Social Movements and the Youth: the Ethiopian Experience

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Abstract

There are considerable studies that examined the recurring occurrences of popular protests and social movements in Ethiopia. These studies shed light on how social movements were organized and sustained in the contexts of repressive regimes. There is a lacuna of research examining the pivotal role of movement actors providing leadership in movements that aim to sustain its organization and ensure the emergence of a democratic government structure by analyzing their roles in social movement organization, and the different mobilization tactics they utilize. Drawing on this gap, the article examines the role of different actors, mainly the educated youth within the country and in the diaspora, in forming and sustaining collective actions by focusing on two selected social movements. The article takes the 2015 Oromo protest and the 1960s students' movement as comparative cases to examine the role of youth in social movement organizations and their discursive practices in mobilizing the mass. As such, the underlying objective of this article is to provide insights into the role of the youth in framing and leading social movements that embraces the demand for human rights and democratic reform. The article bases its analysis of the 2015 Oromo protest on primary data collected as part of the author's PhD project concerning freedom of expression and social movements, while secondary sources of data are used to understand the 1960s students' movement. The study findings depicted that the educated youth demonstrated a shared identity and common purpose in organizing and leading the selected social movements. The findings of the article further highlighted that youth-led social movements in repressive regimes tend to utilize violence as a final resort to bring about change.

Keywords: Social movements; youth, Oromo protest; students' movement; human rights; political transformation

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1. Introduction

The recent popular protests in Ethiopia brought about a new government that acknowledged the role of various sets of actors including the youth and the diaspora in the overall political transition process (Melaku, Dereje, and Mamo, 2020). Scholars accentuate the role of social movement organizations in helping young people to take part in political activism (Elliott and Earl 2018). Often, the involvement of the youth in social movement organizations is being defined as an act of members or supporters without paying due consideration to their role in organizing and leading social movements that can potentially result in democratization and the rule of law (O'Donoghue and Strobel, 2007).

The 2015 Oromo protest and the 1960s students' movement are selected as social movements that help to understand the characteristics and trajectories of social movements in the context where the regime criminalizes political dissent. The two selected movements proved that the youth within the country and in the diaspora had been important actors in forming and sustaining social movements that significantly influenced the political trajectories of Ethiopia (Wilson, Lindberg and Tronvoll 2021; Bahru Zewde, 2010).

The youth, mainly university students, played a key role in organizing and leading both the 1960s students' movement and the 2015 Oromo protest. Nonetheless, their efforts to uphold democracy and human rights through collective actions appeared to be counter framed by the State as an act of radicals agitated by external enemies (Bahru Zewde, 2010; Abbink 2015). The crackdowns and repressions against youth dissent resulted in the exodus of the Ethiopian diaspora fleeing persecutions by the successive draconian regimes (Lynos 2007; Posey 2016). The Ethiopian diaspora shares the political history of the educated youth in their homeland, which facilitated their active involvement in political affairs, notwithstanding they are geographically distant from home. Therefore, examining the role of youth in the formation and sustenance of selected social movements helps to understand the characteristics, organization, and leadership structure of movements led by young people.

This article argues that the selected movements sought to uphold human rights, promote democracy and end authoritarian rule in their respective periods under the leadership of the educated youth. Arguably, both movements contributed to ending repressive regimes and paved the way to democratic change. However, both movements experienced political infiltration,

crackdowns, internal contestations and conflicts that challenged the political reform they aspired. Thus, this article seeks to understand the movement framing alignments, leadership structure and mobilization strategies of the past and present social movements to understand the existing political reality. In this regard, this article aims to explain how different actors, mainly the educated youth and the diaspora, play a role in social movements in the context of Ethiopia through a comparative analysis of the 1960s students' movement and the 2015 Oromo protest. The article highlights the challenges, uncertainties, and prospects of social movements in Ethiopia and provides suggestions to sustain social movements and uphold human rights at times of political transition.

2. Theoretical Underpinnings: Postulating the Foundations of Social Movement Organization and Youth Leadership

The organization, sustenance, and youth leadership of the 2015 Oromo protest and the 1960s students' movement can be examined through the theories of resource mobilization, collective identity, movement framings and organizational structure (Zald and McCarthy, 1987; Brandes and Engels, 2011; Della Porta and Diani, 2006;). These theories shed light on the contributions of diverse social movement actors to uphold human rights and help shape the democratization process in Ethiopia by emphasizing the role and influence of young people within Ethiopia and in the diaspora. The selected theories provide the best-supported explanation about the formation and sustenance of social movements in the context of nondemocratic states by emphasizing the young generation's struggle to ensure democracy and halt the continuing conflicts in Ethiopia.

To begin with, the theory of resource mobilization helps to explain the 2015 Oromo protest and the 1960s students' movement activities in mobilizing resources. The resource mobilization theory is also linked with the political opportunity paradigm that focuses on utilizing political events and systems to advance social movement agenda (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). According to Zald and McCarthy (1987), the resource mobilization theory is about understanding how social movements possess and effectively utilize the financial, ideological, and human resources to achieve their goals. However, this theory could not be separated from the notion of collective identity building that deals with cultivating human resources, which directly contributes to the results of social movements (Melucci 1996). This article acknowledges the diverse debates about the importance of collective identity

building in forming and maintaining youth-led social movements. For Tarrow (2011), identity is the base for ethnicity, religious activism and nationalism rather than social class. However, he also argued that social movements achieve their objectives only when they sidestep from using identity as a mobilization tactic to engage with the broader public and diverse actors.

Similarly, Polletta and Jasper (2001) argued that although social movements form when collective identities develop, shared identity should not be considered as a condition to initiate collective action. Nonetheless, the academic debate on the concepts of collective identity seemed to pay little attention to social identity that is becoming politically important in understanding social movements where young people played a significant role. Social identity develops when certain groups of the society feel threatened by others and desire to be recognized in political settings (Gregory and Miller 1998). Thus, social identity can be explained as an act of identifying oneself with others who share general social status, while collective identity relates to one's allegiance with a social movement cause (Polletta and Jasper 2001; Gregory and Miller 1998). Although ethnonational identities influence the formation of diasporic identities in social movements, social identity also creates a cross-border linkage between group members in the homeland and host-land communities (Lynos 2007; Posey 2016). This article subscribes to the idea that collective identity formation is the foundation of social movements, but it should not be used as a tactic to mobilize a segmented group of society, especially at times of political transition in nondemocratic contexts (Polletta and Jasper 2001; Brandes and Engels 2011). At the same time, the article highlights the youth's social identity and their interest to amplify their political concerns as one group of the society from which they derive their shared identity and sense of belongingness during the past social movements in Ethiopia.

