

Ethiopian Ethics or “*šine migibari*” “*ābiro minori*,”(Living with others) as Ethiopian Ethics

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Abstract: *Ethiopian ethics observe a network of interdependence and relationships that are naturally given to stimulate, sustain and nurture life. Indigenous morality is one of a critical study relevant for Ethiopians to build strong relationships among citizens. Ethics in Amharic the national language of the country the equivalent word is “šine migibari”. There are virtues of approaches to deal with in studying Ethiopians Ethical life. Ethiopian ethics can be classified in the first place, into environmental ethics, conflict resolution, religious ethics, and natural resource utilization. The Majority of people in Ethiopia are religious. The Ethiopians ethics are driven from scriptures mainly the Bible and Quran. Hence, in Ethiopian Ethics there is a deep relationship between religion and morality. However, there are ethical values that the society developed from daily interaction with nature and the human-built environment. The word “ābiro minori” typically represent living with others. Living with others refers to living with another human being and nature. The word “ābiro minori” (living with others) in the national language are found in a different term in other indigenous languages. The “ābiro minori” principle is the central themes in both classifications of ethics in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian ethical values are also found in traditional indigenous religions. The indigenous political structure in the past was also the source of moral life in some parts Ethiopian society like the “Geddaa” system. Like the other African moral life sebi’āwīneti(‘humanity’) and wenidimamachineti(brotherhood) govern the Ethiopian ethics. The concept “ābiro minori” (living together) make the Ethiopian people for intermarriage between different language speaking groups in the country. It makes the different religion to live with tolerance. It is this unifying factor in Ethiopia that make the people live together in the absence of central government in a time of internal chaos in history. The principle of hager wodadinet(Patriotism) is the other best ethical virtues, principles in Ethiopia, which contributed the people victorious over the giant imperial power repeatedly and keeps their independence. From the individual perspective, it is polemical, not to discuss Zara Yacob ethics in “Hatata”. The ethical views in Zara Yacob "Hatata" are based on the classification of laws into two “the Law of God” and “The laws of Man”. The ethical principles have also been dedicated to “The principle of harmony”, “Respecting living by the fruit of work”, “Gender equality”. According to the philosopher “The light of reason in our heart” is authoritative for measuring all the ethical principles.*

Keywords: Ethics, Ethiopian ethics, ābiro minori, patriotism, Hatata,

Introduction

In Ethiopian ethics the “ābiro minori”(living with others) principle is not limited to the relationship between human being. It is also between human being and that of flora and fauna.

The “ābiro minori”(living with others) principle between human being is based on the idea of ‘humanity’ (sebi’āwīneti) and wenidimamachineti (brotherhood).

The relationship between human being and the natural environment is based on mutual benefit and that of the intrinsic value given to the natural environment. In the study of the Xhosa society Breidlid (2004) explained there is a holistic interrelationship between ‘human beings’, ‘nature’ and ‘the supernatural’ in the African knowledge system (Breidlid,2004,5). The same is true in an Ethiopians knowledge system.

The relationship between human being based on sebi’āwīneti(humanity) and wenidimamachineti (brotherhood) can be explained on the bases of historical fact in Ethiopian history. And the relationship between human being and the natural environment can be explained from the cultural values embodied in the ethics of the community in the country.

The human aspect also has a conflict resolution aspect, which is part of the cultural aspect. This fact has enabled Ethiopians to maintain their unity and freedom. Their country has also been able to resist foreign invasion. The country’s history show even in the time of disagreement among the people due to different reasons, they reunited in time where the country is under invasion by a foreign power. In time of aggression the unity among Ethiopians regardless of religious and ethnic background on their historical enemies is strong(Teshome 2017). The unity formed in time of difficulty is rooted in “ābiro minori”(living together) principle. The principle is deteriorating in their day to day life mainly due to the currently colonized system of education and politics in this

uncolonized country. The situation gradually deteriorating the Ethiopian 'self' those elements which the Ethiopians experienced in their culture, history, politics and communal life rooted in their ethical life (Teshome (2017).

