



Girma the Gedeo of southern Ethiopia and their environment (1895–2004): Religious-environment interconnection and Dararro ritual practice in Gedeo up to 2004 Introduction

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ABSTRACT

Background: Given the various causes, trajectories, and impacts of environmental issues, responses should be multifaceted, with one important component being the promotion of religious and indigenous roles for environmental protection. The relationship between religion and the environment, as well as religious attitudes toward nature, became a hot topic since 1967. **Method:** This study explores the connection between religion, Dararro ritual ceremonies, and environmental protection among the Gedeo people, highlighting the changes and continuities since Menelik's occupation and the introduction of universal religions from 1895 to 2004. **Finding:** It argues that, regardless of religious differences, most of indigenous activities, whether intentional or unintentional, contribute to environmental conservation in Gedeo, whereas Dararro serves as a generational bond, despite varying social, political, economic, and religious factors. The Gedeo believe that land and its components are created by *Magāno* (God), and hence, humans are entrusted with the responsibility of protecting it. Gedeo local religion further served as a bridge between *Magāno* (Sky God), humans, and environment. However, the introduction of universal religions has greatly affected the local religion of the Gedeo people, disturbing their indigenous way of life and hindering their efforts in environmental protection. Prior to the arrival of Orthodox Christianity in 1895 and Protestantism in 1955, the Gedeo people enjoyed a rich cultural heritage rooted in their local religious practices. These beliefs shaped their identity and community, highlighting the importance of preserving such practices in the face of changing environments. Drawing on archival sources, including government documents, reports, news articles, and interviews with knowledgeable elders, this study highlights the role of religion and indigenous knowledge in promoting systemic environmental protection while challenging conventional protection narratives. **Conclusion:** It calls for integrating religious beliefs with environmental protection frameworks and religious attitudes toward nature to effectively address the long-term effects of climate change and mitigate its environmental and socioeconomic damage. **Novelty/originality of this article:** This study improves our understanding of environmental history by documenting the ecological impacts of religion beyond personal worship and their socio-ecological consequences in Gedeo.

KEYWORDS: *Dararro*; environmental protection; Gedeo; indigenous; *Magāno*; religions.

1. Introduction

In 1895, when Gedeo was directly controlled by Ethiopia, its agricultural system was dominant and its land was not under serious pressure. Because of this, the *nāftānya* (northern soldiers) who were members of the imperial army found the place conducive for

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farming and settling. Soon after the Empire took control of the Gedeo, the northerners turned to fierce struggle for land and the erosion of its old institutions, local religion and indigenous practices. This had an immediate effect on the environment and its indigenous practices (McClellan, 1978).

The blessing of *Magäno* to the world's harmony, welfare and fecundity is the Gedeo's central beliefs. The Gedeo 'local religion' has an immense value on the perspective of environment. It contributed a lot for the wellbeing of environment by maintaining ecological system in a better degree than the new soil and water conservation ways of preservation. The disregarding of indigenous knowledge, the emphasis given to material values and the impairment in moral values of people appear to have left the door open to odd and evil acts like corruption, nepotism, chauvinism, narrow mindedness, insensitiveness, greed and wastefulness including the destruction of tropical forests, alongside political, economic, social and cultural considerations (Getachew, 2018).

The introduction of universal religions has greatly affected the local religion of the Gedeo people, disturbing their indigenous way of life and hindering their efforts in environmental protection (Getachew, 2018). Various changes have been undergone with the introduction of universal religions; no social and cultural activities were remained untouched notable by the teaching of Protestant Christianity. After 1991, the Gedeo people tried to revive some indigenous practices, but not everyone was willing to participate after converting to Christianity. One of these practices revived was *Dararro* rituals which have long been declined largely due to the teachings of Protestantism and other factors. Generally, this article examines the relationship between religion and indigenous practices related to environmental protection, with a focus on the changes and continuities following the introduction of universal religion in Gedeo.

This research is particularly significant because it takes an interdisciplinary approach, weaving together environmental history with the vital role of religion in fostering environmental protection. Exploring these connections highlights how spiritual beliefs can inspire us to care for the planet in meaningful ways. While previous research has concentrated on indigenous peoples' environmental protection and the effects of modernization, few studies have systematically examined how the introduction of universal religion disrupted the role of indigenous and local religions in the Gedeo people's environmental protection. This study addresses that vacuum by looking at how the disdain for indigenous knowledge and local religious practices that accompanied the introduction of universal religions in Gedeo interrupted long-standing environmental protection and led to degradation, causing sociopolitical and economic distress. Yet, this article posits that environmental crises cannot be addressed solely through modern environmental protection methods or any single environmental theory. While it is important not to completely dismiss contemporary approaches, it is crucial to exploit the role of religions in environmental protection.

Key research questions include: (1) How have Gedeo local religion contributed to environmental protection of the Gedeo people? (2) In what ways have the occupation and spread of universal religions influenced the indigenous environmental protection system? (3) What are the long-term socio-ecological effects of the decline of local religion and *Dararro* ritual practices?. Objectives of this study is (1) Explore the rich environmental perspective of the Gedeo people, a fascinating interplay of local religion and vibrant ritual practices; (2) Delve into how their beliefs shape their relationship with nature, highlighting the sacred bonds that connect spirituality and the environment in their daily lives; and (3) Analyze the changes and continuities in religions' role and *Dararro* ritual practices related to the environmental protection efforts of the Gedeo people.

There are several scholarly discourses on the relations between environment and religion. Some claim that there is a good correlation between religion and the environment, while others argue that there is a negative relationship. They do, however, unanimously point out that most of world religions conventionally conveyed some ethical concerns for the environment and its species. It is widely accepted that humans have had religious obligations to care for its creatures.

Because it is impossible to think of human existence devoid of plants that depend on it to survive. Archaeological evidences show the place of plants in people's lives from ancient times. The ideologies, religious beliefs and practices, livelihoods, medicines, diets, etc., of people all have depended on plants; and that the development of human material and non-material culture has been tied to plants, rather than animals (Arhem, 1996; Turner & Clifton, 2009). Yet, it appears that with the emergence of contemporary civilization, these religious concerns for the environment have vanished (Arhem, 1996; Northcott, 1996).

Moreover, the development of modern scientific, economic and political institutions have reduced the position religion has assumed historically on societies. With this, in modern nations, local religious attitudes toward nature have mostly faded. Over the past few decades, however, several religious leaders throughout the world have recognized the need to retrieve pre-modern religious environmental teachings and portray them as religious environmental ethics (McNeill, 2000; Hughes, 2009). From this, one might deduce that religion cannot be ignored since it has had a tremendous influence on the environment throughout history.

The relationship between religion and the environment, as well as religious attitudes toward nature, became a hot topic after Lynn White Jr. published "The Historic Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" in 1967. This article criticized Western civilizations in general for exploiting science and technology to control and destroy their environment, but he specifically blamed Christianity of pushing a human-centered worldview. White was useful in introducing religious perspectives on the environment, science, and technology. He was instrumental in igniting the debate regarding the link between religion and what he dubbed as "ecological crisis" with this piece. According to White, Christianity not only established a duality between man and nature, but it also opened the door for man to use nature for his own interests by desecrating nature. White argued, the answer to the dilemma will not be found in the application of more science and technology. "Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not" (White, 1967). One might infer the significance of religion in the environmental protection process from White's argument.

