Anthropogenic menace on sacred natural sites: the case of Me’ee Bokko and Daraartu sacred shrines in Guji Oromo, Southern Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the anthropogenic menaces affecting Me’ee Bokko and Daraartu sacred shrines among Guji Oromo, in Adoolla Reeddee and Annaa Sorraa districts, Southern Ethiopia. This study employed qualitative approach, ethnographic research design, and methods of data production like in-depth interview; transect walk, and focus group discussions. The findings indicate that the expansion and teaching of Abrahamic religions (particularly Christianity and Islam), the implementation of unsustainable infrastructural project, modern educational system, waning of people’s loyalty to customary laws of Gadaa system and encroachment of sacred land were anthropogenic menaces affecting the sacred shrines. Even though these threatening factors are formidable in their very nature and affecting the sustainability of sacred shrines, Guji people have century long indigenous mechanisms to maintain and preserve those sites. These mechanisms include the replacement of destructed sacred tree by ordaining another tree, occasional supervision on the status of sacred shrine by insisting local people to protect the sites, demarcating the sites, and enforcing customary punishment to sustain the sacred shrines. Generally, to mitigate the menacing factors and ensure sustainability of sacred shrines that are inextricably linked with Guji culture, and serving as biocultural diversity hotspot, the scholars, local people, government and non-governmental organizations have to collaborate on their preservation.

1. Introduction

A sacred natural site (SNS) is socially set aside, venerated and consecrated natural area that is inseparably allied with local traditions such as worship, commemorations, myths, celebrations and belief systems of the local communities (Verschuuren et al., 2010). The SNS consists of old age and deep ingrained historical connection that human societies have with the physical environment since the ancient time (Danica et al., 2005). Evidently, different people sacralize a certain landscape for various traditional practices such as worship of a supernatural being and ancestral spirit, commemoration of ancestors and martyr, traditional rituals and events, libation and supplication purposes (Aniago, 2015; Ashutosh et al., 2011; Dawson, 2009; Ikoro, and Ekevere, 2016).

The sacred natural site is imperative for wellbeing of humankind and environments by holding and sustaining the essential elements of biological and cultural diversities (Verschuuren et al., 2010). It holds traditional practices, cosmos, values, belief system and identity of the people serving as a bridge connecting human cultural practices with physical environment (Dawson, 2009; Frascaroli and Verschuuren, 2016). As a result, it is indispensable for human’s life holding huge forests, groves, old trees, medicinal plants, pastures and overall biodiversities in landraces. Currently, the conservation of sacred natural site is being coterminous with the preservation of human cultural heritage and biological diversities, because of inextricable linkage between biological and cultural diversities (Verschuuren et al., 2010). Consequently, the sacred natural sites have been thought as biocultural diversity hotspot embracing cultural and biological diversities at the same time.

Nevertheless, the sacred natural sites and associated indigenous mechanisms of environmental stewardship have been endangered currently due to escalation of human interventions and influences on sacred sites (Maffi and Woodley, 2012; Verschuuren et al., 2010). Globally, these endangerments are caused by multiple factors such as unsustainable development interventions, globalization, and expansion of mainstream religions, westernization and enormous socio-cultural changes among others (Berry, 2008; Blaser et al., 2004; Deloria, 2003; MacDonald, 2011; Phillipson, 1996). Indeed, these challenges are ubiquitous and touch every parts of the world differently.

In Ethiopia, there are many sacred natural sites that are highly connected with local traditions in one way another. For instance, the sacred...
shrines like Me’ee Bokko, Adoola and Samarro in Guji Zone (Jemjem and Dhadacha, 2011), Caato forest in Horroo Gadurru Wollaggia Zone (Lemessa, 2014), Wonho sacred site in Sidaama area (Doffana, 2014), Madda Walabaabu, Haroo Walabaabu, Mormor, Liiban and Haroo Girjaa in Oromia region (Hinew, 2012) are commonly recorded sacred natural sites that are highly interlinked with local traditions.

In Guji Oromo, there are considerable sacred natural sites where diverse cultural practices have been performed as per the long-lived people traditions (Gemeda, 2018; Jemjem and Dhadacha, 2011). Me’e Bokkoo and Daraartu sacred shrines are among the most valued sacred natural sites particularly identified for propitiating Waaqaa (God) and performing rituals of Gadaa system (Gemeda, 2018). These places are centers for socio-political practices and religious rituals of the people. However, currently it is global wide evidence that anthropogenic interventions are acutely affecting the natural environment in general and sacred natural sites in particular (Bernbaum, 2010). In this rapid socio-cultural changes and biocultural diversity degradation, where there is no pristine nature, the anthropogenic factors affecting Me’e Bokko and Daraartu sacred shrines in Guji is not duly empirically investigated. Therefore, this article explores the impacts of human interventions on sustainability of Me’e Bokko and Daraartu sacred shrines, and the indigenous mechanisms local people apply to sustain those sacred shrines in Adoolaa Reeddie, and Annaa Sorraa districts.