Movement framing is the foundation of social movements that enhance collective identity formation and resource mobilization (Della Porta and Diani 2006; Gregory and Miller 1998). Movement framing requires the capacity of key actors to articulate the social or political problems in a way that appeals to the deep-seated grievances of their social base, aiming to call for action (Della Porta and Diani 2006). Hence, waiting for the political opportunities that support the formation and revival of social movements is vital from movement actors' side who also needs to identify their opponents and supporters ahead of time. The article further argues that social movement framing is crucial in

volatile political contexts to galvanize mass support and sustain contentious actions.

Political opportunities in this article are defined as occasions that encourage the emergence of diverse actors into a political system of a nation-state and transcend the movement agenda into a transnational contention. Hence, the article borrows the debate by Castells (2015) that the transboundary political relationships created by globalization in general, the online and offline media and international human rights organizations, in particular, have the potential to influence the way social movements are organized and sustained in nondemocratic states. Castells's (2015) argument seemed to be supported by Kaplan (2008), who asserted that although countries with a certain degree of political stability and the rule of law benefit from globalization, nondemocratic and transition states could be challenged. Among the challenges nondemocratic states face is the direct involvement of the diaspora community in the political affairs of their homeland. Often, the diaspora is associated with a violent approach to help support social movements in their country of origin that are prone to ethnic nationalism and weak democracy. In order to facilitate their involvement in homeland political affairs, the diaspora uses their relative freedom in host countries to establish equivalent transnational movement organizations that do not shy away from advancing violence and war in their homeland (Della Porta, Donker, Hall, Poljarevic, and Ritter 2018). Some scholars argued that social movements use violence to advance a common purpose and attract the attention of the media and international human rights organizations (Tarrow 2011; Della Porta et al. 2018). Others argued that cyclic social movements usually produce countermovement, leading to illegal actions, conflicts and violence in contexts where draconian governments operate (Della Porta et al. 2018). It should also be noted that nonviolent movements are acclaimed for supporting democratization processes during political transition periods (Della Porta et al. 2018; Polletta and Jasper 2001).

Conversely, violent movements aggravate repression by causing counteraction and reaction within and from groups (Tarrow, 2011). Hence, among the issues that need to be discussed in this article is the use of violence as a movement strategy. This article argues that it is worth examining the movement strategies of the selected movements in order to understand efforts exerted to deploy or avert the framing of violence as a tactic to advance movement agenda, and if

the recurring contentions contributed to the violations of human rights, leading to de-democratization.

Nevertheless, there are possibilities where contentious movements develop permanent organizational structures as civil society organizations, political groups and charitable institutions (Brandes and Engels 2011). Violent movements can also transform into an informal network of social movements with no hierarchical leadership structure but sustaining collective action (Della Porta and Diani 2006; Tarrow 2011). In this regard, social movements could emerge without formal organizational and leadership structure but produce leaders who are capable of providing strategic guidance in coordinating communication and other organizational resources. According to Castells (2015), communication relationships are more important to determine the structural sustainability of social movements than their organizational characteristics as formal and informal. In fact, this is dependent on the capability of key movement actors to ensure organizational continuity by enforcing, inspiring, and persuading social control methods on movement members (ibid).

3. Note on Methodology

The empirical data presented in this article mainly draws on a qualitative research method. Part of the empirical basis of this article is qualitative research that the author conducted for a PhD dissertation titled *"Freedom of Expression and Social Movements on the Internet: A case study of the 2015 Oromo Protest in Ethiopia"*. The data pertaining to the 1960s students' movement is mostly obtained from secondary data sources and is supplemented by additional voices of movement actors from the 1960s through key informant interviews.

This article utilized a comparative case study approach providing historical explanations to understand the organization, framing and leadership structure of the 2015 Oromo protests and the 1960s students' movement. The comparative case study approach helps the analysis of trends, differences and shared characteristics of cases and helps examine claims based on human experiences within its socio-historic context, taking into account the changing political contexts, contesting perceptions and interpretations of events (Bhattacherjee 2012; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012; Stake 1995).

The article further utilized an interpretive research method that infers theoretical concepts of social movements to understand the organization, leadership and mobilization tactics of the selected cases and if there were efforts made to advance human rights and democracy by key movement actors (Bhattacherjee 2012; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012; Stake 1995). The research design facilitated the interpretation of experiences and values of key movement actors and derived a comprehensive and contextualized understanding of social movements in Ethiopia.

Different data collection tools were utilized during the course of the study that led to this publication. Interviews and focus group discussions regarding the 2015 Oromo protest were conducted with informants during extensive fieldwork from November 03, 2020, to August 31, 2021. Key informants were purposively selected based on their active stake in the 2015 Oromo protest as leaders, activists, bloggers, academics, journalists, diaspora members and party cadres. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 61 respondents to obtain firsthand information about the background, objectives, organizational and leadership structure, key actors, and movement framings and strategies of the selected movements. Purposively recruited individuals (i.e., farmers, civil servants, traders, university students, teachers, religious leaders, casual workers, and unemployed youth) who participated at least in one of the protest rallies during the Oromo protest joined focus group discussions. Eight focus group discussions were organized, each comprising of 5 to 7 people in which a total number of 44 participants took part.

In order to supplement secondary data regarding the 1960s students' movement, key informant interviews were conducted in October 2021 with informants who had first-hand experience. Five purposively selected informants were interviewed on various themes covering a wide range of issues such as the characteristics of the students' movements, the involvement of the youth within Ethiopia and the diaspora, the movement organization and leadership structure. Furthermore, this article inferred to data obtained during a national public dialogue forum held in September 2020[2] on social movements, human rights and democracy. As part of ethical considerations, informed consent was secured from informants and anonymity was granted through the use of pseudonyms during the write-up process of this article.

[2]Center for Human Rights organized the dialogue forum on 21 and 22 September 2020 at Sarem Hotel, Addis Ababa.

4. Juxtaposing the 2015 Oromo Protest and the 1960s Students' Movement

The 2015 Oromo protest was initially organized by young educated Oromo youth who call themselves "the *Qubee* Generation" (Kelbesa[3] July 16, 2021; Jigsa[4] February 16, 2021). As the protest progressed, people with diverse social backgrounds, dominantly young people, who are generally known as *Qeerroo*[5] joined the movement. The Oromo diaspora community and the ruling party cadres, known as Team Lemma, later joined the movement leadership.

This article asserts that the Oromo movement reached its climax in 2015, passing through different movement episodes. The November 12 2015, demonstration in Ginchi, a small town 80 kilometres away from Addis Ababa, is the marking date of the 2015 Oromo protest (Misebratu, 2020; Wilson et al. 2021). The triggering factor to the 2015 Oromo protest was the Addis Ababa and Surrounding Oromia Special Zone Integrated Development Plan, known as "the master plan". The master plan aimed at expanding Addis Ababa onto Oromia special zone towns by 1.5 million hectares and implementing integrated development projects in surrounding areas (Mebratu 2020). Following the announcement of the master plan on April 20 2014, popular protest rallies were held in Ambo, Nekemte, Jimma, and Meda Welabu. In January 2016, the government cancelled the Addis Ababa Master Plan, yet the protest continued embracing popular demand for democracy, fair distribution of wealth and political power spreading to other regional states. Protest demonstrations in the Amhara region on July 31, 2016, depicted widespread discontent against the ruling party while the Grand Oromia Protest Rally in August 2016 voiced the deep-seated grievances of the Oromo people through protest demonstrations within Ethiopia and in the diaspora.

