Abstract

This article is aimed at revealing the effects of mechanized farming and industrialization on Oromo ritual/sacred sites by focusing on Tulama and Arsi Oromo of Ethiopia. Qualitative research methodology was exploited to generate and analyze data. Data was collected through observation, interview and focus group discussion. Findings of the research indicated that, sacred sites of the Oromo are highly affected by mechanized farming and industrialization in the study areas. International and national legal frameworks guarantee people’s right to religion, self determination and property. Nonetheless, sacred/ritual sites in the area are occupied, narrowed and enclosed by mechanized farming and industries. Hence, the investments restricted activities performed in the site and denied community’s access to their land. Expropriation of landholdings does not recognize ritual sites as places with rich customs, reverence, celebration and belief systems of the local communities; this is not compatible with the basic rights enshrined in FDRE constitution. The result of this research therefore can serve as an input for policy formulation of the country concerning natural environment in an attempt to ensure communities’ right to sacred sites and ritual performances.
Keywords: Sacred natural sites; Ritual sites; Tulama and Arsi Oromo; Mechanized farming; Industrialization;

1. Introduction

The term sacred natural sites are an open concept with an evolving articulation. Sacred natural sites are part of a broader set of cultural values that different social groups, traditions, beliefs or value systems attach to places and which ‘fulfill humankind’s need to understand, and connect in meaningful ways, to the environment of its origin and to nature’ (Putney, 2005; Verschuuren et al., 2010). Similarly according to Oviedo et al. (2005), sacred natural sites are natural areas of land or water having special spiritual significance to peoples and communities. They include natural areas recognized as sacred by indigenous and traditional peoples, as well as natural areas recognized by institutionalized religions or faiths as places for worship and remembrance.

According to Verschuuren (2017), sacred natural sites consist of all types of natural features including mountains, hills, forests, groves, rivers, lakes, lagoons, caves, islands and springs. They consist of geological formations, distinct landforms, specific ecosystems and natural habitats. They are predominantly terrestrial but are also found in inshore marine areas, islands and archipelagos. In many sites nature is itself sacred, while in others sanctity is conferred onto nature by connections with spiritual heroes, religious structures or sacred histories.

In sacred natural places nature and humanity meet, and people’s deeper motives and aspirations are expressed through what is called the sacred. They are also integral parts of ethnic identity and play a key role in traditional cultures and lifestyles. While community controls once helped protect sacred natural sites, rural peoples are increasingly vulnerable to political and economic pressures outside their control. Without security of tenure and active participation in decisions that affect them, it is impossible for such communities to effectively protect their lands and resources (Verschuuren et al., 2010; Oviedo et al., 2005).

Many sacred sites have survived for hundreds of years and act as important biodiversity reservoirs. However, their contribution to conservation has been largely overlooked and undervalued by state and conservation agencies, policies and laws. Changes such as biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, human population increase, shortages of
resources, imbalances in wealth and poverty, increasing cultural homogenization and modernity all contribute to impacts on sacred natural sites. The sacred dimensions of nature are viewed in a historic context where the expansion of mainstream religions, colonialism, scientism, technology and globalization prove to have had a significant negative impact on the survival and conservation of sacred natural sites (Verschuuren, 2017; Oviedo et al., 2005).

With the same move, according to Herz (1993), indigenous cultures throughout the world have faced eradication by discrimination, assimilation, genocide, and most recently, the accelerating pace of economic development. In line with this, the most serious source of threats to sacred sites is the ever-increasing process of the so-called ‘modernization’ and economic development. Commercial forestry, mineral extraction, tourism, industrial fishing and infrastructure expansion are all common causes, of sacred and ritual site destruction.

Despite the devastation caused by colonial exploitation of indigenous territories, and the expansion of agricultural frontiers that resulted from the impoverishment suffered under centuries of displacements and discriminatory policies, indigenous territories still constitute the best-preserved natural areas in many parts of the world today. The greatest threats to their integrity are major infrastructure projects. These sites have, for the most part, survived due to their sacred character, the humble lifestyles of indigenous peoples, and the sustainable use and management of their resources. Their conservation is a result of ethnic values evoking the spiritual relationship between indigenous people and nature (UNESCO, 2003).

In Africa at large, societies believing in indigenous religions relate objects and living things in their environment with some other imaginary forces. Some places are given due consideration and regarded as sacred. The sacred objects and places are believed to have relations with the Supernatural Force. Besides this, sites that attract the imagination of religious leaders of societies appear to be the habitations of spirit. It is true that sacred areas are believed to have spirits that act between God and human beings. Here, what should be noticed is that the indigenous religious believers of African societies do not worship the natural object (Dereje, 2012).

