Defensive Walls under Threat: Examining the Status of the Great Medieval Defensive Walls of Dawuro People in Southern Ethiopia

Admasu abebe; Zelalem tesfaye

Abstract

Historically, in different countries walls are built for different purposes. Among others, defense purpose is the most common one. For instance, to mention a few, we do have the Great Wall of China was built from 3rd century B.C to 17th century A.D, the Great Zimbabwe Wall was built from 1100–1450 A.D; the Koso Defense mud Wall in Nigeria was built from 1000 to 1500 A.D, in Kenya the Gunda-buche Wall and in Ethiopia, the Jegol Wall of Harer city was built in the 16th century for defensive purposes. Likewise, the Dawuro kings who ruled Dawuro between 16th to 18th centuries pursued a common goal of establishing a dependable defense mechanism by building walls and digging ditches. These defensive walls are known as the great walls of Dawuro or locally named as kati halala keela. The average height of a wall is about 2.6m, and its average width is about 3.5m. The sum total of the rows estimated to be about more than 1000 kms. The walls were made of stones without any joining materials like masonry and cement. The walls had seven main gateways called lappunnmitsa. Accordingly, this paper attempts to elucidate whether the construction technology of the Walls evolved from traditional terracing practices. It also presents why the walls were purposefully built and how they used dry stones as building materials. The article discerns that resource mobilization for the construction was based on the owed quota system in family and village levels. Besides, it found that the walls are being destructed by both human activities and natural factors. The indigenous construction technology and spirit of cooperation that manifested through the living wall of Halala Keela is now prone to extinction. Thus, this article is based on fieldwork between 2010-11 and thus it used primary data collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussion. Besides, secondary data were used to supplement the primary data. Finally, it calls for intervention to put in place the proper management of the heritage and to combat the further extinction of the wall.

Key words: Dawuro, Development, Dry stone defensive walls, Halala keela, traditional terracing practice, Omo Valley

1. Introduction: People, the Land and the Defense Walls

The history of building ‘great’ walls was associated with defensive roles from arch-enemy. The historical and scientific values of these walls could be compared to different walls across the world. For example, the Great Wall of China was built from 3rd century B.C to 17th century A.D to
keep themselves safe from semi-nomadic people; the Great Zimbabwe Wall was built from 1100–1450 A.D as enclosure to the commercial and political center (www.dreams-travel.com/); Koso Defense mud Wall in Nigeria was built from 1000 to 1500 A.D to control trade centers (Aremu 2007:7). The intermittent warfare, the raiding of slave from the state, the trans-Atlantic or trans- Saharan trade might have forced the society in West Africa to build Segou Walls in between 18th to 19th centuries (MacDonald 2012, 343). In western Kenya, the defensive earthworks enclosures known as Gunda-buche were built to protect human enemies as well as domestic animals from wild animals (Odede 2009:47). In Ethiopia, the Jegol Wall of Harer city was built in the 16th century for defensive purposes. In the same line, the Dawuro people had constructed defensive walls from 16th to 18th Century.

The term “Dawuro” is used to refer to both the people and their land. Currently, the Dawuro is constituted as one of the fourteen Zones in South Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples’ Regional State (SNNPR) in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, according to the post-1991 political and administrative reordering. Dawuro zone lies in between the Gojob and Omo Rivers. Dawuro shares boundaries with Konta Special Wereda in the west, Jimma zone (Oromia Region) in the northwest, Hadiya and Kambata-Tambaro zones in the northeast, Wolayita zone in the east, and Gamo-Gofa zone in the southeast directions. Dawuro has an area of 5,000 km² (Damene, cited in The Ethiopian Herald, 19/02/2003 E.C). Their language is Dawurotsuwa which belongs to the Omotic language family. Based on the 2007 Ethiopian Population and Housing Census projection, the population of Dawuro nationality is about 846,199. The political centre of Dawuro zone is Tarcha, located at 486 km from Addis Ababa.

Historically, Dawuro had been a highly centralized powerful independent kingdom, until Emperor Menelik II incorporated it into the Ethiopian Empire in 1891. Dawuro’s southern, eastern, and northern strategic border positions were enclosed by vigorous defensive walls. The walls stretched from the borders of Gofa in its southwestern direction and extended to the borders of Wolaitta, Kambata, Hadiya and Jimma zones in its northwestern direction. Conversely, in the western borders from Gofa-Konta to Gojob River, the kingdom
was blocked by a series of defensive ditches with 3 meters depth. These defensive ditches should be equally treated with the Walls, but not dealt well in this paper.

