

Recent trends on the socio-cultural and economic life of the Shinasha tribal in Ethiopia: In the case of Benishangul- Gumuz Region

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Abstract

This paper is a part of my Ph.D. research work and entitled “Recent trends on the socio-cultural and economic life of the Shinasha tribal in Ethiopia: In the case of Benishangul-Gumuz Region.” This work analysis how the recent trends on the socio-cultural and economic changes and its implications underwent on the Shinasha community? I address this question by historically juxtaposing socio-economic and cultural life of the people with my interviews with the key informants and observation of changes in conditions of the Shinasha. This inquiry illuminates aspects of the recent trends in the socio-economic and cultural life of the Shinasha. This layered analysis and illuminates the contextual of the study area and complex relationships between socio-economic and cultural changes with geographical locations of the areas. It is well-known that the socio-cultural and economic changes of the Shinasha are the least studied subjects in Ethiopian historiography. The method used contains the interviewing key informants to support the existing sources. Their witnesses were cautiously crosschecked and analysed through qualitative methods.

Keywords: Shinasha, Marriage, Socio-Cultural and Economic change, Religious practice.

Overview of the Study area

Five native ethnic groups are living in the Benishangul-Gumuz region. There are Shinasha, Berta, Gumuz, Mao and Komo (BGRSRC, 2002). Among these people, the concern of this article is the Shinasha ethnic group. They were one of the marginalised ethnic groups in Ethiopia for the centuries from socio-economic and political affairs of the country. Northwestern Ethiopia region was unique potential regions in the country. Its resources and viability placed it in a position to play a very notable role in the history of the country from ancient times. It is this potential that projected it to develop into seven important districts with some addition and deletions of tracts in modern Ethiopia. These districts are Bullen, Dangur, Guba, Mandura, Dibate, Wenbera and Pawe, which play a considerable role in the history of State of Benishangul-Gumuz. North-western Ethiopia has been a traditional area of settlement of Shinasha since ancient period. Shinasha is 7.7% of the total population of the region (CSA, 2007). Researcher for time being unable to find recent statistical data after 2007 in the study area. They are farmers. Since the late 19th century, but in many places as recent as the 1970s and 1980s, immigrant settlers from West, North, and Center such as Oromo, Amhara, Agaw, Tigrayan, and others) arrived (Abebe Ano, 2010, 3).

Many of them intermarried and mixed with the local Shinasha. The first northerners originally came in the wake of the conquest of northwestern Ethiopia and dispossessing or competing with local Shinasha and other groups. The more recent migrants have mostly re-settled drought victims from the northern Gondar, Tigray and Wollo regions. Most of the newcomers became regular farmers or civil servants, traders, teachers, religious leaders and soon (key informants interview results).

Migrants from Semitic speaking Amhara and Cushitic-speaking Oromo have also influenced the Shinasha cultural heritage, epigraphy and languages. Although this proved Cushitic speaking people movements of the 16th and late 18th centuries A.D. (Abebe, 2010, PP. 3-7). These expansions proceeded through several centuries of the influx of Oromo, from southwestern into western and northwestern Ethiopia, pushed many of Shinasha from north and south of Abay River to present localities. The remained groups of Shinasha in those areas today found scattered and culturally similar to Shinasha of northwestern Ethiopia. The economic, social, religious and other aspects of the Shinasha culture are traditional and the people have now discarded most of these traditional systems. An effort to deed and analyze indigenous knowledge systems and practices is a practical way of understanding a group of people, people's culture can be considered as a form of sciences. It may be useful to understand and explain human experiences. However, culture of the different indigenous group is in danger of extinction. Hence, this study.

Research General Goal

The General research goal of the study aimed at investigating recent trends on the socio-economic and cultural life of the Shinasha tribal in Ethiopia.

