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The Ethiopian Muslims Protest in the Era of Social Media Activism

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Abstracts

The Islamic movement study mostly focused on radical, extremist, violent, or military aspects. The current research was carried out to examine the nonviolent elements of the Islamic movement. Based on the ethnographic photo research conducted in the Ethiopian Muslims Protest, the Islamic movements nonviolent aspect investigated. The Ethiopian Muslims were organized social media-led protests called *Let Our Voices be Heard* for their religious rights between 2011 and 2015. The study *first* examined where this *Let Our Voices be Heard* protest fits in civil resistance studies. *Second*, it investigated Facebook's role in initiating, organizing, and sustaining the nonviolent Islamic movement in Ethiopia. Using Johnston's defining terms of social movement theory, the *Let Our Voices be Heard* protest tested. The result shows that the protest well fit with the dimensions and components of social movement theory. The result indicates that the *Let Our Voices be Heard* protest exemplifies nonviolent Islamic movement in the Eastern Africa region, Ethiopia. The study further shows that Facebook, when used for a common goal, is a robust platform for successfully mobilizing nonviolent Islamic movements.

Keywords: Ethiopia, Religion, Islam, Civil Resistance, Nonviolent, Protest, Social Movement, Digital Media, Social Media Activism

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Acronyms

CSA – Central Statistics Agency of Ethiopia

EIASC – The Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (also known as Majlis)

EOC – The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church

EMAC – The Ethiopian Muslims Arbitration Committee

EPRDF – The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front

PDRE – The People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

TPLF – The Tigray People's Liberation Front

Chapter One: Introduction

Ethiopia is a multi-religious secular country. According to the 2007 report of the Central Statistics Agency, CSA (2007), the Orthodox Christians and Muslims' followers account for the lion share of the population (i.e., 43.5% and 33.9% respectively). Followers of protestant Christians, Traditional Faiths, and Roman Catholics account for the remaining (i.e., 18.6%, 2.6%, and 0.7%). The two major religions, Christianity, and Islam, arrived in the country at the early ages of religious expansion (i.e., Christianity in the 4th and Islam in the 7th century CE). Moreover, Ethiopians have practiced various indigenous religions since antiquity.

As a multi-religious secular country with two dominant religions, fierce religious competition can give rise to conflicts among different faiths' followers. The struggle to get more political power and public space among different religions interlinked with its history. Without understanding Ethiopia's political history, following its religious history and the tensions among different religions' followers is challenging. After all, the Ethiopian government has sided with one religion for a very long period.

Orthodox Christian rulers from the north have governed Ethiopia for over a millennium and a half. They have defined the national identity of the country using the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) worldviews. The Orthodox Christian narratives have dominated the country's social, political, and national identities for centuries. Eshete (2009) explains the prerogative position of Orthodox Christianity as "a religion that embraces culture, politics, flag, identity, and nationalism, all put in one package" (Eshete 2009, 35). Thus, the Orthodox Christian narratives decorate Ethiopia's political history, and the Ethiopian EOC has had roles in state affairs.

Being decorated with Orthodox Christian narratives, the state favored the Orthodox Christian religion for most of Ethiopia's history. The northern Emperors for long stated the country as the *Island of Christianity in the Sea of Islam*. As a result, many have considered Ethiopia as the ancient Christian land in the Horn of Africa. The Orthodox Christian religion had assumed the status of Ethiopia's official state religion since the 4th century. It enjoyed this privilege until the 1974 Ethiopian revolution, which led to the removal of the last King, Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia.

In 1974, the revolution led a socialist military regime (called *Derg*) to power. *Derg* officially declared the separation of state and religion for the first time. This declaration ushered a new era in the religious environment by ending the special connection between EOC and the Ethiopian state. This era created the political space for followers of the marginalized religions to mobilize for religious equality. Previously marginalized religions have benefited from the state's new balanced treatment in religious affairs. As one of the most significant religions in Ethiopia, Islam got the chance to revive itself from the shadow of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity.

Religious movements often arise in settings in which governments historically were involved in religious affairs and created conditions for religious grievances. Because of this involvement, investigating the link between religion and state is crucial. Thus, it is hardly possible to study Islam's history in Ethiopia without Ethiopia's political history. After all, religious movements are a natural reaction when the state reflects one religion's image at the expense of the others.

Ethiopian Muslims have organized various social movements for a very long time. This paper focuses on the late well-organized protest (i.e., from 2011 to 2015) called *Let our Voices be Heard (Dimtschin Yisema (ድምፃችን ይሰማ) in Amharic)*. *Let Our Voices be Heard* was the leading slogan of the Ethiopian Muslims protest from 2011 to 2015. Throughout this paper, *Let Our Voices be Heard*, and *Muslims Protest* used interchangeably. They both refer to the same protest. *Dimtsachin Yisema*, the Amharic meaning of *Let Our Voices be Heard*, refers to the protest's Facebook page. This protest, which was active in major cities, had mobilized millions of Ethiopian Muslims throughout the country and influenced its political structure.

The belief that the government is involved in Muslims' religious affairs fuelled protests all over the country. The protests were organized on social media daily. Public demonstrations were held once a week, every Friday-after-prayers. The protesters believed that the government is directly assigning politically affiliated leaders to the Higher Ethiopian Muslims Supreme Council (also known as *Majlis*). They accused the government of unfairly favoring one sect of Islam while labeling the rest as religious extremists. The protesters demanded the right to practice their religion free of government intervention. They demanded the right to choose their leaders. The Ethiopian constitution declares the separation of state and religion and defines the

country as a secular state with no government role in religious affairs. The protestors cried for their constitutional rights.

How do protesters manage to organize a protest on social media? What is the role of social media in igniting, coordinating, and sustaining social movements? Asked differently, does digital media activism facilitate the religious movement? What is the effect of the protest on a country's political structure? This paper examines the Ethiopian Muslim protest to shed light on some of the above questions.

The rest of the thesis covers the following issues. *The next chapter* tries to briefly cover the history of Islam within Ethiopia's history from the 7th century time of the Aksumite kingdom. Afterward, the *third chapter* presents the research design -- the research problem and aims, research questions, theoretical approach, methodology, and research overview. The *fourth chapter* discusses the protest using evidence-based on pictures, texts, and government responses. The *fifth chapter* analyses the data to understand and contextualize the research questions in the Muslims' movement. By using social movement theory and social media activism, this chapter interprets the evidence from pictures and texts. Besides, it uses visual discourse analysis further to understand the situation and the prospects of the protest. The *last chapter* provides a concluding remark with suggestions for further research.

Chapter Two: A Brief Historical Note on Islam and Ethiopia

2.1 The first Muslims (7th century)

Despite Ethiopia's reliable identification with Orthodox Christianity, the history of "Islam in Ethiopia is as old as the religion itself" (Feyissa 2013, 27). The historical link between Islam and Ethiopia dates to 615 CE when the companions of Prophet Muhammed (*the Sahaba*[1]) came to Aksum fleeing religious persecution by the *Quraysh,*[2] the ruling elite in Mecca (Feyissa and Lawrence 2014). Trimingham (1952) noted that "when the Arabian prophet's followers were

[1] the Sahaba – companions - those believed to have lived, interacted with, heard, or seen the Prophet, Muhammad. Oxford Dictionary of Islam (Esposito 2003)

[2] Quraysh - Powerful Meccan tribe at the time of the Prophet Muhammad; descendants of Qusayy, who united them. The Quraysh were prosperous merchants controlling Mecca and trade in the region. Muhammad was born into the Hashemite clan of the Quraysh tribe. Presently the Quraysh clan holds the keys to the Kaaba. Oxford Dictionary of Islam (Esposito 2003).

being persecuted in Mecca by the *Quraysh*, the prophet bethought himself of refuge in the country [Ethiopia]." He told his followers, "if you go to *Abyssinia*[3] you will find a king under whom none persecuted. It is a land of righteousness where God will give you relief from what you are suffering" (Trimingham 1952, 44) and in the fifth year of his prophethood (615 CE) refugees began to cross the straits in small groups; this referred to by Muslim writers as the first *hijra*[4] (Trimingham 1952). Islam arrived very early in Ethiopia, even before the Prophet's *hijra* (in 622 CE) from Mecca to Medina of Arabia, where the Islamic calendar starts.

During this first period of emigration, some members of the Prophet Mohammed's family and some of his early followers sought refuge in the *Aksumite Empire* (North Ethiopian kingdom at the time). The Christian king of Aksum called *Armah* in Ge'ez and in the Amharic language, whom Arabic tradition has named *Ashama Ibn Abjar (Najashi)*, accepted the refugees and allowed them to settle on the *Abyssinian* territory. Describing this history, Trimingham noted that "the *Quraysh*, dismayed by the defection, sent a deputation to the Aksumite king (*Najashi*) to ask that refugees might be returned" (Trimingham 1952, 44–45). The king summoned the refugees and asked them about their new religion and why they left their country. After listening to their response, their religious worldviews, and their defense statement, the king gave asylum to these first Muslim emigrants. He refused the Quraysh emissary's demand to send them back to Arabia, as Feyissa and Lawrence (2014) noted that "central to *Najashi's* reputation is his refusal to take bribes in return for handing over the *Sahaba* to the *Quraysh*" (Feyissa and Lawrence 2014, 283). It is also widely believed in the Islamic world and among the Ethiopian Muslims that the Aksum king *Najashi* not only protected the followers of the Prophet Mohammed but also ultimately embraced Islam (Feyissa and Lawrence 2014). While this migration laid the foundation for Islam in Ethiopia, Islam expanded only modestly, without spectacular growth (Abbink 1998). The establishment of Muslim communities in the country strongly associated with merchants and teachers. It further explained that Islam was nevertheless introduced to Ethiopia early on through the international trade routes that linked

[3] Abyssinia refers to the historic kingdom of northern highlands which was influence by the Semitic civilization of South Arabia and afterward adopted Christianity, and whose peoples expressed themselves through the Semitic languages, Ge'ez, Tigrigna, and Amharic. (Trimingham 1952)

[4] Hijrah - Migration or withdrawal. Typically refers to the migration of Muhammad and his companions from Mecca to Medina in 622 C.E., the first year in the Islamic calendar. It symbolizes the willingness to suffer for faith and the refusal to lose hope in the face of persecution. It can be undertaken individually or collectively in response to a threat to survival. Oxford Dictionary of Islam (Esposito 2003).

Ethiopia with the Arabian world and the works of indigenous Muslim scholars (Feyissa and Lawrence 2014, 283).

2.2 Muslim Sultanates (9th – 15th century)

Through commerce and religious teachings, the expansion of Islam reached the level that Muslim communities formed their political structure and became rivalry to the Christian rulers in central Ethiopia. As Loimeier (2013) noted "on the fringes of the Christian highlands, Muslim principalities developed from the eighth or ninth century and entered into competition with Christian emperors of Ethiopia from the 12th century in the race for the control of the southern marches of Ethiopia" (Loimeier 2013, 180). Feyissa and Lawrence add that "by the 9th century, the Shewa Sultanate (the Makhzumite dynasty) emerged at the periphery of the Axumite Christian kingdom in central Ethiopia and stayed in power until 13th century" (Feyissa and Lawrence 2014, 283). They further argue that "the expansion of Islam coincided with the decline of the Axumite kingdom. By the time the Christian kingdom reconstituted in the form of the so-called *Solomonic Dynasty*[5] in the central highlands in the second half of the 13th century, Islam had already become well entrenched in the central and south-eastern part of the country, taking advantage of the flourishing international trade that linked the Ethiopian hinterland with the Gulf of Aden" (Feyissa and Lawrence 2014, 283). Subsequently, the 14th and 15th centuries were times of intense political and economic competition between the Solomonic Christian kingdom and the Sultanate of Ifat and other Islamic principalities (Feyissa 2013). The power struggle between the Muslim sultanates and the Christian rulers continued until it reached the point of full-scale Muslim-Christian war in the 16th century in Ethiopia.

2.3 The 16th Century War

One of the critical episodes of power competition between Christians and Muslims in Ethiopian history was the devastating 16th-century war between the troops of the Harar-based Muslim leader Ahmed ibn Ibrahim Al-Ghazi (nicknamed *'Ahmed Grang, Ahmed the left-handed'*) and the northern highland Christian rulers (Abbink 2014). In this war, the Harar-based Adal Sultanate advanced and managed to defeat Christian rulers and control many northern and

[5]Solomonic Dynasty: line of Ethiopian emperors who, according to tradition, were descended from Menelik I, the son of Solomon and Queen of Sheba (Makeda). Until Emperor Haile Selassie deposed in 1974, their rule was supposed to have been continuous but for two periods, the reign of the Zagwe dynasty (12th-13th century) and the reign of Tewodros II (1855-68). ("Solomonic Dynasty") ("Solomonid Dynasty | Ethiopian History" n.d.) (Encyclopedia Britannica).

central Ethiopia for some time (Arab Faqih 2003). It is the period that Islam overpower the Christian kingdom in the country. Feyissa and Lawrence (2014) noted that in the “centuries-old protracted hegemonic struggles, the Christian kingdom gained the upper hand except for a brief interlude in the 16th century when the balance of power swayed towards Islam with the emergence of the Sultanate of Adal under its capable leader Ahmed Ibn Ibrahim Al-Ghazi, popularly known as Ahmed Gragn” (Feyissa and Lawrence 2014, 283–84). For fourteen years (1529-1543), Ahmed ibn Ibrahim Al-Ghazi was successful against the Christian kingdoms and controlled Ethiopia's central and northern highlands (Arab Faqih 2003). It is noted that reacting to long-term Christian political domination and assuming a more significant religious profile than his predecessors; the Sultan destroyed many churches and centers of Christian civilization (Feyissa 2013).

The bloody struggle between the Muslim sultanate and the Christian kingdom escalated further with external actors' involvement. Turks supported the Adal Sultanate of Ahmed ibn Ibrahim Al-Ghazi, and the Portuguese were by the Christians' side. In 1543, the Northern Christian kingdom's combined forces and the Portuguese defeated the forces of Muslims and killed their leader Imam Ahmed. After this defeat, Islam decidedly lost its power and political clout in Ethiopia's affairs for centuries to come (Feyissa 2013). After this incident, the dominant Ethiopian Orthodox Christian history writers portrayed the leader of Muslims Ahmed ibn Ibrahim Al Ghazi as an evil foreign invader who came to Ethiopia to destroy Orthodox Christianity and the national identity of the country, not as a rival Ethiopian Muslim competitor who fought for power (Feyissa 2013). Scholars agreed that ever since the mid-16th century, Islam had viewed as a "*national security threat*" by the country's political leadership and the dominant Christian population (Feyissa, 2013; Loimeier, 2013; Abbink, 1998). As a result, several policies targeting Muslims were designed by different Christian monarchs and emperors throughout Ethiopia's history.

2.4 Muslims and the Emperors (Mid. 16th – 20th century)

Muslims in imperial Ethiopia were lived under marginalization and considered as a secondary citizen. According to Loimeier (2013), under Emperor Yohannes I (1667-1682), Muslims were forced to live like foreigners in quarters or villages of their own and were not allowed to own land. In the mid-19th century, Emperor Tewodros II issued a decree that ordered all Muslims to convert to Christianity or leave the country. Two decades later, Emperor Yohannes IV issued

a decree, at the council of Boru Meda in 1878, that Muslims were to accept baptism or banned from the country. Muslims who refused to convert to Orthodox Christianity executed, and if they rebelled, their villages were burned down (Loimeier 2013). Considering Ethiopia as only Christian State and marginalizing Islam continued throughout imperial Ethiopia.

