From "Melting Pot" to Quest for Recognition:
The Kemant People in Ethiopia

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List of Acronyms

ANDM   Amhara National Democratic Movement

ANRS   Amhara National Regional State

CSA   Central Statistics Agency

EC   Ethiopian Calendar

EPRDF   Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front

FDRE   Federal Democratic republic of Ethiopia

FGD   Focus Group Discussion

KDS   Kemant Development Association

KPDM   Kemant People's Democratic Movement

TPLF   People's Liberation Front

UN   United Nations

OLF   Oromo Liberation Front

SNNP   Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples

TGE   Transitional Government of Ethiopia

TPLF   Tigray People's Liberation Front

HF   House of Federation

Abstract

Against the backdrop of improvements in politico-legal framework for protecting and promoting "Nations, Nationalities and Peoples" of Ethiopia, at least rhetorically, this study examines the Kemant people's quest for recognition as a manifestation of contemporary struggles for social justice in multicultural society. They remain unrecognised and henceforth denied the opportunity to exercise rights enshrined in the constitution, including the right to self-determination. So crucial is their dependence of official recognition that, their very existence as distinct group depends, political participation and representation at the federal and regional levels of the government are severely undermined. This may affect the process of implementing ethnic based federalism, and consequently building a "peaceful" democratic and "developmental state".

Given the fact that 'the demand for recognition that national groups struggle for can be changed or renegotiated in the course of the movement' (Tully, 2004:93), Kemant's demand for recognition remains far from explicated. This research brings out their demands for recognition informed by contemporary recognition theories developed by Charles Taylor, Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser and analyses in light with the prevailing political and legal grounds in Ethiopia. A key finding of this study has shown that recognition demands are multiple and interrelated, but don't necessarily supplant each other.

Relevance to Development Studies

In order for development to be materialized in multicultural state, all communities, i.e. ethnic groups, need to be respected with their particular (and distinct) identities and understood as equals, without which peace and stability remain problematic which in turn might affect the development process at all levels of the country. Respect for fundamental human rights, equitable resource distribution, and political participation and representation in decision making process are quite significant as well. This study attempts to promote inclusive development and growth whilst supporting an enabling environment for social justice, peace and democracy to flourish.

Struggle for socio and political recognition is increasingly became crucial for claiming social justice, identifying and attempting to address socio-economic, political and institutional marginalization and exclusion and analysing the contemporary movements through the lens of equality, identity and diversity. The concept is developing and requires input from various schools of thought. Therefore, the study intends to contribute to the literature of recognition through representing, and underscoring, development ideas

Keywords

Recognition, Ethnic groups, Identity, Equality, Social Justice,

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the Research

Ethiopia, a country described as "a nation of nations"[1], is one of the most populated and diversified countries in Africa. It has a total population of 85 million and more than 80 ethnic groups[2] and a substantial plurality in ethnic, language, religion, culture and socio- economic activities (Beken, 2007:106; Semahagn, 2012:169). Nevertheless, instead of recognizing and accepting this diversity, the historical Ethiopian state formation was one of severe and sometimes violent repression and marginalization of ethnic groups in the name of "nation-building".

Modern state formation was initiated by Emperor Tewodros (1855-1868), consolidated by Yohannes IV (1872-1889) and consummated by Menilik II (1889-1913) further strengthened and centralized by Emperor Haile Selassie I (1930- 1974)[3]. Throughout this period, ethnic groups who became what D. Levine (2000) called "Greater Ethiopians" had been incorporated and forced to assimilate and melt in to the dominant *amhara* culture, with insignificant space for the preservation of their distinctiveness (Merera, 2006:8; Lewis, 1983:15). There was no any institutional arrangement and even political willingness to recognize the very existence of plural identities in the country (Semahagn, 2012:169) let alone due credence to socio- economic and political claims. Assimilation had almost been equated with Ethiopian unity and integrity. Fighting the "centrifugal" tendencies was politically emphasized. These practices continued for the largest part of the 20th century.

Hence, the problem of ethnic groups has originated from "the difference blind" approach of the historic "nation-state" building process and its subsequent evolution and consolidation (Merera, 2006:8; Merera, 2003:1) The modern politico-legal structures established in the country were unable to accommodate the demands of the newly incorporated ethnic groups (Yacob, 2010:1); claims for preservation of their distinct identities, political participation and representation and fair access to economic resources were not given due attention.

Reasonably, it is not surprising to see these groups being involved in political movements for self-determination and fighting against marginalization and exclusion (Lewis, 1983:16). In other words, Mohamed Salih (2003:108) opines that in a state constituted of a dominant majority, minority groups struggle for civil rights, political participation and representation and recognition of their distinctiveness as well. This is evident that in 1960s and 70s ethnonationalist movements proliferated in the country. The most significant were

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[1] Fasile Nahum (1997) "Constitution for A Nation of Nations: The Ethiopian Prospect", The Red Sea Press, Inc: Eritrea

[2] Central Statistics Agency (CSA) (2008) FDRE, Summary and Statistical Report of the 2007 Population and Housing Census, Addis Ababa, December 2008

[3] For detail discussion see Bahru Zewde (1991) "A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1974", Addis Ababa University Press, Addis Ababa

Eritrean People Liberation Front (EPLF), Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) and Oromo People Liberation Front (OLF). State officials attempted to undermine these movements and considered them as an impediment to modern state formation.

In May 1991, the dawn fall of the *Dergue*[4] regime, a glimpse of hope for redressing ethno- nationalist grievance (Yacob, 2010:35) and historical injustice came to emerge. The new political leaders, under the guidance Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)[5], adopted a different policy of state building and promised to create a strong "nation-state" of equals and to get rid of ethnic domination and marginalization (Merera, 2002). This necessities the practice of advancing "a politics of recognition of differences" together with "a politics of equal dignity" and to the end can contribute for the development of a multicultural society, social justice and democracy which are Ethiopia's very essence. Thus, the protection and promotion of ethnic groups is not only the political objective of the government, but also indispensable instrument for state building (Beken, 2012:3).

Nowadays, though there remains ample room for improvement, the political and legal situation of ethnic groups has improved (Kiden, 2008:7). 75 "nation, nationalities and peoples"[6] have a representation in the House of Federation (HF) which emanates from acceptance as distinct ethnic groups[7] . Among others, *Awi*, *Himra* and *Argoba* in Amhara regional state, *Erob* and *Kunama* in Tigray regional state and *Alba* and *Silte gurage* in Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS) are recognized and represented in the federal and regional governments. They are self-governing ethnic groups within their respective territories. A very small populated ethnic groups such as *Qewama, She* and *Dime* 298, 320 and 891 respectively, were recognized and counted as distinct groups in 2007 National Census (CSA, 2008: 86-87). The *Koyego, Karo. Murle,* and *Gedicho* were counted as a distinct ethnic groups in 2007 for the first time[8]. This would have a significant spill over effect to other nationalities, indeed.

Currently, twelve self-declared ethnic groups, including Kemant, are demanding for state recognition[9], perhaps recognition of their very existence as distinct groups. Some other members of Ethiopian polity with their distinct and particular identities are aspiring for political autonomy. For instance, the

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[4] *Dergue* is literally means 'Committee'. It is also known as Military Junta. The *Dergue* regime ruled Ethiopia from 1974- 1991

[5] EPRDF is an alliance of four ethno- regional political parties : the Tigrayan Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF), the Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (OPDO), the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), and the South Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Front (SEPDF)

[6] The meanings and the distinction between "nations, nationalities and peoples" are not explicated in 1995 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia constitution. For the purpose of my analysis, however, I took the three categories as ethnic groups.

[7] Interview with Abebe Tadesse, *Constitution interpretation and constitutional rights directorate,* House of Federations, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

[8] Central Statistics Agency (CSA) (2008) FDRE, Summary and Statistical Report of the 2007 Population and Housing Census, Addis Ababa, December 2008

[9] Interview with Abebe Tadesse

Allie people in *Konso* special *woreda*[10] and *Goffa* ethnic group in *Gamo*-Goffa Zone who are dominated by *Gamo* people both politically and numerically are struggling for self-administration. The most "radical" contemporary ethno-nationalist struggles are Oromo People Liberation Front (OLF) and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) assertive secessionist demand to establish an independent Oromo and Ogaden (mainly populated by ethnic Somali)[11] state respectively. These organizations claimed to represent their respective people and framed their demands in terms of effective implementation of their constitutional right, i.e. self-determination up to secession (article 39).

Certainly, the demand for recognition made by ethnic groups, whether they are minority or majority, are diverse in terms of their objectives and the nature of political struggle (i.e., democratic and peaceful or violent struggles, elite fabrication and/or mass mobilization etc). Thus, each and every case study contributes to the body of knowledge pertaining to recognition. Till now, let alone a study on their quest for recognition, exclusive research on Kemant people are rare at any event (Tinbitu, 2005EC:24)[12]. In this sense, the Kemant case deserves academic investigation.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the ruling government's political rhetoric about protecting ethnic groups and promoting socio- cultural diversity, for the past 22 years, the Kemant people's quest for recognition has fell in deaf years for almost a decade. They remain unrecognized and henceforth denied the opportunity to exercise rights enshrined in the constitution, including the right to self-determination. So crucial is their dependence of official recognition that, their very existence as distinct group depends, political participation and representation at the federal and regional levels of the government are severely undermined.

The problem is, however, whether the Kemant people continued quest for recognition is exclusively a matter of a) claim for status equality and equal participation in the state; b) a question of recognition that promotes their identity formation; or c) a "nationalist" demand for political autonomy, including secession and the right to self-rule. This is much more complicated by the fact that the demand for recognition that ethnic groups struggle for can be changed or renegotiated in the course of the movement (Tully, 2004:93) Furthermore, it is unclear whether the Kemant people quest for recognition of their very existence as a distinct ethnic group will translate into political action in itself or an instrument for agitating for political representation within Ethiopian polity and/or outright political autonomy, including the right to self-rule. The Kemant political circumstance is problematic.

[10] *Woreda* refers to the local level government administrative unit higher than Kebele and lower that Zone. Kebele is the smallest administrative unit in Ethiopia.
[11] Abdullahi, Abdi M. (2007) "The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF): The Dilemma of Its Struggle in Ethiopia", *Review of African Political Economy, Vol. 34, No. 113, p.p.556-562*
[12] E.C. means Ethiopian Calendar, which is 8 years behind the Gregorian calendar.

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 General Objectives

The overall objective of this research is to examine the relevant historical factors, legal issues and the politics involved in Kemant's quest for recognition. A particular focus is given to explore the demands for recognition, cognizing the fact that the quest for recognition depends up on what kind of non-recognition/misrecognition they are struggling against and what kind of recognition they are demanding.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

- To examine the demands that the Kemant people are seeking to achieve and the substantial socio-historical, legal and political grounds to their claims;
- To explore factors which have contributed to the rise of Kemant People's demand for recognition in recent time; and
- To contribute to the literature of politics of recognition.

1.4 Research Questions

In light with the above objectives this research aims to address the following questions.

1.4.2 Main research question

- What kind of recognition do the Kemant people seek to achieve?

1.4.2 Sub- research questions

- What are the demands of the Kemant people?
- What are the factors which have contributed to the rise of Kemant peoples' quest for recognition?
- To what extent the claims of the Kemant people have a substantial socio-legal and political grounds?

1.5 Research Methods

This research is a case study research informed by multi-disciplinary orientation. It is an exploratory attempt to investigate Kemant's quest for recognition in Ethiopia which has not been investigated in detail so far. The study employed mainly qualitative method of research to become more familiar with the issue in detail. In doing so, some of the respondents' own words in Amharic, medium of the interview processes, were translated in to English and directly quoted in the research. In addition, quotations from legal documents, reports and government publications were used for analysis.

1.5.1 The Setting

The Kemant are part of the *Agaw* people live in North *Gonder* Zone, Amhara Regional State, Ethiopia. According to Gamst (1969:1) they are the original inhabitants of north central Ethiopia. According to the 1984 Population and Housing Census, the population of the Kemant people was 169, 169 (CSA, 1984) and increased to 172,327 in 1994 (CSA, 1994). However, no official data is found on the number of Kemant people in recent times.

