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“Down, down Woyane!”

*A qualitative study of the Qeerroo movement in Ethiopia
using Political Process Theory*

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Any errors are mine alone.

Thea Forsén
Oslo, 12.08.18

Declaration

I, Thea Emilie Forsén, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature.....

Date.....

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1. Introduction

September 9th 2016, René Lefort wrote “There is every sign that Ethiopia is plunging into a crisis whole scale, intensity, and multiple and interdependent drivers are unprecedented since the founding of the regime in 1991” (Lefort, 2016). Mid-February 2018, three major events occurred in one week and the hashtag #ethiopiaincrisis trended on Twitter. After protests and demands for reform from several movements, a number of prominent political prisoners were released. Prime minister Hailemariam Desalegn of almost six years resigned without being thrown or diseased, an unprecedented event in Ethiopian history. Lastly, rumours of a new state of emergency was confirmed, hardly six months after the last. Following this chaos was the appointment of a new prime minister, the Oromo Abiy Ahmed, which manifested the major shift happening in the ruling coalition, EPRDF.

At the core of resistance stood the Oromo people – long-time opponents of Ethiopian governments (despite being a part of the current one). The main driver leading the frontlines of the Oromo Protest movement was the youth, also titled the Qeerroo. Since 2014, they have become an important political actor in Ethiopia. The leadership they protest against also derived from the same force: young Tigrayans opposing the regime they were living under in the 1960s and 1970s. Historically it is evident that in Ethiopia, as in many other states, students and youth have driven progress forward – fighting the Italian occupation, fighting the military Derg regime, and finally today – in resisting the power balance within the EPRDF.

Ethiopian history is complex and disputed, especially due to ethnic diversity. After centuries of assimilating to Amharic language and culture, the coalition party EPRDF sought to imbed a political system in which every ethnicity can express itself, both in linguistics, politics, history, and culture. However, the implementation of this practice was not fulfilled and there has been a high level of political control by the government. Violations of human rights have been reported, elections are skewed, and the function of the constitution remains on-paper. Opposition parties have not been allowed space, nor have they been organized to the extent to stand a chance against the ruling coalition. So how come a group of students managed to get enough attention and create enough chaos to demand change?

The Ethiopian population has grown with approximately 50 million people since 1991, thus the lion's share of the population is under 27 years old (The World Bank, 2018). The number of universities has increased massively; Ethiopia went from having one university in the capital Addis Ababa in 1991, to today having 44 public universities across the country, in addition to private institutions (Ministry of Education, 2016). Almost half the population have a phone and 13.6 million have access to the internet (Lefort, 2016). The availability of resources for Ethiopian youth today is immensely different from that of the previous generations. Thus, the youth stand in the centre of the hurricane of political unrest that is now blowing through the country. To properly understand the political environment in Ethiopia, it is fundamental to understand the majority of the population: the youth.

There is little information about the Qeerroo. Their organizational structures are not known, their leaders have been underground. Nevertheless, they have managed to gather a massive amount of people to protest since the start of the Oromo Protest movement in 2014. This thesis aims to look closer to the Qeerroo movement using political process theory. Three theoretical concepts will provide the framework in which the collected data is understood; political opportunity, mobilization structures, and contentious repertoires. By theoretically framing the case of the Qeerroo through these three concepts, the thesis will provide insight to how the social movement is perceived and their space to operate in Ethiopia.

The following research question has guided this thesis:

How did the Oromo Qeerroo create a movement that contributed to a major shift within the EPRDF?

Additionally, three subordinate research questions, related to political process theory have been the basis of coding and further analysis of findings:

- 1) What factors have disrupted the status quo in order to open up political opportunity for the Oromo youth?
- 2) How did the Qeerroo structure its mobilization?
- 3) What means/tactics are used by the Qeerroo and to what extent are they effective?

Thesis outline

The thesis is divided into five chapters. To begin, the background chapter aims to frame the factors historically leading up to the current situation in Ethiopia, as well as to provide an understanding of the political motives and interests of the central actors. The historical background (and the thesis in general) will focus on the dynamics between the Amhara, Tigray and Oromo ethnic groups, and how historical events have shaped the country and the relationships between the groups. Following is the theory chapter, giving an overview of political process theory and going deeper into the concepts of political opportunity, mobilization structures, and contentious repertoires. The research methodology chapter follows the theory chapter, giving insight to the research methods used and how I conducted fieldwork in Ethiopia. The findings and analysis are divided into three parts, aiming to answer the three subordinate research questions. Starting is the section on political opportunity, analysing what factors disrupted the status quo to open up space for the Qeerroo as well as other resistance movements. Second, is the section on mobilization structure, analysing how the Qeerroo mobilized participants and organized themselves. Third, is the section on contentious repertoires, analysing the means used by the Qeerroo and how it affected the movement. The final chapter is a discussion of the findings, looking at how the movement has contributed in changing the EPRDF, as well as some thoughts on what comes next.

2. Background: Politics and youth in Ethiopia

Make no mistake that the young people of Ethiopia have internalized their resistance against the regime the same way their ancestors did against the Italian occupation of the 1930s. Nothing short of a genuine and fundamental change that addresses their yearning for freedom, justice, opportunity and equality will extinguish this internalized fervor for freedom (Freda, 2018).

Oromo youth have always had a weak position in Ethiopian politics. To understand their grievances and protest, a brief review of Ethiopian history and politics is necessary. History is important to understand any subject within politics and social movements – but in the Ethiopian case, the historical narratives emphasized by each ethnicity lay the foundation for political behaviour. Ethiopian history is deep, complex and contested, so for the following chapter I will pull forth some elements to provide a backdrop for current the social movement. Starting with a brief review over the Ethiopian state formation, before a summary of the student movement in the 1960s and 1970s, continuing with the development of organizations under the Derg-rule that led for formation of the coalition party EPRDF and the implementation of ethnic federalism in 1991 and the unrest and resistance that came in the aftermath of regime change. Lastly, there is a section including how the Oromo Protest movement erupted and who the Qeerroo are.

A central element in Ethiopian political resistance throughout its modern history is the question of land. Here lies the main similarity from the student movement of the 1960s and 1970s and today's student and youth movement, the tense question of rights to land. The complexity of Ethiopianness, and how the state came to be, is vital to understand the deeply engrained divisions between certain groups in the state. However, the scope of this thesis cannot cover such a massive historical backdrop. Nevertheless, I aim to provide an understanding to how the Qeerroo movement has risen and become a force to be reckoned with in Ethiopia today.

The Ethiopian state dates back to the Kingdom of Axum, and thus has a long history of monarchic rule. The Amhara people, the next largest majority in Ethiopia, have been perceived as the leaders of the Ethiopian state for the larger part of its existence. The Amhara people are referred to as the next largest majority group in Ethiopia. However, historically Amhara refers to people living in most of four large pre-1991 provinces (Levine, 2012, p. 36). The name originates from a small enclave in southwest Wollo (Levine, 2003). Historically, Ethiopian state

culture has assimilated to Amharic culture and language, because of the position of the Amhara leaders. It is a position that has been continuously contested since the formation of the modern Ethiopian state. Even though the collective history of Ethiopia can be traced back over 2000 years, the modern state did not appear until mid 19th century, and its boundaries and state identity were largely affected by the four last kings of Ethiopia – Tewodros, Yohannes IV, Melenik II and Haile Selassie (Balema, 2014). The old kingdom of Axum only occupied Tigray and Eritrea, thus the Tigrayan argument of being the originators of the Ethiopian state formation. The Shoan Solomonic dynasty started in the late 1100s to expand south, where territories were occupied by other ethnic and religious groups. It was the Amhara king Melenik II, that was the first king to benefit from a professional military force, that took a large Oromo land mass (Michael, 2008). Dominated by Amhara, the monarchy continued to seize land, and it coincided with the Scramble of Africa happening in rest of the continent. Due to the fact that Ethiopia was a Christian monarchy with a professional army that started to establish some kind of a state formation and bureaucracy, the Ethiopian state was recognized by Western colonizers and the boundaries laid by the conquest of the emperors became fixed (Keller, 2006).

The last Emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, had contradictory politics, as the protectionist relations towards the monarchy conflicted with how he wanted the state to modernize. Agriculture and land was, and to some extent still is, the centre of power and economic activity. The exploitative system of land tenure created large social differences and economic uncertainty, and severe grievances in a poor and exploited population. As Selassie wished to modernize Ethiopia, education became a priority, but it also connected students and youth and provided an arena for opposing the monarchy and its politics to land. As stated above, the question of land is deeply ingrained within the Ethiopian political discourse and was what the students of 1960 and 70s built their movement around, while it also is central to the youth movement today.

‘Land to the tiller!’: The 1960s and 1970s student movement

When the University College of Addis Ababa (UCAA) was established in 1950 it was a liberal arts college and there were no science graduates until 1957 (Zewde, 2014, p. 74). As the different colleges were spread mostly in and around Addis Ababa, the emperor wished to unite them all and elevate the institution to a university bearing his own name (as many other Ethiopian institutions at the time), and thus UCAA became Haile Selassie I University. The

Emperor most likely knew that joining together young people in a state like Ethiopia was putting himself and his rule at risk. In his inaugural speech, he expressed somewhat of a warning to the students, referring to an incident of a student leader opposing the Imperial rule openly. Emperor Haile Selassie stated: “There is no point in expressing regret after you have been punished” (Zewde, 2014, p. 74). However, despite the Emperor's warnings, creating institutions where students had the possibility to share experiences and political thought, ultimately became one of the largest contributors to the downfall of the Ethiopian monarchy. Zewde links the birth and growth of the Ethiopian student movement with the establishment and development of Ethiopian institutions for higher education, and UCAA and the later HSIU shaped the movement's institutional base (Zewde, 2014, p. 99). It also made a significant difference that a number of students were sent abroad, and thus the movement established a base outside the country as well, that was not as easily controllable as those within its borders. Student papers and pamphlets became an important channel of distributing the movement's message and especially student papers made abroad (Balsvik, 1985).

The students started sharing grievance of the poverty in the country and the injustices happening under Haile Selassie's rule, and particularly criticizing the system of land tenure. The main slogan “Land to the tiller!”, described that land should belong to the farmer using and working the land. The movement was inspired by socialism and Panafrikanism, as many of the African colonies started their independence at the time. The other social movements happening globally at the time inspired and motivated the students that the country could have a system more just and beneficial to all. Several groups grew out of the student movement and organizations formed underground. Radical intellectuals sat at the forefront, planning the downfall of the monarchy. Nevertheless, the student movement has been characterized as an elitist movement. The few people that had the possibility of going to University was for the most part either ethnic Amharas or Tigrayans, with inherited privileges from the Northern parts of Ethiopia (ibid). The movement was ideologically grounded in Marxist/Leninist thought, and thus they spoke for and represented the peasantry and the peripheral Ethiopia but came from a small elite in the centre. Here lies the biggest difference from the current student movement – they represent and embody the masses, criticising the elitist centre.

The students (including those attending secondary school as well as university) was the only visibly consolidated opposition to the Emperor rule. Their role became so important due to the lack of political parties and organizations, making the students somewhat the only bearers of

public opinion, and thus a critical factor in overthrowing the monarchy (ibid). In being such a force, the movement also provided the ideological direction to the Derg, the military government that managed to seize power after the 1974 revolution, as few other groups was organized enough to take on the task of managing the state apparatus (Zewde, 2002).

Military leaders formed a state rule known as the Derg, which implemented a communist/Marxist regime. Problems of famine and drought, problems that were a part of suffocating the imperialist regime to its death, continued into the military communist rule, and the Derg persisted with the same methods of centralism as done by the Imperialists (Balema, 2014). The state socialist state ideology was as stated above influenced by the student movement and was supposed to calm the students and intellectuals. But as the Derg prohibited civilian political participation, opposition and (peaceful) demonstrations, discontent grew. One of the groups originally resisting the Imperial rule became one of the main forces fighting the Derg. The Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party (EPRP), was originally founded to defeat the Imperialist regime, but when the Derg took over without allowing political participation or better the living conditions of Ethiopians, EPRP became one of the leading organizations in resistance to the Derg. Thus, EPRP was one of the main targets in the Derg's Red Terror Campaign, one of the bloodiest war crimes in Ethiopian history (Joireman, 1997).

Another group, central in the Derg resistance, was initially the student organization Tigrayan National Organization (TNO), which later became the TPLF.

Making EPRDF

While Oromos and others more recently incorporated into the Ethiopian empire suffered the greatest oppression under the regime, it was the Tigrinya speakers of the Eritrea and Tigray who were the most ethnically conscious: Tigrayans who inhabited the heartland of the historic Ethiopian state, were especially resentful of their subordination to an Amhara dominated state, and Tigrayan students increasingly embraced the view that the best approach would be to engage in a national liberation struggle (Young, 1998, p. 37).

One of the groups in Ethiopia showing resistance towards the Derg-regime were from the northern part of Ethiopia, Tigray, bordering Eritrea. Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) was established in 1975, through the student organization TNO. The guerrilla movement started as a force to fight the Derg, based in the ideology of abytawi democracy (revolutionary democracy) with the belief that armed struggle was the only way of removing the military rule.

