

# ‘Qeerroo Fi Qarree’: The Engine of Current Transition In Ethiopia Politics

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**Abstract:** *Qeerroo fi Qarree* from the whole parts of Oromia region emerged to stop the accumulated humiliation, decimation, and marginalization of Oromo people through strong peaceful struggle in Oromia region since 2014 G.C. The main objective of this study is to make the issue of *Qeerroo fi Qarree* the part of academic discussions, debates and critics. In doing so, the study attempted to review and describe specifically *Qeerroo fi Qarree* (youth Male and Female) of West Shewa Zone struggle movements in the pre-transition period and changes and uncertainties took place since the transition period in the west shewa zone. Social movement (SMT) and political process (PPT) theories are employed as the major theoretical frameworks. Both primary and secondary data were used to get necessary information. Purposive sampling was employed to select the setting and key participants of the study. Accordingly, six public figure *Qeerroo fi Qarree* (four male and two female) who have organized the protest movements, three officials from West Shewa Zone Administration office, West Shewa Zone Communication Office, and West Shewa Zone police Station, and two instructors from Ambo university political science department were purposively selected to get firsthand information. Besides, documents from both government and private reliable online sources were used as secondary source of data. In-depth-interview, document analysis and researcher own observations were used as tools to gather necessary information. The gathered data were analyzed qualitatively. Lastly, the paper found out that the current transition period of Ethiopia shares the characteristics of civilian coup d'état since *Qeerroo fi Qarree* peaceful struggle movements is main cause for the transition. The name *Qeerroo fi Qarree* have conceptual political meaning than a literal one. They have struggled barehanded and voiced the political, economic and socio-cultural marginalization of Oromo people through well-organized tactics. As a result, they brought the current transition and achieved great missions within five years of pre-transition protest movements. In this regard, social media plays a great role to organize different peaceful demonstrations, and business or service boycotts. However, *Qeerroo fi Qarree* of west shewa zone have still doubt on the current reformations made by existing government. On one hand, the absence of clear transitional political roadmap, heightened ethnic-border based violence at the beginning of the transition period and ununiformed reformations from federal to local government structure are the source of their political dilemma on the success of the transition. On the other hand, absence of renewed relationship between *Qeerroo fi Qarree* and the currently ruling party, ODP (Oromo Democratic Party), and lack of competent and financially strong opposition parties vis-a-vis incumbent government makes *Qeerroo fi Qarree* of west shewa zone uncertain about the current transition and expected changes in post-transition period. Clear transition political roadmap, unspontaneous discussion and practical reformation evidences should be needed to clarify *Qeerroo fi Qarree* confusions and ensure democratic transition.

**Key Words:** Qeerroo, Qarree, Politics Transition, Protest

## THE WRITER INTENTION

The current political transition is the result of all Oromo people struggles for centuries. For the current political juncture, *Qeerroo fi Qarree* sacrificed their unreturned soul to voice the accumulated grievances of Oromo people and bring the current transition in Ethiopia. The writer strongly believes that all *Qeerroo fi Qarree* from all parts of Oromia region stand for the same goal and achieved unthinkable missions in the Ethiopian political history. Thus, necessary recognition should be given to all *Qeerroo fi Qarree* of Oromo people. *Qeerroo fi Qarree* of west shewa zone, however, is taken as a sample for the purpose of this paper. It should be noted that the writer has no intention to make any comparison of *Qeerroo fi Qarree* in terms of a specific area.

*‘Na ofkoolcha! ‘With an apology for the unintended mistake in this paper’*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A transition from a political perspective is simply a change in the characteristics of a political system. This transition could be triggered by the participation of elite and the mass albeit the nature and strategies of their involvement in the transition process varies.

