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ARTICLE

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Full Length Research Paper

Census through riddle: the Case of Waliso Liban Oromo, Ethiopia

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The paper examines a special type of riddle, called 'hibbantee' used for census, among the Oromo in Ethiopia with particular attention to the Waliso Oromo. The practice is one of the ways of providing information on basic statistics of the population within certain geographical boundaries. It is performed as part of verbal games, specific riddles with its own peculiar formula. Primary data were generated from the area through observation, key informant interview and FGD. The findings of this work indicate that as part of oral literature in general and riddle in particular hibbantee has aesthetic, educational and entrainment values; it enhances competence skills, observational skills, normative skills, memory skills, and entertainment skills.

Key words: Riddle, Hibbantee, Oromo, Waliso, census.

INTRODUCTION

Riddles

Riddle is one of the genres of the short form in the study of folklore (Finnegan, 1970; Nijoroge, 1994, p. 54; Tucker 2008). Finnegan (1992, p. 128) indicates that in the study of folklore scholars are interested in categorization, which has led to the concept genres. The evolutionary perspective classifies oral arts in terms of history and origin. Different version of evolutionary approach is repeated by Marxian studies which revolve around different levels of mode of production and pertinent ideological and cultural elements. Structural functionalism focused on the functions of oral literature compared to their forms and contents. For this perspective oral literature contributes in maintaining the status quo. The psychological perspective focuses on the cognitive structure as a basis of oral literature. The historical-

geographical perspective on the other hand is interested in cross-cultural studies of categories with special attention to contents with their various subdivisions in terms of plot, actors or motifs. Structuralism emphasizes types of narrative in terms of their structure. This approach is highly interested in formation of certain taxonomies which have served them for their scientific collections and studies. Finnegan (1992, p. 129) further discusses the importance of the ethnographic perspective, which stresses cultural specificity and the importance of building on local classifications and experience rather than outsiders' categories. The author, of course indicates that this approach too has its own shortcomings for there may not be a fully consistent or clear local classification. In addition, even in the presence of clear classifications some of the oral arts can be pervasive and may not surface in local terms. Thus, the use of

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conventional terms for the consumption of scientific community is also important.

For this article the ethnographic approach, which focuses on the text and context provides theoretical framework. However, to avert any shortfall of this approach and in response to the current global cultural links the paper attempts to use the perspective of intersectionality which provides an interpretive platform based on text and context.

Some studies pertinent to the current study provide certain categories of riddle. The categories are important to establish a benchmark for comparing the results of this study with other findings.

Riddles are among the genres of oral literature prevalent in different parts of the world. Scholars like Finnegan (1970), Abrahams and Dundes (1972), Nijoroge (1984) and Tucker (2008) indicate that riddles are common oral art that serve important educational and recreational roles. Yet, neither riddles are of same type or serve the same purpose across the globe. In this regard, Tucker (2008) indicates that riddles vary in styles. Citing Simon, Tucker indicates that riddles are categorized into riddle-jokes and which are not. The first refers to riddle parodies that emphasize humor than guessing to identify a referent, which is enigmatically represented. The second refers to riddles, which demanding to identify a certain referent, coined based on the similarities between the symbolic representation and the referent in color, character, shape, size, structure, co-existence, etc. Still Danielle (cited in Tucker, 2008) discusses riddles as verbal and nonverbal. In terms of structure it is also possible to categorize riddle into rhyming and non-rhyming (Opie cited in Tucker, 2008; Dejene, 2014a). Riddles can be also categorized in terms of their level of difficulties. Some are simple and a kind of descriptive question without any intention to confuse the guesser who is not mature enough to face the complexity of the riddle. The riddle “what is brown and round and it gets leaves on it” can be an example. The answer is a tree. Brian Sutton-Smith (cited in Tucker, 2008, p. 24) labels such a riddle as pre-riddle. Riddles can be also used to surprise or embarrass the respondent; for instance, a riddle “what do virgins eat for breakfast?” is an example of this sort. Tucker calls these kinds of riddles catchy. The respondent can be possibly caught that she is not virgin. Still puzzles are very much related to riddles. Puzzles mainly present problems to be solved. This author further discusses that there are also catchy riddles, which do not require numerical or logical solutions, but demand clear understanding of the questions. For instance, the puzzle ‘if a cock lays a golden egg on a border line between Ethiopia and Kenya, to whom does the egg belong?’ is a tricky question, for the answer is in the question itself. It is neither of the two countries, for a cock does not lay an egg. Pertinent to this, Abraham and Dundes (1972) divide puzzles into riddles and reverse riddles. The first forwards a problem

to be solved, whereas the second is a riddle in which the respondent is told the answer and asked the how of it.