TPLF's roots in abytawi democracy was closely linked with Marxist-Leninist tradition, although they were not formally a Marxist-Leninist party. Nevertheless, the functions and structures of the organisation resembled those ideals (Medhane & Young, 2003). Abytawi democracy still is central to TPLF today. First being used by TPLF in the 1980s, the term has changed over time and is also understood differently across party lines (Vaughan, 2011). The notion of revolutionary democracy partly emerged from a Leninist interpretation of Marx's Proletariat Dictatorship Thesis, which is a democratic project using revolutionary means (Bach, 2011). Jean Nicholas Bach argues that this doctrine of revolutionary democracy aims at legitimizing a political and economic structure that suggest a resistance to authoritarianism and is described by the TPLF/EPRDF as a direct opposite to neoliberalism (ibid). Lenin described the social revolution as something expected to be led by a vanguard party using "democratic centralism", which also is a key term in Ethiopian context. Seife Hailu (2014) argues the democratic centralism party discipline is the most important organizational principle in Ethiopian politics, giving EPRDF a dominant say over personnel decisions, making state institutions outside party structure less powerful (Hailu, 2014: 68). Bach further argues that revolutionary democracy in Ethiopia should not be singularly regarded as a static discourse tool inherited from the period before the party came to power, i.e. the period of struggle, but as a flexible and adaptable discourse tool (Bach, 2011: 643). This is clear through the changes made in Ethiopian policy, from a Maoist model, to an Albanian model, and the transitions to a more liberal and open market economy. Nevertheless, the doctrine of revolutionary democracy has not been abandoned, and Bach states "post-1991 institutions, practices *and* ideology are both liberal and revolutionary democratic" (Bach, 2011: 644). Bach further acknowledge that the revolutionary democracy in Ethiopia today has lost its original substance, however, it remains as an important discursive tool as well as a fighting tool for the EPRDF, which mainly explains the resilience of the ideology (ibid). Thus, revolutionary democracy can be viewed as an essential instrument of governing for the EPRDF. However, as it is a flexible tool used to reinforce party structures, the democratic part of the ideology seems absent. As explained by the resigned Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn: "Due to poor education and illiteracy the Ethiopian public is too underdeveloped to make a well-reasoned, informed decision, and so Revolutionary Democracy is the political bridge by which the 'enlightened leaders' can lead the people to democracy" (Lefort, 2018).

The leaders of TPLF acquired their knowledge and understanding of Marxist-Leninism during

the last days of the Imperial regime but rejected the notion of proletarian revolution and a country wide struggle and was rather in favour of a peasant revolution infused by provincial Tigrayan nationalism. But while TPLF represented the peasantry, it was led by young, radical intellectuals.

At the same time, in the mid-seventies, Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) was established in Oromia. The Oromos, although a numerical majority in the Ethiopian empire, was not recognized as such throughout the Imperialist rule and the period of military communism. As Oromo nationalism grew, OLF became its main way of expression. In its beginning, the aim of OLF was to make it possible for Oromos to be decision makers over their own political future, whether it was to create an independent Oromia (secession) or to build a multicultural democracy by joining the rest of the state in a federal or confederal arrangement (Jalata, 1998, p. 11). The point was that the decision should be democratic and Oromos should be able to determine their own future. OLF, despite not having much means, fought against Ethiopian forces in Oromia and mobilized and gained support among farmers by medical aid, fighting illiteracy and making the Oromo populace more politically conscious (Jalata, 1998, p. 12)

Into the 1980s, TPLF became the most efficient and capable military force in the country. With already established control over the Tigrayan areas, the guerrilla group expanded further across its traditional borders (Prunier & Ficquet, 2015). At the end of the 1980s, TPLF looked to partner up with other national movements, sharing the fundament of socialist ideology. Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Front (EPRDF) was established in 1989, under the Stalinist assumption of nationalities and that ethnicity could serve as a natural meeting point in politics. Originally, the coalition constituted of TPLF, Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM), today known as Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), the Oromo organization Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) and the Ethiopian Democratic Officer's Democratic Movement (EDORM), which was replaced by Southern People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM) in 1992. TPLF made their dominant position in the coalition clear early on and made sure that EPRDF's political programme was rooted in their socialist ideology of abytawi democracy (Aalen, 2006, p. 245).

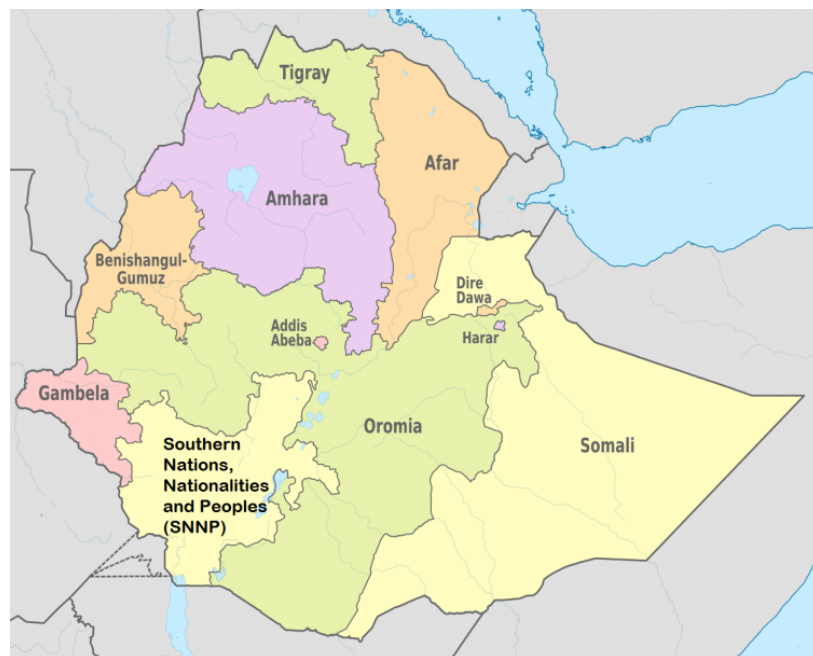
28th of May 1991, a week after the Derg leader Mengistu fled to Zimbabwe, EPRDF took Addis Ababa. One of EPRDF's first actions after seizing power was to create a Transitional Government, convene a National Conference and establish a Council of Representatives. The

Council of Representatives included a large range of different political groups, approximately 20 political movements were a part of the council. The National Conference and the Council of Representatives was strategically led and organized by the EPRDF. Thus, EPRDF largely dominated the political landscape, consolidating power through military strength, effective organizational skills and leadership (through democratic centralism), and controlling the agenda, as well as the rules of political competition (Lyons, 1996). OLF was one of the organizations participating in the Transitional Government, but as it had deep rooted problems with the Tigrayan dominance, the collaboration ended. OLF also had a problem with the creation of OPDO and their willing cooperation with TPLF. OLF argued it was a puppet organization initiated by the TPLF, as it was created in 1990 by Ethiopian war prisoners captured in Eritrea and Tigray (Jalata, 1998). OLF accused OPDO of undermining the Oromo cause by standing by Tigrayan dominance. During the first regional election in 1992, OLF represented the biggest challenger to TPLF/EPRDF, and so the coalition worked to gain support of OPDO whilst OLF supporters were harassed and intimidated (Lyons, 2010, p. 111). OLF ended up withdrawing from the 1992 election and in the aftermath of the election the party was severely weakened. Party members and soldiers of the OLA (Oromo Liberation Army) had to flee to the bush, where EPRDF forces raided their camps and 20 000 soldiers were arrested as well as thousands were killed (Jalata, 1998).

The birth of the ethnic federal state

EPRDF sought to control the problem of ethnicity with converting it into a federal system, in order to meet the differences of ethnicity and confront them, based in Marxist Leninist thought on nations and nationalities. Throughout Ethiopian history, the notion of ethnicity brought oppression, and with the ethnic federal system, EPRDF wanted it to end. However, the implementation of the state, being ruled by developmental and coercive imperatives, has worked against incorporating locally determined social institutions and knowledge, as it was intended to do (Vaughan, 2003). Nine regions were created, in addition to two chartered cities, all based on the ethnic groups living in the areas. The regions were geographically designed in such a way that one dominant ethnic group controls the state; i.e. the Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Somali and Harari people each control a state, and Benishangul-Gumuz, SNNPR and Gambella are more multi-ethnic and thus without a dominant ethnic group (Tronvoll, 2008, p. 55). The EPRDF thus provided a solution to the ethnic groups' claims for political recognition that was the fundament for protest and resistance towards Ethiopian governments since the fall

of the monarchy. The constitution elaborates on democratic and human rights, conforming to the principles of the UN Declaration of Human Rights. On the rights of ethnic groups, the constitution establishes that every ethnic group has the right to speak, right and develop its own language, culture and history, in addition to the infamous article 39, where “every Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession” (Negarit Gazeta, 1995; Tronvoll, 2008). However, studies show that the politics of regional states are rigorously restricted by federal policies and claims of violations of human rights have been frequently reported under the EPRDF regime (Clapham, 1995; Lyons, 1996; Tronvoll, 2001; 2008etc.). When challenged by opposition, as seen with OLF, EPRDF has taken excessive means into account in order to hold on to federal power.



(Ethiovisit, 2018)

Unrest and protest

During the elections held in the period between 1991 and 2000, EPRDF had won a large majority of the vote by harassing and intimidating the opposition, making an uneven playing field, as well as using oppressive means to control the electorate (Lyons, 1996; Pausewang, 1994; Tronvoll, 2001). However, the running up period before the election in 2005 indicated a new acceptance for displaying public political dissent, through the positive conduct of campaigns and polling (Tronvoll & Aalen, 2009: 194). Clapham (2005) characterized the election at the time as ‘founding’ and compared it to the elections that took place in South

Africa in 1994. “They marked the first occasion in the country’s history when the mass of the electorate felt that they had the opportunity to express their own views on their country’s future, and were able to exercise it” (Clapham, 2005). Lyons (2006) describes the election as a remarkable opportunity for the Ethiopian people to express their political view, as opposition parties did not boycott the polls, but competed forcefully across the country. The media attention before the election was revolutionized. There were live televised debates on matters of public policy, the opposition parties had access to state-owned media channels, and there were large peaceful rallies in the final weeks before election day (Lyons, 2006: 1). Clapham (2005) notes that this level of openness could only have been permitted by the government, as it was strongly pressured by donors and the international community, and that they were confident that EPRDF would win either way. However, the results showed that the opposition made a remarkable achievement, by gaining one third of the seats in the House of Representatives (Tronvoll, 2010). Clapham (2005) made some important conclusions from the results: EPRDF had completely lost support in important cities that worked as bellwethers for the rest of the state. The votes were largely taken by the opposition party, Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) with a nationalistic pan-Ethiopian sentiment, in regions and across nationalities and settlements patterns indicating support among all urban population groups. And, results of EPRDF winning in areas where hostility to the regime runs very deep (especially in Sidima and western Welega), indicated either pressure from the government before and during the election, or fraud after the vote had been taken (Clapham, 2005). Results from Addis Ababa indicated the same, the EU observer mission, and the Ethiopian Human Rights Council confirmed that rigging of the election took place (ibid).

The aftermath of the election showed that it was not the progressive turning point for Ethiopian democracy as some scholars had hoped (Clapham 2005; Harbeson 2005; Lyons; 2006), but rather a culmination towards a more authoritarian political structure. Tronvoll and Aalen (2009) argue that the unprecedented liberalization that took place before the election was just a part of EPRDFs continuous efforts to stay in power. Following, the aftermath of the election showed how EPRDF managed to close political space in Ethiopia, evident through; the immediate clampdown on opposition and civil society; continuous structural suppression through the maintenance and development of local administrative structures of control, and; the legislative restraints put down through drafting and ratification of new restrictive laws (Aalen & Tronvoll, 2009, p. 194). On the eve of election day, Prime Minister Zenawi declared a ban on demonstrations and outdoor meetings, lasting a month. All police and security forces were put directly under Zenawi’s command. Students organized peaceful demonstrations three weeks

after the election, to criticize the delay of the announcement of the results, which ended with at least 36 killed by police and security forces in Addis Ababa. Approximately 5000 people were arrested and detained after the protests in June, followed by about 20 000 detainees within December the same year (Aalen & Tronvoll, 2009, p. 196). After high hopes of a free and fair election, Tronvoll and Aalen state that by the local elections in 2008, Ethiopia had returned to an authoritarian regime.

The election of 2005 provides perspectives to what approaches to use in the Ethiopian context. The pan-Ethiopian party CUD took a significant share of the votes, indicating that an approach of a united Ethiopia can be more successful than mobilizing through just one group. The Qeerroo and the Oromo Protest movement fronted the Oromo thought, but turned after a meeting between OPDO and ANDM in Bahir Dar in November 2017, in which the Oromo leadership turned from just fronting the Oromo cause to fronting the Ethiopian cause (more on this in chapter 5, mobilization structures).

Oromo struggle and the Qeerroo

Who the Qeerroo are, and how they have helped bring one of Africa's strongest and most autocratic governments to its knees, is only dimly understood (Gardner, 2018a).

The Oromo people are an ethnic group living on Ethiopian, Somalian and Kenyan land. In Ethiopia they constitute the largest of the ethnic groups, being around 30-40% of the Ethiopian population (numbers differ). In Ethiopia they are located in Oromia, an area stretching from the capital Addis Ababa, from east to west of the country, and further down south.

Historically, the Oromo lived as neighbours to the Abyssinian Kingdom for centuries, not undertaken military or affected politically. In Oromo nationalist thought it is argued that Ethiopia colonized Oromo territory as a part of Christian missionaries, allying Ethiopian warlords with European imperialists. British and French government supported intervention in Oromia to Sahle Selassie (a part of Amharan nobility and Emperor Melenik II's grandfather) "so that he could spread the seeds of civilization [i.e., Christianity] among the Gallas [Oromos]" (Jalata, 1993, p. 47). Occupying Oromo land mass took several decades, with Emperor Melenik being the most significant in seizing land. Oromia was slowly incorporated into Ethiopia and its politics and economy. The Oromo national movement argue that Oromos have been exploited and neglected by the Ethiopian system and viewed as secondary citizens. Oromo

history, language and culture have not been recognized in Ethiopia before 1991, as with most of the other ethnic groups in the country. Oromo students have been a part of the Oromo national movement, even though their limitations to education slowed the process compared to the Amhara/Tigray based student movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Oromo student pamphlets were distributed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, where the central issues of Oromo questions were raised (Jalata, 1993, p. 162). Ethiopian governments' treatment of Oromos has created a large number of Oromos living abroad, and the extensive diaspora has become an important part of the national movement and the Oromo Protest. Some of the most influential leaders of the protest movement live outside Ethiopia but they have stayed connected to the movement through social media.

