
The Natural Occurrence Contexts in Which Social Morals are Presented in the Dejen District Society from the Perspective of Folk Belief, in The Northern Part of Ethiopia

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Abstract: *Various experts in the field point out that social morals found in African society have not been studied in depth and widely. As a result, it is difficult to say with certainty that the current and past conditions of the social morals are like this. For example, Ushe (2011); Aden and Olira (2017); Amoah and Peprah (2022) state that, African traditional morals are poorly studied and misunderstood. When come to Ethiopia, the situation is not different from above. Therefore, what are the natural occurrence contexts of social (group) morals? It is not seen that adequate explanations are given to such question. However, this study was conducted on the society of Amara region /Dejen district, which is one of the twelve regions in Ethiopia. And it is a study that investigated the natural occurrence contexts in which the studied society's social morals are presented from the perspective of folk belief. Therefore, it is expected that it will have its own role to fill the research gap. The data of the study was ethnographically collected by the researcher in person and living with the society for many consecutive months using primary data collection methods (observation, interview and focus group discussion). Obtained data were analyzed and presented in descriptive approach. Finally, from the results of the study, it was possible to understand that the natural occurrence contexts in which the social morals of the studied society are presented mainly are related to materials, performances or abstract things.*

Key words: *moral, social (group) moral, folk belief, natural occurrence context, Ethiopia*

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INTRODUCTION

The word «moral» derived from the Latin word «mores» which means custom, norm or behavior (Fransson, 2017; Tschudin, 2003). They describe the historical origin and meaning of the word. The world Book of Encyclopedia (2001) and «moral is the general attitude or outlook of an individual or a group towards a specific situation. » is said. This expression moral refers to the general attitude or view that an individual group has towards a particular situation.

In addition to that the term «moral» implies behavior...«moral» and «Immoral» suggest behavior which is acceptable and unacceptable. There is also a suggestion of «social criteria» because when we talk about moral behavior being acceptable and immoral being unacceptable, we think of the acceptance, or non-acceptance, by a society. Society has established norms or standards against which to measure different modes of behavior to determine their acceptability or otherwise (Ayeni, 2012).

Therefore, moral has basic principles of what should and should not be done in a society (Trusted, 1987; Thomas, 1997). This means that there are things that society respects and likes, thinks about, and shows through its own criteria; on the other hand, Musschenga and Harskamp, (2013); Gray and Graham, (2018) and Hazlitt (1994) point out that there are actions that are obscene in the moral sense, that society does not allow to be done or thought, and they lead their personal and group lives based on this.

In other words, morality shows what is accepted as good from the point of view of a person or society; it has principles, ideas and customs that are approved and accepted by mutual agreement, which are used by both the individual and the society to determine whether an issue is «right» or «wrong». In addition to this, it also encourages respect, responsibility, unity and loyalty, apart from indicating the views and attitudes of a society (Kaur, 2015). In general terms, we mean morals that occur in the context of social interaction, which are defined as right and wrong by the personal reason or feeling of the society and which are limited (Gray and Graham, 2018; Akpan, 2022). As a result, actions, behaviors, attitudes, etc. accepted by the members of a society and accepted as right or wrong, good or bad, to be or not to be, to be done or not to be done, are called moral values (Gilson, 1961; Thomas, 1997; Gray and Graham, 2018). These moral values can be classified as positive or negative (Tymienieck and Schrag, 1983).

In general, moral is a result of consensus, showing human attitudes and tendencies. In addition, it has its own contexts and criteria for right and wrong, good and bad. It can also be said that it is the social structure and connection of a society that can be seen from the perspective of actions, behavior and situation.

Moral can be mainly divided into two types: individual and social (group) morals. Individual morals refer to the way in which the individual applies the values that he considers good or bad to others. Social (group) morals are a type of morals that is created based on the social norms and traditions created, shaped and accepted by the members of the groups (Thomas, 1997). The purpose of this study is to examine the natural contexts of the studied society in which social morals are presented from the perspective of folk belief.

