the bitter struggle and sacrifices. Thereby, it is only *Guji* and *Borana* who have been able to keep their *Gada System* unbroken and unmodified (i.e. sustainability and originality, respectively) among the Oromo stems. Also, from *Gada frequency cycle*, *Guji's* is the oldest of all Oromo stems; currently administrated under 74<sup>th</sup> *Abba Gada*, means more than 600 consecutive years of exercising *Gada administration* (i.e. one *Abba Gada* rules for 8 years and thereby 8 multiply by 74 is equivalent to 592; it exceeds 600 years when we consider those few *Abba Gada* who ruled more than one term in failing to be able to transfer the power due to the Empire's political situation of that time). Although there is no clearly investigated reason for this variation, two assumptions are there: either *Guji* is the ancient designer of *Gada System* so that the rest of Oromo stems adopted it from *Guji* in later time; or the others have broken the practice of the system for some years while *Guji* has not.

### 3.1.2. Economic Monopolization and Colonization History of Consecutive Regimes, and Followed Guji's Struggle and War

Later, the ruling group's colonizing act of imposing their identity over others was gradually shifted to solely monopolizing the economy and grabbing the resources of the country. These were mainly emerged following the reign of emperor Haile Sillasia, who overtook all the lands of farmers and gave it to his fellow ruling group members, named them as '*Balabat*', means 'the owner of everything'; in which farmers left to be slave for the *Balabat* and thereby waged for their labor force as '*Cisegna*'. Though the land was returned to the farmers following the fall of emperor Haile Sillasia regime, the interest and practice of economic monopolization of ruling group are remaining up to date--up to the recent toppled and succeeding ruling groups, called *TPLF and PP*. Thereby the second reason to be engaged in struggle and war against government for *Guji* is to defend against economic colonization and unfair and unregulated natural resources (mainly land and precious minerals) grabbing that held by ruling group in the favor of government power. The shift in struggle: from identity politics (the demand for dignity and the politics of resentment) to the demand for equality and fairness. In this regard, *Guji* has enormous pride/heroic struggle and war history which remain with it up to date.

Accordingly, during the emperor Haile Sillasia regime, *Guji's* main agenda of struggle and war was, to protect and defend its land and resources from invaders, *Balabat*; to resist enslavement by feudal landlords.

In that manner, *Guji* employed a bitter struggle both in peaceful and violent ways. Peacefully, they often employed struggles such as denying tax paying; refusing participation in any meetings that called by government rulers; and disobeying government's rule and command in general. An example of *Guji's* disobedience and resistance were manifested, among others, by settling in remote areas far away from city, where there is no road network and infrastructure in aiming not to be accessed by the oppressive and exploitative government officials.



In addition to peaceful struggle, *Guji* is also known by war, not only to preserving its identity but also to defend its resources and protect its territory. One of the resources that *Guji* never bring on table for negotiation with anyone is their land. That is why *Guji* clashed with *Balabbats* even refusing accepting them /at Maggarree/ prior to any other societies' struggle and upraising such as students' 'land to tiller' movement and *Bale farmers'* revolution, as land taken from farmers and given to *Balabbats* during Haile Silliasie regime; which is an extreme act of economic colonization by the ruling group over the majority farmers in history of Ethiopia. Accordingly, *Guji Oromo* has gotten and get into war with the regime starting from their early suppression and continued fighting for its land in different ways with consecutive regimes up to this date. Farmers' resistance song and motto during Haile Silliasie regime, as an example, said:

*"Akorkaji gara rimesa, hin futu niti hiyesa; (Aqorqaajii garaa rimeessaa, hin fuutu niitii hiyyeessaa!)*

*Akorkaji gara rimesa, hin buchu Kara hiyesa"*  
(*Aqorqaajii garaa rimeessaa, hin buuchuu karra hiyyeessaa?*)

Means:

*'You the big stomach tyrant, you can't take the wife of the poorest;*

*You the big stomach tyrant, drop down the assets you took from the poorest'.*

It indicates that both mentally and in action they were not in a position to kneel down for invaders and to give-up on their resources and assets. Unfortunately, until the battle of *Thowra* (i.e. few years ahead of the fall of emperor Haile Silliasie regime), *Guji* has been engaged in different war by using only the indigenous war equipment such as arrow (*Laaye/Xiloo*), sword/ knife (*Cuube*), spear (*Woraana*) and shield (*Wontee*); while government's *Militia armed* with the modern weapon of the time, especially by using different types of gun locally called *Wojigira*, *Nas*, and *Wochafo*. Here, one can imagine the magnitude of the life cost that local community can pay because of that unbalanced force. Even though *Guji* tried to be armed with the equivalent weapon using the gun that they brought from Somalia country at the battle of *Thowra*, the balance of the force was not attained at the equilibrium as government revealed being stepped forward-used Air Force – resulted the death of mass from the community.

