The Genesis and Trajectories of Social Movements in Ethiopia: The Case of the 2015 Oromo Protest and the 1974 Students' Movement

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Abstract

Ethiopia has experienced numerous social movements that failed to sustain its organization and ensure the emergence of a democratic government structure. The cyclical occurrences of mass protests in Ethiopia have not been examined well, as available research on the issue tends to focus on analyzing street demonstrations and the government's reaction. The underlying objective of this article is to provide insights into Ethiopia's own experience of why and how social movements form and sustain collective actions. It also scrutinizes the challenges and prospects of embracing the demand for human rights and democratic reform as organization resources during political transition periods. The study collected data from purposefully selected 42 interviewees and 48 discussants of FGDs, and document review as part of a Ph.D. project on freedom of expression and social movements. The study analyzes thematically the movement agenda, framing, organizational structure, and mobilization resources and strategies utilized by the 1974 students' movement and the 2015 Oromo protest. The article found out that the involvement of the Ethiopian diaspora, the use of violence, and the solidification of ethnic identity hindered selected movements from ensuring democratic change and the rule of law. This article highlights the need to create a state accountability system that encourages the emergence of in-country movement leaders who do not rely on the distant mobilization capacity of the Ethiopian diaspora. It also suggests continuous dialogue with the existing social movement actors to help shape the ongoing democratization process and break the recurring happenings of violent protests.

*Keywords***:** /Democratic elections/Human rights/Political transformation/Social movements/

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1. Introduction

The current government administration in Ethiopia came to power in 2018 due to the recent widespread protests. Since then, institutional, legal, and political reform processes have been taking place in the country's internal and external affairs (Melaku, Dereje, and Mamo, 2020). Several political prisoners were released, and the government appointed nonpartisan individuals to lead the Supreme Court and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (Melaku et al., 2020). The legal reform initiatives have been taken to uphold human rights and democracy and to end the 27 years of authoritarian rule (EBC, 2018). The political reform process generally aims at helping the revival of vibrant civil society organizations and political parties by institutionalizing collective actions into strong and sustainable organizations that can contribute towards the democratization process (Mebratu, 2020; Melaku et al., 2020). However, another round of protests and conflicts challenged the political reform process, mainly along ethnic lines causing the arrest of leading political figures and social movement actors, including Jawar Mohammed, Eskinder Nega, and Bekele Gerba. The postponement of the sixth national election due to the COVID-19 pandemic ended in dispute and legitimacy challenges. Tigray held its regional election in September 2020, which the federal government annulled and arguably contributed to the war between the federal government and the Tigray regional state.

The fast-paced political happenings call for a deep understanding of the movement framing alignments, leadership structure, and mobilization strategies of the past and present social movements that led to political changes in Ethiopia. Thus, the central question worth asking is: why do social movements in Ethiopia succeed or fail to sustain their organization and ensure the emergence of a democratic government structure that guarantees the rule of law and the protection of human rights? This article responds to this question by selecting two major social movements that have occurred in the past half a century, i.e., the 1974 students' movement and the 2015 Oromo protest. The selected movements help understand precursors that supported the formation and diffusion of collective actions. This article argues that the success and failure of the 1974 students' movement and the 2015 Oromo protest can be explained through the theories of (1) collective identity, (2) resource mobilization, (3) movement agenda and framings, and (4) organizational structure. The article scrutinized the support of vibrant diaspora communities, the deployment of the Internet, and the framing of human rights as movement agendas that encouraged popular participation and transnational support. It proclaims that the clandestine nature of in-country movement organizations, heavy reliance on the distant mobilization capacity of the Ethiopian diaspora, and lack of state accountability discouraged the mass from voicing their demand for democratic change, human rights, and the rule of law transparently and sustainably.

The cyclical occurrences of mass protests in Ethiopia have not been examined well, as available research on the issue tends to focus on analyzing street demonstrations and the government's reaction. To fill this research gap, this article analyzes the movement agenda, framing, organizational structure, and mobilization resources and strategies utilized by two movements: the 1974 students' movement and the 2015 Oromo protest. As such, the underlying objective of this article is to provide insights into Ethiopia's own experience of why and how social movements form and sustain collective actions.

The article begins by outlining the relationship between social movements, human rights, and democracy as movement resources and outcomes that helped form and sustain the organization of the selected movements. It then reflects on multifaceted factors shaping the success and failure of social movements in ensuring democratic change and sets the scene and brief notes on the methodology used in conducting the study. Subsequently, it discusses why the 1974 students' movement and the 2015 Oromo protest succeeded or failed to establish a democratic government structure in Ethiopia. The last part of the article suggests possible ways to encourage and sustain social movements that can influence the emergence of democratic transition in Ethiopia.

2. An Overview of Conceptual Frameworks

2.1 Social Movements, Democracy, and Human Rights

Social movements are defined by Trottier and Fuschs (2015) as "collective actions that can be motivated by political, economic or cultural goals" (p.32). Tarrow (2011), on his part, argues that social movements are better defined as "collective challenges, based on common purpose and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities" (p.9). This article perceives social movements as fairly structured organizations that require collective action of members to work together with a clear goal and specified targets articulated in social or political terms and organizational leadership (Tilly, 2004; Della Porta & Diani, 2006; Tarrow, 2011). Social movements can be categorized based on the goals they tend to promote, including cultural rights, social justice, and equal opportunities. However, not all movements are progressive, as some could be regressive in a manner that hinders the protection of human rights and the realization of democratic change (Stammers, 2003; 2015). This article examines how the 1974 students' movement and the 2015 Oromo protest were organized and framed their respective agendas and contributions to human rights and democratic change progression or regression.