Research Specific Aims

The specific aims of the study are-

- Analyze the socio-cultural and economic implication of the different wedding stages and rituals of the Shinasha of the Benishangul Gumuz region, Ethiopia.
- Describe the different wedding stages and rituals of the Shinasha, in the state of Benishangul Gumuz region.
- To outline the recent trends on the socio-economic and cultural life of the Shinasha;
- To draw the attention of researchers to the study of Ethiopian history from margins perspectives.

Basic Research Questions

The study is guided by the following sets of the key research questions.

- What were the socio-cultural and economic implication of the different wedding stages and rituals of the Shinasha of the Benishangul Gumuz region?
- What were the different wedding stages and rituals of the Shinasha, in the state of Benishangul Gumuz region?
- What were the recent trends on the socio-economic and cultural lives and its implications in the Shinasha community?

The Significance of the Study

A profound examination of the recent trends on the Socio-cultural and economic life of Shinasha may show a comprehensive and objective experience of the people of northwestern Ethiopia in general and Benishangul-Gumuz in particular.

The study would make an outstanding contribution to understanding the recent economic, social and cultural among Shinasha. The study also delivers key endorsements for defending and conserving the social and cultural practice of the peripheral groups like Shinasha and others region. I hope this paper will also help interested researchers to focus on the subject for further studies in the future.

Methods: Data Collection Instruments

The chief gears that the investigator used for data collecting purposes were questionnaires, interview and Focus group discussions. Besides, the primary sources have obtained from informants and personal observations, which collected during a brief study tour of the Benishangul-Gumuz Region from the end of July to September 2019. Therefore, this study resulted from qualitative methods.

The methodology of the Study

The data for this study collected at Asosa, Gilgel Belese, Dibate, Bullen, Dangur, and Wenbera districts in the Benishangul-Gumuz Region. The data for this study collected through qualitative data collecting methods. Moreover, carefully checked and counter-checked with secondary sources available to different offices in the Benishangul-Gumuz Region.

A. The study area

Benishangul Gumuz Region is one of the Federal states of Ethiopia located in northwestern regions of the country. It shares territorial boundaries in the north and eastern Amhara region, in the east with the state of Oromia, in the south with the Gambella region and the west with the Republic of Sudan.

B. Sampling techniques

The researcher used purposive sampling techniques with the topic of the study and sample areas where the majority of Shinasha people were living in the region.

C. Sampling Districts

In the Benishangul-Gumuz region, there are three administrative zones and one special Woredas. Asosa, Gilgel Belese, Dangur (Manbuk), Dibate, Bullen and Wenbera districts selected for reasons the majority of the Shinasha reside there for centuries.

D. Data analysis and Interpretation

Wedding is a tedious processes among the Shinasha especially the modern ones. It goes through a series of stages and rituals, each taking a significant period depending on the progress of each stage. This is because the wedding is a serious decision among the couple and their family and it is considered as a family affair and their relatives are expected to participate during the preparation until it ends. During the olden times,

arranged marriage was practised but such cases are gone nowadays. The method used contains the interviewing key informants to support the existing sources. Their witnesses were cautiously crosschecked and analysed through qualitative methods.

Discussion and results

Recent trends on the Socio-cultural and economic changes and its implications on the Shinasha community

In connection with the social system of the Shinasha, the practice of patriarchal system community divided several clans, which again divided into lineages, or sub-clans with no social hierarchical structure are some of the common characteristics. Besides, the practice of the inter-clan marriage is social taboos, the practice of indigenous festivals; cultural dance and music are all intrinsic parts of the Shinasha culture. The performances of the feast of housing system, New Year celebration, marriage festivals, food and drinks on ceremonial occasions etc. are all similar reveal a common practice between the Shinasha (key informants interview results).

To the extent that the other ethnic groups in northwestern Ethiopia, Shinasha socio-cultural practices are concerned, they have their pattern of the social system, economy and polity. Of course, through the ethnic groups of northwestern Ethiopia differ among themselves in many ways, linguistically, culturally, ethnically and they have in common many structural and cultural characteristics.

