

The Structure of “History” among People without Writing
An Analysis of the Boorana Oral Chronicle in Southern Ethiopia

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Abstract

In this paper, I describe how people without a writing tradition preserve and construct their own history, based on a research on the Oral Chronicle of the Boorana in southern Ethiopia.

The Boorana has a sociopolitical institution based on generation sets called *gadaa*. It has eight generation sets. Boorana choose their leader from the 6th generation set. This leader called *abba-gadaa* bears the main responsibility for politics and ceremonies during the eight years during which he belongs to the *gadaa* generation set. There were 70 *abba-gadaa* until now according to the Oral Chronicle. Boorana can memorize all the names of the *abba-gadaa* of the past, and narrate events, which are said to have happened in the time of each *abba-gadaa*.

I focus on the concept of *maq-baasa*, which was frequently used by narrators. Here, I describe the law of history which Boorana believe in, which can be illustrated by the discourse of the *maq-baasa*. The *maq-baasa* are the “given names” of the *abba-gadaa*. There are seven “given names” and each name is, in Boorana imagination, linked with a specific destiny such as conflict, disaster or peace. Seven *maq-baasa* names are to be given to the different *abba-gadaa* in a cyclical order.

The Boorana believe that all events happen according to the regular cycle of the *maq-baasa* names and the destinies linked to them, given to each *abba-gadaa*. I document such a way of thinking about the laws of history through an analysis of several historical narrations which mention the cycle of *maq-baasa*. This structure is used to construct Boorana history, which shows the important role of specific structures for memorizing history.

In the conclusion, I point out three perspectives on the structure of historical memories, which Boorana use. First, there is a correlation between historical memories and the *maq-baasa* cycle. The *maq-baasa* cycle has the role not only for constructing history but also for determining which events shall be memorized or not. Second, on the other hand, the same memorizing system produces different histories, thus different versions exist among Boorana. They sometimes even create historical memories in order to apply them to the *maq-baasa* cycle. Third, the view on history as being controlled by the *maq-baasa* cycle constructs not only the history of the past, but also the present and the future. The Boorana try to foresee the future according to the laws of history. Even accidental events will thus be involved into the cyclical historical program.

I Introduction

This paper focuses on the Boorana people in the southern Ethiopia who do not have a tradition of writing. However, for over 600 years, they have passed down rich and detailed historical narratives, which form a highly elaborated Oral Chronicle.

Herein lies a great mystery: How did they share and pass down this “history” for six centuries without using any writing system? The purpose of this paper is to answer this question. I want to reveal the cultural mechanism by which people without writing², like the Boorana, talk about their own past, how they construct it as a group “history”³, and how they unify their memories of such a huge past and pass that down the generations without having any sort of written records.

²Ong stated a feature of people who live within oral cultures is to “Think memorable thoughts” (Ong, 2002, 34). Following Ong’ s approach, I use the term “people without writing” as people who have own systems of thoughts and memory independent from writing.

³In this paper when the word *history* is not in quotation marks it is being used to mean the classical form of academic history that aims for a positivist reconstruction of the past. “History” in quotation marks is being used to mean the history that the people of a certain society believe to be their own history.

There are two streams within studies on oral historiographies in non-literate societies. One is writing history based on written documents and oral traditions (ex. Vansina 1960 ; Mohammed 1990). The other is describing “history” from a local perspective; how people themselves analyse, discuss, and remember the occurrence of events while reproducing them as a “history” of their society (ex. Hokari 2004).

In the 1980s, influenced by the “linguistic turn” that had occurred in the Humanities and Social Sciences, a view emerged that History was not something that was “discovered” from the pages of historical sources by historians, but rather it was the multiple speech acts of historians themselves which produced History (Chartier 1994; Mori 2002). With this paradigm shift, the course of research into oral traditions also began to change, and as a sign of that, the positivist historical studies that had been mainstream in the field up to then began to lose their dominance. In their place, anthropological historical research began to attract attention. This method examined the discourse and cultural contexts within the society in question, and tried to reveal the multiplicity of “History.” The importance of paying attention to the people’s historical awareness was pointed out as “history” was a cultural record organized according to those same people’s cognition of their past, and it emphasized that oral traditions should not be treated as a collection of facts that have been haphazardly passed down from generation to generation. Influenced by the work of Paul Ricoeur and Hayden White, Junzo Kawada said with regard to analyses of oral traditions in non-literate societies, “The discourse by black Africans about their own past must itself be brought into question” (Kawada 1987: 142).

This paper does not aim to rebuild Boorana history by verifying this six-hundred-year oral traditions and demonstratively elucidating how events actually occurred, which was mainstream of oral traditions studies. It does not analyse the oral traditions from the perspective of an outsider trying to describe the history, but rather it analyses it in order to reveal the perspectives the Boorana themselves have regarding their “history.” The paper also attempts to demonstratively describe their structure of historical memory, which helps to construct and preserve “history” without writing systems among the Boorana. Therefore, this paper is located within the academic trend of what Kawada called the quest for an Anthropological History (Kawada 1986).

This paper regards “structure” as something that is inductively revealed in Boorana narratives and continues to operate among the people. The concept of structure in this paper is closely related to that defined by Marshall Sahlins⁴.

In the course of explaining the enigmatic death and divinization of Captain Cook, Sahlins clarified that phenomena that occurred by accident took on meaning by becoming entangled with Hawaiian mythology and were consequently considered to be “events” (Sahlins 1993). According to his theory, structure acts like a filter to continually reproduce cultural categories that convert simple phenomena into meaningful events for the people concerned. The Hawaiian mythology

⁴Levi-Strauss defined “structure” as a cognitive system in which components mutually work towards creating a framework based on fixed principles, although he considered such a structure to be a hypothetical model (Levi-Strauss 1972:304).

that Sahlins focused on consists of a set of cultural categories that continue to reproduce interpretation patterns among the Hawaiian people.

In Hawaiian society, people understand events as being based in mythology, and either revise their understanding to prevent real occurrences from deviating from mythology, or practice “mytho-praxis” to establish their “history”. However, very little of the Boorana oral traditions found contains narratives about their mythology. Instead of having a structure produced by mythology, Boorana society puts forward the “*maq-baasa cycle*,” which is discussed in this paper:

The Boorana *maq-baasa cycle* and the “history” related to it were first discussed by Asmarom Legesse, a social anthropologist from Eritrea who conducted extensive research into the *gadaa* system of the Boorana in 1960s(Asmarom 1973). Asmarom likely noticed the unique historical views of the Boorana people, but he did not collect narratives about the *maq-baasa cycle* from many narrators, nor did he cross-check the knowledge of multiple narrators for further research.

In this paper, I will compare the data collected by Asmarom Legesse in the 1960s to the data which I have collected since 2007. I will verify the existence of a common structure of the *maq-baasa cycle* within the Oral Chronicle collected and confirm how “history” was established around that through cross-referencing the narratives of multiple narrators. Finally, by examining specific narratives, I will attempt to clarify exactly what this *maq-baasa cycle* is, what meaning can be found in events that occur within the cycle, and how Boorana “history” is structured around it.

II Background to the Oral Chronicle

1 The *gadaa* system and the Oral Chronicle

The Boorana is one of sub-groups of the Oromo that speak Oromo language and dominate around 40 % of population in Ethiopia. The Boorana are living in savanna area of southern Ethiopia, near the Border of Kenya. Their population is around 30,000 in Ethiopia (Oba-Smidt 2016).

A great many of the Boorana who live in the villages keep cows, goats, sheep, and camels, and, excluding the ewes, live on the milk of those animals. However, the Boorana have sold livestock and bought crop in weekly markets, started crop growing and settlement to town during 20th century as the overall number of livestock has dropped due to several factors, among them illness and the last 50 years of intermittent drought, thus causing a drop in the quantity of milk obtained⁵ (Boku Tache and Sjaastad 2010; Oba-Smidt 2007/2016).

They have a political form of organization based on generation stages called *gadaa* (Asmarom Legesse 1973; Baxter 1978; Schlee 1998; Bassi 2005; Tagawa 2014). The Oral Chronicle of the Boorana has been constructed while deeply interconnecting with the *gadaa* system. In this section, I will describe what *gadaa* system and the Oral Chronicle are, and the relation between them.

⁵ There are many factors making the Boorana losing cattle, among them also social factors (Boku Tache and Sjaastad 2010).

The whole *gadaa* is divided into eight sets or stages. The first stage, called *dabballee*, spans eight years. The second stage, *gammee*, is sixteen years; the third stage, *kuusa*, is eight years; the fourth stage, *raaba*, is eight years long; the fifth stage, *doorii*, is five years; the sixth stage, also called *gadaa* is eight years long; the seventh stage, *yuuba*, is twenty seven years; and the eighth and final stage, called *gadaammojjii*, is eight years long (Tagawa 2014:214). Once the *gadaammojjii* ritual is completed, which is the final rite of passage, the men begin a reclusive retirement in which they cannot go to war or go hunting

The sixth set of the eight is also called *gadaa*, and some of the Boorana leaders, called *abbaa-gadaa* (“Leader of the *gadaa*”), are chosen from the members of this stage. For the eight years they belong to the *gadaa* set, they are responsible for the rituals and political functions of all the Boorana. The Boorana people remember the names of the *abbaa-gadaa*, who change every eight years, and call the eight-year time span in which the *abbaa-gadaa* belonged to the *gadaa* set “the time of so-and-so’s *gadaa*” (“*gaafa gadaa X*”). As of the present time, there are thought to have been seventy *abbaa-gadaa*; the Boorana remember them in chronological order and are able to talk about the various events that occurred within each of the leader’s eight-year span⁶. This orally transmitted “history”, chronologically sequenced based on the dates of the *abbaa-gadaa*, can be traced back to

⁶ There are three *abbaa-gadaa* in a *gadaa* stage. *Abbaa-gadaa* of Koonituu clan, Awaxxuu clan and Arbooraa (the generic name of other 16 clans). People memorize names of *abbaa-gadaa* from Arbooraa.

the fifteenth century (see Chart 1) and virtually forms an unwritten Oral Chronicle, which had never been described so far. It can be called a “chronicle” in the strict sense of the word, as it consists of a specific body of oral narrations organized like texts, thus going well beyond the more general framework of what we understand as “oral traditions” (Oba-Smidt 2016).

The Boorana remember the names of the *abbaa-gadaa* according to chronological order like Chart 1. They also memorize the names of the *abbaa-gadaa* according to the five patri classes (*gogeessa-shani*; see Chart 2).

