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ASPIRING AND DOING ACTIVISM UNDER REPRESSIVE SYSTEMS: A
NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF FORMER STUDENT ACTIVISTS

By
Kedir Assefa Tessema

A dissertation submitted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

May 215

Dissertation Committee

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Abstract

The expansion of higher education in the last 24 years in Ethiopia has broadened the causes, alignments, and avenue for students to engage in student organizations and contentious actions. Despite the severity of the state's repressive tactics, university students contentious actions have not waned. Not only do students engage in everyday micro resistance, they also use student organizations and clandestine means to challenge policies and practices. Such collective student engagements and contentious actions cannot be done without activists who mobilize and organize students in extremely complex and risky circumstances. Unfortunately, little is known about such activists.

The purpose of the research was to study these activists by retrospectively examining former students who were involved in contentious actions in Ethiopian universities. The study specifically addressed three interrelated research questions, focusing on student activists' (a) socio-biographical factors and life experiences that contribute to the formation of activist consciousness; (b) domains of social and organizational belonging; and (c) leadership roles in student mobilizations and contentious actions.

The research participants were nine former students who took part in student organization and ethnic identity based activism in three Ethiopian universities during the period of 1997-2007. They each participated in a Skype one-on-one interview that lasted 90 minutes. Additional data were obtained through document analysis to understand the socio-political context of their activism.

The findings of this study reveal how youth aspiration for student activism gradually develops, manifests itself, and is eventually subjected to repressive counter-

actions. Two factors, social origin and life experiences, contribute to activist consciousness that pre-disposes students to high sensitivity to practices and propensity to action taking. The findings also include four types of activist belonging, defining the type and magnitude of activist work and leading roles. Although mobilizing prominently features in their work, activists played vanguard roles by committing their time and efforts to a common cause.

Although the focus on former activists has limitations to understand current student activism in Ethiopian universities, the study has implications for activist research in problematic regions, civic engagement in higher education, and activist and leadership development programs.

Dedication

To all activists whose aspirations, visions, and work have contributed to the betterment of humanity.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In many countries, students as a potent political force exert a significant influence in shaping the political identity and substance of their society. They may not be central players in the political landscape, but they are indispensable participants (Altbach & Klemenčič, 2014). Student actions have direct effects on educational institutions and national and international politics. Students have “catalyzed local educational reform, transformed national political structures, and in more than a few instances, spurred coups d’état” (Boren, 2001, p. 3). One can simply recall recent movements such as the Arab Spring, Occupy Movements, and Venezuelan protests in which students played pivotal roles in framing political agendas and mobilizing youth (see Buxton, 2014; Huff Post, 2011; Van Dyke, 2012; Zewde, 2014).

Like in the rest of the world, students in Africa have continued to play a role in their continent’s socio-political changes. In the last hundred years, as an alternative political force, they have contributed to the struggles against colonialism, apartheid, bad governance, and authoritarianism (Byaruhanga, 2006; Zeilig, 2007). Studies on postcolonial African politics reveal a significant degree of student actions that have frequently been projected onto a national stage (Zeilig & Ansell, 2008). The position of student activists in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa has prominently featured in the student activism literature. Furthermore, student activism in many sub-Saharan Africa countries have been credited for setting key agendas for popular uprisings, which led to the overthrow of authoritarian regimes. Students were among the key participants in the agitation that preceded the coups in many countries, such as

Madagascar, Liberia, Ghana, Ethiopia, and Sudan (Nkinyangi, 1991). In 1990s, students were credited for instigating what Mazrui (1995) calls “second liberation” struggles in Africa. Students turned higher education institutions into sites of struggles against economic and political difficulties brought mainly by authoritarianism, while also reaching out to, and aligning themselves with, other sections of society, especially trade unions, in their demands for democratization (Badat, 1999; Munene, 2003).

In Ethiopia, too, students have stood at the center of a series of social and political struggles since the introduction of modern higher education. From a historical perspective, the roles of students in Ethiopia can be divided into two distinctive student movement periods. The *first-period* student movement, which was roughly from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s, has its origins in student unions (Balsvik, 1979; Greenfield, 1965; Zewde, 2010, 2014). Most scholars agree that there were three phases that characterize the student movements during this period, namely awareness, organization, and militancy (Darch, 1976; Zewde, 2010). The dominant agendas of the student movements were anti feudalism, land redistribution to the farmers, social and economic equality, and political participation. Moreover, students were able to organize both domestically and internationally. There were satellite organizations in US and Europe which were able to motivate students at Addis Ababa University to be active. The major movement strategies were open critiques of the regime through literary expressions, demonstrations, class boycotts, and student publications. The movements also faced various cooptation and repression strategies by the regime. Leading activists were killed and many left the country. The student movements had also their own internal challenges, especially internal divisions because of disagreements in movement strategies and

agendas. Although student movements during the first period had several achievements, the most immediate and revolutionary one was the overthrow of the imperial regime from half a century of authoritarian rule (Asres, 1990; Balsvik, 1979; Fentahun, 1990; Hiwet, 1975; Zewde, 2010, 2014).

There was no evidence of significant student actions during 1976-1990. This period, which was ruled by the military dictatorship commonly known as Derg, was effective in totally shutting down all opportunities for student activism. “For the student movement, the 1980s were a time of both political hibernation and modest recovery from the repression of the second half of the 1970s” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 299). However, towards the end of the Derg regime in 1990, students again appeared in the political sphere when they took to the streets in a demonstration.

The transition from the Derg regime to the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) regime prefigured a revival of student activism (Ahmed, 2006; Balsvik, 2003, 2007), which can be considered the *second period* in Ethiopian student activism. In this period, which roughly covered the 1990-present, mass student protests have occurred several times. Unlike the first-period student movements, the second-period has gone beyond Addis Ababa University because of the addition of several universities in the country. However, challenges have also deepened. For example, student activism has been fragmentary and short-lived. National issues have given ways to local issues; identity-driven issues have become dominant agendas, particularly ethnicity and religion have become a rallying factor (Balsvik, 2003, 2007). Moreover, students are increasingly being subjected to a concerted effort of depoliticization by making them career-oriented rather than politically conscious citizens.

Their private and public spheres are highly controlled so as to render them irrelevant. In general, student activism is neither encouraged nor tolerated by the state. In terms of the opportunity for organizing, student unions are not free; students are not allowed to organize freely and when they do so, they face dire consequences. In the past, activists who have managed to mobilize students and engage in protests have been either imprisoned or killed or exiled or expelled from university (BBC, 2001; Human rights Watch, 2003; IRIN, 2001). Or, they have decided to disengage from activism at all. On the other hand, there is ample evidence that suggest the regime could not to completely silence students from making claims and challenging authority. Students have continued to challenge the regime by openly protesting policies and practices despite the highly likely dire consequences on their freedom and lives. Human rights groups, the mass media, and political parties show such a continuation in students' actions on many campuses (see, for example, Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2003; World Socialist Website, 2001).

In addition to being a high-risk political engagement, the contemporary student activists have largely been marginalized in recent accounts of higher education and social transformation. As such, the existing literature on student movements in Ethiopia either does not address or inadequately addresses key issues that are in need of deeper understanding. The dearth of scholarly work on recent events, incidents, and student actions has created a void in the student movement literature in Ethiopia.

Statement of the Problem

Evidence (e.g. reports from electronic and press media, social media, and rights organizations) shows that student protests have been present on many campuses despite

the restriction on assembly and free speech. A cursory analysis of the reports on student protests in the last twenty-four years indicate that there have been at least ten major incidents, involving over 13 universities (see Appendix B). Despite the occurrence of student protests (although short-lived and fragmented), with the exception of Balsvik (2003, 2007) and Ahmed (2006), no scholarly studies exist that show the cause, nature, and consequence of the second period's student political actions.

Because of the minimal amount of research on student protests and other related actions, we know little about student activists and activism in Ethiopia during the 1990-present. The major knowledge gap with regard to Ethiopian student activists and activism include the characteristics of activists, the nature and scope of students' participation in activism, the issues that trigger widespread student protests, students' protest tactics, and impacts of student protests. Consequently, nothing or little is known about the range of possibilities and challenges for student activism.

The Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study was to understand student activists in Ethiopia, specifically those who participated in student organization and contentious actions during the 1997-2007 period. The study examined the lived stories of former student activists by adopting a modified *life-course* perspective which allowed tracing the continuum of the development of the activist consciousness. The study examined the student activists by taking into account their historical, social, and educational contexts. Put more specifically, the research had three foci: *activist becoming*, which examined their pre-activism stories; *activist belonging*, which examined politicized group identification; and

activist leadership, which examined activist agency and activists' contributions to a movement.

The research sought to cast a local light on the activist literature by examining each of the three foci, as well as the interplay among them. The study, in a way, was to challenge the dominant narrative of student activism that is predominantly based on the research conducted in the West. This study assumed the socio, political and economic reality of the Ethiopian context differs from that of the Western reality, and so does the possibility of doing activism. Hence, the study challenges the Western notion of student activism that portrays activism as an unproblematic, protected, low-risk student contentious actions.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following three primary and overarching questions:

1. What were the socio-biographical factors and life experiences that contributed to the formation of activist consciousness in students who were involved in activism in Ethiopian universities?
2. What, if any, domains of activist belonging could typify student activists in Ethiopia?
3. What leadership roles did Ethiopian student activists play in student mobilizations and contentious actions?

Constructs and Concepts

There are three constructs that need to be defined, clarified, and justified for their inclusion in this study. These are *becoming*, *belonging*, and *leading*.

The first construct, *becoming*, refers to the developmental process an adolescent or late adolescent undergoes in order to become an activist. The developmental process includes maturation in awareness, attitude, and thinking about one's roles in an institution or society. Becoming is a sociological, a psychological and a historical construct. Students—while transitioning from a non-activist to an activist stage—are believed to experience a developmental passage of time which can be characterized historically, psychologically and socially. Activist becoming requires an examination of the formation of activism attitude and disposition in the activists. It is, therefore, crucial to examine activist becoming which constitutes a trajectory of personal development—from politicized group consciousness to action-taking.

The second construct, *belonging*, refers to activists' self-categorization in terms of a community of movement and other identity groups. In the context of Ethiopia, belonging can be locational, gender, political orientation, ethnic, religious, and class of admission. Some of these categories of belonging are social, such as gender and ethnicity while others are results of politicized group consciousness, such as political orientation. Activist agendas and level of mobilizations are influenced by belonging (Blee, 2012). For example, in the first-period student activism, one of the student activists' agendas was land ownership (Zewde, 2010), and students from rural areas were leading proponents of such agendas (Darch, 1976). Integration into or affiliation with groups is thought to be crucial to understanding the type of work activists accomplished or failed to accomplish.

The third construct, *leading*, is often associated with making student actions possible by carrying out strategic coordination of members and other activists. According to Han (2014), leaders are individuals who make their movements run. However, leading

is not an easy concept or process to understand. Its meaning is a subject of many scholarly efforts and projects (Goethals & Sorenson, 2006)). In this study, leading is defined as a process in which an activist relates himself or herself with other activists and movement followers in order to make actions happen. It refers to how an activist becomes part of the collective movement, and takes personal initiatives to mobilize others to accomplish a task in the movement.

The selection of the constructs of becoming, belonging, and leading were mainly based on the assumption that understanding social actors—whether they act conventionally or unconventionally—cannot be fully accomplished without taking into account these three factors. In order to understand actors, it is important to analyze the history and context of their actions. While the history of their action constitutes their becoming, the context of their action constitutes their belonging. Lastly, the inclusion of leading as an analytic construct in this study was based on the assumption that the activists who were sampled for the study had played important leadership roles that were relevant to be understood to inform the practice of activism in the future.

Significance of the Study

The study of student activists has three broad significances. The first is what Han (2014) calls the *normative importance* of understanding activists. Student activists are potent political forces in many African, Asian, and Latin American countries where conventional political parties, citizen groups, and civic associations are weak or not tolerated to operate freely. Altbach (1984) also argues that student activists activate the apathetic and disengaged citizens and social groups. This is specifically true in countries such as Ethiopia, where students can spontaneously and rapidly mobilize to pose massive

political challenges to the state. Therefore, studying student activists' significance could be viewed from the perspective of understanding a social group that can provide a political force. Both scholars and society seek to better understand such crucial actors because they influence the political direction of their country.

The second significance of studying student activists relates to higher education. Higher education in Ethiopia is expanding (Rayner & Ashcroft, 2011). The form and content of student activism are changing because of the expansion of higher education and the progress in the social media. In addition, students are key stakeholders in higher education. Their political participation, if carefully considered and cultivated, can contribute to policy debates, student mobilization, and changes within higher education. A study of student activists can shed lights on our understanding of why, when and how students act. Such knowledge can lead to better higher education policies and student government. Higher education leadership can also begin to rethink how to involve students in inclusive and productive civic engagement.

Similarly, the study has significance for student activists. Understanding the role of students would contribute to our knowledge of effective activist work —activist work that initiates, organizes and leads transformative social movements. The initiation of this study was undergirded in the thinking that the need to know how students become activists and engage in situations hostile to activism is becoming more pressing as social, political, environmental, and economic difficulties are getting more acute in Ethiopia. Teske (1997) argues that understanding activists as moral agents, their becoming, their preferences, styles of engagement can help inform activists' work on social change. The concepts and perspectives that emerge from such a study can assist activists in better

understanding the full range of options available for doing their work, the possible consequences of particular strategies and goals and the tradeoff involved in particular courses of action. This understanding will be useful to identify if there is a specific kind of agency activists possess. Studying activists should shed light on the role of moral and ethical motivations in explanations of political actions. The ways that moral motivations affect political activists can tell us something about the way moral motivations operate.

CHAPTER TWO

ETHIOPIA COUNTRY AND HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT (1997-2007)

The main purpose of this chapter is to provide a general country and higher education context to enable readers to situate the analysis of student activists in its local contexts. In this study, it is assumed that local context shapes the nature and characteristics of activists and their activism. That is why this chapter addresses the following questions: What does the dominant political discourse in the country look like? How about the general administrative context of higher education? What are the general and specific characteristics of the three universities from which the research samples were drawn?

The Country Context

Three themes are included in this section which has a bearing on student activists and activism. These are the competing narratives of Ethio-nationalism and ethno-nationalism, the post-Derg new political order, and major political events during the 1997-2007 period.

Ethiopia, located on the Horn of Africa, has a population of 96 million, making it the fourteenth most populous country in the world. Forty-three percent of the population is Orthodox Christians, while 35% are Muslims. Ethiopia has over 80 ethnic groups, of which the four largest ethnic groups are Oromo (34.5%), Amhara (26.9%), Somali (6.2%) and Tigray (6.1%) (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014).

Contesting and Competing Narratives

The official narrative of Ethiopia and Ethiopianism has largely remained reductionist. In order to remain in power and continuously assert the legitimacy of their being in power, successive regimes have reproduced the imagery of Ethiopia and Ethiopianism based on the myth of “glorious past,” “mighty Ethiopia,” “a country with ancient history,” and “a country unique in Africa with its own alphabets and calendar.” While the large part of this narrative is reflective of the way the regimes have tried to reconstruct memory of their past in ways that would help them cement national identity that is the source of their power, this type of narrative has been contested, generally in the last five to six decades, and more intensely, in the last two decades. The totalizing narrative about might, territory, uniqueness and glorious past has increasingly been contested.

Various actors who have ethno-nationalist ideological orientations have challenged such hegemony-based self-depiction. More importantly, they have produced counter hegemonic discourses against the unicentric narrative that identifies Ethiopia with a “three-thousand year” history. Increasingly, different historical narratives are emerging that counter the claim of ancient history of Ethiopia. According to these counter-narratives, the history of the country has been about marginalization, domination and resistance (Hassan, 1994; Holcomb & Ibssa, 1990; Jalata, 1993). The genesis of the narratives and counter-narratives surrounding the history of Ethiopia has been in the making for some time. However, in the last 55 years, following the momentous student movement at Addis Ababa University and the political debates within the movement, the contestation has been remarkable. According to Feyissa (2008), the 1974 and 1991

regime changes have brought about significant debates in the country's historical and political orders.

The 1974 revolution has redefined imperial Ethiopia in class terms, the country ultimately embracing socialism for nearly two decades. The 1991 regime change has brought ethnicity to the political center-stage which translated into a new political order in the form of ethnic federalism. In these new frames of reference – class, ethnicity and religion - heroes have now become villains, and villains have been redefined as heroes, evident in the attempts to bring down old monuments or erect new ones. Similarly, ‘dark’ ages have been lighted and perceived as ‘golden’ ages, and the very life span of the country is contested whether it is three millennia old or a mere centenary. (p. 1)

Post-Derg Ethiopia's political landscape has brought ethnicity and nationalism to the forefront. According to Toggia (2008), ethno-histories have acquired some prominence, and began to challenge the “unicentric narrative of the state as one feature of resistance by ethno-national movements” (p.320). He further states:

The political challenge to Ethiopia's central state encompasses a contention of the representativeness of the nation's history which reflects only state history of the dominant military and political groups. Thus, while the pages of Ethiopian history affirm the legitimacy of the state, they simultaneously evoke resistance and struggle from subaltern groups which have no space even in the margins of those history pages. (p. 320)

EPRDF-led Government: A New Political Order

The Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) took power in 1991 after 17 years of armed struggle. EPRDF's nation rebuilding attempt began with a new constitution in 1993. This new constitution redrew regional administrations largely along major ethnic groups. According to Aalen (2011), most governments in Africa, seeing the political mobilization of ethnicity as a threat, have rejected the use of ethnic differences as an explicit basis for political representation. The one prominent exception

is Ethiopia, which since 1991 has imposed a system of ethnic-based federalism that offers each ethnic group the right to self-determination. The redrawing of the regional administrations, with its ethnic logic, has also deviations in the way two city administrations and one regional state were redrawn, and as a result, the very intent of the boundary redrawing and rezoning has always been contested.

The new constitution has also granted a number of new rights and privileges to Ethiopian peoples that previous regimes did not provide. The major ethnic groups have become owners and users of their language for administration, education, and legal practices. Furthermore, the constitution provides various universal rights to individuals and groups, including freedom of speech and multiparty elections. Since EPRDF took power, there have been four national elections, and the fifth is planned for May 2015.

The constitution is comprehensive in its content and provisions. However, the regime has failed to implement most of the constitutional rights it promises to the citizens of the country. For example, none of the elections has been free from controversial outcomes, and one of the elections, unfortunately, resulted in civil unrests in which hundreds of people were killed.

The state has become more adept at using the constitution and various institutions as tools for coercing, intimidating and repressing dissidents, activists, journalists and politicians. In particular, the state uses the legal system so cleverly in ways that its predecessors failed to do so. Scholars (e.g. Berman, Eyoh, & Kymlicka, 2004) argue that Ethiopia's federal system has long remained only a promise on paper. Looking at the behavior of the regime, Aalen and others have characterized it as a "semi-authoritarian state" (Aalen, 2006), "electoral authoritarian state" (Aalen & Tronvoll, 2008), and a

“hybrid regime” (Aalen, 2011). The regime also calls itself a “dominant party developmental state.” Aalen (2011), who has written extensively on the current Ethiopian regime, argues:

Ethiopia had adopted a democratic constitution and a form of multiparty elections normally associated with liberal democracies, but the government uses practices that are highly authoritarian undermining basic human rights and using multiparty elections largely as a means to sustain its own power. (p. 48)

Historically, Ethiopian rulers, on the whole, have limited the privilege of political participation to a few educated and military elites. Chiefly, they have narrowed citizens’ opportunity for political participation by controlling the media, judiciary, and legislative bodies at all levels. However, various political groups and social movements have seized opportunities whenever they opened up to mobilize their constituencies in order to seek various types of change—be it political, social, or economic. The situation of student social movement should be seen in this light.

Major Political Events (1997-2007)

There were three major events that need to be mentioned here to fully contextualize the political-historical realities of the period of activism (1997-2007) of the research subjects in this study. One was the Eritrean–Ethiopian War which took place from May 1998 to June 2000, which many commentators considered one of the deadliest and catastrophic conflicts in the Horn of Africa. When the conflict began, the government of Ethiopia carried out a large-scale mobilization in which the conflict was used as an opportunity to resuscitate patriotism and national unity that had been weakening following the establishment of the new political and federal order in 1991. Higher education institutions were key sites for the government to recruit intellectuals and

students who could do the work of mobilizing the population using patriotism and national unity as mobilizing mottos.

Another important national historical event relates to general elections. Election is an important political process for Ethiopia, mainly for two reasons. One is that election is a means of asserting legitimacy. Ethiopia is heavily dependent on the financial resources that come from Western and Asian donors and lenders. These donors and lenders, particularly the Western ones, sometimes demand the government of Ethiopia to open up its system to democratization, of which election is a key component. The second reason why election is important is that it is a game, which might result in a loss of power. Generally, there have been four national and regional elections since EPRDF took power in 1991. Two of them took place during the time under consideration in this study. One was the second general election which took place in May 2000 and the third was the May 2005 election. In both elections, the results were highly disputed. The ruling party claimed a landslide victory although, in the 2005 election, the opposition parties won unprecedented number of federal and regional legislative seats. Following the 2005 election, one of the opposition parties, which won the second largest number of seats, boycotted parliament and called national civil disobedience, which resulted in uprisings mainly in the capital city. Security forces reacted harshly in which hundreds of people died. A significant number of Addis Ababa University students, having actively participated in observing and casting votes, were also angered by the outcomes and participated in campus demonstrations to protest the outcome (Aalen & Tronvoll, 2008).

The third political incident was the split within the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), a front within the ruling party, EPRDF. This news became public in 2001.

The power tussle that followed within the ruling party was also a source of anxiety for groups that were beneficiary of the system. Simply put, it created a temporary instability within the power holders. The split had other consequences as well. For example, opposition parties and dissenting groups were emboldened, thinking that the state became weaker. They considered the situation was what *political process* scholars call a political opportunity.

The Higher Education Context

This study examined activists from three universities in Ethiopia, namely Addis Ababa, Jimma, and Haramaya universities. Before I present the unique institutional elements of each university, I will begin with the general higher education characteristics that would help readers look at the commonality and uniqueness of each institution.

Universities in Ethiopia

There is consensus that higher education in Ethiopia did not really begin until the second half of the previous century (Haile, 1984). In other words, higher education was introduced during Haile Selassie's imperial regime (1930 to 1974) and has been significantly expanded during the current regime (1991-present). The expansion of higher education in Ethiopia is a recent phenomenon. It all began after the mid-1990s when the EPRDF government began to implement an education policy whose premises were equity and access. Within two decades, the country has seen a radical expansion from 2 to 33 public universities. For the first time, the private sector has also been allowed to contribute to the expansion of higher education. In terms of the higher education landscape, Ethiopia has thirty-three public universities and about thirty-five colleges (Ministry of Education, 2015). The total 2012/2013 undergraduate enrollment in higher

education institutions was 553, 848 and graduate enrollment was 79,788 (Education Statistics Annual Abstract, 2014). When seen quantitatively, the EPRDF regime has improved higher education remarkably. There was only one university during Haile Selassie's regime and two during the Derg regime. The significant growth in student enrollment has improved access for youth, including access to historically disadvantaged groups, such as ethnic minorities, female students, and students from rural areas. However, many critics (e.g. Rayner & Ashcroft, 2011) disparage the expansion because significantly less attention has been paid to improving the quality of education in colleges and universities.

The vast expansion of student numbers is mainly in new regional universities. According to Ashcroft, who served as a consultant to the Ministry of Education, the government sees higher education as an important plank in its strategy for social and economic development. Higher education is also seen as one of the ways of spearheading regional identity and autonomy in a country with over 80 languages and dialects. Ethiopia, being one of the world's poorest countries, it sees the expansion of higher education a considerable investment both financially and politically (Ashcroft, 2011).

Over recent years, there has been a process of defining what exactly the purpose of higher education is and what benefits it offers in return for the investment of scarce economic and human resources. The 2009 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Proclamation provides a long list of objectives for higher education. Many of these overlap with the previous 2003 Proclamation, but others relate to technology transfer; freedom of expression based on reason and rational discourse; community and consultancy services; participation of stakeholders; institutional autonomy with

accountability; upholding justice, fairness and the rule of law; multiculturalism; and the expansion of access. Thus, the expansion of higher education was potentially intended to fulfill various economic and social imperatives (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2003; 2009).

Public universities receive their entire budget from the federal government. After years of line-item budgeting system, the Ministry of Education seemed to have taken an important step to implement block grants to institutions three years ago (Ashcroft, 2011). This was apparently based on what was promised in the 2003 Proclamation which stated recurrent funding would be provided in the form of block grants defined on the basis of a funding formula.

Although Higher Education Proclamations (2003, 2009) grant institutional autonomy to universities, little has been achieved. For example, according to the higher education proclamations, university boards, and staff choose their own institutional leaders. However, what has been practiced thus far has not shown such institutional administrative autonomy. For example, university presidents are nominated by the Ministry of Education and approved by the Prime Minister's office. Academic vice presidents are nominated by university presidents and approved by the Ministry of Education. In many cases, except the choice of department heads (chairs), the selection, nomination and appointment of middle and senior academic and administrative positions are conducted either by the Ministry of Education or the top university administrators. In most cases, the Ministry of Education appoints a university president from faculty who are either members of the ruling party or loyal to their ideological commitments.

Despite the promise of institutional autonomy in both the 2003 and 2009 proclamations, universities still seem to suffer from lack of autonomy and micro-management by the Ministry of Education. For example, universities admit students based on the Ministry of Education's annual placement of school leaving students. Institutional expansions, such as opening up of new campuses and programs are largely initiated and approved by the Ministry of Education. Academic freedom, including freedom of scholarly practices and organizing are significantly constrained by the severe bureaucratic structure and regulatory systems. Faculty and staff are practically not allowed to have their own independent labor union. Similarly, independent student unions hardly exist because of the ideologically tainted micromanagement and regulation of student organizations and clubs. The single most important student organization in many universities is the student union in which students loyal to the ruling party are recruited and lead. For that matter, the ruling party, which controls the state power, requires students to be its members using employment incentives and promises.

Addis Ababa University (AAU)

Addis Ababa University is the oldest and largest public university in Ethiopia. It has remained a major source of both human capital and of intellectuals who at times challenge the status quo. Originally called the University College of Addis Ababa at its establishment in 1950, it was later renamed Haile Selassie I University in 1962 after the Ethiopian Emperor, Haile Selassie I. The institution received its current name in 1975 (Addis Ababa University, 2015).

Addis Ababa University has over fourteen campuses both in the capital and nearby towns. Efforts to strengthen the institution as a graduate university, supplying

university teachers to new universities have continued though financial and administrative challenges have remained bottlenecks. The growth and flourishing of the university have been impacted by global, regional and institutional dynamics. However, the state's direct action in response to students' and academics' demands for autonomy, academic freedom, freedom of expression and assembly, on several occasions, resulted in the disruption of the teaching and learning activities. Generally speaking, the university's general situation can be described as follows:

- A series of student protests and actions occurred during the first period student movement, namely the late-1950s to the mid-1970s.
- Until recently, the university had a vibrant tradition of student literary nights in which poems were read, student band and actors showed musical performances. This tradition seems to have been weakened in the last decade or so.
- Students competing interests have also been seen for communal spaces for prayers and ethnic cultural performances and celebrations. Like many universities, Addis Ababa University has also chosen to restrict campus prayers, student inspired cultural performances and arts.
- Addis Ababa University Student Union is the largest university wide student organization which operates along a strict university regulatory policy. It is heavily dependent on the university administration financially, politically, and administratively. Election of union leaders is politically manipulated by state-affiliated politicians and loyalists. In recent years, the likelihood for the student union leaders to be independent is low. However, there were occasions in the past when students hijacked this tendency to be micro-managed from the administrators,

succeeding to form a more independent student union leadership. For example, the student union during the 2000-2001 academic year was able to challenge the university and the state in its search for increased organizational autonomy and freedom of speech. One of their accomplishments was that they began to have an independent student newspaper called *Helina*, which was disseminated once and closed by the university.

- The post-1991 campus realities differ significantly from previous decades. One difference is the student population has changed both numerically and demographically. Addis Ababa University had over 48, 000 students in 2015 (Addis Ababa University, 2015). Demographically, it has also become more diverse. The diversity has also brought another challenge. The political contestation outside the university spills over into the campus creating tensions among ethnic groups. The unity among students seems to have increasingly been loose. It is easier for students to organize along ethnic and religious interests than issues.
- Outside campus politics had impacts on students. For example, the split of TPLF in 2001 was also reflected in Tigray students, who supported one side or another.
- Post-Derg Addis Ababa University has also seen frequent clashes between students belonging to different ethnic groups, especially between Oromo and Tigray students. Two of such confrontations were in 2011 and 2013 (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, 2013).
- The dismissal of 42 senior professors and lecturers from the university by the government in April 1993 was considered the worst silencing action ever taken on the academe in Ethiopia. It was widely believed that the dismissal of these professors

was attributed to their political opinions. Most of the professors dismissed criticized the killing of the 17 students who were participating in a student demonstration in 1993. In the same year, the entire faculty of the university was also required to sign a 2-year contract (American Association for the Advancement of Science Human Rights Action Network; 1994; Human Rights Watch, 2003).

- The university has been closed several times following student protests and the state's fear of student mobilization. The first was in March 1975, when Derg closed the university, ordering all students to deploy to the countryside to carry out voluntary development activities. The second was in January 1993, following students' demonstrations against the state's decision to accept Eritrea's independence. Students staged a series of unauthorized demonstrations at Addis Ababa University. The third was the April 2001 closure, which followed a series of student protests (Ahmed, 2006; Balsvik, 1985; 2007).
- Most of the country's famous names, including public intellectuals, prime ministers, scientists, university presidents, authors, and actors were former students of AAU. The university still maintains being as a main source of academics to the newly opening higher education institutions in Ethiopia.

Jimma University (JU)

Jimma University is a public higher educational institution. It was established in December 1999 by the merger of Jimma College of Agriculture—which was founded in 1952—and Jimma Institute of Health Sciences—which was established in 1983 (Jimma University, 2015).

Some of the institutional characteristics that have implications for student activism include the nature of the student union, interethnic conflicts, institutional autonomy, and competing interests among students.

Like many universities in Ethiopia, Jimma University students have student organizations which can be divided into two: student union and campus clubs. Both the student union and clubs are tightly controlled by the university administration. Student union is tightly controlled by the university administration and individuals sympathetic to the ruling party. It is micro-managed from the center, becoming heavily dependent on the university administration financially, politically, and administratively. Election of union leaders is influenced by individuals who are members of the ruling party. In recent years, the likelihood for the student union leaders to be independent is low. However, there are occasions when students also hijacked this tendency to be micro-managed from the administrators succeeding to form more independent student union leaders. In the past, there were times when the university's student union was lively and engaging. The student clubs, although restricted in what they do and how, provide students an opportunity to practice leadership and civic engagements.

Similar to Addis Ababa University, students representing various religious faiths in Jimma University have demanded communal spaces. University administrators have proved to be more fearful and intolerant than accommodating to such demands. Similar situations have happened regarding demands for space and accommodation by students to celebrate their cultures and arts.

The university has also seen frequent clashes between students belonging to different ethnic groups. One example was the 2006 clash between Oromo and Tigray students (Ethio-Zagol Post, 2006)

Finally, student protests have become gradually frequent mainly by Oromo students demanding increased freedom and other related issues peculiar to the Oromia region. Other students, too, protest on campus related grievances although not frequently (Finfine Tribune, 2015). Because of such increasing protests and interethnic lashes, there is a heavy police presence on campus.

Haramaya University (HU)

Haramaya University is a public higher education institution, located in the eastern part of Ethiopia. It is the second oldest university next to Addis Ababa University. From its initiation in 1952 up until 1996, it remained an agricultural university. However, in 1996, when two faculties, namely education and health were included, the university was renamed as Alemaya University. Oromo students demanded the change of the name “Alemaya” to “Haramaya,” reclaiming the historical name of the place where the university is located. In response to the pressure, the university administration renamed the institution to “Haramaya University” in 2008/09 academic year. Currently, Haramaya University has three campuses (Haramaya University, 2015)

Haramaya University has similar characteristics with Jimma University because of shared historical and locational realities. To begin with, there are two types of student organizations at Haramaya University. These are student union and campus clubs. The student union is formed through the representation of departments and schools. The student union at Haramaya University is always considered as a campus extension of the

ruling party. In the past there were efforts by some students to genuinely reflect student aspirations and needs. Gradually, it has increasingly and completely fallen in the hands of students who are sympathetic to the ruling party. Similarly, campus clubs are not free politically and economically. However, since they focus on environmental, health, and gender issues, they seem to be more relevant.

University administrators at Haramaya University show a great deal of uneasiness over students demands such as requirements for spaces and resources to celebrate their cultures and arts. They fear that allowing such things to happen on campus amounts to creating pristine conditions for interethnic or interfaith conflicts.

The university has also seen frequent interethnic clashes between students belonging to different groups, notably between Oromo and Tigray students. For example, the clash that occurred on April 11, 2006 was stopped only when police from the nearby towns came and put the situation under control (Nazreth.Com, 2006).

Frequent student protests, notably by Oromo students, who demanded (and still demand) increased campus freedom and national issues concerning Oromia were a common campus feature at Haramaya University. Other students, too, protest various campus and curriculum related grievances. The most notable one was the 2000 contentious action of the Faculty of Education students who boycotted classes and the cafeteria protesting the introduction of the B.Ed. curriculum. At the time, the Faculty of Education was one of the two schools being opened at the university and hoping to graduate its first education groups. In the meantime, the Ministry of Education passed a directive to all schools of education to rename the degree they award to B. Ed. from

B.A/B.Sc. The proposed change in the naming of the degree spurred a week-long class boycott and campus demonstrations.

CHAPTER THREE

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter provides the conceptual and research context which situate the understanding of student activists within its broad theoretical and empirical materials. To this effect, the chapter reviews both relevant theories and the research on international and local student activism. The chapter has three sections, which separately deal with relevant theories, student activists and activism, and the study's conceptual framework.

Activism, Social Movements, and Leadership

Analysis of the concepts and practice of activism and activists has often relied on sociological and political science theories and models. By doing so, analysts have benefited significantly in showing the social and political dimensions of actors and their actions. Likewise, this research has drawn insights from social and political science theories and models to generally conceptualize activist development, activist behaviors, and activist practices, and then extrapolate key insights to analyze student activists in a particular context. This section has three sub-sections. The first sub-section will present theoretical materials relevant to clearly define activism, explain activists and their work and explore the relationship between activism and leadership. This section will begin with key definitions and offers a possible taxonomy of activism. The second sub-section will provide reviews of the social movement theories to inform the analysis of student activist development, behaviors, and practices. The third subsection will draw insights from the discussion of social movement theories to seek a link between movement contexts with leadership types.

The Conceptual Ambiguity of Activism

The term "activism" in the social movement literature refers to a broad range of meaning. As a result, there is ambiguity in applying the term because the conceptual boundary between activism and other related terms, such as "leadership," "advocacy," and "political participation" is imprecise. Perceptions and understanding of "activism" have varied significantly from time to time. In many cases, activism is often associated with radicalism (Cohen, 1993), revolution (e.g. Altbach, 1979), rebellion (e.g. Lipset, 1971), movement (Feuer, 1969; Staterg, 1975), revolt (e.g. Heineman, 2001; Lipset, 1969; Zeilig, 2007), and protest (e.g. Zeilig, 2007). In general, activism can easily evoke both negative and positive imagery.

To begin, activism has been defined differently across the social sciences and fields of human practice. In political science, for example, activism is portrayed as a form of political action taking. According to Corning and Myers (2002), activism in political activities may apply to a broad range of behaviors: "Activism ranges from the quite conventional (e.g. participating in the electoral process) to or both (e.g. physical confrontations with police officers, damaging public property, risking serious injury)" (p. 704). However, one thing is clear. "The activist is not a political titleholder or a government officeholder and is not a part of the formal institutions of our political system" (Teske, 1997, p. 150). The boundary between political and nonpolitical applications of activism is indistinct.

Activism is also associated with engaging in political actions on behalf of one's group or constituency. Martin (2007) identifies activism as an action individuals take on

“behalf of a cause, action that goes beyond what is conventional or routine. Activists are challengers to policies and practices, trying to achieve a social goal...” (p. 19).

In sociology, activism is defined in terms of the personal characteristics and social relationships activists bring to a certain social movement. For example, Crossely (2008) defines activism in relation to identities, practices, and memberships. In his writing, activists belong to a certain social movement that defines their identity. Practice denotes participating in public expressions of what a movement stands for, for example, demonstrations. The third element of activism for Crossely is salient memberships. An activist is either a member of a high profile or low key social movement organizations.

From a practitioner-orientated perspective, activism can be defined in terms of the level of engagement activists are associated with or a particular form of action. Angelina (2011), who interviewed young activists on the notion of “activism,” made a distinction between two levels of activist engagement. First, activism can be viewed as either an intention at an abstract level, or action at a concrete level. As an intention, individuals uphold, and sometimes express their passion for countering hegemony, and status quo. At a concrete level, individuals translate their intentions for change through deep involvement. So, activism can be viewed both as a particular ways of doing and being. When the two attributes, namely being and doing are integrated, it involves actions based on reflecting on one’s self-position with regard to class, privileges, and self-analyze one’s relation with intentions and actions. In other words, being an activist is not just about doing, but also about engaging in critical reflection on one’s position in relationship to the issue and how it influences the way an issue is being pushed forward. Angelina’s portrayal of activism seems to go beyond the daily actions of individuals with

some conviction because there is a focus on the *activist imagination*—an imagination that suggests a peculiar way of being and acting. Angelina concludes that activism carries a peculiar political baggage, in the same way that social movement and social mobilization do, by conjuring a high moral and civic imagination.

Activist scholars have also tried to develop a broad definition in order to integrate the rather fragmented conceptualization evident in the activism literature. For example, Corning (2002) defined an activist orientation as an “individualist, a developed relatively stable, yet changeable orientation to engage in various collective, social-political, problem-solving behaviors spanning a range from low-risk, passive, and institutionalized acts to high-risk, active, and unconventional behaviors” (p. 704).

A well-established taxonomy of activism or the forms in which various activist projects are manifested does not exist. However, the literature passingly makes references to the various ways in which activists engage. For example, the literature makes a distinction between individual activism and collective activism. Various fields of activism are also identified including rights activism, environmental activism, political activism, and social activism (Martin, 2007).

The forms and modes in which activism manifests have also captured the attention of scholars. Scholars (e.g. Martin, 2007) have emphasized the importance of paying attention to the mode of activism. It is evident that there are various ways in which activism manifests itself, including through social movements (SMs), social movement organizations (SMOs), transient groups, generic organizations, and informal groups. It is essential to pay attention to such modes of activism manifestation since it can shape activist disposition and action in a certain way. Most often, activists—whether

it is in higher education institutions or social communities—are either recruited into the world of activism by members of social movements or inspired by what activists do in various social movements. Therefore, it is important to understand *social movement* as a concept and a practice.

Social Movement Theory

Social movement as a concept and practice has attracted the attention of scholars from various disciplines, including sociology, political science, and economics. Tilly (2004) defines social movement as successive contentious actions anchored in a certain aim or cause. Very often, contentious actions are based on various attention-seeking tactics which include including performances, displays, and campaigns. Essentially, socially movements are collective though they differ in size. There are various theories which explain social movements—why they emerge, how they recruit their members, how they operate, why they fail or succeed, etc.

Classical social movement theory is identified with different names including *mass society*, *collective behavior*, and *social breakdown*. The earliest theories associate informal mobilizing and organizing with individuals' deficit psyche. These earliest theories assume that social movements occur when society loses its intermediary organizations and that social movements are most attractive to discontented individuals (Kornhauser, 1959). Adopting behaviorist approaches, the classical theories emphasize individuals' troubled relations with society. These focus on individuals disaffection, dissatisfaction and discontent with existing norms and practices, hence choosing to rebel against dominant structures. These theories also portray activists as rebellious, revolutionaries, and militants. The classical theories tend to reduce activists to angry

mobs and mobilizations with contagious effects, where people are united because of common emotional outbursts. According to these theories, activism is viewed as irrational reactions to individual and institutional practices. The theories represent social movements as reactionary and emotional outbursts caused by societal and economic dysfunction. The classical theorists (e.g., Semelser, 1962) attribute hive mentality to mobilizations. They consider movement participants as having little agency over their actions or articulations. According to these theorists, activism is synonymous with riots, disruptions, mob, and spontaneity. Classical social movement theorists contend that people protest because they are part of an irrational crowd or because they have personality flaws for which they try to compensate. In general, the central thesis of classical theories is that individuals become activists or protesters because they are discontent with something in their society.

Another classical theory pertinent to understanding activists and motives for their action is *relative deprivation*. According to Folger (1986), a feeling of relative deprivation results from comparisons of an individual's condition with a standard. The comparison can be one's past condition or someone else's condition. When the comparison results in a conclusion that the person is not receiving what he or she deserves, the individual experiences relative deprivation. Runciman (1966) identifies two types of deprivation feeling; the first emanates from personal comparisons, and the second emanates from group comparisons. According to Stekelenburg and Klandermans (2013), individuals who develop a strong sense of personal deprivation and group deprivation are the most likely to have strong motivations to take actions. Individuals

take part in collective actions to express their grievances originating from relative deprivation (Linda & Tyler, 1988).

The classical theories came under heavy criticism in 1970s by social movement theorists who provided an alternative explanation for collective actions. One of these theories is *resource mobilization*. Instead of focusing on individuals, this theory focuses on organization or structure. The theory of *resource mobilization* emerged as a response to behaviorist theories of social mobilization. Its central thesis is anchored in the belief that social movements emerge and thrive when members can mobilize adequate resources to take action. Actors are rational—they weigh the costs and benefits of movement participation. This theory highlights the agency of social movement actors, paying attention to resource acquisition and building allies as key to mobilization. This theory emphasizes the organizing process. It places massive importance on structures and processes that mobilize individuals for an action. It was largely used to understand the social movements of the 1960s, which for the most part had top-down organization structures and singular charismatic leaders (McAdam, 1999).

The theory of resource mobilization is believed to be the most widely employed approach to the study of social movements. Rootes (1990) argues that the theory of resource mobilization assumes politically motivated actions are socially structured, and the resources activists use for their actions reflect the pattern that exists in the social structure. The theory makes the assumption that movement activists are at least overtly rational. Rationality guides the way activists devise strategies. “Actions are contingent upon the availability of resources and the best use of the resources available” (p. 7).

The significance of resources in social movements is considerable. Success in social movements hinge on the level of resources mobilized by members and leaders (McAdam, 1999). According to this theory, both material and non-material resources are crucial for the strength of a movement. Morris (1984) states, "Social actors who have access to resources and who are well integrated within the institutions of a community are more likely to engage in protest than individuals who are marginal and uprooted" (p. 279).

Resource mobilization theorists also used the notion of efficacy to explain the differential propensity to participate in activism or protest actions. Efficacy, a belief that current conditions and policies can be altered through protests (Gamson, 1992), is often associated with activist motivation. This view is consistent with the classic sociological construct of *agency*, which places considerable importance on individuals' beliefs that their action can potentially shape social structure and change the status quo.

Organization and leadership are often considered aspects of the resources on which social movements rely. Rootes (1990) states that much of the early work on resource mobilization theory tended to focus on the ways social movements were organized and led. There was a bias towards focusing on processes internal to social movements and disregarding other factors crucial to the survival and success of social movements. Some of the factors which were disregarded by researchers include the actions and reactions of political actors, including the state.

The resource mobilization lens provides insight for understanding why activism activities are more prevalent in higher education institutions than other types of organizations. Since resource mobilization recognizes organizations as springboards for

movement (Caniglia & Carmin, 2005), higher education institutions as organizations provide rich contexts for student activism. Higher education institutions offer supportive spaces for mobilization. Activists can easily recruit and agitate peers for their causes. Information can be shared quickly and effectively. Higher education institutions, as centers of learning, present pristine conditions for member recruitment and consciousness raising. The higher the consciousness of citizens, the more inclined they are to question, resist, and challenge. Additionally, higher education institutions generally tend to provide a safer environment for individuals to organize for activism. The environment lends itself to rapid student mobilization. According to the theory of resource mobilization, these three types of resources (accessible, informed constituents, and in a safe environment) are the driving factors for the more frequent activism of students in higher education institutions. The theory fails, however, to take account of the institutional context, type of issues, and human concerns as drivers of student activism.

The third theory is *political process*. The theory of *political process* assumes that the sociopolitical context determines social movements. Political dynamics either facilitate or constrain movements. This theory places emphasis on longer cycles of mobilization. It stresses factors external to movements that can constrain and shape movement outcomes (Tarrow, 1998). One of the major concepts in the theory of political process is political opportunity. According to this concept, there are political opportunities which facilitate movements. Such political opportunities may be achieved through social movement participation, political concessions, or social movement organizational condition.

The notion of political opportunity structure has often been used to elaborate the particular elements that shape movement emergence. It suggests that the duration and cycle of mobilization are influenced by the degree of challenging groups' access to the political process (Tarrow, 1998). The political opportunity factors, which shape movement development, vary from place to place. However, five basic opportunities are often cited as crucial. These include institutional suitability for stability of political alignments, increased access to political decision-making power elite alliances, participation, instability in the alignment of ruling elites or elite conflict, and declining capacity and propensity of the state to repress dissent or level of repression (McAdam, 1998; Tarrow, 1998).

The most important utility of the political process lens for understanding student activism is that it provides a framework to analyze the wider political milieu in which movements occur. Activism, to a certain degree, is political. It requires activists to operate with a thorough understanding of the political system. Activism requires galvanizing alliances with key power holders. It also requires knowledge of the political climate of the time.

The theory of *new social movement* is a theorization of social movement, which has shifted away attention from economic and political considerations to identity, meaning, and culture. This theory holds that individuals are motivated to join movements, at least in part, because the movements resonate with their personal values and beliefs. In many recent social movements, identity affiliation has been found to be strong. For example, membership in major movements that rally constituents around sexuality, gender, and environment, showed identity as a major recruiting force.

Researchers have highlighted that movement mobilization is a challenge from this perspective, especially since identity motivated actions often do not pay attention to political change, although it might strive to achieve social, cultural, and economic transformation (Bernstein, 1997). Consequently, movements must “craft identities and frame their goals in ways that not only encourage participation and adherence, but that promote transitions in prevailing societal norms” (Caniglia & Carmin, 2005, p. 205).

