

**ETHNIC IDENTITY: THE CASE OF THE QEMANT OF CHILGA
WOREDA, NORTH GONDAR ZONE**

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Ethnic Identity: The Case of the Qemant of Chilga Woreda, North Gondar Zone

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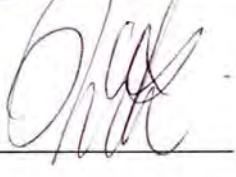
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Acronyms

EOC Ethiopia Orthodox Church

EPRDF Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front

FGD Focus Group Discussion

Glossary of Local Terms

<i>Anestiey</i>	<i>Yetäntey</i> moiety member who is the daughter of a <i>yetäntey</i>
<i>Aṭentä Qemant</i>	The one whose flesh and bone is from Qemant
<i>Awura/wanna</i>	Main/original (e.g. <i>awura/wanna</i> Qemant)
<i>Ayat/emita</i>	Grand father
<i>Balabat</i>	Amharic title given to local notable who is assigned to facilitate the indirect rule of the government
<i>Dubit/Degna</i>	“Sacred trees”/ the religious sites of the Qemant
<i>Enejalat</i>	Parents at the fifth generation above of an ego

<i>Gäläläka</i>	A priest from <i>yetäntey</i> moiety
<i>Gebärhu /Mizegäna</i>	The Qemant religious holidays which shifts on the first Thursday of every month
<i>Gult</i> system	Feudal system of administration
<i>Idir</i>	Burial and mutual aid association
<i>Iquib</i>	A form of rotating saving associations
<i>Kaas/Makkas</i>	The Qemant religious purification ceremony which is an equivalent of holly communion in the Orthodox Christian religion
<i>Kämäzäna</i>	A Qemant priest from the <i>keber</i> moiety (a higher priest)
<i>Kebelé</i>	The smallest political administrative unit
<i>Keber</i>	A name of a moiety/it also refers a male <i>keber</i> moiety member
<i>Mahibär</i>	Religious associations practiced by followers of EOC which held every month
<i>Menzelat</i>	Parents at the forth generation above of an ego
<i>Qemä ayat/Qemant</i>	Great grand parents of an ego
<i>Quanqua qämäs</i>	A name used by the neighboring Amhara to identify the newly converted or Christianized Qemants
<i>Rist</i>	Land owned through hereditary rights
<i>Rist</i> right	A claim to the hereditary ownership of land

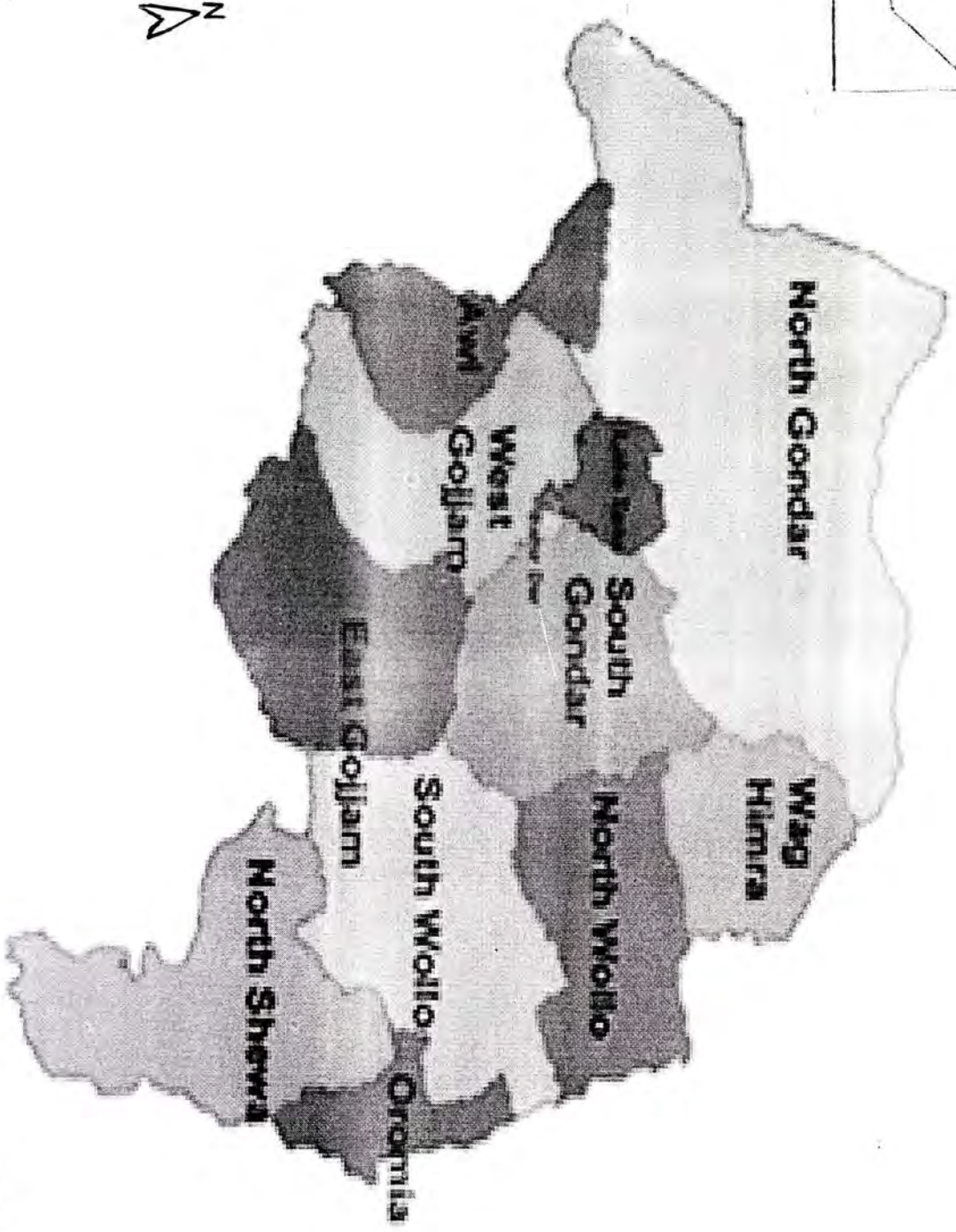
<i>Sänebäté</i>	Sabbath association by followers of EOC held every Sunday
<i>Senkera</i>	A female <i>keber</i> moiety member who is a daughter of a <i>keber</i>
<i>Senkera Yehura</i>	<i>Yetantey</i> moiety member who is a child of a <i>senkera</i>
<i>Taṭāmañe</i>	Tenant
<i>Wämbär</i>	A socio-political and religious leader of the Qemant
<i>Woreda</i>	District (a relatively larger political administrative unit than <i>kebelé</i>)
<i>Yäqum Täzikar</i>	Memorial service for somebody while he/she is alive
<i>Yedära</i>	The name the Qemant God
<i>Yetäntey</i>	The name of a moiety/ it also refers a male <i>yetäntey</i> moiety member

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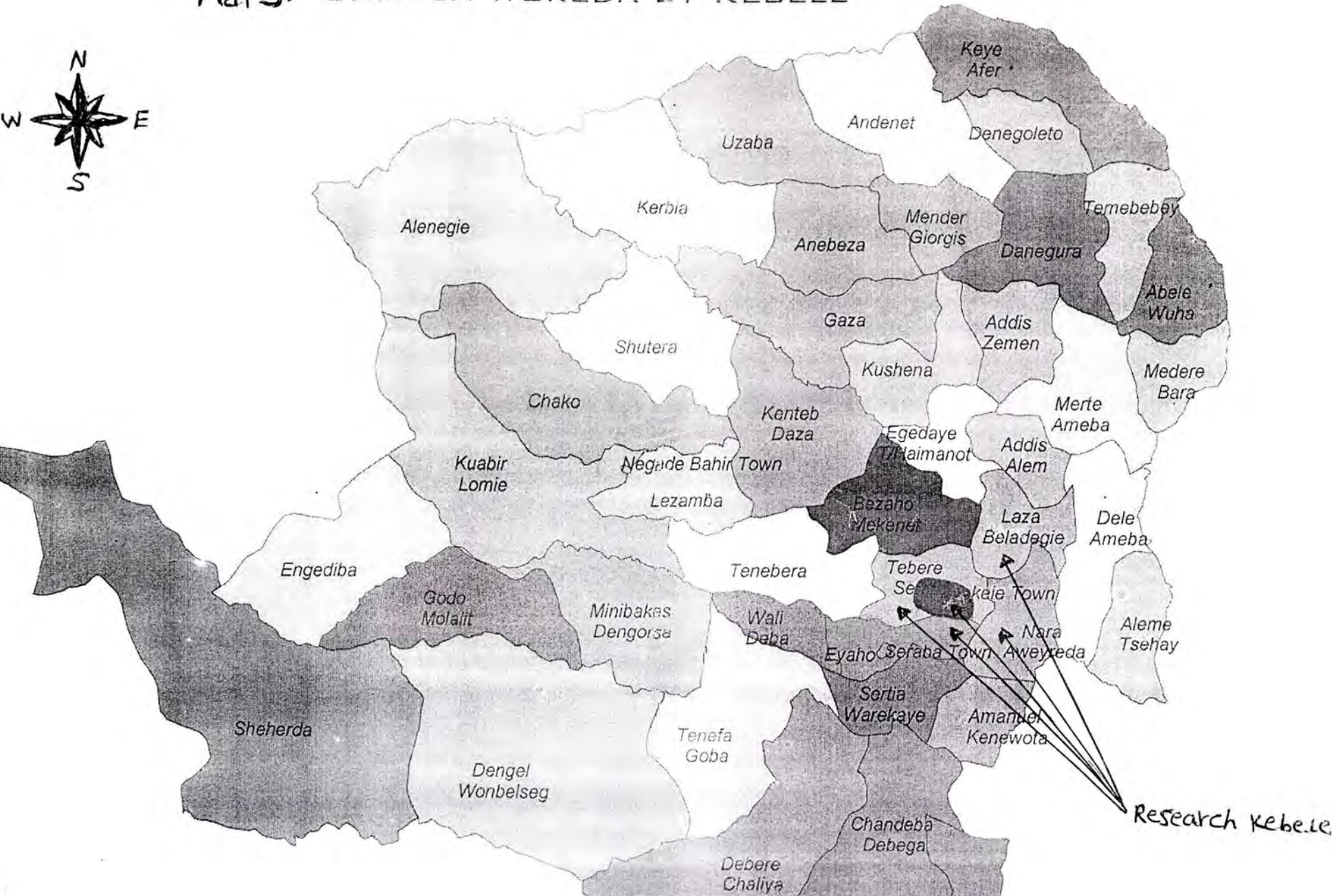


Map 1 The Amhara Regional state by Zone

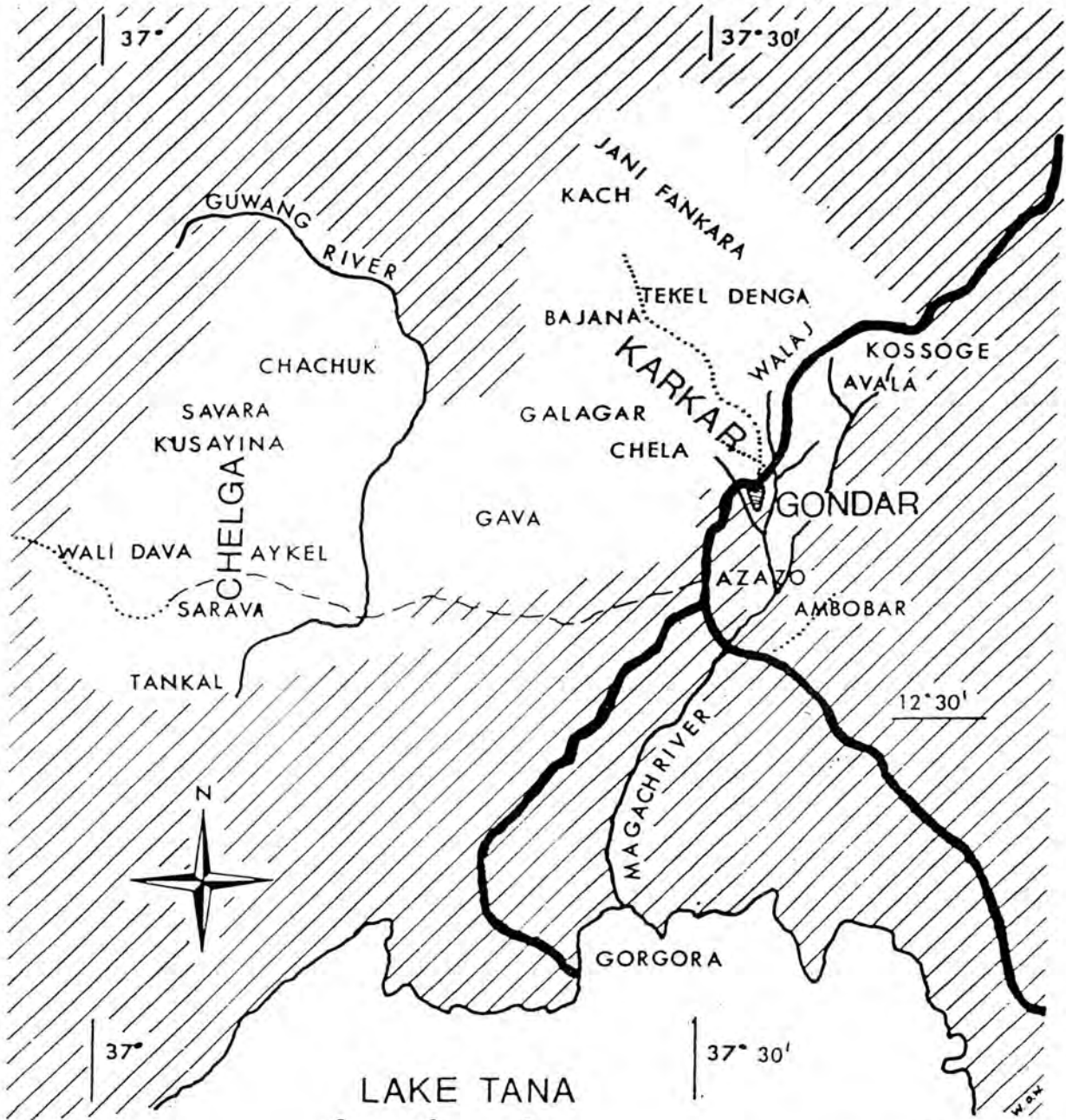


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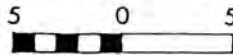
MAP 3. CHILEGA WOREDA BY KEBELE



[Map 4] THE QEMANT OF ETHIOPIA



MILES



GRAVEL ROADS



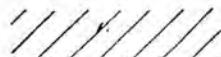
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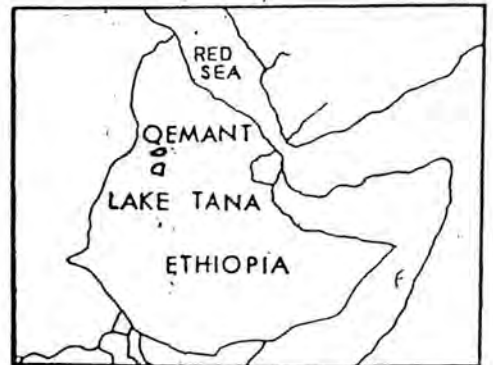
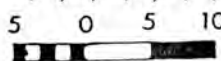
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NON-QEMANT AREA



KILOMETERS



Abstract

This study is all about the ethnic identity of the Qemant people in Chilga *woreda*, North Gondar zone. Despite few researches have been done so far on the Qemant, they mainly focused on the ethnographic account of the people; only the objective cultural content of the people is addressed. The objective versus the subjective aspects of Qemant ethnic identity; its content versus boundary; and the internal versus the external factors that dichotomized the Qemant ethnic identity are largely not discussed. Likewise, the changes versus continuities of the contents and boundary of Qemant ethnic identity together with the factors behind are not uncovered. So, this study tried to address all such issues jointly with an overview of Qemant ethnic identity in light of the constitutional ethnic rights of the country. Qualitative research methods such as semi structured interview, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, life history narrations and observation were employed to generate data. But published and unpublished materials were also used as secondary sources.

The Qemant were once a closely knit ethnic group with its own ethnic identity markers. The moiety based ethnic organization and the associated marriage rules; the kemantney language, the traditional political structure and their religion all served as the basic integrative and ethnic boundary maintaining mechanisms. In addition to this, the internal social networks and the self ascription of the people internally solidified their ethnic identity. Externally, the nature of the economic system and religious difference together with the prejudiced ascription and identification of their Amharan neighbors once dichotomized the Qemant ethnic identity. However, following the massive Christianization movement launched in the area during the 1960s both the internal and external factors that dichotomized the Qemant ethnic identity get ruptured. This initial kick together with other contingent factors further weakens their ethnic identity. Today, except the near extinct kemantney language and their “*hegä libona*” religion almost all the objective identity markers of the people are wiped out. The subjective identity markers are reflected in different ways. Ethnic members reflect their ethnic feelings and subjectively associate themselves to those extinct objective markers in various ways. Some ethnic members identify themselves as “*Aṭentä qemant*”. On the other extreme are those who tried to conceal their ethnic identity and mostly identify themselves as an “Amhara”. All these show the Qemant ethnic identity was constructed across the long time social, economic and political interactions they have with their Amhara neighbors; and the diffused nature of Qemant ethnic identity at the present time.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The study of ethnicity has relatively short history in social sciences in general and in Anthropology in particular (Fekadu, 2004:12). Ethnicity in its full Sociological meaning is a very recent term which was not in general use in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and, with the clear exception of Weber (1968), no other classical sociologist employed this term in their works (Malesevic, 2004:13).

Since the 1960s, ethnicity has been one of the central concepts in social sciences. An important topic related to the study of ethnicity is the problem of ethnic identity (Irimato and Yamada, 2004:81). The concept of identity has been used in explanations of ethnicity on a sociological and also psychological level, and has often been interpreted as the underlying core of ethnic group identification and formation, as well as a recurring variable in inter ethnic relations (Abbink, 1984:139).

Recent concern with ethnic identity has derived in part from the ethnic revitalization movements in the 1960s. Growing awareness in society of differences associated with ethnic group membership has been accompanied by social movements leading to increased ethnic consciousness and pride (Phinney, 1990:499). In the Ethiopian context it was following the coming into power of the EPRDF led government in 1991 that issues of ethnicity and ethnic identity have got much emphasis in the political arena of the country. At present, due to the policy of ethnic restructuring and ethnic entitlement since

1991 there are nearly hundred ethnic based political parties that are legally registered in Ethiopia.

Identity and ethnicity are associated with the process of changes in population and its culture. Groups and their cultures that have been handed down will change through contact with other groups and cultures. In this process, minority cultures; their languages in particular, are endangered; language and socio-cultural shifts may occur and original languages and socio-cultural practices may be disappeared (Phinney, 1990: 402). Hence, ethnic identity become at risk.

Coming to the case at hand, the Amhara and the Qemant people co-habited the study area, *Chiga woreda*, with a significant degree of socio-cultural interaction leading to a change in the content of ethnic identity for the latter group. Inline with this, Gamst (1969:2-6) mentioned that “The Qemant are today undergoing marked cultural change toward the patterns of culture of the Amhara peasantry surrounding them. Today, the Qemant are on the verge of complete Amharization”.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The Qemant people once described by Gamst (1969:1) as “an ethnic group with their own distinct Pagan-Hebraic religion, indigenous political system, marriage rules and other socio-cultural features which makes them as distinct ethnic group with their own identity”.

The indigenous political structure of the Qemant formerly served as an integrative factor among ethnic members. Likewise, their religion was the focal point of this “closely knit ethnic group” (to use Gamst’s word), providing its members with a sense of group

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identity, reinforcing their basic values, and rigidly defining the social boundaries between them and their neighbors (basically the Amharans). Moreover, the moiety based social organization and associated marriage rules; moiety exogamy but ethnic endogamy, of the Qemant were strong boundary maintaining mechanisms.

Nowadays, however, the situation is changed. The above-mentioned integrative and boundary-maintaining mechanisms ruptured leading to a rapid withering away of Qemant culture and ethnic identity. Their socio-cultural system that was the manifestation of their ethnic identity has dropped substantially following their mass religious conversion into Orthodox Christianity. The religious switching causes a great decrease of adherents to the original religion, which was intimately tied with the indigenous social structure. Simoons (1960:30) assured this in saying “in regions that were occupied a few hundred years ago by Agow-speaking K’amant, people today are indignantly Amharic”.

Today not all of the Qemant speak their native Agaw dialect, called kemantney. In fact, according to the 1994 National Census of Ethiopia, the total number of the ethnicity’s population as a whole was 172,324 out of which only 1,650 people still speak kemantney as their first language. Although different factors may determine it, Hudson (2003) stated that “A language with fewer than 10,000 speakers is assumed as endangered or likely to become extinct within a generation or so”. Therefore, the kemantney language which was one of the most important ethnic identity markers of this people is dying out as most of their children, nowadays, only speak Amharic. As Zelalem (2003:20) mentioned, the extinction of a language is particularly distressing because in such a situation, not only the language perishes but also the cultural tradition expressed with it and the socio-cultural or even ethnic independence of the people who speak it.

“Where people change their ethnic identity, this creates ambiguity since ethnic membership is at once a question of source of origin as well as of current identity” (Barth, 1969:29). In line with this, Stavenhagen (1996:94) also stated that “A secure identity provides a sense of well being, whereas a diffuse identity or a lack of a secure sense of identity, will lead to what is commonly termed as identity crisis; and sometimes personality breakdown”.

Despite all these, so far only few researches have been done concerning the Qemant people in general and their ethnic identity in particular. Gamst’s research on the Qemant people mainly focused on the ethnographic account of the people and it was undertaken in 1969 while Simoons (1960) discussed a bit about the economic aspect of the people. The only one who in some way touched the issue under scrutiny was Zelalem (2003) who partly assessed their ethnic identity only using elements of language and religion. The other components (markers) of Qemant ethnic identity were largely left out of his work. Such essentials as myths of common descent, ethnic self identification, myths about the ethnic (collective) name, the individuals’ sense of ethnic belongingness and awareness about their ethnic identity etc also needs examination. That means, both the objective and subjective components of Qemant ethnic identity have to be examined since “Ethnic identity is not just a process whereby groups or individuals judge their ethnicity solely by objective physical criteria or on the basis of the culture in which they were born but the subjective nature of ethnic identity is also important” (Stephan, 1989:507).

Moreover, such internal factors as sharing of common traits and internal social network; and external factors especially interaction with and ascription by other neighboring groups, in this case the neighboring Amhara people, should be examined. This is because

ethnic identity is dichotomized across such internal and external factors; we define ourselves in large measure in terms of what we are not, and that derives from our experience of what others are and how we differ. Therefore, this research tried to address such issues and attempts to bridge the gaps.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1.3.1 General objective

The general objective of the research is to examine the ethnic identity of the Qemant people living in Chilga *woreda*, North Gondar zone.

1.3.2 Specific objectives

Inline with the above general objective, the specific objectives of the research are to:

- a. Assess the basic objective and subjective elements that constitute the current ethnic identity of the Qemant people.
- b. Examine the changes and continuity in the content and boundary of Qemant ethnic identity;
- c. Identify the main factors behind the shift in Qemant ethnic boundary markers; and
- d. Examine Qemant ethnic identity in light of the constitutional ethnic rights of the country.

1.4 Rationale For the Selection of the Research Site

Even if the Qemant people are found in the different *woredas* of North Gondar Zone such as Lay Armachiho, Qara, Dembiya, Metemma and Wogera; the place selected for the research was Chilga *woreda* which is located at a distance of 61 km. to the West of

Gondar town. This was because most of the remaining speakers of the Qemant language (kemantney) and remnant followers of the earlier Qemant religion currently live in and around Ayikel (the main town). In addition, the majority of those “sacred trees”, under which the Qemant religion is undertaken, are found in Chilga.

1.5 Research Methods

Throughout the literature, different scholars who studied the various aspects of ethnic identity basically depend on the quantitative research methods. To mention; Stephan (1989); Holmes and Lochman (2009); Umaña-Taylor, et al. (2008); Worrell, et al. (2006); Gonzalez et al (2006); were some of them who heavily relied on questionnaire and statistical correlation methods. Likewise, most of the researches done merely relied on the information gained from the concerned ethnic members without taking into account the view of members in the respective neighboring ethnic groups.

Concerning the commonly employed methodological trend in studying ethnic identity, Syed and Azmitia (2008:1014) stated that:

The methods used for studying ethnic identity have been narrow in scope, with primary reliance on quantitative survey measures. A richer and more nuanced method may broaden our understanding of how ethnic identity processes are linked to the context of ethnic identity. The analysis of personal narrative provides an ideal opportunity to accomplish this goal.