Chart 1 Chronology of events and matters narrated by four or more informants

| Names of abbaa-gadaa | maqqa-baasa | Events and matters narrated by four or more informants |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|--|
| 1, c.1456–1464 Gadayoo Galgaloo | Fullaasa | |
| 2, c.1464–1472 Yaayyaa Fulleellee | Mardiida | |
| 3, c.1472–1480 Jaarsoo Baabboo | Daraara | |
| 4, c.1480–1488 Daawwee Borbor | Libaasa | |
| 5, c.1488–1496 Diida Nam-Durii | Sabbaaqa | |
| 6, c.1496–1504 Areeroo Boruu | Moggisa | Beginning of the marriage system |
| 7, c.1504–1512 Tittilee Dullachaa | Maakula | |
| 8, c.1512–1520 Lukkuu Jaarsoo | Fullaasa | |
| 9, c.1520–1528 Daadoo Iddoo | Mardiida | |
| 10, c.1528–1536 Kuraa Dhaalaa | Daraara | |
| 11, c.1536–1544 Dagalee Yaayyaa | Libaasa | |
| 12, c.1544–1552 Osoosoo Tiittilee | Sabbaaqa | |
| 13, c.1552–1560 Booroo Lukkuu | Moggisa | |
| 14, c.1560–1568 Abbayi Horroo | Maakula | |
| 15, c.1568–1576 Biduu Dhoqqee | Fullaasa | Excessive rain |
| 16, c.1576–1584 Horroo Dullachaa | Mardiida | |
| 17, c.1584–1592 Yaayyaa Oolee | Daraara | |
| 18, c.1592–1600 Dooyyoo Booroo | Libaasa | Beginning of the split and conflict among the Oromo |
| 19, c.1600–1608 Bachoo Nadhoo | Sabbaaqa | |
| 20, c.1608–1616 Urgumeessa Igguu | Moggisa | |
| 21, c.1616–1624 Baabboo Horroo | Maakula | |
| 22, c.1624–1632 Baabboo Sibuu | Fullaasa | |
| 23, c.1632–1640 Indhaalee Dooyyoo | Mardiida | |
| 24, c.1640–1648 Acuu Abbiyyuu | Daraara | |
| 25, c.1648–1656 Abbuu Lakkuu | Libaasa | Conflict with the Gabra/ Beginning of Buttaa ritual |
| 26, c.1656–1664 Abbayi Baabboo | Sabbaaqa | The migration from Baalee |
| 27, c.1664–1672 Aallee Kuraa | Moggisa | |
| 28, c.1672–1680 Waayyuu Uruu | Maakula | |
| 29, c.1680–1688 Morowwa Abbayi | Fullaasa | The special powers of Morowwaa Abbayi |
| 30, c.1688–1696 Gobbaa Allaa | Mardiida | The distribution of wells/Internal conflict |
| 31, c.1696–1704 Daawwee Gobboo | Daraara | The establishment of law and territory |
| 32, c.1704–1712 Jaarsoo Iddoo | Libaasa | Conflict with the Arsii |
| 33, c.1712–1720 Walee Waaccuu | Sabbaaqa | Conflict with the Samburu / Internal conflict |
| 34, c.1720–1728 Soraa Dhaddachaa | Moggisa | The clan of Soraa Dhaddacha |
| 35, c.1728–1736 Dhaddacha Rooblee | Maakula | |

| | | | |
|------------------|--------------------|----------|---|
| 36, c.1736–1744 | Halakee Dooyyoo | Fullaasa | Internal conflict |
| 37, c.1744–1752 | Guyyoo Geedoo | Mardiida | |
| 38, c.1752–1760 | Madha Boruu | Daraara | Internal conflict |
| 39, c.1760–1768 | Soraa Diidoo | Libaasa | Conflict with the Arsii and the Soomalii |
| 40, c.1768–1776 | Soraa Dhaddacha | Sabbaaqa | Droughts |
| 41, c.1776–1784 | Liiban Waataa | Moggisa | The wisdom of Liiban Waataa |
| 42, c.1784–1792 | Waayyuu Raallee | Maakula | Peace protected by invincible warriors |
| 43, c.1792–1800 | Boruu Madhaa | Fullaasa | |
| 44, c.1800–1808 | Ungulee Halakee | Mardiida | Excessive rain |
| 45, c.1808–1816 | Saaqqoo Dhaddachaa | Daraara | Droughts |
| 46, c.1816–1824 | Jiloo Nyeencoo | Libaasa | Conflict with the Gabra, the Gujii, the Arsii and the Kibiyaa |
| 47, c. 1824–1832 | Sokoree Annaa | Sabbaaqa | People becoming greedy |
| 48, c.1832–1840 | Madha Boruu | Moggisa | |
| 49, c.1840–1848 | Liiban Jiloo | Maakula | Internal conflict |
| 50, c.1848–1856 | Jaldeessa Guyyoo | Fullaasa | Internal conflict/Conflict |
| 51, c.1856–1864 | Dooyyoo Jiloo | Mardiida | Internal conflict/Conflict |
| 52, c.1864–1872 | Haroo Adii | Daraara | Cholera epidemics |
| 53, c.1872–1880 | Diida Bittaataa | Libaasa | Internal conflict |
| 54, c.1880–1888 | Guyyoo Boruu | Sabbaaqa | Exhaustion of society |
| 55, c.1888–1896 | Liiban Jaldeessa | Moggisa | Tsetse fly infestation and Menilek's Conquest |
| 56, c.1896–1904 | Adii Dooyyoo | Maakula | Peace |
| 57, c.1904–1912 | Boruu Galma | Fullaasa | Epidemic diseases among the livestock |
| 58, c.1912–1920 | Liiban Kusee | Mardiida | Appearance of the Amhara robbers |
| 59, c.1920–1928 | Areeroo Geedoo | Daraara | |
| 60, c.1928–1936 | Bulee Dabbasaa | Libaasa | Invasion by Italy |
| 61, c.1936–1944 | Aagaa Adii | Sabbaaqa | Conflict with the Gujii, the Soomalii |
| 62, c.1944–1952 | Guyyoo Boruu | Moggisa | A big droughts |
| 63, c.1952–1960 | Madha Galmaa | Maakula | Epidemic diseases among the livestock/ Beginning of spirit possession cult |
| 64, c.1960–1968 | Jaldeessa Liiban | Fullaasa | Conflict with the Garrii, the Soomalii |
| 65, c.1968–1976 | Gobbaa Bulee | Mardiida | Droughts |
| 66, c.1976–1984 | Jiloo Aagaa | Daraara | Conflict with the Soomalii |
| 67, c.1984–1992 | Boruu Guyyoo | Libaasa | The killing of Boruu Guyyoo |
| 68, c.1992–2000 | Boruu Madha | Sabbaaqa | Conflict with the Gujii, the Garrii, the Soomalii and droughts |
| 69, c.2000–2008 | Liiban Jaldeessa | moggisa | Continual small scale conflict |
| 70, c.2008–2016 | Guyyoo Gobbaa | Maakula | |

Chart2 The five gogeessa and seven maq-baasa cycle

| The 1st gogeessa | The 2nd gogeessa | The 3rd gogeessa | The 4th gogeessa | The 5th gogeessa |
|-----------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| 1 Gadayoo | 2 Yaayyaa | 3 Jaarsoo | 4 Daawwee | 5 Diida |
| 6 Areeroo | 7 Tittilee | 8 Lukkuu | 9 Daadoo | 10 Kuraa(Aagaa) |
| 11 Dagalee | 12 Osoosoo | 13 Booroo | 14 Abbayi | 15 Biduu |
| 16 Horroo | 17 Yaayyaa | 18 Dooyyoo | 19 Bachoo | 20 Urgumeessa |
| 21 Baabboo | 22 Baabboo | 23 Indhaalee | 24 Acuu | 25 Aabbuu |
| 26 Abbayi | 27 Aallee | 28 Waayyuu | 29 Morowwaa | 30 Gobbaa |
| 31 Daawwee | 32 Jaarsoo | 33 Walee | 34 Soraa | 35 Dhaddacha |
| 36 Halakee | 37 Guyyoo | 38 Madha | 39 Soraa | 40 Bulee |
| 41 Liiban | 42 Waayyuu | 43 Boruu | 44 Ungulee | 45 Saaqqoo |
| 46 Jiloo | 47 Sokoree | 48 Madha | 49 Liiban | 50 Jaldeessa |
| 51 Dooyyoo | 52 Haroo | 53 Diida | 54 Guyyoo | 55 Liiban |
| 56 Adii | 57 Boruu | 58 Liiban | 59 Areeroo | 60 Bulee |
| 61 Aagaa | 62 Guyyoo | 63 Madha | 64 Jaldeessa | 65 Gobbaa |
| 66 Jiloo | 67 Boruu | 68 Boruu | 69 Liiban | 70 Guyyoo |
| Seven maq-baasa-cycle | | | | |
| 1 Fullaasa | 2 Mardiida | 3 Daraara | 4 Libaasa | 5 Sabbaaqa |
| 6 Moggisa | 7 Maakula | 8 Fullaasa | 9 Mardiida | 10 Daraara |
| 11 Libaasa | 12 Sabbaaqa | 13 Moggisa | 14 Maakula | 15 Fullaasa |
| 16 Mardiida | 17 Daraara | 18 Libaasa | 19 Sabbaaqa | 20 Moggisa |
| 21 Maakula | 22 Fullaasa | 23 Mardiida | 24 Daraara | 25 Libaasa |
| 26 Sabbaaqa | 27 Moggisa | 28 Maakula | 29 Fullaasa | 30 Mardiida |
| 31 Daraara | 32 Libaasa | 33 Sabbaaqa | 34 Moggisa | 35 Maakula |
| 36 Fullaasa | 37 Mardiida | 38 Daraara | 39 Libaasa | 40 Sabbaaqa |
| 41 Moggisa | 42 Maakula | 43 Fullaasa | 44 Mardiida | 45 Daraara |
| 46 Libaasa | 47 Sabbaaqa | 48 Moggisa | 49 Maakula | 50 Fullaasa |
| 51 Mardiida | 52 Daraara | 53 Libaasa | 54 Sabbaaqa | 55 Moggisa |
| 56 Maakula | 57 Fullaasa | 58 Mardiida | 59 Daraara | 60 Libaasa |
| 61 Sabbaaqa | 62 Moggisa | 63 Maakula | 64 Fullaasa | 65 Mardiida |
| 66 Daraara | 67 Libaasa | 68 Sabbaaqa | 69 Moggisa | 70 Maakula |

The Boorana narrators have told me that I have to understand and memorize *gogeessa* and *maq-baasa* for studying “history” of the Boorana. Those two terms are important key concepts for understanding the structure of historical memory of the Boorana. First, I will explain about *gogeessa* in this section. I will discuss about *maq-baasa* in next section.

All the men belong to one of the stages of *gadaa* system, but a fundamental principle exists by which when one is assigned to a particular set, it must be five sets removed from that of his father. For the time being, let us provisionally call it “The Principle of a Five-Sets Distance between Father and Son.” To understand it, first think of the Boorana’s system of generation sets as a sort of programme for life that the men are already incorporated into according to certain rules.

