Ethnicity, belonging and identity among the Eastern Gurage of Ethiopia

Ethnicities
DOI: 10.1177/1468796815588619

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In this paper, I will analyse a case of ethnic transformation in post-1991 Ethiopia based on an ethnographic study of the Eastern Gurage. The case represents an ethnic setting where the conventional conceptualization of ethnicity in terms of a notion of origin undermines the diversities expressed in various forms of category and boundary formations. The ethnic setting does not also fall into, but combines, the commonplace dichotomization of primordialist versus constructivist notion of ethnicity. Not only by taking Barth's (1969) formalist anthropological conception of ethnicity as boundary formation, but also suggesting my own analytical distinction, I will attempt to account for the various forms of ethnicities particularly those based on clanship, locality, Islam and state's categorization. In this regard, I have introduced a distinction between the concepts of identity and belonging in order to explain the different forms of social and political classifications, ideologies and power relationships that are often treated as implying a single phenomenon, i.e. identity formation.

Keywords
Eastern Gurage, Siltie, ethnicity, belonging, identityntroduction

In the last 23 years or so, following the restructuring of the Ethiopian state in the form of an 'Ethnic' based federalism, there has been a transformation process taking place in the country particularly with respect to ethnicity. Historically Ethiopia has remained a Christian Kingdom constituted largely of the northern

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and central Amharic and Tigrigna-speaking people. Though not totally isolated from what is now known as the Southern Ethiopian region, it was only during the last decades of the 19th century that this kingdom was enlarged towards the south creating a modern Ethiopian state incorporating various politically and linguistically distinct populations with a centralized politico-economic state structure.

This process resulted in the restructuring (rather than, I argue, total distraction or transformation) of the traditional forms of ethnicities and the creation of new ones amongthe conquered peoples.Both the old andthenewforms of ethnicities however existed side by side until the radical restructuring of the traditional Ethiopian state in theearly 1990sthathasled toanewconfigurationof Ethiopianethnicities. My aim is toprovide someinsightregardingcontemporarysocial andpoliticaltransformations in Ethiopia by analyzing the case of the Eastern-Gurage-speaking people, while critically evaluating existing hypotheses as well as reflecting on some of the conceptualization regarding ethnicity in anthropology.

The people known in the literature as Eastern Gurage constitute an ethnic setting in the sense that they share some cultural attributes commonly attributed to an ethnic group, including language, religion (Islam) and notions of origin. However, until the early 1990s, they never self-identified themselves, nor were they recognized by their significant others as constituting a single social category in any way. While there is ample evidence demonstrating the existence of a shared language (Hetzron, 1972; Leslau, 1992), there was until recently no emic category of ascription recognized by the people themselves representing this language or the speakers of the language as a single social unit.

In the literature, the name ‘Eastern Gurage’ comes from linguists, who use the term ‘Gurage’ to refer to one category of Ethiopian Semitic language-speakers as being distinct from their Cushitic-speaking neighbours. They classified Gurage speakers into three major groups: Northern Gurage, Western Gurage and Eastern Gurage. In his pioneering anthropological analysis of the people, William Shack (1963) generally described the structural features of the Gurage as typical of what are known in anthropology as segmentary societies (p. 1). While Shack himself noticed some form of ‘inter-tribal’ political organization uniting clans within the Western Gurage (Shack, 1963: 160), and Fekadu, another anthropologist on the subject, also explored processes of identity formation uniting territorial groups among the Northern Gurage (Fekadu, 1972: 3); until recently, no similar stable intergroup organization or identity formation has ever been observed among the Eastern Gurage speakers.

However,thischangedbetween1991and2001,afterasuccessfulcampaign,struggle and negotiation that led to official state recognition of the majority EasternGurage-speaking population as one of the many ‘nationality’ groups within the Ethiopian federal state system. There are a number of indicators demonstrating such a transformation. First, while there was no ethnonym or self-ascription representingtheEasternGuragespeakersasasingleidentitycategory,sincethenthename Siltie[1] was adopted from one major clan of the people called Silti to represent the other

Eastern-Gurage-speaking population, which, as I will subsequently show, had historically never identified themselves as such, nor were they recognized by others using the category 'Siltie'. Second, a few months following a referendum, the Siltie Zone was also established as a self-governing politico-administrative and territorial ethnic and political unit, with a measure of local autonomy providing economic opportunities and more access to resources such as the federal state budget, land and some local employment, primarily for local people.[2]

Third, both local and diaspora Eastern Gurage elites have become consciously involved in the cultural and social construction and representation of a distinct Siltie history (see, for example, Abdulfatha, 2007, 2009)[3] and culture. Fourth, there has been a systematic attempt to undermine the historical and symbolic ties with the neighbouring Gurage groups, while accentuating a cultural and political alliance with the Harari[4] (see Woldeselassie, 2013: 159). In short, there has been a more or less successful attempt to claim, if not monopolize, 'ethnic'/regional sovereignty, economic opportunities, political power and collective destiny using relevant cultural symbols that are meaningful in a specific context. How can one understand and explain this?

Recently, a number of political scientists suggested that the post-1991 assertion of Siltie ethnicity corresponds to an already existing separate Eastern Gurage versus non-Eastern Gurage identity formation, which was subsumed under the encompassing Gurage category (Markakis, 1998; Nishi, 2005; Smith, 2005; 2013; Vaughan, 2003). This explanation assumes the concept of ethnicity as a continuity or revivalism of an already existing collective identity built on some identifiable cultural attributes. Hence, Markakis claims that, though this was not politicized until the early 1990s, the Eastern Gurage speakers historically constituted an identity formation distinct from the other Gurage groups based on a separate notion of origin, language and religion (Markakis, 1998: 131). He also argues that, following conquest and incorporation, they were subsumed under one Gurage identity which was formed as a response to the socio-economic and political exigencies that confronted migrants in the newly created urban centres (Markakis, 1998: 141–143).

Building on the ideas of Markakis, Vaughan also took the case of the Siltie as an 'instance in which a group which had been included as part of a larger ''ethnic'' composite won separate recognition' based on its distinct and easily identifiable identity markers and political position in the modern Ethiopian state (Vaughan, 2003: 261). Similarly, Smith goes to the extent of treating 'Siltie' as an already existing ethnic group by claiming that, '[i]n recent history, the Siltie ethnic group was considered a sub-clan of the Gurage ethnic grouping.... the term Gurage came to be operative at the national level and subsumed the identities of ethnic group which were distinct in certain ways and some of which had little interaction' (Smith, 2005: 189). Notwithstanding their significance, such hypotheses do not fully document the actual and more complex nature of Eastern Gurage ethnicities in general and Siltie versus Gurage identity politics in particular. My aim is to contribute to closing this gap by providing and chronicling an ethnography of ethnicity and ethnic politics respectively from a historical-anthropological perspective.

