

# **Dynamics of the Cult of *Sheik Hussein of Bale*, Ethiopia: Its Course and Curse of the Extremists, a Historical Perspective<sup>1</sup>**

Kefyalew Tessema Semu<sup>2</sup>

## **Abstract**

*This article explores historical dynamics, values and emerging threats to the cult of Sheik Hussein of Bale. Oral, archival and secondary sources have been collected and crosschecked in the interpretation. Sheik Hussein, an Islamic wali who lived about 800 years ago at a sanctuary named after him known as Dirre Sheik Hussein, is the icon of Bale. His connection to the blood line of Prophet Mohammed, as well as his spiritual graces and deeds in the Islamization of Bale were factors behind his fame, which led to his veneration as a saint while already he was alive and fully transformed into a cult, after his death. The cult, which evolved from the pre-Islamic muudaa tradition of the Oromo, consists of pilgrimages, baaroo and rituals at his shrine twice a year. It has immense potential for tourism that fascinates even the pilgrims, involving tour of scenic landscapes, famous shrines and singing in honor of the saint and Allah. However, due to the proliferation of extremist teachings of the Salafists and Wahabbists, attacks on pilgrims and marginalization of adherents have been strengthening. Even the extremists vow to destroy the shrine. There were problems arising from lack of viable conservation schemes and ample studies that jeopardized the heritage constraining its registration as Permanent World Heritage Site by the UNESCO. Thus, building the capacity of the darga, community based conservation of the shrine and promoting tolerance embedded in the cult are required to sustain the heritage calling for a lookout.*

**Key words:** *Sheik Hussein, cult, dynamics, pilgrimage, extremism*

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<sup>2</sup> Lecturer of history at MaddaWalabu University and currently Ph. D. candidate in the History Department of Addis Ababa University

## Introduction

Dynamism of religious development of Ethiopia is a less studied theme. In Ethiopia, there are many religious festivals that have blended traditional practices with Christianity and Islam (Trimingham 1952; Braukämper 2004).<sup>3</sup> Followers of indigenous religions participate in these ceremonies because some elements of their religion are practiced during these festivals. They have huge potential for peace building process in peripheral areas like Bale by cementing economic and cultural ties among diverse religious groups. But, they have not been fully investigated. Despite their enormous potential for peace building, such practices are recently becoming the targets of religious extremists as they curse the blending of indigenous rituals with a formal religion as a disgraceful act; hence, they are on a spiritual mission of purifying them. (Dereje 2011: 25, 33).<sup>4</sup>

Islamic culture in southeastern Ethiopia is better studied by the standard of the region. The pioneering works of Ernico Cerulli, Spencer Trimingham, Ulrich Braukämper, B. W. Andrzejewski and Terje Østebø provide us with general reference on Islam in Ethiopia and Bale in particular with varying degrees of details.<sup>5</sup> There are undergraduate and graduate theses on the history of *Sheik* Hussein (Eshetu 1973; Teshome 2008)<sup>6</sup> and on some practices of his cult by Jeylan (2005), Braukämper (1989), Andrzejewski (1975) and Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau.<sup>7</sup> Works of Terje Østebø (2008), Dereje Feyissa (2011), Henock Tsegaye

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<sup>3</sup> The best examples are the Epiphany, *Dämära* (founding of the true cross) festivals and the Islamic Saint Cult rituals such as *muuda*, *nazri* and *waziza* observed by Christians and Muslims of Ethiopia respectively. The *Irecha*, the Oromo thanks giving ritual or festival, is among practices of indigenous religions that allows the participation of followers of different religions though not blended with other religions.

<sup>4</sup> He mentioned some minor Christians-Muslims conflicts mainly during festivals like the Epiphany (*Ṭimqät*), which are reported to have been triggered by extremists in areas like Jimma, Harar and Kamise towns in the last decade.

<sup>5</sup> See in the reference for relevant works of Braukämper and Østebø.

<sup>6</sup> Such studies on history of Islam in Bale overlooked socio-cultural values of practices of the cult.

<sup>7</sup> See their works in the reference. The work of Sintayehu Tola, a member of faculty of Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau (OCTB), is an example of OCTB's effort to encourage researches on the cult. OCTB has also asked the History Department of Madda Walabu University to contribute.

(2002) and Jon Abbink (1998) describe some aspects of Islamic reformist movements in Ethiopia. The gap in these works is that they focused on interreligious relations and overlooked the dynamics with in religious discourse and the emerging threats of extremists to the cult of *Sheik Hussein*, which have been growing bolder recently. Written sources are scarce on this subject. To fill this scarcity, I have tried to collect oral data and use my own observations of rituals at Anajina in 2007 and 2012 and at Sof Omar Cave in 2010 and in 2013. This article has three objectives. One, it tries to resonate values of the cult and how envies have been defused to destroy it. (By exposing these threats, it, furthermore, aspires to raise the awareness of the public, heritage conservers and academicians, to whom it also indicates areas of further studies.)<sup>8</sup>

### **History of *Shiek Hussien of Bale: Historical Overview***

*Sheik Hussein* is one of the most celebrated figures in the history of Islam in Ethiopia. There are a number of factors for his reputation and popularity, which later led to the emergence of a saint cult in his name. First, Nur Hussein *Sheik Ibrahim al-Malakai* was an Islamic godly man (*wali*) native to Bale. Sources show that the *Sheik* was born at Anajina,<sup>9</sup> a site of his shrine also known as “Dirree Sheekanaa Huseen” (the plain of *Sheik Hussein*), which is located 60 km east of Jara town of Gololcha district in Bale Zone of Oromia Region and 610 km south east of Addis Ababa (Teshome 2007: 32). Though his date of birth is not clearly known, written

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<sup>8</sup> Informants were willing to share their views aimed at conservation of the heritage but some asked for confidentiality of their identities. So, I skipped their names and gave them numbers. It is not all of the interlocutors that wanted confidentiality. Some experts in Bale Zone Culture and Tourism Office gave information to assist studies and share their knowledge freely. But for uniformity all are indicated by number.

<sup>9</sup> A legend about the origin of the name Anajina has it that one day *Sheik Hussein* was said to have taken a walk and on his way back to his Mosque, he heard a strange noise and asked in *Afan Oromo* “who is there?” Then, the *Satan*, who was said to have been afraid of the *Sheik*, replied in *Afan Oromo* as “Ana Jinnii dha” meaning “it is me *jinni (Satan)*,” which eventually transmogrified into Anajina. And to this day that gate of the shrine is called *Karra Jinni*- gate of the Satan. Eventually, the name Anajina came to be used as alternative name of the Shrine.

sources<sup>10</sup> show that he was born 800 years ago (Braukämper 2004: 83).<sup>11</sup> But, oral sources tend to date him back to the early times of the introduction of Islam into the Horn of Africa. Yet, even the 800 years saga makes Bale a hub of early Islamic culture in Ethiopia mainly due to the roles of the *Sheik*.<sup>12</sup>

Second, *Sheik* Hussein's genealogy has connected the local inhabitants of Bale to the family of Prophet Mohammed. As to Eshetu Settegn (1973: 3), the father of *Sheik* Hussein, *Sheik* Ibrahim al-Malkai *Sheik* Abdulla is the 12<sup>th</sup> descendant of Abu Talib, the paternal uncle of Prophet Mohammed.<sup>13</sup> According to oral sources, Makida, the mother of the *Sheik*, was an Oromo woman native to Bale.<sup>14</sup> The life time of *Sheik* Hussein is dated to 29 generations ago, when he converted the people of Bali to Islam.<sup>15</sup> Oral tradition of the area affirms that he was the first Islamaizer of Bale. Written sources also unanimously show that Bali was Islamized before the 13<sup>th</sup> century and its Islamic culture was firmly established before its conquest by king Amde-Tsiyon in 1332 (Salviac 1901: 39<sup>16</sup>; Huntingford

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<sup>10</sup>As to Braukämper the earliest written source on *Sheik* Hussein is known as *Rabi-al Qulub*, which is compiled in Arabic by *Haji* Yusuf Abd al-Rahiman in 1874, consists of legends and myths about him. See others in the reference.

<sup>11</sup>Braukämper is the first to cite *Rabi-al Qulub* that states the 29 generation saga and later researchers accepted it.

<sup>12</sup>Informants: No. 13, No. 19, No. 20. In Bale, *Sheik* Hussein's first Islamic sainthood is uncontested. Informants list as many as 30 generations since their ancestors were converted to Islam bearing Arabic names, but before that it bears local names. Yet, it is difficult to rely on names to identify religious affiliations of individuals.

<sup>13</sup>His genealogy descends as: Adbul Mutalib (grandfather of the Prophet) → Abu Talib (uncle of the prophet) → Aqil → Abu Baker → Abbas → Dawud → Issa → Idris → Yahaya → Umar → Abu Bakar → Abdullah → Ibrahim → Hussein.

<sup>14</sup>But other sources state the mother of the *Sheik* to be a Sidama woman by the name Shamsia. Yet, Shamsia is not mentioned in any of the songs praising either *Sheik* Hussien or his brother Sof Omar as we shall see later.

<sup>15</sup>The name *Bali*, meaning feather of big birds like Ostrich in *Afan* Oromo, is a primordial name in referring to what is eventually known as Bale. There are many traditions about this name which I skipped for interest of space here.

<sup>16</sup>Martial *De Slaviac* stated that the Arsi Oromo of *Bali* were mentioned in Christian sources in the first century of the last Millennium. Braukämper cited (Perruchon 1897: 277, 280) that the name *Bali* appeared in Zagwe records.

1965: 129).<sup>17</sup> This is in line with the 29 generation saga. Thus, the *Sheik* has glorified Bale and its earliest Islamic culture by binding it to the most respected family of Prophet Mohammed in the history of Islam worldwide (Eshetu 1973: 3).

