

NEW YEAR FESTIVITY: GAARO/GAARI-WORO/ IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES IN AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF SHINASHA TRIBE IN NORTHWESTERN ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

Ethiopia is home to one of the oldest peoples in the world. Thus, Shinasha tribe is one of the ethnic groups of the people in Ethiopia, Africa continent, who are living in the State of Benishangul-Gumuz Region, Ethiopia. They have different cultural, economic and social practices that distinguish them from other ethnic groups of the region. This study aimed to assess and outline New Year festivity: *Gaaro* or *Gaaro-Woro* (in local language) among the Shinasha in historical perspectives. It attempted to analysis the festivals and festivity of the New Year, *Gaaro* and related cultural practices among the Shinasha tribe.

During various cultural activities and celebration, youths both boys and girls, children, men and women participate fully, and at times, they are the main actors in the festivals. Though some of these festivals are no longer celebrated with all ceremony and display with the advent of its traditions. Yet, there is persistence in the observances of some certain festivals in spite of social change brought about by the others influence in neighbouring areas and modernity. This paper, therefore, argues that despite the incursion of others influences, modernity and technology, there are still some adherents who through persistence have to continue till today the celebration of festivals like *Gaaro* and others. The paper will further enlighten on the outline of social units of Shinasha people. Finally, the study also highlights the geographic and ethnic settings of the people in the region are discussed as a case study

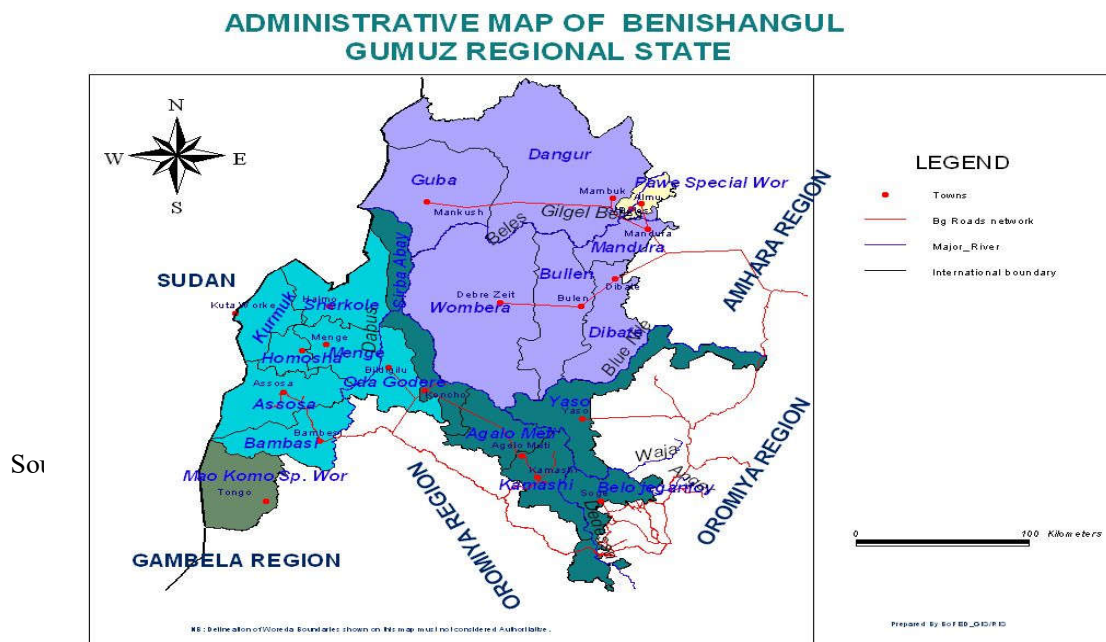
Keywords: Shinasha, Boro-shinasha, Boro, Festivals, Religion, Cultural Practice, New Year, Ethiopia, Meskel, *Damera* Celebration, Social Unit, Metekkel Administrative province, Assosa, Festivity, Modernity, Benishangul-Gumuz Region.

INTRODUCTION

THE BACKGROUND AND THE RATIONAL OF THE STUDY

The State of Benishangul-Gumuz Regional (BGRS) is one of the nine Federal Regions of Ethiopia situated in the western and northwestern part of the country. It shares boundaries in the northern and northeastern with Amhara region, in the east with Oromia region, in the south with Gambella region and in the west with Republic of Sudan (Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State Revised constitution, 2002).

Map1. A sketch Map of Study area



A paper presented on the Ninth Nations, Nationalities and People Day: August 2007).

Benishangul-Gumuz National Regional State (BGNRS) was carved from areas which had formed parts of Gojjam and Wollega Provinces to the north and south of the Blue Nile, respectively (Facts about Benishangul Gumuz Region (FABGR: 2007). The land mass of the region is estimated to be 50,380km² stretching 9°35" to 11°39"N latitude and longitudinally, from 34°20" to 36°30"E (FABGR: 2007).

The elevation of the region ranges from 580 to 2,731 meters above sea level. The highest peak is the Belaya plateau in Dangur Woreda, in the north of Metekkel Administrative Province. The lowest elevation is where the Blue Nile crosses the Ethio-Sudanese border, between Guba and Sirba Abbay Woredas. The majority of the region-about 75% - is lowland or *kola* (below 1,500 meters above sea level), 24% is Woyna dega (between 1,500 and 2,500 meters above sea level) and only 1% is highland

or *dega* (over 2,500 meter above sea level). Administratively, the State of Benishangul Gumuz region is divided into three Provinces (Metekkel Administrative, Assosa and Kamashi) and 20 Districts (ibid).

The State of Benishangul-Gumuz region has a few river basins among them, which cover most of the region, is *Abay* river also known as Nile basin. In addition, to this Dabus, Belese, Sherkole, etc...are also among the known basins of the region.

According to available sources in study area the state of Benishangul Gumuz region is the region where the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) formerly known as the *Millennium Dam* and sometimes referred to as *Hidase Dam*, on the Blue Nile River (*Abay* river) that has been under construction since 2011 (History and Culture of the Benishangul Gumuz People: A paper presented on the Ninth Nations, Nationalities and People Day: August, 2007). It is in the State of Benishangul-Gumuz Region of Ethiopia, about 15 km (9 mi) east of the border with Sudan. At 6,450 MW, the dam is the largest hydroelectric power plant in Africa, as well as the seventh largest in the world (FABGR: 2007), is started.