Folk belief

It is difficult to find a uniform explanation that is suitable for everyone due to the multitude of issues that folk belief includes, its close and complex connection with other folklore genres, the changes it shows over time, the differences from culture to culture, the separation of understanding between experts in the field, etc. however, experts have given different details.

«Belief, Folk: A broad genre of folklore that includes expressions and behaviors variously called superstition, popular belief, magic, the supernatural, old wives tales, folk medicine, folk religion, weather signs, planting signs, conjuration, hoodoo, root work, portents, omens, charms, and taboos» (Green, 1997)

The term belief refers to both the things we believe in and the act of believing (O'Connor, 1995). Belief range from customary actions or behaviors that bring about a desired outcome, like practical advice or a home remedy or cure...to fundamental concepts, perhaps religious or supernatural, that we learn through verbal narratives such as myth...or through observation and interaction with our particular communities (Sims and Stephens (2011: 62). When folklorists speak of belief, they understand a mental attitude or behavioral pattern that manifests in audibly or visibly observable texts and the generic ingredients of a belief system, amounting to local or subcultural religion (Dégh, (2001).

As a general, belief can be said that it refers to the expressions, attitudes, and religious knowledge, ideological philosophies, and material representations, religious practices that the community recognizes and believes as positive or negative, which can be developed based on the local, cultural, and religious foundations found in a society through generations.

Study area

Ethiopia is a country in East Africa. The country is a country where more than 85 languages are spoken and there are many materials, traditional and spiritual cultures. Therefore, in order to accommodate this multiculturalism, the government structure is a federal system⁴. In addition, for administrative purposes, the country is divided into twelve regions and two city (mayor) governments. Amara region is one of the twelve regions. The Amara region is the place where the

⁴ From 1991 till now; But before that, the country's history tells us that there was a unitary administrative system.

Amara society is settled, and it is one of the largest and widest of the more than 85 nation, nationality and peoples in Ethiopia. The communication language of the society is called Amharic. Dejen district is located in the north of Ethiopia. In the Amara region, it is 229 km from the country's capital, Addis Ababa, 335 km from the region's capital, Bahr Dar, and 70 km from the zone's capital, Debra Marcos.

METHOD

The researcher was physically present in the studied society for a long period of time from twenty-four kebeles in Dejen District, establishing a purposeful sampling method. Seven kebeles that can represent the district in terms of wine plateau and plateau, lifestyle, culture, etc., namely Kurar, Akabet, Koncher, Dejen City 01 kebele, Menj, Gelgele and yetnora were the sample areas of the study. There were a total of 21 key informants from each of these kebeles and a total of 28 auxiliary informants from each of the four, and a total of 49 people participated.

In terms of age, men aged 19-75, women aged 18-62, and religions⁵ 34 are Orthodox Christians and 15 are followers of Islam. These data recipients are selected by using the Network or Snow Ball Sampling and purposive sampling methods.

As it has been tried to indicate the data above, the researcher is present in person to study the social, cultural, customary, religious, beliefs etc. issues of the social structure in which they are presented by carefully observing and attended the social /group/ morals that are done, seen and heard in their daily life individually or in groups through actions, materials, situations, speech or in any other form. The primary data collection methods were interviews (informal), observation (participative and non-participative) and focus group discussions.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

First of all, various scholars have conducted surveys at different times and places about the natural characteristics of traditional (group) morals found in the traditional African society. Based on the findings of their research, they have made the following classifications and analyses. Among those who presented written surveys on the traditional morals of African society we can be mentioned (Aden and Olira, 2017) These researchers point out that the natural characteristics of African moral traditions are closely related to the social context of the terms humanity, this-worldly, religion, taboo and ancestral.

⁵ The information obtained from the District Communication and Culture Tourism Office indicates that the study area is where only the followers of the two religions are settled.