Besides, some sources affirm that in southwestern direction it stretched up to the border of Kaffa as far as south Omo to the areas of the “Ari, Bume and Omo Galab” pastoralist areas (Sied 2007: 27). The construction of these walls might have begun in the first half of 16\textsuperscript{th} century and completed during the reign of king \textit{Halala}, probably in the second half of 18\textsuperscript{th} century (Elias 1999: 120). Although the Walls were started by his predecessors, it might have been named after king \textit{Halala} who finalized the construction. However, for the purpose of this article the authors refer to the walls as “Dawuro Walls” because we believe the walls had not been built by a single king and for consistency purposes.

To commemorate their ancestors’ suffering during the construction process, the Dawuro people consider the walls as sacred places and hence they never walk on them as this might despise their ancestors. In this regard, Blake Janet (cited in Kamenka 2000: 77) stated that the relationship between cultural heritage, cultural identity and human rights as “… the importance to the human beings of the sense of identity given not so much by material improvement, but by customs and tradition, by historical identification, by the religion… the sense of identity for most people is essential to their dignity, self-confidence, value that underlie in the concept of human right itself.” More importantly, Rosabela, (2005:283) stated “without culture there is no future.”

1.1. Setting the Context of the Problem

Ethiopia is one of the countries, which has long history of civilization and outstanding human achievements. In its jurisdiction, there are copious past attainments that profusely guarantee its civilization (Institute of Archaeology 1966:4). Nonetheless, those achievements are not treated fairly and equally among the diverse cultural materials. For instance, the cultural heritages in southern Ethiopia were not treated as much as those in northern Ethiopia. Kassaye (1998: 12) reported that “the type and number of the heritages that we knew are less than those we didn’t in southern Ethiopia.” He also stressed that “the protection, preservation, documentation and scientific investigation done on the heritages
were predisposed to single dimension on those well-known historical heritages” (Kasssaye 1998:13).

The case of Dawuro walls is the untold and unexplored tangible heritage of the medieval period of Dawuro people. This was not without reason. The historical accounts of medieval periods in Ethiopia are distorted, sometimes fabricated and at other times forbid recognition. Hence, little is known about Dawuro walls. For historians, it could seem unread massage in a box of Ethiopian history. According to Oliver (1963: 50) unlike the western history, African history should focus on the living culture and material remains of the past which could serve as primary sources. Moreover, conducting continuous scientific studies on these walls could bring about paradigm shift to the understanding of the history of the so called “uncivilized, barbarian and backward” southern societies. Perhaps, lack of recognition and scientific investigation of the Dawuro walls might have “shadowed” the medieval history of Dawuro and its cultural attributes to the human community.

Leave alone in the 19th and 20th century historical accounts, the case of Dawuro walls is not given any serious attention in 21st century. To the contrary, the massive development projects led by the government of Ethiopia have destroyed some parts of the wall. Recently, a few archaeological surveys have been undertaken on the kati Halala Defense Walls. First, in February 2007, on the request of the local government for the destruction caused by Gibe III hydroelectric project, Rapid Archaeological Impact Assessment was made by Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritages (ARCCH) (Hailu 2007: 1). Second, in November 2008, the ARCCH made an archaeological survey and investigated the stone walls of Ijajo keela in Wollaita (67 kilometers long, 1.5 to 2.5m height, 1 to 2.5m width) and Kati Halala Walls in Dawuro (Ethiopian Electric Power Corporation 2009: 147).

1.2. The Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this article is to discuss the genesis of the construction process of the walls and the defensive strategies of the medieval Dawuro people. In particular, it aims to explain the pouring forces for the construction of the walls, to elucidate the physical structure and the purposes of the walls, and to identify the causes of endangerments of the walls.
1.3. Methodology

This article employed qualitative research methodology in order to dig out qualitative information (Johnson and Christensen 2004: 180). Nominal data were collected during fieldwork in selected sites. During the fieldwork, notes, pictures and video images of the walls were taken. In the meantime, selected key informants were interviewed. Besides, 47 interviewees who had good knowledge of the oral tradition were purposefully selected. Interviewees were selected from five districts but the majorities were chosen from the nearby settlements surrounding the Dawuro walls. Two focus group discussions were carried out. With regard to document analysis, the researcher used reports, letters, magazines, diaries, electronically accessed materials, theses, dissertations and books.

