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# 1 **Gadaa as an Integrative Factor of Political Organisation**

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**Summary** 1.1 Introduction. – 1.2 Generic Features of Council Organisation. – 1.3 Reevaluating the Political Significance of Kinship. – 1.4 *Gadaa* as an Integrative Factor of Political Organisation. – 1.5 Other Borana Councils. – 1.6 A Few Observations.

## 1.1 Introduction

*Gadaa* is the generational<sup>1</sup> class system typical of the Oromo people in Ethiopia and Kenya. Its internal mechanisms are quite clear and noncontroversial, thanks to historical written sources and the more recent systematic work of scholars and anthropologists. In its basic form, a succession of named generation classes passes through

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a series of named grades, with promotions occurring at fixed intervals of eight years. Individuals are enrolled in the class five positions below their father's class. Beyond this general framework, there are variances in terminology and norms among different Oromo groups.<sup>2</sup>

The functional attributes of *gadaa* are not as clear and universal-ly agreed upon as its structural principles. Since the earlier reports, the *gadaa* council/assembly has been described as a sort of parliament and as a centre of government characterised by a rotation of leadership: every eight years, a new generation class takes the leadership of the *gadaa* council and 'rules' the country. This class stays in power for eight years, a *gadaa* period. The leader of the generation class - *abbaa gadaa* among the Borana or Gujji Oromo or *abbaa bokkuu* among other Oromo territorial sections - has often been referred to as 'chief' of the nation or tribe for eight years. This view has been a sort of anthropological cliché, discussed and criticised in *Age, Generation and Time*, a volume edited by Paul Baxter and Uri Almagor (1978a). The contributors of that volume analyse *gadaa* in terms of a ritual and conceptual system rather than a political one. They criticise the established interpretation of *gadaa* (Baxter, Almagor 1978b; Baxter 1978a) and, specifically, that of Asmarom Legesse (Baxter 1978a, 153-5), whose book, *Gada. Three Approaches to the Study of African Society* (1973), has become the classic reference for the *gadaa* system. Both Baxter and Legesse carried on their systematic field research among the Borana, a pastoral section of the Oromo living across the border between Ethiopia and Kenya.

Baxter suggests that classes, per se, do not have direct control over economic resources (Baxter, Almagor 1978b, 9; Baxter 1978a, 158), nor do they "rule or have power of a direct political kind" (Baxter 1978a, 152). Thus, he opens a debate not only on the actual political role of *gadaa* but also on the Oromo political organisation in general. He suggests that formal and informal general assemblies, rather than sets, perform the few political tasks (Baxter, Almagor 1978b, 19). Such an approach reflects what Baxter calls a "comparative Africanist perspective" (Baxter 1978a, 153).

In this paper, I reconsider the political significance of *gadaa*, trying to analyse its role in the assembly organisation.<sup>3</sup> I limit myself to the ethnographic case of the Borana, among whom I carried out field research in 1986. Being concerned with the traditional organisation, I take into account only assemblies and other correlated elements that constitute a traditional heritage.

<sup>2</sup> After the 19th century incorporation of the Oromo into the Ethiopia empire some Oromo territorial sections have abandoned the *gadaa* system.

<sup>3</sup> I have already discussed the relation between political activity and assembly organisation among the Borana in an article published in Italian language (Bassi 1988a).

## 1.2 Generic Features of Council Organisation

The Borana have various types of assemblies, each with specific organisational principles and names. Institutional meetings among the Borana can be seen as community-in councils or assemblies, characterised by the right of all full members of the political community to attend and participate (Kuper 1971, 14). Decisions are reached through consensus, with fines and compensations given in heads of cattle possibly being decided. Typically, members of the institutional political elite formally express such sanctions. The political elite is internally differentiated, consisting, in order of growing authority, of *jaallaba*, *jaallaba abbaa qa'ee*, *hayyuu*, and at the same level, *abbaa gadaa* and *qaalluu*. Different leaders have specific competencies for various types of assembly. Except for the *qaalluu*, political leaders engage in economic activities like anyone else for most of their lives. According to Borana ethics, they have no special authority in the decision-making process, although they are often influential. People attribute their political influence to their greater knowledge of *aadaa* and *seera* – traditional norms and laws recognised by everyone as binding – and other qualities necessary for holding office.