Della Porta (2009) argued that the relationship between social movements and democracy is not restricted and unilateral. Progressive movements may produce desirable changes but mostly fail to achieve a deliberative participative democracy model that promotes "consensus and broad participation in democratic processes" (Della Porta, 2009, p.128). In contexts like Ethiopia, where polyarchy (a democratic institution within a political system that provides opportunities for popular participation) is not practiced, and social movements that overthrow a repressive regime often tend to replace it with another tyranny. Likewise, Tilly (2004) described democracy as a form of government and a process with a clear relationship between democracy and social movements. Social movements can have a systemic impact on the democratization process by allowing the public to demand voting and associational rights.

The 1974 students' movement and the 2015 Oromo protests can serve as practical cases to discuss how the democratic process can lead to democratization or de-democratization of a state. De-democratization occurs when social movements interrupt the work of legal and political institutions and fail to uphold democratic conceptions (Tilly, 2004). According to Stammers (2015), social movements are platforms for the emergence of different forms of democratic practices. However, their structure, which promotes direct democracy, does not encourage the emergence of representational democracy, at least in the case of Ethiopia. On the other hand, social movements offer popular space to demand democracy and the protection of human rights, as seen in the selected social movement cases for this article. Social movements will also have a positive role in the democratization process if their request for democratic change embraces the demand for human rights, increased equality, and protection for minorities (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). The overall academic debate regarding social movements and democracy might not address the Ethiopian context directly. However, the assertion that social movements may not always succeed to help establish a democratic government structure appears to fit into the realities in Ethiopia. This article provides an empirical explanation of the 1974 students' movement and the 2015 Oromo protest in promoting democratic government structure in their respective periods.

The relationship between human rights and social movements is rooted in analyzing social relations, as human rights have economic, social, and collective perspectives linked to the perceptions of "identity to ideas of the collective, as well as individual, rights" (Stammers, 2015, p.70). Social movements in the 19th century served as the source of human rights. The same pattern is observed in different contexts where elements of all generations of human rights are intertwined with movement activism to call for mass support and democratic change (Stammers, 2003). In the context of Africa, ethno-nationalists use human rights selectively to mobilize the mass "based on identity frameworks of insider and outsider" (Brandes & Engels, 2011, p.12). On the other hand, movement actors use human rights to construct and prescribe norms and values among their members (Stammers, 2003). There are also times when human rights claims are used in movements to replace an oppressive form of power with another, and hence one should not assume that incorporating human rights in movements guarantees social change and democratization. Therefore, examining how the 1974 students' movement and the 2015 Oromo protest deployed human rights as a

resource to garner global support and local participation is essential. This article scrutinizes the role of human rights in mobilizing social class and ethnic identity as collective demands, taking the experiences of the selected cases. It also builds on the academic discussions about the links between human rights, democracy, and social movements to provide insights from the Ethiopian experience.

2.2 Reflections on Multifaceted Factors Shaping the Success or Failure of Social Movements

The most common determinant factors used to analyze the success and failure of social movements in various literatures are the theories of resource mobilization, collective identity, movement framings, and organizational structure (Zald & McCarthy, 1987; Melucci, 1996; Della Porta & Diani, 2006; Brandes & Engels, 2011). This article borrows these determinants to scrutinize the 1974 students' movement and the 2015 Oromo protest. The article does not claim the selected theories explain the discussion topic comprehensively. However, these theories provide the best-supported explanation of why social movements are not sustained and transformed into formal civil society organizations and political parties to break the cyclical occurrences of violent protests. The theories help shed light on why social movements in Ethiopia succeeded or failed to influence the emergence of democratic government and the protection of human rights.

The resource mobilization theory focuses on understanding how social movements acquire and utilize human, financial, ideological, and organizational resources to achieve their goals (Zald & McCarthy, 1987). This theory helps to explain the 1974 students' movement and the 2015 Oromo protest's success to obtain movement resources and mobilizing members. Another way to understand the effects of social movements is to employ the theory of collective identity (Melucci, 1996). Social movement formation occurs when collective identities develop beyond specific events and initiatives, but identity should not be considered a requirement for collective action (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). According to Tarrow (2011), identity is at the core of nationalism, ethnicity, and religious movement organizations rather than social class. This article subscribes to the notion that social movements at times of transformation will attain their ultimate goal only if they can circumvent the focus on identity to mobilize the wider society and engage with the state as national citizens.

The theories of resource mobilization and collective identity can best explain movements when elucidated by movement framings, which reflect the advent of changing political contexts encouraging new perspectives for contentious actions that serve as the foundation of social movements (Della Porta & Diani, 2006; Tarrow, 2011). The favorable conditions supporting the emergence of social movements are considered political opportunities where social movement actors confront identified opponents. 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 garner mass support. Scholars did not exclude the use of violence to advance a shared goal, call for action, and attract media attention (Della Porta & Diani, 2006; Tarrow, 2011). However, framing violence as a tactic to advance movement agendas often results in cycles of contention by triggering "diffusion, extension, imitation, and reaction among groups" that were usually inactive and with fewer resources to organize social movements (Tarrow, 2011, p.205). Recurrent social movements are often violent, producing countermovement leading to civil war in fragile states (Della Porta, Donker, Hall, Poljarevic, & Ritter, 2017). Thus, nonviolent movements are considered "options of value and strategic choice", specifically during reform periods (Della Porta & Diani 2006, p.174). It is worth examining the movement strategies of the selected movements to understand efforts exerted to break the cyclical occurrences of mass protests by formalizing movement structures.