The kati Halala walls and ditches lie in more than 45 kebeles (villages) of the border areas of the zone. From these, nine kebeles were selected as specific study area for fieldwork (see fig. 1 below).

Fig.1. Map of Dawuro Zone and the Study sites

In order to estimate the average height and width of the walls, through non-random sampling technique, 20 sites were selected and measured. Accordingly, the subjects of the study were selected based on “who knows what”. Elders, traditional religious
fathers, concerned local politicians and professionals (teachers, lawyers and heritage management experts) were included in the study. Lastly, the data from both primary and secondary sources were transcribed after repeated listening, watching and reading of the records. Finally, it was analyzed and interpreted.

2. The Genesis of Dawuro Walls: From Terracing to Defense Walls

The long and tall Dawuro walls might have evolved from the people’s indigenous practice of terracing. In southern Ethiopia, some ethnic groups are well known for their knowledge of building dry stone walls as mechanism of soil conservation. For example, the Konso people are known for having dry stone walls terraces to get cultivable surfaces on steep slopes, counteract erosion, assist drainage and encourage the formation of cultivable deep soil (Demeulenaere 2002: 81; Amborn 1989:73). Likewise, the Dawuro people, who live near the Omo River valley, had been practicing construction of terraces1 from stone and dug trenches to keep the soil fertility since long ago. Besides, according to my informants, terraces helped to protect crops from wild animals like pigs, maintaining soil fertility and protecting it from erosion. In Dawuro tradition, there is also an experience of re-terracing farm plots. A terraced plot may be cultivated for about 4-5 years until it loses its fertility. Then, it will be removed and shifted to immediate spot. The mark where the terrace lay for years will become very fertile, and the shift produces fertile soils for the farmers. Elders in the localities asserted that such a terracing system is a long established knowledge of the society. The elders of Dawuro confirm that these terraces have existed on their farms and grazing lands since time immemorial.

Consequently, one may conclude that the long-standing tradition of terracing and re-terracing of farm plots has laid the foundation and skill for building strong and defensive great Dawuro walls. The designing and planning strategy of the walls also shows us how well-skilled and traditionally trained man power took part in the whole construction process (Hailu 2007:409 and ARCCH 2008:13). As a result, they might have learned the dry stone wall building technology from agricultural practices of terracing. Accordingly, all the engineering skills and architectural know-how employed to the construction were the products of the local skill. However, nowadays, the degree of terracing in Dawuro has significantly declined because of labor intensiveness of terrace construction (Watson 2009: 1) and time consumption. Therefore, these indigenous practices are overlooked by contemporary farmers and state development agencies.

1 Even today, the low land area of Hala, Qayi, Sayki, and Zima Waruma Farmers Associations (FAs) in Loma Woreda and Dachiya Deneba, Zaba Garada, Dasha Aja, Garada Bachira, Garada Intela FAs in Gena-Bossa district had numerous early terraced plots. Those terraces found in the farm plots and in the forest were about 1 meter high and 0.5 meter wide. The distance between the corresponding terraces was about 5 meters. In those localities, small basalt stones could be found on most of the farming lands.


2.1. The Unsettling Reasons of Dawuro Walls Construction

The construction of Dawuro walls had several presumptions. The first one reveals that it might have begun during the reigns of Kati Mao, from Susungiya clan, Kawo Ubana from Zutuma, Kawo Dina Moha from Zalinisya clan and Kawo Nao Beyedu from Kawuka clan in the first half of the 16th century (Minister of Tourism and Culture 2010:1 and Wogaa 2000:44-45). The second presumption focused on the assumption that the whole process of construction that took more than 20 years was begun and completed during the reign of Kati Halala in the second half of the 18th century. Most of the sources indicate that the construction of the walls might have begun in the first half of the 16th century, during the turbulent period in Ethiopian history – the periods of Ahmed Gragn’s war and the Oromo expansion. Haberland (1977:3) mentioned that three factors: political, cultural, and ethnic movements that had played a prominent role in the history of the loss of the people of south western Ethiopia. They were the influence of Islam and Arab culture, the spread of Christian Empire, and the Oromo population movements.