Kemant people live in the north *Gonder*, Amhara region, Ethiopia, adjacent to and extending west and south west the town of *Gonder*. According to Worku (2010:1), currently counties (*woredas*) identified as Kemant areas are *Quara, Chilga, Lay Armachiho* and *Metema* and partially Gondar City, portions of *Wogra* and *Dembya* towns (see Appendix, 2)

1.5.2 Research Site and Selection Criterion

Two urban areas (*Gonder* town and *Chilga woreda*) out of eight *woredas* were purposively selected as research sites to get more information on the issue under investigation by taking in to consideration the limited time and cost obtained for this research. *Gonder* was selected because it is the main centre of the political movement and a place where the Interim Coordinating Committee for Kemant People quest for recognition is located. *Aykel*, the administrative centre of *Chilga woreda*, one the other hand, is a historic place of Kemant people and a place where the traditional religion is still practiced. Moreover, the largest *Kemantney* speakers and the large number of self-declared Kemant people are live in *Aykel*[13]. The data collection took place from July 9 to August 23, 2013 in both sites.

1.5.2 Sources of Data

Both primary and secondary sources of data are used for this research. Primary Sources such as semi-structural interview, in-depth interview and focus group discussions were conducted. In addition, secondary sources such as reports, minutes of meetings, letters to the government, books, articles and electronic journals had been used.

1.5.3 Techniques of Data Collection

(1) Key Informant Interviews

Five (5) key informant interviews were conducted with purposively selected Kemant political elites and federal level government officials who were supposed to have knowledge about the issue under investigation. The main objectives of the interviews were to gather information about the overall aspect of the quest including their objectives or demands, how the struggle for recognition is going on and to assess the major obstacles and challenges they are facing. Particularly, my visit to the House of Federation (HF) was to explore in-

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[13] This information was obtained from my first informal contact with the Chairperson of the Interim coordinating committee of Kemant's quest for recognition Abera Alemayehu but he was not part of this research formally speaking.

formation on how the claims of the Kemant people under the legal and political context look like, what criteria are exist to grant or deny recognition and the reasons why the claim of the Kemant people stayed for almost a decade without obtaining official recognition. Prior to field visit and process of data collection interview guides were prepared consisted of mainly open-ended questions. Finally, the questions were translated into Amharic, the local language.

(2) In depth Interviews

The primary data for this study was also obtained through in-depth interview with two persons: (1) Kasse Mengistu, the current Deputy Chairperson of The *Kemant Nationality's Quest for Recognition Interim Committee* in *Gonder* and (2) Tigabu Zegeye, *Chilga Woreda* Council Chairperson and Member of the Central executive committee, in *Chilga*. The Interviews were almost lasted for three and three and half hours. In general socio-cultural, political and historical aspects of Kemant people's quest for recognition were interviewed. In addition, they were interviewed about their demands of recognition and about the misrecognitions they faced with or experienced. Interview guides were prepared and used. The interviewees were asked whether they want to be recognized by their name and to cite it in the text. They gave the consent to do so.

(3) Focus Group Discussions

Four (4) focus group discussions each consisted of 6 (six) participants were conducted in *Gonder* town and *Aykel* with purposively selected individuals who revealed themselves as Kemant. The participants were consisted of retired government officials, civil servants and self-employed men and women ranges from 25- 65 years of old. Most of them had a formal education of different levels. The interim committee helped me a lot in organizing the focus group discussions. Focus group discussions were important to obtain information, opinions and attitudes of the people on Kemant's quest for recognition. The primary aim was to examine how the Kemant identity has been defined by the public and their socio-cultural and historical backgrounds of discrimination and exclusion from *Amhara* ethnic group and the current tempo of the movement from the community perspective.

(4) Analysis of policy narratives

This research had used document analysis as the third method of data collection. Relevant legal documents such as Constitution and Civil Society Law, the interim committee letters to the federal and regional governments and other official reported, like population census, were analysed.

1.5 Ethical Considerations

Realizing the voluntary consent of respondents is absolutely essential; ensuring the willingness of the research participants had been given priority. The objective of the study was explained. The official letter from the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) which clearly states the title of my research was crucial in my negotiation with political activists and officials at all levels of research site in order to get access to information. Respondents were told in advance that they have a right to withdraw from the research process at any

time. The researcher assured the confidentiality of the information, and therefore, no harm to them.

In the process of data collection through interview, the researcher asked the consent of the interviewees to use tape recorder and to cite their responses in the text as a reference. The researcher generally exercised due care in gathering and processing the data, and in taking reasonable steps to assure the accuracy of results.

1.7 Limitation of the Research

The fieldwork was an interesting and useful learning experience. However, the filed work did not proceed without some problems. Perhaps one of the main challenges to this study was unwillingness of as well as lack of information to be accessed form the regional government. My request was first rejected by Amhara National Regional State (ANRS) administration Public Relations Office. However, I tried my best effort to get in touch with other officials to that extent I managed to ask cooperation to my research to the Special Assistance of the President, Mr Yargal Asefa. I assured him that the data will be used for the academic research only and will not be used for any political purpose or political agenda setting although difficult to be sure how it will be used by others who read this research. Although the International Institute for Social Studies (ISS) letter to Amhara regional government increased my confidence to push forward to get information on the issue under investigation, it was unfortunate that I couldn't manage to collect data from the regional administration office, which was not willing to grant me access without any apparent reason.

This challenge implicates that the issue under investigation has become increasingly politically sensitive which frustrated my effort to be daring. Perhaps exhaustive evidence can only be obtained by working within government institutions or using a longitudinal research method.

1.8 My Position as a Researcher

In my view, the fundamental elements of any social research are the researcher's position and his/her relation with the participants. In this research, I put myself as a researcher with clear objective and value of justice which had informed my interaction with my informants. Thus, my interview process and data analysis reflect the on-going process of creating social justice.

My position as a researcher cannot be understood as "value-free" because I was relatively close to the research participants in order to get access and detailed personal experiences. Due to this, political elites in *Gonder* helped me a lot in facilitating the research process and providing me with a space for conducting it which otherwise could not be possible without their consent to collect data from any Kemant political activist who is supposed to have a knowledge on the issue. However, in the midst of the research I found myself in a situation of conflicting identities of being researcher who have "epistemological identity" who committed to know the injustice made on the Kemant people and justice to be made and my Amhara ethnicity, the group that the Kemant are accusing against. After realizing the fact that the feelings and expressions of some respondents was a challenge to my researcher process, too

much attachment with their impression was avoided. But, I had critically interviewed their justifications to events they expressed. In this regard, by looking myself as an outsider researcher I tried my best effort to understand and value the expressions of informants, but also engaged in critical assessment of their comments and ideas. In doing so, I made reflections on some issues which I had informed in the past.

1.9 Organization of the Research Paper

This Research Paper is organized in five chapters. Chapter one is an introductory part, which contains the background of the research, the research problem, objectives, research questions, limitation, significance of the study and the methodology of the research. Chapter two reviews the relevant literature and discusses the conceptual and theoretical framework pertaining to recognition. Chapter three discusses about the Kemant people and their political movement. Chapter four provides the analysis of the data collected on the Kemant people's quest for recognition. Particularly, it analyses their demands under Ethiopian legal and political setting. Finally, chapter five presents the conclusion and summaries of the main findings of the research.

Chapter 2 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

This research is primarily about recognition. For a better understanding of the issues involved, conceptualization of this term is paramount. Hence, this chapter presents the conceptual and theoretical perspectives, which had informed this research.

2.1 Recognition

The term "recognition" has been used in various contexts and with different conceptualizations.[14] It does not amenable to a single and straightforward definition. It remains the subject of intense academic debate within social and political theory (Charles Taylor, 1992; Irish M. Young, 1990; Nancy Fraser, 1995, 200; Axel Honneth, 1995; Hines, 2013). Some define it as the moral-ethical goal of inter-subjective relations; others see it as a basic human need granted to those who claim it. The consequence "is some confusion about whether recognition is a goal or the remedy for those who did not receive it in the first place" (Emcke, 2000:484). As Kompridis (2009:277) opines, "we are still struggling with the social and political meanings of recognition". For a thorough understanding of the concept, however, there is a need to reflect briefly what has been found in the literature.

The concept of "recognition", as stated in Hegel's Master/Slave model, assumes that individuals become aware of themselves only "through recognizing and being recognized by the others". Self-consciousness depends upon recognition obtained from others (Wynne, 2000:3). Relied on Hegel's model, Axel Honneth defines the term as the positive relation between individuals in a given society. He argues that the integrity of human depends upon their others approval and respect for their existence (Honneth, 1992: 188). Recognition by the surrounding community is a necessary condition for social and emotional development whereas lack of recognition causes considerable harm (Cited in Perez, 2012: 29).

Some other scholars understood recognition in relation to identity and proclaimed that it is a way of accepting, acknowledging and respecting group and individual identities and according some sort of positive values (Blum, 1998:79). Identities are by no means the product of the political and legal recognition itself rather they are existing objects. In this sense recognition refers to re-cognition or revaluing hidden, suppressed or ignored identities. The quest for recognition is to bring identities into the light of publicity. Thus, identities precede the politico- legal dynamics of recognition and misrecognition (Markell, 2000: 496).

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[14] The term can be used for acknowledging and accepting individuals as a teacher/student, man/women (interpersonal level) or can be used as a criterion for statehood (international level)

On the other hand, recognition is sometimes used to mean the constructive process through which group or individual identities are shaped or brought into being. If recognition does not simply know its objects but makes them, then identities are not pre-political phenomena that can simply be cognized (Markell, 2000:496). Seemingly, in this case, recognition has a more active and constitute role. Identities are the very objectives of recognition. New identities could develop and transformed overtime through recognition process, which implies identities are never static.

It is important to note that recognition involves acknowledging both deep rooted primordial identities and elite driven and/or instrumental identities. Certainly, the demand for recognition is part of identity politics. Identities can be politically constructed and even used as an instrument for political agenda setting. Apparently, as Sally Hines (2013:8) holds, demands for recognition have been formulated through a number of identity markers such class, race, ethnicity, nation, religion, sexuality and gender. But, problematic issue is whether the demand for recognition made by groups and individuals is exclusively identity matter or not. The next section provides theoretical perspectives of recognition in relation identity and beyond this sphere.

2.2 Contemporary Theories of Recognition

2.2.1 Charles Taylor (The Politics of Recognition, 1994)

Taylor begins his seminal essay with the idea that a number of strands in contemporary politics has significantly shaped by the need, sometimes the demand, for recognition. The demand for recognition made by oppressed and marginalized groups is one of the significant factors behind nationalist struggles (Taylor, 1994: 25).

According to Taylor the importance of recognition lays in its relationship to identity. He defines the latter as "individuals' understanding of who they are and their fundamental characteristics as a human being" (Taylor, 1994: 25). Recognition enables individuals to fashion and strengthen their identities and to secure respect from others. Without it they would experience a form of oppression that prohibits them from becoming full human agents and free and equal member of the society (Taylor, 1994:25). Therefore, his understanding of the term enforces us to think the role recognition plays in shaping our human agency which in turn affects the way we define ourselves. Non-recognition, he articulates that:

> *"… [is]a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, reduced mode of being. [Non-recognition] shows not just lack of due respect. It can inflict a grievous wound… [Therefore] recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need" (Taylor, 1992:25-26) (emphasis added)*

I subscribe to the idea that identities are reinforced by the recognition which serves as external support to individuals' internal self-identification. If other society around them mirror back a demeaning or contemptible image of themselves, individuals suffer real damage, real distortion, and consequently internalize a picture of their own inferiority and depreciated identity. Therefore, identities are shaped not only by recognition, but also its absence: by the misrecognition of others (Taylor, 1994: 25). His conceptualizes that identities

are not a mere individuals' construction from within, but also the outcome of dialogue with others. He puts "us/we" and "them/other" categories and locates the crucial role others play in the formation of our identity. The positive relation between individuals and the "significant others"[15] is, therefore, important in the process of recognition.