Based on the 2007 Census conducted by the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA), the Benishangul-Gumuz Region has a total population of 784,345, consisting of 398,655 men and 385,690 women; urban inhabitants number 105,926 or 13.51% of the population (CSA 2007).

The rationale of the study is that Festivals are celebrations of important events in every human society which bring together people from all treads of life. In Shinasha, festivals are observed by the adherents of the religious and social characters to mark important social and cultural events in the lives of the people and these culminate in series of performances, entertainments, rites and rituals. Through these festivals, the values and beliefs of the people are demonstrated, they give meaning to the social, cultural and religious life of the people celebrating them.

They are vital mainsprings in the job of the people's culture. However, generally speaking, some festivals are no longer celebrated to bring out the values in them. This is obvious that the practice of cultural events is declining rapidly particularly in the most areas of Shinasha inhabited localities in the region. So it needs the attention of all Shinasha individuals to do a good job and to promote *Gaaro* and to keep and preserve this incredibly rich cultural tradition of the people in the region.

ETHNIC SETTINGS OF THE PEOPLE IN STATE OF BENISHANGUL-GUMUZ REGION

The major ethnic composition of the region includes the Shinasha, Berta, Gumuz, Mao and Komo who are considered as indigenous ethnic groups in the State of Benishangul Gumuz region, Ethiopia. Linguistically, the main languages speaking in the region by the native tribes are the Shinasha, Berta, Gumuz, Mao and Komo. Much of the land in the region is abundant which makes it attractive to different settler community in addition to early inhabitants until recently. These include the Agaw, Oromo and Amhara who are settled in the region coming from different areas of Ethiopia at different periods. In addition, there are others like Wolayta, Hadiya, Kambata and Gurage who were brought to the region because of the resettlement program of the Military a government of Ethiopia in 1984/5 (Tsega, 2002a:2). Concerning religion, there are Orthodox Christians, Muslim, Protestant, Catholic and traditional religious believers in the State of Benishangul Gumuz region (Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia: 1994).

Concerning the resources like Minerals, Benishangul-Gumuz region rich in Gold and Marble. Thus, the region is more comfortable and suitable for Agricultural farming, mining etc. The region is also very rich in natural resources like Mango, gold, coffee, animal skins, civet and minerals. Mango, Marble and gold are largely obtained in the region. However, because of the physical features of the area, these resources like minerals are not effectively exploited and used. A region is a place where we can find a variety of animal species like elephants, giraffes, monkeys, lions, buffaloes, apes, ostriches and others (ibid).

Much of the land in State of Benishangul Gumuz Region, Northwestern Ethiopia is abundant which makes it attractive to different settler community (History and Culture of the Benishangul Gumuz People: A paper presented on the 9th Nations, Nationalities and People Day: August 2007). Most of the regions productive land is still not yet being used. Therefore, the existence of variable natural resources and fertility of the region, attracted different settlers coming at various times to settle in the regions in alongside with indigenous people of the region(Ibid).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

SOURCES: The study is based on primary and secondary sources. The primary sources have been obtained from informants and personal observations.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The data for this study were collected at Assosa, Bulen, Dibati, Dangur and Wombera districts in Metekkel Administrative Province. The data for this study were collected by qualitative data collecting methods. The primary data were collected through interviews with elders and observation of study areas. This research tools used, namely interview and observation (of traditional rites and festivals), made it possible to explore both the festivals and socio-cultural history of the people, which existed, mostly in oral tradition. In this sense, one of the contributions of this research lies in its role of rescuing the memory of the indigenous people. This effort becomes more relevant as the potential for losing this important aspect of the people's narrative history increases, with the older generation passing on from this life and the reality of the mainstream of the historical account coming from other sources. This study contributes to the scanty local scholarly material in this field of study, which, for some time now, has relied on non-indigenous sources, often, with their underlying assumptions and biases.

The data used in this study consisted of oral sources and written which were collected during a brief study tour of Metekkel Administrative province from the end of December to January 2018. Although it difficult to confidently to accept oral information as perfect, I carefully checked and counter-checked with secondary sources available different offices in State of Benishangul-Gumuz Region, Ethiopia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Introduction: Shinasha, Gumuz, Berta, Komo and Mao tribes are the indigenous ethnic groups of the State of Benishangul Gumuz region, Ethiopia. These ethnic groups have their own unique and typical features of languages, cultural entities, festivities, religion, a way of life and beliefs. So each tribal group is distinct from other in ethnic affinity and social practices. They have some salient features which make them unique. The cultural identification or way of living is still strong among them.

The State of Benishangul Gumuz Region curved out as the 9th States in Ethiopia since 1995, the state is famous for its rich socio-cultural, political and ethnical traits and traditions. The diversity of the People of Benishangul Gumuz Region, the unique divergence of the cultures, rich heritage and fertile resources and peaceful co-existence among each other grabs the attention of many people in the different parts of the country towards it.

Geographically, Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State(BGRS) was carved from areas which had formed parts of Gojjam and Wollega Provinces to the north and south of the Blue Nile, respectively (Facts about Benishangul Gumuz Region (FABGR: 2007). The land mass of the region is estimated to be 50,380km² stretching 9°35" to 11°39"N latitude and longitudinally, from 34°20" to 36°30"E (FABGR:

2007). The elevation of the region ranges from 580 to 2,731 meters above sea level. The highest peak is the Belaya plateau in Dangur district, in the north of Metekkel administrative province. The lowest elevation is where the Blue Nile crosses the Ethio-Sudanese border, between Guba and Sirba Abay districts. The majority of the region-about 75% - is lowland or *kola* (below 1,500 meters above sea level), 24% is Temperate or *Woyna dega* (between 1,500 and 2,500 meters above sea level) and only 1% is highland or *dega* (over 2,500 meters above sea level).