Movement organizations are sources of continuity to collective action. In due course, contentious collective actions and movements may develop their organizational structures to become permanent social movement organizations in the form of civil societies, non-governmental organizations, political parties, and interest groups (Brandes & Engels, 2011; Tarrow, 2011). Contentious collective actions can also transform into an informal network of social movements with no hierarchical structure, specifically when the Internet and mass media serve as organizational resources to deploy communication tactics (Della Porta & Diani, 2006; Tarrow, 2011). Some social movements may emerge without formal and identified leadership but could produce leaders who can provide strategic guidance and serve as a center of communication as the

struggle continues (Tarrow, 2011). The formal features of organizations do not necessarily determine the structural sustainability of movements. Instead, it is the interpersonal networks among movement members and leadership, capability of persuading, inspiring, and enforcing social control mechanisms on members to ensure organizational survival (Tarrow, 2011). Moreover, globalization has created transboundary political relationships that encouraged a pluralization of actors into a political system of a nation-state and transnational contention (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). As Kaplan (2008) stated, "countries that enjoy a reasonable degree of stability and the rule of law" benefit from globalization, bringing about an interdependent market economy system while fragile and transition states are losing (p.71). In countries prone to ethnic nationalism and weak political democracy, social movements often have equivalent transnational organizations overseas led by the migrant diaspora who take a radical stance in promoting conflict and violence within their homeland (Della Porta et al., 2017).

This article used the determinant factors to analyze the different degrees of success achieved by the 1974 students' movement and the 2015 Oromo protest in establishing a democratic government structure in Ethiopia. The article briefly discusses the involvement of diaspora communities in distant mobilizing resources and the deployment of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law as movement agendas to encourage popular participation and transnational support. It also scrutinizes the influence of framing violence to advance movement agendas both in the 1974 students' movement and the 2015 Oromo protest.

3. Methodology

3.1 Setting the Scene and Overview of Research Methodology

Part of the empirical basis of this article is the author's PhD dissertation titled *"Freedom of Expression and Social Movements in the Digital Era: A case study of the 2015 Oromo Protest in Ethiopia"*. Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with informants during extensive fieldwork from November 3, 2020, to August 31, 2021. Key informants were purposively selected based on their active stake in the selected social movements as leaders, activists, bloggers, academics, journalists, diaspora members, and party cadres. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 42 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 in one of the protest rallies during the past decades joined the focus group discussions. Eight focus group discussions were organized, each comprising of 5 to 7 people in which a total number of 48 participants took part. In addition, topical interviews were conducted in October 2021 to gather additional primary information regarding the 1974 students' movement. Secondary sources were collected by reviewing relevant literature, media reports, and social media posts. Tranfarability of the instrument was ensured through expert review.

The article employed a qualitative (thematic) data analysis method to respond to the viewpoints regarding why and how social movements in Ethiopia form and sustain collective actions. Qualitative data analysis helps capture the circumstances that support the formation, diffusion and sustenance of social movements in political transitions (Sloan & Quan-Haase, 2017; Tracy, 2020). Moreover, qualitative data analysis is effective in helping to examine factors that contribute to the success and failure of social movements to influence the emergence of democracy and the rule of law (ibid).

Moreover, the Ph.D. candidate (one of the authors of this article) presented a paper on the role of social movements in promoting democracy, the rule of law, and human rights during the national dialogue forum on social movements, human rights, and democracy organized by the Center for Human Rights at Addis Ababa University in September 2020. Feedbacks provided by senior political party leaders regarding the leadership structure, framing, and strategies of selected movements during the conference were used to support and validate data collected through interviews and discussions. The ethical precautions considered during the data collection and write-up of the article includes gaining informed consent and securing informants' anonymity using pseudonyms.

This article followed a comparative case study approach that helps scrutinize the similarities and differences of the selected movements in terms of their formation and sustenance. The study approach is

suitable for examining the changing political contexts that influence social movements, movement actors, and discursive strategies differently (Bhattacherjee, 2012; Tracy, 2020). Furthermore, the article employed an interpretive research method that infers theoretical concepts of social movements to understand the extent of the success the selected social movements achieved in upholding the values of human rights and democratic elections.

3.2 Brief Note on the Selection of Cases

This article purposively selected the 1974 students' movement and the 2015 Oromo protest to discuss how social movements prevail and pave the way for the democratization process in the country. There are several reasons for selecting these two cases. First, the 1974 students' movement and the 2015 Oromo protest were popular movements that appeared well-coordinated in mobilizing the mass and challenging the political structure they contend in their respective periods. Second, the selected contentions shared the collective movement characteristics regarding their impact, motivations, diversity of participants, and the degree of organization and leadership. Notwithstanding their similarities and differences, the selected movements correspond to the concepts of social movements discussed in this article. Most importantly, these movements occurred at different points in time and space. The space as a mobilization resource can be examined from the extensive utilization of the campus space during the students' movement and the online space during the 2015 Oromo protest. The selected cases link time and space to other theories of social movement organization, resulting in different experiences that help understand why social movements fail or succeed in supporting the emergence of a democratic government structure. The following part presents a brief overview of the 1974 students' movement and the 2015 Oromo protest illustrating the historical and political events that changed the trajectories of these movements.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Result from Document Review

4.1.1 The 1974 Ethiopian Students' Movement

The exact time of the start of the 1974 students' movement is arguable. According to Gebru (2009), the December 1960 coup d'état staged by the educated military personnel changed the clandestine opposition against the monarch to an overt mass-based movement. For Legesse (1979), the starting date of the revolution was the March 1968 protest rallies by primary and high school students against the dean of university students who rejected their membership in the National Union of Ethiopian University Students (NUEUS).

The 1973 Wollo famine was the immediate triggering factor for the 1974 Ethiopian students' movement (Legesse, 1979; Gebru, 2009; Bahru, 2010). Police crackdown on the students' discussion meeting about the famine led to violence and killings of students. The 1974 Ethiopian Students' Movement was organized as a class struggle against the land-owning class (which was the basis of power, inequalities, and economic stagnation) as an approach to the demand for structural political change and equality (Abbink, 2015). 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 organizing popular protests in rural and urban Ethiopia (Gebru 2009; Bahru, 2010; Abbink, 2015). Students utilized protest rallies, school boycotts, strikes, and campus demonstrations to advance their cause.