The *Irreecha* stamped on October 02, 2016, instigated widespread anger throughout Oromia and Amhara that changed the trajectory of the 2015 Oromo protest into a revolution. Protest demonstrations in many parts of the Oromia and Amhara regions turned violent. The protesters burned factories

[3] Kelbesa, protest leader and activist, Interview with the author, July 16, 2021
[4], Jigsa, diaspora activist, virtual interview with the author, February 16, 2021
[5] "Qeerroo" literally refers to an unmarried young person. It can also mean simply a young person in Afan Oromo. Qeerroo: A regimented organization or a spontaneous movement? - Ethiopia Insight (ethiopia-insight.com)

and government properties[6] as the violent protest rallies intensified in October 2016. The government openly declared a state of emergency, acknowledging that the situation endangered the lives and properties of citizens in the country.[7] The political actions aimed at responding to the protesters' demand, including the release of political prisoners coupled with the State of emergencies, did not help curb the mass protests in Oromia and Amhara regional states. Thus, Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn resigned from office On February 16 2018, claiming that his action would help guarantee national peace dialogue in the country[8].

The exact time of the start of the 1960s students' movement is arguable. Some people claim that the marking date for the start of the Ethiopian students' movement is the December 1960 coup d'etat against the emperor staged by educated military personnel and civilians (Legesse 1979). Sebhat[9] and Gemechis[10] argued that the intense protest against a fashion show organized by the University Women's Club in March 1968 marked the start of the Ethiopian students' movement. According to Sebhat, the March 1968 protest rallies were instead by primary and high school students who applied to join the National Union of Ethiopian University Students (NUEUS). The dean of university students rejected the membership application by primary and high school students on the basis that the union was only university students, which led to a protest rally later joined by university students. The primary and high school students' rally was also mentioned as a triggering factor of the 1960s students' movement by Legesse (1979). According to Werede,[11] the 1973 Wollo famine was the immediate triggering factor to the 1960s Ethiopian students' movement. Some students returned from Wollo visit with photographs and organized exhibitions to raise funds for the people in need. In April 1973, a police crackdown on students' meetings that was called to discuss the famine caused the death of university and high school students.

[6] Ethiopian protests descend into violence – The Ethiopian Satellite Television and Radio (ESAT) (ethsat.com)
[7] The Oromo protests have changed Ethiopia | Human Rights | Al Jazeera
[8] Ethiopia prime minister Hailemariam Desalegn resigns | News | Al Jazeera Accessed on October 17, 2021.
[9] Sebhat, former students' movement participant, interview with the author, August 05, 2021.
[10] Gemechis, a university student during the imperial regime, participated in protest rallies in the 1960s, interview with the author, June 10, 2021.
[11] Werede is among the key actors of the 1960s students' movement. He led the Alemaya students' union and later joined the leadership committee of the Ethiopian Student Federations in Europe and North America (ESFENA). Interview with the author, October 28, 2021.

This article confirms that the Ethiopian students' movement flared up in February 1974 as university students came out on the streets with the slogan "Land to the tiller" to declare their commitment to radical social change and eliminate the land-owning class (Yemane-ab 2016; Solomon 2019). Students demanded the resignation of the then Education Minister Akalework Habtewold, an additional budget for the education system, and a budget reduction in government officials' salaries and travel expenses in March 1969 (Legesse 1979).

Similar to the 2015 Oromo protest, the 1960s Ethiopian Students' Movement was organized by educated youth. It was a class struggle against the land-owning class as an approach to demand structural political change and equality in Ethiopia. Different mobilization episodes contributed to the formation of the students' movement. The presence of African students through the 1958 Accra Conference of Independent African States, where the Imperial regime granted scholarships, opened the door for Ethiopian youth better to understand their country's economic and political challenges (Solomon 2019; Legesse 1979). The Ethiopian University Service (EUS), which made it mandatory for students to serve one year in the provinces, created opportunities for young Ethiopians to realize the economic and political burden of the public at large (Legesse 1979). Additionally, students used the university service program to introduce the Ethiopian Students' Movement to their supporters in the provinces. The arrival of U.S. Peace Corps volunteers in many Ethiopian schools facilitated discussions about the values of freedom of expression and its coronary rights, the importance of forming political parties and political debates among Ethiopian students (Solomon 2019; Legesse 1979).

The students' movement did not have a solid representative body to negotiate its demands and save it from internal division and political sabotage. Although the university students started the movement, urban workers, educated elites and farmers were also actor players (Bahru Zewde 2010; Yemane-ab 2016). The students' movement utilized protest rallies, school boycotts, and campus demonstrations to advance their cause (interview with Werede and Salsawi[12] October 03, 2021). The students' movement overthrew the centuries-old Monarch on September 12, 1974, and in the form of Derg, abolished the private land-owning class and nationalized land ownership (Yemane-ab 2016). However, in 1976, Ethiopia was submerged with political violence widely

[12] Salsawi, students' movement member, interview with the author, October 03, 2021

known as "The Red Terror", a violent contestation among key movement actors over the ownership and agenda of the students' movement (Yemane-ab 2016; Abbink 2015).

According to Sebhat and Gemechis, the students' movement failed to sustain itself by formalizing its organizational structure into a political party or a civic organization to avert tyranny and civil wars. However, its agenda continued to be shared by succeeding political parties and movements. The analysis of empirical data for this article further shows that the 1960s students' movement served as a ferment for the succeeding social movements and armed struggles in the country (Ketim[13] July 22, 2021; Sebhat August 05, 2021). In summary, the 1960s students' movement and the 2015 Oromo protest were popular movements that appeared to be well-coordinated in mobilizing the mass and challenging the political structure they resisted in their respective eras. The selected movements had common characteristics in terms of their influence, inspirations, diversity of participants, organization and leadership. These shared features are used to examine the role of youth-led social movements in ensuring the rule of law, human rights and democratic elections in Ethiopia's context.

5. Reflections on the 2015 Oromo Protest and the 1960s Students Movement as Youth-Led Social Movements

This section of the article discusses empirical data regarding the role of youth in organizing and leading social movements in the context where draconian regimes suppressed political dissent. It does so by analyzing the selected movements based on the theories of collective identity, movement framings, organizational structure, and resource mobilization to understand the effect of youth social identity in creating a transboundary connection that might have influenced the course and results of social movements in Ethiopia.

Educated Youth as Key Movement Actors

This article challenges the dominant discourse that portrays the youth as politically disengaged members of society:

[13] Ketim Oromo activist, interview with the author, July 22, 2021.