The years after 2005 were characterized by authoritarianism and a tightly controlled regime, at the hands of prime minister and leader of TPLF, Meles Zenawi. Even though all Ethiopian peoples were protected by the constitution implemented in 1995, claims on violations of human rights were made. Several reports by human rights organizations were published on the lack of political and civilian rights in the country, some targeting western states supporting the Ethiopian government (Amnesty International, 2009, 2010; Human Rights Watch, 2010). The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination raised questions towards if these violations of human rights were made along ethnic and racial lines in a report published in 2006. The claims were made on the basis of “well-documented reports of grave incidents of racial discrimination” and the UN committee was “concerned that inter-ethnic conflicts could escalate to a much larger scale in the near future, fuelled by political tensions and violations of economic, social and cultural rights” (CERD, 2007, paragraph 12). The report concluded that “military and police forces have been systematically targeting certain ethnic groups, in particular the Anuak and the Oromo peoples” (CERD, 2007, paragraph 19).

The Ethiopian government, despite their vocality on the issue of human rights in the constitution, did not comment on such reports on human rights abuses. Instead, EPRDF kept their western allies and the Ethiopian economy grew. Internationally, Ethiopia under EPRDF became a rising star in the region. A number of development projects were started, amongst other The Addis Ababa Master Plan, or the Addis Ababa Finfinne project. The Master Plan was developed in cooperation between the Addis Ababa City Administration and the regional government in Oromia, led by OPDO. The Master plan provoked significant protests in the area affected by it, Oromia. The criticism was primarily focused on that the implementation of the

plan would lead to the eviction of millions of farmers and families from their land, covering 1.1 million hectares of land. The first protesters of the Master Plan were mainly students from Oromia during the spring and summer months of 2014. The protest resulted in injuries, deaths and imprisonment of a great number of people all over the region. Despite the state of emergency implemented after protest erupted again in November 2015, the movement continued growing (Ethiopia Human Rights Project, 2016). The largest and most expressive part were the students and the youth, and especially a faction of these which call themselves the Qeerroo. The political movement consists of young Oromos resisting the TPLF supremacy within the EPRDF and demanding implementation of human rights, as well as the constitution. One of their key issues has been the release of the large number of prisoners jailed for political activities opposing the regime.

It is difficult to state when the movement started, as it drew inspiration from the earlier Muslim movement¹ in the country, but the movement as seen today will be defined in this thesis as the one that prevailed under the Oromo Protest that started in 2014. As stated above, Oromo students have been a part of the Oromo national movement, but beyond that, it is difficult to determine their role historically. However, as the number of universities in Ethiopia has grown tremendously since 1991, the number of Oromos having the possibility to attend university has also increased. Since the Oromo Protest started in 2014, students and youth calling themselves the Qeerroo, demanding Oromo liberation and self-determination, have been at the front of the protests. A shift in the leadership in OPDO, brought Lemma Megersa in as regional president of Oromia. Lemma became a symbol of hope for the Oromo movement, much due to him listening to the protest movement and taking actors such as the Qeerroos seriously. It changed how OPDO was viewed in the region, from being a puppet of TPLF, to proactively working for the Oromo cause. When Hailemariam Desalegn resigned, the Oromo movement wanted rising star Lemma in as new prime minister, however, he was not elected in parliament and thus not qualified to be appointed. A change of positions made it possible for Abiy Ahmed to be elected as the first Oromo prime minister in EPRDF, marking a major shift in political dynamics in Ethiopia.

Exactly who the Qeerroo's are, is a question asked by many. Both by those who wish to understand the movement and those who wish to destroy it, i.e. the TPLF-led regime. Thus, members of the Qeerroo are hard to find and the movement is not publicly organized, due to

¹ A Muslim protest movement erupted in Ethiopia in 2012, wanting to end governmental interference in religious practices and preference.

security reasons. In an interview with the Guardian, two anonymous Qeerroo's described that there is a system in which each district of a city has one Qeerroo leader with at least 20 subordinates, who are all responsible for sharing messages about upcoming strikes and other events (Gardner, 2018a). In the same interview, Bekele Gerba, an important Oromo opposition leader, shared that he did not know who their leadership is and even if they have a central command. The structure of the movement is thus hard to define, without clarity in regard to if it is defined by the movement itself. However, insight into how the Qeerroos contributed to a major shift within the EPRDF can be achieved through social movement theory. Analysing factors of political opportunities, mobilization structures, and contentious repertoires can provide an explanatory framework in which we can come a bit further in understanding the Qeerroos.

3. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of the thesis is outlined in the following chapter. In order to conceptualize the topic of the thesis, I will use literature on Social Movement Theory (SMT) and Political Process Theory (PPT) to theoretically frame the case of the Queer movement in Ethiopia. The academic field of social movements are broad, and the empirical basis for SMT can be found in a number of cases, such as the French revolutions (Tilly, 1986), the Civil Rights Movement in the US (Morris, 1984), student activism and the international feminist movement in the 1960s-70s (McAdam 1988; Evans 1980; Rupp and Taylor 1987), and several mobilizations for gay and lesbian rights (Engel, 2001). Thus, most SMT is empirically understood through western cases, framed by the social and economic situation before and after major events such as industrialisation, capitalism, and globalisation. However, the tools of SMT can be used to understand African states (and other non-western countries) as well, even though the premise is different. African states, and especially Ethiopia as used in this thesis, can enrich theoretical knowledge on social movements as well as other forms of political contestation.

Why use sociology theory in International Relations?

The study of International Relations is interdisciplinary, i.e. the traditional hard boundaries that exist between the different fields of social sciences are more porous and adaptable. Especially in studying Africa, I argue that this approach is more beneficiary than a single minded political science approach. In addition, the study of youth movements, i.e. social movement, is the study of people and their actions. Thus, using a sociological theoretical framework provides a deeper level of understanding than other theories of political science.

Political Process Theory (PPT)

Some terminology must be defined before proceeding; mainly the difference between social movements and Social Movement Theory. A social movement is “a sustained, organized collective effort that focuses on some aspect of social change. They tend to persist over time more than other forms of collective behaviour” (Crossman, 2017). SMT consist of a broad body of literature, with the main aim of understanding and conceptualizing how and why social movements happen and their possibilities for success or failure. Political process theory is an important part of SMT, and although it has been revised several times, it still is the dominant

paradigm for social movement research (Caren, 2007, p. 3458). It is disputed over when PPT first emerged, but it was crystalized by sociologist Douglas McAdam in his study of the Civil Rights movement in the US. In his book, McAdam (1982) presents the Political Process Model (PPM) which became a part of PPT in later revisions of the model, done by McAdam himself in addition to other sociologists. PPT is the culmination of the counter perspective to the social scientific view that participants of social movements, for example people that engage in protest opposing a political system, are irrational rebels, controlled by emotion and collective mentality. PPT argue that such protestors in fact are rational actors, not a result from alienation or abnormality, and use means to achieve political ends to resolve their legitimate grievances (Caren, 2007, p. 3455).

McAdam reused the term “political process” after it was mentioned in an article by Rule and Tilly (1975) on social movements in the context of revolutionary France. In a later publication, Tilly (1978) presented how the interaction between three components; interests, organization, and opportunity, explains the protesters level of mobilization and collective action. “Interests represent the potential gains from participation; organization represents the level of unified identity and networks; and opportunity represents the amount of political power, the likelihood of repression, and the vulnerability of the target” (Caren, 2007, p. 3455). McAdam worked further on this and presented his model based on the three factors; political opportunities, indigenous organizational strength, and cognitive liberation, and argued that the model can be used in looking at the causes for success in social movements, but also at the same time for the reasons for decline.

The original thought of McAdam stresses the importance of the *process*, rather than a particular phase of a process, for example the emergence of social protests. Thus, McAdam argued it was better to analyse such a process when it is done to be able to see the holistically. However, problems arise in defining when a political process is over. Is it when state power is seized by forces of the social movement, or the opposite, collapse of the movement? When has a social movement collapsed? As most social movements do not seize state power, it is a far to static and state centric way of thought, especially in studying non-western states, but also in regard to studying social movements in the west. There are some political processes that can be argued to take decades, and the time limit should not stop social scientists from studying these movements.

Sociologist Neal Caren (2007) describe the theory using five key components that determine the success or failure of a social movement, derived from the previous literature on the subject, mentioned above; 1) political opportunities, 2) mobilizing structures, 3) framing processes, 4) protest cycles, and 5) contentious repertoires (Caren, 2007). The first three are major concepts within PPT, changed and revised, but the core of the concepts are still central to PPT today, even though formulations may have changed. Framing is not included as a theoretical concept as such, due to the limits and scope of the thesis. The way especially historical framing is used in political movements in Ethiopia is central to mobilization and motivating collective action. However, the political history of Ethiopia is so complex and extremely contested, and a sufficient chapter on framing could not fit within the limitations of the thesis. The background chapter covers the most important elements to set the premises for the Qeerroo and the Oromo movement, and throughout the paper, I aim to consequently be aware of how framing affected the movement as well as the political processes around it.

The two latter, protest cycles and contentious repertoires, are today also often mentioned as a part of PPT. However, protest cycles will not be included in the theoretical framework. As the literature on protest cycles can be understood as dependent on the context of Western states, i.e. presence of fundamental rights such as the freedom of speech, the different context of the Ethiopian case makes it harder to conceptualize in order with the published literature. However, there have been recurring cycles of protest in Oromia, starting in the 1950s, again in the 1970s, and in the 1990s, before today's movement (Jalata, 1998). It could be interesting, not to say important, to interpret this in a historical perspective and provide the literature with non-western cases. However, the scope of this thesis is contemporary, and thus the concept of protest cycles is not further elaborated on here.

With the theoretical concepts of political opportunities, mobilization structures and contentious repertoires the thesis aim to explain how the Qeerroo contributed to a major shift within the EPRDF. The concepts are further explained and defined in the following sections.

Political opportunities

McAdam defines political opportunities as “any event or broad social process that serves to undermine the calculations and assumptions on which the establishment is structured” (McAdam, 1982, p. 41). According to PPT, a social movement ending successfully is impossible without political opportunity. Political opportunity is described as what the protesters (challengers) lack under ordinary circumstances. They are excluded from decision-

making processes because of their weak position. However, any political environment is constantly shifting, and the particular set of power relationships defining this environment can be challenged due to a number of factors. Political opportunities work indirectly in changing the degree of power inequality between the ruling and suppressed group. Among the events that can disrupt the political status quo are wars, industrialization, international political realignments, prolonged unemployment, and widespread demographic challenges (McAdam, 1982, pp. 40-41). From classic literature, especially the events of industrialization and urbanization are pulled forth as promoters of social movements, historically evidenced in the labour movements that spread across the western world in the beginning of the 20th century. This understanding of political opportunities is broad, and it is the part of PPT getting the most attention and the most criticism. Authors have narrowed or broadened the understanding of political opportunities to fit their own scope or case, making critics argue that it is either too narrow i.e. only relevant for the examined case, or too broad, and thus become trivial (Caren, 2007). Nevertheless, it is still agreed upon that shifts in the political status quo, exposing vulnerabilities, either way it is caused, can facilitate political activism.

Mobilizing structures

In McAdams original work on the political process model, the element of mobilizing structures was based on the strength of indigenous organizations during the civil rights movement, the case in which he researched. These organizations were important networks for the movement, they provided members that could be recruited as a group, had respected leaders, and a network of communication. Such organizations could be churches, universities, local community networks etc. Today, PPTists talk more of relational mechanisms, and how these affects social movements, in moving to a more dynamic approach of understanding political process. Nevertheless, mobilizing structure is still a dominant term in PPT, and can provide as a concept to explain especially the development of a social movement. In a later revision of the political process model, McAdam (1996) defines mobilizing structures as “those collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action” (McAdam, 1996, p. 3). For example, in student movements, university campuses and/or student organizations are central as a mobilizing structure.

Contentious repertoires

Lastly, the concept of contentious repertoires aims to describe the means that the social movement use to make their claims and demands. Means such as protests, boycotts, and strikes

are some examples. Conventional strategies are also mentioned, but as participants of social movements often lack access to these channels of influence, such as lobbying, voting, and petitioning, they often turn to more informal ways of spreading their message. The concept of contentious repertoires was first introduced by Tilly (1978), who argued that the concept can explain historical variations in forms of political contestation. With the term “repertoire”, Tilly implies that the way claims are made and received, occurs in established and predictable ways.

Political and economic context

As initially mentioned, the political and economic context of traditional cases referred to in SMT and PPT are in western states. Hence, important event such as industrialization, urbanization, globalization and so on, are often used to explain the bigger picture of political opportunities, and why social movements take place. Theory of New Social Movement are often explained as movements happening in the post-industrial economy (after the second world war) and is more difficult to understand and apply in the African context. Thus, this thesis uses PPT, which include concepts that can be applied for all cases where one group criticize the state structure. This happens all over the world and is definitely present in African states. To conceptualize these movements are both interesting and important in order to understand politics and structure in Africa.