In addition to this, Amoah and Pephrah (2022) state that there are five natural characteristics of African traditional morals in close classification and expression, namely: theocentric, communalist, anthropocentric, utilitarian and shame-oriented. According to Walt's (2003) classification, bringing the number to six, the characteristics of traditional African morality can be described in the following terms: (1) communalistic; (2) humanistic or anthropocentric; (3) pragmatic and utilitarian; (4) tribal; (5) shame-oriented and (6) this-worldly. The definitions and essence of the words mentioned in the above classifications by scholars can be briefly described as follows. African social morals are based on religion, so their natural context is theocentric. This clearly implies that the moral beliefs and principles of the African people are derived from their religion and that religion provides the necessary justification for moral values and beliefs (Mbiti, 1975; Opoku, 1978).

In addition, the lifestyle of African society is characterized by collectivism. In other words, their social connection is «our» rather than «me». Therefore, African morality and ethics...cannot be conceived outside of the community. The communalistic orientation...means that an individual's image will depend rather crucially upon the extent to which his/ her actions benefit others rather than him/herself, not of course, by coincidence, but by design...an individual who remained content with self-regarding success would be viewed as so circumscribed in outlook as not to merit the title of a real person (Gyekye, 1998; Kolman, 1988; Aden and Olira, 2017; Walt, 2003).

In another way, fundamentally the morality of the African is anthropocentric. This means, humanity /man-centered/ is the value and center of all that is good and moral. Morality in traditional African societies is essentially social, arising out of the relations between individuals. This means that if there is no such thing as human society, there would be no such thing as morality (Bujo, 1990; Gyekye, 1998; Walt, 2003).

Without ending with this, social morals are utilitarian /pragmatic/ in nature because the value and adulation of the gods depend on their usefulness to humanity. ...morality in Africa is acts of humans that solve the problems of the world (Bujo, 1990; Walt, 2003; Wiredu, 1992).

And the next one, African social (group) morals are shame-oriented /taboo/ characteristics because an individual's orientation in life contributes greatly to eliciting feeling of guilt and shame. In every African indigenous society, there exists many laws, customs, set forms of behavior, regulations, rules observances and taboos which constitute the moral code and ethics of a given community or society. There are many things held to be morally wrong and taboo, such as: robbery, murder, rape, telling lies, stealing, being cruel, saying bad words, showing disrespect, practicing, sorcery or greedy or selfishness, breaking promises and so on (Mbiti, 1969; Lienhard, 2001; Walt, 2003).

The other is that, African traditional morals have ancestral /tribal/ natural characteristics. ...most Africans, now, whether converted to Islam or Christianity or not, still share the beliefs of their ancestors in ontology of visible beings. That means moral and ethical codes are derived from the

ancestors and also from the ultimate interest and security of the blood group. Even though individuals might operate under national and universal moral codes, their loyalty and allegiance are first to their tribal /ethnic groups/ (Appiah, 1992; Walt, 2003).

Apart from this, African morals are a this-Worldly morality. This last characteristic of African traditional morality indicates the fact that it does not believe in any judgment of our moral behavior in life after death. Beyond death there are only the ancestors who continue to live as they used to live (Walt, 2003; Aden and Olira, 2017). There is no final judgment by God which can encourage one to live a morality good life here on earth (Bujo, 1990).

In general, according to the research data obtained above, the natural characteristics of African traditional (group) morals looks like this. But what is the natural context in which they occur in society? Based on the findings of this study we found the following.

Data analysis and results of the study

According to the results of this study, the natural occurrence contexts in which social morals are presented are found to be mainly related to materials, performances or abstract things from the point of view of folk beliefs.