> "Young people are less concerned with politics, less politically knowledgeable, do not participate in social or political activities, are more apathetic, and have low levels of political interest*"* (Quintelier 2007, 165).

Unlike Quintelier's (2007) claim, the experiences from the 2015 Oromo protest and the1960s students' movement portrays active participation of the youth in Ethiopia's political upheaval. The youth in Ethiopia appeared to utilize universities as safe spaces to engage in the political affairs of their country and mobilize their peers. Even though key movement actors in the selected movements cherished their social identity as young educated elites, they have also managed to establish a broader collective movement identity that embraced members and supporters from diverse walks of life. The 1960s students' movement established collective identity based on social class, while the 2015 Oromo protest employed the longstanding ethnic identity questions of the Oromo people to galvanize mass support. The 1960s students' movement advocated for equal treatment of citizens and to end the tyranny of the ruling class, which was dominated by a small segment of the society. As a class mobilization, the students' movement established networks between socially diversified groups such as the students, educated elite, urban working class, and farmers to achieve its causes. According to Werede, the issue of ethnic identity was discussed in the early times of university students' assemblies. These discussions might have also influenced how various political and armed groups framed the 'national question' in the early 1960s and 1970s (ibid).

Nonetheless, the students' debate on the national question was interrupted due to heavy crackdowns against students' associations and the killing of Tilahun Gizaw, one of the student movement leaders (ibid). It should also be noted that the 1960s students' movement emboldened the issue of national identity that was raised in the mid-1960s in Eritrea, Balle, Ogaden and Sidamo within the scope of nation-state building. Hence, it can be argued that the 1960s students' movement contributed to the framing of the Oromo ethnic identity as a movement agenda during the 2015 popular uprisings.

The 2015 Oromo protest echoed the notion of a collective reconstruction of identity and consciousness-raising discussed by Melucci (1996). The historical background analysis of the Oromo resistance depicted the emboldened Oromo identity, *Oromumma*, which influenced members' self-consciousness about

their common values and shared goals. Based on data collected, it can be argued that *Oromumma*- Oromoness started to revive during the early 1970s in response to the injustice Oromos encountered. Thus, the issue of identity was integrated into the organization of the 2015 Oromo protest, tacitly and overtly aiming to reclaim an equal share of resources and political representation within the Ethiopian State, situating the demand to make Afan Oromo one of the official languages of the country at the center.

The demand for language rights was guided by the desire of the 2015 protest to promote equal participation of the Oromo people in the Ethiopian State's political, social, economic, and cultural affairs. More so, the demand for the recognition of Afan Oromo as an official language along with Amharic was a profound move to symbolize the "one-ness" of geographically dispersed Oromo people embedded within the shared value of "*Orommuummaa*" that reflects the collective identity (interview with Nahim[14] and Kitata[15]). On the one hand, the ability to articulate and act towards the movement objectives carrying the language agenda was framed by key actors to embrace Oromoness. On the other hand, protesters' demand for Afan Oromo to be considered as an official language in the federal structure can be understood through the constructionist perspective. The constructionist perspective claims that collective identities ascend within an interactive environment where power relationships legitimize, resist and project collective identities (Della Porata 2006). In this regard, the 2015 Oromo protest was about legitimizing Afan Oromo as a federal working language, a political demand from the dominant party state, while resistance and projecting Afan Oromo as a symbol of Oromoness is a tactic to valorize the language within the broader Ethiopian society.

> "One thing TPLF did us good is making Afan Oromo an instructional language in primary schools. We are the *Qubee* generation. That was what enabled us to discuss societal grievances freely; for sure, I know my fellow *Qubee* generation feels the same about the cause of the movement" (Koket[16])

The above quote from one of *Qaarree* leaders (female movement leader) conforms to Tarrow's assertion that language facilitates trust among

[14] Nahim, university lecturer and protest leader, interview with the author, November 14, 2020.
[15] Kitata, university lecturer and activist, interview with the author, December 13, 2020.
[16] Koket, Qaarree Finfine, interview with the author, July 16, 2021.

movement actors. What is not captured by the broader literature is the context in which movements that framed language rights as an agenda in the postmodern era potentially form an exclusive identity within the broader collective identity. In the case of the 2015 Oromo protest, the issue of language was the shared goal among the mass public, but the ability to speak, write and read Afan Oromo fluently created a distinct group within the Oromo community, which is called "the *Qubee* Generation", who fearlessly spearheaded the protests. Data from the field shows that most active movement members, both online and offline were renowned as "the *Qubee* Generation" – young people taught in Afan Oromo during their junior and secondary schools. Thus, the primary communication language of the protest was Afan Oromo, although Amharic and English were used to broaden the reach of potential supporters and sympathizers of the 2015 Oromo protest. In the 2015 Oromo protest, language served a multirole. Speaking, writing and reading Afan Oromo in Latin alphabet was an identity, a communication tool to advance the movement agenda and a human rights quest shared by movement members.

Youth as Agents of Change: Organizational Structure and Leadership

This article confirms that educated youth, particularly university students in their respective periods, initially organized both movements and were later joined by other segments of society. However, the article contends that the 2015 Oromo protest and the 1960s students' movement followed different organization, leadership structures, and communication tactics despite the active involvement of the Ethiopian diaspora. i

Prior studies argued that the 2015 Oromo protest lacks visible organizational structure and leadership, while others asserted that the movement has a formal organizational structure with identifiable leaders (Ostebo 2020; Mosisa 2020; Mebratu 2020). This article argues that the lack of visible organizational structure and leadership is one of the features of the 2015 Oromo struggle and the ongoing protests in Ethiopia. Among issues that struck heated debate during the national policy dialogue forum in September 2020 was the organizational and leadership structure of the 2015 Oromo protest. The OLF and the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) representatives claimed to have led the organization of the 2015 Oromo protest. Ostebo (2020) and Mosisa (2020) agreed that the 2015 Oromo protest had a leader. However, their difference is regarding the structure of the 2015 Oromo protest, which Ostebo (2020) believes is informal, while Mosisa (2020) is confident that the movement has a

viable and robust organizational structure. Empirical data of this study shows that the 2015 Oromo protest had no individual leaders. Instead, the protest had an informal networked organizational structure segmented by four leadership groups: *Qeerroo*, local urban digital activists, the diaspora, and Team Lemma. Even though they cannot be counted as part of the leadership structure, the indirect participation of individuals with financial resources, human rights awareness and connections with international organizations was vital in sustaining the Oromo movement. Fligstein and McAdam (2019) called these individuals indirect activists who can have vertical and horizontal approaches to influence the scale shift and diffusion of social movements. According to key informants of this study, the support of indirect activists during the protest goes beyond mere protest sponsorship. Instead, it includes anchoring the harmony between the online and offline protesters (Sebsebe[17] November 03, 2020).

