

Full Length Research Paper

Change and continuity in the indigenous institution of Qoollee deejjoo ritual practice and its role in forest resource management among the Kafecho: The case of Gimbo Woreda

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This ethnographic article explores the changes and continuities of indigenous Qoollee Deejjoo ritual practice, and its role in forest resource management among Kafecho peoples. The Kafecho people, who live in Southwestern Ethiopia have enormous indigenous intangible ritual practices which have never been well investigated and recognized clearly. This study focuses on Qoollee deejjoo ritual practice in Gimbo woreda. The above study site is selected as the main study area based on the availability of indigenous ritual practice, and the researcher's personal experience. The researcher employed qualitative methods of data collection and analysis techniques. The major findings of the research pointed that Qoollee Deejjoo is a thanksgiving sacrifice ceremony to forest spirit (Qoolloo). This research also shows that the ritual ceremony performed under forested landscape is symbolic reminder of the worshipers and their survival, which depends on the forest. Hence, the ritual practice recognizes and honors the ethics and taboos of forested landscape for what it is. The sacrifice ceremony is exclusive. In addition, it plays a significant role in maintaining social coexistences, conflict settlement among its adherents. Based on the research finding there are changes in the ritual practice. These changes include reduction in the number of participants, reduction in the number of the ritual places, clearance of the sacred ritual forest for other purpose and reluctant towards the norms, taboos and values of the ritual practice. Some of the agents for these changes are change in the belief system due to currently spreading evangelical Protestant missionaries, cultural diffusion due to 'Westernization' narratives, the state led intervention and its contradictions with local socio-cultural dynamics, and disempowerment of local cultural practices. Finally, though there is big pressure and discouragement from internal and external dynamics against the practice of Qoollee Deejjoo, it is still representing the religious belief and cultural identity of its adherents in the study area.

Key words: Qoolloo, Qoollee Deejjoo, ritual practice, indigenous institution, sacred forest.

INTRODUCTION

In Ethiopia, rural highland farmers of indigenous Kafecho people, who live in Southwestern part of the

country in Southern Nations Nationalities Peoples Regional states (SNNPRS,) in particular, are

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Progressively losing their best and critical land and forest resource (Dessalegn, 2003). These people have also been losing their spiritual and cultural assets associated with forest resources, which are diminishing through recent forest resources commercialization of agricultural lands, state induced development projects and customary right alienation (Ibid).

The cultural values and belief systems of the community inhabiting these areas, which have very strong and practical bearing on such resources are often never been emphasized. Though Kafecho, communities have established their own indigenous institutions and local religious ritual practices that enjoy greater local legitimacy, the issue of indigenous knowledge system in general and the thanks giving scarification ceremony in particular in relation to forest management has never been well studied, documented and recognized. However, very few researches have been conducted on the indigenous knowledge of forest management, which is very general (Orent, 1969; Yihenew, 2002; Yeshambel, 2009).

Since Menilik's conquest, Kafecho people were compelled to adopt foreign cultures and religions (Bieber, 1948; Orent, 1969). Furthermore, serious attempts were made to discourage and dismantle the belief systems and rituals of Kafecho people during the imperial and Marxist's Derg regime (Bekele, 2004). As a result, cultural change has been observed among the majority of population under study. One of the factors was the expansion of new Christian denominations. These are Orthodox Christianity, Catholic Christianity and evangelical protestant Christianity. These agents of changes have influenced and shaped the livelihood of the indigenous communities through changing their land use and belief systems respectively (Hailu, 2009; Bieber, 1948; Data, 2005).

Furthermore, the Western environmental thinking and their baggage narratives of the native subjects and their environmental relation had been destructive. These narratives undermined the time driven practical local knowledge of natural resource management of many African countries (Thomas and Donald, 2003).

Among the lifelong cultures and spiritual traditions of Kafecho people, the traditional religious belief which can be explained through ritual practice is the most popular spiritual and cultural assets of the society that is directly associated with forest resource preservation. But it is never studied and recognized. Thus, first what is ritual? According to Rappaport (1968), ritual can be defined as "*Formal, stylized, repetitive and stereotyped that people perform them in especial (sacred) places and at set times*". Furthermore, Tuner (1967) explains ritual as "*the organized performance of behaviors intended to influence spiritual powers*". According to Hicks (1999), rituals are also defined as formal, invariant, earnest acts that require

people that stays together in a social collective environment.

According to the explanation of Lange (1982), 'Kafecho believe in all manner of spirits, like the spirits of trees, paths, rivers and water, who animate everything and bring good and bad fortune to mankind'. Hence, these communities have designated special sacred forests, which are important as a part of the history and identity of the people.

Since time immemorial, the practice of ritual sacrifice was held/performed deep in the forest and these forests were sacred places and were kept in fact without any violation among Kafecho people (Orent, 1967). Kafecho people in general have various traditional religious belief and ritual practices. Among these, *Qoollee Deejjoo* is one of the popular thanksgiving ritual ceremonies in the thick forest. This ritual ceremony is directly associated with natural forest resource in Kafecho people. The ritual has been institutionalized with its customary laws, values, ritual taboos and conventions with in community

Therefore, Q.D¹ religious ritual practice has socio-cultural and economic value for Kafecho community. The rules of such rituals are powerful tools for sustainable forest resource management, fertility of the crops, livestock production, social cohesion and conflict resolution.