Tamene (2002) categorizes riddles among the Oromo into two—*hibboo* and *hibbantee*. The first is a kind of riddle commonly prevalent across the cultures. *Hibboo* among the Oromo is shaped based on enigmatic representation and use of analogy. Items of riddles are chosen based on similarities of shape, size, color, structure, etc with the referent (Dejene, 2014a). On the other hand, *hibbantee* is a kind of Oromo lesson on statistics focusing on population census (the term refers to a sort of demographic survey done at local level in cultural context of the study area) (Tamene, 2002, p. 81). The way it is structured is also different from *hibboo*. *Hibboo* uses different analogies for different representations, whereas *hibbantee* uses similar and few words throughout. According to Tamene (2002) children ask one another the number of persons in a household of their village. In the riddle representative terms are: *abbaa warraa*, *hadha warraa*, *jibbootii*, *raaddeen*, *dullootii*. These words are Oromo words that stand for husband, wife, young bulls (male calves), young heifers (female calves), and old cattle. Tamene (2002) shows that these terms are not used in their derogatory senses. Particularly, the term old cattle have different meanings in other cultures, like German. Here it means simply old lady. The phrase ‘old cattle’ is not comparable with the German ‘Alte Kuh—Old Cow, which is infamous insult.

Brief description of the study area

This study focuses on the Waliso Liiban Oromo (the Oromo are one of the Cushitic groups, inhabit Ethiopia and northern Kenya and majority in the Ethiopian territory) who are one of the many sub-moieties of the Macha moiety. Literatures indicate that Macha dominate western and south western part of Oromia National Regional State, which is one of the federal units of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (Dejene, 2007; Mohammed, 1999; Knutsson, 1967, p. 34).

The Waliso have *gadaa* system. *Gadaa* system is a system of classes (*luba*) that succeed each other every eight years in assuming military, economic, political, and ritual responsibilities. Each class remains in power during a specific term (*gadaa*) which begins and ends with a formal power transfer ceremony (Asmarom, 1973). This system is a living institution, with multifaceted economic, social and political responsibilities in different parts of Oromo land. The system requires that every male member of the Oromo has to pass through different *gadaa* grades in his life time; each group is promoted to the next stage every eight years. Accordingly, the class which assumes political power needs to pass through different pre-*gadaa* grades. Regardless of certain amendments in the face of the ever changing world owing to internal and external factors, *gadaa* has been

operating uninterrupted since distant past among the Waliso (Dejene, 2014b; 2007). The prevalence of the system has contributed to the survival of other pertinent cultural elements and practices.

Rationale of the study

The Waliso have rich oral traditions, which can be seen in this particular cultural framework of the Oromo. This paper gives attention to riddles as one way of doing census. Oral literature of the Oromo has been studied by different scholars. Tadesse (2000) discusses the riddles of number nine among the Guji Oromo. Tesema (2002) presents Oromo traditional songs of various types, focusing on Oromo of the western part of Oromia, particularly in Wollega. Shongolo (2002) presents Borana blessings and prayers. Similarly, Shongolo and Gunther (2007) describe Borana proverbs in their cultural contexts. Sumner (1994) discusses Oromo oral literature and its philosophical foundations. Pertinent to the present study, recently, Dejene (2014a) discusses riddles among the Waliso. The work of Tamene (2002) is more appealing in this regard. He studied riddles among the Oromo. In his work Tamene divides riddles into *hiibbantee* and *hiibboo*. He translated *hiibbantee* as a kind of Oromo lesson on statistics and *hiibboo* as a proper riddle. Tamene provides the classification and directed his discussion to *hiibboo*. The works of Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau are also worth mentioning. Several volumes have been published on different oral genres. Yet, these few works among others have not focused on how the Oromo use riddles for the purpose of census. Thus, this paper attempts to address *hiibbantee*, with its peculiarity as one version of *hiibboo*, to fill the prevailing research gap.

