

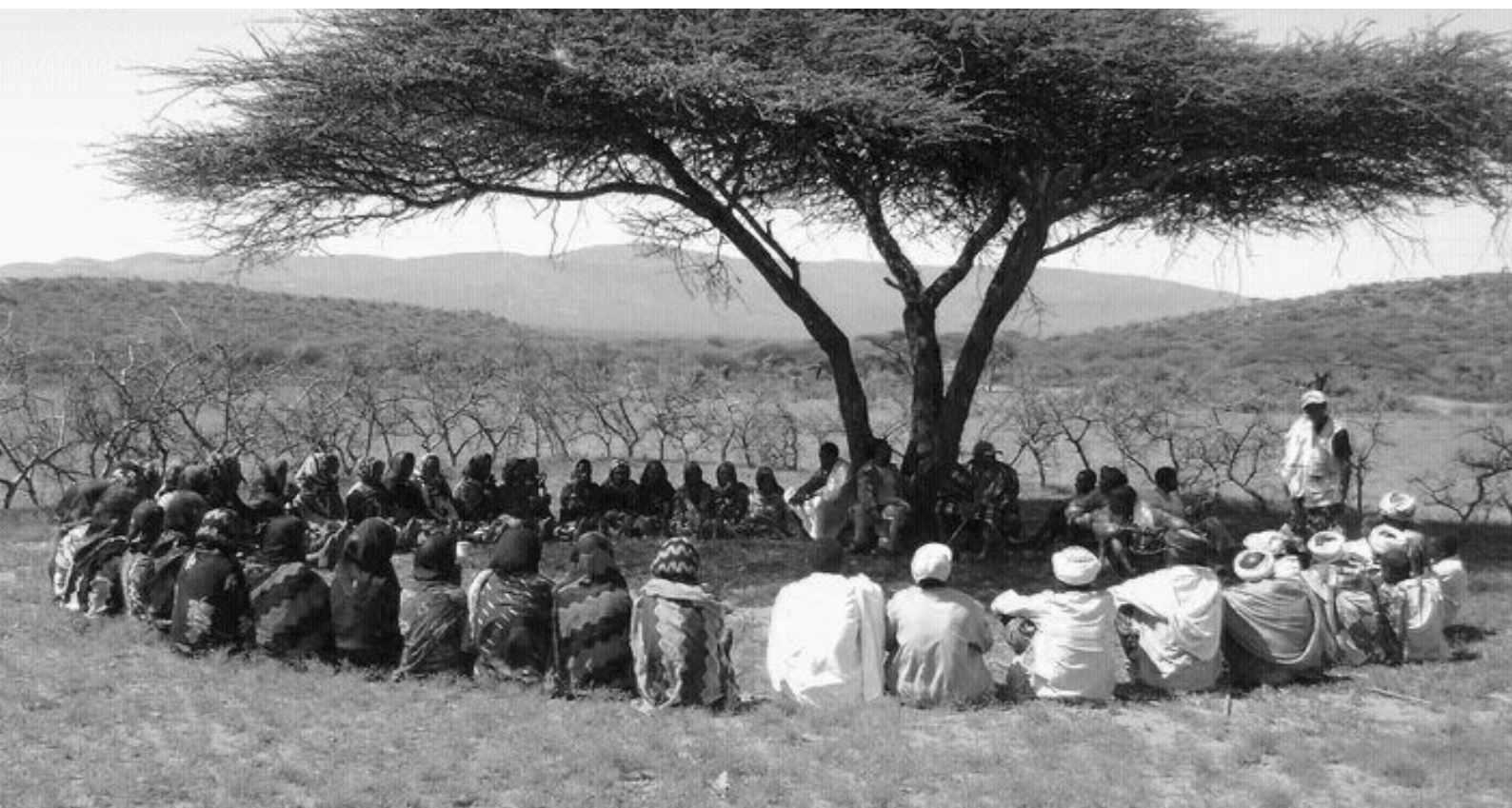
# PANEL DISCUSSION

## THE OROMO “GADAA” AND THE SOMALI “XEER”:

EXPLORING THEIR SIMILARITIES AND CONTRIBUTION  
TO THE REBUILDING OF AN AFRICAN ENDOGENOUS POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

25 February 2025 - Addis Abeba, Ethiopia

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## REPORT

**AFROSPECTIVES**

A GLOBAL AFRICA INITIATIVE

**SALALE UNIVERSITY**



Group Photo

# INTRODUCTION

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Jointly organized by the Think tank **AFROSPECTIVES** and the **Salale University**, the panel discussion brought together 22 scholars and officials to exchange ideas on the similarities between the Issa Xeer and the Oromo Gadaa and discuss the modalities to facilitating intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding, reconciliation and solidarity between these two communities. The moderator, Dr. Mergitu Debela, introduced the panelists and the issues to be discussed

## OPENING REMARKS:

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Professor Bekele Gutema, Addis Ababa University, opened the panel discussion and emphasized the importance of revising the African endogenous systems of governance to address the current pressing social, political and economic challenges in Africa.