The Borana do not dispose of any executive force, nor can anyone, including the political leadership, impose anything on others by the use of force or violence. Baxter explains the nature of authority in terms of exclusion from *nagaa Booranaa*, the Peace of the Borana, a fundamental Borana concept having both sociological and sacred implications. It consists of the absence of strife and active cooperation and concord (Baxter 1965, 65), but it is also critical in the relationship between people and God (Baxter 1978a, 167).

Backsliders are simply brought into line by being excluded from the blessing and prayers, even from the exchange of greetings, and hence from the Peace. No man can exist for long as a social, herding or ritual isolate. The last resort, after withholding greetings and blessings, is the curse, which separates its recipient from all social and ritual support. (Baxter 1978a, 4-5)

Individuals may reject an assembly decision. In such cases, the matter is successively discussed in other assemblies under the responsibility of a leader of greater standing. The curse of the Borana, *abaarsa*, is formulated at the general assembly of the Borana, the *Gumii Gaayoo* (the assembly of the multitude), held every eight years. Judicial cases rarely reach this last level. In the traditional context, *abaarsa* implies exclusion from the community. Even basic tasks, such as extracting water from the deep traditional wells, require the cooperation of numerous pastoral units. Exclusion from *nagaa*, and hence

from social cooperation, means exclusion from access to dry-season water and the inability to continue traditional pastoral activities.

Kuper suggests that “the principles by which membership of any council is fixed must be directly related to the forms of social differentiation in the society” (1971, 15). From this perspective, it is perhaps possible to distinguish Borana institutional assemblies into two groups. In the first group, membership is determined by locality; all individuals residing in a given area may take part in the assembly. The local community is typically a village (*ollaa*) or a group of villages (*deeda*) that habitually utilise the same water resources during the dry season. These assemblies are known as *kora* (meeting) *ollaa* or *kora deeda*. The decision-making process is strongly influenced by structural age.<sup>4</sup> Though anyone, including women and youths, may participate and talk, decisions are reached by consensus of the elders only. For this reason, the assemblies may be called *kora jaroollee*, or the “assembly of elders”. Elderhood is not related to the *gadaa* system but rather to the *hariyaa*, an age-set system integrated with the *gadaa* system. Individuals can easily change their place of residence, and, therefore, in this context, friendship, voluntary choice of affiliation, and neighbourliness are, as discussed by Herbert Lewis (1975, 201), primary elements of social organisation.

In the second group of assemblies, membership is more ascriptive in character. Various Borana institutions – kinship, *qaalluu*, and the *gadaa* system – provide the framework for social differentiation and assembly membership. The *gadaa* system plays a role in this second group, which consequently is the focus of the following analysis.

### 1.3 Revaluating the Political Significance of Kinship

Because descent groups have no territorial connotations and because there is a tendency to focus attention on *gadaa*, the relevance of kinship in Oromo social and political organisation might have been underestimated. The focus on *gadaa* may be found in Legesse’s view of the Borana political system: the *gadaa* class, assisted by age sets, is seen as the principal repository of political authority, and the political role of kinship is considered in terms of its influence in the process of electing *gadaa* leaders (Legesse 1973, 225). Thus, kinship is considered only in terms of its influence over *gadaa*. Instead, I consider here the political role that the descent system plays per se, that is, its direct influence on council organisation.

<sup>4</sup> In societies regulated by age class systems structural age is related “to the degree of integration into social life and the grades of successive promotion in society” (Bernardi 1985, 9).

The Borana descent system is patrilineal and segmented. At no level of segmentation are descent groups bound by residential norms, so that members of any section may be found in any local community. The Borana are divided into two exogamic moieties, called *Saabbo* and *Goona*. Below the level of moieties, there are no precise symmetries. Moieties are segmented into *gosa*, *gosa* into *mana*, and *mana* into *balbala*. Groups of *mana* or groups of *gosa* may also be found. Such groups are considered normal descent sections: all bear their distinctive name and constitute a standard point of segmentation.

A second differentiation of population overlaps this segmentation. Some sections are *Warra Qaalluu* (people of the *Qaalluu*); the others are *Warra Bokkuu* (people of the sceptre). Such a distinction is not directly related to the principles of descent. There are five *Warra Qaalluu* descent sections, each of them having a *qaalluu*, a holy dignitary whose origin is considered divine.<sup>5</sup> The first descent section, known as *Karrayyuu Warra Qaalluu*, is formed by twelve out of twenty-eight *mana* of the group *Daayyoo*, a subdivision of the *gosa Karrayyuu* (*Saabbo*) [fig. 1].