It was, therefore, by accepting this suggestion that I used the narrative approach which is qualitative in its nature; and by considering both the Qemant and neighboring Amhara ethnic members that this thesis tried to address the issues under investigation. This is because ethnic identity is a socially constructed phenomenon which arises from the

economic, political and social interactions that a group entertains with other neighboring groups.

The other methodological stance is that ethnic self-identification is clearly an essential starting point in examining ethnic identity. “The failure to assess self-identification with any group raises the possibility that the studies include subjects who did not consider themselves members of the group in question” (Phinney, 1990:504). Therefore, in this research, the study participants were first asked the question: What is your ethnic identity? Once their “ethnic self-identification” has been made known such qualitative research methods as: semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, key informant interviews and life histories were employed to collect first hand data. These methods are described below.

1.5.1 Primary Sources

1.5.1.1 Semi Structured Interviews

This method was used to collect data concerning the objective and subjective elements that constitute the identity of the Qemant people. This was because the information gained in each interview can be compared and contrasted so that the basic socio-cultural distinction of the Qemant could be assessed.

For this reason, a total of sixty Qemant people were selected and interviewed. Informants were categorized into five groups based on their locality. The first two groups each constituting eighteen informants were from Ayikel and Säraba (sub town thirteen kilometers to the west of Ayikel). The rest of the groups with a total of twenty four informants were from three rural *kebeles* that are adjacent to the main town; eight

informants were selected from each *kebeles*. One of these *kebeles* is known as Tābär Sāraqo, ten kilometers to the North and West of Ayikel where the majority of those unbaptized Qemants who follow the remnants of earlier religion and tradition are currently living. These people identified themselves and were identified by others (the Amhara and Christian Qemants) as “*awura/wana Qemant*” (original Qemants). The second rural *kebele* is named Laza-Bulladgie, eleven kilometers to the North-East of Ayikel, in which the majority of the residents basically identify themselves and were identified by the surrounding Qemant people as an Amhara. It was selected due to the perception that the residents might be early Christianized Qemants. The last group of informants were from Nara-Awudarda which is another adjoining area ten kilometers to the East of Ayikel.

Informants were selected in such a way so as to look how Qemant ethnic identity is constructed across urban and rural settings. The reason behind choosing the main town and adjacent rural areas was because of the fact that ethnic identity is meaningful mainly in situations in which two or more ethnic groups are in contact over a period of time. And it is most likely that one can find people from different ethnic background in such areas.

For the purpose of the study, informants were categorized in to four age groups as youths (18 to 28 years old), early adults (from 29 to 39), late adults (from 40 to 49) and elders (50 and above). Informants were arranged in such a way; because, as it is manifested in various literatures such things as ethnic self-identification; attitude towards one’s ethnic group; ethnic involvement and sense of belonging etc, vary across generational difference. In fact, Phinney (1990:509) had stated that “studies of generational differences in ethnic identity have shown a fairly consistent decline in ethnic group

identification in latter generations [...]”. Therefore, ten informants from each of the first three age category and thirty from the last category, with a total of sixty informants were interviewed using an interview guide which basically aimed at identifying the changes in the objective and subjective elements of the Qemant ethnic identity.

The other variable considered in selecting informants was the level of education of informants. Concerning their educational level informants were categorized as ‘educated’ and ‘uneducated’ to refer to those who had an experience in the ‘modern education’ and those who did not have respectively. This was because, as it is reflected in various works (see Rogler et al., 1980 and Phinney, 1990) the feeling of ethnic identity among ethnic members varies across this variable. Specifically in the case at hand, the uneducated study participants tend to consider ethnicity and religion as one and the same (being Orthodox Christian means becoming an Amhara). But the educated ones view the two as different. Half of the total informants were educated most of whom (twenty six informants) were living in the town while the rest half were the uneducated out of which twenty informants were residents in the above mentioned rural areas.

In selecting informants based on the above mentioned variables, the socio-economic status of informants was also considered. This is because of the fact that ethnic identity might also vary depending on the socio-economic status position of ethnic members. Indeed, Makabe (1979 cited in Phinney, 1990:510) affirmed that “ethnic identity is negatively related to the occupational mobility of subjects”. So, informants from Ayikel and Säraba towns were selected across their socio-economic status; in accordance with the common perception of the people in the area. Thus, eighteen of the informants were those who were identified as people who belong to a higher socio-economic status. These

were mainly the white collar workers and business men/women. The other eighteen informants were identified as people having a low socio-economic status who were the uneducated mostly engaged in low income generating activities such as selling local beer and street vending.

Generally, a total of sixty informants were selected and interviews conducted to look in to the nature of ethnic identity across such variables as; age, level of education, locality of residence and socio-economic status. Across such variables, men and women are equally represented. This was because ethnic identity is so complex and multidimensional that it varies according to the context and the characteristics of the ethnic members. Informants were selected with the help of two experts working in Culture and Tourism Office of the *Woreda*. The other person who helped me in identifying informants was an interested man in the research objective who was from Qemant origin and served as a teacher for the last twenty years around the area. The latter has also an experience in facilitating the process of identifying informants when a researcher from Addis Ababa University was conducting research on the Qemant language around the area. However, once contacting and building relationship with some of the informants, I also used the method of interpersonal network to select some other informants in accordance with the already set selection criteria.

In addition to those informants from Qemant origin, semi structured interviews were also conducted with twenty non Qemant residents; all of whom were from the neighboring Amhara ethnic group. Ten of these informants were selected from Ayikel and Säraba, based on the duration of their residence in the towns. So, those who had lived for twenty years and above were interviewed since they might know better about the nature of socio-

cultural interactions between the two groups. Half of these informants were business men and women who mainly relied on the main trade route that extends from the towns of Gondar to Mettema which crosses Ayikel. But the remaining are civil servants working in the town. The other ten informants were recruited from the above mentioned rural *kebeles* so as to get a highlight about the nature of interactions between the two groups in rural areas. All of these rural informants were engaged in agriculture but the two also serve as priests in the nearby Orthodox churches. The Amhara informants were interviewed using another interview guide which focused on the nature of socio-cultural relations and interactions between the Qemant and the neighboring Amhara as well as on how they mutually identified each other. This is because ethnic identity is dichotomized following the socio-cultural interactions between different ethnic groups. It is a dual process that is determined both by the group members and important outsiders.

1.5.1.2 Focus Group Discussions

Focus Group Discussion was the other method that was employed to collect other relevant data. This method was selected because the feeling of being 'ethnic' might vary according to the situations the informants are in and the people they are with. So, I found this method typical to cross check and enrich the information gained from each individual interview. A total of four FGDs were conducted, each contained eight participants. Two of the focus groups constituted those with the age of fifty and above, one for the 'educated' and the other for the 'uneducated'. The other two focus groups were arranged based on the socio-economic status of participants, one for those identified as having high status position while the other for those in low status position. Therefore, the FGD participants were selected considering their level of education and socio-economic status

position. Although it was planned to equally represent men and women in all of the FGDs, unfortunately all of the volunteers were men. Participants were selected with the help of the *kebele* chairmen and the above mentioned facilitators who were always behind me in time of my need. The FGD participants were first introduced about the aim of the discussion and then invited to discuss on such topics as: the nature of changes in the content of the Qemant ethnic identity and the factors behind the change. On average each of the FGDs took one and half hours which were conducted in the *kebele*'s conference hall with refreshment provided at the end of the discussion.

1.5.1.3 Key Informant Interviews

In addition to semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, I also used key informants interview. It is natural to find some individuals in any society that have special knowledge about the socio cultural practices of the society where they are in. So, for Anthropological studies, even for others, the contribution of such people as an informant would be a lot. Accordingly, based on my request, ten informants were identified by the facilitators as those having special knowledge and experience in what was perceived by the people as the distinctive feature of the Qemant people. Out of these informants, I selected only five, after my first interview, considering their ability to elaborate and create contexts in answering questions. All of the key informants were above the age of sixty; two of whom were women living in Ayikel, the other three were men in Säraba, Tübär Säräqo and Nara-Awudarda (one from each place). Therefore, through out the field work time, I repeatedly contacted these informants for the further elaboration of facts when I faced some ambiguities, paradoxes and fragmented information from other informants.

1.5.1.4 Life History

For a better understanding of the subjective elements of ethnic identity particularly the individuals' awareness of their ethnic identity and their sense of belonging to and identification with the Qemant ethnicity, the life history method was also employed. For this purpose, six informants were selected: two youths aged twenty two (one boy and one girl); two adults with the age of forty two and forty seven (both men); and two elders at the age of sixty and eighty one; a woman and a man respectively. These were selected out of the already interviewed sixty Qemant informants under semi structured interview. Those whom I considered their case will better illustrate the issues at hand, and also those considered as having well articulator skill were invited to recount their life history themselves. Here, the individual life histories did not necessarily cover the whole span of their life. But it was largely limited to the main aspects they experienced being Qemant. As such, the results gained are presented as individual case studies towards the end of the analysis part.

1.5.1.5 Direct Observation

Besides collecting data using the above methods, throughout the field work time, I also tried to observe those aspects which might give additional insight into the issues under investigation- ethnic identity. I attempted to look into the nature of socio-cultural interaction among the people at the market places, local beer houses and churches. Likewise, I tried to observe the body languages (such as gestures and facial expressions) of the informants at the time of the interview. Moreover, the life style and settlement pattern of the residents were also observed.

Generally, therefore, the basic data of the research was collected using the methods of: semi-structured interview (with sixty Qemant and twenty non Qemant informants); Focus group discussion (Four focus groups, each contained of eight participants); key informant interview (with five informants); life histories (of six individuals selected out of the already interviewed informants); and observation. In all of these methods, the objective of the research was communicated to the informants so that the required data were collected based on the informed consent of the study participants. In addition, the research agenda was also explained for the concerned government officials in the *woreda*.

1.5.2 Secondary Sources

Secondary sources of information were consulted in order to articulate related literature and to examine Qemant ethnic identity in light of the constitutional rights given to different ethnic groups in the country. So, both published and unpublished materials such as books, journals, and Articles were used. These secondary sources enabled to deepen and supplement those first hand data collected in the field.

1.6 Fieldwork Situation and Experiences

Unluckily, it is common to read the dry ethnographic accounts of the people with whom Anthropologists are working with. Most of the time the various encounters, the ups and downs, and the experiences of Anthropologists in the field are just like a closed book; not reflected in their work. I believe such field encounters and experiences are not less than the major issue intended to be addressed in the research. So, in this section I tried to describe the field work situation that I experienced as a student researcher. The time that I

spent in the field was two months; from 21/12/2009 up to 21/02/2010. Based on the types of activities done in the field this time period was divided into three phases.

The first phase extended from 21/12/2009 up to 30/12/2009 which was the first week of my field time, especially the time of field entry during which I undertook some major activities. First, I introduced myself and the research agenda to some concerned people in the town. Specially, I went to the *Woreda* and *Kebele* Office of Administration and communicated my research objectives to the respective office administrators. In addition, I met experts working at the Culture and Tourism Office of the *Woreda* and explained why I was there. All these were to get their assistance in time of necessity. Secondly, by walking through the main and supplementary roads of the town I tried to observe the general layout of the town, the location and direction of different government offices, religious centers and market places. I tried to acquaint myself with the general physical layout of the research area. Thirdly, in order to accustom myself to the common socio-cultural and normative system of the area, I tried as much as possible to get and talk to different people. Those houses in which *tella* (local beer) is sold were my favorite places where I met with different people. Specially, on Thursdays and Saturdays which are market days in the area such houses are crowded by people coming from different sections of the rural areas where I get important information when they talk to each other. For example, the way they talk and express ideas, the words they use, the various economic, political and socio-cultural issues they raise were among some to mention. The most important information that I found and used in approaching my interviewee throughout the field work was the commonly known greeting expression in kemantney language which says “*dangergina*” which means ‘how are you/how do you do’ and the

associated response “*mizegāna wang*” which is an equivalent of ‘be God praised’. Finally, I modified the original interview guide by incorporating some other important questions (see Appendix). Likewise, an attempt was made to correct the nature of word usage in the Amharic version of the guide; considering whether it could be easily understood or not by the informants.

The second phase of the field work lasted from January 1/2010 to February 16/2010; during which I collected almost all of the basic data of the research using the qualitative methods discussed above. The last one was field exit period which took only four days after the end of the second phase. This was the time for doing some finishing tasks such as the collection of some officially organized or documented profiles of the research site among which the *woreda* and zonal maps of the research area were the crucial ones. I had also the last refreshment with those people who were behind me at the time of the field work.

The field work was not free from any challenges and strains. First and foremost the sensitive nature of the issue at hand was my first difficulty in approaching informants. I have learned practically that building rapport and getting acceptance among the study participants needs time, courage and effort from a researcher. The other major challenge that I faced in the field was the difficult and tiresome travel on foot in getting the rural informants. Associated with this, there was also some failures and postponement of interview appointments (for various reasons) on the side of my informants. The boredom transcription of recorded interviews, most of the time I did every night, was the other one. What should be noted is the facility problems: the intermittent supply of water and electric power provision in the town. Finally, the absence of mobile phone network

coverage was the other problem that largely hindered my communication both with my informants and facilitators there; and with my classmates who were doing their field works in different areas of the country. Experience sharing might have been my benefits from my colleagues.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The study would add some information to the ethnographic study of Ethiopia. It would also serve as an input for further research that would be undertaken on the Qemant people.

1.8 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study of ethnic identity is a broad subject matter. It is difficult to address all issues in such a small research project. Therefore, this research is limited both in place and scope. As it is mentioned in section 1.4, although the Qemant people are found in different parts of North Gondar Zone of the Amhara Regional State, this study is confined to those Qemant living in Chilga *woreda*.

The thesis has some limitations. First, out of the four focus group discussions, the two were originally planned to be undertaken with those study participants in the rural side. Unfortunately, all the four were conducted with those residents of the main town (Ayikel). Because the time of my field work coincided with the harvesting season which made it difficult to conduct FGD with the rural people who are engaged in agriculture. This would have possibly limited the further enrichment of the data collected. Secondly, ethnic identity is so fluid and dynamic across place, time and context that despite an

effort was made to consider different variables, throughout the research, it will be difficult to say that the thesis fully capture the issue under investigation.

1.9 Description of the Study Area

Chilga is one of the twenty four *woredas* in North Gondar Zone and Ayikel is its capital. It is located at a distance of 61 km. to the west of Gondar, the Zonal city, and 237 km. to the north of Bahirdar, the regional capital city. Latitudinally, Chilga is located between 12⁰ E and 13⁰ 30'N and approximately at 37⁰ E longitude (Aychew, 2001:2). Chilga covers an area of 251,100 hectares (Zelalem, 2003:53). It is found along the main trade and commercial route from Gondar to Metemma across the Ethio-Sudanese boarder.

The *woreda* has an administrative area constituting forty-three rural and four town *kebeles*. According to the 1994 Ethiopian Housing and Population Census Chilga had a population of 166,086 while Ayikel the administrative center had a population of 8,364. The same Census indicated that the total number of the ethnicity's population (those living in the region as a whole) was 172,324; and those whose first tongue was kemantney numbered 1,650 while the rest 3,450 had the first tongue of their Amhara neighbors, Amharic. But there is no specific data compiled for those Qemant people living in Chilga *woreda*. From these figures one could easily understand that they are small in size compared to the neighboring Amhara. Indeed, the 2007 National Census of the country did not list the Qemant people as a separate ethnic group and so did not at all compiled specific data about the people. But it estimated the total size of the population of the *woreda* to be 221,361 out of which 20,739 people were found in the urban while 200, 622 were in the rural areas. Until very recently the Bétä Israeli ("Fälašša") people

also constituted an important portion of the population of the area. However, their mass exodus to Israel in the 1990's has reduced their number drastically.

The language of the Qemant people is known as Kemantney. According to Zelalem (2003:30) Kemantney (western Agew) together with its sister languages, Bilen of Eretria (northern Agew), Ximt'aja of Wollo (eastern Agew), and Awnji of Gojjam (southern Agew) constitute the central Cushitic language family, traditionally called Agew.

The dominant religion in the area is Orthodox Christianity, then Islam and there are also a few Qemants practicing the earlier religion. In the *woreda* there are five monasteries, 153 churches and 221 schools. Likewise many Muslim shrines are also found (Aychew, 2001:3).

As per the information gained from the *Woreda's* Office of Information, the topography of the area is dominated by rugged terrain. The mean annual temperature ranges between 11-32^o c and the annual rainfall vary from 995-1175 mm. And 67% of the area is *kolla* (tropical climate) while the rest (33%) is characterized by *woyena dega* (temperate) climatic conditions. The inhabitants of the *woreda* especially those living in the rural areas are peasants whose livelihood is agriculture while those in the town are civil servants and businessmen and women.

1.10 Organization of the Paper

The study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is an introductory one which includes the background of the study, statement of the problem, the general and specific objectives, the rationale for the selection of the research site, the methods employed and

its justifications; the significance, scope and limitations of the study, and finally the descriptions of the study area.

The second chapter focuses on the review of related literatures which basically aimed at assessing the conceptual and theoretical approaches about ethnic identity. The forms, contents and dynamic nature of ethnic identity are also scrutinized. The next two chapters consist of the analysis part. The third chapter aims at showing the objective and subjective elements of Qemant ethnic identity while the fourth one essentially dictates the internal and external factors that dichotomized the ethnic identity of the people and the major factors behind its weakening. Finally, the summary part presents a highlight of what was said in the previous chapters.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 CONCEPTUAL REVIEW AND THEORITICAL APPROACHES

There are many concepts for which definitions are problematical. "Ethnic identity", "ethnic group" and "ethnicity" are three such (Royce, 1982:17). Likewise, Berhanu (2008:1) maintained that "there is no generally agreed definition or theory of ethnicity [and ethnic identity]; scholars define and describe the term in various ways [...]". Ethnic terminologies reflect not only a certain amount of conceptual confusion but also the various ideological frames of reference and the different theoretical approaches in which these terms are commonly used (Stavenhagen, 1996:18). The following quotation from Vaughan (2003:43) will give a better insight:

'Ethnicity' remains a mobile term (Glazer & Moynihan 1975), meaning different things to different people. 'Ethnic' or 'ethnic group' has been used to mean: race; specific major races; socio-cultural groups; sub-groups living among others in a foreign country; or, a group of people who 'contrast themselves or are contrasted by others, on the basis primarily of sharing certain cultural criteria such as language, beliefs and values, religion or history' who may or may not share geographical contiguity' and 'racial characteristics' (du Toit 1978:1-4).

It is in the sense of the last alternatives mentioned in the above quotation that this thesis intended to address the issues under investigation. Here below, an attempt is made to review important concepts and theories that are relevant to examine the research subject.

Ethnic groups are historically given collectivities which have both objective and subjective characteristics, that is, their members acknowledge sharing common traits such as language, culture or religion, as well as a sense of belonging (Stavenhagen, 1996:4). Such groups exist over time, even as they emerge and may well change and disappear. Ethnic boundaries are socially constructed and may be more or less permeable (Ibid: 40).

Membership criteria by members and nonmembers may or may not be the same, and the creation and maintenance of the ethnic boundary within which members play according to similar and continuing rules is a major aspect of the phenomenon (Cohen, 1978:386).

An ethnic group is a type of cultural collectivity, one that emphasizes the role of myths of descent and historical memories, and that is recognized by one or more cultural differences like religion, customs, language or institutions. Such collectivities are doubly historical in the sense that not only are historical memories essential to their continuance but each such ethnic group is the product of specific historical forces and is therefore subject to historical change and dissolution (Smith, 1991:20). It is a reference group invoked by people who share a common historical style, based on overt features and values, and who, through the process of interaction with others, identify themselves as sharing that style (Royce, 1982:18).

Horowitz (1985 cited in Smith 1991:22) has linked ethnic groups to 'Super-families' of 'fictive descent' because members view their ethnies (the French term used to refer an ethnic community or ethnic group) as composed of interrelated families, forming one huge 'family' linked by mythical ties of filiations and ancestry. Without such descent myths it is difficult to see ethnies surviving for any length of time. The sense of 'whence we came' is central to the definition of 'who we are'.

Ethnic group members often recognize that they have an historical tie to one another that precedes or is external to those societies in which they now find themselves. This tie is reflected in a common language that facilitates communication and maintains solidarity

and in forms of family life and social organization that make group members feel common or shared understanding of interpersonal relations (Cohen, 1978:398).

“There are six main features of an ethnie”. These are: a collective name, which symbolizes the uniqueness of the community and demarcates it from others; a myth of common origins, which relates all the members to a common ancestor; a shared ethno-history, that is, the shared memories of successive generations of a culture-community; one or more common cultural characteristics which can serve to demarcate members from non-members, such as language, customs, religion, and institutions; an association with a historic territory, or homeland, even where most of the community no longer resides in it; and a sense of solidarity on the part of at least a significant segment of the culture-community (Harris,1995:133).

As the several attributes of an ethnie come together and become more intense and salient, so does the sense of ethnic identity and of ethnic community. The more a given population possesses or shares the attributes, the more closely does it approximate the ideal type of an ethnic community or ethnie (Smith, 1991:21-23). There are three main kinds of ethnic community in the historical record. These are: ethno-linguistic communities, in which language is the most salient and vital element in the definition of ethnicity and the mobilization of ethnic sentiments; ethno-religious communities, which have been defined and have defined themselves, primarily in terms of religious beliefs, practices, and symbols; and ethno-political communities, that have defined themselves, and been defined, by historical memories and political traditions (Harris, 1995:133-34).

Cohen (1978:386) explained ethnicity as “a set of socio-cultural features that differentiate ethnic groups from one another”. He directly stated: “ethnicity is a series of nesting dichotomizations of inclusiveness and exclusiveness”. In addition, Weber (1968:389 cited in Malesevic 2004:25) defined ethnic groups as:

Those 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 and migration; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists.

Irimato and Yamada (2004:11) used the term *ethnos* to refer to a group of people who are considered to have common features among them while not sharing said features with outsiders. “Common features” refers to their language, culture, origin and history, as well as people’s recognition of these features. They also explained ethnicity as the entirety of features which an individual, belonging to a certain group, distinguishes his own group from others, and which makes this group unique.

Barth defined ethnic groups by its relations to other groups; by its boundary not by what he called “the cultural stuff that it encloses”. It is seen as a form of social organization in which the critical feature is the characteristics of self-ascription and ascription by others. He openly stated it as: “[...] ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves, and thus have the characteristic of organizing interaction between people.” To the extent that actors use ethnic identities to categorize themselves and others for purposes of interaction, they form ethnic groups in this organizational sense (Barth, 1969:10-15). There must be a “significant other”, because ethnic groups are always in relational. There is always a “we” and “us” in relation to a “you” and “them” and the relation ship is usually in flux, rather than stagnant (Mesfin, 2006:8)

Barth's main contribution is to urge a shift away from discussions of the content of ethnic identity through considerations of ethnic markers such as dress, food, language and so on, towards a consideration of the boundaries that mark the limits of such contents. This is because; boundaries persist despite a flow of personnel and information across them. Secondly, such groups cannot exist in isolation but only in contrast to other such groups (Banks, 1996:12).

Ethnic boundaries are patterns of social interaction that give rise to, and subsequently reinforce, in group members' self identification and outsiders' confirmation of group distinctions. Ethnic boundaries are therefore better understood as social mediums through which association transpires rather than as territorial demarcations (Sanders, 2002:327). In another image the boundary can be seen as the dialectical synthesis of internal thesis and external antithesis (Jenkins, 1996:112).

From the above, one can understand that some theorists advocate the importance of the content of an ethnic identity and has consequently ignored the boundary around it. Others focus on the boundary rather than the content, not dealing about what goes on within those boundaries. Still for some other theorists the content of an ethnic identity is as important as the boundary around it. Indeed, Vaughan (2003:41-42) mentioned this as:

The debate between those who stress the cultural content of ethnicity, and those who emphasizes the salience (or otherwise) of ethnic boundaries and divisions, has been a number of incarnations, and continues to exercise anthropologists. It was sparked by Fredrik Barth (1970), whose introduction to his edited collection *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* set out a preference for a focus not on the cultural 'contents' of ethnic identity, but on the boundaries that 'contain' the group .

Ethnic boundaries function to determine identity options, membership composition and size, and form of ethnic organization. Boundaries answer the question: who are we?

Culture provides the content and meaning of ethnicity; it animates and authenticates ethnic boundaries by providing a history, ideology, symbolic universe, and systems of meaning. Culture answer the question: what are we? (Nagel, 1994: 162) Likewise, Royce (1982:18-19) explicated about the continuous interaction between contents and boundaries in saying: "If we are to understand ethnic behavior without shutting our eyes to its complexity and ambiguity, we must pay equal attention to the two contrasting features [i.e. content and boundary]". Therefore, it is in line with this position that this thesis focused both on the cultural content and boundary of ethnic identity concerning the Qemant people.

