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The Dynamics of Amhara Nationalism in Ethiopia and its Political and
Institutional Implications

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Studies

Declarations

I undersigned, hereby declare that the dissertation is my original work and have not been submitted partially or in full in any other university or institution for graduation before, and all primary and secondary sources have been dually acknowledged.

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This dissertation has been submitted for examination with my approval as dissertation supervisor.

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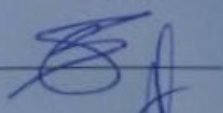
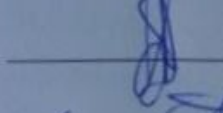
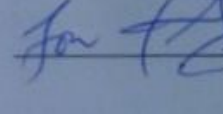
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List of Acronyms

AAPO: All Amhara Peoples Organization

ACSI: Amhara Credit and Saving Institute

ADA: Amhara Development Association

ADFM: Amhara Democratic Force Movement

ADP: Amhara Democratic Party

AESM (*Meison*): All Ethiopian Socialist Movement

AEUO: All Ethiopians Unity Organization

ASC: Amhara Scholars Council

AMMA: Amhara Mass Media Agency

AMC: Amhara Media Corporate

ANRS: Amhara National Regional State

ANDM: Amhara National Democratic Movement

APP: Amhara Prosperity Party

ASA: Amhara Student Association

AV: Alternative Vote

AYA: Amhara Youth Association

Balderas: Balderas for True Democracy

CUD: Coalition for Unity and Democracy

ECSJ (*EZEMA*): Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice

EPRDF: Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front

EPDM: Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement

EPLF: Eritrean People's Liberation Front

EPRP: Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party

ESAT: Ethiopian Satellite Television

ESM: The Ethiopian Student Movement

ESUE: Ethiopian Students Union in Europe

ESUNA: Ethiopian Students Union in North America

FDRE: Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

IGR: Interogvernmental Relations

HoF: House of Federation

NaMA: National Movement of Amhara

OBN: Oromo Broadcast Network

OLF: Oromo Liberation Front

OLA: OromoLiberation Army

OMN: Oromo Media Network

ONLF: Ogaden National Liberation Front

OPDO: Oromo People Democratic Organization

PDRE: People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

PR: Proportional Representation

PP: Prosperity Party

TGE: Transitional government of Ethiopia

TPLF: Tigray Peoples Liberation Front

USUAA: University Students Union of Addis Ababa

WAIQC: Wolkait Amhara Identity Question Committee

Abstract

No other identity has been as debated as Amhara ethnicity in post-1991 Ethiopia. This dissertation examined “Amhara” both as a supra-ethnic category and an ethnic identity, which is relevant in contemporary political and scholarly discourse of ethnicity and nationalism in Ethiopia. Ethnicity, conflict, and institutional design in Ethiopia have been discussed mostly in connection with minority groups. This kind of general classification may be rejected by “dominant” groups who do not perceive themselves as based on ethnicity. As a result, little is known about Amhara identity in relation to Ethiopian nation-building practices. This concern is more crucial in the current context as the Amhara, who used to closely associate themselves with Ethiopian statehood since imperial times, are now developing an ethnic sentiment claiming a perceived and real marginalization within the post-1991 political system. The study’s key questions were: (1) how has the post-1991 political discourse and its institutions contributed to the development of Amhara ethnicity? And (2) how will the rise of Amhara nationalism affect the functioning of the political system work in progress? Data was acquired through interviews, focus groups, document review and netnography, as well as observations using a qualitative research methodology. Data were gathered from a wide range of sources, including broadcast and social media platforms, political party leaders, activists, and academic elites, leaders (members) of formal and informal associations and organizations, and viewpoints voiced by these groups. The results indicate that the in-group and out-group conceptions pertaining to Amhara identity are different. Amhara identity is defined from the outside and contested from inside. This study also revealed the different discourse behind the debate on the (non) existence of Amhara as an ethnic group. Proponents of the idea that Amhara does not exist as an ethnicity espouse an Ethiopian nationalism promoted as a supra-ethnic identity that all ethnic groups need to integrate into. It also showed how Amhara ethnicity has been built under various political contexts in which it goes from rejection to embracement. The study also identified the discursive narratives, ideological underpinnings of othering, and institutional flaws as the cause for the rise of Amhara nationalism. This is the result of the fact that a nation-state system and its centralized structures are replaced by a non-representative, fragile devolved system. The Amhara, who remained left out during the institutionalization of the current political system, now demand to be integrated into it. This would be an entry point to the evolution of constitutional and institutional designs that redress the limits of existing multi-national federalism in general and ethnic-territorial autonomy in particular, which further replicates the strain on the management of conflicts caused by the existing system.

Chapter One

1. Introduction

Ethnicity and nationalism in the contemporary political and scholarly discourse of Ethiopia are largely framed in two competing models that could be described as Pan-Ethiopian nationalism and ethno-nationalism. These paradigms became polarized mainly after the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) institutionalized the latter as an organizing principle of the polity. Pan-Ethiopian nationalism imagines an idealized form of national identity which is promoted as a supra-ethnic identity that ethnic groups need to integrate into. While ethno-nationalism perceives Ethiopianness as the sum total of ethnic groups and is guaranteed through their participation,

In most African states, nationalism is largely associated with the legacy of colonialism and anti-colonialism. However, Ethiopian nationalists trace their origins to the remote past and emphasize a deep historical root tracing back to antiquity. Ethiopian rulers built a nationalist mythology around a three-thousand-year-old state that gained international recognition (Markakis, 1999, p.70). Ethiopian nationalism derives from the Axumite Empire, which flourished since the 1st century A.D. and was largely expressed through language and religion (Sorenson, 1992; Bahru, 2010c). The conversion of Axum into Christianity (4th century A.D.) enabled those successive regimes to draw their main ethos and ideology (Bahru, 2010c).

Competing nationalisms are somewhat the outcome of the institutional legacy of Ethiopian nationalism in a modern sense. Ethno-national movements such as Eritrean, Tigrean, Oromo, and Somali occurred since the 1960s, and they were located within the much more diverse Ethiopian polity. The Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) of the 1960s and 70s articulated ethno-national claims in Marxist ideological terms. The radical students rejected the idea of Ethiopia as a nation. Instead, it was seen to be an empire comprising various semi-autonomous units and diverse cultures. The emergence of Ethiopia as a multi-national state that was narrowly defined by Amhara-Tigre hegemony, an assertion introduced by Wallelign (1969), one of the leading radical students, became the ideological precursor of the ethnic federal arrangement (Bahru, 2014). This also shaped the political discourse and the way the state has been viewed, and that

eventually led to the development of the ethno-regional movements in the country for the past four decades (Semahagn, 2014).

The description of the domination and imposition of Amhara culture on others largely implies forcing people to abandon their culture and forcing them to assimilate into a pre-defined ethnic identity, that of Amhara. This is problematic since ‘Amhara’ as an ethnic identity has never been scrutinized in Ethiopia’s history like the way we see it in contemporary Ethiopia. The imposition is rather to look like the monarchy and the nobilities, which is mainly to speak Amharic and profess Orthodox Christianity, not to look like a certain group of people. Teshale has described the distinction between oppressor and oppressed nationalities in cultural terms as it "is not Amharas oppressing non-Amharas. [Rather] it is the imposition of the cultural hegemony of *Ge’ez civilization* over those outside its embrace" (Teshale, 1996 p. 176). Even though the ethno-nationalist groups amended the Amhara oppressor and other oppressed nationalities' rhetoric, as they reiterated that the common Amhara people do not represent the oppressor ruling class, it has negatively contributed to shaping the attitude of other ethnic groups towards the Amharic-speaking population in the past three decades (Semahagn, 2014).

Ethiopia is one of the world’s ancient states, having its core in the present northeastern part of the country. Historic Ethiopian borders were never clearly defined. Its size and level of diversity have been changing with the strength of the center through the passage of time (Markakis, 2011). In the long history of the country, the Amhara have appeared as one of the people who crucially contributed to the emergence as well as the consolidation of the state system of Ethiopia. In history, until the 18th century, the name Amhara was first used by both Muslim and Christian chroniclers to signify the Amharic language and a toponym, the medieval province of *Bete-Amhara*, located in the present-day Wollo (Chernetsov, 1993).

Since the second half of the 13th century, the kings of Amhara dominated the political power of the medieval Ethiopian state. According to Ludolf (1682), the geographical location (being the center of Abyssinia with those inaccessible fortified rocks) helped to play a key political role in historic Ethiopia. He explained Amhara as “... the most noble kingdom of all Ethiopia... and is, therefore, accounted the native country of the late and present kings and of all the nobility” (Ludolf, 1682, p. 13). However, other major players were not absent, like the Tigreans who were

parteners since Axumite times, Agaws during the Zagwe dynasty, and Oromos, especially since the 17th century (Markakis, 2003; Shiferaw, 1990).

The most widely known explanation about the peopling of Ethiopia in various historical and linguistic works such as Taddese (1972), Bender (1983) and, Baye (2008) asserted that Semitic People migrated from South Arabia and intermingled with the indigenous Cushitic population, which bears the mixed and pidgin nature of the Amhara and Amharic language, respectively. These ideals serve the Pan-Ethiopian nationalists' argument that the Amharic language does not belong to an Amhara ethnic category that itself does not exist. It also serves the Oromos to present the Semitic people, particularly the Amhara, as migrants. Moreover, the hardliner Oromo nationalists formulate a 'settler colonialism' thesis. In contrast to the assertion that limits the history of Amhara to 1270 and the migration thesis, it has been argued that the Amhara are one of the oldest and indigenous groups of people in Ethiopia. Recently, assertions have come out that trace the common origin of Amhara to pre-history (Mesganaw, 2018; Tedla, 2018). Marcus (2002) and Girma (2009) argued that Ethiopia is a cradle of Semitic languages as opposed to the assumption that they migrated from South Arabia. This autochthony claim could also be viewed as a reaction to the indigenous claims of other ethnicities, particularly by the Oromo nationalists who have presented the Amhara as "outsiders". It is a reaction to the presentation of the Oromos as "aliens" to the Ethiopian body politic; a mutually constituted deconstructionist indigenous discourse.

There was no agreement on the presence of Amhara ethnicity before 1991. However, scholars and authorities have an accord on the presence of Amhara identity and a group of people called Amhara. Many studies have stated that the Amhara are contagious people who live primarily in Ethiopia's central and northern provinces, such as Gojjam, Shewa, Goder (Begemidir), and Wollo (Levine, 1974, p. 118; Markakis, 1974, p. 47; Tegegne, 1998, p. 119). Apart from its shared ethos, values, and cultures across territories, Amhara is known for its interest and energy in local units while also looking to others that may offer greater economic opportunities and less restrictive regimes (Levine 1974, p.118). They rarely express strong solidarity with all Amhara and identify in provincial or supra-ethnic terms such as Habesha or Ethiopia (Levine 1974, p.118). After the advent of the modern Ethiopian state and the use of Amharic as the national language, the name Amhara took on a different meaning that could be described in relation to

power and prestige, as even non-Amharic groups have identified as Amhara. Chernetsov (1993) wrote: “the people of Merabete are partly of [Oromo] descent, and [Oromo] living in the nearby Shewan fief Fichie, though many speak only a few words of Amharic, tend increasingly to describe themselves as Shewan and Amhara” (Chernetsov, 1993, p. 101). Hence, the Amahara represent four provincial outlooks and sentiments: Gonder, Gojjam, Wollo, and Shewa, and one supra-ethnic sentiment (Tegegne, 1998 p. 119). In his sociological study, Levine revealed that the Amhara are a group of people who bear a distinctive dominant culture, reside in specifically located boundaries, share similar cultures, and possess common historical experiences (Levine, 1972, p. vii).

The issue of ethnicity is often related to “otherness,” expressed by the application of the systematic distinction between “us” and “them”, in which any identity needs the presence of other comparable identities in order to define it (Eriksen, 1992). Hence, ethnic identity requires a designation by relevant others. Certainly, the presence of other identities in Ethiopia is a sufficient condition for the presence of Amhara identity, at least in the minds of others. Simply put, an “Amhara” means a group that is not an Oromo, Sidama, or Somali and vice versa. Hence, Amhara identity has defined itself and has been defined by others. The most important component of ethnic identity is the 'cultural stuff' enclosed within the ethnic boundary that the actors use to identify themselves and that gives moral significance to their day-to-day lives (Barth, 1969, p. 15). The Amharic language is an important cultural marker exclusively shared by a significant number of people with no additional vernacular (Markakis 2003). As ethnic identity often requires a designation by relevant others, these Amharic speakers are identified as Amhara by other ethnic groups of Ethiopia.

In the 1850s, the first attempt was made, though practically unsuccessful, to end regional warlordism and create a unified Abyssinian kingdom by Emperor Tewodros II. His centralization and modernization ideals remained as a road map for succeeding kings, Yohannes IV and Memelik II. They proceeded to establish a “modern” state of Ethiopia by expanding towards the south, southeast, and southwest of historic Ethiopia. There are political and scholarly claims that the Amhara ethnic group dominated the Ethiopian state formation process and that internal hostilities were manifestations of competing ethnic groups. Conversely, others argue that the

power struggle was motivated by regionalism rather than ethnicity. They were also cautious not to include the Amhara people and emphasized its class dimension.

Recognizing regionalism as a dominant element of the period, Merara contends that it was the struggle for supremacy among ethnicities, notably the Tigray, Amhara, and Oromo elites, that accounted for various competing warrior classes to emerge (Merara, 2011 p. 2). According to Teshale, an important element of Tewodros's reign over the Abyssinian Kingdom was his conviction to put an end to the influence of the Oromo, whom he regarded as outsiders to the Ethiopian throne (Teshale, 1996 p. 38). According to Teshale, the successive military campaigns of Tewodros were motivated by the intention to stop the political dominance of Amharized Oromo rulers in the very heart of Amhara land, i.e., the Yeju Oromo ruling house at Debre Tabor. Merara also strengthens the aforementioned stand and argues that "Tewodos was the first modern Ethiopian ruler who was explicitly conscious of the ethnic factor in his project of empire-building and consciously challenged the supremacy of the Oromo princes over the Abyssinian kingdom" (Merara 2011 p. 3). During the period of Zemen mesafint, the term "Oromo" referred to both an ethnic and a religious (Muslim) identity (Shiferaw, 1990 p. 166). The truth is that Tewodro's letter to Queen Victoria of the Great Britain aided the preceding argument. He mentioned in the letter that he was able to drive the Oromos out of state power.

The first thesis, in contrast, contends that regionalism was a significant fault line and that regional lords competed with one another for dominance. State power was less ethnically based, and conflicts and rivalries were between areas and provinces rather than ethnic groupings (Bahru, 2002; Greenfield, 1996). Others argued that the ruling elite of the Amhara people did not support the Amhara ethnicity or organize the Amhara masses (Tegegne, 1998 p. 121; Semahagn, 2014 p. 97). The reason for such restraint from Amhara ethnic mobilization is not clear. It may be deliberate only because they did not need it (Tegegne, 1998, p. 121). The multi-ethnic nature of the ruling class since medieval times has also been underscored (Chernetsov, 1993). Looking at the early few studies on Amhara identity, except Admasu (2010), who used the concept of "status group", there was a difficulty in conceptually analyzing the pre-1960s Amhara identity. As it is analyzed in chapter four, the Amhara identity before the rise of ethno-nationalism lies in the issue related to the supposition that 'dominant' groups do not have "ethnicity" because they realize their ethnic identity in national terms. Given the lack of evidence on the presence of

Amhara ethnicity in Ethiopian state formation, the argument goes to 1991, and the aftermath is the time that Amhara ethnicity began to emerge.

Unlike other African countries, the nation-building process in Ethiopia and Sudan was far from using neutral images for the state symbols and values, as they aspired to build the nation in the image of the culture and history of the dominant group (Kymlicka, 2006; Markakis, 2021). In Sudan, the issues of religious (Islam) and linguistic (Arabic) homogenization were at stake. Since the early days of independence, the northerners have sought to establish an Islamic state governed by religiously inspired laws and norms, which has been a source of discontent among the non-Muslim south and has resulted in an ongoing civil war (El-Gaili, 2004). In Ethiopia, the colonial language was not used for nation-building; rather, the Amharic language and culture were spread throughout the country (Markakis, 2021). Power was almost monopolized by the Amhara ruling class, which defined the newly diverse state of Ethiopia with its three prolonged ideologies of Orthodox Christianity, Amhara cultural ethos, and Ethiopian unity (Merara, 2011 p. 4). As a result, the state symbols of Ethiopia have been questioned and caused the rise of ethno-national movements against the nation-building project (Markakis, 2021, p. 25).

By the end of the 1960s, Ethiopia as a nation was challenged by the radical student movement. It was presented as a multinational state that was narrowly defined by Amhara-Tigre hegemony (Bahru, 2014). The students' movement of the 1960s and 70s with its radical thoughts have shaped the political discourse and the way the state has been viewed. It also came to be the reason for the development of ethno-regional movements in the country for the past four decades (Semahagn, 2014, p. 93). Despite it being contested within the body of the student movement, the national question was taken for granted by all radical activists of the revolution. The "Amhara oppressor-other oppressed nationalities" narrative that has been portrayed since the time of Italian occupation, and even before, is now staged by the local left-intelligentsia within the Leninist-Stalinist framework. Currently, ethno-nationalist groups have amended their position and shifted from accusing Amhara as a whole to those who were on top of the socio-political pyramid of the state. Despite repeatedly saying oppressed Amhara is not an enemy, the mentally entrenched narrations of Amhara blame politics are manifested practically in various ways.

Marxism, in its Leninist-Stalinist variant, has been the dominant ideological and organizing principle in Ethiopian political discourse since the 1960s. The Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) was successful in being the imperial regime's gravedigger. Like the student body politics controversy on the national question, its offspring political parties took opposing positions on their political agenda. While the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (AESM) (commonly known by its Amharic abbreviations (MEISON) took the class struggle under the Pan-Ethiopian umbrella, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) chose the national liberation struggle as their priory mission (Merara, 2006). The ethno-nationalists (the latter) were able to realize their political aspirations by institutionalizing ethnicity after they took power in 1991.

The ethno-nationalist group, the TPLF, that prevailed in the armed struggle against the Dergue, established an ethno-nationalist coalition, the EPRDF, and seized central power in 1991. The EPRDF claims to be the main successor of the ESM, advocating nationalities' rights to self-determination, including secession, and having adopted federalism in which ethnicity is an organizing principle of the polity. Following the global trend, Ethiopia has shifted from the centralist state to the constitutionally entrenched ethnic-based political organization, reversing the pursuit of the European nation-state project (through political centralization and cultural homogenization) and its own domestic state crisis (Dereje, 2013 p. 156). 'New frontiers in Ethiopian politics' have emerged in a way that ethnic groups have become the building bricks of the Ethiopian polity (Andreas, 2003). Apparently, 1991 was not marked as a mere regime change; rather, it was a turning point that the Ethiopian state was fundamentally restructured (Dereje, 2013 p. 156).

Since 1991, the Amhara identity has been the center of political and academic debate, especially among the "Amhara" elites and Ethiopianists abroad. The political debate was initiated following the non-representation of Amhara in the transitional process, which was revealed by the president of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) and the chairman of EPRDF, Meles Zenawi. There was no individual or group that attended the peace and democratic conference representing Amhara (Meles, 1991). The summit was a turning moment in the country's political history. Ethiopia departs from not just the prior political system but also other African statesby

restructuring it based on ethnicity because it accepts the transitional charter, which serves as the foundation for the constitution and political discourse.

A heated debate was held on the existence of “Amhara” as a distinct ethnic group between Professor Mesfin Wolde Mariyam (leading educated elite) and Meles Zenawi in a widely televised program in the autumn of 1991 (Meles & Mesfin, 1991). In the debate, Mesfin argued there is no ethnic Amhara and it is difficult to represent something that does not exist. To him, the people use the term Amhara to refer the religious or provincial identification, not ethnicity. Meles countered Mesfin’s argument and underlines the presence of the Amhara ethnicity since it has a distinct language, culture, and common history. He argued, evidence (features) presented by Professor Mesfin was witnessed in all ethnic groups. And there is an essence that makes Oromo, Tigre, or Amhara an ethnic group.

In the early years of the 1990s, when ethnic tension was at its highest, Amhara became the fitting choice for ethnically targeted attacks. People who are designated as Amhara have been massacred and evicted from the newly established ethnic-territorial regions. Amhara were executed and displaced in areas of the Oromia region such as Bedeno, Arba Gugu, Garra Muleta, and Eastern Wolega, and a large number of Amhara were evicted from the southwest to the Amhara region (Tronvoll, 2002; Tesfaye, 2002). The ethnically motivated political tension and the atrocities on the “Amhara” people since that historical juncture continued for decades until these days gave rise to Amhara nationalism. The plight of people known as Amhara at the time prompted the formation of the All Amhara Peoples Organization (AAPO) under the leadership of Professor Asrat Woldeyes. It was the first Amhara-named party established in 1992. He was a hardliner Pan-Ethiopianist, representing the university at the July conference and questioned the mandate of the conference to decide on Eritrea. AAPO’s political influence immediately diminished after the arrest of party leaders and the death of its chairman, Professor Asrat, in detention. In 1993, the Ethiopian People’s Democratic Movement (EDPM), one of the coalition members of EPRDF, changed into the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) to mobilize the Amhara people. AAPO, on the other hand, changed its name to All Ethiopian Unity Organization (AEUO). As would be argued later, the reconfiguration of EPDM (from national to ethnic) and AAPO (from ethnic to national) indicates the dilemma that the Amhara elites face in positioning for Ethiopian nationalism and (or) Amhara nationalism.

The long-running institutional arrangements aimed to regulate ethnic diversity have contributed to the rise of a series of nationalist mobilizations. Nourishing on the autocratic nature of successive regimes, they have finally managed to push Ethiopia into a political crisis after a generation (Yusuf, 2019). The primary reason for adopting federalism was the need to respond to the “national question,” which various ethno-nationalist groups demand self-determination (Assefa and Zemelak, 2018 p.15). However, after two decades of experimentation with ethnic politics, the ‘national question’ endures as many groups are still seeking recognition, self-government, and political participation. The number of ethno-nationalists pursuing armed struggle against the EPRDF regime is not far less than during the Dergue regime.¹

Since 2015, the country has begun to face stress. Widespread public protest against the regime continued until Abiy Ahmed came to power. The two largest ethnic groups, Oromo and Amhara, were notable in the protest, as the names’ “Oromo protest” and “Amhara protests” have been coined to it. Paradoxically, the anti-regime public protest was intensified only a few months after the EPRDF claimed “100 percent win”. The unprecedented and perhaps unique kind of opposition and popular protest came from the Amhara people. Unlike other protests seeking rectification of political and economic marginalization under TPLF dominated government, the Amhara protest stands against the discursive narratives under the baggage of the national oppression thesis upon which the constitution and its institutions were established.

The issue that will have a potential impact on the post-1991 nation-building practice is the sense of victimization and exclusion from the making and implementation of the federal political order. It has been argued that the current constitution and its federal arrangement were established based on the radicalized ideological narration of the students’ movement, which characterized Amhara as oppressors and all other communities as oppressed. It has been claimed that an immediate discussion on the constitution, which does not have consent from the Amhara ethnic group, Even though it is unclear whether the change in the entire text or seeking some amendments to the question has a de-legitimizing effect on the federal arrangement. Considering this, Amhara nationalism is an entry point that could even take the federal experiment at least to new heights and (or) more conflict.

¹ There were continued armed struggles in Afar, Amhara, Somali, Oromia, Gambella, Benishangul-Gumuz throughout the past three decades.

The new and heightened territorial claims and disputes between the Amhara state and its neighboring states, notably Tigray, is the other face of Amhara ethnicity. Its cause is the feeling of annexation of the *Wolkait* region by the Tigray. The immediate cause of the Amhara protests was the attempted arrest of Colonel Demeke Zewdu by the federal security forces on July 12, 2016. As the leader of the Wolkait Amhara Identity Question Committee (WAIQC), he was and continues to advocate for the return of the Wolkait district to Amhara state. Apparently, this territorial dispute over *Wolkait* and Raya from the north and *Matakel* in the southwest has a potential effect on the federal arrangement in general and the restructuring of federal units in particular.

There are also developments that show Amhara nationalism would bring tremendous political dynamics in Ethiopia. The dynamics of party politics have changed in the Amhara region. A long time after AAPO ceased to exist following the death of its founder, a new regional party along the Amhara ethnic line was established in June 2018. The National Movement of Amhara (NaMA), with its motto “one Amhara for all Amhara and all Amhara for one Amhara”, was born out of the Amhara protests. Apart from the establishment of an ethnic-based political party, Amhara nationalism has impacted upon the ruling regional party, ANDM, which changed its name to Amhara Democratic Party (ADP) in September 2019. It was short-lived, as it merged into the newly evolved party, the Prosperity Party (PP), and was renamed as the Amhara Region Prosperity Party (APP). The move from ethnic-blind political practice to vice versa by the party has something to do with the federal order. ADP (APP) was getting more and more championing for ethnic issues, “correcting” the criticisms coming from Amhara activism and its competitor, NaMA. This leads to another issue related to intergovernmental relations. This affects relations with both the federal government and other neighboring regional states. The manner of horizontal relationships has been shaped by the approach that the regional government holds regarding individuals that belong to the Amhara ethnic group who have been living in many parts of the country.

Amhara living in other regions with deep-seated insecurity is one of the subjects of Amhara nationalism. The lack of efficient federal institutions to protect the intra-unit minorities, replicates the atrocities against those “who do not belong to that territory”. The replica of the former nation-state model and of “ethnic domination” has been implemented in regional states. As a

result, those who do not consider themselves the owners of that territory have been killed, displaced or systematically assimilated. Given a large number of Amhara living in various parts of the country, they have been victims of attacks such as ethnically motivated killing and displacement, which have endured for nearly three decades. This deep-seated insecurity is one of the triggering factors for the emergence of Amhara nationalism. This might be the impetus for launching additional institutional designs to allow the federal system to address the pressing issue of minority rights.

Ethnicity, conflict, and institutional design in Ethiopia have been discussed mostly in connection with minority groups (groups possessing positions of relative non-dominance in political or numerical aspects). This kind of general classification may be rejected by “dominant” groups who do not perceive themselves as based on ethnicity. As a result, there has been little research into Amhara identity without undermining Levine’s classic works on Ethiopian nation-building practices (1965; 1974). This concern is more crucial in the current context as the Amhara, who used to closely associate themselves with Ethiopian statehood since imperial times, are now developing an ethno-national sentiment claiming a perceived and real marginalization within the post-1991 political system.

The scholarly discourse on Amhara identity that immediately followed the political debate was focused on the questions of “who is Amhara?” and “whether or not Amhara exists as a distinct ethnic identity”. In those debates, Amhara was described in varying expressions, such as a distinct ethnic group (Meles, 1991; Andargachew, 1993), an expression to signify religion, i.e., Christian as opposed to Muslim (Mesfin, 1991), supra-ethnic or ethnic Ethiopia (Getachew, 1992; Takkele, 1994), a social group rather than ethnic (Chernetsov, 1993). Studies came out on Amhara identity after some hiatus, such as Tegegne (1998), Pausewang (2005), Michael (2008), Admasu (2010), Birhanu (2015). The studies described ‘Amhara’, both as an ethnic identity and as a supra-ethnic category, with less resolution than the 1990s debate. However, some, like Tegegne and Admasu, analyzed contexts and new political developments that might bring an Amhara ethnic consciousness in the near future. Moreover, the works of Chernetsove (1993), Pausewang (2005), and Admasu (2010) are a step forward in clarifying the question of who is Amhara.

Chernetsov's work entitled "On the Origin of Amhara" is remarkable, especially in shedding light on the then debate on "who is Amhara; do the Amhara exist as a distinct ethnic group?" He described Amhara as a culture of assimilation in the imperial court. He summarized that the word 'Amhara' originated as the name of a fairly small region in what are today the northern highlands of Ethiopia, and "Amharic" was the language spoken in that region. Since this proved to be the area from which the medieval Ethiopian empire emerged, and from which many of its rulers originated, the term came over time to assume a wider significance, and the people who spoke its language came, in turn, to be known as "Amharas". The major contribution of Chernetsov to Amhara scholarship is the multi-ethnic nature of Amhara, who embrace Amharic culture, the culture of the imperial court. The other one is that he gave a clue to the presence of two kinds of Amhara identity later developed by Pausewng, who came up with his concept of the two-faced Amhara identity, urban and rural. The former is a "predominantly urban elite group that maintains a distinctive supra-ethnic and Pan Ethiopian outlook". The latter is "a rural Amhara population living in large parts of northern Ethiopia... adopted a rural Amhara culture, self-consciousness, and ethnicity". He argued the attempt of politicians to frame both the "an all Amhara" baggage and the cause of political conflicts, especially in the case of the 2005 election (Pausewang, 2009). In his PhD thesis entitled "Invention of Amhara Nationalism", Admasu has undertaken a wonderful inquiry into the making of Amhara nationalism within a broader context of ethnicity and national identity in Ethiopia. He problematized the widely held view that equates Amhara ethnicity and nationalism with the Amharic language. He maintained that, this view conflates language and ethnicity, which emphasizes the objective elements of ethnic identity over boundaries that are contingent and structural by social formation. As a result, he described Amhara as a status group that speaks Amharic, not a conscious ethnic identity. He traced the political discourse of Amhara nationality to the radical student movement that might have led to the emergence of Amhara nationalism and its imposition from above, through the establishment of an Amhara national state.

The preceding studies were conducted in the context of the Amhara peoples' affiliation with pan-Ethiopian nationalism. Currently, people have gone through different contexts. A heated political mobilization along the Amhara ethnic line has prevailed. This triggered further curiosity, which needs systematic understanding of this newly emerged Amhara ethnicity. To date, there has been no study that focuses on the emerging Amhara nationalism and its political and institutional

implications. In addition, many commentaries have been written on the protests and instability of the country over the past five years, but little has been said about the trajectory and rising potency of Amhara nationalism and its implications for the political system of the country. This study helps to bridge that gap by providing a cursory look at the trajectories of Amhara identity formation and its implications for the larger picture of nation-building. Accordingly, the study examines two interrelated issues: the first is examining the trajectories of ethnic identity concepts among the Amhara people, from rejection to embracing of Amhara ethnicity. The second issue is assessing the development of Amhara nationalism in relation to the federal order. Hence, the main purpose of this study is to explore the dynamics of Amhara nationalism in Ethiopia and its political and institutional implications.

As a result, the highlighted questions are (1) what are the developments of Amhara ethnic identity self conceptions under the post-1991 political discourses, and practices? (2) How will the rise of Amhara nationalism affect the functioning of the political system work in progress?

In order to answer the first question, we need to address a number of other issues as well.

- Who are the Amharas and what makes an Amhara? How are ideas of common origin imagined and the Amhara ethnic boundary constructed?
- How has the Amhara ethnic identity been linked with the process of state formation? Simply put, what is the relationship between Amhara ethnicity and Ethiopian national identity?
- What are the courses in the development of Amhara nationalism?
- What are the terms of debate on the existence of Amhara ethnicity with a focus on the development of Amhara nationalism?
- What are the causes and major claims of Amhara nationalism?

The second main question, “How has Amhara nationalism been affecting the federal order?” will be addressed through answering the following questions:

- What are the implications of Amhara nationalism for the political and institutional dynamics at both the federal and regional level?

- In what ways is Amhara nationalism implicated in constitutional and institutional aspects, especially regarding matters of constitutional revision and institutional design?

This study is informed by the constructivist approach to ethnicity, especially formulated by Fredrick Barth. According to Barth (1998), ethnicity is fluid and ethnic boundaries are not stable, which undergo changes from time to time based on sociohistorical contexts. Under the Ethiopian political discourse, the fluidity and variability of Amhara ethnic identity are coming to the fore. Barth's concept of ethnic identity is fluid and relational and is central to understanding Amhara identity conceptions. He emphasizes the subjective aspect of ethnicity, that ethnic groups must be treated as units of ascription in which social boundaries are used to determine the group rather than the cultural content enclosed (Barth, 1998). Barth's relational and processual approach to ethnicity is still acknowledged by scholars in ethnic studies. In this regard, Eriksen (2010) writes, "The ethnic group is defined through its relationship to others, highlighted through the boundary, and the boundary itself is a social product which may have variable importance and which may change through time" (p. 45).

Since 1991, the Amhara people, who identify with Ethiopian national identity, have been subjected to ethnic target practice. Currently, an emerging Amhara nationalism appears with visible indicators in institutional and extra-institutional aspects. It is the reaction of othering that causes perceived and real alienation from the political, social, and economic aspects of the country. According to Amhara nationalists, this results from the discursive narrative of the 1960s and 1970s radicals under the banner of the national oppression thesis and its subsequent institutionalization by the EPRDF. The underlying argument of this thesis is that, since 1991, as ethnicity has become the predominant mode of articulating political conflicts within Ethiopia, Amharas have increasingly come to feel that they can better protect their interests by identifying themselves as a single ethnicity in a reactive sense than by subscribing to the pan-Ethiopian national identity, with important implications for the current political discontent and future of Ethiopia.

The divergent nature of the arguments and opinions regarding the Amhara identity indicates the in-group conception of Amhara identity appears to be varying greatly. This is partly the result of the Amhara not being politically mobilized along ethnic lines, with the exception of the short-lived AAPO. The agenda of the party in a sense of reactive Amhara ethnicity, compounded with

the attempt of EPDM to raise Amhara ethnic consciousness, was not successful. However, in such efforts, EPDM-ANDM, under the political context that everything is interpreted in ethnic terms, has lent its legacies to the current development of Amhara nationalism.

The out-group conception of Amhara identity clearly presumes the presence of a cohesive Amharic-speaking group because the movement of other ethnic groups has centered on the discourse of “Amhara domination” rooted in the student movement of the 1960s and 70s. This was in reaction to the territorial expansions of Menelik and the birth of modern Ethiopia in the late 19th century. By that time, the ethno-nationalist movements remarkably transformed the politics of identity by defining the difference between the “Greater Ethiopia” tradition and its ‘subordinate peoples’ (Clapham, 2002, p. 25). For those who did not associate themselves with the state, and who were often subjected to conquest and oppression, Amharic figured as the language of the Ethiopian imperial state and served as the marker of their oppression. The current political system and nation-building project were instituted more or less based on the interests of these groups. Hence, the argument goes that a centralized state structure was replaced by non-representative devolved structures. Indeed, the change in political discourse and institutional design since 1991 is the cause of the development of Amhara nationalism currently demanding rectification.

This study will be significant in a number of ways. It has both theoretical and empirical contributions. Ethnicity and cultural particularities are mostly discussed in connection with “minority” groups in the peripheries. Their application as general principles of classification may be rejected by “dominant” groups who do not perceive themselves as based on ethnicity. In this case, the study brought the case of “Amhara”, with its varying identity conceptions, which are relevant in today’s ethno-linguistic political structure and discourses of Ethiopia, to the fore. Theoretically, it contributes to the discussion about how a group formerly affiliated with supra-ethnic nationalism is shifting to ethnic sentiment. In this case the situationality, variability of ethnicity, and more importantly, the weight of context in the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of identity discourses and practices even in the life span of individuals. Hence the study tried to show additional dimensions to view the issues of ethnicity and nationalism in Ethiopia in a more flexible way than rigidly as of primordialism or only driven by actors’ greed i.e., instrumentalism. Amhara nationalism, which emerged in reaction to the political system

since 1991, contributes to seeing the federal arrangement in additional dimension and future constitutional amendments and new institutional designs to include at least one of the left outs, the Amhara.

This study is limited to the issue of ethnic phenomena through a case study of Amhara nationalism. It examines two interrelated issues: the trajectories of Amhara political mobilization from rejection to accepting Amhara ethnicity and the emerging Amhara nationalism in relation to the federal order. It is focused on the prevailing manifestations of Amhara nationalism rather than going deep into the perceptions and experiences of people regarding their national feelings. Geographically, it is mostly restricted to the regional state of Amhara but will follow the issues that transcend the state's boundary, such as key informants related to Amhara nationalism and the federal arrangement. Accordingly, a kind of grand tour was made to the four places in Amhara region (Gondar, Gojjam, Shewa, and Wollo) and settled at Gondar and Bahir Dar for detailed investigation. One site, the Benishangul-Gumuz region, was also selected to include the Amhara who have been living in other regions.

1.1. Research Design and Methodology

1.1.1. Epistemological Claim

The subjective nature of inquiry into the dynamics of ethnicity (nationalism) and its implications for a particular political system requires applying responsive epistemological assumptions. The researcher bases the inquiry on the assumption of an interpretivist knowledge claim that gives emphasis on how social reality is shaped by human experiences and social contexts through reconciling the subjective interpretations of its various participants (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 103). The nature of this research problem is not concerned with searching for specific answers, rather it aspires to examine the trajectories of Amhara identity conceptions and how the post-1991 political discourse with its federal arrangement and the Amhara identity conception influenced each other. In this case, interpretivist epistemology is convenient to the study since it is concerned with understanding or “making sense of” a dynamic social process as it unfolds over time (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 103).

1.1.2. Research Design

A qualitative approach was used in this study. As the selected research paradigm leads to the appropriate research approach, interpretivism has to do with qualitative research focusing on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live (Creswell, 2007; Bhattacharjee, 2012; Schwandt, 2007).

A case study strategy has been selected in this study. The case study design is appropriate for research problems that have previously received little attention as well as those that lack good theories to explain the phenomenon (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 41). Accordingly, among various research designs or strategies, a case study is deemed appropriate for answering the research questions of this study. According to Stake (2003), “case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied. By whatever methods, we choose to study the case.” (p. 134). Bhattacharjee also defined it as “a method of intensively studying a phenomenon over time within its natural setting in one or a few sites” (Bhattacharjee, 2012, p. 93). It is desirable when the researcher seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the case (a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals) (Creswell, 2007).

There are three categories of case study: intrinsic case study, instrumental case study, and collective case study (Stake, 2003 pp. 136-67; Creswell, 2007 p. 74). An intrinsic case study is deemed appropriate for this inquiry. In intrinsic case studies, the study is not undertaken primarily because the case represents other cases but because, “in all its particularity and ordinariness,” the case itself is of interest (Stake, 2003, p. 136). This study used an intrinsic case study because it focused on examining one case that helped to better understand the phenomenon based on the uniqueness or typicality of the case.

1.2. Research Methods

1.2.1. Data Type and Source

Qualitative case study research requires providing detailed descriptions of the case using multiple sources of evidence, which requires different sources of data. Hence, in this study, the necessary data has been collected from social media discourses on Amhara ethnicity, political party leaders, notably APP and NaMA, and pan-Ethiopian parties (EZEMA), leaders (members) of newly established associations like Amhara Youth Association (AYA), Amhara Student

Association (ASA), and professional associations like Amhara Scholars' Council (ASC). A variety of source documents, including archives of EPDM/ANDM found in the library of Amhara peoples' memoir center and documentation office of ANDM. The study also use the political and intituional as well as relational and security factors which are relevant to explaining the intensification of ethnic impulses within the Amhara people. Hence, meta data and discourses from social media, interviews, and public discourses such as written texts, oral texts (speech), and mixed texts (internet chat) were among the sources of data.

1.2.2. Methods of Data Collection

To address the research objectives, various methods are used based on circumstances, though the topic of the study is one and the same. Hence, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and tools of data gathering is conducted through interviews, observation, focus group discussion (FGD), and document analysis. The data was gathered largely from October 2019 to November 2020. However, data were gathered both before and after the specified time frame, primarily through observation, casual conversation, and interviews, as well as a review of media technologies.

In-depth Interview

In-depth interviews are one of the most important and widely used data collection instruments in qualitative research (Legard et al., 2003 p. 138; Darlington et al., 2002 p. 48). It is a more personalized form of data collection method than questionnaires, and the most typical form of it is "a personal or face-to-face interview, where the interviewer works directly with the respondent to ask questions and record their responses" (Bhattacharjee, 2012 p. 78). In this study, interviews were used as the main data collection method. From the three types of interviews (unstructured, semi-structured, and structured), semi-structured is used, which is often described as a form of conversation and used to catch the power of language to illuminate meaning (Legard et al., 2003 p. 138). The method enables us to understand the meaning people make of their own experiences and report how they see a particular phenomenon, i.e., Amhara identity conceptions in relation to the ethnicized political discourse and institutional context.

Face-to-face administration of a semi-structured interview has been conducted. Individual and group interviews with potential for further investigation of additional information from the respondents were conducted. Informal conversations, they are also used to supplement data

generated through interviews. By so doing, it was able to communicate with the concerned and more willing informants in order to make and obtain relevant data from potential respondents. The choice of the interviewees was largely dictated by their degree of relevance to the case study selected and the research questions. More over, the interviews were organized in a way that allowed the researcher to elicit discourses pertaining to the trajectories of Amhara identity conceptions, imagined ideas of common origin, and causes of Amhara nationalism. In this regard, one founding member of EPDM, three senior members and officials of APP since it was EPDM, a chief secretary of APP, and a member of the research office of APP, five leaders of NaMA, the speaker of Amhara National Regional State Council, chairs of four standing committees, two leaders of ASA, two members of WAIQC, and three leaders of AYA branches, conducted more than three group interviews in which fifteen academic experts were enclosed. Speakers of two sub-city councils of Bahir Dar, and a legal expert of the Bahir Dar city council, as well as a deputy manager of the Amhara People Memoir Center, were also interviewed to generate data about the local institutional impact of Amhara nationalism.

Moreover, two group interviews with three participants each were conducted with four ADP officials in Assosa, the capital of Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State. In addition, two officials of the Benishangul-Gumuz region from indigeneous groups were consulted. Five interviews with residents of Metekel were done, as well as three group interviews with more than three displaced people in each group. People also interviewed were displaced Amhara from Wolkayit (Tigray) and Wollega (Oromia), who had settled in Gondar and Bahir Dar, respectively. Two academic elites and one partisan from the Agaw ethnic group were also interviewed, along with people from the Oromo ethnic group, to gain a better understanding of how other elite groups regard Amhara and Amhara nationalism.

Observation

Interviews were supplemented by systematic observation and participation. Observation is a method of generating data about human experience, being an eyewitness account of every day social action (Schwandt, 2007 p. 211). It is a very effective way of collecting data about what people do in particular contexts (Darlington et al., 2002). Participant observation has been conducted where the researcher joins in the activity as a participant (Stake, 2010 p. 94).

Hence, being participatory with various political, cultural, and sports events, qualitative data which is related to Amhara ethnicity is collected. This included attending conferences, political meetings and celebrations on public holidays, cultural night clubs and related events. Among the events I attended, the 12th ANDM congress, public meetings prepared by EZEMA, NaMA, and the Wolkayit committee, huge public demonstrations held at Bahir Dar, the first international conference of ASC, were remarkable in capturing the feeling of the emotional landscape on Amhara sentiments of those who participated in the events, and how the issues of Amhara sense of victimization are framed.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

FGD is a method which “brings a group of people together to discuss a particular topic or range of issues” (Schwandt, 2007 p. 119). Usually, the method is used as a data-generating tool in combination with other methods. Accordingly, it supplements the data generated through in-depth interviews since it generates data through interaction between group participants rather than through the researcher (Finch, H. and Lewis, J. 2003, p. 171). It is an essential data gathering tool for studies to understand the ideas and thoughts of different groups of people regarding Amhara nationalism. Accordingly, focus groups were conducted with people who have certain characteristics (ethnic Amhara) in common but different opinions, understandings, and experiences pertaining to Amhara ethnicity and the current political dynamics at country level in general and Amhara people with its regional state in particular. More importantly, it was used to capture the emic perception of Amhara identity and its relationship with Ethiopian nationalism. By so doing, a total of 4 focus groups, based on their viewpoint as well as affiliation of nationalism (Pan-Ethiopian nationalism and Amhara nationalism), were conducted. To achieve this, purposeful homogeneous and snowball sampling techniques are used. Each group contains 6–8 individual informants, and a focus group guide is used, comprised of open-ended questions and major topics to be covered during discussions.

Document Review and Netnography

Document analysis, in its broadest sense, refers to the analysis and interpretation of various data generated by the examination of documents and records relevant to a specific study (Schwandt, 2007, p. 119). It also addresses a variety of issues concerning obtaining access to records and documents and examining their authenticity. By using this method, historical documents were

analyzed in order to examine the relationship between Amhara ethnic identity and Ethiopian national identity as the former has been linked with the state building process. The Archives of EPDM/ANDM since its establishment, passing through makeovers, found in the library of Amhara People Memoire Center and the documentation center of ANDM, are examined. It also enables us to trace the trajectories of the development of the Amhara ethnicity since 1991 and assess its institutionalization. The tool also enables users to generate data about the post-1991 discourse from documents and records of media accounts, including print, broadcasting, and social media.

Recently, on-line resources are increasingly emerging as valuable research tools. Social media websites allow researchers to get data from informants hardly reached by traditional research approaches (Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 2013). The new digital media technologies, especially social media platforms, appear to be effective means of communication and interaction. They enable all internet users to get access to opinions, share contents, and debate each other (Gündüz, 2017). It is also a platform where users express and share facts and opinions about an issue, and where communication and interaction are intensely experienced. Awareness-creation campaigns about the Amhara identity and the need for organizing along the Amhara ethnic line were championed by social media even before the outbreak of Amhara protests. These sites have been the hub of Amhara identity construction and political mobilization since the past five years. Hence, in this study, the sites where the issue of Amhara ethnicity is discussed analyzed to generate the required relevant information. Data is also collected through this tool from sources such as books written by Amhara activists, journals, constitutions and proclamations of both federal and state levels, letters, minutes, and both published and unpublished relevant papers.

1.3. Methods of Data Analysis

There are no universally agreed upon rules and procedures for conducting qualitative data analysis (Ritchie, J. et al., 2003, p. 200). This is because “qualitative data analysis is a dynamic process and no method can stand in isolation from the world of research practice” (Darlington et al. 2002, p. 157). Hence, researchers have relative freedom to follow their own ways of analysis based on basic epistemological assumptions about the nature of qualitative enquiry and the status of researchers' accounts (Ritchie, J. et al., 2003, p. 200). In addition to this, choosing a data analysis method depends on the purpose and focus of the analysis. As mentioned above, case

study research demands an extensive and in-depth description of the phenomenon to better understand the case under study. To achieve this purpose, thematic analysis is used in order to get a rich and detailed description of the data set.

Data analysis does not always begin after the data collection task has been accomplished. Rather, there is no particular moment to begin data analysis. According to Creswell, qualitative data analysis is conducted concurrently with gathering data, along with data interpretation and writing the research report (Creswell, 2009, p. 181). The preliminary data analysis was begun simultaneously with the task of data collection. This enables us to shape the on-going data collection around emerging issues and to reframe the interview and FGD guides.

Apparently, data analysis is a rigorous process of raw data, which includes transcribing, translating, coding, categorizing (identifying themes), and reporting. Selective transcription is used to avoid irrelevant information and obtain the required relevant data that contributes to the purpose of the study. Transcribing techniques are very important for analyzing audio-recorded data (Darlington et al., 2002, p. 143). Hence, the relevant audio data transcribed from the data collected during the in-depth interview and FGD were translated into English and prepared for the final analysis. Then, thematic categories with codes of the data are identified in such a way that asks what each data is about and why it is important. Coding has been done through words and phrases related to the research questions. In doing so, themes were developed from related coded and grouped data segments. This activity was accompanied by the triangulation of a thematic analysis on data from the literature before report writing.

1.4.Trustworthiness

Interpretivist research aims to interpret social reality based on the subjective constructs of research participants within a specified context. Hence, ensuring trustworthiness is a crucial responsibility of the researcher. In this regard, Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide four alternative criteria (credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability) for rigorous data interpretation.

The credibility of research can be ensured through supporting the findings based on the data collected. This can be achieved through extended engagement in the field, triangulation, meticulous data management, and an independent audit of data collection and analysis. Despite

all the techniques already mentioned being not underscored, this study has used a demonstration of data triangulation across subjects and data collection techniques to address credibility. Confirmability is about to what extent the findings of the research are independently confirmed by others, especially the participants. Based on the specificity of the data provided and the nature of the contexts, this study communicates the inferences to research participants. Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other settings. Usually, this is determined by the reader. Despite the intrinsic nature of the study, the researcher has to provide a detailed description of the research context which helps the reader to decide whether the findings are transferable or not.

1.5.Ethical Considerations

It is apparent that researchers are guided by serious research ethical rules. From this, confirmability and neutrality are crucial. The researcher will strive to avoid bias in the tasks of data analysis, interpretation, and drawing conclusions based only on the collected data rather than personal decisions and prejudice. Regarding confidentiality, confidential communications are protected and the researcher will be responsible for protecting the privacy of the individuals that give their willingness to participate in the study either through interview or FGD. Moreover, individuals' intellectual property is seriously protected through proper acknowledgment of works as well as restraint from using unpublished sources without permission.

1.6.Structure of the Dissertation

Including this first introductory chapter, the dissertation is divided into eight chapters. This chapter and Chapter Two provide introductory information about the nature of the research problem, the relevance of the study, and its contribution to the body of knowledge, as well as the theoretical framework that the study was guided by. Chapter three provides a general overview of conflicting Ethiopian historiographies and political interpretations of competing ethno-nationalisms in order to help us understand how the debates on ethnicity and national identity in Ethiopia have been framed and how Amhara nationalism was born out of such discourses. Chapter four discusses the Amhara identity conception based on secondary sources. The first part of the chapter discusses the specificity of Amhara identity, focusing on the issue of who the Amhara are and their origin, and revealing that "Amhara" has different meanings and origins for different groups. The name signifies province, language, religion, class, supra-ethnic identity, or

ethnic group. The second part provides a discussion on the link between Amhara identity and the process of state formation in Ethiopia. Except for embracing the Amharic language and culture, which has been the culture of the imperial court since earliest times, it emphasized the multi-ethnic nature of the pre-revolution ruling elite. It also shows that Amhara ethnic identity has been attached to the Ethiopian national identity because of its significant involvement in modern Ethiopian state-building. This helps to understand the reason for actors and political parties shifting their subscription from Amhara to Ethiopian identity and the other way around in the last three decades. Part three provides a detailed analysis of the national question, as the radical students viewed the state of Ethiopia as an ethnic patchwork and framed the imperial ruling class as an "Amhara oppressive class" that later slipped into "Amhara oppressor-other oppressed nationalities". The discussion helps to understand how the discursive narrative that portrays Amhara as an oppressive ethnic group that should be securitized in the post-1991 political path has evolved. It also argues that the students who showed less interest in understanding either Ethiopian history or ethnography grasped unparalleled ideologies, Marxist-Leninist, from the literature and tried to apply them in a very different context in Ethiopia.

The fifth chapter traces the trajectories in the development of Amhara nationalism from 1991 to date. The practice of "Amhara democratic nationalism", with its Bolshevik ingredients, aimed to "discipline" Amhara, accompanied by the attitude of other ethnic groups that consider all Amhara as oppressors, gave way to reactive Amhara ethnicity. However, it also argues that an official nationalism, in Anderson's perspective, which has been implemented by the regional government since 1991, contributes to the generational aspect of Amhara consciousness. The role of Amhara-named institutions, the educational system, and the political context that preached the primacy of ethnic identity over national identity is critical to raising a significant number of Amharans. This could be the answer for many people wondering how Amhara nationalism has developed within such a short period of time. The chapter also shows the indicators of the development of Amhara nationalism not only in the political identity but also in the cultural one.

Chapter six discusses becoming Amhara, which describes how Amharaness is redefined from the actors' perspective at these current times. The first part of the chapter examined the different discourses behind the debate on whether Amhara exists as a distinct ethnic group or not. The

proponents of “Amhara does not exist” espouse Pan-Ethiopian nationalism, and they reject the attribution of the Amharic language and its speakers to an ethnic category. Ethiopian national identity, on the other hand, is promoted as a supra-ethnic identity into which ethnic groups must integrate. While the latter argue in favor of Amhara ethnicity not only in the primordial sense of the term but also in the sense of reactive ethnicity as a result of othering, which created deep-seated insecurity, making them vulnerable to attacks by other ethnic groups. The second part revealed the view of people towards Amhara identity. It also shows ideas of common origin that have been imagined by the Amhara nationalists. Amhara nationalists have traced the origin of the Amhara people to antiquity, which debunked the argument pursued as Amhara cannot claim common descent. However, *Amharaness* makes more analytical sense if conceived as a reactive ethnicity within relational terms.

The seventh chapter discusses the causes and major claims of Amhara nationalism. It analyzes the political and constitutional determinants of the development of Amhara nationalism. It also analyzes the discursive narratives, ideological underpinnings of othering, and institutional flaws in the development of Amhara nationalism. The chapter also revealed the lack of commonly shared goals among the Amhara nationalists, including their contradictory aspirations. On the one hand, they criticize the ethnic-based political system and argue it should be scrapped. At the same time, they pursue identity and territorial claims as well as constitutional amendments that are effective only under the existing ethnic-based political system. Chapter nine provides the political and institutional implications of Amhara nationalism, both within the Amhara region and outside. One of the implications is the politics of (re)naming, in which institutions of the regional state engage in redefining things that they perceive as an imposition of EPRDF and its ideological ingredients. The reaction of intra-regional ethnic minorities such as Agaws, Kimant, and Oromo fears the “pursuit of the nation-state”, as it erodes their current status in the regional state. Amhara nationalism has impacted the situation of Amhara living in other regional states and both horizontal and vertical intergovernmental relations that call for the introduction of additional mechanisms to supplement the inherent problem of existing multi-national federalism.

The distinction between an ethnic group and a nation lies in their relationship to statehood. Ethnicity becomes a national movement when it appears to be a political identity to seek an independent national state or self-government or a constituent unit status in a federation (Kruger,

1993; Eriksen, 2010). When an ethnic group mobilized to achieve the aforementioned goal, the movement became a nationalist movement, and at this juncture, the two terms, ethnicity and nationalism, have the same meaning. Likewise, there are two paths of nationalism: civic and ethnic. Despite the fact that there is civic nationalism expressed in a supra-ethnic ideology that stresses shared civil rights rather than shared cultural roots, the majority of nationalisms are ethnic in character (Eriksen, 2010). The above analysis allows using both concepts (ethnicity and nationalism). Hence, in this study, the terms “Amhara ethnicity” and “Amhara nationalism” have been used interchangeably.

Chapter Two

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1. The Concept of Ethnicity

The term “Ethnicity” is a recent subject first used in the academic discourse in the second half of the 20th century. However, its synonym “ethnic” can be traced back to the Greco-Roman times. Etymologically it is derived from the Greek word *ethnos* or *ethnicos* to mean ‘heathen’ or “pagan” (Eriksen, 1996 p. 30). By the mid-19th century, the term began to signify “racial” characteristics. Currently, in Social Anthropology, the term ethnicity refers to “aspects of relationships between groups which consider themselves and are regarded by others as being culturally distinctive” (Eriksen, 1996 p 30). Despite this, there is no agreed definition of ethnicity in the field of identity study. For Schermerhorn, as adapted and mentioned by Hutchinson and Smith, the term *ethnie* or ethnic group is “a named human population with the myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more elements of a common culture, a link with homeland and a sense of solidarity among at least some of its members” (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996 p. 6). Among others, myth (rather than fact) of common ancestry is crucial in defining ethnic groups. It implies a perceived common descent in which the ideas of common origin have been imagined in defining *ethnie* with “a golden past” (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996 p. 6). Ancestry or myth of common origin has crucial relevance for ethnicity. Max Weber, the first sociologist who gave attention to studying ethnicity, defines ethnic groups as “human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent- because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization or migration- in such a way that this belief is important for the continuation of the non-kinship communal relationships” (Weber, 1996 p 36). In defining ethnicity, Weber emphasizes the idea of common origin at the level of belief and noted as it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists (Ibid.).

The subjective and objective nature of ethnicity is also important to conceptualize ethnicity. The former signifies the state of mind and sentiment that people have a sense of belonging to a group and the latter is about visible attributes on the affiliation is constructed on. Hence one can conceptualize ethnicity through in a balanced way as ethnicity is “the outcome of subjective perceptions based on some objective characteristics such as physical attributes, presumes

ancestry, culture or national origin” (Yang, 2000 p. 40). In this regard, there are core elements of ethnicity in the academic discourse. Cultural markers of group attributes are crucial. Such cultural markers of differences create an ethnic boundary. The boundary marker features according to Nash, ought to be visible, reacted to social situations, and clearly implicate the membership status of an individual in the group (Nash, 1996 pp. 24-25). Among others, there are three ethnic boundary markers which widely used in the study of ethnicity: *kinship*, *commensality*, and *common cult* (Nash, 1996 pp. 24-25). Kinship is the presumed genealogical descent that identifies who belongs to the group and who is not. Commensality signifies the practice of togetherness and intimate relationship which enlarge kinship networks. And common cult implies “a value system beyond time and empirical circumstances, sacred symbols and attachments coming from *illo temper*” (Nash, 1996 p. 25).

This trinity of boundary markers (blood, substance, and cult), separate ethnic grouping from other social communities. They are index features that sometimes its basic symbols of ethnicity far from visible. At this juncture, surface features overshadowed the index ones and become a secondary “basic recursive metaphor of ethnicity”. Such “surface pointers include dress, language, and (culturally denoted) physical features” (Nash, 1996 p. 25). Besides, there are other (tertiary) supplementary signs of distinctiveness that can be found like house architecture and interior arrangements, ritual calendars, specific taboos in joint social participation, special medical practices, and so on (Nash, 1996 pp. 25-26). Nash emphasized that the secondary surface language dress and other tertiary elements of group distinctiveness must justify the basic core elements of ethnic group formation to be a building block of ethnicity.²

2.1.1. Theories of Ethnicity

Usually, the concept of ethnicity has been explained by the three contending (complementary) theoretical approaches. These theories enable us to understand the nature of ethnicity and why it emerges and endures. Primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructionism are the three existing approaches in this regard.

² For instance, some usage of language (dialectics) serves as an implicit reminder of differences among the same language users. Effective mastery of language is also associated with mother-tongue learning from birth. This has directly linked with kinship or an ethnic core of the linguistic group. Hence as a secondary ethnic boundary marker, language acquires a supper social and psychological weight (Nash, 1996 p. 26).

Ethnicity from the primordialists view perceived as an ascribed identity; assigned status; something inherited from one's ancestors. It is perceived as a very deeply rooted primal bond to one's ancestral bloodline (Yang, 2000, p. 42). As Greetz noted, every person's affiliation to a group is highly determined by the very primordial tie itself rather than personal choice, practical necessity, or social interaction (Greetz, 1996 p. 42). According to primordialists, identity is given and a priory element to all experiences as well as social interactions. They emphasize the importance of cultural "givens" like race, religion, language, and custom that such sentiments are overpowering and coercive. Here an ethnic group is determined by common ancestry which people belong to an ethnic group as a result of members of that group all sharing common and biological origins. It emphasizes the static nature of ethnicity and the role of primordial factors such as lineage and cultural ties in determining ethnicity. This primordial perspective has suffered from criticisms especially its characterization of ethnicity as natural and static. Ethnic mobilizations in various manners have shown that identity is fluid and ethnic boundary is subject to change as a result of external realities. Some also support their arguments as there are mobilizations through the resurgence of pre-existing cultural markers but were relatively "dormant" to be the center of "primordial attachment" and there are newly created groups that previously existed and the other way around (Eller and Coughlan, 1996 p.47).

According to instrumentalists, ethnicity is a political occurrence than the cultural one. It is a manifestation of elite competition for political power, and social or economic advantages through manipulating the cultural life of the communal group (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996 p. 8; Kruger, 1993 p 12). This view of ethnicity has been strengthened by the rational choice approach adopted by Michael Hechter and Michael Banton. They maintained that the role of actors in ethnic mobilization was to satisfy their desire for material gains. Hence, elite strategy is prominent in which individual 'rational choice' is masked by group aspirations (Banton, 1983; Hetcher, 1986 and 94). The other version of instrumentalists for ethnicity is as interest groups rather than an association based on ancestral bloodline. This perspective argues that people became ethnic and remain ethnic as far as their ethnicity provides returns to them and is a sentiment used as a means of political mobilization for advancing group interests (Yang, 2000, p. 46).

However, the instrumentalist view of ethnicity is criticized for paradoxical limitation as ethnicity has a feature of permanence and historical continuity rather than temporary means to material gain that tone down afterward. Smith asserted the nature and durability of ethnic forms. He emphasizes the mythic and symbolic nature of ethnicity has potentially durable since such features are carried through the passage of time with a very slow change (Smith, 1988 p. 16). Instrumentalists are also criticized for defining interests largely in material terms and failing to acknowledge the passion of participants evoked by ethnic ties and the readiness for sacrifice in the name of an ethnic category. The third criticism goes to the argument that a person does not always choose his (her) identity affiliation. Rather identity is largely determined by an identity constructed by the society (Yang, 2000 p. 50).

The third theory that seeks to reconcile the above two contending views is the constructionist perspective which says ethnicity is socially constructed in a response to structural changes in the society (Yang, 2000, p. 44). Unlike primordialism, constructivism does not take ethnicity for granted; it is rather viewed as something constructed. It emphasizes the role of historical and structural forces that create and sustain ethnicity. It argues that ethnicity is not static and biological rather it is an association and volatile and ethnic boundaries are not stable and undergo changes from time to time based on socio-historical contexts.

Constructivism imagines ethnicity and nationalism are a social constructs and ethnic affiliation or identification is determined by society (Yang, 2000 p 50). Unlike primordialism and instrumentalism which associate ethnicity with cultural ‘givens’ and a means to socio-economic gains respectively, constructivism considered it as a product of human thought and action and subject to change. As dissected below, nationalism is distinct from ethnicity by its relation to statehood, and primordialism and instrumentalism have been used to explain ethnicity and nationalism has been associated with the advent of modernization. Constructivists have come up with a conceptual tool to be applied for both ethnicity and nationalism without discarding them as ‘essentialists’ (Yeros, 1999 p. 11). As a result, constructivism as a conceptual tool has the potential to transcend the above distinction and explain both ethnicity and nationalism.

2.1.2. Ethnic Group and Nation/Ethnicity and nationalism

Despite the terms ethnic group and ethnicity have seen used interchangeably, there is a distinction between the two that ethnic group signifies a social group based on ancestry, culture,

or national origin, whereas ethnicity is about affiliation or identification with an ethnic group or in other words it is to mean the mobilization process in the conversion of an ethnic identity into an ethnic group (Yang, 2000, p. 40).

Usually, the relationship between the terms nation and ethnic group is also complex. Despite this, scholars have tried to put some distinctions by looking from various perspectives. Similar to ethnicity, nationalism emphasizes the cultural similarities of followers and uses it for drawing boundaries with one another. The point that distinguishes nationalism from ethnicity is its relationship to the state (Eriksen, 1996, p. 30). The exclusive nature of the ethnic groups and relative inclusiveness of nation could be presented as another point of distinction. Since the ethnic group uses the myth of common descent as the basis of association, it excludes those who have shared common culture but lack lineage. While the nation is more inclusive as it uses shared cultural and political goals as a basis and creates solidarity among a very large number of people (Eriksen, 1992, p.220).

Another area of distinction is the issue of consciousness. David Miller argues nation is a conscious creation of bodies of people who have an elaborated sense of their social and political surroundings (Miller, 1995, p. 6). Ethnic groups can be both self-defined and others-defined. Hence a nation is a self-conscious and self-defined group while an ethnic group is a group defined by others and until the members get aware of the particularities of the group it remained an ethnic group (Assefa, 2010, p. 74). For example, the German romantics defined them based on common cultural traits while the German Jews were defined by the Germans (Wolff, 2006, p. 35). This type of nationalism is primarily ethnic-based since they define the nation in ethnic terms and exclude others who are not a member of the same ethnic group by means of harsh measures (Wolff, 2006, p. 32). Hence, a nation is an ethnic group that aims to establish or build a state along with its cultural markers (Eriksen, 1992, p. 220).

Nationalism could also be seen as an eventual extension of ethnicity. The former could be the result of the advancement of the latter. Kruger mentioned Miroslav Horch's model and maintained the transition from ethnicity to nationalism is justified by a series of events. Hoch offered three phases in the transition empirically happened at least in the European context (Kruger, 1993 p. 15). The first is the "national awakening" which primarily occurs when a group of intellectuals are concerned with and studying the descent, history, culture, and language of a

presumed oppressed ethnic group. Whether or not this act of intellectuals arouses ethnic consciousness, it lay the foundation of ethnicity and nationalism. The social basis of ethnicity/nationalism/ has broadened in the second period. Varied interests of political, social, economic, and cultural interests join the elites and intellectuals. Communication intensified across members of ethnic groups which eventually enhanced a sense of national unity. A national movement has come to appear as a nation that is valued in itself at this stage. Pursuing such a movement, a political national identity comes to be to find an independent national state or self-government or a constituent unit status in a federation (Kruger, 1993 p. 15).

The above narrations on various perspectives on ethnicity do not indicate the concepts of ethnicity and nationalism is distinct. Rather they have close ties in which one can hardly draw a clear-cut border between them. One argument in this regard is that both are born out of a lineage core group (Kruger, 1993 p. 14). A scholar like Smith (1988) argues nations have ethnic origins. From this perspective, while an ethnic group precedes a nation, analytically ethnicity merges with nationalism to produce ‘ethno-nationalism’ (Conner, 1994). Hence that each has nearly the same end goal, political, which is establishing a separate statehood of its own (Markakis, 1999 p. 72). When an ethnic group mobilized to achieve the aforementioned goal, the movement is called nationalist movement and at this juncture, the two terms, ethnicity and nationalism will have the same meaning. Accordingly, in this study, both terms have the same meaning and are used interchangeably. Given the Amhara, mobilization develops in the last five years has a political agenda the above analysis allows using both concepts (ethnicity and nationalism) interchangeably. However, it has no secessionist objective (both for independent statehood and regional statehood). Hence, the concept (term) “Amhara ethnicity” is used in this study.

The main theories about the origins of nations and nationalism are the enduring debate between primordial/perennial/ethno-nationalist and modernist school of thought. The first is promoted prominently by Smith and Connor and the second by Gellner and his variant proponents. Primordialism /ethno-nationalists consider ethnicity (nationalism) that humanity is naturally divided into nations and that the nation is an organic community and nationalism is its expression. They agree on nationalism is a modern phenomenon but modern nations and nationalism are grounded in pre-existing ethnic ties and that the nationalist, political mobilization is based on this legacy. On the other hand, modernism argued instead that nationalism was a

recent phenomenon rooted in the ideals of the Enlightenment, especially the French and American revolutions. It sees nations as created by nationalism, itself a product of the changes brought about by modernity: transformations manifested through industrialization, urbanism, and communication.

2.1.3. The Two Paths of Nationalism: Civic and Ethnic

In the study of nationalism, there are overlapping classifications which all are dichotomous in nature. The most common distinctions are between voluntaristic and organic, political and cultural, subjective and objective, liberal and illiberal, western and eastern, and civic and ethnic nationalism (Brubarek, 2004 p. 133). Among such overlapping distinctions, civic and ethnic forms took a sound area of conceptions in the academic discourse of nationalism. And the distinction between civic and ethnic citizenship (nationalism) continues to be one of the most influential theoretical frameworks for the study of nationalism, national identity, and citizenship politics (Reeskens and Hooghe. 2010 p. 579).

Previously, the assumption of the two dichotomous forms of nationalism was stipulating civic nationalism to “the West” in contrast to ethnic nationalism of Eastern Europe and other parts of the world (Brubaker, 2004 p. 133). Accordingly, there was a projection of uncritical link of contrasts between civic and ethnic nationalism as “universalism and particularism, inclusion and exclusion, civility and violence, reason and passion, modern tolerance and ancient hatreds, transnational integration and nationalist disintegration, civic nationhood and ethnic nationalism” (Brubaker, 2004 p. 133). However, nationalist resistance and subsequent violence in Northern Ireland, the Basque Country, and Belgium as well as the increment of constituencies for xenophobic parties in various countries questioned the “civic” quality of so-called Western civic nationalism.

The difference between civic and ethnic nationalism lies in the assumption that lies behind the terms civic and ethnic. Civic nationalism is the concept based on the assumption that a nation is a result of the voluntary association of individuals and they give themselves the state which made the state have a subjective existence based on the will of individuals. Contrary to this, ethnic nationalism is about a nation that is a product of shared language, culture, tradition, more importantly, the same ancestry. It views as a nation preceding the state and appears to be an objective fact of social life. In empirical reality, the French concept of citizenship is descriptive

and has room to choose whether somebody is a citizen as far as they adopts a French culture that fits with civic citizenship. While the German concept of citizenship is close and ascriptive that one cannot choose to descend from the German ancestry and it manifests the ethnic citizenship (Reeskens & Hooghe, 2010, p. 580).

Another distinction between the two is manifested through using national culture to achieve political values, as well as democratic and economic transformation. Accordingly, national culture is a means to achieve the goal of the state. On the other hand, ethnic nationalism is intended to sustain one's own identity for generation through shaping the state according to the culture of the nation and it is an ideology that puts the nation first before all other forms of social or political organization (Wolff, 2006, pp. 31-32). Hence, state embraces culture to protect the existence of the nation, and unlike civic nationalism, building a state is a means of sustaining the nation.

The end result of ethnic nationalism is each nation has to live in its own sovereign state and consequently, it promotes a nation-state model which is the majority's culture, tradition, religion, and language define the nation. The Chichin, Kurdish and Palestinian nationalism apparently seek independent statehood. On contrary, the nationalisms of Hutu, German, Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, and Albanian Muslims manifested in genocidal tendencies (Wolff, 2006, p. 32). Despite their disastrous consequences all these movements aimed at building ethnically 'pure' states for their cultural group. Civic nationalism is not different from ethnic nationalism if we see it from the consequentialist perspective. The state has to choose whose culture should explain the state that eventually the dominant group's identity is imposed upon the minorities. Unlike the case regarding religion, it is impossible to secularize the state from culture. The rhetoric that the primacy of individual assent entrenched in civic nationalism begs the question that whose culture would be the state culture that eventually enclosed within an ethnic category. Hence, there is a default agenda of ethnic nationalism within the so-called civic nationalism. The nationalist resistance mentioned above in the west and the subsequent measures taken by the states to accommodate them is an important manifestation.

2.2. Ethnicity and Nationalism: Constructionist Perspectives

The above discussion of key concepts regarding ethnicity and nationalism should be seen in the context of broader theories of the same. The researcher is not going to discuss these in detail

here, and there is no need for direct application or testing of any of these theories. This is because the study looks primarily at a kind of unfolding development of ethnicity (nationalism) within an existing state. However, it might be useful if the researcher briefly made a clear position on some of the main approaches and also specified which theories provided the most useful insights for this study. Accordingly, an inquiry that anticipates understanding an emerging kind of ethnicity (nationalism) needs a frame of understanding which is flexible enough to be appropriate, at least relatively, for the contemporary nature of ethnicity and nationalism.