2. Methods

This study employed qualitative approach, ethnographic research design and data production techniques like transect walk, in-depth interview and focus group discussions. Data were collected from community elders, Gadaa system custodian elders, and experts as well as heads of culture and tourism offices in the study areas. Twenty-five informants were interviewed among which eight of them are women. Though the approval of ethical committee for this study was not required by my institution, I obtained informed consent from all informants before data production. The fieldwork took six months starting from September 2018 to February 2018. The obtained data were regrouped under the theme before presentation and analysis. As soon as data collection was started, the sorting and grouping of ideas under the similar themes was simultaneously conducted. Finally, the data were thematically presented and qualitatively analyzed by statements.

3. Description of the study area and communities

Guji people inhabit in three Zones namely Guji, West Guji, and Borana, in Oromia National Regional State, in southern Ethiopia. According to Jemjem and Dhadacha (2011) the people also live around western parts of Bale Zone and Wondo district of West Arsi Zone in Oromia regional state as well as in South Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNPNPR) around Dilla, Gamo Gofa, Wondo Genet and around lake Hawassa. Guji people are among the Oromo branches that speak Afana Oromoo (Oromo language), one of the most widely spoken languages in Ethiopia. Guji Zone particularly Girja district is mythically considered as origin land of Guji people. The Zone is one of the twenty Zones of Oromia National Regional State that located in southern part of the Region. The following is map of study area (see Figure 1).

Baale Zone in the east, Somali Region in the southeast, south nations, nationalities, and people of Ethiopia (SNPNPR) in the north, West Guji Zone in west and Boorana Zone in south demarcate this Zone. Based on national census conducted in 2007, the total population of Guji Zone was 1,389,800, of which 702,580 are men and 687,220 women with an area of 18,577.05 square kilometers and a population density of 74.81 persons/km² (PCCFDRE, 2007). Guji Zone is characterized by three ecological Zones, Baddaa (high altitude), Badda-daree (middle altitude) and Gammojijji (semiarid land) (Debsu, 2009), but Annaa Sorraa and Adoola Reede districts are found at highland and middle altitude area of the Zone respectively (Desalegn, 2013). Guji Zone is highly endowed with various precious natural resources among which minerals like, gold, emerald, tantalum and others. The dense and stunning forests like Anooggaa, Ulaan’uluu, Sarbaayyee, and Saakarroo in Waadara and Adoola Reede districts respectively and preserved by indigenous mechanisms are the imperative natural resources found in Guji Zone.

Culturally, there is spectacular, and all-rounding socio-political, military, cultural, religious, economic and ecological institution known as Gadaa system that entrenched in Guji philosophy in particular and Oromo worldview at large. Gadaa system of Guji Oromo was intensively studied by Hinnant (1977) and Jemjem and Dhadacha (2011) and described as indigenous complex system of ranking, authority, and decision-making consisting of a successive generational structure that rotates every eight years among five culturally systematized parties locally known as Baalli/Luba. These five Baalli/Lubas are known as Halchiisa, Rooble, Harmalaa, Muukana and Dhallana. The term of office for one Baalli is eight years and the rest parties wait for their turn performing various rituals and preparing themselves through anticipatory socialization processes. The active party in Gadaa power is responsible for all affairs of Guji administration in politics, socio-cultural affairs, economic and ecological cases. Accompanied by various rituals and events, the Gadaa power transfer is peacefully performed even without a symptom of disputes and disturbances, which are common in power transfer of the so-called modern states. As a result, Gadaa is indigenous democratic institution of Guji in particular and Oromo people in general.

Gadaa- the indigenous institution of Oromo is inextricably linked with various physical features on one way or another. As noted by Jemjem and Dhadacha (2011) each ritual in the Gadaa system is conducted at a particular sacred natural site. This implies that a given ritual in the Gadaa system is connected with a particular natural area. For instance, Me’e Bokko sacred site has been serving as a center for socio-political power transition in Guji Oromo Gadaa system. Generally, Gadaa system is indigenous socio-political, cultural, military, economic, religious and ecological institution, which is handed down from generation to generation and operating in Guji by regulating and maintaining the relationship between culture and nature as well as humans and supernatural being.

In other cultural dimension, Guji people have their own indigenous religion, which has been practiced even since before the advent of Abrahamic religions in the area. This indigenous religion is known as Mandooyyyuu, which is also termed as Waaqeffaanma among other Oromo tribes (Jemjem and Dhadacha, 2011). As to this religion, there is Waaga tokkocha (One God) in whom people believe and propitiate everyday by doing all good things to their fellows and physical features. The followers of this religion are known as Awaamaa and they have no man-made place of worship, but they use sacred landscapes as sacred shrines for worship. The traditional rituals such as libation and supplication are commonly performed in Guji indigenous religion. These rituals are performed to offer thanks to God for his omnipotence, omniscience, fatherhood, care on one hand; supplicate him for bright future prosperous life on the other. This religion has been playing the significant role in stewardship of the sacred sites, consisting the values of Gadaa system (Bedassa, 2016; Benti, 2018; Gemeda, 2018). Consequently, the Oromo Gadaa system and indigenous religion are the same coin with different sides.

