

Gebrehiwot Gebreslassie Zesu

The Sacred and the Profane

Environmental Anthropology
of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity



Anchor Academic Publishing

disseminate knowledge

Zesu, Gebrehiwot Gebreslassie: The Sacred and the Profane - Environmental Anthropology of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. Hamburg, Anchor Academic Publishing 2014

Buch-ISBN: 978-3-95489-081-1

PDF-eBook-ISBN: 978-3-95489-581-6

Druck/Herstellung: Anchor Academic Publishing, Hamburg, 2014

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek:

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographical Information of the German National Library:

The German National Library lists this publication in the German National Bibliography. Detailed bibliographic data can be found at: <http://dnb.d-nb.de>

All rights reserved. This publication may not be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers.

Das Werk einschließlich aller seiner Teile ist urheberrechtlich geschützt. Jede Verwertung außerhalb der Grenzen des Urheberrechtsgesetzes ist ohne Zustimmung des Verlages unzulässig und strafbar. Dies gilt insbesondere für Vervielfältigungen, Übersetzungen, Mikroverfilmungen und die Einspeicherung und Bearbeitung in elektronischen Systemen.

Die Wiedergabe von Gebrauchsnamen, Handelsnamen, Warenbezeichnungen usw. in diesem Werk berechtigt auch ohne besondere Kennzeichnung nicht zu der Annahme, dass solche Namen im Sinne der Warenzeichen- und Markenschutz-Gesetzgebung als frei zu betrachten wären und daher von jedermann benutzt werden dürften.

Die Informationen in diesem Werk wurden mit Sorgfalt erarbeitet. Dennoch können Fehler nicht vollständig ausgeschlossen werden und die Diplomica Verlag GmbH, die Autoren oder Übersetzer übernehmen keine juristische Verantwortung oder irgendeine Haftung für evtl. verbliebene fehlerhafte Angaben und deren Folgen.

Alle Rechte vorbehalten

© Anchor Academic Publishing, Imprint der Diplomica Verlag GmbH
Hermannstal 119k, 22119 Hamburg
<http://www.diplomica-verlag.de>, Hamburg 2014
Printed in Germany

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study is the result of the efforts and support of many individuals. For that I would like to thank the people of Dagya, Romanat, Adi-Amuag and Khokholo in the Inderta *wereda*, Ethiopia who opened up their hearts and their lives to me while I stayed in their villages. People in these communities were fully supportive and actively interested in what I was doing and assisted the research by giving of their time.

I want to give special thanks to Dr Wolbert G.C. Smidt (Associate professor in Ethnohistory) and Mr. Alula Ayele (MA in Social Anthropology), who are my advisor and co-advisor respectively for their dedication. They went through my study from title selection to the final work that helped me a lot in shaping the framework of the book and final appearance.

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1. Trends in Biodiversity Conservation	1
1.2. Research Questions.....	5
1.3. Objectives of the Research	5
1.3.1. General Objective	5
1.3.2. Specific Objectives	5
1.4. Significance of the Study.....	6
2. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	7
2.1. Conceptual Framework.....	7
2.1. 1. Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church.....	7
2.1.2. The Sacred and the Profane.....	8
2.1.3. Biodiversity and Culture.....	9
2.2. Theorizing Environmental Ethics and Biodiversity Conservation	11
2.2.1. Economic and Institutional theorists view.....	11
2.2.2. Cultural theorists view	12
2.2.3. Christian Anthropocentrism (human-centered ethics).....	13
2.2.4. Christian Deep ecology (Creation-centered ethics)	15
3. FORMER RESEARCHES ON BIODIVERSITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS	19
3.1. Biodiversity and Culture.....	19
3.2. Biodiversity and sacred areas in the World and Ethiopia	20
4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	24
4.1. Description of the Study area	24
4.2. The Study Site: Churches Selected for the Study.....	25
4.2.1. Mika’el Tsellamo Church.....	25

4.2.2. Mika’el Romanat Church.....	25
4.2.3. Khokholo Yowhannis.....	26
4.2.4. Mika’el Dagya Church	26
4.3. Research Methodology and Methods of Data Collection	28
5. BIODIVERSITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS IN ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX TEWAHEDO CHURCH	32
5.1. The churches and their Plant composition	32
5.2. The churches and their Animal composition	36
5.3. Community’s View Towards Plants and Animals in the Church	37
5.3.1. Community’s view on plants in the Church	37
5.3.2. Community’s view on Animals in the Church	39
5.4. Significance of Church Plants	41
5.5. The Sacred and Profane Dichotomy in the Churches	43
6. CONCLUDING REMARKS	47
References.....	50
APPENDIX I: LIST OF QUESTIONS: INTERVIEW DISCUSSIONS.....	56
APPENDIX II: PHOTOS OF CHURCH PLANTS AND THEIR DESCRIPTIONS.....	57
APPENDIX III: LIST OF LOCAL AND ENGLISH NAMES OF ANIMALS AND THEIR RESPECTIVE DESCRIPTION	97
List of Figures.....	102
List of photos	102

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Trends in Biodiversity Conservation

The very fast rate of deforestation and killing and hunting of animals in Africa has brought significant decline in biodiversity to the extent that some species are on the verge of local extinction. For Mackinnon, though the available information is limited, it is estimated that two-third of the land that could support habitats for wild plants and animals is being used for other purposes (cited in Biodiversity Support Program, 1993).