This new social movement shows dimensions of identity and interpersonal relations and how actors become incentivized for involvement in a social movement. The theory explains how solidarity is an alternative force of mobilization and rethinks the commonly used governing structures of organizations and centering identity and shared experience. It also allows for the possibility of understanding the mobilization of loosely coupled, but networked, organizations that operate as independent bodies. The role of leadership is minimized as such movements are considered as “leader-full” (Caniglia & Carmin, 2005, p. 205). Some new social movement theorists (e.g., Melucci, 1989) argue that the purpose of social movement is to create collective identities. Cohen and Arato (1992) argue that other theories have a structure bias. The new social movement theory attempts to remedy such a structural bias. The new social movement privileges politics of identity.

Identity, particularly social identity—self-definition in terms of social category membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)—is often associated with group actions and activism, particularly protest. Researchers have tried to address why individuals identification with their group is a strong drive to participate in a collective action. First of all, it is mainly because identification with others is accompanied by an awareness of

likeness and mutual destiny. Moreover, identity has a deep affective element. It is widely believed that the more one has a sense of group in him or her, the more she or he feels for the group (Yzerbyt, Dumont, Wigboldus, & Gordijn, 2003) and the stronger he or she is motivated to participate on behalf of the group (Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013). Politicized collective identifications deepen sentiments of efficacy. Then, collective emotions and heightened sense of efficacy and identification with others results in individuals developing an inner obligation to act as a good group member (Stürmer & Simon, & Jorgen, 2003). When process of defining oneself fluctuates from personal to social identity, the group norm of involvement becomes prominent; the more frequently one self-categorizes with the group, the more load this group norm will carry and the more it will result in an “inner obligation” to take part on behalf of the group.

In order for collective identities to become the driver of shared action, it must *politicize* (Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013). Naturally, an awareness of shared grievances spurs the tendency to politicize identity. Politicization of identities and the deep contestations of power take place as a result of politicizing measures that gradually changes the group’s relationship to its environment, whereby the choices they make are again shaped by identity. The more politicized identity group members have the likelihood that they will participate in collective action is higher (Van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008).

Activism and Leadership

The relationship between activism and leadership is not articulated well in the literature. However, some scholars seem to suggest that activism is a type of leadership. Others refer to the two interchangeably when dealing with the subject of social

movements. For example, Chamber and Phelps (1994) suggest, “all student activism is student leadership” (p. 46). Barker, Jonson, and Lavalette (2001) also state:

For collective images and ideas, projects, forms of action and organization to emerge, someone must propose them. It is here that the issue of leadership arises. Leadership in movements consists in proposing to these differentiated entities how they should and can identify themselves and act together. Without such proposals, and any asset they receive, movements do not exist, collective identity is not formed, collective action does not occur. The terms ‘leadership’ and ‘social movement’ are inseparably interconnected. (p. 5)

The potential each activist has in taking the first initiative and being impactful are often considered aspects of leadership. Given the concept of “active” implied in any activism, it is not surprising to find linkages equating activism with leadership. The reverse, equating leadership with activism, however, promotes greater ambiguity in the more conventional understanding of leadership. If student activism is a form of social mobilization, there are more active students who take the first initiatives to recruit, set agendas, establish means of communications, and set directions. How are such students characterized? This question has partly been addressed by some writers and researchers.

Activism researchers who deal with general social movements argue that leadership is an important aspect of social mobilizations. According to West (2008), leaders in social movements can be conceptualized in three ways: as informal public leadership representatives, as ideological innovators and as active agents. For West, activists are not passive “followers;” rather, they are the true carriers of the movement. He further argues that social movement leadership requires the quality to inspire, activate and empower. It is a different type of quality that leaders in formal organizations require, such as decisiveness or authoritative command. Furthermore, unlike leaders in formal

institutions, social movement leaders seek out to encourage action taking behaviors with a greater degree of *independence* and *enterprise*. Second, social movement leaders need to be considered as ideological innovators. Social movements succeed by transforming interests and identities rather than replicating prevailing interests and resources into more politically forceful mixes; their leaders need a different level of imagination. The imaginative side of social movement leadership necessitates a different array of leadership qualities. Ideological and cultural innovators have a substantial place in social movements. West also states that an important set of skills with which social movement leaders flourish includes rhetorical skills, moral persuasion, and cultural inspiration as much as organizational skills or decision-making.

The third leadership dimension that West (2008) stresses is active agency. The relationship between social movement and public sphere(s) has implications for informal leadership. He argues that the public role of social movements transcends narrow groups; movements and the individuals who participate in them do not simply address a narrow constituency of members or followers. Both movements and their leaders aim to span the boundaries of their members to a wider public audience of potential partakers and devotees. For West, movements cannot ignore even its *opponents*; *these need to be* embraced as important counter-constituency. This is particularly important when movements nominally represent the interests of minority groups whose support is crucial. The complexity and heterogeneity of the members and supporters of social movement leaders imply the existence of strains between public and movement responses to particular statements or actions. Arguably, the public context of social movement implies that movements *in general* practice some aspects of leadership within the wider society.

Various social movement theories have addressed the issue of leadership in different ways. For example, the theory of resource mobilization subscribes to the concept of “charismatic leader.” Approaches based on rationality characterize the function of leaders in social movements in terms of organizing and mobilizing resources. The leader is a political entrepreneur who seeks and navigates the available opportunities (Taylor, 1982). While the resource mobilization theorists’ conclusions about leadership may be effective within their own theoretical formulation, such an approach neglects the fundamentally *creative* exertion of social movement leadership.

On the other hand, the new movement theory provides a more suspicious analysis of leadership. The concept of being “leaderless” in new movement theory is pervasive. New social movement downplays a hierarchy-based understanding of leadership. If there is leadership at all, it is about meaning making. Key players and participants in movements are viewed as signifying agents meaning for their stakeholders, opponents, and onlookers (Snow & Benford, 1988). Leadership in this context goes beyond organizing and mobilizing. Leadership is about appropriate representation of movement intentions and actions in various forms of symbolic and communicative actions.

Another dimension of the relationship between activism and leadership is the impact of taking part in activism for the activist. Research shows that partaking in some action can have a deep influence on activists and their actions. Undergoing the shared emotion of group action, belonging to an entity, and being in the process of consciousness raising, often causes people to choose a life course, including a livelihood

that is consistent with their ideological orientations. It is widely believed that individuals who participate in group actions often continue to be active in politics for the rest of their life (Corrigall-Brown, 2012; McAdam, 1988; Whittier, 1995).

Student Activists and their Activism

Student activists have historically taken crucial initiatives in the struggles against social and political dominations, subjugations, and inequalities in many countries. There are several instances around the world in which student mobilizations have spurred popular mobilizations which led to changes in regimes and public consciousness. Students have played such roles at least partially because of their unique social status. Among others, students are young, relatively unencumbered, inhabit a transitory space which is occupied by a vibrant and energetic new generation each year (Taylor & Van Dyke, 2007). In part, these characteristics of students help to explain why student movements occur and their impacts both on the participants, higher education institutions, and their society.

The literature on student activist is broad because of the geographic scope and historical length that the subject covers. However, the literature to be reviewed in this section focuses on three themes of scholarly and empirical materials, namely empirical materials that specifically focus on the characteristics of student activists, their movement agendas, and action modes.

Attempts to Characterize Student Activists and their Activism

The question of "What kinds of students participate in student activism?" has been around since the beginning of higher education and student activism. However, most of the scientific documentation of student characteristics have been based on the studies

conducted on the generation of students that participated in the 1960s widespread and committed activism. Since then, studies (e.g. Astin, 1969; Baird, 1969; Block, Haan, & Smith, 1973; Dickinson, 1969; Flacks, 1967; Franz & McClelland, 1994; Geller & Howard, 1972; Rothman & Lichter, 1978; Trent & Craise, 1967; Watts & Whilaken, 1966; Winter & Wiecking, 1971; Yankelovich, 1981) have sought to shed light on our understanding of the subject of student activist characteristics.

One of the earliest and often cited studies is Flacks' (1967), which was based on extensive interviews and survey questionnaires with activists, non-activists, parents of activists, and opponents of activists. The study found out that activists came from upper-middle class families. They also found that "activists are more radical than their parents, but activists' parents are decidedly more liberal than others of their status." Their findings included that activism is related to a set of values, shared by both the students and their parent (pp. 65-68). According to Flacks (1967), the activism shown in student movements of the 1960s was a result of a historical process in which the activists' parents, who themselves had college education, followed a child-centered approach to raising their children. The impact of the parenting styles that parents adopted was noticeable in the student activists' personality.

Another important study on the characteristics of student activists was Baird's (1969) research which was based on a sample of more than 5,000 students from 29 colleges and universities in the United States. The study compared activists' backgrounds with non-activists' background. A comparison of activists' high school records with the non-activists' high school record in the sample showed better achievements of the former, especially in leadership positions, speech, drama, and writing. Activists, more

than non-activists, were described as sensitive, critical, aggressive, dominating, leading, sociable, very skilled verbally, interested in others, imaginative, self-sufficient, and more competent as well as more innovative. However, the comparison did not show any difference in the non-activists' and activists' high school academic achievement.

Based on the studies of the 1964-65 Berkeley "Free Speech Movement," Trent and Craise (1967) characterized student activists both on cognitive and social commitment levels. Students who were involved in student activism were found to be superior cognitively and socially committed. In addition, they were characterized as higher academic achievers at universities and colleges. According to Block, Haan, & Smith (1973), student activists had a strong intellectual orientation and superior academic records in their colleges and universities. Kerpelman (1969), who studied 73 undergraduate students, belonging to six groups, also found that activists were more intelligent than non-activists.

Geller and Howard's (1972) study delineated sociological and psychological correlates of students' engagement in activism. Using a qualitative study, they investigated Yale University students who were likely to participate in student protests. Their research participants were the 1967 Yale Draft Refusal signers and non-signers. The comparisons of the two types of students showed that the signers of the Draft Refusal pledges were to some extent older than the non-signers. A disproportionate number of the signers reported they were either Jewish or non-religious. Whereas the non-signers predominantly composed of students who defined themselves as moderate, the signers were represented exclusively by the very liberal and radical categories. The signers had stronger anti-war and anti-administration sentiments. On the other hand, the findings

were inconsistent with previous studies which proved that activists represent intellectual or sociological elites.

Student activists are generally considered to possess strong ideological interest and anti-establishment proclivity. Research also shows that the many student movement projects are leftist in their ideological proclivity (Altbach, 1979, 1989).

Studies conducted on social movement participants have also shown the fact that activists come from families of high socio-economic backgrounds. Block, Haan, & Smith (1973), on a study they conducted on youth activists, identified several characteristics that distinguish activists from non-activists. Their findings regarding the family background of social movement participants show that activists are likely to come from more privileged family than non-activists:

Whether measured by family income, occupational prestige of parents, socioeconomic indices, or the amount of education of parents, the families of actively committed students were more advantaged than those of other college students. (p. 185)

Compared with non-participants, social movement participants are more or less self-controlled, rebellious, restless, unconventional, and independent of traditional authority. They are keener to self-express and engage in the arts. The probability that they are more idealistic and altruistic than non-social movement participants is high. Similarly, the likelihood that they are married and have children and pursue high-status careers is lower when they are compared with non-social movement participant. They are likely to have been raised as young children in a more permissive way that encouraged "the child's differentiation and self-expressiveness, with discipline per se being less critical" (p. 189).

The moral maturity and power desire of social movement participants have also been studied. Social movement participants are likely to score higher than nonsocial movement participants on measure of moral development (Haan, Smith, & Block, 1968). With regard to their desire to acquire power, a study by Rothman and Lichter (1978) established that students with radical ideology score higher on indexes of the implicit need for power. However, Winter and Wiecking (cited in Franz & McClelland, 1994, p. 197) found activists lower or no different in their need for power.

Consistent with Block, Haan, and Smith's (1973) finding, Yankelovich (1981) found that individuals who took part in the social movements of the 1960s cherished expressiveness as opposed to instrumentalism in defining success in life. As Fishkin, Keniston, and MacKinnon pointed out "nowhere in the literature can so striking a relationship be found between a single personality measure and observed student activism"(cited in Franz & McClelland, 1994, p. 197).

Apart from characterizing activists (psychologically, socially, and ideologically), the literature on the characteristics of activism can also shed some light on our understanding of the socio-biographical characteristics of student activists. I begin with Bakke (1966), who compared activism in six countries. Bakke identifies five major characteristics of student activism. Most of the students engaged in activism fall within the age category of 16 and 23. The second characteristic is that they are mobilized by some form of student organization. The third is that they participate in collective activities most frequently in demonstrations. The fourth is that they all are led by a few initiating activists who propose what types of actions to take, their targets, and methods of ensuring effectiveness. The final characteristic is that all of them challenge university

administrators and cause problems of public order. Bakke also tried to examine the differences of student activism in the six countries. The differences include organizational structure, relationships, pressure and action groups, characteristics of leaders, numbers of members and supporters, characteristics of members and supporters, characteristics of activities, characteristics of operational fields, objectives of actions, and ideological orientation.

Van Dyke (2003), who studied sixty years of student protest in United States, made three conclusions which might also be applicable elsewhere. First, college student actions are reasonably continuous in some localities because of the presence of activist subcultures. At almost any particular period, students on certain campuses will be protesting though the choices of issues might be campus grievances or issues garnering national attention. Second, during relatively quiet times when high levels of mobilization and protest periods are non-existent, student activism is confined to more highly selective “hotbeds of activism.” Third, campus students are most likely to protest because they are biographically available (McAdam, 1988; Snow, Louise, & Eklund-Olsen, 1980). Students are relatively free from many of the constraints that fulltime careers and family commitments entail.

Unlike the abundance of studies on United States student activists, research on the characteristics of activists in other countries, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa is scarce. The only exception is activist scholars’ attempts to provide descriptions and analysis of student activists based on empirical materials available in the West. One such scholar is Altbach, who has written extensively on student activism. According to Altbach (1989), student activists are 1 schools specializing social sciences and the

humanities. He speculates a link between the study of social sciences and humanities and a propensity to become a student activist. Similarly, faculty who teach in those departments, by virtue of the subjects they teach and research, emphasize socio-political issues which can influence both the faculty and students to be concerned about social problems. Another characteristic of student activists relates to parents of the activists. According to Altbach, the parenting attitude families of activists are more permissive than the general population. As far as academic achievements are concerned, student activists are likely to be among the top performers. Activists often come from minority social groups which are not properly represented in the government. Still another characteristic worthy of understanding student activists is their family socio-economic status. Activist leaders tend to come from more wealthy parents than the general student population. Altbach's characterization of student activists of low-income countries is not supported by empirical materials. It is apparently based on the understanding of the characteristics of the general student population in low-income universities. Altbach (1984) also identifies five major themes which help characterize student activism in low- and middle-income countries. The first is the broader political system of the country. In low- and middle-income countries, the political system is less dense than high-income countries. In other words, the system allows fewer competing political forces, weak mass media, and intolerance for other alternative organizations. As a result, student activism provides a substituting or alternative political force. The second is the nature of higher education institutions, which relatively provide freer environments and opportunity to engage in academic endeavors. The organizational culture of higher education institutions is so attuned to questioning and challenging the status quo. The academic environment is

more suitable to get organized and mobilized for a political action. The third is historical tradition. Because of the role that the academic community played in the struggles against colonialism and repressive governments, society tends to grant legitimacy to any political role students play. Students are often considered the champions of resistance, and that encourages student activism (Altbach, 1984).

Balsvik (1998), who conducted a qualitative study of student activism in African countries, found a pattern of student actions and universities reactions across the countries she observed. According to her study, a chain of events characterizes the students' action phases. The students' action begins with a demand of some kind which is unlikely to be acceptable to the political elite. The demands are usually expressed in a student publication or in the form of a campus demonstration. Then security forces intervene with excessive forces to disperse the campus demonstration which might result in the arrest and torture of student leaders. Next, the university announces that expulsion of prominent student leaders and agitators and the banning of the student union. Then students continue to take actions often in the form of class boycotts demanding the release of arrested students, the rescinding of the decisions to expel student activists and their union. Following the university's action, a period of tension and uncertainty comes in which the student body becomes divided between those who want to continue the boycott and those who want to resume classes. Then the administration starts an unsuccessful reregistration of students. When the re-registration fails, the administrators announce the indefinite closure of the university.

While activist's personality, biographical and demographic characterization provides an important insight into the causal direction among actor-activism relationship

factors, it does not offer a complete explanation of activist trajectory and participation. It is, therefore, important to look at other elements in addition to individuals' personality as a predisposing factor to activism. For example, Keniston (1968) identifies four elements which will influence the course of activism in the United States: the production of protest-prone personalities, institutional attributes which encourage expression of activism, a cultural climate which sanctions activist expression and a historical situation which facilitates or requires activist response. Unlike the early scholarship on student activism which emphasized the study of activist personality and social origin, recent literature on social movements has revealed that activist path and trajectory is influenced by both personal and environmental factors. There is an increasing recognition that historical, cultural, and political contexts in which young individuals grow shape their propensity to engage in activism and their activist identity.

The Route to Becoming a Student Activist

Research into initiation into student activism is scarce. The few studies that exist have tried to show the complex process of becoming. One of such studies was Navia's (2008) Ph.D. dissertation on six student activists, which sought a narrative examination of activists' path to the world of student activism. Navia recruited her research participants from former student activists of the University of Michigan. The participants were chosen from three distinct eras, namely the 1970s, 1980s, and the early part of 2000. Her study found that despite differences in age, historical timing, gender, and personality, research participants went through a similar process of becoming activists. She singled out six steps, out of which four constituted the major elements of student activist becoming. The steps are stated as follows:

First, participants encounter *threshold people* and *threshold organizations* with which they establish serious relationships. Then, certain *mobilizing events* on campus occur, prompting participants' and their peers of color to begin building their own student movements. Along the way, participants experience their own private moments of *moral shock* that ultimately work to solidify their resolve to work for institutional change. Their activist engagement begins not through some pressured form of recruitment, however, but an open, non-coercive *invitation to act*. For reasons that remain largely undisclosed, participants *make the commitment to act*, offering to support their peers in transforming the University into a more equitable and just institution. They then *assume personal responsibility for the movement*, working behind the scenes and tackling numerous tasks that despite their lowly administrative nature are still critical to its functioning. (p. 331)

Braungart and Braungart's (1990) study on student activists of the 1960s was another relevant study worthy of review here. The researchers, adopting a life-course approach, conducted interviews with student activists both from left-wing and right-wing organizations. Their aim was to examine the trajectory and path of activism at three levels: formative stage, activist stage, and post-activist stage. Their findings with regard to the formative stage, which is the most relevant to this study, revealed the impacts of parents, developmental stage, and generation. To begin with, politics provided a source of identity and meaning while they were growing up as children and adolescents. The activists followed the political direction of their parents. Second, the findings show that political socialization influenced the activists' political orientations, hence enticing them to choose a social movement organization compatible with their political orientation. The third finding is the effects of the socio-historical events and trends that have a generation effect on the activists.

Munson (2008), who studied how individuals develop activist consciousness, came with a model that shows the formation of an activist identity in terms of the sequence of idea formation and joining a movement. Munson examined the differences

between the lives and beliefs of activists and non-activists using a qualitative study. She found that many activists affiliate with social movement organizations before they develop strong beliefs about the issues and causes they deeply care about. Munson concludes that commitment to an issue is often a consequence rather than a cause of activism. Social contacts and networks are more important than preconceived attitudes.

Another study that looked at the process of the formation of activist identity is McGuire, Stewart, and Curtin's (2010), which provided a narrative examination of four activist women across different cultures. The study showed that personal factors and the social, cultural and political context of an individual's life coincided to create the capacity to respond critically to normative expectation. In addition, they identified three more specific elements and steps that helped form activist identity. First is the sense of differentness or a sense of being a minority in the society they live. Second is the overt and frustrated recognition of the disjunction between stated ideals and lived realities. The final is the exposure to activist organizations and charismatic leaders who inspired them to participate as activists and encouraged the development of new skills and commitments.

Student Activists' Repertoires of Contention

Repertoires of contention is a social movement concept. It is often used to refer to the whole set of means that an activist group has for making claims (Tilly, cited in Tarrow, 1993, p. 282). It refers to a variety of tools and actions available to make a claim. According to Tilly, repertoires of contention is not only what action people take when they make a claim, it is also what they know about their action (cited in Tarrow, 1993, p. 283). Student activists, in addition to framing their issues and developing their protest

agendas, choose their repertoires of contention. The form and content of the repertoires of contention that student activists employ vary across time, place and movement.

Social movement scholars identify and classify a wide range of repertoires of contention. Some of the repertoires, which are relevant to understand how students take action, will be reviewed below. To begin with, Gene Sharp (1985), in his *Dynamics of nonviolent action*, identifies three methods, which he calls them as symbolic, non-cooperative, and interventional. The symbolic and non-cooperative methods do not employ direct actions. The symbolic methods include petitions, speeches, vigils, rallies, mock awards, teach-ins, stay-at-home, and renunciation of honors while the methods of noncooperation include ostracism, withdrawal of bank deposits, refusal to sell property, boycott, embargoes, strikes, administrative stalling, and mutiny. The methods of intervention focus on direct actions, such as fasting, sit-ins, alternative communication systems, occupation of work sites, alternative markets, and parallel government.

Alternatively, movement scholars classify the various repertoires of contention as *disruptive* versus *non-disruptive* methods. Piven (2006) defines disruptive methods as “withdrawing cooperation in social relations” (p. 23). The aim of disruption is coercing concessions from those who hold organizational power. According to Rojas (2006), disruptive tactics are those aimed at inhibiting an institution from attaining its goals, which include sit-ins, riots, and vandalism. Gonzalez-Villant and Schwartz (2012) further classify disruptive methods into two: *structural disruption* and *invasive disruption*. Structural disruption centers around students’ refusal to accomplish their role as students whereas invasive disruption occurs in institutions in which students have no routinized role to function. They illustrate the distinction using sit-down and sit-in methods. Sit-

down, which is mainly used by workers, allows strikers to discontinue carrying out their work and remain inactive at their workstations unless and until their demands are met. The striking workers' impact on such a disruption emanates from the degree of the dependency of the organization on the workers to execute their work. On the other hand, sit-ins are often carried out by outsiders, who penetrate into an organizational space and attempt to affect its functioning by interfering with the ongoing tasks of those working there. In such cases, the disruption derives from the occupation of organizational spaces by individuals with no formal affiliation with the organization. Student activists have historically carried out both forms of disruption.

Non-disruptive methods are indirect actions intended at challenging the legitimacy of an organization, and they include mass demonstrations, rallies, hunger strikes (Rojas, 2006). Della Porta and Diani (1999) distinguish two causes behind non-disruptive tactics. First, non-disruptive tactics are often caused by the assumption that power holders will alter the way they behave if the movement pressures can impact many people. For example, big gatherings and demonstrations show mass support for the movement. Non-disruptive events are symbolic, appealing to abstract moral principles. For example, hunger strikes are the most common form of non-disruptive method while campus teach-ins are a less extreme case where students and teachers show moral integrity by conducting classes on their movement's cause (Rojas, 2006). Having reviewed the taxonomy of repertoires of contention, I will now turn to providing examples from student tactics used to make their claims.

Student activists' non-disruptive methods. Student activists have used non-disruptive methods in many countries though their social movement impact has not been

studied well. The tactics used in the most widely studied Summer Freedom Movement provides exemplary non-disruptive methods. For example, the 1960s White students recruitment into the civil rights movement provided them the opportunity to learn various tactics of civil disobedience later used in their universities campuses. The tactics of civil disobedience taken from the civil rights movement included mass demonstrations, teach-ins, and effective use of extended student networks (Horowitz, 1986; Laufer & Light, 1977; Obear, 1970; Rhoads, 1998; Rudy, 1996).

More recently, several anti-war and divestment movements in the United States employed non-disruptive methods. For example, in October 2006, students in various United States universities, such as University of North Carolina, participated in writing campaigns to government officials, fasts, fundraising, and teach-ins to highlight the genocide in Darfur. The pressure from student activists made colleges and universities throughout the country divest from companies doing business in Sudan (Blumenstyk, 2006; Fain, 2006; Field, 2006; Strout, 2006).

Another example from a developing country can be the 2011-2012 Chilean student activism. The Chilean student movement can also provide many examples of creative non-disruptive tactics. The protests by Chilean students were commonly portrayed as a new social movement loosely based on the Arab Spring. They were triggered in part by a new policy in Chile implemented by the country's Ministry of Education. The big marches in many cities of the country showed the students' capacity to mobilize and protest. The marches revealed the level of mass support to student movements. Consequently, the government was forced to spend a great deal of resources to deal with the contentious actions. Most of the marches targeted famous streets and

landmark locations. The marches on such locations not only symbolized the significance of the popular demands but also highlighted its conspicuousness given the large concentrations of onlookers. Another form of contentious method was the deployment of collective artistic performances, which complemented the popular marches. The artistic performances included kiss-ins in public squares (*besatones*), marches in underwear, giant puppets, bicycle rides around the presidential palace, and performances based on classic pop songs (Somma, 2012).

Student activists' disruptive methods. Historically, disruptive methods have also been part of student activists' repertoires of contentions. Non-disruptive methods sometimes are not effectively forceful to persuade university administrators and other targets of protesters. Inevitably, then, disruptive methods become preferred contentious methods. To begin with, the anti-apartheid divestment movements in the United States provides a good illustrative example of a whole set of disruptive methods. One of the phenomena which sparked widespread activism in the 1980s was the apartheid in South Africa. Students started to show increasing concerns about the brute force that the apartheid regime was unleashing on peaceful protesters. One notable example was the blockade at Columbia University in April of 1985. Students staged a blockade of the main administration buildings. The main administration building and the scene was described as follows:

...covered with sitting, sprawling, hunkering students, maybe two hundred of them, debating, laughing, reading, conferring and establishing a presence. Armchairs and sofas dragged out from a near-by dormitory offered some comfort. Tarps were rigged up to provide shelter; blankets covered some who slept. (Vellela, 1988, p. 24)

The scene was spectacular, and it attracted a great deal of media and public attention (Vellela, 1988).

For the same cause, students at Princeton University and University of California at Santa Cruz staged a camp out (Vellela, 1988). Similarly, University of Iowa students camped out in front of the administration building, naming it "Biko Hall." Moreover, Harvard University students held a library sleep-in. Students at a number of other universities also held sit-outs. Sit-out is a modified form of the sit-in tactic (Vellela, 1988). For many movement scholars, camp-outs, sit-outs, and sleep-ins marked the emergence of innovative protest methods enhancing students' claim-making capacity. Another interesting innovative contentious action was what students at Cornell University accomplished in spring 1985. The students protested by building a shack using scraps of wood, tar paper, and plastic in front of the university's administrative building. Calling it the "Karl Marx House," students used the place as a setting for meetings. The shack was the first of what later came to be known as the shantytown (Vellela, 1988). After a few days, the university administration authorized the removal of the shantytown, and efforts to dismantle the shack continued without success because students were successful at rebuilding. The decision by the Cornell faculty to join the students in their protest eventually made the administration yield to the students' pressure. Finally, the Karl Marx House was remained standing after the administration was made to agree (Soule, 1997).

According to Soule (1997), the shantytown strategy was employed by the student activists because it served two purposes: to disrupt the idyllic campus atmosphere in order to attract attention and to bring awareness to the poor living conditions experienced by black South Africans living under apartheid rule. Soule's findings showed that the

shantytown protests happened most frequently at selective liberal arts colleges with lower numbers of African American students, and the movement spread most quickly to colleges of similar type.

The Chilean student movement mentioned earlier can also provide an example of disruptive tactics. One disruptive method was exemplified by a short-time occupation of major buildings, such as university and high school structures to offices of political parties, and media centers. Even the use of excessive force to evacuate the occupied places by the police highlighted the indiscriminate repression methods the government often uses. When student activities released the films showing police's brutal actions, the authorities decided to investigate the manner in which the police intervened.

Occupations served a disruptive function because they threatened the financial stability of some educational institutions and created uncertainty amongst academic and government authorities (Somma, 2012).

In summary, student protest and movements have historically utilized a wide variety of methods to make their cases. Beyond documenting the various methods of protest and actions, the literature fails to show in what ways the methods are chosen and the role of activist leaders in making tactical choices. Moreover, studies on the effectiveness or impacts of various methods of protest or claim making do not exist. However, social movement scholars have argued on the merits and demerits of disruptive methods and non-disruptive methods. For example, Gamson (1975) argued that violent protest was actually effective. Many sociologists (e.g., Gamson, 1975; Piven & Cloward, 1977), who subscribe to logical rationality, have made a case for the efficacy of disruption, the archetypical expression of challenging groups. Others (e.g., Cress &

Snow, 2000) argue that the effectiveness of tactics depends on the context in which claims are made.

Student Mobilization Issues

One of the common themes in the student activist and activism literature worthy of exploration is activist mobilization agendas. A significant body of scholarly literature is devoted to analyzing the issues that drive student activism. The literature shows that the major concerns that drive student activism include campus services, social and economic justice, war and weapons of mass destruction, and environmental degradation. The issues and agendas that provoke students to protest or mobilize vary from time to time and campus to campus. Students in each period have shown different concerns and protested with new emergent mobilization agendas. A complete review of issues around which students have mobilized is impossible. However, I will review the issues that aroused broad student activism and mobilization which will be presented below.

One of the issues that historically galvanized student movement in Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa is nationalism and anti-colonialism. For example, students were crucial sources of movement in the struggle for liberation in many countries. The earliest student nationalists emerged in 1848 in Germany (Altbach, 1969).

During colonial periods in Africa and Asia, nationalism was a key motivating force. Essentially, independence and nationalist struggles were supported by active participations of student activists. In many instances, various university communities, especially students were at the forefront in envisioning an independent nation and culture in many countries under European colonies. Students were key players in the movement (Lipset, 1966). Some of them who were educated abroad provided ideological

clarifications and articulation for the anti-colonial nationalist. In Indonesia, for example, the concept of nationhood and the need for a national language originated from a group of students (Douglas & Bachtiar, 1970). In other countries such as Burma, Kenya, Vietnam, students contributed remarkably in the struggle against colonialism (Altbach, 1989). Even in China, since 1911, students spearheaded several nationalist and revolutionary movements (Tse-Tung, 1960).

Major nationalist movements in Africa had its roots in student activism. Some historical accounts of the role of students during the colonial period point to the fact that students constituted a major force by aligning with nationalist movements. In Mozambique, for example, members of a national student organization, including future leaders of the liberation struggle such as Eduardo Mondlane, Joaquim Chissano, and Mariano Matsinhe, covertly organized “to spread the idea of national independence and encouraged resistance to the cultural subjugation which the Portuguese imposed” (Mondlane, 1983, pp. 113-115). As Gellar (1982) indicates during the postwar period, Senegalese students were among the four groups that played key roles in national politics, along labor unions, African businessmen, and Muslim leaders. Many of the first-generation African nationalist leaders, notably Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Modibo Keita of Mali, Hastings Kamuzu Banda of Malawi, Nelson Mandela of South Africa, began their political career as student activists. The struggle against apartheid in South Africa was heavily complemented by student organizations and their leaders (Adams, Bah-Lalya, & Mukweso, 1991; Badat, 1999; Boahen, 1994; Bundy, 1989).

In Europe, during the turbulent 1960s, students were key players in national politics as pressure groups. For example, French students effectively challenged the authoritarianism of the De Gaulle regime, while in West Germany students organized an extra-parliamentary opposition to the coalition government of the conservative Christian Democrats and the leftist Social Democrats (Fraser, 1988). In many European nations, too, student activism was of major importance, and extra-campus political issues were significant motivating force for students' engagements in contentious actions (Altbach, 1989).

Another important movement agenda for student activists has been campus services and university administration. In the industrialized nations, educational and campus-based issues are sometimes relevant to student activism, but such questions do not usually stimulate mass movements. In the United States, most student protests in the 19th century dealt with grievances against faculty and administrators (Braungart & Braungart, 1990; Brax, 1981; Horowitz, 1986). The issues of concern to students did not revolve around a single ideology or with national politics. Students were not interested in changing society, nor were their political differences or ideologies different from those of their teachers and college administrators (Brax, 1981, DeConde, 1971). The student body in the early 19th was homogenous in ethnicity, social standing, and values. Since students did not have varying political or ideological differences, they were likely to accept the status quo and view college as the means to prepare themselves to be leaders within society (Brax, 1981).

Hence, typical protests of the day were local. While students may not have been involved in national issues, locally students attempted to increase their representation in

university decision-making processes. Students most often protested against authority figures such as the college president, or with town residents (Brax, 1981; Lipset, 1971).

In the late 19th century and early 20th century, protests revolved around two particular issues, *in loco parentis* and the removal of unpopular college presidents (Brax, 1981; Wood, 1974). College administrators operated under the doctrine of *in loco parentis*, whereby “the college would assume the parental role over the student” (Melear, 2003, p. 127). Students’ rights to due process in both academic and non-academic manners were not guaranteed. While students at that time were criticized by the public for their apathy and lack of interest and involvement in national politics (Brax, 1981), there was activism around local and personal issues such as establishing freedom of expression and speech on campus and fighting against the censorship of campus newspapers (Altbach, 1979; Altbach & Peterson, 1971). In working on issues related to *in loco parentis*, a collective identity and consciousness developed among students (Lipset, 1971). Student activists during the 1960s protested and voiced their concerns on a number of issues that included student involvement in university decision-making, U.S. foreign-policy, and free speech on campus (Heineman, 2001; Peterson, 1970; Rhoads, 1998; Rudy, 1996; Simon, 1980).

University cost is another campus issue to which students have shown increasing interest in protest. In 1989, students at the City University of New York (CUNY) system went on strike against an increase in tuition. Students in 17 universities in the system occupied spaces or caused shut-downs by chaining and padlocking doors. They also demonstrated in thousands on the streets of New York City. They full force persuaded the city to rescind the tuition hike. While these actions were among the more publicized,

there were numerous other tuition actions throughout the United States, empowering students through confrontation and struggle (Altbach, 1989).

In many African universities, after independence, there was a significant shift from national issues to campus issues. One of the main issues for students' contentious actions was the low-quality campus services. Often identified as "bread and butter issues" issue, low campus services provided the main impetus for student protests (Mazrui, 1995). Student complaints about inadequate or low-quality food in university cafeterias actually constitute a serious problem embedded in the general deterioration in educational standards (Nkinyangi, 1991). According to Howard (1986), African governments fear that student food-related disturbances might expose the more serious problem of generalized food insecurity. "If students, an elite group, are improperly fed ..., it is a sign of food shortages throughout the country" (p. 124).

Similarly, low educational quality, coupled with Structural Adjustment Programs, was another factor for student protests in 1980s. According to Baffour, by the end of the 1980s, large parts of Africa witnessed "a fundamental revolt [of students] against teaching, poor conditions, unpaid scholarships, rising prices, lack of concern by those in charge and general deterioration of educational conditions" (cited in Munene, 2003, p. 121).

Civil rights and liberty have been recorded as one of the most mobilizing issues in the history of student movement. In the United States, in particular, in 1960s, racial inequality was one of the most dominant agendas for student mobilization (Laufer & Light, 1977). Student protests began with the organized sit-in of four Black students from North Carolina A & T at a segregated lunch counter (Horowitz, 1986; Obear, 1970;

Rudy, 1996). Following this lead, Black college students Southern states of United States, began their own sit-ins and marches, picketing and boycotting against segregation and discrimination. In 1964, White college students from northern and Midwestern states were actively recruited to assist in civil rights efforts in the South through the Freedom Summer campaign of 1964 by registering Black voters and staffing Freedom schools (Horowitz, 1986; McAdam, 1986).

One of the issues that has transfixed student activists in the last two decades relates to labor and trade practices. In what commonly known as anti-sweatshops and fair-trade movements, students have mobilized to advocate labor and trade justices. For example, in 2006, students at Michigan State University, DePaul University, Harvard University, Indiana University, and the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign, demonstrated against Coca Cola's disputed labor practices. These student protesters were part of nationwide college movements to have Coca-Cola removed from the campuses. After protests at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, New York University, and Swarthmore College, university administrators decided to stop selling Coca-Cola products (Walters, 2006).

Still another important issue driving student activism is authoritarian rules in many non-democratic countries and transitional democracies. Student activism, for example, in many Sub-Saharan Africa countries have been credited with setting key agendas for popular uprisings which have led to the overthrow of authoritarian regimes. Some of the issues which student activists raised and gradually resonated across the wide spectrum of society include social equality, political participation, poverty, and illiteracy. Examples where authoritarian regimes were collapsed following student uprising, include

Ethiopia, Liberia, Ghana, Madagascar, and Sudan. It is widely believed that the regime changed occurred mainly because of student agitation and widespread protests (Nkinyangi, 1991).

The Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 were a good example of student activism against authoritarianism. The protests were triggered in April 1989 when a liberal reformer lost a power struggle within the ruling communist party. Some of the demands students made include freedom of the press, accountability, freedom of speech, and the restoration of workers' control over industry (Ziyang, 2009).

Another example of anti-authoritarian student activism from the same continent was the Indonesian student movement in 1999 which led to the toppling of Suharto dictatorship. The immediate cause which triggered student protest was an economic problem including mass unemployment, food shortages, and eventually led to the resignation of the leader of the country and the fall of the New Order government. Elsewhere in Asia there were periods of student protests against the developmentalist dictatorship that came to the region in the 1970s and 1980s (Weiss, Aspinall, & Thomson, 2008).

Demand for respect for diversity and social inequality has also been a driving force for many student activism projects. By analyzing media and newspaper reports nationwide, Rhoads (1998) found that some of the most commonly occurring themes of student protest events were focused on issues of multiculturalism and identity politics, especially those concerning race, gender, and sexual orientation. Solidarity with international liberation struggles, women's, gay and lesbian rights, sexual assault on campuses was major movement agendas.

In sub-Saharan African countries, anti-neoliberalism was another issue which ignited several movements led by students in the 1980s. There were common scenes of clashes between the police and students. One of the issues that spurred students' anger and protesters was Structural Adjustment Programs, which was blamed for the austerity measures many African countries implemented (Luescher-Mamashela & Mugume, 2014). During this period, university campuses were sites of deep struggles against mismanagement and poverty. The continuous arrests and movements brought about what many scholars dubbed the movements during this period as *second liberation* (Mazrui, 1995). Economic issues became a source of grievances consistently spurring student actions. Concerns for the social justice, rights to education, democracy were also key issues of student mobilization (Mazrui, 1995; Nkomo, 1984).

In general, the issues that spur student movements are broad and interrelated. Issues change according to the political, economic, and historical contexts of the country. Similarly, each period has its own unique generational circumstances underlying.

Ethiopian Student Activists and their Activism

The history of modern higher education in Ethiopia is slightly over 60 years. Although there were some traces of student activism during the early years of higher education in Ethiopia, it was only after 1960 that a noticeable student activism began. Analysis of the existing literature on the history of Ethiopian students' activism leads to the fact that there have been two distinguishable periods of activism. One is the 1960-1974, which is widely referred to as a period of Ethiopian Student Movement. There is some parallel between the movement in Ethiopia and the worldwide student activism during this period. The bulk of the literature on Ethiopian student activism addresses the

movement during this period. The second period is from 1991 to the present. Except what is widely reported in the media and publications of rights organizations, scholarly materials on student activism during this period is almost absent. There are several differences between the student activists in the first period and that of the second period. One major difference is that student movement in the first period was mobilized through student unions well organized both within Ethiopia and overseas. This may not be surprising given the small number of university students and the relatively homogenous composition of the student body. This provided the movement a significant degree of consistency and unity. The impact of student movement during this period was widely felt in terms of regime change and its reverberation for the present day politics in Ethiopia. The student activism in the second period has not been able to mobilize and act with consistency and unity. A number of factors can be mentioned for the fragmentation and lack of sustainability in the second-period movements. One major factor is the political constraint on organizing independent student unions. The second factor is the significant increase in the number of higher education institutions and diversity of the student population. One possible reason why there is a dearth of scholarly commitment to study the student activism in the second period is the absence of sustained, unified, and impactful student activism. In this review, I will distinguish the first period activism from the second period on all the three review themes: student activist characteristics, activist repertoires of contention and activist movement agendas.

First-period student activism. There is no empirical evidence that shows the socio-biographical characteristics of Ethiopian activists. However, from available scholarly and non-scholarly accounts, inferences can be made about the characteristics of

activists from existing descriptions of the composition of university students. One possible inference is that student activists were mainly male, in their 20s, come from more privileged rural and low socio-economic status. This inference is possible from what Darch (1976) states about the general characteristics of Haile Selassie I University: (1) university students were considerably older than their Western counterparts; (2) a large proportion of them were drawn from lower social strata; (3) they were predominantly born in rural areas, but moved to the cities and towns for their secondary education. Such a characterization of the general student population can be tentatively used to characterize the student activists in the absence of empirical evidence focusing on the socio-demographic features of activists. However, Zewde (2014) argues that most student activists were from the countryside. In addition, he points out that despite the presence of some female activists, no female student was able to make it to the student leadership roles.

The ideological orientation of student activists during the first-period was widely discussed in the literature (e.g., Balsvik, 1979; Lemma, 1979; Zewde, 2014). The most noticeable ideology of students during the first period was their attraction to leftist orientations. According to Balsvik (1976), student publications extensively made references to left-leaning sources. Frequent references to and "quotations from Marx, Engels, Lenin, Mao, Fanon and Che Guevara left no one in doubt as to the ideological inspiration of the movement" (p. 443). According to Lemma (1979, p. 38), the emergence of Marxist ideology as a dominant world outlook within the Ethiopian student movement could be dated as late as the 1960s. Student publications were explicitly full of anti-

imperialist articulations. He identifies evidence of students' anti-imperialist tendencies as follows:

In January 1968 during Vice President Humphrey's visit, Addis Ababa University students protested the US role in Vietnam by hanging President Johnson in effigy, chanting slogans, and carrying anti-American signs. The anti-fashion shows demonstration of March 1968 was evidently opposed to cultural imperialism and to the lopsided development in the country associated with it. The following year, 1969, both university, and high school students specifically demanded the expulsion of the U. S Peace Corps.... Also, the students stoned the Peace Corps headquarters in Addis Ababa and lobbed gasoline bombs into the United States Embassy Compound. (1979, p. 38)

Student activists' repertoires of contention in the first period range from absolute non-disruptive methods to militancy. Student activists used both disruptive and non-disruptive methods to make their claims and move their agendas forward. To begin with the non-disruptive methods in the first-period movement, the most prominent method was awareness raising through various forms of the student press. For example, student papers featured articles on issues that were central to the student movements.

As early as 1952, only a year after the founding of UCAA, three students... spearheaded a one-page fortnightly dubbed *Writers Club*. But this did not last more than a year (UCJ.1). This was followed by University College Calls in 1956/57....UC Calls gave way to the UCAA Newsletter. (Zewde, 2014, p. 78)

The appearance of a radical paper did not happen until 1959 when a Kenyan activist student Omogi Caleb started the *Campus Star*. "The most famous and enduring student paper of the home based student movement, *News and Views*, had its first issue in 1959" (Zewde, 2014, p. 79). Other publications which were launched in the second half of 1960s were *Challenge* and *Struggle*. These publications were instrumental in featuring key debates in relation to the direction and strategies of student movements. The most

noticeable and often cited article on the issues of ethnic rights (nations and nationalities self-determination) was “On the Question of Nationalities in Ethiopia,” which was featured in the November 17, 1969 *Struggle* (Zewde, 2014).

The most common form of non-disruptive method was submission of petitions to government and university bodies. For example, as Lemma (1979) states, students put pressure on the government by submitting a long list of petition on March 1969:

...university’s students in the capital presented to the government a long list of demands comprising the abolition of fees from the public educational system (tuition had always been free), a larger educational budget, a cut in public expenditures for embassies, banquets and ministerial salaries and travel, the firing of unpopular Minister of Education, Akale Work Habte Wold, and the expulsion of U.S Peace Corps teachers. Students decided to boycott classes until their demands were met. (p. 35)

Forging some informal alliances and showing solidarity with other groups was another feature of the students’ repertoire of contention. Students had some relationships with other activists at least at the level of public protest. For example, a milestone stage in the student movement tactic was reached in 1974, when students merged with other popular movements. On February 18, for example, they joined several social and occupational groups, such as teachers, taxi drivers, the unemployed, and others in the streets of the capita in street demonstrations against the government. Determined to see the end of the monarchy and to attain their goal, students assisted almost any other group openly opposing the status quo (Lemma, 1979).

Balsvik (1979) also suggests that students also had some relationships with clandestine movements. She states that “pamphlets also spoke about the existence of a Revolutionary Ethiopian National Movement, implying that the existence of a formal

connection and solidarity between groups that opposed the government and the student and peasant masses” (p. 445).

Disruptive methods were also used, including class boycotts, occupations, and demonstrations. In the history of Ethiopian student movement, two demonstrations were frequently cited in the literature. One was the 1960 coup support demonstration which began when General Mengistu Neway, coup leader, personally appealed to university students to demonstrate in support of the coup’s leader’s objectives. In the first demonstration of its kind in Ethiopia, university students came out in full strength with slogans written in Amharic, Arabic, and English, denouncing the Emperor and calling for the destruction of the feudal institutions in Ethiopia. “The December coup attempt not only succeeded in removing the myth of imperial invincibility but also marked the birth of a new organization—the Ethiopian Student Movement” (Asres, 1990, p. 76).

The February 25, 1965 “Land to the Tiller” demonstration (Balsvik, 1979; Greenfield, 1965; Zewde, 2014) was another major contention in the first period. The demonstration covered a wide area from the parliament, where they submitted a petition, and then across the city, including the two major commercial centers—Mercato and Piazza. The public viewed them with a mixture of enthusiastic approval and bemusement (Balsvik, 1985). In addition, in February 1974, students joined taxi drivers who marched in the streets and stoned public buses in protest of a high price for gasoline (Lemma, 1979).

Disruptive methods were also part of the students’ repertoires of contention. The most widely reported disruptive method was occupation of key buildings and public spaces. For example, in March 1969, the Ethiopian Students Association in North

America occupied the Ethiopian embassy in Washington D.C. (Asres, 1990; Zewde, 2014). The killing of Tilahun Gizaw, a leading student activist, spurred students to occupy embassy offices in Moscow, London, and Stockholm in December 1969 (Zewde, 2014; Lemma, 1979). Students on some occasions resorted to violent actions including the throwing of eggs on March 30, 1968 when they opposed a fashion show on campus (Lemma, 1979). The disruptive method reached its apex when radical student activists hijack Ethiopian Airlines planes bound for Sudan. "In Ethiopia itself, the summer of 1969 witnessed an event that pushed student militancy to unprecedented and spectacular level. This was the hijacking on 11 August of an Ethiopian Airlines plane on a domestic flight" (Zewde, 2014, pp.164-165). "Yet there were to be more hijackings even after the release of all detainees in September, including one in December 1972 in which one of the released detainees, Walelign Mekonnen took a leading part" (p. 165).