4. Background of land sacredness in the area

Before delving into the specific discussion of sacred shrines, high-lighting their general background in Guji land is a precluding condition. As roughly raised in previous section of this article, there have been considerable sacred natural areas in Guji territory being dedicated to
rituals of Gadaa system and propitiating God through libation and supplication practices. The data obtained from Guji Zone Culture and Tourism Office in January 2018; revealed that Guji people have more than 376 sacred shrines (Ardaalee woyyuu) in different areas like Guji Zone, West Guji Zone, Arsi Zone in Oromia national regional state, Sidama region and Gedeo Zone in SNNPR. However, after 1991 formation of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia, many sacred shrines of Guji Oromo are remained out of the Guji territory in political administration demarcation. These all sacred natural sites have inextricably linked with respective traditions and rituals in Guji culture; some of which are now out of reach for Guji because of administrative demarcation.

According to Taddesse (1995), the sacred shrine of Guji is like churches of Christians and Mosques of Islam in terms of their sacred value among the people. In addition, this scholar noted that Guji make a pilgrimage across these places and sojourn at every site to perform a particular ritual. Broadly speaking, the sacred natural sites in Guji are administratively split into two as phratry's sacred shrines and entire Guji's sacred shrines. Even though there is no hard divisional line of administration between phratry's sacred shrines and whole Guji's sacred shrines, the sacred sites in territory of Uraagaa phratry is mostly administered by Uraagaa and the same is true for Maattii and Hookkuu phratries. Nevertheless, there are some major and special sacred shrines administered by whole Guji in three phratries. For instance, Me'ee Bokko, Haroo Gobbuu, Dibbee Dhuugoo, Fuutoo and Adoolaa (Daraartuu and Biluu) are some of them. In the context of this study, Me’e Bokko and Daraartuu are some of the sacred shrines communally used and jointly preserved by all three phratries of Guji Oromo. In all sacred shrines of Guji, the activities like farming, settlement, cutting down trees and degradation of the forest are strictly forbidden by Gadaa customary laws and belief systems (Gemeda, 2019). However, the sacred shrines are open for grazing purposes since livestock and their products are indispensable in Gadaa traditional practices. Me’e Bokko and Daraartuu are major sacred shrines, where various rituals are performed and the ordained trees for those rituals are found. As a result, a focus of this article is exploring the anthropogenic menaces on Me’e Bokko and Daraartuu sacred shrines.

4.1. Sacredness of Me’ee Bokko

Me’ee Bokko sacred shrine is a center for multi-traditional practices including the socio-political power handing over, libation, supplication, formulation of customary laws and making oral declarations. It is a place where customary laws that govern the socio-cultural life of Guji people have been made and orally declared by Yuubaas. This sacred natural site is located in Annaa Sorraa district adjacent to asphalt road passes through Hawassa city and goes to Nageelle town, the Guji Zone capital. According to information obtained from Adoola Reeddee Culture and Tourism Office head in January/2018, Me’ee Bokko shrine is about 992.8 ha. Empirical evidence shows that some parts of the shrines are covered by patchy forest and the rest parts are plain field. Guji Oromo look upon Me’ee Bokko sacred shrine as culturally distinguished and respected site since

2 Yuubaas is Oromo language term that indicates the retired Abbaa Gadaa (leader in the Gadaa system) and his councillors, but active in Gadaa system by advising Abbaa Gadaas, formulating and announcing indigenous laws in Guji Oromo Gadaa system.
the time immemorial. According to Guji elderly informants, the sacredness of Me’ee Bokko area is developed from myth of Me’ee tree. When explaining story background of Me’ee tree sacredness, one of the informants narrated that:

Once upon a time, a man who was living around Bokko (present-day Me’ee Bokko) came to cut down Me’ee tree for house construction purpose. At that time, the tree had spoken unexpectedly to the man saying, ‘I am a sacred tree (Woyyuu), please do not cut me down’. Then the man was perplexed, thrown away his axe and hurriedly run back to the villagers because of the miraculous talk of the tree that he had never experienced before. When he met his neighbors and community elders, the man told them what was happened to him. Being highly shaken by great fear and tremble, the elders gathered at the place made a ritual of libation ordaining Me’ee tree as well as dedicated the surroundings to God. Since that time, Bokko remained the most sacred place and the area renamed as Me’ee Bokko, where Guji people occasionally come together to perform indigenous practices of Gadaa system. Then our ancestors made customary laws to keep and sustain the sacredness of Me’ee Bokko land. From that time onward, Me’ee Bokko se aside as sacred shrine serving as a center for propitiating God and performing traditional rituals in Gadaa system (Informant, Aaga Waare: January 2018, Me’ee Bokko).

This explanation indicates that Me’ee Bokko has deep ingrained and long-lived connection with Guji belief system, politics, myths and indigenous practices. In Guji tradition, Me’ee Bokko sacred shrine is feared and respected as Woyyuu land (sacred shrines) by local people. Traditionally, the Woyyuu always needs a great respect, care, and proper approach and conformity to the existing norms. According to Guji elders, the harm of Woyyuu and its tradition is equivalent to the act of calling upon curse and punishment of God on oneself. The existing belief system of the people also confirms that God would not tolerate a person who harms sacred shrines and violates its traditions without punishing seriously. Based on the belief system, the customary law that regulates and protects the shrines are made and proclaimed every eight years at this center.

