



*Sunset from Lalibela
Flickr / SarahTz*

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Amharic Cultural Orientation



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CHAPTER 1

*Bahir Dar, Amhara Region
Flickr / Alan*

Profile

Introduction

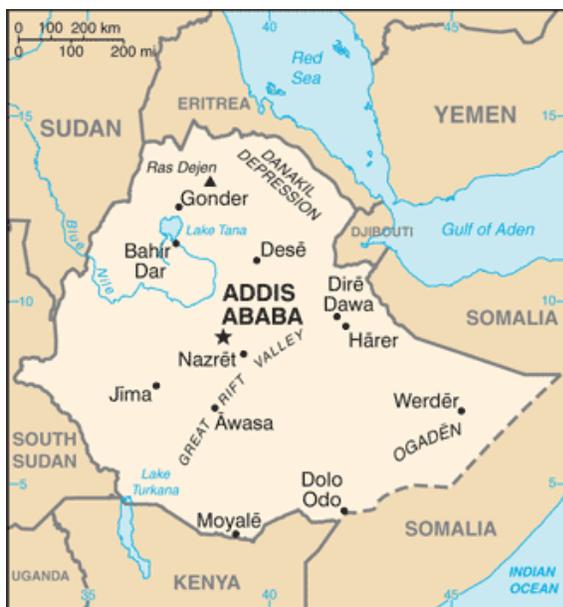
The Amhara people are the second-largest ethnolinguistic group in Ethiopia, making up approximately 27% of the population. They live mainly in the Ethiopian Highlands in the northern section of the nation.^{1,2,3} The Amhara are thought to have come from the area of present-day Yemen.⁴ They speak Amharic, an Afro-Asiatic language, related to Geez, the sacred literary language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Most Amhara are adherents of the Church, although some have converted to Evangelical Christianity and Islam.⁵ For much of Ethiopia's history, the Amhara dominated the nation. Although

several states have other official languages, Amharic remains Ethiopia's official national language.^{6,7,8} Except for one of the nation's emperors, all Ethiopian rulers between 1270 and 1974 were from the Amhara ethnic group. This political dominance created tensions with the nation's largest group, the Oromo, particularly between 1974 and 1991 when Ethiopia was a socialist state.^{9,10}

The Amhara region has approximately 17.2 million people. The population is predominantly Amhara (91%) although about 3% are Oromo. Other smaller groups make up the rest of the population. About 81% of the region is Christian (i.e., Ethiopian Orthodox) and 18% are Muslim. A small number of Evangelical Protestants live in the region.¹¹ For the most part, the Amhara are agriculturists who make their living raising grains including corn, wheat, barley, sorghum, and teff. Historically, personal influence depended on land ownership. Wealthy men who did not own land were rarely influential. The Amhara are justly proud of their history and ethnic heritage. In spite of the harsh living conditions, they are a friendly and hospitable people who have managed to retain their cultural traditions in the face of challenges from other groups and religions.^{12,13}

Geography

The Amhara National Regional State is located in the northern section of Ethiopia. It is bordered by the Tigray region in the north, the Oromia region in the south, the



*Map of Ethiopia
Courtesy of the CIA*

Benishangul-Gumuz region in the southwest, Sudan to the northwest, and the Afar region in the east. The state covers approximately 170,752 sq km (65,927 sq mi), roughly 11% of Ethiopia's land area.^{14,15}

The area contains three major geographical regions. The highlands take up about 20% of the Amhara region, with the elevations rising to levels exceeding 2,300 m (7,546 ft). The semi-highlands, which make up about 44% of the land area, range from 1,500-2,300 m (4,921-7,546 ft) above sea level. Another 28% of the land consists of lowlands.¹⁶ Topographically, the region is diverse. It contains plains, gorges, plateaus, hills, and mountains. The highest point in the state is also the highest point in the nation. Ras Dashen, Africa's fourth-highest mountain, and the tallest in Ethiopia, rises to 4,620 m (15,157 ft) in height.^{17,18}

Some of the country's largest rivers flow through Amhara lands. The Blue Nile (*Abāy*) rises from Lake Tana and flows out of the lake. The river flows through a deep canyon southeast and west around the Choke Mountains before turning northwest and crossing into Sudan, where it joins the White Nile.¹⁹ The Beles

River rises southwest of Lake Tana and flows southwest, where it feeds into the Blue Nile.^{20, 21} Other important rivers, most of which feed the Blue Nile, include the Jema, Tekezie, Anghereb, Athbara, and Kessem Rivers. The region is home to the country's largest lake. Lake Tana, the third-largest lake on the African continent, sits at an elevation of 1,800 m (6,000 ft). It has an area of 3,620 sq km (1,398 sq mi). Although large, the lake is relatively shallow, reaching a maximum depth of about 14 m (45 ft).^{22, 23}

Climate

There are four distinct seasons in the Amhara region. Summer (*kiremt*) falls between June and August. Fall (*belg*) lasts from September through November. Winter (*bega*) is the dry season and runs from December through January. Finally, spring (*tseday*) usually falls between March and May.²⁴



*Tigray region
Flickr / Alan*

Temperatures throughout the Amhara region are tropical and hot with little variation. Variations in altitude, however, create microclimates with varying climatic zones. The tropical zone (*kolla*) is found around sea level. Here the climate is generally hot and dry. Temperatures average around 27°C (81°F). Between 51 and 153 cm (20-60 in) of rain falls in this zone. The subtropical zone (*woina dega*) is found at elevations ranging from around 1,830-2,440 m (6,004-8,005 ft). Here temperatures average around 22°C (72°F). Temperate weather is typical of the cool zones (*dega*) found in areas over 2,440 m (8,005 ft) in elevation. In this zone, the temperatures average around 16°C (61°F), accompanied by 153 to 200 cm (60-79 in) of annual precipitation.²⁵

May is generally the hottest month. Between June and September, moist winds from the Atlantic Ocean bring rain to the region. The western sections and the highlands generally see the most rain. In the west, more than 120 cm (47 in) of rain are common. An average of 30 cm (12 in) falls over the entire area, while over 200 cm (79 in) falls in the Awi zone. Rainfall amounts decrease as one heads north and northeast, where the rainy season is typically shorter.²⁶

Major Amhara Regional Cities

Bahir Dar

Bahir Dar is one of the largest cities in Ethiopia and the regional capital of Amhara. This city of approximately 199,000 is located at the south end of Lake Tana.^{27, 28} The city has a tropical climate. Temperatures throughout the year average around 17.5°C (64°F).²⁹ Its location and moderate temperatures make the city a major tourist destination. The city is known for its wide, tree-lined streets and colorful flowers. According to many, the city is one of the safest in Africa. In 2002, the city received honorable mention for the UNESCO Cities for Peace Prize.^{30, 31}



Vendors at Bahir Dar market
Flickr / Alan

The city was first settled in the 16th or 17th century by Jesuit missionaries who established the Kidana Mihret Church. Later in the 17th century, the city came under church administration. In the middle 1800s, the troops of Emperor Tewodros II used the city as a staging area. The city's growth and development was greatest during the years of Italian occupation (1928–1933) in the early part of the 20th century.³² The city was liberated by the British in 1941. By the mid-1950s, the city had become an Awaraja capital. Emperor Haile Selassie maintained a palace in the city and once considered naming Bahir Dar the national capital.³³ The city is also home to Bahir Dar University and its 35,000 students.^{34, 35}

Gonder (Gondar)

The city of Gonder is a UNESCO heritage site.^{36, 37} It lies at an elevation of 2,300 m (7,500 ft) in the Amhara region of northwestern Ethiopia. It served as the national capital from 1632 to 1855. Sometimes referred to as the Camelot of Africa, the city is home to walled castles and palaces built by the nation's early rulers.^{38, 39} Each ruler had a castle built, often employing skilled artisans and architects from India and Italy. The palaces were more for showing off the wealth of the emperors, since their construction appears to have been unable to withstand any serious military challenges. The city declined during the Era of the Princes (1706–1853) as warlords effectively challenged the emperors. The city was sacked twice by Emperor Tewodros II during the 1860s. The city was also burned by Islamic fighters from neighboring Sudan in the 1880s. Today the city of roughly 265,000 is the capital of Gonder province and an important regional and cultural center. It is home to one of the nation's most modern hospitals and a medical university. The city remains an important center for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.^{40,}

41, 42



Hotel in downtown Gondar
Wikimedia / Bernard Gagnon

Dese (Dessie)

The city of Dese (pop. 153,700) lies at an elevation of 2,300 m (7,500 ft) in the Amhara region of Ethiopia.^{43,44} The city was founded in 1882 when Ras Mikael built his residence in the region and named the city as his provincial capital. At the beginning of the 1900s, he expanded the city by building a series of palaces. He also established a major market center, helping establish the city as a major trade center, which it remains today.^{45,46} In 1936, the Italians occupied the city. The Italians set about modernizing and expanding the city. The Italians set up a city plan that clearly separated the city's black and white residents. The area north of the modern-day piazza was reserved for whites while the southern part housed the city's indigenous population. Many of Dese's factories were built in the old quarter in the black section of the city. The Italians continued to build the city and expand its infrastructure—especially transportation. In 1941, however, the British drove the Italians out of the city. The British immediately erected an internment camp for soldiers and civilians. The camp became known as No. 410 and eventually functioned as a transit camp for evacuees awaiting repatriation.⁴⁷ Today the city remains a major commercial and communications center. It is also an important distribution center for grains, oilseeds, hides, and honey. The city is also a manufacturing center and home to many flour mills.⁴⁸



*Market in Dese
Flickr / Canned Muffins*

History

Modern Ethiopia has a long and rich history. The nation is the product of thousands of years of interaction among various groups of people who inhabited the region. One of the most significant groups was the Semitic people, who migrated from southwestern Arabia and came to the region in the first millennium B.C.E. These people are believed to have established the Aksumite Kingdom, which adopted Christianity in the fourth century C.E. This Christian heritage was passed down to the Amhara people, who remain Christian today. Much of Ethiopia's history is linked to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the



*Fasilides Palace, Gondar
Wikimedia / Bernard Gagnon*



Fossil skeleton of "Lucy"
Wikimedia / 120

Amhara people.^{49, 50}

Prehistory

Scientists disagree on the origins of the people of highland Ethiopia. They do agree that the Great Rift Valley region in Ethiopia is probably the site where humans originated. The remains of Earth's oldest discovered hominid (one of the family of humans) were unearthed in Ethiopia. In 1974, archeologists digging in the Great Rift Valley in Ethiopia uncovered part of a female skeleton estimated to be 3.2 million years old. The discoverer, Dr. Donald Johanson, called her "Lucy."^{51, 52}

During the Stone Age, prehistoric populations began to emerge in the region of modern-day Ethiopia. They spoke Afro-Asiatic languages that included Omotic, Cushitic, and Semitic. The first people seem to have been the Omotic peoples, who arrived in the southwestern and central Ethiopian highlands around 13,000 B.C.E. They were followed by the Cushitic peoples, who migrated to the northern highland area. Finally, the Semitic peoples arrived in the region. During the second millennium B.C.E., the Semitic peoples dominated the northern highland region. In the seventh century B.C.E. they established the Da'amat Kingdom, which thrived on trade with South Arabian merchants.^{53, 54}

Ancient History

Sabaeans from Arabia traveled across the Red Sea, bringing with them a written Semitic language and knowledge of stonework. These nomadic tribes later became farmers and herdsmen as part of the Aksumite Empire.^{55, 56} The Aksumites rose to power around

300 B.C.E., flourished in the next six or seven centuries, and declined over the next 400 years. The core of the kingdom was in the highlands of southern Eritrea, Tigray, and Welo, with its major centers in Aksum in present-day Ethiopia and the port city of Adulis in Eritrea.^{57, 58, 59} According to Amhara legend, Menelik I, the son of the Abyssinian Queen of Sheba and King Solomon, led his people to the region around 1000 B.C.E. and became the first Emperor of Ethiopia.^{60, 61}

During the third and fourth centuries C.E., Christianity spread throughout the kingdom. The Askumite ruler, Ezana, converted to Christianity sometime between 330 and 340 C.E. and made it the official religion. The form of Christianity that was adopted eventually led to the formation of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Modern Amhara and Tigray remain centers of the church's primary adherents.^{62, 63, 64}



Stelenpark in Axum
Wikimedia / JensiS65

In the seventh century, Islam arrived and was broadly embraced throughout the area. Within the Aksumite kingdom, however, the Christians remained in power.

Relations between the two groups were not initially hostile and trade relations continued. As Islam grew, the Christian Church in Aksum became increasingly isolated. Conflict grew as Islam came to dominate the region. By the middle of the ninth century, Aksum's power had significantly declined. Eventually, much of the population converted to Islam, leaving only the Amhara and Tigray peoples as the main Christian groups.^{65, 66} For the next several hundred years, the Ethiopian Christian Church remained isolated from the rest of the Christian world. Its main contact was with the Coptic Church in Egypt. Over the ensuing years, the religion developed its own unique brand of orthodoxy, focusing mainly on the Old Testament and their historical Jewish roots. The Church remained isolated until sometime in the 14th to 15th century, when it began an active campaign to proselytize new members.⁶⁷

Early Modern History (1270–1868)

About 1270 C.E., an Amharic nobleman, Yekuno Amlak, expelled the last Zagwe ruler and proclaimed himself king. The new dynasty came to be known as the “Solomonic”



Castle of Emperor Susenyos
Wikimedia / Hgetnet

dynasty, claiming direct descent from Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.⁶⁸ When the Zagwe Dynasty declined, the empire crumbled into many separate kingdoms. The Amhara Dynasty settled in the central part of the region. The Solomonic rulers continued to develop both the church and regional culture. Relations between the church and state were often tense. In the 15th century, Emperor Zara Yaqob (1434–1468) introduced a series of reforms into the church. For Zara Yaqob, national unity took precedence over all else. He launched a successful campaign against the Muslims, eventually displacing their ruling clan.⁶⁹

In the mid-16th century, the Muslim dynasty had dealt serious blows to the Christian groups. The Portuguese, who had recently arrived, came to the aid of the Amhara and Tigray groups, helping them to destroy the

Muslim attackers.⁷⁰ Severely weakened by the war of jihad, the Christian Church was in a state of disarray. Having defeated the Muslim threat, it now faced challenges from the Portuguese Catholic Church, who wanted the Ethiopians to join the Western church.⁷¹ The Christian ruler, Emperor Susenyos (1607–1632), eventually embraced the Catholic faith and the idea of the dual nature of Christ. This so incensed the other nobles that Susenyos was forced to abdicate to his son, Fasilides.^{72, 73, 74}

Fasilides moved the capital to Gonder and established it as an educational, religious, and cultural center. The next two emperors continued the tradition of cultural development. In 1730, Empress Mentewwab assumed the throne, ruling jointly with her son and grandson. Under the surface, tensions continued, and in 1769, the kingdom collapsed.^{75, 76}

The following chaotic years were known as the Age of Princes (1769–1855). Order was finally restored when Tewodros II became emperor in 1855. He reestablished power over the states and established the modern nation of Ethiopia.^{77, 78}

Modern History (1868—1991)