Materials: when we say materials, we mean tangible things that can be seen by the eyes, touched by the hands and tasted by the tongue, which are found in the studied society in man-made or natural form. As the researcher was able to understand by observing and asking in person, these are one of the natural occurrence contexts in which the society's social morals are presented. Materials in society can be divided into living and non-living. The living things of the society are the plants and the body parts. Social morals found to be related to inanimate materials were also found to be directly related to foods /drinks/, spa, cereals, and clothes /jewelries/. The social morals classified in these are the social morals that are expressed in the form of actions, behaviors and manners that the studied society allows or does not allow to be done, are desired or not desired, are considered to be right or bad, and are believed to be good or bad.

However, even if they seem to follow a positive or negative strategy in approach, when the overall thematic contents (ultimate goals) of the morals is analyzed, they are found to be good for the society as a whole (economically, socially, politically, religiously, etc.) or help bring about something positive. For example:- It was understood from the responses and explanations given by the respondents that they have the objective of maintaining unity, empathy, respect, loyalty, law and order, generosity, sharing, goodness, blessing, peace, health, compassion, sympathy, etc. in the studied society. Therefore, they are said to have positive content.

Performances: It indicates the things that the studied society does in the form of actions in their daily activities in order to facilitate social, economic, political, religious, customary, etc. issues.

The researcher saw and asked to understand that there are performances that are carried out by individual or groups for different purposes in the studied society on a daily basis, every week, month or year.

Thus, it is the second natural context in which the social morals in society occur. Social morals presented in the form of performances are distinguished by the notion of useful. The important ones were found to be directly related to slaughtering, farming, generosity, greetings, respect, directions, marriage, birth, and product production /agricultural or commercial/ work. From the explanations and definitions of the informants, it has been found that the main reason why the studied society performs, respects and prohibits these moral issues is because they are believed to bring physical, spiritual, environmental, natural, social, conscientious, systematic, economic, etc. advantages to the society.

And the last one is in **Abstract things**. By abstracts we mean the mental issues that exist in the mind in a conscious form, not concrete or expressed by actions or both. Therefore, it is understood that the studied society has situations in which social morals occurs due to different reasons, feelings and ideas that are positive or negative. The natural occurrence contexts identified as positive were age, honesty, religion and gender. The research data tells us that the social morals expressed in different forms related to these issues encourage and elevate obedience, respect, subordination, prioritization, conscientious /physical/ cleanliness, honesty and transparency in the society.

The negative ones are dark, death and addiction. Darkness and death are symbols of bad things in the belief of the studied society. Therefore, the situations or behaviors associated with these things are undesirable, prohibited, and shameful things that are socially inappropriate to be done, to be, or to be thought of; If these social morals are violated or not, if they happen or not, if they are intended or not, bad things happen to the living individual, group or society as a whole; or believed to be coming. Field data indicated that it is believed that bad things (condemnation, pain, and suffering) will happen to the souls of the dead. Therefore, they are called negative.

The last negative thing is addiction. Addiction is a sign of being to have or possessed by evil spirits in the belief of the studied society. Because of this, it is believed that a person who is addicted is possessed by an evil spirits in the belief of the studied society. Because of this, it is believed that a person who is addicted is possessed by an evil spirit. Therefore, the data obtained from the field indicated that all the social morals associated with this issue are not accepted, unethical, condemned, unwanted and hated by the studied society. Therefore, they are identified as negative. Therefore, these 22 topics, which are classified into three main and five sub-sections, are the natural occurrence contexts in which the social morals of the studied society have occurred separately. On the other hand, an attempt has been made to indicate the natural occurrence contexts

in which these social (group) morals listed above occur and the relationship between them as follows.

