

An Assessment on the Marriage Practices Among Boro- Shinasha in Ethiopia

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Abstract

This study was conducted to understand the Marriage practices among Boro- Shinasha in Bullen Woreda, Metekel zone, Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, Ethiopia. To address this general objective of the study, the researcher focused on brief understanding of the marriage practice, types of marriage practice (its rationale and the process) among Boro-shinasha. The study was utilized the phenomenological design and ethnographic research approach with qualitative research method. The instruments of data collection used for this study were informant's interview, focus group discussion and document analysis. The sampling technique employed for the study was non-probability sampling; purposive sampling technique. Thus, findings of the study show that establishing marriage within clan and early marriage is prohibited, divorce is not recognized, there is huge amount of bride wealth provision for female couple families and five types of conducting marriage practices are practiced among boro-shinasha as well as all are conducted based on socio-cultural system of the ethnic group.. Therefore, the study recommended that all the stakeholders could be responsible to protect and promote their positive cultural values. However, the practice not go to beyond attitude and violate women human dignity effective and efficient awareness creation education should be provide on the strong and weak sides of practice among the community.

Keywords: Wi'rra, Ts'tsa, Puriyya, Naata' and Ji'yya

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Introduction

Religion and culture are two inseparable and inter-related elements that influence the day to day activities of people all over the world. Accordingly, most of the societal norms and values are often products of cultural and religious doctrines.¹ These two practices are reflected in different elements of people's everyday life such as in their mode of worship, marriage system, child rearing. Marriage is an age-long practice that unites a man and a woman together as husband and wife.² This study was conducted to understand the marriage practices of Boro-Shinasha in Bullen woreda Metekel zone benishangul-gumuz regional state, Ethiopia. So, as a way of addressing this objective, this study was explain the general background information on marriage system among Boro-Shinasha, discusses 'Naata' marriage practice as one among ways marriage practice and its rationale and the process of widowhood rites and inheritance. These are the major elements of this paper focuses on in marriage practice among the Boro-Shinasha.

General background information on marriage practice among Boro-Shinasha

Marriage is considered as an institution entered by individuals or couples who have power to lead their livelihood and their community. Hence, the community has a strong opinion that couples must be matured enough to enter into such a contract. As the key informants explained:

It is through our marriage rites that the adult world is entered, controlled, shaped and lived and it is the central institution that sets the tone for our whole society.³ Without marriage, we would be people without roots (like tree without root), without stability, and without responsibility.⁴ We would be little better than animals that breed promiscuously. This is why marriage is the concern of more than just the bride and the groom - it is the concern of the lineal families of both partners.⁵

Hence, the marriage institution among the Boro-Shinasha is mostly conducted and protected by their socio-cultural system. The traditional value of the Boro-Shinasha defines marriage to be exogamous and not to be conducted among the same clan members. The Boro-Shinasha has five traditional ways of marriages. These are *Wi'rra*; Betrothal, 'Ts'tsa' (elopement); *Naata* (inheritance) marriage, *Biqaa'*/*puriyya* (Abduction) and 'Ji'yya'; summary procedure marriages.⁶ This section gives brief information about the aforementioned marriage types

¹R. A. Shehu, etal, "Health Implications and Educational Media Strategies of Widowhood Practices in Niger State," *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences* 7(2):101-105, 2010 – ISSN- 1683-8831:P:102

² Ibid

³Key informant interview Information from elders (ages 65 and 74) conduct at Emanji on 10 January, 2015.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Addisu Adema, *Yeshinasha Tarikena Bahale*, 1992:23 unpublished and Wudessa Habte; "Nema: Traditional conflict resolution mechanism

and the detail of the 'Naata' (inheritance) marriage is provided below.

3.4.3.1. Marriage through *Wi'rra* (Betrothal)

Most of the time in the Boro-Shinasha community marriage through *Wi'rra* (betrothal) is considered as customs and rules. It is practiced largely in the community. So, *Wirra'*; Bethortal is a formal marriage mostly arranged by the parents of the bride and groom with a great deal of negotiation. Traditionally the groom's parents search a bride for their son. Before they make any contact with the bride's parents, the groom's parents research about the background of the girl by counting back to the seventh generations to make sure that the families are not related by blood. Once this has been done, the boy's parents contact the girl's parents through a mediator. The mediator goes to the home of the girl's parents and asks their daughter for marriage. The mediator will communicate with girl's parents on the issues and take the message to the boy's parents, and then arrange a date for both parents to meet at a mutually convenient location. When the parents have reached an agreement, the man and woman get engaged (Betrothed). The parents then set a wedding date and they meet all the wedding expenses. However, nowadays searching for girls is done by the boys themselves with their friends. It is also often based on the consent of both future spouses and their parents. Betrothal has bride wealth payment and as a result it usually believed to create strong social bonds that integrate the partners and their relatives.¹ So, the father and mother of boys encourage their sons to plow their own land and own property. This is aimed to let the boys own initial capital that will allow them to start a family by paying for the bride wealth payment. Hence, the boys have to actively engage in production and accumulation of property that will allow them to buy their own cattle, land and property at large. Moore (1988) explained that in African patriarchal society, marriage by bride wealth payment is the common types of marriage.² The amount of bride wealth payment in *Wi'rra*; betrothal marriage depends upon the wealth capacity of the boy and his families however there is the minimum requirements in the socio-cultural practices of the community.³ As to one elder informant at Dosh Kebele explained that in early period the bride wealth payment that was paid/ provided for the girls used to be three gold for ear and one gold necklace, suit for the father, dress for the mother in-law to be. Furthermore the man needs to provide ten (10) to thirty (30) kilograms of honey for local Beer, one (1) kilogram of Coffee, two (2) bars of Salt, 200 to 500 birr for Jewelry and blessing. But, now days the amount of bride wealth payment has become huge in amount. The minimum amount being eight (8) grams of gold to ear and thirteen (13) and maximum up to twenty six (26) gram gold to neck with full tuxedos and for bride parents fifty (50) kilo grams Honey for local Beer, two (2) up to four (4) kilo grams of Coffee, One Ox, two Bar Salts; 5000- 10,000 Birr for jewelry and blessing.

