

Habtamu Wondimu
Handbook of Peace and Human Rights Education in Ethiopia,
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In this work the author, Professor Habtamu Wondimu has treated an interesting issue in a lucid fashion using clear language and methodology of presentation. The issue is not only topical seen from the Ethiopian context, a country that has embarked on a socio-political transition from military dictatorship with its basis in feudal autocracy to a federal democratic polity where great efforts to realize social justice, peace and development through guaranteeing citizens democratic and human rights have to be made in practice, not in rhetoric. This is what this work will contribute to and what makes it interesting and topical and for what the author deserves credit. To be precise, Habtamu has to be congratulated for having made a kick-start to producing a material of national importance of the type of his *Handbook of Peace and Human Rights Education in Ethiopia*.

To be sure, the challenges that confront these lofty ideal of promoting peace, human rights, and democracy are many and diverse. This is what Habtamu tries to make. The *Handbook of Peace and Human Rights Education in Ethiopia* also discusses in a clear and lucid manner with clear language and methods of presentation the issues of the rights of the child upon which the future fate of the Ethiopian polity rests in earnest. This is what Habtamu dwells on with details in the first chapter of the work. What the author tries to underscore in the chapter is the fact that respect of the rights is the collective responsibility of members of the society. Habtamu also has made assessment of the history, categories of rights, and international instruments of human rights, which Ethiopia has also signed. These are presented in an impressive clarity – understandable to students, educators, and all interested– with the intention to show that the issue of the rights of the child is national, regional and global in nature. Moreover, the author has provided a glossary of relevant technical terminologies used in his work and a long list of references that can also serve as materials for further reading are provided at the end of the work. Indeed, this is not what is not expected of Professor Habtamu owing to the fact that he is a professional and experienced educator in social psychology.

All these however do not suggest that this *Handbook* is without flaws. For example, in his overview of the socio-political background to this work, where he has tried to put in perspective the need for peace and human rights education in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) (pp.1 - 3), Habtamu does not seem to have given emphasis to the fact that the bad legacy of the past still has its shadow on the present. Here the author tends to believe that human rights education, i.e. teaching human rights values and

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principles at schools alone can provide guarantee for the respect and non-violation of human rights in practical life. In other words, merely by obtaining human rights education one can not rest assured and secure from having his/her human rights abused. The argument that “people who do not know their rights are more vulnerable to having them abused” (p.3) is difficult, if not impossible to empirically prove. For example, with respect to Ethiopia’s recent history, during the Derg’s era, were they not the intellectuals who were mostly the victims of the regime? What follows from this is also the fact that practices of human rights violations are both vertical and horizontal. Culture plays an important role in the practice of human rights respect or violation. Also, abuses of human rights are vertical than horizontal, i.e., despite rhetoric, it is the government that abuses human rights with impunity that one may not be able to get rid of overnight by mere introduction of values and lofty principles of human rights into the school curricula. On page 4, paragraphs 4 and 5, in reference to civic and ethical education offered in the Ethiopian education system Habtamu, however, notes the limits of integrating human rights into the State’s education policy. Here, he rightly argues, that “issues related to peace and human rights” as well as “the social and cultural aspects of the country have not been given due attention”.

In this work Habtamu has treated three broad topics: Democracy, Human Rights, and Peace. In light of this the more appropriate title the author should have given his work is “Handbook of Democracy and Human Rights Education for Peace and Development in Ethiopia”. The author tends to believe that diversity in terms of religion, ethnicity, etc. is the cause for human rights abuses and violation (pp. 3, 15). But he has not persuasively explained, how diversity per se is the cause for human rights violation and what would the solution be thereof. On page 15, while discussing the state of human rights conditions in African states that have signed the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights and other international instruments the author singles out Ethiopia, the Sudan, Kenya, and Uganda for violation of human rights. But he has not explained whether this is on the basis of degree/scale of human rights violation or geographical proximity per se. Needless to say, Human and Peoples’ Rights are violated in almost all African countries but with varying degrees. So to say, violation of human rights abuses are acute in African countries like Eritrea, Liberia, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic Congo, stateless Somalia, only to mention some.

On page 22 of his work the author tends to argue in favour of what one would call “cultural globalization” as a solution for the problem of human rights violations and abuses. In his words, “implementation of human rights means bringing about socio-economic changes in every country, and it is globalizing local cultures and *localizing* the global culture”. The idea that is illusive and demands explanation is ‘*localizing the global culture*’. The world we today live in has not developed a universal culture that is equally applicable to all the peoples of the world. Hence, the question, therefore, is whose culture is it that is to be localized? The culture of colonialism based on domination and exploitation? The idea that the issues of human rights have become ‘global concerns’ is more of NGO propaganda than reality, and in some cases the foreign policy instrument of great powers. This is what the author himself on the same page paragraph 3 captures while stating the necessity “to constantly re-conceptualize human rights and re-consider its standards”.

In chapter 2, the author has extensively discussed the meaning of teaching human rights and its significance, where he argues that the outcome of human rights education is empowerment – the process through which people and communities increase their control of their own affairs and the decisions that affect them. Here again Habtamu has paid less attention to the issue of peoples' civil/political rights. It seems that, with all due respect, Professor Habtamu has been taken by the winds of the day, the NGO ideology – stating normative values (morality) than political realism. To add insult to injury, in chapter 3, where the issue of democracy is discussed among the rights citizens are entitled to enjoy in a democratic system, the author overlooks the right to be elected (p.37), and the same 'oversight' continues on page 39, last paragraph where representative democracy is discussed.

Habtamu's discussion on the system of representative democracy is generally incorrect. Here, while his reflections on the historical and theoretical foundations of democracy are commendable, he has missed not only the fact that the two systems of representative democracy are parliamentary and presidential, but also risked the danger of implying that parliamentary democracy does not operate on the principles of liberal democracy. For example, is it not so simple for us to state that the Federal Republic of Germany (a parliamentary system) and the United States of America (a presidential system) are both representative democracies operating on the principles of liberal democracy? In the section on the 'Drawbacks of Democracy' the author ought to reflect on the present state of liberal democracy, which seems to be in serious crisis even in the lands of its origin.

The chapter on gender equality (pp. 72-78) would have been more interesting had it been given the title minorities and minority rights, that would also give the author the opportunity to include other minority groups, say political minorities in a society like Ethiopia. The chapter on Peace and Conflict (pp. 80-93) is an important part of this work. This is the chapter in which Habtamu, as a social psychologist, has demonstrated superb skill in terms of approach and analysis. The only points that may make one feel not to be at ease while reading this chapter are in the first place, among the qualities an ideal mediator should demonstrate. Impartiality is very important for a successful conflict resolution, a point easily overlooked by the author. In the second place, the conceptual difference between 'states and nation-states' demands explanation, the author also has not done this. In the third place, the author shies away from including/discussing aspects of political conflict in the chapter. Last but not least, the chapter does not mention the fact that resources are ultimate causes of any type of conflict.

To conclude, the flaws identified do not detract from the value of this work. In fact, the author deserves high commendation for producing such a valuable work to be used by students, educators, human rights activists, civil society organizations (CSOs), community based organizations (CBOs), and multiple other beneficiaries.

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