Kafecho also believe in 'Yeero' which is an almighty God, as a creator of the Universe. Majority of Kafecho people also believe in the clan specific spirits called *Eqqo*, which is an intermediary spirit that connects the people with *Yeero* (sky god) via selected *Allaamo* or mediator. They use *Eqqo* interchangeably with *Yeero*. Furthermore, *Qoollee Deejjoo* as a thanksgiving religious ritual has been one of the common traditional religious ritual practices among Kafecho people. This thanksgiving ceremony among Kafecho people is *Qoollee deejjoo*. In almost all forest resources of Kafa, there are parts or all of the forest patches that people spiritually associate themselves with. From these, Q.D. is the one in which ritual scarification ceremony is held in the forest to give thanks to *Qoolloo*². Q.D. ceremony is accomplished by the *Eqqo* leader, who is called by the communities as *Allaamo*³. This ritual practice has close attachment with forest resource and its biodiversity conservation. Further, it has been playing a significant role in maintaining solidarity and resolving conflicts among the people.

Despite the aforementioned reality on the ground, little

¹ Thanks giving scarification ceremony to forest/ earth god

² Forest spirit, which is believed to dwell in forest, bushes, running water and mountains has the power to influence the activities of men and women.

³ A male shaman who acts as a medium for the spirits of his patrilineal ancestors. A man who inherited his father's spirit (*Eqqo*) and being selected from a group of brothers by the sipirit. He is a holly person who has been discharging his custodian responsibility in the communal *Qoollee deejjoo* of Kafecho people in general and the study community in particular.

is said about the contribution of the *Q.D.* ritual practice in preserving and managing forest landscape of Kafecho people. Therefore, this study tried to describe the local perception of *Q.D.* practice and its significance for the sustainable management of forested landscapes. The study also aimed at filling the existing knowledge gap.

The overall objective of this study is to describe the changes and continuities in indigenous Qoollee Deejjoo *ritual* practices, identifying the factors contributing to the changes of the norms and rules in relation to forest resource management.

METHODOLOGY

Description of the study area and the people

The Southern Region is one of the nine Regional States of the Ethiopian Federal Government. The study area is located in the Southern Nations Nationalities Peoples' Regional State (SNNPRS, 2001, 2004, 2007), more specifically in Kafa Zone⁴.

The SNNPRS region is situated at 4°27' to 8°3' latitude North and 34°21' to 39°11' longitude East. It has a total area of 113,539 km², accounting for about 10% of the country. With its capital at Hawassa, the SNNPRS is divided into thirteen (13) Administrative Zones, seven (7) special Woredas and 72 Woredas.

Kafa is one of the thirteen administrative Zones in the SNNPRS. Kafa zone is located in the South western part of Ethiopia; astronomically lies within the latitude of 07°8' to 07°26' North and longitude of 35°53' to 36°36' East. The total land area of the zone is 10602.7 km² (ZOFED, 2011; Yonas, 2005).

The present Kafa Zone, with its capital at Bonga, has a surface area of 1,328,923 ha (ZOFED, 2011).

Kafa is about 9.65 percent of the total area of the region. The zone comprises 11 Woredas (districts), which are subsequently divided into 291 Kebeles (276 rural and 15 urban) (lower administrative units). In order of their alphabetic sequence, the Woredas are Bita, Bonga (urban unit), Chena, Cheta, Decha, Gesha, Gewata, Gimbo, Menjiyo, Saylem and Tello (ZOFED, 2011).

Bonga, the capital of Kafa Zone, is situated at 460 kilometers Southwest of Addis Ababa and 110 kilometers south of Jimma. The zone is bounded by Oromia Regional State in the north and Sheka Zone in the north-west, Bench-Maji in the south-west, South Omo Zone in the south and Konta Zone in the south-east of the SNNP Regional State.

Historical evidences show that there were times when the territories of Kafa were as wide as the Gibe River on the north, the Sudan and Kenya border on the south. This could easily be noted from recent events taken place during the time of the Emperor and the Derg (Bekele, 2010).

The fact that Kafa had its capital at Jimma and Mizan Teferi during these earlier two regimes, at different times, signifies the dynamism undergoing in the expansion and shrinking processes of territories in the area. Kafa would have also been extended to Baro

River on the West, the Sudan and Kenya on the south, and Omo-Ghibe River on northeast and East (Grul, 1932; Orent, 1969).

Despite the aforementioned, the land of Kafa and the origin of Coffee have indispensable history. Since time immemorial, *Coffea Arabica* has grown first in the wild forests of the south western highlands of the country, in most areas of Kafa. It is believed that the name '*coffee*' is derived from the name 'Kafa', a *district* in Ethiopia where the *bean* has been originated. Recent studies confirm that the occurrence of wild forest coffee at the moment is limited in the southwest Ethiopia as the only place in the globe (Gruhl, 1932).

Data collection and sampling techniques

The qualitative research method places the emphasis on knowing and to dig out the internal dynamics of the situation or certain issue. Qualitative research approach is mainly concerned with 'how', 'what' and 'why' of the issue or problem. Since this research aims at describing the local perception of *Q.D.* practice in relation to forest resource management and its changing circumstances this method seem to be the best. As a research design, the researcher had used the descriptive way of analysis that simply describe the emic knowledge about the issue and is changing circumstances.

For this study, the researcher employed purposive sampling which is convenience sampling method. The study sites were selected as main study area based on the availability of indigenous religious ritual practice and the researcher's personal experience. Primary sources are the major source of information feeding answers to most of the questions in this research. Reliable data were gathered from Key informant interview, Group interview, a participant observation. The researcher's personal and field experience also helped to obtain primary data.