Surrounded by Muslims on the Nile, on the Horn, and across the Red Sea in Yemen, the dominant narrative of Ethiopia's history is that the rulers perceived Ethiopia as an Orthodox Christianity state (Feyissa 2013; Loimeier 2013). After emperor Yohannes IV, his successor Emperor Menelik II (1889-1913), in his letter to the European powers in 1891, promoted Ethiopia as the *Island of Christianity in the sea of Islam* (Loimeier 2013). The perception of the *Island of Christianity* adopted by European historians and further presented prominently in the *Kebre Nagast*[6] (Brooks 2001). This official myth of presenting Ethiopia as a purely Christian state stayed long in the system. Emperor Haile Selassie, in a speech before the United States Congress, also described his country as the *Island of Christianity in a sea of Islam*. This myth was widely accepted abroad and propagated by the first generation of foreign scholars who studied Ethiopia (Markakis 1989). Such national identity construction has often challenged by other religions. Muslims struggled to change this dominant national identity narratives. They strived for generations to practice their religion, to gate the proper public space, and to be visible with their own religious and cultural identity in the face of the country.

Menelik II, relatively "reverted to largely accommodative policy, allowing people to live 'in the faith of their fathers', despite the challenge posed by his conquests of new Muslim-populated areas in the south and east" (Abbink 2011, 259). While Menelik ended the forced conversion of Muslims to Christianity in the late 19th and early 20th century, Christian dominance over Muslims and systematic marginalization continued until the end of the Christian monarchy in 1974. It noted that despite its ancient history and roots in the country, Islam in Ethiopia has always been a religion with secondary and in the eyes of many Ethiopian leaders inferior, status; Islam emerged in the shadow of Christianity and often suffered from suppression and discrimination (Abbink, 1998, 2014).

During the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie (1923-1974), Abbink argues, a Byzantine-Christian-inspired imperial ideology dominated national politics, which led to the denial of full

[6] Kebre Nagast - The Glory of Kings – a book originally recorded in the ancient Ethiopian language (Ge'ez).

citizenship to Muslims (Abbink 2011). Muslims suffered from discrimination, such as a wide range of exclusion from legal title to land access to high-level public jobs and political representation. Ethiopian Muslims were called '*Muslims living in Ethiopia'*, not as '*Ethiopian Muslims'*. This labeling linked to the first Arab Muslim emigrants who received protection in the Axumite kingdom in the 7th century. By considering Ethiopian Muslims as foreigners, the aim was to exclude them from the Ethiopian political identity. The Haile Selassie constitution officially declared the exceptional state support to Orthodox Christianity while neglecting other religions in the country (Abbink 1998). Islam and other religions are inferior in the constitution.

Both the 1931 and 1955 constitution ratified by Emperor Haile Selassie favor the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Church as the only established church of the Empire, and the Emperor expected to profess the faith of this church. Article 126 of the 1955 constitution reads as:

> *The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, founded in the fourth century, on St. Mark's doctrine, is the Established Church of the Empire and is, as such, supported by the State. The Emperor shall always profess the Ethiopian Orthodox Faith. The name of the Emperor shall be mentioned in all religious services (Article 126, 1955).*

This constitution, however, did permit practicing different religions in the country. However, Abbink argues, despite the imperial constitution's provision of freedom of religion, Haile Selassie's policy toward the Muslims of his Empire was a mixture of suspicion, exploitation, and patronizing tolerance, the characteristics of Christian politico-religious hegemony (Abbink 2011). Emperor Haile Selassie famously attributed to the saying *'The country is public, religion a private matter*.' This saying aimed not to leave every religion in the country as a private matter instead protect Muslims and Protestant Christians from the public space. Explaining the saying Abbink (2011) argues that, although this was no doubt a sound principle in state affairs, Haile Selassie himself did not follow it; instead, he maintained Orthodox Christianity as the *de facto* state religion. It further emphasized that the Emperor discouraged any political expression of Ethiopian Muslims as Muslims, but he allowed them to practice their religion. While Haile Selassie allowed the translation and publication of the Quran into Amharic in the 1950s, but, the historical Orthodox dominance maintained, implying restrictions on Islamic self-expression and self-organization (Abbink 2011, Feyissa 2013). Muslims under emperor Haile Selassie could practice their religion only as a private matter. They treated like secondary citizens with none or very restricted public representation of Muslims in the country's political discourse (Abbink 2011; Feyissa 2013; Loimeier 2013).

2.5 Muslims in the Military Regime (1974 – 1991)

By the 1974 Ethiopian revolution, the 16th -century-old Christian monarchy system come to an end. The socialist-oriented military junta deposed Emperor Haile Selassie and then imposed a military regime on the country. Larebo (1988) noted that after the feudal system's downfall, the new Marxist regime did not have a well-articulated policy towards religion (Larebo 1988). However, "it strengthened one major point of departure that is the declaration of the separation between the State and the church. Besides losing its status as a de facto state religion, the EOC became the target of political attack for being an integral part of the monarchy's power structure" (Girma 2018, 6). The military regime further attacked the EOC as 'bastion of feudalism,' expropriated its land property including most of its urban real estate and ended its receipt of government subsidies. It further described that, while it was once the church with a fascinating history, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church under the military regime accused of being the reason for Ethiopia's backwardness (Larebo 1988; Eshete 2009; Girma 2018). On the other hand, Muslims started to gain from the regime change as the military government cuts the exceptional support to the EOC and declares the equality of all religions in the country. For the first time in the country's history, religious freedom proclaimed, and all religions became equal under the eyes of the constitution (Feyissa 2013; Feyissa and Lawrence 2014).

The 1987 People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE) constitution Art. 46(1), guarantees freedom of religion. The constitution clearly outlines that state and religion are separate (Art. 46(3)). It is under this constitution that Ethiopia has become a secular state for the first time. The constitution stated that one religion could not be considered more important or superior than the other religion. Compared to imperial Ethiopia, Muslims and Protestant Christians got better recognition in the new secular State, especially in the regime's first time.

With the collapse of the imperial system, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church reduced to a standard religious organization with very little political significance (Bayeh 2015). On the other hand, Muslims got better public space, compared to the previous regime, and even started to participate in political activities. As Abbink noted, "Muslims made significant gains, including recognition of their religious holidays, less job discrimination, more mosque buildings, and higher *hajj* (pilgrimage to Macca) quota" (Abbink 2011, 260). Under this military regime, the expression '*Muslims living in Ethiopia*' was officially replaced by '*Ethiopian Muslims'* and three religious' holidays of Islam; *Eid al Fitr*, *Eid al Adha*, and *Mawlid al-Nabi* became the

Ethiopian public holidays (Tolera 2017). The Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC or Majlis), the higher council of Islamic affairs, also established in 1976 by the military regime as an element for religious equality and institutional representation of Muslims in the country (Feyissa 2013).

Ahmed (2006) emphasized that "although the resurgence of Islam in Ethiopia in the 1970s was part of the worldwide revival of Islam, one of the most decisive internal factors that contributed to the former was the outbreak of popular revolution that toppled the Ethiopian monarchy in 1974 and created a favorable condition for disadvantaged and oppressed communities such as Ethiopian Muslims to demand a radical change in the policy of the state towards them" (Ahmed 2006, 10). The *Derg* and the process of state re-formation did inadvertently have positive effects on Ethiopian Muslims. It further explained that by equalizing all religions, the EOC, Protestants, and Muslims, all began from the same starting block simultaneously in the regime. However, Muslims have continued to be slowed by historical baggage (Feyissa and Lawrence 2014). While the military regime did not go so far as to redefine the parameters of Ethiopia's national identity, it did declare religious equality in the country. It further noted that Ethiopian historiography left untouched with an 'unbroken' three-thousand-year historical paradigm (with the Solomonic narratives), that in effect, remained populated by Christian heroes.

The Islamic heritage of the country primarily silenced. Although the *Derg* period began with the support of Muslims, because of the anti-religious Marxist-Leninist ideology that the military regime violently enforced, the relation between Derg and Muslims gradually deteriorated as with other religions in the country (Feyissa 2013). Muslim struggle for an equal public space continued.

2.6 Muslims in Federal Ethiopia (1991 – Present)

In May 1991 Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF)-led insurgent movement took over Ethiopia's government. With the coalition of four ethnic-based parties, TPLF formed a government called Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). The change created better space for political, economic, and religious activities, including party formation, election, an independent press, and religious self-organization (Abbink 2011). The 1995 constitution of EPRDF, continued the line from the previous constitution and proclaimed religious freedom and the separation of State and religion. Ethiopia remained a secular state but

with different philosophy that linked with ethnic politics. It further noted that EPRDF decentralized religion as it did in ethnicity and allowing the faith communities to organize themselves internally (Abbink 2014).

In EPRDF constitution article 11, the “secular state” defined as “separation of religion and state," and there is “no state religion” and “the state shall not interfere in religious matters and religion shall not interfere in state affairs." Article 27 further declares the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right includes the freedom to hold and adopt a religion or belief of choice and practice freely either individually or publicly with others (Article 27, 1995)

According to Haustin and Østebø (2011), in contrast to the previous governments, the EPRDF has sought to accommodate religions' role in Ethiopian society. It has provided more space for the country's religions, separate from State and politics, and constitutionally enshrined religious equality and freedom of consciousness. Even though Ethiopia formally declared a secular state, religion is very present in the public sphere and functions as a critical framework for community life. Despite the type of religion, they hold and practice, most of the Ethiopian population is religious. Understanding this reality, the government never allowed religious institutions the freedom they need to operate their religious activities. Instead, it has used them to advance the ethnopolitical agenda and control the religious society (Haustein and Østebø 2011).

In EPRDF Ethiopia, especially in the first decade, Islam further benefited. In some situations, Friday public office hours adapted to the mosque prayer times; the legal status of religious (sharia) courts solidified. A significant expansion of the Islamic religious education center and mosque building with foreign funding was allowed (Abbink 2014). New Islamic NGOs, self-help, and charity organization emerged. The quota for *hajj* travellers significantly increased, and a freer private religious press became active. Islamic publications flourished. Many foreign Islamic teachers came to Ethiopia to teach at new Islamic schools, and many Ethiopian Muslims went abroad for religious training. Many more Ethiopian Muslims received religious training abroad. Many translations of Egyptian, Pakistani, Sudanese, and South African books on Islam were published, showing the reconnection of Ethiopian Islam to global Islam (Abbink 2011). As Ahmed noted in post-1991 Ethiopia, Islam witnessed not only institutional rehabilitation and religious and cultural revival, but visibility and prominence in the public sphere (Ahmed 2006).

This new and relatively better opportunities further create competition among different religions for more public space. Statistical figures showing the number of followers of religions become a significant source of contentions, especially between EOC and Muslims. The 2007 CSA religious composition report, for instance, refuted followers of both religions. The figures (i.e., 43.5 % Orthodox Christians, 34 %) became the sources of debate on religious demography. There have always been arguments over the number of Christians and Muslims in Ethiopia. There was also public suspicion about the 1994 and 2007 census data. Both EOC and Muslim leaders and critics have strongly protested, believing their numbers were far too low. The perception led to competition to be more visible in public space. The competition especially visible in public holidays (Abbink 2011).

There exists considerable regional variation about religious predominance too. Islam is dominant in the Afar region (95.3%), Dire-Dawa (70.8%), Harar (69%), and Somali (98.4%). Orthodox Christianity is dominant in Tigray region (95.6%), Amhara region (82.5%), and Addis Ababa (74.7%). Protestantism is dominant in Gambella (71.1%) and SNNPR (55.5 %) ("Central Statistical Agency Of Ethiopia," n.d.)). Haustein and Østebø (2011) argue that such religious distribution in Ethiopia largely correlates with regional and ethnic boundaries, making it compatible with the EPRDF's political philosophy of ethnoreligious federalism. In the early ages of EPRDF, media were relatively free, and their freedom created space for religious publications and played a key role in aggravating religious competition. With the dawn of press freedom in the early years of the new regime, several dozen new Islamic periodicals emerged, all in Amharic. Some of them contained small sections in Arabic. These publications created competition among religions and raised questions about the widely accepted Ethiopian historical Christian narratives (Haustein and Østebø 2011; Abbink 2011, 2014). The competition among sects of the same religion also manifested on these religious publications.

Chapter Three: Research Design

3.1 Research Problems and Aims

Islamic movements have been studied in different social science disciplines. Various movements, including the Hamas in the Palestinian territories, Hizbullah in Lebanon, Jama'at-i Islami in Pakistan, and the Islamic Action Front in Jordan and many more, have become the theme of Islam's political study (Esposito and Shahin 2013). The series of protests across the Middle East and North Africa, commonly known as the Arab Spring that shakes the political structures of different countries, also received much attention. These studies on Islamic movements mostly focused on the radical, extremist, violent, and the military aspects of the movements. Nonviolent Muslim movements often received less attention in academia. Besides, social media's significant role in mobilizing Muslims for nonviolent religious movements has not researched much.

This thesis project aims to study the power of social media in mobilizing nonviolent Islamic movement in Ethiopia. Ethiopian Muslims organized a series of protests between 2011 and 2015 against government interference to their religious affairs. The protest was considered one of the well-disciplined public demonstrations in the history of Ethiopia. Using pictures and texts collected from the protest's Facebook page, the study shows how Facebook helps Muslims mobilize themselves and organize a nonviolent protest.

The study is relevant as there is not much research on Islamic nonviolent movements and social media's role in achieving it. The study expected to contribute to Islamic movements' nonviolent aspects to the broad social and political research on Islamic movements by investigating the Ethiopian Muslim protestors' tactics, strategies, and experiences.

3.2 Research Questions

- How do we understand the power of Facebook in mobilizing Muslims protest in Ethiopia?
- How does the Ethiopian Muslim protest fit with the characteristics of social movement theory?

- In what ways does using social media increase religious engagement and social interaction among Ethiopian Muslims and help them achieve public protest?
- In what ways does the social media led Ethiopian Muslims protest have impacted the country's political structure?

3.3 Theoretical Approach

The social movement theory and social media activism will be used as the two interlinked theoretical frameworks to undertake the study. The social movement theory will be used in a frame to examine the Ethiopian Muslims' protest by Johnston's five characteristics of the theory. The aim is to identify whether the protest goes under Johnston's conceptualizations of social movement theory or not. The theoretical approach further includes the importance of using the concept of the religious social shaping of technology by Campbell. The concept will help to interpret the protest both as a religious practice and social activism. The action and interaction of Ethiopian Muslims on social media were interpreted as the practice of religious social shaping of technology that would help apply social media activism.

3.3.1. Social Media Activism

Religion and Digital Media

Understanding the link between the practice of religion and the continuous emergence of new digital media requires multi-disciplinary views. Scholars from theology, sociology, cultural anthropology, media, and communication studies framed various approaches that would help categorize the link between religion and the new digital media's religious use.

Religion and digital media by themselves are a very vast concept. Stating working definitions would ease the conversation. Geertz (2004), defined religion as

> *"(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (Geertz 2004, 4).*

Explaining the relevance of this definition, Campbell (2010) noted that "Geertz's definition is useful in relation to the study of how religion informs specific group's use of media technology because it presents religion as being centrally about expressed practice and experience that informs people's understanding of everyday life" (Campbell 2010, 7). This study uses Geertz's conceptualization of religion to see the link between religion and religiously shaped social media uses. Social media as an essential digital media element for religious people.

