The Politics of Recognition and the Kemant Nationality in Ethiopia[1]

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Abstract:
Against the backdrop of improvements in politico-legal framework for protecting and promoting "Nations, Nationalities and Peoples" of Ethiopia, at least rhetorically, this article examines the Kemant nationality demand for recognition as a manifestation of contemporary struggles for social justice in multicultural societies. The Kemant remain unrecognized and henceforth denied the opportunity to exercise rights enshrined in the constitution like other nationalities. So crucial is their dependence on state recognition that, their very existence as distinct group depends, political participation and representation at the federal and regional levels of the government are severely undermined. Given the fact that the political demand for recognition that national groups strive for can be changed or renegotiated in the course of the movement, it is quite important to analyze the current Kemant nationality demand for recognition, which remains understudied so far. In light with the prevailing political and legal grounds in Ethiopia, the article focuses on the politics involved in their struggle for recognition informed by the contemporary recognition theories developed by Charles Taylor, Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser.

Keywords: Recognition; Ethnic groups; Kemant; Ethiopia

1. Introduction

Ethiopia, a country described as "a nation of nations"[2], is one of the most populated and diversified countries in Africa. It has a total population of 85 million with more than 80 ethno-linguistic groups (Central Statistical Agency, 2008). However, instead of recognizing and accepting the diversity of the country, the modern Ethiopian state formation was one of severe and sometimes violent repression and marginalization of ethnic groups in the name of "nation-building".

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

Reasonably, it is not surprising to see these groups being involved in political movements for self-determination and fighting against marginalization and exclusion (Lewis, 1983:16). Mohamed Salih (2003:108) opines that in a state constituted of a dominant majority, minority groups struggle for civil rights, political participation and representation and recognition of their distinctiveness as well. This is evident that in 1960s and 70s ethno- nationalist movements proliferated in the country. The most significant were Eritrean People Liberation Front (EPLF), Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) and Oromo People Liberation Front (OLF). State officials attempted to undermine these movements and considered them as an impediment to modern state formation.

In May 1991, the downfall of the *Dergue*[4] regime, a glimpse of hope for redressing ethno- nationalist grievance (Yacob, 2010:35) and historical injustice came to emerge. The new political leaders, under the guidance Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), adopted a different policy of state building and promised to create a strong "nation-state" of equals and to get rid of ethnic

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[1] Some sections of this article are part of my research work carried out for Masters of Arts in Development Studies at the International Institute of social studies (ISS), the Netherlands.
[2] Fasile Nahum (1997) "Constitution for A Nation of Nations: The Ethiopian Prospect", The Red Sea Press,: Eritrea.
[3] Bahru Zewde (1991) "A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1974", Addis Ababa University Press, Addis Ababa
[4] *Dergue* is literally means 'Committee'. It is also known as Military Junta that ruled Ethiopia from 1974- 1991

domination and marginalization (Merera, 2002). This necessitated the "politics of recognition of differences" together with "politics of equal dignity" and to the end can contribute for the development of a multicultural society, social justice and democracy which are Ethiopia's very essence.

Nowadays, though there remains ample room for improvement, the political and legal situation of ethnic groups has improved (Kiden, 2008:7). Seventy five (75) "nation, nationalities and peoples"[5] have a representation in the House of Federation which emanated from state recognition as distinct ethnic groups[6]. Yet, twelve self-declared ethnic groups, including Kemant, are demanding de jure recognition[7]. Some ethnic groups are aspiring for political autonomy. For instance, the *Allie* people in *Konso* special *woreda*[8] and the *Goffa* ethnic group, in *Gamo*-Goffa Zone, who are dominated by *Gamo* people both politically and numerically, are struggling for self-administration. The most "radical" contemporary ethno- nationalist struggles are the Oromo People Liberation Front (OLF) and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) assertive secessionist demand to establish an independent Oromo and Ogaden (mainly populated by ethnic Somali)[9] states respectively. These organizations claimed to represent their respective people and framed their demands in terms of effective implementation of their constitutional right, i.e. self-determination up to secession.

Certainly, demands for recognition made by ethnic groups, whether minorities or majorities, are diverse in terms of their objectives. Thus, each and every case study contributes to the body of knowledge pertaining to recognition. Till now, let alone a study on their quest for recognition, exclusive research on Kemant people is rare at any event (Tinbitu, 2005EC:24)[10]. In this sense, the Kemant and their quest for recognition highly deserves academic attention.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. What is Recognition?