Emperor Menelik II
Wikimedia / Janweh64

Following the death of Tewodros II, the kingdom fell into disarray. Several rulers exercised power over the next few years. Italian troops entered the country during this time. Menelik II (1889–1913) declared himself emperor. He attempted diplomatic solutions with the Italians but failed. The Italians attacked Menelik’s army but were defeated in the Battle of Adwa in 1896. In the next decade, Menelik II extended Ethiopian territory to its present size.^{79, 80}

Upon his death, he was succeeded by his grandson Lij Iyasu. Iyasu alienated his countrymen by favoring Muslims. He antagonized the British, French, and Italians by supporting the Central Powers (including the Muslim Ottoman Empire) in World War I. Iyasu was deposed in 1916. Judith Zawditu, a daughter of Menilek, became Empress, with Ras Tafari Makonnen as regent and heir apparent. Makonnen was given additional powers by the Empress in 1928. On her death in 1930, he was crowned emperor as Haile Selassie I (“Strength of the Trinity”). Selassie, Ethiopia’s last emperor, wrote the country’s first constitution in 1931 and incorporated many Western political ideas to modernize the country.^{81, 82, 83}

Selassie introduced the two-house parliamentary system, abolished slavery, and ended the practice of brutal punishment for crimes. When Italy invaded in 1935, Selassie left the country. After a 7-month war, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia were occupied by Mussolini’s Italian army from 1936 to 1941.⁸⁴ Selassie returned to Ethiopia after British and South African forces defeated the Italians. At the end of the war, Ethiopia became a charter member of the United Nations.^{85, 86}

A military-socialist regime known as the *Derg*, Amharic for “council” or “committee,” removed Emperor Selassie from power in 1974.⁸⁷ The *Derg* was led by Lieutenant Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam. Mengistu formed a socialist government aligned with the Soviet Union and became president of the newly instituted republic. The *Derg* attempted to nationalize and redistribute land and sped up literacy reforms. Famine, along with internal and external attacks, weakened government control. In 1991, Mengistu resigned and left the country.^{88, 89}

1991–2015

A Tigrayan, Meles Zenawi, led Ethiopia's transitional government. He pledged to democratize the nation and began by paving the way for a new constitution. The government set about creating homogenous ethnic regions that would make up



the states of the new nation. The Amhara were particularly incensed by this idea. The government vilified the Amhara and continued with the plan.⁹⁰ In 1994, the country adopted a new constitution creating the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. The constitution created a federal system based on largely homogenous ethnic states. The intent was to create ethnic autonomy within a broader federal system.^{91, 92, 93} Some argue that this new structure has enhanced existing ethnic divisions rather than minimizing them. Violent clashes with ethnic groups have persisted. Numerous allegations of violence against the government and the military have been leveled.^{94, 95, 96}

*Meles Zenawi, Prime Minister of Ethiopia
Flickr /
World Economic Forum*

Government

Ethiopia has a parliamentary form of constitutional government with three branches of government. The chief of state is the president, who is elected to a 6-year term by parliament. The head of government is the prime minister, who is designated by the party winning the national elections. A Council of Ministers is appointed by the prime

minister, subject to the approval by the lower house of parliament.^{97, 98}



*Foreign Minister of Ethiopia
Flickr / Foreign and Commonwealth Office*

The legislative branch consists of two Federal Houses. The upper house is the House of Federation, whose 108 members are chosen by state assemblies to serve 5-year terms. The lower House of People's Representatives has 547 members directly elected by the people to 5-year terms.^{99, 100}

The judicial branch consists of a supreme court and various subordinate courts. The Federal Supreme Court has 11 judges. The president and vice president of the Supreme Court are nominated by the prime minister and appointed

by the lower house of parliament. The remaining judges are nominated by the Federal Judicial Administrative Council and appointed by the House of People's Representatives. Judges are allowed to remain on the court until they reach the age of 60.^{101, 102}

State governments, like the Amhara state, have a legislature and a state constitution. States are free to determine their own national language and to adopt their own flag. Each state has three levels of judicial courts, of which the state supreme court is the highest. Judges are selected in much the same way as they are at the federal level.¹⁰³

Media

Ethiopia has a single public TV station and one public radio broadcaster with stations in each administrative district. There are a few local commercial radio stations.¹⁰⁴



Radio days
Flickr / Overseas Development Institute

In spite of constitutional guarantees of a free press, Ethiopia ranks as “not free” in the most recent press freedom report.¹⁰⁵ The government strictly enforces its laws on antiterrorism, which it uses to quash dissent, including online and mainline journalism. Media freedoms and access to information are severely restricted. Government censorship and self-censorship are routine. The government revokes operating licenses of newspapers viewed as anti-government, although the official reasons are often something quite different.^{106, 107} Ethiopia has one of the lowest rates of internet access in the world. Low access is due in part to poor infrastructure, but obstructionist policies by the government and mobile providers have also limited availability of services. Only 2% of households had internet access in 2013. Most users connect to the internet at cyber cafes. In more remote areas, cyber cafes are rarely available.^{108, 109} The government blocks access to websites, especially those of terrorist organizations, political blogs deemed controversial, and social media, including Facebook and Twitter. The government has the right to review private online activities.^{110, 111}

Economy

Nearly 450,000 hectares (1,112,000 acres) of land in the Amhara State is suitable for agriculture. The water from Lake Tana is an important source of water for irrigating crops. Consequently, approximately 85% of the population in Amhara State is engaged in agriculture, most of which is subsistence farming. The state is one of the nation's largest



Harvest time in Oromia
Flickr / SarahTz

growers of teff, a staple grain in the nation. Barley, wheat, oilseeds, sorghum, maize, wheat, oats, beans, and peas are also major crops grown by Amhara farmers.^{112, 113} Raising livestock is another important source of income. Nearly 25% of the nation's cattle population is in Amhara. In addition, sheep, goats, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, poultry, and beehives are raised.¹¹⁴ Approximately 37% of the population lives in absolute poverty, earning less than USD 1 per day.¹¹⁵ In the three main urban centers of the state, a 2007 survey found that between 19% and 25% of people were self-employed or small business owners. Another 22 to 24% were government employees.¹¹⁶

Ethnic Groups

Ethiopia is ethnically diverse, with more than 70 languages spoken by over 100 ethnic groups.^{117, 118, 119} Nationally, the Oromo are the largest group, making up 34% of the population. They are followed by the Amhara (27%), Somali (6%), Tigray (6%), Sidama (4%), Gurage (3%), Welaita (2%), the Afar (2%), and other smaller groups.¹²⁰ In the Amhara region, there is far less ethnic diversity. Approximately 91% of the population is ethnic Amhara. About 5% belong to the Agew-Xamir group, 3% are Oromo, and the rest belong to smaller ethnic groups.¹²¹



*Market day near Lake Tana
Flickr / SarahTz*

Among the national population, 72% speak a language that belongs to one of three primary language groups: Semitic, Cushitic, and Omotic. Ethnicity is defined by how a person sees himself, and how others see him. In Ethiopia, this depends on how long ago any mixing between two or more groups occurred and on social status. Often, people generally recognized as belonging to a particular tribe do not see themselves the same way. The Amhara, for example, are found in Gojam, Gonder, Welo, and Shewa in the West, Northwest,

Northeast, and Central Highlands. But those in one area tend to view those in another area as different. So although the southerners see the Christian Shewa as Amharic, the Amhara from Gojam and Gonder see them not as Amhara but Oromo.¹²²

Amhara

The Semitic Amhara people have lived in the Highlands of central northwest Ethiopia for more than 2,000 years. Their language, Amharic, is a Semitic language related to Arabic and Hebrew. The Amhara are the most politically powerful ethnic group of Ethiopia, and thus Amharic is the official language. The Amhara are overwhelmingly Christian (over 90%).^{123, 124, 125, 126} Most Christian Amhara belong to the Ethiopian

Orthodox Church. Amhara Christians often wear a blue cord around their neck to distinguish themselves from the Muslim Amhara.^{127, 128} The Amhara people trace their ancestry back all the way to Menelik I, son of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon. While the authenticity of this legend cannot be fully vetted, the legend itself is central to the identification of the Amhara.¹²⁹



*Women of Amhara
Flickr / USAID*

The Amhara are mostly settled agriculturalists. Many are also involved in animal husbandry.^{130, 131, 132} Kinship relations are a key component to social organization among the Amhara. Kinship is traced through the father and Amhara social structure is strongly patriarchal.^{133, 134} Work roles are strictly segregated by gender and age, particularly among the rural Amhara. Women remain largely responsible for the domestic chores, including carrying water from streams to the home. Women are in charge of cleaning, separating, and grinding grain into flour. Men are responsible for preparing the soil, plowing and seeding fields, and harvesting the crops.¹³⁵

Oromo

Called Galla by the Amhara, the Oromo are dominant in the southern regions of the nation. They are concentrated in the Oromia National Regional State, where they constitute 85% of the population.^{136, 137, 138} Their language, Afaan Oromoo, is the third most widely spoken language in Africa.¹³⁹ They migrated to Ethiopia from their homeland in the southern highlands, beginning in the 16th century.¹⁴⁰ Some Oromo, especially in the southern provinces, remain pastoralists. The majority, however, especially in the north, have become plow cultivators or are engaged in mixed farming.^{141,}



*Oromo tribe, Ethiopia
Flickr / Rod Waddington*

^{142, 143, 144} They maintain their highly formalized age-set system or *gada* in which all male members are included in separate age groups for their entire lives. This system is both political and social in nature. The political system is egalitarian. The chairman, elected by all males of age, presides over an assembly (*Chaffee*) that creates the laws.^{145, 146, 147} Many of the Oromo subgroups have retained their pagan beliefs (*Waaqeeffannqa*). In the north, the Oromo are more assimilated and many pagan traditions have been diluted or lost completely. In the north, about half the Oromo population is Muslim, while others are Orthodox Christians.^{148, 149, 150, 151}

Tigray

The Tigray are a Semitic group related to the Amhara. Although they originated in Yemen, the Tigray historically resided in Ethiopia's northern highlands. They represent 95% of the population of the Tigray State in northcentral Ethiopia.^{152, 153, 154} For the most part, they make their living through agriculture and animal husbandry.^{155, 156, 157} They speak Tigrinya, a language derived from the ancient Ge'ez language, and trace their origins back to Shem, Noah's eldest son. Like the Amhara, most Tigray Christians adhere to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. About 10% of the Tigray, known as Jiberti, are followers of Islam. They still conduct their church services in the ancient Ge'ez language.^{158, 159, 160, 161} The original Tigray were the founders of many great kingdoms in the region, including the Axumite. After the Middle Ages, the group separated into three tribes: the Amhara, the Tigre, and the Tigray. Each spoke their own language and devised specific cultural practices.^{162, 163, 164} Along with the Amhara, the Tigray dominated the political life in Ethiopia. All Ethiopian rulers for over 2,000 years were either of Tigray or Amhara heritage.¹⁶⁵ Most are subsistence farmers, although more Tigray are moving into other professions including government services and the trades.¹⁶⁶



Children in Tigray region
Wikimedia / Rod
Waddington

Afar

The Afar, known as *Adal* in Amharic, live in northeastern Ethiopia, where they are concentrated in the Afar National Regional State. They call their land *cafar-barro*.^{167, 168, 169} The Afar are highly individualistic and organized according to patrilineal kinship groups. They have a long tradition of keeping themselves separate from other groups. In fact, there is a strong preference for cousin marriage to keep family ties strong. In times of war or other emergencies, these smaller kin groups would join together to form larger groups capable of meeting the challenge. Two specific classes emerged. The *Asaimara* (Red Men) are the landowners and titled nobility. The *Adoimara* (White Men) are the lower class. The Afar are Sunni Muslim but many have retained their animistic religious beliefs and practices.^{170, 171, 172}

The Afar are geographically and politically divided across



Afar tribe
Flickr / Achilli Family

three countries (Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti). When the Eritreans defeated the Ethiopians, they claimed land for their new state. These recently created borders split clans and families, giving rise to such groups as the Ugugumo (the Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front).^{173, 174} There are ongoing disputes between the Afar and the equally nomadic Issaq-Somali, who arrived from the southeast.¹⁷⁵

The Afar are nomadic pastoralists. Their livelihood depends on their goats, camels, and occasionally cattle. By far the Afars' most important resource is their salt mines. Although no longer used, *amole*, or salt blocks, were once traded as currency.^{176, 177, 178} Muslim Afar and Christian Tigrayans work together for 10 months each year to mine salt and transport it to sell at Ethiopian markets and beyond.¹⁷⁹

Somali

The Somali people live mainly in neighboring Somalia, although they represent a significant minority group in Ethiopia. They are concentrated in southeastern portions of Ethiopia, in the State of Somali, where they represent 95% of the population.^{180, 181} Most are Sunni Muslim.^{182, 183} Most make their living from livestock; however, some Somalis raise sorghum and maize along with other cereal grains.¹⁸⁴ Somalis speak a Cushitic language that takes various forms across the geographic regions inhabited by the group. In Ethiopia, most speak Somaligna.^{185, 186, 187} Some Somali clans trace their lineage to the Sharif family, descendants of the Prophet Mohammed. But most believe that the Somalis originated in the highlands of Ethiopia.¹⁸⁸ Many of the Somali clans located chiefly in Ethiopia have close associations with groups in Somalia.^{189, 190} Somali society's genealogy is patrilineal, organized into groups such as the clan-family, clans, lineages, and sub-lineages. Though the clan-family has no actual political, economic, or social mission, the other groups do. These functions often include political and economic competition, which can lead to conflict between parallel social units.¹⁹¹

There has been fighting in the Ogaden area, which is the western part of Ethiopia adjoining Somalia that is inhabited mainly by ethnic Somali. The Ethiopian government has been accused of human rights abuses against the Somali people in the Ogaden territory. Executions, rapes, and arbitrary detentions are among the charges levelled against the ruling Ethiopian People's revolutionary Democratic Front.^{192, 193}

Somali woman
Flickr / Syllvie Doutriaux



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Overview

Chapter 1 Assessment

1. The Amhara National Regional State is located in southcentral Ethiopia.

FALSE

The Amhara National Regional State is located in the north central region.

2. The Amhara National Regional State has three geographic regions.

TRUE

The Amhara National Regional State contains three major geographical regions. The highlands take up about 20% of the Amhara region. The semi-highlands make up about 44% of the land area and another 28% consists of lowlands.

3. Ethiopia's largest lake is located in the Amhara region.

TRUE

The region is also home to the country's largest lake. Lake Tana, the third-largest lake on the African continent, sits at an elevation of 1,800 m (6,000 ft). It has an area of 3,620 sq km (1,398 sq mi).

4. The Amhara are the largest and most politically powerful ethnic group in Ethiopia.

FALSE

The Amhara are the most politically powerful ethnic group in Ethiopia. However, the Oromo people are the largest ethnic group (34%) followed by the Amhara (27%).

5. The Amhara region has four distinct seasons.

TRUE

There are four distinct seasons in the Amhara region. Summer (*kiremt*) falls between June and August. Fall (*belg*) lasts from September through November. Winter (*bega*) is the dry season and runs from December through January. Finally, spring (*tseday*) usually falls between March and May.