Digital media, on the other hand, refers to "tools, channels, platforms, and strategies which we can use to obtain, produce, and share knowledge about the world around us, through communication and interaction" (Lindgren 2017, 4). It further emphasized that digital media are, from the perspective where they have seen as the environment for social interaction, rather than merely as channels for transmitting information (Lindgren 2017). Campbell (2010) also noted on the new media as the "generation of media which emerges on the contemporary landscape and offers new opportunities for social interaction, information sharing, and mediated communication" (Campbell 2010, 9). Thus, the new digital media is explained as mechanisms influencing digital society's daily life that substantially include religious people.

Digital society means "society affected by digitally networked communication tools and platforms, such as internet and social media" (Lindgren 2017, 6). It further noted that "we live in a digital society in the sense that we are in an era where our lives, our relationships, our culture, and our sociality are digitized, digitalized, and affected throughout by digital processes" (Lindgren 2017, 16). Religious practices, as one aspect of social reality also affected by these digital processes. Religion goes through various shaping mechanisms with the emergence of various new digital media, including social media.

Scholars argue that religion changes with the new forms of digital media (Campbell, 2010; Meyer & Moors, 2006; Hoover, 2006). The "successive eras of media change are not something that must be seen in relation to a rather fixed and immutable form we call 'religion.' Instead, we need to understand the ways in which these changes in media are actually changing religion, resulting in new forms, expressions, understandings, contexts of practice, and source of authority" (Hoover 2013, 171). The change of religion with the new digital media is explained further through mediation and mediatization processes in various religious practices.

Religion, Mediation and Mediatization Process

In social movement's perspectives, mediation refers to "a social process in which media supports the flow of discourses, meanings, and interpretations in societies. It is an encompassing concept that brings together many media practices, paying attention to the flow of media productions, media circulation, media interpretation, and media recirculation that supports and surrounds social movements". On the other hand, mediatization is "a term used to denote adaptation of different social fields or systems of the 'media logic.'" The difference between the concept of mediation and that of mediatization is that the former 'describes the concrete act of communication using a medium in a specific social context.' Simultaneously, the letter 'refers to a more long-lasting process, whereby social and cultural institutions and modes of interaction are changed as a consequence of the growth of media's influence'". While mediation also considers situations where the media do not affect social institutions, mediatization would focus only on processes where social and cultural institutions are modified by media influence" (Mattoni and Treré 2014, 60–62).

Religion, as a social institution, goes with the mediation and mediatization processes. Lundby (2013) pointed out that religion must be viewed as a practice of mediation. He argues that religion cannot be analyzed outside the forms and mediation practices that define it (Lundby 2013). Meyer also notes that "the turn to mediation facilitates the study of religion across media, across time and space, and across disciplinary boundaries"(Meyer 2013, 14). The 'mediation of religion' paradigm "holds that all religions have always been mediated, and the new forms of media simply introduce new forms through which religion is circulated." Moreover, the mediation of religion argued for "less institutional, structural view of religion, one that thinks of religion as practice, rather than as doctrine or institution" (Hoover 2013, 173).

The mediation of religion further means that in studying the relation between religion and digital media, the focus is the interaction and rituals of various religious traditions rather than belief or dogma (Lundby 2013). The 'Mediatization of religion' paradigm, as an account for the mediation of religion, suggests that "it is not just what media do to religion that matters, but that new forms and functions and practices of religion are emerging due to media" and "the mediation of religion in facts changes religion (Hoover 2013, 173). These processes are an indication that the social practice of religion changes with the emergence of new social media.

The Religious Social Shaping of Technology

Technology is shaped socially (Campbell, 2010; Lövheim, 2013). The practice of various social and cultural processes determines the uses of technology. Social groups shape technology for their own needs and meaning makings. Technology "presented as a product of the interplay between different technical and social factors in both design and use" (Campbell 2010, 50). It further explained that "technology is seen as a social process and the possibility is recognized that social groups may shape technologies towards their own ends, rather than the character of the technology determining use and outcomes" (Campbell 2010, 50). Moreover, "technologies are constitutive of society and culture, but the way they shape these can never be understood outside the practices, social relations, and contexts in which they are used" (Lövheim 2013, 154).

Scholars argue the importance of developing the theory of the religious social shaping of technology as an alternative approach (Campbell, 2010; Lövheim, 2013). It is because "religious communities are unique in their negotiations with media due to these groups' moral economies and the historical and cultural setting in which they find themselves. Therefore, what is needed is a religious-social shaping approach" (Campbell 2010, 58). It also noted that "religious individuals in their use of digital media not simply change their practices according to affordances given by the medium, but also reshape technology through uses and social arrangements that adjust technology to fit with their value and lifestyle" (Lövheim 2013, 155).

Campbell (2010) further explains that "the religious-social shaping of technology emphasizes that religious communities do not outright reject new forms of technology, but rather undergo a sophisticated negotiation process to determine what the technology may affect their community" (Campbell 2010, 59). The negotiation process of the religious community is understood by the concept of resistance and reconstruction of technology. The "resistance involves asocial group choosing not to reject a technology, but instead to resist certain aspects or outcomes. Resistance means a religious community becomes actively involved in the process of analyzing the potential outcomes of the technology and negotiating standards of acceptable use" (Campbell 2010, 55). The resistance leads to reconstructing technology. The "reconstruction involves making choices about what form of the technology will be acceptable, the context in which how it should be used, how it should be utilized, and if any aspect must be

modified (Campbell 2010, 55). The uses of social media for religious purposes are considered part of the religious social reconstruction processes.

Religion and Social Media Activism

Like other forms of digital media, religious people's use of social media also passes through mediation, mediatization, and the religious social shaping of technology. The platforms are shaped socially and culturally in a way to fit religious practices. Besides shaping it for religious teachings, religious people use social media to organize themselves for their religious goals. Using their networks, they mobilize followers for social and political changes. Social media activism as an approach is helpful to understand this act of religious people on social media.

Ethiopian Muslim protestors mainly used social media to organize their protest. The religious networks on Facebook helped them to mobilize more people. The act could be considered as a religious practice. A practice to achieve a religious goal for social and political change. Social media activism is used as a theoretical approach and the broader social movement theory, thereby to show the power of social media to mobilize protests to the level of a social movement.

3.3.2 Social Movement Theory

The theoretical traditions of social movement emphasize the importance of three factors in understanding social movements' emergence. These factors are political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes. The broader set of *political opportunities* and constraints refers to unique factors to the national context and shape movements and revolutions in that context. *Mobilizing structure* means "collective vehicles informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action." The *framing process* is linked with the cultural dimension of social movements. It refers to the "conscious strategic efforts by a group of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and themselves that legitimate and motivates collective action." These three processes: political process, mobilization processes and, framing processes, are determinants in dealing with social movement theorization (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996, 2–7).

Johnston (2014) explains the social movement concept as a complex sociocultural phenomenon and identified three basic social movement dimensions. The first, the structural-organizational sphere; the second, shared ideational and interpretive elements; and networked performances that confirm, elaborate, and give life to the first two (Johnston 2014, 23). From these three dimensions, the theoretical applications of social movement emerge—the first dimension mainly related to networked relations among groups and participants. The second dimension is associated with ideology, values, beliefs, motivations elements. The third dimension is linked with collective actions for common goals.

Johnston (2014) further suggests five defining terms of a social movement. First, social movements collectively pursue social change goals derived from ideologies, interests, and frames that define a problem as a warranting action. Second, social movement performances mostly follow extra-institutional actions to influence decision-makers. These include marches, sit-ins, protest actions, demonstrations, meetings, rallies, and many more similar strategies. Third, social movements are structurally diverse, made up of numerous, networked groups, organizations, and individual adherents. They are not just one large Social Movement Organizations (SMO). Fourth, social movements have cohesion and continuity over time, partly derived from their organizational breadth that comes from their networked structure. Fifth, the continuity is also partly on a movement's collective identity, an ideational-interpretative element that is conformed and elaborated in numerous small-scale micro performances that also constitute a movement (Johnston 2014, 24–25).

Social movement theory used to study the Ethiopian Muslims protest by applying the five defining terms of Johnston's social movements. The aim is to assess whether the protest fits with the defining characteristics of the theory or not. The theory would help to identify where the protest fits in civil resistance studies. This identification further linked with social media activism approaches to show Facebook's power in mobilizing protests and movements.

3.4 Methodological Approach

3.4.1 Presentation of Research Material

The research materials used for the study are pictures and texts collected from the Ethiopian Muslim protestor's Facebook page called *Dimtsachin yisema (ድምፃችን ይሰማ) (Let Our Voices be Heard).* The protest was active between the years 2011 to 2015. Every Friday-after-prayers public protests were performed in different mosques at a time with its specific protest title. In this short thesis project, addressing all the protest pictures throughout these active years is hardly possible. Thus, a few weeks and pictures were selected.

Seven weeks and twenty-two pictures were selected for the main ethnographic study. According to Pink (2001), there is no single rule to identify a given picture as ethnographic or not. Any visual image can be ethnographic interest for further interpretation and discourse (Pink 2001). Pink's argument was considered, and I applied subjective criteria to select the pictures. The main criteria used in the selection process are the picture's power to show the nature of the protest.

The selected pictures also aimed to tell the story of the protest in the form of a photo essay. Stating the importance of using this technique as a source of information (or data), Pink noted that "some have objected to the inability of photographic essays to represent 'data' in a sufficient objective way. In response, visual sociologists have argued that visual essays can be adapted to the need for objective ethnographic representation" (Pink 2001, 134). Pictures are selected based on these ethnographic methodological considerations.

3.4.2 Critical Visual Methodology

The critical visual methodology was selected as an appropriate qualitative method to undertake the study. The method helped do both ethnographic and critical analysis of the Muslim protestors' selected pictures between the years 2011 to 2015. As the study used a series of pictures as an alternative way of giving information, the method helps study the protest in various contexts. Since the purpose of the research is to understand social media's power in mobilizing the Muslim community, the method helps interpret different pictures of the same protest expressed differently in different circumstances that circulated on Facebook.

The Ethnographic Perspectives

From an ethnographic point of view, visual research methods "divided into three broad activities: 'making visual representations' (studying society by producing images); 'examining pre-existing visual representations' (studying images for information about society); 'collaboration with social actors in the production of visual representations'" (Pink 2001, 30). Researching the protest pictures of Ethiopian Muslims goes with the second division. Collected pictures from Facebook studied the societal and political effects on the Ethiopian Muslim Community and the government.

Using pictures as a source for ethnographic study, Pink noted that "there is no simple answer or definition of what it is that makes an activity, image, text, idea or piece of knowledge 'ethnographic,' but will be defined as such through interpretation and context" (Pink 2001, 18). She further emphasized that:

> "any experience, action, artifact, image or idea is never definitively *just one thing* but maybe redefined differently in different situations, by different individuals and in terms of different discourses. It is impossible to measure the 'ethnographicness' of an image in terms of its form, content, or potential as an observational document, visual record, or piece of 'data.' Instead, the 'ethnographicness' of any image or representation is contingent on how it is situated, interpreted, and used to invoke meanings and knowledges that are of ethnographic interest" (Pink 2001, 19).

It is crucial to note Pink's point that "no images are essentially 'ethnographic' but are given ethnographic meanings in relation to the discourses that people use to define them" (Pink 2001, 28). She adds, "visual images are made meaningful through the subjective gaze of the viewer, and that each individual produces these photographic meanings by relating the image to his or her existing personal experience, knowledge and wider cultural discourses" (Pink 2001, 66–68). Stating the existence of variations in a visual method, Pink further noted that "the key to successful photographic research is an understanding of the social relations and subjective agendas through which they are produced and the discourses through which they are made meaningful" (Pink 2001, 76).

The visual method's ethnographic aspects are helpful not only to interpret the visual contents of the photographs but to examine how it creates subjective meanings to the Ethiopian Muslim viewers and contribute to the protest. As Pink emphasized, the "analysis should focus not only on the content of the image but on the meanings that different individuals give to those images in different contexts" (Pink 2001, 99). The method helps analyze the content and context of the image.

Critical Discourse Perspectives

Because images are often used with texts for further mobilization during the protest, the visual methodology's critical aspect is also useful in understanding the image's discourses. According to Rose (2016), "critical visual methodology must be concerned with the social effects of the visual materials it is studying." She further explains, "the social effects of an image or set of images are made at four sites–the sites of production, the site of the image itself, the site of its circulation, and the site of its audience" (Rose 2016, 46). The critical interpretations and meaning-making process of the visual image determined by these four sites. Although all the stated sites are essential, "discourse analysis is most concerned with the site of the image itself" (Rose 2016, 218).

The critical analysis of the image mainly focused on the pictures' power in affecting the situation's social and political dynamics. Each picture has its own story, implication, interpretation, and effects. To understand the full social and political effects of the Ethiopian Muslim protest connecting the meanings and interpretations of protest pictures is essential. This connection is what the analyst called discursive formation. Discursive formation "is the way meanings are connected together in a particular discourse" (Rose 2016, 188). The visual method's critical aspect is then helpful to search for meanings in a single picture and connect this meaning with others to study the broader social effects of pictures in the protest.

The ethnographic and critical aspects of the visual methodology are interlinked. The combined approach helps to study the social and political effects of the protest. Thus, a critical visual methodology was selected as an appropriate method to undertake the study.

3.5. Review of Related Literature

3.5.1 Major Branches of Islam

Islam is a global religion with followers of about two billion. Although all Muslims share monotheism and belief in one God, there are many divisions on practicing Islam. The primary division started after the Prophet Mohammed's death, mainly on disagreement about the religion's successor. After that, significant theological and legal differences among different denominations of Islam emerged.

Islam is mainly divided into three main branches: Sunni, Shi'a, and Kharijite (Glasse 2013). There is also further division among each branch. Most of the world Muslims are Sunni (i.e., 85 %). The remaining are Shi'ites and others (i.e., 15%). Despite divisions, almost all Muslims share beliefs and rituals, irrespective of their backgrounds, societies, and languages. Hillenbrand (2015) noted that "the performance of all the pillars of Islam the faithful are like the teeth of one comb. The five pillars–the shahada (the profession of faith), prayer, almsgiving, fasting, and pilgrimage to Mecca – are shared by Sunnis and Shi'ites alike" (Hillenbrand 2015, 140).

Sunni Islam

Sunni is the largest, often known as "the orthodox," branch of Islam. The adherents of Sunni Islam are referred to in Arabic as ahl as-sunnah wa l-jama'ah (the people of the Sunnah and the community). Sunnism strongly associates itself with the Prophet's Sunnah. The prominent meaning of Sunnah is that the spoken and acted example of the Prophet. It includes what he approved, allowed, or condoned when under prevailing circumstances, he might well have taken issue with others' actions, decisions, or practices, and what he refrained from and disapproved of (Glasse 2013, 510–11). Sunnis believe their practice is based on this Sunnah.

After the death of the death Prophet Mohammad, Abubakar declared his "successor" (Khalifa–caliph). By this, Abubakar, the father-in-law and close companion of the Prophet became the first Sunni caliph. The Sunni caliph's role was never to be considered a prophet, as Muhammad was the last Prophet, but to lead the Muslim community. The responsibilities include protecting the faith, to uphold Islamic law–based on the Quran and Sunnah, and to defend and expand the borders of the Muslim world. Sunni Islamic leadership started this way, and four caliphs after the Prophet's death ruled in sequences (Hillenbrand 2015).

With the Sunni caliphate system, the vast Muslim empire was established. According to Hillenbrand (2015), within a century of Muhammad's death, Islam as a faith and an Islamic empire stretched from Spain to Northern India and China's borders. The caliphate's seat moved away from remote Arabia, first to Kufa in Iraq, then Damascus, and then to Baghdad's new city in the second half of the eighth century. There it remained for centuries. He further emphasized that "just as the pope was identified with Rome, so too the name Baghdad evoked the caliph, the supreme leader of the Sunni Muslim community" (Hillenbrand 2015, 144).