Throughout history, the world's religions have been considered to have some sort of impact on human being and the Earth. Because it affirms that people have a religious duty to take care of the planet and its inhabitants. But, it should be noted that religious commitments can differ greatly, resulting in a lack of consensus on what true environmental care comprises. However, there are shared ethical concerns found in historical teachings, and not only in actual religious practices. Greed and destructiveness are condemned, while restraint and protection are affirmed by most religious principles. Mahatma Gandhi for instance, warned that "nature had enough for everybody's need but not for everybody's greed." He believed strongly in drawing on India's diverse spiritual and cultural traditions (Gottlieb, 1996). Gandhi makes it very evident that people are the root cause of the environmental problem. It is important to note that sacred woods or sacred forest preservation has been part of the Hindu and Buddhist cultures (Nair, 19927). Moreover, in the history of ancient civilizations, "...indigenous people in many countries attribute supernatural powers to plants, animals, rivers, oceans, mountains, the wind, sun and moon. Respect for nature is inherent in many religious faiths" (Nair, 1992).

In Christianity as well as in Islam, conservation of the environment is based on the principle that nature and its components are created by God, and hence, humans are entrusted with the responsibility of protecting it (Northcott, 1996). In a similar vein, the Gedeo people's environmental protection emanates from religious principles. They believe that land and its components are created by *Magāno* (God), and hence, humans are entrusted with the responsibility of protecting it.

Many religions have recognized the importance of protecting all creatures on earth and the obligation of human beings to care for them (Narayanan, 2012). On the other hand, there have been disputes over whether religious principles should take precedence over scientific approach to halt the ever-growing environmental crises (Narayanan, 2012). It is crucial to note that both religious and secular approaches can effectively be used. What truly matter

here is the outcome achieved, highlighting the significance of results over the methods employed.

African indigenous religion, as practiced in the majority of African communities, is ecologically friendly and sustainable, helping to conserve and protect natural resources. In relation to this Joseph Ignatius stated if traditional religion is still practiced, most of these environmental problems would have been avoided (Ignatius, 2012). Traditional Africans regard land and water as extremely valuable gifts from God the Creator. Omari, also underlines that many Africans think that land is not something they own, but rather belongs to God (Ignatius, 2012; Omari, 1990). The profound bond that Africans have with their land is viewed not simply as a source of income, but also as a home, a site of sacrifice and offerings (Ignatius, 2012). Hence, Africans refrained from utilizing resources irresponsibly, especially when it came to sacred areas, because African beliefs and taboos helped in imposing norms and regulations for environmental preservation (Ignatius, 2012).

Over the last few decades, an ever-increasing commitment to conservation by all the major religions has been noted. This commitment has resulted in a significant increase in the number of pronouncements by religious leaders on the conservation of nature. This was accompanied by the growing number of religion-based environmental organizations and their active participation in specific environmental actions. This has led to a greater awareness among politicians, scientists and representatives of various international organizations with regard to the role that religions can play in overcoming the ecological crisis (Narayanan, 2012).

The cooperation of scientists and religious leaders in work for the environment is today taken for granted (Boersema et al., 2008). However, until recently, international organizations, national governments, policymakers, and even environmentalists overlooked the importance of cultural and spiritual heritages in environmental conservation and sustainable development (Gottlieb, 1996). Religion, both directly and indirectly, has the potential to be a tremendous force for environmental conservation and protection. While societal issues such as peace and social justice have been a central theme in religions for a long time, they have been slower in taking up the environmental agenda. World religions, each in its own way, provide a distinct set of moral principles and norms to guide humans in their connection with the environment (Gottlieb, 1996). Thus, the world requires a conservation approach that does not disregard religion's profound effect on environment. Therefore, religions can assist from moral influence, a vast base of followers, considerable material resources, and community-building potential. Based on this, all religions in the world have much to contribute for the environmental protection as a whole. Appealing to religious motivation to achieve larger and more involved participation of local communities significantly boosts the odds of success of many environmental efforts (Narayanan, 2012).

Based the points discussed so far, the article mainly engages with the concept of eco-theology, highlighting the vital connection between humans, the natural world, and the divine. By doing so, it invites readers to reflect on the profound impact of this relationship and encourages a sense of stewardship for our environment. Bratton argues that Eco theology is founded on the relationships between God and humanity, God and nature, and humans and nature. Mosaga also states that, "Monumentally, Eco theology delves into the profound relationship between humans, the natural world, and the divine" (Masoga, 2023). Bahru observes that traditional cultures see nature as sacred, in stark contrast to the consumerism driving the environmental crisis (Zewde, 1998). In line with this local religion and Indigenous practices the Gedeo had a significant role in maintaining and protecting the natural resources, social values, and cultural landscapes on one hand, while also serving as a fundamental agent in the interaction between people, *Magano*, and the environment.

This is also true in other parts of Ethiopia. For instance, the Oromo people of Ethiopia in their indigenous religion believe that *Waaqa* (God) would punish those who violate the cosmic order by unduly exploiting the land and its resources. The land is a blessing and a means of survival. *Waaqa* permits people to use the land and care for various creatures (Kelbessa, 2010). In addition, in Ethiopia, churches and mosques are erected beside vast

woods or nurture forest by themselves (Zewde, 1998). Therefore, in Ethiopia too, religious attitudes, values, and behaviors compel farmers to respect nature and natural sites. Peasants in Gedeo protect specific types of plants, for the sake of religion. This enabled the Gedeo people to maintain an ideal blend of nature and religion. As a result, indigenous leadership and local religious organizations have made significant contributions to environmental protection efforts. The religious understanding of the human-nature interaction reflects how the Gedeo coexists with nature.

2. Methods

This study employs an inter-disciplinary qualitative methodology to examine the environmental protection through indigenous activities focusing on religions and ritual practices in Gedeo, Southern Ethiopia, from 1895-2004. Largely, a qualitative approach was chosen to capture the lived experiences of the Gedeo people, interpret historical phenomena, and analyze the environmental disruptions caused by occupation and introduction of other religions. Qualitative data collection methods included structured and unstructured interviews, group discussions, participant observation, field notes, and document analysis, with an emphasis on narrative research to understand human environment interactions within their historical, religious and cultural contexts. The research integrates historical analysis, archival research, academic literature, geographical studies, anthropological studies, ecological assessments, and oral testimonies to explore the long-term ecological consequences emanated from occupation and changes. Primary sources were drawn from governmental documents and religious reports including photographs from the national archives and library agency (NALA) in Addis Ababa. Oral history interviews with local residents and knowledgeable elders provided firsthand accounts of ecological degradation, linked to undermining of local region and indigenous practices.

After the Gedeo Zone Culture and Tourism Office gave us authorization letters to the respective districts and subordinate administrative units, citing informed elders and traditional institutions, we began data gathering for more than a year, notably in 2024 and 2025. Then key informants were selected using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling, which allowed us to recruit through their social networks, including *songo*, religious, and *Balle* institutions. Although the elderly were prioritized, key informants were chosen based on their extensive experience, unique insight, and special knowledge of the issue at hand, with a focus on their ability to provide concrete information about past and current religious practices and their connection to the environment.

In the process, rural Gedeo elders, adults, youth, members of the *baalle* and *songo* institutions, and government officials from main districts in the Gedeo Zone in 2024 and 2025 were involved. More than 30 participants took part in in-depth interviews and focused group discussions. We looked for heterogeneity in gender, education, age, livelihood, and religion to notice a variety of religious-environmental perspectives and indigenous institutions. Because our methodology is entirely qualitative, the amount of data saturation determines the number of participants. We first did in-depth interviews with participants with four notable persons Gedeo Zone Culture and Tourism Office gave us in Dilla. Using these contacts and the snowballing method, we added other participants from different districts. Based on the key informant interview results, areas that require more clarification were highlighted for focus group discussions (FGD). The FGDs were convened in each of the three main districts, Dilla, Yigachaffe, and Wonag, allowing us to clarify and cross-check areas that the respondents had not sufficiently addressed. The researchers held four Focus Group Discussions with 6 to 8 people in each group, including persons with extensive knowledge of local religion and tradition, Orthodox and Protestant Christianity in the study region. Secondary sources encompassed academic literature from environmental science, history, and religious studies, as well as geographical analyses and ecological assessments to corroborate historical findings.