Since 1990s dozens of Africa countries have attempted political transitions. Majority of them attempted to transform from dictatorship or autocracy to a democratic system through elections. Unfortunately, the leaders of most of the African countries cannot bring genuine democratic system for long decades in the continent. Conversely, they opt for extreme dictatorship and autocratic system and totally excluded the mass participation and privileges. As a result, there were African countries which were collapsed and succeeded in the transitional process (Lewis, 1992; Seely, 2009; Barbara, Joseph, and Eric, *et.al*, 2014)

Ethiopia is one of Africa country which has been passed through different political transitional eras. For instance, the existing government, EPRDF, conducted Peace and Democracy conference and established Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) and adopted a transitional charter which recognized freedom of association and speech, multi-party democracy, referendum for Eritrea and the right of nations, nationalities, and peoples' to self-determination after it overthrew the *Derg* military junta (Aalen, 2002; Bahru, 1991; Marcus, 1994, and Turton, *et.al*, 2006). Again, the current transitional government of Ethiopia took place by incumbent government due to accumulated public grievances for the last two decades erupted by Oromo people unprecedented and unspontaneous protest movements. As a result, the existing government made immediate and necessary reformation to restore the country from the edge of state collapse before one year ago. The current transition expected to be optimistic to bring genuine democracy and fix the wrongly manifested ethnic federalism consequently brought disrespect and hatred among ethnic groups in Ethiopia which have been propagated by autocratic EPRDF lead by TPLF for the last two decades.

Oromo people are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia. However, they have been marginalized by different regimes for centuries. The Oromo people have been protesting to ensure their human and constitutional rights at different focal points though their legitimate question ended by the government mass killing (Aseffa, 1993 & 1998). However, since 2014 strong Oromo protest movements have been made in very well organized manner by students of different educational level and workers of different institutions. For instance, the land grabbing strategy of the government called "*Integrated master plan of Addis Ababa*" which aimed to expand the capital city around 1.5 million hectares onto surrounding Oromo farmers land and privatization which evicts and makes the Oromo farmers beggars in the name of false capitalism were the triggering causes of the protest. In this case, social media played as medium of informing and organizing protest movements, the youth male and female called '*Qerroo fi Qarree* in Afaan Oromoo language as an engine and Oromo bloggers and activists as the wheel played a crucial role. In fact, there were '*Qube Generations*' Oromo elites group in 1991 fought for real democracy in Ethiopia politics before *Qerroo fi Qarree* protest movements. The accumulated injustice for the last 27 years of Oromo people lastly erupted and shook the Ethiopian politics by *Qerroo fi Qarree* of Oromia region (Aseffa, 2011, Ezikel, 2018, and Forsén, *et.al*, 2018). Therefore, this paper attempts to describe the achievements of West shewa zone *Qerroo fi Qarree* in the pre-transitional period and their political confusion in the contemporary transition period.

## 2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Oromia region is the heart of the Ethiopian economy and politics. More than half percent of Ethiopia economy depends on Oromia region agriculture. For instance, Oromia accounts for 51.2% of the crop production, 45.1% of the area under temporary crops and 44% of the total livestock population of Ethiopia. There are numerous mineral deposits in Oromia region including gold, platinum, nickel, iron-ore, soda ash, diatomite, limestone, feldspar, silica sand, kaolin, granite and other non-metallic construction materials. Mining activities that are already underway include are gold (Borena and West Wellega), soda ash in the Rift Valley, limestone, gypsum and clay soil (Muger), tantalum (at Kenticha) ornamental and construction minerals (in Hararghe and Wellega) and ceramic in Borena. With its vast and varied natural resources the region has ample opportunity for investment. There are more than 761 investment projects in the region. These projects have a capital of 3.4 billion Birr (<http://www.ethiopia.gov.et/oromia-regional-state>). Politically, Oromo people are the source of democracy. *Gadaa* system is essentially an indigenous democratic socio-political organization of the Oromo people. *Gadaa* has been considered as a democratic and just system than other forms of governance in the region. It governs the life of every Oromo from birth to death. It is also an example of a traditional African form of democracy (Tadesse, 2018). However, the Oromo people have been denied equal access to participate in the political and economic arenas of the country. The Oromo people systematically and forcefully marginalized from the political arena since the imperial monarchy albeit they are the largest ethnic group in the nation. Several opposition political parties represent the Oromo people were also labeled and attacked by the name of 'terrorist group'.