From the two study sites, 25 informants were selected purposively based on their good ability in oral tradition, occupation and custodian responsibility. Two group interviews were administered during the data gathering period. One group was the aggregate six members of discussant of the Kafecho clan elders and *Allaamos* from the nearby settlement to the study villages, and other group was the combination of official staffs (especially from the office of culture and tourism and forestry staff.

In addition, participant observation and the researcher's personal experience have been also employed as source of information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The perceptions and meanings of Qoolloo and Qoollee Deejjoo practice in relation to sacred forest landscape

The people of Kafa define *Qoolloo* from different

⁴ Zone and Woreda (Wereda) are administrative echelons in the Regional states of Ethiopia since 1993. The term "Zone" is given to an administrative level below Region and above Woreda, after the recognitions of the country into the new form of Federal government by the EPRDF. "Zone" in this sense is usually preceded by name of places (e.g. Kafa Zone, Sheka Zone...etc.). whereas Woreda is a term, which had been in use for quite a long time in Ethiopia to denote an administrative unit more or less equivalent to "district" in English.

perspectives. The data obtained through group interview revealed that Qooloo is spirit which is believed to dwell in the forest, bushes, and running water. In some cases, Qooloo is believed to have inhabited the rocks, pathways, and most revered streams.

One of the informants explained that Qooloo is the forest spirit that either gives humans good harvest, fertility and ensures the continuity of meaningful life, or it denies them by causing nature disasters that devastate the area for its 'inexplicable proposes'. Based on the comprehensive knowledge of local elders, the researcher defines it as a general term denoting the 'forest spirit'. It resembled human beings inhabited in forests of the specific compound. The derivative of *Qoolloocho* means to pray, beg for protection or mercy while the noun Qooloo is the forest spirit in *Kafinoonoo* (Kefigna language).

Every *Gafoo*, the place where the same group members live and move on and act, has small woods or copses nearby in places where dwells Qooloo. According to other Inf: (WA), Qooloo is a white like 'Farango' (white people), which has one leg and stands for a very long time. The community members perceive that all things, fauna and flora, soil and water, land domain found in the forest belong to Qooloo. In both case study villages, it is common to hear the name of Qooloo in their communication, Pray and testimonies of truth through swearing 'in the name of Qooloo, along which or together which as in the phrase with Yeero (God). It is in the form of *Yeerinaa Qoolloona*.

Regarding the origins of the Qooloo spirit, one can trace satisfactory explanation from the knowledgeable informants and oral historians of the localities. But what is widely and commonly accepted is that it is an ancient religious belief. Moreover, it is believed that the Qooloo spirit is its malevolent or benevolent intentions towards human beings. The inhabitants of the land told the researcher that, in the ancient time they were oaths or prayer and curse in the name of Qooloo "Ee Qooloo ne ciinaa" (let Qooloo see you) with the intention to impose misfortune on those who fail to follow the customs and norms of the society. Although the researcher did not come across Qooloo, the researcher heard about Qooloo from some of the group interview members who said they met or saw Qooloo. Based on their statement, Qooloo is tall and white which is seen for a while and disappears. If somebody gets sick because Qooloo saw him then Allaamo will explain and advise the victim to offer sacrifice to Qooloo at the place where the spirit saw him. Furthermore, the following mythology elaborates the invisible power of Qooloo:

"If your son happens to see him before he sees the boy then nothing will be fall him. But if Qooloo sees him first then the boy will get sick and die" (My local elder and

Inf:Gm.,Dec.2011).

Since belief in Qooloo represents animism, it is the belief in any natural resource as supper natural power and these natural resources are treated as if it was a person with a will and intention which might be malevolent or benevolent towards human beings. It is true to Kafecho people that they perform ritual scarification to Qooloo intentionally. Therefore, the local people perceive that Qooloo spirits that reside in some selected forests and bushes in every village are said to be big creatures. It has the power to influence the activities of men (Kifle, 1992).

Q.D is a ritual of scarifying first fruit of *Baaroo* (maiz) and *Gaashoo* (teff) in the form of very complex traditional feast of thanksgiving to the forest and land spirit or 'Qooloo'. In short, it is organized ritual practice associated with the product of harvest and it is the actions performed in terms of family groups or clan.

Types of Qoollee Deejjoo

According to the informant (Mr. Am), Q.D. as thanksgiving scarification to forest or land spirit basically associated with *Goyee daachoo*⁵ is explained in three different ways. Furthermore, he narrated the following emic perception of Kafecho people about the essence and classification of deejjoo (ritual) practice in broad sense:

"Kafecho people celebrate their Nihee qettoo; litrary means Commemorating one's patrilineal descents or clans' previous belief or practice in three ways:

1. Qoollee deejjoo: - is scarifying the first product of harvest to Qooloo so as to present thanks for his good will. This type of deejjoo may be family affair or community based.
- 2) Baaree Qoco :-is another type of commemorating one's father's or grandfather's belief or practice under the big tree or in the house through covering the pillar of the house by Naaxxacho trees (a young tree with succulent leaves) in order to perform the Afaallo (ceremony of purification). According to Kifle (1992), it is the father's feast.
- 3) Dabbo:-is a nationwide sect which allows the participation of the whole kafecho people and such practice was led by Kafi Taato (Kafa king)".

Moreover, the aforementioned classification is also further described by the knowledgeable local elders and the **Allameena'o** (Eqqo midiums) in the following manner.

