A STUDY ON THE LIVING ENVIRONMENT OF
HARAR JUGOL, ETHIOPIA
エチオピア・古都ハラールの居住環境に関する研究

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Harar, situated in the eastern highland of Ethiopia, has flourished by dominating the caravan route from Red Sea to the inland Ethiopia. Registered in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2006, the old town of Harar Jugol still maintains its traditional character as Muslim city. This paper aims at the status quo of its architectural heritage by analyzing its building typology as well as the housing conditions for those who reside within the old residences, some of which date back even to the 17th century. According to the full research on both the buildings and the inhabitants in a selected case study area, central Harar was proved to be a unique city with the characteristic of woman-headed society with strong tie among them. Unlike other historical cities in Ethiopia, Harar still keeps the nature of comparatively wealthy residents supported by a dense network of Harari who dispersed all over Ethiopia.

Keywords: Harar Jugol, Kebele, Ge-Gar, Historical Heritage

1. Objective and Research Method

(1) Objective

Harar is one of the most impressive cities in Ethiopia as it still maintains the historical core surrounded by city walls, called Harar Jugol. In 2006 this fortified city was registered in the UNESCO World Heritage List, as “Harar Jugol, said to be the fourth holiest city of Islam, numbers 82 mosques, three of which date from the 10th century, and 102 shrines, but the townhouses with their exceptional interior design constitute the most spectacular part of Harar’s cultural heritage”. The location of the city in the eastern highland on the way to Somalia gave this city high opportunity to dominate the main routes from the Red Sea towards the inland of Ethiopian highlands and, thus, to become a prosperous trading center [Fig.1].

Unlike other parts of Ethiopia, this area is characterized by unique townscape and lifestyle generated by local people in the course of long history. Muslim culture has played a decisive role among the natives called Harari, who once established an independent caliphate in the medieval period and kept it until the end of the 19th century. However, since the coalition with Ethiopian Empire under Emperor Menelik II in 1887, the immigration from the inlands has been accelerated, resulting in co-habitation of different ethnic and religious groups. Actually native Harari people represent only 11.8% of the total municipal population after Amhara (40.5%) and Oromo (28.1%), but they still keep their own territory within the city walls. Today, approximately 24,000 people live within the 60ha walled area and half of this population is Harari. Lifestyle is different according to ethnic and religious groups although the city looks apparently typical multi-ethnic society. The conservation of its historical environment has become one of the most urgent issues for both the municipality and the federal government, but the social structure which supports the real life of the historical districts has not yet been profoundly studied so far.

The authors have been examining the housing problems of Ethiopian historical cities such as Gondar and Mekelle, focusing on the way how the local inhabitants occupy the historical districts and adapt their own life to the existing environment. Harar has often been cited as an exceptionally successful case in terms of the sustainability of the local life within historical compounds in comparison with other cities which are suffering from the deterioration of the old living environment. The objective of this research is to examine the relation between the physical aspects of the urbanity and the social inclination of the inhabitants so as to find out the key for sustainable urban life in historical complex.

(2) Previous Researches

Thanks to its specific cultural value, not a few researchers, both Ethiopians and foreigners, have visited this city and undertook a series of researches on the subject of urban formation and conservation strategy. Following the Italian scholars who undertook the survey of occupied Ethiopian cities, Harar has constantly attracted architectural historians and cultural anthropologists. The House of Arthur Rimbaud in the heart of...
the historical core, where this famous French poet used to reside after he abandoned his literature career and became a trader in the second half of the 19th century, raised an international attention for preservation and even touristic promotion. This may be one of the reasons why French researchers have contributed a lot for the appraisal of its historical value. Among them the mixed research team of IPRAUS, CFEE and l’Ecole nationale d’architecture de Paris-Belleville, led by Philippe Revault and Serge Santelli, has undergone a full scale survey of Harar Jugol from the viewpoint of architectural heritage and urban spaces since 2001. Their report, published in 2004, is very accurate and useful to understand the urban fabrics and the spatial composition of Harar Jugol⁶. They dared to investigate several important houses which represent unique design of Harari traditional houses.