An ethnic group is a phenomenon that gives rise to: social organization; an objective phenomenon that provides the structure for the ethnic community, and identity; a subjective phenomenon that gives to individuals a sense of belonging and to the community a sense of oneness and historical meaning (Isajiw, 1990:35).

In addition to the content-boundary division, Royce (1982:8) also makes clear about the dichotomy existing between objective versus subjective definitions of ethnic identity. Objective definitions require material demonstration of ethnic identity such as language, phenotype, dress, religious beliefs, foods etc. Subjective definitions revolve around ideological positions (e.g. identification to a group). Still there are other definitions what he called "composite definition" which composed both objective and subjective elements. Besides, the objective-subjective dichotomy in definitions, the description of ethnic identity is also dependent upon theoretical contexts.

Anthropological uses of “identity” are ambiguous. In one sense, the term refers to properties of uniqueness and individuality, the essential differences making a person distinct from all others, as in “self-identity”. In another sense, it refers to qualities of sameness, in that persons may associate themselves, or be associated by others, with groups or categories on the basis of some salient common features as in the case of ethnic identity (Barnard and Spencer, 2002: 292). It is in this latter sense that the identity of the Qemant people was addressed in this thesis. Ethnic identity is the sum total of feelings on the part of group members about those values, symbols, and common histories that identify them as a distinct group (Royce, 1982:18).

Ethnic group identity is the result of internal factors (common life styles and shared beliefs), and the out come of the relations the group entertains with other distinct but similarly constituted groups and with the state in any given country (Stavenhagen, 1996:40). He further explained that:

[E]thnic identity refers to an individual’s consciousness of belonging to, and identification with the group of which he or she becomes a part in the process of growing up, the internalization of values and symbols shared with other members of the group, and the common beliefs regarding the origins, descent, characteristics, specificity and destiny of the group [Ibid: 94].

“Ethnic identity is a person’s conscious awareness that he belongs to a certain ethnos based on ethnicity” (Irimato and Yamada, 2004:11). For Isajiw (1990:11) it is conceived as “a social psychological phenomenon that derives from membership in an ethnic group”. Identity with reference to a group involves a sense of belonging to the group based on characteristics shared by its members. Fundamental to group identity is the division of people into “us” and “other”. When group identity is defined in terms of

ethnic origin, it is referred to as ethnic identity (Li, et al., 1995:343). On the other hand, Juang et al (2006:543) consider ethnic identity as a dynamic, multidimensional construct that refers to one's identity or sense of self as a member of an ethnic group.

Irimoto and Yamada (2004:401) described identity as "etic or emic recognition that certain attributes possessed by individuals belong to certain categories. Recognition based on ethnicity that an individual belongs to a specific group is ethnic identity". Lambert (1986, cited in Irimoto and Yamada, 2004:82) said "ethnic identity, one of a person's identities, can be a frame of reference for social practice in a multi-ethnic society".

It seems reasonable to assume that identity, from a socio-cultural point of view, has to do with recurring distinctive characteristics of persons or group which are apparent in their interaction, as for example physical type, religion, language, sense of belonging, collective focus on country of origin or heritage and occupational specialization (Abbinck, 1984:139). Ethnic identity describes that condition in which a mass of people have made the same identification with ethnic symbols - have internalized the symbols of the ethnic group - so that they may act as one psychological group when there is a threat to, or the possibility of enhancement of, these symbols of ethnic identity (Stavenhagen,1996:95).

Li and his colleagues in "Discourse on Migration and Ethnic Identity" (1995:343) used the term "ethnic identity" and "cultural identity" interchangeably justifying that "shared ethnic identity usually implies common cultural heritage, although the reverse does not necessarily hold". But, Dorais (1994 cited in Irimoto and Yamada 2004:82) distinguished cultural identity from ethnic identity. He regards the former concept as 'a fundamental

consciousness of the specificity of the group to which one belongs in terms of ways of living, customs, languages, values, etc.'. It is related to all domains of daily life, but ethnic identity is a 'politicized cultural identity'. The latter is 'connected with the political domain and becomes manifest in relation to and confrontation with others within the context of a larger political arena or state'.

As it is indicated above, ethnic identity is defined in many ways by different scholars. This shows the fact that there is no widely agreed on definition of the term and is indicative of confusion about the topic. The definitions presented above reflect quite different understandings or emphasis regarding what is meant by ethnic identity. Indeed, Phinney (1990:500) explained it as follows:

Some writers considered self-identification the key aspect [of ethnic identity]; others emphasized feelings of belonging and commitment, the sense of shared values and attitudes, or attitudes toward one's group. In contrast to the focus by these writers on attitudes and feelings, some definitions emphasized the cultural aspects of ethnic identity: for example, language, behavior, values, and knowledge of ethnic group history.

The differences in the definitions of ethnic identity are related to the diversity in how researchers have conceptualized ethnic identity and in the questions they have sought to answer (Ibid: 501). Since the objective features of ethnic identity are assumed to be the basis for the ascriptive identification of ethnic members towards their own ethnic group, in this thesis, both the objective and subjective elements of ethnic identity are considered in examining the ethnic identity of the Qemant people.

2.2 THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO ETHNICITY AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

Although ethnicity and ethnic identity were not the primary focus of their analysis, we can attribute the theoretical basis for the issues of ethnicity and ethnic identity to the founding fathers of Sociology and social Anthropology.

For Marx who had considered the “infrastructure” or “economy” as the base and other institutions including culture and ideas as “superstructure”, it is easy to include ethnic identity in the sphere of superstructure. And since he had assumed the economy as the driving force behind social change, ethnic identity would also be changed when the economic base of a society is transformed. Smith (1991:5-6) mentioned that, in Marx’s Sociology, class is the supreme indeed the only relevant collective identity. And this class identity emerged from the sphere of production and exchange. This is what Malesevic (2004:14-18) referred:

The historical ascendancy of class over ethnic identity; For Marx class consciousness remains a real potent force of social change while ethnic identities are no more than an epiphenomenon, a second order reality, which will be transcended once a genuine communist society is established.

Just as for Marx, ethnicity and ethnic identity was not a main focal point of Durkheim’s work; he never explicitly dealt with this topic. However, the decline of ethnicity and ethnic identity with the arrival of modernity; the nature of ethnic group solidarity; and the perception of an ethnic group as a form of moral community would be at the heart of Durkheim’s theory (Malesevic:18-21).

Weber (1968) is the only founding father of Sociology who explicitly and extensively engaged with ethnic relations. Ethnicity as a form of status group and a mechanism of

monopolistic social closure and ethnic group formation through social and political action are among the central tenets of Weber's theory (ibid: 24).

Nowadays, we can find various theories that largely deal with ethnicity and ethnic identity as Banks (1996:47) put it:

The theories dealt with ethnicity [and ethnic identity] largely oscillated between a number of polar extremes: the individual versus the group; the content of an ethnic identity versus its boundary; the primordial gut feeling of an identity versus its instrumental expression; ethnicity as all-inclusive general theory versus ethnicity as a limited approach to particular problems.

However, "the two fundamental theories that inform the study of ethnic identity are Primordialism and Circumstantialism (Matsuo, 1992:506). Likewise, Wolde-Sellassie (2004:21) also mentioned that there are two broadly predominant but competing approaches to the understanding of ethnicity, ethnic identity and ethnic groups. These are usually characterized as Primordialism and Constructivism. Some other scholars do also categorize the paradigms of understanding ethnicity into three approaches: Primordialism, Instrumentalism, and Constructivism (Barnard and Spencer, 2002: 190).

Nevertheless, many of the theoretical accounts of ethnicity are clustered under the former two categories, combining the arguments of instrumentalism and constructivism under one category and labeling it by either of the terms or several related others such as Circumstantialism, Situationalism, Interactionalism, and Subjectivism (Wolde-sellassie, 2004:21). On the other hand, Primordialism is also labeled by several other related variant terms such as essentialism, naturalism, objectivism, and socio-biology (Ibid).

2.2.1 The Primordialist Approach

It was Edward Shils (1957) who coined the term 'primordial' in his argument that family attachment are embedded in a primordial relational quality that attaches ineffable importance to blood (Berhanu, 2008:3). To scholars of Primordialism, ethnicity is considered first and foremost an extension of a pre modern social bond (Lien, 2001:8).

The Primordialist approach treats ethnic identities as something that is broadly given. Ethnicity and ethnic identity are seen as a stable feature of individual and group life that is able to endure over historically long periods of time. Ethnicity is for the most part equated with culture, and culture itself is viewed as a more or less constant, persistent, static, almost unchangeable feature that clearly demarcates groups one from another. In this perspective ethnic identity is examined as "an imperative status, as a more or less immutable aspect of the social person" (Malesevic, 2004: 175-76).

At its most extreme, the Primordialist position hold that ethnicity and ethnic identity are innate aspects of human identity, given, requiring description rather than explanation (Banks, 1996:39). This approach defines ethnic identity as a given reality which persists over time in spite of radically changing circumstances. Primordialists argue that ethnic identity is a function of strong emotional ties which are based upon common biological origin and the distinctive past of a group. It argues that implanted ethnic identity through kinship persists even when assimilation progresses (Matsuo, 1992:506). Primordial ties are decisive in the maintenance of ethnic identities. They seek a psychological explanation for the behavioral phenomena typical of ethnic groups. In other words, distinctive cultural traits, strong ethnic solidarity and resistance to exogamy are explained

by strong ethnic identities that persist over generations (Ibid). Grosby (1994, cited in Berhanu 2008:3) associated the term 'primordial' as a cognitive reference to the objects of attachments or ties around which various kind of kinship are formed.

For the extremist Socio-Biological Primordialists, ethnicity and ethnic identity are conceived as based on biology and determined by genetic and geographical factors in which group identification is genetically coded as a product of early human evolution when the ability to recognize members of families and primary groups was essential for survival (Wolde-sellassie, 2004:22).

Within the framework of this approach, some authors contend that the persons who shares a certain number of genes (it is not said how many nor which), will bond together and seek to reproduce their genes in the most efficient possible manner. This they achieve through the endogamy of the ethnic group, leading to a process of genetic selection which ensures greater opportunity for group survival. Genetics accounts for ethnic identity (Stavenhagen, 1996:19). On the other hand, the cultural and historical moderate Primordialists view ethnicity as extended groups or collective identities deeply rooted in historical ties and based on assumed kinship or descent, custom, language, and race (Ibid).

The primordial perspective argues that people have an innate sense of ethnic identity. It is something that people are born with, is instinctive and natural, and is difficult if not impossible to change. This is illustrated by the natural instinct to favor one's kin or co-ethnics over non-kin and non-ethnics (Le, 2009:2). The persistence of ethnocentrism and even outright conflict between different ethnic groups attest to the historical and

continuing validity of the primordial basis of ethnic identity (Ibid). The longevity and persistence of ethnic ties are explained by direct reference to these primordial, 'ineffable' sentiments (Malesevic, 2004:176). Similarly, Grosby (1994, cited in Berhanu 2008:4) justified the primordial basis as: 'this is one of the reasons why human beings have scarified their lives and continue to scarify their lives for their own family and for their own nation'.

However, this approach is inadequate in explaining observed geographical variations in that the expression of cultural identity by sub groups of people from the same ethnic origin differs according to the particular socio-political milieu in which they reside (Li, et al., 1995:343). It cannot account for the dynamics of ethno-genesis (the formation of ethnies over time), nor does it tell us much about the internal and external structures of ethnic groups and identities (Stavenhagen, 1996:19). In other words, Primordialism has been criticized for presenting a static and naturalistic view of ethnicity and ethnic identity that mystifies emotion and reduces cultural and social behavior to biological derives (Berhanu, 2008:6). The theorists in this approach underemphasize people's passions and strong dedication to rational values, sense of duties, classes and other socially constructed supreme goals. Cooperation and intimacy among people do not take place only between kin, but also can extend to non-kin groups based on belief system, ideological commitments, professional interests and other pragmatically required or developed shared commonalities beyond primordial sentiments (ibid:6-7).

2.2.2 The Constructivist Approach

Earlier Anthropologists and Sociologists [sociological functionalism] believed in the distinctiveness and immutability of ethnic groups, a view that is not surprising in light of the general emphasis in the social sciences on social institutions, equilibrium, and the analogy that society, like all organisms, made sense; that is, it was an internally consistent system. Ethnic groups were seen as another kind of social institution that fit into the larger society in certain ways and that maintained a conservative equilibrium [Royce, 1982:19].

But, for constructivists, ethnic identity is conceived as dynamic, flexible and variable in which both the contents and boundaries of an ethnic group change based on circumstances. For them, ethnic groups are subjectively constructed collective entities without fixed boundaries based on economic, social or political processes. They consider ethnicity as a complex and highly adaptable social construction created by individuals and groups to bring together members for a common purpose (Wolde-selassie, 2004: 23).

According to the Constructionist view; the origin, content, and form of ethnicity reflect the creative choices of individuals and groups as they define themselves and others in ethnic ways. Through the actions and designations of ethnic groups, their antagonists, political authorities, and economic interest groups, ethnic boundaries are erected dividing some populations and unifying others. Ethnicity is constructed out of the material of language, religion, culture, appearance, ancestry, or regionality. The location and meaning of particular ethnic boundaries are continuously negotiated, revised, and revitalized, both by ethnic group members themselves as well as by outside observers (Nagel, 1994:152-153).

Symbolic interactionism has more than any other sociological approach made clear how fluid and variable ethnic identity can be, and how unstable and situational are the

boundaries of ethnic groups. For them ethnic identities are fluid, flexible, changeable and a matter of consent. Ethnic groups exist as long as membership is voluntary and conscious (Malesevic, 2004:70-71).

Belonging to an ethnic group is a matter of attitudes, perceptions and sentiments that are necessary fleeting and mutable, varying with the particular situation of the subject. As the individual's situation changes, so will the group identification (Smith, 1991:20). Ethnic identities are fluid across time and social contexts, sometimes even to the point of "ethnic switching" (Sanders, 2002: 328). However, for Nagel (1994:156) ethnic identity is not only "optional" but also "mandatory" in that externally enforced ethnic boundaries can be powerful determinants of both the content and meaning of particular ethnicities. Similarly, Stephan (1989:508) argued that "[a] group or individual's ethnic identity cannot be sustained successfully if it is inconsistent with the identity assigned by others in a society". Therefore, ethnic identity is a dual process that is determined both by the group members and important outsiders.

The most influential and seminal constructivist approach is that of Fredric Barth (1969) which explained the situational and contextual nature of ethnicity. Barth's principle argument was that ethnicity is not some bundle of unchanging cultural traits-the "cultural stuff" of ethnicity, as he calls it-that can simply be examined and enumerated in order to determine differences between ethnic groups. Rather, ethnic groups are situationally defined in relationship to their social interactions with other groups, and the boundaries established and maintained between them as a result of these interactions (May, et al, 2004: 9).

Barth (1969) first convincingly articulated the notion of ethnicity as mutable, arguing that ethnicity is the product of social ascriptions, a kind of labeling process engaged in by oneself and others. According to this perspective, ethnic identity 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; what you think your ethnicity is, versus what they think your ethnicity is (Nagel, 1994:154).

Generally, ethnic identities in Barth's approach are not necessarily fixed. They are situational, a matter of self-ascription and ascription by others in interaction; what counts are boundaries rather than contents. Ethnicity is first and foremost a form of organizing social life rather than an inborn characteristic. Cashmore (1996:123, cited in Mesfin 2006:8) had also stated that:

Ethnicity is not a historical given at all and in fact a highly adaptive and malleable phenomenon. In response to changing conditions, the boundaries of an ethnic collectivity can expand or contract; individuals move in and out and even share membership in more than one community. The very content, symbols and meaning of a particular collective identity can and do evolve. In effect, ethnicity is dynamic, not a fixed and immutable element or social and political relations.

Malesevic (2004:176) explained that "the Situationalist [constructivist] perspective is the exact opposite of Primordialism". It aims to explain ethnic group solidarity and the maintenance of intensive ethnic group bonds underlining historical, structural and cultural contingencies and circumstantial aspects in ethnic relations. The notions of "interaction" between culturally diverse groups and "boundary maintenance" are the key terms in the analysis. The meaning and boundaries of ethnic identity are constantly being renegotiated, revised, and redefined, depending on specific situations and set of circumstances that each individual or ethnic group encounters (Le, 2009:3).

Ethnic identity is not a given reality but is a function of rapidly changing circumstances and a group's position in a social structure and historical context. It is amenable to fluctuation depending upon a group's solidarity and position in society (Matsuo, 1992:507).

The instrumentalist position would hold that ethnicity and ethnic identity is an artifact, created by individuals or groups to bring together a group of people for some common purpose (Banks, 1996: 39). Instrumentalists grasp ethnic identity as a social construct that emphasizes the sharing of cultural and linguistic characteristics and, kinship roots for the purpose of group mobilization (Berhanu, 2008:7). Similarly, rational choice theorists assumed that ethnic groups are the central source of private rewards as well as punishments, which motivate actors to take part in collective action. As per this theory ethnicity functions primarily as a source of benefits that compel individual actors to participate in collective actions. What is crucial for this perspective is the view that ethnic identity is not a primordial or static feature but rather dynamic, changing process. The change in the importance attributed to ethnic identity is explained in line with the cost-benefit calculations of individuals (Malesevic, 2004:99-101).

Instrumentalism, with its intellectual roots in Sociological functionalism, consider the cultural elements, values and practices of ethnic groups as resources for elites in competition for political power and economic advantage (Barnard and Spencer, 2002:191). For elite theorists like Mosca (1939), Pareto (1963) and Michels (1962); ethnicity and ethnic identity is generally viewed as a political resource, an ideological mask used by leaders for their own political ends. Elites constantly attempt to present their particular interest as the universal, common interest of the community as a whole

(Malesevic: 114-117). By transforming cultural attributes into political symbols, elites seek to establish a unique identity for their group which in turn serves the purpose of mobilizing the group against rivals (Li, et al; 1995:344).

Primordialism and Circumstantialism have been treated as if they were mutually exclusive theories, the advocates of each approach having criticized the other approach. Primordialism tends to focus on the persistence of ethnic identity and ignores the fluctuation of such identity in changing circumstances while Circumstantialism puts too much emphasis on the change of ethnic identity, and therefore, can not explain why such identity persists over time (Matsuo, 1992:507). Even if these two theories have been treated as contradictory, a few scholars have attempted to synthesize them to explain the persistence and fluctuation of ethnic identity of minority groups (ibid, 506).

Although, the Primordialists' emphasis on the givens and permanency of ethnic identities is highly exaggerated, the instrumentalists' assumption of fluidity of ethnic identities is equally overstated. Ethnic identities and ethnic solidarities have become reduced and subtle when societies find other solidarities on the bases of professionalism, class, political opinion and other opportunities (Berhanu, 2008:17). Primordialism has long been charged with assuming the fixed nature and explanatory power of the very ethnic given, which much research now problematizes. Instrumental or materialist approaches, on the other hand, are often criticized because they lack an adequate account of the emotive strength, and often apparently irrational power or pull associated with ethnic identities (Vaughan, 2003:41).

We must not overstate the mutability of ethnic boundaries or the fluidity of their cultural contents. To do so would deprive us of the means of accounting for the recurrence of ethnic ties and communities and their demonstrable durability over and above boundary and cultural changes in particular instances. The fact remains that ethnicity and ethnic identity exhibits both constancy and flux side by side, depending on the purposes and distance of the observer from the collective phenomenon in question. Therefore, any realistic account of ethnic identity must eschew the polar extremes of the primordialist-instrumentalist debate (Smith, 1991:24-25). Despite all these, Eriksen (2001:47) stated the recent shift, in Anthropology, towards the study of identities as follows:

For many Anthropologists, essentialism and primordialism appear as dated as pre Darwinian biology [...]. Reification and essentialism have become central terms of denunciation; multiple voices, situational identification and cultural flows are some of the key words delineating the current intellectual agenda.

Although ethnic diversity is overtly recognized in contemporary Ethiopia, as different scholars argued, Berhanu (2008) and Abbink (1997) to mention some of them, its discourse has become strongly politicized and the ethnic identity of groups is assumed to be a reflection of a primordial group character. But I am dubious about the presumed primordial character of ethnic identity since it is so fluid and subject to change and manipulation, and also of its cultural content and boundary maintenance. Even those core ethnic symbols and identity markers of an ethnic group can be changed depending on the circumstances that surround an ethnic group. This is particularly true in the case of the Qemant that once was a clear distinct ethnic group from the neighboring Amharans but following the Christianization movement launched in the area; their ethnic identity

became changed. Accordingly, in analyzing the ethnic identity of the Qemant people, the constructive approach is applied as guiding theoretical framework.

2.3 FORMS AND CONTENTS OF ETHNIC IDENTITY

In his book “Ethnic Conflicts and the Nation State”, Stavenhagen (1996:26-28) discussed about markers of ethnic identities. According to him, the various criteria commonly employed to identify ethnic groups may be usefully classified into objective and subjective categories. The objective criteria generally mean those attributes of a group that are independent of an individual’s volition, that ascribe him to his group at birth or through the process of socialization. They serve to identify the group as such and to denote individual and collective membership in the group. Objective criteria are sometimes externally visible markers, such as “racial” characteristics, material culture or group activities. They are the specific attributes of an ethnic group independently of the individuals who partake of them. The most commonly observed objective criteria include language, religion, territory, social organization, and culture.

Ethnic identity is not just a process whereby groups or individuals judge their ethnicity solely by objective physical criteria or on the basis of the culture in which they were born but the subjective nature of ethnic identity is also important (Stephan, 1989:507).

Subjective criteria refer to the psychological, affective, individual mental and emotional processes by which specific persons identify with a culture or an ethnic group, through which they assume a particular ethnic identity, and which guide their actions and behavior as members of such groups. Subjective factors, as distinct from objective attributes, have to do with cognition, affect, choice and will. They are thus essentially

elements that pertain to the individual, although by being widely shared they may often be referred to as “collective consciousness” (Stavenhagen, 1996: 27- 32). In recognition of the subjective nature of ethnic identity, it is now thought that self- identification is the least ambiguous way of determining where one group ends and another begins (Stephan, 1989: 507).

In a similar way, Isajiw (1990:36) also identified external and internal aspects of ethnic identity. External aspects refer to: observable behavior; both cultural and social, such as speaking an ethnic language and practicing ethnic traditions; participation in ethnic personal networks, such as family and friendship; participation in ethnic institutional organizations, such as churches and schools; participation in ethnic voluntary associations, such as clubs and youth organizations; and participation in functions sponsored by ethnic organizations. The internal, subjective aspects of ethnic identity refer to images, ideas, attitudes, and feelings.

Based on the differential variation of the components of ethnic identity Isajiw (Ibid: 37- 38) distinguished various forms of ethnic identity. A high level of retention of the practice of ethnic traditions accompanied by a low level of such subjective components as feelings of group obligation is one form of ethnic identity-“ritualistic ethnic identity”. By contrast a high intensity of feelings of group obligation accompanied by a low level of practice of traditions is a different form of ethnic identity which he labeled “ideological identity” with different implications for the collective aspects of ethnic group behavior. Negative images of one’s own ethnic group, accompanied by a high degree of awareness of one’s ethnic ancestry is still another form of ethnic identity; “rebellious identity”.

Finally, positive images of one's ancestral group accompanied by a practice of highly selected traditions represent another form of ethnic identity, "ethnic rediscovery".

With in the situational perspective, Le (2009:3) also identified two forms of ethnic identity. The first is "resurgent ethnic identity" in which the traditional or ancestral identities reemerge through historical events and particular circumstances. The other is "emergent ethnic identity" which involves the creation of new forms of group identity due to the convergence of particular circumstances. "More specifically, because of demographic changes or competition and conflict with other groups, a new ethnic identity based on group solidarity and similarity of experiences might form".

An individual who retains a strong ethnic identity while also identifying with the new society is considered to have an "integrated (or bicultural) identity". One who has a strong ethnic identity but does not identify with the new culture has a "separated identity", whereas one who gives up an ethnic identity and identifies only with the new culture has an "assimilated identity". The individual who identifies with neither has a "marginalized identity" (Phinney et al., 2001:495-496).

In his examination of commonalities across various models of identity formation; Phinney (1990:502-503) proposed a three stage progression from an "unexamined ethnic identity" through a "period of exploration" to an "achieved or committed ethnic identity". Early adolescents and perhaps adults who have not been exposed to ethnic identity issues are in the first stage, an "unexamined ethnic identity". Young people may simply not be interested in ethnicity and may have given it little thought. A second stage is characterized by a "moratorium or period of exploration". This may take place as the

result of a significant experience that forces awareness of one's ethnicity. It involves an often intense process of immersion in one's own culture through the activities such as reading, talking to people, going to ethnic museums, and participating actively in cultural events. As a result of this process; people come to a deeper understanding and appreciation of their ethnicity-that is, "ethnic identity achievement or internalization".