CHAPTER 2

*Church of Abba Afse, Yeha
Flickr / Alan*

Religion

Introduction

Ethiopia is a religiously diverse nation. Approximately 44% of the people are adherents of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, 34% are Muslim, 19% are Protestant, 3% practice their native religions, and less than 1% are Catholic.¹ In the Amhara region, however, there is significantly less diversity. Approximately 81% of the region is Christian (i.e., Ethiopian Orthodox) and 18% are Muslim, predominantly Sunni. A small number of Evangelical Protestants live in the region.²

Ethiopia may be the world's oldest Christian nation.³ Some historians point to Biblical references that the Apostle Matthew brought Christianity to the region.^{4,5} The Orthodox

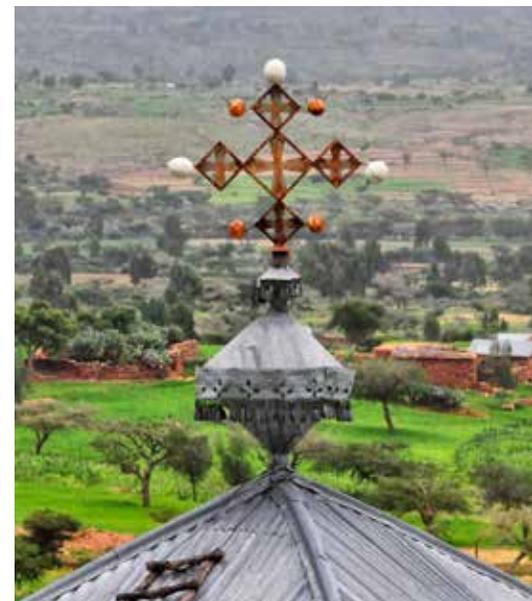
Amhara Christians trace their roots to Menelik I, the son of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon.⁶ Some Biblical scholars believe that the Ark of the Covenant was brought to Aksum by Menelik I after a visit to his father, King Solomon in Jerusalem. Many believe the Ark remains in Ethiopia.^{7, 8, 9} According to established accounts, two brothers from Tyre, St. Frumentius and Aedesius, first brought Christianity to the region early in the fourth century C.E.^{10, 11} Following the conversion of Ethiopia's ruler, Ezana, Christianity became the official state religion.^{12, 13} From the beginnings of Christianity in the region, the Church has been more than a religious institution. It is the central institution in society, playing a pivotal role in all aspects of national life. It has been a repository of cultural, political, and social life for Ethiopian Christians.^{14, 15, 16}

As Islam spread throughout the region in seventh century, the Ethiopian Christian Church became increasingly isolated from other Christian communities. This isolation allowed the Church to develop its particular brand of indigenous orthodoxy that still characterizes the Church today.^{17, 18} The name of the Ethiopian church, from the Geez word *Tewahedo*, refers to the "one nature" of Jesus.¹⁹ The Amhara are proud of their religious traditions and culture. For them, to be Amhara is to be Orthodox Christian.²⁰

Major Religions

Christianity

Christianity among the Amhara is vastly different from Western Christianity. It is a fusion of the Old Testament teachings and indigenous beliefs. There are four separate but inextricably linked religious realms within Amhara Christianity. The first is that of the Ethiopian Coptic Church, which believes in one God, the Devil, saints, and angels. But the faith, however, rejects the dual nature of Christ. Instead, the Amhara believe that Jesus was both human and divine, but in one body.^{21, 22, 23} The second is protector spirits who exact punishment and retribution for failure to recognize them through ritualistic practice. Third, the Amhara believe in a class of people, called *buda*, who possess the evil eye. The *buda* exercise deadly powers over the descendants of God's "chosen children." Finally, Amharic Christianity includes a belief in ghouls and devils that wander the land creating danger for those they may encounter.^{24, 25}



*Church roof, Gheralta
Flickr / Rod Waddington*

Amhara Christians usually attend weekly services as part of their religious observance.

In addition, Ethiopian Christians are required to pray seven times a day beginning upon awakening and ending at midnight. Prayers are highly ritualized. Christians should stand when praying, turn toward the east and make the sign of the cross from left to right, and finally kneel down and lie prostrate. In addition, there are several important holy days that require the faithful to attend longer service, and engage in rituals of singing, dancing, and feasting. Devout Christians should fast approximately 165–180 days a year. For the clergy, the number of fasting days is 265. Fasting days include each Wednesday and Friday as well as the two months of the Lenten and Easter seasons. Fasting requires that at least one meal be completely vegetarian with no meat, fats, dairy, or eggs.^{26, 27, 28}

Islam

Islam came to Ethiopia in the seventh century C.E. Most Amhara Muslims are Sunni. Their daily practices are a fusion of Quranic teachings, the worship of saints, and



Mosque in Bahir Dar, Amhara Region
Wikimedia / Ondřej Žváček

indigenous religious practices. The most important rituals, including fasting and regular prayer, are more typical in urban than rural settings.²⁹

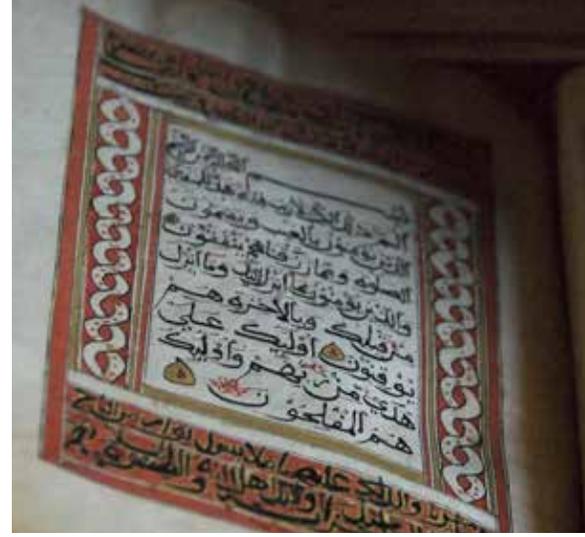
Islam is a monotheistic religion and its followers believe in a single deity. The Muslim community, or *umma*, calls this deity Allah. The Arabic term *islam* means “to submit” or “to surrender.” So a Muslim is one who submits to the will of Allah.³⁰ Muslims believe that Allah revealed his message to the Prophet Muhammad, a merchant who lived in Arabia from 570 to 632 C.E. They consider Muhammad as the last in a long line of prophets including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Allah’s message, as relayed by Muhammad, is delivered in the Quran, the sacred text of Islam. Additional doctrinal guides include the Hadith, a collection of the sayings of Muhammad, and the *Sunna*, which describes the practices of Islam by way of Muhammad’s example.³¹

Regardless of their sect, Muslims follow the five Pillars of Islam, which capture the essential beliefs and rites

of the Muslim faith. The first of these is the *shahada*, the declaration of faith that “There is no god but God and Muhammad is God’s messenger.” The *salat* is the requirement to pray five times a day. *Sawm* is the required fast during the month of Ramadan. *Zakat* is the expectation that Muslims should be generous by sharing their wealth. The fifth pillar is the *hajj*, which requires all able Muslims to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lives.³²

Care and Treatment of the Quran

Muslims regard the Quran as sacred. Treat Islam's holy book with respect. Do not touch the Quran with dirty hands. Keep the Quran off the floor—if you are sitting on the floor, hold the Quran above your lap or waist. When not in use, protect the Quran with a dustcover and do not place anything on top of it. (Muslims will keep Quranic texts on the highest shelf of a bookcase.) Finally, keep Qurans out of latrines.³³ Old or damaged copies can be properly disposed of in one of two ways. Burning is acceptable so long as the process is conducted with respect. Texts should not be burned with trash or other items. The second method of disposal is burial. Before burying the text, it should be wrapped in something pure and then buried where people do not walk.^{34, 35}



Pages of the Quran
Flickr / Alan

Other Religions

Other smaller denominations include some traditional animist groups. Most animist traditions recognize spirits, many of which are similar in both name and function to Christian and Islamic spirits. Many believe in a supreme deity usually associated with the sky. This deity is addressed through the spirits rather than directly.³⁶



Boys of Kechene, Falasha Mura
Flickr / Senia L

A Jewish community settled approximately 2,000 years ago in northern Ethiopia around the Lake Tana area. Through the years, their faith evolved into a mix of Judaic and Ethiopian traditions. Those who practice this faith call themselves *Beita Yisrael* (House of Israel), but are known as *Falasha* (Amharic for *stranger* or *landless ones*) by the rest of the country. Their scripture, the *Orit*, is written in Geez and includes the Old Testament and some apocryphal books. When the *Falasha* were endangered by civil war and famine, the government airlifted thousands of them to Israel during the 1980s. Small groups of *Falasha* still live in Ethiopia, mostly in Addis Ababa, where there is a synagogue.^{37, 38}

Religion and Government

The Ethiopian Constitution guarantees freedom of religion. Though that freedom is generally respected, the government requires religious groups to register with the



*Medhane Alem church in Addis Ababa
Flickr / rustinpc*

Ministry of Justice and to reregister every 3 years. The national government officially recognizes eight religious holidays—five of which are Christian and three of which are Muslim.^{39, 40} The government owns all the land and requires all religious groups to apply for land on which to build mosques, churches, or hospitals. There have been complaints by some that the Amhara Christians receive preferential treatment in land allocation on which to erect religious structures. The government retains the right to close any institution at any time. Religious instruction in all schools, whether public or private, is prohibited.^{41, 42} Public schools may have school clubs that teach religious values.⁴³

Islamic law, *sharia*, plays no role in the government. Most religious tension is directed toward the government in the form of grievances. Inter-religious

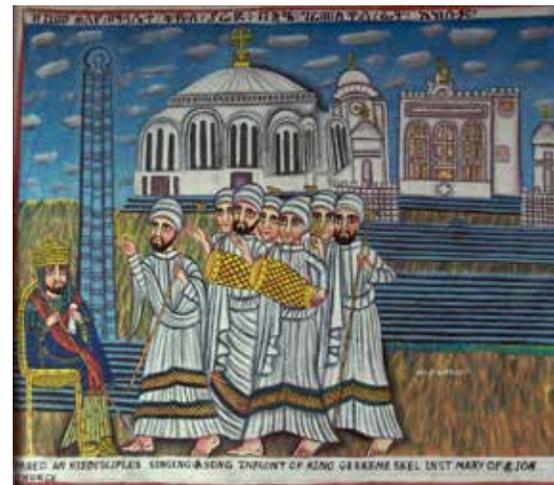
violence or open hostility is rare. Although there are scattered reports of friction between religious groups, the various sects appear to have found balance. For the most part, that balance is maintained and enforced by the government.⁴⁴

Influence of Religion on Daily Life

As a symbol of their faith, many Amhara wear white. During times of mourning, they wear black clothing.⁴⁵ For Orthodox Christians, there are a myriad of cultural practices connected to the rituals and calendar of the church, even among those who do not regularly attend services. Many Christian Amhara fast on Wednesdays and Fridays, when they abstain from meat and dairy products.⁴⁶

Some Amhara believe that illness or disease stems from punishments from God. Because of this belief, many attempt to prevent these problems by making regular pilgrimages to holy sites including St. Gabriel's Church at Kulubi. Christians wear

*Yared and his disciples
Flickr / Alan*



amulets to protect themselves from evil spirits and ward off the evil eye. Such amulets may be Christian texts written on rolled parchment worn around the neck tied by a silk cord. Coptic crosses are another popular form of protection.⁴⁷

Other medical treatments clearly influenced by religion among the Christian Amhara are rituals performed by the *Dabtara*, lay clergy. They may write scriptural or other formulae on paper and in disappearing ink. Once the ink has been dissolved in water, the solution is given as a drink to patients, helping to establish a link between the patient and the spirits. The *Dabtara* may prescribe concoctions of medicinal herbs as a way of treating particular ailments.^{48, 49} Mystical healers known as *zar*-doctors or “sheiks” are assumed to have the ability to manipulate and exorcise spirits. Such doctors are often consulted for ailments such as epilepsy, hysteria, rheumatism, and fertility issues.^{50, 51}

For Muslims, dress is also an indicator of religion. Muslim women wear scarves that cover the entire head. Like their Christian counterparts, there are restrictions on diet. Muslims may not eat pork and should not eat meat from any animal that has not been blessed.^{52, 53} Religion regulates the events of everyday life. It is dedicated to the five pillars of faith (charity, profession of faith, fasting, pilgrimage, and prayer five times daily).⁵⁴

Religious Holidays and Celebrations

Officially, Ethiopia has several major religious holidays from both the Christian and the Islamic faith.⁵⁵ Christian holidays are marked with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church calendar, which is divided into 12 months consisting of 30 days each. The remaining 5 days are placed at the end of year and are known as *Pagumen*. In a leap year, the extra day is added to *Pagumen*. The religious calendar includes nine major and nine minor feast days.⁵⁶ The Muslim holidays are determined by the Islamic 12-month calendar. The Muslim calendar is a lunar calendar so the dates shift from year to year based on the period of the moon.⁵⁷



*Ceremony of Buhe using bonfire
Flickr / IRLI*

Official Christian Holidays

The first official holiday of the year is Ethiopian Christmas Day, *Lidet* (7 January 2015).⁵⁸ Christmas is not the major religious holiday for the Amhara. The devout go to church services that continue throughout the evening. People often move from one church to another throughout the night. Young men often play *genna*, a game similar to hockey, on this day. Unofficially, Christmas is often referred to as *genna*.^{59, 60}



*Priests and Ark of Covenant, Addis Ababa
Flickr / John Iglar*

The next Christian holiday is the Epiphany (19 January 2015).⁶¹

Epiphany, or *timket*,

commemorates Christ's baptism by John. This is a 3-day celebration observed 2 weeks after Christmas. On the first day, Epiphany Eve, crowds gather and march in colorful processions to Gonder, where Christ's baptism by John is reenacted on the second day. The third day is the Feast of St. Michael.^{62, 63}

The third and fourth Christian holidays of the year are Good Friday (10 April 2015) and Easter Sunday (12 April 2015).⁶⁴ These holidays are particularly meaningful to Ethiopians. Half of the original cross on which Jesus was crucified is believed to be in an Ethiopian church in Wello. Christians normally attend religious services with special prayers on Good Friday. On the evening before Easter, people go to mass/church where they light candles. The mass lasts about 8 hours. Because the faithful have abstained from any meat or dairy during the 56-day Lenten season, at the end of the service, Christians go home to break the fast with a traditional meal of chicken or lamb. Easter is a day for families to spend together and many exchange gifts.^{65, 66}

The last official Christian holiday is the finding of the True Cross (28 September 2015).⁶⁷ *Meskel*, from the Amharic word for *cross*, celebrates an event from around 325 C.E. Helena, the mother of the Christian Roman emperor Constantine the Great, is said to have had a temple destroyed in Jerusalem, thus uncovering remnants of the cross of Christ. Because it is believed that Helena followed smoke from a bonfire to find the relics, *Meskel* celebrations involve a large bonfire. Afterwards, the faithful use the charcoal to paint a cross on their forehead.⁶⁸