This article, therefore, tries to discuss the Ethiopian ethics from the environmental, historical, political, cultural and individual philosopher perspectives.

The “ābiro menori” (living with others) principle from historical perspective.

Patriotism, as an ethical conduct.

In Ethiopians life, hagerwodadinet (patriotism) is one of the best ethical conduct and moral feeling of mind (Teshome,2017,310). Ethiopians are proud of their country. That is why they defend their country several times from European colonial power and remain independent. However, locally, for several times Ethiopia as a country and Ethiopians as citizens feels pain due to conflict for power among politicians starting from ancient times of monarchs and landlords (Adejumobi, 2007,3). During the Italian invasions in 1896 when emperor Menelik made a call for all Ethiopian helping him to defend the country from invaders the people sent warrior to the war front from both corners of the country. This is one occurrence, in the war before and after Adwa, the people as a whole sacrificed for the good of the country to make Ethiopia free from colonial power invaded the country. The victory was an epitome for other African country at the time to liberate them from colonial rule. The Adwa victory for “the Black diaspora, the shining Ethiopian triumph signified present dignity and future possibilities” (Harold,2005,229), it was also one of the best parts of the patriotism of Ethiopians.

As a Christian church movement

African Christians who denied of hierarchy in the church may perhaps voluntarily appropriate Ethiopia as a symbol of identity and willingly follow “Ethiopianism” as an intellectual and religious nationalism movement and mass activism. ‘Ethiopia’s cultural legacy’ in this case it helps to initiate and evolve black intellectuals to struggle for black freedom and independent nationhood” (Adejumobi, 2007,2). This cultural legacy is no doubt patriotism and living together for common belongings. Ethiopianism as a movement has many parts. The Christian part of Ethiopianism movement is mainly rooted in the Bible; especially in the Biblical sections Psalm 68:31 which prophesied that "Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands Unto God.”

The intellectual movement also initiated some scholars to call for the return of all blacks to their mother land which can be considered as an expression of ābiromenori(living with others).

Another important political and cultural legacy was Ethiopians contribution for pan African movement. It is to support other black countries the Emperor of the time Haile Selassie call for the black people to come to Ethiopia. The emperor, as a symbol of gratefulness for the support of the black people contributed to Ethiopia during the war with Italy offered to the member of the Ethiopian Federation (EWF) 200 hectares of fertile land at the periphery of place called Shashemene, (Bonacci,2015,151). This is one of the ethical values of ābiro menori (living with others) that resulting from the Ethiopian community reflected by the emperor. ābiro menori (living with others) principle of the Ethiopian values attracted many to Ethiopia among some of the good examples “Noel Dyer to tie his identity, freedom, redemption, and future to that of Ethiopia” (Ibid) . Dyer’s journey was first from his country to England where he found no justice and freedom. Hence, he started travelling on foot to Ethiopia the land of justice and equality at that time to search for justice and freedom. It is not only Dyer but also many African descents came to Ethiopia from both the Caribbean and America in the nineteenth century and live together with the Ethiopians (Ibid). This indicates ābiro menori(living with others) exemplified living together with all in wenidimamachineti(brotherhood) without discrimination (Teshome, 2017,1829).

From historical perspective the ābiro menori (living with others) principle which is revealed in different historical time can be explained in another live symbolic example, one is the first migration of Islam to Ethiopia which the Islamic religion followers called the first “Hejira”. In this religious movement, Mohammad companion and relatives when suffered hardship in Mecca, they

flee by the order of Mohammad to Ethiopia the country which was chosen by the Prophet Mohammad when his followers and relative needed safekeeping and freedom from persecution. Lastly, the Christian Ethiopian king (Negus) Al-Najashi, welcomed them without forcing them to convert to Christianity.