Consequently, *Guji Oromo* repeatedly employed face to face war with the *militia* of the regime /CALLED ነጭ ለባሽ/ in different times during the Haile Silliasie regime. However, they were not being able to free their land with that mass-based face-to-face war, due to the unbalanced power between them and regime's *Militia* (i.e. using TRADITIONAL war equipment to fight with well-trained and modern weapon armed *militia*). After the loss of huge number of life and sacrifice, *Guji Oromo* enforced to change their war tactics and strategy, from mass-based face-to-face war to individual based killing, from fighting ordinary militia to eliminating regime rulers (*Balabbats*). That is through killing each *Balabbat* separately by: 1) ambushing: waiting at the roadside invisibly in the forest and then suddenly attacking while individuals are mobile in the community, or 2) getting to *Balabbat's* home as a servant, feeding his mule and collecting fuel woods for housewife in waiting for the right time to kill the husband; and then instantly kill the husband as favorable conditions attained. Thereby many *Balabbats* were killed in these ways; which indicates that *Guji Oromo* are the real warrior, not only for having commitment to be engaged in war but also for

being wise designers of war tactics and strategies from their indigenous knowledge of *Gada System*.

Governors assumed that *Guji Oromo* were defeated and gave up struggling when they stopped the face-to-face war. But later, when they got aware of strategically changes *Guji* has made, they were too angry and thereby decided to eliminate all individuals who they suspect as the designer of the strategy. Instantly, the contemporary zonal administrator (then called, *Awuraja*), who called *Takele Wolde*, called a pretentious (fake) public meeting saying: 'Let Us Peacefully Negotiate'. Accordingly, 379 most figurative *Guji's* elders, war heroes, and literate individuals who purposely selected and invited by *Takele Wolde* were gathered at *Surro Ganda* (*Surro Kebele*) to attend the said meeting. Finally, after he made sure that all the attendants arrived, *Takele* ordered the military to surround the attendants and get them in one house of farmer; where they were burnt down after the home closed from the outside. Only one man survived from them. That mass massacre was named as "*Tula Surro*" ("Human Pile Blazed at Surro"); and it has been considered as the worst ever and unforgettable wound in *Guji's history*.

Surprisingly, *Guji* has not given-up and knelt down for the regime even after that bitter sacrifices of *Tula Surro*; rather they decided to return to their first war strategy, fighting face-to-face in mass, to overthrow the system for the last time. Accordingly, they decided to search and get the timely modern weapons that equivalent to weapons *Militia armed with*; and thereby sent all the strong men (all except under-aged, inability, unhealthy, and over-aged) to *Mogadishu of Somalia* for the search of guns. During that long journey of cross border, which was on foot, some men had fallen on the road as some were eaten by crocodile or taken away by water during crossing *Ganale-Dawa river* while others died of hunger and thirst at the middle of dessert. The survivors, those who were able to arrive at Mogadishu, were supported by *Somalia government*, and thereby came back to their mother land with timely modern guns. As they arrive, they started war directly with *Militias and Ballabats*. That was named as *Thowra War or Battle of Thowra* in *Guji Oromo history*. Though the regime used air attack by war jet at the Battle of *Thowra*, no force found to stop community from fighting. At the middle, governors killed *Takele Wolde* in front of the public aiming to divert the attention of the community, but nothing was changed. From that day onwards, *Balabbats* never survived on *Guji's land*; some were killed, others fled for life, their home burnt down, and their land returned to the initial land owner farmers. In that manner, *Guji's rural* part of the land was freed from *Balabbats* before the fall of the overall system.