The climate of the region follows the mono-modal rainfall pattern characteristic of western Ethiopia, with the duration of the rains decreasing from South to North, and precipitation rates varying with altitude. With regard to the temperature, the lowest occurs in August while the maximum is in January. Administratively, the State of Benishangul Gumuz region is divided into three Administrative provinces (Metekkel, Assosa and Kamashi) and 20 Districts (ibid).

From ancient period to till the present day, the majority people of the region mainly depended upon the agriculture as their primary occupation. Because of the region geographical location, we can observe the practice of shifting cultivation and dry land cultivation. The Agriculture practice in the state mainly depends upon the rain-fed agriculture.

The same is true to Shinasha where the majority of the population generally inhabit in different ecological and geo-climatic conditions mostly western and northwestern parts of Ethiopia. In terms of language aspect, the Shinasha tribe is one of the Omotic speaking people living in Eastern Africa. In Ethiopia, Omotic speakers have occupied parts of the south, southwestern, western and northwestern Ethiopia for as long as recorded in history. Majority of Shinasha people are found mainly in Ethiopia but are spread of as far as the border of Sudan (Fazoghli Region). They seem to have been a part and parcel of the historical Gonga population who once lived on both sides of the Blue Nile (Abay) river in Ethiopia (Garretson, Peter. 1989. pp. 657-660). However, they were disintegrated due to population pressure in the 16th century A.D and expedition of Christian highland states forcefully pushed them to present locations (Abebe Ano: 2010).

In recent Ethiopia, beliefs, cultural practices and languages are using given due prominence for transmitting them to the new generation and nations are being motivated to do so. Thus, the outcome of doing this is to make positive impacts on promoting and up-grading the nation's cultural entities and putting a promoting start for future generations. Shinasha tribe is one of the earlier people, who are living in Africa in general and state Benishangul-Gumuz Region, Ethiopia in particular. They have their own, distinctive, and unique socio, cultural and political traits and traditions that distinguish them from others. As the case to the history of other tribes in the region, Shinasha people had all together had a different itinerary in State of Benishangul-Gumuz Region's socio-cultural and political history.

Agriculture is the main economic activity of the Shinasha. They produce crops like sorghum, millet, corn, pumpkins, cotton and others. In addition, they reared various animals like cattle, sheep and goats to please their need for food items like meat, milk and for the market. Furthermore, a small number of the society supplements their requirements by hunting wild animals and gathering fruits and roots. The Shinasha tribe have their own language, which they called *Borenona'a*. *Borenona'a* literally means the Boro-Shinasha language spoken in most western and Northwestern parts of the region (Abebe Ano: 2010).

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE SHINASHA

The Shinasha tribe have their own socio-economic and cultural practices that reflect their social and class distinctiveness from other people of the Ethiopia. That means in other words, they have their own culture, cosmology, belief system and language without any script until the last decade of the 20th century. However, recently they developed their own script. In shinasha societies, there is no rigid social stratification. Economically, they represent agriculturalist society (land shifting cultivators) in the borderland of western and northwestern Ethiopia. The year 1898 is a significant in the history of relations of Shinasha with Christian highland state and the central government in western and northwestern Ethiopia, particularly State of Benishangul-Gumuz Region. This was because since 1898, the Shinasha was normally incorporated part of the Centralized Ethiopian Empire State. They were a self-governing people till that period. They organized themselves under chieftains. Probably because for their self-defence from continuous excursions of the Christian highland state. The other possible reason was their bordering in the geographic location; their social unity in defending external powers and the ability to manipulate their culture of self-defense sustained their social unity until the last decade of the 19th century. Hence, it seems that in many aspects, the Shinasha tribe has been a self-autonomous conscious group having a feeling of being a distinct political community in the low lands of Western and Northwestern Ethiopia (Abebe Ano: 2010).

In Shinasha traditions, family is a universally recognized social institution, which may be described as the oldest human institution tracing back its antiquity. Shinasha as a tribe or community follow and prefer to live in a patriarchal family. This form of family system is the foremost and socially recognized among the Shinasha. According to the local traditions of the shinasha, the family is the most important basic social institution among the Shinasha society. The husband, wife (wives), children and grandchildren form the extended family. The head of the family is the husband. Infants and children has been taken looking for closely by the mother's (ibid).

According to available data in study areas a commune is also a very important social unit among the Shinasha tribe. Members of the same neighborhood seem to have ideally egalitarian in nature. The society believes that all people are, in principle, equal and should enjoy equal social and economic

rights and opportunity. It seems that based on such tradition they performed many activities together, *Dawa*, (labor sharing) initiated by individuals. Members of the commune most of the time, they pool their labor and shared closely in all aspects of the village life. They drink together, *Bore-Dawusa*, local shinasha traditional brew These traditions of the Shinasha still reminded in living memories of the elders. Thought, there is in the far-reaching change in many of the localities of the Shinasha communities recently due to the incursion of neighbouring ethnic groups, Modernity, science and technology.

As far as the social organization of Shinasha tribe is concerned oral informants states that clans basically lacked clearly defined territories. The Shinasha clans were mostly composed of different neighborhood members related by descent along patrilineal. Sub-clan is a symbol of identity for its members among the Shinasha tribe. Their locations were not limited to a single territorial area. It was uncommon to find the same sub-clans that occupied two or more discontinuous territorial areas. Due to this, villages become centers of identifications. Recently, the Shinasha village is usually though not exclusively, composed of the people of the same clan and /or sub-clan who claim a common patrilineal descent. The village identified with and belonged to these whose claim different patrilineal descent. In fact, the clan-units become more evident at a village level where members who traced their descent to common lineage lived. In a historical point of view, the pattern of residence could be considered as patrilocal since a genetic lineage members lived together during both pre and post marital period. It was among the inhabitants of the various adjacent villages and clan members that marriage relationships formed. Of course, this does not mean that marriage relationship among the inhabitants of discontinuous villages did not exist. The Shinasha society practiced marriage on the bases of clan exogamy (Plazikowsky-Brunner 1950:39, Abebe Ano 2010: 46-50).

Actually, the Shinasha tribe had distinct genealogies. Accordingly, there have been two major clans of the Shinasha tribe. These are the *Gongo* and *Do'o*. In view of that, the *Gongo* clan have been the largest clan consisted of a number of sub-clans. For instance, the *Gongo* major clan was divided into two major sub-clans. These were the *Endi* and *Ennoro* (*ibid*).