The activists in the first-period movement protested the government on several agendas. They challenged the regime on many movement agenda levels. The most popular agenda which mobilized a great number of students was land reform. It was one of the earliest movement agendas. In 1965, students took to the streets of Addis Ababa demanding ownership rights for impoverished tenant farmers. It was the second largest demonstration. The first was in 1960 after the failed coup (Zewde, 2010). The demonstration was preceded by a general meeting in the dining hall, where the University College Union president Baro Tumsa urged the assembled students to mobilize for the cause of social change. Another student activist called Berhane Meskel Redda urged the gathered students to rise up in courage as the students who demonstrated in support of the 1960 coup did. The oratorical persuasion of these two activists were instrumental in

persuading students for a second historical demonstration that took the students first to the parliament, where they submitted a petition, and then across the city, including the major commercial centers (Balsvik, 1985; Zwede, 2014).

Another movement agenda was the question of ethnic rights—the rights of nations and nationalities in Ethiopia. This reached its apex in 1969 when Walelign wrote an article on the self-determination rights of the nations and nationalities in Ethiopia in 1969. The issue of ethnic rights had both mobilizing and dividing effects because the less progressive section of the students rejected the notion of self-determination.

Anti-poverty and pro-poor agendas were also central to their movements. In 1966, for example, students condemned the conditions of in Shola Camp. This camp was located outside Addis Ababa and was used to keep beggars and vagrants during state visits (Darch, 1976). Moreover, students protested several social, religious and state practices which they thought contributed to the impoverished living condition of the society. For example, the Ethiopian student Union in Europe held its 5th annual conference in 1965 in Vienna and condemned various practices associated with Orthodox Church, feudalism, the imperial family, the nobility, and the landed gentry. The union advocated the establishment of independent trade unions and land reform (Darch, 1976). Other issues which triggered students' condemnations and action in March 1968 relate to income tax and school fees. Students also opposed a fashion show which took place at Haile Selassie I University which became a factor for police-student confrontations.

Education was also another agenda for spurring student protests. A good example was the December 1968-69 protest in relation to education reform, Peace Corps, and end to the political and military elites extravagant lifestyle (Darch, 1976).

Campus service grievances were also among the issues, which spurred protest by students in the first period. For example, students protested against unpopular lecturers in 1970, demanded repeal of Title V, return to control of the coffee bar and duplication machines that had been confiscated before. In semesters of 1971-72 students boycotted classes in protest of the non-recognition of Muslim religious holidays (Darch, 1974).

Similarly, the Wollo famine, which killed over two million people in two provinces, was a historic issue that spurred a series of protests. Students were infuriated by Emperor Haile Sellasie who deliberately hid the famine from the public and international communities. In response, students took pictures of the people who were affected by the famines in Wollo and Lasta, and showed them to the public during the demonstrations in the streets of Addis Ababa (Tsfagiorgis, 2008).

The first-period student activism can be summed in what Zewde (2010) spells out as the consequences of the first-period student movement. One consequence was the demise of the imperial regime. The second consequence was the radicalization of the Derg, including the fateful adoption of Marxist-Leninist ideology, induced by the ascendancy of the left before and during the revolution. Third, two leftist organizations, namely the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party and Me'ison, were direct outgrowths of the student movement. Fourth was the birth of Tigray People's Liberation Front, which is the dominant force behind the current dispensation had its genesis on the fringes of that movement. Fifth, the Eritrean liberation movement developed in constant interaction—at both the ideological and organizational levels—with the student movement and the leftist organizations that grew out of it. Last, some of the major ethno-nationalist organizations, notably the Oromo Liberation Front, in part got not only their ideological inspiration but

also their leadership from the movement.

Second-period student activism. A return of student activism was witnessed after 1991 (Shinn & Ofcansky, 2013). This year marks the beginning of another phase in the history of Ethiopian student activism. The activism that supervened can possibly be called *second-period* student activism. The student activism during this period has been largely based on protests that erupt whenever issues emerge and conditions allow for protesting. The dearth of scholarly materials makes it difficult to provide relevant literature on the characteristics of student activists during this period. However, their issues and contention strategies will be discussed below based on information drawn from non-scholarly sources.

The movement agendas in the second period of students protest tend to focus on group identity, student rights, and campus services. One of the earliest student contentious actions after 15 years of hibernation was opposition to the executions Derg carried out on top military generals. In 1990, Addis Ababa University students voiced their anger against the Derg regime when 13 generals were executed because of their alleged involvement in the unsuccessful coup attempt. According to Ahmed (2006), students were outraged by the execution. In March 1990, Addis Ababa University students were once again in action when they supported the new economic policy the government announced to circumvent the looming public discontent with the war in the north and poverty. Students delightedly demonstrated on the streets of the capitals. It was rare to see much youthful energy and joy displayed in public (Balsvik, 2003). Literally, student's excitement about the new economic policy was a policy support. Although they were seemingly in support of the government's reluctant move towards a free market, but

their demonstration was effectively against its dismal economic situation. The government, too, watched students reemerging interest in politics suspiciously. The government, because it was besieged by rapidly advancing rebels from the north, had to show tolerance to students who would soon join the army in the war against the rebels (Ahmed, 2006).

The third issue during the second period which ignited the January 4, 1993 student protest relates to Eritrea, which fought for thirty years to secede from Ethiopia. The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), jointly with Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), defeated Derg. Upon the conclusion of the war, EPRDF formally agreed with EPLF to hold a referendum in Eritrea to legitimize the secession of Eritrea from Ethiopia. The UN Secretary General was also invited to visit Eritrea prior to the referendum. Addis Ababa University students, who from the very beginning were unsympathetic to both EPLF and EPRDF, opposed the referendum and took to the streets in protest. The demonstration resulted in the death and arrest of students and subsequent closure of the university (Human Rights Watch, 2003).

After four years of student inaction, in March 1997, students of the university protested against the redistribution of land in the Amhara regional state. The students claimed it was an unjust redistribution of land (Ahmed, 2006; Balsvik, 2003). This showed a significant shift in students' attitude about Ethiopian politics. The 1997 Addis Ababa University protest shifted attention from a national issue to a regional issue. In subsequent years, Oromo students echoed the same regional sentiment by protesting several regional policies and practices. For example, for almost six months in 2000, Oromo students took the center stage of student activism when they protested the

apparent silence of the government regarding the largest wildfire in Oromia and the arrests of their colleagues who protested the government's failure to extinguish forest fires. Similarly, students from Oromia opposed the decision to relocate the capital of Oromia state from Addis Ababa to Adama (Human Rights Watch, 2004).

Campus and administrative issues were also among the movement agendas that ignited student protest in universities. Almost every year, students have demanded improved cafeteria meals, library services, and dormitory facilities. In 2000/01 academic year, Haramaya University students opposed the Ministry of Education's decision to change the degree to be offered from B.Sc. /B.A to B.Ed. One of the largest student protests in the history of Ethiopian students was the 2001 Addis Ababa University student demand for independent student union and student press. It seemed at this time that Addis Ababa University students regained their traditional political activism when they demanded increased freedom to organize and self-express (Balsvik, 2003). To assert their independence, a new student paper, *Helina*, was published and circulated at least once.

After 3 years of apparent silence, in July 2005, Addis Ababa University students protested against what they called vote rigging by the ruling party (New York Times, 2005).

One of the negative marks of student politics in the second-period was interethnic conflicts among students. Students from the main ethnic groups, namely Oromo, Amhara, and Tigray have clashed multiple times, diminishing the chance for co-existence among students who belong to different ethnic groups. For example, in May 2008, Oromo-Tigray students clashed on Addis Ababa University campus. Again, in January 2013

Oromo-Tigray students clashed on the same campus. Similarly, Oromo students have clashed with Tigray students on Haramaya University and Jimma University campuses. Such conflicts were symptomatic of the deep divides and fragmentation among students. In consequence, progressive national agendas have been undermined.

Ethnic grievances have also manifested themselves in various forms on university campuses. For example, Oromo students have continued to make claims and demands for increased recognition and freedom. Despite the state's brutality in cracking down on organized actions, students have impressively shown persistence. Several campus level protests have continued in many public universities located within Oromia (see reports of Global Coalition for the Protection of Education, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2014).

Freedom of worship is another issue that has triggered university students' protest in the second period. Since 2012, university student actions have been running along religious patterns. In particular, Muslim students in various universities have showed great resolve to resist restrictions on mass worships and gatherings. For example, in October 2013, Debre Markos University and Bahr Dar University students demanded freedom of worship (EthioTube, 2013).

In the second-period student movement, students seemed to have used fewer protest tactics as compared to the first-period student movements. The most dominant form of protest method was street demonstration, chanting slogans in dormitories, submitting written petitions, public gatherings, event disruptions, and defying restrictions. In the student protest against the execution of 13 generals, students boycotted classes and chanted slogans in their dormitories. For three stimulating days, students asserted their presence by controlling the mood on campus. The regime appeared to be

shocked although it intervened with a security force. However, one thing was certain at the time. Students were back with actions (Ahmed, 2006)). Students did not resume class until their detained fellow students were returned to campus (Balsvik, 2003). A Student demonstration in March 1990 in support of the new economic policy was another evidence of the common use of street demonstrations. Students were in an openly defiant mood, this time demonstrating without a permit in the streets of Addis Ababa. Another off-campus demonstration in protest of a government policy was the 1997 Addis Ababa University protest. The demonstration included chanting of slogans and submission of a petition to the prime minister's office although the demonstration was dispersed by riot police (Ahmed, 2006).

In 2000, Addis Ababa University challenged the government when they volunteered to put out the largest wildfire raging in Oromia, in two provinces called Bale and Borena. Students were reluctantly allowed to travel to the locations where the fire was raging. Symbolically, they expressed their resolve and commitment lining up along fighters. Another example of non-disruptive methods can be cited from the 2001 Addis Ababa University student protests. On April 10, students handed in a written petition to the university administration to allow them to have their own independent press and union, and demanding the removal of security forces from university premises. Security forces of the state killed several students. Several hundreds of others were arrested and a significant number of them were apparently subjected to torture. When no response came from the university administration, they went on strike. The subsequent raiding of the campus by government forces, without the authorization of the highest state officials, was denounced by the university president and the Minister of Education. After the failure of

the attempts at a negotiated settlement of the dispute, the conflict spilled over into central Addis Ababa, resulting in widespread violence and uprisings. When the university was closed, many students withdrew and were readmitted after a year. When the 2001/2002 academic year began, the government police on campuses were replaced by private security. However, many other barriers to freedom of expression and association remained intact. In April 2002, almost one year later, students returned to Addis Ababa University having been forced to sign not to engage in protests (Ahmed, 2006; Human Rights Watch, 2003).

Most of the methods used by students during the second period were non-disruptive. The only exception was the 2004 Oromo students' event disruption in which students self-organized to disrupt a cultural show which they said was against Oromo students' interest. Students engaged in violent confrontations to stop the staging of a show in the Sidist Kilo campus culture hall.

The second-period student movement, generally put, has been fragmentary, more identity-driven protests than issue-driven, short-lived and non-cyclic, and institution-focused demands, such as curriculum change, improved services, rights to worship on campus, etc. Balsvik (2003), who has written the most on Ethiopian student activism, summed up the condition in one of the universities as follows:

The condition for creating, practicing, and developing a political culture in Addis Ababa University from 1960s until the turn of the century was discouraging. The three regimes...were all repressive. Opposition was interpreted as insurrection and rebellion. (p. 1025)

Balsvik also argues "the students as a social force, a voice in society, became less important." They lost their political conviction because of fragmentation. For the government it was considered important to prevent the formation of united independent

body. In the struggle during the 2002-03 between AAU and the government, the formation of a student union and a student press remained an important issue. Such a struggle and the government's strategy proved that the university had not become a protected space for the development of a student political culture. "The use of excessive violence by the security forces was always the most important contributory factor in the development of crises" (p. 1027).

The major characteristics of the literature on student movements in Ethiopia can also be summed as follows: (1) most of the studies are conducted by historians providing descriptive accounts of the movements (the nature, pattern, and consequences of the movements); and (2) except few studies, almost all the research and scholarly materials focused on the first-period movements. In general, both the scientific work and the mass media have focused on describing student actions and ignored the actors who initiated and led the movements. This study was an effort to begin to contribute to the gap in our understanding about the actors, namely student activists in Ethiopia.

Conceptual Framework

Since my study focused on the understanding of students' path to activism and political/social participation as an activist, I drew insights from various relevant theories. This was done in an effort to capture the personal, social, historical, political, and developmental dimensions of what it means to become and act as an activist in a particular environment.

Theories and models focus on entry-level characteristics—how activists get into the world of activism and social movements. There has been no plausible model or theory

that accounts for the diverse ways in which activists act in a certain protest project or social movement cycle. The literature on the roles and relationships of activists is scarce. The theories and models I identified focus on showing entry points rather than what occurs after activists come to the world of activism. Thus, my conceptual framework reflects a limitation in that regard.

My framework reflects an interdisciplinary approach to understanding activists. First, the framework draws from a wide range of theories from three major disciplines to analytically disaggregate what it means to be a student activist in the Ethiopian context during the early 1900s-2014. Second, the framework is also a convenient assemblage of theories, models and concepts to make sense of student activism in characteristically difficult contexts where risk is high and success is often seemingly unlikely. It is intended to provide a possible explanation for the three constructs chosen to study student activists in Ethiopia. The framework is generally stated as follows (see also *Figure 1*):

1. Student activist becoming is constituted in the interaction of the workings of social origin, life experiences, grievances, and political opportunity.
2. Student activist belonging manifests in multiple ways including identification with one's ethnicity, as a group membership or intersectionality.
3. At the center of student activist leading are agency and meaning that help us understand student activists as signifying agents and meaning workers.

These three statements are further explained below.

Turning point, Grievances, and Political Opportunity

Activist becoming is a complex process. A proclivity to act in response to undesirable situations becomes part of young people after years of a process of

consciousness development. Activists are different from non-activists in their capacity to act or create a situation for actions. Such a capacity to act, combined with their keenness and sensitivity to socio-political issues that matter to their society, is a personal quality that develops over a long period of time. In order to account for this process, aspects of the *life-course* theory, namely *trajectory* and *turning-point*, provide insights into the pathway activists traverse to come to the world of activism. In this study, the conceptual utility of turning-point was particularly salient in helping to determine the key period or moments in which the students in this research began to take actions. Turning-point, the event or experience that redirects paths in one's change in behavior, was crucial to understanding the development of activist consciousness. According to Blee (2012), it is important to pay attention both to trajectories of action and to the turning point at which trajectories change.

In addressing the question of “What motivates students to participate in social movements, particularly become activists?” social movement scholars have provided explanatory models and frameworks. One comprehensive framework that addresses this question was van Stekelenburg and Klandermans’ (2007; 2010) model, which tries to integrate various concepts, based on the theories of grievances, identity, efficacy, and emotions. Their *social embeddedness* model shows how grievances, efficacy, identity and emotions each develop and interact with each other leading to the propensity to take action in contentious politics. They argue that a shared identity is needed to develop shared grievances and shared emotions. According to the model, when individuals feel their interest and principles are threatened, they develop grievances. The more such a

sense of threats develops, the angrier they become and the more prepared they are to participate in protests aimed at safeguarding their interests and principles.

The notion of efficacy is another element in the model. Efficacy is a strong sense of belief in collective actions. It is the belief that develops individuals' confidence in their actions. They believe that their actions have the potential to shape and change the social structure that poses threats to their interests and principles. For the perception of the possibility of change to occur, individuals need to perceive the group to be able to act collectively on the issue, and they must likewise perceive the political context as conducive to the claims made by their group. Efficacy is often divided into four: group, political, internal, and external (Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013).

In general, the *social embeddedness* model holds that political debates within a movement group enhances efficacy and transform individual grievances into mutual grievances and anger, which translates into participation in collective actions intended to change the condition causing the grievances.

Another source of conceptual insights is Corrigan-Brown's (2012) *participation trajectory*. She proposes the need to look at participation trajectory to understand how activists *come to* and *engage in* social movement and contentious politics. She proposes four possible trajectories, which need to be looked at over the life course. She identifies these trajectories as *persistence*, *transfer*, *abeyance*, and *disengagement*.

According to Corrigan-Brown, individuals' decision to join organizations and participate in protest activities is the result of four sets of individual level factors: ideology, resources, biographical availability, and social networks. Ideological factors, such as religiosity, partisanship, and efficacy, prime some individuals to participate in

contentious politics. Once individuals are ideologically pre-disposed, however, they must have sufficient resources to allow them to translate their concern into action. Resources may be financial, such as income or wealth, or cultural, such as education or knowledge. Biographical factors can also facilitate or exhibit an individual to participate; for example, marriage, child rearing, employment, and aging may all act as barriers to participation. Finally, social networks are an important means of recruiting new members to contentious political activity.

Political opportunity is another important concept that is drawn from the theory of *political process*. Student activists are, more or less, political actors. They make claims; they also mobilize their constituency to persuade university administrators and the state to respond to their claims. The timing and context of their claims are based on political opportunities. Differently put, the scale of their claims and the extent of their actions are contingent upon the suitability of the political environment. The political environment has five elements. These include institutional provisions for stability of political alignments, participation, instability in the alignment of ruling elites or elite conflict, increased access to political decision-making power, and declining capacity and propensity of the state to repress dissent or level of repression (McAdam, 1998; Tarrow, 1998). It does not mean that all the five elements should exist before claims are made and actions are taken.

Agency, Signification and Meaning in Activism

I also drew insights from the theories of agency, signification and meaning to understand activist leading. Activism and leadership can be linked on multiple levels. The first theory that helps us understand such a link is the notion of agency. Although agency

is conceptualized in various ways, Emirbayer and Mische's conceptualization is analytically inclusive and related to activism. They describe agency as follows:

... a temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments—the temporal-relational contexts of action—which, through the interplay of habits, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations. (1998, p. 970)

They analytically distinguished the different constitutive elements of human agency, which can also apply to activists. These are the iteration element, the objectivity element, and the practical-evaluation element. These three elements define the agency of any actor. In other words, the agency of activists is the integration of their habits of action and thought (iteration), their imaginative generation (projectivity), and their capacity to make practical and moral judgments. Activists' agency is central in determining the leading roles activists play in problematic situations where the freedom of action and assembly is highly constrained. These three constitutive elements of actors can help us define activists' thoughts and actions as regards the range of possibilities they bring into a specific protest project. The framework Emirbayer and Mische (1998) provide are useful to account for activists' participation in general and leadership, in particular: their habits of action (how they reactivated past patterns of action, how they maintained routines, how they contributed to bringing about order and stability to the group or movement they represent). It can also help us look at the extent to which they creatively reconfigured received structures of thought and action in relation to their hopes, fears, and desires. It can also help us pay attention to their capacity for judgments in response to emerging demands, dilemmas and ambiguities of evolving protest situations and circumstances.

This theory of agency recognizes student activists not only as receivers and implementers of past routines or antecedents, as also capable of envisioning new possibilities and reshaping new courses of action.

The second relevant notion to understand the relationship between activism and leadership is what is outlined by West (2008) as *ideological innovation*. The success of social movements depends on transforming interests and identities; success does not rest in solely simply packaging existing interests and resources into more politically forceful mixes. He stresses the need for a different level of imagination by leaders. The creative demands of social movement leadership require a different range of leadership qualities, including rhetorical skills, moral persuasion, and cultural inspiration.

The third insight that needs to be considered to link activism and leadership is the notion of signification or meaning work by activists. Student activists are considered as *meaning workers*. Movement actors are viewed as “*signifying agents* actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers” (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 613). Activists’ work regarding meaning making is key to student mobilization and their motivation in contentious politics. The concept of framing is important when it comes to how activists produce and reproduce meaning that lead to mobilization. Snow and Benford (1988) eloquently put it as follows:

...mobilization depends not only on the existence of structural strain, availability and deployment of tangible resources, opening or closing of political opportunities, and a cost-benefit calculus, but also on the way these variables are framed and the degree to which they resonate with the targets of mobilization. (p. 213)

Politicized Identities and Activism

The most central notion of belonging emanates from the theory of identity. When the notion of “self” changes from personal to social identity, the collective norm of participation becomes prominent. In other words, the more one associates himself or herself with the group, the more weight this group norm will carry and the more it will result in an “inner obligation” to participate on behalf of the group. For identity to become the driver of collective action, it must politicize, in which the underlying power struggle unfolds and gradually transforms the group’s relationship with its environment. The more group members become politicized, the more likely they will become part of a collective action targeting the government or the general public (van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008).

The second source of insight to understand belonging is activist group membership. According to Wright (2001), “It is simply obvious that in order to engage in collective action the individual must recognize his or her membership in the relevant collective” (p. 413). One way of asserting one’s belonging to a group is formal or informal membership. In belonging to a group, we can develop a sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’ that helps us define who and what we are by knowing what and who we are not. Activists make continuous decisions with regard to their belonging, which can be psychological, political, social and spatial.

Political or ideological belonging refers to the political party one is affiliated with or ideological orientation one subscribes into. Such classifications as “Left versus Right” or “ethno-nationalist or ethio-nationalist” refer to such orientations. On the other hand, social belonging refers to activists’ inner circles whether it is gender, religion, and

ethnicity. Activists' sense of belonging can also have a spatial dimension. Belonging spatially means having a developed sense of connectedness to a place and a time. For example, students often talk their connectedness to a certain university or campus. They also identify themselves as a class of a particular year. Identifying oneself with a particular campus historically known for a strong activism is sometimes associated with deep political engagement. It is not too well clear whether spatial belonging is an aspect of identity. Spatial identity also includes whether someone comes originally from a rural or urban or suburban locations.

Belonging might also go beyond social, political, and spatial identifications. Referring to the communitarian understanding of citizenship as a way of belonging to a community, Yuval-Davis (2004) suggests:

...belonging is not just about membership, rights, and duties.... Nor can it be reduced to identities and identifications, which are about individual and collective narratives of self and other, presentation and labeling, myths of origin and destiny. Belonging is a deep emotional need for people. (p. 215)

According to McAdam (1993), young people are often concerned with questions of identity, belonging and purpose and often experiment with "alternative ways of acting, feeling, and believing" as a way of discovering who they truly are (p. 93).

The notion of "student" or "studenthood" is another important construct that needs to be deconstructed to understand activist belonging in the context of student activism. It is usually debatable to consider "student" or "studenthood" as a separate category of identity. There is no straightforward answer as regards under what conditions the category of "student" becomes an important political identity such that students organize primarily as students. In some countries, students have desirously guarded their

autonomy, and campus-based movements have been the norm. In others, students have joined forces with other groups, whether they are social movements, political parties, or ascriptive or occupational groups. Rather than assuming that students will normally view themselves primarily as students when it comes to acting collectively, it is important to underline that “student” is as a problematic collective identity (Weiss & Aspinall, 2012).

One reason why “student” is a problematic collective identity might be because of their transitory behavior. There are writers who characterize studenthood as a liminal status (Field & Morgan-Klein, 2010). Arguably, “studenthood” can be described as institutionalized and imagined status. It is an institutional status because it is bounded by organizational frame, which exists within a given time, norm and policy boundaries. The most salient aspect of this status is its being temporary or transitory. Students will build their sense of studenthood over time, in the knowledge that it has prescribed temporal boundaries. These temporal milestones are often associated with ceremonies and ritual, from the symbolic practices of assessment to performance of graduation. All of these organize and reinforce the transitional nature of studenthood. With regard to their imagined future status, Field and Morgan-Klein (2010) also characterizes studenthood as identities in the making, arguing that student identities will be expressed through, and also shaped by, different ways of seeing the future self.

Figure 1. Emergence of Activist Consciousness and Activist Action Taking Behavior

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I describe, explain, and justify my methodology. First, I describe my research design and explain how it fits my research purpose. Next, I explain the sources of my data, how data were collected, and analyzed. In this chapter, I also explain how I maintained anonymity and confidentiality of the research participants and the information they provided. Additionally, I explain my approaches to trustworthiness. Lastly, I try to make the researcher and research subjects' positioning explicit by providing illustrative examples.

As stated earlier, the purpose of the study was to investigate student activists retrospectively. Three research questions guided the study. The questions are:

1. What are the socio-biographical factors and life experiences that characterize the formation of activist consciousness in students who were involved in activism in Ethiopian universities?
2. What, if any, domains of activist belonging could typify student activists in Ethiopia?
3. What leadership roles did Ethiopian student activists play in mobilizing students?

Research Design

Studying activists, particularly student activists, requires a flexible research design because each activist is unique in his/ her style, purpose, and degree of engagement. So a design that fits one activism situation might not work well for collecting data in another situation. Therefore, I sought a balance between loose-design

and tight-design (Miles, Huberman, & Seldana, 2014) in order to maintain a certain degree of flexibility in determining data, methods of collecting the data, and making sense of the data.

The study was a qualitative multiple-case retrospective investigation. Within this broad qualitative orientation, the study adopted a narrative inquiry approach. In other words, narrative inquiry, which is a “study of experience narratively” (Clandinin & Huber, 2010), constituted a major aspect of the research design. Three reasons guided the choice of narrative inquiry. The first was its fit for retrospectivity. Narrative inquiry is used to examine human experiences retrospectively—thinking backward about the past in order to understand the present and the future of the activist world. It was assumed that only retrospectively, that is, only through the stories that arise from their deeds and performances, could activists’ becoming, belonging, and leading become fully manifest.

The second reason for using narrative inquiry was its integrative function. It was generally assumed that activists’ experiences are fragmentary and their ideology and actions are dispersed in time and place. Narrative inquiry would provide integrated understanding of each activist’s fragmentary lived experience.

Another reason for using narrative inquiry was that it is appropriate for studies of social movements, political change, and macro-level phenomena (Riessman, 2001). This is, in part, because personal stories and accounts can illuminate “individual and collective action and meanings, as well as the social processes by which social life and human relationships are made and changed” (Laslett, 1999, p. 392). By adopting narrative inquiry, the aim of this study was to elicit relevant accounts and stories to understand student activists contextually—within the socio-political and educational milieu of

Ethiopian higher education—and to bring to meaning those experiences in ways that reflect their trajectories.

Research Site and Participants

In this study “research site” need not be understood in its conventional definition. It simply refers to the time and location of the phenomenon under investigation. At the time of the research, both the researcher and the research subjects were far removed from the time and location of the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore, the research site was only in the minds (which can be termed as *retrospective imagination*) of the researcher and the research participants. The research subjects and the researcher were not in the research setting—namely, in Ethiopia, during the target period under consideration for the purpose of the study. Therefore, both time and location only manifested as a collective memory rather than a research design element.

Three Ethiopian universities during the period of 1997- 2007 were the sample sites for the research. These universities are Addis Ababa University, Haramaya University, and Jimma University (see Chapter Two for description of the universities). The choice of the universities and the specific time period for the study was a result of the snowball sampling (see next subheading) used in this study.

The research participants were nine former students at the three universities mentioned above. They were selected for the study because they participated in student organizations and one or more contentious actions students initiated to challenge university administration or the state. It was assumed that there are several such students both inside and outside Ethiopia. Neither a definite number of Ethiopian student activists nor the colleges and universities they participated at could be estimated in advance or

verified for certain. In general, three points can be made about the characteristics of past leading activists, type of their activist work, and the scale of their participation that were worthy of consideration in planning the study of activists in Ethiopia. First, they are dispersed throughout the world since many of them had to escape the Ethiopian security forces after a series of crackdowns on their movements or organizations. Some of them, who managed to stay in the country, might have stayed away from any activism although there was no conclusive evidence to support this claim. Second, it is highly likely that the contentious activities they were involved in or they led did not continue for long because of the state's policy of intolerance for dissent. Third, the issues and situations that stirred contentious activities changed from time to time. There was a challenge of keeping continuity and nationwide mobilization. This is the context in which activists would come and go. These three points are important to understand the context of selecting the nine former students for the study.

Sampling Procedure

I used snowball or chain sampling (Patton, 2002) to identify, contact and select the research participants. Using various sources of information, including the print and electronic media, social media, and blogs, I identified a list of 16 former activists who were leaders of student unions, student clubs, and student-led actions during the period of 1991-2014. My initial focus was to establish some contact with these students through email and instant messages. Five of them responded immediately and the rest needed repeated contacts. Once I established contacts with the potential respondents, I explained the aim of my research project and invited them to participate in the project. Some of them agreed to my invitation and also collaborated in helping me identify other activists.

The sampling technique allowed for the construction of a “universe” of activists through referrals and recommendations from those who were themselves involved in various social movements, activist organizations, or were students when the activists they knew carried out their actions. A central element of this sampling technique was the determination of a core set of individuals who could both participate in the study and provide references for identifying others. The process helped me establish contacts with 16 former activists, the majority of whom were living outside Ethiopia.

In the meantime, I gathered information about the activists profile from the media and available documents. Based on their profile and institutional variation, I sent out formal invitation emails to 13 activists. The reason for excluding the three potential participants was to maintain a balance between movement types. Out of the 13 activists to whom invitations were sent, 11 formally expressed their agreement to participate in the study. Two of them later dropped out because of their busy schedule, which made interview arrangements impossible (see Table 1 in Chapter Five).

Data Collection

The primary data for this study were former activists’ stories and accounts. Broadly, both stories and accounts refer to “spates of talk [and text] that are taken to describe or explain matters of concern to participants” (Gubruim & Holstein, 2009, p. xviii). The study required both what Polkinghorne (1995) calls diachronic and synchronic data. The type of diachronic data needed for the study includes events in which the activists participated, how the events happened, and the roles of the activists in those events. Activists’ autobiographical accounts of personal episodes, including their social origin, upbringing, school experiences, and out-of-school experiences constitute the

major body of the empirical materials. Key in the data was the historical and developmental dimensions that characterize the events, actions and thought processes of which the activist was a crucial part. Synchronic data in the form of categorical or close-ended answers were also sought, not as an input to understand the activist per se, but to examine the temporal and causal elements of key activist accounts.

Interviews and document analysis were used to collect both types of data. The interviews, which were guided (Patton, 2002) and semi-structured (Maxwell, 2005), were aimed at helping activists tell and retell their authentic and undistorted memories of upbringing, the formative stage, and their involvement in contentious actions. The process was intended to allow a researcher-participant joint production of meaning (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009).

All interviews were carried out on Skype. The interviews lasted, on average, for 90 minutes. Except one, all the interviews were single-session interviews. All participants were emailed the main themes of the questions in advance to help them prepare for the interview (see Appendix A). In conducting the interviews, I applied what Gubrium and Holstien (2009) call *narrative adequacy*—orienting oneself to generating quality accounts. They explain narrative adequacy as follows:

Do not seek thick accounts when they aren't forthcoming; likewise, do not seek thin (briefer and more concise) accounts when detailed, seemingly pointless accounts, or accounts contrary to fact, are offered. Instead aim to understand quality and other criteria in terms of what is circumstantially adequate. (p. 202)

I conducted the interviews in two Ethiopian languages. I used Amharic with five of them and Oromo with four of them. Using the participants' native language helped the interviews to be deeply engaging, open and conversational. It also enhanced the

participants' trust in the process and researcher. Then, the interviews were translated into English and transcribed simultaneously. While the use of languages in which the research subjects were more fluent facilitated expressivity and provided detailed accounts, the process of textualization, i.e., changing the oral data into *clean verbatim* transcript, resulted in full textual materials ready for analysis.

The second method of data collection was document analysis. Relevant documents were traced and analyzed to enhance both accounts of individual activities and the macro context of student activism. Each activist story was embedded in social, political and economic contexts. Documents such as news articles, rights group's reports, and interviews in electronic and print media were analyzed to shed light on the context of the various contentious actions in which the participants were involved. A document analysis was used to provide *thick description* (Gertz, 1973) to the primary data obtained through the interviews.

Data Analysis

The study adopts what Gubrium and Holstein (2009) call *narrative reality-based analysis*. The analysis focused on both the "internal and external organization of accounts, especially how the two relate in practice to produce situationally adequate stories" (p. 17). The analytic strategy was based on the assumption that both the text and context are essential to present a story meaningfully.

Analysis of the data—both the interview and document data—began with a process of textualization (Maanen, 1988). Stories obtained through interviews were transcribed and, thereby, transformed into written texts. The purpose of clean verbatim

transformation of the oral stories into written texts served various purposes, which Bamberg (N. D.) identifies as *rendering reality* and *transforming reality*.

The analysis of the data—the process of sense making of the stories and accounts—involved two steps which I identify as *generic process* and *interphase process*. The generic process was the initial reading of each interview transcript for a general meaning. As I read each transcript, I paid attention to identifying and numbering stories that I thought would provide an understanding of the continuum of each participant's lived experiences. I also attached short strings of phrases adjacent to each segment worthy of further consideration. This initial process helped me decide the nature of the second and subsequent stages in the coding process.

The interphase process was fine-tuned to sense making the three *a priori* constructs identified in the research questions: activist becoming, activist belonging, and activist leading. For each construct, I carried out a separate analysis. Including the initial exploratory reading of the transcripts, in total, I needed four rounds of careful and between-the-lines reading of each transcript to identify, extract and sort stories along the three constructs. For example, the second reading was carried out solely to identify, extract, and sort stories that refer to activist becoming. The same process occurred for activist belonging and activist leading. Although the process was arduous and long, it was useful to attend to each story that the participants were able to tell. The rereading process was useful to be familiar with each transcript and comprehend the stories with a nuanced understanding of the continuum of the research participants' experiences.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Data collection began after informed consent was obtained from the research participants (see Appendix C). From the outset, I explained to the participants that the research would be based on voluntary participation, including their rights to withhold any information they deemed risky or unnecessary to disclose. Second, I provided them the assurance that they would be offered an opportunity to read the interview transcript and make corrections if they needed. Third, I guaranteed them the opportunity to receive copies of the findings.

Once the data were collected, I handled all research information in a way that would maintain the anonymity of the participants and their information. I stored audio materials and electronic copies of transcripts in password protected folders and files.

In reporting the findings, I used pseudonyms to hide the actual names of the research participants. In addition, all other identifiers of the respondents were either changed or avoided. For example, actual names of other activists who were not part of the study, but who were mentioned by the participants were changed. In general, all precautions were made not to disclose the identity of all research participants in ways that put them at a risk.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Like many other narrative inquiry, in this study there are three levels at which threats to trustworthiness could be encountered in the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation. These threats include believability of subjects' accounts, limitations in interviewees recalling of specific processes and events, representation of oral accounts into texts (e.g. fidelity of written accounts), and making sense of accounts and the

process. Such threats do exist in all kinds of narrative inquiry. However, in order to mitigate the threats, I used three strategies that are known to be effective. First, I used different forms of member checking which involved discussing the internal incongruities of accounts with the interviewees (della Porta, 1992). This includes what Riessman (1993) calls *correspondence*, which refers to the process of taking the analysis back to those studied for verification. Five participants were able to respond to my invitations to read the findings and fact-check. Second, I distinguished accounts of reality from interviewees' interpretation of the reality (della Porta, 1992). This was done through a careful and continuous documentation of emergent interpretations in the process of reading narrative materials through research memos. Third, in order to control the contaminating effect of researcher's bias (della Porta, 1992), I paid attention (through research memos) to my prior attitudes and preferences towards key issues and processes to which the research subjects also showed their own attitudes and preferences.

Narrative Context and Positioning

The context in which the research participants told their stories, the current ideological contestations among the various groups in Ethiopia, including the research subjects has an impact on the type of stories generated and their transformation into constructing the narratives of activist becoming, belonging and leading. In the following section, I show how research participants positioning overlapped with and diverged from my positioning in the process of establishing research relations.

Research Participants' Voice and Positioning

The research participants' stories of the major activist events and processes in which they were involved show significant resemblances although there were some sharp

contrasts that can be attributed to their ideological orientations, attitudes, and self-positioning. The two major divergences are between the ethnic identity oriented activists and student organization oriented activists. The ethnic identity oriented activists used a significant level of “us-them” language. They also tried to construct their stories in such a way that it would help them contend existing narratives about their contemporary student movements.

All research participants, in general, at times, were able to provide their own retrospective interpretation of what they did, why they did, and how they did their actions. In addition, their presentational style provided an insight into how the research participants retrospectively viewed their activism. For example, some of them had a collectivizing style in their language. They used the plural first person “we”, “our” or “our people.”

The use of “we” by the research participants can be interpreted in three ways: the first as a style of interlocution. The pronoun “we” marks humility and humbleness in many Ethiopian languages. The use of “I” might easily be interpreted as arrogance. The second is blurred role boundary. The use of “we” can also conceal roles and responsibilities. The third is as a signifier of a collective action. The research participants’ use of “we” or “us” might be considered as a leadership concept in which individuals show credit to the collective endeavor. Therefore, this third aspect can be interpreted as an implicit acknowledgment of collective inputs and processes.

Their stories and the way their stories unfolded during the interview also posed an analytic challenge by blurring the boundary between stories of becoming and stories of leading. For example, any action or development of consciousness to challenge a status

quo or engagement in a public arena was considered evidence of becoming. Such stories were also at times found to be evidence of leading. Therefore, there were several lines or episodes in the participants' stories which presented overlapping nuances.

Being motivated by the use of one's native language, the participants were responsive to all questions they were asked. They storied relevant experiences they lived. At times, they tried to balance self-critiquing and critiquing of others. At other times, they were generously praiseful of the contentious actions they initiated and led. Almost all of them provided detailed accounts of the major contentious actions they were involved with. However, some were more detail-oriented than others; some were less interested in accurately mentioning dates and names. Their memories of facts (names, dates, events, processes) were generally fresh with minor inaccuracies. All this was reflected in presenting the findings in Chapters Five through Seven.

It is important to distinguish between two types of data in the stories the participants told. One type of data was historical and biographical facts, which I tried to verify through document analysis. With the exception of some personal biographical facts, I was able to verify most of the facts about dates of events, names of activists, issues, places, and processes. The second was interpretation of the facts. Each activist combined both pure facts and their own interpretation of the facts. Of course, their interpretation of facts was shaped by their current ideological orientation and worldview.

Lastly, in reporting the findings, I tried to adopt narrative reporting that balanced the representation of the research participants' voices and my own voices as a researcher. I tried to include direct quotes from interviews conducted with the research subjects

without diminishing my own voices as a researcher. Generally put, I tried to balance the significance of my research participants' voices and my own voices.

Researcher Positioning

The researcher positioning can be seen in terms of my relations with the research subjects and the kind of epistemological biases I brought to the research.

My relations with the research subjects. Except with three of them, I had no prior contact and direct relations with the research participants. My relationship with six of them began when I proposed to study Ethiopian activists. Because of the sensitivity of the topic and personal challenges the participants faced, they responded to my initial contact with suspicion. They reluctantly responded to my invitations. Even some of them did not respond to my emails and Facebook requests at all. However, the initial mistrust and disinterest gradually changed to interest to participate in the research. During the interview, I noticed a high degree of ease and comfort with me which was apparent in the information they revealed. The Oromo students became increasingly confident as they knew they would be interviewed in Oromo and the researcher knew the language. The non-Oromo research participants tried to find out about my intentions and political identity before they agreed to be interviewed. While language positioning was an essential factor with Oromo participants, ideological positioning was a factor with non-Oromo speakers. These two factors shaped the kind of relationship that the participants decided to have with me. Most conceivably, the way they told their stories were also shaped by the ideological positioning and language positioning.

Using the interviewees' introspection, the socio-political and institutional realities of the time, I tried to interpret their activist becoming, belong and leading. In order to do

this interpretation, I took into account what is said in the text, the interviewees' self-interpretation, and the context.

My epistemological positioning. My social origin obviously influenced my choice of the research setting. I was born and brought up in Ethiopia. In retrospect, I can also link my educational and professional background to my choice of the subject of student activism. I studied and taught education for many years in Ethiopia. This background placed me close to students' lives and their challenges, and made me curious to study their desires, ambitions, expectations, and potential. For many years, I studied the different ways students learn and change. I also worked with them as a teacher educator in their effort to become school professionals.

In the last four years, I have begun to look at and explore students' potential from another, but related, angle: the leadership vantage. Such a change in perspective has made me search and question the multiple ways students engage in their society. It was this search that took me to the subject of student activism. In fact, much as I have always desired, I have never been a student activist nor have I been an active member of a social movement. But, student movement and activism has been one of my favorite topics. Quite recently, because of my study of the history of Ethiopian student movements, I have become more sympathetic to student activists and openly supportive of their activism.

My choice of the research topic and the way I arrived at it was also influenced by the way I view truth, reality, knowledge, and the process of knowing. For me, truth and reality reside in each person's practice. It is the reconstruction of what exists in each person's practice that lead to a valid knowing process. I also believe that knowledge is

local. In other words, every person is unique and so is his/her practice. Each person is an expert of his/her own world which he/she inhabits. I also believe that the process of knowing can be enhanced when a subject stories his/ her lived experiences. It is when the personal becomes social and public that we claim we know about a certain practice. That is how I view activists and the relevance for studying their experiences.

How does activism resonate with my belief about knowledge and knowing? It resonates with my belief because I continually think that students have a potential to impact their society. One way they can impact their society is by engaging in social and political activism. Activism is a social and political practice that identifies problems, injustices, wrong-doings, and challenges authority, power holders and beliefs to correct those social ills. For me, there is no any doubt in my mind about the society's needs for activism. The population in which I was born and grew up has multiple and complex social, political, and economic challenges and difficulties, and one way these can be challenged is through student activism. Thus, my research was influenced by my own biases about activism and students, which I brought to the research. In no way did I think that such biases could be pushed aside to keep the objectivity of data collection and analysis. Rather, my position was that such biases are unavoidable, and if they are used carefully, can inform the process of data analysis.

Limitations and Delimitations

This research has five limitations. First, the research sample does not reflect the diversity and history of student activists in Ethiopia. Dominantly, research participants for interview were selected from among those who live outside Ethiopia largely because of the snowball sampling procedure used in the study. The selection of activists who live

outside Ethiopia was due largely to access to the social media and communication channels. Unlike the activists who live outside Ethiopia, those who reside in Ethiopia have extremely limited access to the Internet and social media. As a result, there was no or little information about their whereabouts and how to contact them. Selecting and inviting former activists to the study from Ethiopia was found to be difficult, if not totally impossible, because of the constrained communication in the country.

Second, distance interviews had to be conducted because the research participants lived in three continents and six countries at the time of data collection. This was not surprising given the fact that most former student activists are in exile. Although technology has expanded the possibility of gathering data, whereby improving our capability to conduct more research, distance interviews can hardly substitute face-to-face intimate conversations. Therefore, the amount, quality, and context of personal accounts and stories that the activists told may not be equivalent to what is normally obtained through face-to-face interactions.

Third, contemporary student movements in Ethiopia are short-lived and fragmentary. The most common pattern of contentious action involves students making a demand through writing; the university administration failing to address the students' demands; student protests; security forces cracking down on the protests by arresting protest leaders and the university dismissing them from the university; some leaders escaping arrest and fleeing the country. In other words, students' demands and actions occur within a short span of time. Such swiftness in demands, actions and counter actions has methodological implications. Understanding organizational processes and leadership

in such a context poses some difficulty as such short-duration actions limit our understanding of how activist consciousness develops.

Fourth, there were crucial episodes in the participants' life stories that could have been better understood through second- or third-round interviews. Of all the constructs examined in this study, activist belonging was in need of further data. The current data only highlights the scope of belonging. Similarly, the data on activist leading only shows the research participants' repertoires of contention and mobilization agendas, and fail to show strategic choices and the decision-making role of the activists in the process.

Fifth, the use of narrative interviews as a self-reporting method has its own limitations. The most conceivable limitation relates to participants' scope of recalling facts, processes, actors, issues, and consequences. Memory load poses limitations in recalling and storying lived experiences. Additionally, research subjects might have under-reported certain facts and processes and over-reported others. Current values and political orientation might have also masked past preferences and justifications for actions.

As far as the delimitation of the study is concerned, two major points are worthy of mentioning. One is the temporal scope of the study. The study roughly encompassed nearly a decade of student actions (1997-2007), focusing on the second period of activism in Ethiopia. This period witnessed active student engagements in terms of contentions actions. The second is the geographic scope of the study. Although most student actions in the past were confined to Addis Ababa University, the opening up of regional universities has increased the sites of actions for students. Therefore, the study covered

student activists who participated in three universities, namely Addis Ababa University, Jimma University, and Haramaya University.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS—BECOMING A STUDENT ACTIVIST

In this chapter, I begin to present the findings of the research. Chapters Six through Chapter Eight, I present the findings on activist becoming, belonging and leading respectively. In Chapter Six, in addition to detailing the findings, I reiterate the research questions and type of data collected to address the research questions. I also describe the research participants, the data they provided and the events and protests in which they were involved.

This research intended to examine student activists in the *second period (1990-present)* student movement in Ethiopia. The attempt to understand the student activists during the second period was to carry out an in-depth analysis of how students embrace the world of activism and their activist work through a narrative inquiry. The three constructs that were used to frame the questions and elicit relevant data were activist becoming, belonging, and leading.

Using snowball sampling, 16 former student activists were contacted, of which nine were able to participate in the study (see Table 1). Generally, the period of activism that the participants covered was from 1997-2007. Six of them were students at Addis Ababa University, two were students at Jimma University, and one was a student at Haramaya University. It is not surprising that the majority of study participants were from Addis Ababa University because this university has historically been at the forefront of student activism. In terms of gender composition, only one participant, Fetiya, was female. Again, this was not surprising given the fact that the overwhelming majority of student activists in Ethiopia have been male students. As far as the ethnic composition of

the participants was concerned, four were Oromo (Moti, Nemo, Nebil, and Mustafa), four were Amhara (Sitotaw, Leul, Berhanu, and Mintesinot) and one was Guraghe (Fetiya). According to the 2007 census, the Oromo constitute the largest (35%) population, followed by the Amhara (26.9%). The Guraghe constitute only 2.5 % of the Ethiopian population (Central Statistical Agency, 2008).

Research participants were interviewed on Skype, for an average of 90 minutes, on topics ranging from their upbringing, education, family background, social and political engagements, and student activism. The participants were given the themes of the interview in advance so that they would have a chance to call to mind the facts and processes they went through as student activists. Almost all the participants were able to relay their stories with fascinating details. During the interview, the participants were cordial, engaged and motivated to share their stories. The use of the participants' native language was instrumental in their motivation and freedom to recount their lived stories.