Among different parts of Oromia, west shewa zone is a fountain of the Oromo protest movements. The zone is known by strong struggle against the minority TPLF (Tigray People Liberation Front) party lead EPRDF corrupted system for years. Since 2014, *Qerroo fi Qarree* of west shewa zone with all *Qeerroo fi Qarree* of different parts of Oromia region made well-organized protest and lastly overthrew the minority TPLF party which had an absolute power over the three coiled parties, OPDO, now ODP (Oromo Democratic Party), ANDM, now ADP (Amhara Democratic Party), and (SEPDM) Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement. In this process, few members of ODP and ADP officials played a great role to bring the current transition and made necessary reformations in an effort to realize democracy in Ethiopia. In this regard, several opposition parties particularly representing Oromo people like OLF and its banned flag which adored and believed as a symbol of Oromo people resistance waved in all parts of Oromia region. Hundreds of political prisoners by false TPLF allegations were released from prison. Necessary power shift which encourages female for political position also made in federal and regional levels. These and others deeds brought great appreciation

and acceptance nationally and globally within a short period of time for an effort made by revolutionary leaders (Prime Minister Abiy Ahimed (PhD) and President of Oromia regional state, Lemma Megars and his team). As a result, the protest movements were gradually decreasing in the west shewa zone.

However, *Qerroo fi Qarree* of west shewa zone gradually get into confusion about the current direction of the transition and expected change in the pos- transition period. On one hand, lack of total genuine reformations by the existing government leads to *Qerroo fi Qarree* suspicion on government trustworthiness. In fact, *Qerroo fi Qarree* of west shewa zone has no smooth relationship with ODP (Oromo Democratic Party) due to the fact that the party was acting as tool of TPLF mischievous propaganda and harsh governance on Oromo people till the transition period. Even if *Qerroo fi Qarree* support the revolutionary leaders form ODP, their 27 years painful wound was not fully healed yet. On the other hand, there is strong political influence of OLF (Oromo Liberation Front). *Qerroo fi Qarree* trust an armed OLF opposition party which has been fought for Oromo people liberation and sovereignty since 1973. Since OLF started the negotiation process with the existing government in current transition period, several ethnic and border based violence have been ignited and thousands of Oromo people were died and displaced in the different parts of Oromia region. In this regard, there are groups who argue soldiers of OLF are responsible for such inhumane act happened in Oromia region. Conversely, there are groups who make an attachment the act with ODP secretive agenda to blackmail OLF. These contradicting and contesting arguments create an obscure view and suspicion among *Qerroo fi Qarree* of west shewa zone about the general political context of the transition period. Therefore, this paper intends to describe struggle movements and achievements of *Qerroo fi Qarree* of west shewa zone in the pre-transition period and the causes of their confusion or suspicions on the current political transition.

### 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of this paper is to describe the role of *Qerroo fi Qarree* of West Shewa Zone, Oromia region to bring the current transition period in Ethiopia. The study specifically attempts to:-

- I. review the nature of current political transition of Ethiopia
- II. analyzes an explication of the name '*Qerroo fi Qarree*'
- III. describe the struggle movements of '*Qerroo fi Qarree*' of West Shewa Zone during the pre-transition period
- IV. analyze changes happened in west shewa zone since the transitional period
- V. Investigate the sources of *Qerroo fi Qarree* of West Shewa Zone confusions on the current transition period

### 4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Social movement theory (SMT) and political process theory (PPT) theories are used as theoretical frameworks. Social movement theory (SMT) focus on any '*change*' in society and analyze how and why such change happen through the effort of societies. To contextualize the broad concept of SMT, the paper employed SMT from the political perspective in which marginalized group purposeful and organized attempt to create or resist change. In addition, political process theory (PPT) which is an important part of SMT is employed to describe the protest cycles, mobilizing structures, political opportunities, framing processes, and contentious repertoires that determine factors for the success or failure of a social movement (Tarrow, 1994; Caren, 2007; McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly, *et.al*, 2001).

### 5. METHODS AND MATERIALS

The descriptive qualitative research design was employed to describe the major achievements of *Qerroo fi Qarree* of west shewa zone and their political confusion in the current transition period. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used to get comprehensive information. Purposive sampling was employed to select the sources of data and tools of data gathering and analyzing. The primary sources were totally thirteen (13) key informants. Accordingly, Six (6) public figure of *Qerroo fi Qarree* (four male and two female) who have organized the protest movements, three (3) higher officials from West Shewa Zone Administration office, West Shewa Zone Communication Office, and West Shewa Zone Police Station, three (3) informants from ruling and opposition parties (Oromo Federalist Congress party (OFC), Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), and Oromo Democratic Party (ODP), and one (1) instructor from Ambo university political science department were purposively selected to get professional and first-hand information on the subject under investigation. In addition, documents, news and features from private and government legible websites were used as a secondary source of data. To get the necessary information from both aforementioned sources of data, researcher own observation, in-depth interview and document analysis were employed as the main data gathering tools. A qualitative approach was used to analyze the gathered data

