Building peace by peaceful approach: The role of Oromo Gadaa system in peace-building

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Abstract: The Oromo Gadaa system has a great role in peace-building. It embraces peaceful peace-building values and approaches useful to maintain durable, lasting, and sustainable peace in society. Africa in general and Ethiopia, in particular, are suffering from multiple conflicts and lack of peace. Modern peace-building has not been able to bring lasting solution to these challenges. As a result, much weight is given to modern peace-building apparatuses over indigenous peace-building approaches. The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of the Oromo Gadaa system in peace building through a peaceful approach. A qualitative research approach was employed to examine the contribution of the Oromo Gadaa system in peace-building. Primary data were collected using key informant interviews from Abbaa Gadaa, Hayyuus, female participants, and academicians. The finding of the study reveals that the Gadaa system incorporates proactive approaches that necessarily facilitate peace through values of safuu (morality), equality, respect and tolerance, law, and order. The system also embedded in itself post-conflict reactive mechanisms such as jaarsummaa (Araaraa), Siiqqee, Gumaa, and Qaalluu to ensure lasting and sustainable peace.
peace. The integration of Gadaa peace-building approaches, values, and practices makes peace-building lasting and sustainable. Incorporating Gadaa system values, customs, principles, and mechanisms is important to make peacebuilding efforts consistent and productive.

Subjects: Anthropology - Soc Sci; Social & Cultural History; African History; Cultural Studies;

Keywords: peace; role; peace building; Gadaa system; Oromo

1. Introduction
States employ various efforts and instruments to restore peace internally and collectively at the global level. Given several factors risking peace, it is the mandate of the state to provide security and sustain peace of its citizens (Maxted, 2001). Civil war, ethnic conflict, terrorism, human trafficking, revolution, extremism and radicalism, and inter-state wars directly or indirectly intimidating peace and stability in the world (Negasa, 2021). States and regional organizations have strived to realize international peace collectively under the auspices of the United Nations (Amaechi, 2017; Shinoda, 2018). An effort to preserve peace and stability has always been challenged and waned due to interventionist policies in the name of peace-keeping (de Coning, 2016; Tschirgi, 2003). In some cases, it is understood that peace-building is sustained through external interventions by peace-keeping organizations and countries that are envisioned to reduce the risk that a state will erupt into or return to war (Barnett et al., 2007). There have been interventions in the name of peace-building and peace-keeping in many countries. Yet, not all these efforts brought radical changes in these nations. Foreign peace-keeping bodies including the UN sometimes see peace agreement and resolving conflict as a feat. The argument is, how much conflict resolution and concluding peace agreement promise peace-building project at all (Wallensteen, 2002).

Peace-building practice is not an easy task. It needs understanding the nature of the conflict and the condition of the society in which peace is built (Mpangala, 2004). In line with this, there is a tendency of thinking that conflict resolution is lasting durable peace. The fact is that conflict resolution cannot be peace-building, but a preliminary footstep towards peace-building process. Given the efforts employed at local, national, and international levels, world peace at large and nations’ peace, in particular, agonized from several causes of instability. The United Nations and its members engaged several efforts to retain peace. Nevertheless, their security forces, laws, and institutions failed to bring durable and lasting peace to people in pursuit. Modern peace-building approaches are characterized by the prevalence of methods capable of causing complementary harms and incapable of providing lasting and sustainable peace. Moreover, peace-keeping agents typically rely on force and unjustifiable power to build peace and repair stability.

Indigenous knowledge systems are those systems lived within the society and are distinctive to a given society (Ellen & Harris 1996 as cited in Tharakan, 2015). Indigenous systems play a substantial role in solving social, economic, political, and cultural problems of the society. Indigenous peace-building systems are so effective before they were superseded by modern peace-keeping approaches. Its peace-building apparatuses are communally grown approaches capable of building durable, sustainable, and lasting peace in the community (Omona et al., 2020). These are “local and community-based systems aimed at providing the socio-cultural information necessary for community survival and flourishing within the community’s local environmental, geographical and cultural context” (Tharakan, 2015, p. 53). It has been maintaining the relationship of humans with nature and realizing sustainable development (Briggs, 2005). Indigenous peace-building systems are equipped with rich customs, values, and
practices encourage consensual decision-making and instill obedience in the conflicting parties for their common good and society.

Africa is home to indigenous knowledge systems. These indigenous systems manifest themselves in different forms of agriculture, medicine, security, and many others (Mapara, 2009; Njiraine et al., 2010; Ocholla & Onyancha, 2005). The pre-colonial livelihood of Africans was merged with practice of indigenous knowledge systems that maintained their interaction with the environment. In Rwanda, the Gacaca system was one of the African indigenous peace-making systems used to restore justice and settle the conflict between the disputants (Rettig, 2008). However, this indigenous way of interaction with nature was changed with the advent of colonialism (Mapira & Mazambara, 2013). Similarly, in South Africa indigenous system of Ubuntu is a complex philosophical view that stresses human cooperation (Arthur et al., 2015). It involves the thought that a person is what he is because of other persons around him (Dolamo, 2013; Gade, 2012). In post-colonial period, these indigenous systems were outmoded by the modern European knowledge system. This shows that African indigenous peace-building systems were adversely affected by colonial fist of Europeans (Kaniki & Mphahlele, 2002). The effort to revitalize African indigenous knowledge system of peace-keeping has encountered various challenges in the post-colonial era.