The paper attempts to respond the following questions: 'How *hiibbantee* is structured and played?' 'What are the roles of *hiibbantee* as part of oral literature?' 'What are the changes and continuities of *hiibbantee*?'

METHOD

Ethnographic research strategy was used for this paper. Sources of the data were primary ones. As many riddles of different kinds and puzzles as possible were collected from children and adults during April 2013 field work.

Observations of actual practices were done at two households. Children of different ages participated in riddles, including *hiibbantee*. Yet, this method was not satisfactorily done for certain reasons. First the observation was not in its naturally occurring setting. The riddling session was arranged by the author and the setting did not happen as ordinary activities of the actors. Secondly, riddles are normally played in the evening at household level or in rare case by children from two or more nearby households before bed time. Observation of such an actual practice was challenging, because the identification of a particular household(s) or neighborhood whose children were ready to play riddles was not easily possible. It does not have specific schedule, rather it is

haphazardly determined by the plying children themselves. Further, even with the identification of such a household my presence disturbed the real setting, and the approach was by no means a naturalistic one enabled me to understand the issue under study free of my intervention. Observation of real world setting demanded the author's prolonged stay over the area, which could not be afforded.

Third and more important is the change in the scene for riddle. Data from the field indicated that since recently children are playing riddles at schools instead of homes, during day time instead of evening and being supported by school teachers instead of parents. This approach actually indicated changes and continuities in riddling and its contexts. In response, riddling sessions were organized at two primary schools—Rachee and Qorichaa, and the performances were observed. The arrangement of day time riddling sessions was necessitated for observation of actual practices was unfeasible.

However, the arranged day time riddling session was not directly relevant to the particular type of riddle for census (*hiibbantee*) at face value. The riddle demands the context in which two or more children are in a position to understand each other and have access to information on the members of different households. As far as the students of these two schools are from different vicinities it is not expected that every student of the school knows the size of each and every households within a certain geographical boundary where students came from. As a result, there were no actual practice of *hiibbantee* performed, but a special and specific arrangement was done to hear how children tone and shape the riddle in asking and responding *hiibbantee*.

These schools were selected purposely, because they are situated geographically nearest to the Waliso Liiban *gadaa* ritual centers and their accessibility in terms of transportation facilities. In addition, primary data were gathered through interview. Interviews with five elders and four primary school teachers were conducted to secure additional data. This method, thus, helped me to gain access to information on riddles, particularly from emic point of view. Purposive sampling technique was used to identify elders and teachers. The researcher's past experiences over the area were also used.

Data were analyzed using interpretive and descriptive approach. Because this type of riddle targets only demographic survey and there is no option of classifying it in terms of items of riddle, interpretations are provided in terms of how this type of riddle is coined and the purpose it serves in this specific cultural context.

RESULT

The types of riddle and riddling session

Data from the field indicated that there are three types of riddles in the study area. These are: *hiikuu*, *hiibboo* and *hiibbantee*. There is no specific and special riddling sessions for each of these three types of riddle. Children play all the three interchangeably and possibly switch from one type to the other based on their interests and what challenging riddles they have at their disposal. For the sake of clarity let us briefly see the first two and focus on the third one, which is the central attention of this paper. The first one, which is termed *hiikuu* refers to puzzle. *Hiikuu* means literally 'solving' or 'to solve'. It requires special mathematical, logical or computational skills. Mainly they involve mathematics and critical thinking in which children are given orientation on how to

solve problems through addition, subtraction, multiplication, division and logic. These are relatively high standard and played by relatively matured children or even adults. For instance, the following is one of the river crossing puzzles commonly played over the area.

There are three father cannibals. Each cannibal has a son. Six of them traveled together. The father cannibals do not hurt one another, but eat each other's son whenever the later are found in the absence of their respective fathers. The son cannibals also do not hurt each other. But any father cannibal cannot stay with any son cannibals in the absence of their fathers except his own son. As they moved together they came across a lake that could be crossed only by boat. The boat can accommodate only two persons at once. All are able to operate the boat. They all used the single boat and safely crossed the lake. So how did they do it?