Socio-cultural life: Patriarchal social system among the Shinasha

Patriarchal is the basis of the social structure of the Shinasha. Hence, only the males especially, the eldest son called *qaabbi na'a/nahe*, who lives with the parents permanently unlike his younger brother, *muqafoni/eeno-nahe* and sister, *eeno-nihe*, can inherit the parental or the family properties (*Ibid*). In contrast, women who generally thought to be inferior and subordinate to men have customarily no share in the property of the father since the ancient period. Her responsibility is to become a true

and faithful homemaker. Among the Shinasha, the right of the inheritance goes mostly to the eldest unless to the youngest son of the family (*Ibid*). This means the right of inheritance to the male-line. However, in the absence of the son, the daughter has opportunities became inheritor.

Speaking further concerning the position of women in society, women considered as mere halves of men and to men of high self-importance. They were no more a property particularly when her price was fully paid. She treated as a product. Such practice is as old as their culture, they considered as a member of the family only when they had produced a male issue or heir. She is proud of giving birth to son or male (*Ibid*). Recently; these traditions are under changing conditions in the study area.

Family structure among the Shinasha

Family is a common phenomenon in every social group. In Shinasha society, the family is the oldest social structure and every closely interwoven social foundation. It is this social association, which regulates and restrains the society. Among the various social institutions of the Shinasha, there is nothing more important than the institution of the family. Although its establishment, composition and specific functions have varied greatly with time and place, some of its features are remarkably uniform and resistant to change. The society is organised based on the family as a unit whereby the father who is the head of the family-controlled the other members. The traditional Shinasha concept of family is a nuclear family with a patriarchal family system. The father is the owner of the family, which taken intentionally or unintentionally acknowledged by society. The family included the father, wife and children living together under the same roof who related by blood, marriage or by adoption. The members of the family work cooperatively with other family members to fulfil the purpose from which the family exists (*Ibid*).

The Shinasha family comes from Endogamy, marrying within a specific social group or ethnic group. This was common cultural and marriage practice among the Shinasha

since ancient period. However, recently there is changing aspects of marriage practices in Shinasha. That is the license an exogamous marriage or marrying outside one's social group, as the convert, accepting the partner's religion and assimilated with other ethnic groups in the area. Even though, marriage within the same clan members forbidden. They believed that the born child would be hand-cape, disabled, deaf etc. In contemporary thought, it may result in diffusion of genetic disorders within the somewhat closed community (Abebe and Addisu Adama, 2015, 41-53).

The Shinasha family has undergone a drastic change in the wake of the introduction of Christianity and others. The socio-cultural changes are so rapid that the family which was closely knit and the practice of monogamy seen to be changing and eroding. In ancient times, the marriage lasted though it was an arranged marriage, yet today divorce is becoming like the changing of fashion. The family economy, which was shared by all the family members especially in the agricultural work is no longer so due to modern education. School-going children have to stay in schools and convent to pursue their studies. They are unable to support in the family problem. The whole family is becoming personal and the concern for the community is gradually on the decline (key informants interview results).

The social life in Shinasha society is a classless society. There is no social stratification. The villagers at large closely joined and have mutually dependent numbers of families. It also found that there is a close tie between the religious, cultural, social and political institution in the recent periods. As far as family life is concerned, they practice both joint and nuclear types of family. Every existing family in the society is a piece broken off from a larger unit. It is because of marriage children are born and the family gives a daughter in marriage to another family and receive brides. The practice of marriage among the same clan or families is taboo between the Shinasha (*Ibid*). However, younger generations of the today, violating this social taboo and made marriage relations with very close relatives. This is becoming common around urban areas understudy community. Though it is often embraced with the agenda of the cultural

crackdown in its negative impact on social development is quite debatable among the Shinasha with its diverse lineage social norms often a concern of the social taboos.