The Oromo people are very much concerned about the health and peace of the environment and its inhabitants. They collectively pray together for
the peace of the people and the land. The Oromo religion teaches that environment should be regarded as sacred and be treated always with due respect. The Oromo believe that the present generation has responsibility to pass on natural resources in good order to a future generation. That is why the Oromo are concerned with the health and peace of the environment and its inhabitants. They are aware that their health is affected by the environment in which they live. They depend on environmental resources to heal themselves (Workineh, 2010).

According to Asafa (2001), Oromo religious and philosophical worldviews consider the spiritual, physical, and human worlds as interconnected phenomena and believe that Waaqa, the creator, regulates their existence and functions in balanced ways. Similarly, Kassam (1999) stated that, in Oromo rituals represent the locus at which the concepts of uumaa (physical creation), ayyaana (principles of nature) and safiuu (moral order of culture) converge and through which social order is produced. Through the performance of ritual, harmony is established between all things in the universe. This condition contributes, in turn, to the creation of universal peace (nagaa) that is indispensable to all forms of human and natural development (finna).

According to Assefa (2015), like sacred objects, sites bearing material indications of the ancestral presence of a culture, but also natural sites (hills, rocks, water holes) held to be sacred to the culture, were traditionally inalienable.

In Oromo, the Qaalluu institution has had a positive impact on the environment. The Oromo perform prayer ceremonies besides permanently flowing rivers, by the side of big mountains, hills, and trees. This is because the Oromo believe that Waaqa likes these natural objects which are green and distinguished by their size or other impressive quality which has aesthetic appeal. In other words, these places are regarded as numinous (Workineh, 2010).

There are different kinds of rituals which are performed at sacred natural sites in different times and places by Oromo depending on their calendar. All spiritual cultures are unthinkable without these sacred and ritual sites. As a result, all religious and secular activities are connected to nature in general and sacred natural sites in particular in Oromo culture. Thus, sacred natural sites are very important in Oromo culture in general and in Arsi and Tulama in particular. However, today many Oromo sacred and ritual sites including the ones in the research areas are affected by
mechanized farming and industrialization. Since the identity of the Oromo is greatly attached to the natural environments, devastation of the natural environment has a direct implication on the survival and identity of the Oromo as a nation.

On the other hand, some Oromo scholars and others studied the interaction of indigenous people and their natural environment including natural sacred sites from different perspectives. Workineh (2001; 2010) focuses on traditional Oromo attitudes towards the environment and the indigenous Oromo environmental Ethic versus modern issues of environment and development. Sinha et al. (2011) depicted understanding the cultural and environmental worth of natural space in Oromo religion by focusing on caato sacred forest. Lemessa (2014) studied indigenous forest management among the Oromo. Desalegn (2013) investigated indigenous knowledge of Oromo on conservation of forests and its implications to curriculum development. Zerihun (2014) explored the origins, maintenance motives, consequences and conservation threats of wonsho sacred sites in Sidama.

Therefore, the impacts of mechanized farming and industries on Oromo sacred and ritual sites were hardly researched. There is no systematic and critical study on this issue. Thus, this research sets out to fill the knowledge gap that exists due to lack of scholarly studies on the devastating impacts of agricultural mechanizations and industrialization on the longstanding Oromo religion and its sacred sites in these three highly vulnerable areas, namely Ada’a, Dugda and Adami Tullu districts. Proximity to a central market, presence of an industry cluster because of its topography, presence of water bodies and availability of infrastructure highly allured mechanized farming and industries, making these sites highly vulnerable. To this end, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the sacred and ritual sites taken over by investments in the study areas?
- What are the religious, social and historical significances of these sites for the people?
- What are the effects of these investments on way of life of the local community?
- How can the legal frameworks on land and investment be explained?
2. Materials and Methods

2.1. The Study Areas

This study was conducted among Tulama and Arsi Oromo who are living in the Great Rift Valley of central Ethiopia. These include Ada’a, Dugda and Adami Tullu Districts which are found in the Oromia National Regional State of Ethiopia, east Shoa Zone. The areas of the study attracted the attention of researchers due to the presence of various mechanized farming and industrialization which are affecting indigenous culture in general and sacred natural and ritual sites in particular. Therefore, the study covered these three districts which are greatly affected by mechanized farming and industrialization.