Japanese research teams have started their own contribution during the last decade. The authors’ team, based at Keio University, has published a few papers on the urban formation of Harar as well as its modern urban policy in the course of the 20th century⁷,⁸.

(3) Research Method to be Applied

To achieve the goal for the analysis of the housing aspects within the historical core, the authors’ team undertook a field survey in August 2007. Traditionally the walled city, Harar Jugol, has been divided into 5 districts corresponding to 5 city gates, but during the Derg Government period new administration system by way of kebele (neighborhood scale administration unit) was introduced so that actually the walled city is administrated by 7 kebeles⁹. The case study area was designated near Argob Bari (Gate) in kebele 2 within this walled city, comprising 3 blocks, which are divided into 49 parcels [Fig.2]. Its surface is 1.02ha (gross). The number of building units within these blocks reaches 89, including 2 mosques in which guardians keep their living spaces, 9 shops and restaurants without dwelling function, and 8 warehouse or vacant shops. Accordingly, the housing units here are counted 72, excluding single commercial facilities. The number of the households is thus 72, corresponding to these housing units, while the population is counted 302. The area is considered less populated than the average of 350 persons/ha in whole Harar Jugol.

The survey consists of two different approaches: one for understanding the physical aspects of the living environment, another for analyzing the social characters of the inhabitants. Accordingly, the following steps were to be taken to accomplish the research program.

1. Measurement of all the buildings was carried out within the target area on the basis of cadaster map given by the municipality in order to grasp the condition of the houses, housing unit plans, number and type of rooms, building age and so on [Fig. 3].

2. Interview with the inhabitants was programmed to clarify their attributes (age, gender, ethnic group, religion of the head of the household) as well as their social factors (size of the household, income, period of residence, tenure, building age, rent, condition of water and electricity). The authors’ team visited all the households with questionnaires on hand, but several of them were absent. Among 90 households 72 have responded (recovery ratio = 80.0%).

3. Another interview with the local authority of both municipality and kebele was also carried out so as to clarify the housing and the infrastructure policy.

4. All the collected data were to be processed integrally, referring to the existing materials made by other research teams, so as to extract the building typology as well as the characteristics of inhabitants.

2. Housing Typology of Harar Jugol

Harar Jugol is a very old urban complex originating from the medieval period. Some religious buildings are identified as works of the 10th century, worth for describing as Muslim counterparts of medieval Christian monasteries in Ethiopia.

The houses of the target area seem to be exceptionally old comparing to other Ethiopian historical cities. The interview with the owners of such houses proved that some of them date back to the 16th to 17th century although some do not know exactly when and how their houses came to be constructed. Most houses are properly used with adequate maintenance.

The previous researches done by French teams have shown detailed analysis of the housing typology⁹. Three building types were identified: Harari type, Indian type, mixed type, according to the evolution of houses from a native style to a “modernized” building. The authors use this terminology to explain the typology inside the walled city.

Blocks are divided by organically formed parcels so that the serpentine narrow streets give the impression of typically Muslim townscape of northern Africa which does not exist in Ethiopia except Harar. All the parcels are surrounded by high stone walls and separated distinctly from the streets. The access from the street into the house is done by one single gate except a few cases in which the in-block parcel without touching streets is only accessed through a neighboring private parcel. Traditionally there was no street-side housing unit as seen in the modern period.
Harari type houses are based on the courtyard type with a living unit on the backside, called ge gar (principal house) in Harari terminology, which literally means “Harari townhouse”\(^\text{(1)}\). This main building is in many cases connected to adjacent building called tit gar (dependent house) in which secondary rooms and kitchen are placed. A spacious salon called gidir gar (entrance hall and seating spaces), meaning literally “large room”, provides the most spectacular scene within the ge gar. Stepped platform (nadaba) is arranged behind the flat floor (qeh afar) just after a monumental scale entrance door. The layout of this platform is flexible and free, following the position of large columns and alcoves. Colorful objects such as plates and baskets are hung on the wall, which is hollowed for putting symbolic objects such as Holy Quran\(^\text{(1)}\). Stepped seats, with 4 to 5 steps (nadaba) and painted in red, correspond to the important names of the past generation, but the most dignified one is specially reserved for the head of the family (emir nadaba). [Fig.4\(^\text{(1)}\)].

