Ethnic Federalism and Ethnic Relations in Ethiopia: A Focus on the Peoples of Amhara and Kemant, Amhara National Regional State

Birhanu, Bitew
Bahir Dar University

Faculty of Social Science

Department of Political Science and International Studies

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By
Birhanu Bitew

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Bahir Dar, Ethiopia
Bahir Dar University
Faculty of Social Sciences
Department of Political Science and International Studies

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A Thesis Submitted to the Department of Political Science and International Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Political Science

By
Birhanu Bitew Geremew

Advisor
Moges Demissie (PhD Candidate)

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Bahir Dar, Ethiopia
Bahir Dar University
Office of Post Graduate Studies
Social Science Faculty
Department of Political Science and International Studies

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By
Birhanu Bitew Geremew

Approved by Board of Examiners:

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Chair Person’s Name  Signature

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Internal Examiner’s Name  Signature

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External Examiner’s Name  Signature
DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis entitled, *federalism and inter-ethnic relations in Ethiopia: a focus on the peoples of Amhara and Kemant, Amhara National Regional State* is my original work and has not been presented for a degree or any other purpose in any University/Institution and all the sources used for the thesis have been dully acknowledged.

Name                                             Signature                  Date
Birhanu Bitew                                      ____________________   _________

This thesis was submitted for examination with my approval as an advisor of the candidate.

Name                                             Signature                  Date
Moges Demissie (PhD candidate)                     ____________________   _________
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# Acronyms

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<tr>
<td>AAU</td>
<td>Addis Ababa University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAPO</td>
<td>All Amhara People’s Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANRS</td>
<td>Amhara National Regional State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANDM</td>
<td>Amhara National Democratic Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDU</td>
<td>Bahir Dar University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EHRC</td>
<td>Ethiopoan Human Rights Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPDM</td>
<td>Ethiopian People’s Democratic Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPLF</td>
<td>Eritrean People’s Liberation Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPRDF</td>
<td>Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPRP</td>
<td>Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party</td>
</tr>
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<td>ESM</td>
<td>Ethiopian Student Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDRE</td>
<td>Federal Democratic Reburgin of Ethiopia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGD</td>
<td>Focus Group Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HF</td>
<td>House of Federation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HPR</td>
<td>House of People’s Representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDEA</td>
<td>Institute of Development and Education in Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>KDA</td>
<td>Kemant’s Development Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>NNP</td>
<td>Nations, Nationalities and Peoples</td>
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<tr>
<td>MEISON</td>
<td>Melaw Ethiopia Socialist <em>Niqinaqie</em> (All Ethiopian Socialist Movement)</td>
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<tr>
<td>OLF</td>
<td>Oromo Liberation Front</td>
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<tr>
<td>TPLF</td>
<td>Tigray People’s Liberation Front</td>
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<td>SALF</td>
<td>Somali Abo Liberation Front</td>
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<td>WB</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
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<td>WSLF</td>
<td>Western Somali Liberation Front</td>
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Definition of Terms

Arie Sinou – a customary ways of conflict resolution among the Kemant

Awuraja – imperial sub-provincial district made up of several Woreda

Azaj – an imperial military title which is equivalent to commander

Baria – slave

Buda – a person who is considered as having ‘evil eye’

Debo – a customary mechanism of performing agricultural tasks together

Dega – highland area


Digina – a forest in which the the follower of Pagan-Hebraic religion conduct pray

Ginbot 7 – an opposition political organization which is distinguished as terrorist by HPR

Idir – a customary institution used for ceremonial of sorrow and happiness

Kebele – the lowest administrative unit in Ethiopian local government structure

Kibir – highest class among the Kemant

Kolla – lowland area

Mahiber – an association which is organized for the feast of saints such as St. Michael

Neftegna – gun holder

Rist – the right to use land in the feudal Ethiopia

Sembete – a religious based practice mainly on the Sabbath day

Shemane – a social group who have a profession of weaving

Shimglina – a customary ways of conflict resolution among the Amhara.

Timkihitegna – an assault used by Ethiopian government for political oppositions from Amhara.

Womber – the title of the politico-religious leaders of Kemant.

Woreda – an administrative unit below Zone and Special Woreda

Yekirstina lij – a relationship created through God parenthood

Yetint – lowest class among the Kemant

Yetut lij – a kind of adoption

Zone – Highest level of local government
Acknowledgment

First and foremost, I would like to thank Saint Mary and the almighty God for the successful completion of this study. Next, the successful completion of this thesis would be difficult without the scholarly constructive feedbacks and comments of my advisor, Moges Demissie (PhD candidate). Thus, I am deeply indebted to Moges Demissie for his unreserved follow up and timely comments. I am also indebted to the Amhara and Kemant elders, government authorities and academicians for their readiness to share with me their valuable knowledge, without which theoretical arguments would have not been complemented by empirical evidences. Likewise, I am grateful to my friends, Derbew Tefera, for his constructive comments on the methodological parts of the study, Assabu Sewunet, Getachew Fentahun and Gebre Tariku, for their comments and edition. Special gratitude extends to my coworkers and friends, Anteneh Kebede (PhD candidate in Literature) and Gemechu Bayisa (PhD candidate in literature), for their constructive comments and edition. Last, but by no means the least, I extend my deep gratitude to Bahir Dar University for opening Political Science program and Wolkite University for sponsoring me.
Abstract

Cultivating cordial inter-ethnic relation is an important mechanism of engendering nation-building and development plans of a state. To accomplish this objective, the incumbent government of Ethiopia established ethnic based federalism. However, there is strong debate on the effectiveness of this policy. Thus, the main aim of this study was to assess the influence of ethnic federalism on inter-ethnic relations between the Amhara and Kemant peoples by uncovering their historical economic and social relations. To achieve the main objective, the study employed qualitative case study design via consulting wide ranges of primary and secondary sources. Key informants and FGD participants were selected based on both purposive and snowball sampling. The data obtained from both primary and secondary sources were analyzed through the use of thematic analysis. The finding of the study revealed that the Amhara and Kemant people have had long periods of amicable relations expressed in terms of economic interdependence, inter-ethnic marriage and companionship in religious based social practices. This is not to say that there were no interpersonal conflicts such as land conflict, homicide, abduction and property looting. However, these conflicts were resolved easily through the employments of shimglina. After the initiation of ethnic federalism in Ethiopian political system, identity conflict started to emerge between the two groups. This is because of the fact that ethnic federalism brings new kinds of political question such as ethnic recognition and the right to self-determination which in the end creates ethnic suspicion. The major conclusion drawn from the findings of the study reveals that the mere existence of ethnic difference is not a cause for hostile inter-ethnic relations unless manipulated by ethnic entrepreneurs for political and economic motives.

Key words: Amhara, ethnic federalism, ethnic relation, Kemant, shimglina
CHAPTER ONE

1.1. Background of the Study

The twentieth century has witnessed the revival, intensification and persistence of ethnicity as an issue in politics, as a focal point of popular political mobilization, and as a source of domestic conflict (Mason, 2002). In this century, for instance, the notions of ethnicity played a key role in fuelling WWII in Europe (Thomson, 2010). In the 1990s, similar sentiments brought devastation to the Balkans (Limenopoulou, 2004; Westin, 2010) with the breakup of Yugoslavia and USSR (Kymilcka, 2006; Zhang, 2008). This shows that the diffusion of modernization has not reduced the impacts of ethnic politics on the peaceful coexistence of diversified peoples. Adversely, modernization, urbanization and industrialization exacerbate the politicization of identity which in turn strains inter-ethnic relations in many parts of the world (Malešević, 2006; Mason, 2002).

At the onset of independence, African countries were overburdened to accomplish the nation-building projects forged on the artificial borders drawn by colonizers (Adediji, 2015; Athow, Blanton & Mason, 2001) and to manage the demand of ethnic groups for self-determination (Asebe, 2007; Thomson, 2010). However, neither nation-building project nor the quest for self-determination has been successfully accomplished. The failure of nation-building along with authoritarian rules, high level of backwardness and loss of legitimacy (Azarya, 2003) led to the politicization of ethnicity to maintain political power and to accomplish nation-building process (Saha, 2010). Hence, ethnicity became the most potent force for political mobilization by far throughout black Africa (Salih & Markakis, 1998). Political leaders began to deliver special benefits to their fellow ethnic groups to gain political support at the expense of others. Such a situation strains inter-ethnic relations in most states of the continent. Thus, ethnicity became the main hindrance to Africa’s politico-economic development after independence (Thomson, 2010).

The Ethiopian experience is at odd from the rest African states since it is the only state which preserved its sovereignty and independence. But, it is not exceptional from the politicization of ethnicity for political goals (Abbink, 2011). Even though Ethiopia is a museum of diverse ethnic groups, the past leaders made an effort to instill in their subjects a sense of belonging collectively to a single nation based on shared history, culture and often language (Merera, 2006). Such a process of inclusion and assimilation of the diversified peoples was not a result of an Abyssinian
desire to exploit and subjugate the rest ethnic groups (Alem, 2004; Messay, 1999; Semahegn, 2014). Rather, it was primarily an outcome of internal power struggles between emperors and competing forces (Bahiru, 2001; Mesay, 1999). In contrast, the so called nationalists and radical lefts claims that Ethiopia as a state is seen as an artificial invention in line with the European colonies in Africa (Aalen, 2002). In this context, the northerners are acted as European colonial settlers with the aim of exploiting the human and material resources of the new territories. This view along with unjust and dictatorial rule of the previous regimes (Abbink, 1997) has led to the emergences of many ethno-nationalist and secessionist group. Such groups engaged in one of the protracted conflict in Ethiopia with the military regime by mobilizing their fellow ethnic groups.

After the demise of the military regime in 1991, the present government engineered a federal system on the basis of ethnic identity (Abbink, 2011; Alem, 2003; Turton, 2006). Ethnic federalism was mainly introduced to decentralize power and resolve the so called ‘nationalities question’ (emphasis mine) by accommodating diversity (Assefa, 2006). To accomplish this goal the one party\(^1\) dominated TGE has established multi-party democracy (Keller, 2003; Walle, 1993). Despite the governments’ establishment of ethnic based federal system that gave full recognition to ethnic autonomy by maintaining the unity of the state (Alem, 2003; Asebe, 2007), inter-ethnic conflicts have become more frequent than before (Abbink, 1997; Asebe, 2007).

The region which is identified as Amhara National Regional State (ANRS) contains ethnic groups including Amhara, Agaw, Kemant, Woito and Falasha (Walle, 1993) in which some of them are recognized while others are non-recognized minorities. Of such ethnic groups, the Kemant people are considered as the original inhabitants of northern Ethiopia (Tourny, 2009). They are living in North Gonder with their neighboring Amhara. The Amhara and Kemant peoples have long and historical amicable inter-ethnic relations (Zelalem, 2000). The present day tradition asserts that Kemant were just like Amhara (Quirin, 1998). In fact, during the imperial periods there were resource conflicts that have resolved easily through the employment of customary conflict resolution mechanisms and the 1975 land reform\(^2\) (Quirin, 1998; Getachew, 1998). However, in November 2015, sever conflict has existed between the two ethnic groups

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1 EPRDF was the dominant party which imposes its ideology without proper consultations and deliberations with competing forces (Abbink, 2006; Kymilcka, 2006).

2 The 1975 land reform was the military regimes measure of nationalizing both rural and urban land. It was a radical transformation in changing the social, political and economic scene of the state (Andargachew, 1993).
(EHRC, 2016) which resulted in the conduct of referendum in 2017. This is in contrast to their long period of mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence based on the culture of living together. Accordingly, an in-depth investigation of the influence of ethnic federalism on inter-ethnic relations between them is essential since the conflict is come about after 25 years of ethnic based federal experiment in Ethiopia.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Cultivating cordial inter-ethnic relation is an important mechanism of engendering nation-building and development plans of the state. It was from this ground that the incumbent government introduced ethnic based federal system to maintain the unity of Ethiopia through improving inter-ethnic solidarity (Alem, 2004; Assefa, 2006). But, the question whether ethnic federalism has offered a successful path for solidifying inter-ethnic solidarity or escalates inter-ethnic conflict is subject to intense debate (Aalen, 2006; Abbink, 1997; Alem, 2004). Framers of the FDRE constitution, for example, argue that ethnic federalism is the only way to achieve peace, stability and development (Assefa, 2006). In line with this view, some scholars contend that ethnic federalism could bring the unity of the Ethiopian people through the recognition of the principle of ethnic pluralism and ethnic equality (Alemseged, 2004; Aklilu, 2006; kidane, 2001; Temesgen, 2015; Young; 1998). Inversely, opponents claim that ethnic federalism invites ethnic conflict and risks state disintegration (Alem, 2004). They argues that ethnic based federal system would unnecessary encourage secessionism and fragment political space along ethnic lines (Aalen, 2002; Abbink, 2006; Alemante, 2003; Daniel, 2003; Walle, 1993; Zahorik, 2011).

However, understanding the impacts of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia requires going beyond these polarized debates and examining changes in the inter-ethnic relations at local levels using empirical study.

The ANRS, which was established in 1995 by the FDRE constitution as a federating unit of Ethiopia has experienced severe inter-ethnic conflict between Amhara and Kemant ethnic groups in 2015 (EHRC, 2016). This conflict has resulted in the loss of human life and destruction of properties. The EHRC (2016) report, for example, estimated that in November 2015 around 97 and 86 persons are died and wounded respectively from both sides. This is in contrast to their long period of peaceful coexistence (EHRC, 2016; Quirin, 1998), albeit there was resource
conflict between them during the imperial regimes (Getachew, 1998; Quirin, 1998). This conflict, however, was resolved easily through the employment of customary conflict resolution mechanisms and state interventions (Getachew, 1998). Nevertheless, after the 2015 conflict between the two ethnic groups, referendum has conducted as a means to find durable solution for the conflict.

Not surprisingly, many researchers have conducted research on inter-ethnic conflict in Ethiopia. Demelash Muche (2017), for example, has conducted a research on inter-ethnic conflict in Ethiopia with a specific focus on Amhara and Kemant ethnic groups since 1991. In this study, Demelash tries to explore the causes, actors, impacts and management of the conflict between them. Employing qualitative approach, he argued that inter-ethnic conflict between Amhara and Kemant communities has been caused by the Kemants’ quest for self-determination and has resulted in the loss of human life and destruction of property. Other researchers like Teshome (2010), Anteneh (2013), Bekele (2010), Biniam (2016), Yasin (2010) and Asnake (2013) also conducted a study on inter-ethnic conflict between different ethnic groups. The focus of such studies is mainly relied on the triggering factors, consequences, actors and transformation of the conflict between ethnic groups. But, the influence of ethnic federalism on inter-ethnic relations by uncovering historical social and economic relations is rarely investigated.

In fact, Assebe (2007), Alemayehu (2015) and Abebe (2013) have conducted a study on historical inter-ethnic relations between different ethnic groups in Ethiopia. Alemayehu Erkihun (2015) conducted a research on inter-ethnic relations between Awi and Gumuz in North Western Ethiopia since 1974. Employing qualitative approach, he find out that a shift from hostile to cordial relations between Awi and Gumuz has been experienced since 1974 because of socio-political development and the dynamic nature of the interactions such as agricultural alliance. Asebe Regasa (2007) also conducted a study on ethnicity and inter-ethnic relations between Guji and Gedeo ethnic groups. Using qualitative approach, he argued that ethnic entrepreneurs activated elements of dichotomies at the expense of long periods of cordial relations between Guji and Gedeo ethnic groups that resulted in severe conflict between the two groups since 1991. Abebe (2012) also conducted a study on Shinasha’s relation with other Gonga peoples in North Western and South Western Ethiopia. Employing qualitative approach, he argued that the
Shinasha people are assimilated by Agaw, Amhara and Oromo peoples as a result of continuous interaction with these ethnic groups.

Even though such researches have been conducted on the issues under investigation, the problem of hostile inter-ethnic relation is still the critical problem in Ethiopia. Secessionist movements, armed warfare between different ethnic groups and the quest for ethnic self-determination (Muhabie, 2015) are the most commonly heard news in today’s Ethiopia. Attack on the Amhara ethnic group in different parts of Ethiopia (Alem, 2004; Daniel, 2003), conflict between Amhara and Kemant (EHRC, 2016), conflict between Afar and Karrayu Oromo (Asnake, 2011) and the increasing tension between different ethnic groups, *inter alia*, are some of the observed hostility between ethnic groups after the launching of ethnic federalism. In addition to the failure of modern institutions, customary conflict resolution mechanisms having good records in cultivating inter-ethnic solidarity (Young, 1998) become less effective (Dereje, 2010). This makes Ethiopia at a cross-road and on the way of national disintegration. Hence, after 27 years of federalization, Ethiopia as a state is neither disintegrated nor harmonized inter-ethnic relations. Thus, the researcher is interested to conduct a study on the issues under investigation mainly for the following reasons.

- Cordial inter-ethnic relations are important to promote nation-building and development plans of the state. Accordingly, digging out the historical relations of diversified ethnic groups helps to prop up the present generation to take a lesson from the past to improve inter-ethnic relations and make the future of Ethiopia bright. It is from this rationale that the researcher is interested to conduct a study on social and economic relations of the Amhara and Kemant peoples.

- Customary conflict resolution mechanisms help to cultivate cordial inter-ethnic relations by resolving inter-ethnic conflict at the grass root level. In Ethiopia, these institutions are accepted and respected by the public than formal institutions since they are based on the values and norms of the society (Abbink, 2006; Tirsit, 2004). Accordingly, the researcher is interested to assess how customary institutions are employed to maintain inter-ethnic solidarity by taking Amhara and Kemant as a litmus test.

- Moreover, there is a raging debate among scholars and politicians on whether ethnic federalism can bring cordial inter-ethnic relations by providing answers for the age old
‘nationalities question’ or create hostility among diversified ethnic groups in Ethiopia. Ethnic federalism also reemerged as one of the hot issue of discussion among the public. Therefore, the researcher is interested to assess this contradictory view with a specific focus on the influence of ethnic federalism on Amhara and Kemant relations.

Thus, the main focus of this research was to examine the influence of ethnic federalism on the inter-ethnic relations between Amhara and Kemant peoples by assessing the groups’ historical social and economic relations.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

1.3.1. General Objective

The main objective of this study was to examine the influence of ethnic federalism on the inter-ethnic relations between Amhara and Kemant peoples by uncovering their historical relations.

1.3.2. Specific Objectives

Being derived from the general objective, this study has the following specific objectives.

- To examine the historical social and economic relations between Amhara and Kemant peoples as a means to understand the contemporary scenarios;
- To investigate how the two ethnic groups used customary conflict resolution mechanisms to improve ethnic relations and maintain solidarity among them and
- To assess how ethnic federalism influence inter-ethnic relations between the two ethnic groups.

1.4. Basic Research Questions

This research attempts to provide answer for the following basic questions.

- What was the nature of social and economic relations between Amhara and Kemant peoples?
- How the two peoples used customary conflict resolution mechanisms to maintain inter-ethnic solidarity?
• How ethnic federalism influence inter-ethnic relations between Amhara and Kemanit peoples?

1.5. Scope of the Study

This study was delimited to assess the influence of ethnic federalism on inter-ethnic relations between Amhara and Kemant ethnic groups since 1991. In order to understand the present scenario, it examined the historical relations between Amhara and Kemant ethnic groups. Since inter-ethnic relations are so comprehensive, this research was delimited to social and economic relations between the two ethnic groups. Economic and social relations were selected because of the fact that economic interdependence, inter-ethnic marriage and other social relations are available between different ethnic groups of Ethiopia in a situation where there were cordial inter-ethnic relations (Levine, 1974). Thus, investigating the economic and social relations of the two ethnic groups helps to understand the present scenarios, i.e. the issues of how ethnic federalism influences inter-ethnic relations between Amhara and Kemant ethnic groups.

Spatially, this study was delimited to Chilga Woreda in North Gondar administration Zone. The area was selected because both the Amhara and Kemant peoples has been lived in this district together (Zelalem, 2000). The other reason for this area selection was that it experienced sever ethnic conflict between the two ethnic groups in 2015 as a result of territorial claim of certain Kebeles after the division of the Chiliga Woreda into Kemant’s special administration Woreda (new administration) and the Old administration (EHRC, 2016). Nevertheless, the legal operation of the newly established Woreda is not yet implemented. Government officials were busy in resource division during the time of data collection for this research.

1.6. Rationale for Selecting the Amhara and Kemant Case

Ethnic federalism and its influences on inter-ethnic relations in Ethiopia reemerged as an agenda of discussion among the public, politicians and scholars. What makes the Amhara and Kemant case unique as a focus of this study is that the two ethnic groups have experienced sever ethnic conflict in November 2015 (EHRC, 2016). In fact, this is not a unique incident for Amhara and Kemant. However, this conflict is the first identity based conflict between the so called the ‘historically dominant ethnic group’ with minority ethnic group in ANRS. The Amhara ethnic
group is perceived as dominant in terms of political, economic, and cultural aspects in Ethiopia (Semahegn, 2014; Merera, 2006; Muhabie, 2015). My intention here is not to support or deconstruct this discourse, but to uncover Amharas historical relation with its neighboring ethnic groups and how the newly induced ethnic federalism influences its relation with the Kemant people. The Amhara and the Kemant peoples are lived together for centuries. There is no historical evidence which shows the eruption of identity based conflict between them with the exception of land conflict—the most routine forms of conflict in Ethiopia even among the member of families. However, most recently identity based conflict has happened which resulted in the conduct of referendum to split the two groups in 2017 as a means to find durable solution for the conflict. Still, the two ethnic groups are lived under the state of no war no peace. This makes the researcher to select the Amhara and Kemant ethnic groups as a case study which has given little attention by the researchers.

1.7. Research Methodology

This research was designed to understand the influence of ethnic federalism on inter-ethnic relations in Ethiopia with a specific focus on the peoples of Amhara and Kemant. In order to answer the aforementioned research questions, multiple approaches have used. The whole framework of this study was based on the philosophical assumption of interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm claims that the social world should be studied in its natural setting through the standpoint of the participants (Creswell, 2009). This paradigm gives the researcher great scope to address the issues of influence, and to ask questions such as why and how particular issues are emerged (Adams, Collair, Oswald & Perold, 2004). The purpose of interpretive research is to understand peoples experience with in a particular situation. Accordingly, this study assessed the social and economic interaction of the Amhara and Kemant peoples, how they employed customary conflict resolution mechanisms to maintain inter-ethnic solidarity and how ethnic federalism influence their relations based on the experiences and perspectives of the member of the two ethnic groups. Moreover, interpretive paradigm believes in multiple realities and reality is socially constructed. Since reality is socially constructed, subjective meaning and subjective interpretation to a particular issue has great importance (Creswell, 2009). Thus, the researcher inculcates the feelings, opinions and ideas of the participants and provides interpretation and evaluation for it. This is because the interpretive
paradigm acknowledges that people’s subjective experiences are valid and should be taken seriously (Adams, Collair, Oswald & Perold, 2004). Furthermore, the researchers believe that they can understand the experiences of others in interaction with them and by listening with them. Qualitative research techniques are best suited for the researchers’ task following interpretive paradigm (Adams, Collair, Oswald & Perold, 2004). Accordingly, the researcher in the present study employed qualitative research approach.

Since qualitative approach deploy a wide range of interpretive methods to understand the worlds of participants surrounding them, the researcher used this approach for the purpose of understanding the issues under investigation from the perspective of the members of the two ethnic groups. According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003), qualitative research aimed at providing an in-depth and interpretive understanding of the social world of participants by learning about their social and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and histories. Hence, the researcher aims to conduct an in-depth and interpretive understanding of the nature of inter-ethnic relations between the Amhara and Kemant peoples, investigate the views, opinions and perspectives of the participants on how ethnic based federalism influence inter-ethnic relation and how they employed customary conflict resolution mechanisms to cultivate cordial inter-ethnic relations. Moreover, qualitative research concerned with the social aspects of our world and seeks to answer questions like why people behave the way they do, how opinions and attitudes are formed and how people are affected by the events that go on around them (Hancock, Ockleford, & Windridge, 2007). It is from this fact that qualitative research was employed in this research to investigate how the Amhara and Kemant people are interacting with each other, how they employed customary conflict resolution mechanism to maintain inter-ethnic solidarity and how ethnic federalism influence their relations. According to Anderson (2010) qualitative approach allows the researcher a kind of flexibility that the research framework and direction can be quickly revised as new information emerges. To understand the emotion and feeling of the participants, having close contact with them through interview is necessary. Therefore, the researcher used qualitative approach to have close contact with the participants.

The theoretical perspectives for this study were based on the existing theories on ethnicity and inter-ethnic relations (for the detail of theoretical frameworks see chapter two). By analyzing the existing theories on the issues under investigation i.e. primordialism, constructivism and
instrumentalism, the researcher contextualized ethnic federalism and inter-ethnic relations in Ethiopia with a specific focus on Amhara and Kemant ethnic groups based on instrumentalist approach. The researcher was also complement the theoretical frameworks and review literature with primary data sources that were collected through personal interview, FGD, observation and informal conversation in the study area.

1.7.1. Research Design

With regard to research design, the researcher employed qualitative case study design. In case study research design the researcher explores in depth a program, an event, an activity, process and interactional dynamics within a unit of study (Kumar, 2011). The case(s) are bounded by time, place and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures (Kothari, 1990). Accordingly, the researcher seeks to carry out an in-depth investigation on the influence of ethnic federalism on inter-ethnic relations between the two ethnic groups after the launching of ethnic based federalism in Ethiopia since 1991. The case is bounded in time, place and activity. In addition to this, qualitative case study design is intended to employ mainly to understand events that are actually happened. As a result, it was employed in this study since ethnic federalism is experienced for the last 27 years in Ethiopia. The adaption of the case study design was done purposely taking into account the issue of study at hand and the chosen design’s strength to derive richer, more contextualized, and more authentic interpretation of the phenomenon of interest than most other research methods by virtue of its ability to capture a rich array of contextual data (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Above all, the researcher employed qualitative case study research design as a result of his use of multiple sources of information for data triangulation such as interview, FGD, documents, reports and audiovisual materials.

1.7.2. Methods of Data Collection

In conducting this research, the researcher consulted both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected from informants selected from the two ethnic groups, FGD participants, academicians and government officials. Secondary data were collected as a supplementary for primary data from published and unpublished materials such as books, journal articles, thesis, dissertation and archives. Written materials were collected from libraries of Bahir
Dar University, Culture and Tourism office library of Chilga Woreda, public library of Gondar town; and from internet websites.

The participants for the fieldwork parts of this study were selected based on non-probability sampling, especially purposive sampling technique. In qualitative research, participants are typically selected based on transparent criteria, such as their knowledge, life-experience, particular characteristics or role in a group/community (Khan & Manderson, 1992). Hence, the informants for this study were selected on the basis of their knowledge on the issues concerned, their position as local elders, leaders of traditional social organizations, a head of religious institutions, duties and responsibilities in conflict resolution, level of academic status and position in government offices. The researcher selected informants from both the Amhara and Kemant ethnic groups who are living in Chiliga Woreda. To access those informants having better knowledge on the issues concerned the researcher used snowball sampling technique. The sample size in qualitative research is determined based on a point of data saturation (Kumar, 2011). Accordingly, the researcher collected data from informants until the data reaches in its saturation point.

In conducting this research, the researcher employed different approaches to collect data from the fieldwork part. Semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, informal conversations, and personal observation were employed. As a supplementary for it, secondary data were collected from multiple documents.

**Semi-structured interview**: Semi-structured interviews and discussions were conducted between elders, government officials from the regional bureau, Zone and Woreda offices, academicians and with persons having better knowledge about the issues concerned. A total of 18 interviews were conducted with local elders, academicians and government officials. Out of it, 9 interviews were conducted with local elders, 3 interviews were conducted with academicians and 6 interviews were conducted with government officials at different levels. In conducting the interview with local elders, the researcher tried to balance ethnic backgrounds of elder informants (see appendix B). But, the attempt to balance ethnic backgrounds of government officials and academicians was unsuccessful. This is because the criteria for interviewing them were their level of academic status and direct exposure to the study area and position in government offices of a specific sector having direct linkage to this study. The
interviews were conducted in Amharic language. During the interview, relevant notes were taken. Moreover, based on their consent, only few of the interviewees were recorded using audiotape, transcribed and translated into English. It was the prime responsibility of the researcher to arrange suitable time and place for conducting interview and discussion with key informants. In addition to semi-structured interview, the researcher conducted informal conversations with different individuals from both sides in order to uncover the back-region information of a group. Accordingly, a total of 5 conversations were held with different individuals from the two groups.