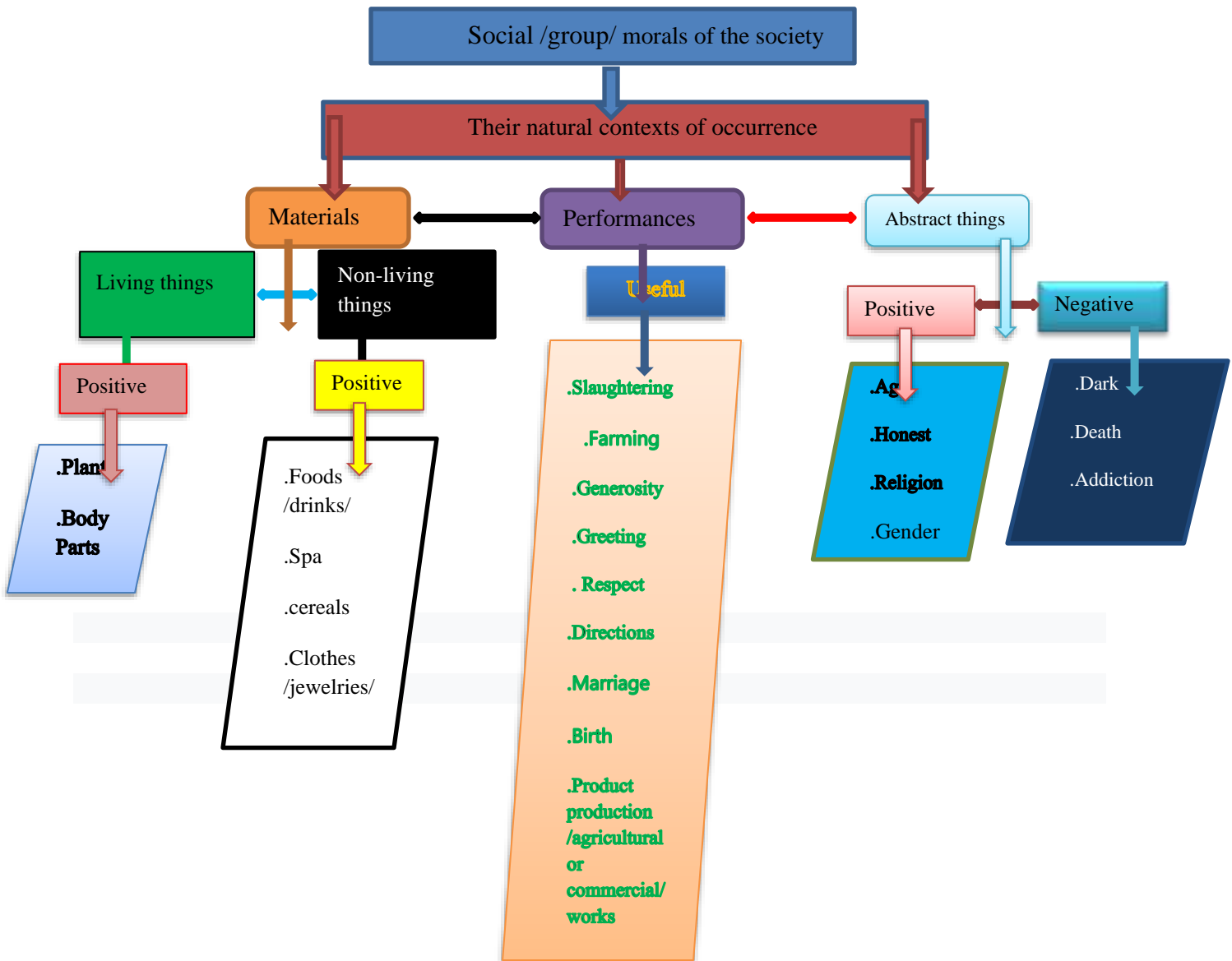


Figure 1: The natural occurrence contexts of social morals and their relationship

Summary

In general, according to the findings of this study, the social (group) morals that are used in the form of actions, behaviors and situations as right or wrong, good or bad, allow them or not allow them, to be done or not to be done, to be or not to be, in the form of actions, behaviors and situations, their natural occurrence contexts are mainly related to materials, performances, or abstract things. Material contexts subdivided into animate and nonliving. Furthermore, the morals are positive in terms of their thematic end goals. And those presented in performances form all have important social implications. Those associated with abstract things are separated into another subcategory, having positive and negative contents.

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