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Inventorying Intangible Cultural Heritages of the Ethiopian Somali People & Assessing their Values

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Abstract

Intangible Heritages are non- material cultural heritages that includes oral traditions; performing arts like music, dances; social practices, rituals and festive events; and knowledge and skills of people. Undoubtedly, nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia are very in intangible cultural heritages. In addition to their cultural values, intangible heritages have great economic cultural and academic significances. Albeit their importance, most parts of intangible cultural heritages in Ethiopia remains unstudied. Similarly the intangible cultural heritages of the Ethiopian Somali are not well studied. Therefore, this study was mainly conducted to inventorying the intangible cultural heritages of the Ethiopian Somali with particular focus on two selected woredas of the Ethiopian Somali Regional State. In this study, interview, observation and FGD (Focus Group Discussion) were utilized as data gathering instruments. Then the heritages are identified and documented using UNESCO format of inventorying intangible heritages. Accordingly, samples of intangible cultural heritages have been taken and documented based on the 2003 Convention of UNESCO which divided intangible heritages into four domains. The study result shows that Ethiopian Somalis are rich in intangible cultural heritages namely oral traditions, performed arts, social practice, global and natural knowledge and art knowledge. The heritages found in the study area are generally associated with historical, religious and cultural life of the society. Moreover, the study also reveals that the heritages have potentially great social, economic, cultural



and economic values. However, the heritages are not well utilized and preserved in order to ensure their transmission to the future generation.

Key Words; heritage, inventory, culture, Somali, intangible

Introduction

Heritage can be defined as any man made (both material and non-material) or natural objects that can be used, preserved and transmitted from generation to generation Munjeri (2004: 23). Broadly speaking, Heritage can be divided into cultural heritage and natural heritage. Cultural heritages can be seen as any man made material and non-material things by which the values, cultures, beliefs, and attitudes of the society are manifested as well as transmitted from one generation to the next. Natural heritages are heritages which are naturally made (available) and can serve as part of life of the community. It includes bio-diversities, mountains, rocks, etc. that attract human beings. Cultural heritages are divided into tangible and intangible heritages. Tangible cultural heritages are those cultural items which can be touched and observed. It is the material aspect of culture. Intangible cultural heritages are cultural heritages that include oral traditions; performing arts like music, dances; social practices, rituals and festive events; and knowledge and skills of people Van Zanten (2004:76). Therefore, this study only deals with the intangible cultural heritages of the Somali community.

Like other societies in the country, Somalis have their own unique cultures. And there are also several cultural heritages in the region of Somali which are both intangible and tangible. Regarding this, Teshager (2010:7) states that Somali community is rich in the makings of cultural heritage. Albeit these facts, the most parts of Ethiopian Somali's cultural heritages remains unstudied. As a result, the extent of heritage vulnerability to threats, their current status of preservation as well as their socio-economic and cultural values are not identified. In recent years, globalization and social transformation started to pose dangerous threats to the preservation of the cultural heritage based on oral transmission and traditional culture (Severo, 2010).

Therefore, the basic objective of the study is conducting inventory of intangible cultural heritages of the Ethiopian Somali People based on the sampled areas.

Review of Literature

The Concept of Heritage

No consensus has been reached among scholars on the meaning of the term heritage (Cameron, 2016: 177-190). It is now generally accepted that heritage may be contested and defined or appropriated differently by several groups. What is considered cultural heritage by one generation or group may be rejected by the next generation or another group (Aikawa, 2004:89). There is therefore no easy consensus on what constitutes heritage in a given context.



Basically, there are two competing views on heritages. The first view of the old concept which says heritage is what passed down to the existing generation and therefore, their resources (Nas, 2002; Aikawa, 2004). For them the current generation exploited the past experiences to shape their daily lives and identities. According to this view heritage is also serve to legitimize the current generation right ship or authority over what they considered belongs them.

On the other hand the supporters of the second view argue that heritage is what produced by human beings in their day to day activities to cope up with their natural environment (Aikawa, 2004:63). For this group heritage is not only what passed down by ancestors but also what is constantly and repeatedly produced and reproduced by the current generation too.

In this research, the definition of heritages given by UNESCO (2003) which consisted of the elements of the above mentioned two views is preferred. That is “Heritage can be defined as any man made (both material and non-material) or natural objects that can be used, preserved and transmitted from generation to generation” (Munjeri, 2004:142).

Heritage can be in the forms of material or spiritual. Material heritages are tangible which can be seen and touched. They can be movable or immovable. Spiritual heritages are what we cannot touch but see or hear. Music, song, dance, theatre, ritual performance, religious belief, wedding, mourning ceremonies, knowledge, art, artistic, language, expressions, morals, law, costumes and the likes are spiritual heritages (Hafstein, 2009:31). This paper is only focused on the intangible cultural heritages of the Ethiopian Somalis.