This puzzle is shaped around the mentally created four eyed creature. It plays the role of enhancing critical thinking. Children are supposed to avoid any risky combinations of the six cannibals while they travel from one edge of the lake to the other. On the other hand, the puzzle targets in shaping the behavior of children through fear of the cannibal, which is said to hunt misbehaving children. In this regard, regardless of its complexity the question is directly asked and different from other types of riddle.

The second type of riddle is a short form, which follows a rhyming style. It is called *hiibboo*. The term *hiibboo* is also used to refer to the riddling session itself regardless of which type of riddle is played. In most of the cases, in *hiibboo* a question is not directly asked rather the respondent is exposed to an allusive sentence referring analogously to something else, which the respondent is expected to identify. It is the one in which the respondent is exposed to double process of answering the question. S/he is supposed to identify the character chosen for allusive representation and the actual phenomenon represented (see Nijorge, 1984, pp. 49-63; Finnegan, 1992). For instance, the riddle “*godoo gamaa, balballi lama*”, meaning ‘the hut over there has two doors’ is typical example. It stands for nose. Nose is represented by hut and two opening of a nose are considered doors. In this category there are different ways of shaping riddles, apart from allusive representation. Associations or coexistence of the items of riddle can be taken into consideration. For instance, the riddle, ‘*sadii waltarkaa dhufan, tokko lafa taa’a tokko lafa lixa, tokko tasa bada, isaan maal?*’ which means, ‘three things come together, one stays on the earth, the second penetrates in to the soil, and the third hibernates; what are they?’ is coined in terms of the concurrence of the three in terms of time and space. The answer is excrement, urine and fart, when somebody use open field to excrete.

The third type is riddle for census, which is termed as *hiibbantee*. As one aspect of the riddle over the area

hiibbantee has its own opening and closing formula. It has a challenger and a respondent or respondents. Once agreed upon the session and the type of riddle, the challenger marks the opening by uttering *hiibbantee*. The respondent has to show his/her willingness to receive by uttering *tee*. In some Oromo areas the respondent utters *tee tee*. Both terms have no other meanings apart from marking the session and the type of riddle of a particular riddling session.

Hiibbantee and its procedure

All riddles of this sort must be preceded by these two terms—*hiibbantee* and *tee*, the first by the challenger and the other by a respondent. Next, questions are forwarded by a challenger. For riddles, there is no permanent challenger and/or respondent. They change their position after each responded riddle. Any respondent who responds to a riddle is given the chance to challenge his/her former challenger.

With *hiibbantee*, contrary to *hiibboo*, there are few and limited words and analogates. Since *hiibbantee* targets census it uses common words for household members with analogates or without. Husband and wife are directly mentioned as *abbaa manaa (abbaa warraa)* and *haadha manaa (haadha warraa)*. The analogy comes with children and dependent elderly people. Elderly people are represented by *dullacha* (old cow or ox). For clarity the challenger is supposed to identify whether *dullacha*, refers to woman or man. In some Oromo area the word *moyyee kokor* is used to refer to divorce or divorcee who lives with his/her parents. Among the Waliso there is no special term for this category in this special type of riddle; they are considered as either heifer or bull. Further, *hiibbantee* targets a household and not a family.

The most common type of household appearing among the Waliso is nuclear family, constitutes father, mother and children. However, other relatives and/or none relatives can join a particular household through temporal arrangements. Children also take this into their riddle, as long as they access information. Any member of a particular household is counted. There is no option for someone to use false composition of household to challenge each other for he/she is expected to provide answer at the end when the respondent fails to respond.

Form its basic nature, with *hiibbantee*, many questions cannot be asked, because there are no possibilities of allusive representations of the items of riddle or riddles, which can be done infinitively in terms of physical structure, forms, functions, facts, colors, size, status, co-existence, cause and effect, etc. The volume of *hiibbantee* is simply dependent upon the number of households and the geographical boundaries covered by the riddling children. *Hiibbantee* for a particular household with five persons that constitutes a boy, a girl, an old man or woman, a husband and his wife goes as

follows:

Challenger: *Hiibbantee*

Respondent: *Tee*

Challenger: *raadaa, jibichaa, dullacha* (sex is specified), *haadha warraa, abbaa warraa*

Respondent: He/she has to search for a particular household with this combination and size

Similarly, *hiibbantee* for a household with seven persons that constitutes three girls, two sons, husband and wife can be coined as follows.