McAdams political process model is based on the fundamental assumption that wealth and power are concentrated within a few groups, taking away influence from the populace of major decisions that affect their lives. Hence, social movements are viewed as “rational attempts by excluded groups to mobilize sufficient political leverage to advance collective interests through noninstitutionalized means” (McAdam, 1982, p. 37). These boundaries are not as manifested in the African context as in the West. The position of the elite is not as rigid, as western states are of older origins, the elite structures dates back to old labour structures of owner/worker in the means of production, the nobility and the general wealthy population. The elite is more interchangeable in the context of African states, and other factors, such as tradition, ethnicity, politics of the informal sector, plays a greater role. The concept of the elite can thus be understood in different ways, but in this thesis, the term is used referring to the group operating the state apparatus.

Criticism to PPT, emotions and revisions

There has been extensive criticism of both PPT and McAdam's political process model. Especially have the critics emphasized neglecting of the role of emotion in PPT. Traditionally in Social Movement Theory, emotion had the role opposite of rationality, making emotional protesters irrational, rebellious and angry. In the 1960s, the apex of many social movements, scholars began sympathising with protesters, but instead of further researching the role of emotion, they avoided the concept in order to legitimize the protesters as political actors (Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2004). Thus, when political process theory was developed, there was a greater attention towards the impact of states and elites in social movements, but the factor of emotion remained absent. The closest PPT came to analyse emotion was McAdam's concept of cognitive liberation. Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta (2004) argue that cognitive liberation was presented and interpreted "as an instrumental calculation of the odds of repression and the costs of action" (Goodwin et al., 2004, p. 415). The authors further argue that the various types of emotions that matter for social movements can be analysed with the same theoretical tools as the ones being used to understand cognitive beliefs and moral visions. However, even though emotions undisputedly are a fundamental part of a social movement structure, they will not be analysed as such in this thesis. The power of emotion is included in the chapter on mobilization structures in the Queer movement and conceptualized on that basis.

The main PPTists, McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, moved to a more dynamic approach of political process theory in the book *Dynamics of Contention* (2001), rather than the general causal arguments of their previous work. Here, they speak of environmental, relational, and cognitive mechanisms, instead of opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes. The three are not argued to be causally necessary, but the attention lies on the specific mechanisms that can be found across multiple movements (Caren, 2007, pp. 3457-3458). Nevertheless, even though the founding fathers of PPT have distanced themselves from the original theory, it remains the dominant paradigm for social movement research, and thus will be used as theoretical framework in this thesis.

4. Research Methodology

In the following chapter the research methods used in collection of data will be presented, i.e. the case study approach through qualitative interviews, an overview on how fieldwork in Ethiopia was conducted, and how it affected the thesis. Further there will be a section on selection of respondents as well as my own position as a researcher, followed by a presentation of internal validity through process tracing, and obstacles faced along the way.

Using Qualitative Research

The aim of the thesis is to explain how the Oromo Qeerroo created a movement that contributed to a major shift within the EPRDF. Bryman (2016) describes qualitative research as an approach using words rather than a numerically based quantitative approach. As the thesis questions the phenomenon of social movement in Ethiopia, an in-depth approach on a qualitative basis serves to be beneficial as an explanatory tool. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to observe the conduct of self and of others and thus understand the mechanisms of social processes and provide an explanatory framework of these (Norman K. Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). To study the complex political situation in Ethiopia, a qualitative case study-based approach is thus used in the thesis.

The case study approach

Bryman describe a basic case study to entail the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case. Case studies does not only contribute knowledge to this single case, but also analyse the case as an example of the broader category of which it belongs to (2016, p. 60). As the aim of the thesis is to explore how the Qeerroo created a movement that contributed to a major shift within the EPRDF, the particular case can contribute to further understanding in social movements in Ethiopia, as well as it can provide insight to how youth movements operate and mobilize in an African state. Obviously, findings from a single case-study at this level will not be able to provide general tendencies about social movements and how they play out in Ethiopia. However, it will contribute with insight and knowledge on a topic that is underrepresented in academia, much due to its recentness. Adding, there is an overweight of Amhara/Tigray based literature on Ethiopian politics and history, and thus the thesis aims to provide a nuanced perspective on the Oromo situation. Unfortunately, the turmoil happening in Ethiopia in the midst of collecting data for this thesis created difficulties in contacting Qeerroo's and going to

Oromia whilst in Ethiopia. Especially during the time frame of the field work, which was mid-protest for releasing Oromo leader Bekele Gerba, Qeerroo's was underground and hard to reach. However, as the Qeerroo's are very much active on social media outlets, these have been used in order to capture the voices of the movement, in addition to newspaper articles and general media. People connected to the movement outside Ethiopia have also been reached over social media. The contemporariness of the phenomenon in question made it difficult to research, but nonetheless interesting and important. As the case-study approach allows the researcher the possibility to explore "a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context", it was suitable with a case-based research design to study the social movement happening in Ethiopia (Yin, 1994, p. 10).

Inductive research process

Working with the thesis has been an inductive research process, which is "an approach to the relationship between theory and research in which the former is generated out of the latter" (Bryman, 2016, p. 691). The theoretical framework used in the thesis was not generated before the data collection was completed. Going in to field work in Ethiopia, the original angle of the thesis was to study the changes made within EPRDF, and especially the agenda of deep reform. However, due to both external changes and personal interest, the youth movement contributing to the changes in dynamics became a natural focal point. Especially younger people were more open and willing to share their experiences, and as a researcher I found their points of view far too interesting not to address. Additionally, due to the contemporariness of the study, as well as the focus on Oromo youth, there was a gap in the written literature. It is also to be mentioned that in working with Ethiopia previously, I was aware of the fact that going into fieldwork, my angle could change. Adding, the current situation in Ethiopia provides a myriad of angles to study and as Schwarzenberger argues "the use of the inductive method presupposes the existence of a fair amount of case material from which plausible generalizations may be attempted» (1947, p. 541).

Data collection: Field Work

In collecting data for this topic, I travelled to Ethiopia in order to comprehend the situation to the fullest and gather information. Having studied Ethiopia previously, I knew the complexities of its history and political situation and wanted to gain further knowledge and insight. I sought to speak to Ethiopians in Ethiopia with the aim to gain a fuller understanding an enormously multifaceted situation. Due to a strict time frame, the fieldwork was conducted over 18 days,

from 12th of February until the 1st of March 2018. First stage of the data collection was spent in Addis Ababa, before travelling through Amhara and further up north to Mekelle, Tigray, and lastly back to Addis Ababa to make one final interview. The political situation of the country at the time I was there affected the collection of data, as many of the before-hand scheduled elite interviews were postponed. In Mekelle it was easier to make contact with academics, and thus are the lion's share of elite interviews made in Tigray.

Interview as a Research Method

I used semi-structured interviews as method for collecting data from six out of a total of fourteen respondents. Semi-structured interview can be described as “the researcher has a list of questions or fairly specific topics to be covered, often referred to as an interview guide, but the interviewee has a great deal of leeway in how to reply” (Bryman, 2012: 468). In addition, the semi-structured interview allows for the conversation to develop further than to what is outlined in the schedule, and thus is quite flexible. However, all the questions have to be asked, and it is important to keep similar wording to each individual informant, to be able to uphold reliability and validity (ibid).

I chose to conduct interviews due to a number of reasons. Firstly, because of the recentness of events and the topic at hand, interviews were the easiest way of getting updated information. Second, relevant documents such as party documents, records from meetings etc. is for the large part not official in Ethiopia, nor is it in English. To look for relevant documents without knowing Amharic would exceed the time frame for this research project. Lastly, in an interview situation the researcher has the possibility to see reactions, facial expressions and evaluate direction of the interview on that basis. Politics is a sensitive and personal subject in the Ethiopian context and should be handled accordingly. In addition, the interviews provided insight to emotion, and thus served as a vehicle of both emotion and information.

Selecting informants

«In a case study, respondents are selected on the basis of what they might know to help the investigator fill in pieces of a puzzle or confirm the proper alignment of pieces already in place» (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002: 673). Six of the respondents in the thesis were first and foremost chosen on the basis of their knowledge and familiarity to the current shifts happening in the country and Ethiopian politics in general. Some of the interviews were scheduled in advance of travelling to Ethiopia, although several of these fell through. I used snowballing in sampling the respondents, where I made contact with one or two relevant respondents and used

these to establish contact with others. I used this method in Ethiopia as well. The main aim was to talk to Ethiopians with knowledge and personal opinions to the situation, in addition to student and youth sharing their perspectives and experiences. Thus, the information provided in the findings are the respondents' own opinions and affects the reliability of the statements the respondents make. In some instances, for example the size of parties and organizations in which the respondent interviewed are a member of themselves, the numbers presented should be further checked with available literature and not taken as facts. However, these biases are accounted for in the analysis and also serves as important parts of the findings, in the way the respondents perceive themselves and their position in Ethiopia.

The biggest loss of the thesis is that because of the situation, I did not have the possibility to travel into Oromia, and with the heightened tensions, it was not possible to talk Qeerros located in Addis Ababa. However, I believe the data collected still provides interesting findings especially towards how the Qeerros are perceived and the underlining structures that have been present in order for the social movement to thrive.

The informants used to gather information for the thesis can be divided into two groups; 1) people in academia in which I had semi-structured interviews with (i.e. a tape recorded sit-down interview, using a previously made interview guide, and 2) informal conversations and encounters, noted after memory as quickly as possible after the interaction happened. An overview of the informants, time of interview and their position (i.e. ethnicity, line of work, location) is listed in Appendix 1. Due to sensitivity, pseudonyms are used instead of the informants correct names. The recorded interviews have been transcribed and the quotations found in the thesis are direct quotations from the informants. Many of the informants are well known in the political sphere in Ethiopia and can be recognized through their positionality in this thesis. However, as ethnicity and political affiliation are fundamental in understanding the perspectives in which the informants come from, it is disclosed in appendix and throughout in the analysis where it is necessary.

The informants used are part academics, with whom I did sit-down interviews that was mostly scheduled before the interview took place. These interviews have all been recorded and transcribed. The other half of informants are Ethiopians which I came randomly across travelling through the country. None of these interviews were planned, they were informal conversations about politics and the situation of the country, as well as personal stories about their lives. The interviews were conducted in the time period between February 12th and 1st of March 2018. The political climate in these three weeks affected both the findings and the

perspective of the thesis. It affected the findings practically in two ways; it opened up and made it easier to approach normal people to talk about the state of the country, and it made it harder to get hold of the experts and academics whom I planned on seeing. I believe it also affected the topics the informants discussed and pulled forth, because this shift touched every part of Ethiopian politics and it was something so recent when the interviews were conducted.

Most of the informants were located in Tigray and from Tigray or located in Addis Abeba with unknown ethnicity. Six of those interviewed (informant 1-6) work at an institution for higher education, i.e. the University of Mekelle and the University of Addis Abeba.

Two of the informants (1 and 14) was openly supporters of and organized within TPLF, while most of the people from Tigray (2, 6, 9, 10 and 13) showed scepticism to the regime due to recent signs of weakness in those ruling and not having the ability solve problems within and outside the party. One informant (6) was particularly critical to the system of ethnic federalism, which he argued was dividing Ethiopia rather than to unify it. Many of the informants were critical to the means used by the Oromo protesters, however, they showed sympathy towards the Oromo cause and struggle. The two supporters of TPLF talked openly about the legitimacy of Tigray dominance and argued TPLF was the rightful ruler of Ethiopia and used for the most part historic arguments. In both conversations, questions of the Oromo struggle were dismissed. One informant (5) was Tigrayan, and part of the Tigrayan opposition. He believed Tigray was the most controlled region in the state.

Positionality

My own position as a researcher affected the thesis in 1) how I was perceived during data collection in Ethiopia and how it coloured the data i.e. the statements of the respondents, and 2) how my personal views and experiences could interfere with the analysis of the data. Thagaard (2009) argues that the purpose of qualitative data is the possibility to go deeper than with quantitative data, but this cannot be done without analysis and interpretation, in which the researcher has to use his or her abilities to make connections and understandings. What I was predisposed to before embarking on the project (upbringing, education, political affiliations, western media etc.) as well as personal experiences in Ethiopia, has undeniably interfered with an objective position. Prior to the fieldwork I had not travelled to Ethiopia before, nor to any other states in East Africa, and I had few if any preconceptions of what I would meet. My knowledge of Ethiopia was mostly on a systemic political level and I had few expectations to the research process and the outcome of the fieldwork. I believe this gave me an advantage, because opened up for possibilities that came along the way. As a young, white, female in

Ethiopia especially young people found me approachable, and it made it easy to start a conversation that had the possibility to go into deeper questions, relevant for my research. Young people were eager to talk about the political situation and their own situation and being a student myself created a bridge and a meeting ground. However, being an obvious outsider definitely affected the kind of people that approached me, wanting to share their story, and how/what people communicated. There is a notion in academia that research conducted *from* the West *to* the developing world is exploitative and based on the assumption that people of the third world have no power, when in fact researchers rarely have control of the research process (Andy Sumner & Tribe, 2008, p. 44). As I was interviewing academics, students and employees in mostly the service industry, they held control over what they wanted to share, and I was there to listen and learn. The situation of the interview contributed to making clear roles; interviewer and interviewee. However, the situation would be different had I been in contact with more marginalized groups.

Secondary sources

In addition to the data used from the interviews and conversations, I looked at social media posts and other media outlets to understand the contemporary discourse inside the movement. Much of this information is in Amharic or Afaan Oromoo, but some, especially around the time of data collection (a heightened time of protest) a significant amount was in English (probably due to international attention). These posts are not referred to in the findings as such, but they were an important part of understanding the situation and provided insight to the Oromo thought.