Due to a sacred value of the area, during entering agaqalaa gumii (the place where Gadaa councilors along with entire assembly proclaim customary laws) at Me’ee Bokko shrine, every authorized body to attend this event should remove his/her shoes before entering agaqalaa gumii—the highly sanctified place in Me’ee Bokko. This practice of removing one’s shoes before entering to a sacred area in Guji Oromo is analogous to God’s order to Moses that Moses should take off his sandals because of the sacredness of the area as stated in Holly Bible, Exodus chapter three verse five. This indicates that there is a practice of taking off shoes or sandals before entering hallowed land in Guji tradition to respect the value of the land sacredness. Generally, Guji elders noted that Me’ee Bokko is a sacred center for entire Guji people where they perform cultural, political and religious traditions as per the norms of Gadaa system.

4.2. Sacredness of Daraartuu land

Daraartu has been feared and identified as a place of God’s presence. Based on this mythically outlandish phenomenon happened at the place, the then Guji ancestors’ dedicated Daraartu to God and ordained it as a center of performing libation, supplication and slaughtering animals for sacrifice and various rituals. (Informant, Duubee Elemaa: February 2018, Daraartu).

This myth-based explanation indicates that Daraartu was chosen by God to be a sacred place that produces milk and water to humankind. But, the disobedience of Haawwaa to God’s order invoked a wrath of God that is believed as reason for conversion of milk well into a water well. Mythically it was seen as will of God to abundantly feed those ancestors from the sources of water and milk, even though the milk well was permanently converted into water because disobedience.

From the myth point of view, Daraartu is a place where God’s transcendental power was revealing itself to Guji ancestors by the time. Consequently, Guji dedicated the area to propitiate God and perform rituals of Gadaa system. This place is now playing a central role in Gadaa system of the people. Currently, Uraaga, Maatti, and Hookkku phratries have independent sub-sites and sacred trees in Daraartu where they perform various traditional rituals. The Hookkku perform supplication and libation rituals by pouring down milk under Qilxaas (Ficus vasta) in Daraartu sacred site. In addition, Uraaga and Maatti conduct the similar rituals under Hadaammmiu (Euphorbia abyssinica) and Qilxaas (Ficus vasta) trees in the sacred shrine to bless land and propitiate God. These trees are culturally important among other trees in the area since they have been ordained and identified for these rituals and traditions in Gadaa system.

5. Result and discussion

5.1. Human impacts on Me’ee Bokko and Daraartuu sacred shrines

Presently human impacts on natural environment have been increasing at an alarming rate from time to time. The empirical study demonstrates that these impacts are threatening sacred and non-sacred natural environment in different ways. The sacred shrines in Guji Oromo that mainly perceived as equivalent to churches of Christians and mosques of Islam (Taddesse, 1995), are being undermined by various human impacts. The findings show that the expansion and teaching of Abrahamic religions (particularly Christianity and Islam), the implementation of unsustainable infrastructural project, modern educational system, waning of people’s loyalty to customary laws of Gadaa system and encroachment of sacred land were anthropogenic menaces affecting the sacred shrines.

5.1.1. Influence of Abrahamic religions

The Abrahamic religions include Christianity, Islam, and Judaism that trace back their descendants and origin to Abraham, in the history of religious formation (Knowles, 2011). Some scholars call it as ‘world religions’ because of the immense number of followers they have at global context (Jackr, 2007). In study area, Christianity and Islam are two major religions highly followed by people. Both are considered as the religions menacing and undermining the existence and sustainability of the sacred shrine among Guji Oromo (Discussion with Gadaa system custodian elder, January 2018). The influence of these religions is reported by informants as the major menacing impact on Me’ee Bokko sacred shrine since past two decades. Similarly, the comparative study conducted in Africa shows that the influences of Abrahamic religions are very significant among many African communities (Bediako, 2000; Meyer, 2004).

On the other hand, Ikoro, and Ekevere (2016) noted that the contact of the African continent with the outside world in many directions paved the ways for the influences of Abrahamic religions, the slave trade, colonialism, and Western education that have been affecting the indigenous shrines and traditional way of life at large. The other comparative studies conducted in Wonsho district of Sidama and Caato sacred forest of Horro Guduruu Wollage Zone indicate that there have been similar
influences of human intervention on sacred natural sites in Ethiopia (Doffana, 2014; Lemessa, 2014).

In the study area, according to the informants, the expansion of Christianity and Islam religions and some of their teachings that contradict with the values of Gadaa shrines have highly threatened the existence of the shrines and traditional practices associated with them. One of the elderly informants noted that the major followers of Christianity and Islam in the area have been denigrating the indigenous shrines of Guji Oromo in general, and Me’ee Bokko and Daraartuu sacred shrines in particular as the place dedicated to an evil spirit. These religions teach the devotees as if the custodians of the Gadaa system are the group of people yet living in the darkness and waiting for the true creator. This empirical evidence is similar to what, Shaw (1990) stated as the missionaries of Christianity sent to Africa have been equating the African belief systems, traditions, and shrines to the act of Satan and counted as worthless traditions. From this argument, the acts of disdaining and denigrating local belief systems are not unique menacing factors affecting sacred shrines and associated traditions among Guji Oromo but these factors are global wide impacts of mainstream religions targeted on local communities’ traditions.