Description of the Participants

All nine participants were undergraduate students when they engaged in student activism. Most began their activism while they were freshmen and gradually increased their involvement. Four were able to complete their studies, while five left the country before completing their studies. Those who left the country before completing their studies were all from Addis Ababa University. These individuals fled Ethiopia through Kenya upon realizing they had been pursued by the state security because of their role in student protests. Among them, Mustafa had even been expelled from Addis Ababa University before he decided to leave the country. These former students spent a great deal of time in refugee camps in Kenya. For example, Mintesinot stayed for four years in

a refugee camp in Kenya before he was given asylum in Canada. Leul, too, lived eight years in refugee camps in Kenya and Uganda before he was given asylum in Australia. Moti, Mustafa, and Nebil also spent some years in refugee camps before they left to Europe and USA. Even Sitotaw, who later returned to his university, fled to Kenya where he stayed as a refugee for five months. Fortunately, Fetiya, Sitotaw, and Berhanu were able to graduate and pursue a career in Ethiopia. When the data for this study was collected, they were graduate students in a foreign university, and they hoped they would return to their country. Seven participants (i.e., Fetiya, Mintesinot, Leul, Moti, Nemo, Nebil, and Mustafa) still lived and studied outside Ethiopia at the time of the interview, and they did not see any hope that they would return to Ethiopia as long as the current government is in power.

At the time of the research, except Sitotaw, Berhanu and Fetiya, all of them were still engaged in some kind of diaspora activism. Although they have already become public faces because they have been interviewed on TV and radio shows, for the sake of protecting the identity of the remaining three participants, only pseudonyms are used to identify all the participants.

Table 1

<i>Research Participants' Profile</i>				
Participant Pseudonym	University	Duration at University	Major at University	Current Status
Fetiya	Haramaya University	1998-2001	History	Graduate Student in USA
Mintesinot	Addis Ababa University	1997- 2001	Law	Student-at-Law Canada
Moti	Addis Ababa University	1998-2001	Management	Graduate Student in the Netherlands

Mustafa	Addis Ababa University	2000-2004	Engineering	Graduate Student in the Netherlands
Nemo	Jimma University	2002 – 2007	Law	Legal Practitioner in Belgium
Nebil	Addis Ababa University	2000-2001	Natural Sciences	Graduate Student in USA
Leul	Addis Ababa University	1998-2001	Business Education	Accountancy Practitioner in Australia
Sitotaw	Addis Ababa University Jimma University	1999 Addis Ababa University 2000-2001(Jimma University) 2006-2009(Jimma University)	Library Science Engineering	Graduate Student in Italy
Berhanu	Addis Ababa University	2002-2006	Sociology	Doctoral Student in England

Data Analysis and Presentation

The main analytic approach in this study can be characterized as inductive and exploratory. Using various aspects of the inductive qualitative analysis, I sought a meaning-making process that was grounded in the socio-political contexts of the students. The three *a priori* constructs, namely activist becoming, belonging and leading were used to differentiate each activist's story across the three constructs. The focus of the analysis was to make meaning of the students' activist becoming, belonging and leading. Therefore, I had to read each interview transcript at least four times: holistic reading, reading to code activist becoming, reading to code activist belonging, and reading to code activist leading. Once stories were identified as becoming stories, belonging stories, and leading stories, they were read to identify sub-stories, which progressively led to the

identification of relevant materials that illustrate each activist's becoming, belonging and leading.

Three of the activists from Addis Ababa University represent the same activism period (1997-2001), and their references to events, protests and processes had great resemblances although their accounts of those events, protests and processes differed. The varied details they provided was a factor in the differential results in the content and quantity of stories regarding each construct. Except for two, all of them narrated about certain periods in their university life because their activism was, in some cases, short-lived and, in other cases, fragmentary.

The analysis of each construct had its own characteristics. For example, *tracing analysis* was dominant in examining the activists' becoming in which I traced the emergence of the nine research participants' activist tendency by examining major developmental processes and issues relevant to their lives. Such *tracing analysis* required me to pay attention to their origin, turning point, issues that they would be attracted to, individuals they were influenced by, and ideological formation.

In general, the analysis resulted in various stories which were a basis for identifying categories and themes which are relevant for each construct. Analysis of the stories shows both particular (unique to each activist) and general (shared across activists) characteristics of activist becoming, belonging, and leading. I will describe and highlight both the particular and the general as I present the findings.

Key Events and Protests

Before I begin to present the findings of the analysis of the activists' stories, I outline key events and protests which the nine activists made frequent references to while

telling their activist stories. The campus and off-campus events and protests provide essential context for the activists' stories. Although the activists themselves described the events and protests, I carried out some document analysis to shed more light on the stories of the events and protests and to establish an accurate representation of the facts included in the stories.

The Bale-Borena Fire

The Bale-Borena fire, which began in late January 2000 and raged for about three months, was one of the major forest fires in Ethiopian history. The fire in these two forests, which constitute two of the major forest reserves because of their rare indigenous species, caused major public outcry (Global Fire Monitoring Center, 2000; AllAfrica, 2000). These forests are located in Oromia. Although the cause of the fire was not compellingly established by all sides, many Oromo activists considered it was a conspiracy to destroy the forests. This fire accident was one of the factors for Oromo students' activism in 2000, which features in Moti's, Mustafa's and Nebil's stories.

The Beating of a Sociology Student and Follow-up Protests

On 22 December, 2000, a third-year sociology student presented a paper in class in which he allegedly mentioned the word "Galla"—a derogatory term for many Oromo people. As soon as the class ended, Oromo students who were offended by the student's use of the word beat the student to the ground. Later, police arrived and arrested some of the students involved in the violence. Oromo students at Addis Ababa University's Sidist Kilo campus protested the arrest of these students sparking a round of arbitrary arrests. The police raided the university dormitories in search of Oromo students, which resulted in the arrest of 200 students. The violent arrest of Oromo students was a cause of Oromo

students protest in subsequent weeks and months

(<http://www.concernedhistorians.org/ca/20.pdf>). This incident was referenced in the stories of Mintesinot, Leul, Moti, Mustafa, and Nebil.

Changing of Oromia Capital from Addis Ababa to Adama

The capital city of Oromia was relocated from Addis Ababa to Adama in July 2000. The decision to relocate the capital to Adama was opposed by many Oromo civic organizations, groups, and individuals. Students also staged protests at various times, including in 2000 and 2004. Critics of the move believed that the Ethiopian government desired to de-emphasize Addis Ababa's location within Oromia. On the other hand, the government maintained that Addis Ababa "has been found inconvenient from the point of view of developing the language, culture and history of the Oromo" (Walta Information Center, 2000). Mustafa, Moti and Nebil make references to the decision to relocate the capital and the subsequent student protests following the pronouncement.

The National Lottery Hall Meeting

This was one of the events which is central to the activists' stories. On April 8, 2001, Professor Mesfin Woldemariam and Dr. Berhanu Nega had a panel discussion with Addis Ababa University students at the National Lottery Hall. According to Ethiopian Human Rights Council—the organization which sponsored the meeting—Addis Ababa University Students Council wrote a letter on February 6, 2001 requesting a discussion on human rights, the nature of the university, and academic freedom (University Of Pennsylvania - African Studies Center, 2001). The meeting was chaired by Professor Mesfin Woldemariam and Dr. Berhanu Nega, who made controversial comments in

relation to identity. Both the process and outcome of the meeting are mentioned in the stories of the participants, including Moti, Mintesinot, Leul, Mustafa, and Nebil.

The B.Ed. Controversy

Following the addition of five schools of education in the public higher education, the Ministry of Education of Ethiopia proposed a new curriculum in 1999. One aspect of the change proposed was the naming of undergraduate degrees for education students. According to the proposal, all students who would graduate from the four-year teacher education schools would be awarded a B.Ed. degree rather than a B.A/B.Sc. as it used to be at Addis Ababa University. The newly opened education faculty students at Haramaya University opposed the change of the name of the degree and carried out protest activities for almost one month in 1999-2000 academic year. Fetiya makes references to this change and protest in her stories.

The Death of Sime Terfa

Sime Terfa, an Oromo student at Mekele University, was found dead off campus in 2001. Neither the killer nor the cause of his death was known at the time though many Oromo students pointed their finger at the ruling party. Sime's dead body was brought to Sidist Kilo campus on April 11, 2011. The timing coincided with the day Dr. Genet Zewde, Minister of Education, met with students to discuss some of the demands of Addis Ababa University students. Initially, Oromo students were reluctant to join university students who were protesting on campus. Once Sime's corpse arrived on campus, they decided to join the student protest, which contributed to the easing of the tense atmosphere following the Ethiopian Human Rights Council sponsored meeting in the National Lottery Hall (Interview with Moti, Mustafa, Nebil).

The April 2001 General Student Protest

On April 10, 2001, around 4,000 students at Addis Ababa University began boycotting classes and demanding their right to freedom of association. They called for the removal of armed police stationed on the campus, for the reinstatement of the Student Council which was disbanded in December 2000, and the resumption of the publication of their newspaper. Security forces raided campuses and attacked students on April 11, 2001, injuring more than fifty students. After one week, a large scale protest—both inside university campuses and outside the university—broke out, resulting in the death of about 40 students. Police again raided the Addis Ababa University campus on April 30, 2001 arresting several students suspected of playing leadership roles in the protests. Despite the police action, and contrary to the government's public statements, Addis Ababa University remained under a student boycott in support of the detained students. The unrest spread to other higher education institutions and several high schools around the country (Human Rights Watch, 2001; World Socialist Website, 2001). All the activists, particularly those from Addis Ababa University, make references to this protest.

Oromo Cultural Show and Follow-up Protests

On January 18, 2004, a controversial Oromo concert sparked violence at Addis Ababa University. The concert was allegedly financed by Oromo Peoples Democratic Organization (OPDO) in consultation with the Addis Ababa University administration. The aim of the concert was widely believed to be a counteraction to an Oromo cultural club being formed by Oromo students at the time who were not affiliated with the ruling party. When the show was about to start, students who were among the audience began to occupy the stage and smash the musical instruments being set up. Following the violent

clash between the concert organizers and opposing students, some students were arrested. The next day, Oromo students protested the arrest which led to further crackdowns and mass arrests of Oromo students (Ethiomeia, 2004; IRIN, 2004).

Presentation of the Findings on Activist Becoming

The findings on the activist becoming include five subsections: activists' social origin, formation of activist consciousness, turning point in the activist's lives, issues and actors relevant for the emergence of the activists' consciousness, and ideological formation. I begin with a description of each activist's key elements that define their social origin.

The Beginnings: Social Origin of the Activists

Social origin—the family, socio-economic, locational, and ethnolinguistic characteristics in which the activists were born into and brought up—is considered essential to understanding each activist's becoming trajectory. With this assumption, I describe the activists in terms of the location where they were born and brought up, their ethnic and language background, family economic class, and school performances.

Leul was born and spent some of his early childhood years in New Era, a government farm located in Oromia, south of Adama. New Era was largely a rural location with sparse schools and communication facilities. Leul's father was a mechanic and his mother owned a small bar business. They had enough money which enabled them to cover their basic needs and students' school expenses. His father attended school until eighth grade; his mother never attended school. Leul was one of the five children who were born into the Gebreselassie family. Even though Oromo was the dominant language in New Era, Leul hardly spoke the language. Leul's parents and siblings could speak

Oromo, though their preferred language at home was Amharic. Consequently, Leul was brought up speaking Amharic as a dominant upbringing language and his chance of learning Oromo was diminished when his family moved to Adama. Leul's father moved the family to Adama, the second largest town at the time, later in Leul's childhood. Leul's father paid significant attention to his children's education, a key factor in his decision to move them to Adama, where there were relatively more and better schools. Leul acknowledges in his school stories that despite his good and strong grounding in elementary school, his secondary school performance declined gradually as he got socialized into the destructive city life in Adama.

Mintesinot was born in a military camp outside Negele Borena, to a family of seven children. He spent the first twelve years of his life around Negele Borena, a small town in south Oromia. His father, a soldier, was only able to complete a primary education. His mother never went to school. His father, because the income he earned as a soldier was not sufficient to support his family, had to supplement the family's income through cattle rearing agribusiness. In many rural and semi-urban places in Ethiopia, rearing cattle was a common practice. The dairy products could be used for family consumption or generate additional income by selling the remnants. His family's economic status could be described as lower income. Oromo was dominantly spoken in Negele Boren, while Amharic was his parents' native language. Mintesinot felt that there was not any compelling reason to learn Oromo even though he was born and raised among the Oromo. Later in his early adolescence, his family moved to Arsi Negele after his father retired from military duty. There, Mintesinot became a deacon at an Orthodox Christian church where he served for seven years. He also attended a secondary school at

the same time. He was one of the best students at school. As a result, he passed the school leaving exam which enabled him to have access to the best higher education institution in Ethiopia.

Mustafa was born in Wabe, which is a small town located in Arsi, a province in Oromia. His parents moved to Wabe after their house was burnt down by Derg when they resisted a resettlement program. At Wabe, his parents began a small family business which earned them a better income than they had earned as farmers. By the Ethiopian economic context at the time, they could be considered a middle-income family. His mother took on more responsibility for raising him and his six siblings. His older brother, who was the most educated of all the family members managed to go to Addis Ababa University for his undergraduate degree. Unfortunately, his brother had to drop out later when he joined the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), an Oromo political front that had fought Derg for 17 years. His brother, who was a great inspiration both to him and young students at Wabe, had to leave the country and later became a university professor in the United States. Mustafa's family were Oromo and he was brought up speaking Oromo. He was one of the few students who were awarded a distinction for their performance at both elementary and high school levels.

Moti was born in Akaki, a suburban area east of Addis Ababa. By Ethiopian standard, he was considered an urbanite. He was from a large family. His parents were farmers before moving to Akaki. Although Oromo was his native language, he grew up also speaking Amharic since it was the language spoken predominantly in Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia. For the most part, Moti was brought up by his aunt. His family was considered low-income. Neither his father nor mother attended school at all.

His grandfather helped him go to school. He was one of the outstanding students both at primary and secondary schools. Within two years, he was able to complete four grades of primary school education.

Nebil was born at Deneba, a village in Bale, Oromia. He was brought up by his grandmother, because his father was constantly on the run because of his association with OLF—a political party at war with the state. Since there were no schools nearby, Nebil had to walk for miles every morning to get to the nearest school. His primary education was at a missionary school, where he also studied the Bible even though he was a Muslim. His father served in the Derg military, and later on joined OLF. Nebil had only one brother. His native language was Oromo, which was the language predominantly spoken in his community. He was born into a low-income family. He went to Dodola for his junior and high school education. He was one of the outstanding students both at Deneba and Dodola.

Nemo was born at a government farm called Anger, which was located in East Wollega, Oromia. His father was a health officer while his mother was a clerk. His parents, both civil servants, were considered lower-middle income class. He had three brothers and four sisters. He went to Bako, a small town in West Showa, Oromia for his secondary education. Both his parents were Oromo. His elder sister graduated with a certificate from a teacher education institute. Thus, he was not a first-generation college student. Nemo was an outstanding student at the schools he attended.

Berhanu was born in Bishoftu (Debre Zeit). Bishoftu is a town 30 miles east of Addis Ababa. His father went to the United States for his higher education after which he served as a jet technician in the Ethiopian air force during the Haile Selassie and the Derg

regimes. His mother did not go to school at all. Before his father was forced into early retirement, the family lived a middle-income life. Berhanu was born into a large family with many sisters and brothers. Amharic was the main language in his family. He went to school in Bishoftu, the city where he was born. He was one of the outstanding students both at elementary and secondary schools.

Fetiya was born in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. Her father had a modest education while her mother attended only primary school. She was born and brought up in a predominantly Amharic speaking community though her parents were Guraghe. Despite the strong influence from Amharic speakers, her family practiced Guraghe and Islamic customs at home. Among her three siblings, she was the only one who made it to higher education. Her father retired early from civil service. In order to supplement the meager income from her father's pension, her mother ran a small business.

Sitotaw was born in Addis Ababa. He lost his mother when he was still a child. He subsequently moved to live with his uncle who raised him. He grew up in one of Addis Ababa's neighborhoods, which was "notorious" for youth violence and juvenile delinquency. He was an active member of one of the youth groups involved in violent activities. His parents came from Amharic speaking communities in North Showa. He was one of the ten children in his family. His uncles' children were all educated, and three of them joined university. The eldest son was an active member of Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) in the late 1970s and early 1990s before he was killed for his allegiances to the party. Sitotaw's upbringing was influenced by the stories of EPRP which were narrated to him by his uncle. His parents had a small business one could presume that he was brought up in a middle-income family. During his school life,

he transferred between schools because he moved frequently. Although he was an outstanding student both at primary and secondary schools, he had to take school leaving exams more than once. He also enrolled in university four times. It took him ten years to complete his undergraduate education because he dropped out and re-enrolled twice.

What Do they Have in Common?

There are four common themes that intersect the activists' social origin. These include low family economic status, relocation, father as a dominant influence, and coming from a large family. First of all, none of them come from a wealthy family. Low to middle income characterizes their family's means to survive. Second, almost all of them came from a large family. Third, most of them were first-generation students. They each had a father who at least had a primary education while their mothers had little to no formal education. As a result, a father was quoted by almost all the activists as the most important factor in their school education. Fourth, relocation was another important characteristic for most of the activists. At one or more points, they either had to move with their family or alone from one location to another. They had to relocate (six of them) either because their family had to move or because there was no primary and secondary school where they were born. Five of them were born in rural locations, but brought up either in semi-urban or urban locations. The rest were born and brought up in urban areas.

The Activist Consciousness Formation Process

The beginning of pre-activism. The nine activists under study had a significant degree of exposure to crucial experiences, issues, and actors before they eventually embarked on their activist lives at a university. The activists went through a series of encounters and transitions before they began their student activism at university. The

following section recounts the research participants' stories related to early life, school, and work experiences that exposed them to issues, individuals, and practices. Only the experiences and encounters that are considered to be potential triggers of the onset of activist consciousness will be described.

Leul. Three critical periods embedded in four stories were important transitions in his life. These three periods can be exemplified by the following stories:

One was the story of relocation from New Era—where he was born—to Adama (where he was brought up). The relocation meant moving from a rural setting to a relatively vibrant urban location. New Era was relatively homogenous and noiseless while Adama was heterogeneous and noisy. Adama was where he first went to his primary and secondary school.

As he was growing up in Adama, it became evident for him that he was living in a poor neighborhood. There he directly observed the peril of poverty although he and his family were better off as compared to his neighbors. He curiously observed with his childhood mind the poor people's daily struggles. Without realizing, he was deeply involved in the process of sense-making, questioning the reasons for the material condition of the poor. He recollects his childhood observation as follows:

As I was growing up in our neighborhood in Nazreth...it was a low-income poverty stricken community...so whatever you see in your area makes you question everything. At the time even getting the bare minimum needs, for example, food, was difficult in many of the households...I remember since only because we had three meals a day, people used to say, we were better off...but in general, I began to question everything...I would say: "why would people become so poor?" So frankly speaking, something began to burn inside me though I didn't know the answers...why people live in so difficult conditions like that. But I didn't even think about the politics since I was so drawn into the city life....

After Adama, he transferred to his second-period life. This second critical period was his joining of the navy, which helped him experience a different kind of group and social life as he met many young people from different parts of Ethiopia. That brought another level of development in his self-identity and understanding of his environment. In the navy, he was fully immersed in the nationalistic rhetoric of Derg. The discourse in the Derg military was diametrically opposed to the post-Derg discourse of nationhood, citizenship, and Ethiopianism. His relocation to Adama exposed him to a new form of reality that enabled him to observe the various manifestations of poverty. However, his experience of a brief military life exposed him to another reality, namely a close-knit community habituated with the rhetoric of nationalism.

When Derg was deposed from power, the students at the naval academy were forced to return to Addis Ababa where they were offered to enroll at a teacher education college. Having completed his two years of teacher education, he was assigned in a primary school in Dire Dawa to teach Business Education. That period was another transition to a different social and work setting. It was a crucial period because he was exposed to a new reality of life, work, and above all, politics, which made him see various social actors with his wide-open eyes. Among others, he noticed how politics excluded groups and citizens who were either independent or oppositional. Leul recollects his experience as follows:

...when you scrutinize the nature of the government...the people who were in charge of the system, you would realize how people come to power through favoritism, nepotism, it was not through merits, or because you are competent. That was the time when I came to know this. So I worked both at a junior and secondary schools, and what I observed was that people who were members of the ruling party were given the responsibility to be in charge of school office, for example. So I thought that was not the right way to good education, good

development...so I became better at looking at such malpractices. For example, there was the old professional association and they formed another parallel association that we were not members of and didn't contribute monthly fees. I and friends around me didn't contribute fee to the new association. The system didn't tolerate free associations or unions. But we were pushed hard to be members of the new association. Those made me see the behavior of the state better. It was a system where there was no free professional association [labor union].

While in Dire Dawa, he also began to be a sensible citizen by participating in school clubs intended to create environmental awareness.

In general, Leul's early childhood relocation to a city life was disorienting and eye-opening. Similarly, his short stay at the naval academy, his education at a teacher education college, and then his teaching career in Dire Dawa, were significant contributors to his development as an active member of society. Such a life-education-work trajectory helped him mature and make sense of his environment although there was little in his early formative stage, which suggests what kind of political persona he would acquire later in college.

Mintesinot. Three stories exist in Mintesnot's childhood and early adolescent accounts that have the potential to reveal the evolution of his political consciousness. The first story was about his birth and growing up in a military camp. Growing up in a military camp meant both an opportunity and a disadvantage for Mintesinot. On the one hand, the experience of growing up in a military camp was unique because the community he was embedded in differed from the mainstream society in its daily practices and discourse. The army had a unique focus on, national discourse, and interaction. His political beliefs and ideological orientation began to take shape in that particular setting and context. On the other hand, he was aloof from the mainstream social life and practices. In some way, such aloofness was confining.

Mintesinot's second stage in his childhood life trajectory was embedded in his story of relocation from Borena Negele to Arsi Negele. That meant moving from a militarized location to a non-militarized location. That move opened up a new opportunity to integrate into mainstream society. Integrating in mainstream society brought a new form of life and belonging. For example, he began to go to the Orthodox Christian church in addition to continuing his elementary school. He continued to be a devout Orthodox Christian and deacon for seven years. Mintesinot revealed in his Arsi Negele story that his church going and serving as a deacon was one of the experiences that laid down the foundation for his activism that fully ripened in college. Most conceivably, the interplay between secular and spiritual teachings shaped his character and capacity to see his environment with curiosity.

The third major transition in his early age was characterized by active high school life. As his stories of school indicate, he actively challenged school administrators in two major ways. One was resistance to accept practices and policies he felt wrong and an imposition. For example, he resisted a new school policy that required all students to attend an Oromo language subject as part of their high school curriculum. He agitated students to resist this policy. The second evidence of his youthful resistance was a school fee. Mintesinot recollected this story of resistance as follows:

At high school, too, there were frequent debates about language: the imposition of Oromo language learning on all students, both Oromo speaking and non-Oromo speaking alike. The school administration was not consultative; rather they were intent on imposing policies on students; the administration should have first convinced students to study the language; they rather grossly made it a required course. They stubbornly implemented the policy despite some students' reluctance to take the course, an obstinate approach to making students attend the Oromo class. I used to challenge this stubbornness of the administrators. I used to argue that there should be a differentiation. Some of them would accept, but they

didn't have the resources to do so. For example, they didn't have books to teach the language because they had just begun teaching the language. But there were also radical groups who would dismiss my suggestions.

The fourth stage in his youth development was when he experienced dissonance between his expectation and the university reality. As a freshman and a sophomore at Addis Ababa University, he encountered various practices and processes that were contrary to his student idealism. The university context he came to experience in 1997 was quite an antithesis to what he had hoped while in high school. One notable observation that Mintesinot disliked was the way students from Tigray were given special attention through access to information and cultural activities. That period was a time of personal dissonance and awakening with regards to what was happening at Addis Ababa University, in particular, and in the country, in general. Mintesinot called to mind the situation as follows:

When I joined university, I used to notice a poisonous climate on campus. For example, each ethnic group used to gather separately, especially students from Tigray gathered separately. I remember the Tigray students going to Mega Amphitheater to party, watch concerts; they got special orientations about university education. They would get special treats; they would be given books. Students from Amhara and Oromia regions didn't have similar privileges. This was striking to me.

Meanwhile, the Ethio-Eritrea war changed the situation in which all unity was preached rather than ethnic solidarity. Mintesnot felt such a move by the state was not genuine, and he even made a popular comment at a student meeting organized to rally support for the war. In response to the invitation to enthusiastically rally around the army, Mintesnot spoke angrily emphasizing the lack of a charismatic Ethiopian savior to rally behind. Here is what he said:

...dying for one's country is normal; Gobena died for his country because there was King Menelik; Alula died for his country because there was Yohannes; Gebriye died for his country because there was Tewodros; there was nothing now for which we sacrifice our life.

This could be considered as an expression of his dissatisfaction with the country's ideological direction at the time. Mintesinot spoke against such a call because he believed the government did not have unity and a leader that deserved support.

Mustafa. Mustafa brought up three different, but closely related, stories that have relevance for understanding his activist consciousness development. The first was his story of being a brother of an activist. He was fortunate to have a brother who was a devout participant in Oromo students' activism. His brother was a university student when he was quite young and that provided him one of the earliest exposures to political discourse. At the time, his brother was a committed activist at Addis Ababa University. Every summer, when his brother would return home for vacation, he talked a lot about current political situations of the country. Therefore, as he was growing up, he was listening to such political rhetoric from his brother and his brother's friends.

The experience of being away from his family was another important period of challenge and self-awareness for Mustafa. This was the period when Mustafa moved from Wabe to Dodola for his junior and secondary education. This time was a significant transition in that he, for the first time, began to feel the agony of separating from his family.

I still vividly remember that the first week was a very tough time for me. I had to cook for myself, but I did not know how to cook. Every situation was very tough on me. I remember that my father came to visit me for four days after I arrived at Dodola. When I saw him, I couldn't stop crying. I missed my family so much. Tears were uncontrollably dropping down on my face. He actually came to see me

and to give me some money. He came on Thursday. He could have returned back the next day, but he decided to take me back home, so I missed the classes on that Thursday afternoon and the next day. So the situations were very tough one during my early days and months at Dodola. But, I knew that I had no other alternatives; I knew that I had to attend school; I knew my elder brother was also educated in the same way; and I knew he already joined university at that time. I was following on his footsteps. I decided to be a strong boy. I gradually started to slow down thinking about my family. I started living an independent life. I started to solve some problems on my own. I decided to become a strong and a tough student.

Prior to that, he also had a memory of his parents' home being set on fire by Derg for resisting the village resettlement program implemented by the regime. He felt life was not easy. However, he soon realized that he had no chance but to be tough and develop endurance while he was away from his family. He gradually overcame his emotional turbulence despite being subjected to hunger and parental longings. In terms of development, it was a period of independence and reflection. This was also when he began to learn how to challenge authority. He, on occasions, challenged house renters' demands and difficult-to-live-with roommates.

Next was another milestone in his early adolescent life. After gaining confidence as a student and shaking off the effects of separating from his parents, he gradually began to be involved in extracurricular activities at school. One of his significant participations at school was in the nature club in which he spearheaded the club's formation and leadership. At high school, too, he agitated students against the Ethiopian government's large-scale wartime military recruitment of young people for the 1998-2000 Ethio-Eritrea war. When Mustafa and his peer group noticed that the government was actively recruiting young people from his school, they began to dissuade students against signing up for duty in Ethiopian army. This was his earliest major political action, which can be

considered an initiation into political action-taking. He was involved both tacitly and explicitly to discourage Oromo students from taking part, because he believed the war was not “theirs.” His sense of *us-them* distinction between the state and the Oromo began to take shape at this particular phase.

The government made a call to grade 11 and above students to join the army. It announced that it purchased technologically sophisticated weapons which require educated military personnel. The government made a big campaign in our school so students of grade 11 and above could sign up to serve in the Ethiopian army. The campaign was led by the governor of Bale zone who later died in Kenya while he was in exile. He came twice to our school for a campaign. My group and I implicitly agitated students against the campaign.

Mustafa seemed to have a lot of such a significant experience that heightened his awareness of Oromo identity and the dominant political discourse related to being an Oromo. Of course, the socio-political reality during the ten years of his upbringing means it was a time when regime change brought a radically different political order in the country. High school also provided a context for exchanging information and inspiration with regard to Oromo nationalism. He widely networked with students and teachers that helped him exchange books and albums on Oromo history and nationalism. He and his friends updated one another on current issues. For him, the pre-university experience put him on activism course, and his life later at Addis Ababa University provided a context for deeper engagements and self-awareness.

Moti. Moti’s childhood and early adolescence life experiences were a source of unique stories regarding personal identity development processes. At the center of his childhood and early adolescent stories were key characters such as religious leaders,

school friends, teachers, and political groups. Three critical life encounters stand out among many ones.

The first was a story of breaking a fast. Early in his childhood, Moti broke an Orthodox Christian fast—a strong tradition of abstention from certain types of food. When he realized he was in violation of the dietary restrictions, Moti had to confess to a priest who was serving at a nearby church. The priest who was angry for what Moti did branded him untrustworthy because of his ethnic identity.

One of the fasting seasons is called *Filseta*. It starts on August 1 and ends on August 16 according to the Ethiopian calendar. These 16 days are observed as a period of total abstentions from eating animal products. One day, I mistakenly had eaten the forbidden foods before the last date of the fasting. I went to a nearby church to repent my sin to a priest. I told my sin to the priest saying that I had mistakenly eaten the forbidden food and that I wanted him to purify me by sprinkling the holy water on me. The priest replied, “Oh here comes the Galla problem!” I was shocked by what the priest had said, and then I have never returned to the church since.

That moment provided a childhood awakening. From that point onwards, Moti was always in search of his identity and character.

The second significant experience that Moti recalled was the story of name changing. Moti suffered similar disrespect and contempt from another priest who insisted that the name “Moti” should be changed to “Abebe” in order to get a cure from the recurrent illness he was suffering from. Similarly, his school friends did not like the name “Moti” simply because it was an Oromo name. Moti kept resisting both his friends and the priests. He remembers his experience as follows:

I was continuously suffering from illnesses when I was a child. A priest came to our house and warned my parents saying that I could die unless my Oromo name was changed to an Amharic name. After that my parents changed my name to Abebe.

Despite the priest's insistence and a peer pressure, Moti decided to keep his Oromo name. In the meantime, a regime change occurred in 1991 and that considerably altered the discourse of ethnicity and identity in the country. Both major under-represented ethnic groups and minorities gained significant level of recognition. That provided Moti an opportunity for ethnic identity development and self-discovery. He was able to read about Oromo history and identity, especially how the Oromo were made to change their names and abandon their language.

Circumstances began to quickly change for Moti at school. He began to read about everything Oromo. Once self-discovery started and he better understood his Oromo identity, he resisted imposition. Not only did he acquire a significant level of self-discovery, he also began to engage others to create Oromo consciousness. He, for example, established a network with other Oromo. At high school, he actively participated in forming the Oromo Readers Club. Among other gains, he developed his confidence in teaching Oromo writing and reading. He taught students, teachers, and even public office holders. This was a considerable change in his personal development.

Nebil. Nebil had a “troubled” and “troubling” childhood experience because of his father's and mother's persecutions. His elementary and secondary school stories show two types of challenges that prominently shaped his development: beings ostracized and leading a burdensome life at early childhood and adolescence.

The story of being ostracized at school was one of the earliest experiences that had a significant impact in his subsequent life. The reason was his father who was on the run because of his allegiance to Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). At the time, the state media was also intent on associating OLF with atrocities committed on humanity in the

eastern part of the country in the early 1990s. As a result, Nebil was ostracized by his fellow students and sympathizers of the regime.

Because of isolation, his father being on the run, he had a burdensome life. Simply put, he suffered from a lack of parental care; this had consequences on his emotional and social development. Not only lack of parental care, but also the fact that his father suffered a lot and his mother had to face similar persecutions because of her husband, Nebil was emotionally unstable and troubled. His instability also impacted him academically and socially. He remembers his condition as follows:

I was under different tensions and pressures when I was attending my high school education. I did not have much freedom. However, I focused only on my education when I was in the school. I had many things to worry about when I was out of the school. Firstly, my father was with the OLF rebels when I started grade nine. He was arrested and taken to prison when I was about to start grade ten. My father was in prison starting from when I was in grade ten up to grade twelve. I had to rise up early and go to the prison to visit my father. The guards of the prison were not always willing to allow my father and I to meet. I remember I was studying in front of the prison house until they would allow me to see my father. I would also read while walking to my school. My life was not settled. I was not focused at that time, but I was attending my education enviously. Most students of that area were not willing to have relations with me because of my father's identification with anti-government rebels. Students were not willing to associate with anyone who had political attachments. Those students who were from Asassa were academically very strong students. They were compassionate to me because of what happened to my father. I was reading with these students. My high school life was limited to school and library. There were times when I would lock the door on myself from outside and enter the house through the window to have the privacy to read.

Unlike all other activists who had edifying elementary and high school times, Nebil's school life was constraining, limiting, tense, and was dominated by a dedication to work hard to defeat the troubles of his life. However, his political consciousness was growing as he focused on his school subjects. One thing Nebil was proud of at the time

was his confidence in challenging authority. For example, in class, he used to challenge the class monitor—a peer leader in the class—who would try to exercise his power on him. Similarly, his nationalistic attitude grew and became stronger.

Nemo. There were three distinct experiences and events that had the most relevant consequences for Nemo's activist life. The events were more or less a reflection of the political climate at the time. It was a time when ethnicity and Ethiopianism began to be redefined in a fundamentally different fashion.

The first was the story of his father's imprisonment. Nemo's father was put in jail for a brief time because of his alleged association with Oromo Liberation Front. One of the earliest experiences that might have shaped Nemo's personal development and identity was the imprisonment of his father.

When I was a child my father used to follow up current affairs on the radio; he used to read newspapers and sometimes he happened to openly talk about contemporary political issues. He was put in jail for one month without any reason. He was the first person in our family to be put in jail for an alleged political involvement. I was very sad at what they did to him. I was a small boy at the time, but I can still remember every detail of his circumstances. Actually, being a small boy, certain questions and ideas that no one was able to answer to me regarding why and how it happened to my father started to bother my mind.

When Nemo reached high school age, he had to also relocate to Bako, the closest town where there was a high school. At Bako high school, he had a chance to actively participate in youth politics. He took part in student clubs, especially in school radio programs. Similarly, he participated in one of the Oromia-wide student protests that were taking place across the region against the regime's inadequate response to the Bale-Borena fire. As a result of his involvement in the protest, he was arrested briefly. Since that time, his political consciousness has shaped slowly but deeply.

Another significant life story that has relevance to understand Nemo's activist consciousness development was his interactions with voters in his native places with regard to the 2005 election. He recalls the time as follows:

What happened was that, many potentially strong opposition parties campaigned for the election. ONC [Oromo National Congress] and CUD [Coalition for Unity and Democracy] were among leading prominent opposition parties that strongly campaigned for the election.... CUD had agendas that concern neither the Oromo people nor any nation in particular. When the election result was made public, I heard that CUD won in some parts of Wollega. That was very shocking news to me because I did not expect a political party that stood totally against the interest of the Oromo people to win the election in Oromia regions like Wollega when there was an equally competent and legal political party that stood for the Oromo people. Then I started to ask myself why and how this could happen. When the university was closed for a summer vacation that year, I went back home and decided to find out how CUD was able to win the election....I asked an elderly person what exactly made them cast their ballots for the party that stood against their interests. He told me that they had no idea about a single political party, that no political party did any election campaign in that area, and that they cast their ballot for CUD just because they only heard that CUD was an opposition party...What I finally found out was that the people had decided to cast their ballots for any party whose election poster did not bear the 'bee' symbol because the ruling party used the picture of bee as its election symbol....It was then from this observation that a big question struck my mind: if everybody takes his own way, at some point, we are going to lose everything even what we have at hand. There was a great doubt about the future of the Oromo people in the whole country for that matter and everybody was asking each other the same question.

At university, the issue was quite salient in his political memory. The election aftermath was used by various ethnonationalist groups to reflect on the pattern of voting and societal alignments. Nemo participated in many such discussions both with groups sympathetic to the regime and individuals concerned about Oromo nationalism.

Berhanu. Berhanu had three significant life experiences that relate to family and school that laid down the foundation for his activism.

The first was the story of being cared for by an educated father and brothers. His initiation into a social and political life began early at home. This was partly because of his exposure to current issues. His father encouraged staying current by reading newspapers and listening to the radio. His brothers, who were also educated, encouraged him to stay up-to-date. They massively influenced Berhanu's upbringing, because they provided him with closer mentorship and guidance regarding his school studies and future directions.

Berhanu's school life could be characterized as engaging. Such an activeness and engagement was an extension of his father's and brothers' considerable support and sustained attention. He participated in school clubs both as a member and as a leader. He tells his elementary school experience as follows:

As I was growing up, especially after 5th and 6th grades, I think I started becoming conscious and participating in activities like the writing club, the tour club in my school. In addition, some of the encouragements my father used to give me at home were, I believe, the original cause of my activities at school. As I told you he made us read newspapers, books, watch TV, listen to radio news. We used to do these things in gain his appreciation as well, especially I was told that I was very active compared to my older brother, so his encouragement was huge. I used to collect poems from newspapers, books and read it in school. When I started 7th and 8th grades, I became more active by highly participating in the schools tour club and becoming a leader of the club, organizing tours with teachers. I did these things out of my own interest and my father's support. So my social interaction became stronger. The first reason for this was my father's encouragement and the effort he exerted to make us close to knowledge. For instance, I remember when I was in grades 7th or 8th, I was a member of the Red Cross club and there was a need for training first aid givers who were 14 and 15 years old. Even though I was 12 years old I was chosen since I was very active and later became the leader of the elementary school Red Cross club. I was this much active. I think my activities at home and school were high.

Berhanu continued his pursuit for vigor and engagement at university. He revealed that his freshman year was not as active as he wished it to be because of the

absence of student engagement opportunities at the time. However, towards the end of the first year and at the beginning of his sophomore year, he found the AIDS Club, which was the only student organization. He then began to attend the club's literary events.

Fetiya. She has two vital pre-university experiences that significantly defined and shaped her life at university. The first was her experience of participating in clubs at high school. Her engaged life in her school's community began at Menen Secondary School when she participated in school sports, media, and girls clubs. She had a broad range of opportunities to network with students and work with teachers in off-class settings. It was a dynamic life of exploration and engagement. She recalls the time as follows:

It was here at Menen School that my outlook about justice grew stronger than ever. I started participating in different clubs after I joined Menen School. I participated in different clubs including the sports club, the journalism club, and the art club. My participation in these clubs helped me to understand the availability of different opportunities in my future life and the choices I could make in my later life. It helped me to have more open eyes for the kind of path I could follow and on the kind of choices I could make in my future life. When I was at Menen School, especially when I was in grade 9th, it was the girls who unfortunately did not academically perform well due to many factors. We then established the girls club, though it was not as such a strong club, and we were able to facilitate certain means by which girls would receive academic assistances.

The second crucial stage in her growth was the one year transition period to university. Although her high school experience was rewarding and beneficial, which was evident in her national examination results, her transition to university was difficult. When the Ministry of Education announced student placements into various public higher education institutions, she realized she was placed in Haramaya University to study a major in the natural sciences. From this point onwards, she began to fight to convince the Ministry of Education and Haramaya University to reverse the decision. She remembers her ordeals as follows:

I told you I was a social science student, but I was assigned to join the natural sciences. I spent my first year trying to be reassigned to my field of interest. I went to the Ministry of Education to ask for an explanation about how I was made to study when my stream of study was the social sciences. The Ministry of Education explained to me that my placement was done by a mistake and that there were 30 students who also were assigned to join out of their fields. They also told me that social sciences were ready to be opened at the Haromaya [sic] University in the following year and that I had to wait and change my department to the social sciences. I can say that I did not have any success stories during my freshman year.

Unlike many of her friends, freshman was not a period of excitement and learning. Rather, it was a period of personal struggles against university administrators and ministry of education officials. Both the lack of responsiveness and negative responses by various groups increased her resolve and intensified her anger. It was during this year that she began to challenge authority on a higher scale.

Sitotaw. Sitotaw had an elaborate and complex upbringing that would present a discernment challenge to anyone who tries to understand the development of activism in students. Out of his many childhood and adolescence experiences, four would stand out quite considerably.

One story was linked to his growing up in an educated family. The death of his mother at an early age brought him to live with his uncle's family. There, he frequently interacted with a more educated family and became accustomed to the distinct style of his uncle's family.

What happened was that my mother died when I was very young. After that I was taken to my uncle's house where I was brought up. My uncle was called [Name]. This means that [Name] is not my biological father, but he was like a father to me. Almost all the children of [Name], my cousins, joined the university, especially one of his sons joined a university in the 1960s. When I was a grade one student, almost three of [Name's] sons joined a university. In terms of modeling for being educated and joining a university, of course, they were my heroes. They had great impact on my outlook about the value of education, especially there was the eldest

one who was called [Name]. He was one of the most intelligent students that time. He assumed a big power in the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP). He was killed in 1971 by the Derg government during the bloody Red Terror. I was a small child that time. My father used to tell us a lot about the roles [Name] played in the EPRP. He also used to tell us very interesting stories about the ideology of the EPRP. I grew up listening to those stories with a child mind. It greatly impressed me. Even though I was not mature enough to become a member of the EPRP, the stories I heard from my father about its ideologies really inspired me. Two of the younger brothers of [Name] had also participated in the struggles of the EPRP.

After attending his elementary school while living with uncle's family, he had to enroll at a Catholic boarding school where he met a family of Catholics. He had to adapt to new daily routines and strict moral and religious ethos. The life at the Catholic boarding school presented to him a challenge that he could hardly survive. In his own terms, he "failed" in the strict moral requirements though he succeeded academically. Unfortunately, he was dismissed before he completed his high school. Then he had to move to Zeway to live with his sister.

In Zeway, he began to live with his sister, which meant another layer of life trajectory. By virtue of being in Zeway, he joined the Swedish Protestant missionary church. This church provided him an early adolescence experiment with leadership practices. Sitotaw narrates:

I was living with my sister. I was also going to the public secondary school, but I had some social involvement with them until the last years of the Derg regime. That was until the last months of 1990. Fortunately, because of my high involvement in the religious activities, I assumed the leadership position. There was a fellowship program if you know about it; I was traveling to different places to establish the fellowship programs at the expense of my formal education. I was the leader of a big spiritual body that I organized in the high school.

Joining the group also meant a religious conversion from a Catholic to a Protestant. This was another period of active youthful life and engagement. Unexpectedly, Sitotaw was unable to score the minimum grade in his national examination, because of his devotion

to religious activities. That was the saddest moment in his life. He remembers his story of failure and success as follows:

After I started involving in the religious and student movements, I devoted my full time to the religious activities. I did not have the time to study for the examination. I took the ESLCE [Ethiopian Secondary Leaving Certificate Examination] in 1982. I failed to score the passing grade. That was one of the major impacts of my involvement in the religious activities. It was one of the saddest moments in my life. My family were also disappointed at my ESLCE result. My failure in the ESLCE gave me a good lesson in my life. It made me decide to quit involving in any religious and student movements. After that, I stayed away from making any involvement in any religious or secular activities for the coming three years. I spent those three years re-attending my secondary education to take ESLCE again. I then retook ESLCE, and this time I scored a pass marks. I joined a university in 1993.

In general, Sitotaw's childhood and early adolescent life was full of "letdowns" and "challenges" characterized by relocation, conversion, risky adventures, and juvenile experimentations. Not the least, the faith-based leadership or fellowship also meant less time for his school subjects.

Turning point: A major leap towards activism. In the preceding section, each activist brought up at least two stories that exemplify typical experiences that were significant enough to slowly, but gradually, trigger emotional and cognitive maturation towards the formation of activist consciousness and persona. While looking at the process was useful to trace possible triggers and formation elements, it is also important to pay attention to the one or two life encounters in the process that might be considered a turning point.

Turning points, events or experiences that have the impact of redirecting the life path, were carefully identified for each research participant on the basis of information revealed in their lived stories. The turning point(s) were assumed to be a significant

involvement either in their personal or collective action mostly occurring in the form of first-time action taking in one's life. They are outlined below for each research participant.

Leul: The discontinuing of Business Education and students' anger. Leul and his cohort were admitted to Addis Ababa University in 1998 to study Business Education. Suddenly, after they began their classes, they were told Business Education as major was no longer be offered. This was the time when Leul began to challenge authority on a higher scale. Leul and his course mates refused to accept the decision. This stage was significant in two ways: the unjust and arbitrary decision occurred to the students as a moral shock forcing Leul to challenge authority at different levels. The fact that he protested the decision both at the Ministry of Education and university administration was evidence of his emerging action-taking dispositions. For the first time, the political and social reality he faced increased his “resolve” to fight it at a systemic level. It also helped him gain popularity among his close associates and course peers.

Mintesinot: Challenging authority at school. Similar to Leul, Mintesinot experienced family relocation which brought him to a new location and social reality. It was at this new social reality that he encountered major changes that forced him to act. While he was in high school in Arsi Negele, Mintesinot had to face new social and school realities which he thought were “contrary” to a voluntary and legitimate process. As revealed earlier, two of the school policies challenged by him constitute a significant change in his action-taking readiness. The first was the new Oromo language subject that was introduced into school curriculum. For him, such a decision was wrong, mainly because there were many non-Oromo speaking students in the school who were forced to

study the subject against their will. He had to challenge teachers and school administrators. The position he took was politically sensitive and on many occasions sufficiently powerful to ignite a conflict. He took a high risk to challenge teachers and school administrators. The second instance of challenging authority that Mintesinot revealed in his stories was his opposition to a school fee. At that time, he had to mobilize like-minded students to protest such school decisions. This period was a significant time in his adolescence, providing him an important avenue and context to think and take action on a relatively higher scale. Indisputably, this period was a turning point in Mintesinot's emergence of activist consciousness.

Mustafa: Resistance at school. Mustafa's turning point in the evolution of his activist consciousness occurred when he was a high school student. His first significant political action was his covert protest to the military recruitment project the regime was undertaking during the Ethio-Eritrea War. He had to stir resistance among students by spreading the message that the war was not an Oromo war. The informal peer-to-peer relaying of information that the "Oromo young students had nothing to benefit from the war" was an important political project for a young high school student at the time. It was a political consciousness helping him make a distinction between "our war" and "their war." It was possibly an important milestone in his evolution of consciousness. It was not only about the formation of oppositional ideology which makes it a milestone, it was also the action that followed such an orientation in his understanding of why the war broke out and who was in and who was out.

Moti: Identity discovery and development at school. High school was a period of self-discovery from the point of view of Moti's ethnic identity. As his early life

experience stories showed earlier, he was subjected to encounters that presented to him moral shocks because of his ethnic identity. Consequently, he chose a path that led him to come to terms with his identity. Such a path began at high school in the form of intense engagement in understanding about his Oromo identity, history, and contemporary political forces. Sometimes naively embracing everything about the new discourse about Oromumma and sometimes engaging in learning about the language, history, and culture, he began to both “disappoint” and “delight” people around him. The Oromo Readers Club he spearheaded was not only a cultural-linguistic project. It was also a leadership and consciousness raising scheme. He attracted the young and the mature, the insider, and the outsider. The period was crucial in many ways. He began to differentiate between the Oromo and non-Oromo, marking his subconscious efforts to define in-group and out-group members. For him, it was a period of epiphany—a period of deeper awakening, making this time turning point in his activist consciousness development.