The term "recognition" has been used in various contexts and with different conceptualizations.[11] It remains the subject of intense academic debate within social and political theory (Charles Taylor, 1992; Irish M. Young, 1990; Nancy Fraser, 1995, 200; Axel Honneth, 1995; Hines, 2013). Some define it as the moral-ethical goal of inter-subjective relations; others examine as a basic human need granted to those who claim it. The consequence "is some confusion about whether recognition is a goal or the remedy for those who did not receive it in the first place" (Emcke, 2000:484). As Kompridis (2009:277) opines, "we are still struggling with the social and political meanings of recognition". For a thorough understanding of the concept, however, there is a need to reflect briefly what has been found in the literature.

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

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

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

It is important to note that recognition involves acknowledging both deep rooted primordial identities and elite driven and/or instrumental identities. Certainly, the demand for recognition is part of identity politics. Identities can be politically constructed and even used as an instrument for political agenda setting. Apparently, as Sally Hines (2013:8) holds, demands for recognition have been

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

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

[7] Ibid

[8] *Woreda* refers to the local level government administrative unit higher than Kebele and lower that Zone. Kebele is the smallest administrative unit in Ethiopia.

[9] Abdullahi, Abdi M. (2007) "The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF): The Dilemma of Its Struggle in Ethiopia", *Review of African Political Economy, Vol. 34, No. 113, p.p.556-562*

[10] E.C. means Ethiopian Calendar, which is 8 years behind the Gregorian calendar.

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

formulated through a number of identity markers such class, race, ethnicity, nation, religion, sexuality and gender. But, problematic issue is whether the demand for recognition made by groups and individuals is exclusively identity matter or not.

2.2. Contemporary Theories of Recognition

2.2.1. Charles Taylor (The Politics of Recognition, 1994)
Taylor begins his seminal essay with the idea that a number of strands in contemporary politics has significantly shaped by the need, sometimes the demand, for recognition. The demand for recognition made by oppressed and marginalized groups is one of the significant factors behind nationalist struggles (Taylor, 1994: 25). According to Taylor the importance of recognition lays in its relationship to identity. He defines the latter as "individuals' understanding of whom they are and their fundamental characteristics as a human being" (Taylor, 1994: 25). Recognition enables individuals to fashion and strengthen their identities and to secure respect from others. Without it they would experience a form of oppression that prohibits them from becoming full human agents and free and equal member of the society (Taylor, 1994:25). Therefore, his understanding of the term enforces us to think the role that recognition plays in shaping our human agency which in turn affects the way we define ourselves. Non-recognition, he articulates that,
"… [is]a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, reduced mode of being. [Non-recognition] shows not just lack of due respect. It can inflict a grievous wound… [Therefore] recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need" (Taylor, 1992:25-26) (emphasis added)
Indeed, identities are reinforced by the recognition which serves as external support to individuals' internal self-identification. If other society around them mirror back a demeaning or contemptible image of the group, individuals suffer real damage, real distortion, and consequently internalize a picture of their own inferiority and depreciated identity. Therefore, identities are shaped not only by recognition but also its absence, by the misrecognition of others (Taylor, 1994: 25). His conceptualizes identities as not a mere individuals' construction from within, but also the outcome of socio-political dialogue with others. He locates the crucial role others play in the formation of our identity. The positive relation between individuals and the "significant others"[12] is, therefore, important in the process of recognition.
Charles Taylor articulates two forms of recognition: (1) the "politics of equal dignity" which involves equal enjoyment of all fundamental rights and the treatment of individuals as universally equal human beings through recognition of their "citizenship" or "humanity"; and (2) the "politics of difference" which holds that individuals deserve recognition for their distinctiveness (Taylor, 1994:37-38) While the former is related to struggles in which legal issues are dominant and significant, the latter is connected with movements in which the major issues are identity related (Cooke, 2009:77). In this sense, Taylor dichotomized recognition demands which could be understood otherwise. In my view, most recognition struggles are identity based (in terms of ethnicity, nationality, sexuality or gender) but broaden their claims pertain to issues of citizenship, political representation, and egalitarian economic distribution which Taylor seems overlooked.