When a generation set (*luba*) reaches the fourth stage (*raaba*), the members of that generation set are able to marry, and when they enter the fifth stage (*doorii*) they are able to have children. In the past, children born before their parents had reached the *doorii* stage were abandoned, according to widespread Boorana narrative⁷. This practice continued into the 1970s, according to informants. In other words, the system is set up so that when a male is in the sixth stage (*gadaa*), it will coincide with either the birth of his first child or his first child’s infancy. A child born when his father is in the sixth stage (the *gadaa* stage), will automatically belong to the first stage, *dabballee*,

⁷It is quite clear from oral data that Boorana practiced infanticide much less than talking about it as a rule, which by fact was not regularly put into force (see on this for example Bassi 2005).

which is separated from the *gadaa* by five other stages. The system controls the Booranas' lives, and they are expected to lead their lives managed in this way.

The Principle of a Five-Sets Distance between Father and Son does not only guide the male Boorana's lives, it also creates an ideological social relationship. Two people belonging to sets separated by five other stages are regarded as father and son, regardless of any actual blood relation⁸. If the past *gadaa* leaders were placed in a father-son relationship according to this Principle of a Five-Sets Distance, the five *gogeessa* (the five patri classes) which are some sort of "ideological" lineages⁹ among the Leaders of the *gadaa* emerge (see Chart 2).

The concept of the five *gogeessa* is extremely important for understanding not only the Boorana's politics and society, but also their "history" (Asmarom Legesse 1973 deals with this topic in length). The five *gogeessa* are more than just the driving force for social unification beyond the clans. Due to people remembering the *gadaa* leaders' ideological lineages according to each *gogeessa* and orally transmitting information about events that occurred in the time of each leader, the *gogeessa* have come to act as the framework for creating a common memory that makes the sharing of "history" possible.

⁸Each generation set is called "XXX' s *Iuba*," after the name of whoever became *gadaa* leader from that particular generation set. Members of the same generation set are regarded as brothers, regardless of any actually blood relation.

⁹The positions of *abbaa-gadaa* were also inherited between real fathers and sons.

2 The Narrative Space, Narrators and Listeners to the Oral Chronicle

In this section, I would like to clarify the social context of the Boorana's Oral Chronicle, examining the place it occupies in their entire oral tradition, and looking at what sort of situations is it narrated in and by whom, as well as who listens to it.

The Boorana's oral tradition can be divided into five categories: 1) *mammaasaa*, which are similar to proverbs and sayings (Abdullai A. Shongolo and Schlee 2007), 2) *duri-durii*, or folk tales (Sahlu Kidane 2002), 3) *hiibboyyaa*, which are a type of riddle, 4) poems, including *gobaa*, *aachaboo*, *geerarsa*, *jeemuu*, *kaarriilee*, *weedduu*, and *addaraa* (Oba-Smidt 2016), and 5) *argaa-dhageettii*, which concerns the Boorana's "history" and customs.

5) The *argaa-dhageettii* refers to the knowledge and oral transmission of the Boorana's "history" and customs. The root of the word is *argaa*, meaning "things that were seen," and *dhageettii*, meaning "things that were heard," and when combined it means "things that were once seen and heard." If the Boorana are asked what the *argaa-dhageettii* is, they will explain that it is a combination of oral tales relating to "customs" (*aadaa*) and oral tales relating to "history" (*seena*). The former are oral tales concerning Boorana customs and customary laws, such the manner of their diet, attire, and habitat, or ceremonial occasions and rituals like weddings and funerals; they are also concerned with how the structure of society should be. The latter are oral tales about the past that are narrated together with the names of the successive generations of Leaders of the *gadaa*, and which in this paper are called the Oral Chronicle. The Boorana say that the *argaa-*

dhageettii is the combination of these two oral traditions.

There are three narrative scenes for the *argaa-dhageettii*. The first is when someone who keeps the *argaa-dhageettii* knowledge chooses from among his sons one who has both the capacity to understand and remember, and then recounts the traditions to him in secret. The second is when someone who wants to learn the *argaa-dhageettii* gives presents such as chewing tobacco, coffee beans, and cloth to a person who knows the *argaa-dhageettii*, and then listens to the narrative. The third is when it is spoken spontaneously at places where men gather, such as the home, cattle-grazing camps, or councils. If one observes these scenes, at their centre there is always a person who knows the *argaa-dhageettii*. When men gather in such places, there are occasions when references to the past appear spontaneously during the course of the conversation, and as these references increase, the men show off to each other just how much they can recall past events; sometimes they point out each other's mistakes and it develops into an argument. Sometimes a discussion about "history" begins after someone asks a question, a person who knows the *argaa-dhageettii*. For example, someone might ask, "Who were the *gadaa* officials who died at the battle of Xiloo-Waraaba?" Here, the questioner has randomly heard some of the *argaa-dhageettii* somewhere before and with a basic understanding of it, now asks this complicated question, thus the topic of conversation turns to "history". When I asked the speakers how they got their knowledge of the *argaa-dhageettii*, they told of narrative spaces such as those described above.

Talking about past events does not just require a good memory, but also a degree of performance, and not everyone can do it. Listening to the narrative, it is easy to fall into an illusion

that the narrator is performing a one-man play. Descriptions of conversations by the main characters (who are usually Leaders of the *gadaa*, heroes, and prophets called *raaga*) at historic councils and battlefields unfold throughout the narratives. There is a reality to them that makes it seem as though those past events are occurring right before one's eyes. When dialogue between characters is recounted, or poems that were recited in war are retold, the narratives are given authenticity and authority, and this also seems to be a factor in drawing the attention of the listeners¹⁰.

People like this, who have knowledge of the *argaa-dhageetti* and can deliver it as a vivid monologue that leaves the listener wanting to hear more, live scattered across the Boorana territory, and they are a kind of source of historical memory. From these experts in narrative, the rest of the people in the various regions can get some sort of historical memory at events and scenes such as villages, grazing camps, and councils. This is why, when I played back to people the narratives I had recorded, many of them said that, although they could not narrate them themselves, they had in fact heard them before.

Relatively speaking, the men share expressions of ideas about the past more than the women, and the narrators are always men. As a rule, women are excluded from the narrative spaces in which the *argaa-dhageetti* is passed on. If someone who knows the *argaa-dhageetti* has several

¹⁰Poems, patterned expressions and poetic quotations have role of mnemonic and creative devise of 'history' (Oba-Smidt 2016).

children, he will make a point of selecting a boy to whom he will try and pass on his knowledge.

Moreover, as women are never with the men at the camps and meetings, their only opportunity for learning the *argaa-dhageetti* is when they encounter a male-dominated narrative scene that has begun at random in their own home.

Looking at the ages of people who listen to the narratives, there are few listeners among both men and women who are under thirty compared to older age groups. Young people in this age bracket or below are the main workers, and they are busy herding the cattle or attending to the watering holes, so it is not possible for them to be at councils or in the village during the day when the narratives are most often spoken.

Furthermore, along with the young living in urban areas, some young people in the villages have also begun to receive school education, and when they go onto to higher education they eventually have to leave the villages for the bigger towns. Young people receiving schooling do not spend much time in the villages, and their connection with the pastoral way of life and the narrative scenes that are so closely linked to it is becoming more and more tenuous¹¹.

¹¹Young people who go to school and are able to continue with their studies are relatively clever and have good memories. Normally, young people like this would have absorbed the *argaa-dhageetti*, requiring as it does both good memory retention and intellectual curiosity, and they would have memorized it and become the next group to carry on the tradition. However, the reality is that by receiving a school education, and having to

For a total of 16 months, I trekked across huge areas of land to visit forty-six narrators of Boorana “history” in order to collect this huge set of oral traditions (Oba-Smidt 2016). In this paper, I analyze the Oral Chronicle corrected from 14 persons.

Among the Boorana, the *argaa-dhageettii* is basically handed down through the paternal line. If we look closely at the lineages of the main narrators, four categories emerge: 1) in their lineages there was someone who was a clan or *gadaa* official in the past, or was a close relative of a *qaalluu*¹²(three people); 2) the narrator himself was an official or lived in the *yaa-a* village¹³(four people); 3)

live in towns to do so, it is becoming more difficult for them to access the Boorana’s intellectual realm. Amidst this transformation, the narrators of the *argaa-dhageettii* are also now feeling a sense of crisis over how to pass on their knowledge to future generations, and when I pointed this out to them and emphasized the significance of narrating and recording the *argaa-dhageettii*, often they agreed and would recount it for me.

¹² In the third generation set of *kuusa*, six *gadaa* officials called *adulaa* are chosen by the Boorana who will in the future have responsibility for the politics and rituals of the whole Boorana society. When the six *adulaa* reach the *gadaa* set, they will take on this responsibility. Clan officials called *hayyuu* are chosen by each respective clan. *Hayyuu* are responsible for mediating in internal clan disputes, managing watering holes, assisting the poor, and organizing rituals that are performed by the whole clan (Bassi

in their lineage, there was in the past a prophet called a *raaga*¹⁴(one person); 4) the narrator had the chance in the past to talk with old people who had the *argaa-dhageetti* knowledge (six people).

2005). *Qaalluu* whose very existence is the object of worship. *Qaalluu* are descended from lines that are part of the Odituu and Karrayyuu clans and the Kuukkuu, Karaara, and Garjeedaa sub-clans of the Maxxaarrii clan. When a *qaalluu* father dies, his child inherits the position. The *Qaalluu* used to have authority over the final decision on who became a *hayyuu* or *adulaa*, and without the consent of the *qaalluu* it was impossible to get an official appointment.

¹³The villages in which the *adulaa* and *hayyuu* all live, together with people called *makkala* who assist the officials, people called *wayyuu* who perform the rituals, and members of the same generation set as the Leaders of the *gadaa*. The Awaxxuu clan, Koonnituu clan, and *Arbooraa* each form one *yaa-a*. Each *yaa-a* is a political center, and many Boorana historical narratives are set in these villages.

¹⁴ *Raaga* are persons who can prophesy about conflicts and disasters, advise how to overcome such problems, and practice magic. One of the prophecies told by a *raaga* was documented by Bassi and Boku Tache (Bassi and Boku Tache 2005). Through the Oral Chronicle, *raaga* appear in big historical events and take important roles for the Boorana society (Oba-Smidt 2016).

In many cases, someone regarded as knowing the *argaa-dhageettii* is a member of a famous lineage that has produced several *gadaa* officials, clan officials, *qaalluu* and prophets in the past. The people in the fourth category have, of course, the knowledge that is passed down within their respective lineages, but besides that they have also learnt the *argaa-dhageettii* by either being fortunate enough to have the chance to meet someone who knew the *argaa-dhageettii*, or by searching for such a person and then questioning them. They said that many of the people who knew the *argaa-dhageettii* and taught them the “history” belonged to either the first, second or third category.