Based on my ethnographic study[5] I will show that the people now called the Siltie have been constituted of at least three different but related types of identity and belonging formations. First, they have been constituted of competing descentand territory-based categories of people situated at the margin of the Ethiopian state with symmetrical power relationships among themselves and in relation to other, similar neighbouring categories of peoples. Descent- and territory-based belonging did not create a discrete social formation, as there have been social, symbolic and political ties across linguistic and descent boundaries. Yet, intergroup relationships did not themselves lead to the formation of a common Eastern Gurage identity implying a specific category and boundary vis-a` -vis the nonEastern-Gurage-speaking people.

Second, the Eastern Gurage, together with some other Gurage- and nonGurage-speaking populations of the region, had been classified by both the state and the academics as a part of one category of people (i.e. Gurage) based on the existence of a shared culture. Despite its relevance in urban and national contexts, this ethnicity formation however was not more socially and politically relevant than those ethnicities formed that were based on clan and local categories. Third, the Eastern Gurage also came to share, together with other Muslims in Ethiopia, a common identity and political position based on Islam. This identity formation relates to the asymmetrical incorporation of Islamized populations of Ethiopia into the Amhara-Tigray Orthodox Christian culture which dominated the Ethiopian empire-state structure.[6] Contrary to existing assumptions however, such politicized identity was not specific to the Eastern Gurage and did not result in the formation of a Siltie versus non-Siltie ethnicity.

The post-1991 Siltie identity claim in which a number of Eastern-Gurage-speaking population are constructed as a single identity group, representing one of the many nationality groups of the Ethiopia federal state system, is a new form of ethnicity that began to fundamentally transform existing clan- and locality-based ethnicities and alliances within the wider national and regional contexts. Such identity formation does not represent a continuity or revivalism of an already existing Siltieversus-non-Siltie category or boundary since there had never been one before.

Despite the consensus among critical writers on ethnicity in anthropology that, rather than being a product of shared cultural attributes, ethnicity is a social construct (Yeros, 1999), few studies have documented the historical, political and ideological construction of identity as implied in the instrumentalist and modernist conception of ethnicity. While there exists a familiar assertion in the literature that ethnicity is manipulated by elites (Toland, 1993), ethnographic accounts of an actual process of that manipulation at the local level (especially descriptions and analysis of how an ethnic appeals of political elites are received by non-political elite members of a population), are rarely offered. The politics of Siltie identity can be taken as an interesting case that demonstrates, in a particular way, the commonplace assertion of ethnicity in the literature as a socio-political construct instrumentally used to achieve political and economic gain particularly in the context of change related to the state.

In the following, I will first provide further theoretical reflections. The literature on ethnicity is voluminous and so not all arguments will be reheard here. Nevertheless, I will critically examine the commonplace notion of ethnicity based on a notion of origin and suggest my own conceptualization, drawing from standard conceptions of ethnicity in social anthropology. Thereafter, I will first, using a historical-anthropological perspective, discuss clanship and locality and then raise the question of identity particularity in relation to the state and shared religion (i.e. Islam). This will be followed by a description and analysis of the events between 1991 and 2001 that led to the claim, assertion and final recognition of a separate Siltie identity distinct from the Gurage. Finally, I will briefly summarize the core arguments of the article by way of conclusion.

Ethnicity, identity and belonging

The question of ethnicity formation among a population who share some basic cultural attributes, including language, religion and notions of origin, but who are socially organized along descent and territorial lines, remains an under-theorized field of research in anthropology after the major criticism against lineage theory (Kuper, 1982; see also Schlee, 1985 for a related discussion). The main issue in this regard is to explain the logic of collective action and political mobilization without undermining the significance of descent- or territory-based structuring processes. This question also relates to the much wider contemporary sociological and anthropological question of explaining the diversities of phenomena associated with the concept of ethnicity (see for example Eriksen, 2010 and Wimmer, 2008).

In anthropology, the commonplace assumption is that descent groups comprise a sub-unit of an ethnic group and intergroup relationship, which implies a wider 'tribal-identity' formation expressed through a shared notion of origin that ideologically legitimizes a subjective feeling of 'we-hood' in the form of an individual-writlarge kind of collectivity. However, this conception, as I will show subsequently, does not explain the dynamic and more complex nature of category and boundary formation and intergroup relationships among the Eastern-Guragespeaking population.

John Comaroff (1995: 249) once noted that, since 'all identities are not ''things'' but relations' whose 'content is wrought in the particularities of their on-going historical construction'... 'the substance of ethnicity and nationality can never be defined or decided in the abstract'. Extending such an argument further, I claim that, while there may possibly be a number of cases in which ethnicity formation can be explained in terms of kinship ideology, a notion of origin as a defining substance is valid only for clan categories.

The theoretical problem associated with the concept of ethnicity relates to the wider epistemological issue of whether we are dealing with either universal or historically contingent social phenomena or both. One way to deal with this problem is to consider ethnicity as a set of relations (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1987; Okamura, 1981) and adopt a broader definition of ethnicity capable of explaining different forms of ethnicity

formations in different cultural and historical contexts. In this regard, Barth's treatment of the concept of ethnicity as boundary formation (1969) could serve as a point of departure[7] as it still remains an important contribution for the comparative study of ethnicity in sociology and anthropology (see, for example, Comaroff, 2010: 531; Wimmer, 2008: 970). However, a further distinction and clarification is also necessary in order to explain different forms of boundary-maintaining processes.

I will use the concept of ethnicity to refer to an aspect of a wider human sociality implying category and boundary formation of different compositions and scales based on shared social attributes not determinable a priori. Nothwithstanding the variation in terms of the contexts of their formations, categories and boundaries, constructed based on shared religion, nationalism, language, descent, race, histories could all be taken as examples of ethnicities. This approach is in line with the contemporary epistemological reflection in anthropology where some anthropologists emphasise that, rather than the predefined group, the 'social' in the sense of 'the social relational and interactive structures, as well as institutional and organizational formations' (Kapferer, 2005: 151) is the appropriate object of anthropological inquiry (see also Comaroff, 2010: 526). The concept of ethnicity in this sense does not imply a separate ontology but serves as a heuristic concept to explain how human beings socially classify themselves by making social categories and boundaries. The anthropological studies of ethnicity, therefore, include analyzing sets of relations in the form of category and boundary formations and their objectification in different historical, cultural and political contexts and the associated social and political consequences at individual and group level. It includes discerning the embedded forms of power relationships and deconstructing the associated ideologies of sameness and difference and the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion (Eriksen, 2010; Jenkins, 2008) in specific ethnographic contexts.