The Oromo Gadaa system is one of the African socio-political egalitarian systems that govern the social, political, economic, security, and peace of the Oromo people (Abdurahman, 2019). The Oromo people are Cushitic-speaking ethnic group in East Africa in Ethiopia and Kenya (Taddesse, 2018; Tsega, 2012). They are composed of Christians, indigenous religious followers (Waaqefataa), and Muslims (Jalata, 2010). They practice the Gadaa system and indigenous practices of the socio-political age-grade system that leaders succeed each other every 8 years (Desalegn et al., 2005). It is a system of equal participation in every social, economic, political, and religious aspects of the Oromo people. Abbaa Gadaa is the leader in charge of managing social, economic, and political issues of the Oromo people in the Gadaa system (Taddesse, 2018). Abbaa Gadaa whose term of office is ended transfers power to succeeding Abbaa Gadaa peacefully (Jemjem, 2020). The Gadaa system maintains peace (Endalkachew, 2018a). By its nature, the Gadaa system values consensual and participatory decision-making and abhors anything that denounces human dignity. Gadaa system’s uniqueness stands out from its role in peace-building (Taddesse, 2018), and maintaining law and order in the Oromo people. In the Gadaa system, Oromo believes not only in maintaining peace with fellow humans but also peace with Waqqa (God; Hamado & Dejene, 2016). Before the expansion of western cultural values systems, the role of the Gadaa system in preserving social and political order in the Oromo people was paramount. Yet, the advent of western/modern value systems affected the long-established culture of the Oromo nation (Endalkachew, 2018b). The intrusion of western values came with the premise that African traditions are backward and they need to see modern knowledge systems. As a result of the expansive interest and superseding projects of modern peace-building approaches, the role of Gadaa system in peace-building and resolving conflict.

Several studies examined the role of the Gadaa system in social, political, economic, conflict resolution, and peace-making. For instance, Abdurahman investigated the role of the Gadaa system with the United Nations peace-keeping system and initiative and relevance to maintain peace in Ethiopia and beyond (Abdurahman, 2019), its basic understanding for citizens and researchers (Jemjem, 2020), the institutions governing peace, resource, and social integrity among the Borana from historical perspective (Tesema, 2016). Asafo (2012) expounds on the kernel of Oromo Gadaa and its significance in addressing contemporary African problems. Taddesse (2018) elucidated Gadaa system contained a potential standard for promoting democracy, Gadaa system plays a critical role in promoting sustainable social development and emancipatory politics (Shelema, 2018). Despite their limitless effort to discuss the Gadaa system and its role in political, social, and economic facets, their analysis tilts towards historical, structural, and pays little attention to the peace-building role of the Gadaa system in power transfer and harmony. Still, these studies did not explicate the proactive
values significant in preventing conflict and anything that violate peaceful interaction and post-conflict reactive mechanisms that the Gadaa system employs to maintain peace in society. Hence, there is a need to discuss that the Gadaa system has embedded in itself a peaceful means of peace-building approaches both proactively and reactively. Furthermore, incorporating the Gadaa system’s peace-building values, customary laws, and approaches into any peace-building effort has to be well enlightened. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the role of the Gadaa system in peace-building through proactive and reactive peaceful approaches to bring durable, sustainable, and lasting peace.

2. Research method
The research relied on qualitative research methodology. A descriptive research design was employed to examine the contribution of the Oromo Gadaa system in peace-building in proactive and reactive approaches. The study employed key informant interviews with Abbaa Gadaa, two Hayyuus, two female interviewees, and five academicians. These informants were purposefully selected by the researcher with the notion that they would provide sufficient data for the investigation. On the other hand, secondary data were also gathered from both published and unpublished books, articles, reviews, documents, and thesis and dissertations. Primary data obtained for this research were analyzed using textual analysis (data was transcribed) to describe, interpret, and understand the role of the Gadaa system in peace-building using proactive and reactive approaches. On the other hand, secondary data were also analyzed using document analysis. Finally, the result obtained from these data sources was cross-checked and triangulated to maintain both the internal and external validity of the study.

3. Gadaa system: An Oromo democracy
The Oromo people are the second-largest ethnic group in sub-Saharan Africa (Abdurahman, 2019). They have rich historical, cultural, traditions, and governance that persisted for many years. The Oromo indigenous knowledge systems are wide and essential instrument of creating unity and organization in the Oromo people. Among these indigenous systems is the Gadaa system, which has been practiced from time immemorial. Some argue knowing the exact date and how the Gadaa system started is difficult. However, Gadaa system was fully exercised beginning from the 16th century (Asafa & Schaffer, 2013). Especially, during the 16th-century, the Gadaa system reinforced the Oromo people to defend their unity, identity, and withstand external oppression. This system guided religious, economic, cultural, political, and social aspects of Oromo for many years (Dereje, 2012). As a result, the unity of the Oromo people has been maintained and defended under the Gadaa system for many years. Zelalem argues that the Gadaa system is an icon of socially and culturally deep-rooted egalitarian democratic institution witnessed in recent developments. It is an indication of a cultured system of dealing with social, economic, and political aspects of the Oromo people. The Gadaa system is a complex system of governance in which Oromo people are divided into age-grade sets to enjoy their rights and discharge their responsibilities (Tesema, 2016). The power of Abbaa Gadaa is fixed and the leader stays in power for 8 years. It is the system of governance where the power of the ruler is fixed and popular sovereignty is maintained (Asafa, 2009). The age-set classification in the Gadaa system enables individual persons to participate in each grade and pass to another grade as per customs and practices. It is a participatory decision-making system that everyone equally participates in (Ayehu et al., 2016). That is what makes it egalitarian that encompassed basic principles of participatory politics (Solomon, 2017).