Each data collection technique has its strengths and weaknesses. However, this study evaluates changes and continuity using carefully selected instruments designed to complement each other's limitations, ensuring reliable results. The collected data were examined using case summaries and thematic content analysis. The data were coded and then classified according to their commonalities. The classified data were then refined into themes for further analysis. Finally, the draft document is created using both the content narrative and descriptive approaches.

Rather than adhering strictly to conventional Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) frameworks, this study adopts a historical and interdisciplinary lens to unveil the intricate interplay between religion and environmental protection. The study's findings emphasize the necessity of maintaining religious initiatives, local ritual practices and environmental rehabilitation to mitigate the lingering effects of modernity in Gedeo's indigenously protected ecosystem. Generally, interdisciplinary method is carefully crafted to align with the objectives, providing clarity and depth to the study that integrates rigorous data collection and analysis, enhancing the credibility of the results. This systematic approach not only strengthens the research but also ensures that the conclusions are both persuasive and impactful.

The term Gedeo designates both the people and their land in what is now Gedeo Zone, in the newly formulated Southern Ethiopian Region since August 2023 with Dilla town its center. The Gedeo Zone, in general, is located in southern Ethiopia between Lake Abaya (1200 masl) near Dilla town in the west and the highlands that reach (3200 masl) at Haro Wolabu in Bule district in the east. Gedeo is found in the Southern major Ethiopian Rift Valley, stretching 150 kilometers north to south and 40 kilometers east to west. It is located approximately between 5 degrees and 7 degrees North latitude and between 38 degrees and 40 degrees East longitude (Kippie, 2008; Mamo, 2021).

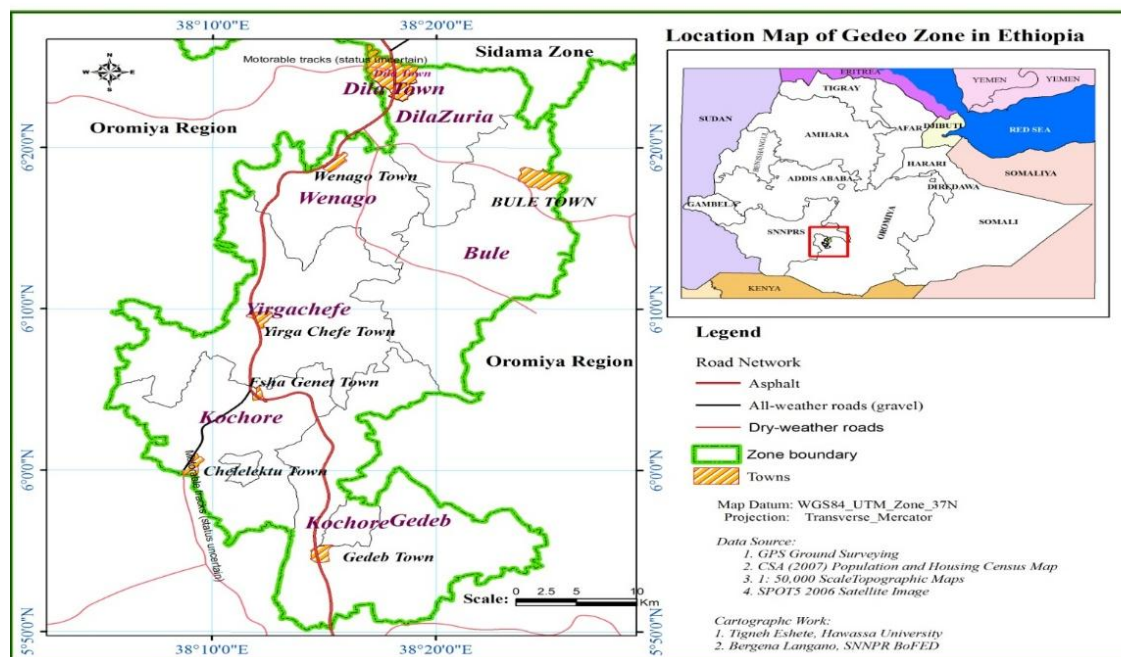


Fig. 1. Location map of study area
(Gede'o World Heritage Technical Team/Location Map of Gede'o Zone, 2023)

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Local religion of the Gedeo and its connection to environment

Before the introduction of Christianity and Islam, the Gedeos, like many other society, had their own indigenous beliefs. Local Gedeo religion revolves around *Magāno* (the Sky God), who is claimed to have created everything on earth. Their local religion is monotheism

which is based on worshipping One Supreme God (*Magäno* in Gedeo language). It has been evident that the majority of Gedeo people adhered to the local religion until the introduction of Orthodox Christianity in 1895, Protestantism in 1948, and Islam after 1955 (Getachew, 2018).

Their religion is local in its practices and indigenous in its origin, but unlike Jews, Christianity, Islam, or other universal religions, there is no time of inception and founder to trace. Nonetheless, some informants claim that it has always been a part of their lives and history, passed down from their predecessors. In the Gedeo indigenous belief system, *Magäno* is the Supreme Being, who is said to be male and lives in heaven but reveals Himself via His nature. In addition, He created and sustains everything on the planet, including the sun, moon, and stars. In their religion, the people of Gedeo acknowledge the intermediary between *Magäno* and human. Accordingly, among the seven Gede'o clans (one for each clan), there were *Woyyo*, a people with a spiritual gift to assist the Gedeo in times of adversity as intermediary between *Magäno* and the people. This appears to be akin to the Oromo *qalluu* institution (Debelo et al., 2017). However, my focus is on the interaction between religion and the environment, rather than religion itself.

Religion and the environment are extremely important to the Gedeo people since they are mutually dependent. Their local religion and way of life are primarily connected with natural features such as mountains, rivers, and trees, where *Magäno* is said to have revealed himself to his people. In Gedeo local religion in general, the plants, animals, wildlife, trees, birds, forests, and other ecosystems are the part of nature, belonging to the creator *Magäno* and it should be deserving to be respected as much as human beings who are also part of nature. This is one of the concepts that created a tremendous interaction between the environment and the Gedeo people's local religious practices (Tesfaye, 2019).

That being said, the second notion can be extracted from what the informants explained below, which shows the link between religion and the environment in Gedeo. Tesfaye (2019) at the research said according to the Gedeo, animals and the natural world are older than humans. Because after creating everything in the world, God made humans at last. Respecting your elders is a fundamental aspect of Gedeo culture. Therefore, we must respect nature since it is older than humans. We must also love, protect and preserve it since God has commanded us to do so. A man was neither a creator nor was created first. Man was created at last but destroying nature that comes before him. Hence, had man been made first the world could have been completely extricated.