"The first Hegira," al-hijra al-'ula, was to Christian Ethiopia. The Prophet's initial followers, the Sahaba, persecuted in Mecca in 615-616, were ordered by Muhammad to seek asylum with the Christian king, al najashi Ashama, of al-habasha. The episode, a story of generous hospitality, survival, redemption, and success is in itself outside of our scope. It left a double message for the Muslims community that the Ethiopian Christian najashi's generosity, his refusal to betray the first small community of Muslims to their Meccan persecutors, his befriending of and correspondence with the Prophet, and his contribution to the latter's victory, left a special message of gratitude for Islam" (Erlich, 2013,4).

This historical event showed how the *ābiro menori*(living with others) ethics was deep rooted in Ethiopian traditional life taking *sebi'āwīneti*(humanity) and *wenidimamachineti*(brotherhood) as a basic principle.

The "*ābiro menori*" (living with others) as a concept can be traced to the ancient civilization of the Ethiopian community, although the principle is still shared across much of the country. *ābiro menori* (living with others) definitely is a social philosophy based on the principles of (brotherhood). The care of the Ethiopian Christian kings his hospitality, respect and responsiveness to the Muslim community are the best reflection of Ethiopian ethical value *ābiro menori* (living with others). This ethical value is collectivist in its orientation - articulating the value of relationship, mutual aid and collaboration .

Gudifecha(adoption)

Gudifecha(adoption) in Ethiopian society, especially that of the Oromo community of Ethiopia is one good example for the ethics of *ābiro menori*(living with others). In Ethiopia, the term *guddifachaa* (adoption) is one form of adoption, which is inherited from the Oromo indigenous language. "It means adopting a child by satisfying all the economic, psychological and social rights of a family member" (Dessalegn, 2006,13). Gudifecha(adoption) is practised by all Ethiopian (Ibid). This practice is still widespread in all parts of the country which represented the *ābiro menori*(living with others)ethical life.

Traditional Dispute Resolution

Customary dispute resolution in Ethiopia is one of the most important areas that *ābiro menori* (living with others) is clearly revealed. Studies showed that there are well organized customary dispute resolution mechanisms among different communities in Ethiopia(Alemu, 2014,601-623). Though, the names of the institution or process are given different name across the country the practices are almost similar. To mention some as a sample in the Oromo community of Ethiopia upon the demand of disputants elders is selected to mediate the dispute which is called *Jaarsummaa*(meditation)(Ibid). In Amhara community of Ethiopia also the dispute is operated by elders and they are elected by the disputed parties. The three terms used in different location in the Amhara community named as '*Shimglina, Erq and Giligel*'(mediation)(Melaku and Wubshet,2008, 107-121). In a Mao society of Benishangule Gumuz regional, state dispute is resolved by religious leaders of Mao known as *Qallu*(elders). Decisions are passed depending on the issue for dispute. In the Komo society of the same region also they are elders who handle the case (Bayisa and Lemessa,2008, 123-131). There is an institution called *Gereb* for the resolution of the border conflict between Tigray and Afar ethnic groups in the country. The institution compiled elders from both ethnic groups to resolve conflict(Shimeles and Tadsse, 2008, 217-236).

The *ābiro menori* (living with others) in Ethiopian coffee ceremony

The Ethiopian coffee ceremony is one place the *ābiromenori*(living with others) is practically mirrored. The ceremony gives pleasure to all Ethiopian including those who do not drink coffee. The traditional Ethiopia coffee ceremony for Ethiopian is the central part of the social and cultural life of the Ethiopians (Doyle 2009). An invitation to participate in the coffee ceremony is considered a mark of companionship or respect and the reflection of hospitality (Ibid). Especially, in the rural part of Ethiopia the neighbouring residence is drinking coffee in any one of the house the ceremony is prepared. It is in the form of rotation every day that coffee drunk with the neighbourhood. The same thing is there in urban areas, though it is not deep as of the rural community. At present, the traditional coffee ceremony is conducted as a form of business in small, large cafeteria and on the nearby walk roads. Workers

from different organizations after lunch, drink coffee in these shops in group and informal discussion among work mate is held at this place.