2.2. Methods of Data Collection

2.2.1. Interviews

In this study, interviews were conducted with Gadaa leaders, knowledgeable persons (hayyuu), land and environment protection officers, culture and tourism experts and experts from Investment office and daily workers from industry. Thus, 12 individuals were interviewed. Key informants were selected purposely based on their sex, age and wisdom, social responsibility and knowledge about their culture and the environment.

2.2.2. Observation

Observation matters for cultural research because it is the most useful field technique when researchers want to know what is actually happening on the ground and to grasp how certain event or situation takes course or effect. It also provides a first-hand opportunity to address and adjust their asymmetrical relation to authorial power. To meet the objectives of this research, therefore, the researchers observed the relevant sites, sacred locations, and the mechanized farms and industries on sacred sites in the research areas. Accordingly, Hora Harsadi, Oda Tuta, Malka Tajo sacred and ritual sites and most industries from the study areas were observed.

2.2.3. Focus Group Discussions

Focus Group Discussions were organized to elicit further data on issues related to the topic of the research. Accordingly, three Focus Group
Discussions (one from each district) arranged in order to know and cross-check the views of selected individuals on selected topics that demand further elaboration. The discussants were Gadaa leaders, local administrators (culture and tourism experts, development agents, experts from land and environmental protection office, investment office and agriculture and rural development office) (two individuals from each office) and local residents. We purposefully selected these FGD participants to get diversified ideas.

3. Results

3.1. The Effects of Investment on Oromo Sacred and Ritual Sites
3.1.1. The case of Ada’a District, Tulama1 Oromo

The ritual centre for Oromo in general and Tulama Oromo in particular have been Finfinnee before the conquest of Menelik. This place was taken from Oromo and its name was changed from Finfinne to Addis Ababa. Before its conquest by Menelik, this place has been important sacred site used by Oromo for different religious and secular rituals at different times. Another sacred site of Tulama Oromo is Caffe Tuma which is found in Aqaqi district. This site has been used by Tulama Oromo to make, ratify and amend laws once every eight years during Gada power transfer ceremony. Seera jahan Waaqayyoo (the six laws of God) were also made at this site. In general, Gada leaders made the general Gada laws at Caffe Tuma. The other important ritual site for Tulama Oromo is Dhaka Kora which is found in Aqaqi district. At this site newly elected Gada class announces laws and send message for each other to announce for people after return from Gada ritual.

However, now days, these sacred and ritual sites are at risk because of expansion of Finfinnee city and industries. Dongora and Dhaka Kora ritual sites are becoming very narrow. As a result, always conflicts arouse between indigenous people and investors. In past, horse racing used to take place at Caffee Tumaa. Horse racing is one of the Gada customs and regulations on Gada power transfer ceremony. However, nowadays this ritual is fading and it is difficult to perform even rituals.

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1 Tulama is one of the Oromo moieties have three clans namely Dacci, Bacho and Jille and mainly resides in central Oromia.
Odaa Nabe is also the well known ritual and historical place of Tulama Oromo especially in making and declaring general laws during Gada power transfer. There was an effort to give Odaa Nabe ritual site for investment in 2015. However, Tulama Gada leaders prohibited the establishment of mining industry on this sacred site by complaining against the destruction of the site. Gada leaders also declared to perform irreecha festivity at this sacred site annually in spring beside eight years of Gada ritual to protect the area. They made the same declaration for Caffee Tuma sacred site.

Another important ritual site in Tulama Oromo is Hora Harsadii, Harsadi Lake. This lake is becoming the important ritual site for all Oromo to perform irreecha thanksgiving festivity annually. The lake brings together Oromo in general and Oromo Abbaa Gadas in particular. They meet each other to discuss about their people and their unity annually on the eve of irreecha festival. However, this lake is at risk because of expansion of Bishoftu town and growth of industries. In 2015, all shore of the lake including irreecha celebration ford were transferred to investors. The main Lake ford of ritual site is given to one woman Diaspora investor to build the lodge on it. After getting permission from Bishoftu town administrative bodies, the investor started destructing sacred sites including big trees by excavators. After destruction of most part of the ritual sites, Gada leaders complained and stopped the destruction of sacred environment. Gada leaders also warned the government by saying that they are ready to publicize the issue and mobilize people. Then government immediately discussed the issue with Gada leaders and stopped the destruction by firing the investor from the area. After that the Oromia president office assigned engineer to enclose and protect the ritual site. Gada leaders and Culture and Tourism office discussed on the boundary demarcation with engineers. Then engineers demarcated and handed over the plan for concerned bodies. However, Bishoftu town administration refused to take responsibility and to process expulsion of the people who have already inhabited on the ritual site. The government also prohibited only the investors who occupied directly ritual points, but many investors are there by surrounding Lake Harsadii until now.

