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FARMERS' VALUE ORIENTATION AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS SECULAR TIME AND WORK ETHICS IN TIGRAY, ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

This research paper studies the secular value of time and work ethics, as experienced by farmers in rural Tigray, Ethiopia. The general objective of this research paper was to identify the triggering factors for having low esteem for secular success through hard work and proper utilization of time among farmers in rural Tigray, Ethiopia. I systematically examined the socio-cultural construct of time and work ethics among farmers, using structured and unstructured interview, focus group discussion and observation as our main data gathering techniques. The data were analysed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The finding of the study shows that their attitude towards any aspect of life is shaped by their goal of life. It also reveals that farmers in the study areas orient their life goals towards 'that-world' than 'this-world'. The finding of the study also indicates that the 'present' tense does not have existential value in their socio-economic construct of time. The most important factors to negatively influence the farmers' attitude towards the secular value of time and work ethics were shown to be: the old sacred myth Scriptures, the life orientation of the farmers and the influence of the authority structure of religion.

Key words: Christian farmers, Tigray, Ethiopia, Secular time and work, socio-cultural, life orientation

1. INTRODUCTION

It is commonly understood that societies with different socio-economic background construct the concept of time quite differently. Though societies have been living in time, the categorization of time into the conception of cyclic, linear and holistic is a recent work of philosophers, historians and physicists (Cladellas, 2009). In all layers of human past the conception of time has gone through many changes due to impulses of survival. Hence, time had been a very difficult concept to define throughout human history and remains a disputed issue among scholars till this day. In fact, the difficulty is attached with the innumerable appurtenances it holds. Because time seems to flow or pass or else people seem to advance through it or its use is simply to measure the duration of events. In this regard, Hayden (1987, p. 282) argues that

. . . time is not a natural phenomenon; rather it is a societal construct. What exist in society are duration clocks and coordination clocks selected by society, and the sequencing of events as scheduled by societal patterns.

The conceptualization of time has ancient root with various manifestations in Ethiopia for the country is home for a multilingual and multi-ethnic nation, nationalities and peoples. Although country has national calendar that presumably guides the secular activities of its citizens, most of the nation, nationalities and people used to follow their own time constructs for regulating their distinctive religious and socio-economic activities. Along with these distinctive cultures and environmental settings, there are diversified types of socio-cultural construct of time among the peoples of Ethiopia. Recently, however, there is a growing concern about the knowledge gap on the secular value of time and labour work as well as the decline of the attitude of farmers in Ethiopia towards success in secular life in general.

Scholars like Casanova (1994) usually understand secularization under three prisms. First, secularization as the decline of religious beliefs and practices in modern societies which is often postulated as a universal human developmental process; second, secularization as the privatization of religion, often understood as a precondition for modern liberal democratic politics; third, secularization as the difference of the secular spheres (state, economy, science) usually understood as "emancipation" from religious institutions and norms

What so ever the various definition of secularization, it is generally known that we live in a globalized world where physical realities and material world gained high value and importance in the daily life of human beings (Ramón 2009). These physical realities and the material world operate under the rule of 'survival of the fittest'. In other words,

the globalized world opens a competitive market where knowledge and time become the main tools for survival and economic growth. For instance, recent literature stresses that knowledge is by far the most important tool to mitigate the challenges of poverty and illiteracy (Dutton, 2004; UNESCO, 2008). In this case, sufficient knowledge on the secular value of time and work is needed to sustain secular life on earth.

Even though there is little empirical data on the amount of time that farmers spend on religious or secular matters, it is generally believed that people in Ethiopia do not engage in economic related activities during religious holidays. For instance, a study undertaken by Teshome (1971 cited in Dejene, 2000) indicates that the followers of the Orthodox Christian Church refrain from any types of productive activities during holidays. Similarly, Workaferahu (1969 cited in Dejene, 2000; Tamrat, 1972) asserts that 'Christians would choose to starve to death rather than to work on the farm on a certain Saint Day.' But it is commonly known that the farmers in Ethiopia are living under the yoke of poverty (Grover and Temesgen, 2004; Bogale et al, 2005; Alamirew, 2006; Mulugeta, 2009).

Moreover, there is little empirical data, which evinces the source of knowledge gap on the secular value of time and work as well as the factors that affect the attitude of the Christian farmers of Tigray in dreaming for a successful secular life. Thus, the life orientation and the value system of these farmers is either hardly studied or given due attention. Researches conducted prior to this current study failed to be comprehensive and underestimate the role of life orientation in shaping the peoples mentality towards the celebration of dozens of days in a Month as holidays. In fact, it's plain that the constraining core is embedded in in their social or institutional environment, which is socially constructed.