Study informants highlighted that *Qeerroo Bilisummaa Oromoo* (QBO), translated as "Youth for Oromo freedom", gave birth to "*Qeerroo*". QBO has a formal organizational structure with departments to coordinate its movement activities, including political affairs, foreign relations, income administration, military, and art departments. This is in line with Mosisa Aga's (2020) claim that *Qeerroo Bilisummaa Oromoo* (QBO) emerged in April 2011 as the Oromo Students Movement (OSM) transformed itself into a formal Oromo movement organization. According to informants, Oromo university students established the QBO, but it also embraced young people from all walks of life that earned them the name "*Qeerroo*". The 2015 Oromo protest is known as the *Qerroo* movement, to acknowledge the role of young people in the protests, but not to overshadow the fact that the whole society protested against repression (ibid). The QBO led university strikes and on-the-road movements since its formation in 2011 and as the protests intensified in 2015 (interview with Sebsebe and Ibrahim[18] November 15, 2020).

Together with *Qeerroo*, the local Oromo activists were vigorously campaigning online for the cause of the Oromo movement, some openly and some with pseudonyms. Study data shows that many local Oromo activists were either members or supporters of the OSM during their university and

[17] Sebsebe, diaspora returnee and protest leader, interview with the author, November 03, 2020.
[18] Ibrahim, protest leader and former OPDO cadre, interview with the author, November 15, 2020.

high school time. Thus, the local activists have a strong relationship based on trust with *Qeerroo* leaders operating in the Oromia region. The local activists are primarily urban dwellers with better Internet access and educational background, and they were in a better position to recruit other educated urban-based Oromo elites to join the movement. Empirical findings highlighted that the urban-based local activists do not identify themselves with a specific name and attribution, yet some key informants associate their role with that of *Qeerroo*. Hence, it can be argued that the 2015 Oromo protest emboldened the role of youth in the organization and leadership of the movement, despite the involvement of other actors in the later stage. In light of this, the educated youth appeared to have primary communication with the Oromo diaspora.

The Ethiopian diaspora community used human and democratic rights to call for international support and make the movement a transnational contention (Seifu, 2019; Arora, 2018). Study informants described that there had been a strong relationship between the diaspora activists and local *Qeerroo* leaders guided by mutual trust and shared identity to organize the 2015 Oromo protest. This is because of the shared identity and experience between the educated youth in Ethiopia, the *Qubee* Generation, and the Oromo diaspora. Key informants of this article stressed that the Oromo diaspora had not lost contact with the everyday struggle of their people in their homeland. Therefore, it was easy for the diaspora activists to position themselves in the movement leadership organization generating movement resources such as finance, social media engagement, diasporic media, easy access to the international human rights organizations and the influence of western countries. However, the local youth appeared to be steering the decision-making wheel as any political decision and statements were issued in their movement name as *Qeerroo*. Oromo activists brought up various socio-cultural narratives that they think could highlight their political cause on the Internet and traditional media aiming to attract international media coverage (interview with Kelbesa and Sebsebe).

There are different stories about why the OPDO joined the 2015 Oromo protest leadership structure. The common narrative why Team Lemma supported the 2015 Oromo protest is the conducive internal political environment swinging the EPRDF member organizations to balance power within the coalition (Abdulhakim[19] November 06, 2020). Some informants believed that the OPDO faction was a group of young leaders who shared the

[19] Abdulhakim, OPDO cadre, protest leader, interview with the author, November 06, 2020.

experience and the identity of the Oromo youth (Sifan[20] December 09, 2020; Robsan[21] July 16, 2021). Most of them are the products of the new education system and are the *Qubee* generation. They experienced incarceration, exclusion and human rights violations similar to other youth leaders and were very keen to support the protest (ibid). Some informants believed that the growing tension of the protest forced the OPDO faction to sustain its political power by responding to the popular demands before the movement washed them away (Ebsa[22] May 04, 2021; Wagari[23] November 01, 2020). Other interviewees emphasized that the 2015 Oromo protest actors pressurized Team Lemma to ally with the people (Kitata December 13, 2020; Kooluu[24] January 29, 2021). The OPDO young leaders, widely known as the "Team Lemma", started to respond to the needs of the Oromo people and eventually picked the issue to show their allegiance (ibid). On November 30, 2015, the Speaker of the Oromia Regional Assembly, Lemma Megersa, delivered a public speech in Burayu[25]. As the protest intensified, Team Lemma started to speak protesters' language. In 2016, young members of *Caffee* Oromia expressed their support for the protest against the master plan.[26] The assertions by Lemma Megersa and Takele Uma during that time were an indication for movement actors that the OPDO, as a regional ruling party, is liberating itself, and some "young" members are becoming the Oromo movement supporters if not actors (Dabesa[27] November 15, 2020; Bedaso [28]18/07/2021).

The research findings show that the 2015 Oromo protest had a multilevel informal organizational structure with a segmented character, providing an opportunity for the movement to mobilize the mass online and offline. Unlike other social movements with an informal organizational structure, the 2015 Oromo protest was an organization with segmented groups, i.e., the local activists, the diaspora, *Qeerroo* and the Team Lemma, which played an essential role in forming and sustaining a hybrid movement structure where

[20] Sifan, activist, international nongovernmental sector, interview with the author, December 09, 2020.
[21] Robsan, protest leader and activist, interview with the author, July 16, 2021.
[22] Ebsa, police officer, interview with the author, May 04, 2021.
[23] Wagari, farmer, focus group discussion, Sululta, November 01, 2020.
[24] Kooluu, Qeerroo, civil servant, interview with the author, January 29, 2021.
[25] No name, no date. https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/ethiopia/lemma.htm Accessed on July 01, 2021.
[26] Oromia Regional Council.
[27] Dabesa, blogger and activist, interview with the author, November 15, 2020.
[28] Bedaso, blogger and Activist, interview with the author, July 18, 2021.

the Internet served as a safe site of resistance and communication platform (interview with Bedaso, Kelbesa and Kooluu). Based on data for this article, each cluster can be considered an independent movement actor with a significant degree of liberty to initiate protest events linked at the national, regional and transnational levels to encourage continuous individual member participation online and on the road. Similar to what Gale (1986) and Tilly (2004) described, the organizational structure of the 2015 Oromo protest rejected centralized, top-down command and control in favour of participatory and democratic movement structure. It has also established a centralized communication structure aiming to link leadership across the groups and mitigate the ruling party's counter-framing of the movement agenda..

The question "who were the key actors that played a significant role during the 2015 protest?" often leads to an abrupt silence during interviews and focus group discussions and takes courage of a participant to respond "*Hin beekaman*" to say "no one knows them". Data analysis shows that such repeated responses resulted from the previous experience of the crackdown, mass arrest and killings of movement members so that respondents are still keen to protect their comrades and leaders from unforeseen attacks (interview with Kelbesa and Sebsebe).