Dosh, Emanji and Banosh Kebeles elders' key informants explained that the bride wealth payment should be consumed with the relatives of the girls and other community by making the feast. They forwarded this as:

*In the community bride wealth payment has great value. So, the bride wealth payment paid for the girl parents is to make the feast in order to bless the bride and their relatives by their neighborhood and other community. This is the community believed that the voices of the relatives and other neighborhood has its contribution for the couples to establish stable and long lasting cherished relationship.*⁴

Again the other fact that '*Be'rre Danda*'; the bar of salt provided as bride wealth payment for blessing the brides should be shared between all the close relatives of the parents of girl after the wedding ceremony. This is because they believed that the voice of relatives has a great power to the newly married girls to live with their husband's in conducive and prosperous life.

3.4.3.2. Marriage through *Ts'tsa*; Elopement and *Puriyya*; Abduction

Ts'tsa is ways of marriage concluded by the consent of the brides and bridegroom secretly in Boro-shinasha. According to Abebe Ano and Addisu Adema the reason for such marriage are often conditions where by the two couples loved each other but when the family disregards their affair, or on those conditions whereby the family questions the economic status of the husband to be ...etc.⁵ The process of this marriage is concern; the key informants asserted that the condition of this form of marriage is informally the future male couple's deals with the behavior and family of the girls in very well manner as the girl is free relative (exogamous). Then inform for the woman who is accountable, confidential and close neighbor of the girl to ask and explain the condition of boy. In such away if the girl is revealed her consent like the boy she has to decide the date of meeting and discussion about their issues of marriage together and decided on the issues of tuxedos and Jewelry.

of the boro-sinasa people Northwest Ethiopia: challenges and prospects". MA thesis submitted to the school of graduate studies in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of master of art in peace and security studies AAU, 2010, PP: 34.

¹Wudsha Habte, 2010, P: 35.

²Meron Zeleke, "The Socio-Economic Role And Status Of Gumuz Women," MA thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in Social Anthropology, Addis Ababa university, 2005; p: 74.

³Addisu Adema, *Yeshinasha Tarikena Bahale*, Benishangule Gumuz Regional state, Metekel Zone, Bullen *Woreda*, Part One 1992.; P: 24. Unpublished

⁴Elders key informants interview results(age 69 and 74) conducted at Dosh Kebele on 5 January, (age 65 and 74) at Emanji Kebele on 10 January and (age 56 and 63) at Banosh Kebele on 2 February, 2015.

⁵Abebe Ano and Addisu Adema, 2015, p:106

Lastly, they decided the date; place and time of marriage. Thus, based on their decision the boy prepared all the tuxedos and Jewelry; and goes with his a few friends taken the girls to his house and marred. After this the family of boy sends elders to the parents of girls as the girls with them and in order to pay the bride wealth payments. In such way the *ts'tsa* marriage is conducted. So, like marriage through *Wi'rra* (Betrothal) it is also common form of marriage in Boro-shinasha.

As elders key informants from the study sites forwarded that Marriage through *Biqaa' / puriyya'*; Abduction is another form of marriage in Boro-Shinasha which is pro conflict and bloodshed among the couples family and clans. The factors for *puriyya/Biqaa'* are similar with marriage through *Ts'tsa* except its clandestine for girls and their families as well as no one considered the consent of girls.

Profoundly, the basic factors for such kind of marriage is the lack of economic capacity to pay the bride wealth payment. So, in such situation the friends of the boy cooperate with him to abduct the girl. After the abduction of the girls like Marriage through *Ts'tsa*; Elopement the family of the bridegroom sends elders with *Ts'tssa' Neheyya*; father of rituals to the family of girl's. The reasons for sending elders with *Ts'tssa Neheyya'*; to neutralize the condition of Abduction because *Tss'tsa' Neheyya'* in Boro-Shinasha community are highly respectful persons unless the parents of girls may be kill the elders which is sent by the family of boy's. Then if they accept the Elders; the elders communicate with the bride family and decided the date of meeting to together with the father of boys to pay all the requirements of marriages as their ability allows.

However, Marriage through *puriyya/Biqaa'*; Abduction among the Boro-Shinasha is on the way of elimination because of its serious impacts upon the couples and the community at large. Similarly; the same source revealed its impact still today resulted in reality the low enrollment rate of Boro-Shinasha female students in high schools and even in higher institutions.