Focus group discussion: it is conducted on different issues which cannot be obtained by other means. FGD is important to obtain high quality information from a group of individuals on a particular issue. FGD is a type of data collection instruments that involves bringing in a small group of subjects, typically 6 to 10 people at one location (Hancock, Ockleford and Windridge, 2007). It provides a more natural environment than that of personal interview because participants influenced by others since they are in real life (Dilshad & Latif, 2013). Thus, two focus group discussions were organized with each ethnic group representing both male and female groups of the community and discussions were conducted in a separate schedule. The researcher was hired supporter who take notes in times of the discussion. Government officials were excluded to make discussants free to express their views and opinions on the issues under investigation. Though it is expected to encounter a bit of a challenge in organizing and conducting FGD in such individual research, available and affordable resources were used to finance the discussion. The collected data from the FGD made it worth the trouble of organizing it (Kultar, 2007). FGD produces information and insights that may be less accessible without the group.

Observation: The use of an observation method is commonly associated with a qualitative research. It aims to simply observe the flow of events or behaviors in their natural settings without intrusion (Bruce, 2001). Observation is a purposeful, systematic and selective way of learning about the interaction between groups (Kumar, 2011). Accordingly, the researcher spent some of the time in observing interactions between members of the two ethnic groups in common market areas, tea rooms and public transport stations in its natural setting. By walking around the market place, tea room and bus station, the researcher documented interesting
interaction between the two ethnic groups. In doing so, maximum cares were taken not to intrude the natural flow of events.

**Document analysis:** In addition to fieldwork, the researcher analyzed different documents, archives, reports and audiovisual films. Hence, both published and unpublished documents like books, journal articles, working papers, MA theses, PhD dissertations, the Transitional Charter, different proclamations, the FDRE constitution, Newspapers and Magazine were used by evaluating their reliability to accomplish the purpose of this study.

**1.7.3. Selection of Field Assistants**

In order to undertake this study, having field assistants were very crucial. As a result, the researcher selected two field assistants based on their willingness and communication skill (see appendix B). They were also selected purposively from both groups based on their social and ethical acceptance in the eyes of the society. The local communities suspect the researcher as government agent. Thus, the field assistants were essential to create trust between the researcher and the interviewees and FGD participants. In addition, the field assistants helped the researcher to arrange FGD with their own fellow ethnic groups. They also suggested elders whom they believe that they have better knowledge on the issues under investigation.

**1.7.4. Fieldwork Experiences**

Before the researcher went to the field area for data collection, all necessary preparation was made. Voice recorder devices and interview protocols were get ready for the field. The interview and FGD guides were prepared in English language. Then it was translated into Amharic language (the language of data collection). Then after, the research advisor and peer reviewers of the study commented and corrected the guiding instrument. On 28th of January, 2018 the researcher has made phone conversation with one person who conducts a study on inter-ethnic conflict between the two groups. He gave the researcher the phone number of local peoples, teachers and Woreda officials.

The field data gathering was conducted mainly for around three weeks from 31st of January, 2018 to 23rd of February, 2018. Primarily, the researcher went to Ayikel (the administration city of Chiliga Woreda) without asking permission from the Zone administration. But, it did not pose
any problem for the researcher in collecting data since the researcher has a letter from the Department of Political Science and International Studies at Bahir Dar University.

Immediately, after arrived at Ayikel town the researcher made phone conversation with one priest. The priest suggested the researcher one elder from Kemant whom he believe that he have good knowledge on the issues under investigation. Before going to the local elder, the researcher started to find field assistants with the help of one teacher. It was a difficult task to find a trusted field assistant who can travel in different Kebeles of the Woreda along with the researcher. However, because of the teachers’ direct exposure to the area, he found two field assistants from both groups. The field assistants are government employees and socially and ethically accepted and trusted in the local communities. They told the researcher that they can travel in the rural areas on Saturday and Sunday only. The researcher agrees with their claims since the two days are leisure time for them and even for the rural peoples.

With the help of the field assistants, the researcher travelled into different Kebeles of the Chiliga Woreda. Local elders primarily suspect the researcher as government agent. The researcher, however, convince them with the help of the field assistants. After the field assistants told them, they became voluntary for the interview. They treat the researcher as their own son. Even some local elders in Laza Mariam help the researcher to organize FGD.

In addition to local elders, the researcher conducted interview with government officials. In Ayikel town, government officials were busy in resource division to organize the new and old administration that was established as a result of the Kemants’ quest for self-determination. This was a little bit a challenge for the researcher. However, the researcher patiently waits them until they completed their task. Even the researcher conducted interview with one government official after a regular working hour is over.

After completing data collection in Chiliga Woreda, the researcher returned back to Gondar town. Surprisingly, the researcher conducts two interviews with Zone government officials with in a single day. In Gondar town, the researcher also conduct interview with academicians in the Department of Civics and Ethical Studies and School of Law at University of Gondar. It was easy task for the researcher to conduct interview with the academicians since the researcher have
friends in the Department of Civics and Ethical Studies. Academicians were selected based on their academic status and their direct exposure to the study area.

In the end, the researcher returned back to Bahir Dar. The data collection in Bahir Dar was coexisted with the prime ministers’ quest of job retirement permission. The political environment was not good in that time. As a result, it was challenging for the researcher to conduct interview with them since they were busy in meeting. The researcher patiently waits them until they completed the meeting and conduct interview with two regional government officials.

1.7.5. Methods and Procedures of Data Analysis

In this study, the researcher used thematic analysis in order to provide a brief description and understanding of the outcomes of the research in line with the research objectives. Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing of the data for analysis and then reducing the data into themes through the process of coding and condensing (Creswell, 2007). It is important to produce an insightful analysis that answers a particular research questions (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Consequently, the researcher employed thematic analysis to bring a clear answer for the established research questions. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis is a method used for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. Thus, data that were collected from interviewees through semi-structured interview, FGD, personal observation, informal observation and documents was structured into themes and patterns to have a clear analysis of the results based on the established objectives. The data were analyzed by using the data analysis stages of Huberman and Miles (1994) i.e. data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification.

1.8. Limitations of the Study

This study did not reach at this stage without any challenge. The first challenge that encounters this study was that the written materials that explain the historical relations between the two ethnic groups were scant. As a result, primary sources were mainly employed to accomplish the the first specific objective of this study. The second challenge of this study was the lack of willingness of the informants to provide information on the issues under investigation. They perceive the researcher as government agent, as one informant said, “how can I know whether you are government agent or not”. To secure their willingness and trust the researcher
enlightened them to know the purpose of the study with the help of field assistants. The researcher aware them that he is a student and the information they provide to the researcher is used only for academic purpose. Through this procedure, the researcher secures their willingness and trust to conduct interview with them. Since the culture of the society obstruct women from forwarding their opinions and views on the issues under investigation, the researcher were challenged to consider the voice of women. To prevent the challenges concerning gender dimension, the researcher described females’ role on the issues under investigation to their husband so that they allowed them to express their views and opinions at least in the FGD. However, the researcher failed to conduct face to face interview with women elders with the exception of two government officials. With regard to FGD, the researcher failed to conduct FGD having a member from both groups in the same place. This is because the Woreda officials warned the researcher that the groups may beat each other as a result of disagreement over some issues.

1.9. Significances of the Study

By examining inter-ethnic relations between Amhara and Kemant ethnic groups within the context of the newly emerged ethnic based federal system, the study could provide the following significances for researchers, new generation, ethnic entrepreneurs, and for the people itself. Primarily, it enables the new generation of the two ethnic groups to take a lesson from past relations and to develop an aspiration to revitalize the tradition of peaceful coexistence by avoiding ethnic conflicts. Secondly, this study serves ethnic entrepreneurs to abstain from the politicization of ethnicity to advance economic, political and ideological motives. Thirdly, since the issue is sensitive and detrimental factor for overall future affairs of the state, this research serve as an impetus for researchers to conduct further investigation on the issues concerned. Suffice it to say, the study helps the peoples of the two ethnic groups to have peaceful relation and positive outlook towards each other.

3 Ethnic entrepreneurs are local elites who use the constitutional status of ethnic groups to pursue political, economic and ideological goals in Ethiopia (Aalen, 2006).
1.10. Ethical Consideration

According to the Belmont Report (1979), the researcher should be guided by research ethics which is universally accepted. According to this report, the researchers should respect the dignity of all research participants so as to not to use them simply as a means to achieve research objectives. In order to ensure this ethical principle, the researcher relied on the principle of informed consent. The researcher made the participants to aware the purpose of the study so that they become voluntary to participate in the study or not. Since the issue is to some extent politically sensitive, the researcher was confidential to the informants for whatever information they provided to him. Moreover, the researcher withholds the name of the participants through the use of codes to secure their privacy. The most important thing that the researcher performs was that he acknowledges the participants and the authors that he used in doing this study. Plagiarisms were strongly condemned by the researcher throughout the whole part of this study.

1.11. Trustworthiness of the Research

The credibility and dependability of the research were assured by the use of multiple methods. For instance, the researcher employed different data collection tools to cross-check the credibility of the data that were collected from the participants. This is for the purpose of what the social science researchers called data triangulation (Asnake, 2009). Moreover, throughout the study peer reviewers and advisor were contacted to minimize errors in conducting the research.

1.12. Structure of the Study

This study is organized into six chapters. The first chapter presents the problem that the thesis aims to examine. It in particular provides the general background of the study, problem statement, objectives and research questions and the methodological aspects such as research approach, design, methods of data collection and data analysis through which the research questions are answered. The concern of the second chapter is the examination of the conceptual and theoretical debates on ethnicity, federalism, ethnicity and inter-ethnic relations, and ethnic federalism and its implication on inter-ethnic relations in Ethiopia.

After providing the methodological and theoretical contexts of the study in the first two chapters, this thesis presents the origin of the Amhara and Kemant and their history and relations with the
Ethiopian state in chapter three. This chapter gives an insightful analysis about the background of the study area, economy, language and religion of the two ethnic groups.

Chapter-four presents the Amhara and Kemant relation and articulates what tides and divides the two groups. This chapter gives vital information about the early interdependence and mutual coexistence between the groups and outlines the beginning of change in their relationship. The way how customary conflict resolution mechanism is employed to maintain inter-ethnic solidarity and what challenges it faced is dealt under this chapter.

The influence of ethnic federalism on inter-ethnic relations between the Amhara and Kemant peoples is dealt under chapter five. This chapter looks the convergence between national discourse on ethnic federalism and inter-ethnic relations and local realities. The last chapter synthesizes the several points discussed in the thesis and gives a general conclusion.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. Introduction

This chapter aims at providing the general background on the theoretical and conceptual approaches of ethnicity and inter-ethnic relations. The first part of the chapter presents the conceptual clarification of ethnic group, ethnicity, federalism and inter-ethnic relation. The second section discusses on the theoretical approaches that link ethnicity and inter-ethnic relations and how such approaches are applicable in the context of Ethiopia. The third section deals with inter-ethnic relation. It in particular presnts the cordial and conflictual ethnic relations in Ethiopian past and link it to the present. The fourth section deals with the historical basis of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia and its implication for the creation of the ‘Amhara oppressor’ discourse. It also highlights the implication of ethnic federalism on inter-ethnic relations. The last section of the chapter deals with the historical role of customary conflict resolution mechanisms in maintaining inter-ethnic solidarity in Ethiopia.

2.2. Conceptual Perspectives

2.2.1. Ethnic Group

Multi-ethnic states constitute the norms of world politics today (Hislope & Mughan, 2012; Mason, 2002; Thomson, 2010). Out of around 200 countries in the world 5000 ethnic groups are reported (Mehta, 2015). Only six states including South Korea, North Korea, Lesotho, Algeria, Morocco and Egypt are ethnically homogenous (Hislope & Mughan, 2012). This means that the remainders of the world states are multi-ethnic. It is from this fact that the concept and basic elements of ethnic group became an agenda of world scholars, politicians and commentators. This makes the term subject to different interpretation (Berthoud, 2012).

To begin with, the word ethnic is derived from the Greek word ‘ethnos’, which encompasses a wide range of situations where by human beings lived and acted collectively (Adediji, 2015; Westin, 2010). This definition considers living or acting together as one component of ethnic group. Ethnic group is an informal interest group whose members are distinct from the member of other ethnic groups with in a larger society because they share kinship, religion and linguistic
ties (Cohen, 1974). This means that ethnic groups are social formations which are distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries. Individuals identify themselves as a member of certain groups based on the existences of collective name, myth of common descent, a shared history, a distinctive shared culture, an association with a certain territory, and a sense of solidarity (Smith, 1986) as well as subjective self-consciousness of the members about the existence of their fellow ethnic groups and their relational behaviors (Brass, 1991).

The most approximate definition to the FDRE constitutions’ definition of Nations, Nationalities and Peoples is given by Alex Thomson. He stated that, “ethnic group is a community of people who have the conviction that they have a common identity and common fate based on issues of origin, kinship ties, traditions, cultural uniqueness, a shared history and a shared language” (Thomson, 2010, P. 60). In Ethiopia, even though there is confusion between ethnic groups and the terms Nations, Nationalities and Peoples, article 39 (5) of the FDRE constitution stated that “a nation, nationality or people for the purpose of this Constitution, is a group of people who have or share a 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” (FDRE constitution, 1995).

The definition is the direct adoption of Joseph Stalin’s definition of nation (Asnake, 2009). The constitution gives much emphasis to primordial features of identity as markers of Nations, Nationalities and Peoples. In fact, the traits that are stipulated in the constitution as markers of NNPs are constitutive elements of ethnic groups. It constitutes both subjective and objective elements of ethnic groups (Yonnatan, 2010). Hence, the Ethiopian governments’ use of the term NNPs in the constitution is synonymous with ethnic groups (Abbink, 2011; Bekalu, 2016; Smith, 2007). For the purpose of this study, the researcher used ethnic group instead of NNPs.

One of the contested issues among Ethiopian scholars and politicians after the inauguration of the transitional charter is the status of Amharas as ethnic group (Alem, 2004; Pausewang, 2009). Particularly the controversy was intense after a public debate raged in Addis Abeba hosted by the former ETV. In the debate, Meles Zenawi⁴ and Endreas Eshete argued that the Amharas are considered as an ethnic group with a territory and culture as any other ethnic groups in Ethiopia

⁴ Meles zenawi was the prime minister of Ethiopia from 1995 to his death in 2012.
In contrast, Mesfin Woldemariam and Getachew Haile voiced that the Amharas are not considered as a distinct ethnic group having its own common culture, history and common psychological make up. After this debate many scholars argue that Amhara is not a defined ethnic entity rather it is an elusive concept, which sometimes refer to all speaker of Amharic language (Asebe, 2007). Those scholars claimed that the Amhara do not have myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, and a link with homeland, but they do have elements of common culture, specifically language (Tegegne, 1998). But, this explanation provides unsatisfactory evidence for the claim that Amhara is not a defined ethnic group. Religion, region, language and common descent are the bedrocks in Amhara ethnic identity (Merera, 2003). Rather than deconstructing the Amharan ethnic identity, it seems more convincing to see it from the historical attachment of the group with the Ethiopian state. Therefore, the researcher agrees with the view that the Amharas have a distinct identity with common language, shared memories, territory, solidarity and common descent with strong attachment and feeling of Ethiopianism.

The Kemant people have their own religion, language and common descent which make them distinct from other ethnic groups (Addisalem, 2014). The Kemant religion was used as the boundary-maintaining mechanism with the surrounding Amhara society (Getachew, 1998). However, they were converted to Christianity through long periods of contact with their neighbors (Quirin, 1998; Zelalem, 2000). Linguistically they have their own language known as Kemantney language (Belay, 2010). Their means of livelihood and customary practices are the same with neighboring Amharas. Although the customary practices and means of livelihood of the two people are the same, they have different language, myth of common ancestry and religion. Thus, the Kemant are considered as a distinct ethnic group. This is because boundary which separates one ethnic group from another varies from place to place. For instance, in Northern Ireland, it is religious domination, in Quebec it is language, in Britain it is color, and in Belgium it is both of those in combination which serves as a marker of ethnic groups (Berthoud, 2012). In addition, while all the variables need not present before a group is so defined, such a group is classified or categorized as having a common identity that distinguished it from others (Ukiwo, 2005). Therefore, for the purpose of this study the researcher will use Amhara and Kemant as distinct ethnic groups.
2.2.2. Ethnicity

It is a daunting task to give a generally agreed definition to the term ethnicity. Anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists have defined ethnicity from different point of views. Birhanu (2008) posited that the term ethnicity is understood from different point of view of cultural construct, universal social phenomenon, a personal identity and a particular kind of informal political organization or association. In this study, the researcher attempted to define the term ethnicity from the perspective of political science.

Despite its complexity in terms of definition, ethnicity has both subjective as well as objective elements (Jones, 1997; Smith, 1986). The subjective aspects of ethnicity are those attitudes, values and perceptions whose meaning has to be interpreted in the context of communication (Yang, 2000). It also encompasses the subjective self-consciousness of the person towards his/her fellow ethnic groups. The objective dimensions of ethnicity according to Young (2004) are those aspects of facts which can be observed in the existence of institutions including kinship and descent. The feeling of belongingness to a particular ethnic group can only arise if it is based on objective variable elements such as language, culture, religion, skin color, and other physical characteristics. By considering such dimension of ethnicity, Yang (2000) conceptualized ethnicity as the outcome of subjective perception based on some objective characteristics such as physical attribute, presumed ancestry, culture and national origin.

Yang (2000) defined ethnicity as identification or sense of belongingness of an individual to a particular ethnic group. Ethnicity focuses more on sentiments of origin and descent rather than the geographic imperatives of a nation (Thomson, 2010). It is a sentiment expressed by both majority and minority ethnic groups. Ethnicity may be of positive as well as negative feelings or belongingness. For Guibernau & Rex (2010) it is a positive feeling of belonging to a particular cultural group. But, since the collapse of the communist regimes more negative aspect of ethnicity have come to light (Wamwere, 2003). Negative ethnicity manifest itself when one begins to imagine that his/her fellow group’s religion, culture, food, language and dressing style are superior to others.

The notion of ethnicity became pronounced and political when the ethnic elites used to distinguish one social group from another with in a specific territory (Thomson, 2010). This is
true in the case of post-1991 Ethiopia. Ethiopia today is said to follow ethnic politics through divide and rule of the country’s ethnic groups (Abbink, 2006). In the name of entitling ‘the right to self-determination’ to ethnic groups, the incumbent government divided the Ethiopian people along ethnic lines. This creates competition among ethnic groups to control resource and state power. Such a situation makes the researcher to contextualize the essence of ethnicity in Ethiopia by borrowing the definition given by Osaghae. Osaghae (1995) defined ethnicity as the employment of mobilization of ethnic identity and differences to gain advantage in situations of competition, conflict and cooperation.

This definition is important to explain the context of ethnicity in Ethiopia for at least two reasons. The first is that ethnicity is the product of conscious efforts by social actors like political elites to achieve certain goals. In Ethiopia, ethnicity is the product of a deliberate action of the ethno-nationalist groups to mobilize their fellow ethnic groups to achieve political goals. The second central issue in the definition is that of cooperation. If it is in the best interests of the government, ethnicity is used as a means to create stable inter-ethnic relations in Ethiopia. For instance, the government arranged a forum of elders to create stable inter-ethnic relations between Amhara and Tigray ethnic groups in Mekelle and Gondar before they proceed to violent form of ethnic conflict. But, the government arranged a forum of elders after violent ethnic conflict were erupted between Amhara and Kemant.

2.2.3. Inter-ethnic Relations

Overtime societies have become increasingly diverse in terms of ethnic identity. This has led to the contact between different groups which are culturally distinct (Erikson, 2010). This contact has been accompanied by tension as well as cooperation among majority and minority groups (Coenders, Hindriks & Verkyten, nd). Tijani (2008) pointed out that inter-ethnic contact lead to conflict or cooperation. This may create the integration as well as the disintegration of the state at large. Because of this Timasheff (1944) claimed, inter-ethnic relations had played and will play a significant part in the national and international politics.

The concept of inter-ethnic relations comprises a broad range of encounters between people of diverse origins (Erikson, 2010). This relation may be of peaceful as well as hostile (Timasheff, 1944). Thus, inter-ethnic relation is relations between ethnic groups under different
circumstance. Inter-ethnic relations across the globe encompass highly varied and complex form of social relations (Daniel, Law, Nekorjak & Vajda, 2009). Economic interdependence (Tijani, 2008), routine public interaction (Daniel, Law, Nekorjak & Vajda, 2009), shared value and inter-ethnic marriage (Aapengnup, 2010) as well as tension among ethnic groups (Erikson, 2010) represent some of the example for this varied and complex ethnic interaction in the world.

Ethnic group is the predominant means of social identity formation in Africa (Aapengnup, 2010). Most of the ethnic groups coexist peacefully with high degree of mixing through inter-ethnic marriage, economic partnership and shared values (Tijani, 2008). Tensions have arisen between diverse groups in Africa as a result of ethnic mobilization by politicians in pursuit of power, wealth and resource (Saha, 2010). In Rwanda, for instance, Hutu and Tutsi have intermarried to such an extent that they are often not easily distinguished physically. They speak the same language and share the same faith (Backer & Bhavanani, 2000). But, politicians, demagogues and Medias used ethnicity as a play for popular support and as a means of eliminating political opponents (Tijani, 2008). Thus, inter-ethnic relations in Africa are mainly characterized by cordial before the coming of colonial powers.

For many centuries, the Ethiopian state has been the home of more than eighty ethnic communities with different languages, cultures, and religious beliefs (Markakis, 1989). Ethiopian statehood is the shared product of a creative and dynamic process of interaction and development among these communities (Alemante, 2003). Suffice to say, ethnic groups in Ethiopia have been in a constant interaction through trade, inter-ethnic marriage, and exchange of special service and sometimes through war (Levine, 1974). However, the arrangement of federalism to manage diversity based on ethnic lines creates competition among ethnic groups which were assimilated due to continuous interaction, intermarriages, trade, migration, and other social activities (Bekalu, 2016). In this regard, the essence of inter-ethnic relation in Ethiopia can be contextualized through the use of Westin’s and Marger’s definition of inter-ethnic relations. For Westin (2010) inter-ethnic relations can be defined as failed as well as successful management of diversity. In Ethiopia the management of diversity by the current government is failed. Marger (2009) also defined inter-ethnic relation as a form of interaction among ethnic groups. Accordingly, inter-ethnic relation is defined as the failed as well as successful management of interactions among diversified ethnic groups.
2.2.4. Federalism

Like many other social science concepts, there has been much scholarly debate about the definition of federalism. The lack of consensus on the meanings, principles and processes makes the concept too flexible and any regime could call its system federal on the basis of the mere existence of the structure (Yonathan, 2010). Hence, conceptual clarification of federalism is essential for many purposes. To begin with the etymological definition, the term federalism is derived from the Latin word ‘foedus’, which means covenant (Burgess, 2006; Elazar, 1995) or compact (Erk, 2008). Etymologically, therefore federalism is an alliance, pact or a political compact between individuals or collectives aiming at the promotion of both individual and common interests (Burgess, 2006; Erk, 2008).

Federalism can be defined as the mode of political association and organization that unite separate polities within a more comprehensive political system (Elazar, 1995), the advocacy of multi-tiered government combining elements of shared-rule and self-rule (Birhanu, 2007; Elazar, 1995; Keller, 2003; Watts, 1996) and the pragmatic compromise between the divergent linguistic and religious groups (Semahegn, 2014). It is considered as a comprehensive system of political relationships which emphasizes the combination of self-rule and shared-rule within the matrix of constitutionally dispersed powers (Birhanu, 2007). This virtue of constitutionally dispersed powers safeguards individual liberty and local autonomy. To ensure the protection of individual liberty and local autonomy federal system must be based on the primacy of bargaining and negotiated cooperation among competing power centers (Elazar, 1995). For the purpose of this study, federalism is the combination of elements of self-rule and shared-rule with the aim of accommodating diversity and promoting unity in diversity within a larger political union on some constitutionally entrenched basis.

There is no uniformity in the formation of federation across the world. In line with this, Stephan proposed three categories on the formation of federation (Asnake, 2009; Keller, 2003). These are coming together federalism, holding together federalism and putting together federalism (Aklilu, 2006; Asnake, 2009; Keller, 2003). Coming together federalism is associated with the notion of federal union and national integration. It is the result of the coming together of sovereign states who freely decided to reconstruct their shared political community to accomplish common
purposes (Aklilu, 2006; Semahegn, 2014). Holding together federalism refers to those multi-ethnic federation established through a process of democratic bargaining (Aklilu, 2006; Asnake, 2009). On the contrary, putting together federalism is established through a heavily coercive effort by a non-democratic centralizing power (Aklilu, 2006).

The question here is to which category does Ethiopia’s federal formation belong to? Endreas considered the Ethiopian federation as a result of the coming together of the country’s ethnic groups who freely decided to reconstruct their shared political community on a new basis (Asnake, 2009). In contrast, Assefa (2006) suggested that the formation of federalism in Ethiopia is holding together federation. Aklilu (2006) and Keller (2003), on their part noted that Ethiopia’s ethnic federalism began in 1991 as holding together but receded since 1992 into a putting together type due to the monopolization of the political landscape by the EPRDF. But, the above views failed to accept the fact that the post-1991 political order in Ethiopia was imposed by the EPRDF with little or no participation by other political forces (Asnake, 2009). Accordingly, the creation and maintenance of Ethiopian federalism resembles the putting together federalism. This is because ethnic federalism from the very beginning is imposed by the EPRDF without proper compromise and consensus (Abbink, 2006; Kymilcka, 2006).

In addition to the process of establishing federal system, debate is also intense among scholars on the issues concerning which types of federal system is more appropriate to ensure inter-ethnic harmony. Accordingly, federation can be classified based on their recognition of ethnic and linguistic diversities (Burgess, 2006; Kymilcka, 2006). In this respect, federation can be classified into two categories. In the first place, there are federations that ensure territorial power sharing which do not recognize ethnic and linguistic cleavages (Asnake, 2003). Many of the older western federations such as the US, Germany, and Australia fall under this category. Typically they are termed as national or mono-national federation (Burgess, 2006). Federalism in the second category not only recognizes ethnic and linguistic diversity but also reflect them in their ideology and structures (Asnake, 2009). Such federalisms are called multinational or ethnic federation (Kymilcka, 2006).

Since 1991, Ethiopia pursued the second category of federalism. But, for Asnake (2009), ethnic as opposed to multinational federalism is more appropriate to explain Ethiopian context. This is
because of the fact that in Ethiopia, unlike western multinational federations (e.g. Spain and Canada) that mediated questions of ethnic autonomy through bargaining between the state and mobilized minority groups, federalism entailed a top down reconstitution of the country based on ethnicity (Kymilcka, 2006). As a result many ethnic groups, which before 1991 were not mobilized based on ethnic nationalism, were required to organize themselves according to ethnicity (Asnake, 2009). This led to the politicization of ethnicity in the country. Accordingly, it is more appropriate to use ethnic federalism in the Ethiopian context. In contrast to Ethiopia, western federations usually categorized as multinational do not promote ethnicity as the chief instrument of state organization and mobilization (Asnake, 2009).

By promoting unity in diversity the main objectives of federalism is to cultivate cordial inter-ethnic relation. However, like its meaning, process of formation and ways of structuring the federal system, there is no agreement among scholars, politicians and commentators on it. For supporters, federalism is increasingly perceived as counter majoritarian political settlement that can be used to manage ethnic diversity (Yonathan, 2010). It is generally argued that federalism serves as a device for accommodating the interests of two or more ethnic groups locked within the boundaries of a single state (Alemante, 2003; Horowitz, 1985). By doing so, federalism creates a sound strategy for promoting national unity. Opponents on the contrary argue that federalism intensifies ethnic conflict (Bermeo, 2002 as cited in Anderson & Erk, 2010). It results in the erosion of national unity and the promotion of inter-ethnic hostility (Bekalu, 2016; Filippov & Shvestova, 2013). By taking the disintegration of the former USSR, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, the proponents of this view warns that federalism has the property to promote ethnic fundamentalism which endangered the unity of the state. They advised that, care must be taken not to suggest that federalism necessarily ensures the harmonious coexistence of ethnic groups (Yonathan, 2010). However, the researcher takes a midway position by arguing that there is no problem with federalism in managing diversity and cultivating inter-ethnic harmony if it is the result of democratic bargaining and compromise among competing forces. Federalism poses a problem when the government uses it as a mere means of maintaining political power. To cultivate inter-ethnic solidarity, federalism must be accompanied by genuine democracy and the idea of common citizenship.
2.3. Theoretical Perspectives on Ethnicity and Inter-ethnic Relations

Since the middle of the 20th century a lot has been written and debated about the concept of ethnicity, its manifestation on inter-ethnic relations, the role it plays in group mobilization for common ends (Asebe, 2007). It is neither my intention nor the scope of this study to go into the detail of all controversies. However, for better understanding of inter-ethnic relations, which is the main objective of this thesis, a few words must be said about how ethnicity is fabricated and politicized in Ethiopia in line with the instrumentalist approach. The existing theories that explain ethnicity and inter-ethnic relation encompass primordialism, instrumentalism and constructivism.

