

Full Length Research Paper

Friendship: acquisition forms and functions as a web of social relationship in Raya Community of Southern Tigray, Northern Ethiopia

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This cultural study was conducted in Raya community of Southern Tigray, Northern Ethiopia, focusing on the relevance of friendship for social relationships. Specifically, the study aimed at identifying the forms of friendship acquisition, describing friendship application procedures and rituals performed and depicting the social function of friendship as a web to strengthen social networks. The study was limited to the friendship of males. To meet these objectives, fieldwork and interviews were used to gather the primary data. The research design was descriptive, while the study approach was qualitative. The author found that there are two friendship acquisition forms in the study community; inherited and acquired. In the community under study, there are three friendship entitlement occasions that is friendship during an early age, friendship at social events, and friendship formed through daily routine practices. In the procedure of applying friendship, there are cultural rituals performed. Furthermore, there are local names with cultural connotations that intimates use to address each other. The social relevance of friendship has appeared as a base for the creation of fictive affinity which ensures decent social relations. Similar ethnographic studies that would contribute to the critical reading of anthropology of friendship are suggested.

Key words: Cultural study, friendship, social relations, Raya, Ethiopia.

INTRODUCTION

Friendship is a relationship that has existed across historical times in all types of societies (Keller, 2004). Friendship exists in the majority of, if not all, societies, and normally throughout the numerous stages of life (DeSousa and Cerqueira-Santos, 2012). Friendship is an important affiliation for people that endorse cheerfulness and life satisfaction through instrumental rewards, emotional sustenance and comradeship (Argyle, 2001). Definitions of friendship regularly denote to it as a completely voluntary association (Wiseman, 1986).

According to Adams and Plaut (2005), from this viewpoint, actual friendship is context autonomous rather than setting explicit, rather than a result of structural affordances, and it involves impulsive acts of fondness rather than the scripted performance of institutionalized compulsions. All these characteristics infer independent constructions of an unrestricted self which is permitted to form such relationships (Carrier, 1999).

Aristotle conceives friendship as a kind of virtue or indicates virtue, and it is also the greatest requirement for

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living that even if having all the other good things, nobody would choose to live without friends (Doyle and Smith, 2002). Friendship ascends out of meagre companionship when two or more of the mates learn that they have common belief or interest which the others do not share and which each believed to be his own exceptional treasure or burden (Lewis, 2002).

According to Ravichandran (1999), friendship exists for three reasons: virtue- when it exists for the sake of friendship, where both like and cherish each other for some admirable values in the other's character; usefulness- when established for the utilitarian value of it; and pleasure- essentially on account of the pleasure the relationship can offer. Aristotle also describes three types of friendship namely genuine friendships, one based on mutual usefulness, and the other grounded on pleasure. Genuine friendship does not dissolve, it occur between good men; the two forms will last provided that there are utility and pleasure involved in the relationship (Doyle and Smith, 2002).

Friendship was one of the pillars of the traditional community that were disordered by the upsurge of the more objective forms of society linked with industrialization, urbanization and capitalism (Tönnies, 1955). In a social system, the rights and responsibilities of friendship can exceed all formally institutionalized roles, and it diffuses the larger social order by satisfying both individual and social functions (Sivertsen, 2003). According to DeSousa and Cerqueira-Santos (2012), friendship relationships have the purpose of encouraging affection, intimacy and trust. However, even the finest friendships can have undesirable forms (Berndt, 2002).

In childhood, association with friends helps the healthy socialization process which allows them to practice positive relational features such as collaboration and social support; and negative ones, such as conflict and competition. However, in adolescence it delivers the main basis of intimacy for youths (DeSousa and Cerqueira-Santos, 2012:326). "Generally, in childhood and adolescence, the friendship relationships promote social engagement, cooperation and conflict management" (DeSousa and Cerqueira-Santos, 2012:326), while the cultural similarities of friendship are expected in different societies, in the contemporary world, cultural variation in connotation and purpose of friendship do likewise exist (Krappmann, 1996). It stands obvious that the importance of friendship to general social life differs across time and space (Beer and Gardner, 2015).

Since friendship is regarded as private, regardless of its being a public phenomenon, research on friendship is difficult which resulted in limited anthropological interest on the study of this subject (Uhl, 1991). Moreover, perhaps anthropologists have concentrated too strongly on kinship, thus becoming unmindful of occasionally even overlapping notions of friendship (Beer, 2001).