From Environmental ethics Perspective

The *ābiro menori* (living with others) ethical principle is not only living with the human being or human built environment but also with the natural environment. The indigenous people in Ethiopia have their own rule to deal with the natural environment. To simply show a few examples that reveals this situation in Workeneh (2011) study of Borena Oromo society in Ethiopia clearly show that the Oromo society of Ethiopia gives respect for certain wild animals because of their belief. They abstain from killing those animals living in the communities' worship and sacred places. The reason, according to the belief of the community is that the animals are there simply because God sent them to save the animals from different threats. According to the Borena Oromo of Ethiopia, the animals are 'Wayyuu' who fled to 'Wayyuu' which is to mean (respected). In the Borena society to be considered as 'a man of God' one has to be individually dedicated (Workeneh, 2011, 3-4).

The indigenous people are environmentally friendly people who have their own way to live together with the natural environment friendly (ibid), the example shown in the study of the Ethiopian community 'Gedeo' cultures by Abyot et al (2013, 14) reveal that it is culturally forbidden to cut huge indigenous trees. These trees, according to the local people considered as symbolic representations of the 'Gedeo' elders who planted them. "It is a taboo to cut down the trees. Cutting tree according to this community is seen as demolishing the reputation of those who planted them" (Ibid). Hence, one can consider it as one way of preserving trees from cutting down. However, at present the study discovered that due to the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge, and priority given to international education than the indigenous perspective, there is a tendency of shifting to anthropocentric behaviour. The influence of globalization and western knowledge steadily deteriorated the respect, especially the young generation gives to indigenous knowledge and values (Ibid).

For the Gedeo community of Ethiopia living together in harmony with the natural environment is not a matter of choice but it is an issue of survival. For the Gedeo community the natural environment is the sources of both economic, rituals, and other aspects of life (Tadie, 2017, 39).

In the Ethiopian Orthodox Church the protection given to the natural environment such as trees and other living things in church compound is another good example. "Relations with nature figure prominently in the monastic spirituality at the heart of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church; Monastic rules prescribe respect for nature and the protection of all living beings within the church or monastery precincts" (Person, 2016, 5). That is why big tree are found in most of Ethiopian church compounds. The intrinsic value given to trees by the orthodox church is high.

Traditional cooperation as a reflection of *ābiro menori*(living with others)

Cooperative societies are found in a different form which shows the *ābiro menori* (living with others/together) in Ethiopian society. Such cooperation exists in rural and urban setting of the community. Some cooperation is found in agricultural communities. Some exist both in urban and rural area. Debbo, Jiggie or Wonfel(indigenous cooperation) are found in the rural community serving different purpose. Their purpose is mainly supporting one another in time of ploughing, weeding, harvesting, construction of house, and other activities which need cooperation. The traditional cooperation which exists in both rural and urban areas is like Equib, Eddir, Mahiber, and Senbet. Equib is a voluntary money saving cooperation in which member get together, to collect a fixed amount of money weekly or monthly. The money collected goes to each member in the form of rotation. The money may have for fixed purposes such as construction of house, clothing, or other purpose.

Eddir is organized mainly to support the diseased family for burial ceremony. However, currently the purpose includes wedding and development activities in the area it organized.

The other forms of cooperation in which *ābiro menori* (living with others) ethics is practiced in both rural and urban areas are "Mahiber" and "Senbet". In these organizations, mainly the *wenidimamachineti* (brotherly) or *Ehitamamachinet* (sisterly) relationship is highly expressed. "Mahiber" is a type of periodic feast held in each member's house periodically. However, in the

case of “Senbete” members prepare food and local drink “Tela” and take it to the church where members get together. “Senbete” is a type of get together that takes place every Sunday and the feast is in the church compound.