The Gedeo people's perception of the *Magäno* and nature influenced their regard for and care of the environment. This implies that they perceived themselves as part of nature and all creatures on the planet including human beings are signifying the spectacular works of "*Magäno*" or God (Maru et al., 2020). Hence, they have to respect nature, which was created by *Magäno* on the one hand and is older than human beings on the other. From this, it is clear to see how Religion and Environment are inextricably linked with every Gedeo existence. The Gedeo believe in *Magäno*, the one and only Supreme Being, who is Omnipresent and hence exists everywhere. The Gedeo believe in life after death. They also believe that *Magäno* manifests Himself in His works of creation (Ebabey, 2019). Therefore, Gedeo people generally respect nature, as shown by the following notion. Kippie (2008) stated that there are certain places, such as riversides, hillsides, or large trees, where individuals present their petitions to *Magäno*. For this purpose these places need to be protected. The Gedeo often present their petitions together with *xeero*, offerings presented to *Magäno*. A piece of food and/or a mouthful of honey sprayed over the area comprise the *xeero*. In doing so, the Gedeo always refer to the *Magäno* who created these beings (rivers, hills or trees). Most outsiders misunderstand this as a pagan approach. Each Gedeo village has its own songgo, the place for mass prayer

Thus, religion and the environment are extremely important to the people of Gedeo since they are mutually dependent. This means that until these places were green, clean, and well-protected, *Magäno* could not reveal himself to his people. Therefore, the Gedeo people assert that they must preserve their environment in order to interact with their *Magäno*. Furthermore, as already been indicated, they held the belief that their God

frequently appeared on mountain summits and dense jungles to visit his people and nature. Consequently, this is one of the main reasons the Gedeo people avoided destroying their environment and built friendly relationships with nature since they believed it was a location where *Magäno* could watch over his people.

It can be argued, therefore, if there is no forest, there is no access to *Magäno* since they contemplate it is where He shows Himself to his followers. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the Gedeo people do not worship nature but believe their *Magäno* reveals himself through it. On the other side, natural phenomena are associated with *Magäno*. For instance, one significant means by which people experience the existence of their God is through climate fluctuations. Drought, caused by human wrongdoing, is said to be *Magäno's* retribution. Additionally, the rain was granted amnesty for the man's confession. These incidents are said to be signs of *Magäno's* existence and response to human activity on land. This is another significant aspect illustrating that the Gedeo people assume complete responsibility for environmental crisis on Earth instead of deflecting accountability to others or external factors.

Yet, it is difficult to attribute climatic swings purely to a supernatural presence as this notion ignores other dynamics. Second it can also be argued, the existence of natural disasters and extreme weather patterns challenges the notion of a benevolent deity. Rather, political, economic, scientific or societal factors may affect the environment more than direct impact from God. However, the notion itself served environmental protection, regardless of whether it ignored scientific explanations, either intentionally or unintentionally conceived. The blessing of *Magäno* to the world's harmony, welfare and fecundity is the Gedeo's central beliefs. Among the followers of the Gedeo local religion, it is commonly believed that maintaining a harmonious relationship with the environment pleases *Magäno*, who, in turn, reciprocates with fertility, abundance, peace, and health. The local people, notably old age people believe that if they destroy the environment, God will inflict by holding back rain, and causing epidemic diseases and famine upon people and animals. Based on the discussion so far, the local Gedeo religion has played a significant role in environmental protection, as the Gedeo people have developed a culture of planting and protecting trees for religious purposes, which has also helped to sustain the fertility of their land. Landscape (forest, mountain, valleys, rivers, and plains) have symbolic importance among this community (Debelo et al., 2017).

As it is indicated above, the Gedeo developed their religious discourse through creature interpretation and most notably have no culture of erecting worshiping places; instead, they converse with their God in green spaces, mountains, and riverfront locations, particularly on hill areas. This knowledge has been passed down through generations within their local belief system. Hence, they claim that they enjoy greening the environment, which has been a part of Gedeo's life for many years. But the principal secret that makes the land of Gedeo green is the deeply accumulated experience of the people that emanated from their religion. It is noted that the Gedeo life is highly intertwined with three elements: coffee, *ensät* and tree (Legesse, 2013). This deeply ingrained local religion and indigenous knowledge serves as the foundation for environmental conservation and preservation ideals in Gedeo. Though it is not the dominant religion of the people particularly since 1895, the Gedeo local religious practice is deeply integrated in to the life of the people (Legesse, 2013).

According to Shuaibu, traditional religion is the beliefs and practices, rites and rituals, customs and norms, moods and attitudes of our forefathers passed down by word of mouth and practical examples from past generations to present and future generations (Shuaibu, 2018). Subsequently, in this article, the term tradition will primarily be used per this concept. The Gedeo 'local religion' has an immense value on the perspective of environment. It contributed a lot for the wellbeing of environment by maintaining ecological system in a better degree than the new soil and water conservation ways of preservation. The disregarding of indigenous knowledge, the emphasis given to material values and the impairment in moral values of people appear to have left the door open to evil acts like corruption, nepotism, chauvinism, narrow mindedness, insensitiveness, greed and

wastefulness including the destruction of tropical forests, alongside political, economic, social and cultural considerations (Getachew, 2018).

The Gedeo people believe that the environment is one part of human nature, and destroying the environment out of greed results from a corruption in human nature. This shows that the concern of environmental ethics is not the matter of choice rather it is the issue of survival (Getachew, 2018; Maru et al., 2020). Generally, the principles of harmonious coexistence, loving, respecting, and avoiding overexploitation of the environment are the key lessons to be extracted from the Indigenous environmental ethics of the Gedeo people (Maru et al., 2020).

In Gedeo worldviews, land is believed to be home to many sacred natural sites, living things, and havens niches for various trees, plants and wildlife which protected and preserved as economic and sociocultural well-beings. According to Gedeo elders, there is strong relation between Gedeo traditions and Land ownership. Land is the Gedeo's most important resource, and it cannot be regarded a commercial or exchangeable item. Because of this, all Gedeo households firmly feel that their culture, customs, and means of subsistence are rooted on their land (Maru et al., 2020). Therefore, aside from financial requirements, all-natural resources including trees, forests, cultural landscapes, animals, birds, and natural ecosystems are essentially preserved and valued for religious purposes and livelihood (Maru et al., 2020; Knight, 1996). This connection has assisted them in sustaining their environment and surviving adversity for a long period. However, as already indicated, the advent of universal religions emerges to have posed a challenge to this trend in this area.

3.2 Changes and continuities with the introductions of non indigenous religions in Gedeo

Prior to the arrival of Orthodox Christianity in 1895 and Protestantism in 1955, the Gedeo people enjoyed a rich cultural heritage rooted in their local religious practices. These beliefs shaped their identity and community, highlighting the importance of preserving such practices in the face of changing environments. The introduction of universal religions has greatly affected the local religion of the Gedeo people, disturbing their indigenous way of life and hindering their efforts in environmental protection (Getachew, 2018).

Historical sources indicate that a pivotal encounter occurred in 1896 when Orthodox Christianity was introduced to the Gedeo people after their incorporation into the Ethiopian Empire under Emperor Menelik II. This phenomenon can be observed in various churches that were established in Gedeo after its incorporation. Several churches gained prominence in the Gedeo region, with the most notable being *Bulle Sellase*, the first Orthodox Church established in the area in 1896, and Ciicu Gabriel, situated in the southeastern part of Dilla town. Despite the official endorsement of the central government, the dissemination of Orthodox Christianity progressed at a sluggish pace (Getachew, 2018; McClellan, 1978).

Based on oral and written sources, the following are some of the causes that contributed to the slow and limited spread of Orthodox Christianity in Gedeo. Among these, the use of Amharic and Ge'ez by the church in sermons presented a challenge for the Gedeo community to easily understand the concept of the religion. Second, Orthodox Christianity was introduced as a direct consequence of military expansion, resulting in a widespread perception of the religion as a vehicle of invaders. This viewpoint is further reinforced by the fact that the majority of its followers speak Amharic. Third, it has been conveyed that some individuals associated with the Orthodox Church played significant roles in allegations regarding land disputes and extensive land alienation practices. Lastly, the Orthodox Church and the state maintained a symbiotic relationship, wherein mutual support was evident. Settlers frequently benefited from preferential status in administrative decisions.

