

Fall 12-15-2017

# The ReSisters: Contemporary Ethiopia through a Feminist Lens

Eldana Mathias Temesgen  
emtemesgen@usfca.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.usfca.edu/thes>

 Part of the [African Languages and Societies Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Temesgen, Eldana Mathias, "The ReSisters: Contemporary Ethiopia through a Feminist Lens" (2017). *Master's Theses*. 266.  
<https://repository.usfca.edu/thes/266>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, Capstones and Projects at USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. For more information, please contact [repository@usfca.edu](mailto:repository@usfca.edu).

# The ReSisters

Contemporary Ethiopia through a Feminist Lens



**Eldana Mathias Temesgen**

**Master of Arts in International  
Studies Senior Thesis**

**12/18/2017**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	1
ABSTRACT	2
LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>11</b>
1.1. A CAUSES OF ETHNIC CONFLICT	11
1.1. B EXPERIENCING ETHNIC CONFLICT	14
1.1. C RESISTING ETHNIC MARGINALIZATION	18
1.2 METHODOLOGY	22
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS</b>	<b>25</b>
2.1. A DEMOGRAPHICS	25
2.1. B FINDINGS	28
2.1. C TRENDS AND THEMES	41
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>43</b>
3.1 CONCLUDING REMARKS	43
3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOLUTIONS	45
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>47</b>

## **Abstract**

Based on the recent mass protests in Ethiopia, there is a strong indication that the Oromo people of Ethiopia, who are at the forefront of these protests, have been placed in a position of marginal importance, influence and power in their society. Due to the power and agency wielded by the government, some ethnic groups in Ethiopia, including the Oromo ethnic group, claim to be underrepresented on a political, economic, and social scale, which has led to conflict.

The nuances of ethnic based conflict, such as the situation in Ethiopia, have been tackled through several disciplines and examined through different lenses, however, there is one voice that seems to be lacking in this conversation-- the feminine voice. The findings of this paper seek to uncover that voice, and illuminate the narratives of a subculture, that have thus far been inaudible. In order to comprehensively understand the ethnic conflict in Ethiopia, this paper poses the following question; what do we miss about ethnic marginalization, if we do not consider the female perspective?

## List of Figures and Tables

<b>Figure 1.</b> The Oromo Community Protesting in London.....	Pg. 19
<b>Figure 2.</b> Image of Feyisa Lilesa.....	Pg. 19
<b>Figure 3.</b> Pie Chart of Participation Based on Ethnicity.....	Pg. 25
<b>Figure 4.</b> Table of Age Range of Participants.....	Pg. 26
<b>Figure 5.</b> Colors of Resistance.....	Pg. 37

## **Acknowledgments**

This paper could not have been made possible without the guidance of the advisors and professors, in the International Studies department at the University of San Francisco. Thank you to all the professors who taught and advised me, especially Dr. Jeffery Paller, who encouraged me to write what I care about the most.

This is a dedication to all the women in the struggle and to my mother, the strongest woman I know. Thank you for all that you do.

## Introduction

The Oromo people are an ethnic group in Ethiopia, who make up nearly 40 percent of total population, making them Ethiopia's largest ethnic group. The foundation of the Oromo economy is agriculture, of which, 90 percent of the Oromo population is employed in the agriculture sector. Within the last few years, there have been mass protests led by the Oromo people, who have claimed that the Ethiopian government-- which they argue consists largely of influential members belonging to the Tigray ethnic group-- has been misusing their power and resources, resulting in the marginalization of the Oromo population. These protests have been met with violence and alleged human rights violations by the government on its constituents. An exposé done by the BBC on the recent protests claims,

*“Ethiopia's government normally keeps a tight grip on the country and there has not been anything (protesting) on this scale in the last 25 years. There has not been a specific trigger and what we are seeing is an accumulation of years of frustration from ethnic groups, who have long complained that they have been excluded from the country's political process and the economic development which has seen the capital, Addis Ababa, transform in recent years. Demonstrations began in Oromia last November. Protests have also sprung up more recently in the Amhara region. Oromia and Amhara are the homelands of the country's two biggest ethnic groups. New York-based Human Rights Watch says that more than 400 people have been killed in clashes with the security forces in Oromia, although the government disputes this figure,” (BBC News, 2016).*

Although flawed, the Ethiopian government (EPRDF) is responsible for bringing about considerable economic growth in Ethiopia and as a result, the economy can operate more on a global economic level. According to The World Bank,

*“Over the past decade, Ethiopia has been one of the world's fastest growing economies. While positive external conditions and increased exports contributed to this growth, the country also successfully leveraged agriculture exports to developed countries,” (The World Bank, 2014).*

This illustrates that the government was successful in not only improving the economy locally, through the expansion of services, manufacturing and investment, but also in integrating

Ethiopia into the capitalist arena on a global level, through the exporting of goods. However, this has created unintended consequences.

According to a study conducted by Human Rights Watch,

*“The protests were triggered by the so-called Addis Ababa Master Plan, which envisioned expansion of Addis Ababa’s municipal boundary 20-fold. Protesters raised concerns that ethnic Oromos living in the area of that boundary expansion would be displaced from their farms,”* (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

As was mentioned in the report by the World Bank, Ethiopia has one of Africa’s fastest growing economies, largely due to its booming export industry, and there is a need to make physical space to accommodate this growth. However, this is problematic because it has resulted in the displacement of the Oromo people, from what they consider to be their “homeland”, to make way for the expansion.

Additionally, even though the Oromo population make up 40 percent of the population, they have little formal political representation. Control of the state lies in the hands of the Prime Minister, and it is alleged that the positions of power in the government are appointed to individuals who are of Tigray descent. The government has unfettered access to the country’s economy, controlling everything from the trade industry to the appointment of ministers in parliament. These positions of power have ostensibly been given to members of the Tigray ethnic group, which is causing animosity and tension between the Tigray people and the Oromo people, as well as other ethnic groups.

Furthermore, another cause for concern lies in claims that in reaction to the mass protests taking place, the government is censoring the media and controlling how information is distributed in Ethiopia.

While Ethiopia's constitution guarantees freedom of the press, there are several criminal codes that allow for many provisions that limit this right. A report conducted by Freedom House revealed that the state operates the only national television station and owns almost all radio outlets-- Ethiopia's primary sources of information for the general public. State-controlled media are biased in favor of the government and the ruling party. Broadcasting law prohibits any political, religious, or foreign entities from owning stations, though the existing owners of the few private radio stations are generally seen as "friendly to the authorities", (Freedom House, 2016).

Additionally, censorship and self-censorship are routinely practiced. The government obstructs access to numerous websites, including independent and international news sites, opposition websites, and the sites of groups-- who they deem "terrorist organizations", (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

A comparable report conducted by Amnesty International, disclosed that internet access on mobile devices had been completely blocked in certain areas in Ethiopia, in the lead up to protests which took place in August 2016. This was confirmed in Google's transparency reports for the period between July and November 2016, which showed a dramatic drop in internet traffic out of Ethiopia, on the two days when at least 100 people were killed by security forces during the protests, (Amnesty International, 2016).

The existing attitudes of the government toward the freedoms of the media and communication in Ethiopia, has allowed them to regulate; how information is administered, the content of the information, who has access to it, and or who doesn't have access to it. This is problematic for several reasons, first and foremost-- as was stated in the reports-- it has given the government the ability to stronghold the way the public thinks, and essentially decide for its

constituents, what information is acceptable for them to know and to share. Thus, making it quite difficult for the people to mobilize against them, because the public cannot communicate amongst themselves or the with the outside world.

Furthermore, the state appears to be the only entity that gains financially, as they are the sole owners-- with a few exceptions-- of the telecommunications networks, printing presses and radio stations. They have full control of the content released by these channels of media and as a result; have full control of how they appear to their constituents and the image they present to the world, which may or may not be accurate.

In summation, one can see that the factors causing the grievances of the Oromo people fall under the social, political, and economic umbrella. Consequently, it is not difficult to see why there would be a feeling within the Oromo community of being underrepresented in the formal political and economic sphere, in addition to being removed from their homes and land-- hindering their ability to make money, in order to habituate a growing economy, of which they have little control over or access to.

There are existing theories that explore the complexities of ethnic related conflict on an international level, a state level and on a regional level. However, throughout the research process, I noticed that our understanding and concept of war has been told predominantly through a male voice or illustrated through a male lens. Too often, we hear about the male roles and players in conflict, more so than about how women are either affected by it-- even then they are often viewed as victims or collateral damage-- or contribute the war itself.