⁵ It means the product of harvest

According to the narration of the group interview and key informants, the first type of Q.D. ritual is family based ritual practice performed around one's farmland compound particularly under one specified big tree and led by the owner of that particular farmland. In this case there is no specified time but simply before eating fresh harvest such ritual practice must be performed. According to their concluding statement, such type of offering sacrification is referred to as *Ukkoo* which is simply giving the first fruit or crops of the harvest to *Qoolloo*. The family based Q.D. in essence is a Sylvesterian celebration that involves digging hole under a big trees, especially (*Butoo, Di'oo, aa'i Caphero Orooro, Yahoo, Sheddo*)⁶ trees etc or simply in the cave covered by *Shaahoo* or dense cultural forest; then planting freshly plucked trees and then pouring out libation and offering gifts.

The second type of ritual is communal Q.D., which occurs during the harvest of *Gaashoo* or 'teff' and *Baaro* or 'maiz'. It involves offering yearly sacrification with especial established rules and regulations. Before such sacrifice will make people not to eat or drink from new products. For holding the communal Q.D. each community is called and there is a well identified and known permanent place pointed by *Allaamo*. The particular ritual/holly landscape is sealed by *Allaamo*. This is a landscape covered by *Hallee Shaaho*⁷ and it is a place situated within a reasonable distance from the *Gafo* (village). *Allaamo*, one of the informant (Mr.Gm), who holds the role of a custodian in the ritual practice explained the following about the taboo, honor and respect associated with the ritual place or site:

"Once this place is identified as the ritual ground and domains of the forest spirit, nobody is allowed to clear the forested area for the purpose of cultivation or agriculture. If one is against this principle, Qoolloo causes him to have illness or some misfortune. However, the breaking of such rules and taboos by an individual will result in the stigmatize action of that and his isolation from his respective community and the local forest spirits will punish him for his wrong acts or reluctant of the domain or ritual place" (Inf:Gm, Dec.2011)

Communal Q.D. practices are, therefore, those who involve a kinship group or tribe village. These rituals may be conducted for variety of purposes such as veneration of gods, prosperity, protection against danger or the

making of season.

One of the basic features that distinguish the family based Q.D. from community based Q.D. is that the latter one is led by a quasi-religious chief who leads the entire activities of the ceremony. The communal Q.D. is performed based on *toommoo*(clan), participants and specified time and ritual place. As it has been mentioned in Section 3.5.2, Kafecho community is constituted of some 241 clans. Each of these clans has their own communal Q.D. ritual and organizes their own ceremony. It is led by one *Alaamo* and his *Gaberechos*⁸. It is mainly associated with the harvest of maize and teff. It is performed in more organized manner, by custodian whereas the ritual ceremony held at the family level is found to be very simple and flexible. Since the majority of the Kafa people are subsistence cultivators, family based thanksgiving sacrification ceremony is done after the harvest of new cereals.

The information obtained from group interview reveals crop failures, devastation of harvest by wild animals and some kind of illness is attributed to the malevolent intention of the *Qoolloo*. On the other hand, productivity, good harvest, fertility protections of crops and other natural resources is attributed to the benevolent will of the forest spirit. The malevolent intention of the *Qoolloo* happens when the ritual ceremony is distorted while the benevolent wills could be realized by being faithful to *Qoolloo* that is, offering sacrifice according to the norms and rules established (Inf. Mr.Ag).

As earlier stated, the third type of ritual is *Dabbo* which is nationwide ritual ceremony that provides an arena or forum for the participation of the entire population of Kafecho society. It includes all marginalized Manjos and other minority clans. It was at this nationwide ceremony that socio-economic and political performance of each *woraafo* (according to current governments) was evaluated. The evaluation of the past years' performances of the land and forest resources in each *Woraafo* is still the central issue of the discussion and deliberation during both communal and *dabbo* ritual ceremony. Therefore, this type of ritual is respecting of the forest spirit due to its multi dimensional goals and functions to fulfill as compared to the first category of the ritual practice.

The aforementioned three types of ritual practices held by the people have common features. All of them are performed and celebrated annually, which celebrates holyday, especially in Ethiopian New Year and the Ethiopian Christmas. They are mainly held during the harvest of new crops or fruits.

In general, Q.D. ritual at community level is well

⁶ local name of different tree types commonly used for Qoollee deejjoo ritual practice.

⁷ Dense natural forest or sometimes referred us cultural forest which is always preferable for such communal Q.D. Such forest is different from common one (Inf. Mr . Am)

⁸The close assistance of the *Allaamo* who is selected on the basis of his kinship closeness and sit side by side and take over all the offering items brought by the community members to the *Allaamo*.

organized, and has a large number of adherents than other *Deejoo* ceremonies held for celebrating harvests of agricultural crops.

Kafecho religiosity: A cultural ethos

The Kafecho spirituality and religiosity which are intertwined with everyday life has been very instrument in the preservation and proper management of their forest by its indigenous local users. To the Kafecho people, praying is a continuous dialogue with the forest spirit 'Qooloo' and it is about everyday affairs and activities regarding their struggles and risks of life. These struggles and endeavors put the Kafecho in constant contact and interaction with their forest spirit on a more or less permanent basis. The contact and experience with the spirit is manifested in their relationship with their fellow men, their animals, both domestic and wild animals, the domestic crops and wild plants, the falling rain, the green trees, and plants, the flying birds, the open sky, the blowing wind, the bright rays of the rising sun, the soft light of the shining moon and star, the fear of the dark night, the morning and evening stars, the lifeless body of the sacrificed ram or ox or chicken, and virtually anything in the forest.