## 7. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 7.1 The Current Transition Model of Ethiopia

Transition is a critical juncture in the form of political, economic, social, technology, and so on in a specific period. For the purpose of this study, transition refers to the process of political shift from one form of government to another radical form of government obviously has an optimistic result. As Seely (2009) clearly stated political transitions focus on the factual changes happened from previous political practices in the post-transition system. These changes could be seen in terms of the party hold the power, updated and new policies and strategies to bring a range of feasible outcomes despite the new system is democratic or not.

Political transition usually analyzed from multi-perspectives of models and stages. There are three political transitional paradigms that could be an insight to analyze the current political transition model of Ethiopia. The first is a replacement or overthrow. In this model, political transition is triggered when an armed opposition group/s overthrew the incumbent government and holds the political power. Replacement characterized by fight, war, and violence among the people. In this case, for instance, EPRDF come to power overthrew the *Derg* military Junta and formed Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) in 1991. During this period, there were great famines and conflicts in the country. Transformation or reform is another transitional paradigm when the transition is promoted by the incumbent government itself. It is a kind of *inner-out* political change. The government by itself is in charge of bringing transition without negotiation or consultation of any opposition parties. The incumbent government makes necessary reforms, introduce different rules, legislation, create different strategies. Lastly, transplacement or compromise transition emerges from both existing government and opposition groups/parties. There is a political bargain from both sides. In this regard, an extreme stands usually compromised to create consensus on the common interest of both parties. Furthermore, political transition is a sequential process passed through the opening, breakthrough, and consolidation stages (Carothers, 2002; Ezekiel, 2018; Mukerrem, 2018; Lefort, 2018; Lewis, and *et.al*, 1992).

In the process of transition, when one a regime loses power, three things would take place. First, an election will be conducted in the country. In this regard, the old regime (autocratic or dictatorship) is replaced by a democratically elected political party. Secondly, an immediate reform has made by the existing government which starts from replacing a new leader from the existing government for the survival of the regime. Lastly, the opposition party overthrows the ruling party and control power. However, it is difficult to state clearly political transition that represents the current Ethiopia transitional period depend on the above political transition models and phases. Of course, the socioeconomic requisites, political culture, institutional, comparative historical/political economy, elite bargaining models, and ethnic conflict models are determining factors on the nature and characteristics of political transition particularly democratic kind of transition (Davis, 2014; Scott, 2003; Giuseppe, 1990; Haggard, and *et.al*, 1995).

The current Ethiopia transition seems in the middle of both transformation and transplacement models. The current Ethiopian political transition is not a pure transformation model. This is due to the fact that some of current reformations are made purposively to calm down aggressive public quest for the continuation of existing government status- quo. Unlike transformation, transplacement transition model is not the pure path for Ethiopian political transition. Of course, the incumbent government attempted to organize different discussion and negotiation forums to discuss with some political parties. However, these discussions and negotiations were not fruitful as they were expected due to competitive nature of negotiation than collaborative one among opposition parties and existing government. Thus, as Mukerrem (2018) mentioned that the current political transition of Ethiopia inconclusive and it seems a “hybrid” or “grey zone”.

Again, focusing on political transitional phases, Ezekiel (2018) puts the political transition of Ethiopia as "a political limbo between the promising opening of the system and expected attainment of a breakthrough". Opening phase indicated an initial point where the public protest movements erupted and then the incumbent government implemented necessary reformation like an appointment of new prime minister after the executive committee meeting of December 2017. The breakthrough phase shows when the EPRDF made political bargain forums with opposition parties which were tagged as terrorist groups on the transition roadmap and coming national election agenda. Different opposition parties also merged to be strong and competitive. Besides, EPRDF made the necessary internal demotion and promotion. Several new officials were assigned on minister positions and, conversely, former corrupted higher officials were jailed as a step forward to clean the political mess. The Consolidation stage is still not become practical. This stage would be became realistic when opposition political parties and existing government build consensus and agreed on the concept of '*Medemer*' or inclusion, the new Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed unification rhetoric to bring pragmatic and inclusive change in Ethiopia.