Similarly, Barru Mountain is very important mountain to get ritual trees especially in Gada power transfer rituals. When Gada of Tulama Oromo travels to Odaa Nabe for Gada power transfer ritual, they use meexxii (phoenix reclinata) and birbirsa (podocarpus falcatus) tree by cutting from this
mountain. To bring these ritual trees, Gada class in power assigns one person from foollee 2 group. The assigned person cannot use any means of transportation while going and returning from the mountain. Accordingly, using transportation to bring ritual tree is safuu (unethical). It is also unethical to spend the night in someone’s house or his own house while going to bring the tree or returning from mountain by carrying these ritual trees. Until he bring these ritual trees to Oda Nabe, he cannot spend the night in house. Before the expansion of Bishoftu town and industries in the area these ritual trees are available at Barru Mountain which is found around Bishoftu town. Nowadays this important mountain is given to investor to extract sand stone mineral for construction purpose. The investor destructed and destroyed the environment to excavate sand stone by excavators. Consequently, people go far place up to Cuqqalla Mountain and Hawas River to get these ritual trees. According to elders, if expansion of towns, mechanized farming and industries continue in this way, it may cause total eradication of Oromo cultural practices. Some active sacred site like Hora Harsadii survived because of struggles of Gada leaders. Beside different impositions on them, Gada leaders are renowned in their society and they are respected by government. They are more powerful than Culture and Tourism offices.

In Bishoftu area there is one mountain known as Tullu Daloo. At this mountain Tulama Oromo performed ritual known as Ari’aa annually. The name of this ritual comes from the Oromo term ari’uu which means to chase. Therefore, Ari’aa ritual is performed to ward off evils and bad things from the society. This ritual is especially performed during drought. According to informants, in past when people sacrifices Bull and he-goat at this place, the rain drops immediately. Now days, this sacred site is sold to investor to excavate red Sand stone. People are prohibited by the investor not to sacrifice and perform ari’aa ritual at this site. According to elders, after the forbiddance of Ari’aa ritual at Tullu Daloo, this area is exposed to lack of rainfall which is affecting the life of indigenous people. People always complain about this sacred site; but no one hear/consider their voice. The sacred site is destroyed and the vicinity became deep hole.

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2 Foollee are a group of young people between 17 and 24 years of age according to Gada age grade system.
Figure 1: Hora Harsadi sacred natural site and its surrounding in Ada’a District

Source: Photos captured by researchers during data collection, 2017

3.1.2. The case of Dugda District, Jille³ Oromo

Oda Tuta sacred site is very important ritual place for the Jiillee Oromo. More than three hundred Odas are found at this site. This site is important especially for rituals in Gada power transfer of Jillee Oromo. For instance, Gada leaders proclaim Gada laws which are made at Oda Nabe to Jille Oromo after they are returned from Oda Nabe. However, this ritual site is at risk because of the expansion of mechanized farming to the area. The road to this site is also narrowed and it is difficult to reach the site even on foot.

³ Jiillee is one of three sub clan of Tuulama Oromoo. According to today’s governmental structure they inhabited mainly in Dugda and Bora district of East Shoa Zone.
Another ritual site in Dugda area is Waldaa Horoo, Qallina Kutoo, Gafarsa Kormaa and Malkaa Qoffee. At Waldaa Horo people used to perform ritual of *Hiddii Saamuu* (literally meaning dividing up Sodom Apples). These Sodom apples are used to symbolize cattle in Gada power transfer ritual. The ritual symbolizes fertility of human being and cattle. This ritual is mainly performed by foollee group of Gada grade. However, today this site is not conducive to perform the ritual. The expansion of mechanized farming in the area narrowed the site. People go to the place for the sake of meeting rules and regulations of Gada system rather than performing actual *hiddii saamuu* ritual.

Gafarsa Kormaa is another important ritual site in the area. Gada leaders resolve conflicts in the community at this site before moving to ritual of Gada power transfer ceremony. Abba Gada is responsible to address all types of conflicts in the society ahead of power transfer ceremony. This is to transfer power peacefully to the next Gada class. *Bantii qaluu* (shaving hair) ritual is also performed at this sacred site. This site is also becoming narrow because of mechanized farming.