It has been challenging for scholars in the field of ethnicity to bring a conceptual model which reconciles not only primordial and instrumental approaches to ethnicity but also ethnicity and nationalism themselves. However, this is not mean nothing has been done. There have been some attempts to synthesize the two approaches of ethnicity at least theoretically. These are, among others, Barth's 'Transactionalist', Horowitz's 'social psychological', and Armstrong and Smith's 'ethno-symbolism' (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996 p. 9). The idea of constructivism had emerged since this time. According to Yeros, social constructivism does not only transcend the borders of primordial and instrumentalist approaches but also bridges ethnicity and nationalism (Yeros, 1999 p. 11). The constructivist approach stresses the importance of social construction in ethnic formation and maintenance. It maintains that historical and structural forces that create and sustain ethnicity which also acknowledge the volatility of ethnicity.

Among the varieties of constructivist approaches, this study is informed by Barth's formulation of social constructivism (Barth, 1998). It is the earliest concept of constructivism that challenges the idea of taking ethnicity for granted (Yeros 1999 p. 3). He brought the concept of the fluidity of ethnicity. Barth emphasizes the subjective aspect of ethnicity that ethnic groups must be treated as units of ascription in which social boundaries are used to determine the group rather than the cultural content enclosed. This is the main feature of Barth's approach shifting from the cultural elements of an ethnic group to the social one. Language has been mentioned as the basic core element of ethnic group formation which justifies the subjective element of ethnicity (Nash, 1996). The 'cultural stuff' enclosed within the ethnic boundary which the actors utilize to identify themselves and which gives moral significance to their day-to-day life is the most important component of ethnic identity (Barth, 1998 p. 15). Despite this constructivist theories simultaneously recognize the driving force of objective material interest in ethnic mobilization

(Yeros 1999 p. 9). In this regard, Yang (2000) recommends conceptualizing ethnicity in a balanced way as it is ‘the out-come of subjective perceptions based on some objective characteristics’. Amharic language is an important cultural marker exclusively shared by a significant number of people with no additional vernacular. As ethnic identity often requires a designation by relevant others, these Amharic speakers are identified as Amhara by other ethnic groups of Ethiopia.

Apparently Barth’s speculation is anthropological. This study does not sufficiently engaged in an ethnographic context. Rather the study is focused on the role of elites in the identification process of ethnicity. Barth emphasizes the subjective aspect of ethnicity that ethnic groups must be treated as units of ascription and identification by actors themselves in which social boundaries are used to determine the group rather not the cultural content enclosed (Barth, 1998). According to this perspective, the role of elites in ethnic group formation and mobilization is paramount, and mobilization is run to a great extent by ethnic entrepreneurs rather than popular will. In this regard, Barth’s formulation acquired an instrumentalist variety of constructivism (Dereje, 2011 p. 12).

This study recognizes such motives of material interests and the role of elites in framing the ethnic identity conception of the Amhara people. Barth’s other constructivist view is ethnicity is a social ascription of oneself and others. In this regard, one’s ethnic identity is compounded with the view one has of oneself as well as the views held by others about one’s ethnic identity. Hence, ethnicity “is the result of a dialectical process involving internal and external opinions and processes, as well as the individual’s self-identification and outsiders’ ethnic designations- i.e., what you think your ethnicity is, versus what they think your ethnicity is” (Nagel, 1994:154). In the discourse of ethnicity and nationalism in Ethiopia, designation by relevant others is more salient when the issue of Amhara identity is a case in point. Ethno-nationalists imagined the presence of a cohesive Amharic-speaking group, called Amhara, who had the political and cultural upper hand in the country’s history.

External forces also play a crucial role in shaping ethnic boundary-making (Nagel, 1994:155-156). Official ethnic categories and meanings are generally political, and formal ethnic labels and policies are even more powerful sources of identity formation (Ibid.). Accordingly, the state’s role is crucial in shaping identity conceptions either through legal frameworks and

specific policies or by controlling and manipulating information to establish a particular ethnic (national) worldview. The “Amhara” blame narrative compounded with the image of Ethiopia as an “ethnic make-up” where the ethnic Amhara are said to be dominant was articulated by ESM and institutionalized by EPRDF in 1991.

Barth’s relational and processual approach to ethnicity is still acknowledged by scholars in ethnic studies. In this regard, Eriksen (2010) writes “The ethnic group is defined through its relationship to others, highlighted through the boundary, and the boundary itself is a social product which may have variable importance and which may change through time” (p. 45). The theoretical position of Barth’s concept of ethnic identity is fluid and relational and is central to my study of understanding Amhara nationalism. Some scholars attempt to show, though contested, the Amhara identity as conflated with the Ethiopian national identity based on objective cultural markers. Despite this, the Amhara identity consciousness had grown since the 1960s Ethiopian Student Movement and their radicalized political thought specifically the “national question”. The ethnic sentiment gets more and more visible in relation to the mobilization of other ethnic groups. The establishment of the federal arrangement based on ethnic identity creates a legal person of Amhara identity and territory which shaped the consciousness of the current young generation who show more ethno-nationalist tendencies than the older ones.

The variability of ethnicity is determined by the actors’ perceptions and understandings of cultural symbols and signs in social situations (Barth, 1998; Nagata, 1974). According to the situational approach to ethnicity, variability is the fundamental nature of ethnicity in diverse situational contexts (Okamura, 1981, p. 463). The situationality and variability of ethnicity deemed suited to examine how Amhara nationalism has been constructed under various political contexts in which the actors going through various makeovers.

Like the Barthian tradition, the concept of ‘imagining’ has been widely used and considered as a turning point for constructivist inquiry into ethnicity and nationalism (Yeros, 1999 p. 3). Anderson’s concept of ‘imagined communities’ is also constructivist (Ibid. p. 11). The concept of ‘imagined community’ is the one that transcends the boundaries of both ethnicity and nationalism. In fact, Anderson’s work is directed at the emergence of nationhood at the historical juncture of capitalism and print media. However, his argument that every community is

“imagined” except a difference in the “style of imagining” permeates his theory could be applied to the concept of ethnicity as well (Yeros 1999, p. 2; Eriksen, 1999, pp. 46-64).

Anderson’s conception of a nation as an imagined political community is also relevant to this study. Within the process of Amhara ethnic mobilization, there are speculations of imagining who Amhara is and what makes an Amhara the by the actors. Despite this how the mainstream society on the ground express itself is not certainly known. In this study, Anderson’s model helps to figure out how Amhara ethnicity is imagined by other ethno-national elites and its own members. Moreover his concept of “official nationalism” is deemed important to explain EPDM’S attempt to mobilize the “Amhara” people along the principle of ‘Amhara democratic nationalism’.

In addition, the social constructionist perspective, more particularly Barth’s and Anderson’s conceptual model discussed above better explains the nature of ethnicity and nationalism in Ethiopia. It is the product of social, economic, and political changes. As ethnicity and nationalism are not something fixed, Amhara ethnicity has emerged so fast and is more widely embraced by the mass of the people especially, youths, than ever before. An ethnic group is not primordial rather it is the result of historical and political contexts. Accordingly, the role of the state is crucial in shaping identity conceptions either through legal frameworks and specific policies or by controlling and manipulating information to inculcate a particular ethnic (national) hegemony. This has something important to Ethiopia in which the Amhara has been characterized, at least implicitly, as a beneficiary of the former “Amhara dominated regimes”.

2.3. From Centralized State to Fragile Federations: the Limits of Nation-state and Multi-nation Federalism

The evolution of the nation-state is highly associated with the development of the modern state system. In the birth of the modern state system, the Peace of Westphalia of 1648 was instrumental. Before this event, the European medieval organization of political authority was based on a vaguely hierarchical religious order. The main aim of the Peace of Westphalia was to end the extended and devastating war fought in Europe inspired by religion and to redraw the map of Europe for the balance of power (Vaughan, 2011, p. 5). Pursuing secularized international politics, promoting sovereignty, and accepting a conception of international society based on the legal equality of states, the Westphalia treaty marks the birth of the nation-state,

itself the primary subject of modern international law (Vaughan, 2011, p. 6). After a century and a half following the promulgation of popular sovereignty the ideals of the nation-state have come to be known as a tool of state organization and consolidation (Nimni, 2011, p. 1; Assefa, 2017, p. 42). Except for some countries like Iceland, Portugal, Korea, and Japan which frequently mentioned as homogeneous, other states' national homogeneity has constructed through various nation-building policies (Kymlicka, 2007, p. 62).

There is a prevalent tradition around the world that uses the terms “nation” and “state” interchangeably (Clark, 2011, p.15). It has been observed that the concept of state and the manner in which it is commonly treated as synonymous with the vastly different concept of the nation is prominent among academics and authorities (Connor, 1972, p. 333). Names such as “League of Nations” and “United Nations” and other naming combined with the terms “international” and “nation(s)” are one manifestation of the confusion in terminology which begs the question rather than proves it (Ibid.). However, there is a distinction between the two terms: state means an apparatus of governance and a nation is about cultural community (Clark, 2011, p.15). Connor rightly pointed out the difference that is inherent in the two concepts combined with their lexicon. He writes:

state is ‘a legal concept describing a social group that occupies a defined territory and is organized under common political institution and an effective government’ by contrast nation is defined as ‘a social group which shares a common ideology, common institutions, and custom and a sense of homogeneity’ it carefully adds ‘a nation may comprise part of the state, coterminous with a state, or extend beyond the borders of a single state’ ” (Connor, 1972, p. 333).

Accordingly, the two concepts are not congruent in that either multiple nations may exist in one state or a nation may transcend many states' territorial boundaries. Understanding of a nation as a state emanates from, as noted above, the historical creation of early modern Western Europe. Accordingly, the assumption is that a nation-state and its territorial boundaries of the state should match the perceived cultural boundaries of the nation. In other words, it is about equating the nation with the state or the border of the nation to approximate those of the state (Connor, 1972, p. 334; Assefa, 2017, p. 43).

Hence, the ideals of the “nation-state” are developed from the fusion of two separate concepts, state, and nation that signify a culturally homogeneous society sustaining the state with legitimacy and loyalty (Markakis, et. al., 2021 p. 13). This fusion took place in Western Europe, especially with the attitude of French revolutionists who view France as a state that constituted a homogeneous cultural nation and is indivisible (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996 p. 11). Here, minorities have a right to practice their customs and religion but have to assimilate into the French body politic.

As indicated above on the civic-ethnic dichotomies of nationalism both are similar in their end goals: producing a culturally homogeneous state. Despite the presence of a few homogeneous states, equating the borders of political authority with national identity in the name of nation-state consequently remained more aspiration than reality (John McGarry, 2006, p. 23). In the nation-state model the possession of a dominant national group, which used the state to privilege its identity language, history, culture, literature, myth, religion, and so on, and defined the state as expressions of its nationhood (Kymlicka, 2007, p.61).

Accordingly, a nation-state is achieved through promoting and consolidating a common national identity like language, history, mythology, heroes, literature, military, media, and in some cases religion (Kymlicka, 2007 p. 63). In implementing such policies building one clear majority ‘nation’ that equates with the state out of the various minorities having a distinct identity. In the modern nation-state, the demand of minority cultural groups for autonomy was (is) inherently conflictual with the assumption that citizens have to integrate into the state which is already defined by the cultures of the dominant group (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996 p. 11). As policies of assimilation and exclusion in the name of constructing homogenous nation-states encroached against minorities, they began to be resilient and politically mobilized for the protection of their distinctive cultural values and a bundle of minority movements has been intensified in Europe (John McGarry, 2006, p. 5).

Under the guise of the nation-state and its inherent contradiction with intra-state cultural groups, a wider concern has emerged for the issues of ethnic and national identities. Western societies shifted from nation-state to multiculturalism. Unlike the west, which acquires the “civic” ideal of nationalism, in non-western societies ethnicity has relatively more influence on the creation of states (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996 p. 13). During decolonization and the post-colonial period,

the primary emphasis of African countries was securing the territorial integrity of the state with the western model of the nation-state. The first generations of African leaders were engaged in the process of nation-building aiming to realize the ideal of “one-nation” in multi-lingual, multi-religious, multi-cultural, and multi-ethnic contexts (Olukoshi and Laakso, 1996 p. 13). In Africa ethnicity has taken as a factor in the creation of nations and distribution of resources. Colonial boundaries continued to be the boundaries of newly independent states and nation-building was based on colonial language which is neutral to all ethnic groups (Kymlicka, 2006 p. 48). However, this is not without exception. Unlike other African countries, the nation-building process in Ethiopia and Sudan was far from using neutral images for the state symbols and values (Kymlicka, 2006 p. 48). In Ethiopia, colonial language was not used for nation-building rather it was through diffusing Amharic language and culture throughout the territory (Markakis, 2011, p. 125).

The Ethiopian state formation has its own unique features as it took a combination of pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial patterns of state formation (Clapham, 2002 p. 10). The pattern of pre-colonial state formation follows expanding from the core into the hinterlands and the extent of possession of territories is determined by the strength and ambition of the ruler (Clapham, 2002 p. 10). The conversion of Axum into Christianity (4th c. A.D.) enabled those successive regimes to draw their main historical mythologies (Bahru, 2010c, p. 365). Markakis (1999) describes this as: “Ethiopia's rulers invested more in weaving a colorful nationalist mythology complete with the familiar fable of a three-thousand-year-old state, which gained worldwide currency” (Markakis 1999, p. 70).

Given it is the only state (except for Liberia) that escaped colonialism, Ethiopia is relatively excluded from the mainstream comparative study of decolonization in that African states’ nationalism has manifested (Zohrik, 2014 p. 152). While the region was under the siege of the tripartite European colonial powers, Ethiopia was the only party that took part in the territorial demarcation (Bahru, 2010, p. 366). As a result, there is an assertion that despite the fact that Ethiopia is not the creation of Europeans, that enables to claim “exceptionalism” in analyzing it, the state as everyone knows it today, is not older than other African states and exclusively escapes from colonial legacy (Markakis, 1999, p. 70).

There were sets of attitudes or ideologies owned by the long-established and politically dominant state system (with the ingredients of Orthodox Christianity, historical mythologies, and written language, notably Amharic), which claimed its members (those who associate themselves with the state) are destined to govern the surrounding territories and peoples (Clapham, 2002 p. 10). The state was not exclusively owned by a particular group and all individuals who originated from various identity groups could join the royal court. This was possible only if those individuals associate themselves with the state through the adoption of orthodox Christianity, Amharic language, and Geez (Amharic) names (Chernetsov, 1993; Clapham, 2002 p. 11). However, because of the nature of the state itself, the cultures and communities of these individuals had no chance of recognition and equal treatment (Ibid.).

Liberals and socialists were certain for a long time about their expectation that ethnic, racial, and national identifications would wither away as the unification of the world is realized through international trade and mass communication (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996 p. v). As Connor (1999) put it, ethno-national forces have been a political reality of most states in the world irrespective of geographic location, level of economic development, democratic culture, religion, and ideology (Connor, 1999 pp. 163-164). The ethno-national mobilization is a universal phenomenon that which ethnic groups struggle with the state claiming autonomy, representation, or fair socio-economic share (Kymlicka, 2006, p. 32). Despite the presence of a few homogeneous states, equating the borders of political authority with national identity in the name of nation-state consequently remained more aspiration than reality (McGarry, & Keating 2006).

In post-colonial Africa, the processes of nation-state building faced challenges that came from ethno-nationalist assertiveness and mobilizations. Davidson (1993) explained the causes of the crisis of post-colonial African states were directly related to the European nation-state model trans-plant to Africa with less sensitivity towards its socio-political structures and other realities (Davidson, 1993). The notion of nation-state building was not convenient to the reality of African diverse states. The Ethiopian reality is not an exception since various linguistic, religious, and cultural groups became part of the state after the late 19th century. Markakis maintained the policy that Ethiopia and Sudan choose to promote national integration was the assimilation of diverse groups that cause the rise of ethno-national movements against the nation-building project (Makakis, 2021 p. 25). Using attitudes or ideologies owned by the long-established and

politically dominant state system the Ethiopian state promoted its own version of Ethiopian nationalism and embarked on nation-building process (Makakis, 1999 p. 70). The desire for unity and territorial integrity through centralization of power at the expense of various distinct groups eventually led to the reaction of ethno-cultural groups to mobilize politically to avert the situation (Assefa and Zemelak, 2018 p. 14).

By the end of the 1960s, the idea of Ethiopia as a nation was challenged by the radical student movement with Leninist-Stalinist underpinnings. It was presented as a multi-national state that was narrowly defined by Amhara-Tigre hegemony (Bahru, 2014). It was first raised in Walleign's article (1969) entitled "On the Question of Nationalities in Ethiopia" which consequently influences the political discourse of the country until this time. The main argument Walleign makes was Ethiopia is not a nation. Rather it is a nation of nations that he characterized as a collection of nationalities. He also asserted the presence of national oppression from the view of the imposition of cultural and political hegemony over other nationalities. Using Fanon's word, Ethiopian nationalism has been criticized as fake nationalism but an Amhara mask. He writes this controversial argument: "What is this fake Nationalism? Is it not simply Amhara and to a certain extent Amhara-Tigre supremacy?" (Walleign, 1969). The ethnicity of other ethno-national movements is centered on this speculation of 'Amhara domination' rooted in the varying interpretation of the process of the modern Ethiopian state. The "national question" raised by the ESM is associated with their interpretation of the Ethiopian state crisis only in the Leninist-Stalinist glance.

The ESM was successful in being the gravedigger of the imperial regime. There was controversy within the student body politic on the national question. The disagreement has manifested in the political organizations that evolved out of the ESM. While the Ethiopian EPRP and MEISON took the class struggle under the Pan-Ethiopian umbrella, the TPLF and the OLF, and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) choose the national liberation struggle as their priority mission (Merara, 2006). After the class-based parties were wiped out by the military group, Dergue, the ethno-nationalist movements had got a momentum that dominated the political climate of the country and took power by overthrowing the military regime. The new nation-building experiment that began in 1991 was thus antithetical to the past (Haile Selassie and Dergue) regimes. The government began to encourage ethnic mobilization and ethnic-based self-

government based on the Soviet Russian federal model that also could be described as multi-national federalism.

2.3.1. The Limits of Multi-nation Federalism and the Ongoing Debates on Institutional Designs

In states where there is more than one group who think they are nations, Stefan (2011) calls it “robustly politically multi-national” and require an alternative nation-building model to the nation-state (Stefan, et.al., 2011 p. xii). These states have deep cultural diversity with territorially mobilized claims of self-determination in the form of self-rule or complete independence. Canada, Spain, Belgium, and India are states which are “robustly multi-national” due to ethno-national assertiveness of Quebec, Basque Country and Catalonia, Flanders, Kashmir, and separatists in the northeast and southern parts respectively (Stefan et.al., 2011 p. 2). Territorially based ethnic mobilizations persist to confront nation-building projects not only in the global north but also in the global south such as Nigeria, Ethiopia, South Africa, Sudan, Kenya, and South Sudan. These countries could be portrayed as deeply divided societies. This expression stands for a context in which everything is interpreted in ethnic terms; people organized based on their ethnicity rather than alternative forms of political mobilization such as ideology, class, and gender, and the relationship between groups is less cooperative affected by mistrust (Horowitz, 2002; Choudhry & Hume, 2011).

In the post-cold war period where the claims of ethno-nationalism were challenged in all parts of the world, states adopted different mechanisms as a response given for such claims that vary from one to another (Kymlicka, 2006:33). Most states embrace federal arrangements for the sake of maintaining territorial integrity and managing intrastate conflicts through the accommodation of diversity. This was the major factor for the adoption of post-cold war federal arrangements (McGarry and O’Lerry, 2009; Choudhry & Hume, 2011). Some African states adopted federalism and devolution in their post-conflict situations, among them South Africa (1995), Ethiopia (1995), Sudan (2005), Kenya (2010), South Sudan (2011), and Somalia (2012).

The hallmark of post-conflict federations is the core of its design is the drawings of internal borders to ensure territorial autonomy for those ethnic minorities that constitute a majority in a region (Kossler, 2018). The division of powers between different levels of government is designed to ensure that no national group is left out and has sufficient powers to protect itself

from economic and political disadvantages. However, this is not always the case when it comes to practice. In some federations like Ethiopia, the design has been working as a fragile experiment (Kymlicka 2006). Steytler and de Visser (2015) also designated the African federations as ‘fragile federations’ to signify the federal arrangement is designed to solve the fragility of the state while the design by itself is fragile.

There has been considerable debate as to whether pluri-national federalism mitigates conflicts by facilitating peaceful co-existence among ethnic groups or magnifies differences and encourages fragmentation that eventually leads to the expulsion of the state (McGarry and O’ Leary, 2009 p. 5). In the mean time, this design has faced several criticisms. Kossler, (2018) has analyzed three critical arguments against territorially based multi-national federations. The first evokes the risk of secession that the application of this alternative led to the disintegration of the state. While the proponents of multi-national federations assert that guarantying sufficient autonomy for ethnically mobilized cleavages would decrease their secessionist motives. The second critical argument against multi-national federal designs claims that making ethnicity as an organizing internal territorial structure would perpetuate these differences and result in polarized political discourse. Scholars reflect the menace of creating homogenous units that encourage intergroup competition at the expense of shared goals (Horowitz, 2002). In spite of its potential to reconcile the forces of centralization and fragmentation, those who oppose multi-national federation argue these two extreme forces continued to be manifest in the ordinary routine politics.

The third critical argument focuses on the paradox, inherent in multi-national federalism, which is while it explicitly recognizes diversity and guarantees territorial autonomy at national level, it fails to do the same at the sub-national level. This resulted sub-national “nation-states” within a multi-national federal design. Kossler (2018) described this weakness as “.... The more the law has reinforced the ethnic-territorial link which is the essence of the concept, [of multi-national federalism] the more than adequate legal recognition of the internal diversity within a sub-national entity has been compromised.” (Kossler, 2018 p. 26). The dominant groups who own territorial autonomy considered the region as their own land and relegate the minorities from the political life of the sub-national entity.

Karl Renner identified such pursuit of the nation-state by ethnically empowered territorial groups and the fate of internal minorities a century ago as “if you live in my territory, you are subject to

my domination, by law, and my language! It is the expression of domination, not of equal rights” (Renner, 2005 [1918], pp 27-28). A good example is a controversy involving Quebec’s language laws in Canada (Ford v. Quebec (Attorney General), 2 SCR 712, 1988). The case was between the Shopkeepers and Quebec province as the former challenged the constitutionality of the law of the latter which requires that all signs be in the French language and argues the community’s interest could not infringe on their individual rights.

Research findings also show that federations that secure the socio-economic and political conditions of a group are unthreatened by the actions or inactions of the central government, escape the risk of secession than those federal states whose regions are not autonomous and having exclusive democracy (Erk and Lawrence, 2009 p. 192; Choudhry & Hume, 2011 p. 370). The ideal type of mechanisms to deal with minority-majority problems, as noted down, would be a consociational mode of institutional setup without undermining the existing multi-nation federal system. Experts in the field such as Brendan O’Leryry and McGarry suggest the twin institutional arrangements for addressing the paradox of multi-national federalism and concerns of intra-unit minorities. These are power sharing (ensuring the proportional representation of intra-unit minorities in key regional state political institutions), and non-territorial autonomy (allowing intra-unit minorities to exercise their language and culture in publicly funded institutions).

2.3.2. Accommodation and Integration

There are various sets of institutional designs to regulate controversial ethno-nationalist agendas. Scholars of comparative politics and comparative constitutional law have studied the pathology of specific institutional/constitutional designs and their contribution to the stability of divided societies. Broadly speaking, there are two (contending) models prescribed by scholars countries follow to handle diversities in divided societies that complemented the ethnic territorial approach. Jhon McGarry, et al, broadly categorized the various specific institutional designs in to two: accommodation and integration. They described the two designs:

While integration responds to diversity through institutions that transcend, cross-cut, and minimize differences, accommodation ensures that each group has the public space necessary for it to express its self-defined identity, to protect itself against tyranny by

other groups, and to make its own decisions in domains of critical importance (McGarry, et, al., 2008 p. 80).

There is also enduring scholarly debate over which one is more effective. The two dominant scholars involved in this debate, are Lijphart and Horowitz respectively. The debates on how best ethnic diversities will be managed and stable political systems are entrenched. The ideal of the integration scheme aims to diffuse identity-based politics by creating fructurized smaller units. It is characterized by a centralized presidential federal system with a majoritarian electoral system. In his argument, Horowitz emphasized that rather than worry about how to design a system that accommodated multi-segmented societies, it is better to think of mechanisms that bring the multi-polar pattern of diversity with several ethnic groups into a bi-polar. To Horowitz, “if the units are homogeneous, they may foster intra-group competition, at the expense of an exclusive focus on inter-group competition” (Horowitz, 2002 p. 24). He argues that fractionalizing units with homogenous ethnic groups into small, many, and heterogeneous ones increases political socialization and promotes non-ethnic political organizations which ultimately mitigated ethnic-based conflicts. In this regard, he mentioned Nigeria’s experience in the proliferation of sub-national units from 3 to 36 (Horowitz, 2002 p. 24). Horowitz proposed the Alternative Vote (AV), electoral system taking the experience of Fiji rather than Lijphart’s Proportional Representation (PR) electoral system. He argues that the pre-election coalition across group lines is better for compromise than depending on the post-election statesmen bargain (Ibid.). Moreover, he maintained that a list system of PR accompanied by ethnic-based political parties does not foster compromise ethnic issues and it is a zero-sum electoral competition between ethnic groups is aggravated, as “elites in divided societies are likely to be more tolerant of other ethnic groups or less inclined to pursue advantage for their own group is extremely dubious” (Horowitz, 2002 p. 24). Horowitz also is in favor of a presidential system elected through a singled member constituency that upholds the will of majorities across ethnic groups. His preference depended on the conditions he proposed: a bi-polar political society with AV electoral system. He criticized the parliamentary system as it maintained and facilitated division along ethnic lines and produce unstable government when coalitions failed or votes of no confidence happened.

The ideal of Consociational democracy is a “principal standard of political representation, civil service appointment and the allocation of public funds” (Lijphart, 1977:25). Lijphart argues that in deeply divided societies the interests and demands of communal groups can be accommodated only by the establishment of power-sharing (Lijphart, 2004 p.100). In contrast to Horowitz's majoritarian electoral and presidential system, Lijphart argues that legislatures need to be inclusive and that all groups have a voice through their representatives. Granting proportionality and minority representation is the merit of PR electoral system. Apart from this as he noted, “it treats all groups ethnic, racial, religious or even non-communal groups in a completely equal and even-handed fashion” (Lijphart, 2004:100). He criticized Horowitz's AV proposal as an electoral system not better than a majoritarian election which does not broaden the representation of minorities and remained them loyal opposition which is outrageous in the 21st century. Granting proportionality and minority representation is the merit of the PR electoral system. Lijphart emphasized the presence of strong scholarly consensus in favor of parliamentary government; he proposed a parliamentary system for divided societies. Apart from its wide acceptance, he identified merits of the system that are convenient for divided societies such as it avoids the need for presidential elections which are necessarily majoritarian in nature; it has a cabinet that is “a collegial decision-making body-as opposed to the presidential one-person executive with a purely advisory cabinet-it offers the optimal setting for forming a broad power-sharing executive” (Lijphart, 2004 p. 201). The critics of presidential democracy as a zero-sum game with the winner taking all elections and being subjected to executive autocracy.

Since there is no one size fits all, the context of a particular country matters to pick up those contending models of constitutional design for divided societies. In such societies, like Ethiopia, the nature of cleavages and level of mobilization determine the type of institutional design to apply. Countries where ethno-national groups are politically mobilized, based on whether they are territorially concentrated or dispersed, power-sharing and accommodation within a federation or a combination of both. It has been asserted that multi-national federations especially none of those communal groups do not constitute majority like the case of Ethiopia “ if they are to survive, must develop consociational practices that protect the interests of all encompassed national and ethnic communities with the capacity to break way.” (McGarry and O'Leary, 2009 p. 15). Though there is no best tool, the most recommended form of accommodating territorially concentrated ethno-nationalist groups is a kind of consociational federalism (McGarry et.al.,

2008 p. 63). Successful federations that have politically mobilized cleavages, such as Belgium and Switzerland, often combine federalism with power-sharing.

In the meantime, ethno-nationals with a high level of political mobilization demand more autonomous self-government while less mobilized groups could be managed through an integration model and other softer options (Watts, 2008 p. 84). The Ethiopian context seems to fit with both conditions. There are territorial cleavages with distinct identities as well as political mobilization and at the same time, there are areas where groups are less divided and mobilized. Relatively homogeneous regions like Oromia, Somali, Tigray, and Afar could be grouped the first while urban areas and regional states with multiple diversities such as southern, southwestern, Gambella, and Benishangul-Gumuz could be fitted with the later type of cleavage. However, there are politically highly mobilized groups within each that might not accept softer mechanisms.

The ethno-nationalist group, the TPLF that prevailed in the armed struggle against the Dergue, established an ethno-nationalist coalition, EPRDF, and seized central power in 1991. EPRDF claims to be the main successor of the ESM, advocating the rights of nationalities to self-determination up to and including secession, adopted federalism in which ethnicity is an organizing principle of the polity. The primary reason for adopting federalism was the need to respond to the “national question” that various ethno-nationalist groups demand self-determination (Assefa and Zemelak, 2018 p.15). Ethnic-territorial autonomy for titular groups is the salient feature of the Ethiopian federalism. In response to the “national question” the Ethiopian federal design reinforces the “ethnic territorial-link” that compromises the rights of minorities. Critical arguments suggested that the federal system replicates the nation-state model and ethnic dominance at the sub-national level (Assefa, 2017). Yonatan also described the limits of the Ethiopian federal design: “the decision that each major ethnic group should be dominant in one and only subnational unit has also proved to be the original sin as it has elevated ethnic identity to a primary political identity” (Yonatan, 2017, pp. 232-233). The federal system also overlooks the need for additional mechanisms to redress such limitations. Assefa writes: “As in Ethiopia nesting identity remains vital to ensure social cohesion, unity, and common citizenship” (Assefa, 2022, p. 38). It has been also recommended the integrationist model without replacing

the existing accommodation mechanism in order to overcome the extreme ethno-national mobilization that could lead the federation to fail (Assefa, 2018).

After two decades of experimentation with ethnic politics, the ‘national question’ endures as many groups are still seeking recognition, self-government, and political participation. The number of ethno-nationalists pursuing armed struggle against EPRDF regime is not far less than the same case during the Dergue regime.³ Since 2015, the country began to face stress. Widespread public protest against the regime continues until Abiy Ahmed came to power. The two largest ethnic groups, Oromo and Amhara, were notable in the protest, as the name “Oromo protest” and “Amhara protest” have been coined for it. Paradoxically, the anti-regime public protest intensified only a few months after the EPRDF claimed a “100 percent win” in the 2015 election. The unprecedented and perhaps unique kind of opposition and popular protest came from the Amhara people. Unlike other protests seeking rectification of the unconstitutional kind of maladministration under the TPLF-dominated government, the Amhara protest goes against the grain: the discursive narratives under the baggage of the national oppression thesis upon which the constitution and its institutions were established.

2.4. Issues of Minorities, Minority Rights, and Instruments of Protection

In dealing with identity politics, the issue of minorities has relevance for Ethiopia where all groups are minorities at the federal level and various numerically inferior groups inhabited in each regional state which is established for the majority group to exercise its self-determination right. In this study, the word ethnic groups are used to express both territorially concentrated and dispersed but politically non-dominant groups in the regional states of the Ethiopian federation. Looking at minorities from the international comparative public law perspective is important to analyze the role of state mechanisms in relation to Amhara nationalism. Indeed this also crucial to see the situations of Amhara outside of the regional state and to understand how the regional state mechanisms shape their identity conceptions. The issue of intra-state minorities has been one of the mobilizing factors for Amhara nationalism in the past four years. Hence looking at the

³There were continued armed struggles in Afar, Amhara, Somali, Oromia, Gambella, and Benishangul-Gumuz throughout the past three decades.

rights of minorities has useful insights to assess the role of the state in shaping Amhara identity conceptions.

There is no unanimously agreed on the definition as to which groups constitute minorities. It is often stressed that the existence of a minority is a question of fact and that any definition must include both objective factors (such as the existence of shared ethnicity, language, or religion) and subjective factors (including that individuals must identify themselves as members of a minority) (UN, 2010). Adopted by consensus in 1992, the United Nations Minorities Declaration in its article 1 refers to minorities are identified based on national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity, and provides that States should protect their existence (UN, 2010). The term minority as used in the United Nations human rights system usually refers to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, pursuant to the United Nations Minorities Declaration. All States have one or more minority groups within their national territories, characterized by their own national, ethnic, linguistic or religious identity, which differs from that of the majority population. According to a definition offered by Francesco Capotorti, a minority is:

A group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State, in a non-dominant position, whose members—being nationals of the State—possess ethnic, religious, or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language(UN, 1979).

The above definition has been challenged by the proponents who claim numerical value is not the sole parameter to determine who is a minority. In most instances, a minority group will be a numerical minority, but in others, a numerical majority may also find itself in a minority-like or non-dominant position, such as Blacks under the apartheid regime in South Africa, and the Sunni under the Saddam regime in Iraq (UN, 2010; Wimmer, 2004). Minorities may be found in a territorially concentrated or dispersed existence. The adoption of an ethnic-based federal system aimed to guarantee the self-determination rights of minorities found in historically defined territories. The mismatch between territory and identity that inevitably happened in the establishment of ethnic-territorial units creates the problem of minorities within the privileged titular groups.

2.4.1. The Position of Intra-unit Minorities in the States

In Ethiopia, these intra-unit minorities are largely found dispersedly within such territories. Ethnic groups who are the majority at their “home” territorial unit are minorities in other counterpart units. In this case, Amhara was a significant part of the regional population, particularly in Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, Oromia, and Harari regional states (Van der Baken, 2010). When two or more distinct groups occupy the same territorial space violent conflict would be inevitable, as the claim of rights becomes a zero-sum game (Nimni, 2015, p. 64). One of the most pressing problems in the Ethiopian federal system is the persistence of titular groups in claiming those units as “their own” excluding others. The situation is worse when an intra-unit minority is presumed to have another home region out there. Assefa (2017) explained: “Tensions between the titular ethno-national groups that claim exclusive control over territory and political institutions at the constituent unit and intra-unit minorities’ call for accommodation has at times led to deadly conflicts” (p. 175). Several studies assess the protection of minorities in the Ethiopian federal system. Van der Baken (2010) and Yonatan (2012) are prominent in this regard. The studies addressed the cultural, language as well as political rights of titular groups. Assefa (2017) examined the status of intra-unit minorities and identified it as one of the pressing problems of the Ethiopian federal system. As discussed above, the problem of intra-unit minorities partly emanated from the very nature of multi-national federal design, and experts in the field suggest the use of consociational democracy particularly power-sharing and non-territorial autonomy to minimize the limits of territorial autonomy. Scholars mentioned above also have been recommending these solutions for decades ago. The problems of intra-unit minorities, particularly the Amhara, is not only political, economic, and social marginalization they experience at the hands of the nation-state controlled by the titular nation but also their very existence has been threatened. After a brief discussion of international instruments on the existence, recognition, and non-discrimination right of minorities, the concepts of power-sharing and non-territorial autonomy will be discussed.

So far the issue of minorities raised, the prerequisite lies in their existence and recognition of them. Any action for the protection of minorities should focus primarily on the protection of the physical existence of persons belonging to minorities, including protecting them from genocide and crimes against humanity. The 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide stipulated that ‘Any of these acts, such as killing members of the group,

causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group, deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part, or committing them with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group, would be punishable'. 2001 Durban Declaration affirms that "the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of minorities, where they exist, must be protected and that persons belonging to such minorities should be treated equally and enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms without discrimination of any kind" (para. 66). In addition to this, the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities promulgated as "States shall protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and shall encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity" (Article 1). It extends its protection by stating "States shall adopt appropriate legislative and other measures to achieve those ends" (Article 2). As has been experienced, the physical integrity of persons belonging to minority groups is endangered during conflicts. Hence, attention should be paid to ensuring that minorities, including those displaced internally within their own country or externally as refugees, have access to humanitarian aid and relief such as food, shelter, and health care.

Lack of respect for, lack of protection, and lack of fulfillment of the rights of minorities became a contributing factor to the cause of displacement and may—in the worst cases—even lead to the extinction of such communities in some countries (UN,2010). It is important to note that the protection of the existence and recognition of minorities also requires respect for and protection should get due attention on the part of the state and all their particularities should be respected and recognized.

Freedom from discrimination is crucial in protecting the rights of minorities in all regions of the world. Minorities everywhere experience direct and indirect, de jure and de facto discrimination in their daily lives. Non-discrimination and equality before the law are the two basic principles of international human rights law. This provision of nondiscrimination prohibits any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference which has the purpose or effect of ignoring the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise by all persons, on an equal footing, of all rights and freedoms (ICEARD, Art, 1.1). There is no requirement to demonstrate discriminatory intent. Legislation and/or

policies that may be textually neutral but are interpreted in a manner those results in discrimination need to be corrected and changed to real practice.

International human rights law prohibits both direct and indirect discrimination. Indirect discrimination is more subtle and, therefore, harder to recognize and eliminate. It occurs when a practice, rule, or requirement is neutral on its face but has a disproportionate impact on particular groups unless the practice, rule, or requirement is necessary and appropriate to achieve a legitimate objective. Focusing on the unequal impact of a measure on an individual as a member of a group helps to better identify the root causes of discrimination and inequality (UN, 2010).

2.4.2. Non-territorial Autonomy and Power Sharing

Being elements of consociationalism, power Sharing and non-territorial autonomy are convenient forms of institutional arrangements for minorities occupying non-territorial forms. Both are often portrayed as vital political remedies to mitigate the risks associated with the tyranny of the majority at the constituent unit level (Assefa, 2017). Since Karl Renner introduced it in the last days of the Hapsburg (Austro-Hungarian) Empire, the concept of non-territorial autonomy has been improved and advocated by several scholars and is often recommended for societies that are deeply divided by identity differences but the groups are found to be geographically intermixed.

The concept of non-territorial autonomy is a kind of minority protection mechanism that disengages territory and autonomy. It is a sufficient tool to enable the dispersed ethnic minorities within titular territorial unites to exercise their language and cultural rights (Van der Bakem, 2014 p. 23). Lijphart underscored “An example of non-territorial autonomy would be the power given to a semipublic association representing a particular cultural community to run its own schools throughout the entire area of the state” (Lijphart, 1979, p. 505). In this case, those sub-national ethnic minorities are endowed with the right to establish a non-territorial council composed exclusively of each respective ethnic minority group to deal with identity-related matters without replacing the territorial administration already established (Van der Bakem, 2014 p. 23).

Identity matters run by the non-territorial councils are those beyond the matters sought by territorial constituents like infrastructure, and land agriculture. Rather it would limit to

establishing and administering mother schools, cultural centers, and other identity-related issues and festivities. The establishment of non-territorial councils could be realized in two ways: 1) establishing a separate non-territorial council that is convenient to ethnic minorities that do not have their own local government. 2) Designing the existing territorial councils to exercise non-territorial competencies (Ibid.). To realize the second option, two conditions must be fulfilled: providing an exclusive decision-making power to the concerned ethnic group pertaining to non-territorial matters, and including representatives of the respective group outside of the sub-national or local administration when it comes to non-territorial matters (Ibid.). Conversely, a territorially autonomous ethnic group could exercise extra-territorial rights over only identity matters. The hallmark of non-territorial autonomy that merits is it addresses the problems of minorities without undermining the territorial rights of titular groups (Assefa, 2017).

In addition to (non) territorial autonomy, effective participation of minorities in public life is also an essential component of a peaceful and democratic society (The Lund Recommendations, 1999). This requires the participation of minorities in political decisions that affect their interests. Apart from its importance to facilitate the inclusion of minorities to maintain their own identity and characteristics, political participation also ensures a majority as well as minority groups thereby increasing the legitimacy of decisions and enhancing the unity of the state supporting political decisions (Van Der Beken, 2010).

In this regard, international conventions have incorporated the political participation rights of minorities. For instance, such rights are included in the 1992 United Nations Declaration of Rights of persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities. Article 2(2) of the same has stated as “persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life” article 2(3) also stipulated as “persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in decisions on the national and where appropriate, regional level concerning the minority to which they belong or the region which they live, in a manner not incompatible with national legislation”.

In addition to this, the council of the European Framework Convention for the protection of National Minorities emphasized the above provisions in providing effective political participation. Here, the need for state parties’ involvement has also been provided. Article 15 says that “the parties shall create the conditions necessary for effective participation of persons

belonging to national minorities in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs, in particular, those affecting them”.

Based upon the above provisions state parties have a duty to bound not only to respect the rights of political participation in the political arena but also to facilitate and support the exercise of those rights. Accordingly, states should provide specific mechanisms to increase the opportunities for minorities to effectively participate. Such mechanisms used considering specific circumstances may include representation, guaranteed minority seats, minority veto, and power-sharing. Political participation also has directly associated with the exercise of political power in government bodies. According to General Comment No. 25 of 1996, “the right to representation and participation relates to the exercise of political power, in particular, the exercise of legislative, executive and administrative powers that all aspects of public administration of policy at international, national, regional and local levels”. In addition to this, the council of the European Framework Convention for the protection of National Minorities emphasized the above provisions in providing effective political participation.

Power-sharing has been presented as an important tool to ensure effective political participation for intra-unit minorities. According to Lijphart, power-sharing denotes “the participation of all significant communal groups in political decision-making, especially at the executive level” in a proportional manner (Lijphart, 2004, p. 100). In deeply divided societies, the establishment of power-sharing or federalism can accommodate the interests and demands of groups and it also offers important political protection for minority segments (Lijphart, 2004, p. 100). It allows intra-unit minorities to have a voice in the decision-making as well as to have veto power on matters related to their own particularities (Nimni, 2011).

Chapter Three

3. An Overview of Historical and Political Context

3.1. Historical and Political Background

Historical evidence has revealed that the name Ethiopia has been used at least since Axumite times. Apart from using the term 'Ethiopia' as an appellation for the African landmass south of Egypt, the specific application of the term to the Ethiopian region began during the time of Ezana, the Axumite king, in the fourth century AD (Bahru, 2002 p. 1). The Axumite kingdom (1st-7th century AD) is used as a core establishment from which successive regimes claim common ancestry. Historians such as Marcus (2002) emphasized that, despite disintegration and fragmentation into its constituent parts over time, Ethiopia had never vanished as an idea and had always reappeared in fact (Marcus, 2002, p xiii.). The conversion of Axum into Christianity (4th century A.D.) enabled those successive regimes to draw their main ethos and ideology (Bahru, 2010c, p. 365). The Zagwe dynasty emerged in the eleventh century after the Axumite Empire weakened and diminished from the 7th century until the restoration of the Solomonic dynasty succeeded it.

Since medieval times, the name Abyssinians (*Habeshas*) was coined by explorers, mapmakers, and historians regardless of their ethnic origin. The people and rulers who were proud to call themselves Ethiopian were coined a name (Markakis, 2011 p. 3). The Abyssinian kinfolds comprise two branches of Semites: Amhara and Tigray, whose Christian kingdom ruled the north and north-central plateau for centuries (Markakis, 1999). In fact, the Agaws are the third members of the *Habesha* cultural identity, and political players who contribute the state system to continue by establishing the *Zagwe* dynasty after the decline of Axum until the rise of Christian highland kingdom in 1270. However, it was the Amhara who headed the territorial expansion that enlarged the territory of the kingdom that officially took the name Ethiopian Empire (Ibid.).

The empire-building process of the Christian highland kingdom was reversed and its domains were ravaged by the Muslim military genus led by Ahmed ibn Ibrahim, commonly known as Ahmed *Gragh* ('Ahmed the left-handed') (Bahru, 2002 p 9). The war between the Muslim sultanate and the Christian highland kingdom handed over both to another contending force, the Oromo. The Oromo successfully defeated both the Christian and Muslim states; penetrated and

controlled the vast areas of highlands (Marcus, 2002 p. vii; Bahru, 2002 p 9). The Oromo also began to involve in the politics of the imperial state already retreated northward. Since the early 17th century, they were effectively incorporated into the state system after their cavalry helped Susenyos (1606-1632) to seize the throne defeating his brother Ze-Dingil (Hassen, 1983). The consolidation of the imperial state around lake Tana and later at Gondar with relative stability and urban life was challenged by the growing power of regional lords at the expense of the monarchs that eventually led to the period called the ‘Era of the Prince’, commonly known in Amharic as *Zemene Mesafint*. The political assimilation of northern Oromo was the other historical event that significantly shaped the politics of this era. Amharaized Oromos, notably the *Woreseh*, emerged as power brokers throughout the *Zemene Mesafint* (Shiferaw, 1990).

The reemergence of imperial power from the accession of Tewodros II in 1855 marked the end of the era of princes and the beginning of the centralization process that the emperor sought for regional lords to be subordinate to him. Despite this attempt, he was unable to maintain a stable political system that his successors, Yohannes IV and Menelik II took lessons from (Clapham, 2013 p. 16). Emperor Menelik crystallized the current shape and size of the country by incorporating semi-autonomous units under his control (Teshale, 1996 p 31).

3.1.1. Contested State Image and Nationalisms

Considering the complex history and diverse socio-cultural systems, there are contending frames of understanding of Ethiopia. Carlo Conti Rossini’s expression that describes Ethiopia as a museum of ethno-linguistic diversity is one of the frames of understanding (Rossini, cited in Levine, 1974, p. 20). This model, however, might lead to an interpretation that portrays the state as a mere container that diverse objects are put together in a static manner. However, such diverse groups interacted with each other through long-distance trade routes, state systems, and sporadic conflicts. The other is a reductionist interpretation of the state that emerged in the 1960s, presenting the Ethiopian state as “a prison house” of ethnic groups. Proponents asserted the state was dominated by one ethnic group, the “Amhara”. The Amhara political identity (Amhara elite) was created (imagined) by then ethno-nationalists as a group that dominated and oppressed the country’s other ethnic groups (Levine 2012, p.36). The radical groups proposed that though Ethiopia is seen by some, especially black people, as a symbol of independence, domestically it is a prison where nationalities are pushed aside. In explaining the state crisis, they

think that the enemies of modernizing Ethiopia are these oppressive and oppressed systems. The solution provided by these groups was that oppressed nationalities had to be free from oppressive Ethiopia. Given an absolute right to self-determination, each has to decide for themselves either to be part of the state or to secede. This position is followed by both leftists who seek class struggle and ethno-nationalists. But there are slight differences between them when it comes to the details of the oppression. The former looks at the oppression from the perspective of class analysis between the landlords and the peasantry. The latter focuses on ethnic relations. Despite the leftists with class struggle agendas that do not explicitly mention who the owner is in the land tenure system, they point to the “Christian Amhara”, of which Tigreans are part. The ethnonationalists are clear in this regard. Despite the Tigreans, Gurage, and Oromo officials and soldiers being part of the expansion and later state-building tasks, they spoke Amharic and professed Orthodox Christianity, the key cultural label of being Amhara (Berhe and Geberesilassie, 2020, p. 98). Ironically enough, elites from any Ethiopian ethnic group excluded their group from the oppressive class and subscribed to the oppressed domain from the very beginning and labeled the Amhara ethnic group as oppressive (Haile, 2019). Some of these groups recognize only a century of Ethiopian history since the incorporation of the present-day south of Addis Ababa during the time of Menelik II. This model could represent the two interpretations of the history of the modern state formation of Ethiopia discussed later: ‘national oppression’ and ‘colonial’ perspectives.

The other mode of understanding is Levine’s model which is somewhat related to the “nation building” or “Greater Ethiopia” perspective. Levine (2011) seems to have tried to bridge the ancient and medieval state of Ethiopia to the modern one disregarding the dominant literature which associates the history of state formation in Africa with the advent of colonization. He argued that Ethiopia had already established its nationhood since antiquity. The conventional academic discourse, which claims nationalism is a modern phenomenon and rooted in the French revolution, that the revisionists have been challenged by arguing England and Netherlands have met nationhood before the modern era, 16th -17th century. Levine has maintained that so did historic Ethiopia before the 6th millennium B.C. fulfilling all criteria that a nation fulfills in the modernist academics. This idea has challenged not only the assumption that the rise of nation and nationalism is a result of, if not the midwife, modernization, but also the association of the same with Western Europe (Levine, 2011).

Hence, in Ethiopia, the past is contested terrain. In fact, many agree on the ancient nature of the people and the land. However, the Ethiopian state and its major historical events are contested. The questions at the center of debate in the Ethiopian historiography and political discourse related to the age of the state itself, the introduction of Islam, the Oromo expansion, the Italian invasion, Emperor Menelik II's expansion to southern territories, and the Ethiopian student movement, are the major ones.

The political elites are not in consensus on their interpretation of the historical process through which the country emerged and on the nature of the conflicts that prevailed in the country. The solutions they recommend also vary according to the characterization of the historical processes and conflicts. While the above-mentioned historical events are at stake of varying magnitude, the post-1960 political contestation is centered on the process of state formation in the late 19th century. The way the Ethiopian "empire-state" was created and evolved made it easy for the contending ethno-nationalist elites to interpret Ethiopian history in markedly different ways, depending on their own political goals and ambitions (Merara, 2006). Three main competing nationalist perspectives on Ethiopian history could be distinguished. Their differences lie in the way they interpret the historical events that gave birth to modern Ethiopia and in the solutions, they propose for the country's contemporary problems. Their characterization of the historical process ranges from "(re)unification" to "expansion" and "colonization" (Merara, 2006).

Some characterize the history as a colonial experience and recommend independence as a panacea for all problems. This idea was first propounded by the Eritrean liberation movement which started in 1950 (Sorenson, 1992 p. 232). Later on, some liberation movements from Oromo elites and Ethiopian Somalis advanced the same idea (Merara, 2006 pp.124-26). The former group traces its argument to the Italian occupation of Eritrea and the dissolution of the federation which lasted from 1952 to 1960, while the latter group refers to the atrocities committed during Menelik II's expansion to the south, southeast, and southwest in the late 19th century. There are others who reject the colonial characterization of the country's history, but vary in the solutions they recommended. They can be grouped into two: "national oppression" and "greater Ethiopia" or "nation building".

The national oppression thesis is generally advanced by members of the Ethiopian intelligentsia with a Marxist background, who recognize the injustices done during the process of expansion

but seek a solution within greater Ethiopia (Merara, 2006). Almost all of the Ethiopian opposition forces derived their origins and inspiration from the ESM, and the central premise of that movement was that Ethiopia constituted a “prison house of nationalities”, a national oppression by one group against all others. Ethiopia was portrayed for the first time as a multicultural country and the movement clearly acknowledged that the nationalities should be treated equally thus it is an only ethno-linguistic political characterization that can guarantee the equality of all nations and nationalities within the country.

The argument that proponents of the national oppression perspective make was the domination of one group, (Amhara ruling class) against all others. Thus, it is the only ethno-linguistic political characterization that can guarantee the equality of all nations and nationalities within the country. The second perspective and its Pan-Ethiopian proponents challenge the argument of the former and argue there was no ethnic domination and advance a solution that is free from any ethnic-based politics. They see little or no injustice in the actions of the empire builders and consider the state-building process as re-unification (i.e., bringing together territories formerly under the control of historic Ethiopia). Nonetheless, the ‘national oppression’ perspective has the opportunity to test their belief for the last two decades.

The advent of the “national oppression” thesis is directly associated with the Ethiopian student movement. Young, revolutionary university students influenced by Marxist-Leninist speculations bring the national question to the public. They project the presence of one oppressor group, which is Amhara, and a host of oppressed nationalities who are subsequently marginalized in socio-economic aspects and culturally dominated (Merara, 2006 p. 122). According to Merara the projection of the Amhara oppressor nation and other oppressed nations and nationalities was within the larger class struggle rather than along a simple ethnic line (Merara, 2006 p. 122). The revolutionaries then hold the position, of recognition of the right of Ethiopian nationalities to self-determination including and up to secession. Despite this, no agreement was seen on the solutions among the proponents of the “national oppression” thesis. For some, it meant the national oppression is a priory problem but not the root cause for the state crisis and to be solved under class struggle and others see the national oppression as a root cause and to be implemented through struggle along ethnic lines (Assefa, 2010 p. 98).

As the students get more radical, the debate on the national question heightened. Despite the political groups (EPRP and MEISON) sharing similar political philosophy and radical transformation of Ethiopian society, their unexplainable hostile relation led them to collapse (Merara, 2006 p. 126). As a result, the development of ideological radicalism and major ethno-regional movements appeared in the country. The revolutionary rhetoric manifested by ideological radicalism has shaped the political discourse of Ethiopia for the last four decades. In the radicalization process, “the question of nationalities” was born and Marxism was embraced as a sole defining principle of everything. This has, later on, become the social and economic policies that translated into the Ethiopian constitutional principles till now (Semahegn, 2014 p. 96). Currently, ethno-nationalist groups have amended their position and shifted from accusing Amhara as a whole to those who were on the top of the socio-political pyramid of the state. Despite repeatedly saying oppressed Amhara is not an enemy, the mentally entrenched narrations of Amhara blame politics are manifested practically in various ways.

3.1.2. The Emergence of Absolutism

From the governance and state structure aspect, imperial Ethiopian is characterized by a devolved polity. Clapham (2013) maintained that the multi-ethnic and multilingual nature of the people accompanied by the inaccessible topography of the empire has contributed to the character of devolved governance. Hence, it is safe to say that historic Ethiopia had followed a *de facto* federal system. Clapham rightly pointed out that “broadly speaking, one can characterize the Ethiopian political system before the modern eras constituting, in fact, if not in form, a kind of federalism” (Clapham, 2013 p. 16). The title of the emperor ‘king of kings’ indicated the presence of kings and *Rases* beneath the monarch. The devolutionary feature paved regional kings and governors with full autonomy so far as the latter gave recognition to the king of kings at the center. The Leche Agreement (concluded on March 20, 1878, between emperor Yohannes IV and Minilik of Shewa, as the latter accepted the former as king of kings while he maintained the title of king of Shewa) could be considered not only a model for the settlement of political conflicts in the history of Ethiopian state but also the first modern federal pact that officially introduced the duality of power that expanded to another province, Gojjam. Yohannes’s motive was “a feudal suzerain rather than an absolute autocrat” (Bahru, 2002 p. 46). Another example of the ‘federal’ character of the Ethiopian imperial state was the nature of the relationship between the Ethiopian empire and Kingdom of Jimma. The latter emerges as a

powerful kingdom of the Gibe region in the 2nd half of the 19th century incorporated into the former between 1882-1886 and helped the campaigns of emperor Menelik to subdue Wolayita and Kafa (Bahru, 2002). The peaceful submission of Aba Jiffar II of Jimma to emperor Menelik was a means of establishing a kind of asymmetric federalism between the state of Jimma and the Ethiopian empire. The former was able to secure both the traditional hereditary monarchical power and maintained the distinctive features of the kingdom.

Hence, the political system of Ethiopia before 1931 was characterized broadly by its devolutionary approach that provided regional kings and governors full autonomy so far as the latter gave recognition to the king of kings at the center. The reign of Haile Selassie I was different by far from its preceding political tradition. One of the distinctive features, which was believed to be the source of resentment, was the centralization process conducted throughout his reign. Besides, the five years of interruption by Italian occupation, Haile Selassie has vanished the regional concessions untouched by his predecessors Menelik II and Yohannes IV (Bahru, 2010c p. 329).

The move towards centralization by encroaching against the autonomy of regional governors during the time of Haile Selassie It was interrupted by the Italian occupation (1936-1941). The hallmark of Italian rule was maintaining centralized colonial administration and at the same time the introduction of ethnicity as an organizing principle of administrative units. The replacement of traditional provinces inherited from ancient times by ethno-linguistic criteria could be seen as a precursor to ethnic federalism instituted in 1991 (Clapham, 2013 p. 21). At this time all Amharic-speaking territories were named (once again) as Amhara administrative units. However, the provincial sentiment entrenched since the era of the princes (1679-1855) and encouraged by the system of administrative structure afterward was salient enough to restore itself following the evacuation of Italy.

Since the restoration of Haile Selassie to power in 1941, the relative autonomy of territories was highly restricted (Clapham, 2002 p. 13). The process of centralization reached its peak in 1941 with the establishment of new provincial administrative structures and strengthening of ministries and the expansion of bureaucracy (Bahru, 2002). Unlike in the pre-1930s, provinces were accountable to the ministry of interior located in the capital Addis Ababa and effectively controlled by the central government (Clapham, 2013 p. 21). Regional governors and their

administration were put under imperial surveillance since each sectorial ministry in each province were directly appointed by the emperor (Ibid). Such a centralization process was accompanied by imperial absolutism which was endorsed by the 1955 revised constitution. Article 4 of the same constitution stated that “By virtue of His Imperial Blood, as well as anointing which He has received, the person of the emperor is sacred, His dignity is inviolable and His power is indisputable”. The determinants of peripheries were a geographic distance from the capital, level of incorporation into the socio-economic structure of the government, and degree of association with the legitimizing myth of nationhood was later used for the purpose of nation-building in the time of Haile Selassie (Clapham, 2002 p. 11).

As discussed above, the discourse of ethno-nationalism in Ethiopia centers on the contending interpretations of the process of modern state formation since the late 19th century. The formation of 19th century Ethiopia was conducted by the process of expansion of territorial claims through bringing the pre-existing autonomous and semi-autonomous groups into a centralized rule (Teshale, 1996 P31). There is no easy explanation for the motive of the conquest of MenelikII to the south. The continuity of aspirations of Tewodros and Yohannes to restore the ancient frontiers of Ethiopia is also underlined by Menelik. He mentioned his aspirations in his circular letter to European powers as ‘re-establish the ancient frontiers of Ethiopia up to Khartoum, and as far as Lake Nyanza with all the [Oromos]’ (Markakis, 1972 p. 23). By the 1960s the issue of land creates tension among the peasantry, especially in the southern part of the country. The land owners were victorious soldiers and public servants, nobilities and royal families as well as higher cleric members of the Orthodox Church (Kiflu, 2021, p. 36). Emperor Haile Selassie himself embarked on distributing land from this area to the civil servants, military officers, and supporters of the system (Ibid).

The Ethiopian ruling class was hardly defined in ethnic terms, as it is characterized by encompassing triple identity at ones: orthodox religion, Amharic speaking, and multi-ethnic origin (Teshale, 1996 p. 179). The highest positions were open for anyone from any ethnic background so far as they speak Amharic language and profess orthodox Christianity. Orthodox Christianity is the key cultural label of being an Amhara. Amharic language and Orthodox Christianity, the key cultural labels of being an Amhara, made the ruling class “Amhara” regardless of their ethnic origins (Prunier & Ficquet, 2015).

On the other hand, without challenging the mixed nature of the imperial ruling class, Tirulzi emphasized the ethnic boundary lines that existed within the sociological and political definitions of 'Amhara' and its meaning to the non-Amhara. He wrote:

No one would, I think, dispute the mixed origin of the Ethiopian leadership, past and present. But this begs the question of a sociological and political definition of what it means to be an 'Amhara' in the Ethiopian context, and what the term means, and traditionally meant, to the non-Amhara peoples of Ethiopia (Tirulzi, 1983, pp. 118-119).

The newly incorporated communities lost a considerable proportion of their arable land to the conquering soldiers and their commanders, and many turned into tenants and serfs of their new masters. This class relation had later acquired an ethnic dimension (Prunier & Ficquet, 2015).

The imperial project with its explicit identification of Ethiopia with the Amharic language, the culture and customs of the northern highlands, and Orthodox Christianity was challenged as imperial subjects who were members of communities with varying identities and specific sociocultural structures demanded recognition (Aalen, 2006). This shaped Ethiopia's political trajectories in the second half of the 20th century. The grievances were not limited to the newly integrated communities but also included communities such as the Tigraians, who had historically been at the heart of the Abyssinian Empire (Prunier & Ficquet, 2015). With the objective of building a centralized absolutist state, the imperial regime replaced the traditional administrations, dislodged the local nobility from power, and increasingly concentrated power at the center, thereby triggering resistance that usually had an ethnic dimension. The extraction of resources in the form of taxes to meet the growing budgetary needs for building a modern state structure was also an exacerbating factor to the grievances. Resentments over the identity of local governance structures and the extortionist policies of the regime eventually led to multiple rebellions.

The most prominent peasant uprisings against imperial rule were the 1942 Tigrayan rebellion known as the "Weyane," the 1960 Gedeo rebellion also called the "Michille war," the beginning of the Eritrean secessionist movement in September 1960, the Bale rebellion in 1965, and the rebellion of peasants in Gojjam in 1968 (Gebbru, 1991). The underlying causes of these rebellions point to the key political problems of the imperial regime that ultimately led to its collapse in the 1974 revolution. (Berhe and Geberesilassie, 2021 pp. 98-99)

Hence, the process of incorporation through marching to the south and its subsequent nation-state-building policies of Haile Selassie has been believed to be the rise of ethno-regional nationalist movements (Alemseged, 2013). This argument is relevant to explaining the rise of ethno-national movements from the south. However, it is hard to explain the paradoxical question of why the fierce challenge came from the north. On the other hand, Teshale contends that it was the relative autonomy given by the imperial regime, especially by Haile Selassie to Tigray and Wollega areas that enabled the ethno-regional consciousness prior to others (Teshale, 1996 p. 173-181). Clapham saw the paradox from the perspective of the shift in the motive of state expansion and control from; entrenched ideologies of state mythology to the need to raise state revenue (Clapham, 2002 p. 11). It was reinforced by Ethiopia's contact with the international system during colonialism which brought the opportunity of getting the benefits of sovereignty i.e., the ability to get access to the international market. In this new kind of center-periphery arrangement, the northern highlands, areas historically the "core" of the Ethiopian state, turned into peripheries; they could not provide resources (Clapham, 2002 p. 12). In a nutshell, the pursuit of centralizing power and creating a unified nation through the constitution and institutions like the military and education invited reactions from the elites drawn from both north and south peripheries.

The ESM serves as the incubation center for the rise of ethno-national movements as the Eritrean, Tigray, and Oromo nationalists are visibly seen in the venue. There is a unanimous agreement that the rationale for the ESM was the rejection of all forms of oppression in the country. Students raised the question of land, question of nationality, and freedom of religion (Kiflu, 2021). As the struggle got radicalized, a heightened debate and controversy on the "national question" appeared within the ESM. As Andreas recollects recently and said that "there was nearly similar understanding on the national question among the student movement unions without conflicting opinions until Walelign's and Tilahun's articles came out" (Andreas, 2010). The main argument of those pieces was the presence of oppressed nations in Ethiopia and that they should endow with the right to self-determination up to and including secession. The locus of the debate was on whether there were 'nations' in Ethiopia or not that deserved secession even under Leninist-Stalinist perspectives. The causes for the rise of the national question in the ESM were the emergence of national and regional movements the Eritrea and Bale, south eastern Ethiopia (Andreas, 2010, p. 103).

The “Amhara oppressor-others oppressed nationalities” narrative has got an ideological underpinning during this time. However, the Walelign himself and the radical student body did not define who Amhara is. As Mesay Kebede (2003) underlined, the slippery slope description of the oppressor from the feudal ruling group to Amhara ruling class again to all Amhara is an indication of the irrationality of the post-1960 political discourse in explaining the state crisis. Nonetheless, the narrative has been the mobilizing factor for various ethno-national resistances throughout the country. Among the movements, the Eritrean, Tigray, and Oromo ethno-national movements have been briefly discussed below.

3.1.3. The Rise of Ethno-nationalist Movements

Eritrean nationalism was the first organized nationalist movement against the centrist Ethiopian state. Despite it beginning with the Muslim lowlanders that were later joined by the Tigrigna-speaking Christians, the movement was not strictly ethnic-based. The nature of Italian colonial policies gave rise to an apparent type of national identity that developed in Eritrea in the post-colonial era (Tekeste, 2008). Considering the presence of Turks and Egyptians along the Red sea coast, Eritreans claim that no Abyssinian king holds full control of the area and trace the origin of their separate identity to the Italian colonialism (Sorenson, 1992 p. 131). Eritrean nationalists asserted their struggle was a colonial struggle to regain colonial territories. Bereket Habte Sellase (1997) posits that the self-determination of Eritrea has quite different from that of the same in Ethiopia due to Eritrea’s history of colonization. On the other hand, the Ethiopian narrative considered the Italian takeover of Eritrea as a temporary interruption of the pre-existing unity to Ethiopia (Sorenson, 1992 p. 131). Mesfin (1990) contends the analysis of the Eritrean problem and its national identity only from the perspective of external actors. He asserts, “...the Eritrean question is neither national nor colonial but related to the process of state-building in a multi-ethnic Ethiopia where capitalist relations of production are undeveloped” Mesfin 1990, p. 80). In addition to the role of Italy in framing a distinct identity of Eritreaness, the impact of the British decade, the process and implementation of the federation with Ethiopia and the war of liberation are put legacies in the evolution of Eritrean nationalism (Reid, 2007 p.238).

Eritrean nationalism has been shaped by the persistent claim of Ethiopia over the territory and pro-union Eritreans, especially the highland Christians and the equal persistent claim of independence by the Muslim sections of Eritreans backed by Italy until UN general assembly

decided the association of Eritrea to Ethiopia with a federation (Mesfin, 1990). The UN has proposed a federation to negotiate the divergent interests of Eritreans as opting for unity with Ethiopia or claiming independence. With the absence of a federal will, the central government in Addis Ababa began taking measures that infringe the autonomy of Eritrea. Discouraging civil societies and trade unions; replacing Arabic and Tigrigna languages with Amharic; abolishing criminal laws and replacing them with the Ethiopian ones and eventually, the nomenclature of ‘the Eritrean Government’ was replaced by ‘Eritrean Administration’ which led to the eventual dissolution of the Eritrean council and the federation (Kiflu, 2021 p. 43).

The birth of EPLF was considered a response to the dissolution of the federation and the imposition of repressive governance of the imperial regime including the Dergue. The dissolution of the Eritrean federation was a landmark in bringing a new dimension of political discourse, ‘the question of nationality into the Ethiopian politics (Clapham, 2013 p. 23).

In the 1940s Eritrean politics was drawn mainly along religious lines. Unlike the Eritrean-Ethiopian Union party and Muslim League, the Liberal Progressive Party (LPP) pursue a separatist Eritrean nationalism (Tekeste, 1997). The opposition to the union of Eritrea to Ethiopia first came from Wolde Ab Wolde Mariyam. He wrote a four page in the Eritrean weakly Gazzettethat he was working as an editor of its Tigrignaedition.Most Eritrean nationalists recognize its leading member, Wolde Ab Wolde Mariyam as a father of Eritrean nationalism. He used the pages of the Gazettee, particularly the device of readers’ letters, to propound the ideas that became encapslaed in the slogan “Eritrea for Eretreans” (Markakis, 2012 p. 65).

LPP, in which Wolde Ab was one of the leading members, refused the proposal of the union with Ethiopia asserting that “Ethiopia was dominated by an imperial Shoan Government (Mesfin, 1990, p. 83). The party further expressed its resentment that “a previous vassal state had come to assume political supremacy [and] Amharic was the only official language for the whole of Ethiopia.” (Ibid).The nationalist movement in Eritrea is also associated with the expansion of education in the region. A more serious grievance intensified when Amharic langusge was imposed as a language of instruction in the early 1960s. Those studentsdemonstrated against the raising of Ethiopian flag in Eritrea, now they found encountered with a state polcy that relegating their other tongue, Tigrigna as well as Arabic (Markakis, 2012, p. 125). Though English was the

language of instruction in secondary level students were required to pass Amharic examination to join university in Addis Ababa (Ibid.).

Despite the Eritrean nationalists putting the Eritrean question in a colonial frame, they established a discourse of Amhara (Shewa) domination and Amharic-speaking *other* that lent to ethno-nationalists in Ethiopia. While the latter conceived it as internal the former took it as an external *other* by which a regional movement was bent to fit into the 'nationality question'. These new ways of thinking immediately had an intellectual backing from the university students that appeared the main challenge for the imperial regime and eventually facilitated its demise. According to Clapham this time, the 1960s, was the intellectual foundations which contributed to the institutionalization of the federal arrangement established in 1991 (Clapham, 2013 p. 24).

As the modern state remarkably enlarged, the level of diversity of the state and its administrative regions have at the same time dramatically increased. Exceptionally, Tigray was and is remained the most culturally homogeneous region in Ethiopia (Clapham, 2002; Markakis, 2003). As a matter of fact, Tigray had been steadily deprived throughout the 20th century because of overpopulation and lack of production (Donham, 2002 p. 4). Using this context, (impoverishment and linguistic distinctiveness) the TPLF has effectively mobilized the peasants along ethnic lines (Donham, 2002 p. 5). The Tigrayans were told by their elites, that they were marginalized and poor because of “Amhara domination” (Young, 1998; Alemseged, 1998). The TPLF was able to create a new kind of ethnic consciousness in the minds of the Tigrayans using the discursive narrative of common victimhood. This was significantly nourished by Dergue’s brutal military approach to crushing the resistance in the region (Donham, 2002 p. 5). Before, Tigrayan peasants’ sense of difference had related primarily to their identification with Tigray provincialism and elites who had competed with other lords in Ethiopia for the office of 'king of kings'. The new identity conception appeared in a reactive sense of Tigrayan ethnicity that eventually led the TPLF leaders portrayed their struggle as the extension of the first Woyane rebellion of 1943 disregarding differences in motive and participants (Gebru, 1991 pp. 89-90).

Tigray nationalism is somewhat different from both Eritrea and the south because it was one of the active participants in the process of Ethiopian state formation. Teshale (1996) writes in this regard: “Tigray was on average one among equals, sometimes equal, sometimes more, sometimes less equal than others” (Teshale, 1996 p. 173). Teshale contends the argument of

TPLF leaders' narrative that reiterates class oppression might be manifested in national oppression, as it never happened in Tigray. For him, the reason for Tigray nationalism was the presence of autonomous space for nationalist practice, as Haile Selassie left the region with a wider margin of regional autonomy (Teshale, 1996 p. 173). He also underlined the nature of Tigrayan nationalism as “a compound of aspirations for hegemony struggle against Amharic linguistic oppression” (Teshale, 1996 p. 174). The main determinant for the transformation of Tigray from regional entity into national-ethnic one is the linguistic policy that proclaimed Amharic as the official language of the state and a channel for the newly emerged modern education (Teshale, 1996, p. 175). However, it was the implication of the linguistic policy in the context of modernisation such as the spread of education and the differential access to state resources was the triggering factor for the Tigrayan nationalism. Throughout Ethiopian history, there was a rivalry of power between Tigray and Shewa. The Tigray nationalists presented that regional deprivation is the result of the Shewa-Amhara conspiracy and happened after the death of Yohannes IV (Young, 1997). However Ethiopian scholars argue that national oppression is a mere tool of mobilization for the resurgence of Tigrian hegemony replacing Shewa-Amhara (Teshale, 1996 p. 174; Merara, 2003 p. 155). This argument also criticized for its instrumentalist interpretations (Assefa, 2010). Hence, it could be said that the contributors to Tigray nationalism are political rivalry against Shewa, and the conflation of identity, language, and regional name i.e., Tigray.