The common narrative for the blurry image of the leadership structure of the 2015 Oromo protest was its peculiar organization influenced by the political context and the fast expansion of the Internet in Ethiopia. It is also worth considering Asafa's (2020) claim about the influence of the Oromo traditional self-rule approach that promotes equal participation, liberty and trust among movement actors. Data from the field shows that respondents appeared to claim ownership of the movement and consider themselves responsible for upholding the causes of the protest, which implies the practice of equal participation and the shared responsibility of the Oromo traditional self-rule within the movement structure. Gemechu is a hotel receptionist in Alem Gena town; he asserted:

> "I am the leader. I believe I have contributed my share to the success of the protest both online and offline" (Gemechu, May 10, 2021).

The above quote supports the argument of this article that the 2015 Oromo protest did not have individual leaders. The composition of leadership cluster members of the 2015 protest included people with diverse socio-economic backgrounds, education, social status, religion, age and gender, emphasizing

that there was no gender difference in the leadership structure (interview with Kelbesa July 16, 2021; Sebsebe November 03, 2020).

The 1960s students' movement was started by the University Students Union of Addis Ababa (USUAA), the only organized group against the Imperial regime (Solomon 2019; Legesse 1979). The USUAA was formed in 1967 and launched its famous publication "Tagel", meaning "Struggle" (ibid). The imperial regime responded by enacting a proclamation that required citizens to obtain permission from authorities to organize peaceful public demonstrations (Salsawi October 03, 2021; Legesse 1979). However, university and high school students bypassed the proclamation to hold protest rallies at different times and places. The 1960s students' movement actors continued to organize protest demonstrations in-country and abroad; however, diaspora students in Europe and the USA seemed to influence mobilization activities. The Ethiopian student federations in Europe and North America actively communicated with the 1970s students' movement actors in Ethiopia, mobilized necessary resources, and set the agenda for political change and social equality (interview with Werede and Sebhat). As a result, students managed to link their movement agenda, "Land to the Tiller", and the country's rampant social injustice, class contradictions, and poverty to call for mass support (Solomon 2019; Yemane-ab, 2016). According to informants, the secret visit of a group of university students to the Imperial's rehabilitation center for beggars and destitute people in Addis Ababa influenced the formalization process of the University Students Union of Addis Ababa (USUAA) (interview with Werede and Sebhat August 05, 2021).

In 1966, the students issued a statement highlighting that poverty is not a crime and that the rehabilitation center was a concentration camp. The statement further indicated the return of students' movement from overseas to Ethiopia (Legesse 1979). The continued protests in Ethiopia started to embrace high school students, teachers, taxi drivers and other segments of the society. Study data shows that the 1960s students' movement did not have a formal leadership structure to negotiate its demands and save it from internal division and political sabotage. However, it produced educated elite leadership through time but was forced to operate in clandestine to minimize repressions, killings and crackdowns (interview with Werede). The gradual emergence of students' movement leaders confirmed the assertion that social movements may emerge without formal and identified leadership that can provide strategic guidance and communication structure (Polletta and Jasper, 2001; Gregory

and Miller 1998). The 1960s students' movement lacked mutual trust among its leadership, adequate organizational resources and structure to utilize the political context to its formalization. As a result, junior military officers – the Derg, hijacked the revolution and killed prominent movement leaders, while those who escaped the government's death squad fled the country, abandoning their struggle for democracy and human rights (Yemane-ab 2016; Andargachew 2014).

The Role of Youth in Movement Framing

The framing of the students' movement revolved around land reform, democracy and equal treatment of all citizens regardless of their social status. Although the students had a domestic revolutionary agenda, the global Marxist-Leninist ideology influenced the movement that attracted urban workers and farmers who echoed their grievances against the monarchy. According to Legesse (1979), the immediate demands of the 1960s movement were often related to the increased fuel price. However, key informants pointed out that the curriculum change in schools and low salary pay to teachers and civil servants aggravated the deep-seated grievances of the public (interview with Salsawi and Sebhat). The 1960s students' movement actors used their flagship agenda, "Land to the Tiller" to demand broader political and social changes that mobilized citizens beyond their ethnic, class, and religious divides. The students' movement achieved its underlying objective of overthrowing the monarchy. However, the actual implementation of the land allocation and administration under the Derg regime created an impression that people in the South and Southwestern parts of Ethiopia continued to be excluded from equally benefiting from the land reform process (Ketim July 22, 2021).

Students boldly demanded the establishment of a people's government and chanted slogan, "We want Democracy" reflecting the public demand for democracy (Werede 28/10/2021; Legesse 1979). Furthermore, the students' movement inspired the political engagement of citizens and confronted the Imperial State, demanding the establishment of a popular government with social and economic equality, implying the need for democracy and recognition of human rights (Werede 28/10/2021). The new generation of Oromos (the *Qubee* generation) utilized new movement resources, organizational skills, capacity, and campaigning strategy supported by digital technologies to reframe the longstanding demands of the Oromo people. The *Qubee* generation changed the 1970s movement agenda of Oromos from

establishing free Oromia into a case of self-determination and power-sharing within the multicultural Ethiopian State. Therefore, the messages were directed to reflect the movement's commitment to ensuring equal distribution of political power and national resources among all ethnic groups (interview with Jigsa and Ketim).

The 2015 protest against land grabbing and the eviction of Oromo farmers from their ancestral land was not just a demand for the protection of peoples' economic rights. "It was all about *Baattoo*; the mother earth that carries us all as Oromos" (Dibaba[29] January 18, 2021). Dibaba's expression relates to what Gemetchu (2005, 68-79) called the "Oromo worldview" that explains, among other religious and philosophical worldviews, how Oromos perceive land. For Oromos, land is not just an economic commodity. It is instead the core of their existence and realm. Hence, the right to land administration has been their main movement agenda since the 1960s, intertwined with identity questions calling for collective action.

Data analysis highlighted the occurrences of irregularities in terms of land administration and appropriation in Oromia region. According to key informants, the issue of land is often politicized, curtailing equal access to natural resources and the right to property in the Oromia region. There has been corruption by state officials and party cadres who were openly selling, endowing and exchanging plots of land throughout Oromia.[30] Additionally, the federal government was directly involved without the local communities' will and full participation in distributing land to foreign investors. Therefore, land administration rights and Oromia's regional territory within the federal structure arose as a significant concern igniting the 2015 Oromo protest.

The Oromo people describe the value of land in their identity through the saying "*Lafti lafe kenyaa*", loosely translated as "Land is our bone" (interview with Sifan, Nahim and Bedaso). "*Lafti lafe kenyaa*" implies that land among the Oromo community is central to their livelihood. The following assertion from a key informant sheds light on how the notion of *Lafti lafe kenyaa* reinforced freedom from eviction as one of the 2015 Oromo movement flagship agendas.