### 3.1.3. During the DERG (Military Junta) and TPLF

In fact *Guji* didn't struggle alone and not only for its lands; its struggle extended out of its border where *Guji* cooperated with its Oromo brothers to struggle on national-wide concerns. During the *Bale Farmers Revolution* that led by *General Wako Gutu*, a mass of *Guji's men* and women were left their home and travelled to *Bale* forest to fight *Naftegna* system by cooperating with *Bale* farmers. Thereby the farmers strong army that inhabited in *Bale* forest, which can be mentioned at front line in history of Ethiopian farmers resistance and revolution and even which known by downing the war jet, was composed majorly of *Bale and Guji Oromo*; in which *Haj- Kuta Danbi*, from *Guji*, served as a vice commander in chief next to *General Wako Gutu*. Not only *Haj- Kuta Danbi*, also *General Tula Dube Gomboso*, who served for a long year as a commander in chief of that wing following the death of *General Wako Gutu*, and his vice Colonel *Haj-Birre Roba Godana*, are listed at the front line among *Guji's heroic* warriors.

### 3.1.4. *Fight for the Territory: War with Neighbor Tribes*

So far we have tried to present struggle and war history of *Guji Oromo* against succeeding regimes of Ethiopia; which aimed at defending their identity and resources. However, under this topic we will try to present *Guji's history* of war with neighbor tribes in protecting its territory.

Geographically, the territory of *Guji Oromo*, as administrative unit of Oromia Regional State inhabited by *Guji Oromo*, is bounded with around six different tribes of three other regions. *Burji* and *Amaro* tribes from SNNP region in west; *Gamo* tribe from SNNP region who share Lake Abaya at north-west; *Gedeo* in northern boundary from the same region; *Sidama* Regional State in north-east, and *Somalia* Regional State in east.

With almost all these tribes there were frequent conflicts and war in different times; which rose directly to protect geographical boundary (i.e. administrative boundary), but indirectly for economic interests—particularly on competing for scarce natural resources such as farm land and pasture land. The 1987 E.C. and the 2010 E.C. wars that resulted huge mortality and displacement of thousands of *Gedeo* are best examples among it. Conflicts over scarce resources were recorded mostly before the last three decades when *Guji Oromo* has not their own administrative boundary—zoned with other tribes as *Awuraja*. This is common especially within pastoralist communities, where resources accessed openly and utilized in common. But it resolved as soon as *Guji Oromo* territory demarked legally as administrative unit—called '*GujiZone*'. They logically reasoned for the change as follows:

*"Because, we have no moral and legal ground to make claim for the resources out of our boundary; and thereby /now after/ there is no cross-boundary conflict over specific resources"*.

Later the conflicts and war were over boundary, as interest to expand territory increases following the population growth. In fact, the war with neighbor tribes is not always to protect territory. Sometimes it initiated by the third person—politicians—for the political consumption. Elders mentioned that the *Guji Oromo* and *Gedeo* conflict during *Abiy Ahmed's first year* in palace can be mentioned as among the politically imposed conflicts.

In other words, when we say '*Guji Oromo* fights with neighbor tribes to protect its territory' it not meant that *Guji* cannot live together with another tribes in its territory. Rather it means that *Guji Oromo* will go to war option when administrative boundary modified in a way that gives *Guji's* piece of land to another region, even if it is in the name of referendum. That was what frequently observed in the last three decades after the regional boundary legally demarked by politicians; and yet, when it is politically driven in its context.

However, beyond protecting its boundary, *Guji Oromo*, in its nature, known by being inclusive, protecting and living in brotherhood with different tribes; hosting them in its territory for long years by respecting their identity and cultural values. *Bule Hora* city is a best example to prove these; where *Burji tribe* has been living peacefully, occupying exclusively more than two *Kebele (Ganda)* (i.e. around 30% of town population) since the initiation of the city. Not only *Bule Hora*, but also all towns in *Guji Oromo territory* has occupied by the mixture of all nations, nationalities and peoples from every corners of Ethiopia; where everyone has been living peacefully, getting full respect for their identity and culture.

Even during the war occasion with neighbor tribes, members of that tribe who has been living in *Guji Oromo territory* is never be

targeted, rather highly protected and respected. The huge populations of *Burji and Gedeo tribes* that live in *Guji zones* are the living witnesses for the proof of these; who have been been protected and kept in peace at the center of *Guji's land* during all those frequent battle at the border in different times. This is due to the fact that, in one way, there is informal constitution of *Guji Oromo*, as *Gada law*, which protects and respects the rights of any individuals or groups that live under the administration of *Abba Gada*. It stated by *Abba Gada* during power taking ceremony that held at *Me'e Boko*<sup>3</sup> every eight year, as "*Nama dhisi binensi lafa tiya kesa jiru hundi kiya, tuqamu hin qabu /Nami Barbadaa Gujii keessa qubatu hundinuu Guji'ii hin tuqanuu Santi Seera*". Means: "*Not only human, even any animal in my administration boundary is mine, so that they should be protected*". In another way, there are cultural war principles that enforces *Guji Oromo* to protect individuals lived with him during the war occasion. There is a cultural belief that they assume they will be defeated at the battle if attacked others internally. Not only those who lived with them, women and children will not be attacked when they won the battle and entered into the territory of enemy. This is also among the war principles within *Guji Oromo*.