Heritage in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is a country endowed with diverse kinds of cultural and natural heritages (Levine, 2004:12). This diversity includes tangible and intangible heritage. It has both traditional and modern cultural expressions, languages, and centuries-old knowhow in handicraft production (Dudley, 2008:7). Ethiopia’s cultural industry is perhaps one of the oldest in the world and is exceptionally diverse (Karbo, 2013:190). The other intangible heritage of Ethiopia includes ceremonies, festivals, celebrations, rituals, and other living expressions (Levine, 2004: 24). There are eight cultural and natural heritage sites listed on UNESCO’S World Heritage Site. This certifies the outstanding universal value of Ethiopia’s heritage (UNESCO, 2015). In addition to this, three ritual and cultural practices of Ethiopia are designated World Heritage status (MoCT, 2017).

Its cultural landscape is further enhanced by the representation of numerous religions including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and other traditional religions (Jenkins, 2011:176). The peaceful coexistence of these religious communities for centuries is a testament to Ethiopia’s social cohesion. Moreover, Ethiopia is a land endowed with immense biodiversity (Barth, 1998). Safeguarding, harnessing and promoting these assets would enable Ethiopia to get international tourist influx for the socio-economic wellbeing of its people (Dudley, 2009:10-13).

1. Method

This research used both primary and secondary sources of data. As far as concerned with the delimitation of the study areas, two zones (i.e. Shinille and Jigjiga Zones) were selected systematically from the region of the Ethiopian Somali. Purposive sampling



technique was used to select 40 respondents from each zone based on criteria such as willingness, belongingness to Somali ethnic group, knowledge about the cultures of the Somali people, age and etc. The data were gathered through semi-structured interview, focus group discussion and non-participant observation. In the semi-structured interview, respondents were asked about the general attributes of social practices, traditional arts and other intangible heritages of the Ethiopian Somali People. Interviews were also conducted with experts and heads of Culture and Tourism Bureaus of the area.

Moreover, two focus group discussions were held from different background in both two selected zones. The focused group discussants were clan and religious leaders and elders. The focus group discussions were useful to acquire data related to the histories and functions of the identified cultural heritages of the Ethiopian Somalis.

Furthermore, non-participant observations were conducted to collect data particularly on the social (ritual) practices and performing arts. The non-participatory observations were conducted as the social practices and folk arts were naturally conducted by the local community. Inventory format of intangible cultural heritages prepared by UNESCO (2003) was used in documenting key data during observations.

Finally, the collected data was analyzed using qualitative technique of data analysis. Data was described, triangulated and redefined different views based on systematic grouping of variables and content analysis. Then, results are presented descriptively.