2.2.2. Axel Honneth (The Struggle for Recognition, 1995)
Honneth theory of recognition has received a widespread academic attention since the publication of his book and its English translation.[13] He has provided significant insights into social forms of recognition and misrecognition. Honneth identifies three modes of recognition: care, respect and self- esteem; and three corresponding modes of misrecognition: threats to self-confidence, to self-respect, and to individuals' sense that their way of life has value (Honneth, 1995:173-174; Honneth, 1992: 190-195). Recognition is the positive mutual relation between individuals or groups where as misrecognition is seen as "the denial of recognition, the phenomena of humiliation and disrespect" (Fraser and Honneth, 2003:134). He argues that individuals' integrity depends upon the approval and acknowledgment from others (Honneth, 1992:188). Misrecognition causes considerable harm to individuals which doesn't represent an injustice solely because it constraints individuals freedom to action, but also impairs positive understanding of oneself (Honneth, 1992:188-189). Thus, recognition is a necessary precondition for individuals' self-realisation.
In essence, Honneth shares a similar understanding with Taylor. Firstly, both realize that recognition, constructed by mutual relation with and by the "significant others", is a necessary condition for obtaining undistorted self-image and misrecognition is a condition of "impaired subjectivity" and "damaged self-identity" (see also Fraser and Honneth, 2003:28). Secondly, they inclined to argue that individual experiences of misrecognition, disrespect and humiliation provide a basis for collective social movements. Thirdly, they claim that individuals seek recognition as a member of a group for their distinct identities to be respected. These understandings provide a crucial theoretical base to analyse critically whether the current Kemant's quest for recognition is mere elite fabrication or a collective effort generated by individuals' sense of misrecognition. However, although their framework deserves attention in my research, due to their, perhaps exclusive, emphasis on identity it couldn't offer me to comprehensively understand the demands of Kemant people.

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[12] Charles Taylor (1994:32-33) says individuals define their identity in relation to others, and sometimes in struggle with others. He called the later as "significant others".
[13] Joel Anderson translated German version of the book to English

<u>2.2.3. Nancy Fraser (Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics, 1996)</u>
Fraser's theoretical framework is part of her effort to develop a social justice theory relevant to contemporary post-socialist politics and society (See Fraser, 1996; 1998; 2001). She says that recognition struggles for cultural identity, replaced redistribution struggles, have been occurring in a situation of worsened "economic inequalities". By criticising Charles Taylor's "politics of recognition" which "ignores socio-economic distributive inequalities" (Zurn, 2003:524), she constructed a "bivalent" conception of justice that incorporates struggles for recognition with struggles for redistribution without subordinating each other (See Fraser, 1996; 1998; Fraser and Honneth, 2003: 3). To this end, instead of looking recognition as the revaluation and misrecognition as the depreciation of cultural or group specific identities, she suggests recognition and misrecognition to be seen in terms of the institutionalized patterns of value and practice that have the effect on individuals or groups "ability to participate as a peer in social life" (Fraser, 1998: 22; Fraser and Honneth, 2003: 29).

She argues that to be misrecognized
"…is to be denied the status of a full partner in social interaction, as a consequence of institutionalised patterns of cultural value that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem" (Fraser, 2000: 113- 114)
Fraser argues that to address misrecognition requires politics aimed at establishing the misrecognised actor as a full and equal member of the society capable of participation with the rest. Changing or modifying the values that regulate human interaction, or establishing new values to promote "parity of participation", provides the situation to overcome status subordination (Fraser, 2000:116). At this point we may observe that she shifted recognition from identity sphere to status and social justice sphere. The notions of "parity of participation" and "status equality" are central to her framework. The absence of institutional values that promotes these elements, "parity of participation" and "status equality", prevents any effort to overcome social injustice which her two-dimension approach aims to redress.
In sum, socio- political struggles for recognition for equality, political participation and economic redistribution have been formulated by groups with a defined or self- identified categories. While some of these movements have been generated by, and aim to redress, inequalities and misrepresentations, others are emerged from the combined effects of identity or cultural, political and economic injustice. In my view, therefore, identity is used as a collective ground for various recognition claims or the main demand to be acknowledged and respected, as a means for achieving socio- economic justice, without necessarily replacing the demand for redistribution justice. The issues of identity, equality/inequality, and participation are central to social and political movements for recognition and, therefore, equal entertained in my case study analysis. However, understanding recognition as a matter of social justice provides a roader based and appropriate base for explaining the Kemant case.