[29] Dibaba, self-employed, focus group discussion, Lege Tafo, January 18, 2021
[30]The Guardian, January 18, 2016. In Ethiopia, anger over corruption and farmland development runs deep | Governance | The Guardian Accessed on October 23, 2020.

> "*Lafti lafee keenya* was among the important messages framed by movement leaders. It has the element of 'Land to the Tiller' slogan of the 1974 students' revolution, but then again, *Lafti lafee keenya* resonates to the understanding of the Oromo people – land is our bone - the core of our existence" (Bedaso).

Empirical data from fieldwork confirmed that the Oromo historical questions about the land use right and freedom from eviction were intertwined with the collective identity of the Oromos linking key movement actors and the public at large to establish collective action. The issue of the master plan was beyond the issue of land rights and economic benefits for the Oromo people. This article further elucidated that the land issue relates to identity and belongingness and that the 2015 Oromo protesters claimed autochthony, connectedness to the land they possess by virtue of birth.

The 2015 Oromo protest framings reflected the core demands of the Oromo people ever since the 1960s. The objectives and main agendas were framed through consecutive dialogue between the diaspora activists and movement actors on the ground (interview with Kelbesa; and Robsan). The claim for "*Abbaa biyyummaa*", roughly translated as "country ownership", was repeatedly mentioned during focus group discussions. From the essence of the phrase, "country ownership" refers to the full participation and representation of the Oromo people within the State (Sifan December 09, 2020; Terfasa[31] January 20, 2021). Conversely, key informants asserted that the ultimate objective of the 2015 Oromo protest was to ensure self-determination, the rule of law and democracy (ibid). However, the notion of self-determination seems to be contested among key movement actors as some claimed that the movement failed to achieve its primary objective of establishing an independent democratic Oromia state.

Based on empirical data, it can be argued that the framing of the 2015 Oromo protest "*Abbaa biyyummaa*" (country ownership) challenged the longstanding agenda of the OLF, "*Hiree Murteeffannaa*" (secession) and that the new generation of Oromos moved away from the secessionist agenda and promoted a federalist state (ibid). In contrast, others asserted that the movement aimed to reestablish a democratic Oromia state within the multicultural national context. Hence, the long-term objective of the 2015 Oromo protest was to establish a multicultural democratic state of Ethiopia by primarily addressing

[31] Terfasa, Qeerroo leader, Pastor, January 20, 2021.

the longstanding Oromo demands, i.e., land ownership, the right to language and equal distribution of national resources and political power.

Political Opportunities as Organizational Resources

The favourable conditions supporting the emergence of social movements are considered political opportunities where social movement actors confront identified opponents (McAdam et al. 2001). As such, movement framing is all about the ability of actors to state the problem in a manner that resonates with the longstanding demands of their social base and garners mass support. According to McAdam et al. (2001), effective use of political opportunities could result in the diffusion and upward-scale shift of social movement by embracing new actors, interests and values into the movement structure and agenda. In this regard, the political opportunities utilized by the two movements were different. A year earlier, in the 1960s movement, students learned about the Wollo famine that the government was not responding to and used it as a political opportunity to call for collective action. Students protested boycotting classes repeatedly, but their demand was met with a fierce crackdown. As time passed, students intensified the protest, adding a request for the university students' unions' reinstatement and the establishment of peoples' government through democratic elections. Initially, the students' movement was steered from abroad when the Ethiopian Students Union in Europe and North America were established in 1960. The Ethiopian students' unions abroad started to protest against the Ethiopian empire right after its establishment. Students in the diaspora organized protest rallies in the United States, Germany, Russia, and other parts of Europe (Solomon 2019). The Ethiopian student diaspora who participated in the 1960s movement framed messages and communicated with members in their homeland through printed leaflets and letters. According to key informants, the socialist ideology of the students' movement was guided by the diaspora leaders' experience in their host countries rather than the reality back home, which led the students to disagree on the interpretation of the Marxist ideology (interview with Salsawi and Sebhat). Because many of the students' movement leaders were members of the Ethiopian students' unions in Europe and USA, they brought their ideological interpretation differences to local movement actors, resulting in internal division and contestation. As a result, ideological debates were organized through publications, i.e., *Democracia*, *Forward, Challenge,* and *Combat,* printed abroad and served as platforms to voice the political concerns of students (interview with Werede). Like Tarrow (2011) proclaimed, mass

media was considered an organizational resource that facilitated the communication tactics of the 1960s students' movement.

Empirical findings portrayed that the 2015 Oromo protest leaders prudently waited for the right time to exploit the Addis Ababa master plan as a political opportunity to deliberate on the concept of free Oromia within the multicultural national context. Study informants emphasized that articulating the master plan into the notion of freedom from forceful eviction appealed to the longstanding demands of the Oromos about the right to land, language and political participation. Moreover, the weakening of the ruling party and continuous protest episodes such as the Rio Olympic incident and the Grand Oromia Rally served as political opportunities creating strategic collaboration between the Amhara and Konso protests. This article found out that the Oromo protest applied an intersectional approach to recognize and amplify Muslims, Amhara and Konso protest demands without compromising its agendas.

The 1960s students' movement and the 2015 Oromo protest shared the collective action characteristics in utilizing available media to communicate their agenda. The Ethiopian student unions based in Europe and the United States of America used the legacy media to advocate the "Land to the Tiller" motive. There were movement episodes that helped students attract international media coverage, for example, the resignation of Berhanu Dinkei, Ethiopia's Ambassador to the United States in June 1965, and students' riot following the assassination of Tilahun Gizaw in late December 1969, protest demonstrations by Ethiopian diaspora students in Russia, Europe and the USA garnered international media coverage. Also, Ethiopian diaspora students obtained the attention of international media when they protested the emperor's visit to the United States in July 1969 with the slogan "Down with Hileselassie". The New York Times and The Frankfurt newspapers widely reported the students' movement following a heavy crackdown against students' protests in Ethiopia and support rallies in Europe and USA (Legesse, 1979; Solomon 2019).

Data analysis shows that the communication power built by the diaspora community strengthened the foundation of the 2015 Oromo protest by integrating the decentralized decision-making process of different leadership clusters with a centralized communication structure. The diaspora activists positioned themselves in the movement leadership organization with their possession and capability of organizing the 2015 Oromo protest

communication structure online and through the satellite television they run (Yesuf [32] February 10, 2021; Kelbesa July 16, 2021). Any information regarding the protest was centralized to avoid the counter-framing of movement messages by the government and opposing groups (ibid). In line with movement message frames, media content production was coordinated by on-the-ground *Qeerroo* and sent to the diaspora via the Internet (ibid). There were also similarities between the two selected movements regarding message framing. A good example could be the slogan that became an emblematic chant of the Oromo protest, Down Down *Weyane* chanted during the 2016 *Irreecha* celebration,[33] which sounded equivalent to the "Down with Haile Selassie" slogan of the 1960s. The recorded video of the Down Down *Weyane* chant was sent to the diaspora via the Internet by a professional journalist working for Oromia television during that time e(interview with Jigsa and Yesuf). The Internet was not the only mobilization tool used during the 2015 protest; Qeeroo members travelled to areas where Internet and Satellite TV were not reaching to introduce the movement's objectives and organize the grassroots for the upcoming protest rallies (ibid). They also post written notice and distribute leaflets in marketplaces and community gatherings. The existing one-to-five networks established by the ruling party to promote deep participatory democracy were used by *Qeerroo* to mobilize the mass. Empirical data further shows that local authorities collaborated and provided protection for *Qeerroo* to operate safely within the community (ibid).