Nebil: The troubling experience at school. Unlike other student activists, Nebil’s upbringing and school experiences were not characterized by intense actions and engagements. Rather, it was a period of disengagement. He chose silent self-reflections and self-pervations. In part, his father’s legacy contributed to his choices. That his father was associated with Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)—a “brute rebel,” hated by the regime—meant different things for different students at his school. OLF sympathetic students were sympathetic to him, while others, who distanced themselves from Nebil, did not wish to be associated with him in any way. In general, Nebil felt he was ostracized and subjected to isolation. Although he knew the regime contributed to such an attitude to develop among students, he had deep resentments towards both students and

the state. The pain was deep, and emotionally debilitating. However, he seized the opportunity to reflect on and examine his environment. Consequently, he became more aware of Oromo nationalism. He embraced, somewhat subtly and silently, the notion of resisting domination. He gradually became more aware of the workings of the structure of domination and the need for counteractions.

Nemo: Participating in the Bale-Borena fire student protest. Nemo's epiphany to political action began when he was a high school student. The first major action he was involved in was the February 2000 Bale-Borena fire protest that took place across Oromia. He was in Grade 10 at the time. For many Oromo, high school and university activists, the fire was a political conspiracy by the regime to destroy the resources of Oromia. That was why both high school and university students protested against the government's "complacency" to fight the raging fire. Nemo organized and led the protest at Bako Secondary School. Of course, he was arrested and detained for days for this role. His participation in high school protests was a turning point in the emergence of his activist consciousness.

Berhanu: Mindful participation in the Addis Ababa University AIDS club. His significant engagement in student activities began when he was a second-year student. He was an active participant of the Addis Ababa University AIDS Club. Additionally, he regularly showed up in the club's literary nights where he read poems. This was the time when he met other critical friends who later initiated the Afro-flag Youth Vision Cub. This period can be considered a turning point in that he began to network with like-minded students whom he worked with for two years. The occasion was also important in that the notion of pan-Africanism as a student movement was born out of that process.

Fetiya: Fighting academic misplacement. Fetiya's turning point in her activist consciousness development was the year—1998—when she was placed at Haramaya University (at that time it was called Alemaya University of Agriculture). In principle, students who graduated from high school were (and still are) placed in various higher education institutions according to their choices for fields of study. In some cases, as happened to Fetiya, students might be placed against their choices. Such misplacements could have severe consequences on the students' engagement and success. Personally, Fetiya challenged her own misplacement although she did not succeed. However, the process provided her an opportunity to challenge authority up to the top university administration and the Ministry of Education. She was able to realize the extent to which public administrators wrongly subject citizens to detrimental situations. It made her pause and question unfair public practices. According to her stories, this period was when her activist consciousness began to emerge.

Sitotaw: Determined Protestant fellow. His turning point in his activist consciousness formation was the two years he spent in Zeway as a high school student and Protestant faith organizer. He was immersed in a transforming environment in which he studied a new religion, began to work in teams, and traveled frequently to various localities to teach about the Protestant faith. Although he was actively motivated to undertake his Protestant faith responsibilities, the situation also presented to him inner conflicts, identity crisis, and a dilemma. Here is a quote from his conversion stories:

That means I started having the feeling of just like the sort of a man of no land. I was not sure to which faith I belonged, but later it became a must for me to choose one. My involvement in both faiths also created a conflict between the priests of the two faiths. The priests from the two faiths were visiting us at my sister's house; they had the tendency to pull me to their own faiths. I actually

stayed with them for about two years, but I finally decided to drop one of the faiths and stuck to the other. It was after I decided to continue with the one which was my choice that I played a great role in organizing the students.

His involvement in religious teachings was monumental in that it provided him an opportunity to practice youth leadership. He was engaged in mobilizing school students to embrace Protestant teachings. The responsibility made him travel, meet new people, and work hard. In that sense, the experience was a tipping point to elevating his leading capacity.

Attractors and Inspirers. An effort to trace the origin of an activist consciousness in the students cannot be complete without taking into account major issues and actors that are associated in some way with the events that were identified as critical in their becoming activists. In other words, it is essential to ask these questions: What were the salient issues that prompted the students to engage in the various events recounted as pre-activism? Who influenced the activists before coming to the activist world? The stories of the participants indicate there are great variations among the participants with regard to the issues that attracted them at their formative stage. On the other hand, there is a great resemblance regarding individuals who influenced them to be socio-politically sensitive and responsive students. The following section shows how the activists grappled with various issues and were influenced by others.

Leul: Poverty, national unity, and political malaise. Poverty was the first social issue that captivated him as he was growing up in a poor neighborhood in Adama. He became curious enough to question and ponder why many residents in his neighborhood were so poor to the extent of not having enough to eat. It was obvious in this context that

poverty affected his community. It was one of the crucial issues that was relevant for a young student who was becoming an activist in the future. The second issue that arose in his youthful life was the unity and territorial integrity of his country by virtue of his enrollment into the Ethiopian Navy. At the time, the dominant discourse in the Ethiopian army was Ethiopian unity. The 17-year war between Derg and various nationalist fronts was raging in all frontiers. State media would inundate the country's various types of population with a propaganda focusing on patriotism day and night. It was particularly so within the army to boost their fighting morale and instill in them deep and radical patriotism. That had an effect on Leul who was training to become a member of the Navy. The army was dismantled in 1991 when Derg lost the war, but the legacy of the Navy training camp lived with him for years. After two years of college teacher education, he began a teaching career which switched him to a different social and political context. In Dire Dawa, as a secondary school teacher, the issue that caught his attention was the mishandling of public trust by members of the teachers' union. The teachers' union was a highly politicized organization in Ethiopia. There were competing forces within the union at the time. On the one hand, the ruling party was establishing a union loyal to the regime. On the other hand, there were teachers who were struggling to keep a union that was "independent" and "truly" representative of the voices of teachers. However, the regime had more power to "hijack" such efforts. This was one issue that Leul found difficult to comprehend at the time. It was not until his freshman year at Addis Ababa University, when he later rejoined a higher education institution, did he encounter a purely student issue. The decision by the university to discontinue business education as major study was the first major issue that directly affected him.

Unexpectedly and suddenly, his dream to be a practitioner in business education faced an obstacle. He also thought justice was being threatened because of the arbitrariness of the decision. Simply put, he was deeply affected by the decision of the university.

Leul believes he was inspired by three kinds of individuals who he knew closely and dearly. The first was his father whose altruistic life and devotion to helping others were found exemplary to him. The second was the late Professor Taye Woldesemayat who was the leader of the former Ethiopian Teachers Union. Professor Woldesemayat was born and brought up in the same neighborhood where Leul was brought up. The third were former Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party members whom he heard about as he was growing up.

Mintesinot: Religion, language, school fee, and ethnic politics. Mintesinot seemed to be affected in his late childhood and early adolescence by the Orthodox Church teachings, as he was serving at one of the churches in Arsi Negele for seven years. He was "deeply" inspired and moved by the meaning of sainthood and paying a sacrifice for humanity. Considerably, the dominant issues in his life during this period were encapsulated in religion and faith. It was later at high school that he began to contemplate and engage with secular issues. One of the issues that prompted his high school involvement in student actions was language. The issue of language occurred to him when he was required as part of his school policy to study Oromo language although he did not speak it. For him, the desire to study any language at school emanates from free choices. It should not be imposed. The new policy that required all students, both Oromo speaking and non-Oromo speaking alike, to study Oromo as a subject was unacceptable to him. His position at the time was that students who did not speak Oromo

should not be forced to study Oromo if they did not choose to learn the language out of their free will. Another issue that Mintesinot was able to engage with was school fees. Schools introduced some school fees when he was a high school student. It was “unfair” for him to ask two or three children from the same family each to pay a school fee. What he was proposing to the school administrators was that the amount of money parents would pay should not be per the number of children they could send to schools. It was an economic issue that concerned “many” families who would hardly afford to pay school fees. His father was a retiree and paying school fees for all his children would starve the family. This was another issue that prompted his action.

When he began his university education, he departed from local issues and began to engage with national issues. One of the issues he was pondering in his freshman year was the unfairness of the system that would favor a certain group of students and neglect many others. He also noticed a “poisonous” tendency on campus. For example, he observed how students from Tigray were given more access to resources and the manner in which they were materially supported was unacceptable to him. He began to think something was politically “incorrect.” He began to say to himself, "Doesn't this country belong to all of us?" He kept on thinking about this, and without his likings, he began to be ethno-conscious.

The development of his activist consciousness was greatly influenced by his father. Mintesinot generously acknowledged that his father had immensely contributed to the direction he followed to becoming an activist. His father lived a life that can be described as altruistic, dedicated to helping others as long as he could. His father even paid more attention to reaching out to his neighbors and friends at the expense of his

family's economic resources. His father also served his country as a soldier for many years. His father's impact was profound.

Mustafa: Oromo nationalism. Mustafa revealed that the most significant issue that dominated his upbringing during his junior and high school periods was Oromo nationalism. By virtue of the generational effects, both his close acquaintances and brother were highly preoccupied with Oromo nationalism in their daily life. At the time, the music they listened to and the books they read all would boil down to one issue: Oromo nationalism. With the broad nationalistic discourse and lifestyle, language, identity, culture, and nationhood were some of the issues his school friends and brother were engaged to advance as much as they could. For example, when Mustafa and his friends dissuaded students from signing up for duty in the Ethiopian army, it was mainly because they did not believe the war would “serve the interest of Oromo peoples.”

In addition to Oromo nationalism, there was another issue that Mustafa had to grapple with early in his adolescence. One was homesickness when he left for Dodola to attend his junior and secondary school. Like many other rural children, he was a “victim” of the lack of schooling facilities in his birthplace. He had to move to a nearby town where there were schools. As a result, he had to separate from his parents for the time he should attend schools and would go back home when schools closed.

As far as individuals who influenced him were concerned, Mustafa recalled the profound effect of his brother and his brother's friends' nationalistic feelings and actions on his subsequent emergence of activist attitude. His brother and his brother's friends were among the students who left university to join Oromo Liberation Front when the

latter withdrew from the transitional government in 1992. His brother was an ardent supporter of the Oromo population's rights to self-determination.

I learned the idea and meaning of nationalism from my elder brother. Unfortunately, most students in our locality were not able to join the university before him, but many students did when he joined the university. He actually joined the science faculty, Addis Ababa University. These university students were visiting our home when they returned home during semester or summer breaks. The time was when the OLF was officially operating in Ethiopia. The whole students in the country were politically very active at the time. My brother and his friends who returned from the university were talking about many things related to the political situations in the country. They would discuss and conduct intense debates on different political issues in our house. They would bring different Oromo songs, which we had never heard. They would proudly talk in Afaan Oromo. Actually, my brother was one of the first students who left the university and joined OLF when the OLF withdrew itself from the charter and decided to leave the country. They had strong self-confidence. I was in grade three or four at the time and what they were would talk about inspired me a lot. It greatly influenced me. I learned from their self-confidence and felt that the Oromo is naturally great. I was greatly inspired by them while I was still in grade three up to five.

His junior and high school teachers, too, had an important contribution to shaping his attitude and resolve to commit himself to Oromo nationalism.

Of course, there were also teachers in the junior and secondary schools that inspired me a lot. Since I was active, I would privately contact these teachers. We were like friends with those teachers. I just became one of them. I would speak openly in the classroom. I was greatly influenced by these teachers. Our motivations and determinations were very great. These individuals were actually imprisoned several times and suffered a lot. I was also reading books, but I had very limited access to books. I was reading a few books that my brother used to bring home. In general, I was greatly influenced by those university students I told you and by my junior and high school teachers.

Generally put, Mustafa was deeply affected by various issues and individuals that relate to Oromo nationalism.

Moti: Identity, name, and language. Moti became involved in profoundly meaningful conversations and interactions in his childhood. For example, the most

“notorious” and notable interchanges he brought up during the interview were the exchanges with a priest. In this revealing story, the relevant issue appears to be faith and religion as the topic of conversation. However, what was “deeply affecting” through the brief exchanges was the issue of the intersect between faith and identity. Orthodox Christianity has largely been the realm of two major ethnic groups in Ethiopia: the Amhara and Tigray populations. This was the intrinsic message articulated by the priest by “disassociating” Moti from Orthodox fasting. That was what Moti realized, which led him in subsequent years, to distance himself from the Orthodox Christianity church. In general, the issue that the verbal exchange ignited in Moti’s mind was Oromo identity. In fact, other similar personal experiences he encountered, namely a priest’s advice that he should change his name, and his friends despising of his name were instrumental in making issue of Oromo identity, history, and self-discovery more vital. The major issues that he dealt with as he was growing up as a high school student were language, culture, history, and identity. These were evident in the kinds of books he chose to read, the clubs he was enthusiastic about, and the kinds of people he preferred to network with. In general, four issues seemed to have redefined his ethnic awakening: a priest advised him to change his Oromo name, the story of the abuse of Chaltu, a priest’s response when he broke fasting, and his friend’s dislike for his Oromo name.

Lastly, Moti’s inspiration for activism was drawn from Oromo Liberation Front, as a group, although the most powerful drive was his own personal experience and observations of reasonably unfair situations in his life. Oromo Liberation Front as a political manifestation had a profound effect on many young Oromo population at the time partly because it ignited a deep sense of nationalism. It was OLF which stood out in

the post-Derg politics reclaiming Oromo identity and history although it departed immediately from the group of parties which constituted the transitional government of Ethiopia in 1992. Therefore, it was not surprising if Moti was inspired by OLF as a political force articulating the need for self-determination and cultural expression.

Nebil: Parental suffering, isolation, and Oromo nationalism. Nebil's childhood and early adolescence lived experiences reflect more or less the same life story as Mustafa and Moti regarding the major issues that had a dominant impact on his subsequent adolescent life. The issues that had resonance for him during his early ages were persecution, freedom, and parental care. His father's imprisonment and the subsequent burden that brought on his family made him think about ethnic nationalism. On a more personal level, a troubled high school life meant working hard to change his circumstances. Three kinds of people impacted his attitude and political orientations. These were his family (his father and to some extent his uncle), his biology teacher, and his school friends. However, his father played the most significant role in terms of shaping his political awareness.

My awareness of politics and political parties started since I was a kid. My father was collecting and reading different books and documents when I was a child. When I would ask him about what he was reading, he would not tell me the truth about it. He was very careful about the confidentiality of the documents. He was very careful not to violate his party's protocol. However, I would read his notes when he was away. I was able to understand many things about the rules and agendas of the OLF from his notes.

The most dominant character in Nebil's upbringing story was his father: his father's political identity and its implications for his subsequent school and university life.

Nemo: Identity, politics, and imprisonment. One of the issues that the imprisonment of his father ignited in him was abuse of power by state actors. At the time,

Nemo knew nothing about why his innocent father could be put in jail. What he heard from the local administrators was that his father was linked with Oromo Liberation Front. For many young Oromo, it was beyond their comprehension why people would be criminalized because of their association with a political party many consider as symbol for freedom. That notion of being criminalized for showing allegiances to Oromo Liberation Front was an important issue they would continue to understand through self-discovery and political actions. Nemo showed that kind of effort in his “commitment” to know about politics in subsequent years. He demonstrated this “commitment” when he took part in the protests against the government’s response to the Bale-Borena fire. He continued to further understand national trends in politics when voters from his home town cast ballots to vote for a political party that “did not” articulate the interest of Oromo peoples.

Although Nemo discounted the impact of his family on his political attitudes, he acknowledged the role his father had in shaping his interest:

Basically, there was no one in my family whom I could consider as an exemplary for my activism. They do not have any political engagement as such, but my father used to have little understanding of political issues. I remember he was also imprisoned once during the transitional period with matters related to politics. Except that, no one engaged in activism in my family nor joined university...Actually, his imprisonment particularly triggered so many kinds of questions in my mind and those questions grew up with me. After that, I grew up closely observing many people whom the government imprisoned, persecuted, fired up from their jobs because of their political attitudes.

As is evident in this quote, the impact of his father on his political attitude was indirect.

At the same time, the impact was profound.

Berhanu: Civic knowledge and humanitarian duty. Berhanu’s childhood and early adolescence engagement began with his involvement in the Red Cross and Know

Thy Country clubs. Having passed a more passive elementary school life, his engagement in out-of- class activities increased at a junior school.

I used to collect poems from newspapers, books and read it in school. When I started 7th and 8th grade I became more active by highly participating in a country tour club and becoming a leader of the club, organizing tours with teachers. I did these things out of my Red Cross club own interest and my father supported it. So my social interaction was becoming stronger. The first reason for this was my father's encouragement and the effort he exerted to make us close to knowledge. For instance, I remember when I was in grade 7 or 8 I was a member of the Red Cross and there was a need for training first aid givers who were 14 and 15 years old. Even though I was 12 years old, I was chosen since I was very active and later became the leader of the elementary school Red Cross club. I was this much active. I think my activities at home and school were high.

What this quote suggests is Berhanu's fascination with humanitarian issues through his involvement in the school Red Cross club. Regarding inspirers, Berhanu mentions his father's and brothers' influences as a remarkable factor in shaping his student consciousness.

Fetiya: Girls' empowerment and academic justice. Her childhood and early adolescence experience was shaped by issues of gender equality and academic justice. When she was a high school student, her involvement in school clubs drew her attention to girls' empowerment. She was often involved in school media programming in which she gathered materials that were of great benefits to girls. She would gather inspirational stories to encourage girls to be as hard working as their male counterparts. When she went to Haramaya University, the opportunity to engage more deeply and meaningfully opened up, enabling her to contribute more tangibly. Issues of gender equality, particularly student rights to choose what subjects to study, to work as much as they could and chose to, continued to fascinate and attract her. She primarily attributes the influence of her father and mother for her "confidence" and "devotion" to activism. She

also “praises” Assefa Mamo, one of the EPRDF politicians who died a few years ago, for his influence in shaping her activist consciousness.

Sitotaw: Religion, leadership, and EPRP. Sitotaw’s predominant issues included religion, youth leadership, and EPRP stories. At first, he was born to an Orthodox Christian family. Then he became a Catholic Christian when he was enrolled in a Catholic boarding school, where he attended his junior and part of his high school. Next, he moved to Zeway to live with his sister and attend his 11th and 12th grades. It was there that he met the Swedish Protestant Church leaders. There, he was converted to a Protestant faith. The Protestant Church provided him great opportunities of leadership in which he interacted with faith leaders from Sweden and local communities. His engagement with faith issues increased. Faith issues dominantly featured in his daily life. Conversion also meant dilemmas and identity crises.

With regard to people and groups that influenced him, Sitotaw mentioned two types of sources of inspirations. He revealed that stories of Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party and Ethiopian and international student movements inspired him considerably.

Ideological formation: The dispositions of action-taking. The attitude and dispositions to think and act on behalf of one’s group or constituency was an important element of the general activist behavior. In this section, I describe the types of ideology that was being formed in the research participants before they took part in their first activist action.

Leul’s activist attitude began to form in his early adolescence from being a mere observer of social ills to becoming a “sympathetic” citizen whose “concern” for the poor

began to take shape in his mind. Later after years of secondary and post-secondary education, he became a teacher where he had ample opportunities to observe his environment more curiously, not only from an economic perspective alone, but also from the angle of public office administration. It was there that he noticed “arbitrariness” of decisions by public office holders and the consequences of their action to deepening the existing injustices. His father’s involvement in a labor union might have also enhanced his attitude towards advocacy. His activism at Addis Ababa University actually began from playing the role of self-advocacy (when he disputed the decision of his department to discontinue Business Education) to advocating the wider student community at the university. Simply put, his ideology was advocacy for rights and fairness.

Mintesinot’s formation of beliefs and orientations about politics began with student rights at high school. It was at that level that he began thinking about and acting on unfair practices. The very practice of thinking about unfair practices point to the beginning of his ideological formation. It was impossible to formally challenge authority, as he did, without forming some kind of conceptions about student rights. This attitude continued to persist into his freshman year at Addis Ababa University. There, too, he was able to identify and notice a social world that was unfair, privileging, and corrupt. He was unhappy with what he observed at Addis Ababa University. His comment about the lack of a charismatic Ethiopian savior reflects the kind of ideological orientation emerging in him. It is apparent that he had a liberal unionist stance in which he privileged a unity over a divided society along ethnicity and religion.

Mustafa’s early involvement in environmental clubs might be considered as one of his early interests in showing concern and commitment to a cause. However, the most

notable inclination and motivation that continued through the rest of his high school and university life was nationalism. By dissuading Oromo high school students from enlisting in military services, as stated early in this chapter, he signaled the kind of ideology being formed in him. He remained committed singularly to Oromo nationalism, by advocating the need to self-express and self-determine. For him, the position he subsequently seemed to develop was the opposition of the hegemony of one ethnic group over another and that would be resolved through self-disassociating oneself from the dominant group. The ideology that was forming in him might be characterized as emerging ethnocentrism.

Moti's attitude to human relationship and social reality began to quickly change after the *verbal incident* he encountered in his childhood. He, like Mustafa, was forming an ethnocentric attitude because he witnessed how dominance operated in various forms including naming, language use, and historiography. He began to think about Oromo identity from various angles, including from the perspective of his interaction with people belonging to other ethnic groups, learning and teaching his language, and having a faith that was predominantly practiced by people belonging to the ethnic group that subjugated his ethnic group. Gradually, he formed an attitude that crystalized around ethnocentrism and ethnonationalism. In specific terms, his ideology was geared towards resistance and anti-subjugation.

Nebil was significantly impacted by his father's involvement in Oromo nationalistic struggles and his school friends' attitude towards him. On the one hand, early in his childhood he had a chance to closely observe what his father would read and associate himself with. That made him think about OLF and its ideology. On the other hand, the two ways in which his school friends expressed their attitude towards him also

made him realize the range of possibility in what people think and do about other people. The different ways he related to others forced him to think, somewhat unsophisticatedly, about persecution, power, and knowledge. Through the persecution his father endured, for example, he formed a subjugation ideology and refocused his engagement with ethnocentric ideals and goals. Like Mustafa and Moti, he too, began to form a resistance and anti-subjugation ideological orientation.

Nemo was also significantly impacted by what his father suffered. His father was associated with OLF. Because of the changing circumstances in Ethiopia's political order at the time, too, it was foreseeable that he would be forming an attitude and ideology tantamount to ethnonationalism. The student generational effect too was strong enough to lead him to form an advocacy attitude and dispositions which in later years put him in student organization leadership.

Berhanu's interest in student involvement in general without any ideological link to his actions was obvious from his childhood. His preferences and orientations at early age were indicative of his non-partisan ideological direction. For example, his involvement in the Red Cross club meant little interest in ideological orientations that privilege one party over another. However, as it will be shown later, the kind of involvement he gradually chose at university as a student activist made clear that he subscribed to a pan-African ideology.

Fetiya's noticeable "concern" for gender equity began at Menen Secondary School when she was involved in the school media and girls' clubs. The thinking that "girls should be as hard working as their male counterparts in school" had its roots in the conception she developed about female students. She began to think that the social

structure did not provide female students the same discourse as it provided to male students. She might not have engaged as deeply as she should have liked. However, the opportunity continued to be an important thought process that manifested itself in some tangible actions when she went to university. The attitude and disposition were ripe enough to become actions in later years. The “faulty” placement of students which she experienced first-hand, was also an important factor which could reinforce her “student rights” stance. Her exposure to students clubs at school, the unfortunate faulty placement in the natural science studies program, and the absence of conducive study environments for female students tightly shaped her ideology about gender equity, student rights and learning environments. Consequently, her particular ideology, attitude, and dispositions continued to take shape and form, enabling her to take even more risk and commitment to engage in activism in the following years.

Sitotaw was somewhat unique in that there was not any coherent pre-activism formation of student ideology, attitude, and disposition in him. His multiple relocations and conversion life trajectory forced him to change course more than one time. Towards the end of his high school experience, he chose to stay away from school activism, thinking that it affected his school performance. Similarly at university, he went through a comparable process of engaging and disengaging. Such unstable courses of life made his ideological commitment vary from time to time, also making it seemingly incoherent and unsustainable. Apparently he carried out self-evaluations when circumstances allowed forcing him to change course. Justifying his decisions why on the two occasions when he decided to stay away from activism, he asserted that he regretted the lack of

balance between his commitment as a student and as an activist. Generally put, nevertheless, he was pro- students. He advocated standing for one's rights.

Summary of the Findings on Activist Becoming

In this chapter, findings focused on showing the emergence path of activism among nine former student activists in Ethiopia. The findings on activist becoming were organized in five themes, namely social origin, pre-beginnings, turning point, attractors and inspirers, and ideological formation. The aim was to trace and examine the root of the beginning of the formative stage and process. Cumulatively, the themes provided stories that show the shared and unshared trajectory of becoming a student activist in Ethiopia (see Table 2).

The activists' *social origin* largely points to a similar pattern in family socio-economic status, influence of the father, family education, dwelling stability, family size, and school performance. Almost all of them were born into a large family, influenced most by their father who in most cases had completed elementary education. Relocation was another important similarity that most of them share as an aspect of upbringing trajectory. For one reason or another, they had to relocate either in search of schools or moving of family from one location to another. Almost all of them performed well in their school subjects earning the title of "distinction students" in most of the grades they completed. Most of them were born either in rural areas or families from rural areas, but later moved to urban areas.

Table 2

The Activist Life Continuum

Participants Pseudonyms	Pre-activism Period		Activism Period
	Critical Encounters in One's Personal and Social Life	Activist Turning Point	
Leul	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relocation • Curious observation of poverty • Being in the navy • Being a teacher 	Freshman: Challenging his university administrators and Ministry officials on the discontinuing of Business Education at Addis Ababa University(AAU)	Involvement in student politics as a congress member and general secretary in AAU Student Union (2000-2001)
Mintesinot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing up in a military camp • Relocation • Challenging school administrators and teachers • Freshman-sophomore dissonance 	High School: Challenging school administrators and teachers on language education and school fee	Involvement in student politics as president of AAU Student Union (2000-2001)
Mustafa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having an activist brother • Being away from family • Resistance at school 	High School: Agitating students not to sign up to serve in the Ethiopian army	Participated in Bale-Borena fire student mobilization, student bulletin, petitioning against student harassment, musical show disruption, Oromia capital change, and student protest (2001-2004)
Moti	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breaking a fast and the negative response from a priest • Bearing an Oromo name and the reactions from friends and a priest • Initiation of the Oromo reader club at school 	High School: Forming Oromo readers club and teaching Oromo literacy	Participated in Bale-Borena fire student mobilization, student bulletin, protest against Oromia capital change, and student protests(1999-2001)
Nebil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being ostracized at school • Burdensome school life 	High School: Silent reflections on one's personal life difficulties	Petitioning against student harassment and student protest (2000-2001)

Nemo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Father's imprisonment • Participation in school media and protests • Cognitive dissonance why the Oromo voted for UDJ in 2005 Election 	High School: Participating in Bale-Boren fire protest	Involvement in student politics as student union organizer and Jimma University Student Union president (2005-2007)
Berhanu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being cared for by an educated family • Participating in school clubs • Participating in a university student club 	Freshman: Participating in Addis Ababa University AIDS club	Involvement in Afro-Flag Youth Visions as a member and a leader (2004-2006)
Fetiya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in school clubs • Being placed at Haramaya University to study natural sciences 	Freshman: Persuading university and Ministry of Education officials to reverse her placement in the natural sciences	Involvement in female students advocacy; Haramaya University Student Union, and B.Ed. curriculum change protests (1999-2001)
Sitotaw	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing up in an educated family • Being a student at a Catholic boarding school • Being a Protestant fellow in Zeway • Failing in ESLCE 	High School: Fulfilling his mission to convert and organize young people in Zeway	Involvement in collecting petition against academic injustice, petition against shortage of facilities, and Jimma University Student Union leader (1999; 2000-2001)

Note.

Pre-activism Period: a) Critical Encounters in One's Personal and Social Life: This refers to research participants' personal, family, school and out-of-school experiences and encounters that are thought to have a significant impact in shaping their ideological orientations and action-taking disposition.

b) Turning point: This refers to events or experiences at a particular point in time, which have the impact of redirecting life-path, in this case redirecting one's life path to the disposition or propensity to activist action-taker.

Activism Period: This refers to a period in which the research participants engaged in various actions that can be considered activism.

The pre-beginnings of activism were also traced in the participants' lived stories. One common thread that intersects all the participants lived experiences was active high school life which provided them the opportunity to participate in various avenues. They had an opportunity to take part in school clubs either as active members or club leaders. The only exception was Nebil who intentionally avoided any student social and political interactions because of being ostracized by students who were unsympathetic to his father. For activists like Mintesinot, Moti, Nebil and Mustafa, schools meant a place for awakening. When they began their university education, they had already known a great deal of national and student politics.

A turning point in their lives was another area which the findings tried to address. The pre-beginnings were cumulative experiences which can be regarded as antecedents to turning point. The turning point(s) was a major leap towards activism. In analyzing the activist's stories, I looked for a life event or experience which I defined as a turning point, events or experiences that redirect paths in one's life. I used two methods to determine a turning point. One was asking the research participants directly or indirectly. The second was comparing the major events or experiences that the activists encountered before embarking on activism. Except Fetiya and Leul, all the activists had their turning point before coming to the university. The turning point was a critical moment in their school or college life in which a situation arose to challenge authority through direct actions. The events or experiences that marked the activists' turning point were academic discipline (Fetiya and Leul), Oromo nationalism (Moti, Nemo, Nebil and Mustafa), faith-driven leadership (Sitotaw), school policies (Mintesinot), and campus club (Berhanu).

The findings on attractors and inspirers were stories which linked issues and individuals with the events or experiences which were identified as salient and significant in the participants' life. As they grew up, the participants had to encounter certain issues more dominantly than others. For example, the dominant issue for the Oromo activists was Oromo nationalism.

Lastly, the findings on the ideological formation surfaced the growth of distinct ideological orientations in each participant. For the Oromo students, ethnic nationalism was their distinctive ideological orientation. It seems all of them had more leftist tendencies in that they advocated equality and fairness in power distribution and political participation.

The findings on student becoming show both the unique and shared trajectory of the activists. It also indicates the type of activism that the activist entered and why. A thorough understanding of the formative process each activist went through is hardly attainable without looking at the belonging they established both as university students and activists. The next chapter will provide the findings that will help us see another dimension of both the formative process and the manifestation of student activism each student promoted.

CHAPTER SIX

FINDINGS—STUDENT ACTIVIST BELONGING

In Chapter Five, I presented the findings on the nine student activists becoming, focusing on their social origin, turning point, attractors and inspirers, and ideological formation in their formative stages. In this chapter, I present findings that relate to activist belonging. I explore the various types of belonging the participants aspired and exhibited. Belonging in this context is broadly used referring to membership, affiliation, self-association, and self-identification. The activists reported the various ways they showed and sought belonging in order to present a persona that would win them trust and acceptance within their specific student community or constituency. The concept of student community or constituency itself was fuzzy as it was sometimes narrow, overlapping, and contradictory. In order to analyze salient elements of belonging, its manifestations, and its significance for action, I examine how each activist showed and sought belonging at both micro and macro levels.

Showing and Seeking Belonging in a Contested Student Community

The lives and experiences of students are replete with belonging trajectories. Every time they transitioned from one educational setting to another, they entered a new social community, which had its own unique culture. In the case of Ethiopia, it was not only culture that mattered, the dominant ethno-linguistic practices of the community they would join also presented its own demands and expectations. In particular, students who moved from one region to another—even from rural areas to major urban areas—were likely to enter a new community, which had its own ethno-linguistic and cultural practices. The challenges of adjusting to a new community of university students were

even more overwhelming. Universities in Ethiopia, particularly the older and larger ones, enrolled (and still enroll) students from various regions having distinct ethno-linguistic communities. Therefore, it is not uncommon for universities to have students who come from diverse linguistic backgrounds into an environment that is not set up to accommodate tolerance and diversity in a positive way. Language, religion, politics, and other forms of group affiliations create new forms of adjustment and communication demands. This was the type of context that the activists navigated during their duration as university students. In this study, I examined the activists belonging only in terms of their activist lives (see Table 2 for participants major activism), which led me to classify the research participants into four categories of belonging: student organization-oriented belonging, ethnic identity-oriented belonging, belonging as intersectional identity, and belonging as pan-Africanism.

Student Organization-Oriented Belonging

Post-Derg student unions in Ethiopian universities have been both a platform for student politics and a means to show allegiance to political groups. They have been a means of ideological expression, in which students show or deny their allegiance to the current ruling party. Therefore, showing or seeking belonging to the student union in Ethiopian universities has both symbolic and political meanings. It is inevitable for many students to align themselves either with or against student unions although there are a great number of students who stay away from both types of alignment. Five out of the nine activists in this study were involved in either establishing or leading the student union in their respective universities. Not only did they express their belonging, they also

committed themselves to strengthen it. Three of them particularly set aside another type of belonging, fully devoting their time and energy to act through it.

Leul: Belonging as boundary spanning. Leul sought belonging at the stage of his pre-activism in considerably narrow constituency. He began his epiphany when he advocated justice and fairness at a small academic department at Addis Ababa University. In 1998, when Leul was enrolled in Addis Ababa University and about to begin his study, he had to challenge administrators against the discontinuation of a major at the faculty of education as was described earlier. In the findings on activist becoming, this specific time was considered turning point in his emergence of activist consciousness. The time was when Leul sought alliance with students who enrolled to study business education. His default membership to the business education students was an antecedent to a fully-blown activism. Even before he joined the Addis Ababa University student union, the Business Education department was where he began to take actions as a student. The decision by the department to discontinue the program provided Leul and his friends an opportunity to awaken and rise up. It was there where he first opened up his eyes as a student and sought a cause to act. He found a reason for doing advocacy work, and the advocacy was both for himself and his class group. At this time, belonging was defined not in terms of the various identities the students at the department brought; rather, it was in terms of the common grievances that affected them. Leul's story of his early stage at the department points to the fact that membership to a big community begins from membership to a small community. Belonging was simply a matter of sharing common grievances and experience of unjust academic practices.

The same year Leul expanded his commitment from advocating a departmental cause to advocating a school-wide cause. His community of belonging grew. He began to serve in the student congress, representing his school in the university administration. He became a member of the formal bureaucracy. Membership to an organization occurs in various ways. One is when a student commits himself or herself to serve others by taking a formal position.

The next year, Leul decided to run for a position in the Addis Ababa University Student Union. In his campaign, he promoted the need for a national student union. He campaigned on the need to form an “Ethiopian Student Union,” expanding his allegiance to students from one institution to students in all institutions of Ethiopia. Obviously, his category of belonging is students represented by the student union, an entity both claimed and contested.

While serving in the Addis Ababa University Student Union, Leul “advocated” for student rights. He tried to straddle difficult boundaries to be a voice for students. Even at times when some groups disregarded the Student Union, he “persuaded” them to be part of the union. For example, at one point, when Oromo students were arbitrarily arrested, he “intervened” to become a voice for them, showing solidarity with Oromo students when they were beaten, detained, and abused. He “stood” for them while at the same time he tried to “convince” them that the student union was a legitimate body to demand the release of detained students. Such a “willingness” and “commitment” to deepen one’s belonging to all groups regardless of membership to the student union or not was a desire to span boundaries.

Leul's belonging was not wholly limited to the Addis Ababa student community. His stories present evidence of engaging with one civic organization outside the university. For example, in his story of the National Lottery Hall meeting, it was apparent that he established a working relation with Ethiopian Human Rights Commission when the opportunity to engage as a student union leader began to narrow down on campus. Looking outward, rather than inward, expanded his belonging although his relations university administrators deteriorated afterwards.

His relations with university administrators took a completely negative turn after the university declared the union illegitimate. The university's decision was after Leul and his group put forward a student union agenda, which challenged normative interactions and avenues for engagement. Although they knew working relations mattered to keep the union running, they did not wish to compromise on student rights. They knew without any meaningful collaboration with the university administrators, the student union could not function properly. That was what happened towards the end of 2000 when the university announced the disbanding of the union.

In general, Leul's belonging can be characterized as student union focused, non-ethnic, inclusive, and politically committed. He transformed himself from showing belonging to his department to a "selfless" commitment to advocate for Ethiopian students (akin to altruistic serving as he characterized his engagement). Student identity was the most salient element in his belonging. What changed his identity from someone who came to pursue a path to a committed activist was situated in his first-year encounter of institutional betrayal that became evident in the decision to discontinue the field of study he wished to study.

Mintesinot: Belonging as an imagined community of students. Like Leul's belonging, Mintesinot's belonging grew from a narrow constituency to a university-wide constituency. He began to belong to the Ethiopian Student Movement as an imagined community of belonging early in his student leadership responsibility. In his stories, he mentioned that he heard and read about the 1960s and 1970s Ethiopian Student Movement. His "inspiration" to advocate for student rights encapsulated in his ideology of *Ethiopianism* (an ideology that espouses tolerance of dissent and diversity identity) stems from his retrospective belonging to that movement. He found student idealism in student activists who "made" history five decades back. This is one important belonging that shaped his activist consciousness and persona.

He then began to participate in the Addis Ababa University literary nights, sports, and excursions. That meant beginning to associate himself with student writers, poets, and athletes early on. He also self-associated with off-campus interest groups such as Hamer Yesinetsihuf Mahber (Hamer Literary Society). Apparently, his interest in literature motivated him to connect with writers and poets.

Early on as a member of the law school, he began to show allegiance to his school and the students who were enrolled in the law programs. The school and students were his initial constituent. They were his sources of power and motivation. They campaigned for his election into the student union council; he campaigned to give voice to them. That advocacy for a small constituency grew into an advocacy for Addis Ababa University students in general. By and large, his belonging transformed significantly when he was elected as president of the student union at Addis Ababa University.

Mintesinot also tried to create opportunities to meet with civic organizations, political parties, and non-collaborating student movements as president of the union. He tried to collaborate with various groups although he did not have any formal membership affiliations with them. For example, Ethiopian Human Rights Commission provided him an avenue to bring together various voices when they arranged a one-day meeting of university students. Political parties tried to attract him, too. In fact, being president of a student union constrained his desire to belong to various off-campus groups, which had their own ideological motivation.

He “made” efforts to keep engaged with some of the Oromo activists in an apparent desire to “advocate” for their cause. But their ideological differences constrained their relationship. One of the Oromo activists in this study believed that Mintesinot represented “Amhara elites,” a group that “subjected them to subjugation and domination.” They believed they had little in common, hence no reason for showing any form of belonging. Therefore, Mintesinot’s desire to engage with various groups posed some leadership challenges to him, because of such a resistance and a suspicion. Consequently, the relations with groups acting on nationalist agendas were untenable.

Sitotaw: Belonging as advocacy and devotion. Sitotaw’s belonging has some parallel with Leul, who initially embedded in his department as a constituency for his advocacy. Sitotaw also began with his allegiance to students of his own department. He began his activism by resisting unfair grading in which he agitated students of his department to collect petitions and submit these to school and university administrators. Then at Jimma University (at the time it was called Jimma Institute of Health Sciences), he became a leader of the student union at Jimma University. The main vehicle for his

activism at Jimma University was the student union—a student organization which was both used and seen with suspicion by university administrators. As a student union leader, he participated in academic commission meetings, which helped him work with both faculty and school administrators.

His ideological orientation was unique in that it did not subscribe to the mainstream political belief categories, such as Left and Right. Sitotaw believes natural law is the only force, which can have an effect on social equilibrium.

My belief is based on the view that natural laws have the power to stabilize social forces. I believe that there is justice between them. I believe in just. I don't support any political ideology. I believe that not only humans but also all creatures have the right to live equally with freedom.

In sum, for Leul, Mintesinot and Sitotaw, student union oriented belonging meant showing allegiances to the entire university students without paying attention to ethnic and religious differences. These three activists held a top student leadership position in their respective student union although they were also involved in department level and club activities before being elected for the student union position.

Ethnic Identity-Oriented Belonging

The second path in which belonging was manifested could be considered ethnicity. Oromo activists dominantly chose the path of ethnicity to situate themselves in the broader university students' complex relations. They refashioned the nature and intensity of their belonging in terms of the Oromo identity they aspired to develop and consequently promote. Three of the activists, namely Mustafa, Moti and Nebil, projected a significant degree of belonging along their ethnic identity while Nemo blended his student and ethnic identities together.

Mustafa: Belonging as a commitment for the Oromo. Mustafa's primary belonging was deeply rooted in his national identity widely known as *Oromumma*. He began to express this national identity when he was at schools in Dodola. He had a story of resistance, which began with a firm opposition to young Oromo students' recruitment into the army to fight the 1998-2000 Ethio-Eritrea War. When Mustafa and his group realized the war was not "theirs," they "dissuaded" school students from signing up for a military training. They did not believe the war belonged to them. The war was "Others." They secretively began counter actions, "convincing" young people to stay away from volunteering for the war. This ethnic or national consciousness, which began to take form at this early stage, continued to shape his attitudes and actions throughout his school and university life. However, Mustafa's group had to face a "coercive reaction" from local government administrators. Despite the coercion, Mustafa also had friends in the police department who provided him a cover and a protection, helping him escape a severe form of persecution.

In the story of the April 2001 university-wide protest, we also find how Mustafa's belonging characteristics were manifested. One of the debates among the Oromo students prior to the student protest was whether to take part in the protest or not on the grounds of belonging as it was evident during the meeting facilitated by Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. Mustafa (also Nebil and Moti) recollected in his stories that the meeting resurfaced the identity debate that was taking place among many Ethiopians. At the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission meeting, the main controversy that sparked fury among many participants was the comment given about ethnic identity. A significant number of Oromo students disputed the main speaker's position that all identities were

subsumed within the “Ethiopian” identity. During the meeting, it was evident that Oromo students tried to disassociate themselves from other groups, such as Addis Ababa University Student Union. On the following days, they continued to disassociate themselves from student protests by otherizing the protest participants. But at a later stage, they were convinced that they had to take part in the protest fearing political polarization. Explicit in Mustafa’s language is “us-them” distinction in showing the relation between Oromo students and non-Oromo students. While the non-Oromo students include more than one ethnic group, Mustafa’s language referred to them as “the Amhara.”

Belonging was not a straightforward category at this stage, because while ethnic categories can easily provide a distinction among various social groups, the general student population that was mobilized by the student council at the time had common causes that led them to protest. Some of the issues that led to students to protest include freedom of expression, reinstatement of the student union, and replacement of the campus police by civilian public safety personnel. Oromo students also needed these common values. They also shared a common category of *studenthood*. They belonged to this important category of a transitional identity although they did not enact it. While ethnic identity lent them power and resources for mobilization, student identity also mattered. The challenge for them was how to uphold their ethnic identity and at same time collaborate with others who upheld only student identity.

Even within the community that the Oromo students declared allegiance for belonging, there was a group that they considered hostile to their goals. The story of the process of electing the editorial board for the Oromo graduation bulletin shows that some

sympathizers of Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (OPDO) appeared to be a divisive interference. This is evidence of the challenge of establishing a strong base of belonging using a mono-ethnic identity.

The difficult relations with the student council were another important indicator of the type of belonging Mustafa aspired for his activism. Oromo students "believed" the student council was "dominated" by Amhara students. So, from the very beginning they tried to distance themselves from the council. Mustafa and many other Oromo activists did not opt to participate in the student council. Neither did they opt any relations with them although some council members tried to reach out to them.

What exemplifies Mustafa's "deep" *Oromo belonging practices* was what he did in "defense" of Oromo students' rights and culture. Two instances provide illustrations. At one time, he was involved in collecting petitions against Oromo students' abuses in which the university responded by inviting Oromo students for a meeting to discuss the matter. Another example was the disruptive role Mustafa and his group employed to stop the Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization facilitated cultural show. As Mustafa indicated, the cultural show was intended to counteract the Oromo literary club Mustafa and his group had been preparing to establish. In any case, any Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization initiative was always seen suspiciously by many Oromo activists, because the political organization was widely considered by many Oromo as an emissary of the "oppressive" political party in the country.

Another salient story in Mustafa's university activism was the Mecha and Tulama monthly cultural and music show that Mustafa and like-minded Oromo students would attend. Mustafa calls this occasion the "Day of Our Freedom." It was a typical *cultural-*

political belonging. The monthly show provided spaces for Oromo students to come together which otherwise was impossible under any other agendas.

As was evident in his resistance stories, Mustafa's ideological orientation at the time was in favor of independent Oromia, a total disassociation of the Oromo from other ethnic groups. For many non-Oromo students and groups, particularly the student council, such an ideology amounts to a radical manifestation of belonging.

Moti: Belonging as a commitment to an imagined “Oromo National Movement.” Moti had a “strong” desire to transform the small-scale fragmented Oromo student protests into a broad Oromo student movement. He recalls: “Our main objective was to at least change our movement in to a mass movement. That mass movement was hoped to have a cause.” Such an assertion indicates a desire to belong to an imagined community, perhaps imitated from the student movement that mobilized the broad Ethiopian masses in 1960s and 1970s.

One of the defining elements in Moti's upbringing was his engagement with the project of Oromo literacy. Language began to be an element of his belonging in schools. Two specific cases in his childhood and early adolescence stories illustrate how language became an important defining element. One was how he associated himself with Oromo individuals who sought to develop their Oromo writing and reading skills through the project he introduced at school. Another illustrative case was how Moti identified students who joined Addis Ababa University with him from his neighborhood. In his stories, he makes references to such students in terms of what language they spoke. He says: “I had close communications with many university students when I was a high school student. These students were from Akaki [his town]. Most of them did not speak

Afaan Oromo.” This is an indication of the *cultural and linguistic boundedness* of his belonging.

Still another relevant story that illustrates the nature of his belonging was the effort he made to disassociate himself from Orthodox Christianity. After a priest gave a pejorative comment about his identity when he was a child, he always felt a “disconnect” between being an Oromo and being an Orthodox Christian, which was evident in his fast breaking story. His effort to successfully come out of the circle of belonging that was defined by his early childhood Orthodox identity continued until he joined Addis Ababa University. He mentioned his experience of sharing a room with Orthodox Christians. In his freshman stories, he brought up a story of his initial days of sharing a dorm with “deeply” religious students. As a challenge to the most dominant religious practice, he introduced his own ways of dormitory life style and practice by bringing his own spiritual texts and scripts. Their practice and his counter practice—the practice in which he used to bring to his dormitory various scripts representing different faiths—was a representation of the implicit struggle between Oromo students and students who practiced dominant culture in Ethiopia. By doing so, he drew his dorm mates into a counter hegemonic practice. Despite his dorm-mates’ resistance to seeing those books, he continued to bring the scripts. This might have also contributed to his activist persona that was founded on the principle of active resistance to subjugation, hegemony, and domination.