On the other hand, it is discussed that the Oromo people maintained their security and sovereignty under Gadaa system (Asafa, 2009). Asafa further argues that except for technological development, the Oromo people “enjoyed relative peace, stability, sustainable prosperity, and political sovereignty” in the Gadaa leadership (p. 1). In this system, there are traditions used to resolve conflict, maintain justice, peace-building, and security (Debela, 2017). The fact is that it encompassed arrangements and approaches to maintain public security and peace-building. The key informant interview result discloses that:
The Gadaa system embraced principles of peaceful power transfer, check and balance, and popular sovereignty. The Gadaa system did not borrow values, principles, and democratic concepts of leadership from modern democracy; rather it had already achieved it in its way (Informant 2 & 3, 2021).

The result expresses that the Oromo Gadaa democracy entrenched values and principles that are not in a representative democracy. The decision-making in the Gadaa system is not implemented based on a majority vote and minority rights; however, based on consensual democracy in which all members are equally involved. In this way, Abbaa Gadaa and his councils take time to deal with differences until consensus is reached with opposing parties. This shows that the Gadaa system is based on the grounds of limited governance, democratic election, and peace-making in society. From this, it can be concluded that the Gadaa system is a tangible democracy that cannot be compared to modern democracy, which is the majority and minority oriented—a thousand illiterates simply prevail in their number over the matured, literate, and powerful minorities.

4. The concept of peace in the Gadaa system

Peace in the Gadaa system is entirely different from the concept of peace in modern democracy and politics. The concept of peace in the Oromo people context is beyond human wellbeing (Guyo, 2009). This notion is embedded in the Oromo worldview that peace is not complete unless a harmonious relationship with nature is maintained. Peace in the Gadaa system is the peaceful coexistence of Oromo with the neighboring Oromo and non-Oromo people (Tesemo, 2016). One of the key informants indicated the understanding of peace among Oromo people as follows:

The Oromo people believe peace is achieved when they live with Waaqaa, nature, and other fellow humans in harmony. For a person to live at peace, he/she should have peaceful interaction with his ummaa (creator), umamaa (nature), and his fellow humans. This is strongly believed in the gadaa system that peace is the gift of waaqaa (God), which humans are obliged to maintain as per gadaa system laws (Informant 1 & 8, 2021).

This indicates Oromo people are peace-loving people who respect humanity (namummaa), nature (umama), and God (Waaqaa). God is the source and provider of peace to all under his authority. Hence, Oromo believes that a person who is not at peace with Waaqaa cannot have peace with nature, other fellow humans, and within himself. On the other hand, interview data indicates Abbaa Gadaa pray to Waaqaa for peace as follows:

Ka oli olitti nuu hanqadhu—protect us from a danger that comes from above

Ka gadii gaditti nu hanqadhu—protect us from a danger that comes from below

Ka midda lamaani achumatti Nuu hanqadhu—protect us from a danger that comes from both sides (Informant 7, 2021).

This shows Oromo’s belief in a creator who protects everything and everyone against any harm. As a result, in different Oromo societies, peace comes at first. The rationale is in the absence of peace, any action might not realize harmony with all. Another key informant interview data exposes that:

Oromo pray to God in the morning that ‘Waaqa nagaan na bulchite nagaan na oolchi’ (God, you gave me a peaceful sleep in the whole night, do the same for me throughout a day), and when the night falls they pray ‘Waaqa nagaan na oolchite nagaan na bulchi’ (God who gave me peace all the day long give me the same in the whole night) (Informant 4, 2021).

Oromo views peace as what Waaqaa gives to humans and everything in the universe. Waaqaa is the provider of peace and man is responsible to protect the balance in its relationship with the rest. For that reason, maintaining peace is to protect everything and everyone from anything that
would jeopardize their safety and stability. Similarly, a key informant interview conducted with a scholar of anthropology elucidated that

Oromo in the Gadaa system describes peace as “buna fi nagaa hin dhabiinaa” (May you not lack coffee and peace). Buna (coffee ceremony) according to Oromo tradition is prepared three times a day. This is in the morning, at lunchtime, and during dinnertime. These coffee ceremony events are supposed to ask each other how peaceful and healthy they were throughout the night, each other’s safety up until lunchtime, and in the afternoon at dinnertime (Informant 4 & 7, 2021).