From its inception, the TPLF seemed to have embraced an instinctual hatred of “Amhara” (Bahru, 2021).⁴ The manifesto which launched the armed struggle in 1976 was filled with anti-Amhara rhetoric. The manifesto clearly stated the goal of the liberation struggle: “the Tigray people’s struggle is anti-Amhara oppression, anti-imperialism....” and pledged to work on “subverting the societal security of the Amhara in the years to come”. Despite this content of the manifesto was removed after some time, the political practice for the past decades revealed that it is about all Amharic-speaking people all over the country.

⁴<https://www.ena.et/en/?p=30584&fbclid=IwAR1i8dNtTb7aATGrgJJTEELwwN-KSzVrutNGQfz7nU5zwNlnN4NUd1DXFvU> (Accessed, November 11, 2021)

TPLF did not put a clear indication of what “Amhara nation” means in the manifesto. Despite it being amended as ‘Amhara ruling classes in the latter years, the rhetorical and practical sideslips to all Amhara become the main political determinant of the development of Amhara nationalism. Unlike their Eritrean counterparts, who saw Haile-Sellassie’s rule as a continuation of Shoan domination that began with Menelik, Tigray nationalists staged it as an Amhara rule by an Amhara nation. In this formulation, provinces Gondar, Gojam, and Wollo, which were as much dominated by Shewa as Tigray was, were transformed into oppressors (Admasu, 2010 p. 188).

The rise of Oromo ethno-nationalism has a distinct path. The Oromo are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia. Compared to Eritrean and Tigray ethno-nationalisms, the Oromo ethno-nationalism was not developed in its maturity. Mohammed Hassen described that Oromo nationalism has developed slowly (Hassen, 1996 p. 67). Ironically enough, ethno-nationalism was not developed in the south while it was both politically and culturally dominated by the north. The reason could be, as mentioned above, the shift in the framing of factors determining center and periphery.

The assumption of “Amhara” ruling elites and the Somali ruling class about the Oromo people was as a scattered group of people who lack conscious mobilization. Hassen put the formers’ attitude which read as: “the huge Oromo society was nothing more than a conglomerate of petty states having little in common besides the language wherever it was retained”. The latter see the Oromo as “[they] were pre-ethnic [sets of people] who could be Somaliized” (Hassen, 1996 p. 67). However, for the leaders of Mecha-Tulema Association and Oromo Liberation Movement, Oromo nationalism was a lived reality beyond doubt (Ibid.) The suspicion of the Ethiopianists, that the Oromo ethnic consciousness would endanger the territorial integrity of the state, and the Somalis’ frustration that the Oromo might thwart their ambition of greater Somalia were the main opposition to the development of Oromo nationalism (Hassen, 1996 p. 67-68). In 1974 OLF, which grew out of the political experiences of the Macha-Tulama Self Help Association, has established. Until then there was no unified kind of ethnic mobilization within the Oromo peoplehood. The reason for Oromo nationalism was the reaction of Oromo elites to the political and cultural dominance of the north. Assefa Jalata explained this:

With the onset of modernization and the spread of Western ideas of equality in the 20th century, many of the Oromo elites did not see any reason why they should be subjected to

the rule of other ethnic groups. They nursed the memory of the circumstances in which their people had been incorporated into the empire (Jalata, 2001, p. 56).

The Oromo nationalists, who sought independence, seemed to have resented the nation-state building project, as they were unable to find their particularities in the state system. In contrast to TPLF's position, Oromo nationalists did not single out the 'Shewan Amhara' for the cultural dominance rather they accused all the northern Ethiopians who enclosed with the *neftegnas* (Young, 2021 pp. 63-64). In this regard, Hasen wrote:

For those who want to create an independent Oromia, there is no Ethiopian nation that generates a common feeling and reflects past achievements and future aspirations. For them, national religion, national dress, and national symbols (the church, the flag, national anthem) which are projected to represent Ethiopian nationalism are of the Amhara-Tigray nations (Hassen, 1996, p. 71).

The Oromo nationalists also asserted that the "Amhara" elites appropriated the Ethiopian nationalism since Menelik created the modern Ethiopian empire and instituted the Shewan Amhara privileges (Ibid.). In a nutshell, the Oromo nationalism centers on the claim that 'Amhara' elites controlled the political, military, economic, cultural, religious, and social life of the Ethiopian state until 1991. However, this begs the question that who were these "Amhara elites", as the reality shows the ruling elites were characterized by heterogeneous ethnic origins including those from Oromo. Baxter's description helps to shed light on this regard as the Oromo nationalists imagined the presence of a cohesive Amharic-speaking group. From the Oromo perspective, he wrote, Amhara is defined as:

Anyone who is either born into Amhara society and culture or anyone who chooses to center them, by speaking Amharic in domestic situations in support of the Amharic lifestyle and by acting in public situations in support of Amharic values An Amhara is one who, all in all, assumes that Amharic culture is so obviously superior to the other cultures of Ethiopia that all Ethiopians should seek to acquire that culture (Baxter, 78 p. 289).

Unlike TPLF's view that sees the regime as feudal and Amhara-dominated, the OLF considers the Amhara-dominated Ethiopian state in which the Tigrayans are junior partners who exercise a kind of settler colonialism in the southern territories (Young, 2021 p. 64). The characterization of

the state as feudal by TPLF was not comfortable for EPLF and OLF who pursue a colonial thesis that sought an automatic right of secession. While the former achieved its goal and Eritrea had succeeded, the latter subsequently divided over the issue until this time. OLF's narrative of settler colonialism nourished by academic back from the Oromo intellectuals such as Assefa Jaleta (2003) has shaped the Oromo youth, as they were convinced to expel other ethnic groups notably the Amhara from "their home" region.

Guided by Marxist class analysis Dergue dismantled the class relation, entrenched in the land tenure system, between the landlords and the local people using the 1975 land redistribution proclamation. Though it managed to get support from the people south of the capital who become the owners of their own land, other creeds of the people like autonomy remained problematic. Its military approach to settling the Eritrean problem ended with its demise.

The tactical alliance with the Oromo elites enclosed in MEISON ended in a bloodletting confrontation that eventually hardens the OLF which was established in 1974. Dergue was encircled by the proliferation of ethno-nationalist opposition movements. These movements remarkably transformed the politics of identity by defining the difference between the 'Greater Ethiopian' tradition and its subordinate peoples (Clapham, 2002 p. 25). Hence the ethno-nationalist forces did not associate themselves with the state and were often subjected to conquest and oppression, Amharic figured as the language of the Ethiopian imperial state and served as the marker of their oppression.

Having only a political program to realize regional self-determination, the Leninist-Stalinist model of ethnic federalism was the only way for TPLF to seize central power (Clapham, 2002 20s). EPRDF changed the regional (provincial) administrative boundaries and replaced the Soviet Union's model to conform ethno-linguistic lines. Ironically enough the EPRDF, with TPLF at its core, crafted the state at the time of the collapse of the union along those ethnic boundaries.

3.1.4. The "Amhara Domination" Discourse

The assumption that portrays "Amhara as an oppressor and other people of Ethiopia are living under the iron fist rule of the former that consequently underlined all ethnic groups have to liberate themselves from such status quo" was not new except amplified by the ESM. Italy has

used it for its colonial ambition under the political narrative of “Tigrian and Shewa Politics” and “center-periphery politics” to instigate division and political tension in Ethiopia as “Shewa” and “center” stands for Amhara (Haile, 2019 p. 16). They were disseminating strong anti-Amhara (Shewa) propaganda including printing hate books in Tigrean language even after the battle of Adwa (Mesganaw, 2018).

Apart from such colonial propaganda, there was a line of scholarly discourse that propagates an image of Ethiopia as an ethnic make-up, where the ethnic Amhara are said to be dominant. The “Amhara” blame narrative explicitly came to the fore with the book entitled “Abyssinia: The powder barrel” authored by Baron Roman Procházka, an Austrian lawyer having a short stay in Ethiopia until he left in 1934, one year before Italy occupied Ethiopia. He seems to feel unpleasant in his stay in Addis Ababa as he did not get “respect” given to the white person by the black one. Among the events that offend Procházka was unlike what has been done in other African colonies, Ethiopians sit in the business class of a train with the whites while they pay less. He explained how the foreigners and diplomatic personalities were received and threatened in Ethiopia:

The animosity that the ruling Abyssinian tribe, the Amharas, towards foreigners, which has been growing steadily in recent years is becoming evidenced to a most threatening extent in [the] relations and dealings with foreign powers and their citizens (Procházka, 1935 p. 7).

However, the central argument of his book is nothing but concocting Ethiopia for colonialism. Projecting the Ethiopian state system as it does not fit with the modern nation’s style and the sense of equality the ruling class and educated elites return from Europe show to the whites is threatening not only European colonialism in Africa but also international peace. Hence, he urges the European powers to dismantle the “empire” by weakening the “Amhara” ruling class by encouraging various ethnic groups inside and preaching to them as they have been oppressed by the Amhara.

Italy used this narrative as a scholarship back for its propaganda at the international stage and eventually occupied Ethiopia in 1935 and design its ethnic-based colonial administration. For the patchwork of traditional provinces, the Italians substituted six large regions, broadly based on ethnicity, which could be referred to as the precursor to the ethnic federalism scheme introduced

after 1991 (Clapham, 2013, pp 20-21). The radical ESM and its depiction of Ethiopia as “a prison house of nationalities” then is not a new ideal except augmented and led by the stock of educated elite that the country has after the Italian occupation. Wallelign and his colleagues have taken the idea of oppressor-oppressed narrative only from the view of Leninist-Stalinist perspective.

Apparently, in the year 1991, the Ethiopian state was fundamentally restructured. This dramatic shift from a centrist political approach to an ethnic-territorial one is derived from the national oppression thesis i.e., its subject is the hard rhetoric of “Amhara domination”. In reversing the national oppression in which Amhara is supposed to be the oppressor, a political system is crafted that encourages every ethnic group to mobilize along its ethnic line. This move partly instigated violence in the already polarizing ethnic politics in which the Amharic-speaking people were targeted.

Immediately after they took power, Ethno-nationalists’, notably the TPLF, had reduced the name “Ethiopia” and Ethiopian statehood to hundred years going back to Menelik’s reign (1889-1913) and they staged the entire period from Menelik to Dergue as sinister with no little good references (Shiferaw, 2010 p. xxii). Historians and intellectuals from other fields of studies who wrote and argue the other way around were labeled as “*Chauvinist*” and “*Neftegna*” and were expelled from the university.⁵ This move bypass the frequent mythical depictions with the familiar account of a three-thousand-year-old state and remove the central place of the Amhara in that past (Young, 2021 p. 67).⁶

⁵ According to Shiferaw, Bahru was the one who took the challenge and wrote an article in Amharic entitled “*three thousand or hundred years of history?*” published in the journal of Addis Ababa University Teachers Association in March 1992. In this article, Bahru demonstrated the Ethiopian rulers called their country “Ethiopia” as far back as the 4th century A.D. based on primary sources. Consequently, the association was dissolved and the journal also terminated publication. Most of the officers of the association and members of the editorial board were expelled from the university (Shiferaw, 2010 pp. xxii-xxvii).

⁶The late Prime Minister Meles, who was the vanguard revisionist, dramatically changed the historiography of EPRDF in his speech on September 11, 2007, when Ethiopia celebrated the Ethiopian New Year and second millennium in an official and color full manner. In the speech he mentioned that ‘this generation is unable to know how the forefathers of Ethiopia celebrated their first millennium because of lack of evidence but our grandchildren would have evidence of how their forefathers celebrate this day.

The characterization of Amhara as “*Ahadawi*” (unitarist) and “*timkihtagna*” (chauvinist) was one of the informal narratives that prevailed over the political climate of Ethiopia for decades. The principle of “democratic centralism”, as Bahru (2010) describes, “centralism prevails over democratic both in accent and practice”. This helps for the stronghold of TPLF in which central executives pass major decisions and handed over to the junior officials for execution. As TPLF is central to EPRDF, it exercises absolute real political power in the last two decades. The two parties, the Oromo People’s Democratic Organization (OPDO) and ANDM, which represent the majority population of the country, Oromo and Amhara respectively, were in a position with no significant real power (Merara, 2010). To maintain its power in the coalition vanguard party TPLF had been pitting the two numerically largest ethnic groups (Anwar, 2018 p. 5). This is because; the two ethnic groups are potential threats to TPLF and serious contenders for power in Ethiopian politics.

TPLF characterizes the Oromo as “secessionist” Amhara as “unitarist”, and assumes the name “federalist”. By these assumptions, TPLF has presented itself as the only protagonist in reconciling the two “extreme ethnic identities and their political views” (Anwar, 2018). The above naming of the two largest ethnic groups and the mediator role of TPLF has been strengthened by the tagging of names, “*teb*” and “*timkihtagna*”, given to the Oromo and Amhara respectively. The first stands for “narrow nationalists” as the Oromo identity conception, “Oromoness” whilst the second stands for “chauvinism” or ‘arrogant Amhara nationalists whose ethnic affiliation is Ethiopianess which claim the past regime to restore’ (Ibid). Such Amharic terms came to the Ethiopian political discourse immediately after EPRDF seized power. They were given to OLF and AAPO. However, the characterization could not stop after the disbanding of both parties from regular political participation. In the eyes of revolutionary democracy, *Timkihtegnet* is described as the main enemy of the regime that has to be crushed while *Tebabnet* has some democratic element as having a conviction to struggle against the oppressive interests and their outlook, *timkihtegnnet* (Tederaj, 1987 1st year part 3, p 83, Assembled in, Memoir Struggle, 2004 Vol. 1).⁷

⁷These terms are also discussed in *Addis Raey*, EPRDF's 'theoretical' journal

The name “*Neftegna*” (*literally to mean gun bearers but for ethno-nationalists it is a loaded term stands for oppressor*) has also notoriously been mentioned interchangeably with “*Timkihtegna*” to target potential political contenders since 1991. *Neftegna* is particularly used that ethno-national elites to gaze at those who are supposed to be non-native to the area. There are at least three dimensions of *neftegna* characterization in the Ethiopian political discourse.⁸ The first is the ethnic dimension in which *neftegna* means Amhara. In this case, religion has no value as both Christians and Muslims are *neftegna* as far as they are ethnic Amhara. The second dimension is religious and *neftegna* stands for Orthodox Christian. Here, ethnicity has no value. Orthodox Christians of any ethnic group are labeled *neftegna*. The third is an ideological dimension in which *neftegna* signifies anyone from any ethnic group who subscribes themselves to the Ethiopian state; having a Pan-Ethiopian sentiment and bearing the tri-color flag. In this dimension, neither ethnicity nor religion has differentiating value. As discussed in the later chapters, the ethnic dimension of *neftegna* took the lion's share in the political antagonism in Ethiopia. The ideological dimension of *neftegna* is the second significant variable that every Pan-Ethiopianists in which most of them are ‘Amhara’ have been under attack. Amharas living in other regional states have been targeted on the basis of the ethnic dimension of *neftegna*.

3.1.5. The Post-1991 Ethnic Based Political Syaytem

Ethiopia began decentralizing before the formal federal arrangement was endorsed in 1995. EPRDF encouraged the establishment of sub-national and local government units along ethnic lines. This was deemed to be a necessary response to accommodate diversity which was considered to be the most pressing challenge in the country. Proclamation number 7/1992 was instrumental at the beginning of state reorganization. The Proclamation also laid down the foundation for the federal constitution. It had listed 64 ethnic groups to establish their own ethnic self-administration (Art. 3, Proc. No. 7/1992).

By the year 1995 the sovereignty of ethnic groups was granted constitutional recognition in response to the national question. Explicit recognition and self-governing rights were given to various ethno-linguistic groups of the country. In response to “the past injustice”, the constitution

⁸<https://www.facebook.com/HenokAbebeA/posts/pfbid02kD7vk8277cZMRyWWPWrD3f9hh57vgPvqnR9mu2HeD DGqDPSTiwdSGgvCHGvm631hl> (Accessed, June 22, 2022)

which establishes the federal system, gives strong emphasis to the “Nations Nationalities and Peoples” of the country by giving sovereign political power to them (Art.8 of FDRE constitution). Moreover, it explicitly recognized the self-determination rights of “Nations Nationalities and Peoples” including the right to secede (Art.39 of FDRE constitution). This right is also labeled with the fundamental human rights which are supposed to be more equal than other rights during amendment (Art.104 &105 of FDRE constitution).

Drawing on the idea of revolutionary democracy, the preamble of the constitution ensured the primacy of the group over fellow citizens. It is unique as compared to the constitutions of other countries which begin as “we the people of ...” Instead; it begins with “we the nations, nationalities, and peoples of Ethiopia”. The right to self-determination of nations nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia stipulated by Article 39 has a broader interpretation in Ethiopia’s political discourse that could be seen in view of the constitution’s understanding of ethnicity and self-determination through the retrospective analysis of Marxists’ speculation about the same.

FDRE Constitution’s Understanding of Ethnicity

Like modernization theorists, who argue national sentiments will wither away as a result of modern conditions such as industrialism, literacy, education systems, mass communications, secularism, and capitalism; Marxists have a rejectionist tendency toward nationalism and argue that it is a ‘false consciousness of the bourgeoisie construct. They maintained it will die away by the victory of socialism at an international level (Stalin, [1929]2008). In the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels wrote: “The working men have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got” (Marx and Engels 2010, 502). Hence the question of nationality did not assume a vital place in Marx’s ideals. However, this is not without exception. Since the late 1840s, his view was dramatically changed, and consistently supports the liberation movements of Poland and Ireland as well as anti-slavery movements in the USA (Anderson, 2010, p. 124). Besides his reflections on the movements, Marx neither set a clear definition of the nation nor the national question which led the Marxists to consider this to be one of the major gaps in the pioneer Marxist theoretical speculations (Hobsbawm, 1992, 30–40). The Marxists seem to learn the resilience of nationalist tendencies from resistance to the policy of assimilation of Turks and Tsarist Russia and underlined the improbable extinction of national differences immediately after the victory of socialism (Stalin, [1929]2008).

The latter interpretation of nation and nationalism has got much more complicated and remained confused oscillating between rejection and acceptance. This can be seen in the various strands of Marxist interpretations of the nationality question and debates on the concept of self-determination. In this regard, the debate between Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin became visible, especially after the London Socialist International Conference in 1897 is the famous one. Luxemburg argues it would be impossible that take measures to solve all national issues within the framework of capitalism by guaranteeing the “self-determination” of all nations rather the viable solution for the national questions would be class interest (Luxemburg, [1896]1976; [1909] 2006). Her firm position on those national antagonisms would be resolved not by granting small ethnic groups statehood, but rather by a genuine socialist revolution making to stand on the opposing position against Marx and Lenin while she is Polish.

Despite Luxemburg later recognizing the cultural dimensions of nationalism and autonomy as a viable solution for the national question, Lenin insists on the political dimension of the same. In his writing, in response to Luxemburg’s assertion, Lenin underlined that:

Consequently, if we want to grasp the meaning of self-determination of nations, not by juggling with legal definitions, or “inventing” abstract definitions, but by examining the historico-economic conditions of the national movements, we must inevitably reach the conclusion that the self-determination of nations means the political separation of these nations from alien national bodies, and the formation of an independent national state (Lenin, 1914).

Nonetheless, he did not suggest the automatic relationship between the right to self-determination and the formation of a separate national state by presenting the analogy that ‘endorsing the right to divorce is not encouraging the disintegration of family and guaranteeing the right to self-determination does not mean encouraging secession’ (Lenin, 1914). Stalin, on the other hand, did not take Lenin’s self-determination for granted. Rather he understands Self-determination as “regional autonomy” for a “definite population inhabiting a definite territory. He also defined a nation with prescribed characteristics and emphasized that a group that lacks at least one of the characteristics below is insufficient to qualify a nation. Accordingly, he defined the nation:

A historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of the common possession of four principal characteristics, namely: a common language, a common territory, a common economic life, and a common psychological make-up manifested in common specific features of national culture (Stalin, [1929]2008).

The root of the principle of self-determination in the FDRE constitution is the Leninist-Stalinist ideology that was widely adopted by the radical student movement and later pursued by national liberation movements (Bahru, 2014 p. 187). The constitutionalization of the rights of nations and nationalities for self-determination including and up to secession stated in Article 39(1) is a direct replica of the Soviet Union's style of addressing ethnonational issues. The Stalinist definition of 'nation' is also a potent ingredient of the definition contained in the FDRE constitution. According to Stalin, a "nation" is "a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological makeup manifested in a common culture" (Stalin, 1929). Given he did not define nationality as its counterpart, nation, it seems to say that if one element is missed that group will be defined by the terms like nationality. However, apart from his rigid criteria in defining nation, Stalin underlined that like other historical events, a nation is also subject to change which indicates the conception of a nation as a historically constituted political community (Ibid.).

The ethnic groups and minorities in Ethiopia are denoted collectively in the Constitution as "nations, nationalities, and peoples". The constitution does not give a definition for each term of nations, nationalities, and peoples. Rather it simply assigns a collective meaning to the whole. Article 39 (5) of the constitution defines the three terms "Nations Nationalities and Peoples". It reads as:

...a group of people who have or share a large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in common or related identities, a common psychological makeup, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory.

The constitution does not clearly define identity as "historically constituted" and having "economic life". Yet, it appears that similar culture, language, and identity are the product of historical societal development (Berhe and Gebreselassie 2020 p. 97). As it discussed down in chapter four, the criteria, "economic life" was the source of debate in the body of the ESM on

whether or not nations exist in Ethiopia. The proponents of the existence of nations in Ethiopia attributed it to the circumstances under which Stalin labeled Georgia as a nation. An earliest handwritten article of EPDM which intend to justify Tigray as a nation and the independence of Eritrea, explains:

Stalin called Georgia a nation despite the fact that it had not developed a common economic life by that time (before the first half of the 20th century). However, there was an emerging lower-level economic transformation in the 1850s in Georgia, which indicated a dialectical leap forward had been undergone from 'nationality' to 'nation'. ... [In the same vein,] Italian occupation brought hybrid capitalism to Ethiopia, which accelerated the people's lack of an integrated economy. Hence, the absence of well-developed capitalism in Ethiopia does not lead to the claim that there are no nations (compiled in Zikre Tarik, vol 3).

Under comparative international law, “peoples” have the right to self-determination. The reference to “peoples” may have a basis in the African Charter of Human Rights, which recognizes the rights of “peoples” Article 19 stipulated “All peoples shall be equal, they shall enjoy the same respect and shall have the same rights. Nothing shall justify the domination of a people by another”. The Constitution also does not set out criteria according to which demands recognition as a “nation, nationality, and peoples” can be determined. Despite the federal constitution providing a single definition for the three connected terms of nation, nationality or people, state constitutions appeared to be used one or two of the concepts to define them. This indicates, in addition to the implicit expression of Stalin and the document of EPDM, there seems an implicit agreement among the political elites over the presence of distinction among the three terms. Accordingly, the three terms are different in size and scope in referring to a certain group. Officials of EPRDF occasionally explained the distinction between the three terms as “nation” is a group that enables to establish independent statehood or regional state and is wide in scope while “nationality” is a distinct group found within a nation and “people” is smaller than nationality in scope and size.

There are various interpretations of the constitution’s understanding of ethnicity. One reading of the constitution posits that it is a constructive understanding of ethnicity whereas others emphasize its primordial manifestations which eventually lead to instrumentalist dimension, at

least at the level of practice. This has to do with the divergence in the naming of the federal order. Divergent justifications have been given over the name to be “ethnic” or “multination” federation both among scholars and political groups. Allen argued that the Ethiopian constitution’s definition of ethnic groups is linked with a primordial approach to ethnicity (Aallen, 2006 p. 247). She noted that when ethnicity is the only acknowledged identity in a federal arrangement, it relegated others which pushes toward parochialism and essentialism.

Another way of looking at the constitutional view of ethnicity is instrumental which see ethnic mobilization as a means to get access to power and resource. Merara sees the constitution and its practice as a result of Tigaryan insurgency and political dominance (Merara, 2003). Assefa contends this instrumentalist view of the constitution and argues that it does not answer the question of why the people were mobilized with passion and points to the constructivist approach to ethnicity (Assefa, 2010). Others who share this opinion contend that Article 39(5)'s description of nations, nationalities, and people includes a sociopolitical idea rather than an explicit reference to ethnicity, which is established by common ancestry (Mulugeta and Fiseha, 2015).

Sidelining the practical manifestations, the definition placed on Article 39 (5) signifies a political association with clear political goals by deconstructing the past nation-state model and reconstructing a new dimension through empowering ethnic groups. The meaning of the term by the constitution has twofold insights. One is the manifestation of the new construct of the Ethiopian identity “from below”, which would emerge from the “first” and “real” identities of Ethiopian peoples, i.e., their “ethnic” belonging (Bach, 2014, p. 105). In contrast to the nation-state and its requirements for citizenship, now it is possible to have double loyalty to the group and to the state i.e., Ethiopian national identity without losing one’s own ethnic identity. The definition of the term “Nations Nationalities and Peoples” has an implication of exercising the self-determination rights of the same and “voluntarily” being Ethiopian nationals. It is the construction of a new direction of building a polity through the conscious participation of each ethnic group by deconstructing the symbols and myths used by the previous regimes.

State Mechanism and Amhara Living in Other Regional States

Regional states were established as a member of a federation. Even though the constitution stated they are delimited based on language, identity, settlement pattern, and consent of the people

(Art.46(2), it was organized based on ethno-linguistic line (Fassil, 1997; Vaughan, 2003). Despite the regional states having drawn in ethno-linguistic lines with the aim of enabling the nation's nationalities and peoples to exercise their right to self-determination, it does not mean that the whole groups in Ethiopia have got their own mother states. Rather there are significant minority ethnic groups inhabited in the states which created for the numerical majority groups. Therefore, each regional state is characterized by ethnic diversity. There are minority groups inside each regional state having both concentrated and dispersed existence. There are many reasons for such reality such as those who resided as pocket entities within the dominant ethnic group empowered with regional statehood; those who settle by the government relocation and resettlement program; those who transcended during border demarcation for the establishment of regional states; those who historically moved and settled in the current Oromia, south and southwestern regional states for different historical and economic reasons commonly that ethno-nationalists call them Amhara or Neftegna.

Given the heterogeneity of regional states inhabited by various groups for the above reasons, the designation of peoples as “indigenous” and “non-indigenous” became the hallmark of sub-national political and academic discourse (Yonatan and Van der Baken, 2013). There are no clear criteria to identify which group is indigenous or not. Experts in the field seemed to have been using the ‘who settle earlier in the area’ criteria which were supported by the legal constitutional mechanisms (Yonatan and Van der Baken, 2013).

Since the constitution granted sovereign power and self-determination rights to all ethnic groups of the country (not necessarily for the regions), intra-state “indigenous” minorities could claim such rights. To this effect, the federal constitution poses a duty upon the states to realize genuine autonomy and ample amount of decentralization of power to the local levels (Art.50). In addition to this, each ethnic group of the country has the right to claim regional statehood at any time and effected according to prescribed conditions (Art. 47:2).

Based on the provision stated by the federal constitution, Article 52(2)(b), all regional states had adopted their own constitutions with mechanisms to regulate the state behavior towards accommodating diversity. Constitutions were enacted and ratified by the respective regional councils without a wide-range of consultations and public deliberation processes (Van der Baken, 2014 p. 8). Hence, they are only the will of the majority in which the hands of political

elites of ethno-nationalists and the federal officials were long enough to polish the substantive content of the state constitutions. Undoubtedly, the State constitutions and the decisions of state legislatures have an irreplaceable impact on the position and status of ethnic groups inside the regional states. It has been informed that the Ethiopian constitutional framework provides mechanisms of self-determination and self-government rights but this is not the case for the non-indigenous minorities (Yonatan and Van der Baken, 2013). As he examines the mechanisms used by regional states in accommodating intra-state minorities, Van der Baken, (2007) revealed that the state constitutions have provided convenience for regionally empowered; ‘indigenous’ groups as “son of the soil” whilst others are considered as newcomers and treated as “second citizens”. Both the federal and regional-state constitutions are silent on the regulation of this matter and as Assefa said intra-unit minorities continue to face various kinds of discrimination and marginalization and this has so far been left to the discretion of the states (Assefa, 2017).

Amharas have been living in all regional states of the country. They have a significant number in regions like Oromia, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella, and southern region, Sidama, and Southwestern regions. Millions of Amhara live in deep-seated insecurity in these regions, as they have been constantly killed, displaced, and systematically treated as 2nd class citizens throughout the past three decades. Many come to believe that such plights of Amhara are the result of a long-aged discursive narrative propagated against the people.

According to the disputed census result of 2007, the number of Amhara living outside of the region is 4, 120, 017 from which most of them live in the Oromia regional state. Almost in all regional states of federal Ethiopia, Amhara constitutes the largest minority ethnic group (Van der Baken, 2014 p. 7). A relatively large number of Amhara is living in the territories of the Oromia, southern, western, Benishangul-Gumuz, and Gambella regional states. The atrocities against people called Amhara, who now embrace the name for granted, begin with the institutionalization of the ethno-linguistic federal system in 1991. The constitution emphasizes empowering the ‘historic marginalized indigenous minorities’ by providing their territorial self-government turning themselves to the majority, a typical form of territorial autonomy. This creates a new kind of minority vulnerable to human rights violations. Given a large number of Amhara living in various parts of the country as a result of reasons related to historical, personal, and government policies, and the prevalence of ‘Amhara oppression’ discourse, they were

victims of fresh attacks which endured for three decades. In addition to the lack of political and legal schemes to guarantee the rights of intra-unit minorities, the state constitutions engaged in dichotomization of residents as “indigenous” and “non-indigenous” in which the former are supposed to be the owners whilst the latter largely constitute Amhara is not.

3.2. The Rise of Amhara Political Mobilizations

The ANRS was established officially with the adoption of the Transitional Charter in 1991 by the Boundary Commission. It was largely the replica of the Italian administrative region created through merging the Amharic-speaking provinces (Gondar, Wollo, Northern Shewa, and Gojjam) and named “Amhara”. In terms of diversity, ANRS is one of the relatively homogeneous regional states in the federation. According to the 2007 population and housing census, the population numbered 17,214,056 people, with the Amhara constituting 91.35 percent of the total. The Agaw-Awi, Agaw-Himra, Oromo, and Argoba are never the less significant ethnic groups resident in the region. They constitute 3.59, 1.46, 2.74, and 0.42 percent of the total regional population, respectively. The regional state-guaranteed territorial autonomy and representation schemes for those ethnic groups. Though not included in this census –one of the sources of their grievances the Qimant are also a recently-recognized ethnic group of the regional state. Following the political liberalization of the current political situation, the regional (local) opposition political parties of the Agaw Democratic Party and Qimant Democratic Party have been established in Agaw and Qimant constituencies, respectively. NaMA is also a new political party and has been enjoying huge popular support in the region. Since 2016 the regional state has been passing through popular protests and political instability. A sense of victimization was haunting the regional state that eventually manifested through the “Amhara protests” that bears a reactive Amhara nationalism.

After the 2005 election in which EPRDF had lost many seats in the election, it took aggressive actions to control every political space in the country. As a result, the party won by 96.6 percent in 2010 and 100 percent in the 2015 national elections respectively. Ironically, the country had trapped by popular protests that erupted immediately after the party establishes a government. The protest was first notably come from the two largest ethnic groups, Oromo and Amhara constituting more than half percent of the total population of the country. The Oromo protest was started in 2014 and it gets momentum in 2016 when the Amhara protest joined it. The protests

were neither organized nor led by political parties or individuals except for the role of social media. This resulted in tension within the coalition member ethnic-based parties of EPRDF in which one of the coalition member parties, TPLF, is allegedly criticized as it dominated others. Another paradox was the question of identity raised by many ethnic groups while the constitutions are supposed to be established in response to the past ethno-cultural injustice and to empower all identity groups of the country, which the Amhara case is the notable one.

Following the 2016 protests, the EPRDF became increasingly fragmented. This changed its previously centralized nature, with the TPLF having lost its core position. In 2019 EPRDF, in which the essence and name of revolutionary democracy were found, was replaced by the PP whilst TPLF rejected and walked away from the newly reconfiguring party and its new ideology of *Medemer* (synergy), which is a more pragmatic political ideology. Enjoying this state of political liberalization, opposition ethnic-based local parties are becoming more assertive in their claims for territorial autonomy.

As observed from social media and the banner of the rallies, the cause of the Amhara protests of 2016 there is the perceived and real alienation of the Amhara people from the political, social, and economic aspects of the country. This was witnessed in the slogans of protesters and narrations of popular social media activists. The other, but the most important, cause is the issue of Amhara identity as a question of existence and survival. This has been framed and often refers to the ethnically targeted killing of Amhara living in other regional states including the Wolkayit people in Tigray.

Contrary to their historic administration, the Amharas in wolkayit region were taken from the former Gondar province and was incorporated into Tigay regional state during the formation of the federal arrangement. Eventually, the displaced Wolkait people have formed a committee and have been campaigning in Gondar (a town in Amhara state) to regain their land and identity as Amhara by declaring “We are from Wolkait; we are Amhara, we have always been Amhara, our first language is Amharic” (John, 2021). The immediate cause of the Amhara protests was the attempted arrest of Colonel Demeke Zewdu on July 12, 2016. He was and is urged for a return of the Wolkait district to the Amhara state in his position as leader of the Wolkait Identity Question Committee.

One year before the Amhara protests, some bloggers and activists began to write in social media about the need for a struggle based on ethnic lines. Immediately in the beginning of 2015, a political party called “*Bete Amhara*”, to mean, the house of Amhara was established abroad. It advocates separatist agenda claiming that “if being an Amhara is a crime in federal Ethiopia, an Amhara independent statehood shall be established”. The paradigm shift from pan-Ethiopian identity to ethno-nationalism was very swift, especially among the Amhara youth. This attracts the concerns of many actors including the newly appointed Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.⁹ The protests have been used as a platform to voice discontent over alleged government repression of the Amhara as well as to promote a budding ethnic nationalism among them. During these times, slogans reflected a sense of victimization such as: “Being an Amhara is not a crime”, and “Respect Amharaness”.

The peace with Eritrea has made after Abiy Ahmed announced the border demarcation settled by the international community was recognized by Ethiopia. Eritrea in its part showed interest in the “political transition” of Ethiopia. Tigray continued to be a de facto independent state exercising power out of the reach of the federal government. The war broke out between the Tigray region and the federal government highly hardened both Tigray and Amhara nationalism. TPLF has accused the Amhara forces of collaborating with the federal and Eritrean ones to expel Tigrians. The Amhara seem to realize the “Amhara hatred” entrenched in the Tigrian elites when nearly half of the regional state was ravaged by the TPLF forces. The unsettled Sudanese border dispute has continued to affect the Amhara farmers residing along the Ethio-Sudanese border. The political and armed collaboration of the Agaw-Shengo party and the militant Kimant committee with the TPLF has created a strain on the Amhara region from within. All the above international, domestic, and intra-regional contexts led Amhara to feel insecure with an existential threat that eventually caused the development of Amhara nationalism.

⁹The newly-appointed prime minister, who led the political transition, had made a speech at the discussion forum organized by the Amhara Regional State for academics and a few selected business people. He noted that he has been worried by the growing Amhara nationalism and called for scholars to study, understand and suggest ways forward for the government.

Chapter Four

4. On Amhara Identity and the National Question

4.1. Introduction

The term “Amhara” does not stand for one and precise definition that brought everybody’s accord. Rather it is used to refer to different meanings. It is accompanied by multiple descriptions referring to geographical place, class, ethnicity, religion, or “Ethiopianess”. However, ethno-nationalists have used the term “Amhara” to refer to all Amharic speakers who allegedly oppress other ethnic groups of the country. This chapter intends to analyze the specificity of Amhara identity and its relation to the Ethiopian national identity by analyzing how the Amhara identity is linked to the process of modern Ethiopian state formation. This link is important to understand the dynamics of Amhara ethnicity in various themes discussed in this dissertation. Moreover, the chapter has appraised the national question in light of Amhara identity and its unprecedented consequences on the people. This chapter discusses three issues of Amhara identity for a contextual understanding of the empirics that have been written in the remaining chapters. Accordingly, the first section presents the specificity of Amhara identity focusing on the issue of who Amhara are and their origin. Section two discusses the link between Amhara identity and its relation to the process of state formation and nation-building. It serves as a precursor to the current ethno-national mobilizations centered on the ‘Amhara-domination’ narrative. Section three analyzes the frames and controversies over the national question and the designation of Amhara as an oppressor in the body of radical ESM.

4.2. Who are the Amhara?

There is no precise definition for the term “Amhara” that everybody would agree on it. Rather it is used to refer to different meanings (Michael, 2008; Girma, 2009). Such varied, perhaps confusing, definitions and descriptions about Amhara are found in the written as well as oral traditions of the Amharic-speaking society. Mostly, the term had been used in relation to a province, language, religion, class, supra-ethnic or ethnic group. Scholars studying Amhara and related issues seemed to agree as Amhara do not have a rigid identity. Chernetsov also agrees with the inconclusive nature of Amhara as he argues that “Amhara probably never had a close

definition (Chernetsov, 1993 p. 101). In this case Levine mentioned that the term began to signify an ethnic group in recent times. He writes as “only the last quarter of the 20th century has the term Amhara come to be a common ethnic appellation, comparable to the way in which Oromo has become generalized to cover people who long knew themselves primarily as Borena, Guggi, Macca and the like.” (Levine, 2003 p. 231). The one that the term “Amhara” stands for is the medieval province, *Bete-Amhara*. Without overlooking the connection between the Amhara province and the Amhara people, Chernetsov writes “...in the Ethiopian chronicles [both in Christian and Muslim written traditions] of the 14th-18th centuries the term “Amhara” occurs to be a toponym, not an ethnonym, and designates a province, not people.” (Chernetsov, 1993 p. 97). Levine upholds the above assertion and writes “Royal chroniclers of the 14th-18th century consistently refer to Amhara only as a geographical region in Wollo, never as an ethnic name” (Levine, 2003:230). Ludolf mentioned it as one of the provinces and dominant political kingdoms in the medieval Ethiopian period. To him, Amhara is the geographical location (being the center of Abyssinia with those inaccessible fortified rocks) that helped to play a key political role in historic Ethiopia. Ludolf characterizes Amhara as “...the most-noble kingdom of all Ethiopia... and is therefore accounted the native country of the late and present kings and of all the nobility” (Ludolf, 1682 p. 13). Levine also describes the geographic location of the province Amhara as:

The term Amhara referred originally to a region of historic Ethiopia bounded on the west by the Abay and its tributary the Beshilo river, on the north by regions of Angot and Lasta; on the east by the escarpment leading down to the Danakil Desert (Afar); and by the *Wanchit* river to the south(the southern part of Wollo province). (Levine 2003:230).

In some sources like travelers’ accounts, the term Amhara seems elastic and represents the people as well as the province of Amhara which is as large as the present-day Amhara region encompassing the four provinces: Gojjam, Gonder, Wollo, and Shewa. Jams Bruce wrote about the Amhara people while he illustrates the border with Tigray saying ‘Tekeze is the natural boundary between Tigray and Amhara’ (Bruce, 1970 p.582). Indeed, the English topographical and statistical department of the war office in its ‘route in Abyssinia’ says: “the province of Amhara ...in the north Waldba, Wogera, Chilga, Kuara, Belesa, Fogera, Damot, Gojjam Begemider, Beshlo” (Cooke, 1867 p. 188). Accordingly, the Amahara indeed represent four

provincial outlooks and sentiments: Gonder, Gojjam, Wollo, and Shewa, and one supra-ethnic sentiment (Desta, 1981 p. 938-39); Tegegne, 1998 p. 119).

The inconclusive nature of the definition of Amhara is visibly seen in the works of domestic authors. For example, the lexicon definition of the term Amhara is associated with ethnonym, religion (Christianity), and provincial sentiments. Desta Teklewold in his Amharic dictionary put Amhara as a composition of two words *Am and Hara* by which *Am* stands for people and *Hara* refers to free which in combination gives a meaning “free people”, people who dislike being ruled by others (Desta, 1981p. 937). Desta also defines “Amharaness” as becoming Amhara through baptism and other manifestations of Christianity, “which means since the people of Amhara profess Christianity, non-Christians began to be like Amhara by worshiping their God”(Desta, 1981 E.C. p. 937). The same dictionary defines Amhara by mentioning their provincial identities as Shewans, Lastas, Gonderes Gjjames, and the like. This indicates that Amhara people are known by their provinces and have a common ethnic name called ‘Amhara’ (Desta, 1981 p. 938-39).

The other is the expression of Amhara with a people with the pan-Ethiopian national identity or affiliated to their provincial identities. Many of scholars had maintained this. Levine writes as “... despite the recent ethnicization of political discourse, most of the people considered “Amhara” continue to identify themselves primarily as “Ethiopians”, beyond being residents of some local area” (Levine, 2003 p. 231). He exemplified his assertion as “Amharic-speaking Shawan still feel themselves closer to non-Amharic speaking Shawans than to Amharic-speakers from distant regions like Gondar and there are few members of the Shawan nobility who do not have Oromo genealogical links” (Ibid.). At the beginning of the 20th century, the term Amhara is used to refer to “Ethiopian” as opposed to *‘ferenj’* which stands for “foreigner”. As Girma refers to the advertisement for a horse race during the time of empress Zewditu, one of the schedules of the race was reserved for only Ethiopians written in the Amharic text as Amhara (Girma, 2009 p. 25). In this poster, names supposed to be the homeland of “Amhara” such as Gojjam and Gondar have been mentioned. Girma also confirmed the presence of written works during the time of Haile Sellassie I that the term Amhara was used to signify Ethiopians which strengthened Chernetsov’s assertion. Greenfield also says “the people of Merabete are partly of [Oromo] descent and [Oromo] living in the nearby Shewan fief Fichie, though many speak only a few

words of Amharic, tend increasingly to describe themselves as Shewan and Amhara” cited in (Chernetsov, 1993 p. 101).

Historically, Amhara is associated with a settled human group in the north-central highlands of Ethiopia that later fractured into provincial constituents such as Gojjam, Shewa, Goder (Begemidir) and Wollo (Levine, 1974 p. 118; Markakis, 1974, p. 47). In his seminal work, ‘Wax and Gold’, Levine revealed that Amhara are a group of people who bear distinctive dominant culture, resided in specifically located boundaries, shared similar cultures, and possess common historical experience (Levine, 1972 p. vii). Particularly, he writes “The Amhara as a whole are not much given to aesthetic concerns. They are practical-minded peasants, austere religionists and spirited warriors their interests and achievements as a nation are chiefly in the spheres of military activity and government” (Levine, 1965, p. 5). Amhara is also known for their interest and energy for local units and at the same time looking to others that may offer greater economic opportunities and less restrictive regimes (Levine 1974 p.118). They rarely express strong solidarity with all Amhara and identify themselves either on a provincial basis or supra-ethnic terms such as Habesha or Ethiopia (Levine 1974 p.118). The ruling class of Amharic speakers who were allegedly called “Amhara kings” identified themselves as Ethiopians or referred to their provincial origin (Tegegn, 1998 p. 119). Regarding the usage of the idiom “Amhara kings”, Chernetsov maintained as it does not stand for ethnic identity as “the dynastic ties of Ethiopian kings with their native province were quite strong” (Chernetsov, 1993 p. 98). It seems to mean that the kings originated from Yikuno Amlak and a province called Amhara.

Berhanu tried to differentiate the term that only refers to toponym and the other having multiple meanings. In this case, he clarifies the interchangeable and confusing identities between “አምላራ” (Amhara) and “አማራ” (Amara). He noted the former refers to a historic region where the Amharic speaking people originated and the latter signifies three competing identities: religious identity to identify oneself as a Christian; Ethiopian identity which resembled to civic citizenship and the third is an ethnic identity for whom Amharic is a mother tongue and who self-identifies as such (Birhanu, 2015 p. 2).

As a people, the Amhara can mobilize when it called upon the situation which threatened their land possession (in which Ethiopia in bold), religion, and wife rather than its ethnic members

(Baye, 2008 P. VI). They respond to the call for a military campaign from the ruler with no hesitation and marching wherever and adapting and living everywhere. Chernetsov also confirmed this and writes “They are not self-centered at all, nor indifferent for the fate of Ethiopian state and the whole country, and demonstrated it during the Ethio-Somali conflict” (Cherntsov, 1993 p.102). This also confirmed five years later he published the article on the Ethio-Eritrean war. This and the long-aged interaction across various groups developed a socio-political structure based on individual benefit than an ethnic group. The people organized based on regional identities such as Gojamie, Gonderie, Shewie, and Wolloye. The forefront political position and its ability to get into marriage relations with other groups contributed to the Amhara people having a supra-ethnic consciousness affiliated with the Ethiopian national identity (Levine, 1974).

Traditionally many rural Amharas used the name Amhara to refer to a Christian. Baye maintained that the name Amhara is more related to religion than ethnic group at least in the rural areas. He also said that ‘if the peasant of Wollo and Shewa said I am Amhara they refer that I am a Christian. Likewise, the Muslim society replies “I am a Muslim” when asked about their identity (Baye, 2008, P. VI). On the other hand, an Amhara would not identify herself (himself) as Christian to her (his) Tigrean neighbor. In the cultural dimension, the Amharic language is a crucial cultural marker from which social boundaries are articulated.

From the above various descriptions of the term “Amhara”, one can understand that it is hard to specify its way of mobilization be it social or ethnic. Chernetsov agree with this and said the nature of Amhara group is also problematic whether it was a social or an ethnic (Cherntsov, 1993 p. 100.). Markakis also mentioned that the ethnographic, historical as well as cultural dimensions do not “disclose a crucial historical fact” without looking into the sociological dimension of Amhara (Markakis, 2005). He indeed put his position and explains Amhara society was characterized by a rigidly stratified social structure. The mass of the people, which is a vast peasantry, is situated at the bottom, and the clergy and the ruling aristocrats are found at the top of the social pyramid respectively (Markakis, 2005). Lewis likewise defines Amhara as:

[it] comprises a loose tripartite hierarchy of military aristocrats, clergy and the lay peasantry; the last whose surplus production sustained their masters, live in loosely

aggregated parishes, cultivating cereals (including the indigenous *teff*) with ox-drawn plough” (Lewis, 1983 p. 1).

Though controversial to use the concept of feudalism in the Ethiopian context, Markakis described the sociology of Amhara society as feudal with the presence of class divisions. He wrote:

The class dimension needs to be emphasized, because the Amhara peasantry belonged to the dominant group in cultural and psychological terms only, having no share of power or economic privilege. Invariably, access to state power controls access to economic privilege and social status (Markakis, 2003 p. 9).

Chernetsov has also somewhat the same position as Markakis and Lewis subsequent to referring to the Russian literature and the works of other foreign scholars on Ethiopia. Accordingly, he observed that the heterogeneous nature of Amhara and the nature of social relations within do not let someone overlook the justification that Amhara for being a social one not ethnic (Chernetsov, 1993 p. 101). Hence, he concluded “Amhara” probably never had a close definition and always meant more social than an ethnic group.” (Ibid., p. 101).

Amhara identity could also be viewed from its land tenure system. As a primordial view of Amhara identity, the land tenure system could be mentioned. *Rist* has a lot of ingredients in this regard. It is a land-holding right of a person claiming ancestral descent (Hobben, 1973 p. 30). Memorization of one’s kin descent is crucial among the Amhara since it is the only way to claim *Rist* (Teshale, 1996). The government has neither the power to provide nor annex the landholdings of the peasants. However, it has the power to collect tribute from the produce of the *Rist* land through *Gult* system. *Gult* is a “tribute appropriation right granted by the emperor to various ranks of warrior class, the church and others in return for military, administrative and religious services rendered to the emperor by the *Gult* grantees.” (Teshale, 1996 p. 79). While *Rist* is a natural right over the land, *Gult* is the right over the owner of the land given to those who serve the imperial court by the emperor. At this juncture, a kind of class structure is formed between the powerful, rich people with *Gult* rights and the poor landowner peasants who must pay their produce to the former but not their land. Teshale underscored that this is one variant of

class relations as “the Gult system is the foundation of the class structure of the Geber system.” (Teshale, 1996 p. 83.).

True that “Amhara” denotes multiple things by virtue of its association with Amharic language, Orthodox Christianity, economic and social status with national identity. The linguistic component and connection to national identity are profound. Because Amharic language is exclusively associated with the Amhara people as opposed to the culture shared with Tigray (Markakis, 2003). The linguistic boundary is salient in distinguishing Amhara from Tigray and other counterpart ethnic groups. Given Amharic speakers living in other regions have been attacked regardless of their religious identity, as discussed in chapter seven, the religious boundary has been steadily weakened except for some contestations in the emic aspect of identity conception. The association with the Ethiopian identity (the dominant culture of Amhara and partly Tigrayan) has been an important boundary in relation to the other ethno-cultural groups who do not associate themselves with the Ethiopianist traditions.

4.3. Origin of Amhara Identity

Regarding the origin of Amhara, two domestic “historians” of the 19th century are prominent: Aleka Taye Gebre Mariyam and Aleka Atsme Giorgis. While the former claims the primordial origin of Amhara from the tribe of Yoktan the latter argues as Amhara and its language Amharic evolved from the mixed stock of the king’s soldiers since the 13th century. Alaka Taye, an Ethiopian evangelist, and historian of the nineteenth century writes that the origin of Amhara is having its own common descent. He suggests that the ancestors of Amhara and Tigre are the same: they both are sons of Yoktan and grandsons of Shem (Taye, 1922. p. 15). He argues that there is no doubt about Amhara as they have originated from the race of the tribe of Yoktan since they bear evidence that shows customs, appearance, names, place names, and their language of the same (Taye, 1922. p. 17).

Taye also reviewed the work of Aleka Atsmie who considered Amhara as a mixed group serving the king as *Chewa*, a soldier appointed over the peasantry whose origin is unknown. He criticized the idea that the Amhara people and Amharic language evolved from the mixed nature of the king’s soldiers since the time of Yekno Amlak as absolute jock and (or) folk story and argues for the existence of both before the time specified by Aleka Atsme, 1270. He writes as

“Amhara are the lineages of Yoktan Tribe and Agazian race and their language, Amharic was distinctly found 1640 years before the time of Yekno Amlak”. He also presents evidence to support his assertion that Amharic names of the then kings which are neither related to Ge’ez nor Tigrigna such as *Werede, Negash, Agba, Gum Asgomgum, and Mera Tekle Haymanot* (Taye, 1922, p. 20).

Literature in the modern scholarship about the origin of Amhara has the same contending views as the traditional historical accounts. Historically, Allan Hoben, in his seminal book about the land tenure system among the Amha people, wrote about the emergence of Amhara as “a self-conscious ethnic and linguistic group at the beginning of the second millennium A.D.” (Hoben, 1973, p. 3). On the other hand, Taddesse Tamrat, who is accredited for his work on the medieval Christian highland of Ethiopia, says little about Amhara. He traces the origin of Amhara as Semitic immigrants from south Arabia who settled on the land inhabited by the Agaws who later adopted the language of the former and became “semiticized natives” constituted the peoples of Axum and spread further south (Taddesse, 1972, pp. 37-38). This historical account with its migration thesis served for the pidgin origin of the Amharic language and its speakers which has wider acceptance by those who largely identify themselves in a Pan-Ethiopian sentiment until this time.

In his article, “On the origin of Amhara”, Chernetsov has described Amhara culture as a culture of assimilation in the imperial court. His premise is in the context that the Amhara which is the second largest group in the country emerged from a single province of “Amhara” with a relatively tiny population which leads to wondering how they could dominate in quite a vast Ethiopian empire in the 14th-17th centuries (Chernetsov, 1993 p. 97). His argument is based on Tadesse’s work which discusses the royal regiments and other structural administrative services of the medieval empire were run by people from various ethno-linguistic backgrounds that had to adopt the king’s culture and language, Amharic.

Getachew presented the pidgin nature of Amharic without denying the presence of the people called Amhara in the 13th century somewhere in Wollo. Mentioning the historical diversity of Ethiopia, Getachew maintained that one of these groups called Amharas spoke early Amharic. He further writes “Only those people from Amhara were called Amhara” (Getachew, 1993).

Later, Amharic spread outside Amhara province into the present day Gonder, Gojjam, Lasta, and northern Shoa which spoke another language before being overrun by Amharic. Getachew further writes “For unknown historical reasons, the language of the Amharas started to spread outside Amhara, especially into Gonder, Gojjam, Lasta, and northern Shoa (notably Menz, Tegulet, Bulga)”(Getachew, 1993).

Chernetsov has also tried to explain the ‘unknown historical reason’, that Getachew states, is the army of the emperor that is responsible for both the expansion of the Ethiopian empire and Amharic language and culture. He writes as “this army was naturally not recruited exclusively from the population of Amhara province.” Chernetsove also supports his argument by presenting the composition of the army of Amde Tseyon. He described it as “the great conquests of his [Yikno Amlak’s] grandson Amda-Seyon were conducted by the regiments of warriors from Amhara, Shewa, Lasta, Tigre, Damot and Begemder [and] these soldiers were of quite different origins and background” (Chernetsov, 1993 p. 98). AssefaEdeshaw has a similar assertion to Chernetsov except for the time frame that Amhara and Amharic language has created. He took the pidginization process to Axumite times and underscored the way the people Amhara created is related to the way Axumite military was organized, the implementation of war campaigns, and its relations with the conquered people (Assefa, 2015, pp. 49-50).

The above various and perhaps controversial justification definitions of the term “Amhara” probably emanated from the two-contending historical and linguistic hypotheses on the origin of Ethio-Semitic people and the Amharic language. These are the pidgin origin of Amharic language which is built on, though no hundred percent connections, the migration hypothesis of Ethio-Semitic people on the one hand and the non-pidgin origin of Amharic language and the non-migration hypothesis of Ethio-Semitic people on the other hand (Girma, 2009). The first assumption considers these people outcomes who emigrated from south Arabia in the first century B.C. The second hypothesis claims that the Ethio-Semitic is autochthons groups that lived in their home origin. While the first hypothesis is the most widely known explanation in various historical and linguistic works, the second one is an emerging which gaining ground in recent years.

The above descriptions of the origin of Amhara and Amharic by Aleka Atsme, Chernetsov, Assefa, and Getachew put under the first hypothesis. Scholars in the areas of linguistic origin are the protagonists of the idea that Amharic is a result of the pidginization process. In the same analogy, Amhara ethnic group is the result of the intermingling process of Semitic people with the Cushitic and to some extent Omotic ones (Tadese, 1972; Bender, 1983; Baye, 2008). The hypothesis claims that Amhara identity is a melting pot into which various ethnic groups are assimilated. This has parallelism with the hypothesis of the pidgin origin of Amharic language. The latter asserts, Amharic originated in the surroundings of the Beshilo River or somewhere in the North West around the 4th century as pidgin and become a distinct language around the 14th century (Bender, 1983; Baye, 2008). Girma noted that in the listed sources there is a contradiction between the date of origin as pidgin and became distinct. Indeed, Ayalew also mentioned that Amharic originated and spread during the Zague dynasty (Ayalew n.d. p. 155).

However, the pidgin theory for Amharic language and the people (Amhara) has been debunked by the recent hypothesis which claims Amharic is not a pidgin but rather a distinct and the Semitic people in which the Amhara are dominant, are indigenous and distinct for Ethiopia rather than migrated from south Arabia or a fusion of soldiers from the various ethnic background (Girma, 2009). Considering Amharic exhibits a number of non-Semitic features Bender and others propose and promote the pidgin origin hypothesis. In contrast to this, some argue that this is due to the latter influence. Indeed, considering the presence of non-Semitic features in other Ethio-Semitic languages Amharic could not be the exception (Girma, 2009).

The pidgin origin hypothesis of Amharic language is built on the previous dominant hypothesis that Ethio-Semitic languages are brought by Semitic-speaking emigrants in the first millennium B.C. The migration hypothesis is largely suggested by historians based on the fact that cultural presence of south Arabia elements in the northern part of Ethiopia. However, the linguists appeared hardly find evidence to prove this hypothesis (Girma, 2009 p. 135). Girma also noted that in examining the premises presented to support the non-migration hypothesis it is also imperative to consider that ‘there is no evidence’ does not mean there was no migration at all (Ibid.). However, historians like Sergew suggested that the origin of Amharic was hardly associated with the rise of the Zague dynasty, and its place of origin was somewhere in the central part of Ethiopia. Sergew Confirmed Aleka Taye’s argument and said that despite the

origin and expansion of the language attributed to the period of Zagwe dynasty, the birth of Amharic was dated much earlier in the central part of Ethiopia among the Amhara people. He also wrote:

During the Zagwe, it [Amharic] seems to have acquired wider importance and was spoken at the imperial court. This explains why it was known in the beginning as *Lisane Nigus*- the language of the emperor. At that time the Amhara people were politically very active and ... occupied key administrative positions as well as those of lesser rank. Thus, they had an opportunity to impose their language in turn, was subject to the influence of the Hamitic languages, particularly in the areas of syntax and vocabulary (Sergew 1972: 227-279)

Historians like Marcus have also maintained that the Ethio-Semitic people are indigenous groups to Ethiopia. Despite he maintained the immigration of the Sabaean language to Ethiopia; the Ethio-Semitic is the other way around. Marcus has explained that the Semitic branch which echoed in Tigrigna and a bit heard in Amharic developed in Ethiopia and simultaneously spread to the Middle East before it returned in a written form (Marcus, 2002 p. 3).

Girma has presented linguistic and historical evidence to question the pidgin origin and migration hypothesis regarding the Amharic language and Amhara people not plausible. The main reasons mentioned by Girma, to [the first reason that] support the non-migration hypothesis of Ethio-Semitic, are diversity and least move principles. The former is about the existence of a diversity of Semitic language such that diversity indicates origin. Accordingly, considering 80 percent of the living Semitic languages, Ethio-Semitic languages are the most diversified languages within Semitic. Hence, he concluded: “This clearly indicates that Ethio-Semitic is an indigenous group that lives in its home of original habitation” (Girma, 2009 p. 143). The second reason is the ‘least move’ principle “it suggested that the origin of the proto-Afro-Asiatic language (peoples) in Africa, especially in Ethiopia.” (Girma, 2009 p. 144). This is because, as Afro-Asiatic has at least six languages families (Semitic, Cushitic, Omotic, Berber, Chadic, and old Egyptian), “only a few of Semitic languages are spoken in Asia while the rest are spoken in Africa” (Ibid).

In general, Girma has challenged the presumption based on chronological, historical, geographic, and linguistic grounds and contends that the Semitic people, of which the Amhara are dominant,

are native to Ethiopia and distinct from other ethnic groups rather than having immigrated from southern Arabia. According to Girma, historical digs only uncover Semitic people when they return to their ancestral homes after going into the Arabian Peninsula and the Middle East (Girma, 2009). We have been able to comprehend the contemporary nativism discourse, particularly between the Amhara and Oromo ethnic groupings, thanks to this intellectual discussion. It has also been acting as a scientific counterargument to the long-running controversy over whether Amhara constitute a separate ethnic group. In addition to intellectual debates and discussions, the development of an ethnic identity focused on the identification process undertaken by certain peoplehood or its elite group. Chapter 6 evaluates both of these focusing on the later one.

4.4. Amhara Identity and the Modern Ethiopian State Formation

Historic Ethiopia, commonly mentioned in the name of Abyssinia by foreign writers, comprises mainly the Amhara, Agaws, and Tigray ethnic groups who speak different languages but share a common ancestry, history, and culture that the former was managed to expand to the south and appeared the most dominant figure in what is called Ethiopian empire in general (Markakis, 1999). From the second half of the 17th century, until the rise of Tewodros II, the Yeju Oromos were additional players in the state system of Ethiopia (Shiferaw, 1990). Most studies on Ethiopia, if not all, emphasized two historical fundamentals: the multi-ethnic nature of the polity and the political dominance of the Amhara people since the second half of the 13th century.

As discussed above, with the spread of Amharic language from the province of Amhara, the place where the restored Solomonic dynasty had its base, to other parts of the north, northwestern and south-central Ethiopia Amhara came to assume the character of ethnic category (Bahru, 2010a p.82). Despite this, the native Amharic speakers are largely affiliated with their region or province than by their ethnic identity i.e., Gojjamie, Gonderie, Shewie, or Wolloye rather than Amhara (Ibid). This is partly because the administrative divisions that existed until 1991, with the exception of a brief-lived ethnic-based Italian administrative organization, also reinforced or shaped this provincial sentiment (Ibid p. 83).

As the imperial authority steadily weakened since the 16th century, especially following historical events such as the war with the Muslim sultanates, the Oromo expansion, and the first

formal contact with Europe, power was significantly shifted from the monarch to the imperial domains. In the late 17th century, the ascendancy of regional lords was intensified and the imperial authority had broken down and culminating in the emergence of regional dynasties. It marked the infamous historical time called the era of princes, *Zemen Mesafint* (1769–1855) (Bahru, 2002).

The formation of 19th century Ethiopia was conducted by the process of expansion and restoration of territorial claims by bringing the pre-existing autonomous and semi-autonomous groups into a centralized rule.¹⁰ As many historians agree that the process of state centralization, under the guise of the Ethiopian modern state formation was started by emperor Tewodros II. It broadly involved two processes: centralization of power within the domain of historic Ethiopia and territorial expansion conducted southward (Teshale, 1996 p. 38). The reemergence of imperial power from the accession of Tewodros II in 1855 signals the end of the era of princes and the beginning of the centralization process that which the emperor sought regional lords to be subordinate to him (Clapham, 2013 p.16).

The centralization process during this period should be seen as an act of recentralizing power previously under the monopoly of the imperial throne taken by the regional warlords and dynasties. There are two contending views on the political struggles and wars conducted between regional lords during the *Zemene Mesafint* and its aftermath in the process of modern state formation. The first argument is that regionalism was a major fault line and regional lords fought one another for power. There was less ethnicized state power and struggles and rivalries lay between regions and provinces, not ethnic groups (Bahru, 2002; Greenfield, 1965; Yonatan, 2017).

The second view presents the struggle as an ethnic rivalry for power. Recognizing regionalism as a dominant element of the period, Merara contends that it was the struggle for supremacy among

¹⁰Scholars like Markakis argued the motive for the expansion southward was material interest, especially for land. Scarcity of land in the non-arable northern plateau led to the expansions followed by an appropriation of better land in the newly conquered frontiers (Markakis, 1999, p. 69). No less significant number of intellectuals and politicians on their side argue that Menelik's deed was not seen beyond reunifying the pre-existing domains of the Medieval Empire (Bahru, 2002).

ethnicities notably the Tigray, Amhara, and Oromo elites accounted for various competing warrior classes to emerge (Merara, 2011 p. 2). Merara also underlined that “Tewodos was the first modern Ethiopian ruler who explicitly conscious of the ethnic factor in his project of empire-building and consciously challenged the supremacy of the Oromo princes over the Abyssinian kingdom” (Merara 2011 p. 3). Teshale also noted that an important element of Tewedros’s reign over the Abyssinian Kingdom was his conviction to put an end to the influence of the Oromo, whom he regarded as outsiders to the Ethiopian throne (Teshale, 1996 p. 38). The successive military campaigns of Tewodros were motivated by the intention to stop the political dominance of Amharized Oromo rulers in the very heart of Amhara land i.e., the Yeju Oromo ruling house (from the present-day Woldia) at Debre Tabor (Ibid).¹¹ Despite this, Tewodros had marched to other provinces ruled by Amhara such as Simen and Shewa which contained the ethnic rivalry argument. The evidence used by Merara and Teshale to support their claims is the letter written by the emperor sent to Queen Victoria of Britain. The translation by Pankhurst is put as:

My fathers the emperors having forgotten our creator, He handed over their kingdom to the [Oromos] and Turks. But God created me, lifted me out of the dust, and restored this empire to my rule ... By his power, I drove away the [Oromos]. But for the Turks, I have told them to leave the land of my ancestors. They refused. I am going to wrestle with them. (Pankhurst cited in Teshale, 1996 p. 38)

Despite the acts of Tewodros seems mobilization based on identity, and manifest itself in the name of Ethiopianess. Trgegn (1998) and Semahegn (2014) on the other hand argued that the emergence of Shewa as a unifying force under the rule of Minilik II was not based on the conscious mobilization of all Amhara. As mentioned above, Greenfield has underlined the multi-ethnic nature of Amhara and designates it as a status group than ethnic. As will be discussed below, the imperial ruling class was ethnic blind in recruiting people into its highest positions (Teshale, 1996). Hence so far as someone managed to embrace the culture of the royal court, Amharic language, and orthodox Christianity, was eligible to join the ruling class of the royal

¹¹The type of state system that the Yeju established was what Shiferaw introduces the notion of *Mesfinate*, adapted from Aleka Teye and Tekle Tsadik Mekuriya’s term, *Misfina*. According to Shiferaw, Mesfinate means the state ruled by Mesafint, princes as opposed to monarchy.

family in which some degree of the myth of origin is inevitably at stake accompanied by culture, and language. Another reason could be the absence of power-sharing for the Amhara nobilities found in Gojjam, Wollo, and Gondar during and after expansion (Akele, 2004 p. 47).

Tewodros was only successful in unifying the territories of historic Ethiopia. An imagined state of Ethiopia with its defined international boundaries was pursued by emperor Yohannes IV. This was indicated in his letter to the King of Prussia in 1881 in which he listed the holdings of Ethiopia and its adjoining international boundaries (Teshale, 1996 pp. 30-31.). In the letter, the sea frontiers in the east and southeast and territories that transcended the current neighboring countries were mentioned as Ethiopia's natural boundaries. Despite the imagined and well-defined territorial entities of Ethiopia, it was not materialized.

Having a liberal approach to the issue of political power, Yohannes's policy of modern state formation had a religious dimension. He had shifted from ethnicity to religion as a defining feature of the state. Unlike his liberal approach to political affairs, he showed intolerance to religious diversity. The council of *Boru Meda*, which chaired by the emperor himself was aimed to end the doctrinal controversy within the Orthodox Church that served as an ideological wing of the Zemene Mesafint. Tewahido was declared to be the only doctrine of the Orthodox Church and those who stuck with the other sects (*Qibat* and *Tsega*) were executed (Bahru, 2002 p. 48). The worst was happened to the Wollo Muslims, as they were ordered to renounce Islam and accept Christianity. Islam had no place in the ideological realm of Yohannes that "he was aiming not only a unity of doctrine but also at unity of the faith" (Bahru, 2002 p. 48). The people of Wollo responded in various ways to the religious policy of the emperor manifested through conversion, pretend, exile, and resistance (Ibid.).

The present shape and size of Ethiopia was crystallized by emperor Menelik II. Following the spectacular expansion (restoration) of the state in the second half of the 19th century, Ethiopia became a Mosaic of diverse groups and cultures. This was encountering a new dimension of diversity for a state which previously relatively homogeneous. Emperor Menelik had treated the newly incorporated areas in two ways depending on the way they reacted to the expansion (Teshale, 1996; Bahru, 2002; Clapham, 2013). Those who peacefully submitted had got an opportunity to maintain their prerogatives of ruling their regions and became members of the

ruling class through embracing Amharic and marriage alliance as well as conversion to Christianity. On the other hand, those areas fiercely resisted the expansion were subjected to harsh rule through direct appointment from the center. While territories like Wallaga and Jimma were incorporated with no military engagement integrated into the royal class culture, areas incorporated after fierce resistance like Arsi, Harrar, Wolayta, and Kaffa were treated harshly.

To answer the question that how the Amhara identity has been related to the Ethiopian identity is determined by the way we answer the question How have the Amhara managed to dominate historic Ethiopia and contributes to the process of modern state formation. Given Chernetsov's description of Amhara i.e. "a culture of assimilation at the imperial court", people recruited for government service, notably in the military, regardless of their cultural origin integrated into the court culture. The old ties (which continued until Haile Sellassie's reforms) between land tenure¹² and military service created a dominant group having similar culture but mixed ethnic origin (Chernetsov, 1993, p. 100). Chernetsov also seemed to suggest about the two types of Amhara identity are highly interrelated to each other. Pausewang elaborated later on the two-faced Amhara identity: urban and rural (Pausewang, 2005). While the former stands for people who acquire the imperial court culture and show pan-Ethiopian sentiment, the latter represents those who adapted the rural Amhara culture as other ethnic groups do. Similarly, Getachew clarified recently the two faces of Amhara identity as "Amharic-Amharic and xxx-Amaharic". The first stands for primordial Amhara and the second referred to those who abandoned their pre-existing ethnic identities and assimilated into the culture of the state which was taken from the former. Getachew underlines the fusion of the two identities which are called Ethiopianess. To him, the "xxx-Amharic" neither wants to be called Amhara nor did claim their former ethnic identity and the culture of primordial Amhara has already become the state's culture.

The perception that Amhara is an empire builder is entrenched among the newly incorporated areas. True that this perception has been endured until this time, especially in the eastern lowland of Afar and Somali the name Amhara beyond its definition from the view of power relation has been characterized as an empire builder. Markakis also has seen this assertion has no absolute limitation except its ignorance of others "the Ethiopian ruling class could not be defined in ethnic

¹²In the Ethiopian land tenure system, Rist and Gult were vital elements. The first is an inalienable right of possession of land by a person through kin descent while the second is the power to collect tribute from the produce of the former granted by the Emperor in return for military service.

terms” is questionable since one can easily infer the presence of Amhara (ethnic identity) within the “Amhara ruling class” in his narrations. Indeed, the reason that the highest positions were open for anyone from any ethnic and linguistic background is not strong enough for the argument which underlines the multi-ethnic character of the Ethiopian ruling class since 1270. Rather it indicates the inclusive, nature of the group’s socio-political system in which there seems to be a limit in the route to power.

The issue of Amhara identity before the rise of ethno-nationalism in Ethiopia seems difficult to conceptually articulate. Admasu (2010) prefers to use the concept of “status group” as an analytical tool to deal with pre-1960s Amhara identity. His reason was there was no collective consciousness of the myth of origin within the Amharic-speaking people; rather there was a linguistic category, a group from various ethnic and cultural origins speaking the Amharic language. However, given the absence of a society where all people are affiliated with the same ethnic group, there is no such thing as “non-ethnicity” (Doane, 1997 p. 378). A conceptual issue that is suited to understanding Amhara identity before the rise of ethno-nationalists is the notion that “dominant groups do not have ethnicity”. Doane (1997) explains the role of “hidden” ethnicity on the majority groups in a way that “ethnic identity is especially “hidden” for members of dominant groups; it is likely that subordinate group members may be more likely to consider the group affiliation of dominant group members” (Doane, 1997 p. 378). Blackwell (1981) explains why ethnicity is not salient among the dominant group:

Another way in which dominant group status affects group identity is when dominant group culture assumes normative status and group customs and practices are built into a “mainstream” culture that is not overtly linked to a particular ethnic group (Blackwell 1981, cited in Doane, 1997 p. 378).

Doane conceptualized ethnic identity as less salient due to that group being in a position of dominance. It seems to suggest that because they realize their ethnic identity in national terms. However, the hidden feature of dominant group identity is not static in nature. Given ethnicity is socially constructed and changes according to situations, dominant group identity might have appeared in a defensive manner in response to actual or perceived threats to the group (Doane, 1997 p. 391). This presentation of ethnic identity seemed to have been suited to conceptually describe the nature of Amhara identity in the pre-ethnonationalist movements. And currently

appears to be in a reactive sense claiming real and perceived marginalization after the introduction of ethnicity for political organization. However, we need to be cautious that the notion of 'dominant group' in Ethiopia is not similar to the 'dominance' of the English and white European-Americans in Britain and the United States of America respectively. While the former is a semi-inclusive ethnic identity that changes its shape and texture according to historical contexts, the latter is in which inter-group relations are largely expressed in racial terms.