As a freshman, he knew only a few Oromo students. That limited his sense of belonging to a community in which he was most comfortable. So he claims he did not belong to any group at the time. Gradually, he found Oromo students who introduced him to other Oromo students, helping him expand his network. Once he was able to find

Oromo students who could share similar ethnic goals, he began to engaging in clandestine protest movement, which meant secretly communicating with students whom he “trusted.” Then he began to exchange books with the group. Another still powerful vehicle for establishing belonging for Moti was the Oromo student graduation bulletin. It was a significant engagement in that the work brought Oromo students together. The graduation bulletin was a kind of group memorabilia in which graduating students’ names, departments, and stories were published. The work of putting materials together required multiple tasks. For example, they had to raise fund, meet frequently, write stories, and design a format that reflected their Oromo identity.

Within the broad Oromo belonging, there were students or Oromo groups whom he called “Oromo Peoples’ Democratic Organization cells” which posed obstacles to Oromo movement. For example, after Oromo students volunteered to put out the Bale-Borena fire, Moti and his friends sought a formal establishment of an organization that would bring Oromo students together. Their effort was thwarted by students who belonged to this “cell.” This was an effort to show his disassociation from the Oromo who did not embrace the various causes for which they long stayed committed.

Although many non-Oromo students challenged the veracity of ethnic-oriented belonging in student-led movements, there were efforts by “committed” Oromo activists who were actively initiating various forms of mobilization to protest unfair practices, to challenge other movements, especially the student union. The concrete existence of Oromo student movement itself was a challenge for Oromo activists. For example, in Mustafa’s stories, Oromo student movements did not exist in a formal organizational structure. Mintesinot, who was a non-Oromo activist, rejected the existence of Oromo

movements altogether. However, for Moti, there were significant activities both in clandestine and public that amounted to a movement. Their vision was to transform the uncoordinated and fragmented energy into a formal student movement within five years. The increasing number of sympathizers across the country, especially high school students, provided his group with some motivation, making them think of greater purposes.

The Oromo students' relation with Addis Ababa University Student Union was at times competitive in which both the union and Oromo students vied to have control over power and resources. For example, the two competed to make use of Ethiopian Human Rights Commission in their own ways. They showed different forms of belonging to the civic organization. Their interaction began when Oromo students were arrested by the state security apparatus in 2000. The first organization that Moti reached out to was Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. Although he sought support from this organization, he found them untrustworthy. He thought this organization favored more "Amhara student causes" than Oromo student causes. For example, at one point, Moti rejected the organization's proposition that Oromo students should collaborate with Amhara students. Moti thought the organization wished the status quo to continue. Moti, like other Oromo activists, defined non-Oromo groups in terms of *us-them* categories.

Another way to understand Moti's belonging was through his ideological orientation. Moti considered himself an Oromo activist—an activist who "struggled" against subjugation, hegemony, and domination imposed on Oromo people.

Nebil: Belonging as being responsive to protest calls. Nebil's primary belonging as an activist was the Oromo student community at Addis Ababa University.

The path to becoming an Oromo student activist meant creating a campus student network to which he could belong and express his belonging in ideological and action terms. He demonstrated such allegiances multiple times in his one year stay at Addis Ababa University. The reason for his short duration at the university was basically such an allegiance to a community of students who had “deep grievances” and who were prepared to express such grievances.

For him, belonging was defined in terms of sharing grievances and showing solidarity when protests would take place. The story of the April 2001 student protest presents an important example in which Nebil resurfaced an interesting story of reluctance to cooperate. Similar to what Moti and Mustafa reiterated, Nebil stressed that Oromo students were initially unwilling to participate in the 2001 Addis Ababa University protest. The reason for being reluctant in participating in the general student protest was that non-Oromo students, mainly Amhara students, were not responsive to participate in the various protests the Oromo students organized before (the Bale fire and the Oromo students protest following the beating of the sociology student). The logic was simple for him: “They did not support us; why should we support them?”

The friction and suspicion among the Oromo, Tigray, and Amhara students provide an important dimension into how students defined belonging in those heightened activism years. According to Nebil, each group was suspicious of another group:

...there were actually frictions between the Oromo, the Amhara, and the Tigrean students. The Oromo and the Amhara students were considering taking the Tigrean students to be uncouth savages. The Oromo students did not trust the Amhara students, either. The Amhara students also did not trust the Oromo students. But it was the Tigrean students who were openly talking abusive words to both the Oromo and the Amhara students. In my view, it was the Tigrean students who had the protection from the government. The political power was

controlled by their people. Even though the Tigrean students were feared by all, the Oromo and the Amhara students described the Tigrean students as traitors using the graffiti in every corners of the campus... in general, the students did not trust anyone out of their ethnic group. There was no situation where the students acted for their demands in concerted or united ways for their common purposes... I had no personal problem with the students who come from different ethnic and regional backgrounds, but to be honest, I did not like the political system of the country since I was a small boy. I did not have any personal problem with them, but there were other external social issues which that forced us to widen our differences. For instance, if you take the monthly music concerts which were held at the technical school, I was going to the music concerts only with the Oromo students, or if there was any Oromo shows at the Menelik High School, I would go with Oromo students. In fact, it was only Oromo students who would participate in Oromo gatherings. So my social life outside the campus was with Oromo students. I did not have any problem living with the non-Oromo students in the university, but socializing with one's ethnic group outside the campus was the social order of the day.

Nebil's ideological orientation has parallels with other Oromo activists. He would refuse to negotiate on the rights of his people. But he believes state building should be based on mutual respect. He did not believe in the most extreme and "unreasonable" politics.

Belonging as Pan-Africanism

The only activist who was involved in a club that envisioned an identity that intended to transcend a national identity was Berhanu. His activist vision was the most ambitious project in terms of crossing traditional boundaries of identity. This was an interesting and ambitious belonging because either ethnic identity or religious grouping was the dominant way of seeking collective engagements at the time. His project aspired to break such a divide among students.

Berhanu belonging envisioned a broad boundary of community. Seeking political impartiality and black identity meant stretching the boundary of community. His

belonging was the most unique and experimental of all the activists. He and his associates stretched the boundary of identity. The naming of their activist group itself was descriptive of the intent behind their belonging. Afro-flag, which was composed of “Africa” and “flag”, was intended to refer to an African identity symbolized by a flag. On the one hand, his club’s premise emanated from the thinking that Ethiopians did not “consider” themselves as Black or African. So the club “aspired” to build African identity at a time when Ethiopian identity was challenged. They believed that African identity can unite students regardless of linguistic and religious divides. They hoped Black identity or pan-Africanism would transcend all kinds of divides that “swamped” students at the time.

Gradually, Afro-flag transformed itself from a campus student organization to an off-campus organization in which faculty became board members. It also tried to establish branch clubs across the country’s universities.

Berhanu and Afro-flag members’ activism was not free from being associated with one political group or another. Some students would consider them pro-EPRDF (Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front), while others dubbed them pro-CUD (Coalition for Unity and Democracy), because of the various activities in which they involved students. For example, some of the films they showed to students were sources of controversy. At one time, they showed the film *Hotel Rwanda* to students during one of their weekly programs. Some students associated the showing of the film with the “Interahamwe” story that the ruling party used in its election campaign. Interahamwe in Kinyarwanda means those who stand together, and it refers to the militia that enjoyed the backing of the Hutu-led government leading up to and during the Rwandan Genocide.

Berhanu and his associates expressly enacted “commitment” to political neutrality was not without challenges. Despite their “commitment” not to cross the borderline of taking sides, they were “misjudged” by various student groups. For some students, Afro-flag had the ruling party’s agendas. For others, Afro-flag had the opposition parties’ agendas.

In sum, Berhanu’s choice to advocate for pan-African identity and be non-partisan was not an easy process. No matter what his intention was that students always categorized him and his friends in one way or another.

Belonging as Intersectionality

Belonging is sometimes not categorical. It is either in-between or at the intersect of two or more identities. For two of the activists in this study, namely Fetiya and Nemo, belonging firmly remained a search for an intersectional identity. It was not an either-or choice; it was an attempt to be in both territories.

Fetiya: Seeking the intersection between student and gender identities.

Fetiya’s belonging can generally be characterized as intersectional in that it held together two identities, namely student and gender. Here is an episode from her story of intersectionality:

So I can say that my gender identity and my student identity are inseparable. They are just like two sides of the same coin. One is in the other. It is difficult for me to judge that one is more important for me than the other one.

Her belonging to female students began when she was a high school student. Her concern for female students’ success at school became an embodiment that continued throughout her university study. Her activism was devoted to being a voice for female

students. She, on several occasions, articulated her concern for female students whether it was the use of the student union path or the protest route.

As a member of the student council and an active participant in the B. Ed. curriculum protest, she also showed a broader scope of belonging to students. She advocated student rights and spoke on behalf of the entire student community. Her belonging to students as an identity was also evident in the way she resisted ethnic divides among students and members of the student council. In a move to protecting students as a community, she also resisted fragmenting agendas and ideologies. For example, she resisted ethnic-based belonging, thinking that it diverted attention from the issues that unite all students. She thought it was detrimental to effective activism. She recalls her experience as follows:

...there were some committee members who held their own differences. For instance, the agenda about the ethnic issue was a very sensitive topic and that if we focused only on that agenda, we could forget our objectives. I held the view that we had to have an attitude that could accommodate the interests of all groups. For me, the ethnic issue did not need to become our primary agenda.... when the differences between the Oromo, the Amhara, the Tigreans, and between the Muslim and the Christian students started to grow stronger, our sense of unity started to fade away gradually.

Her ideological motivation could also indicate her preferred type of belonging. She had a Left leaning ideological orientation which is evident in her views of empowerment, gender equality, and Ethiopian nationalism:

I am not an Ethiopian nationalist, but I hold a strong view that whoever ruled the country, and whatever political party assumed power, as much as possible, the individual and group rights must be equally protected. That right had to be protected in a meaningful and fair manner. There must be an equal distribution of the resources in the country...

Nemo: Seeking the intersection between student and ethnic identities. Nemo was an exceptional activist among the Oromo students in straddling the tight boundary between student union and Oromo identity oriented activism. Like most student unions in Ethiopia, the Jimma University student union Nemo led was established to be inclusive of all students. By default, Nemo's role as a union leader reflected his advocacy for student interests regardless of ethnic and religious differences. Structurally, at a deeper level, however, students at Jimma University were aligned along ethnic lines. This was evident in the manner in which various groups contended for the top student union position during the 2006 student union council election. When election for the top position for Jimma University Student Union was carried out, the Oromo students campaigned for Nemo. He was elected "primarily" because the Oromo students constitute the largest student population. Election of the top three positions was Oromo, Amhara, and Tigray respectively proportionate with their size in the university. For most students, what is evident from such a pattern is that the most salient belonging was ethnic rather than *student*. Nemo tried to break such a divide by advocating for student interests. In his stories, he revealed the challenge of being a union leader because the burden of meeting the expectations of students from one's ethnic group was overly high. Despite such a heightened expectations from students belonging to his ethnic group, he maintained a balance of serving both his ethnic constituency and the entire student population.

Ideologically, Nemo was transformed significantly once he joined the Law School at the university. It helped him understand the various laws of the country and he used them to challenge university administrators. He also used his knowledge of law to draft the constitution for the new student union. His emergent ideological orientation was

compatible with the desires and benefits of Oromo populations. He is pro-federalism. He argues that “true” federalism benefits the Oromo population.

Despite his strong connection with a religious faith group, he favored serving his ethnic group rather than his religious group. He abandoned serving a church in favor of serving as president of Student Union. Again, this shows the gradual changes in his choices of belonging and serving.

Looking at his relations with the university administration, one can notice his shaky relations with the university administration. Since he “advocated” for student rights, he had to challenge the university administrators. Often times, such an advocacy was not easy and had consequences for them. At least, in the long term, both the administration and the state kept their eyes constantly on him suspecting him of a member of Oromo nationalist movements.

Summary of the Findings on Activist Belonging

This chapter presented findings on activist belonging. The findings on belonging were presented in four themes: student organization-oriented belonging, identity-oriented belonging, pan-Africanism oriented belonging, and belonging as intersectionality.

The findings on student organization-oriented belonging showed how three leaders of student unions tried to reach out to the broad student community. Leul tried to span boundaries. Mintesinot considered university students a microcosm of the Ethiopian population, and despite the divisive “toxic environment” he noticed on campus, he approached the university students as an imagined community of enlightened individuals. Sitotaw, who enrolled in various departments in two universities, approached university

students as a constituency to be served and advocated. For him, the student union was an emotional connection to which advocacy and service were needed.

The second group, who displayed ethnic identity based belonging, operated from the premise that students that belong to their ethnic group deserved advocacy and empowerment. Three of these activists, namely Mustafa, Moti and Nebil, projected a significant degree of belonging along their ethnic identity, while Nemo blended his student and ethnic identities together. For Mustafa, belonging was a commitment to the Oromo cause, while for Moti it was a commitment to an imagined “Oromo National Movement.” Lastly, Nebil showed emotional and social connection by being responsive to protest and action calls.

Berhanu’s stories of pan-African interest were another area of findings which this chapter presented. Berhanu, by overstretching the boundary of belonging, displayed a unique interest for a broader claim of identity and connection. He also claimed impartiality and civic duties as central tenets of his belonging. However, his belonging was not free from controversy like all other activists’ belonging. In particular, Afro-flag was suspiciously seen both by students, sympathizers of the regime, and non-sympathizers although the club’s agenda was to transcend national boundary by advocating black consciousness.

The last finding was belonging as intersectionality. This finding showed that belonging was sometimes not categorical. It was either in-between or at intersect of two or more identities. For two of the activists in this study, namely Fetiya and Nemo, belonging firmly remained a search for an intersectional identity. It was not an either-or choice; it was an attempt to be in two territories. Fetiya sought the intersection between

student and gender identities, while Nemo sought the intersection between student and ethnic identities.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FINDINGS—ACTIVIST LEADING

In the preceding two chapters, I examined the trajectory of the nine activists' becoming and the various forms of belonging that they displayed during their engagement as union leaders, club organizers and initiators of various forms of student actions. In this chapter, I further advance the analysis of these activists by exploring their contributions to the student leadership that made various forms of student action "possible." Some of the questions to be addressed include the following: Were there aspects of leadership they could be associated with? What and how did they contribute to their constituency? What do they think they achieved?

The stories of the activists show that there are five aspects of leading worthy of examination to understand their unique and shared contributions to their collective actions. First, they took a risky and courageous commitment to serve with formal authority by competing for or agreeing to formal positions to symbolically and practically be at the forefront to mobilize students. Second, the activists contributed to the various ways of mobilizing collective contentions of their constituents. Third, they contributed to the framing of their constituents' messages. Four, they stood firm in the face of various coercions and enticements. Lastly, they revealed different cases in which the followers trust gradually led to leadership endorsement impacting the leader's decision to lead. These four characteristics of leading blend the diverse manifestations of activist leading during the period of research participants' activism (see Table 3 and Appendix B for the specific aspects of leading and contentious actions).

Leading with a Position and Authority

Student organizations in Ethiopian universities were of two types: student unions and campus clubs. Each university usually had (and many universities still have) one student union in which university-wide student representation was typically sought through a bottom-up selection of student representatives. For example, Addis Ababa University had Addis Ababa University Student Union, Jimma University had Jimma University Student Union, and Haramaya University had Haramaya University Student Union. The composition of the council that would lead a student union was usually determined on the basis of the number of faculties or schools in the university. The most common practice was that students in each faculty would have one or two representatives. Female students were also represented in university student unions. Although student unions were closely monitored and manipulated by various groups from within and outside the university structure, there have been years when students cleverly defied such “controls,” seeking a more independent student organization. The second type of student organization was usually referred to as “clubs.” In each university, there were (and still are in some cases) several student clubs such as a literary club, a female student club, an environmental club, a Red Cross club, an anti-AIDS club, etc. Although they were small and usually apolitical in their agendas and activities, there have been times when some students used the opportunity to showcase artifacts and activities critical of main political actors in the country. For example, student poems and essays were popular in the 1960s for their critical views of the imperial regime. Since then, until recently, the literary and language club in Addis Ababa University was also famous for their performance arts, which in some cases were critical of political actors.

Assuming a formal position in a student organization, particularly in a university student union was considered to be quite an achievement for students in two ways. For those students who aspire to participate in a genuine student politics, it was an opportunity to practice leadership. For others, it was an opportunity to increase their employability.

In the following section, I describe two contexts in which formal leadership was seen. One context concerns those who were involved in forming and running the student union. The second context refers to one activist who was involved in founding and leading a student club which later on grew into a non-profit organization.

Leading the Student Union

Five of the activists in this study, namely Mintesinot, Leul, Nemo, Sitotaw, and Fetiya had a formal leadership role in the student union. The process and the manner in which they came to their position itself was a leadership exercise. They had to campaign to be elected. They had to create an image of leadership by which they could be associated with.

Mintesinot. Mintesinot was president of Addis Ababa University Student Union during the 2000-2001 academic year. His interest in a student leadership position began when he was a sophomore. Vying for a formal position, he began to be publicly present on many occasions. Then an opportunity emerged when he was a third year student. An election contest was announced in which many students competed for the presidency position. He was first elected at Law School and became qualified to run for the next stage in the contest process. Then, the university congress convened, and he was elected president of Addis Ababa University Student Union in 2000.

Leul. Leul was general secretary of Addis Ababa Student Union during 2000-2001 academic year. Leul's journey to assume a leadership position in the student union began when he became a member of the student congress in 1999. Being encouraged by students at his department, he competed for a position in the Addis Ababa University student congress. He worked as a congress member for a year while at the same time resisting from being elected to the congress executive. This position helped him become a voice for Faculty of Education students. It was a time for him to practice a small scale leadership of articulating students' needs and concerns within the framework of university administration. This specific responsibility helped him recognize the degree and extent of violations of students' rights. In particular, his frequent attendance in the school academic commission meetings and students' affairs meetings provided him an opportunity to learn about organizational processes and complexity. It was a time of understanding of group dynamics at both organizational and students levels.

In 2000, he won a position at a higher level. He campaigned and won a student union position. It came after being "intentional" to be earnest and "serve" students because students really needed an activism to challenge administrative and political suppression. After serving the student congress, he gained confidence by what he accomplished and was emboldened by students' encouragements to contest for a position in the student union. Accordingly, he ran for the position and he won the general secretary position, a key position at the time.

Nemo. Nemo was president of the Jimma University student union during the 2005-2006 academic year. His ascendancy into the student union leadership went through two stages of involvement: as a reorganizer of the union and as a leader of the new union.

First he became an interim chairperson of the committee established to propose a framework for a new student union after the previous student union was disbanded for an alleged “non-representativeness” of the student population. He was chosen to serve as an interim chairman to make sure a transition from the old student union to a new form of student union would take place properly. First he was chosen to chair the committee formed to draft a law for the new union to be established. Later, he was chosen to chair a referendum committee. Then, once the task of preparing groundwork for a new student union was completed, Nemo was “hard-pressed” by his Oromo students who knew him well to compete for the presidency position in the new student union. The students “felt” Nemo was one of them in terms of embodying their group identity.

In the process I had learned a lot about the union, about the university, and I became very popular among many people. Then when the election board was formed many people requested me to continue my service again in the electoral committee. I finally accepted their idea and I competed for the presidency and I was elected as a president...I worked in the committee for a year and a half, and I worked as president of the union for a year and some months.

Nemo feels identity had a significant place in his willingness to accept the responsibility. He even had to abandon his off-campus duties. His stories show that he had not been prepared for such a charge; however, he gradually developed a sense of obligation and a moral duty to serve one’s community. He recalls as follows:

In the meantime, when the right time came and I was called to shoulder the new responsibilities and assignments, I was fully committed to do the assignments they gave me honestly. Even I resigned from the responsibilities I had in the church in order to give much of my time and energy to the new responsibilities. So I can say that identity has many implications.

He has also been elected twice as president of Ethiopian Higher Learning Institutions Students Union (EHLISU)—an assembly of nine (which later became 21)

public universities' student union. In relation with his student union leadership position, he had to be involved in African debt cancellation campaign. He led a sub-committee of the union which later spread throughout the EHLISU branches. They carried out major awareness creation efforts nationally, in which they collected nearly 100,000 signatures and finally organized an event at African Union Hall to hand over the appeal and petition to the representative of Germany, the G7 host at that time.

Once he became president of the Jimma University student union and Ethiopian higher learning institutions student union, he quickly became familiar with undercurrents within his university, and "learned" how to lead. He gradually "developed" his leadership skills in which he engaged disenfranchised students more positively. For example, in his efforts to cultivate a non-violent engagement among violence prone students, he encouraged tolerance and understanding. He explains his persuasive strategies as follows:

...there were some groups who used to come to me and emotionally say that they must get rid of those whom they considered their enemies....My responses to these kinds of complaints were often the same. I often asked them: "Then what?" "What will you benefit from killing someone, stabbing someone, kicking someone?" "Do you know what will happen tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, a week from today, or after a month?" "Why do you really listen to your emotions?" "Do you really think that all your questions would be answered if you killed, kicked, and prosecuted someone?" "Do you really think that you can meet your objectives that way?" Then they had no answer. They keep quite.

Part of his persuasive strategies was to challenge them with some questions to which some students which he identifies them as "emotional" had no answers. Nemo thinks the step-by-step approach to convince such "emotional" students had a big pay-off. convincing the people step by step. Such students who used to consider Nemo too liberal in his attitude and approach began to believe in what he would say. Nemo thinks the conversational approach helped him a lot. He recalls as follows:

There were some students who were informal Oromo activist leaders. They were also my friends, and they were king makers. They had the voice and the power to influence everyone on campus. They could simply say he could not represent us, or they could endorse me. In the meantime, however, when they started observing success after success through the steps I followed, they began to accept and listen what I would say.

In addition to using persuasive strategies, Nemo, as he brought up in his stories, adopted methods of accommodation and tolerance, and he thought such methods were powerful to win the hearts and minds of even less enthusiastic groups. He mentioned in his stories that such methods were useful to build trust among diverse groups towards each other. Then gradually his leadership team prioritized to work with students who had different viewpoints and backgrounds. They took such a work very seriously and they worked on it. He also divulged some specifics of his leadership, including how he dealt with students being overemotional: “Letting emotions cool down. You have to share from what you have, and you have to look after that person as your family. Everyone keeps his eyes on you...”

Nemo also benefited from his knowledge of the law he was studying at the time. Using his knowledge of the law and legal systems, he challenged the Jima university administrators. That kind of approach helped him properly make complains and protect student interests. Instead of promoting contentious actions, he advocated for the use of what he called the “right channels”:

As student union leaders we did not organize and lead any protest against the government. Rather we systematically used all the available channels to present the grievances of the students... What I normally did was that we just went for the right power. Once we got it we followed the legal and official route to pursue according to our objectives.... and we followed the legal procedures to prepare different kinds of events.

Nemo's stories show a more successful student union approach to advocate for students than others efforts in this study, at least, in terms of balancing students and university administrators' demands.

Sitotaw. Sitotaw was the leader of the Jimma University student union in 2001.

One year after he moved to the university, he was elected to head the student union:

I was just an ordinary member of the student union at Addis Ababa University. I was a member at the lower leadership level, but it was when I was at the Jimma University that I assumed the higher leadership position.

As head of the student union, he represented students in the academic commission of Jimma University. At the time, the union's sole role was to protect students' needs and rights from being ignored through administrative processes. They did not engage in any contentious actions. Nevertheless, things changed when they supported the Addis Ababa University student protest in April 2001, and boycotted classes. The union had to coordinate students' actions to boycott classes and present their demands to the university administrators.

Fetiya. Fetiya was a member of the student council at Haramaya University in 2000. She was elected to the union representing female students. She was the only female student in the student union. Soon after she was elected to the student union, a school-wide protest broke out, and her attention was geared toward mobilizing students for the protest. Therefore, her stories of a formal position in the student union were overshadowed by her stories of the protest. Similarly, her stories of gender activism were more salient than her stories of a formal leadership in the union. She accomplished more for the female students than she was involved in the student union.

Leading a Student Club

The second type of student organization that required a formal leadership position was a campus club. One activist who could be associated with a student club's formal leadership position was Berhanu.

Berhanu's Afro-flag Youth Vision was led by a law student when the club was first established formally. At the beginning, Berhanu was involved only as a founding member. However, he played a part in the collective leadership.

We had a chief secretary and a chairperson. The student I told you about earlier, [name], who was a 5th year Law school student, was the chairperson of the club. We assumed roles to play, to do public relation assignments, there was a girl who did the chief secretary part, two of our female friends were extension students; the other 2 were Linguistic and Literature students, one was philosophy student, the other drawing student in the Art school and there was me.

In 2005, when the chairperson graduated, Berhanu was elected to head the club. He recalls his election and what the club accomplished as follows:

In 2005, I became chairperson of Afro-flag club. We had established 4 divisions, Debate and Dialogue, Pan-Africanism, Intellectual Discourse and Culture and literature. Our members were divided among these 4 divisions.... Each division had its own leader. There was Literature Night every Wednesday night, so we got permission from Cultural Center and started Afro Night every Monday nights. The 4 divisions had their own programs. Debate and Dialogue prepared discussions; Intellectual Discourse prepared an interview with an instructor or a foreign guest through our connections or Art and Culture prepared literature nights or movies. Monday night was Afro Night. We started mobilizing almost consistent programs, while, as I told you, the organization, outside the university, were already established. Students were very active; the student council was also reestablished in 2004.

Leading a student club was not as complex as leading the student union partly because of the size and ideological motives. Berhanu's Afro-flag was small in size although it

gradually grew and expanded beyond the university. The club members effort to remain impartial also made the university be more cooperative with their work.

Mobilizing for Collective Actions

Mobilizing—a process of motivating students for a collective action—was a crucial undertaking of many activists. Without some kind of mobilizing, a group's goals and relations can hardly translate into actions. A typical mobilizing in the universities represented in this study involved changing disparate student actions into some form of collectivity, scaling up a small group into a campus wide collectivity, and consolidating pockets of actions into integrated campus-wide actions. The process required motivating and empowering students to transform issues into common causes. Additionally, it required determining the group's repertoires of contention. In the three universities in this study—and in most universities for that matter—the common forms of repertoires of contention that the student activists used to mobilize their constituency were meetings, demonstrations, camp-ins/camp-outs, petition drives, and statements to the media, boycotts, toilet graffiti, and pamphleteering. Repertoires in many cases changed over time, and could vary from one university to another. They were also determined both by what the activists knew how to do, and what was expected from them.

The activists carried out various forms of mobilizing in a wide range of ways. Each activist exhibited both a unique and a common set of skills and styles in his or her efforts to mobilize one's constituency. In the following section, I describe the leadership contributions of the activists in terms of mobilizing students to be involved in various forms of contentious actions. The contributions of the activists can be viewed within two

sub-themes of activist leading. One subtheme focuses on those who mobilized students beyond divides and ideologies, while another sub-theme addresses those who mobilized students as a form of searching for vibrancy amidst fragmenting tendencies.

Beyond Divides and Ideologies

Besides administrative hurdles and barriers, various forms of divides among students were the most challenging factor for many activists. The deep divides among students presented mobilizing dilemmas and challenges. Despite such challenges, the stories of the research participants revealed various instances of mobilizing efforts. The student organization-oriented activists, who were described in the previous chapter, particularly challenged existing divides to mobilize students. In the following, I present stories that illustrate the mobilizing endeavors of the activists.

Mintesinot. Mintesinot, who throughout his presidency sought an independent and impactful student union, mobilized students into two major ways. One was by leading the executive committee of the student union effectively. The most prominent mobilizing role of Mintesinot was to lead the student council executive committee to function as a coherent team in service of the “entire” student population. The council as a formal body had its own tasks, roles and resources, and Mintesinot’s role was to be in charge of the determination and orchestration of these elements. As a council president, for example, he had to establish a working relationship with the university administration so that resources were allocated and used properly. He had to determine and negotiate some kind of power relationship among the council members. Above all, he had to motivate the council to act along the risky path of claiming “autonomy,” which led the student organization to a confrontational relationship with university administration.

The second way in which he showed efforts of mobilizing students was by encouraging student participation. He invited students to rally round their goals and ideals. He also sought their collaborations in their efforts to challenge the administration against student abuses and university malpractices. He stood in the forefront as council president to confront university administrators in search of improvements in many areas, for example, police abuse, freedom of assembly, state espionage on students (e.g. students spying on students). Comparatively, as Mintesinot's story of the union shows, the council had a strong collection of student leaders, who were committed to overcome the interference of university administrators and state agents.

He also led the effort to revive student press by initiating a student newspaper called *Helina*. As he pointed out, the process of initiating *Helina* was arduous.

Getting *Helina* published was no easy task. We had to engage in difficult fund raising activities. We fundraised by finding sponsorseven we spent our own personal money to make sure the newspaper was published...the process was painful and exhausting, but we managed to get it published....

For Mintesinot, *Helina* was a source of student voice and visibility. It was also a source of collision and confrontation with the university administration, because the university administration felt intimidated by the critiques students posted in the newspaper.

As part of their effort to increase the relevance and meaningfulness of the student union, they coordinated various activities in which they sought student participation and contributions. They also staged various literary nights; they challenged the university administration on many issues and practices. For example, they succeeded in getting student representatives on student conduct committees with the hope of safeguarding the rights of students. They also managed to organize university sports competitions.

As a result, he helped the effort to make the student union as independent as possible. They worked towards distancing the union from being dependent on the ruling party from being the ruling party's stooge. They tried to make the union as an independent body of student organization which put them in the spotlight.

Leul. Leul shares similar efforts of mobilizing students with Mintesinot. He was part of the student leadership team that Mintesinot led. Top in their mobilizing agenda was leading an independent and meaningful student organization. Because of this, he was focused on attracting university students to rally around the union. In addition to using university allocated resources to organize meetings, he sought additional resources from other sources. He was in charge of the student union office. He was also the closest person among council members to various university officers because of his role in making request and getting them done. When he realized university resources were no longer available in fall 2000, after the university declared them illegal and illegitimate, he sought alternative pathways to secure resources such as meeting spaces and speakers. For example, Leul and his associates had to look for external resources to gather students for debate on contemporary political challenges of university students. Leul tells the following story:

So when we couldn't convene students on campus, we cooperated with Ethiopian Human Rights Commission... a discussion, which began long before that... we organized a panel discussion. We asked them... they prepared speakers. In particular, we wanted students to know their rights, academic rights, and human rights... It was a long process. Such collaborations requires persistence and lots of persuasion in Ethiopian context...It took us 3 to 6 months...that to be organized.

Leul revealed in his stories that the divides among students presented mobilizing challenges. According to his stories, despite the deep divides among students, he and his team served the students with great devotion and purposes.

Nemo. Nemo was a polite and savvy mobilizer. He was another student union based activist whose mobilizing endeavors illustrate exceptional devotion and emotion. As stated earlier, he was also one of the two activists in this study who strived to blend two identities to advocate with and for students. His mobilizing began as a member of the Oromo student community at Jimma University. When he was a third year student, Oromo students to which he belonged came together and fought for an Oromo club which they had been disallowed for years.

Determined to establish the club, these underground Oromo activist leaders came together in September 2005 and discussed key strategies of pursuing their struggle. They came to a consensus that a strong team, which could take their request to higher authorities, had to be established and that a very strong team of students had to be elected as team members. When names were proposed, I think, those students who saw me during the summer meeting proposed me and then I was elected as somebody who can take this petition to the next authority. I was elected with another student whose name was [Name]. [Name] and I gratefully accepted the new responsibility.

Then he gradually got involved in proposing and forming a new student union structure. When the university administrator accepted that a new union structure was needed, he was involved in drafting a constitution for the new student union. After the establishment of a new student union, he also served as president in which he played key roles of navigating ethnic boundaries to serve all students.

Sitotaw. Sitotaw was a “tireless” mobilizer and persuader. He began student mobilizing work while he was a student at Addis Ababa University. Being a “victim” of

unfair grading practices by faculty members, he was compelled to organize students to challenge such practices. He fearlessly began to challenge faculty members.

I took the initiative to organize the whole students of the departments who were directly affected by the problem. After that, I presented the dean of the faculties and the president of the university with a petition signed by all the students. It took me much effort to get the problems solved. Finally, the problem regarding the grading system was solved once and for all.... During my stay, I was able to accomplish many tasks such as advocating the problems of the students. I worked on solving many of the problems of the students starting from the level of the department up to the president of the university. I can say that I spent a successful year.

At Jimma University, his role expanded partly because of his student leadership position in the student union. He was a student organizer and leader at various levels.

...there was the student union. I was the main organizer of the student union. I was participating in the meetings of academic commission of the university representing the students. I was actively participating in the legal bodies of the university. It was at this time that the government gave the right to participate in such activities for the university students. I was a permanent member of the academic commission of the university. I had the opportunity to participate directly in the decisions that were passed by the university. It was leading every activity of the student movements in the university.

He also carried out other similar mobilizing activities, including convincing students for class boycott in support of the 2001 Addis Ababa University protest and subsequently facilitating situations for students to leave campus following the class boycott. That was his last involvement in a protest. Here is an episode from his story of class boycott and the consequences:

...the Jimma University students unanimously agreed to oppose the brutalities of the police force against the Addis Ababa University students. We said that our rights could not be protected unless the rights of the Addis Ababa University students were protected. We stopped classes completely. As I told you, the student union leaders in all of the universities were communicating with one another at the time. The students of the remaining universities also followed our

steps and stopped their education to show their support to the Addis Ababa University students. The student union of the Jimma University was playing significant role in the process. A very strong tension was created between the government and the university students' union.

Fetiya. Fetiya's mobilizing efforts at Haramaya University also reflect the same challenges as the activists at Addis Ababa and Jimma universities encountered. In her university, there were deep divides among students along ethnicity, ideology, and faith. Fetiya's mobilizing leadership needs to be seen in this context. Although Fetiya was both a student union based and gender based activist, most of her mobilizing works occurred during the B. Ed. curriculum protests.

The first mobilizing work she was involved in was to advocate for female students. While she was a sophomore she mobilized students to demand for better learning conditions for female students. Her first accomplishment was the establishment of a study room exclusively erected for female students close to their dormitories.

Fetiya's most significant involvement in mobilizing students occurred when students opposed the introduction of the B.Ed. curriculum. Along 13-student committee members, she organized students to boycott classes and the university cafeteria. They gradually organized students to camp-in on the university soccer field. Their camp-in was the optimization of their strategy to persuade the university administration to succumb to their demand. The non-disruptive student actions eventually persuaded university administrators and local public officials to sit down and discuss possible solutions. Here is what she said:

We then stopped going to classes, we stopped the university meal, and any work in the university was totally stopped....One of the actions we took included stopping the campus meal. The other action we took was leaving the campus

rooms and camping in the campus fields. We continued sleeping in the camp until they released the leader of our committee.

Not only did she display the character of persistence and courage, but also she encouraged the same in students despite the university administrators' counter actions.

I then decided to motivate every student to play its maximum role to support the cause we started so that we could strengthen our unity and could go further. On the contrary, the management of the university made different announcements and warnings stating that if the students refused to attend classes until the deadline that was set by the university, it could take serious measures on the students. We encouraged students not to be intimidated by the university's threats to expel students from university...

Enthusiastically, she strived to reach out to campus-wide students by mobilizing beyond the education faculty. Ambitiously, she tried to create a sense of unity among Haramaya University students, a project too difficult in any Ethiopian campus because of the deep divides among students ethnically, religiously, and place of origin. She “worked” towards creating a sense of unity among students, seeking solidarity from other schools, asking others to show belonging. Although her efforts to expand in-group membership presented a daunting challenge, she continued to agitate students to join the collective action.

The first strategy I used was that, it is true that, we were learning in different faculties, but I worked towards creating a sense of unity among the whole students in the university.

She had to continuously be present in student committee meetings to hammer out the various ways they intended to organize students.

I remember that we were making frequent meetings every evening for a month since the idea about the movement was conceived. It took us almost a month to organize and convince the students before the actual strike started. After the strike started the university was closed for about two to three weeks.

Berhanu. Berhanu's involvement in student mobilization was focused on a student club, which was relatively small in size as compared to a student union. He was involved both in the establishment and running of Afro-Flag Youth Vision. He began to be involved at a time when the student union was disallowed to operate. The crackdown on student activists following the 2001 protest and the closure of the university for one year had consequences for the psychology of the university administrators and students. It was at this time that Berhanu came to Addis Ababa University and engaged in an ambitious and courageous civic engagement minded activism.

Berhanu, the only campus club based activist in this study, carried out at least three types of mobilizing: founding the Afro-flag Youth Vision, recruiting members, searching various avenues for students to play their civic duties. To begin with, Berhanu was one of the pioneering students who were involved from the early stage of Afro-flag formation. At early stage of Afro-flag, they used to organize events to attract students. They particularly carried out various informal programs since they did not have a legal status at the early stage of their formation. However, they needed approvals and support from university administrators. Berhanu thinks university administrators were very cooperative to their requests. This was the time when he spent most of his time mobilizing minor events, such as student discussions and panel discussions.

Once the club became operational, Berhanu and his team had to strengthen it by recruiting members. Recruiting students into a club or any other student organization was difficult at the time because of the fearful and suspicious campus climate. Despite the challenge, they motivated students to join them. Gradually and slowly, they were able to increase their members. He recollects the progress as follows:

We used to recruit club members, who by the way had their own political view, to do the activity. At that time the hot issue was CUD [Coalition for Unity and Democracy] vs. EPRDF [Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front]. I, as a club leader and the one I mentioned earlier, [name] who had already graduated at the time, as the organization director, used to strictly stress that our purpose was not to accept one and reject another but to enhance political participation of the youth in an active and knowledgeable manner.

When the activities of the club expanded during the 2005 national legislative election,

Berhanu had to do a different kind of mobilizing:

Part of the Afro-flag work was civic engagement. So they took part in mobilizing voters in 2005....There was a program called voter registration before the vote and our first project was to mobilize specifically the youth to vote. I, as a club leader, used to work as project officer in programs. Since national NGOs had interest in observing the election, we, as students and as a youth organization, had similar interest and mobilized students for that purpose. ... Since I was already in the process from the very beginning, I was the leader of the observer group from Addis Ababa Youth Association, Addis Ababa Women Association, Addis Ababa Students' Council and other NGOs for *wereda* 3's election center located at Mexico....We did that on behalf of the organization however, the students did the activities entirely. I also acted as a leader, activist and the organization's staff.

Berhanu's and other students' active participation in voter education and registration provided his club an expanded symbolic mandate. Not only did they get acceptance on campus, they were also recognized by off-campus groups and local election officers.

The stories of the five activists show how devotion and emotional commitment could provide one a strength and motivation to mobilize students despite deep challenges and barriers. The stories illustrate the potential for young activists to challenge divides and ideological barriers.

Searching for Vibrancy in the Midst of Fragmenting Tendencies

The kinds of mobilizing described below focused on how activists potentially could search vibrancy in a context where in-group and out-group tension poses challenges. This particularly concern the ethnic identity oriented activists. Fragmenting tendencies were present in small struggles and movements. Their context was one which shows the intragroup and intergroup relations which were characterized by incongruities in ideologies emanating from the dominant political narratives in the country and the various groups which vied to control students as political forces. The stories of Moti, Mustafa and Nebil will follow.

Moti. There were at least three contexts in which Moti was involved as a mobilizer: voluntary firefighting, demonstrations, and orienting new movement members. One prominent mobilizing story that features in his personal biography was the Bale-Borena fire-fighting mobilization. He describes the process as follows:

We organized a team of students and went to the Oromia Agriculture bureau to ask for an explanation regarding the forest fire. We also went to ask them to give us permission to go and visit those areas. It was a kind of negotiation at the beginning, but they declined to cooperate. We, as a team, returned back to the campus and organized around five hundred students and marched to the office of the Oromia Regional council. It looked like a demonstration.

In another collective action process Moti brought up in his story, there was a process in which a more successful collective engagement began to take shape at least temporarily. Similar to what social movement scholars identify as *micromobilization actors*, Moti and his friends emerged as team leaders.

Then they were convinced by my suggestion and told us to form a committee. We elected a team that consisted of 12 members. [Name], [Name] and I were elected from the faculty of business.

Although the Oromia Regional State officials refused to cooperate initially, when they realized the issue gathered massive public attention, they began to offer assistance to students. Then the committee formed to coordinate students started to register other students to transport them to the sites where fires were raging during February-April 2000. Later on, they capitalized on the mobilization process they began as a response to the Bale-Borena fire quickly transformed into national student movements in which various demonstrations took place against the government's "complacency" and "indifference" to the fire. The spillover of the university student mobilization to towns in Oromia was rapid. Although Moti and his team were amazed at the rapidity and scale of the response, they were also apprehensive of the possible reaction of the state to the Oromia-wide protest. The fire itself had a political dimension. At the time, many students believed the Bale-Borena forest was deliberately set on fire thinking that Oromo nationalists, such as Oromo Liberation Front fighters hid in the forests.

Moti and his group were also able to mobilize students for demonstrations. When they would organize demonstrations, they did not have a formal structure. In many cases, they had informal ways of enacting their own chain of communication. It was also common to have demonstrations which were spontaneous, quick and ineffectively organized.

When we organized a demonstration, we randomly picked up a person from our group and that person would informally contact key representatives from every department. We actually had the tradition of informing the government before the demonstration.

Recruiting and orienting freshmen into the movement was another contribution. It took place in a more informal fashion and piecemeal sizes. Such recruiting exercise

would likely take place when there was a potential for action waiting for some triggers.

Moti describes the process as follows:

When the first year students were registered in September 2000, we planned to re-orient the freshman students. We elected different senior students who could coordinate the reorientation program. Then we continued working on different plans and looking for excuses that could help us to start a protest or uprising during the whole summer of 2000. When the freshman students were registered, we recruited representatives from them and re-oriented the freshman students.

His involvement was facilitated with his prior university knowledge. As he revealed, he had already become familiar with the university and established some relations with university students and staff when he initially enrolled at the university. Consequently, once he became part of the student community, his eagerness and curiosity to establish a network with Oromo students increased. He gradually proved to be a devoted network seeker, campaigner, agitator and communicator. His capacity to carry out clandestine work increased. However, his stories of mobilizing also points to challenges. For example, following the Bale-Borena firefighting mobilization, one of the hurdles his team encountered was the lack of tolerance by university administrators and the state. Because of such “intolerability,” Moti and his friends had to at times operate out of the sight of such entities. Moti refers to such out-of-sightedness as “operating in clandestine.” After Oromia Regional state refused to give them a permit to register their entity as a formal Oromo student association, they continued to operate underground.

We assessed the existing situations at the time and decided to strengthen the committee by adding new members. Finally, [Name] was elected as a chairperson, I was elected as a vice-chairperson, and somebody was elected as a secretary. After that we continued our work through a clandestine operation.

Another challenge that surfaced in Moti's stories relates to orienting students. Recruiting of new members was not open, continuous, and effective. Lack of clarity with regard to roles, tasks, and the possible reaction of entities that authorize collective active actions was another challenge which brought about variations in the process of mobilizing demonstrations. Mobilizing in collective actions for which agendas, tasks, and members are not clear-cut and ambiguous is challenging. That was why collective actions were spontaneous and unplanned among Oromo students at the time

Mustafa. Mustafa was an expeditious mobilizer. He was involved in various mobilizing activities both directly and indirectly. He contributed to Oromo students' activism by being both on and off the front lines. His mobilizing contribution was made in the form of a protest organizer, an event disrupter (as a counter action organizer), a student rights advocate, a student assistance coordinator, and a demonstrator.

I will begin with his role as a formal or informal protest organizer. In his protest stories, Mustafa brought up four protests in which he centered himself as a foremost participant and coordinator. The first was the protest related to the capital city of Oromia. He was at the forefront of leading the march to Oromia Regional headquarters which was found in Addis Ababa to oppose the move of the capital.

...we wrote to the Oromia regional council requesting them to organize a discussion forum with us. We finally decided to demonstrate.... we individually took public buses and gathered in front of the office of the regional council. We individually went to the place because...if we marched in groups, the government could arrest us and disperse the whole students. Around 200 students gathered in front of the office of the regional council of Oromia. Instead of holding talks with us, they arrested all of us and detained us at Kolfe police training camp.

The second protest was following the arrest of Oromo students after they violently reacted to a sociology student's use of the derogatory word "Galla,"

We demonstrated at Sadist Kilo campus in 2000. It was because of a conflict between the Oromo and the Tigrean students. A Tigrean [Moti's accounts differs from Mustafa's' regarding the ethnic origin of the student] student used the term "Galla" in the class while he was presenting his paper. Then the Oromo students who were attending the presentation violently reacted against the Tigrean student. Then the government arrested those Oromo students. We demonstrated against the arrest of the Oromo students. After that, we continuously demonstrated for three days, and at last the government flooded the campus with the police force at night. We fought with the police for an overnight.

The third protest was the April 2001 Addis Ababa University general students protest. This was one of the most controversial Oromo students' action in which students were divided whether to join the protest or not. Oromo students had challenges joining other protests because of the mistrust and non-collaboration between Oromo students and non-Oromo students. Therefore, mobilizing students in such cases would present daunting leadership challenges. For example, Mustafa recalls his role in the major student protest as follows;

I played a very active role in that uprising. Firstly, I mobilized the Oromo students in collaboration with my senior students, especially we conducted several meetings on whether we could stop or continue our education.

Prior to the demonstration, there was a meeting in which Oromo students debated whether to join the university students in the protest. Mustafa contributed to the debate by articulating a position which he mentioned as "non-detrimental" to their movement.

I remember the Arat Kilo meeting; I took a strong position in that meeting. I strongly stated that we had to participate in the demonstration inactively; we had to stop our education if the majority stopped; we need not weaken the demonstration; any demonstrations against this government need not negatively affect us; and in the meantime, we could also run our agendas through the demonstration.

When universities across the country were closed following the protests, Oromo students decided to keep the momentum by mobilizing at grassroots levels. They agreed to return

to their home towns and villages with a mission of raising the consciousness of their local communities by teaching them about the plight of Oromo students in particular and the population in general. Mustafa recollects the process as follows:

After having agreed on these points, we returned to our home towns and villages when university was closed. We selected a group of students who stayed in Addis Ababa and who could coordinate those students who went to the different zones to teach and organize people. I was elected to organize those who went to Bale and Arsi zones. Other students were also selected to coordinate those who went to each of the Oromia zones. We stopped our education and started running different campaigns. We taught our population; we distributed different brochures and leaflets.