Consequently, despite the church's extensive efforts in baptizing and forced conversions in Gedeo, particularly after 1941, a significant portion of the population continued to adhere to their local beliefs. Until the Protestant Christianity was introduced among the Gedeo people in 1940s, Orthodox influence remained minimal and had not yet

penetrated the grassroots level. Therefore, Orthodox religion's contribution was minimal in changing the social condition that benefits the majority. The Sudan Interior Mission (SIM), led by American Albert Brandt and Mr. Gilen Keyen who was Canadian, arrived in Gedeo in 1949, marking the introduction of Protestant Christianity. Unlike Orthodox Christianity, Protestants found it relatively easy to spread their evangelical mission among the Gedeo and further expanded in the 1950s and 1960s.

Several factors contributed to the successful introduction and spread of Protestantism. The most significant point to note is that the Gedeo people were already aware of the idea of the Christian God, having been introduced to it earlier by Orthodox Christians. Therefore, the Bible and Christianity were not new to the Gedeo people when Protestantism was introduced to the people under study. In my view, Orthodox Christians may have already influenced the Gedeo people's understanding of Christianity before the arrival of Protestantism. The Gedeo people's adaption of protestant Christianity may have been more of a reinterpretation than an introduction of new doctrines. Not only this, the way that Protestants applied the concept of the Bible to the existing situation of the people especially in response to the oppressive feudal authority was a novel idea to the Gedeo (Ebabey, 2019). In this regard the Protestants' emphasis on the democratic ideals of equality before God, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or nationality, sparked the attention of many Gedeo in this new approach of Christianity (Getachew, 2018).

According to *Ato Worku Gollä*, head of Qalä Hiwot Church in Gedeo since 1954, the other technique Protestants used to spread their faith was education, including building schools, implementing literacy programs, and teaching Indigenous leaders of all statuses. The prime objective was to evangelize the learning community and train them for further church and religious expansion. Many early converts among literacy school attendees and those who completed their elementary education influenced their families, neighbors, and relatives and built churches within the community. Moreover, these groups also became ordinary preachers and religious elders in their respective areas (Getachew, 2018).

The SIM first established its center on the southern outskirts of Dilla town, in a place called Qoffe. In the 1950s, as the number of converts surged, the mission decisively expanded its social services throughout Gedeo, starting with the establishment of a small school and clinic. The Protestants created primary schools and clinics at their missionary posts, bringing education and medical facilities to previously underserved areas, which benefited the Gedeo people. McClellan noted that the introduction of education by Protestants contributed to a slight improvement in the status of women (McClellan, 1978). Lapiso on the other hand argued that Missionaries increased the political consciousness of the people through education to oppose feudal rule and domination. He discusses the important role missionaries have played in boosting peasant awareness, which prompted the Michele Peasant uprising in the 1960s (Delebo, 1983 E.C.).

The Missionaries quickly established Bible and elementary schools, which created a good opportunity to attract the attention of the Gedeo people. This strategy played a significant role in the Gedeo people response to the Gospel as well as in the rise, growth and development of the Protestant church (Kanshie, 2002). Donation was another tool that played a crucial role in the arrival and expansion of Protestantism in Gedeo. Donation, especially the medical services and the school attracted the attention of other members of the society who also have a good social status. Therefore, the people were clearly attracted to go to the station where the Missionaries preach and teach the Bible. Prayers and Bible studies accompanied the medical and school services in their daily activities (McClellan, 1978).

Above all, the Protestant use of *Gede'uffa* (Gedeo language) as a preaching language was another remarkable phenomenon that attracted the people and helped them understand the Bible easily. The language has been attributed to many Gedeo who have converted to Protestantism. Another crucial point to note is that the God of the Bible and *Magäno* of the Gedeo people's local religion remain unchanged, since Protestants continue to use the name *Magäno* (Getachew, 2018). It can be argued that Protestants integrated social, political, economic, and primarily religious elements that transformed various aspects of the society.

On the other hand, it was claimed that in some cases the church significantly undermined indigenous material cultures that were deemed irrelevant to its worshipping practices and lacked Biblical interpretations. Therefore, materials that possess inappropriate significance and interpretations are not accepted in the Christian context. For instance, *Qääxäla* was a ritual and dance performed in response to various ecological catastrophes, such as droughts and locust infestations. As most people began praying at church, this practice was largely abandoned, leading to a dramatic drop in the number of persons participating in the performance *Qääxäla* ritual.

Similarly, the *Gondoro* practice was significantly declined. The word *Gondoro* literally means never again to announce or conclude that something or an event will not occur again. The practice has complex ritual procedures and powerful symbolic representation of purification of the 'curse' and reconciliation of conflicting individuals or groups. The practice is performed both as a means of purifying the 'curse' from the guilty and way of conflict resolution (Deesalegn Bekele, n.d.). But Protestants preached that purification is possible only through the "Blood of Jesus". Therefore, the *Gondoro* practice declined primarily due to Protestant Christian teachings, though other factors also played a role (Feleke, 2004).

In addition, the expansion of church planting has undermined the *Ballee* tradition. As previously noted, the *Ballee* system determines Gedeo's social, cultural, religious, economic, and political activities, as well as all aspects of their life. The ruling *Abba Gäda* occasionally performs ceremonies for the welfare of the populace, including the fertility of people and animals, bountiful harvests, and peace amongst peoples, in addition to enforcing and administering the *Ballee* rules. The *Abba Gäda* leads these ceremonial prayers at every gathering and whenever the circumstances need it. Most of these activities were over taken and performed by prayers in the church guided by protestant leaders than *Abba Gäda* (Feleke, 2004).

However, this should not lead to the conclusion that Protestant teaching was the only contributing factor to the decline of the Gedeo *Ballee* system or the aforesaid indigenous practices. Nor did these practices totally dissolve. It should be noted that the Gedeo *Ballee* system deteriorated throughout the imperial period as a result of political pressure from the central government, which regarded it as a challenge to state power, among other things. However, even after converting to either Orthodox or Protestant Christianity, many Gedeo people did not entirely abandon their local religions of worshipping *Magäno* and indigenous practices including *Gondoro*, *Faci'e*, *Qääxäla*, *Dararro* ritual, and other cultural activities (Ebabey, 2019).

Another noteworthy alteration brought about by the introduction of Protestant Christianity was the damage of numerous Indigenous trees and sacred places that the people had previously revered. Sacred sites and trees, where *Magäno* was once worshipped were abandoned as the Protestants continued in preaching *Magäno* alone. In addition, according to Jensen, cited by Getachew, most people used to bury their dead bodies inside their enclosures. People began to use church graveyards once they converted to Protestantism, and only a few elderly individuals preferred to be buried in their own compounds or plots (Getachew, 2018). The Gedeo people plant a tree on the grave of the deceased to mark the burial site, which helps protect indigenous trees as no one dares to cut trees in graveyards. As already been discussed, people have begun leaving cement grave markers similar to those seen in Orthodox Christian burial sites. This practice contributes to land scarcity and impacts Indigenous land use, which emphasizes environmental protection. However, Protestants gradually began to promote environmental conservation and tree planting.

Similarly, most of the rituals that were practiced by the Gedeo people have declined due to the expansion of Protestant Christianity affecting some of the Gedeo's cultural values. Despite the presence of Catholicism, Islam, and Orthodox Christianity in Gedeo, Protestant expansion and activities were more aggressive and impactful. In this context, Asebe argues that the native religious practices of the Gedeo were significantly influenced by two contrasting historical events: the arrival of Orthodox Christianity and, more notably,

Protestant Christianity, had a substantial influence on the Gedeo's local religious practices, potentially transforming the culture within a decade (Debelo, 2007).



Fig. 2. Grave with cement markers

Table 1 clearly indicates a tremendous growth in protestant religion and a steep drop in traditional religion, both of which have direct and indirect implications on environmental conservation. As previously stated in 1895, indigenous followers were forcefully converted to Orthodox Christianity, and by 1955, Protestants began to increase, resulting in a decline of traditional faith (Tesfaye, 2019).