3. Research Area
The Kemant are the origin inhabitants of the north central Ethiopia (Gamst, 1969:1). Their historical homeland stretched from the area around north of Lake *Tana*, the origin of *Abya* River (Blue Nile), to rural areas around *Gonder* town (The Interim Committee, 2004EC: 6). Nowadays, the Kemant live around the highlands of northern and north western part of *Gonder* town (Tinbitu, 2005EC: 34). Particularly they inhabited eight *woredas* in North Gonder Zone contiguously such as: *Quara, Chilga, Lay Armachiho, Denbia* and *Metema* and portions of *Wogra,* partially in *Gondar town* and *Gonder Zuria Woreda*[14].
The population of Kemant were 169,169 in 1984 and 172,327 in 1994 national population censuses. They were the 17th and 10th populated ethnic groups respectively. But, arguably, the census reports are far from reflecting the exact population size of the time and any conceivable demographic transition. This would be partly due to the reason that many people were unenthusiastic to disclose their Kemant identity because it was not convenient time for them to do so. The recent number of Kemant people is officially unavailable because they were not counted in 2007 national census. Hence, precise figures of the population have proved difficult to determine. As unofficial estimates suggest there may be a very large Kemant population living in the country. The estimates range from 300,000[15], to 600,000[16] to 1 million people[17].

4. Methods of Data Collection
The field-based research on which this article is based utilized a combination of qualitative methods: semi-structured key informant interviews with five purposively selected Kemant political elites, in *Gonder* and *Aykel*, and the House of Federation Directorate in Addis Ababa; in-depth interview with the Deputy Chairperson of the *Interim Coordinating Committee for Kemant Nationality Quest for Identity and Self- rule* in *Gonder* and with the Chairperson of *Chilga Wereda* Council and member of the Central executive committee in *Aykel*; and four focus group discussions each consisted of six participants were conducted in *Gonder* and *Aykel* towns. Discussants were purposively selected, who revealed themselves as Kemant, and consisted of retired government officials, civil servants and self-employed men and women ranges from 25- 65 years of old. Most of them had a formal education of different levels. Ensuring the willingness of participants had been given priority. Legal documents and reports were also used for analysis.

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[14] The Interim Committee, Request letter to the House of Federation, January 14, 2005EC, p.1
[15] Timbitu, 2005EC:34
[16] Interview with a Nega Geta, political activist and the former chairperson of KDA
[17] The Interim Committee, Research on Kemant Nationality Quest for identity and self-rule, Gonder, Ethiopia, July 2004EC

5. The Kemant Nationality Demands for Recognition

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

5.1. Reclaiming Identity

Preserving socio-cultural practice, religious beliefs and language is an old one in Kemant history albeit the strong Amhara pressure led to the assimilation of their identity and incorporation into the state in the mid-19th century (Quirin, 1998:220)[18]. In the 20th century Kemant experienced political regimes that discouraged ethnic identity claims. Thus, their identity markers had been ignored and suppressed. Due to the processes of "*Amharanization*" and Christianization in the mid-20th century, the Kemant lost their identity though not entirely eroded.

Given the collective experiences of discrimination and prejudice which are analysed below in this section, Kemant's political struggle began as the demand for recognition of their identity immediately after the Ethiopian Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power who denied their identification as a distinct group. But, the demand has no explicit connection with the global trend of identity politics of the time. The 2007 national census "institutional deprivation" of their identity that abolished the previously privileged and counted distinct ethnicity and language provides a crucial entry point to examine Kemant's misrecognition and the demand for recognition of identity. Iris Marion Young (1990) elucidates that misrecognition refers to sorting individuals to a group to which they does not "authentically" belong to or recognizing individuals in terms which are demeaning to a group to which they belong.[19] These two aspects are manifested in Kemant case. The very existence of Kemant ethnicity, which depends up on the approval by "significant other", in Taylor (1992) and Honneth (2003) understanding, has been denied. Their religion, language and self- identification as distinct group based on common descent remain unrecognized. The Kemant people, whose membership was institutionally imposed from above not chosen, were categorised either under the Amhara ethnic group and/or under others Ethiopian nationals in the census report. This is not only a form of disrespect but also a form of oppression and suppression their self-expression and discourse of their self-understanding because the government categorised the people despite their declaration that they do not belong to these categories.