Challenger: *Hiibbantee*

Respondent: *Tee*

Challenger: *raadaa, raadaa, raadaa, jibichaa, jibichaa, haadha warraa, abbaa warraa*

Respondent: the respondent has to search for a household with seven persons in a household, which constitutes three girls, two boys, a husband and a wife.

Challenger: *Hiibbantee*

Respondent: *Tee*

Challenger: *Jibichaa, abbaa warraa, haadha warraa*

Respondent: in this case a respondent searches for a household with three members, a husband and his wife who have a son only.

Based on the number of the household members, their sex and their social status *hiibbantee* is shaped using these limited terms and common analogies.

If a particular *hiibbantee* is correctly answered the

challenger admits and acknowledges the response. If the respondent fails to respond he/she has to declare his/ her failure to answer. This is signaled by the term *baksaa dhugi* meaning drink melted butter. This term indicates that s/he is ready to pay fine or to reward the challenger as custom demands. Soon the challenger requests for a reward. The respondent has to provide one of the nearby markets. Referring to the standard of the market in terms of size of the attendants, the quality and quantity of items available for sale, locational advantages, etc the challenger possibly refuse to accept what the loser provides him/her. A challenger often denies taking small markets. Respondents who fail to respond often attempt to give small and relatively poor markets.

Once it is agreed upon which market is given and accepted as a reward the challenger appreciates his/her market stating what he/she won, exaggerating the market and its resources. For instance, if the challenger is rewarded Gabaa Jimmata (Friday market), s/he may express his/her pleasure as follows:

"*Gabaa Jimmaata argadhee maalan dhabe, jimmaata lafa xaafii, lafa qamadii, lafa dhadhaa, dammaa, warqii, biyya fardaa, biyya sangaa, biyya sa'aa...*" "O! I am lucky! Since I got Friday market, I have everything; I have crop, cattle, horse, gold, cloth, honey, butter, etc."

In this regard *hibbantee* is the same with *hiibboo*. Next, the challenger abuses the loser for losing the riddle in the following way (see Dejene, 2014a, pp. 48-49).

In Oromo

Guutuu manaa irra si basee, raatuu namaa si dhansisee

Gama kee xaaxessaa dhaabee, gama koo xaaxa'aa dhaabe.

Kan kee xaaxa'ee bade, kan koo xaaxeessee gale.

Balbala irra ciifta, dhuufuu gad dhiifta.

Gama kee sardiidi kuruph, gama koo jabbiin kuruph.

Ati baksituu dha, ani kakaksituu dha.

Situ baksa goboxaa'ee, ani nan dhuga ol utaalee.

Gufuu gugguufuu jala bahi; utuu dhudhuufuu bara bahi.

Hundee migiraa, hundeen keenya fira.

Fardi hin dannabsu, kana caala si hin arrabsu.

Adamii baalaa, ani fi ati jaala.

Deebiin isa....

English Equivalent

You are sent to the roof and trashed by the foolish.

Plant shrub to your side and corn to my side.

Yours is exploded, mine crackled.

Sleep at the get; release your fart.

A fox is gamboling on your side; a calf is gamboling on my side.

The butter you melt, I drink it.

You melt being bowed low to my feet; I enjoy it.

Face stumbling block, pass the year farting.

Any ways we are relatives.

I will never abuse you anymore.

We are bond friends.

The answer is so and so household

In plying this type of riddle the basic assumption is that both the challenger and the respondent have fairly similar access to information on size and composition of different households within reasonable geographical territories. In this regard, the competitors agree upon what geographical boundaries are included in the riddle based on their maturity level. In addition, a sort of clarifications are given when need be. The respondent possibly asks the direction or specific vicinity where the riddle refers to.

This is required for different households possibly have similar size, sex and status compositions.