We have to consider about the difference of keeping historical knowledge among people within the society with not only individual ability of memorizing oral traditions but also political aspect of “*argaa-dhageettii*” in the Boorana. For example, Knowing *argaa-dhageettii* is one of criteria of becoming officials. People who are very knowledgeable about the *argaa-dhageettii* have excellent memory retention, as they can talk about a custom while referring to the narratives that show the evidence for the formation of that particular custom. There is always an event or incident behind the formation of the various Boorana practices, and they can point out that the lesson learnt from it has led to the creation of the present-day customs. Furthermore, they have the ability to reflect on the past while merging the two different bodies of knowledge—that of “customs” and that of “history”—and then they can consider how things should be today. In addition, if a political rival is aiming to grab an official position, they can use their knowledge of the *argaa-dhageettii* to reveal a

“history” of failures by the rival’s ancestors, or speak of the marvellous successes of the family to which they themselves belong, and thus establish their own political legitimacy.

Among the Boorana, this ability was not just a sign of a learned person who simply understood the world, it was also a prime requisite for entering into politics. People who have *argaa-dhageettii* have succeeded to secure legitimacy of their political positions while monopolizing *argaa-dhageettii* within their paternal lineages. Such a socio-political context has been producing difference of quantity and quality of historical knowledge within the Boorana.

3 Aspects of Diversified Narrative Spaces and the Production of the Oral Chronicle

As mentioned earlier, the narrators combine two oral traditions, one concerning customs (*aadaa*), and one concerning history (*seena*). I would like to focus on the word *seena* here.

Seena means history, but originally it was not part of the Boorana vocabulary. Depending on the person, they sometimes express history using the Amharic word *taariki*, which has its origin in Arabic, instead of the word *seena*. It is unknown when these loan words first came to be used by the Boorana, but it is thought to be from the early part of the twentieth century, after they were conquered by the Ethiopian Empire. By using an external word, the people are conceptualizing the historical aspect of the *argaa-dhageettii*.

To elaborate on this, in the first place, the *argaa-dhageettii* is an oral tradition that is both

historical and encyclopaedic at the same time, but in the past these two aspects were not as clearly delineated as they are now. There was most likely an entire body of oral tales that were blended together and circulated among the people. However, due to the import of the external word *seena*, in recent years a growing awareness has emerged among the Boorana towards the historical aspect of the *argaa-dhageetti*. This can be seen by the fact that they refer to its historicity as “The History of the Boorana” (*Seena-Boorana*).

It is perhaps necessary for us here to consider how the *Seena-Boorana* is being created alongside contemporary developments such as the spread of recording devices and school education — when I asked the narrators to talk freely about *Seena-Boorana*, both the narrators and I were already unintentionally caught up by the power of the word *seena*.

By clarifying various modern aspects of the Boorana’s narrative scenes, I would like to consider here how the phrase *Seena-Boorana* came into being. By doing this, the current condition of their narrative scenes should reveal themselves as they expand and diversify beyond villages and regions. It should also show that the Oral Chronicle that I was able to collect was constructed contemporaneously and cooperatively within the context of those narrative loci.

The Boorana say that one month has 30 days, and one year has 12 months¹⁵. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, they divide time up in 8 years cycles based on when the Leader of the *gadaa* changes. If we use this system it is possible to convert the chronological list of the Leaders of the *gadaa* to the Western calendar system, although there will be a slight margin of error. In actual

¹⁵Asmarom records that the Boorana count one month as 29.5 days according to the waxing and waning of the moon, and the reason they give names to just 27 days in the month is simply just because it is like a ritual calendar (Asmarom1973). Bassi disagrees, stating that the ritual calendar is in fact the Boorana' s calendar, created while basing the waxing and waning of the moon on the unique way in which they observe the celestial bodies (Bassi 1988). In practice, the Boorana month contains only 27 days. The taboos put on a boy will have been decided according to which of the 27 days he was born on, but the Boorana call people who know and inform others about the meaning of this calendar *ayyaantuu*. *Ayyaantuu* tell people what taboos a boy is born with, and, based on the day he is born, on which day his marriage ritual should be performed, and they also decide the dates of a variety of other rituals. Bassi put forward the theory that one Boorana month is 27 days after observing how *ayyaantuu* identify the time and date while making connections between the waxing and waning of the moon with the stars.

fact, more and more young Boorana have since 1991 been receiving a school education, and they have started to think about the *Seena-Boorana* based on chronological tables showing the Leaders of the *gadaa* that they made by transliterating the genealogical records of the *gadaa* leaders, which previously had only existed in the heads of people who knew the *argaa-dhageetti*. Incidentally, this shift in the way young Boorana people are thinking is behind how I made the chronological list of Leaders of the *gadaa* (see Chart 1; cf. Leus and Salvadori 2006). At the beginning of the 1998, a boy called Jaarsoo Duuba, who had begun to learn how to write at school, asked an old man called Huqqaa Dheeraa about the names of the Leaders of the *gadaa* in order to write them down.

At the time, the old man Huqqaa recited the ideological lineages of the Leaders of the *gadaa* according to each of the five *gogeessa* (see Chart 2), but Jaarsoo later rearranged what he had written down into a chronological table. Next, as the *gadaa* leaders change every eight years, he included dates converted into the Western calendar, which he had learnt at school, and added those to his notes (see Chart 1).

By pure chance, I began my research in Jaarsoo's village in 2005. Jaarsoo, who was by then a high school student, once showed me his notes. At the time, I mistakenly thought that they learn about the history of the *gadaa* in high school, but when I asked him about it again later, I found out

that he had actually made the chronological table via the process described above. After that, I made a cross-comparison between his table and a chronological list that a different narrator had memorized, and thus put together the chronology of Leaders of the *gadaa* that can be seen in Chart 1 (cf. Leus and Salvadori 2006).

There are several differences between this chronological table and the one by Asmarom Legesse, who carried out a comprehensive study of the Boorana's *gadaa* system in the 1960s (Asmarom 1973:190-193). In Asmarom's table, several names before the 20th Leader of the *gadaa* are unknown, and it is ten leaders shorter than mine. Furthermore, in some places the names of the Leaders of the *gadaa* are different, or the order is different. It could perhaps be simply said about these differences that Asmarom's question and answer survey was insufficient. However, there is also a possibility that after his research, there was a growing awareness among the Boorana regarding this chronology, and the people gradually reached a consensus on the names and order. Asmarom says that following a request from a certain young Boorana, he handed over his chronological table of Leaders of the *gadaa* he had put together via interviews. The possibility that this act actually influenced the formation of later Boorana chronologies cannot be denied.

To begin with, Asmarom was the first to adopt the method of asking about the occurrence of events according to the chronology of the Leaders of the *gadaa* rather than the genealogical order of

the five *gogeessa*. He soon became aware of the existence of the Boorana's vast oral historical narratives, and writes, "Students of oral tradition who wish to examine history within the framework of social structure will find Boorana to be an incomparably rich gold mine" (Asmarom 1973:198). Borbor, one of the narrators included in this paper, is famous among the Boorana for having knowledge of the *argaa-dhageetti*. Not only is he in demand from *gadaa* and clan officials and scholars, but in recent years television stations have also come to interview him, and he wields some considerable influence on the discourse space both inside and outside the Boorana community. According to Borbor, Asmarom invited him to Addis Ababa in 1995, and asked him some questions about the occurrence of certain events following the chronology of the Leaders of the *gadaa*. I asked Borbor a number of times about this event, and he always maintained that it was the first time he had been asked to give a historical narrative that followed the chronological list of the Leaders of the *gadaa* and not the genealogical list of the five *gogeessa*. Boku Tache, who is a Boorana anthropologist, took Borbor to Asmarom. He said that Borbor might have previously narrated based on not just the *gogeessa* but also the chronological order before. It is therefore impossible to say that the chronological style was created after the interview with Asmarom, but, as a turning point which made the Boorana focus on the chronological style than the *gogeessa* style, the impact this event had not only on Borbor's narrative style but also by extension on how the

Boorana narrate history is not insignificant.

In 1996, at a meeting of the Koonituu clan in a place called Borbor, Borbor narrated the so-called *Seenaa-Boorana* in public, which is a “history” of events organised chronologically according to the order in which the Leaders of the *gadaa* appear. Guyyoo Barraaqoo (62 years old at the time), who by chance happened to be there, was greatly interested by Borbor’s narrative, and that same year he took a tape recorder and interviewed Borbor to get information on the *argaa-dhageettii*, including data on the clans and *hariyyaa* (age sets)¹⁶, the Boorana calendar, and the oral historiography of the Boorana. He would not let anyone else listen to the recording except family members and close friends, and he stored it carefully deep inside his house without making any copies of it. He refused to have the recording shared among the general public, saying that in order for him to acquire the *argaa-dhageettii* from Borbor he had presented him with gifts including *khat*, coffee beans, and chewing tobacco according to Boorana custom, and only then had he heard it, and that the recording was therefore his and his alone. However, I managed to persuade him to share the recording, and I was able to make a digital copy of the tape, which was heavily worn and about to snap.

¹⁶ The age set, or *hariyyaa*, is made up of people who were born during the eight-year term of a particular *gadaa* leader.

What this man did — hold a dialogue with Borbor, record it, and then maintain exclusive possession of it — is also done by other Boorana men. In the town of Dilloo, which is near the border with Kenya, I discovered and digitalized another tape on which Diida Galgaloo Dhalaani had recorded the *arga-dhageetti* covering the Oral Chronicle of the Leaders of the *gadaa*, the names of heroes, the Boorana calendar, the *hariyyaa* (age set), and clans, just as Guyyoo Barraaqoo had done with Borbor. In the oral narratives recorded by Diida Galgaloo Dhalaani from Dilloo, the events referred to were mostly the same as those recorded in 1996 by Guyyoo Barraaqoo and those I heard in 2009, but the content of each narrative was far more detailed.

With the collapse of the socialist regime in 1990 and the introduction of a free market economy, more and more people began to own tape players and recording devices, especially in the urban areas. Among the music tapes on sale in a small store in the town of Yaaballoo, I saw some tapes which contained of Borbor's narrative recorded by the Boorana. These tapes, on sale for just ten Birr (about 50 cents), were making Borbor particularly famous for his historical narratives compared to all the other narrators out there.

When I asked the shop owner where he had obtained the tapes, surprisingly he said that he had got them in Mooyale, a town near the border with Kenya. In spite of the fact that these tapes were recorded in the part of Ethiopia where the Boorana live, they first circulated among the Boorana

living on the Kenyan side, then were reimported back to Ethiopia. Many of the people who owned these reimported tapes were young Boorana. It is not difficult to imagine them being taken to the villages and listened to there by lots of people. It is almost certain that, even for those other people who know the *argaa-dhageettii*, the existence of these tapes made them pay attention to the historicity that is inherent to the *argaa-dhageettii*, and gave them a perspective of *Seenaa-Boorana*, as well as influencing how they narrate the *argaa-dhageettii*.