This shows peace is the harmonious relationship among Oromos and with neighboring non-Oromos. It affirms that peace makes people live peacefully, work, and interact together as they share coffee. The symbolic association of coffee (Buna) in this case is that in the Oromo tradition, no family drinks coffee in private. They call upon each other to share coffee, chat with each other, share information, and ask about each other’s wellbeing. It is at this ceremony that they make sure everyone is peaceful, leading happy life, and feel safeguarded. This suggests that peace is attached to the safety and mutual existence of Oromo in the Gadaa system.

Peace is an important and natural right for everyone and everything (Abdurahman, 2019). In the Oromo Gadaa system, without peace human flourish, social harmony, family safety, and well-being are impossible. The maintenance of peace guarantees the smooth interaction of individuals within and with structures in society. The earth gives its rich to humans, God (Waaqaa) brings rain and blesses them with his richness (Gemetchu, 2005). This shows how the Oromo people established harmony with their creator, humanity, and nature-based on norms and principles that protect peace (nagaa) and morality (safuu). Anyone who violates peace or jeopardizes harmony with his neighbor, nature, and God has trespassed the mandate assigned to him by values and ethos embedded in the Gadaa system. These values, laws, and customs are a reflection of the laws of Waaqaa (God). The violation of these laws, values, and customs contained in the Gadaa system would disturb peaceful coexistence and harmony in society and beyond.

The relationship between Oromo and God is maintained by his law (Seera Waaqaa; Asafa & Schaffer, 2013). Each and everyone in society should obey Waaqaa. God communicates with them through the spiritual leader Qaalluu. The law in the Gadaa system emphasizes on “restoration of peace, guarding normative pattern of the society and keeping of equilibrium between creatures” (Ayehu et al., 2016, p. 102). As a result, peace is interaction between Waaqaa and human beings, environment as well as human beings and environment (Tesema, 2016). The relationship between Oromo and God is guided by the law of God, which is instruction and an authoritative directive that governs human behaviors (Tesema, 2012). Ginbar (2018) states that the Gadaa system laws are subordinated to the law of nature to realize the laws of Waaqaa govern human social interaction. Likewise, the Gadaa system is divinely inspired by a political philosophy of safuu that promotes harmony in the universe, society, and other human associations (Asafa & Schaffer, 2013; Firdissa, 2017). Safuu shows what is right and what is not right or acceptable and unacceptable based on human conscience and social norms. What constitutes peace among the Oromo people is not the absence of war, but the harmony between clans, villages, households, and the relationship with Waaqaa (Desalegn et al., 2005). Peace is understood as the backbone of development, prosperity, cooperation, and happiness without which nothing could be achieved (Asafa, 2012). The notion of peace, Gadaa laws, respect for and fear of the great Qaalluu as a spiritual mediator between man and Waaqaa all contribute to social cohesion, orderly life, and continuity of the tradition (Asebe, 2007).

Any action or behavior that is harmful to human life and its flourishing is contradictory to peace (Guyo, 2009). Hence, every person should attempt to realize peace both individually and collectively. For this, the Gadaa system is an all-inclusive participatory democracy whereby all stakeholders play their part in peace-building, conflict resolution, and maintaining justice (Debela, 2017). It describes
peace as the Oromo’s harmonious relationship with the entire universe and the creator of everything, which in turn ensures a balanced and strong bond of interactions. Peace is thus in the very life of Oromo people’s peaceful interaction between and harmonious relationship with Waqqaa, nature, and fellow human beings based on the law of Waqqaa which is replicated in the Gadaa system.

5. Proactive values in the Gadaa system to maintaining peace

Gadaa system contained a hub of values, customs, norms, and principles that deal with several aspects of the Oromo people’s lives in itself. It is endowed with moral values that promote peaceful interaction among the Oromo society by “prohibiting injustice, social evils, and political chaos” (Dereje, 2012). The philosophy of peace in the Gadaa system shows that anything that negatively attacks the peaceful interaction of society and the tranquility of nature is intolerable. It is considered something disrespectful to the very purpose of creation and the creator who gave laws embedded in the Gadaa system. In the same vein, the Gadaa system incorporated values of peace-building for peaceful coexistence and social harmony. Also, the Gadaa system combined a “culture of peace, gender equality, solidarity, peacemaking, development, human rights, justice, natural resource, and environmental management” (Debela, 2017). For a detailed understanding, some of these values are mentioned below.

6. Safuu (Morality)

The Oromo people have lived for many years, and their life is dependent on safuu. In the Oromo society, safuu is a moral category about natural laws that they need to respect. It is the law of Waqqaa that cannot be amended, and being disobedient to it is immoral (Asnake, 2019). The key informant interview result indicated that safuu serves as a source of respect, which reduces the intensity of misbehaving, conflict, and violence (Informant 6, 2021). Oromo teaches his sons and daughters how to become ethical people in society. Likewise, in the Gadaa system, a child passes through different levels of grades to become a competent and morally good person (Informant 5, 2021). As a result, safuu maintains the interaction between humans and trees (Desalegn, 2013). This specifies that safuu is a law that regulates the interaction of the Oromo people with their environment. Depending on this law, Oromo protects the trees, rivers, mountains, and sacred places. On the other hand, Guyo (2009) states that religiously safuu represents the moral duty of a person to obey the laws of Waqqaa (God) and ensure his obedience to God’s authority. Embedded in religious beliefs and indigenous laws, safuu indirectly impose check and balance (Desalegn, 2013). Concerning religion, a person has to take into account that he is responsible to obey the laws of Waqqaa and acting accordingly to meet the requirements of the law. This authorizes whether a person is ethical and adherent to social ethos.