Hiibbantee: past and present

Data from the field indicate that parents have been important socialization agents that affect children's education. Parents usually teach and help their children

to have close observation of their natural and social environments. Riddles, including *hibbantee* are one of the mechanisms of teaching children both technical instruction as well as all ways of information on the natural habitat or social life. Riddles are commonly used to instruct young people the knowledge of the nature, morals, the social behavior, and virtue essential for their future social success. Parents in this context are expected to introduce their children into the world of established facts, shape behaviors and enhance their knowledge to achieve the expected standard of personality. Parents, as agents of socialization take blames for any problem in the processes.

In spite of their invaluable roles the present situation shows that parental role in providing instruction through various oral mode like riddle, is getting declined. Informants attribute the reason behind this to some factors. Primarily, the expansion of formal education has played the major role in eroding oral mode in general and *hiibbantee* in particular. As attested by informants parents send their children to schools with the expectation that a school is substituting parental role in terms of providing all necessary education. Secondly, since children spend most of their times at school parents think that taking another time for riddles is waste of time and redundant. Whenever children, especially girls, have leisure time including evening before bed time they have to help their parents. In the mean time, parents urge their children to study, rather than helping them to riddle. Riddle in this case is taken as simple means of entertainment with no instructional role. Children also do their assignments instead of riddling.

Thirdly, relatively young parents themselves are lacking experiences in supporting their children compared to older generation. Some of the parents interviewed could remember only very few stock of riddles and complain that they have forgotten as it is not area of their interest. In this regard, more important is the perception of the parents towards oral mode in general and *hiibbantee* in particular. It is not taken as something important endeavor. The situation is entirely against *hibbantee* as it cannot be played in school context. *Hibbantee* can be played between children of the same household or vicinity who have fairly similar information or at least similar access to information on the sizes and compositions of different families. Since students of the same class could be from different vicinities the school context does not support playing *hibbantee*.

Fourthly, parents indicated that the introduction of mobile telephone and the whole day radio transmission have adverse effects on performing riddles in general and *hiibbantee* in particular. Children have other options for entertainment.

DISCUSSION

Literatures indicate that riddle serves various purposes.

Hibbantee as a version of riddle is one way of doing population census at local level. In this article the term *hibbantee* is translated into English term population census. Population census is defined as “the total process of collecting, compiling, evaluating, analyzing and publishing or otherwise disseminating demographic, economic and social data pertaining, at a specified time, to all persons in a country or in a well-delimited part of a country”(United Nations, 2007, p. 8). The definition indicates that census refers to a full count of a given population (United Nations, 2010, p. 1).

The findings of this article indicate that census as a total count through *hibbantee* is the cumulative effect of the riddling process. Children do not make total count for each and every riddling session. Instead, they riddle picking certain households within a certain geographical boundaries for specific riddling session. From this perspective, *hibbantee* satisfies some of the essential features of population census. United Nations (2007) specifies four essential features of population and housing censuses. These are individual enumeration, universality within a defined territory, simultaneity and defined periodicity.

Primarily, because children enumerate members of the target households in terms of sex, number and social statuses *hibbantee* satisfies individual enumeration as one of the basic characteristics of population census. Secondly, the riddle also covers a precisely defined territory agreed upon by the contenders. In this case, there is no household potentially excluded from the riddle. However, only some of the households within the specified geographical boundary are subjects of the riddle for a specific riddling session and for children of a certain household. *Hibbantee* does not have any specific schedule; rather it is part of the day-to-day activities of children’s verbal games. Thus, census through *hibbantee* is not taken at regular intervals as it is supposed to be in strict sense of the term census. What makes *hibbantee* a census is the whole system through which the statistics of households within a specified territory is secured uninterruptedly. Thus, census through riddle is not done every ten or so years, but every day as part of the day-to-day children’s activities of riddling. The process allows children in every household to do demographic survey within a feasible geographical proximity to their living quarters. Accordingly, every household is both the subject of riddle (*hibbantee*) and the actor of keeping data on the current numerical and population characteristics of a certain households.

The need for population census is justifiable across history in any country and at all levels in terms of its economic, political and social benefits. It is said to be essential to international comparisons of any kind of information. It involves collecting data on many attributes of a population, age, sex, education, occupation and the like.