According to oral informants, like *Gongo* and *Do'o*, the *Endi* and *Ennoro* are the collective name. But here *Endi* clan is further sub-divided into the *Endiwo* and *Anifa* sub-clans. Again the *Enidwo* is which consisted of the following small clans: the *Karinawo*, *Wurna*, *Jirowa*, *Kerembya*, *Indshuyila*, *Muzeena*, *Jarona'a*, *Kunden*, *Bombina*, *Shopena*, *Wondara*, *Warna*, *Endefara*, *Endegosha*, *Ermasa*, *Assena*, *Neheyne*, *Kerena*, *Janegera*, *Jashana*, *Arbatsera*, *Almatseara* and *Kura* clans. Like that of the *Enidwo*, *Anifa* is collective name included the following sub-clans: the *Juwna* (*Danbi* & *Dashi Juwna*), *Shuna*, *Ambayea*, *Tulina*, *Zembandera*, *Shinesona* and *Auwsa*. Equally, the *Ennoro* clans constituted of the *Azina*, *Nashena*, *Satera*, *Aruna*, *Bukena*, *Gulena*, *Nashewara*, *Mandena*, *Gida*, *Bakera*, *Gusena*,

Wuriefa, Sasena, Genzena, Salena, Endoba and Shinasa clans (*Asasa, Woshara, Jabina and Dukana* clan)(Ibid). The Shinasha *Do'o* super clans consisted of the *Aujakela, Jundufia, Bouda, Awayema, Endemara, Moura, Gura, Autseara, Auchacha, Aumaka, Qolla, Augana, Audembera, Aushara, Aukosha, Mayena, Boyena and Achacha*(Ibid).

Thus, *Do'o, Endi* and *Ennoro* clans are till today considered to be the Shinasha ancestors and widely respected in the society and played a significant role in resolving disputes among the community. They are also responsible for performing traditional blessings and leading various rituals and ceremonies within Shinasha society (ibid). In local traditions of the shinasha tribe, however, those who were belonged to the same clan members did not make marriage relations with their clans. They considered making marriage among the same Shinasha clan is taboo. So, this means in other words it contributed to the division of the Shinasha tribe into different clans. In spite of this facts, there is no hierarchies of divisions among Shinasha society. They were an egalitarian society, where there is no social stratification among shinasha. However, recently there is radical changes took place in making marriage relations. This is due to attentions not given by youngster to count clans descent in order to make marriage relations with their own clan. It seems that due the influence of the so called modernization ideas and two lover youngsters (both Boy and girl) did not reveal request their parents to make marriage relations before making any kind of relationship between each other. Therefore, the actions led into violation of making marriage relation within the same clan is taboo.

A New Year Festival in Shinasha, *Gaari-woro/ Gaaro*, Time, Dates and Years in Historical Perspectives.

Introduction: What is *Gaaro /Gaari-woro/* in Shinasha? *Gaaro* is one of the prominent festivity among the Shinasha. It marked as the beginning of the New Year among the Shinasha Community. It is also one of the festivals celebrated in an impressive manner among Shinasha people in Ethiopia. Most Shinasha prepare a feast to welcome *Gaaro*: New Year. The individual Shinasha organizes a service on the eve where all members of Shinasha meet and celebrate the *Gaaro* throughout the year. *Gaaro* celebration has unique characteristics among these features without any sort of discrimination based on age and sex, all sections of the society, such as Men, women, youth and children together actively involved at the celebration. This celebration in the language of Shinasha called as *Gaari-woro* or *Gaaro* festival. Actual celebration held at the middle of September. This month is a time in which new crops items standing by for consumption by local people. The elders of the Community announced the beginning of the celebration at actual day celebration. The celebration took place at a special place called *Gaari-jaba*. This place is intentionally selected and blessed by elders from three Shinasha clans (*Endi, Ennoro and Do'o*). This place one blessed by these elders of the three clans is not easily changed year to year. It served as a permanent place for the celebration of *Gaaro*. The congregation also spares

a few moments to pray and show respect to the members of the Shinasha elders recalling their names who passed away in various years and announce the beginning of the New Year: *Gaari-woro*. They pray the Gaaro seeking blessing from God and offer thanksgiving for the past year and coming to New Year/*Gaari-woro* to be a happy, love, prosperity and peace and stability for the Country and youth, children's and the whole families among Shinasha and elsewhere. During the celebration, there is colourful cultural dance and songs of different expressions of events of the New Year. These have three different stages prior and aftermath of an actual day ceremony. The first started from the end of the month of July to eve of *Gaaro* actual day. The second from eve to until actual day celebration. The third stage since the actual day celebration until two-week aftermaths. In these various stages, different types of songs played with related to the New Year.

Phases and Celebration of *Gaaro*: New Year

In local traditions of the Shinasha preparation for the *Gaaro* festivals and their Rituals is launched prior to two months before, when community was begin to sense of taste new crop production and they marked as the period of the transforming from the seasons of darkness to the bright and prosperous year. Informants argue that the other activities performed pre-actual day celebration of *Gaaro* is cultural dance and songs for more than two months before the actual day. During this period immediately, preparations for the festival and songs and play in every Night till to the mid-night by a group of youngsters in round turn in front of Individual members of the house begins. The song has three type of stages or phases and songs used by who the group of males, females, youth and children gathered for singing. In the first stage which started at the end of the month of July until the eve of a celebration for the actual day. For instance, cabbage and pumpkin provided and tasted it. In this occasion, the song during this period used to express their feeling on new crop items for consumption. These type of song different from one local area to another in Shinasha inhabited localities. For example, in Dangur district and Wombera lowland areas (Kutan and Minjo local areas), the type of song in local language known as "*Eyaq (Eduick) Duba*" while in Bullen, Dibati and Wombera Highland areas the song called as "*Dalashé Duba*" and continued until the eve and actual day celebration (Addisu Adamie and Abebe Ano, 2007; 85-89).