Sunnism is not a unitary form of Islam. Instead, with the application of Islamic Jurisprudence and theological traditions, Sunnis further classified into different sects. Hillenbrand noted that "it would be as serious a mistake to treat "Sunnism" as a single entity as it would be to regard Christianity as a single consistent global phenomenon" (Hillenbrand 2015, 139). The classification within Sunni creates not only different interpretations but also intra-religious competition among the various sects for more space and power. The competition among sects of Sunnis remains to be the main discourses in political Islam.

Shi'a Islam

Shi'ism is a branch of Islam comprising 10% or less of all Muslims (Glasse 2013). Their doctrines are significantly different from those of the orthodox Sunni majority. The term "Shi'ah" refers to the "factions," "party," from shi'at Ali, "the party of Ali." Any faction or supporters, but specifically those who supported the claim to the Caliphate of Ali ibn Abi Talib is called Shi'a" (Glasse 2013, 488).

The origin of Shi'a Islam started with power competition after the death of Prophet Muhammad. They believe that succession should stay with the Prophet's family. Sunni and Shi'a share the core belief of Islam – about the Quran, the Prophet, and the five pillars of Islam. The core doctrine that separates the Shi'ites from Sunnis is that the Shi'ites doctrine of imama – charismatic authority vested only in the Prophet's family in a continuous line of Muhammad's descendants, known as Imams (Hillenbrand 2015). Sunni-Shi'a division started by a succession dispute and developed to various theological and legal differences in Islam's application.

Kharijites Islam

Kharijites (also known as the Khawarij, meaning 'seceder') is another branch of Islam, also created due to the leadership crisis. According to Glasse (285), the Kharijites were part of caliph Ali. However, when it was announced that the question of succession to the caliphate was to be decided by negotiation, they, some twelve thousand, left, hence the name "seceders" given. The Kharijites felt that such a matter could not be solved by compromise; their cray was, "decision

is God's alone." Glasse further noted that "their starting point was puritanism, indeed a very Calvinism, a nostalgia for the Islam of the Caliphate of 'Umer; they could be called "old believers" (many of the Kharijites had been qurra,' public reciters of the Quran) (Glasse 2013, 285).

The Ethiopian Muslims

Ethiopian Muslims are mostly Sunni. Shi'a, Kharijites, or other Islamic branches are almost inexistent. However, there are a variety of Sunni sects of Islam in Ethiopia. The legal and theological interpretations are different in different sects of Sunni Islam. Among the Sunni sects, the Wahhabis and the Ahbash are the two most rivalry Sunnis in Ethiopia.

According to Glasse (2013), Wahhabism is sect dominant in Saudi Arabia and Qatar. At the beginning of the 19th century, it gained footsteps in India, Africa, and elsewhere. After its founder Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahab, this sect's Adherents prefer to call themselves Muwahhiddun (Unitarist). However, this name is not often used. Glasse further noted that Wahhabism is a steadfast fundamentalist interpretation of Islam in the tradition of Ibn Hanbal, founder of the Hanbali School of Law and the theologian Ibn Taymiyyah (Glasse 2013, 550). Hillenbrand also states Wahhabism as "a movement of purification of Muslim society" begun in Arabia in18th century (Hillenbrand 2015, 184). It also noted, "Wahhabism may be considered the more enduring modern movement representing rigidly the concept of al-Islam din wa-dawla – Islam is inseparably religion and state" (Kabha and Erlich 2006, 519–20).

Ahbash is an Ethiopian based Sunni interpretation of Islam. The sect was founded by Ethiopian born prominent religious scholar Shaykh Abdalla ibn Muhammad ibn Yusuf al-Harari. An Ethiopian scholar from Harar. Arabs give the name Ahbash to indicates the identity of the founder, habasha. The term habasha in Arabic is used to refer to Ethiopians. The followers of Ahbash call themselves al-Ahbash. The teaching of Ahbash started in the 1940s in Harar, Ethiopia, but it did not expand well due to government interference. In 1948, the Founder Shaykh Abdalla suspected by the Ethiopian imperial regime of mobilizing Muslims for political purposes, jailed for some time, and then forced to leave the country. After leaving Ethiopia, Shaykh Abdalla spent some time in Mecca and Jerusalem in late 1948 and moved to Damascus.

In 1950, the shaykh moved to Beirut, where he resides for the rest of his life. He referred by many as the firm believer in Islamic-Christian coexistence (Kabha and Erlich 2006).

The Fundamental of the al-Ahbash is their adherence to the Shafi'i school of law. Their core ideology lies in combining the theological legacy of the Ash'ariyya with Sufi terminology, and in their contention that they represent ahl-sunnah wa-l-jama'a – the community of orthodox Islamic beliefs – the consensual, centra trend in Sunni Islam (Kabha and Erlich 2006, 524).

After settling in Beirut, Shayk Abdalla spent the early years in the company of leading local Islamic scholars. Shaykh Mukhtar al-Alayli supported him through his Dar al-Fatwa association, and Shaykh Muhiyy al-Ajuz did the same through his Association of Islamic Philanthropic Projects. When Shaykh Ajuz died in 1983, Shayk Abdalla was declared leader of the Association of Islamic Philanthropic Projects. Since then, the association has been popularly called 'the Ahbash.' The slightly flexible interpretation of Islam that revolved on Islamic-Christian coexistence received much attention in Beirut. The Ahbash sect of Sunni Islam later entered Lebanese politics, and in 1989, it won a seat in the Lebanese parliament for its member (Kabha and Erlich 2006, 523).

Shayk Abdala returned to Ethiopia three times (1969, 1995, and 2003) and continued spreading his teachings. As there are many Ethiopian Muslims who accept Ahabsh's interpretation of Islam, many others strictly reject his teachings. The sect often in a fight with the Wahhabism. Kabha and Erlich (2016) noted that the story of the rivalry between Ahbash and the Wahhabiyya has its roots in Ethiopia's Harar town, the old capital of Islam in the Horn of Africa. The conceptual rivalry turned in the 1990s into a verbal war conducted in traditional ways and using new channels of Internet exchanges and polemics (Kabha and Erlich 2006, 519–22).

The recent Ethiopian Muslim protest could be a manifestation of the Ahbash-Wahhabiyya competition. The government visibly supported the Ahbash sect of Sunni Islam while blaming all other sects, especially Wahhabism, in Ethiopia as adherents of Islamic extremism.

3.5.2 Studies on Ethiopian Muslims Movement

Literature focused on the Ethiopian Muslims mainly shows the struggle of Muslims for public space and equal rights. The history of Ethiopian Muslims is a history of struggle. Muslims in

Imperial Ethiopia were suffered from various discriminative policies and systematic marginalization. Muslims struggled for centuries to be treated as equal citizens (Abbink, 1998; 2011; 2014; Ahmed, 2006; Feyissa, 2013; Omer, 2002).

The recent movement also attracts the attention of a few researchers. Their research focused on the historical and political implications of the movements. They linked the freedom movement with the political and historical orders of the country. By doing so, they studied the movement with the perspectives of ethnoreligious federalism (Abbnik, 2014; Feyissa & Lawrence, 2014).

All research addresses the historical, political, and religious aspects of the movement. Their analysis focuses on examining the power of the protest in challenging the country's political structure by addressing the systematic historical discrimination, marginalization, and unequal treatment of Muslims. The research papers further discuss the competition of different sects for more power in Islam.

Although these studies address the core issues of the Ethiopian Muslim movements, their study did not address the social media aspect in achieving the protests. This thesis project aims to contribute to filling this research gap by studying the movement from social media activism perspectives, thereby examining the power of Facebook in mobilizing Ethiopian Muslims for a religious movement.

3.5.3 Brief Notes on Civil Resistance

Gandhi and Civil Resistance

Nonviolent resistance is often associated with Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. He referred by many as a symbol of Civil resistance. In a fight with the British for the 'Indian Self-Rule,' he developed civil resistance techniques called 'Satyagraha.' Satyagraha is an "amalgamation of two Gujarati words, Satya (truth) and agraha (taking, seizing, holding), the implication being that one seizes hold of the truth" (Hardiman 2004, 51). Gandhi's tool 'Satyagraha,' further interpreted as "holding to the truth, with two elements; love and force" (Jones and Kraft 2003, 149). Gandhi's truth was his God, but he interpreted in many ways. The truth principle was used for mobilization of nonviolent resistance in the fight for Indian independence.

Gandhi equated the Sanskrit word Satya with God. The meaning further linked with "true, actual, pure, virtuous, good, successful, effectual, valid" (Hardiman 2004, 52). Emphasizing on the power of truth in mobilizing for civil resistance Gandhi in 1937 said that:

> I used to say, 'God is truth.' But some men deny God. Some are forced by their passion for truth to say that there is no God, and in their own way they are right. So now I say, 'Truth is God'. No one can say, 'Truth does not exist' without removing all truth from his statement. Therefore, I prefer to say, 'Truth is God'. It has taken me fifty years of preserving meditation to prefer this way of putting it to the other (Hardiman 2004, 51).

Based on this principle of truth, Gandhi mobilized Indians in the 1930s and 40s for independence movement against the British rule. Indians used various nonviolent resistance tactics, including economy boycotts, school boycotts, civil disobedience, tax refusal, and many other tactics.

Like Gandhi, during the 1950s and 60s, the US Civil Rights Movements organized different nonviolent campaigns such as the Montgomery bus boycotts and the Nashville lunch counter sit-ins in their fight for the institutionalized segregation system. Since then, many people have exercised nonviolent resistance for various rights movements in different parts of the world. Most of the nonviolent resistances ended with success (Merriman 2010).

The Success of Nonviolent Resistance

According to Smith and Burr (2014), nonviolent resistance is classified into three essential stages. These are Protest and persuasion, Noncooperation, and Intervention. Proper application of these actions leads to the success of resistance. These are the critical actions in nonviolent resistance (Smith and Burr 2014).

Chenoweth and Stephan, in their book, 'Why Civil Resistance Works,' argue that "a critical source of the success of nonviolent resistance is mass participation, which can erode or remove a regime's main sources of power when the participants represent diverse sectors of society" (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 31). They add that "the ability of nonviolent campaigns to mobilize a higher number of participants with a more diverse array of skills, abilities, and perspectives explains why they have been so successful at activating local mechanisms of change in their societies, including shifts in loyalty from the regime to the resistance and the ability to make regime repression backfire" (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 61).

Nonviolent campaigns' success further explained that the physical, moral, and informational barriers to participation in nonviolent campaigns are substantially lower than the violent campaigns given comparable circumstances. The lower the barrier to participation translates into a higher degree of a more diverse membership in nonviolent campaigns, which proves to be a critical factor in explaining the outcomes of resistance campaign" (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 220).

Even in extreme suppression by an authoritarian regime, civil resistance will work by creating a backfire effect (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011). Regime brutality, economic domination, and sophisticated population control through harassment and intimidation are formidable obstacles to mobilization. However, Chenoweth and Stephan argue, the repression against massive, nonviolent campaigns is more likely to backfire against the perpetrator than when repression is used against massive, violent campaigns. They add, backfiring results in even greater mobilization, shifts in loyalty among erstwhile regime elites, and sanctions against the offending regime" (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, 82).

The Trifecta of Civil Resistance

The three attributes that can make the difference between success and failure for nonviolent movements are Unity, Planning, and Nonviolent discipline (Merriman 2010).

As the first principle of the trifecta, *unity* helps organize and continually reach out to new groups in society and even reach out to the opponent's supporters. Unity strengthens the bond among the participants that lead to success for the case.

The second principle is planning—strategic planning linked with deciding what tactics to use and how they should be sequenced. Developing galvanizing propositions for change is based on the people's aspirations and grievances they aim to represent. Planning what individuals and groups to target with tactics and what short-, medium-, and long-term objectives to pursue; and building lines of communication so that coalitions can be negotiated and built are just some of the issues around which nonviolent movements must creatively strategize" (Merriman 2010, 6).

Discipline, as the third principle of the trifecta, is also vital in protecting violent action. Merriman emphasized that strategy is only useful if it is executed in a disciplined way. The most substantial risk for failure of discipline in a nonviolent movement is that sometimes members may become violent. Nonviolent discipline – the ability of people to remain nonviolent, even in the face of provocations – is often continually instilled in participantS. Violent incidents by members of a movement can dramatically reduce its legitimacy while giving the movement's opponent an excuse to use repression (Merriman 2010).

The tree attributes –Unity, planning, and discipline– are timeless. As such, they provide a general framework through which members and supporters of movements and those report and study them can quickly assess a movement's state (Merriman 2010).

Chapter Four: Visual Discussions

4.1 Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (EIASC or Majlis)

The Majlis is the highest council of Islamic affairs in Ethiopia. It was established in 1976 by the Derg regime to ensure equality of all religions in Ethiopia and institutionally represent Ethiopian Muslims. Although the official and institutional representation allowed Muslims to have a Supreme Council for their religious affairs, the council's practical work exhibited frequent government interventions. Most activities, including the management team's assignment, were influenced by the government (Feyissa and Lawrence 2014). Even in the post-1991 regime, most Muslims in the country consider the Majlis as a government-influenced institution. The leaders of the Majlis are often seen as loyalists to the political ideology of the ruling party. Political affiliation to the ruling party matters more than merits in religious education or popular will to assume a position in the management of the Majlis.

The Majlis has been a source of tension despite the good intentions in its formation. In principle, the Majlis is the highest council for Islamic affairs independently of the Islamic community sects. In reality, members of different sects of Islam in Ethiopia fought hard to control the Majlis. Understanding the interest of different sects to exercise control of the Majlis, the state often favored the sect leader believed to be most loyal to the ruling elite. Thus, the government often places loyalists, who allow the government to control the institution and indirectly influence the Majlis's management. However, state intervention often creates tension within the Muslim community and between the state and the Muslim community. For example, in 1995, the Majority of Muslims at Grand Anwar Mosque in Addis Ababa challenged a pro-government vice-chairman of Majlis. That event alone caused the violence that ended with many Muslims' death and injury (Abbink 1998).

The recent conflict and Islamic movement revolve squarely on the Majlis. For the state, involvement in the management of the Majlis, for that matter, the other religious institutions, is crucial to regulate the rise of religious movement in the country. Perhaps, due to the perceived fear of Islam, the government gradually employed more assertive secularism in a way that directly affected the Muslim community (Østebø 2016). For the state, controlling the Majlis means controlling the Muslim community for political agenda. For the Muslim community, state involvement in the Majlis' affairs is a source of repression and disempowerment. After all,

the Majlis is the principal institution for Muslims after centuries of explicit exclusion. The conflict between the government and the Ethiopian Muslim community reached its climax in 2011, which manifested itself with massive protests throughout the country. What is the immediate cause of this conflict?

4.2 Ahbash Training and Awoliya Students

Believing that Ethiopia's Islamic movement moves towards a radical direction, the Ethiopian government decides to develop more authoritarian rules against Muslim activities. The late prime minter Melese Zenawi told his parliament that "we are observing tell-tale signs of extremism. We should nip this scourge in the bud" (Reuters 2012). Islamic institutions, schools, teachers, and young preachers targeted. The targeting reached a boiling point when the government-sponsored Lebanese-based al-Ahbash movement started through the Majlis in July 2011.