In my research, I hope to uncover the feminine experience and voice behind the ethnic conflict, specifically as it pertains to the way women are resisting, and the views on women regarding the current situation in Ethiopia. I aim to unearth how women view the causes of the

conflict, how they have been affected by it and in what ways they are fighting back, if they are at all. Thus, the research question I hope to unpack is; how do marginalized ethnic groups, and specifically women within these ethnic groups, resist, in the context of an authoritarian regime?

The current discourse on ethnic conflict converges the intersectionality between ethnic conflict and the formation of identity. In particular, the nuances surrounding the theory of “othering”, as a way to explicate the division between ethnic groups, which creates an us versus them mentality, that develops into conflict and or violence. Alternatively, some scholars reason that ethnic conflicts are more aligned with economic disparities and political power struggles, rather than social divisions and tension between different ethnic groups.

Pertinent as these theories may be in unpacking ethnic conflict, the accounts, experiences and perceptions of women within the conflicts are lacking, especially in the case of Ethiopia. My contribution to the existing literature surrounding ethnic conflict, is focused on addressing how the gender component in the marginalization of ethnic groups, helps us understand ethnic conflict, through probing the following questions:

1. How do Ethiopian women explicate the causes of the ethnic conflict?
2. How have Ethiopian women experienced ethnicity and the ethnic conflict?
3. How are Ethiopian women resisting ethnic marginalization?

By paying close attention to the hidden transcripts and cloaked expressions of resistance, I use female voices and narratives to uncover how Ethiopian women, in the diaspora, are resisting. Having conducted more than a dozen interviews with Ethiopian women from different walks of life, it is apparent that their understanding of the ethnic conflict is deeply rooted in; the feeling of belonging to a group, their attachment to their homeland, the importance of culture and

the way culture is taught, as well as the significance of talking and listening-- in safe spaces-- in relation to the efficacy of resistance efforts. Ultimately, I hope that we can apply the findings and outcome of this study, to other or similar ethnic conflicts, in an effort to add to a larger conversation of women's roles in ethnic conflicts and violence.

I will begin by introducing the existing literature on ethnicity, specifically, how scholars have rationalized its creation and how it develops from division to conflict. Then, I will outline the relevance of the theories proposed by the different scholars, to the current situation in Ethiopia, and provide an overview of the implication of the current condition of Ethiopia. I will then provide a framework of my methodology, explaining the demographics of my study as well as the reasoning that went into selecting the participants. After presenting the sample study, I will analyze the findings of the interviews, by interpreting the responses of the participants, based on the 3 themes aforementioned, namely; how Ethiopian women identify the causes of ethnic conflict, how they have experience ethnicity, or the impact ethnicity has had on them-- both in Ethiopia and here in the United States-- and finally, how they are resisting ethnic marginalization. Lastly, I will offer some recommendations, which I believe could bring about solutions to the prevailing ethnic based conflict in Ethiopia.

## Chapter One

### Literature Review

#### **1.1. A Causes of Ethnic Conflict**

There is a large body of existing literature that unpacks conflict as it relates to ethnic identities and ethnic related violence. Within this literature, scholars address how identity and perceptions of difference relate to conflict, and if distinct identities inevitably lead to violence. They also discuss the social constructs that allow for such differences to become a basis of conflict and how all this might relate to perceptions of power and oppression.

Scholars who have contributed to the existing literature on conflict, and specifically ethnic conflict, have quite differing interpretations on what they believe explains the causes, and why they are constantly reoccurring.

Pierre Englebert and Kevin C. Dunn (2014), discuss the nuances in African politics, as it relates to ethnic conflict. They outline the three different lenses in which one could analyze and define ethnic conflict, especially in African nations such as Ethiopia. Ethnic conflict, they argue, can exist on, or be examined through three theories, namely, Primordialism, Instrumentalism and Constructivism. Before attempting to outline the causes and seek the explanations surrounding ethnic conflict, I will use the theories of Englebert and Dunn (2014), to define ethnic conflict and see how it relates to the situation in Ethiopia.

In their book, *Inside African Politics*, Englebert and Dunn claim,

*“Many problems, from corruption to conflict, tend to be attributed to ethnic polarization. The reality is formidably more complex. Yet there is no denying that ethnicity, in all its ambiguity, lies center-stage in African politics... there are different ways to conceptualize ethnic identity, from primordial ties of blood to coalitions based on political expediency; the connection between ethnic and national identity, including the more recent development of political discourses of autochthony that link ethnicity with soil; and discuss the tendency of many regimes to repress, and of others to accommodate, ethnic identity,” (Englebert and Dunn, 2014, p. 7).*

Essentially, they argue along the lines that African politics and ethnicity cannot be separated because so much of a person, or group's, identity is entrenched in their ethnic background and build. The problem, however, lies in privileging one ethnic or "tribal" identity over the collective, (Englebert and Dunn, 2014).

Conceptually one can see how belonging to a group of people; who have shared experiences, customs and who are from the same land, could result in one choosing to show loyalty-- or even favoritism-- to people "of their own kind", bringing into question if one's national identity comes second to their ethnic identity. In other words, does being an Ethiopian come second to being Oromo or Tigray, which identity holds more weight, and how can we understand this through exploring the socio- economic and political inferences?

Keeping this notion of the relationship between ethnicity and politics in mind, let us explore how other scholars have examined how African politics and ethnic identity relate.

William Reno is one such scholar. In his analysis of African states, he refers to a concept where state actors and leaders; because of their position, influence and having agency to control markets, are able to maintain control over weak states in developing countries. He refers to this as Warlord Politics or Warlordism, (Reno, 1999). As he defines it,

*"Warlordism is not simply an implosion or disintegration of a state, but is also a technique for building new political authority,"* (Reno, 1999, Pg. 30).

Reno uses this theory as a way to analyze the role of weak states and warlord politics, in both creating and perpetuating ethnic violence, especially in African nations, such as Ethiopia. He discusses how these governments and leaders are able to control the wealth and resources in that nation, thus, controlling which group benefits and which does not. When it comes to matters of

governance, the neoliberal agenda and generating wealth trumps the need to advance public welfare and the needs of civil society.

Similarly, James Ferguson, in his book *Transnational Topographies of Power*, unpacks the relationship between the state and civil society operating as separate entities, in relation to the power dynamics in developing African states. He argues along the lines that, the effects of globalization have created an environment where international and transnational corporations have restructured the relationship between politics and economics and have married the two, allowing said corporations to acquire power over states, (Ferguson, 2007).

Additionally, Ferguson discusses how with the increasing number of developing nations, such as Ethiopia, allowing transnational corporations and international corporations into their borders-- in the interest of boosting their economies and for the purposes of trade-- comes the threat of states, and often in the case of developing countries, weak states, compromising their sovereignty as a way to operate and have a presence on a global political and economic scale. As a result of this, international corporations can use this power to control states and similarly, states leaders and state actors can use these corporations as a way to control the civil society, leaving very little room for traditional democracy to function effectively in a nation.

Considering Reno's concept of Warlordism, a connection could be drawn between the theory of a Warlordism and the current administration in Ethiopia. One could argue that it is because of its success in boosting the industry and in revitalizing Ethiopia's economy, that the government is able to stay in power and possibly use the economic success as a justification for being able denying Ethiopians full democracy, in the way of; withholding freedom of speech, neglecting people's land rights and hindering economic access to an industry that has been monopolized by the government itself.

Additionally, it could also be argued that Reno's theory of Warlordism and Warlord Politics, can explain why there is tension between the two ethnic groups. The government's ability to control the wealth and resources of the country, also puts them in a position to decide who benefits from this influx of wealth and, consequently, who might be left out.

Both the theories of Reno and Ferguson speak to the relationship between power and agency; by using elements of a state's sovereignty to mobilize resources externally, in the name of modernity and economic advancement, the purposes of a state can shift from what is intended in its convention-- contributing to the machine of capitalism and influencing the marriage between the economy and politics, whilst simultaneously creating a fragmented society.

Based on the ideologies of Reno and Ferguson, one can deduce that because Ethiopia is a developing nation, it can be seen as a weak state and can be more vulnerable to Warlordism because; the state and civil society are at odds in their goals, prioritizing fiscal progress at the expense of civil duty, (Reno, 1999), and the manner in which power is held by states and state leaders who control the policy as well as the capital, (Ferguson, 2007), as a way to privilege one ethnic group over the collective, (Englebert and Dunn, 2014).

### **1.1.B Experiencing Ethnic Conflict**

From my observations about the trend in literature, however, as more time passes, more scholars are looking inward as possible reasons and explanations for ethnic conflict. This is to say that, overtime, experts in the field are examining ethnic conflict from the perspective of the parties or the groups directly involved with the conflict-- on a regional and state level-- as opposed to solely placing responsibility on the shoulders of foreign and international influence, or as the residual effects of contributing to the capitalist agenda.