The ruling class composed of mainly Amhara and other ethnic groups described as '*neftegna*' began to make a formidable socio-political control over the vast territory of the newly incorporated territories of the south, southeast, and southwest of present-day Ethiopia. Members of this ruling class had formed a networked elite group that supports the imperial power. One way of doing this was through marriage. The other is recruiting members of the local people to pass through Christianity and the Amharic language. This process of assimilation had got the name 'Amharaization' and was promoted under the empire having political implications. Markakis noted that the ultimate goal was "the fusing of Amhara and Ethiopian identities" (Markakis 2005 p. 2).

The view from the south is quite different from the system in the north. The cultural hegemony of Amharic language is a sufficient condition for the presence of "Amhara ruling class", especially from the perspective of the south. Broadly speaking the southern part of current Ethiopia had suffered from both economic and cultural domination. In fact, it is nothing but the *chawa/balagar* class relation in the north, on the claim of superiority of the former over the latter, became *naftagna/gabbar* distinction in the south (Teshale, 1996 p. 45). In other words, the *naftegna* was nothing but *chawa* where Christian warrior settlers imposed on the *gabbars* which is nothing but *balagar*. The former was predominantly Amhara extractions that had enjoyed socio-political and economic benefits at the expense of the latter, the local population. The land expropriation and the introduction of the *gebar* system results in the first. Unlike the land tenure system in the north the inalienable landholding right of peasants, *Rist*, counterbalance the regular appropriation of tribute and plundering by the warrior class, *Chewa*, peoples of the south lost most of their traditional land to the new rulers and warrior settler class, *neftegna* (Lewis, 1983, p. 3).

The other point of difference in the south is culture, predominantly Amharic. The spread of Amharic language at the expense of the preexisting local languages brought double domination (Bahru, 2002). Contrary to the vast diversity of the empire, the ruling class was engaged to define it by culture and values which represent the northern and central Ethiopian people. Hence an additional imposition of culture which is not the case in the north creates relative strain in the south which is eventually interpreted as national oppression by the 1960s Ethiopian left intelligentsia. In explaining this conflation of class and nationality Teshale writes: “class and nationality almost merged in the form of an Amhara nation-class but there were Tigreans and Shawa Oromos in Menelik’s army that settled as *naftegna*, too” (Teshale, 1996 p. 176).

Given Amharic is the only objective cultural marker that the Amhara do not share with others, its expansion¹³ was characterized as an instrument of Amhara domination. Amharic had got a new status as a symbol of unification during the reign of Menelik II for a newly diversified socio-cultural setup of Ethiopia following southward expansion (Mayer, 2006 p. 120). Similar to the Tigray case, the institutionalization of Amharic as the sole language of instruction in the modern educational and administrative system, in 1950s, triggers other nationalisms in the south (Teshale, 1996).

Unlike his predecessors who allow relative regional autonomy, Hile sellassie, took strong and centralized policy measures in the expansion of Amharic with less degree of sensitivity towards local sentiments (Bahru, 2010a, p.84). Considering the situation in the south, as mentioned above, the undeniable fact is it was especially from 1875-to 1898 that Amharic was spread into the newly incorporated territories. This was achieved largely through “settlers who came to occupy strategic social positions in the outposts of the new empire” (Bahru, 2010a, P. 84). As

¹³ Following the resurgence of the imperial power in 1855, the development of Amharic language reaches its peak in both writing and speaking. Emperor Tewodros made it the written language of the imperial court and order his three chroniclers to write the history of the time in Amharic (Meyer. 2006). Previously, Ge’ez was used as the written language of the court. Despite Amharic being made *lisane nigus* (the language of the king), the role of Ge’ez is not ruled. Since the last times of Gondarian period Oromiffa was added which creates an almost trilingual imperial court. Bahru underlined the presence of ample evidence that Yohannes IV continued the same language policy as his predecessor (Bahru, 2010a). The shift from Ge’ez to Amharic impacted the political pattern that existed for a long within the Abyssinians, Amhara, and Tigray. Teshale (1996) reflects that in the historic setting of Ge’ez civilization, Tigray was a regional power contender, not a national-ethnic entity until the introduction of modern education. The seed of discord between the two people got its apogee when Amharic became the language of instruction throughout Ethiopia. Teshale writes: “This was perceived as the language of Amhara becoming dominant over that of Tigrayan led to the transformation of Tigray from regional entity into a national-ethnic one; hence the rise of national question in Tigray” (Teshale, 1996, p. 175).

discussed above, the military settlers were composed of other ethnic groups like Tigreans, Gurages, and Oromos of northern and central Ethiopia. Indeed, in view of the mass of Ethiopia's peasantry, it is non-controversial that Amharic has not appeared as a lingua franca by the forces of market economy. Rather it had emerged as a national language by virtue of being the language of the ruling elite (Alemseged, 2013 p. 236).

The cleric and traders came into the area following the military settlers (neftegna). In some cases, the priests arrived earlier than even the soldiers, and only they helped the spread of Amharic through their discourse out of the church service. Unlike the Ethiopian Orthodox Church showed little missionary zeal to convert the local population and was limited to addressing the spiritual needs of the settlers, the Protestants did a lot in the expansion of evangelical activities and the expansion of Amharic (Markakis, 2003; Bahru, 2010).¹⁴

Despite Amharic did not succeed in instituting itself as a commercial *lingua franca*, urbanization did play a crucial role in the development of Amharic at the level transcending other ethnic groups in the newly incorporated areas who regard themselves as their mother tongue (Bahru, 2010a P. 85). The spread of Amharic in the incorporated areas occurred mainly in the emerging urban sector. Most of the towns there were founded as military and administrative centers where northerners congregated as soldiers, administrators, and landlords (Markakis, 1974). A string of towns appeared along the Djibouti - Addis Ababa railway line and some of these developed into commercial and manufacturing centers (Markakis, 2011). Here the psychological makeup of the settlers (Amhara) facilitated the expansion of the language. Markakis writes as: "the Amhara proved an extroverted, cosmopolitan people who mixed uninhibitedly with other ethnic groups." (Markakis, 2003 p. 3). Intermarriage with other ethnic groups was extensive, and it proved a significant factor in the spread of the dominant language and the related process of assimilation into the dominant culture and society. From the above historical event, it is clear that the spread of Amharic is achieved mainly through its association with the dominant political power which symbiotically lived for a long time (Bahru, 2010a, P. 85).

Despite all the above facts regarding the Amharic language and its expansion before 1931, the official establishment of Amharic as the state symbol of Ethiopia was laid by the 1955 revised

¹⁴The policy of Haile Selassie in his later years obliged the missionaries to their activities to be in Amharic.

constitution. Not only did Amharic become an official language of the state but also it was set as one of the requirements for foreigners to acquire Ethiopian citizenship as stated in the first citizenship proclamation. In post-1964, Amharic replaced English and was made the medium of instruction throughout the elementary level by which time textbooks for all subjects in that language had been prepared (Bahru, 2010a, P. 84). Moreover, Amharic was used to print postage stamps, currency, and government notices as well as print and electronic media (Bahru 2010a, P. 86). The official newspaper, *negarit gazetas* as well as other government notices and official publications came out bilingually in Amharic and English. This act formalized an existing situation, especially a nation-state building process but also set the framework for future development.

In the second half of the 20th century in Ethiopia, the name Amhara and its identity have been linked to negative connotations like “Amhara domination”, “Amharaization”, and until now “Amhara chauvinism” (Markakis, 2005). This negative depiction is the burden the people have to bear. However, the vast majority of the Amhara peasantry has more or less lived as peasants in the southern parts of Ethiopia. Despite they got the name “empire builders” or “oppressors”, they have got little benefit from the empire and this does not go beyond the cultural stuff (Markakis, 2005). In reality, by the end of the imperial regime, it was the northern part of the country marginalized and a victim of underdevelopment and famine strikes. Indeed, Markakis argues the name Amhara refers not to the ethnic group but to the ruling class as he puts in his terms "to include the peasant mass of northern Ethiopia in the designation “dominant” is a gross distortion, for this class belongs to this group in cultural and psychological term only." (Markakis, 1974 p.8).

Despite the presence of significant and vocal groups who claim Amharic is ethnic neutral and a kind of collective identity, its establishment as a national educational language has brought the rise of other ethno-nationalist movements against Amhara cultural domination (Alemseged, 2013 p. 236). There is little (if not none) evidence of the presence of Amhara ethnicity in 1991. Nonetheless, since collective identity is defined by significant others, Amharic speakers have been designated as Amhara as an ethnic group who inflicted political and cultural domination on other groups of the country (Alemseged, 2013 p. 235).

The motive of the state policies discussed above was to ensure national integration. Indeed such centrist tendencies accompanied by nation-state policy created centrifugal sentiments in diverse societies like Ethiopia. The centrist nature of Haile Selassie regime did not show some degree of sensitivity to the Eritrean case which was federated by the decision of the United Nations. Eventually, the above state policies faced two challenges: the rise of regional and ethno-national consciousness and radical student movement (Bahru, 2010a p. 87). The former manifested itself through peasant uprisings in different parts of the country. The regional challenges came from Tigray and Gojjam were clearly reactions to the increasing growing centralization process which affects their prerogatives of regional autonomy (Bahru, 2010c p. 337). On the other hand, Bale uprising showed two dimensions: class and ethnicity resulting from the cultural and economic domination of the north via its centrist policies (Ibid). The other regional opposition which poses the most significant challenge to the imperial regime came from Eritrea. As will be discussed below, the leftist student movement holds the Eritrean case under the Marxist-Leninist formula of national question that extended later to the colonial perspective. The above challenges forced the government to give some concessions at least regarding language policy. Other languages such as Somaligna, Tigrigna, and Oromiffa were included in the media. Despite its stiff stand over the territorial integrity of the country, Dergue had made some adjustments to the language policy at the level of allowing local vernaculars in primary education (Bahru, 2010a p. 88). The second and the most radical challenge to the imperial regime came from the students. The national question under the baggage of the Marxist-Leninist recipe began to dominate the country's political discourse and endured until this period.

4.5.The National Question and Imagined Amhara Identity

The rise of Amhara nationalism is centered on the discourse of “Amhara domination” which sideslipped from the national oppression thesis articulated by the ESM. This part provides a detailed analysis of the national question, as the radical students viewed the state of Ethiopia as an ethnic patchwork and framed the imperial ruling class as an "Amhara oppressive class" that later slipped into “Amhara oppressor-other oppressed nationalities”. The discussion helps to understand how the discursive narrative that portrays Amhara as an oppressive ethnic group that should be securitized in the post-1991 political path has evolved. There is a unanimous agreement that the rationale for the ESM was the rejection of all forms of oppression in the

country. It has been reiterated that the odds of the ‘national question’ raised by ESM are associated with their interpretation of the Ethiopian state crisis only in the Leninist-Stalinist glance and overlooking the historical realities in the interaction of peoples since a long time ago. Despite the difficulty to identify the exact time when the student movement adopted Marxism-Leninism as a dominant ideology, it was by the end of the 1960s (Bahru, 2014, p. 128).

For the emergence of national and regional movements, the existence of the Eritrean question was mentioned as the cause for the rise of the national question. Some of the movements especially in Bale and Eritrea were on the upsurge consequently transcending the localities and influencing the center (Andreas, 2010, p. 103). Domestic writings about the ethnic-regional movements and prisoners suspected of being involved in them are believed to inculcate the issue among students who were roommates imprisoned in other cases of the student movement. In this regard Abdul, a student activist who was imprisoned together with Wallelign recalls:

I believe that these people [prisoners from Bale and Eritrea] were instrumental in making us aware, directly or indirectly, of the situation in Ethiopia. I would like to think that Wallelign was likewise influenced. I believe that those prisoners from Mecha and Tulema and those brought from Bale and Eritrea had a great impact on Wallelign’s post-prison behavior (Abdul, 2010, p.99).

By the time, the national question was moderately discussed in students’ movement in Europe and North America, and a group of students held similar discussions in Addis Ababa. As Abdul emphasized, Wallelign’s article was not the first surprise, except for the public of the student body, rather it was the summation of the subject (Abdul, 2010, p. 101). Wallelign also confirms this in his article that the issue he raised was already “the subject of clandestine discussions among students” (Wllelign, 1969). Moreover, the need to take a stand for the ever-worsening situation in Eritrea accompanied by the lack of a “reasonable” response from the government pushed the students to endorse the national question and secularism (Andreas, 2010, p. 104; Bahru, 2014, p. 128). The main determinant of the national question to come to the fore was the Eritrean claim of the right to self-determination and the debate over could Eritrea be considered a colony or not (Young, 2021, p. 63).

Before Wallelign's article which challenged the idea that Ethiopia is a nation, little was known about how nationalism was defined by the ESM. Bahru mentioned a freshman student called Haile Mariyam Goshu defined "nationalism" as "Ethiopianism" in terms of the vision of Tewodros and the diplomacy of Minilek (Bahru, 2014, p. 128). Until 1969 the student body of the movement notably the University Students Union of Addis Ababa (USUAA), Ethiopian Students Union in North America (EAUNA), and Ethiopian Students Union in Europe (ESUE) were known for their stand against the tendencies of ethnicity and regionalism. Their papers were continually abolishing group identification along the linguistic lines and other sectarian groupings and plan to develop a truly national language from the dialects of the people (Bahru, 2014, p. 130). This was the impression of the identification of the cause of the state crisis is a class contradiction. The editorials of mainstream Media of the ESM such as *Tiglachin* and *Tatek* were intolerant of such ethnic sentiments and underlined the problem shall be resolved through class struggle (Bahru, 2014, p. 197). However, some of the student figures "qualified" the ruling class has an Amhara ethnic origin which relegates other ethnic groups. For instance, Tedla Haile, who joined later the EPLF, argued as "it was the failure of the policy of Amhara ruling class to co-opt members of other ethnic groups that gave those rebellions an ethnic character"(Bahru, 2014, p. 197).

In the last months of 1969, the "national question" came to dominate the debates in the campus climate of ESM. There was first raised in Wallelign's article entitled "On the Question of Nationalities in Ethiopia" which consequently influences the political discourse of the country until this time. The first assertion that Wallelign makes is the presence of national oppression from the view of the imposition of cultural and political hegemony of Amhara and to some extent Amhara-Tigre over other nationalities (Wallelign, 1969).

Wallelign used the concepts "nation" and "nationality" interchangeably which became the bone of contention afterward. Despite the concept of self-determination is not mentioned, radically enough, the clause of secession boldly appeared, perhaps for the first time, in his article and urged worth supporting so long as pursued by progressive forces. The main argument of Wallelign's manifesto that brought a paradigm shift in the post-1960s political discourse of Ethiopia was his rejection of the idea of Ethiopia as a nation and the 'Ethiopian people' in third person singular. Rather, he characterized it as a collection of nationalities. He wrote:

What are the Ethiopian people composed of? I stress the word peoples because sociologically speaking at this stage Ethiopia is not really one nation. It is made up of a dozen nationalities with their own languages, ways of dressing, history, social organization, and territorial entity (Wallelign, 1969, P. 1-2).

He also calls those dozens of “nationalities” as “nations” identifying them as “the Oromo Nation, the Tigray Nation, the Amhara Nation, the Gurage Nation, the Sidama Nation, ..., however much you may not like it the Somali Nation” (Wallelign, 1969, p.2). Ethiopian nationalism was criticized as “fake” (Fanon’s word) and “Amhara domination”. Wallelign writes this controversial argument as: “What is this fake Nationalism? Is it not simply Amhara and to a certain extent Amhara-Tigre supremacy?” Lastly but strikingly, Wallelign took the violent option, social revolution, as a panacea to the problem without showing empathy towards any peaceful resolutions.

The lack of precision in using the two concepts, “nation” and “nationality” instigated the intense debates that followed after the argument came out from the ESUNA as there are no ‘nations’ in Ethiopia. In response to Wallelign’s assertion, the 17th congress of ESUNA came up with an objection. Papers were presented by prominent figures such as Andreas Eshete, Hagos G. Yesus, and Alem Habtu before the resolution was made. Andreas identified “regionalism” and religion as a potent issues in Ethiopia. He argued that:

Self-determination makes sense only in the context of a bourgeoisie democratic revolution which was hardly the case in Ethiopia ... however, the principle has some legitimacy for the equality of regions and religions of Ethiopia (cited in Bahru, 2014, p. 203)

Hagos in his part associates the problems in Eritrea and Bale with the problem of regionalism. He provided a solution to avoid “big chauvinism” and “narrow-minded provincialism” and embrace socialism to escape from the regionalism with a symptom of feudalism (Cited in, Bahru, 2014, p. 204). Alem in his part underlines the feudalistic nature of regionalism and shows opposition to the EPLF leadership as it is reformist rather than revolutionary. He explained the ways to solve the national contradiction without separation and reflects on secession with the analogy of divorce mentioned by Lenin (Cited in, Bahru, 2014, p. 205). However, the resolution

of the congress came out with a conclusion that overlooks the intermediary opinions raised by presenters regarding self-determination for regions and religions. And it treated such issues as secondary to the primary feudal ruling class domination and the encroachment of imperialism (Bahru, 2014, p. 205).

At this juncture, the body of the student movement has dramatically split into two contending views on the nature of state crisis and its suggested solutions. In response to EUSNA resolution an article written by the Algerian based student exiles under the pseudonym of Tilahun Takele (his real name is Birhane Meskel Reda)¹⁵ entitled “the national question (regionalism) in Ethiopia” came out with the idea of the right of nations and nationalities to ‘self-determination up to and including secession’ by rejecting the concept of ‘region’ used by ESUNA (Bahru, 2014, p. 206). Tilahun Takele justified the presence of nations in Ethiopia as: “in the epoch of ‘rising nationalism that Ethiopia is passing through, there is no longer the ‘tribe’ that bourgeoisie social science tries to inculcate in students but ‘full-fledged nations (cited in Bahru, 2014 p. 207). He underlined the presence of an oppressor nation that oppresses other various nationalities i.e. Amhara, as already identified by his like-minded colleagues Tedla Haile and Walleign Mekonen. They called for the support of progressives originating from this nation so that it will foster trust and fraternity among various nationalities who expected to support unity. This notion of revolutionary division of labor was based on Lenin’s speculation that says:

The proletariat of the oppressive nation should denounce the hegemonic control of their nation over the oppressed nations and demand the protection of the right to self-determination up to secession. Unless and otherwise there will not be mutual trust between the proletariat of the oppressive nation and the oppressed nations (Lenin, 1914).

He underlined that “we believe that the support of the right to secession will by itself discourage secession” (Bahru, 2014 p. 208). This argument remained controversial in the Ethiopian constitutional discourse since then.

As Andreas recollects recently and said that “there was nearly similar understanding on the national question among the student movement unions without conflicting opinions until

¹⁵Bahru (2014) has indicated slightly Tilahun Takele was Birhane Meskel. Recently Tadelech (2020, p. 189) has confirmed that the article was written by her husband Birhane Meskel Reda under the pseudonym Tilahun Takele.

Walleign's and Tilahun's articles came out" (Andreas, 2010, p. 105). As shown above, the locus of the debate was on whether there were 'nations' in Ethiopia or not. In response to Walleign's and Tilahun's assertions Tumtu Lencho, a pseudonym of Andreas Eshete¹⁶ wrote an article entitled "Nationalities and Class Struggle in Ethiopia". Pursuing the absence of nations in Ethiopia, Tumtu Lencho frames a Marxist-Leninist theoretical context and emphasized the limits in which the principle of self-determination has to be exercised. He writes:

The principle of self-determination is legitimate only in so far as it does not interfere with the organizational and practical unity of the progressive classes of all nationalities and the leadership of a laboring mass, both of which are essential for the victor of the minimum and maximum program of the liberation struggle (Cited in Bahru, 1014, p. 210).

Accepting the prevalence of capitalist relations in Ethiopia, Tumtu Lencho called "nationalities" rather than Tilahun Takele's "nations". He described 'nationalities' or 'national groups' as they form a common territory, common language, and common culture, but not a common economic life and proposed a solution of a full exercise of the principle of self-determination without secession (Bahru, 1014, p. 210). Hence the principal difference between the two positions lies in the existence of nations and their subsequent claim what Bahru calls "a fate full rider of 'up to and including secession'" (Bahru, 1014, p. 210).

The discussions were blatantly flawed. As Andreas recollects, despite there being no doubt about what is to be done on both sides, "there was a distinct pressure to assert the existence of nations" (Andreas, 2010, p. 105). These groups seemed to have been sincerely taking the instrumentalist relevance of the national question to facilitate the struggle. They want to use it to fuel the student movement to reach its zenith and pave the way to popular armed struggle. According to Andreas, while the ESUNA gave priority to socialism considering the national question as democracy, the Addis Ababa-Algeria group gave priority to armed struggle, not to democracy (Andreas, 2010, p. 105). In the later discussions between the two student unions to settle the issue once and for all, the second group of students who resist the idea of Tilahun Takele, "up to and including secession" were subject to blackmailing by tagging names as they are on the side of the ruling class. Zenebework stated this:

¹⁶This was revealed by Andreas himself during the retreat program which aimed to document the oral history of ESM arranged by Bahru Zewde (Bahru, 2010).

The opposition said that their stand was that of Tilahun Takele And charged us with denying the existence of nations and their rights because they said, we were intent on perpetuating Amhara dominance over others. We refuted these accusations by stating that we did accept the existence of nationalities and their rights, but not to the extent of endorsing their secession” (Zenebework, 2010, p.112).

There was an oversight by progressives on the national question. Most of the leading members of the revolutionaries miscalculated as if they support national movements and overthrow the imperial regime the nationalists will drop their secessionist tendencies (Kiflu, 2013 p. 122). However, the opposite happened as resistance to secession rights became costly as it was subject to tagging names as quoted above. At some point, especially after Tilahun’s paper, accepting the right to self-determination including secession became a test for a revolutionary character (Ibid.).

To recap, the definition of nations and nationalism as one of the major theoretical gaps of Marxism opens up itself for various and contending speculation about the national question. It seems that the students use selectively the Leninist-Stalinist perspectives without consulting and considering the writings and criticisms provided by other Marxists from Austro-Hungary and Poland against Lenin’s view that he himself reconsidered some of the comments. Some also associated the problem with the sideslip nature of Marxism itself. Melaku argues:

The problem arose not only from the fact that Marxism had degenerated down to Leninist and Stalinist clichés but also from the fact that Marxism and the national question were reduced into the formula of ‘up to and including secession’ (Melaku, 2010, pp. 109-110).

With not standing to the inherent problems of Marxism regarding the national questions, the extent to which the students who raise the question integrate the problems they saw with that Leninist-Stalinist literature is questionable. For instance, Bahru mentioned that Walleign’s knowledge of Marxism was at a rudimentary stage for his failure to explain the concept of self-determination (Bahru, 2014, 201). Tilahun Takele’s article also encountered similar limitations. According to Bahru, the “fundamental weakness” of the article was “the paucity of empirical data to support such strongly worded argument” (Bahru, 2014, 208). In contrast to this Tumtu Lencho’s article was relatively better in understanding the theoretical foundation of the national question as well as the local context with a well-referenced piece (Bahru, 2014, 210).

In addition, the student body that pushed the national question and “self-determination up to and including secession” to the fore, saw the situation of Ethiopia only from the view of Marxist-Leninist perspective. They showed less interest to understand either Ethiopian history or ethnography. Bahru comments and argues in this regard as:

...few asked crucial questions such as what are the nationalities and nations of Ethiopia. How did they evolve over time and what was the nature of their mutual interaction? How precisely do they exercise their right to self-determination? In the objective economic circumstances in which Ethiopia found itself, need one push the principle to its extreme limit of secession? In the end, therefore, the principle amounted to little more than a legitimizing instrument for any organized national elite that took up arms against the central government (Bahru, 2014 p. 333).

Marxism in its Leninist-Stalinist version has been the dominant ideological and organizing principle of the post-1960s political discourse in Ethiopia. Its ideological underpinning descended not only in post-1974 and its revolutionary process but also informs the post-1991 transition process. The basis for the solution was the Stalinist canon, not historical fact. The current constitution of Ethiopia stipulates directly the student resolution without revision. This is one of the potent problems which have been getting a reaction from the Amhara people recently is the narrative came under the baggage of the national oppression thesis. The post-1991 political discourse with its sideslips of the narrative Amhara oppressor and other oppressed nationalities encouraged ethnic animosity that other ethno-national elites instigated violence against the people who are supposed to be Amhara.

4.6. Conclusion

In the long history of the country, the Amhara have appeared as one of the people who have crucially contributed to the emergence as well as consolidation of the state system of Ethiopia. However, the term “Amhara” does not stand for one fixed definiendum. Due to its association with the Amharic language, Orthodox Christianity, economic and social status with national identity the term Amhara has been subjected to multiple descriptions referring to a geographical place, *Ethiopianess*, class, ethnicity, language, or religion. According to the Barthian tradition, ethnic boundaries are articulated at the borders, and cultural markers are infused with social significance as a means of distinguishing between in-groups and out-groups. Cultural markers

such as the linguistic component and connection to national identity (Ethiopianess) are more salient at the borders where Amhara identify themselves. When an Amhara distinguish them from a Tigrean the linguistic boundary is salient. Reinforced by a religious identity (Amhara Vs Islam) and a national identity Amhara culture (and partly Tigrean) vis-à-vis groups who do not associate themselves with the Ethiopian identity in the sense the former defined.

The word “Amhara” originated as the name of a fairly small region in what are today the northern highlands of Ethiopia, and “Amharic” was the language spoken in that region. Since this proved to be the area from which the medieval Ethiopian empire emerged, and from which many of its rulers originated, the term came over time to assume a wider significance, and the people who spoke its language came, in turn, to be known as “Amharas”. These people were associated with several cultural characteristics. The prominent among which was their fierce adherence to Pan-Ethiopian sentiments, which arguably say, they could realize their ethnic identity. There are contending assumptions (debate) over the origin of the Amhara and Amharic language. It is on the time that traced back and more crucially on the (non) indignity of Ethiopian Semitic in general and Amharic language and Amhara in particular. Beyond the academic debate, this has a political implication that underlines the current nativism discourse of Amhara and Oromo nationalists. Reacting to their presentation as “outsiders” in Ethiopianist discourses, Oromo nationalists have inverted the Amhara and Semitic speakers more broadly, claiming of Arabian origin to re-present them as the “real” “outsiders”.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the territory of the Ethiopian empire had massively expanded, and Amharic emerged as the language of the Ethiopian state. Amhara has had a different meaning at the national level, especially after the advent of the modern Ethiopian state and the use of Amharic as a national language. The local Amhara identities and their varied definitions are redefined in favor of the wider Amhara cultural identity or what Pausewang calls “urban Amhara identity”. It was a manifestation of power, class, and prestige that even non-Amharic groups have identified as Amhara. Hence in pre-1991 the term Amhara is better conceived as a semi-open dominant group in that ethnicity is not salient in a way that does not generally meddle in the day-to-day experience but is not non-existent. Hence, a better analytical tool to describe Amhara before the rise of ethno-nationalist movements is “dominant groups have no ethnicity because they realize their ethnic identity in national terms”.

The Amharic language was figured as the language of the Ethiopian imperial state rather than lingua franca and served as the marker of their oppression by ethno-nationalists. The ethnonationalism claim was articulated in ideological (Leninist-Stalinist) terms by the ESM in the last months of 1969, under the banner of “national question”. Ethiopian nationalism and the Ethiopian nation were contested and the country has been portrayed as a collection of nations in which these nationalities are living under the Amhara hegemonic control.

The student body that pushes the national question and ‘self-determination up to and including secession’ to the fore saw the situation of Ethiopia only from the view of Marxist-Leninist perspective. They show less interest to understand either Ethiopian history or ethnography. They grasped unparalleled ideologies from such literature and tried to apply them in a very different context in Ethiopia. The idea of self-determination and the characterization of Amhara were ill-thought recipes for the Ethiopian illness in general and the root cause for Amharas’ grievances.

Chapter Five

The Development of Amhara Nationalism under Various Political Contexts

Introduction

The ethnicity of other ethnic groups in Ethiopia has centered on the discourse of Amhara domination with roots going back to the student movement of the 1960s/70s, and ultimately to the territorial expansions of Menelik and the birth of modern Ethiopia at the end of the 19th century. The issue of Amhara ethnicity emerged in Ethiopian political discourse in 1990s. Since this time the subject of Amhara continued to be sensitive and debatable among both the political and academic elites. Following the institutionalization of ethnicity as an organizing principle of the country, most ethnic groups of Ethiopia have been enjoying political recognition and a certain degree of autonomy. On the other hand, those who do not want to define themselves in any ethnic category remained under the banner of “Ethiopian nationalism”. The Amhara identity remained in a dilemma of positioning to Pan-Ethiopian and Amhara identities until the Amhara ethnicity has emerged recently with visible signs. This chapter examines how Amhara nationalism emerged in the Ethiopian political discourse in the 1990s and has appeared at varying paces across time. The chapter shows the situationality, and variability of ethnicity, and more importantly, the weight of context in the construction of identity discourses and practices which manifested through the evolution of Amhara nationalism under various political contexts. The chapter has two major themes. The first shows how Amhara ethnicity is instituted by EPDM while the party pursues a Pan-Ethiopian agenda and its evolution under the banner of Amhara democratic nationalism when the party changed its name in to ANDM. AAPPO also raised the issue of Amhara identity in the protectionist sense of the term until it went in the opposite direction of changing from an ethnic party into a Pan-Ethiopian party – the All-Ethiopia Unity Organization (AEUO) that consequently diminished the nascent Amhara ethnicity. The second theme of this chapter discusses the development of Amhara political identity centering on Amhara protests and ongoing institutional and extra-institutional aspects of ethnic mobilization.

5.1. The Dilemma of Positioning to Ethiopian Nationalism and/or Amhara Nationalism

Until the advent of ESM, the radical opposition against the imperial regime did not come to the fore. Oppositions manifested in plots and conspiracies, in the case of Belay Zeleke and Takele Woldehawaryat, and coup d'état, as attempted by the two Neway brothers (Mengistu and Girmamie), did not have a motive of radical change (Bahru, 2002). Many opposition political parties had come out from the ESM. EPRP was one of the pioneer parties, in the history of party politics in Ethiopia, which was able to mobilize the vast majority of youths across the country from various ethnic backgrounds. It was the country's leading revolutionary party mobilized on a Pan-Ethiopian basis and called for a proletarian revolution (Young, 2021, p. 63). It explained the main cause of the state crises as the concentration of political power and resource in the hands of one group described as Amhara nation and the subsequent marginalization of the Ethiopian masses (Merara, 2006 p. 122). There were contending views between EPRP and TPLF on the options of class versus ethnic struggle solutions. Notwithstanding that TPLF confirmed the precedence of class contradiction; in practice, it gave primacy to the national issue for the ease of political mobilization (Young, 2021, p. 63).

In the early 1970s, the party had dramatically collapsed. In addition to its enmity with Dergue, and TPLF, the main reason for the crumble of EPRP was the contradiction from within. Political factionalism created due to the members raised a question over the inconsistency between the party program and its ongoing activities took the lion share of the demise of the party (EPDM, 1987 p. 29). Its members were faced with the fate of custody and exile while others voluntarily joined the Dergue. At this juncture, some of the members decided to continue the armed struggle and 37 of them established EPDM on November 20, 1981. Unlike its predecessor EPDM hold a smooth relationship with TPLF and managed to get shelter from the assault of the Dergue. The reason for EDPM being able to get support and shelter from TPLF was the former has adopted a similar program to the latter. According to Gebru, the two most important political positions were accepting the right of nations, nationalities, and people's self-determination up to secession and the anti-colonial nature of the Eritrean struggle (Gebu, 2015 P. 108). However, given EPDM did not scrap its Pan-Ethiopian agenda and related elements it appears to have some ideological differences from that of TPLF. TPLF in its part was able to get ally from the south of Tigray and bridge the rift between Tigray and the other part of the country that occurred following EPRP left

the area. Gebru expressed this “After EPRP was expelled from Tigray TPLF was worried about whom to continue the struggle in the hinterland of the county” (Gebru, 2015 p. 108).

Inevitable contact with liberation forces in Eritrea and alliance with TPLF required EPDM to qualify for some blurred position of EPRP without changing its basics of establishment, multi-national Pan-Ethiopian party. These were issues regarding the question of Eritrea and the presence of nations in Ethiopia.¹⁷ EPDM had made changes in its program five months after its establishment during the first party conference. Its former position on the issue of national question was “there are no ‘nations’ but only nationalities in Ethiopia” had changed to “there are both ‘nations’ and ‘nationalities’ in Ethiopia” (EPDM-ANDM, 2016 p.81). The difference between an ethnic group and a nation lies in their relationship with statehood (Erikson, 1992). When one calls an ethnic group a nation, it implies statehood or a claim or recognition of statehood (Markakis, Gunther and Young, 2021, p. 14). Consequently, EPDM accepts not only the unconditional right of nations and nationalities to self-determination up to and including secession and the nation and the national liberation status of Tigray and TPLF respectively but also it took the national question as a problem which needs a priority in the struggle rather than the class contradiction (EPDM, 1987 pp 126-127; EPDM-ANDM, 2016 pp. 80-81).

The unconditional right to secession stemmed from the Marxist view of self-determination that underlined only the nation has the right to determine its destiny without the right of outsiders forcibly interfering in the life of the nation, and its members could determine the nation’s life (Stalin, 1913 p. 23). Unlike the national question of other ethnic groups, EPDM considered the Eritrean question as colonial and presented independence as a solution (EPDM, 1987 p. 81). There was a debate over the Eritrean issue within the ESM on which most student activists rejected the independence struggle arguing that Ethiopia is a feudal and Eritrea could not be considered a colony (Young, 2021 p. 63).

¹⁷ Interview with a founding member of EPDM; the interviewee says “EPRP did not have a clear position regarding the Eritrean question. Neither believes in the presence of ‘nations’ in Ethiopia. But we were able to qualify these crucial questions in the changing political dynamics of Ethiopia”. According to Kiflu, after the central committee of EPRP declined the proposal of Birhanemeskel (accepting the independence of Eritrea without condition) it proposed a federation with Ethiopia and if independence would be the interest of the Eritrean people, it should be in a peaceful and democratic way, referendum. EPRP also recognizes the self-determination rights of nationalities inside Eritrea. (Kiflu, 2021)

In accepting the ethnic liberation struggle as a priority agenda than that of class, the EPDM members seem to consider Lenin and Stalin's writings (latter directly amplified by Walleign Mekonen): "liberation movements could be supported as long as they did not hinder the main anti-feudal and anti-imperialist struggle." Even though Lenin never sidelined class struggle he accepted the right for self-determination of nations including and up to secession. This would be supported as far as the movement facilitated the class struggle, as it superseded all other contradictions. Later, EPDM side slipped into the idea of Tilahun Takkele's and his Algerian based groups' argument (in fact this is Lenin's proposition as indicated in chapter four) that "supporting the right to secession promotes a righteous unity rather than a divisive one" and their division of labor to realize their argument in a way that those who are from oppressive groups to support secession and those who are from oppressed groups promote unity (Bahru, 2021).

During the last times of the Dergue, the two parties, EPDM and TPLF, established EPRDF as a coalition party to which other organizations with similar political programs would be joined. EPDM had played an irreplaceable role in the establishment of EPRDF. Two merits made EPDM important in this regard. The first was in pre-EPDM movement within the EPRP, the "democratic movement" the latter EPDM undermined the claim of EPRP being the "vanguard proletariat party" of Ethiopia and convinced the notion of the proletariat party should be established through forging a front with the Marxists-Leninist forces in other political organizations (EPDM, 1987 p. 85). The second was unlike TPLF and other liberation movements; EPDM had a nationwide political program (EPDM-ANDM, 2016 p. 115). Combining the EPDM's political program with TPLF's military and political strength,¹⁸ that EPDM lacked in this regard, the two parties agreed on the establishment of EPRDF (Ibid. pp. 114-115).

The establishment of EPRDF heralded the end of EPDM as a multi-national party. This was practically seen when 30 officials of EPDM, who were from the Oromo and southern ethnic groups, agreed to leave their party to establish ethnic based organizations to mobilize their respective groups (EPDM-ANDM, 2016 p. 116). On the other hand, an enormous amount of

¹⁸Indeed, despite the alliance of the two Parties reaching its peak in establishing EPRDF, there was also a significant difference between them, especially in power. While TPLF had achieved a high level of organizational and military development, as well as diplomatic recognition, EPDM was at the lowest level (Gebu, 2007 E.C. P. 108).

young Amhara continued to join the party as it advanced into the hinterland of the regions of Amhara (Ibid.). These factors practically diminished the multi-national role of EPDM to play in the Ethiopian politics and forced to re-brand its mission. Immediately after the coming to power of EPRDF, EPDM took the task of organizing the Amhara people and administering the newly established Amhara-named, “Amhara National Regional State” region as one of the constituents’ units of the federation. Although the role of EPDM dramatically changed during the transitional period; and the party engaged in administering the regions of Amhara and participating in the transitional process, it did not take measures in changing the name and program of the party due to procedural issues (Tsinat, 2006 p. 15).

Immediately after EPRDF seized political power, a national conference called “peace and democratic conference” was held from the first to the fifth of July 1991 to endorse a Charter and establish a Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) with a term of two years. The Charter has allegedly drafted by EPRDF and OLF and the participants were screened and selected by EPRDF (Admasu, 2010 p. 208). Despite the conference being remarkably inclusive, regarding ethnically mobilized groups, there were groups and parties, excluded by EPRDF¹⁹ and it dominated the whole session (Young, 2021; Admasu, 2010, Van der Baken, 2008). While the EPLF participated as an observer status, there was no group representing the interests of the Amhara. EPDM was a default governing party of the regions of Amhara without having ethnic-based political program. This contradicted ethno-nationalists’ designation of Amhara ethnic identity while affirming the nonappearance of Amhara political identity.

The Charter was ratified as it recognizes individual and group rights simultaneously and a TGE has established to facilitate the adoption of a new constitution. The TGE was eager to restructure the country based on ethno-linguistic criteria. An ever-influential proclamation of the TGE, the national self-government proclamation 7/1992, created 14 ethnic-based regions and identified 64 ethnic groups. Amhara was included in the listed ethnic groups and provided with a territorially demarcated region. The Charter grants Self-determination rights with conditional secession to all ethnic groups and all participants of the conference, except Professor Asrat who represented the university, supported Eritrea to hold a referendum. Despite opposition notably from the Amhara and most of the elites and urbanites the TGE rushed to the demarcation of ethnic-based regions

¹⁹ Those relegated from participation include EPRP, MEISON, (as Meles himself mentioned during the debate with professor Mesfin), and individuals and groups associated with the Dergue.

before the adoption of the constitution and national election (Admasu, 2010 p. 210). In the above reconstruction, the transitional period was a critical historical juncture that gave rise to Amhara nationalism both in an official and a reactive way based on the growing sense of exclusion and political grievances more broadly.

5.2. AAPO's Protectionist Agenda and the Nascent Amhara Ethnicity

During the transitional period, ethnic tension was at its peak. People who are designated as Amhara have been massacred and evicted from the newly established ethnic-territorial regions. Amhara were executed and displaced in areas of the Oromia region such as Bedeno, Arba Gugu, Garra Muleta, and Eastern Wolega, and a large number of Amhara were evicted from the southwest to the Amhara region (Tronvoll, 2002:22; Tesfaye, 2002). This situation led to the establishment of the first Amhara-named political party, AAPO, in 1992. The party was announced to be the voice of the victim Amharic-speaking people who left for the mercy of newly empowered titular groups. The response of the newly ethnic-territorial administrators to the complaints acquaints with the need for organizing along with a political party. In this regard, one of the eyewitnesses of the massacre and displacement of Amhara in Oromia region who later came to be a founding member and the then deputy chairman of AAPO, Mr. Abebe Wondimagn, explains the response of an OLF official to his request for security issues as: "since your ethnic group has no organization or representative, we will not provide you with weapons" (Abebe, cited in Abyssinia, 1993).

AAPO's mission was to protect the rights and safety of Amhara, unrepresented in the new political landscape. Its program says: "It will strive without delay to see to it that the interests, aspirations, democratic rights and freedom of the Amhara people are respected wherever they are found" (AAPO program). In AAPO's statements, speeches, and rallies the issue covered most was the sense of victimization emanated from the atrocities on the Amhara under the new regime. But it reiterates the end goal is to preserve the unity of Ethiopia that has stood for centuries and enable the people to live together in peace and harmony.²⁰

By that time, the party managed to get huge support from Amharic-speaking people and urban-based other ethnic groups. Here the "Amhara oppressor-other oppressed nationalities" narrative

²⁰A speech of AAPO planned to be delivered at Meskel square on July 24, 1993 which was prohibited by the government; published later in Tobiya 2nd year No. 5 July 1993 pp. 9-16.

encouraged other ethnic groups to target the Amhara resided in “their” self-governing territories which created a new opposition to the government. Arguably to say AAPPO appeared to be the most contender party during the transitional period. The government accused the party with mutually conflictual terms: “chauvinist and warmonger” on the one hand and “narrow nationalist” on the other.

Since it was inherently reactive in nature, AAPPO’s Amhara ethnonationalism was contentious from the start. The party’s mission to represent the Amhara people were not welcomed by the educated elites by conceded it as undermining the unity and integrity of Ethiopia. After its chairman, Professor Asrat Woldeyes, and many active members were arrested by the EPRDF regime were allegedly accused of inciting violence and treason the party changed its name to AEUO. The death of Professor Asrat was fateful for the nascent Amhara ethnicity to fade. The leadership crisis emanated from the absence of a charismatic leader and factionalism and the perception among the political elites that no political party is successful in claiming to represent Amhara were the factors that weakened the AAPPO and its claim to represent Amhara (Tezera, 2021).

The motive behind the transformation of AAPPO, an ethnic-based name into AEUO, a pan-Ethiopian political organization shows the dilemma in positioning Amhara in ethnic or Pan-Ethiopian terms. While some argue it was pressure from the educated elites who consider the acquiring of ethnic dimension is fulfilling the divisive strategy of TPLF, others maintained as it was the main agenda of the party and used the ethnic dimension as a temporal response to a pressing problem to stand for Amhara. In spite of the fact that there were vocal elites who pushed with the first motive, many of the leaders of the AAPPO interest were to hold a pan-Ethiopian mission. Their responses to interviews of the Print Media of the time, underline that holding the Amhara cause is its short-term mission, and ensuring the unity and integrity of Ethiopia by which all the people of the country live in peace and harmony is the main tenet of the party. Hailu Shaul, the chair of the party after the arrest of professor Asrat told to one of the local magazines of the time about this. For instance, he replied to the question “is it not a contradiction for AAPPO that oppose ethnic politics and advocate Pan-Ethiopian agenda while claiming to represent the Amhara people?” As:

No contradiction at all AAPO is a temporal organization. Let me explain this by example. There are many people living in a village. Except for one person who only struggling to build a fence for the village, all are building their homes. This is the situation in current Ethiopia. Nobody would talk to Amhara without organization and its aim is just to be a voice for Amhara who are under attack and to save lives (Mahlet, 1993 p. 10).

Like the political position of the Amharic-speaking elite of the time, leaders of AAPO strongly believed in Ethiopian national identity which (shall) define all the people of the country regardless of diverse origin. Hailu Shaul told the same local magazines as:

Ethiopian people are not categorized based on race or ethnicity. The fact is Ethiopia is a nation. The idea of one country one people is not questionable. The narration that reiterates the presence of many groups and to let them walk away from Ethiopia is not acceptable (Mahlet, 1993 p.10).

The idea of “one people” seem to be understood by the party as the presence of an indivisible people called Ethiopian which is long ago before the notion was deconstructed by the ESM. In fact, the move toward the name AEUO was not a surprise. The name was proposed during the early times of party establishment. As Mamushet Amare, a founding member of the party and currently the leader of AEUO states:

Initially, the names AAPO and AEUO were nominated for the party. It was decided as ‘For the time being, unlike the rest of the Ethiopian people, it is Amhara that is suffering from all forms of violence in all regions of the country. Therefore, it can be accepted if we name it AAPO (Mamushet, 2020 p. 69).

Apart from the party officials and active members, it has been told that the people who support the party had an interest in changing names and “rejecting” Amhara ethnicity. According to Hailu, the party was consulting the people through public meetings held in various parts of the Amhara region and outside. He shares the deliberation during AAPO changes its name: “In a meeting with people [members] from all parts of Amhara, I found that they said, ‘Even if we are Amhara, we are more Ethiopian than anyone else; we want to organize and struggle under Ethiopian unity’” (Hailu, 2013 p. 73).

However, it does not mean that there was no opposition to this change. Many quit from continuing with the rebranded party and some remained with the weakened AAPO party to peruse the struggle for the Amhara people. Some members decide to preserve the name and spirit of AAPO and continue the struggle. But they were unable to visibly appear on the political scene to make a significant change.²¹ Despite AAPO changing its name and mission to the Pan-Ethiopian agenda, the new party AEUP was defined as the party of Amhara by other ethnic groups. Ethnonationalists already characterized a pan-Ethiopian sentiment as an Amhara interest. The elites told the rural people in the south and Oromia that the Amharas come for your land and to restore the former (*neftegna*) political system (Hailu, 2013 p. 78).

In sum, the immediate reason that AAPO was established is quite clear. It was formed not from the identity conceptions and ethnic consciousness from within. But it is established to take up a particular cause neglected, if not facilitated, by the government through reiterating the Amhara oppressive narrative. The safety of the Amharic speakers was vulnerable and the atrocities inflicted by the ethnonationalists were shocking. Disclosing such acts of violence and representing the unrepresented “Amhara” under the political discourse in which ethnicity is the rallying point of the government was demanded. At the same time contributing to the maintenance of unity and integrity of Ethiopia was the main aim of AAPO. Indeed, the shift made by AAPO to Pan-Ethiopian politics indicates the dilemma that the political elites face and the unstable nature of Amhara identity conceptions.

5.3. From EPDM to ANDM: The Introduction of Official Amhara Nationalism

Meles had made clear the absence of a group came to represent Amhara in his debate with Mesfin and underlined as it will continue represented by EPRDF (Meles and Mesfin, 1991). In pre-1991, EPDM engaged in mobilizing the northern regions of Amhara (North Wollo and North Gondar) based on socio-economic lines (struggling for the benefit of the oppressed Amhara) to the extent redistributing land (Interview with a senior member of EPDM, December 20, 2020). Hence it seems to suggest that EPDM was relatively a better candidate to represent Amhara in that new political era.

²¹Recently AAPO, in exile for decades, return under the chairmanship of Afework Teshome to the country following Abiy Ahmed’s reform.

Since late 1991, EPDM held the first “Amhara National Conference” in Bahir Dar, the capital of the newly established Amhara region. Later, the conference expanded to Debra Markos, Gondar, and Dessie and cascaded into the lower levels of government structures (EPDM-ANDM, 2016 p.149). These conferences were a landmark that brought together the Amhara for the first time to stand as one, Amhara nation, at the expense of provincial sentiments.

The agendas of the conferences were the ‘what of Amhara nation’ and ‘Amhara democratic nationalism’ and the necessity of political participation of the people to achieve enduring benefit. In the conferences, a foundation was laid down that the people of Amhara discussed as one nation; Amhara for the first time without divisions based on regionalism such as Gojjame, Wolloye, Gondare, and Shewe rather to embrace Amharaness saying ‘we all are Amhara’ and stand together for its ethnic interest (EPDM-ANDM, 2016 p.149).

In addition to the above identity issues, the national oppression narrative was discussed in the conference that reiterates the Amhara oppressor class and other oppressed nationalities.²² On the other hand, some criticized the move of EPDM embarking on mobilizing the Amhara people as it is a political satire that the majority of its leaders and some of its members are not Amhara (Yared, cited in Muday, 1993 p. 15; Chuchu, 2019, p 142). In his interview with *Muday* magazine, Yared Tibebe, the founding member of EPDM who later left it for exile said that:

EPDM’s stand as the only representative of Amhara is a typical political satire that is created by confusion. By what miracle, an organization led by persons from Sidama, Eritrea and other ethnic backgrounds become the representative of Amhara? (Yared, 1993, cited in Muday, 1993 p. 17)

By that time, a heated debate on whether or not the Amhara existed as a distinct ethnic identity had been undertaken which had both political and academic dimensions. However, both sides fail to put a precise definition to the Amhara identity. EPRDF took the position as Amhara is an ethnic group having a distinct culture, language, homeland, and a mindset. EPDM has taken the

²²The issues included: ‘the oppression of Amhara ruling class over other ethnic groups do not represent the Amhara people; the Amhara people did not benefit from Ethiopia while the country was a prison of nationalities; the oppressors were those ruling classes who belonged to the Amhara people not the people as a whole; a nation-building process based on one “country, one people” which is not only a chauvinist outlook of the former ruling class but also relegates the identity of other ethnic groups and deny the multi-ethnic nature of the country and their belonging (integration) to Ethiopia based on their consent (EPDM-ANDM, 2016 p.149).

presence of Amhara ethnic identity for granted. However, the people did not ready to take the name Amhara as an identity since Ethiopian national identity was overwhelmingly embraced. Again, this attempt was largely resisted and did not create amassive ethnic consciousness among the Amhara.

Moreover, both a proponent of “there is no Amhara ethnicity” and their opponents did not come up with a conclusive definition for Amhara. This defect seems reflected in the regional constitution. Unlike the intra-regional ethnic groups such as Awi, Himra and Oromo recognized as “nationalities” with their self-determination and secession rights; the Amhara region constitution does not mention the term Amhara as “people”, “nation”, or “nationality”.²³ However, the view of the framers intent, senior members of the party, indicate the other way around. A founding member of EPDM says in this regard:

It is not a matter of failure to define or recognize Amhara as an ethnic group. Rather it was to accommodating other ethnic groups in the region we prefer to use ‘the people of Amhara regional state’. Obviously, the region is established for the Amhara and we defined Amhara as a nation and others as nationalities who have an inseparable and similar destiny with Amhara (Interview, October 22, 2019, Addis Ababa)..

In contrast to AAPPO’s reactive ethnicity and EPDM’s official nationalism, a potentially operational form of Amhara nationalism came out from the writing of Andargachew Tsigie.²⁴ In 1993, he wrote what could be best portrayed as the first manifesto of Amhara nationalism entitled “*The Amhara People: From Where to Where?*” Despite he appeared to be shifting from advocating Amhara nationalism to a Pan-Ethiopian political agenda in his later (recent) times, the way he re-defined Amhara identity was effective given the existing socio-political context. In his piece, Andargachew asserts the Amhara people have to accept the new political reality and embrace their Amhara ethnicity:

The subject of Ethiopian politics is ethnicity. It became the principle of political organization. People undertake the economic and social participation with their ethnic-based political parties. The forces of ethnicity would be potent in the coming years.

²³ With the exception of Tigray, all state constitutions have recognized and defined the ethnic group that the regional state has named. A more primordial definition has been found in Article 39 of the Oromia regional state.

²⁴ Andargachew Tsigie was a former EPRP member who chooses to exile when the party collapsed. He joined EPDM immediately after EPRDF took power collaborating with them for about one year until he suddenly resigned from his post.

Hence, groups like the Amhara will fail to be on equal footing with others. The Amhara can overcome this drawback only by organizing themselves on the basis of ethnicity (Andargachew, 1993 p. 55).

Unlike the ethnonationalist assertions we have seen in the preceding chapters, he did not blame any ethnic group for the plights of the Amhara people. Rather he underlined that Amhara paid a lot in the turbulent Ethiopian history while they contributed its major part. Andargachew considers Girmamie and Mengistu Neway as well as Wallelign as an Amhara who saw the sufferings of all ethnic groups and called upon them against oppression. However, he underscores as those ethnic groups now have their own people to lead them:

History brought a new political context the oppressed Ogadeni might remember Girmamie but they do have their own today. All ethnic groups now stand for their own interests. Hence, Amhara should follow this line and organize as an Amhara based on informed national consciousness (Andargachew, 1993 p. 53).

In framing Amhara nationalism, Andargachew did not use the TPLF domination as a subject of mobilization nor explicitly criticized the status of both AAPO and EPDM and their nationalistic agenda. However, his manifesto is implicitly critical of both parties as having no clear rhetoric and practice in framing Amhara nationalism (Andargachew, 1993 p. 55). He indeed hopes the manifesto to be a source of inspiration for the establishment of a united Amahara peoples' organization that collaborated with other ethnic groups of Ethiopia and centers on the rural Amhara.

In January 1994, EPDM declared the change of its name to ANDM. This happened in its third-party Congress. In fact, the role of EPDM to play as a multi-ethnic party began to be diminished and limited to the current regions of Amhara before the establishment of EPRDF. Yared recalls this as follows:

After two months [in April 1985] we went to the TPLF base, *Kisad Gimel*, for discussion which lasted for ten days. In the discussions with the TPLF men, the issue that EPDM will not have a role beyond representing Amhara was boldly mentioned, and by that time I felt a sense of losing hope since I prefer EPDM remained multi-national party (Yared, 1993 cited in Muday, Muday, 1993 p. 17)

It was clear to the EPDM officials also that a situation that urges to change their mission to come after the demise of Dergue which makes the multi-national agenda will be irrelevant to the political discourse afterwards (EPDM-ANDM, 2016 p.155). As indicated above, the rationale for

taking the mission to mobilize Amhara people was that the majority of its members were from the Amhara and Agaw ethnic backgrounds; its base during the armed struggle was in the region of Amhara people and more importantly the changing political dynamics both internationally (the collapse of socialism and the proliferation of ethno-nationalism) and at home (most of the ethnic groups were represented by ethnic-based organizations).²⁵ The transition from EPDM to ANDM was to shape the political struggle along with the political reality of the country and it was the result of the national liberation movement (Akele, 2014 P. 55). This scenario forced EPDM to turn its face to the Amhara constituency.

In the socio-political context that ethnic groups of the country were able to enjoy their self-determination rights, the mission of Amhara democratic forces must follow the same route and enable the Amhara people would be to use their language, and promote their culture and preserve their history. And the reason for EPDM changed into ANDM was this political reality (Tsinat, 2006, p. 22).

On the other hand, Young (2021), underlined that EPDM was replaced by ANDM “to emphasize its national character and distinguish it from Professor Asrat’s All Amhara Organization” that labeled as a reactionary nationalism of the ruling class (Young, 2021 p. 65). Unlike other organizations, there is no evidence that supports the argument of EPDM undertakes a specific struggle for the Amhara cause that the people asked for. The struggle was against the system established allegedly by “Amhara ruling class” which was physically collapsed in 1974 and systematically continued until 1991 except the introduction of the constitution of the People’s Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE) in 1995, which established an asymmetrical scheme of regional autonomy (Young, 2021 P. 64). For example, the party issued a statement in the third congress stated as:

EPDM as a multi-national party undertook the historic struggle of ensuring the equality of nationalities by dismantling *neftegna* Amhara ruling classes and their system which

²⁵The Oromo has Oromo People Democratic Organization (OPDO); the southern peoples have Rift Valley Forces Democratic Association later established their own respective ethnic organizations until merged again into Southern Ethiopian People’s Democratic Movement (SEPDM). The two parties were established largely by individuals who walk away from EPDM.

made the language, culture, and history of Amhara to represent all nationalities under the banner of Ethiopianism which declined the reality that Amhara is an ethnic group.²⁶

EPDM also draw some kind of continuity from Walleign and his piece. There were military and political units named by Walleign. There were several occasions that EPDM/ANDM mentioned Walleign stand for others while he was from Amhara, who at least their cultural identity was not threatened. Despite this, the transformation of EPDM into ANDM did not come up with a new dimension and rationale. If any it was to mobilize the people against the alleged remnants of old ruling class and “chauvinists” in socio-economic aspects. The dilemma of EPDM has shown in such a way as while it accepts national oppression thesis as a primary problem as a political program, it continued to apply a class dimension struggle in Amhara region. One of the founding members of the party says:

EPDM believes that it is impossible to mobilize the Amhara people based on ethnic lines. We think that the people do not suffer from national oppression. Problems related to land and the free use of one’s own production was the causes to mobilize the people and EPDM used it under a pan-Ethiopian nationalism (Interview, October 22, 2019, Addis Ababa).

A typical example that shows the party undertook a class-based political mobilization among the Amhara people was the land redistribution proclamation by the Amhara regional state which was the most contested issue both in the eyes of the people and the federal constitution.²⁷ Ege (2002) described the situation as “The basic feature of the redistribution was its peculiar class analysis, which stigmatized the officials of the preceding regimes as oppressors, but ironically enough lumped the current officials together with the oppressed peasants, without further criteria needed.” (Ege, 2002, p. 73). In this practice, which was materialized only in Amhara regional state after the proclamation of “land to the tiller” by Dergue, two opposing class groups have established: *Bureaucrat* and *Qirit feudal* (remnant feudal) on the one hand and *Chiqun ArsoAder*

²⁶Report for the third-Party Congress, in Memoir of Struggle: Political writings and Internal Letters, Volume 2.Amhara Region Martyrs Memoir Center, Bahir Dar.

²⁷The federal government has empowered to enact laws for the utilization and conservation of land (Article 51(5)) and the regional states have vested to administer it based on the federal laws (52(2)). Inconsistent to this the Amhara region enacts land law and regulations which led to one of the first case presented to Commission of Constitutional Inquiry/CCI/ as it needs constitutional interpretation (Assefa, 2010 p. 394).

(oppressed peasants) and *Abiotawi democrats* (revolutionary democrats which stands for officials, members and supporters of EPDM) on the other.²⁸

Data from senior members of EPDM, indicate that, unlike other liberation fronts who mobilized “their” people by ethnicity, the party made a choice to mobilize the Amhara people partly in class perspective. They argued that the people have questions over land and its produce and they mobilized them in that way. However, it was EPDM’s political conviction that led to such a choice. The party believed that there was no strong class struggle took place which put the fairness of land distribution by Dergue in the areas covered by the land redistribution practice. One of the earliest documents of the party that describes the nature of Dergue stated that:

When Dergue forced to proclaim land distribution in March 1975, in areas where the peoples’ anti-feudal struggle was strong the feudal economic system was dismantled. While in area where there was no heated anti-feudal struggle like Gondar, Gojjam, and north Shewa the feudal economic system still existed²⁹

Despite the arguments there were questions of land among the Amhara people, none of the studies regarding land redistribution identified such demand came from the people (Ege, 2002, p. 73). Women, youths and other sections of society having relatively low quantity and quality of land might stand in favor of the government’s decision. However, it does not mean to be there was active demand for land redistribution from the people (Ege, 2002, p. 73). It was by other factor the peasants of Amhara had more resented against Dergue such as its agricultural development projects implemented forcefully without the consent and participation of the people such as villagization and resettlement program, activities of peasant cooperative associations; forced payment, and collecting one’s produce by quota and national military service (Getie,

²⁸These terms were very unfamiliar to the peasants. As defined by the regional state legislation and print Medias such as Zikre-Hig (1989E.C), Bekur (1989E.C), Mahtot (1989E.C), *Qirit feudal* means those who had prerogatives during the imperial regime with a large amount of land holdings not expropriated by Dergue; *Bureaucrat* stands for those who were elected leaders of localities and having land by annexing from others by misuse of power and those who served in various committees during Dergue regime. And oppressed peasants are those youths, widowed and supporters of EPRDF who have no land both during the previous two regimes (cited in Getie, 1999, p. 2053).

²⁹ “የደርግ ሃብታሙ” ዝክረት ገልጽ፡ ፖለቲካዊ ጽሁፎችና የወጥደብ ጥያቄዎች ቅጽ 2 የአማራ ክልል ሰማዕታት መታሰቢያ ሃሳቦች ነፃ (2004) “The True Nature of Dergue” Compiled in Memoir of Struggle: Political writings and Internal Letters, Volume 2. Amhara Region Martyrs Memoir Center, Bahir Dar.

1999, p. 2048). On the other hand, there was a significant number of population who benefited from this land reform especially the women and youth. Still there is diversity of opinions in rural areas in supporting and cursing the land redistribution. Besides redressing the disadvantaged section of rural population, the land redistribution had a hidden political agenda: making the so called *qrit-feudal* and *bureaucrat* politically irrelevant by using the land reform as a political weapon to weaken their economy (Interview with senior official of EPDM, December 20, 2020). On the other hand, it is hardly to say there was purely class dimension in Amhara region. The mobilization of the people along socio-economic lines was accompanied by a kind of ethnic mobilization which directs the Amhara people to be beneficiary from the existing ethno-cultural equality in a democratic way by avoiding the chauvinistic nature of cultural expression. As Anderson (2006) explained, official nationalism in post-colonial states was sculpted on the “nation-building” policies encompassing “both a genuine, popular nationalist enthusiasm, and a systematic, even Machiavellian, instilling of nationalist ideology through the mass media, the educational system, administrative regulations, and so forth.” (Anderson, 2006, p. 163). Taking the task of mobilizing Amhara along ethnic lines, EPDM used the instruments above notably by introducing the principle of “Amhara democratic nationalism”, and establishing Amhara-named institutions.

5.3.1. ANDM and its “Amhara Democratic Nationalism”

EPDM has made a resolute effort struggling “chauvinism” and preach the self-determination up to and including secession rights of nations and nationalities to its members and people under its administration. However, it fails to define the people who were not represented by all other liberation movements, apparently the Amhara. This accompanied by the unpredictable international changing situation especially the proliferation of ethnonational movements at the expense of ideological debacle on socialism as well as the resurgence of western democracy creates confusion on EPDM and its political program has challenged (EPDM, 1986 p. 21). To redress the changing situation, the directive of Amhara democratic nationalism had prepared to mobilize the Amhara people. The party confessed in the report for the third congress:

The anti-chauvinist struggle that we undertook for long within us was limited to taking the danger of chauvinistic outlooks without inducing additional democratic thinking. This creates a sense of vacuousness (emptiness) among our members. The changing situation

of Ethiopia also needs to design a kind of instrument to ensure ethno-cultural equality in which the equality of Amhara people has guaranteed i.e., a directive of Amhara democratic nationalism (EPDM, 1986 p. 21).

There was a firm belief that to hold the country together, to this end, EPRDF embarked on democratizing, the two extreme attitudes: “chauvinism” and “narrow nationalism”. Based on Lenin’s assertion, the division of labor has made between each respective political parties.

In the early period of Soviet Union, most Bolsheviks themselves were Russians. At the same time, they combat the greater Russian chauvinism to end the domination of greater Russians over other peoples of the empire (Yung, 2021: 59). In the same vein, as a progeny of the “oppressor” national group EPDM members engaged to struggle elements considered as chauvinism among which the Amhara need to express them avoiding emotions or ways of expressions that claim “superiority”. This was aimed to achieve through Amhara democratic nationalism. An informant who is a founding member of EPDM says:

It was not a matter of loving one’s own ethnic group. It was a matter of taking task. We cannot make to think of the people as an Amhara because they know they are Amhara but our task was helping to think as an Amhara democratically without provoking other ethnic groups of the country manifested through ‘I am neither greater nor smaller than others’(Interview, October 22, 2019).

The concept of Amhara democratic nationalism has presented in various ways with less standardization and consistency across time. An ANDM document called *Tsinat* (2006) presented three main features of Amhara democratic nationalism. The first is “the main aim of Amhara democratic nationalism and its democrat agents’ is ensuring the benefit of oppressed masses especially the Amhara peasantry” (Tsinat, 2006 p. 22). It had been emphasized that Amhara democratic nationalism, that EPDM/ANDM sought to develop is against the Ethiopian nationalism from the perspective of Amhara. The document underlined this as: “Amhara nationalism of the *neftegna* and chauvinists rallied under the banner of Ethiopianism aimed to protect the interest of their group interest” (Tsinat, 2006 p. 22). The second feature of Amhara democratic nationalism is making a distinction between the oppressed Amhara and the oppressive ruling class. It underlined that “the oppressed Amhara did not benefit from the exploitation of other nations and nationalities and struggle against the narrow nationalism that consider the national oppression was conducted by all Amhara” (Tsinat, 2006 p. 23). “Liberation of oppressed Amhara from chauvinistic outlook and making them to support their self-

determination rights of other nations and nationalities” has described as the main task that EPDM (ANDM) has to lead (Tsinat, 2006 p. 25). Hence the second feature works on ensuring the equality of all ethnic groups of the country, including the Amhara, and encourage unity based on the consent of them through struggling against chauvinism and narrow nationalism. The third feature of Amhara democratic nationalism is guarantying the democratic rights of the Amhara people which enables to benefit the people from their land and produce and encourage them to protect their environment (Tsinat, 2006 p. 24). As can be seen from the discussion, Amhara democratic nationalism was designed from both national and class perspectives. It has sided and aimed to mobilize the oppressed Amhara, the peasantry by relegating Ethiopianism as an Amhara nationalism of the ruling class.

The second description of Amhara democratic nationalism as stated in the book History of EPDM-ANDM (2016) shows somewhat moderate gesture. It avoids distinction between oppressed Amhara and others. It has explained *Amhara democratic nationalism* with its four pillars. These are:

- 1) knowing the Amhara national identity; *democratically* develop the language, culture, and history of Amhara nation; working to avoid the distrusting created by the biased governance of the former Amhara ruling class and improving the good histories of the same
- 2) recognizing the presence of various ethnic, linguistic and religious identities; respecting their right of self-determination, and understanding the necessity of building unity based on equality and mutual respect
- 3) ensuring the equitable participation, representation of the Amhara people on the countrywide issues
- 4) responding to the basic questions of the Amhara people which are poverty and backwardness; ensuring the self-rule right of Amhara people and creating a suitable regional environment which increases productivity and grass-root democracy (EPDM-ANDM, 2008 E.C. p. 154, author’s emphasis).

In practical realities, ANDM did not embark upon the prerequisites tasks that mobilized for the effective implementation of the rest of the pillars. For instance, there is little evidence that ANDM did regarding the first one (knowing the Amhara national identity; democratically develop the language, culture, and history of the Amhara nation). All through its program, statements, or training materials the issue of who is Amhara is not well defined. The Amhara ethnic identity was defined based on the elements stated in the constitution under Article 39(5)

without extra elaboration. Regarding this, Akele, writes as Ethiopia has various groups who fit with the definition of Article 39(5) living in the country for a long period of time and Amhara is one of them (Akele, 2014). Unlike other ethnic groups of the country, ANDM hardly works for the fostering of the culture, language, and history of the Amhara people. Neither the Amhara cultural center nor the history of the people is organized throughout the last two and above decades.³⁰ The right to self-determination seemed to have been overlooked in the embodiment of ‘Amhara democratic nationalism’ and the emphasis is given to only self-government. Since the first element of Amhara democratic nationalism which is probably a prerequisite for the others not materialized, it was uncertain in embarking on the rest of the pillars.

The persistence of training and public conferences on Amhara democratic nationalism gradually sidelined. Data from officials of EPDM/ANDM indicated supports this observation. According to the founding member of EPDM ‘there were epic scripts and cheering discussions on Amhara democratic nationalism during the transitional period. But after ANDM came to the fore, both activities on the issue have been declined (Interview, October 22, 2019, Addis Ababa). Despite it goes shady through time for unknown reasons; ANDM keep ‘Amhara democratic nationalism’ as its intra-state ideology particularly in defining Amhara and the way to address their interests.

In October 2015, ANDM has come up with separate definitions, probably for the first time, for “Amhara nationalism” and “Amhara democratic nationalism”. A paper prepared for public discussion defines the former as: “Amhara nationalism means being aware of Amhara nation’s identity and ensuring its right of self-determination and safeguard the nation’s interests through a struggle which include sacrifice” (cited in Husen, 2016, p. 168). On the other hand, “Amhara democratic nationalism” means “after fulfilling the interests of the Amhara nation in the above manner, respecting and recognizing the self-determination rights of others and working to build a strong multinational state” (Husen, 2016, p. 168). Hence is there any strong ethnic consciousness in the Amhara people is a crucial question to develop Amhara “democratic nationalism”. Taking

³⁰In 2007/8, when the Ethiopian second millennium was celebrated, most ethnic groups, if not all, were written and publish their respective history. By the time, the Bureau of Culture and Tourism of the Amhara region was only prepared a book called “Language and Culture of Amhara” and overlook its history. According to rumors believed to be disclosed from officials of the regional state, the history part was not allowed to publish for political reasons.

this definition for granted, it is impossible to build “Amhara democratic nationalism” since it is not fulfilling its prerequisite, self-consciousness.

The imposition of democratic nationalism and the persistence of an overwhelming “Amhara oppression narrative” among ethnonationalist elites, which despised some of the particularities of Amhara identity, a reactive Amhara ethnicity have been developed which instigated a claim for authenticity and recognition. As Bahru writes, one of the main features of post-1960s political discourse emanates from the baggage of Marxism-Leninism was the principle of “democratic centralism” in which centralism prevails over democratic both in accent and practice (Bahru, 2010c p. 332). Using the analogy, it can be argued that in the “Amhara democratic nationalism” in which “democratic”, that acquires similar intentional meaning with “centralism”, prevails over nationalism both in accent and practice. This situation led Amhara to develop an ethnicity in relation to others rather than a consciousness emerged from within. Given other ethnonationalism have been shaped by national oppression narratives which presents Amhara as oppressor; the nature of Amhara nationalism emerged as reaction of this othering and having a protectionist agenda.

Some commentators also suggest that the sense of nationalism, which can be the basis for “democratic nationalism”, has not yet been created among the people of Amhara (Husen, 2016 p. 171). So far as ethnicity (nationalism) is about consciousness, one has to answer the question to what extent such feeling has found in the hearts of Amhara people need to be manifested. According to Husen, an Amhara ethnonational feeling does not develop let alone a national consciousness suited for the so-called “democratic nationalism” (Husen, 2016, p 169). He also presented an assertion for Amhara ethnic consciousness is hardly developed. He writes as:

The people of Amhara do not live in other regions based on the guarantees of the constitution but by the will of other ethnic groups and this does not concern the people of the Amhara regional state; Occasionally, when the people are suffered from persecution and displacement in other regional states, it does not show solidarity and protest for the violence; the absence of active involvement of Amhara people in critical regional affairs (Husen, 2016, pp 169-170).

The fact that the historical evolution of the party itself contributed to its mission remained formless oscillated between the agendas of pan-Ethiopian and Amhara nationalism even after the

name change as ANDM (Andinet, 2019. p. 57). On the other hand, like the Amhara people who show pan-Ethiopian sentiment, the party resembled a sense of caretaker for Ethiopia (Andinet, 2019 p. 58). The party tending to have all-inclusive agenda (national brotherhood) form than mobilizing the Amhara people even after became the makeover. The party's central committee was multi-national until 2017 composed of members from Oromo, Tigray, and southern nations ethnic backgrounds in addition to members from intra-state. The founding and senior party members have also reaffirmed the importance of EPDM (ANDM) in keeping the country together during political crises, such as the transitional period and the split of the TPLF and its effects on neighboring states, with the exception of ANDM, which prevented the EPRDF from collapsing.