An Ethiopian born Islamic scholar Abdullah Al-Harari founded the Ahbash sect of Sunni Islam around the 1960s. Due to political disagreements with the previous regimes, he spent most of his life in exile, mostly in Lebanon. His teaching received much recognition in Lebanon. The current government considered the political relevance of this sect of Islam. After being invited by the Majlis and the Ministry of Federal Affairs, the Ethiopian born Al-Ahbashis from Lebanon started disseminating their teachings to the Muslim community. The government believed that the Ahbash sect of Islam is crucial in combating any form of "extremist" Islam and promote moderate views (Østebø and Shemsedin 2017). Thus, supporting the Ahbash sect was believed as a critical strategy to control the activities, teachings, schools, and institutions of Ethiopian Muslims.

The Ethiopian government considered the Ahbash sect of Islam more liberal and politically helpful to control the Majlis. Because of that, the state provided exceptional support to spread Ahbash teachings. The support includes importing more of their followers, mainly Ethiopian Al-Ahbashis, from Lebanon to alter the power balance on the ground and help the sect to control the Majlis. As noted by Østebø, from fall 2011 for over a year, enforced Ahbash training was given throughout the country. Lebanese al-Ahbash instructors schooled Muslims about the organization's ideas. They were using the Majlis to provide training about the teachings of Ahbash to selected Muslim officials. A book that is glorifying Abdullah Al-Harari and his

teachings published and distributed at the expense of other formal Islamic educational institutions (Østebø 2016).

The official promotion of the Ahbash teachings created tension between the government and religious figures who declined to support the government's action. Many Muslims reacted very negatively to the Ahbash campaign. The tense situation reached its climax when the controversies around Awoliya Islamic College erupted in December 2011. At the time, the Majlis dismissed all Arabic teachers of the school and suspended the Arabic curriculum (Østebø 2016; Østebø and Shemsedin 2017). The government targeted Awoliya Islamic College, declaring that the school is producing extremists and non-tolerant Muslims. The government further blamed Awoliya students for threatening people of different religions' peaceful coexistence through religious extremism in the country.

Awoliya was established around the 1940s, initially as a child school for Quran, and became an Islamic College after some time. The Ethiopian Muslim community considers the college as the principal Islamic College for the Ethiopian Muslims, although its finance came from the International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO) of Saudi Arabia. At a time, Awoliya can serve about 5000 students.

In September 2010, before the start of the official Ahbash training in 2011, the Ethiopian government closed IIRO's office in Addis Ababa and cut a considerable part of Awoliya's fund from Saudi Arabia. Next, most of the college's authority transferred to the Majlis, and the school became under the control of the Addis Ababa education bureau (Let Our Voices be Heard 2014).

Awoliya students and protest organizers believed that the assault on the college's independence and the transfer of the college to the Majlis as an infringement of constitutional rights. During 2011, the Majlis targeted selected teachers, students, and especially the school's Arabic teaching team. The same year government-sponsored Ahbash training started. They felt the action as direct intervention in Muslims' affairs, official support in favor of one sect at the expense of the rest.

Consequently, Awoliya Islamic college students lead the opposition against the government-sponsored training and the spreading of Ahbash ideology. The protestors say they are not opposing the right to teach Ahbash in the country for any sect of any religion has an equal constitutional right to preach its teachings. They emphasized that they are opposing the government action of forcibly imposing Ahbash on the general Muslim community. They said that they are fighting the control of Majlis only by al-Ahbashis.

In response, in December 2011, the Majlis dismissed fifty Arabic language teachers and administrative workers of the college. It replaced the entire administration of the college by, what the critics believe, by Ahbash Muslims. This dismissal of the teachers and other workers from Awoliya College was the turning point for the Ethiopian Muslims protest. Thus, the protest formally began at Awoliya College in December 2011.

The student demanded repealing the dismissal of their teachers. Initially, it was a gathering of concerned students at Awoliya (see picture 1). What began as a small gathering of protest of the college students, demanding their teachers' return to their work, turned into a full-blown Friday-after-prayers protest that attracted hundreds of thousands of Muslims throughout the capital Addis Ababa. The protesters gathered and chanted *"Allahu Akbar"* and *"Let Our Voices be Heard"* at Awoliya college, Grand Anwar mosque, and other mosques in the capital Addis Ababa. They call the entire Muslim community to join them and fight for injustices and the attack unleashed on Islamic institutions in Ethiopia.

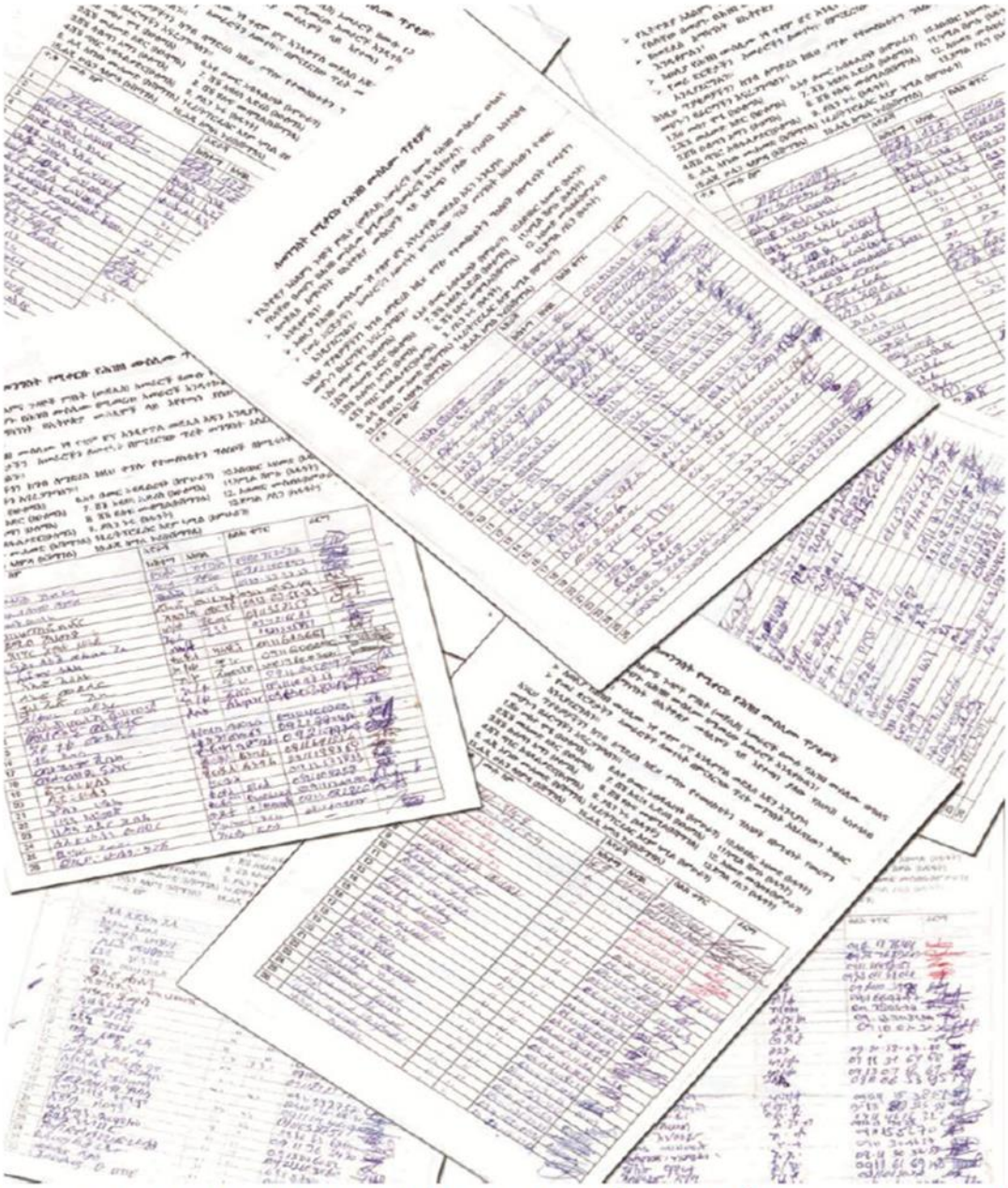
Picture 1: Awoliya students expressing their anger and demanding the return of their teachers and mosque leaders (imams) to their works. (Source: Yetezenebele *fiteh* Amharic book p. 20)

The students further organized themselves. They created social media pages and accounts on various social media platforms. They started publishing their questions, activities, and demands. They called for all Muslims to stand with them and protect the Awoliya Islamic college and other Islamic institutions. They opposed government-sponsored Ahbash training, criticized the act of Majlis leaders, and demanded election for the Majlis leadership.

The government responded with force to stop the Awoliya student's movement and labeled them as a few extremists having connections with extremist groups, particularly in the Horn of Africa. The police arrested active students and campaign organizers and assaulted the participants. Despite this, students continued to publish notes and updates about their case. They kept posting pictures of injured students on social media. The government's use of force created anger among Ethiopian Muslims, and most of them joined the protest to show solidarity to the students' causes.

4.3 Ethiopian Muslims Arbitration Committee (EMAC)

The government interference on Muslims' religious affairs and Majlis's control by the government-supported sect of Islam got much attention throughout the country. The government's use of force to stop the student's movement further made the majority of Muslims stand beside them. In addition to the capital Addis Ababa, major regional cities joined the student protest, and the size of the people who showed solidarity with the protestors became greater and greater. The social media pages got tens of thousands of followers, and the Friday-after-prayers protest became the practice of many prominent mosques in many major cities throughout the country. The government started to realize the difficulty of stopping the protesters by force and insisted on selecting a representative to negotiate the case. The protestors agreed to elect a committee that represented their case for negotiation with the government administration. Muslims suggest many candidates for the committee. The suggested nominees are prominent Muslims who are well-known and respected by most Muslims in the country through their religious works and activities for the Muslim community. Using a paper form, the vote for the formation of committee collected from major protesting mosques, especially in Addis Ababa. The representing committee for negotiation with the government officially formed through these processes in 2012 (see picture 2).



Picture 2: Sample of the collected petition to appoint the committee
(Source: Yetezenebele fiteh Amharic book p.24)

The elected committee was named the Ethiopian Muslim Arbitration Committee (EMAC) and had seventeen members of known Muslims from various disciplines. The membership was composed of prominent religious scholars, imams, preachers, teachers, lawyers, historians, authors, and activists. This committee represents Ethiopian Muslim protestors and sought solutions between the Muslim Community and the government concerning the protest's central issue. The committee started its work by developing three main questions for negotiation with the government. The questions include:

- Majlis's current leadership does not represent the Muslim community, so an elected representative of the Muslim Community must substitute it.
- Using Majlis, the government should stop indoctrinating Ethiopian Muslims with Al-Ahbash ideology (but the Al-Ahbash sect can preach its doctrine independently).
- An independent board of directors that has no attachment to Majlis should administer the Awoliya Islamic College.

The committee met the government representatives, mainly of the Ministry of Federal Affairs, for negotiation. They presented their questions and demanded an immediate response to their issues. The negotiation process aired on state-owned national television. The aim may be to reduce the tension and to convince Muslims that their case is under negotiation. At the beginning of the negotiation process, the government showed interest in solving the problem, promised to answer the questions, and correct any inappropriate wrongdoings.

Picture 3: Showing passageway for committee members to their public speech about the negotiation process in one of Friday-after-prayers protest (Source: Yetezenebele fiteh Amharic book p.38)

The committee made speeches and continuously published reports on the protest's Facebook page about the negotiation processes. They further asked the protestors to skip some of the Friday-after-prayer public protests during the negotiation process, when necessary. Despite the

repeated efforts, the negotiation brings no appropriate answers to the committee's question. The government facilitated unclear politicized elections that led to leaders' changes in Majlis and said that the question of changing the management had been answered. The committee insisted on a free election by the entire Muslim community themselves, not the government changing the leadership. The situation grew increasingly tense. While the negotiation process was ongoing, the government used state media to say that the management in Majlis has changed, the agreement has been reached with the committee, and Muslims' basic questions have been answered.

On the other hand, the committee decried that no agreement was reached, and none of the questions were answered, and they called for further nonviolent protest. The disagreement created severe tensions between the government and the committee. It became clear that the government negotiation plan was not aimed at solving the problem but identifying the protest leaders and organizers to attack them separately. By doing so, the government believed that it could be possible to stop the protest. The government blamed the committee members for not collaborating and working for a solution. It accused the committee of having a hidden agenda of forming an Islamic government. The government further emphasized that the committee members were not working for the rights questions of Ethiopian Muslims. Instead, the government accused them of working for the interest of the listed "terrorist" group in the region to create chaos and destabilize the country. According to the government, they aimed to seize political power to achieve the long-term goal of forming an Islamic state. The government said that there was evidence for this and charged most committee members on terrorism by the country's anti-terror law. The committee members and other active protestors were targeted and imprisoned.

While the committee members are under custody, state-owned television aired a documentary film entitled 'Jehadawi Harakat.' The documentary referred to the rising of Islamic religious extremism in Ethiopia. It aimed to show the committee member's connection with listed "terrorist" groups in Africa and the rest. It further accentuated that the committee members and other Muslims allegedly tried to establish an Islamic government. A study on the audience reception (using both Muslim and non-Muslims respondents) analysis of the documentary Jehadawi Harakat among Addis Ababa communities indicated that the audience found the film's contents less credible, biased, and distorted to achieve the hidden agenda of the government

(Nigussie 2013). The respondents to the study noted that the film subjects do not represent the overall Muslim society, and the theme is irrelevant to the country's socio-religious context. The respondents expressed their concerns that the documentary film might create further instability in the country and instigate non-Muslims against Muslim societies (Nigussie 2013). They emphasized that "portraying Abubakar or Kamil [the Chairman and the secretary of the committee] as terrorists, extremists that threaten peace and development [of the country] is the same as representing [the whole Ethiopian] Muslims as terrorists and extremists that threaten peace and development of the country" (Nigussie 2013, 81).

Picture 4 shows the committee chairman, Abubakar, chained and investigated in the Jahadawi Harakat documentary film. Despite the government effort to stop the Muslim movements by arresting the committee members and making documentary films to convince the public of their charges on terrorism, the protest continued. The movement never stopped instead spread in a more organized manner.

Picture 4: The Committee chairman, Abubakar, chained and under investigation in the documentary Jihadawi Harakat (Screenshot)

4.4 Let Our Voices be Heard and Social Media

The Ethiopian Muslims protest was mainly organized on social media. The leading slogan *Let our Voices Be Heard* became an essential subject of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, blogs, and YouTube, among most Ethiopian Muslims' social media users. Many supporters from followers of other religions also joined the online movement and showed solidarity to Muslim questions. All digital media platforms properly used to organize the protest, advance communication, criticize Majlis's wrongdoing, and expose the government's brutal responses to the Muslim questions.

The social media pages and accounts associated with the protest received tens of thousands of followers and subscribers. Their main Facebook page, *Dimtsachin yisema ("ድምፃችን ይሰማ" n.d)*, gained over one hundred fifty thousand followers and interactors. Each activity and moments were adequately recorded. The updates, news, protest plan, and any other relevant information was shared immediately. The call for Friday-after-prayers protest further supported by teachings of Islamic ways of resistance in the time of persecution. The teachings of the prophet Mohammed and early Muslims' experience at the time of religious hardship in Arabia was repeatedly narrated. The sufferings, marginalization, systematic discrimination, and the centuries-old struggles of Ethiopian Muslims contextually written. Even old pictures from the previous Ethiopian Muslims' movements for equal public space in previous regimes circulated. The organizers were able to mobilize Muslims of different ages, ethnicity, and sex throughout the country. Women were active participants of the protest; both on social media and Friday-after-prayers public protests, women played a significant part in advancing the movement.