Therefore, this research paper attempts to identify the root of the established life orientation and attitude toward secular life of these farmers using an emic and ethic perspectives.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

2.1. GENERAL OBJECTIVE

The general objective of this research paper was to identify the triggering factors for having low esteem for secular success through hard work and proper utilization of time among the Christian farmers in rural Tigray, Ethiopia.

2.2. THE SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- ⊖ Identify the socio-cultural institutions under which farmers' thought and actions are shaped.
- ⊖ Assess the life orientations and the socio-cultural constructs of time and labour work among farmers of Tigray.
- ⊖ Understand the attitude of the farmers towards the secular value of time and worldly success through hard work.
- ⊖ Identify the factors that affect the farmers' attitude towards secular value of time and labour work.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question which are addressed under this study includes the following:

- ⊖ What are the socio-cultural institutions that shape farmers' concept of time and secular work?
- ⊖ What are the socio-cultural constructs of time and work among farmers in Tigray?
- ⊖ What is the basic manifestation of the life orientation of the farmers in Tigray?
- ⊖ What are the attitudes of farmers towards the secular life in general and the secular value of time and work in particular?
- ⊖ What are the factors that affect the attitudes of the farmers towards the secular value of time and work?

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The primary data analysed in this article was largely collected from Samre Zone in rural Tigray, Northern Ethiopia. In order to gather relevant data pertaining to the aforementioned research questions, the researcher used

both primary and secondary data sources and collected those data using structured and unstructured interviews, focus group discussion and observation.

Furthermore, the researcher purposely chose the Christian farmers as the population framework from which the sample respondents were selected. This is mainly because most of the farmers in the rural areas of Samre are Christians and also most scholars agree that purposive or judgemental sampling enabled a researcher to use his judgement to select cases that can best enable him/her to answer the research question (s) and meet his/her research objectives (Creswell, 2003).

Accordingly, 200 sample respondents were chosen from approximately 120,000 population units who live in villages around the town of Samre. The sample consisted of 40 priest farmers, 80 non-priest farmers and 80 female farmers. The purpose of categorizing into three clusters was to see the attitudinal difference between priests and non-priest on the one hand, and between the male and female farmers on the other. The age of the respondents ranges from 25 to 95 years old.

All the sample priest farmers were church educators and they are literate. On the other hand, all sample female farmers have no both informal and formal education. To triangulate and supplement the data obtained from the sample respondents, the researcher had also chosen 15 key informants from different areas in Tigray based on the knowledge and experience they have on the life style and mind-set of the rural Christian farmers and focus group discussion was held with them.

In the analysis part, both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed. Simple descriptive statistics were used for analysing the data representing the latter because the main objective centred on examining the attitude of the Christian farmers towards secular success through hard work and optimal utilization of time.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1. THE IMPACTS OF SOCIO-CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

The findings of the study show that family and church are the two most important institutions in the study area, which had greater share both at primary and secondary level of socialization. Similarly, the findings indicate that the family fuses its extended family members into a homogenous compact unit. While it has become obvious that the homogeneous compact unit strengthens emotions of solidarity and cooperation among family members, it could also discourage the family members to develop individuality or independent personality. Moreover, it is found that the church is both the most influential institution in rural settings and a central feature of communities as well as of each family's daily life. Therefore, it's found that the church used its religious authority structures and functionaries such as priests, deacons and father confessors, to reach society. Here religious authority structure denotes the definition given by Chaves (1994), which states as follows:

. . . social structure that attempts to enforce its order and to reach its ends by controlling the access of individuals to some desired good, where the legitimating of that control includes some supernatural component. . .

The results of this study reveal that the separation of church and state in Ethiopia has not avert the influence of the church authority structure on the social structure of the society. Although the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution brought to an end the strong bond that has lasted for centuries between church and state (see Shenk 1994), the process of secularization in Ethiopia is not yet strong.

Thus, it has become apparent that the process of secularization in Ethiopia contradicts the general concept of the classical secularization theory (see Jakelic 2010; Casanova 1994) and the neo-secularization theory (see Chaves 1994; Yamane 1997). The classical secularization theory states that 'religion has a lower impact on the public sphere where church [religion] and state are separate bodies.'

Similarly, the neo-secularization theory puts forward that the separation of the church and the state implies the decline in the sphere of influence of religious authority structure on the secular life of the society not a decline of religiosity. Contrary to these assertions, in this study the researcher identified the prevalence of the church's significant influence on the moral, spiritual, psychological, material and cultural life of the Christian farmers in the study area. This finding consolidates what Kebede (2006, pp. 824-826) states as follows:

. . . the vocation Ethiopians assigned to themselves was the guardianship of Christianity. . . Convinced of being God's favorite country, to stay steadfast and defend Christianity became Ethiopia's mission. This mission is enshrined in the founding myth of the Ethiopian nation, the Kibra Nagast (the glory of kings), which portrays Ethiopian kings as the legitimate successors of King Solomon. God's favors shifted from Israel to Ethiopia when the Aksumite King Ezana, abandoning Judaism, became Christian in the fourth century and decreed Christianity as the state religion. The myth promoting Ethiopia to the rank of the new elect of God depicted Ethiopian nationhood in terms of the oneness and common destiny of church and state, the state acting as guardian of the faith and the church consecrating the election of the people and its emperor. In addition to being an official religion, Christianity had become the *raison d'être* of a people and of its social and political system. It was everything: at once religion, culture, way of life, and polity.