The second type of song which is started from the actual day of celebration is called "*Gaari-Duba*". This type of song continued even aftermath of the celebration. During this period new arrived crop productions like Corn and related items. These crops tasted by individuals of the society after the blessing and praying to God conducted by selected three elders from *Do'o*, *Endi* and *Ennoro* clan of the Shinasha. The third type of song by members of the society after actual day celebration for one month continued. This type of cultural song in Dangur and Wombera (Kutan and Minjo local areas) is called "*Dalashé Duba*" in the local language of Shinasha while in Bulen, Dibati and Wombera highland

areas, the song called as “*Gichinge-duba*”. The theme of the song during this period revolves around the following issues. For instance, the “*New Year is arrived, The Dark period is passed, New Year arrives and Problems are solved, Our eye is brightened and We well come New year!*”(ibid).

There are the conditions in which individuals celebrate the festival in their own home based on their ability to provide refreshments to invite neighborhood and families like food and local drinks. One of the significant activity prior to the actual day of the festival is individual’s prepared 4-12 stick piece of wood that has been cut off from a tree which used for burning of edible new crop items like Corn and related crops. They are also standing stick of wood in front of the house. Then after wood burn off on September 26 in the evening. During this period, the major theme of song revolved around “Well come to New Year”. This celebration is known as “*Gaari-Ginda-Gada’a*” in the local language. At the same place, individual members of society gathered at one place and celebrate the ceremony.

At the day before of actual celebration on 16 September, at evening around 3:00 P.M the whole group of the community gathered at one selected place began to raise food and local drinks which locally called “*Bedi-Mesha*” or “*Chambo*” and “*Bori-Dawusa*” respectively. During this time initially, blessing performed by selected elders from three Shinasha clans. The elders pray to give thanks to God mentioning or saying. Thanks to God, who transferred us from the period of Darkness to light” and they also pray to their God saying thanks for his peaceful transfer to New Year. At the time of blessing, they drop a piece of local food, “*Bedi-Mesha*” and local drink, “*Bori-Dawusa*” on the ground. Then after they continued to consume provided local food and drink (Addisu Adamie and Abebe Ano, 2007; 85-89).

After returned to their home each individual Shinasha conducted similar ceremony by expressing their feeling of happiness and ambitions giving thanks to their God for his devotion to transfer them into New Year and they recalled their death forefathers name list. They consume provided food in a group. Another significant event took place at *Gaaro* celebration in the tradition of Shinasha is that conflicting parts or groups or individuals discussed and resolved their disputes or any sort of conflict among each other. Then after these groups enjoy and celebrate the ceremony together (ibid).

Next day, on 27 September, morning at 9:00 P.M, selected elders of the clan announced the actual beginning of ceremony by blessing and then after participants of the ceremony begun to celebrate the ceremonial by moving turn by turn into one’s individual house while they meet or arrived at one’s individual house there is especial greeting for expression of the New Year called “*Woro-Gawo* or *Woro-Bore*”, literary .meaning “Well come to New Year”. Thus, the youths have a habit of gathering at a friend’s house or a selected place at night of the eve of *Gaaro* and wait for midnight. The waiting period is filled with dancing, singing and related social issues like selecting a future partner. This gathering of

singing and dancing is called “*Gaari-Douba*” or “*Guache Douba*”. At times, the singing or the *Guache Douba* goes beyond midnight. The dancing and singing of *Gaaro* songs with the traditional drums accompanied by all types of Cultural musical instruments can be heard throughout the day (Addisu Adamie and Abebe Ano, 2007; 85-89).

It is recorded in history that in the remote past, the young boys and girls met each other at individual houses in which meeting held and exchanged their feelings of love and affection. In local traditions of the Shinasha, since the *Gaaro* and other related festivals are well-maintained as the affair of the whole community, the all sections of the community is particularly informed and involved. These trends continued until the actual day’s celebration took place. For actual day of festivity, Messages are sent to the various relatives, well-wishers, including friends and relatives far. However, for the people in nearby areas in which actual festivity of *Gaaro* conducted individuals could move by their own initiation accompanied by their relatives and families as a whole. A lot is done to announce the commencements of the festival (*ibid*).

Nowadays, the festival is preceded by Boro-Shinasha Development Association, Boro-Shinasha Nationality Council in various districts of the State of Benishangul-Gumuz region and some volunteer groups. Recently even invitation card sent to individuals in order to give it wide publicity. The *Gaari-Jaba* is cleaned and decorated in readiness for the festival. The various places have to be washed and cleaned including the symbols of the various cultural shows and local food as well as drinks.

Items for rituals are acquired foodstuffs, new crop products, local drink, *Bori-dawusa* and local cultural food, *Bori-Badi-Mesha*, are brought from members of the Shinasha community before the festival begins. This is known as the commencement of the *Gaaro* festival. This is marked as an actual celebration of New Year: *Gaaro/Gaari-woro* because the elders for blessing activities selected and ready for functionaries can wear clothes and cannot go the moment until the festival begins and announce festivity through blessing in front of the gathered people in *Gaari-Jaba*. The three elders selected from three clans only tie white cover, *Gabiya*, in the local language of Shinasha. All purchases and preparations must be done before the commencement of the festival. It is seen as a period in which they prepare varied and special meals, cultural food and drink for all. The Shinasha community far and near would come back to their relative homes. The young boy uses the occasion to acquire, girlfriend, new outfits and a new look. The same is true for young girls. During this period, they go about in their best cover and spend heavily before and during the festival. They heartily endure the cost because they know; they would be selected by their close boyfriend. They plait their hair in a traditional style called “*Baari-Tsengurwozya*,” in the local language (Addisu Adamie and Abebe Ano, 2007; 85-89).

Figure.1 Traditional Hairstyle of Shinasha girls during *Gaaro* celebration.



Source: adopted from Boro-shinasha Development Association Office

According to local informants New Year Celebrations, *Gaari-woro/Gaaro* in Shinasha tribe is great and exciting events. Mostly the New Year celebration or festivity frequently take place over several months and days. Important holidays in Shinasha besides to *Gaaro/Gaari-woro,/* includes such as “*Shaweya*” or “*Hundura*” in local language of Shinasha, *Ganaa* in Amharic and “*Gedya*” in local of Shinasha language, Timkat (in Amharic) which marks festivity and cultural expression of the people and the most colorful event of the year. For the instant, Christmas: “*Shaweya*” or “*Hundura*”, in the local language of Shinasha, *Ganaa* in Amharic is one of the most important among the festivals in Shinasha inhabited areas celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ (Abebe Ano: 2010).