Charles Taylor articulates two forms of recognition: (1) the "politics of equal dignity" which assumes equal enjoyment of all fundamental rights and the treatment of individuals as universally equal human beings through recognition of their "citizenship" or "humanity"; and (2) the "politics of difference" which assumes individuals deserve recognition for their distinctiveness (Taylor, 1994:37-38). While the former is related to struggles in which legal issues are dominant and significant, the latter is connected with movements in which the major issues are identity related (Cooke, 2009:77). In this sense, Taylor dichotomized recognition demands which could be understood otherwise. In my view, most recognition struggles are identity based (in terms of ethnicity, nationality, sexuality or gender) but broaden their claims pertain to issues of citizenship, political representation, and egalitarian economic distribution, which Taylor seems overlooked.

2.2.2 Axel Honneth (The Struggle for Recognition, 1995)

Honneth theory of recognition has received a widespread academic attention since the publication of his book and its English translation.[16] The book provides insight into social forms of recognition and misrecognition. Honneth identifies three modes of recognition: care, respect and self- esteem; and three corresponding modes of misrecognition: threats to self-confidence, to self-respect, and to individuals' sense that their way of life has value (Honneth, 1995:173-174; Honneth, 1992: 190-195).

Honneth sees misrecognition as "the denial of recognition, the phenomena of humiliation and disrespect" (Fraser and Honneth, 2003:134) like physical maltreatment, marginalization, discrimination, and social exclusion and a lack of dignity whereas recognition is the positive mutual relation between individuals or groups. He argues that individuals' integrity depends upon the approval and acknowledgment from others (Honneth, 1992:188). Misrecognition causes considerable harm to individuals which doesn't represent an injustice solely because it constraints individuals freedom to action, but also impairs positive understanding of one self (Honneth, 1992:188-189). Thus, recognition is a necessary precondition for individuals' self-realisation.

In essence, Honneth shares a similar understanding with Taylor. Firstly, both realize that recognition, constructed by mutual relation with and, by the "significant others" is a necessary condition for obtaining undistorted self-image and misrecognition is a condition of "impaired subjectivity" and "damaged self-identity" (see also Fraser and Honneth, 2003:28). Secondly, they in-

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[15] Charles Taylor (1994:32-33) says individuals define their identity in relation to others, and sometimes in struggle with others. He called the later as "significant others". The term was originally used by Herbert Mead refers people who define individuals' place in the world and social role, that is parents, friends, teachers, idols.
[16] Joel Anderson translated German version of the book to English

clined to argue that individual experiences of misrecognition, disrespect and humiliation provide a basis for collective social movements. Finally, therefore, both claim that individuals seek recognition as a member of a group for their distinct identities to be respected. This understanding provides me to analyse critically whether the current Kemant's quest for recognition is mere elite fabrication or a collective effort generated by individuals' sense of misrecognition. Nevertheless, although their framework deserves attention in my research, due to their, perhaps exclusive, emphasis on identity it couldn't offer me to comprehensively understand the demands of Kemant people.

2.2.3 Nancy Fraser (Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics, 1996)

Fraser's theoretical framework is part of her effort to develop a social justice theory relevant to contemporary post-socialist politics and society (See Fraser, 1996; 1998; 2001). She says that recognition struggles for cultural identity, replaced redistribution struggles, have been occurring in a situation of worsened "economic inequalities".

By criticising Charles Taylor's "politics of recognition" which "ignores socio-economic distributive inequalities" (Zurn, 2003:524), she constructed a "bivalent" conception of justice that incorporates struggles for recognition with struggles for redistribution without subordinating each other (See Fraser, 1996; 1998; Fraser and Honneth, 2003: 3). To this end, instead of looking recognition as the revaluation and misrecognition as the depreciation of cultural or group specific identities, she suggests recognition and misrecognition to be seen in terms of the institutionalized patterns of value and practice that have the effect on individuals or groups "ability to participate as a peer in social life" (Fraser, 1998: 22; Fraser and Honneth, 2003: 29).

She argues that to be misrecognized

"…is to be denied the status of a full partner in social interaction, as a consequence of institutionalised patterns of cultural value that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem" (Fraser, 2000: 113- 114)

Fraser argues that to address misrecognition requires politics aimed at establishing the misrecognised actor as a full and equal member of the society capable of participation with the rest. Changing or modifying the values that regulate human interaction, or establishing new values to promote "parity of participation", provides the situation to overcome status subordination (Fraser, 2000:116). At this point we may observe that she shifted recognition from identity sphere to status and social justice sphere. The notions of "parity of participation" and "status equality" are central to her framework. The absence of institutional values that promotes these elements, "parity of participation" and "status equality", prevents any effort to overcome social injustice which her two-dimension approach aims to redress.

In sum, socio- political struggles for recognition for equality, political participation and economic redistribution have been formulated by groups with a defined or self- identified categories such as Afro-American, feminist, indigenous groups, minority identities etc. While some of these movements have been generated by, and aim to redress, inequalities and misrepresentations, others are emerged from the combined effects of identity or cultural, political

and economic injustice. In my view, therefore, identity is used as a collective ground for various recognition claims or the main demand to be acknowledged and respected, as a means for achieving socio- economic justice, without necessarily replacing the demand for redistribution justice. The issues of identity, equality/inequality, and participation are central to social and political movements for recognition and, therefore, equal entertained in my case study analysis.

Chapter 3 Kemant People and Their Political Struggle

This chapter explores the Kemant people's myth of origin, geographic settlement and identity markers, and the development of their political movement since 1991.

3.1 The Kemant People: Who are they?

3.1.1 Myths of Origin

Although the word "Kemant" was first mentioned in written sources in the 18th century,[17] the question of "who are the Kemant people" has been one of the contentious issues in Ethiopian politics since 1991. Their early history is more obscured and hence it becomes a puzzle for scholars interested to study this people recently. Different people have understood the origin of the people differently. Dawit (2010:53), who studied the Kemant from social anthropology perspective, stated that information about their descent line is so "highly fragmented and paradoxical". Thus, it is difficult to construct it in a more conclusive manner.

According to the myth of origin, during the time when the Canaan land in Middle East, which is located in today's Israel, had faced with drought and hunger, *Aynar* (the first father of the Kemant) and his families came to Ethiopian passed by the today's Egypt. Nonetheless, the exact time is unknown[18]. *Aynar* (sometimes known as *Yaner*) has been identified as the great grandson of *Canaan*, grandson of *Ham*, son of *Noah* (Tourny, 2009: 1226). Although there is a lack of further information about *Aynar* (Gamst, 1969:58), but it is believed that he used to live in the forest area of *Karkar*, around *Chilga*[19].

On the basis of this mythology, some traced their origin to the mythical ancestors, *Canana* and *Ayner*, and their root to Israel. In contrary, by leaving aside their land of origin, others identified themselves as descendants of *Keberu/Keberua* who is identified as the son of *Adarayke*, whom they believe as the founding father of Kemant people (Dawit, 2010: 60). Who so ever is their founding father, due to their mythical attachment to the land, some "out-group" individuals' identified the Kemant as emigrated from Egypt (Tinbitu, 2005EC: 25; Tourny, 2009: 1226).This description is purely legendary and therefore challenging to elaborate upon it.

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[17] As cited in Quirin (1998:203) the name "Kemant" is found in 'Liberato da San Lorenzo, 28 May I7I4', in Camillo Beccari (ed.), Rerum Aethiopicarum: Scriptores Occidentales inediti a saeculo XVI ad XIX (I 5 vols.) The name has often been written "Qemant"

[18] Interview with Nega Geta, one of the earlier political activists and former leader of Kemant Development Association (KDA) ; see also Tinbitu, 2005 EC pp.24-25; Dawit, 2010 p.54

[19] Interview with Tigabu Zegeye, Aykel

Like their descent line, the origin and meaning of the word "Kemant" is unclear. Nevertheless, most informants assumed that it is derived from their terminology "*Kemä-ent*", literally which means "You *Kam* or *Kamatic*". In this sense, they associated their common ancestor with the son of *Noh (i.e. Kam)* and define themselves as the people of "*Kam*" descents[20]. This implies that there is strong ethno- geographic self- identification of themselves as descendent of ancient Israelites. Of course, scholars found that the Kemant have close ethnic and historical linkage with Ethiopian Jewish (Known as *Bete Israel*) (Quirin, 1998; Tourny, 2009).

My informants believe that Amharic speakers gradually began to use the name "*Qemant*", which they assumed is inaccurate because an explosive "Q" sound in their language doesn't exist (see also Dawite, 2010: 55). In 1984 and 1994 population censuses the word "Kemant" had been used which should not be overlooked as an important institutional pattern of naming the people.

In essence, the above discussion of the word "Kemant" denotes more than a mere description of the people having a common ancestor. It seeks to affirm that the people have a collective name which symbolizes their uniqueness and distinguishes them from other social groups. It helps to organize the people around collective socio-political identity for some common demands.

3.1.2 People and Land

Fredric Gamst (1969:1), American anthropologist, described that the Kemant are the origin inhabitants of the north central Ethiopia. Their historical homeland stretched from the area around north of Lake *Tana*, which is the origin of *Abya* River (Blue Nile), to rural areas around *Gonder* town (The Interim Committee, 2004EC: 6). *Chilga*, *Metema* and Lay *Armachiho* were ancient places where the Kemant people have lived. From the mid-1950s, they immigrated significantly to the areas occupied by Amhara people and established their permanent settlements[21]. Nowadays, the Kemant live around the highlands of northern and north western part of *Gonder* town (Tinbitu, 2005EC: 34). Kasse Mengistu, the deputy chairperson of the Interim Committee for Kemant's quest for recognition, said that the Kemant are "historic people" who live in eight *woredas*, in North *Gonder* Zone, contiguously such as: *Quara, Chilga, Lay Armachiho, Denbia and Metema* and portions of *Wogra,* partially in *Gondar* town and *Gonder Zuria Woreda*[22]. These *woredas* are also inhabited by amhara people (see Appendix 3).

The population of Kemant were 169,169 in 1984 and 172,327 in 1994 national censuses. They were the 17th and 10th populated ethnic groups respectively. But, arguably, the census reports are far from reflecting the exact population size of the time and conceivable demographic transition. This would be partly due to many people were unenthusiastic to disclose their Kemant identi-

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[20] Focus group discussions; See also Tinbitu (2005EC: 27-28)
[21] Interview with Tigabu Zegeye
[22] The Interim Committee, Request letter to the House of Federation, January 14, 2005EC, p.1

ty because it was not convenient time for them to do so. They might have preferred to hid their ethnic identity for fear of discrimination and exclusion.[23]

The recent number of Kemant people is officially unavailable because they were not counted after the mid-1990s. Hence, precise figures of the population have proved difficult to determine. As unofficial estimates suggest there may be a very large Kemant population living in the country. The estimates range from 300,000[24], to 600,000[25] to 1 million people[26]. A healthy scepticism is important because Kemant activists might overestimate the number of population in order to increase their importance and to get more attention form the government, other organizations, the media and scholars. Therefore, the number of Kemant people remains a significant issue both politically and academically. However, it would be safe to say that the figure of self- declared individuals is increased due to the politico-legal changes in the past two decades and the growing Kemant's "political activism". In the country where ethnic "nationality" has been promoted and respected, at in principle, and many might not fear to reveal their identity.

3.1.3 Ethnicity, Language and Religion

Language and religion are essential elements in the formation of ethnicity, i.e. a "collective identity", along with common culture and history. They are "sources and forms of social, cultural and political identification" (Brubaker, 2012:3). Kemant are, of course, not unique in having these key components of ethnicity, which are uncovered in more details probably since F. Gamst's (1960) anthropological study of the people sixty years ago. He found the Kemant as self-evidently distinct ethnic group. In my view, this doesn't necessarily deny that ethnicity and ethnic identification are dynamic processes.