Thirdly, the birth of the pious *Sheik* was believed to have been based on prophesy that he was destined to a great mission. As to Eshetu (1973) before the birth of *Sheik* Hussein, Abu-al Qasim had a vision in which Prophet Mohammed announced to him about a great saint to be born and ordered him to wash the baby. When the time was ripe, Abu-al Qasim was taken to a particular house in Anajina, where Makida was beginning to feel the labor of childbirth, to perform *salat* prayer and immediately Nur Hussein was born. He grew up there as a descent, envisioned and spiritual man. When he came of age, he succeeded in converting the people of Bale and taught Quran and *Hadith* to tens of thousands. He was known as performer of miracles, interpreter of dreams and prophesies future events. He was venerated as a godly man while already he was alive, which led to the rise of his cult after he passed away. These traditions had made him famous in the region (Cerulli 1971: 420-40; Jeylan 2005: 33).<sup>18</sup>

Fourthly, *Sheik* Hussein is the icon of Bale and its Islamic culture because he had produced many disciple saints—*awliya* or *waliyi*, who in turn have established their own teaching centers (Jeylan 2005: 32-33).<sup>19</sup> Sof Omar, *Sheik* Ibrahim, Abu Nassir, Abu Koyi, *Sheik* Logomo and Ali Bahrey, who are the renowned Sufi Saints of Bale, were his disciples

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<sup>17</sup> The “soldiers’ song in honour of King Amda Seyon...” interpreted by Huntingford didn’t mention *Sheik* Hussein, but there is clear Islamic influence from the name of Bali’s prince Ali, who was defeated by the campaign. *Sheik* Hussein and his cult are also not mentioned by Shiab in Dininhis *Futuh al-Habasha*, who was with ‘Ahmed *Giraññ*’ during his campaign against *Bali* in 1531. Yet, from the 29 generation genealogy and his list as the 12<sup>th</sup> descendant from uncle of the Prophet, we can calculate him back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century and Islam’s presence was confirmed by the ‘soldiers’ song’. But, by 1531 the cult might not be fully developed to take its name far audible enough.

<sup>18</sup>Jeylan stated a legend in which Abu al-Qasim had to wash 114 baby sons until Nur Hussein was revealed by a sign, a flow of light from heavens over the house in which the baby Hussein was born in that particular night. This story looks to have the influence of the Biblical story about the birth of Christ.

<sup>19</sup> Bale has many shrines which were established by *waliyi* or *awaliya* (plural) and observed by their adherents. These include Dirre, Sof Omar Cave, Hamara, *Sheik* Ibrahim Jamal, Nur Amin and many *Ujubas* (grave sites).

(Eshetu 1973: 6-8; Østebø 2005a: 27-28). But, unlike Sof Omer, no clan claims descent from *Sheik* Hussein. Since, the *Sheik* was the first to teach Islam and referred to as “Our father” by all. As shown in *baaroo* (in his praise), it seems as if no one allows any clan to claim him in private.<sup>20</sup> At Anajina, he built mosque and a *madrssa*, where some 6,666 *darssas* were said to have attended for a term of six months at a time.<sup>21</sup> This shows it was the hub of early Islamic learning (Eshetu 1973; 8).

Fifthly, the history of *Sheik* Hussein has been popularized by works of his disciples. There are two most venerated *awaliya*, who are closely linked to the *Sheik*. The first one, who is often claimed to have been the favorite disciple and a close relative of *Sheik* Hussein, was Sof Omar. In Bale, Sof Omar, a *wali* of three shrines with spectacular natural features, is the most venerated Sufi Saint next to *Sheik* Hussein. But, Sof Omar has always been mentioned as appendix to *Sheik* Hussein (Braukämper 2004: 156).<sup>22</sup> The second *wali* associated with *Sheik* Hussein was Abdu al-Qasim. As mentioned earlier, he was told to pave the way for the great saint to be born. This is similar to the Biblical story of John the Baptist, who according to the Bible cried “[h]e it is, who coming after me... whose shoe’s latchet I am not worthy to unloose...” (KJV St. John 1:27).<sup>23</sup> He was clearing the ways for Jesus and so did Abu al-Qasim for *Sheik* Hussein. The shrine of Abu al-

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<sup>20</sup>*Sheik* Hussein was said to have married a Sidama Girl and by her he begot four sons namely, Mohammed-Tamam, Abdullah, Suleyman and Ahmed and a daughter named Fatima. Trimmingham also mentioned the marriage of the *Sheik* to a Sidama girl stating that the pre-Oromo societies in Anajina to be the Sidama. But other sources state that the site was owned by the Arsi Oromo before Islamaization of the area. Perhaps, since the Sidama and the Oromo peoples have been neighbors, Shemsia might have been married to the *Sheik* as the second or third wife and due to her junior status she might not be mentioned in *baaroo* and *gamoo* of the cult unlike Makida.

<sup>21</sup>*Madrassas* are Islamic schools and *darassas* are student, who learn the Quran and other Islamic teachings.

<sup>22</sup> Some legacies of the cult of Sof Omar and why his shrines were located at magnificent caves, waterfalls and mountain will be the subject of further study. There is time mismatch about contemporarianship of the two saints.

<sup>23</sup> The Sufi Saint Cult in Bale had adopted many stories from Christianity. Even traditions about the birth of *Sheik* Hussein resemble the birth of Jesus Christ. There are also practices which I skipped for the interest of space here.

Qasim is also among the most visited shrines in Arsiland (Braukämper 2004: 169).<sup>24</sup>

In sum, *Sheik Hussein* has been venerated as much he is regarded as the light and the king (*garada*) of Bale<sup>25</sup> because he taught Islam and won the heart of the people (Jeylan 2005: 33). The term *garada* is adopted from title of governors of the medieval state of *Bali* (Østebø 2005a: 43). The following *baaroo* sung in spiritual and public occasions shows this.

### Gloss

*Garaada Baale abbiichoo naa oolee*

*Jawaara dhaamata warrii warra oolee*

*Alaahu maraam abbiyyoo baaroo  
baara jalalaa*

*Maaltu nuu baasa bobaa keessan  
jalaa...*<sup>26</sup>

### English

*Garada* /King/ of Bale becomes my father

Those who can't visit his shrine cry for *jawara*

May Allah give mercy for our father!  
(*Sheik Hussein*) Here is *baaroo* for your love

No one can take us away from your bosom...

The reason for his observance as such seems to have been deeply rooted in his strives and miraculous deeds during the Islamization of Bale. Thus, achievements during his life time later led to the rise of the cult devoted to him following his passing away (Østebø 2005a: 23).

## The Cults of *Sheik Hussein*: Origin and Practices

### *Muudaa* as the Origin of Islamic Saint Cult Pilgrimage

*Muuda* is a spiritual journey of *jila* (envoys of each Oromo clans) to the *Abbaa Muuda* (spiritual father of the Gadaa System), who during the sixteenth century, was at his *galma* (temple) at Madaa Walabu, near

<sup>24</sup> Ulrich Braukämper coined the term Arsiland to refer to territories inhabited by the Arsi Oromo, descendants of Siko and Mando lineages, which include the present Arsi, West Arsi, Bale and parts of East Shawa Zone of Oromia.

<sup>25</sup> Oral tradition refers to *Sheik Hussein* by many names. One of these names in *Afan Oromo* is *Nuura al-Allah Baalee* - meaning the Allah's light of Bale due to the story of his birth. He is also called Sayyid al-Arafina meaning our righteous lord. But, unlike Sof Omar why he has no clan claim descent from him needs further investigation.

<sup>26</sup> Taken from a song artist Jamal Shale, this is a public melody so that a person can sing it with different poems.

Gannale River in Bale. Some of the Oromo also refer to the *muuda* site as Haroo Walaabu (Salviac 1901: 177-80; Braukämper 2004: 143). *Muuda* involved various ceremonies at *galma*, where the *Abbaa Muuda* (father of the anointment) performed prayer and sent blessings back to his people through the *jila* every eight years. He performs *muudaa* that is symbolized by putting fresh butter on the head of *jila* members in spiritual rituals. When the *jila* returned home, they were received warmly at the *Caffee* (council) by the *hayyu* (scholars), who interpret the messages of the *Abbaa Muudaa*. The *jila* were identified by their unique dressings and signs and they were honored and no one touched them even if they walk in the middle of a battle because *muuda* was holy and pilgrims carry a stick with their stuffs on it and myrrh (*qumbii*) as tribute gift for the *Abbaa Muuda* (Legesse 1974: 9-10; Salviac 1901: 180)

Gradually, two major factors that led to the decline of pilgrimage to *Abbaa Muudaa* were the influence of Islam and the prohibitions of the *muuda* by the imperial Christian regime of Ethiopia. But, few Oromo among the Borana and Guji, who retained their indigenous religion, *Waaqeffannaa*, were able to continue their pilgrimage to *Abbaa Muudaa*. Above all, the expansion of Islam in Bale after the 1530s made it difficult for the Oromo to conduct the *muuda* freely. Thus, these factors led to the emergence of new *muudaa* sites. In Bale, such sites became Islamic shrines that blended some *muudaa* rituals with the Sufi Saint cult (Braukämper 2004: 35; Østebø 2005: 29). Consequently, the cult of *Sheik* Hussein has combined early Oromo religious traditions, Islamic teachings, myths and miracles (Braukämper 2004: 141-145). Trimmingham (1952: 256) also elucidated that the cult is an amalgamation of Sufi Saint Cult, the Maccaa pilgrimage ceremonies and *Abbaa Muudaa* rituals. Such rituals were commonly practiced in Arsi land up to the 1950s.<sup>27</sup> Asmarom Legesse (2000: 185) also observed the continued *muudaa* practice among the Islamized Barentuma Oromo. Similarly, Mario Aguliar (1994: 762) reported that a ritual practice combined with the cult of *Sheik* Hussein has been practiced by the Waso Borana in Kenya.

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<sup>27</sup> He states *Muuda* practices at *Sheik* Hussein is similar to the cult of Sof Omar and pilgrimages to other shrines.