Historically, traditions of the people reveal that the actual date in which Christmas was first celebrated in Shinasha is not well known. In this regard sources are scanty. It seems along traditions experienced among the people. The people have their own song or singing of Christmas songs and moving from one house to another sharing the Christmas spirit in actual celebration day. It is now a big event and awaited eagerly the whole year by the young, the old and the children. The government declares days holding for its celebration. Every year, the 23rd of December is kept aside for preparation, the 24th is the main celebration and the day of feasting (Addisu Adamie and Abebe Ano, 2007; 85-89).

Among these celebrations, which is celebrating in the month of September, is *Meskel* marks the finding of the True Cross in Christian tradition for Christian religious followers in which other ethnic groups celebrate and all together Shinasha society is also shared and celebrating in State of Benishangul-Gumuz region. For Shinasha society, *Gaaro*, New Year's last Day comes on September 26th, which coincides with Meskel, and marked as the end of the season of heavy rains and the beginning of spring (Abebe Ano 2010:62-63). As informants reveal that *Meskel*, is also observed and given great importance by the Churches of Christian to remember the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made for human beings. It is celebrated with feasts among Shinasha in line with *Gaaro* celebration. It is spent like a period of *Gaaro*. Many fast and pray on the occasion. 'Sacrament' or the Lord's Supper is prepared in each member of Shinasha individual houses. Singers and the elders who are worshippers of forefathers pray for seeking God to bless them after death.

During the process of the celebration of New Year, Artistic talents are utilized to the full, in form of art, music, drama and oral communication. Elders seize such occasions to solicit blessings. It is obvious that Festivals are both social and religious ways of implementing the values and beliefs of society.

There are various festivals of special importance in the collective life of the Shinasha. It is for the benefit and good of all as a whole because people in the society are not alone but as a being-in-relation. Festivals through its corporate rituals help to create peace and harmony in the society, to prevent war and other social disorder. During these various festivals, they offer a collective prayer for the peace of all and heterogeneous. These actions of praying and blessing performed by selecting the elders from the three the clans (Do'o, Endi and Ennoro clans) in any social occasions.

Apart from making people happy, the Gaaro festival serves some other purposes. They are occasions for moral sanctions against social and traditional conflict issues in bringing conflicting bodies into resolution during ceremony among the Shinasha society. There are a number of festivals celebrated to commemorate specific occasions in Shinasha history and, consequently, each of them was celebrated during the same period throughout Shinasha up till today. Therefore, Gaaro is also served as a catalyst for peace and unity among the people (ibid).

In other words, Gaaro celebration also realizes together the people as a group, thus strengthening their unity and cohesion among the Shinasha society. Written documents reveal that Gaaro festivity in State of Benishangul Gumuz region had highly and cordially celebrated holiday among Shinasha society as the whole. According to local traditions of the Shinasha tribe, the last actual day for Gaaro/Gaari-woro or Shinasha New Year is celebrated on September 26th. This is unique festival in Shinasha tribe in particular and state of Benishangul Gumuz Region in general because the holiday is celebrated in the

Middle of September (Meskerem) month at the special place where selected and blessed by the elders of the clan named in local language as Gaari-jaba (Addisu Adamie and Abebe Ano, 2007; 85-89).

The *Gaaro/Gaari-woro* celebration is also different from other holidays because it involves young women, men, girls and boys amazingly. During the ceremony, the young women, men, boys and girls participate in cultural dancing called *Gaicho*, in the local language. The preparation for celebration begins before three months of the actual holiday's celebration (Ibid). It is also marked as a turning point for the beginning of the New Year throughout Shinasha community in the state of Benishangul Gumuz Region in northwestern Ethiopia.

The festivity served as an instrument of transforming the cultural traditions and value to the next generation. The elders, women, men, youth (boy and girls) and children of the Shinasha tribe celebrate the holiday together and promote their culture and values of the people. It enables to resolve and understandable any conflicted social groups or individuals among the society. As the result, the conflicted groups consolidate their positive relation to each other. It created good opportunities for youth to select their future partner or friend for marriage. Moreover, at *Gaaro* celebration, elders pray for peace, health and prosperity of the society and the country as well (ibid).

During this occasion those Shinasha who live neighbouring each other form a group and arrange the day on which individual could meet and sing together. It is in the way the celebration took place for more than three months. During these processes the festival allows the youngster to select others for marriage. Throughout songs, youngsters make chains by putting their hands on each other's shoulders and make circles with two females sitting inside to produce and coordinate the songs and drum beats. It is this dance in the local language of the society as we already called *Gaicho*. Thus, the participants meet in the midnight and present songs in front of the house of members turn by turn until the final holiday's celebration on 26th of September and even continued for more than two weeks after the last day of the celebration (ibid).

Figure 2. Shows Cultural Dance of Shinasha during *Gaaro* celebration



Source. Abebe Ano and Addisu Adame. A Short history of Boro-Shinasha people and cultural values, Assosa, 2007 E.C.

The songs are accompanied and animated by their dance, *Gucho*. For *Gucho*, to take place, each participant puts his/her right hand on the right shoulder of the immediate person and move often making a circle. Two females sit inside the circle to produce songs and play the drum. So *Gaaro* celebration is one of honoured and celebrated among the Shinasha society. Actually, the celebration passed the different stages before it actual holiday celebration took place among the Shinasha society. The first stage in celebration launched at the end of July and continued until the day before the actual day (eve). The second one started from eve to until actual day celebration. The third stage of celebration started during the period of actual holidays until two weeks. The types of songs different based on the occasion of seasons of the period (Addisu Adamie and Abebe Ano, 2007; 85-89).

The holiday is cordially celebrated to wish a happy and prosperous New Year and to announce the beginning of harvesting seasons. On the holiday's ceremony, the youths, men and women sing a song which contains a poem of best wishes and the end of the dark seasons. They wish the New Year would be a year of bright for all sections of the society (ibid). The elders announced the so-called "Dark Age" or refer to the previous old year is passed and the bright future coming.