5.2. THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF TIME AND WORK ETHICS

The Christian farmers in Tigary orient their goal of life towards getting salvation in heaven instead of perusing successful and luxuries life on earth. The researcher has also identified that the attitude of the farmers towards valuing of life ends is basically shaped by their eternal goal of attaining God's will in the coming world.

The findings in the study also show that the Christian farmer perceives 'time' as an entity that is created by God and gets its final stage with God's final judgment. With regard to this linear time concept, Whitrow (1972) asserts that "Hebrew and Christian doctrine defend that time is linear (process towards one divine destination) and finite (doomsday), based in that the arrival of the Messiah it will be or it was the only fact, which will not turn to repeat (eternity at the end of times). The landmark for the linear concept of time seems the idea that time had a definite beginning at the creation of the world and it will have a definite end when Christ returns at the Last Day."

In effect, the Christian farmers viewed 'time' as an entity that belongs to God alone and shall be regulated by 'Him' and shall be used for 'Him'. It has become apparent that God's time is infinite and it has not become the concern of the Christian farmers. Instead, their concern has been the 'Human Age' on earth. This is mainly because to the Christian farmers the 'Human Age' on earth is finite and hence, they believed that this finite 'time' should be used to glorify God and the church. Since they believe that death could come any time in the future, they needed to use the finite 'time' to their religious activities and they also aspired to remain always prepared for the last judgment. Therefore findings confirmed that the Christian farmers in the study area have no clear value-orientation toward their physical survival on earth though they need to have longer age on earth because they are not sure to what extent they do fit to pass the last judgment at death.

To further clarify their time concept, considering the existential value that the Christian farmers attached to the 'tenses' such as the 'past', the 'present' and the 'future' is significant. The results of the study indicates that the 'present' tense does not have an existential value in the socio-economic constructs of time among the Christian farmers in the study area.

Interestingly, the concept of the 'present' is similar with the 'Theory of Now' (see Chen 2007). According to this theory, whenever things are changing, the present becomes the past as soon as it has happened, and whatever is happening at the present moment is the only "now" that exists; everything that has already happened is no longer real. In this theory, within the idea of "now", the present does not even exist, because by the time an instant is experienced or thought about, it is already past. The idea of "now" is also justified in the Confessions of St. Augustine (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2003). According to St. Augustine, the 'present' is merely a "knife-edge" between the past and future, and that it is incapable of containing any duration of time.

Moreover, the finding revealed that the Christian farmers in the study area have unlimited future which is associated with the infinite God's time that flows to the future without any interruption until the end of the world. This situation is also similar with what Stephen and Mlodinow (2005) have put forwards as follows:

. . . the linear of time places the recorded past behind us to be remembered while we move forward, toward the unknown and what is yet to come. This makes past events unchangeable in the mind's eyewhile the entire lives are spent preparing to edit the future . . .

On the other hand, the 'Future' concept of time of Christian farmers contradicts with the concept of time that John Mbiti has attached to Africa. Mbiti (1971 cited in Booth 1975) explains that in Africa there is limited future "stretching to about six months, and in any case, not beyond two years from now." In this regard, the researcher found out that

the individual preference of time is similar with the time that the religious institutions actually require. As a result, much time of the day invested in religious services over which followers have little day-to-day control, and the sequence of a day's activities in the life of an individual is 'pegged' around key structuring episodes.

Furthermore, the nature and end goal of work of the Christian farmers, in the study area, is spiritual, i.e. work as a way of repentance, ascetic self-purification, or as a prayer to God as well as involving in church attendance. This spiritual work does not include the external aspect of labour work that is directed towards change in the physical environment as well as change in the livelihood of the society.

In this regard, Geser (2009) states that to the degree people still cling to church teaching as a source of life guidance, they are sensitive to the differences in the work-related theological and ethical positions of various confessions. Various sources also indicate that in the Western society it is after the Renaissance and Protestant Reformation that the affirmative attitude towards work as a general ingredient of religion was considered as labour work to fulfil the life on earth (Benz 1964 cited Geser (2009). However, the time concept and associated work ethics of the present time in the study area is similar with the economic thought of the pre-modern Western society. In this regard, Perrotta (2003) explains the economic thought of the pre-modern Western as follows:

. . . it seems that in all pre-modern Western thought, hostility to increased consumption in nearly always linked to or confused with the condemnation of the desire to get rich. . .