This research has found that many people, i.e., my informants define themselves as a distinct group belong to *Agew Cush* family[27], who speak or couldn't speak and/or whose ancestors spoke, *Kemantney* language and who have common history and culture distinct from the Amharas[28]. Implicit in this account is loose attachment to the language for self- identification criterion. They explicated their similarity with the reset of *Agew* people and their differences with the dominant Amhara ethnic group simultaneously.

Kemantney, not written, belongs to the central Cushitic *Agew* languages[29] (Appleyard, 1974:3160) and hence a sister language of the *Agew-Awi* (in *Gojjam)* and the *Xamta* (in *Wollo)* of Ethiopia and the *Bil* of Eritrea (Zelalem, 2002: 11).

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[23] For detailed discussion see part 3.3 of this Research Paper. See also Gamst (1964) p.1
[24] Timbitu, 2005EC:34
[25] Interview with a Nega Geta, political activist and the former chairperson of KDA
[26] The Interim Committee, Research on Kemant Nationality Quest for identity and self-rule, Gonder, Ethiopia, July 2004EC
[27] The Agew people ruled Ethiopia from undefined period to 1270.
[28] Focus group discussions in Gonder town
[29] The four linguistic families in Ethiopia are Semitic, Omotic, Cushitic and Nilo-Saharan

In the 1994, 4831 people were *Kemantney* speakers[30]. Contrary to the assertion that *Kemantney* is at the verge of extinct (Dawit, 2010: Zelalem: 2003), the recent interim committee's survey (2004EC) reflects that the people, particularly in *Chilga, Lay Armachiho* and *Wogera woredas*, still maintained their language. The survey, which figure out more than 6000 language speakers in 54 sample *kebeles*, demonstrates that *Kemantney* is spoken by the large number of the population. Political activist has uncovered that it is spoken mainly by the elderly people (on average those of above 50) for household communications. Even, they are bilingual in both *Kemanteny* and *Amharic*[31].

Kemantney language is being an important marker of Kemant identity is not doubtable particularly in multilingual Ethiopian society. The research, however, found that many people identify themselves as Kemant, though unable to speak the language. So, it was challenging to situate those non- *Kemantney* speakers, mainly Amharic speakers, who identify themselves as Kemant. Indeed, they might have found themselves in hybrid and fragmented self-identification and/or selectively applied some other markers of ethnicity.

Historically, the role of Kemant religion, *Hege-Lebona*[32] (literally which means believe in heart), was essential for providing a sense of identity and belongingness. Supportively, F. Gamst (1969:29) stating that:

> *"the religion of the Kemant [Hege-Lebona] is [was] the focal point of this closely knit ethnic group, providing its members with a sense of group identity, reinforcing their basic values, and rigidly defining the social boundaries between them and their neighbours [Amharas]" (Gamst, 1969:29) (emphasis added)*

Today, however, the majority of Kemant belong to the Orthodox Christian, while there are few Muslims, Catholics and Protestants. A very few individuals, estimated as 0.01% of the total population (Timbitu, 2005EC: 48), who live in rural areas of *Aykel* in *Chilga woreda* maintain their old religious tradition[33]. Their geographic remoteness might have helped them to maintain their religion escaped from the historical process of massive Christianization and assimilation policy since 14th century.

Hege-Lebona "comprises of many Hebraic and some Christian elements. Religious leaders through pray, chant and dance perform the central ritual, called *Kedassie*, all over the year" (Tourny, 2009: 1225). This practice is still considered as a constitutive for the entire collective identity of those very few people. Although there is little or no reference to *Hege-Lebona* amongst the majority

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[30] National Census (1994) shows 1650 and 3181 speak Kemantney as mother language and second language, respectively.

[31] Interview with Kasse ; and Nega

[32] It has been labelled 'pagan-Hebraic' because it consists of traditional indigenous African religious practices with Old Testament influences. They have special outdoor places of worship, such as certain groves of trees, where prayers recited, sacrifices performed and offerings left. They have priesthood, though no written books. They venerated Saturday, observed memorial service for the dead, in common with Christians. Once a year, they assembled on a hill and performed sacrifices in a 'Day of Atonement'. Other beliefs included the concept of a supreme God, personal immortality, and the recognition of Moses as one of God's prophets. For detailed discussion see also Quirin (1998) pp.216- 219

[33] Interview with Tigabu

to mark their ethnicity, religious affiliations remain. Some Orthodox Christians participate in the religious ceremonies, contribute money for religious performance of the Kemant priests and respect Saturdays as their main Sabbath day[34].

The above contextual and statistical discussion has a significant implication. The majority who identify themselves as Kemant don't use *Kemantney* language nor follow *Hege-Lebona* religion[35]. This implicates language and religion are not the necessarily accounts for ethnic belongingness and crucial unifying elements, while they have historically been fundamental identity markers (Gamist 1960). I would claim that they play a symbolic role and nonconformity doesn't necessary affect self- identification. This makes Kemant ethnicity complicated. So, what other ethnicity markers exist for identification and categorization of the Kemant people?

Identity can be seen as "part of an individual's concept of him/herself" (Borowska, 2003: 137), but also influenced by external perception through the "significant others". Relied on this idea, the research found that the majority of informants have a strong level of self- identification grounded on the belief in common ancestor, culture and history. Perception of common mythical ancestor has a primary importance; their identification as a distinct ethnic group is based on 'primordial' attachment established by descent, which is discussed in the first section of this chapter.

Therefore, the question of 'who are Kemant people' can be responded in the idea that Kemant are Cushitic *Agew* people who have a strong self-image of their distinctiveness based on diverse elements: common descent, culture and history, and rarely language and religion with a different level of emphasis. However, the existence of Kemant as a distinct ethnic group in Ethiopian polity needs recognition by the "significant others". The current ethno- linguistic and ethno- religious context would have a profound impact on their political movement for recognition. This complexity might contribute to the contention around ethnicity and makes the case study academically more relevant.

3.2 The Political Movement of Kemant People: Historical Genesis and Development

This section examines Kemant people's political movement[36]. Although it deserves attention as a manifestation of current ethno- nationalist movement for recognition in multicultural society, very little has been written about it so far. I intend to focus on the some key issues and the subsequent political mobilization, with particular reference to the post 1991 events.

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[34] Interview with Tigabu; see also Dawit, 2010 pp.80-83
[35] Interview with Kasse
[36] Most scholarly research on Kemant, till now, focus on religion and language See Frediric Gamist (1964); Quirin (1998); Zelalem (2003)

3.2.1 Pre 2007 Political Movement: Elite based Struggles

The roots of the contemporary Kemant political movement can be traced back to the early 1990s. The Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a coalition of different ethnic based political parties, came to power in 1991. It brought to an end the centralized unitary state and introduced ethnic- based federalism grounded on acceptance and equality of ethnic groups and recognition of socio-cultural pluralism. During the time of post-war peace and democratic negotiations in 1991, a very few Kemant political activists attempted to attain a place, in the name of their ethnic group, in the new "democratic political map" that would be organised according to the principle of the self-determination and political participation and representation of "nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia."[37]

At the inception, political activists' membership was composed of self-appointed middle income urban, educated and politically aware and interested individuals who lived in *Gonder* town. Most of them were civil servants who had no any connection with political parties or militant groups of the time.[38] Some of the activists are still members of the current coordinating committee for Kemant's quest for recognition.

Despite their anticipations from the new regime, the Transitional Period Charter (1991-1995), which laid down the basic framework for the 1995 federal constitution, completely denied the existence of Kemant ethnic group. Their distinct language, religion and ethnicity suffered the fate of non- recognition. This has been seen as the first post *Dergue* "historical" and institutional injustice against the people. However, the Kemant people had not been involved in questioning about the issue nor they were much conscious about its implications albeit the practice left a sense of grievance (Tinbitu, 2005: 60 EC). Nowhere in Kemant had areas been a well-organized political movement emerged to challenge the decision of government. Except informal arrangements to take to the federal government, political activists demonstrated little sign of overt action to mobilization the public.[39]

In the same year, a live speech on Ethiopian Radio by Tamrat Layna, the then Prime Minister of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE), repudiated the existence of Kemant ethnic group which had provoked resentment beyond political activists. Although it is not clear, his speech might be in response to activists sporadic political movements. He said that[40]:

> *"In the past, there were Kemant people who lived around North Gonder. These days, they do not exist; [hence] they became ordinary Gonderianess. Those who discard this fact and consider themselves as Kemant [Individuals who have a Kemant consciousness] are "backward" people[41] living with the past."*

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[37] Interview with Nega Geta, former leader of the political movement and the former chairperson of Kemant Development association in the early 1990s
[38] Ibid
[39] Interview with Endeshaw Bogale, Former Chairperson of The Kemant quest fro Recognition Coordinating Committee
[40] Interview with Kasse Mengistu; and interview with Nega Geta
[41] His idea implies labelling the Kemant who claim it as backward looking people of their ancestor's identity, being "nationalist" and "narrow"

His framing of the Kemant has two implications, perhaps for political activists as well: First, it pronounces the Kemant as a historic-geographic term for the people who had live in northern *Gonder*. Secondly, using the term "*Gonder*" as identity category, though it is a geographic place, he called the Kemant as "the ordinary *Gonderianess*", assumed that people who have been living in *Gonder* area are "*Gonder- Amhara* identity" category and, hence, the so called "historically" Kemant people do not constitute a distinct identity irrespective of their common ancestor, history, tradition, religion, language and self-identification.

One of the earliest political activists Nega Geta said that:

"We questioned the meaning of his [Tamrat Layna] words especially what he meant by "ordinary Gonderianess". … soon we [political activists] organized themselves and start a movement for the recognition for the existence of Kemant identity and the protection of Kemant people rights".

Ironically to his speech, the transitional government permitted Kemant activists to establish development association like the Amhara (Amhara Development Association), Oromo (Oromia Development Association), Tigray (Tigray Development Association) ethnic groups etc. Thus, Kemant Development Association (KDA) was established in 1993 to contribute towards alleviating socio-economic problems of the people. The association was non-governmental and non-profit association, but the transitional government had been providing material support to it. The then Chairperson of the association, Nega Geta, said that:

"Despite its' support, scepticism towards the government was evident amongst activists because it was too early to know the regime. But, in general we appreciated its support and start mobilizing the people in Lay Armacho, Wegera and Chilga werdas. We had implicit plan to change the association to political party framed as Kemant People Democratic Movement (KPDM). We had in mind that the association could be a financial basis for the political party"

Despite this auspicious beginning, government's approach to the association changed and its relation with activists began to deteriorate in the first few years. Perhaps being suspicious of their active engagement with the public and of their political activities beside the inconvenient early periods for the regime, it urged the activists to stop their activities which resulted in almost the closure of the association.

Beyond the political pressure, some other organizational problems might have contributed to the association's impairment. Instead of working for the socio-economic endeavours to cultivate public support, the association demonstrated its political objectives (will be discussed in the next chapter) beforehand that couldn't able to brought support from both the government and the majority of Kemant people. The absence of genuine public support could be due to the inconvenient times for the people to reveal their identity, let alone to support the political movement. Accordingly, for almost a decade Kemant ethnic identity mainly manifested by self- identified political activists.

3.2.2 National Population Census as a trigger for Political mobilization

The 2007 national population census became a hallmark for the beginning of mass mobilization. Unlike the past censuses (1984 and 1994), Kemant ethnicity and language codes were omitted from the census questionnaire, and hence they were not counted, without any official reason yet. This implies that the "historic" Kemant people don't constitute a distinct identity, or they are extinct or assimilated into the Amhara in the past a decade. The census report would be a turning point either confirming people's will to be fully "melted" within the dominant ethnic group or provoking political struggles and demand remedies from the government who unjustly denied their very existence. Consequently, previously active political elites and some other educated and politically aware people instigated "ethnic mobilization"[42] (see also Dawit, 2010:74-75).