Different mobilization episodes contributed to the formation of the students' movement. The presence of African students through the Imperial scholarships in 1958 helped students understand the country's economic and political challenges (Bahru, 2010). The Ethiopian University Service (EUS), which made it mandatory for students to serve one year in the provinces, created opportunities to experience rural life and introduced the movement agenda to the provincial supporters (Bahru, 2010). Additionally, the arrival of U.S. Peace Corps volunteers facilitated discussions about the values of freedom of expression and

the importance of forming political parties among students (Legesse, 1979; Solomon, 2019). 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 (Abbink, 2015; Solomon, 2019). The students' movement toppled down the centuries-old Monarchy on September 12, 1974, and "in the form of Derg", nationalized land and abolished the private land-owning class (Abbink, 2006; 2015, p.345). However, in 1976, Ethiopia was engulfed with political violence widely known as "The Red Terror", group violence over the ownership and agenda of the students' movement (Gebru, 2009).

The 1974 students' movement served as ferment for the succeeding social movements and armed struggles (Gebru, 2009; Abbink 2015; Solomon, 2019). Hence, various collective actions inclined to civil war resulted from a wide range of frustrated expectations and the intensification of the Red Terror (Gebru, 2009). The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) chose armed struggle to advance the national identity question and overthrow the Derg regime. Over time, a new political front, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), was formed under the leadership of the TPLF, later joined by the Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Movement (EPDM). According to Aregawi (2001), the EPRDF formed the Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization to attract broader support. In 1991 the EPRDF defeated the Derg regime and came to power as the victors in the civil war. 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, but its agenda continued to be shared by succeeding political parties and movements (Abbink, 2006; Gebru, 2009; Solomon, 2019).

4.1. 2 The Oromo Protest (2015-2018)

The Oromo protest is alternatively known as the "*Qeerroo* movement". The initial reason for the 2015's Oromo protest was Addis Ababa and Surrounding Oromia Special Zone Integrated Development Plan, which was known as "the master plan". The master plan was intended to expand Addis Ababa onto Oromia special zone towns by 1.5 million hectares and to implement integrated development projects in surrounding areas. Following the announcement of the master plan on April 20, 2014, popular protest rallies were held in Ambo, Nekemte, Jimma, and Meda Welabu, led by university students. The exact time of the start of the Oromo protest is still debatable. However, various articles and news reports marked the November 12, 2015, demonstration in Ginchi, a small town 80 kilometers away from Addis Ababa, as the Oromo protest's starting place and date that brought about government administration change in 2018 (Awol, 2017; Mosisa, 2020; Ostebo, 2020). Oromo university students in Ambo, Jimma, and Nekemt towns chanted "No to Finfinne[4] Master Plan", "The prison speaks Afan Oromo, not the State", and "The land belongs to the Oromo".

Initially, young educated Oromo youth who call themselves "the Qubee Generation" organized the 2015 Oromo protest. The Oromo diaspora community and the ruling party cadres, Team Lemma, later joined the movement leadership. As the protest progressed, people from diverse backgrounds joined the movement, predominantly young people, generally known as *Qeerroo*. This article proclaims that the Oromo movement reached its climax in 2015, passing through different movement episodes. 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. In May 2016, movement leaders urged the government to postpone the annual school-leaving examination as Oromo students who had been protesting for months were not ready to sit for the exams. Days later, the national exam leaked, and copies of exams started to circulate on Facebook, forcing the government to postpone the exam, even though the protests continued.

Support rallies in the Amhara region on July 31, 2016, depicted widespread discontent against the ruling party. On August 6, 2016, the Grand Oromia Rally was held in more than 200 Oromia towns and

Addis Ababa, voicing the deep-seated grievances of the Oromo people. The Grand Rally attracted the attention of international media. On October 2, 2016, the Irreecha festival in Bishoftu started peacefully but ended with a stampede that changed the trajectory of the 2015 Oromo protest. The Irreecha stamped instigated widespread anger throughout Oromia and Amhara that turned the protest into a violent revolution, ostensibly reducing protesters' fear of brutal crackdowns. The protesters burned factories and government vehicles with exceptions like in Jimma University, where peaceful protest demonstrations and candle vigils for victims of the Irreecha stampede took place (ESAT, 2016). On October 9, 2016, the government openly declared a state of emergency, acknowledging that "the situation posed a threat against the people" (Al Jazeera, 2018). The prolonged state of emergencies and corrective actions to respond to the protesters' demand, including the release of political prisoners, did not help curb the mass protests in Oromia and Amhara regional states. On February 16, 2018, Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn announced his resignation to help ensure peace and democracy in Ethiopia.

4.2 Result from Empirical Evidence

4.2.1 The 1974 Students Movement and the 2015 Oromo Protest: Empirical Evidence

. This section discusses the formation of the selected social movements, the faced challenges, and the missed opportunities that might serve as a learning curve to the trajectory of social movements in Ethiopia. Thus, the selected movements were analyzed based on the theories of collective identity, movement framings, organizational structure, and resource mobilization.

Collective identity. The selected movements form and sustain their struggle against power and privilege utilizing collective identity. The 1974 student 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 students' movement advocated for equal treatment of citizens and ending the ruling class's tyranny dominated by a small segment of 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. The issue of ethnic identity was discussed as part of the national question agenda in the early times of university students' assemblies (personal communication with Getachew, April 4, 2021). These discussions might have also influenced how various political and armed groups framed the 'national question' in the early 1960s and 1970s.

The 1974 students' movement magnified the issue of national identity raised in the mid-1960s in Eritrea, Bale, Ogaden, and Sidamo within the scope of nation-state building. Nonetheless, the students' debate on the national question was interrupted due to a heavy crackdown against students' associations and the killing of Tilahun Gizaw, one of the student movement leaders (personal communication with Melakou, October 19, 2021). Hence, it can be suggested that the 1974 students' movement contributed to the framing of the Oromo ethnic identity into the 2015 protest agenda. "Firaol" (43 years old, civil engineer and Qeerroo member, in Burayu) said he participated in the 2015 Oromo protest because "all Oromos stood together as one to protect their identity".