2.3.1. Primordialism

Primordialism often referred to as essentialism theory or objective theory is an early model developed in the 1960s (Jones, 1997; Birhanu, 2008; Seol, 2008). The primordialists’ thesis claims that primordial ties of an ethnic group such as kinship, common descent, place of birth, ancestral origin, race, religion and language call for the emotional attachment and ethnic solidarity from members (Seol, 2008). The primordial attachment inherent in the members of group causes an action (Vaughan, 2003). Threats to primordial elements results in violent and intractable conflicts leading to irredentism and secession (Geertz, 1996).

The basic intuition of primordialism is that ethnic conflicts today can be traced back to older animosities between groups (Varshney, 2002). This implies that Primordial attachments or ancient enmity is the cause of conflict. Hostile inter-ethnic relations are the result of the emotional ties of blood or ancient hatred rather than rational calculus. Enmities are based on intrinsic differences of race, religion or culture. The emergence of ethnic consciousness and ethnic mobilization are the result of inherent atavistic or primordial sentiment (Rudolph, 2006). Geertz (1996), one of the well-known advocates of primordialism, claims that states with homogenous societies are more stable than the heterogeneous ones because the latter lacks common feeling among the members. However, the long period political crisis of homogenous Somalia challenges such a claim (Dagne, 2013). He also badly ignores the historical peaceful coexistence of diversified ethnic groups. Moreover, he ignores the negative role played by
external forces and ethnic entrepreneurs against such harmonious inter-ethnic relations. The truth is that primordial character was not a means of inter-ethnic antagonism (Ismagilova, 2004).

2.3.2. Instrumentalism

Instrumentalism emerged in the early 1970s as a response to primordialism (Dagne, 2013). The proponents of instrumentalist thesis claim that ethnicity is based on the rational awareness used for socio-political and economic competitions (Adediji, 2015). Ethnicity is foremost a resource in the hands of leaders to mobilize followers in the pursuit of their interests (Yang, 2000). Ethnic bonds are related to political and social projects; instrumentally mobilized as a means to gain material goals. People become ethnic and remain ethnic when their ethnic affiliation yields significant returns to them. For instrumentalists’ actions have causes other than primordial attachment (Vaughan, 2003). Ethnic entrepreneurs manipulate differences to achieve political, economic and ideological motives. Thus, ethnicity is a fundamentally political phenomenon rather than something biological, cultural and linguistic (Joireman, 2003). In fact, the primordial attachments have been exploited to advance economic, political and ideological objectives. This has created permanent cleavage that could provide a venue for further exclusion, discrimination and prejudice of the so called ‘others’ (Rudolph, 2006). The recurrent prejudice, exclusion and marginalization inevitably led to inter-ethnic conflict.

2.3.3. Constructivism

Another model of ethnicity that began to surface within the field of anthropology, sociology and political science during the 1960s was constructivism (Dagne, 2013). The first major influence of this theory was the approach by the Norwegian anthropologist Friedrich Barth. In his edited essay (1969), *Ethnic groups and boundaries: the social organization of culture difference*, Barth presented a new approach to ethnicity. He illustrates the fluidity of ethnic relations in different types of multi-ethnic societies. People may modify and shift their ethnic identity in different types of social interactions (Barth, 1969). Ethnicity is based on ones perception of ‘us’ and ‘them’ and not objective reality that actually exists.

Constructivists hold that ethnic groups are not born but made (Hislope & Mughan, 2012; Messay, 2001). The origin, content and forms of ethnicity are open to negotiation. It reflects the
creative choice of individuals as they define themselves and others in ethnic ways (Rudolph, 2006). Ethnic boundaries are flexible and changeable; ethnic affiliation or identification is determined or constructed by society (Yang, 2000). Ethnicity in general is a reaction to the changing social environment. For Varshney (2002) the construction and reconstruction of ethnic identity created inter-ethnic conflict in different parts of the world. He posited out that the Hutu-Tutsi massacre were the outcome of the reconstruction of new ethnic identity by Belgian colonial power in the 1930s on the basis of cattle ownership, physical measurement and church attendance. Nevertheless, this assumption ignores the fact that the construction and reconstruction of ethnic identities are used by ethnic entrepreneurs and colonial powers to advance political and economic goals. Ethnic entrepreneurs and colonial powers are reconstructing ethnic identities on the basis of the existing primordial differences. The Hutu and Tutsi case illustrates that they were different in terms of physical appearance and the Belgian used it as an ethnic categorization instrument.

2.3.4. Conceptual Framework: Analyzing the Relevance of Theories in Ethiopia

From the three main approaches presented above, this study theoretically falls within the instrumentalist perspective. This is because ethnic difference is used as a weapon in pursuit of collective action via ethnic mobilization (Young, 2004). The drawing of boundary lines depends on the benefit that can be accrued by a particular ethnic group. In Africa, for instance, colonial powers manipulate differences by divide and rule strategy and the post-independence leaders used this division for their own advantage (Johnston, 1998). Accordingly, inter-ethnic conflict in Africa is the result of politicized ethnicity rather than mere primordial attachments (Markakis, 1998). To be more specific, in Rwanda, for example, there was extended attachment between Hutus and Tutsis in terms of custom, economic interdependence, common bondage, kinship and shared culture in the pre-colonial period (Backer & Bhavanani, 2000). There is no evidence of political violence between Hutu and Tutsi before 1959 (Alder & Wang, 2014). However, the divide and rule policy of Belgium and the post-independence activation of differences by ethnic entrepreneurs create hostile inter-ethnic relation between Hutus and Tutsis. Therefore, it is the manipulation of ethnicity by politicians and ethnic elites which creates hostile inter-ethnic relation rather than primordial attachment. It is from this fact that Ismagilova (2004) illustrated
that the deliberate mobilization of ethnicity by ethnic elites to control political power and economic resources create hostile inter-ethnic relation in many parts of the world.

Within the context of Ethiopia, the absence of colonial experience convinces one to look at the situation of ethnicity from internal perspective. There are two contending views regarding ethnic phenomenon. Firstly, the empire building process spearheaded by the Amhara ethnic group in the late 19th C is considered as the reason for the existence of inter-ethnic hostility (Asebe, 2007). But, this view ignores the fact that there was common bond, national feeling and historical ties among the diversified ethnic groups in Ethiopia (Daniel, 2003; Levine, 1974). In fact, such process of empire building creates an opportunity for ethnic entrepreneurs to manipulate differences for the sake of achieving economic, political and ideological goals. But, ethnic classification and mobilization is not a widespread phenomenon among the Ethiopian population. It is more common among the political elites (Messay, 2002). It is from this historical fact that Abbink (1997) concluded that in Ethiopia there have been strong cultural, historical and social ties among various ethnic groups binding the society in its long history.

Secondly, many writers attribute the hostile inter-ethnic relations in Ethiopia with the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front’s (EPRDF)\(^5\) ethnic federal political experiment since 1991 (Abbink, 2007; Asnake, 2010; Muhabie, 2015; Semahegn, 2012). The introduction of ethnic federalism creates fertile ground for the instrumentalization of primordial elements of identity for political goals (Vaughan, 2003). Ethnicity is employed as an instrument of political manipulation, group mobilization and a banner for power competition among ethnic entrepreneurs. Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF)\(^6\), for instance, is blamed for engineering ethnic based federalism under the coverage of EPRDF (Zahorik, 2011) to maintain the minority hegemony through divide and rule strategy (Abbink, 2006; Merera, 2003). It is based on the fact that political elites from ethnic minorities strategically initiate the polarization of the society along ethnic lines for divide and rule strategy (Alder & Wang, 2014). Accordingly, inter-ethnic

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\(^5\) EPRDF is a coalition created by TPLF with other forces such as EPDM, OPDO, and the Ethiopian Democratic Offices Revolutionary movement in 1989. It is mostly controlled by TPLF, which seized power after the demise of military government (Asnake, 2009).

\(^6\) TPLF was organized in 1975 by the Tigrean youth who was discontented with the shift of political power to the Amhara and the subsequent ‘suppressions’ of the group under the Amhara hegemony. The principal aim of TPLF was liberation of Tigray. As a political strategy to enter into the territories beyond Tigray and as a camouflage to attract the support of the West for political, ideological and financial support, the Front changed its name to EPRDF in 1989 by creating surrogate parties from other ethno-linguistic groups (Vaughan, 2003).
relation became more and more hostile, the prejudice of people to other ethnic groups is increasing and clear tensions are emerging due to the institutionalization of ethnicity (Semhegn, 2012). Therefore, it is misleading to describe the rise of ethnic bias and prejudice in Ethiopia with primordial attachment since the ordinary people is not ethnically organized to preserve and glorify their primordial identity (Birhanu, 2007). Rather, it is the results of ethnic entrepreneurs’ activation of dichotomies at the expense of common bond to advance economic, political and ideological goals.

The Ethiopian federal system gives the right to self-determination to every ethnic group including people who have not shown any interest for such rights (Kymilka, 2006). The ethnicization of the state and territory induces renegotiation of ethnic identity, which at times tears apart inter-ethnic ties that has developed over many generations (Asnake, 2010). The newly emerged notion of ‘otherness’ created an ethnic boundary between the ‘self’ and ‘others’ which was not the culture of Ethiopian in its past history. This boundary is not the result of primordial characters but is ethnic entrepreneurs’ activation of differences to achieve economic, political and ideological goals. In line with this Zahorik (2011) argue that in Ethiopia, the emergence of ethnic consciousness and ethnic mobilization have not occurred due to primordial sentiment rather is due to social, political and economic reasons. The ethnonationalist movements such as TPLF and Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)\(^7\), for instance, instrumentalize the primordial elements of their ethnic constituencies for political mobilization (Birhanu, 2007; Dagne, 2013). Thus, the researcher argues that it is not the mere existence of ethnic diversity which caused for hostile inter-ethnic relation in Ethiopia rather it is ethnic entrepreneurs’ activation of ethnic dichotomies over common bondage. Therefore, the researcher employed instrumentalist approach to explain the nature of inter-ethnic relation in Ethiopia by taking Amhara and Kemant as a litmus test in line with the Ethiopian ethnic based federal system.

\(^7\) OLF began in 1976 as a result of the discontent with the policy measures of the Derg and the widespread feeling that the Oromo are underrepresented in the central government. The founding members of OLF saw themselves as an army of national liberation that had to fight against colonial regime (Alemayehu, 2013).
2.4. Inter-ethnic Relations in Ethiopia

2.4.1. Cordial Relations

For many centuries, the Ethiopian state has been the home of more than eighty ethnic communities with different languages, cultures, and religious beliefs (Markakis, 1989). Ethiopian statehood is the shared product of a creative and dynamic process of interaction and development among these communities (Alemante, 2003). For the last two millennia, ethnic groups in Ethiopia have been in a constant interaction through trade, inter-ethnic marriage, and exchange of special service and sometimes through war (Levine, 1974). Thus, this multiplicity in language, religion, culture, tradition and the overall identity is a beauty for the country considering the fact that the peoples of Ethiopia have had the culture of living together without any narrowly and shallowly focused ethnic belongingness (Muhabie, 2015).

Despite the controversy on the making of modern Ethiopia and the injustices that were committed in the past, there have been strong cultural, historical and social ties among the various ethnic groups binding the society in its long history (Abbink, 1997). Ethnic groups have intermingled over centuries and have shared a long and common history (Muhabie, 2015). In addition to this, some ethnic groups in Ethiopia has a myth of common ancestry that makes them to have peaceful ethnic relations (Asebe, 2007). The peaceful contacts in Ethiopia among diversified groups (Levine, 1974) and war like contacts has resulted in the assimilation of populations, very considerable adoptions of languages, innumerable conversions from one faith to another, and extensive inter-marriages (Twibel, 1998). Diversified ethnic groups in Ethiopia, therefore, has experienced many things together that makes them to have cordial inter-ethnic relations such as economic interdependence through trade, inter-ethnic marriage, common cultural practices, and narration of a myth of common ancestry.

In Ethiopia’s long history, commercial links enabled ethnic groups to know each other, to intermarry and to unite against common enemies (Alemseged, 2004). Ethiopians of different ethnic groups have been brought into contact directly through local and regional markets and indirectly through caravan markets (Levine, 1974). The same author notes that local market in Ethiopia has been attended by members of two or more ethnic groups. In addition to satisfying local consumption needs, the products brought at local markets are taken by traders to
progressively longer regional markets. To the regional market of Debre Tabor, for instance, people brought ginger from Chiliga (Kemant district), cereal crops from Gaint (Amhara district), cotton from the Tigray district, and silver from Dessie and salt from Afar (Levine, 1974). The existence of such kinds of local and regional markets that has been attended by different ethnic groups shows the fact that ethnic groups in Ethiopia had peaceful relations. In fact, given the limited resources available in Ethiopia, the pressure of consumption needs alone makes it unlikely that any ethnic group could remain isolated from all others. Whatever the case, interconnection among the diversified ethnic groups of Ethiopia through the system of local and regional markets has been established as far back as two thousand years ago (Fisseha, nd; Levine, 1974).

More intimate inter-ethnic relation in Ethiopia has been established through the process of migration and inter-ethnic marriage (Levine, 1974). Neighboring ethnic groups in Ethiopia established marital relationship that makes them to have harmonious inter-ethnic relation (Fisseha, nd). In the city of Dire Dawa, for example, marital ties between Oromo, Amhara, Somali and other ethnic groups contributed a lot for harmonious interaction between them (Balew, 2017). This makes Dire Dawa to be branded as the ‘city of love’. Not only this, Ethiopian ruling elite has established marital relationship for political purpose (Bahiru, 2001). With regard to migration, Oromo, for instance, migrated and intermixed with dozens of other ethnic groups (Tekletsadik, 1959). The Amhara and Tigray ethnic groups from northern parts of Ethiopia has migrated into the resourceful Southern parts of Ethiopia in search of better living condition under the Derg’s resettlement program. This has resulted in the intermixing of such ethnic groups to the indigenous ethnic groups.

One undeniable fact according to Levine (1974) is that there was conflict between ethnic groups in Ethiopia. However, such conflict was not the result of primordial sentiment between such ethnic groups (Ismagilova, 2004). Rather the conflict was the result of cultural practices such as bravery by killing others from different community, theft of cattle, sheep and goat and abduction of female from other ethnic groups (Levine, 1974). However, as the same author illustrated that the Ethiopian ethnic groups established mutual understanding concerning the onset, regulation and termination of the conflicts. Warring groups, for instance, establish trade relations by sending their children as a hostage. This makes Ethiopian ethnic groups to have peaceful relation
to each other for centuries. However, as the researcher presented in the next section, there occurs a move from cordial to hostile inter-ethnic relation in Ethiopia as a result of the politicization of ethnicity that began in the 1960s and formalized since 1991. The arrangement of federalism based on ethnic lines created competition between ethnic groups in Ethiopia which have been assimilated due to thousands of years of continuous interaction, intermarriages, trade, migration, and other social activities (Bekalu, 2016).

2.4.2. Conflictual Relations

Despite the existence of amicable ethnic relations, the history of the Ethiopian state is the history of conflict with varying dimensions based on class, religious and regional sentiments (Merera, 2006). However, the past conflict was described as power rivalry which was conducted between regional lords to control the central government (Bahiru, 2001). One of the contested issues in Ethiopian history is the expansion of emperor Minilik II into the south, eastern and western parts of Ethiopia. Some scholars like Asebe (2007) and Assefa (1993) attribute this expansion as ethnic based and labeled the process as black colonization. But, they fail to understand the fact that this process of state building in Ethiopia by no means is unique with the norms in the construction of nation-states in the Western Europe and elsewhere in the world (Markakis, 2011). In addition to this, in Ethiopia’s state building process non-Amhara generals and soldiers were participated (Bewuketu, 2014). In fact, the process caused for the loss of human life and destruction of properties. Moreover, the ruling class of the then time exploited the people of newly incorporated areas. Labeling such a process as ethnic is not as such valid since there was no intra-ethnic consciousness to subjugate others (Semahegn, 2014).

Intra-state conflicts were experienced in Ethiopian history between the central government and local governors urging for decentralization and autonomy (Siraw, 2015). The rise of some rebel groups8 against the imperial and Derg regime has to do with historic hostility, lack of access to the state and material deprivation (Markakis, 1989). The conflicts that were prevalent in the then time were between such rebel groups against the central government. To accomplish their goals such groups in fact used their fellow ethnic groups for political mobilization. One undeniable fact in the Ethiopia’s past is that there was the existence of conflicts among the

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8 Rebel groups such as WSLF and SALF in Somalia has established against the central government for proper power distribution rather than considering one ethnic group as their enemy (Asnake, 2009; Markakis, 1989).
pastoral communities and sedentary farmers (Abbink, 1993). However, it was not considered as inter-ethnic conflict since the emergence of ethnic consciousness and ethnic mobilizations have not occurred due to inherent primordial sentiments. Rather it happened due to social, political, and economic reasons (Birhanu, 2008). Ethnic mobilization have been characteristic for Ethiopia’s modern history already since the Haile Selassie I regime and have been only reinforced since 1991 when the Tigrayan dominated government and the Tigrayan dominant ethnic strategy have been formed (Zahorik, 2011). Hence, the conflicts that were prevalent among the pastoralist community were a resource conflict as a result of scarcity in the arid areas of Ethiopia (Aalen, 2006).

Ethnic groups have intermingled over centuries and have shared a long and common history (Alemante, 2003). They have their own indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms that maintain inter-ethnic solidarity and prevent ethnic conflict (Asmarom, 1973). Nevertheless, due to the institutionalization of ethnicity after 1991, social relation become more and more ethnic oriented, the bias and prejudice of people to other ethnic groups is increasing and clear tension are emerging for controlling of political power and economic resources (Kymilka, 2006). This creates competitive and hostile inter-ethnic relations. Unlike what happened in the past, any dispute on land and other resources between individuals or households now become an ethnic issue (Abbink, 2006). This is because each and every issue in Ethiopia becomes ethiniciized.

Despite its promise, ethnic federalism has contributed to create conducive condition to inter-ethnic conflict. Attack on Amhara ethnic group in different parts of Ethiopia, strong ethnic antipathy between Amhara and Tigray, conflict between Amhara and Oromo in the Harar city state (Alem, 2004), conflict between Kemant and Amhara (EHRC, 2016), conflict between Afar and Karrayu Oromo (Asnake, 2011), inter alia, are some of the observed inter-ethnic conflict after the engineering of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia. Evictions, killings, property destruction and burning of houses are the most commonly heard news in many parts of Ethiopia. Even in 2017, many inter-ethnic conflicts have been reported in Ethiopia including the Oromo and Ethiopian Somali conflict, the Guji and Gedeo conflict and the eviction and killing of non-indigenous Amhara in Oromia and Benishangul-Gumuz regional state. From such an experience, one can deduce that there is a move from cordial to hostile inter-ethnic relations in Ethiopia as a result of the newly induced federal system and divide and rule strategy of the TPLF led EPRDF.
The drive toward an equalitarian ethnic pluralism has intensified inter-ethnic conflict rather than cultivating ethnic harmony. It is on the contrary to the pre-1991 experience of Ethiopia in that the ethnically diversified society had witnessed the culture of living together for centuries (Bekalu, 2016). This shows the fact that the mere existence of diversified ethnic groups or primordial sentiment is not the cause for hostile inter-ethnic relations. Rather, it is the manipulation of such differences by political elites to achieve economic, ideological and political goals which strained inter-ethnic relations in Ethiopia.

2.5. Ethnic Federalism in Ethiopia

After the demise of the military regime in 1991, the EPRDF government established a federal system on the basis of ethnic identity (Abbink, 2011; Alem, 2003; Turton, 2006). This federal arrangement was elaborated first in the Transitional charter and then institutionalized in the federal constitution that was adopted in 1995 (Abbink, 2011). Ethnic federalism was mainly introduced to decentralize power and resolve the ‘nationalities question’ by accommodating diversity (Assefa, 2006). The intended purpose of this federal system was to achieve ethnic and regional autonomy while maintaining the unity of Ethiopia as a whole (Alem, 2005) by ensuring positive inter-ethnic relations. David Turton (2006) stated that the transformation that has taken place in the political structure of Ethiopia since 1991 has been both radical and pioneering. It is radical because it has introduced the principle of self-determination for federated units in a formerly highly centralized and unitary state. It was also pioneering because Ethiopia has gone further than any other African state in using ethnicity as its organizing principle (Turton, 2006). But, the point here is not about the purpose of the newly introduced ethnic federalism since it is the most commonly heard concern in Ethiopia. The most important issue here is that: does the so called ethnic federalism bring its intended objectives? What were the real reasons for the origin of this system? Was it introduced for the purpose of creating inter-ethnic harmony or as a means to divide and rule. Below this, the researcher mentions some of the controversies regarding the issues concerned and come up with conclusion based on the scholarly literatures and the existing circumstances.
2.5.1. The Root of Ethnic Federalism

Any attempt to understand the rationale for adopting the federal system and politicized ethnicity in Ethiopia would be incomplete without scrutinizing the historical trajectories that shaped the modern Ethiopian state since the late 19th century. This is because of the fact that the current federal political system is the outcome of the political dynamics held for centuries. Since narration of the process of modern Ethiopian state formation is beyond the scope of this study, the researcher explores why and how ethno-nationalist movements are emerged since the late 1960s and try to show that was the Amhara ethnic groups really oppressor or not.

To say little about modern state-building processes, Ethiopia as a state took its modern shape in the first decade of 20th century (Merera, 2006) mainly through the use of force as well as peaceful submission (Bahiru, 2001). Began by Emperor Tewodros II, the process was completed through the expansion of Menilik II into the south, south east and south western parts of the present day Ethiopia (Bahiru, 2001; Young, 1996). The incorporation of these new territories in the 20th century gave the present geographical shape and cultural, linguistic and ethnic compositions of Ethiopia (Alemseged, 2004; Asnake, 2009). This development led to the subjection of the subordinated ethnic groups into various forms of economic, political and cultural domination and oppression (Aklilu, 2006). The empire builders who came from the northern part of the present Ethiopia (Yonnatan, 2010) has engaged in cultural assimilation and economic exploitation in the newly occupied territories (Assefa, 1993). Particularly the Amhara people are considered as oppressor and beneficiary from such state-building project (Yihunie, 2017) which led to the creation of ‘Amhara oppressor’ discourse.

The ‘Amhara oppressor’ discourse claims that the Amhara ethnic group is economically, politically and culturally beneficial while other ethnic groups are subjugated and oppressed by the previous regimes (Semahengn, 2014). Public policy favoured economic and education investments in the present Amhara region (Alemseged, 2004). But, in reality the Amhara people are poor, powerless and exploited as is the case of any other non-Amhara ethnic groups. Only the Abyssinian nobility were the main beneficiary of the then time political system (Young, 1996). The ‘Amhara oppressor’ discourse led to the creation of many ethno nationalist movements.
(Alem, 2004; Alemseged; 2004; Semahegn, 2014) to liberate their fellow ethnic groups from the existing national oppression.

This national oppression thesis came into the Ethiopian political vocabulary with the growth of Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) in the 1960s (Merrera, 2006). The students popularized the term as part of their struggle for social justice and national and ethnic equality (Alem, 2003). It was ethnically based historical injustices and inequality that brought ‘Nationalities Question’ as politico-ideological agenda on the side of Ethiopian students in the then time (Temesgen, 2015). The students claim that political, economic and socio-cultural domination of one ethnic group prevailed in the imperial period. The student groups simplistically attempted to classify the Amhara as oppressor while all other ethnic groups as oppressed (Semahegn, 2014). Walelign Mekonnen, for example, in his famous article entitled as ‘on the Question of Nationalities in Ethiopia’ clearly stipulated that:

...there is of course the fake Ethiopian Nationalism advanced by the ruling class and unwillingly accepted and even propagated by innocent fellow travelers. What is this fake Nationalism? Is it not simply Amhara and to certain extent Amhara-Tigre Supremacy?... In short to be an Ethiopian, you will have to wear an Amhara mask (to use Fanon's expression). Start asserting your national identity and you are automatically a tribalist, which is if you are not blessed to be born an Amhara (Walelign, 1969, p. 2).

The article clearly asserted that to be a genuine Ethiopian each ethnic group must have to change their identity into an Amhara culture. Therefore, for Ethiopian students of the then time, Ethiopia is the ‘prison house of nations and nationalities’ (Asebe, 2007). Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and Melaw Ethiopia Socialist Niqinaqie (MEISON), which were the direct offspring of the ESM, accepted this national oppression thesis (Semahegn, 2014).

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9 ESM is a student movement which initially began at AAU from the question of food, housing and other academic issues to the Centre of national political dissent. In the 1960s students had firmly radicalized and endorsed Marxism-Leninism. The students mainly voiced for nationality question and land rights.

10 EPRP is one of the direct offspring of ESM, which was established in 1972. Its members were largely trained by EPLF to bring radical change on the nationalities question. EPRP demanded the establishment of a civilian government immediately after the coming of the military regime.
After the national question became the epicenter of the student’s movement, students specifically from Eritrea, Tigray and Oromia gradually began to distance themselves from the mainstream Marxist view on the question of nationality (Semahagn, 2014). They focused on the colonial thesis by sticking themselves on the nationality struggle over class struggle. Hence, multiple ethno-nationalist groups were emerged during the military regime (Alem, 2004). Among them TPLF, Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF)\(^{12}\) and OLF are the most popular ethno-nationalist group that struggled for the complete liberation of their fellow Ethnic groups from the colony of Ethiopia (Asnake, 2009). One thing that makes them similar is that they perceived the Amhara as their historical enemy. The 1976 TPLF manifesto, for instance, asserted in Amharic as “የትግራይ ከህዝብ ባ夯ራዊ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያለ ከትግላይ ከጣም ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ባሆኔ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግላይ ባስተ ያይ ከተጨማሪ ከሆነ ከትግ갈

From this manifesto one can deduce that ethno-nationalist groups opted for secession as a solution for the existing national oppression. They also have failed to differentiate the Amhara ethnic group and political elites in the then time. They failed to recognize the fact that the Amhara ethnic group were not consciously organized and mobilized ethnically to dominate and exploit other ethnic groups (Semahagn, 2014; Tegegne, 1998). In fact, the previous Ethiopian governments attempted to create a unitary state on the basis of cultural assimilation to create strong and united Ethiopia. They adopted, according to Alem (2004), Amharic as the official language of the state and public discourse and Abyssinian orthodox culture as the core culture of the whole Ethiopian national identity. But this effort must be seen from the perspective of pan-ethiopianist view. Moreover, the assimilationist policy of these regimes does not represent the ordinary people of Amhara. This is because the Ethiopian ruling classes could not be identified with a particular ethnic group (Gashaw, 1993). They were multi-ethnic group whose common factors are that they are Christian, Amharic speaker and claim lineage to the so called Solomonic

\(^{11}\) MEISON is also the other direct off-spring of ESM, which was established in 1968. It acknowledged that the military regime could be progressive and alien itself with it. It provides socialist prescription for the Derg regime.

\(^{12}\) EPLF is emerged in the 1970s as an intellectual left-wing group that split from Eritrea Liberation Front (ELF). It was fought for the independence of Eritrea. After achieving its goal, it transferred into the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), which serves as the only legal political party in Eritrea (Gebru, 2009).
line. That is why Andargachew (2005) asserted that neither Tewodros, Yohannis, Minilik nor Haile Sellassie tried to organize their power in purely ethnic ways since there was no common consciousness of being Amhara, Tigray or Oromo. In addition to this, there was no intra-Amhara ethnic consciousness at the time with the exception of the creation of All Amhara People’s Organization (AAPO)\(^{13}\) in 1992 (Alem, 2004; Kidane, 2001).

