Re-Thinking Community Relationship for Resolving Conflict and Building Peace in Ethiopia: The Need to Shift from Com-Animation to Communication

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Abstract : In Ethiopia, the relationships between different communities have been characterized by mistrust, prejudice, and conflict, resulting in mass killings, displacement, and human rights violations. These relationships are mainly based on ethnic, religious, and linguistic lines, leading to a polarized society. The aim of this study is to appraise the nature of two major community relationships, namely the I-Thou relationship, characterized by genuine dialogue and mutual understanding, and the I-It relationship, characterized by a monologue and mutual suspicion. The study also aims to analyze how these two types of relationships contribute to either resolving or aggravating conflicts and building or deteriorating peace in Ethiopia. The study adopts a qualitative approach, specifically hermeneutics, to explore the nature of the I-Thou and I-It relationships in the Ethiopian context. It also examines how political elites shape these relationships within the community. The study finds that the dominant relationship in Ethiopian society is the I-It relationship, which is manifested as "com-animation." This relationship is characterized by mutual mistrust, prejudice, hostility, and misunderstanding. As a result, conflicts have arisen, leading to violence, displacement, and human rights violations. The study concludes that there is a need to shift from the I-It (com-animation) relationship to the I-Thou (communication) relationship in Ethiopian society. This shift would involve rethinking and readjusting societal relationships, especially among political elites, to foster genuine dialogue, mutual understanding, and lasting peace. It is imperative to overcome mutual mistrust, prejudice, and misunderstanding in order to resolve conflicts and build a harmonious society in Ethiopia. The study's findings and recommendations contribute to raising awareness among both Ethiopians and the international community on the potential for conflict resolution and peacebuilding through a shift in community relationships.
Keywords : dialogue, I-Thou relationship, I-It relationship, conflict resolution, building peace
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