Academic literature on Ethiopian politics and history

I had an intentional aim of looking for Ethiopian sources when researching and writing this thesis, as the people of a country understandably have the best insight to its politics and history. I came to discover that academic literature on Ethiopia, both with Ethiopian origin and elsewhere, is largely written with a political undertone. Tales of history will always have positive or negative interpretations of particular events, thus asserting a set of values. The writer also necessarily has to make judgements on what is more or less important parts of history (Romanowski, 1996, p. 170). In the Ethiopian context historically, the literature was written by and according to an Amharic assimilated tradition, or from the perspective of northerners. The Oromo literature is largely political and sensitive to the Oromo cause. Thus, it is difficult to navigate in between different sources of politics and history.

Obstacles

There is a sensitivity issue in conducting field work in Ethiopia, especially in studying the political sphere. Openly criticising the Ethiopian government can be unsafe and lead to unwanted situations such as restrictions, arrest, jailing, etc., and a fear of possible repercussions could colour the statements of the respondents and thus inflict the data collected. A researcher has to be aware of the ethic consequences of the research, both before and after publication, and in going to Ethiopia to speak to people about sensitive issues I was aware of the difficult situation my respondents could face from engaging. Particularly, I feared not being able to ask questions to people randomly encountered at university campuses, on the street or at a café etc., however, it turned out that the tense political climate during my stay in Ethiopia was beneficial to my research. I experienced an openness and eagerness to talk about the situation and share experiences. Nevertheless, after evaluating if my research could have negative consequences for my informants after its publication, I decided to not identify my informants, especially since all respondents are located in Ethiopia. Harm to the informants cannot only happen during the research process, but also after the information is made public (Glesne, 2006).

One of the main obstacles in collecting information in Ethiopia was language. Especially in Mekelle making other collections than elite interviews were difficult. Language became a barrier in getting both female and male perspective, as men are generally better in English than women are and more eager to talk. It did also exclude men that did not speak English, hence more a more marginalized group without the possibility to get education. Thus, the thesis only includes data collected from males with a relatively high societal position – which is unfortunate for the validity of the thesis. However, the elite interviews made did not separate the situation of men and women, the party, opposition, and social movements were talked about without referring to gender. Research show that gender equality comes as a lower priority in societies like the Ethiopian, where political and civil rights are violated. With that said, women are underrepresented in Ethiopian politics, at universities, and as a voice in society (USAID, 2018). To further examine the role of youth movements as a political actor in Ethiopia, it should be studied with female perspective as well, preferably by someone known with the local languages.

5. Findings and analysis

The following chapter will present the main findings of the research project, coded and conceptualized through political process theory. I used colour coding to categorize and analyse my data, where the categories used were framing, political opportunities, mobilization structures, protest cycles and contentious repertoires. The concepts of framing and protest cycles was excluded from the thesis after coding and analysing the collected data. The following chapter thus contain three sections that each represent a concept within political process theory; political opportunity, mobilization, and contentious repertoires.

Political Opportunities in Contemporary Ethiopia: Rising the Youth Once More

The following chapter aim to analyse how certain events in Ethiopian politics came to facilitate the strengthening of the Qeerroo movement, creating a larger political space than before in the nation as a whole. Particularly two elements are of significance from the interviews conducted in Addis Ababa and Mekelle, 1) the death of Meles Zenawi, and the following 2) imbalance in federal and regional governments.

The period discussed reaches as far back as 2010, from when Meles tutored Hailemariam Desalegn to be his successor, and the evident failure of that project when Desalegn resigned February 2018. The regional governments, given constitutional autonomy in theory but not in practice, have been strengthened over the past years and are now inarguably in a power contest with the federal authorities. This change in federal control made space for students and youth to revolt and mobilize.

“The King-Maker”

As the death of Meles Zenawi is one of the main catalysts of the change in status quo, especially within the hierarchical structures of EPRDF power dynamics, the following section will cover briefly the role of Tigrayans and TPLF within Ethiopia, and how they have legitimated their own dominance.

Our balance of power depends on history, culture, and the 17 years of armed struggle, the sacrifice, all these things. Peasant movement, student movement. In the student movement the leaders were mostly Tigrayans. [...] So, even in the student movement,

in the peasant movement, in the armed struggle, in the civilization, Tigray is always there. Even though numbers are weak, we proudly own the state (Informant 1, 24.02.18).

Tigrayans represent about 6% of the Ethiopian population and are thus referred to as a minority group, however, they can also be viewed as the fourth majority group, behind Oromo, Amhara and Somali (Informant 1, 24.02.18). Throughout history, Tigrayan people have had high standing positions in Ethiopian society and political life, which have been an important factor in how TPLF legitimates itself and their dominant role in EPRDF.

One term brought up frequently by one respondent, as well as in the literature, was “the king maker” (Informant 1, 24.02.18). During what is known as the Zemene Mesafint period in Ethiopia, a period approximately stretching from mid 18th century to mid 19th century, Ethiopia was divided into several regions with warlords fighting each other, and the Solomonic dynasty did not hold central power. The Yejju tribe from Oromia are often described as the most powerful lords of this period and managed to rule over the other lords of Ethiopia at the time (Jalata, 1993). Tigrayan governor Sehul Mikael ended up supporting the Solomonic rule, i.e. the Amharic assimilated elite, and had a large role in determining the appointment of the new king from Datka palace. From that time, according to the Tigray perspective, the tigrayan role in the Ethiopian state is king maker, i.e. holding the decisive power in who governs. The shift from the Yejju dynasty in the mid 19th century back to Amhara rule is often described as the beginning of Oromo struggle (Informant 1, 24.02.18). In placing Hailemariam Desalegn, a leader from the Southern Nations and Nationalities at the leader of the state and the Front, Informant 1 argue Tigray still has the role of king maker. Opposition and protesters have also accused Hailemariam to be a puppet, forced to act upon the will of TPLF, the puppet master. “They [Oromo] had to challenge him [HMD] because Hailemariam is relatively weak. So, they started a protest, but they directed their process not against Hailemariam, but against TPLF. Because TPLF is considered as the king maker” (ibid). I.e. the Oromos argue their grievances to be legitimately directed towards TPLF, because they have the dominate role in the EPRDF without holding the prime ministership. TPLF legitimates this role by referring to the people of Tigray as the originators of the Ethiopian state, thus a natural leader, as well as their position in Ethiopia in several important events; the student movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and the peasant movement leading up to the armed struggle, where they were a central actor. Many of the leaders of the 1960s-1970s student movement were from Tigray, although they obviously lived and studied in the capital or abroad. In Tigrayan perspective, TPLF “won” the state after

the armed struggle leading to the transition of power in 1991, thus making their entitlement of the Ethiopian state legitimate (Informant 14, 26.02.18).

The Meles-factor

In 1975, a student organized within the TPLF left his medicine studies to join the guerrilla movement in Tigray. His name was Meles Zenawi. Zenawi was bright, charismatic and intelligent, and soon became a central part of the group leading TPLF. He had a clear vision for Ethiopia; to get the country out of poverty. The utmost important goal was to achieve development and economic growth, as he meant the creation of wealth was the fundament of consolidating democracy and make politics more than a zero-sum game (De Waal, 2012). He expressed his views in a master thesis, although it was not finished, where he presented a theory of 'democratic developmentalism' in the manuscript called "African Development: Dead Ends and New Beginnings". The thesis described and legitimized the methods of which a state would achieve development and democracy. Zenawi was radical in many of his statements on reform of the Ethiopian society and justified means violating human rights, as the utmost important issue for Zenawi was to develop Ethiopia into the prosperous state he envisioned (ibid). And, Ethiopia did grow economically under Zenawi's leadership. Comparisons with benevolent autocracies, such as South Korea, that grew under a controlled regime into a democratic one, was made especially by foreign donors (such as Norway). Human rights organizations on the other hand, complained of the lack of political and civil rights. Zenawi held a tight grip on not just the Ethiopian population, but also his own party, TPLF, and the coalition, EPRDF. Even though the federal constitution gave autonomy to the regional states, it became hard to implement in practice due to Zenawi's centralised power. The crisis within TPLF after the Ethiopian-Eritrean war where several long-standing members was dismissed for criticizing the leader, manifested Zenawi's power further, and set the record for behaviour within TPLF/EPRDF and the consequences of crossing Meles.

The 20th of August 2012 in a hospital in Brussel, Meles Zenawi died. In the aftermath of his death, several experts and commentators announced the risk that without Meles, Ethiopia would destabilize, or worse, collapse. He was spoken of like the force that kept the federal system under control, that secured economic progress and the factor that changed the outcome for Ethiopia and made it on the rise. Without Meles, what would modern Ethiopia look like? Yet, no big turnovers happened. Although his death came as a surprise and created chaos within the

party, it did not destabilize the country. It could seem like Meles had created a system so that even from beyond, he controlled the situation. He had handpicked and prepared his successor, and successful institutionalization of the ruling party organization and strong economic growth made Ethiopia remain stable (Aalen, 2014). However, as Lovise Aalen pointed out in 2014, short-term stability should not be confused with long-term sustainability. Meles did what he could to not leave a power vacuum in the aftermath of his death, but his role in the country deemed hard to fill, and maybe impossible. People in Ethiopia seem to have an ambivalent perception of the leader, as he is described as a tyrant, but, in control. A few days after Hailemariam's resignation, a young graduate in Tigray told me that Ethiopia needed a strong leader with solutions. He said it did not matter that much if the solution was good or bad, but he preferred one over an insecure leader that did not have the ability to make hard decisions. The quality of being in control, being clear and dominant, are valued in Ethiopian politics, as well as African politics in general. The Abyssinian order of hierarchy where power ultimately derived from God is still affecting how Ethiopians think of power holding and politics (Vaughan & Tronvoll, 2003). After the election in 2005, the democratic progress in Ethiopia was put to a halt by the closing of political space. When it became clear for EPRDF that the opposition actually had a chance in the electorate, there was an immediate clampdown on opposition and civil society, a continuous structural suppression through the maintenance and development of local administrative structures of control, and legislative restraints put down through drafting and ratification of new restrictive laws (Aalen & Tronvoll, 2009, p. 194). The two elections held in 2010 and 2015 revealed a weak opposition and an electorate with a general impression that the outcome of the election would either way be in favour of the sitting government (Tronvoll, 2010). There is no point in speculating in if Meles would have lived, would the situation remain the same, but the problems internally in the party would probably not have exceeded to the level at which it is today. Externally, with increasing grievances towards the regime, the situation might be the same without the partly support from regional leaders. The regime would be struggling, but not at the same level with massive internal difficulties.

A decisive leader is valued especially in the African context, and what came after Meles was construed not to be. "You know, they recognized Meles as their leader, by fear and by love. But when big man go, everyone become amongst equals. It becomes horizontal, everyone looks for more power" (Informant 1, 24.02.18). The power structure in EPRDF and in Ethiopian politics became more horizontal with Meles death, because what leader could ever fill that power

vacuum. The man chosen by Meles turned out to not be able to keep the same hierarchy as before.

“The puppet”

Desalegn was hand-picked by Meles as the right one to take over the torch leading the next most populous country in Africa. Hailemariam was good on paper – he was not from TPLF, he was balanced, he was a politician. Well educated, long term loyal supporter of Meles and of EPRDF. Hailemariam is from Wolayta, thus representing the region Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region (SNNPR) and president of the party SEPDM from 2002. The southerners did not pose as a threat to either TPLF, OPDO or ANDM, and the election of the leader was seen at the time as somewhat neutral. Hailemariam thus were to have the role of a balancing factor that could keep EPRDF united, maintain stability and status quo. And it did – for a few years. In an article for Washington Post, Lovise Aalen argues it was the power vacuum left by Meles together with increased authoritarianism that erupted into protests in 2015, which caused severe problems for EPRDF. What brought the serious shift in dynamics, was the move by Amhara and Oromia regional leaders in going out and publicly partly support the protesters in summer 2017 (Aalen, 2018). This gave protesters a legitimacy in formal politics they have not had before and showed the seriousness in both groups (Amhara and Oromo) of wanting to end Tigray dominance. EPRDF answered by putting the coalition party and the regional parties through a deep reform process in the latter part of 2017, to relieve some of the pressure put on the regime. Political prisoners were released in February 2018, and when the regime caved to the protesters demands, they simultaneously admitted to having political prisoners in the first place. A few days later Hailemariam resigned.

The weakness of Hailemariam became abundantly clear being in Addis Ababa the day of his resignation. A man encountered in a taxi from Arat Kilo to Bole scoffed of the then former prime minister of his country. “He was a puppet to the TPLF and his resignation was expected”. The same word, puppet, was used by two young men in a bar when asked of the resignation, as well as in social media post and in the local news. In international media, his resignation was presented as a shock. And, to the international medias defence, the resignation of a prime minister has never happened in Ethiopian history. They have either been killed, defeated into exile, or died of natural causes. The unprecedented event made the problems within EPRDF crystal clear, and the words “political crisis” spread like wildfire over social media channels and formal media outlets. The events leading up to the resignation of prime minister

Hailemariam Desalegn will be discussed in the following sections and how this created political space for the Oromo Qeerroo.

“Down, down Woyane!”: Grievances towards EPRDF

With a lack of political and civil rights, arbitrary arrests, police brutality, ethnic violence, exploitation of economic and human resources, and high poverty levels, there are a number of reasons for why Oromos wish to see a change in the Ethiopian government. The most frequent brought up in the findings was the obvious Oromo oppression, leading to the Oromo Protest, but also the TPLF/Tigray dominance and how they benefited from the recent economic growth.

They [oromo's] had to challenge him [HMD] because Hailemariam is relatively weak. So, they started a protest, but they directed their process not against Hailemariam, but against TPLF. Because TPLF is considered as the king maker. [...] Then what comes is, you know, the regions become stronger, EPRDF becomes weak. Because Hailemariam is weak. Then, the chain of command become loose. Then the oromo, you know, starts their emancipation (Informant 1, 24.02.18).