Experts such as Kenneth Parson (2007) and Iris Marion Young (2010) argue that it is very likely that distinct identities can inevitably lead to violence, due to the fact that there is an unequal hierarchy amongst the different identity groups; in that some groups have historically been privileged, whereas others have been oppressed. In an environment where one group is dominant over the other, or others, and there has been a long- standing history of inequality-- where minority groups associate their identities, group or otherwise, as having been exploited and marginalized-- this can create a breeding ground for conflict and violence.

Young focuses on how the construction of identities can lead to the oppression of an ethnic group. Members in a group with a specific affinity for one another, that share similar experiences, way of life and have a shared identity, often view anyone outside of their group as the “other”, which can lead to forms of oppression. In her theory about the five faces of oppression, Young argues that oppression can be used as political tactic to exercise the tyranny of the ruling group through; exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence, (Young, 2010).

Kenneth Parsons, supplements this by arguing that there are different forms of violence and oppression. He states that structural forms of violence and oppression are linked to power and control. The construction of social identity and the use of “othering” has the potential to cause violence and or conflict. Additionally, societal constructs such as patriarchy and racism, have been designed to preserve the different identity groups in the same minority positions they have been in, whilst simultaneously perpetuating the on- going culture of violence and conflict between them, (Parson, 2007).

Furthermore, Kenneth Parson (2007) and Iris Marion Young (2010) address the underlying issue one must consider; who does this conflict benefit, or who stands to gain from

this? They suggest that the dominant group, or the group that is considered to be the "norm", is perceived as the one with the power. By keeping the minority identity groups oppressed, arguably, this allows for the dominant group to maintain power, which can extend to both political and economic power.

Not unlike Parsons and Young, scholars Maurianne Adams (2010) and Gwyn Kirk and Margo Okazawa- Rey (2010) argue that the root cause of ethnic related conflict lies in the formulation of identity, and claim that it is constructed socially, whether it be on a micro, meso or macro scale. People identify themselves, and others, based on how society says they, or others, should identify.

Adams argues that when people share similar social locations, based on their gender, race, religion, or ethnicity, they are able to create a communal truth. However, the possibility of conflict arises when people perceive others as different, because it creates an "us" vs "them" or a "insider" "outsider" way of thinking. This is problematic because it leads to social identities being based on identifying one's group in an advantaged or disadvantaged social location or position, (Adams, 2013).

Her theory on the framework for analyzing oppression states that one group's privilege, directly relates to another group's disadvantage, and that this has historically been used to justify and perpetuate injustice, typically through marginalization and specifically institutionalized injustice, (Adams, 2013).

Similarly, scholars Gwyn Kirk and Margo Okazawa- Rey concur that the formation of identity is integral to understanding why conflicts arise. They claim that factors such as community recognition and expectations, societal categorizations, and classifications, go a long way in creating identity on a micro level as well as a meso level. They argue that this

categorization can lead to seeking similarities and differences in identity which affects the various relationships between people in society, contributing to the an “us” versus “them” way of thinking, (Kirk and Okazawa- Rey, 2013).

Consequently, this classification of people in one group versus another group, often leads to structural inequality, by ascribing privilege, power, and status to one group over the other. This categorization of people in society implies who the dominant group is, and who is the subordinate, and because these identities are learned and culturally accepted, it allows for sustaining systems of social and structural inequality, (Kirk and Okazawa- Rey, 2013).

There are elements of both Young and Parson’s theory that are reflected in the current situation in Ethiopia. The protests led by the Oromo population, came as a result of one ethnic group claiming to that due to systemic and deliberate favoritism, there appears to be a hierarchy within the ethnicities, creating tension and conflict between the ethnically Oromo population and ethnically Tigray people.

Young discusses the five faces of oppression, which goes hand in hand with the claims of the Oromo people, and the basis for their need to protest in the first place. Young discusses how oppression can manifest through exploitation, marginalization, and powerlessness, which are the very issues that the protestors and protests are aiming to address.

In addition, as explained by both Parsons and Young in their explication of the theory of “othering” as a result of the construction of identities, it is not difficult to see how conflict can arise when two groups-- who have different cultures, traditions, languages, experiences and identities in society-- are at odds.

We can liken the situation in Ethiopia to the ideologies of Adams as well as Kirk and Okazawa- Rey, by arguing that the ethnic divide between the Oromo people and the Tigray

people can in fact be explained by using the “us” versus “them” theory. As the scholars above argue, ethnicity is considered a social position to which people or a group attach a feeling of belonging, this can create displays of injustice that creates inequality. Based on the root causes of the Oromo protests explained earlier, it is not difficult to see which group is able to benefit from their identity and social position, and which is marginalized in contemporary Ethiopia.

Additionally, the scholars above also discuss how this inequality can manifest on a micro and meso level. First, on a micro or person level, one identifies with one’s own tribe-- either being Oromo or Tigray, and how the two groups having different languages, geographic locations, traditions and cultures creates division. Secondly, on a meso level, the lack of political autonomy and underrepresentation in the economic sphere-- which the Oromo people are protesting against-- reiterates the theories discussed by these scholars, surrounding the systems of structural and social inequality.

### **1.1. C Resisting Ethnic Marginalization**

The impact of the ethnic tension and systemic division between influential members of the government, who are of Tigray dissent, and the Oromo people, as well as other ethnic groups such as the Amhara, has been ubiquitous and destructive. Although the complexities of the issues between these two groups have been long- standing and far- reaching, it is fair to say that the conception and implementation of the Master Plan has acted as a sort of chemical reaction, igniting and inciting a slew of nationwide protests, and like ripples in a pond, the waves swell until nationwide eventually becomes worldwide.

From Europe to the Americas, the Ethiopian diaspora have spoken out, peacefully protested in mass quantities, held rallies and forums raising awareness bringing to light the current situation in Ethiopia.



**Figure 1.** Oromo Community Protesting in London (Lillywhite, 2015).

According to my findings, mobilizing the masses, formally protesting or even speaking out against the government within Ethiopia, has become increasingly difficult with censorship of journalism, restrictions on internet use and control of the media. However, people seem to be finding informal ways to combat that.



**Figure 2.** Feyisa Lilesa (Morin, 2016).

Figure 2. hints at a recent trend in the protests. During the recent Olympics, an Ethiopian long- distance runner by the name of Feyisa Lilesa, demonstrated a symbol for resistance as he crossed the finish line by crossing his hands above his head. This display of protest illuminates the dichotomic nature of the resistance movement, illustrating how an informal, some would say hidden, symbol of protest can exist in a formal space and even on a universal stage. How can we explicate this phenomenon?

The work of James Scott and specifically his ideas that unpack the invisible spaces which exist in resistance movements, is crucial in understanding the contemporary socio- political climate in Ethiopia.

Scott, in his book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, discusses his theory on “hidden transcripts” and explores how they function in times of conflict. Essentially, he looks at what remains unsaid when it comes to theorizing conflict and the manner in which people resist; paying close attention to the modes of communication used, in both the public sphere and behind the scenes, between people who possess social, economic and political power or dominance over others.

Scott claims that the hidden transcript can manifest in several different ways and gives examples such as; rumors, gossip, jokes, songs, plays, symbols, rituals, codes, and euphemisms as catalysts for reinforcing the hidden discourse in resistance, (Scott, 1990).

He discusses the relationship between culture and power, suggesting that tools such as language can be used to reinforce systems of dominance through mimicry, the use of stereotypes and ridicule, to perpetuate an image or understanding of a person or a group, (Scott, 1990, pg. 31-33).

Scott argues along the lines that, characteristics such as language, tradition and customs, that build a culture or the identity of a person or a group of people, can be used both as weapons against, and instruments that facilitate resistance movements in the hidden transcript. (Scott, 1990).

This goes a long way in shedding light on what is often missing in the discussion surrounding ethnic conflict, especially as it pertains to the manner in which people who cannot, or do not resist publicly, do so “offstage” or “below ground”.

Correspondingly, feminist scholars such as Annick Wibben agree that there are voices missing from the conversations surrounding conflict and violence, however, they argue that these voices belong to women. Wibben argues that when studying conflict and violence, we must ask what is missing if we leave out women’s voices? She claims that there needs to be more engagement of feminist curiosity towards war and issues regarding security. Whether it is through literary methods, field work or by exploring case- studies, feminist narratives and feminist critiques of war, violence and conflict should be included in the discussion, (Wibben, 2016).