Figure 1 Major Borana Descent Sections

The *gosa Odituu*, which is one of the seven *gosa* of *Fuleellee* (*Goona*), is the second descent section. Three out of seven *gosa* of *Mataarrii* (*Saabbo*) constitute the other three *Warra Qaalluu* descent sections. The *qaalluu Karrayyuu* and the *qaalluu Odituu* are considered more important, being ritually associated with the two moieties.

Borana descent terms, such as *gosa* or *mana*, only tendentially indicate precise levels of segmentation. *Mana* are consistently subdivisions of a *gosa*, but the two terms do not always refer to descent groups with similar functional and organisational attributes,<sup>6</sup> and *gosa* may refer to more than one level of segmentation. Therefore, I will use the terms clan and lineage to indicate descent sections with similar functional characteristics. A clan will be considered the minimal descent section disposing of a regular general assembly whose

<sup>5</sup> Haberland (1963) reports some variants on the myth concerning the origin of *qaalluu*.

<sup>6</sup> Hultin reports a similar situation among the Matcha Oromo (1990, 101).

members recognise a common *hayyuu*. Clans are all found below the level of segmentation reported in Figure 1. The term lineage will apply to sections at a lower level of segmentation, that is, to the sections into which each clan is divided.

The office of *hayyuu* has often been associated with *gadaa*. As we shall see, the process of training, the early ritual activity, and the legitimacy of the office are indissolubly tied to the context of *gadaa*, or, for the *Warra Qaalluu* clans, to the institution of the *qaalluu*. Nevertheless, there is a strong correlation between the office of *hayyuu* and the clan's activity. *Hayyuu* are normally classified according to their clan membership, and they are the organisers and the moderators of the assembly of their own clan. The latter is called *kora gosaa*, and it is held yearly unless special constraints occur. All clan members are concerned with the *kora gosaa*. However, because clan assemblies are always held in the Borana homelands, in Ethiopia, where all the *hayyuu* live, most of the Kenyan Borana do not participate in the assembly. In fact, among the three territorial sections of the Kenyan Borana – Obbuu (the area of Mooyyale and Sololo), Baddaa Saakee (Marsabit Mountain), and Waasoo (Isiolo) – only Obbuu is territorially contiguous with the Ethiopian Borana area.

Some *gosa*, especially in the *Goon* moiety, organise the *kora gosaa* jointly, in groups of two or three. Such groups are functionally equivalent to normal clans, except that the *hayyuu* maintain their clan attribute in speech. In this paper, such groups will be considered as simple clans.

Clans are very large, both numerically and territorially. Consequently, the clan assembly is characterised by the presence of an institutionalised representative elite, although any clan member may participate directly. Representation in the *kora gosaa* is related to two principles: descent and territory. The lineages into which each clan is segmented have their *jaallaba* (lineage leaders). Their activity is mainly carried on in their local community. In the context of the *kora gosaa*, they typically act as spokesmen for the people of their lineage living in their local community. In some of the clans, experienced and prestigious *jaallaba* are selected for the office of *abbaa qa'ee* (*jaallaba abbaa qa'ee*), that is an officer having the capacity to organise and lead formal meetings. Such events are territorial decentralisations of the *kora gosaa*: they gather the members of a clan residing in a given area. The area is not rigidly defined and depends on the number of *jaallaba abbaa qa'ee* available in the clan and on their place of residence. The assemblies led by the *jaallaba abbaa qa'ee* are normally indicated by the term *kora* (meeting) plus the name of the clan, or *kora* plus a name indicating the specific reason for which the assembly has been called. If possible, clan matters are tackled and solved directly in this decentralised context. Only matters that require the consensus of the whole clan and problems

that have not been solved under the competence of the *abbaa qa'ee* are discussed at the *kora gosaa*, but even in this case, they are preliminarily discussed in the decentralised assemblies. In the context of the *kora gosaa*, the *jaallaba abbaa qa' ee* act as representatives of the members of the assembly they organise.