However, what I want to emphasise here is not that due to the existence of this tape the style of Borbor's narrative unified the content of all Boorana narratives like a history textbook and dominated them. That becomes clear when Borbor's narrative is compared with narratives by other speakers that I have collected. In both cases, different events are recounted, or even if the same event is being told, there may be differences in the details, and conformity in certain narrative patterns exists side-by-side with unconformity in others. While listening to the tape of the *argaa-dhageettii*, people learn and criticise the memories, or find mistakes and try to correct them. That itself could be said to be a new, modern narrative scene.

The birth of *Seenaa-Boorana* can be ascribed to the diversification of narrative spaces, which arose due to a number of factors, among which are: the introduction of modern history education, which began to spread mainly among the young after 1990; changes to the manner of narration

and the intervention in narrative spaces by researchers such as Asmarom and myself; and the appearance of tapes of the *argaa-dhageetti* recorded by the Boorana themselves as a narrative space that transcends time and physical space. The Oral Chronicle that I was able to document also has that aspect of being constructed in the current time, amid transformations in the intellectual framework of Boorana society, and in the context of the modern Boorana narrative space. It could perhaps be said that in the 20 years between the 1990s, when the narrative space exploded in size, and the present day, the Boorana themselves have started to view and narrate the *argaa-dhageetti* from a new perspective.

Nevertheless, I must once again emphasise that the Oral Chronicle that is widely recounted among the Boorana today is not something that was suddenly created purely due to social and technological advancements since the 1990s. Before then, a different form of narration of the Oral Chronicle was dominant. In the older form, events were memorized and narrated following the five *gogeessa*. It is this method of memorization that has become the driving force behind the creation of the present-day form of the oral historiography. As a result of the dissemination of literacy and history education among the young in particular, the old Oral Chronicle based on the five *gogeessa* is being reworked into a modern form that sequences the Leaders of the *gadaa* from the very first to the 70th as a chronology. Regarding structural concepts that have been understood

until now as “a static set of symbolic oppositions and correspondences,” Marshall Sahlins states that, just as the meaning of a ‘thing’ is inherently precarious because it changes even while it is being interpreted, so too does structure possess a dynamic aspect as it transforms “in its global and most powerful representation” (Sahlins 1985:77). The shift in narrative method seen in the Boorana from a chronology based on the five *gogeessa* to one based on chronological sequence of the Leaders of the *gadaa* can be regarded as a clear example of a structure transforming “in its global and most powerful representation.”

A phenomenon revealing these dynamic structural aspects is indeed occurring in Boorana society, but the fact must not be overlooked that without the structure of the five *gogeessa* that sequences the events, and without the memory of structured events that have been passed along based on this sequence, the Boorana’s Oral Chronicle that we see today would not have come into existence.

In next chapter, I will concretely describe what a structure within the Boorana narratives is and how the structure influence into construction of the Oral Chronicle.

III Structured Events

1 Categories and Patterns in the Oral Chronicle

In this section, I will compare the numerous historiographical narratives which gathered from the narrators, transcribed those narratives and translated literally into Japanese and from Japanese to English (Oba-Smidt 2016). I will look at just how events are spoken of as “Boorana history,” analysing any similarities and differences that are revealed. I will statistically clarify the shared categories and patterns used by these unrelated narrators who live across a widespread area, and reveal the numerous cultural tools that are used to construct the Oral Chronicle¹⁷.

First, we will use the *gadaa* leader table (cf. Chart 1) to look at any incidents referred to by four or more of the fourteen narrators. I have compiled statistics on the topics that the fourteen narrators referred to in their narratives and categorized them. I found a total of nine categories: (1) 27% of the narratives are about conflicts with other ethnic groups; (2) 19% of the narratives are about disasters, including droughts, abnormal rainfall, and diseases among humans or livestock; (3) 17% of the narratives are about specific figures, including *gadaa* leaders, heroes, and wise men; (4) 15% are about political feuds and domestic discord among the Boorana that lead to large numbers of deaths; (5) 7% are about customs, including migrations, and the implementation or ending of laws

¹⁷Narratives for which multiple categories and patterns are applicable are included in each percentage.

and other customs; (6) 6% are about times of peace; (7) 5% are about events relating to social conditions; (8) 2% are about migrations; and (9) 2% are about events occurring outside Boorana territory. With regard to the Oral Chronicle samples I collected, there are nine narrative themes: conflict, disaster; episodes regarding specific figures, internal conflict, customs, peace, social conditions, migrations, and the outside world. Stories about external and internal conflict, disasters and specific figures make up of 78% of all the narratives. The main focus of the chronicle is on narratives that cover these four categories.

After reading each version of the Oral Chronicle carefully, several narrative patterns arose in which the narrators talked about the events that occurred when each Leader of the *gadaa* was in charge, regardless of whether the events being related were the same or not. I regarded the following as common patterns. First, narrators provided generalised versions of events by referring to cultural concepts of misfortune such as “*dhaaccii*”¹⁸ “*raaga*”¹⁹, and “*maq-baasa*”. Second, they orally documented events using particular phrases, poetic verse, and other stylized lines of dialogue. Third, they tied events to politics by referring to the *gadaa* leader’s clan and the legitimacy of his succession. The fourth pattern involved narrators describing events through reference to stylized

¹⁸ *Dhaaccii* means similar phenomenon repeatedly happen among members of paternity lineage. Especially Boorana use this concept, when they explain personal history (Asmarom Legesse 1973; Miyawaki 2006; Oba-Smidt 2016).

¹⁹See footnote 13

and plotted stories. I have compiled statistics on those patterns; 28 % of the narratives are used the first pattern; 23 % of the narratives are used the second pattern; 23 % of the narratives are used the third pattern; 6 % of the narratives are used the fifth pattern.

The narratives of the 14 narrators were classified statistically into the patterns described above. Narratives that covered the same events and periods were compared, and those narratives could be separated into three categories: (1) narratives in which more than one narrator related nearly the same version of events; (2) narratives in which the narrators related different versions of events; and (3) narratives in which narrators each described different events entirely. The four patterns described are found often in the narratives falling into the first category, and while there was no common content in the narratives falling into the second and third categories, a number of patterns are also found there.

This suggests that narrators are likely to use the same narrative patterns when relating stories about the same events and periods, while patterns used can affect the content of narratives and increase the diversity of events covered.

There is a great amount of consistency in regards to which events occurred and how they should be narrated for pre-twentieth century narratives. Various events should have occurred in each era, but narrators tend to refer to the same events in certain eras.

Furthermore, there are similarities in how the events are described and their causal relationships.

The next sections will provide more detail regarding the *maq-baasa* cycle, as well as explain the memory mechanism which allows this non-literate society to historicize events and construct and

maintain a consistent Oral Chronicle.

2 The Term *Maq-baasa*

The word *maq-baasa* literally means “to give a name,” but if we look at how this word is used by the Boorana, we can see that it is used in two ways. The first use is in *maq-baasa* ritual through which a child is named, and the second is in the phrase “the *maq-baasa* of a *gadaa* leader” which refers to the seven names that are allotted to *gadaa* leaders through a systematic cycle. This section looks at the latter, namely the *maq-baasa* assigned to individual *gadaa* leaders.

The *maq-baasa* of the *gadaa* leaders are assigned in the following order: 1. *Fullaasa*, 2. *Mardiida*, 3. *Daraara*, 4. *Libaasa*, 5. *Sabbaaqa*, 6. *Moggisa*, and 7. *Maakula*. Each of them is allotted to the era of a specific leader in order (cf. Chart 1). For example, the first *gadaa* leader, Gadayoo Galgaloo, was assigned the first *maq-baasa* of *Fullaasa*, and following the cycle shown above, the second *gadaa* leader, Yaayyaa Fulleelle, was assigned the second *maq-baasa* of *Mardiida*. Each leader is allotted the applicable *maq-baasa* in order, with the seventh *gadaa* leader receiving the *Maakula* *maq-baasa*, and the eighth resetting the cycle and being assigned *Fullaasa*, the same *maq-baasa* as the first leader. The seven *maq-baasa* continue to be assigned in this way.

Why did the Boorana purposely make such a rule? To answer this question, we should look at the fact that the Boorana have assigned a particular meaning to each of the seven *maq-baasa*. Asmarom Legesse did not refer to the meanings, but Gemetchu and Aneesa have summarized them using their research into the narrative provided by Dabbassa Guyyoo (Gemetchu and

Aneesa 2005:260). Some of their data agrees with my data, but other data disagrees. I would like to cross-reference my findings with their results.

1. *Fullaasa* means “to pierce something with a spear.” Gemetchu and Aneesa interpreted this to mean that a *Fullaasa* era would see an increase in livestock, but nine out of the fourteen main narrators in this paper said that *Fullaasa* leaders are fated to experience internal conflict or war. For example, many narrators described the internal conflict in the time of 36th leader, Halakee Dooyyoo, in detail, while Jaarsoo did not know much about it. However, Jaarsoo did mention that there must have been some sort of domestic discord as Halakee Dooyyoo’s *maq-baasa* was *Fullaasa*.

Fullaasa means that people will fight amongst themselves. People become unable to talk to each other. They lose their respect for each other. When they discuss something, when they discuss the reservoirs or *eela* (water wells), during a *Fullaasa* they always fight with each other. I don’t know why, but they always fight with each other [Jaarsoo Waariyoo, recorded in December, 2009].

2. According to Gemetchu and Aneesa, *Mardiida* means “transformation,” and at the end of the eight years of a leader’s rule, a transformation is fated to occur. According to the narrator Kunnoo, people in the past who knew the *argaa-dhageettii* said that this *maq-baasa* was always fated to experience opposition. The fate allocated to this *maq-baasa* differs according to the narrator. Four narrators stated that it involved war, internal conflict, and drought, but eight narrators said

nothing was fated to occur during this time.

3. *Daraara* means “to sprout.” Seven narrators said this *maq-baasa* had no particular fate, and four narrators said it was fated for peace. Gemetchu and Aneesa interpreted that leaders with a *maq-baasa* of *Daraara* were fated to see peace and prosperity.

4. *Libaasa* means “to glare at each other (*ila walti baasa*),” and fourteen narrators mutually indicated that leaders with this *maq-baasa* were fated to see terrible wars and internal conflict. Gemetchu and Aneesa agreed that *libaasa* leaders were fated to face serious confrontations, disputes and domestic discord, and this matches up with my data.

5. *Sabbaaqa* means “to enjoy everything (*itti sabbaaqa*),” and ten narrators said that the fate of this *maq-baasa* is that people will become greedy, or there will be droughts and war. Kunnoo mentioned that the *Sabbaaqa* fate was preventable using a *raaga’s* magic²⁰. Gemetchu and Aneesa interpreted *Sabbaaqa* to be a fortunate fate with rains and peace, which does not agree with my data.

6. *Moggisa* means “unstoppable fights at the border of the Boorana territory (*lafa moggaa waraana keessa hin ba-u*),” and twelve narrators stated that it was fated to bring conflict. According to Gemetchu and Aneesa, *Moggisa* leaders are fated to see both conflict and full bellies.