3.4.3.3. Marriage through *Ji'yya*; Summary Procedure

This type of marriage takes place when the family of the boy decides to appeal to conclude marriage through *Ji'yya' / summary procedure* and it is usually appeal to the girls who already in Betrothal. As the elderly informants at Emanji *Kebele* discussed, the name of this form of marriage is derived from the stick of spear named as "*Ji'yya*" that the husbands places at the main entrance of the house of the bride's family. According to Bayissa and lemmessa (2004) the common factors that leading to appealing the '*Ji'yya*' is mostly the unduly extending date of marriage by the family of the bride against the interest of the boy and his families.¹

The process of marriage through "*Ji'yya*" starts with an instance where by the future husband together with his friends being accompanied by some members of his colleagues appear at the main gate of the family of the bride at the morning and wait until the door is opened. Then as soon as the door is open, they enter into the main house and sit at the kitchen as a way of signaling that they are begging for the good will of the parents of the girl. Unless there is sufficient cause to behave otherwise, the bride families will allow negotiation. Through "*Ji'yya*" marriage, the date of the wedding party tends to be arranged for a short period of time on an average of three to seven days. Therefore, except the marriage through *Wi'rra*; Betrothal the bride wealth payment depends on the economic capacity of the boy and their family. Marriage through '*puriyya'*; Abduction and '*Ji'yya'*; summary procedure are becoming less common in Boro-Shinasha because they are conflict oriented and resulted bloodsheds among the community. One common element to the different marriage types discussed above relates to the fact that the marriages should be strictly exogamous and endogamous marriage is not recognized.

4.1. 'Naata' Marriage practice among Boro- Shinasha

In socio-cultural practices of the Boro-Shinasha community, intra-clan marriage is not allowed and is defined as an incest marriage. When marriage is proposed, as a way of avoiding such intra clan marriages they have to count the blood trees up to seven bloodlines. Unless the marriage proposal could not be approved by *Tss'tsa' Neheyya'*²; the ritual fathers for the expected couples.³ The informants also revealed the reasons for banning intra-clan marriage among Boro- Shinasha community. First it is banned to avoid chances of giving birth to child with disability. Secondly intra clan marriage is believed to cause unwanted death within the family, and thirdly divorce is not recognized in the socio-cultural system of Boro-Shinasha.⁴ This is Establishing marriage within intra-clan is considered as taboo; '*Nuwaa*' in community. The informants expressed the results of intra-clan marriage as follows:

Children born among related couples cannot grow properly. Even, the couples are physically inflicted and they give birth to children child who has biological defects as lacking bone, being physically impaired and disabled. Even if they give birth to abnormal child, it will die at a very infant stage or

¹Wudesha Habte, 2010, P: 34.

²*Tss'tsa' Neheyya'* is an elders who make an oath of clearing the sin among the couples who are married within intra-clans or people who are killed each other. This is to create the harmonious relationship and stability among the society and not to revenge each other.

³Wodisha Habte, 2010, p: 34.

⁴Inheritors key informant interview result (age 39 and 48) and elders (age 69 and 74) at Dosh *Kebele* conduct on 5 January, 2015.

*later in his/her life.*¹

In case related people end up in marriage, they face extreme social ostracisation and the family and relatives of the two couples could no longer eat, live and drink together as usual unless they get divorced through *Tss'tsa' Neheyya* by performing the ritual of *Fala*². '*Fala*' is the ritual which the Boro-Shinasha conduct for the purification or cleaning of the couples from their taboo; '*Nuwaa*'. Hence, in the tradition of Boro-Shinasha community to purify marriage and to avoid the potential of harms that results from incest marriage, the community counts the bloodline of the couples up to seven generation before establishing marriage. Accordingly, Marriage is union of couples commit to one another with the hope of stable and lasting cherished socially recognized and approved relationship.³ A marital relationship usually involves some kind of contract either written or specified by tradition, which defines the partners' rights and responsibility to each other, their children, and relatives.⁴ The Community influence, social context and individual attitudes play a major role toward marriage (Barber 2004).⁵ Marriage is a universal practice that unites male and female in socially-recognized reproductive units (Murdock GP, 1949).⁶ Marriages have wide significance beyond reproduction and are a fundamental cornerstone for economic, social, and kinship networks.⁷ Thus, marriage is a remarkably essential occasion in the existence of women; in particular a compromise marriage is a greeting and salutation for security of women but a marriage by pressure is not good for women.⁸

The principle of marriage in Boro-Shinasha community complements with the confession of family law of Ethiopia which stated about marriage with consanguinity at Article (8) sub-article (1) ensures that Marriage between persons related by consanguinity in the direct line between ascendants and descendants is prohibited. The same article (8) sub article (2) stated that in the collateral line a man cannot conclude marriage with his sister or aunt; similarly, a woman cannot conclude marriage with her brother or uncle.

Polygamy is also common among the Boro-Shinasha community. The basic rationales for entering in to polygamous marriage are the need to have more children and the child sex preference whereby in those instances whereby the wives give birth mainly to female or male and vice versa. Another reason is when the former wife is unable to perform the household activities and when the family is economically advanced in wealth but not have children.⁹ Informants also expressed that divorce is rarely practiced among Boro-Shinasha because their socio-cultural system could not recognize and accept divorced couples. In connection to divorce in Boro-Shinasha the elders, inheritors and widows' key informants stated that:

Those divorced women and men are considered in the community as the individual who act unethical, irresponsible, those who are unable to perform the activities, and being those who lack social skill in social life. So, due to this social pressure the divorced couples stays for long period of time without remarriage.