In the social context, safuu signifies that everyone has the moral responsibility of respecting and caring for each other (Guyo, 2009; Ibrahim, 2002). In the Oromo tradition, there is a culture of responsibility to help each other in times of difficulty, respect seniors, and those individuals and groups in higher social rank. It is widely accepted in the Oromo culture that a person who does not adhere to the value of safuu is considered deviant (Informant 1 & 5, 2021). As a result, he would be excommunicated and cannot participate in any social activities. The key informant interview data indicated that a person is not allowed to marry from his clan or lineage. If he/she does, in the Oromo tradition he/she should be excommunicated according to the customary law. He/she will be identified as “nama safuu cabse/cabsite (a man/woman broke the moral law)” (Informant 3, 2021). Another interview result indicated that:

Safuu is a lubricant of Oromo people’s interaction with God, nature, and fellow humans. This entails that safuu is a proactive value that prepares individuals for accepting and respecting laws that are from Waqqaa and Gadaa systems. When individuals are bound by safuu, they would accept the norms, values, and demands of society to maintain peace (Informant 8, 2021).
Therefore, a person whose heart and mind are occupied by safuu would not rush to involve in conflict and violence. Beyond that, safuu masters the disposition that preventing conflict before it happens and prioritizing peace is more important and everyone is responsible to abide by it.

7. Equality
Equality is a person’s enjoyment of equal opportunity regardless of political outlook, ethnicity, sex, and other backgrounds. The Oromo Gadaa system incorporates the principle of equality of all human beings. Equality in the Gadaa system is built on the concept of humanity. Humanity is the source of the dignity of a person whereby everyone is entitled to equal respect, treatment, and benefit. Equality emanates from namummaa (humanity), which is the pillar of the Gadaa system. In these social structures, the Oromo Gadaa system allocated corresponding rights and responsibilities (Informant 9, 2021). The interview result obtained from the Hayyyuu indicates that:

namummaa (humanity) is highly esteemed in the Gadaa system. Human dignity is God-given so that no one has the power or right to deprive of any man or woman whether he/she is Oromo or non-Oromo. It can be inferred that equality emanates from the law of Waqqa in which Gadaa law is embedded. Accepting human dignity and equality has great potential in peaceful co-existence and maintenance of a harmonious relationship (Informant 3 & 6, 2021).

It is depicted above in the Gadaa system peace is the harmonious relationship with God, nature, and other people neighboring non-Oromo people. This unveiled that the deep entrenchment of equality and equal treatment of all humans in the Gadaa system plays a key role in peacekeeping and peace-building. The Gadaa system “has been built on the kinship system through which the community has sustained equity, justice, equality, and harmony since the time immemorial” (Shelema, 2018). Wake describes that namummaa (humanity) is cherished in the Gadaa system because man is the creation of Waqqa who established a sense of dignity in human beings. Equal participation of all people in the political, social, economic, religious, and security aspects with specified roles and responsibilities directly or indirectly contribute to peace-building.

8. Respect and tolerance
In the Gadaa system, all persons are respected. The Gadaa system works on the desire and interest of Waqqa in which respect for all people and harmony exists. In line with this, the interview result gained from Abbaa Gadaa indicates that respect is the principle of creation on which interdependence is built. In this way, respecting nature is an essential value whereby trees are valued, a person is treated with dignity, and based on this mutual existence is maintained (Informant 7, 2021). Another interview result revealed that a person whose dignity, personality, beliefs, and ideals are respected would attempt for sustainable peace, development, and prosperity (Informant 10, 2021).

This entails that respect in the Gadaa system is the foundation of mutual existence that ensures the kernel of a person, thing, or nature to peacefully interact with everything in the environment. Respect in the Gadaa system spring from the relationship of a person with Waqqa and his laws, nature, and other fellow humans (Asafa & Schaffer, 2013). Respect facilitates harmonious interaction among people. In this way, peace and harmonious relationship between the Oromo people and other entities is maintained. In a society where the value of respect is highly embedded in their ways of life, all members of the society feel secure and a sense of dignity is built. When the culture of respect is maintained in society, individuals in society adhere to tolerating diversity. Tolerance of diversity, therefore, is a basis for peaceful coexistence and sustainable peace-building in society.