The argument above is not a novelty and largely draws from the standard explanation of ethnicity particularly in anthropology where anthropologists speak of ethnicity as a social (Barth, 1969), situational (Mitchell, 1956), instrumental (Cohen, 1969), historical (Comaroff, 1995), social and political formation. Throughout the paper, I will indeed refer to such explanations depending on their relevance. Nonetheless, based on the empirical material, I propose a distinction be made between the concepts of 'identity' and 'belonging'. The concept of 'identity' should be treated as a notion of cultural difference entailing a wider context in which the difference is constructed as meaningful. The term 'belonging' should be referred to as implying a socially and spatially defined notion of relatedness to certain individuals or locality within or outside the realm of a given notion of cultural difference. There are three major reasons that explain the theoretical relevance of the distinction between the concepts of identity and belonging.

Firstly, while both concepts should imply forms of ethnicities in the sense of category and boundary formations, the concept of belonging is different from the concept of identity because it does not imply a claim of cultural distinctiveness. The concept of identity in this sense corresponds with much of the conceptualisation of the term 'ethnicity' in the literature (Eriksen, 2010; Jenkins, 2008). It implies a modern sociality

based on a logic of difference (Escobar, 2004), suggesting the reproduction of social categories and boundaries in a hierarchical power relationship (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992) in a modern and urban context (Mitchell, 1974). The concept of belonging on the other hand primarily implies (but not necessarily always) a specific form of human sociality implying a sense of loyalty, social immediacy, 'feeling at home' and being socially safe in either a stable or transient way. It refers to category and boundary formation based on a logic of sameness in symmetrical power relationships. Such distinction entails that people sharing similar cultural attributes, including language, religion and notions of origin may claim different forms of belonging, even though they may imagine (Smith, 1986) each other as members of similar identity category or community. This perspective helps us explain different forms of category formation and boundary-maintenance processes other than those based on a notion of cultural distinctiveness.

Second, the distinction I propose between the concept of identity and belonging broadly corresponds to what Jenkins proposed in his important book, Rethinking Ethnicity (2008), regarding different forms of group ideologies and basis of identification. Jenkins makes a distinction between what he called 'basis of identification' and 'ideologies of identification', and argued that there is a hierarchical overlap between different bases of identification and their attendant ideologies. He illustrates his point by using the case of 'kinship'/'co-residence' and 'ethnicity'/'nationality'. Explaining 'ideologies' as 'bodies of knowledge' and 'mobilized in the definition of criteria of group membership and principles of [inclusion and] exclusion', Jenkins made two analytical distinctions. First, he makes a distinction between kinship and co-residence as a 'basis of identification' on the one hand, and 'familism' and 'localism' as the corresponding ideologies of identification, respectively, on the other. Second, he also makes an analytical distinction between 'Ethnicity' and 'Nationality' as two different 'bases of identification' on the one hand, and 'Ethnicism' and 'Nationalism' as the corresponding 'ideologies of identification' on the other. 'Because of the coincidence of descent and residence in many societies', Jenkins argues kinship 'may be associated with localism', despite the fact that its corresponding ideology is familism. 'Ethnicity may bound up with... ethnicism and Nationalism, though its corresponding ideology is ''ethnicism''' (Jenkins, 2008: 86–87).

Though he never made a distinction between identity and belonging, Jenkins' explanations, particularly the one in which he treats kinship, ethnicity, nationality and co-residence as different '[bases] of identification' and 'ideologies of identification' is broadly relevant as it entails (though based on different conceptualisation) various forms of ideologies and bases of category/boundary or ethnicity formations. I argue that the nature of ideology, both as a culturally and socially meaningful idea and legitimization of a specific identity (Eriksen, 1991a), is often different from the one assumed and made relevant in claims and legitimation of a specific form of belonging. While ideologies of identities tend to legitimize notion of cultural differences vis-a` -vis other competing notions of cultural difference in a wider context of inter-group power relationships,

ideologies of belonging often relate to the issue of legitimizing a meaningful and immediate social classification or ordering, often within an identity group.

Third, the distinction between belonging and identity formation could also be explained in terms of the different social and political circumstances associated in each case. Identity in general and politicised identity in particular are associated with the situational rise of a specific form of 'We-consciousness' due to the perception of a shared (symbolic or political) external threat. The concept of threat is a relational term implying informal or formal social and political action in a given social field. This process implies under-communication of internal differences (Eriksen, 2010: 195) and the enhancement of strategic alliance and political mobilisation of subjects across boundaries with or without the effect of making a shared identity category or group.[8] Contrary to this, the formation of belonging does not imply the perception of an external threat or common enemy. Rather it is primarily associated with internal differentiation and competition in an environment of shared cultural and economic resources. Belonging, in this sense, functions as a cultural and symbolic resource, as a marker of identity rather than serving as an identity itself. In the following, I will demonstrate this distinction and clarification to analyse the different forms ethnicities constructed based on clanship and locality on the one hand and those based on notions of cultural distinctiveness on the other.

Belonging

The Eastern-Gurage-speaking people constitute a cluster of categories of population built primarily on claims of specific descent and/or territoriality.[9] While 'categories and boundaries based on descent' refers to a subjectively defined notion of relatedness or belonging to a specific category of individuals based on kinship (fictive or real) ties, categories based on territoriality entail a sense of attachment to a specific place. The largest form of category based on descent is clan. The largest form of category based on territoriality is locality. There are emic terms that represent categories based on descent and territoriality.

The category gaar locally refers to notions of relatedness expressed through the idiom of blood or kinship ties. The Eastern Gurage also use the category of gicho to refer to sub-clan descent categories or smaller forms of clan categories. In addition to gar and gicho, there is the concept of zirret (lineage), representing an individual's real kinship ties and origin. Two emic terms express territoriality among the Eastern Gurage, namely baad and geye. Unlike gaar, these categories are constructed through a notion of relatedness to a specific land or soil. The term baad refers to clan locality, country or region, while geye/gee (also called mewta) refers to a native place and it is further sub-divided into many geye.