This study, therefore, aimed at contributing to the anthropological reading of the concept of friendship

through describing the acquisition forms of friendship and the functions that it provides in networking social associations among the Raya Community of Southern Tigray, Northern Ethiopia. Specifically, the study aimed at identifying the forms of friendship acquisition, describing friendship application procedures and rituals performed, specific to friendship of males, and depicting the relevance of friendship as a web of the social relations

METHODOLOGY

Research approach and research design

The study approach was qualitative search, and the design for this study was descriptive. The collected data was analyzed using content analysis that the spoken and physically observed data was described. But again, narrative analysis was used to transcribe the gathered data as interviews and observations have a narrative aspect.

Data collection tools

The period during which the primary data collection was June to August 2020. This period was during the Covid-19 crisis. All necessary arrangements have been made to ensure the protection of the researcher and the informants. The following primary data collection methods were utilized to reply to the research questions and produce a report based on the specified study objectives.

Field work

The researcher used participant observation to physically observe the ceremonies practiced in the process of establishing a friendship. As a native researcher, the author has experienced the friendship acquisition forms and the application procedures and rituals performed. Researcher's life experience was of great added value to the making of this article.

Interviews

Key informant interviews with 18 people were conducted. The 14 key informants were purposefully sampled aged people with extended knowledge of the culture and have exercised the formation of friendship. Moreover, an interview with randomly sampled 4 youth was made to comprehend their perspective viewpoints. Unstructured open-ended questions were used to gather the data. The major question include how friendships are obtained in the community under study, how do people address to their friends, and what functions does friendship contribute to the social process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Description of the study area

This study was conducted among the Raya community of Southern Tigray, northern Ethiopia. Raya community

resides in northern Ethiopia, northeast of the Amara regional states and south end of Tigray regional state in Ethiopia. There are historical evidences that the district was a habitual residence of the Doba and Qeda community, who no longer exists as an ethnic group in the present Ethiopia, who had a long-established connection with the Afars, the Amharas and the T'egrians, and Oromo that expanded to that area (Mengesha, 2010).

Raya is a name for both the community and the territory (Mengesha, 2010). Currently, five major languages are being spoken in Raya area namely: Tigrigna, Amharic, Agawigna, Afarigna, and Oromiffa, thus the Rayans do not share a mutually intelligible language (Alemayehu, 2019). Usually, this is taken as footage of respective ethnic groups that have lived or are living in the area at some time.

A historical discourse since 16th century discloses that Raya is a label for a diverse group of people that formed a collective identity due to merger and intermarriage of the stated ethnic groups (Alemayehu, 2019). This consolidation of multiple cultures in this area has resulted in a unique way of life for the study community.

The cultural values and emotional settings are virtually similar throughout the different language speaking communities Raya with insignificant differences in linguistic and cultural traits.

The research was conducted specifically at one of the villages in Raya-Azebo district which was later divided into two districts namely Raya-Azebo and Raya-Chercher. The primary data was collected from the village called Dalate, in which the fieldwork was conducted. The village was purposefully selected because it is one of the biggest villages in the study area with considerable aged population. Three of the languages namely: Afar, Amharic, and Tigrigna are spoken in this village.

Forms of friendship acquisition

The forms of attaining friends customarily involve four main cultural elements namely vowing, selecting a name to address each other, perform ceremonies of the respective applied friendship, and calling each other in a way that signifies respect. There are two forms of friendship accession. Literature on anthropology of friendship states that contrary to kinship, friendship is based on choice and voluntariness that it is an acquired not an ascribed status (Beer, 2001). However, as experienced in the fieldwork, there are two friendship acquisition forms in the study community namely: acquired and inherited.

Acquired

An intimate relationship of people can result in establishment of friendship. This procedure of forming friendship makes it a personal choice and so voluntary and proves that it is an acquired status. People can attain

friends at any age.

Inherited

This form of friendship is the type of alliance that people get as a result of the previously formed friendship between their fathers, elder brothers, or close relatives. People are told from an early age that the sons of the friends of their fathers are their friends. They use their family name to address each other. Usually, this occurs for children who closely match in their age. If there are no children of their age from the other party, the alliance could be formed regardless of the age difference as the alliance has to be maintained. This type of friendship could be extended to other relatives in case there are no boys born in one or both leading families.

Friendship application procedures and rituals performed

The acquired and inherited friendships need to be applied through one of the friendship requisitions measures. It was discovered that there are three friendship entitlement occasions that is friendship during an early age, friendship at social events, and friendship formed through daily routine practices.