Second, pastoralists from around Lake Turkana and lower Omo valley might have put pressure on Dawuro peasants during resource scarce seasons. Hence, these pastoralist groups had been pushing towards the Upper Omo basin up to Gojob River searching for free grazing land and water, which again forced them to cross the Dawuro territory. Their mobility, accompanied by raids, might have instigated conflict with the highland settlers. Thus, such pastoralist movements might have been causes for everlasting conflicts between the herders and/or with cultivators (Informant J, K & L). For example, according to local Dawuro elders consider the Golda (but Fujimoto (2009: 313 defined golda as Surmic-speaking, chiefly the Bod’i) pastoral groups as entirely merciless, brutal murderers, and greedy ran sackers and raid their cattle during dry season. Furthermore, the current contentions between pastoralists and cultivators around Gojob River in Wara, Goriqa, Aba and Baza Shota are the signs of the continuity of the conflicts. Therefore, the construction of the defensive ditches and walls along Dawuro territory on a right side immediate to Omo and Gojob Rivers might be intended to block the routes of these pastoralists along these rivers.

Third, the informants declared that the construction of the Walls were associated with the society’s unity and loyalty. The people “always considered themselves as independent, (Abbo daadada gumiya Dawuro! meaning, “a hero people like a thunder, free, loving their state, jealous of their identity, and having strong unity and solidarity.” Weil Simone (2002:79)

---

2 In addition, there was a myth about “Gragn’s war” and his personality among the Dawuro oral traditions. There were a number of stone stelae called “Gragnsucha” (Gragn’s stone). According to the tradition, these stelae were erected by the left-handed “Ahmed Gragn” as an anchor for his horses. Others maintain the view that it was the place where his soldiers were buried and these stelae were grave markers. Hence, these stones and the myths related to them strengthened the suspicion that the walls might have been constructed during the “Gragn’s war.”
theorized: “true liberty is not defined by a relationship between desire and satisfaction but by the relationship between thought and action.” Likewise, the oral traditions of the Dawuro stated that the society had thought and planted vanguard wall to maintain their identity and ultimately their freedom. The strong sense of defensive identity could also be referred from some of the Dawuro proverbs, “qommu bayanappe godhiy qanxeto” (which means it is better to be slaughtered than lose one’s identity). Accordingly, their intrinsic spirit of patriotism had perhaps helped them to construct such huge walls using their indigenous knowledge.

Finally, the oral traditions collected from the informants confirmed that after the detection of the main security problems of the kingdom, the Dawuro kings usually held public discussions. Afterwards, the congregation promised to build walls and dig ditches on the whole borders to shield from the alien threat. This public promise (oath) is known as “nuu awaa lafunuwa mayizada” (the oath of our seven forefathers). Accordingly, it had become the hallmark decision for generations to accomplish the construction.

2.2. Role of Social Structure in Dawuro Wall Construction

The well-structured social structure of the Dawuro people has played pivotal role in the construction of the walls. According to key informants confirmed that the well-organized political administrative structure of the kingdom empowered regional states and they played key roles in the whole construction phases. In such a social and political structure, even their leaders knew the names of each individual (Seid 2007: 41; Wandimu, 2009:17). Tha Dawuro had the following social structure:

King → Woraba → Erasha → Guuda → Daana → Huuduga → D’uga.

The king rules and oversees all the functions of the subordinate social structures. Worabas (‘regional’ leader) were authorized in each administrative region under the king. It seems that each region under woraba was ordered to fortify its own territory. Then, the construction sites of the regions were also subdivided for different Erashas (village leader) under the supervision of Woraba. Thus, the quota was given to each woraba to mobilize the people in his/her territory. Labor mobilization takes place through conscription of labor force based on quota system. An individual who could engage in the construction was recruited from each family based on a quota scheme. An individual who could engage in the construction was recruited from each family based on a quota scheme. The quota system was given for each of the seven administrative regions.3 For instance, if there were four youngsters in a family, two of them would be sent to build the walls and the remaining two would serve the family. If there were no youngsters in the family, the male parent would either go to build the walls or pay additional tribute (in kind: such as offering fatten goat, ox, and/or sheep). Sometimes apart from the quota, some individuals would voluntarily participate in the building process to be

3 These seven administrative regions include: Gena, Bosa, Loma, Koyisha, Mareqa, Tocha and Isera.
regarded as gadaawo means a hero. Thus, we have three approaches of conscription: youngsters are mandatorily required to construct (quota system), a male parent can either take part in construction or pay in kind in lieu of his absence, and finally, in addition to these categories any volunteer can take part in. Later on, the independently built fortifications were interconnected with one another thereby forming complete and unified Defense Walls.