To conclude, the transition model of Ethiopia share the characteristics of civilian coup d'état. As Seely (2009) stated civilian coup d'état political transition made by the actor's resistance or public protest and boycotts to make necessary political shift through reformation in the old organs of government or overthrew the existing government, electing a transition prime minister and legislative body and laying the groundwork for a meaningful political transition. Accordingly, *Qeerroo fi Qarree* brings the contemporary political transition in Ethiopia. They initially emerged to stop the marginalization of Oromo people using social media as a major channel of informing, and organizing several protest movements. *Qeerroo fi Qarree* became more powerful vis-a-vis the incumbent government lastly after five years well organized and strong protest movements. The power of *Qeerroo fi Qarree* shook the country political economy and forced the existing government to make necessary reforms. As a result, new transition government PM Dr. Abiy Ahmed was appointed and reformations have been made in Ethiopia politics.

### 7.2 Clarification for the Name '*Qeerroo fi Qarree*'

The origin of the word *Qeerroo fi Qarree* is associated with the animal name '*Qeerrensa*' or 'Tiger'. This association emanated from the comportment of the tiger. Tiger is fast, furious and fortitude animal. As *Qeerroo* Informant (personal interview January 7, 2019) says "*Qeerroo fi Qarree* is symbolized as '*Qeerrensa*' due to their energetic, powerful and determination. People frequently used the

name *Qeerro* than *Qarree* though they are inspirable. *Qeerrof Qarree* is an Afaan Oromo term which has an equivalent word in English 'Youth male and female'. In fact, there is no single and precise definition for the word 'youth'. However, age is preferably taken as a criterion to define youth though the age interval varies from county to country or organization to organization.

'*Qeerroo fi Qarree*' is a common name majorly refers the age, gender, ethnicity and sometimes marital status bachelor and bachelorette respectively. In the context of Ethiopia, *Qeerrof Qarree* or youth is the society's class range in 15-29 year (Ministry of youth, Sport and Culture of Ethiopia, 2004 and USAID, 2017). *Qeerrof Qarree* also shows gender reference. *Qeerro* refers to male while *Qarree* refers to a female. Even though female are culturally not motivated to participate on political issues and burdened to keep in house activities, *Qarree* (bachelorette) discredited the negative cultural perception towards females being underground or covert forces fighters in the Oromo protest movements. Lastly and most importantly *Qeerrof Qarree* signifies ethnicity. As Seely (2009) ethnicity is an important element of Ethiopian politics. *Qeerrof Qarree* of the *Gadaa* system emerge from Oromo ethnic group to resist the TPLF cruel activities and guard their society and land. Similarly, different youth group like *Fanno* in Amhara region, *Ejeto* in Sidama, *Berberta* in Somali, *Jeldim* in Gambela, *Yelaga* in Wolaita and others from different ethnic groups raised for the equal economic and political benefit of their respective ethnic group (Retrieved on March 14, 2019 from <https://oromiatimes.org/2018/01/08/who-is-qeerroo-what-is-qeerroo/>).

Furthermore, *Qeerrof Qarree* has more conceptual political meaning than a literal one. *Qeerrof Qarree* become more powerful after strong struggles and achievements made in pre transition period. People from all age strata, gender, and profession took part in all *Qeerrof Qarree* protest movements. Majority of *Qeerrof Qarree* are students from elementary, secondary, technic and vocation, colleges, and university and unemployed youth due to ill treatment of TPLF corrupted system. In addition, politicians, activists, and civil servants agitated and coordinated the protest movements. Currently, *Qeerrof Qarree* is perceived as liberation front from any marginalization on Oromo people. They represents an idea of relentless pursuit of liberty equipped with mental readiness and resilience which leaves no stone unturned to get what it pursues in the current transition period of Ethiopia (Retrieved on March 19, 2019 from <https://qeerroo.org/resources-afaan-oromo-amharic-and-english/guidelines-of-qeerroo-bilisummaa-resistance>).