He also reiterated the significance of this panel discussion in bringing Somali and the Oromo intellectuals together to discuss their historical and socio-cultural communalities. Professor Bekele shade light on the vitality of interculturality in political philosophy to learn from each other's knowledge systems and emancipate from Eurocentric epistemology.

## BOOK PRESENTATION:

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Dr. Ali Moussa Iye, Chair of AFROSPECTIVES, presented the book “**Beyond Mimicry: The Potential of African Endogenous Systems**”, edited by prof. Augustin F. C. Holl and Ali Moussa Iye and published in December 2024 by the famous German Publisher de Gruyter. It was the first promotional event of the book which is the first of the AFROSPECTIVES's Series to be published. The book is the result of a series of discussions and deliberations on the quest for alternative solutions to the crisis of the dominant socio-political models. It includes contributions from scholars from Africa and the African diaspora who undertook field research on African endogenous visions and practices of governance and developed critical analysis on the main characteristics of these political heritages and their potential to respond to the governance crises faced by African societies today. The book includes in particular a critical analysis of two important systems of governance and justice that emerged in the Horn of Africa ( Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya and Djibouti) and were both inscribed on the UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage Humanity respectively in 2009 and in 2024: The Oromo Gadaa and the Xeer Ciise. It is the first of its kind to envision endogenous system of governance by and for African states and aims at informing policy makers and practitioners committed to develop “home grown” governance systems and practices rooted in African culture and worldviews instead of mimicking failing imported models.

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## INTERCULTURALITY

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Professor Bekele Gutema presented his work on “The Interculturality of African Political Philosophy”. He compared the African endogenous systems of governance – taking some examples from Buganda of Uganda, Ubuntu of South Africa, Kgotla of Botswana, Gadaa of Ethiopia and others to indicate their interculturality. He discussed why and how African endogenous systems of governance are inclusive, consensual and deliberative and avoid the “majority tyranny” in decision making process.

He also discussed how these endogenous systems of governance could be utilized and revisited to address some of the critical political challenges in Africa, in particular the political crisis we are currently facing.

Prof. Bekele’s presentation had laid a ground for the two subsequent presentations by Dr. Moussa Iye on the “Xeer Ciise” and by prof. Tesfaye on the “Gadaa system”.

## THE XEER CIISE

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Dr. Ali Moussa Iye presented the main characteristics of the Xeer Ciise, its fundamental principles, its different components as an ontological and cosmogonic Framework, a Penal Code, a Political Constitution and a Code of social conduct. Recalling the historical context of its emergence, he analyzed the political philosophy, the conception of power, rule of law and human rights developed by its founders to respond to the global crisis experienced by the people of the Horn of Africa in the 16th century. He discussed the lessons that could be drawn from this holistic system of governance to re-integrate African spiritual principles, re-imagine the symbolic representations of power, transcend blood ties, mitigate power abuse, develop participatory and consensual decision making, and build an education rooted in endogenous knowledge and experiences. He finally indicated some of the similarities between the Oromo Gadaa and the Xeer Ciise that need to be further explored through joint research.

## THE GADAA SYSTEM

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Asst. Prof. Zelalem Tesfaye presented The Oromo Gadaa and revisited its African Political Philosophy. He introduced the notion of Gadaa, the major pillars of the Gadaa system and how the Oromia regional state is appropriating it through the education system (from elementary to higher learning institutions); establishing customary courts known as Mana Murtii Aadaa. He also noted that the Oromia Regional State opted for a piecemeal approach to revalorize the Gadaa system rather than an overhaul reform and transformation. He emphasized that the legislative and executive branches of the government will embrace the Gadaa system's legislative and executive philosophy and practices beyond the state modus operandi. He recalled the similarities between the Xeer and the Gadaa system, inter alia: both are sacred knowledge systems and traditions, holistic and deeply rooted, both promote collective well-being and social-cohesion, both have constitutional structures important to guide the social, economic and political life of the people, and both are derived from the natural and living laws.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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The presentations were followed by a lively exchange with the audience. Most of them praised the initiative of organizing such a panel to discuss the communalities of two endogenous governance and justice systems developed by two neighboring peoples. They highlighted the importance to know each other better in order to understand the shared historical, spiritual and cultural heritage. Some of the participants regretted that this kind of exchange was only happening now.