Clans also hold important economic significance, although a detailed discussion of economic matters is beyond the scope of this context. It is sufficient to note that clans (1) may use individually controlled cattle to assist impoverished clan members (Bassi 1990a),<sup>7</sup> and (2) play a fundamental role in the digging, maintenance, and regulation of wells (Legesse 1973, 43), which are crucial human-made investments to access pastoral natural resources in the Borana homelands.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, even if descent groups do not have territorial connotations, clans appear to be the basic units of Borana political organisation through their structured councils. Most of Borana's political *offices* - *jaallaba*, *jaallaba abbaa qa'ee*, and *hayyuu* - find their basic definition concerning the internal organisation and social differentiation of clans.

The traditional political significance of clans also affects state-related politics. Dahl found out that among the Borana of Isiolo (Kenya) the clan "is still vital to faction-building in the modern political context" (Dahl 1979, 232). I found a similar situation in Sololo, where two big clans competed for elective governmental offices.

#### 1.4 *Gadaa* as an Integrative Factor of Political Organisation

Bernardi describes the dynamic interconnection between age and generation classes and grades as a way of regulating the social life of individuals. In their corporate promotion through the series of grades, members of a class progressively acquire specific powers, resulting in the "capacity to perform social acts" (Bernardi 1985, 27-30). These characteristics are found in the *gadaa* system. Different social activities and responsibilities are associated with different grades.<sup>9</sup> Passages through the grades are marked by collective ceremonies involving the whole class. Thus, most of the rites of passage happen in the context of what is generally called the *gadaa* cycle. However, as Baxter made clear, the *gadaa* cycle is an idealised form

<sup>7</sup> Ch. 5 in this book.

<sup>8</sup> Information on natural resources in the Borana homelands and on patterns of exploitation may be found in Helland (1980), Upton (1986), Baxter (1970) and Oba (1990).

<sup>9</sup> The discussion of the different activities connected with each grade is not among the aims of this paper. Thus, even the military implications of *gadaa* will not be considered.

of social relations (Baxter 1978a, 155). Classes are formed based on the position of one's father in the system rather than based on one's age, and consequently, only a few individuals are born when their generation class is in the first grade, *daballee*, the grade of infants. The majority of the population is born when their set is already in the upper grades or has passed through the whole series of grades,<sup>10</sup> finding themselves in grades whose ideal social activity ill-suits their real age, or completely out of the grades. Those who are unable to participate in the *gadaa* ceremonies with their generation class perform the rites of passage singularly or in the collective context of the *hariyaa*. It is this latter system that absolves the typical function of regulating the progressive acquisition of powers by individuals on a diffused basis. The political function of the *gadaa* has rather been associated with the role of the *gadaa* council.

Among the Borana, the *gadaa* council is called *yaa'a gadaa*. The term *yaa'a* describes a council or camp formed by specific groups of people whose existence is grounded on ritual requirements of particular importance. The term *gadaa* distinguishes the *yaa'a* inherent to the *gadaa* system from the other five *yaa'a*, led by each of the five *qaalluu* of the Borana. The *ya'aa gadaa* follows a ritual circuit lasting eight years, a *gadaa* period, during which a specific generation class is considered responsible for the *ya'aa*. The set is represented by six councillors, called *hayyuu aduulaa*. They are chosen among the few members of the class who were born *daballee*, that is, those who represent a paradigm of the ideal correspondence between age and generation.

The *ya'aa gadaa* consists of three separate camps. The *ya'aa arbooraa* is considered the most important. It is led by the *abbaa gadaa arbooraa*, the first nominated among the six *hayyuu aduulaa*. There other two mobile villages are called *ya'aa kontoomaa*, each led by an *abbaa gadaa kontoomaa*, the second and third *hayyuu aduulaa* to be nominated.

Other important councillors of the *ya'aa gadaa* are the *hayyuu garbaa* and the *hayyuu meeddhichaa*. The distinction between the two offices is determined by the *ya'aa - arbooraa* or *kntoomaa* - in which they live. According to my field data, the *hayyuu garbaa* and *meeddhichaa* do not need to belong to any particular generation class. The only requirement is that they must have been in service at the *yaa'a* for one or more *gadaa* periods (each lasting 8 years) as *jaallaba*, or voluntary assistants.

Legesse explains that the *ya'aa gadaa* is concerned with any area of social life:

<sup>10</sup> The Borana have secondary norms (Baxter, Almagor 1978b,7) that prevent having persons born too early, but they cannot avoid having them born too late. Legesse provides a demographic survey on the Borana *gadaa* system (1973).