Some ethno-nationalist groups like TPLF are quick to reiterate that the oppressed Amhara are not their enemy (Semahegn, 2014) and renounced the secessionist goal because of internal and external factors (Aregawi, 2004). However, the assertion of Amhara as oppressor is still applicable in the Ethiopian political atmosphere (Yihunie, 2017). In the last two decades, this rhetoric has negatively contributed in shaping the attitudes of other ethnic groups towards the Amhara ethnic group. This makes non-Amhara ethnic groups to perceive Amhara as oppressor and beneficial in the previous regimes. This discourse caused for the death and displacement of innocent Amharas at Watter, Bedano and Arba Gugu in the Arsi Zone of Oromia regional state (Alem, 2004; Muluken, 2016). In Arba Gugu, for example, several Amharas were displaced and hundreds of them killed (Daniel, 2003). Not only this, the TPLF led EPRDF regime reduce the Amharas in the civil servant immediately after the seizure of power (Young, 1998). This is in contrast to the fact that there was no conscious ethnically motivated mobilization to consolidate Amhara against the rest of Ethiopian ethnic groups (Semahegn, 2014). In fact, it is undeniable that the ruling class spoke Amharic and Amharic dominated other languages and cultures. Despite many scholars debated over the issue of Amhara as oppressor and non-Amhara as oppressed or not, it’s positive and cordial relation at the societal level with its neighboring ethnic group is given little attention by scholars. Therefore, the researcher will try to assess Amharas relation with the Kemant.

Whatever the case, the ethno-nationalist groups have achieved victory over pan-ethiopianists’ (Turton, 2006) that was hotly debated among students in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Thus, in 1991, after a long period of armed struggle the TPLF led EPRDF defeated the Derg regime with the help of EPLF (Alem, 2004). The EPRDF regime then established an ethnic federal system. It recognized the most potent ingredients of the Marxist ideology of the Ethiopian revolutionary

\(^{13}\) AAPO represent the Amhara in Addis Ababa and other large towns. It was established in 1992 with the aim of fostering the unity of Ethiopia. It was against Eritrean independence and ethnic federalism (Aalen, 2002).
movement which is the right of nations and nationalities to self-determination up to and including secession that was introduced into the students movement at the end of the 1960s (Dereje, 2006). This implies that the revolutionary rhetoric that began in university campuses since the end of the 1960s has brought a lasting legacy in terms of shaping the country’s political discourse and state structure. The ideological principles that the ruling party currently pursues are largely the results of the radical ideological movement of the students.

2.5.2. Debates on Ethnic Federalism

The current federal system in Ethiopia was established with the objective of creating a country of equal nations, nationalities and peoples and ending the long lived authoritarian rule by democratizing the Ethiopian state and society (Merera, 2006). This federal system was introduced to decentralize power and resolve the nationalities question by accommodating diversity (Assefa, 2006). By doing so, the EPRDF regime aims to bring cordial inter-ethnic relations that maintain the unity of the country (Asnake, 2009). However, the introduction of ethnic based federalism in Ethiopia faced different criticism from both internal and external scholars, observers and politicians. The debates on the issues concerned revolved around the question of whether ethnic federalism brings cordial inter-ethnic relations or an instrument of divide and rule strategy that further escalate inter-ethnic conflicts. Hence, according to Alem (2004) ethnic federalism became the most controversial issue in the public discourse everywhere.

To begin with, supporters of the federal system claim that the so called ethnic federalism maintained the unity of the Ethiopian people and the territorial integrity of the state at large. They argue that it has brought the recognition of the principle of pluralism and ethnic equality (Alemseged, 2004; Temesgen, 2015; Young, 1998). It also produced a sense of pride and equality especially among those Ethiopians who felt marginalized by the dominant culture of the center (Assefa, 2012). The supporters go further and illustrate that ethnic federalism in Ethiopia ensured the recognition of the cultural and linguistic rights of ethnic groups with the aim of improving inter-ethnic relations (Asnake, 2009). Moreover, as propagated by the members of the ruling elites through EBC and other government Medias and international Medias, the newly engineered ethnic federalism saved Ethiopia from state disintegration and grants linguistic and cultural rights for the formerly oppressed ethnic groups.
In contrast, the critics stipulated that the federal arrangement expanded cultural and linguistic rights without the political freedom of the so called formerly oppressed groups (Alem, 2004). Despite its goal of maintaining inter-ethnic harmony, ethnic based federal system escalates inter-ethnic conflict in the country (Muhabie, 2015). Moreover, many critics argued that the use of ethnicity as the main organizing device of federalism unnecessarily essentializes identity, encourage secessionism and fragment political space along ethnic lines (Alemante, 2003; Abbink, 2006; Daniel, 2003). In line with this Kymilka (2006) pointed out that the EPRDF’s commitment to ethnic federalism is an anachronism, a throwback to a model of inter-ethnic relations that had just been proved a failure in three former communist federations including the USSR, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia.

For many scholars, ethnic based federalism is engineered for the sake of ‘divide and rule’ aiming at securing Tigreans’ political supremacy (Abbink, 2006; Bekalu, 2016; Birhanu, 2008; Merera, 2003; Muhabie, 2015; Wondwosen & Zahorik, 2008). In addition to this, TPLF devised this policy to divide the other people of Ethiopia along ethnic lines so that it could maintain its political position at the expense of other political groups (Aalen, 2006). To accomplish their goal of political supremacy, the leaders of TPLF who learnt the principle of divide and rule from European colonists have propagated the gospel of ethnic division (Alemante, 2003). The TPLF’s system is to disintegrate Ethiopia into pieces, abolishing the long existing unity of the people and retarding the development and growth of Ethiopia (Aalen, 2002). In its extreme case, Tuso (1997) contends that the EPRDF/TPLF regime deliberately fosters ethnic hatred and division for its own political goals particularly at the expense of the Amharan ethnic groups. In fact, even though it is unsuccessful, this process of divide and rule strategy was opposed by several groups. The opposition claims that this policy will lead to the dismemberment of Ethiopia (Alem, 2004; Assefa, 2012). However, the oppositions claim was rejected by the ruling party by criticizing them as the ‘pine of the former ruling system’ and supporters of the Amhara hegemony.

In the current political atmosphere of Ethiopia, parties and other political groups even are organized on the basis of ethnic identity (Abbink, 1998; Huntington, 1993). It is because Ethiopian ethnic federalism encourages political parties to organize along ethnic lines (Alem, 2003; Bekalu, 2016). This has a disastrous effect on the national unity and political stability of the country. The TPLF led EPRDF legalized the organization of political parties on the basis of
ethnic identities under the 2008 Revised Political Parties Registration Proclamation no. 62. The revised proclamation stated that at least forty percent of the founding members of any national party shall be resident of the same regional units and more than sixty percent of the founding members of any regional party shall be the resident of the same regional state. This proclamation clearly asserted that the EPRDF regime doesn’t encourage the existence of political parties that have access of supporters in the whole parts of the country. It enables the ruling party to intimidate and oppress oppositions by giving different name that has attached to different ethnic groups for different reason. According to Aalen (2006) and Semahegn (2014), for instance, the EPRDF intimidate political parties having an ethnic attachment from Amhara as the ancestors of Neftegna and the missionary of the so called Ginbot-7. The divide and rule strategy helps the government to maintain its power.

Rather than improving inter-ethnic relation in Ethiopia, ethnic federalism invites ethnic conflict and risks state disintegration (Alem, 2004). Many scholars fear that Ethiopia might face the fate of USSR and Yugoslavia (Aalen, 2002; Kymlicka, 2006; Wondwosen & Zahorik, 2008). This is because ethnic federalism in Ethiopia reinforced and generated local inter-ethnic conflict (Abbink, 2006) by destroying the country’s collective identity (Assefa, 2012). Therefore, by analyzing the existing scholarly literatures and the existing circumstances that has happened in Ethiopia, the researcher argues that Ethiopia’s ethnic based federal system is fabricated for the sake of maintaining the TPLF’s supremacy through divide and rule strategy at the expense of others. By initiating conflict along ethnic lines, political elites can deepen ethnic division to maintain their political supremacy (Horowitz, 1985). Improving inter-ethnic relations through organizing the federation based on ethnic identity is used by TPLF as an instrument to accomplish its objectives. The empirical data shows that Tigrean elites control military, economic, political and ideological sources of power (Alemayehu, 2013). TPLF maintain its political power and build its huge economic empire in Tigray Regional State by making other regions politically unrest and creating inter-ethnic conflict (Alemayehu, 2013; Daniel, 2003; Merera, 2003; Muhabie, 2015; Paulos, 2007). In light of this, the TPLF elites realize that Article
39(1)\textsuperscript{14} of the constitution seriously jeopardizes regional peace and stability. Such regional uprisings are needed so that the regime wants to weaken the unity of the country (Bekalu, 2016).

2.6. Customary Conflict Resolution Mechanisms in Ethiopia

Customary conflict resolution mechanisms are indigenous practices used to resolve conflicts and maintain peace and stability in the community (Tefera & Mulugeta, 2009). Those institutions have different names such as traditional conflict resolution mechanism, indigenous conflict resolution mechanism and customary conflict resolution mechanism. For the purpose of this study the researcher used customary conflict resolution mechanism. Therefore, in this study, customary conflict resolution mechanisms can be described as those institutions that have been experienced for long periods and have developed within societies, rather than being the product of external importation. Scholars agree that customary institutions employ the use of customary knowledge, norms, values and traditions in order to resolve conflicts. They are applied based on local realities and helps to resolve conflicts at a grass root level (Kelemwork, 2011).

Customary conflict resolution mechanisms play a very significant role in the day to day lives of Africa (Meron, 2010). Such institutions have been used at the grass root level to resolve conflict of various cases such as conflict over land, water, marital problem, homicide, inter-ethnic and religious conflicts (Rabar & Karimi, 2004). Like other African countries, Ethiopia has a strong cultural heritage and customary conflict resolution mechanisms that play a great role in maintaining inter-ethnic harmony (Asmarom, 1973; Meron, 2010). Each ethnic group has rich tradition of resolving conflict within and outside the group (Dereje, 2010). Council of elders is the most common in almost all communities under different name including \textit{Jaararumma} among the Oromo (Mamo, 2008), \textit{Shimglina} in Amhara (Alula and Getachew, 2008), \textit{Shengo} among the Sidama (Ambaye, 2005) and \textit{Deriacimma} in Wolayita (Melese, 2006). Majority of the Ethiopian ethnic group prefers customary institutions of conflict resolution since they are based on the values and norms of the society. It is from this ground that Tirsit (2004) pointed out that people obey customary institutions, leaders and elders rather than modern government system in Ethiopia. In fact, the formal institutions which are mandated by the federal government to

\textsuperscript{14} Article 39(1) of the FDRE constitution stated that every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession (FDRE constitution, 1994).
resolve conflicts such as HOF and MOFA are started to take measures after the escalation of the conflicts. Furthermore, they are not in a position to resolve the conflict at a grass root level since they are at a distance from the local area.

In countries like Ethiopia, which adopted ethnic based federalism as its policy, such customary institutions helps blur political boundaries and bring people from different ethnic and regional boundaries together (Meron, 2010). Despite its long history of maintaining inter-ethnic solidarity (Ayalew, 2012), customary conflict resolution mechanisms has given little attention by the constitution. Article 34(5) of the constitution states that “the constitution shall not preclude the adjudication of disputes relating to personal and family laws in accordance with religious or customary laws, with the consent of parties to the dispute” (FDRE constitution, 1995).

This provision shows that FDRE constitution limited the mandate of customary institutions to private and family matters. In different parts of Ethiopia, however, these institutions operated beyond the domain of family and personal matters mentioned under article 34(5). In May 2009, for instance, the sheikhs dealt with conflict between the Amhara and Oromo pastoralists over grazing land in Oromo special Zone of Amhara region (Meron, 2010). This case clearly illustrated that the court of the sheikhs operates beyond the mandates given to customary conflict resolution mechanisms. Accordingly, such institutions are important in maintaining inter-ethnic solidarity and cultivating inter-ethnic harmony in Ethiopia.

Even though article 78(5) of the FDRE constitution grants the House of Peoples representative (HPR) and state councils the power to give recognition for customary courts, the government sanctioned some ethnic groups not to use them for the maintenance of inter-ethnic solidarity. According to Young (1998) the Borana, for instance, has prohibited from the use of the Gada system to maintain inter-ethnic harmony with their Somali neighbors. On the contrary, the government allowed Afar and Tigray ethnic groups to use Abagore to maintain inter-ethnic harmony in times of conflict over grazing land. From this fact one can clearly illustrates that there is a lack of uniformity in the enforcement of such institution on the sides of the government. Whatever the case, the prohibition of customary institutions demonstrates that there is conflict between customary institutions which sometimes have greater legitimacy than the modern forms of government.
Among the many customary institutions, *shimlina* is the well-known ways of conflict resolution in Ethiopia (Asmarom, 1973). *Shimlina* which is arbitrarily interpreted in English as arbitration or reconciliation by elders is the process of reconciliation between conflicting parties by a group of elders (Ayalew, 2012). It is the most rooted system among the Amhara society. For Getachew (1998) *shimlina* is a traditional conflict resolution mechanism used by both Amhara and Kemant ethnic groups. The Ethiopian formal courts interestingly do recognize the decision of *shimlina*. Empirical studies have conducted on the role of this customary institution in maintaining peace and order in the community. Bamlaku (2013), for instance, has conducted a study on the assessment of customary conflict resolution system and practice in Simada *Woreda*, North Gondar. Employing qualitative approach, he argued that with less cost *shimlina* is the most effective method used by the community to resolve land disputes. To the best of the knowledge of the researcher, no research has conducted on how *shimlina* is utilized to cultivate inter-ethnic harmony. Therefore, the researcher will try to explore how the Amhara and Kemant ethnic groups used *shimlina* to maintain inter-ethnic solidarity and what challenges they faced.
CHAPTER THREE

HISTORY AND ORIGIN OF THE AMHARA AND KEMANT PEOPLES

3.1. Introduction

In any investigation of inter-ethnic relations, the geographical setting of the groups, economic life, nature of socio-political organizations, language, religion and myth of ancestry plays a pivotal role in determining the nature of interactions of the groups in any given time and condition. As a result, the focus of this chapter is to provide a general insights on the historical background on the origin of the two groups, their economic life, language and religion, and finally describing the study area where the two ethnic groups lived together.

3.2. The Amharas in History

3.2.1. Origin of the People

Amhara is the second largest ethnic group in Ethiopia in terms of number (Jama, 2002). According to a letter sent by Abba Gorgorios to Ludolf, the historical location of Amhara is situated between River Beshilo in the north dividing it from Begemdir, and Wonchit River in the south dividing it from Shewa (Tegegne, 1998). One of the preeminent writer of Ethiopian history called Donald Levine (1974) in his part noted that situated in the present day Wollo provinces, the historical Amhara region was bounded on the west by the Abay River and its tributary the Beshilo River, on the north by the regions of Angot and Lasta, and on the south by the Wonchit River. The primary historical place of Amhara, therefore, is the district of Amhara Saint and Bete-Amhara which is fertile and suitable for cultivation (Tekletsadik, 1951). Through gradual process the Amhara went out from their original area and mixed with the neighboring peoples and culture (Fissiha, nd; Tegegne, 1998). Currently, they are situated in Gondar, Gojjam, Wollo and shewa (Shoup, 2011; Jama, 2002; Yohannis, 2013). They are also diffused in different parts of Ethiopia as a result of migration, inter-marriage and resettlement program of the Derg regime.

Despite some sorts of consensus on their historical location, there is disagreement among scholars and politicians on the meaning and origin of Amhara. With regard to the meaning of Amhara itself, different scholars and historians have different points of view. The notable Ethiopian evangelist and writer Aleqa Taye (1922) illustrated that Amhara or Amara means
cultivator. Others see it as an ethnic name that can be linked back to the himyarites, or claim that it drives from Ge’ez, meaning free people (Mekonnen, 2008). Kessate Birhan Tessema in his part claims that the word Amhara comes from the Ethiopian word *Amari* which means pleasing, agreeable, beautiful and gracious (as cited in Mekonnen, 2008). In a televised speech, Mengistu Hailemariam also tried to define the term Amhara by saying that Amhara consists of a Hebrew term *Am*, which means people, and *Ham*, which means mountain. He then argues that Amhara means people who live under the mountain.

With regard to the origin of Amhara, different scholars have also different interpretation. After the launching of the transitional government, particularly, some politicians and historians interpret it differently so as to advance political goals. Some scholars deny even the existence of an ethnic group called Amhara. Scholars like Tegegne, Mesfin and Getachew have claimed that it is difficult to find the primordial origin of Amhara. Others claim that the Amhara were not an ethnic community, but rather a military strata with in the Ethiopian feudal state (Chestenstove as cited in Jama, 2002; Lapiso, 1983). In contrast, other scholars claim that the Amhara have had its own origin as is the case in any other ethnic groups of Ethiopia (Fissiha, nd; shoup, 2011; Taye, 1922; Tekletsadik, 1951). For such scholars, Amhara ancestors are believed to have come from South Arabia and inter-married with the local inhabitants (Shoup, 2011).

The ancestor of Amhara is the son of Yoktan and the grandson of Shem (Taye, 1922). The tribes of Yoktan (Agazian) come from near-east to Ethiopia across the Red Sea. These tribes include Saba, Habesa, Homerit or Himyarite. Of such tribes, the so called Homerit or Himyarite has changed its name into Amhara after long periods of gradual modification (Tekletsadik, 1951). Aleqa Taye (1922) argues that the evidence which shows that the Amhara people are the race of the tribe of Shem, the descent of Yoktan and the lineage of Israel is their bearing, custom, appearance, names and place names. They are also similar in terms of dietary culture. In general, those people who are situated in Amhara Seint and Bete-Amhara has been intermixed with other inhabitants and expands its territory into different parts of the present day Ethiopia.

### 3.2.2. Language

The earliest description of Amhara, from 16th and 17th C, entails that the people of Amhara speak a language called Amharic (Levine, 1974). The Amharic language is an Afro-Asiatic language
belongs to the Semitic group. It is related with Ge’ez, the sacred literally language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (Bahiru, 2001). It adopted a great number of words from Ge’ez, especially words connected with religion and the advancement of arts and civilization (Prichard, 1837). The Amharic language spread across the whole corner of Ethiopia and created a mixed language with others (Shoup, 2011). This resulted in the incorporation of Cushitic vocabulary and syntax into Amharic language (Levine, 1974). Currently Amharic became the lingua franca of many Ethiopians.

Historically, the Amharic language was served as the language of court and nobles of the empire (Bahiru, 2001; Prichard, 1837). It served as the official language of the country for centuries (Bahiru, 2001; Levine, 1974; Mekonnen, 2013) and currently served as the working language of FDRE (FDRE constitution, 1995). This status is the result of Yikuno Amilaks’ decision (Taye, 1922). It was decided to be the official language because majority of the king was from Amhara ethnic group (Shoup, 2011; Mekonnen, 2013) and the Amharic language is perceived as easy to speak, civilized and grandiloquent (Taye, 1922). However, in the latter time, some non-Amhara elites considered the status of Amharic as an official language as the systematic methods of cultural assimilation and Amharization (Tegegne, 1998). Nevertheless, it is not unique for Ethiopia since every country in the world have its own official as well as working language, albeit, they are multiethnic states. In fact, the imperial rulers engaged in the diffusion of Amhara culture and Amharic language to create common citizenship (Jama, 2002). According to Alem (2005), it is based on the French model of nation-building process.

3.2.3. Economy

The location of the Amhara is more mountainous with fertile hills than the rest of Abyssinians. This location makes them to engage in sedentary agricultural economic activity (Levine, 1974). As a matter of fact almost 90% of the Amharas are rural agriculturalist people (Mekonnen, 2013). The same author noted that they are sedentary farmers living in villages surrounded by cultivated fields. As settled agriculturalists, land is the focus of Amhara culture, social life and personal concerns (Fellman, 1976). In various cultural villages of Amhara, therefore, land is the source of personal and communal conflicts.

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15 French model infers the attempt to create a homogenous national culture through the agencies of mass schooling, the deployment of national symbols and the invention of national traditions (Bell, 1988).
They are among the earliest people in Africa to develop plows and harnessing the oxen to pull them. Grains such as millet, corns, *teff*, and barley are the dietary staple among the amhara community (Prichard, 1837). They also raise cattle, goats and sheep with donkey serving as a draft animal. Currently, as a result of the expansion of urbanization and some sorts of modernization, some Amharas are engaged in trade and served as government employee, factory worker and labourer in different towns and cities of the country. The Amhara societies are poor in which whose life is little changed (Mekonnen, 2013). According to most international organization reports and the documentary film prepared by Aljazeera, the Amhara people are the poorest not only in Ethiopia but also in the world (WB, 2017).

### 3.2.4. The Amhara in Ethiopian Political History

The Abyssinian/Ethiopian state is identified with the Amhara ruling class and the people (Tegegne, 1998). Politically, economically and historically they are the par excellence of Abyssinia (Fellman, 1976). Credited for revitalizing the effort to provide a political and cultural center for Ethiopia goes to this ethnic group (Levine, 1974). Hence, most scholars agreed that the Amhara has the ruling class of Ethiopia over most of its long history. Claiming its descendant from the Solomonic dynasty (Taye, 1922), the Amhara kings are considered as the heirs of Aksumite empire (Jama, 2002). Hence, the Amhara plays a central or leading role in the formation of the Ethiopian state. However, due to the takeover of trade routes by the Muslims, the Aksumite civilization declined (Bahiru, 2001). This led to the creation of the so called the Zagwe dynasty. This implies that the center of power shift from Aksum to lasta.

In 1270, the pretender of Amhara called Yikuno Amlak ended the Zagwe Dynasty (Aspen, 2001; Bahiru, 2001; Levine, 1974). Claiming descent from the ancient rulers of Aksum and beyond the king Solomon of Israel and Queen Sheba of Abyssinia, he established the so called Solomonic dynasty (Levine, 1974; Taye, 1922). The great breakthrough of the Amhara political expansion occurred after this time. Particularly, King Amde Tsion (1314-44), aptly called the founder of Ethiopian state, expanded Ethiopian territory into different corners (Levine, 1974). It is from this time onwards that the relation between the Amhara and Ethiopian state has clearly established. The Amhara remained the leading political power and the main forces of state building (Jama, 2002). Along with other Ethiopians, the Amhara people contribute a lot for the unity of Ethiopia. For the last seven hundred and more years this people preserved the territorial integrity of
Ethiopia from foreign invasion such as Turks, Egypt and Italy as well as internal crisis such as the War of Ahmad Gragn (Fissiha, nd).

The political domination of the Amhara elites has accompanied with the diffusion of Amhara culture such as its language, religion, moral value and political style into the newly incorporated areas (Levine, 1974). The same author noted that the official religion of the Amhara kingdom, Orthodox Christianity, had a major impact on the practices of indigenous pagan religion. Saints such as Abune Tekle Haymanot were sent to convert followers of pagan into Christianity. The main thrust of the Amhara missionary was to replace pagan animistic beliefs and practices. The Pagan-Hebraic followers of the Kemant people, for example, has been baptized into Orthodox Christianity through this program of religious conversion beginning from the Zagwe Dynasty till the reign of Emperor Haile Sellassie I regime (Quirin, 1998; Zelalem, 2000). Whatever the case, the political, social and cultural expansion of the Amhara kingdom in the 14th and 15th C laid down the foundation for the integration of Greater Ethiopia (Levine, 1974).

This process was interrupted by both internal and external factors.Externally, the invasion of Turks and internally, the Oromo population movement and the war of Ahmad Gragn had a negative role on the state-building projects of medieval Ethiopia (Lapiso, 1983). This factor is followed by the era of princes in which the power at the center became declined while the power of the regional nobility becomes stronger (Bahiru, 2001). But, with the coming of Emperor Tewodros II with his vision of modernization and centralization, the process of uniting the disintegrated Ethiopia started again (Bahiru, 2001; Ghelawdewos, 2006). Started by Tewodros and continued by Yohannis IV the process was completed by Minilik II and Hailesellassie I (Bahiru, 2001). This shows that with the exception of a single leader, Amhara kings contributed a lot for the unification of the present Ethiopia.

As a matter of fact the process of unification by Amhara rulers is a source of profound contentions. According to Alem (2005) there are two contradictory views regarding to the process of state formation in Ethiopia. Being represented by Solomon Gashaw, the first view stated that Ethiopia as a state is existed for millennia through a successful management of ethnic and regional challenges (Alem, 2005). By doing so, a distinct national identity is created by assimilating the periphery into the Amhara culture. This process is called nation-building.
second view is represented by ethno nationalist movements such as OLF, which advocated ‘black colonialism’ (Teshale, 1996) thesis. Supporters of this view argue that the Abyssinian colonized more than half of the territories and peoples as a colonial empire in the last quarter of the 19th C (Alemayehu, 2013; Assefa, 1993; Seyoum, 2004). But, this view is strongly opposed by several scholars. Aspen (2001), Daniel (2003) and Shoup (2011), for instance, argues that the Amhara expansion of the 19th C was in reality the process of reconquering Amhara areas lost to the Oromo during the 16th C. In a different way Alem (2005) contend that a more credible image of Ethiopia is a historically evolved non-colonial empire. By adopting a French model, modern Ethiopian governments attempted to forge cultural homogenization through state centralization and one language policy.

### 3.3. The Kemants in History

#### 3.3.1. Origin of the People

The name kemant has not been found in written sources before the 18th C. The first mention of Kemant in written source is Liberato da san Lorenzo in 1714 (Quirin, 1998). Although it is mentioned in written source in this century, the question of ‘who are the Kemant’ has been one of the contentious issues in Ethiopian politics since 1991 (Yeshiwas, 2013). Different people have different understanding about the origin of Kemant people. Hence, the historical origin of Kemant people is obscure (Quirin, 1998; Tourney, 2009). There are a lot of myths in what Nega Gete (1993) call it ‘gossips’ about the origin of the Kemant.

The first myth is that during the time when the Canaan land in Middle East has faced with drought and hunger, Aynar and his families came to Ethiopia passed by the today’s Egypt (Nega, 1993; Tourney, 2009). Aynar has been identified as the great grandson of Canaan, grandson of Ham and son of Noah (Tourney, 2009). Although there is a lack of further information about Aynar, it is believed that he used to live in the forest area of Karkar. According to Nega (1993) the Kemants are branded as the ‘son of wood’ (emphasis added) because of the gossip that Aynar has lived in the forest by enclosing his body through wood flake. But, for Zelalem this claim is in contrast to the truth. Zelalem (2000) in his empirical study claims that the Kemant are named as the child of wood because of the fact that the Kemant supplied the Gondar town with firewood after the construction of the castle of Gondar. Since then the name Kemant has become
synonymous with wood. Whatever the case, one the basis of this mythology, some traced their origin to the mythical ancestors to Canaan and Aynar and their root to Israel.

The other myth for the origin of Kemant is stipulated by Aleqa Taye. For Aleqa Taye (1922) the father of Kemants was migrated from Egypt to Ethiopia around 2410 B.C. He left Egypt with his wife, Entela, at a time of prolonged famine. Aleqa Taye opposes the view that the Kemants descended from those people who came from Israel with Minilik I as servant, which is the third myth on the origin of Kemants’. The difference between the first and the second myth is the place where the so called Kemant father is come from. All this claims and myths are considered as gossips and rejected by some Kemant members including the former Wombar (Belay, 2010). For such groups Kemant’s place of origin is nowhere but Ethiopia. One of the supporters of this claim is Nega Gete. He claims that the above myths are a mere fabrication and the truth is that Kemant has the same origin with Amhara and Tigre. The present Amhara and Tigre are converted Kemant; both were Kemant before the introduction of Christianity in Ethiopia. But, this view is the result of the attachment of the ethnic origin of the Kemant with the territory they inhabit and ultimately with self-determination (Belay, 2010). For Belay (2010), the last view is propagated by those groups of Kemants serving for Kemant’s quest for recognition and self-governance.

Since the description is purely legendary, it is therefore challenging to elaborate up on it. However, for many scholars the word Kemant derived from the term Kema-ent, literally which means You Kam or Kamatic (Yeshiwas, 2013). In this sense the Kemants associate their common ancestor with the son of Noah and define themselves as the people of Kam descents. This implies that there is strong ethnographic self-identification of themselves as descendants of Israelites. Of course, scholars found that Kemant has close ethnic and historical linkage with Jewish (what we call it Bete Israel) (Quirin, 1998; Tourney, 2009).

Whatever the origin it has, the Kemant people are currently living in North Gondar administrative Zone. Their historical homeland stretches from the area around north of Lake Tana to rural areas around Gondar (Gamst, 1969). Chiliga, Mettema, and Lay Armachiho were the ancient places where the Kemant people have lived (Yeshiwas, 2013). Currently, they are lived in this area along with Amharas in North Gondar administrative Zone. In 2007 E.C., the
kemants are entitled Special Woreda Administration by the Amhara National Regional State (ANRS) council which comprises of 42 Kebeles. Currently, their question of recognitions for the surrounding Kemant people is continued. In September 2017, referendum has conducted to give response for such question. As one member of the interim committee told the researcher that, “now we have given 69 Kebeles from North Gondar which is good for us to establish our own special Zone just like other nationalities in the region” (IK4, Gondar, on 16th of February 2018).