In summary, as any indigenous society in the world, *Guji-Oromo* has been involved in different conflicts and wars with different neighbor tribes in different times in order to protect both their resources and territory. However, *Guji-Oromo*, in its history, never tried to attack its neighbors by crossing the border in order to expand its territory or to access others resources (i.e. not by its own initiation) rather than defending the invaders. But once they are forced and entered into war in order to defend themselves or their resources, they can attack enemy by crossing the border and go up to hundred kilometers in enemy territory. Out of that, *Guji* is inclusive in its nature, living in love and respect with others by hosting in its territory any comers; which is the result of culture and *Gada System*.

## 3.2. Culture and Management of War in Guji Oromo

### 3.2.1. Cultural Norms and Principles of War in Guji Oromo Area

As tried to present in the above sections, *Guji* is governed by the *Gada System*. *Gada* is governance structure or organization in which the '*Abba Gada*' is the supreme governor. *Aadaa*<sup>4</sup> is a constitution in which *Gada* rules and is ruled by. A combination of *Aadaa* and *Gada* is, therefore, termed as *Gada System*. Their *aadaa* and *Gada* is more than anything for *Guji Oromo*. *Guji* loves, respects, obeys and believes in its *aadaa* more than any formal institutions, even now days. It is because of this that *Gada System* is not simply governance system for them, but also their identity, beliefs, moral and psychological concerns; as it is dynamic and complex incorporating all the social, political, economic, cultural and religious entities.

<sup>3</sup> '*Me'e Boko*' is a place name located in *Guji zone*; where the *Gadaa power transition and associated traditional procedures and ceremonies takes place in every eight year*.

<sup>4</sup> '*Aadaa*' is usually defined as '*culture*' within majority of *Oromo tribes*. But in *Guji Oromo*, it is more than culture. Here it conceptualized as the informal institution or unwritten constitution in which the whole *Guji Oromo* governed by for his all political, social and economic aspects under the governor, *Gada system*. That is why the term '*aadmalee*' defined as unlawful or crime or committed guilty against *aadaa*.

Thereby maintaining peace and stability (internally and externally with neighbors), conflict and war management, all are well regulated in *aadaa*, having its principles in the bases of not only political and economic interests, but also in respecting internal beliefs such as moral and psychological values, and religious and cultural norms. Therefore, it is important to investigate these principles in order to know how basically *Guji* attached it to war in their history; which I have tried in the next paragraphs. The principles related to war in *Guji's aadaa* are as follows; classified in *Pre-War* and *During the War*:

### 3.2.21.1. Pre-War Cultural Principles: Diplomacy and Neighbor Relations

1. **Peace is first of all.** This is among the *Guji's* core principles in *Gada System* with respect to having peace internally and living peacefully with neighbors; usually they are saying it in local language as '*Nagaan hunda dursa*'. Peace is very important element in *Gada System*; primary and key rule in the *aadaa*. This means, *Guji Oromo* never declare a war on the others unless having sufficient reasons; and even in having the sufficient reasons, the war can be chosen as a solution at the absence of all other options. This is a result of belief system that existing within *Guji Oromo*: believing that "*attacking others without reason is equated to committing a sin and it is immoral; thereby, resulting in to be cursed and defeated at the battle*". The opposite is also true that they believe that '*fighting with those who attack the Guji in a wrong case or without having any logical reason or having a motive against Guji's right, is holly and thereby always results in a victory over enemy at the battle*'. Three conclusion points can be drawn from these: 1) living peacefully with all is always primary choice for *Guji Oromo* which regulated by, not only social norms, but also spiritual beliefs that strictly attached to their moral and psychological values; 2) *Guji Oromo* can declare a war over other, not by his initiation but under the intolerable external enforcing conditions, at the absence of other options; 3) once start a war after fulfilling all the preconditions, *Guji Oromo* never step-down until attaining victory over enemy in whatever costs. These all are the result of social norms together with spiritual beliefs as in *Guji's aadaa*, which is strongly attached to their moral and psychological values.
2. **Priority for peaceful dispute resolution mechanisms:** Once the *Guji Oromo* are attacked, they often not immediately fight back at the first day of attack from the enemy; unless cattle raid is part of the attack. Except cattle raided, their first response, to any attack (even to the loss of human life), is identifying the logical reason behind the attacking; in which elders would decide whether to deal peacefully or to fight back based on investigated reasons as a cause of attack. If they prove that the cause of conflict is due to something wrong done by the individuals or groups from *Guji* which is violent against the attackers right, they try as much as possible to resolve that dispute peacefully through negotiation (in local language: *mala marii*) and mediation (*Jaarsummaa*) by sending elders (*Jaarsa Araara*) as a mediator (i.e. their own elders for the small-scale conflict as of between some individuals or groups; or from the third neighbor tribe for the large-scale conflict such as between two tribes). In this way they always ask for forgiveness and reciprocity for the all fault they did. But if they prove that they were attacked by outsiders intentionally in violence against their rights such as

