

1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family:

Oromia, Ethiopia, Oromo - Borana-Arsi-Guji, Afro-Asiatic

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com):

gax

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

7.9, 39.6

1.4 Brief history:

“Oromo history began in the sixteenth century when the Oromo were actively recapturing their territories and rolling back the Christian and Muslim empires. The Oromo had at that time a form of constitutional government known as *gada*. [...] During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when various peoples were fighting over economic resources in the Horn of Africa, the Oromo were effectively organized under the *gada* institution for both offensive and defensive wars. [...] There is adequate evidence that indicates the Oromo people dominated the areas from Abyssinia to Mombasa and from Somalia to the Sudan (albeit there were no well demarcated boundaries) before they were partitioned and colonized during the scramble for Africa.” (1, 3)

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

“It is necessary to recognize those internal factors such as class and state formation processes and their articulation with external factors such as Turko-Egyptian colonialism, European and Ethiopian colonialism, the emergence of an Oromo collaborative class, and the spread of Islam and Christianity undermined the political and military roles of the *gada* system in the nineteenth century.⁵⁵ These changes did not totally uproot Oromo values and traditions. There are still some elements of these values and traditions in Oromo society.” (1, 10)

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

Their main carbohydrates are grain crops such as sorghum, maize, barley and wheat. (1, 13)

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

They receive most of their protein from cattle and sheep. (1, 13)

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

“Certain caste groups specialized in iron- and wood-working, and made iron and wood instruments needed for farming.⁸² Iron instruments, such as swords, spears, hoes, axes, sickles, knives, etc., have been very important. Some of these instruments were also essential for fighting and hunting. Woodworking has been known for a long time. Carpenters have made wooden objects, such as platters, stools, spades, tables, ploughs, bows, wooden forks, honey barrels, etc. Goldsmithing (warqee *ungulalu*) has been practiced in western Oromia.” (1, 13)

2.4 Food storage:

2.5 Sexual division of production:

“Despite *gada* being an egalitarian social system, women were excluded from passing through age-sets and generation-sets. *Gada* effectively enforced a gender-based division of labor in Oromo society, although it allowed two equally important separate and interdependent economic domains.” (1, 8)

“...men have controlled the mobile resources – those that required going out from the homestead --- herding, defense of livestock and land, tilling new fields, plowing, etc. Women have controlled the stationary resources – the house, the grain and other products of the fields once they are brought into *gotara* for storage, etc. Even the cattle around the house are under their control; women milk them, decide how much milk goes to the calves, how much to the people in the household for drinking, how much for butter or cheese to eat or sell...” (4, 8)

2.6 Land tenure:

“They grew crops on the highland around their homes and took cattle down to the lowland plain for pasture. Later colonization and confiscation of land forced most Oromos to remain either in the lowlands or in the highlands.” (1, 13)

2.7 Ceramics:

“Pottery making, weaving, and tanning have been practiced by specialized caste groups.” (1, 13)

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

2.9 Food taboos:

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): 168.2 cm, 156.5 cm (3, 93)

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f): 55.1 kg, 49 kg (3, 93)

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

“Traditionally the groom's parents search for a bride for their son. Before they make any contact with the bride's parents, the groom's parents research back seven generations to make sure that the families are not related by blood. Once this has been done, the boy's parents then make contact with the girl's parents through a mediator. The mediator goes to the home of the girl's parents and asks if their daughter will marry the son of the other parents. The girl's parents often impose conditions and the mediator will take the message to the boy's parents, then arrange a date for both parents to meet at a mutually convenient location. When the parents have reached an agreement, the man and woman get engaged (betrothed). The parents then set a wedding date and they meet all the wedding expenses.” (2, 6)

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized?

4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”)

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

4.22 Evidence for couvades

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

“Despite the fact that Oromos claim that they descended from the same family stock, Oromo, they do not limit their kinships to biological ancestry. The Oromo kinship system has been based on a biological and social descent. Oromos recognize social ancestry and avoid the distinction between the biological and social descent since they know that the formation of Oromo peoplehood was based on a blood and social kinship.” (1, 11)

4.24 Joking relationships?

“Good social relationships and proper ritual relationships are reflexes of each other.” (1, 15)

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

“Traditionally the groom's parents search for a bride for their son. Before they make any contact with the bride's parents, the groom's parents research back seven generations to make sure that the families are not related by blood.” (2, 242)

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

“The Oromos have a traditional marriage ceremony which descended from earlier times (antiquities). The great social significance is attached to the wedding ceremony. The wedding day is a very important day in the life of both the bride and the

groom. It is important for the bride whose wedding celebrated once in her life. As for the man, he can celebrates his wedding if he marries a second or third wives either because of the death of his first wife or when ever he wants to have more than one wife. However, even for the man, it is the first wedding ceremony, which is more important than the second or the third one.” (2, 243)