As underlined by Guji elder informants the priests and sheiks of both religions regard the attempts of preserving sacred shrines and rituals performed there as worthless and outdated tradition. Therefore, these denigration and teaching campaigns against indigenous virtues of Guji have been challenging the existence and sustainability of sacred shrines. These situations also paved the way for some exogenous local inhabitants to destroy sacred shrines by cutting down trees, destroying forests and farming. However, the sacred shrines are property of the entire Guji people (Taddesse, 1995) thus they are not allowed to individually own for private or group utilization.

Even though Christianity and Islam are two Abrahamic religions existed among Guji Oromo and locally claimed as threats for indigenous way of life among the people, Pentecostal protestant plays a major role in the menace. This has its own reasons. For instance, when comparing the impact of two religions on the sacred shrines, one elderly informant from Daraartuu stated that:

"Notwithstanding influence from Islam and other Christian Churches denomination, the most destructive practices are conducted by Pentecostal protestant Christianity against indigenous practices and shrines. Unlike Orthodox Tewahido and other denominations of Christianity, Pentecostal protestant has many churches and followers in rural areas of Guji where Gadaa shrines are predominantly found. One thing I identified is that the followers of Christianity perceive custodians of the sacred shrines as the agents of devil who strive for sustaining the idol worship in the area. In different occasion, priests, evangelists, and other servants come and preach to us believe in Jesus by abandoning the indigenous belief system" (Informant, Aredo Adula: January, 2018).

This narration shows that there is a polarization of ideas between the guardians of indigenous shrines and followers of mainstream religions. The informants from Daraartuu have also underscored that the current massive conversion of young generation into Christianity and Islam has been exacerbating the campaign against the indigenous shrines by both religions. The comparative study conducted in Kenya also indicated that conversion of local communities into other faith group is among serious threat to sacred natural sites and territories (Adam, 2012). This apparently indicates that not only in case of Ethiopia at large and in case of Guji people in particular, the conversion of local people to mainstream religions has been acutely menacing sacred natural sites in other African communities. Guji elder informants stated that the current generation belonging to churches and Mosques has been abandoning and demonizing their traditions connected with Gadaa shrines. The study conducted in Horro Guduruu in Ethiopia reveals that the protestant expansion is a threat to the indigenous belief system and sacred natural sites (Ashutosh et al., 2011). Similarly, the empirical data produced from the study area demonstrate that Me’ee Bokko and Daraartuu sacred sites are highly exposed to similar threats.

As underlined by informants, local youth who actively follow churches and mosques have been currently denying the sacredness of Gadaa shrines arguing ‘no shrine, except our churches or mosques’. A protestant church grudgingly constructed in Me’ee Bokko sacred shrine implies the denigration imposed by mainstream religions on indigenous traditions and sacred shrines. During my transect walk in Me’ee Bokko sacred shrine with local community elders, they showed me a protestant church constructed in the shrine that photo is displayed below (see Image 1).

This shows that not only in their teachings but also in practice, the mainstream religions particularly Pentecostal protestant affected the sacredness of Gadaa shrines when it compared with Orthodox Christianity that has few churches and followers in the area. One of the reasons why local people do not respect Gadaa shrines is believed to be the opposite teaching and disparagement measures taken by these imported religions. Additionally, the informants elaborated that the followers’ of Pentecostal protestant in the area consider the sacred shrines as idle places to be used for the construction of churches (Discussion with Gadaa system custodian elder, January 2018).

Moreover, they believe that indigenous shrines are home of evil spirits and centers for demonic worship rather than taking them as old age socially conserved natural sites where biological and cultural diversities are co-existing. This trend in one way or another indicates that mainstream religions particularly Pentecostal protestant has been contradicting with the existence and sustainability of sacred shrines.