Having all this in mind, the ethnic identity of the Qemant people is scrutinized based on the above discussed contents and forms of ethnic identity.

2.4 THE DYNAMICS OF ETHNIC IDENTITY

Based on the literatures that I came across, it is possible to identify different factors that contribute for the dynamics of ethnic identity.

Many studies on the relationship between the individual's ethnic identity and structural position argue that people in lower status positions are more likely to have strong ethnic identities than people in higher status positions. As people move up in a social structure, they tend to lose their ethnic identity through assimilation (Matsuo, 1992:508).

Hwang and Murdock (1991:469-470) presented two competing models with opposing views of ethnic identity: "ethnic enclosure" and "ethnic competition" perspectives. The "ethnic enclosure" thesis explained that ethnic identity erodes over time as minorities learn the host's language, adopt its cultural patterns, improve their socio-economic standing, and are exposed to and interact more frequently with majority members and other minorities on a primary basis. In sum, the ethnic enclosure thesis maintains that lack of opportunities for inter-group contacts and socio-economic advancement sustains

ethnic identity. As cultural and structural barriers fall, most minority members relinquish their ethnic identity and seek full assimilation.

The second view, “ethnic competition,” counters the above and sees ethnic identity as a “dormant political consciousness” aroused among minorities as they confront majority prejudice and discrimination. Ethnic identity heightens as minority increase their knowledge about the host society, enter mainstream occupations, and interact more frequently with majority members. In sum, the ethnic competition thesis asserts that greater inter-group contact intensifies minority ethnic identity.

Sanders (2002:327) also discussed about how interpersonal networks within ethnic communities influence the degree of closure in social boundaries and the degree to which ethnic identity is retained. Blauner (1972) and Hechter (1975) cited in the same author suggested that ‘ethnic enclosure led to heightened group consciousness and increased the likelihood of collective mobilization’. When social boundaries take on less of a gate-keeper function protecting ethnically generated resources and more of a bridging function encouraging greater inter-group association, the identity preserving influence of ethnic boundaries is likely to decline (Ibid:348).

Studies of various groups in the United States find that ethnic identity is strongly shaped by the location of settlement. Regional and neighborhood concentrations of ethnic groups presumably facilitate the maintenance of social boundaries and ethnic identity (Sanders, 2002:345). Matsuo (1992:509) also added: “the isolation of a community leads to lower degrees of structural assimilation and higher ethnic identity”.

But other scholars like Phinney (1990:501) proposed a counter argument to the effect that ethnic awareness, group solidarity, and the potential for collective mobilization grow stronger under conditions of contact and competition with a dominant group. Ethnic identity is meaningful only in situations in which two or more ethnic groups are in contact over a period of time. In an ethnically or racially homogeneous society, ethnic identity is a virtually meaningless concept. Without the contrast between “us” and “them”, ethnic identity does not exist. “We define ourselves in large measure in terms of what we are not, and that derives from our experience of what others are and how we differ” (Royce, 1982:12).

From the above discussions one could identify two types of approaches what Royce (1982:38-41) labeled as “isolationist” and “interactionist”. In the “isolationist” approach scholars felt that ethnic identity could persist only in the absence of interaction, it was assumed that with contact inevitably comes change and loss of traditions. On the other hand, “interactionists” assume that interaction and contact with others who are different often prompt a strengthening of each group’s identity, ethnic identity is more often the product of increasing interaction between groups than the negative result of isolation. The shift of emphasis away from isolation reflects changes in the field of Anthropology in general. Perhaps the major change was from an emphasis on equilibrium to a concern with process.

Historical incidents are another major contributing factor to the dynamics of ethnic identities. For example, Stavenhagen (1990:501) assured this by stating: “when an ethnic group has a history of persecution and discrimination, identities may become positively reinforcing or negatively stigmatizing”. Another factor contributing to the dynamics of

ethnic identity is the pattern of interethnic relationships. Matsuo (1992:508) has this to say “prejudice and discrimination that a person experiences impacts one’s sense of ethnic identity”. In a similar way, Bonacich and Modell (1980, quoted in Sanders 2002:336) had described that ‘hostility from the dominant group tends to generate a defensive reaction from ethnic groups; it encouraged ‘reactive ethnic solidarity’ and strengthened ethnic boundaries and identity’. In the face of real or perceived hostility towards a particular ethnic group, some members of that group may down play or reject their own ethnic identity; others may assert their pride in their cultural group and emphasize solidarity as a way of dealing with negative attitudes (Phinney et al., 2001:494).

Political and economic incidents are also other major contributing factors to the vibrant of ethnic identity. For instance, Nagel (1994:157) mentioned that “as the State has become the dominant institution in society, political policies regulating ethnicity increasingly shape ethnic boundaries and influence patterns of ethnic identifications”. On the other side, Barth (1969:20) linked ethnic boundaries to resource niches in saying: “where separate niches are exploited by separate ethnic groups, ethnic tranquility prevails; however, niche competition (e.g., for land or water) results in ethnic boundary instability due to conflict or displacement”.

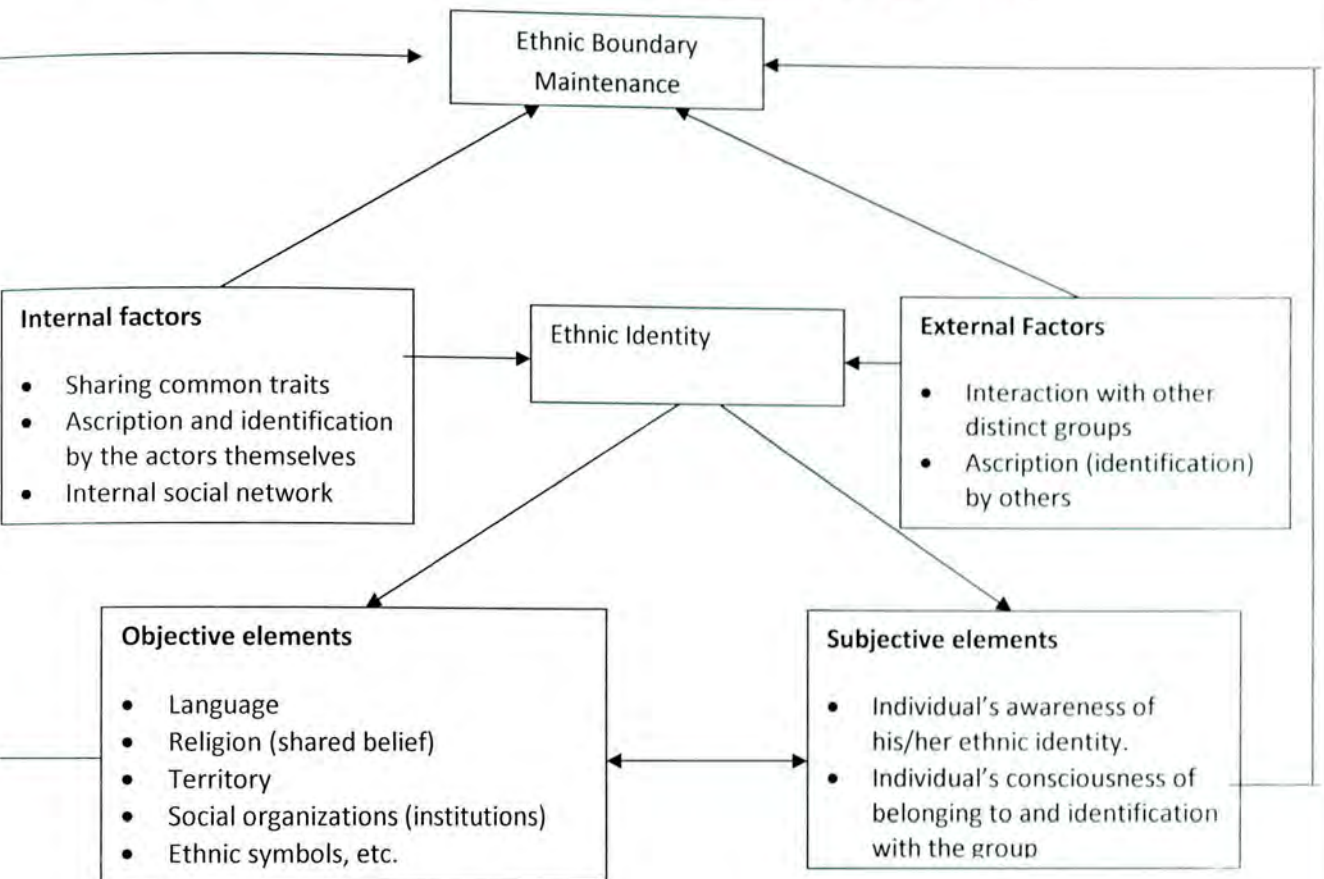
Moreover, the family and religious institutions also play a crucial role. The family exerts strong influence on the identities that children adopt. In support of this Elkin (1983 cited in Stephan 1989:509) affirmed that ‘ethnic identity is learned in the course of family activities, such as the language the family members speak, and their religion, holiday celebrations, and food customs’. “Familial ethnic socialization and experiences within the family are of primary importance in shaping ethnic identifications” (Gonzalez et al.,

2006:187). In addition, ethnic churches fill a crucial role in family and community efforts to socialize the younger generation in ways that are consistent with traditional roles. In this way, religious ties also facilitate the maintenance of ethnic boundaries and identity (Sanders, 2002:343-344).

Generally, since ethnic identities are shifting and changing according to historical and social process, it is crucial to take into account complex and dynamic historical processes and factors to conceptualize ethnicity and ethnic identity in the context of multi-ethnic societies just like Ethiopia.

2.5 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Fig 1: Conceptual framework for understanding ethnic identity and its boundary.



Source: own developed based on information from the review section (2010).

The above conceptual framework indicates how ethnic identity is constructed through the interplay of internal and external factors. Likewise, it shows the objective and subjective elements (contents) of ethnic identity and their mutual interdependence. Moreover, it illustrates how internal and external factors as well as objective and subjective elements contribute for the maintenance of ethnic boundary. Generally, it was based on this schematic representation and the consideration of the constructivist/instrumentalist approach that the ethnic identity of the Qemant people was examined.

CHAPTER THREE: THE OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE ELEMENTS OF QEMANT ETHNIC IDENTITY

In this chapter the ethnic identity of the Qemant people (those living in Chilga *woreda*) is analyzed taking into account both the objective and subjective aspects of ethnic identity that were presented in the review section. Specifically, the ethnic self identification of the people; myths related to the ethnic name Qemant and their common descent; the changes and continuity in the content of Qemant ethnic identity are all discussed. Through out the analysis part an attempt is made to scrutinize the Qemant ethnic identity across time, place and contexts; since ethnic identity is fluid across these dimensions.

3.1 Ethnic Self Identification vs. Boundary Markers

“Ethnic self identification is clearly an essential starting point in examining ethnic identity” (Phinney, 1990: 504). Therefore, for the question asked about their ethnic identification informants responded in different ways. Some of the informants responded that in the earlier time we were Qemants but now we are Amhara. These were basically the uneducated who gave different reasons or justifications for such “identity/ethnic switching”. Some said we were Christianized (baptized) in the earlier times and now we follow Orthodox Christianity, so we are now Amhara. They considered religion as the basic ethnic boundary marker that differentiates the Qemant from the Amhara. So, for them getting baptism means becoming an Amhara (see case two on page 108). Others especially youths and early adults thought that “we do not know the language kemantney. we speak only Amharic”. For this group, language was the basic marker and to be Qemant means to know or speak the kemantney language. They also supposed “we are

found in the Amhara region, so we are an Amhara”. In this way, they try to ethnically identify themselves respective to the politically delineated and named regional level.

The other group of informants was those who identified themselves as “Christianized Qemants”. This group of informants were mainly the educated and politically aware ones¹ who justified that “even if we are now baptized, follow Orthodox Christianity and practice the same socio-cultural traditions with that of the Amharans, we are *aṭentā Qemant*; our parents and grand parents were from Qemant”. They consider religion and ethnicity discretely (see case three on page 111). This may support Eriksen’s (2001: 43) proposition that “One can have deep ethnic differences without correspondingly important cultural differences”.

Most of the other informants recognized themselves as both Qemant and Amhara. They maintained that “we are Qemant because our parents and grand parents were Qemants, but we are also Amhara since we are baptized and speak only Amharic”. Mainly, youths and early adults fall in this category (see case five on page 114). Surprisingly, the other group of informants was those who had accepted the name given to them by their Amharan neighbors and identified themselves as *quanqua qāmäs* (*quanqua* means language and *kāmäs* means the one who run through). This was the label used to refer to them as newly converted and recent Amharic speakers.

At last there were also other groups who are not yet baptized or Christianized and still practice their indigenous religious traditions (see case four on page 113). This group

¹ Here ‘the educated’ refers to those who have an experience in the modern education system while ‘politically aware’ means those who have at least some knowledge about the current political sphere of the country.

identify themselves and are identified by both the neighboring Amharans and “Christian Qemants” as *awura Qemant* or *wanna Qemant* which literally means the main/original Qemants. Generally therefore, leaving those who recognized themselves as an “Amhara” (no more Qemant); the study participants could be broadly classified as “Christian Qemants” and “*awura/wanna Qemants*.”

3.2 About the Name Qemant

One of the main features of an ethnic group is a collective name which symbolizes the uniqueness of the community and demarcates it from others. Therefore, it is important to discuss about the name Qemant.

There are three main different mythical views about the source and associated meaning of Qemant. The first view assumed that the father of the Qemant was named *yenär* who had come to Ethiopia from the land of Israel following drought in the area. During his first arrival, he used to live in the forest of *kärkär*, around Chilga, covering his body with wood leaves and barks and by hunting animals and collecting wild fruits. “One day”, when *yenär* came out of the forest and contact with “other people”², the latter asked the former whether it was human being or wood. Then, *yenär* responded that “*kämä antäe*” which in Geez language means “just like you”. Therefore, this group of informants, especially the religious affiliated ones (Qemant priests), argued that the name Qemant has been gradually derived from the word “*kämä antäe*”. But here, whether the Qemant ancestors were Geez speakers or not; and the relationships between Geez and Qemantney has to be examined. Other informants associated the name Qemant with the Amharic

² Informants were unable to explain the approximate time; they could not also mention “which day” and “which people”.

name for great great grand father; the fourth generation above an ego, as: *Abat*→*Ayat/Emita*→*Qemä ayat/Qemant*→*Menzelat*→*Enejalat*. And they argued that the ethnic name Qemant was derived from this to refer the people as “forefather or founder”. Here also, the ethnic precedence between the Amhara and the Qemant; and the historical cultural contact between the two groups needs historical explanation. If the ethnic name Qemant was derived as such, one could also ask why not at the fourth (*menzelat*) or fifth (*enejalat*), but at the third generation above. Informants had nothing to justify this.

Still some others argued that the name Qemant was derived from the word “*Kemä-ent*” which in kemantney means “*you kam/hamatic*” and they tried to associate the root of their ancestor with the son of *Noh* i.e. *Ham*. As such, it was from the word “*Kemä-ent*” that the Amharic speakers gradually began to use the name Qemant; and it became a common name. To support their argument, they said there is no a letter with an explosive “Q” sound in the kemantney language. However, this argument can also be questioned on the ground that the kemantney language belongs to the Cushitic family, not to the Hamatic.

Despite all these varied views, the elder informants, when asked about their ethnic origin and their language they revealed that “we are kemänty [not Qemant] and our language is kemantney” (see case two on page 108). However, the majority others did not know about such names and simply used the name “Qemant” and “Qemanteña” to refer to themselves and to their language respectively. In this thesis I used the name Qemant to refer to the people and their ethnic name while kemantney to their language. This is simply to have conceptual uniformity throughout the thesis.

3.3 Myths of Common Descent

Without descent myths and historical tie it is difficult to see ethnies surviving for any length of time (Horowitz, 1991:22). A myth of common origin relates all the members to a common ancestor. Concerning their descent myths the Qemant people have different inspections. Informants' reaction, especially those of elders, about their descent origin is so highly fragmented and paradoxical that it is difficult to construct the descent line of the people in such a conclusive manner.

Some elderly informants identified *Aynär* (sometimes they call him *Yenär*) as the first father of the Qemant who had first came to Ethiopia from Canaan in time of difficulty-drought and hunger. In support of their view, they remembered a place named as "*Yä Aynär badema*" (Aynär's locality) which is found in Kärkär, around Chilga. In association with this, some others simply traced their root to the land of Israel saying "we Qemants first came to Ethiopia from Israel via the northern part of the country." In support of their argument they recognized the Bilen Agaw living in Eritrea as their relatives who had settled in the area following their entry. In addition, they also acknowledged the Ximtana Agaw living in Wollo Seqota and the Awngi Agaw in Gojjam Dangila as the other group of their relatives who settled and left behind the area following the progression of their entry. In favor of this, they raised language similarity between the Qemant and these other groups identified as "relatives". At last, they classified themselves as the founders of the area in and around Gondar including Chilga.

Still others, without referring to their place of origin, identified "*Keberu/Keberua*" as their naissance father. But the majority of the informants merely identified *Keberu* as the

son of *Adäräyke* whom they argue as the founding father of those Qemants living in and around Chilga. All those who descended through this line branded themselves as “*Keber*” and form one moiety. Even if, almost all of the Qemant people highlight their mythical ancestor and descent line in such a way, it is common to find other Qemants who identified themselves as “*Yetäntey*”. This group traced their line of descent starting from a mythical ancestor named as “*Juangs*”. Even though the majority of the informants did not know the detail, some of the key informants mentioned that “*Juangs*” was the father of those Qemants who recognized themselves as “*Yetäntey*”. He was a person who had followed *Keberu* in his way to anywhere as an accompanier. It was later that they arrange marriage tie and those descended from *Juangs* become classified as *Yetäntey*. Even if, those members from the *Yetäntey* moiety trace their line of descent down to *Juangs*, all of them, just like the *Keber*, considered *Adäräyke* as their mythical father.

Generally, from all the above discussions it could be understood that the Qemant emphasize their descent line through the father side; they followed patrilineal descent system.

3.4 Ethnic Identity Markers of the Qemant People: Changes and Continuities

Most of the discussions about ethnic identity identified the objective and subjective elements of ethnic identity. The objective elements are those which include language, religion, social organization, collective name, territory etc. On the other hand, subjective elements refer to the individual awareness of his/her ethnic identity and; the individual’s consciousness of belonging to and identification with a group. Therefore, the ethnic identity of the Qemant is examined based on such elements.

3.4.1 The Objective Aspects of Qemant Ethnic Identity

Although Gamst (1969) wrote that the Amharanization of the Qemant began around A.D 1270, most of the informants looked at the basic markers of Qemant ethnic identity in two ways as those indicators before and after the year 1960s³. Before this time, the Qemant see themselves as more or less socio-culturally distinct from the neighboring Amharans. Some very aged informants argued that in the much earlier time the Qemant were clearly distinct from the neighboring Amhara ethnic group in their socio-cultural traditions; their language, religion, social and political organizations. But following the mass Christianization of the Qemant in the 1960s, the basic ethnic boundary markers of the people drop drastically leading almost all of the Qemant to adopt the same socio-cultural features with that of the neighboring Amharans. Through out the interview, informants repeatedly mentioned the word *qädemo/qädämsil* (that means, in the earlier time) to refer to the time period mainly before the 1960s. Hereafter, I will use the phrase “in the earlier time” to refer to this time period.

Even if, the majority of the Qemant, nowadays, do not differ from the neighboring Amharans in their ways of living, customs, and traditions like marriage and mourning ceremonies; in the coming section an attempt is made to look at the basic objective ethnic identity markers of the people and the changes associated with it.

3.4.1.1 The Kemantney Language

The historical tie between ethnic group members is reflected in a common language that facilitates communication and maintains solidarity among members (Cohen,

³ According to the informants the year 1959/60s were the time period during which a Christian bishop by the name *Abba Layke Mariam* had come to the area and baptized the majority of the Qemants.

1978:398). When we look at language in the case of the Qemant people, their language referred to as kemantney is on the verge of extinction. The widely held perception of the people that Christianization means Amharanization together with the widely held prejudice that the Qemant originated from wood contributed for the extinction of the language. Those people who had known and spoken the language stop to use the language. Parents began to socialize their children on those ways which could attribute them as an Amhara; mainly to speak Amharic language. According to the informants, even if some parents were willing to teach the language, their children became reluctant to learn it. All these were because of fear of prejudice from their Amharan neighbors. If they spoke kemantney, they would be easily identified as Qemants (see case one and case two on pages 106 and 108).

Today, almost all of the people speak Amharic only. Even those few aged people, in their 60's and above, who knew the language very well, use Amharic language in their daily routines. The reason behind was the majority others did not know the language and spoke Amharic only. Informants mentioned that, even those who knew the language used it for secret talk in front of others who do not know the language. Amazingly, some parents used the language when there is something that their children are not expected to know or hear about. Some others used it only for religious purposes at the time of prayer by Qemant priests.

Although the kemantney language was almost extinct following the mass Christianization of the people, it is common to find few "Christian Qemants" who can speak the language. Almost all of this category of people are the uneducated ones who belong to the lower socio-economic status position. At the same time, among those who were identified as

awura Qemants, there are members who do not know the language. This indicates that what make them “*awura/wanna Qemant*” is not their knowledge of the language but living by the religious and other socio-cultural rules of their ancestors.

Those aged people who knew the language are dying off together with the language. Even among the informants one can get some aged people who had spoken the language in the earlier time but now forget and can't speak it. Here is what an 85 years old informant said:

I was fluent in kemantney in the past, but nowadays I only know some fragmented words. I used to talk in kemantney with my wife but she died long time ago. My children did not know the language at all. All of my age mates died, so there was no body in my locality who knew the language and with whom I could talk. So, I always used Amharic to communicate with others who did not know the language. This is the reason why I forget the language.

From this, one can understand that the language break was both from above and below. However, even if the kemantney language was almost extinct and most of the people spoke Amharic, some informants continue to identify the kemantney language as the basic ethnic boundary marker that distinguishes them from the neighboring Amhara. For example, some of such informants when asked about the language they can speak, they replied “kemantney” but in reality they do not know how to speak the language. They justified that “even if we do not know kemantney, it is our fathers’ and grand fathers’”. Here one can possibly argue that the subjective markers of ethnic identity (here feelings associated with the language) are more resistant for change than the objective ones (the language itself).

3.4.1.2 The Qemant Religion: “*Hegä Lebona*”

It is possible to argue that religion was one of the key ethnic boundary markers that distinguished the Qemant and to which the various socio-cultural elements were related or tied with. Indeed, Gamst (1969:29) assured this by stating that “The religion of the Qemant is the focal point of this closely knit ethnic group, providing its members with a sense of group identity, reinforcing their basic values, and rigidly defining the social boundaries between them and their neighbors”.

Nowadays, there are only a few Qemants who practice some remnants of their ancestral traditions specially the earlier religion. These people are referred by the Amharans and even “Christian Qemants” as “*awura/wanna Qemants*” and so basically identified in terms of their religion. This group can be referred to as what Harris (1955) called “ethno-religious communities” which have been defined and define themselves primarily in terms of religious belief and practices. Therefore, in the following section an attempt is made to explain some of the religious features of the present day “*awura/wanna Qemants*.”

Gamst (1969:4) identified the religion of the Qemant as: “[...] largely Pagan-Agaw, but many Hebraic elements and a bare trace of Christian characteristics are also found, making the Qemant religion Pagan-Hebraic”. He also discussed about sites where major spirits, *genii loci* called *qolé*, were worshipped by the Qemant. But when I asked the Qemant priests about their religion they said it is named “*hegä- lebona*” by which they intended “believing in God only and accepting its rule in our heart”. They strongly opposed the label “pagan” which they commonly understood as “without any religious

affiliation". They also denied such things as the worship of spirits, *genii loci* called *qolé*, rather they pointed out that "even if we undertake our prayer under trees, it is for *yedära* (our God), one supreme God". But they accepted the presence of some Hebraic elements, specially the mandatory sacrificial offer after their prayer. From these two sides, one could possibly argue that either there is misrepresentation in the work of Gamst (1969) or monotheistic belief among Qemants could be the recent trend following the further encroachment of Orthodox Christianity into the area.

The religious prayer and ceremonies are undertaken under "sacred trees" they called "*dubit*" or "*degena*" which are mostly located in an elevated area. The people have their own priests known as *gäläläka* (priests from *keber* moiety) and *kämäzäna* (priests from *yetäntey* moiety). Unless there are major religious ceremonies where all priests pray together, two priests (one *gäläläka* and one *kämäzäna*) pray together under those *dubits* found in their locality. The religion does not have any written document; they simply learn and pray orally for their supreme God which they called *Yedära*. In fact, they have also others, like angels and saints, whom they labeled as *Keberua*, *Jäkäränta*, *Gebärhu* and *Mizegäna*.