The ceremony of Qoollee Deejoo ritual

Q.D. is a ritual sacrifice ceremony held twice a year. It is performed at the beginning of January and September. This period is a period of anticipation in Kafa when great quantity of food will be consumed during this season. The ritual of sacrifice and thanksgiving to the spirit of land and forest is held before eating this new harvest.

The majority of the Kafecho people in general and the study Kebeles in particular offer sacrifice to the *Qooloo* in a well organized ceremony. This execution of the ritual sacrifice ceremony has generally shared pattern of procedures, taboos and rules, which are followed by the performers and participants. The procedures of *Q.D.* ritual ceremony held at family or communal level are similar.

According to the one of the *Allaamo* who served as the *Buukkee Niho*, literarily custodian and leader of the ritual practice, and elders of the two case study villages, the broad description about the entire ritual sacrifice ceremony is as follows:

Once Gaashoo (teff) and Baaro (maize) are harvested, then every neighborhood in general and the same clan members in particular are told to gather at the identified ritual place. Once the assigned person blows the

Shameto (a wooden tube like horn) at 7 pm (1:00 local time) to announce the gathering for the ceremony, then older people, young married and unmarried boys come to the place where the ceremony is to be held. Once people gather with their sacrifice including coke, several food items like local Qiiddo (Godare), honey, milk, butter, shoko, literally means the paste-like essence made from the teff grain and a little water. Then they turn their direction to the place where the deejoo is taking place with Buukkee nihoo or sometimes called Geppee taato, who is the ritual expert of the community and his Gabrechos or Aafe Bushoo leading the way while others join him in clearing a path. This ritual practice involves blessing, praying for rain, for productivity, health and peace of the people, crop and cattle. After they reach a fence which is a marker for the place of the spirit (Qooloo), the Gepeeetaato or the Buukkee nihoo addresses or cites the following especial pray for Yeero(God) in the name of Qooloo (put in Kafi Noonoo) (Inf: Am,Dec.2011/12).

Yeero!,(showee/kubbi Qoollocho), Giidechi ta nihoocho, ta nihinihoocho,giidechi shimaaji ooge yeero, ne taajoon shakkimoocho,kootaanoocho,koonanocho no aacon no kubboon quyeye. Michi gabbooch neech no immeto ne halliti mixi kootaane,koonaaane,dityaane axxaaxiyaane be tunetoch arena neech shagaa noo qiddebe iyaa gabbetone.Ebich showee/kubbi qoollocho:

Tatatoona bi naayonon shunib!

Gattona bi Wanjonon shunbi!

Kenona mechenon shunib!

Gonde ginon no showooche wokkib!

No showoon nooch nechib gonde yongoochena quyeb!

No Kubbona guudonoon quyeb!

Amihoona aaboonon nooch tatoona imbe!

Gondee hayboon /biyyoon no shooweche wokkib!

Gochiibeeti gattoon shappabeeti mimin quyeb!

Kechi ashon ,bushon maachen gonde biyyooche quyeb !

Yeero, no taaton nooch nechib!

The literal translation of the aforementioned Coorooto or praying is the following:

Oh! Our Lord/Qoollocho! The absolute and powerful, the spirit of my father, my grandfather and the sky God that who keeps one promise: let's keep our water, forest resource and our community's unity and solidarity. We offer this sacrifice for you under this big tree due to this tree doesn't lie, free from any sin and only intermediate the people with the God.

Therefore, we provide the following praying to you as follows:

Let there be agreement between the king and the people!

*Let agreement between the ox and its yoke!
 Make agreement between husband and wife!
 Do not allow bad war in our land!
 Let our land remain standing and fertile, keep from bad
 wind!
 Let's keep and sustain our forest!
 Let's make the sun and the rain seasonally!
 Do not allow hard sickness in our land!
 Let's keep the cattle from disease!
 Let's keep the whole people from evil!
 Keep our king for us!
 (My experience and observation, Jan.2012).*

After this special pray, assistance of the *Buukkee nihoo* (Allaamo) clean the whole place where the offering is to be made. Then other participants bring the Wuro (Bull), which is sponsored by the community for the offering (Figure 1).

Then the people come one by one with their sacrifice and the Buukkee nihoo (Allaamo) take those sacrifices and put it in the hole with his special pray addressed to Qoolloo. One informant (Am.) said Kafecho people could not use sheep and goat to this scarification due to some related taboos with them. After everybody's sacrifice is offered, the Allaamo and his assistance change their place and sit in arranged place. Once this is done, everybody sits and the shameto would be blown so that all people gather there and the action is performed. Hence, those in the house usually women and children start eating and drinking of the new products. As this continues all elements of the meat from right part of bull and coke are roasted and then put in the hole; but the rest of the meat is eaten there with special varieties of food items (Inf;Am,2011/12).

After everything is offered, the Allaamo(Buukkee nihoo) said:

*"Hini no immeti maayoo nech shawa!
 Hini asho ubba bi kexooch diggoona giba!"
 Literary means: - This food which we provide may it be
 good for you!
 Let all these people enter into their homes in health!
 (Participant observation, 2012).*

Cultural songs and dances of the ritual

As time went by the religious, spiritual, cultural, social and economic significances of ritual practice and the sacred forest and the need to preserve it intact for posterity were taken up, expressed, reflected and articulated in every cultural song, dance, lyric and poem that was sung or recited in all for a arena in Kafecho

society. Equally, the ritual and religious leaders of Q.D. took these concerns seriously and address the same in their ritual blessings and prayers.