Malkaa Gafarsaa sacred site is used by Jille Oromo to perform *irreecha* ritual annually. At this site, they thank their Waaqa and pray Him for fertility, prosperity and abundance. The whole community of *Jahan Jiillee* (the six descendants of Jille namely Gona, Siba, Gusa, Loya, Ware and Gindo) perform the ritual together. However, this site was given to investor though elders and Gada leaders were complaining. The place is considerably narrowed and not conducive for *irreecha* celebration as before. Until today there are complain, rumours and frictions between the community and the investor.

In past, people spread their cattle to where they like for grazing. But now there is no grazing land because of expansion of mechanized farming and industries. Because of shortage of grazing land, people are forced to sell their cattle. Economic problem is also increasing from time to time as industries are expanding to the areas. Some rituals performed by the community are fading because of changing trend of life. Especially, shortage of cattle and cattle products are affecting the performance of ritual. In the area where onion is produced by mechanized farming, cattle eat the waste of onion after it is harvested. Milk and butter of cows which eat onion waste gives bad smell. Such kind of butter cannot be eaten and sold in market because of its smell. People are insulted when they bring such kind of butter to market. Social interaction of the community is also
weakened; people come together only on funeral ceremony. Settlement by clan structure is also disturbed and clan network is disappearing because displacement.

**Figure 2:** Oda Tuta Ritual site and mechanized agriculture around the site in Dugda District

![Source: Photos captured by researchers during data collection, 2017](image)

3.1.3. **The case of Adami Tullu District, Arsi⁴ Oromo**

From industries in this area Sher-Ethiopia and Castel Winery inherited the land from Garbi mechanized farming which was occupied during Dergue regime by grabbing it from the society. In past, the land have been used by local society for farming, pasture and ritual. Etico, Sagal and Ethio-flora mechanized farming were also established on individual private lands and ritual sites.

⁴ Arsi is one of the Oromo moieties inhabiting mainly in the Arsi, West Arsi and Bale Zones of Oromia and Adami Tullu district of east shewa zone according to the current administrative boundaries.
There are many ritual sites and river fords in these industries and mechanized farming which have been used by the society before time immemorial. For instance, river Garbii which is occupied by Castel Winery industry was very important ritual site for Wayu clan of Arsi Oromo for different ritual performances. Sacrificial rituals take place at this site to pray to Waaga (God) in time of drought and other problems like war and disastrous diseases. It is also used by the society as drinking water for both people and their domestic animals. Now days, the ritual site and the River are completely occupied by this industry; the road to ritual site at river ford is also closed. The industry is established on the centre of ritual site. Today, no one can reach the site either for ritual or to water domestic animals. Even nobody is allowed to go nearby the site.

On the other hand, there have been a lot of grave yards in these mechanized farming and industries. When Sher-Ethiopia flower industry was established, more than hundred graves were excavated and taken to another place and buried in one place. Excavating the grave is safuu (unethical) in Oromo culture. The grave yards are used by the people to perform dhibaayyuu (libation ritual) to pray for the deceased ekeraa (soul). Grave yards also indicate the identity and land ownership of certain group of people or clan in Oromo culture. Most of the time, people say, ‘awwaala warra ebaluu’ and ‘awwaala gosa ebaluu’, meaning ‘the so and so family’ and ‘the so and so clan grave yard’ respectively to indicate the ownership of the land.

However, almost all grave yards are destroyed by the investors and some skulls of the deceased were taken to other grave yards and buried at one place. Furthermore, according to Oromo religion trees around grave yards are considered as sacred and no one is allowed to cut them. Even nobody can take the fallen trees in grave yards for personal use. The grave yard trees are used for burial purpose only when members of the society are died. But, mechanized farming and industries destroyed all trees in grave yards.

In Adami Tullu District, only one grave yard was left in Castel Winery industry because of serious protest of Oliyyee clan. Ayantus (religious leaders) were buried at this grave yard. When they tried to excavate, fire was blasted from the grave yard and the investor left the area by fearing the situation. It remained as it was and surrounded by the wine farm. However, people are forbidden to go the site for different rituals and to bury the dead person.
The Dergue regime established stadium by vanishing Tajo ritual which was celebrated by Wayu clan of Arsi Oromo annually as New Year festival. The regime also changed the name of this river ford from Malka Tajo to Korokonch. This river ford and its surroundings have been very important not only for Tajo ritual but also used as meeting places for different purposes. There have been many Odas at this site which was used as dhaddacha Koraa, the meeting hall. To build the stadium, these all sacred trees have been cleared by excavators. Currently, the meeting place is occupied by Uta Wayu Stadium while the ritual site at river ford is given to Haile Gebra Sillassie who built Haile Resort on this ritual site on the east direction of Batu town.