9. Laws and order
Peace and harmony in the Gadaa system are inconceivable without some kind of norm or law that governs the life, passions, and relations of people. In the Oromo tradition seeraa (law) has
the highest authority in the order of human society (Guyo, 2009). Customary laws guide the actions, interactions, and life of individual members of society. These laws are enacted by the Gadaa General Assembly every eight years at Gumiil/assembly when Baallii (power) is transferred from Abbaa Gadaa whose term of office is terminated to the new Abbaa Gadaa (Aregash, 2019). The Gadaa General Assembly is the highest legislative authority that reviews working laws, proclaims new ones, and is authorized to impeach the men in power when they fail to conform to the Gadaa laws. This organ also has the power to “settle major disputes that could not have been resolved at the lower possible levels of its judicial organs” (Zelalem, 2018). The Gadaa law-making bodies gather under the sycamore tree called Ooda and make laws (Zelalem, 2018). These laws are announced publically at the time of power transition and endorsed to guarantee mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence. The Gadaa assembly makes laws not only for individuals but also for animals (Zelalem, 2015). Furthermore, laws for trees, rivers, sacred places, and other environmental issues are also among these laws (Ginbar, 2018). One of the key informants indicates that without law/custom human interactions have no guarantees. Gadaa customary laws are governing instruments by which everyone is bound. These customary laws in the Gadaa system have a regulating power on any member of the society (Informant 4, 2021).

To endorse the law, the Gadaa system contains security forces. These groups are those men entrusted with the duty of maintaining law and order under the direction of Hayyuus in the Gadaa system (Jemjem, 2020). They are security forces who enforce laws and orders when a breach of laws occurs. Taddesse (2018) explains that the foollee/jalhaaba is responsible for ensuring the peace and security of Abbaa Gadaa and those with him during Gumiil (assembly) at ya’aa”. They also receive and transmit messages and collect gumaata (gift/tribute) by the order of Abbaa Gadaa or Lubaa” leaders (Jemjem, 2020). They should develop the quality and capacity to struggle against injustice anything that harms the tradition of the Gadaa system (Dereje, 2012). The result obtained from the key informant interview indicates that:

The role of these security forces is critical to maintain security issues during deliberations at ya’aa and make sure the safety of Abbaa Gadaa and the people with him. They are entrusted with the power to use force if the conflicting parties refuse to stop fighting or the fight got intense (Informant 7 &9, 2021).

This indicates that these men are trained based on values and customs in the Gadaa system so that they can fully undertake their duties and responsibilities. This shows that everyone in society is responsible to make their share in implementing these customary laws and fight anything that threatens public stability.

10. Post-conflict peace-building mechanisms in the Gadaa system

10.1. Jaarsummaa
In the Oromo Gadaa system, jaarsummaa is one of the processes of dispute resolution known as the “elder’s institutions” (Getachew, 2019). This process takes place in the presence of a third neutral party that mediates between the disputants. Jaarsa Araaraa (reconciliation elders) are those who have the experiences and skills to mediate between disputants. Jaarsa Biyaa or Jaarsa Araaraa are linked with the Gadaa system and have respect and acceptance in the Oromo society (Desalegn et al., 2005). This process is mostly practiced by community elders who are closer to the parties in conflict (Informant 2, 2021). In line with this, Dejene confirms that Jaarsa Araaraa discusses with disputants referring to norms, values, and laws in their tradition (G. C. Dejene, 2002). These norms and rules are given by Abbaa Gadaa and have a binding role on both disputants because refusing them is disobedience to these customs (Informant 5 & 6, 2021). Besides, Firdissa describes that elders are responsible to follow the traditional rules and regulations embedded in jaarsummaa and solve disputes, disagreements, and other problems in the family and the community to ensure peace, security, and social harmony (Firdissa, 2017).
On the other hand, Blen discusses that the resolution of the conflict between the disputants based on the Gadaa system helps the victim and defendant obtain justice and truth in a short time within their vicinity. She concludes that the Gadaa system is a peaceful and amicable means of settling disputes following fair and just procedures to social justice and the right to be heard (Blen, n.d.). The interview result indicated:

Jaarsummaa takes place at the gosaa (clan) level; however, if the case is beyond the capacity of community elders, then it is taken to Abboa Gadaa and his council. This mechanism has been practiced for a long to resolve any dispute that existed between Oromo and others living with them (Informant 3, 2021).

The finding of this research demonstrates that jaarsummaa has been a long-practiced peace-making and peace-building method that has been practiced in the Oromo tradition. This reconciliation and arbitration system practiced by Oromo elders “has been part of the Gadaa system from the ancient time up to the present time by which the Oromo peoples have lived a stable life by keeping their unity” (Ketema & Obsa, 2020). Its role in the peace-building process is priceless since it maintains the relationship between antagonistic bodies and makes them part of the peace-building process. However, this culture of peace-building is getting weak as the majority of people today are rushing to the court leaving this astounding culture behind.