It is natural that anyone who enters inside the gidir gar feels at once the sense of clear hierarchy and symbolism because of the existence of stepped space and shrine-like wall decoration, the coloring of the floor and steps and the unique circulation from the monumental door to each nadaba and side rooms. This is a kind of spatial hierarchy similar to toko-no-ma in Japanese traditional houses or even stepped synthronon in Byzantine churches although religious and anthropological connotation is different. It is interesting to know that the decoration of the wall objects, such as baskets, plates and pots, is the work of the mistress of the family. This gidir gar is undoubtedly the central place of the house and expresses the grade of the family among the neighborhood. It is now used for celebrating events and neighborhood meetings.

Traditionally speaking, gender matters much in Muslim houses. In Harar’s case, the spatial separation between the male and the female is also very distinct. Women’s space is reserved on the left side of the ge gar described as kirtat, or kirtat nadaba (seating) as the wallside is stepped up with the form of alcove. This space is exclusively for women, who sleep, meet and chat there. In front of this kirtat, there is a tiny space called dera, which is used as storage. The upper level of these kirtat and dera is quit qala, an upper gallery. This room is used to receive guests.

In the case study area, 21 houses within the 49 parcels are identified as this type [Fig.5]. Although the size of the parcel varies from 24m\(^2\) to 377 m\(^2\), the basic planning with ge gar is the same. No such planning exists in other part of Ethiopia nor in Somalia. Even in the outskirts of Harar, the farmers’ villages represents completely other type of dwelling, probably due to the fact that most of the farmers are occupied by Oromo Muslims immigrated after the coalition in the second half of the 19th century\(^\text{(1)}\). In short, Harari type of housing is genuinely urban and unique in Harar Jugol\(^\text{(4)}\). The fact that approximately 70% of the whole Harari population in Ethiopia reside in Harar Jugol supports this tendency\(^\text{(4)}\).

Majority of the old houses are privately owned by native Harari families. Interview to the residents revealed 38 percent of the houses are constructed more than 300 years ago, or rather to say, nearly a half of the houses are more than 200 years old [Fig.6]. The buildings constructed during the 19th century also represent the same typology as the older ones.

It is only after the coalition with Ethiopian Empire, the building activity has changed and new types of row houses appeared. These row houses were arranged alongside the streets and have direct access from the street without courtyard. As the east-west main axis from Argeb Bari (Gate) stretches on the northern edge of the case study area, shops were also generated in the form of row houses. After mid 20th century, renting house business has become common. Not a few house owners have accepted tenants in the surplus houses built in the compound. That is the reason why a certain number of single or small households reside in small housing units within the case study area. [Fig.8].
the 72 households interviewed, 49 households (68%) are Harari while other 23 (28%) represent other ethnic groups such as Oromo, Amhara, Gurage and Somali [Fig.9]. Most shops are run by Harari owners. 2 Somali families reside in very old traditional houses incidentally. One among them is in possession of this house as heritage from their parents. In this respect, the legacy of Harari traditional houses is still well maintained despite the gradual occupation by other ethnic groups. It is natural that Muslim is the majority (66 households = 92%) from the religious point of view, but 6 households are Orthodox Christians (8%).

According to the interview, 37 houses are proved self-owned (51%), 3 of which are possessed by Christians, while 27 belong to kebele public housing (38%). It should be noted that more than half of the kebele housing consist of old buildings with the age of more than 200 years old. 6 among them are of ge gar type. This means that at least 1/4 of old traditional houses were handed over to kebele during Derg period. The inhabitants claim that they are suffering from the lack of maintenance and repair. Evidently self-owners live in their houses much longer than tenants of kebele housing. These families have kept residence as landlord for generations, but female heads of households, so long as Harari owners are concerned, answered that they started living by marriage. Still, their consciousness of belonging is very strong as they are well integrated into neighborhood association called affocha.

However self-owners with other ethnicity have different tendency. An extreme case is an Oromo family with 6 members headed by a woman, who has resided in a very old house, but surprisingly without roofing, although it is her own property. A female head of this household of 27 years claims that she earns only 3,600 ETB (Ethiopian birr, 401 USD) annually and no family member has permanent job.