As an event disrupter, Mustafa contributed to discompose a concert or a show, which his group thought was orchestrated to “hijack” their long inspired project of establishing Oromo student’s cultural and literary club. Mustafa believed that the show was planned for Oromo students although Mustafa and his group believed it was intended to “pre-empt” the establishment of a genuine club. The disruption went ahead with some success although security forces came to campus the next day which resulted in the arrest of eight students who participated in the clash.

That was on Sunday, I remember, and when we heard that 8 students were arrested we went to the office of the president on Monday morning. We demanded the immediate release of those students. When we refused to leave the place, they asked us to elect a team of representatives from our group who could go where the 8 students were kept and check their status. They also promised us that they were going to release the students soon, and that if they would not release them, we had to be back and check their status. The students were not released, and we then returned back to the office of the president to continue our demands.

Mustafa’s another contribution was his involvement in the Oromo student’s graduation bulletin, an annual publication that featured Oromo students graduating from each department. He was a member of the Oromo students’ graduation bulletin

committee. The bulletin was not such an entirely apolitical process. It was a cultural process used to exploit a political opportunity that was hardly available on campus.

Mustafa played a role in using the bulletin as a conduit to another level of mobilizing.

Although members were senior students, he began to interact with them as a freshman at the time.

Additional leadership involvement for Mustafa includes the initiatives his group took to aid needy Oromo students.

...we were also academically helping those students who did not afford their educational expenses. We needed resources mostly for photocopying books and materials for those students. We contributed money from our purses for these purposes. After I joined the technology faculty, I became head of the committee of the technology faculty in 2002. I proposed that we had to constantly contribute certain amounts of money.

In general, playing a leadership role in an “amorphous group” was not easy. He had to find his ways in order to confidently navigate the movement.

...at first because our primary focus was not on giving names to our movements, but we focused on the practical things. The nature of our movement was on practical matters. On the other hand, our group was not a legally recognized association. We were conducting clandestine operations. We were hunted by the government. It was amorphous.

Nebil. Nebil could roughly be characterized as a “follower” organizer. He was involved in mobilizing students from below. He was a low-key activist who could motivate students door-to-door. His contribution to his constituency was in the form of active participation in all protests and persuasive actions. He detailed his step-by-step involvement in two of the protests as follows:

We the Arat Kilo campus and the Amist Kilo campus students went to Sidist Kilo campus to protest against the arrest of Oromo students...First, we went out for the demonstration and gathered in front of the office of the president. Second,, we

signed and presented the university with a petition demanding the president to talk to us. Third, we chanted and shouted different slogans while we were still gathered in front of the office of the president. No one responded to us...from the office of the president. Instead, the university called in police forces to arrest us. Fortunately, every detail of the event reached a VOA reported called Zelalem. Other news media also covered the story. At the same time, Oromo students signed and presented the Office of the Oromia region with a petition demanding them to stop chasing Oromo studentsMost of the time, my participation in the demonstration was like as an individual student. I was a member of the mass. My responsibility was doing according to what the organizers told us as to do.

Nebil was also regularly and enthusiastically present in his constituency's self-mobilizing venues and gatherings. For example, he participated persistently in most of the Oromo student meetings. He tells his story as follows:

The meetings were held in the dormitories with a small group of participants. We did not hold meetings in dormitories with large number of participants. The maximum number of the participants in a dorm was 15 students.

He also stated his perceived desire of being a morally responsible member of his constituency as follows:

... whenever I see any injustice when I am in the country, I don't refrain from doing something about it. That is also my vision.

Generally put, for the Oromo activists, the perception among Oromo students regarding the student union, the repressive practices that they encountered, and the conflicting reactions from within were three major fragmenting tendencies. The general perception about the student union was that the union did not represent their constituency. Evidence of the disjointedness between the Oromo students and the union was that there was no single Oromo student in the union leadership. Because of that, they preferred a different option, which by itself was problematic. The Oromo student activists mobilizing was largely characterized as a constant search for vibrancy in the midst of fragmenting

tendencies. Both within and outside their constituency, the power dynamics were such that they had to constantly struggle to motivate each other to forge their own competing power relationship. Arguably, they sought a power balance by mobilizing whatever resources available to them. The works of Moti, Mustafa and Nebil were all focused with overcoming both internal and external power imbalances. Moti was both a reactive and pro-active organizer while Mustafa was largely a reactive organizer. Nebil was largely a “follower” organizer. They “knew” the potential for mobilization among Oromo students because of the multiple “oppressive” processes in higher education institutions. They also “knew” their grievances were deep enough to trigger mobilization. They also knew the Oromo constitute a significant number of the students representing various ethnic groups. That was why they sought vibrancy in their “small struggles” however the tendencies were fragmenting.

Framing Messages

Framing was an important aspect of the roles played by the activists with varying degree of success. Wherever there was a collective action there was framing. Framing was often the responsibility of leaders who shaped and communicated the message that helped mobilize zealous, enthusiastic, and passionate members in the constituency, supporters and by-standers outside the constituency. One caveat that needs to be stressed is that messages that the activists desired to spread did not have continuity or were not always coherent. Messages would change depending on the sociopolitical mood of the time and critical student issues. The concept of framing in this study will be applied more broadly to refer to the process of originating, articulating, shaping and communicating collective action’s messages that guide action taking. The practice of framing evident in

the activists stories encompass a wide array of possibilities such as public speaking, publishing an article in the newspapers, interviews on the radio, and pamphleteering.

Leul

In Leul's stories of mobilizing students and protecting their interests, there are various instances of message framing. The most significant message framing his union was engaged in include awareness raising by clarifying the purposes and goals of the union. The methods they used included student press, using the existing off-campus media outlets, and gathering students for meetings whenever the university administrators allowed. Leul recalls their work as follows:

We created some awareness that the union was not a parasitic organization serving the administration or the state. That was the case for one decade prior to our time. So we cleared off this suspicion out of the students mind. In order to do so...as you know... we had to use various media outlets. We had to boldly go out and be interviewed by the free media. But most importantly, we wanted a free student newspaper to enhance student-student communication. We envisioned this not through the university's financial support but even using our own pocket money and by raising funds from friends of the union. We started to circulate *Helina* one round....The newspaper was envisioned to raise consciousness, to develop students trust in the union, to gain their support, etc. We also used leaflets to reach as many students as possible.

As Leul recalls, because of the student union's commitment to be independent and desire to pave the way for a robust student organization culture, they focused on student press-based interaction and awareness raising.

Mintesinot

Mintesinot was a gifted public speaker and persuader. He was a student speechmaker who could deliver a message that could get deep down to his audience. His popularity partly emanated from the speeches he delivered during one of the students'

gatherings in relation to the Ethio-Eritrea war. Mintesinot revealed in his stories that the comment (as was quoted in Chapter Six) was famously remembered and it was a major step for his political career as a student union leader. He referred to the comment as a gateway to popular acceptance at least within the pro-Ethiopian unity constituency.

Later during his term as president of the student union, he pursued a public communication approach in which he utilized the available “free press” to get his messages across. He particularly submitted news and editorials to the various weeklies and radios. Additionally, they sought discussion forums to help students engage in debates and dialogues.

In addition to calling the public’s attention to student sufferings on campus, he contributed newspaper articles on urgent student issues. Repeatedly, he tried to keep the public informed about the university student conditions. He condemned police actions following the beating of students while they were in their dormitories. For example, when the police targeted Oromo students, he spoke on the VOA (widely heard radio transmitted from USA) strongly condemning the actions against Oromo students.

...we used to organize dialogues among students and with other external groups such as Ethiopian Human Rights Council, and involving students in election observations. We used to contribute newspaper articles. He used to issue communiqués that would reflect the position of the Student Union

Both Leul and Mintesinot focused on using various means of communication to increase awareness and understanding with regard to student rights and student abuses by the administration.

Nebil

Nebil was a relentless message conveyer. His contribution to framing was somewhat different from the rest of the activists. He was a low-profile, low-key activist whose contributions were largely confined to the process of relaying messages from one dormitory to another. Activists, who especially pursued a less public approach, had to use traditional methods of passing information from one corner to another. Such an approach had its own challenges. One fear was that the messages could fall in the hands of opposing constituencies or individuals who worked for the state security.

The freshman students were assigned to rooms; the senior students facilitated a unique system in which the Oromo students occupied either one or two rooms only. We, therefore, used these rooms which were made to be occupied by the Oromo students for meeting purposes... we would inform each other carefully though some of us were even didn't know each other, but we would take care of ourselves and get together in dorms. I participated in several meetings of that sort... The representatives in the meeting would move from dorm to dorm and inform every student.

He was a reticent and introverted activist, but deep in his thought and calm in his reaction.

Moti

Moti was a conversant communicator who had a wide network of students and non-students. As an Oromo activist, his contribution to framing and spreading messages was “considerably high.” That is what we understand from his stories of framing and spreading messages. We can look at his framing role from two angles: as a vision setter and a communicator.

Early on and at various stages of Oromo student movement, Moti and his team had to engage in the process of *envisioning*—what they would like to achieve and when.

One of our major strategic goals was to create a strong link between and with different colleges, sympathizers of our causes, high schools, and high school teachers in the country, and to change our objectives to a mass movement within three to five years. We set plans and tactical strategies, but not long and full-fledged, that could help us achieve our strategic goals. We magnified and tactically depended on strategies that include: creating a strong national committee that includes a team of both students and teachers, stopping any involvements in risky movements and revolts, and reacting against all offending government measures and policies. We agreed that we had to operate progressively and push in these manners in the long run. We then shared tasks and responsibilities and started communicating with other colleges and universities in the country. We also asked for support from the Diaspora.

Moti revealed with profound clarity the internal disequilibrium within the Oromo students with regard to agreeing on the vision and goals of their struggle. Therefore, reframing the issues and also identifying the ripening issues were an important aspect of their engagement. He offers the following detailed recollections of the internal dynamics:

We did what an infantry of soldiers could do. We did not as such focus on our long-term visions. Our main objective was to at least change our movement in to a mass movement. There were certain students who suggested that we had to ask for self-determination, but that idea was rejected because we agreed that our group was not mature enough to raise that kind of question and that the feasibility, achievability, and its realization was beyond our group's scope. We instead agreed on short-term and achievable objectives. We could move on to other bigger issues from the victory we achieved from the short-term objectives. I personally had a view that we didn't need to design a grand project like asking for a referendum. If we did so people would become frustrated and the government would imprison and kill many people. Instead of focusing on such issues, we had to focus on minor issues. If we achieved victory on minor issues, it would create a sense of victory in us, our popularity would grow bolder and many people would join us. Third, our action was reactive by its nature: the government did something wrong on the people, we would become angry at the government's action, and we would react against it...I proposed that we would need to focus on bigger social issues and on articulating a big social agenda.

Moti thinks the crisis that happened in the country at that time had been planned to happen in five years. For him it was unfortunate that no one had clear agendas at that

time. After that they started working closely with Amhara students, from whom they had been distancing themselves for a while. Nevertheless, he generally believes his group's objectives lacked clarity at that time because they had nothing in common with Amhara students except that they both would reject the government.

His general approach in framing various messages at that particular critical juncture was to loosen the tension between Oromo students and Amhara students that supervened as a result of the disagreement regarding strategies and goals.

The mechanism we used to reconcile the tensions was that, of course some of our groups proposed the agenda of pushing the movement further, we assessed all situations and agreed that we could never create any influence on the government by aggrandizing the contradictions we had with Amhara students. Amhara groups were externally financed and some rumors were spread about how other groups were receiving external financial supports too.

Apart from engaging in the intense debates and interchanges within the leadership team and the various groups within the movement, Moti was also at the vanguard of leading the effort to get messages across their constituency and external supporters. He pursued three possible options: public speaking whenever opportunities emerge, writing letters and newspaper articles, and face-to-face relaying of messages. For example, he mentioned that at one point he wrote up to 17 mails by hand to "well-known Oromos" who were living abroad. This was when his group tried to operationalize their clandestine movement and broaden their struggle. There was another evidence of public communication. This was after students were arrested when they protested the arrest of students who were involved in the beating of a sociology student.

We wrote a letter to Mr. Anan [the former General Secretary of United Nations] and gave it to Zelalem Gemechu who was a VOA reporter so that he could deliver it to Mr. Anan. I don't know if the letter reached Mr. Anan or not. We sent copies

of that letter to publishers of different newspapers. The letter appeared on different newspapers the next day.

Another media campaign he was involved in was after the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission meeting which led to the Oromo-Amhara students' tension.

I then assumed a pseudo name and prepared a false interview in which the interviewer and the interviewee was me. I explained in the interview that we overtly oppose student councils viewpoints; but we truly believed that we had no intention to support their [members of the student council] imprisonment because of their beliefs, we believed in freedom of expression; they had the right to speak about what we agree and we disagree on, we opposed every wrong ideas right on the stage, so no one deserved imprisonment for what he said or believed in. The interview was published in Menelik [a weekly Amahric newspaper]. After that Amhara students changed their minds regarding the conflict they planned with us. Then what happened was that the extended revolt which happened in 2001. After that I prepared a long article in Amharic which later became a cause for me to leave the country.

In addition to using the press and electronic media, he and his team also wrote public letters and petitions. They wrote letters to prime minster Meles Zenawi. They also submitted a petition to the parliament. As a result, the government formed a committee in the parliament in which Moti's group was invited. After meeting with a committee formed at the parliament, they reached an agreement on two points. One was that the government agreed to release all students who were imprisoned. The second component of the agreement concerned class boycotts. Moti and his group agreed to fully start classes. Unfortunately, no sooner did they leave the parliament premise, Moti was arrested for carrying a draft paper. He was later released after he was made to admit and sign that he was the only person responsible for everything that had happened since the movement started. After that he did not see the importance of staying in the country, and he decided to leave.

Not only did he lead internal communications efforts, he also tried to stay connected with civic organizations and various groups. For example, at one point he tried to reach out to human rights organizations when students were arrested: “I got the telephone number of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission from Mintesinot who was once the president of the student union in the university.” Moti was a point person for keeping some kind of communication with various groups partly because of his competence in three languages, namely Oromo, Amharic and English.

I had good communications with all those who protested. Although I had some personal resentment for the Amhara students, I continued talking to them. It was me who had been drafting and writing every document that was written in Amharic... Since I took the responsibility for the papers we had distributed and published on newspapers, I was almost informally imprisoned. I had good communications with almost all kinds of people at that time. I used to talk in Amharic with the Amhara and the Tigrean students.

His social capital helped him to get covers from threats and persecutions; his spoke Amharic well helping him create close friendship with both Amhara and Tigrean students; his early engagement in the teaching of Oromo language helped him broaden his network with teachers, public officials, and influential Oromos. His knowledge of the history of Ethiopia also helped him articulate issues and positions providing him confidence to speak in public.

Moti was also able to speak at large and formal meetings to defend Oromo students' actions and articulate their concerns. One notable example was the speech he made at the Oromia regional office in which he persuaded the senior political officials to respond to Oromo students' calls. He persuasively made a case for students to go to Bale-Borena to help firefighters. Using the opportunity, he tried to communicate Oromo

students' vision. By so doing, he drew the officials' attention to the reason and extent of Oromo students' effort to mobilize.

With regard to their channel of communication, Moti described the internal processes as follows:

The first thing we would do was...since we informally knew all students on campus...we would use the department structures. For instance, it was my fourth year in the department of management. I knew all students in the department of management. In the same way, we had all representatives from every department in every cohort. When freshman students arrived we immediately selected representatives from each class. We communicated through those representatives. The communication was organized that way. For instance, if there were three representatives in the business faculty, there was a committee of students at the business faculty...we had representatives from every department and every cohort. The committee would inform representatives about what could be done on a certain day at a certain place and a certain time. Then the information would quickly reach everyone. We would discuss these works in dormitories where only Oromo students lived. The maximum number of committee members who could participate during a discussion was 10 students.

Once they made decisions, all students in their constituency would get the messages through representatives. They would keep the confidentiality of their activities as much as possible. For example, if they needed to write letters about student abuse, they would consult with students and distribute lists of students who were affected by the abuse.

Although Oromo students had the over-arching goal of protesting every discourse and practice that would be associated with domination of Oromo by others, internal cohesion and motivation remained a challenge. There was uncertainty among both the leadership and organizers.

We considered ourselves as if we were in the war front, not in school. It was a new movement at that time; most students did not have any idea about it, so there were wild speculations from the non-Oromo students about who was behind the movement; most students did not speak to each other; some students quarreled on

very minor things, and still others quarreled in class rooms. After these incidents started to grow stronger, firstly the leadership of other groups started to become decentralized and dislocated. Ours was not as such a disconnection of leadership, but it was a kind of a continuous pressure from different individuals and groups.

As Moti revealed, even within the seemingly coherent discourse of Oromo identity, there were diverse voices. There were different groups who reflected diverse agendas. He did not hide the challenge of distinguishing the genuine from the bogus. He mentioned one group as an example which often interfered in their movement because it had a support from the dominant political party. He also mentioned a group within the Oromo student community that insisted for a demand for an immediate referendum. All these diverse voices posed a challenge to forge a unified and robust Oromo movement.

Mustafa

Mustafa was a mediator, a debater and a persuader. He could make a strong case for student actions. One particular case was his persuasive approach to raise money for needy Oromo students. His initiative attracted many students to coordinate efforts to support students who were struggling financially and materially. Another example was the case he made to disrupt a music show at Sidist Kilo culture center. Additionally, Mustafa remained committed to keep information flow from one student to another. He states his experience as follows:

When I was in the freshman, four of us who were in my room were Oromos. We shared information with each other.... We sent messages to those who were not around us. Then any new development would reach everyone very quickly overnight. We randomly stopped everyone and asked if he heard about a certain new thing. Everyone would hear about any development very quickly that way...

After he joined the technology faculty, he became head of the committee of the technology faculty in 2002. Such a responsibility required him to occasionally meet to consult with his fellow Oromo activists. Clandestine meetings were key to determine what kind of information to share and how. He admitted that meeting in the dormitories had risks. He mentioned one example in which information of their meetings leaked to state security agents.

Fetiya

Fetiya was a problem communicator and persuader. Fetiya's engagement in combining framing and acting simultaneously was helpful at getting university administrators respond positively. For example, early in her second year at Haramaya University, she made a strong case for the need to support female students; she challenged authority, especially the university president. At times, her efforts of challenging authority were successful particularly with regard to gender activism. For example, university administration was able to construct a reading room for female students in response to her "irresistible" demands. Students used to call the reading room after her name for many years. In addition to informally and personally persuading university administrators to respond to female student' needs, she also spearheaded the formation of female students committee:

One important thing we did right after we started our second year was that we convinced the president of the university to call students for a general meeting. The president accepted our request and called students for a general meeting. At the meeting, I took the opportunity to speak about how the university... repeatedly made clear in its various reports stating that female students themselves were responsible for their academic dismissal from that particular university when there were, in fact, different external factors such as assessment

issues. I made clear the lack of commitment by the university to respond to female students demands.

The meeting was a rare opportunity for Fetiya to communicate important concerns and issues in public to the university president. Some of the issues and concerns she publicly articulated include the need to address the shortage of reading spaces for female students. Because of her persuasive demands and student's support, the president promised to address the concerns of female students. Then she devoted her time to follow up the demands made at the meeting and the corresponding promises. She committed a considerable amount of her time to make sure promises were fulfilled. She was finally able to witness a fulfillment of one of the promises, namely the construction of a new reading hall for female students. Such an accomplishment granted her respect from students. She was considered a voice for female students.

She contributed to the framing of the messages about the B. Ed curriculum protest. She also invested her time and energy in the formation of the messages used to agitate and persuade students.

Sitotaw

Sitotaw was a message creator and conveyer. The story that illustrates his most outstanding work of framing messages was his letter writing campaign. The letter he wrote to the prime minister of Ethiopia, which went through a collective framing process, was an important non-disruptive strategy to attract senior politicians' attention. The content of the letter had to be debated before the letter was mailed to Addis Ababa. This was a typical democratic micro-framing process, which did not exist in other activists'

framing process. Of course, such an assertion should also consider the structural constraints that pose challenges to processes of open and democratic collective framing.

When the strike started, a new idea about writing a letter of complaint to Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, the former prime minister, came to my mind. When I proposed the idea to the students, they said that it was absolutely impossible! They argued that no letter of that kind had ever reached the prime minister in the history of the country nor did the prime minister reply to such letters. To make matters look worse, it was a time when there was a big disagreement between the government and university students. University students declined my proposal arguing that our letter could not reach the prime minister nor could he read it. However, I said that I could take the responsibility if the letter failed to reach the prime minister and if our problem persisted.

Sitotaw continues to narrate that students pessimistically let him start the process of writing the letter. Then he began to frame the message which took him about seven to ten days. Since he had some years of work experiences, he wrote the letter very carefully. By carefully crafting the letter, to avoid any idea that could be interpreted in different ways, he articulated students' needs for adequate resources. When he completed writing the final draft of the letter, he called students for a meeting, and read the draft letter in front of students. When eventually students agreed on the content and language of the letter, he sent it to the prime minister office.

Sitotaw believes that the letter writing approach and the positive response from the prime minister office was a success story. It was one of his "historic achievements" in his involvements in the student activism. He revealed that what he did was remembered by many people who were studying at the university at the time.

Berhanu

Berhanu's work of message framing revolves around vision setting and raising students' consciousness on civic responsibility. At early stage of the establishment of Afro-flag, Berhanu's club main concern was vision and mission setting.

Our main issue was about Pan-Africanism, huge ideas like pan-Africanism, culture and identity. The idea that we used to critically and consciously engage in was that each Ethiopian doesn't consider herself/himself an African, the fact that they call other Africans Blacks or Africans. We believed we were part of that and we so challenged that inbuilt thinking. There is the idea of being African that unites us regardless of linguistic, cultural and religious differences. We have, as Ethiopians, a connection with other African people through history and culture. That Pan-African identity was our up front identity. By "Afro-flag" we meant that there are multiple African identities but with a flag we can be both diversified and united....challenges and good opportunities of Ethiopian youth and many African youth are similar. So the beginning was to work on our similarities.... Culture, language, identity and being African were our upfront identities.

The idea of pan-Africanism as an identity and concept was not well spread among students. Because of this, spreading such a message was not easy for Berhanu and his team. Additionally, the deep divides among students along ethnic and religious lines were also a factor in attracting students towards a pan-African vision.

Understanding and Overcoming Enticements and Coercion

One of the daily realities of student activists in Ethiopian universities was coercion from both inside and outside individuals and agents. It was not uncommon to be subjected to repeated intimidations and various forms of threats, including arrests and expulsions from university. Deciding to operate within such a context required leadership: overcoming intimidation and facing the challenges. In many cases, the activists were able to overcome such coercive moves by university administrators and state agents. Although all of them were subjected to the inevitable running away from the

world of student activism, their decision to stick to their activism for some time was noteworthy of analysis from the perspective of *endurance* leadership.

Leul

Leul's experience provides a prototypical representation of how student union leaders were enticed and threatened so that they would be restricted in their capacity to make influences. Here is his story which would illustrate common practices in Ethiopian universities:

The first was to include their own people into the system, which they were successful at doing so until 1998/99 after the 1993 student union when Boutros Boutros Ghali [6th Secretary-General of the United Nations, January 1992 to December 1996] came and students protested...from that point onwards up until we came to that power, they were successful at controlling the union through their loyalists. They put their own people in place, and de-capacitating the union and denying students of the right to know about their union. They were in full control of the union, incapacitating it from functioning well. Students were given only office spaces. But whenever the government wants for its own demonstrations, students would be called to participate. This trend totally changed after the 1998 student union. Then in 1999 it got stronger. Their second mechanism was when they were not able to get their own people elected to the position, they would entreat/ entice you to something by making you manipulable. I was personally offered an alluring promise....They warned me to consider what they offered me. If the second mechanism doesn't work, they use all means of intimidation, spreading rumors, and creating bottle necks.

Leul detailed how the coercive methods were multifaceted. He additionally mentioned that if all the three methods do not work, as was seen in his case, university administration would declare the union does not have a student mandate and they would carry on another election. But in his case, students were aware of all such interferences and they did all what they could to defend the union. So they were not able to create a split union as they tried. But they closed the union's office and confiscated their property.

Mintesinot

Mintesinot shares similar stories with Leul. Members of the student union were threatened several times at the university's police office. They were also interrogated and harassed by the campus policy on a regular basis.

Even when the university declared that the student union was illegal, Mintesinot and some of the student union leaders were able to "show" persistence and courage by defiantly continuing their activities despite the verbal threats and abuses from university administrators. Mintesnot's stories show that the student union members, particularly Leul, were repeatedly reprimanded for their behavior. They were denied resources and spaces not to meet on campus. At last, the union was disbanded which finally ignited a campus wide anger and subsequently a protracted action by students.

Around March 2001, the student union council couldn't properly function, because of the interference of the university administration. For example, we were not allowed to use meeting halls when we needed. We were denied access to our student union account whenever we needed money to have our newspaper printed although the money belonged to the union.

The university administration had showed similar behaviors to previous student unions as a way of frustrating them so that they would be incapacitated. But knowing this, Mintesinot and the union he led kept on pushing the administration until the April 2001 university wide protest, which led to the closure of the university.

Fetiya

Fetiya had similar stories of threats, enticements, and polarization. Her involvement in the B.Ed. curriculum protest was the main factor for the university's strict stance to her activism. During their protests, Fetiya and her associates were threatened with warnings of expulsion from university if they would not totally abandon their protest

and resume classes. The leader of the protest committee was arrested for days in which he reportedly sustained torture. Subsequently, they were also declared “illegal” and threats of legal action spread across the campus. She states her experience as follows:

When the management of the university realized that we were not willing to submit ourselves to the directions they wanted us to follow, they called the 13 committee members for a meeting. The meeting was held at a military camp in Harar town. I remember that the meeting was held in the presence of General Bacha Debele... At first, the university took a harsh decision on the 13 committee members. What happened was that [Name], leader of the committee, was an extraordinary student. He was an exceptionally gifted organizer, coordinator, and speaker. He was known for his presentation of convincing ideas. The university then made a snap decision to dismiss [Name] from the university for once and for all.

Fetiya also mentioned that not only did university dismiss their leader, it also decided to suspend the remaining 12 members from university for a year. Later on they rescinded the decision although they continued to issue threats. Campus security forces continued to harass them.

Nemo

Nemo’s stories reveal similar behaviors of university administrators regarding reactions to student activism. In Nemo's university, espionage, pressure, and intimidation were common practices. Despite the successful soft power and less confrontational methods Nemo and his team employed to stay engaged with university administration to advocate for student rights, the state’ security apparatus obtrusively controlled their work. In many cases, the system was repressive. He states as follows:

...the government keeps its eyes on you and never stops gathering evidences against you. It is a huge responsibility. It is even not an easy responsibility if you take a centrist position, too. However, it is much easier to become a rebel, to take a position at the corner, to score the goals one wanted to score, and to run away whenever danger lurks...you should understand that the Ethiopian intelligence system transects through the power and structure of the university

administration. It was not a simple matter. They used to create a lot of pressure on us. We had to make a big struggle to save some students from being expelled from their education. We risked ourselves, our identities, our education, our time, and our grades to struggle for the right of the students to be protected. The officials do not like to see any student who loudly speaks about his/her legal rights in the campus. They ask us to immediately get rid of those kinds of students off their eyes, or to immediately send them to prison. Sometimes they bring to us a list of 20 or 30 students so that the union could cooperate with them in expelling those on the list, but the authorities do not present any tangible evidence against the students whom they wanted to be expelled.

Because the university and the state were continuously on the watch out, leadership in student union was an uneasy position for Nemo. The following excerpt from one of his stories is a good illustration of the general behavior of the state and university administrators regarding student movements:

The Ethiopian student movements and unions have peculiar nature since the 1960s. They do not limit the scope of their struggle only to campus level. They go off campus and struggle for the rights of the society at large. They are one of the organizations who present great challenges to the government. Consequently, the government of Ethiopia by its nature regards the university student unions and movements as independent political parties which struggle against the government policy. It does not give any recognition for the struggle the unions make to protect the rights of the students. That is why it continued repressing, harassing, intimidating, prosecuting and imprisoning leaders of student unions.

Mustafa

Mustafa's experiences show both the university and state security system was commonly obtrusive, watchful, and intimidating. Despite his groups and movements' secretiveness and preference to operate in clandestine, they were repeatedly subjected to arrests, threats, and even expulsions. Here is one of his stories about the behavior of the state and the university:

...in 2002, I was chairing a meeting in one of the dorms and another student was chairing in another room. The information about our meeting reached the government intelligence officials. Our room was surrounded by the police.

Fourteen students were immediately arrested. Some of my groups and I managed to escape from the arrest. The fourteen students who were arrested given a “complete dismissal” notice for one year from the university. So there were these kinds of risks at that time.... Oromo students faced harassments from the government every day. I was personally harassed...The armed cadres harassed us to forcefully stop our movements.

Threats, arrests, and harassments were the norm particularly targeting highly active student activists who made strong demands that the state and university administrators did not wish to hear.

Moti

Moti was not immune from administrators’ and state agents’ threats despite his good relations with students who had close ties with the regime. He was generally successful in escaping direct action of expulsions and suspension which other activists could not; he finally felt his relation got quite worse. He states his last minute situation as follows:

...since I took the responsibility for the papers we had distributed and published on newspapers, I was almost informally imprisoned. I had good communication with almost all kinds of people at the time. I used to talk in Amharic with the Amharas and the Tigreans. I had people who could give me a cover from them. For instance, [he mentions a student’s name], the Tigrean guy I told you, was with me day and night after I was arrested and released. There were also other people who could give me cover, but later when the cover started to be weaker, I decided to leave the country.

The severity of the threats and abuse was evident in the eventual actions Moti took to flee his country in spite of the fact that he was one month away from graduation.

Sitotaw

Sitotaw's relation with Jimma University administration gradually became worse as the student union he led publicly boycotted classes in support of Addis Ababa University student protest. He describes the situation as follows:

The government also ordered us to show our agreement by putting our signature that we could take the responsibility if we failed to convince students to resume their classes. As time passed, the tension between the government and the university student union started to become worse. All the leaders of the student union refused to accept what the government ordered us to do. I especially showed my strongest disagreement.... The campus was guarded by armed forces. The idea about leaving the country started to come to my mind after I realized that I fell under the target of the government securities. I then fled to Kenya in 1993.

Generally put, research participants stories show universities they attended were not tolerant of their activism. Universities had a high tendency to put barriers against activism. Not only barriers, they directly took measures to intimidate and expel activists.

Building Trust

Research participants' stories also show how students' trust in their constituency led them to be more motivated and overcommitted. In particular, the activist who played significant leadership roles through formal positions were elevated into a higher level of commitment and engagement mainly because of the trust they gained from their constituency. Five of the activists, namely Leul, Mintesinot, Nemo, Fetiya, and Mustafa revealed that they were motivated by students' expectations and belief in their leadership.

Leul

Leul's involvement in the student union was the consequence of the encouragement of students at his school. He was not even "prepared for the position"

when students expressed their desire that he should be in the student union. They showed a great deal of trust in him. He recollects as follows:

It was in the same year in May. This was the time when elections take place...always... I became a member of the student congress of Addis Ababa University. In order to become a congress member, you have to be nominated by your faculty. The students thought I could finish the work I started as a voice of the students, and they nominated me to the position. This was a chance... I didn't even think about being a congress member. Life is full of chances.

Nemo

Nemo reveals a story of trust in a more compelling way. Many students in his constituency not only supported him, they also showed a great deal of endorsement. They even worked for him by consolidating his support base. He was particularly emboldened by the contributions of Oromo activists who amassed supports for him. He referred to them as “king-makers.”

Oromo activist leaders....they were also my friends, and they were king makers. They had the voice and the power to influence everyone on campus. They could simply say he could not represent us, or they could endorse me. In the meantime, however, when they started observing success after success through the steps I followed, they came to accept and they also started to listen. Generally, one's religion, one's views, one's courage, determination and commitments, and one's readiness to pay sacrifices for what one is elected for all matter most. For instance, time is the most precious thing in a university, but I worked at the expenses of my study time and my grades.

Mintesinot

The positive image Mintesinot began to project as a result of his involvement in establishing the literary club with a few literature enthusiasts, and his continued visibility on various occasions during his freshman and sophomore years enabled him to gain popularity to the extent of being elected to the union presidency. He told stories of

students' campaigning for him. Once, he was elected, he was deeply moved by students belief in the new student union which was shaped by his vision to make the union independent. Students' participation made him even to be more committed. Once he gained the top position, another outstanding achievement enabled him to gain trust. In particular, *Helina*—a campus newspaper which featured various interesting articles—was the main reason for gaining respect from students.

Fetiya

Fetiya's campus activities in relation to her gender and student activism were also a direct result of the trust she gained because of some tangible results students were able to observe. Through what she succeeded to do for female students and her resilience to withstand the pressure of university administration when they opposed the B.Ed. curriculum, students "trusted" her leadership.

We were even ready to become martyrs if the need arose. We had the belief that the students elected us by trusting our leadership and that they believed that we could honestly represent them. So, in view of this huge responsibility, we decided not to give up until our objectives were met no matter how we were beaten or tortured.

Moti

Moti's elections for various Oromo committees were also a result of the trust Oromo students built about their "ability" and "motivation" to organize and mobilize students. For example, Moti was also elected to the committee formed to lead Oromo students' campaign against the Bale-Borena fire and other multiple initiatives.

Subsequently, he was also chosen to lead various committees and protests both formally and informally. Because of his communication skills and deep desire to serve, students

trusted him and even they rallied behind his visions. As a result, he became more involved and took several risks which might have even endangered his life.

Mustafa

Mustafa was elected several times to be both a member and chair of committees representing Oromo students. He was also among the students who on their own initiatives initiated group actions to protest student abuses, to petition demands, and disrupt shows. Not only did he lead group initiatives and contentious actions, he was also involved in mediating disagreements among different groups within the Oromo student community. Such a multi-faceted involvement in Oromo causes was the source of student trust in him. The fact that he was elected several times was an indication of student trust. He revealed in his stories that such a trust in him emboldened him to take risks and be involved in more actions.

...there was a single incident at the technology faculty when I was the leader of the committee. The incident happened between two students who were from Wollega....These two students were dedicated activists. Both of them were students of the technology faculty. I was leader of the committee and I had to solve the disagreement between them. It took us a lot of time to solve the conflict. Their conflict greatly affected our activism. It hindered us from going forwards to focus on our next steps before we resolved the conflict. Imagine that, both of them were Oromo of the same region, and basically their conflict could have been minor in its extent. I think, probably, the differences grew stronger after we left, especially in 2004 and 2005. The Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization was greatly interfering in the affairs of students.

Most of the research participants recollected in their stories that they were hard-pressed by students at their respective department or school to compete for a position in the student union. This was an indication of the extent to which followers showed the activists were dependable.

Table 3

Aspects of Activist Leading

Types of Leading Activity	Descriptors	Examples
Petition drive	Writing petitions; getting them signed; submitting to administrators and politicians	Petition demanding a meeting with a university administrator against Oromo students abuse (Mustfa and Nebil)
Letter writing	Writing letters to supporters, government officials, and politician	Letter to the Prime Minister (Sitotaw); Letters to sympathizers in the diaspora (Moti)
Direct verbal persuasions	Making demands in front of university administration; talking directly to top university administrators, and government officials	Demands for the release of detained friends (Mustafa, Nebil and Moti)
Agitation	Agitating students to demonstrate, boycott class, boycott cafeteria, and boycott library	Agitation of Haramaya University students to boycott class and cafeteria (Fetiya)
Organizing students for action	Announcing/leading demonstrations, boycotts, and disruptions	Organizing students to disrupt the music show at AAU Culture center (Mustafa)
Organizing student meetings	Calling general student meetings to debate on issues or obtain consensus for student actions	Meeting of AAU students to discuss the fate of AAU student union (Leul and Mintesinot)
Writing on local newspapers/ asking a news outlet to broadcast their concerns	Writing an article to make a case for an action; Challenge a university policy; challenge opposing groups stand on an issue or action	Newspaper articles following the National Lottery meeting (Mintesinot); Message sent to a VOA reporter (Moti)
Leading a committee or an action Team	Contributing to the formation and direction of a committee, action team, etc.	Chairperson of the interim committee to draft a constitution for the student council (Nemo)
Information gathering and sharing	Gathering information on a particular issue, trend, policy, practice, and making it available to students through words of mouth to active members of one's action group, and committee	Relaying committee decisions to members of one's student constituency (Moti)

	Printing and distributing leaflets and announcements to call students for an action	
Networking with off-campus groups	Requesting supports from off-campus groups, influential people, civic organizations	Demands for support from Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (Leul, Mintesnot, and Moti)
Defending or protecting members from abuse	Defending students from university administrators' or campus police abusive intrusions	Opposing students from being dismissed (Nemo)
Resource mobilization	Requesting permission to use university halls, sport fields, classrooms; collecting money contributions from sympathizers	Permission to use the AAU culture center (Berhanu)
Setting group norm	Sharing strategies or tactics on how to detect intruders, how to behave during a certain action; what goals and vision to uphold	Demanding students to be non-violent (Nemo) Demanding committee members to avoid ethnic divides (Fetiya)

Summary of the Findings on Activist Leading

The purpose of this chapter was to present the findings on activist leading. Five leadership themes emerged from research participants stories of activist engagement. These themes are mobilizing for collective actions, assuming formal leadership positions, framing messages, understanding and overcoming coercions and enticements, and trust building.

The stories of mobilizing students under difficult circumstances were one of the most dominant aspects of activist leading. They point to stories of “small struggles” under circumstances where mobilization is either not tolerated entirely or allowed minimally. The mobilizing “projects” that the activists initiated along with their associates show three patterns of micro-mobilization efforts: refashioning the student union in some form, initiating a new club, and engaging with repertoires of contentions. The stories of Mintesinot, Leul, Fetiya, Nemo, and Sitotaw were about projecting student power through the student union. They showed unique styles of maneuvering and creating possibilities under difficult circumstances. Their mobilizing was difficult mainly because of two reasons: the political-economic culture which allows ruling elites to curtail dissent and ethno-linguistic divides among students. For example, the student union at Addis Ababa University was not embraced by Oromo students which further weakened the union’s capacity to mobilize. All of the activists in this study were engaged in exploiting available repertoires of contention. The most common form of contention includes petitions. Student activists played leadership roles by convincing students to sign and encourage others to cooperate. Another form of contention was to directly meet university administrators and present their demands orally. Different forms of gathering,

such as gathering in sports fields, in front of administration buildings, boycotting class and cafeteria, and campus demonstrations were common forms of contention strategies. Lastly, efforts to organize in the form of ethnic association and clubs were evidenced in the stories. For example, the Oromo activists demanded to form their own association although they were not successful. Berhanu and his associates were successful in forming a new club which was named Afro-flag Youth Vision.

Searching for vibrancy in the midst of fragmenting tendencies on campus was another finding which illustrated how activists desired and operated to be alive and impactful. Fragmenting tendencies among students was present both from within and beyond. It was common for student politics to be averse to unifying discourses and practices. There was also external pressure from the university administrators and the state to pull student groups apart. It was difficult to project leadership which holds the various groups together. However, the student activists showed the desire and potential to forge a unifying discourse and structure no matter how problematic it was. One pattern among the activists, particularly the Oromo activists, was the continuous alertness to seize opportunities to mobilize students. The ethnic based activists seized opportunities to mobilize in five situations: when a decision was passed to change the capital of Oromia, the Bale-Borena fire, arrest of Oromo students at two different times, to disrupt the Oromo music show, and the April 2001 student. Each activist displayed a unique way of seeking vibrancy among their group. For example, Moti organized students' petitions, voluntary work, and even demonstrations. Mustafa participated as a protest organizer, event disrupter, student rights advocate, and a demonstrator. Nebil was an active "follower" organizer and responsive to various types of calls from leading activists.

The third body of findings was presented under the theme of engaging with a formal leadership position. One way the student activists showed leadership was to empower themselves through a formal position. Three types of leading patterns were evident: leading the student union, leading a student club, and leading “small struggles.” Five of the participants had a chance to exert their influence and serve students through the student union. By assuming a formal position, they had various opportunities to persuade university administrators to meet student demands. For example, as a student union leader, they were allowed to represent students and attend various university administration meetings. By virtue of attending such meetings, they were able to learn the formality of university organization and power politics. For example, Nemo who was president of the Jimma University student union for two years was able to become familiar with the structure of the university administration and key university officers who helped him effectively advocate for student rights. On repeated occasions, he defended students from expulsion and suspension. Admittedly, formal positions in student organizations had their own challenges. On the one hand, the university administrators expected students to be obedient and overly compliant. On the other hand, students expected the student unions to be autonomous and serve as true advocates for student rights. In many cases, student expectations drove them to risky over-commitments. The stories of leading a student club mainly relate to Berhanu who was both a founding member and later on president of the Afro-flag Youth Vision club. Through formal positions, he was able to exert some influence in shaping the identity and content of the club. He also faced challenges both from enthusiasts and skeptics with regard to the various activities of the club. Lastly, leading “small struggles” was a story

of resistance and micromobilization by ethnic identity based activists. They were also selected on various occasions to represent their groups with formal positional assignments although such assignments were not “legitimate.” They had a challenge of gaining legitimacy from university administrators and the state.

The fourth area of findings relate to activist leading as manifested in the form of framing messages. Research participants’ stories show that as activists they were able to contribute to the initiation of a new message, its spread, and a gradual shaping of its content. Very often, the messages were articulated in the form of public speeches, comments that the activists make at a gathering. The messages they would articulate emanated from the current grievances of students, which could be national, local or campus-focused. Most of them were communicators who could impress and persuade their constituency. In addition to public speaking, the activists used available media outlets, including private newspapers and radio stations. Stories of Mintesinot and Moti had examples of such effort to make use of the media. Sending letters to public officials and civic organizations was another method the activists used to shape the narrative of their movements. For example, Sitotaw and Moti wrote letters to the prime minister of the country. Lastly, relaying messages across the campus was another significant contribution to the framing of movement messages. Nebil was the most notable example for this although all of them contributed to such a method of relaying information.

Another finding in this chapter relates to the activists’ capacity to “overcome” enticements and coercions. All of them recounted stories of various kinds of intimidation both by the university administrators and the state. Threats of expulsions and suspensions were part of the coercions. In some cases, notably as was revealed in Leul’s stories, there

were various efforts of enticements to re-align the activists to a more pro-state position. Overcoming coercions and enticements had its own limits and consequences. Despite their “courage” and “strength,” seven of them left the country to escape persecution.

Building trust was another set of findings that could be considered an aspect of activist leading. The very involvement of the activists with large scale and risky mobilizing and other forms of activities was set in motion by the various groups that the activists represented. Their leadership emerged from the impulse and potency within their respective group. The groups had trust in the activists when they observed the activists enthusiasm and willingness to take initiatives and challenge authority. For example, Leul and Nemo initially did not want to be student union leaders. The push came from their constituency. That marked a significant level of trust.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DISCUSSION

This chapter focuses on the key findings of the study, and has four sections. The first is a summary of the findings related to activist becoming, belonging and leading. The second is a discussion of these findings that seeks to provide an interpretative meaning behind them using the conceptual framework presented in Chapter Two as a lens. The chapter will also provide a comparison of the findings with the literature; it highlights the major limitations of the study, and the final section is a discussion of the major implications of the study.

Summary of the Findings

The tracing analysis of the social origin of the activists revealed that they showed a significant degree of similarity in their family socio-economic status, influence of the father, family education, dwelling stability, family size, and school performance. The pre-beginnings of activism were also traced to the participants' lived stories. One common thread that intersected all the participants' lived experiences was an active high school life, which provided them the opportunity to participate in various avenues. The participants had an opportunity to take part in school clubs, either as active members or leaders. For four research participants, school became a place for awakening (see Table 2).

Turning points was another area which the findings tried to address. The pre-beginnings in the participants' lives were cumulative experiences which can be regarded as antecedents to turning point. The turning point was a major leap towards activism. With the exception of two activists, all had their turning point before coming to the

university (see Table 2). Again, diversity rather than homogeneity characterized the types of events or experiences that brought about turning point. The events or experiences that marked the activists' turning point included academic discipline, ethnic nationalism, faith-driven activity, school policies, and campus clubs.

In trying to understand the participants' activist becoming, issues and individuals that had saliency in their early lives were also traced. As they grew up, the activists had to encounter certain issues more dominantly than others. For example, the primary issue for the Oromo activists was Oromo nationalism.

Lastly, the findings on ideological formation surfaced the growth of distinct ideological orientations in each activist. For the Oromo students, ethnic nationalism was their distinctive ideological orientation. However, all of them had more leftist tendencies in that they advocated equality and fairness in power distribution and political participation.

In general, the findings of student becoming show both the unique and shared trajectory of the activists. It also indicates the type of activism that each one engaged in and why.

The second construct to which I collected data was activist belonging. According to the findings, activist belonging manifested itself in four ways: student organization oriented belonging, ethnic identity oriented belonging, pan-African identity oriented belonging, and intersectional identity oriented belonging. The findings on student organization oriented belonging showed how three of the activists who were leaders of student unions tried to reach out to the broad student community. Diversity rather than homogeneity characterized the student organization oriented belonging. Each of the three

students who showed this type of belonging displayed both idiosyncratic and overlapping behaviors of belonging. One was a boundary spanning behavior. The other was the tendency to consider university students as a miniature of the diverse Ethiopian populations. The third was the tendency to create an abstract view of university students as an imagined community of enlightened individuals. Still another was the tendency to submit oneself to a deeper emotional connection with university students.

The second group, who displayed ethnic identity-based belonging, operated from the premise that students that belong to their ethnic group deserved advocacy and empowerment. Three of the activists in this study projected a significant degree of belonging to their ethnic identity, while one activist blended his student and ethnic identities together. For one activist, belonging was a commitment to an ethnic cause, while for another it was a commitment to an imagined ethnic movement. Still for another activist within this category, belonging provided an emotional and social connection by being responsive to protest and action calls.

Included in the findings was also the story of pan-African interest which was presented as an aspect of an overstretching of the boundary of belonging. Such a belonging was shown as a unique display of a broader claim of identity and connection. Similarly, belonging as intersection, was another finding which showed the discursive interest and social position of activists. Intersection, spanning the boundaries of multiple identities, showed that belonging was sometimes not categorical. It was either in-between or at the intersect of two or more identities. For two of the activists in this study, such a belonging showed the difficulty of making a choice between identities as an activist.

The third body of findings in this study relate to activist leading, which explored the diverse ways in which activists spearheaded and directed various group-based initiatives. Stories of organizing students under difficult circumstances were one of the most dominant aspects of activist leading. They point to stories of “small struggles” under circumstances where mobilization is neither tolerated nor minimally allowed. The organizing “projects” that the activists initiated along their associates show three patterns of micro-mobilization efforts: refashioning the student union in some form, initiating a new club, and engaging in organized contentions. The stories of five of the activists were about projecting student power through the student union. They showed unique styles of maneuvering and creating possibilities under difficult circumstances. Their organizing was difficult due primarily to two reasons: the political-economic culture that allows the ruling elites to curtail dissent, and the ethnolinguistic divides among students.