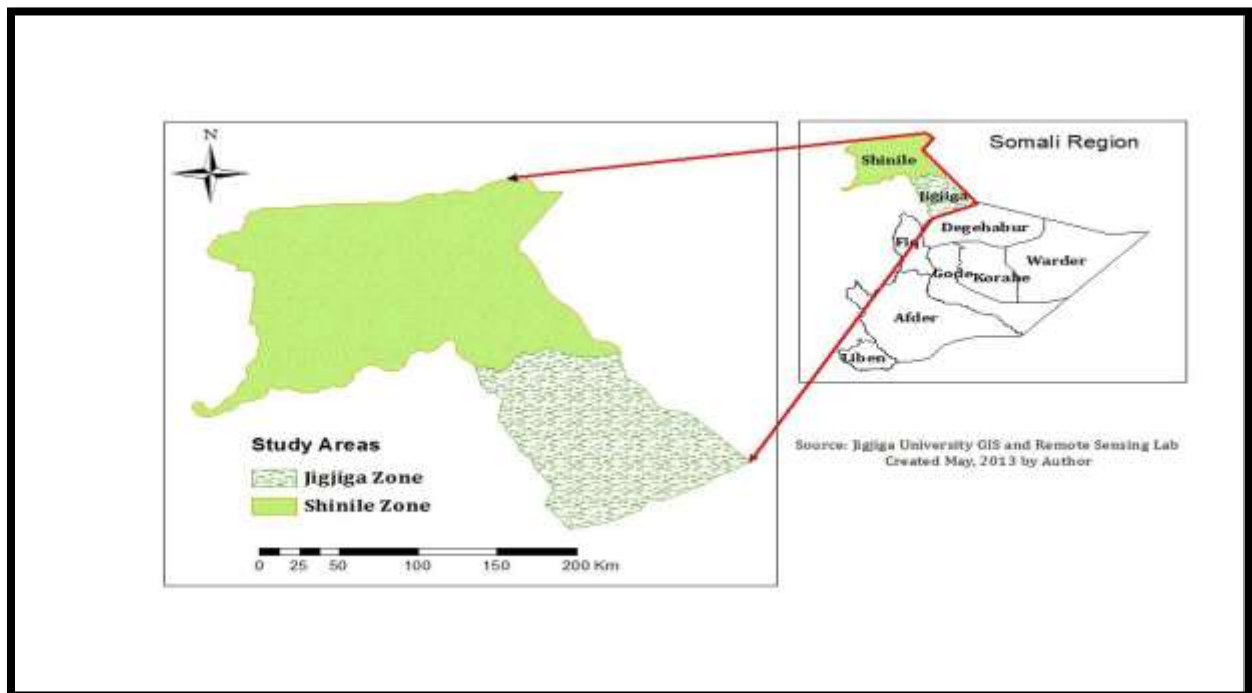


Figure 1 Map of the study area

3. Findings



The study has revealed numbers of intangible cultural heritages of the Ethiopian Somali People in the study areas. Accordingly, the data of intangible cultural heritages that have been identified and documented are presented with their photographs and their detail description in this part. Under the 2003 convention, UNESCO divided intangible cultural heritages into four domains, namely social practice, oral traditions, art knowledge and performed arts (Blake, 2008). The four domains have sub- categories. Sample was taken from each domain and summarized as follows.

3.1. Social Practices

The study shows that there are several socially practiced activities. Some are ritual while others are cultural. They have their own ruling system like kingdoms. There is also traditional way of selecting ruler of each clan within the community. There are several religious practices. There are some odd practices like fortune tellers. Some of the social practices identified as intangible cultural heritages of the Ethiopian Somali people are presented as follows.

A. Ritual Practice of “Qaadiiriya”

Qaadiiriya is methodologies in Islam followed by the handful groups in Somali community. It is practiced in many part of the region. Recently it has great position in some mosques in regional cities. The qadiiriya is types of ritual performed in especial night for every year. Group of the most young men make lines in front of each other and with chanting, shattering words and applauding. This qadiiriya is cultural heritage which was handed down from Sheik AbdikadirJilaani.

B. The Ritual Practice of Nuriyah

This is ritual or social practice is called the nuriyah or seyliciya and practiced widely in Somali community. Nuriya is performed almost centuries and still practiced recently. It associates with the narso (made up of the animal skin and wood-made vessel) and stick. Sticks collide and make pleasing sound.

C. Election Ceremony of Traditional Leaders

Elders are the most respected persons in entire Somali community. Each clan has its own clan leader. The system of selecting the leader has slightly difference in some areas. There are many things commonly shared throughout the Somali society. The process of selecting the leader (suldan) is called calemasaar. The process began with a big ceremony where all the people are invited. Leaders of other clans, government body, and all the clan elders are invited. Finally the elected sultan will be given a milk to drink (caanokushubid). The newly elected sultan has to be the same family descendent from the previous sultan. For instance he can either be the brother, son, uncle or aunt of the dead sultan.



Figure 2-Nuryiha practice



Figure3- election of clan leader

3.2. Oral Traditions

The Somali community has strong and developed oral traditions. Since the community is mostly semi-literate, most of their traditions exist in oral. There are strong stories, poems, and proverbs which are familiar. Commonly used oral poetry and proverbs are presented here.

A. Oral Poetry

The poems or *gabay* (*gabaygii loo tiriye haweenaysoomaali ah*) the oral expressions such as poems existing an immemorial time in the culture of Somali community and exist still. The poems could be for life, national, braves, mourning, love, and it also could be about the beautiful woman, horse and other properties. The following oral poetry for instance vividly shows believe of the society in fair and equal distribution of available resources.

Somali Poem

*Haddaymuraqageeduhugo 'aanmilayagaj
iilaalkaMahwiceelhaddii loo kacoo*

*MaalkukuarooroMattaanwaakaqaybasa
dtolkiiMidhawadaagaayeMagaabanaha
ddaanlaygasiin*

*Maax la
dhuranaayoMuskainaAffaydegonafला
Kamamiciinmoodo*

English Translation

If the best of pastures withers away during the dry season of the Jilaal and the herds, for their watering, if they are taken to a watering well, of reliability that is shared by clansmen who are of the same origin? Even a mouthful of it, if I am not given from early morning water, being taken by all to the encampment, where the son of



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Afayresides,of all the creaturesfor a
favor, I will never go.



3.3. Performing Arts

The study shows that there are many performed arts in the Ethiopian Somali culture. Dance is among the dominant performed art in the society with gender basis. There is also many other performed arts. For instance there are different traditional sports. Children of the community have also several art performances. In this area, there are around 3 counted performance which two of them are presented in summarized way.