Wibben argues that this will challenge the existing representation of violence and will restructure the perceptions and knowledge of what we, as a society, have accepted as violence. Creating an environment where the conversation surrounding war, violence, and conflict, encompasses feminist scholars and the feminine narrative, allows for a more comprehensive approach, that promotes and produces a more interdisciplinarily inclusive narrative, (Wibben, 2016).

In addition, Wibben implies that the feminist narrative is one that shares a more intimate side of violence, and often reflects what is left out the history books, so to speak. By engaging

more women to share their narratives and reflections of conflict and violence, society can grow out of the prevailing Eurocentric, or patriarchal concepts and ideologies of war and violence, thus, growing the “other” into the Western or male frame, (Wibben, 2016).

Essentially, in order to get a wider scope of the nuances of violence and conflict, we must refrain from only equating women with peace and men with war. Furthermore, adding the feminine perspective to this discussion, might broaden our understanding of what unconventional resistance looks like, by adding a viewpoint on conflict and violence, that might have otherwise been overlooked, assumed or misunderstood. This speaks to Scott’s notions on the existence of invisible spaces and the hidden transcripts that operate within them. This is where my research comes in.

My research is focused on combining these two ideologies; integrating the notions that there could exist a cloaked space where resistance is functioning, a space modeled or conducted by women, who have an alternative perspective and present a unique narrative of the conflict, so as to uncover a contemporary, all-inclusive landscape of the existing conflict in Ethiopia.

## **1.2 Methodology**

My research plan consisted predominantly of conducting interviews, and in the event that a participant could not meet in person, a phone interview was conducted. Face-to-face interviews took place in public areas mostly coffee shops, universities, and community centers. I conducted these interviews amongst the community of the Ethiopian diaspora, specifically Ethiopian women, who are living in the United States. I spoke to women who reside in the greater Bay area; San Francisco, Oakland, Berkeley, and San Jose, as well as Minneapolis, Minnesota, where there is a large Oromo community.

The participants, were all Ethiopian women of varying ethnic groups, the majority of whom identified as either Oromo, Tigray, Amara, or a combination of two or more of these groups. These women were all adults, the range in age of participants was from as young as 18 years to 60 years old.

I was able to gain recruitment through reaching out to formal community leaders, small business owners, religious leaders, nonprofit organization leaders and members, all operating in the United States. I designed a handout and distributed it to the different people mentioned above, outlining; my intention for conducting this research, the working title of my thesis, purpose of the study, protocol summary, basic eligibility criteria, study site locations, and how I could be contacted for further information.

Upon gaining a few interested potential participants, I distributed a consent form, which had been pre-approved by the Masters of International Studies Institutional Review Board. This form explicitly outlined the parameters and boundaries of my study namely; I would be using a voice recorder and later transcribing the details of the interview, however, participant who did not want to be recorded could decline, participants would be volunteering their time and would not be compensated for their services-- either financially or for college credit, the participants were free to stop the interview at any moment or opt out of the study altogether if they so wished, and that their anonymity would be protected by either using a pseudonym, or to avoid any mention or record of names, personal details, political affiliation, or previous criminal activity. Not surprisingly, all the participants chose the latter, which they described as the “safer” option.

Fortunately, there was no need for a translator, as all the women who participated spoke English, thus, there was no need to have the consent form translated into any other languages.

It was also explicitly mentioned in the handout that the target sample would not discriminate against immigration status and ideally should include the Ethiopian diasporic community as a whole.

The interview questions were semi- structured and open- ended, focusing on addressing the following: a) how women view the ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia, its conception and explanations for it, b) how women have been impacted by the ethnic conflict, both in Ethiopia and in the United States, c) how women are involved, or not involved, in resistance movements, and d) what impact, if any, this has made on resistance efforts.

Recording the interviews, gave me the chance to take ethnographic notes, identify the quotes that stood out, and interpret the body language and facial expressions of the participants, which amplified their narratives and experiences.

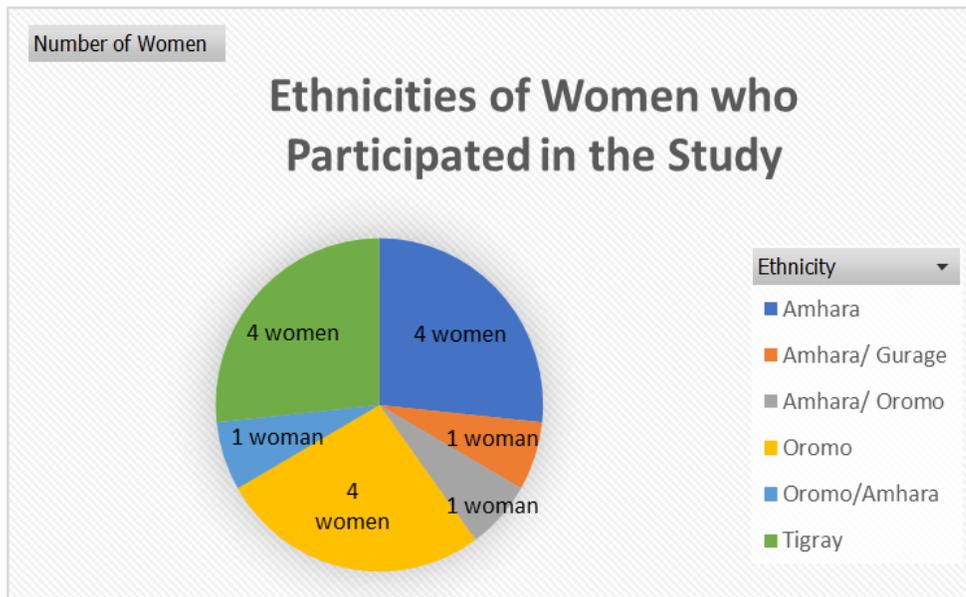
Based on the data and information I received, I analyzed the narratives of the women, paying close attention to any similarities, relationships, and trends in their responses. Correlations in responses will be added to my findings, as well as any memorable or significant quotes by the participants, that might give insight into how women are resisting both here in the United States and in Ethiopia.

## Chapter Two

### Findings and Analysis

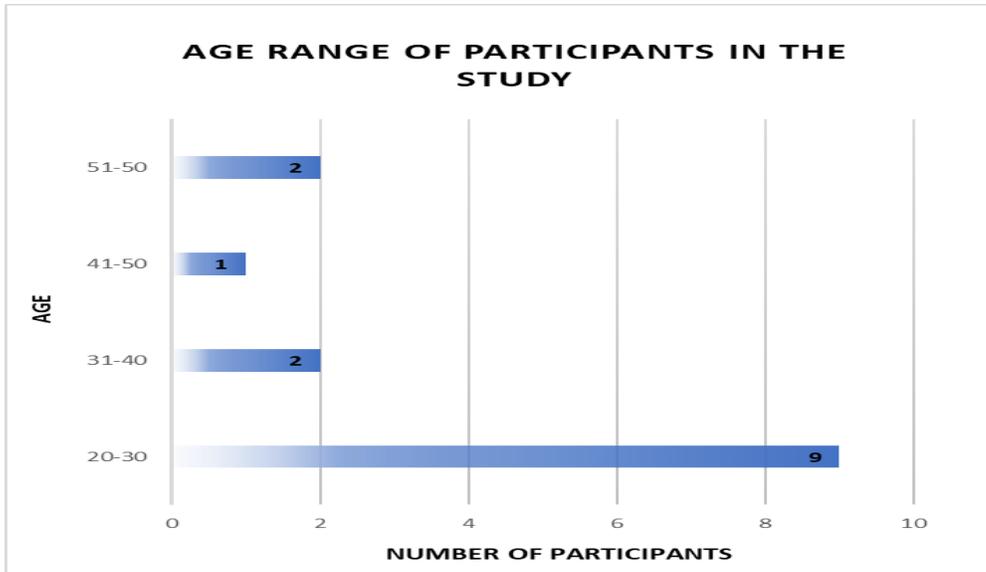
#### 2.1 A Demographics

The aim of this study was to collect information from a multifaceted group of Ethiopian women of different; ages, ethnicities, education levels, occupations, and immigration statuses in the United States. The study included interviews from a total of 15 Ethiopian women living in the either California or Minnesota, each with different backgrounds and experiences. The following illustrates the breakdown of the participants:



**Figure 3.** Pie Chart of Participation Based on Ethnicity.

As is clear in Figure 3. the majority of participants identified as either ethnically Oromo, Tigray, Amhara, or a combination of two of the ethnicities.



**Figure 4.** Table of Age Range of Participants

As illustrated in Figure 4, the majority of the participants were between the ages of 20-30 years old. I did, however, want to include the perspectives of women of a certain age, in order to compare and contrast perspectives generationally, as well as get firsthand accounts from women who might have been present in Ethiopia to see the various political, social and economic transformations, that have molded the existing situation.