In further discussion of their situation, my informants stated that many Amharas identify Kemant in demeaning terms. Like the previous studies, this research also found that the worst epithets by which Kemant are labelled as "wood" (*enchet*), "born of wood" (*ye enchat zere*) and "wood worshippers" (*enchet amagnoch*) because of their associations as carriers of wood for Gonder town, worshippers in trees, and the historic practice of wearing wooden earrings amongst the women (see also Quirin, 1998: 217; Zelalem, 2003:46-51). Perhaps, it is because of this "dehumanization"[20]of the origin of the people that the "name Kemant has a derogatory sense" (Zelalem, 2003:46). Kemant ethnicity, therefore, has been depreciated by others. "Dehumanization" and stigmatized identity might have led several people to deny their socio-cultural, religious and linguistic identity and identify themselves as Amhara in the past years. In this contest, they have faced with "impaired subjectivity" as well as "damaged self-identity" (Honneth, 2003; 1995)

One woman focus group discussant in *Gonder* stated the following:

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

The expressions of being "demeaned", "humiliated" and "degraded" affect their "self-esteem", "self- respect" and "self-confidence", which are "non-negotiable aspects of personhood" and can only fully realized within intersubjective recognition (Honneth, 1995:88). From Nancy Fraser (2000:115-116) perspective, of course, such social injustice requires "status equality as full partners in social interaction". But, I would say that her proposition of institutional equality is a possible option in the context of ethnic groups that have

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

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

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

already been accepted as distinct. The Kemant, whose very existence is not recognized yet, requires institutional recognition of their identity and a "transformative attitude towards their collective identity" through public institutions (Emrck, 2000:492).

In this regard, recognition of their distinct identity has taken precedence in their political struggle. At the inception in 2007, the political activists requested the government to recognize and respect Kemant identity[21]. Explicitly, identity has been one of primary political demand, i.e., recognition and acceptance for a hitherto stigmatized Kemant identity[22]. Moreover, they want to reinforce their distinctiveness in relation to their neighbouring dominant Amhara ethnic group and to resist any government attempts of denying it and homogenizing them with the Amhara.

However, as a matter of fact legal recognition is hardly possible without objective and subjective identity marker. This is the reason why the Interim Committee explicated its main objectives one of which is "recapturing their lost identity."[23] Practically, it aims to develop "ethnic consciousness" through reconstruction and mobilization of some traditional values that could help to define the group and increase the self-identification of the people to their language, cultural values and traditions. This might help to restore identity through the development individual's "self-confidence", "self-respect" and "self-esteem". Regardless of its reliance on the recognition by the "significant others", ethnic conciseness is seen as the key element for reclaiming Kemant identity; in this way, individuals became more conscious and politicized to defend their identity.

5.2. A Quest for Constitutionally Enshrined Civil Rights

Protection of the constitutional rights of "nations, nationalities and peoples" is at the centre of current political and legal framework in Ethiopia. It is drawn upon the principle of equality. The Kemant have been marginalized and denied their human, political and cultural rights in the past regimes.[24] The Deputy Chairperson of the Interim Committee, Kasse Mengistu, maintained that there is also a continued violation of their constitutional rights in multi-cultural Ethiopian state. For instance, their request for public demonstration in accordance with article 30 of the constitution in different Kemant *woredas* was rejected by the government.

Against this backdrop, Kasse Mengistu said that:

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

My informants have claimed their rights to be accorded a place of recognition and respect in light of the prevailing constitutional framework[25], a structure which acknowledges and protects linguistic, socio-cultural and political needs and rights of ethnic groups. Implicitly, they defined themselves as a distinct group who can claim and protect their collective rights. In fact, they are not recognized and therefore could not able to claim collective rights like other ethnic groups. So, without doubt, they are demanding recognition of their ethnicity along with a concrete demands for constitutional rights.

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

Nega Geta said that

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

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

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

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

5.3. From Recognition to Self- determination

Since the early 1990s up to 2007, the Kemant people had never claimed, or even never proposed to claim, for self-determination.[26] Their main political demand was limited in its scope i.e. demand for "recognition and respect for their identity". In 2007 national

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

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

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

[24] See also The Interim Committee (2004 EC) pp. 3-4; Tinbitu (2005EC) p. 50- 59

[25] Focus group discussion

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

census, in particular, it was a genuine desire "to be included in census questionnaire" as a distinct ethnic group that provoked the mass political mobilization. There was no any explicit political calculation to demand self-a determination in advanced.

The 2007 national census has created a "political opportunity" for activists to "radicalised" their demand by stirring it to the level of self-determination, which can be defined as "people's quest for freedom and desire to determine their own political, economic, and social life" (Mancini, 2008:554-5)[27].