Orthodox Church was also built during Derg regime on Deemsisaa river ford which has been used by Wayu women for different rituals such as ateetee, itti deemsisuu and others. As its name indicate this river ford is very important for women especially for itti deemsisuu. Itti deemsisuu is punishment by women against the man who violated their right. This take place when the son beat or insult his mother, when husband beat woman who has given birth recently, and when man cut women’s sacred tree, dambii. On such occasion, women mobilize each other by picking up their siinqee (women’s ritual stick) which is used to settle violence against women. This ritual stick is given by mother to her daughter on her wedding day so that she fights for her right in her marital life. Therefore, women start ululating at the wrong doer kraal to announce the issues to the public when one of the above actions is done one women. If the wrong doer does not send the respected elders in the society on time to calm down the issue they may go far place from their home by ululating and versifying about the action. According to Wayu elders, if the silence of men continued women finally go to deemsisaa river ford for final action against the wrong doer. If they reach this ritual site no discussion with men group at all, they return to their home by cursing the wrong doer.

The Dergue regime also built Church at Batu River ford by vanishing dhibaayuu (libation) and xiribbaa dhaabuu (erecting wooden peg) ritual which have been performed by Wayu Oromo. Xiribbaa dhaabuu indicates ownership of a certain land, keeps away evil deeds from the society, and warrants the sustainable living of the people on their land. At Batu river ford people celebrate different rituals side by side with the church. For instance currently Tajo ritual is celebrated at this site. According to elders, changing ritual site is safuu (unethical) in Oromo Culture but people are
forced to change Tajo ritual site because of forbiddance of Tajo river ford. To fulfil the rules and regulations of culture, on the day of Tajo ritual, people send two elders by representing them to the original Tajo ritual site to make libation of milk on behalf of the people.

Beside New Sher Ethiopia industry, there are also about three another industries established between Adami Tullu and Bulbula town recently. These industries are established on community’s common pasture land and ritual sites. To establish these industries they destroyed forests including sacred trees and ritual sites by excavators. Sacred trees have been used by local society as religious sites and meeting hall. During the destruction of these natural environments, people protested against the destruction of forest in general and of sacred sites in particular. They were forced to stop the destruction by the complaint for a while. But later, the government settled large military force around the industries and frightened and imprisoned some representatives of community and allowed the investors to continue eradication of forest. They cleared all forest and barren the land. The environment and cultural values connected with these environments are also disappeared. Thus, there are no more pasture land, ritual sites and forests in the area.
Figure 3: Some occupied sacred natural sites on the western shore of Lake Dambal in Adami Tullu District

Source: Photos captured by researchers during data collection, 2017

4. Discussion

According to Godbole et al. (2005), indigenous societies all over the world have developed their own concept of the sacred since time immemorial. Through understanding the nature, local knowledge-holders have defined the sacred for a community, village or region. Accordingly, the sacred species, groves and landscapes became an integral part of culture. The sacredness attributed to natural systems and nature later took the form of tangible symbols, images, effigies and elaborate structures for deities. For the Oromo too all natural environments especially land is sacred. People of the study areas say ‘lafti woyyu/ulfo’ which means land is sacred. Sacred and ritual sites also known by the name of rituals performed at the sites. For instance, people call sacrificial ritual site malkaa falaa, thanks giving site malkaa irreechaa, prayer and blessing site dhaddacha faatee and etc.
Sacred natural site is explained as socially reserved, holy or venerated areas that are connected with social traditions, worship, remembrances and belief systems of the local communities (Oviedo et al., 2005; Verschuuren et al., 2010). It consists of all types of natural features including mountains, hills, forests, groves, rivers, lakes, lagoons, caves, islands and springs (Verschuuren et al., 2010:2). The Akwé Kon Guidelines (2004) define ‘sacred site’ as a site, object, structure, area or natural feature or area, held by national governments or indigenous communities to be of particular importance in accordance with the customs of an indigenous or local community because of its religious and/or spiritual significance.