The early 1970s to 1990s saw the formation of Oromo associations valorizing the Oromo ethnic identity. During this period, key movement actors were the Oromo elite, who organized themselves under the Macha-Tulama Self-Help Association, campaigning for equal participation of Oromos in state affairs and the recognition of cultural and language rights (Kejela, September 22, 2020). Study informants highlighted that the establishment of the Macha-Tulama and the Oromo Liberation Front marked the revival of the Oromo identity– Oromumma, which the two organizations used to mobilize the Oromo people against suppression and systematic land eviction (personal communication with Geleta, June 10, 2021; Biftu, July 22, 2021). Demand for the recognition of the Oromo ethnic identity shaped the 2015 Oromo protest from establishing "Free Oromia" to reclaiming equal political participation and representation within the Ethiopian State and making the Oromo language (Afan Oromo) one of the official languages of the State (personal communication with Duguma, November 7, 2020; Gadissa, July 16, 2021).

The national question raised by the students' movement as an articulation of collective identity still dominates the country's political debate highlighting the "unitarist" and "federalist" approaches to the

government structure. The unitarist view is perceived as Pan-Ethiopianism that opposes ethnic-based federalism and promotes national unity, while the federalist view is associated with the issue of ethnic secessionism (Khisa, 2019). Empirical data for this article shows that the "federalist" view abandoned secessionism as the 2015 Oromo protest started to advocate for meaningful representation and participation in the Ethiopian State. Nevertheless, the debate on "The Unitarist" and "The Federalist" views continued to cultivate further collective contentions that could be considered an extension of ideological polarization instigated by the unfinished debate of the students' movement on the national question (personal communication with Seboka, November 3, 2020; Kiya, July 18, 2021; Melakou, October 19, 2021). This article proclaims that the hardening of ethnic identity in contentions after the 2018 government administration change intensified communal conflicts and led to the November 4, 2020's war in Tigray. The solidification of ethnic identity can potentially abandon the broader quest of the mass for democratic change and the rule of law only to galvanize existing conflicts into a civil war and to promote extremism in a manner that threatens the reform process.

Movement agenda and framings. The framing of the 1974 students' movement revolved around land reform, democracy, and equal treatment of all citizens regardless of their social status. Students exploited diverse public events to frame appealing movement agendas to instigate the popular uprising. "Negussie" (72 years old, former students' movement member) recalled a fashion show organized by the University Women's Club. As he recalls, "It started peacefully until some students shouted it is a manifestation of cultural imperialism. Then, we were on the road protesting".

Empirical data supports Abbink's (2015) assertion that the 1974 Ethiopian students' movement actors succeeded to link their flagship agenda, "Land to the Tiller", and the rampant social injustice, class contradictions, and poverty in the country. 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. The immediate demands of the public were often related to the increased fuel price; however, study informants pointed out that the education curriculum change in schools and low salary pay to teachers and civil servants aggravated the deep-seated grievances of the public (personal communication with Getachew, April 4, 2021; Negussie, August 5, 2021; Melakou, October 19, 2021).

The revolution voiced bold demands for broader political and social changes that mobilized citizens beyond their ethnic, class, and religious divides. Students demanded the establishment of a peoples' government chanting the slogan "We want Democracy" that reflected the popular desire for a democratic government (personal communication with Kejela, September 22, 2020; Melakou, October 19, 2021). The movement achieved its underlying objectives of toppling down the monarchy but failed to create a democratic government. The Derg regime implemented the "Land to the Tiller" demand but the actual land allocation and administration created an impression that people in the South and Southwestern parts of Ethiopia, specifically the Oromos, continued to be excluded from equally benefiting from the land reform process (personal communication with Kejela, September 22, 2020; Biftu, July 22, 2021).

Like the 1974 students' movement, the framing of the 2015 Oromo protest considered the political and economic aspects of land administration rights. As a result, an Afan Oromo phrase, "*Lafti lafee keenya*" loosely translated as "land is our bone", became among the dominant movement messages during the 2015 protest with an element of the "Land to the Tiller" slogan of the 1974 students' revolution. "*Lafti lafee keenya*" implies that land among the Oromo community is the core of their existence, livelihood, dignity, and realm (personal communication with Kiya, July 18, 2021; Hawi, February 16, 2021). The land framing resonated with the understanding of the Oromo people about the master plan issue and encouraged them to join the 2015 protest.

The new generation of Oromos (the Qubee generation) utilized new movement resources, organizational skills, capacity, and campaigning strategy to reframe the longstanding demand of the Oromo people for self-determination. 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. "Terfa" (34 years old, Qeerroo leader) said, "the objective of the 2015 Oromo protest was to ensure that we all are equally represented within the political structure of the Ethiopian state."

The new movement framing of establishing a democratic, multicultural Ethiopian State appealed to the various ethnic groups, specifically Amhara and Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples', spreading the movement to a sizeable interregional agenda that finally changed the government (personal communication with Hawi, February 16, 2021; Biftu, July 22, 2021). The collaborative approach between the Oromo and Amhara further highlighted the demand for self-government and equal political participation as shared movement agendas of the Ethiopian people. Furthermore, the intensification of Oromo protests sustained the existing demands of the Konso and Sidama people in the Southern Nations. The collaborative effect suggests the need for concrete action to address the longstanding public demand for self-governance and the right to land administration to mitigate the recurring happenings of mass protests in Ethiopia. The shared view by key informants was that the 2015 Oromo protest could not settle for a government administration change until the longstanding issues of land administration rights, the right to language, and equal distribution of national resources and political power were granted.