5.1.2. Infrastructural project

The infrastructural project is fundamental to development endeavors (Nedoji et al., 2014) if properly planned and implemented. This form of project consists the constructions of hydroelectric dam, highways, railways, Airlines, and expansion of various projects important for wellbeing of people (Foster and Morella, 2011). However, if the cultural and social dimension is underestimated and due weight is given to only economic aspect, the projects could result in loss of cultural diversity. In case study area, the project of electric power line supply is one of the infrastructural works pass through Me’ee Bokko sacred shrines. It acutely harmed cultural heritage and sacred shrines of Guji Oromo. This cultural heritage is a sacred tree under which the Guji perform libation ritual through praying and offering thanks to God. In fact, the traditional rituals and practices undertaken in sacred natural sites are not unique to Guji Oromo, because there are similar practices among all Oromo from Boorana to Wollo and, from Hararge to Wollaga. Traditional rituals have been conducted under sacred tree or in the sacred landscapes in many countries of Africa (Aniago, 2015; Githitho, 2005), which is similar to Guji experience. As noted by the informants, the project of electric line power supply, which had been implemented by Ethiopian Electric Power Corporation, bisected Me’ee Bokko sacred shrine and destroyed patchy forest as well as rituals’ tree from the shrine (Discussion with Gadaa system custodian elder, January 2018). This information has also been
confirmed by the researcher during the transect walk in Me’ee Bokko with local community elders. The project of electric line supply, which is stretched from Gannalee hydroelectric power dam to the central part of the country, has destroyed huge forests and old native trees from Guji sacred and no-sacred land. Particularly, including culturally preserved sacred trees that are identified for traditional rituals and biocultural diversities in the area were degraded during the project implementation. In addition to degraded patchy forests from the shrine, the old native tree that is locally known as Me’e, which was highly respected among the community, for supplication and libation purpose, was cut down by exogenous project implementers. Correspondingly, as apparently stated by Dawson (2009) the sacred natural sites in Africa embodies a plethora of societal traditions through which their identity is manifested. From this perspective, the degradation of Me’e tree and forests in the sacred site in the manner that lacked consentaneous approach of infrastructural development harmed not only tangible cultural heritage but also a plethora of local traditions.

This tree had a long mythological history associated with Me’ee Bokko shrine and Guji people in general. According to Guji elders, had it been not for the presence of Me’e tree at the place and its myth of communication with a man in the story, the area would have not been sacred. As a result of unintegrated and non-participatory approach followed by the project implementers, sacred trees and forests that had been used for libation ritual for many years were destroyed. This indicates that if the attention is given to only developmental projects regardless of identiﬁcation ritual for many years were destroyed. This demonstrates that the extension of Protestant Christianity along with the expansion of modern education system accelerated the spread of sacred land encroachment. In the case of Daraartuu, empirical evidence shows that similar to Me’ee Bokko sacred shrine, the expansion of farmland and settlements are serious menace affect the sustainability of sacred shrine. However, unlike Me’ee Bokko, the settlement case in Daraartuu has political and ecological dimensions. Politically, during the Derg’ regime, there was a campaign of reducing sacred shrines and replacing them by village construction on sacred lands. As noted by Taddesse (2002) the villagization program of the Derg rampantly damaged the natural environment of the Guji and sacred land in particular. The then government forcefully formed a village in Daraartuu shrine, bringing some exogenous ethnic groups from different areas to weaken the Guji indigenous institution -Gadaa system through amalgamation.

The settlement occupied some parts of Daraartuu sacred shrine during the Derg because of villagization program has been still there and expanding to the vicinity. This signiﬁes that the subsequent outcome of the Derg villagization program is currently threatening the sustainability of Daraartuu sacred shrine. Ecologically, Daraartuu is very fertile land and conducive for agricultural purposes. Speciﬁcally, there are pulling factors for settlement and expansion of farmland at Daraartuu shrine and its surrounding. First, the land is very fertile and highly wanted by local people for agricultural businesses and second it has proximity to Addoolla Woyoyu town that some town’s people penetrate the area to plant coffee, eucalyptus tree and khat (khat edulis L.). The informants underlined that these situations exacerbated the encroachment of sacred land by the local people. Daraartuu sacred shrine is highly exposed to land rush by local people in many dimensions. Currently, besides the gradual expansion of farmland and new settlements, the elders from the area reported that there has been a campaign of land grabbing to own and plant Baargamoom (eucalyptus tree), coffee and Weessiti (false banana) in sacred land.

Due to the declining values of Gadaa system, the violators of sacred shrines are loyal to customary laws of Gadaa system that govern the shrines. During my ﬁeldwork in Daraartuu, one elder member of Harmuufa4 Gadaa councilors told me that presently many people who violated customary rules of sacred shrines would not be loyal to customary punishment imposed by concerned Gadaa councilors. In such condition, the Haayyuw, Jaldhaabaa and other custodians of Gadaa shrines bring case to formal court along with districts culture and tourism of ofﬁces instead of reporting to Abooa Gadaa. This implies that legal pluralism is currently in practice to sustain the sacred shrines among Guji though it is not much effective so far. In Daraartuu the settlements and emerging expansions of farmland are degrading the shrine. The partial view of Daraartuu and Me’ee Bokko shrines affected by population increment, settlement and expansion of farmland are as the follows (see Image 3).

5.1.3. Land encroachment

Me’ee Bokko and Daraartuu sacred sites have been challenged by land encroachments in multidimensional ways. In the case of Me’ee Bokko, the expansion of farmland, settlement and informal enclosure on the piece of land for future private utilization are major ways of land encroachment threatening the site. According to the informants, the declining values of customary belief system, the expansion of Pentecostal Catholic Christianity and conversion of youth into the imported religions are among the underlying causes for the expansion of the farmland, new settlement and informal enclosure on the land by some local inhabitants. This demonstrates that the extension of Protestant Christianity along with the expansion of modern education system accelerated the spread of sacred land encroachment. One of the elderly informants noted that before a decade, the local people settlement trends and number of inhabitants around Me’ee Bokko sacred shrine were sparse and there was no such a recorded serious damage of the shrine. This means population increment around the sacred shrines is another challenge to the sacred site. Nowadays Gadaa shrines have been gradually inhabited and farmed by local people from the different sides as apparently seen in Me’ee Bokko. Generally, it is not a single anthropogenic menace that affecting Me’ee Bokko sacred shrine, but there are a number of factors affecting the land in one way or another.