It is important to note that the building of the walls took place on difficult landscapes of hills, plateau, mountains, plains, and steep cliffs, searching for appropriate sites that could pledge the military defensive strategies. Three to seven parallel rows of walls would be built in the directions where an intensive attack was assumed to arise. The inaccessible steep cliffs, hills, mountains in the border would reinforce the defense system. In these areas, the walls were not constructed instead those natural fences were believed to serve as defensive grounds.

2.3. Description of the Physical Structure of the Dawuro Walls

The Dawuro walls were constructed on strategic defense positions, skirted by the Omo and Gojob Rivers. The length of a single row of the wall, estimated to be more than 200km and the sum total of each wall was about more than 1000 kilometers (Ministry of Culture and Tourism 2010: 1). In addition to my field observation, some of the informants stated that the heights, upper width, and thickness of the walls varied according to the landscape as well as the direction from which a threat was expected. The upper width and the heights of the walls, being proportional, give regular thickness of the walls. When the height increased in the plains, the upper width also increased vis-à-vis to the steep hill area. During the fieldwork, 20 selected sites of the walls were measured to estimate their height, width, and thickness. Accordingly, the height of the walls ranged from 1.8 meters in steep hills and ill-constructed areas to 3.8 meters in the plains and well-constructed areas. The average height was about 2.6 meters. The length of the upper width of the walls extended from 1.6 meters in the steep hills and poorly constructed parts to 5.70 meters in the plain and well-constructed areas. The average length of the upper width was about 3.5 meters.
Fig. 2. Partial view of Dawuro walls (photo by the authors).

The dry stone walls were two separate but interlocking walls, tied at irregular intervals. Neither mortar or nor cement was used for bonding. Carefully dressed, sharp and flat stones were placed towards the front sides on the upper part of the walls facing the enemy position. Indeed, it was designed so as to easily crash the enemy who happened to break/cross the wall. Hence, to make the walls strong enough, the proportion of thickness, height and width of the walls were well calculated on the basis of how much a cavalry horse able to jump the wall.

Constructing dry stone walls was very expensive and time consuming. Scholars suggest that building dry stone wall currently may not be cheap even if supported by modern technology. A 1.5m high dry stone wall might cost £270. Walling needs hard work: a good craftsman can build probably three meters of wall a day.

2.4. Dawuro Walls: Main Gateways and Its Function

As a defensive wall, the Dawuro walls had the ‘killing fields’ in between the Walls, ranging from 300 to 1000 meters, which help the soldiers attack an enemy by surprise. A killing field referred to an area between the first wall and second or third wall. When the first wall was breached, the guards ran to the second wall and ambushed
the enemy. Soldiers usually waited on top of the second wall armed with spear, shield, knife and sharp stones. When the enemy came to the killing field; soldiers could step ahead and easily attack them. If the enemy forces breaking the walls were enormous, they would retreat back and hide themselves on the other walls (third to the seventh walls). At the bottom of the walls, very sharp wooden weapons were erected to crash the enemy when they tried to cross the walls.

Moreover, the Dawuro walls had main gateways appropriated to control the import and export trade activities. The movements of people to and from the neighboring kingdoms were highly controlled. These gates did not have doors to be opened and closed rather watched by soldiers day and night. The king directly assigned gatekeepers (Wogaa 1992: 42; Seid 2007: 27; Womdimu 2009:18). The Dawuro Walls had seven main gateways. They were: Gate of Dara, Gate of Aba-Garga, Kaffa Gate, Gate of Qala, Gate of Yelu or Doylu, Gate of Zima Waruma and Gate of Zaba Garada. Here below each of the main gateways are discussed.

i. **Daara Mitsa (Gate at Dara):** It is located in Gena Bosa district in Baza-shota around Gibe and Gojeb Rivers confluence. It is found on the top of the first row of the defense walls. Above the gate, there were two rows of Defense Walls and two watching towers on the top of the mountain and there are ten fortresses built on the two sides of the gate.