Thus, although the past has contributed significantly, it was their dismissal from the census against their own interest that enabled activists to politicize Kemant ethnicity and mobilize the people for common goals, i.e. to struggle for the recognition and protection of their ethnic identity.[43] I would argue that "ethnic consciousness" has begun to develop across urban and rural areas since 2007 although it has never been a new phenomenon.[44] In a very few years, Kemant people's political movement for recognition has gained prominence.[45]

Immediately after the census was started in May 2007, activists began to organize themselves more strongly. They established a new committee, consisted of seven members, that might have helped them to formulate their demands and to strength their position to deal with the government[46], due to the fact that Kemant have never been represented in both federal and regional levels of the government and their needs and grievances are yet overlooked by mainstream political parties and the mass media.[47] Due to this fact, any political organization established based on their collective identity has a great importance in articulating demands.

In May 2007 the committee asked both the federal and regional governments about the abrogation of the ethnic code. North *Gonder* Zone Statistics Office, Amhara National Regional State (ANRS) Population and Housing

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[42] Ethnic mobilization is seen, what Olzak (1983:355-357) defines, as the process by which people organize around some feature of ethnic identity in pursuit of collective ends. It is a collective action that takes ethnic markers as criteria for membership. For further discussion see Susan Olzak (1983) "Contemporary Ethnic Mobilization" *Ann. Rev. Sociol.. 9:355-74*

[43] see also The Interim Committee, Request letter to the House of Federation, January 14, 2005EC, p.2; The Interim Committee, July 2004EC, p.4

[44] A good example is the activity of Womber Muluneh Mersha, the current Hege-Lebona religious leader's letter to Emperior Hailselassie (1931-1974) to preserve their religion and their desire not to be Charistainized.

[45] Interview with Kasse Mengistu

[46] Ibid

[47] The Interim committee stated that the government restricted the mass media from promoting their quest for recognition. See The Interim Committee, Request letter to the House of Federation, January 14, 2005EC, p.4

Census Commission and Central Statistics Agency (CSA) were requested to include the Kemant ethnicity and language in the census questionnaire. However, the government informed the people to be counted either under the category of "Amhara ethnic group" or "Other Ethiopian nationals."[48] Although the committee subsequently took the case to the House of Federation (HF), the census continued without any change.

Kemant political elites immediately invoked the decision as a means of mobilizing the people for more ethnic-nationalist demands. In 2008, the committee wrote a letter to the then Prime Minster of Ethiopia, Mesels Zenawi, who forwarded the issue to be seen by the House of federations.

In May 2009 the most active political organisation so far, *The Kemant People's Claim for Identity and self-rule Coordinating Committee*, also known as the *Interim Committee*, was established realizing that the previous committee was less effective in terms of mobilizing and engaging the public.[49] It was also established in order to continue the political movement in a more coordinated and legal manner. From the activists' perspective, the committee represents the interests of the Kemant people as a whole, perhaps legitimizing and hence consolidating their quest.[50] It is an ad hoc committee, and the sole political agent, primarily aims to coordinate activities and to present claims to the state.

The committee has a "*Council*" or assembly consists of 120 members from all Kemant *woredas*. The council established the 12 *Central Executive Committees* of which three (3) are female. In order to perform day to day activities, the committee established *Zone level coordinating committee*. Its organizational structure extended to *woreda* and *kebele* levels;[51] this could help to bring the people closer to the committee. Basically, formulated organizational structures can be seen as those that are active, and have actual influence on the community and the state, such as *The Central Executive Committee* and the *Council*, and those that have limited scope and less effective such as *Kemant Women Association (KWS)* and *Kemant Youth Association (KYA)*.

During the last six years, the Kemant activists have managed to gain substantial support from the people. When the committee requested the House Federation to reconsidered their demand (in July 2009), it has presented 18,584 public petitions and one *woreda* and 10 *kebele* administrations official support letters to their quest. This demonstrates that the movement for recognition is becoming a more publicized issue than ever before. Active public involvement is, therefore, the result of elite driven political mobilization triggered by the national census, but not the immediate effect of the census by itself. This also doesn't necessarily mean all Kemant support the political struggle. Although it is difficult to figure-out, some co-opted Kemant government officials might not support all the claims made by the committee.

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[48] "Others" category includes nationals who have no ethnic background which are recognized under Ethiopian polity or who are not identified themselves to any ethnic group.
[49] Interview with Kasse Mengistu; Tinbitu, 2005 EC, p.70-71
[50] Interview with Kasse Mengistu; Interview with Molla Jenber, Manager of Kemant Development Association (KDA)
[51] Interview with Kasse Mengistu

In sum, institutional deprivation against the Kemant led to latent dis-satisfaction and grievance in the early 1990s which later transformed into mass political mobilization since 2007. Political activists became more active on the political stage. Seeking official recognition, they managed to put their claims to the regional and federal governments. However, some government officials defined their political struggle as "narrow nationalism" and attacked them with "opposition groups" although it is difficult to prove this allegation[52]. The 2007 Ethiopian census helped to mobilize the public and to redefine demands for recognition.

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[52] Interview with Nega Geta

Chapter 4 Kemant's Demand for Recognition under Ethiopian Legal and Political Setting

This chapter analyses the political demands of Kemant people in light of the prevailing political and legal grounds in Ethiopia with the intention of describing the findings which demonstrated that while the demands for recognition made by Kemant are interrelated, it can't be reduced to either of the theoretical frames developed by Charles Taylor, Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser. The chapter further analyses the politico-legal context within which these demands are made and explicates that regardless of the extent that both objective and subjective elements of recognition are meet, recognition depends upon the nature of demands made by the people and its implications aforethought by "the significant others" who would recognize them.

4.1 Demands for Recognition

The political demand of Kemant people is deeply rooted in the Ethiopian state-formation. A history of oppression and discrimination, a sense of socio-cultural and religious deprivation lasting for centuries, feelings of mistreatment and neglect of their constitutional right under the current government combined with a recent official identity disavowal have contributed to the rise of the quest for recognition. Despite powerful philosophical debates, Emcke (2000:494) foresees that demands of such kind are not only to protect otherwise neglected ethnic group but also people's understanding of who they are (a matter of identity as advocated by Taylor and Honneth) and their understanding of justice and injustice made on them (a matter of social Justice as Fraser advocates). This section illustrates these issues by identifying the key recognition demands of the Kemant people.

4.1.1 Reclaiming Identity

Preserving socio-cultural practice, religious beliefs and language is an old one in Kemant history albeit the strong Amhara pressure led to the assimilation of their identity and incorporation into the state in the mid-19th century (Quirin, 1998:220)[53]. In the 20th century Kemant experienced political regimes which have discouraged ethnic identity expressions in the country. Thus, their identity markers were ignored and suppressed. Due to the processes of "Amharanization" and Christianization in the mid-20 century, they lost their identity though not entirely eroded. Nonetheless, presumably, further loss of their ethnicity, even extinction, was far from realized.

Given the collective experiences of discrimination and prejudice which are analysed below in this section, I would claim that Kemant's political strug-

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[53] Since the beginning of 14th century, the Abyssinia (historic name of Ethiopia) incursion to Kemant, the people tied to protect their identity and integrity and maintained control over their land by incorporated peacefully and pay tribute to the state. See Quirin (1998) pp.218-220

gle began as the demand for recognition of their identity immediately after the Ethiopian Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power who denied their identification as a distinct group. But, the demand has no explicit connection with the global trend of identity politics. Since the 2007 "institutional deprivation" of their identity that abolished the previously privileged and counted distinct ethnicity and language, consciousness of being part of, declaring, and promoting Kemant ethnicity has increased.

In this regard, the 2007 national census provides a crucial entry point to examine Kemant's misrecognition and the demand for recognition of identity. Iris Marion Young (1990) elucidates that misrecognition refers to sorting individuals to a group to which they does not "authentically" belong to or recognizing individuals in terms which are demeaning to a group to which they belong.[54] These two aspects are manifested in Kemant case. The very existence of Kemant ethnicity, which depends up on the approval by "significant other", in Taylor (1992) and Honneth (2003) understanding, is denied. Their religion, language and self- identification as distinct group based on common descent remain unrecognized. The Kemant people, whose membership was institutionally imposed from above not chosen, were categorised either under the Amhara ethnic group and/or under others Ethiopian nationals in the census report. This is not only a form of disrespect but also a form of oppression and suppression their self-expression and discourse of their self-understanding in the way that the government categorised the people despite their declaration that they do not belong to these categories.

In further discussion of their situation, my informants stated that many Amharas identify Kemant in demeaning terms. Like the previous studies, this research also found that the worst epithets by which Kemant are labelled as "wood" *(enchet)*, "born of wood" *(ye enchat zere)* and "wood worshippers" *(enchet amagnoch)* because of their associations as carriers of wood for Gonder town, worshippers in trees, and the historic practice of wearing wooden earrings amongst the women (see also Quirin, 1998: 217; Zelalem, 2003:46-51). Perhaps, it is because of "dehumanization"[55]of the origin of the people that the "name Kemant has a derogatory sense" (Zelalem, 2003:46). Kemant ethnicity, therefore, has been depreciated by the dominant Amharas. "Dehumanization" and stigmatized identity might have led several people to deny their socio-cultural, religious and linguistic identity and identify themselves as Amhara in the past years. In this contest, they have faced with "impaired subjectivity" as well as "damaged self-identity" (Honneth, 2003; 1995)

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[54] Cited in Samuel Holden Garfield (2010) "The Kurdish Struggle for Recognition in Turkey : Towards an Expanded Model of Recognition" , Research Discourse, 1 (1), pp.20- 41 p. 25

[55] The term "Dehumanization" as mentioned by Haslam (2006) is mostly discussed in relation to ethnicity, race, and some other related topics. In the context of intergroup conflictual relations some groups claimed to dehumanize others. It is often accompanied by emotions of contempt and disgust. See Nick Haslam (2006) "Dehumanization: An Integrative Review" Personality and Social Psychology Review, l0(3), pp.252–264 Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc

One woman focus group discussant in *Gonder* said that:

> *"Nowadays, no significant attitude towards the Kemant has changed even in Gonder [to say a more urbanized place]. ... I was married 10 years ago. My husband had never known my ethnicity. Since Kemant people's quest for recognition started, I revealed myself. I told him [her husband] that my families are Kemant from Chilga woreda and hence I am Kemant. Three months later, we divorced and he left me alone with our child without any convincing reason. Perhaps, I am being a Kemant. For the last 5 years am not married again and I promised to myself that it is enough to have a marriage with Amharas"* (emphasis added)

Expressions of informants being "demeaned", "humiliated" and "degraded" affect their "self-esteem", "self- respect" and "self-confidence", which are "non-negotiable aspects of personhood" and can only fully realized within intersubjective recognition (Honneth, 1995:88). From Nancy Fraser (2000:115-116) perspective, of course, such social injustice requires "status equality as full partners in social interaction". But, I would assert that her proposition of institutional equality is a possible option in the context of ethnic groups that have already been accepted as distinct. The Kemant, whose very existence is not recognized yet, requires institutional recognition of their identity and a "transformative attitude towards their collective identity" through public institutions (Emrck, 2000:492).

In this regard, recognition of their distinct identity has taken precedence in their political struggle. At the inception in 2007, the political activists requested the government to recognize and respect Kemant identity[56]. Explicitly, identity has been one of primary political demand, i.e., recognition and acceptance for a hitherto stigmatized Kemant identity[57]. Moreover, they want to reinforce their distinctiveness in relation to their neighbouring dominant Amhara ethnic group and to resist any government attempts of denying it and homogenizing them with the Amhara.

However, as a matter of fact legal recognition is hardly possible without objective and subjective identity marker. This is the reason why the Interim Committee explicated its main objectives one of which is "recapturing their lost identity."[58] Practically, it aims: (1) to develop "ethnic consciousness" through reconstruction and mobilization of some traditional values that could help to define the group and increase the self-identification of the people to their language, cultural values and traditions. This might help to restore identity through the development individual's "self-confidence", "self-respect" and "self-esteem". Regardless of its reliance on the recognition by the "significant others", ethnic conciseness is seen as the key element for reclaiming Kemant identity; in this way, individuals became more conscious and politicized to defend their identity.