cattle raid and cross-border land colony for territory expansion, they never hesitate to declare a war in order to defend themselves. Yet they are ready to stop the war and take the issue to indigenous court, called *Gaaddisaa*<sup>5</sup>, to be resolved through *Jaarsummaa* at any point as request comes from the opposite side.

3. **Believing in truth and justice:** *Guji* highly believes in truth. They believe that truth belongs to God; saying '*Dhugaan ta Waaqaa fi Lafaa ti*', means '*the father of truth is God and earth*'. This belief has a great meaning and influence in their day to day social life, particularly in resolving disputes and maintaining justice. They exercise it in this way: if someone did a fault or crime against others he/she will confess his/her wrong doing during the *Jaarsummaa* in front of elders by telling all the truth, even if he/she did that fault secretly at the absence of any witnesses. That is a result of the belief '*the father of the truth is God and earth*' interpreted as '*when I do that fault, God is watching me downward and Earth is watching me upward so that hiding the truth is sinning against God and Earth*'. Amazingly, in *Guji's* culture and beliefs, once your case brought to *Jaarsummaa* in front of elders, you can't receive compensation or any payment or reward for any harm that you get from someone if he confesses his guilty. The only thing you need is the truth. They said as '*dhugaan karra moonati*', means '*truth is equivalent to packed compound cattle*'; implies that getting the truth gives high mental satisfaction than getting any amount of treasure in *Guji Oromo*. Once you get the truth you truly forgive the one who hurt you, and forget the case. Thereby, someone (as individual, or group) who did a fault on other should say that '*I did wrong against Mr. X, thus, the truth belongs to him and the fault belongs to me*'. This confession is more than any sanction having moral and psychological punishment in social norms of that society. These all, do therefore, show how strongly truth and justice control over conflict and war in *Guji culture*.
4. **Tolerance and reasonableness:** Often *Guji* not immediately fights back during the first day of attack from the enemy. They wait until the attack repeated at least two times or more, even at the cost of human life and assets. After they prove that the attack frequented more than the tolerable manner, they take the issue to the concerned elders. They should get permission from the elders to attack back. Elders should prove that the attack from other-side disputant is planned and intentional. They also cross-check that if attackers properly invited but refused to take part in peaceful dispute resolution package (i.e. negotiation or mediation). After the fulfillment of all these preconditions of tolerance, community gets the permission to defend themselves. The war is about to start hereafter; and everything will be

<sup>5</sup> '*Gaaddisaa*' is a place where all social, political and economic issues in the society discussed on, resolved and decision made at under the elders or *Gada* rulers leadership. Usually it is under the shade of culturally selected tree species, locally named as *Oda* and *Dhadacha*, but sometimes other species can be used for a time manner based on availability.



accomplished according to the community war commander (called in local language, *Abba Dula*).