Friendship during early age

Children at early age exercise friendship when they are looking after sheep, goats and cattle. While heading to the field to do so, they find children at a different age. The normal scenario is that children prefer spending time with their favorite kids. The continuous connection results in forming a friendship. The fundamental rule is that friendship is dependent on the mutual pact of the parties. The children do not need consent from their parents to ally. The parties proceed to perform a ritual after they agreed to form the friendship. The ceremony could be performed in the presence of other kids or autonomously. They sat face to face catching a pebble with their left hands and holding their right hands with their little fingers crisscrossed on each other. Then, they swallow the pebbles vowing that they are friends from that instant forward and that they will not deny each other at adverse events. They choose one of the terms of friendship to name each other and decide to never address themselves using their actual names. In case one of them forget the agreed name of friendship and used the real name of their alliance, they get penalized with a formerly agreed punishment. If the mistake continues even with continuous punishments, it can result in an offence to the addressed party to the extent of terminating the partnership. Usually, the penalties are looking after the

other's animals for some time, minor punching with free hands/legs, or slight beating with a stick or bush branch.

Social events

There are two social events at which men can apply the formation of friendship namely circumcision and marriage. The social events validate the formality of the friendship of the parries. Once friends are invited to these social events, they get acknowledged by family members and relatives and their ally becomes branded publicly. One basic principle is that once you are invited to one of these social events, it is mandatory to invite them in return to similar occasions. There is no standard vis-à-vis the number of friends essential for the social event but usually, it ranges from five to fifteen.

Friendship at circumcision

Circumcision happens at two different age categories. First, at early ages; and secondly in their teens. There are no fixed ages for both categories. The later life juncture requires a celebration. People gathered, traditional music played, aboriginal dances performed, and food and drinks served. During the circumcision, the boy is in company of his friends. Usually, the ceremony lasts for a week. The friends stay for the whole week taking care of the boy and serving him with foods meant to bring fast recovery from the circumcision's wound. The food items could be collected from the family, relatives, neighbours in the same village, even from adjacent villages. The friends could be from both friendship acquisitions forms, but most apparently from the inherited acquaintance. For the acquired friendship, for any buddy to join the social event as a friend, there is a need of preceding communication of parents of both teenagers, usually fathers, that the father of the boy to be circumcised must properly request the other side for the friendship to be formed. The friends have equal status, except the fact that one of them is considered as a premium friend which they call *bokri-arki* in local terms. The premium friend is assumed to have relative special intimate and is responsible to coordinate the other friends throughout the ceremony.

Usually, the circumcision formality persists for a week period. The specific ritual of applying the friendship happens towards the end of the circumcision ceremony. A spotlight of a candle but usually a lamp is required to perform the ritual. Early morning, around 4:00 am is the perfect time chosen to accomplish the rite aimed at having a complete attentiveness. Though not mandatory, all friends are expected to attend the event. All available friends seat rounded next to the boy. Then the friends crisscrossed their little fingers of their right hands with the boy one by one. With their hands attached as stated, the lamp must be on. At that moment, a facilitator starts

speaking. A relatively elderly person, usually an older brother of the circumcised boy or any relative, facilitates the sets of actions at this occurrence. If not, any of the friends could handle the course and get replaced by another for himself. The intermediary tells the friends that they will be friends from that instant. He fabricates stories of both parties and tells both sides. Invented stories such as that one of them is a thief, a killer, or a deceiver and may encounter a serious problem at some point. Then, he asks both sides whether they will maintain their friendship and stand beside each other regardless of the future challenges in which they are expected to vow to do so. After that, if friendship is attained, the friends are given a chance to choose one of the friendship names to address each other; or asked to start using their family's designation if it's an inherited friendship. Finally, both together, put out the light vowing that they will perish like the light any moment they betray each other. The friends get replaced by another and the same process happens for all of them.

Friendship at a marriage

Like in other communities, marriage has a special value in the Raya community, which is one of the principal social events. At a marriage day, the bridegroom gets a company of his friends. The friends could be from both friendship acquisition systems but clearly from the inherited one. By default, friends that attended the circumcision ceremony are part of the marriage event. However, there is still a chance for the groom to have additional friends on his marriage day. The premium friend maintains his status also at this occasion with extra responsibilities such as leading the communication with the bride and her relatives, organizing the event, and handling all cultural performances required for the event. The ritual is almost the same as the circumcision. The major difference is that a bride is added to the bridegroom's side. Then, the mediator addresses each friend versus the couple to crisscross little fingers of their right hands. Similar fabricated stories are also used to get the pact of their friendship and vow to not each other or commit any wrong. The usage of the lamp is also similar. Then, they choose one of the friendship names, or start using the term from the inherited friendship, or keep using the designation they selected at the circumcision event as appropriate.