3.3.2. Language and Religion

The Kemant people have had their own language and religion that makes them distinct from their neighboring Amharas. Linguistically, they are Agaw speaking population who emerged as a distinct group gradually over centuries (Quirin, 1998). In line with this professor Gamst contend that the Kemant people speak a dialect of Agaw, a Cushitic language. Kemantney, which is the name of the language of Kemant, is a sister language of the Awign of Gojjam, the Xamt’ana of Wollo and the Bilan of Eritrea (Zelalem, 2000; Zinabu, 2016). It was spoken in several villages in North Gondar especially in the district of Chiliga and Lay Armachiho (Zelalem, 2000).

Many scholars contend that the Kemant language is on the way of extinction (Addisalem, 2014; Zelalem, 2000). Amharic is widely spoken among the people of Kemant. Even the people are more fluent in Amharic than Kemantney (Zelalem, 2000). Kemant people use Amharic at schools, market places, religious institutions, clinics, working places, courts and shops. They also speak Amharic with strangers, administrators, priests, teachers and government employees. According to the census of 1994, Kemantney is spoken by 1625 people as first language and 3450 people as second language among the total number of 172,291 people (Central Statistical Authority, 1994). The proportion of the number of speakers of the language and the size of population clearly indicates that Kemantney has lost ground due to centuries of contact with the neighboring Amharas. Cultural contact with the neighboring Amharas such as linguistic, religious and social contacts and intermarriage, religious conversion, the spread of Christianity, the introduction of modern education and peaceful coexistence with Amharas swallowed the Kemantney language by the dominant language (Zelalem, 2002). Today the language is a live only in remote areas of Chiliga particularly in some semi-desert villages and in these villages located at the plateau which has relatively cool climate (Zelalem, 2000).
Historically, the role of Kemant religion was essential for providing a sense of identity and belongingness (Yeshiwas, 2013). The religion of kemant, which is branded as *Hege-lebona*, provided its members with a sense of group identity, reinforcing their basic values and rigidly defining boundaries between them and their neighbors (Getachew, 1998; Tourney, 2009). *Hege-lebona* comprises of many Hebraic and some Christian elements (Tourney, 2009). It also comprises some elements of paganism (Getachew, 1998). It is from this fact that Gamst named the Kemant as Pagan-Hebraic peoples. According to the Kemant tradition, they believe in one God known as *Adara* or *Mezgana* (Addisalem, 2014; Belay, 2010). *Mizgana* is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient and that everything was created by him (Belay, 2010).

Today, the majority who identify themselves as Kemant doesn’t follow *Hege-lebona* religion. A very few individuals live in the rural areas of Chiliga Woreda maintain their old tradition (Yeshiwas, 2013). The majority of Kemant belong to Orthodox Christianity, while there are few Muslims, Protestants and Catholics (Yeshiwas, 2013). The conversions of Kemants to Orthodox Christianity particularly take place through gradual processes. For Bruce, it was started during the reign of Fasiledes (1632-1667) (Zelalem, 2000). But, the history of Orthodox churches shows that the process started during the reign of Yikuno Amlak (1270-1285). According to local oral traditions, the mass conversion was taking place during the reign of Yohannis IV (1872-1889) and the Haile Sellassie I regime (1923-1974). The first is forced whereas the second is based on the will of the people (Zelalem, 2000). During the last conversion, the Christian Kemant who had position in the government and churches took the lion share of converting the people to Christianity. As one elder informant from the Kemant side explained that those who became priests in Orthodox Christianity, did their best to persuade their relatives to give up their traditional religion in favour of Christianity.

**3.3.3. Economy**

The Kemants are indistinguishable from their neighboring Amharas in terms of economic activities. They conduct plough agriculture and subsistence agricultural system of production (Belay, 2101). But, there is no historical evidence which shows that the Kemant is imitating the plough agriculture or the reverse. Simply, Prichard (1837) noted that the Amhara are among the earliest in Africa to develop this tradition. Historically, however, Kemant remained rural agriculturalists and kept control over their own *rist* in their region between Karkar and Chiliga.
(Quirin, 1998). As a result, they were much less disrupted economically (Quirin, 1998). The land where the Kemant live is very rugged and mountainous and much of it is not suitable for cultivation. However, it is compensated by its suitable environment which is *Woina Daga* and *Kola* with the availability of enough rain (Belay, 2010). They produced cereal crops such as *teff*, barley, wheat, maize and sorghum.

Though the livelihood of Kemant people was based on Agriculture, they also known for the faggots of firewood they brought to Gondar (Zelalem, 2000). They were participated in the construction of Gondar castles by providing logs, sand, stone etc. (Quirin, 1998). The kemant also served the royal family and the nobility as domestic labourers, soldiers and guards (Getachew, 1998; Zelalem, 2000). It is from this fact that James Bruce (1790) illustrated that the Kemant were active peoples who never refused to do any kind of work (cited in Zelalem, 2000). Similarly in the second half of the 19th C, Stern describes the Kemant people as industrious, energetic, and active race residing in districts where they have fine pasture for cattle and fertile soil to reward their field labour (cited in Belay, 2010).

### 3.3.4. The Kemant in Ethiopian Political History

It is possible to say that the current identity of the Kemant people is emerged out of a differential interaction with the Ethiopian state (Quirin, 1998). Kemant oral tradition suggests that the Kemant people had good relationship with different kings of the country. They are proud of being the supporters of the monarchs. In fact, the Kemant were under the protection of the state to prevent conflict with the stronger Bete Israel (Quirin, 1998). They were more worried about the attack of Bete Israel than the Ethiopian state. The German traveller Martin Von Heuglin described that there was strong contact between the Kemant people and the emperor because of their nature of faithfulness and bravery to the emperor (Zelalem, 2000). Gamst (1969) said that the Amhara monarchs could place more trust in their Kemant vassals than they could in Amhara nobilities and peasants. One of the highest titles of the day, *Azaj*, for instance, was given to Chewsaa during the reign of Yohannis I (Quirin, 1998). This shows the fact that the Kemant people had involved in politics and had a say in government affairs (Quirin, 1998; Zelalem, 2000).
During reign of Fasilades, the Kemant served as construction workers, suppliers of wood and stone, guards and soldiers, masons and carpenters (Quirin, 1998). It is during the reign of Tewodros II that the Kemants’ relation with the Ethiopian state reaches in its highest stage. They supported him during his time of banditry for he has spent a long time in Quara, Chiliga and Lay Armachiho (Belay, 2010). His contact with them contributed a lot for his success in overthrowing the Yejju lords and to rule the country for 13 years. After Tewodros II has come to power, the Kemant joined Tewodo’s army (Zelalem, 2000). In general, the Kemant participated in different battles to protect the integrity of the country (Quirin, 1998; Zelalem, 2000). To mention a few, they were participated in the fight against Egypt, Mahdist Sudan and Italy on the side of their home state.

To have access to state power, however, the kemant needs to adopt Amharic names and accept orthodox Christianity (Quirin, 1998). This has led to the social and institutional incorporation of the Kemant into Amhara (Zelalem, 2000). Accordingly, the Kemant had passed through different assimilation with the neighboring Amhara after the restoration of Solomonic dynasty since 1270 (Belay, 2010). During the era of Gondarine period, for instance, a high degree of cultural assimilation was happened (Getachew, 1998). But, for Quirin (1998) the cultural and linguistic assimilation was somewhat ambiguous. According to him, the monarchy acted as a mediator between different peoples to utilize their skills properly. Thus, it is possible to conclude that the assimilation process was not forceful. Rather, it was conducted by the Kemants who seek political position in the central government. In fact, to be beneficiary from the existing system in the then time, everyone needs to speak Amharic language and follow Orthodox Christianity (Zelalem, 2000). This entails that the ordinary Amhara has nothing to do with the conversion and assimilation processes. They themselves were oppressed and subjugated by the existing regime in the then time (Semahgn, 2014).

### 3.4. The Chilga Woreda

Chilga Woreda is located in the North-Western Ethiopia to the west of Gondar city following the mountainous and rugged areas of Walas and Gaba Galla\(^{16}\) Ager. It is situated at the latitude of 12\(^{0}\) 50’N and a longitude of 37\(^{0}\) 10’E. The Woreda is bordered with Tach Armachiho Woreda in

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\(^{16}\) It doesn’t connote the former name of Oromo.
the North, Takusa *Woreda* in the south, Dembia and Tach Armachiho *Woreda* in the east and Mettema *Woreda* in the west (for the map of the study area see Appendix C).

Historically, the Chilga district was the center of trade for various ethnic groups. Chilga market was attended by at least 3000 peoples from different ethnic backgrounds in the 19th C and was held three days a week (Ayichew, 2001; Pankhurst, 1961). A number of merchants from neighboring areas were gathered to barter commodities. In the time of the *Kefu-Qan* (1888-1892) the Chilga was less affected by the famine. There was availability of crop products. Elder informants from both sides explained the Chilga market as, ‘የእህል ብቸኛ የተገኘባት ይናት’, which literally interpreted as it was the only market where cereal species were available. During this time merchants from different corners of Ethiopia attended the market to purchase food products (Ayichew, 2001). It was also one of the markets for imported and exported goods before it reach into Gondar and Mettema respectively. Due to its commercial significance of the route, Chilga pays 100,000 Dollars to the governor of Semen (Zelalem, 2000).

As a result of its strategic location, it was politically important during the reign of Tewodros II, Yohannis IV and Haile Selassie I. The wonderful chain of mountain ranges of Chilga was used as prison and place of detention until the end of the imperial regime (Zelalem, 2000). The rock fortress of Wohni to the south of Ayikel (the administrative town of Chilga *Woreda*) was a famous prison for revolting rulers and members of the royal family especially during the era of princes (Pankhurst, 1961). It is due to this strategic location with secured border with Sudan that a new and relatively modern kind of road began to be constructed from Gondar to Sudan via Chilga during the Haile Selassie I regime. This road increases the contact between Amhara and Kemant peoples.

The number of battles was fought and rebellions were arisen in which both the Amhara and Kemant were participated. The war between the royal family of Gondar and Kassa Hailu before 1855 and the war with Mahdist Sudan was the most notable war that was fought in the area. The war brought different ethnic groups together. Particularly, this war along with other factors mentioned above brought the high social interaction between the Amhara and Kemant peoples.

During the Derg regime, the Chilga district has acquired a status of *Awuraja*, which comprises other *Woredas* as a sub unit. After the EPRDF come into power, it acquires a status of *Woreda*. 
The Woreda comprises of 54 Kebeles from which 48 are rural Kebeles and the remaining 6 are small towns. Currently it is divided into two Woreda as a result of Kemants’ quest for ethnic self-determination. From the 54 Kebeles, 24 Kebeles are awarded to the Kemant Woreda (new administration) and the remaining Kebeles to the Amhara Woreda (old administration). Nevertheless, the administration activity of the newly established Woreda is not yet implemented. The Woreda officials were busy in dividing resources when the researcher collects data.

The 2017 population projection estimates that the population size of the Woreda is 237, 581 of whom 120, 103 are males and 117, 478 are females. Ethnically, the Chilga Woreda consists of the Amhara and Kemant peoples along with others such as Tigre, Oromo, and Guraghe who came in the area for different purposes. However, the researcher can’t find the total percentage of each ethnic group with the exception that the Amhara and Kemant are majority in the Woreda. The majorities of the people speak Amharic and follow Orthodox Christianity. Very few elders and priests on the side of Kemant spoke Kemantney language and follow Pagan-Hebraic religion. In fact, they speak Amharic in their regular social interaction with the masses. The total size of the Chilga is around 332, 569 hectares. It consists of two major agro climatic Zones such as Daga (33%) and Kolla (67%). The major economic activity of the people is agriculture which is followed by trade and employment in government sectors.
CHAPTER FOUR
AMHARA - KEMANT RELATIONS

4.1. Introduction

In the preceding chapter, the researcher discussed the Amharas and Kemants myth of origin and ancestry, basic economic livelihood, language and religion, relation with the Ethiopian state and description of the study area. This chapter deals with the roles of these contexts in the inter-ethnic relations, boundary maintenance and ethnic complementaries between the Amhara and Kemant ethnic groups.

What tides the two groups together and divides them is the central focus of this chapter. Empirical data collected from fieldwork and secondary materials were employed to accomplish the goals of this chapter. Based on the empirical data, the first part of this chapter analyzes the nature of Amhara and Kemant relations and identifies factors that tied the two groups together. The second part of the chapter presents factors that divide the two ethnic groups. The section in particular focuses on the conflictual relations between the two groups. The last section of the chapter focuses on the roles that customary conflict resolution mechanisms played to maintain inter-ethnic solidarity between them. The roles that *shimglina* plays in maintaining inter-ethnic solidarity and the challenges it faced are also discussed under this section.

4.2. The Nature of Amhara and Kemant Relations

Throughout human history diversified ethnic groups are in constant interactions through trade, intermarriage, migration and warfare (Stanvcic, 1992). In Ethiopia, for instance, ethnic groups having different backgrounds have had a constant interaction through trade, migration, religious activities, intermarriage, and warfare (Alemante, 2003; Daniel, 2003; Levine, 1974; Walle, 1993). Studies on the political history of Ethiopia show that there has been very little antagonism between the various ethnic groups (Asebe, 2007; Dagne, 2013; Daniel, 2003). In the year before the coming of EPRDF into power, the major conflict was between the rebel forces and the government. The engineering of ethnic federalism localized conflicts between ethnic groups without posing problem on the power of the central government.
Elder informants unanimously argued that the neighboring Amhara and Kemant peoples have had a long period of amicable ethnic relations. Even though it is difficult to find a comprehensive work conducted on the inter-ethnic relations between Amhara and Kemant peoples, oral tradition show that there was no violent conflict between them before 2015. Basically, the two peoples are indistinguishable in terms of livelihood, diet, weeding and mourning ceremonies. According to some scholars, there is a controversy whether Amhara culture is the original culture or Kemant culture which is original (Addisalem, 2014; Zelalem, 2002). Some Kemant elders claimed that it is the Kemant culture which is original due to their assumption that the Kemant people are part and remnant of the Agaw people who were the founders of civilization in Ethiopia. However, it is in contrast to the fact that the Agaw culture is assimilated by the Amhara culture since 1270 onwards (Gamst, 1969; Quirin, 1998).

Whatever the case, their similarity in terms of wedding and mourning ceremonies, eating and closing styles made them live together in peace for a long period of time. Despite differences in terms of religion and language before the conversion of Kemant into Christianity, the kemant opted to live in harmony with Amhara through paying tribute (Quirin, 1998). In fact, oral tradition suggests that Kemant aspired to live in peace with their neighboring Amharas because of their fear of the Bete-Israel, the strongest rivals at the time, to make Amhara as their supporter. This made the Amharas not to impose their religion on the Kemant. Through this long period of harmonious interactions, the Kemant have come to adopt the culture of the Amharas and forged an Amhara identity mainly voluntarily and to some extent by force.

According to oral traditions the interaction between Amhara and Kemant became more vivid when the son of womber Jikry helped to escape the son of Tetemke Medhin, an Amhara priest who was killed by a Muslim merchant called Hajji Umar17 at a place called Geladeba. The oral tradition is narrated as:

*Once up on a time, Tetemke Medhin and Hajji Umar lived in harmony at Geladeba. However, the two persons were engaged in conflict for unknown reasons. Tetemke Medhin was killed and his property was confiscated by Hajji Umar’s family. It was at this time that the son of Womber Jikry helped the son of Tetemke Medhin called*

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17 The ethnic background of this person is unknown. According to interview with one Muslim elder in Ayikel, there is a wrong perception that Muslims are non-ethnic. But, the same elder said that ‘we are either Muslim Amhara or Muslim Kemant’.
Tekle Gioris who was captured by his enemy to escape. After successfully helping Tekle Giorgis to escape, the two persons along with other individuals joined the army of Gelawdeos (1540-1559) (Year Added) as soldiers. After many years of military services, Tekle Giorgis, the son of Wombar Jikry and others come back from Shewa to Chilga. After returned back to Geladeba, they surrounded the Geladeba area and destroyed the Muslims’ town (IK1, Ayikel, on 31st of January 2018).

In doing so, Tekle Giorgis was assisted greatly by the son of womber Jikry. In the latter time, however, the ruling classes of the area favoured Amharas and those who were Amharanized in government positions and land allocation. Because of this favoritism, the Kemant people in Chilga often cite the saying, ‘የተጠምቀልጅሲነሣ፤የጅክሪልጅአይረሣ’, which is literally interpreted as ‘whenever Tetemke’s son is recalled, Jikry’s son should not also be forgotten’. However, after Tekle Giorgis seized power, land was allocated proportionally. Therefore, it is believed that it was during the governorship of the area by Tekle Giorgis that the Kemant and Amhara divided the land equally as rist (IK2, Geladeba, on 2nd of February 2018). This oral tradition clearly illustrated that the two ethnic groups lived in peace for centuries irrespective of their differences.

The peaceful cooperation between Amhara and Kemant peoples helped the Kemant people to preserve their ancient Pagan-Hebraic religion until the reign of Emperor Yohannis IV (Gamst, 1969), albeit there was direct contact between them. The two ethnic groups developed the culture of tolerance which helped them to create interesting multicultural society in the area. This togetherness is still available in the rural parts of the Chilga Woreda. As one member of the regional special security force told me in an informal conversation that they celebrated the Ethiopian Epiphany together. The people told him that, “you come here to protect us from conflict between Amhara and Kemant…but we are living in peace…we were never disconnected. The food that you eat is collected from both Amhara and Kemant” (CRSF, Ayikel, on 5th of February 2018). In fact, there are some sorts of suspicions between them after the 2015 conflict that resulted in the loss of human life. In contrast to this, in Ayikel town, there is a clear ‘ethnic boundary’ between Amhara and Kemant. To take coffee and tea, one has to prefer his/her own fellow ethnic group’s bar and restaurants. According to elder interviewees, it is the so called the educated that create ethnic boundary between Amhara and Kemant for their own benefits.
Ethnic entrepreneurs from both sides are responsible for the emergences of the notion of ethnic otherness.

The finding of the study clearly shows that primordial elements are not a cause for the emergence of the notion of ethnic otherness as is envisaged by primordialists. According to Geertz (1996) primordial elements are the cause for the emergence of the notion of ethnic otherness which leads to hostile ethnic relations. Diversity in terms of culture, language and religion is the prime cause of ethnic conflict (Varshney, 2002). However, history of ethnic interaction in the world shows that primordial elements are not the cause of hostile relations (Aapengnuo, 2010). The Ethiopian past, for example, shows that ethnic groups were in constant interactions through trade, migration, intermarriage and social practices irrespective of language, religious and cultural differences. Even though the primordial elements such as myth of ancestry, religion and language of the Amhara and Kemant peoples are different, they had lived in peace for centuries.

Instrumentalists’ argument, therefore, seems to explain why the notion of ethnic otherness is created between the Amhara and Kemant ethnic groups. Ethnicity is fundamentally a political phenomenon rather than something which is biological, cultural and linguistic (Joireman, 2003). Oral traditions in the Chilga Woreda show that there was a prophecy about Emperor Yohannis IV before coming to power. The prophecy is told in Amharic as, ‘የግን_variant ከር ከን ከድ ከስ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከእ ከ реша

The present state policies as discussed in the next chapter, created ethnic entrepreneurs that mobilize their constituencies to access state budget and power. Kemant elites mobilize the people
to access identity recognition and self-administration rights via politicizing the primordial elements. They strongly politicize the denial of Kemant as ethnic group status in the 2007 population census as ‘silent identity genocide’. This is in line with instrumentalist arguments that the primordial characters have been exploited to advance economic, political and ideological objectives (Brass, 1991). As a counter attack, the Amhara elites particularly the members of Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM)\(^{18}\), engaged in political mobilization of their fellow Amharas. The elites in particular told the people that ‘the Kemant will remove you from your rist’. This created ethnic competition which resulted in the 2015 conflict.

4.3. Cordial Relations

As discussed in the preceding section, the Amhara and Kemant people have had long periods of harmonious relations. Their affable relations have been exhibited in the form of economic interdependence, inter-ethnic marriage, involvement in religious based social practices and the use of shimglina as a means of maintaining inter-ethnic solidarity. Hereunder, the long standing cooperation that existed between the two ethnic groups is presented based on the analysis of empirical data collected from the research participants and secondary sources.

4.3.1. Economic Interdependence

Economic interdependence had been the most significant form of harmonious relations between Amhara and Kemant peoples without which the very existence of the groups would be jeopardized. According to Gamst (1969) the economic interactions between the Amhara and Kemant peoples are too ancient. This long period of economic interaction is determined mainly by the settlement patterns of the two ethnic groups. The Amharas lived in the low land (Kolla) parts of the Chilga Woreda. They produce agricultural products like pepper, sorghum, cabbage, tomato, teff and other related products. The kemant people originally settled in the mountainous (Dega) parts of the Chilga Woreda. They produce agricultural products like barley, wheat, maize, buckthorn, teff, bean, chickpeas, and other related products. Even though their means of livelihood is the same, they interacted economically through trade, supporting each other in times of famine and drought, performing agricultural tasks together through a traditional cooperation mechanism called debo and land rent (IA1, Ayikel, on 5\(^{\text{th}}\) of February 2018; IK3,

\(^{18}\) ANDM is one of the four members of EPRDF which administer the Amhara region.
Ayikel; on 6th of February 2018). This is in contrast to Asebe’s (2007) argument that similar economic activity led to competition over resources that resulted in conflict between Guji and Gedeo after the Guji’s economic transformation into sedentary agriculture.

Trade has provided the major avenue through which the two ethnic groups interacted economically. In a society where there is contiguous settlement trade relation is common (Levine, 1974). Different local markets were available in which the Amhara and Kemant people exchange their produce. Geladeba market, for instance, was a prominent market center in the 1540s and 1550s through which individuals from both groups bartered what they had produced such as itan, zabib and tuaf (Ayichew, 2001). The market of Geladeba still is held on Thursday and Saturday. Individuals from both groups exchange their agricultural products like maize, barley, vegetables and other related products.

In addition to the Geladeba market, there are many other local market centers through which the Amhara and Kemant people barter what they produced. The local markets of Ayikel, Aimba and Negade Bahir are the most prominent local markets through which both groups meet together and conduct exchange of commodities. Even though it is difficult to identify the ethnic origin of the traders, the researcher has observed Aimba and Ayikel markets through which agricultural commodities, sheep, goat and other animals are exchanged via Ethiopian Birr. The researcher, however, identified the ethnic origins of some traders at Ayikel local market through the support of his field assistants. But, the researcher was unable to identify the ethnic origins of the traders at Aimba local market because his field assistants are also new to the area. Whatever the case, the flow of products according to elder informants is from surplus areas to places where there is shortage of commodities. This is in line with the argument that the peasants sell products which are surplus in their area and purchase products they did not produce (Gamst, 1969). The Kemant, for instance, purchase products like pepper, sorgum and vegetable products from the Amhara. The Amhara also purchase products like buckthorn, barley and bean from the Kemant.

In addition to trade relation, the two ethnic groups assisted each other in times of chronic famine and drought. Focus group discussants from both groups said that in a situation of chronic

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19 It is difficult to distinguish between Amhara and kemant peoples physically. They both speak Amharic language.
economic problems both groups were never isolated. One focus group discussant, for instance, clearly said that:

Let alone after the conversion of Kemant into Orthodox Christianity, the two groups even assisted each other before. The two groups were working together to resolve their common economic problems. As our forefathers told us those who were better in terms of economy from both groups provided assistance in the form of loan and grant for those who were under abject poverty during the Kifu Qan (1888-1892) (Year added) of the Minilik II era and the drought and famine of the Haile Selassie I regime. In fact, it is the common manifestation of all ethnic groups in different corners of Ethiopia. All ethnic groups in Ethiopia were never separated in times of such kinds of chronic problem. Accordingly, it is not surprising for the Amhara and Kemant to cooperate in times of famine and drought which is a chronic problem of Ethiopia’s long history (FGDA4, Laza Mariam, on 10th of February 2018).

The above speech clearly illustrates that like any other Ethiopian ethnic groups, Amhara and Kemant people cooperated to resolve their common economic problems particularly in situations of severe drought and famine. The peoples consider it as a norm. The same cooperation happened in the incident of the 1977 drought and famine. In the 1977 drought and famine, as one informant stated, “let alone among themselves, the Amhara and Kemant people provided assistances such as food, clothes and materials for migrants from Wollo and Tigray” (IA3, Ayikel, on 7th of February 2018). A committee having seven members was organized from both groups to support people who were under extreme economic problems. The committee facilitates ways through which the poor can get assistance from the rich. Divorced women and poor families were the main beneficiaries of the aid program of the local community. Such economic interdependence still exists between Amhara and Kemant people even after the 2015 conflict. Economically poor Amharas receive loans and grants from rich Kemant and vice versa in times of famine.

The loss of soil fertility resulted from natural and man-made reasons in the areas where Kemants lived led to another forms of economic interaction. The Kemant people move to the Amhara areas to work as farmers and shepherds (Zelalem, 2000). In line with this, one informant explained, “the scarcity of land in the Kemant area is very serious as a result of high population
density. This resulted in the migration of the Kemant people into the vast Amhara areas to engage themselves in agricultural activities through land rent and hired as workers of Amhara” (IK1, Ayikel, on 31st of January 2018). In places where the Amhara and the Kemant peoples lived together, they perform agricultural tasks cooperatively through a traditional association called *debo*. During harvesting seasons, this temporary traditional association is commonly practiced between them. They also share Ox, Donkey and other animals in such season.

To summarize, in a society where there is contiguous settlement like the peoples of Amhara and Kemant, economic interaction is common. In a world where ‘no one is self-sufficient’ economic interdependence in fact is essential. It is from this ground that the two peoples are economically interdependent through trade, solving economic problems together, land rent, performing agricultural tasks cooperatively and sharing agricultural materials in harvesting season. Economic interdependence has its own direct implications for other social relations between different ethnic groups. In line with this argument Alemayehu (2015) claimed that economic interdependence such as agricultural alliance in the form of the diffusion of indigenous agricultural knowledge from Awi to Gumuz and land rent led to cordial relations since 1974 in contrast to their long period of hostile relations. In the same way, economic contact between Amhara and Kemant people led to the establishment of close relations through intermarriage, social capitals like *yekirstina lij* and *yetut lij* and participation in *iddir, mahiber* and *sembete* (Zelalem, 2000). In fact, the two groups have had long period of cordial relations as compared to the case of Awi and Gumuz. Therefore, economic interdependence contributed its own share for this long period of harmonious relations between Amhara and Kemant peoples.

### 4.3.2. Social practices as Inter-ethnic Connectors

In addition to interaction in economic aspects, Amhara and Kemant people have long history of social practices that tie them together. These social values have played a vital role in creating friendly relations between them for centuries. Members of both groups participated in some common social practices like *Iddir, Mahiber* and *Sembete*. They also engaged in different social relations through intermarriage, *yekirstina lij* and *yetut lij*. But, before dealing with how these groups engaged in social practices together, a brief description of how religion has served as the boundary maintaining mechanism and ethnic connector between the two groups before and after the conversion of Kemant into Christianity is given. As discussed in the preceding chapter, the
Kemants have their own religion which is known as Pagan-Hebraic. This religion has served as a boundary maintaining mechanism between the Kemant and their neighboring Amharas. There are some sorts of difference in the social relation between Amhara and Kemant before and after the conversion of Kemant into Orthodox Christianity. Thus, the next section will focus on how religion served as both as an ethnic connector and disjunction between the two groups and then a discussion on how they interacts each other through inter-ethnic marriage and Iddir, Mhiber and Sembete will follow.

4.3.2.1. Religion as Marker of Ethnic Dichotomy and Connectors

As many scholars and elder informants pointed out, before the conversion of Kemant into Orthodox Christianity, religious difference has served as a boundary maintaining mechanism between Amhara and Kemant (Gamst, 1969; Getachew, 1998; Quirin, 1998; IK1, Ayikel, on 31st of January 2018). The difference in terms of religion created some sorts of positive self-image and negative images for others between the groups. The Kemants as followers of Pagan-Hebraic religion considered the Amhara as ‘unclean’ because of their religion. The Amharas on their part considered the Kemant as ‘wood worshiper’ because of their special outdoor places of worship in a certain grooves of trees called ‘digina’. However, as discussed in chapter three, the image of ‘wood worshiper’ is too controversial. Some claimed that the image is the result of Kemants’ provision of wood products to Gondar town (Quirin, 1998; Zelalem, 2000). However, elder informants argued that it is the result of the Kemant’s places of worship.