The ongoing political developments of the country also influenced the identity conceptions and the position of political actors. The official move of AAPPO towards a pan-Ethiopian political mobilization and the reluctance of ANDM pursuing the discussions on “Amhara democratic nationalism” immediately accompanied by the Ethiopian-Eritrean war resulted in the resurgence of Pan-Ethiopian identity. *Ethiopianism* has reached its summit with the emergence of the CUD in 2005 on which the party got huge support from the Amhara and urban centers of other regional states. The wave of Pan-Ethiopianism reached in the periphery, as the case in the Nuer of Gambella asserted their Ethiopian identity following their participation in the Eritrean war (Dereje, 2006). However, EPRDF refused to acknowledge the championship of Ethiopian nationalism to be confused with Amhara chauvinism and attempted to promote concepts like “democratic nationalism” distinguished from chauvinistic and narrow nationalisms (Young, 2021 p. 70).

Nevertheless, the official nationalism instituted by EPDM later significantly influenced the generation that passed through the educational policy, mass media communication and political mobilization, in complementing with the relational aspect of self-identity conceptions. Given the current rising Amhara ethno-nationalism has endorsed largely by young people EPDM (ANDM)'s official nationalism has now transformed into mass consciousness and redefining one's own ethnicity. Despite the creeping rise of Amhara ethnic sentiment in reaction to ethnonationalist politics which defined itself against an imaginary Amhara ethnic group, Amhara as a political identity is not emerged until recent times.

5.3.2. The Introduction of Amhara-named institutions and Everyday forms of Institutionalised ethnic life: The “New Amhara Generation”

Another indicator of official nationalism was the setting up of Amhara-named institutions. Taking up the mission of mobilizing the Amhara people, ANDM has effectively established the regional institutions with the name of Amhara. As indicated above, the notion of “Amhara democratic nationalism” also aims to bring the regions of Amhara into one by neutralizing the competing provincial sentiments which reached their zenith during the imperial regime and continued by Dergue. The party believed regionalism prohibited the unity of Amhara territories into one authority which provides the Amhara people political, social, and economic strength (Akele, 2014 P. 48). This assertion might have its own limitation since other ethnic groups were under different administrative structures except for the case of Tigray.³¹ Nevertheless, such institutions had been established both during EPDM and ANDM notably, Amhara Media Communications (AMC) formerly, Amhara Mass Media Agency (AMMA); Amhara Development Association (ADA); Amhara Credit and Saving Institute (ACSI), and sectoral institutions of the regional government. These institutions have reached most of the people of the region bearing the name “Amhara”.

AMC played a pivotal role in the common consciousness of Amhara people. This Amhara named regional media and its subcategories such as Amhara Radio and Amhara Television and Amhara FMs played a crucial role in bringing people from all areas of the country into an imagined Amhara ethnic solidarity. As discussed in chapter seven, AMC has played its role in the development of reactive Amhara nationalism broadcasting the sense of collective victimization. ADA has been mobilizing, participating, and serving both the rural and urban population to contribute to the expansion of social services in the region. Besides this, there are accusations of ADA as it weakened similar development associations organized based on provincial names such as Gondar and Wollo (Chuchu, 2019 p. 145). On the other hand, the ethnic boundary formation has come into view between the Agaw and Amhara ethnic groups when the former walk away from ADA and establish their ethnic named same development association: Awi Development Association stands for Awi and Wag Development Association

³¹ According to Markakis, unlike other parts of Ethiopia, Tigray was able to hold its cultural and traditional political authority simultaneously. This helps the province to “held fast to its own distinct language and parochial identity” and eventually appeared with distinct ethnic identity exceed (Markakis, 2003, P.1).

stands for Wag nationality administrations. ACSI has a record of reaching all rural population of Amhara region selling the name “Amhara” which other financial institutions of the country are unable (could not) to do it. It has been participating most households in its services thereby communicating the name “Amhara” as an identity of, at least, the government.

Though the root cause of Amhara ethnicity is the perceived and real marginalization under the EPRDF regime, that extensively discussed, one of the main factors that led to the movement’s momentum is generational. When it comes to the relatively fast Amhara ethnic consciousness and mobilization in the past five years, some observers attributed to the legacies of the EPRDF regime claiming that “the current Ethiopian young generation grew up only knowing and breathing tribalism, constantly being told, “you are Amhara.” (Teshome, 2018). Millions of young people were coming to grow up in EPRDF’s Ethiopia and its rhetoric that preached the primacy of ethnic identity over a national one. The presence of a significant number of young generation who know little about “Ethiopian identity” and patriotism but Amharaness has facilitated consumption spikes of ethnicity from the political marketplace.

The major contents of the “civic and ethical education” subject inculcated the ethno-linguistic principle of state organization among the students. The most crucial aspect of ANDM’s Amhara nationalism is the regional anthem that students should sing every day during the flag ceremony. It narrates the work culture, historical memory, belongingness of Amhara ethnic identity, and the commitment to live with other ethnic groups on an equal basis. This could be seen as an official nationalism encouraging Amhara ethnic consciousness which the armed struggle along ethnic line gives life to it. Regional-level soccer and other variants of sports festivals named “All Amhara Matches” and “All Ethiopia Matches” led to inter-regional races that, eventually, participants and their fans developed the relational aspect of ethnic consciousness. One of the main factors of Amhara ethnicity that led to its momentum is generational, and this might be the answer for those who wonder how it is growing so fast.

Despite the contentious nature of Amhara nationalism and the rise of ethnic sentiment in reaction to ethno-nationalist politics which defined itself against an imaginary “Amhara domination” discourse, Amhara as a political identity is constructed recently.

5.4. The Development of Amhara Political Identity

5.4.1. The Amhara Protests: The Midwife of Amhara Ethnicity

The rise of Amhara nationalism has several forms which could be categorized as institutional and extra-institutional. The institutional form encompasses civic organizations, professional associations, and political parties both abroad and home. Some of them entered the country following Abiy Ahmaed's political reform. The extra-institutional aspect of nationalism includes traditional military, soccer politics, intellectual and cultural movements.

Social media activism engages both institutional and extra-institutional aspects of the movements. The early phase of Amhara ethnicity was limited to the digital world. One year before the Amhara protests, some bloggers and activists (most of them were from the diaspora) began to write on social media about the need for a struggle based on an ethnic line. This can be viewed from Anderson's (1983) speculation about the crucial role of print media in the formation and spread of nationalism. Unlike print capitalism, the digital one, particularly Facebook and Twitter have been major sites of identity construction instrumental in enhancing Amhara ethnic consciousness among the youths. Social media platforms played a crucial role enabling the Amhara activists and their protesters to debate, exchange ideas and disseminate their message to a larger audience (Tezera, 2017 p. 142). Most of the ideas came out from a movement called *Bete Amhara* to mean House of Amhara via its web page. It advocates separatist agenda claiming that "if being an Amhara is a crime in federal Ethiopia, an Amhara independent statehood shall be established" (Mesganaw, 2021).

By July 2015 "*Bete Amhara Manifesto*" came out written by Mesganaw Andualem who was also both founder and first leader of the *Bete Amhara Movement*, established by a handful of like-minded diaspora youths notably from the USA, Canada, Australia, and Europe (Mesganaw, 2021). The manifesto has developed from its preceding writing entitled "*Abri Anqets 12: Amharan sile megentel yeqerebe Hasab*" its meaning could be "Awakening piece 12: a motion staged about to secede Amhara" that Mesganaw wrote and shared via Facebook on February 18, 2015. It begins saying:

Usually, we Amhara have been shocked to hear about secession. Currently, this is not in order. Understandably, there is no place in Ethiopia where our fathers' and forefathers'

blood are not spilled. We have a historical, cultural, psychological, and primordial attachment to Ethiopia. We have also a dream to make Ethiopia great again. However, we have been facing a complex question that let us standing at a crossroad: should the people called Amhara be exploded to keep Ethiopia exist? (*Abri Anqets* 12, cited in Mesganaw, 2021 p. 77).

It could be described as the second manifesto of Amhara nationalism after Andargachew's piece. Both manifestos have a similar frame of understanding on why and how to cope with the situation. Andargachew's situational analysis and his prediction have got real and reactively manifested through the second. However, the manifesto of *Bete-Amahara Movement* insisted on organizing based on a single ethnicity is not enough to reverse "the existential threat that Amhara encountered as a result of the 'new Ethiopia' organized based on anti-Amhara political system and its discursive exclusion and establishing an independent state of Amhara is needed".

This social media discourse had coincided with the Amhara protests, a surprise turnout for both the government and the Amhara activists. Condemning the TPLF's dominance and the annexation of the territory of Wolkayit the neighboring Tigray region, Amhara in their regional state went to the streets and wereshot. The immediate cause of the Amhara protests was the attempted arrest of Colonel Demeke Zewdu on July 12, 2016, by the federal security forces. He was and is urged for a return of the Wolkait district to the Amhara state in his position as leader of the Wolkait Identity Question Committee. The protests have been used as a platform to voice discontent over alleged government repression of the Amhara as well as to promote a budding ethnic nationalism among them. During these times, slogans reflected a sense of victimization such as: "Being an Amhara is not a crime" and "Respect Amharaness". The Oromo protest which started in 2014 now got momentum in 2016 when the Amhara protest joined it, eventually leading to fragmentation within the EPRDF.

The paradigm shift from pan-Ethiopian identity to Amhara nationalism was very swift, especially among the youth. This attracts the concerns of many actors including the newly appointed Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.³² Eagle became the symbol of Amhara ethnicity. It

³²The newly-appointed prime minister, who led the political transition, had made a speech at the discussion forum organized by the Amhara Regional State for academics and few selected business people. He noted that as he has been worried by the growing Amhara nationalism and calling for scholars to study, understand and suggest ways forward to the government.

waved in politically motivated public gatherings and demonstrations along with the song “*Amhara Nen*” to mean “we are Amhara”. The political symbolism of eagle to Amhara ethnicity is largely related to its vitality character. As they find time to look back at their life and re-energize them passing through metamorphosis; removing their body parts like beaks, talons and feathers for re-growth. The motto “አማራታሪኩን ያድሳል” (Amhara would re-new their glory) used by Amhara activism and nationalists including NaMA is good to explain it.

New and heightened territorial claims by the protests and the subsequent tensions between the Amhara state and their neighbors, notably Tigray are the other face of emerging Amhara ethnicity. The EPRDF leadership fears about the Amhara protest due to the suspicion that the regional government hearten the protests or not discouraged it (Young, 2021 p. 76). Especially the TPLF has been affronted in some assertive measures taken by the ANDM as the case that they were refused to let Colonel Demeke to the federal prison and arrested in Gondar. The TPLF also accused ANDM, through its electronic media outlet; *aiga forum* has been hijacked by rotten *neftegna*.³³

5.4.2. Institutional Aspects of Amhara Nationalism

The origin of Amhara nationalism rooted in the 1990s, where armed ethnic-nationalists hold political power. Nonetheless, Amhara nationalism was further solidified when the circle of informal Amhara activists transformed in to a formal political party, NaMA.³⁴ NaMA is a collective of like-minded urban-based youths and supporters and file members located ranges from lower to upper-class town youths, teachers, bureaucrats, professionals, and the diaspora (Tezera, 2021). Most of the leaders of Amhara nationalism in general and NaMA, in particular, have studied or worked in institutions outside of the Amhara region. This led them to have a better understanding of how other ethnic groups designate Amhara and subsequently develop Amhara ethnic consciousness from a relational perspective.

NaMA is able to hold the fundamental questions raised in the Amhara protests and makes part of its program. It aimed to reverse victimization and the threat to the survival of the Amhara people

³³ <http://aigaforum.com/article2016/andm-hijacked-commentary-080716.htm> (Accessed, April 4,2021)

³⁴ <https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2021/06/07/amhara-nationalism-at-the-polls-in-ethiopia/> (June 23, 2021)

emanated from anti-Amhara narratives and ensuring the effective participation of Amhara in socio-political and economic aspects of the country (NaMA Program).

Next to AAPO, the only active opposition Amhara named political party was Amhara Democratic Force Movement/ADFM/, more commonly known by its Amharic acronym *Adehan*. The movement was fighting against EPRDF government springing from Eritrea where it was based. ADFM has entered Ethiopia following Abiy Ahmed's reform. Currently, it became the second Amhara-based party certified by the Ethiopian National Electoral Board next to NaMA. It run for the June 2021 election, though failed to secure a single seat.

The Amhara nationalism hitherto acquired political and militant character now it began to have economic and social aspects. The people seem to understand mobilization along the ethnic line and its political and economic benefits under a federal system in which ethnicity is the organizing principle. Accordingly, Amhara-named institutions have been establishing inspired by the Amhara mobilization. Currently, financial intuitions, under which "Amhara Bank" has been established; regarding professional associations, a diaspora-based "Amhara Professional Association" and "Amhara Scholars Council (ASC)" have been established, and are functioning. Amhara Association in North America is a strong civil society that has been disclosing and documenting the killings and displacement of Amhara to the outside world.

The ASC and Amhara Youth Association are two civic organizations that have been actively recruiting members and supporters in their respective fields. The scholar council actively involves a sizable number of professionals and university professors. For the benefit of the Amhara people and Ethiopia's overall unity, it works on doing research, performing community service, and fostering open forums and debates. The youth who were active participants and supporters in the Amhara protests now established a new form of Amhara Youth Association. This bottom-up formation of the association has been in confrontation with branches of the older "Amhara Regional Youth Association" which are dormant only activated during elections by ANDM. The two associations have been struggling for full legitimacy. While the older one has a legal status, the newer one has support from Amhara nationalists. As the older youth association has been accused of partisanship of ANDM, the newer also associated with NaMA and some

figures in the Amhara protest. New youth associations are found in places where protests were very strong like Gondar, Bahir Dar, Woldia, and Debre Birhan.

The protests were neither organized nor lead by political parties or individuals except the role of Amhara activists in the social media. Considering the protests complaints against the ‘TPLF-led government’, tension within the coalition member ethnic-based parties of EPRDF in which one of the coalition member parties, TPLF, is allegedly criticized as it dominated others. Member parties of the EPRDF are represented by an equal number of people in their executive committees despite the difference in the population size each of them is supposed to represent. However, many agree that the TPLF was the most influential member party. Leaders of the remaining member parties confirmed on many occasions that, after party fragmentation, there was no equal power balance and the TPLF took the upper hand in decision-making, to the extent of interfering in the internal affairs of member parties. Following the 2016 protests, the EPRDF became increasingly fragmented. This changed its previously centralized nature, with the TPLF having lost its core position.³⁵ Apparently, numerous Amhara is offended by the ANDM officials did not speak out against their perceived TPLF’s encroachment on their interests since they were subservient to their Tigrian associates.³⁶ Moreover, some senior members of EPDM (ANDM) argue that despite the region of Amhara is the constituency of the party it was not founded and ruled by neither people who are primordially Amhara nor affiliate themselves with Amhara ethnic identity and hardly struggle decisions not pleasant to the Amhara people (Chuchu, 2019 p. 142; Gashaw, 2018. pp. 42-43). The critics that designate ANDM as a sarrogate of TPLF and its political creed which designated the people that it claimed to represent, Amhara as an oppressor of the rest of nationalities. On the other hand, there are people, among the senior party members, who do not accept the presence of TPLF domination within EPRDF to harm the Amhara people. Rather argue the problem is incompetent leadership of the incumbent officials to execute the development plans effectively. One of the EPDM’s founding members says:

³⁵As will be noted later, currently excluding the TPLF, member parties of EPRDF and its affiliate parties have been merged into a multi-national party known as the Prosperity Party.

³⁶<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/b156-bridging-divide-ethiopias-north> accessed January 13, 2020.

If EPDM/ANDM gets to submit to be subordinate to TPLF, it was in 1981 where we were 32 individuals while they had 12 battalion army. But we confront them face to face as they are narrow nationalists and forced to accept our positions in some aspects. For the current complaints from Amhara people regarding access to fair socio-economic and political benefits, the ANDM officials are responsible since they did not commit to working on that (Interview, October 22, 2019, Addis Ababa).

Tamirat Layne also confirms the above argument as from the inception all political programs of EPDM were discussed and adopted without any interference and since we consider us and the TPLF leaders are Marxist forces we think we all are working for all oppressed people of Ethiopia and never suspicious over who holds which position and so on (Tamirat, 2020).

Mobilizing the Amhara in the regional state which ANDM seemingly advocated before the Amhara protest now taken seriously. In the 12th party conference, the questions raised in the rallies of Amhara protests were basic agendas that eventually let the party decide to revoke “revolutionary democracy”. By this conference, ANDM not only changes its name into ADP but also changed in content.

The move from ethnic-blind political practice into an ethnic-nationalist by ADP and its “sympathy” with NaMA and the newly established Amhara-based political movements was additional evidence for the change. ADP also decides to expel senior party members who allegedly criticized as not “true Amharas” and instrumental for the interest of TPLF. ADP’s 12th party conference ensured a paradigm shift on the nature of the agenda (as it took the questions of the Amhara people as an agenda of its own) and resolutions. One of the statements reads as:

Amhara People has known for long in collaborating with the rest of the people of the country and defends the sovereignty of Ethiopia. The people also struggle and paid sacrifice to remove the Anti-democratic Dictatorial System. The people respect other peoples of Ethiopia and consider them part of it. Despite this image of the Amhara people, we have carefully considered the distorted historical narrative and doctrinal work that has been widely used and how this issue is affecting national integrity beyond the Amhara people (Statement of the 12th Party Congress).

The ADP came to the fore and does not hesitate from making its nationalist credentials clear. This is partly to overcome NaMA's growing influence. Despite this, ADP's rhetoric is often expressed under the banner of "Amhara democratic nationalism". This is because there should be positive perception from other ethnonationalists as Amhara nationalism does not antagonize any group in the country rather the party keeps its support for the protection of rights of other ethnic groups (KII P3, October 28, 2020, Bahir Dar).

Similar to NaMA, the 12th congress has pinpointed about five pillars of the Amhara question to be considered in future political struggles. These are: 1) rectifying the unfounded narratives and tagging of names emanated from the "oppressor nation" and "oppressed nationalities" rhetoric motivated by the ideology of "revolutionary democracy" on Amhara that led other ethnic groups to consider the people inseparably with the past regimes. 2) The territorial and identity questions of the Amhara people are the most pressing issues in our federal system and need political solutions. Accordingly, the territories which demarcated to other regional states before the FDRE constitution come to effect without the interest of the local people need to be reconsidered. 3) The party seeks constitutional amendment not only because the Amhara were not properly represented during the constitutional making process and it has some elements that harm the interests of the Amhara people but also need to adjust itself to the changing realities. 4) The question of an equitable share of the national wealth and the quest for equitable access to road, electricity, budget allocation in the sense that the people of Amhara did not benefit from. 5) The rights of Amharas living outside the regional state; to stop the violence against Amhara in various regional states and work for the protection of individual and group rights. In the meantime, "Amhara democratic nationalism" has taken for granted when ANDM was shifted to ADP as the statement said:

Since we believe the all-inclusive interests of the Amhara people will be fulfilled when the fraternity and multi-national democracy which steadily growing with other peoples of Ethiopia. To this end, we will work to build the 'Amhara Democratic Nationalism' in this direction.³⁷

According to an official of APP, "Amhara democratic nationalism" in this sense implies a kind of nationalism not enmity to others and ready to collaborate for shared rule and peaceful co-existence (Interview, October 28, 2020, Bahir Dar). Both parties framed in a way that shall be

³⁷Statement of the 12th ANDM/ADP Party Congress.

solved in the political discourse and struggle. However, it does not mean that NaMA and ADP have no differences in framing the above agendas. For instance, the NaMA took the problems of Amhara as an existential threat while ADP's position in this regard was (is) far from clear.

The decision of ADP to transform EPRDF into a new party shortens the life of the name ADP, if not the party itself, within not more than two years. The long-time plan of EPRDF to reform and restructure itself bears PP, a merger party of both former coalition members of EPRDF, except TPLF, and former affiliate parties of five emerging regions. There are confusions over the nature of the party especially the structural aspect. Some consider it not different from EPRDF except for the absence of TPLF dominance. Others see it as a monolithic party in which the former parties have abandoned their nationalistic approach and became pan-Ethiopian. However, the party has found between the two opinions. It is different from EPRDF since PP has a central council at the center. Despite the executive committee of the former was powerful, it was a mere amalgamation of member parties and the sole decision-maker was the central committee of each respective member party. According to the data obtained from the chief secretary of APP despite last decision will make by the central council of PP, there are subordinate branches in each regional state with some level of autonomy in ruling the regional states (Interview, Bahir Dar, October 16, 2020). A crucial question is whether or not APP still holds its nationalistic agendas as it passed in the 12th party conference. The data from officials of APP revealed that it won't abandon those issues and hopefully will be answered under the umbrella of PP. Abraham Alehegn, head of political affairs of APP says:

We haven't yet abandoned the five basic questions unanimously passed in the 12th party conference while we join PP. Since the foundation of PP is a multi-national character, it is possible to say that its pillars are primarily the values of the Amhara people. We sincerely believe problems related to the Amhara people are hardly solved without the collaboration of other political actors' especially political elites of other ethnic groups. Therefore, it is possible to answer the fundamental political and economic questions of the Amhara people through the ways of PP. (Interview, Bahir Dar, October 16, 2020).

In addition to this, Mr. Agegnehu, chief secretary of APP, suggested that, the positions that ADP took during the 12th party conference accepted by other parties and became part of the program of PP. Regarding the practicability of such promises he says:

Raising those questions before EPRDF meetings subject to serious criticism and labeled as chauvinist (*Ahadawi*) but now we are able to make our claims to be heard. As per issues of identity and territorial claims the federal government has established a commission to study and solve; concerning the claims of fair socio-economic share, we submit our evidence to the house of federation specifically the problems pertaining to the share of electric power, road coverage and population number as having a direct impact on budget allocation; and we are working for the Amhara as outside the regional state.³⁸

The endorsement of Amhara questions at the party level further witnessed in the formal governmental institutions. The regular (as opposed to ethnic ones) local government councils and the executives to pass identity motivated decisions such as changing the name of local governments themselves (name of woredas, Kebeles, Sub-cities and airport) and erecting monuments of presumed heroes of the local population and disgraced by the EPRDF government as members of the oppressive ruling class. Some of the decisions have been sent to the regional state council to inform about changes.³⁹ Considering the Amhara regional state constitution does not give detailed provisions of local government functions; this move is a kind of emerging issue that might broaden the competencies of regular local governments to exercise the rights included under the baggage of self-determination.

The decision of ANDM to re-brand itself in to ADP and its activities in the aftermath was not accompanied by a soft journey. The June 22, 2019 assassination of the Amhara regional officials is an incident which put scar not only on the Amhara nationalism in general but also the intra-state political dynamics. The federal government announced it was an attempted coup d'état.⁴⁰ This epic incident latter acquired both coup and conspiracy theories. The public opinions oscillated between admitting the incident was the result of each other's problem (Brigadier-General Asaminew Tsige and the core leadership of the regional state including the president,

³⁸ Amhara Television Interview with Mr. AgegnehuTeshager, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PX2MeIH8sSU&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR2LBfQeTtQiml7QChAJ82G0dti3205snQec-qatf5aDrbpGNuNogrGFzPc> Accessed on Sep 3 2020

³⁹ Interview with Amhara Regional Council's Speaker, WorksemuMamo, (December 23, 2020)

⁴⁰ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/6/23/ethiopias-amhara-state-chief-killed-amid-regional-coup-attempt>

Dr. Ambachew Mekonnen)⁴¹ and a conspiracy orchestrated by the allegedly Oromo dominated federal government to avoid the two strong Amhara leaders.⁴² Whatever the truth is the incident goes against the newly emerging reactive Amhara ethnicity. It damaged the regional state and took time to recover, if at all it is the case now. It also initiated the provincial tensions at the expense of a unified Amhara nationalism. As the assassinated three persons including the regional president were from one district or neighboring two in South Gondar and Assaminew from north Wollo and those presumably conspiring behind him were Gojjames. The Amhara activism has been deeply divided in praising and ridiculing Assaminew and Ambachew in respective groupings. It seems appropriate to look at the incident from the contentious nature of Amhara nationalism and the internal debates and diverging perspectives in defining it and the strategy to protect Amhara interests in post-2018 Ethiopia.

5.4.3. Extra-institutional Aspects of Amhara Ethnonationalism

Amhara nationalism should not only be seen solely by its political dimension. It has many forms that fail under the extra-institutional dimension. The militant nature of Amhara nationalism, at its earlier stages, was manifested in the form of armed struggle in the name of “*Kefagn*” to mean “I am disgruntled” later evolved into traditional military movement held in the form of banditry and commonly known in Amharic as *Fano*. It has gained legitimacy in the eyes of the public especially after the group of armed countrymen came to Gondar during the attempted arrest of Colonel Demeke Zewudu to take out from federal police encirclement. Many joined the group in the 2019 *Fano* huge public meetings in Gondar, Bahir Dar, and Woldia.⁴³

Another most influential aspect is the intellectual and cultural movement. The past, present, and future of *Amharaness* have been expressed in a conscious attitude. A paradigm shift occurred from the narration of a phenomenon from the view of Ethiopia and Ethiopianism into Amhara and *Amharaness*. The intellectual movement engages on not only exposing the anti-Amhara

⁴¹<http://www.biyokulule.com/the-amharas-and-the-bitterness-after-the-coup/> (Accessed, April 5, 2021)

⁴²<https://zehabesha.com/was-olf-tipped-off-by-the-authority-that-dr-ambachew-and-general-asaminew-would-be-killed-and-claiming-wollo-is-part-of-north-oromia/> (Accessed, April 5, 2021)

⁴³After the June assassination of Amhara regional leaders, *Fanno* has got into contradiction with the formal security apparatus of the regional state in which some of its leaders were killed, arrested and still fugitives.

nature of national oppression thesis and its institutions of the government but also strives to create shared ideas of the common origin of Amhara people. Among Amharic books published in the post-2017, pertaining to the ideas of common origin, Misganaw's *Gionawinet: Ye Amara menesha ena medaresha* [Gionawinet: The roots and routes of Amhara] and Tedla's *Kibre Amhara: Yemaninetachin Amd* [Glory of the Amhara: Pillars of Our Identity] are influential. Data collected through interviews and FGD from members and supporters of NaMA, and AYA indicate that the concept of *Ghionawinet* has become the ideological frame of Amhara ethnicity.

Many books were proliferated by early 2017 and some of them swiftly sold-out and reprinted.⁴⁴ Prior to these writings, creative literatures show how the situation in Ethiopia is unsuitable for Amhara and promote the need for organizing based on Amhara ethnic line. Amharic novels and poetry are used as a medium of ethnonational sentiments.⁴⁵ Complemented and promoted by social media activism the books played their own role in creating Amhara ethnic consciousness.

The cultural dimension of Amhara nationalism also manifested in the case of the 'Save Tana and Lalibela' movement. The claim was the federal government remained silent while the water hyacinth engulfed much of Lake Tana (Horn Africa's largest lake) and the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela (one of the impressive world heritage enlisted by UNESCO) are near to collapse. While the latter has done through putting pressure on the government via social media activism, the former was accompanied by the physical participation of people. To show the unity of all Amhara, youths from the four provinces (Shewa, Wollo, Gondar, and Gojjam) traveled to Bahir Dar (the capital of the Amhara region and the city where the lake is visibly found) to avoid the hyacinth from the water.

⁴⁴In addition to Misganaw's and Tedla's there was a proliferation of Amharic books on Amhara such as: Gashaw, 'The Amhara resistance'; Misganaw, 'Gionawinet'; Melkamu Teshome, *Ye Amara behertegnet* [Amhara nationalism] (Self-published, 2010 EC); Yihune Aweke, *Amharanet* [Amharaness] (Self-published, Addis Ababa, 2010 EC); Chuchu Alebachew, *Dagetyaberetaw ye Amarawfinot* [The Amhara gateway] (Self-published, Bahir Dar, 2011 EC); Mamushet Amare, *Yetegaredewjegnet* [The hidden heroism] (Self-published, 2012 EC).

⁴⁵Fikadu Sisay, *Meste'ate Amhara: Be addiso chu Amharoch* [The advent of the Amhara: By the new Amharas] (Self-published, Addis Ababa, 2007 EC); Tesfa-Tsion Gashaneh, *Tel'eko Armageddon: Zemechafikir le Ethiopia andinet* [Mission Armageddon: Operation love for Ethiopia's unity] (Self-published, Addis Ababa, 2009 EC); Melaku Alamrew, *Neftegna Senegnoch* [the Neftegna verses] (A.M. Printing, 2009 EC).

The revival of Amhara cultural dressings and festivals appeared. Wearing of traditional clothing “Shama” and “Jano” became very common among the youths in events usually the western dressing has adapted like weeding and university graduations. Shady celebrations of cultural festivals revived such as *Shadey (Ashendye) (Solel)* in areas of Wag, Lalibela, and Raya respectively and “*Engicha Neqela*” in Gojjam. The former involves a dispute over the claim of cultural ownership between Amhara and Tigray regional states.⁴⁶

Traditional night clubs, commonly known in Amharic *Azmari Bet*, became centers of protests against government repressions and glorifying Amhara. According to the researcher’s observation in clubs found in Bahir Dar and Gondar, people give poems to the *Azmari*, (traditional singer using a string music instrument called *Mesenko*) and he played it in his own voice. The *Azmari* has been praised with a relatively great sum of money from the customers if they use poems to glorify Amhara or noticing their victimizations by TPLF.

Unlike other times that Amharic traditional songs focuses on associating values, norms, heroes, and cultures of the people with provinces and Ethiopianism, now came out praising Amhara and denouncing their victimization in the past decades. Music plays a crucial role not only used to express and maintain pre-existing identities, but it also provides resources for contesting and negotiating identities and constructing new ones (Lidskog, 2017 p.25). In this regard, a song called “*Amhara Nen*”⁴⁷ to mean “we are Amhara” is still considered as an Amhara national anthem at least among the youths. It was written by Temesgen Tesema, (one of the founding members of NaMA and currently member of central committee of the party) and produced by an online media called *Lisane Amhara* (Amhara Press). The central message of the song seems underscoring the indignity of Amhara maintaining historical ownership of Ethiopia since pre-Axumite times in claiming self-righteousness and celebrating being an Amhara. It has been using in public meetings and Amhara cultural and political events as Tilahun Gessesse’s song

⁴⁶There is a controversy between Amhara and Tigray region over the ‘ownership’ of the annual girls’ festival, known differently in different areas. In Lalibela, for instance, it is called Ashendeye, in Seqota *Shadey*, in Tigray, *Ashenda*, and in Raya-Kobo, *Solel*. With the movement to enlist this holiday in the UNESCO intangible cultural heritages list, the controversy was growing. Henock Yared, ‘Female celebration of various’ [Amharic], *Reporter*, 23 August 2017,

⁴⁷https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykEVNJR_tFs

“Ethiopia” is used in all-inclusive agendas and Pan-Ethiopian gatherings and events. The song, *Amhara Nen* has also made a strong message in regard to myth-making (*Ghionism*) and creates common ethnic consciousness. It also stresses and reiterates Amhara as the pioneer of civilizations; owners of Axumite and pre-Axumite cultural achievements and the indigenous as well as original inhabitants of *Ghion* (Bete Amhara) in particular and Ethiopia in general. It also triumphantly describes Amhara as a state builder, people of justice and free people, never enslaved or colonized. The song is by far different from the official regional anthem, *Yetatari Hizboch* (Diligent people) that the later only mentioned the name Amharaness once while the former said it nine times. Unlike the new song, the official regional anthem emphasizes the Amhara region than the people in a way excluded Amhara outside of the regional state.

Soccer politics also played a medium of ethnic consciousness among the youths. Both Amhara solidarity and protests against the government used in the stadiums. Especially when the Gondar-based- *Fasil Kenema*, Bahir Dar based- *Bahir Dar Kenema*, and Woldia based- *Woldia Kenema* meet each other, supporters enjoyed peaceful support. The last 20 minutes are always left for protest songs and praising Amhara solidarity. The soccer gets hostile one of these clubs meets with a Tigray-based club. The disputes were not mainly by the incidents in the playground but the political polemic words that the fans throw at each other.

To recap, the above analysis has shown the development of Amhara nationalism under various situational contexts. There has been significantly growing ethnic sentiment with a sense of victimization among the Amhara people since 2015. Amhara, who used to closely associate themselves with Ethiopian nationalism since imperial times, is now developing an ethno-national sentiment claiming a perceived and real marginalization within the post-1991 political system. Shiferaw and Ishiyama (2021) also confirmed the steady development of Amhara nationalism since 2013. Employing a quantitative analysis of the data set from the Afrobarometer and World Value survey the study revealed a remarkably consistent increment of Amhara ethnic sentiment over time (Shiferaw and Ishiyama, 2021, pp. 1042-1046). Hence Amhara nationalism is in the rise since 1991 being antithetical to the national oppression political discourse and its institutionalization, and seeking significant political remedies that determine the current political crisis and future of Ethiopia.

5.5. Conclusion

The fluidity and controversy over Amhara ethnic identity justify Barth's formulation that describes ethnicity as fluid and ethnic boundaries are not stable and undergo changes from time to time based on historical and political contexts. Raising the question of what are the trajectories of the Amhara identity conception until this time requires looking into various political contexts through which Amhara identity passes. Amhara was imagined as a dominant ethnic group in the political discourse of ethno-nationalists and ESM of the 1960s. The Pan-Ethiopian agenda that EPDM inherited from EPRP and its decision to replace the class struggle as a priory agenda than a national movement was the root of the party's dilemma in positioning to Pan-Ethiopian agenda or mobilizing Amhara people along the ethnic lines. The international and domestic political context shifted from socialism to western democracy and the proliferation of identity politics forced EPDM to transform itself into ANDM.

On the other hand, during the transition period, the complaint that Amhara was not properly represented in the conference establishing the transitional charter constituted a political grievance. Representing the Amhara ethnic group, as those who are from the oppressive group, EPDM members support the secession rights of ethnic groups but fail to comprehend how its political program works with the Amhara people until they came up with the idea of Amhara democratic nationalism. The reconfiguration of EPDM from national to ethnic and AAPO from ethnic to national indicates the parties' dilemma in positioning to Pan-Ethiopian agenda or Amhara ethnicity. The former's transformation could be seen as the debacle of both pan-Ethiopian political discourse and the class struggle solution for the country's political problems. Afterward, none of the pan-Ethiopian political parties managed to break through the ethnic-based political discourse and state organization except its short-lived resurrection during the 2005 election represented by Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) party.

In the last, nearly three decades' actors and political parties shift their subscription from Ethiopian identity to Amhara and the other way around. In this case the situationality, variability of ethnicity, and more importantly, the weight of context in the construction of identity discourses and practices. Despite the attempts made by ANDM to mobilize Amhara along the ethnic line, the people rejected being affiliating to the Pan-Ethiopian national sentiment.

However, the institutionalization of Amhara ethnicity by the regional government brought about a generational aspect of ethnic consciousness.

The practice of “Amhara democratic nationalism”, with its Bolshevik ingredients, aimed to “democratically” mobilize Amhara, accompanied by the attitude of other ethnic groups which consider all Amhara as an oppressor, gave way to reactive ethnicity, and Amhara ethnicity is already developed both in the form institutional and extra-institutional aspects. The ethnicization of Ethiopian politics has gone through several phases that this study tries to show. Based on the situationality of collective identity that is drawn from the Barthian variety of social constructivist perspectives, this chapter revealed how the Amhara identity conception and mobilization evolved from an elite mobilization nurtured through political parties to mass consciousness and subsequent mobilization that has impacted the political system in progress. The above dynamics show how Amhara ethnicity has been built under various political contexts in which it goes from rejecting to embracing.

Chapter Six

Becoming Amhara

6.1. Introduction

The debate over the nature of “Amhara” people within the framework of Ethiopian political discourse has emerged since the 1990s. While EPRDF seized political power replacing the Dergue regime, it argued that Amhara existed as a distinct ethnic group with specifically located boundaries, distinct language as well as culture, and history. On the other hand, most of the educated elites of the time rejected this notion and argue the opposite “there is no Amhara ethnicity”. Hence the first section of this chapter is intended to capture the terms of debates on the existence of Amhara as a distinct ethnic group or not. Understanding the reasons behind this enduring debate is crucial to have a frame of understanding in the analysis of both pan-Ethiopian and ethno-national political discourse vis a vis the ongoing Amhara identity conception and political mobilization. Accordingly, the different discourse entrenched in the dominant debate over the existence of Amhara is assessed. The second part of this chapter has explored how the term “Amhara” is defined and re-defined by the Amhara nationalists, “Amhara” with Pan-Ethiopian outlook and ordinary people. It discusses the in-group conceptions have been extended from imagining ideas of common origin traces antiquity to reactive sense in relation to other ethnic groups.

6.2. The Terms of Debate on the Existence of Amhara as a Distinct Ethnic Group

6.2.1. Debating Amhara

Following the radical student movement and their national question framed in Wallelign Mekonen’s article, the issue of Amhara appeared to be a recent political discourse. The main argument of Wallelign’s manifesto his rejection of the idea that Ethiopia is a nation and the ‘Ethiopian people’ in the third person singular. Rather, he characterized it as a collection of nationalities. Walelign’s article was staged the first official claim of the national question as he defined Amhara as a dominant and oppressive nation. The first assertion that Walelign makes is the presence of national oppression from the view of the imposition of cultural and political hegemony of Amhara and to some extent Amhara-Tigre over other nationalities (Wallelign, 1969). Immediately after the TGE was set up in 1991, the issue of Amhara became the epicenter

of the political debate. Its immediate cause was the question of why the Amhara was not represented in the July 1991 “peace and democratic conference” which ratified the Transitional Charter. Soon it has got political and scholarly dimensions.

Despite the question of “who is Amhara?” becoming sensitive political agenda in post-1991, the first head of state who tried to define the name “Amhara” was Mengistu Haile Mariyam in the last days of his power. He insisted there is no Amhara identity; even the name Amhara was coined by the foreigners to signify “people of the mountain”. According to Mengistu, the name “Amhara” in Ethiopia is understood as *degegn* (highlander) and he emphasized that Amharic is not a language of one ethnic group rather it is a pidgin (Mengistu, n.d.). It is difficult to capture the reaction of either the public or elites during that time. From the opposition side, one of the senior members of EPDM shares his memory:

I remember that there was a heated debate and response to Mengistu’s concept of Amhara, despite the fact that we never had the Amhara ethnic emotion or mission to fight for the Amhara interests during the war under EPDM (KIIP6, November 18, 2019, Addis Ababa).

A heated debate was held on the existence of Amhara as a distinct ethnic group between Professor Mesfin Wolde Mariyam (leading educated elite of the time) and Meles Zenawi (the chairman of EPRDF and president of TGE by the time) in a widely televised program in the autumn of 1991. Two persons took in the discussion panel from the academics, namely Andreas Eshete and Mekonnen Bishaw. Unlike Mesfin, both were active participants in ESM. In the debate, Mesfin presented as the people use the term Amhara to refer to religious or provincial identification, not ethnicity. He said:

There are no people called Amhara. It is difficult to represent something that does not exist. As far as I know, there is *Gojjame*, *Gondere*, *Wollo*, and *Shewe*. And when you look into Gojjam there is *Damote*, proper Gojjam, and similar in other provinces. I asked hundreds of farmers from Wollo. They consider Amhara in religious terms. I asked are you Amhara? And, He said no I am Muslim. I asked what your language is. He replied

Amharic. Hence there are no people who define themselves with an ethnic sentiment (Mesfin, 1991).⁴⁸

Meles contended Mesfin's argument and underlines the presence of Amhara as a distinct identity since it has a distinct language as well as culture and history. He argued as:

Regarding the conclusion that Amhara does not exist, the evidence presented by Professor Mesfin are the cases in all ethnic groups. If we use this premise, there is no ethnic group called Oromo or Tigray too. In the case of Tigray, one might say I am Temben and the other Axum. That identity conception from Wollo is because of the influence of Oromo found in some pocket areas that are predominantly Muslims. But there is an essence that makes Tigray, Oromo, Amhara, and others an ethnic group. Language, culture, and mindset transcend provincial feelings to make a distinct ethnic identity (Meles, 1991).⁴⁹

Andreas replied to the question if there was an Amhara ethnic group without taking a position (Cited in Admasu, 2010). He reflected that "Amhara hide behind an Ethiopian identity by not acknowledging they are Amhara but simply Ethiopian" (Ibid. p. 85).⁵⁰ Andreas stated that he is an Amhara and is proud of his people's culture, tradition, and contributions in an interview with Sheger FM in 2017, with the exception of the members of the ruling class and their actions.

In response to the execution and mass displacement of "Amhara" from the new ethnic-territorial regions, AAPO was established in the name of Amhara for the first time. In its statement, the party announced that the purpose of its establishment is: "representing the people, and striving without delay to see to it that the interests, aspirations, democratic rights and freedom of the Amhara people are respected where ever they are found" (AAPO Program). AAPO's conception of Amhara ethnicity, in its reactive sense with a protectionist agenda immediately suffered from criticisms made by the then-educated elites who urged the party to maintain its Pan-Ethiopian sentiment. Professor Getachew Haile suggested that AAPO would reconsider its identity conception and the naming of the party itself. He wrote:

⁴⁸Ethiopian Television [Video].YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8SXeZGnxls>

⁴⁹Ethiopian Television [Video].YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8SXeZGnxls>

⁵⁰ The video that still exist on YouTube does not include the Andeas's and Meknnes's remark on the issue.

Instead of [as stated in the program] "It will strive without delay to see to it that the interests, aspirations, democratic rights, and freedom of the Amhara people are respected wherever they are found," I would prefer to call it [AAPO] All Ethiopian People Organization and change and replace the objective to "it will strive without delay to see to it that the interests, aspirations, democratic rights, and freedom of minorities and other peoples not organized by ethnicity are respected" (Getachew, 1992).

Following the political debate held, conceptualizing the Amhara ethnicity in terms of supra-ethnic consciousness had been strengthened in justifying the non-existent of Amhara ethnicity. Underlining the advent of ethnicity as EPRDF's conspiracy, Getachew has urged all the Amharic speakers need to resist the dividing terms of EPRDF: "the oppressed" and "the glorious Amhara nation," is to continue the Amhara identity playing a binding role across ethnic groups of the country. Underlining Amhara is an ethnic Ethiopia; he also called upon as: "Your glory is your acceptance of every Ethiopian as a member of your ethnic group, Ethiopia, and your role to serve as a bridge between ethnic groups." (Getachew, 1992). A more summarized account on the side of those who claim there is no Amhara ethnicity was brought by Takkele. In his presentation to the 12th international conference of Ethiopian studies entitled "Do the Amhara Exist as a distinct ethnic group?" According to Takkele, the Amhara can "be said to exist in the sense of being a fused stock, a supra-ethnically conscious ethnic Ethiopian serving as the pot in which all the other ethnic groups are supposed to melt," (Takkele, 1994 cited in Mekonen, 2008 p. 396). Similarly, Tegegn argued Amhara as a group with no myth of common descent and shared historical memories and a link with a homeland given that they have several homelands (Tegegne, 1998 p 116).

As shown above, there was a loud voice that came out from the proponents of "there is no Amhara ethnicity" through scholarship and media outlets. On the opposite camp, only Andargachew Tsigie wrote a book. Parallel to Meles's criteria of ethnicity, he defined Amhara as a group of people who have a similar language, culture, and history. He wrote: "Amhariness is a hidden, not non-existent sentiment" (Andargachew, 1993, p. 26). He also maintained that Amhara as a group appears in relation to others and urged the need for organizing along Amhara ethnic line (Ibid. p.31). He further criticized the religious and topographic connotation of

Amhara (Mengistu's and Mesfin's assertion) as unrealistic which make all Christian and highlander ethnic groups of the world ethnic Amhara.

Within the academic debate, Chernetsov had come up with a well briefly elaborated article on the question of who is Amhara. He summarized the debate by giving clarifications about the Amhara identity which the previous debates failed to do so. Chernetsov had described Amhara as "a culture of assimilation at the imperial court". He underlined the way that Amhara managed to expand to other territories and dominated Ethiopian politics for centuries (Chernetsov, 1993 p. 97). The land tenure system was crucial in the expansion of the Amharic language and culture. The military regiments of medieval Ethiopia called *Chewa* were predominantly multi-ethnic but embraced the Amharic language and culture in which they receive *Gult*⁵¹ lands as a salary for their military service. Here Chernetsov also hinted at the presence of two interrelated Amhara identities: the rural Amhara and the Amharic imperial court culture. There was a close connection existed between the Amhara peasant and the military service. In order to have land they should serve in the army (Cherntsov, 1993 p. 100).

Building upon Chernetsov's work on the Amhara identity, Pawsewang has come up with his concept of the two-faced Amhara identity: rural and urban. The former is a "predominantly urban elite group that maintains a distinctive supra-ethnic and Pan-Ethiopian outlook". The latter is "a rural Amhara population living in large parts of northern Ethiopia ... adopted a rural Amhara culture, self-consciousness, and ethnicity" (Pawswang, 2005 pp. 273-274).

He underlined that despite the two being similar in Pan-Ethiopian sentiment, culture, and language, they are different in regard to social, economic, and political interests. Pawsewang has concerned that nobody among the Ethiopianist scholars reacted to Chernotsov's presentation of the ethnogenesis of Amhara. This is related to, as he reflects, either the journal hardly gets the attention of scholars due to its limited expansion or the attitude of elites who do not want to see

⁵¹ In the Ethiopian land tenure system, *Rist* and *Gult* were vital elements. The first is an inalienable right of possession of land by a person through kin descent while the second is the power to collect tribute from the produce of the former granted by the Emperor in return for military service.

any distinction between not only the Amhara and other ethnic groups of Ethiopia but also the urban and rural Amhara (Pawsewang, 2005 p. 274).

In dramatic political turns and twists, a reversed transformation of two political parties occurred. EPDM, a Pan-Ethiopian member party of EPRDF but its constituency restricted to the Amhara region was changed into ANDM to mobilize the Amhara ethnic group. On the other hand, AAPO has changed into pan Ethiopian party and is named AEUO. Within the time frame in which every ethnic group celebrating diversity since 1991, two historical events led the country into an overwhelming pan-Ethiopian spirit. These were the Ethio-Eritrean war in 1998 and the contested 2005 election in which the people of the Amhara region and urban dwellers all over the country voted for CUD; a coalition of Pan-Ethiopian political parties.

Twelve years after his initial discussion of Amhara, Mesfin resurfaced with his enduring argument in his book “*ye kihdet kulkulet*” (the Rake of Betrayal), which was published. In his writing, he stated: “I mean there was (is) no Amhara is to imply that there is no gosa named Amhara but now, Amhara as a gosa is created by the direct order of the TPLF” (Mesfin, 2004 p. 100). He added that Amhara became an ethnic group as a result of the TPLF's betrayal of Ethiopia. In actuality, he did not study the term “*gosa*” from the standpoint of a worldwide academic discourse using the concepts of ethnic group, ethnicity, and nation.

He does not define the phrase in terms of local knowledge or language. Mesfin employed the word *gosa*, which appears to mean clan (Mesfin 2004, p 110). He occasionally conflates the terms “*gosa*” with “clan” and “ethnic group” in the same sentence.⁵² In a nutshell, Mesfin argues that neither the Amhara have a common ancestry nor a political identity that is manifested through a mobilized Amhara people to achieve some socio-economic as well as political goals collectively, both in this book and in various interviews with local media outlets afterward. Despite the fact that the political process of Amhara ethnicity creation was already underway.

Leading oppositions from pan-Ethiopian political parties appeared to support Mesfin's argument accompanied by presenting experiences of their home origin on some occasions. For example,

⁵²He mentioned the term for two different purposes in the same chapter in resenting the Somali as an example by saying ‘the conflict in Somali is because of gosa (clan) difference. At the same time, he recognized that Somalis are gosa (a distinct ethnic group).

Yilkal Getnet, former president of Blue Party and currently one of the leaders of Hibir Ethiopia said to life magazine:

People you called Amhara [to the journalist] do not believe in the existence of the Amhara ethnic group. I am from Gojjam. We used to say Amhara-Islam for religious identity. I know about the issue of the Amhara ethnic group when I joined the university for the first time. Unlike other ethnic groups in the country, it does not count genealogical descent. And I don't believe that it is appropriate to establish an ethnic-based political party for Amhara and be tied up on only ethnic interests. If this happened, I believe that will be the end of Ethiopia (Yilkal, 2013).

The fluidity and instability of identity conceptions are witnessed in the terms of the debate over Amhara ethnicity. Like the political reconfiguration of the EPDM and AAPo in the late 1990s, the same has happened recently that those individuals who were active in the debate of the 1990s shift their positions. While Andargachew came up with there is no Amhara ethnic group since it is “the backbone of Ethiopia” and cannot claim common descent, Getachew argued “the question ‘does the Amhara exists as a distinct ethnic identity’ is the question of fools”. Andargachew in his interview with Amhara Television on March 19, 2020, said that:

Amharaness is a non-ethnic identity that developed when the Amharic language was created. Since Amharic is a pidgin, so are the Amharas. I refer to myself as an Amhara in that sense rather than in terms of my ancestry. There is no distinct ethnic Amhara identity; rather, it is the result of interactions across ethnicities over a millennium through the state system (Andargachew, 2020).

During the early stages of NaMA and prior to the 2021 election, Andargachew was questioned about his prior assertion that “Amhara exists as an ethnic group” while on a tour of various towns in the Amhara region. For instance, when he responded to the identical question at Dessie town, he pretended to answer it differently. He acknowledged that he was a pioneer in encouraging Amhara ethnic awakening, but that ethnic politics are currently and ultimately dangerous for Ethiopia (Interview with a person who attended the meeting). Getachew offered three pieces of proof that the Amhara had a distinct ethnic identity: Because Amhara is viewed as an ethnic group that belonged to the claimed oppressor (dominant) ruling class, the name Amhara, the existence of notable individuals who go by the name, and the bearer of the name Amhara have all been targets of victimization (Getachew, 2019). Getachew has recognized two

faces of Amhara identity: “Amharic-Amharic and xxx-Amharic,” which are similar to Pausewang’s differentiation but come from different angles. The first, there are individuals who have always been Amhara, and The second; there are those who gave up their previous ethnic identities and assimilated into the state’s culture, which was derived from the first group (Getachew, n.d.). However, Getachew has not changed his claim of Amhara as ethnic Ethiopia and both types of categories have only one identity i.e., Ethiopianess. This is because; according to him, the “xxx-Amharic” neither wants to be called an Amhara nor claim their former ethnic origin since Amhara has already become the state’s culture.

Yilkal has also recently revised his position with greater sympathy to Amhara ethnicity. In his interview with Ethiotimes media, he clearly supported the idea and practice that Amhara need to be organized to protect their interests. He said:

EPRDF says that nationalities were oppressed. The oppressor group as has been reiterated for a half-century is Amhara. Currently, Amhara have been experiencing double oppression: economic marginalization from all other ethnic groups and suffering separate victimization. Thus, I encourage the Amhara to be organized based on ethnic lines to resist such victimization (Yilkal, 2019).

Recently, following the development of Amhara ethnicity, some Oromo and Tigrayan ethnonational activists shift their position that reiterating “Amhara need to stand as an ethnic group rather than be covered under the mask of Ethiopian national identity’ into supporting the idea that ‘Amhara does not exist”. For example, the former consular of Ethiopia in the United States, Birhane Meskel Abebe, underlined the non-existence of Amhara and those Amhara are Amharic-speaking Oromos, Agaws and Tigrrians. Borrowing Aleka Atsmie’s expression he regarded Amhara as those who rebelled from their ethnic roots. He further reflects, somewhat awkwardly, as:

Like the people [Amhara], the language is also pidgin, a mixture of Affan Oromo, Agawgna and Tigrigna. They hate their original languages and the threat to Ethiopian unity. The solution would be to re-integrate these people with their ethnic roots. In doing so, the arbitrarily established Amhara region must be dismantled. The whole Wollo and parts of Gojjam to be merged into the Oromia region; demarcating parts of Gondar to

Tigray, and the remaining parts of Gojjam and Gondar to be organized as a new Agaw regional state.⁵³

Various social anthropologists underlined the role of diverse situational contexts in understanding ethnicity and ethnic relations. Barth and Nagata accorded the variability of ethnicity is determined by the actors' perceptions and understandings of cultural symbols and signs in social situations (Barth, 1969; Nagata, 1974). The situational approach to ethnicity "illuminates the fact that variability is the essence of ethnicity in its significance for the structuring of social relations in diverse situational contexts" (Okamura, 1981, p. 463). From the above discussion, one can understand the weight of context in the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of identity discourses and practices even in the life span of individuals.

6.2.2. From the View of Amhara Ethnicity

Following the founding of NaMA and at least after 2015, when the Amhara ethnicity began to surface in social media discourse, the pan-Ethiopianist movement quickly erupted in ferocious resistance. The dispute over whether Amhara even exist has resurfaced, and the Amhara activists' reaction has fervently sparked debate. Arguments against the existence of the Amhara ethnic group are viewed as evidence of Amhara animosity, if not outright foes. The diaspora-based media and politicians, particularly *Ginbot 7* and "its" media outlet Ethiopia Satellite Television (ESAT), reported on and made comments about the situation in the country during the 2016 protests. When media journalists and their guest analysts preferred to refer to protests in the Amhara region by the names of the places where they were taking place, such as "Gondar protest" and "Bahir Dar protest," they immediately raised the issue of naming politics. In contrast, they referred to the protests in the Oromia region as "Oromo protest" and the casualties as "this number of Oromo youths." The Amhara protests, which were referred to as being led by "citizens" or just "youths," were an exception to this. At the time, Amhara social media activists were vehemently opposed to this. They were protesting the Ethiopianists' "offense" for refusing to refer to them as "Amhara" while carrying a banner that read "respect Amharaness." The pan-Ethiopianist group was accused by Amhara nationalists of supporting the government's securitization policies by hindering the public from developing an ethnic awareness, which is the sole means of defending their interests under the current political system. The *Ginbot-7* and their

⁵³ <https://www.facebook.com/birhanemeskel.abebe/posts/3117488655145417> (Accessed, April 19, 2021).

sympathizers, who are pan-Ethiopianists, maintained their age-old debate and accused the Amhara nationalists of being TPLF stooges that threatened Ethiopia's territorial integrity and national identity.

In contrast to the *Ginbot-7* activists and its media, ESAT, the notable Oromo activist Jawar Mohammed, was a sympathizer of Amhara activism and he has worked hard towards the recognition of Amhara nationalism. This was visible in his several interviews and facebook posts before entering Ethiopia and immediately afterward. Cooperating with Amhara activists like Achameleh Tamiru, supporting the claims over Wolkaiyt by Amhara nationalists.⁵⁴ He has been asserting that the TPLF ruled the country by raising the Oromo against Amhara and vice versa and contributed to the *Oromara* alliance which implicitly encourages Amhara ethnicity.⁵⁵

After Ginbot-7 entered the country in 2018 and established a merger party called *Ye Ethiopia Zegoch le Mahiberawi Fitih* (Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice (ECSJ/EZEMA), the discussion and contestation over Amhara identity have continued. Ginbot-7 (EZEMA) was the target of persistent campaigns by Amhara activism. The party was charged by Amhara activists because it rejected the existence of the Amhara ethnic group, and one cannot engage in political activity for a community that does not exist. As a result, until the election campaign began, its political activities in the Amhara region were constrained in a manner comparable to that of other regions. EZEMA is a political party that advocates for the existence of several languages and cultures rather than nations or ethnicities, or as it refers to them, *Gossegnnet* (tribalism in its negative connotation). Mengistu, one of EZEMA's public relations representatives in Bahir Dar city, says:

By declaring that this group is mine and that group is mine, ethnicity undermines Ethiopia's shared culture and social fabric. Our self-government approach is significantly better than those ethnic-based parties in terms of upholding Amhara interests. A person

⁵⁴(51) [EthioTube ጭድረክ : Social Media Activism in Ethiopia - Q & A Session - Round 1 | September 18, 2016 - YouTube](#) (Accessed, May 19, 2022)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-f7AlmkNjJI> (Accessed, May 18, 2022)

⁵⁵<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tSAZADmpVcQ&t=62s> (Accessed, May 19, 2022).

from and elected by that specific location would reign at each administrative level, from kebele to region (Interview, December 15, 2020, Bahir Dar).

The party's catchphrase, “በብዙሃነት የተገመድን አንድ ህዝብ ነን” (We are one people of diversity) makes it seem as though Ethiopia is a nation (Ezema, 2021). The Amhara may, of course, be considered a linguistic and cultural community rather than an ethnic one by the party.

Some commentators argue that the coordinated atrocities against the people of Amhara are being carried out by both the ethno-nationalists and the Amharas themselves. Recently, a former staff member of the Ethiopian security office, Ayalew Mengesha, reflected this view in relation to Andargachew's recent speech; the ongoing killings, and its subsequent silence from Pan-Ethiopianists and exclaim of Amhara activism. Andargachew underscored as: “Amhara is the backbone of Ethiopianess. The coordinated attack against Amhara since the Italian occupation is not against the Amharic speaking people rather it is against Ethiopianess”⁵⁶ According to Ayalew, such arguments and acts of Pan-Ethiopianists and a section of Amhara activists is nothing but using Amhara plights as a means to achieve their political and material ends respectively.⁵⁷ A founding member of EPDM reflects a similar opinion on the argument of “Amhara do not exist”:

Nobody can confirm the existence or nonexistence of a certain ethnic group. The main goal of individuals who assert that Amhara do not exist as an ethnic group is to make the people stand alone without ethnic belongingness while also informing them that they have no other option but to serve as the protectors of Ethiopianism. Given that Ethiopia is a multi-national state, this is a problematic (Interview, October 22, 2019).

In spite of the accusation of Amhara nationalists for the restraint actions of Pan-Ethiopianists from openly denouncing the attacks on Amhara, others accused the paradox inherent to the later for their exclusive reactions for Amhara problems in the name of human rights while they argue “there is no Amhara”. According to these commentators, the irony of such contradicting stands

⁵⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gO1GCis2WS8> (Accessed, May 11, 2021).

⁵⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ctKCE0kGXg&t=2684s> (Accessed, May 11, 2021)

emanated from the assumption that equating Amhara ethnic identity and Ethiopian national identity and planting the later on the grave of the former.⁵⁸

From this, one can draw two kinds of reactions against the assertion on “Amhara do not exist as an ethnic group”. Amhara nationalists consider this argument as a conspiracy theory to marginalize, if not eliminate, the Amhara ethnic group under the banner of *Ethiopianess*. Others regarded it as a kind of “kill and save” strategy that building Ethiopianess at the cost of Amhara having a premise being an Ethiopian is more beneficiary to Amhara than being an Amhara.

The terms of Pan-Ethiopianists are aimed to decouple the Ethiopian national identity from the Amhara referent. On the other hand, the intention of those ethnonationalist activists seems to see an Amhara ethnic group in a non-dominant position both in numerical and political aspects in the Ethiopian political discourse that hardens the “existential threat” framed by Amhara nationalists. Those activists seemed to have been not stopping accusing the people no matter they affiliate with Amhara or Ethiopian.

Despite the limitation on drawing a solid and unanimously agreed definition for Amhara, the actors in Amhara ethnicity (activists, political parties, civil societies, and the Diaspora) largely framed the movement in response to victimization inflicted by what they call “anti-Amhara narratives” and its state machinery. In fact, the Amhara ethnic movement rejected the assumption of the non-ethnic premise of Amhara and Amharic language which propagate by pan-Ethiopianists. As discussed in the next part of this chapter, they rather claimed a common origin as Amhara is the direct descendants of the earliest Agaziean-Sabean tribes who originated in Ethiopia and were designated as the south-central Semitic category (Tedla, 2018 P. 24). However, the most important foundation for Amhara ethnicity is the view from other ethnic groups. Accordingly, the actors argue that the presence of other identities in Ethiopia and their way of designation and practical pressure against Amhara is a necessary condition for the emergence of Amhara nationalism.

⁵⁸https://www.facebook.com/messenger_file?attachment_id=1518837615142655&message_id=mid.%24cAABa8xQPKqV8zrnlw12nXSGwRA4g&thread_id=1802945388 (Accessed, December 26, 2020)

The political system crafted in response to the “past ethno-cultural injustice” immediately began to target the people supposed to be called Amhara. The system encouraged all ethnic groups to mobilize along their ethnic line to exercise their “national self-government denied for a long time by the past oppressive regimes”, which is implicitly associated with the Amhara identity. Despite this, for decades, Amhara did not have issues of their own to redefine along with it except for the brief appearance of AAPO in response to the fresh atrocities on Amhara in the early 1990s.

Amhara have been continued to experience ethnically targeted violence, especially outside the Amhara regional state. Pursuing pan-Ethiopian agenda is now perceived to be costly. Subsequently, the Amhara nationalists are redefined ethnically within a political system in which the rule of the game is protecting the interests of one’s own identity group showing less loyalty to the state (Meganaw, 2018 p. 347). An informant underscored that:

Although the people did not identify themselves as Amhara, they were forced to organize in wave-like ethnic mobilization in the name of the Amhara as a result of atrocities committed by others. Because of the dominance of political rhetoric of national oppression and the failure of the pan-Ethiopian political movement to challenge it, the contemporary nationalism has emerged. (FGD BD 1, February 5.2020, Bahir Dar)

Hence, Amhara ethnicity is just an approach in which ethnic Amhara would redefine their interests collectively centered on victimization and securing their survival. The Amhara ethnicity also understands that the incompatible nature of the expression of one’s identity is only Ethiopian. This is because equating Amhara identity with Ethiopia is ignoring or minimizing the Ethiopianess of other ethnic groups (Mesganaw, 2018, pp. 353-354). In this regard, NaMA opposes the opponents of the idea that there is no Amhara ethnicity found in both the ethnonationalist and Pan-Ethiopianist camps. One of the “red lines” that NaMA will not negotiate and compromise is to sit to bargain with those political actors who do not recognize Amhara as an ethnic group in the Ethiopian political arena (Interview, former president of NaMA October 10, 2020). Here it seems to suggest that Amhara ethnicity defines Amhara ethnic identity both in primordial sense and in relation to others while taking Ethiopian identity as an identity of all ethno-cultural groups in which Amhara is part of it.

6.3. Ideas of Common Origin and Amhara Ethnic Boundary Constructions

There is no nationalism without myth. As discussed above, those who assert that there is no Amhara ethnic group present the premise that Amhara does not claim common descent. Since 2018, Amhara nationalists have come up with ideas of common origin to Amhara with a slight difference, but they agree on the ultimate argument. Mesganaw's and Tedla's writings on social media and in their self-published books have been used as the ideological and academic backbone for Amhara activism and political mobilizations in post-2018. The former is a pioneer of Amhara activism and the founder as well as the first leader of the *Bete-Amhara* Movement, while the latter reconstructs the history of the "Amhara people", making an academic sense of it based on the earliest Ethiopianist studies. Both rejected the assumption that Amhara do not have common descent. Ethnically conscious groups are steadfast in emphasizing their ethnic identity's long historical tradition, even if it means delving into a previously unknown mythical past (Kruger, 1993, p. 16). Mesganaw (2018) traces the idea of the common origin of Amhara to the biblical Jethro (*Yotor*). He claimed the described values, a way of life and geographic features indicated the Amhara people and their current homeland (Mesganaw, 2018 pp. 91-94). It has been argued that the Amhara are one of the oldest and most endogenous groups of people in Ethiopia. The names of a group mentioned in different languages that flourished in the ancient Middle East are similar to the name Amhara, and their identity markers are quite similar to the Amhara in Ethiopia (Mesganaw, 2018, p. 46). Names such as *Amorites*, *Himyarites*, *Amar*, *Amer*, *Homeraytes*, *Amhara*, and *Amara* as well as their attributes such as eating raw meat, being a warrior, mountain residence, being never conquered, knowledge of astrology and astronomy, as well as writing civilization are similar to the identity features of the present-day Amhara in Ethiopia (Mesganaw, 2018, p. 56). Mesganaw argued that, considering the origin of those people that used to live in Mesopotamia, Arabia, and Egypt was not well known, the origin of those groups should actually be in Ethiopia. Tedla (2018) also underlines that Amhara are the direct descendants of the earliest Agaziean-Sabeian tribes who originated in Ethiopia and are designated as the south-central Semitic category (Tedla, 2018 p. 24). Tedla starts with the deconstruction of what Girma (2009) has called "migration hypothesis", which considers Ethio-Semitic people to be migrants to Ethiopia. He underscored that both the Cushitic and Semitic people are indigenous to Ethiopia. Before 4000 years, the Amhara, who were of ancient descent of Semitic (Sabeian and Agazian) who spoke Geez, began to intermingle with the proto-Agaw and settled

south of the Tekezie River. As a result, through time, Geez and Amharic separated into north Ethio-Semitic and south Ethio-Semitic (Tedla, 2018 p. 19).

According to Tedla, a Semitic Agazian clan called *Hamra* lived in the lands between Abay and Tekezie. The Semitic people who arrived in Ethiopia 3000 years ago have since returned to their original homeland (Tedla, 2018, p. 23). Hence, Tedla asserts, Amhara has a Cushito-Semitic root. Its Semitic side belongs to the Agazian, Israelites, and Sabeans, while its Cushitic side is proto-Agaw (Tedla, 2018 p. 35).

Mesganaw (2018) describes the Amhara as an ancient and indigenous Ethiopian people while also constructing a mythical speculation about *Gionism*. For him, *Ghion* is not only a name for one of the biblical rivers, which stands for the Blue Nile, commonly called in Amharic *Abay*. It is also the ancient land of Amhara that encompasses all the physical and spiritual aspects in which mythical and historical memories of Amhara are found. According to him, the *Ghion* mountains, which are currently found in the north-central part of Ethiopia, were the original homeland of Amhara. One of the mountains is *Amba-Gishen* located in the Medieval province of Amhara, currently called Wollo, which has been described as the ship of Noah having floated over and landed afterward. The *Ghion* mountains served as a springboard for the ancient Amhara people to expand and establish overseas civilization, notably in the Middle East, and were a suitable fortified place to back migrate to shelter at bad times.

The nationalist song, *Amhara nen* (we are Amhara), which became the *de facto* national anthem of Amhara, also stresses and reiterates that Amhara is the pioneer of civilizations; owners of Axumite and pre-Axumite cultural achievements, and the indigenous as well as original inhabitants of *Ghion* (*Bete Amhara*) in particular and Ethiopia in general. It also triumphantly describes Amhara as a state builder, a people of justice, and free people who were never enslaved or colonized.

As discussed in chapter four, Girma (2009) revealed that the origin of the Amhara and Amharic language is in Ethiopia, and that the settlement stretched from the present-day Shewa to Harar. He also underlined that the closest relative of Amharic is Argoba. The difference in the Amharic and Argoba languages appeared as a result of religion (Girma, 2009). Despite their differences on the genesis of ethno linguistics in Amhara, Girma (2009) on the one hand and Tedla and

Mesganaw, on the other hand, agreed on two fundamental issues: the indigenoussness of Amhara to Ethiopia and the non-pidgin nature of the Amharic language. This deconstructs the dominant assumption and historical narrative that Semitic people migrated from South Arabia and is used as the foundation for the “settler colonialism” thesis. This autochthony claim could also be viewed as a reaction to the indigenous claims of other ethnicities, particularly by the Oromo nationalists who have presented the Amhara as “outsiders”. The discourse is a reaction to the presentation of the Oromo as “aliens” to the Ethiopian body politic; a mutually constituted deconstructionist indigenous discourse.

An ethnic expression always includes an element of past times and a myth of common origin. Smith reveals the connection between the earliest ethnic groups and later ethnonational mobilizations. It has also built on the memory of the old good days of the past (Smith, 1986). Amhara nationalists recognize “*Bete-Amhara*” or “Amhara” as an ancient and medieval kingdom of the Amhara people. Tedla maintained that “the Solomonic kings spoke Amharic and originated from the kingdom of *Bete-Amhara*, so that they were called Amhara. These Solomonic Kings from *Bete-Amhara* were leaders of the southern part of the Axumite Kingdom (Tedla, 2018, p. 30).

Since 2015, the name *Bete-Amhara* (House of Amhara) has been re-defined as a concept that signifies ethnic Amhara or Amhara descent, on the one hand, Amhara homeland on the other. *Bete-Amhara* movement implies organizing and mobilizing all Amhara along their ethnic line to defend the existential threat encountered from some but dominant ethnonational groups of the country (Meganaw, 2021 p. 112). The essence of *Ghionism*, is similar to that of *Bete-Amhara* movement except it came out after *Bete-Amhara movement* has weakened, with its secessionist political aspiration, due to internal factions within the organizations.

The above re-definition of *Bete-Amhara* or “Amhara” indicates both an ethnonym and a toponym that contends with Chernetsov’s claim that says in the Ethiopian chronicles [both in Christian and Muslim written traditions] of the 14th–18th centuries, the term “Amhara” occurs to be a toponym, not an ethnonym, and designates a province, not a people. Tedla resists such ideals and says: “It was Ethiopia which was a politonym and Amhara existed as an ethnic identity of Agazi (Sabaic-Himyaritic) and primitive Agaw origin. The province was named after

the ethnic group.”⁵⁹ However, he could not present evidence that justifies the meaning of word “Amhara” as an ethnonym and Ethiopia’s being the only political toponym of time.

“*Ghionism*” is not directly associated with Christianity, as it traces memories of pre-Christian Greek mythologies. However, its biblical narration and the intention of renaming Wollo province after its medieval name, at least according to social media and Mesganaw’s book, has sparked opposition from “Amhara” elites, particularly those with a Muslim background. There was an intense debate weeks before the official establishment of NaMA centered on the accusations of some activists, as Amhara nationalism is exclusively defined in terms of (Orthodox) Christian terms. The debate was held under the Facebook post of one of the founding members and currently vice President of NaMA, Yesuf Ebrahim, posted as:

We now see some people engage in the business of “stand-up and knock-down the straw-man” about the Amhara movement!!!

እኛየማንለዉንበራሳቸዉአንደበቶቹኣስመስለዉአቅርበዉሲሞግቱእንደማየት!!! ለማንኛዉም

Bete Amhara ማለት!

1. An older name for Wollo, before 1850 AD, is Bete Amhara.
2. "Bete Amhara (Amharic: ቤተአማራ) was a region in Ethiopia that existed for centuries. It covered most of modern Ethiopia’s south and north Wollo, significant parts of north Shewa, Gojam and Gonder zones.”“The people of the region were civilized one so they taught and share their clothing culture, eating culture, language, education system and other culture to the rest of Abyssinia.”

[Reference]

1. 1818 Pinkerton Map of Abyssinia (Ethiopia), Sudan & Nubia
2. A Voyage to Abyssinia by Jerome Lobo, Library of Alexandria
3. Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile, In the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772 and 1773, Third edition, 8 volumes; Ed., Alexander Murray; Edinburgh, 1813
4. Datei: 1690 Coronelli Map of Ethiopia, Abyssinia, and the Source of the Blue Nile

Geographicus - Abissinia-coronelli-1690.⁶⁰

⁵⁹Personal conversation with him on the comment box of his Facebook post regarding Amhara (April 6, 2020).