### Practices of the Cult of *Sheik Hussein*

**Pilgrimage to “Maccaa of the Poor”:** this is the key practice of Islamic sainthood cult that involves singing of *baaro*, dances and ceremonies at shrines, where the *wali* was born or had been taught or his burial tomb is located. Pilgrimage to Dirree is the most valued spiritual duties of adherents of the cult.<sup>28</sup> There are two pilgrimage seasons that demand fraternity among pilgrims called *gariba*, visit of adherents on the pilgrimage route and performing of rituals at camping sites and at Dirree (Jeylan 2005: 30, 34). The first pilgrimage is called *muudaa hajjii*. It is often equated with the pilgrimage to Mecca by those who cannot afford the latter. Its also takes place at the same time with the *hajji* pilgrimage to Maccaa, which coincides with the Islamic *Id al-Adeha* or *Arefa* holyday based on lunar calendar.<sup>29</sup> That is why Anajina is unanimously called “Mecca of the poor” in which pilgrims don’t earn the title of *Hadji* (Trimingham 1952: 253; Braukämper 2004: 122). Informants claim that almost all ceremonies at Maccaa are carried out at Dirre too. The second pilgrimage to Dirree, called *Muudaa Sheek Huseenn*, is held on every first Tuesdays of August to celebrate the birth of the *Sheik*. Pilgrims from all over northeast Africa, mostly from different parts of Oromia and Ethiopian Somali and few from Gamo Gofa and Wollo flock to Dirree. A large number of pilgrims visit such sanctuaries during pilgrimage seasons (Trimingham 1952: 253). The number of pilgrims is usually higher during the August *ziyara*, which was estimated to be 100, 000 in 1971 (Braukämper 2004: 141). But, in 2007 the number of pilgrims during *hajji ziyara* was very high due to a special circumstance.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> He observed that *gariba* is an Arabic term meaning guest. Thus, *gariiba Sheekanaa Huseen* means guest of *Sheik Hussein* but it is often used in its short form as *gariba*.

<sup>29</sup> NALA, Folder Number 17.2.204.01, report by *Ato Tibebe Desta* about Bale Governorate General to Ministry of Interior of the Imperial Government of Ethiopia, on 1941 E.C. (pp. 1-97), pp. 1-2.

<sup>30</sup> Informants; No. 13, No. 14, No. 10 in 2007, on the occasion of the *hajji* pilgrimage, the third Ethiopian Millennium celebration by Oromia Regional State was held at Anajina attended by about 500,000 people among whom were the top officials of the regional and federal governments.

**Baaroo:** the second key practice in the cult is the singing of melodious songs in praise of *Sheik Hussein*, known as *baaroo*.<sup>31</sup> In addition, *baaroo* symbolizes the beginning of *muudaa* seasons and served to communicate pilgrims in different roads on the ways to Anajina. Singers roar loudly in cute lyrics to hearten the morale of the pilgrims and to attract those who would provide them with food, water and shelter to spend nights. Jeylan (2005: 34-43) observed that hymns in praise of *Sheik Hussein* had various significances. It reflects submission to *awali*, a symbolic gesture of Bale to them and elements of pre-Islamic *muudaa* tradition.<sup>32</sup> This is shown in the following *baaroo*.

**Gloss**

*Asalaam wa'aaleekuum abbaabbaa*  
*Yaa Nuura nuurii dhalootaa*  
*Anaajinaan galma aadaa*  
*Seenaa ilmaan Oromootaa*  
*Ariiba keenya dachaanee*  
*Mee harqootaan nutii kootaa....*<sup>33</sup>

**English**

Peace be up on you father  
You the Light, whose birth lights  
Anajina is the temple of culture  
of the descendants of the Oromo  
We returned back again to your shrine  
Please come to us in our vision...

In the above *baaroo* Anajina is presented as the center of Oromo history and *Sheik Hussein* as the father of his followers. The following *baaroo* also states *Sheik Hussein* as the pride of Bale.

**Gloss**

*Abbakeenya waamana Huseen faaya*  
*Baaliyyoo*  
*Raabii keessani jedhaa gadi hin*  
*dhiisiinaa adiyoo*  
*Badheedssa uumaa dhumtii teessan*  
*Abbiyyoo...*<sup>34</sup>

**English**

We call 'Our Father' Hussein the  
pride of Bale  
For the sake of God don't forget the  
cult  
For grace of the heavens our end is on  
you [Dad]

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<sup>31</sup>Jeylan wonderfully traced many Arabic terms in the cult of *Sheik Hussein*. As to him "*Baahroo* is a loan word from the Arabic *bahar*, meaning sea. For the Arsi, "sea" is used as a panegyric reference to *Sheikh Hussein*. It symbolizes the perceived imminence of the saint's generosity, benevolence and bounty. Historical records and legends indicate that *baaroo* was first inspired by the Sufi movement in the region."

<sup>32</sup>Jeylan also has interestingly analyzed various messages embedded in the *baaroo*.

<sup>33</sup>*Baaroo* by Artist Jamal Shale, Volume 6, track Number 6, no year of publication

*Baaroo* is also embedded with valuable historical information that shows the cult has been used as ideology of resistance against Ethiopian governments. A document dated back to the 1940s confirms that the implementation of land measurement called *qalad* was resisted on the grounds that Bale is “the land of *Sheik* Hussein and to be treated carefully (Braukämper 2004: 123).<sup>35</sup> *Baaroo* has been sung by people of different ethnic or language backgrounds as a common practice of the cult that unites them all. This is clear even in the wordings of poem of *baaroo*, which is a punch of Arabic, Oromo, Amharic and Somali languages as shown below.

**Gloss**

Allahu maraam *Abbiyyoo*

Xaqaallaloo *kiyyahoo*

Xaqaallalii *fixii hajaa tiyyahoo...*<sup>36</sup>

**English**

My Allah is merciful to our father (*Sheik* Hussein)

You are mine who holds all together

Please fulfill all wishes in my heart ....

In this hymn, the first underlined word is Arabic, the double underlined in the second line is Amharic and the remaining are accents of the Oromo and Somali languages. During the rituals speakers of different languages feel excited by instant songs and dance emotionally. Pilgrims sing *baaroo* in various melodious lyrics, hitting drums, dancing and asking for alms in the name of *Sheik* Hussein on markets or from door to door or at their camping sites by nights. The sound of *muudaa* pilgrims is often heard from a distance.<sup>37</sup> *Baaroo* is the source of the music of Bale that has a unique genre. In Oromo musical performances, it is customary for every major province to be represented by music hits and dancing styles, reflecting the Oromo culture in their area. For example, the Oromo of Arsi, Borana, Giji, Hararge, Ilu, Jimma, Karrayu Shawa, Wallagga and Wallo have special music melodies and genres. The Bale Oromo has musical tone or genre originated from *baaroo* with slight modification. This modification is the

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> This is clearly indicted in document cited on nn. 29 above. I shall detail it under *the dynamics of the cult* below.

<sup>36</sup> *Baaroo* by Artist Jamal Shale, Volume 6, track Number 6, no year of publication

<sup>37</sup> Informants; No. 13, No. 6.

use of modern instruments to compose it and cerographic adjustments to its dance move for modernizing the art. Thus, the Islamic saint cult in Bale has contributed a unique musical culture to Oromia and Ethiopia indicating its extraordinary masterpiece of human heritage.<sup>38</sup>

**Dressing Style and *Hanqee*:** are the third practices in the cult, which consists of unique dressing style of the *gariba*. Pilgrims dress in their own style such as wearing long dresses called *jalabiya*, putting *kuffiya* (hats) and *marxoo* (*muntantrum*) over their heads and beads around their necks. They carry water pots, food containers and bags on their backs holding it with a ‘Y’ shaped stick. The ‘Y’-shaped stick called *hanqee* (also pronounced as *dhanqee*) is a replica of the walking stick of *Sheik Hussein*. Informants state that the *Sheik* used to do miracles by using his *hanqee* (Jeylan 2005: 30).<sup>39</sup> There are different traditions as to what the branches of the “Y”-Shaped stick symbolizes (Braukämper 2004: 141). Some say it represents Prophet Mohammed and *Sheik Hussein*. But this does not mean that *Sheik Hussein* is equal to the Prophet (Jeylan 2005: 40).<sup>40</sup> Others say it is simply the choice of the *Sheik*. In sum this dressing style and the ‘Y’-shaped sticks are unique identifiers of pilgrims to Dirree and adherents of the cult. This style was adopted and modified from that of the *jila* of the Oromo *muudaa* as mentioned earlier.

***Hadra and Nazri*:** are two interrelated practices. *Hadra* is a ritual performed in camping sites in localities where large number of adherents of the cult live (Braukämper 2004: 117). It marks the beginning of *muuda* seasons. In *hadra* rituals adherents contribute *sadaqa* in kind or in cash. *Hadra* has been accompanied by festivities in which adherents, who got their prayer rewarded and their *nazri* accepted give their witness about holiness of *Sheik Hussein*. *Nazri* is an offering for *Sheik Hussein* in return for their problems

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> As to traditions, *Sheik Hussein* is said to have been known by holding *Hanqee* or *Dhanqee* (also called *maxraasaa* with sharp metal ending) with which he used to do miracles. For example, one day when the *Sheik* needed water for *zuhr* (midday prayer), he speared the ground and at a time created a marshy land in Sinana district of Bale.