Thus, it can be said that the way of formulating secular economic habits and promoting norms of economic rationality depends on the inward and outward orientation of the people towards the secular and religious work ethics.

5.3. THE ATTITUDE OF THE CHRISTIAN FARMERS TOWARDS THE SECULAR VALUE OF TIME AND

WORK

The finding indicates that 30 (75%) of Priest farmers, 55 (66.8%) of non-priest farmers and 45 (56%) of female farmers responded that secular life is a dull necessity to them and the researcher also noticed that there is no significant attitudinal difference among the three categories of respondents.

Similarly, 40 (100%) priests, 70 (87.5%) none-priest farmers and 75 (93.8 %) female farmers responded negatively to the vision of becoming materially rich on earth. Thus, it can be said that the material richness is not a priority issue for most of the priest and non-priest farmers. This finding is consistent with the findings of Geser (2009, p.1), which states belief in afterlife shows a spectacular negative correlation with work value that pervades all confessions. Based on the data from World Value Survey, Geser (ibid) found out that Christian people who believe in an afterlife are motivated to shift personal investments (in terms of subjective attention to time, money, personal energy, etc) from 'this-world' to 'other-world' concerns. Geser (ibid) also argues that "the Orthodox Church has been even less decisive in forming secular economic habits and behaviour because it puts earthly matters at a distance by emphasizing spirituality and the higher standing of inward, contemplative orientations."

The majority of the respondents, i.e. 40 (100%) priests, 55 (68.8%) non-priest farmers, and 60 (75%) of female farmers, explain that they do not get satisfaction when they go first to work in their agricultural fields during holidays. Therefore, the findings allow suggesting that as religious involvement increases, individuals tend to spend less time in secular activities. It also shows that Christian farmers, in the study area, place more emphasis on collective religious involvement around the church. Therefore, it can be inferred that the collective religious and social environment pose positive influence to the individuals' religious commitment but negatively to the individuals' commitment to their secular activities.

Based on the World Value Survey on the Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox followers, Geser (2009, p. 28) concludes that apart from the subjective religious disposition, individual work values are also heavily affected by the surrounding culture. Similarly, the European Value Survey data confirms the demographic patterns that are usually associated with the secularization thesis, i.e. religious involvement is stronger in rural areas, among older people and among those with a lower educational achievement (Liana Giorgi, 1992).

It can be argued that the Christian farmers, in the study area, aspired not to be punished if they inclined to secular life and if they see knowledge as a means for survival on earth. Likewise, the people believe that the desire for wealth is original sin of humanity as it's indicated both in the biblical and classical version of the West (Perrotta, 2003). Therefore, the concept of time and work of the Christian farmers, in the study area, does not fit into their economic

occupation. Their economy is based on subsistence and rain fed agriculture, which requires extensive labour and time. From all this, findings, it's clear that Christian farmers have developed a negative attitude towards the secular value of time and work.

6. CONCLUSION

From the preceding discussion of the key findings of this study, I draw the following conclusions:

I conclude that still today the most influential socio-economic institution in the study area is the church. As a result of this, the religious authority structure plays a significant role in shaping the socio-cultural constructs of secular time and work ethics. It has become clear that the individual preference of time is similar with what the religious institution actually requires. Therefore, I conclude that the life orientation of the Christian farmers, in the study area, and their time concept of the 'present' time may have negative impact on the secular value of time and work ethics as well as on their the economic occupations. Such circumstances in the rural setting of Christian farmers explain not only the lack of knowledge on the physical realities of the earth but also explain the weakness of the secular government to establish strong secular institutions that could change the attitude of the Christian farmers in this case. In this regard, the main sources of knowledge gap among the Christian farmers in the study area are as follows:

- The presence of powerful authority structure of the church that shaped the inward/spiritual life orientation of the Christian farmers;
- The absence of a strong secular authority structure that could influence the outward/secular life orientation of the Christian farmers;
- A lack of the flow of valid information and knowledge about the physical realities of the earth and human potentials to deal with it; and
- A lack of knowledge that enables the Christian farmers to perceive the shortcoming of the ancient myths.

It is generally known that we live in a globalized world where physical realities and material world gained high value and importance in the daily life of human beings. We also know that the globalized world opens a competitive market where knowledge and time becomes the main tool for survival and economic growth. The findings of this current research are valuable for policy makers seeking to build secular institutions and to ensure the free flow of information and knowledge among the rural society of Tigray in particular and in Ethiopia in general. I believe that in the long run such secular institutions may contribute to build informed society whereby people decide their own life style based on knowledge and reason. Therefore, we suggest that our study result can be used as an input to understand the existing knowledge gap among the Christian farmers in rural Tigray, Ethiopia, on the secular value of time and work ethics.

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