One can understand from the discussions and debates of the group that had been working for the establishment of NaMA that they were highly inspired by Mesganaw's book *Gionawinet* (Ghionism) in which Wollo province was deliberately renamed as *Sayint* to remember the place was the first homeland for Amhara forefathers and to show objection to the name Wollo, coined following the Oromo expansion (Mesganaw, 2018 p. 3). In the discussion (debate), through writing comments and replies under the Facebook post, Tedla writes:

The name Wollo is relatively a very recent designation of that region. Before 1850, the name of the region was Amhara or Bete Amhara. The name Wollo is in the Oromo tongue the correct, original, and historical and rightful name of this ancient province from which all Amharas trace their origin is Bete-Amhara.

Opponents of Amhara nationalist narratives, most notably Mesganaw and Tedla at the time, claimed that the essence of Gionism is incompatible with existing religious diversity. It is not only as inclusive as having religious narratives; it is highly associated with a certain region.⁶¹ They also insisted that Wollo has constructed a unique identity, "*Woloyenes*", as a result of the socio-historical contexts that the region has passed through. Complementing this assertion, one of the officials of Wollo Hibret, a civil society aiming to serve the people of Wollo and an active participant in the above debate, says: "Wollo is neither Amhara nor Oromo. Rather, it is a mixed stock in which Amhara, Oromo, Agaw, Argoba, and Tigray have melted, so that no one can claim it for own ethnic agenda" (KII 6, November 18, 2019, Dessie). However, among those arguing against *Ghionism*, no one tried to define Amhara identity and ethnicity. Eventually, ethnic boundaries appeared along with religion, compounded with elements of Oromo ethnic

⁶⁰ https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=131755424341646&id=100025215680044 (November 23, 2020) an intense dialogue on the issue of Amhara province and Wollo has been held under this Facebook post by Yesuf Ebrahim since April 14, 2018, which is directly quoted from historical sources, just weeks before the official establishment of NaMA. (There was an intense debate between social media activists who later became the founders and leaders of two contending organizations, NaMA and Wollo Hibret). In this particular social media discourse, the politics of naming has become the bone of contention. The claim of 'Amhara nationalists' was the previous name of Wollo was Amhara or Bete-Amhara and that Wollo is the name imposed after 1850. In reaction to this, many wrote as it was not an imposition rather it is one of the identities of the people. One of the participants of the debate on the post comments as "the changing name of Wollo is motivated by the fear of OLF 'irredentism' but not a wise solution".

⁶¹ This is to refer the province Gojjam which surrounded by Blue Nile river.

identity. The latter's growing sense of provincialism, especially “Wolloyeness” and violent conflicts between the Oromo nationality administration and the neighboring woredas, might be the result of such contentious definitions of Amhara identity and ethnicity.

6.3.1. What Makes the Person Amhara?

The questions "Who is Amhara?" and "What makes a person Amhara?" were not easy questions to answer, not only for the research participants but also for the Amhara activists and Amhara political actors. In the interviews and FGDs, there were long waits for silence before responding to these questions. Like in the body of literature discussed in chapter four, the definition of Amhara is not conclusive even after the identity has evolved into mobilization. The research participants in the FGD and interview were found to have different opinions and identity conceptions regarding Amhara and Amharaness. Some, approximately 40% of participants, have a Pan-Ethiopianist perspective in defining Amhara, and there are informants who accept Amhara mobilization along ethnic lines as a tactical approach that allows Pan-Ethiopianism to flourish, while others within the same category have a strong adherence to Amhara ethnicity and claim historical ownership of the Ethiopian state. And the rest are those who re-define Amhara ethnic identity and mobilization along with the rule of the political game in the country as sticking to Pan-Ethiopianism would be costly for Amhara. These groups recognize the role of other ethnic groups in the Ethiopian state's formation and aspire to a multi-national brotherhood.

Research participants' answers to the question ‘who is Amhara?’ and ‘what makes a person Amhara?’ is dissimilar and they define it based on their own affiliation summarized above. Significant similarities in defining Amhara are found among informants who are Amhara nationalists and activists as their worldview is shaped by party (NaMA) training, social media activism, and books written by Amhara activists of the Diaspora.

For those informants who have a Pan-Ethiopian outlook, Amhara is people who have love and devotion to the Ethiopian national identity. However, having this affiliation as a common denominator, there are variations among research participants in defining Amhara. One version of the definition emphasizes the subjective element of ethnicity. Amhara is a person who has an affiliation with *Ethiopianism* regardless of his own unique cultural element. One research participant summarizes this view as:

Those who give priority to their Ethiopian national identity than one's own ethnic identity are Amhara. For me, people who do not speak Amharic but show their loyalty to Ethiopianess are more Amhara than those who speak Amharic and identify themselves as Amhara ethnic group (FGDDT 4, August 22, 2020).

Others define all Amharic speakers as Amhara by virtue of having a Pan-Ethiopian affiliation and not following purity as they are capable to live with other ethnic groups with intermarriage relationships. One of the discussants says: "I see Amharaness is inseparable from Ethiopianess except for one element i.e., language. So, to those who use Amharic as their mother tongue are Amhara" (FGD BD3, March 5, 2020). The other defines Amhara as: "People who are relatively able to live far from their own group by adapting other peoples' culture. They are people with a psychological makeup who have less tend toward purity and are ready to live wherever they go (FGDG 4, November 2020). These informants do not consider Amhara and Amharic languages as an ethnic category. Rather it was a political discourse imposed by TPLF-led government in the last three decades.

Other participants of FGD tend to equate Amhara ethnic identity and Ethiopian national identity. One of them says: "I always equate Amhara identity with Ethiopianess. Because people called Amhara do not consider Ethiopia as their second or third project." (FGD BD 1, March 5, 2020). This identity conception has a similar content to Getachew's (1992) definition: 'Amhara is ethnic Ethiopia'. These groups of informants are aware as they have been defined as Amhara by other ethnic groups and the political system. Despite they do not want it, there are situations they feel Amhara that could be justified in a reactive sense of ethnicity. One informant says: "My feeling is Ethiopianess. I feel as I am Amhara when I get upset and feel discriminated by the ongoing political environment of my country. I am ready to abandon my Amhara identity if the political discourse changed" (FGD. DT3, August 22, 2020). The other also says:

I believe that we are forced to embrace Amhara identity. I am not growing to hear that my identity is Amhara rather I was told that Amharaness is attached to the orthodox Christian religion. Unfortunately at some time of political discourse we are told as we are Amhara and it became an ethnic identity (FGD BD 5, August 22, 2020).

The above description of informants seems to make sense of an official nationalism imposed by EPDM-ANDM since 1991. As discussed in chapter five, ‘Amhara democratic nationalism had been indoctrinated at the expense of Pan-Ethiopian affiliation of the ‘Amhara people’ resided in the newly crafted Amhara National Regional State. However, others’ identity conception regarding Amhara, especially the widely accepted ‘Amhara nationalism’ led by diaspora activists and NaMA, appeared to be in reaction to the political discourse instituted in 1991 that creates deep-seated insecurity in them.

It is worth mentioning here how NaMA has defined ‘Amhara’ since its definition had inspired by the concept of *Gionawint* (Gionism) that Amhara nationalists and activists follow it. In their tour in Europe, the current president and vice president of NaMA, Belete Molla and Yesuf Ebrahim respectively had discussions on the issues of Amhara. In one of the discussions held in Amsterdam in 2019, they defined Amhara by listing some criteria founded on which a person becomes Amhara. Accordingly:

‘Amhara’ means people who believe in the common descent of Amhara; people resided in the four historic provinces of Amhara land (Gojjam, Gondar Shewa, and Wollo); Amharic speaking people living outside of Amhara regional state and all those who have a common psychological makeup (Belete, 2019).⁶²

The definition is somewhat broad encompassing the primordial component of ethnicity and rudiments used by other ethnonationalists to designate Amhara as ‘original homeland’, language, and psychological makeup which is usually expressed in affiliation to state nationalism that eventually has wide acceptance by the “Amhara people”. Most research participants, more than 50 percent, believed that not only Amhara has a primordial origin but also there was Amhara ethnicity since medieval times. One of the participants of FGD summarizes:

There was Amhara and Amharaness prior to Ethiopianess. As Amhara, I am descended from *Yotor* (Jetro). In addition to this Amhara, is largely defined by its common psychological makeup manifested through their belongingness to the state. All of which is for Amhara has been given to Ethiopia (FGDDT 5, August 22, 2020).

⁶²<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XT7oN9VRAuQ> (November 19, 2021).

Asserting the primordial and cultural as well as psychological make-up aspect of Amhara identity, this group of informants rejects the idea that considers ‘both all Amharic speakers and all Pan-Ethiopianists an Amhara’. One discussant says:

I do not agree with the assertion that says ‘all who are affiliated to Ethiopian national identity are Amhara’ because Amhara has their own distinctive particularities as an ethnic group. People who define themselves as Amhara on the basis of their historical, psychological, and geographical background are Amhara (FGDDT 2, August 22, 2020).

They criticize the Pan-Ethiopianists for failing to distinguish between Amhara and Amharaness, where the former refers to mobilization and the latter, to identity. They also argue that just because Amhara ethnicity was previously invisible does not mean that it does not exist as a distinct ethnic identity. An individual says:

All Amhara, in my opinion, identify as Ethiopian. Therefore, I would assert that not all Ethiopians who embrace their Ethiopianness are Amhara, yet all Amhara do so. Amhara is descended from the Agazian, offspring of the tribe of Yoktan who mixed with the early proto-Agaw people. Yoktan is the great-grandson of Shem. In light of this, Amhara identity has persisted from the time of remembrance (FGDDT 2, August 22, 2020).

One of the members of NaMA who has been active in coordinating branch offices in Addis Ababa and leading party trainings defines “Amhara” as:

Blood and psychological make-up are elements that make a person Amhara. Before 1991, as well as for millennia prior, there were individuals referred to as Amhara. Amharas' father is Yotor (also known as Jetro). He was a sheep herder who lived in Begemidir, in the north central region of present-day Ethiopia. The Amhara are a group of people that originated in Ethiopia and spread to the Middle East. Fairness, kindness, and embracing guests are a few other characteristics that make the Amharas distinct (KIIP9, February 6, 2020).

Another active member of NaMA has passionately defined Amhara based on the ideology of *Gionism* imagined and framed by Mesganaw. He says:

Personally, I feel uplifted when I say ‘I am Amhara’. Its essence is beyond Ethiopianness. Amhara lived around *Ghion* Mountains since ancient times. In good times they expand to

and occupy territories to the extent of establishing civilizations and kingdoms in Egypt and the Middle East. When they weakened and attacked, they back migrate to their origin, the mountains. Hence Amhara does not limit themselves to a certain geographic boundary (KIIP9, February 6, 2020).

Some of the study participants who supported Amhara ethnicity claimed that it might be incorrect to categorize Amhara exclusively by blood or language. While possessing both, individuals run the risk of losing their Amhara identity. A participant who has been conducting ethnographic research backs up this claim with the following statement:

Amharaness is not necessarily defined by blood. For example, the group in the southern region that I have been studying claim themselves as Amhara by origin who detached from the main body of the group. At the same time, they are not Amhara by virtue of acquiring a new identity following adapting to another language (Personal conversation, January 23, 2021).⁶³

This phenomenon could be understood in the sense that the variability of ethnic affiliations with situations and existing contexts. In this case to become an Amhara people do have no specific criteria like descent, and psychological makeup as far as they are socially integrated. Barth's (1969) constructivist approach to ethnicity introduces the idea that ethnicity is "a form of social organization" than "culture-bearing units". This means that "people who share a culture can have different ethnicities and, conversely, people who are culturally different may have the same ethnicity" (Dereje, 2011 p. 12).

People also define their Amhara identity in their own terms, while others ascribe them to different things that do not adequately explain them. Currently, the notion of ethnic identity becoming politicized is mostly relational and the product of designation by others. One interviewee claimed:

In two ways, I describe my Amhara identity. The first is who I am, which includes my political preferences, Amharic language proficiency, location in north-central Ethiopia, and historical connections to my people who once resided there. On the other hand, what

⁶³ The informant did not mention the name of the group that they had been studying.

others believe or say about me, which is mainly not who I am, is what makes me Amhara (KII Ac 1, February 29, 2020).

However, they do not adhere to purity because intra-state minorities are still seen as Amhara despite their individuality, according to sources from Amhara political actors who underline that the primordial assertion of Amhara identity is legitimate. In this regard, a source reports:

We don't want to define it too strictly even though it has a primordial aspect because it barely excludes people who claim to be Amhara by blood. Amhara is about those who identify themselves as Amhara. Amhara are those who, despite having a primordial identity, believe in a shared destiny with the Amhara people (KII P.2, October 9, 2020).

The other informant emphasized the difficulty in identifying Amhara as an identity and elite mobilization, both of which favor Amhara ethnicity and Pan-Ethiopianism. The individual defines Amhara identity as follows:

Language and blood are less relevant rather values, memories, culture, history, aspirations, being fair, and its relation with the state are some of the elements that define Amhara. The politicization of ethnic identity creates mobilization along that line. That is what is happening in recent times regarding Amhara political mobilization (KII P. 4, October 18, 2020).

Amhara nationalists also believe that both identity and mobilization go back to the earliest times. An informant reflects that the Amhara ethnic consciousness was seen in the invocation of Emperor Libne Dingil during the 'religious war' commonly known as the war of Ahmed Gagn.

During medieval times especially during the reign of Emperor Libnedingil, I believe they were conscious of their Amharaness. Ftul al Habesha mentioned both Amhara and Christians in his account. [for unknown reason] rulers did not want to identify themselves with their Amhara identity. Being principal actors of the state building, Amhara seem to have preferred to identify themselves by the identity of the state so that the state was able to accommodate other groups (KII P.2, October 9, 2020). .

The lack of evidence in that Amhara ethnic identity and ethnicity are not clearly visible, both within society and by the authorities (especially when referring to oneself as Amhara in ethnic

terms). This, however, might be connected to the idea that dominant groups lack "ethnicity" since they understand their ethnic identity in terms of national identity. It is unclear, however, if "it was submerged in state nationalism" as the informant claimed or whether, as Chernetsov (1993) emphasized, no group was known as an Amhara until at least the 19th century.

6.4. The Relational aspect of Amhara Ethnicity and Ethnic Boundary Making

Almost all informants, partisans, and both civic and academic Amhara activists defined Amhara as an ethnic group, among others, based on common psychological makeup. The most frequently mentioned elements of Amhara psychological makeup are: adherence to state nationalism; people of justice (who do not discriminate against people along identity matters and accept them as human being); compassion, hosting guests, individualistic, mode of production etc. However, shared culture is not a sufficient condition to make ethnic identity. As the Barthian theory of ethnicity and nationalism, ethnic identity is very closely linked to the subject of boundaries. These defining elements of Amhara identity is hardly draw ethnic boundaries as all might be found in other ethnic groups as Chernetsov rightly point out:

The Amhara are keeping some cultural traits that are not ethnic strictly speaking, and belong to a wider Ethiopian culture. ... They still consider themselves to be Ethiopian par excellence and preserved a taste for government and administration on a national level.” (Cherntsov, 1993 p.102.).

Some informants challenged this limitation during interviews. They argued that ‘despite other groups might have similar elements, Amhara are distinct in the way giving meaning and value systems whilst they practice it’. Hence, they seem to draw an ethnic boundaries in the way Amhara perform the above particularities which are different from other ethnic groups. One of the interviewees says:

Amhara shares a common culture of hosting guests. Of course, others also share this trend too. But the way of treatment is certainly different. For example, the Afars might invite the guest *Bekel*; the Guragie invite Kocho and the Amhara might leave their bed for the guest to sleep or bend in a knee to wash her/his foot. All ethnic groups stand with justice but the way Amhara ensure justice is different from others (KII P.2, October 9, 2020).

The subjective interpretation of objective culture is one of the hallmarks of identity formation and construction in the realm of social constructivist approach to ethnicity. Barth emphasizes the variability of cultural content which is determined by which aspect of culture is selected by its members to construct the ethnic boundary (Barth, 1998). In addition, the above informant explanation has justified the construction of Amhara ethnic identity in relational terms.

Additionally, Amhara ethnicity is a mobilization that holds the last section of society late to join the ethnic route. It is like a particular part of the food on which spice has dropped that will remain on the plate since persons around the meal do not want to take it. Hence Amhara is the ruminant section of people abandoned by ethno-nationalists with their centrifugal force (KIIAC1, February 29, 2020). This kind of expression could be relevant to understanding the political reality that faces EPDM before renaming itself ANDM.

In defining Amhara, the relational aspect is crucial. Still, in rural areas and within the adult section of the society, the definition of Amhara could have been varying based on circumstances. The question for a Muslim ‘are you an Amhara?’ might not be an appropriate question if someone wants to check their Amharaness. The person most probably replied as ‘no, I am Muslim’ like a Muslim in Wollo replied to Mesfin. However, it is less probable that this person could reply the same if the question is ‘are you Tigray or Afar’. One can find similarities in areas of predominantly Christian Amhara areas. During the fieldwork in Gondar, the researcher undertook an engaged conversation with a man who is 73 regarding his identity conception. For the question ‘who are you in terms of identity? He replies “I am *Gondarie*!” then the researcher says ‘in Gondar province, there are Bete Israels and Kimants who identify themselves as proud *Gondarie* like you. He replied ‘yes’. Then the researcher asks ‘So, are you Kimant or Bete Israel?’ the man replies as ‘if that is the case, I am Amhara.’ In the same analogy, the person would eventually identify himself as Amhara rather than saying proud Ethiopian as Tigre or Oromo are Ethiopians too.

The quest for recognition and autonomy of Kimant that is violently expressed by the Kimant activists creates a relational Amhara ethnic consciousness among their counterpart people who define themselves as *Gondarie*, in which the Kimants are supposed to be enclosed. One interviewee from Gondar city says “I became Amhara in 2014 when the Kimant people held

demonstration with the slogan of ‘Gondar City is ours’. I was surprised and my identity conception has changed since that moment” (KIIAC 5, December 2020, Gondar).

Currently, a reactive sense of Amhara ethnic consciousness transcends not only the youth and elite group but also the rural population. As discussed below, the federal system by itself has shaped the nature of ethnic relations in Ethiopia. Such consciousness is due to at least three factors: the negative campus climate for ethnic diversity which manifested through the ethnic structures in the public universities; the deep-seated insecurity of Amhara living outside of the regional state; and the political antagonism of the Amhara region with Tigray regional states and fragile intergovernmental relations with Oromia regional state.

As discussed throughout this study, the post-1991 political discourse and its contexts are the main factors in the development of Amhara ethnic consciousness. It has been also affecting the structural context of university campuses.⁶⁴ As a matter of practice, public universities including their name, emblem, and management allegedly defined by the ethnic origin of the area they planted. Considering the diverse nature of the country, Ethiopian public universities are characterized by extreme linguistic, ethnic as well as religious diversities that lead people to explain public universities as a ‘mini Ethiopia’. The less accommodative structure of university campuses is a stark opposite to the diverse body of students they host. This encourages students to undertake their every activity: having dormitories, group studying, and using cafeterias as well as television rooms with their own ethnic members (Abebaw, 2014; Desalegn and Seyoum, 2020). Moreover, ethnic associations have been established that led the ethnicification of university campuses to reach their peak. Universities in Ethiopia have been criticized that they have not properly addressed the challenges of diversity in their own context, let alone playing a vital role in addressing the diversity-related problems of the larger society (Abebaw, 2014). This is partly because of the ethnic capture of public universities which are apparently federal institutions.

⁶⁴ Based on the framework of Hurtado et al, (1999) in investigating ‘campus climate for diversity’ (which refers to the campus climate in relation to issues of diversity), there are three crucial contexts: the government/policy context (includes various factors such as legal-constitutional mechanisms, governmental policies, strategies, programs, initiatives); the socio-historical context (various issues or events in the larger society that potentially influence the way campus community members to view diversity-related issues); and the institutional context in which one of its four components is compositional (structural) diversity (diversity-related programs and policies within the campuses targeted to increase the diversity of students, staff, and faculty and the proportional or numerical representation of diverse groups on campus).

The relational aspect of ethnicity has been seen in the university campuses, another site of Amhara identity formation. Researches have pointed out the campus climate to ethnic diversity has negatively affected the relationship of students as ethnocentrism is the hallmark of universities (Abera, 2010; Desalegn and Seyoum, 2020).

Ethiopia proclaimed multiculturalism as one of the guiding principles of universities and portrayed university campuses as ‘mini Ethiopia’ in which all diversities lived in harmony (Proc. 650 /2009). However, they have been criticized that not properly addressing the challenges of diversity in their own context. Programs arranged by universities aiming to encourage harmonious relationships among the students have ended up in tension instigated by competition (Desalegn and Seyoum 2020).

The expansion of public universities and a growing number of students joining those universities brought about a reconfiguration of ethnic boundaries among the student body. Students have shown the maintenance or increase in ethnic identification rather than weakening of ethnic boundaries for the primacy of Ethiopian national identity through celebrating diversity. As a result, universities have been appearing as centers of ethnocentrism in which polarized ethnic relations are usual in many aspects of campus life in Ethiopia (Desalegn and Seyoum, 2020).

Most of the students from the Amhara background first were surprised by how they were defined as Amhara by their counterparts from other ethnic backgrounds with some characteristics and developed their ethnic consciousness on campus.

Prior to joining the university, I was aware that the term "Amhara" was used to denote an Orthodox Christian. In the university, I discovered that students have their own ethnic membership. They told me that they recognized me as an Amhara. My home origin and mother tongue [Amharic language] were enough for them to designate me and my Muslim friend, since high school, as an Amhara (KII Ac 4, February 22, 2021).

Most of the leading Amhara activists either lived outside of the Amhara region or follow their education on the university campuses located in other regions. They had interactions and conversations with individuals from other ethnic backgrounds eventually ethnic boundaries have been drawn in the process. Mesganaw (2021) suggests that: “My lived experience in the university campuses both as a student and lecturer in which intense polarized ethno-political

discussions held and the prevalence of atrocities on Amhara shape and develop my Amhara ethnic consciousness” (Mesganaw, 2021).

As per the information obtained from informants, students, especially from Oromo and Tigray ethnic backgrounds, seemed to have been came up with a socio-historical mindset that designate Amhara as an oppressor people, if not a ruthless killer, who let suffer their grandparents. One informant recalls his shocking experience of the first week of campus life whilst he meets with students from other ethnic backgrounds.

The anti-Amhara false image extends to this extent at least for two generations. Let me share my personal experience here. When I joined the university, I only know I am an Ethiopian. In the first weeks of my campus life, my three roommates did not sleep before me. I tested them by waiting until midnight outside of the dormitory and they keep waiting for me and follow me when I sleep. I did not fear they might hurt me despite they communicate with each other in their own vernacular, Affan-Oromo. One day I asked them ‘why always don’t sleep before me?’ they replied as “We know you are Amhara we have grown to hear Amhara is a killer. So, we have to be sure that you sleep before us’. I was shocked and unable to say a word at the time (FGDDT2, August 22, 2020).

The researcher was able to spend additional 30 minutes with this informant to capture the full narrative mentioned during the FGD. It happened in 2009 at Addis Ababa University, 6-kilo campus. A study also reveals that there were ethnic tensions amongst Amhara, Oromo, and Tigray students at the same campus during this time (Desalegn and Seyum, 2020). After the encounter, they became good friends until graduation. However, this and the campus climate as a whole increased the informant’s Amhara ethnic consciousness. Currently, despite having no participation in political parties, he supports the idea that Amhara should be organized based on ethnic lines to defend themselves as well as for common economic empowerment.

Ethnic awareness and boundary-making also occurred even in the teacher-student relations in the university campuses. “Students’ grade performance is sometimes seen as linked to their ethnic similarity or dissimilarity to the instructor of a given course” (Desalegn and Seyum, 2020 p.9). Provided an example of a person who reminds and wrote his disapproval to his former teacher who asked him a friend request on Facebook:

Our universities play a significant role in conditioning us to be ethnically centered and thus to find our collective identity. ... The picture below [an image of the grade report posted beneath this text] is my grade achieved during my BA training. The grade “D” is by my teacher (who is seeing this post for sure) given for my ethnic group, not for my ethnicity. Because during that time, at the age of 18, I wasn’t aware of ethnicity. You can apply a logic or reliability test to confirm the “D” grade doesn’t deserve me. I have been disadvantaged a lot by having that grade. Ontologically, I am born with the image and likeness of God. The teacher introduced me to the concept of Ethnicity for the first time.

In fact, it is difficult to justify this claim even if it was acknowledged by another person who asserts as they know where and when it happened. However, these kinds of narratives have analytical relevance even if they are not true because they are publicly communicated to a targeted community creating and reinforcing a community of grievances.

Inter-ethnic conflicts among students reached their peak in the past three years those allegedly ethnic motivated killings of students in various universities found in different regional states. Given the majority of university students originated from rural areas parents, relatives, and the surrounding communities became aware that their students are Amhara at least in the universities. This generates greater ethnic consciousness when students drop out and leave the campuses as a result of violent conflicts. The feeling of blocked transition to adulthood because of riots on university campuses reinforces ethnic resentment.

Many parents worry when their students are allocated to universities outside of the Amhara region. In 2019, a rural mother who came to the registrar office of Debre Tabor University to request a transfer for her son spent one academic year in another university found in one of the regional states in which notoriously Amhara students have been attacked. She says:

My son spent one year in a bad situation in that university. Students who join the university from my area told us as they are beaten based on their areas of origin. They say that students from other ethnic backgrounds targeted them saying ‘you are Amhara and Amhara is our enemy’. I heard parents have been receiving the dead body of their children from universities and I fear for the life of my son (Personal conversation, September 2019, Debre Tabor).

Currently, Amhara students on university campuses have been organized to defend themselves from any attacks from their counterparts. One of the leaders of the Amhara Students Association reflects that before the establishment of our association Amhara students were assaulted being dispersed but now they are at least organized to defend themselves (KIYY1, February 28, 2020, Dessie).

Even though there are no clear criteria for the allocation of students to the universities, as a matter of precedence; the Ministry of Education promotes the diversity of university campuses. According to the data obtained from one of the officials of Ministry of Education Indeed, given the limited number of universities as compared to the student population nearly for the last five years 60 percent of students are allocated in the universities following their university education located outside of ‘their home’ regional state. Hence one can consider that the Amhara ethnic consciousness of students in relation to others with a sense of insecurity eventually has a spillover effect on their parents and relatives.

There is also a relatively high level of Amhara ethnic consciousness in areas where people left for other regional states either through the resettlement program of *Dergue* or using their freedom of movement. A significant number of people evicted from their settlements in Oromia, Benishangul Gumuz, and Southern regions “back” to Gojjam, Wollo, and Gondar in the last three years. Apparently, these victims share their experiences with the people where they go which influences the Amhara identity conceptions beyond the term Amhara stands for Christian. In this regard, it is worth mentioning Geta’s story. He is a person who lives in a rural village in the central Amhara region, confirms the role of survivors of violence and displaced Amhara from other regions on the identity conception of the portion of the population who are offline and far from media ethnonational advocacies. His concerns are:

[Relocating] Amhara people to other parts of the country, making some of the Amhara into minorities elsewhere in the country. Disconnected from their land and people, they became weak and vulnerable. This is evident to him now, he states, as those Amhara living in Oromia and SNNP regions have “lost their property and lost their lives, while the government is not able to protect them, or does not want to protect them. As people are displaced, we need weapons to protect ourselves, our land, and our assets against armed groups (Cited in Cochrane & Hadis, 2021 pp. 104-105).

The political antagonism between Amhara and Tigray regional state also shapes the identity conception of the local population beyond the elite. As discussed below as one of the causes of Amhara ethnicity, there is a widespread perception that the sense of victimization emanated from TPLF-led government repression and marginalization of the Amhara people. Among other factors, the heightened territorial claims resulted from the feeling of annexed traditional homelands of Amhara in Gondar and Wollo being annexed to the Tigray region during the re-drawing of regions of the federal system. The ruling party of the regional state has recently, following its accusation of the preparation of Tigray for war, engaged in creating awareness using its structure to the lowest level of government that TPLF is an imminent threat for Amhara by reminding what was done in the past 27 years. Gashaw who lives in another rural village attributed to the TPLF for his decision to purchase a gun. He said, cited in (Cochrane& Hadis, 2021):

I own this weapon to defend myself against any aggression that might arrive at the doors of the Amhara people, as we are witnessing in the northern parts of the country. We are not fighting the government, even if we have been put at a disadvantage by it, it is wrong to fight the government because it may entirely collapse (p.105).

The posture of TPLF before the war and devastations in the Amhara region by the Tigry regional fighters increase the ethnic consciousness of Amhara at most levels of the society. This conception was tested during the ‘law enforcement operation’ on Tigray the government is able to mobilize easily rural people militia to defend the people of Amhara in the ‘mission for existence and survival of Amhara’ proclaimed by the regional state. In the same way, as it has elaborated in chapter eight, the problematic intergovernmental relation between the Amhara region and Oromia regional states over the issues of intra-state minorities, (Oromos and Amharas living in both regions in minority status) heightens the ethnic tensions.

6.5. Re-defining Amhara Ethnicity

There is no disparity of opinion on the presence of Amhara identity both in the scholarly and political debate (Tegegn, 1998). However, there are different assumptions about the time when the Amhara ethnicity emerged. Amhara nationalists associate it with the encounters of medieval times, especially the ‘religious war’, commonly known as “the War of Ahmed Giragn” and the

Oromo population movements. Others suggest that the Amhara ethnicity was visible during and after the era of princes commonly known in Amharic, *Zemene Mesafint*, (1769-1855) that Tewodros II emerged as victor under the banner of Amhara ethnicity over his Tigrayan and Oromo contenders (Teshale, 1996; Merara, 2011). This assertion is based on the premise of the king's letter to the Queen Victoria of Britain. EPDM (ANDM) follows a similar argument and asserts that the Amhara ethnicity emerged during the reign of Tewodros II (Tsinat, 2006 p. 30; Akele, 2014 p. 47). However, in both materials, there is no evidence presented that shows "Amhara" mobilized based on the ethnic line against other ethnic groups. ANDM has asserted that Amhara ethnicity immediately began to manifest itself under the banner of Ethiopianess, especially during the reign of Menelik II (Tsinat, 2006 p. 20). It also accused the ruling class of hiding Amharaness and overstating Ethiopianess to assimilate them into the Amhara identity which was already covered under the mask of Ethiopianess (Tsinat, 2006 pp. 20-21). This assertion seems to make semblance with the "Amhara oppressor ruling class" narrative.

Given the multi-ethnic nature of the ruling class since medieval times and the lack of evidence on the presence of Amhara ethnicity in Ethiopian state formation the argument goes to 1991 and the aftermath is the time that Amhara ethnicity has begun to emerge. It is in reaction to the new political arrangement conducted based on the "Amhara oppressor-oppressed nationalities" narrative and the deep-seated insecurity that the "Amhara" faces in the newly organized ethnic territorial unites. For leading Amhara activists, Amhara ethnicity is a natural antidote rather than an orchestrated political instrument to restructure the state system along with the actor's interest and at the same time exploit through identity elements (languages, culture and ethnicity, etc.).

The emergence of Amhara identity is a good example of what French philosopher Michel Foucault called "the construction of a 'reverse' discourse," in which a once marginalized community seeks to make a claim to legitimacy and recognition (Foucault, 1978 p. 101). The Amhara ethnic group started to speak up in order to simply assert its authenticity. According to Foucault, social constructionist theories of sexuality are likely to undergo a full reversal of their laboratory potential in sexual discourses. The evolution of homosexuality is a straightforward illustration of this. Once disparaged and unlawful behaviors are now publicly supported in the term itself and form a part of the person's identity tied to them. In a same vein, the name "Amhara" was criminalized to denote oppression and dominance that can encourage identity

concealment to avoid being condemned. The term Amhara has been employed in many spheres of social and political life, including literature and music, to turn this around.

In the process of affiliating oneself to Ethiopianess and pursuing pan Ethiopian agenda, Amhara endured irreversible damage since ethnonationalists consider the position as the agenda of “oppressor Amhara”. Subsequently, the Amhara nationalists are redefined ethnically within a political system in which the rule of the game is protecting the interests of one’s own identity group (Mesganaw, 2018). Hence, Amhara ethnicity is an approach in which ethnic Amhara would redefine their interests collectively centered on victimization and securing their survival. Mesganaw put the situation that Amhara encountered in a metaphorical expression:

Take, for instance, there is a tent in the desert where sojourners are sheltered, and each of them wanted their separate room. They, let us say, partitioned it and secluded their respective rooms. Strangely, one of them was idly watching what was going on. He did not participate in the process while others divided the space with respect to their interests and wishes. He remained seated while they were partitioning the space in which he had naturally a right. While separately constructing their spaces, one of them pushed him to the side, the other pushed him to the other side, and everyone in that home did the same thing in order to expand their respective spaces. All have partitioned the entire space, and that man later knew he was the only one without one. They are building their homes in the home, but that man’s destiny is very bad. Does he have to ask them to let him rest in their separate rooms? Does he have to leave the home? Where?⁶⁵

One of the executive members of the Amhara Scholars Council, held in September 2019 speaks at the first international conference: “The British have given up their gloating claim that ‘the sun never sets in the British empire’ and have come to terms with their status as just one of the independent nations in Europe. Amhara must rearrange itself to reflect the evolving political circumstances of the day”. This and other remarks suggested by the presented papers triggered debate, especially after a section of participants asked “are we talking about accepting the current status quo arranged and given to us by TPLF, or do we design our own goal in a way to save

⁶⁵Melek Hara’s Face book post (8/22/2016). Apparently, as he revealed in his recent book, the name Melek Hara was a pseudonym used by Mesganaw before appeared in his true identity in the late 2016 (Mesganaw, 2021).

Ethiopia from such ethnification?” The conference ended up agreeing on the notion that “አንዱን ጥሎ አንዱን አንጠልጥሎ የለም” that means Amhara should work in a way protecting their interests and at the same time contributing for the Ethiopian national interests. One can infer from this that Amhara people need to read and act on the re-definition of their identity beyond equating Ethiopianess with Amharaness. Apparently, there is no ethnicity without myth. The Amhara ethnicity is in the process of myth-making in reaction to the idea of “settler colonialism”. Activism in framing identity conceptions disseminated through both the digital and print media has been shaping the ideas of common origin imagined by the people on the ground.

6.6. Actors’ Perspectives on Ethiopianess and Amharaness

While informants defined “Amhara,” three variants of identity conception on Amhara ethnic identity and Ethiopian national identity emerged. The first is an opinion that considers Amhara identity and ethnicity as politically constructed by the divisive political discourse of the TPLF-led regime. The remaining two agree on the ethnic root of Amhara for the Ethiopian state, and Ethiopian national identity is a political discourse constructed by Amhara with the contribution of other identity groups. However, they differ in their “political goal”: those who equate Amhara identity with that of Ethiopian national identity and those how to see Ethiopian identity as an identity composed of all diversities of the country in which Amhara is one of them and Amhara ethnic identity is a distinct one in which neither Ethiopianess nor other identities are couples. According to one of those who argue that Ethiopia's national identity is being weakened by the imposition of Amhara identity by ethnonationalists:

After drawing boundaries between each ethnic group, the OLF and TPLF referred to those who had supra-ethnic consciousness and did not wish to identify themselves in terms of their ethnicity as Amhara. Then they humiliate them by tagging names like “neftegna,” “timkihtegna,” and “ahadawi” to this group. As a result, Amhara identity is established politically. In my opinion, the main reason the Amhara people supported Abiy Ahmed in his early years in office was because they believed he would restore Ethiopian identity. Therefore, rather than being Amhara, I would claim that Ethiopia is our true origin (FGDDT 3, August 22, 2020).

Amhara nationalists including NaMA asserted that Amhara identity is prior to Ethiopian national identity. Given the multiple identities as an integral part of a human person, NaMA has come up with the trinity of identities in the Ethiopian political discourse: personal identity, national/ethnic identity, and national (statistic/civic) identity (Interview, former president of NaMA October 10, 2020). It has been argued the Ethiopian national identity has presented as a discursive identity that has given ontologically rather than reconstructed in the existing political contexts (Belete, 2019). Hence in the current Ethiopian political discourse, costly to advocate Ethiopianism, Amhara needs to foster its ethnic identity that was neglected before. Desalegn Chanie, former president of NaMA further reflects in this regard:

We basically consider Ethiopianess as a political concept not cultural. We understand the presence of a significant number of people, largely the Amhara, who do not want to define themselves without Ethiopianess. However, we do not believe that Ethiopianess and Amharaness are one and the same. Among multiple identities, we prioritize the three: individual identity, Amhara collective identity that a person found her/himself relative to others, and citizenship i.e., Ethiopian identity. Hence as a political organization, our goal is to ensure individual liberty, equality of Amhara cultural identity, and unity and integrity of the Ethiopian state.

80 percent of informants reached both through interview and FGD believe in the notion that ‘all Amhara is Ethiopian but all Ethiopians are not Amhara’. Rather most of Ethiopia is Amhara and they have a lot of shares of the Ethiopian state image and symbol. Hence, Amhara nationalists agree on the difference between Amhara ethnic identity and Ethiopian national identity in such a way that the latter is a political discourse that went through construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction process in which Amhara contributed their parts.

The data collected from informants also indicated that the border has sometimes blurred in distinguishing Ethiopian and Amhara identities because of historical reasons. In fact, it is not surprising to get most Amharas are still a long way before nation and state are decoupled. Indeed, there is resistance against multilingualism by Amhara nationalists. Unlike ethnonationalists who do not subscribe themselves to the Ethiopian state system, Amhara ethnicity is non-conflictual. One interviewee has summarized this conception:

When we say Ethiopian identity, we mean the citizenship aspect defined in relation to other nationals and indicates the formal legal member of a person with the Ethiopian state. While Amharaness is a connection of a person founds in relation to other group identities and its members. Hence Amhara identity is an ethnic identity of a person. As a matter of historical incident, the values of an ethnic group might abundantly appear in the state symbols and institutions. This indicates the role of that ethnic group in the state-building process. The relation between Amhara ethnic identity and Ethiopian national identity is a reflection of this historical fact (KII Ac 1, February 29, 2020).

However, the historical ownership claims of Ethiopia with hard rhetoric by NaMA leaders during the formative phase of the party encountered huge criticism both from other ethno-nationalist elites and the people of Amhara.⁶⁶ The proponents of Pan-Ethiopian nationalism who are “ethnic Amhara” keep arguing that Amhara and Amharic language do not belong to an ethnic category. There are a significant proportion of actors among those who are under the umbrella of Amhara ethnicity that equates Amharaness with Ethiopianess hopping Amhara ethnic mobilization could bring about “Ethiopianess”. They have openly confronted with the ‘Pan-Ethiopian’ camp that denies the existence of Amhara ethnicity. Ironically enough, the two opinions complement each other in their goals, establishing an overarching Ethiopian national identity that transcends all ethnic groups. However, the challenge is the terms of an Ethiopian national identity inclusive enough to be seen as ‘transcending’ by members of other ethnic groups.

In addition to being unable to defend Walleign’s “national oppression thesis,” which the other side slipped into the “Amhara oppressor” narrative of ethnonationalists, Amhara nationalists who assert historical ownership of Ethiopia and Ethiopian national identity as their strategic goal are also incompatible with the present socio-historical reality of the Ethiopian people. Furthermore, those who assert that Ethiopia is the only nation-state to have developed over time as a fusion of several ethnic groups ignore the political reality of the country and fail to provide an explanation for how ethnonationalism came to be such a strong force in modern-day Ethiopia. If Ethiopia had attained that level of integration, as one of the informants accurately stated, “The nation-building

⁶⁶ One informant from the NaMA leadership says that “the reaction of the people was intense when our members go to them for mobilization. During that time, those members criticized us (the executive) ‘should we always engaged in explaining your brags on media to the people or communicate them the parity’s aims and programs?’ (KIIP7, April 7, 2022, Addis Ababa).

project would not have been launched in the first place and eventually failed” (KII AC 2, February 28, 2020).

6.7. Conclusion

No other identity has been as debated as Amhara ethnicity in post-1991 Ethiopia. The post 1991 Ethiopia staged the political and scholarly debate over whether or not Amhara exists as a distinct ethnic group. Given the term “Amhara” has been accompanied by multiple descriptions referring to a toponym, class, ethnic, religion, or supra-ethnic (Ethiopian national identity) the debate over its existence would not be surprising.

Those who argue it does not exist are pursued by Pan-Ethiopianists and recently some ethnonationalists joined it for their respective political agenda. The different discourse behind the position of the former is to decouple Ethiopianism from Amhara ingredients and blames and promote it as a non-ethnic identity to be embraced by other ethnic groups. As a result, they insisted Amharic language and its speakers are the centers of the Ethiopian state and one should not restrict them to a specific ethnic category or territorial unit. The focus of those ethnonationalists who claim no Amhara identity seemed to have been on power contestation. They stand against as far as the Amharic-speaking people and seemed to have appeared as contenders regardless of their affiliation to Amahara ethnicity or Pan-Ethiopian nationalism.

In contrast, those who argue in favor of Amhara ethnicity not only in the primordial sense of the term but also in the sense of reactive ethnicity; that Amharas have already been designated by other ethnic groups of the country as the “dominant ethnic group” based on the national oppression thesis with roots in the student movement of the 1960s and 70s. Proponents of Amhara ethnicity argue that this negative framing has created deep-seated insecurity, especially for those Amharas who live in other regions, and have been vulnerable to attacks.

Moreover, in the last, nearly three decades’ individual actors and political parties shift their subscription from Amhara to Ethiopian identity and the other way around. This is directed to the variability and situationality of ethnicity that happens even in the life span of an individual person let alone the ethnic agencies. The other reason could be the Amhara ethnic identity has been attached to the Ethiopian national identity because of the “abundance” of the former in the imperial court culture and its “significant” involvement in modern Ethiopian state-building.

There is no ethnicity without the myth of common descent. The construction of both ideas of common origin and the Amhara ethnic boundary is somewhat in response to the premises used by those who pursue the argument “Amhara does not exist”. The primordial expression of Amhara ethnicity challenges the migration assumption of historical and linguistic literature its argument, Amharic language and its speakers are pidgin. Recent studies however challenge this dominant historical assumption justifying those Semitic groups were indigenous to Ethiopia. The identity construction of both Ethiopia and Amhara has been informed by this scholarly debate. Hence the myth partly in the making suggested that Amhara, along with other Semitic people, are indigenous to Ethiopia and its root has traced back to pre-history times. In addition, Amhara nationalists extend their ethnic boundary is defined as those who are Amharic speakers and do not belong to other ethnic categories and subscribe themselves to either the Ethiopian national or Amhara ethnic identifies as Amhara regardless of primordial ties. This directs to the ascription of “Amhara” by other ethnonational groups conflating language and class with ethnic identity. Amhara is largely defined from the perspective of relevant others. Hence, the relational aspect of ethnicity is crucial and Amhara ethnic consciousness has been intensifying as interaction with other ethnic groups is growing. Despite the religion and toponym connotation of the term, Amhara, has currently diminished, there are variations in defining the term within the people called “Amhara”. Therefore, Amhara identity is defined from the outside and contested from the inside.

Chapter Seven

Causes and Major Claims of Amhara Ethnicity

7.1. Introduction

The Amhara people, who subscribe themselves to the Ethiopian national identity, continued to experience the plights of targeted ethnic violence since 1991. Currently, as discussed in chapter five, an emerging Amhara ethnicity appears with visible indicators in institutional and extra-institutional aspects. It is the reaction of othering that acquires perceived and real alienation from the political, social, and economic aspects of the country. According to Amhara nationalists, this results from the discursive narrative of the 1960s and 1970s radicals under the banner of the national oppression thesis and its subsequent institutionalization by the EPRDF. Hence, this chapter presents the causes and goals of the Amhara ethnicity. By so doing, the chapter sought to answer the question: in what ways do the post-1991 political discourse and its institutions contribute to the rise of Amhara ethnicity? Accordingly, the discursive narratives, ideological underpinnings of othering, and institutional flaws have been analyzed as the political and institutional determinates of the development of Amhara ethnicity. In addition, the chapter tried to show the conditions of Amhara living in other ethnic territorial units by giving emphasis to the Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State. The Amhara identity is defined from the outside and contested from within. This contributed to the lack of a clear and commonly shared goal for ethnic mobilization. The second part of this chapter shows the commonly agreed goals and claims of Amhara ethnicity, particularly, the convergence and divergence among the Amhara political forces, i.e., NAMA and APP on the 'Amhara questions'.

7.2. Political and Institutional Determinants of Amhara Nationalism

7.2.1. Constitutional Making: Victors' Peace?

The constitution itself and its development process is a source of resentment on the part of many Amhara elites. One of the major issues that appeared during and in the aftermath of the Amhara protests since 2016 is the sense of victimization as a result of exclusion in the making of the federal political order as well as its ongoing implementations. AAPO's nascent Amhara nationalism and the Pan-Ethiopian nationalism were sidelined from the constitutional making process, as the EPRDF portrayed them as reactionary nationalisms which aimed to restore the

old regime (Tsinat, 2006). EPDM became a *de facto* Amhara organization sharing the power in the transitional government as well as participating in constitutional making. However, it does not mean that people from the newly established Amhara region were not represented in the constitutional assembly. The fact is these representatives were hand-picked by the regional party EPDM. Data obtained from the senior members of EPDM (ANDM) confirms this reality. A senior official of the EPDM (ANDM) summarizes how individuals elected to be representatives in the constitutional assembly as: “there was a top-down assignment of individuals by which a short-list was prepared by the party and the people were asked to espouse the names in the list.” (Interview, Bahir Dar, December 5, 2019). Hence the people did not have a chance to propose persons to represent themselves.

The members of the constitutional assembly selected by the party ‘elected’ by the people to represent the Amhara support the right of ethnic groups to secession. In contrast, in the popular discussion of the draft constitution, there was strong opposition to that particular clause (among others) of the constitution. Another senior official of the EPDM (ANDM) who was coordinating the public discussions on the draft constitution recalls:

On the issue of the secession clause, almost all discussions ended with objections, presuming that it would disintegrate the country. From my practical experience in facilitating the discussion; attending plenary sessions and the discussions with my colleagues before constitutional making, there is no single discussion that ended in accepting the secession clause (Interview, November 20, 2020, Addis Ababa).

A senior official of the EPDM (ANDM) was also asked whether the discussants had an ethnic consciousness while addressing their opinions in a way that benefits or hurts them as a group. The answer indicates that the Amhara ethnic consciousness was not developed at the time. The informant says:

When the discussants accept the right to self-determination of nations, nationalities, and peoples, it was not considering they were part of those ethnic groups, but it was from the impression that the right deserves for other nationalities.” (Interview, November 20, 2020, Addis Ababa).

This was because they might not consider themselves as a distinct ethnic group claiming collective political rights. The lack of ethnic consciousness among the people was the result of the attachment of the ‘Amhara people’ rallying along with Pan-Ethiopian sentiment. Generally, the spirit of Bolsheviks’ assertion that reiterates ‘progressives came out of the oppressive nation must support the right to the secession of oppressed nationalities’ was the driving force, which was the official view of EPDM and their selected participants in the constitutional making process.

The constitutional making process and the demarcation of constituent units had serious implications for the emergence of Amhara ethnicity and its current manifestation. Several Amhara political actors argued that the current constitution and its federal arrangement were established based on the radicalized ideological narration of the students’ movement which categorized Amhara as an oppressor and all other communities as oppressed. During the time of the deliberation of constitutional making, words like *neftegna*, *timkihtegna* in the insulting sense of the word were thrown from the EPRDF representatives at those participants who resist the Marxist orientations in the venue.⁶⁷ It has been claimed that Amhara are wrongly characterized in Ethiopian politics and not properly represented and consulted in the process of constitutional making.

The Amhara elites’ sense of exclusion from the political life of the existing system has potential and practically de-legitimized the constitutional and federal order. Launching an inclusive constitution-making process is a necessary condition to hold divided societies together. Consent is a crucial element for meaningful and legitimate constitutions, realized though offering the polity a sense of authorship and ownership, a sense that they are included in the constitution (Lerner, 2010 p. 85). In this regard, the South African Constitution is among rare achievements that break through the difficulty of creating a legitimate constitution within deeply divided societies. The Ethiopian constitution does not enjoy such legitimacy. The main opposition has been coming from the Amhara. This has been reiterated both in the Amhara activism and political mobilization, especially since-2018. In this regard, the chief secretary of APP says:

⁶⁷Extracted from the minutes of the constitutional commission cited in “Political and Legal Reasons that Urge for the Constitutional Amendment”, A paper presented at the first international conference of the ASC (Bahir Dar September 2019)

Both the constitution and the federal arrangement do not design in a way that understands historic relations of nations nationalities and peoples and the history of the country. We also believe that the Amhara people did not represented as a distinct, conscious ethnic group (Interview, October 16, 2020, Bahir Dar,).

NaMA and APP claimed that Amhara did not properly represent and consulted in the process of constitutional making and redrawing of constituent units. Both parties have been complaining that the constitution is not genuine enough to protect the Amhara interests, as it implicitly endorsed such a discursive narrative that created deep-seated insecurity in the Amhara, particularly those living in other regions.

7.3. The Limits of Ethnic-territorial Approach and the Amhara Sense of Victimization

7.3.1. The Pursuit of Nation-State by Sub-national Governments? The Paradox of Multi-national Federalism

The institutional legacy of the FDRE constitution, and the federal arrangement established partly the causes for the rise of Amhara ethnicity. In spite of the nation-state building project being removed in the 1991 political change, its replica has run in various regional states and ethnic local governments. Ironically enough, those elites who reiterated as they fought against the imposed nation-building project that excluded ethno-cultural groups now have been working to establish homogeneous units. As a result, Amhara living in these ethnic territorial units have been killed and, displaced. The paradox of multi-national federalism is while it explicitly recognizes diversity and guarantees territorial autonomy at the national level, it fails to do the same at the sub-national level (Kossler, 2018). The dominant groups who own territorial autonomy considered the region as their own land and relegate the minorities from the political life of the sub-national entity (Ibid.). A replica of building a nation-state tendency has clearly been seen in relatively homogenous regional states like Oromia, Tigray, and Somali. Their constitutions gave sovereign power only to the dominant ethnic groups that the regional state has named.

Oromia region did not recognize the Argoba (resided in both western and eastern Harargie zones), the Zay (lives within and around Lake Zeway), the Gedoe, and Yem. Tigray did not guarantee self-government rights to the Kunama, Erob, and Amhara minorities. Somali regional

state refused to recognize the Bantus and the Shiekash despite their cultural similarities. Afar regional state at least recognized Argoba with Self-government.

On the other hand, the Amhara state constitution has granted autonomy with representation schemes to the ethnic groups inside. These rights enable the intra-state minorities of the regional state to foster their identities and exercise their self-determination rights as well as representation both in the regional state and federal government (Art. 39(6) of the Amhara state constitution). Unlike other state constitutions, The Amhara state constitution has some provisions which recognize intra-state minorities. It has created “Nationality Administration” for those groups particularly the Awi, Himra, and the Oromo and the “Argoba Nationality Woreda” by ordinary law for the Argoba nationality (Article 45(2); Article 74 of the state constitution; Proc. No. 130/2006). The reason for such measures of accommodation is to ensure the self-determination rights of the minority groups. The statement of the fourth congress of ANDM stated that: “those Agaw and Oromo nationalities in our regional state that were ignored and forgotten in the previous regimes now guaranteed autonomy” (Tsinat 2006 p. 34).

There are creative mechanisms for accommodating differences in the Canadian federation. The differentiated rights of groups include self-government rights to what Kymlicka termed “national minorities” (Quebecois and Aborigines) and polyethnic rights to “ethnic minorities” (immigrants) (Kymlicka, 1996). According to Kymlicka, national groups in Canada are historic communities with deserved homeland rights while ethnic minorities are not “nations” and do not occupy homelands (Kymlicka, 1996 p. 154). However, they are free to maintain various aspects of ethnic heritages, and exercise old customs and traditions (Ibid.). There seems parallelity between the Ethiopian and the Canadian mechanism. ‘Indigenous’ groups with territorial concentration are guaranteed self-government. The case in point in Amhara region is similar to the “self-government rights” in Canada. However, there are indigenous minorities who deservedly relegated self-government rights in regional states as indicated above. Moreover unlike the Canadian group-differentiated right, special preservation rights, almost all regional states do not give proportionate and guaranteed representation for the dispersed and marginalized groups. The Amhara regional state at least guaranteed a proportionate representation for the four minority groups at the regional council. Considering the above legal-constitutional mechanisms

and practical scenarios, Amhara regional state is relatively better in expanding the horizons of protecting minority rights and accommodating intra-state diversity.

The sense of ownership of titular ethnic groups considering the ethnic-territorial units and sidelining the rights of minorities are not restricted to the regional states. Ethnic-based locals united beneath the Southern and Southwestern regional states also do not recognize diversities resided within. The sporadic displacement of Amhara from *Gura Farda* and other districts is the case in point here. As also would be discussed below, the issue of Wolkayit partly arises from the reaction to the dominance of the Tigray language and culture. One recent study on the situation of non-indigenous ethnic groups living in Oromia revealed that they are given restricted representation in some city councils (in which Amhara are proportionately living) in which they are the majority, which restricts their decision-making power, in addition to being excluded from effective and equitable representation in the legislative and administrative councils of the region (Sisay, 2020).

Additionally, the expulsion of the Amhara from the regional state of Oromia raised Amhara ethnic consciousness. The Amhara are not the only ones that experience assaults and displacement. The same issues affected the Wolayita in the Sidama zone (during their violent quest for regional statehood), the Oromo in the Somali region, the Gamo and Gedeo in the Oromia region, and the Oromo in the Somali region. As a result, Ethiopia acquires one of the world's leading countries having internally displaced people. However, almost in all the listed incidents, Amhara was also targeted. Indeed, the intensity and frequency of atrocities on Amhara are relatively greater as compared to others that happened not more than once. As the above-mentioned issues indicate one of the most pressing pitfalls of the federal arrangement is that emphasizes the protection of territorially concentrated indigenous groups and relegates the rights of others in which the Amhara took the lion share of victimhood. Indeed the next part is intended to show how Amhara living in other regional states are viewed and treated with particular emphasis on Benishangul-Gumuz regional state.

7.3.2. Amhara Living Outside of the Regional States: with Emphasis to Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State

A large number of Amhara live in various parts of the country as a result of reasons related to historical, personal, and government policies. With the prevalence of 'Amhara domination'

discourse, they were victims of fresh attacks which endured for three decades. The federal government did not ensure accountability except by attributing to the ‘faults of the Amhara’, not the failure of the state for the incidents.⁶⁸

There have been accusations that ANDM gave little emphasis to the issue of Amhara outside of the regional state. A representative of Amhara from outside the regional state who attended the 12th party congress expressed surprise at the lack of attention paid to this group of people and questioned the party report. He claims that only five pages out of 140 mention Amhara outside of the regional state (Personal observation, September 2018). During the first international conference of ASC participants demanded the conference discusses the way to stop the persecution and eviction of Amhara who live in other regional states. The problem on Amhara as it is farmed with an existential threat, a discourse in the Amhara region, is not sufficient for those who have been living outside of the regional state. One of the participants of the conference came from Mekele, Tigray says:

You all are saying Amhara has faced existential threat but we (on behalf of Amhara outside of the regional state) are facing this on a daily basis. I am always insulted on the street and in my workplace as *neftegna*, *timkihtagna*. I also might be killed when I return to that regional state. But it’s okay now I have already take it off my chest (Personal Observation, September 2019, Bahir Dar).

Representatives of Amhara outside of the regional state oppose in strong terms the naming of the “people of the Amhara regional state” (የአማራ ክልል ህዝቦች) used by the regional state and “people whose origin is Amhara regional state” (የአማራ ክልል ተዋላጆች) as it excluded the Amhara living outside of the regional state and urge for renaming as “the people of Amhara” (Personal Observation, September 2019).

The party in its part reiterated that the Amhara outside of the regional state is considered “citizens” of that particular administration. According to a senior official of ANDM, the party

⁶⁸During his last days of power, the late Prime Minister Melse said for the parliament, televised for the public, about the mass eviction of Amhara from Gurafarda, Southern regional state, they have been cutting trees in the area.

chooses to protect these people indirectly through party channels without formal institutional engagement except for some offices of ANDM opened in Oromia, Benishangul-Gumuz, and Gambella (interview, December 25, 2020). A senior member of EPDM-ANDM and the chief coordinator of ANDM offices in other regional states also confirm the above response and say:

We use the party offices to mobilize Amhara and coordinate with the ruling party of the regional states they reside. They are not voting for ANDM candidates but for the candidate presented by the regional party. Our challenge is the absence of political will from the side of regional parties to grant political representation and power-sharing to them (Interview, November 18, 2019).

Amhara living in other regional states and their deteriorated security situation was and is one of the main causes of Amhara nationalism and still continued to be the agendas of both NaMA and APP at least at program and orientation level respectively. The concerns over Amhara living outside of the Amhara region are intensified more than ever immediately after Abiy Ahmed came to power especially in 2019 and 2020 Amhara in many parts of the country facing persecutions and evictions which hardens the Amhara ethnic consciousness beyond the elites and activists. Not only Amhara are victims of attacks and displacement. The Oromo in the Somali region; the Gamo in the Oromia region; the Wolayita in the Sidama zone, (during their violent quest for regional statehood). However, almost in all the listed incidents, Amhara was also targeted. Indeed, the intensity and frequency of atrocities on Amhara are relatively greater as compared to others that happened not more than once.

Amhara were facing attacks in the West Arsi Zone of the Oromia region after social unrest erupted in the region following the assassination of a singer and politically significant person among the Oromo, Hachalu Hundessa on June 29, 2020⁶⁹ Horrific details of persecutions have been revealed by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission report entitled “It seemed there was no a government” after assessing the atrocities that occurred in 38 different places in the

⁶⁹ “My son died the worst kind of death’: Horrific details of violent unrest in Ethiopia.” 14 July 2020. < <https://mg.co.za/africa/2020-07-14-my-son-died-the-worstkind-of-death-horrific-details-of-violent-unrest-in-ethiopia/>> (accessed January 1, 2021).

region.⁷⁰ Months before, the same attacks happened in the region following a prominent Oromo activist and politician, Jawar Mohammed complains about the security situation of his house.

Members of the Amhara community who were in the area were called to assemble in a school compound where they were “summarily executed” by gun shooting, and burning in Oromia region, West Wellega Zone, Guliso district, on 1, Nov 2020 by members of the Oromo Liberation Army where the victims were women, children and the old.⁷¹ According to the report by Addis Standard, the attack occurred immediately after a division of the Ethiopian Defense Force leaves the area.

7.1.1.1. Amhara in Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State

The peopling of the Benishabgul-Gumuz region is composed of largely the low land frontiers of the adjoining Sudanese border and the highland areas of the Ethiopian state. It was established by cutting off the parts of territories from the former Gojjam and Wollega provinces and jumbled together to stand as one constituent unit of the federation. The Berta and Gumuz ethnic groups have socio-historical origins to the Sudanese peoples. The Berta, are an ethnic blend of the indigenous peoples of the area with the Sudanese people. The Gumuz, that, made their center at Guba had contacts with the kingdoms of Funj and Sennar in Sudan (Markakis, 2011). While the Agaws, believed to be, in tradition, came from Seqota, northern Ethiopia, the Shinasha, came to the area after being pushed out from their settlements in the south of Blue Nile by the pressure of the Oromo (Alula, A. A., & Kuthadi, A. R., 2020 Markakis, 2011). The Oromo penetrated to the area when they flee from the expansion of the modern Ethiopian state and the Amhara move to the area in search of land from densely populated highland areas and Muslims from the exclusionary land tenure system of the Ethiopian state in addition to government-sponsored resettlement program since the 1960s (Gebre, 2003; Markakis, 2011).

⁷⁰ Ethiopian Human rights Commission Report on the Atrocities committed following the assassination of Singer Hachalu Hundesa
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DjJ3IXrYZ6s2TJKWuFVZAmRYrnffAO1/view?fbclid=IwAR2uEoetNlk8zjBTHElhSQtyefTB-elel_JTDJ9XbsPFVccJna6Ywt5bEQ (Accessed, January, 2021)

⁷¹<https://addisstandard.com/killing-of-civilians-in-west-wollega-guliso-wereda-govt-reactions/> (Accessed August2, 2021).

Berta is concentrated in the Assosa zone to the Sudanese border whilst the Gumuz are living, but not limited to, in Metekel and Kamashi zones. The Agaws settled in districts bordered to Awi nationality administration of the Amhara region such as Dangur, Mandura, Dibati, and Wonbera. The Shinasha are concentrated in Bulen and Wombera districts. While the Oromo settled in Wonbera and Dibati, the Amhara are dispersed throughout the region with territorially concentrated settlements established by the relocation program.

The area was considered by the Ethiopian and Sudanese states as a buffer zone except for the sporadic penetration of slave raiders on both sides. From the emic perspective of the Sudanese and Ethiopian highlanders, Berta and Gumuz names (with additional derogatory terms) signifies slave (Markakis, 2011). The nature of interethnic relations in the area, especially in the Metekel zone, is shaped by the expansion of the modern Ethiopian state with its own commercial farming and mining operations and agents from the highland core, as well as the memory of slavery in which the Agaws were dominant since medieval times (Gebre, 2003). The Dergue implemented a relocation program in the 1980s, which was followed by a self-initiated movement that altered the region's demographics. People who are now known as Amharas came to settle in particular sections of the Metekel and Assosa zones from drought-prone districts of Wollo province. The introduction of ethnic-based federalism in 1991 intensified local rivalries not only between indigenous but indigenous with the highlanders (Young, 1999). Despite the ethnic-based territoriality has been designed to address the national questions and the intra-state conflicts in the country, the conflict was found to be intensified in which Benishangul-Gumuz region is a living example (Asnake, 2009). The constitutional emphasis on ethnicity encourages ethnic-based competition aimed at controlling state resources and identity-based demands targeted at establishing ethnic-based local administrations, which, in turn, create wider access to state resources for the ethnic-based elite groups (Asnake, 2009).

There are multiple social (ethnic) boundaries that existed in the interaction of peoples of the region. One is based on skin color which also simultaneously divided the highlander and lowlander, i.e., the “*qey*”, the light-skinned (Amhara, Oromo, Shinasha and Agaw), and ‘*tikur*’ dark-skinned (Berta and Gumuz) peoples respectively. In this ethnic boundary formation, the indigenous Shinasha are at the opposite camp of the social strata. The other is a discursive ethnic boundary formation through dichotomizing of ethnic groups as owners of the region and

newcomers to the region which constitutes as (*nebar*) indigenous and (*mete*) non-endogenous. As will be explained down, based on the data obtained from the members of Amhara in the regional state, there is also a typical kind of ethnic boundary formation as a result of othering. This is between all ethnic groups in the region, regardless of the above boundaries, and the Amharas. The legacy of the national question and later framed by EPRDF as ‘Amhara oppressive’ ‘oppressed nationalities’ narrative encouraged all ethnic groups of the region to see and target Amhara as an oppressive group who work to bring back the regime before 1991.

Every ethnically based self-governing unit has its own ethnic minorities due to the mismatch between territory and ethnic group. Unlike the five regional states (Oromia, Amhara, Somali, Tigray, and Afar), that named after the majority ethnic groups, Benishangul-Gumuz regional state is inhabited by relatively many ethnic groups in which none of them constitute a majority in the region. Based on the most recent census, the total population of the regional state is 670,847 covers 0.9 percent of the total population of the country. The ethnic groups constituted in the regional state are the Berta (25.9 percent), the Gumuz (21.11 percent), the Amhara (21.23 percent), the Oromo (13.32 percent), the Shinasha (7.59 percent), the Agaw (4.49 percent), the Mao (1.9 percent) the Komo (0.96 percent) and others (3.49 percent).

The constitution of the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state designates five ethnic groups as indigenous and never mentioned in name other ethnic groups including the Amhara constitute more than 20 percent of the regional population. Article 2 of the constitution states as: “Notwithstanding the recognition of other people’s living in the region, the indigenous nationalities of the region are Berta, Gumuz, Shinasha, Mao and Komo”. The Amharic version of the article (which is deemed to be the final legal authority of the constitution), stated as “የክልል ባለቤት ህዝቦች” instead ‘indigenous’ which stands for the owner of the regional state. Hence, it simply passes about 42.5 percent of the population by designating “other peoples” whilst giving the regional state to the five ethnic groups with exclusive power.

The Benishangul Gumuz Democratic Party (BGDP) is the ruling party of the regional state. It was an affiliate party of the EPRDF, in which ANDM (ADP) is a coalition member, with a similar ideological orientation. In return to the status of the BGDP at the federal politics, the ANDM (ADP) branch in the Benishangul-Gumuz region has an affiliate status. As a result, its

role in mobilizing the Amhara of the regional state to vote for the BGDP in which all the candidates are from the indigenous nationalities. Currently, BGDP has merged to the PP after EPRDF vanished which by implication the ADP branch in the region would merge with the Benishangul Gumuz Prosperity Party (BGPP). This creates a new curiosity about whether or not the move-in party system would bring a paradigm shift regarding the autonomy and power-sharing schemes of the regional state.

The Status of Amhara in Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State

Amhara in Benishangul-Gumuz regional state explains their ethnic affiliation in referring to time. All informants agree that before 1995 they were only Ethiopians and nobody was against them. But after 1995, the so-called indigenous ethnic groups are not comfortable with their only affiliation to Ethiopia, and as they see them as supporters of the previous regimes that allegedly oppressed them which ultimately accepted the Amhara ethnic identity. Apart from the political system that encourages mobilization along ethnic lines, there are elements that make a person in the regional state Amhara such as: speaking “Amharic without additional one, place of origin that a person or his/her family originated from, Pan-Ethiopian feeling and district cultures still practices here in the region.” (KIIBeGu1, October 20, 2019, Assosa).

It is apparent that, as argued by this dissertation, one of the triggering factors for the emergence of reactive Amhara nationalism is the atrocities on the Amhara living in other regional states. Most of informants (nearly 70 percent) mentioned the Amhara living in the Amhara region do not care about them especially before the Amhara protests. However, others associated with the information gap that the regional people encountered rather than lack of belongingness. One of the informants summarizes:

It is not a matter of reluctance from solidarity but it is a lack of information about us. That is why the current wave of solidarity from the regional state came out as a result of social media activism disclosing the suffering of Amhara in each regional state including us (Interview, October 20, 2019, Assosa).

However, all informants including the ADP officials in the region agree on the Amhara regional state did not show solidarity in times of attacks and other problems they have been living with. They have accusations for the lack of support and developed a perception that it uses them only

for political consumption rather than doing joint effort with the regional officials for the wellbeing of Amhara ethnic minorities.

Security, Equality, and Non-discrimination

The security and existence of non-indigenous minority ethnic groups, notably the Amhara, is not guaranteed as always it has been the case since 1991. The constitutional and other legal mechanisms of the region created the vulnerability of these minorities. While the regional state recognized them as ‘others’ the indigenous peoples prefer to call them ‘*sefari*’ to mean migrant settlers. This designation of name, considered as derogatory by the Amhara, and practical exclusions made them feel strangeness, ‘statelessness’, and a lack of security. One of the informants estimated in the 70s says:

They refer to us as *sefari* and *metie* (newcomers), and they have always warned us that the land does not belong to us and does not deserve to be lived on.. We also informed them that a legal government had brought us here to live. Most of us have been residing in this area for over 40 years. After we were forcibly removed from our own homeland by Dergue, the land was redistributed in the Amhara region. What is our destination? Since 1995, I have felt as strength I am going nowhere and that I live dependent on them [indigenous ethnic groups], not by my produce (Interview, October 21, 2019, Assosa).

In addition to *sefari*, the indigenous elites especially the Berta call the Amhara *Habesh*, (a dialect form of *Habesha* used it in association with the imperial Ethiopian state), and tell their people as they (Amhara) are *neftegna* who have been living in their (Berta) land could oppress them again if there is convenience. (KIIBeGu1, October 20, 2019). Hence, the terms like *sefari*, *neftegna*, and *Habesh* are ethnic boundary markers that create relative victimization and deprivation as compared to the other non-indigenous ethnic minorities. These are the discursive narratives but irreplaceable impact on the security and safety of the Amhara beyond the legal-constitutional mechanism of the regional state.

Amhara residents in the area express resentment due to discrimination. Assosa town expands to the rural kebeles where Amhara and Berta farmers live. A different amount of compensation was decided for the indigenous and non-indigenous, as the former were able to secure a land area

equal to that taken by the town and an additional one million Ethiopian Birr. While for the latter⁷² only 400-meter squares of land were given. This creates anger among the Amhara, and the June 24, 2018 protest broke out, which threatened the regional executive (KIIBeGu2, October 20, 2019).

The regional state's employment of an ethnically blind strategy for "others" does not seem to be working, as the Amhara continue to feel discriminated against in that setting. One source says: "When they cannot find them within the indigenous communities, all "other" ethnic minorities are invited to job opportunities. Most of the time, they are ethnic blind when hiring from "others" and fail to take the population proportion of the relevant ethnic minority into account" (KIIAss1, October 21, 2019, Assosa). The young people have apparently been protesting the "baggage" of "others" and insisting that each ethnic group in the area should go by their ethnic name because they want to be called 'Amhara' (KIIBeGu2, October 20, 2019, Assosa). This claim is justified in order for them to be acknowledged as Amhara by the regional state and receive what the people are due in proportion to their demographic weight and contribution to the area.

Autonomy, Representation, and Power-Sharing

Some argue that the non-recognition of non-indigenous ethnic minorities in the Ethiopian regional states is linked with the very definition of an ethnic group in the federal constitution, Article 39(5) especially the phrase "an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory" which is explained as 'ethnic territorial approach (Van der Baken, 2014 p. 11). However, these ethnic minorities could claim group rights as enshrined in the federal constitution through Article 39 which provided the right to self-determination to all ethnic groups regardless of indigenous-non-indigenous designations. The problem partly relies on the absence of schemes intended to ensure such rights in the federal constitution and institutions nor using its supremacy clause, Article 9(1) to check the constitutionality of regional state behavior. For instance, there are numerous kebeles resided by Amharas fulfilling both the ethnic territorial approach with contiguous territory in Assosa and Metekel zones. In fact, 37 pages of a proposal requesting the establishment of the special zone where Amhara lives concentrated with the contiguous territory. However, there is

⁷²According to informants, despite being the second-largest non-indigenous ethnic minority in the region, the Oromo predominantly live in urban areas, except for areas in Metekel. Hence, the Amhara are highly affected by such kinds of decisions.

no political will from the regional officials to provide a status of self-government (KIIBeGu2, October 20, 2019, Assosa). The special woreda status of the Pawie district was disbanded. Here the intention is not a matter of criteria to establish territorial autonomy rather those non-indigenous ethnic minorities are considered as not native to that area.