In terms of kebele housing, on the contrary, two tendencies are distinguished among the tenants. A half of them have lived there since the beginning of kebele housing, that is, since 1970’s, or inherited living rights from their parents who used to reside there as tenants. 3 of them, all females, told that they earn more than 10,000 ETB (1,114 USD), which is considered rather high income, equal to owners’ group. Another half of the tenants show much shorter period of residence, but with higher income. Those who reside in new type of rental houses tend to rotate with shorter cycle of 2-7 years except one female Oromo who claimed to have lived there for 30 years.

The land reform undertaken by the Derg Government in 1970’s gave a decisive influence in terms of tenure of the real estate property. To direct the real estate policy to the socialist goals, all the urban land was nationalized. In addition, one household was allowed to possess only one single housing unit. The surplus was expropriated by the government and redistributed to newly created kebeles administrations. Thus, kebele started running public housing business with extremely low rent in order to house those who had been excluded from house ownership. Even after the fall of the Derg regime in 1991, this kebele public housing was kept and functioning for assuring minimum living space for the poor. Such was the case in Harar.

In other cities, kebele housing is a synonym of low quality chikka (mud and timber) house as this type of construction is cheap, quick, and very humble, often regarded as slum\(^8\). In other words, physical conditions follow the nature of tenure. However, in Harar it is difficult to distinguish at first glance a self-owned “wealthy” house and a rented house for the poor, because the latter was generated artificially and politically by expropriating the same type of old buildings only 35 years ago and does not mean slum-like cheap housing, but those who occupy this must have been very different from old landlords. Therefore, it should be questioned what is the result of the shift of housing policy during last three decades and who actually live in and use these buildings.

As for the house owners, their average income is 12,606 ETB (1,342 USD), which could be considered sufficiently high according to Ethiopian standard, but what is interesting is the fact that the average annual income of the households residing in kebele housing goes up to 10,387 ETB (1,157 USD). This looks opposite to the common idea of poor inhabitants residing in kebele housing. However, careful examination of this average figure reveals that the inhabitants are clearly divided into two income groups: very low and very high. The former represents 3/4 of the kebele residing households and what constitutes this group is the mixture of such ethnic groups as Oromo, Amhara, Gurage, Somali and Harari. The latter, occupying 1/4 is exclusively Harari. The former’s average income is 2,463 ETB (274 USD) and the latter is 26,811 ETB (2,986 USD). The difference is astonishingly large: 11 times. In short, kebele housing is still occupied by the poor majority with the mixture of different ethnic groups, including

Fig.7 Distribution of Ethnic group

(2) Type of Tenure:

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a few poor Harari, but a certain number of rich Harari people tend to live even in kebele housing if the condition is good. In fact, these kebele-owned houses are well-maintained and well-furnished thanks to the investment by such wealthy tenants [Fig.10].

Harari are generally known as highly commerce-oriented people. Their presence in Ethiopia is very strong although the total population is only 31,000. They have their own community in the central market (Mercato) and other commercial quarters of Addis Ababa, counting around 6,000 people. Their network is very tight even for outside of Ethiopia. The tradition of commercial activities since the medieval period is said to have formulated their temper and mode of business activities. The high income of the residents of Harar Jugol clearly corresponds to such business background of established Harari merchants. In fact, 21% of the total households of the target area forms a very high income group which earns more than 15,000 ETB (1,670 USD) per year. Most of them are former landlords with Harari ethnicity. The most successful business figure is an old farm owner of 84 years old, Haye Saie, who runs the business of mango plantation outside of the city as well as retail clock shop, earning 72,000 ETB (8,018 USD) per year. His family with 5 members lives in a house of double-storey, say, Indian type. Other figures among this income group are an old widow of 95 years old, living in a house of double-storey, and a male accountant of around 35 years old, who owns a very old house of Harari traditional type.