Other Christian Religious Holy Days

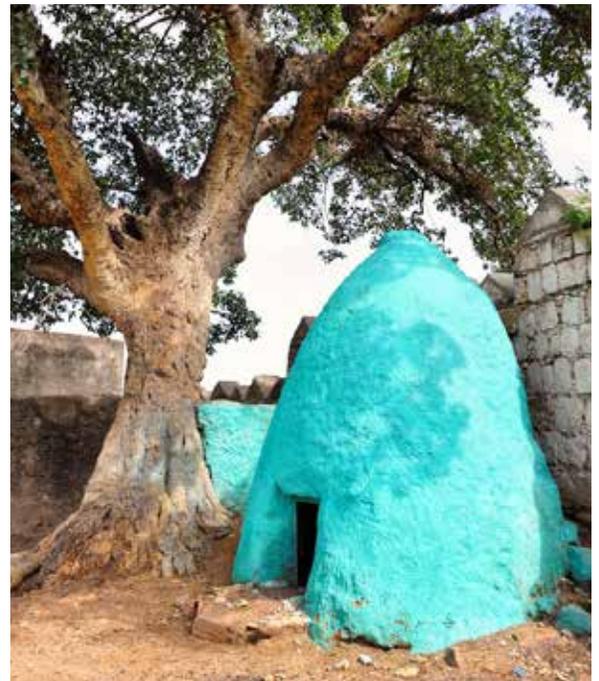
The year is blanketed with feasts and commemorations, the most important of which include 9 feasts of the Lord and 33 feasts and festivals devoted to the Virgin Mary.⁶⁹ During the Festival of Maryam Zion in late November, pilgrims flock to Aksum by the thousands to pray to the Virgin Mary, who is highly venerated in the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition. The majority of pilgrims are women, who ask for help with fertility, rainfall, or illness in front of the shrine to Our Lady of Zion.⁷⁰

*Altar detail,
Church of St.
Mary of Zion
Flickr / Alan*



Official Muslim Holidays

Several Muslim holidays are observed as Ethiopian public holidays. The first of the year is the Prophet's Birthday. This holiday is celebrated on different days by the Sunni and Shi'a communities. Both dates are legal holidays.⁷¹ *Eid al-Fitr* is the next Muslim holiday and marks the end of the holy month of fasting known as Ramadan. Many Muslims don new clothes and go out to pay *zakat*, alms to the needy, before attending special prayers. Afterward, families and friends gather together to break the month-long fast.^{72, 73} The last major public holiday is *Eid al-Adha*. This day, known as the Feast of Sacrifice, commemorates the willingness of Abraham (Ibrahim) to sacrifice his son.^{74, 75}



*Islamic shrine, Harar
Flickr / Rod Waddington*

Buildings of Worship

Orthodox Churches

The Christian Amhara worship in churches. The rock-hewn churches in Lalibela, each made from a single block of stone, are considered a wonder of the modern world.⁷⁶

Ethiopian Orthodox Churches have generally been constructed in octagonal or circular



Original Church of St Mary of Zion, Axum
Flickr / Nancy

shapes since the late medieval period. Each church consists of three concentric rings. The innermost section is the Sanctuary (*Maqdes*), also referred to as the *Qeddusa Queddusan* or Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies mirrors the ancient Jewish temples but has 12 doors representing the 12 Apostles of Jesus. Only deacons of the church may enter this section, which contains the *tabot*, or chest containing stone tablets representing the tablets in the Ark of the Covenant.^{77, 78, 79} The second circle contains the *keddist*, where the faithful receive the Sacrament. It is segregated into separate sections for men and women. The outermost ring is the *Qene Mahelet*. This room is divided into

three sections by curtains. The western section is for the *Dabtaras* or cantors. Another section is for women and the third for men. This chamber has three doors, one each on the east, north, and southern exposures. The southern door is reserved exclusively for women to enter the room. Christians who consider themselves unclean normally stand in the courtyard rather than entering the church building. Sometimes, there are more worshippers outside than in the building.⁸⁰

According to the Ethiopian Church, the Our Lady Mary of Zion church in Aksum houses the actual Ark of the Covenant, the sacred container for the Ten Commandments that Moses carried with the Israelites.⁸¹ The building is surrounded by armed guards. It is closed to all but one monk, who is designated as caretaker and is required to spend the rest of his life confined to the church.⁸²

There are also monasteries sprinkled throughout the country. In the Ethiopian Church, monasteries are highly spiritual places. The monks who reside in them do not marry but live quietly, devoting their days to solitary prayer.⁸³

Mosques

A mosque, or *masjid*, is the traditional site of Muslim worship. The largest and most important mosques are known as *jama* (or *jami*) *masjid*. These mosques, also called Friday mosques, host large communal prayers on Fridays (the Islamic holy day) and holidays. They are found in city or town

centers. Smaller mosques are scattered throughout villages

and rural areas; each community has one if not several mosques. Mosques have several basic features. The main prayer hall is where Muslims meet to worship. They sit on the floor, which is covered in mats or carpets. The *mihrab* is a niche in the wall of the prayer hall that faces Mecca; this direction known as *gibla*. Muslims always pray facing the holy city. To the right of the *mihrab* is the *minbar*, or pulpit, where the prayer leader stands during services. Minarets are towers attached to the mosque from which the muezzin calls Muslims to prayer. Mosques contain designated areas for Muslims to remove their shoes and washrooms where they perform their ritual ablution (*wudu*) before prayer.^{84, 85, 86, 87}



Mosque in Simien Mountains
Flickr / Richard Mortel

Behavior in Places of Worship

Orthodox Churches



Ethiopian Orthodox women
Flickr /
Tim & Annette Gulick

Visitors are normally welcome in churches, but some special rules may apply. Some monasteries do not allow women to enter. If you have a question, it is always better to ask. The Orthodox church is a place of significant spirituality and should always be approached with reverence. Even when passing by a church, it is respectful to make the sign of the cross. Behavior in Orthodox churches is highly ritualized. Men and women usually worship in separate parts of the church.^{88, 89}

Exchange 1: May I enter?

Soldier:	May I enter?	megwaat echeelaalo?
Local:	Yes.	aawo

Exchange 2: Do I need to cover my head?

Soldier:	Do I need to cover my head?	raaseyn meshefen aalaabin?
Local:	Yes.	aawo

For worshippers, dress should be formal. Never wear shorts. For men, a shirt and a tie are best. Shirts should button to the neck. T-shirts, sleeveless tops, or loud colors are to be avoided by both sexes. Women should wear dresses or skirts. A woman must always cover her head with a scarf. Jewelry, makeup, and perfume are frowned upon. Always remove shoes before entering an Orthodox church building in Ethiopia.^{90, 91, 92}

Exchange 3: Who conducts the mass this morning?

Soldier:	Who conducts the mass this morning?	zaarey te-aawat qedaasi manaw yemeek-adasaw?
Local:	Father Seyum.	aaba seyoom

Exchange 4: Does he say the mass in English?

Soldier:	Does he say the mass in English?	qedaasewoon be-engelizeenya naw yemeek-edesoot?
Local:	No.	Aay

Smoking, drinking, and talking loudly are prohibited in churches. Be sensitive when taking photographs; it is probably best to get permission first. Sometimes you might be allowed to take pictures of the church interior in exchange for a fee. Do not try to enter the Holy of Holies. It is a sacred area reserved for priests and monks.^{93, 94}

Exchange 5: I would like to receive Communion.

Soldier:	I would like to receive Communion.	qurbaan mequrab ifeligalaw
Local:	Ok, but have you gone to confession?	eshee gin nuzaazey gebtehal?
Soldier:	What day and time is confession?	yenoozaazey k-en-ena se-aat mechey naw?
Local:	Friday and Saturday at 5:00 in the afternoon.	aarb ena kedaamey ke se-aat ba-asra aand se-at laay

Mosques

Specific cultural conventions may exist regarding behavior in specific mosques. When in doubt, visitors should always ask. In Ethiopia, both men and women are allowed to worship in mosques, although they worship in segregated sections.^{95,96} Several points of etiquette are common when visiting a mosque. Shoes must be removed at the entrance to the mosque.⁹⁷ There is no loud talking, eating, or smoking inside. Visitors are advised not to touch ritual objects or copies of the Quran, nor should they climb the *minbar* (elevated pulpit) or step into the *mihrab* (niche indicating the direction of Mecca).⁹⁸ Visitors should be dressed modestly, with clean, pressed trousers and long-sleeve shirts. Women must dress conservatively, with no skin showing, and wear head scarves.⁹⁹ Never walk in front of people who are praying, since it invalidates their prayer.^{100,101} One should never chew gum or smoke cigarettes in or near mosques or religious places. Laughter or talking and touching walls and books are out of place. Photography, unless permitted on an organized tour, is strictly forbidden. Always remove shoes before entering an Ethiopian mosque.^{102,103}



Ethiopian women at meeting
Flickr / ARC

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Overview

Chapter 2 Assessment

1. Christianity spread throughout Ethiopia in the Late Middle Ages.

FALSE

Christianity was accepted by the Aksumite King Ezana in the fourth century C.E., and, when designated as the official state religion, spread throughout the kingdom.

2. Islam spread to Ethiopia in the early modern era.

FALSE

Islam came to Ethiopia in the seventh century C.E. on the crest of a successful wave of military campaigns and religious proselytizing.

3. Beliefs and practices of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church are significantly different from the Christianity practiced in the Western societies.

TRUE

Christianity among the Amhara is vastly different from what most Westerners would recognize. It is a fusion of the Old Testament teachings and indigenous beliefs.

4. Religion plays little role in the daily lives of Amhara Christians.

FALSE

For Orthodox Christians, there are myriad cultural practices connected to the rituals and calendar of the church. Many Christian Amhara fast on Wednesdays and Fridays, when they abstain from meat and dairy products of any kind. Medical treatments are often linked to religious beliefs.

5. The Ethiopian Constitution protects the freedom of religion.

TRUE

The Ethiopian Constitution enshrines freedom of religion. The government requires religious groups to be registered, and those engaged in formal development work must also register as a non-governmental organization.



*Colorful Monday market, Bati
Flickr / Dietmar*

CHAPTER 3

Traditions

Introduction

The Amhara are a Semitic people who are mostly agriculturalists, concentrated in northern Ethiopia's central highland region. Their lives have remained largely unchanged for centuries. The vast majority (91%) are Orthodox Christians. The church remains at the center of the Amhara identity. Because of its isolation over the centuries, the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Church developed its own unique form, relying heavily on the Old Testament and Judaic traditions.¹ This uniqueness in religious practices is manifested in contemporary Amhara culture in such matters as dietary restrictions and the slaughter of animals.²

Like Ethiopians in general, the Amhara are a friendly and hospitable people. They are proud of their cultural legacy and their Christianity. Amhara culture is highly stratified and social status is defined by age and social class structures.³ This is reflected in the general Ethiopian attitude that power is inherently unequal and that subordinates are required to do as they are told.⁴ The Amhara are uncomfortable with public displays of aggressive, loud, and demanding behavior. They rarely publicly display their emotions, preferring instead humility and individual honor.^{5,6}

Formulaic Codes of Politeness

Greetings and Interactions

Ethiopian greetings tend to be courteous and relatively formal.^{7,8} Handshakes among individuals of equal social status are a common form of greeting, though they are lighter and linger longer than in Western cultures. The younger generation often lean in and touch their right shoulders.^{9,10,11} Greetings are always accompanied with inquiries about the other's health and family.^{12,13}



*Greeting a friend in Tigray
Flickr / Rod Waddington*

Exchange 6: Good morning!

Soldier:	Good morning!	indemen aaderk!
Local:	Good morning.	dehinaa indemen aaderk

Exchange 7: Good afternoon!

Soldier:	Good afternoon!	indemen walk!
Local:	Good afternoon.	dehinaa indemen walk

When meeting an older individual or someone of higher status, it is appropriate to bow slightly. Shake hands only if the other initiates the action.^{14,15} Women who are close friends or family will often greet each other with three to five kisses on alternating cheeks.¹⁶

Exchange 8: Good evening.

Soldier:	Good evening.	indemen aameshaKh
Local:	Good evening.	dehinaa indemen aameshaKh

It is appropriate to use titles, especially when meeting for the first time. *Ato* should be used for men, *woizero* for married women, and *weizarit* for single women. A man

named Tesfaye Desta would be introduced as *Ato Tesfaye*. His wife, Almaz Teferra, would be introduced as *Woizero Almaz* under a highly formal circumstance.^{17, 18, 19} Titles, followed by an individual's first name, are appropriate.^{20, 21}

Exchange 9: Good night.

Soldier:	Good night.	dehinaa ider
Local:	Good night.	dehinaa ider

Exchange 10: Are you doing well?

Soldier:	Are you doing well?	dihinaa neKh?
Local:	Yes.	aawo

When being introduced, Ethiopians will give only their first name; you should do the same. Ethiopians do not use last names or surnames; only their personal name given at birth. If they have a second name, it is likely the personal name of the father. A third name is usually the personal name of the paternal grandfather.

Exchange 11: How are you?

Soldier:	How are you?	indemen neKh?
Local:	Fine, thank you.	dehinaa, yeemesgen

Exchange 12: Hi, Mr. Kebada.

Soldier:	Hi, Mr. Kebada.	selaam aato kabede
Local:	Hello.	salaam

Eye Contact and Personal Space



Eye contact during conversations is generally appropriate, even across genders. Avoiding eye contact can be regarded as a sign of dishonesty or an attempt to hide something. Young people tend to avoid direct eye contact when addressing their elders. Engaging in too much direct eye contact with members of the opposite sex may be regarded as inappropriate.^{22, 23, 24} Ethiopians tend to stand about an arm's-length apart while speaking to each other. Among members of the same gender, slightly less space is required.²⁵ Ethiopians may touch each other on the shoulder or arm when speaking with member of the same sex.²⁶

*Elderly couple
Flickr / Rod Waddington*

Male-Female Relationships

Ethiopian and Amhara culture is patriarchal. Women in Ethiopian Orthodox communities enjoy greater equality than those in the Muslim community. Christian women share more responsibility for family and wealth.²⁷ Yet, women generally have a lower social status than men. Women are socialized to be subordinate, submissive, dependent, and patient.^{28, 29} Gender roles are strictly segregated among the Amhara. Women are responsible for taking care of children and the home. In agricultural settings, women clean, separate, and grind the grain. Men are responsible for plowing the land, harvesting the crops, hunting, and the slaughter of animals.^{30, 31}



*Co-workers at Gogahot
Flickr / Katie Hunt*

Exchange 13: God bless you and your family.

Soldier:	God bless you and your family.	egzyab-her anten enaa beyta-sabahen yeebarka
Local:	Thanks to God.	egzyab-her yeemesgen

Domestic violence is a major problem in Ethiopia. Women are frequently victims of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse by their partners. Much of the abuse goes unreported because of the stigma and shame. Estimates suggest that the rate of domestic abuse in Ethiopia is the highest in the world (71%). Some of the abuse stems from the general view that women are inferior.^{32, 33}

Hospitality and Gift-Giving

Because of the friendliness of the Ethiopians, visiting friends is commonplace. Visitors should remove their shoes before entering the home. Punctuality is not critical and guests often arrive late. Being extremely tardy, however, is inappropriate.^{34, 35} Guests should dress well, as it is a sign of respect and appreciation.³⁶ Female guests should offer to help prepare the meal or to clean up after dinner.³⁷

It is polite to greet each person, beginning with the eldest. Do not begin eating until the elders at the table have begun their meal.^{38, 39}

Exchange 14: I really appreciate your hospitality.