### 3.2.1.2. Cultural Principles during the War: Beliefs, Norms and Procedures

1. **Cooperation and Unity:** Once the war declared on *Guji* from the outside, the first step that *Guji Oromo* should take is notifying and alarming the case to all *Guji* at every corner. This has been accomplished through mobile phone communication now a day. But, before the arrival of modern telecommunication technology, *Guji Oromo* accomplished it through his indigenous information transmitting way, called in local language 'Iyyii dabarsii' 'Iyyii iyya dabarsi' 'be alarmed and alarm others' during the early evening starts as everyone gets to his home for dinner after finishing the process of cattle getting and milking, aimed that everyone can hear and human vocal voice can reach from one village to other clearly as of night silent, and Volunteer but moral obligation from social norms.
2. **Discipline and humanity:** (*haqa namaa hin feenu, haqa keenna hin dhiifnu*), every step and activity under the command and permission of commander, children and woman not attacked, no further attacking the dead body of enemy rather covering by the tree leaves, respecting surrenders, never leaving wounded colleague, no individual stepping in front (too fast) or behind (too late)
3. **Spiritual purity and holiness** (*Nami didhaa fi miidhaa, kajjuu haadhaa fi Abbaa, ollaa, Haadha manaa fi ijollee qabu hin duuluu*) if you have unaccomplished cultural obligations in family (*miilo Abbaa kennuu*)
4. **Undefeatable spirit:** as a nation and as individual participants, Moral and psychological confidence resulted from the beliefs of keeping purity, social norms: ceremony after war for those who killed among the enemy during war as encouraging all men to be take part in war and struggle without stepping back unless they kill from the enemy. Wives sing encouraging killer /with the name of killer/ and discouraging for being non-killer in their day to day indigenous songs.

### 3.3. Types of Indigenous War and Its Purposes

Based on its context, manner it employs, and purposes, there are three types of indigenous war in *Guji's* culture, namely: *Gubbaa (Duulaa Gudda)*, *Bocceessa*, and *Gaada (Yaasa)*. The purposes for which it is employed for, the enemies and the size of warriors involved in it makes the difference clear.

#### 3.3.1. Gubbaa/Duulaa

*Gubbaa Duulaa* is the types of the *Dula* which can participate more peoples to the war fronts. In this type of *Duulaa* campaigners are so large in the numbers of participants going to the war; they are so many and more than one thousand (1000) and above. *Gubba Dula* is managed by two persons who are very well experienced in the war and who are known as heroes in their communities. They are known as *Abba Dula Gudda (Manager of Dula)* and *Abba Dula Diqqa (Vice Manager of the Dula)* based on their position they have to manage *Dula* on the field of war. Gadaa System is dynamic and complex that incorporate all social, political, economic, cultural and religious entities. *Gaada /Anbushing/*: is type of war employed for revenge by individuals or in group of few men.

#### 3.3.2. Bocceessa

*Bocceessa* is the type of *Dula* that can have the medium numbers of the participants to the war. Therefore, *Bocceessa Duulaa* means the type of the *Dula* that can have the only participants counted in hundred numbers to the war area. This also has commanders /Managers/ mentioned above in *Gubba Dula* to achieve their Goal of war.

#### 3.3.3. Gaada/Yaasa

*Gaada /Yaasa* is a type of the *Duulaa* that can have the few numbers of the participants starting from the two (2) persons, ten persons (10), and may continue to add a few numbers as mentioned above based on their agreement to participate in this type of *Dula*. This can be Managed by one person who participants in and believed to manage and command them into the war area. But, in *Guji-Oromo* traditional *Dula system*, Types of the *Dula* are based on the difficulties or the numbers of their enemies fighting with them. Selection of the *Abba Dula (Dula leaders)* is based on the *Gada* culture of the *Guji-Oromo*, there is a Saying "Worri isaanii Worra Uchumaati" this literally means they are from the war leader Clan /Family.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The researcher of this paper recommends the following points to be carried out by all concerned bodies for sustaining the indigenous Knowledge of Gada System in Study area. The researcher has used this study as a springboard that other researchers have to open their eyes and carry out their studies on this Indigenous Knowledge of Guji-Oromo Gada System area to promote its cultural values and norms. Future Researchers should undertake to know all activities of indigenous knowledge of the Gada System in the Guji-Oromo's area. Further Studies have to be undertaken on the provisions of the Guji-Oromo Gada system to point out the all-important elements of the indigenous knowledge of the war Discipline Governance of the Gada System to protect the Oromo border line of their territory. Gada is an indigenous socio-political democratic system of the Oromo people that regulated Political stability, economic development, social activities, cultural obligations, moral responsibility, and the philosophy of religious order of the society. The former/ prior/ six grades are fixed learning grades while the latter /mature/ five grades are educators. Every male Oromo /in Gada System/ passes through eleven series of grades acquiring various talents and skills. Each Grade is associated with various privileges and responsibilities. The system makes members of the society to accomplish their obligation and enjoy privileges at the right time. In other words, the Oromo are able to govern social, economic, military, political and other aspects of their life by this egalitarian system. Since Gada is highly endowed with moral and legal values, among the Oromo it creates peaceful setting and keeps social order by prohibiting injustice, social evils, and political chaos.

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