Additionally, in an effort to diversify the sample study, I included women from a variety of different backgrounds, socio-economic classes and professions, namely; small business owners, students-- both international and domestic-- a lawyer, a radio presenter, a fashion designer, a scientific researcher, a registered nurse, a data analyst, a waitress, stay-at-home mothers, as well as local advocates and activists.

Likewise, the sample study included women with various immigration statuses including; Ethiopian- American citizens, both naturalized citizens and Ethiopian women who were born and raised in the United States, U.S. residents who were born and raised in Ethiopia, as well as newly arrived asylum seekers and women who arrived in the U.S. as refugees from Ethiopia.

With the exception of the international students-- who arrived in the U.S. through obtaining a F1 student visa, as well as the Ethiopian American citizens, the majority of the women who participated in the study arrived in the U.S. as political asylum seekers or as refugees from Ethiopia. The sample study also includes Ethiopian women who have all lived in the U.S. for different lengths of time, from as short as 7 months to 48 years.

One participant recalls,

*“I was in my early twenties when I first considered moving to the United States. The situation in Ethiopia wasn’t as bad as it was now, but when I saw an opportunity to leave, I had to take it. I risked being away from my family for 5 years because I didn’t want my children to suffer the same discrimination and violence that I faced living as an Oromo in Ethiopia. I have lived in the U.S. for over 4 decades now and I am a citizen, but I first arrived as an asylee. Most of my friends and family weren’t so lucky”.*

Similarly, another participant said,

*“I arrived in the U.S. a few months ago, seven to be exact. I applied for political asylum almost immediately after I arrived. I’m still awaiting my asylum interview, in the meantime, the government has given me work authorization, to be able to get a job and support myself, until my immigration status is confirmed.”.*

Alternatively, one participant shared,

*“I was born and raised in the U.S., mostly here in Minnesota. I guess I would be considered second generation, my parents moved here in the late 80s, early, 90s. When my siblings and I were younger, our parents would take us to Ethiopia-- they call it Finfine (the Oromo name for Addis Ababa, capital city of Ethiopia) -- every other year so we could spend time with our family and to practice speaking the language. It was very important to them that we were not strangers to our culture. They insisted we learn Oromiffa (Oromo language) and not Amharic (the nation language) and only visit places within Oromia. I didn’t understand why back then, but it makes sense now that I’m in college and can understand the background and history,”.*

The intention behind diversifying the sample study, was that this would broaden my understanding of the conflict and provide me with a comprehensive outlook on; how Ethiopian women-- in general-- explicate the situation in Ethiopia, how they have been affected by it, and the ways in which they are reacting to it.

## 2.1. B Findings

### Causes of the Ethnic conflict

In the section below, I present excerpts of interviews with the participants, describing their thoughts on the conflict. The participants were numbered, to protect their identity, this, as well as their ethnicity and age, are included after each excerpt.

As mentioned earlier, one of the main objectives of conducting this study, was to discover how Ethiopian women view the existing conflict, how they explain it, and make sense of its conception. When asked their thoughts on the causes of the conflict, the participants responded in the following ways,

*“The current government’s need to control people, maintain power, divide and conquer through ethnic division is the root cause. There is a large economic disparity based on belonging to a specific ethnic conflict. People in high places only looking out for their own, for example, Ethiopian Airlines began operating direct flights from Makele to international airports. Makele is an area in Tigray land, so this is economically growing the Tigray community and promoting tourism in that area, but not in other areas” (Participant 1, Amhara, 26).*

Another participant agreed,

*“The federalism practiced in Ethiopia is not necessarily bad on its own, but it is ethnic based federalism, pitting one group against the other. There is a large economic disparity leading to conflict. This is only made worse by corruption. For example, it is very difficult to get good a job without ethnic connection, even if you are qualified,” (Participant 14, Oromo, 28).*

The majority of the participants added that even the actions of the government which can be considered as helpful or seen as bettering the situation, are really just a strategic way to sow dissension between two of the largest ethnic groups-- Oromo and Amhara-- or to somehow placate the people, so as to manage the protests. One participant gave the following as an example,

*“The Oromo protest were based on the Master Plan, Addis is growing and as a result, Oromo farmers are suffering. So, then the government changed the names of different towns in Ethiopia, back to their original Oromo names-- like calling Addis Ababa, Finfine-- but this was just a ploy to placate the Oromos, so that they agree with the government to expand Finfine.*

*They also finally introduced Oromiffa as an official language, but I think it was to create issues with the Amhara people, because Amharic is the official and national language, and keep them at odds,*” (Participant 6, Oromo/ Amhara, 21).

However, not all the participant believed that the government was solely to blame for the ethnic divide. When asked what the causes of the conflict were, two participants-- that were of a certain age-- argued that society, and specifically how people are taught culture, is just as responsible for the current state of the country. The first participant had this to say,

*“Growing up in Ethiopia was brutal back in my day, not just as an Oromo but as a young Oromo girl. I would say I faced the ethnic tension sooner than I was ready for, I was far too young to feel like that way about myself. Members of my own family had been targeted and jailed, so there was a very real physical fear, but what was worse, to me at least, was the emotional or mental fear of being Oromo. Here in the U.S. they say kids can be mean, it was true back then as well. I was afraid to speak the language at school or in my neighborhood. I felt pressured to change my name because it sounded too Oromo, no one could pronounce it correctly, or worse they would intentionally say it wrong to make fun of me. I never really felt like Oromos fit in to Ethiopia, I never really felt like I fit in,*” (Participant 4, Oromo, 55).

Similarly, one participant claimed,

*“In general, Oromos were not seen in a good light, especially the women. When we were younger it was just assumed that they were not as smart as us, they spoke differently, they looked different sometimes, so it made them easy targets. It’s just one of those things you can’t explain, you don’t know why you think like that, you just do. The girls, I would say, were the most vulnerable; they couldn’t defend themselves and couldn’t speak their mind. Women back then were taught to be submissive, act lady like, and not bring shame on the family, that sort of thing. A lot of girls I went to school with started off as friends, but for some reason or another, there was a divide the older we got,”* (Participant 11, Tigray, 38).

I found that when asked their thoughts on the causes of the conflict, responses differed drastically based on both age and ethnicity. The data illustrates that if the participant belonged to, or identified with being either Oromo or Amhara-- especially if they were a woman of a certain age-- the responses to that question were often based on the social divisions between the ethnic groups.

Participants often cited culture, and particularly how culture is taught, as one of the main reasons for the tension. Differences in language, customs, and even a person’s name, can be used

as stereotypes that reinforce these divisions. These stereotypes or misconceptions can lead to distrust between the ethnic groups, on a social level, determining how people interact daily with one another, and even in a professional setting, and could very well be the reason someone does or does not get employed.

Additionally, participants who identified as Oromo, Amhara or a combination of both, articulated that a major cause for the conflict was the government's disregard for the importance of "homeland" to the Oromo ethnic group. They claimed that the government was solely concerned about their own economic and financial expansion, at the expense of expelling Oromo people from a land that is tied into their culture and sense of belonging.

In contrast, however, the responses of those who identified as belonging to the Tigray group, were more grounded on the economic and political climate of Ethiopia, especially as it pertains to the struggle for Addis Ababa-- arguing it was less about claiming a homeland, and more about who has control of the resources and capital. Participants who gave this as a response, alluded to the economic disparity between different groups, and certain groups having more political power or control over the others, as the reason for resentment, and ultimately the cause or causes of the conflict.

Reno's theory on Warlord politics, as well as Ferguson's theory on power, are articulated in one way or another by the participants in the study. Although, it was mostly acknowledged by the Tigray participants, there was definitely mention of the growing economy, and the effects this has had on the socio- political climate, and beyond that how one group has been able to capitalize off this growth, whilst other ethnic groups suffer. Similarly, the participants recognized that their feelings toward other ethnic groups were molded by their own experiences and attitudes towards belonging to their specific ethnic group.

## Experiencing the Ethnic Conflict

The second objective of the study was to identify how women have experienced and been impacted by the ethnic conflict, both in Ethiopia and in the United States. What was a common thought amongst the younger participants (ages 20- 30 years old), was that the division between people, based on ethnicity, existed, however, it was subtle. There were certain stereotypes attached to each ethnicity that portrayed them in a negative light, however, it was only recently, to their recollection, that it became a point of contention or would be the basis of a fight or conflict.

Two of the participants recall hearing or using these stereotypes to make jokes, but claimed it never amounted to anything more serious. However, in light of the recent mass protests and demonstrations, they argue, even jokes can be misconstrued as aggression.