²⁰ According to Kunnoo, this fate was exorcised by *raaga* during the *baalli* exchange rituals (Inauguration ceremony of the Leader of *gadaa*), and if the *gadaa* leaders did not exorcise it, they experienced unfortunate events in line with it.

The origin of 7. *Maakula* is unknown, but ten narrators said that this *maq-baasa* brought a fate of peace. However, Gemetchu and Aneesa stated that *Maakula* was fated to be neither good nor bad, but to have both construction and destruction.

Of the seven *maq-baasa*, the narrators whom I spoke to agreed on the fates of the following: 1. *Fullaasa*—internal conflict and war; 4. *Libaasa*—large-scale war and internal conflict; 5. *Sabbaaqa*—drought and conflict; 6. *Moggisa*—a fate of conflict, and 7. *Maakula*—peace. No consistency was seen in the descriptions of the other two, 2. *Mardiida* and 3. *Daraara*, as some narrators said that these brought no particular fate with them, while others said that the fate was irregular, with either good things or bad things happening in turn. Compared to Gemetchu and Aneesa's findings, *Libaasa* and *Moggisa* were quite similar, and the vaguer fates of *Mardiida* and *Daraara* showed only slight similarities.

According to Boorana fatalism, the periods from *Fullaasa* to *Maakula* are sections of a continuously flowing fate that acts as if it has been programmed in that way. When the Boorana assign a *maq-baasa* to a *gadaa* leader, they establish a rotating cycle, and analyse the eight years of his service through the lens of his *maq-baasa* fate.

3 Historical Perspective Based on the *Maq-baasa* Cycle

The “historical perspective based on the *maq-baasa* cycle” refers to how the Boorana use the *maq-baasa* to explain how “history” follows a cyclical, programmed path. In this section, I would like to examine how the Boorana actually narrate their “history” based on this historical

perspective using a number of examples.

The narrator Waaqoo Gurraacha said that no fate is allocated to *Daraara*, *Mardiida*, *Maakula*, and *Fullaasa* fates, but the *Libaasa*, *Moggisa*, and *Sabbaaqa* fates can be seen to consistently influence Boorana “history” throughout the Oral Chronicle (cf. Chart 1).

Waaqoo Gurraacha said that the 4th and 11th *gadaa* leaders, Daawwee (c.1480–1488) and Dagalee (c.1536–1544) shared a *maq-baasa* of *Libaasa*, which resulted in conflicts during their respective periods. Waaqoo said he did not know exactly what kind of conflicts occurred, only that there were conflicts. Dooyyoo (the 18th leader; c.1592–1600) also ruled under a *Libaasa* fate, and during his time groups like the Arsii, Gujii, and Garrii broke away from the greater Oromo group, and, in spite of their hitherto close relationship, they began to fight. This *Libaasa* fate was said to be connected to the conflict in the time of Abbuu (the 25th leader; c.1648–1656), the large-scale conflict with the Arsii in the time of Jaarsoo (the 32nd leader; c.1704–1712), and the conflict with the Arsii in time of Soraa (the 39th leader; c.1760–1768), which resulted in the annihilation of an entire *luba*. The wide-spread internal conflict during the times of Jiloo (the 46th leader; c.1816–1824) and Diida (the 53rd leader; c.1872–1880) were also said to have been the result of a *Libaasa*. Bulee (the 60th leader; c.1928–1936) was killed by the enemy during the war against Italy, and Boruu (the 67th leader; c.1984–1992) was also killed by someone. The violent deaths of these two *gadaa* leaders were also linked to the fate of *Libaasa*, and the narrators said in the Oral Chronicle that *gadaa* leaders ruling under a *maq-baasa* of *Libaasa* were destined to suffer misfortune through either war, internal conflict, or their own violent deaths.

In the same way, Waaqoo Gurraacha pointed to certain events that were related to a *Moggisa*. He said though he did not know what kind of conflict had happened, there had probably been a conflict under Areeroo (the 6th leader, c.1496–1504) because his *maq-baasa* was *Moggisa*. Booroo (the 13th leader, c.1552–1560) was also under a *Moggisa*, and society was so unstable in his time that they were unable to perform the *gadaammojii*, the final rite of passage in the *gadaa* system. The *Moggisa* of Urgumeessa (the 20th leader, c.1608–1616) meant he was fated to have the people take his title of Leader of the *gadaa* away by force because he refused to give way to the next leader. The *Moggisa* of Aallee (the 27th leader, c.1664–1672) and Soraa (the 34th leader, c.1720–1728) caused conflict that resulted in the deaths of a number of *gadaa* officials. Liiban (the 41st leader, c.1776–1784) was killed by Gujii while under the fate of *Moggisa*. The *Moggisa* of Madha (the 48th leader, c.1832–1840) caused a confrontation between Madha and the hero Diidoo Gaawwalee. The *Moggisa* of Liiban (the 55th leader, c.1888–1896) caused a terrible famine after an invasion by the Ethiopian empire and the spread of disease among the livestock. The *Moggisa* of Guyyoo (the 62nd leader, c.1936–1944) caused him to kill the *qaalluu* of the Odituu clan. In the time of the 69th leader, Liiban (c.2000–2008), people started to fear the *Moggisa* fate, and in fact there was constant conflict.

Waaqoo Gurraacha also mentioned that the fate of *Sabbaaqa* had an effect during the rule of a number of *gadaa* leaders. Droughts occurred in the times of the 5th leader, Diida (c.1488–1496), the 12th leader, Osoosoo (c.1544–1552), the 19th leader, Bachoo (c.1600–1608), the 26th leader, Abbayi (c.1656–1664), the 33rd leader, Walee (c.1712–1720), and the 40th leader, Bulee (c.1768–1776). In the

times of the 47th leader; Sokoree (c. 1824–1832), the 54th leader; Guyyoo (c.1880–1888), and the 61st leader; Aagaa (c.1936–1944), people became greedy and they violated sexual norms and stopped helping each other. He also mentioned that there was a terrible drought in the time of the 68th leader; Boruu (c.1992–2000).

Like Waaqoo Gurraacha, and using the *Libaasa* fate as an example, the narrator Kunnoo talked about the “history of the Boorana” unfolding according to the cycle of a *maq’baasa* of *Libaasa* befalling certain *gadaa* leaders. Kunnoo recited the verse, “Biduu Dheeraa Duuba of the *Gamasii hariyyaa*, who fought his way into the enemy (*Gamasii duude haate Biduun Dheeraa Duuba*),” which was sung in praise of the hero Biduu, who lived during the time of the 4th Leader of the *gadaa*, Daawwee, and noted that there was a conflict due to the *Libaasa* fate. In the time of the 11th leader; Dagalee, there was no conflict but a terrible drought happened instead. In the time of the 18th leader; Dooyyoo, the narrative describes how the conflict between the Oromo groups began. In the time of the 25th leader; Abbuu, there was a war with the Garrii. In the time of the 32nd leader; Jaarsoo, there was a large conflict with the Arsii. In the time of the 39th leader; Soraa, all the *gadaa* officials were killed in a major conflict. In the time of the 46th leader; Jiloo Nyeencoo, Maasai-speaking pastoralists called the Kibiyaa attacked the Boorana. There was internal conflict in the time of the 53rd leader; Diida, and both Bulee and Boruu, the 60th and 67th leaders respectively, met tragic deaths. Kunnoo said these incidents were triggered by the cyclic fate of *Libaasa*.

One narrator; Qaallicha, said that *Libaasa* was the cause of the Oromo split during the time of the 18th *gadaa* leader. He also noted that a conflict probably occurred in the time of the 25th leader, and

that the 32nd leader saw a large-scale conflict against the Arsii. There was wide-spread domestic discord during the time of the 53rd leader; a drought and the war with Italy in the time of the 60th leader; a coup and subsequent regime change in the time of the 67th leader; and a case of murder in the time of the 67th leader, Boruu. If the regime change that occurred during the time of Boruu in 1991 was also caused by the *Libaasa maq-baasa*, then Qaalicha's narrative indicates the possibility that events that occurred outside Boorana society are also interpreted by the code based on the *maq-baasa* cycle and incorporated into the historical perspective based on the *maq-baasa* cycle.

The seven *maq-baasa* are assigned in turn to each *gadaa* leader; which means that a leader is considered to have the same *maq-baasa* as the leader who ruled eight terms before. The Boorana share the belief that the fates within this eight-generation long cycle control the events that occur under each leader. This cyclic "history" is embedded in the cultural memory of the Boorana in various forms.

4 Historical Perspective Based on the Composite *Maq-baasa/Gogeessa* Cycle

As referenced in II Section 1, in the past, narrators who related the *argaa-dhageettii* memorized events in terms of the five *gogeessa*. The narrators told me that when they learned "history of the Boorana" they needed to understand and memorize the five *gogeessa* and the seven *maq-baasa*, and they recognized the premise that their "history" was structured within that framework of the five *gogeessa* and the seven *maq-baasa*. If we consider the five *gogeessa* to be the bones of their

memories, we might regard the *maq-baasa* cycle as serving to thereby flesh them out. These two concepts configure the structure to support the narrative of the Oral Chronicle as they interact with each other.

The interaction of the five *gogeessa* and the seven-stage *maq-baasa* cycle is indicated plainly in the phrase “The *maq-baasa* circulate inside the *gogeessa* (*Gogeessa keessati maq-baasa irra mara*).” Asmarom Legesse suggested something similar, (Asmarom 1973:192), but the narrators explained it as follows: “*Fullaasa* creates *Moggisa*. *Moggisa* creates *Libaasa*. *Libaasa* creates *Mardiida*. *Mardiida* creates *Maakula*. *Maakula* creates *Sabbaaqa*. *Sabbaaqa* creates *Daraara*. And *daraara* creates *Fullaasa*.” When I first heard this explanation, I did not understand it. I had learned that the order of the cycle was, 1. *Fullaasa*, 2. *Mardiida*, 3. *Daraara*, 4. *Libaasa*, 5. *Sabbaaqa*, 6. *Moggisa*, and 7. *Maakula*. But this explanation suggested the order of the cycle was 1. *Fullaasa*, 6. *Moggisa*, 4. *Libaasa*, 2. *Mardiida*, 7. *Maakula*, 5. *Sabbaaqa*, and 3. *Daraara*. However, I finally understood that latter cycle was created by fitting the *maq-baasa* cycle into each of the five *gogeessa* (cf. Chart 2).

In other words, as shown in the Chart 2, if a *gadaa* leader has the *maq-baasa* of *Fullaasa* and belongs to the first *gogeessa* his son will belong to the group five generations below (according to the Principle of a Five-Sets Distance between Father and Son), and based on the *maq-baasa* cycle, he will be assigned a fate of *Moggisa*. In the same manner, when the son of a *gadaa* leader with a *Moggisa* fate becomes leader, his *maq-baasa* will be *Libaasa*. Furthermore, if the grandson became a Leader of the *gadaa*, his *maq-baasa* would be *Mardiida*. The Boorana remember the *maq-*

baasa cycle within the five *gogeessa* as well.