Though the public protest held every Friday-after-prayer, the online campaign, preparation, and information sharing were practiced daily. Friday selected because Friday (Jumu'ah) is considered a blessed day in Islam and the highest pray day of the week, where lots of Muslims gathered for Jumu'ah prayer everywhere in the world. The organizers use this tremendous opportunity to address their questions and to attract more public and media attention. The process of the protest was well organized. They often published the plan and strategies of the protest early in the week on their different social media platforms to be disseminated to the public and ready for the Friday protest. The message on social media shared, liked, and commented by many protesters and their supporters throughout the week, and Muslims became ready for Friday-after-prayer protest.

Each Friday's protest had its title and symbolic physical representation. The meaning and detailed explanation of the chosen title and symbol and Islamic teachings of civil resistance was published. The online and public protest continued in these ways for years between the years 2011 and 2015. Even after the imprisonment of committee members, the protest actively continued. There are occasions where the government shut down the internet to stop the protest. In such situations, the organizers used short text messages instead, and the protest continued. The exact admins or persons behind the social media pages and accounts are not precisely known to the public. All posts published in the protest's name – *Let Our Voices be Heard*. Short text messages were also used to address those who do not use social media.

In this short paper, covering all forms of social media platforms used for the protest are hardly possible. Facebook was the primary tool to organize the protest accurately and to mobilize Ethiopian Muslims. The protest Facebook page has many more followers and interactors than other social media accounts. As a result, this study only focusses on the protest's Facebook page, *Dimtsachin Yisema*. Other social media platforms used for the protest are not included. Unless stated, all photos used in this study collected from the *Dimtsachin Yisema Facebook page*. Since this study's parameters as a master thesis could not cover the whole four years of Facebook movements in this study, a few weeks from the active years of the protest and their pictures were selected. The selection of weeks and photos has been made based on its relevance to show the movement's nature. The public owns these pictures as the protest organizers never claimed ownership of the photos. Instead, in many situations, the protest organizers state that the photos are collected from protestors or protest supporters. They further encouraged people to take and send them protest pictures for further use and mobilization.

4.5 The Protest in Pictures

4.5.1 Yellow Protest

Yellow usually represents a sign of warning. One of Ethiopian Muslims' Friday-after-prayers protest was called the yellow protest. The explanation behind choosing the color yellow was to warn the government. It was a symbolic representation of warning to stop interfering with the religious affairs of Muslims immediately. Warning to stop favoring one sect of Islam, *Ahbash*, over the others. Warning to stop detaining Muslim activists, students, teachers, and journalists.

Warning to stop attacking Islamic schools, institutions, and charity organizations. Warning to immediately release detained Muslims. Warning to stop torturing imprisoned Muslim activists, teachers, and protestors and to respect their human rights. Warning to stop targeting Islamic publications of newspapers, magazines, audio, and video CDs. Warning to stop terrorizing Muslim preachers, Imams, Ustazs , and community leaders. Warning to stop linking the right movement of Ethiopian Muslims with terrorism. Warning to stop labeling Muslim freedom fighters as terrorists. Warning to stop the label and attack strategies. Warning to respect the freedom of every religion equally. All these themes on the color yellow and its meanings clearly stated in various texts on the Facebook page and the interpretations were made by the protestors.

Details regarding the yellow protest strategies were published on their Facebook page, mostly in Amharic and sometimes in English and other Ethiopian languages. The information was published both in text and picture forms. The message could read as, "anyone of you coming to Friday prayer, please come with a yellow sign with you. After the end of Friday prayer, we all stand together and wave our yellow signs for about three minutes". The yellow sign could be anything harmful. It was not allowed to bring any form of weapon or harmful materials. The sign could be paper, textiles, cartoons, or balloons. What was essential was not the type of materials, but the color and that was to be yellow.

The organizers clearly stated that the protest was necessary to be nonviolent. They emphasized the importance of helping each other in protecting any form of violent action from happening. They noted that the aim of the protest was addressing Muslim voices, not creating further problems. The goal was to be heard and to get the right response for the basic questions. They emphasized that the purpose is not to form an Islamic state as the government repeatedly presents; instead, it was a fight for religious freedom. It is a nonviolent fight to get the freedom to elect their leaders and administer their institution without government interference.

Pictures 5 and 6 below show Muslim women and men performing a yellow protest at Grand Anwar mosques on Friday after prayer in October 2012, Addis Ababa. The yellow protest was the one that gained the attention of various international media. International human rights organizations, activists, and journalists commented on the protest strategies. Observers considered the yellow demonstration as the protest's critical move on getting more attention from the international community.

Picture 5&6. October 2012: Yellow Protest
Source:
https://www.facebook.com/DimtsachinYisema/photos/a.325745250810171/464413043610057/?type=3&theater

4.5.2 The 27 Protest

Constitutionally Ethiopia is a secular state. The 1995 Ethiopian constitution states the separation of religion and state. Article 27 declares the freedom of religion as:

> *Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right shall include the freedom to hold or to adopt a religion or a belief of his choice, and the freedom, either individually or in a community with others, and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, and teaching (Art. 27, 1995).*

Article 27 (3) further says that "none shall be subject to coercion or other means that would restrict or prevent his freedom to hold a belief of his choice." Even though Ethiopia is a formal 'secular state,' religion is strongly present in the public sphere and functions as a critical framework for community life. Understanding this reality, the government never allowed religious institutions the freedom they need to operate their religious activities instead used them to advance political agenda. Despite the written freedom of religion, the government has not fully succeeded in keeping religions and politics apart. The government's involvement in Muslims religious affairs comes from the goverenmnt's interest to control religious institutions. Ethiopia Muslims protestors oppose the act in different forms. The 27 protest was one form of protest addressing the constitution. The 27 protest aims to ask the government to respect the constitution, especially article 27, and the rule of law.

In picture 7 and 8 below, Muslim women and men waved white papers with number 27 after their Friday prayers in 2012. The number is a symbolic representation of article 27, and they were asking the government to respect the constitution and stop interfering with their religious affairs. Throughout the week, the organizers of the protest published messages on their Facebook page about the protest strategies. Texts from the constitution and legal expert explanations about the constitutional rights of exercising religion circulated. They repeatedly reminded Muslims to bring white paper with number 27 to the Friday protest. They emphasized that number 27 should be written in a white paper. Using white paper further interpreted as a symbolic representation of the clearness of the questions. Uniform nonviolent protest strategies that everyone exercises the same forms of protest. They were also instructed to avoid any kind of violent actions and instead wave the white papers with number 27 after the prayer for about

three minutes. While these pictures were from the main protest at Grand Anwar Mosque in Addis Ababa, the protest was active in many other mosques throughout the country.

Picture 7&8: December 2012. Respect article 27 of the Constitution Protest
Source:
https://www.facebook.com/pg/DimtsachinYisema/photos/?tab=album&album_id=483058131745548

4.5.3 Justice Protest

The government responses to the Muslims' questions and their protest were not understanding and genuinely negotiating their case but using force to stop the move. Charging committee members and protesters with religious extremism, terrorism, and conspiracy to form an Islamic government was the government's strategy. In different circumstances, many protesters were imprisoned and beaten by police. Despite the government effort to stop the movement by force, the protest continued every Friday after prayers in a more organized manner. Different protest strategies were practiced. One of these was the justice protest. They emphasized justice for Ethiopian Muslims, justice for imprisoned Muslim journalists, religious leaders, teachers, activists, and all protestors.

Like the other protests, the organizers posted detailed messages about justice on their social media platforms. They emphasized the importance of justice for all perpetrated Ethiopian Muslims. They told their followers to bring white paper with the word justice written on it. Like the 27 protests, they explained the importance of using white paper as a symbolic indication of the clearness of the questions and the nonviolent nature of the movement. Muslims who went to Friday prayers followed the instructions, took the white paper with the word justice written on it, and performed the protest, as shown in the following two pictures.

Pictures 9 and 10 are from the justice protest at Grand Anwar mosque in Addis Ababa in 2013. It shows women and men performing justice protest by waving white papers with the word justice written on it. No other form of the demonstration was applied except waving the white paper. After the end of Friday prayer, protesters stand together and wave the white papers. In most protest papers, the word Justice (*Feteh ፍትሕ in Amharic*) was written three times.

Writing justice three times was explained as a symbolic representation of the three main questions of the protest. These include, the government must stop involvement in religious affairs, the Muslim supreme council leaders should be elected again by all Muslims' participation, Awoliya School should be administered by the independent board free from Majlis. Besides, banned teachers from Awoliya Islamic College must return to their work. Writing justice three times was further explained as Justice for Muslims, Justice for prisoners, and justice for Muslim university students. Justice protest was also one of the main protests in Ethiopian Muslim struggle and exercised in different weeks in different forms.

Picture 9&10: April 2013. Justice Protest.
Picture Source:
https://www.facebook.com/pg/DimtsachinYisema/photos/?tab=album&album_id=547719015279459

4.5.4 Silent Protest

Moment of silence was another form of the protest—a nonviolent protest strategy used by the Ethiopian Muslim protestors. Throughout the week, organizers shared ideas and Islamic teachings about the importance of tolerance, prayer, silence, and a more profound connection with God during hardship in religious life. They emphasized that by performing a moment of silence in the face of government atrocity, they wanted to show their peaceful struggle to the public. Moment of silence was exercised in different weeks of the protest. Standing together, holding hand by hand, sitting and praying, crossing hands over the head, and duct tape over the mouth was among the different silent protest forms. Silence week, prayer week, endurance week, connection with Allah week, and many more similar titles used for silent protests.

Picture 11 and 12 below show women and men performing silence protest at Anwar Mosque in Addis Ababa in 2013. Crossed hands over the head was a symbolic representation of nonviolent response in the time of persecution. It further explained as a symbolic indication of unarmed struggle in the face of armed government. The protesters believed that despite their peaceful, nonviolent, and harmless acts, the government failed to respond to their questions. Instead, they were treated like criminals, labeled as terrorists, imprisoned, tortured, and systematically attacked by the government. Crossed hands over the head was an indication of all the injustice and imprisonment. Deep prayer and connection with God were also used as part of silent protest. The following pictures show forms of silent protest in one of Friday-after-prayers protest. Crossed hands over the head later became the symbol for the *Oromo Protest*, another massive ethnic-based protest between 2015 and 2017. The Oromo protest followed the Muslim protest that further shook the political structure of the country.

Picture 11 & 12: April 2013. Silence Protest.
Source:
https://www.facebook.com/DimtsachinYisema/photos/a.544700038914690/544717668912927/?type=3&theatre

4.5.5 Marriage Protest

Mubarek and Khalid were the two Muslim activists imprisoned for their role in the Ethiopian Muslim Movement. Amongst the many other Muslim activists, teachers, journalists, university students, and ordinary participants, they faced terrorism charges. They had been jailed in one of Ethiopia's dangerous prison called Kality. The most severe charges include the attempts of terrorism, conspiracy to establish an Islamic state, and public incitement. What makes Mubarek and Khalid different from other Muslim prisoners was their decision to marry their loved one while being incarcerated and tortured in prison. While defending their case against the most severe accusation under the country's law, their decision to marry was interpreted by many as a symbolic resistance and a showcase of defiant hope.

On May 6, 2013, the wedding day and the ceremony were held in the brides' houses, local mosques, and Kality prison. The groomsmen of the bridegroom were the imprisoned four Muslim arbitration committee members who led the Muslim rights movement since the end of 2011. The wedding ceremony was considered very loud in indicating the struggle to defeat fear and hopelessness. Islamic songs (Neshidas) included in the ceremony were not only of those praising the marriage but also of expressing civil resistance.

Picture 13 and 14 shows the two brides with their bridesmaids celebrating their marriage ceremony without their bridegrooms. They both certainly know that they might not see their loved one sooner or may never at all. According to the country's anti-terror law, they both were aware that their spouses' terrorism charges might lead to staying in prison for more than fifteen years. However, they decided that they supported the Ethiopian Muslim's struggles and wanted to be part of it by standing by their bridegroom's side in their hard time.

One of the brides in an interview commented on her decision to marry at this time of hardship; she emphasized that "if we meet here in this world, well and good. If not, the rendezvous will be in the afterlife [in Jennah (heaven)]"[7]. The expectation of family union was not conditioned by state atrocity and brutal actions. They wanted to show hope and the delight of resistance to overcome the pain of separation. The wedding was considered as public, not as merely of subjective and personal matters. Interpreted by many as a symbolic representation of civil

[7] https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/marriage-as-symbolic-resistance-story-of-ethiopian-muslim-activism/

resistance, the marriage ceremony praised as very impactful, indicating the defeat of fear, dejection, and hopelessness (Tafesse 2013). Islamic songs (Nashidas) of defiance and resistance played loud in the family's wedding ceremony. The marriage was recorded as part of Muslim protest.

Picture 13&14. May 2013. Marriage Protest
Source: https://www.facebook.com/DimtsachinYisema/

4.5.6 Unity Protest

The main underlying message throughout the different forms of protest in the years between 2011-2015 was the importance of unity. The organizers often emphasized the strength of unity to win their case. In almost every type and form of their protest, Islamic teachings about the unity of Muslims were preached and the act of togetherness practiced in public demonstrations. The index finger indicated the symbolic representation of unity as a pointer to one. The protest organizers referring to the ancient day Muslim persecutions and their responses to the persecutor noted that, unity of Muslims in the face of any form of authoritarian injustice was represented by pointer finger as one. They emphasized that we believe in *one Allah, one God*. We as a Muslim are one, and with unity, we win our case. Thus, one form of protest was showing the index finger as a symbol of unity and togetherness. Besides, as the government is blaming the protestors by saying the movement is the interest of very few extremists who had a hidden agenda of destabilizing the country. The organizers emphasized that the unity protest is the one to show the government that we are not few but millions of Ethiopian Muslims.

Pictures 15 and 16 below shows unity protest in Addis Ababa in 2013. After Friday prayers, Muslim women and men stood together and showed their index finger as symbolic representations of the Ethiopian Muslims unity for the case. As we see in the pictures, some hold hand by hand, and others point their index finger as number one. Both actions were explained as indicators of unity for the typical case. These forms of protest were common even in different previous types of protests. Some people also show their index finger as one in yellow or any other form of protest. What makes this unity week special was its full dedication for the pointer finger as a symbol of unity. Most Muslims came to the Friday prayers with blank white paper as a sign for nonviolent protest, peaceful activism, and clearness of the questions. After the Friday prayer, they stand together, holding hand by hand, waves the white papers, and their index finger as a pointer to one. This act was common among the protesters throughout the whole protests, and lately, they developed their official graphic symbol for the protest from this unity ideology.

Picture 15&16: Unity Protest
Source:
https://www.facebook.com/DimtsachinYisema/photos/a.593280747389952/593281687389858/?type=3&theater

4.5.7 Global Protest

The government's forceful response to the three primary questions of Ethiopian Muslims created anger among many Ethiopian Muslims and their supporters who lived outside of the country. The Muslim diaspora community denounced the act of the government by organizing different forms of protests. Ethiopian Muslims living in different countries, including the USA, Canada, the UK, Germany, Norway, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, and many more joined the movement in solidarity with the protesters in Ethiopia. The organizers of the protest created a worldwide protest week on their social media platforms. Picture 17 below shows the call for international protest week. It shows the title and dates in Amharic and English language and the map for the country of the protest: Facebook, Twitter, google plus, blog, and YouTube used for disseminating the information.