*“We all think these things at one point or another, and if you say you don’t then you’re lying. You can’t help it, but there are things people immediately think when they see you or find out what you are. Everybody knows this, like the Tigrays love money or are stingy, the Oromos are not smart, they speak funny, that kind of thing,”* (Participant 3, Tigray, 22).

The second stated,

*“I went back to visit the motherland recently and it felt very different. There was a whole different vibe than what I was used to. People who I grew up with, in the same neighborhood or same school treated me differently and I realized that this was probably because of things I had said in the past. I didn’t mean them harm or really even know what I was saying, but now after everything that’s happened, I can understand why they would feel some type of way,”* (Participant 7, Tigray, 21).

When asked if either of these participants; felt the tension between the ethnicities, made, or heard those same jokes or stereotypes being used, after they moved to the U.S., both vehemently insisted they hadn’t, and laughed at the thought even. In fact, they argued that after having grown up, or lived in Ethiopia and then moving to the U.S., it was difficult to even see the differences or even tell who belonged to which ethnicity, for the most part.

Alternatively, the responses of participants of a certain age, specifically in the 50- 60-year-old age group, there appeared to be a consensus amongst the women, that there was still tension between the different ethnic groups and in addition, that leaving Ethiopia and coming to the U.S. did little to change their apprehension or distrust of one another. One participant stated,

*“By that point, too much had already happened for me to just forget about everything I had faced back home, sometimes at the hands of people I considered friends. You know, when you grow up thinking one kind of way and experiencing certain traumas, it’s difficult to move on from those memories. Of course, coming here helped me get over some of the issues I left behind, but some things don’t really leave you. It’s difficult to see people differently and just change your whole mentality at once. Even to this day I struggle with trusting other Ethiopian women because it doesn’t feel natural to me,”* (Participant 13, Oromo, 60).

The participants described how much of an impact the construction of identity played in not only creating the ethnic tension and divide, but also how it kept certain groups-- like the Oromo ethnic group, and to some extent the Amhara ethnic groups-- in specific social, economic and political positions.

Similarly, another theme I uncovered from the responses of the participants was the role of “shame” and how it, not only shed light into the experiences of some Ethiopian women, but also how it either hindered or promulgated resistance efforts.

In the case of the Tigray participants, 3 out of the 4 of the participants used the word “shame” to describe how they felt about the current government. This shame, they argued, stemmed from either, not knowing the extent of the government’s involvement in the oppression of the Oromo people, or knowing the situation, but not doing anything about it, for fear that it might affect their standing in society.

Alternatively, the word “shame” was also used by at least 4 other the participants who were all above the age of 40, however, it was used to describe how they felt about themselves as Oromo women at the time that they were living in Ethiopia.

After noticing that this was a predominant theme in the responses, I altered my questions to see if the participants responded differently when the word “shame” was stated in the question. With the exception of 2 participants, the majority of the responses thereafter indicated that the women realized that after leaving Ethiopia, they needed to shed the shame attached to their different ethnicities, in order to come together and effectively resist.

These responses are expressive of the theories introduced by authors Adams, Young, Parsons, Kirk and Okawa- Rey, in their discussions regarding the construction of identity, as it relates to how people have different cultures, languages, and experiences, and how this can often lead to; structural inequality, the use of “othering”, and creating an “us versus “them” way of thinking amongst different groups.

In the cases of these women, particularly the Oromo participants, it is clear that there was an apparent feeling of “othering”. Oromo women, felt that they did not, or do not, fit into the Ethiopian society. The emotional trauma of feeling like the “other” or unwelcome in your own country, has led some women to view other ethnic groups as the enemy, tying into the “us versus them” theory mentioned earlier. It seems however, that shifting from this mentality, to one where Ethiopian women resist side by side, lies in redefining, reconstructing and reproducing ethnicity in the diaspora.

### **Resisting Ethnic Conflict**

The third, objective of the study was to uncover how women are involved, or not involved, in resistance movements. As stated earlier, there has been widespread mass protests taking place both in Ethiopia and in countries all over the world. It appears to be the most common form of fighting back or speaking out against the actions of the government. The protests in Ethiopia, according to the studies and reports aforementioned, are peaceful in nature,

however the government's reaction, has not exactly mirrored that sentiment. On a few occasions, the police force or army have allegedly opened fire on protestors.

According to the participants who took part in this study, engaging in peaceful protests here in the U.S., is considered to be the "fastest" and most "effective" way to raise awareness on the situation in Ethiopia. In fact, a large portion of the participants who were interviewed, 10 out of the 15 to be exact, said that they have, in one way or another, been involved in protesting either in San Francisco, San Jose, or in Minneapolis.

Whether it was marching down the streets holding picket signs and chanting, or being responsible for organizing where and when people would gather to be able to protests, the majority of the participants claimed that peacefully protesting here in the U.S. would bring more attention to this issue, than people doing so in Ethiopia.

A few participants went so far as to say that Ethiopian people in the diaspora, especially those living in the U.S., had an obligation to do so because being able to protest, without fear of being harmed by the authorities, is a "privilege" in itself, one that is not afforded to the Ethiopians doing so in back home.

Another form of resistance that appeared to be popular amongst the participants, was the use of social media as a platform to resist. With the exception of two participants who admitted they were not on any social media sites or apps, the majority of participants said that they have used sites like Facebook, Instagram and other social networking apps to resist. One participant had this to say about the role of social media in resistance efforts,

*"It's amazing how much it has helped to be able to just click, click, click and create a whole page dedicated to an upcoming protest or demonstration. You can reach so many people, Ethiopian or not, who may be interested in helping or getting involved. Although, it is probably not the safest way to protest; I have had a few friends who were flagged down by the Ethiopian government for articles that they shared on Facebook, or something that they posted and it's*

*truly terrifying because all your information is on your page, virtually anyone can find you or your family and friends, if they really wanted to,” (Participant 5, Amhara/ Gurage, 22).*

It is even popular with the older generation, who one might assume is not as inclined to use technology or social media on a regular basis. One participant had this to say,

*“It has made the world of difference to be able to vent on things like Facebook because for the most part, the people that follow me, or who I am friends with are like- minded individuals. Even if they are not, we can have discussions on different pages or in the messages. It’s frustrating because some sites keep getting shut down by the Ethiopian government for what they say is “terrorist activity” or “treason” against the current government, when really, it’s not. It’s also very frustrating when the Ethiopian government shuts down Facebook, all the other sites, and even the internet so that people back home won’t be able to see what we post, or vice versa,” (Participant 15, Amhara, 59).*

Correspondingly, at least 6 of the participants agreed that supplementary to reaching out to people through social media, creating Ethiopian networking organization, especially in schools and universities, has become a line of defense in resistance efforts.

These organizations are targeted at creating open forums and facilitating discussions surrounding the issues going on in Ethiopia. Lately, these have become more common in universities and colleges nationwide. As one participant describes it, there are usually organizations that cater to international students of African dissent, or even just Ethiopian student organizations. It is in these groups that meetings, debates, rallies and forums are being held. The same participant goes on to describe the purpose of these organizations and her role in the one she created on her college campus,

*“My friends and I started this organization as a way to seek out other Ethiopians in our school and it just took a life of its own. Now that we are a little bit more established in the school, it is an opportunity to talk more openly about political issues without fear of being harmed and having discussion in a safe space. You can also hear different perspectives, you never know, even an allies’ opinion may differ in their reasoning. There are different degrees of resistance, it could be active or silent, whatever the case may be, bringing people together, and especially the younger generation like us, and creating a united front should be the first step,” (Participant 1, Amhara, 26).*

Other ways in which women are resisting include speaking out against the Ethiopian government, by writing Op-eds and Letters to the Editor in various magazines and publications. At least 3 of the participants have had their articles published in major publications; 2 of which were covering the recent killings of Oromo university students who were killed while protesting, and the third article discussed the internet and social media restrictions during times of protest.

Additionally, two of the participants, both women of a certain age, described themselves as either activists or advocates. They claimed that one of the most crucial tools in contributing to the resistance efforts, is understanding the difference between what it means to be an activist, and what it means to be an advocate. One participant described this distinction in the following way,

*“A lot of people, if not most, don’t know that there even is a difference and refer to themselves as both. I truly think that this is where the movement lacks strength. In my opinion, anyone can be an activist, pick up a sign and protest to their heart’s content, or however they choose to protest. Advocates on the other hand, have to affect change in a different way. We have to lobby and petition until we can convince people who hold office, to change the laws and policies that make it possible for the current situation to remain on- going,”* (Participant 4, Oromo, 55).