Taking the provision under Article 3(4) of proclamation no. 73/2008,⁷³ Van der Baken suggested that the regional state has stepped forward in introducing a non-territorial mechanism in the Ethiopian federal experience to protect the dispersed ethnic minorities of the regional state (Van der Baken, 2014 p. 24). The borderless intra-state boundaries regarding identity issues, however, are not for the non-indigenous due to the constitutional recognition of certain ethnic groups as owners of the regional state, the practical realities following the adoption of the proclamation, as well as the intention of regional officials to provide convenience to the dispersed Gumuz ethnic group. Amhara, who resided in Assosa woreda, has 74 kebeles, of which Amhara exclusively live in 38 kebeles. In Bambasi woreda, there are 83 kebeles, of which 22 kebeles are inhabited by Amhara. However, Amhara have no deservedly proportional representation at the local level. The region's ADP branch executives claim that indigenous people seized 55 percent of the seats at first and then sat down with them to discuss how to divide the remaining 45 percent. Schemes for representation and power-sharing are not regulated by law. However, during this tenure, an Amhara non-indigenous person was given a position on the regional executive.

In sum, there is no unanimous agreement on the definition of minorities in the academics and other perspectives. The question of who is the minority is also the rallying point in the Ethiopian political and academic discourse. Hence scholars of the area advise following a pragmatic approach both to define and treat minorities and their accommodation in all aspects. Every ethnic group in the Benishangul-Gumuz regional state is a minority, as was said above, and makes up less than 50% of the region's population, similar to the situation at the national level. However, it seemed that the non-indigenous ethnic groups appeared to be politically non-dominant, favoring the indigenous majorities.

⁷³ [t]he hierarchy of the Administration of the Council [the Nationality Administration] shall have its own boundary limits to perform regular governmental functions and administrative functions; however, it is established borderless [sic] regarding the protection and preservation of the rights and privileges of nationality cases under Article 39 of the constitution (cited in Van der Baken, 2014 p. 24).

As studies indicated, and data from informal conversation with the elites of the so-called indigenous groups indicate that and data collected from the non-indigenous elites, they fear being outnumbered by the non-indigenous groups in “their” territory and they do not want to give concessions not to be victims of the “limits of referendum” in the Ethiopian territorial autonomy (Van der Baken, 2014; BeGuKII5). Given the presence of two of their neighbours who are the largest and most powerful groups, the Oromo and Amhara, they still feel politically insecure while they are dominant in the meantime. Hence, the threat of a demographic upset of the region and the resistance of indigenous groups to grant self-administration for the non-indigenous groups is understandable. However, rejecting all proposed institutional designs that mitigate the problems of non-indigenous minorities that at the same time guarantee the groups’ rights of the indigenous is also problematic.

Despite the acceptable claim of the indigenous ethnic groups, fear of being outnumbered, violence, and discrimination against the non-indigenous, notably the Amhara, are some of the reasons that harden Amhara nationalism. An important departure from the sense of common victimhood of the non-indigenous ethnic minorities in the Benishangul-Gumuz region is the Amhara exception. Amhara has been experiencing double victimization as a result of “Amhara blame” politics and the discursive narrative of “Amhara oppressor-oppressed nationalities.”

Under this political context, all the non-indigenous ethnic minorities have a similar gaze (collective “memory of oppression” by the “Amhara ruling class”) with the indigenous ones to Amhara that places them at the bottom of the regional ‘citizenship’ pyramid. These encouraged kebele-level local governors to oust the Amhara by posting a single sealed letter on a tree in the communities.⁷⁴ The region offers an intriguing illustration of both the Ethiopian federation's problems and the dynamics of national politics. The regional government is unable and unwilling to address the growing issue of minorities' lack of political representation.

7.3.3. Territorial (Identity) Claims: with Particular Emphasis on the Case of Wolkayit

Land expropriation has always been an instrument of control used by the Ethiopian rulers, and those actions without the consent of the people always invite resistance throughout Ethiopian

⁷⁴ There was a single paper posted on a trunk of a tree by a female Kebele administrator to urge the Amhara to evacuate from that Kebele within couple of days in Metekel Zone. The letter was circulating on social media and was the agenda of a week in 2018.

history (Bahru, 2002). The territorial demarcation in the formation of federal arrangements is not an exception, as it encountered opposition from its inception. Delineating boundaries during the transitional period and in the aftermath was largely made politically (Young, 2021p. 69). There are accusations that the government did not undertake consultations with both the local elites and the population. Teshome explained what did happen at the time as: “To be blunt, the harsh reality is, the ethnic “Scramble for Ethiopia” was supervised by TPLF, OLF, and other similarly minded organizations two decades ago to determine who gets which pieces of the pie” (Teshome, 2018).

In fact, unlike at the time of constitution drafting, the EPRDF involvement was limited in drafting the new ethnic-territorial map in 1991. Six parties participated, in addition to EPRDF, and among the 10 members of the Boundary Commission were three from EPRDF, two from OLF, one Gurage, one Hadiya, one Harari, one Somali, and one Afar (Vaughan, 2003, p. 33). There was a claim of contested areas by the OLF and it was countered by the non-EPRDF members. For political reasons, the EPRDF appears to prefer to avoid direct confrontation with the OLF. As Vaughan explicitly mentioned, the claim of OLF that the Amharic-speaking Wollo was a historic Oromo land was countered by a Hadya representative, as claimed by the same logic of OLF that vast areas of Bale and Arsi belong to Hadya or Sidama (Vaughan, 2003, p. 34). The boundary was delimited on the basis of language, an observable marker rather than disputable history, and the boundary commission extensively consulted the work of the Dergue’s Institute for the Study of Ethiopian Nationalities and crosschecked it with Bender’s 1976 language map for the work to be finished within a short period of time (Vaughan, 2003, p. 35).

The legacy of regional state demarcation is areas that were formerly part of the principal Amhara domains Shewa, Gojjam, Wollo and Gondar (Begember) became part of other regions notably: Tigray, Benishangul-Gumuz, and Oromia thus leading to Amhara claims of dispossession. Areas (Wolkayit and Raya) taken from Gondar and Wollo respectively to the Tigray region remained bone of contentions that attract international attention. This claim is not exceptional for Amhara. Despite they do not officially claim, Tigray and Oromia lost a large chunk of land to Afar and Assosa Zone of the Benishangul-Gumuz region, respectively. Nonetheless, it is understandable if Amhara now retrospectively reinterpreted the politics of allocation given the stark power imbalance and their sense of exclusion from the political process.

The unsettled constitutional issue regarding Addis Ababa also brought about disputes between Oromo and Amhara elites. The problem arises from the (mis)interpretations of Article 49(5) of the federal constitution, stipulated as: “the special interest of the State of Oromia in Addis Ababa, arising from the location of Addis Ababa within the State of Oromia, shall be respected” by the Oromo political actors. Since the early 1990s, there has been considerable sensitivity among the Oromo nationalists, including the Oromo People Democratic Organization (OPDO), to laying claim to *Finfinne* (Addis Ababa) itself. It was then labeled as “narrow nationalist” favoring nationalist rhetoric and symbols above the interests of the people of the region (Vaughan, 2003, p. 226). The issue was heightened contestation. It happened when the alleged draft proclamation on the special interest of Oromia in Addis Ababa leaked out in the last days of the TPLF-dominated government, which continued until the establishment of PP.

The claim of ‘special interest’ by the Oromo nationalists, which could be described as a spectrum between symbolic and political ownership, was rejected by Amhara nationalists and political parties (NaMA and APP), as well as Pan-Ethiopian Parties such as Balderas for True Democracy (*Balderas*) and *Ezema*, which have all argued that Addis Ababa belongs to its residents and must have its autonomy. One of the issues that the discourse of “*tereget*” and Amhara grievance has appeared vis a vis the activities of the federal government in and around Addis Ababa. The word “*tereget*” for the Amhara nationalists signifies the pursuit of the Oromo political elites to monopolize political power, replacing TPLF in the sense of ‘it is our time to rule’. NaMA has explicitly mentioned this in its election manifesto:

Above all, the Oromo Prosperity Party has been using state power for an ethnic agenda, and collaborating with extremist Oromo Nationalists, pushing to take control of Addis Ababa, which is apparently deserved for all ethnic groups (Nama election manifesto, 2021 pp. 25-26).

Similarly, *Balderas*, an Addis Ababa-based party, has been known for its resistance to the activities of the Addis Ababa city administration, especially pertaining to the construction projects and the subsequent demolishing of old buildings. Eskindir Nega, the party's president, claims that they have been campaigning against such projects because the city government has

been intentionally destroying the city's historical legacy.⁷⁵ *Balderas*, formerly an association established by the residents of Addis Ababa in reaction to the perceived (real) demographic change underway in the city now morphing from a party of Addis Ababa into an advocate of Amhara interests.

During the heyday of Amhara protests, criticism against the primary and secondary curricula⁷⁶ surfaced as it was designed to take over the historical and traditional Amhara land by the TPLF led regime. For instance, the controversial content enclosed in the grade ten Civic and Ethical Education students' textbook on page 24 shows the map of Ethiopia with its constituent units which avoid the international frontiers that Amhara region is bordered in the west and given those frontiers to the Benishangul-Gumuz and Tigray regions.⁷⁷ The Amhara regional constitution clearly stipulates that the region is bordered in the west with Sudan and practically exercise state powers over those territories. In this case, in late 2016 the MoE asked for apologies on the state media for the mistake and urges the regional states to remove the page having the content. Additionally, Mount Ras Dashen, Ethiopia's highest mountain and part of the Amhara region, is depicted as being in the Tigray region in the sixth-grade school textbook for that region. These worries sparked a heightened sense of territoriality and apprehension over potential land annexations that resulted in the displacement of the Amhara, such as the TPLF's purported desire to establish a "Grater Tigray" in the Horn of Africa.

TPLF controlled the Wolkayit area since 1979, during its armed struggle. According to displaced persons from the area, Wolkayit Amhara people identity question has begun since the TPLF officially begins administering the territory. They accused the senior and founding members of EPDM for the problems happened to them by the TPLF (interview with displaced Wolkayit person, June 15, 2020). There are also witnesses that question was raised within the EPDM.

⁷⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yjtOSt3rgus> (Accessed, June 4, 2022)

⁷⁶ According to the data obtained from the Amhara regional Education Bureau, the power to prepare curricula for primary education (from grades 1 to 8) is vested to the regional state, and secondary education (from grades 9 to 12) is the federal mandate.

⁷⁷ The map was primarily produced by the Election Commission of the transitional government in 1991. And the parliament renounced the future usage of the map. (Addis Zemen Newspaper, May 21, 1992).

According to data obtained from a senior member of EPDM, by the time, 42 members who opposed the demarcation were expelled from the party (Interview, September 2018). Though the persistence of the resistance was conducted on an individual and collective basis for over 25 years, there was no organized claim by the Amhara people in Wolkayit until the Welkayit Amhara Identity Question Committee (WAIQC) (የወልቃይት የአማራማንነት ጥያቄ ኮሚቴ) came to the fore. There were continuous discussions and debates among the displaced Wolkayit Amhara people to crystalize reasons to raise identity questions (Atalay, 2019). Those discussions led to the formation of WAIQC on August 23, 2015, which held the first inaugural meeting on September 19, 2015, in Gondar city (Atalay, 2019; John, 2021 p. 1011). The WAIQC in its part pursues its effort to broaden its legitimacy by conducting discussions with Wolkayit Amhara in the Tigray region. Consequently, they managed to collect about 25,000 signatures from the residents of Wolkayit district who identify themselves as Amhara (John, 2021 p. 1011).

The WAIQC reiterates that their identity question could be resolved under the existing constitution. It is born out of the violation of the constitution itself. For example, the committee members claim that the people of Wolkait should not be demarcated to the Tigray region in the first place in light of Article 46(2). The aim of the federal system was to empower all ‘indigenous’ groups by providing either regional statehood or autonomous special local governments. The practice has been directed towards this aim. Instead, as they asserted, they became victims of discrimination, ethnic cleansing, and forceful assimilation under the Tigray regional administration since 1991 (Atalay, 2019).⁷⁸ John (2021) described the causes for the Wolkayit identity question as: “Oppression, violations of the law and other “unpleasant incidents” have forced them to justify their Amhara identity claim.” John, 2021, p. 1010). The committee's letter to the appropriate authorities, including the zonal, regional, and federal agencies and institutions, identifies the factors that compelled them to bring up the Amhara identity issue. The most frequently cited causes by WAIQC members and the displaced Wolkayit people are socioeconomic discrimination, denial of the right to education based on mother tongue, and ethnically motivated attacks manifested through harassing those who kept their Amhara identity, arresting and killing people who are assertive for their Amhara identity, and

⁷⁸ From the speech delivered by Mr. Atalay Zafie, secretary of the Welkayit Amhara Identity Question Committee during the discussion with Wolkayit people living in Addis Ababa in February 26, 2019.

raping and forcing marriages of women. As reiterated by some elites of Oromo and southern nationalities as they were forced to be renamed and acquired Amharic names during the imperial regimes, Amhara in Wolkayit reportedly faced similar trends of assimilation into Tigray language and culture. A lawyer of WAIQC prisoners says: “a person was imprisoned in a dark cell only because asking a spelling correction on his name written in Tigrigna dialect as ‘*Mebrah’atu*’” instead of the Amharic one ‘*Mebratu*’”⁷⁹

In reaction to the above discriminations from the Tigray region and the WAIQC requested the state institutions to recognize the identity of indigenous Amhara people from Welkait as Amhara and to be demarcated to the adjacent Amhara region (John, 2021 p. 1010; Atalay, 2019). For the question of indigeneity and territorial demarcation, they brought historical and cultural reasons that directed to the constitutional criteria other than language and ethnicity. Given the fluidity of administrative boundaries in different regimes since medieval times, both the Amhara and Tigray elites have brought historical evidence to substantiate their respective claims.⁸⁰ Tigray nationalists criticize the identity and territorial claims of Amhara (region) by presenting an overwhelming number of Tigray population and place names, as most places in the region have Tigrigna names (Mathza, 2020).⁸¹ However, the WAIQC rejected the claims framed in population numbers and place names. They asserted that the former is the result of a resettlement program through which the regional state brought people from central parts of Tigray and settled them at the expense of the tens of thousands of displaced Amhara in the area. While each location has its own own historical Amharic name, the committee contends that the latter is the result of renaming practices based on the Tigray region's and its elites' assimilation policy (Atalay, 2019; John, 2021).

⁷⁹ From the speech delivered by a lawyer of the Welkait Amhara Identity Question Committee during the discussion with Wolkayit people living in Addis Ababa in February 26, 2019.

⁸⁰ Though the researcher could not find a historical account of the area written by Tigrayan elites in English or Amharic, there are strong arguments on the media both in broadcast and electronic. On the side of Amhara nationalists, Achameleh Tamiru has published a book called *Ye Wolkayit Guday* [The Case of Wolkayit] based on historical archives covering the year from 331-1991.

⁸¹ <http://www.aigaforum.com/article2020/amhara-claim-of-west-south-tigray-is-pure-expansionist-dream.pdf> (Accessed, November 5, 2021)

The political and institutional response to the long-aged identity and territorial questions of the Wolkayit Amhara people was rejection. The WAIQC members have underlined that the institutions of each level of government, zonal administration, regional council, and the federal House of Federation (HoF) have no interest to solve their problem. The regional institutions engaged in intimidation, suppression of the people and committee members, and denial as if there is no such question raised and submitted to it (Atalay, February 2019). John (2021) summarizes the trajectory of the case as: “The identity question of the indigenous Wolkayit Amhara was raised and suppressed since 1991” (John, 2021 p. 1007). Indigenous minorities who do not constitute regional statehood have guaranteed political autonomy inside regional states like Amhara, South, and Afar regions (Van der Baken, 2014). When it comes to the Wolkayit Amhara, the Tigray regional state does not recognize them and does not have the status given to their counterparts, Kunama and Irob.

As learned from the data obtained from the members of the HoF, there are several identity and boundary questions awaiting the actions of HoF from regional states. However, except for some cases like Kimant (recognition) and recently Sidama and South West (regional statehood) the House is not accomplishing its constitutional mandates. One member of the House explains: “The House mostly focuses on individual complaints than responding to identity, self-rule, and border disputes” (Interview, December 12, 2020). The speaker of the Amhara regional council and member of the HoF says:

In the years of my membership, I have observed that powerful political officials influenced the tasks of the House. And this was particularly [not exceptionally] on the identity and border questions of Wolkayit and Raya. Both the speaker and the concerned standing committee were sabotaging the case rather than taking appropriate and legal actions (Interview, December 12, 2020).

The testimony of the Speaker justifies the presence of TPLF’s upper hand in the institutions of the country. The asymmetric power relation within the EPRDF coalition members since its formation at the end of the day brought about party fragmentation form within.

The WAIQC did respect and believe that their question is constitutional and would entertain under the state institutions. However, their expectations were far from real. John describes what was happening as “[the] government institutions have remained unresponsive, willfully delayed

the case, blocked legal pathways, and obstructed the case through intimidation, imprisonment, and killings” (John, 2021, p.1019). This clearly indicates the political and institutional determinants for the development of Amhara nationalism taking Wolkayit identity and territorial question as a case. In addition, the dispute over Wolkayit is also about occupying a strategic resources land that recently became a growing strategic corridor with the two neighboring countries, Eritrea and Sudan. The HoF has not effectively responded to and works on the questions related to identity matters and building unity in diversity. The weakness of the HoF to discharge its constitutional mandate especially solving problems related to identity matters and building one economic community based on the principle of unity in diversity is related partly to the design itself. Since members of the House are partisans, they are always under the pressure of the executive branch and party discipline. This prohibits the members to be adherents of institutional integrity in promoting unity in diversity.

Until the beginning of the Amhara protests, the question of Wolkayit Amhara has been dealing within the Tigray region. The attempted arrest of Colonel Demeke Zewudu by the federal forces led to the Amhara protests to erupt and the Wolkayit question transcends the Amhara region and became one of the rallying points of the protests and the following political struggles. NaMA declared immediately after its establishment that the indivisibility and territorial integrity of traditional regions of Amhara as one of the pillars of its struggle in which Wolkayit comes to the fore. The 12th ANDM Congress also passed a resolution on the case of Wolkayit that the territory was taken by unilateral political decision of TPLF and it should be resolved in the same manner. ADP also has taken a firm stand on the territorial problem with other regions because it implemented the transitional government in which Amhara had no proper representation and participation. The chief secretary of APP says:

APP claims that the territories which demarcated to other regional states before the adoption of the federal constitution without the interest of Amhara people need to be restored to the former traditional territories through political decisions rather than constitutional ways (Interview, October 16, 2020).

Both institutional failure and political deadlock pose grave threat to a peaceful resolution of the dispute. In the first month of coming to power (April 19, 2018), Prime Minister Abiy has promised the committee that their question will be resolved within the federal system and asked

them for patience and calming the people they represent (John, 2021 p. 1007). Abiy once again meet with the committee and promised it would be settled by the Border and Identity Questions Commission (John, 2021 p. 1018). However, the TPLF announced that both the establishment of the commission and tendencies to the constitutional amendment are not acceptable. As the relationship between Tigray regional state and the federal government got sour, the newly established commission could not visit the contested areas, and eventually, the civil war broke out.

While the federal forces, alongside the Amhara and Afar regional forces, temporarily dismantled the Tigray regional forces, the Amhara have managed to control the disputed areas of Wolkayit and Raya, western and southern territories of Tigray region. As the military engagement continued, the Amhara nationalism has allegedly characterized as territorial rather than reactive. This was because some Amhara activists began to reiterate as ‘we return our territory back by force which forcefully appropriated into Tigray region by TPLF in the 1990s’. The Amhara regional officials confute the claim. The then Amhara regional president, Agegnehu Teshager says: “We fought to retake the identity that was stripped off from us. We didn’t go there looking for land,” (cited in Mistir Sew, 2021). The then Deputy President of the region, Fanta Mandefro, follows the same line of argument without denying the irredentist motive of Amhara nationalism. In his interviews with Aljazeera, he underlines:

There have never been any disagreements about the areas in the past. The TPLF drew the flawed demarcations and decided on those territories unilaterally when it came to power in 1991. It took nearly 30 years to gain. The Amhara people were not consulted or given their consent at the time of annexation (Fanta, 2021)⁸²

Unexpected events occurred as the Tigrayan army advanced to the Amhara and Afar territories and successfully retook their region, with the exception of Wokayit. The 1994 census report has shown that a relatively larger proportion of Amhara are living in the Western Tigray and southern Tigry zones in which Wolkayit and Raya are part of it from which the Tigray ethnic group took 91.53 and 92.12 percent of the population in the areas respectively (1994 Census

⁸²<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/16/qa-amhara-leader-fanta-mandefro?fbclid=IwAR2DubocE0njnnouKlhDZPBGIB8kw7DIFLEWeniJpo1Ab4vKhxruK-FocFo> (accessed July 16, 2021)

report of Tigray region.⁸³ Despite the fact that there is no zonal (district) level ethnic disaggregated data in the 2007 census, the number of Amhara living in Tigray region is 70, 334, which is less than the number in the 1994 census report, which was 81, 279. Despite this striking figure, which initiates further investigation and interpretation, it supports the Wolkayit Amhara community's claim, as they were experiencing displacement and assimilation in the region. The residents of Wolkayit are multi-ethnic, with a clear majority from the Tigray ethnic group. Kassahun (2000) maintained that the TPLF's role and its political intent were crucial in resettling the people who fled to Sudan to escape the 1980s famine. Hence, the resettlement program significantly altered Wolkayit's demography. That is why TPLF considers a referendum the ultimate solution to the dispute, knowing that Tigrigna speakers have become the majority. The same reason why Amhara nationalists advance a historical (administrative) argument for entitlement.

7.4. The Unfolding “Amhara Domination” Discourse

The ethnicity of other ethnic groups has centered on the discourse of Amhara domination with roots going back to the radical student movement of the 1960s/70s, and ultimately to the territorial expansions of Menelik and the birth of modern Ethiopia at the end of the 19th century. For its adherents, Amhara ethnicity is born out of a sense of strangeness in one's own country, a lack of security, that is, a threat to both physical and cultural survival of the Amhara (Mesganaw, 2021). Amhara nationalists agree on discursive attacks against Amhara through tagging of names as *neftegna* (gun bearers of the imperial regime often meaning Amhara) and *timkihtegna* (chauvinists). There are accusations that the EPRDF with its core TPLF regime has used revolutionary democracy as an ideological weapon to target Amhara for decades. Since the 1980s, Revolutionary Democracy known in Amharic as ‘*Abiyotawi* democracy’ had been the core ideology of TPLF and EPDM in its Marxist version passed through a discursive shift since 1980s not less than four times until 2010 (Bach, 2011). The major shift that significantly shapes the ideology of TPLF (EPRDF) was made by the end of the cold war with the triumph of western democracy and the collapse of socialism. The discursive shift was necessitated by the desire for getting international funds. The Ethiopian government managed to get steadily growing development aid through its negotiating capitals despite criticism of the Western donors on the

⁸³ <http://www.statsethiopia.gov.et/census-1994/>

regime's democratic deficit (Dereje, 2011). Bach describes revolutionary democracy, a doctrine neither revolutionary nor democratic "but remains powerful as a fighting tool to exclude internal and external 'enemies'" (Bach, 2011 p. 642). Its exclusionary nature through tagging names is inherent in the ideology and the strong conviction that the TPLF led EPRDF uses it as a discursive weapon to weaken the potential opponents.

ANDM has effectively eliminated AAPO through revolutionary democracy weaponry after tagging the name "chauvinist party" (the 'reactionary Amhara nationalist party') on it. ANDM had emphasized that relentless struggle has been made to wash away chauvinist tendencies within the party afterwards (EPDM-ANDM, 2016). By so doing, many members of the party who were competent and sympathizers for the interests of the Amhara peoples were expelled (Chuchu, 2019). Since the party was EPDM, one of its senior members has succinctly summed up their personal experience as follows:

They [TPLF members] talk distressing things about Amhara in the party meetings, then we [some members of the then ANDM] comment that such acts are inappropriate, and they immediately accuse us of being *timikihtegna*. They believed the Amhara needed to keep quiet, even when they were hurt. Many members were expelled from the party for their resistance against such a status quo. When claims were raised over Wolkayit immediately after demarcation, the TPLF said *timkihitegnet* has infiltrated the party, and subsequently many were demoted and expelled (interview, November 18, 2019, Addis Ababa).

The name "*Neftegna*" has also notoriously been mentioned interchangeably with "*Timkihtegna*" to target potential political contenders since 1991. A specter of ethno-nationalism that criminalizes the Amhara as an oppressor was haunting Ethiopia. In the early years of the 1990s, where ethnic tension was the highest, Amhara became the fitting choice for ethnic target practice. The ethnically motivated political tension and the atrocities on the 'Amhara' people since 1991 that continue until these days gave rise to Amhara nationalism. The plight of the Amhara and its non-representation in the transitional process caused the establishment of AAPO. It has been the root cause for the rise of reactive Amhara ethnicity. Teshome argues that "the rise of Amhara nationalism was ... a reaction to EPRDF- propagated discourse against the '*neftegna*' - often meaning Amhara" (Teshome, 2018)

Many ethno-nationalists are also acting as if the “Neftegna system” (the old imperial regime) was not removed and the 1974 revolution never took place. Poor peasants who migrated from other regions of Ethiopia, mostly the present-day Amhara region, became Neftegna and needed to be exterminated. The EPRDF, for its part, argued that although the system had disintegrated, it still existed in perception and that elite group that had carried the ideology of the system but lost power would inevitably strive to reclaim their long-standing interests (Alemnew, 2017 pp. 301-302). However, the ethnic dimension of *neftegna* has been used for attacks. As this notion diffused to the ethnic-territorial units, the people who were defined as “Amhara” by the respective titular groups have been targeted and displaced from parts of the country until today. In this case, religion and ideology have no value as ordinary Christian and Muslim people are *neftegna* as far as they are ethnic Amhara. The recent atrocities in Oromia and Benishangul-Gumuz region confirm the above assertion.

Data collected from survivors of the violence that claimed hundreds of lives of members of the Amhara community in the Oromia region on 1, Nov 2020⁸⁴ indicated that both the attackers and local administrators were repeatedly saying “*Neftegna* Amhara” do not deserve to be buried let alone to live in this Oromo land’. Among this group of survivors, most of them were vulnerable Muslim women and their children (personal observation, November 2020). A survivor-woman estimated 30s surrounded by her three children says: “all the Muslims and Christians were targeted in the region and they call us “*neftegna* Amhara” they told us as we have no place in that region”. An old Muslim man, one of the survivors says that:

We made the mistake of not paying attention to them. The local governors instructed us to vacate the area before four years because it is not our property. They will compel us to leave and confiscate our property for the Oromo unless they forewarn us. They have completed the task now (interview, November 2020).

The above testimony of victims is only a sample that shows the suffering that Amhara living in other regions lasted for three decades. The Amhara nationalists largely framed their movement in response to victimization inflicted from what they call “anti-Amhara” narratives and its state machinery. Discursive attacks on Amhara, which refer to and imply as *neftegna* and *timkihtegna*,

⁸⁴<https://addisstandard.com/killing-of-civilians-in-west-wollega-guliso-wereda-govt-reactions/> (Accessed August2, 2021).

compelled people to choose how to reconfigure their identities, most likely embracing Amhara identity and joining the mobilization.

Amhara nationalists also criticize that the constitution was designed based on the discursive narrative of Amhara domination. They complain that the spirit of the constitution implicitly recognizes narratives of “Amhara oppression-oppressed nationalities”. They mentioned the preamble of the constitution as it recognizes the presence of unjust historical relationship between people. As the preamble states that “Fully cognizant that our common destiny can best be served by rectifying historically unjust relationships and by further promoting our shared interests”, they point to the national oppression thesis which blames the Amhara, and thus needs to be revised. The Amhara regional constitution also endorsed the national oppression thesis in its preamble. The preamble of the regional state constitution confirms this position saying:

Being dully convinced of the fact that we had for long been victims of an unbearable harm caused to us directly or indirectly to an atrocious national oppression which had to be committed in the past on and against the majority of our country’s nation-nationalities and peoples, and henceforth needs to be corrected and rectified hereafter (preamble of ANRS, paragraph 2).

Other state constitutions also detailed that the majority ethnic group or ‘indigenous groups’ had for long been oppressed under the past regimes until overthrown by the ultimate sacrifice they paid (Preamble of state constitutions).

A sideslip within the post-1991 political discourse from “Amhara ruling class oppression” into the narrative of “Amhara oppressor” has witnessed. Such implicit discursive shift has been confirmed thorough selectively attacking ethnic Amhara living in other ethnic-territorial units. There were strong opposition during the 12th congress of ANDM against the labeling of the imperial ruling class as Amhara. Within the APP there have been dissenting voices in this regard. One of the officials of APP argued:

The assumptions that consider the ruling class were only from Amhara need to re assessed. We believe that it was a multi-ethnic stock composed ethnic groups from north and central parts of the country that established the *Neftegna* system and benefited from it. However the ethno-nationalists prefer to give this accusation for the ruling class who had Amhara origin. If you scratch little, they have an attitude that “Amhara people are

oppressive”. Hence the perspective that sees the Amhara people as oppressive need to be corrected. (KIIP5, October 17, 2020).

The failure to implement the principle of ‘democratic nationalism’ that EPRDF adopted to struggle “chauvinism” and “narrow nationalism” throughout all ethnic based parties created discrepancy; while ANDM aggressively implement it others not. As a result “narrow nationalism” (an attitude which considers the whole nation from which the oppressive groups came out as an oppressive nation (Tederaj, 1987)) is prevailed. Some senior members of EPDM (ANDM) do not endorse the erroneous nature of Amhara democratic nationalism rather regrettably mentioned the failure of other coalition and affiliate parties of EPRDF to implement the same in their respective endeavors that eventually creates fertile ground for narrow nationalism. A founding member of EPDM reflects:

We have been struggling to expand Amhara democratic nationalism in a sense that promotes the equality of Amhara without undermining others. In this regard, we seriously fight attitudes that are supposed to undermine other ethnic groups in the Amhara region. In terms of rhetoric, democratic nationalism was taken for granted by the political elites of all ethnic groups and their respective coalition parties. However, they did not implement it for themselves. As a result, the attitude that considers all Amhara people as oppressors transcended from the elites to the people. They reiterate the Amhara oppression narrative while they are in power and indoctrinate youths as to the probability of the restoration of the past regime that marginalized their forefathers by the ‘Amhara people’ (Interview, October 22, 2019)

The discursive trajectories of ethno-nationalists, notably the TPLF and portion of Oromo nationalists have continued charging Amhara for all historical and current problems while they hold political power.

7.5. The Contested 2007 Census and Amhara Sense of Victimization

The controversial 2007 census result is one of the sources of Amhara grievance. In fact that it is not only the Amharas who have disputed the census result. Before looking in to how the Amhara nationalists saw and frame the result of the census, it worth showing the statistical summary briefly. All major ethnic groups scored increment in population number in the three census results while Amhara increase in a highly decreasing rate. For instance, if one takes a closer

look, it is clearly the gap between the Oromo and Amhara ethnic groups have been getting wider and wider. As shown in the table1; it is not only the gap between these two largest ethnic groups but the number of the Amhara is steadily decreased while the spikes of population number of the Oromo and other major ethnic groups. The population number difference between Oromo and Amhara which was 1 million in the 1994 census, reached 5.6 million after 12 years in the 2007 census. The regional variation, Oromia and Amhara, of population size by region is also fast growing that spike from about 5.5 million in 1994 to nearly 10 million by 2007. One of the most controversial aspect of the 2007 census result is the annual population growth rate of Amhara region scored not only less than its counterpart regions but also the average country level growth rate which is found to be 1.7. As put in table 3, all major regions scored more than the country level growth rate. People ask unconvincingly why this figure.

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Population by major ethnic groups: 1984, 1994 and 2007

Ethnic group	1984		1994		2007	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Oromo	12, 387, 664	29.068	17, 080, 318	32.1	25, 488, 344	34.5
Amhara	12,055, 250	28. 288	16, 007, 933	30.1	19, 867, 817	26.9
Somali	1, 613394	3.786	3, 160, 540	5.9	4, 581, 793	6.2
Tigrie(Tigrawi) ⁸⁵	-	-	3, 284, 568	6.2	4, 483, 776	6.1
Sidama	1,261,721	2.961	1, 842, 314	3.5	2, 966, 377	4.0

Source SCA, 2008 and⁸⁶

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Population by major Regions: 1994 and 2007

Region	1994		2007	
	Number	%	Number	Number%
Tigray	3, 136, 267	5.9	4, 314, 456	5.8
Amhara	13, 198, 297	25.9	17, 214, 056	23.3
Oromia	18, 732, 525	35.0	27, 158,471	36.7
Somali	3, 198, 514	6.0	4, 439, 147	6.0

⁸⁵ There are various spelling conventions used for Ethiopian peoples and languages. Since the 1984 census includes Tigrawi found in Eritrea, not suitable for comparison.

⁸⁶ The 1984 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia: Analytical Report at National Level, Central Statistical Authority, December 1991, Addis Ababa https://international.ipums.org/international/resources/enum_materials_pdf/source_doc_e_1984a.pdf

SNNP ⁸⁷	10, 377, 028	19.4	15, 042, 531	20.4
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Source: CSA, 2008 p. 10

Table 3 Annual Population Growth Rate by Region between 1994-2007

Region	Tigray	Amhara	Oromia	SNNP
Annual Growth Rate (1994-2007)	2.5	1.7	2.9	2.9

Source: CSA, 2008 P. 11

The then head of the Central Statistical Agency Samia Zecharia explained the discrepancy and lower population in the Amhara region could be a result of a higher prevalence of HIV/AIDS, something that did not convince many Amhara rather considered it as a public insult.⁸⁸ In addition to the disproportionate impact of HIV/AIDS, increased awareness in using family planning was another argument. In spite of the lack of evidence (study) to justify, shifting ethnic identity might be the reason for the decline of Amhara population, as previously nearly all people with mixed ethnic heritage used to claim Amhara identity, especially in urban areas and now might abandon it for various reasons.

The other argument for the demographic decline of Amhara is related to conspiracy theory. Prevalent allegations have been presenting by Amhara nationalists and ANDM (now merged into the PP), around some 2.5 to 5 million Amhara “disappeared” from the federal government census generating the discourse of numerical genocide (Cochrane, Hadis, 2021). This let the regional state remained disadvantaged in budgetary transfers, with striking implications on economic share of the regional state. Many perceive the census result an act of the federal government to weaken Amhara region and Addis Ababa where it lost the election of 2005. One research participant says it is an act of ethnic cleansing against Amhara by the TPLF dominated federal government (KIIP3, March 5, 2020). It seems that any variable attributed to be the cause of the lowest growth rate does not let the federal government and census authority from criticism. The same informant reflects “Neither ‘increased awareness in contraceptive nor increment of death

⁸⁷ Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Regional State

⁸⁸ <https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2021/06/07/amhara-nationalism-at-the-polls-in-ethiopia/> (June 23, 2021)

rate are helpful to defend, as Addis Ababa which is supposed to be hosting urban and relatively literate population has 2.1 growth rate”.

Representatives from Amhara region were unanimously opposed the ‘unrealistic’ figure of the population number result of Amhara region which was against democratic centralism, a pillar of revolutionary democracy that eventually the members were threatened by the executive. One of member of the parliament by the time and senior member of EPDM-ANDM-APP evoked the situation and summarized:

We all represent the Amhara region rejected the report, as it was unrealistic census result on the number population in Amhara region. Immediately they (the federal executive notably the TPLF) put us in a room as *de facto* imprisonment for one day and asked to revoke our claim. But we never gave up that eventually forced them to undertake sample survey and the Amhara regional state has managed to get additional budget which equated for about 9 *woredas* (districts) (Interview, November 18, 2019, Addis Ababa).

This indicates that at least nine *woredas* populations were not counted in the Amhara region. Following the *woreda* level decentralization program in 2001, 100, 000 people were set to be the baseline for *woreda* government creation. However, practices show that the creation of local government is not guided in accordance with the threshold set by such policy document, and by the time of the census each *woreda* population has significantly increased (Ayenew, 2017). A *woreda* government should have a population of between 100,000 and 300,000, according to the ANRS.⁸⁹ Hence taking the above figure and the failure of the government to defend itself, the allegation that the government admitted 2.5 million Amhara are lost from the census is justifiable.

Following such intense controversy an intercensal survey was conducted and the central statistical agency concedes a somewhat higher growth rate.⁹⁰ NaMA opposed the planned census in 2019, as it announced that the result of the 2007 census and its annual population growth rate projection of Amhara people are unacceptable. Opposition is not limited to NaMA but even within the APP there have been dissenting voices. Hence the demographic decline of the Amhara

⁸⁹ Interview with Mr., Merhatsidk Mekonnen, 13 May, 2019)

⁹⁰ <https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2021/06/07/amhara-nationalism-at-the-polls-in-ethiopia/> (June 23, 2021)

people and its ongoing controversies has been serving the current sense of Amhara victimization which relapsed in each fiscal year.

7.6. Socio-economic Discrimination and Amhara Sense of Victimization

Amhara nationalists including political actors accused the TPLF led EPRDF government as it caused a systematic socio-economic marginalization of the Amhara. They have long complained that they have been excluded from an equitable distribution of the national wealth. Among the Amhara activists, one informant summarizes by what perceives regarding the economic impoverishment of own vicinity being part of Amhara region:

There has been a deliberate alienation from the government led economic development policy. Here I could mention a typical example Debre Birhan town. Compared to its counterparts located nearby Addis Ababa, it is the only town with no investment allocation until 2018. In addition, there has been public opinion, which I share it too, that investors from Amhara ethnic origin discriminated to get bank loan and discouraged to work contrasting the so-called free market economic ideology (KIIDb5 February 15, 2020).

Scholars who have been studying Ethiopia and the Horn, such as Abink, commented on the reasons for the protests in Oromia and Amhara regions. He maintained that the cause of the out-blow of protests in the Amhara region commonly called, Amhara protests, is the feeling of being marginalized for years (Abink, 2016). The fact that economic impoverishment has relatively worse in the Amhara region is justified by the World Bank reports. The World Bank report (2017), indicated that, taking the development of road infrastructure, distribution and connectivity is not homogeneous across all regions. As the report revealed, in the government's effort in this regard, the Amhara region is remained with its lower share, as it says:

Between 2006 and 2016, the increase in road density was concentrated in certain regions, notably Ethiopia's capital of Addis Ababa, as well as Tigray in the north of the country and in Oromia in the center. Remote and economically lagging regions, and Amhara Region, see lesser increases in road density (World Bank, 2017).

Triangulating the data obtained for the World Bank and the Government data set, Desalegn (2021) states that the percentage increase in road distribution from 1997 to 2017 is not only

lower in Amhara region it is the lowest having 51.4 next to one regional state whilst the highest regional state scores 171 (Desalegn, 2021 pp. 284-285).

In terms of electricity, given the capacity of usage per mega-watt per region and per 1million population, the distribution is varied across the regions. Amhara region is one among its counter parts having less than the national average in the capacity usage of mega-watt (Desalegn, 2021 p. 291). The project funded by the World Bank, the Global Partnership on Output-Based Aid (GPOBA), has been helping the government of Ethiopia expand electricity access in rural communities since 2011–2013 in five regions. The impact evaluation study revealed that despite the project being quite successful in increasing electricity connections in rural households, there were differences in regional penetration rates, ranging from 9.3 percent for the surveyed villages and towns in Amhara to 69.5 percent for those in Oromia (World Bank, 2016).

The Amhara regional state officially complained, in a televised panel discussion with the federal stakeholder in 2016, that the region never gets an expansion of electricity since 1991. This could support the claim of the exclusion of the regional state from the infrastuctural development.

Table 4: Share of GPOBA Households among Households with Electricity in the Study Regions

Region	Oromia	Amahara	SNNPR	Tigray	BSG	Overall share
Share of GPOBA connections (%)	69.5	9.3	36.9	58.5	38.8	41.8

Source: World Bank, 2016

In sum, disparities in infrastructure components such as electricity, road, telecom, airport, industrial park and universities, Amhara is found to be one of the lagging regions in the country (Desalegn, 2021). The consequence of uneven infrastructural development especially road connectivity and density, brought about unequal economic development as it impacted on labor mobility, transportation of goods and services and agricultural productivity (World Bank, 2017).

As a country, Ethiopia faces serious problem of uneven economic development. This is indicated by the variation in poverty line and poverty reduction performance as well as unemployment rate and employment opportunities. Data from CSA gleaned from 1999 to 2016 indicates that, Amhara region is one of the lowest three regions of the country in poverty line and scores the lowest performance in poverty reduction (Desalegn, 2021 p. 305). Regarding unemployment rate

by region, Amhara is one of the two regions that highest rate was observed (CSA cited in Desalegn, 2021 p. 307). Desalegn (2021) examined the relationship between growth and infrastructure equity across regions in Ethiopia and its impact on the national cohesion at large. He summarizes:

The well-known case of Ethiopia's miracle growth over the previous two and half decades obscures the overlooked truth that the gains from the economic infrastructure expansion have not been distributed in an equitable fashion across regional states. This flow in economic growth has brought about significant change for some states while leaving other states nearly unchanged. As a result of the above, infrastructure inequity has hindered inclusive growth and the nation-building processes of Ethiopia (Desalegn, 2021, pp. 314-315).

7.7. The Role of the Media for the Rise of Amhara Ethnicity

The role of the media in triggering Amhara nationalism can be seen from Anderson's (2006) postulation about the crucial role of print media in the formation and spread of nationalism. Digital media, in particular Facebook and Twitter, have been important sites and have played a key role in raising Amhara ethnic consciousness among the youth. Mass media has a significant role in creating awareness of the society which is a sufficient condition for social movements to occur (Gusfield, cited in Corbett, 1998). Recently, the new digital media technologies, especially social media platforms appeared to be effective means of communication and interaction that enable all internet users to get access to opinions, share content, and debate with each other (Gündüz, 2017). AMC and Facebook, as well as other social media platforms, have been instrumental in the rise of Amhara nationalism.

AMC has made its own contribution to the fast growing aspect of Amhara nationalism. Besides carrying the name Amhara in its subcategories such as Amhara Television, Amhara Radio and several Amhara named FM broadcasts played a crucial role in bringing people from all areas of the country into an Amhara ethnic consciousness. Regional Media are largely reflections of regional politics. Their work follows the interests of the regional politicians and it is dependent on the nature of intergovernmental relations that existed between the federal and regional states. The Oromo Broadcast Network (OBN) and AMC were on the side of Oromo and Amhara protests respectively and the response from the Ethiopian Broadcast Authority, controlled by

TPLF was unsympathetic. Likewise, the Tigray regional media has been doing the same path after the TPLF was pushed from the political center. Mr. Muluken Setiye, general manager of AMC, mentioned about the regulatory issues accompanied by confrontations with the Ethiopian Broadcast Authority, and he noted “since 2016, we have been broadcasting the grievances of the people of the region. But the federal government objected, so we frequently argued with the Broadcast Authority.

The activity of the AMC increases the awareness and ethnic consciousness of the Amhara people that triggered fierce opposition to the regime. It has got acceptance from the public, especially the Amhara despite studies (Asfaw, 2019) indicated that the government media (electronic and print) are one of the least popular national institutions in Ethiopia. The reason might be related to the act of the media tried to transcend the boundaries of revolutionary democracy in inviting scholars to discuss issues related to democracy, identity, and good governance and put on air the implicitly censored songs of Tewodros Kassahun’s “*Tikur Sew*” (the black man) and Fassil Demoz’s ‘*Aresut*’ (they plowed it).⁹¹ Unlike before, the media gleefully celebrated the Adwa battle and associated national holidays by applauding the imperial regime's rulers, which is forbidden in revolutionary democracy and detested by them. There was a motive from ANDM to stand alone and to convince the people as it (was) is not created and directed by the TPLF. A documentary was televised by Amhara television for the promotion of the 35th anniversary of the party. This created discontent from the TPLF as it criticized ANDM and the media has been hijacked by rotten *neftegna*.⁹²

Moreover, AMC has broadcasted the Amhara protests as legitimate public questions while the federally owned Medias have nothing to talk about it. This move of the regional media is partly the reaction to the silence of the federally owned medias about Amhara protests and the manifestation of the fragmentation of the EPRDF from within. The most remarkable role in enhancing Amhara ethnic consciousness was its television broadcast of the stories of political prisoners freed following the Amhara protests. They disclosed the inhuman treatment, torture

⁹¹The first song praises the role of Menelik II and his fellow warriors in the battle of Adwa, the second expresses the feeling of annexation of Wolkayit and other territories and criticizes own (leaders) failing to restore them.

⁹²<http://aigaforum.com/article2016/andm-hijacked-commentary-080716.htm> (April 4, 2021)

and psychological intimidation by insulting their ethnic name, Amhara by TPLF⁹³ in federal prisons. Many Pan-Ethiopianists shifted their belongingness and embraced Amhara identity after the story of political prisoners was televised by AMC. Among the FGD participants of this study, one reason they became Amhara from hardliner Pan-Ethiopianists could explain the contribution of the regional media to Amhara nationalism's faster growth:

If you called me Amhara before 2018, specifically before the convicts were released and their prison experiences were broadcast on Amhara television, I would want to confront you. When I witnessed the victims being subjected to abuse such as "damned Amhara" and "why you guys want to play a game with us [the TPLF and its counterparts], we wrecked you all once and for all," I was horrified. I adopted the identifying name that the TPLF and its government had shamed me with (FGDBD 9, March 5, 2020).

The other important site of Amhara identity construction is the social media. One of the most important factors that made social media platforms have got widespread acceptance and followers is its capability to escape from actions of authoritarian governments such as censorship and restrictions to contents created by users (Gündüz, 2017). In the case of Ethiopia, both the Oromo and Amhara protests used social media platforms as an alternative tool to express grievances, opposing the government and seeking regime change (Dugo, 2017). Social media permits communication and interaction by allowing people to publicly post their views and have others like it and share it with their followers, or comment in support or opposition so that it is open to debate by others. It brings together people who have common opinions, emotions, and thoughts that are eventually instrumental for identity construction (Gündüz, 2017). This partly explains the rapid growth of Amhara nationalism, a nationalism which grew up in the age of social media as opposed to other ethno-nationalisms having an age of no less than a half century.

Amhara activists use these technologies, especially Facebook, to increase public awareness about the importance of organizing along Amhara ethnic lines through amplifying grievances and sharing a sense of victimization as a result of TPLF led regime and the perceived territorial annexation by the same. They encourage and lead protesters by producing and communicating

⁹³According to the victims, persons who were tortured were Tigrigna language speakers.

slogans during demonstrations, and displaying and communicating graphic images of the Amhara who are attacked which is crucially important in creating a community of grievance.

7.8. Major Claims (Goals) of Amhara Nationalism

Bahru (2002) portrayed the 1974 Ethiopian revolution as a surprise for both the revolutionists and the regime. He presented the Amharic term used by the people, *Abiyotu feneda* to mean “the revolution erupted” to describe how the downfall of the imperial regime was, despite expected, sudden and quick. Similarly, the Amhara protests were a surprise for both the Amhara activists and others with Pan-Ethiopian agenda on the one hand and the EPRDF government on the other. Hence the mobilization precedes the institutionalization of Amhara nationalism and framing of clearly defined and shared goals as well as organization to lead for those ends.

The early years of Amhara protests saw a growing number of people joined to the Amhara movements and appeared critical of a pan-Ethiopian political discourse.⁹⁴ Actors known for their hardliner Pan-Ethiopianism and active in the Pan-Ethiopian parties such as Blue Party and Ginbot 7, currently evolved into *EZEMA* joined the Amhara activism, *Fanno*, NaMA, and ADP and immediately enjoyed many social media followers.⁹⁵ Under such contexts, NaMA was established with an Amhara ethnic agenda. The situation lent to the internal factions happened in ADP (APP) and NaMA that manifested in the assassination of Amhara regional leaders and the recent internal fragmentation of NaMA. This context helps to understand the discontent within the APP and NaMA rose from the internal debate and diverging perspectives in defining Amhara identity and the strategy to protect Amhara interests in post 2018 Ethiopia.

The pioneer Amhara activists, within and around *Bete-Amhara* movement, tone down their separatist agenda especially after the coming to power of Abiy Ahmed. It follows that the discourse on Amhara nationalism appeared to be unclear vague political agenda, and goals except for the common denominator, sense of victimization. However, there are some informants who share *Bete-Amhara*’s secessionist view and pursue anticipatory nationalism to escape from surprise just in case Ethiopia disintegrates.

⁹⁴<https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2021/06/07/amhara-nationalism-at-the-polls-in-ethiopia/> (June 23, 2021)

⁹⁵Among whom some are be able to be members of executive and central committee of NaMA.

About 90 percent of research participants in both interviews and FGD support the goal of Amhara ethnicity to be ensuring peaceful coexistence with other ethnic groups under the umbrella of the Ethiopian state through ensuring equality and non-discrimination. These informants represent a section of society who question the legitimacy of the constitutional and institutional arrangements of the country. Indeed, they demand the revision of the constitution and redrawing of some territorial boundaries to include the interests of Amhara that relegated or unconsciously lost in the making of the federal order. The protection of right of Amhara living in other ethnic territorial units of the country is also at stake. One FGD participant, who belonged to NaMA, has summarized this conception:

Our nationalism [Amhara nationalism] does not put Ethiopia aside. We stand for the territorial integrity of the country; it is the grievance born out of TPLF's anti-Amhara and anti-Pan-Ethiopian agenda, and the failure of Pan-Ethiopian parties to be a voice for atrocities against Amhara while they got support from the same people that led us to organize along Amhara ethnic line (FGDDB2 March 5, 2020).

According to APP chief secretary, the party has followed a multi-national brotherhood approach in which all regional states would ensure both the group and individual rights of all citizens and major decisions would make through consociational elite-based dialogue (Interview, October 16, 2020). According to the former president of NaMA, NaMA believes no political problem of the country is hard to solve through dialogue and negotiations with other groups and it is committed to that. He further says:

We need a democratic country in which Amhara as an ethnic group are equally respected vis a vis other ethnic groups of the country and an Ethiopian state that represents all ethnic groups including Amhara which apparently needs an inclusive dialogue and negotiation followed by constitutional amendment and some concessions on the federal design (interview, October 9, 2020).

As framed by the two Amhara parties (NaMA and ADP-APP), the goals of Amhara nationalism revolve around the following issues: Changing the narratives surrounding “oppressor nationality” that master narrative which the federal edifice is built up on; issues related to constitutional amendment; heightened territorial claim more particularly the Wolkayit and Raya; the violations of rights against Amhara living in other regions. The goals of NaMA and ADP-APP have

similarities and articulated the questions largely raised during the Amhara protests in a rudimentary way. Hence there is a basic alignment between the two parties when it comes to Amhara questions. The differences in these goals between the two parties lie in the specific issues that APP does not assert its claim. For instance, NaMA claims compensations for Amhara being disadvantaged as a result of the contested census and socio-economic discrimination. There are also areas in territorial claims where APP is being shy, especially regarding Metekel and *Derra* (territorial claims from Benishangul-Gumuz and Oromia regions respectively) while NaMA is loud in all territorial claims. The reason might be related to the issue of accountability, as most of the current APP leaders were part of the ‘problems’ or for political reasons.

In spite of the above alignment of goals of the two parties, many criticize Amhara nationalism and its political and civic organizations as having no clear and commonly shared goal to achieve. If one looks at the activism and interviews of party officials to the state Media, there is a dilemma to take up multi-national federalism or civic citizenship, Pan-Ethiopia agenda. Indeed, expert interviewees express their concern for ‘discrepancy’ in the Amhara nationalism. APP officially announced pursuing a multi-national federalism with means of redressing the problems of Amhara living in other regions. This was amplified during the election campaign and recently by its program. NaMA neither puts explicitly multi-federal design nor civic citizenship as a goal. Its difference with APP would lie on if the recent Pan-Ethiopian rhetoric appeared to the party’s official strategic goal.

Given the widely promoted narrative of NaMA officials such as “we never turn our back to Ethiopia that we built it”, there would be an alignment of goals with the Pan-Ethiopianist parties than APP. Observing this, one expert informant comments as: “I want Amhara nationalism to have its own flag, symbol, icons, narratives and clear shared goals to achieve. Otherwise, Amhara nationalists would face the challenge of making Ethiopian things for Amhara which is not effective” (KIIAC3 February 26, 2020). NaMA leader’s excessive claims over Ethiopian statehood and hard rhetoric that consider Amhara as the pillar of Ethiopian polity invites criticisms from both Amhara and other ethnic groups. Hegemonic framing of the Ethiopian polity is hugely contentious that relegated the role of other ethnic groups in the making of the Ethiopian statehood. As a result other ethnic groups view the current Amhara nationalism with suspicion and they consider it as a threat.

Recently, since the war begins in the northern part of the country; some officials of NaMA appeared to be engaged in the Pan-Ethiopian discourse as a strategic goal of Amhara ethnicity. This was strongly pronounced during the active engagement of the war and the election campaign. One of the members of central committee who has been working in one of the executives of NaMA reflects:

Concerns about a change in attitude within NaMA regarding the future of Amharas living in other regional states are developing. There is an argument that asserts that we cannot protect them only through amplifying Amharaness. Rather, it should be through a Pan-Ethiopian outlook that they can live with the ethnic groups they have been living with (KIIP7, April 7, 2022).

As the vice president of NaMA, Yesuf Ibrahim, underlined in a televised election campaign that acquiring an ethnic agenda is temporal and tactical for NaMA and they do not want to be representatives of Amhara ethnic group in the future (when the heightened ethnonationalism get tone down).⁹⁶ This assertion also begs the question of what makes Amhara nationalism different from other ethno-nationalisms and/or from Pan-Ethiopianists? Data obtained from ASC meetings and discussion papers and officials of NaMA, indicated Amhara nationalism holds the middle ground of the two extremes: the Pan-Ethiopian agenda that pursue civic citizenship incompatible with the current political reality of the country and some ethno-nationalist parties who aspire to secede from the federation.

7.9. Conclusion

After the overthrow of the imperial system of government by the Ethiopian revolution of 1974, and the subsequent ousting of the military Marxist regime that displaced it in 1991, the new regime attempted to redress the national question by introducing a federal system in which the federal units were defined (modeled on the USSR) by ethno-linguistic criteria. Each of the major language groups thus acquired its autonomous state within the federation. The area within which Amharic was widely spoken as a native language thus became the Amhara state. The etic conception that the presence of a unified Amharic-speaking people associated with the Ethiopian state which constituted in national oppression perspective, became a foundation for the new political system since 1991 and the main cause for the rise of Amhara nationalism.

⁹⁶<https://www.facebook.com/100000570262721/posts/4637453196283643/> (Accessed June 44, 2021)

After 1991, political discourse shifted from “Amhara ruling class oppression” to “Amhara oppressors-other oppressed nationalities”. The subsequent state structure re-enforced by the implicit discursive shift, at least within the local elites, encouraged ethnic animosity such that those elites instigated violence against the people who are supposed to be Amhara. Amhara activism became particularly acute with the expulsion (or even murder) of Amharic speakers living in areas assigned to other regional states, who regarded themselves simply as Ethiopians. The perceived and real marginalization of the people in the Amhara region has hardened, which eventually led to the development of reactive Amhara ethnicity.

In recent years, Amharas have increasingly come to feel that they can better protect their interests by identifying themselves as a single ethnicity than by clinging to the pan-Ethiopian national identity, with important implications for the current political discontent and future of Ethiopia. Amhara nationalism is a political force that was sidelined in the post-1991 political reforms in Ethiopia and remained left out during the making of the constitution and federal arrangement and its subsequent internal restructuring. It is the result of a political reality that a nation-state system and its centralized structures are replaced by a non-representative devolved system. A more open and accommodative political system would have enabled it to serve the Amhara interests better, and Amhara ethnicity could be an entry point and a factor that will take it to a new height of legitimacy to begin a ‘genuine’ practice of nation-building.

The irony is that the narrative that portrayed Amhara as a marker of oppression and assimilation in the pre-1991 period and the replica of the nation state at regional state level is another determinant of the development of Amhara ethnicity. The Amhara ethnicity does not completely reject the current constitution or the federal system based on ethnicity, as this chapter demonstrates. Amhara nationalists call for constitutional change, territory “restoration”, and other improvements to the current framework. Therefore, it is reasonable to claim that Amhara, a key component of Ethiopia’s state-nation system, has been “pushed back” from the creation of the federal system and that they now want integration into it as a result of internal reorganization and subsequent political engagement.

Chapter Eight

Political and Institutional Implications of Amhara Nationalism

8.1. Introduction

As ethnonationalism has emerged in reaction to the mythologies and institutional approaches of Ethiopian nationalism, Amhara ethnicity has emerged in reaction to ethnonationalism and its political and institutional establishments. This chapter deals with the effects that Amhara ethnicity brought to the existing political system. It has two broader parts i.e., the implications of Amhara ethnicity on the political discourse and institutional set-up of the Amhara region, and on the federal system as a whole. The political discourse and institutional elements of the Amhara region have seen numerous transformations, as will be covered in this chapter. Political discourse with a flavor of revolutionary democracy, as well as the name of the regional state and its flag, has all been questioned and some have been rejected. The chapter also shows the (re) naming practices at the regional and local government level that came underway after 2018 as an implication of Amhara ethnicity. It also discusses the response of intra-regional identities notably the minority ethnic groups and provincial sentiments towards Amhara ethnicity. By analyzing particular changes in federal issues, the second part has set out the effect of Amhara ethnicity on the federal order, and the nation-building practice that is going in progress. The hostile nature of intergovernmental relations and situations of Amhara living in other regional states eventually call for constitutional amendment and additional mechanism to redress the flaws of the existing federal system and its founding political discourse.

8.1. Amhara Ethnicity and Its implications on the Regional Political Dynamics

Following the Amhara protests of 2016 and the subsequent party fragmentation within EPRDF, the local political dynamics have been going differently in Amhara region in such a way that affects the institutional responsibilities of both the regional and local governments. The popular protest, relatively confined to Amhara and Oromo ethnic groups is the game changer that brought the 2018 ‘political change’. Emerging Amhara ethnicity also brings the public to the political life, especially the youth. An increase the political and ethnic consciousness brought a paradigm shift from ‘stay away from politics’ into active participation in political parties, protests, and activism. Amahara protest, later claimed to be called Amhara nationalism, was a

means to force ANDM to drift into makeovers and accept the Amhara ethnic agendas. One of the executive committee members of ANDM (ADP) says:

We are certainly drawn into *tehadiso* [renewal] by the pressure of the people. Despite the EPRDF Council having put a direction in this regard before, the pressure that pushes us to go for it for real are the people. I would say that the people of Amhara mobilized ANDM in this regard, and the party gave credit to the people (September 2019).

However, the impact of Amhara nationalism on the legitimacy of the regional government is ambivalent. The growth of ethno-national movement and the weakening of TPLF following the fragmentation of EPRDF from within has finally provided legitimacy to the ANDM (Teshome, 2018). On the other hand, the accusation that ANDM is subordinate to those who controlled the federal power has endured. The critics saw ANDM as a vassal of TPLF and implementing its political ideology at the cost of Amhara, and their interests now shift to APP, which is acting in the interests of the Oromo-dominated federal government (pronounced by a section of Amhara nationalists as *Teregnnet*) rather than the interests of the Amhara people. This is partly because APP failed to appear to be the vanguard of Amhara interest, in the eyes of the public, as the atrocities on Amhara living in other regional states worsened now more than ever, let alone enhancing Amhara political power at the federal level.

8.2. The Politics of Naming

8.2.1. The Flag and Nomenclature of the Regional State

Despite there being no survey on whether or not the regional people care about the regional flag, one can hardly argue that it is loved by the people. Apparently, when the regional state was established, the flag of EPDM continued to be the regional flag. While other regional states adopted a flag which supposed to express the values and cultures of the people Amhara region preferred to hold EPDM's flag which evokes Marxist ideology which is still unchanged. According to a by-law of EPDM, the emblem represented by a star at the center of the flag represents solidarity with anti-imperialist peoples around the world (a by-law of EPDM, Assembled in, *Memoir struggle*, and 2004 Vol. 3). Amhara nationalists have been reiterating as this flag has to change since it does not reflect the values of regional people.

In March 2021 the Amhara regional council discussed changing the regional flag. The House has delivered as it is too late as the people announced the flag does not represent and passed a decision to adopt a new regional flag within 6 months. Despite the regional state's proposal samples to be voted on social media encountered opposition as it is not an ideal time because of the war with TPLF. Currently, the regional flag is not weaved in the region.⁹⁷

The politics of naming is strong in the Ethiopian political discourse (Mulugeta and Fiseha, 2015). However, it hardly gets academic attention. Naming the people of a certain constituent unit, public institutions, governments, and governance systems is a very sensitive political issue. Mulugeta and Fiseha (2015) explain the reasons as:

Names are expected to summarize the nature, purpose, and behavior of the entities they represent. Secondly, names convey messages with a direct bearing on the popular perception of a system or an entity and therefore contribute to its approval or rejection by the public.” (Mulugeta and Fiseha, 2015 p. 89).

In Ethiopia, the name of the federal design (ethnic [*ye gossa*] versus multi-national), ethnic groups (variously called “nation”, “nationality” or “peoples”), and constituent units (while the federal constitution named them as “states”, state constitutions call themselves “national regional states”) are contested. In the same vein, the naming of Amhara people became the point of controversy following the development of Amhara ethnicity. The name that traditionally ANDM uses “the people of Amhara regional state” (የአማራ ክልል ህዝቦች) and “those who originated in Amhara regional state” (የአማራ ክልል ተዋላጆች) is criticized by Amhara nationalists as it excludes Amhara living in other regional states. They instead suggest the name “the people of Amhara ‘የአማራ ህዝብ’”. The name is a demand on the regional state to represent and promote the interests of the Amharas living outside of the Amhara regional state.

The argument goes to the word *Hizb* to mean “people” itself is plural and includes Amhara outside of the regional state and the intra-state minorities. However, intra-state minorities prefer the preexisting name or the plural one, “Amhara peoples” feeling exclusion in the new name. The regional officials and representatives disclosed as they are in trouble choosing which one is

⁹⁷(Amhara TV News) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmgtAf9Tg3E> (Accessed on March 13, 2021).

appropriate in a time of making a speech. This notion was the point of debate during the 12th ANDM congress while the ANDM was replaced by ADP. ADP has passed by vote with additional operational definition that says: “the word Amhara means all Amhara people living inside and outside of the regional state and includes the Agaw, Argoba, Kimant and Oromo nationalities resided in the regional state”. ANDM has been criticized for its subordination to the TPLF and for working for the latter’s interest. The accusation extends to the presence of “non-Amhara” persons in the political decision of the regional state. These people are believed to have an ethnic origin other than Amhara and other ethnic groups inside the regional state and collaborate for the interests of other ethno-nationalists. The discourse on the naming of the party is particularly emanated from this impression. Before the congress session, the central committee of ANDM expelled those officials believed to have no ethnic origin from the peoples of the regional state. However, the dilemma encountered the regional institutions and officials still unresolved. Triggered by Amhara ethnic activism, such politics of naming has manifested practically in (re)naming of places and institutions of the regional state.

8.2.2. (Re) Naming Places and Institutions

Following the Amhara protests of 2016 and the subsequent party fragmentation within EPRDF, the local political dynamics have been going differently in Amhara national regional state. The endorsement of questions rallying behind the Amhara protests and afterward by the regional party somehow began to affect the institutions of both the regional and local governments.

The regular (as opposed to ethnic ones) local government councils and the executive organs to pass identity motivated decisions under the guise of renaming of local governments themselves (name of woredas, Kebeles, Sub-cities), streets, airport and erecting monuments of presumed heroes of both the national and local population. These persons were disgraced by the EPRDF government as members of the oppressive ruling class.

Parallel to the experience of Oromia region, where extensive renaming practice has been made since 1991, there was also a tendency to renaming of places and local governments into their ‘original’ names particularly in Wollo. The Speaker of the regional state council also confirms, some of the decisions have been sent to the regional state council to inform about changes

(Interview, December 23, 2020).⁹⁸ As would be discussed latter, this encountered strong resistance. In spite of such resistance, local units renamed schools, health centers and other sectorial institutions. Considering the Amhara regional state constitution does not give detailed provisions of local government functions, the renaming of streets and local areas is a kind of emerging issue that might broaden the competencies of regular local governments to exercise such competencies largely related to identity matters.

The post 1991 political discourse had demonized and stigmatized the leaders of the preceding regimes as oppressors. It also sidelined those showing empathy towards them by tagging names like *timkihtagna* (chauvinist). The class analysis of political mobilization of the regional government accompanied by the narrative of “Amhara oppressive ruling class” has led to engaging in disgracing almost all individuals associated with the state by the time and their legacies. EPDM (ANDM) has begun to impose new names, in some cases rename various places and institutions associated with the regime’s political ideology.

Names such as *Ginbot 20* and *Hidar 11* are notoriously coined as names of sub-cities, schools, an airport, health centers, greeneries, and recreational places in urban centers of Amhara regional state in the last three decades. The names are signifying just a month and date. *Ginbot 20* (May 28) is a day that EPRDF seized Addis Ababa defeating the Dergue regime and *Hidar 11* (November 20) is the month and date that EPDM was established. The Amhara activists strongly argued that the Amhara people have not benefited from *Ginbot 20* victory rather it should be considered as the day in which the suffering of the people just begun accompanied by a state system instituted based on the rhetoric of Amhara oppressor-oppressed nationalities. Most elite of the regional state have perceived that ANDM as a trusteeship governor of TPLF on the Amhara people and it was shy in struggling against TPLF’s motives which were costly to Amhara. Hence the date the party was established is not worthy to celebrate by the Amhara people.

This was accentuated by the Amhara protests and the unfolding Amhara activism forced the regional government embarked upon changing names hated by such public mobilization. In Bahir Dar city, the names of two sub-cities was immediately changed by the same council. The

⁹⁸ However, the Speaker reserved to mention the name(s) of local governments that decide to change their names.

first sub-city was formerly known as *Hidar 11* was changed into *Atse Tseodros*, the name of an Ethiopian emperor (1855-1868) with whom the modern history of Ethiopia is associated. The second sub-city's name *Ginbot 20* was replaced by *Menelik II* (188-1913). The renaming was not made by the city council. Rather it was decided by the council of the sub-city structurally found beneath the city council. Information obtained from Bahir Dar city council indicates that like the Woreda(s) have done to the regional council, the sub-cities merely notify them by letter about the renaming. The fact that there are no clearly defined functions provided to the city council regarding the naming and renaming of institutions, streets, and other physical features. Hence, the issue of renaming does not seem a planned and well-initiated measure of the sub-city. It was made for the sake of calming down the protest of the people by avoiding EPRDF related memories from their sight (Interview with Speaker of Atse Tewodros sub-city, April 14, 2021).

Glorifying and celebrating rulers of the preceding regimes has become the hallmark of Amhara activism. Those rulers were disgraced by the EPRDF and other ethnonationalists more broadly as the oppressive ruling class and labeled those who oppose the party's stand and admire the deeds of those kings was labeled as *timkihitegna* (chauvinist). The reason for Amhara nationalists celebrates the rulers of the past regime is the eventual blame shift by the ethno-nationalists from Amhara ruling class to all Amhara (KIIP2, October 9, 2020). The other reason is a reaction to the selective demonization of rulers because ethno-nationalists consider them as an Amhara. One interviewee says:

We need to selectively promote those who are victims of selective demonization ascribed as Amhara. Previously, ethno-nationalists consider all those who associate themselves to the Ethiopian state system as members of oppressor Amhara ruling class regardless of their ethnic origin. But now the Oromo and Tigray nationalists have been praising the ruling members of imperial regime by virtue of being Oromo and Tigray (KIIAC1, February 29, 2020).

Another research participant also reflects as:

We stand with those rulers and kings because other ethnonationalists try to judge them primordially. I personally have equal respect to Gersu Duki or Jagema Kelo with other patriots and rulers with Amhara origin and happily accept if one proposes to build a monument of them in Bahir Dar. However, they selectively demonize rulers they

consider them Amhara while they praise those who are from their ethnic group. This act has side slipped to the common Amhara people that the current generation needs to tackle it from the source i.e., praising the demonized; the ruling class who are the source of the curse descends to generations” (FGDBD1, March 5, 2020).

In fact, there are growing tendencies of celebrating and praising national heroes with an Oromo background such as Balcha Safo, Abdisa Aga, Abichu and other heroic patriots who fought against Italian colonialism in the regional mass media. Likewise, the Tigrean nationalists, including the TPLF praising emperor Yohannes. EPRDF (ANDM) renames the airport found at Bahir Dar as *Ginbot 20* by revoking the preexisting name, *Dejazmach Belay Zeleke*, a heroic patriot in the resistance against Italian occupation (1936-1941). In contrast, the two airports in Mekele and Axum in Tigray region were named as *Alula Aba Nega* and *Emperor Yohannes IV* respectively. This implies that the desire of ethnic representation of the past in a way that some imperial rulers are more equal than others. The (re)naming practice in Amhara region signifies the endorsement of the regional government about the Amhara activism to correct its previous “mistakes”, imposition of ideological names at the expense of cultural and historical values of residents.

Beside the sub-cities, the renaming practice has carried out in two places in Bahir Dar city: the airport and one street. After three names proposed for the change to be discussed and “voted” via social media and public gatherings, the former name, *Dejasmach Belay Zeleke*, was restored. The main street starts from the bridge of Blue Nile, commonly known in Amharic Abay River to the eastward way out of the city was named as *Nehassie 1 Martyrs Road* for the commemoration of youths massacred in gunshots by security forces during the Amhara protests on August 8, 2016.

The renaming practice was not made by the city council. Rather it was by the regional executive office (Interview with a legal expert of Bahir Dar City council, April 9, 2021). In addition to the practice of renaming the sub-cities themselves, the names of Kebeles have been changing as initiated by the residents. There are names of *Kebeles* changed as it has no longer liked by the residents. Two *kebeles* under the *Atse Twodros* sub-city changed their names and endorsed by the council of the sub-city. The sub-cities seem to have no plan to embark on the naming of places for further purposes by themselves. They only act on specific issues raised by the residents. They do not have the impression to see the issue of naming and renaming as one of the

functions of the local councils and reluctant to plan further activities based on clear guidelines and procedures (Interview with a legal expert of Bahir Dar City council, April 9, 2021). The city council also found in the same disposition as the sub-cities has shown. And it has been looking idly at the acts of both levels of governments: the regional executive and the sub-cities without any reactions regarding the renaming of places.

The other institution that gets into renaming practice is the Amhara People Memoir Center. It has been established by Proclamation no. 160/2001 structurally under the Regional Bureau of Culture and Tourism. The former የአማራ ክልል ህዝቦች ሰማዕታት መታሰቢያ ሐዉልት ጽህፈት ቤት (The Peoples of Amhara Regional State Martyrs Memorial Monument Office) which commonly known by the people as ሰማዕታት ሐዉልት “Martyrs monument” is renamed first as የአማራ ህዝብ ዝክረ-ታሪክ ማዕከል “Amhara People Memoir Center”. At this time, the name የአማራ ክልል ህዝብ ዝክረ-ታሪክ ማዕከል “Amhara *Regional* People Memoir Center” (Emphasis by the author) placed interchangeably.⁹⁹ About the renaming and ongoing reform activities the vice manager of the office says:

There has been public criticism of the former name “The Peoples of Amhara Regional State Martyrs Memorial Monument Office” as it contained only ten-year-old EPDM’s martyrs’ memory from 1981- to 1991 and it excludes the long-aged sacrifices, values, and history of the Amhara people. Guided by the new name, “Amhara People Memoir Center”, reform works have been underway to enable the institution to commemorate the glorious history of Amhara and represent (Lalibela Rock Church, Shonke Village, Gondar Palace, Ankober Palace, King Teklehaimanot Palace, King Michael Palace) in the compound (Interview, May 26, 2021).