Picture 17: Call for Ethiopian Muslims Worldwide Protest in July 2013
https://www.facebook.com/DimtsachinYisema/photos/a.364082036976492/595413593843334/?type=3&theater

Pictures 18 and 19 below shows the protest in Dallas, Texas, and Seattle, USA. Muslim women and men were denouncing the government's actions and asking the US government to stop a friendly relationship with Ethiopia's dictator regime. Free our religious scholars, we need justice, standing for religious right is not religious extremism, our religious scholars are not a terrorist, the Ethiopian government must respect the constitution, stop interfering in our religion. These are the statements and slogans addressed in global protests. The protesters further wear yellow t-shirts with pictures of imprisoned committee members and protest leaders painted on it. They emphasized that the international community needs to intervene by influencing Ethiopia's authoritarian regime to release committee members and other Muslim prisoners.

Picture 18&19: Global Protest
Source:
https://www.facebook.com/DimtsachinYisema/photos/a.597795080271852/597795126938514/?type=3&theater

4.5.8 The Protest Symbol

In 2015, after many discussions and different opinions collected on social media, they agreed on the need for specific graphic design as a symbol of the protest. The graphic symbol was then developed. The symbol was explained as when represented in writing, number one within a circle, and, when represented in the physical act, index finger pointing to one. They clarify that one is an indication for unity and togetherness and the concept of *Ahad, one Allah*. The meaning further linked with the history of Bilal ibn Rabah's sufferings in his masters' hands during the first days of Islam in Arabia.

A former slave with Ethiopian origin, Bilal was one of the most respected companions of Prophet Mohammed. He was the first *mu'azzin*[8] in Islamic history, chosen by the Prophet himself. Since Bilal was a slave owned by Arabian masters, he did not have the right to choose his religion. By accepting Islam and becoming a follower of the Prophet Mohammed, he experienced massive persecution. His master whipped, beat, and tortured him to make him leave his new religion. Bilal refused to renounce Islam, remained firm in his belief and continued to say *Ahad (one God)* during various tortures. Reciting his Ethiopian origin, the protest organizers use Bilal's story to strengthen their unity and togetherness campaign in the face of atrocity. The pointing index finger was accepted as a symbolic sign to show the Ethiopian government's unlawful act toward Ethiopian Muslims and to remember Bilal's courage in the time of persecution. Picture 20 shows both the graphic and physical presentation of the protest symbol—number one in a circle in graphics and pointing index finger to one in action.

[8] Muezzin – one who makes the call to prayers (adhan) from minaret or the door a mosque (Glasse 2013)

Picture 20: The protest symbol in physical and graphic form
Source:
https://www.facebook.com/DimtsachinYisema/photos/a.325745250810171/1026967464021276/?type=3&theater

4.6 End of Muslims Public Protest

The Friday-after-prayers public protest ended in 2015 by the government's use of excessive force. Between the years 2012 and 2015 , many of the committee members and active protestors were imprisoned. Østebø (2016) explains the situation as Muslim protestors are now history, effectively ended by the government, which viewed them as radical Islamic expressions. He adds that "the protesters were remarkably disciplined and peaceful, and represented a broad spectrum of the Muslim community transcending ideological and ethnic division" (Østebø 2016). Despite this remarkably disciplined nonviolent effort, the protest ended by the government's ruthless decision to put the leading committee members and other Muslim prisoners' long term in jail.

In 2015, the federal high court sentenced imprisoned Muslims to a lengthy jail term between seven to twenty-two years. The eighteen Muslim prisoners who received the verdict were

charged on counts that included attempted terrorism, conspiracy to establish an Islamic state, and public incitement. The leading committee members, Abubakar Ahmed, Ahmedin Jebel, Yasin Nuru, and Kamil Shemsu sentenced to 22 years each. Others: Bedru Hussien, Sabir Yirgu, Mohammed Abate, Abubeker Alemu, and Munir Hussien were each jailed for 18 years. The court also sentenced Sheik Mekete Muhe, Ahmed Mustafa Sheik Seid Ali, Mubarak Adem, and Khalid Ibrahim 15 years each. Mubarek and Khalid, who got married in prison, were among these and sentenced for 15 years. Simultaneously, Murad Shikur, Nuru Turki, Sheik Bahiru Omar, and Yusuf Getachew were jailed for relatively fewer terms of seven years each (Addisstandard 2015).

Picture 21: Protest pictures of the leading committee members sentenced long term in 2015

While the act of formal Friday public protest ended in 2015, the social media campaign for Ethiopian Muslims' rights and the call for imprisoned Muslims' release continued. After years of imprisonment, the government decided to release some of the prisoners in 2016. The reason for releasing some but not all, was not clear. Abubakar Ahmed, the committee chairman, sentenced for 22 years, was released in 2016 together with others. As he said, he did not know his crimes, why the government put him in jail for almost five years, and he did not know why they released him. Abubakar further explains that what was known that he had been asking for his right for religious freedom. He firmly believes that the nonviolent protest would continue until the Ethiopian Muslims rights are equally respected.

The end of the Muslim public protest was followed by another ethnic rights protest called the Oromo protest. The Oromo protest was very influential in influencing the country's political structure and was active between the years 2015 to 2017. It ended by bringing an Oromo prime minister into power in 2018. It is possible to argue that the Muslim protest laid the foundation

for the Oromo protest. After he assumed power in 2018, the new prime minister released the remaining Muslim prisoners. The new prime minister further invited the committee members and the Majlis leader to his office for dialogue, and he supported to form a negotiated Majlis. Thus, the situation became relatively less tense.

Chapter Five: Theoretical Application

The previous chapter's visual discussions showed how Facebook is used to mobilize thousands of Ethiopian Muslims for a common goal. The ethnographic presentation in the form of photo essay not only tells the stories of the protest but indicated how pictures were used to facilitate protest both on social media and in public. Together with examining Facebook's power in initiating, organizing, and sustaining the nonviolent protest, it is also essential to identify where the *Let Our Voices be Heard* protest fits in civil resistance studies. In this chapter, whether the protest provides evidence that it fits with social movement theory elements is examined. Moreover, religious social media activism and the protest's social and political impact were also analyzed.

5.1 From Protest to Social Movement

Every protest is not considered as social movements. People organize themselves and do public demonstrations for various reasons. Different advocacy groups, interest groups, NGOs, and lobbying organizations may succeed in addressing different cultural, social, or political issues. Still, all these may not be referred to as a social movement (Johnston 2014). Although these activities had components of the social movement, their acts need to go through testing processes to determine whether they are social movements. The test process could be done using specific social movement theories under specific social or political contexts. The political, social, and cultural aspects of the movement need to be investigated.

To examine the *Let Our Voice be Heard* protest for the social movements, I choose Johnston's conception of social movement theory. To determine whether the *Let Our Voices be Heard* fits the frame of social movement theory, I used the three analytical dimensions and the five defining terms of social movement theory suggested by Johnston. Using these, I examined the *Let Our Voice be Heard* protests to identify where it fits in civil resistance studies. According to Johnston, the three core dimensions of social movement theory include "the groups and

organizations that make up a collective action, the ideas that unify the groups and guide their protest, and the events that are part of the action repertoire" (Johnston 2014, 3). He further explains these three as *the structural sphere, ideational-interpretive sphere, and performative sphere* (Johnston 2014). The Let *Our Voices be Heard* protest will be tested for each of these dimensions. Besides, the protest further examined by Johnston's five defining characteristics of social movement theory: having a clear social change goal, exercising extra-institutional actions to influence decision-makers, involving structurally diverse stakeholders, having cohesion and continuity over time, and finally, having a collective identity (Johnston 2014).

5.1.1 The Structural Sphere of Social Movement Theory and the Protest

The structural sphere explained by two components: *first*, by the existence of groups and organizations, and *second*, by the presence of the network structure. The presence of large or small groups who act together, integrations of individuals in varying degrees of participation, and mobilization of individuals for actions are critical elements for the first component. Networked processes that interconnect complex ideological and tactical operations to bind the movements' ingredients and impart the cohesion go with the network structure components of the dimension. The *Let Our Voices be Heard* is explained by presenting these two components of the social movement's structural sphere. It had the groups, the organization, the integration of individuals, and the networks required to achieve the action of the Protest. These actors worked in an organized way to accomplish the protest goal.

The committee members, those who run the social media accounts, the majority of Muslims who interact with the Protest's Facebook page, and those who exercised the Friday-after-prayers public protests were all considered different formal groups who worked for the same goal. The coordinated processes on Facebook explained the integration of various individuals at varying levels of participation. Through Facebook, the protest organizers mobilized the Muslim community for the protest case. They created an environment where different groups of people work together on the same plan. They attracted not only the formal groups (i.e., Muslims who were directly involved in the protests) but other informal groups (i.e., not necessarily Muslims but followers of other religions who believed in the religious rights questions) too.

The organization structure of the *Let Our Voices be Heard* Protest is diverse with multiple connections. As there were active participants who took part in Friday-after-prayers public

protests, people actively involved only on the Facebook protest. Liking, sharing, commenting, changing profile pictures, taking protest photos, posting Friday-after-prayers public protest photos on Facebook, and taking part in live online discussions were some of these groups' characteristics. Johnston identifies these types of people as "individuals who may favorably be disposed to the movement but not yet acted" (Johnston 2014, 8). Besides, some people were not Muslims but showed interest in the Muslim case and involved themselves in the online protest activities. This group of people goes with Johnston's categorization of bystanders – those who are not yet fully committed to the movement. Understanding the structural and organizational sphere requires investigation of all these actors and their connections. The Let Our Voices be Heard Protest successfully created networks with all these formal and informal actors. They acted together for the same case. The test processes show the existence of strong organizations and networks. Thus, it is plausible to say the Protest fits with the structural dimension of Johnston's social movement theoretical explanation.

5.1.2 The Ideational-interpretative Sphere of Social Movement Theory and the Protest

The ideational-interpretative sphere of social movement theory is explained by the ideas and interpretations behind the movement. Examining the values, interests, beliefs, frames, motivations, ideologies, and identities are essential in understanding this theoretical dimension. Johnston explained the importance of ideas as "social movements are characterized by big, change-oriented ideas that guide them and impart to them an overall unity" (Johnston 2014, 12). He further explained that movement ideologies "focus on ideas, on their systematic relation to each other, and on their implications for social and political action based on value commitments. Ideologies specify a movement's goals, what they aspire to" (Johnston 2014, 15). Examining the idea behind the *Let Our Voices be Heard* Protest is done based on this understanding of ideology and its implication to the social and political context in Ethiopia.

The protest organizers well-connected their protest idea with the history of Ethiopian Muslims in the country. Ethiopian Muslims suffered from marginalization and systematic discrimination for centuries. Throughout Ethiopian history, the government favored Orthodox Christians, and Muslims were often inferior. Due to such historical reasons, any government's interference in Muslim affairs is often seen by the Muslim community with great suspicion. History had a significant role in mobilizing Muslims for the protest ideology. Johnston also emphasized the importance of history for social movement as "the defining characteristics of all movements,

big and small, that they move history along, sometimes in significant ways" (Johnston 2014, 1). The call for protecting Islamic institutions, schools, Islamic publications, and the imprisonment of Muslim scholars received tremendous acceptance by most Ethiopian Muslims because of the past's marginalized history (see chapter two for historical note). The protest organizers used historical narratives to build their ideologies—protest ideas presented in historical context.

The historical narratives helped protest organizers. They mobilized Ethiopian Muslims for common religious values, interests, and beliefs. Framing the situations to motivate people for collective actions was appropriately done. They succeeded in building a collective identity for the protests. They used the Islamic teachings about the unity to organize people for common goals and group identity. Bringing the history of Bilal from the first persecution years of Islam in Arabia and connecting it with Ethiopia, using former Ethiopian Muslims movement pictures, and contextualizing it with the situation was vital in creating a unity ideology. Johnston's ideational-interpretative dimension of social movement is all about these processes. It is about the interpretation of ideologies for shared values, interests, and beliefs. It is about the creation of collective action frames, collective interest, and collective identity. It is based on these ideational-interpretative elements that solidarity for the case was built.

The *Let Our Voices be Heard* Protest exercised the elements of ideational-interpretative dimensions of the theory. The ideology, shared values, group interest, group identity, and belief were well-built. These components were further supported by collective actions in well-organized composite frames. Thus, the Protest fits in the ideational-interpretative dimensions of the social movement theory.

5.1.3 The Performative Sphere of the Social Movement Theory and the Protest

The performance dimension of the theory is associated with the proper application of the first two dimensions. Johnston explains this dimension of social movement theory as repertoires of collective action as displayed by participating actors. The performative sphere is mostly linked with the performing aspects of the movements. How various recognized sets of protest tactics and strategies used? Johnston stated acts such as demonstrations, strikes, meetings, marches, petitions, rallies, and sit-ins as the aspects of the performative sphere (Johnston 2014). Such

performance acts together with the performing network, explains the various forms of social movements.

The *Let Our Voice be Heard* protest exercised the performance practices. Individuals organized themselves to discuss, debate, assert, narrate, and affirm their position about the protest. They used both Facebook and mosques to achieve these. The committee's formation, the selection of each Friday's protest title, and strategizing protest tactics all go with the performative aspects of the movement because all these require performing act. Through such processes, they develop and contextualize their meaning for the ideology they protested. They build collective interests and worked together for the goal of collective identity. They build networks to perform the actions. As explained in the previous two dimensions, the individuals, groups, various formal and informal actors used Facebook to build and sustain their networks. Both the online and Friday-after-prayers public protest performed successfully. Thus, the Let Our Voices be heard protest fit with the social movement theory's performance dimension.

The *Let Our Voices be Heard* protest further examined by the five defining components of social movement theory. *The first* component, having a clear *social change goal*, is explained by the Muslim protestors' apparent demand for changing the repressive political structure of the country. They set a goal to get religious freedom. *The second* component, having *extra-institutional actions to influence decision-makers* demonstrated by the protestors' actions of using different strategies and tactics to influence the government. *The third* component of *having structurally diverse groups* explained by the existence of participants and supporters from various group of people in the society. The protest attracted not only Muslims but the attention of human rights activists and journalists both from Ethiopia and abroad too. *The fourth* component, having *cohesion and continuity* explained by the continuous and consistent actions of the protest throughout the years between 2011 to 2015. *The last* and final component, having a *collective identity*, described by the collective actions of individuals, groups, and organizations to achieve the common goal of the protest.

Thus, I argue that the *Let Our Voices be Heard* protest is an exemplary social movement that perfectly fits the three dimensions and five components of Johnston’s social movement theory.

5.2. Religious Social Media Activism

I consider social media activism a continuous organized action of a group of people on social media to mobilize, campaign, and protest for social and political change. Social media activism is associated with the successful utilization of social media platforms to spread information and build secure connections among people for a common goal. The creation of stable relations among people on social media is explained with the understanding of digital networks. Through digital networks, the Ethiopian Muslims built connections and organize themselves for their common cause.

Cernison (2019) noted that the idea of forming a network on social media is related to several factors, "firstly since these technologies tend to permit more direct and relational communication if compared with the broadcasting and a one-to-many model of television, radio, and newspapers. Secondly, as technologies, because they are based on a reticular infrastructure, made of computers, wires, or connected mobile phones. Thirdly, because numerous successful platforms and projects based online have developed solutions for promoting the creation (or online reapplication) of connections among people or content: social media, of course, are the most efficient and widespread platforms of this kind" (Cernison 2019, 33). It further added that, following these three premises, scholars often formulate the hypothesis that the widespread interaction with these communication networks can alter or influence the structure of mobilization, or network between activities and organizations, or campaigns (Cernison 2019).