In the cultural tradition of the Shinasha, the family system has a lifestyle of its own. In this life cycle from birth to death, it contains a sequence of rites, rituals, ceremonies and restrictions, which considered compulsory for the growth and wellbeing of a person in his present life and life after death. The fact about it is that when the brothers of a joint family subdivided their father's property they established independent nuclear families of their own. With time, those newly independent nuclear family units acquired new members by way of birth and marriage and eventually formed a new joint family which in turn dissolved by the death of the family founder and the subsequent partitioning of the property by his heirs (*Ibid*).

Marriage and its implications among the Shinasha

The social life of the Shinasha holds reflection to the society and picture of the same can had by a study of marriage practices. Since marriage is important in the creation of family, various beliefs, rituals, traditions and practices is observed across the Shinasha in particular and State of Benishangul Gumuz region in general. In olden times, child marriage is unknown among the Shinasha. Marriage by the exchange was one form of marriage among the Shinasha during ancient times. Marriage by the exchange is a type of exchange marriage in which a Young-man marries the sister of another man in exchange for his sister. However, this type of marriage has removed among the Shinasha recently.

There were several types of marriage among the Shinasha of northwestern Ethiopia. Nevertheless, the important ones were marriage by bride-wealth (*Wiid'a*), and marriage by persuasion (*S'is'a*) respectively.

Bride-wealth (*Wiid'a*):-is a type of marriage, which requires the payment of the bridewealth to the bride-family. In ancient time, the amount of bride-wealth was not as big as today. Sons of poor parents (low economic status) paid only three *Maria Thresa*

Thaler whereas the rich parents paid eighteen *Maria Thresa Thaler*. They're also a condition in which the economically average parents paid about six *Maria Thresa Thaler* given to the family of the girl as bridewealth. However, nowadays restrictions lifted and parents are free to bring any amount of bride-wealth they can, although the bride's parents can negotiate and tell them what amount will be appropriate. Sometime, the parents of the boy may be generous and give to the family of the girl much bridewealth more than can be expected on the date of betrothal. The changing nature in the amount of bride-wealth is continuing even nowadays. It has reached up to 40,000-50,000 Ethiopian birr (money). Due to modern Influence, sometimes bride-wealth includes such items like tape-recorders, radio, decoration, gold earrings, gold hand, gold necklace, goat, sheep, honey, watch etc. based upon the demands of the girl's parents and the total amount of expenditure for wedding ceremony estimated to reach 100,000 Ethiopian birr. Because of these majorities of the society, become victims of the high rate of debt with interest. Thus, marriage ceremonies in Shinasha recently have brought socio-economic and psychological impact on both bride parents in particular and on the society in general. This indicates a situation that the nature and amount of bride-wealth among the Shinasha of northwestern Ethiopia is in the process of changing (*Ibid*). Economic growth and development can be the reason for such changes (Fortes, Meyer. Ed. 1962, P. 115).

Concerning this informant, commenting on the importance of bride-wealth said that it is required to keep the stability of marriage and recognize the legal right of the husband over his wife. On this matter, Lucy Mair said, "The requirement of payment is more adequately understood as a reconciliation of the wives' value both to her husband, to her own and relatives, and of the importance of the marriage contract" (Mair Lucy Philip, 1969, P. 5).

Abduction, buta, -unlike above two forms of marriage, **buta** is an informal marriage which does not follow the procedures of a marriage. In this type of marriage, a girl is a forcefully taken-a way by someone, with the assistance of his friends. Among the

Shinasha of the Northwestern Ethiopia, *buta*, is not only against the interest of the girls and it against her parents' will as well as the Shinasha of the northwestern Ethiopia custom. The girls could abduct on the market road or when she is going or coming from the wedding, or a stream of water-well where she fetches water (key informants interview results). In any case, it is a marriage without any prior understanding or agreement.