The Oromo grievance has been an ongoing struggle throughout Ethiopian history. After the death of Meles, Oromo-people started protesting against the regime after a few months, according to Informant 1. However, there are no sources available to confirm this claim, and the Oromo Protest referred to in media and publications is mainly defined as starting in 2014-15. As EPRDF lost control, political opportunity opened for protesters. The Oromo Protest started as a direct response to the Addis Ababa Master Plan, or the ‘Addis Ababa-Finfinne Integrated Development Plan’, that was developed in cooperation between the Addis Ababa City Administration and the regional government in Oromia, led by OPDO. The criticism was primarily focused on that the implementation of the plan would lead to the eviction of millions of farmers and families from their land, covering 1.1 million hectares of land. The student protest against the Addis Ababa Master Plan started as a peaceful protest, where the protesters claimed the Master Plan was a blueprint of annexation of Oromia to enable the government to displace Oromo farmers, and thus increase control in the region. The government on the other side, insisted that the Master Plan would be beneficial to the region, as it would integrate towns and rural districts in terms of utilities, infrastructure, and better market access to Oromo people (Berhane, 2016).

The first protest started peacefully at the University of Ambo in Oromia, before it turned violent as government security forces opened fire at the students. Number of deaths differ between sources, the government claim that eight people died in Ambo, opposed to a witness who told BBC that 47 were killed by government security forces (ILPI, 2016). The protests spread to other large cities in Oromia and to smaller villages throughout the region. Over a year later, November 2015, protests commenced again, ending with the implementation of a state of emergency (Ethiopia Human Rights Project, 2016).

The regional and national election in 2015 played a part in the start of the Oromo protest. Since the election of 2005 and the democratic setback, opposition at regional level was low and there was little belief within the population that anyone other than EPRDF would retrieve state power in the election. However, inside the Oromia regional election, the situation was different. Two Oromo opposition parties had merged; The Oromo National Congress and Oromo Federal Democratic Movement together became The Oromo Federal Congress (OFC). With OPDO being unpopular because of their place in EPRDF and their collaboration with TPLF, it would seem as if the OFC would have a chance in a fair and free electoral process. Especially in the West Shewa Zone of Oromia, where some of the OFC leadership comes from, they extensively mobilized the youth.

Another source of frustration and criticism towards EPRDF is the perception of TPLF prioritizing the Tigray region in allocating funds to development projects etc., making Tigray wealthier and leaving the majority of the population in poverty. Especially in social media, the wealth of Tigray is brought up frequently as a symbol of Oromo exploitation. However, these claims are not properly nuanced. Ethiopia has experienced a massive growth over the last decade, drawing international attention on their success of proper and effective distribution of developmental aid to ensure economic prosperity. The country has been successful in meeting some of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in defeating extreme poverty, access to primary education for all, decreasing child mortality, and promoting gender equality. However, both the validity of numbers of Ethiopian growth has been contested, as well as critics points out that the terms growth and development are used synonymously, suggesting they are one and the same. A well-known Ethiopian scholar located in Addis Ababa argues “[I] don’t believe that the growth is seriously purposely channelled toward ensuring economic distributive justice, because you have from the last few years a number of people that exponentially grown

in terms of wealth and by same token you have significant number of people who are living in poverty. [...] Growth is limited to certain actors” (Informant 4, 01.03.18).

The problem of distribution of growth is further problematized with the weak private sector and the strong governmental rule. A politician organized within the opposition in Tigray argues that the problem is that the philosophy of the regime is that in order to control politics, you have to control the economy too (Informant 5, 26.03.18). He further claims that “either you have to be their supporter, their partner, in the political sense, or you will get arrested. For having money. If you have much money, you will be arrested, and you will be asked *where did you get this from?* You have to be their member, you have to serve them, you have to pay and you have to just serve them in every aspect” (ibid).

Outside Tigray, there is another point of view. Another scholar located in Addis Ababa, supports the statements made by informant 4, but concretizes it further. He speaks of a feeling, like the dividence of growth is not equally distributed, and that the government favours one group, and that is the Tigrinja speaking population (Informant 3, 16.03.18). The collective understanding of the dominance of TPLF goes thus further into the dominance of ordinary Tigrayans above the rest of the population. This idea was largely opposed in Tigray. Several of the informants said it was just plain wrong (Informant 1, 24.02.18; Informant 14, 26.02; Informant 13, 16.02; informant 6, 28.02.18; informant 2, 28.02.18), and figures for the economy in Tigray show the same – the regions poverty level is higher than the country average (UNICEF, 2016). One respondent from Tigray stated, “The issue of Tigray dominance is very much orchestrated, unfairly magnified throughout the country” (Informant 2, 28.02.18). As the Ethiopian economy is growing, there is an underlying issue of grievance in the people that does not experience that prosperity for themselves. The government is blamed, especially TPLF, and to some degree, the tigrinja speaking population, seen through harassment and violent attacks over recent years.

The federal state struggle, the regional states increase power

After the death of Meles, the chain of command within the EPRDF loosened. Due to successful institutionalization of the ruling party organization and strong economic growth, stability remained for some years. However, since the Oromo Protests sprung out in 2014-15, the EPRDF has had serious problems, especially towards managing the regions and regional parties. As stated from informant 1 above, the chain of command loosened after the death of

Meles, and the events occurring in the years to come worsened the situation for the federal government. There have been problems between regions on several fronts², but due to the scope and limits of the thesis, it is not possible nor relevant to cover them all. Nevertheless, the general turmoil happening all over the country is by large destabilizing EPRDF and the system of ethnic federalism. Adding, over the past years it became clear that the party suffered substantial problems internally.

The internal problems within EPRDF is much due to the death of Meles – as Meles was the one who personally authored most government policies (ILPI, 2016). “The Meles legacy” has been stated by EPRDF as the unifying factor in the party – but Meles is long gone and his legacy is contested. ANDM and OPDO have for a longer period of time tried to renegotiate the power relations within EPRDF, because of the resentment of TPLF dominance in the coalition (ibid). SEPDM was the latest addition in the coalition, and even though it is the largest party by representing a large number of ethnic groups, it is seen as not as powerful in the coalition and easily directed by TPLF. Even though the idea was that Meles picked a “neutral” successor by picking someone from SEPDM, ANDM and OPDO have the largest and second largest groups and they both felt entitled to the PM-spot. The coalition cracked under poor leadership and discontent of TPLF dominance and escalated into the statements made by ANDM and OPDO leadership that they partly supported the ongoing protest. At the same time, the party has gone through major personnel changes. Speaker, and an important Oromo leader and figurehead, Abadula Gameda, submitted his resignation very much publicly “in protest over recent political developments including the federal security handling of the ongoing violence in eastern Ethiopia” (Ethiopia Observer, 2017 2018). The new Oromo leadership is seen as protégés of Abadula and the stance he took against the government has been significant to the movement, legitimizing it as well as questioning the EPRDF leadership from within. The Oromo movement was taken to the next level as Abadula, a former general and former regional president of Oromia, known for his loyalties to the TPLF, criticised the party he had served for over 25 years (Tadesse, 2017). Abadula was as well the first high ranking politician in Ethiopia to resign since EPRDF seized power in 1991, making the resignation historic. However, he later decided to retract his resignation, and did go back to his duties as speaker before he was appointed to the

² Especially during the fall of 2017 there was reported a high number of deaths after violent clashes between groups across regional borders and the number of internally displaced people increased enormously because of the ongoing turmoil. In the media, the Somali Lijyu Police was especially pulled forth, as they were accused of ethnic cleansing after killings of Oromo people living in the Somali region (Zelalem, 2017).

position as National Security Advisor, a position he had a few months before retiring June 2018. It was never made clear why Abadula retracted his resignation. Nevertheless, the stance he took made a significant difference to the Oromo movement.

Abadula's resignation came in the midst of several resignations and replacements of EPRDF seniors. Rumoured, there was a rift between executive members of ANDM and TPLF, because of issues related to border conflict. These internal problems happened in the midst of a challenging situation between ethnic Somalis and Oromos, where multiple crackdowns led to killings and displacement of thousands, and the Somali Liyu police was accused of ethnic cleansing of Oromos living on Somali territory. Oromos claimed the Somali regional government was wrongfully supported by the federal government and that proper measurements against the Somalis did not happen (Zelalem, 2017). As political instability and violent conflict increased, the number of internally displaced passed one million in 2017 (UNHCR, 2018). At the time, expert on Ethiopian politics at Addis Ababa University, Assefa Fiseha, expressed concerns about the situation: «No healthy country allows a mass displacement of this magnitude in the presence of a capable government», continuing «what we have is rivalry among ethno-nationalist leaders who think the center is weaker than ever» (Schemm, 2017). This conflict, in addition to turmoil in several parts of the nation, made the federal government look weak and unable to control its regions.

A shift in the status quo of TPLF dominance led to the opening of political space allowing the Qeerros gain momentum and mobilize rapidly. The Addis Ababa Master Plan Project is seen as the main catalyst starting the Oromo Protest, but the context around the time of the Master Plan is equally important; the weakness of Hailemariam after Meles' death, the regions gaining power, and the general turmoil and dissatisfaction in the country. The political environment changed from being closed where people feared to speak about politics, to people opening up and supporting protest, strikes and sit-ins, as well as vocal presences online, not fearing the repercussions of the regime. In the following chapter, the mobilization structures of the Qeerros will be further discussed.

Mobilization structures: Mobilizing the youth of Ethiopia

This chapter analyse how the Qeerroo has mobilized in this process of protest. One of the clearest outtakes, emphasized in all interviews made in Ethiopia was the power of ethnicity. Ethnicity has always been an important element of Ethiopian state structure and politics, as the diversity of the country has characterized the state from its origin. After the fundament of the constitution and system of governance was categorized from ethnicity, the concept has further penetrated both formal and informal structures in the Ethiopian society. This is evident in the mobilization of the youth as most youth movements are based in ethnic background, for example the Qeerroo. But student/youth movements in general are also traditionally largely mobilized through the university campus, which is a platform growing in Ethiopia today as an increasing amount of youth are attending university. Separating from previous forms of mobilization are the importance of social media. Social media channels like Facebook and Twitter have become a vital part of youth mobilization, and especially to maintain relationship and guidance from the Ethiopian diaspora. In this chapter, these three elements of ethnicity, the university campus and social media will be further discussed as main mobilizing structures for Ethiopian youth today.

Ethnicity as mobilization structure

In considering the cultural terms in which political participation is the passport to membership of the ‘nation’, the significance of ethnicity is identified as the most potent force for political mobilisation (Michael, 2008, p. 7).

Over the last 27 years, the overall way of dividing and categorize Ethiopian politics has been through ethnicity. Hence, political mobilization largely begins with the basis of ethnic background. Informant 6 from Tigray claims that mobilization of youth movements is based on ethnicity because they have no other motive. The Oromo, ever so fragmented as they are, have a collective feeling of being secondary citizens in Ethiopia, and thus the power of wanting more recognition and influence become a motive for mobilization. In previous student movements in Ethiopia, ethnicity has played a role, but not in such a significant way as it does today. The way the ethnic federal governance has penetrated the formal system of the state, where all political activity is organized in terms of ethnicity makes the formation of social movements also highly reliant on ethnicity. Arguably, instead of making people closer, it created a larger space to see

the differences among peoples, which can be taken political advantage of. Informant 6 states further that the formal political parties take advantage of the large masses of youths, because it enables them (i.e. the formal political parties) to challenge the centre and gain power (28.02.18). It is evident from the latter part of 2017 and the beginning of 2018 that the youth has a powerful voice in formal Ethiopian politics and that the political parties as well as the government take them seriously. However, actions of violence and hate crimes, such as harassing innocent people on the background of their ethnic affiliation, deconstruct the Qeerroo's as a serious political actor. It enables the government to argue that the movement is in fact nothing but a rebellious group, legitimizing arrests and imprisonment of people associated with the Qeerroo. As such, the very foundation the Qeerroo movement is mobilized on, can be problematic because it is founded of and run by Oromos. In founding the very basis of the struggle on ethnicity, one automatically excludes all other group formations/ethnicities from joining, and this has been an ongoing problem in Ethiopian politics for decades. OPDO acknowledged the restrictiveness of ethnic mobilization and wanted to separate themselves from this line of thought, marked with a historic meeting in Bahir Dar with ANDM (Gardner, 2018b). The aim of the meeting was to unite the two largest parties opposing the dominance of the TPLF within the EPRDF, and to create a broader and more sustainable movement, crossing the borders of ethnicity. However, even though OPDO saw the challenges and restrictiveness in ethnicity, the grass root movement remained at an ethnic level.

Emotion

We don't know their capability, what we are seeing is, they are mobilizing the people, they are guiding them, to fight against their brothers, against other ethnic groups, for no reason! People cannot have proper representation, you see. Lemma Megersa cannot represent the Oromo. He can represent the Oromo emotion, but not the Oromo advantage, not the Oromo benefit, not the Oromo future for children (Informant 6, 28.02.18).