Tafesse (2008) who studied Shalla Abjata Lakes National Park which is relatively close to this research sites state that, people in the area usually are attached with their traditions to use natural resources as sacred places for spiritual reason. Local people were considering lakes (Lake Abjata and Lake Shalla), Shalla Islands, trees in the woodland and wild animals as sacred. They were gathering at the Lake side and sacrifice oxen to honour or appease their supernatural power, Waaqa (God). In addition, during drought (shortage of rainfall), famine and unexpected natural disaster people gather under Odaa and pray to their super natural power (Waaqa). However, according to current study, a major part of the water inflow of Lake Abjata which originates from Lake Dambal through River Bulbula is blocked by newly established Sher-Ethiopia flower farm around Adami Tullu town. Consequently, the size of Lake Abjata is decreasing drastically and natural environments are affected. Abjata Soda Ash industry also endangered Lake Abjata by extracting water of the lake. As a result, sacred natural and ritual sites and cultural practices around the lake are fading out.
Indigenous social institutions reflect indigenous peoples’ unique and holistic worldviews, as well as their collective perspective, and this includes, for most of them, an interactive relationship between the community, nature and ancestors. Most of the activities of daily life are accompanied by rituals and cultural practices aimed at maintaining that relationship with, for example, the ancestors or nature. Cultural practices relating to ancestors are particularly important because of the reciprocity existing between living and deceased persons (UN, 2009). With the same move, according to Workneh (2010), the Oromo Gadaa system has mainly shaped the Oromo environmental ethic, although it was outlawed by Abyssinian rulers in the last quarter of the 19th century in most parts of Oromo lands. The Oromo believe that cutting sacred trees down is tantamount to the violation of the will of Waaqa. The recognition of the will of Waaqa is believed to be the basis of moral value. The current study also confirms the above notions. According to all informants in the study areas, the destruction of Oromo Gadaa system have direct implication on Oromo natural environment in general and sacred and ritual sites in particular.
Even today, the destruction of natural environment is visible in the areas where Gadaa system declined than where Gadaa is functional.

Boku (2008) on the other hand affirms that, the Ethiopian policies have neglected traditional systems of resource administration. The policies applied to the rangelands have alienated the customary rights, aggravating inter-ethnic conflicts. The customary right holders consider their claims to be a legitimate historical right that equates land not only with grazing and water but with the spiritual wellbeing of the community as well. Loss of ritual lands causes social disharmony. Similar to this Ayalew (2001) reveal that, the Awash National Park (ANP) has expropriated about 75,000 hectares, while the state sugar farms have taken 15,000 ha. These sites represent some of the best dry season grazing areas along the Awash River. It is estimated that together the two development schemes have reduced pastoral grazing areas by 60%. It is not only the total area lost to commercial farming that is a serious problem for pastoral production, but also the quality of those lost grazing resources. Furthermore, part of the eviction involved the destruction of sacred ritual places and funeral sites. Their ritual circuit used to regulate the rotational seasonal exploitation of different ecological zones. After they have lost access to their ceremonial grounds their religion was not environmentally functional anymore and the Karrayu have massively converted into Islam. Asebe (2012) also uncovers the impacts of Nech Sar National Park on Guji Oromo. In view of that, the eviction dislocated them not only from their economic and material spaces (access to pasture and water for their livestock), but also dismantled them from cultural spaces as well. They were restricted from access to sacred sites, ritual places, burial sites, extraction of medicinal plants and so on. Guji sacred cosmologies are embedded in their attachment to the environment as part of their connection to Waaqa. Through territorialisation of the park territory, the state reveals its authority and power over the means of production and also detached them from spiritual connectivity to the supernatural power. Likewise, evictions and resettlement programs not only displaced the people from the physicality of the place, but also from cosmological meanings embedded in their physical and cultural spaces.

This study also shares similar notions with the above authors. Accordingly, there is no clear policy regarding indigenous peoples’ right to ritual/sacred sites. The lands belong to indigenous people used by them for different rituals and grazing lands were/are regarded as idle land.
However, according to Oromo worldview there is no empty land; in Oromo every landscape is sacred and have certain purpose. Most of the time indigenous people in the study areas are regarded as backward and their cultural and religious practices are considered paganism. Consequently, local administrators try to make them civilized by destructing their sacred and ritual sites in the name of development. In most areas churches were built on sacred and ritual sites of indigenous people to banish cultural and religious practices of indigenous people and to impose other culture and religion on them. In Oromo, grave yards and its natural environment is sacred. They also indicate the identity and land ownership of certain group of people or clan in Oromo culture. Most of the time, people say, ‘awwaala warra ebaluu’ and ‘awwaala gosa ebaluu’, meaning ‘the so and so family’ and ‘the so and so clan grave yard’ respectively to indicate the ownership of the land. However, almost all grave yards in the study areas were destroyed by mechanized farming and industries.