Marriage by Persuasion, *S'ús'a*:-is a type of informal marriage in which someone or an intermediary persuades a girl to marry. A middleman should be an honest person to the boy who wants to get married. Usually, a person who acts as the middleman is a woman. Because it believed that, a woman can convince another woman or young girls on certain issues in general and marriage in particular among the Shinasha society. According to informants, persuasion may not complete within a short period. Because the girls require enough, time to show her consent. This type of marriage called "Love marriage." This type of marriage based on the interest of the two couples. It is not forceful like *butta*, which is illegal in the modern legal concept (*Ibid*). Therefore, it is dominate type of marriage among the study population.

Marriage by Inheritance:-*nata*-is a type of marriage in which the brother of a dead husband inherits a woman. This was done when a widow still within the age of childbearing. A person who inherits the widow believed to postulate the line of his dead brother by having children from her. According to informants, such a person inherits not only the widow of the deceased but also his property including children (*Ibid*). However, at present, such marriages are less likely to exploit than the benefits of marriage, with few exceptions. It is under declined among the Shinasha society.

A bridegroom performs, *Jiyya*:- This type of marriage after he accomplishes with full preparation. He accompanied by his age mates suddenly goes to girls parents early in the morning when the girl's parents are at asleep. They enter the house of girl's parents without permission and take sit circling a large jar; *Kunda* (*Ibid*). The husband handles branches of leaf and *jááwa*, walking stick, which distinguishes him from others. Up to

this time, the parents of the girl have no information. Following these event elders of the village play a greater role in reconciling the parents and to make the marriage real and shorten if possible. The *jiya* marriage among Shinasha not usually rejected. However, it changes among the Shinasha societies (*Ibid*).

In the Shinasha society, customary laws and duties concerning the birth of a child and marriage in their society are extensive. The family life is rest upon sacred ties of marriage. A customary wedding celebrated in the house of the groom or the boy's parents. The society was primarily monogamy though there were instances of men having a more than one wife at the same time. Traditionally, polygamy was allowable in the Shinasha community. In marriage, therefore, the community is exogamous. Endogamous marriage among the clan families' lineage families is strongly and socially taboo in Shinasha (Abebe and Addisu Adame, 2015, PP. 41-53).

The Eloping has become the communal system of marriage among the Shinasha, though not a system in its reality. The traditional system of marriage, first love afterwards, has reversed at present; love first and then marriage is common now. As pre-marital sex has become common, marriage often preceded by the conception of a child by the girls. Currently, divorce is also very common as compared to the distant past. Regrettably, there is no effective movement or attempt to stop this dishonesty among the youngsters in Shinasha society. Not as good as than this sin in sex today, the greatest numbers of the youngsters have become a drug addict, which has drawn the attention of the parents and the governments. Thus, the future of the border people is not very bright unless some social change takes place; they have very slight hope for future generations.

Impact of Christianity and its implications

Another important change force for the social and cultural system of the Shinasha society is *Orthodox* Christianity. Historically, Christianity was introduced to the most Shinasha inhabited present areas at the end of the 19th century. It has affected the economy of the people. In religious holidays, such as *gebrel*, *bala-egzabihar*, *mariyam*, *Giyorgis*, the local people not allowed to engage any agricultural activities in the region. The church employed priests, evangelists, clerical staffs and executives. The priests and evangelists respected in the Shinasha society. Christianity has found its deepest impact in the field of education. Before the coming of Christianity, there were no schools, no teachers to teach and no students to learn in study areas. The idea of modern Education was unknown to Shinasha areas until the second half of the 20th centuries A.D. In some of the study areas, it is a fact that the missionaries used education as one of its instruments in converting them to Christianity. The idea is to teach the youngsters secular as well as religious education. Therefore, wherever, they found an establishment they opened schools where secular subjects and subjects relating to the teachings of Lord Jesus Christ taught outside the school campus. In the end, social and funeral festivals called *Shárá*, *tásqár* in local language etc. had also disappeared. The main factor behind this was influence of the *Orthodox* Christianity and other religious activities in the region. They believed that to continue these social festivals and other social systems to be against Christianity. “*Tásqár*,” is a traditional memorial feast for the dead person in Shinasha society led by the priest, deacons and other religious members. “*Shárá*,” is mean memorial of the dead. Recently, funeral practice, “*Shárá*,” would perform on the 40th day before “*tásqár*” ceremony in the name of “*fíthat*,” (in Amharic) accordance of principles of *Orthodox* Christianity. At present-day, the youngsters, aware of the significance of preservative one’s identity, and culture, tried to regain consciousness of the traditional festivals especially, New Year festivals and are very eager to preserve their rich cultural identity and elements. However, they found strong resistance from the church elders, who expertise ethical control of the people (Abebe, 2010, 56-59). Therefore, it was one of the most important which brings Shinasha to change in the