Basically, this is most of time the community influenced the couples for the purpose of establishing socially and culturally stable community due to divorce is social problem that creates instability within the community but it is an inevitable. Divorce is one of social problem challenging family, which is the fabric of society but regardless of all efforts made by the family, community and state to protect marriage and it is unavoidable reality for many families in the world.¹⁰

Widows and widow inheritance is concern, Widows are women who have married and lost their husbands because of death. '*Naata*' marriage, widow Inheritance, is the customary way of marriage which refers to the remarriage of widows to their brother in-law or close male relatives of the late husband as well as the adopted person in the family. Widow inheritance can be practiced based on the socio-cultural practices of the society. In fact, '*Naata*' marriage practice is one of the different marriage systems among the Boro-Shinasha. The '*Naata*' marriage happens only when husbands die and there are widows to be inherited.¹¹ As key informants explained the Boro-Shinasha understanding of '*Naata*' marriage practice is:

¹Inheritors and elders key informant interview results conduct at Dosh Kebele on 5 January, 2015.

²*Fala* is the ritual that conducted for purification or cleaning of the couples from their taboo; '*Nuwaa*' while unknowingly marriage established among intra-clans in Boro-Shinasha community.

³Serkalem Bekele, "Divorce: Its cause and impact on the lives of divorced women and their children. Comparative study between Divorced and Intact families", MA thesis submitted to the graduate school of Addis Ababa university in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in social work in department of sociology, Addis Ababa University, 2006,p:10.

⁴Serkalem Bekele, 2006, p: 10.

⁵Johnson Janagan and Shyamala, "Widow Remarriage: A New Dimension of Social Change in India." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, ISSN 2250-3226 Volume 2, Number 3/ 2012, pp. 195-205, p:195.

⁶Walker S. R, etal, "Evolutionary History of Hunter-Gatherers Marriage Practices", *PLoS ONE* |www.plosone.org, April 2011 | Volume 6 | Issue 4 | e19066, p: 1.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Mina Uprety and Sikshya Adhikary, "Perceptions and Practices of Society towards single women in the context of Nepal", *Occasional Papers*, Vol 11, n.d, p: 246.

⁹key informants interview results age 69 and 74) conducted at Dosh Kebele on 5 January , (age 65 and 74) at Emanji Kebele on 10 January and (age 56 and 63) at Banosh Kebele on 2 February ,2015.

¹⁰Serkalem Bekele, 2006, p: 16.

¹¹Inheritors key informant Interview results (age 39, and 48) and elders (age, 69 and 74) at Dosh Kebele conducted on 5 January, 2015.

While individuals marry, there is the implicit agreement that this relationship will continue even after the death of the husbands. The man's families promise to carry on the marriage by caring for the wife and children in the event of the husband's death. This is a very consecrated part of Boro-Shinasha marriage. This is the reason for the families of the boys' and girls' families that the partners are properly selected and carefully pore over prior to any accord for marriage.¹

In socio-cultural practice of the Boro-Shinasha the death of husbands usually gives a way widows to 'Naata' marriage practice whereby they are often inherited by their brother in-laws or close relatives of late husbands.² The same discussants revealed that the closeness one has to the deceased husband; determine the potential inheritor and whether the younger or elder brother is preferred to inherit the widows. In those instances where the elder brother is dead the younger brother is the right person to inherit the widows' vice-versa. Historically, the oral accounts and informants revealed that 'Naata' marriage is experienced in Boro-Shinasha community for long period of time. In connection to 'Naata' marriage practice of Boro-Shinasha the husbands have marital rights over wives but caring for their children is the responsibilities of the enter families and relatives. Thus, after death of husbands the widows are inherited by their brother in-laws or close relatives of their late husbands. In those conditions where by their husbands do not have brothers or close male relatives, the widows are inherited by a person adopted by the deceased husbands' family. In socio-cultural practice of the community, children born of the inheritance are named after the first husband.³ This is justified as a way of keeping his name alive.

Basically; this naming of children fathers is applicable for those husbands who were deceased without giving birth.⁴ Widow Inheritance in some customs for example recognises what is known as "Levirate unions" by which the widows cohabit with brother in-law or other relative of their deceased husband.⁵ In case a new child is born out of this marriage, it is regarded as those of the deceased husbands.⁶ In these cultural settings, wives of the deceased are considered to be part of his property and hence widows could be inherited by somebody too older or younger than their son.⁷ The 'brother' who takes up the roles of their late husband is to be as inheritor⁸ and "..... the brother in-law relates to the widow as a substitute of their deceased husband" (Kirwen, M.C, 1979).⁹ 'Brother' in this context would be wider in meaning, brother of the deceased or a paternal first cousin or a clan cousin or an adopted stranger (Wilson, 1961, 120-122).¹⁰