The traditional cooperation in Ethiopia is a form of “Ubuntu” because “Ubuntu” is a reflection of an essential interconnectedness of human existence; it is based on the principle of ‘care’ and ‘community’, ‘harmony’ and ‘hospitality’ respect among the community (Richard, 2014). Ubuntu that existed for centuries in a sub-Saharan African culture that symbolizes ‘respectful treatment’ of all people as ‘sharing’, ‘caring’, and ‘living in harmony with all creation both human and natural environment (Leonard, 2014,1). It is the same principle of ethics that reflected in *ābiro menori* (living together) of Ethiopian ethical principle. In Ubuntu (People are people through other people) and it represents humaneness, caring and community (Ibid) which is similar to the Ethiopian ethics *ābiro menori* (living with others) which connotes *sebi’āwīneti* (humanity) and *wenidimamachineti* (brotherhood).

Gibregebinet (Morality)

In ancient Ethiopian indigenous curriculum and at home students learn different skills, virtues and right conduct. The virtues and right conduct are mainly based on the teaching from the holy books. However, in the present so-called modern education curriculum, there is no opportunity for learning such knowledge as “Moya (Skill), gibregebinet (morality), and Sinsireaat (right conduct)” (Elleni 1992:7-26). This is mainly because Ethiopian education is colonized by Western Education. This requires promoting Indigenous Ethiopian knowledge to make it bloom again the principles of Ethiopianism.

Ethiopian Ethics from individual philosopher

It is polemic, not to discuss Zara Yacob ethics in “Hatata” in discussing Ethiopian ethics. “Hatata” is a system of thought which refers “to question bit by bit, piecemeal; to search into or through, to investigate accurately; to examine; to inspect” (Sumner, 1985:225 and Habte 2012:134).

In “Hatata” Zara Yacob’s written work some parts are devoted to ethics (Teshome 2016,435). Zara Yacob classified law into the law of God and the law of Human. For human beings to be self-governing in the sphere of moral life, they have to always check with the law of God. In the sphere of the moral life for human beings to be self-sufficient must always check his action with the law of God (Ibid). According to philosopher Zara Yacob of Ethiopia “we cannot, however, reach truth through the doctrine of men, for all men are liars” (Zara Yacob in Sumner 1985:240). Hence, human being must check his activities with the law of God. “God sustains the world by his order which he himself has established... because the order of God is stronger than the order of men” (Ibid). According to Zara Yacob without the guidance of God through his gift of reason the dogma of man will destroy the order of the world created by God (Teshome, 2016,436).

Respecting one another as an ethical principle of Zara Yacob started when he was suffering because of his idea different from the priests of the time. The threat from the priest on him either implicitly or explicitly brought harm to him. Zara Yacob explained the incidence in the following way “Moreover, our reason says: Do not do unto others that which you do not like to be done to you, but do unto others as you would like others to do unto you” (Zara Yacob in Sumner, 1985,242). Hence, according to him being from different faith should not result in a threat. His emphasis on respecting one another, view is vital, even though we are different (Teshome, 2016,437).

The Equality of man.

For Zara Yacob in the face of God all are equal since humans are His creature. The problem is that the inequality that exists created by the work of humankind. God destined all equally to die and all are His creatures. Zara Yacob stated in this way “All men are equal in the presence of God; and all are intelligent, since they are his creatures; he did not assign one people for life, another for death, one for mercy, another for judgment” (Zara Yacob in Sumner 1985:239). The question of equality extends to mankind and humankind for him all are equal (Teshome, 2016,436).

Living from the fruit of work. This is one of the ethical values in the teaching of Zara Yacob including his disciple. The value given to work occupies as the central themes in the work of both philosophers which is considered as a response against the established norms in ancient Ethiopia, where less respect was given to manual and technical trade (Sumner, 1978,217). The respect Zara Yacob

gives to work can be explained in his feeling of the happiness when he started working in the rich man's house Habtu. The work was copying and teaching of the Plaster of David. He thanks God for starting living from the fruit of his work (Ibid), it is because the work was not for free but with payment.