<sup>40</sup> He collected a good amount the *baaroo* of *Sheik Hussein* that connects him to the prophet in which the former took the responsibilities of teaching Quran to the peoples of Bale. The “Y” stick may show the duality in the cult.

solved or their health restored. As to informants before the introduction of purist movements in Bale after 1990s, there were colourful *hadra* ceremonies a month before the *ziyaras*. The practice was common during the imperial period and declined during the *Därg* and becomes rarer or even halted in large towns in the incumbent regime (Areba et al 2011: 4-5).<sup>41</sup>

**Muuda Prayer at Anajina:** this is the major reason for which the pilgrims travel from far and near to Anajina. *Muudaa Salat* is the most valued and highly organized prayer carried out on the model of *hajji* prayers at Mecca. Pilgrims state that if a Muslim cannot afford to visit Mecca, Allah would accept the humble prayer of the poor at the shrine of his beloved servant, *Sheik* Hussein, who glorified his Lord in his spiritual missions all his life time, as equal to the one at Mecca. In the ceremonies at Anajina, pilgrims try to be as honest and spiritual as possible, for Allah is watching them. It consists of a highly organized spiritual ceremony led by senior Imams or *Sheik* as well as private prayer of every pilgrim. The former include *salat* prayer of the occasion and visits to the site. The later varies according to the *nazri* of every pilgrim. Some pray to Allah in the name of his grace for *Sheik* Hussein whose patronage would mediate them to Allah.<sup>42</sup> They may pray to get solution for their health problems, difficulties in their lives, for peace and wellbeing of their relatives. *Gariba* rollover the ground, kiss objects that are believed to have contact with the *Sheik*, chew *jawara* (whitish limestone powder), try to pass in a narrow rock tunnel called *huluqoo*, drink water from a greenly pond known as *Haro Lukku* and so on.<sup>43</sup> There is also a ceremony known as *Lillata*, which is a kind of prayer, get-together and thanks giving ceremony performed by participants of the *ziyara* for being able to meet each other in peace. It is believed to have been started during the life time of *Sheik* Hussein by his disciples, who used to visit him for blessing and spiritual reinforcement. It also might have been started immediately after his concealment (*ijibbata*) due to his veneration as

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<sup>41</sup> Informants; No. 13, No. 11, No. 15; Field Observation, 2012 at Sof Omar Cave

<sup>42</sup> Filed Observation, 2007, Dirre; Filed Observation, 2012 at Sof Omar Cave

<sup>43</sup> Filed Observation, 2007, Dirre; There is a similar tradition at *tsebel* or holy-water sites observed by the Orthodox Christians, where believers put mud at the origin of *tsebel* over their body. It is believed it heals from illnesses.

having *baraka* (holy virtues).<sup>44</sup> *Lillata* is held during both *ziyara* to Dirree involving prayers, feasts, *baaroo* and dances hitting drums. It is also popular at Sof Omar cave (Areba et al 2011: 17-19).<sup>45</sup>

### **Some Tangible and Intangible Heritages of the Shrine *Sheik Hussein***

Shrines of Sufi Saints consist of natural features and indigenous knowledge based manmade objects associated with the cult. Some of these are the shrines of Sof Omar at Sof Omar Cave and Hamara, the shrine of Amir Nur in Agarfa district<sup>46</sup> and the shrine of Abu al-Qasim in Seru district. Anajina, the shrine of *Sheik Nur Hussein* of Bale, is the earliest and the most known of all in Bale and a medieval historical site of Ethiopia.<sup>47</sup> Because it was blessed by the pioneer and pious *Sheik Hussein*, its rituals are the holiest and the beauty of the scenery is awesome (BMO 2008: 16, 39). This sacred site consists of the main compound of the shrine, the *darga* villages, ponds, cave, forests and land features essential to the tradition, whose size is estimated to 94 square kilometers (OCTB NY: 8).<sup>48</sup> Among the eleven mosques at the site, the oldest of all, which is said to have been built by *Sheik Hussein* himself, is known as *Ziqtum*.<sup>49</sup> The main enclosure of the shrine consists of five *gamos* (buildings) with *kubbah* (a cupola-shaped structure of a well-designed dome on its top) graves and other objects. In this compound there are five major *gamos* namely, the *gamo* of *Sheik Hussein* (the biggest of all at the center), *gamo* of *Sheik Abd el-Qadir al-*

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<sup>44</sup> Concealment is to hide out of reach and sight. Devotees of *Sheik Hussein* and Sof Omar believe that they never passed away but they were concealed. But, this tradition contradicts the tomb cult at Anajina and Hamarra.

<sup>45</sup> Filed Observation, 2007, Dirree; Filed Observation, 2012 at Sof Omar Cave. Little is known about its early story.

<sup>46</sup> See nn. 29. This report shows that 300 oxen were slaughtered at Amir Nur shrine near Agarfa town in 1939 E.C.

<sup>47</sup> Informants estimate that some 500 bulls were slaughtered to serve meat for pilgrims at a time in Anajina.

<sup>48</sup> Informants; No. 13, No. 6, No. 19, No. 15.

<sup>49</sup> According to my key Informant, who is a senior expert in cultural heritage at Bale Zone Culture and Tourism Office, the word *Ziqtum* is an acronym of Arabic words *Ziwuriya* (meaning home of *Sheik*), *Qtulaba* (meaning home of *Darassa/* student) and *Madrassa* (meaning school). The detail on its dating needs archaeological investigation.

Jalani,<sup>50</sup> which was built by Emir Abd al-Shakur (r.1783-1794) of Harar (Cerulli, 1971: 404), *gamo* of *Sheik* Mohammed-Tamam (son of *Sheik* Hussein), *gamo* of *Sheik* Mohammed *Haji* Ahmed and *gamo* of *Ayyo* Fatumah (daughter of *Sheik* Hussein). The enclosure has twelve gates /*karra*/ each with particular significances to the cult.<sup>51</sup> Outside the enclosure there are *gamos* devoted to *Sheik* Ibrahim al-Malakay (father of *Sheik* Hussein), *gamo* of *Ayyo* Makida (mother of *Sheik* Hussein) and *gamo* of *Sheik* Mohammed al-Masky. These buildings were erected superbly and colored with white gypsum that gave beautiful scenery to the site (ARHC 2013: 2-3). The fence itself has attractive windows with various geometric shapes. It seems this is why some devotees feel euphoric and rollover the ground in tears when they arrive at the site. Therefore, Anajina is cultural and spiritual heritage that attracts pilgrims, tourists and researchers with more potential if properly conserved. See some views of the shrine in images below.

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<sup>50</sup> Abd al-Qadir al-Jalani died in Baghdad in 1166 and legend has it that he lived as 40 lives that explains why he got many shrines throughout Muslim world. His life time is closer to the birth of *Sheik* Hussein. But Abu al-Qasim was the one who was said to have washed the baby Nur Hussein and his shrine found by the main gate at Dirre.

<sup>51</sup> The gate or *karra* in Afan Oromo are *Karra Milkii*, *Karra Jajjabaa*, *Karra* Sultan Mohammed, *Karra Sheik* Mohammed Qasso, *Karra Boqole*, *Karra Haroo Lukkuu*, *Karra* Abd al-Qadir, *Karra Masgida Sheek Huseen*, *Karra Jinni* (the first gate), *Karra Sheek* Mussaa, *Karra Haarawa* and *Karra Sheek* Aliyyi Suraa. These gates are named after personalities, events and features significant in the cult and some are used for particular rituals.



Image 1: The Main Enclosure at the Shrine of *Sheik Hussein*



Image 2: Pilgrims in the Shrine ready for ritual (note the Y-with Mosque of *Sheik Hussein* at the centre, stick and the *jawara* on women's face).

Source: Bale zone culture and tourism office and modified by the writer, 2014

There are three attractive natural features with some manmade objects, which made up the cultural landscape of Anajina that begins from far off the site with significant history relevant to the cult. One, there are two ponds known as *Haro Lukku* (pound of hen) and *Haro Dinkure* (pound of Dinkure); they were said to have been dug by *Sheik Hussein* as source of drinking water for local inhabitants and *darassas*, which are seen as a holy-water by pilgrims (Braukämper 2004: 141).<sup>52</sup> Two, there are three hills called *Qachamsare*,<sup>53</sup> *Dadala* and *Abu al-Qasim*, which are located surrounding Dirree and gave it the shape of a green cup in which the white colored mosques and buildings at Anajina look like drops of milk as one sees them from these hills. They are areas where pilgrims take recess awaiting for those who are left behind on the voyage, serve as areas of cleaning up themselves before entering the sacred place and perform

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<sup>52</sup> He observed that a cholera epidemic, which claimed the lives of some 3000 pilgrims, broke out in Dirre in 1973.

<sup>53</sup> *Qachamsaree* is portmanteau of two Oromo words *qachama* meaning soft tree and *saree*-meaning dog. The combination gives as stick to chase dogs away from the shrine and pilgrims.

various rituals. These are traditions dating back to the early days of the cult. Three, the cave (*holqa* in *Afan Oromo*) of Ayinagayn, located about five kilometers from the shrine, is a natural heritage related to the cult (ARCH 2013: 1).<sup>54</sup> Tradition has it that this cave served *Sheik* Hussein as an underground route to the cave of *Sheik* Sof Omar, which is located some 30 km to the south. There is a related tradition at the cave of Sof Omar, where there are three stone mats called *sidaja* on which *Sheik* Hussein, Sof Omar and Abu al-Qasim were alleged to have used to pay *salat*. This means at every *salat* prayer *Sheik* Hussein was said to have been miraculously transported to and from Sof Omar Cave via the underground route to pray at both sites. There are very narrow passages at the cave of Ayinagayn, which is believed that only the blessed could pass through (Areba et. al. 2011: 4-8). The length and other details of the cave are unknown.<sup>55</sup>

The indigenous knowledge of the production of white gypsum that is used for decoration of the *gamos* at the site is a remarkable heritage that dates back to the times of the beginning of the cult. Informants claim that its production consists of digging deep hole in which limestone will be burnt at high heat for three months by using fuel. The quality and whiteness of the gypsum made it water proof and lasts for a long time (ARHC 2013: 6).<sup>56</sup> Despite the plentiful availability of limestone in Bale lowlands, this kind of gypsum production and use of it for private or religious buildings is rarer indicating the peculiarity of the knowledge to Anajina. Even though, the *kubbah* architectures of the shrine are similar to those in Harar plateau, the manmade features here are magnificent heritage worth mentioning (Braukämper 2004: 114).