The 1960s students' movement was dominantly mobilized by diaspora students with a radical stance to promote the use of violence, hoping to fasten the pace of the struggle (Raji[34] October 20, 2018). Partially, the violent characteristics of the 1960s students' movement emanated from the lack of clear organizational structure and vibrant leadership to articulate and negotiate its demands with the regime (Salsawi October 03, 2021). Consequently, the imperial regime deployed crackdowns against student protesters, forcing them to respond aggressively by destroying private and public properties. Hence,

[32] Yesuf, diaspora activist in the Oromo Protest and Dimtsachin Yisema, interview with the author, February 10, 2021.

[33] OMN: Gaafii fi Deebii dargaggoo Gammadaa Waariyoo(Down Down Woyane/TPLF/) (Sad 25,2016) - YouTube OMN interview with Gammadaa Waariyoo about the chant he led during the 2016 *Irreecha* celebration and his participation in the protests. Accessed on July 24, 2020.

[34] Raji Raga, Senior Member of OLF. 2018. Tikur Engida. In Ke Ha Eske Pe weekly radio show. Radio Interview with Elsabet Samuel and Mesay Wendimieneh. Aired October 20 2018. Fana Broadcasting. Addis Ababa, 13:30-16:00.

this article argued that the 1960s students' movement deployed violence as a strategy to sustain its movement agenda.

The 2015 Oromo protest initially adopted a nonviolent approach, although it became violent following the 2016 *Irreecha* stamped.[35] Empirical data shows that the Oromo movement actors appeared to use the word "revolution" deliberately to indicate that the previous nonviolent nature of the 2015 Oromo protest had changed to a revolution where violence was used as an option to advance the movement's cause within the restricted political sphere following the declared State of emergencies. The 2015 Oromo protest framing change as an uprising confirms that social movements use revolution as an option when the actors' relative position in the political process is threatened (Della Porta and Diani 2006). The protest trajectory to revolution was also reflected on individual social media posts encouraging protests to use violent techniques.[36] It is also worth mentioning that Jawar Mohammed admitted the challenges of organizing a nonviolent movement given the government's brutal crackdown against protesters and that he fears "armed struggle might become the permanent form of response" if the repression continues.[37]

6. Concluding Remarks: Youth-Led Movements and the Current Political Condition in Ethiopia

The selected social movements' contribution to Ethiopia's political reform processes in Ethiopia appeared multidirectional. Among the achievements of the 1960s students' movement and the 2015 Oromo protest is their role in facilitating popular participation to demand human rights and democracy protection. The movement participants and leaders perceive the 2015 Oromo protest as a struggle that led to a political solution by overthrowing the regime and replacing it with a democratic government structure. Therefore, the general perception was that the political transformation process that has been taking place would nurture the protection of human rights and democracy

[35] Ethiopian protests descend into violence – The Ethiopian Satellite Television and Radio (ESAT) (ethsat.com) Accessed on September 18, 2021.
Oromia Media Network - Posts | Facebook Accessed on September 18, 2021.
[36] The *Irreecha* celebration massacre. | Facebook A Facebook post that teaches protesters how to make and use petrol bombs during protest demonstrations. Posted on October 05, 2016. Accessed on September 21, 2021.
[37] Oromo nationalism on the rise in Ethiopia | Human Rights | Al Jazeera Protests and online activism in recent months have brought a resurgence of ethnic Oromo nationalism in Ethiopia.Wiliam Davison August 01, 2014.

through legal reforms. The 2015 Oromo protest seemed to provide a strong evidence base to build on existing local experiences and secure political commitment at the highest levels to support the political transition process by introducing democratization and improving the protection of human rights.

Conversely, the selected movements failed to formalize their organization into formal civil society organizations or political parties to halt the continued violent protests and communal conflicts. The 1960s students' movement failed to bring about a democratic government. Instead, it changed its polity level by neglecting its supporters' interests and exposing the movement to violence, which resulted in civil wars (ibid). The students' movement agenda was in some way inherited by the Derg regime, specifically the right to land. The Derg regime came to power through a mass movement that aspired for democracy and the rule of law, yet, became a tyranny triggering "The Red Terror" communal violence that saw thousands killed, tortured and exiled, and a civil war which lasted for 17 years (ibid). Conversely, Derg advanced the communist ideology by ignoring issues of interest to the protesting general public, such as the right to development, democracy, human rights, and peace (Abbink, 2015; Andargachew, 2014).

The 2015 Oromo protest continued to influence the Ethiopian political landscape. Empirical findings show informants' strong opinions about the link between the Oromo national question in the 1960s and the 2015 Oromo protest. Respondents identified the political fragmentation and disagreement on the social movement organization approach among the Oromo elites that created political stagnation. This is similar to Tarrow's (2011) argument about fragmenting movements; yet again, protest rallies that seemed partly to bear extended demands of the movement never stopped, and there are developing stories, perhaps suggesting a lingering question that may probably require further study.

The analysis of the outcomes and effects of the 2015 Oromo protest showed its contribution to the 2018 government administration change and the political reform processes. The protest achieved this because movement actors used distinct organizational and leadership structures, mobilization and communication tactics anchored by mutual trust based on shared objectives and supported by digital communication technologies. The new generations of Oromos, commonly referred the *Qubee* generations, framed the movement agenda into three pertinent themes: Land, Leadership, and Language.

One of the most important empirical findings of the 2015 Oromo protest demand for equal political participation and meaningful representation in national politics relates to how the youth as key actors framed the demand for leadership and the "timing" it became in the spotlight of the movement. Study data about key actors in the selected social movements and their discursive practices demonstrated the value of educated youth as a shared identity in movement organization and leadership structure. University students formed *Qeerroo*, and then embraced young Oromos from diverse walks of life, including urban digital activists who were primarily town dwellers with better Internet access and educational background. Many diaspora movement leaders claimed to share the lives and experiences of young people in their homeland, and their fight was to emancipate Oromos under repression. This article highlighted that the utilization of violence in both selected movements originated from movement actors ability to have more safety and control over the courses of the movement Among the significant empirical findings that proved the initial assumption of this article is that social movements in draconian states may not always choose violence as an ultimate approach to pursue change.

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