Ethiopian Muslims created secure networks on social media that helped them achieve their movement goal, which is to bring religious freedom to Ethiopian Muslims—fighting for freedom as the component of social and political change. Social media, especially Facebook, played a significant role in mobilizing the movements. Explaining the mobilizing role of social media about the Egyptian revolution in 2011, Gerbaudo noted that "Facebook used to set the date, Twitter used to share logistics, YouTube to show to show the world, all connect people" and primarily "Facebook is used to form groups, covert and overt – in order to establish those strong but flexible connections" (Gerbaudo 2012, 4). Like the Egyptians' movements, Ethiopian Muslim protesters used Facebook to build secure connections, share information, and disseminate protest strategies and tactics, thereby achieving successful social movement.

The *Let Our Voices be Heard* protests used Facebook to distribute religious teachings, preach for unity, call for togetherness, and call for nonviolent Islamic movements. They used it to organize themselves, mobilize the Ethiopian Muslim community, lead Muslim rights movements, and set social changes goals. They used it to achieve their nonviolent public protest. To exercise religious rights movements and to do spiritual practices.

I argue that the Ethiopian Muslim protestors' practices on social media are a mediation process. As referred to in various works of literature, mediation is associated with a social process in which media supports the flow of discourses. It is linked with the creation of meanings for activities and developing interpretations in society. Mediation further refers to the concept that brings many online practices, the flow of media productions, media circulation, and media interpretation. It incorporates media recirculation and reinterpretation to support various social and religious movements and change processes. Thus, the *Let Our Voices be Heard* movement goes with all these processes of mediation.

The *Let Our Voices be Heard* protest passes through processes of mediation for a religious cause. Muslims used Facebook to raise Muslim rights questions, and they used it to create discourse on the issue. The texts and news published on the Facebook page became sources of various interpretations, social engagements, and lots of social and political discussions. The Muslim protestors and government interactions are the discourses that led the protests. The protestors believed that the government mistreated them. Many of them thought that they were labeled as extremists and terrorists by the government. Their central questions did not receive proper attention. They defended their rights through various online practices—news and updates produced on social media. All the discourses circulated and recirculated on Facebook. Most Ethiopian Muslim Facebook users interpreted social media updates for their social goal and joined the protest. Thus, the massive protest is the result of mediation processes.

Religion is viewed as a practice of mediation. Scholars have argued that all religions have always been mediated (Lundby, 2013; Lövheim, 2013; Meyer, 2013). The new forms of media introduce new strategies through which religion circulated. The concept of the mediation of religion is associated with considering religion more as an evolving social practice than dogma. The practice changes through media, and thereby the mediation processes changes religion. Religious practices have many forms on social media. As teaching or preaching is considered

one form of spiritual practice, organizing a religious cause movement could also be regarded as a religious practice. These acts represent religious activity. During the Friday-after-prayers public protests, Muslims practiced moments of silent, deep connection with God, unity under one Allah, and most importantly, they choose Friday (Jema'ah) for the public protest day. Friday is a blessed day for Muslims. All these refer to religious practices, but they were used in a context to advance the protest. Thus, the protest practices are religious.

I argue that the Ethiopian Muslims' protest act, as conveyed through Facebook, is a religious practice. After all, religious practice in association with mediation processes is not about dogma. It is not about the principles of religion, but about the uses of media for religious purposes. Thus, Muslim movements to achieve the religious goal arguably considered as a religious practice.

The Ethiopian Muslim's use of Facebook to address religious right questions results from various religious negotiation processes by Ethiopian Muslim protest organizers. The protest organizers socially frame the platform to address the historical and cultural context where Muslims belong in Ethiopia. Protestors reconstruct the technology in such a way that fulfills their demand. The reconstruction processes include considering Facebook as an essential tool to achieve a religious case and shaping it accordingly. Creating a Facebook page and formal networks for the protest could be seen as shaping technology.

The religious social shaping of technology was exercised in the *Let Our Voices be Heard* Protest. Campbell (2010) argues about the importance of applying the "religious social shaping of technology as an approach to understand the religious people's practices on digital media. The approach emphasizes technology because of the social process. Understanding the social shaping of technology requires examining the social practices, social relations, and the context in which technology is used. The Ethiopian Muslim protestors act on social media, their organization, their way of using Facebook, their meaning-making process, their connection with the public, and the contextual narratives of religious teachings can be seen as an explanation for the shaping processes. Thus, organizing religious social movements using Facebook could be an example of the religious social shaping of technology.

Thus, religious social media activism refers to the act of religious processes on social media for social and political change that results from the religious social shaping of technology. The religious social media activism mainly aimed to change social and political structures to achieve a religious goal. Through the shaping of technology and mediation processes, religious social media activism further refers to the changes in religion's practices through new digital media. Religiously organized protest on Facebook as a significant part of social movement is an exercise of social media activism. Thus, the *Let Our Voices be Heard* movement of Ethiopian Muslims is an excellent empirical example that shows the most critical social media activism components. It is further possible to call the movement as a model case for religious social media activism.

5.3 The Social and Political Impacts of the Protest

One of the significant impacts of the *Let Our Voices be Heard* movement is that its strength of showing the power of the people. The Protest proves the ability of ordinary people to shake an authoritarian political system. It shows the power of an organized and disciplined movement on social media for social and political change. Despite the government's continuous effort to stop Mulsim protestors, despite the government's hard decision to sentence committee members and other prominent Muslims long term in jail, the Protest continued.

Even though the *Let Our Voices be Heard* Friday-after-prayers protest stopped, especially after the court decision of sentencing Muslim prisoners between seven to twenty-two years in prison and the government's excessive uses of forces, the online Protest continued. The Protest created an environment of initiation for other marginalized groups of people to organize themselves through social media. The *Let Our Voices be Heard* Protest clearly showed the power of social media, the power of the people, and the power of disciplined Protest. Thus, another massive public protest called the Oromo Protest started in 2015 using almost the same protests strategies but for a different cause, for the Oromos' rights in the country.

Oromo is one of the most prominent ethnic groups in Multi-ethnic Ethiopia. The Oromo Protest is an ethnic rights movement triggered by the government plan to expand the capital Addis Ababa to the neighboring Oromia region over 25 years' time span. The project to expand Addis Ababa was criticized by the majority of Oromos and brings many questions, including land dispossession. Oromos started to organize protests against the plan's implementation by saying

the plan aims to take lands from Oromo farmers and disempower Oromos around the capital Addis Ababa. The Oromo Protest followed the Muslims protest, and it was active between the years 2015 to 2017. It created a massive influence on the political structure of the country. It forced the government to impose a state of emergency twice between the years 2016 to 2018.

I argue that the *Let Our Voices be Heard* Protest provided foundations for the Oromo Protest. I consider the Oromo Protest a continuation of a more substantial shift in social and political activity in the Ethiopian society. This Protest also used social media platforms to mobilize Oromos. They practiced similar protest strategies, including using the same protest sign. Crossed arms over the head is a known Oromo protest sign—this symbolic representation of nonviolent Protest used by Muslim protestors in various Friday-after-prayers protests. Both protests were about the rights of the marginalized groups of people in the same country. Although the cases are different, the context of the Protest was similar. Using the same protest strategies could be an indication of the existence of a robust discursive connection.

Although understanding details about the connections require further research, it is possible to argue that the Ethiopian Muslim protest contributed much to the Oromo Protests. Muslims count a significant share of the Oromo population. Among the imprisoned Muslim committee members and activists, there were prominent Oromos, including the Committee secretary, Kamil Shemsu. Among Muslim religious teachers and prominent preachers who were active in Muslim protests, there were many Oromos. Most Oromo Muslims know these Oromo Muslim religious scholars for their spiritual teachings in *Affaan Oromoo* (the Oromo language). Muslim Oromos have both ethnic and religious reasons to protest against the regime. Thus, I argue that the Muslim Protest influenced the Oromo Protest by creating a social and political awareness that brining change is possible by a disciplined organization on social media.

Smith and Burr (2014) classified the progressive stages of civil resistance into three: Protest or persuasion, noncooperation, and intervention (Smith and Burr 2014). The Let Our Voices be Heard Protest was mainly at the first stage of civil resistance action. The Oromo Protest exercised the second and third actions. I consider the Oromo Protest as the continuation of the Muslim Protest with similar social contexts explained by similar protest strategies.

In civil resistance study, the repression against massive, nonviolent campaigns is more likely to backfire against the perpetrator. Such a consequence is called the backfire effect. That is, the brutal response to end people's nonviolent resistance would never stop it but create a more organized opposition (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011). I argue that the emergence of the Oromo Protest could be the backfire effect of the government's excessive use of force towards Ethiopian Muslim protestors. Yes, Muslim protests and Oromo protests were not the same. Their goal was different. However, they both raise a similar issue. Both protests were the result of systematic marginalization, injustices, government interferences, and unequal treatment. The participants were people in similar social and political contexts. Thus, it is plausible to argue that Muslim Protest served as a ground for the Oromo Protest.

I argue that Muslim Protest created an environment for the Oromo Protest by showing Ethiopians the possibility of shaking an authoritarian regime just by using social media. The Oromo movement adopted much of Muslim protestor's protest tactics and strategies, and they applied them to similar social and political contexts. The Oromo Protest used the same protest sign with Muslims. In their public protests, Oromos often crossed arms over the head as a symbolic representation of repression. Muslims were using this sign throughout their Protest. Muslims used this sign to show that they are unarmed, nonviolent, and under the authoritarian regime's pressure. Oromos used the same meaning-making processes to explain the protest signs. Picture 22 and 23 show Muslim protestors in 2013 and Oromo protestors in 2016. The similarities in similar social and political contexts indicate a discursive connection between the two protests. As Rose noted, "discursive formation refers the way meaning are connected together in a particular discourse" (Rose 2016, 218). In Ethiopian political discourse, the Muslims and Oromo protestors connected with their meanings making processes.

Both Muslim and Oromo protests raised political questions that required political answers. The protests cases related to constitutional and legal issues. While the Muslim public Protest ended with excessive use of force by the government in 2015, the more organized Oromo Protest followed almost immediately. It continued until it brings political reform in the country. The Oromo Protest ended by bringing a new Oromo prime minister into power in 2018. The Oromo Protest successfully brought a visible political change in Ethiopia, and the *Let Our Voices be Heard* Protest was successful in creating an environment for the Oromo Protest. They are discursively connected.

Picture 22: Muslim Silence Protest 2013
https://www.facebook.com/DimtsachinYisema/photos/a.544700038914690/544717668912927/?type=3&theater

Picture 23: Oromo Protest 2016
Source:https://theglobalobservatory.org/2017/06/ethiopia-protests-oromo-addis-ababa-master-plan/ (Pinaud and Raleigh 2017)

Chapter Six: Concluding Remark

The research project has been motivated by social media's role in initiating, organizing, and achieving the religious rights movement in Ethiopia without violence. Using the *Let Our Voices be Heard* protest between 2011 to 2015, the effect of social media activism on the Islamic religious rights movement in Ethiopia studied. Facebook's role is examined individually as a crucial means for facilitating communication, mobilizing action, and nurturing interactions among Ethiopian Muslims in their quest for pursuing their faith without the state's intervention. The critical-visual ethnographic study based on selected pictures of the protest shows that Facebook had created a secure environment for social connections, thereby organizing a nonviolent public protest among Ethiopian Muslims.

Disciplined online campaigns on Facebook raised religious engagements and social interactions among Ethiopian Muslims, creating the necessary conditions for public protests. The continuous Friday-after-prayers public protest by Ethiopian Muslims was the manifestation of the disciplined online processes. The protest's Facebook page *Let Our Voices be Heard (Dimtsachin yisema in Amharic)* was used as an essential tool in achieving social media activism. Thus, the research shows that Facebook, when used for a common goal, is an essential platform for successfully mobilizing nonviolent Islamic movements.

I have used Johnston's social movement theory about social movements' characteristics to examine the *Let Our Voices Be Heard* protests. I have used the three dimensions (and the five components) of social movement theory to determine whether a social movement theory can explain the protest under study. I have conducted the test processes to identify where the case in focus fits in civil resistance studies. The research suggests that the protest processes apply to the three analytical dimensions of social movement theory: *the social structure, cultural ideations/interpretations, and social performances*. The protest strategies and organizations fit for these three spheres of the approach.

Besides, the protest fulfills Johnston's five defining terms of social movement theory:

- *having a clear social change goal*
- *exercising extra-institutional actions to influence decision-makers*
- *involving structurally diverse stakeholders*
- *having cohesion and continuity over time, and*
- *having a collective identity*

Examining the *Let Our Voices Be Heard* protest through these five defining terms indicates that the protest fits these criteria. The Muslim protestors' behavior provides sufficient evidence that the *Let Our Voices be Heard* protests is an example of social movements that fit well in social movement theory. This movement is an exemplary Islamic movement in the Horn of Africa.

The study is relevant as it contributes to the Islamic movement studies in Eastern Africa. It is especially important because the Horn of Africa region is known for the activities of Islamic militant group *Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen (commonly known as al-Shabab).* The actions of al-Shabab have been a theme of various Islamic movement studies. Understanding al-Shabab is essential to understand the origins of the support for the use of violence. Similarly, examining nonviolent Islamic movements in the same region is equally important to understand Islamic communities' political interactions from various perspectives. The study is vital in bringing the nonviolent dimensions to the broader social and political studies of Islamic movements.

While the protest lasted at least four years, the current project focused on Facebook's activities using data from selected weeks and pictures. Because of this, the picture painted by this research is not complete. More research is necessary for a comprehensive understanding of the origins of ramifications of this nonviolent social movement.

The studies on the protest pictures may invite further visual ethnographic investigations. Prominent social anthropologist Sarah Pink suggests the importance of researching by interviewing images. The techniques are vital in studying the effects of pictures on social life. Interviewing the Ethiopian Muslims about their reflections, connection with the protest photos, and the impact of the images on their social and political life can be enlightening. Besides, investigating whether they experience actual change may motivate other ethnographic and social studies to focus. Thus, future research can benefit from this study, which draws inferences using photos.

The main reason for the *Let Our Voices be Heard* protests was the government's interference and its decision to favor one sect of Islam over the others (i.e., Ahbash over the others). Thus, the sectoral competition among different sects of Islam in Ethiopia could be another research area. Since this thesis project aims to study the power of social media in shaping Muslim

protests, the rivalry aspects of different sects of Islam in Ethiopia were not addressed. The competition for dominancy, especially between the *Ahbash and Wahhabism* sects of Sunni Islam in Ethiopia, will be another interesting topic for future research. After all, the understanding will advance our knowledge about the power dynamics in Islam's social and political life in Ethiopia.

The research also shows the contribution of the *Let Our Voices be Heard* protest to the emergence of another massive movement in Ethiopia called the Oromo Protest. The Oromo protest was an ethnic rights movement between 2015 to 2017 that created an enormous influence in the country's political structure. The Oromo protest led to many changes, including the replacement of the Prime Minister of the country. Although the Oromo protest followed the Muslims' protest and applied almost similar strategies, including using the same protest sign, investigating detailed connections between them requires further research. Were there prominent Muslim protest organizers who helped in strategizing the Oromo protests? Were there any underground Muslim groups that later joined the Oromo protest? How do we understand the connections? These and many more similar questions could be a topic of further research. Studying these will help to understand the ethnoreligious political dynamics in Ethiopia.

Last but not least, compared to the violent one, why nonviolent Islamic movements received less attention in social and political studies of Islam, which I would like to pursue further.

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