This dominates practice among the Boro – Shinasha is similar to the numerous African cultures. Accordingly, Nyambedha and Aagaard-Hansen (2003) stated that among the Luo, a patrilineal ethnic group in western Kenya, husbands are the traditional breadwinners and the women and their children belonged to the entire kin group.¹¹ While the husband had sole matrimonial rights over the wife, their children were considered to belong to the entire community and socialization was its responsibility (Kayongo-Male and Onyango 1991:19).¹² Oke (2001:52) studying Yoruba people in Nigeria indicated that if a man dies without having a son, his belongings go to his brother or uncle, and his name is believed to have been lost.¹³ So, among Yoruba people having a male child is sacrosanct and the relevance of late husband's name is not lost. Thus, a woman may not inherit rather she could be inherited.¹⁴

4.2. Underlying principles and Justifications for 'Naata' marriage Practice

The 'Naata' practice is often justified in terms of the need to administer the property of the deceased man and the need to look after the widows and children of the deceased. Informants explained that 'Naata' marriage practice is a means by which the Boro-Shinasha community attempt to cope with death and its adverse socio-economic and psychological implications on widows. It is also believed to fill the gaps and check the disruptive

¹Elders key informant results (age 69 and 74) conducted at Dosh Kebele on 5 January , (age 65 and 74) at Emanji Kebele on 10 January and (age 56 and 63) at Banosh Kebele on 2 February ,2015.

²FGD widows discussants results conducted at Banosh Kebele conducted on 7 January; 2015.

³Inheritors key informants (age 39, and 48) conducted at Dosh on 5, (age 27, and 45) at Emanji on 10 January and (Age 29 and 52) at Banosh Kebeles on 2 February, 2015.

⁴Inheritors key informants (age 39, and 48) conducted at Dosh on 5, (age 27, and 45) at Emanji on 10 January and (Age 29 and 52) Banosh Kebeles on 2 February, 2015.

⁵Widow inheritance <http://lawschoolnerds.blogspot.com/2012/03/widow-inheritance.html> accessed on 5 December, 2014, p: 1.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Familusi O.O, "African Culture and the Status of Women: The Yoruba Example", *The Journal of Pan African Studies, university of Ibadan, Nigeria* ,vol.5, no.1, March 2012,p:301.

⁸Nyarwath, Oriare, "The Luo Care for Widow's (Lako) and contemporary challenges", Thought and Practices, *A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya.(PAK) New Series, Vol.4 No.1,2012.pp.91-110, p. 94- 95.*

⁹Nyarwath, Oriare,2012,p:95

¹⁰Nyarwath, Oriare,2012,p:95

¹¹Nyambedha Erick Otieno, "Change and Continuity in Kin-Based Support Systems for Widows and Orphans among the Luo in Western Kenya", *African Sociological Review*, 8, 1, 2004, pp.00-00.

¹² Nyambedha Erick Otieno, 2004.

¹³Familusi O.O, 2012, p: 301.

¹⁴Familusi O.O, 2012, p: 301.

consequences created by the death of a husband, for the provision of care and protection of the children, properties of the late husbands' and widows rather than its sexual purpose.¹ The participants of the FGD also revealed that in Boro-Shinasha community divorce is not recognized. Like this if widows are not remarried to the brother in-law or close male relatives of their late husband's they are not recognized not merely by the relatives of their late husband's but also in the community. The discussants put this as:

If we reject the 'Naata' marriage, People offend us by saying that women who could not prove their virtue of distress to their late husband's through widowhood rites and inheritance. People also refer to us as women who are living with Kalawaa²; sin and dirty. Again when the relatives of husband show disinterest to inherit widow the same connotation is given for them in the community. These issues lead us to be inherited.³

The practice of 'Naata' marriage is so central in the Boro-Shinasha that it is considered as an offence and taboo; *Nuwaa* to violate it in the community.⁴ Its violation is believed to bring serious misfortune among the family, children and wealth. However, in Boro-Shinasha socio-cultural practices of widowhood rites widows are not be forced and threatened to drink the water used to wash the dead body, and nor are they forced to abstain from sleep and food.⁵ The aforementioned rationales obliges widows to be submissive and to be inherited by brother in-laws with oath performed by the three elders from the major clans of Boro-Shinasha community to protect widows with their children as well as resources.⁶ This ensures to continue family stability by providing the inheritors to the widows of let passed roles and duties of a dead husband.

'Naata' marriage practice in Boro-Shinasha community is preferred for the care and development of children. Furthermore it is believed to maintain a strong bond among the primordial relatives of the family, sustaining and continuing the clan system that in return contributes to preserving the Boro-Shinasha community. Accordingly, widows in Nigeria are forced by tradition into a process of proving their virtue of grief. They must undergo extremely distressing rites such as drinking the water used to wash the dead body, abstain from sleep, food and health care.⁷ Widowhood practices in Imo state, restraining from taking care of one self and one's own personal hygiene and element of isolation of widow without movement at all-time could predispose the widow to overweight and cancer.⁸ Nwachukwu (1993) viewed a widow from the perspective of her troubles as a person who by certain circumstances living in distress life. Thus, to her a widow is one who finds herself in the middle of the ocean of life, and struggling to survive.⁹ Beside this, in the opinion of Goldman and Lord (1983) mourning and widowhood are opposite sides of the same coin with wide range of implications for those affected.¹⁰