![Fig.8 Income distribution](image)

(4) Gender and Age

The division of gender among the heads of household is equal, exactly the same number for both male and female. However, watching the age of the females, which is 61 years old as average, most of them are aged widows. 1/4 among them is wealthy, belonging to the top income group, while other 3/4 is poor. Again, the difference of the wealthy and the poor is outstanding. A half of them are obliged to live with annual income less than 6,000 ETB (668 USD) regardless of house ownership. This group consists of different ethnicity. They manage to spend their life working in the informal sector, that is, selling daily items on the streets. Not only kebele residents, but a few house owners are suffering from the poverty.

On the contrary, male heads of household is 47 years old as average age. This figure is much younger than female. No specific tendency was detected among male-headed households as various types of households are mixed within them. In an Islamic society where male is considered to represent household, this phenomenon is quite natural.

The size of household is 4.1 persons in average, much larger than the average of Harar City (3.4 in 2007). The proportion of single family and widow-headed families is small in comparison with the whole city. 10 single households were detected. They suffer from very low income except one female who share a house and income with her relative. Taking into consideration that the size of Harari household is not so large, only 3.7 persons, other ethnic groups have much larger household size, sometimes containing more than 9 family members.

4. Characteristics of Inhabitants

The analysis of the collected data has led to the understanding of the reality of the inhabitants in Harar Jugol. The traditional lifestyle is still kept in their traditional living spaces like gidir gar despite certain influence of modernization. Immigration of other ethnic groups exerted more influence and transformed the uniformity of one single people into multi-ethnic society. So far, 4 types of the inhabitants have been extracted, divided into 4 groups with nearly the same number of households.

(1) Wealthy Harari residents living in traditional houses by generation:

The first group of the residents is formed by sufficiently wealthy Harari people who are engaged in the business of commerce, retail sale, and plantation. Most of them are proud of possessing traditional ge gar type residences as Harari, but some live in kebele-owned housing, still with ge gar. Running houses for rent is another business among this group. They enjoy traditional lifestyle and keep the identity of Harari urban culture. Some are depending on the money transfer from their relatives in foreign countries, especially in the United States.

(2) Poor Harari people living in kebele housing, working in domestic services:

As for the second group of the residents, with Harari ethnicity, they are employed mainly for housekeeping or guarding. Their income is very low. Although many of them are descendant of old families residing in Harar Jugol, they have lost the way for appropriate income by various reasons. Widows, who receive pension of around 600 ETB (67 USD) yearly, form another sub-group.

(3) Poor non-Harari people depending on informal sector:

The third group of residents consists of non-Harari people. Most of them have settled here from rural areas in last decades. They find their houses in some depending houses of old housing complex. Some are in possession of their houses exceptionally, but the housing condition is very bad. Oromo is the majority among them. They suffer from poverty because of unemployment, obliged to depend on informal sector to maintain their lives.

(4) New comers with comparatively convenient housing conditions:

The last group is new comers with different ethnicities. Many of them reside in privately-owned houses, with more spaces but comparatively higher rent, facing upon the streets. They are working as public officer or secretary in offices.

The notion of house is extremely important in Harar Jugol. A house is
not only the place to live in, but also a foyer to gather all the neighbors, a symbol representing the status and the value of the family, and the evidence of Harari nationality. Barbara Bonefoy pointed out that the key notion of Harari as cultural identity is ge abad (house of the city), which is certainly a micro-cosmos of Harari people. Ge gar, very specific space with hierarchy and focal point, is nothing but the anchor for the identity of Harar20.

5. Conclusion

Harar is a unique city, which miraculously maintains the old life style within old urban fabrics. This fact is contrary to what happens in most of Ethiopian cities where city centers with historical district suffers considerably from deterioration of both physical and social environment. The good access condition of city centers attracts those who are deprived of appropriate measure for employment because of a lot of opportunities for informal works. Accordingly, low-income people migrate within the historical core situated in the very heart of the city. In addition, the fragility of social maintenance in relation with the potential of local residents as well as the financial situation of municipalities or kebeles do not allow such areas to be well sustained.

However, in Harar, which has been endowed with rich Muslim trading culture since old times, the walled central district could be considered still the cradle of unique urban culture. Harari are minority in Ethiopia but their strong network and internal power make their homeland city sustainable. The research has proved that wealthy Harari ethnicity people, who mainly reside in very old traditional houses, are playing the role of conveyor of old historical values and ethics to the new generations as a dominant resident group. Still it should be noted that recent tendency caused by new migrants has been enlarging the gap among different ethnic groups by breaking the entity of single Harari residents.