Table 1. Ethnic and religious combination in Gedeo

Variable	Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Population	Total population	879,749	100.00
Ethnicity	Gedeo	-	86.14
	Oromo	-	3.37
	Amharic	-	-
Religion	Protestant	-	73.21
	Orthodox	-	10.67
	Traditional religions	-	7.96
	Muslim	-	2.44
	Catholic	-	2.11

(Statistical report of the 2007 population and housing census results (Gedeo zone))

With the decline of local religion and rituals practices, elders have lost their position to young generation. The youngsters who began reading and preaching the Bible became religious teachers and leaders. In this way formal education and knowledge have become substitutes for seniority, experience and cultural knowledge. This change has negative implications for the leadership role of elders and the transfer of indigenous knowledge to the next generation. Some of the important cultural values of the Gedeo are harmed by the ceremonies' demise. For example, elders were historically in charge of performing rites. Since 1950s, young people who can read the Bible become religious educators and leaders. In this sense, modern education and knowledge have replaced seniority, experience, and

traditional expertise (Getachew, 2018). Based on the points discussed so far, various changes have been undergone with the introduction of universal religions, no social and cultural activities were remained untouched notable by the teaching of Protestant Christianity. After 1991, the Gedeo people tried to revive some indigenous practices, but not everyone was willing to participate after converting to Christianity. One of these practices revived was *Dararro* rituals which have long been declined largely due to the teachings of Protestantism and other factors.

3.3 *Dararro* ritual practices to 2004

In *Gedeinke affo* (Gedeo language) the term *Dararro* refers to a flower. *Dararro* also refers to a cultural food prepared with fried coffee, honey, and fried barley. This food is the most popular in Gedeo and is only prepared occasionally during *Dararro*, weeding, birth, and Holy Days. It is largely utilized for the blessing of *Abba Gäda* and other elders. *Dararro* (flower) on the other hand represents the Gedeo people's hope for their crop and a successful harvesting season. *Dararro* is also a ceremony of thanks giving to *Magäno* for all He has done in the previous year and wishing each other prosperity in the next year. It is generally carried out soon after *Faci'e* (purification for the previous year's sins) at the village *songo* (assembly) level, during the harvest season from the end of December to the middle of January (Ebabey, 2019; Getachew, 2018). *Dararro* is similar with *Camballala* of Sidama and *Irrecha* of Oromo in purpose as all focus on thanks giving for creator and New Year.

Informants claim that *Dararro* is the Gedeo people's most fascinating and exciting ceremony. It is always been hoped and considered by some as a festivity of transition from hardship to prosperity. The arrival of harvesting period is venerated accompanied by thank offering and praying. The people believe that reaching at harvesting is through the willingness and help of *Magäno*. Following the coffee harvest, a large crowd gathers at place called Michille Grissa to commemorate the occasion and to get New Year's instructions from *Abba Gäda*. But since 2004 it has begun to be celebrated at Dilla multi-purpose Stadium in the final day of January after it was celebrated at all *songo* sites in Gedeo zone. It is claimed that in Gedeo there are about 500 *songo* sites throughout the zone. While the month is always January, the final date of the *Dararro* celebration at zonal level in Dilla Stadium remains unknown until the *Abba Gäda* confirms it.

Local religious adherents believe that a bountiful crop is a gift from *Magäno* if they please Him by carefully protecting their environments and avoiding sins. Consequently, *Dararro* is a festival of thanksgiving and gratitude for *Magäno* whereas an opportunity for contrition and forgiveness among the Gedeo people (Ebabey, 2019; Getachew, 2018). In this case, it has contributed to the Gedeo's environmental protection as the people committed to please *Magäno*. Although *Dararro* is religious ritual practice and New Year celebration for the Gedeo people, in my view it goes beyond that and it encompasses various features. *Dararro* on the other hand marks the beginning of the New Year and the end of the harvesting season in Gedeo. The essential value of the *Dararro* religious rite unquestionably outweighs its other vital features.

Most literature remains mute about the historical inception of *Dararro*. Informants, such as Ato Getachew Desalegn, linked the beginning of *Dararro* to Daraso and the place called Harasu. To this end, Daraso, the progenitor of the Gedeo people, initially conducted the *Dararro* ceremony for his children at Harasu in the 16th century. Nonetheless, it is challenging to validate this date. Contrary, Harasu currently located in Guji Uraga, which is said to be their original site until they relocated to their current place in the 16th century. Likewise, the following source from the Dilla town communication office traces the inception of *Dararro* to the 16th century, along with the establishment of their first administrative system, *Ballee* or Gedeo *Gäda* system.

Amharic

ዳራሮ ማለት ከአካማኖዬና ከጎሣሎ ጨቋኝ ሥርዓት ሕዝቡ ተለቆ ነጻ በመውጣት የራሱን "ባሌ"

መንግስትና የአስተዳደር ክልል አቋቁሞ በሕዝብ ምርጫ መሪዎችን/አባታዊ/ መርሁ በሽመበት ማግስት ከ16ኛው መቶ ክፍለ ዘመን ጀምሮ መከበር የጀመረ በዓል ነው። አባታዊው ለሕዝቡ ሰላም ጸዮተጋ የራሱን መሬት አርሶ ሀብት ለመሠብሰብ ጊዜ በማጣቱ ሚስትየውም የባልየው አጋር በመሆናቸው እንሰት ለመፋቅ ጊዜ የሚያጥራቸው በመሆናቸው የምርቱ በኩረነት ሳይጠበቅ የሚበረከት የፍቅር ስጦታ ነው "ጉማታ"። "ጉማታ" በጥሬ ትርጉሙ፡- እርዳታ፣ ልገሳ፣ ወይም አንዲት ሴት ስትወለድ ለአራስ ሴት የሚሰጡት የፍቅር ስጦታ የሚል ትርጉም አለው። ቀደምት ለ"አባታዊ" የሚሰጠው ስጦታ "ጉማታ" እስከታችው ድረስ ነበር፤ ከዚያም ወደ "ሶንተ" አሁን ጸዮሳፋ ወደ አደባባይ ድረስ ደርሷል። (Mr T.)

Gloss

Dararro began in the 16th century, when the people overthrew the oppressive rules of Akkomanooyye [feminine] and Gossalloo [masculine] and established its Ballee (Gäda) traditional government with regional administrative systems, led by publically elected Abaa Gädas. Since then, several Abaa Gädas have ruled the Gedeo people, devoting all of their time to the peace of the community rather than their own lives and families. Therefore, the community is responsible for providing different presents and services, such as preparing ensät even before the first fruit appears. These presents are called gummata, which literally mean "gift," "aid," or "gift of love" which similar to a present given to mothers during childbirth. Previously, presents were delivered to Abaa Gäda's residence, later expanded to songo, and currently changed to the square [Dilla Stadium].

The Gedeo people, ascertain the origin of their Indigenous governmental systems with the *Akkomanooyye* (feminine), the *Gossalloo* (masculine), and the *Ballee (Gäda)*, which is still intact and believed to be democratic. In comparison, the first and second were oppressors and monarchical hence overturned by the people to build the democratic *Ballee* or *Gäda* administration. The *Dararro* ritual, they believe, developed concurrently in the 16th century. Therefore, available sources take the beginning of *Dararro* to the 16thc.

Other informants associate the inception of *Dararro* with Daraso and the place called Harasu, as part of their local religion. It should be noted that Harasu is included in Gedeo people heroic songs. It might thus be stated that the origins of *Dararro* can be traced to the older place known as Harasu by the Gedeo forefathers in the 16thc and connected with their local religion, although the process of its inception remain uncertain.