The statement above is made by a Tigrayan lecturer at the University of Mekelle, describing his frustration of using emotion as a mobilizing tool in the Oromo Protest movement. The role of emotion is a powerful tool in politics, but it has been avoided in early social movement theory as well a political process theory. Neglecting to study emotion as a component for political behaviour stems from the sentiments that it is too personal and irrational for it to be modelled

or measured in a scientific manner (Goodwin et al., 2004). However, as the Oromo emotion is highly relevant for the Qeerroo cause, and thus its mobilization capabilities, it has to be taken as a serious element in understanding the movement and its successes and failures. Emotion has been a vital part of Ethiopian politics, and especially the previous generations of student movements. These emotions can be categorized as longer-term affective commitments and based on complex moral and cognitive understanding. The latter is also relevant for the concept of framing processes. Longer-term affective commitments describe emotions that persists over a long period of time and that can persist through generations. “Our affects give us our basic orientations toward the world, especially telling us what we care most deeply about. They are the reason we bother to participate in movements at all rather than sit on the sidelines” (Goodwin et al., 2004, p. 418). The terms Oromo emotion or the Oromo struggle was frequently used by Ethiopians to explain the ongoing events with youth movements such as the Qeerroo in Ethiopia, and it is these two terms that make the movement continue, that make it thrive. However, emotion is often taken advantage of. Emotions make the Qeerroo thrive, but it is also blamed for violence, vandalism and other criminal activities. In the quote above, respondent 6 problematize how the use of emotion does not transfer into formal politics, and how the Qeerroo, as well as similar voices in the Ethiopian society, lack political weight and voices in more formal channels in order to provide proper representation of the Oromo benefit and advantage. Nonetheless, emotion is an important element of youth mobilization in Ethiopia, as it is inherited from generations feeling abandoned by the Ethiopian state, creating division between ethnic groups and a feeling of hopelessness.

The university campus as a mobilizing structure

The university campus has a large function of mobilization for the Ethiopian youth, serving as a platform in political participation, as well as an arena of political expression, without formally acknowledging or encouraging political engagement. As the organizational structures of the Qeerroo is unclear and underground due to security reasons, the campus provides a common meeting ground for possible participators, as well as vehicles and arenas for communication.

One of the most developed and thus celebrated sectors in Ethiopia is the education sector. Within higher education, i.e. private and public universities and colleges, there has been a massive growth since EPRDF came in power. During the first generation of student movements in the 1960s, there were two universities in Ethiopia, The University of Addis Ababa and

University of Asmara. Today, there are millions of people registered and involved at the 44 public universities in the country (Ministry of Education, 2016). Respondent 2, lecturer at the University of Mekelle, argues that increased access to university is a central part of mobilizing the youth (28.02.18). Most farmers have the possibility of sending at least one child to university, meaning that the movement can feasibly mobilize one person from each household in a rural community. Comparing to social media, the university campus as a structure of mobilization provides a much deeper rural penetration than the social media channel. More people have access to university than to functioning internet access and a smart phone. Hence, the university campus continues to be a significant actor in mobilizing youth, which it has been through every generation of student movements in Ethiopia.

The university campus enables youth to meet people with similar political view and join groups or societies. However, political activities are not encouraged. According to a respondent working with Arena, the local opposition party in Tigray, political organization at the universities is not permitted. Still, he claims that many students attending the University of Mekelle, where the respondent himself lectures, are members of Arena. The students prefer to keep their membership out of the public due to being deprived of job opportunities etc., after graduation (Informant 5, 26.02.18). Political youth parties do not exist in Ethiopia, so for students to engage politically they can either become a part of larger political parties (such as TPLF, OPDO, etc.) or youth movements, such as the Qeerroo. Formal youth organizations with political platforms do not exist in that sense, which makes the youth movements important for political expression. The function of campuses thus becomes somewhat of an arena for the political expression by movements. At the different university campuses across the country there are a mix of ethnicities, which in some cases has turned university campuses into the front lines of youth and student movements, executing what they argue is justice. There have been reports of several attacks and clashes across the country since 2014, that have deteriorated to the point that government security forces were placed at a number of campuses (Berhane, 2017). Hence, the campuses did not only serve the function of uniting likeminded, but also as a place of executing political conflict.

In talking to youths localized in Addis Ababa, Lalibela, and in and around Mekelle, university is seen as something to thrive for and something talked about with great pride (Informant 7, 14.02.18; informant 8, 19.02.18; informant 9, 21.02.18; informant 10, 21.02.18; informant 14, 26.02.18). All people under 30 years old with whom I had longer conversations with concerning

politics, went to university or had graduated. The notion of the shift in generations between themselves and their parents was also frequently brought up. The generations born after 1991 are not only more educated, they have increased insight to what is happening in the rest of the world due to the internet. Several of the graduates in Ethiopia said their parents did not understand their grievances and dissatisfaction with their life situation (Informant 7, 14.02; Informant 8, 19.02.18; Informant 9, 21.02.18). One of the vehicles for mobilization used frequently by the youth is social media.

Social media

The use of social media has dramatically altered how social movements operate. Like all technology, its rapid pace of development has exceeded judiciary systems and policy making. Governments have not been able to keep up with the development of technology and social media, which made social media as a mobilizing structure much more efficient in its early days. Today, the situation is different.

There have been statements made that Ethiopian youth are inspired and fascinated by the Tunisian, Egyptian, and other revolutions known to be part of the Arab Spring (Birara, 2011; Opride, 2011). During these revolutions, social media were central channels for mobilization, in the Egyptian case, for example, they were pointed to as the “it”-factor that secured regime change. However, activists and revolutionaries contest this in the aftermath of the revolution. Even though social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, provide accessibility to a network of people and makes a process of mobilizing to a protest extremely easy, it was and is just a medium. Mariam Kirolos, an activist during the Egyptian revolution, argues that “it takes more than a keyboard and a tweet of 140 characters to start a revolution” (Kirolos, 2012, p. 42). She talks of the fact that millions of people in Egypt are illiterate and do not have access to internet, let alone social media. The revolution was started and lived on the demand of bread, freedom and social justice, by all layers of the Egyptian society. The “honour” given to especially the importance of Facebook, undermines the grievances and demands of the people of the revolution.³ Respondent 2, a scholar of Tigrayan origin, talks of some of the same challenges in using social media in the Ethiopian context:

³ Articles like «Is Egypt About to Have a Facebook Revolution» published by Time Magazine in January 2011 was a part of establishing the important role of the social media in the Egyptian revolution. The term «the social media revolution» sprung out from this discourse in the media.

Taking the size of the country, which is very vast, and the population mix of the country, which is also quite diverse, I would say it is very small impact it [social media] could have, eventually. Because look at how many percentage of the total population would use internet and social media, Facebook, so on and so forth, you would see not in decimals, in decimals of percentage, and it's in the capital cities of the major regions of the country, so you will not have any deep penetration to the rural area where you have 85% of the population. Most of them cannot access internet and let alone social media (Informant 2, 28.02.18).

From both the Egyptian and the Ethiopian case, it is clear that in a population where the majority lives with little access to electricity and internet, a social movement cannot lie at the hands of social media. It is an effective channel in urban areas, where it is possible to use. In addition, there are several challenges in using social media today.

Another factor in using the arena of social media to mobilize is the way governments have changed in relation to it as a serious arena for political opinion and expression. The underestimation of social media by governments was one of the factors that enabled the protesters to use them as channels for mobilization, because they were not as seen as belonging to a serious arena for executing political opinion. Since then, social media have become some of the most accessible ways of engaging with formal politics. This shift in how social media are understood by governments as an arena for political opinion make the Ethiopian case differ from the Arab revolutions. The state-owned telecom company Ethio Telecom, which is the only operating telecom company in the country, makes a significant difference. The company (i.e. the state) can shut down mobile internet access as they please, and outspokenness on Twitter and Facebook can be used as a structure of finding people with an opinion different to the regime. This makes the use of social media both dangerous and politicized. Nevertheless, in urban areas the use of social media is increasing. An unprecedented outspokenness that opens the space for political expression. In researching social media profiles in Ethiopia, such as Daniel Berhane⁴ and Jawar Mohammed⁵, people are extremely outspoken in their political

⁴ Daniel Berhane is a Tigrayan journalist leading the online newspaper Horn Affairs. Berhane is a supporter of the TPLF.

⁵ Jawar Mohammed is an Oromo activist and analyst, living in the US. He has a massive following on social media and has been referred to as the strategist behind the Oromo Protest movement. Mohammed's support in Ethiopia manifests the importance of the Ethiopian diaspora.

opinions, and especially those who oppose EPRDF. Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, provide accessibility to a network of people and makes a process of mobilizing to a protest very easy, compared to mobilization before this kind of technology. This is further backed up by two Qeerroo's interviewed by the Guardian, who state that social media make reaching out to people planning protest much quicker than going door to door. They also describe a system in which each district of a city has one Qeerroo leader with at least 20 subordinates, who are all responsible for sharing messages about upcoming strikes and other events, made more effective with the help of social media channels (Gardner, 2018a).

The use of contentious repertoires by Ethiopian youth

Scholars use the term contentious repertoires «to describe the distinctive constellations of tactics and strategies developed over time and used by protest groups to act collectively in order to make claims on individuals and groups» (Taylor & Dyke, 2004, p. 265). I.e. the means used over time by social movements to show their protest and to demand change. The most documented examples of contentious repertoires started in the 1960s with the American civil rights movements, and continued with various student movements, followed by the feminist movement, the gay rights movement, and movements such as neo-Nazi movements and other organized hate-movements. All these groups used tactics and strategies to get their message across, from protesting, petitioning, sit-ins, marching, raising a clenched fist, singing, wearing specific clothing, violence in different forms, destruction of property, and so on. There is an endless list of possibilities. However, there is usually a predictable, distinct pattern followed by social movements. These repertoires also have the purpose of linking social movement actors together, as well as to their opponents. «We are interested in tactical repertoires as interactive episodes that link social movement actors to each other as well as to opponents and authorities for the intended purpose of challenging or resisting change in groups, organizations, or societies» (Taylor & Dyke, 2004, p. 266).

A pair of hands crossed in the air have been one of the strongest symbols of the Oromo Protest as a whole, including the Qeerroos. The symbol became internationally known after marathon runner Feyisa Lilesa made the gesture of protest as he crossed the finish line during the 2016 Summer Olympics in Rio (Burke, 2016). It has been used under protest and demonstrations to mark resistance and unite the Oromo Protest movement. The gesture was first used in Ethiopia

under the Muslim protests in 2012, and as the Oromo Qeerroo was inspired by the protest, they also started using it as a symbol of resistance and protest.

Protest using position

One of the most used tactics by the Qeerroo and the Oromo Protest movement has been protests, demonstrations, and sit-ins. The sit-ins were silent protests, where people did not leave their homes for work etc., so whole towns across Oromia were shut down. They became extremely visible and difficult to oppose by the government. Arresting people for not leaving their own home, made government forces seem totalitarian, unjust and desperate to the outside world. It stated resistance to the government, as well as it inflicted with produce and the economy. The Qeerroo also made use of the geographic location of Oromia, encircling the capital, Addis Ababa. Addis Ababa is the political base of the federal government, which the Oromo use to their benefit (Informant 1, 24.02.18). The roads in and out of the capital have been one of the main targets for demonstrations, as well as protesters throwing rocks at vehicles entering the city. Affecting important sectors such as tourism, business and trade, controlling these roads has been a key tactic for the Qeerroo. Merchandisers have feared travelling in to the capital selling their goods due to attacks or large masses of people protesting, affecting both business in the city and the producers outside (AFP, 2018; Africanews, 2018). Masses of people with the intention of peaceful protest have also been target for the federal police forces, affecting the security situation. As the movement has been alienated by the federal government, condemning them as terrorists and criminals, the use of institutional options within the political system has not been possible. I.e. disruptive tactics of this sort has proven to be effective, making the government act in the movement's favour, as seen in the events happening February and March 2018.

Violence and vandalism

One informant from Tigray argued the violence was what separated the Qeerroo's from the other youth movements in the country.

Also, in terms of the content of their challenge, the youth movements from other ethnic groups could have been more convincing to disinterested observers, politically disinterested observers, in terms of content, the fact that the Oromo youth movement

has become consistently violent, has captured the mind and the heart of many observers I think. That's the distinguishing factor as I see it (Informant 2, 28.02.18).

The Qeerroo got attention for turning to violence since the start of the Oromo Protest, which started as a peaceful protest against the Addis Ababa Master Plan, but turned violent after government security forces opened fire against the masses (Ethiopia Human Rights Project, 2016). Over these years of Oromo Protest, which included two implementations of state of emergencies, tensions have increased and analysts in the media have feared that the protesters will turn to violence and extremism (Gardner, 2018a). There have been reported attacks and harassment at a number of universities, in particular Oromo youth targeting Tigrayans. These events, that can be deviations from the rest of the movement, makes it easier actors like TPLF to dismiss the movement as a whole as illegitimate, like the informant quoted below.

I personally would condemn all tactics and strategies used by them in order to bring about any change that they would like to see in the country, this is not to say, as whichever agendas they raise, is illegitimate or illegal, I actually have a lot of sympathy towards the questions that they raise, but the way they want to bring whatever kinds of change is illegitimate, through the use of force, violence, and so on and so forth. I have a serious reservation of the means and not the aid that they want to see (Informant 2, 28.02.18).

It also makes the terrorism charges in which most political prisoners in Ethiopia are imprisoned for, easier to justify for the government. Oromos interviewed by The Guardian in the aftermath of Hailemariam's resignation February 2018, feared protest would get out of order and not remain peaceful, due to young men wanting to destroy properties and attack people of other ethnicity than Oromo (Gardner, 2018a).

Using violence, including harassment, attacks, killings and destruction of properties, vehicles etc., can be defined as disruptive tactics (Taylor & Dyke, 2004, p. 208). They intervene in the society in a larger sense than quieter institutional options, for example through insider tactics where networks in formal politics are used strategically to gain access to political power or demands towards policy change. Several studies have been done on the matter, with different results to what tactics gain most. Taylor and Van Dyke found that several early studies concluded that disruptive tactics are more successful than using institutional options, whilst

some studies from the US found that activists using violence were more likely to achieve both policy gains and access to political power. However, studies of US women's groups have had a larger success rate using conventional insider tactics⁶ (Taylor & Dyke, 2004, p. 280). As institutional tactics from within were not available to the Qeerroo, most of their tactics and strategies were disruptive. What the Qeerroo actually gained is yet to be known; is the formalization of the Qeerroo a strategic move to hush them down, or will their demands be met?