10.2. The Siqqee institution

Siqqee is a women’s institution in the Gadaa system. Some authors argue that siqqee is a separate institution that works side by side with the Gadaa system (Endalkachew, 2018b). While others described siqqee as a part of the Gadaa system which empowers women (Solomon, 2017). According to one of the female key informants, siqqee is a women empowerment institution through which they play their part in the Gadaa system (Informant 9 &10, 2021). Siqqee is an exclusively married woman institution exercised to defend their rights against violations. Siqqee is a ritual stick that only married women carries with herself “during various social, ritual, spiritual and political purposes throughout her life starting from the very day of her wedding” (Tesema, 2016). According to Guji Oromo tradition, it was Qaalluu who gave siqqee to Abboa Gadaa’s wife after giving Bokku to him (Gemechu & Dereje, 2020). N. D. Dejene (2009) indicates, before the practice of the Gadaa system, in Guji tradition five kings and five queens ruled respectively. The Gadaa system came into being due to a lack of good governance and the prevalence of lawlessness during these queens’ administration (Informant 8, 2021). Endalkachew (2018b) indicates siqqee is an instrument of ensuring religious ritual, moral authority, peace, and harmony. Their role is not only limited to political and marriage, however, they also pray to Waaqqa during a severe situation like drought, infertility, famine, and pandemic through Ateeete. The interview result indicated that there is a widely accepted belief that women are very close to God so that he responds to their prayer (Informant 6&9, 2021).

Another key informant interview with Hayyuu shows that:

A woman is given priority in every aspect of the Gadaa system practices. For instance, in the Gadaa system, the law that should be made and declared first is the law concerning the rights of women. No one crosses or faces a woman holding siqqee because crossing her way or facing her is disrespectful. A person who sees siqqee has to wait until she crosses her way (Informant 10, 2021).

Furthermore, women carrying siqqee are authorized to fight when a violation of God’s law and safuu occurs. Under such an institution, the Oromo women struggle for their equality, respect for their rights, and benefits (Solomon, 2017). When a violation of rights occurs, a woman whose right was abused screams. This cry is a wake-up call to the rest of the siqqees to indicate she is in trouble. As soon as they hear her cry, they rush to the place where the incident took place. The “siqqee stand between man and man, man and Waaqqa, man and earth and sky to maintain
peace for human beings” (Getachew, 2019). Siiqqees pray to Waaqaa regularly when settling conflict (Endalkachew, 2018b). In the place where inter-ethnic or intra-ethnic conflicts occur when Haadha siiqqee intervenes and the war would stop (Tesema, 2016). Following siiqqee’s intervention, a messenger would travel between the conflicting parties to facilitate the restoration of peace (N. D. Dejene, 2009). The role of the siiqqee institution in the Gadaa system is so critical. The fact is that no ritual, ceremony, or practice be full in the absence of a woman. On the other hand, a woman is a mother to all, cares for her children, makes no partial treatment among her children, and is likened to Mother Nature. That is why the siiqqee institution’s contribution to peace-making in the Oromo tradition is highly advocated.

10.3. Qaalluu institution
Qaalluu is the spiritual leader and an intermediary agent between Waaqaa (God) and the Oromo people. This power passes through blood lineage and a person who is in charge of this duty communicates with God on the issues of his followers and bring directions from God (Informant 4, 2021). He is the spiritual director of any ritual practices, an overseer, and approves authority in the Gadaa practices. The interview data obtained from Abbaa Gadaa and Hayyuu reveals that:

Qaalluu approves the authority of Abbaa Gadaa and after that, whatever Abbaa Gadaa says comes into effect. The power of Abbaa Gadaa will not be effective unless approved by the Qaalluu, who gives qummbii (a type of plant) which Abbaa Gadaa eats during the approval of his authority. Qaalluu is the one who monitors Abbaa Gadaa and makes sure he exercises his power democratically (Informant 1 & 2, 2021).

In the Gadaa system, it is asserted that power comes from Waaqaa (God) and qaalluu is there to oversee it. This logic emerges from a belief that Qaalluu is the executive arm of Waaqaa to manage every aspect of human life. Qaalluu has a moral and social obligation to maintain harmony and support democratic relations based on the principles of “safuu, kaa’oo, Waaqaa, and uuma” (Muleta & Irshad, 2018). For this reason, Qaalluu is in charge of looking after the implementation of the laws of Waaqaa (Informant 4, 2021). This institution serves as a means of prohibiting immoral actions like stealing, lying, dishonesty, and deception. Qaalluu’s responsibility is to pray to Waaqaa and guide rituals during Gadaa ceremonies (Asnake, 2019). A person who is gifted with this should avail himself at every ceremony in the Gadaa system.

Qaalluu resolves conflict through seera kakuu (law of oath) that every one of the disputants should tell the truth (Kebede & Aregash, 2019) because the Qaalluu may curse those who do not obey the law of reconciliation. In some cases, the Qaalluu institution serves as an institution to which some cases are referred. For instance, in the case of stealing or a robbery where a person who committed the act remains unknown, the case will be taken to Qaalluu. Through a power bestowed to him by Waaqaa, he will give clues to bring who committed the crime. The interview data showed:

Qaalluu is feared, venerated, and respected because of its spiritual power bestowed to him by Waaqaa whose laws none must not break. Qaalluu has a double role to play in the peace-building process. The first one is that he warns anyone who intentionally does something, which violates peace, will annoy God and be subject to curses. On the other hand, once disputes existed between disputants they have to work hard to bring peace obeying the law of Waaqaa, Abbaa Gadaa, and elders. This must be done because failure to obey and do what the Qaalluu dictates constitute disobedience (Informant 1&2, 2021).