Lastly, the way of the custodians' life of Anajina known as *darga* and the tradition of tolerance of diversity are significant cultural heritage of the cult. The way the *darga* live in their eleven small villages around the site is an attraction by itself. The biggest village at the shrine is known as Qachamsare. The *darga* have been curators of the sanctuary and its holy objects witnessing their devotion to the *Sheik*. Their life activities are bounded by spiritual norms acceptable by the cult. Though originated from

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<sup>54</sup> Informants; No. 13, No. 1, No. 6, No. 4.

<sup>55</sup> Field Observation 2013 at Sof Omar Cave Shrine; Informants; No. 1, No. 2, No. 4, No. 3. It needs further studies.

<sup>56</sup> Informants; No. 13, No. 1, No. 6, No. 5.

different areas, they are used to live in harmony. Economically, they depend on cattle breeding, by retailing goods and providing services to pilgrims. Moreover, when pilgrims land at the sacred shrine, they perform many ceremonies using objects left behind for them by the *Sheik*. The uncommon mutuality among pilgrims and tolerance to diversity embedded in the cult is the most significant heritage of the cult (BMO 2008: 13-15; Braukämper 2004: 122). This included the custom of *sadaqa* (alms like food, water, money and shelter) to the pilgrims simply in return for blessing and goodwill. Pilgrims also share logistics, treat the sick and bury the dead. Adherents, who can't conduct the *ziyara* contribute money and in return ask to pray for them or send them with *nazri* to the holy site. This tradition of tolerance enabled Muslims, Christians and traditional believers to participate peacefully in the cult. This is also evident in Christian tradition of *tsebl* (holy-water), where the sick including the Muslims attend seeking for cure in many sites. They are not asked to convert to Christianity and the same is true when Christians or *Waaqeffatas* make pilgrimage to Anajina. This is the key aspect of religious tolerance in Ethiopia, which I believe has never been taken seriously by social scientists (Jeylan 2005).<sup>57</sup> But, dependence of the *darga* on the gifts of pilgrims and their openness to strangers has been exploited by political groups and extremists, who jeopardized the tolerance embedded in the cult (Braukämper 2004: 123).<sup>58</sup> I shall discuss some of it below.<sup>59</sup>

### **Dynamics of the Cult of *Sheik* Hussein**

There are five dynamics that shaped the cult over time. First, towards the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century, a major dynamic was the change from the *muudaa* pilgrimage to Madda Walabu into the *ziyara* pilgrimage to Islamic Sufia *waliya* shrines (Østebø 2005b: 28). For example, there is evidence in *baaroo* in praise of *Sheik* Hussein which runs as follows:

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<sup>57</sup>Jeylan observed that Sufism is known for its elasticity and overt eclecticism. Simplicity of rituals and modesty of demands are the other characteristics of Sufism in Africa.

<sup>58</sup>Informants; No. 16, No. 1, No. 6. They remember how some groups who fight the *Därg* hideout there in the 1980s.

<sup>59</sup>Field Observation, 2012 at Sof Omar Cave; Informants; No. 13, No. 11, No. 15.

**Gloss**

*Gannaalee yaa Gannaalee, Gannaalee*  
*Gannaalee Aqisanaa ariifa Baalee...*

**English**

Gannale you Gannale, Gannale  
 Gannale our father the best of Bale

In this hymn the spiritual father of the Oromo was metaphorically represented by the big size of the Gannale River, whose blessings they believe makes them prosper as the waters in it. The hymn was used to praise the *Abba Muudaa* near the Bank of Gannale. But, eventually the same hymn began to be used as panegyric reference to *Sheik* Hussein in his praise without changing the river into Waabee, which flows near Dirree.<sup>60</sup> Similar concept exists in the third *baaroo* above.<sup>61</sup> The term *muudaa* is also still on use while its Islamic equivalent is *ziyara*. In the early stage of the cult, practices of Oromo religion—*Waaqeffannaa*, such as putting butter on the head of pilgrims, beads around the neck, sprinklings of milk and drinks as a gist of the *Irecha* of the Oromo on the way to and from Anajina and even there, seem to have dominated its practices. The process of change might have taken longer time since it was conducted through peaceful preaching of the Sufi *Sheiks*. Even, Ahmed Badley's settling of 1000 Muslim families in Bale was shortly checked by Emperor Zara Yaqob (r.1434-'68) (Braukämper 2004: 77). That looks why *Sheik* Hussein was not mentioned in the *Futah*. Besides, though the conquest of Bale by Ahmed *Giraññi* in 1532 resulted in mass Islamization, it was soon neutralized by the Arsi Oromo expansion since the Melba *Gadaa* (1522-1530) that caused the decline of Islamization and reconversion of its society back into *Waaqeffannaa* (Østebø 2005b: 24).

Secondly, the construction of new beautiful *gamos* at Anajina was another dynamic of the cult that accelerated the growth of the cult towards

<sup>60</sup> Here it is important to note that the tradition of pilgrimage to *Sheik* Hussein is the continuation of *muuda* and it is believed that among the Oromo of the area Gannale is bigger in terms of its size than Wabe indicating no change has been made.

<sup>61</sup> In this *baaroo* Anajina is indicated as temple of the history and culture of the Oromo. But the irony behind this is that Madda Walabu, where the temple of *Abba Muudaa* was located, is the center of Oromo culture, while Anajina is for all Muslims that observe the Sufi Saint cult but not only for the Oromo. So, Madda Walabu might have been replaced by Anajina due to the change in the center of pilgrimage in the passage of time.

the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century (Cerulli 1971:404).<sup>62</sup> These scenic buildings at Dirree have attracted more pilgrims and mounted its popularity. This marked a major breakthrough in the process. It seems that the new religion with decorated houses of worship, educated preachers and Supreme Being ascribed in holy books had outshined the indigenous religion at the time. The emerging cult also tolerated the customary *muudaa* practices which attracted people from diverse societies. Thus, the cult eventually dominated the indigenous beliefs, whose practices continued to prevail in the cult in many ways.

Thirdly, the new cultural orientation among the Oromo of Bale and its surrounding following their conquest by Imperial Ethiopia and the subsequent imposition of the *gäbbar* system in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were other significant dynamics of the cult. The dominations of the local people by the culture of the conquerors have rejuvenated Islamic sentiments among the Muslims and forced the non-Muslim Arsi in Gädäb and western Bale to embrace Islam as a means of cultural resistance (Østebø 2005b: 37). This was based on the unifying spirit of *Sheik* Hussein as explicitly indicated in the next document from the state archive as follows:

የባሌ ጠቅላይ ግዛት ቀላድ ይለካል እየተባለ ከብዙ ጊዜ  
ጀምሮ ሲነገር ይልቁንም ዘንድሮ ቀላድ ጣይ ከአዲስ አበባ  
ተነስቷል የሚል ድምፅ ስለሚሰማ ጉዳዩ አስጊ ሆኗል። ባለባቶቹ  
ቀላድ ሲጣል አይፈቅዱም በፍፁም ተቃዋሚ ናቸው የሼክ ሁሴን  
አገር ቀላድ ሊወድቅበት አይገባም፤ አይበጅም እያሉ የአምልኮት  
ወሬአቸውን ይነሳሉ።<sup>63</sup>

<sup>62</sup> There is no clear source that indicates the time when the present buildings at the Anajina were constructed. But, oral sources state that Ziqtum was built some 29 generations ago, which is in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and others were added later. Since the cult was not cited in the *Futuh*, the time between the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century and the construction of Abd el-Qadir's Mosque, which must have been after popularity of the cult, is the likely time of its eventual rise.

<sup>63</sup> NALA, Folder Number 17.2.204.01, report by *Ato* Tibebe Desta about Bale Governorate General to Ministry of Interior of the Imperial Government of Ethiopia, on 1941 E.C., (pp. 1-97), p. 1.

In Governorate General of Bale there are rumors for long time about the imposition of *qälad*;<sup>64</sup> but this year the news about men from Addis Ababa, who are discharged to impose *qälad* have worried the people in Bale. The *balabats*<sup>65</sup> of Bale do not want the imposition of *qälad* and they totally resist it by disseminating blasphemies such as ‘the land *Sheik* Hussein shall not be subjected to *qälad*; it will have bad consequences.’

Thus, even persons from the core of the empire had proposed to the government to delay the imposition of the *qälad* because of the possibility of resistance based on the fraternity among adherents embedded in the cult. The long fasting seasons observed by Orthodox Church was not suitable for semi pastoralist in the region. Thus, some of the Arsi, who sustained the Oromo *muuda* tradition until the 1950s, began to change their pilgrimage to Anajina in unprecedented scale (Braukämper 1989: 35; 2004: 143; Salviac 1901: 179).

Fourthly, the invisible hands of antigovernment political activists that tried to manipulate the gatherings of the cult and the state’s close watch out were the other dynamics of the cult. Since the conquest of Bale by forces of Emperor Menelik II in early 1890s, local chiefs of Bale tried their best to forge an ideology of resistance with the cult of *Sheik* Hussein as their guardian spirit. This is illustrated in a report that advices to the state to assign spies for surveillance at *ziyara* festivals as follows:

የዚያራ ስፍራዎች ሁሉ ልዩ ልዩ የኢትዮጵያ ህዝብ  
የሚሰባሰቡበት ስፍራዎች ሆነዋል፤ ... በዚህም አንዱ ከሌላው  
እየተገናኙ የሚተዋወቁበት... በዚያም ልዩ ልዩ ባለባቶች ቀጠሮ  
ማድረጊያና መማከሪያ የአድማ መወሰኛ ስፍራ ነው።

<sup>64</sup>*Qalad* is a rope or leather thong about 135 cubits or 66 to 67 meters that was used to measure land.

<sup>65</sup>*Balabat* (Amharic)-is an appointee at district level by the state to serve as subordinate land administrator.