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

Marriage is preferred within the community. (2, 242)

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

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4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

Warfare/homicide

4.31 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

4.32 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

“*Butta* wars occurred every eight years by the Oromos, when power transferred from one *gada* grade to the next, and were organized for revenge, or for defensive and offensive purposes. In the beginning of the 16th century, when they began to intensify their territorial recovery and expansion through the *butta* wars, all Oromo were under one *gada* government.” (1, 4)

4.33 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

“Young men are also trained to become junior warriors by taking part in war campaigns and hunting large animals; they learn the practical skills of warfare, military organization, and fighting so that they can engage in battle to defend their country and economic resources.” (1, 8)

4.34 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

“Oromos have had a long history of cultural contacts with nonOromos through war, marriage, economic relationship, and group adoption. When there were wars and conflicts between Oromos and their neighbors on economic and cultural resources, such as land, water, territory, trade route, and religious and political issues, the former imposed specific cultural policies to structurally and culturally change the conquered people in order to Oromoize them and consolidate Oromo society.” (1, 11)

4.35 Cannibalism?

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

“This system has the principles of checks and balances (through periodic succession of every eight years), and division of power (among executive, legislative, and judicial branches), balanced opposition (among five parties), and power sharing between higher and lower administrative organs to prevent power from falling into the hands of despots.¹⁰ Other principles of the system included balanced representation of all clans, lineages, regions and confederacies, accountability of leaders, the settlement of disputes through reconciliation, and the respect for basic rights and liberties. [...] There are five *miseensas* (parties) in *gada*; these parties have different names in different parts of Oromia as the result of Oromo expansion and the establishment of different autonomous administrative systems.¹³ All *gada* officials were elected for eight years by universal adult male suffrage.” (1, 3-4)

5.4 Post marital residence:

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

“In Oromo society, knowledge and information have been mainly transmitted from generation to generation through the institutions of family, religion, and *gada*. Young Oromos are expected to learn important things that are necessary for social integration and community development. They learn appropriate social behavior by joining age-sets and generation-sets. From

their families and communities and experts, they learn stories, folk tales, riddles, and other mental games that help acquiring the knowledge of society. As age-mates, they share many things because of their ages; members of generation-sets also share many duties and roles because of their membership in grades or classes.” (1, 7)

“The balancing of the domains of women and men and maintaining their interdependence has been a precondition for keeping peace between the sexes and for promoting *saffu* (moral and ethical order) in society. [...]The value system of Oromo society has been influenced by the *gada* and *siiqqee* institutions. In precolonial Oromo society, women had the *siiqqee* institution, a parallel institution to the *gada* system [...]These two institutions helped to maintain *saffu* in Oromo society by enabling Oromo women to have control over resources and private spaces, social status and respect, and sisterhood and solidarity by deterring men from infringing upon their individual and collective rights.” (1, 9)

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization:

“The Oromo people have lived in scattered homesteads or huts. The basic unit has been the patrilineal extended family. A man, as *Abba Worra* (literally head of the family), has authority over his wife or wives, unmarried sons and daughters. Next to the family, *oola* (neighbor) and *ganda* (community) have been very important social networks.” (1, 13)

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens’ houses):

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

“Oromo political and social institutions have been built on the kinship system; Oromos call the largest kinship system *gossa* which is subdivided into moiety, sub-moiety and *qomo* (clan). These subdivisions have lower-order branches of kinship known as *mana* (lineage), *balbala* (minor lineages), and *warra* (minimal lineage or extended family).” (1, 12)

“Clear distinction between clans and lineages. The clan (*qomo*) is first of all a social group, consisting of several descent groups who need not all be Oromo. The heart of every clan is compounded of a cluster of lineages tracing their descent to the ancestor who gave his name to the clan.” (1, 12)

5.12 Trade:

“Coffee has been an important cash crop. It had long grown wild in Oromia and other neighboring regions.” (1, 13)

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

“Between the third and fourth *gada* grades, boys become adolescent and initiated into taking serious social responsibilities. The ruling group has responsibility to assign senior leaders and experts to instruct and council these young men in the importance of leadership, organization, and warfare. [...] At the stage of grade four “the *gada* classes and the age set come into being as a formal corporate group: Leaders are elected for both groups. The name of the most senior man in each group becomes the name of the group as a whole.” (1, 8)