As illustrated in the figure below, in between the exit and entrance door there were three steps of seats carved from rocks. The gate keepers seat on them to check the incoming and outgoing of the people both for security and to collect tributes. Besides, on the two sides of the gate there were ten forts: five on the right hand and five on the left hand side.

ii. **Aba Garga Mista (Gate of Aba-Garga):** It is located in the western part and used to control the attacks from Jimma and Konta; yet it was used as trade route to Jimma. As to informants, the forces of Menelik II controlled the territory through this gate in 1891.

iii. **Ella or Kaffa Mista (Ella/Kaffa Gate):** It is located in the Manta-Tulama to protect the territory from aggressors and cattle burglars especially from Kaffa.
iv. **Qala Mitsa (Gate of Qala):** It is located in the southwestern part on the border of Konta and Gofa. Yet, the cattle raiders from Menit, Bume, and Goldia continuously attacked the Dawuro society during dry season in this direction. Currently, the gate is found in the dense forest of Chabera-Churchura national Park.

v. **Yelu or Doylo mitsa (Gate at yelu or Doylu):** It is located in the southern part on the borders of Gamo-Gofa, and Malo.

vi. **Zima-waruma or Dangarsa mitsa (Gate of Zima Waruma):** It is located in the eastern part on the way to Wolaitta. In this direction, seven parallel rows of Walls were built to block the attacks from that side.

vii. **Zaba-garada or Barakenna mitsa (Gate of zaba Garada):** It is found in the northeastern part of the region on the borders of Kambata, Tanbaro and Wolaitta.

3. Evaluating the Current Condition of Dawuro Walls

Based on the data gathered from fieldwork, the factors that exposed the heritage to endangerment can be broadly classified into three actors: natural hazards, local communities’ activities and state development projects. First and foremost, the Dawuro Walls remained for half a millennium without any maintenance and protection. Hence, the dynamic changes of climate exerted its own impacts on the heritage. As a result, this heritage is highly damaged by the continuous variation of temperature. Some of those natural factors affecting the heritage are weather, land slide, wind and bank erosion, trees growing on the walls, and wild animals. Second, local people’s undertakings such as settlements, land grazing, use as construction material and others had affected negatively the maintenance of the walls. Third, state led development project had also demolished some parts of the walls. For example, for the purpose of construction of main road part of the Dawuro wall was demolished. Here below, these three actors are noted and analyzed.

**Natural Hazards:** The walls are located in the hot gorges of Omo and Gojeb Rivers. The temporary variation of temperature and rainfall throughout its age caused the disturbance of structure, joints, curving position and its architecture. As a result, the Walls are cracked and dismantled in various areas. Besides most of the walls were constructed on the topography of steep hills, plateaus and mountains of high potential areas where land sliding occurs. During the
rainy seasons, the land highly slides from the top of hills and mountains, causing the Walls crack and break down. Besides, the high erosion rate and some of the small water drainage (during summer season) dismantle it. When strong winds cause trees to tip over, the roots of the trees often displace the structure of dry stone. Furthermore, there are numerous natural growing big trees on the walls and their surroundings. Similarly, the structure of the walls is disturbed when wild fire burns down both the branches and roots of old trees. These trees dismantle the Walls twice, first in their growing stage and second when they get burned. Finally, the damages also exerted from various wild animals such as monkeys, apes, lions, leopards, buffalo, hyena, antelope, etc often cross the walls while searching food from the other side of the walls.

Activities of Local Community: Here, according to the data obtained from field observation and focused group discussion with local community members, the damages on the heritage caused by settlement and resettlements. As discussed earlier, the high density of population and shortage of farming land might have forced the people to search for free land around the walls and to settle there. Such human settlements damage the structure of the walls and this has been clearly observed during the fieldwork. Second, the inhabitants near the walls graze their cattle in the Omo gorge by crossing the walls. The local people cross these parallel rows of the walls in various directions so that they could access free grazing lands, and mineral waters in Sogida as well as Omo Rivers. The inhabitants around the walls get wood for construction, fuel and agricultural implements from Omo and Gojeb gorges by crossing several rows of the walls.

State-led Development Induced Endangerments: Today, Ethiopia is achieving its economic prosperity through constructing infrastructures such as roads, hydroelectric dams, and others. While the rate of the introduction of development projects and investments increased, the destructions on the heritages are also increasing from time to time. Specifically, when roads and dam construction activities were launched in the area, the heritage was easily removed just like any kind of “garbage” and was disfigured without any due attention for its historical significance.
In this regard, it is very important to elucidate the controversies between development projects and heritage conservation specifically on the Dawuro walls.

**Case I: The Construction of Sodo-Chida Road (1996)**

In 1996 the Ethiopian Road Authority constructed a road that crossed the walls in seven different parts. To minimize the labor and financial costs of the construction, the contractor simply removed the well-dressed basalt stones from the nearby walls and used it for the construction of road as raw materials without any consulting the Dawuro people or compensating the people. This issue was clearly reflected during the discussion with local community members in the fieldwork. Currently, the road that connects Dawuro, Wolayitta and Oromiya Region (e.g. Jimma and Illu Abba Bora zones) is found in area to be submerged by the Gibe III Dam reservoir. Therefore, the road is realigned in the downstream direction to the Gibe III dam.