Nonetheless, it seems certain that they practiced *Dararro* rituals until their incorporation in 1895. As the government exerted its influence and universal religions spread, the *Dararro* rituals declined or ceased. From a historical perspective, *Dararro* rituals and cultural practices in Gedeo have undergone various changes since their incorporation in 1895 until 2004. Throughout imperial regimes, the introduction of Orthodox and Protestant Christianity led to the decline of *Dararro* and other Indigenous institutions, which either diminished or remained in a debilitated state.

The most significant historical development impacting the *Dararro* ritual and related cultural practices was the expansion of Protestant Christianity, which was further exacerbated by the rise of the *Därg* regime. This confluence of religious and political changes fundamentally altered the landscape of indigenous institutions, local rituals and cultural activities. The *Därg* regime (1974 to 1991) unequivocally obstructed the proliferation of Protestantism. It should be noted that the rise of the *Därg* government had an impact not only on the Protestant Church, but also on other religions and religiously affiliated institutions (Abiso, 2003).

The *Dararro* ritual and other religious activities in Gedeo were absent or contracted for a long time, but some began to resurface after the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power in 1991. The EPRDF soldiers entered Addis Ababa on May 28, 1991, and declared the formation of a Provisional Government on June 6 of the same year (Henze, 2002). Since then, the Gedeo people have restarted the practice of *Dararro* at village levels and at Michille *songo*. In 2004, the *Dararro* celebration underwent yet another significant historical turning point. In this year, the Gedeo people experienced a significant milestone, when they successfully revived their long-neglected *Dararro* ritual

and other indigenous activities openly and freely. Consequently, 2004 was another remarkable year as the Gedeo people launched formal and public celebrations of *Dararro* at Dilla Stadium.

Although various factors contributed, two basic reasons can be pinpointed behind this development. In 2004, according to informants, the government faced significant challenges while preparing for the 2005 Ethiopian general election, particularly from a coalition party. These challenges were even worsened after the result was revealed. To garner support, the government reportedly granted more freedoms and promoted cultural festivals in Gedeo and other regions. Second, the ceremony was held again as part of a revitalization initiative spearheaded by the zone's Tourism and Culture Office and by the then *Abba Gäda* Agaa Birbo. However, the festivities and cultural aspects of *Dararro* may not hold the same importance for all members of the Gedeo community currently. This happened because as I have explained above external influences, such as governments, universal religions or globalization, affected the indigenous rituals of *Dararro* and its perceived meanings.

It appears that the religious significance of *Dararro* may be overshadowed by socioeconomic changes impacting the Gedeo community. An informant pointed out that the *Dararro* ceremony's present emphasis is more on political advocacy and financial values than on its rituals and cultural significance. Particularly in recent years, money has been collected from various individuals using various tactics, willingly and unwillingly. Additionally, some people, particularly the younger ones, started to become attracted to alcoholic beverages once the participants dispersed on the final day of the event. Even more, the location of the celebration has also been changed. *Dararro* was historically been celebrated at Michille, where the highest *songo* is generally held under a tree. Since 2004, it has begun to be celebrated in Dilla Stadium in the Gedeo Zone. As we have indicated in the preceding parts the *songos* are responsible to the *Abba Gäda*, the highest authority that leads the *Ballee* system of Gedeo (Mamo, 2021). Finally, not all Gedeo people see *Dararro* as a ceremonial activity that is still important in today's world, especially among the protestant followers and youngsters. Mainly elderly individuals are honoring its principles and going more frequently than young generations. Although it may be claimed that among the Gedeo people, *Dararro* acts as a unifying factor irrespective of religion, age, or clan, some have started to wonder if it is consistent with its original concepts.



Fig. 3. The author and incumbent Abba Gäda, who elaborates on *Dararro* and other Gedeo cultures and histories in detail.

However, some people from various religious backgrounds including the reigning *Abba Gäda* contend that going to the *Dararro* ritual is not an issue because the celebration is cultural practice focusing on the New Year and expressing gratitude to *Magäno* for His abundant kindness in ending the darkness. It also includes future wishes to have a similar good harvesting period and health to the people.

Dararro ritual is preceded by the practice of *Faci'e*. *Faci'e* refers to a period of confession which is accompanied by presenting praying activity. It is mainly performed during difficult situations affecting many people. The difficult situations could be explained in terms of drought, epidemic diseases, mass death, etc. The society links the happenings of misfortunes and calamities with human offence against nature, which was followed by a punishment of *Magäno*. The Gedeo believe that their 'good deeds' are the sources of their pleasure while their 'evil deeds' are the sources of hardship times which occurred due to the blessing and angriness of *Magäno* respectively. Hence, the festivity of *Faci'e* is performed deliberately to purify sinful persons from their sin.

On the other hand, the time following *Dararro* may be characterized by different social interactions and meetings. *Qääxäla* is the most important festivity that creates interaction among the Gedeo people which mostly follows the ceremony of *dararro*. It combines both ritual and cultural characteristics accompanied with local music and dances of youths and elders of the people. In this event the youths handling arrows express their attitude and emotion. In all practices, praying has an immense place among the people. It was mainly practiced during and following the festivity of *Dararro* (Feleke, 2004). As an illustration, the photograph below depicts the *Qääxäla* practice between 1945 and 1948, although it looks to have diminished and is now more widespread among the Sidama.

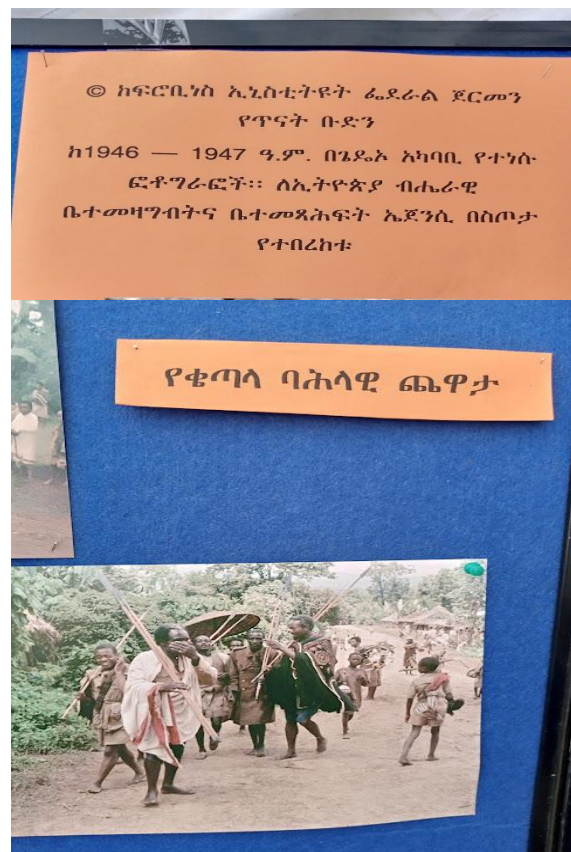


Fig. 4. Source national archive and library agency

All the above ceremonies and ritual activities are credited in shaping the cultural history of contemporaneous activities of the people. The events served as exchange of experiences among the different people of the Gedeo. It is through these activities that the people preserved their custom, working habit, environmental integration and other

valuable experiences. Based on this I argue that religion played a connecting role among the Gedeo and environment whereas *Dararro* rituals played as a cement among various religious groups, generations and even among nations as it started to attract neighboring people once every year in January. Similarly, the expansion of Protestantism in these regions since the 1950s enhanced religious solidarity among the people yet weakens some local cultural and ritual practices as already been indicated (Feleke, 2004; Doda, n.d.).