⁶ See: Tilly et al. 1975; Piven and Cloward 1979; Steedly and Foley 1979; Mirowsky and Ross 1981; McAdam 1983; Gamson 1990; Soule et al. 1999.

6. Changing the EPRDF

Ethiopia's first Oromo leader,⁷ Abiy Ahmed, was appointed as the new prime minister April 2nd, 2018, more than six weeks after Hailemariam Desalegn made his resignation public. This change of power within the EPRDF and thus the Ethiopian state is one of the most significant changes in modern Ethiopian history. One of the sources of this change lied at the hands of the Qeerroo, the front of the Oromo Protest movement. This thesis argues that political process theory, through political opportunity, structures of mobilization and contentious repertoires, can provide further understanding to why the Qeerroo managed to contribute to such a shift within the EPRDF. This chapter provides a discussion of how changing the narrative of the Oromo cause to include the entire Ethiopia, to the further formalization of the Qeerroo into official politics, may have changed the movement.

One Ethiopia

A quick online search provides the reader with endless articles and op-eds about the situation in Ethiopia, resolved with a new Oromo PM. Whether in fact the crisis the Ethiopian state has had over the last four years is resolved, is yet to be known. The Qeerroos approach is mainly working for the Oromo cause, whilst Oromo leadership changed their position towards a more holistic perspective for the whole country. There are factions of Qeerroo's still wishing for secession of Oromia, but as the movement grew, a united, changed Ethiopia became the common goal. OPDO made a collaboration with ANDM, historically interpreted as somewhat radical due to centuries of Oromo oppression by the Amharic assimilated elite. The strategic alliance was not well-received in Tigray. When asked about the new friendship, several of the Tigrinja speaking informants in Ethiopia rolled their eyes and said it was merely tactical and that the only common goal between the two parties was to bring down TPLF. Either way the narrative turned to OPDOs favour, with TPLF as the suppressor of the majority of the Ethiopian population, and OPDO and ANDM working together for a united Ethiopia, despite their differences, under the coalition of EPRDF. Not getting in line with this narrative, was the violent factions of the Qeerroo. Targeting especially Tigrayans, as well as other ethnicities than Oromo, the Qeerroo ran violent campaigns leading to attacks, destruction of property and

⁷ Should not be mistaken as the first leader in Ethiopia to be of Oromo ethnicity, but the first Oromo leader to be just that – openly Oromo without having to conform to amharic language, culture and history.

killings. These attacks made the movement seem as bad as the force they resisted, contributing to further ethnic divisions in the country. However, Oromo leadership focused on talking about a united Ethiopia, and being on the “right” side of the narrative, the Qeerroo violence did not get as much attention as it could have. It was, and still is, described as a small, rebellious faction of the movement, where anger fuelled activism. Still, the move OPDO leadership took directing attention to Ethiopia rather than Oromo became an important part of legitimizing the movement as a whole.

Of timing and mobilization

The movement gained momentum due to a number of factors. First, all Ethiopians had the right (although not necessarily the possibility) to attend university. The university as a ground for mobilization has been immensely important for the movement, without Oromos at university campuses, the movement would have been entirely different, probably non-existing. Not only did it provide an arena to mobilize, it provided knowledge, which again is important to achieve legitimacy, especially in the Ethiopian context. An increasing number of Oromos attending institutions for higher education for almost 30 years, made a significant difference when EPRDF leadership started to fall apart. The timing – of where the death of Meles, the Master Plan, the problems within EPRDF, was vital – the Qeerroo created a force. Not an organized group as such, due to the necessity of being underground. An organized group would be easier to pick apart and to arrest. Instead, a massive amount of youth and students mainly had two things in common; they were of Oromo origin and they resisted the TPLF supremacy within the EPRDF. Much lead by diaspora actors such as Jawar Mohammed, they provided the Oromo Protest movement with strength in numbers and a fast way of reaching those individuals and getting messages of demonstrations, sit-ins, etc. More people, less fear of the repercussions of their collective actions. The necessity of clear organizational structure was not there, because 1) the movement did have some form of underground leadership, and 2) effective ways of communication. The Qeerroo provided the Oromo Movement student activists, who had strength, knowledge, capacity, engagement for the cause – and also anger. Anger fuelled by old Oromo grievance, of suppression, neglect, and exploitation. It unified the movement, such as strong collective emotion does, but gave grave side effects of violence and deaths. The different “types” of Qeerroo was identified by opposition leader Bekele Gerba, who stated that the future lies at the hands of the Qeerroo, but the good ones, *the educated ones* (Schemm, 2018). There are no sources that indicate that educated Qeerroos, or Qeerroos enrolled at

university, were less violent than other youths. The fact that many of the attacks happened at university campuses rather indicate otherwise.

There is an assumption that large social movements, such as the one resisting TPLF supremacy in Ethiopia, does to some extent have a violent faction. There will be people driven by emotion, corrupting peaceful protest and letting anger fuel their political beliefs. Getting revenge on perpetrators can be a more desired goal than rising to a higher level of justice for all nationalities. Ethnicity in the case of the Qeerroo is two-sided; on one hand it provided the foundation for mobilization, and on the other, it brought simplified truths and unnecessary enemies.

Qeerroo success?

When has a social movement achieved success? Maybe in joining formal politics, which in the Ethiopian case means joining the EPRDF. Whilst OPDO slowly changed their allegiance towards TPLF and to a larger degree supported the Oromo cause, the Qeerroo became an important political actor and partner. Analyst Masresha Taye even gave the Qeerroo the credit for paving the way for the new OPDO leadership (Manek, 2018).

The six weeks between the resignation of the leader from the south and the appointment of the Oromo prime minister was characterized by speculation and a tug of war between different interests within the EPRDF. As a TPLF leader would cause a frenzy with what seemed like the larger part of the population, and a leader from the south was leaving the post, ANDM and OPDO provided the obvious candidates. Lemma Megersa was a favourite due to his rapid changes in OPDO but was not elected in parliament and thus not able to be appointed as prime minister. It should be mentioned that whilst Lemma did change the leadership of OPDO, it was questioned by others to what extent the young politician was ready to take management over the whole country. He was accused of only representing the Oromo emotion by one of the informants from Tigray, and that would not suffice in a prime ministership (Informant 6, interview 28.06.18). On the other hand, his sentiments to the Oromo emotion was probably the main reason he was such a favourite in the Qeerroo movement. Abiy Ahmed, a part of OPDOs central committee since 2010 with former experience in directing the Ethiopian Information Network Security Agency, became the leader of OPDO and thus a suitable candidate for the PM-spot. Abiy is Oromo, but speaks three other Ethiopian languages, including Tigrinja after

his participation in Eritrean-Ethiopian war of 1998-2000 where he was stationed in Tigray as an intelligence officer. He has academic and military experience, and what can seem even more important, he is supported by the large mass of the youth much due to his friendly allegiance to Lemma Megersa (Lefort, 2018). As Abiy was a part of OPDO and EPRDF elitist leadership, the Qeerroo stance is precautious towards the new Oromo PM. It was stated that Abiy chose to not attend a parliamentary vote to ratify the state of emergency implemented February 2018, in order to not loose support from either the youth or elements of the ruling coalition (Lefort, 2018; Manek, 2018). Abiy can be understood as a middle ground in being partly supported by the masses, and at the same time having a strong position in formal politics, i.e. EPRDF.

Authors describing the situation in Ethiopia since 2014, often write of two blocks.⁸ The people in Ethiopia that want to keep status quo, i.e. the government, and the people who wanted radical change and demonstrate that in the streets. These two blocks are historically difficult to blend. The Qeerroo nor the Oromo Protest movement as a whole did never have any real chance of taking over the state. Even seeing past the lack of organization, their political goals apart from wanting to throw TPLF hegemony, was unclear at best. Simple slogans of democracy, transparency and reforms, without addressing a realistic view of the country's future without TPLF as a central actor of the Front. What they did have, was the masses in the palm of their hands, making them an important political actor. Lemma Megersa included some of the Qeerroo leaders as part of the new OPDO leadership, cementing the importance of the movement and having ears on the street. Formalizing the Qeerroo thought into real politics, can be interpreted as a sign of success. However, leaders of radical groups have been taken into high politics before and lost their abilities to hear, and thus control, the masses on the streets. In a way, as some the Qeerroo speaks of a new way of economically, socially and morally ruling Ethiopia, conforming to EPRDF leadership seems not being "Qeerroo" anymore. The reason for their success have been the necessity of a force opposing the TPLF supremacy within EPRDF, and that supremacy is for the time being, gone.

Many of the leaders of the student movement causing overthrow of the monarchy in 1974 became important figureheads and supporters of the TPLF lead EPRDF. And although they worked for "land to the tiller!" in the 1960s and 1970s, when achieved power, it became easy to justify the actions of the government with the necessary means to meet the goals of the country. TPLF lead EPRDF used revolutionary democracy, democratic centralism and the

⁸ See Lefort 2018 and Gebissa 2018, for Addis Standard.

developmental state to legitimize the level of control executed by security forces. Abiy Ahmed took a clear stance denouncing such actions in his inauguration speech, but the country, and the party, still has deeply entrenched divisions and interests. That Lemma Megersa chose to absorb the Qeerroo into formal politics, may be more beneficial to him and OPDO, than to the Qeerroo.

A similar line can be drawn from the peasant-based guerrilla fighters of the armed struggle seizing state power in 1991. Studies of peasant-based revolutions show that for them to be successful, there has to be a discontented, urban-based petty bourgeoisie uniting causes with a discontented peasantry. This was the case in Tigray under the Derg (Young, 1996). It also shows that when such a political movement achieves success, the leaders take up residence in the city and distance themselves from their peasant base, eventually developing into a middle class with interests of their own. This became a major problem within the TPLF, because there was a necessity to water out the ideological views in order to be able to take on the various components of EPRDF and cooperate and participate fairly with other ethnic groups in a national institution. This process weakened the collectiveness in TPLF, stressed relations between leaders that before worked as an entity and encouraged opportunism (Medhane & Young, 2003).

The Qeerroo can in no way be compared to TPLF in any shape or form. However, the case with TPLF underlines the difficulties of when opposition is quickly drawn into formal politics. Whilst previous revolutionaries in the Ethiopian context have been elitist opposing the elite, the Qeerroo represents the masses opposing the elite. However, joining OPDO acquires some kind of conforming to the EPRDF way of going about things, and certainly some of the Qeerroo mind-set will be lost on the way. Keeping contact with the student mass and youth will be imperative to how OPDO and Qeerroo leadership will be perceived in the future.

7. Conclusion

The objective of this thesis has been to provide an understanding to how the Oromo Qeerroo created a movement that contributed to a major shift within the EPRDF. To conceptualize that matter, I used three theoretical concepts of political process theory. As described in the chapters above, the movement contributed to a shift within the EPRDF through an opening of political space, followed by effective mobilization, and lastly gaining attention through disruptive tactics.

The situation in Ethiopia is changing rapidly, and whilst writing this thesis, the government changed, Ethiopia made peace with Eritrea, and there was an attempted coup of the Somali regional state. There are still frequent reports on clashes across the country, especially in Oromia and the Somali region. I want to urge further research to embark on the formalization of the Qeerroo and how it affects the grass root movement, in the chaotic political environment of contemporary Ethiopia, and to what extent the Qeerroo are satisfied with the new Oromo prime minister.

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List of informants		
Elite interviews		
Name	Date	Position
1. Walleign	24.02.18	Tigrayan, academic, organized in the TPLF.
2. Tewodros	28.02.18	Tigrayan, academic.
3. Yohannes	16.02.18	Located in Addis Ababa, academic. Ethnicity unknown.
4. Tesfaye	01.03.18	Located in Addis Ababa, academic. Ethnicity unknown.
5. Dawit	26.02.18	Tigrayan, academic, organized in the opposition party Arena.
6. Solomon	28.02.18	Tigrayan, academic. Located in Mekelle.
Randomly selected informants		
7. Alfred	14.02.18	Graduate, located in Addis Ababa.
8. Alex	19.02.18	Graduate, located in Lalibela.
9. Abel	21.02.18	Graduate, located in Tigray.
10. Yonas	21.02.18	Graduate, located in Tigray.
11. Kofi	12.02.18	Graduate, located in Addis Ababa.
12. Abraham	15.02.18	Lecturer at the University of Addis Ababa.
13. Amadi	16.02.18	Tigrayan, academic. Located in Mekelle.
14. Negasi	26.02.18	Tigrayan student. TPLF-supporter, located in Mekelle.

Appendix 1: Interview guide

Main topic	Refining Questions
Introductions, background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Line of work • Political affiliation (if possible)
Current situation in Ethiopia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think about the current situation in Ethiopia? • Is there a political crisis? Who are the perpetrators? • What do you think about the agenda of deep reform?
The ethnic federal state	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent does ethnic federal rule benefit Ethiopia? • Has EPRDF left the doctrine of Abyotawi democracy? • Has the state-party relationship changed?
Tigray	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do Tigrayans feel represented by the TPLF? • How do you react to Tigrayans being harassed?
Oromo/Qeerroos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the role of the Qeerroo? • What tactics do they use to make their demands? • What is your impression of them? • What is your thoughts on the tactics of the Qeerroo? • How do they mobilize?
State of Emergency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think is the purpose of the current SoE?