According to the Environmental Protection Authority (2003), Ethiopia is one of the richest countries in flora and fauna in Africa. As the Institute of Biodiversity Conservation cited from Tewolde Brehan (1991), there are 6500- 7000 species of higher plants of which 12 percent are believed to be endemic. Besides, the country (Ethiopia) is endowed with 284 wild mammals, 861 birds, 201 reptile, 63 amphibian, 188 fish and 1225 arthropod species of which 10, 2,5, 54, 0.4 and 21 percent respectively are believed to be endemic (Institute of Biodiversity Conservation, 2009). However, due to deforestation which is occurring at an alarming rate, the country is losing much of its unique biodiversity. The findings of Teketay cited in Zewge, (2001), shows that the major reasons for deforestation are the intensive use of land for agriculture and livestock production, and tree cutting for different purposes.

With a number of factors for deforestation and decline in or loss of biodiversity, the problem is evident in the northern highlands of Ethiopia and more severe in Tigray regional state, where forests are downscaled to few protected areas especially the Orthodox Tewahedo Church compounds. To this end, very little of the natural forest and wild animals remains today. These all are the results of both conscious (a long-term human occupation of the area, accompanied by

sedentary agriculture and extensive cattle husbandry) and unconscious (consecutive civil and national wars) exploitation of the biodiversity. For this reason, the government made different efforts in various sectors of biodiversity conservation. To overcome problems in biodiversity loss, the ministry of agriculture in collaboration with different national and international organizations is working to implement agro forestry and community tree planting programs for the last three decades. However, yet the challenges of minimizing the rate of deforestation, lack of appropriate technologies to improve conservation practices, and imbalance between the forest resource and the demand of the ever increasing population of the country remain unsolved (United Nations, 2002).

In such devastated areas, conserving and maintaining biodiversity has been a very challenging task, and most approaches did not bring significant change. The only areas where one can observe forests/trees in northern Ethiopia are in some protected areas and the church surroundings and hence, these patches of biodiversity in the church compounds are believed to survive as a result of the religion and tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church's conservation system and protective patronage (Dagnachew, 2001). In line with this Zewge (2001) underlines that;

The sacred church and monastery lands of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Churches have, however, survived for many centuries as islands of natural forest biodiversity in a sea of deforested landscape in much of the Ethiopian Highlands.

Having the knowledge of the multi-faced benefits of biodiversity conservation, the Ethiopian government is enhancing the activities and organizational structure of biodiversity conservation from time to time. As part of its enhancement activities, the government upgraded Plant Genetic Resource (PGR) to Institute level which is named as Institute of Biodiversity Conservation and Research (IBCR) by proclamation No. 120/98 and re-established it with the name of Institute of Biodiversity Conservation (IBC) by proclamation No. 381/2004 (FDREPA, 2004). Yet, few protected areas and church and monastery compounds are the only areas in which biodiversity are conserved (Alemayehu, 2007).

As different writers have agreed, sustainable use of environment depends on two main factors: (1) having appropriate local knowledge and technology to use resources, and (2) the environmental ethics that guides the relationship between human and nature in a sustainable way (cited in Alemayehu, 2007). In the development of human beings (either for misuse or wise use of the environment) institutions can play a significant role. For instance, in states like Ethiopia in which religion has a great value, Orthodox Tewahedo Church plays a prominent role in conserving biodiversity.

The Christian Anthropocentrists believe that God created nature for human's benefit by using the biblical instruction of Genesis which instructs Adam and Eve to be "*fruitful and multiply and fill the Earth and subdue it; have dominion over everything that moves upon the Earth.*", which supports the argument of Anthropocentrism: nature should be used as a means (*wealth*) for the people (Chandran and Ramachandra, 2008). However, the Christian Deep Ecologist, Nash concludes that the massive losses in biodiversity *matter morally*, not primarily because of the

instrumental value of the other species (other than human beings), but rather because of the intrinsic values of the species that humans ought to respect (Zaleha, 2009). However, although the observation in the Orthodox Church compounds seems in line with the proponents of Deep ecology, there is no research done regarding Orthodox Tewahedo Church values and practices in Ethiopia in general as well as the wereda Inderta in particular.

In influencing peoples' perspectives on biodiversity conservation, the Orthodox Tewahedo Church is believed to play its role in three ways to conserve biodiversity: (1) Based upon and rooted in their own understanding of the relationship between humanity and the rest of nature; (2) They can teach about the environment and natural systems upon which life depends; (3) They can provide active leadership in initiating practical environmental projects. Having Said this, the Church norms and values which are being respected in the Church compound are not applicable in other areas/ outside the Church compound which can be in this case expressed in the form of separation between sacred and profane and levels of sacredness linked with secrecy of spaces, from open space to very much closed one.

1.2. Research Questions

The primary research questions of this book are:

1. What are the value-bases for biodiversity conservation according to bible and other religious traditions of the EOTC?
2. Can the existing biodiversity Conservation practices in and around the church compound be attributed to the space wise dichotomy of the sacred and the profane? Why? And How?
3. How do individuals/ followers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church behave towards biodiversity while they are in and around churches and in other areas?
4. Do conservation practices in the churches animal and plant type specific? How?
5. How the Church values, which are in favor of biodiversity conservation, can be applicable to other areas?

1.3. Objectives of the Research

1.3.1. General Objective

The main objective of the study is to investigate the role of the Orthodox Tewahedo Church in biodiversity conservation. Based on the above general objective the following specific objectives are in order.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives

- i. To find out those religious values (principles and actions) of the EOTC that are in favor of biodiversity conservation.