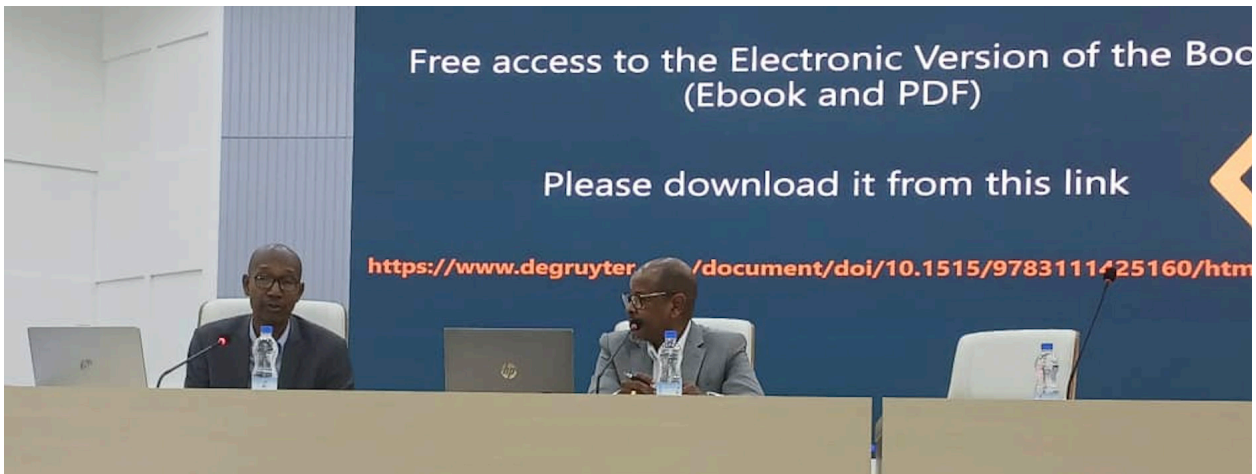
All those who took the floor agreed on the necessity to promote these endogenous governance systems and facilitate their reappropriation by the concerned communities. All of them also urged for further comparative research and dissemination of the Xeer and the Gadaa system.

## PANEL DISCUSSION : THE OROMO “GADAA” AND THE SOMALI “XEER”

The gaps between the researchers who worked on these issues and the policy-makers who do not use this knowledge or follow recommendations were highlighted. The necessity of creating institutions and other mechanisms or spaces to facilitate continual exchange of experiences and collaboration between Somali and Oromo scholars and decision-makers was emphasized. Concrete actions to implement these ideas were proposed such as engaging joint research and regular meetings between stakeholders. This dialogue was considered paramount to respond to the current political challenges in Ethiopia and the geopolitical trends that are creating dangerous tensions and competition between peoples of the region.

One participant raised the issue of Reparations from the slavery and colonialism and asked the role that the new leadership of the African Union should play to respond to that request.

## RESPONSE OF THE PANELLISTS:



Professor Bekele responded that the reappropriation of endogenous system of governance should be done in a way that promotes interculturality, dialogue and polylogue. Dr. Ali Moussa Iye supported the suggestions made by the participants to increase possibilities of organizing meetings and discussions between Oromos and Somali stakeholders to discuss issues of common interest and fill the gaps between researchers and decision-makers to translate research findings into political decisions through creating institutes and other mechanisms of exchange and collaboration. He responded to the necessity for African union to build a common position among its members and with the African Diaspora regarding the issue of reparations which is the theme of the AU for this year. He shared his experience as a Director of the UNESCO’s Slave Route Project and highlighted the work accomplished by the CARICOM countries and the activists from the African diaspora to legitimize reparations for slavery which was recognized since 2001 as a Crime against Humanity by the UN.

Prof. Zelalem Tesfaye added that it is time for the Oromo and Somali to collaborate and promote common goods as Cushitic people. He suggested that they should go beyond lamentations and join hands and efforts to march forward towards mutual understanding reconciliation, peace and cooperation.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

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Ambassador Mahammad Drir gave the final remarks noting that – the Oromo and Somali share history, culture and language as Cushitic peoples. He recalled that Oromos and Somali shared up to 70% of their language and mentioned some of the important common vocabular such as head, eye, soul, and blood that are core human body parties.

He noted the necessity to explore further areas that bring them together – as one family. He thanked the organizing team, the moderator and the participants for their contributions to the discussion.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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The organizing team thanked the Oromia Regional State Urban Administration Office for hosting the meeting in its new Conference Hall, in particular, his Excellency Obbo Kadir Mamo, the Oromia Land Administration Director, his Excellency Obbo Mulugeta, Urban Administration Cluster and all the supporting staff for their support during the panel discussion session.



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CO-CONVENED BY



**SPECIAL THANKS TO :**

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