The aim of 'Naata' marriage practice among the Boro-Shinasha is justified for its value to protect the socio-cultural value of the society in accordance with their surrounding communities: such as protecting widows from societal taboo, protecting children from violence, to increase the social bond between the partner families and their relatives, to have more children in those circumstances whereby the widows are at productive age.¹¹ The basic question raised here is what would happen if the widows marry other husbands after the death of their husband's? If widows marry other husbands by rejecting the 'Naata', this will be considered as having higher economic implications on the family of late husband's because the late husband and his families' were the ones who have paid the bride wealth during their wedding. Informants revealed these as:

During their initial marriage, the family of husbands has paid huge amount of bride wealth payment for the family of girls. So, if the widows are not remarried for their brother in-law or close relatives of the late husband's is economic crisis for the husbands' families. This is for the family of husbands losing widows means that losing the resources of their son in addition to the death that causes the pain for them.¹²

Furthermore, the participants of the FGD revealed that marriage of widows and other husbands creates the

¹FGD widows discussants results conducted at Banosh Kebele conducted on 7 January, 2015.

²*Kalawaa* is synonymous word for Sin in shinashagna language.

³Mixed FGD conducted with Widows and inheritors on 15 January, 2015

⁴The inheritors key informants interview results (Age 28 and 52) conducted at Banosh Kebele on 2 February, 2015.

⁵The FGD widows' discussants, inheritors and Elders key informants at Dosh Kebele conducted on 9 and 5, January, 2015.

⁶Elders key informants interview results (age, 69 and 74) at Dosh conducted on 5 February, 2015.

⁷United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women United Nations Economic Commission for Africa; Expert Group Meeting on good practices in legislation to address harmful practices against women United Nations Conference Centre Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 25 to 28 May 2009, P: 5.

⁸Nzewi, Esther, "Widowhood Practice: A female perspective, Paper Presented at a workshop, Widowhood practices in Imo State", Owerri, June 6-7, 1989.

⁹Oniye Olayinka Abdulraza, "Widowhood Practices in Nigeria and support Systems: Challenge to Counseling for National Integration", WIDOWHOOD%20PRACTICES%20IN%20NIGERIA%20AND%20SUPPORT%20SYSTEMS%3A%20CHALLENGE%20TO%20COUNSELLING%20FOR%20NATIONAL%20INTEGRATION%20Cpdf&category=web accessed on 12/4/ 2014.

¹⁰Ibid, accessed on 12/4/ 2014

¹¹Inheritors key informants (age 39, and 48) conducted at Dosh on 5, (age 27, and 45) at Emanji on 10 January and (Age 29 and 52) Banosh Kebeles on 2 February, 2015

¹²Ibid, conducted at Dosh; Emanji and Banosh Kebeles conducted on 5&10 January and on 2 February, 2015 respectively.

social disruptions due to children born from the previous marriage; the Children whether a son or a daughter born between the widows and their late husband's.¹ As the discussants forwarded, it can result in other marriage to occur between the husbands who married widows and the children of the widows.² Thus, no matter how the people rationalized the practices, widows' key informants expressed that the basic causes that leads the widows to be inherited by their brother in-law or close relatives of the late husbands are because of bride wealth payment paid for bride families during widows' marriage with late husbands.³ In view of that, Kayongo-Male and Onyango (1991:19) stated that in Luo community in western Kenya, marriage arrangement has its roots in the traditional marriage practices whereby the bride wealth payment upon marriage was the responsibility of husbands' family.⁴ As Nyambedha and Aagaard-Hansen cited in Nyambedha Erick Otieno further revealed, the Payment of bride wealth guaranteed children and their mothers the right to resources within the kin group and a place within the kinship structure.

4.3. The process of widowhood Rite and 'Naata' Marriage practice

Widowhood ritual is a customary burial rite and practice that is performed by widows and widowers starting from the death of husbands or wives up to mourning ceremony in accordance of their socio-cultural systems. The burial rite is socio-cultural practice performed by individuals in the community where the person has died from. Consequently, there are burial rite that is practiced by both widows and widowers when husbands or wives are dead. However, the extent of rite and mourning days are different between widows and widowers. Accordingly, when the wife is dead the "rite" performed by husbands or widowers are as follows:

When wives die, 'Barri Qutsa'; husbands should shack their face by using cloth, start crying and sit in front of house, shave their hair; and wear condolence cloth. If these burial rites are not performed by the widowers' the community believes that the evil spirits may attack the family and their children. Furthermore, failure to carry out the burial rite is believed to cause misfortunes in business in those instances whereby the families are engaged in farming or trade. In accordance with the socio-cultural practices of the Boro-Shinasha community, the widowers are not accepted and respected if they do not pass through the rites.⁵

However, for widowers there is no specific mourning period. In fact, widowers may remarry within short period of time after the death of their wife unlike widows. The reason mentioned is related to having a woman around to perform household activities.⁶

On the other hand the practices of the burial rite that are conducted by widows are different from widowers' when their husbands passed away. Consequently, the FGD widow discussants explained that the widows' rites as: *Initially, "Ts'ooole Beshi'beyya"; widows are expected to sit on the left sides of their husband's bed when the husbands struggle to die. They are expected to sit until husbands die, then after they pass away "Farri Gat'a"; twitting widows dress by the expected inheritors, "Farri Karcha"; wearing their dress to their waist, then widows round the house counting up to four by wearing their jacket. The widows also repeat rounding of the house when the corpse is taken to burial place. At this stage "Sheen Jesha"; widows lead in front of the corpse, widows necked white ribbon until the day of "shero"; the day of Holy Communion. Again, on the day of "shero" widows will repeat all the rites. Also widow could not be allowed to use cosmetic and not wear their usual jewelry until the day of tasker; mourning ceremony. Lastly, inheritance practice will be conducted on the day of 'tasker'; mourning.⁷*