On the actual day of the ceremony which is known as locally as “*Gaare-gindie gada*” or in Amharic equivalent term is known as “*Damera*”. The people of the neighbourhood are gathered together at selected and distinct place called “*Gaari-jaba*”, contributing local cultural food known as “*Bori-Mesha*” in local language or “*Chimbo*” in Amharic term and local drink, *Bori-dawusa* with a kind of cup called as “*Wancha*” or “*Nawuro*” which contains local drinks called “*Bori-dawusa*”. It will be provided to selected elders from *Endi*, *Do’o*, and *Ennoro* clans at ceremony and it will be escorted with blessings, best wishes of New Year and will be followed by sacrificing of different cultural drinks and food and after all these participants of the holidays will be back to their homes(ibid).

After the celebration at Gaari-Jaba, most of the participants of the society returned back to their homes, the participants of the holiday will express their pray to the God of their fathers and grandfathers and concluded by eating the prepared food called *Bori-Mesha* or “*Chimbo*” on plate kind called “*Mesob*” or “*Maara*”. These process of praying is called as “*Mish k’iira*” in Shinasha language. Following these prying process, the group of people or families eat prepared food (ibid).

Written documents reveal that in Shinasha Community, the festival of Gaaro celebrated in two different ways. One is that celebrated by all of the people and it is called by the local language of Shinasha as “*Gaari-Ginde Ganado*”. This kind is celebrated at selected and blessed by elders of the society place called Gaari-jaba (ibid).

According to cultural beliefs of the Shinasha society, *Gaari-Jaba* is a place that could not change every year and time by anyone once it blessed and named as a place of public ceremony. So it served as a permanent meeting scared place for the people. At these place during the ceremony would be accompanied with blessings and begging’s of their God to give them a prosperous life, peace and security (Abebe Ano and Addisu Adame: 2007).

The elders among the group will magnify by splitting a local drink called “*Bori-dawusa*” and by dropping a piece of bread under the tree. At the next day, oxen will be sacrificed and the ceremony will stay for two weeks accompanied by cultural dance, *Gucho* with the participation of neighbourhoods (ibid).

The other one is held one month, after the celebration of the actual Gaaro ceremony and it takes place in wealth and rich people’s houses. The person who held the ceremony is going to be blessed by an elder after a rich person made stand on edge of a bed. According to the elder, this kind of ceremony, locally called as “*Gaari-dero*” or blessing the *Gaaro*, is not being celebrated nowadays among the Shinasha society (ibid).

Local informants justify that the Gaaro celebration of the actual day continued until on 28 September at the selected special place, “*Gaari-jaba*”. In the evening of this day, around 4:00 P.M. elders gathered at the ceremony and announce the closing end of the ceremony in that particular place. During this period, Elders giving thanks to their God by saying thanks to God, who brought us to New Year celebration let pray to God, for his New Year to be a year of peace, stability, love and prosperity and productive”. So by saying these elders announced the closing end of the ceremony.

In general, *Gaaro* celebration in Shinasha society, have two main salient characteristics. In the first place, the whole community gathered at one selected place, Gaaro-Jaba celebration took place. Secondly, the celebration ceremony started since the day before the actual day and continued post-actual day ceremony at least for two weeks. During this ceremony, individual family invite their relatives from remote and nearby areas and celebrate at their own houses. At the occasion, it provides different kind of edible food items, local drinks and results of new crop items. According to local informants and written documents portray that *Gaaro* celebration has multidimensional advantages and salient characteristics. Among these features.

- *Gaaro* enables them to transmit their cultures, norms and traditions to new generations.
- *Gaaro* enables Shinasha community especially elders, youth and children celebrate their festivity together. So advance the culture of tolerance and respect to each other.
- Conflicted individuals or groups succeed in order to resolve their disputes or differences at the ceremony and strengthened social, cohesion among each other.
- Enables opportunities for youth to look for their future life partner or friendship for marriage.
- Elders get an opportunity to thank giving to their God and bless, to make the country and community as the whole for peace, stability, love, health and prosperity.
- *Gaaro* served as a binding and unifying factor, a sign of tolerance, friendship, love and respect to each other among Shinasha communities and with other ethnic groups in the region. Since it invites other ethnic groups to exchange culture and celebrate together with Shinasha (Abebe Ano, 2010).

Figure 1. Traditional dance of Shinasha during *Gaaro* ceremony.



Informants state that *Gaaro* celebration has always been colourfully celebrated in all Shinasha inhabited cities, towns and villages every year. *Gaaro* one of the brightest festivals in Shinasha communities and its history goes back to many years back. *Gaaro* festival is therefore not a recent phenomenon. It has a long time proud history and tradition among Shinasha community. Informants from a study area state that *Gaaro* has a religious base and influence and background associated with Christianity and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo value. In fact, it has been an Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo major religious holiday in the name of *Meskel*. This time around, however, *Gaaro* is beyond new holiday; it has further transcended itself to include social, economic, touristic and more people to people transactions and more benefits to the areas and peoples that celebrate this historic New Year holiday. *Gaaro* has become a traditional festival where thousands of people get together every year and enjoy not only holiday festivity (New Year festivity) but also social festivity as well. As a result, people enjoy variety of artistic and musical traditions ones during this great holiday. This phenomenon has been colourfully demonstrated every year with strength and persistence in the city of State of Benishangul Gumuz region. Assosa, Manbuk, Dangur, GilgelBlesse, Debati, Bulen, Guba and Wombera in a rather special way. These cities are well known for its traditional hospitality with its turning mark history of the culture of tolerance and social relations like no other place. The Mentioned places are proud of its hospitable, hardworking and generous people.