The other participant acknowledged that there in fact was a difference between the work of activists and advocates in the resistance movement, however, she argued that there is a need for both and that one cannot exist effectively without the other. She stated,

*“The Ethiopian government won’t listen to us so we have had to get creative, and find one that will. This is why we are working with our local senators, district leaders and such, to affect change at a higher level. This wouldn’t be possible however, if there weren’t peaceful nonviolent protests in the streets of Minneapolis, bringing attention to our cause. It’s a symbiotic relationship, we need both,”* (Participant 13, Oromo, 60).

For both these participants, focusing their advocacy towards lobbying and targeting U.S. government officials, has allowed for several collaborative and fundraising initiatives. Thus far, these initiatives have been aimed at raising funds, for women and children who have been

widowed and orphaned, as a result of the clash between Oromo protestors and the police and army forces.

*“There are Oromo community meetings which I attend and help fundraise for. I am on the board of organizations such as Oromo Christian Foundation, which help mothers and children who have lost people during the protests or who were jailed and killed by the government. We meet with our local senators and state department heads to talk about the issues and how we can educate others. They have been working closely with us to see if we can find legal aid to help journalists and protestors who have been arrested unjustly, and without due process. It’s a slow process but we have to start somewhere,”* (Participant 4, Oromo, 55).

Other forms of resistance have been concentrated on using the resources here in the U.S., to help motivate the people resisting in Ethiopia. According to a few of the participants in this study-- specifically those who fell in the 20- 30-year-old age range-- a recent trend within the last couple of years, has been to gain recognition and support for the resistance movement, through the use of art.

7 of the 15 participants who were interviewed, noticed an increasing amount of artwork in the form of; paintings, drawings, posters and even billboards, with resistance symbols and use of the Oromo flag or Oromo cultural colors to represent the resistance-- as illustrated below in

**Figure 5.**



**Figure 5.** Oromo Women Protesting Human Rights Abuse in Ethiopia (Davidson, 2016).

In addition, the 7 participants who discussed using art as a tool in the resistance movement, shared that there have been songs and poems created since the protests became popular in 2015, aimed at mobilizing the youth. These songs and poems are sung and chanted during protests, the underlying message behind these songs-- or “gitims” as they are referred to as-- is; to inspire hope to those currently resisting, pay respect to those who have died protesting, and to give morale to the people who are carrying on the movement. One participant stated,

*“I have an aunt who lives in Europe, she cannot travel back to Ethiopia because the government sees her as a threat. I can’t name her for obvious reasons, but she is something of a poet and a writer. She writes these gitims for the women in Ethiopia, encouraging them to get involved in the resistance, encouraging them to challenge the cultural norms and speak out against injustice. I’ve heard her lyrics before during marches and the message is truly powerful,”* (Participant 8, Amhara, 26).

Another example of art being used as a tool to resist is through fashion. As I was researching certain resistance efforts taking place in the U.S., I came across an opinion piece written about how one fashion designer based in the California, was using her new fashion collection to resist. When interviewed, she had this to say about her upcoming showcase,

*“I am currently about to unveil my new collection, at a showcase on the East Coast. I use my designs to protest or bring awareness to certain causes, for instance, in my last collection all my designs, clothes, fabrics and accessories were black and a portion of the proceeds went to the Black Lives Matter movement here in the U.S. The collection before that was green to bring awareness to environmental issues such as global warming, recycling, renewable energy, you get the idea. This collection is a more personal. Although I was born and raised here, I am still Ethiopian and so my new collection will be red with hints of green, which are in the Oromo flag, to support the resistance. The majority of the profits I make, will be donated to the women in Ethiopia whose family members have been killed or arrested by the government,”* (Participant 10, Tigray, 23).

On the subject of providing those in Ethiopia with resources from the U.S., one participant from the study disclosed a new and innovative tool that could potentially be useful to the resistance movement. She informed me that there is a network of Ethiopian women, who are all in some way or another involved in the tech industry and in data analysis. These women are

working together to combat the internet and social network restrictions, through coding and developing software built-in to devices, such as phones, laptops, tablets etc., that will counteract the effects of an internet blackout-- a literal representation of Scott's notions on resistance in the hidden transcript. She stated,

*“Without going in too much detail, I can say that there are a few women, Ethiopian women, from here in the U.S. and a couple in Europe who are heavily involved in this project. What we are trying to achieve by creating these shortcuts or codes is that, in the event that the government shuts down the internet or people can't access their social sites, they can type in a code or txt a code which will essentially override those effects. It is still in the very early stages, but we have tested these codes and so far, they seem to be working. We still need time to perfect it, and make sure it can't be traced back,”* (Participant 12, Oromo, 35).

Similarly, another participant described how her work as a radio presenter has helped her resist. Much like the participant mentioned above, she aims to combat the restrictions and shutdowns of the internet and social networking sites. However, she is doing so by broadcasting her radio channel and programs directly to Ethiopia, through back channels or underground radio stations, that have so far gone undetected by the government. She shared,

*“When I was living in Ethiopia, I used to work in a radio station with two lawyers, we discussed the different laws available to the public so they would have more education on the issues and their rights. There were live discussions where people used to call in and discuss their issues with the government and we would run this until we were shut down. I used to participate in this program with the lawyers. Now that I've moved to the U.S and have applied for political asylum, things are a bit different and dangerous. I'm still resisting, but I have to be smarter about it. I volunteer for an underground network based in Ethiopia but with networks worldwide. I host a program that is run by other asylees and refugees who have fled Ethiopia, and we share our stories and our opinions on the human rights violations etc. I am careful not to be tagged in anything posted online, or use my real name, out of fear for my family and friends back home,”* (Participant 2, Amhara/Oromo, 25).

When I asked the participant how the internet shutdowns and media blackouts affect her ability to broadcast her program, she informed me that some programs are prerecorded and are released as soon as the internet is operating, or catalogued in podcasts and released all at once before the internet is shut down again. She stated,

*“Sometimes we get found out so we have to move to another channel, they (the Ethiopian government) are getting smart but we’re smarter,”* (Participant 2, Amhara/ Oromo/ 26).

The final objective was to find out what impact, if any, women participating in resistance efforts, has had on the resistance movement as a whole. An overwhelming majority of the participants-- regardless of ethnicity or age-- argued that there is, in the recent years and as protesting and speaking out has heightened, an increasing amount of pressure on women to a) resist, b) be at the forefront of resistance movements, and c) to be able to do so underground or undetectably. The reasoning behind this sudden and unprecedented wave of pressure differed for the participants, however, 9 out of the 15 women who were interviewed, concurred that this came to be, as a way to take the heat off the men, so to speak, who are arguably more targeted by the authorities. As they explain it, women took over for the men who were jailed or killed for protesting, by recruiting and mobilizing people, thus, expanding the movement.

Whether it is through peaceful demonstrations, advocacy work, or campaigning for change through art, the majority of the participants agreed that there is an increasing number of women leading resistance efforts, and that Ethiopian women, especially in the diaspora, are going against the cultural norm by speaking up and speaking out. Some participants argued that because of their importance and role in the household, Ethiopian authorities tend to be more lenient on women, it appears, however, that some women are using misogyny to their advantage.

*“I remember being in high school a long time ago, our class was just finishing up, and we were all headed to lunch. Just as we were leaving for the stairs, our teacher came running after us yelling about a stolen stapler or calculator, I’m not sure which. She stopped all the boys in the class and searched each one of them, before deciding that she must have just misplaced it. When I got home after school that day, it turned out that it had fallen into my bag, or maybe someone put it in there, I’m not sure. Either way, the teacher didn’t even consider checking me, or any other girls in the class, and she even insisted that we hurry along to lunch. The world will have you believe that men are usually the ones in the frontlines, but sometimes being a woman can come in handy, don’t you forget that!”* (Participant 9, Amhara, 42).

## 2.1. C Trends and Themes

Whilst conducting these interviews, I was careful to document any similarities and contradictions in the responses of the participants. One of the things that I observed from the data I collected, was that the participants agreed, overwhelmingly, that the current government is not responding to the protests in a way that it conducive to creating a more united country, in fact, they concur that it is causing a bigger rift and fueling the tension.

Additionally, it appeared that the older the participants were in age, the more vocal they were about resisting, and open about discussing the ways in which they do so. The participants who were under the age of 30, although spoke just as passionately about resisting as the women of a certain age, were more reluctant or hesitant to admit exactly how they were involved or had been involved in the movement. Ironically, one of the younger participants gave a possible explanation for this in her response,

*“In my experience, Oromo women are more outspoken and braver in their actions and how they carry themselves, than any other ethnic group or compared to their husbands, especially here in the U.S. Older women especially, they are usually the matriarchs of their whole family, they are the disciplinaries, they are usually the ones orchestrating the events and protests, in addition to being the ones who march and protest openly,”* (Participant 6, Amhara/Oromo, 21).