Today, there are eleven pairs of priests (one from each moiety) in Chilga who pray in their locality. The days of prayer are Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays. But there are also some *dubits* under which they pray on Mondays. There are four conditions for which the Qemant priests are invited by the local people and perform their prayers. The first is when there is a problem associated with rain; either shortage or excessive rain that will affect crops. The second is prayers for the health of the community. Members in a community collect money and provide sacrificial sheep for the priests. The third one is

when somebody dies and when they are invited to perform the mourning prayers. The fourth is when some people invite the priests to have their prayer for the well being of their family and property. From this one can understand that in certain conditions their prayer can be undertaken out of those *dubits*.

At the end of the religious prayer sacrificial offering is mandatory; they scarify either sheep or hen without which they do not perform it. In offering scarifies, only the *kämäzäna* is allowed to slaughter the animal while the task of his fellow *gäläläka* is to help the *kämäzäna* by handling the leg of the sacrificial animal (see case four on page 113).

The religious activities of the Qemant are under the order and supervision of the *wämbär* who is at the apex of the social ladder. Anybody who wants to be priest is expected to inform the *wämbär* about his interest. After getting acceptance, that individual under goes a process what they named “*makkas/kaas*” which is more or less an equivalent of “*qureban*” (holly communion) among Christians. In the process, the *wämbär* baptize the trainee by scattering a few drops of “holly” water on him. The ceremonial participants also burn barely and bake bread as part of the ceremony. This baptism is made for those Qemant people who were baptized and converted in to Orthodox Christianity. Here is what one of my informants has to say “it would be very easy if an individual never gets baptism in the Orthodox Church, because there is no need to baptize [in the way of Qemant] and make him Qemant again”.

After the purification rite, that individual begun to learn the religious prayer and associated rules with the help of *wämbär* and other already trained priests. As far as an

individual learned, he could be a priest; his fluency in kemantney is not considered. Here someone will argue that the kemantney language may get extinct much faster than the religion. However, it leads to a wrong assumption since there are few Christian Qemants who still speak kemantney. The other point that can be understood from the above discussion is that, getting *kaas* signifies becoming Qemant again. That means, those Christianized Qemants are considered by the unbaptised *awura Qemants* as no more Qemant. But they can be a member again as far as they undergone the rites of *kaas*. In other words, the issue of baptism is the basic boundary marker between the *awura Qemants* on the one hand and Amharans and Christian Qemants on the other. This idea may be supported if one looks at the perception of the neighboring Christian Amharans. They mostly signify by the name Qemant to refer to those yet unbaptized Qemants while those Christianized Qemants are considered as an Amhara. Of course, informants from Christian Qemants and neighboring Amhara use such words as “they” and “their” in referring to those *awura Qemants* and their traditional practices. All of these indicate the fluidity (flexibility) of the ethnic boundary between the two groups. The other point that one can implicitly understand is that there are notions of purity and impurity associated with the transgression of the ethnic boundary between the two. That is why an individual has to first pass through the process of purification (*kaas*).

Just like their Christian Amharan neighbors, the Qemant has also their own fasting days, but the duration of fasting days are different. The time of their fasting was the whole month of August unlike those Orthodox Christians whose fasting days extend until August sixteen on which they celebrated their festivity. The other fasting time of the Qemant falls between the months of March and April but before the time of Ester for the

Orthodox Christians. That means their fasting days are short and they celebrate their festivity on “*däbrä zäyt*” (the passion day); half time the fasting days of Orthodox Christians.

Saturday is their main Sabbath day during which they do nothing; even they do not cook their food. They consume what they had prepared on the days before. They do not slaughter animals on Wednesdays and Fridays which were considered as *godolo qäne* (odd days) according to their religious rule. If an accident happened to their livestock, they do not slaughter them and consume the meat. One of the key informants mentioned that “if a cow is accidentally fall into a hole and is going to die [on these days], we simply burry it”. But the rule allows them to eat meat on these days if the animal was slaughtered on the other days of the week. That means, unlike the Orthodox Christians, Wednesdays and Fridays are not there fasting days.

Moreover, according to their religious rule women had to be out of the main residence during their menstrual period (for seven days) and when they gave birth (forty days for male and eighty days for females). There are small houses (huts) built for such women where they became secluded for the above specified period of time (see case two on page 108). One of the informants, a Qemant priest, mentioned that “even a fellow priest whose wife gave birth is not allowed to lead the prayer ceremony, unless *kaas* has been prepared for him. We consider him ‘*abro yäwolädä*’ [a man who gave birth together]”. They said “*melassaçen yegodefal, şälotaçen semur ayehonem*” which literally means our tongue will get impure and our prayer can not be easily heard by *Yedära*. According to the key informants, all the above contents of ethnic identity is followed and practiced by each and every member of the Qemant and which make them distinct from their Amharan

neighbors. But nowadays, only those unbaptized *awura/wanna Qemants* are practicing it while the majority of the people abandoned it. Today, some of those Christianized Qemants when asked about the above religious elements, they feel shame and disgrace considering it as a “backward” practice. This was because all the above mentioned religious elements are contradictory with the doctrine of Orthodox Christianity to which they are now affiliated.

3.4.1.3 Social Organization

Social organization is also an objective aspect of ethnic identity that provides the structure for the ethnic community. Ethnic based social organization are another manifestation of ethnic identity since the historical tie among ethnic group members is also reflected in forms of social organization that make group members feel common or shared understanding of interpersonal relations (Kuper,1969; Cohen, 1978:398).

Socially, the Qemant were organized both vertically and horizontally. When one looks at the social hierarchy one could find the *wämbär* at the apex of the social ladder. *Wämbär* is more or less an equivalent title with that of a Christian bishop but with other non-religious responsibilities. A person with this position has to be selected by the wider ethnic members from the *keber* moiety based on his perceived knowledge in administering the wider ethnic members. Only members from *keber* are permitted for such position because they are considered as much respected and near to *yedära*. Next in their social position are Qemant priests (the *kämäzäna* and *gälaläka*) who are mainly responsible for religious issues under the order of the *wämbär*. The *kämäzäna* is a high priest from the *keber* moiety while the *gälaläka* is a fellow priest from *yetäntey*. Down to

the priests are *yägebäz aläqa* (leader of the braves) and *yähagär šimaglé* (council of elders) respectively in their social statuses that are legible in solving disputes and conflicts at the lower level.

As it was touched in section 3.3, the Qemant were also organized horizontally in to two halves or moieties known as *keber* and *yetäntey*. According to informants, *keber/keberua* was the son of *Adäräyke* (the ancestral father of the Qemant) from whom some of the people in the area started in tracing their line of descent and formed one moiety. And those who self identified themselves as *yetäntey* started from *Juangs* in counting their line of descent and formed another moiety.

Among the Qemant marriage was arranged in such an exogamy base that a man from *keber* moiety was allowed to marry with a woman from *yetäntey*. Likewise, a man from *yetäntey* moiety has to marry with a woman from *keber* moiety. Even if marriage is broadly arranged in such a way between *keber* and *yetäntey*, there are other specific rules as discussed below.

A son whose father was *keber* become *keber* again who would marry with a girl from *yetäntey* moiety known by the name *anestiey*. But a daughter whose father was *keber* became referred as *senkera* and was allowed to marry with a boy from *yetäntey* moiety. Then, both sons and daughters born from a mother *senkera* and a father *yetäntey* referred by the name *senkera yehura* and became *yetäntey* moiety members. But here, the female *senkera yehura* was allowed to marry with a man from *yetäntey* moiety (*yetäntey*) but not with *keber*. The same was true for the male *senkera yehura* who was allowed to marry with *anestiey* but not with *senkera*. These were because, according to the informants,

keber and *anestiey* are the grand father and grand mother (*emita*) of the female and male *senkera yehura* respectively. Children born from the male or female *senkera yehura* also became *yetäntey* moiety members, but did not have any special name. All these were the marriage rules followed by the Qemant.

From the above discussion, one can understand that the Qemant had a system of patrilineal moiety organization which was one of the mechanisms through which they maintained their ethnic boundary. Not only this, the informants also raised that the descent line of the couple were traced up to the seventh *house* (generation) so that marriage was arranged out of the seventh *house* (generation). That means, marriage below this was considered as a taboo, as the future couple were considered as siblings. In addition, some old informants mentioned that marriage outside the ethnic group was not allowed, it was considered as “impure”. The marriage rule was so strict that every body looks for its applicability. It was enforced in such a way that a person who violates this rule was cursed by the Qemant priests and elders. Generally, it was using such moiety exogamy and ethnic endogamy that the Qemant had maintained their ethnic identity.

However, following the massive religious conversion of the Qemant (into Christianity) all such boundary guards get burst leading to the interethnic marriage between Qemants and their Amharan neighbors. Even in those rural areas where almost all of the residents are Qemant, people today arrange marriage simply considering the ethnic, but not moiety, affiliation of the would be marriage partner. Nowadays, only some of those unbaptized *awura Qemants* are following the earlier marriage rules. Even within this latter group it is common for some members to get baptized and arrange marriage with those early Christianized Qemants.

3.4.1.4 The Traditional Political Structure

Within the traditional political structure of the Qemant, there were four main hierarchical levels through which the people used to solve different conflicts and problems that would arise among ethnic members. These were *yähagär šimaglé* (council of elders), *yägobäz aläqa* (leader of the braves), *kämäzäna* (a high Qemant priest), and then *wämbär* (a title for an ethnic leader). All of these were nominated by the people and had their own responsibility in solving different types of disputes and conflicts.

The role of the council of elders was to settle disputes and disagreements at the grass root levels; conflicts at the family level and those associated with marriage and property. When there are some cases which could not be solved at this level, it would be referred to the next level; *yägobäz aläqa*. The latter would solve those unresolved conflicts at the first level and those associated with theft and boarder conflicts on agricultural and grazing lands (*yädänber gečit*).

The *kämäzäna* is a higher priest selected from the *keber* moiety. He was selected not only based on the nomination from the mass of the people but also his level of knowledge in the Qemant religion also taken into account. Once selected, he has the responsibility of adjudicating those unresolved cases by the first two levels. But his main role is to settle any problem associated with the religion.

Finally at the apex of the hierarchy was the *wämbär* who has to be selected from the *keber* moiety based on his perceived knowledge in adjudicating the wider ethnic members. So, all those unresolved cases would get final decision by the *wämbär*. In addition to this, cases of murder were only seen and resolved by the *wämbär*.

In resolving conflicts, the Qemant mainly depended on what they called *mähala* and *gizzet* system (religious oath/swearword). And it was the *kämäzäna* that led this process. Since the people were basically tradition bound, they respect the decisions passed. So, a person found guilty would pay the victim that amount of money specified by the respective adjudicator depending on the fault that he/she had committed. But half of the money should be allotted for the undertaking of the religious ceremony; to buy sacrificial sheep.

It was in such a way that the Qemant people had maintained the peaceful relationship and ethnic solidarity among members. But nowadays, following their baptism, almost all of the people go to the formal legal institutions to solve cases of disputes and conflicts. This is because their traditional political structure and conflict resolution process by its nature was basically tied with or embedded in their religious domain. So, following their conversion to Orthodox Christianity, the majority of the people abandoned to be adjudicated in the Qemant *mähala* and *gizzet* system. According to *wämbär* Mulluneh, at the present time, only the unbaptized *awura Qemants* and some Christian Qemants who do not have enough time and/or financial capacity for the undertaking of their cases in the formal legal institutions use the *gizzet* system to solve their problem.

Generally, informants could be classified in to two broad categories depending on their views about the above discussed objective aspects of Qemant ethnic identity. The first category of informants are the educated ones who argued that “the objective identity markers that are on the verge of extinction still distinguishes the Qemant as a separate ethnic group”. Except such informants others maintained that, nowadays, there is almost nothing which makes the Qemant people distinct from the Amhara. Such informants

argued, in the present time almost all of the Qemant speak Amharic, follow Orthodox Christianity and assimilated through intermarriage with the neighboring Amharans. So, for them the ethnic identity of the Qemant people is a lost case. In fact, it is common to hear from them “In the earlier time we were Qemants but nowadays we are Orthodox Christians, we speak Amharic and we intermarried with the Amhara people. So, we are now Amhara”. The Qemant ethnic identity could therefore be considered as what Le (2009) identified as “emergent ethnic identity” which involves the creation of new forms of group identity due to the convergence of particular circumstances; in this case the change towards the socio-cultural pattern of their Amharan neighbors; Amharanization.

3.4.2 The Subjective Aspects of Qemant Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity is not just a process whereby groups or individuals judge their ethnicity solely by objective physical criteria or on the basis of the culture in which they were born but the subjective nature of ethnic identity is also important (Stephan, 1989:507). Most of the literatures about ethnic identity identify subjective elements as; the individual awareness of his/her ethnic identity and individual consciousness of belonging to and identification with his/her own group. For instance, Stavenhagen (1996:27) stated “subjective criteria refer to the psychological, affective, individual mental and emotional process by which specific persons identify with a culture or an ethnic group”. These are of course elements that pertain to the individual, but by being widely shared, they can often be referred to as “collective consciousness”.

Although the objective aspects of ethnic identity are interrelated with the subjective elements and are in mutual influence, it is impossible to say that the subjective elements

are wholly determined by the objective aspects. Indeed, Isajiw (1990:36) assured this stating:

Although the internal, subjective aspects of ethnic identity are interconnected with the external or objective behavior, it should not be assumed that, empirically, the two types are always dependent upon each other; [...] one may retain a higher degree of internal than of external aspects, and vice versa.

This is reflected in some ways in the case of the Qemant. Even if the objective markers of the Qemant ethnic identity are near extinction, the feeling of attachment of the people to the name “Qemant” is still observed on the side of late adolescents and aged informants. This is reflected when they are asked about their ethnicity; they replied by saying “we are *aṭentä Qemant*” which literally means our background is from Qemant. As it was discussed above, some others who could not speak kemantney also tried to relate themselves to the language. Without following the associated rules, some others as well identified themselves to the label *keber* and *yetäntey*.

The subjective aspects of Qemant ethnic identity is reflected in the form of mixed types of feelings; associated with the near death of their ancestral language. Mostly, feelings of regret were reflected on the side of informants while talking about the factors behind its annihilation. Below are further discussions about the subjective elements of Qemant ethnic identity.

3.4.2.1 The Cognitive Dimensions of Qemant Ethnic Identity

The cognitive dimensions of Qemant ethnic identity are examined by looking at the self image of the people towards their own ethnic group; the perceived stereotypes of the

Qemant towards their Amharans neighbors; and the knowledge of ethnic members about their heritage and historical past.

The self images of informants toward their own ethnic group varied across their age, education, socio-economic status and place of residence. The youth and early adult informants do not know the earlier ethnic tradition, heritage and its historical past. They are socialized and grown up in accordance with the socio-cultural pattern of their Amharan neighbors. It is common to find children born from Qemant parents but responded as an Amhara when asked about their ethnicity. Some others mentioned that they were in a dilemma to express their ethnic identity. For example, one of such informants said:

I have two reasons by which I do not have the courage to say I am Qemant. The first thing is, they [the *awura Qemants*] pray and undertake religious ceremonies under trees. So, I feel they worship in that tree; and feel shame. The other reason is I do not know the language [kemantney].

From these, one can probably argue inline with the constructivist approach that dictates ethnicity and ethnic identity as socially constructed.

Those late adults, who mostly blamed themselves for the demise of the ethnic traditions and the near extinction of the language, had mixed feelings and images about their ethnicity. Most of the informants in this age category mentioned their reluctance to learn and/or practice the ethnic traditions from their parents when they were children. Following the further encroachment of Christianity into the area and the mass conversion of the people into Christianity (during the 1960s); speaking Amharic language in particular, and acting and behaving in accordance with the cultural pattern of their Amharan neighbors was considered as a sign of “modernity” for them. So, they had a

negative image towards the socio-cultural elements of their own group. However, there were some other informants who blamed not themselves but their parents. They maintained that “even if our parents had known kemantney very well, they did not teach us the language; they used it to have only secret talks”. Informants under this age category had some fragmented knowledge about their heritage and historical past. In fact, few of them are able to listen, if not to speak, when others talk in kemantney.

The very aged informants were once the members of a clearly distinct Qemant ethnic group. But now almost all of them are Orthodox Christians; the majority of whom have positive image about the early socio-cultural content of their ethnic group. They romanticized the harmonious relationship and good conduct among ethnic members which was regulated by the religious and traditional political structure of the group. However, it is common to find few informants in this age category, especially those in their communion, who tend to blame the Qemant religious traditions.

The educated and those at the high socio-economic status position had first concealed their ethnic identity and were the early converted and assimilated ones with their Amharan neighbors through marriage and socio-cultural adoption. However, according to the informants, their situation at the present time is totally different; they are now preaching the mass of the people about the “injustices” done on the group by the past regimes and are claiming for self administration. This tendency is perhaps what Hwang and Murdock (1991:469) discussed under their ethnic “competition model” which sees ethnic identity as “a ‘dormant political consciousness’ aroused among minorities as they confront majority prejudice [...and] heightens as they increase their knowledge about the

host society, enter mainstream occupations, and interact more frequently with majority members”.

The situation was different for those living in the rural areas, all of whom had constructive attitude and image about their ancestral group. Even if the majority of the people are now Christians they at least know their ancestral traditions and its historical past. In fact, it is possible to find some of such people who still celebrate the early Qemant religious holidays. Most of the time, they blamed those living in the main town for the further weakening of their ethnic identity. Such positive images towards one's ancestral group accompanied by a practice of highly selected traditions represent what Isajiw (1990) classified as “ethnic rediscovery”.

3.4.2.2 The Moral Dimension of Qemant Ethnic Identity

In most of the literatures (see for example Phinney and Isajiw,1990) the moral dimension of ethnic identity is basically associated with the feeling of group obligation in the form of the importance a person attaches to his/her group and the implication the group has for the person's behavior. Specifically, it includes such feelings of obligations as the importance of teaching the ethnic language to one's children, of marrying within the group, or of helping members of the group in times of difficulty. Feelings of obligation accounts for the commitment a person has to his group and for the group solidarity that ensues.

Informants had different views for those questions designed to know their ethnic obligations and commitment for ethnic integration. Some of the educated were interested if they organize the ethnic members into different forms of associations through which

they could participate, exchange ideas and develop their ethnic feelings and solidarity. But the uneducated and few educated ones emphasized on the strengthening of the peaceful relationship and avoidance of possible conflicts with their Amharan neighbors. Still the emphasis of other informants was on the kemantney language: those who knew the language wanted to teach others; and those who did not know the language, mostly youths and early adults, their interest was to study the language from those remnant speakers. Under this category of informants were those who were attempting to collect and write down some kemantney words before the complete death of their ancestral language (kemantney). However, their intentions were different; some of them had a belief that the language would be revived and serve again in strengthening the ethnic ties and its solidarity; so their intention was to study and expand it. But others are not sure for its revival and so their aim was simply to write it down and make it published as part of the history of the group.

All the above efforts of youths and early adults indicate the reverse in the feelings and concern of the people towards their ancestral language; because as it was discussed in the section above the feelings of their immediate predecessors in teaching kemantney (their ethnic obligation) was very weak due to the prejudiced attitude in the area that Qemants originated from wood together with their own perception that Christianization means Amharanization.

There are also some indications that the way of family socialization among Qemants is changing. Some parents are attempting to teach their children about their ethnic background and tried to make them feel and develop a sense of Qemant ethnic identity. For example, one of the female informants said "I have two children and I am always

telling them to say I am from Qemant". All these changes might be because of the expansion of education and increasing awareness of the people together with the present government policy of ethnic reorganization and ethnic entitlement.

The 2007 Population and Housing Census of the country became a hallmark for the beginning of Qemant ethnic mobilization. Unlike the previous National Censuses, this one did not list the Qemant as a separate ethnic group. So, following the missing of the ethnic census code that was representing the group (for no apparent reason), the educated and politically aware Qemants initiate a movement for ethnic mobilization and claim for self administration of the area. On the other hand, those priests serving the Orthodox Church are strongly against this pressure group. Such priests are mainly those early converted Qemants. For them, according to the key informants, the movement for ethnic mobilization and ethnic revival means a return to the earlier ethnic traditions among which the Qemant religion is the one which by its nature has contradictory elements to the doctrine of Orthodox Christianity. So, they ideally oppose those leaders of the movement and their followers. Indeed, the mass of the Christian Qemants and the neighboring Amhara people are strict adherents to the church, its doctrine and the saying of the priests who together resist such a movement.

Some of the informants in the field had feelings of fear and doubt about the movement. No matter how I had introduced myself, during the time of interview few informants still considered me as one of those initiators and tried to advice me. They mainly talk about their long cohabitation and socio-cultural interaction with their Amhara neighbors; their mutual participation in the different community based associations such as *idir*, *iquib*, *mahiber*, *sänbeté* etc; and their marriage ties. They mentioned that there is nothing, which

makes them different from their neighbors. Here was one of the informants who asked me “I am from Qemant but my wife is an Amhara, and we have three children. So, to which category will you classify them?”

As already discussed above, the religion and the traditional political structure of the Qemant had had strong implication for the behavior of individuals in the group, but not today. Unlike the earlier moiety based ethnic endogamy, at present most of the Qemant do not have any special marriage preference within the group rather it is common for them to marry out of their ethnic group. Indeed, some informants mentioned that “since our Amhara neighbors strongly believe that we are hard workers and honest for our marriage, they usually prefer to have marriage tie with us”. The information gained from the Amhara informants also attests the work endeavor of the Qemants. Despite this change in the general trend of the marriage pattern, some informants mentioned that still there is a tendency on the side of few people from both groups who tend to give priority for a spouse from their own ethnic background. But they couldn't justify the reason behind.

Generally, as it is reflected above, the feelings of ethnic obligation of the informants were reflected in various ways. However, most of them actually did nothing in following their ethnic traditions but simply mentioned their interest. This high intensity of feelings of ethnic obligation accompanied by a low level of practice of their traditions is what Isajiw (1990) identified as “ideological identity”.

3.4.2.3 The Affective Dimension of Qemant Ethnic Identity

As it is reflected in the various works done on ethnic identity (see for example Stavenhagen, 1996; Stephan, 1989; Phiney and Isajiw, 1990), the feeling of attachment to one's group is referred as the affective dimension of ethnic identity. This can be manifested in the associative preference for members of one's group as against members of other groups and feeling of security and comfort with the cultural patterns of the group.

The feeling of attachment of the Qemants to their own ethnic group was reflected in various ways during the process of interviews. Those who did not actually know the language but identified kemantney as their own language were some of them. Those who identified themselves as "*aṭentä Qemant*" in responding to their ethnicity were the other ones who feel proud of being Qemant. These informants were conscious of their belonging to and identification with the Qemant ethnic group. On the other extreme, there were those who did not want even to say "I am from Qemant" and mostly hide their ethnic background. This might be the result of the feeling of inferiority that they developed as a result of the earlier mentioned prejudiced labels associated with the name Qemant.

Informants do not have any special associative preference for their own members. They mentioned their day to day interaction and participation with their Amharan neighbor in such voluntary and community based associations as *idir*, *iquib*, *mahebär* and *sänbeté*. They together interacted at the time of difficulty, grievances, joy and happiness; they

mutually help, cooperate and have smooth relationship. In other words, members of both ethnic groups felt secured in their participation with that of the other group.

However, the informants' feeling of comfort towards the earlier cultural pattern of their own ethnic group was mixed one. Some of the informants referring to their language responded that they would be very blissful if they could know and speak kemantney. Such informants mainly look at the near death of the language; they feel regretted and ask themselves about the reasons behind. For example, a 22 years old informant said "when I hear some elder people talking in kemantney, I ask myself why it gets extinct". Still another informant explained his own feeling by saying "when I hear my parents talking in kemantney, I feel and consider myself as an outsider".

Some informants basically students from Qemant background mentioned that: the different ethnic groups in the country have also passed different periods of injustice, although the degree may vary from one to the other, but they can at least maintain their language and other identity markers. Now such groups are mainly known by their language and socio-cultural practices. The fact that the near death of the kemantney language and other ethnic identity markers make them regretted. One of the informants had this to say:

I feel proud of being from Qemant. But, when I think about the extinction of our language, I feel gloomy. Specially, starting from the day of celebration for Ethiopian nation, nationalities and peoples, I have developed a feeling which I couldn't express. When I see people from different ethnic groups together showing their identity markers on TV, I sense about the Qemant group and feel sad.