The assembly as a whole is charged with the responsibility of resolving major crises between descent groups, clans or camps [...] The manifest purpose of their travel is to perform ritual. However, every ritual that they performed in 1963 and 1971 was either preceded or interrupted by a crisis. (Legesse 1973, 85)

Thus, despite the ritual's manifest purpose, the assembly performs activities that are clearly political. I would suggest, however, that the direct political concern of the *gadaa* council is restricted within specific social limits.

All my *Warra Qaalluu* informants – elders, *jaallaba*, *allaaba abbaa qa' ee*, and personal servants of the *qaalluu Karrayyuu* – agreed that the *Warra Qaalluu* are excluded from the *yaa'a gadaa* and that they are not concerned with the public discussions occurring in that context. The *Warra Qaalluu* perform with the *Warra Bokkuu* all the rites of passage in the *gadaa* cycle, but they are excluded from the *Baallii walirraafuudhuu* (exchange of sceptre), the ceremony marking the passage of responsibility of the *yaa'a gadaa* from one class to the next (Legesse 1973, 81). Individuals belonging to the *Warra Qaalluu* clans cannot be *hayyuu aduulaa*, *garbaa*, *meeddhichaa*, or *jaallaba* in service at the *yaa'a gadaa*. They simply have nothing to do with that *yaa'a*.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the direct political activity of the *yaa'a gadaa* only applies to the *Warra Bokkuu* clans.

The view of the class in the *gadaa* grade as being in power also needs some discussion. The title of Legesse's paragraph regarding the *gadaa* grade is "Grade VI: *Gada*, the Stage Political and Ritual Leadership" (1973, 81). During the eight years of permanence in the grade, the set is described as being in power (1973, 82-3). The following stages are described as those of "partial retirement" (1973, 92). After the *gadaa* grade, individuals would be semi-retired because they take an important part in the *Gumii Gaayoo*, and they may serve as assistants at the *yaa'a* and retain advisory authority (Legesse 1973, 92-3).

A first observation regards the composition of the council: among the many *hayyuu*, only six, the *hayyuu aduulaa*, belong to the generation class in power. The *hayyuu garbaa* and the *hayyuu meeddhichaa* are chosen regardless of their generation class membership. The *hayyuu aduulaa* do not enjoy a special type of political power in the council (Legesse 1973, 64, 85).

A second observation regards their 'partial retirement'. The expression essentially refers to the activity in the *gadaa* assembly, but it should not imply retirement, not even partial, from the political

<sup>11</sup> In former times, the *qaalluu Karrayyuu* and the *qaalluu Odituu* had the responsibility of formally nominating the *hayyuu aduulaa*. But during a recent *Gumii Gaayoo*, even such a prerogative had been abolished.

activity in general. All *hayyuu*, including the *abbaa gadaa*, continue their activity as clan leaders after their service at the *yaa'a*. Again and again, local *jaallaba* said that if they had unsolved problems, they would bring them to the attention of a *hayyuu* of their own clan. They could report to a *hayyuu* in service at the *yaa'a*, but because *hayyuu* in service are often too busy with performing rituals, they usually prefer to bring the matter to the attention of those who already completed the permanence at the *yaa'a*. If explicitly asked, my informants confirmed that councillors retain all their authority even after the service at the *yaa'a*. Thus, that the “*adulawh* councillors of these semi-retired classes enjoy the same kind of power in the assembly of the multitudes as does the class in power” (Legesse 1973, 93) may perhaps be a simple consequence of the fact that the ‘semi-retired’ officers do indeed retain all their political authority.

Although the *hayyuu aduulaa* symbolically represent the generation class, *hayyuu* may be regarded as clan leaders even in the context of the *yaa'a*. The selection of the councillors is made in the context of the *kora gosaa*. My informant and friend Bantee Abbagalaa stressed that the role of the *abbaa gadaa* would be limited to giving public announcements of the chosen persons. He also suggested that there is a rotation among different clans for getting the various offices of *hayyuu*. In this way, political competition among clans would be reduced. Indeed, Legesse reported a case of political competition during the process of selecting a *hayyuu aduulaa*, but it arose because his clan was not in agreement about presenting him (Legesse 1973, 208-29).