During the festivity of *Dararro*, various people of the Gedeo, including the *Abba Gäda*, *songo* leaders and participants of the ceremony, gather at Michille and move to Dilla Stadium. The farmers of Gedeo also collect some part of their harvesting in kind of crop, cattle, honey and etc to get the blessing of the *Abba Gäda*. Gifts to *Abba Gäda* are required since he is not permitted to do anything to survive to this day, and his mission is to bless, monitor his people, and educate history and culture.



Fig. 5. *Huluqa* in one of the *songo* house compounds in Haroresa.

Generally, *Dararro* encompasses different activities, praying, gifts for *Abba Gäda*, thanking *magäno*, declaration of New Year and may be new regulation, *huluqa* (pass through) to New Year and then the final blessing of *Abba Gäda* marks the end of celebration. As you can see from the picture blew the *huluqa* constructed from different tree branches and leaves. The passing through it indicate going to New Year and passing from the darkness of the previous year to new prosperous year. The following point shows the major procedural activates in *Dararro* ceremony.

የዳራሮ በዓል አምስት ዋና ዋና ኩነቶችን በመፈፀም የሚከበር በዓል ነው። ፋጭ ወይም ንፁህ፣ ሁሉም ወይም መጀመሪያ፣ ጉማታ ወይም ስጦታ፣ ላላባ ወይም አዋጅ በመጨረሻም ዳራሮ የአንድነት ምግብ የሚቀርብና ምርቃት የሚሰጥበት ነው። ፋጭኤ ዳራሮ ከመከበሩ በፊት የሚከወን የመንጻት ስርዓት ነው። ሁሉም መሻገሪያ ምልክት ነው። ጉማታ፡- ጉማት ስጦታ ነው። የባሌ ስርዓት መሪ አባ ጋዳ የማያርስ፣ የማይነግድ እና የተለያዩ የገቢ ምንጭ የሌለው ፈጣሪን በፀሎት የሚያገለግ በመሆኑ ምክንያት ማህበረሰቡ መሬት ካፈራችሁ የሚያቀርበው ጉማታ ይበላል። ላላባ/አዋጅ አባ ጋዳ በዳራሮ በዓል አካባቢ ወቅት ክልከላዎችን የሚገልፁበት ነው። ዳራሮ በበዓሉ አካባቢ ማጠቃለያ ምርቃት ተመርቆ ዳራሮ የሚባለው ምግብ ይበላል። ዳራሮ ከቡና፣ ከማር እና ከገብስ የሚዘጋጅ አንድነትን የሚያፀና፣ ተናግረን የምንግባባበት እንዲሆን የመመኘት መልዕክት የሚተላለፍበት አሰባሳቢ በዓል ነው። (Mr T.)

Gloss

Dararro ritual has five major celebration events: *Fachi'e* (purification), *Huluqa* (pass through), *Gumatta* (gift).The gift to *Abba Gäda* is one major component of *Dararro*

because he cannot cultivate, trade, and has no source of income only to pray and serving the community, people brings what the land produced to Abba Gäda. Lallaaba (declaration) if anything needed Abba Gäda announces new regulation for the New Year and finally Dararro food made barley, honey and coffee shared that shows unity. The ceremony closed with the blessing of Abba Gäda by spraying Dararro food on the people by his mouth. The following image shows huluqa or passing through to next year at Dilla stadium.

Dararro is a multifaceted annual activity that combines ritual practice and New Year celebration for the Gedeo people. Therefore, for the Gedeo people *Dararro* is part of their identity, culture, religion, history and holiday. Regardless of the difference I argue that *Dararro* is a connecting bond of generation, reflection of religion and culture. It is also a connecting bond between *Magāno*, human being and nature. As I have already argued elsewhere, every local practice in Gedeo had something to do with the environment and helped protect it, whether it was done on purpose or by accident. Their marriage, death, graveyards, religious and ritual practices are connected to environmental protection.



Fig. 6. The following image shows *huluqa* or passing through to next year at Dilla stadium. (Gedeo Zone Culture and Tourism Director Office)

But as already been discussed above, some of these and other indigenous practices were declined while others abandoned, although some revived since 1991. These were mainly related to the incorporation, introduction of universal religions and influence from ruling regimes.

4. Conclusion

This article reconstructs the environmental protection of the Gedeo people in southern Ethiopia from 1895 to 2004, exploring patterns of environmental change and elucidating the underlying dynamics through a diverse range of oral and written historical sources. It demonstrated how the natural environment interacted with the several traditional methods employed by the Gedeo people to protect their environment, with a particular emphasis on religion. The period from 1895 to 2004 marks a significant turning point in Gedeo's history.

The year 1895 represents the time when Gedeo was incorporated into the central authority under Menilek II, leading to changes in the political, social, environmental, and economic systems of the people; in contrast, the year 2004 signifies the resuscitation of the *Dararro* ritual practices. The article demonstrated that for multifaceted environmental challenges interdisciplinary approach is important underling the promotion of religious approach and indigenous roles for as one of the few of ways. The article underscored that; the Gedeo people used numerous Indigenous means and religious practices to protect their environment and all species on their land. Their protection stems from love and respect for nature and *Magäno* as stressed in their local religion.

The study hence summarizes two basic principles that define the Gedeo environmental protection. First, protection originates from love not from benefit. Second, respecting nature since it was created first by God before human. Consequently, the article argued that the Gedeo people's environmental protection and concepts stem from love and respect. It accentuates that, in recent decades, a paradigm shift emerged in the approach to protection to involve local populations and their beliefs, institutions, and knowledge linked to the environment and its management. Based on this perspective, the article asserts that Gedeo's environmental history emphasizing protection founded on indigenous knowledge, and sheds light on the global vulnerability to climate change. In the Gedeo indigenous belief system, *Magäno* is the Supreme Being, who is said to be male and lives in heaven but communicates Himself via His nature. Therefore, the Gedeo people assert that they must preserve their environment in order to interact with their *Magäno*. Furthermore, as already been indicated, they held the belief that their God frequently appeared on mountain summits and dense jungles to visit his people and nature. Therefore, the article establishes that, this is one of the main reasons the Gedeo people avoided destroying the environment and built great relationships with nature since they believed it was a location where *Magäno* could watch over his people.

The article pointed out that the advent of Orthodox Christianity and, more notably, Protestant Christianity had a significant influence on the Gedeo's local religious practices, potentially transforming their culture and affecting their interaction with their environment. After 1991, the Gedeo people tried to revive some indigenous practices, such as *Dararro*. The most significant historical development impacting the *Dararro* ritual and related cultural practices was the expansion of Protestant Christianity, which was further exacerbated by the rise of the *Därg* regime. This confluence of religious and political changes fundamentally altered the landscape of indigenous institutions, local rituals and cultural activities. In general, the article concludes that local religion and Indigenous practices had a significant role in maintaining and protecting the Gedeo's natural resources, social values, and cultural landscapes on one hand, while also serving as a fundamental agent in the interaction between people, *Magano*, and the environment. This study, therefore, posits that environmental crises cannot be addressed solely through modern environmental protection methods or any single environmental theory. While modern approaches are significant, it is equally important to highlight the role of religions in environmental protection. However, the article acknowledges the limitations of the study, as it mainly depended on oral histories, lacked ecological data, and had a few informants who misunderstood the research. The article also calls for future research, primarily comparative studies and ecological measurements of land-use change.

This research emphasizes the need of preserving indigenous knowledge, local institutions, and religious rituals. The Gedeo environment and indigenous protection system should be supported from below rather than imposing from above. Religion and indigenous practices should not be understated, as they serve not only as a source of sustenance but also as a foundation for cultural practices and ecological balance. Local governance should be promoted, and the rights of indigenous peoples must be upheld. Research should be expanded geographically and thematically to improve integration and consolidate environmental protection.

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