After the ritual meal is consumed, singing and dancing would start and continue for several minutes. All the participants sing in union like *wooho imiritone --- wooho ejjoominote*; literary means praising the forest spirit (*Qoolloo*) as an absolute source of their happiness. The rhythm of the ritual is as follows:

(in Kafi Noonoo)
*Bo guura waanebe barehoo wooho ejjoominote!
 Bo guudooch deebe ariyoo wooho ejjoominote!
 Gatteee shooto nummetoone wooho ejjoominote!
 Gaashee shokoon muuritone wooho ejjoominote !
 Natoochoo noonoo bechibe wooho ejjoominote!
 Naloochoo nooch tooce wooho ejjoominote!
 Bo yammoo daabbee turoo tiishee wooho ejjoominote !
 Bo yaa'a kellaa daadda gibe wooho ejjoominote!
 (Participant observation, 2012).*

The literal meaning of the aforementioned mythological song of the ritual ceremony is:

*Let the Buke Niho slaught the bull then the sprit brings
 ample of knowledge to
 his surroundings!
 We repay two pairs of ox!
 We provide local drink (Shoko) from teff to you!
 May the spirit let us to live long!
 May the spirit give us justice!
 May the dreams of Buke Niho bring success in all
 direction!*

The whole Q.D. ceremony at *Capher guudo* took a duration of about 3:00 (three) h. As the researcher has tried to show earlier, the whole ceremony of the thanksgiving sacrifice ritual at *Capher guudo* has important purposes. Apart from its main goal that is, the protection of land and natural forest resources, the ritual plays a central role in promoting social unity and cohesion. It also served in shaping attitudes of people toward the environment. It protects natural environment in general and forest land resource in particular from natural and manmade disasters or catastrophes.

Based on the finding evidences from both Beyemo and Baka Kebeles, there are six ritual places designated for the Q.D ritual practice. Four of them are found in and around the area called *Agella* in the Beyemo Kebele and the other two are found in the Baka Kebele. They are under the autonomy of two venerable *Allaamos*. These ritual leaders are called by the community with their spirit possession as *Baarochi Naayeeno* and *Asheellochi Naayeeno*, respectively.



Figure 1. Participants of the ceremony offering various food and drink items to *Qoolloo* on behalf of the Buukkke Niho.

According to one of *Allaamo* informant (Gm.), the *Allaamo* and clan leaders autonomously organize and conduct such ritual ceremonies and provide sacrament in the specific area. Prayers and sacrifices are conducted through the guidance of clan leaders. In order to guide the ritual a clan leader has to be "pure" by keeping himself from any "polluting activities".

These ritually protected grounds in the Kebeles are: *Ceecci*, this place is located very close to the house of the *Allaamo*. *Capheri*, is the special place called by the community as *Capher Guudo*⁹, *Guuggi*, *Bibberi*, *Yahi* and *Maaxxi* by vernacular language. The *Guudo* area is commonly covered and surrounded by sacred tree species like *yaho*, *Di'o*, *Butoo'Orooro*, *aa'icaphero*, *Qareeroo*, *Yinoo*, *Sheddo*, *Shinaatoo*¹⁰ trees as well as

⁹ *Guudo* is mostly found at the middle of *Shaaho* or cultural forests. It is specifically situated in areas relatively elevated around big stones and trees. It is a worship place inside the cultural forests where religious ceremonies, sacraments and prayers are conducted.

¹⁰ Refers the names of trees by vernacular language usually used for *Q.D.* ritual ceremony

some sacred ritualized or holly water springs or '*iinoo*'. The high points of a Mountain are also commonly used for such purposes.

Apart from conservation of above mentioned tree species and other sacred sites, the indigenous religious ritual beliefs of the *Qoollee deejoo* ceremonies strengthened societal common understanding towards the proper treatment of the environment and its conservation.

Changes in the ritual practice

As the researcher observed one of the ritual ceremonies in one of the two Kebeles, there were many changes as compared to previous experience. Some important changes observed in the ritual practice are:

1. The reduction of the number of the participants.
2. Reduction in the number of the ritual places.
3. Clearance of the sacred ritual forests for other

purposes.

4. Reluctant towards the norms, values and taboos of the ritual practice.

To elaborate the aforementioned changes, for instance many of marginalized Manjos are currently the followers of Protestant Christianity. House to house preaching of priests and their encouragement to be given justice by God for the discriminatory situation was the inspiring attribute for their conversion. The priests are still appreciated for the extended truly service both in the church and at home. They feel the priest fairly visit and bless each house voluntarily (Mesfin, 2005). Those converted began to abandon the local religion and practice, because the protestant preaching do not admit the combined form of belief what people usually had before. Hence, shrines of local deities and the associated sacred groves in surroundings of this society were destroyed. According to the key informant Allaameno Ag.:

“In Beyemo Kebele, there are two protestant churches where almost all members of the Manjos and some youngsters were converted to this Christian denomination and banned their previous local ritual practice of Qoollee deejjoo” (Inf: Ag, Dec.2011)

In addition to the key informant interview, the researcher took part in one of the ritual practice called *Capher Guudi deejjoo* found in Beyemo Kebele. From this ritual occasion, the researcher observed some changes as compared to my experience in the past. What made the author surprise was majority of the youngsters and the elite did not participate in the occasion. In the mean time the researcher raised question for the participants why this happened? They responded:

“Some of those youngsters and elites were converted to new faith and consider the local traditional belief and practices as backward and traditional; they said such practice as ‘thanksgiving to evil spirit or ‘satan’. Some also consider themselves as ‘civilized’ because of the cultural diffusion due to the spread of the narratives of ‘westernization’. Furthermore, one of the ritual leader in the Beyemo kebele stated that there is change in the performing of Q.D. ,there were many other deejjoo places in the area performed by the Manja but now banned because of their conversion to protestant Christianity” (Inf:Gm,AgandAm,Jan.2012ofthe Ethiopian Christmas day).