During the Eve of *Gaaro*, villages with a special place called *Gaari-jaba*, was decorated with signals, shining lights. The *Gaaro-jaba* was full of all sections of society such as Women, Men, Young Boys, Girls and Children. There is modern and traditional music case shows with known artists putting musical variety to the delight of audiences who come to selected places in the cities, towns and villages from different parts of the region and everyone was dancing and singing mainly holding the famous “*Bore-Gina*” and drink local brew called “*Bori-dawusa*”. Everyone feel happy, no disturbance, no loss of anything; simply enjoyable and entertaining day and night until the eve and post-*Gaaro* festivity for the last more than two weeks. The eve was simply wonderful. A little late the same night, there followed a performance of firework for almost half an hour to the passion of the people. *Gaari-Jaba* looked like the city of hot super local dance’s and Music with that lightning and shinning colourful fireworks for a moment. Then the date of *Gaaro* arrived the next morning and as early as 3 P.M. and thousands headed to the very historic *Gaari-jaba* to celebrate “*Gaaro*” (Abebe Ano and Addisu Adame: 2007).

Informants in study areas state that the lightening of “*Gaaro*”, New Year ceremony was attended by the Elders during *Gaaro* festival to the delight of their reinforcements and they always want their participants to come every year. To your surprise, *Gaaro* festival in Cities, towns and villages of shinasha is organized by both elders and youth and children, joining hands in order to make it successful. What social tolerance! Keep it up! This noble tradition has continued and must be preserved for the next generation. *Gaaro* festivity is growing every year. It is expanding; it is becoming more and more like New Year festival without leaving its religious character. More and more all sections of the societies are coming every year and the new generation is gaining cultural traits of their ancestor’s every year. This is good for the cities, towns and villages of the regions of Benishangul-Gumuz and for its people; so, it should be encouraged.

Generally, *Gaaro* festivity in State of Benishangul Gumuz Region is growing and expanding every year. Likewise, the participants, guests and neighbours ethnic groups who come to celebrate from within the region with their family, friends and loved ones are increasing every year. What is truly amazing is that societies who are living with Shinasha side by side celebrate this grand festival together as one family making.

Gaaro truly social and cultural way of life beyond New Year festival; a binding and unifying factor, a sign of tolerance, friendship love and respect to each other among shinasha communities and with other ethnic groups in the region. The state of Benishangul Gumuz region kept this rich culture because Shinasha elders expected to teach the young generation about their rich culture, values, norms and traditions of the shinasha. So that, concerned individuals there share to promote this rich cultural values; therefore, they deserve our respect and admiration for their very valuable contribution in all aspects in that regard in State of Benishangul-Gumuz Region.

Summary and conclusion

The most important and the concern of this paper is *Gaaro/Gaari-woro/* in a historical point of view, is an important festival in the lives of Shinasha society. It is also one of great festivals of the Shinasha in Ethiopia. They are celebrating New Year, *Gaaro*, in every year. As far as the Shinasha identity is a concern the Shinasha is one of the ethnic groups in Ethiopia, State of Benishangul-Gumuz region, and their language family belongs to the Omotic language family jointly with other Gonga people in southwestern Ethiopia like Kafa, Sheka, Bosha and Anfilo. This is evidenced in writings of many scholars and literatures. Among these recent scholar, Hammarström, Harald revealed that “The Gonga or Kefoid languages belong to the Afro-Asiatic family and are spoken in Ethiopia. These days, the Kafacho (southwestern Ethiopia), Shekkacho (Southwestern Ethiopia), Boro Shinasha (Northwestern Ethiopia), Anfillo (Western Ethiopia) mainly are speakers of the language. The people were living together some 400 years before and because of different social, environmental, economic and political factors they disintegrated by migrating to their respective place of this time”(Hammarström, Harald, 2017). It is also one of the most ancient linguistic groups in southwestern and northwestern Ethiopia. Today, the majority of Shinasha live mostly in State of Benishangul-Gumuz Region, Administrative Province of Assosa and Metekkel as well as various parts of the countries regions today Western Wollega, Northeastern Wollega and in some localities of the former province of Gojjam present day in the State of Amhara.

They have their own various cultural festivities and ritual performance in various occasions, among these festivals, *Gaaro* is one of the prominent festival celebrating as the beginning of the New Year in Shinasha tribe. *Gaaro* celebration has always been colourfully celebrated in all Shinasha inhabited cities, towns and villages every year. From a historical point of view, *Gaaro* is one of the brightest festivals in shinasha communities and its history goes back to many years back. *Gaaro* festival is therefore not a recent phenomenon. It has a long time proud history transmitted from generation to generation and practice among Shinasha.

From all said above, the performance of the festival of the *Gaaro* and ancestor should be celebrated more with vigour by the adherents. The Shinasha people should continue to do all in their power to keep alive and restore the celebration of the annual festival, *Gaaro* celebration. The old enthusiasts should continue with the tasks of passing on the cultural values, the practices and performance pattern down to the younger members so that there would be continuity, conformity with the traditional values as a way of preserving the cultural values, identity and practices. This is because, through these festivals, we are able to preserve various traditions, culture and norms of the people.

The *Gaaro* and other festivals in the region should be opened up to become tourist attractions. So that it can also generate income for the state. Suitable programmes or knowledge of things to know about the various annual festivals should be given to all whenever the need arises. Above all the Culture and Tourism of Regional government of Benishangul-Gumuz should rise up more to its responsibilities to promote and enlighten all more about the cultural practice of the earlier people and preserve and maintain the identity of the culture of the ethnic groups in that part of the country.

The issue of *Gaaro* celebration among shinasha society is becoming the concern of all shinasha individuals to do a good job and to promote *Gaaro* and to keep and preserve this incredibly rich cultural tradition of the people. Here are some thoughts that may be added during the planning for *Gaaro* Celebration-government officials and non-government as well as shinasha community as a whole should be encouraged to continue the celebration every year.

The *Gaaro* festival should include national conferences, workshops focusing developmental endeavors of culture within the city of Assosa, Assosa University, The Boro-Shinasha Development Association and the Boro-Shinasha nationalities council as well as Benishangul-Gumuz Region Culture and Tourism Bureau and each shinasha inhabited districts may take the leading role in that regard-More and more cultural events should be included to those already in place to put more color to the events.

Non-government organizations and investors are also should be encouraged to come every year to celebrate this Impressive a New Year Festival, *Gaaro* and invest in Benishangul Gumuz region. Ethiopians from every corner should be invited to see and enjoy *Gaaro* celebration in Assosa, the capital city of Benishangul Gumuz region and various localities of Metekkel administrative province.

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