As Asmarom Legesse reported (Asmarom 1973:198, 199), the Boorana see a problem if people with the same *maq-baasa* in the same *gogeessa* become Leaders of the *gadaa*. The Boorana believe that similar events will recur when a person with the same *maq-baasa* and in the same *gogeessa* as a previous leader becomes leader; thus they remember the names of *gadaa* leaders with the same *maq-baasa* in the same *gogeessa*. For example, “The *Sabbaaqa* of Abbayi Baabboo (26th leader) came round to Aagaa Adii (the 61st leader) (*Sabbaaqa Abbayi Baabboo Aagaa Adii mare*)”. Another example can be seen in the phrase, “The *Libaasa* of Jaarsoo Iddoo (the 32nd leader) came round to Boruu Guyyoo (the 67th leader), who was in the same *gogeessa* (*Libaasi gogeessa Boruu Guyyoo ka Jarsoo Iddoo itti mare*)”(cf. Chart 2).

From this interpretative framework regarding the occurrence of events and how they are remembered, it is assumed that in addition to the eight-generation historical perspective based on the *maq-baasa* cycle described previously, there is also a composite *maq-baasa/gogeessa* cycle of fate that is 35 generations long.

As stated previously, Asmarom Legesse was the first one to put forward the theory that the Boorana see the *maq-baasa* as being allocated to *gadaa* leaders according to a systematic cycle and that events recur based on this cycle. His theory was that this created a historical perspective based on a composite *maq-baasa/gogeessa* cycle. On the other hand, Asmarom does not mention that each *maq-baasa* has an underlying fatalistic meaning, or that the Boorana share a historical perspective based on the recurring fates of the *maq-baasa* cycle.

Considering the relationship between the perspective of the *maq-baasa* cycle and the composite *maq-baasa/gogeessa* perspective, the latter, which puts the focus more on the five *gogeessa*, may have been more popular among the Boorana in the past. However, when the chronicle shifted from being *gogeessa*-based narratives to being narrated chronologically, as described in II Section 3, the Boorana may have become more conscious of their “history” from the viewpoint of the non-composite cycle made up of the *maq-baasa* alone. This idea is supported by the fact that many of the narrators who pointed to the composite *maq-baasa/gogeessa* cycle in the Oral Chronicle are over 80 years old. Asmarom Legesse also presented a narration by fortune teller Areeroo Raammataa based on the composite *maq-baasa/gogeessa* cycle (cf. Asmarom 1973:198 and 199), and Areeroo was born in the late 19th century.

Further research into the dynamics of this structure is necessary, but the current findings suggest that the transition from using the complex composite *maq-baasa/gogeessa* cycle to using the simpler *maq-baasa* cycle as a basis for their historical perspective may have occurred in line with the transition from *gogeessa*-based narration to chronological narration of the chronicle.

5 Fixing and Generating Historical Memory

In the Section 1 of this chapter, we compared narratives regarding events in the Boorana chronicle mentioned by four or more narrators. Comparing those events to those about which the narrators pointed out the effect of the *maq-baasa* fates in terms of either the *maq-baasa* cycle or composite *maq-baasa/gogeessa* cycle, we find that the fate-related events are almost always

described in great detail. Analysis of those narratives with a focus on this detail reveals the consistency of the historical memory and the relationship between the historical perspectives based on the *maq-baasa* and the composite *maq-baasa/gogeessa* (cf. Chart 1). For example, as stated previously, it is said that a *maq-baasa* of *Libaasa* will always see conflict or domestic trouble, and if we look then at the chronicle, we find that the narrative for every leader with a *Libaasa* fate includes references to events related to war or internal conflict. In the same manner, *Sabbaaqa* is a fate that brings conflict and disaster; and narratives regarding leaders ruling under *Sabbaaqa* are always about conflict and disaster.

In the present time, the Boorana not only share historical perspectives based on the *maq-baasa* and *maq-baasa/gogeessa* cycles, they also share a code that has been passed down through many generations; these all serve to build a consistent foundation for the historical memory. As mentioned by Asmarom Legesse (Asmarom 1973:200), Boorana living in a specific time and witnessing specific events interpreted the occurrence of those events using the *maq-baasa* cycle. From all the events that occurred in those eras, they choose to narrate and remember those events that agreed with the fates inherent to the *maq-baasa* cycle. Therefore, the *maq-baasa* cycle seems to serve both as a method of generating “history” and remembering it.

According to Sahlins, “history” is constructed from phenomena either through a performative structure that tries to tie the structure to events, or through a regulative structure that tries to tie events into the structure. These two structures can coexist within a single society, and they can be found in various places around the world (Sahlins 1993). According to Sahlins’ definition, the

structure seen in Boorana society has a strong regulative aspect that tries to tie events into the structure.

As an example of this, Asmarom Legesse claimed that Jaldeessa Liiban (the 64th leader) contributed his own funds to the large-scale construction of *eela* to ensure consistency with the composite *maq-baasa/gogeessa* cycle (Asmarom Legesse 1973:200), which is surely a clear example of the regulative structure behind Boorana “history.”

If the regulative structure in the Boorana works in a more radical way, new historical memory can be created through reference to historical perspectives based on the *maq-baasa* and *maq-baasa/gogeessa*, even when no event actually occurs.

When the analysis of the Boorana narratives is focussed on the reference to *maq-baasa*, we may sometimes stumble across examples of “history” being created based on the codes inherent to the *maq-baasa* and *maq-baasa/gogeessa* cycles. Narrators tend to speculate about the “history” of eras ruled by *gadaa* leaders unfamiliar to them based on the *maq-baasa* allocated to those leaders. Some speculations develop even further and become connected to mis-recollections, thereby creating an entirely new “history.”

For example, as previously mentioned, Waaqoo Gurraacha’s narrative noted that Madha (the 48th leader; c.1832–1840) had a *maq-baasa* of *Moggisa*, and that caused a conflict with the hero Diidoo Gaawwalee. However, this story about a Leader of the *gadaa* having a conflict with a hero is well-known among men and women of all ages, and the other narrators said this incident happened in the time of the 38th leader, who was also named Madha (c.1752–1760). The 48th

leader was the grandson of the 38th leader, and Waaqoo Gurraacha attributed the incident to the wrong Madha.

The cause of this misunderstanding appears to be rooted in the historical perspective based on the *maq-baasa* cycle. The 48th leader definitely had the *maq-baasa* of *Moggisa*, but either little conflict occurred during his time, or what conflict did occur has been forgotten. Perhaps it was because I asked about events triggered by the *Moggisa fate*, but Waaqoo Gurraacha could not help mentioning how the fate of *Moggisa* had come true in the time of the 48th Leader of the *gadaa*. The result was this fictional account about a conflict between the hero Diidoo and the 48th leader, Madha.

This is an example of how a new “history” can be created through the incorrect application of the perspective based on the *maq-baasa* cycle, but there are also examples of the same phenomenon in regards to the *maq-baasa/gogeessa* composite cycle.

The narrators Dooyyoo and Areeroo mentioned that there was a major conflict with the Arsii during the time of Aallee (the 27th leader; c.1664–1672), a war that many narrators attribute to the 32nd leader (c.1704–1712). A story about the 32nd leader was thereby misattributed to the time of the 27th leader. Dooyyoo stated that according to the *maq-baasa/gogeessa* cycle, Aallee and Guyyoo (the 62nd leader; c.1944–1952) belonged to the same *gogeessa* and had the same *maq-baasa* of *Moggisa* (c. Chart 2). This results in both of them experiencing similar events. As noted previously, when a leader has the same *gogeessa* and *maq-baasa* as another leader, the Boorana people believe that the power behind the *maq-baasa* fate is multiplied. However, there were either no

major events during the time of the 27th leader or they were not memorable, but either way, Dooyoo and Areeroo did not remember what actually happened during the time of this *gadaa* leader. To stay faithful to the concept of a recurring *Moggisa* fate, it would be necessary for something to have happened in the time of the 27th leader. This is potentially why the well-known story about the war with the Arsii that is said to have happened in the time of the 32nd leader (Jaarsoo) was misappropriated as an event that happened in the time of the 27th leader, especially as Jaarsoo was in the same *gogeessa* and thus ideologically equivalent to the 27th leader's son according to the principle of a five-sets distance between father and son (See Chart 2). Thus, there is always the possibility that new "history" will be created because of the misapplication of the historical perspective stemming from the composite *maq-baasa/gogeessa* cycle.

The Boorana also talk of "future history" that will occur in line with the *maq-baasa* and *maq-baasa/gogeessa* cycles. For example, the narrators Jaarsoo and Dooyoo pointed out that the 36th leader's *Fullaasa* would be passed on to the next *gadaa* leader, Guyyoo (the future 71st leader; c.2016–2024), and that Guyyoo shares Halakee's *gogeessa* so that fate will also be passed on. At the same time, they said that since Halakee lost his political power in an internal conflict when he was Leader of the *gadaa*, a similar event would happen to Guyyoo²¹. Waaqoo Gurraacha stated that

²¹Guyyoo Jaarsoo was supposed to become the 71st *Leader* of the *gadaa*, but he died in July 2011. People have started describing this unexpected event historically as having been caused by the *Fullaasa* of the 36th leader, Halakee Dooyoo. When I was conducting my

when the son of the current leader (the 70th leader, Guyyoo Gobbaa) becomes the 75th leader in 2048, a drought will occur; people will become greedy and society will become disorderly because his *maq-baasa* is *Sabbaaqa*.

This is how they create not only the past but also future “Boorana history.” The Oral Chronicle is often recounted with interpretations added by the memory keepers, and it is possible that stories which are consistent among the narrators and in line with the *maq-baasa* cycle code have been discussed and passed among the narrators over the generations. If these future narratives are also discussed and passed on to the next generation, any conflict or drought that occurs under the rule of future leaders may become connected with the predictions made by past narrators and become set as “history”.

As stated above, a regulative structure is strong in Boorana society, but when something that is in no way applicable to the *maq-baasa* or *maq-baasa/gogeessa* cycles occurs, new categories are sometimes added to explain the irregular event within a Boorana context, including whether the leader had a good or bad character; or that magic was used. For example, a *maq-baasa* of *Daraara*

surveys in 2009 and 2010, people were already saying that the *Fullaasa* would cause something to occur during the time of Guyyoo, and currently (as of 2015) his death is being spoken of as a consequence of the *Fullaasa*.

is not supposed to experience drought, but it is said that Jiloo Aagaa (the 66th leader) had a drought in his time because he often did things that went against the customs. In this way, the Boorana people say that the event occurred because something was added to the original *maq-baasa* fate. Assimilation of such situations works not only with a regulative structure, but also with a performative structure²².