This notion of self-image and image of the others created ethnic dichotomies in some forms of social interactions between the two groups. This is in line with the argument that group’s self-image and its image of the others represent basic dichotomizing aspect in ethnic groups’ categorization (Asebe, 2007). The nature and degree of stereotypical representation of the other influences inter-ethnic interactions. The Kemant, for instance, claims that eating with the non-Kemant will desecrate them (Gamst, 1969). However, interviewees said that the Kemant religion doesn’t prevent eating with the Amhara with the exception of meat that is not slaughtered by the follower of their religion. This claim is also advocated by the Amharas as followers of Orthodox Christianity. Thus, with the exception of meat they eat together when they celebrate certain social practices such as mourning and weeding ceremonies.
In addition to their eating habits, the difference in terms of religion also prevented inter-ethnic marriage. Both groups were rigid in this regard. Particularly, Kemants’ religion was served as an iron curtain not to engage in inter-ethnic marriage with the Amhara (Gamat, 1969). Kemants’ women began to wear large wooden earring because of their desire to remain separate from the non-Kemant. In fact, this tradition started after Chewsa (a famous Kemant leader) refused to give his wife to the King who desires her. The oral tradition is stated as follows:

The wife of Chewsa was very beautiful and desired by the king. The time was during the reign of Yohannis I. The king told Chewsa to bring his wife to him, but Chewsa said he could not do that because it was her menses. Then he pierced her ears so that in a few days her ears became infected and smelled bad. Thus, when she finally went to meet the king, he ordered her to leave immediately because of the stench (IK1, Ayikel, on 31st of January 2018).

The oral tradition clearly illustrated that the Kemants sacrifice even their parts of body to remain separate from their neighboring Amharas. In fact, the symbol of separation such as wood earring was finally abolished by the Kemant leader Dejazmach Bitewa during the reign of Minilik II (Quirin, 1998). In relation to marriage, Amharas were also rigid to make marital ties with non-Christians though they have no specific oral traditions to ascertain it. It is considered as a sin if one married the unbaptized (IA3, Ayikel, on 7th of February 2018).

With the exception of their eating habit and intermarriage, the difference in terms of religion didn’t prevent other kinds of social relations such as celebrating wedding and mourning ceremonies together. As most of elder informants explained the two groups were engaged in friendly relations through a traditional system called yetut lij. Yetut lij (breast child) is the kind of relation between the newly born child and father/mother. The relation was needed mainly if one has no close families, land and wealth. In fact, wealthy families with small or no children engaged in such kinds of relationship to have burrier and inheritor of their wealth. Such kinds of relationships created cordial relations between the Amhara and Kemant peoples despite religious difference. This shows that religious difference has not served as a means of inter-ethnic conflict, although, it prevented some forms of social relations between them.
As presented in chapter three, the Kemant people were converted into Christianity through gradual process by force (e.g. during the reign of Yohannis IV and to some extent under Haile Selassie I regime) as well as based on the will of the people (e.g. during the reign of Tewodros I and Haile Selassie I). The conversion of Kemant into Christianity changed the nature of social relations between the Amhara and Kemant peoples. The change of religion primarily created a homogenous society in terms of language and religion. This is because once the Kemants were baptized they give up their language along with their religion because of their perception that Amharic language and Christianity are one and the same (Zelalem, 2000). This is followed by deep social interactions such as yekiristina lij (Abelij) - to some extent similar with yetut lij - but the former is religious based, inter-ethnic marriage, participation in iddir, Mahiber and sembete.

To summarize, religious difference created ethnic dichotomy in the history of Amhara and Kemant relations. This dichotomy was created as a result of the positive self-image of the in-group and the negative image of out-group. The contrasting image, however, didn’t prevent social interactions between the groups with the exception of eating meat products together and inter-ethnic marriage. It was also not a cause of ethnic hostility. This is in line with the instrumentalists’ argument that unless differences are activated and politicized by external actors and ethnic entrepreneurs, their mere existence doesn’t create ethnic hostility (Aapengnuo, 2010; Birhanu, 2007). The Amhara and Kemant people interacted peacefully through yetut lij and participated in wedding and mourning ceremonies together despite their extreme religious difference. The conversion of Kemant into orthodox Christianity through gradual process changed the society in the Chilga Woreda into a more or less homogenous society. The two groups now engaged in inter-ethnic marriage and created companionship in some religious based social practices. Accordingly, in the history of the relation between Amhara and Kemant peoples religion served as a means of ethnic dichotomy and ethnic connectors.

4.3.2.2. Inter-ethnic Marriage as a Social Bond

While ethnic group is the predominant identity formation in Africa, most ethnic groups coexist peacefully with a high degree of mixing through intermarriage (Aapengnuo, 2010). Inter-ethnic marriage is used as a mechanism for enhancing inter-group cohesion among African societies

20 But it doesn’t imply that the society is too uniform since there are few individuals who follow Pagan-Hebraic, Islam and protestant religion. The undeniable fact is that the majority of the people from both sides follow Orthodox Christianity.
(Ndura, 2015). As a result of inter-ethnic marriage between ethnic groups in Ethiopia there is no pure province (Daniel, 2003). This contributed for the creation of multiethnic greater Ethiopia with amicable ethnic relations (Levine, 1974). In the same sense, marriage relations contributed a lot for the sustenance of harmonious relations between Amhara and Kemant people until recently (Zelalem, 2000). In fact, there were limited marriages between Amhara and Kemant peoples before the conversion of Kemant into Christianity. Even immediately after their conversion there was limited and unilateral flow of marriage between the two groups.

Elder informants from both groups contend that let alone between Amhara and Kemant, there were criterias to establish marital relation even between the same ethnic groups. In Amhara society, for example, there were traditional social stratifications which prevent marital relations. The so called balabats were not interested to marry the perceived ‘inferior’ peoples such as Buda, Baria and Shemane. The latter societies are culturally considered as incomplete creatures by the so called balabats. These kinds of social practices are still available in the rural parts of Chiliga Woreda. Similarly, there are two groups among the Kemant society called Kiber and Yetinti (Worku, 1994). In contrast to the Amharas marriage tradition, marriage between Kibir and Yetinti was possible. However, it was socially punishable to establish marital relation with individuals from the same social status because of their belief that individuals from the same social status were considered as close relatives. They had also closed marriage relations with Amhara because of religious difference (Gamst, 1969; Quirin, 1998).

After the introduction of Orthodox Christianity to Kemant, the line of separation disappeared. In fact, it is impossible to say that there were no marriages between Amhara and Kemant before the latter’s mass conversion. Kemant interviewees argued that a high degree of intermarriage has taken place between the Kemants who want to be Amhara and the Amhara people. During the reign of Tewodros II, for example, the Kemant males had arranged marriage relations with Amhara females to advance high position in the Ethiopian politico-military hierarchy (Quirin, 1998). Some Amhara priests had also established marriage relation with Kemant females after baptizing them for the reason that converting the unbaptized into Christianity is considered as blissful. But, there was low degree of intermarriage between them despite such few religious and political purpose marriage incidences.
After Yohhanis IV and Haile Selassie I religious conversion, intermarriage between the peoples of Amhara and Kemant has become a common phenomenon (Zelalem, 2000). Christian Kemants started to marry Amharas. Interviewees from both groups contend that the Kemants were more interested to establish marital relation with Amharas. In contrast, the Amharas were reluctant to marry the Kemants. According to Zelalem (2000), this happened because of the inferiority complex of Kemant and the superiority complex of Amhara. For the Kemant, marital relations with Amhara were considered as means of acquiring a high social status. It was a great pride for them to marry Amharas (IK2, Geladeba, on 2nd of February 2018). But, later religious mission was given for Amhara priests to create marriage relations with the Kemant that changed the limited and unilateral flow of marriage into a bilateral flow of marriage between the two groups. In addition to this, Emperor Haile Selassie I himself ordered the governor of the area to establish marriage relation with the Kemant to make the religious conversion successful. Elderly Kemant used to tell a story about the event that happened in 1959 when the Emperor visited the area. The elderly people narrate the story in such a way:

The king was told about the existence of a distinct ethnic group in Gondar area having different language and religion. After listening to the report he patiently told the governor of Alafa, ‘why don’t you eliminate them’? The governor interpreted the king’s response wrongly and he wanted the Kemant to be eliminated through the use of force. The governor said to the king, ‘it is a matter of giving an assignment to a small group of my soldiers to put an end to them’. The king’s retributive remark was this, ‘when I said eliminate them, I did not mean that you should kill them, but reduce their number through intermarriage’ (IK2, Geladeba, on 2nd of February 2018).

The speech shows that intermarriages between the Amhara and Kemant peoples were even supported by the government mainly to reduce the number of the followers of Pagan-Hebraic religion in the area. Priests started to marry Kemant females by baptizing them. The nobilities and their manservants also started to marry Kemant women (Worku, 1994). Not only priests and nobilities, but ordinary Amhara also engaged in marriage relations with Christian Kemants. Those who still practiced endogamic marriage also started to engage in marriage relation with Christians as a result of the reduction of the number of the followers of their religion. This led to a high degree of mixing through intermarriage between the two ethnic groups.
Even after the 2015 conflict, mixed marriage is practiced in both rural and urban parts of Chilga Woreda. In fact, according to focus group discussants there are couples who made divorce recently. This is in line with the argument of Yeshiwas (2014b) that he contend that divorce is commonly practiced between Amhara and Kemant couples which bitterly lead to deep social crisis. Nevertheless, most of informants argued that it is narrow nationalists who made divorce. Those who are patient individuals still live together and preserve their relation alive. One Kemant elder informant stated that that he is married to an Amhara women and still living together. The recent crisis doesn’t affect their relation. He added that it is myth that marriage relation between the two groups is standstill.

As a result of a high degree of intermarriage between the two groups, the cultural process through which marriage is conducted is similar (Worku, 1994). There are two kinds of marriage systems: religious marriage and cultural/civil marriage. Religious marriage is conducted based on the dogma of Orthodox Christianity. One priest informant who refused to tell his ethnic origin said that in this kind of marriage, divorce is impossible unless committed adultery. The cultural/civil marriage is conducted mainly by the oral discussions and agreements between the families of bridegroom and bride (Gamst, 1969). As one informant said, the cultural/civil marriage is conducted in the following way.

Before the nuptials day is decided, oral promise between the two families is conducted. They discuss on several issues like the future fate of bridegroom and bride, their respective contribution for the future life of the bride and bridegroom, and finally decide the nuptials day. After that they prepare festive meals based on their economic capability and invite their relatives and neighbors for the nuptials day. On the nuptials day, the bridegroom with his escorts and best man go to the bride’s house. The best man particularly acts as a brother of the bride. The bride confides her secret to him and the best man provides food, beverage and water to her. The escorts and best man have also the responsibility to liven the ceremony through war songs and weeding songs. Finally, they returned back to the bridegroom’s house with the bride (IA3, Ayikel, on 7th of February 2018).

The intention of the above quote is not to show the process through which cultural/civil marriage is conducted. Rather, the message is that a high degree of ethnic interaction such
as inter-ethnic marriage leads to the interpenetrations of social practices from one group to
the other. This in turn creates a multicultural society having synonymous cultural practices
with stable ethnic relations. Therefore, the researcher argued that intermarriage between the
peoples of Amhara and Kemant contributed a lot for the existence of peaceful ethnic
relations. Intermarriage has direct impact on other social relations between the two groups.
Through intermarriage they eat together, participate in common social practices and resolve
local problems together based on the values and norms of their local area.

**4.3.2.3. Companionship in Religious Based Social Practices**

Ethiopian society is endowed with a variety of important social practices that connect different
ethnic groups together for common purposes (Sudarkasa, 1972). These social practices are of
different kinds with distinct purposes, functions and memberships (Wubalem, 2003). Some are
socio-religious and self-help associations like *iddir*, *mahiber* and *sembete*. They are more of
religious based social practices based on the dogma of Orthodox Christianity. They create strong
bond among ethnic groups and enable them to resolve common problems jointly. This helps to
maintain inter-ethnic solidarity in Ethiopia for centuries particularly in areas where Orthodox
Christianity is the predominant religion.

Concomitantly, the finding of this study revealed that since they lived adjacently, the Amhara
and Kemant peoples interacted and interconnected with each other through religious based social
practices. These kinds of ethnic interaction started mainly after the mass conversion of Kemant
into Christianity. This is because of the fact that membership for *mahiber*, *iddir* and *sembete* is
open only for the followers of Orthodox Christianity. Hence, after the Kemant people adopt
Orthodox Christianity, the two groups were tied together through such religious based social
practices.

Through participating in religious based social practices, Amhara and Kemant peoples developed
the culture of cooperation to resolve personal as well as communal problems (Worku, 1994). The
primary aim of religious based social practices is mainly to feast on days of Saints and on the
Sabbath day. In addition to this, as one informant said, the religious based social practices have
also social purposes. In *iddir*, for instance, the members cooperate in burial and mourning
activities as well as social security activities. Members of *mahiber* also supported each other in
mourning and wedding ceremonies and in undertaking agricultural tasks together. In general, as elder informants from both sides clearly summarize, in religious based social practices through which the Amhara and Kemant peoples participated, personal and communal problems such as loss of property due to fire and other accidents, death, illness, flood and famine are resolved collectively. This in turn created inter-ethnic harmony between the two groups.

In addition to such religious based social practices, the two groups have established personal friendships through a system called yekirstina lij (Gamst, 1969). This is the most prominent religious based social practice that brings the two groups together since the mass conversion of Kemant into Christianity. This practice is almost similar with that of yetut lij with the exception of the religious basis of yekirstina lij. Those who are tied together under such a practice are considered as close relatives. Most informants agreed that this is the sign of the harmonious relations between the two groups. Interestingly, the two groups have been involved in such kinds of religious based social practices even after the 2015 conflict. As one informant clearly told the researchers that, “I have participated in one sembete. The sembete have more than 40 members. The members are from both groups which I can’t remember the exact proportion” (IA3, Ayikel, on 7th of February 2018). This indicates that the social interaction between the two groups is still continued.

### 4.4. Hostile Relations

Historically, as discussed above, the Amhara and Kemant ethnic groups have had a long period of harmonious relations which is followed by a deep social intermixing. If one is to say there was conflict, it was not between the two groups but with the ruling classes. As a result of the oppressive rule of the imperial and Derg regimes, the two groups were in constant grievances with the ruling system (Getachew, 1998). During the imperial regimes as Kemant informants said, the Kemant were in a constant conflict with the Ethiopian state. This was because of the religious conversion program of successive Ethiopian emperors (Worku, 1994). During the era of Emperor Yohannis IV (1872-1889), for example, Dejazmech Bitewa refused to assist Ethiopian soldiers in the fight against Sudan as a result of religious grievances. The feudal mode of production was also the main cause of conflict between the two groups with the Ethiopian state. The misappropriations of crop products of farmers by nobilities in the form of tithe in the area led to social grievance. During the Derg regime, both the Amhara and Kemant people
experienced the oppressive policies of the regime (Getachew, 1998). Both Amhara and Kemant youths, academicians and politicians were imprisoned and tortured by government forces by attaching different names like the fan of EPRP.

Despite such state-society grievances, there was no inter-ethnic conflict between the two groups before the EPRDF came to power. In fact, it is a common experience of diversified Ethiopian ethnic groups through which inter-ethnic conflict was uncommon (Abbink, 2006; Levine, 1974). This is because of the fact that the previous systems advocate common citizenship rather than sermonizing the gospel of ethnic division (Alemante, 2003). In line with this argument informants claimed that there was no reason for the Amhara and Kemant to quarrel each other as a result of intrinsic ethnic hatred. Even until 2015, there were no reported ethnic based conflicts between the two groups. The situation changed after November 2015 as a result of offensive mottos that were demonstrated in the illegal demonstration held in the area by both groups.

According to elder interviewees, there were interpersonal conflict such as property looting, abduction and land conflict. Such kinds of conflicts were also common in almost all ethnic groups in Ethiopia (Levine, 1974). The interpersonal conflicts between the two groups however were not transcending into ethnic based conflict. They had been resolved easily through the employment of customary practices and state involvement (Getachew, 1998; Quirin, 1998). The two groups, however, experienced ethnic based conflict in 2015. In the following section, the interpersonal and identity based conflicts between the two groups are discussed separately.

4.4.1. Interpersonal Conflicts

Interpersonal conflicts are the most frequent incidents that happen everywhere and virtually in all societies (Arega & Mulugeta, 2017). To acquire cattle, pasture and grazing land, slave, control over trade route and secure trophies to prove masculinity, virtually all ethnic groups in Ethiopia were in a hostile interaction with one another (Levine, 1974). The conflicts were more of interpersonal rather than ethnic based conflicts (Aalen, 2006; Abbink, 1993). Similarly, the historical facts and oral traditions indicate that interpersonal conflicts have been experienced between the Amhara and Kemant people. These conflicts include land conflict, property looting, act of homicide and abduction. As elder informants told the researcher, such kinds of conflicts
are common even among the same ethnic groups. They illustrated this by Amharic proverb, እንግልቻ እና እንግልቻ ይግሮጆላ, which is literally interpreted as “even trivet and trivet collides each other”.

The first and major kind of interpersonal conflict between Amhara and Kemant was land conflict. The issue of land and access to land plays an important role in Ethiopian conflict dynamics (Abbink, 2006). This is because in Ethiopian historical experience land had a major existential and identity aspects of the people. As presented in chapter three, the Amhara and Kemant people’s means of livelihood is agriculture. As a result, land becomes an important and essential aspect of their lives.

The Amhara and Kemant kept control of their own rist (Gamst, 1969; Quirin, 1998). However, the increasing migration to the area, population growth and soil erosion in the area led to land disputes during the Gonderaine era²¹ (Quirin, 1998). The same author noted that this dispute was settled when the state recognized the claim of Azaj Chewsa to supervise Kemant workers on the construction of Gondar castles during the reign of Yohannis I (1667-1682). The researcher, however, can’t verify this narration from primary sources as a result of the informants’ lack of knowledge. The only thing that they told the researcher is that land conflict was common between individuals of the two groups since they lived adjacently for a long period of time.

Elder informants recalled that during the imperials regime, land was used as an instrument for religious conversion of the Kemant society. The unbaptized person’s land was confiscated by the state and awarded for those who were baptized. The Emperors appoint local governors in the area to implement religious conversion program and confiscation of land. Such kind of religious conversion program was highly employed by Emperor Yohannis IV (Quirin, 1998). This created resentment not only against the state but also between Christians and non-Christian Kemants. This indicates that the issue of land indeed results in conflict between individuals with in the same ethnic groups.

During Haile Selassie I regime, competition for land led to conflict between the Amhara and Kemant peoples in the Kemant highland areas. As Kemant interviewees said the Amharas look for land in the Kemant areas. The Amharas were unable to use forceful eviction since the

²¹ The era where fixed center of power were established in Ethiopia in the city of Gondar during the seventeenth century up to the second half of the 19th C (Perham, 1947)
Kemants had *rist* titles. According to Getachew (1998) the Amhara sought to take over the churches in the Kemant area, so that they could use them to control the land and impose taxes on the population. This led to conflict between the Amhara and Kemant peoples. The 1975 land reform policy nationalized all rural and urban lands that ended all sorts of land disputes in the area (Getachew, 1998). In fact, this policy brought a significant relief to both societies since it destroyed feudal rule over land. In contrast to Kemant interviewees, Amhara elder informants argued that the Amharas have been living in the vast areas of the lowland parts of the Chiliga *Woreda*. The Amharas were not looking for land in the Highland area in which the Kemant lived. The Kemants were migrated to the vast Amhara areas in search of land in contrast to the claim of Kemant informants.

According to informants from both sides there were personal land conflicts. This happened between individuals who share border in their farm lands. These kinds of interpersonal conflict happened even between the same ethnic groups. In Simada *Woreda*, for instance, conflict over land between individuals even among brothers is a common experience (Bamilaku, 2013). This indicates that land conflict is the most routine form of conflict between individuals with in the same ethnic groups let alone between individuals of different ethnic origin. This is in line with the argument that in the rural Ethiopia the majority of conflict emerged as a result of land dispute even between relatives (Abbink, 2006).

In addition to land conflict, property looting, abduction and homicide were common (Worku, 1994). In an unexpected day, members of one ethnic group loot the property of the other along with females and herdsman. The member of the other group also takes retaliatory measures. This creates conflict between the two groups. As a result, homicide and revenge for the death of relatives becomes a common experience between the two groups. Getachew (1998) illustrated such kinds of retaliatory actions by conducting interview with his informants. He said, “in one instance, one group of Amharas killed seven members of one Kemant family. The only remaining brother left his job as a police man to take revenge by hunting down and killing seven Amharas”. Interviewees from both groups argued that such kinds of activities are the results of some sloth individuals from both groups. Such kinds of conflicts do not transcend into ethnic based conflicts.
To conclude, since conflict is the natural aspect of human life, it is not surprising for the Amhara and Kemant peoples to experience interpersonal conflict. One thing that must be clear here is that the interpersonal conflicts between the two groups were not the result of ethnic hatred between the two groups. The conflicts were the results of the rational awareness of the two groups mainly to accomplish certain socio-economic advantages. The instrumentalist assumptions, therefore, better explains the interpersonal conflict between the two groups. Such kinds of conflicts are shaped by a wide range of factors such as the demographic patterns and trends, economic factors, government policy initiatives and social privileges (Brown & Ganguls, 1997). Thus, the interpersonal conflicts between the Amhara and Kemant peoples were mainly the results of economic conditions such as land problem and social privileges such as to prove one’s heroines by killing the members of the other group. Government policies have also their own shares in exacerbating the interpersonal conflict between the two groups. The feudal mode of production and the religious conversion program of the imperial regime created conflict between individuals of the same ethnic groups in addition to interpersonal conflict between Amhara and Kemant peoples. This is in contrast to the primordialists’ argument that enmities are based on intrinsic difference in terms of language, religion, ancestry and color. The oral traditions from both groups show that there was no ethnic mobilization to revenge against the members of the other group when interpersonal conflicts happen between the two groups. The conflicts become issues of the combatants only or the two conflicting parties rather than transcending into ethnic issues.

4.4.2. Identity Based Conflict

As discussed in chapter two and in the preceding section of this chapter, the pre-EPRDF Ethiopian history were shaped by conflicts between central government and the local governors and some rebel forces (Markakis, 1989; Siraw, 2015) and interpersonal conflicts (Abbink, 1993; Levine, 1974). The institutionalizations of ethnicity in 1991, however, changed the nature of the conflict into identity based conflict that tears apart the previously peaceful ethnic groups (Abbink, 2006; Asnake, 2009; Kymilka, 2006). Some ethnic groups were engaged in identity based conflicts immediately after the institutionalization of ethnicity in Ethiopia as is the case between Guji and Gedeo (Asebe, 2007; Dagne, 2013). Some other ethnic groups entered into identity based conflicts after years of ethnic federalism’s experiment.
The finding of this study revealed that the Amhara and Kemant ethnic groups had not experienced identity-based conflict immediately after the introduction of ethnic federalism. The prolonged and cherished mutual relationship has been disrupted in the end of 2015. In November 2015 violent conflict with disastrous consequences up on human life and destruction of immense property occurred between the long time friendly peoples. One government official in Ayikel town said that the year 2015 was a difficult year for the two groups since it was difficult to tell ones ethnic origin for strangers.

The immediate cause for the 2015 identity conflict was the conduct of illegal demonstration in Chilga Woreda and other neighboring Kebeles like Shinifa which is found in Mettema Woreda. The interim committee of Kemant applied for North Gondar Zone Administration the quest to conduct peaceful demonstration in Ayikel town on June 15, 2015. The administration rejected the quest for unknown reasons. The youths who came from Lay Armachiho Woreda, however, incited the society to engage in the demonstration one day ahead the planned demonstration date. This led to conflict between the Kemant youths and the regional special security forces. As a result of this conflict four and eight kemants were killed and wounded respectively (EHRC, 2016). On November 13, 2015, demonstration was held in Ayikel town by Amhara people.

The mere conduct of the demonstration was not the immediate cause for ethnic conflict between the Amhara and Kemant peoples. The demonstration was accompanied by offensive mottos against each other (Demelash, 2017; EHRC, 2016). The Amhara demonstrators rolled offensive mottos against the Kemant like the Kemants are migrants and stop the illegal treatment against the Amhara. The Kemant demonstrators also raised the same offensive mottos against the Amhara like Chilga is the historical place of the Kemant, the quest for self-determination is not the concern of the Amhara Regional State and there is no development before identity. In addition to this, the Kemants beat influential Amharas when they held demonstration because of their belief that they are the primary bottlenecks for their quest of recognition and self-determination. This creates grievance between the two groups that resulted in conflicts in different parts of the Chilga Woreda.

During the conflict, roads were closed in Ayikel town and influential persons from both sides were targeted. On November 8, 2015, for instance, the Kemants blocked roads and launched attack against Amhara (Demelash, 2017). As a result of this incident, five died and four wounded
from the side of Kemant, whereas one died and three wounded from Amhara (EHRC, 2016). In addition to the death of individuals, private properties and government offices were destructed. Thirty two Amharas were also kidnapped by Kemants. Under such a situation, as one informant said, things gone out of control.

Unlike the previous inter-personal conflicts, according to elder informants, after the 2015 incident personal conflicts began to transcend into identity based conflicts. In line with this assumption, Abbink (2006) argues that unlike what happened in the past Ethiopia, any personal dispute over certain interests now become an ethnic issue and pits ethnic groups against each other. There is also a fear that conflict will happen between the two groups even after the quest of Kemants’ for self-determination is implemented. As of the discussion in the informal conversation with different individuals from both sides, Ayikel town will be the future conflicting area. Both groups claim the town as their own administration town. This is in line with the argument that the quest for recognition and autonomy led to competition over certain districts and Kebeles in the area that resulted in ethnic conflict between the Amhara and Kemant peoples (Fentahun, 2017). When the researcher collects the data, different offices were locked through double keys by unknown persons. The interim committee of Kemant is criticized in such doings since it claims that Ayikel town should be an administrative town of the newly establishing administrative Zone of Kemant.

In sum, the 2015 conflict and the post conflict tension between the two groups is clearly branded as identity based conflict. A conflict is identity based if conflicting parties claim that their distinct identity is the reason why its members can’t realize their interests, why they do not have the same rights and why their claims are not satisfied (Dagne, 2013). Identity based conflict may happen when ethnic minorities tend to believe that their identity is not recognized, that they are given few opportunities for development and that their culture and some of their existences are challenged (Horowitz, 1985). The majorities, on the other hand, may also perceive the minorities as a challenge to their security. This study revealed that both groups feel a sense of insecurity because of their distinct identity in contrast to their long periods of togetherness. The Kemants perceive that their quest for identity recognition and self-determination granted for other ethnic groups in Ethiopia is undermined because they are assimilated by the dominant Amhara culture and Amharic language. The Amharas, on the other hand, feel insecure because of their belief
that the Kemants will remove them from their rist after the later achieved their self-autonomy. This contrasting ethnic perception created ethnic grievance and resulted in the rolling of offensive mottos in the demonstration against each other. As a result, the elites of the two groups mobilize their fellow groups to take coercive measures against one another that resulted in the 2015 identity based conflict and the post conflict ethnic tensions.

4.5. Customary Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

As discussed in chapter two, customary conflict resolution mechanisms in Ethiopia are different in form and substance depending on the social context. Those institutions do not have uniform application all over the country (Bamilaku, 2013). The finding of this study revealed that the Amhara and Kemant people have had their own distinct customary conflict resolution mechanism, particularly before the conversion of the later into Orthodox Christianity.

In the Amhara society, shimglina is the most prevalent form of dispute resolution mechanism since ancient time till the present (Tefere & Mulugeta, 2009). Shimglina is a committee of elders regarded by local peoples as the most effective mechanism to settle disputes (Getachew, 1998). The committee members for shimglina are appointed by the disputants themselves based on their choice. According to one interviewee, the members of shimglina are selected based on their social status in the society, ability to provide a sound judgment, ability to persuade disputants, ability to keep the secrets of the disputants and level of propinquity to the disputants (IA3, Ayikel, on 7th of February 2018). In line with this argument, interviewees claimed that the most respected and wise parts of the society because of their status or age are appointed as committee member.