social relationship with the highlanders, who first came to Shinasha in the last decades of the 19th century and the mid-20th century due to drought many of the highlanders migrated to the Metekel, northwestern Ethiopia.

Recent Economic trends among the Shinasha

The land tenancy is the method in which privileges in land held. The institutions that govern access to and use of land and the security of the land tenure range from provisional to limited, customary or recorded and secured by the legal means, and have a substantial influence on justifiable use of land. Ethiopia has its land tenure policy that convulsion to their political social, cultural and economic system. The land is the very fundamental social, political and economic possessions of the people in every nation-state. Similarly, in Ethiopia land is an imperative benefit in all features. This essential asset preserved differently under a diverse ruling system of the nation, one's state-owned and the other time denationalized. In the 19th century and early 20th century, the church was a holder of large tracts of land. Rulers of different years donated to the churches and monasteries so that the later would delivery from the income. The very vigorous nature of land tenure policy throughout these regimes makes access to land significant matters for the mainstream of Ethiopian who one-way or the other, determined by on-farm production for their revenue and existence. Land tenure matters, therefore, continue to be one of the dominant point and economic questions (Beka Girma, 2006, PP. 28-31).

The 1975 Ethiopian revolution brought another chapter of Ethiopian land tenure regulation. The *Derg* who come to power by crushing the monarchical rule-taking place to appliance land strategy directly opposed to the feudal-imperial system. The main measure taken by the *Derg* administration was the nationalization of land became the possessions of the State (Rural land Proclamation of 1975). As said by this declaration renting, selling, or operating land-based on share crop firmly forbidden and the only possible way for transmitting land was either back to the state or through heirloom within the family(*Ibid*). The collapse of *Derg* government in 1991 manifest the grounds of

the current regime as a result of the different nature of socio-capitalist ideology, the current administration redefined almost all of policies, rules and guidelines of the country except nationalization of the land previously applied by the *Derg* regime (Beka Girma, 2006, 28-31).

The inconsistency between *Derg* and the current administration nationalized policy of land is that the current regime land policy, unlike *Derg*, guaranteed in the constitution (*Ibid*). Hence, the constitution of FDRE (1995) stated that the government and people of Ethiopia own all land (FDRE constitution of 1995). Previously land nationalized, the government has guaranteed that the land property rights to use by the landholder for an unlimited period and has guaranteed protection of landholders from expulsion (*Ibid*). This was also a case in northwestern parts of the country.

Agriculture has been the main economic activity of the people of Metekel, northwestern Ethiopia. Considerable land in the region is fertile and productive which made the region attractive to different settler communities following the imperial conquest of this region and until recently. The indigenous people of the Metekel in general and Shinasha in practised shifting cultivation, which performed by traditional agriculture tools. The Shinasha use simple agricultural tools such as the *taba*, small hoe; *goda*, Sickle, and Axe, *sakursa*. According to informants of the Shinasha, there were various crop productions. These include food crops, cereal crops and oilseeds. The major food crops consisted of finger millet; sorghum and maize are the most stable food crops. Sorghum has been the main food crop to the people of the Shinasha. Most of Shinasha societies preferred to use Sorghum than other crop productions because it has multi-purpose: Among these purposes: it is used for "*bedi-mesha*," traditional Shinasha food, Bread, and porridge, *mo'wa*-it is an often eaten with "*kawa*" (Abebe, 2010, P. 84). However, regional state policymakers who emphasized the exploitation of land neglected this sector and the rural population and labour instead of investment on both agricultural activities remains mostly rain-fed without proper investment and suitable land use policy.