Organizational structure and leadership. University students in their respective periods initially organized both movements. "Melakou" (leader of the student union in the Netherlands) proclaimed that the University Students Union of Addis Ababa (USUAA) started the students' movement against the Imperial regime. The USUAA was a formal association established in 1967, and known leaders were elected periodically to lead the students' movement at its initial stage. However, the 1974 students' movement and the 2015 Oromo protest had different organizational leadership and communication tactics. Others asserted that the students' movement did not have a formal leadership structure to negotiate its demands and save itself from an internal division and political sabotage (personal communication with Negussie, August 5, 2021; Yosef, March 6, 2021).

The USUAA organized continuous protest rallies and disseminated its agenda through its famous publication "Tagel", meaning "Struggle" (Melakou, October 19, 2020). The empire responded by enacting a proclamation to govern peaceful public demonstrations that required citizens to obtain permission from authorities (personal communication with Getachew, April 4, 2021; Yosef, March 6, 2021). However, university and high school students bypassed the proclamation to hold protest rallies at different times and places. "Melakou" (leader of the student union in the Netherlands) emphasized that the university students in Ethiopia organized and framed the movement structure, agenda, and communication tactics. Thus, the movement from within influenced the actions of diaspora students in Europe and the USA. The absence of effective communication platforms and political repression hindered fast information flow between the diaspora and in-country movement actors (personal communication with Yosef, March 6, 2021). Nevertheless, the Ethiopian student federations in Europe and North America mobilized solidarity rallies and contributed to the movement agenda through continuous debates and reflection papers.

The secret visit of a group of university students to the Imperial's rehabilitation center for beggars and destitute people in the Shola-Lamberet area of Addis Ababa could serve as an example to show the dominant role of in-country university students. The release of photographs from the Shola "concentration camp," along with a statement highlighting that poverty is not a crime, changed the trajectory of the formalization process of the USUAA (personal communication with Negussie, August 5, 2021; Melakou, October 19, 2021). Since then, the continued protests embraced high school students, teachers, taxi drivers, and other segments of society. This finding supports Abbink's (2015) claim that the students' movement produced educated leadership through time but was forced to operate clandestine to minimize repressions, killings, and crackdowns. The 1974 students' movement lacked mutual trust among its leadership, adequate organizational resources, and visible organizational structure to utilize the conducive political context to help establish a democratic government. As a result, the Derg hijacked the revolution and killed prominent movement leaders and their dream for social justice and democracy.

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. The organizational structure of the Oromo protest is debatable. Some argued that the movement lacks visible organizational structure and leadership, while others asserted that the 2015 Oromo protest has a formal organizational structure with identifiable leaders (Ostebo, 2020; Mosisa, 2020; Mebratu, 2020). 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 2015 Oromo protest. Ostebo (2020) and Mosisa (2020) agreed that the Oromo protest had a leader. However, their difference is regarding the structure of the 2015's Oromo protest, which Ostebo (2020) believes is informal, while Mosisa (2020) is confident that the movement has a viable and robust organizational structure. This article contends that the 2015's Oromo protest had an informal networked organizational structure segmented by four different leadership groups than individual leaders: *Qeerroo*, local urban digital activists, the diaspora, and Team Lemma.

The first leadership group *Qeerroo Bilisummaa Oromoo (QBO),* translated as "Youth for Oromo freedom", emerged in April 2011 with a formal organizational structure. QBO has departments to coordinate movement activities, including its political affairs, foreign relations, income administration, military, and arts. The QBO led university strikes and on-the-road movements since its formation. Although Oromo university students established the QBO, it embraced people from all walks of life as movement actors (personal communication with Hawi, February 16, 2021; Biftu, July 22, 2021). QBO, widely known as *Qeerroo* spearheaded the 2015 Oromo protest. Political decisions and statements were also issued in its name.

The urban digital activists are the second leadership segment. They do not identify themselves with a specific name and attribution, yet some key informants associate their role with *Qeerroo*. The urban-based local digital 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. The urban digital activists campaigned online for the cause of the 2015's Oromo protest, some openly and some with pseudonyms. "Biftu" (49 years old civil servant) proclaimed that many urban digital activists were either members or supporters of the Oromo Students Movement during their stay in universities and high schools. Thus, a strong relationship existed between the diaspora, urban digital activists, and the *Qeerroo* leaders guided by mutual trust and shared identity.

For this reason, the Oromo diaspora activists positioned themselves in the movement leadership structure, generating movement resources. "Seboka" (a diaspora returnee and activist) recalled: "we supported the protest back home through finance, social media engagement, facilitating easy access to the international human rights organizations and media". The diaspora community used human and democratic rights to call for international support and make the movement a transnational contention. Oromo activists brought up various socio-cultural narratives that could highlight their political cause on the Internet and traditional media (personal communication with Seboka, November 3, 2020; Kiya, July 18, 2021).

As the protest intensified, another leadership group joined the segmented informal organizational structure - Team Lemma. Team Lemma was an Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (OPDO) faction led by the then Oromia regional state president Lemma Megersa. In April 2016, Oromia regional television quoted Takele Uma, one of the young members of Caffee Oromia (Oromia regional Council), saying, "I personally do not want to see a Master Plan that evicts farmers" (OMN, 2016). "Ali" (46 years old, former OPDO cadre) highlighted, "Takele's speech hinted at the support of young OPDO leaders to the Oromo movement agenda". Through time, *Qeerroo* realized that the Oromia Police force stopped the frequent crackdown against protest demonstrations, and they associated the action of the regional police with the capacity of Team Lemma with providing safety and protection to the 2015's Oromo movement (personal communication with Kiya, July 18, 2021; Hawi, February 16, 2021). Key informants argued that the 2015's Oromo protest leadership structure was communal, guided by transparency, and supported by the Internet to facilitate communication and a safe site of political resistance (personal communication with Wakjira, November 2, 2020; Gadissa, July 16, 2021). Although Jawar Mohammed became a defacto representative, who helped the protest, get media visibility, study informants uttered that the 2015's Oromo protest leaders are unknown - *"አይታወቁም" "āyitawek'umi"*- to say "they are not known".
 Learning from such repeated responses, this article argues that respondents learned the importance of protecting their comrades from the previous experience of crackdowns, mass arrests, and killings of movement actors.