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[56] The coordinating Committee , Request Letter to AMNRS entitled on " demanding the recognition and respect for the Kemant people's identity, Gonder, April 2, 1999EC.

[57] Interview with Endeshaw Bogale, the former Chairperson of the Coordinating Committee

[58] The Interim Committee, " Research on Kemant Nationality quest for Identity and Self- administration", Gonder, ANRS, Ethiopia July 2004, p.5

(2) On the other hand, as the Interim Committee explicated, it demands a favourable environment to be established to rehabilitate Kemant culture, tradition, language and to write and preserve their "true history" (The Interim Committee, 2005EC:5). This demand directed towards the government to provide support for the development of their identity.[59] Implicitly, reclaiming and re-cognition Kemant identity can only be takes place in a continuing struggle and "dialogue" with the government. Hence, the people couldn't have a complete control over their ethnic identity; even though they can construct and shape through "ethnic consciousness", the context within which identities are reclaimed affect identity formation. Identity reclaiming has a crucial role in Kemant's progressive political struggle. Even the subsequent recognition of Kemant's very identity might not be an end state of affairs.

4.1.2 A Quest for Constitutionally Enshrined Civil Rights

Protection of the constitutional rights of "nations, nationalities and peoples" is at the centre of current political and legal framework in Ethiopia. It is drawn upon the principle of equality, at least in theory. The Kemant people have been marginalized and denied their human, political and cultural rights in the past regimes.[60] The Deputy Chairperson of the Interim Committee, Kasse Mengistu, maintained that there is also a continued violation of their constitutional rights in multi-cultural Ethiopian state. For instance, their request for public demonstration in accordance with article 30 of the constitution in different Kemant *woredas* was rejected by the government. This is a violation of one of their constitutional right.

Against this backdrop, Kasse Mengistu said that:

"our demand is not to change those who have already lost their identity to Kemant. Rather, it is the demand for protection of the constitutional rights of those who still identify themselves as Kemant".

My informants have claimed their rights to be accorded a place of recognition and respect in light of the prevailing constitutional framework[61], a structure which acknowledges and protects the linguistic, socio-cultural and political needs and rights of ethnic groups. Implicitly, they defined themselves as a distinct group who have a legitimate status to claim and protect their collective rights. In fact, they are not recognized and therefore could not able to claim collective rights like other ethnic groups. So, without doubt, they are demanding recognition of their ethnicity along with a concrete demands for constitutional rights.

Other "nations, nationalities and peoples" of Ethiopia have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct characteristics while exercising their right to participate fully in the socio-political life of the state. Thus, the Kemant claim to have the same rights by the principle of equality. With regard to this, they are basically claiming the principle of non-discrimination to be applied to

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[59] The Interim Committee Letter to the House of Federations on "Kemant people identity and self-administration quest", Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 14 January 2005 EC
[60] See also The Interim Committee (2004 EC) pp. 3-4; Tinbitu (2005EC) p. 50- 59
[61] Focus group discussion

their questions. This implies that they are demanding inclusion to the system of governance that has recognized ethnic groups on equal basis.

Nega Geta said that

"the core of our vision is to create an environment where the Kemant people, as a distinct ethnic group, live together with other "nations, nationalities and peoples" on equal footing"

It seems that the actual political movement is about the struggle against, the perceived and real, sorts of underlying inequalities. One civil servant woman said that:

"we need a democratic Ethiopian state where different ethnic groups recognize and respect the constitutional rights and freedoms of each other reciprocally. … we desire to live together in peace with our fellow Ethiopians let alone with our neighbour Amhara brothers and sisters as far as our constitutional rights are protected"

Informants are seeking equality with other ethnic groups as a first priority; immediate full political equality to exercise their constitutional rights. In final analysis, the basic rights they are demanding, beyond the rights of equality which described as a right against discrimination, are the right of political participation in decision making process at both the federal and regional levels of the government which all ethnic groups can exercise equally. The Interim Committee demands and the federal governments to recognize a political status that includes the right of the Kemant for self-determination which is discussed in detail in the next part.

4.1. 3 From Recognition to Self- determination

Although the Kemant were counted as distinct group in 1994 census, they had never been the member of Ethiopian federal arrangements. The Transitional government (1991-1995) leave the Kemant at the mercy of the Amhara regional government. Political activists pronounced their situation as "under the protectorate of Amhara administration" (*Bedebal maninet agezaz sir* or *bemogzit metedader)* (Tinbitu, 2005EC:65).

Since the early 1990s up to 2007, the Kemant people had never claimed, or even never proposed to claim, for self-determination.[62] Their main political demand was limited in its scope i.e. demand for "recognition and respect for their identity". In 2007 national census, in particular, it was a genuine desire "to be included in census questionnaire" as a distinct ethnic group that provoked the mass political mobilization. There was no any explicit political calculation to demand self-a determination in advanced.

I would assert that the 2007 national census has created a "political opportunity" for activists to "radicalised" their demand by stirring it to the level of self-determination, which can be defined as "people's quest for freedom and desire to determine their own political, economic, and social life" (Mancini,

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[62] See The Interim Committee, July 2004EC, pp.9-13; The Interim Committee, January 2005EC, pp2-4; Tinbitu (2005EC: 61)

2008:554-5)[63]. The strong public grievances might have contributed significantly.

Political activists increasingly politicised the dismissal of their ethnicity by framing it as a manifestation of undermining their status and equated it with "silent identity genocide". In effect, the public began to "grave" and mobilized for collective goal. This might be a crucial ground for political activists to maintain their role and to develop further demands on the name of Kemant ethnic group. In 2009 the new Kemant "nationality" quest for recognition coordinating interim committee was established and political demands were re - framed as "the quest for identity and self-rule". The later is, therefore, elite-driven and framed as "a basic constitutional demand" that would meet the aspirations of the Kemant people as a whole.

The similarity of my informants understanding of, and its' importance, self-rule demonstrates the active engagement of the activists with the public. Most of the informants understood it as a process of governing the Kemant area by the people themselves. The Interim Committee used the word "Self-rule" (*yeras gez astedader)* dominantly while they rarely used the term "Self-determination" when they describe their demand form the constitutional point of view. The use of the term "self-rule" is might be due to the fear of being seen as "radicals" or "secessions" in their approach and to achieve public support from "the significant others" including the Amhara regional government.

In February 2009, the Interim Coordinating Committee for Kemant Nationality quest for recognition requested the House of Federation which explicitly stated that "we the Kemant "nationality" are demanding effective implementation of our constitutional right to self- determination as stated in article 39 of the constitution"[64]. This implies the demand for a new federal structure, perhaps either Zone or *woreda* level administration, to be in placed in Kemant area where political leaders able to exercise political power. They aspire to control their own affair which is often seen as a demand for autonomy.

Explicitly, they are demanding to "internal self-determination" which soon galvanized public support from both the rural and urban *woredas*. This demand is linked to the quest for parity of participation and political representation at the federal and regional governments. The Kemant simultaneously claim for self- determination, "institutionalized parity of political participation and representation" due to the fact that the mere recognition and acceptance as a distinct ethnic group does not guarantee the entitlement of these political rights as a matter of state practice. Out of the total number of more than 80 ethnic groups in the country (CSA, 2007) seventy five (75) ethnic groups have representation in the House of Federation.[65]

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[63] Self-determination can be internal self-determination (pursuit of political, economic, social and cultural development within the framework of an existing state) and external self-determination (amounts to a right to secession). See Mancini (2008) "Rethinking the Boundaries of Democratic Secession: Liberalism, Nationalism, and the Right of Minorities to Self-Determination", INT'L J. CONST. L., 6(3) pp. 553-584

[64] The Interim Committee, January 2005EC, pp2

[65] The House of Federation (upper house), the interpreter of the constitution, .is the chamber in which "nations, nationalities, and peoples" are directly and proportionate-

Furthermore, their demand implicitly extended to demand for territory and resource available, and the demand for national resource redistribution (such as state budget) that would be allocated for the new administrative structure by elites on the behalf of the people. However, the specific political, economic and social implication of calming self-administration status to remains unclear. What seems clear is that their demand as part of the broad claim for "political rights" "equality" and "social justice" than a mere "autonomy" and "self- governance" issue.

Therefore, I would argue that Kemant's quest for recognition articulates multiple kinds of demands simultaneously: (1) the recognition of Kemant's very existence as distinct ethnicity and eliminating different stereotypes engendered by the Amharas; (2) to be recognized as equal in status with other "nations, nationalities and peoples" of Ethiopia; and (3) a demand for "unconditional" right to self-determination as enshrined in the constitution. In essence, it combines identity "re-cognition" and "intersubjective identity" formation with a quest for parity of participation and representation, and political autonomy which implicitly involves the demand for economic redistribution. This implies, the quest for recognition is the demand for inclusion in, and effective application of, Ethiopian ethnic based federal arrangements.

They seek to recover and develop their culture, tradition and protect their historical values and language. Furthermore, the recognition by the "significant others" which is essential for demanding, and achieving, political participation and representation at both the regional and federal governments, and for exercising their collective rights including self-determination. This idea reinforces the existing Ethiopian ethnic based federal structure; in a way that ethnicity is only ascribing criterion for demanding autonomy.

4.2 Politico-Legal Framing of Kemant people's Demand for Recognition

The Ethiopian political and legal system in the post 1991 period has witnessed a major departure from the previous regimes, at least theoretically. This section analyses the wider politico- legal setting within which the Kemant raised their demands and framed to substantiate it. This is paramount to understand to what extent their claims are justifiable domestically. Indeed, Kemant political elites never come out to explicitly sketch the political and legal basis of their demands in a clear manner. The research, however, explicates that their quest for recognition is based on the following major frameworks.

4.2.1 State (Political-) Discourses: "Multi-nationality" and "Unity in Diversity"

Multi-nationality *(Hibre Bihar or Hibre Biharawinet)* has been one of a key terminology in Ethiopian political discourse over the past two decades. The government, the rhetorical fount of this discourse, considered it as a pana-

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ly represented. It is composed of at least one representative from each of 75 groups and additional one representative for every 1 million population of each.

cea for the long standing "nationality question" of diverse nationalities- the question for identity and autonomy.[66] From the government perspective, "Multi-nationality"[67] accepts and celebrates the plurality of Ethiopian societies (*Bizuhawinet*) whereby each "nationality" is granted with equal status (*Ekulnet*) which in the end results positive interaction with each other. In pronouncing this discourse, President Girma Wolde Goiorgies said that "Ethiopia is a mosaic of Nations, Nationalities and Peoples" who either individually or collectively are free to practise and uphold their own linguistic, religious and cultural heritage that had not been the case during the past regimes *(Hibre Bihar, Annual Magazine, 2011, p.3)* The then Prime Minister, Melse Zenawi, said that they are "sources of our strength and beauty" (Ibid, p.9).[68] This political rhetoric perhabs increase Kemant's sense of ethno- cultural sentiment.

Manifesting its commitment to promote "Multi-nationality", the Ethiopia celebrates "Nation, Nationalities and People's Day" annually in November throughout the country.[69] The Kemant had been involved in celebrations (since 2006) marked by decorated national and regional flags, cultural festivities and almost an exclusive live televised coverage of the events depicting the importance of the day. Like other ethnic groups, the celebration helped to publicize the existence and membership of Kemant to Ethiopian polity, but also legitimised, and perhaps reaffirmed, the distinctive customs and traditions of the people which could generate their self-esteem. This would mean a de facto recognition of the Kemant as a distinct group and a legitimate basis for framing further demands such as de jure or legal recognition.