![Fig.3. Sodo-Tercha- Chida road construction which cut the walls (photo by authors)](image)

**Case II: Gibe III Hydroelectric Dam Project**

Gibe III dam project is being constructed on the Omo River between Dawuro and Wolaitta zones in SNNPR. The reservoir of the dam extends for about 150 kilometers over the narrow Omo River gorge from elevation 670 to 896 meters above sea level. It has the capacity to produce 1870 MW and
an annual energy production of 6,500 GWh, which provides great input for the development of the country (EEPCO 2009: 1). On the other hand, such a big project has its own side effects on the environment and historical heritages. For instance, *The Great defensive stone Walls of Dawuro* are one of the historical resources located in the west bank of *Omo* River (from 1 to 2.5 kilometers away) and exposed to a serious destruction due to this project. The impacts of Gibe III dam project on the heritage is examined at three levels: during initial stage (the building of road routes, camps, clearing of trees and geological excavation), construction stage (digging foots of dam, bulldozing trees and stones to remove waste materials from one site to the other) and operating stage (its partial occupation by the reservoir).

At the end of 2006 mid-day international consulting engineers of Gibe III hydroelectric project reported to ARCCH that they had encountered the elongated stone of *kati Halala* walls in Dawuro and *Ijajo* wall along the *Omo* River (Haile 2007:399). Besides, in November 2007 they also sent a letter to Dawuro zone administration stating that:

> According to our research findings, we found that the historical wall, built by King Halala of Dawuro, has total length of 175km, highest 2-2.30 in the project area. During the operation stage of the Dam, about 5km of the wall was partially submerged by the reservoir. Therefore discussion with concerned body is needed about the aim of the project, and the expected impacts and rescue mechanisms.

Based on this request, from January 28 to February 4, 2007 preliminary archaeological survey and rapid impact assessment was conducted by team of 3 ARCCH experts and 1 from the mid-day international engineers consultancy particularly in the accessible area of *Zima-waruma Kebele* in Dawuro zone (Hailu 2007: 400). Later, on November 20, 2008, ARCCH conducted fieldwork survey in 2 phases: first from October 3-14, 2008 and second from October 15-November 2, 2008 in five zones (*Wolayita, Dawuro, Jimma, Hadiya* and *Kambata-Tambaro*) of reservoir outpouring areas and adjacent buffer zones. Its principal aim was to evaluate and locate archaeological
resources in the proposed area (ARCCH 2008: 2-3). This interim study stated that a total of 45 sites of Archaeological importance were located in the course of the survey; most of these sites are located above 893masl (below 893masl expected to be submerged by the reservoir). Out of this, 4 sites were identified in Wolaitta side of the Omo River whereas 41 sites were found to be in Dawuro zone (Loma and Gena-Bossa woredas) on the western side of the same river. Eight sites were found in Subo-Tulam kebele (found in Dawuro) where the construction of the dam and its related activities are taking place and located between 700 to 920 masl and found between 2 to 2.5kms away from the Omo River (ibid: 8-9). This report also concluded that most of the discovered sites contain defensive walls which might be affected by the dam reservoir. The report also added that two sites from manara locality in kindo-koysa district of Wolyita zone and six sites from Dawuro zone will be affected by the water of the reservoir. Besides, the walls that descend from shirgimi mountain of Dawuro to the same valley can be flooded by the reservoir through shirgimi Valley that joins the Omo Valley. Moreover, three sites that preserve the Halala defensive walls could be affected by the construction activities and may be covered by water if the reservoir is over flooded. Sied (2007: 27) also anticipated that “the newly constructed Gibe III hydro-electric power station may affect its (Halala walls) historic significance in the future.” Even though the interim archaeological survey partially identified the impact of Gibe III dam on the Halala walls, it was reserved from describing the magnitude and scale of the impact in measurable units (like kilometers, meters and so on).
At the beginning of January 2009, a discussion was held between the Mid-Day International Consultancy Engineers and Dawuro zone administrative bodies (with five members) on the importance of the project, impacts of the project and compensation issues. Among the other issues, it seems that the zone administrative officials stressed in their discussion about the historical significance of the walls for Dawuro society and attention should be paid to preservation activities.