"Wakjira" (Pastor and activist in Burayu) asserted that *Qeerroo* led the protest. According to Wakjita, only those who do not understand how the protest leaders operated say Jawar led the movement.

Conversely, this article argues that the 2015 Oromo protest did not have individual leaders. Jawar described himself as "the Oromo microphone", which liberated the airwaves of Oromia through establishing OMN and active social media engagement (France 24, 2020).

In summary, the diaspora community had its stake in the organization of the selected movements. The 1974 students' movement had strong and visible domestic leadership compared to the 2015's Oromo protest, which was fragmented and dominantly influenced by the diaspora community and its Internet-supported organization. The organizational structure of the 2015's Oromo protest portrayed the characteristics of new social movements that tend to form a nonhierarchical, autonomous, and participatory leadership structure. Perhaps the 2015's Oromo protest provides an alternative social movement leadership structure uniquely influenced by the global South's political, cultural, and technological contexts.

Resource mobilization. The selected movement cases utilized political opportunities, globalization, the media, and violence to advance their respective movement agendas and mobilize mass support. However, the political opportunities utilized by the two movements were different. The 1974 students' movement utilized the 1973's Wollo famine as a political opportunity to show the government's reluctance and to call for collective action. "Getachew" (a former students' movement member) recalled: "some university students went to Wollo and returned with photographs later displayed in an organized exhibition to raise support funds, but they were met with brutal police crackdown".

The police crackdown forced students to intensify the protest, requesting the university students' unions' reinstatement and establishing a peoples' government through democratic elections. The Ethiopian Students Union in Europe and North America joined the famine protest right after the news of protests in their homeland reached them (personal communication with Yosef, March 6, 2021; Melakou, October 19, 2021). Students in the diaspora organized protest rallies in the United States, Germany, Russia, and other parts of Europe. The Ethiopian student diaspora, who participated in the 1974 movement, framed messages and communicated with members in their homeland through printed leaflets and letters. "Melakou" (leader of the student union in the Netherlands) asserted, "the socialist ideology of the students' movement was guided by the diaspora leaders' experience in their host countries rather than the reality back home". "Getachew" (a former students' movement member) added: "the background difference between the diaspora and local university students led them to disagree on the interpretation of the Marxist ideology and to the fragmentation of the movement". The 1974 students' movement appeared to have no clear communication strategy to effectively utilize the Wollo famine as a political opportunity to garner popular support. The students failed to adequately translate the famine into a movement agenda that resonated with the people's deep-seated grievances. The student's interaction with the popular mass was also limited to disseminating flyers as the mass media were captives of the regime. The diaspora shared ideological publications, i.e., *Democracia*, *Forward, Challenge,* and *Combat*, with their homeland counterparts.

The 2015's Oromo protest leaders prudently waited for the right time to exploit the Addis Ababa's master plan as a political opportunity. Data analysis of this article shows that the Ambo's protest rally against the master plan precedes the November 12, 2015, Ginchi's protest that has been considered the marking date where the Oromo Protest gained its momentum. "Duguma" (44 years old, urban digital activist) asserted: "the small protest in Ginchi was magnified on social media to bolster the movement agenda against land grabbing". This article argues that the university students' rally in Ambo encouraged movement leaders to synchronize the off-the-road protests with online activism. Articulating the master plan into the notion of freedom from forceful eviction appealed to the longstanding demands of the Oromos. Moreover, the political opportunity created a strategic collaboration between local movement actors and the diaspora community.

Unlike the 1974 students' movement, repeated political opportunities transformed the 2015 Oromo protest into a transnational human rights agenda. For example, Feyissa Lilesa, an Olympic marathon runner, who won a silver medal on August 21, 2016, crossed his arms above his head during the Rio Olympics, symbolizing support for the Oromo movement. The diaspora community used the case to strengthen their lobbying against the Ethiopian government, framing the incident as gross human rights abuse and the absence of democracy in Ethiopia (Mebratu, 2020). As a result, the international media and human rights advocacy groups picked Feyisa's Olympic gesture.

In the 1970s, 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. "Melakou" (leader of the student union in the Netherlands) stated that some happenings helped students attract international media coverage, for example, the resignation of Berhanu Dinkei, Ethiopia's Ambassador to the United States in June 1965, and the students' riot following the assassination of Tilahun Gizaw in late December 1969, and protest demonstrations by Ethiopian diaspora students in Russia, Europe, and the USA. 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" (Legesse, 1979; Solomon, 2019). This article proclaims that the 2015's Oromo protest and the 1974 students' movement had similar message framing techniques. For example, the slogan "Down with Hileselassie" and "Down Down Weyane" chanted during the 2016 Irreecha celebration (OMN, 2016) served as transnational movement messages among the Ethiopian diaspora to articulate popular demand for regime change.

The 1974 students' movement and the 2015's Oromo protest utilized violence to advance their respective movement agendas. "Negussie" (72 years old, former students' movement member) said, "the 1974 students' movement turned violent through time". On the one hand, the diaspora students with a radical stance promoted violence, hoping to fasten the pace of the struggle. On the other, the empire's crackdown against students' protests was fierce, forcing students to respond violently by throwing stones at public and private properties. In part, the use of violence in the 1974 students' movement resulted from a lack of clear leadership structure to convey the interests of protesters and negotiate their needs with the regime (personal communication with Getachew, April 4, 2021; Negussie, August 5, 2021).

Study informants argued that the first protest rallies of the 2015's Oromo protest were peaceful (personal communication with Seboka, November 3, 2020; Duguma, November 7, 2020). Others asserted that violent public protests were deliberately used as a major source of pressure against the political order (personal communication with Kiya, July 18, 2021; Hawi, February 16, 2021). Nevertheless, this article contends that protest demonstrations turned out ferocious following the Irreecha stamped on October 3, 2016, forcing the ruling party to declare a nationwide state of emergency.