Theoretically, these emic concepts correspond to the anthropological concepts of clan and lineage. Nevertheless, in practice, the local concepts represent a far more complex social relationship and action than the anthropological concepts entail. Individuals claiming belonging based on a gaar can rightly be termed as clan or fictive, extended

kinship-based ethnicities locally naturalized as primordial ties. Because individuals claiming a baad may also consist of naturalized descent categories or networks of individuals of various scale and composition claiming multiple ancestors, they are, however, irreducible to an individual-writ-large kind of ethnicity formation commonly attributed to a definition of ethnicity as a fictive, expanded kinship group based on a notion of shared descent.

The relevance of clanship and locality as the bases for social organization of the people is generally meaningful in the context of scarce resource, that is, land and the high density of population of the region. Anthropologists long ago argued that the relevance of African lineages correlates to the absence of centralized authority. Some anthropologists have also argued that, even though lineages are often both ‘fictions and facts’; ‘they are facts both in local ideology and in settlement patterns in some areas of land scarcity and competition eastern and western Africa’ (Shipton, 1994: 353).

Categories and boundaries based on descent and territoriality are not mere historical realities as they are still relevant in the present-day context. For example, on the regular weekly market day in the towns of Kibbet and Dalocha, EasternGurage- and non-Eastern-Gurage-speaking people of the region come for trade. In such a context, the majority of Eastern-Gurage-speaking people use the names of clans and natal places to classify people during interactions. Language in fact is relevant; however, it is not the overriding factor in determining an individual’s sense of belonging or notions of relatedness, which are the basic criteria of classification in such contexts. Since the Eastern Gurage are exogamous in the sense that there is a requirement for marriage outside one’s lineage, the descent or local group a person belongs to is also relevant in marriage selection.

Islam has remained an important factor in intergroup relationships connecting descent- and territory-based categories across boundaries. Historically it served as a major factor as crosscutting ties and in mobilizing Muslims particularly in situations of war against a non-Muslim enemy, including the neighbouring pastoralist Oromo groups and the Ethiopian Christian empire builders. There were strategic and periodic political alliances among chiefs of descent groups or garrads[10] against a common internal or external enemy. The garrad represented the highest political authority that the Eastern Gurage knew before they were fully incorporated into the modern Ethiopian empire in the late 19th century. The level and nature of solidarity and alliances depended on the situation regarding the interests of various descent groups involved in the conflict. The alliances were commonly made across linguistic and descent boundaries, both within and outside the Gurage groups. Islam has also served as a crosscutting tie by providing Muslims in the region with shared Islamic symbols, rituals and socially recognized dispute-resolution mechanisms locally known as seera (Woldeselassie, 2008: 14).

Descent- and territory-based groups have also been inter-related through a shared notion of origin, locally accepted as histories of the people in the region. What is interesting about the notion of origin that the Eastern Gurage and related groups subscribed to is that, while it has provided them with a sense of a shared past by situating or positioning them within the wider Muslim–Christian historical and cultural relations

in the region, it does not construct them as a single category of people in any way. In addition to being claimed by different categories of people in the Gurage region across linguistic boundaries, the notion of origin classifies the ancestors of the Eastern Gurage and related neighbouring peoples into three major categories.[11]

The first category includes the majority of individuals who claim ancestors from the various itinerant Muslim preachers and leaders who are imagined, in the notion of origin, as coming to the region for Islamization purposes. Some of these figures are depicted as being genealogically related to each other or to neighbouring Gurage and non-Gurage ancestors. Others, though collectively seen as agents of Islamization, are socially recognized as autonomous individual ancestors having distinct personality and genealogical roots. The second includes a significant number of individuals who claim origins from indigenous people of the region variously called Zˇ ara or Abzana, Ager, who are depicted in the notion of origin as welcoming the immigrant to their native land. The third category represents the remaining individuals who claim ancestry from the Christian settlers from the north. Such a classification is a long way from the commonplace understanding of an identity or rather an ethnic category or group formation, with a single us/ them boundary, shared feeling, cohesion and political solidarity.

Identity

Prior to 1889, the Eastern Gurage remained a cluster of categories of people primarily organised on descent and territoriality. While there was temporal and strategic co-operation among garrads against a common internal (Eastern Gurage) or external (non-Eastern-Gurage or non-Muslim) enemy, no historical or ethnographic evidence suggests the formation of a common identity or social or political organization of the majority of Eastern Gurage people that contrasts them to their neighbouring Gurage- or non-Gurage-speaking neighbours. The question of a shared identity for the Eastern Gurage emerged after the late 1880s, when the various clan and territorial groups came to identify themselves and to be categorized by the state and significant others following the social differentiation and stratification processes within the modern Ethiopian empire state.

As with most other Ethiopian peoples of the southern region, the Eastern Gurage have experienced the imposition of a state-based centralized structure on their indigenous forms of social and political organizations since the late 1890s. One major change relates to the destruction of the institution of the garrad and the introduction of the balabat. The balabat were co-opted local chiefs who served as the link between the empire ruler and the ordinary subjects. The introduction of the balabats contributed to the restructuring of territorial-based categories in the sense that it introduced new local offices in the form of sanga. The sanga redefined a group of gicho in a new form, as local territorial units paying tax to the state or its institutions, such as the church. For example, much of the territory of the Silti clan came to be divided into eight sanga, locally called semut (eight)-sanga, namely Welia, Abzana, Gora, Titi, Danicho, Arat-Ber, Mukarie and Anshbeso. Such a

classification (i.e. sanga) was not peculiar to the Eastern Gurage as some writers implied (see for example, Bustorf, 2010: 607) and was largely connected to the traditional Ethiopian state system classificatory practices in the region (see Tibebu, 1995: 200). It existed among the neighbouring Semitic and non-Semiticspeaking groups including the Mesqan and Kembata.

Following the collapse of the imperial regime in 1974, the Ethiopian socialistoriented government commonly called the Derg (1974–1991) also imposed its own spatial classification by creating apparatuses of control called the qebele, which penetrated the Ethiopian people at the household level. The aim of the qebele was to make subjects legible for governance and control in the form of smaller administrative territorial and household units. This classification further restructured the existing territorial classification. Today, qebele names serve as a basis for territorial-based belonging. It is not my plan here to discuss the entire territorial classification of the Eastern Gurage people. Suffice to note that the historical and current territory-based categories of belonging among the Eastern Gurage should not be taken as reflecting continuities of past categories, but rather must be seen as the result of complex classificatory practices that involve official categorization and indigenous adaptation over time.