በጠቅላላው እንደመካ (አረብ) የፖለቲካ ስፍራ በመሆኑ በየክብረበዓሉ ልዩ ተመልካች እንዲገኙባቸው ያስፈልጋል።<sup>66</sup>

.... all *ziyara* centres are places where the different peoples of Ethiopia gather.... there they meet one another and know each other ... there, different *balabats* make appointments, make discussions, pass decisions to make plots. Generally, like Mecca [of Arabia], these are *places of politics and it is necessary to assign a special observer (spy) during these ceremonies.* (Emphasis added)

The Italians, during their occupation of Ethiopia (1936-1941) tried to give political and financial support for the Muslims such as the freedom to exercise their religion and paying salary for the *Sheiks* at Dirree, who teach Quran even in many other places (Østebø 2005b: 38-39). After the liberation, the imperial regime reinstated its exploitative systems, which had caused antigovernment struggle in Bale to a large scale on the base of religious solidarity with the neighboring Somalis in the 1960s and 1970s. The *Därg* inherited this legacy due to its antireligious communist ideology, which forced it to try to ban the cult on the pretext of political intervention of separatists (Andargachew 1993; 24).<sup>67</sup> Thus, successive regimes have tried their best to control the cult. The condition after the fall of the *Därg* in 1991 was dichotomous in that the 1995 constitution has guaranteed the freedom of religion to the Muslims alike other religious groups in Ethiopia, while it concurrently met with the mushrooming of global Islamic extremists that posed an enduring threat to the cult (Østebø 2008: 412).

Likewise, the infiltration of fundamentalist Islam in Bale since 1970s was the major dynamic that precipitated a more drastic change in the cult of *Sheik* Hussein. At the apogee of the Ethiopian revolution that culminated in the *Därg* regime, new political and religious extremists had gained

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<sup>66</sup> NALA, Folder Number 17.2.204.01, report by *Ato* Tibebe Desta about Bale Governorate General to Ministry of Interior of the Imperial Government of Ethiopia, on 1941 E.C., (pp. 1-97), p. 4.

<sup>67</sup> He clearly states that a political ideology based on Islamic unity in Bale was supported by Somalia to unite and arm the Oromo and the Somalis of Bale on the bases Sufi Saint cult that connects the two of them.

footholds in the surrounding areas of Anajina. Waves of purist criticisms have denounced the Sufi Saint cult and its long established traditions as disgraceful to Islam. Despite its reputation in the early Islamization of Bale and its surroundings, its long heritages of Islamic history and graces it have rewarded, the above practices of the cult of *Sheik* Hussein have been cursed as heretics. Pilgrimages and pilgrims to Islamic shrines were becoming the targets of extremists' preaching. They targeted the tradition of religious tolerance in the cult. They also tried to manipulate resource based disagreements over the income from pilgrims and succeeded in infiltrating their members to put pressure on the government to take measures against the cult. These led to a closer patrol by the state and thus to a sharp decline in the number of pilgrims and practices of the cult have been relegated around big towns as highlighted bellow (Braukämper 2005: 145; Dereje 2011: 12).

### **Curse of the Extremists**

#### **Extremists' Teachings at a Glimpse**

There have been emerging threats to the cult due to purist Islamic teachings. Ethiopia is the earliest place where Islam was preached outside Arabia. The first *hijira*, taken by the followers of Prophet Mohammed to survive the persecution of the Quraysh of Mecca, took place from Mecca to the Aksumite Kingdom in the present day Ethiopia. Since then Islam exists in Ethiopia. Jon Abbink observed that on the authority of the Prophet himself Ethiopia was not to be seen as a target for  *jihad*  (Abbink 1998: 111). Another source also cites "*utruku al-habasha ma tarakukum* (leave the Abyssinians/Ethiopians alone, so long as they do not take the offensive)" (Dereje 2011: 11; Erlich 2010: 225). This is the reason why "the early  *jihad*  was not applied to Ethiopia at a time when all countries in the Red Sea sub region succumbed to the new Islamic political and military power" (Dereje 2011: 11-12). But there were occasions when internal and external  *jihads*  threatened Ethiopia, due to politico-economic and social factors. The best example can be the  *jihad*  of Ahmed  *Ibn*  Ibrahim al-Ghazi of the sultanate of Adal, who launched a full-scale conquest (Abbink 1998: 114). The trauma of this time is still remembered on both sides and the Christians refer to any Islamic revivalism as "*Giraññ Syndrome*" (Dereje 2011: 16; Erlich 2010: 240). The Egyptian and Mehadist invasions in the last quarter of the

19<sup>th</sup> century are external examples. The Somalia based Union of Islamic Courts' futile *jihad* is the most recent one (Hussein 2010: 268). But, the tradition of religious tolerance in Ethiopia has been often cited as exemplary to most parts of the world despite futile attempts to spoil it (Erlich 2010: 233; Abbink 1998: 119).<sup>68</sup>

Islamic revivalists have been charged to have caused complexities in the existing religious discourses and interactions among religions in parts of the World. In Ethiopia, it has gained momentum since the 1990s, in responses to the changes in political landscape of the country. According to Henock Tsegaye (2002:1), “[w]ahabbi are reformists/fundamentalist sects, who have taken the initiative to bring changes in the lives of all groups of Muslims in Ethiopia.” Terje Østebø (2008: 416) also elucidates this as “[t]he political transition in 1991 not only brought relief from the hardship of the Marxist regime (1974-1991), it also signaled the emergence of a new era for Ethiopia's Muslim population. It entailed a movement from the margins of society to increased recognition in the public sphere.” This movement was not only aimed at exercising the right of religious freedom but also took a spiritual mission to reform the ‘traditional Islam’ in Ethiopia. Østebø is explicit in stating “[a]s the name implies the main objective for any reform movement is to initiate change. This involves evaluative perceptions of the existent reality, a determined agenda and a strategy for change and reflections on an idealized future.” He stated that these movements are part of the discursive tradition within Islam, which obviously has been enhanced through the process of globalization, crossing spatial and cultural boundaries (Østebø 2008: 418).

*Salafism (Salaffiya)*, introduced by educated Oromo returnees from Saudi Arabia, is a dominant movement in south-eastern Ethiopia in general and in Bale in Particular. Though there are various trends in this movement, *Salafism* in Ethiopia belongs to the purist trend. It attacked what is regarded as inclusion of ‘pagan’ elements, Sufi interpretations of Islam, pilgrimages

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<sup>68</sup> It is also vital to mention the imposition of Christianity on the Muslims and followers of indigenous religions during the medieval and modern periods by the Ethiopian state, (and European missionaries, by the consent of the former). The council of Boru Meda of 1878 can be taken as a move against tolerance by the state because Orthodox Christianity was the official religion of the Ethiopian state until 1974. But, I skipped it for the sake of space here.

to shrines and celebration of *mawlid* (Østebø 2008: 429-30). The writer witnessed young educated Muslims who refused to partake in Oromia Region's Millennium celebration at Dirree attended by the then president of the regional state, federal ministers, regional state cabinet members, foreign tourists and hundreds of thousands of pilgrims in December 2007 (Dereje 2011: 21). One of my colleagues, an educated Muslim told me that "this practice disgraces Islam."<sup>69</sup>

Intellectualists, similar to the *Salafis*, are challenging the popularized versions of Ethiopian Sufism. In contrast to the 'traditional' Sufism practiced in Ethiopia, a sort of neo-Sufism is advocated, not affiliated to any *tariqa* (Islamic mysticisms and orders), but focused on individual religious practices as enhancing one's spiritual life in a materialistic world. As to Østebø, neo-Sufism 'is a way to combine modern life and religion. With neo-Sufism one can live close to Allah, and it gets personal. They sought inspiration from indigenous Sufism, where the roles of well-known Sufi scholars are emphasized. They have embarked on a project of reinterpreting these figures as representatives of a true form of Sufism, whereas the cult involving their shrines is seen as degenerations and as a relapse from this pure Sufism (Østebø 2008: 429-30).

In sum, the above radical teachings led to the emergence of various Islamic movements in contemporary Ethiopia. A more pronounced rift is between the *Salafis* and the neo-Sufis. Sufis' saint veneration is severely criticized by the [*Salafis*] detractors as *bida* (unwelcome innovation) that threatens *tawhid*, Islam's monotheistic stance (Dereje 2011: 21). Henock Tsegaye listed various strategies for the execution of the *dawa* meaning spiritual missions of the *Wahabbists* in the society. He states that one of the *dawa* has been for the young devoted Muslims to "teach 'folk Muslims' (those seen to have syncretized their religious practice) to reject pagan and Christian practices and return back to the 'true way' of Islam" (Henock 2002: 3).<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> I have records of that occasion, the biggest national festival ever I know. The celebration was on the occasion of *Ed al-Adeha* or *Arefa*, which is one of the national public holidays observed in Ethiopia recognized by the government. It was the biggest pilgrimage to the Shrine of *Sheik* Hussein.

<sup>70</sup> See in Abbink (1998) footnote 17.

### **Curse of the Extremists on the Cult and Its Consequences**

These purist activities of the *Salafists* and *Wahabbists* have endangered the existence of the heritages of the cult of *Sheik* Hussein by posing five major threats. The first and the most serious threat has been social marginalization of adherents of the cult. As the result of the reformist tendencies in the last three decades, Muslims who observe the Sufi Islam have faced criticisms as heretics for not following the 'right order' (Dereje 2011: 11). In southeast Ethiopia, ardent forms of intolerances to the Sufi cult observers were defused widely with the emergence of Islamic militant groups such as *al-Ittihad al-Islamia* and *al-Shebab*, which were based in stateless Somalia (Braukämper 2004: 145; Abbink 1998: 123; Hussein 2010: 270-71). In Bale, this situation has reduced the number of adherents of the cult. Though, it is very difficult to tell the exact figure, the majority of those in towns and in their environs have been influenced by the purists. This meant continued observance of the cult would inevitably result in their exclusion from social affairs such as *afosha* (Afan Oromo) or *iddir* (Amharic), a social association that facilitates cooperation among its members in the event of death both financially and socially (Henock 2002: 10). Refusal of marriage exchange is common. Religious uniformity is becoming the common criteria of friendship for both sexes. These are examples of despising the devotees of the cult. As a result, many people declaim the cult at least in social events.<sup>71</sup>

Secondly, adherents were denied their freedom to practice rituals of the cult in areas of majority *Salafist* population (Dereje 2011: 19-21). Reports of ever growing challenges sometimes involving physical harassments, verbal abuses and snatching of belongings are frequent (Henock 2002: 3-4).<sup>72</sup> These led to insecurity to conduct pilgrimages, to sing *baaroo* and to perform rituals in markets and camping sites. The custom of *sadaqa* was becoming very rarer. Informants state that Christians and traditional believers are better in this regard than the radicalized Muslims. In big towns pilgrims have been insulted, thrown stones at and dogs unleashed after by children. To cope up, the pilgrims were forced to keep their identities secret, avoid *baaroo* near towns and villages and travel by bus in groups. Yet,

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<sup>71</sup> Informants; No. 20, No. 11, No. 3, No. 6.