On the contrary, some of the government owned magazines (zemen metset October 2006: 48), by referring to environmental and social impact assessment, stated that about 2% of the Halala walls (5kms) would be flooded by the reservoir. Disputes, surprisingly Abraham Dereje reported in the Ethiopian Herald (October 13 and 23/ 2013) that:

The construction of Gilgle Gibe III Hydroelectric Dam, which is expected to go fully operational in April 2016, will not have any effect on King Halala wall. A research undertaken on the dam’s environmental effect revealed.... that the artificial lake which will cover about 150 km of land will have no effect on King Halala wall, which was constructed by king of Dawuro in the 16th century to protect the people from external attack. The 175 kms long wall is completely free from any possibility of being under the water of artificial lake unless unexpected flooding happens in the area, Yacob noted.

However, the water of the artificial lake
is expected to cover 2% (1.34 km of the 67km long wall) of King Ijajo wall, the other wall is located in Wolayta zone... the dam’s reservoir will not totally have any effect on King Halala wall while only 2% of King Ijajo wall may be covered by it.

This quote may indicate the controversies of the interim archaeological survey findings and the government reports regarding the impacts of Gibe III on the kati Halala walls. Moreover, the existence of favoritism of studies towards the development projects could seem lead to wrong conclusions. Specifically, even though the interim archaeological survey suggested that six sites of Halala walls of Dawuro and two sites of Ijajo wall in Wolayta will be flooded by the reservoir, it has showed favoritism towards Ijajo wall. Likewise Tsadiqu (2014: 47) stated that even though the designed rescue mechanisms for Ijajo wall, which was built by the provincial ruler of Walyita seems fair, but it couldn’t put a clear rescue mechanism for kati Halala walls. Thus, the exact part of the heritage that would be submerged by the reservoir is unknown because of the absence of appropriate documentation and continuous in-phase archaeological and historical assessments.

On the other hand, it could be argued that, the commencement of Gibe III project in 2016 will have the following merits, if properly handled: promotion and conservation of the Walls; archaeological importance of the walls, the registration of the walls as national and international heritage, access to additional infrastructures (like boat and road transportations), and attract tourism and recreation development. These are the hopes aired despite the damages it causes to the heritage the Dawuro people cherished for centuries.

In nutshell, any reasonable person can see that the natural, local communities and the state led development projects are causing serious damages to the Dawuro wall. Leaving beside the controversy over the impact of the dam would have on the Dawuro Walls, serious attention to its conservation shall be given. According to UNESCO (2013: 25) there are two main approaches of conservation and management of heritage. The ‘conventional’ approach refers to the methodology adopted by the conservation professionals on the conservation of the materials of the past to be preserved for the sake of future generations. The other is ‘value-led’ conservation approach based on the values
attached by all stakeholders (not only by the experts). In the latter case, conservation and management plans should be based on local values and, more importantly, on the cultural significance of heritages to the society. For instance, the Dawuro people regard the Wall as the symbolic and feels about their destruction stating that “walls are built up on our forefather’s bones and bloods and even walking on them is taboo” (EEPCO 2009). This has to be positively viewed and valued so that its protection shall be built on this value.

4. Concluding Remarks

The great Dawuro walls are complex, unique and famous medieval dry stonewalls in the Omo Valley. The walls have been considered as signals for the existence of high degree of political and social cohesion of the society. The walls are sources of self-inspiration, pride and identity for the society that witnesses the patriotic deeds of the people by building strong unity. Historically, it is the living testimony for the Medieval Civilization in the Omo Valley during the 16th to 18th centuries. Scientifically, it can help to investigate the indigenous architectural technology in dry stone building and a potential area for research in archaeological, historical, and engineering fields of studies.

However, this article found that, first, state-led development projects are jeopardizing this historical heritage and worries of the Dawuro people are sidelined. Lack of emphasis from ARCCH for conservation of the walls at national level undermined its necessary cares and protections. This indicates that it needs cooperative conservation campaign to protect, safeguard, and preserve the heritage. Second, there should be an attempt to: first, launch awareness creation training for the local people and design a participatory and integrated conservation projects. Third, authors suggest that, it is quintessential empowering local experts and researchers on sustainable preservation. Third, do deep inventory assessment and research on the side of the effects of development projects on the heritage and clear naturally growing trees from the walls. Fourth, involve public universities and other research institutes in the conservation process, create open-air museums, build recreation centers and organize tour exhibitions.
References