4.2.2 Making Sense of the Selected Movements and the Post-2018 Transition Period

This section analyzes the influence of the selected movements on the current political condition in Ethiopia. The analysis process considers the theories of social movements and the selected movements' ability to promote human rights and democratic practices in Ethiopia.

The 1974 students' movement did not result or lead to a democratic election. Instead, the students' movement shifted its polity level by avoiding its supporters, inviting sequences of contentions, and producing civil wars (personal communication with Yosef, March 6, 2021; Getachew, April 4, 2021). This article confirms the claim that the students' movement agenda was somehow inherited by the Derg regime (Legesse, 1979; Andargachew, 2014; Abbink, 2015; Khisa, 2019). Derg promoted the communist ideology while at the same time ignoring issues of interest to the protesting general public, such as the right to development and democracy. Thus, it can be argued that 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", a campaign of mass killing that saw thousands have died, tortured, and exiled, and a civil war that lasted for 17 years. This article further highlights no discontinuation between the Oromo people demand to end systematic land eviction in the 1970s and the 2015's Oromo protest as the right to land administration and recognition of the Oromo culture still protrude as major movement agendas.

The 2015 Oromo protest is a recent movement that has continued to shape the political context in today's Ethiopia. The movement significantly contributed to the government administration change in 2018 and to the ongoing political and legal reform processes. Arguably, the 2015's Oromo protest has also inspired the fragmented contentions and communal conflicts in various parts of the country in which the diaspora actors play the political agenda-setting role. The 2015's Oromo protest has notably influenced the revision of repressive laws on issues of concern raised during protest campaigns. Freedom of expression, assembly, and association were among the protesters' demands. Therefore, the government amended the

civil societies and media laws and responded by establishing independent institutions capable of properly implementing the rule of law.

The formalization process of the 2015's Oromo protest was expected to be materialized through elections, negotiations, and institutionalization. In this regard, there had been sequences of negotiation events and signings of peace agreements with various political groups ever since the coming of Abiy Ahmed to power. However, the efforts ended up fruitless, leading to the imprisonment of key political actors, excluding prominent political party leaders and personalities from the June 2021's election, and a flare of armed conflict between the federal government and the Tigray regional state. The diaspora community appeared to push for the withdrawal of the OLF and OFC from the 2021 national election claiming arbitrary detention of opposition leaders. On the other hand, the government stated that the opposition leaders were engaged in violent protests that resulted in the killings of people. Making the contention dramatic, the OLF and OFC called for the establishment of a "Government of Salvation", just a few days later, the sixth national election was held on June 21, 2021 (Addis Standard 2021). The call could be perceived an act of re-mobilizing the 2015's Oromo protesters who felt threatened by the arrests of their perceived leaders before the election.

This article argues that the heavy involvement of the migrant diaspora in steering political negotiations hindered the emergence of strong movement leaders out of the past and current contentions. Strong local leadership could have helped institutionalize movements either as political parties or interest groups to play a role during and after the post sixth national election. Although social movements follow different routes to join the electoral process, it is worth mentioning that there were cases of movement supporters sponsoring the electoral campaigns of parties and individual candidates they think would promote their causes (Fana T.V., 2020). The arrival of "Pan-Ethiopian" parties such as Ezema and Enat Parties into the 2021electoral process proved the role of social movements in opening up the democratic space to deliberate on systematically excluded political ideologies.

Ethiopia's experience further shows another dimension of the role of social movements in democratic elections – allying with existing political parties to promote movement objectives. The case of the OFC and arguably the "face" of the 2015's Oromo protest, Jawar Mohammed, could be an example despite his arrest before the 2021 national election (Africa News, 2020). The diffusion of ethnic conflicts in different parts of the country seems to be triggering another round of contentions, this time in Sothern Nations and Nationalities, Benihsangul-Gumuz, Oromia, and Amhara regional states (Addis Standard, 2021). The contention between the federal government and the Tigray regional state evolved into a full-scale war since November 2020. Media reports indicated that the Oromo protest has gradually turned back into an ethno-nationalist movement (The Conversation, 2020; The Elephant, 2020), which again needs deeper scrutiny and cannot be captured by this brief article.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The overview of selected social movements depicted that Ethiopians strived to escape fragile political situations by forming collective actions. This article argued that educated youth played a role in leading the two movements, later garnering the support of the mass public. The collective identity formation of the selected movements is different as the students' movement was based on a social class while the 2015 Oromo protest focused on ethnic identity. The movement framing agenda is similar as both utilized the right to land administration at the center to demand, the protection of human rights, and democratic change in the country. The selected movements enjoyed the support of the diaspora community that made the characteristics of the selected movements transnational. This article highlighted the shared successes of the 1974 students' movement and the 2015's Oromo protest in facilitating popular participation to demand democracy and government change. It also emphasized the failures of the selected movements in formalizing their respective organization into formal civil society organizations and political parties and their weaknesses to break the cyclical occurrences of violent protests.

This article suggests consecutive positive engagement, based on mutual respect, in discourse and communicative actions to shape the ongoing social movements. Local and transnational movement actors must work towards strengthening the organizational and leadership structure of ongoing movements. The

best way to sustain social movements is to support the in-country movement actors to become transparent and encourage the emergence of organizational leaders who can confront power without fear and favor. This can be achieved by establishing and strengthening a system of state accountability that protects human rights and ensures an effective criminal justice system. The legal and institutional reform process should also support the emergence of vibrant and independent civil society organizations to break the cyclical occurrences of violent protests and ensure democratic change.

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Competing interest: The author declared there is no conflict of interest.

Consent for publication: We have agreed to submit for Journal of Social Sciences and Language Studies and approved the manuscript for submission.

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Publisher's Note: Jimma University is neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published material and affiliations.

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