There was a relentless social media protest and activism against one monument in the compound. It was an old man standing and turning his head and the muzzle of his gun to the ground. Amhara activists consider the meaning of the monument from the perspective of some TPLF officials who allegedly speak as “we brock the backbone of Amhara; we kill and buried Amhara once and

⁹⁹ [Amhara Media Corporation/ አማራሚዲያኮርፖሬሽን - Posts | Facebook](#) (Accessed, February 15, 2022). The former has been posted on the main get of the office and the later has been shown on the top of the monument. The vice manager, Mr. Addis Beyene says we are not meant to decide about the name. We have been suggesting alternative names for the public to choose. Eventually, we will take it to the regional council for endorsement.

for all”. They were campaigning to demolish the monument. It was removed as televised by the Amhara television. In spite of the heightened social media activism against the monument, there was a description of what kind of meaning the monuments conveyed published in its inauguration bulletin. Accordingly, it ought to be visualized with the young with a baby standing in front of the old man and it signifies the duality inherent in human beings; female and male, childhood and old age, sorrow and happiness, remembrance and inspiration, beginning and end. Indeed, the monument alone symbolizes the end of the war, peace, democracy, and good governance (Mezekir, 2005 pp. 13-14.¹⁰⁰ The memoir center administration insists that the monuments were removed because of not only the pressure from Amhara activism but also the presence of enduring quest from the public and visitors. Mr. Addis says:

We have been receiving comments from the public and visitors. For the people, the monument conveys information that ‘Amhara have been following burial ceremony. Amhara put down the muzzle of their gun pointing to the ground only when the dead body of their loved ones buried in the ground. It transmits a meaning saying you all are dead (Interview, May 26, 2021).

Currently, in the place of the removed monument a new one, a young soldier standing having a gun pointing its muzzle upward has planted and inaugurated by the regional cabinet members in February 2022. The new monument represented the reverse discourse that Amhara activists portrayed the former and campaigning against it. In other words, the meaning attributed to the new monument is Amhara is not broken; even if they do, they will rise again through renewal.

Place (re) naming is usually understood as one constituent of a broader political project concerned with governmentality, state formation and nation-building (Light and Young, 2018). The act of (re) naming places by EPDM (ANDM) by *Ginbot 20* and *Hidar 11* can be seen from the motive to entrench its political aspirations and project in the minds of the public and then to achieve ideological legitimation. Place naming is also instrumental to substantiate a particular set of political values and the ruling socio-political order in the urban climate (Ibid). Place names in urban centers are formed in particular political contexts so that they are subject to change along with political dynamics and when new regimes took power with different political aspirations

¹⁰⁰<https://www.govermeta.com/ET/Bahir-Dar/684770868229134/Amhara-Region-people-memoirs--Center> (Accessed, May 24, 2021).

and values from the preceding one, names will not be compatible with the new political order (Light and Young, 2018). Accordingly, it is not only the local population questioned the name of their local area as it does not express their history and value but also it is because the regional government dropped the EPRDF ideology of *Revolutionary Democracy* that the renaming practice has been made regardless of the formulations of laws and guidelines. As data obtained from the sub-city councils indicate, after renaming there was no complaint came from the people and the authorities believe their decisions were not only along with the new political direction but also the interest of the local population. Given the renaming practice largely considered as a restoration of the past memory denigrated by the EPRDF regime, it can be also said that it satisfies the identity question of the local population. This move might be justifiable since “place names are outward manifestation of how people perceive themselves, both their history and value system” (Mcebisi, 2012).

Post-apartheid South Africa has experienced numerous place name changes. The unfolding renaming process has initiated by the African National Congress (ANC) ruled government and backed by an institution called South Africa Geographical Names Council (SAGNC) (Ibid). The institution has been played issuing guidelines aiming to “eliminate duplication; rectify orthographic errors; accord official recognition to place names commonly used by residents; and to sensitize toponyms to South Africa’s democratic values and diverse history” (Ibid.). However, no place (re) naming can be made without the municipality council approval in South Africa.¹⁰¹ The intention of coordinating the local councils with SAGNC is to standardize, transform, and correct toponyms.

In Ethiopia, the practices of (re) naming of toponyms have been made since 1991. Most of them are identity-motivated actions that replace the existing name with a new but supposed to be formerly used by the ‘endogenous’ local population until changed by the expanding modern state system. Unlike the experience in South Africa, there are no regulatory mechanisms to identify which kind of names are supposed to be renamed; how the standardizations are maintained; who should decide the renaming, and in what ways the public interest and participation are ensured. The practice of renaming in Bahir Dar city and elsewhere in the region is not the exception. It

¹⁰¹Article 5 of Street and Place Making Policy of Ingquza Hill Local Municipality.<http://www.ihlm.gov.za/download/policy/STREET-AND-PLACE-MAKING-POLICY.pdf>.

has been pursued in response to the new political dynamics pushed by Amhara ethnicity that emerged in reaction to EPRDF's political values as it perceived as against the Amhara interests.

8.3. Implications on Intra-state Identities: Ethnic, Provincial and Religion

Like the case of the federal constitution, the spirit of Amhara regional constitution has guided by the national oppression thesis. There are calls for the regional state to amend the regional constitution in this regard. As indicated elsewhere above, ANDM has considered ethnic groups including groups found in Amhara region as oppressed and forgotten ones. This is from the perspective of national oppression thesis.

The rise of Amhara nationalism opposing the political discourse and practices under the banner of "Amhara oppressor-oppressed nationalities" narrative certainly has brought something a new political taste for the intra-state minorities. Based on the data gleaned from social media discourse and interviews, the attitudes of intra-state minorities, notably the Agaws (Awi and Himra) could be broadly categorized in to three. There are groups believed that both APP and NAMA do not hurt the interests of Agaw people and they will be beneficiary as far as the regional state is peaceful and keeping its unity. Others disregard Amhara nationalism like all pan-Ethiopianists do. At the earlier stages of Amhara activism, there was a counter discourse from these groups being skeptical of the tone of the discourse run by NaMA and Amhara activists. This was due to the fear that Amhara nationalism would assimilate their distinctive cultural markers. In 2018 and 2019 Amhara activism and speeches of NaMA leaders about the relation between Amhara and Agaw as 'two sides of the same coin' to mean 'Amhara means Agaw and Agaw means Amhara' was not liked by the Agaw nationalists. They claimed that Agaw are distinctive ethnic identity express their fear not to be assimilated by the alleged pursuit of nation-state by NaMA.

The case of Kimant is somewhat different from the Agaws. There is no conflict happened between the Agaws and Amhara and the discourse seems smooth between them. The political context, the temptation of Tigray region in the north and the indiscriminate attacks of the Gumuz militia in Metekel, also helped to forge unity for both groups. In contrast, following the development of Amhara nationalism, the conflict between the *Kimant* activists and the regional security forces has got intense. The quest for recognition and autonomy of the Kimant was a long running question but officially started in 2007 (Semir, 2019 p. 7). The demand of activists has

been heightened to get more *kebeles* to form a nationality administration. The Amhara nationalists saw this growing agitation as a plot to divide and weaken the unified Amhara nationalism and a form of proxy war waged by TPLF against Amhara (Semir, 2019 p. 7).

The proliferation of local political parties in the ethnic local governments in reaction to both the recent stand of the ruling regional party, and the establishment as well as consolidation of NaMA, has been the cause of strain in the regional politics. The *Agaw Shengo* and the *Kimant* Democratic Party are examples that the former sought a regional statehood while the latter a nationality administration along all Kimant residents. This is because; there are some manifestations that the parties of ethnic local governments specifically Agaw and Kimant have been allegedly getting implicit support from the structure of TPLF and Oromo nationalists. This got acute when the Oromo Media Network (OMN) arranged air time to the Kimant committee and *Agaw Shengo* leaders to express their opposition on Amhara regional government and the ongoing Amhara ethnicity. Moreover, these ethnic local parties have been discussing with the TPLF and other ‘federalist’ parties about the need for transitional government. This has an obvious political implication on the regional unity as well as its structures and responsibilities.

The internally contentious nature of Amhara nationalism also hardens provincial sentiments. *Amharaness* is an instrument of mobilization in relation to ethnonationalism and their ethnic-territorial cleavages. In the meantime intra-state ethnic groups, and provincialism (*Wollyyeness*, *Gojjameness*, *Shewaness* and *Gondareness*) which is the historically rooted one, remained influential in the intra-state political dynamics. The latter is less relevant in representing the regional state at national level. However, it might be used as a variable in the intra-state power struggle or to neutralize a heightened Amhara ethnicity. Almost all informants of FGD, interview, and informal conversations perceive provincialism has been pushed by those actors who want to use it as an instrument to weaken Amhara ethnicity for the desire of their political and material interest.

On the other hand, some proponents of provincial identity consider the relevance of provincialism from the perspective of accommodation of diversity. They argue that it is more inclusive and accommodative identity than Amhara ethnicity (KIIWH, February 26, 2020). One of the informants, proponent of provincialism, says: “it is being Wolloye that holds Oromo; Gojjam that holds Awi; Gondar that holds Qimant not Amharaness” (KIIAC3, February 26

2020). In the activism of territorial claim of *Raya* there was a strong argument that “the *Raya* people in Tigray could join their counterparts in Amhara regional state if and only if we told them that they will rejoin the people of Wollo not the Amhara people”. In contrast, the struggle for territorial claim of Wolkayit is accompanied by Amharaness rather than Gondar provincialism.

The above assertion suffers from limitations since the intra-state ethnic groups consciously identify their ethnic boundary and have been enjoying their political autonomy. As discussed in chapter five, this reality to some extent contributed as one of the causes of Amhara ethnicity. The affirmative action in nationality administrations given to members of respective ethnic minorities has brought ethnic consciousness among the Amhara who are living and working in the areas. The Kimant ethnic mobilization precedes the Amhara ethnic mobilization and nourished by the national oppression thesis that increase the ethnic consciousness of Amhara. Moreover, the context of unreserved attacks against Amhara living in other regional states mistrust and confrontation of the Amhara region with the Tigray and Oromia regions overshadowed Provincial identities, as the former creates collective victimhood. However, it does not mean that provincial identities being politically not salient, they still exist beneath, and appear in relation to Amhara nationalism itself or manifest themselves in internal political struggle. Both NaMA’s and APP’s leadership arrangements appear to be directed toward ensuring equitable representation for these provinces.

The social media activism reiterates provincial identities are serious threats to Amharaness and they are inherently mutually exclusive. Tendencies of discouraging traditional singers when they come up with songs celebrating provincial issues (Gojjam, Shewa, Gondar and Wollo) instead commending to come up with songs only mention Amhara. Moreover, the name four provinces replaced by directional names such as western Amhara, eastern Amhara and northern Amhara on social media.¹⁰² In fact the regional state government have been used names western and eastern Amhara for the feasibility of provision services and public meetings without replacing provincial names. However, the main aim of this activism was to replace those names only by

¹⁰² It seems that an attempt to create a monolithic ethnic identity as the case of Tigray in which traditional provincial names such as *Temben*, *Raya*, *Axum*, *Adwa* and *Shire* were replaced by western, central and southern Tigray

Amhara. This move had suffered from criticism and opposition not only from the members of intra-state identity groups but also Amhara nationalists and activists themselves.

Following the renaming practice in Oromia that many place names were changed since 1991 by the alleged former endogenous name, in the course of 2018 and 2019, Amhara activists were campaigning to ‘restore’ the former name of Wollo i.e., *Amhara* or *Bete-Amhara*. Wollo is considered as a new name coined to the areas after the advent of the Oromo in the 16th century. This move encountered with opposition that eventually evolved in to a civic organization called Wollo Hibret.

The former Chair of Wollo Hibret says:

በአማራ ብሄርተኝነት ጅረት ውስጥ የሙሰሊሙን እግር የሚፍቅ ድንጋይ አለ እርሱም ክርስትና ሀይማኖት ነዉ። በተመሳሳይም ወሎየነት ጅረት ውስጥ የአማራውን ብሄርተኛ እግር የሚፍቅ ድንጋይ አለ (ያንን ድንጋይ ለማንሳት ሞከሩ፣ ስም መቀየር ወሎ-ቤተአማራ) ይህ ሲሆን እኛ ወሎዎች ራሳችንን ሪዲፋይን አደርግን ወሎ ህብረት

There is an unpleasant thing within Amhara nationalism for the Muslim i.e., flavor of Christianity. Likewise, there is an unpleasant thing within Wolloyeness for Amhara nationalists i.e., [*Oromoness?*] they [Amhara nationalists] tried to avoid that thing by replacing the name Wollo by *Bete-Amhara*. At this juncture, we the Wolloyes redefine ourselves and established Wollo Hibret (Interview, February 27, 2020).

Some consider this kind of activism and calling everything exclusively in the name of Amhara came from frustration resulted from losing alternative with which identity (Amhara or Ethiopian) to affiliate since both expose vulnerability for discrimination. And as a last resort people acquire Amharaness and they stick themselves and other related issued to the name Amhara. ‘It is a kind of holding the bull by its horn’ one informant explains the motive for the loud tone of Amhara by the activists as:

Since the name Amhara is hated by ethnonationalists, people opt to identify themselves by their provincial identity. In so doing, they might escape from the sharp sword despite discrimination is inevitable. The response of the system is the same whether someone has identified them as an Ethiopian or Amhara. In the absence of alternatives, Amhara activism has emerged calling Amhara loudly and exclusively. The actors in the social

media activism want the prevalence of the name Amhara and this emanated from the cupidity for the name they pay for it (KIAC1, February 29 2020).

Informants from APP suggested that making Amharaness as a main rallying point does not mean abandoning provincialism. Celebrating provincialism does not compromise Amharaness unless it is used for political mobilization. NaMA seems correcting the discourse creates dissatisfaction in some areas and groups. The former president of NaMA summarizes this as:

Since its establishment, NaMA was the focus of Media and we also use it to promote us. We initially related Amhara with Christianity and made other politically incorrect mistakes. Unfortunately, we did not get a chance to correct those mistakes by the same channel. We have many woredas in which all the cabinets are Muslims (Interview, October 9, 2020).

Provincial sentiments have endured throughout the governance system of ANDM. Almost all the four regions have shown this sentiment in varying degrees since the rise of Amhara nationalism. What makes the Wollo provincial sentiment epic in this regard is the presence of additional variable in it i.e., religion, Islam. Muslim elites from this area criticized NaMA as having a narrative drawn from the medieval times Christian highland kingdom. And they tried to justify the inclusive capacity of *Wolloyeness* than *Amharaness*.

NaMA leaders on their part, strongly criticize the perception from Muslim elites that the party and Amhara ethno-national movement has inclinations to orthodox Christianity does not represent all Muslim Amhara. Rather it is purposefully propagated by either former friend, if not currently foes, dissatisfied for not being the founder and leader of NaMA or others having their own political agenda (KIIP1, February 29, 2020 and KIIP2, February 28, 2020).

Some informants consider accusations ‘Amhara nationalism has strong flavor of Christianity’ from some Muslim elites miss the context that Christian Amhara nationalists have a right to promote their cultural marker, their religion, that was criminalized by the TPLF led government as “a religion of *neftegna*”. One informant says:

Orthodox Church was (is) the target of ethnonationalist elites and the political system since it has been considered as a religion of Amhara ethnic group. Amhara nationalists celebrate the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is in reaction to victimization of spiritual value

of their ethnic group not using the national movement to achieve religious goals (KIIAC1, February 28, 2020).

One interviewee also summarizes it as:

Associating Amhara nationalism with Christianity does not make sense in two respects: Amhara nationalism is caused by victimization inflicted from other ethno-nationalists. In addition to Amhara ethnic group, Orthodox Church has been demonized and criminalized too in which most of Amhara people belonged to. The other is NaMA is one manifestation of the development of Amhara nationalism and does not fully represent it (KIIAC2, February 28, 2020).

The most important point however, as discussed in the preceding chapter, both the Muslims and Christians targeted under the existing political discourse because of their common denominator, Amharaness as ascribed by relevant others. Indeed, there is no evidence that Amhara was able to escape victimization by virtue of being Muslim or having provincial identity.

8.4. Implications to the Federal System

8.4.1. On the Terms of “Nations, Nationalities and Peoples”

The dichotomy entrenched in the politics of naming diverse federal systems in general and the Ethiopian case, in particular, has boldly prevailed these days. As indicated in chapter three, the issue of how the FDRE constitution understands the terms “nations”, “nationalities”, and “peoples” and how the constitution understands them is also debated among scholars and politicians. The debate is basically between those Pan-Ethiopian oppositions that consider the terms of “nations, nationalities, and peoples” as (ye gossa federalism) a “tribal” organization of a polity (Mulugeta and Fiseha, 2015). On the other hand, it has been argued that despite the practical degeneration towards primordialism, the constitution and its definition of the terms “nations, nationalities, and peoples” enable individual citizens to define themselves with a certain ethnic group without claiming common ancestral descent (Assefa, 2018).

The argument here is the federal constitution and its framers have let, if not dictate, the regional states (ethnic groups) (re)define themselves as a “nation” or “nationality” or “people” that point to a social constructionist approach to ethnicity. The state constitution of Oromia uses “people” and “nation” interchangeably in referring to the Oromo. While the Amhara state constitution and

ordinary laws use none of the three terms to refer to the Amhara. However, it uses the term “nationality” for Awi, Himra, Oromo, Argoba, and Kimant. The reason for its failure to name Amhara as one of the three terms is not clear. It may be deliberate or poor draftsmen. A founding member of EPDM was asked about this. The response confirms the above conception of the three terms. They, EPDM officials, saw Amhara as a nation and others as nationalities and part and parcels of the Amhara nation. However, the informant did not explain why the state constitution fails to explicitly recognize Amhara as a nation like in the case of other state constitutions. The “denial of constitutional recognition” to the Amhara creates a sense of statelessness among the Amhara activists. Especially after the issue has appeared in the social media discourse as Amhara is not legally the owner of the regional state even if it has been named by the ethnic group. Other intra-state ethnic group activists, who oppose Amhara ethnicity, seem not to want to endorse the name of the region, as they use the term “*Kilil 3*” (region 3), the name all regions provisionally named during the transitional period. This obviously created frustration for the Amhara counterparts.

On the other hand, the constitutions of Gambella and Benishangul Gumuz labeled the “indigenous” groups as “nationalities” and the “non-indigenous” named as “people”. The Harari and Afar constitutions use the term ‘people’ to define themselves. Related to this; such claims go beyond constitutions in practical scenarios. A typical example of this is the claim of independent regional statehood by the Sidama. An interesting discourse appeared after the request for regional statehood by the council of nationalities of the regional state; the Sidamas’ request has dramatically shifted into the naming of the ethnic group itself. This is explicitly available in the letters exchanged between the council of nationalities (under letter no.11/157/98; date 02/01/1998 E.C. (Ethiopian Calendar); No. 19/165/98; Date 8/01/1998E.C.), and the Sidama Zone council (No. 2/41/1623; Date 08/11/1997 E.C.; no. 2/5/1758 Date 20/01 E.C. For instance, the latter wrote a letter that demands rectification of the former’s letter which declined the request for regional statehood. The demand of the letter was not about the declined content but the naming of Sidama as “nationality” to be corrected into “nation”. This strengthens the implicit distinctive definition of the three terms which let the groups define and redefine them to give meaning to the changing realities. Here, arguably to say that the Sidama nationality council believed that if they are called a “nation” their claim for regional statehood will be achieved

easily. They eventually secured it. The Sidama were finally able to create their own regional state in 2020 after being consistently rejected by both the regional and federal administrations.

The terms of the debate over the term “nation” and its implicit implication have been one of the crucial internal political discourses in other multi-national federations like Canada and Spain. In Canada, Quebec wants to be a nation but the constitution calls it a “distinct nation” which equates the Quebecois with other indigenous minorities. The federal government refused to define the francophone population as a nation and regarded the motion as an “unusual request” that could lead to the quest for independence.¹⁰³ After the liberals in Quebec adopted “a nation within Canada” a special clause was included to recognize Quebec’s “distinct society” and at the same time reduce demands for secession (Nordström, 2006).

The same issue was the case in point in Spain pertaining to the claim of Catalan nationhood. In 2017, the Spanish government denounces the secessionist decision of the people of Catalonia because they are nationalities, not nations.¹⁰⁴ There was a clause saying “we the nation of Catalonia” in the 2006 Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia passed by both the legislature of Catalonia and Spain, and ratified by Catalan voters in a referendum. However, the case was sent to the constitutional court and decided it is unconstitutional saying “The interpretation of the references to “Catalonia as a nation” and to “the national reality of Catalonia” in the preamble of the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia have no legal effect.”¹⁰⁵ The irony behind this was the fear of secession claims that the federal government knows that they will ask for self-determination and secession.

As discussed in chapter three, the understanding of the FDRE constitution on ethnic groups of the country is based on the Bolshevik underpinnings. Apart from the political and scholarly debate on the political interpretation of Amhara nationalists wanted the amendment of the beginning phrase of the preamble “We the nations, nationalities, and peoples of Ethiopia”, “providing that this is linked with Article 8, guarantying sovereignty on such groups, and Article

¹⁰³<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/nov/24/mainsection.international1> (Accessed, July 7, 2022).

¹⁰⁴This was a speech delivered when Francesco Palermo presents a paper on the symposium held at sub-national constitutions in federal systems in Addis, on Dec. 1 2017.

¹⁰⁵<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/10/catalonia-referendum/541611/> (Accessed, July 7, 2022).

39 (1), providing unconditional secession, the implication thereof is that the intra-state minorities have been living under the tyranny of titular groups. Out of the realm of Amhara nationalism, leading Ethiopian scholars also have been suggesting amendments to the naming of ethnic groups and their intent. For instance, Bahru Zewude, a prominent historian of modern Ethiopia who thoroughly studied the Ethiopian student movement and the national question suggested an amendment on the terms “nations nationalities and peoples”. He recently wrote:

Replace the confusing expression “nation, nationalities, peoples” with the single word “nationalities”. This mitigates the implication of some ethnic groups are more equal than others and puts everyone on an equal footing. And the term “peoples” should be replaced by “people” and promoted to use it for the whole Ethiopian population” (Bahru, 2021).¹⁰⁶

In such requests for a constitutional amendment, there is a desire to escarp the term “nation”. Like the case in Canada and Spain opponents of the above articles fear ethnic groups would ask for secession at some point which is inherently antithetical to the very essence of federalism and threatens the territorial integrity of the state. Bahru extends his suggestion that Article 39(1) should be removed and replaced by the provision inserted in Article 88 (2) which says: “Government shall have the duty to strengthen ties of equality, unity, and fraternity among them”.

8.4.2. Constitutional Amendment (Revision)

In divided societies, constitution-making process is likely to be controversial given the inevitable heightened political polarization between groups holding extreme views on the existing state (Kossler, 2018 p. 22). The problems of constitutional legitimacy and the on current controversies are centered on the non-representative adopting process in 1994. The framers’ intent entrenched in the preamble of the constitution is the source of discomfort that seem implicitly endorse the presence of oppressor nation and oppressed nationalities in pre-1991 times. The institutionalization of ethnicity and its subsequent federal design, the unconditional right to secession, the national flag and emblem, the state ownership of land, and the status and governance of Addis Ababa are all contested. The idea of constitutional amendment was a political taboo in pre-2018 period (Zelalem, 2019 p 29). Raising such issue might lead to inviting unprecedented consequence on oneself or accused for an attempt to dismantle the constitution

¹⁰⁶ [የኢትዮጵያ ተቃራኒ ጥያቄዎችን ቅናሽ ማድረግ ስላለበት \(sebategna.com\)](http://sebategna.com) (Accessed, March 7, 2021)

and constitutional order. Such ideas, incessantly raised by the Pan-Ethiopian political forces, were labeled as anti- democratic thoughts of ‘*neftegna* Amhara’ forces who sought to restore the previous oppressive systems (Semahegn, 2014 p 96).

The FDRE constitution is characterized by lack of legitimacy and imperfection in which the textual and substantive models of constitutional amendment are not suitable (Zelalem, 2019). After two and half decades of authoritarian political practice with rigidity in issues of constitutional amendment, prospects of constitutional reform appeared possible already in the acceptance speech made by PM Abiy Ahmed in April 2018.¹⁰⁷

However, there are extreme positions among the main potential actors of the country ranging between those who oppose any action of amendment at all and those who want total replacement. While TPLF officially positioned to the first, centrist (Pan-Ethiopianists) elites sided, informally through social media activism, to the second. Afrobarometer finds out that 69 percent of Ethiopians support amending the constitution while 18 percent want to be kept unchanged and 11 percent says it should be abrogated and replaced (Afrobarometer, 2020).¹⁰⁸ The constitution has little legitimacy from the Amhara people even before the development of Amhara ethnicity. Afterwards, the demand for constitutional amendment has been one of the features of Amhara activism. Both ADP/APP and NaMA have vowed to struggle for the substantial amendment of the FDRE constitution. ADP officially demands amendment on the federal constitution in May 2019.¹⁰⁹ However, the issue appeared to be a point of disagreement even within EPRDF, during the merger process that ultimately led to the formation of PP. While the TPLF that already refused to join PP, keep resisting any pursuit of constitutional amendment and acting as if the

¹⁰⁷ In his meeting with opposition party leaders, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said that all the issues could be raised including constitutional amendment. Yared Tsegaye, *News: Defunct Political Parties Negotiation Forum Leaders at Odd with PM Abiy's Fresh Talk with Opposition*, ADDIS STANDARD, Dece. 5, 2018, available at <http://addisstandard.com/news-defunct-political-parties-negotiationforum-leaders-at-odds-with-pm-abiys-fresh-talk-with-opposition/> (Accessed on August 22, 2020).

¹⁰⁸ https://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/ab_r8_presentation_federalism_and_constitutional_amendments_25082020.pdf (Accessed, September 22, 2021).

¹⁰⁹ “Amhara Region decides on the amendment of the Ethiopian Constitution”, Amhara TV News, May 8.2019.

guardian of the constitution and ethnic groups of the country.¹¹⁰ According to data obtained from one of the officials of ADP at federal office, there was strong opposition from member parties on the agenda of constitutional amendment, especially on the right to unconditional self-determination up to secession (Interview, October 16, 2019). The tactical alliance of ADP and ODP seemed to have been fragile and their members have been eyeing each other suspiciously.¹¹¹ Despite the divergent positions, a senior member of ANDM and member of the parliament informs as a national committee has been established to conduct studies regarding constitutional amendment (Interview, November 18, 2019). Therefore, it appears constitutional amendment seems to be inevitable in Ethiopia.

In the main, NaMA has opened the Pandora's Box of demanding constitutional amendment. By April 2020, it officially initiated a proposed amendment for 15 articles of the constitution including the preamble.¹¹² The party also requested the government to begin the process for constitutional amendment, as the election was postponed because of COVID 19 pandemic. To mention some of the proposed amendment by NaMA are: the naming of the people of the country by "unclear Marxist terms" as nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia and the subsequent guarantee of sovereign power to them to be replaced by "the people of Ethiopia"; the secession clause that endanger the territorial integrity of the state and antithetical to federalism to be erased; restructuring of the constituent units in a way that prohibits one ethnic group is the owner of one unit; the replacement of the first past the post electoral system by PR with party list electoral system, the public ownership of land and the status of Addis Ababa.

¹¹⁰*Tigray State President Dr. Debretsion Gebremichael Says the Ethiopian Federal System is Being Destroyed*. TIGRAI ONLINE, Aug. 15, 2018, available at <http://www.tigraionline.com/articles/debretsion-gmichael-pr818.html>

(Accessed on 17 August 2019); Kibreab Beraki, *TPLF: Struggle in Defense of Revolutionary Democracy...and Federal System is Expected*, ETHIOPIA INSIGHT, Oct. 24, 2018, available at <https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2018/10/24/tplf-struggle-in-defense-of-revolutionary-democracy-and-federal-system-is-expected/> (Accessed on 10 August 2019).

¹¹¹International Crisis Group (ICG), *Restoring Calm in Ethiopia after High-profile Assassinations*, Statement/Africa, (June 25, 2019), available at <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/restoringcalm-ethiopia-after-high-profile-assassinations> (Accessed on 15 August, 2019).

¹¹²https://www.facebook.com/AMHARANATIONALISM/posts/876026556206311?_tn_&_K-R April 29 2020

According to a paper, presented in the first international conference of ASC on the need for constitutional revision, content wise amendment was suggested as a better option in amending the constitution to include the Amhara interests. It also argues to repel the negative narrative against Amhara. The context, in which the constitution was crafted, shaped the spirit of the constitution which is a guiding principle and frame of understanding of the text usually placed in the preamble. In a nutshell, the paper underlined that, to change the context the narrative should be officially denounced and the denunciation needs to be incorporated in the preamble of the constitution.

Apparently, in the current political context of Ethiopia, the constitution should be amended not only for those who call for amendment but also for those who oppose because it is procedurally very rigid and need to cope with the changing realities. However, there are significant numbers of people who oppose the amendment of the articles listed by NaMA and sought by Amhara nationalist actors. For instance, Afrobarometer revealed that, the idea of removing Article 39 on self-determination is supported by 43 percent of Ethiopians while the same notion suffers from 50 percent opposition. 37 percent of Ethiopians support the removal of national emblem at the center of the flag. Contrary, 52 percent oppose it. The option makes Addis Ababa a member state of the federation has got 35 percent support but opposed by 54 percent. Allowing more land ownership by individual citizens has 46 percent supports while opposed by 49 percent (Afrobarometer, 2020).¹¹³

Amending the FDRE constitution in procedural manner is also impossible. As per the amendment procedures of the FDRE constitution, the proposed amendment of NaMA would not be submitted for discussion let alone the demands for amendment to be achieved. Article 104 stipulated as:

Any proposal for constitutional amendment, if supported by a two-thirds majority vote in the House of Peoples' Representatives, or by a two-thirds majority vote in the House of

¹¹³https://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/ab_r8_presentation_federalism_and_constitutional_amendments_25082020.pdf (Accessed, September 22, 2021).

the Federation or when one-third of the State Councils of the member States of the Federation, by a majority vote in each Council have supported it, shall be submitted for discussion and decision to the general public and to those whom the amendment of the Constitution concerns.

In addition, according to Article 105 (1), and 105(1)(a), the human right chapter that encompass the sovereignty of ethnic groups and secession clause and Article 104 can be amended when all State Councils, by a majority vote, approve the proposed amendment. Given the Tigray regional state officially announced that any attempt to amend the constitution is unacceptable, the proposed amendment could not be treated under the existing procedures of the constitution.

Amending the preamble of the constitution is uneasy task. It would be considered as an act of unconstitutional constitutional amendment. Unconstitutional constitutional amendments are non-constitutional changes that invalidate amendments that are inconsistent with the content and spirit of the constitution (Albert, 2009 p. 28). As noted above, the ethno-nationalist groups show less interest on the constitutional amendment except its democratic and full-fledged implementation. On the other hand, the Pan-Ethiopian and the Amhara political parties need the amendment.

The ASC proposed a national dialogue on constitutional revision as a better option to end this controversial nation-building issue. NaMA, in its debate during the election campaign underlined the need for an extra-constitutional amendment to constitutional legitimacy. Zelalem, who studies the politics of constitutional amendment in the context of political dynamics, recommends the political (extra-constitutional) model of amendment which necessitates public dialogue with active participation of citizens and political parties in the political process of amendment (Zelalem, 2019 p. 38). This model is commendable to the current Ethiopian context because “the civic engagement and deliberation part of the process would retrospectively cleanse the violation of stringent rules of amendment and then heal the ‘original sin’ of the constitution” (Zelalem, 2019). The government recently established a commission for national dialogue in which the issue of constitutional amendment would inevitably be part of it.

8.4.3. Implications on Amhara Living in Other Regional States and the Nature of IGR

Intergovernmental relation (IGR) is the interaction between levels of governments on matters of their common interest and it has two dimensions: relations between the federal and unit

governments (vertical) and that of inter-unit (horizontal) relations (Watts, 2008 p. 117). The desire for IGR is associated with the need to cooperation and harmonization of policies on shared programs as well as resolving constitutional disputes (Ibid.). The FDRE constitution offers little guidance on the presence of IGR between federal and regional states as well as regional states themselves (Article 48, 50(8), 62(4), 62(6), and 62(7)).

The practice of IGR in Ethiopia has been underway through executive institutions and cooperation through party channel (Assefa, 2009 pp. 19-26). The principle of democratic centralism helped for smooth horizontal and vertical relations in the last two and half decades. Following the fragmentation within the EPRDF since 2016, the capability of party channel to settle problems has deteriorated. By 2017 and 2018, ethnic animosity aggravated and the number of internally displaced people increased more than ever before. Given the absence of institutions and guidelines of IGR in Ethiopia and the broken party channel, each EPRDF coalition member parties more and more championing for their respective ethnic issues. As Aelen (2006) rightly points out, "... the ethnic based political restructuring was considered as the main defining elements of the intergovernmental relations and nation nationalities of the state conflictual and hostile (Aelen, 2006). Nevertheless, the Ministry of Peace has been working on its implementation since Proclamation No. 1231/2021 was issued, which specifies the institutions and mechanisms for IGR.

The situation of Amhara living in other regional states and the posture of Amhara regional state, especially, in appearing as a guardian of those people pursuing Amhara nationalism, state has determined the nature of the relation and cooperation with other regions and the federal government. As per some informants' response atrocities on Amhara living in other regions have increased when elites think the Amhara politics has weakened. According informants from ADP office in Benishangul Gumuz regional state, worried by the growth of Amhara nationalism and NaMA's influence in the region, the regional officials began to cooperate with ADP structure to the extent sharing one executive regional power. However, after the June 22, 2018 incident, public (non-indigenous mainly Amhara) protest in Assosa town, things have been changing. The displaced persons from Metekel say that 'the regional elites told us to leave the land and no one rescues us since Amhara region with its leaders has collapsed'.

The perception of neighboring regions on the claim of Amhara has determined the horizontal IGR. In the last three years, the relation of Amhara National Regional State with Tigray, Oromia and Benishangul-Gumuz regional states was characterized by tension. The ruling parties of each respective region were engaged in throwing words of bullets on each other. The TPLF has accused the ADP (APP), as a chauvinist, expansionist and anti-federalist. On the other hand, ADP (APP) ridicules the TPLF as corrupt, human rights violator and master of conspiracy to divide the peoples of Ethiopia that consequently aspire to return to power. The unrestrained pressure of Amhara ethnicity on the federal government about its territorial issue with Tigray, the latter engaged in strengthening regional paramilitary. The security dilemma led the Amhara region to begin the same move aiming to check the expected Tigray's encroachment. The role of Amhara ethnicity was visible when the war broke out between the federal government and Tigray region. Along the national defense force, the Amhara forces, Amhara special force, militia and *Fano*, effectively controlled the disputed territories of Wolkayit and Raya.

The contradiction within the Amhara and Oromo nationalisms have been impacted on the IGR dynamics between Amhara and Oromia regions. The devastating conflicts in the Oromo nationality Administration of the Amhara region is the outcome of such antagonism nourished by increasing assertiveness of Amhara ethnicity and the unconstrained move of Amhara regional state to ensure more regional autonomy. The nationality administration is the only autonomous unit that effectively uses the right to adopt its working language since its time of establishment. Unlike other autonomous intra-state ethnic groups of the region, the Oromo nationality administration has especial connection with Oromia region and Oromo nationalism. The tension gets worsen since the return of the OLF to the country and the triumphant reception of the people in the area and OLF fighter members spread across the nationality administration (Semir, 2019 p. 28). In return there are rumors that Amhara nationalists compounded by a section of regional security office to get rid of the autonomy status of the administration (Ibid.).

The unfolding atrocities on civilian Amharas in Oromia regional state continue was compounded with the conflict in Oromo nationality administration in Amhara region. The tension relapsed in April 16, 2021 in the border districts of the nationality administration and North Shewa zone. The violence in which the town *Ataye* was completely destroyed by the Oromo speaking armed groups. Public anger bursts and demonstrations in all towns of the region and accused the federal

government responsible for its failure protecting the security of its citizen, if not part of the violence (Reporter, volume 26 Number 2189 2013 E.C p. 1).

This violence happened a week after the two regional states discussed on security problems in both regional states. Given Amhara and Oromo has been living in Oromia and Amhara regions in a minority status respectively, the discussion was a kind of horizontal IGR to mitigate violence and strengthened the brotherhood of both ethnic groups (Addis Zemen, 80th year Number 209 Megabit 29 2013 E.C p. 3). Hence the IGR efforts did not restrain the violence against civilians in which Amhara are victims inside their regional states and outside. A fresh protest in Amhara region seems to have created a strain on the allegedly Oromo dominated federal government. The federal government has attributed to both foreign enemies and their domestic collaborators who want to destabilize the country. The national security council announced that despite the violence appeared in ethnic and religious terms the plan has been designed abroad and assembled as well as implemented at home by the collaborators of historic enemies of Ethiopia and called for unity to defend them (Addis Zemen, 80th year number 227 Miyazia 17 2013).

In spite of the federal government's position, the government officials at sub-national level make conflicting statements on the incessant violence in the areas bordered by Oromo nationality Administration and North Shewa Zone. The communication director of ANRS told the state media that "despite there is no agreement on who is responsible for the violence; they believe OLA is responsible". Contrary to this, the nationality administration has rejected the statement of its superior government structure and announced there are no OLA fighters in the area and accused the Amhara security forces for the violence. Immediately the Oromia regional state has come up with a statement that denounces the ANRS and strengthens the statement of Oromo Nationality Administration and warns Amhara Region to protect the Oromo in the region by mentioning the presence of millions of Amhara living in Oromia regional state. Tensions escalated after the ANRS criticizes the statement of Oromia region as irresponsible and considering Amhara in Oromia as hostages to achieve political ambitions is totally unacceptable. The violence relapsed in April after such tit for tat word fights and towns predominantly resided by Amhara ethnic groups were destroyed; hundreds killed and thousands displaced. A new justification came out from the national defense force as the problem was associated with an

attempt to disintegrate the country by inciting conflict between the two ethnic groups. (Addis Zemen, 80th year number 226 Miyazia 16 2013 E.C).

The development of Amhara ethnicity seems to make the Amhara in the Benishangul-Gumuz region feel as they have people to stand for them. Data from the informants collected in late 2019 revealed that the Amhara protest and its ongoing nationalism encourage them to mobilize in the regional state and ask the regional officials what they deserve. Youths in the region joined the ADP and NaMA operating in the regional state. This reaction of the regional officials was a mixture of suspicion and collaboration which turned aggressive in the following days of the June 22, 2019 assassination of Amhara regional officials. The regional officials arrest many of the NaMA members and threatening the ADP officials and members of different parts of the regional state. In Metekel the Gumuz killed and displaced Amhara by telling them ‘Your government has fallen and nobody rescues you’ (KIIBeGu3). On June 24, 2019, unidentified assailants killed 52 civilians in Metekel Zone. On June 26, 2019, the regional government said the attack could be linked to the alleged coup attempt. The action of the Gumuz could be considered as retaliation for the attack months before as they were killed by alleged armed Agaw and Amhara people who came from the neighboring woredas of the Amhara region in response to the attack of the former on the non-indigenous before.

Apart from discrimination as a root cause, the growing sense of Amhara nationalism and its practical effect was the reason for the upset on the side of the indigenous officials. In two weeks before June 25, The NaMA were registering members, and it was the latest headline on social media. On 25, June 2018: conflict in Assosa town erupted and 19 (unconfirmed) people died (KIIBeGu1, October 20, 219).

Incessant attacks against the non-indigenous ethnic minorities, notably the Amhara in Metekel have been the hallmark of the post 2018 Ethiopian politics. The conflict trend has changed as the previous sporadic broad daylight clashes and attacks now shifted into mid-night attacks (Taddese, 2021). The death toll and number of displaced people increased than ever before. According to a document prepared by the joint committee of the Amhara and Benishangul-Gumuz regions, cited in Tadesse (2021), until mid-2020, 49720 people have displaced from Metekel zone. One sees the pattern of attacks as it seems linked to the ongoing political transition accompanied by the rise of new political developments i.e., the PP and the rise of

assertive Amhara ethnonationalism. Despite there were some indigenous elites who did not welcome the PP whereas the Amhara in the regional state cherished it. On July 15, 2018 people in Pawie woreda, demonstrated in support of the political “reform” and the new Prime Minister Abiy. On the date, they came out with slogans demanding for their rights and freedom denied in the regional state. On, 16, July 2018, the regional security forces arrested 4 people who actively participated in facilitating the rally, and 3 were killed in rural villages, where the regional security forces allegedly participated in the attack (KIIBeGu 4). The same informant also recalls as on 28, Oct 2018 there were rallies in many towns of ANRS demanding for the protection of the security of the Amhara and Agaw people living in Benishangul-Gumuz region. On 1, Nov 2018: 15 people were killed in the Kemashi zone, where the regional security forces were accused of participating in the attack.

The regional government seemed to have been incompetent or unwilling to deal with the intra-state crisis. This was revealed when the Deputy Prime Minister announced the people (the non-indigenous) need to be trained and get armed to defend themselves when he visited the area with fresh atrocities in mid-October, 2020. An informant who had an opportunity to observe the developments after the visit of Demeke Mekonnen summarizes:

In the following weeks: 3,560 residents from selected communities in various Woredas of Metekel Zone were provided with three-day militia training and were armed. However, the new, and more qualified machine guns go to the ‘indigenous’. And two weeks later the regional government launched exclusive military training for the ‘indigenous’ where 400 ‘better trained’ members of the community were armed (KIIBeGu4).

As the atrocities continue a territorial claim over Metekel to be re-uniting its traditional province, Gojjam has intensified from the side of Amhara nationalists and like-minded Agaws. The limits of the regional constitution became the agendas of mainstream media of the Amhara region and social media platforms. When the late police commissioner of the Amhara region police commission highlighted the horrific suffering of the Amhara was committed in the Metekel zone, critics strongly denounced the atrocities committed against them. He then asked the federal government and the Amhara security forces to intervene in the area.¹¹⁴ The Benishangul-Gumuz

¹¹⁴https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTEbDqSM_q0&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR1SIFqCGw0CvPFIYhstFn5EzQgCorsa7JGIBl1_qoAGmfix6KuzWDgoVFY&ab_channel=AmharaMassMediaAgency (

regional PP office replied in turn in the possible strongest terms¹¹⁵ and warns, in its Facebook account that the claims from the Amhara region will be realized only when the federal system and the constitution are dismantled. It further warned those who have been saying ‘the regional constitution is discriminatory’ and ‘Metekel belongs to us will lead to political deadlock and as PP does not allow such kinds of interests as stipulated in the statute.

Tit for tat kind of violence continues in response to the actions from the Amhara region and the federal government. An epic ethnic cleansing was carried out on December 23, 2020, when more than 200 people were killed in Bulen woreda, Bakuji kebele a day after high-ranking officials, including the Prime Minister Abiyehave visited Metakel, the center of the brutal massacre of civilians since 2018, to assess the chronic violence (Gardner, 2021). In the same vein, on 7, March, 2021 an election was campaigned by NaMA in Assosa town, where the city administration had the information ahead of time. It was interrupted by authorities, and some members of the regional security force were yelling ‘it’s not your land’ (BeGuKII4). This political contention that made the civilians scapegoat simultaneously continued in Oromia regions that led the Amhara regional council to call for an emergency session. Council has discussed the summary execution of Amhara in Oromia and Benishangul Gumuz regional states. The members of the council expressed their serious concern on the security of Amhara outside of the regional state, especially in the two regions. The speaker of the House, Worksemu Mamo calls for the Oromia regional state to ensure the security of Amhara in their respective jurisdiction as the Amhara region should not discriminate against people out of Amhara ethnic origin to live. The president of the regional state, Agegnehu Teshager, suggests that if things going this way and this far, we need to talk about the fate of the federation.¹¹⁶

If one thoroughly looks into the violence trend in Metekel, it clearly shows a significant number of elites in the region do not welcome both the posture of the Amhara region with its new wave of nationalism and the post-2018 political development that bear the evolution of PP. In the scene of the ethnic violence, political elites including those who are in position told ‘their’ people as the current political change and PP have nothing to do for them rather it will take away

¹¹⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/BGProsperityParty/posts/65932336810100110/23/2020>

¹¹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-sEGopYN2Og> (Accessed, March 13, 2021)

their autonomy and power enshrined by the constitution and handed over it to the non-indigenous (Tadesse, 2021).

8.5. Concluding Remark

Many criticize Amhara ethnicity and its political and civic organizations as having no clear and commonly shared goal to achieve. If one looks at the activism and interviews of party officials to the state Media it seems that there is a dilemma to take up multi-national federalism or civic citizenship, Pan-Ethiopia agenda. The proponents of Pan-Ethiopian nationalism who are “ethnic Amhara” keep arguing that Amhara and Amharic language do not belong to an ethnic category. There are a significant proportion of actors among those who are under the umbrella of Amhara nationalism that equates Amharaness with Ethiopianess hoping that Amhara ethnic mobilization could bring about “Ethiopianess”. They have openly confronted with the Pan-Ethiopian for denying the existence of Amhara ethnicity. Ironically enough, the two opinions complement each other in their goals, establishing an overarching Ethiopian national identity that traces all ethnic groups i.e., one-nation nationalism-nation-state. Affiliating one to Ethiopianess and pursuing pan Ethiopian agenda was not only costly for Amhara and a failed nation-building project but also it is unlikely to happen today given the presence of ethnically mobilized territorial cleavages that consider the position as the agenda of ‘(re)creating Ethiopia in the image of Amhara’. The clamor for scrapping the ethnic element of federal system, if not the whole aspect, and the legal abolition of ethnic politics in the country has gained impetus especially since the war with Tigray region begun. However, the federal system and its ethnic element could (should) not be totally scrapped. Because there is still strong support for ethnic based federal system in the southern part of the country including the most populous Oromo ethnic group (Zemelak, 2020).¹¹⁷ In addition, empirical researches show that 61 percent of Ethiopians prefer federal system of whom 49 percent say federalism should continue to be based on regions defined by ethnicity (Afrobarometer, 2020).¹¹⁸ Lastly, but not the least, the federal system has created new ethnic identities that want to preserve their respective collective interests. Here, Amhara ethnicity is an

¹¹⁷ <https://www.ips-journal.eu/topics/human-rights/ethiopia-needs-to-negotiate-a-reform-of-its-federal-system-4792/> (Accessed, November 15, 2020).

¹¹⁸ https://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/ab_r8_presentation_federalism_and_constitutional_amendments_25082020.pdf (Accessed, September 22, 2021).

obvious new identity creation under the ethnic based federal system aspiring to protect and maintain its interests. Hence, the attitudes that consider ethnic federalism is the sole threat to Amhara and has to be erased would not help for the country's transition to genuine nation-building process not only for its ignorance of the benefits of federalism in mitigating conflicts through cultural and political inclusion but also it would be the replica of what TPLF (EPRDF) did in 1991 i.e., 'victor's justice' that eventually would lead the country to a new vicious conflict.

On the other hand, for leading Amhara activists, Amhara ethnicity is a natural antidote rather than an orchestrated political instrument to restructure the state system along with the actor's interest and at the same time exploit through identity elements (languages, culture, and ethnicity, etc.). Hence, Amhara ethnicity is an approach in which ethnic Amhara would redefine their interests collectively centered on victimization and securing their survival (Mesganaw, 2018).

Major political actors of the Amhara ethnic group also do not tend to totally reject the existing constitution nor did the ethnic-based federal system. Rather both APP and NaMA demand constitutional amendment and remedial actions on the existing federal arrangement and to this end an inclusive dialogue. About 70 percent of informants asserted that the goal of Amhara ethnicity is to push back the current discriminatory practices against Amhara. The claim is not claiming superiority over others or seceding from Ethiopia. Rather its aims to maintain a democratic country in which Amhara as an ethnic group is equally respected vis a vis, other ethnic groups.

Nonetheless, the way-outs are not as easy as they appeared in the opinions of actors rather it depends on the political reality in which almost all titular ethnic groups want to maintain the status quo as they fear actions to alter it might affect their interests. The other is most of the claims of Amhara nationalism need a kind of 'out of the box' solution with extra-constitutional mechanisms particularly political decisions based on dialogue and negotiations. The sense of 'son of soil' developed among the titular ethnic groups about the territorial units established to enable them to exercise autonomy compounded by the pursuit of nation-state at sub-national level is likely resistant for the reforms to expand the horizons of power sharing and representation at sub-national level. Paradoxically, the ethno-nationalists who fought against the institutionalization of one-nation nationalism (Ethiopianess), now they have been building the

replica of that nation-state model at their 'home region'. This has been violating the rights of minorities within such homogenizing sub-national units that eventually forced them for assimilation or forceful displacement. Amhara took the largest proportion from among those minorities and their deep-seated insecurity is one of the triggering factors for the emergence of Amhara ethnicity. Amhara region has presented itself as a model in protecting the intra-state minorities in guarantying territorial autonomy, representation and power sharing and encourage other regions to follow its route. However, given the precedence positions of titular ethnic groups resisting the proposed solutions provided by experts, the capability of Amhara nationalism to deliver in establishing a territorial or non-territorial autonomy for Amhara in other regional states seems unlikely to happen. The other is the perception that the titular groups already have compounded with the fate-full "Amhara oppressor-oppressed nationalities" narrative. As a result the future would likely be characterized by the introduction of consociational institutional schemes and (or) conflict. Amhara political movement does not only fail to set its own clear, shared goal and vision. It has been engaged in responding for decisions or arguments of others over a certain issue so far as the Amhara nationalists feel bad to 'the Amhara interest'. Due to its reactive and defensive nature, Amhara ethnicity is shaped by or depended on the activities of other ethnonationalists specifically against Amhara. Hence, its effect on the future political dynamics of the country in general and in the federal design in particular depends on the way other political forces handle and respond to its causes.

Chapter Nine

Conclusion

This study has intended to address the dynamics of Amhara nationalism in Ethiopia and its political and institutional implications for the Ethiopian state. The study is based on the social constructivist approach to ethnicity that was developed and refined after Fredrick Barth's seminal work on the importance of social boundaries in ethnicity. Apparently, there is no agreed definition of ethnicity in identity studies. Primordialists defined ethnicity as an assigned status; something inherited from one's ancestors. They emphasize the static nature of ethnicity and the role of primal factors such as lineage and cultural ties in determining ethnicity. Instrumentalists, in their parts, presented ethnicity as an elite competition for political power, and social or economic advantages through manipulating the cultural life of the communal group. The current orthodoxy regarding ethnic identities imagines ethnicity and nationalism as social constructs and socio-political contexts that determine ethnic affiliation and identification. The constructionist perspective on ethnicity and nationalism suggests that ethnicity has been constructed under diverse situational contexts. According to Barth's variety of social constructivism, ethnicity is fluid and ethnic boundaries are not stable and undergo changes from time to time based on historical and political contexts. An inquiry that anticipates understanding an emerging kind of ethnicity (nationalism) needs a frame of understanding which is flexible enough to be appropriate, at least relatively, for the contemporary nature of ethnicity and nationalism.

Hence, Barth's relational and processual approach to ethnicity deemed to be suited to examine the dynamics of Amhara nationalism. Drawing on the literature international instruments on minority rights, federalism, and consociationalism the study aimed to investigate how Amhara nationalism has emerged under the existing political system and its political and institutional implications. The specific questions were: Who are the Amharas and what makes an Amhara? How has the Amhara ethnic identity been linked with the process of state formation? What are the trajectories in the development of Amhara nationalism? What are the terms of debate on the existence of Amhara ethnicity with a focus on the emerging Amhara nationalism? What are the causes and major claims of Amhara nationalism and its political, constitutional, and institutional implications at both federal and regional levels?

The relation of Amhara identity and Ethiopian state formation could be described as follows. The word ‘Amhara’ originated as the name of a fairly small region in what are today the northern highlands of Ethiopia, and Amharic was the language spoken in that region. Since this proved to be the area from which the medieval Ethiopian empire emerged, and from which many of its rulers originated, the term came over time to assume a wider significance, and the people who spoke its language came, in turn, to be known as “Amharas”. Since these people were associated with several cultural characteristics, prominent among which was a fierce adherence to Monophysite Orthodox Christianity, an “Amhara” identity likewise applied to people who acquired these characteristics, especially Orthodox Christians, many of whom originally spoke other languages, but came to adopt Amharic as a *lingua franca*.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the territory of the Ethiopian empire was massively expanded, and Amharic emerged as the language of the Ethiopian state, it was figured as the language of the Ethiopian imperial state and served as the marker of national oppression. The issue of Amhara identity before the rise of ethno-nationalism in Ethiopia seems difficult to conceptually articulate. However, “Amhara” is better conceived as a semi-open dominant group in that ethnicity is not salient in a way that does not generally meddle with the day-to-day experience but is not non-existent. Hence, a better analytical tool to describe Amhara before the rise of ethno-nationalist movements is a “hidden ethnicity” i.e., “dominant groups have no ethnicity because they realize their ethnic identity in national terms”. Currently Amhara nationalism appears to be in a reactive mode claiming real and perceived marginalization after the introduction of ethnicity for political organization.

The results indicate that the in-group and out-group conceptions pertaining to Amhara identity are different. In other words, while other ethno-nationalists perceive the presence of a cohesive Amharic-speaking group (Amhara) who was dominant in the state systems of Ethiopia, those Amharic-speaking people do not define themselves in a similar way. Rather the emic conception of Amhara identity is varying greatly and the people called Amhara have various definitions for the term and about themselves. “Amhara” denotes multiple things by virtue of its association with the Amharic language, Orthodox Christianity, and national identity. The linguistic component and connection to national identity are profound. Because the Amharic language is exclusively associated with the Amhara people as opposed to the culture shared with Tigray. The

linguistic boundary is salient in distinguishing Amhara from Tigray and other counterpart ethnic groups. Given that Amharic speakers living in other regions have been attacked regardless of their religious identity the religious boundary has been steadily weakened. The association with the Ethiopian identity (the dominant culture of Amhara and partly Tigrian) has been an important boundary in relation to the other ethno-national groups who do not associate themselves with the Ethiopianist traditions. Nonetheless, the most important aspect of Amhara identity is the ascription from the perspective of relevant others. Hence, the relational aspect of ethnicity is crucial, and Amhara ethnic consciousness has been raised as interaction with other ethnic groups is intensified. Despite the religion and toponym connotation of the term Amhara being less salient, currently there are variations in defining the term within the people called “Amhara”. Therefore, Amhara identity is defined from the outside and contested from the inside.

The result also revealed that there are two contending arguments in the existing literature on the origin of the Amhara and Amharic language. One is Amhara evolved as a culture of assimilation in the imperial court since the 13th century and the military was instrumental in its expansion. In contrast to this, it has been argued that the Amhara is one of the oldest and endogenous groups of people in Ethiopia and criticizes those who limit its genesis to the 1270s. Such controversies emanated from the two-contending historical and linguistic hypotheses (migration and non-migration) on the origin of the Ethio-Semitic people and the Amharic language. The pidgin origin of the Amharic language and the mixed nature of Amhara are largely built on the migration hypothesis that considers Ethio-Semitic emigrated from South Arabia in the first century B.C. while the non-migration hypothesis is recently developed out of both historical and linguistic research and claims Amharic is not a pidgin rather a distinct and the Semitic people in which the Amhara are dominant, are indigenous to Ethiopia.

This scholarly debate has also somewhat linked to the debate on whether or not Amhara exists as a distinct ethnic identity. The former assumption serves the proponents of the idea that Amhara as a distinct identity does not exist who argue that considers the Amharic language as not belong to an Amhara ethnic category that itself does not exist. The ideas of common origin of Amhara have been imagined in line with the second argument. Amhara nationalists trace the origin of Amhara to the biblical Jethro, and to the earliest Agaziean-Sabean tribes that originated in Ethiopia and were designated as the south-central Semitic category. Beyond the academic debate,

this has a political implication that underlines the current nativism discourse of Amhara and Oromo nationalists. Reacting to their presentation as “outsiders” in Ethiopianist discourses Oromo nationalists have inverted the Amhara and Semitic speakers more broadly, claiming of Arabian origin to re-present them as the “real outsiders”.

Dealing with the trajectories of Amhara nationalism, this study revealed that it was not the impression of EPDM to represent the Amhara ethnic group. Neither Amhara mobilized based on its ethnic identity nor EPDM ever had an ethnic-based political program before 1991. The firm stands of EPDM founders on the necessity of forging a front with the Marxist forces in other organizations and their endorsement of the presence of “nations” in Ethiopia was a turning point that influenced the latter political life of EPDM. EPDM’s position side slipped into accepting the Bolsheviks’ speculation, “progressives came out from the oppressor nation should endorse the secession right of the oppressed nationalities” led its members to accept the *Amharaness* of the ruling class and shoulder its burden that later the Amharic speaking mass inherited. The result further shows that the Pan-Ethiopian agenda that EPDM inherited from EPRP and its decision to replace the class contradiction interpretation with a national liberation strategy (liberating other ethnic groups, not Amhara) is the root of the dilemma that faces the party in positioning to Pan-Ethiopian agenda or Amhara national struggle. The international and domestic political context shifted from socialism to western democracy and the proliferation of identity politics; the political pressure criticizing the non-representation of Amhara in the transition process and the ascendancy of AAPO forced EPDM to transform itself to ANDM. The party’s transformation into an ethnic-based party (at least in form and institutionalization) could be seen as the debacle of both pan-Ethiopian political discourse and the class struggle solution as a unifying ideology of the state to end the political crisis. Afterward none of the pan-Ethiopian political parties’ breakthrough the ethnic-based political discourse and state organization except its short-lived resurrection during the 2005 election represented by the CUD party.

The practice of “Amhara democratic nationalism”, with its Bolshevik ingredients, aimed to ‘democratically’ mobilize Amhara accompanied by the attitude of other ethnic groups which consider all Amhara as an oppressor gave the way to reactive ethnicity and Amhara ethnicity is already developed both in the form of institutional and extra-institutional aspects. The ethnicization of Ethiopian politics has gone through several phases that this study tries to show.

The constructionist perspective of ethnicity and nationalism suggests ethnicity has been constructed under diverse situational contexts. The above dynamics show how Amhara ethnicity has been built under various political contexts in which it goes from rejecting to embracement.

Further, this study shows the different discourse behind the debate on the existence of Amhara as an ethnic group. It revealed that proponents of the idea that Amhara does not exist as an ethnicity espouse a Pan-Ethiopian nationalism and reject the Amharic language's attribution and its speakers to an ethnic category. It is part of the broader critique of ethnicity as a focus of social identity and unit of political participation which undermines national cohesion. Instead, Ethiopian national identity is promoted as a supra ethnic identity that ethnic groups need to integrate into. The irony of this argument could be two. On the one hand, it is probably an attempt to escape from the burden of political discourse put on the name Amhara. Hence, at an individual level, before the rise of ethnic mobilization, no one wants to appear as a member of an ethnic group that was criminalized for oppression. On the other hand, at the political elite level, they might want to use all Amhara which is affiliated with the Pan-Ethiopian identity used as a melting pot. Opposed to this view of Amhara identity those who argue in favor of Amhara ethnicity not only in the primordial sense of the term but also in the sense of reactive ethnicity; that Amharas have already been designated by other ethnic groups of the country as 'the dominant ethnic group based on the national oppression thesis with roots in the students' movement of the 1960s and 70s. Proponents of Amhara ethnicity argue that this negative framing has created deep-seated insecurity, especially for those Amharas who live outside of the Amhara region, and who have been vulnerable to attacks by other ethnic groups.

Hence, the argument goes under a political context that ethno-regional cleavages are strong in the political scene and politics has been made through ethnic participation, the assumption that equating "Amhara" identity with Ethiopian national identity diminishes the "Ethiopianess" of other ethnic groups who are loyal both to the state and their group. The assumption that there was no Amhara ethnicity (nationality) in the distant past does not mean it won't be developed now or in the future. Indeed, the ethnic sentiment gets more and more visible in relation to other ethnic mobilizations and subsequent othering. Moreover, currently, the Amhara ethnicity has officially emerged and has openly confronted the camp that denies its existence. In the meantime, no one can be sure about the sustainability of such identity conception but clearly, an

Amhara political identity is already established with its institutions. Amhara nationalism has developed in two aspects: institutional and extra-institutional that established both inside and outside of the country. Civic organizations, professional associations, economic networking, and political parties are enclosed in the former aspect while traditional military (*Fano*), soccer politics, and intellectual and cultural movements are parts of the latter.

Each of the major language groups thus acquired its autonomous state within the federation. The origins of Amhara nationalism are indeed disputed. For its adherents, its root lay in the effects of political, economic, and socio-cultural factors: a sense of strangeness, “statelessness”, a lack of security, that is, a threat to the survival (physical and cultural) of the Amhara and abject poverty and economic marginalization. The result identifies discursive narratives, ideological underpinnings of othering, and institutional flaws that are deemed to be considered the causes of the development of Amhara nationalism.

This is also partly the result of a nation-state system and its centralized structures that are replaced by a non-representative devolved system. The issue is linked to the broader critics over the multi-national federal design which focuses on territorial autonomy guaranteed to titular groups with less sensitivity towards the internal minorities. Many of the political unrest in the country emanated from this reality. The cause of Amhara nationalism goes beyond the institutional design. Amhara nationalists asserted as Amhara interests were not represented in the transitional process of the 1990s. The finding shows that individuals who participate in the constitutional development and ratification process from the Amhara region were recruited by the EPDM persons based on the criteria of revolutionary democracy. They view the draft constitution and its institutional designs from the perspective of other ethno-nationalists’ interests not from the Amhara. Both the AAPO version of Amhara nationalism and the Pan-Ethiopian nationalism was considered reactionary and chauvinistic and aspire to restore the former oppressive regime. Hence in the new nation-building process, the two views backed by a significant number of the population remained left out.

Using revolutionary democracy as an ideological weapon, EPRDF began to attack contending groups and individuals with different views from it. Names such as *Neftegna*, *Timkihtegna*, and *Ahadawi* have notoriously tagged on those “Amhara” stood in opposite directions. As this notion diffused to the territorial units, the people who were defined as “Amhara” by the respective

titular groups have been targeted and displaced as well as exploded from parts of the country still nowadays. It has been also revealed that the perceived and real socio-economic marginalization is not without the existing fact. The contested 2007 census result and the institutional response seemed to have left a scar in the minds of the people. It seems that no justification immunizes the regime for the result in which all major ethnic groups scored increment in population number in the three successive census results while Amhara scored a highly decreasing rate that meant to be in a federal system budget allocation is largely made based on population number.

The study finds out that Amhara nationalism seemed to have been lacking clear and commonly shared goals to achieve. A closer look at the Amhara activism and interviews of party leaders and regional government officials to the Media outlets it seems that there is a dilemma to take up multi-national federalism with remedies or civic citizenship i.e., Pan-Ethiopia agenda. However, for the leading Amhara activists, Amhara nationalism is a natural antidote to the existing political system and the unfolding dynamic contexts. It is an approach in which ethnic Amhara would redefine their interests centered on collective victimization and aimed at securing their survival. In addition, the major questions raised by the two major Amhara parties (APP and NaMA) indicate they do not tend to totally reject the existing constitution nor did the ethnic-based federal system. They demand constitutional amendment, territorial ‘restoration’, and other remedial actions on the existing system. Hence, it is safe to argue that, Amhara, among the core of the Ethiopian state-nation system, “pushed-back” from the making of the federal system, internal restructuring, and its subsequent political participation, now demands to integrate into it. This would be an entry point to the evolution of constitutional and institutional designs that redress the limits of existing multi-national federalism in general and territorial autonomy in particular, which further replicates the management of conflicts inflicted by the existing system.

The way-outs are not as easy as they appeared in the opinions of actors rather it depended on the political reality in which almost all titular ethnic groups want to maintain the status quo as they fear remedial actions on the existing system might lead them to losers. The other is most of the claims of Amhara nationalism need an “out of the box” solution with extra-constitutional mechanisms. The issues (texts) on which amendment has been requested include the spirit of the constitution centered on the national oppression thesis i.e., the preamble, the definition of “nations, nationalities and peoples”, and its automatic provision (application) of the secession

clause is not amendable based on the existing amendment procedures. Among others, the issue of territorial claim over Wolkayit particularly is very sensitive. It was initially raised by the Amhara living in the area hoping could be solved within the regional state, Tigray. When the Tigray region and the federal government tried to suppress the question the Amhara region raised it and dramatically changed into irredentism. The incumbent party or the established National Dialogue Commission need to create a sense of authorship and ownership among the Amhara people—a sense that they are included in the constitution. This could be done through launching an inclusive dialogue on the constitution, which is also called an extra-constitutional amendment. Albert's political model of constitutional amendment entails when a constitutional amendment become difficult based on the amending procedures, an initiation of amendment might come from the elites as they appeal to the people for its necessity. This led to a mutual understanding of the benefits of maintaining the spirit of the Constitution or amending it. The inclusive dialogue can redress the contention emanated from the violation of the existing rigid amending procedures.

Experts suggest consociational federalism as a better remedy for the protection of intra-unit minorities. In addition, Kymlicka identified conditions in which multi-national federalism is successful in protecting minorities living under ethnic-territorial units, and suggested that the process of “institutionalization is done in a peaceful and democratic way, consistent with human rights and liberal freedoms”. He said ethnic federalism is a riskier proposition in the Global south where there is no convergence over liberal and human rights values that led to the breeding of local tyranny without protection to the new minority groups. As this study revealed the problem is acute in Ethiopia, as ethno-national boundaries are not established in a democratic and inclusive manner nor the titular groups are less interested to adhere the values of democracy and protection of human rights in which the Amhara living in other regional states have been experiencing killings and displacement. Power sharing and non-territorial autonomy can protect the rights of intra-unit minorities without limiting the empowerment of titular groups which already existed. Therefore those institutional tools balance the interests of both the indigenous and non-indigenous communities. The federal government should work to get consensus with the regional states on the protection of internal minorities and thwart their pursuit of creating homogenous states. EPRDF's failure to consider the recommendations by scholars of Ethiopian federalism partly contributed to the current political crisis. Consociational democracy has to be

introduced and constitutionally recognized, which obliges all ethnic based self-governing units to implement it in their region to ensure the protection of minorities.

Nonetheless, the whole issue needs a political solution accompanied by an honest and intensive national dialogue. This should be complemented by an agreement to induce institutional designs in order to redress the limits of ethnic-territorial autonomy. Indeed, the possibility of having an inclusive political system with a federal design without fragility will be determined by the ability of government and concerned political actors to engage in dialogue and negotiation on the pressing issues raised by the Amhara nationalists and get on to compromise from both sides.

Arguably say, Amhara is the only identity that is the center of the debate than other ethnic groups of the country. The study examines the case of Amhara identity in Ethiopia. By so doing, it describes the dilemmas which have emerged with the system change to ethnic federalism and the contestation of Amhara supremacy. Amhara nationalism is centered on the political discourse, a constitutional design, which follows the same discourse, and institutional structures and their implementations. Hence the argument is, that through ‘expansion’ from northern central Ethiopia and the amalgamation of local elites the Amhara identity has become closely associated with Ethiopian statehood since imperial times. Coming under pressure and even suffering oppression and expulsion from parts of the country, there is the emergence of a reactive and defensive Amhara ethnic nationalism following the model of those who claim to have been oppressed by Amhara at earlier stages of Ethiopian history with important implications for the current political discontent and future Ethiopia. Amhara nationalism is the result of a political reality that a nation-state system and its centralized structures are replaced by a non-representative devolved system. The Amhara who remained left out during the institutionalization of the current political system now demands to integrate into it. This would be an entry point to the evolution of constitutional and institutional designs that redress the limits of existing multi-national federalism in general and territorial autonomy in particular, or which further replicates strain on the management of conflicts caused by the existing system.

The rise of Amhara nationalism puts a strain on both Pan-Ethiopian and ethno-nationalist perspectives. Amhara nationalism challenges the first group who consider it a recent ‘political fad’ that will wither away as ethno-nationalists are removed from political power. It also

deconstructs the Pan-Ethiopianists' argument that denies the existence of Amhara ethnicity and Amharic language belong to a single ethnic category without much reflection on what it means for both the Amara themselves and the ethno-nationalists. It also challenges the ethno-nationalist elites, who want to securitize the Amhara and accuse them of using Ethiopianism as an undercover tool to extend Amhara domination. As a result, the hope of Pan-Ethiopianism emerging as a core political discourse in the country has diminished. At the same time, ethnic-based politics has been getting harder and more polarized.

The study in this instance adheres to the social constructivist theory of ethnicity. Barth's concept that depicts ethnicity as fluid and ethnic boundaries as not stable and undergoing changes from time to time based on socio-historical conditions is justified in particular by the fluidity and controversy over Amhara ethnic identity. Moreover, in the last, nearly three decades' actors and political parties shift their subscription from Amhara to Ethiopian identity and the other way around. In this case the situationality, variability of ethnicity, and more importantly, the weight of context in the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of identity discourses and practices even in the life span of individuals. Hence the study tried to show additional dimensions to view the issues of ethnicity and nationalism in Ethiopia in a more flexible way than rigidly as of primordialism or only driven by actors' greed i.e., instrumentalism.

Literature of constitutional design in divided societies also conforms to this study, as Amhara nationalism is one manifestation of the fragility of the federal arrangement in particular and the EPRDF nation-building project in general. Given the lack of comprehensive study on Amhara nationalism with empirical data and is a recent phenomenon shaping the political discourse of the country, this study is believed to contribute to the scholarship in the field of ethnicity and nationalism in Ethiopia and (or) nation-building. This study could be also seen as a response to the lack of academic attention to Amhara resistance to the regime in explaining the recent political situation mainly focusing on the political and economic marginalization that bears the Oromo protests and the authoritarian nature of EPRDF regime.

In this study, an attempt has been made to bridge comparative politics with comparative constitutional law. Both linked an ethnic aspect of nationalism to that of constitutional law, both aligned on the issues of institutional design for divided societies. Hence, the study contributes to an understanding of Amhara nationalism, which is mainly manifested through formation and

mobilization. At the same time, it deals with comparative public law mainly manifested through institutions, focusing on the limits of nation-state and multi-national federal models for nation-building. The meeting point of both is the quest for institutional design in a situation where everything is contextualized and needs an accordingly solution.

The samples used in this study are far from representative of an ethnic group like Amhara, particularly in capturing their perceived origin. In spite of the importance of getting what people think about their origin, the origin of ethnic identity is also centered on the identification process made by a given elite group. This study extensively consulted potential respondents of the latter accompanied by some random interviews and informal conversations with elders and common people. Hence this study suggests an additional ethnographic study on the Amhara people to understand the most shared idea of common origin.

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