Therefore, the place of qaalluu in peace-building by maintaining both religious and social responsibilities along with the role played by its followers is paramount. Individuals obey Qaalluu’s declaration and guidance with the fear that some kind of rage would follow. This implies that the Qaalluu institution’s role in peace-building is double-edged- preemptive and reactive approaches.
10.4. Gumaa system

Gumaa is another indigenous conflict resolution and peace-building mechanism of the Oromo society. It is known by another name in different Oromo tribes, for instance, known as Gondooroaa in the Guji Oromo (Gumi, 2016). Gumaa is mostly used to address the homicide case between the murderer’s side and the victim’s side. Gumaa system maintains justice for the victim and restores peace (Aregash, 2019). Gumaa system serves as a conflict resolution mechanism in which a person who committed homicide or damage compensate for the victim (Getachew, 2019). It is mostly, oriented to avoid further lack of peace between the murderer’s side and the victim’s side (Tamene, 2013). This is to restore co-existence and strengthen social values, norms, and make sure peaceful coexistence (Jeylan, 2017).

The key informant interview showed that the Gumaa system also maintains the relationship between Oromo and animals. For instance, if a person kills a hyena, you will be threatened by its species until he compensates with a cow, donkey, or sheep (Informant 4, 2021). Tamene (2013) argues that the Oromo people’s dependence on Gumaa is either an expression of resistance against law without justice or a manifestation of inadequacies of the legal system to feud the way the public wants. He further goes on to say it is either because of the inaccessibility of the legal system or the inability to do justice according to the philosophy of Oromo conflict resolution and peace-building.

Another key informant interview result indicates that what makes the Gumaa unique in the Gadaa system is that it avoids the victim’s side not to go for revenge through oath and work for sustainable peace (Informant 7, 2021). It can be inferred from this that Gumaa is one of the approaches in the Gadaa system to peacefully resolve murder cases in the Oromo people and work for sustainable peace between parties. In doing so, the Gumaa system not only punishes the offender or the wrongdoer but also restores social harmony, psychological, and social capital destroyed by the homicide (Tamene, 2013), which the legal system cannot do. This reveals that the Gumaa system minimizes the degree of friction between the disputants and concludes through an oath that they must not consider each other as the enemy rather as a family.

11. Conclusion

The Oromo Gadaa system is a democratic political, social, economic, and cultural governance. The Gadaa system has been practiced by Oromo from time immemorial. It has been cementing the unity of the Oromo people with Waaqaa (God), umamaa (nature), and other fellow humans. Customary laws, norms, values, and ideals embedded in the Gadaa system focus on maintaining peace and harmony. In the gadaa system, the concept of peace is when a man is in harmony with Waaqaa (God), nature, and other fellow humans. Especially, the concept of namummaa (humanity) is an esteemed element that Oromo respects the dignity of human beings that Waaqaa bestowed in them. That is why Oromo embraces non-Oromos through moggaasa (naming) and guddifachaa (adoption). Among other things, the Oromo tradition of accepting and including non-Oromo show that they should feel safe. This is contained in the Gadaa system that living with neighboring people is valuing what the customary laws, norms and Oromo culture requires. In the Gadaa system, elements of co-existence and mutual understanding are embedded. It incorporated values and elements capable of making proactive and preventive roles by controlling the mind and heart of individuals. These values are safuu (moral law), the outstanding belief in the equality of human beings, respecting Waaqaa (God) and his laws, umamaa (nature), and other fellow humans, and
tolerance of diversity and accepting them as they are. Furthermore, laws and order are also important values among others whereby everything is governed to maintain peaceful coexistence, mutual understanding, and common goals. On the other hand, once a dispute existed the Gadaa system uses Jaarsummaa, siiqee, aaalluu, and gumaa/gondooreo institutions to resolve conflict, transform, and preserve peace. In these mechanisms, the role of laws, norms, and customs that regulate their interaction and provide ways to maintain peace and harmony with the creator, creatures, and other fellow humans is so critical. The post-conflict peace-building strategies and mechanisms in the Gadaa system have been restorative of social, economic, and political contradictions. Gadaa system incorporated these and many more approaches which are even not mentioned in this research. It is the system working for the well-being of the Oromo people and their neighbors and the whole environment and all things within it. The Gadaa system, therefore, is a peaceful peace-building system whereby both disputants are brought together based on consensual decision-making. Hence, it is essential to reinforce the Gadaa system by protecting it from anything that affects it, protecting its sacred sites, and encouraging its role in peacebuilding.

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Notes
1. Abbaa Gadaa is the leader in the Gadaa system who manages the administration works.
2. Hayuus are policy making, interpretation and implementation bodies in the Gadaa system.
3. Yao’a is collective name of members of Gadaa Council who works at different structure in the Gadaa system.
4. Lubaas are parties in the Gadaa system.
5. Bakkuu Hororoo is the scepter, which Abbaa Gadaa carries with himself that symbolizes power and authority.
6. Ateeetee is women’s exclusive ritual ceremony that is conducted at riverbank to pray to waqooq.
7. Haadha Siiqee is married women holding a ritual stick siiqee that indicates woman’s power.
8. Gumi (2016) describes Gondooreo as “Guji Oromo indigenous institutions of conflict resolution, justice administration and peace building” especially the case of murder.

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