As a result, forest management role of clan leaders or the Allaamos institution have gradually been diminishing, as the new doctrine does not accept the practice of the spirit medium ship (Allaamos) such as swearing, cursing, and sacraments in relation to Q.D. worship.

Hence, the conversion of people to protestant Christianity had a serious impact on the indigenous ritual practice and its taboo on resource management practices. Cultural forests, wetlands, and reverie forests that were conserved through the traditional beliefs for centuries are endangered due to the new belief systems. According to Zewudie (2007), who worked intensively on the ritual culture of Sheka in relation to forest resource:

“The introduction of new belief system in Southwest Ethiopia during the 1970s and its wider expansion in the 1990s has an immense influence on the indigenous practices of resource use and environmental management. The new religious beliefs and world outlook were introduced by missionaries. The belief disregarded the traditional indigenous knowledge (TEK) of the local people that had served as a base for decision making on natural resource management. In addition, he explained that the expansion of investment in coffee plantations also intensively affecting the livelihood of the indigenous community through changing their forest use and conservation culture”.

The role of the indigenous Qoollee Deejjoo ritual in forest resource protection

The various traditional /cultural ceremonies and other rites of passage are conducted in the indigenous scared forest. The Kafecho ritual leaders and elders use the forest as their seats and backyard in carrying out their many religious and socio cultural functions in their society. Because of its immense significance the forest has been preserved in its natural state from time immemorial.

The base for the preservation of these various tree species and diverse fauna and flora is the religious belief that imposes resource and habitat taboos on forest patches known as *gundo* surrounding forests. Furthermore, the day-to-day decisions of most of the Kafechos until today are also grounded by their belief system (Info: Am., Gm, Ag, December 2011/12). The Kafechos consider the *Allaameena'o* as an important traditional institution for forest resource conflict management.

The values and respect people attach mostly to their natural environment and especially the forest land emanates from combinations of these age-old traditional religious beliefs in forest spirits. This close attachment to nature might be attributed to their belief in the interaction of the sky God (*yeero*) and the earth god (*showee Qoolloo*). It is also indicated that people avoid doing harms to the natural environment and selected forests and bushes for they are traditionally believed to be the domains of their land inhabited by a human-like creature called “*Qoolloo*”. It is important to note that Kafa has a number of traditionally respected and considered as holly

forested landscapes.

The data from group interview indicated that the Kafecho people perceive natural and sacred cultural forest as part of or the main symbol of their identity. They called these sacred forests as their *Macciilaato*, which literally translated as it is considered as a comfortable shelter or clothes. They also assumed that the sacred spirits which inhabit the forest world protect the forested land and thereby contributed to their survival. In addition, the forest spirits are believed to be protectors of the particular land and crops and domains of plants and peoples. In order to avert the occurrences of crop failures, they hold or perform an annual ritual sacrifice ceremony for their forest spirit known as *Qoolloo*, which is responsible for the natural and man-made catastrophes. Furthermore, one of the key informants, stated that; "Every thing in the forest belongs to the *Qoolloo*. If one wishes to take something from the sacred forest, one must offer him something in return (Info:Gm. November, 2011).

The group discussion held with representative elders of the two Kebeles indicates that natural forest or *Hallee Shaaho* are found at mountainous landscape, at the sides of rivers. Such types of forested ritual site in Beyemo Kebele are **Ceecci, Capheri, Caama and Guuggi** whereas **Yahi** and **Maaxxi** are found in Baka Kebele. The base for the conservation of these forests is the taboos related to religious beliefs and societal values that coincide with their ecological and farming knowledge.

As it is indicated in the recent work of Zewdie(2007), spiritual culture of Shakecho people contributed a lot for the preservation and management of the cultural forest in the area. He explained the strong linkages between the forest and honorable forest spirit *Qoolloo* as well as the taboos that are directly associated with and shaped the interactions of the community with the surrounding forest:

It is impossible to cut a single tree from the guudo site. People do not even point at it showing their respect for the spirit that dwells in the area and to avoid getting inflicted by evils associated with violation of the guudo's rule. It is prohibited to clear such cultural forest areas or to cut trees for house construction and house furniture. Traditional beliefs also protect forests on river banks and around waterfalls. If a person cuts such trees, there is a belief that he may die, for he is against the rule of the guardian spirit for which sacrament is provided by clan leaders in wetland areas and waterfall points. Taboos on the forests at the side of rivers are based on the assumption that rivers need cover, as people require cloth in the views of the Shekichos. The forest is also important for the continued existence of rivers without drying and the supply of cold and clear waters for drinking and other purposes. Informants clearly state that the natural forest at the sides of rivers, waterfalls and

wetlands are the base for their rivers. They argue that there is a strong relation between the wetlands, rivers and forests in the area (Zewdie, 2005:109-110).