<sup>72</sup> Informants; No. 13, No. 1, No. 3, No. 5.

when buses play *baaroo* by using cassette players, drivers fear stoning of their vehicles from hideouts and private compounds.<sup>73</sup>

Thirdly, the old practices of seeking alms in markets by performing attractive rituals have nowadays become very risky for the pilgrims. Pilgrims are better treated by individual Muslims than they are in groups, by women than men and by the elderly than youngsters. Pilgrims may also opt to beg simply as any poor. These were part of the cult all on the way to and from Dirree. But it does not indicate poverty. But, the *Salafists* oppose them as heretics and break a branch of the ‘Y’-shaped stick on simple pretexts. Such conflicts often lead to insults as *takfiris* or *qaffar* (who do not consider to be living in accordance with true Islam) and even to physical fights (Dereje 2011: 11). To cope up with these changes in spiritual landscape, pilgrims hide their identities by changing their dressing styles, concealing the name of the *Sheik* and by hiring buses. They have also avoided asking the radicalized Muslims that they can easily identify by their wearing styles like women in *hijabs* and men with trousers above the ankles for *sadaqa*<sup>74</sup>

Fourthly, the destructions of spiritually valued camping sites that have been used by the pilgrims were becoming frequent to the cult since the 1990s. These camping sites were located at logical intervals of distances on the *muudaa* routes near local shrines or grave sites of ancestors known as *Uujuba* or near important towns and villages of renowned clerics (Salviac 1901: 180). These can be near home of rich adherents, supportive *balabats* (local chiefs) and *Sheiks* of elder clans, who wait for pilgrims with necessary preparations to travel with them the remaining way to Anajina. They also provide pilgrims with supplies. At these sites, there were rituals known as *hadra*, to get *sadaqa*, recover from exhaustion and join pilgrims of that locality. These sites were becoming the target of the extremists’ premeditated destructions, which take the form of expansion of farm lands, fencing for different purposes and claiming it for private ownerships. *Uujubas* were also either destroyed by deforestations or farmed all the way

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<sup>73</sup> Informants; No. 13, No. 14, No. 3, No. 12. They sate that if Christians and traditional believers want to give the alms to the devotees of the cult, they give it as they do for any needy. But, some radicalized Muslims reject the followers of the cult by considering their practice as a threat to the true way of Islamic life.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* Markets are targeted because the pilgrims wanted pursue the cult but the radicals wanted to end it.

around to deny access. Attempts to cross farms to reach them were obviously used as pretext for conflicts. Thus, both as part of the progress in the cult and as reaction to those emerging threats, pilgrims travel by hiring buses and spent nights in bus stations or near less restricted government institutions.<sup>75</sup>

Lastly, there are reports about the destructions of three shrines in Bale. According to informants, the first destroyed shrine was the shrine of *Sheik* Mohammed Tilama Tilmo located at some 25 km away from Ginnir Town. It was destroyed by unknown individuals after the land in its location was contracted to a private farm mechanization enterprise. The attempt to rebuild this shrine was unsuccessful because it was demolished again soon after the reconstruction started. The second heritage demolished was the shrine of *Sheik* Mussa Gardid located at about 20 km on the road from Ginnir to Beltu town at particular locality known as Harawa Sadee. The convicts were members of the *Salafists*. The third destroyed shrine was that of *Sheik* Ali Walee located in Goro District. This one is a widely known heritage than the former two. It was destroyed by fire set up by unknown individuals in 2013. According to my informants there were inefficient attempts to extinguish the fire by local villagers apparently for the sake of reports.<sup>76</sup>

To sum up, encouraged by their successes in the above destructions, threat on the *Sheik* Hussein and *Sheik* Sof Omar shrines, which are the most renowned Islamic shrines in the Horn of Africa, is imminent unless something tangible is done with their protection because there were no practical corrective measures taken by local officials and beyond aimed at protecting those priceless heritages. This implied for adherents of the cult abandoning the shrines without protection. This in turn opened fertile grounds for extremism. Particularly, newly radicalized Muslims were reported to be zealous to destroy these *awliya* shrines out of the curiosity to erase memories of ‘blasphemous practices’ and to demonstrate of their loyalty to the new sect. For example, in the Cave shrine of *Sheik* Sof Omar,

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<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.* Until recently, *Ujubas* were respected by Christians and Muslims alike and it was forbidden to cut trees or set up fire to it.

<sup>76</sup> Informants; No. 13, No. 5, No. 3, No. 20.

one of its custodians was reported to have been caught with modern machine gun that he had hidden in the cave cluing a link with terrorists.<sup>77</sup>

### Conclusion

History of *Sheik* Hussein has been glorified by prophesies told about him, his connection to the bloodline of the Prophet, his deeds as the first preacher of Islam in Bale and training of early *waliyi* of Bale. These led to the rise of a cult in his observance, which is the oldest Sufi Saint Cult in Bale. The cult is a transmogrified form of the Oromo *muudaa* due to internal and external change agents. This is because, the Oromo in and around Bale had shifted the destination of their *muudaa* from Madda Walabu to *Sheik* Hussein shrine after their conversion to Islam. But, they continued to practice some of their pre Islam traditions. The cult consists of *ziyara*, *baaroo*, *hadra*, *nazri*, *hanqee*, rituals, tradition of tolerance to cultural diversity and interethnic ties developed over time with immense socio-economic values. However, there has been emerging threats to the cult, orchestrated mainly by *Salafists* and *Wahabbists* in the last three decades. This led to a decline in the number of its adherents due to verbal abuses, harassment, segregation from public affairs, destruction of camping sites of pilgrims and few shrines. Nonetheless, the cult is still colorfully and publicly practiced by a large section of the population against all odds. This was possible due to coping strategies of adherents of the cult in response to the pressure of the emergent radicalized Muslim clerics and their followers.

Generally, this heritage is a popular medieval site in the whole of Muslim Ethiopia. The practices and dynamism of the cult exhibit a living tradition with ideas, beliefs, artistic and literacy works of outstanding universal significance that fulfills UNESCO's cultural heritage requirements. But it is not registered on the permanent list of World Heritage yet. Its registration would mean investment in socioeconomic sphere, tolerance to diversity and preservation of the heritage that reflects a masterpiece of human culture (Braukämper 2004: 142). Thus, it needs great effort from social scientists to join hands in the encouraging works by Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau and the Authority for Research and Heritage Conservation in the exploration of its untapped cultural and

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<sup>77</sup> Informants; No. 13, No. 8, No. 9, No. 10.

environmental history and its conservation at the grassroots as suggested below.

**Sustainability of the Heritage: a Retrospective Prospect**

Since most of the rural population still respect the cult and adhere to it at least as the heritage of its ancestors, there is a wider hope for its sustainability. Besides, as Hussein Ahmed (2010: 266) explicitly observed the extremists are very few to constitute a distinct group in Ethiopia. This constrains them to pragmatically change the way of life of the large Muslim population as they proclaim in their *dawa*. Moreover, as Hussein Ahmed (2010: 275) succinctly puts it “[i]t is not the prerogative of an individual or of a group to judge and to evaluate the correctness or wrongfulness of other Muslims’ behavior and action and to grant rewards and impose sanctions.” Thus, landing on the lights of the discussion and executive summary, the following four remedial actions would be considerable for the prospect of sustainability of the heritage.

First, leniency of local authorities to take measures against offences on the cult must be solved. This was due to the fear of social and religious stigmatizations. But, this could be resolved by making heritage conservation the agenda of public discussions. The society understands the importance of those shrines beyond religious stereotypes. Corrective and educational activities should be aimed at attitudinal change to preserve the heritage. This should focus on embedding the freedom of any individual or group to observe a religion of her/his own choosing and mutual respect for faiths of each other as the key to peace and progress. This is elucidated by Hussein Ahmed (2010: 274) “[n]either Islamists nor their external sponsors and internal supporters [...] have any legal grounds or moral right, or public mandate to interpret Islam exclusively from their own perspective, and to impose narrowly-defined vision of religion and society on others.” Thus, the administrative body at all levels must have the commitment to enforce law by empowering the system of community based conservation at the grassroots.<sup>78</sup>

Secondly, the *darga* need to benefit from the income generated by the shrine on accountable and sustainable bases. There were grudges over the monopoly of the income of Anajina by very few *Sheiks* and their families.

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<sup>78</sup> Informants; No. 13, No. 6, No. 3, No. 19.

Informants state that the annual income expectation of the shrine is about 100,000 Ethiopian *Birr* while its actual performance is less than 15,000 Ethiopian *Birr*. Yet, some of the *darga* resent the income is more than the expected. Resolving this intrigues need urgency because as time goes the extremists would exploit it to target the shrine.<sup>79</sup> A solution would be designing a project that could have trained the *darga* and generated income. It is important here to mention the exemplary work of Emperor Hailä-Silassie, who, impressed by its scenery and historic value, had granted 225 *gasha* (about 9,000 hectares) of *rist* land to the *Sheik* Hussein sanctuary as its living wage as early as 1960s.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, Braukämper cited a source that states the Emperor's donations of tax exemption for the *darga* from 235 *gasha* (10, 000 hectares) of land and an annual salary of 1000 Ethiopian *Birr* for the Imam of *sheik* Hussein shrine (Braukämper 2004; 142). Though there was no training to utilize it, the grant was there until it was nationalized by the *Därg* in 1975. Therefore, the government and the private sector got two tasks here. First, culture and tourism offices need to provide capacity building trainings for the *darga* which should focus on creating awareness on the harms of extremism, income generation skills and handling of tourists and pilgrims. These benefit the local community and in turn pave the way for the sustainability of the heritages.<sup>81</sup> Secondly, the inadequacy of tourist facilities that hindered the utilization of tourism potentials of the heritage can be solved by encouraging private entrepreneurs and by forming cooperative associations of the *darga* as there are no supermarkets, lodges, hotels, pension rooms and internet services that are necessary for tourists. This in turn increases the income of the state

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<sup>79</sup> Informants; No. 6, No. 7, No. 8, No. 17. That is the estimate of Culture and Tourism Office of Bale Zone.