### 7.3 Major Struggle Movements of *Qeerroo Fi Qarree* of West Shewa Zone in the Pre-Transition Era

Several protest movements took place in the twenty-two (22) woredas and twenty-eight (28) towns found in the west shewa zone for years. All series of *Qeerroo fi Qarree* protest in west shewa zone aimed to stop economic and political suppressions imposed by TPLF minority party lead EPRDF on the Oromo people for the last 27 years. The protest movements were passive and unorganized. The military forces were easily terminate the protest and took harsh measures on the people. However, the accumulated grievances of Oromo people erupted in well-organized manner in the west shewa zone since 2014 G.C. In this regard, social media as primarily medium to share information and organize protest movements, and popular activists Jawar Mohamed as the captain of *Qeerroo fi Qarree* struggle made undeniable contributions. Universities, colleges, technic and vocational institutions, and schools were an organizing and erupting revolt centers. In the west shewa zone the majority of *Qeerroo fi Qarree* protest of movements took place in Ambo city, the capital of west shewa zone. This is due to the fact that both private and government higher education found in the Ambo city (Forsén, 2018; Dandii, 2014, and Aseffa *et.al*, 2014).

The driving factors for *Qeerroo fi Qarree* protest movements can be seen from local and national perspectives. The national problems emanated from deliberately manifested ethnic- federalism in the Ethiopia politics for the last 27 years by the minority TPLF lead EPRDF to get economic and political capital. This contributes to ethnic tensions and conflicts, widening the disparities than bring respect and unity among the ethnic groups. Abbink (2011) and Bekalu (2007) also asserted that ethnic federalism was intentionally propagated by TPLF elites to perpetuate their virulent form of internal colonialism and ethnic apartheid supremacy. The local problems are usually emanated from national problem. Accordingly, the major triggering factor for west shewa zone *Qeerroo fi Qarree* protest is the issue of land grabbing in Oromia region through different deceiving strategies. For instance, the issue of an '*Integrated Regional Development Plan for Addis Ababa and the Surrounding Oromia Region*' was a systematic land grabbing strategy of which evicted thousands Oromo farmers from their own land. In fact, issue of land is the source main struggle movements in Ethiopian political history. It is an economic, political and socio-cultural representation of ethnic groups found in Ethiopia. As the Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) (2016:37) report shows about the Addis Ababa master plan,

*'The announcement of the Master Plan led to major demonstrations, centered on the town of Ambo (originally beginning at Ambo University before spreading to the town itself and then surrounding areas). The protests started out peacefully, but once the security forces moved in violence occurred against unarmed protesters.'*

This plan was temporarily suspended in 2014 G.C and totally canceled in 2016 G.C after a strong protest was made in the whole parts of Oromia region and around 5000 *Qeerroo fi Qarree* were killed by armed force. In addition, the accumulated grievances of Oromo people related to lack of good governance, lack of necessary infrastructure, poverty and political repressions were factors for *Qeerroo fi Qarree* of west shewa zone strong protest movements. As Ethiopia: Oromos and the 'Oromo Protests' (2016) reported "*the current wave of protest is the result of a governance black spot. The severe lack of public consultation on state developmentalism and the*

absence of a platform for the voices of Oromo to be heard have led to an unexpected local expression of grievance (Retrieved on March 10, 2019 from <https://qeerroo.org/statement/qeerroo-bilisummaa-romoo-freedom-justice-equality> ).

Large number of *Qeerroo fi Qarree* were arrested and killed in the past four consecutive years (2014-2018) of pre-transition protest movements. From April- May, 2014 particularly a large number of *Qeerroo fi Qarree* were killed by military forces in west shewa zone. Similarly, massive number of *Qeerroo fi Qarree* were abducted and killed across Oromia in 2015 G.C due to peaceful demonstration on the issue related to land grabbing in west shewa zone, Ginchi town. (Addis Standard, December 2015). Thus, it is worth to summarize the major *Qeerroo fi Qarree* of west shewa zone struggle movements took place in the 2014 G.C, the critical political juncture in west shewa zone.