The other development in the region, the admission of money in the remote lowlands of northern Ethiopia was one of the driving forces of the recent changes. However, the entry of money cash in the lowlands was very slow. The money came first to a few individuals in amounts too small to enable them to purchase the money goods of the outside world. The most important purchase was clothes, like *Abujadi*. In addition to this small amount of each and its slow inflow in the lowlands, it was very difficult to get back to Addis Ababa or other places to spend it and there were no regular supplies of foreign goods in the lowlands. There were no market facilities and people had very little access to cash it. Therefore, the few cash which made their entry into the lowlands had very little to do with the social, economic and cultural system. However, after 1898, the lowlands or frontier areas also brought under the direct administration of Ethiopia emperors and this enabled the flow of cash more free in the region. The construction of roads which connect local and international links such as province of Debremarkos to Chagni and then Chagni to Guba and border of Sudan. From the Chagni to Wenbera and various districts recently brought the lowland people in contact with outside or rest of the region and they got access to the markets (key informants interview results).

Until recently, some talented and more enlighten people begun to purse business as their occupation by running small shops and selling of commodities to the villages. Even with the emergence of the money economy and their access to the markets, they had very little to sale. The main commodities for sale are still agricultural products such as maize, sorghum, cotton, pumpkin, hot pepper etc. (*Ibid*). Therefore, the lowland or frontier people in northwestern Ethiopia had a very nominal share in the trade of the country. Moreover, they were under the exploitation of the intermediary man in the sale of local products. They were economically better off and had many advantages to exploit the local people (*Ibid*). For example; they sold their commodities at an inflated rate while they bought the local products at a very low rate fixed by them. The local people, contrariwise, had to buy outside products such as clothes at the rate fixed by the intermediary man and at the same time, they were required to sell their products at any available rate unless they would face starvation and unbeneficial. The intermediary

man's taking advantage of these bad conditions of the frontier people, exploited them without any sympathy. Moreover, there is very little economic development among the lowland people. The majority of the Shinasha continue to follow the traditional shifting cultivation, which has not witnessed improvement for centuries. Regardless of the inadequate advances and grants by the state government, substantial achievements are very rare to find. Therefore, in most study areas, salaried persons respected by society because of their purchasing power.

Conclusion

Northwestern Ethiopia, Benishangul Gumuz region is a unique potential region in the country. Its resources and viability placed it in a position to play a very notable role in the history of the country from ancient times.

The social system of the Shinasha is a concern, the practice of patriarchal system community divided several clans, which again divided into lineages or sub-clans with no social hierarchical structure are some of the common characteristics. The family is composed of the father, mother and children. The traditional Shinasha concept of family is a nuclear family with a patriarchal family system. Patriarchal is the basis of the social structure of the Shinasha.

In Shinasha society, the family is the oldest social structure and every closely interwoven social foundation. The social life in Shinasha society is a classless society. There is no social stratification. In ancient time, the villagers at large are closely joined and have mutually dependent numbers of families. It also found that there is a close tie between the religious, cultural, social and political institution.

The Shinasha people have their own culture that describes them as a people. Further, this culture helps them understand their world and the things around them. Their rituals related to the wedding are a manifestation of their colourful culture. The study found out that the wedding among the Shinasha is a union not only of the couple but also of the two lineages where the couple came from.