The necessity of these burial rites in the Boro-Shinasha community is believed to protect the family from evil spirits and from death. Furthermore, it is part of fulfilling the cultural practices but not deliberately conducted for degrading the widows.⁸ Hence, the community considers the cultural practices, particularly burial rites and 'Naata' marriage practice as fixed entity and a cultural trait that cannot be changed because of the spiritual value it has and the fear of affliction to be caused by evil spirits that may attack the family. However, both widowers and widows can eat food and drink water before or while the corpse buried and at home.⁹

Every woman who lost their husbands must pass through the widowhood rites and inheritances whether they are at stage of productive or menopause, economically wealthy and different clan in Boro-Shinasha.¹⁰ As elder's informants and FGD participants asserted, widowhood rites and inheritance practice for widows is not defined and set by age, clan and economic status but rather it is socio-cultural practice of the Boro-Shinasha

¹FGD widows discussants, inheritors and Elders key informants conducted at Dosh Kebele conducted on 9 and 5, January 2015 respectively.

²FGD widows discussants, inheritors and Elders key informants conducted at Dosh Kebele conducted on 9 and 5, January 2015 respectively.

³Widows' key informants (age 29 and 41) conducted at Banosh Kebele on 25, January, 2015.

⁴Nyambedha Erick Otieno, 2004.

⁵FGD widows' discussants conducted at Banosh kebeles on 7 January, 2015.

⁶FGD widows' discussants results at three kebeles conducted at Banosh on 7, at Dosh on 9 & at Emanji kebeles on 13 January, 2015

⁷FGD conducted on 7,9 &13 January, 2015

⁸Inheritors key informants (age 27 and 45) conducted at Emanji Kebele on 10 January, 2015

⁹Inheritors key informants (age 27 and 45) conducted at Emanji Kebele on 10 January, 2015

¹⁰Mixed FGD conducted with Widows and inheritors on 15 January, 2015

which appeals to people from different walks for lives. Despite these facts, the irrefutable interesting issues in the process of the burial rituals in Boro- Shinasha community are the widows and widowers can equally eat food and drink water. This partially complements with the provision of human rights protection which is the right to food security at article 15 of the CESC and there is no sexual cleansing of widows by the professionals or elders who make oath of inheritance of widows to the inheritors.

The other inputs of this study revealed the existence of gender inequality in the widowhood rites and mourning periods between the widows and widowers in the Boro-Shinasha community. This is the mourning period for widowers are short and they can marry other wives within short period of time due to or for the purpose of domestic care and household activities. Thus, in this case women's responsibilities are attached to domestic care and household activities, and the widows experienced mourning period and widowhood rites until the celebration of mourning day, 'Tasker'. In the widowhood period the widows are not allowed to keep their personal hygiene and beauty as usual until the celebration of 'shero', Holy Communion and mourning of the late husbands.

In Boro-Shinasha community, the day of celebrating 'Tasker' mourning must be on Monday and officially widows are inherited to inheritors on Tuesday morning.¹ The reason for conducting 'Tasker'; ceremony of mourning on Monday is that the Boro- Shinasha believed that Monday is a day in which the spirits of dead people communicate with their creator (God).² Thus, the day, Monday is called as 'Mayye Awa' (the day which is the deceased people communicate with their creator).³ The mourning, 'Tasker' is a ceremony which is conducted six month up to one year after the death of husbands.⁴ It is also ceremony that the widows are inherited to their in-law publically with the presence of the parents of widows and their late husband's family as well as three elders from the major clans of Boro-Shinasha community; namely 'Endewaa', 'Enoraa' and 'Dowaa' clans.⁵ The three major clans would give the oath of inheritance and pass the inherited widows to the inheritors and given the mandate of administration of widows as their wives by taking due care of the resources of the late husbands and children.⁶ Likewise, "in Gumuz community inheritance of widowed women by their husband's brother or close male relatives is a common practice; in most cases unmarried brothers of her deceased husband inherit a woman. The inheritance has to wait until the *tasker* for the deceased is held. Part of the reason for such a pattern of levirate marriage in Gumuz community is for the security and wellbeing of the children if there are any".⁷

In socio-cultural practices of Boro-Shinasha, there is an idea of believing that if there is abusing and misusing of the dead Person resources, the spirits of dead person could not live in the tomb and not enter into heaven properly.⁸ Accordingly, the oral tradition and magazine entitled *Tuba Hagerachen Enwoqe* special publication *Tuba no.19* stated that the people believe that there is life after death.⁹ So, in due course if the late husband's has resources and was infertile or did not have children who are ready to administer his property, the elders who give the oath of inheritance warn that the resources must be preserved and protected until the children grow.¹⁰