According to Lenin et al. (2018), Oromo tradition is highly connected with livestock and their products. If there is no pastureland, there is no livestock. Lack of livestock causes dearth of muuda (ritual of anointment by butter), dhibaayyuu (libation) and fala (sacrifice) rituals. Nowadays, all these rituals are fading partly because of expansion of industries on sacred ritual sites. This study also confirms this idea. Empirical data obtained from the field indicates that, some rituals performed by the community are fading because of changing trend of life. Especially, shortage of cattle and cattle products are affecting the performance of ritual. Some mechanized farms and industries cleared forests, grabbed pasture lands and destroyed cultural values connected with the sacred natural environments.

The legal recognition and protection of sacred sites are related to the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination which is all about determining political status and pursue economic, social and cultural development freely. Article 39 of FDRE constitution also clearly stipulates that every nation, nationality and people in Ethiopia has the right to express, develop and promote its culture and to preserve its history. Similarly as enshrined in Article 27 (1) of FDRE constitution, everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include the freedom to hold or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and the freedom, either individually or in community with others, and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.
With regard to ownership of rural and urban land, as well as of all natural resources article 40 (3) of FDRE constitution indicates that it is exclusively vested in the state and in the peoples of Ethiopia. Land is a common property of the nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia and shall not be subject to sale or to other means of exchange. However proclamation 272/2002 article 6 allows up to 60 years of lease for industry which is almost near to ownership.

Butzier and Stevenson (2014) attest that many international laws, including industry standards also suggest or compel that states and business entities, corporations and multinational enterprises (MNEs) conduct consultation or obtain the free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) of affected indigenous peoples prior to commencement of and during development projects that affect sacred sites.

Land is central to the life of Oromo identity in many ways. In the very outset, it is inseparable from its civilization, history, customs and identity as a nation. Similarly, land is essential in building economies and sustainable life. As a result, they demand secured land rights for the existence of their worldview. Their close ties with land can be deduced from the saying which goes “lafti lafeedha” meaning “land is backbone”. As shown in the result, farmers are dispossessed and displaced without adequate and fair compensation; sometimes, they are dislocated without any compensation. In the contrary, the compensation requirements are clearly stated in Ethiopian Proclamation No. 455/2005 outlining the procedures including the advance payment of compensation equivalent to the replacement cost of property on the land and any improvements (value of capital and labor) made to the land. In addition, displaced persons should receive 10 times their average annual income from the previous 5 years.

Let alone the gaps in its implementation, the main drawback of this proclamation is that it considers land as a commodity. Nonetheless, the community has intimate tie with their ancestral lands. It is simply ignorance to think ritual sites in terms of economy. Nothing can compensate/replace such sites. Hence, the question is not about inadequacy or unfairness of compensation in such cases. An effort to strengthen and revitalize Gadaa system of the Oromo, which has been registered on UNESCO as world heritage in 2016, will be in vain if ritual sites are not reserved for the practices. On the other hand, most land given for mechanized farming and industries are labeled as ‘empty’ by the
government. However, this research revealed that there is no empty land in the study areas. Any natural environment has definitely valuable contributions to the Oromo. Therefore, any investment land transfer should strictly be carried out after critical discussion and agreement of indigenous societies of the area.

5. Conclusion

Oromo people have opulent cultures based on a resonant spiritual association with their land and natural resources. In Oromo world-views, natural resource cannot be separated from culture and identity. Natural resource is not only a means for survival, but also a fundamental source of, and element in, their belief systems. Oromo peoples are also drawn their spirituality, cultural values and collective identity from the land, and their traditional laws, customs and practices reflect this attachment. For the Oromo, environment is closely associated with the religion, rituals and identity of people and communities. The empirical data obtained from the field shows that, the cultural practices of the Oromo are intimately attached to the sacred natural sites such as land, mountains, rivers and trees/forests. Yet, development is understood only in its economic sense by the government and investors. Hence, social and cultural aspects of the Oromo are at risk. The undesirable effect of legal framework including investment policy of Ethiopia which sees land as a commercial commodity is posing threats to the lives of local people and the impacts are always long-standing and irreparable. Hence, any investment land transfer should strictly be carried out after critical discussion and agreement of indigenous societies of the areas. The land policy of Ethiopia shall also be reconsidered to register fair, sustainable and inclusive development.

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