Reviving Aspects of Ateetee: An Arsi Oromo Women's Musical Ritual to Empower Women to Protect Their Human Rights and Participate in Society's Social and Religious Life

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Abstract
In the Arsi Oromo society, prior to the introduction of organized religions and subsequent colonization by Abyssinian rulers, women had been leading a cultural musical institution called ateetee. It is organized and performed by married women for the purposes of empowering and protecting their interests and those of their community. For instance, if a husband violates her well-being, other women would gather in front of the man's house, confront him to admit his wrongdoing, and require forgiveness. Women also play a great role in bringing peace among warring clans in a non-threatening way, simply by holding their ceremonial stick, siinqee, and singing their ateetee songs. In recent years, however, ateetee began to decline due to the growing opposition from mosque leaders. Christians have always rejected this ritual and do not realize the implication of cultural identity loss for the spread of the Good News of Jesus. Although Ethiopia’s constitution recognizes the importance of customary laws and institutions in conflict management and resolution among local communities, the current autocratic government is destroying Oromo culture by forcing ateetee women to organize to support their political agenda. Hence, this dissertation emphasizes the importance of revitalizing aspects of the ateetee institution and seeks to answer the main research question: How can Arsi women today be empowered to protect their human rights and participate in society's social and religious life? This dissertation is an ethnographic study dealing with primary sources and exploring a solution in an oral culture. Section one explores the development of Christianity among the traditional Arsi Oromo people of Oromia, Ethiopia. It specifically addresses the Christian Abyssinian king and priests’ colonial approaches that forced the Arsi Oromos to embrace Islam, which in its early period served as an escape from the oppressive values of the Arsi Oromo culture. Section two examines scholarly discussions and solutions offered to empower women’s leadership and protect their rights through the ateetee institution. Section three explores ways churches can empower Arsi Oromo Christian mothers to participate in ateetee rituals to give voice to women in society. It also explores contextualization of the ateetee ritual for fostering understanding and narrowing the social and cultural gap between Christian and non-Christian Arsi Oromo people. This dissertation also includes the description of my artifact that contains video of ateetee rituals and interviews with village mothers in the three regions of Oromia State: Arsi Nagele, Kofale, and Kokossa.

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