Searching for vitality in the midst of fragmenting tendencies on campus was another finding, which illustrated how activists desired and operated to be alive and impactful. Fragmenting tendencies among students was present both from within and beyond. It was common for student politics to be averse to unifying discourses and practices. There was also external pressure from the university administrators and the state to pull student groups apart. It was difficult to project leadership that could hold the various groups together. However, the student activists demonstrated the desire and potential to forge a unifying discourse and structure, regardless of how problematic it was.

The third body of findings was presented under the theme of engaging with a formal leadership position. One way the student activists showed leadership was to

empower themselves through a formal position. In this regard, three types of leading patterns were evident: leading the student union, leading a student club, and leading an ethnic-based amorphous movement.

The fourth area of findings relates to activist leading as manifested in the form of framing messages. The activists' stories show that they were able to contribute to the initiation of a new message, its spread and gradually shaping of its content. Very often, the messages were articulated in the form of public speeches and comments that the activists made at a gathering. The messages they would articulate emanated from the current grievances of students which could be national, local or campus. Most of them were good communicators or able to deliver effective messages that impressed and persuaded their constituency. In addition to public speaking, the activists used available media outlets, including private newspapers and radio stations.

Still another finding worthy of consideration in this study relates to the activists capacity to “overcome” enticements and coercions. All of them recounted stories of various kinds of intimidations both by the university administrators and the state. Threats of expulsions and suspensions were part of the coercions. Overcoming coercions and enticements had its own limits and consequences. Despite their resolve to express grievances and resist domination, seven of them left the country to escape persecution.

Building trust was another set of findings that could be considered an aspect of activist leading. The involvement of the activists with large scale and risky organizing and other activities were set in motion by the various groups that the activists represented. Their leadership emerged from the impulse and potency within their respective groups. The groups had trust in the activists when they observed their

enthusiasm and willingness to take initiatives and challenge authority. For example, two of the activists did not initially have a desire to be student union leaders. The push came from their constituency. That marked a significant level of trust. In the next section, I will select major themes from the findings to discuss the broader meanings they entail in the context of social movement, activism, and leadership. The meanings should also be seen in the context of Ethiopian higher education. Table 4 summarizes the findings:

Table 4

Major Findings

Key Aspects of Activist Becoming

- Most of them were born from low-income family.
- Most of them were born from a large family.
- Most of them had to relocate either with a family or a lone search for better living conditions or schools.
- All of them performed well in schools.
- Most of them participated actively in schools clubs and affairs.
- They had one of the following critical encounters/experience in their lives: parental suffering, identity becoming a cause of demeaning comments, being ostracize by students, and being victim of educational decisions.
- Issues that have saliency in their upbringing are one or more of the following: ethnic nationalism, poverty, language, identity, humanitarian work, and gender equality
- Ideological orientation shaped by one of the following: resistance ideology, academic or social fairness, centrism/unionism, and ethno-centrism.

Key Manifestations of Activist Belonging

Student organization-oriented belonging (3 participants)

Ethnicity-oriented belonging (3 participants)

Intersectional identity-oriented belonging (2 participants)

Pan-African identity-oriented belonging (1 participant)

Key Aspects of Activist Leading

Most of them led student actions through diverse non-disruptive methods.

All of them engaged in message framing and communicating.

Most of them led teams/action groups by chairing committees, clubs, and student unions.

Most of them were emboldened to engage as activist leaders by leadership endorsement.

Discussion of the Findings

This study examined the research participants' activist consciousness formation, their alignments and leadership contributions as activists at university. It was assumed that political consciousness and grievances are two parallel elements in shaping the identity of activists. However, consciousness is continuous while grievance forming experiences are not. Another important element is action taking. In most cases, actions are the results of the interaction of consciousness and grievances. Many social actors undergo a process of consciousness formation before they actually begin to act. This does not mean consciousness always precedes action. One may accidentally act and then consciousness may develop as he or she continues to act. In the following sections, my aim will be to discuss the activists' trajectory of becoming, belonging and leading, the interplay among the three, and the implications for young people and students who aspire to activism as a means of social and institutional change.

Discussion on Activist Becoming

Activist becoming is a process over a long period which spans childhood and adolescence lives. To reconstruct a robust and accurate continuum of the becoming process requires more detailed and extensive stories and accounts of the participants. However, a conjecture—a hypothetical connection of the dots—is possible based on the stories of their early upbringing and school experiences. The continuum begins with the participants' social origin. For example, the participants were born into and brought up by a family whose socio-economic status was low. They were also born either in rural locales or semi-urban places or in poor neighborhoods. This by itself was sufficient for the participants to develop a sense of deprivation or discontent with their economic and

social well-being. Coincidentally, or by virtue of their class or ethnic identity, most of them were also victims of some form of direct or indirect political persecution. Some of them were also victims of some form of unjust educational or social practices. In general, the participants experienced some kind of moral or social shock early in their childhood or early adolescence.

The major issues that participants encountered or discovered in the process of interacting with others were also critical elements in helping them become socialized into a certain school of thought. Similarly, the presence of individuals who could influence them in a certain way contributed to the ideology to which they were orientated. The activists' father was a dominant force in their upbringing, influencing them to develop a strong character and morality that should have social sensibility.

School was another factor in providing the context and social grounding for developing a unique sensibility and sensitivity to issues and practices. It was an important site, either for aggravating their disaffection with the social condition they came from or providing them an opportunity to engage and understand the world better. School clubs were particularly important avenues to engage with others. At the same time, the current political climate and generational effects enhanced their strong sense of dissatisfaction with the status quo. The tendency to be easily dissatisfied gradually became part of their moral and personal character. Their unique sense of dissatisfaction with the current socio-political reality drove them to be audacious and action-seeking. Even before they enrolled in a university, they were involved in a major authority challenging process. Schools provided opportunities and challenges to be engaged and at the same time challenge authority, giving them an opportunity to test their efficacy. Similarly, they

gained some opportunities which put them in a convenient position to express collective grievances. The content of the grievances and the methods used to express them were reported in the findings.

Then, the activists landed at the university, a world full of contradictions. Normally when university-age students enrolled at universities in Ethiopia, they would do so with a great sense of excitement and curiosity to explore the world. They perceived the university as a world of freedom and empowerment. To a certain extent, such a perception could be considered true in that at least the students gained freedom from parental control. On the other hand, their perception could be considered untrue in that parental control was replaced by administrative control. For example, the university administration curtailed basic rights of self-expression, assembly, and organization. In fact, the university itself is an academic institution in which state agents embed and control the daily interaction of all the participants. Such a repressive practice and—even discourse—aggravated the already aggrieved students' emotions. The situation augmented existing anger and bred a new form of grievances.

Aggrieved emotions require little political opportunity to manifestly transcend into actions. Historically, national and regional politics spur students' actions. During the period under consideration, national elections, the government's inaction to control wildfire, and turmoil within the ruling party were the general political context within which students made claims and took actions. Such political opportunities alone could not have spurred students' actions. The grievances alone were not strong enough to spur student protests. Even grievances and political opportunities combined were not adequate enough for students' contentious actions. It required framing the messages in

such a way that the political opportunity could be perceived as the right time to act. Similarly, messages needed to be framed in such a way that past and present grievances were deep enough to be considered unjust and oppressive. Snow and Benford (1988) argue that neither structural strain nor availability and deployment of tangible resources nor opening or closing of political opportunities nor a cost-benefit calculus is enough to spur actions. Rather, collective actions depend on the way “these [strain, resources, opportunities, and cost-benefit analysis] variables are framed and the degree to which they resonate with the targets of mobilization” (p. 213). Therefore, the message framing roles of the activists were crucial.

Message framing in this study does not necessarily refer to Kahneman and Tversky’s (1984) conceptualization of the term. It goes beyond framing messages negatively or positively. Neither did I pay attention to the impact of the way the messages were framed. Rather, the focus was to show that activists were involved in framing messages—the tools they used to frame the messages and how they spread their messages. In so doing, I desired to articulate the leadership contribution of the activists. What I tried to emphasize was the following. The activists’ message framing behavior was crucial in many ways. First, it helped their constituency to mobilize and rally them around their leaders. Second, when broadly seen, framing accomplished protective functions. By framing their messages in many ways, they were able to protect students and groups who were vulnerable to university administrators’ counter-actions. Third, they used message framing to challenge authority.

Factors associated with activist consciousness. As the research participants’ stories showed, three factors can be associated with the emergence of activist

consciousness and involvement in direct actions. The first factor can be identified as *critical life events*. An example is the challenges an important family member (s) faced while they were a child or an adolescent. For example, four of the activists had a father who was imprisoned for some time, affecting them significantly. Three of them had fathers who served in the Derg army and when EPRDF came their father had to be retired. Two of the activists experienced early adolescence intimidation or harassment because of their engagement as activists while they were high school students. Childhood and early adolescent life difficulties were also present among two of the activists. Education was also a factor among two activists who enrolled in a program that was phasing out. Such critical life experiences had the potential to gradually transform into grievances if aggravating factors existed. Grievance based theories of social movement emphasize that grievance is the single most important factor for the emergence of a collective action that initiates contentious actions. Snow (2013) argues,

When individuals collectively challenge authorities via social movements, they typically do so over matters about which they are deeply troubled, have considerable concern, and feel passionate. These troublesome matters or conditions, and the feelings associated with them—such as dissatisfaction, fear, indignation, resentment, and moral shock—can be thought of as grievances. (p. 540)

It is difficult to imagine most individuals taking part in contentious actions without having a deep sense of grievances about some condition that is contrary to the interests, rights, moral principles, or well-being of themselves or others. According to Snow, other factors such as curiosity, the desire for approval, and peer pressure may come into play when considering why people align themselves with a particular movement in the sense of being aggrieved. However, the primary factor is grievance.

Although most of them had early life experiences which may have been the cause of a deep sense of dissatisfaction or discontent, they also encountered an experience at a later stage which was a cause for another level of grievance and action-taking. Such encounters were presented as turning point, triggering phenomena in the findings. The turning point at which the activists began their activist activity was significantly motivated by the sense of changing a condition or practice which was oppressive, corrupt and socially undesirable. The first significant action they were involved in was to counter a condition or practice which they felt unjust or unfair. They challenged authority in the context of school or university. It was a small scale action.

What made the participants significantly different was a turning point (see Table 2) which tipped them into the activist world. Although most of them had their turning point before they came to the university, the content and form of the events and issues that ignited their activist epiphany were not similar. For example, four of them were driven to activism largely because of what they observed and experienced regarding ethnic identity. Five of them were driven to activism largely because either they encountered a decision which affected their education or observed a political process which they thought was detrimental to the country. A number of factors influence student activists' turning point. Although it is difficult to determine the whole set of factors, as is reported in the literature (see Wheaton & Gotlib, 1997), human agency and social identity contribute a significant degree of influence. Furthermore, it is also likely—as is evident in the students' stories of schooling—critical life encounters contributed to the type of turning point they encountered.

What is not clear in the participants' stories is whether the turning point were the result of single dramatic events that brought about abrupt changes or incremental changes that occurred gradually over time. According to Wheaton and Gotlib (1997), life events and experiences may have cumulative and long-range effects, opening up or cutting off future opportunities.

The second factor was *school as an action learning space*. The student activists began a social engagement significantly when they were high school students. One activist organized a religious group while he was a high school student, while another agitated students against school fees and non-voluntary language education. Still another activist agitated or organized a protest against the Bale-Borena fire while he was in high school, while another agitated students against a military draft. The only female activist in this study began to participate in a gender awareness raising club while she was in high school.

The participants' stories illustrate the beginning of a propensity to challenge authority; some of them began to do this when they were high school students. One of the characteristics of the activists was the emergence of events, life experiences, unexpected changes (e.g. curriculum), perceived wrong-doings of school administrators, faculty, etc. and their involvements in a group or individual authority challenging process.

The third factor was the impact of an *inspirational person*. The research participants' considered their father as an inspiration for the direction and path they followed as they grew up. The influence of one's father was recognized in various ways. The participants revealed that their father had exemplary character. They also characterized their father as a committed encourager who devoted his time to his

children's educational success. One may ask why one's father, rather than one's mother, became such a factor in shaping a child's early childhood character and attitude. This has to do with the traditional patriarchal structure in which the father is the head figure and most likely he was considered to be the one who knows the world "best." Typically, the father is a family head, more aware of the world (almost all of them had an uneducated mother, but a father who was either formally educated or semi-educated). These activists themselves are a reflection of a patriarchal society, hence males dominated activism in any social movement or protest in Ethiopia. This finding seems to be consistent with what some researchers found about parental influences. For example, Braungart and Braungart (1990) argue that political socialization is partly the impact of parents. Similarly, Holeman (2007) argues that parents embed many values in their soon-to-be activist children. In the case of the Ethiopian activists, the father was the most impacting parent, while in other settings other members of the family might play important roles as well.

The development of action-taking dispositions. The attitude and disposition to think and act on behalf of one's group or constituency was an important element of the general activist behavior. As Erikson's (cited in Flanagan & Tucker, 1999, p. 1198) identity development theory shows, the major psychosocial tasks of young people focuses on exploring and consolidating an identity. At a young age, people seek a purpose for linking with others. They also decide on beliefs and commitments for linking to others, such as organizations which share such commitments. They engage in the process of developing an ideology that enables them to organize and manage the vast array of choices their environment presents. Ideological orientation also leads to a certain way of

acting. This process of seeking connections with others and developing an ideology was present in the developmental process of activists.

In broad terms, their becoming evolved, from non-awareness through awareness to action taking (see Table 2). Their early childhood—the period before they experienced shocking personal experiences—was a *pre-awareness* stage. The activists' personal, group and social identity did not form at this stage. Nor was there any political orientation. Next was the *awareness* stage, when salient personal, social and national issues or phenomenon became their focus. They began to be pre-occupied with them. Some of them did so because of the personal or family experiences they encountered; some of them did so because of the generational events and phenomenon that were salient during their adolescence age; and some of them moved with family from one place to another. Then followed the *post-awareness* stage during which the activists began to think about possible actions; they also took opportunities to act; they engaged in some sort of self-exploration by examining their environment. This was the period when the dissonance which was created during the awareness stage was reactivated and led to a small-scale action.

Discussion on Activist Belonging

Belonging is not a straightforward, value-free concept. It is laden with various contradictory nuances. It is replete with nuances that can be overstretched to include power, boundary, student-hood, ethnic history, movement, nationhood, us–them distinction, imagined community, envisioned world, representation, and ideological orientation.

Imagined community. In both identity-based and non-categorical belonging, there was a tendency to subscribe to an *imagined community*. According to Anderson (1991), an imagined community, which differs from the actual community, is an abstract manifestation as it exists solely in the mind of the imagining people. Members hold in their minds a mental image of their affinity. This way of imagining that which does not exist was evident in the way the activists defined the community they aspired to build. The general narrative reflects activists' imagining or envisioning a community based on either ethno-national ideals, Ethiopian citizenship or black identity ideals.

Three categories of belonging can also be identified. One was using student identity to advocate for students in general. The second was using ethnic identity to advocate for a certain group of students. Although the Oromo activists' inclination was clearly stated, there were occasions when boundary blurredness presented problematic decisions and action dilemmas for them. The third was using gender identity to advocate for a certain group of students. Similarly, there was one activist who used student identity and advocated for Oromo students at the same time. For those who advocated for students from the perspective of more than one identity, intersection was evident. The same kind of dilemma might have also been present by the gender activist although she emphasized the inseparableness of the two: the student-gender identities.

Inclusion and exclusion. Another dominant narrative in the analysis of belonging is the discourse and practice of inclusion and exclusion—processes of identifying in-group and out-group elements. The Oromo activists at Addis Ababa University identify non-Oromo protesters and union leaders and activists as “Amhara”—although it was highly likely that non-Amhara students were part of the movement or protests. Their

stories show that the Oromo-non-Oromo divide was deep. Their language was typical of *otherizing* Amhara protesters or activists they thought were in service of Amhara causes. They frequently used *we-they/us-them* vocabulary, which shows the depth of the divide between the two.

Activism was about choosing who to belong to or not, who to build an alliance with or not. Despite sharing a common "enemy," both groups, in many instances, found it difficult to join forces. The activists who were student union leaders demonstrated belonging to a student organization, which was the only, but often controversial, political collectivity. Student union organizations in Ethiopia are largely shaped to be "subservient" of university administrators and state establishments. They are hardly independent organizations serving the uncontaminated interests of students. These student leaders had a challenge to create a public image that could be trusted by students, university administrators, and state establishments. It was difficult to be trusted by all three, making their belonging problematic.

Student as a transitional identity. Another relevant element which helps to view activism from the belonging dimension is being a student as a transitional identity. Student as a transitional identity provided both a challenge and an opportunity. It provided a broad context to students to define and shape their aspirations and engagement in many ways. Broadly put, it might refer to three paradoxical, yet simultaneous manifestations.

To begin with, being a university student is associated with *freedom*. The university entry age is a major transition into life away from one's family. Students begin to experiment with and experience personal life without the significant influence of

parental interventions. It is a period of excitement, exploration, and adventure. In other words, many students begin to feel a sense of autonomy in decision-making. They also begin to explore personal opportunities. Life without a significant parental influence on the day-to-day life and decision-making is what characterizes the identity of university students. This transitional identity was a favorable stage to develop ideological orientations. It was also an important stage for choosing one's in-group and out-group students.

Second, being a university student entails *increased responsibility and accountability*. Although a university provides a sense of autonomy and space for unlimited exploration of the world, it comes with increased responsibility and accountability. Academic work for the majority of students is a burden. Students are often told and required to work exceptionally hard and avoid pursuit of non-academic goals while they are at university. They are hard pressed to pass exams and meet curricular expectations. All such expectations take place in the absence of facilities and without resources for academic success. Activists are also part of such expectations. Any time they took time off from their study they increased the possibility of not meeting exam expectations. Civic engagements and activism are not considered major elements of the academic process in universities. In fact, students are encouraged to stay apolitical in many cases. For many students, university curricular expectations provided them with an opportunity to exercise personal decision-making skills and character development. In a way, it was a blessing in disguise.

Third, for many students, being in an Ethiopian university meant *suppression*. For a large number of students, university means a denial of basic freedom of expression and

political action. This was evident from students' efforts to resist and challenge university administration and the state. Both in public and covertly, students expressed the sentiment that the system was oppressive and repressive. So the period of excitement, freedom from parental control, adventure, and personal exploration was restricted through repressive practices and policies. Students' daily non-academic engagement was regulated by administrative policies which limited freedom of expression, association, and gathering, making their civic engagement entirely problematic. Activists, who challenged such regulatory and control policies and systems, risked their right to be a student at the university or even faced various forms of persecution.

In general, being a student at a university in Ethiopia provides a transitional identity which has paradoxical characteristics. On the one hand, it is a *freedom from parental control* and increased personal responsibility and accountability. On the other hand, it is an identity that is controlled and gauged by various institutional and state bodies in order to centrally determine what one ought to be and how one ought to operate. Student identity has many faces, consequences, and opportunities.

Collective grievances and identity. Although individual grievances existed among the activists under consideration, it was the collective grievances which led to collective actions. Collective grievances might have been manifested as students belonging to an ethnic group or a religious faith. In this study, students as a collective group expressed their dissatisfaction with the university administration on several counts: lack of freedom of organization, expression, campus safety, and unfair treatment of students who were thought to have violated student conduct. Oromo students also, as a collective group, expressed their dissatisfaction, and even anger, at the way they were

treated because of their ethnic identity, the perpetuation of the domination structure, the inability to celebrate their culture on campus, and the lack of interest in protecting the resources of Oromia. Such collective grievances had a potential for collective actions in the form of petitions, demonstrations, boycotts, direct confrontations, disruptions, and meetings.

According to Stekelenburg and Klandermans (2013), in order for group identity to become the driver for collective action, it must *politicize*. Naturally, politicization of identities is activated with the awareness of shared grievances. Politicization of a group identity and the deep power tussle that unfolds between groups as a result of politicizing measures gradually changes the group's relationship to its environment, whereby the choices they make are again shaped by identity. The more politicized group members are, the more likely it is that they will participate in collective action targeting certain entities (Van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008).

Part of the narrative could be that the Oromo population was/is subordinated. The protests, petitions, clandestine movements and consciousness-raising efforts they initiated were intended to challenge the system of subordination. They were forms of resistance not necessarily tied to the immediate campus context but to the general Ethiopian politics. The forms of resistance included attempts to articulate their own narratives of subordination, forced incorporation, and becoming voiceless through linguistic suppression. These students participated in these projects mainly because of *identity motives*, not necessarily because of *instrumental motives* or *ideological motives*.

Discussion on Activist Leading

Activist leading in this study is conceptualized as a function of activism. As the findings showed, the student activists took actions on behalf of their group or constituency, either on their own or as part of a team or as a participant in actions initiated by other activists. Their stories revealed various aspects of the process of leading, which I tried to represent as organizing, searching for vitality, seeking a formal position, framing messages, overcoming enticements and coercions, and building trust. As leadership scholars emphasize, leadership has ethical, motivational, relational, and action dimensions. Accounting for all these dimensions in the stories of the research participants is difficult, given the limitations in the current data. Nevertheless, as was evident from the findings, at least, three of the four dimensions existed in the students' aspired and achieved work of activism. The dimensions are motivational, relational and action. The motivational and relational dimensions have already been accounted for in the analysis of their becoming and belonging.

In the previous chapters, the student activists were described in terms of the characteristics they showed in the formative stages and belonging. Here it is possible to describe and classify the activists in terms of their contributions to the collective leadership they demonstrated. Doing so will help me provide the full context of the activist's contribution to student leadership. Using a heuristic classification, I will situate their work within each activist's specific context.

First, we find those activists who pursued the *student union* option, which included five of the activists. The student union option was the most attainable and least resisted option because it was the only "legitimized" form of student political

engagement on campus. It had its own risks and potential. Student union was both accepted and disputed because it had been subjected to manipulation by the university administration, the ruling party and the state (though there was little separation between the ruling party and the state). Second was the *campus club* option. Although Berhanu was the only activist who entirely committed himself to the campus club, other activists in this study were also able to participate in campus clubs prior to becoming either activists or union leaders. The third was the *identity-based* option, in which Moti, Mustafa, and Nebil were prominent participants in this form of student engagement. This option was the riskiest, least tolerated, but deeply and emotionally engaging form of collective action.

One of the dimensions of leadership mentioned earlier was action taking. Action taking occurs in multiple ways. One prominent action that the activists undertook was organizing. All of them were involved in planning and implementing contentious actions, which included boycotting classes, petition writing, and media campaigns. Such organizing activities were not easy in countries such as Ethiopia where state power is controlled by an authoritarian party/group. One can consider the activists' actions, what Krauss (1983) calls, modest struggles. Despite most of their actions being short-lived, fragmentary, and uncoordinated, their organizing efforts were aspects of leadership. They carried out symbolic and real actions that were acts of resistance.

Commitment to collective goals: Leading and following. Existing research on the emergence of activist identity shows that activists, once they have elevated their ideological maturation, begin to show commitments to act on behalf of their group or constituency (Holeman, 2007; Navia, 2008). The commitment to act is one of the

defining characteristics of emerging activists. The activists in this study were not short of such commitments. Most of them led initiatives such as organizing meetings and shaping agendas. They were particularly at the forefront of both low-risk and high-risk activities. Two patterns were possible. One was leading with formal authority and without authority. The second was active participation through committed followership. Committed followership was evident among activists who were not directly involved in directing actions from the front. For example, Nebil, who was neither a member of committees nor part of the formal leadership, was instrumental in coordinating actions at dormitory and micro levels. What makes him characteristically a committed follower was his responsiveness to participate in various actions.

Trust and leader endorsement. One of the theories of leadership that explains how belonging is an important factor in rising to a leadership position is the social *identity theory of leadership*. According to van Knippenberg (2011), the "[c]ore to the social identity theory of leadership is the notion that group leaders, like all group members, differ in the extent to which they are perceived to represent or embody the group" (p. 1079). He further states that individuals should also be more likely to emerge as leaders the more they are group prototypical. Group prototypicality gives group members the influence to emerge as leaders and in interacting groups. Other group members may also implicitly convey this expectation to group prototypical members, in a sense "giving the floor" to them to emerge as leaders. A leader is perceived to be group prototypical—that is, to embody the group identity or to embody "who we are." The leader derives influence from the implicit perception that he or she represents what is group-normative. This was the process that the activists went through to get to the

position of formal leadership as leaders of a student union, student club, and student committees. The activists in this study, particularly Leul and Nemo, were directly influenced by their group members to deepen their commitment to act on behalf of their group. They would not have aspired, for example, for a formal student organization leadership role, had it not been because of the direct pressure from their group to contest for the top positions. The process can be considered what Platow and van Knippenberg call (2001) *leadership endorsement*. Leul's and Nemo's acceptance of their group's leadership proposal illustrates how a group's belief and confidence in their leaders from within lead to a long-term commitment and preparedness to serve by the leaders. Being *one of them* mattered for all the gender, civic, and identity activists.

Trust is an important element that influences followers' endorsement of their leaders. Followers see the relationship with their leader as a process that operates on the basis of trust, goodwill, and the perception of mutual obligations (Blau, 1964). Trust can also be seen as operating on the basis of followers' perceptions of the leader's character and how it influences a follower's sense of vulnerability in a hierarchical relationship. This perspective implies that followers attempt to draw inferences about the leader's characteristics such as integrity, dependability, fairness, and ability (e.g., Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995).

Student leadership is about building trust. When students say to their potential leaders, "you are one of us," it means they are granting them leadership endorsement. Leadership endorsement hardly exists without trust. Both should trust each other. The student leader or activist should trust members of his constituency or group; similarly,

members of the constituency should also trust their leaders or people who spearhead various initiatives and activities.

Amorphous organization and leaderlessness. Viewed from an organizational point of view, the Oromo students' activism could be described as *amorphous*, to use one of the activists' words. It was nebulous and unstructured in its tasks, roles and resources. Despite the number of contentions addressed, there were no visible organizational processes and readily mobilizing resources. However, actions were visible, although their impact was not. Another important aspect of the Oromo students' repertoire of contentions and its forms, is that one reality was not disputable—that it was largely deprived of *leaders with formal authority*. Protests were largely spontaneous. For example, the 2004 Oromo Music Show disrupting a protest was carried out without any leadership. It was a reaction based on a group formation arising from a self-organizing process. To be more specific, the movement did not have a coherent organizational structure. Neither did it have formal and long-lasting leaders who were publically executing their responsibility. They had rapidly mobilizing groups which could spontaneously engage in protests or meet for a consultation and then quickly disperse. Such a rapidly mobilizing and dispersing group was intended to minimize public visibility and self-protect from persecution. Viewed through the new social movement lens, Oromo student movement was more cultural and identity driven. The *new social movement* (see Cohen & Arato, 1992; Melucci, 1989) views social movements as ad-hoc and spontaneous. It views groups as self-directing collectivities. It emphasizes how individuals separately and collectively engage in meaning-making.

Comparison of the Findings with the Literature

The literature reviewed in this study showed the trajectory and behavior of activists in three ways. A large body of the literature included in this study addressed the question: What motivates individuals to take actions, such as protesting? Another body of the literature explained the long-term process that individuals undergo before they begin to take actions as activists. Still another body of the literature illuminated the types of contentious actions activists carry out, and how.

To begin with the motives for participating in student activism, the findings in this study show both instrumental and identity motives. According to Kalanderman (2013), individuals show identity motives when they act as a member of their group, and instrumental motives when they act with the aim of changing their circumstances. While Moti, Mustafa, Nebil, Nemo showed activist commitments on behalf of their ethnic group, Fetiya, Leul, Mintesinot, Berhanu became activists to change the national and institutional circumstances that they felt were wrong.

Stekelenburg and Klandermans' (2007; 2010) theory of social embeddedness, to a certain degree, also fits with the findings of this study. According to this theory, individuals' grievances develop when they feel their interests or principles are threatened.

The more people develop a sense that group interest and principles are being threatened, the angrier they become, and they are prepared to take part in contentious actions to protect their interests and principles and/or to express their anger. The activists experienced moral shocks, suffering from critical parents, or infuriating personal incidents at their early age of schooling, or once they came to the university. Each activist had one or more personal or collective grievances. Gradually, they were exposed

to various consciousness raising activities along the way at schools and at the university, which reactivated their grievances. Locating themselves within preferred student groups—whether it was ethnic groups or non-ethnic—provided them with the desire and deepened commitment to be part of an action or lead an action.

With regard to the long-term process of the formation of activist identity, two studies (Holeman, 2007; Navia, 2010) were reviewed in this study. According to the findings of these studies, activist consciousness emerges in stages. Heavily influenced by Cross's (1971) theory, the studies provide a model that depicts activist identity formation as a short trajectory, which spans only a period of a few years. Navia's model includes four stages: Encountering threshold people and organizations, moral shock, making a commitment to act, and assuming responsibility for the movement. Holeman's model includes five stages: contact, commitment to act, stridency, adoption, and deeper understanding. Unlike these models, my study aimed to understand the emergence of activist consciousness as a life-course process. It is evident from the findings that activists' social origin and early life experiences have significant influences on their decision to join the world of activism. The issues and people they are exposed to along the way shaped the path they chose as well, to resist unjust practices and challenge authority.

Arguably, four elements are essentially relevant to understand both the dimensions of motivation and consciousness formation. The first is social origin and early life experiences. The activists in this study revealed one or two of the following aspects of social origin or early life experiences: socioeconomic status, ethnic identity, the suffering of one's family member, particularly one's father, and experience of

disrespect because of one's ethnic identity, and direct personal observations of unfair practices. The second was individual and collective grievances. Students who came to the university with their own personal grievances related to either the state or an institution or group had an opportunity to reactivate their old grievances. They also found students with similar past experiences. The process helped them transform individual grievances into shared grievances and group-based anger, which translated into protest participation (see social embeddedness theory of van Stekelenburg and Klandermans, 2007; 2010). The third is agency and efficacy. Agency and efficacy are related terms. According to Emirbayer and Mische (1998), the agency of individuals is the integration of their habits of action and thought, their imaginative generation and their capacity to make practical and moral judgments. Individuals who are able to initiate, mobilize and lead a group of people, the integration of the three elements of agency that Emirbayer and Mische identify, is crucial. The stories of making the collective possible seem to attest to the role of activist agency. Without agency, the capacity to choose contentious methods, match contentious methods and context, and carry out contentious activities is unthinkable. Similarly, efficacy, faith in one's capacity to deliver something, is crucial to engage with high motivation and selflessness. The fourth is political opportunity, which includes institutional provisions for participation, stability of political alignments, increased access to political decision-making power, elite alliances, instability in the alignment of ruling elites or elite conflict, and declining capacity and propensity of the state to repress dissent or the level of repression (McAdam, 1998; Tarrow, 1998). The student activists' motivation to organize and lead was contingent upon the realization that their group or constituency was ready for collective action. Similarly, the political environment which

determined the possibility of expressing grievances and staging collective actions was crucial. The activists needed to gauge their institutions and the state's type of reaction or severity of consequences. As the stories of most of the activists demonstrated, despite the fact that they had moments of promising and successful claim-making and collective actions, the state's reaction posed enormous danger to their lives. Whether they knew such consequences would happen to them in advance or not, was not evident in their stories. However, they revealed horrific stories of cruelty that other activists endured in the previous years or during the actions in which they were involved.

Conclusions

In this research, I posed three overarching research questions to which I sought answers through the lived stories of nine activists. Although the stories of the activists helped to understand what it means to be an activist in Ethiopian universities, there are gray areas which remain for further studies. Before I show those gray areas, I will present major conclusions to be drawn from this study.

The first question which I addressed related to the activists' becoming process by examining their socio-biographical characteristics. Individual's social origin (family socio-economic status, dwelling location, ethnolinguistic characteristics) influences the issues and the people they would encounter in their early ages. The current activists under investigation, because of their social origin, had a life process or encounter which grew into social and political grievances. The socio-biographical condition which gave rise to social and political grievances included relocation, parental suffering, belonging to a certain ethnic group, and being subjected to unfair institutional practices (particularly school and university). Although the stories of the students showed their developmental

continuum and the gradual emergence of the activist consciousness, the details provided in the stories were not sufficient to account for the interplay among the major elements which were used to trace their trajectory. In addition their trajectory was not analyzed *vis-à-vis* the activist typology that became visible in the analytic process.

The second question addressed the domain of activist belonging, which examined the possible range of self-alignment that the activists showed in the larger university community. Two major categories of belonging were evident in the findings: belonging to students and belonging to students of a certain kind. The activists who chose their activist work through student organizations, namely the student union and student clubs, aspired to serve the entire student body although their political orientation was disputed by many students and activists. Within this belonging category, two activists also showed another type of belonging—they aligned themselves with groups having specific identities. For example, one activist showed belonging to female students while another showed belonging to Oromo students. The second was belonging to students of a certain type, which refers to the self-alignments the Oromo activists in this study had with Oromo students who had social and political grievances. One gray area that future studies would need to throw light on is the relationship between belonging type and effectiveness of activism. This study has not adequately showed the complex manifestation of belonging. It is highly likely that various belonging categories exist in any community, including student populations in universities. Students at the three universities under consideration are normally quite diverse ethnically, religiously, in political orientation, geographic location, gender, economic class, and field of studies. Such a wide range of diversity was not reflected in the findings. Similarly, the study was only an attempt to

understand past activists, and little can be known about present activists through this research. Although methodologically difficult (because of lack of access to research participants), a study on current student activists is needed to shed more lights on contemporary activism and activists.

The third question relates to activist leading, which investigated the activist's work of claim-making and repertoires of contention. Student activists in this study adopted three major options through which they exerted their influence. One was the student union option in which they used the formal organizational and administrative procedures to protect students' interest, advocate students' rights, and organize various forms of contentions, such as petitions, meetings, and direct expressions of condemnations and persuasions. The second was the identity-based movements (both covert and overt) in which activists mobilized students for voluntary civic activities, direct authority challenging, and disruptive actions. The last option was the student club based activism in which activists mobilized students for civic engagement and awareness raising. Common in all the three options was the use of various means of communication to influence public opinion and responsiveness. Challenging authority, both through direct interaction and indirect means, was another common leadership quality that the activists showed. Above all, their devotion and resoluteness to be at the forefront—knowing the risk was high—was an important aspect of leadership on which further study needs to shed more light. As the structure and content of the stories of the research participants show, actions and accomplishments were collectivized. The plural first person pronouns "we," "us," and "ours" were used in narrating deeds, processes, and tasks. Such narrativity masked the personal deed in favor of the collective deed.

Therefore, it was difficult to delineate individual contributions by the activists to student leadership, envisioning and enacting of various contentious works and claim making.

Implications

The findings and conclusions of this study have three broad implications that have relevance for activist research. These include research in problematic regions, students and higher education, and youth leadership development.

Activist research in countries such as Ethiopia where non-state projects are viewed with suspicion and dissent is not tolerated and this poses unique challenges. Activists are present in Ethiopia both within and beyond the territory of higher education institutions. Their number might be small; their work might be precarious. Nevertheless, they give hope to the hopeless through their selfless actions and a daring capacity to question the status quo. The subject and practice of social movements in general, and activism in particular in Ethiopia, are rarely studied because of lack of access to data and research subjects. The few research efforts that exist often rely on proxy sources and public documents. Admittedly, this research project faced similar challenges. The desire to study past student activists was partly because of the inaccessibility of current student activists. Therefore, the study of past student activists was used as a proxy to understanding current student activists, with all the limitations of such methods.

Even finding and interviewing past activists had data collection challenges. However, the use of social media helped mitigate the challenge of tracing, contacting, and building trust. The fact that activists are likely to be on social media expedited the snowball sampling used for this study. Future research projects are likely to benefit from social media and instant interaction technology.

This study also has implications for higher education institutions in Ethiopia. It shows how students' aspirations to contribute to social and institutional change is aborted. This research is a story of youthful ambition and how universities and the state—instead of cultivating and nourishing youth—eliminate their ambitions. It also shows that in spite of the universities' and state's concerted effort to eliminate student activism, students' youthful aspirations and actions re-emerge in new forms and with new agendas. It is a story of hope, on the one hand, that students' aspirations and energy to challenge is never quashed. It is also a story of state power greed, on the other hand, as the state continues to counter change-minded student activists.

The findings also have implications for youth leadership development. As a life-course perspective of activist development indicates, young peoples' social and political roles begin to take shape early in their upbringing. Major issues and individuals begin to shape their personality before they come to the university. The implication of such an understanding is that youth leadership development programs need to involve young people at earlier stages, particularly in secondary schools.

Once students enroll at universities, too, they need to have opportunities to thrive as activists. Specifically, leadership programs need to expand their readiness to embrace and engage young people who have the burning desire and energy to engage as activists. The role of social and political activists is becoming crucial in changing the status quo in Ethiopia. Conventional politics, such as labor unions and political parties, are proving untenable. Activists, particularly student activists, can play constructive roles if they are cultivated and encouraged properly. As Holeman (2007) argues, "activists are a vital inspiration for an apathetic public. We need them. These are the individuals who do most

of the work, the small core group that says okay, and takes on the next big project” (p. 255).

Lastly, studying contemporary student activists has implications for understanding Ethiopian politics. The first-period student movement in Ethiopia can easily be used to illustrate how student movements shape the identity of Ethiopian politics. Arguably, current Ethiopian politics is a result of the student activism sixty years ago. The advocacy for social transformation, ethnic rights, and self-determination was first encapsulated in the first-period student movement. Leading activists demanded multifaceted social changes and political rights in 1960s and 1970s. Later, when state repression denied them the right to organize and challenge authority in the country, they established clandestine movements that gradually grew into armed struggles. In 1991, these political movements victoriously seized state power and introduced a new political order. Simply put, contemporary Ethiopian politics was both the direct and indirect result of the student movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The current state ideology was conceived in and emerged from the first period student movement. What this suggests is that contemporary student activists might have similar influences and roles in determining future politics of the country. Therefore, understanding current student activists’ ideological orientations, their belonging, and leadership preferences will help researchers predict the future politics of the country.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The purpose of this interview is to obtain information about your student activist life in Ethiopia. It particularly focuses on eliciting your childhood, school, and university stories which have relevance to understanding how you entered the world of student activism and your contributions to student actions. The interview has two major parts. One is your pre-activist stories, and the other is your activist stories.

Background and Social Origin

- Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? What is your ethnic background? How many languages do you speak? How about your religious background? Where did you grow up? Did you live in the same until you went to university? What kind of neighborhood or community did you live in?
- Tell me about your family? How would you describe your parents? Were they educated? Do you have educated brothers, sisters, and relatives? What did they do for living? How would you characterize your home environment?
- Which high school did you attend? How would you describe your high school in terms of extracurricular activities
- Were you involved in any political groups or community service organizations as a high schooler?
- What were your initial plans for college? What did you want to make of your time at X University? What did you think the experience would be like?
- What was your major study at university? Was it your primary choice?

Participation in Activist Work

(Stories of the activism stage)

- Can you list in a chronological order the events, protests, and movements, clubs, and other collective actions you participated in at (X University)?
- What was the scale/level of your participation and your specific roles?
- What were the aims of the movement/protest you participated in?
- What were the various options of courses of action on the menu being debated among fellow activists at the time? What was your role in the debate?
- Were you responsible to mobilize/agitate students to some action taking?
- What were the methods/ strategies you used to motivate students to participate?
- In what ways were you trying to persuade students to act?
- What were your balancing strategies/challenges, for example, in listening to/working with students who had radical-orientations and non-radical orientations?
- Were there constraints/challenges to organize students for collective actions?
- How did you try to overcome all these various challenges?
- What resources (material/ financial) were used for the collective action?
- How did you manage to mobilize these resources?
- What happened to you and the campus initiative as a result of your participation?
- Were there moments of frustrations? How did that affect your actions?
- If you were to name individuals who influenced you to be an activist, who would these names be? Who/what inspired you?

- Were you a formal or informal member of a religious, political, or social group?
Did being a member of these groups influence your participation in university activism? In what ways?
- What were your ways of relating with others? Your challenges of relating with others, especially those who differed from you in views and ideologies?
- What was your ideological orientation?
- Did you notice ethnic or religious or political divides among students at the time and how did such a divide feature in university activism? Which one did you belong to and why?
- Did the presence of such a divide among students influence you in any way to be an activist? In what ways?
- What made you participate in activism?
- Was there a specific turning point, a defining moment where you just felt compelled to get involved? Or was the transition more gradual?
- Did your education or personal readings influence you to be an activist?

APPENDIX B
STUDENT-LED PROTESTS 1990-2014

Student Led Protests 1990-2014

Years of Student Action	University where Student Action Taken	Issues that Triggered Student Action	Basis/Forms of Student Protest
1990 *(2)	AAU	The Execution of 13 generals who were said to be involved in the 1990 coup attempt	Classes were boycotted for 3 days by students (Ahmed, 2005; Balsvik, 2003;2007)
1991 *(2)	AAU	Economic reform	Protest on the streets of Addis Ababa ostensibly in the support of the government's reform announcement, but effectively against its dismal economic record (demonstrations, class boycotts)(Ahmed, 2005; Balsvik, 2003, 2007)
1993 *(2)	AAU	Referendum on Eritrean independence	Students protested the UN Secretary General' visit to Eritrea prior to the referendum (demonstrations, class boycotts)(Ahmed, 2005; Balsvik, 2003; 2007)
1997 *(2)	AAU	Land redistribution in the Amhara region	Amhara students protested the motives for and the consequences of land distribution in the region (petition and demonstration)(Ahmed, 2005; Balsvik, 2003; 2007)
2000 *(6)	AAU	Wildfire in Bale Relocation of the capital city of Oromia Regional State	Oromo students protested the government's inaction to put out the wildfire in the country's largest forest (class boycott, students travelled to the region to put out the fire) (Human Rights Watch, 2003) Oromo students protested the relocation of Oromia Regional state's capital from Addis Ababa to Adama (Human Rights Watch, 2003)
* (6)	2001 AAU HU	Freedom of expression Curriculum	Students at AAU demanded freedom of expression and protested lack of freedom; demanded removal of armed security forces from campus (petitions, strike) (;Ahmed,2005; Balsvik, 2003; 2007) Students of the School of Education at HU protested against curriculum change (class boycott, petition) (Personal Observation)

2005 *(6)	AAU	Election of legislatures	Students protested what they called vote rigging by the ruling party which denied victory for the opposition parties (demonstrations) (Balsvik, 2007; New York Times, 2005)
2009-2010 *(21)	BU GU HU AAU	Ethnic grievances	Oromo students protested what they called the Ruling party's discriminatory policies and practices (Petition, class boycotts) (<i>Finfine Tribute</i> , 2010)
2013 *(32)	BU DMU	Freedom of worship	Muslim students protested against the banning of campus group prayers (<i>ESAT</i> , 2012)
2014 *(32)	JU WU AAU AU AdamaU MWU MU	City development: Addis Ababa Integrated Master Plan	Oromo Students protested the master plan (on campus and off campus demonstrations, written petitions)(<i>BBC</i> , 2014; <i>ESAT</i> , 2014; <i>New York Times</i> , 2014;)

*Number of public universities in Ethiopia.
Abbreviations

AAU= Addis Ababa University
 JU= Jimma University
 MWU= Meda Welabu niversity
 WU= Welega University
 AdamaU= Adama University
 HU= Haramaya University
 AU= Ambo University
 MU= Metu University
 GU= Gondar University

APPENDIX C
RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**University of San Diego
Institutional Review Board**

Research Participant Consent Form

For the research study entitled:

A RETROSPECTIVE LOOK AT STUDENT ACTIVISTS IN ETHIOPIA: A LIFE COURSE OF BECOMING, BELONGING, AND LEADING

I. Purpose of the research study

Kedir Assefa Tessema is a student in the School of Leadership and Education Sciences at the University of San Diego. You are invited to participate in a research study he is conducting. The purpose of this research study is to examine Ethiopian student activists' background and experiences.

II. What you will be asked to do

If you decide to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in a telephone or internet voice/video interview about your student activist background and experiences while you were a university student in Ethiopia. The interviews will be recorded.

Your participation in this study will take a total of either 15 minutes or 2 hours and 15 minutes, depending on whether or not you are selected for the full 2 hour extended interview.

III. Foreseeable risks or discomforts

This study involves no more risk than the risks you encounter when you confidentially disclose information as an activist.

IV. Benefits

While there may be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study, the indirect benefit of participating will be in knowing that you helped researchers better understand student activism in Ethiopia.

V. Confidentiality

Any information provided and/or identifying records will remain confidential and kept in a locked file and/or password-protected computer file in the researcher's office for a minimum of five years. All data collected from you will be coded with a number or pseudonym (fake name). Your real name will not be used. The results of this research project will be made public through a dissertation report and possibly in professional journals and meetings.

If you are requesting a Certificate of Confidentiality, consult your IRB representative and the NIH website: <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/coc/>

VI. Compensation

You will receive no compensation for your participation in the study.

VII. Voluntary Nature of this Research

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You do not have to do this, and you can refuse to answer any question or quit at any time. You can withdraw from this study at any time.

VIII. Contact Information

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact either:

1) Kedir Assefa Tessema

Email: tessemak@san Diego.edu

Phone: 619-715-0495

2) Cheryl Getz

Email: cgetz@san Diego.edu

Phone: (619) 260-4289

I have read and understand this form, and consent to the research it describes to me. I have received a copy of this consent form for my records.

Signature of Participant

Date

Name of Participant (**Printed**)

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX D
IRB REVIEW SUMMARY

Institutional Review Board Project Action Summary

Action Date: September 11, 2014 *Note: Approval expires one year after this date.*

Type: ☐ New Full Review ☒ New Expedited Review ☐ Continuation Review ☐ Exempt Review
☐ Modification

Action: ☒ Approved ☐ Approved Pending Modification ☐ Not Approved

Project Number: 2014-09-010

Researcher(s): Kedir Assefa Tessema Doc SOLES
 Dr. Cheryl Getz Fac SOLES

Project Title: A Retrospective Look at Student Activists In Ethiopia: A Life Course of Becoming, Belonging and Leading

Note: We send IRB correspondence regarding student research to the faculty advisor, who bears the ultimate responsibility for the conduct of the research. We request that the faculty advisor share this correspondence with the student researcher.

Modifications Required or Reasons for Non-Approval

None

The next deadline for submitting project proposals to the Provost's Office for full review is N/A. You may submit a project proposal for expedited review at any time.

Dr. Thomas R. Herrinton
 Administrator, Institutional Review Board
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