The discourse of **"Unity in Diversity"** *(Beluynet wust andinet),* a multiculturalist approach, is increasingly become another governing principles of Ethiopian politics. It promises, according to Nini Abino (2012:2)[70], "all the peoples of Ethiopia to maintain and celebrate their individual identities while at the same time constituting the bigger family of Ethiopians". Ethiopianism, *(amharic* terminology *Ethiopiawinet),* from the official government perspective is

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[66] Throughout the Emperor Hailselasse Regime (1931-74) the question of ethnic inequality was almost seen as a political taboo. It discouraged the possible assertion of ethnic groups for recognition and political autonomy. In 1960s the nationality question has remained problematic. For detail discussion, See Bahru Zewde (ed), 2008, Society, State, and Identity in African History, Forum for social studies, Addis Ababa

[67] Except the different use of terminologies, as a descriptive and normative framework "Multi-nationality" and "multiculturalism" are similar in essence. Of course, former is adopted in response to ethnic and cultural differences as a result of the historic nation-sate building precess, the later is in most cases installed in response to the plurality of countries due to immigration. Both terms, however, are closely related to "identity politics" and "the politics of differences"

[68] House of federation (2011) " Our constitution for our Diversity, unity and Renaissance" The Ethiopian Nations, nationalities and peoples Day, Annual Magazine, 9 December 2011, Addis Ababa Ethiopia. Available at: www.hofethiopia.org

[69] However, during the six anniversary of the day in 2011, the Kemant people were unexpectedly denied to participate in the celebration by the Amhara regional government without apparent reason.

[70] H. Nini Abino, (Head of the Secretariat of the House of Federation of Ethiopia) 2012 Lessons from the work of the House of Federation in celebrating Ethiopian Constitution Day 2011, 126 Assembly and Related Meetings, Inter-parliamentary Union, Kampala, Uganda

seen to be the plurality or diversity of "nationalities", but they are believed to be related with each other by common and shard elements such as their "national Identity", i.e. Ethiopians. This reflects that the discourse accepts and promotes Kemant distinct identity and their autonomy, cultural or political, under the framework of promoting unity. This political discourse, thus, can't only underpin the prevailing roles of "Multi-nationality", but also provides a multi-cultural scheme for building local or regional identities , such as Kemant, *agew, amahra Tigrai* etc along with Ethiopian national identity.

In sum, the current state discourse at a glance reveals that the ongoing Kemant's quest for recognition would be framed on the basis of state discourses on "Multi- nationality" and "Unity in Diversity" in order to legitimize their struggle. Recognition of other nationalities and the associated government rhetoric certainly appear as another fundamental justification for Kemant. Political discourses are mostly the reflections of the country's constitutional or legal system that could solidify the basis of recognition demand.

4 .2.2 Constitutional Law

Demonstrating its clear commitment to be a multi-national polity, and departing from the past (Beken, 2007; Kidene, 2008; Hashim, 2010), the 1995 Constitution explicitly recognizes Ethiopian diversity or plurality by saying in its preamble "We Nations *(Biher),* Nationalities (*Bihereseboch)* and Peoples *(Hizboch)....*" Nevertheless, it doesn't provide any precise definition of these terminologies, nor the need of using it instead of the term "ethnic groups", which provides the opportunity for Kemant elites to frame their status on their own interest. Thus, political activists framed their status as "nationality" although they don't able to provide a reason, which is emanated from the lack clarification in the constitution.

The terminological ambiguity, and hence, whether Kemant is a nation, nationality or people, increases if one looks at article 39 (5) of the Constitution which collectively defines, without explicating and differentiating, "Nation, Nationalities and Peoples" as group of people who have or enjoy the following elements in common: culture, customs and tradition, language, belief in a common identity, common psychological make-up, and the people inhabit contiguous territory. Certainly, the Constitution offers a primordialist account of ethnicity (Aalen, 2006: 246) What is more clearer is that aiming to define the term ethnicity, may be to detach from it, which is problematic both academically and politically, the Constitution uses terminologies that are perhaps more problematic to define.

Despite this ambiguity, the basic principles set under the Constitution affirms the protection of "nations, nationalities and peoples" and offers vigorous rights for the expression and development of their identities, i.e., Article 5(1) by stating all languages in the country have equally recognized , it denotes ethnic groups' an inalienable right to enjoy and develop their language. This would be sufficient formulae in understanding the legitimatized claim of the Kemant. Article 25 (the Right to Equality) provides equal protection regardless of any criteria such as race, language, religion etc; Article 27 (Freedom of Religion, Belief and Opinion); Article 39 (self-determination up to cession rights) particularly sub article 2 states that ethnic groups have the right to use and de-

velop their own languages; to express, to develop and promote its culture; and preserve its historical heritage ; Article 61 (2) provides representation rights in the House of Federation.(FDRE, 1995) Legal basis for the Kemant people's quest for recognition, therefore, is found in the constitution.

More than any other demands, the Kemant political activists consistently and constitutionally framed their demand for Self-determination. In doing so, article 39 is fronted as the cardinal basis for their quest. Sub article 1 explicitly states that ethnic groups have "unconditional" right to self-determination, which also include the right to secession. In principle, this sub-article expands the horizon of Kemant's future political demand; the demand for secession is constitutionally protected.

Evidently, political activists framed their demand in light of sub-article 3 which grants the right to self-government including the right to establish institutions of governance and equitable representation in the regioanl and Federal governments. The Kemant, thus, are anticipating that this framework would able to address their political demands.

4.3 The Current Situation of Kemant People's Quest

It seems easy for a country ruled by "minority" group, Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front /Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front (TPLF/EPRDF), to accommodate the demands of other minorities of having a common history of marginalization and oppression by the dominate Amhara ethnic group. Ideologically, the ruling party aims to protect and promote ethno- linguistic minorities. Hence, there is no reason in principle that it would deny the recognition of Kemant people. Although it is controversial, unless the Amhara regional government, now administered by Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), fails to provide a response to Kemant's claim within two years, the case would not be seen by the federal government. Despite the fact that the case has spent more than five years at the region, the federal government has not a key role so far except recommending the region to address the issue.[71] Thus, Kemant's quest for recognition remains a matter of controversy. I would explain that the current Kemant's major political confrontation is apparently with the Amhara regional government, in whose decision the "legal personality" of the Kemant depends up on.[72]

One of the main contentious issues is the self-rule aspiration of Kemant. Contrary to the Interim Committee's assertion, the regional government stated that the only Kemant who speak the *Kemantney* language are very few individuals aged 50 and above who live in non-contiguous *woredas*.[73] In this regard, the government controversially enforced the objectivist elements more

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[71] Interview with Abebe Tadesse
[72] In my usage of the term "the significant others" include the regional and the federal governments who have the legal authority in defining the status of the Kemant people. This implies all "nations, nationalities and people" who have a set in Amhara regional council and the House of Federation could have a voice on the case.
[73] Office of the Speaker of the Amhara National Regional Council, Decision on Kemant Nationality Quest for Identity and Self-rule, August 2005 EC, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia. Translation mine

strictly[74], rather than self-identification of the people as the basis for recognizing their distinctiveness, and declared that this would avert the region from granting recognition for Kemant.[75]

In the late August 2013, the Office of the Speaker of the Amhara National Regional Council, based on the study conducted by the government, has accepted Kemant people's demand to preserve and develop their language and history, but it doesn't explicitly declared Kemant to fall within the "nationality" social categorization. However, the Office of the Speaker stated that "the Kemant people do not constitute a distinct culture from the Amhara as such" nor do have mutually intelligible language among the majority.[76]

Certainly, if the government continues to implement objectivist elements in this way, the Kemant people would be denied their quest for recognition for some time in the future. Kemant political activists are claiming that under this objectivist pretext the government is working to delay their quest. They assert that there is a great deal of prima facie evidence to support the idea that they met all the objective and subjective criteria. In the face of assertive political demands for self-determination, it seems that not only the misrecognition but also the recognition of their distinct "nationality" could not be sufficient for political demand of the people.

It would be worth mentioning that addressing Kemant's quest for recognition is not merely a legal matter, rigours application of the socio-legal criterion for recognition, but also state politics to decide that implicates extra constitutional action. For instance if the Kemant's claim threatens the security and territorial integrity of the state or the regional government, or other ethnic group, it is not surprise to see the governments' resistance to recognize.

In this sense, the denial or reluctance of the regional government to recognize Kemant may be rooted with the general sentiment that this reclaimed ethnic identity would be a threat to the already established federal structure and political order in the region or may be a lack of confidence and political security among politicians. Therefore, regardless of whether the objective and subjective elements of recognition are met, recognition depends upon the tone of demands and the political implication aforethought by "the significant others" who would recognize them. If the regional government recognizes the Kemant identity and their self-rule aspirations it will be more likely to be accepted at the federal government too. At the time of collecting data for this research paper, the case is still in process at the regional government.

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[74] According to Article 39 (5) Kemant have to fulfil the criteria: have or share large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identities, a common psychological make-up, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory.

[75] Office of the Speaker of the Amhara National Regional Council, Decision on Kemant Nationality Quest for Identity and Self-rule, August 2005 EC, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia. Translation mine

[76] Ibid, p.4- 5

Chapter 5 Summary and Conclusion

This research has provided a glance to the Kemant people's quest for recognition in multi-ethnic Ethiopian polity. It has employed contemporary recognition theoretical stands developed by Charles Taylor, Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser. The main research question was exploring the kind of recognition demands that the Kemant people seek to achieve. The study has explored the development of Kemant people's political movement since the early 1990s. The findings, summarised in this chapter precisely, are organized around some crucial points pertaining to demands made by minority groups in multicultural society.

Kemant's quest for recognition is deeply rooted in the injustice made during the period of "modern" Ethiopian state-formation, started in the mid-19th century. The history of oppression and forced assimilation, a sense of socio-cultural and religious deprivation, the continued mistreatment and neglect under the current regime have contributed to the rise of demands for recognition. Although there had been covert dissatisfaction and grievances and sporadic political activities by urban and educated individuals since the early 1990s, politically organized and publicised struggle for recognition has started in 2007 immediately after the national population census. The census misrecognized the people and declared that Kemant don't constitute a distinct ethnic identity, and hence officially ceased to exist. By considering it virtually as institutional practice of "silent identity genocide", political activists began to mobilize the people under the banner of claim for "Kemant Nationality".

In May 2009, *The Kemant People's Claim for Identity and self-rule Coordinating Committee* (also known as the *Interim Committee*)and its key organs- the Central Executive Committee and the Council- were established to continue the struggle in a more coordinated and democratic manner. The Interim Committee is a sole political actor to present demands and to negotiate with the state. By extending its institutional structure to *woreda* and *kebele* levels the committee has made itself more visible in urban and rural areas and managed to gain substantial support from the people and local government administrations. And hence it has, perhaps legitimized and, consolidated its' quest for recognition. In this sense, the study revealed that the quest for recognition is a dynamic political process driven by urban, educated and politically aware Kemant people.

As the Kemant case illustrates, demands for recognition are diverse and varied overtime. Analytically, three broad demands underlie their quest for recognition: (1) identity reclaiming, (2) a quest for constitutionally enshrined rights and (3) the demand for self-determination. In the early 1990s, the prevailing political demand was recognition and respect of the hitherto stigmatized and demeaned Kemant identity. The demand for constitutional rights such as equality and non-discrimination has been raised by earlier political activists individually and collectively. Since the late 2007 their demand has been prolonged and "radicalised" to the level of quest for self-determination.

Currently, they aspire to be recognized as a distinct "nationality", and to have equal legal status, that which may or may not automatically translate itself in to a political autonomy. The former is a necessary, but not sufficient,

condition to achieve their quest for self-determination including political representation in both the federal and regional governments.

The study shows that the Kemant simultaneously need to achieve multiple kinds of recognition: it combines the demand for identity re-cognition and intersubjective identity formation as a distinct nationality, with struggles for status equality, political participation and representations and political autonomy to administer themselves which implicitly involves the demand for economic redistribution. Therefore, I can argue that the arguments developed by Taylor and Axel Honneth (recognition as a matter of identity formation) and Nancy Fraser (recognition as a matter parity of participation) hold worth and need to be jointly considered in order to provide a comprehensive insight in to the recognition demands made by the Kemant people. While these demands are interrelated, it can't be reduced to either of these theoretical categories. Rather, it can be generally seen as broader and "vital human needs".