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

6.2 Stimulants:

“Cattle and cereal crops have been parts of the Oromo livelihood. They have used cattle for food, ritual, status, wealth accumulation, and sacrifice in initiation ceremonies.” (1, 13)

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

“All newly born males enter a *gada-set* at birth, which they will belong to along with other boys of the same age, and for the next forty years they will go through five eight-year initiation periods; the *gada-grade* is entered on the basis of generation, and boys enter their *luba* forty years after their fathers.” (1, 4)

“Gada divides the stages of life, from childhood to old age, into a series of formal steps, each marked by a transition ceremony defined in terms of both what is permitted and what is forbidden. The aspect of *gada* which throws the concept of age grading into confusion is that of recruitment. A strict age-grade system assumes that an individual’s social passage through life is in tune with his biological development. An individual enters the system at a specific age and passes through transition rites at intervals appropriate to the passage from childhood through full adulthood to senility.” (1, 6)

6.4 Other rituals:

6.5 Myths (Creation):

“Oromo religious and philosophical world views consider the organization of spiritual, physical and human worlds as interconnected phenomena, and *Waaqa*, the creator, regulates their existence and functions in balanced ways.” (1, 15)

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

“(Boys) also learn songs, parables, proverbs, cultural and historical maps, and other social skills that they can use in public speech to praise the living and dead heroes or to criticize and ridicule. Oratory, the art of public speaking, is highly valued in Oromo society.” (1, 8)

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

“They get together regularly for prayers as well as for other important individual and community matters. If men try to stop women from attending these *walargee* (meetings), it is considered against *saffu*. [...] Oromo women used different *siiqqee* mechanisms to maintain their rights; such mechanisms included the law of *muka laaftu* (soften wood), the *abaarsa* (curse), *iyya siiqqee* (scream), and *godaana siiqqee* (trek).” (1, 9)

6.8 Missionary effect:

6.9 RCR revival:

“Through Muslim merchants Islam came to be accepted by the heads of the Gibe states in about the mid-19th century and only then was spread to the Oromo masses. Later, in opposition to Ethiopian colonialism, the Oromo turned *en masse* to Islam. In the Arssi and Bale regions, the Oromos accepted Islam over Ethiopian colonialism and Orthodox Christianity.” (1, 20)

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

“Oromos use three concepts to explain the organization and interconnection of human, spiritual and physical worlds. These three concepts are *ayaana* (spirit), *uuma* (nature), and *saffu* (moral and ethical order). Oromos believe that through *ayaana*, *Waaqa* (God) creates and regulates human and physical worlds in balanced ways. This *ayaana* also maintains the connection between the creator and the created. Oromo society has organizing principles for its known and unknown universe like any society; and *ayaana* is a major organizing principle of Oromo cosmology through which the concepts of time and creation are ordered. *Ayaana* as a system of classification and an organizing principle of Oromo cosmology establishes the connection between *Waaqa* (the Creator/God) and the created (nature and society) by differentiating and at the same time uniting the created things and the Creator.” (1, 15)

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

7.2 Piercings:

7.3 Haircut:

7.4 Scarification:

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

7.8 Missionary effect:

7.9 Types of clothing:

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

“Popular sports among children and young adults in Oromo society include *gugssa* (horseback riding), *qillee* (field hockey), *darboo* (throwing spears), *waldhaansso* (wrestling), *utaalu* (jumping), and swimming. Oromo society has produced athletes who have competed and won in international sports events. In 1956, Wami Biratu, an Oromo soldier serving in the Ethiopian colonial

army, was the first Oromo athlete to participate in the Olympic Games. He became a source of inspiration for other Oromo athletes. Ababa Biqila, another Oromo soldier, won the 1960 Rome Olympic Marathon and set a new world record, running barefoot. Another Oromo soldier, Mamo Wolde, became the 1968 Olympic Marathon champion. Other Oromo soldiers have succeeded in international competitions as well.

In 1988, Ababa Makonnen (Ababa Biqila's nephew) won the Tokyo Marathon, and Wadajo Bulti and Kabada Balcha came in second and third. Daraje Nadhi and Kalacha Mataferia won first and second place, respectively, in the World Cup marathon in 1989. In 1992, Daraartu Tullu (1969–), an Oromo woman, won the gold medal for her victory in the 10,000-meter race in the Barcelona Olympic Games. In 1996, another Oromo woman, Fatuma Roba, became a women's marathon gold medalist. She was the first from Africa to win this kind of race, and she was the fastest marathon runner in the world. The successes of these Oromo athletes demonstrate the rich cultural heritage of athletic ability in Oromo society. The victories of these athletes went to Ethiopia.” (4, 1)

SOURCES

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