Cultural diversity is a new paradigm shared within the contemporary society, but sudden change and amalgamation of living environment may cause the loss of unique and irreplaceable value, which each ethnic group has maintained. An appropriate system of maintenance for heritage based on community bond and balance of ethnic groups should be elaborated.

Notes

1) Description by UNESCO World Heritage Centre “Harar Jugol, the Fortified Historic Town” http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1189
2) Total population of Harar City was 99,368 according to the census of 2007.
3) Harar Jugol consists of 7 kebeles (neighborhood scale administration unit) although kebele stretches out beyond the walled boundary to a small extent. Total population of these 7 kebeles was 24,590 in 2007. The population of Harari ethnic group in Harar City is 11,753.
4) Emilio Scarin was the first who systematically analyzed Harari houses and categorized three types of traditional house. See, Emilio Scarin “Hararino: Ricerche et studi geografici” Centro di studi Coloniali, Firenze, 1942 and Emilio Scarin “Le variazioni di confine dell’espansione territoriale italiana nell’Africa orientale” Casa ed. poligrafica universitaria, Firenze, 1938
8) Kebele is the last and the smallest administrative unit, introduced by the Derg Government in 1975 so as to tighten the control over the people on the neighborhood level. This system has been maintained even after the fall of the Derg Government.
11) Belle Asante Tarstiani “Reversed Vessels: Custom and Innovation in Harari Basketry” in African Arts, spring 2009
12) Barbara Bonefoy of the French team made detailed observation on the spatial composition and the usage of rooms within housing units in several important Harari type houses, but she did not reach its familial connotation. No further study on such Harari houses has been achieved although typological classification has been done according to the similarity of certain housing groups. The author has made interviews with the owners who explained well about the rules of the disposition of platforms and their ornament.
14) Revault has pointed out the existence of the same type in several villages around Harar such as Kuromi, a village populated by Argoba tribe. Philippe Revault, Serge Santelli ed. op.cit. pp. 231-237
15) The total population of Harari people in Ethiopia is 22,000. In Harar Region only 15,900 Harari live, but most of them have their home in Harar Jugol.
16) Chikka is a construction method by timber and mud, widely used in Ethiopian vernacular houses.
17) 1 USD used to be 8.61 ETB (Ethiopian birr) in Nov. 2003, then 8.98 ETB in Aug. 2006. It reached 16.92 USD in Mar. 2011 as ETB had fell since 2008.
18) The difference of 4 years between the field survey of Gondar (2003) and Harar (2007) should be regulated by imputing the inflation ratio of 39.1%.
19) According to the census of 2007, the total population of Harari people is 31,869 all over Ethiopia. Among them 24,347 live in urban areas. Harari people spread all over the world with the total population of 35,000-40,000.
20) The number of household is 28,239 within the total population of 96,621 (Harar City) according to the Census of 2007. In rural area of Harar Region, the average size of household is 4.6.
21) During the Derg period a number of Ethiopians took refugee and migrated to foreign counties as diaspora. They tended to be grouped by ethnic groups. The communities of Harari diaspora are rather large in USA and Canada.
和文要約
ハラールはエチオピア東部の高原地帯に位置し、古くから紅海沿岸地域とエチオピアの内陸部を結ぶキャラバンルートの要所として栄栄してきた。2006年にユネスコ世界遺産に登録された旧市街ハラール・ジゴルは今尚イスラム都市としての伝統的な町並みを維持している。本論文では建築タイポロジー及び17世紀にまで遡る古い住宅の居住環境の分析により建築遺産の状況を把握することを目指す。ケーススタディとして選定された地区において実施された建築及び社会的皆調査の結果より、ハラール中心市街地は女性を中心とした強固なコミュニティが存在するユニークな都市であることが証明された。他のエチオピア歴史都市と異なり、ハラールは経済的に豊かなハラーリ民族が居住し、エチオピア全国にそのネットワークを広げる点が特徴的である。

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