The practice has long history. For instance, the early

Roman Republic conducted census, where they attempted to keep a list of all adult males fit for military service (Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia). Similarly, ancient Greeks and Mesopotamian conducted censuses of males which took place in 1600BC. The Egyptian Pharaonic conducted censuses in 3340 and in 3056 BC (Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia). Census is also part of Biblical versions. As Exodus 30:11-16 states, God commanded a flat tax to be paid with the census.

Population census of the Israelite is shown in the book of Numbers. King David and King Solomon also performed census. In New Testament Gospel Luke 2: reads that Jesus was born when census was conducted. The same practices were common in ancient China, India, and Rome. It was also common practice during the middle age, like among the Inca, Spanish and medieval Europe (Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia).

Pertinent to this, the question why the Oromo do census of this kind through riddles, which is at the disposal of every one particularly children seems appealing. Response to this question requires the understanding of the very political and economic system of the Oromo nation, at the center of which the *gadaa* system is prevailing. *Hiibbantee* is relevant to the practice of membership recruitment, inspection and marriage arrangement.

In *gadaa* government the Oromo are strictly categorized into certain *gadaa* classes. Particularly all male persons have specific places in the system based on their biological and *gadaa* ages. Asmarom (1973, p. 51) who meticulously studied the Borana Oromo shows that in *gadaa* there are grades and classes.

Grades are the stages of development through which all male persons have to pass in their life time. Each grade lasts for eight years. In the principle of *gadaa* a newly born infant enters a certain grade exactly forty years behind his father. Accordingly, five grades separate the father and his sons regardless of their biological (physical) ages. On the other hand, *gadaa* classes are generation sets in which male persons are divided. Since it is generational the *gadaa* classes are permanent across generations for a particular family in male line. That is the class of forefathers, fathers, sons and grandsons are the same. A particular *gadaa* class which passes through the prescribed grades has common rights and duties, including taking political and ritual powers for a limited period of time.

Similar structure with slight variations is prevalent among the Waliso Liiban (Dejene, 2014b, pp.103-104). Among the Waliso there are five *gadaa* sets, which are generational sets called Robalee, Birmajii, Duuloo, Horata and Michillee. In this structure every person is expected to know in which *gadaa* class he is vis-à-vis his peers, friends and neighbors. In the meantime information in which *gadaa* grade one was born is required. Among the Waliso a male person who is ready to pursue his *gadaa* is supposed to perform an initial ceremony exactly sixteen years before assuming political power regardless of his

age. In the context of the Waliso *dabballee* is the grade when a group of people from the same generation set (*gogeessa*) are initiated into *gadaa* grade. The inauguration of the long *gadaa* process is mainly initiated by the fathers' generation. In this regards, full information of the potential participants at each level is public. People in the same category contribute money for running the expected successive *gadaa* rituals. Before commencing the long way rituals each group members often communicates and encourages each other. This process is called *waltohachuu* and *miseensa horachuu*, meaning taking attendance and building up a group respectively (Dejene, 2014b). Attendance taking is not something done all of a sudden or haphazardly; rather it is the cumulative effect of the long inspection done through different customary practices. One way of doing this is *hiibbantee*.

Such a game-integrated census provides overall information of the entire population. Statistics on sex, age and status are secured. The statistics is kept at household level. Inherited social obligations and rights are public knowledge and directly communicated to the concerned person. Any attempt of forfeiting one's obligations is often challenged. For instance, someone who is not ready to pursue his *gadaa* rituals is encouraged and/or compelled to pursue.

In addition, with *hiibbantee*, any social phenomena such as marriage, divorce, adoption, and migration and natural phenomena such as birth and death which change the population statistics are kept up-to-date. Marriage also changes the status of the couple from *radaa* (heifer or female calf) and *jibichaa* (male calf) to husband and wife. Death and birth also change the size of the household. Such occasions are soon picked by very vigilant children and challenge those who do not pay attention to the events. The practice establishes information chain that connects the different villages and localities about social and natural events that have direct impact upon the size of households.