In the case of Daraartuu, empirical evidence shows that similar to Me’ee Bokko sacred shrine, the expansion of farmland and settlements are serious menace affect the sustainability of sacred shrine. However, unlike Me’ee Bokko, the settlement case in Daraartuu has political and ecological dimensions. Politically, during the Derg’ regime, there was a campaign of reducing sacred shrines and replacing them by village construction on sacred lands. As noted by Taddesse (2002) the villagization program of the Derg rampantly damaged the natural environment of the Guji and sacred land in particular. The then government forcefully formed a village in Daraartuu shrine, bringing some exogenous ethnic groups from different areas to weaken the Guji indigenous institution -Gadaa system through amalgamation. This demonstrates that the extension of Protestant Christianity along with the expansion of modern education system accelerated the spread of sacred land encroachment. One of the elderly informants noted that before a decade, the local people settlement trends and number of inhabitants around Me’ee Bokko sacred shrine were sparse and there was no such a recorded serious damage of the shrine. This means population

5.1.4. The multiplicity of socializing agents

Now it is being a global wide experience that there have been secondary socialization processes that socialize children and youths beside the family institution (Zürn and Checkel, 2005). Basically, secondary socialization refers to the process of socialization made out of the family by different agents (Lubbers et al., 2009). The more children and youths adhere to the socialization process of secondary socializing institutions, the more indigenous traditions they learn from their family are changed and/or missed. One of my informants described that unlike the past years, traditional protection and reverence of Gadaa shrines have been

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3 The Ethiopian government that ruled the country from 1974-1991.
4 It is one among five Baallii (parties) of the Gadaa system that rotationally handover socio-political power in every eight years according to the Gadaa tradition.
challenged currently due to a multiplicity of external social and cultural factors (Jaarso Boneyya at Adoolaa in February 2018). In his own word, the informant said: "nami ijiollefi dargaggo ammaa barsisuu heddu'u" meaning, "currently, there are different agents that socialize children and youth of these days". According to this information, the daily contact of children and youth with religious institutions and schools has changed the previous situation whereby children had been stayed with their families to learn more about their traditional practices and values of the shrines. Another informant expounded that an ear of current generation is not open to listen to the traditions of the sacred shrines, because, children were born in their family, but in practice and experience they grow up in churches, mosques as well as in the schools of their vicinity' (Interview, Anole Huqa: February 2018, Me‘ee Bokko). This explanation is evidence for the impact of secondary socialization process pertaining to degrading the indigenous values and traditions of Gadaa shrines.

Education and attend churches and mosques to take religion faith confirmation. This situation has challenged the intact continuity of indigenous protection and reverence of Gadaa shrines acutely. Most of my informants' explained that the religious institutions teach youths and children as if the indigenous Gadaa institutions and its practices on the Gadaa shrines are deeds of demons. From this point of view, the shift of primary socialization process to the secondary socialization because of the expansion of modern education system and religious denominations resulted in affecting the sustainability of sacred shrines.

5.1.5. Indigenous preservation mechanisms

Even though the sacred shrines among Guji Oromo have been facing various menaces mainly discussed above, Gadaa councilors have been implementing indigenous mechanisms to mitigate the menacing problems. According to Debelo (2017:257), ‘Guji ecological wisdom is embedded in their cultural beliefs and is the result of years of integration in a particular environment’. This indicates that environmental concern and coping mechanisms for the harmed environment are deeply ingrained in Guji tradition. These indigenous coping mechanisms usually underpin the sustainability of Gadaa shrines and traditional practices imbued in them. The mechanisms take various forms as the following:

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5 Gadaa age set of the early childhood time. It is usually from 0-8 years.
First, data obtained from the informants revealed that whenever sacred trees are cut down or damaged and/or dried either naturally or for man-made reasons, the other tree would be replaced and ordained to sustain the rituals linked with the previously destroyed trees. Evidently, the informants explained that Gadaa councils have ordained another Me‘ee tree instead of a Me‘ee sacred tree that was destroyed by un-consentaneous infrastructural development project from Bokko sacred site. During replacing and ordaining the new trees instead of the damaged or destroyed sacred trees, Gadaa councilors such as Abbaa Gadaa, Jaikyea, Waamura, Hayyuu, Jaldhaaaba, Faga and others come together at the place and make libation and supplication ritual to God. In Guji belief system, God endorses the sacredness of new places or objects supposed to be sacred if people want them to sacralize. As of that specific time, the places and natural features would be ordained and dedicated to God. Then the assemblies of Gadaa councilors, who meet for ordaining tree, pray to God so that he pours down power of sacredness when ordaining a tree and its environs. During ordaining a tree, the Gadaa councilors come to the place that supposed to be sacred holding milk (fresh or yogurt), honey, barley and coffee beans. It is the mandate of council’s wives to bring these important things when approaching to the site and perform libation for sacralization purpose. Generally, Me‘ee tree cut down by the electric supply line project has been replaced and ordained in this form of indigenous coping mechanisms in the study area. From the foregoing discussion, it is possible to draw conclusion that Guji people have indigenous mechanisms of mitigating the menace of sacred natural sites and preserve them even though anthropogenic menaces have been acutely affecting and may continue to affect the sites.