The following case may show that even economic activities eventually promoted by members of the *yaa'a* are mainly based on clan membership and the clan’s organisational capacity. Legesse describes the impressive work of reopening an abandoned well (1973, 86-7). The *abbaa gadaa* in service at the *yaa'a* took the initiative. Most of the required resources, approximately 280 head of cattle, were provided by his own clan. Consequently, “the clan will collectively own the well”, and “other clans that made smaller contributions will be recognized as having special rights” (Legesse 1973, 87). Neither the generation class nor the *yaa'a* as a permanent body have special rights to that well.

Lastly, the Law of Recruitment – publicly announced during the *Gumii Gaayoo* of 1966 and reported by Legesse (1973, 97) – shows that the *hayyuu* in service at the *yaa'a* have a special authority only within the limits of their clan. According to such law, the *gadaa* councillors have the authority to recruit assistants for the *gadaa* council (even by driving their cattle away to force them to follow), but the *hayyuu* have this power only within their own clan (Legesse 1973, 97).

The interpretation of the *yaa'a gadaa* as a centre of government, proposed by Legesse and other scholars, is therefore doubtful.

Similarly, the members of the generation class occupying the *gadaa* grade cannot be considered the holders of centralised political power. The *yaa'a* is rather a context where the leaders (*hayyuu*) of the basic political groups, the clans, are permanently together for ritual purposes.

In a “primary society”<sup>12</sup> such as that of the Borana, ritual and politics are not categories excluding each other. Baxter suggests that one of the principal purposes of *gadaa* is the maintenance of *nagaa* (1978, 152, 167). As already noted, the *nagaa* has both sacred and sociological implications. I would suggest that the *gadaa* system has an important political function, playing a fundamental integrative role among the clans. Such a role may be schematised and summarised in three main points:

1. Structural Organisation. Even if the existence of the *yaa'a gadaa* is grounded on ritual requirements, the contemporary presence of *hayyuu* and *jaallaba* of different *Warra Bokkuu* clans makes the council suitable for political debate and activity, especially for the resolution of interclan matters. Such activity concerns all, and only, the *Warra Bokkuu* clans.
2. Ritual Super-integration. The collective performing of rites and prayers<sup>13</sup> enforces a sense of unity. As Baxter suggested, the *nagaa Booranaa* is repetitively invoked and reiterated during the ceremonies (Baxter 1965). People from all Borana clans assemble to perform *gadaa* collective ceremonies. A common feature of *gadaa*-connected rites, even when privately performed, is the selection of the *Torban* (the ‘Seven’). The *Torban* are seven officiants chosen with equilibrium among the major descent subdivisions: four of them must belong to the *Goonaa* moiety and three to the *Saabbo* moiety, or vice versa (see Figure 1). Also, all the groups into which the moieties are divided must be represented. The *Torban* ritually act as one and symbolise and stress the unity of all Borana, despite descent divisions. Usually, the same ceremony is held successively in different ceremonial grounds. The officiants or a symbolic group of officiants go through all the sites located in the Borana homelands (Ethiopia), representing a connection among local communities. Similar ritual features are found in the *yaa'a gadaa*. It consists of a group of selected people co-residing for praying and sacrificing together for the *nagaa*. Over the eight years, the *yaa'a* moves from one ritual site to

<sup>12</sup> In Bernardi’s terminology, societies without states are “primary polities” (Bernardi 1985, 26).

<sup>13</sup> Descriptions of *gadaa* ceremonies are especially provided by Legesse (1973) and Baxter (1954). See Baxter (1990) for an analysis of Borana prayers.

the next. Ritual responsibility is attributed to the *hayyuu ad-uulaa*. Like the *Torban*, they are selected among the major Borana descent sections. Also, as mentioned, they all must belong to the generation class occupying the *gadaa* grade, and they are chosen from among the clan members who represent the paradigmatic correspondence between age and generation. These qualifications might give an idea of the general symbolic and cognitive sense of the *gadaa* system: renewal of the internal social harmony, *nagaa Booranaa*, throughout the succession of generations. The values expressed in *gadaa* rituals influence the behaviour and attitudes of individuals, and therefore, they also have an indirect, but not marginal, political effect.