A. Baranburka Dance of Somali Women

Whenever there is ceremony, Somalis women are known with their unique dance called baraanbur. As the above picture shows, two Somali women are performing the dance. The down part of the body particularly the waist is where this dance is played off. They shake their waist in very attractive way. A group of women will also accompany through clapping their hands and reciting melody verses for the marriage.

B. Hello Traditional Dances

The Heelo is another Somali traditional men dancing familiar around Shinle and jijiga zone. A group of Somali men along women play this kind of dance. Its motivational expressions are well known during conflicts and war moments. A group of men usually play this dance. They are all equipped with traditional cloth, sticks; knife (qolxad) which symbolizes brave man's equipment. During the play moment, they jump and frighten one another.



Figure 3- Baranburke dance



Figure 4- Hello dance

3.4. Art Knowledge



The community has a best artistic knowledge. They make their own house hold materials, their clothes, shoes, and house decorating materials which really attract the eyes. They make their own traditional house called Takul, which is movable from place to place. The people of Ethiopian Somali are also known for their knowledge of the art of making traditional shoes known as Jaan and their traditional painting. It is the traditional shoe which is made up of animal skin. The unique style and design used which does not cost is one of the characteristics of this shoes. Recently, majority of the society use the modern manufactured shoes .So, they consider a person wearing jaan shoes as back ward. Modernization has a great impact on this cultural heritage and the knowledge of making this shoe is almost disappearing. Moreover, the Somalis are also known for their art of making traditional coloring system called *geedkaasalka*. It is red color used to protect and decorate the utensils and housing materials. It is natural knowledge art which ancient Somali community used uniquely in the multi purposes. There is peculiar process to extract this color from the barks of the tree.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The study has revealed the existence of various intangible cultural heritages in Jigjiga and Shinille Zones. These heritages are particularly classified into five domains of heritages. Namely oral traditions, performed arts, social practice, global and natural knowledge art and art knowledge

4.1. The Economic, Cultural and Academic Values of the Heritages

The research shows that both the intangible cultural heritages found in the study area have potentially great social, cultural, economic and academic significances. Here, it is also important to understand that these heritages are generally associated with religious, cultural and historical backgrounds.

4.1.1 The Economic Values of Intangible Heritages of the study Area

Economically, the intangible heritages of the study area can be income generating devices by attracting both domestic and foreign tourists. More than 70% tourists of the world and about 40% tourists who arrived in Ethiopia have been attracted by intangible cultural heritages. And some of the religious and cultural ceremonies in Ethiopia are registered as intangible heritage of the world. This all implies that intangible cultural heritages have power to lure tourists.

However, the economic benefit that can be acquired from the heritages is not currently utilized. There are different obstacles that currently challenging economic utilization of the heritages. The tourism activity of the region is very cool and the resent conservation condition of most of the heritages is very poor. Secondly, the intangible cultural heritages found in the study area are not well promoted to bring them into the public awareness. Finally, lack of infrastructures and other services such as tourist accommodating hotels and recreational centers is another obstacle to actualize the potential economic values of the heritages. Therefore it is possible to utilize the potential economic values of the heritages found in the study area by tackling these obstacles.

4.1.2. Cultural and Educational Values of Intangible Heritages



Moreover, the heritages found in the study area have great cultural values. They are devices by which the values, beliefs traditions and cultures of the Ethiopian Somali People manifested. Therefore, these intangible cultural heritages found in the study area can be seen as symbols which represent the cultures of the region's people.

Furthermore, the heritages have also great academic values. This is to mean that these intangible cultural heritages can serve the academician (researchers) by providing firsthand information. The heritages consists of data about historical development of the sites, religious history and history of prominent religious teachers, the art of making cultural objects as well as cultural changes and continuities in the area. Therefore, these can be used as an input to social, cultural and historical researches.

5. Conclusion

The findings of the research reveal that the study area is endowed with various kinds of intangible cultural heritages. As pastoral and semi-literate society, most of their cultures and history are transmitted orally. Therefore, the intangible cultural heritages can be seen as depositories of the Ethiopian Somalis culture, traditions and history. They are non-material resources by which the Ethiopian Somalis expressed their own cultural identity.

The intangible cultural heritages found in the Ethiopian Somali Region include oral traditions, social activities, performing arts and art knowledge. These heritages have great potential values in terms of academic, economic and cultural areas. Academically, the intangible heritages of the area can be used as basic source of data to study the culture and history of the Ethiopian Somalis. Economically, the performing arts (folk dances) can be used as income generating devices by bringing them into public through different program like concert. However, these values are not yet utilized and preservation status of the heritages is currently under threats due to globalization and social transformation.

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