Soldier:	I really appreciate your hospitality.	silaa ak-ababelachooH inaameseganaalen
Local:	You're welcome.	menim aaydelem

It is considered rude to decline offers of food in an Ethiopian home. Always accept what is offered. When finished, it is polite to leave a little food on the plate.⁴⁰

Exchange 15: Did you make this meal yourself?

Soldier:	Did you make this meal yourself?	yehinin megib aanta naKh yagazehaawo?
Local:	Yes, I did.	aawo iney ning

It is polite to engage in conversation during the meal.⁴¹ Avoid topics such as politics and religion. Appropriate topics include the weather or sports.^{42, 43}

Exchange 16: The meal was very good.

Soldier:	The meal was very good.	megboo bet-aam t-eroo neber
Local:	Thanks.	aameseganaalo

Exchange 17: This food is delicious.

Soldier:	This food is delicious.	yiH megib yit-aafetal
Local:	Thank you.	aamasegenaalo egzyabheyr yestiling



Gifts are not normally exchanged in Ethiopia except on special occasions such as birthdays, weddings, and religious occasions. If a gift is given it should not be expensive. Giving a gift that is too expensive is seen as rude or insensitive since the receiver may be unable to reciprocate.^{44, 45} Appropriate gifts include pastries, fruit, or flowers. Small gifts for children are always appreciated. Because most Amhara do not drink, alcohol is generally inappropriate.⁴⁶ Gifts are not usually opened when given. Gifts should be given with the right hand, supported at the elbow with the left. Never give or receive a gift with the left hand.^{47, 48, 49}

*Precious gift from a child
Flickr / Tiffany*

Eating and Types of Food

Eating Customs

Ethiopians generally eat one or two meals a day. If they can afford it, they will enjoy three meals a day. In addition, they consume small snacks throughout the day. Breakfast is generally light and may consist of bread and tea accompanied by eggs and milk.



East African sourdough flatbread or injera
Flickr / maria zerioun

Lunch and dinner are heavier meals, often consisting of single pot stews. Men and women usually eat together. Children generally do not eat with their parents except on special occasions.^{50, 51}

Meals are regarded as social events. Sharing food is an important national tradition.⁵² Before eating, diners wash their hands in water poured from a pitcher. Prayers are usually said before the meal.⁵³ Ethiopians eat from a communal plate. Ethiopians do not generally use utensils. Instead, they tear a piece of *injera* bread and use it to grab food, which is rolled up in the bread and eaten as a single bite. Diners should take food from the area of the plate directly in front of them. Use only the right hand while eating.^{54, 55, 56} It is inappropriate to lick one's fingers.^{57, 58} In Ethiopia, people will sometimes

put food into another diner's mouth. This tradition, called *gursha*, is a gesture of respect and should be accepted gracefully.⁵⁹

Amhara Christians are required to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays, except for the 50 days between Easter and the Pentecost, as well as on several other religious holidays. On these days, they abstain from meat and dairy products. On fasting days, Amhara do not eat or drink until 3 p.m.⁶⁰ They are prohibited from eating pork at any time.^{61, 62, 63}

Types of Food

Ethiopian cuisine is complex. Traditional meals often consist of single pot stews.⁶⁴ Amhara food is often spicy and hot. The main spice is *berbere*, a combination of chilies, ginger, garlic, cardamom, nutmeg, cloves, cumin, and coriander, along with a few others.⁶⁵

Habesha, traditional meal
Flickr / joepyrek



Typical meals on fasting days consist of lentils, ground split peas, grains, fruits, and seasonal vegetables, often made into a stew known as *wot*. All meals are accompanied by *injera*, a large, thin, slightly sour flatbread made from the indigenous grain called teff. Injera is an important protein source.^{66, 67, 68} Ethiopia's main dish is a spiced stew called *wot* that can contain any combination of meat, poultry, and vegetables. Typical varieties are *kik wot* (made from split peas, chickpeas, or beans cooked in fried onions, oil, and red pepper); *goman wot* (made from boiled kale or collard greens finely chopped and cooked with fried onions, garlic, and jalapeño peppers); and *shiro wot* (made from powdered beans, chickpeas, or peas that have been boiled and then cooked with fried red onions and spiced red chilies).^{69, 70, 71}

Fresh vegetables are an Ethiopian cuisine staple and play an important role in local diets because of the many fasting days when meat is not eaten. Common meats include chicken, lamb, and beef.^{72, 73, 74}

A beer (called *talla*) brewed from barley or maize is common, as are a honey-based mead (*tej*) and a sorghum-based brandy (*katikalla*).^{75, 76, 77} The most famous drink of Ethiopia is coffee from Kefa, a highlands area in the south. It claims to be the original home of the coffee bean. Typically, one drinks three cups of coffee, which is often served with popcorn. The coffee is served black and very sweet in small cups.^{78, 79, 80}

Dress Code

Western clothing is commonly worn in urban areas, with a more conservative/traditional dress worn in rural areas. Sleeveless shirts or shorts are considered offensive. Women should not show cleavage and should cover their shoulders and knees. When in a formal meeting or visiting a home, it is respectful to wear a dress shirt and tie or a suit.⁸¹

Many Amhara prefer to wear their traditional dress.⁸² Traditionally, the Amhara wear white clothing as a sign of their Christianity.⁸³ Native dress for men consists of jodhpurs and long shirts. Over their clothing they wear a cotton blanket wrap known as a *gabi*.^{84, 85} Women typically wear cotton dresses. The dresses often have a tight bodice and a full skirt, often covered with a shawl known as a *netela*.^{86, 87, 88, 89} Rural Amhara frequently do not wear shoes.⁹⁰



*Local Women dressed in traditional clothes
Flickr / NBDC*

Exchange 18: Is this okay to wear?

Soldier:	Is this okay to wear?	yehinin melbas icheelaaluH?
Local:	Yes.	aawo

Exchange 19: How should I dress?

Soldier:	How should I dress?	endeyt aaynet libs lilbas
Local:	Dress casually.	yetelemeda libs-libas but am atazanet

Non-Religious Celebrations

Ethiopians celebrate several secular holidays. Adwa Victory Day commemorates the Ethiopian victory over Italian invaders in 1896. The day is marked with patriotic ceremonies and parties throughout the nation. Many lay wreaths at the Menelik Monument.^{91, 92} International Labor Day commemorates workers. For many, it is a day to discuss labor issues and the economy.^{93, 94} Freedom Day, formerly Patriots' Victory Day, is a day to honor Ethiopians who fought against the Italians. The day is marked with festivities featuring traditional music, dance, food, and drink. There are also historical and education programs.^{95, 96, 97}

Downfall of the *Derg* is Ethiopia's National Day. This day marks the end of the oppressive Derg regime, which ruled the nation between 1974 and 1991. Special speeches honoring fallen martyrs are frequently given by politicians. People visit war memorials and monuments.^{98, 99}

Ethiopian New Year's Day, known as *Enkutatash*, is celebrated according to the Julian calendar. Torches made from dried leaves and wood are lit in front of houses while the youth and the elderly sing. Many Ethiopians go to church in the early morning wearing their traditional dress. They return home to share a meal with family.^{100, 101, 102}



*Soccer and flags, Meskal Square
Flickr / April Rinne*

Exchange 20: Will you celebrate the festival next week?

Soldier:	Will you celebrate the festival next week?	yemeeket-alo saamint ba-aal taka-vraalachooH?
Local:	Yes.	aawo

Dos and Don'ts

Do show respect for elders. Take off hats and caps when talking with them and stand when they enter the room.

Do accept offers of food; it is considered rude to decline such offers.

Do leave a little food on your plate when you have finished a meal.

Do remove your shoes when entering a home, Tewahedo Church, or mosque.

Do give and receive items with your right hand.

Do not lick your fingers during a meal.

Do not smoke in front of locals, especially priests. Many Ethiopians do not smoke, but it is not regulated in public.

Do not take pictures of buildings and public areas without permission. Taking pictures of certain areas is prohibited, and doing so may result in a fine.

Do not discuss sexual relations, especially homosexuality. This is highly offensive to Ethiopians.

Do not wear revealing or skimpy clothing, particularly if you are a female.

Do not talk to women when male relatives are around. Address the males instead.

Do not talk about politics or ongoing conflicts.



*Mahlet doing school work
Flickr / Trocaire*

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Overview

Chapter 3 Assessment

1. Amhara culture is extremely egalitarian.

FALSE

Amhara culture is highly stratified, and social status defined by age and social class structures much of the interaction between individuals.

2. Handshakes are a common form of greeting between individuals of equal rank.

TRUE

Handshakes among individuals of equal rank are a common form of greeting, though they are lighter and linger longer than in Western cultures. Individuals often lean in and touch their right shoulders.

3. When introducing yourself to an Ethiopian, you should only use your first name.

TRUE

When being introduced, Ethiopians will give only their first name, except in formal situations.

4. Direct eye contact should be avoided since it conveys aggression.

FALSE

Eye contact during conversations is generally appropriate, even across genders. Avoiding eye contact can be regarded as a sign of dishonesty or an attempt to hide something. Young people, however, tend to avoid direct eye contact when addressing their elders.

5. When one has finished eating, it is polite to leave a little food on the plate.

TRUE

When finished, it is polite to leave a little food on the plate.



CHAPTER 4

*Addis Ababa overview
Flickr / Laika ac*

Urban Life

Introduction

Ethiopia remains a largely rural society with approximately only 17% of the population living in cities. In the Amhara Region, only 12% of people live in urban areas.^{1,2} Addis Ababa is the nation's capital and largest city, with around 3.1 million residents.³ Approximately 28 cities in the Amhara Region have populations over 20,000, with only 8 of those having more than 50,000 residents. The three largest cities in the Amhara Region are significantly smaller than Addis Ababa (Gonder, 265,000; Bahir Dar, 198,900; and Dese, 153,700).⁴ The rate of urbanization remains relatively low at about 3.6% per year.⁵

Urbanization Issues

The poor quality of urban housing and low living standards are serious issues in Ethiopia including the Amhara Region. Little space and poor sanitary conditions raise health concerns including higher risks from airborne and waterborne diseases.^{6, 7, 8, 9}

According to the 2007 national housing and population census, city homes in the Amhara

Region are small, with an average of about two rooms per dwelling. Approximately 87% of the homes had mud floors.¹⁰ Less than 3% of homes had running water, while slightly over 8% of city dwellers accessed their water from unprotected wells, springs, rivers, or lakes.¹¹ Over half (56%) of the dwellings had no toilet facility and 22% had access only to shared pit latrines.¹² Around 57% had traditional kitchens located outside.¹³ People overwhelmingly used charcoal, firewood, or dung for cooking.¹⁴



*Housing in Addis Ababa
Flickr / neiljs*

Healthcare

Indices of health in Ethiopia are poor and its healthcare system is among the least developed in Sub-Saharan Africa. The system is generally unable to deal with the nation's healthcare needs. Life expectancy is 61 years. Maternal and infant mortality rates are among the highest in the world.^{15, 16} As many as 80% of the nation's health problems are due to poor nutrition and preventable communicable diseases.¹⁷ In recent decades

there has been significant healthcare system progress that has dramatically improved health conditions. But the system continues to face severe challenges.^{18, 19}

Ethiopia has a three-tiered healthcare delivery system. The first level, the *woreda* (district) health system, has primary hospitals, health centers, and satellite health.



*Hamlin Fistula hospital
Flickr / BBC World Service*

Level two consists of general hospitals. Level three consists of specialized hospitals. The expansion in primary healthcare means that around 92% of the population is now covered, although the system is significantly underused by the people.²⁰

Exchange 21: Is there a doctor here?

Soldier:	Is there a doctor here?	ezeeKh Haakeem aala?
Local:	No.	aay

Healthcare facilities are limited, even in urban areas, although a number of hospitals are available in larger cities. Hospitals are below Western standards and frequently suffer from shortages of supplies and outdated equipment. There is a shortage of doctors and other medical personnel. On average, for every 20,000 people there is 1 doctor and 1 public health worker, and there are 4 nursing and midwife workers, 6 community health workers, and 4 hospital beds. Emergency assistance is limited. Although some hospitals have ambulance services, they are generally unreliable and require payment on the scene.^{21, 22, 23}

Exchange 22: My knee is broken, doctor, can you help me?

Soldier:	My knee is broken, doctor, can you help me?	dokter gulbaatey tesebruwaal leeredung geechilaalooH?
Local:	Yes, I can help you.	aawo leradaaH icheelaalo

All medical facilities require cash deposits before treatment, with payment in full before the patient is released.²⁴ Clinics outside the capital are inadequate at best.²⁵

Exchange 23: Do you know what is wrong?

Soldier:	Do you know what is wrong?	min endehona tawk-aaleH?
Local:	No.	aay



*Fourth graders attending class
Flickr / Stijn Debrouwere*

Education

The Ethiopian schools system consists of 10 years of general education: 8 years of primary and 2 years of general secondary education. Students may advance to 2 years of upper secondary education, followed by technical or vocational training.^{26, 27} Primary school is free and compulsory for Ethiopian students.²⁸ At the end of fourth grade, students take a national exam that they must pass to move on to the fifth grade. After the last year of primary education, students take another exam. If they pass, they receive a certificate.²⁹

At the end of 10th grade, students must take an exam designed to prepare them for advanced education, or vocational or technical training schools.

Students who pass the national examination at the end of the 12th grade are eligible to attend a university.³⁰ All of the nation's universities are located in the larger urban centers.³¹

Nationwide, 25% of the children drop out of school before completing their first year of primary school. In the Amhara Region the dropout rate is approximately 14%. Boys are more likely than girls to drop out. About 79% of students go on to secondary school. Girls in the urban areas are significantly more likely to be educated than those in rural areas.^{32, 33, 34, 35}

Exchange 24: Do your children go to school?

Soldier:	Do your children go to school?	lejocheH timherta beyt yeheedaalo?
Local:	Yes.	aawo

In the Amhara Region, gender disparities are not as severe. The rates of primary attendance are similar for boys and girls, although girls outnumber boys in secondary school.³⁶ In the Amhara Region, there are approximately 7,500 primary schools and 316 secondary schools, most of which are public. Only 8% of primary schools in the Amhara region are located in urban areas but 78% of secondary schools are in cities.³⁷

Restaurants and Eating Out

Restaurants



Restaurant culture is a relatively new phenomenon in Ethiopia. Cities offer a wide variety of foods, including familiar fast-food establishments.^{38, 39} Simple diners called “mother *bet*” provide inexpensive home-style Ethiopian cooking. *Kitfo betoch* (*kifto* houses) are common. These eateries serve *kifto*, a blend of raw ground beef and *berbere* spice.^{40, 41}

*Ethiopian food
Flickr / buck82*

Exchange 25: Are you still serving breakfast?

Soldier:	Are you still serving breakfast/lunch/dinner?	k-urs/mesaa/eraat/ taak-erbaalachooH?
Local:	Yes.	aawo

Exchange 26: I'd like a coffee/tea.

Soldier:	I'd like a coffee/tea.	boonaa/shaay efelegaalo
Local:	Sure.	eshee

When greeting diners, lightly grasp the other's wrist or touch wrists since hands are likely to be covered in food.⁴² When seated, the server brings a basin and pitcher of water to wash the hands. Utensils are not common in restaurants. Instead, diners eat with their right hands, grasping food from a common dish with pieces of *injera* bread.^{43, 44}

Exchange 27: I'd like some soup.