<sup>80</sup> *Addis Zemen*: "Girmawi Janhoy Yebale Gubegnitachewin Fetsimew....," Megabit 1, 1957 E. C. (A Daily News paper, March 11, 1965, reports the Emperor's visit to Bale and the decree issued concerning various development plans and amnesty of tax arrears for ten years). The emperor also had promised to establish road, health center and other facilities for local people and pilgrims. The same newspaper issued on July 29, 1970 also reported further government decree on the occasion of another visit of the Emperor to Bale. Though, these were politically motivated, they indicate the government's efforts to provide a means of sustainable preservation of the heritage.

<sup>81</sup> Informants; No.13, No. 14. The issue of community based protection is an important requirement of UNESCO for cultural heritages to be ascribed as World heritage.

that can be used for infrastructural facilities, which was the major problem to utilize its tourism potentials. These would create a sense of ownership among the *darga* and help them to expose the radicals who sought to manipulate them.<sup>82</sup>

Thirdly, the curse of the extremists' need to be watched out and halted before it violates the constitutional rights of individuals or of a group to observe a religion of its own choice. The responsibility of protecting constitutional rights should not be left to the law enforcing body alone, which cannot be successful without active community participation. To disseminate their curses, extremists use amplifiers of some religious institutions (Mosques, Quranic schools and electronic shops), digital printed media and interpersonal relations. These led to the free spread of anti-Sufism teachings on markets, released on tape players in transport buses and business centers (Henock 2002: 3-5). These must have legal limits. Above all, the intangible heritages of *Sheik* Hussein are threatened by the psychological pressure on its adherents by this means. Therefore, adherents of the cult should be recognized as a sect by all. This would allow them the freedom of worship. The intent here is not to say this sect is right or that is wrong. The right to choose faith should be personal. But my argument is that why someone needs to destroy historical and culture heritages at this time when promoting it becomes the best sustainable way to development and while it is an armor to resist the negative impacts of globalization?<sup>83</sup>

Fourthly, historical, anthropological, archaeological and sociological studies, debates and forums aimed at conservation of heritages are indispensable. They are required to disseminate the values of *Sheik* Hussein heritages as living evidences of the history of Islam. Islam has a history of protecting its history and history of its respected persons, caliphs and *ulamas*. *Hadith* is the best example for this. The history of Islam in Ethiopia depends on Islamic heritages such as the al-Najashi Mosque, remains of the Muslim Sultanates like that of Shawa, Yifat, *Bali*, Adal, Harar..., heritages of the Muslim dynasties and societies in Wallo, Jimma, Khomasha, Assossa and Sufi *Sheiks'* shrines in Hararghe and Bale. These heritages are testimonies of the past and they do not disgrace the present. But, if these

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<sup>82</sup> Informants; No. 13, No. 11, No. 15; Filed Observation, 2007 at Dirre; Filed Observation, 2012 at Sof Omar Cave.

<sup>83</sup> Informants; No. 13, No. 6, No. 7, No. 8.

heritages are destroyed, then it meant that their histories are gone. The radical groups themselves would benefit from preserving than destroying them because it helps them as the example of what they believe are the traditional Islam and/or not the right one if they like. Thus, collaborative studies by social scientists are vital for its sustainability and inclusion on UNESCO's book of Permanent List of World Heritage.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Informants; No. 13, No. 15, No. 16.

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Some informants wanted anonymity and I promised them to be so. That is why I skipped their names and I hope their remaining data will give the reader some information about them.

- No. 1, *Date of Interview*: 19/03/2013; *Place of Interview*: Sof Omar Cave; *Residence*: SofOmar town, Dawe Qachan district; *Gender*: Female; *Age*: 80; *Information*: details of rituals at Sof Omar and Dirre, the role of women in the cult and economic life of the *darga*...
- No. 2, *Date of Interview*: 19/03/2013; *Place of Interview*: Sof Omar Cave; *Residence*: Sof Omar town, Dawe Qachan district; *Gender*: Male; *Age*: 45; *Information*: details of rituals at Sof Omar cave, misuse of the income from tourists by few persons and economic life of the *darga*.
- No. 3, *Date of Interview*: 17/12/2010; *Place of Interview*: Sof Omar Cave; *Residence*: Sof Omar town, Dawe Qachan district; *Gender*: Male; *Age*: 35; *Information*: details of rituals at Sof Omar shrine, the bloodline of Sof Omar and *Sheik* Hussein, the rights and duties of the *darga*.
- No. 4, *Date of Interview*: 19/03/2013; *Place of Interview*: Sof Omar Cave; *Residence*: Sof Omar town, Dawe Qachan district; *Gender*: Male; *Age*: 100; *Information*: stories of *Sheik* Hussein and *Sheik* Sof Omar, evolution of some rituals of the cult, threats to the heritages, issue of its protection and tradition of the *darga*.
- No.5, *Date of Interview*: 20/03/2013; *Place of Interview*: Sof Omar Cave; *Residence*: Sof Omar, Dawe Qachan district; *Gender*: Female; *Age*: 45; *Information*: women's roles in the cult.
- No. 6, *Date of Interview*: 19/03/2007; *Place of Interview*: Anajina; *Residence*: Gololcha district; *Gender*: Male; *Age*: 80; *Information*: stories of *Sheik* Hussein, evolution of his cult, new threats to it, measures needed for its sustainability, visits of Emperor Hailä-Silassie to Dirre...
- No. 7, *Date of Interview*: 19/03/2007; *Place of Interview*: Anajina; *Residence*: Robe town; *Gender*: Male; *Age*: 35; *Information*: dynamics of the cult, treats due to purist movements....
- No. 8, *Date of Interview*: 19/03/2007; *Place of Interview*: Anajina; *Residence*: Robe town; *Gender*: Male; *Age*: 37; *Information*: deviation Sufi practices from True Islamic life, values of the reformists...

- No. 9, *Date of Interview*: 20/03/2012; *Place of Interview*: Anajina; *Residence*: Robe town; *Gender*: Male; *Age*: 34; *Information*: government intervention in religion, deviations of the cult from the True Islamic life and the *Sunna*, the need for a kind reform to it...
- No. 10, *Date of Interview*: 20/03/2008; *Place of Interview*: Anajina; *Residence*: Gololcha district; *Gender*: Male; *Age*: 27; *Information*: the cult's fallacy to teachings of *Quranic* schools, *dawa* movement....
- No.11, *Date of Interview*: 14/04/2015; *Place of Interview*: Robe town; *Residence*: Robe town, *Gender*: Female; *Age*: 70; *Information*: impact of *Salafists* on relation of Sufis with non Muslims....
- No.12, *Date of Interview*: 14/04/2015; *Place of Interview*: Robe town; *Residence*: Robe town, *Gender*: Male; *Age*: 40; *Information*: jeopardy of extremist teachings on the cult, interreligious relations...
- No.13, *Date of Interview*: 15/04/2015; *Place of Interview*: Robe town; *Residence*: Robe town, *Gender*: Male; *Age*: 52; *Information*: Key information on challenges of conservation, values of the heritage, threats of the *Wahabbist*, deep knowledge on rituals of the cult at various sites.
- No.14, *Date of Interview*: 15/04/2015; *Place of Interview*: Robe town; *Residence*: Robe town, *Gender*: Male; *Age*: 36; *Information*: Key information on challenges of Sufi practices on the true Islam, values of heritages, how to conserve the Sufi shrines, how to convince the extremists....
- No.15, *Date of Interview*: 14/04/2015; *Place of Interview*: Robe town; *Residence*: Robe town, *Gender*: Male; *Age*: 34; *Information*: how radicalism is imposed on followers of Sufi Islam by the few *Salafists* and *Wahabbists* using their political, economic and religious positions.
- No.16, *Date of Interview*: 15/04/2015; *Place of Interview*: Robe town; *Residence*: Robe town, *Gender*: Male; *Age*: 73; *Information*: key information on rituals practiced in the vicinities of Robe town and many people in Bale still covertly observe Sufi Islam despite pressures by the *Wahabbist* teachers.
- No.17, *Date of Interview*: 15/04/2015; *Place of Interview*: Robe town; *Residence*: Robe town, *Gender*: Male; *Age*: 60; *Information*: key information how personalities on government posts influence the youth and women to involve in the *dawa* ministries.

## Kefyalew Tesema Semu

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- No.18, *Date of Interview*: 17/08/2014; *Place of Interview*: Dodola town; *Residence*: Dodola town, *Gender*: Male; *Age*: 67; *Information*: key information on how some Christians sympathizes with the cult as tradition of their ancestors under consecutive governments.
- No.19, *Date of Interview*: 23/06/2014; *Place of Interview*: Sof Omar Welmel Falls; *Residence*: Dallo Manna district, *Gender*: Male; *Age*: 74; *Information*: key information on physical attacks and embarrassment by *Wahabbist* youths in Dallo Manna on adherents of the cult.
- No.20, *Date of Interview*: 17/08/2014; *Place of Interview*: Gassera town; *Residence*: Gassera district, *Gender*: Male; *Age*: 56; *Information*: participation of minorities in the cult and the unique tolerance in the cult unlike seclusions in other aspects of life in Bale lowlands.

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