Tempoethics: temporality, ethical lives and violence of Korean family planning projects in Ethiopia

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Building upon recent ethical turn and temporal turn in anthropology, this ethnographic history illuminates how Korean global health projects and ethical lives of its participants are shaped by ideas and experiences related to time such as historical memories, modernization, revolution and urgency of national development. How do ways of imagining past and future foster new forms of governance and care built across great temporal and geographic distances? How marginalized beneficiaries of global health projects have experienced the violence and velocity of modernization efforts of the central authority in Africa modelled after East Asian countries?

During the 1950s, Ethiopia dispatched six thousand soldiers to join forces on behalf of the South in the Korean War. A half century later, one of the primary explanations for South Korean support for global health programming in Ethiopia is that of "paying back the historical debt of the Korean war." However, an Oromo diaspora critique compared it as an assistance to "eugenics" or "genocide", questioning the motive of the Ethiopian government in controlling population of its marginalized ethnic groups. Oromo is the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia and East Africa without their own independent government ever since the conquest by the Amhara people a century ago.

The current regime in Ethiopia strongly promotes long-term family planning as a population control policy, which South Korean government adopted during the 1960s. In order to meet the numerical target planned by the Ethiopian government and the MDGs, female Oromo bodies were exposed to constant surveillance and punishment for family planning adoptions and unwanted implantation of long-term family planning measures with the help of global health projects, outreach and educational activities by Korean family planning projects. Resistance to family planning was interpreted as an anti-development and thus anti-government position. Without consideration of political unrests and the state of emergency in local contexts in Ethiopia, the Korean government launched a new global health initiative.

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