Soldier:	I'd like some soup.	shorba felegaalo
Local:	Sure.	eshee

Exchange 28: What type of meat is this?

Soldier:	What type of meat is this?	yihey yemen segaa naw?
Local:	Lamb.	yebeg

Do not whistle or snap fingers to gain a server's attention. Instead, say *yikerta* (excuse me), or clap your hands to get their attention.⁴⁵

Exchange 29: Do you have any dessert?

Soldier:	Do you have any dessert?	t-aafach neger aalachooH?
Local:	We have fruits.	feraafarey aalen

Exchange 30: Do you have any more water?

Soldier:	Do you have any more water?	ch-emaaree wuhaa aalachooH?
Local:	Yes.	aawo

If you are invited to eat, you are not expected to pay.⁴⁶ Some restaurants may include a service charge but it is customary to leave a few birr as a tip. Tips should be given directly to the server or left on the table in small cafes.^{47, 48}

Exchange 31: Can you get me my bill?

Soldier:	Can you get me my bill?	ebaakiH heesaabun sit-eng?
Local:	Sure.	eshee

Exchange 32: Put this all on one bill, OK?

Soldier:	Put this all on one bill, OK?	yehinin heesaab aandelaay argo, eshee?
Local:	Sure.	eshee

Street Vendors

Many city street vendors sell a wide variety of local food favorites. Though it may be safe to eat hot food that has been thoroughly cooked from such vendors, safety can be an issue for travelers.⁴⁹

Women selling fruit outside the walls of Harar Flickr / Alan



Exchange 33: Did you prepare this food?

Soldier:	Did you prepare this food?	yehinin megib anchee nesh yegizaashoo?
Local:	No.	aay

Exchange 34: Is this food fresh?

Soldier:	Is this food fresh?	yehey megib yezaaree naw?
Local:	Yes.	aawo

Generally, it is best to avoid buying food from street vendors. Utensils and other equipment are often reused without being properly cleaned. The safety of the food is also questionable. About two-thirds of food sampled from vendors showed unhealthy levels of bacterial pathogens including *E coli*.⁵⁰

Exchange 35: Buy something from me.

Soldier:	Buy something from me.	ke-eney ande neger gizaa
Local:	No, go away.	alfeligem zorebel

Shopping

Shops in the cities are typically open every day except Sunday. The operating hours are usually from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and closed from 1 to 2 p.m. Prices are usually set, so



haggling over discounts is unnecessary.^{51, 52} In Bahir Dar, the main market stays open after dark.⁵³ The main market day is Saturday.⁵⁴ Visitors can buy a wide variety of items including food, clothing, and souvenirs.⁵⁵

*Konso market
Flickr / Achilli Family*

Exchange 36: Is the market nearby?

Soldier:	Is the market nearby?	gebeyaw kirbi naw?
Local:	Yes.	aawo

Exchange 37: Can you give me change for this?

Soldier:	Can you give me change for this?	lezeeKh menezzaarey letset-eng ticheelaaleH?
Local:	No.	aay

Haggling over price is not as common as it once was. Offering to bargain for an item in fixed-price shops may be regarded as offensive. At local markets, however, bargaining is almost expected. Buyers should keep in mind that the purpose of haggling over prices is not to get the lowest price. It should be an enjoyable experience that both seller and buyer are happy with the end of the negotiation.⁵⁶

Exchange 38: How much longer will you be here?

Soldier:	How much longer will you be here?	ezeeKh senti gezey tek-oy aaleH?
Local:	Three more hours.	sost se-aat

Exchange 39: I can give you this much money for this.

Soldier:	I can give you this much money for this.	lezeeKh yehinin yahel genzeb letsetiH echeelaalo
Local:	No.	aay

Africa's largest open-air market is the *Mercato* in Addis Ababa. Myriad shops, selling virtually everything, stretch over miles of alleyways.^{57, 58, 59}

Exchange 40: May I hold this and inspect it?

Soldier:	May I hold this and inspect it?	yehinin be-ijay mayaaz echeelaalo?
Local:	Sure.	eshee

Exchange 41: Do you have any more of these?

Soldier:	Do you have any more of these?	endezeeKh aaynet betich-emaree aala?
Local:	No.	aay

Some shops cater specifically to foreigners and prices there are generally higher, but price bargaining is expected.⁶⁰

Exchange 42: Do you have this in a smaller/larger size?

Soldier:	Do you have this in a smaller/larger size?	kezeeKh yaanesa/yetelek-a aala-chooH?
Local:	Yes, we do.	aawo aalen

Exchange 43: Do you have this in a different color?

Soldier:	Do you have this in a different color?	yehay beleelaa k-elem aala?
Local:	Yes.	aawo

Money, Credit Cards, and ATMs

The official Ethiopian unit of currency is the birr (ETB).^{61, 62} Ethiopia is a cash society. Some travelers have noted that vendors occasionally refuse to accept 1996 series currency, so try to carry new bills. Money and traveler's checks, such as American

Express, can be exchanged into local currency at the airport, larger hotels, and some banks.^{63, 64} By law, only travelers with air tickets out of the country can exchange birr to U.S. dollars or euros. Those leaving the country by ground transportation should take care to make sure they budget well.⁶⁵ ATMs are available in larger commercial centers and near major hotels. Connectivity problems make the machines unreliable from time to time and limit their availability. MasterCard, Solo, Cirrus, or Plus cards will not work in Ethiopian ATMs.^{66, 67} Credit cards may be accepted at hotels catering mostly to tourists but, as a rule, they are not widely accepted outside of those venues. Outside of Addis Ababa, credit cards are unlikely to be accepted.^{68, 69, 70} Exchanging money on the black market is illegal and is punished with fines or imprisonment.^{71, 72}



*Ethiopian currency (birr)
Flickr / rustinpc*

Exchange 44: Do you accept credit cards?

Soldier:	Do you accept credit cards?	kredeet kard tek-ebelaalachooH?
Local:	No.	aay

Exchange 45: Do you accept U.S. currency?

Soldier:	Do you accept U.S. currency?	ya-amereekaan genzib tek-abelalachooH?
Local:	No, we only accept birr.	aay biri bechaa naw yemenik-abelaw

Traffic and Transportation

Cars

Travel fatalities in Ethiopia are higher than anywhere in the world. Roads are generally in poor condition, not well marked, and frequently unlighted. Common hazards include



*City traffic
Flickr / Francisco Anzola*

abandoned vehicles, pedestrians walking along the roadways, and livestock. Ethiopian drivers rarely observe basic road rules and can be unpredictable. Always carry spare tires as there are rarely service stations outside of cities. If involved in an accident, drivers must remain at the scene until the police arrive, unless doing so risks personal safety.⁷³

When traveling by road, drivers should exercise caution. Armed bandits operate in some border regions and along major highways. Highway travel outside of major cities and towns should be restricted to daylight hours. Drivers should travel in convoys where possible. Be wary of other motorists claiming to have mechanical difficulties as this is a common tactic used by thieves to take advantage of unsuspecting motorists.⁷⁴

Exchange 46: Is there a gas station nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a gas station nearby?	nedaaj/banzeen maadeya beq-erb aala?
Local:	Yes.	aawo

Exchange 47: Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?	t-eroo mekaaneek bezeeKh aakaababee aala?
Local:	Yes.	aawo

Exchange 48: Do you know how to fix this?

Soldier:	Do you know how to fix this?	yehinin masrat ticheelaaleH?
Local:	No.	aay

Public Transportation

*Traffic in Addis Ababa
Flickr / Sam Efron*

Travelers are advised to avoid public transportation, especially in the capital of Addis Ababa. This includes buses and mini-buses. Passengers should never leave their baggage unattended, including in taxis.⁷⁵ All U.S. citizens are restricted from traveling to the Eritrea/Ethiopia border area, the Ethiopia/Kenya border, the Somali Region, and the Gambella Region.⁷⁶

Urban transportation consists of buses, mini-buses, and taxis. Buses are available on the main routes, but do not service some of the city's residential areas. They connect main cities and towns.⁷⁷

Exchange 49: Will the bus be here soon?

Soldier:	Will the bus be here soon?	awtoboos ahun yimet-al?
Local:	Yes.	aawo

Taxis, distinguished by their blue bodies and white roofs, often are crowded and are much more expensive than buses. Many Ethiopian taxis do not have meters, so fares must be agreed upon in advance.^{78, 79} Taxis are generally the safest form of public transportation. Passengers should exercise caution and always make sure they are the only passenger.⁸⁰

Exchange 50: Can I get a cab around here?

Soldier:	Can I get a cab around here?	bezeeKh aakaababee taaksee aagenyaalo?
Local:	Yes.	aawo

Exchange 51: Can I rent a car from you?

Soldier:	Can I rent a car from you?	kaanta mekeenaa mekeraayit icheelaaluH?
Local:	No, you cannot.	aats-chilim

Ethiopia has only 681 km (423 mi) of rail lines, in one line.⁸¹ This line runs from the capital of Addis Ababa to Djibouti. The train has not been running for several years but buses travel from the capital to Dire Dawa, where one may get a train to Djibouti twice weekly. A new route was expected to open between Addis Ababa and Djibouti in 2016.^{82, 83, 84}

Exchange 52: Is there a train station nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a train station nearby?	baabur t-aabiyaa bek-erbu aala?
Local:	No, there is not.	yalem

Ethiopian Air Lines links Bahir Dar, Gonder, and Lalibela with the capital, Addis Ababa.⁸⁵ Ethiopia is considered to be compliant with international aviation safety standards. There is a “no-fly” zone in effect near the border with Eritrea.⁸⁶

Exchange 53: Which direction to the airport?

Soldier:	Which direction to the airport?	aaroplan maarifyaw beyet bekul naw?
Local:	That way.	bezaa bekul naw

Street Crimes and Solicitations

Ethiopia is plagued by crime. Criminals are active throughout all regions of the country but appear to be more active in the capital city of Addis Ababa and the south rather than in the Amhara Region. Many crimes are crimes of opportunity including pickpocketing or purse-snatching.^{87, 88} All travelers should remain vigilant and exercise caution when in public places or visiting public landmarks.⁸⁹

It is common to find beggars in the larger cities, especially Addis Ababa. In the Amhara region, 90% of the people live in poverty. Approximately 4 in 10 people live in absolute poverty, subsisting on



Begging
Flickr / Pablo Necochea

less than USD 1 per day. Many have turned to begging as a way to survive. Beggars are especially common in Bahir Dar, the regional capital.^{90, 91} Police can fine individuals for giving money to beggars.⁹²

Exchange 54: Give me money.

Soldier:	Give me money.	ganzeb sit-eng
Local:	No, I don't have any.	yelgnm

Exchange 55: Can I help you?

Soldier:	Can I help you?	min lerdaaKh?
Local:	I have information for you.	yeminegriH gil goodaay aaleng
Soldier:	Thank you, I will pass it to my command center.	aamaasegenaalo le-aazaajey aastelelefwalo

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Overview

Chapter 4 Assessment

1. More boys than girls in the Amhara Region complete primary school.

FALSE

About 89% of students in the Amhara Region completed primary school; the completion rate for girls exceeded that for boys (93% vs. 84%).

2. Most of the Amhara Region's primary schools are located in cities.

FALSE

Only 8% of primary schools in the Amhara Region are located in urban areas but 78% of secondary schools are in cities.

3. Travelers are urged to avoid all public transportation in Ethiopia due to safety concerns.

TRUE

Travelers are advised to avoid public transportation, especially in the capital of Addis Ababa. This includes buses and mini-buses.

4. Approximately 25% of the Amhara population lives in urban centers.

FALSE

Ethiopia remains a largely rural society, with approximately 17% of the population living in cities. In the Amhara Region, only 12% of people live in urban areas.

5. Roughly 9 in 10 urban houses in the Amhara Region have mud floors.

TRUE

According to the 2007 national housing and population census, city homes are small, with an average of about two rooms per dwelling. Roughly 87% of the homes had mud floors.



CHAPTER 5

Ethiopian Landscape
Flickr / ILRI

Rural Life

Introduction

Ethiopia, in general, is predominantly rural. Approximately 83% of the population live in rural areas. In the Amhara Region, 88% live in the countryside.^{1,2} The national economy remains primarily dependent on agriculture, which accounts for 47% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Agriculture is the livelihood of 85% of the people.³

The Amhara Region is particularly hard-hit by land degradation. Approximately 66% of the total regional land area is lost arable land, due to a variety of factors including drought, erosion, and lack of land tenure.^{4,5} To improve confidence in land tenure, the Amhara Region is one area that is using rural land certification procedures.⁶

Life is difficult in rural Amhara state. Only 28% of households have access to safe water.⁷ About 60% of households access water from unprotected wells, springs, rivers, lakes, or ponds. Only 12% of households use water from the tap in their homes or compound.⁸ A trek to obtain water can involve carrying some 20 liters (about 5.25 gallons) of water one or more times per day. That amount weighs slightly over 19 kg (42 lbs). For many with no potable water nearby, it can mean an hour's walk. Adults and children may be away from the home most of the day, walking long distances to feed their cattle and cultivate the crops.⁹

Average rural homes are small, with 83% having two or fewer rooms.^{10, 11} Houses are round with thatched roofs supported by single poles in the middle.¹² Walls are made of wood packed with clay. Most households have a garden and a place to keep livestock, which provide valuable fertilizer for the fields. More modern homes may be square or rectangular and covered with tin roofs.^{13, 14}

Land Tenure and Distribution

Ethiopia's national governments historically have tried to implement land tenure reforms and land distribution policies. Under Haile Selassie, who gave land to friends and political supporters, a type of feudal system developed. Land was in general owned by absentee landlords but worked by tenant farmers. In 1974, Selassie was overthrown and his government replaced by the socialist *Derg*. They confiscated all rain-fed farmlands in the highlands region and redistributed them among the rural population. Every 2 years, the *Derg* redistributed the land in an attempt to establish and maintain an equitable distribution. In 1991, the *Derg* government was replaced by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). Though they kept many of the *Derg's* reforms in place, the EPRDF eliminated private land ownership. The state owns all lands within the nation but grants lease rights to tenants.^{15, 16, 17}



Farmer in Tigray
Flickr / CIMMYT

Traditional Amhara land claims were based on ancestral lineage and customary law. Land was owned by clans or communities rather than a single individual. Individuals could rent the land. This system was known as *rist*. Emperor Selassie granted between 10% and 20% of all arable lands to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. These lands were worked by tenant farmers in exchange for use rights. The current system closely resembles the traditional *rist* system except that the communal *rist* system has been supplanted by state peasant associations.^{18, 19}

Ethiopian farms are generally small. An estimated 85% of farmers work fewer than 2 hectares (5 acres). Productivity can be quite variable due to climatic conditions, drought, and poor farming practices.²⁰ Cereals make up about 80% of all crops. Oilseeds and pulses account for most of the remaining crop production.²¹

Exchange 56: Do you own this land?

Soldier:	Do you own this land?	yihey mareyt yaanta naw?
Civilian:	Yes.	aawo

Rural Economy and Employment

In the Amhara Region, data from the 2007 census report that in the rural areas 79% of males and 66% of females aged 10 and above were active in the labor force. Rural unemployment was 0.6%.²² Among those who were economically active, less than

2% were employed by the government or NGOs.