But some others who are now mainly affiliated to the Orthodox Church refer to their ancestral religion and other associated socio-cultural practices and felt discomfort. They

considered it as “harmful traditional practices”. Mostly, they tried to use the religious elements of Christianity as a standard and attempt to judge their ancestral traditions based on that. For instance, most of such informants raised the practice of the Qemant religious prayer under trees and the seclusion of women from the house at the time of menstruation and delivery as “backward practices”. The other one they censured was the fact that the *awura Qemants* do not fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays. However, such informants internally feel that they are Qemants, especially when they are with their fellow members. This is what I observed during the time of the focus group discussions. Since the name “Qemant” had been associated with different prejudiced or stereotyped labels, they do not explicitly introduce themselves as Qemant when they interact with those whom they do not know (see case five and six on pages 114 and 115). This can show how ethnic identity is fluid and varies across contexts.

As it was presented in the literature section, Hwang and Murdock (1991:469-470) discussed two competing models of ethnic identity. The “ethnic enclosure” model maintains that “lack of opportunities for intergroup contacts and socio-economic advancement sustains ethnic identity” while that of the “ethnic competition” model asserts that “greater intergroup contact intensifies minority ethnic identity”. If one wants to evaluate the ethnic identity of the Qemant based on these seemingly opposing models one can understand that both have some truths. First, as per the information gained from key informants, those Qemants who have maintained and practicing some traces of the earlier ethnic tradition (e.g. following and respecting for the Qemant religious traditions) are found in those far remote, inaccessible *kolla* areas such as Sabéra and Kuššayna. Most of the remaining speakers of kemantney are also found in such areas where the majority

of the residents are Qemants and the degree of intergroup contact with their Amharan neighbors is limited. Leave alone practicing the earlier ethnic traditions; however, those who live in the town do not know much about their ethnic oral traditions. They are assimilated with their Amharan neighbors but sometimes reflect their feelings of ethnic identity in different ways as it was discussed above. Therefore one can possibly argue that the former model works best when one consider the objective ethnic identity markers of the Qemant people while the latter one mainly accounts for the subjective elements of Qemant ethnic identity. In other words, when we look at the objective aspects of Qemant ethnic identity, such as their language, religion and other associated practices, it is mainly following their religious conversion and the long time socio-cultural interaction with their Amharan neighbors that such elements get extinct. But, nowadays, the subjective elements in the form of feelings of ethnic revival, ethnic mobilization, and regret associated with the near extermination of their language become very strong which is basically the result of interethnic contact.

Generally, the Qemant people, specially youths and early adults can be categorized under what Phinney (1990) identified as the stage of “unexamined ethnic identity” because they were not exposed to issues related to their ethnic traditions and so do not know anything about their ethnic identity. One might also classify those educated and politically aware Qemants under what Phinney (1990) labeled as the stage of “exploration of one’s own ethnicity” that takes place as a result of a significant experience that forces awareness of one’s ethnicity. In this case, the omission of the ethnic group code in the 2007 Census. However, unlike Phinney’s (1990) characterization that “such group involves an intense process of immersion in one’s own culture through the activities of reading, talking to

people and participating actively in cultural events”, the majority of such people in the case of the Qemant did not know, leave alone practicing, the very ethnic traditions and basic ethnic identity markers of the group.

CHAPTER FOUR: ETHNIC IDENTITY DICHOTOMIZATION AND THE FACTORS BEHIND ITS WEAKENING

This chapter is a continuation of the analysis part which basically deals with the internal and external factors that dichotomized the ethnic identity of the Qemant; the current trend of socio-cultural interaction between the Qemant and the neighboring Amharans; factors behind the weakening of Qemant ethnic identity; and presentation of six life histories as narrated by the informants. The chapter ends by examining the ethnic identity of the Qemant in light of the constitutional ethnic rights in the country.

4.1 Ethnic Identity Dichotomization: Internal and External Factors

It is such internal factors as sharing of common traits, ascription and identification by the actors themselves, internal social networks etc together with the external factors such as interaction with other distinct groups and ascriptions by others that solidifies ethnic identity. Indeed, Nagel (1994:154) stated that “Ethnic identity is the result of a dialectical process involving internal and external opinions and process, as well as the individual’s self identification and outsiders’ ethnic designations”. Cohen (1978:386) also added that “ethnicity is a series of nesting dichotomizations of inclusiveness and exclusiveness”. Therefore, it is based on this assumption that the ethnic identity of the Qemant people is examined in this section.

First, when we look at the internal factors; as some of the aged informants mentioned, in the earlier time the Qemant people were clearly distinct from their Amhara neighbors in their socio-cultural practices and all of the ethnic members shared common traits. They were organized into two moieties (*keber* and *yetäntey*) and followed the associated

marriage rules; members strictly adhere to their religion and associated rules; they were mainly settling their disputes and conflicts using their ethnic based conflict resolution mechanisms; and generally ascribing themselves as *qädami Qemant* etc they had maintained their ethnic boundary. However, following their religious conversion to Christianity almost all Qemants share common traits with that of their Amharan neighbors. Nowadays, there are only a few Qemants led by *wämbär* Mulluneh who keep and follow the earlier religious tradition. Members in this group are identified by both the neighboring Amharans and Christian Qemants as *awura/wanna Qemant*. However, when one looks at this group, it is difficult to say that members share common traits. There are some who do not at all know the ethnic language; others specially the children of these *awura Qemants* are deviating from those distinguishing markers of the group. They continue the trend in getting baptism into Orthodox Christianity and getting married to those early Christianized Qemants and the neighboring Amharans.

Those internal social networks that once strengthen the ethnic tie and harden the Qemant ethnic identity, at the present time, get weakened. Of course, those ethnic attributes before the massive religious switch of the people were the basic means of their internal social network and ethnic ties through which their ethnic identity was internally solidified. Nowadays, all such mechanisms are absent. Indeed, few associations are emerging recently, mainly in the form of development and help associations (e.g. “The Qemant People Development Association”). One may expect that such associations would renew and enhance the ethnic participation and internal ties among the Qemants. But, according to the informants, such associations embrace only those socially and economically well advanced Qemant elites while the majority of the people rather

participate together with their Amharan neighbors in such community based associations
as *idir*, *iquib*, *mahiber* and *sänbäté*.

The internal factor that almost all of the informants raised was the self ascription that the Qemant are “hard workers”, “honest and faithful who can keep their promise”, etc and mostly they identified their Amharan neighbors to the opposite of such attributions. For example, one of the elderly informants said “In the earlier time theft was not known among the Qemant, but nowadays it is becoming common following the interethnic marriage with our Amharan neighbors”. In addition, as the saying of some other informants indicates the notions of “purity” and “impurity” was also the other factor that internally solidifies the Qemant ethnic identity. For instance, for the question asked about the tendency of interethnic marriage they responded that “in the earlier time we did not marry with the neighboring Amhara people because we perceived them as *aḥentačäwu ämayeḥära* [their bone is not pure]”. So, all such negative stereotyped attributions might also internally solidify the Qemant ethnic identity in the past.

Coming to the external factors, before the 1960s, the socio-cultural interactions between the Qemant and the neighboring Amharans were largely shaped by the economic, religious and other social factors. The first thing was; the production relationship was structured between the *balabat* and *tätämañe*. According to the key informants, most of the times those who were born from the Amharan family were legible for holding *rist* and were identified as *balabat* while the majority of the Qemant were not legible for *rist* and referred as *tätämañe*. The latter group basically led their life by working on the land of the *balabats*. All this was because, the *balabats* were considered as *mänḥari* of the area. During this time; marriage was not common between the two groups because of the

above mentioned economical reason; the one who are not entitled to the land was not preferred for marriage. In addition to the economic ones, religious factor was the other one. The Qemants were predominantly practicing their own ancestral religion which by its nature was different from the one followed by the majority of the neighboring Amharans; Orthodox Christianity. So, the marriage tie between the two was also hindered by such religious difference.

Besides all the above, the commonly held prejudice that the Qemant originated from a tree had also contributed a lot in affecting the marriage and other socio-cultural interaction between the two groups. Generally, therefore, the ethnic identity of the Qemant was solidified across all these internal and external factors. Today, the ethnic boundary between the two seems getting blurred although there is a tendency on the side of the neighboring Amharans to ascribe the Qemant as *quanqua qāmās*. This is an indication of referring them as new converted ones generally into the ways of living of the Amharans and particularly into speaking Amharic language.

2.2 Diffused Ethnic Identity: The Current Trend in Socio-Cultural Interaction

Since the basic ethnic boundary maintaining mechanisms ruptured, the nature of interethnic relationship and interaction between the Qemants and their Amharan neighbors also changed. Following religious conversion, another ethnic category, "Christian Qemants" formed so that the nature of interaction between the three becomes more or less complex. Nowadays, the Amhara neighbors and even some Christian Qemants use the name "Qemant" to refer to those who are still unbaptized and follow their ancestral religion. When asked about the nature of socio-cultural interaction, at the

present, between the Qemant and their Amhara neighbor, an 82 years old informant (Christian Qemant) said:

Those Qemants are nowadays very few. **They** live on **their** own way and tradition; **they** do not arrange marriage with others [Amharans and Christian Qemants]. But, **we** Christians [Christian Qemants] are now married with Amharans and together participate in Mahiber and Sänbeté.

The bold marked from the above case are what I wanted to emphasize from which one can understand that, some Christian Qemants do not consider themselves as Qemants; rather they used the name “Qemant” to refer to those *awura/wanna Qemants*.

2.1 The Religious Domain

There is a widely held or accepted belief in the area that the prayer of the Qemant priests is good for the wellbeing of the community in general and for the health, wealth and life of someone in particular. So, Christian Qemants and Amharans; sometimes even some Muslims, interacted with the *awura Qemant* priests during the time of the latter’s annual religious pray. Even though the majority of the Qemant are converted to Orthodox Christianity, it is common to see some Christian Qemants who still respect the earlier religious traditions. For example, some of them participated in the religious ceremonies of the *awura* Qemants. They contributed, either in the form of cash or in kind, for the religious performance of the Qemant priests. They also respect Saturdays as their main sabbath day and respect and celebrate such holidays as *Gebärhu* and *Mizegäna* all of which are the religious traditions of *awura Qemants*. These informants; when asked about their reason they replied that “it is the tradition of our fathers’ and grand fathers”. However they equally participate in the religious ceremonies and performance of Orthodox Christians. They go to church every Sundays and observe the days of angels

and saints. For example, one of the elder female informants had this to say: “*qedamé lamé näwu ehwud mägelé näwu*” which can be approximated ‘Saturday is by blood while Sunday is my pus’. This was intended to indicate that work on both Saturday and Sunday is taboo for her; she reverences these two days (see case one and two on page 106 and 108). Still the other elder but male informant extended that:

I get baptized and now I am Orthodox Christian, I respect and follow the religious rule (doctrine) of Christianity. I go to church every Sunday; I do not eat on the fasting days; I celebrate some holidays and do not work on the days of Saint *Michaél*, *Gäbrél* and *Mariam*. Likewise, I also celebrate and do not work on Saturdays and other Qemant holidays such as *Gebärhu* and *Mizegäna*. I take some barley, salt, hen, money or other things which I can afford when the Qemant priests undertake religious pray during holidays. All this is because whatever the Qemant priests call for the name of *yedära*, it is for God who does not have any *awuraja* or *woreda*.

Let alone those Christian Qemants; the Amharan neighbors mostly Orthodox Christians and even some Muslims sometimes contribute money for the undertakings of religious prayer by the Qemant priests. This is specially when there is problem associated with rain; because there is a widely accepted belief in the area that the religious prayer of Qemant priests is easily heard by God. As per the informants, this is manifested by the immediate change of the situation. That means, when there is lack (shortage) of rain and when they are invited to pray, within one or two days it gets cloud and rain falls. Also, when there is an excessive rain that will affect crops, they do the same thing so that it is made reduced. A 75 years old informant, stretching his two hands upward repeatedly mentioned, during the time of interview, that “it is because of the prayer of this Qemant priests that one can see the wellbeing of this area, if not things would get worse”.

However, there are some others “Christian Qemant” who felt ashamed when thinking and talking about the religious practices and associated rules of the Qemant religion. The

presence of baptism forty days after birth for the male and eighty days later for the females; the absence of fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays and some other days all these were frequently mentioned and perceived by such informants as "backward practices". One of the informants reflected his own position by saying:

The religion [Orthodox Christianity] which I have received from my immediate father is something that I have to keep and respect. May be, my great grand parents and/or grand parents had changed their religion but I can not change that of mine. Christianity is just like the land that you possess. You can't sell or alter it⁴ but simply keep and transmit for the next generation.

It is possible to understand the degree of religious adherence of the Qemant people in between the two religious poles; between the indigenous religion and that of Orthodox Christianity. Those identified as *awura Qemants* are, in a relative sense, "strict" followers of their ancestral religion while the majority of Christian Qemants are basically adherents of Orthodox Christianity. Still some others, mainly those in rural sides, commonly participate in both religious domains. Around the shade of St. Michael church in the main town there are almost twelve *Sänbetés* all of which have members from both Christian Qemants and Christian Amharans.

2.2 The Pattern of Marriage

As it was discussed in the earlier section, the marriage tie between the Qemant and the neighboring Amharans were more or less restricted by internal and external factors. However, following the land reform policy of the country in 1975 the *balabat-täṭämañe* production relationship ended. This had its own contribution to change the pattern of relationships between the two groups.

⁴The current Ethiopian law does not allow the sell of land.

In addition, the further infringement of Christianity and the expansion of modern education in the area were the other main factors behind the change in the pattern of relationship between Qemant and Amhara. Specifically the latter one can be mentioned for the increasing awareness of the people about the widely held prejudice towards the Qemant which in turn lead to the decrease in the degree of its prevalence. Because of all such changes, the internal and external factors that once dichotomized between the two groups get burst; enhancing the interethnic marriage and other socio-cultural interaction between the two groups. Nowadays, it is a common trend for people from the two ethnic backgrounds to intermarry each other. In order to better illustrate the present day socio-cultural interactions between the two groups, it seems important to directly cite what an elderly Amhara informant has to say:

Derro enässu min näbäračäw? Märét laraššu kāmābalu bäfit enässu kääña
 kä Amarawu näbär täṭāmenāw yāmiadru. Ahune gin hullu tāqäyerwual,
 hullu tämerwual, qādeswual, abesāwual, gebim tāgabetānal tāwaledānal.

This can be translated as follows:

Before the decree of land to the tiller [in 1975], they [the Qemant] do have nothing to possess. They were living by working on our land as *täṭāmañe* (tenant). Now everything has changed. Everybody gets learned, become priest, eat together and intermarried.

The above quotation may better show the change in the trends of socio cultural interactions between the two following the 1975 land reform policy. Until their mass exodus to Israel, in the 1990s, the Bētä Israeli (“Fālašša”) people were also living in the area along with the Qemant and the Amhara. The key informants mentioned that, after the massive religious switch of the Qemant, marriage between the Qemant and the Bētä Israeli (“Fālašša”) was also common. The situation is different in the case of *awura Qemants*. Most of the time members of this ethnic category intermarry with their own

group, following the earlier tradition. In arranging marriage, they at least take into account the moiety affiliation of the couples if not tracing their descent line up to the tenth generation. A man/woman from *keber* is allowed to marry with a woman/man from *yetäntey*. However, since they are very few in number⁵ members have been facing difficulty in getting their marriage partner inline with their traditional marriage rule. Because, almost all of the Qemants today are Orthodox Christians (Christian Qemants) who give precedence not for their Ethnic but religious affiliation in choosing their marriage partner. Even if some Christian Qemants tend to ask for marriage allies from the *awura Qemants*, it is in due request for baptism to Orthodox Christianity. Indeed, two of the children of an informant (*awura Qemant*) was baptized and married with Christian Qemants. But others who get spouse from their own group are now living in their tradition; they at least consider their moiety affiliation. Here it is possible to understand that at the present day *awura Qemants* are still under continuous pressure from outside. One of the key informants, *wämbär* Muluneh, from the *awura Qemants* mentioned that:

If my children get their marriage partner from *qädami Qemant* [*awura Qemant*] and continue to live in their ancestral tradition, I would be very happy. If not, what can I do? I do not want my children to spend their life without getting married. That is why some of my children became baptized and married with Christian Qemants. But others who found their spouse in those far remote *kolla* areas, like Sabéra, are following their familial traditions.

For the question that I raised whether there are marriage ties, without the request for baptism, he continued:

⁵*Wämbär* Mulluneh estimated the total number of the present day *awura Qemants* living scattered in the *awura* area to be 3000

I do not know such cases yet. When they [Christian Qemants/Amharans] want for marriage tie with our members, they always request for baptism and Christianity. They do not want to become our members. If those Christian Qemants were interested (willing), I prepare *kaas/makkas* for them. It is a ceremonial process of purification in which an individual will get baptized into our own ways and become Qemant again. Just like the Orthodox Christians, we have our own holy water. So, by preparing feast, scattering the holy water over the individual and performing our religious prayer, an individual will be made a member again so that he/she can arrange marriage.

From the above quotation one could possibly argue that the notions of “baptism” and “holy water” for the *awura Qemants* might be new adoptions from Orthodox Christianity; from what they experienced during the 1960s.

Generally, all the above points might support the social constructivists conception that ethnic identity is “dynamic” and “flexible”; without fixed boundaries in which the content and boundaries of an ethnic group could shift based on circumstances.

2.3 The Neighborhood Circle

The Qemant and the neighboring Amhara are basically living intermixed in the town and surrounding areas. There is no as such residential segregation between the two groups; the nature of their socio-cultural interaction is tuneful. The response of an 80 years old informant from the neighboring Amhara could be a representative for all others:

Before the coming of Lyke Mariam, they [Qemants] do not have their own *däber* [church]; they were not baptized in their 40 and 80 days. Their religion was different (*häyemanotačew eyégile näbär*). So, we did not eat or drink together; our dining table was separated (*maidačen ena eridačen läbiča näbär*). But now, they get baptized and become Amhara [Christians]. So, there is nothing which makes them different from us.

It is easy to comprehend from the above case that religious difference was the crucial ethnic boundary guards between the two groups which largely limited the socio cultural

interaction between the two. What is special is the social interaction of the *awura* *emants* with that of the Amharans and Christian Qemants which is still restricted due to religious reason; the former do not share the same dining table with the latter ones.

In some parts of the rural areas, however, the residence of the Qemant and the Amhara is virtually demarcated by the topography of the area. Based on the response of informants from both groups, one can understand that the Qemant people mainly settled on the rugged terrain, on the top hills and deep gorge areas (*gädägäda* areas to use their direct word). Based on the information at hand, one can possibly identify two main reasons. The first might be linked to the *rist* and *gult* system that existed before. The plain and fertile agricultural lands were mostly occupied as a *rist land* and *kés märét* (priest land) by the *balabats*, their descendants and few early Christianized Qemants. On the other hand, the majority of the Qemants spent their life either as *tätämañe* by working on the land of *rist* holders or by inhabiting those infertile rugged terrains. So, today's settlement pattern might be a reflection of this. The second reason might be associated with the Christianization movement that was launched in the 1960s. That means, those who did not want to be baptized (Christianized) retreated and settled in to those inaccessible areas as a means of protection. One thing that may support this is the fact that most of those Qemants who still keep and practice some of the elements of the earlier ethnic tradition are found in such areas.

Looking at the settlement pattern, one can also find some enclave parishes inhabited mainly by the "Amharans" while the mass of the surrounding *gädägäda* areas are basically inhabited by the Qemants. Residents in such parishes identified themselves and were identified by their Qemant neighbors as an Amhara. In such enclaves, two of which I

sited (Laza and Awudarda), there were two churches known as “*Laza Baata Mariam*” and “*Awudarda Mariam*” (St. Marry churches). According to the respective head priests, the churches were founded during the reign of *Atse Yikuno Amlak* (r.1270-1285); one of the early period Ethiopian Kings. Therefore, from these one can argue that even if they identify themselves and are identified as an “Amhara”, they can possibly be descendants of those early Christianized Qemants. The fact that most other churches in the *woreda* have been built very recently (after the 1958/59) compared to the above two, can strengthen such an argument. So, it seems credible to deduce that the ethnic identity of the Qemant is on the move. It is from the once “closely knit original Qemants” who were fluent in their ethnic tradition, through those “Christian Qemants” who now follow the same socio-cultural tradition with the Amharan neighbor, to those descendants of early Christianized Qemants who totally identify themselves as an Amhara. This might support Sanders’s (2002:328) argument that “ethnic identity is fluid across time and social contexts, sometimes to the point of ‘ethnic switching’ ”.

Generally, from what have been said so far, one can infer, looking at the objective identity markers, that the present day Qemants seem almost wholly assimilated with the neighboring Amharans. The internal and external factors that formerly served as the basic ethnic boundary maintaining mechanisms and that solidified the Qemant ethnic identity are nowadays shattered. Here is one Amharic proverb, from one of the Amhara informants, which will support this idea: “*kānegedih aybālṭem kāqemant Amhara tāmare desä hone balenjära.*” which can be translated as “Here after, the Amhara are no more superior to that of the Qemants, because the latter get baptized, learned and become priests and fellow members.”

3 Factors behind the Weakening of Qemant Ethnic Identity

There are a number of interrelated factors that are behind the weakening of Qemant ethnic identity. In the following section an effort is made to identify and describe such possible factors.

3.1 The perception that Christianization means Amharanization

Historical incidents are among the major contributing factors for the dynamics of ethnic identity. Stavenhagen (1996:94) affirmed that "When an ethnic group has a history of persecution and discrimination, identities may become positively reinforcing or negatively stigmatizing".

The initial time and process of religious conversion of the Qemant might have a long story. As per the view of some very aged informants the Christianization movement did start long before the 1960s. But almost all of the informants acknowledged that the massive Christianization of the Qemant during the 1960s as the basic hallmark behind the weakening of Qemant ethnic identity. They believed that the massive expansion of Christianity in to the area, by a Christian bishop *Abba Layke Mariam*, had resulted in the massive conversion of the people into Orthodox Christianity. It was after this incident that the basic markers of Qemant ethnic identity dropped drastically. However, informants, even those identified with in the same category, had various views for the question asked: how such an initial kick lead for the further extinction of the Qemant identity markers?

Some of the informants argued about the key nature of the indigenous religion of the Qemant; it was at the center of each and every socio-cultural practice and to which the

der social structure was widely linked. So, change in the indigenous religion means at the same time change in the various socio-cultural elements. Others mentioned that, it is rather because of the perception of the people that becoming Orthodox Christians means becoming an Amhara and Amharic speaker. So, it was because of such awareness that people gradually abandoned their ethnic traditions, even their language.

Some others amplified that when *Abba* Layke Mariam was baptizing the people, he told them "hereafter you are an Amhara", he did not say "you are Christians". So, those who were converted began to identify themselves not as Christian Qemants but as an Amhara. Hence then, they gradually abandon those features that distinguish them as Qemants; and started to follow the Amharan traditions. As such, these informants blame the bishop. Still some others pursued that, at the time of baptism, the bishop had preached *aletäämäqe ayidnem yätäämäqä gen yedenal* that means those who get baptized will be saved from their sin but those who do not never be saved and go to hell. So, such a message exacerbated a bad attitude on the side of Christian Amharans and even those early Christianized Qemants towards those Qemants who tried to resist and live by the earlier ethnic traditions. This facilitated the conversion of the people to Orthodox Christianity and the change in the ethnic identity markers of the people.

3.3.1 Was That Forced Christianization?

Different views were given by the informants for the reason behind the massive Christianization movement, especially during the reign of Haile-Selassie (1931-1974). Some of them mainly the educated ones believed that; it was forced Christianization and was purposely done to smash the resistance of the Qemant people to the land tenure

system that was very exploitative for them. They argued that it was targeted by weakening the ethnic identity and solidarity of the people. But those especially the educated and very old informants argued that the intention was to enable the two people eat and drink together, to have a sit on the same dining table and as such to increase the socio-cultural interaction between the two people which was largely limited by religious difference. These informants added that when the bishop was baptizing, he urged the people not to abandon and forget their language. In a regretted manner they made themselves responsible, saying "The problem was with us, considering ourselves no more important, we abandoned our fathers' tradition; even we stopped using our own language". In fact there were also other informants who thought that the Christianization movement launched in the area was simply an effort to expand Christianity. The reply of the present "ethnic" leader of *awura Qemants* may provide a better illustration of the issue. He stated:

When Layke Mariam was baptizing the people of this area [Chilga], I was also forced for that. But I strongly refused and went to Addis Ababa and reported the case for Haile-Selassié. Then *Negussu* [the emperor] allowed me not to be made baptized if it was not my interest. That is why I still keep my fathers' tradition. Those who resisted baptism just like me are now living by their ancestral tradition.