3. Process of Formation of Political Elite. The basic values expressed in *gadaa* rituals become particularly significant with the political leadership. To become *hayyuu*, a man must go through a long inculturation and formative process at the *yaa'a*. Only members of the *Warra Bokkuu* descent sections do it at the *yaa'a gadaa*, whereas the *hayyuu* of the *Warra Qaalluu* give service at their respective *yaa'a qaalluu*. The *hayyuu aduulaa* are selected when their generation class enters the *kuusaa* grade (Pecci 1941, 314; Legesse 1973, 61-3), about three *gadaa* periods before their generational class enters the *gadaa* grade and overtakes the responsibility of leading the *yaa'a* rituals. During all this time, they live and perform rituals together (Legesse 1973, 64). The *hayyuu garbaa* and *meeddhichaa*, before becoming *hayyuu*, must have already served at the *yaa'a* as *jaallaba* for one or more *gadaa* periods. In that context, discussion of *aadaa* and *seera* (tradition, norms, and laws) occurs, and ritual and political action for unity and peace are continually performed. Thus, they learn the Borana *aadaa* and *seera* and assimilate the very basic Borana values expressed by *nagaa*. In other words, they learn to act not only on behalf of their clan but also in the interest of the Borana all. This formative process, I believe, is crucial. The leaders are selected at the clan assembly; after their 'retirement' they perform political activity, especially in the context of the clan assembly, but they are formally recognised as clan leaders only after their time in the *yaa'a*. Thus, the legitimacy of leadership is based on *gadaa* (*Warra Bokkuu* clans) and in the *qaalluu* institution (*Warra Qaalluu* clans).

## 1.5 Other Borana Councils

The *yaa'a gadaa* gather councillors from all the *Warra Bokkuu* clans. The *Warra Qaalluu* are, in contrast, concerned with their respective *yaa'a qaalluu*. Instead of the *hayyuu aduulaa* performing rituals together, the central element of the five *yaa'a qaalluu* is the permanent and hereditary sacredness of the *qaalluu* himself. The salient ceremonies are the *muudaa*, ritual pilgrimages to the *qaalluu*. The pilgrims bring him symbolic gifts and get his blessing. The *nagaa Booranaa* is also strongly associated with the *qaalluu* (Baxter 1965, 69). At each *yaa'a qaalluu*, there are four *hayyuu garbaa*, having no relation with generation class affiliation. They also are renewed every *gadaa* period. Thus, even the leadership of the *Warra Qaalluu* clan goes through the formative process at the *yaa'a*. The *yaa'a qaalluu Karrayyuu* gathers members of the twelve *mana Karrayyuu Warra Qaalluu*, each constituting, by the definition of clan here adopted, a single clan. Thus, despite the different ritual principles and rites, such *yaa'a* has an integrative political function similar to, and on the same structural level as, that of the *yaa'a gadaa*.

The six *yaa'a*, on the whole, represent a precise structural level. They practically constitute permanent councils, and each Borana clan refers to one or the other *yaa'a*. Two of them, the *yaa'a qaalluu Karrayyuu* and *yaa'a gadaa*, gather leaders of different clans.

The structural division into the six *gadaa* and *qaalluu* councils is overcome with the *Gumii Gaayoo* or assembly of the multitude, the general assembly of the Borana held every eight years at Gaayo locality. All Borana, regardless of descent, locality, and generation class differentiation, are concerned with the *Gumii Gaayoo* and may attend. This is therefore a very large community-in council, requiring heavy organisational efforts. It is the only legislative body.<sup>14</sup> Although it is organised under the responsibility of the councillors of the *yaa'a gadaa*, it is not strictly regarded as a *gadaa* assembly.

According to Richards, council mechanisms may provide a means of achieving results such as linking the sections of a segmentary society together using some form of federal council (1971, 6). In this sense, the Borana councils above described may be schematised [fig. 2]. Descent provides the basic units of Borana political organisation - the clan - but at the higher council level, the segmentation provided by descent is no longer significant. The *gadaa* system and the institution of the *qaalluu*, with their *yaa'a*, are instead determinants concerning federal councils. A broader analysis of the Borana council organisation should include the assemblies based in locality (*ko-ra jaroollee*) and those that constitute territorial decentralisations of

<sup>14</sup> A description of the *Gumii Gaayo* is provided by Legesse (1973, 93-9).

the *kora gosaa*, as well as the role of structural age – the latter related to the *hariyaa* system – in all assembly contexts.