Approximately 2% were domestic workers and the rest were largely employed in the agriculture sector.^{23, 24, 25}

Although food grains constitute the bulk of agricultural crops, coffee is becoming increasingly important.

In recent years, coffee has accounted for as much as 35% of Ethiopia's export earnings. Oilseeds are also

an important export product. A small but growing

number of flowers are exported to Europe.²⁶ Livestock

is a significant subsector of agriculture. Ethiopia is now one of Africa's largest livestock producers. About 30%

of the agricultural labor force makes their living from livestock, and 10% of GDP derives from this subsector.

Only coffee yields more foreign exchange and export dollars than livestock.^{27, 28}



*Market day at Lake Tana
Flickr / SarahTz*

Exchange 57: Where do you work, sir?

Soldier:	Where do you work, sir?	gaashey yesney yemeeseroot?
Civilian:	I am a farmer, sir.	gaashey eney geberey neng

Exchange 58: Are you the only person in your family who has a job?

Soldier:	Are you the only person in your family who has a job?	kebeytesebochiH aanta bechaana yemitseraw?
Civilian:	No.	aay

Agriculture is quite labor intensive. The Amhara use traditional farming methods, including the use of oxen to plow fields.²⁹ Farming tasks are strictly segregated along gender lines. Men and boys are responsible for looking after cattle, harvesting crops, and plowing fields. Women and girls are responsible for weeding, maintaining family poultry, and cleaning animal areas. Women are not allowed to plow. These strict divisions mean that even though a woman may own land, as a matter of practice, she is not allowed to farm it.³⁰

Exchange 59: Do you know this area very well?

Soldier:	Do you know this area very well?	yehenin aakaababee bedemb tawq-ewaaleH?
Civilian:	Yes.	aawo

Rural Transportation

An estimated 14% of Ethiopia's roadways are paved. The rest of the roadways are dirt or gravel—even the roads that link the capital with the rest of the country.^{31, 32} When



*Scenes from Bahir Dar
Flickr / Alan*

traveling by road, drivers should exercise caution. Armed bandits operate in some border regions and along major highways. Highway travel in rural regions should be restricted to daylight hours. Drivers should travel in convoys where possible. Be wary of other motorists claiming to have mechanical difficulties as this is a common tactic used by thieves to take advantage of unsuspecting motorists.³³ It is important to stay on marked paths and roads, and to avoid riverbeds. Before driving off-road, check with local authorities to ensure that the area is mine-free.³⁴ U.S. citizens are restricted from traveling to the Eritrea/Ethiopia border area, the Ethiopia/Kenya border, the Somali Region, and the Gambella Region.³⁵

Exchange 60: Can you help me, my car broke down?

Civilian:	Can you help me, my car broke down?	maakinaaye tebulashtuwal letredaang ticheelaaleH?
Soldier:	I need to check with my commander.	aazaajen met-eyek alebeng

Public transportation in rural Ethiopia is virtually nonexistent. Walking is the primary means of getting around due to the lack of motorized transport throughout the nation,

particularly in the rural areas. Donkeys and other animals are widely used by local citizens to transport goods. Bicycles are becoming an increasingly popular way of getting around the countryside.^{36, 37, 38}

Exchange 61: Will you be going to the market today?

Soldier:	Will you be going to the market today?	zaaree gebeeya tehayjaalesh?
Civilian:	Yes.	aawo

Exchange 62: Can you take me there?

Soldier:	Can you take me there?	izaa litwesden teecheelaaleh?
Civilian:	Yes, I can. Follow me.	aawo teketeleng

Rural Healthcare

The healthcare situation is especially dire because large areas of rural Ethiopia do not have medical facilities. In 2007, there were 700 health centers in Ethiopia's rural areas.³⁹ Healthcare facilities are often too far away to be reached, particularly considering the lack of transportation options. In rural areas, 42% of households were within 6 km (4 mi) of the nearest health center. Approximately 62% of rural households were within 11 km (7 mi). In Amhara State, only about 42% of the population lives within walking distance of a health center.^{40, 41, 42}



*Ethiopian patient
Flickr / Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's photostream*

Exchange 63: Do you need my help?

Soldier:	Do you need my help?	ke-eney erdaata tefelegaala?
Local:	Yes.	aawo

Exchange 64: Is there a medical clinic nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a medical clinic nearby?	ezeeKh aakaababee kleenik aala?
Local:	Yes, over there.	aawo ezaaga

Rural Education

The Ethiopian school system consists of 8 years of primary and 2 years of general secondary education. Students may advance to 2 years of upper secondary education, followed by technical or vocational training.^{43, 44}

Students who pass the national examination at the end of the 12th grade are eligible to attend university.⁴⁵ All of the nation's universities are located in the larger urban centers.⁴⁶



Awra Amba's school

Flickr / SarahTz

Literacy rates in the rural Amhara Region are generally low. Only 39% of males and 27% of females were literate, according to the 2007 census.⁴⁷ In the Amhara Region, the rates of primary attendance are similar for boys and girls, although girls outnumbered boys in secondary school.⁴⁸ Nationally, about 14% of children drop out before completing their first year of primary school. Boys are more likely than girls to drop out. Girls often drop out because they marry early. Boys drop out because they have too many home responsibilities. Nearly 9 in 10 students (89%) in the Amhara Region completed primary school. The Amhara girls finish primary education at a rate of 93% vs. 84% for males. About 79% of students go on to secondary school.^{49, 50, 51, 52, 53}

The region has approximately 7,500 primary schools and 316 secondary schools, most of which are public. In the Amhara Region, 92% of primary schools are located in rural areas but only 22% of secondary schools are.⁵⁴

Exchange 65: Is there a school nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a school nearby?	bek-erboo timherta beyt aala?
Local:	Yes.	aawo

Who's in Charge?

Ethiopia has an ethnic-based federal structure consisting of nine regions, one of which includes the Amhara Region (ANRS), and two self-governing administrations. Below the federal government is the regional government, which is further subdivided into districts (*woreda*) and neighborhoods (*kebele*). The ANRS has decentralized state authority much faster than many of the other regions. There are 128 rural districts in the Amhara Region and an additional 22 urban *woreda*.^{55, 56, 57}



Community police officer
 Flickr / Overseas Development institute's photostream

The *kebele* is a small administrative unit with an average population of approximately 5,000 residents. The administrative structure consists of elected officials assigned to represent the interests of the citizens. *Kebeles* lack budgets or budgetary authority.⁵⁸

At the *woreda* level, the governance structures are more formalized. The council consists of members directly elected from each *kebele*. The executive committee has about a dozen members comprised mostly of sector bureau chiefs. *Woredas* operate their own court systems. The *woreda* government is empowered to prepare and approve

development plans and budgets, set some tax rates, collect local taxes, administer education and healthcare facilities, and manage agricultural activities.^{59, 60}

Exchange 66: Does your leader live here?

Soldier:	Does your leader live here?	meriyaachooH ezeeKh naw yemeenoro?
Civilian:	Yes.	aawo

Exchange 67: Can you take me to your tribal elder?

Soldier:	Can you take me to your tribal elder?	ye-aager shmaagaley letusdeng teecheelaalo?
Civilian:	Yes.	aawo

Kebeles are more informally organized. Each has an elected council of approximately 100 members, an executive committee, a social court with three judges, and a development and security staff. The council's main responsibilities are to prepare a local development plan, ensure the collection of land taxes, organize contributions to development activities, and to resolve community conflicts through their social courts.⁶¹ In the Amhara region, *kebeles* are further subdivided into smaller units called *sub-kebele* of about 300–400 households, villages or *gotts* of around 100 households, and *mengistawi buden*, which are government teams of around 30–50 households.⁶²

Exchange 68: Respected elder, we need your help.

Soldier:	Respected elder, we need your help.	ye-aager shmaagaley mik-ir enfeleegaalen
Civilian:	Yes.	aawo

Border Crossings and Checkpoints

The Amhara region shares most of its border with other federal states in Ethiopia. To the north and northeast is the Tigray Region. The Afar Region lies to the east



*People crossing border
Flickr / joepyrek*

and the Oromia Region to the south. To the southwest lies the Beneshangul-Gamuz Region. The region's only international border is with the nation of Sudan to the west.^{63, 64} The main border crossing point is at Metemma on the Ethiopian side of the international boundary. The border area can be volatile, so travelers are advised to be alert and plan ahead.^{65, 66} Within

the Amhara Region, checkpoints may be erected at city entries or along roadways. Such checkpoints are manned by the local militia rather than by police.⁶⁷

Landmines

Ethiopia signed the Mine Ban Treaty in December 1997 and ratified it 7 years later in December 2004.⁶⁸ According to the government, Ethiopia has neither produced nor

imported antipersonnel mines since 1991. The country completed the destruction of its stockpile in April 2009 although it has retained about 300 mines for training purposes.⁶⁹

Decades of conflicts have contaminated the Ethiopian countryside with mines. Exactly how many hectares of land are affected is unclear. In 2004, explosive remnants of war (ERW) were found in 10 of the nation's 11 regions, affecting more than 2,000 sq km (770 sq mi).⁷⁰ The most affected areas are in the Afar, Somali, and Tigray regions. Several ERW-affected communities in the Amhara Region were decontaminated in 2014.⁷¹ Mines have caused tens of thousands of injuries and fatalities. No fatalities or casualties due to mines have been reported since 2010.⁷²



*Landmine victim
Flickr / Kindepate*

Exchange 69: Is this area mined?

Soldier:	Is this area mined?	yehey aakaababee yetik-abara fenjee aalo?
Civilian:	Yes.	aawo

Exchange 70: Did these people threaten you?

Soldier:	Did these people threaten you?	enezeeKh sewuch asferartewahaal?
Civilian:	No.	aay

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Overview

Chapter 5 Assessment

1. The majority of the Amhara Region's population lives in rural areas.

TRUE

In the Amhara Region, 88% of the population lives in the countryside.

2. Land degradation is an acute problem for farmers in the Amhara Region.

TRUE

The Amhara Region is particularly hard hit by land degradation. Roughly 66% of the total regional land area is lost arable lands. This land loss is due to a variety of factors including drought, erosion, and lack of land tenure.

3. Agricultural lands may be privately owned by individuals or community groups.

FALSE

The state owns all lands within the nation but grants lease rights to tenants.

4. Because of gender role proscriptions among the Amhara, few women are employed in agriculture.

FALSE

According to the 2007 census, 66% of women over the age of 10 were actively employed. Most were employed in the agriculture sector.

5. Fewer than half of the Amhara Region's rural population lives within walking distance of a health clinic.

TRUE

In Amhara State, only about 42% of the population lives within walking distance of a health center.



*Family members, Ethiopia
Flickr / Malcolm Manners*

CHAPTER 6

Family Life

Introduction

In Ethiopia, the family is the basic element of economic production and the institution at the heart of society. Traditionally, the extended family structure has been key.^{1,2} Today, most households (63%) are nuclear although extended families continue to play an important role.^{3,4} Family ties are strong.^{5,6}

Amhara families are strongly patriarchal and hierarchical. Men are perceived as superior to women. Adults have a higher status than children and should be respected and obeyed without question. Adults often eat first in Amhara households. Men, because of

their higher status, receive the best food. Little is left for children who, because they are small, are presumed not to need much food. Families impress upon their children from an early age that girls should be shy, submissive, and subservient. Their duties include pleasing and obeying their husbands. Very early in life, often as young as 5–7 years of age, children begin to assume gender-specific roles in the home.⁷

The Typical Household and Family Structure

Typically, Amhara households consisted of a husband, a wife, their children, and other unmarried or elderly family members. That is changing somewhat as more families have become nuclear.⁸

The Amhara generally value large families.

Those families with at least seven children are regarded as being blessed by God.⁹ According to the 2007 census, the typical household in the Amhara Region had five or six members.¹⁰



*Family
Flickr / Malcolm Manners*

Exchange 71: How many people live in this house?

Soldier:	How many people live in this house?	ezeeKh beyt senti saw yinoraal?
Local:	Ten.	aasir

Exchange 72: Are these people part of your family?

Soldier:	Are these people part of your family?	enazeeKh sawoch beytesebochuKh naachaw?
Local:	No.	aay

An estimated 74% of all households had between 4 and 8 members. Urban households tended to be slightly smaller than rural households.^{11,12} The average size of Ethiopian households is 4.8 children.¹³ The fertility rate is among the highest in the world with each woman having about five children.^{14,15} Although birth rates are rising in some parts of Ethiopia, data show that the birth rate in the Amhara region is declining significantly.¹⁶

Exchange 73: Does your family live here?

Soldier:	Does your family live here?	beytasowochuKh ezeeKh naw yemeenorut?
Local:	Yes.	aawo

Exchange 74: Do you have any brothers?

Soldier:	Do you have any brothers?	wendeemoch alooH?
Local:	Yes.	aawo

The majority of Amhara live in houses made of wood and mud with mud floors.¹⁷ Housing units tend to be small. In urban areas of the Amhara region, 51% of homes have only one room and 23% have two rooms.^{18, 19}

Exchange 75: Did you grow up here?

Soldier:	Did you grow up here?	ezeeKh naw yaadekaw?
Local:	Yes.	aawo

Status of Women

Ethiopia's constitution guarantees women full equality with men. In some avenues, such as political, economic and social fields, women actually are guaranteed preferential

treatment. They have the right to inherit property and an education. By law, all marriages must be consensual.^{20, 21}

Reality generally falls far short of these lofty guarantees. In 2014, Ethiopia ranked 127th out of 142 countries with respect to gender equality.²²

Women are considered to be inferior to men and occupy a lower social status. Women are valued mainly for their role in maintaining the family and kinship bonds. The low status of women subjects women to a variety of harmful practices including early marriage without choice. Due to their subservient roles, women rarely have the opportunity to make choices about their own lives. Men are legally recognized as the head of the household and the sole parental guardian of

all children over the age of 5. Working women typically are paid less than men. Access to employment and credit is limited. Sexual harassment, although illegal, is pervasive. Partially as a result of this cultural view, violence against women is pervasive. Recent studies suggest that as many as 70% of women have been victims of domestic violence.^{23, 24, 25, 26}



Woman farmer in Amhara Flickr / ILRI

Status of the Elderly and Children

Children

The Amhara place a high value on large families and many children, which they regard as a blessing. Children generally are undisciplined until about the age of 7 for boys

and 5 for girls, when serious socialization begins. Socialization follows strict gender proscriptions. Girls learn to tend younger children and fetch wood and water. Boys learn to take care of the family's cattle. By 12 or 13, most children are thoroughly involved in the family work including agricultural tasks. Children are taught to listen and obey their elders without question. Amhara children do not commonly display initiative or creative thinking early in their lives. Parents often tell their children what to think and what to do. In this way, children are taught the traditions of the Amharic culture. Failure to complete one's chores or obligations is often met with harsh discipline including beatings.^{27, 28, 29}



*Market day in Oromia
Flickr / SarahTz*

Elderly

Only 3% of the nation's population in 2012 was aged 65 or older.³⁰ Ethiopians have a high regard for the intelligence and insight that come with age. Showing respect toward elders is extremely important.^{31, 32} Families offer an important support network for the elderly population. Families provide support and assistance to their elderly relatives whenever possible. Elderly relatives often help out around the home. Elderly women typically assist with child-rearing duties in the extended households. Many Amhara regard the support for elderly relatives as a moral obligation. But the rampant poverty and changing lifestyles have eroded some of these traditional bonds, especially in urban areas.^{33, 34}



*Two elderly men
Flickr / SarahTz*

Married Life and Divorce

Married Life

Among the Amhara, there are three types of marriages. *Kal kidan*, the most common type of marriage, is a civil contract and can be dissolved by divorce. Priests do not



Family getting water
Flickr / Rod Waddington

officiate but may be present to bless the new couple. The least common type of marriage is the *qurban*, or church wedding, which cannot be dissolved even after death. This is the only type of marriage that Orthodox priests may enter into. The third type is the *damoz*, in which women are paid to serve as temporary wives, usually for a period of a month or two. Although women in such marriages have no claims to the husband's property, children born of such unions are considered legitimate.^{35, 36, 37}

The Ethiopian Civil Code sets the minimum age for marriage at 18 years.³⁸ In the Amhara Region, many girls marry before reaching the legal age and many are under the age of 15. Nearly three in four girls in Amhara State

are married by the time they reach 18.^{39, 40, 41} Child marriages continue for a variety of reasons, such as to settle debts, parents' inability to care for their children, or to marry off young girls in order to get financial relief.⁴²

Exchange 76: Are you married?