This study has found the political and legal basis within which the Kemant framed their demands: discourse on "Multi-nationality" and "Unity in Diversity" and constitutional law. However, effective realization of their quest for recognition depend upon the nature of their demands and its implication aforethought by "the significant others" who would recognize them. Thus, I addressing the demands for recognition is not only a legal matter, employing the legal criteria for recognition, but also state politics to decide that involves extra constitutional activity given the "immature" democratic system in the country. The Kemant, therefore, require to frame their demands to be understood as the process of decentralization and effective implementation of Ethiopian ethnic based federal system.

In general, the momentum behind the current wave of Kemant's quest for recognition seems irreversible. The registration of Kemant Development Association (KDA) in 2013 under the federal Charity and Society Agency Proclamation No.621/2009 which aims to provide practical solutions to socio-economic and environmental problems would grant Kemant de facto political privilege to their quest. Federal level government officials seem willing to recognize Kemant ethnicity as a way of political accommodation in multicultural Ethiopian society. Moreover, most academics and researchers have approached the Kemant from the perspective that they are self-evidently a distinct ethnic group. This study has found evidences that lead to conclude fairly that Kemant "nationality" will be more likely to be recognized sometime in the near future, but recognition of their identity will not automatically translate itself into political autonomy. Hence, their self-rule aspiration will remain on the table. Lacking the necessary economic basis, and a voice in both the federal and regional government, it become very difficult for Kemant to exert a robust pressure on whatever decisions made by the government. Therefore, they have to search for support from the mainstream political parties, the media and organizations, the academics and the general public. Despite the fact that the findings of this case study can't be generalized, hopefully it can add to the body of knowledge and provide fascinating insights for further inquiries.

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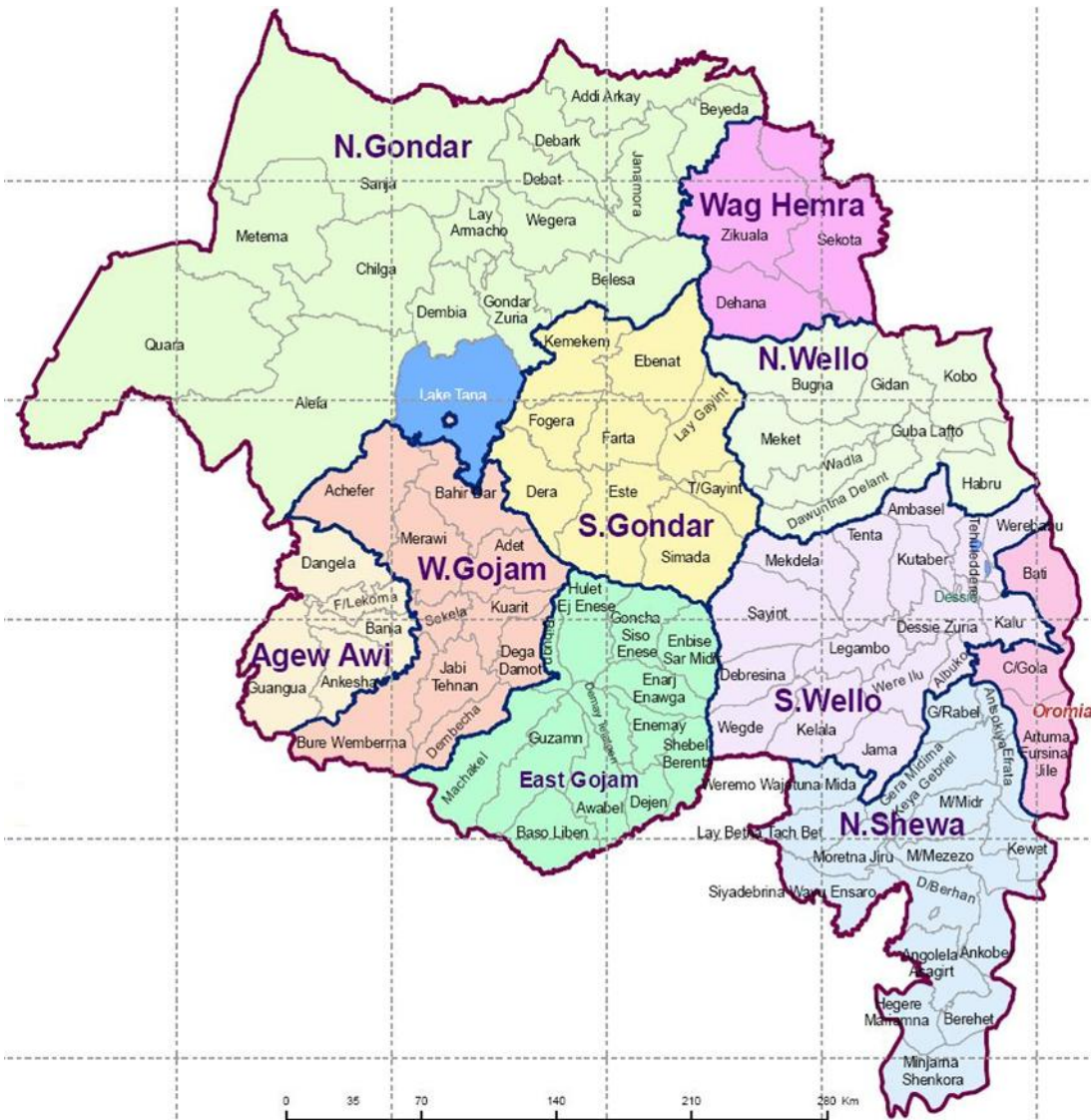
Appendices

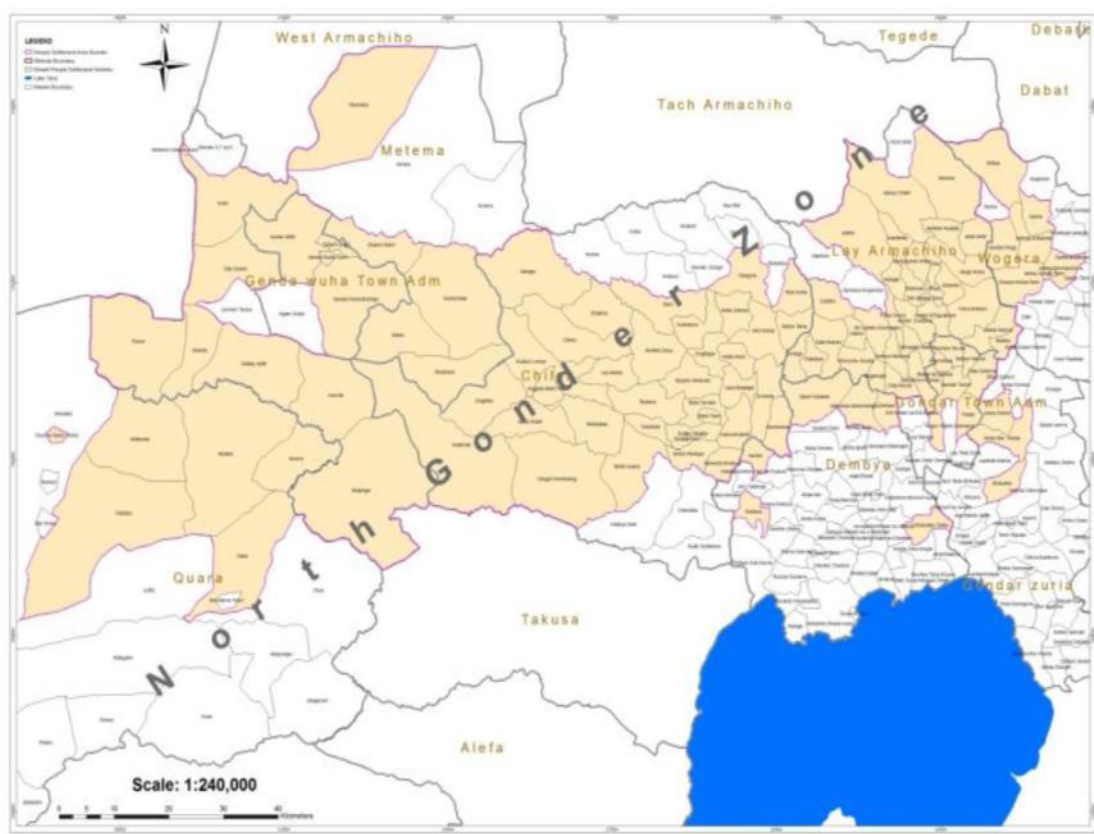**Appendix 1: Map of administrative Regions and Zones of Ethiopia**
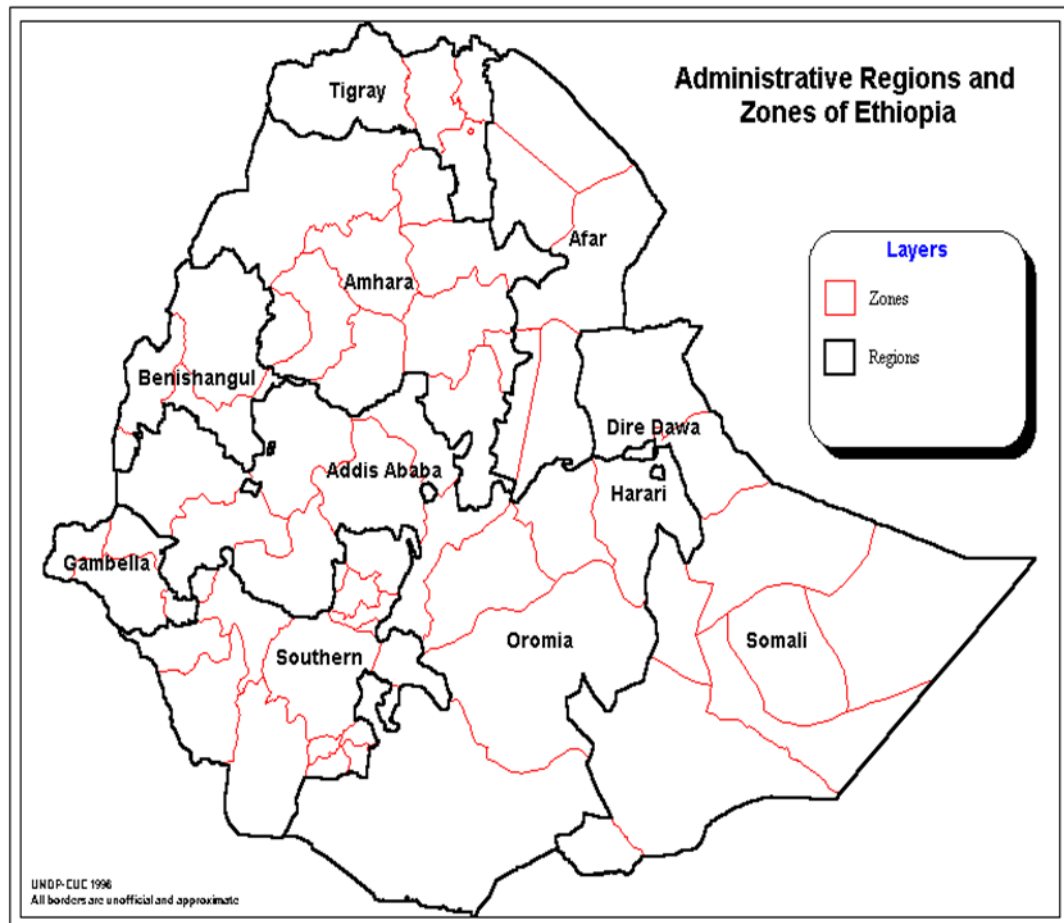
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Appendix 2: Map of Amhara Regional State

Source: www.ethiodemographyandhealth.org

Appendix 3: Map of the Current Settlement of Kemant people

Source: The Interim Committee Survey, 2004EC