The Shinasha are a unique people of the province of Metekel because of their culture that outlines their cosmology. Their rituals related to wedding ceremony signify their communal relationship, their being religious and their connection to the unseen world and the world after death. The importance of the religious beliefs and practices of the Shinasha is present in the entire preparation of the Shinasha marriage. Most of the Shinasha family are members of the *Orthodox* Christian faith. However, a few of the wedding beliefs and practices related to the *Orthodox* Christian doctrines. To note, the highlight of the wedding stages and rituals is the church wedding ceremony. It is believed that God, *Ego* should give the highest form of blessing among the bride couples during this celebration. Today, this blessing is through the matrimonial ceremony headed by a priest.

Marriage system and practice among the Shinasha of northwestern Ethiopia have its advantage and disadvantage, which is highly recognised by society. For example, according to the culture of society marriage requires the involvement of the family and other relatives. The couples not consulted; even though the boy sometimes informs his intention to his father or elder brother about the girl he wanted to marry. That was to obtain the consent of his father. This may satisfy the interest of the boy. However, the girls' right to choose her partner is unknown. This was the case in bride-wealth (*Wiid'a*) type of marriage among the Shinasha, where the process was the male family members are going to ask for the wedding approval from the female family members. A long this activity is the giving of dowry, money dance is being done in the wedding reception. The high amount of bride-wealth, which increases from time to time, would create social, economic and psychological crisis on the individuals because marriage is respectable, phenomena and married people honoured by the society and allow higher social status. The person would affect economically because he has to sell almost all of his property to get a wife. After marriage, the couples would expect to poverty and it would take them a longer time to recover.

The culture of the original ethnic groups of Shinasha is in danger of extinction due to influence of the formal education that is not supportive to their culture, and their exposure to modernization, influence of the others and their dominant culture in town, cities and even in rural areas. The problem of the vanishing traditions and customs is also a reality in the conduct of wedding ceremonies and rituals. According to elders many of the Shinasha wedding traditions and customs in today's generations are being influence by their neighbouring culture and tradition.

The Shinasha society was primarily monogamy though there were instances of men having a more than one wife at the same time. Traditionally, polygamy was allowable in Shinasha community, which is a state of having two wives. That is to get better social status. Even then, many people cannot support both their wives equally due to economic constraints. They tend to support only the one whom they favour most. This has usually created economic, social and psychological problem on the women who could not get the proper attention by her husband. In marriage, therefore, the community was exogamous. Endogamous marriage among the clan families lineage families were strongly and socially taboo in Shinasha. By way of pre-marital sex has become common, marriage often preceded by conception of child by the girls. Presently, divorce is also very common as compare to the distant past.

In religious holidays, such as *gebrel*, *bala-egzabihar*, *mariyam*, *Giyorgis*, the local people not allowed to engage any agricultural activities in the region. The church employed priests, evangelists, clerical staffs and executives. The priests and evangelists respected in the Shinasha society. *Orthodox* Christianity has found its deepest impact in the field of education for its pioneer church education among the study society since the last decades of the 19th century until the mid-20th century.

The land is the very fundamental social, political and economic possessions of the people in every nation-state. The Shinasha economy, which is mainly shifting agriculture, the majority of people is determined by on this sector for their livelihood and employment. Land as a resource has been a basic resource for agrarian societies.

The system of land and resource management was of crucial importance to the country's economic and social life, for besides determining questions of social class it was the basis of administration and taxation service. In Ethiopia in particular throughout history, the land has been one of the most highly valued assets of human society. Furthermore, the instructions according to which members of the society share and use land have evolved in agreement with changing economic and social relations. The variations of the rubrics on use and management of resources determined the destiny of natural resources Vis a visa economic progress of the society. This was the case among the Shinasha society. It was such alienation of peasants from land that worsened deforestation, hunting and other fundamental activities to sustain life. Hence, I suggest the need for a further in-depth study on the matter in study areas.

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Endnotes

The researcher kept the confidentiality of the selected key informant's names in most illustrations as per the interest of the informants of the research who prefer to stay confidential. Accordingly, Key informants interview results (age 60 and 58) conducted at Asosa on 15 July and (age 55 and 52) at Asosa on 18 July 2019.

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