Soldier:	Are you married?	aagveetahaal?
Local:	No.	aay

Exchange 77: Is this your wife?

Soldier:	Is this your wife?	yichee meest-hinat?
Local:	Yes.	aawo

Marriage between blood relatives up to the seventh generation on the father's side is prohibited.^{43, 44} Rates of early marriage and pregnancy have created a dangerous situation for married women. In Ethiopia, half of all maternal deaths are directly related to the young age of the mother.^{45, 46}

Exchange 78: Is this your entire family?

Soldier:	Is this your entire family?	enazeeKh huloo beytasebiKh naachaw?
Local:	Yes.	aawo

Divorce

By law, either party has the right to request a divorce after they have been married 6 months.^{47, 48} If both parties agree, spouses draft an agreement outlining the conditions for the divorce. This document is submitted to a court. After a 3-month cooling off



period, if both spouses still want the divorce, it is normally granted.⁴⁹ In some cases, the court may require the spouses to settle their dispute through arbitration. If the arbitrators are unsuccessful at reconciling the couple, the court can grant a 3-month cooling off period. If the couple fails to reconcile during this time, the court will grant the divorce and determine the custody and maintenance issues.⁵⁰

Divorce among the Amhara is nearly twice the national rate (14% vs. 7%). In 2007, approximately 6% of people in the Amhara Region were divorced.⁵¹ Divorce is generally more common among urban than rural women.⁵² One study reported that 45% of first marriages in the nation ended in divorce and about two-third of those fail within the first

At work

Flickr / MEAS Extension

5 years.⁵³ Women who divorce are often stigmatized. Many migrate to the cities, but their low literacy and skill levels make it more likely they will end up in the sex trade industry.⁵⁴

Birth

Most births among the Amhara people take place in a home.^{55, 56} Only women may attend the birthing process. Fathers wait outside the delivery room to be told whether



the child is a boy or a girl.⁵⁷ Boys are greeted with seven ululations and girls with three.⁵⁸ Female friends and neighbors bring special food to the new mother including butter, cheese, honey, and beer (*tella*). The newborn is washed and covered in oil. When the new mother and her child are separated, mothers wear iron until the child is baptized, to protect it from evil spirits.⁵⁹

In accordance with the Old Testament, boys are normally circumcised on the seventh day following

Dessie Referral hospital

Flickr / GSK

their birth. A priest comes to the home and sprinkles Holy Water to purify the home. Girls may be circumcised on the seventh day but it is more typical to wait until they are 40 days old.^{60, 61}

When boys are 40 days old or girls are 80 days old, they are brought to the church to be baptized. A godfather is named for boys and a godmother for girls and each child receives a Christian baptismal name.⁶²

Family Social Events

Weddings

Marriages are commonly arranged and usually involve a dowry given by the groom's family to the bride's.^{63, 64} On the wedding day, the groom, accompanied by several of his



best men, visits the home of his prospective wife. The bride's family and friends often ceremonially block the entrance to the home. The groom and his party sing songs and "force" their way into the home. One of the best men then sprays the house with perfume, after which the bride's family breaks into song.⁶⁵

*Ethiopian wedding
Flickr / David Nebreda Martín-Tereso*

Exchange 79: Congratulations on your marriage.

Soldier:	Congratulations on your marriage.	silaa tegaabachooH inkwaan des yaalachooH
Local:	Thank you.	inaameseganaalen

Exchange 80: I wish you both much happiness.

Soldier:	I wish you both much happiness.	lehuletaachehum desta emanyalaachuhaalo
Local:	Thank you.	inaameseganaalen

Wedding ceremonies usually begin with music and dancing. After the dances are over, the wife accompanies her husband to her in-laws' home. After a honeymoon, the couple stays with the bride's parents for a time.⁶⁶

Funerals

Funerals are important social events in Amhara culture. Family members often wear black clothing, the traditional color of mourning.⁶⁷ The body of the deceased is washed and wrapped in a thin, white cotton wrap known as a *shamma*.^{68, 69} The body usually remains at home for a period of



*Funeral procession
Flickr / Rod Waddington*

time. Church officials come to the house to offer prayers of absolution (*fetet*). Friends and family gather at the home to pay their respects and help with food preparation.⁷⁰ The body is then carried to the church compound, accompanied by priests and church deacons, who stay with the body offering more prayers and songs. Bodies are usually buried in a grave marked only by a circle of rocks. Women traditionally wail loudly as an expression of their grief.^{71, 72}

Exchange 81: I sympathize with you.

Soldier:	I sympathize with you.	haazeniKh yeesaamanyaal
Local:	Thank you so much.	aamaseginaalo egzyaber yistiling

The 40 days immediately following death are a period of intense mourning for the family.⁷³ On the 40th day, a feast (*tazkar*) is held. Preparations for the feast begin immediately after the funeral. Friends and family gather money to help defray expenses. A large rectangular shelter (*dass*) is built for the feast. All family members including distant kin are expected to participate and to contribute food or money for the event. For many, the cost of their funeral will be the largest expenditure of their lives.⁷⁴ Both 80 days and 180 days following the death, family and friends also have a small memorial service. Often they gather at the gravesite and share a meal. Each year, on the anniversary of the death, similar memorial services are held at the home of the deceased.

Exchange 82: I would like to offer my condolences.

Soldier:	I would like to offer my condolences to you and your family.	haazenaachinen lebeytasebo enaak-erbalen egzyaabyer yatnaachooH
Local:	Thank you.	aameseganaalo

Exchange 83: Please be strong.

Soldier:	Please be strong.	t-enkaara hun
Local:	Thank you so much.	aamaseginaalo egzyaber yistiling

Naming Conventions

Ethiopian names usually consist of a first name and a last name. The first name is a given name and the last name is usually the father's first name. For example, if Aman Bikila had a son named Gabra, his son's last name would be Aman. Gabra's daughter, Falasha, would be Falasha Gabra. Rarely do Ethiopians have a middle name. Sometimes people will use a baptismal name as a middle name or they might append their paternal grandfather's given name.^{75, 76}

Exchange 84: Are these your children?

Soldier:	Are these your children?	enizeeKh lejocheH naachaw?
Local:	Yes.	aawo



*Wedding horses, Tigray
Flickr / Rod Waddington*

Ethiopian names are creative. *Mitiku* (substitute) and *Kassa* (compensation) are names given to children born after a sibling has died. After having bad luck, a family might name a child *Masresha* (distraction). If the family has several children, the parents might use names that mean “that’s the last” or “no more.”^{77, 78} Christian names are more spiritual, such as *Haile* (power of) or *Habte* (gift of). They are usually added to a second name, so *Habte-Yesus* would mean “gift of Jesus.”⁷⁹ Women usually keep their maiden names when they marry.⁸⁰

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Overview

Chapter 6 Assessment

1. The extended family structure is the most common family type in Ethiopia.

FALSE

Most households (63%) are nuclear, although extended families continue to play an important role.

2. Ethiopians traditionally respect the elderly.

TRUE

Showing respect toward elders is extremely important. The responsibility to support and care for one's aged parents is stressed throughout childhood, reinforced by religion, and practiced by everyone.

3. Amhara children generally take their father's surname.

FALSE

Ethiopian names usually consist of a first name and a last name. The first name is a given name and the last name is usually the father's first name.

4. The average Ethiopian household has nearly five children.

TRUE

The average size of Ethiopian households is 4.8 children.

5. The legal minimum age for marriage in Ethiopia is 18.

TRUE

The Ethiopian Civil Code sets the minimum age for marriage at 18 years.

Amharic Cultural Orientation

Final Assessment

1. Bahir Dar is regional capital of the Amhara National Regional State.

TRUE

Bahir Dar is one of the largest cities in Ethiopia and the regional capital of Amhara. This city of approximately 199,000 is located at the south end of Lake Tana.

2. June is the hottest month of the year in the Amhara region.

FALSE

May is generally the hottest month of the year. Between June and September, moist winds from the Atlantic Ocean bring rain to the region.

3. More than 8 in 10 Amhara depend on agriculture and animal husbandry for their livelihoods.

TRUE

Approximately 85% of the population in Amhara State is engaged in agriculture, most of which is subsistence farming. The state is one of the nation's largest growers of teff, a staple grain in the nation.

4. Amharic is the official language of Ethiopia.

TRUE

Amharic is the official language of the nation. Amharic is a Semitic language related to Arabic and Hebrew.

5. A blue cord worn around the neck of an Amhara individual signifies that they are Muslim.

FALSE

Amhara Christians often wear a blue cord around their neck to distinguish themselves from the Muslim Amhara.

6. Religious education is permitted in Ethiopian schools.

FALSE

Religious instruction in all schools, whether public or private, is prohibited. The government does permit churches to conduct Sunday school, and mosques may teach the Quran. Public schools may have school clubs that teach religious values.

7. Followers of Ethiopian Orthodoxy observe more than 150 days of fasting throughout the year.

TRUE

The faithful observe between 165 and 180 days of fasting in the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition. These include most Wednesdays and Fridays; Advent (the time leading up to Christmas); and the Lenten season.

8. White is traditionally worn by the Orthodox Amhara as a sign of their faith.

TRUE

As a symbol of their faith, many Amhara wear white. During times of mourning, they wear black clothing.

9. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church claims it holds the Ark of the Covenant.

TRUE

Our Lady of Mary of Zion Church in Aksum is supposed to house the actual Ark of the Covenant. The Ark is said to have contained stones inscribed with the Ten Commandments that Moses carried with the Israelites.

10. Only Christian holidays are officially recognized by the Ethiopian government.

FALSE

The national government officially recognizes eight religious holidays—five of which are Christian and three of which are Muslim.

11. In Ethiopia, only Muslim Amhara abstain from pork.

FALSE

Both Christian and Muslim Amhara in Ethiopia abstain from eating pork.

12. Gifts are expected when visiting an Ethiopian home.

FALSE

Gifts are not normally exchanged in Ethiopia except on special occasions such as birthdays, weddings, and religious occasions. Because many in the nation are poor, gifts, when given, should not be expensive.

13. Items should be given with the right hand.

TRUE

Gifts should be given with the right hand, supported at the elbow with the left. Never give or receive a gift with the left hand.

14. Amhara men, women, and children normally dine together.

FALSE

Men and women usually eat together. Children, do not eat with their parents except on special occasions.

15. The traditional form of clothing is still preferred by many Amhara.

TRUE

Many Amhara prefer to wear their traditional dress. Traditionally, the Amhara wear white clothing as a sign of their Christianity.

16. It is appropriate to snap your fingers to get a waiter's attention.

FALSE

When getting the attention of a waiter or porter, it would be offensive to whistle or snap your fingers. Instead, say *yikerta* (excuse me), or clap your hands to get their attention.

17. It is acceptable to haggle in city shops.

FALSE

Most prices are set in city shops, so haggling over discounts is not necessary. In traditional markets and bazaars, or when hiring transportation, bargaining *is* acceptable, even anticipated.

18. One should avoid purchasing food on the street.

TRUE

Avoid buying food from street vendors. You can never be sure about the safety of this food. About two-thirds of food sampled from vendors showed unhealthy levels of bacterial pathogens, including *E coli*.

19. Girls in the Amhara Region are more likely to attend secondary schools than boys.

TRUE

In the Amhara Region, gender disparities are not as severe. The rates of primary attendance are similar for boys and girls. Girls outnumber boys in secondary school.

20. Exchanging money is a common and legal practice in Ethiopia.

FALSE

Exchanging money on the black market is illegal and is punished with fines or imprisonment.

21. Most of the Amhara Region's primary schools are located in rural areas.

TRUE

The region had approximately 7,500 primary schools and 316 secondary schools, most of which were public. In the Amhara Region, 92% of primary schools are located in rural areas but only 22% of secondary schools are.

22. The smallest administrative unit in rural areas is the *woreda*.

FALSE

Below the federal government is the regional government, which is further subdivided into districts (*woreda*) and neighborhoods (*kebele*). *Kebeles* are further subdivided into *sub-kebele* of about 300–400 households, villages or *gotts* of around 100 households, and *mengistawi buden* including around 30–50 households.

23. Landmines contaminate some of the Amhara Region.

TRUE

In 2004, explosive remnants of war (ERW) were found in 10 of the nation's 11 regions, affecting more than 2,000 sq km (770 sq mi). Several ERW-affected communities in the Amhara Region were decontaminated in 2014.

24. Coffee is an important export cash crop.

TRUE

Although food grains make up the bulk of agricultural crops, coffee is becoming increasingly important. In recent years, coffee has accounted for as much as 35% of Ethiopia's export earnings.

25. Because most livestock are raised to meet family needs, this subsector contributes little to the economy.

FALSE

Ethiopia is now one of Africa's largest livestock producers. About 30% of the agricultural labor force makes their living from livestock, and 10% of GDP derives from the subsector.

26. Arranged marriages are illegal in Ethiopia.

FALSE

Arranged marriages still occur in Ethiopia. Among the Amhara and Tigray, the negotiations are conducted between parents without the consent of the children, who might not see each other until the wedding day.

27. Children in Amhara families are encouraged to be creative and independent.

FALSE

Children are taught to listen and obey their elders without question. Amhara children do not commonly display initiative or creative thinking early in their lives. Parents often tell their children what to think and what to do.

28. Approximately three in four Amhara girls marry before they are 18.

TRUE

In the Amhara Region, approximately half of all girls marry before reaching the legal age and many are under the age of 15. Nearly three in four girls in Amhara State are married by the time they reach 18.

29. Women normally do not take their husband's last name when they marry.

TRUE

Women usually keep their maiden names when they marry.

30. The Ethiopian government recognizes only civil marriage.

FALSE

The Ethiopian Civil Code recognizes three types of marriages: the civil marriage, the religious marriage, and the customary marriage.

Amharic Cultural Orientation

Further Reading and Resources

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