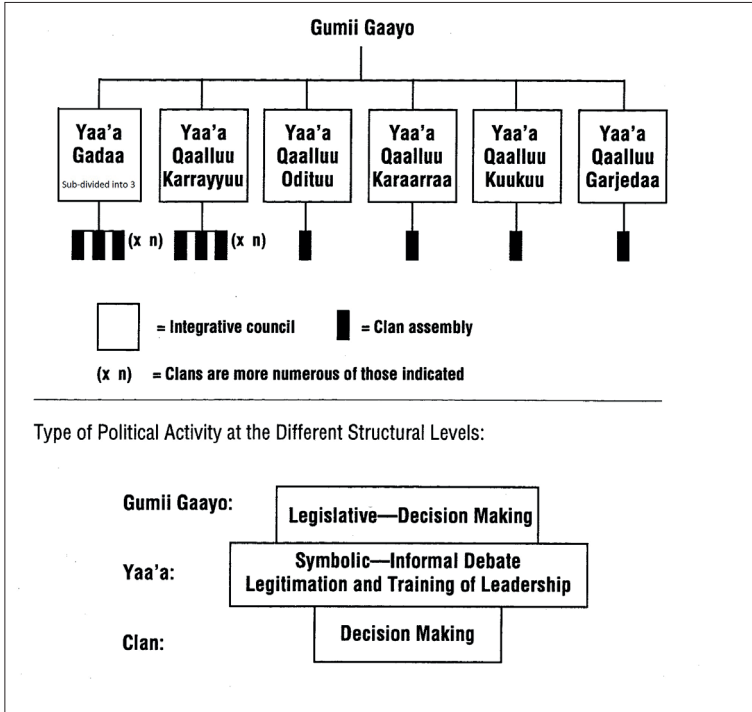


Figure 2 Structural Division into Ascriptive Councils

### 1.6 A Few Observations

In the semiarid environment of Borana country, competition for the limited natural resources is high. Clans, through their *kora gosaa* and the inherent representative elite, are the most organised social groups. Consequently, social strife among clans is potentially high. Max Gluckman suggests that “ritual arises from situations where there is conflict between the general moral order and the interests which lead individuals and groups to compete with one another” (1965, 246). The *gadaa* system and the institution of the *qaalluu* essentially form a ritual system stressing the basic principles of internal peace and cooperation. They play a fundamental integrative role among different clans. From a strictly political point of view, the structural role of the *yaa'a* as federal councils should be stressed. In this sense, it is perhaps correct to talk of *gadaa* in terms of a “primary

system" in that it constitutes one of the essential components of the polity (Bernardi 1985, 42).<sup>15</sup>

A comparison with two other East African segmentary societies may give an idea of the political effect of these two institutions. In his classic study on the institutions of the Nuer, Evans-Pritchard described "feud" as a political institution regulating the relationship among tribal segments. Relations across Nuer tribes are defined through war, the memory of war, and the potentiality of war (Evans-Pritchard 1940, 160-1). According to Ioan Lewis, fighting potential among the Somalis largely determines political status, and feuding and war are the chief means by which the relations between groups are regulated (I. Lewis 1961, 242). Revenge, internal war, and reciprocal fear do not have an institutional place in Borana's political organisation. The voluntary killing of another Borana is considered one of the worst sins, which may, at least in theory, lead to expulsion from the community. As an alternative, the Borana have two complex ritual systems, *gadaa* and *qaalluu*, with the inherent federal councils and the sacred values of *nagaa Booranaa*. The two institutions and the concept of *nagaa* are perhaps the strongest symbols of Borana ethnicity.

Among the Borana, *gadaa* and *qaalluu*, despite their different ritual principles, have similar integrative functions and are on a similar structural level. Among other present-day and historical Oromo groups, the situation is somewhat different. For instance, the Guji are divided into several territorial sections, each having its *abbaa gadaa*, with one *qaalluu* situated above (Hinnant 1978, 208). However, the integrative action across political units, whose nature depends on the case, and the double sacred and sociological aspects are characteristics that likely apply to the two institutions among all Oromo groups. The reciprocal relation in which they are found is probably connected with historical contingencies and with the process of society formation of each Oromo territorial section.

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<sup>15</sup> Tomay (1988) discusses Bernardi's terminology and theory on the political significance of age class systems.