Table.1 Selected protest movements took place in West Shewa Zone in 2014

Date	Place/s	Agendas Of Demonstration	The Protest Outcome
February-March, 2014	Ambo city Wallisoo town Gedo town	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Stop terrorizing Oromo people</li> <li>➤ Ambo University students protested in order to armed forces leave the campus by making a hunger strike.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government military forces arrested and tortured protesters</li> </ul>
March 6- 22, 2014	Gedo town Midaqanyi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Stop torture and arrest Oromo people.</li> <li>➤ Release students jailed and suffered being a member of an opposition party, OLF.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abduction and torture of students continued by government military forces</li> </ul>
March 25, 2014	Ambo city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Job opportunity for jobless graduated students from different universities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Qeerroo fi Qarree</i> who organized the protest were abducted.</li> </ul>
April 16, 2014	In the majority of Woredas of west shewa zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Commemorate Oromo Martyrs Day</li> </ul>	
April 25, 2014	Ambo city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Emperor Minilik is a monster</li> <li>➤ Finfinne [Addis Ababa] the capital city of Ethiopia found in Oromia region is ours.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of <i>Qeerroos</i> were arrested</li> </ul>
April 29-30, 2014	Ambo city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Around 25, 000 people protested the existing government economic and political discrimination imposed on the large Oromo people.</li> <li>➤ Justice, freedom and equality for Oromo people.</li> <li>➤ This protest was a decisive point for further unification and strength of <i>Qeerroo</i> for other protest movements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No of protesters wounded and killed by the government armed forces</li> <li>• Cars and buildings were ablaze on fire.</li> <li>• Ambo city changed to war Zone</li> </ul>
May 1-3, 2014	Ambo city Gudar town Mida Qanyi XuqurHincinni Tokke Kusaye	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Stop killing Oromo people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ambo town remained closed.</li> <li>• The military camp located in the Guder town was burned by <i>Qeerroo fi Qarree</i>.</li> <li>• <i>Qeerroo fi Qarree</i> controlled the administration office and the police station in Midaqanyi.</li> </ul>
May 8, 2014	Ambo City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The protest movement continued, but not aggressively.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Armed forces arrested a large number of people without any randomly</li> </ul>

	Midaqanyi		
June 4, 2014	Ambo city	➤ Release jailed innocent students	
August 25, 2014	Ambo city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Stop deceiving us. We feed up of falsehood of TPL propaganda</li> <li>➤ Qerroo continued protesting against the hidden political agenda promulgation in the name of government training which have been given for decades for different sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A large number of ambo university Qerroo arrested for consecutive three days</li> </ul>

*Note: the table is not comprehensive. Only the major protest movements are included*

#### 7.4 Changes in West Shewa Zone since the Transitional Period

It seems some changes are shown in west shewa zone in terms of political stability, peace and security and economic development in the transitional period. Some of the changes are visible while others are expected to happen in the near future.

##### 7.4.1 Political Stability

Since the transition period, there is relative political stability in west shewa zone. The necessary demotions and promotions on irresponsible and corrupted officials have been made in the different government sectors to stabilize the political tension. The rearrangement trembles the corrupted officials who tried to hamper the current glimpse of reformation in the zone. *Qeerroo fi Qarree* also clearly know these corrupted officials and their shameful deeds. As a respondent from west shewa zone Administration Bureau says,

*“Necessary position shift has been made in the west shewa zone since the transition period. Officials who have the potential to gear up the reformation process and have acceptance in the eyes of the people were assigned at a key government positions. On the other hand, the former officials who cannot make significant contribution and became the source of public violence were demoted from their position and shifted from their former working place.”* (Interviewed on February 10, 2019)

In fact, the frequencies of demonstrations and boycotts in west shewa zone reduced since PM Dr. Abiy Ahimed and Lemma Magarsa the president of Oromia regional state from Oromo came to power. This is due to the fact that the major constitutional question of Oromo people for decades to lead the country is answered for the time being. However, work place shift and relegate the position of corrupted officials is not a guarantee to ensure political stability in zone. It has been seen the demoted officials from their former position have been suddenly promoted to the highest political position. Thus, legal action there should be taken on these officials to ensure long lasting political stability.

##### 7.4.2 Peace and Security

One of the major problems in west shewa zone was lack of peace and security. As a respondent from west shewa zone police station Bureau said that there was a strong conflict between *Qeerroo fi Qarree* and armed forces in the pre-transitional period. But, *Qeerroo fi Qarree* are currently cooperating with the police force to keep the peace and security of their area. Of course, this change is shown in the whole Oromia region. As Armed Conflict Location and Events Dataset 13 Oct 2018 states

*“Since Abiy has been in office, events in Oromia and particularly western Oromia have declined. The protests in that region have petered out. Between October 2017 and April 2018, there were 264 violent events in Oromia, comprising 68% of violent events total; since April, there have been 199 events in Oromia, constituting 47% of events — a decline of over 24%”*