Hence, the resource and habitat taboos imposed by the community from access and use of areas of cultural forest have significant ecological importance particularly to the conservation of forest resources. These taboos and norms related to ritual practice helped to prevent the depilation of biodiversity (specific diversities of fauna flora species and in protecting the wild game animals and bees' species). The communities that live around it believe that people who violate the taboos norms will die. Furthermore, the widely held belief by the community that clearing *guudo* for cultivation brings drought, heavy rain and other forms of catastrophes protects the forests.

The forest and its unparalleled status and condition are equally reflective about the effectiveness of the **Q.D.** religious and ritual institutions and the Kafecho principles and practices of natural resource management. Hence, sacred forest has sociological, cultural and religious functions which have given it a status that has helped to prevent its wasteful destruction and exploitation from time immemorial.

Thanks to the traditional religion and rituals of Q.D. institution, some of the sacred forest found in the study area is probably one of the very few remaining indigenous forests in present Kafa Zone. In general, Q.D. ritual practice among Kafecho people in general and the study communities in particular are highly valuable in making each forest in the ritual surrounding area under the supervision of a specific clan leader or *Allaamoo*. As a result, the members of the clan are responsible for the preservation efforts of the forest and strictly follow the taboos of the ritual practice.

Qoollee Deejoo ritual and marginalized minorities of 'Manjos'

Even though there were changes on the ladder of social stratification within the Kafecho people since 1974, the Manjos have been positioned at the lowest levels as untouchable casts. Economic and social marginalization prohibits them from equal social, cultural and economic exchange with the other groups. (Dagimawi, 2005). The mythology that was narrated in Zewude (2007) about the essence of Manjos marginalization and supported by some of the informants is:

'The Manjos have their own mythological explanation for their status. Eight brothers were coming from Jerusalem. On their way, they were all starved, and one of them separated from his seven brothers, went to hunting and ate 'unmerited diets' like Colobus monkey, porcupine

'rock hyrax, worm, and dead animals (which they still practice). When Manjo came back to join his brothers, he had a bad mouth, which killed one of his brothers'

Consequently, Manjo and his descendants remained isolated due to food habit mainly they had been eating dead and some animals is tabooed by the majority Kafechos until today. The Manjos lived and hunted in the forest during the imperial regime. The *Derg* government had tried to integrate them with the rest of the society but not long-lasting. Informants (Am. and Gm.) interviewed narrated the following:

'Manjos started selling fuel wood during the Derg villegaization program for people who settled at the main roadside. The Manjos started to sell charcoal as a means of subsistence as they could not easily adapt to the farming which they were introduced to during villegaization. People consider Manjos workshy as they spend their time hunting Colobus monkey during agricultural season, eating meat and drinking 'tej' in town during honey harvest season. The shift in lifestyle coupled with change in the belief system and other factors, marginalization of this lower cast has contributed to the deforestation of a large size of cultural forests' (Inf:Am and Gm ,2011)

As far as the clan specific social strata and marginalization is concerned, the Manjos could not perform the Q.D. practice with *gomaro* (Kafecho) clan. Even though the content of the ceremony is similar, the *gomaro* and marginalized Manjo clans provide sacrifice and perform the ritual independently without any contact. Therefore, except the *Dabboo* (nationwide ritual practice) which give the chance for the Manjos, the above mention socio-economic and cultural marginalization is also implemented in both the clan specific communal and family based Q.D. practice. Hence, as far as the informants' explanation is concerned majority of the Manjos in Kafa perform the ritual and belief the ancestral *Eqqo* spirit in line with their clan and kinship tie only. However, majority of these casted Manjo in Kafa in general and the study area (Manjos in Beyemo Kebele) in particular abandoned their pervious local belief system and ritual practice and become the follower of the protestant religion.

Continuities and present status of Qoollee Deejjoo practice

Though there are encroachments and pressures, Q.D. is still one of the most important indigenous religious ritual practices of the Kafecho people in general and the study case community in particular. It is one of the traditional religious belief system and religious identity of the

people. This does not mean that Q.D. ritual practice is survived without challenges and discouragements. According to one informant, following the downfall of the *Derg* regime, the *Allaamos* who served as *buukkee nihoo* in the Q.D. ritual ceremony started to play their traditional role including ritual leadership. Traditional responsibilities performed by the *Allaamos* include the following:

1. Perform and lead various religious ceremonies and rituals. Provide blessing to their land and pray for the peace of their people, cattle and crop;
2. Play a primary role in customary dispute resolution; and
3. Impose and enforce punishments to the violation of traditional rules related to special tree management and celebration of religious ceremonies. The punishments usually involve fines in kind, advice, ostracism, etc. *Allaamos* identify offenders through swearing and cursing. Thus, they have been performing different socio-cultural and religious activities that are substantially related to resource management and the livelihood of the community (Inf: Gm).

However, informants mainly the *Allaamos* in both study area stressed their fear on the new resort which is related to new religion and state led external intervention. They further stated if these resorts continued the existing changing circumstance on the native culture and tradition in general and *deejjoo* ritual of Kafecho people in particular will be at risk.

Conclusion

Hence, with its obscure nature, Q.D. as one of the Kafecho's traditional belief systems has contributed a lot to the present dense forest as well has been the living ritual practice for a century. The socio-economic and cultural value and taboos help this ritual to be promoted among the people in the study area. However, the change in the belief system, market oriented investment propagation, cultural diffusion due to 'Westernization' ideology coupled with weak and incompatible implementation of the government rules, laws and proclamation at different stage dramatically altered the local ritual practices and its role in forest resource management of the indigenous people of Kafa.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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