During the shimglina process, the disputants are brought face to face to state their problems and evidences to the committee or shimagles (elders). The members evaluate the issues and evidences of the conflicting parties to pass their decision based on the cultures and traditions of the society. The committee has no power to enforce the decision. Rather, they advise the disputants to be abided by the values and norms of the society to reach on agreement (Tefera & Mulugeta, 2009). If the disputants fail to arrive at agreement, their case is transferred to religious based solution known as mehala (oath). Mehala means swearing in the name of God to say ‘I am
innocent’ (Getachew, 1998). According to informants, mehala is used when there is no adequate evidence against the defendant. If the defendant swears on the name of God, he/she is innocent and if he/she disagrees to swear, he/she is perceived as guilty.

Just like the Amhara society, the Kemant have their own distinct customary conflict resolution mechanism. This conflict resolution mechanism is known as ariey sinou in Kemantney language, which is literally interpreted as settling disputes (IK2, Geladeba, on 2nd of Febraury 2018). In the Kemant tradition, as informants said, there are four levels of ariey sinou. These are yehager shimagle (local elder), yegobez aleqa (top’s leader), kemezina (priest) and womber (seat). Each level of this conflict resolution mechanism has its own distinct role in settling disputes.

According to the Kemant oral traditions, yehager shimagle, the first level of ariey sinou, settle disputes before its escalation into violent form. It settles issues like family, marital and property conflicts. Yegobez aleqa settles conflicts which are beyond the power of yehager shimagle by receiving appeal from unsatisfied disputants. It also settles problems like conflicts over farm and grazing land and property looting. Yegobez aleqa is appointed through public deliberation based on his ability to persuade others and provide comments and different criticisms in the public meetings. Kemezina is responsible for resolving religious based disputes. It settles disputes like conflict between priests, conflict between priests and ordinary people and when the priests break the dogma of their religion. It also arranges mehala for disputants who fail to reach up on agreement in the first two consecutive levels. To be a member of kemezina, it is a must to have good knowledge of the Kemant religion. Homicide issues, which are beyond the power of the first three levels, are given to the highest body called womber. The womber also addresses various issues in the form of appeal that are not resolved by the first three levels.

After the mass conversion of Kemant into Orthodox Christianity, however, ariey sinou is less practiced among the Kemant society. According to elder informants this is because ariey sinou has strong attachment with the Kemant religion. After their mass conversion, the kemant people gave up their traditions like ariey sinou and their language (Zelalem, 2000) by adopting the tradition and culture of Amharas. As a result, shimglina became the most predominant form of conflict resolution mechanism among the Amhara and Kemant society. Hereunder, a discussion on how the two groups used shimglina to maintain inter-ethnic solidarity by settling conflicts
between them and what challenges they faced in using it is made based on the data collected from the field work and various documents.

4.5.1. The Role of Shimglina in Maintaining Inter-ethnic Solidarity

It is common knowledge that Ethiopian ethnic groups are well-known for their mutual assistance, resource management and the use of customary conflict resolution mechanisms to resolve conflicts of different type. Customary conflict resolution mechanisms have good records in resolving conflicts which arises from resource utilization and cattle rustling (Dereje, 2010). These institutions are employed to maintain inter-ethnic solidarity by resolving inter-ethnic conflicts (Meron, 2010). Shimglina, which is the prominent customary conflict resolution mechanism among the Amhran society (Asmarom, 1973; Alula and Getachew, 2008), has been employed to maintain inter-ethnic solidarity between the Amhara and Kemant peoples.

According to elder informants from both groups, even before the mass conversion of Kemant into Orthodox Christianity, shimglina was employed to resolve interpersonal conflict between the two groups. Religious leaders and local elders from both groups were involved in mediating the conflicts between individuals. Sometimes the committees of shimglina were selected proportionally from both groups and in some situations from one group only. The only criteria to select shimagles (elders) as discussed in the preceding section were their social status, ability to make a sound decision and ability to persuade disputants. After the conversion of Kemant into Christianity, shimglina becomes the dominant way of conflict resolution mechanism even between the Kemants themselves (Getachew, 1998). This makes shimglina the dominant means of conflict resolution mechanism between the peoples of Amhara and Kemant.

Land conflict, homicide issues and property looting are the most prevalent forms of interpersonal conflict between Amhara and Kemant peoples that have been resolved through the employment of shimglina. This customary institution is very successful in resolving such disputes (IK2, Geladeba, on 2 of February 2018). Not surprisingly, the disputant parties accept the decisions rendered by the members of the shimglina. This is because the committee of shimglina settles disputes based on the values and norms of the society. In addition to this, the traditions of the Amhara and Kemant show that elders and religious leaders must be respected by the society. According to Tirsit (2004), the Ethiopian society has a good tradition of obeying customary
institutions, local elders and religious leaders. This makes *shimlgina* more successful in resolving interpersonal conflicts between the Amhara and Kemant peoples.

To resolve the 2015 identity based conflict between Amhara and Kemant, *shimlgina* was highly employed under the supervision of the government (IK1, Ayikel, on 31th of January 2018; IA1, Ayikel, on 5th of February 2018). One government official in Ayikel said that, “as a result of the government’s knowledge of the role of customary conflict resolution mechanisms in maintaining inter-ethnic solidarity, a shimagle committee having 12 members of local elders and religious leaders from both groups was organized to settle the 2015 violent conflict” (IGO2, Ayikel, on 8th of February 2018). However, as one member of the *shimlgina* committee said, “the government arranged the committee of shimagles (elders) after the failure of the use of coercive measures by security forces to settle the conflict” (IN1, Laza Mariam, on 10th of February 2018). It is a recurrent practice that the current government of Ethiopia uses customary conflict resolution mechanisms as a last resort after the security forces failed to settle the dispute (Abbink, 2006). This makes customary institutions not to address conflict between ethnic groups before it is escalated into violent form.

Although *shimglina* was employed after huge loss of human life and destruction of properties, it played a great role in creating peace and stability in the area. The government started its regular activities by following the footprints of elders and religious leaders. Before that, the government was unable to administer the area in a stable manner. The role of the committee of *shimlgina* during the conflict was to facilitate people to people discussions, facilitate the ceasefire agreement and collect money and materials from the society to compensate and support the victims (IGO3, Gondar, on 15th of February 2018). The same government official said that in Chiliga *Woreda* around 600,000 Ethiopian birr was collected from the society by the committee to support the victims of the conflict.

4.5.2. Challenges of *Shimglina* in Maintaining Inter-ethnic Solidarity

Despite their long period of good record in maintaining inter-ethnic solidarity, customary conflict resolution mechanisms become less effective (Dereje, 2010) in resolving the root causes of inter-ethnic conflict. Those institutions have lost their historic significance in settling disputes between different ethnic groups (Abbink, 2006). In the same guise, *shimglina* has lost its
historical significance in maintaining inter-ethnic solidarity between the Amhara and Kemant peoples in contrast to its long period of successfulness in settling disputes. Based on the empirical data collected from different sources, the following problems are identified as challenges for *shimglina* in maintaining inter-ethnic solidarity between the two groups by providing lasting solution for the conflict.

**4.5.2.1. The Change in the Nature of Conflict**

The contribution of *shimglina* in maintaining inter-ethnic solidarity between the Amhara and Kemant peoples becomes less important because of the changing nature of conflict. The pre-1991 conflict was more of interpersonal conflict. These kinds of conflicts were resolved easily through the employment of elders and religious leaders based on the values and norms of the society. This is because interpersonal conflicts are less complex in terms of causes and actors. Members of *shimglina* simply persuade combatants to accept the decision. It is free from government intervention, party affiliation and spoilers such as ethnic entrepreneurs.

The nature of conflict becomes more complex than before in Ethiopia in general and in the study area in particular since 1991. The causes and actors of conflict changed dramatically from interest based cause to political cause and from interpersonal conflict to ethnic based conflict. Identity based conflict is more susceptible to government intervention and the prevalence of spoilers. The Kemant’s quest for ethnic self-determination is the main cause for the existence of ethnic conflict between the two groups. Such kinds of conflicts are resolved mainly by providing political solutions (Dereje, 2010) which is beyond the capacity and experiences of elders and religious leaders to settle it.

**4.5.2.2. The Prevalence of Spoilers in the Shimglina Processes**

In the pre-1991 conflict, there were no spoilers who disrupt the *shimglina* processes since the conflicts were more of interpersonal conflicts. According to the interview conducted with scholars, the current conflict is ethnic based conflict which resulted from politicized ethnicity. There are elites who aspire to achieve their personal benefits by politicizing ethnicity in the study area. Government officials said that the members of opposition parties and terrorist groups disrupt the *shimglina* processes to achieve their own political objectives. According to one government official in Gondar, the motive of such groups is to expose the inability of the
government to create peace and stability for the public and the international community. But, such claim is based on the governments’ habitual rhetoric that associate every problem with opposition political parties. Government officials fail to provide credible evidence for their claim when the researcher asks them how much it is real. Elder informants, on the other hand, argue that elites from both groups were the major bottlenecks of the conflict resolution process through elders and religious elders. The conflicting parties in the rural areas ask permission from elites in the town to settle the dispute. The interim committee of Kemant is highly criticized for disrupting the conflict resolution processes. One Kemant elder in the focus group discussion also said that some chauvinist government officials were not interested for the conflict to be settled through *shimgilina*. The same focus group discussant argued that such government officials think that their political position will be taken away after the Kemant’s quest for self-determination is answered. One thing that must be clear here is that whatever their ethnic origins, interests and political positions, the elites in the study area are the major spoilers for *shimgilina* not to be successful in maintaining inter-ethnic solidarity.

### 4.5.2.3. The Low Attention Given by the Government to Shimgilina

Traditional leaders, religious leaders and local elders which were relics of the past have been given little attention by the incumbent Ethiopian government (Abbink, 2006). The government primarily opted to use coercive measures to settle inter-ethnic conflict. Customary conflict resolution mechanisms are allowed to settle disputes after the conflict resulted in huge loss of human life and destruction of property due to the failure of formal institutions (Dereje, 2010). In the case of Amhara and Kemant conflict, the *shimgilina* committee was organized after the conflict becomes out of government control. Religious leaders and local elders were allowed to involve in the conflict resolution process after ethnic division is escalated into violent conflict. This is in contrast to the long experience of *shimgilina* that it resolves conflict before it results in huge loss of human life and property destruction. The measure that *shimgilina* taken in relation to settling disputes were more of preventive than curative measures.

After allowing elders and religious leaders to settle conflicts, political leaders are involved in the process of conflict resolution (Dereje, 2010) which is out of the norms of customary conflict resolution mechanisms. Elder informants told me that political leaders that are found in different positions pressure the elders to entertain their political agendas on religious leaders and local
elders. As one elder interviewee said that, “the *shimglina* process is government initiated and politically motivated. It is simply to fulfill the wills and interests of the government without addressing the root causes of the conflict…such a process ignores the values and norms of the society” (IAA1, Ayikel, on 7th of February 2018). Religious leaders and elders are selected based on their political position rather that their acceptance by the society. This top-down approach reduces the acceptability and credibility of *shimglina*.

4.5.2.4. The Deterioration of Acceptability of Religious Leaders and Local Elders

Customary conflict resolution mechanisms have lost their historic significance because of their devaluation in the state judicial system (Abbink, 2006). The finding of this study revealed that the peoples of Amhara and Kemant consider *shimglina* as a secondary alternative to settle disputes. The society lacks trust on the decisions of religious leaders and local elders. The religious leaders and local elders according to informants are not neutral. They are affiliated with party politics and their own fellow ethnic groups. In addition to this, religious leaders and local elders struggle for survival. This reduces the acceptability and credibility of religious leaders and local elders.
CHAPTER FIVE

ETHNIC FEDERALISM AND AMHARA – KEMANT RELATIONS

5.1. Introduction

In the preceding chapter, the researcher discusses issues that tide and divide the two groups in their historical relations. The factors that tie them such as economic interdependence, inter-ethnic marriage, companionship in religious based social practices and the use of shimlina to maintain inter-ethnic solidarity and factors that divide them such as conflict of interest, the arousal of offensive mottos against one another and the failure of shimlina to resolve identity based conflicts before their escalation were the focus of chapter four. However, a mere discussion on these factors may be shallow analysis if it ignores assessing the impact of state policies on inter-ethnic relations. Thus, this chapter is intended to do so.

Government policies almost always have a huge impact on the courses and trajectories of inter-ethnic relations in a given state (Brown & Ganguls, 1997). Accordingly, taking this fact into account, this chapter investigates the interconnections between ethnic federalism and inter-ethnic relations in contemporary Ethiopia by hanging on the Amhara and Kemant ethnic groups as a litmus test. Since ethnic federalism is the national policy of Ethiopia with the exception of some implementation disparities, synchronizing the national discourses on ethnic federalism and local perceptions is essential for better understanding of the issues under investigation. Hence, the main focus of this chapter is to assess the bestowal as well as the curse of ethnic federalism on inter-ethnic relations in Ethiopia at large and between the Amhara and Kemant peoples in particular.

5.2. The Influence of Ethnic Federalism on Inter-ethnic Relations

To effectuate amicable inter-ethnic relations, governments of different countries pursue different policies. Such policies may push countries in the direction of stability, harmony and justice on the one hand or instability, conflict and inequality on the other hand (Brown & Ganguls, 1997). Ethnic revival is primarily the result of failure of state policy which excludes certain ethnic groups from socio-economic advantages while favoring the others (Abbink, 1997). The incumbent government in Ethiopia initiates ethnic federalism as a state policy to maintain unity of the country through promoting mutual understanding among diversified ethnic groups.
However, as discussed in chapter two, there is a polarizing debate among scholars and politicians on the effectiveness of ethnic federalism in maintaining amicable inter-ethnic relations.

Being represented by the government, the first debate is that ethnic federalism is the only viable means to effectuate cordial ethnic relations and maintain the unity of the country. Supporters of this view argue that ethnic federalism would bring a new era of ethnic democracy by redressing the legacy of ethnic inequality (Alemseged, 2004; Young, 1998). According to government official interviewees, ethnic federalism grants cultural and linguistic rights to each ethnic group. In support of this argument there are scholars who argue that ethnic federalism gives voice for the previously oppressed and minority ethnic groups (Alemseged, 2004; kidane, 2001; Temesgen, 2015). It brings overall development to each ethnic group that it is considered to be the primary importunity of them (IGO5, Bahir Dar, on 23rd of February 2018). This creates amicable relations between ethnic groups. Government official interviewees unanimously claimed that ethnic federalism is not problematic in fostering amicable ethnic relations; rather it is anti-peace, anti-development and anti-people forces who disturb peaceful ethnic relations to advance their political and economic motives.

In contrast to the above arguments, many scholars contend that ethnic federalism proliferate ethnic conflicts in many parts of the country (Aalen, 2002; Abbink, 2011; Alemante, 2003; Asnake, 2009; Bekalu, 2016; Muhabie, 2015). They argue that ethnic federalism may grant cultural and linguistic rights for ethnic groups. Nevertheless, the provision of such rights to ethnic groups is not accompanied by genuine democracy and proper autonomy (Abbink, 2006). According to academician informants, the worst part of this right is that the Ethiopian government used it as an instrument of divide and rule through stretching differences rather than preaching common citizenship. One informant summarizes this issue in the following way.

*Ethnic federalism may grant cultural and linguistic rights to each ethnic group in Ethiopia. However, the provision of cultural and linguistic rights without genuine democracy, political freedom and proper autonomy is just nothing. What the government really doing is dividing the Ethiopian people along ethnic lines without considering the societal context. The government used ethnic division as a means to maintain its political power... if we take the Amhara and Kemant case; they were and still are inextricably linked in economy, language, culture and religious activities. The*
institutionalization of ethnic federalism as a state policy created good opportunity for new political movement on the side of Kemant elites. This has an adverse effect on the relations between Amhara and Kemant peoples (IAC1, Gondar, on 17th of February 2018).

The above speech clearly shows that the new political experiment in Ethiopia, which articulates ethnicity as a political instrument is central to the change of Amhara - Kemant relationship into open conflict. The indivisibility of the two groups which has been the result of long periods of interaction eroded and disrupted by the introduction of ethnic federalism. This is because of the fact that ethnic federalism is organized on the basis of polarizing ethnic differences. The polarization of ethnic differences resulted in the construction of the notion of ethnic ‘self’ and ‘otherness’ between the two groups.

The post-1991 Ethiopian political discourse is shaped by issues related to ethnic identity and ethnicity. Talking about ethnicity creates or reinforces ethnic division (Horowitz, 1985) which leads to open ethnic conflict. For some scholars, TPLF sermonizes the gospel of ethnic division to weaken the unity of Ethiopia which was perceived by them as a manifestation of the superiority of Amhara language and religion (Alemante, 2003; Bekalu, 2016; IAC3, Gondar, on 17th of February 2017). The TPLF/EPRDF regime deliberately fosters ethnic hatred and division for its own political goals particularly at the expense of the Amhara ethnic groups (Tuso, 1997). Ethnic federalism is the EPRDF’s answer to the problem of state centralism and Amhara domination (Young, 1998). To meet its objectives, the government is stigmatizing the Amharas as neftegna and timkihitegna as a means for mobilizing other ethnic groups that it considered as discriminated by the former Amharic speaking ruling class (Muhabie, 2015; Walle, 1993). Not surprisingly, Kemant informants used such terms in the middle of their talks. They said, for example, it is the neftegna and timkihitegna which was responsible for the 2015 conflict.

In line with the above argument, academician informants said that the TPLF/EPRDF regime doesn’t demand the Amhara to be strong in terms of economy and politics. To weaken this group, the regime fosters ethnic division in the regional state. This ethnic division is followed by inter-ethnic conflict that makes the regional state to devote its time and budget in security issues rather than development activities (IAC3, Gondar, on 17th of February 2018). Regarding the credibility and truthfulness of this, the informants said that there is clear evidence which shows
that the interim committee is supported by TPLF. In the demonstration and different meetings that were held in Chiliga, the Kemant demonstrators and participants of the meeting raised offensive mottos and speeches that are incompatible with their quest for identity recognition and self-determination. They raised, for example, the issue of Wolqiet in the form of slogan22 which is unrelated to their demands. According to informal conversation conducted by the researcher in Ayikel town, the arousal of such kinds of slogans clearly shows that there is strong connection between the interim committee and TPLF which the later doesn’t demand the issue of Wolqiet to be raised. In fact, according to one interviewee, it doesn’t represent the general population of the Kemant (IAC2, Gondar, on 17th of February 2018).

By hook or by crook, ethnic federalism is responsible for the change of the relation between the two groups from amicable to discordant. It paved an avenue for new kinds of political questions to be raised in Ethiopia that were not the concern of ethnic groups in the previous regimes. The Kemant identity question was started immediately after the initiation of ethnic federalism which later became the cause for the existence of inter-ethnic conflict between the two groups. The quest of identity recognition and self-autonomy created the notion of ethnic ‘self’ and ‘otherness’ that was not the culture of the two groups as discussed in chapter four. The notion of otherness created competition that finally resulted in a full blow of conflict. Therefore, presented hereunder is the empirical data about the main offspring of ethnic federalism which has direct influence on the inter-ethnic relations between the two groups.

5.2.1. The Discrepancy between Theory and Practice

According to interviewees, the discrepancy between constitutional theory and practices is the primary factor for the change of inter-ethnic relations between Amhara and Kemant from harmonious to conflictual relation. Theoretically, the transitional charter, different proclamations and the FDRE constitution granted each ethnic group the right to be recognized as a distinct ethnic group and the right to self-government. Practically, however, there are inconsistencies in the implementation of such constitutionally granted rights to each ethnic group (Asnake, 2009). Inconsistency in the implementation of constitutional rights creates ethnic grievances that finally lead to ethnic conflict (Bekalu, 2016).

22 The researcher refrains from mentioning the slogans that were raised by Kemant demonstrators mainly to protect the dignity of the Amhara people since the slogan is too much blood curdling.
The Kemants’ political struggle was begun as the demand for recognition of their identity immediately after the EPRDF came to power. This is because after the demise of the Derg regime, the transitional charter paved the way for the ignorance of Kemant people as a distinct ethnic group while it recognizes the existence of the other ethnic groups such as Amhara, Himira, Awi and Oromo in Amhara region (Addisalem, 2014). Proclamation No. 7/1992 primarily denied the recognition of Kemant as a distinct ethnic group while accepting more than 60 ethnic groups as the constituent of federal arrangement. As a result, sporadic political movements had continued to challenge attempts of obliterating Kemant from the new political map. The quest of Kemant for ethnic recognition becomes stronger especially after the then prime minister, Tamrat Layne’s, speech. He pronounced that the Kemant who had lived around Gondar were for the most part thoroughly assimilated and they become ordinary Gonderianes (Yeshiwas, 2014a). Thus, the claim of identity recognition is inauthentic and inconsistent according to him. The 1994 national population and housing census counted the Kemant people as a distinct ethnic group albeit proclamation No. 7/1992 denied the existence of the group. This indicates that there are some sorts of inconsistencies in policy implementation.

In addition to the denial of Kemant as a distinct ethnic group under proclamation No. 7/1992, the government denied the right to self-determination after the adoption of the constitution. This is in contrast to the constitutional provisions that are stated under article 39(1) and 39(3)23 of the FDRE constitution. The 2007 national population and housing census also explicitly denied the existence of an ethnic group called Kemant (Yeshiwas, 2014a). This is also in contrast to the registration of Kemant as a distinct ethnic group in the 1987 and 1994 national population and housing censuses.

The subsequent denials of constitutional rights by the federal and regional governments created dissatisfaction and grievances among the Kemant community members. The Kemant demonstrators in Chilga Woreda expressed their disappointment to government for its denial while it recognizes and protects other ethnic groups who are numerically inferior to Kemant people (IAC2, Gondar, on 17th of February 2018). Nevertheless, the government failed to provide immediate response for the Kemant’s quest for recognition and self-determination. The

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23 Article 39(3) of the constitution states that every nation, nationality and people in Ethiopia has the right to a full measure of self-government which include the right to establish institutions of government in the territory that it inhabits and to equitable representation in state and federal governments.
failure of the government to provide its constitutional promise discontented the Kemant people. In opposition to the governments’ denial, the Kemant people conducted subsequent demonstrations that were accompanied by the arousal of offensive mottos against the Amhara people in Chiliga Woreda. This created negative ethnic perceptions between the two groups (FGDA2, Laza Mariam, on 10th of February 2018).

According to the interview conducted with regional government officials, the Amhara National Regional State initially presents two reasons to reject the Kemants’ quest for self-determination. Primarily, the regional state conceives that the Kemant peoples’ movement and struggle is fabricated by few elites who need to fulfill their personal and economic benefits. As a result, the question of recognition and self-determination is not the question of the general people. Secondly, the regional state argues that the Kemant people are culturally assimilated with the Amhara people and they are not lived in contiguous territories. This is due to the absence of objective characteristics of the Kemant people that makes them unique from the neighboring Amhara people (Addisalem, 2014). The regional government denied the right of Kemant to be recognized as a distinct ethnic group on the basis of article 39(5) of the FDRE constitution. According to article 39 (5) having distinct language, common psychological make-up and contiguous settlement are the basics for identity recognition. In fact, there is no as such a clear difference between Amhara and Kemant in terms of language, culture, religion and physical appearance. For this reason, the Kemant quest for ethnic recognition and self-determination initially was unacceptable for the regional council. In contrast, the interim committee claims that the Kemant people have their own distinct language and religion even though it is on the virtue of collapse as a result of past assimilation policy.

To conclude, the failure of the federal and the regional governments to implement their constitutional promises created dissatisfaction among the Kemant people. The Kemant people showed their grievances against the regional government in the form of peaceful demonstration that was held in different parts of the Chiliga Woreda. The slogan that the Kemant people raised in the demonstration such as Chiliga is the historical place of Kemant discontented the Amhara people. This creates negative ethnic perception against each other followed by the 2015 conflict which resulted in social despair, economic instability and political tension. As discussed in chapter four, the two groups were linked economically, socially and culturally. Ethnic difference
was not served as a prohibitive factor for the two groups to live in harmony. According to Brass (1991) cultural given, tradition and ethnic difference in general do not constitute the basis of conflict between ethnic groups. It is misleading to describe the rise of ethnic bias and prejudice in Ethiopia with primordial attachment since the ordinary people are not ethnically organized to preserve and glorify their primordial identity (Birhanu, 2008). In contrast to primordialist argument, political and economic conditions determine the existing ethnic relation in a given state (Brass, 1991). The political condition of Ethiopia after 1991 is organized based on the issue of ethnic identity. The transitional charter, different proclamations and the FDRE constitution give primary attention for ethnic rights. But, the government fails to implement such constitutional rights to the Kemant quests that finally lead to inter-ethnic conflict between the Amhara and Kemant in contrast to their long periods of peaceful coexistence.

**5.2.2. The Right to Recognition and Self-determination**

let alone the practices of the federal system, for many scholars and interviewees the constitution itself has left Ethiopian to be divided along ethnic lines and invites ethnic conflict in the form of ethnic self-determinism (Bekalu, 2016; IAC3, Gondar, on 17th of February 2018). One of the core principles that the so called ethnic federalism entitled to each ethnic group is the right to be recognized as distinct ethnic group and the right to self-determination. Any group that wishes to have administrative structure and representation in the regional and federal levels needs recognition as a ‘nation, nationality or people’. However, the ethnic regulation and codification that the government employed is problematic since it is based on primordial features of identity without considering the social context of the country. The government fails to build clear criteria for determining ethnic group boundaries (Smith, 2007). Despite its noble role of providing a full measure of self-administration along with cultural and linguistic rights, the right to self-determination is a generator and transformer of ethnic conflict into lowest administrative units (Muhabie, 2015; Semahegn, 2014).

The Kemant’s quest for recognition and ethnic self-determination is the result of EPRDF’s policy of ethnic federalism. Interviewees from both groups said that the Kemant elites presented their quest of ethnic recognition and self-determination according to the provisions of the transitional charter, proclamation No. 7/1992 and the FDRE constitution. After long periods of struggle, the regional council recognized the Kemant as a distinct ethnic group and provided the
right to self-administration under proclamation No. 229/2015 with 42 Kebeles. However, the interim committee of Kemant’s quest for self-determination is unhappy with the decision of the regional council. The committee claims 126 Kebeles including the whole part of the Chiliga Woreda, Lay Arimachiho Woreda, some parts from Gondar town and some Kebeles from Mettema Woreda. As informants in Ayikel said, the interim committee organized peaceful demonstration against the decision of the regional council.

As discussed in chapter four and the preceding section, the peaceful demonstration conducted by the Kemant communities dissatisfied the Amhara people. Some members of the Amhara considered it as an action which stands against the culture of peaceful coexistence (IK1, Ayikel, on 31st of January 2018). Despite their previous support of the Kemant’s question in terms of money and material assistances, the Amhara people began to think that the quest is a sense of narrowness and against the culture and tradition of peaceful coexistence as one Gonderianes (IA3, Ayikel, 7th of February 2018). The development of negative ethnic perception in turn creates competition between the two groups over certain territories. Most of informants said that the issue of 3 Kebeles in Mettema Woreda, Ayikel town and Gondar town becomes very controversial and led to ethnic tension even after the bitter 2015 conflict is settled.

There is a controversy whether the quest of the right to recognition and self-determination is a cause for the transformation of Amhara and Kemant relations into open conflict. Academicians unanimously agreed that this right is a means for the existence of hostility between the two groups. They argue that the time before 1991 was a time of melting pot which never promised for right to self-determination of groups. The Kemant people were not as such sensitive for their ethnic identity. Rather the Kemant people focused on national integration along with their neighboring Amharas and other ethnic groups. The researcher asked one elder informant, who is a member the interim committee, the reason why the Kemants request the question of ethnic recognition and self-determination. The informant explicitly responded that “we don’t have problems with the Amhara people; we lived in peace for centuries…the previous governments did not allowed for such kinds of questions to be raised. In contrast, the present government allowed it to all ethnic groups and denied it for us. This is the sole factor for the question to be raised…” (IK4, Gondar, on 16th of February 2018).
The above speech clearly illustrates the fact that ethnic federalism initiated new questions in Ethiopia. These new questions in turn created the notion of ‘self’ and ‘others’ between the two groups that finally led to a full blow of ethnic conflict. The government official’s response for the question, ‘is this right a means for the conflict between the two groups?’ is associated with the government’s habitual rhetoric. The officials claimed that anti-peace, anti-development and anti-people forces used the Kemant’s quest for recognition and self-determination as coverage to create instability in the area for their political objectives. Whoever the responsible body for the changes of the two groups’ relation from cordial to open conflict is, the right to recognition and self-determination is an impetus which served as a means for the change of their relations. If we say anti-peace and anti-development bodies are the responsible ones as the government officials said, they used this right as a means to achieve their political objectives. If we follow the argument of academicians, this right creates negative ethnic perception and competition over certain territories. Thus, the researcher argues that the right to self-determination, which is the direct offspring of ethnic federalism, polarized ethnic relation between the two groups by creating the notion of ethnic ‘self’ and ethnic ‘otherness’. In support of this argument the Human Rights Watch posits that the causes of ethnic dispute in Ethiopia are associated with the new ideology of self-determination which has encouraged an upsurge of ethnic nationalism (Daniel, 2003).