Another important change relates to the formation of Gurage ethnicity which is a categorisation by the state and academics largely based on cultural difference visa` -vis neighbours (Shack, 1963: 37). Following conquest and incorporation, the Eastern Gurage speakers, together with other neighbouring groups, were categorized as one category of people, i.e. Gurage, representing ‘a linguistic and ethnic enclave in part of the southernmost range of the central Ethiopian plateau’ (Needham, 1969: 153). This categorisation has led many writers to argue that the Eastern Gurage subscribed to a shared Gurage ethnicity whose purpose was to provide a viable basis for cooperation and solidarity among urban Gurage-speaking migrants (Markakis, 1998: 144). While Markakis’ claim is not irrelevant in the sense that the category of Gurage did, in fact, represent urban ethnicity, it does not, however, show the varying significance of this ethnicity in relation to other categories, boundaries and social organisations particularly based on clanship and locality both in urban and rural contexts among the Eastern Gurage. I argue that, notwithstanding its relevance in an urban context, Gurage ethnicity was no more socially and politically relevant than ethnicities based on clanship and locality, which continued to be relevant in an urban context.

One major way this was expressed was through the establishment of voluntary associations in urban centres based on clan or territorial-based categories of belonging. Institutions based on descent and locality did not cease to be relevant among urban migrants, who had to use clan or territorial-based networks to obtain opportunity and support to adjust to the socio-economic exigencies that urban centres entail. For example, if a cousin in a rural area was found guilty of homicide, his urban cousin, together with those living in rural areas, would be implicated in retribution to the deceased group based on local level collective authority and loyalty. This reproduced the dual system of sovereignty (i.e. the state and local) that the Eastern Gurage lived within in the Ethiopia

Empire. What is more interesting is that this duality still exists in various forms and complexity in the presentday context (Woldeselassie, 2008: 6).

In addition to Gurage ethnicity, the formation of a common identity based on Islam was another important change the Eastern Gurage experienced following their conquest and full incorporation into the modern empire in the late 1890s. The formation of this ethnicity relates to the subordinate political position Muslim in Ethiopia (including the Eastern Gurage) acquired following the construction of the Ethiopian national identity based on the core cultural values of the historically dominant Tigre-Amahra-Orthodox-Christian people. The fact that the Ethiopian rulers followed a policy of cultural assimilation at least at the level of urban and political elites means that the majority Muslim population either were totally ignored or marginalised while being largely excluded from the power and privileged of the empire resulting in a politicised identity based on Islam.

Many writers argued that, in contrast to the other Gurage groups, Islam among the Eastern Gurage represented the basis for solidarity and shared identity formation (see Markakis, 1998; Nishi, 2005). My investigation, however, indicates that, despite its political significance as a crosscutting tie and the basis for periodic mobilisation and strategic alliances across boundaries, Islam among the Eastern Gurage has never served as the basis for Eastern Gurage versus non-Eastern Gurage identity as is commonly assumed. Part of the problem lies in confusing the relevance of Islam as a crosscutting tie and as a basis for shifting and strategic political alliances with solid identity formation and integration. As I will discuss in the next section, the consideration of Islam and other shared social attributes like language as the basis for ethnicity formation is a post-1991 phenomenon. While this must be attributed to the primary importance attached by the people themselves to clanship and locality (at least until the early 1990s), over and above other ethnicities based on shared religion, language and notion of origin, the way Islam was practised in the region has also been another major factor. This could be further demonstrated by analysing the significance of Muslim saints (awliya), who generally constitute an essential element of Islam in the Gurage region.

Throughout the 20th century, the awliya had two major forms of significance in social and political ordering in the Gurage region. On the one hand, wali venerating practices became no less than pious acts or legitimate forms of adhering to Islam itself. They became a central element of being Muslim where ordinary Muslims attached themselves to a wali of their choice seeking their baraka (intercession ability) for various concerns. This could be of an individual nature, such as personal well-being, fertility and success in one's undertakings, or relate to the concerns of all Muslims, such as good harvests, rain in times of drought and peace. On the other hand, they reproduced the internal differentiation and division among the people based on clanship and locality, while at the same time they have also served as crosscutting ties connecting the Eastern Gurage and related groups in the region across clan, territorial and linguistic boundaries (for detailed discussion on this see Woldeselassie, 2013: 147).

This pattern is compatible with one established hypothesis in Ethiopian studies, which is that there is a variable, not a one-to-one, relationship between Islam and ethnicity in Ethiopia. In this regard, Abbink once rightly noted, 'In anthropological studies on the various ethnic groups of Ethiopia, many varieties and forms of Islamic practice have been described. What is clear is that Islam and ethnicity are not isomorphic' (Abbink, 1998: 119). Similarly, in the case of the Eastern Gurage, there was no one-to-one correspondence between Islam and an encompassing Eastern Gurage versus non-Eastern Gurage identity and boundary. Until at least the early 1990s, this pattern was known in Ethiopia by the term Gurage-Muslim—a category or classification which was meaningful in contrast to both Gurage-Christians and other non-Gurage Muslim Communities in the country (see Woldeselassie, 2013: 147).

Politics of identity (1991–2001)

In 1991, when the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), controlled and led by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), toppled the Derg regime, category and boundary formations, political solidarity and social cohesion remained relatively stable at the level of social relationships and organization built on the principles of clanship and locality. However, this began to change when a small group of individuals, primarily from the Azernet and Berberie groups in Addis Abeba, began to advance the view that they should be recognized as a 'nationality' group distinct from other Gurage speakers.

Their claim was a reaction against the first ethnic political organization, i.e. the Gurage Peoples' Democratic Front (GPDF), which aimed to represent the Gurage as a single ethnic group. Following the collapse of the Derg dictatorship, the GPDF was established as a response to the invitation by the transitional government of Ethiopia. This was a period in Ethiopia when political organizations and networks of individuals responded to the invitation from the EPRDF to join and participate in the reconfiguration of the Ethiopian state into an ethnic-based federal structure by forming political organizations that could claim to represent ethnic groups, some of which had never been known to the public before (Markakis, 1998: 139).

The initiative by the network of individuals, including students mainly from urban centres who were active members of the Azernet and Berberie youth association, has a theoretical and historical significance. It generally demonstrates one major and established conception of ethnicity particularly in anthropology, which states that, rather than being a resurgence of something 'tribal' or 'traditional' social organization, the claim and assertion of ethnicity is a modern construct directly related to the social and political concerns and interest of its adherents (Kapferer, 1995; Mitchell, 1956, 1974).