As written literature is a recent phenomenon oral literature has been serving in providing basic information. Oral literature which has the role of transmitting knowledge, attitudes, and values from generation to generation orally has also the role of keeping the new generation be vigilant and informed of their natural and social environments and make use of them. *Hiibbantee* as part of riddle supports intellectual and cognitive development of children. Doing statistics is supported by a special custom of reckoning family tree. Starting from their childhood children are taught to recon their family tree. For the Oromo descent is usually reckoned through male line. Agnates have certain collective rights and duties. They are responsible to stand by each other in time of difficulty. Waliso children are also aware of and supposed to recon family tree in their mother line (Dejene, 2007).

In spite of this, clans are not territorial groups; instead

they are widely dispersed all over the area. Yet, they remain a discrete entity in issues concerning clan, like blood price payment. Further marriage within this group is considered incest. Formally, the Waliso say a marriage between a man and a woman whose common ancestor is less than five ascending generations in the mother line and seven in the father line is incestuous. This is corroborated by the work of Bartels (1983, p. 208). Thus, *hiibbantee* as a riddle of taking statistics is commonly supported by reckoning family tree, which is also important for marriage arrangement. Marriage is arranged with the participation of clan, particularly lineage members in providing information on marriageable girls.

Hiibbantee is coined, structured, and played in specific social environments. It is culture bounded and plays significant role in both transmitting cultural values and providing up-to-date information on population characteristics. The finding indicates that riddles are not simply for recreation. This is corroborated by McDowell (quoted in Tucker, 2008, p. 24), who shows that riddles are also for education and socialization.

Even though oral literature as means of educating children has tremendous potential to actually enhance brain development and increase kid's intelligence and academic ability my data reveals that currently parents pay less attention to it. The former parental role in instructing on knowledge and instilling on values through oral mode is getting declined. Presently, most children are taught through formal schooling, which adversely affected the need for oral mode and the parents' contribution in the education of their children.

Most of them consider school as the only responsible institution in teaching children. Modern pedagogy takes precedence to traditional approaches in providing systematic education and parents rely on formal education. In short, with the expansion of schools and the invention of modern communication and information means and up-to-date teaching methods traditional approaches are considered to be out-dated in the child's education. Parents consider that their responsibilities are sending children to school, nursing, dressing, and covering all necessary expenses pertinent to schooling. Majority of them are unaware that oral literature plays important role in enhancing the knowledge of their children and in facilitating formal education in class rooms. There is less understanding that oral modes use in framing formal education within the cultural contexts.

The work of Mac and Pherson (2004) is relevant in this case. The author agreed that playing has an essential role in children's mental and physical development and said that parents should see their role in helping children play as parental 'investment'. They are never waste of time. Yet, the writer complained that adults have really lost touch with the basic needs of the child. For instance, Mac and Pherson (2004) shows that everything about children's lives these days seems to be so serious and growing number of parents believe games and plays are

just waste of time. If children are permitted to game they are simply encouraged or forced to spend their times either watching TV or plying a video or computer game created by someone else. Such pushing of buttons to activate an electronic toy programmed by adults has little or no contribution in letting children to think critically and use their imaginations to build something by their own.

To conclude, *hiibbantee* is a type of riddle particularly focusing on population statistics. The findings from this study indicate that *hiibbantee* is value oriented and one of the ways to transmit knowledge and disseminate information with certain social, political and economic benefits. It helps to keep update social and natural events, which is directly relevant in affecting population size. With *hiibbantee* children have full information of the population characteristics of their respective villages and vicinities. It enables to collect data on some attributes of a population along sex and social statuses like motherhood and fatherhood. Further, *hiibbantee* has aesthetical, cultural, linguistic and educational values. The way it is structured involves figure of speech or symbolism, for instance, girls and boys are considered as heifer and bull respectively. It educates how to use figure of speech in speaking and writing. Further *hiibbantee* is one way of disseminating information about certain social events like marriage and adoption, natural events like death and birth. It supplements other type of riddle which focuses on allusive representation of natural and social phenomena. *Hiibbantee* has also entertainment role for it is one ways of verbal games, which children often enjoy. Finally, since the present work is not a comprehensive material on the subject, it suggests further in-depth investigations.


Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflicts of interest.

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