Again, we see an underlying theme of how of perceptions of culture have been reproduced in the diaspora, as a reaction to the experiences faced in Ethiopia. With regards to the participants of a certain age, there was a strong indication of a shift in the mindset of Ethiopian women, who after leaving a culture where they were are expected play a submissive role, took a more dominant role in their household, communities and definitely in resistance efforts.

Another theme I observed in the responses was that there appeared to be correlation between the number of years that the participants had spent in the U.S., and their feelings toward what democracy should look like in Ethiopia.

At first glance, it seemed as though there was a generational gap. The participants over the age of 40, often described protesting-- or certain forms of resistance, such as marching and writing to their locally elected officials-- as a privilege. In contrast, the younger participants spoke as though they regarded freedom of speech, or their ability to protest, as something they should be entitled to. Upon delving deeper, however, it was clear that, although there was a component of this trend that was based on the age of the participants, the duration of time the participants spent in the U.S. also played a role, which was evident in their responses.

Thus, the longer the amount of time spent in the U.S., and or if the participants were above the age of 40, the more likely they felt grateful for; platforms such as Facebook, being able to engage in mass protests, and having access to help from the U.S. government. In the case of the participants who were either below the age of 40, or who have lived in the U.S less than 10 years, their responses indicated that they either didn't find this to be a privilege, or didn't even register why this would be considered a privilege.

Another theme the participants seemed to agree on, with overwhelming majority, is the frustration behind resisting in the diaspora, they equated the feeling to being like an outsider looking in. For most of these women, going back to Ethiopia is becoming less and less likely of an option, which they admitted heightened this feeling.

Furthermore, all the participants insisted that one of the most obvious ways to remedy the current situation in Ethiopia, is to have more women involved in the government and make space for a different and new wave of leadership, one that Ethiopia hasn't been exposed to.

## Chapter 3

### Conclusion

#### **3.1 Closing Remarks**

The findings of this paper are significant because they demonstrate, in a personal and tangible way, the myriad of theories that have thus been used to cognate ethnic conflict. Beyond this, however, the findings of this paper can be used to broaden our existing understanding of what effect ethnic conflict has on women specifically, and the implications of this in relation to resisting.

There were, of course, challenges and limitations faced when conducting this study. The dialogue presented in this study was sensitive in nature, although the identities of the participants were protected, it is not difficult to understand why some participants would omit certain anecdotes and experiences from their responses, which could have affected the study.

During the interviews, participants did appear emotional talking about any past troubles they have had in Ethiopia. Although interviewing members of the Ethiopian diaspora in the United States reduces risks of persecution by the government, participants, at times, were visibly uncomfortable or hesitant to speak freely and honestly, regardless of the confidentiality element of the study. It is plausible that this might have discouraged them from going too in- depth about their thoughts and experiences.

Additionally, due to time and financial constraints, I was not able to interview a larger sample size and had to rely on a smaller group of participants to give me an idea of a broad issue. Furthermore, it is my belief that this study would have been more impactful if I was able to

include the narrative of women currently living in Ethiopia, however, due to security reason this was not possible.

Regardless, based on the findings of this study, it is evident that the theories presented by the authors, outlined in the literature review section of this paper, are accurate and cohesively complement my findings.

The purpose of my study, however, was focused on combining the ideologies of Annick Wibben, in incorporating the feminine perspective into a larger conversation of war and conflict, as well as James Scott's theory on resistance that exist in invisible or hidden space.

After integrating elements of both these theories and based on my findings, I can conclude that there are in fact cloaked space where resistance is operational and functioning; these are spaces that are in fact modeled and conducted specifically by women, for women, and that this has absolutely made an impact on the contemporary resistance movement as a whole. Whether it is done through artistic expression such as poetry and fashion, through coding and software manipulation, or infiltrating the masses through underground radio networks, women are resisting ethnic marginalization, in the context of an authoritarian regime, and are very much on the frontline of the movement.

After talking to Ethiopian women in the diaspora, it is clear that access to resources and political control are undeniably important factors, that make a significant impact on perpetuating the ethnic conflict, however, the fundamental causes of the conflict are misunderstood. What we can learn from talking to women, in this case Ethiopian women in the diaspora, is that the causes of ethnic conflict are deeply rooted in one's feelings of belonging to a group, and their attachment to their homeland. The causes of ethnic conflict are far more personal than political

power plays and economic enhancement, instead, it is imbedded in the importance of culture and specifically how culture is learned and taught, as it relates to the formation of ethnic identity. We learn that the lingering traumas of “othering” shapes how Ethiopians view each other and themselves, and that this does not only affect men in government but girls in the playground. In addition, until we understand the significance of channeling fear and frustration, into talking and listening in safe spaces, there will be no lasting solution to ethnic conflict.

### **3.2 Recommendations for Solutions**

Based on my current understanding of the situation in Ethiopia, there are several recommendations I would suggest that might help remedy the conflict or at least address the underlying issues that are causing the conflict.

First, there should be a limit to how long one kind of party can serve or have power. There are about 72 opposition parties in Ethiopia, but they have no voice. These changes can only be effective through implementing changes on a grassroot level and not a top- down approach.

Changing the mind set of leaders is difficult, even harder, is attempting to change the way people attach their identity to their cultural or ethnic heritage. However, instilling in people, especially the youth, the dangers of perpetuating the idea that one ethnic group is dominant and one is inferior should be a priority. Furthermore, it should also be a priority to educate girls and women, engage them from an early age about seeking positions in office and in the economic sector.

There are qualified and capable people of different ethnic groups who are not given the chance of upwards mobility, whether this be economically or politically, there needs to be

enactment of a quota system or a version of affirmative action, based on ethnicity, that exist in the work place or in the political sphere.

Additionally, there needs to be international sanctions and measures imposed on the government, or members of the government, who do not respect the right of expression, freedom of speech and media. The media is an important vessel of communication, it should be open and not censored.

Finally, there needs to be a clear and definitive plan of action regarding what happens after the current government is no longer in power. It is not enough to say that there need to be a change in government, or Ethiopia might run the risk of watching history repeat itself. The majority of participants argued that women need to hold more and higher position in government. One in particular stated,

*“Women are effective in the resistance movement because they can be both empathetic and practical, they can exist in both realms simultaneously, maybe to change history, we need to hear more Herstory,”* (Participant 2, Amhara/ Oromo, 26).

## Bibliography

Adams, M. (2013). *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

BBC World News. (2016, August 22). “*What is Behind Ethiopia’s Wave of Protests?*” Retrieved October 25, 2017, from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36940906>

Davidson, I. (2016, October 11). Oromo Women Protesting Human Rights Abuse in Ethiopia. Retrieved from <http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo/oromo-demonstration.html>

Englebort, P., & Dunn, K. C. (2014). *Inside African politics*. Cape Town: UCT Press.

*Ethiopia Country Report* (Freedom of the Press, Rep.). (2016). Freedom House.

*Ethiopia: Government blocking of websites during protests widespread, systematic and illegal* (Rep.). (2016, December 14). Retrieved October 24, 2017, from Amnesty International website.

Ferguson, J. (2007). *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Human Rights Watch. (2016, March 16). “*Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization*”. Retrieved October 27, 2017, from <http://unpo.org/article/19014>

*“Journalism is not a Crime” Violations of Media Freedom in Ethiopia* (Rep.). (2015, January 21). Retrieved October 24, 2017, from Human Rights Watch website.

Kirk, G. & Okazawa- Rey, M. (2013). *Identities and Social Locations*. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Lillywhite, J. (2015, December 10). The Oromo Community Protesting in London. Retrieved from <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/ethiopia-oromo-community-protests-london-over-forced-eviction-ethnic-cleansing-1532772>

Morin, O. (2016). Feyisa Lilesa. Retrieved from <http://libguides.unitec.ac.nz/apareferencing/images-tables-figures>

Parsons, K. (2007). *Structural Violence and Power*. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Poole, T. (2017, November 27). “*Catch these Hands*”. Cover Page Illustration.

Reno, W. (1999). *Warlord politics and African states*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.

Scott, J. C. (1990). *Domination and the arts of resistance: hidden transcripts*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press.

The World Bank. (2014). “*Unleashing the Potential of Ethiopia’s Export Industry*”. Retrieved October 25, 2017, from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ethiopia/publication/ethiopia-economic-update-strengthening-export-performance-through-improved-competitiveness>

Wibben, A. T. (2016). *Researching War: Feminist Methods, Ethics, and Politics*. London Abingdon: Routledge.

Young, I. M. (2010). *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.