The initiative of the mostly young and educated elites could also be explained by other social and historical factors relating to the social ordering of the clan- and territory-based social organization. Despite retaining their separate notions of relatedness, members of the two groups of belonging developed a historically established solidarity and alliance

over time, especially through marriage and shared popular wali-veneration practices. They were also one of the best-organized groups of the Eastern Gurage in Addis Abeba, helping migrants from the rural areas through voluntary associations. Probably due to this, the groups had (though very few) urban religious and political elites, as well as rich merchants who, while they could identify themselves with the Amhara-Tigray-dominated Ethiopian identity, also developed a competing relationship, particularly with individuals of similar status from the Christianized Gurage groups.

Consistent with their social organization, the first political party organization they established in August 1991 was a collation of clan and territorial groups called the SAMWGPDO (The Silti, Azernet-Berber/Aicho, Melga/Mesqan Wolene/ Wuriro and Gedebano Peoples' Democratic Organization). While the majority of the categories included are from the Eastern Gurage-speakers, the collation also included non-Eastern-Gurage-speaking neighbouring groups such as Mesqan. The party was recognized by the state after a few months in the same year. The EPRDF officials were not against the claim of a separate identity, and in fact already coopted some of the eloquent and active leaders from the activists. Nevertheless, because the claim of the newly established SAMWGPDO did not correspond with their initial perception, which saw Gurage as a single ethnic group, they had to deal with the challenges brought by the activists.

In June 1991, the EPRDF officials organized a rural public gathering in the town of Kibbet in the Silti woreda. The meeting was significant since it largely influenced the standing of the EPRDF on the matter for the next 10 years. It was conducted with the purpose of determining the views of the rural people on the issue of separate Siltie identity raised among the urban Eastern Gurage elites. The participants were mainly elders of the Silti clan, but representative elders from other neighbouring clans and territorial groups were also included. Elders and religious figures who were known and respected in their respective localities were all identified and formally invited by the government to attend the meeting. What was interesting about this meeting was that, as the movement for the separate identity was initiated mainly in Addis Abeba without much participation and knowledge of the majority rural people, the rural elders did not have an obvious answer for this. Hence, following the presentation from the EPRDF officials, the elders demanded more time to deliberate on the issue and proposed to meet the officials again in a month's time.

After the first encounter, the elders decided to deliberate on the issue among themselves, without the involvement of the government officials. In their meeting, they all stressed the historical connection of the Silti with the other Gurage groups. According to one of my knowledgeable and elder informants, the general conclusion they reached was that, 'Our ancestors are related to the Gurage and the latter are our kinsmen. It is vital for us if we decide that we identify with the Gurage.' The rural Silti elders finally decided that they were part of the Gurage, and they would not support a distinct identity from the Gurage. Once the EPRDF officials got the views of the respected elders, they proceeded to establish the EPRDF-affiliated GPDM—the Gurage Peoples' Democratic Movement—as the legitimate representative of all the three Gurage-speaking groups as

a single Nationality group. A founding ceremony was held in Wolqite´ in November 1991, where all regional state officials including the then president, Abate Kisho, and recognized elders of the Gurage-speaking population participated. Once established, the GPDM claimed sovereign power on the people and began to politically and administratively control and govern the Gurage Zone as one element of the Ethiopian federal system. Following this, supporting and legitimizing the rival pan-Gurage political organization remained government policy.

The rejection of the question of a separate identity by the elders at the Kibbet meeting, the legitimation of the GPDM by the EPRDF in Wolqite´ and the fact that the leaders of the GPDM included Eastern-Gurage-speaking individuals (mostly political, business and religious elites) who did not support the goals of SAMWGPDO had four major implications. First, it demonstrated that there was a difference towards the issue between the older and newer generation of the Eastern Gurage. This is interesting because it was the younger generation that claim the historical existence of a separate Eastern Gurage identity, which was not appealing, at least initially, to the older generation. Second, it clearly indicated that the claim of a separate identity did not coincide with the boundary of a shared language since such a claim was not shared by the Eastern Gurage speakers. Thirdly, it also showed that the leaders of the SAMWGPDO had to negotiate, not only with members of the Eastern Gurage speakers, but also with the government officials. The latter, although willing to engage with and let the activists proceed with their claim, did not feel that SAMWGPDO represented a solid and cohesive identity group. Fourthly, it also enhanced the existing EPRDF's and other Gurage and non-Gurage elites' views of a pan-Gurage identity.

The party leaders had also some difference with the TPLF-dominated Ethiopian state. The TPLF often excluded or undermined ethnic or non-ethnic political organizations from the national political arena that did not share its ideology or policy, especially on the question of Eritrean independence and the rights of ethnic groups (self-determination up to session) in the Ethiopian state system, which until now remained contested issues among the Ethiopian political elites. The conflict, however, was not only between the activists on the one hand and the state on the other, but also within the Eastern Gurage elites themselves in view of the differences of interest and outlook related to social, political and economic statuses. These internal and external factors subsequently resulted in the dissolution and replacement of the party with a similar party that was established on 19 December 1992 using the name SAMWGDPM (The Silti, Azernet-Berber/Aicho Meskan, Wolene/Wuriro, and Gedebano Democratic Peoples' Movement).

While it kept up the momentum in the next couple of years, the newly established party did not yet appear as a single-identity-based party with its ethnonym as a single collectivity. In 1993, the leaders and activists of the SAMWGDPM, partly through the influence of the EPRDF officials, who advised them to represent their party with a single category, came to a decision through a meeting to use the name Siltie as their common name and the term Siltegna as the name of their common language. The name of the party was changed to the SPDUP (the Siltie People Democratic Union Party). The meeting and

consultation included the leaders of the SAMWGDPM, local elders, religious figures and their active followers (for details, see Abdulfatha, 2009: 222–225). This was a big step in the making of the case for a separate identity: a claim of a population now with its own ethnonym and language, both of which were the most important factors in the eyes of the EPRDF in the legitimization of an ethnic-based party.

Once redefining itself as the SPDUP, the party strengthened itself by recruiting and mobilizing members of the relinquished SAMWGDPM. However, political mobilization did not follow the commonplace assumption of evoking those subjective feelings associated with the notion of origin. The fact that the Eastern Gurage share a similar notion of origin with a number of other neighbouring Gurage Muslims meant that they had to under-communicate existing ties with neighbouring groups while accentuating their differences.[12] There was also no claim of a 'we are Muslims, but they are non-Muslims' discourse, as the neighbours were also largely Muslim and shared a number of crosscutting Islamic ideas and practices.