Second, the informants stated that Gadaa councilors make superin- tendence on the status of Gadaa shrines (sacred shrines) and make demarcation whenever they make a pilgrimage across the shrines. This superintendence of the shrines’ status is not limited to only time of pilgrimage, the Gadaa councilors who dwell near the shrines have mandate to oversee and to report Jaldhaaaba, Hayyuu or Abbaa Gadaa in case of damages. Because it is this, body who passes a decision of punish- ment upon detractors of Gadaa shrines. Particularly whenever Gadaa councilors move from one sacred site to another in order to perform traditional rituals, they also look over the status of every shrine and existing illicit harm. In case of observed detractors of the shrines, the councilors put demarcation. This means they do not mark the area by putting stone or planting trees but inform the local people to keep themselves from the sites and warn those who settled in the sacred shrines to move back from the demarcation of the sites. This approach is known as gabala keyaatu- means, “putting the demarcation points to preserve Gadaa shrines” (Ganaalee Aaga at Adoolaa in February 2018).

The third indigenous mechanism is the enforcement or imposition of customary punishment on who harm sacred shrine. According to Guji elders, there are punishments and banishment imposed on the individuals who damage Gadaa shrines negligently. Based on the degree of damage the punishment ranges from payment of Kormaa and Goronsaa (a bull and heifer), Saddeetaa (punishment of eight cattle) to shammaggaa muraa (excommunication) (Discussion with Gadaa system custodian elder, January 2018). However, currently, as stated by the informants very few people positively respond to customary punishment measures taken by Gadaa councilors because of declining loyalty to Gadaa values. Generally, the replacement of destroyed tree by ordaining another tree, superintendence of Gadaa councilors across the shrines putting demar- cation, and enforcing customary punishment have been serving as indigenous mechanisms of mitigating the menaces and sustaining sacred shrines and indigenous practices connected to them.

6 Councilors in Gadaa system, who have different traditional roles, status and responsibilities.

6. Conclusion

The findings of the study demonstrate that Me‘ee Bokko and Daraatu sacred shrines have been threatened by multidimensional and interacting human interventions and impacts. The menacing factors identified in the findings rapid expansion and indoctrination of imported religions, unsustained infrastructural project, modern education system and land encroachment for private agricultural businesses. These human inter- ventions and impacts, which are either internal or external factors unprecedentedly, affected sacred shrines of the study area. Evidently, the influences of Abrahamic religions mainly Christianity and Islam and particularly expansion of Protestant Christianity as well as conversion of current generation into these religions have affected the sacred shrines. In addition, the modern education system improperly planned infra- structural projects and villegazation projects, which were in, place during the past regime, are remained human-induced detrimental factors for sacred shrines.

Internally, the expansions of farmland, settlement, and degradation of trees and forests are major threat to sustainability of sacred shrines. Even though the factors might be categorized as internal or external, the destruction they posed on biological diversities of Daraatu and Me‘ee Bokko sacred shrines have affected cultural diversities associated with these sites. Because, there is systematized and inextricable interconnec- tion between biological and cultural diversities (Maffi and Woodley, 2012). From this perspective, it is possible to draw conclusion that unless the special interventions of all concerned bodies are made to preserve the sacred shrines, which are inextricably linked with Guji culture, the existing unavoidable and formidable anthropogenic menaces would be unprecedented challenges to those sites.

Furthermore, if sacred sites are not properly conserved and sustained, the cultural practices of Guji Oromo would be more threatened, since the life of people is culturally connected to sacred sites. Gadaa system and sacred shrines are highly interwoven and inseparable entities, in which the influence happened on one, affect the other. Thus, the attempts made to preserve Gadaa system, which overlooked dimension of sacred shrines bear no fruitful preservation results. As a result, the policy and practical intervention should be made to mitigate the anthropogenic menaces on sacred shrines to preserve Gadaa system of Guji Oromo with its full packages. The preservation endeavors and policy responses that may disregard biocultural diversities conservation approach cannot bring any remarkable change. Therefore, in rapid anthropogenic factors affecting the sacred shrines, preservation attempts need to follow the integrated and community-based approaches to consensually sustain biological di- versities and cultural diversities in sacred shrines. Generally, to preserve and sustain the sacred shrines of Guji Oromo that are interlinked with people’s way of life, and regarded as biocultural diversity hotspot, the scholars, local people, government, and non-governmental organizations have to work in collaboration to keep, preserve and sustain them.

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Author contribution statement

Gemeda Odo Roba: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

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