Then, after these processes, the inheritors of widows do all the rituals and declare themselves as the husbands of widow, having received the oath of inheritance from the major clans by giving their *Gambaa*¹¹; trouser or shorts to the widows and the widows also declare themselves as the wife of inheritors with the "Gambaa" as night pillow.¹² However, widows' informants from the three *kebeles* revealed, if inheritors or widows could not agree on the inheritance, it is the right time for both of them to reveal their view during the widow inheritance process.¹³ If widows could not reflect consent and interest with the inheritors it is the right time to select other inheritors from their direct brother in-law or close male relatives of their late husband's in front of the elders. Hence, the chance of selecting the inheritors for widows are not merely restricted to the family but also discriminatory among the widows those who are at productive and menopause stages.¹⁴

Again, if the culturally recognized inheritors are unable to administer and manage the resources of their late brother or lack capacity to protect widows with their children they must inform for the elders as the widows to

¹Inheritors key informants (Age 29 and 52) conducted at Banosh *Kebele* conducted on 2 February, 2015.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Elders key informants results conducted at Dosh on 5 & at Emanji on 10 January and at Banosh *kebeles* on 2 February, 2015.

⁵Elder key informants conducted on 5 at Dosh & at Emanji 10 January and at Banosh *kebeles* on 2 February, 2015.

⁶Ibid, conducted on 5 & 10 January and on 2 February, 2015 respectively

⁷ Meron Zeleke, 2005, P: 70.

⁸Supra note.260, conducted on 5 & 10 January and on 2 February, 2015 respectively

⁹*Tuba Hagerachen Enwoqe; Magazine special publication Tuba no. 19; November, 2007:47.*

¹⁰Supra note.262, conducted on 5 & 10 January and on 2 February, 2015 respectively.

¹¹*Gambaa* is the cloths such as tourtner or shorts that the inheritors give for widows to declare themselves as who replace the role of late husband's.

¹²Mixed FGD conducted with Widows and inheritors on 15 January,2015

¹³Inheritors key informants (Age 29 and 52) conducted at Banosh *Kebele* conducted on 2 February, 2015.

¹⁴Ibid conducted on 2 February ,2015

choose other inheritors from their remaining brothers by giving two *Birr*(2ETB) for widow's.¹ The reason behind giving *Birr* is to indicate their inability to administer and manage the resources of their late brothers' and widows with their children to be free from sin.² These all practices were done when the late husbands could not be requested the inheritors of widows before their death.³

Therefore, in Boro-Shinasha socio-cultural practices there is the possibility of the husbands to give their consent of bequest for their elder or younger brothers who have power to help and manage their wives, property and children when they are seriously sick and near to death.⁴ In such case the inheritance practice were made symbolically and widows were given for the bequested inheritors by their husbands.⁵ Accordingly, Mbote Kameri stated that the hallmark of African customary law is the dominance of male members over property and lives of women and their juniors and the centralities of the family as opposed to the individual and the definition of the family in expansive terms may include the ascendants and descendants and more than one wife in polygamous union.⁶ The informants expressed that widowhood rites and widow inheritance is free from any beliefs and religious affections rather than the cultural practices of Boro-Shinasha.⁷

Despite the fact that, however the process and criteria of widowhood ritual and widow inheritance in Boro-Shinasha indicated that as it has relation with the traditional religious beliefs which related with the Old Testament revelations that stated providing scarification to God for the forgiveness of their sin through slaughtering animals.⁸ Furthermore the widows' inheritance marriage practices can be reaffirmed in Bible which was established between Boeth and Ruth.⁹

'*Naata*' marriage practice is actively put into effect within the community because is part of Boro-Shinasha culture that the community applied to cope up with the sever impacts of death and to protect the widows from wildness feeling, depression and caring and protecting the children of the deceased husbands.¹⁰ However, informants expressed that there are some factors that are contributing towards its decline such as awareness rising by different stakeholders, education on customary practice, and HIV/AIDS, health and environment protection and religious teachings, occasionally by state and non- state actors, and religious leaders.¹¹

Conclusion

This study deals with understanding the Marriage practices among Boro-Shinasha in Bullen Woreda, Metekel zone, Benishangul-Gumuz regional state, Ethiopia. To address this general objective of the study, the researcher focused on brief understanding of the marriage practice, '*Naata*' marriage practice, its rationale and the process of widowhood rites and inheritance among Boro-shinasha.

The finding of the study has shown that establishing marriage within clan and early marriage is prohibited in Boro-Shinasha socio-cultural practices. This complements with the human rights provisions which stated as marriage through consanguinity and age before eighteen is prohibited in various instruments of human rights such as CEDAW at article (16(2)), ICCPR at article (23(2)), ACRWC at article (6(b)), FDRE and Benishangule-Gumuz regional state family laws article (7/1) and article (27)) stated that a man and a woman who are not attained full age of eighteen years shall not conclude marriages. Another finding of the study is that divorce is not recognized in socio-cultural system of the Boro-Shinasha except marriage established within the clan.

The study has also found out that '*Naata*' marriage practices in Boro-Shinasha community is conducted based on socio-cultural pressures forcing widows to be inherited by their brother in-laws or close male relatives as well as the adopted person in the family. Another finding of the study is that widowhood burial rites are inclusive for widowers and widows but the celebration lasts longer for widows than widowers. Based on the analysis of this study, the researcher recommends that Boro-Shinasha and other stakeholders could be responsible to protect and promote their positive cultural values among the community and other surrounding. However, the practice not go to beyond attitude and violate women human dignity effective and efficient awareness creation education could be provided on the strong and weak sides of practice among the community.

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⁸Leviticus 1: 1-17

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