In much of their mobilization activities, the activists were able to get support based on different claims. One claim relates to marginalization by the Christianized Gurage elites, who dominated the representation of the Gurage vis-a` -vis the state throughout the 20th century. While until then it had never been a politically relevant symbol for constructing boundary they also emphasized language differences as the main cultural difference. More importantly, the activists were often arguing about the economic advantages (such as close and easy access to the federal state budget, to the local administration and to more employment opportunities) that the assertion of a separate identity would bring to ordinary people. In this regard, the politics of the Siltie versus Gurage identity broadly confirms with the wellestablished instrumentalist conception of ethnicity in anthropology that claims of ethnicity should be interpreted as a modern political process in which elites select and use existing cultural symbols to seek political and economic gains in the context of change (Cohen, 1969, 1974).

In addition to the role of what I call ‘‘ethnic entrepreneurs’’ (Woldeselassie, 2004: 124) the significant role state agents played in the construction contestation and legitimation of Siltie identity must be emphasized. The EPRDF officials facilitated the processes by allowing a public debate on the Siltie versus Gurage identity. They allowed the conduct of a number of conferences and televised debates that made the issue of Siltie identity popular at the national level. The major conference were conducted in Addis Abeba (October 1993), Awasa (June 1993; March 1997) and Butajira (August 1997). One major theme during these conferences revolved around the question, 'Who is Siltie?' The question aimed to find out what constituted a separate Siltie identity. The contending positions espoused their respective views, whether the 'Siltie' were Gurage or not Gurage. The outcome of the conferences and meetings was either not conclusive, or in most cases were dominated by the pro-Gurage identity group activist who control the terms with which the meetings and debates were conducted.

The Butajira conference organized by the regional government to make a final decision on the issue of Siltie identity was significant, because following the resolution

by the so-called majority of elected representatives against the claim for a separate identity there were a number of consequences that showed the intensification of the claim of Siltie identity over the next three years. First, the SPDU officials defined the Butajera conference as unconstitutional and sent their petition to the House of Federation (HOF), further formally pushing their claim using the existing legal framework. Second, conflict and tension prevailed, especially in rural areas between followers and supporters of the one side against the other. For example, those Siltie-speaking individuals who were against a separate identity (including my major informants) were marginalized from participation in everyday life local institutions and associations. There was also strong resentment against local officials, who were then from the GPDM. Third, dissatisfied with the outcome, diaspora Eastern-Gurage-speaking individuals supported the stand of the SPDUP by sending a petition to the regional and federal governments showing their disapproval of the resolution of the Butajera conference. Fourth, there was a growing financial and political support for the SPDUP, particularly from the student population and academics or other elites who, so far, for different reasons, were not active participants.

Realizing the irreversible movement led by the SPDUP, the HOF finally ruled the matter should be resolved in April 2001 through a referendum as per the constitution. The outcome of the referendum overwhelmingly concluded that the Siltie 'were not Gurage'. Even though the interference and manipulation of the EPRDF has always existed, following the referendum two major and formal developments occurred. First, a new party with the name Siltie People's Democratic Organization (SPDO) was established by the EPRDF, embracing the former EPRDF-affiliated GPDRM and co-opting a few individuals from the SPDUP who had been in close contact and co-operation with the EPRDF. This could be seen as an aspect of the general state formation in an Ethiopian context, where those who came to share sovereign power as agents of the state have to be co-opted by the dominant ruling group at the centre, this time the TPLF-led EPRDF, which defined the terms by which the Ethiopian state was to be organized.

Second, a significant number of Eastern Gurage speakers known as the Wolla¨ ne´ - Gedebano were consciously excluded from the referendum, partly on the grounds that they were not sharing a contiguous territory and partly also because this group had started to claim a separate identity by autonomously organizing themselves. Since then the party officials have not stopped their quest for recognition of a separate Wolane identity. Nevertheless, its claim for a separate identity was fraught with strong resistance from officials of the regional government who were determined to deny such claims despite the fact that the demand of the activists were in accordance with the Ethiopian constitution. In 2012, the party reorganized itself as the Wolene People's Democratic Party (WPDP), and it complained that the Southern Nations and Nationalities People's Regional State illegally imprisoned and harassed its leaders.

That meant that the assertion of Siltie ethnicity did not correspond to—or reflect the boundaries of—shared cultural attributes, including shared language and notions of origin, as commonly assumed. This process clearly confirms my thesis that, rather than

being a continuity or revitalization of an already existing Eastern Gurage vs. non-Eastern Gurage identity, the post-1991 Siltie ethnicity must be seen as a negotiated and transformative social phenomenon, one largely shaped and determined by the context and situation in which it was initiated and asserted.

Siltie ethnicity is a transformation because it emerged by undermining historically established political, symbolic and social ties in the processes of forming a collective identity. In fact, forming an identity by undermining existing ties may not be specific to the case of the Eastern Gurage, as similar processes may occur among other peoples in Ethiopia or other places. Nevertheless, there are two major points that make the situation of the Gurage in general and the Eastern Gurage in particular (and maybe other related groups with similar social organization) noble, at least in the wider Ethiopian context. First, due to the segmentary nature of their social and political organizations, the attempt to form an overriding identity has displayed a considerable internal and external contestation and fragmentation (see Markakis, 1998) in a way not observed among other (non-segmentary) groups. Second, the politics of identity among the Eastern Gurage have also witnessed a considerable manipulation by the agents of the state in a way not witnessed or would have been impossible in other broadly similar situations in the country.

Conclusion

While there is abundant literature regarding the concept of ethnicity, the diverse phenomena and features that an empirical investigation of a specific case reveals make the subject of ethnic studies more relevant and useful. In anthropology, the term 'ethnicity' is conceptualized in different ways. Some emphasize that the concept of ethnicity explains that emotion-laden sense of attachment of individuals to a particular kind of group (Epstein, 1978). Others speak of ethnicity as being (locally perceived and experienced historically) established primordial ties embedded in a web of significant symbols (Geertz, 1973). Still some others consider ethnicity as a shared interest (Cohen, 1969) or as a strategic and rational choice to be made (Barth, 1969) by individuals. These and other[13] notions of ethnicity are often defined in terms of descent or origin and lumped together as a primordialist versus constructivist conceptions of identity.

However, the ethnic setting the Eastern Gurage represents entails a much more complex set of relations in which different forms of categories and boundaries are constructed in different cultural and political contexts. While some ethnicity formations can be explained by shared notions of origin, others are not. More importantly, the people themselves consider their ethnicities in terms of different forms. While they consider Gurage ethnicity as an imposition from the State, they treat the post-1991 Siltie ethnicity as something not culturally given, but rather something they have achieved through a long-term struggle and contestation. They also perceive the historically established category and boundary formations, based on clanship, locality and Islam, as something evident and 'primordial' in character. The point is not that, in reality, such forms of

ethnicities do indeed imply separate ontological existence. The issue rather is that there is a real perception, by the people themselves, that some ethnicities have primordial-like natures, or are more fluid than others and this perception has real consequences in explaining, not only politics and collective action, but also individuals' sense of self-respect and dignity in the region.