In spite of all these varied views, it seems logical to argue that the basic reason behind the weakening of Qemant ethnic identity is the perception that Christianization means acculturation and Amharization. If it is not as such, the change would have been only in religion but not in language. Here it seems very important to directly quote the saying of one of the informants that will support the argument: "*Käengedih kätätämäqen Qemant min äsärälenal Amhara honäna! eyale endantä [me] yalew wätatu hullu Amarañawun läbäw*". This can be translated as "If we get baptized, hereafter what is the significance

cted that, in the earlier time they were mostly considered as if they had originated or descended from tree. So, this commonly held prejudice also enhanced the “ethnic switch” the people. There are different views about the source of such prejudice. For example, Zalem (2003:46-47), mentioned that such an attribution had started during the reign of Fasiledes (1632-1667), as he explained:

Though the livelihood of the kemant people was based on agriculture, they were also known for the faggots they brought to Gondar[...] when the castles of Gondar were built during the reign of Fasiledes [...]the kemant participated by providing logs, sand, stone etc[...].On the way from their villages, the kemant used to drop the logs they carried at a place now called gind mataya ‘log dropping place’, located about five kms north of Gondar[...].After the construction of the castle, the kemant continued supplying the town with firewood[...].Their ceaseless effort of supplementing their income by selling firewood led to the name Yä-ñč’č’ät lij ‘child of wood’. Since then the name kemant has become synonymous with “wood”.

t the story that I found in the field, from most of the informants, is associated with their mythical ancestral father they dubbed *Yinär (Aynär)*, which says:

Aynär had first arrived in Ethiopia with his wife Intälla from the land of Canaan. Following their arrival, they used to live in the densely forested area of karkär lived by hunting animals and gathering wild edible fruits. They used to cover their body with wood leaves and barks and they slept in the hollow trunk of a big tree called Dizza. When they came out of the trunk, others [not mentioned] looked them and considered as if they were born out of that wood. It was hear afterwards that we are considered as the ‘son of wood’.

matter how the different views about the source; this prejudice greatly impacted the ethnic identity of the people. Still at the present time there are some Qemants who felt ashamed and hide their ethnic identity. For example, most of the informants described that there were and are some fellow members when they go to other places do not tell the exact area where they are from; rather they tend to mention one of those areas where the majority of the residents are Amharans. Indeed, Zalem (2003: 25 footnotes) stated that

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most kemant people show up their kemant identity for researchers perhaps for promoting individual interests out of which they expect some benefits. At other times, however, they hide their identity". These may show the degree of their feeling of honor because of the already mentioned prejudice. Here, it appears significant to mention what one of my informants had experienced in a certain *ṭalla bét* [local beer house]. He stated that:

It was a market day. I was drinking *ṭalla* [local beer] in a house which was congested by customers. People were chatting. Suddenly a man entered in the house and ordered a drink. He had his own beautiful *käzära* [walking stick]. Few minutes later, one of the men alongside me gossiped that man saying 'how much your uncle is handsome'. Then that small house gets full of laugh. But I did not understand the reason behind; it was later that I became aware of the case. That man was Qemant.

Those Qemants who knew the language very well, through time, abandoned to use kemantney language. Even children reacted not to learn the ethnic tradition from their parents even if some of the latter tried to teach them, for example, the language. This was because; if they learned and began to speak kemantney, they would be easily identified as Qemants to which the negative label was attached.

Therefore, because of such prejudices, the people considered themselves as inferior. For example, one of the female informants said that "in the earlier time it was common to hear the saying *Qemant ena wuša dām yālačāwum*" which can plainly be translated as Qemants are just like dogs both of whom do not have blood. This was intended to indicate that their blood was considered as "cheap"; if someone killed a Qemant nobody would return his/her blood (blood feud was common in the area). Generally, because of all these negative stereotypic views those Qemants who wanted to preserve and manifest their ethnic identities were psychologically forced either to hide their ethnic identity or

identify themselves as Amhara. Following their desire not to be identified as Qemants, they made their effort by whatever means was to integrate and assimilate themselves with the socio-cultural pattern of the neighboring Amhara. One twenty two years old youth informant expressed his own feeling as follows:

The locality [the rural] which I came from is mainly known in producing ginger. It is commonly known that the Qemant people largely produce ginger. So, I and my relatives feel shame in going to the market place to sell our product, ginger. Because, we can be easily identified and everybody knows that we are Qemants.

4 Interethnic Marriage

The degree of increment in the interethnic marriage between the Qemants and their Amharan neighbors can be taken as the other major factor behind the weakening of the content and ethnic boundary markers of the Qemant people. There were a number of factors that facilitated the out group marriage. As it was discussed previously the initial factor was the Christianization process which broke the basic pillar between the two groups; religious difference. This led to the intermarriage between the newly Christianized Qemants and their Amharan neighbors. It seems interesting to cite what I heard from my key informants in discussing about the nature of interethnic marriage between the Qemant and the neighboring Amharans. It says:

When emperor Haile-Selassié once visited Gondar during the time of his reign, he heard from his *balämwuals* [his associates] about the presence of the Qemant, around Gondar with their own religion different from Orthodox Christianity. Haile Sellassié replied that *lämen ataṭafuwaččäwum* [why not you destroy them]. Then, one of his war leaders answered 'if I have been given a few soldiers as an accompanier, I will destroy all of them within a short period of time'. The emperor laughed at him and reacted 'what I mean is *lämen ategabuwaččäwum*' [why not you intermarry with them]. So it was heard afterwards that the interethnic marriage between the Qemant and the Amhara became much more common.

other cause that enhanced the degree of interethnic marriage between the two groups economic reason which was associated with the change in the land tenure system of the country in 1975. The land reform during the *derg* regime abolished the *balabat-nañe* system of production relationship through which the Qemant became entitled to land and possession. This change also altered the pattern of socio-cultural relationship between the two groups among which interethnic marriage was the one.

To conclude this section, it seems appropriate to cite the response of one of the informants that will better show how interethnic marriage affects Qemant ethnic identity markers:

In a situation where a father is from Amhara, who knows only Amharic, and the wife is from Qemant who can speak both Amharic and kemantney; all of their children began to speak only Amharic. This is because the wife/mother can't get someone in the house with whom she will talk in kemantney. The same is true, if the father is from Qemant and the mother is from Amhara.

From the above quotation it is easy to understand that those from Qemant are bilingual and can speak both Amharic and kemantney while those from Amhara background know only Amharic. As such, the only means of communication between the two became Amharic that in turn limited the chance of those children born to such types of families to learn and speak kemantney.

Other Factors

The area mostly inhabited by the Qemant people lies along the main trade route from Metemma along the Ethio-Sudanese boarder. In addition, the documents in the *da* office of education indicate the opening of modern education around the main area starting from the 1960's. Therefore, these two incidences might also have their own

for the weakening of Qemant ethnic identity by facilitating the rate of urbanization and interpersonal contact between people coming from different ethnic backgrounds. The option taken here is that for such an ethnic group like the Qemant and its culture that is on the verge of extinction, the degree of increment in interethnic contact might further thicken the content and ethnic boundary that distinguishes them.

School contexts dominated by an ethnic group or culture strengthened the ethnic identity of its adolescents" (Kvernmo and Heyerdahl, 2004:514). But in the case of the Qemant, the opening of modern education in the area might contribute for the change in ethnic identity basically in two ways. First, the medium of instruction in the school in the other regions of the country was Amharic. The other was, when they were at school, the Qemant children interact with their Amharan friends from whom they might also develop speaking in Amharic. These two factors might facilitate the further preservation of the language. Those Qemant children (youths), at that time, who had a minimal knowledge about kemantney totally slanted in favor of speaking Amharic for it was a "fashionable language" and a "sign of modernity" at the time. Informants mentioned that if kemantney had been given as a supplementary course in the school, it would not have been getting extinct. One of the student informants said "my grand father used to teach me the language when I was in the rural home locality. Although I could not speak the language, I could hear at least what others talk. But now, I totally forget it, because I have been living here in the town attending my education".

As a result of the expansion of education those internal and external ascriptions that thicken the boundary between the two groups get reduced. This is because of an increasing awareness of the people in the area about the previously held negative prejudices and

Life History Narrations

Following are six life histories as narrated by the informants themselves which will better illustrate all the issues discussed so far. The life histories were told by six informants, out of a total of sixty Qemant informants. Specially, those who had well articulator skill and in the case, I considered, would better illustrate the issues at hand was invited to narrate their life history. The narrations were carefully edited leaving out the questions and answers to guide them into the appropriate direction. It is also tried to avoid repetition in the statements of the informants and rather intended to represent the broad scope of their life experiences. Mentioning the exact name of such informants might limit the quality of the data that would be gained. So, they were told not to explicate their name; it would remain anonymous. But for metaphorical purposes pseudonyms are used in the following narrations.

One

My name is Telaye Fenta and I am 81 years old. I am a follower of the Orthodox Ethiopian church. I got baptized when I was 40 days old. Now, I am at the stage of holy communion (*qorabi näñe*). However, *añenetä qemant näñe* (my bone is from Qemant). I speak both kemantney and Amharic; the former is my first tongue.

My father was from the clan of *yetäntey* but my mother's was *senkera*. So, I am *yetäntey*. I got married to a woman from *keber*, known by her feminine name as *senkera*. I have five children all of whom get married. Since I am *yetäntey*, all of my children are also *yetäntey* and married with those from *keber*. The children of my sons continue becoming *yetäntey* while those of girls' become *keber* following the line of their father.

My wife also speaks kemantney. When I get my partners (friends) who know the language, we speak in kemantney; but with those who do not know I use Amharic. My daughter is good in hearing but she can't speak; others don't know the language at all. In the earlier time when we say "*ayeru lahu*" it means "come"; when we say "*fäy*"

“*iy*” it means “eat”; “*jakriw*” means “drink”; “*fäyino*” means “let’s go”. It was in a way that children could learn kemantney at their early age. But now, our children did not learn the language. Those who knew kemantney stop using it and children refuse to learn it from their parents. Of course, there were some parents who were not willing to teach kemantney for their children. Even if I tried a lot to teach kemantney for my children, all of them were not voluntary. When I talk to my wife in the house, they laugh and say *bafačehu awugu* (please talk with your mouth) [the language is mostly spoken from the throat]. They feel shame to learn and speak the language. The reason behind this is not to be identified as Qemant; since there were different prejudices associated with the name Qemant.

In the earlier time everything was strict, the cultural traditions and associated rules were very strict. For example, when marriage was arranged the descent line of the partners was counted both vertically up to the 7th generations and horizontally across the *keber-
tey* affiliation. A man from *keber* was not allowed to marry with a woman from *yetäntey*; she is considered like his sister. The same is true for a man from *yetäntey* who has to marry with a woman from the *keber* side, but not from the *yetäntey*; he is like her brother. The religion was also so strict that when there is shortage of rain and Qemants do not undertake their pray, it was within a range of two days that rain falls. Also, when there is an excessive rain that will affect crops, they pray for *yedära* so that it is made to stop. Nowadays, accepting Orthodox Christianity we leave the traditions of our ancestors and grand fathers. Especially, those educated youths started arranging marriage by themselves without considering their line of descent and kinship ties.

In the past we were prejudiced and considered as weak; without any helper and fond of going to a legal court. Our locality was an enclave (*käle näbäre*). It was surrounded by the neighboring Amharans, so we feared to explicitly manifest our identity and to say I am Qemant. It was in such a way that we began to hide our father [origin] and our ethnic identity. Almost all the markers of our identity and distinguishing features gets extinct. So today we are not differentiated from our Amhara neighbors, we are intermarried with them (*gebi mäseretäna*). Today, our heart is getting courage and become tough

ḥen eyadārājā nāwu) because it is the time of modernity (*gizéwu tāqāyeruwal*) and children are also getting education that is why I say my bone is from Qemant.

y, I feel nothing and have any problem. I talk in kemantney when I want and get my things, but not in the past. Even if I get baptized and become Orthodox Christian, I participate in the religious ceremony of the *awura Qemants*; I go to their *dubits* and participate in their prayer ceremony. Because, the Qemant priests also pray for God and ever they call him *yedāra*; but I do not eat what they slaughter. Even, we Christians do not intermarry with them unless they get baptized and become Christian. This makes them different is; they do not enter into our house, considering a woman who gave birth or was in her menstrual period will be there in the house. They feel as if they became impure, so they do everything outside the house. Even, they do not eat or drink what we have prepared on Saturday. All these make the *awura/ wanna Qemants* different from us [Christian Qemants].

us and the Amharans are the same except for our name. Today, almost all of the priests serving the Orthodox Church in my locality are my relatives. What makes me different is my neighbors, the Amharans; when they heard me talking in kemantney, they teased me *ebakihe atrsawu* (please don't forget it).

Two

My name is Netsuhinesh keleb; *yä-awuraw yä-kemänty lej nāñe* [a daughter of the 'original Qemant]. I do not know my exact age but it will approximate sixty. I can speak both kemantney and Amharic fluently. Even if my descent is from Qemant, now I am a Christian and *nitsuhe Amhara* [pure Amhara]. I spent most of my life in a rural area where I didn't get any education. Now, I am living by selling *ṭella* [local beer].

In the past, our Amharan neighbors were marginalizing us. For example, during the *Derg* era a woman had scolded me as *qoraṭa Qemant* [piece of Qemant] and I went to the court and reported the case so that she was sanctioned 60 birr. But now the situation is different, I live together with my neighbors with whom I participate in *sānbäté*, *bār*, *idir* and *iqube*. My neighbors are Amharans, but the one to the left side of my

has her husband from kemänty. One of my daughters has got married to an
ira, and now she is attending her education in Gondar College of education.

ing themselves clean, the kemänty priests pray under big tree/trees. It is on Tuesdays,
days and Sundays that they pray. Their pray is easily heard by God. When they
those women just like me are not allowed to stand close to them because; there will
woman at her menstrual period (*däm yayäče*). When I was living with my priest
, I used to go to those *dubits* but stood somewhere at a distance; they [the Qemant
s] informed me *ṭella teṭeyaleše* [you will made us impure].

ot know anything about the descent myth of the kemänty people, what I know is we
emänty. Today, there are only some people who can speak kemantney. When I talk
nantney, my children feel angry. Especially if I talk on the street while walking with
they become very angry and leave me alone. They said *tasädebinalešš* (you will
us harassed); they afraid that they will be identified as Qemant. Even my relatives
know kemantney don't speak in the language; and they scold me when I tried to talk
them in kemantney. My father was a kemänty priest by whom I felt proud rather
shame. That is why I am still fluent in kemantney while others forget it.

ather Qés [priest] Keleb Chiru had passed through the stage of *makkas*. He had
htered nineteen oxen and prepared a big feast for religious prayer; and got the 'holy
' scattered over him and become ritually purified. He was *gälaläka* but I am
iey who once married with a man from *keber*. Now I am a widow. In the earlier time
ould get married after the descent lines of the couples were counted (*yägebi azalla*)
f the rules allowed them to have marriage. If an individual marry violating the rules,
e became cursed by the priests and elders in the community. Even if a marriage is
ly arranged and sometimes later identified as something wrong was done,
natically the couples were advised to get divorced. They were considered as just like
ags.

and I was living in my father's house, the whole family did nothing on Saturdays; even
did not cook our food or clean the house. It was rather easy for us to work on Sunday.
ing my menstrual period, I was not allowed to stay at the main house; rather there

small hut around the compound where I spent for seven days receiving food and needs. But if it were in the house of others [non priests] it would be for three days. In both cases, I have to wash my body and my clothes at the end of the day and cannot go to the main house.

I went to the town for some reasons and returned back, I was not allowed to enter my father's house, I was said *ṭella teṭeyaleše* [you will make me impure], an expression of impurity. We called those Muslims as *hašša*; *wonjeri* means *kayla*; *ṭiw* means *woyṭo*; and *šebeka* is *Amhara*. Therefore, I was suspected that members of all these groups might have touched me or made some contact [sexual relationship] with me. I was said *ṭella ṭeläwubeše yehonaal* (all these groups might have touched and made you impure). That is why; I was not allowed to get in his house. But this is for those who celebrated their *yäqum täzika*r and reach the stage of *makkas/kaas*. Because they are considered as pure who do not either sit or walk alone but with accompanies. They pierce their ear widely (as a sign of reaching at this stage) and spend their time in prayer; they offer themselves to God.

At the present time I am Christian, I go to church every Sundays and on the days of the feast of saints (*Gäbrél, Michaél, Mariam* etc). I celebrate and respect for these days. However, I am *yä-awuraw yä-kemänty lej*, [a daughter of the main/the original Qemant] I also respect for Saturdays and the days of *Gebärhu* and *Mizegäna* during which I do fasting. When the kemänty priests undertake (perform) their prayer, some days, I go to the church taking barley, salt, grain powder or hen; that amount and the kind that I can afford. I go to the church somewhere at a distance and at the end of their prayer they give me small amount of bread and/or roasted barley which I bring to my home and used it as medicine when I am sick. Of course, I also use the 'holy water' that I brought from *Anzäyemärku* and *Mizegäna* (religious sites of the Qemant priests both found in Chilga). All this is because; it is according to my mother's and father's tradition, my flesh and bone. Some of my neighbors celebrate the days of *Gebärhu* and *Mizegäna* by preparing *zeker* [a feast]. They invite me to participate with them. I have *sänbäté*, so I sometimes prepare and in turn invite them. Now, I am living with my neighbors with whom I participate all my joy and happiness.

Three

eshome Nega. I am 57 years old and Orthodox Christian; a Christian Qemant. I am
er living in Ayikel with my family.

past, we had our own distinctive ethnic identity makers; our own religion and
. But the effort of the past government [of the country] was to expand Orthodox
anity. For example, during the reign of *Haile Selassié* [1931-1974], a man by the
Layke Mariam was sent to this area with a mission to baptize the people and
t to Orthodox Christianity. That is why we get baptized and now become
ians. I have married to a wife from Qemant origin. It is a type considered as
awi gabiča (modern one) which is simply based on love. Of course, I heard that in
lier time the descent line of the couple (*yäzär täwaräd*) were considered at the time
riage. Nowadays, the common trend is both the Qemant and the Amhara get
d to one another. It is common to find a couple one from each ethnic group.
ver, there is still a tendency on the side of some parents to have their children
d with those from their own group; there is a tendency to prioritize for a spouse
Qemant ethnic origin.

if I have grown up in *çonçoqe*; a rural area [in Chilga] considered as the residence
ura Qemants, I do not know kemantney, I can't speak but I hear at least some
. My parents were fluent in kemantney but, in the house, they mostly used it to
some secret talks in front of me and my brothers. In the 1950's [E.C] when the
nt people in my locality were forced to get baptism, I was a child, at the back of my
r. At that time refusing baptism my mother hid herself. She was very afraid in case
it cry, because she would be easily identified from the place. All this was what my
r told me later when I get younger. My mother died when I was at 10 years. Then
I get baptized following what others did/the trend and came to Ayikel for education.
happened in our home was different, immediately after getting baptism my elder
er went to the nearby church and began to attend religious education. Finally, he
ne a priest and altered the whole situation in our home. He preached us the new

ine and without any apparent reasons began to condemn those in our locality who to speak in kemantney.

t of the priests in the Orthodox Christian churches of this area are from Qemant n. They do not differentiate religion from ethnicity; they said 'since we are Christian, are now Amhara'. Therefore, following them other Qemants respond 'we are now ara' when asked about their ethnicity. Even if I am now Orthodox Christian, I will ery happy if those *awura Qemants* continue in their own tradition. I am proud of g from Qemant but I don't think that others [Qemants] are also proud of their icity. Especially, those Qemants living in the rural areas are very proud of being from ant but we living in the town have weak feeling. Because, we live, eat and drink her with people coming from different ethnic background. So there is the influence her cultural elements. But those in the rural areas are still in the belief and tradition er father and grand fathers. One thing which is still reflected is the tendency [on the of the Amharans] to look down those from Qemant origin. On the opposite side, they v that we are now better in education and work. Nowadays, they are in tension and so n we struggle for ethnic mobilization and self administration, they tried to oppose in rent ways. Sometimes they tried to link it with politics (as if we are political onents), at an other time they said 'we live together for long period of time. So why are trying to make us separate.' But our effort is to develop our language, ethnic tions and our ethnic identity.

e are few associations that I know which encompass only those from Qemant ground. For example, two years before I and others from Qemant origin form an ciation and open one recreation center named "*ʔella Aynär*" [Shade of *Aynär*], use *Aynär* is our father; the father of the Qemant. Anybody can enter and recreate y) in the center. If the ethnic identity of the Qemant is recognized, by the ernment, I will be very happy. Now I am a member of an organizing committee for claim of self administration. Together with my friends, I am initiating the rest of the ic members to join the movement.

our

ne is Negatu Mulluneh. I am 42 years old and engaged in agriculture. I can speak Qemantney and Amharic. I didn't attend "modern education" but I am *kämäzāna*, *ādami Qemant* [priori Qemant/original Qemant].

What makes we Qemants different is, when we arrange marriage the kinship ties of the ancestors were counted. The descent line was counted vertically up to the 7th house (generation), so marriage below this was not allowed. It was so strict that we priests, and the whole members of the community seriously enforce its applicability. For example, I am the sixteen (16th) generation below, starting from *Keberua*, our father. It is as follows: *Keberua*→*Gädehu*→*Lithu*→*Tenkebägāna*→*Gäbetägāna*→*Ašāmi*→*Mezegān*→*šhokiya*→*Muzzo*→*Fezadir*→*Worké*→*Zäwudu*→*Märeša*→*Mulunehatu* [this last name is pseudonym]. It was in such a way that our descent line was established and marriage was arranged.

One of our main features is our religion which is very strict and easily heard by *yedära*. We have our own kemantney and at the end it has its own sacrificial ceremony (*enemäsetälän*). I have a priest partner (*gäläläka*) with whom I pray on those *dubits* around our locality [Säraqo]. We pray on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays; but there are some like *Adiré wämbär*, *Bäšir* and *Bešedeba* whose prayer day is on Mondays. Our Sabbath day is Saturdays and so we do nothing on this day, but on Sunday at least I undertake our prayer. Without the presence of the *gäläläka*, I never led the prayer myself. The same is true for him. Because we have our own specific part in the prayer so when we offer sacrifice, it is only me who can slaughter the sheep/hen while his friend is to assist me by handling the leg of the sacrificial animal. The reason is, I am *kämäzāna*, the priest from *keber* [a higher priest] while my friend is from *yetäntey* [the lower priest]. In accordance with our religious rule, Wednesdays and Fridays are considered as *godolo qäne* (odd days) during which we can't slaughter (kill) animals.

There are many *dubits*, how could I list all of them? But now our *dubits* are going to be destroyed and Orthodox churches have been built on the area; leave alone those in the past. For example, on our *dubits* at *Bézaho* and *Kebäye Ašara*, the churches of St. Marry

Michaél, respectively, have been built recently so that we are displaced from
tes. A person who mainly attacks and weakens this area was *Abba Layke Mariam*
ptized the people of the area. If not the will of God, it would not only be the
act) of one person that altered all of our traditions.

ays, things are totally different, everything become in Amharic. So, speaking in
ney is seen as the manifestation of 'backwardness', people feel shame to speak in
1 some of those who are perceived as educated preferred to hide their ethnic
saying 'I am from *Armačiho* or *Dawa*' [places in which the majorities are
ans]. Those from *keber* and *yetäntey* began to marry with those from their own
gets mixed just like *yälemäna ehele* [begged grains/food]. Especially those who
r themselves as 'educated' and 'modernized' initially began to violate the rules.
at the will of their parents they had began to arrange marriage by themselves.
ing them, the majority of the people now arrange marriage without considering the
cified marriage rules. It is in such a way that all our ethnic traditions get extinct.

e [*awura/wanna Qemants*] still keep and practice those traditions saying *abat*
w lälej yebäjäw [what ever the father makes will help for the children]. One of my
n is grade 10 student and I am teaching him the religious rules and the way how to
e does not now the language].

ive

me is *Negesu Lakew*. I am an Amhara but I am also from Qemant; I am both
a and Qemant. I am Qemant because my parents are Qemant. Since I only speak
ic I am also Amhara. My age is now 22.

rents are Qemants, but they do not know Qemantña [kemantney]. Those who said I
mant simply have the name Qemant but they do not know the language; I do not
em playing any role. But those *awura* Qemants are different. Their fasting day,
tosome/Abiy tsome [fasting days before Ester] get end much early; it lasts half way
he ending day of those Christians. There are few people who still speak Qemantña
ntney]. Such things may be taken as their distinguishing features.

near about the earlier Qemant ethnic traditions, it doesn't give me any sense. But I know and speak the language, I will be happy. When I was grade eight student; I had to ask my parents and write a poem in Qemantña [kemantney] that I would read in the class. So, when I asked my parents, I understood that they could know about the language. I asked some other individual's who knew the language. Unfortunately, I could not write what they told me, because the words were difficult for me to write down in Amharic. There were many sounds which I could not represent using the letters of Amharic alphabets. This attempt might indicate my internal feeling (love) towards the language.