Routines practice

The third category of the friendship acquisition procedure is the normal routine practice in which people acquire friends at any age and various circumstances apart from the above procedures. To illustrate, there is a chance for people to have friends in addition to their allies at an early

Table 1. Names used by men to address friends, their literal translation and respective conceptual connotations.

S/N	Name in Ge'ez spellings	Names in Latin alphabet	Literal translation	Connotations
1	ትላማኒ	Ti'amani	The trustworthy	That a friend is someone who you could give a trust.
2	ወደጎይ ወይ ወደኛይ	Wediney	The son of my mum	That a friend is like a brother, has a strong sense of fraternity.
3	ዳርፎይ	Darchay	My edge of the universe	That a friend is someone who you don't compare with anyone, second to none, the end of best friendship.
4	አልጋዮ	Algaye	My bed	That a friend gives you comfort like a bed.
5	ሳንዳይ	Sanday	The wheat	That the friendship is denoted by light brown color, pure or immaculate.
6	ፀባይ	Tsebay	My Milk	That a friend is worthy, has a value.
7	ጥንቅሽ/ይ	Tinkishey	My sweetie	That a friend is not like others, and hard to find. It also means that a friend has an inherent substance, a unique and bonbon element.
8	አንጉዐይ	Angu'ey	My bone marrow	That a friend is a source strength and never let you fail, a trusted companion.
9	ፅላሊ/ይ	Tsilaley	My sunshade	That a friend is someone who protects you from any external compression.
10	ሐበህ/ይ	Habeney	My pride	That a friend is the source of pride, and proud of having him.
11	ፅላሊ/ይ	Elaley	My mix of water & milk	That a friend has some sort of mixture with you.
12	ናብሳ	Nabsa	My soul	That a friend is like your soul.
13	ሙሰላይ	Musley	My alike	That a friend has similar appearance/ behavior is selfsame.
14	ምሽጥጊ/ይ	Mishtrey	My secret	That a friend keeps a secret, never tells anyone else.
15	ምዝጋዮ	Mizgaye	My right hand	That a friend is the source of strength, who you can depend on when necessary.
16	ምራፊ/ምራፀይ	Mirats	My chosen one	That a friend is the best choice of you.
17	ፅራይ	Tsiray	Pure	That their friendship is pure.
18	ሐለፋይ	Halefay	My premium	That a friend surpasses others.
19	ደስታዮ	Destaye	My happiness	That s friend is the source of cheerfulness.
20	ሙሽታይ	Meketay	My shield	That a friend defends or protects you from any exterior attack.
21	ሩሐይ	Ruhey	My soul	That a friend is like a soul, someone you really care about.
22	ታዎተ/ይ	Tawete	My ark	A friend is one you have faith in to get protected from any evil entity; or who helps your wishes get fulfilled.
23	አያሐው	Ayahaw	The father is my brother	That a friend has blood relation in addition to the formed affiliation in which the kinship descends through father, vertically or horizontally.
24	ማዕተባይ	Maetebey	My loop	Loop is a thread dressed on the neck by people to signify that they are Orthodox Christians which they are devoted to. That a friend is
25	ፅሩይ	Eruy	Equivalent	That a friend is a matching.
26	ሽጉጠይ	Shigutey	My handgun	That a friend is like a pistol which you could use to defend yourself.
27	ምትፈላይ	Mot-Felay	The inseparable	That the friends are intimate; they would only be separated by demise.
28	ሃምልባይ	Hamlibey	The wholehearted	That the friendship is cheering, someone who you count on with no reservation.
29	ዓፅም-ሲጋ	Atsmo-siga	The bone-flesh	That a friend has a consanguineal relation in addition to the friendship. Or, that a friend is like kin.
30	አይገፋላ	Aynfale	Inseparable	That friends are close, intimate.

Table 1. Contd.