In order to account for the different forms of ethnicities of the Eastern Gurage, I have first defined the concept of ethnicity as an aspect of a wider human sociality implying the propensity to associate or disassociate with significant others and form categories and boundaries in interactional or relational terms entailing significant moral, social and political consequences. As a social constructionist approach, this conception 'rejects any category that sets forward essential or core features as unique property of a collective's members' (Cerulo, 1997: 3879). From this perspective, ethnicity refers to the variable ways by which human beings socially classify and organize themselves and significant others in terms of categories and boundaries of various scales and composition based on shared social attributes that are not determinable a priori.

In this connection, I have proposed a distinction between the concept of identity and belonging as different forms of ethnicities. In the literature, the concept of belonging and identity is synonymously employed (see, for example, Lovell, 1998; Yuval-Davis, 2011). Both concepts should, in fact, be understood as referring to aspects of a wider human sociality and relate to social differentiation and structuring processes through the construction of categories and boundaries. Even so, because they imply different contexts, forms of classification, category formations, power relations, ideologies and articulations of group interest, I have argued that they are irreducible to a single set of relations. This distinction finally aims to account for the different forms of social and political relationships and collective actions (at individual and group levels) that we grossly treat as an ethnic phenomenon.

Notes

1. In the literature, variant versions of this term exist, including 'Siltie', 'Silte' 'Silt'e' and'Selti' 'S@lti'. In this article, however, it is important to differentiate between Siltie and Silti. The term Siltie refers to the post-1991 formation of collective identity that constitutes the various clan and territorial groups historically known in the literature as the Eastern Gurage. Nonetheless, the term Silti refers to one of the clans or dialect groups of the Eastern Gurage.
2. Referring to the change in government census report Hudson noted 'Silte appears as anethnic group in the 2007 census, with 934,891 members, but unaccountably without mother tongue-speakers. Silte didn't appear in the 1994 census' (Hudson, 2010: 210).
3. This includes the writing of books about a distinct Siltie history and culture and theproduction of Siltie music, and the establishment of Siltie diaspora associations, Siltie social media and Siltie civic and political organisations.
4. A founding conference of joint forum for 'people-to-people relations' of the Siltie andHarari was held in Addis Ababa on 11 June 2006 in which senior government officials and more than 1500 representatives of the two nationalities participated.

5. In addition to the major fieldwork carried out from June 2005–April 2006, periodic fieldvisits were made in summer 2010, December 2012 and summer 2013, 2014. The ethnographic data for the study are obtained through personal observations, various interviews, texts, local video and audio recordings of events from the media and local publications.
6. In addition to representing a form of monopolisation violence in a culturally heterogeneous populations, the concept Empire is here defined as a form of domination residing in values and ideas that claim universality (Krohn-Hansen and Nustad, 2005: 3).
7. There is a lot of literature on the criticism of F Barth's formal, ahistorical, transactionaland individualistic notion of ethnicity and for that reason, I will not repeat such criticism here. For a major and recent critical review see Eriksen (1991b) and Jenkins (2008).
8. Contrary to some writers who 'define threat as a potential loss to a group' (see forexample, Alexander Haslam et al., 2003: 122) a collective threat does not necessarily imply here the prior existence of a group.
9. Ingold argues that the concept of territoriality should be distinguished from that oftenure. He claimed that 'territorial behaviour is basically a mode of communication, serving to convey information about the location of individual dispersed in space'. However 'tenure is a mode of appropriation, by which persons exert claims over resources dispersed in space'. Territoriality, according to Ingold 'presupposes no sense of past and future, no awareness of time, no commitments or intentions' (1986: 133, 138). The notion of territoriality I have observed and learned from the Eastern Gurage, however, does not reflect such conception. First, the notion of territoriality among the Eastern Gurage implies that a particular group or network of people are attached to it historically, representing them in opposition to others who do not claim or are entitled to similar attachment or belonging. Territoriality also implies a sense of tenure of a different nature and scale depending on the nature and size of the people attached to it.
10. The Eastern Gurage did not have a local category or indigenous political institutionbeyond or other than chieftaincy. The garad does not imply a fixed and bounded structure attached to a specific clan or locality, as a clan or territorial grouping always has more than one garad. Nevertheless, the local definition of the term garad indicates that it refers to chiefs within a gaar (clan), while saar-gaarad refers to a candidate for chieftainship. There is also something called the murra, which refers to a chief of a gicho (lineage) next to the garad. His authority is directly subjected to the authority of the garad. In addition, other chiefs' titles, including azma or azmach and abegaz, are widely popular in local tradition.
11. In Ethiopian studies, such an ideological and political inter-group relationship wasdepicted by some writers with the encompassing names 'Isslam' (locally mean Muslim) and 'Haddiya'. The former is assumed as self-identification of the Eastern Gurage in contrast to the non-Eastern Gurage. The latter though was recognized as referring to diverse Semitic and Cushitic-speaking groups including the Eastern Gurage, was applied to the latter in a way different from other Gurage groups (Brauka¨ mper, 2001: 55). In their study that focuses on a specific group of the Eastern Gurage, Abrahm and Habtamu also noted that the Western Gurage-speaking people call the Eastern Gurage as Haddiya (Abrahm and Habtamu, 1994: 33; see also Bustorf, 2010: 607). However, the category Islam was (an internalized) categorization by the Christiandominated Ethiopian state referring to all Ethiopian Muslims in the country and was not exclusively claimed by the Eastern Gurage. The category Haddiya is also not an emic or self-ascription by the people themselves and therefore does not fully

represent ethnicity formation as I discussed above. Rather, it refers to categorization by the premodern Ethiopian empire builders, who used the category Haddiya as a reference to the Muslim ‘‘other,’’ particularly in the southern region.

12. For example, as one of the major clans of the Eastern Gurage, the Silti are depicted inthe local discourse of origins as sharing blood ties with one major group in the Western Gurage, called the Chaha group. But these metaphoric kinship ties were made irrelevant in the mobilization processes since such narratives worked against the very claim of a separate identity.
13. Other conceptualizations of ethnicity include the treatment of ethnicity as a cognitiveprocess (see for example, Brubaker, 2002, 2004).

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