When one is identified as Qemant, he/she is considered as *yä-ñččät lij* (son of wood) and the label *qoraṭa Qemant* [pieces of Qemant] is also attached to him/her. Even, when he/she does something which is very strange or if he/she acts in a different way from the normal, it is considered as because he/she is the son/daughter of a Qemant. I think all these things might greatly affect the language and created the gap between the earlier and present generations. Even today, I have the above feelings, so I don't have the courage to explicitly say I am Qemant; *teqat yemäseläñal* [doing so make me feel lost]. However, I internally feel that I am from Qemant.

I am an Orthodox Christian, and I participate in *mahebärä qedusan* [the religious ceremony in the name of Saints]. Any individual can be a member as far as he/she adheres to the doctrine of Orthodox Christianity. There are some Christians (including Qemants) whom I know and who go to and participate in the religious prayer with Qemant priests. But I don't support such tendency because praying and scarifying under trees is against the doctrine of Christianity. Now I am a bachelor, but in the future I will get married to an individual from any ethnic background as far as he is good and I love him.

ix

My name is Wossen Gashaw. I am 22 years old and grade 12 student. I am from Qemant but my origin is Amharic. I also try English but not Qemantña [kemantney]. I am an Orthodox Christian.

in the past there would be different ethnic identity makers of the Qemant. Now, I only a few people who can speak Qemantña [kemäntney] and follow the earlier. There are few Qemants even if who are now Christians can speak the language.

Qemants are mostly considered as *mämečawu emayetawoq* (whose origin is not clear). This makes me feel shame to say I am Qemant. When I say I am Qemant, the image that comes in my mind is those *wanna Qemants* who pray under trees. I feel that they are worshippers of tree so that I feel ashamed. The other thing is they mostly do not wear made traditional clothes which is somewhat heavy looking. Moreover, their interaction with others [Christian Qemants/Amharans] is weak. They do not eat together; they do not enter into other people's house. Let alone with the Amharans, the language barrier makes their interaction with other Qemants [Christian Qemants] limited. They also seclude women from the house at the time of delivery or menstrual period and practice backward practices. For all these reasons I do not want to explicitly reflect my Qemant background.

My grand parents were fluent in Qemantña [kemantney] but my parents do not know the language. This is why my first tongue became Amharic. People from other ethnic backgrounds such as Amhara, Oromo, Tigre, etc have their own language which they speak and make them distinct groups. But ours is almost dead. This also motivates me to identify myself as Qemant. No matter how all these, however, I can't deny my Qemant origin.

In my school there are students from Qemant origin and who come from different parts of the rural areas. But there is no one whom I know and who can speak Qemantña in the school. Of course, it is common to find students who know some Qemant words especially greeting words. If the language had written form, we would not depend on from what we heard; but we can also add from what we read. As a result, we could expand our knowledge about the language; it couldn't be just like story today.

The person whom I will marry in the future can be from any ethnic background. Because, in the future I will lead my life in a town where there is no much problem associated with

If I were to live in the rural side, I would not do as such. Because most of the time these children born from such type of marriage [marriage between the Qemant and other ethnic groups], have faced discrimination (exclusion) from both the Qemant and the other community members. Any way, my choice will be based on such things as love, education and income etc.

Qemant Ethnic Identity Vs. The Constitutional Ethnic Rights of the Country

In this section I tried to examine the Qemant ethnic identity in light of the constitutional provisions provided for the different ethnic groups of the country.

The terms “nations, nationalities and peoples” are used in the Federal Constitution of Ethiopia to refer to the diverse ethnic groups in the country. The Population and Housing Census published in 1994 indicated that the Ethiopia population is composed of more than eighty different ethnic groups. Ethnic diversity is explicitly recognized by the Ethiopian constitution, acts as a basis for the administrative organization of the state and is institutionalized in state institutions. This approach of ethnic diversity was adopted in 1991 and was both a response to the nation and state building policies of the new regimes and the emanation of the political conviction and strategy of the new rulers; EPRDF government (Van der Beken, 2009:217).

Article 39(2) of the Federal Constitution states that “Every Nation, nationality and people in Ethiopia has the right to speak, to write and to develop its own language; to express, to disseminate and to promote its culture; and to preserve its history”. To ensure the effective realization of their ethnic identity, Article 39(3) provides an ethnic group a right to self

ation. Those nation, nationality and people of the country are defined in Article of the constitution as "a group of people who have or share large measure of a culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identities, a common psychological make up, and who inhabit a geographically predominantly contiguous territory". Even if all such criteria are specified in the constitution, according to different scholars, Abbink (1997) and Cohen (2000) to some of them, the linguistic criterion has been taken as decisive for the actual formation of the groups. Whatever criterion/criteria is emphasized or taken into account, the point intended to be raised here is; does the Qemant people at the present time meet or some or all of such variables? And does the definition in the constitution take into account those groups like the Qemant?

Amst (1969), Simoon (1960) and others who had done research on the Qemant people of the area identified them as a separate ethnic group with their own ethnic characteristics which make them distinct from their Amharan neighbors and the surrounding groups. So, widely sharing their various socio cultural features, the people might also share a belief in a common or related identities and common psychological make up. But as discussed before, following the religious alteration of the people in to Orthodox Christianity; the ethnic boundary markers that formerly mark off the Qemant ethnic entity are leading to the collapse of the content of Qemant ethnic identity. Therefore, by looking at the present situation of the people one can possibly argue that the elements specified (in the constitution) to identify an ethnic group does not apply for today's Qemants. When one tries to look at today's Qemants based on those criteria delineated in the constitution, one can understand at the present time they do not share a large measure

non culture rather they now follow and practice the same socio-culture features of their Amhara neighbor. The other point is; the kemantney language which at was widely spoken by the people, these days almost extinct. Only a few elderly currently can articulate kemantney while almost all of the people are now speakers. The diffused nature of their ethnic identity, these days, has been d in various ways. Among these are the contradictory views of the ethnic about their sense and feeling of ethnic belongingness; their ethnic self ion and ethnic involvement as manifested in the practice of the ethnic tradition. lly, the people are living intermixed with the Amharans, except for some reas where the majorities are either the Qemant or the Amharans. It might be f all such considerations that the year 2007 Population and Housing Census of y, unlike the previous ones, did not list them as a separate ethnic group.

r how all such contemporary situation of assimilation, recently some Qemants y those educated and politically aware civil servants organized themselves and ted a movement which aims for ethnic mobilization and claim for self ation. They responded that "it is the claim for self administration; to develop our ustoms, tradition, language". This is in line with the constitutionally guaranteed ht specified in Article 39(2) cited above. But as I understand from almost all of nants, the real aim of the movement organizers seems only for their own ends; for 'self administration' of the area. Of course, this is one of the onally provided rights for the different ethnic groups of the country so as "to e effective protection of their ethnic identity" (Art.39 (3)). However, as per the nants, almost all of such individuals really do not want the near extinct ethnic

ns to be revived; since, it is mainly linked to the Qemant indigenous religion. t for kemantney language, as it was mentioned by the key informants, the rest cultural practices were mainly embedded in the indigenous religion to which all ian Qemants are not willing to return back. This is because; the ancestral religious nts are contradictory to the doctrine of Orthodox Christianity to which they are now adherents. Indeed, almost half of the interviewee from this group (the leaders of the ment) had their spouse from their Amharan neighbors and they did not know much their ancestral ethnic traditions. When asked about the basic identity markers at t that differentiate the Qemant from their Amhara neighbors, they mentioned those es (mainly the religious ones) that characterize the present day unbaptised *awura nts* which can be referred as "ethno-religious" group. In other words they tried to le themselves within the boundary of this ethnic category.

the above points one can understand that there will be a hidden instrumental goal ical end) behind those organizers of the movement. Of course, Zelalem (2003:89) in udy of the kemantney language in the area had identified these individuals and

[...]The supporters of the association are much fewer than the opponents. Members of the Committee have strived to win the general support of the Kemant people [...] but the overwhelming majority of the people are still either unaware of the establishment of the committee or choose to be neutral. Those who are against Nega's [the founder and chairman of the association] effort blame him for attempting to satisfy his hunger for power at the expense of the Kemant people [...].

course as different literatures have suggested, in almost all cases, in Ethiopia, the as for ethnic mobilization and solidarity have been made in the context of redressing tice of the past, reclaiming of dignified existence and self administration, developing

e and usage of languages which were ignored in the past. These claims are more and for social status, political power and economic benefits (instrumental) rather serving or nurturing relationships that make a bond from generation to generation nizing the overpowering and coercive congruities of blood, speech, customs and rimordial). In other words, it is not because people wanted to preserve or glorify imordial identity, but because they wanted to protect social, political and c rights (Berhanu, 2008:15-16). In line with this, Van der Beken (2009:223) also Today a lot of disputes in Ethiopia are related to the opportunities that have been by the new constitutional provisions [...] there are claims and actions to create nic territorial entities". Often an ethnic revival is primarily a result of failing state which excludes certain ethno regional groups, and of a political strategy of but blocked elites groups produced by the national educational system in a of economic stagnation (Abbink, 1997:160).

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

and ethnic identity has short history in social sciences in general and in linguistics in particular. It becomes a central concept in the 1960s. In Ethiopia it was the coming into power of the EPRDF led government that such issues as language and ethnic identity has gained much emphasis.

This study is about the ethnic identity of the Qemant people in Chilga woreda, North Gondar zone. The area is chosen for two reasons. First, those remnant speakers of the Qemant language nowadays are found in and around Ayikle, the main town. The other reason is that the majorities of those "sacred trees" or the Qemant religious sites are found in Chilga woreda.

Language and ethnicity are associated with the process of changes in population and its structure. For a long time the Qemant and the Amhara ethnic group cohabit the area with a certain degree of socio-cultural interaction that leads to the assimilation (acculturation) of the latter group towards the socio-cultural pattern of the former. The traditional political structure, religion, language, the moiety based social organization and associated marriage rules once made the Qemant as a closely knit ethnic group insulated from the neighboring Amharans. But following the massive urbanization movement launched into the area especially during the 1960s, those traditional ethnic boundary maintaining mechanisms became ruptured leading to the assimilation of the people towards the socio cultural patterns of their Amharan neighbors. This assimilation process has been referred by some scholars (e.g. Simmon, 1969) as "Amharanization". As such, this research is specifically intended

ine those issues related to the Qemant ethnic identity but have not yet been
d by other researchers. In other words, the thesis tried to investigate the basic
; that constitute the ethnic identity of the people: its changes and continuities; to
the internal and external factors that once solidify the Qemant ethnic identity;
1 to look at the factors behind the change in the content and boundary of their
identity. In addition, the Qemant ethnic identity is also examined in light of the
tional ethnic rights of the country.

nic identity of the Qemant was dichotomized by both internal and external factors.
iety based social organization and ethnic endogamy together with the indigenous
, political structure and other socio cultural practices of the Qemant previously
ly solidified the Qemant ethnic identity. The exploitative land tenure system of
, i.e. and the *Qemant tättemañe* and the Amhara *balabat* production relation ship;
r with the widely held prejudice towards the Qemant were the external factors that
mized the Qemant ethnic identity. These internal and external factors had
ed the socio cultural interaction between the Qemant and the Amhara. But things
: altered following the immense religious switch of the people; the alteration of the
ic structure after the 1975 and; the change in the prevalence of prejudiced
s towards the Qemant. These changed the trend of socio cultural interaction
n the Qemant and the Amhara ethnic groups which was much restricted. Today,
the kemantney language and their *hegä libona* religion which are also on the verge
nction; there are no any other major objective markers of Qemant ethnic identity
ll differentiate the Qemant from the neighboring Amharans. It might be because of
perceptions that the majority of the Qemant living there nowadays identify

as an "Amhara" which may point out the tendency of "ethnic switching". However, there are some members who subjectively identify themselves to the extinct objective identity markers.

Looking at some persistent feelings of association (identification) to those ethnic identity markers, together with such ethnic self identification as *atentä* may oblige some one to argue for the side of the primordialists who believe in ethnic "givens" and "permanency" of ethnic identities. Still such external factors as *quanqua qämäs* by some of the neighboring Amharans to identify those Qemants may further strengthen his/her position alongside the existence of that day *awura* Qemants who resisted the long time pressure from Orthodoxy. However, looking at the massive socio-cultural assimilation of the Qemant into the neighboring Amhara the above argument can be countered. The massive erosion of the Qemant ethnic traditions; for example, the near extinction of kemantney and the disintegration of the once closely knit ethnic group followed by interethnic marriages between the Qemant and the Amhara can reveal the constructed nature of ethnicity and identity. That is why the theoretical stance taken in this research is the constructivists which views the boundaries of ethnic identity as being "constantly renegotiated", "revised" and "redefined" depending on the situation and circumstances that an ethnic group encounters.

A number of possible factors that can be mentioned as the crucial causes for the change in the content and boundary of Qemant ethnic identity. As it was partially mentioned above both the historical, social, political and economic incidents are responsible for the change. Following the historical incident of enormous

ation and the widely held prejudiced attitude towards the Qemant there came
tion on the side of the people that Christianization means becoming
ation. This might be a means for them as an outlet from the existed socio
sion and conflicts. The political and economic incidents were also the other
e land reform policy of the derge regime that banned feudal tenant production
o was also the other factor which was accompanied by the transformation in
f interethnic relationship between the Amharan and the Qemants. Following
and the progression of the religious conversion (of the Qemant) the degree of
marriage between the two was enhanced leading to the socio cultural
n of the Qemant into the cultural pattern of the neighboring Amhara. The
Qemant family and religious institutions in playing their role on the ethnic
velopment of ethnic members especially for children and youths could also be
ie other factor behind the weakening of Qemant ethnic identity. Following the
onversion of the people in to Christianity and becoming victims of prejudiced
Qemant family units and community members gradually abandoned to
children in to the ways of their ancestral and ethnic traditions.

the above points, it is possible to conclude that the primordialists position that
re very ethnic "given" and "permanency" of ethnic identities does not have any
explaining the Qemant ethnic identity. Rather, the constructivist view largely
to explain the ethnic identity of the Qemant. Therefore, the Ethnic identity of
nt is constructed out of the long time economic, political and social interaction
ir Amhara neighbor. In addition, taking in to account the objective and
e aspects of Qemant ethnic identity, one can say that the ethnic identity of the

Qemant is a diffused identity. Indeed, the view of Smith (1991:21-23) may be summarized as: "As the several attributes of an ethnic group come together and become more salient so does the sense of ethnic identity and of ethnic community".

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1: Interview Guide for Qemant Informants

and information

Self identification/Background.....

.....

.....

Language.....

Place of residence.....

Marital Status.....

Occupational status.....

Are there any questions specifically designed to examine the objective aspects of ethnic identity

What is your knowledge of:

The Qemant ethnic tradition.....

Its historical past.....

Are there any basic markers (indicators) of Qemant ethnic identity at

present.....

Your answer for question number 2.2 is:

Yes", what are the basic markers (indicators)

"No" what is your justification.....

Do you think that the Qemant are socio-culturally distinct from the neighboring

Amhara

Your answer for question number 2.4 is yes:

2.1 How do you explain the basic socio-cultural distinction of the

Qemant.....

2.2 How do you express your involvement in the Qemant socio-cultural

traditions.....

Your answer (for question number 2.4) is "no", please provide your

reason.....

How is your knowledge about the kemantney language.....

Do you have knowledge of the language, how frequently do you use it in your

do you elucidate your participation in the religious institution of which belong.....

there any voluntary based associations of the Qemant people.....

our answer is "yes", please give explanation on the nature of your participation in these associations.....

ations listed below are formulated to identify the subjective elements (aspects) of Qemant ethnic identity

ing from Qemant, do you feel any difference between yourself and members in neighboring Amharan.....

our answer is "yes", on what aspects (please mention)

our answer is "no", what will be your justification.....

you have any image/stereotypes toward the Qemant vis-à-vis the neighboring Amharans

our answer for question number 3.4 is:

Yes", please clarify it.....

No" what would be your explanation (if any)

you think that, you have any feeling of obligation being from Qemant.....

our answer for question number 3.6 is:

"Yes", how do you express it.....

"No" please justify your reason.....

you have any commitment for the integration (solidarity) of the Qemant.....

your answer for question number 3.8 is:

"Yes", please elaborate your commitment.....

"No" how do you justify your reason.....

Do you have any feeling of belongingness to the Qemant ethnic group.....

if your answer for question number 3.10 is:

"Yes", please highlight it.....

"No", how could you justify for that.....

do you have any associative preference in your day to day activities.....

your answer for question number 3.12 is:

Yes", what is/are your criterion/criteria.....

No" what will be your reason.....

do you have any feeling towards the ethnic tradition of the Qemant.....

what would be your reason if your answer for question number 3.14 is:

Yes.....

No.....

please explicate the nature of socio-cultural interaction between the Qemant and the neighboring Amhara people.....

: Interview Guide for the Amhara Informants

nd information

: self identification.....

.....

.....

of Residence.....

ion of residence.....

ational status.....

s formulated to examine the nature of socio-cultural interaction between
ant and the neighboring Amhara ethnic group

hich ethnic group did/does your grand father, grand mother, father and
ier belong:

1 Grand father.....

2 Grand mother.....

3 Father.....

4 Mother.....

you feel any difference from those individuals with Qemant ethnic
xgrounds.....

use explicate your reason if your response for Question number 2.2 is
Yes.....

No.....

you have any image/stereotypes about the Qemant people.....

ase highlight your reason if your answer for question number 2.4 is:

Yes.....

No.....

here any thing that you think make the Qemant people distinct from the
mhara.....

your answer for question number 2.6 is:

"Yes", what things are there.....

"No", what is your reason.....

o you have any associative preference in your daily routines.....

answer for question number 2.8 is:

1. what is/are the criterion/criteria for your preference.....

2. can you mention your reason (if any)

3. state the nature of socio-cultural interaction between the Qemant and neighboring Amhara people

Annex-3: Focus Group Discussion Checklist

Background information

Ethnic self-identification.....

Sex.....

Age.....

Language.....

Educational status.....

Occupational status.....

Are there any basic markers (indicators) of Qemant ethnic identity at present

.....

For those whose answer for question number 2 is "Yes":

What are the basic markers (indicator) of Qemant ethnic identity.....

2 How would you discuss about the present situation of Qemant ethnic identity markers.....

3 If there is any strength, please justify your reason.....

4 If there is any weakness, what do you think are the factors behind.....

For those whose answer for question number 2 is "No", what are your justifications.....

ix -4: Interview Guide for Key Informants

Background Information

Ethnic self-identification.....

Sex.....

Age.....

Language.....

Place of residence.....

Occupational Status.....

Where are any basic constituting elements (markers) of Qemant ethnicity.....

Your answer is yes:

Please mention them.....

In what situation do these markers currently found.....

If there is any change, what are the major alterations.....

What are the factors behind the alterations.....

Your answer for question number 2 is no, what will be your

Explanation.....

How do you explicate the nature of socio-cultural interaction between the Qemant and non-Qemant people.....

Where any type of effort that has been made by the Qemant people to preserve their ethnic identity.....

Your answer is yes, what types of efforts do the Qemant people are

making.....

5: Profiles of Qemant Informants

Ethnic Self Identification	Age	Language	Place of Residence	Educational Status ²
Aṭentä Qemant	75	Kemantney	Ayikel	Uneducated
Christian Qemant	46	Amharic	Ayikel	Educated
Qemant & Amhara	22	»	»	Educated
Qemant	66	»	»	Uneducated
Qemant	31	»	»	Educated
Kemanty	70	Kemantney	»	Uneducated
Qemant Amhara	27	Amharic	»	Educated
Christian Qemant	81	»	»	Uneducated
Christian Qemant	33	»	»	Educated
Aṭentä Qemant	49	»	»	»
Qemant Amhara	24	»	»	»
Qemant	35	»	»	»
Qemant Amhara	60	»	»	Uneducated
Christian Qemant	75	Kemantney	»	Uneducated
Qemant Amhara	25	Amharic	»	Educated
Aṭentä Qemant	44	»	»	»
I Aṭentä Qemant	42	»	»	»
Christian Qemant	37	»	»	»
Kemanty	65	Kemantney	Säraba	»
1 Amhara Qemant	77	»	Säraba	Uneducated
1 Christian Qemant	47	Amharic	»	Educated
1 Qemant & Amhara	25	»	»	»
Christian Qemant	53	»	»	»
4 Christian Qemant	75	Kemantney	»	»
7 Kemanty	81	Amharic	»	Uneducated
7 Christian Qemant	37	»	»	Educated
7 Amhara Qemant	49	»	»	Educated
M Aṭentä Qemant	72	Amharic	»	Uneducated
M Qemant	47	Amharic	»	Educated
F Qemant	22	»	»	Educated
M Amhara & Qemant	27	»	»	»
F Christian Qemant	60	»	»	»
M Christian Qemant	39	»	»	»
F Qemant Amhara	34	»	»	»
M Christian Qemant	66	Kemantney	»	Uneducated
F Aṭentä Qemant	56	»	»	Educated
M Awura Qemant	76	Amharic	Täbär	Uneducated
M Qemant	23	Kemantney	Täbär	Educated
M Qädami Qemant	79	Amharic	»	Uneducated

Because of the sensitive nature of the issue, the names of informants remain hidden. 'Educated' and 'uneducated' are used respectively to distinguish those who have an experience in modern education from those who do not have.

Qädami Qemant	63	»	»	»
Qemant	44	»	»	»
Qemant	31	»	»	Educated
Wanna Qemant	75	»	»	Uneducated
Christian Qemant	65	Kemantney	»	»
Qemant Amhara	85	Amharic	Laza	»
Qemant	22	»	Laza	Educated
Awura Qemant	62	»	»	Uneducated
Qemant	49	»	»	»
Christian Qemant	69	»	»	»
Christian Qemant	75	»	»	»
Christian Qemant	67	»	»	»
Qemant	38	»	»	»
Qemant	62	»	Awudarda	»
Qemant Amhara	35	kemantney	Awudarda	»
Qemant	80	Amharic	»	»
Qemant	63	»	»	»
Qemant	73	»	»	»
Qemant	22	»	»	Educated
Qemant	61	»	»	Uneducated
Qemant	47	»	»	»

Profiles of Non Qemant Informants

Self Identification	Sex	Age	Place of Residence	Duration of Residence	Occupational Status
ra	M	72	Ayikel	24 years	Merchant
ra	M	79	»	23 »	»
	F	81	»	25 »	»
	M	65	»	22	»
	F	58	»	20	Civil servant
	F	49	Säraba	20	»
	M	64	»	25	Merchant
	F	55	»	21	Civil servant
	F	59	»	20	»
	M	60	»	21	»
	M	69	Nara-Awudarda	Native	Agriculture
	M	78	»	Native	»
	M	59	»	»	» & priest
	F	49	Laza Bulladgie	»	Agriculture
	F	57	»	»	»
	M	71	»	»	» & priest
	M	63	Täbär Säraqo	»	Agriculture
	M	54	»	»	»
	F	60	»	»	»
	M	80	»	»	»

7: Profiles of FGD Participants (Total of Four FGDs)

Language	Sex	Age	Educational Status	Occupational Status
Amharic	M	55	Uneducated	Carpentry
Amharic	M	62	Uneducated	Daily laborer
»	M	61	»	Guard
Kemantney	»	69	»	Unemployed
Amharic	»	57	»	Tailor
Amharic	»	54	»	Merchant
Kemantney	»	70	»	Agriculture
Kemantney	»	71	»	Unemployed
Amharic	»	60	Educated	Civil servant
Amharic	»	63	Educated	»
»	»	54	»	»
»	»	52	»	»
»	»	59	»	Merchant
»	»	54	»	»
»	»	56	»	»
»	»	53	»	»
»	»	52	Uneducated	Daily laborer
»	»	55	»	Guard
»	»	63	»	Tailor
Kemantney	»	70	»	Unemployed
Amharic	»	57	»	Street vendor
»	»	66	»	Pensioner
Kemantney	»	72	»	Unemployed
Amharic	»	59	»	Daily laborer
»	»	53	»	Carpentry
»	»	67	»	Shop keeper
»	»	64	»	Agriculture
»	»	73	»	Agriculture
»	»	71	»	Unemployed
»	»	51	»	Street vendor
Amharic	»	56	»	Agriculture
»	»	69	»	Merchant

3: Profiles of Key Informants

Language	Sex	Age	Place of Residence	Occupational Status
Kemantney	F	67	Ayikel	House Madam
Kemantney	F	65	Ayikel	local drink seller
»	M	75	Säraba	Agriculture
»	M	79	Täbär Säraço	Qemant priest
»	M	69	Nara- Awudarda	Agriculture

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been presented in any other University, and that all sources of materials used for the thesis have been fully acknowledged.

Name: Dawid Yusef

Signature: 

This work has been submitted for examination with my approval as a University advisor

Name: _____

Signature: _____

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