The other principle which was reflected in both the historical and environmental ethics seen in the public which also has space in the individuals philosopher's work is "the principle of harmony". Zara Yacob is much known in this ethical principle. According to this principle he stressed that everything created by God is good. Hence, creating harmony with nature which is the creation of God is good. In this principle, Zara Yacob emphasis, the need for good practice to gain health, stability and happiness, which is central in his "Hatata". Things far from best practice lead to instability. So everyone according to Zara Yacob is the master of his actions. In his word "God created man to be the master of his actions, so that he will be what he will to be, good or bad" (Zara Yacob in Sumner1985:235).

"ābiro menori" in Ethiopian Foreign Relation

One of the best reflection of "ābiro menori"(living with others) on international affairs was the support Ethiopia provided after Adewa battle to other African Countries which were at the time under colonial rule. Ethiopia was served as a voice for other country(Teshome ,2017,313). During colonial period Ethiopians provided both material, military training and diplomatic support to the African countries to liberate them from colonial yoke. African rulers like Nelson Mandela of South Africa and Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe are trained in Ethiopia. Ethiopia played leading role in the establishment of AAU(African Union) the current African Union which African countries came together in their common affairs which in Ethiopian language "ābiro menori". Ethiopia, in general, played the significant role both at diplomatic, material, and training support for those African brothers and sister under colony, apartheid and racism. "Ethiopia has thus come to initiate for the rise of a modern black political tradition that struggles for political independence and anti-colonialism" (Saheed ,2007,3) , which is direct reflection of the principle of "ābiro menori" (living with others).

The other important reflection of "ābiro menori"(living with others) is the intermarriage relationship that exist across all parts of Ethiopia. In previous time though the situation is gradually changing due to ethnic politics in the country, it is only love which matters irrespective of the ethnic background.

Still in the rural part of Ethiopia whoever, come to their home as guest even stranger they show gratitude , kind and happy when receiving guests. They highly respect and welcome their guests. This is the principle of "ābiro menori"(living with others) which is deep rooted in the society. In any eventuality, when there is no space at their home they give priority to the guest who came to their home. Showing hospitality to guests is the principle of life in Ethiopian ethical value "ābiro menori"(living with others). It is a way of life that based on communal life; it is non- individualistic in its character. "ābiro menori"(living with others) refer to an all-encompassing attitude which calls for dignity, respect and love in our relationships with others humanbeing and nature. It is obvious that this ethical life is at present facing ample political challenges in the country. This is because of the challenges of contradictory ethnic politics based on divide and rule in the country. For the restoration of this values there is a need for indigenizing the school curriculum (Teshome 2017,60-63).

Conclusion

The "ābiro menori"ethics in Ethiopia is based on the idea of sebi'awīneti (humanity) and wenidimamachineti (brotherhood). The Ethiopian society's ethical customs, practice, rules are crucial to create ethical citizens.

The ethics in Ethiopian life are primarily associated or parallel with living together. The idea gives recognition to others by showing respect and brotherhood. It recognizes the potential of living together. In which our humanity is built up only when we are together. However, the indigenous ethics are gradually in danger due to several factors, including globalization, political conspiracy in the country, and money politics.

It is utmost important to preserve and promote indigenous ethics for ensuring development in the country by transforming the young generation into ethical citizens.

Therefore, preserving, promoting, controlling and ensuring the use of indigenous ethics and making part of daily life has paramount importance. This is possible when the country indeginize school curriculum. This doesnt mean total elimination of westen curriculum but mixing of both system.

The “ābiro menori” (living with others) is communalist way of life. “Ābiro menori” articulating the value of cooperation, mutual aid and communality. It emphasis the value of solidarity, respect for one another and living as one in diversity. Giving private demand to communal interest. In short, it is important to understand that “ābiro menori” is a social principle of life based on harmony among human being, care, respect and mutual cooperation. However, living with other is not only with other human being but also with nature.

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