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

In February 2009, the Interim Coordinating Committee for Kemant Nationality quest for recognition requested the House of Federation which explicitly stated that "we the Kemant nationality are demanding effective implementation of our constitutional right to self- determination as stated in article 39 of the constitution"[28]. Explicitly, they are demanding "internal self-determination" which soon galvanized public support from both the rural and urban *woredas*. This demand is linked to the quest for parity of participation and political representation at the federal and regional governments. Furthermore, their demand implicitly extended to demand for territory autonomy and resource redistribution (such as state budget) that would be allocated for the new administrative structures. However, the specific political, economic and social implication of calming self-administration remains unclear. What seems clear is that their demand as part of the broad claim for "political rights" "equality" and "social justice" than a mere "autonomy" and "self-governance" issue.

6. The Current Status of their Political Demand

It seems easy for a country ruled by "minority" group, Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front /Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front (TPLF/EPRDF), to accommodate the demands of other minorities of having a common history of marginalization and oppression by the dominate Amhara ethnic group. Ideologically, the ruling party aims to protect and promote ethno- linguistic minorities. Hence, there is no reason in principle that it would deny the recognition of Kemant people. Although it is controversial, unless the Amhara regional government fails to provide a response to Kemant's claim within two years, the case would not be seen by the federal government. Despite the fact that the case has spent more than five years at the region, the federal government has not a key role so far except recommending the region to address the issue.[29] Thus, Kemant's quest for recognition remains a matter of controversy. I would say that the current Kemant's major political confrontation is apparently with the Amhara regional government, in whose decision the "legal personality" of the Kemant depends up on.[30]

One of the main contentious issues is the self-rule aspiration of Kemant. In the late August 2013, the Office of the Speaker of the Amhara National Regional Council has accepted Kemant's demand to preserve and develop their language and history, but it doesn't explicitly declared Kemant to fall within the nationality social categorization. The government in this regard stated that "the Kemant people do not constitute a distinct culture from the Amhara as such" nor do have mutually intelligible language among the majority.[31]

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

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

In this sense, the denial or reluctance of the regional government to recognize Kemant perhaps rooted in the general sentiment that the Kemant nationality's demand for recognition would be a threat to the already established federal structure and political order or due to lack of confidence and political security among politicians in the region. Therefore, regardless of whether the objective and subjective elements of recognition are met, recognition depends upon the tone of demands and the political implication aforethought by "the

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

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

[29] Interview with Abebe Tadesse

[30] In my usage of the term "the significant others" include the regional and the federal governments who have the legal authority in defining the status of the Kemant people. This implies all "nations, nationalities and people" who have a set in Amhara regional council and the House of Federation could have a voice on the case.

[31] Ibid, p.4- 5

significant others" who would recognize them. If the regional government recognizes the Kemant identity and their self-rule aspirations it will be more likely to be accepted at the federal government too. At the time of collecting data for this research paper, the case is still in process at the regional government.

7. Conclusion

This article has examined Kemant nationality's quest for recognition in multi-ethnic Ethiopian polity. It has employed contemporary recognition theoretical stands developed by Charles Taylor, Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser. The main research question was exploring the kind of recognition demands that the Kemant people seek to achieve. The findings, summarised in this part precisely, are organized around some crucial points.

Kemant's quest for recognition is deeply rooted in the injustice committed against them during the period of "modern" Ethiopian state-formation, started in the mid-19th century. The history of oppression and forced assimilation, a sense of socio-cultural and religious deprivation, the continued mistreatment and neglect under the current regime have contributed to the rise of demands for recognition. Although there had been covert dissatisfaction and grievances and sporadic political activities by urban and educated individuals since the early 1990s, politically organized and publicised struggle for recognition has started in 2007 immediately after the national population census.

As the case illustrates, demands for recognition are diverse and varied overtime. Analytically, three broad demands underlie Kemant's quest for recognition: (a) identity reclaiming, (b) a quest for constitutionally enshrined rights and (c) the demand for self-determination. Their political movement combines the demand for identity re-cognition and inter subjective identity formation as a distinct nationality, with struggles for status equality, political participation and representations and political autonomy to administer themselves which implicitly involves the demand for economic redistribution. Therefore, I can argue that the arguments developed by Taylor and Axel Honneth (recognition as a matter of identity formation) and Nancy Fraser (recognition as a matter parity of participation) hold worth and need to be jointly considered in order to provide a comprehensive insight in to the recognition demands made by the Kemant people. While these demands are interrelated, it can't be reduced to either of these theoretical categories.

8. Acknowledgments

9. References

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