6 The Structure of Historical Memory and Cyclical Time

I would like to examine the Boorana's concept of time, based on the historical perspectives of the *maq-baasa* and *maq-baasa/gogeessa* cycles that are embedded within the Boorana historical memory.

In terms of the *maq-baasa* cycle, each *gadaa* leader's term lasts eight years, and each leader experiences events that are allotted to them according to their *maq-baasa*. Therefore, a single

²²This article focuses on the structure within the narratives describing "Boorana history," so it does not sufficiently discuss the dynamic and performative aspects of structure, in other words, how the memory structure itself has been remodelled in relation to the contemporary events. With regard to this point, I need to collect more narratives covering events in specific eras told by people of the same generation, and this should be addressed in future research.

term—from the first (*Fullaasa*) to the seventh (*Maakula*)—takes 56 years to complete, and events are believed to occur according to the pre-determined fate. The Boorana concept of time can perhaps be seen in such terms, with a single cycle of 56 years divided up into eight-year terms characterized by specific *maq-baasa* (cf. Diagram 1).

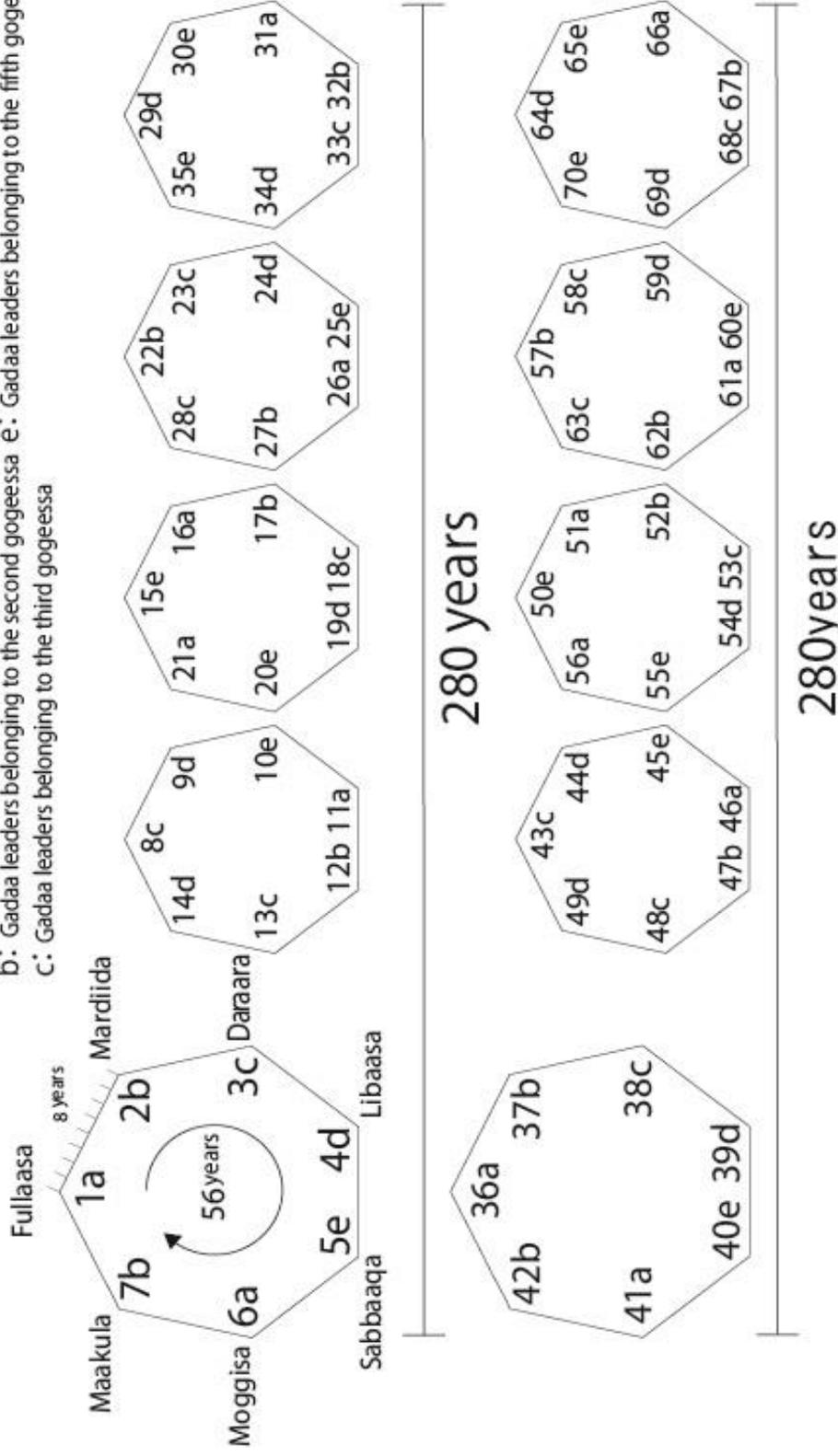
When deriving the Boorana concept of time based upon the historical perspective of the composite *maq-baasa/gogeessa* cycle, the *maq-baasa* cycle takes 280 years to complete within one *gogeessa* (cf. Diagram 1). If the 56-year *maq-baasa* cycle is a sub-cycle, it takes 5 sub-cycles within a *gogeessa* to complete the *maq-baasa* cycle. If we think of this 280-year-long *maq-baasa* cycle within a single *gogeessa* to be a different cycle, it could be called a great cycle²³.

The 56-year sub-cycle and the great 280-year cycle potentially serve as the basis for the Boorana

²³ Gemetchu and Aneesa also referred to the 56-year and 280-year cycles (Gemetchu and Aneesa 2005). They also state that the Boorana believe the world ends every 360 years when the five *gogeessa* cycles complete and a 40-year cycle (the time required for a son to succeed his father as Leader of the *gadaa*) is thus completed nine times. Their historical perspective leads them to this conclusion based in the idea that the number 9 is the last number of a cycle and means “to transform.” Their claims were based on interviews conducted with one narrator, so whether or not the view that the world is reborn every 360 years is one found throughout Boorana society needs to be confirmed through further research and comparison with the statements of other interviewees.

Diagram 1 Model of the Boorana concept of Time

- a: Gadaa leaders belonging to the first gogeessa
- b: Gadaa leaders belonging to the second gogeessa
- c: Gadaa leaders belonging to the third gogeessa
- d: Gadaa leaders belonging to the fourth gogeessa
- e: Gadaa leaders belonging to the fifth gogeessa



※The numbers in the figure correspond to the chronological list of gadaa leaders in Chart 1.

concept of time. A concept of time is naturally difficult to generalize, and people do not tend to explain their concept of time to others, but if we take a comprehensive look at how the Boorana tell their stories and their thoughts regarding their “history,” such a cyclic time concept appears.

The Boorana instinctively see the time from sunrise to sunset as one day, and measure the passage of time by the waxing and waning of the moon. They count the days it takes for the moon to go from new to full, and then back to new again as one month, and one year consists of twelve months. They change their routines based on the cycles of the rainy and dry seasons, and perform various rituals on the dates determined by fortune tellers who read the stars, known as the *ayyaantuu*. This is how time flows for the regular Boorana person. There is also another concept of time that is based in the *gadaa* system. The lives of men incorporated into the *gadaa* system are divided up according to the programme of generation-based sets. Women, and men considered to be the “*ilmaan-Jaarsaa* (The sons of old men)”²⁴ who are not fully incorporated into the *gadaa* system, also remain conscious of the eight-year cycle due to the various rites repeatedly held at eight-year intervals in line with the *gadaa* system.

Many Boorana obtain a practical understanding of time from grasping its passage through the rising and sinking of the sun and the waxing and waning of the moon, and the eight-year compartmentalization of time through the *gadaa* system. However, the Boorana try to further integrate the eight-year cycle into the *maq-baasa* cycle and *maq-baasa/gogeessa* cycles. The

²⁴Men who are born, when their fathers are in *gadaammojji* stage.

concept of time generated by these cycles is extremely conceptual, but it assures the structural continuity of the “Boorana history” not only in the past but also into the future by incorporating the flow of time into these *maq-baasa* and *maq-baasa/gogeessa* cycles and giving time structure. The Boorana process any catastrophic events that happened in the past based on the *maq-baasa* cycle and the composite *maq-baasa/gogeessa* cycle as outcomes of their “time” structure. Also, a template of interpretation has already been incorporated into their concept of time for any unreasonable events that may occur in the future, thereby allowing any future crises to be conceptually woven into the historical fabric forever. What this reveals is an eternally recurring concept of time that is premised on the absolute affirmation of both their lives and society.

VI Conclusion

I revealed that the Boorana have constructed and preserved “history” based on the structure which is their cultural mode of interpreting and memorizing events. Sahlins’s concept of the structure which I referred is suggestive for understanding the local interpretation processes of constructing “history”. I could show the structure appear not only modes of myths but also various forms. In the case of Boorana, *maq-baasa* cycle is the structure for transforming events into “history”

While using the Boorana’s oral chronicle, which they began to narrate in the fifteenth century, this paper aims to reveal the mechanism by which “history” is produced and passed on in a non-literate society.

I have not chosen to do this because the reconstruction of an ethnic group's history is necessarily impossible. I merely want to pick up the pieces that have fallen away as historians map out the history, and, by looking at them from a perspective different to classical historians, show the potential for the emergence of a new historical anthropology.

If multiple narrators who live scattered over a wide area all refer to a certain incident in a certain time, then it can surely be said there is a high possibility that the event did in fact occur, and, in any case, that this event is part of a common, codified narrative (such as an "oral chronicle"). However, with regard to causal theories relating to the occurrence of an event contained within an oral historiography (which in fact often take place with the premise that there is some supernatural power at work), it is usually immediately determined that the event did not occur due to such supernatural factors, and unless one is a historian studying belief systems, these local perspectives are scrutinized and then carefully plucked from accounts of history.

Writing about the history practices of the Australian Aborigines, Hokari Minoru cast his doubts on the state of historians' perspective. Regarding history practices based on local perspectives, which include many things that could never be accepted from a viewpoint of positivist history, he stated, "What is confronting us is the profound plurality of history-spaces and time, and the limits of academic history, which is obsessed with universalizing the modern Western thoughts" (Hokari 2004:216). He argued history should not conceal those limits, but rather stand between the two perspectives—that of local history practice and that of academic historical accounts—which have the potential to contradict each other, and search for the potential to connect them. Ultimately, this

proposal includes the issue of how to harmonize the pluralistic world without unifying it into one or abandoning those parts that cannot be connected. This is not just a problem when describing history, but also one that is deeply concerned with anthropology.

Regarding Hokari's suggestion, here I will consider history from a more anthropological perspective, one that views even positivist history as a type of local "history" practice. This became clear throughout the paper, but by analysing local "history" practices it becomes possible to investigate that society's cultural thinking and the state of its awareness of the world. That is where the ultimate significance of pursuing anthropological history lies. It is also one of the tasks that anthropologists must take up.

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