31	ጉደይ	<i>Gudey</i>	My discreet	That a friend keeps any subtle you have in life; he is respectful of privacy and secrecy.
32	ቀለመይ	<i>Qeleme</i>	My color	That a friend your type, a portrayal of your character.
33	ዓይኔይ	<i>Ayney</i>	My eye	That a friend is key for your realism; and he is someone you really care about.
34	መዋሳልተ	<i>Mewaeleti</i>	The day-colleague	That a friend is who you stay every day with and enjoy spending time with.
35	ወለላይ	<i>Welelay</i>	My honey	<i>Welela</i> is the particulate semi-liquid of honey. This naming represents that a friend is who you have a deep liking with, sweetie, affectionate.
36	ጠጅይ	<i>Tejey</i>	-	<i>Tej</i> is a local beer made from honey, acholic but very sweetie. This name is used to denote that a friend is sweetie, very much loved.
37	ለምጎይ	<i>Lominey</i>	My lemon	Lemon is treasured for its pleasant odor in the study community; that you feel pleasant for having the friend, helps you avoid any discomfort.
38	ፎታውዮ	<i>Fotawye</i>	My devotee	That a friend is your enthusiast, follower or a fun.
39	መጣፍላተ	<i>Metafi'eti</i>	The co-disappearer	That a friend is an attendant when you decide to accomplish ridiculous or astonishing things; that he allied with you during adverse and prosperous situations. A kind of live-together or die-together friendship.
40	ምሓዛይ	<i>Mhazay</i>	My buddy	That a friend is a companion, partner, or a playmate of the same age.
41	ምኸሺ	<i>Mokshi</i>	The namesake	That a friend has the same name; both have similarly given a real name.
42	ምስጉዳይ	<i>Mstyatey</i>	My mirror	That a friend is who you count on to clean your mess; who he helps point at the disorder.
43	ናዉሽጠይ	<i>Nawushtey</i>	My innermost	That a friend is who you could count on to sharing thoughts and internal feelings.
44	ከራዮ	<i>Hraye</i>	My chosen one	That a friend is preferred to other people.
45	አይንካዳ/አይንጣለም	<i>Aynkada'e/Ayntalem</i>	The unbetraysable	That the friends would never deprive of each other at any cost, their friendship is enduring.

The symbol “/” represents that the spellings after the symbol are optional for the people to add or leave when using the names. If the symbol is placed in between two words, then the names are alternative.

Source: Fieldwork, June to August 2020.

age and the social event. There are no specific rituals performed for applying such friendships. Any of the friendship names might still be used, but usually, they choose to address each other by the term *Arkey* which is simply translated as ‘my friend’. The friends do not perform the vowing process, hence could be terminated without any requisitions. This sort of friendship has an insignificant purpose in the social system.

Names used to address friends

In all the forms of friendship established, there are cultural rituals performed. The essence of forming a friendship is entering to vow and that the initial step is selecting a name of friendship to address each other

which is called *Etsfi (Etsifti)*. When entering the vow, the performed ceremonies vary according to the type of friendship. As a rule, one designation term is used only with one associate. The individuals involved must choose one of the terms which suit their social connection and conveys the connotation of their friendship. The researcher found a total of 45 designation terms from the interviews made during the data collection. Although there could be variation from area to area, usually the first thirty names are used for a recognized alliance, while the remaining fifteen appellations are usually for informal friendship that people acquired in their childhood or in their routine life. The formality of friendship, as discussed, is appropriated at the social events. The names that people choose to address their friends are presented in Table 1.

Functions of friendship as a web of social relations

In the social system, the acknowledged friendships give significant functions in strengthening the social order in two ways as learned from the fieldwork. First, friends are expected to be part of every success and letdown event of their party. Friends offer any required support at any social relation that the more you have friends the more you are privileged in the social process. Equally, like in the case of kinship, men can give their life to protect their friends or retaliate if any harm happens to their friends. Traditionally, men describe themselves with their friends at any respectable accomplishments or even failures; they have preferred friends to remark. They use the friendship naming, otherwise the father of the friend, to denote who they are attached more. Secondly, in the study community, friendship of two individuals, particularly an alliance acknowledged at the social events leads to the affiliation of both parties ranging to act like family members and relatives. Occasionally, the association of parties through friendship outweighs the existed kinship system. This goes to the extent of restricting the friends from marrying each other's family members. Relatives of the friends, usually siblings follow the friendship naming to address their respective equals of the party. Generally, similar with kinship, friendship has solid purpose in the social relationship of individuals in the community that is the social network it establishes has contribution to the overall social structure.

Conclusion

The study area has a unique way of life that resulted from the amalgamation of multiple cultures. Friendship is one of the cultural practices that contribute to the smooth maintenance of social order. Differing to the personality and social psychological, perhaps also sociological and anthropological, understandings of friendship acquisition forms, this research reveals that friendship is not restricted to a personal choice, like kinship, but it is also inherited. In the contemporary world in which private matters are emphasized, there exists an alliance of two individuals that ensue from the strong attachment of families and kinfolks. The study of the same topic in different cultures would contribute to the robust anthropological analysis of the subject. Hence, the author recommends similar ethnographic enquiries in diverse cultural settings.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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