The 2015 conflict between the two groups took place immediately after the response is given for the Kemant’s quest for ethnic self-determination by the regional council. It is not surprising that the conflict broke out after response is given, since there are no clear criteria to demarcate the boundaries between the two groups. Since the two groups are highly intermixed through intermarriage and economic relations, they are lived in the same place together. Thus, it is difficult to draw a boundary line between the two groups. In Ayikel town, for instance, both groups lived together being intertwined through intermarriage, companionship in religious based social practices and economic relation. As many scholars agree, ethnic federalism in Ethiopia grants the right to self-administration to each ethnic group without considering the social context of the country (Abbink, 1997; Asnake, 2009; Bekalu, 2017; Daniel, 2003). Most ethnic groups in Ethiopia could not inhabit in territorially defined geographical areas (Bekalu, 2017). This is because the diverse peoples of Ethiopia have created a single geographic and cultural unit as a result of migration, interaction, conquest, trade and intermarriage (Haber land (nd) as cited in
Daniel, 2003). Concomitantly, the finding of this study revealed that the Amhara and Kemant peoples lived together in both dega and kola parts of the Chiliga Woreda and its neighboring Woredas. This makes the boundary making process very difficult. This difficulty along with territorial competition resulted in ethnic conflict between the two groups.

5.2.3. The Creation of Ethnic Entrepreneurs

As discussed in chapter two, the introduction of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia created conducive environment for ethnic entrepreneurs to mobilize their fellow groups. Ethnic federalism encourages ethnic elites to view themselves as agents of their own ethnic groups (Alemante, 2003). Ethnic elite mobilized ethnic groups to achieve their goals such as maintaining political power, controlling local resources and state budget without considering the consequences of ethnic mobilization (Abbink, 1997; Asnake, 2009; Daniel, 2003). Many ethnic entrepreneurs are engaged in a struggle for recognition of separate ethnic identities as this could lead to political representation. The mobilization of ethnic groups by elites in Ethiopia created inter-ethnic conflicts. This is because elites from the neighboring ethnic group involve in ethnic mobilization because of their fear that they will be marginalized from power after response is given for the quest of ethnic recognition by other ethnic elites (IAC2, Gondar, on 17th of February 2018).

In the same scene, interviewees agreed that ethnic elites from both groups are responsible for the existence of conflict between the peoples of Amhara and Kemant. The current ethnic division is the result of competition between ethnic elites from both sides to secure their economic and political benefits. To secure their political and economic advantages, elites from both groups established an ethnic committee. According to Tarimo (2010) ethnic entrepreneurs form an organized social and political action-group to maximize their political, economic and ideological motives. Accordingly, the Kemant elites primarily established Kamant’s Development Association (KDA) in 1993 to facilitate economic and social development for the Kemant people. According to the then chairperson of this association, Kemant elites have an ambition to change KDA into a political party. Even though it is difficult to find clear information about it, the Amhara elites were also established a committee called Amhara committee to protect the people of Amhara from ethnic assaults.
The Amhara committee arranges date and place to conduct demonstration. For some informants, it is responsible for the emergences of negative attitude towards the Kemant’s quest for ethnic recognition and self-determination. But, the researcher neither finds the one who is the member of the committee nor a clear and enough information about the existence of the committee. Some informants claim that it was a clandestine committee. The EHRC (2016) report indicated that the investigators found a leaflet which was prepared by the committee having the stamp of the committee on it. One Amhara in the informal conversation said that it was established to protect the Amhara people from the assault of the interim committee of Kemant. Kemant informants also said that it was established mainly by the support of the members of ANDM to mobilize the Amhara people against the Kemant. Government official interviewees said that currently its function is suspended by the operation of the government.

Most of informants, however, argued that the interim committee of Kemant’s quest for ethnic self-determination is the primary actor for the transformation of positive ethnic perceptions into negative ones. The committee was established in 2009 as an extension of KDA. It claims that it is the representative of the Kemant people. The Amhara focus group discussants agreed that the interim committee mobilizes the Kemant people by arranging public meetings and transmitting offensive messages such as ‘we will disturb the town, we will burn the regional flag, and we will close government offices and public schools’. The committee opted to use force as a means of achieving its goal. At present, the Kemant people have accepted these messages and they are involved in destructive activities. The disruption of public schools and government offices created discontent on the side of the Amharas so that they are also involved in counter attack.

The committee works not for the sake of the masses but for its own political and economic advantages (IAC3, Gondar, on 17th of February 2018). This is because many of those elites had previously held posts in the present government and that they had never advocated the Kemant issue when they were in power (Getachew, 1998). In fact, different names are given to the members of the committee. The government officials said that some of the members are the missionaries of Ginbot-7. On the contrary some individuals during the informal conversation told the researcher that the committee is the missionary of TPLF and that it is established to disrupt the Amhara people. The individuals said that the committee receives monetary and material assistances and different trainings from TPLF.
Whatever the political ambitions of ethnic elites and their backgrounds are, they are responsible for the existence of ethnic conflict and post conflict ethnic tension between the two groups. In contrast, the ordinary peoples of Amhara and Kemant want to live in peace by sustaining their long period of harmonious relations (IA1, Gondar, on 17th of February 2018). There is no intrinsic hatred between the two groups. Not surprisingly, the Amharas supported the Kemants’ quest for recognition and self-determination in terms of monetary and material assistances. However, the assault of influential Amharas by the member of the interim committee and the arousal of offensive mottos against them by the Kemant demonstrators forced them to stop such assistances. The Amhara people were involved in opposition against the Kemants’ quest for self-determination and conducted demonstrations that led to ethnic conflict. During the 2015 conflict, however, there were individuals who work diligently to stop the crisis. Kemant interviewees said that without the existence of some patient Amharas, the 2015 conflict might have been resulted in huge damage more than what has already happened.

The finding of this study revealed that against the primordialists’ notion that sees inherent ethnic differences justifying action, the change in the Amhara - Kemant relation must be understood by the role played by the state and ethnic entrepreneurs. The policy that the Ethiopian government adopted allowed ethnic elites to access political power and state budget if organized along ethnic lines. Territorial autonomy, resource redistribution, participation and political representation at the federal and regional levels are possible when a certain society is recognized as a distinct ethnic group. When one group feel unhappy due to power and resource sharing, the elites of that particular ethnic group directly claim to have their own new administrative units and resources which are reinforced by ethnic federalism (Walle, 1993). Accordingly, the kemant elites requested for such status since the birth of ethnic federalism. As a result of the failure of the government to give immediate response for such quest, they involved in forceful actions such as assaulting influential Amharas, burning regional flag, distructing public schools and government offices and arousing offensive mottos against the Amhara people by mobilizing the Kemant people. This created grievances on the side of the Amhara people. Elites from the Amhara side used this situation as an advantage to mobilize their fellows against the Kemant people. This led to the change in the relations between the Amhara and Kemant.
Thus, the researcher argued that the change in the Amhara- Kemant relation is not the result of an intrinsic hatred between the two groups; rather, it is the outcome of ethnic entrepreneurs who seek to achieve their political and economic motives. The Kemant quest for ethnic recognition and self-determination is more of elite driven (Yeshiwas, 2014a). Initially, the ordinary Kemant people had little interest for such kinds of questions to be raised (Getachew, 1998). This is because drawing territorial boundary between the two groups is not beneficial for the Kemant. As discussed in chapter four, the Kemant people live in the land scarce highland areas. To meet their land related demand, they migrated to the vast Amhara low land areas. If boundary is created between the two groups, such kinds of interdependence will be broken, which is unprofitable for both groups.

5.2.4. Politicization of Ethnic Identity

For many scholars, the mere existence of ethnic differences is not a cause for ethnic conflict (Abbink, 2006; Brass, 1991; Bekalu, 2017; Tarimo, 2010). Ethnic differences become sources of mistrust and conflict when they are politicized and they promoted unhealthy competition (Asebe, 2012; Birhanu, 2008; Tarimo, 2010). In Africa, for example, ethnic difference is typically not a source of inter-ethnic conflict, rather, it is a lever used by leaders and ethnic elites to mobilize supporters in pursuit of political power, wealth and resource (Aapengnuo, 2010). Concomitantly, ethnic tensions and ethnic conflicts happening in Ethiopia are fuelled by the politicization of ethnic identity which is the direct offspring of ethnic federalism (Bekalu, 2017). Since 1991, identities have been articulated in such a way that historical incidents and memories have been reactivated and old labels have been redefined by ethnic entrepreneurs for various motives (IAC1, Gondar, on 17th of February 2018). The granting of constitutional rights to ethnic groups and the organization of politics along ethnic lines makes ethnic difference to be highly politicized by ethnic entrepreneurs to achieve economic and political motives (smith, 2007). This promotes the reconstruction of ethnic identities and inter-ethnic polarization.

According to academician informants, the Amhara and Kemant elites politicized certain elements of ethnic difference to secure their respective goals. The Kemant elites attempt to reconstruct distinct ethnic identities of the Kemant so as to get ethnic recognition and representation at the federal and regional levels. This is because ethnic recognition according to the FDRE constitution is possible based on some objective criteria such as language, common ancestry,
contiguous territories and subjective elements such as common psychological make-up (FDRE constitution, 1995). As a result, political activists on the side of Kemant began to develop ‘ethnic consciousness’ through reconstruction of some traditional values that could help to define the group and self-identification of the people to their language, cultural values and traditions (Yeshiwas, 2014b). To accomplish this goal they diffused information such as members of the Kemant people experienced recurrent marginalization from government work and different decision making activities because of their distinct ethnic identity (Addisalem, 2014).

In addition to the above claims, they politicized the ethnic image that the Amharas have for the Kemant. They pronounced that the Amhara called the Kemant in demeaning terms such as ‘wood, born of wood and wood worshipers’. They associate the denial of the Kemant ethnic identity recognition through past assimilation and oppression. They also highly politicized the 2007 national population census by framing it as ‘silent identity genocide’. It gave rise to a strong nationalist sentiment and political awareness across urban and rural areas, leading to mass mobilization and engagement (Yeshiwas, 2014a). This makes the society emotional and case sensitive for the respect of their ethnic identity. This perception changed the attitude of the Kemant towards the Amhara. The Kemants feel that they lost their identity because of the dehumanization and stigmatization of their identity by the Amharas (Yeshiwas, 2014b).

As a counter balance, the Amhara elites also politicized some sorts of ethnic markers to mobilize the Amhara people. As discussed in chapter three, land is the focus of Amhara culture, social life and personal concerns. In various cultural villages of Amhara, land is therefore, the source of personal and communal conflicts. The Amhara elites mobilize their fellow ethnic group members by propagating that the Kemants will remove you from your rist after their quest for self-determination is answered. They told the public that once the Kemant acquire self-autonomy, boundary and territorial demarcation will be implemented. This made the Amharas discontented. They also activated the past glorious elements of the Amhara people. The elites propagated that after the Kemant quest for self-determination is answered ‘you will be ruled by them’, which is in contrast to your long periods of autonomy’. This created emotional sentiments and ethnic mobilization against the Kemant people.

The emergence of emotional sentiment towards once ethnic identity as a result of the politicization of ethnic difference led to inter-ethnic conflict between the two groups. As
discussed in chapter four, there was no ethnic mobilization and ethnic conflict between the two groups before the introduction of ethnic federalism irrespective of their differences. This is because unless activated by ethnic elites, primordial elements are not the causes for inter-ethnic polarization. The primordial markers of ethnic identity remain ‘silent’ or ‘passive’ until they are activated by some external or internal forces (Asebe, 2007). After the initiation of ethnic federalism, however, politicization of ethnic differences become norm throughout the country. Seemingly, the Kemant elites activated elements of differences to secure their political and economic motives. Counter balance is also committed by Amhara elites through mobilizing their fellow ethnic group members via politicizing some markers of ethnic identity. Such a situation marked the polarization of inter-ethnic relation between the two groups that finally led to a full blow of inter-ethnic conflict. This is in line with the argument that it is more of the activation of silent identity markers that justifies action rather than a mere ethnic difference (Asebe, 2007). This implies that ethnic entrepreneurs politicize those markers that are already existed or died as a result of certain socio-economic and political factors. Accordingly, the revitalization of Kemant ethnic identity does not mean that markers of ethnic identity have been newly constructed. Rather, government’s refusal to elites’ claim to ethnic recognition forced them to activate the already existing elements. The researcher presented the process through which silent ethnic identity markers are activated in a figure.

The finding of this study unveiled that ethnic federalism creates conducive environment for ethnic identity to be politicized by ethnic entrepreneurs. The post 1991 Ethiopian politics is shaped by the politicization of markers of ethnic identity by ethnic entrepreneurs in pursuit for political mobilization (Asebe, 2007). The Kemant elites began to ask ethnic recognition and self-determination immediately after ethnic federalism was initiated. The failure of the government to give response for such claim makes them to politicize elements of ethnic identity. They engaged in politicization of ethnic identity mainly to meet the requirements of article 39(5) of the FDRE constitution. The frustrated Amhara elites also started to politicize identity markers of Amhara ethnic group. This in turn polarized inter-ethnic relation between the two groups.
Figure 1: a model that shows how identity markers are politicized

Religion
Myth of ancestry
Language
Common memories
History
Self-identification
Self-autonomy
Land

Activated by

Ethnic entrepreneurs

Ethnic conflict

Activated by

The notion of ethnic otherness
‘Us’ and ‘them’ category by:
- Memory of suppression
- Memory of assimilation
- Quest for recognition
- Quest for self-determination
- Removal from once ‘rist’

Ethnic entrepreneurs for political and economic motives

Used by

Adopted from the argument of chapter two and five
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

In the previous two chapters the analysis related to the three objectives have been made and interpreted. This chapter presents the summary of the findings and conclusion based on the data analyzed. In fact, each of the objectives have already been discussed and concluded briefly in the concerned chapters and sections. In spite of these conclusions, the overall conclusion is made here. The findings are presented in an objective wise manner in the following paragraphs.

The main objective of this study was to assess the influences of ethnic federalism as a state policy on inter-ethnic relations between the Amhara and Kemant peoples by uncovering their historical economic and social relations. The study attempted to address the historical social and economic relations between the two ethnic groups, the ways how customary conflict resolution mechanisms were employed to maintain inter-ethnic solidarity and their challenges, and the influences of ethnic federalism on inter-ethnic relations by employing qualitative research approach.

Oral traditions from the two ethnic groups show that there was little antagonism between the two groups irrespective of their differences in terms of language, religion, ancestry and traditions. They have had long periods of amicable relations. Their affable relations are expressed in terms of economic interaction, inter-ethnic marriage and companionship in religious based social practices. According to interviewees from both groups, economic interdependences have been the most important forms of amicable relations between the two groups without which they can’t sustain their life. The two ethnic groups are interdependent through trade transactions, assisting each other in times of famine and drought, performing agricultural tasks together through a cultural association called debo and sharing of agricultural materials. Economic contact between the two groups has led to the establishment of close relations through inter-marriage, personal friendships like yekirstina lij and yetut lij and participation in iddir, mahiber and sembete.

Religious difference was served as a boundary maintaining mechanism between the Amhara and Kemant peoples before the conversion of Kemant into Orthodox Christianity. However, it didn’t prevent social relations with the exceptions of eating meat together and inter-ethnic marriage. With the exception of such dichotomies, however, the two groups celebrated weeding and
mourning ceremonies together, performed agricultural tasks in cooperation and established friendly relations through a cultural practice called yetut lij. After the conversion of Kemant into Orthodox Christianity by the policies of successive imperial regimes, lines of separations are broken. Inter-ethnic marriage became a common social phenomenon and they got involved in religious based social practices like iddir, mahiber and sembete. The two groups also started to create amicable relations through a religious based social practice called yekirstina lij. According to elder informants from both groups, these factors contributed a lot for the maintenance of cordial relations for long periods of time between them.

Although the two groups have had harmonious ethnic relations, the finding of this study revealed that there was interpersonal conflict. According to interviewees, land conflict, abduction, property looting and homicide were common forms of interpersonal conflicts between individuals of the two ethnic groups. However, there were no ethnic mobilizations against one another. The conflicting issues were mainly the concerns of combatants only. However, in November, 2015, identity based conflict was erupted between the two groups which resulted in huge loss of human life and destructions of property. This conflict was accompanied by group mobilization against each other. After this conflict, there is a tendency through which personal matters are transcending into an ethnic issue.

Customary conflict resolution mechanism, which is branded as shimglina has been employed to maintain inter-ethnic solidarity between the two groups. It was successful in resolving interpersonal conflicts such as land conflict, abduction, homicide and property looting since it resolved problems based on the cultures and traditions of the society. Likewise, to resolve the 2015 identity based conflict, the government arranged a committee of elders and religious leaders having 12 members. According to interviewees, the government arranged such committee after the conflict reached in its climax stage. This is in contrast to the tradition that shimglina is employed before the conflict is escalated. Currently, this conflict resolution mechanism has been less successful in settling disputes. The changing nature of conflict, the reduction in the acceptability and credibility of elders and religious leaders, the low attention given by the government and the prevalence of spoilers in the shimglina processes are considered as the challenges for shimglina not to be successful in maintaining inter-ethnic solidarity.
With regard to the last objective, this research found out two contrasting arguments. The first argument which is represented by the government officials is that ethnic federalism creates good opportunity for ethnic groups such as granting cultural and linguistic rights and it improves the well-being of the people. This creates amicable inter-ethnic relations in Ethiopia. They further argue that ethnic federalism has nothing to do with the recent ethnic conflict in Ethiopia; rather it is anti-peace, anti-development and anti-people bodies that are responsible for such crisis. The second argument is represented by academicians. They argue that ethnic federalism proliferate ethnic conflict in Ethiopia. In the name of entitling the right to self-determination to ethnic groups, the incumbent government divides the Ethiopian people along ethnic lines to maintain its political power. This creates the notion of ethnic ‘self’ and ‘otherness’ that finally result in unhealthy competition and ethnic conflict.

Ethnic federalism created new political questions in Ethiopia. These questions are mainly associated with the right to be recognized as a distinct ethnic group and the right to self-determination. The Kemant elites struggled for the implementation of such rights to the Kemant people since 1991. They applied their request to the federal and regional governments on the basis of the Transitional Charter, proclamation No.7/1992 and the 1995 FDRE constitution. According to interviewees, since the previous regimes’ policy was national integration based on melting pot approach, such kinds of question were never raised. In contrast, at present it is considered as a fashion to get representation at the federal and regional levels and to share local resources and state budget. This question created conflict between ethnic groups as is the case between Amhara and Kemant peoples. This research found out that there is a change in the nature of the relations between Amhara and Kemant from amicable to discordant due to various factors that are associated with ethnic federalism. These factors include the discrepancy between constitutional theory and practices, the right to recognition and self-determination, the creation of ethnic entrepreneurs and the politicization of ethnic identity.

Hereunder, the overall conclusions are made in accordance with such findings. The diverse ethnic groups in Ethiopia lived in a fairly amicable relation for centuries by tolerating their differences. The Amhara and Kemant people enjoyed such amicable relations for long periods of time irrespective of their differences in terms of language, religion, ancestry and tradition. The two groups focused more on those things that unite them rather than dividing elements. This
validates that ethnic diversity could not inherently be a cause for the emergences of ‘we’ and ‘them’ category. Group categorization is a normal social phenomenon and doesn’t necessarily cause group rivalry by itself as illustrated by the Amhara- Kemant case. Nevertheless, this does not mean that ethnic difference is not a potent force in creating hostilities and conflict between dichotomized ethnic groups.

Once activated by ethnic entrepreneurs to advance political and economic motives, ethnic difference become a powerful driving force through which ethnic groups relation becomes too hostile. The change in the nature of the relations between ethnic groups from amicable to discordant is catalyzed by the activation of markers of ethnic identity by ethnic elites, the suppression of ethnic questions by the state, the disregard of elements of ethnic complementariness and competition over resources. On the contrary to the primordialist argument that explains ethnic hatred is the result of inherent ethnic differences, the instrumentalist argument better explains why ethnic conflict is erupted.

The Amhara- Kemant case illustrated that the activation of markers of ethnic identity to advance political and economic motives resulted in discordant ethnic relations in contrast to their long period of harmonious relationships. The two groups successfully used customary conflict resolution mechanisms to settle their differences. They were mutually integrated through economic interaction and common social practices. But, such commonalities eroded as a result of the introduction of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia since 1991. Ethnic federalism is initiated in Ethiopia on the basis of polarizing ethnic identity markers by discrediting commonalities. This created the notion of ‘we’ and ‘them’ category that resulted in unhealthy competition and ethnic conflict.

The historical amicable relation between the Amhara and Kemant people is changed because of the emergences of new political questions on the Kemant side, which is the direct offspring of ethnic federalism. Ethnic federalism grants the right to ethnic recognition and self-determination to each ethnic group for the sake of protecting their cultural and linguistic rights. Nevertheless, it failed to grant such constitutional rights to the Kemant. As a result, the Kemant elites applied their quest to the concerned body so as to be recognized as a distinct ethnic group and have their own self-government since 1991. However, the government disregarded the identity question of the Kemant people. This forced the Kemant elites to engage in the politicization of ethnic
identity to create ‘ethnic consciousness’. They involved in such an action mainly to meet the requirements that are stipulated under article 39(5) of the FDRE constitution. This is because the regional government initially denied the right of ethnic recognition for the Kemant as a result of the lack of objective elements such as language, contiguous territory and distinct culture.

The elites involved in memory of assimilation and oppression to mobilize the Kemant people across their political interests. The elites touched the emotional and sensitive elements of identity markers. This initiated the Kemant people to be mobilized and involved in peaceful demonstrations that were accompanied by offensive mottos that discontented the Amhara people. This paved the way for the Amhara elites to mobilize their fellow groups to counter attack the Kemant elites. This created a clear ethnic boundary (to use Barth’s terminology) between the two groups with unhealthy ethnic competition over certain territories. It in the end resulted in the change in the nature of the relations between the Amhara and Kemant peoples from amicable to discordant.

To return back to the previous arguments, the Amhara- Kemant case illustrated that the mere existences of ethnic difference is not responsible for the emergences of unhealthy ethnic relations. It is ethnic federalism that creates the notion of ethnic ‘self’ and ‘otherness’. Ethnic federalism failed to take into account the historical, social and cultural interrelation among ethnic groups during the implementation of the state restructuring; rather it defined ethnicity narrowly, often in its primordialist sense. This makes the boundary making process difficult which is followed by ethnic conflict as is illustrated by the Amhara- Kemant case.
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**Appendices**

**Appendix A: In-depth interview and FGD guide questions**
The purpose of this in-depth interview and FGD guide is to gather data on ‘Ethnic federalism and inter-ethnic relations in Ethiopia: a focus on the peoples of Amhara and Kemant’. The questions below were formulated and used as guides for interviews and Focus Group Discussions. However, the interview questions were not strictly limited to these questions.

**Interview questions for local residents**

**On the issue of historical economic and social relations between the two groups**

Explain the social and economic relations between Amhara and Kemant peoples that existed in the past!

**A. Economic interdependence**

1. Explain the level of economic interdependence between the Amhara and Kemant peoples that existed in the past!
2. What kind of products does the Amhara produced?
3. What kind of products does the Kemant produced?
4. Explain the interactions between Amhara and Kemant peoples in market!
5. What economic benefits does the Amhara get from the Kemant?
6. What economic benefit does the Kemant get from the Amhara?

**B. Social relations**

7. Explain the level of social interactions between Amhara and Kemant peoples that existed in the past!
8. How religion was served as a dividing line between the two ethnic groups?
9. How religion served as a means of cohesion between the two ethnic groups?
10. Explain the historical social interactions between the Amhara and Kemant peoples!
11. Were the two ethnic groups engaged in inter-ethnic marriage? If yes how?
12. Was there any culture, norm and practice that prohibit inter-ethnic marriage between them?
13. Explain the interactions between Amhara and Kemant in Iddir and Mahiber!
14. Was there any conflict between Amhara and Kemant before 1983 E.C.? If yes state the reasons!
C. Conflict resolution

15. How the conflicts were resolved?
16. What was the role of customary conflict resolution mechanisms in resolving conflicts before 1983 E.C.?
17. What was the role of customary conflict resolution mechanisms in resolving the 2008 E.C. conflict between them?
18. What challenges does customary conflict resolution mechanisms faced in maintaining inter-ethnic solidarity?

Interview questions for academicians

The influence of ethnic federalism on inter-ethnic relations between the two groups

1. Does ethnic federalism creates cordial inter-ethnic relations in Ethiopia or not? State your reasons!
2. Explain the positive influence of ethnic federalism on inter-ethnic relations between the Amhara and Kemant peoples!
3. Explain the negative influence of ethnic federalism on inter-ethnic relations between the Amhara and Kemant peoples!
4. Does the 2015 conflict between the Amhara and Kemant peoples have to do with ethnic federalism? If yes how?
5. What was the role of ethnic entrepreneurs in the 2015 conflict?
6. Do you think that Art. 39(1) of the FDRE constitution is a means for conflict between Amhara and Kemant?
7. Can you state other reasons for the November 2015 conflict between Amhara and Kemant peoples!

Interview questions for government officials

Role of the government on conflict resolution
1. What roles does the government play in maintaining inter-ethnic solidarity between the Amhara and Kemant ethnic groups since 1991?

2. Is there any time that the government allowed customary conflict resolution mechanisms to maintain inter-ethnic solidarity between Amhara and Kemant ethnic groups? If so how the process was conducted?

3. Do the concerned bodies recognize the decisions of customary conflict resolution mechanisms?

4. What was the reason for the 2015 inter-ethnic conflict between Amhara and Kemant ethnic groups?

5. What was the role of the government in managing the conflict?

6. Does the government arrange a forum of elders to manage the conflict? If so was it successful?

**FGD Questions**

1. Were the Amhara and Kemant ethnic groups relation peaceful or conflictual before 1983? State your justifications accordingly!

2. Explain the level of economic interdependence between them!

3. Explain the level of social relations between them!

4. Explain how religion served as a means of solidarity as well as dividing line between them!

5. Please describe the inter-ethnic marriage ties between the Amhara and Kemant peoples!

6. How the two ethnic groups used customary conflict resolution mechanisms in maintaining inter-ethnic solidarity before and after 1983?

7. What challenges do they face in using customary conflict resolution mechanisms?

8. Describe the role of the incumbent government for fuelling as well as managing the conflict between Amhara and Kemant!

**Appendix B: list of key informants, focus group discussants and field assistants**

1. Local resident interviewees
### 2. Interview with government officials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Interviewee code</th>
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<th>Education level</th>
<th>Place of Interview</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
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<td>Bahir Dar</td>
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Key: IGO- interview with government official

### 3. Interview with academicians

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<th>Date of</th>
<th>Remark</th>
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Key: IAC- interview with academicians

4. Informal conversations

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<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>Ayikel</td>
<td>3rd of February 2018</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Key: CRSF- conversation with regional security force
CFA- Conversation with field assistant
CHO- conversation with hotel owner
CLBH- conversation at local beer house

5. FGD participants

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Key: FGDA- focus group discussant of Amhara
FGDK- focus group discussant of Kemant

6. Field assistants
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Key: FA- field assistant

Appendix C: a sample which shows the role of shimglina in settling the 2015 crisis
129
1. AHIH: 37, 111, RH: 80, 32. ALE: 102, ALE: 37, 111, RH: 80, 32. ALE: 102, ALE: 37, 111, RH: 80, 32.

2. HAIH: 80, 32, 111, 37, 80, 32, 111, 37, 80, 32, 111, 37, 80, 32, 111, 37.

3. IAHI: 80, 32, 111, 37, 80, 32, 111, 37, 80, 32, 111, 37, 80, 32, 111, 37.

4. HAII: 80, 32, 111, 37, 80, 32, 111, 37, 80, 32, 111, 37, 80, 32, 111, 37.

5. "Use the last two digits."

6. "Use the last two digits."

7. "Use the last two digits."