In fact, there are different gangs in the west shewa zone, Ambo city who commit crimes in the name *Qeerroo fi Qarree*. However, as west shewa zone police station Bureau said that these groups are not real *Qeerroo fi Qarree* who have been struggling to bring democracy, equality and justice in west shewa zone. They are tools of political brokers who have targeted to create chaos in the west shewa zone. (Interviewed on March 4, 2019)

##### 7.4.3 Economic Development initiation

Job opportunity for jobless *Qeerroo fi Qarree* has been repetitive protest movement agenda in west shewa zone. As an informant from West shewa Zone administration office says, “The number of jobless *Qeerroo fi Qarree* increased from year to year in west shewa zone. In 2018 G.C only there were around sixteen thousand (16,000) registered *Qeerroo fi Qarree* jobless in west shewa zone before one year ago.” Lack of infrastructures and large unemployment rate are the major problems of west shewa zone. As one of *Qeerroo fi Qarree* leader says “the major causes for unemployment rate in west shewa zone is mistreatment and corruption. Individuals who could give bribe or had relationship with these officials got a job opportunity” (Interviewed on January 12, 2019). However, there are some attempts to create job opportunity for *Qeerroo fi Qarree*. With this regard, as an informant from west shewa zone administration office mentioned that for eight thousand two hundred (8,200) jobless *Qeerroo fi Qarree* created job opportunity in different small and micro industry. In addition, on the fundraising program held in Finfinne, February 23, 2019, around 460 million

birr were collected for Ambo town development projects. The fund also will be utilized to build a secondary school, medium-size stadium, a research center named after Laureate Tsegaye Gebremedhin and other development projects that could create a job opportunity for west shewa zone *Qeerroo fi Qarree* (Addis Herald, April 11, 2018)

### 7.5 The Sources of *Qeerroo fi Qarree* of West Shewa Zone Confusions on the Current Transition Period

Confusions or/and uncertainties often happened among the people during the transition period. The sources of these confusions or uncertainties are usually created due to contradicting and contesting political messages disseminated by different political parties, activists, and experts through different medium of communication. Transition period is also characterized by conflict and tension. As Addis standard (September 25, 2018) reported that the current transition of Ethiopia is unpredictable due to lack of absence of a structured transitional roadmap. Unpredictability stands for uncertainty of the political transition. This in turn creates despair and leads to violence. Accordingly, factors for the uncertainty of *Qeerroo fi Qarree* of west shewa zone about the current transition are the part and parcel of lack of transitional roadmap.

First, *Qeerroo fi Qarree* of west shewa zone didn't make clear demarcation between political party, political elites, and activists at the beginning of the transition period. In fact, democracy needs good activists and good politicians. Good activists can and often do advance the goals of good politicians. As a respondent from Ambo university department of Political Science and International Relations says,

*“Currently, it seems Qeerroo fi Qarree do not understand the clear differences between political party and an individual politician, activists, pressure groups, and so on. Though these actors play in the same field, a political party is broader than a single politician. It is an organization that consists of politicians and a group of voters organized to support certain public policies. A politician is someone who represents and acts on behalf of a general ideology and/or a specific agenda of the party. An activist is someone who organizes and acts for the purpose of changing public policy or law”* (Interviewed on Febr.26, 2019).

*Qeerroo fi Qarree* had been protesting against the dictatorship of EPRDF wearing the T-shirts having the picture of PM. Dr. Abiy Ahimed and the president of Oromia regional state, Lemma Megersa who are the senior members of the OPDO, now ODP one of EPRDF collation party representing Oromia region. *Qeerroo fi Qarree* strongly support these revolutionary leaders due to the fact that the leader's political quality, commitment and visible reformations took place in the transition period. Besides, *Qeerroo fi Qarree* of west shewa zone have been seen when they support the existing government revolutionary leaders waving the flag of opposition party, OLF. In fact, there is a strong bondage between OLF party and Oromo people. They believed OLF as identification of *Oromummaa*, being an Oromo, thus; *Qeerroo fi Qarree* believe OLF party is the representative of Oromo people. As one of *Qeerroo* respondent says, “OLF is my blood. I have told by my elder brothers that OLF is the one who has been fighting to liberate Oromo people from ‘Woyane’ colonialism. Thus, I cannot detach OLF from Oromo and Oromo people from OLF”. Such strong perception inculcated in the mind of *Qeerroo fi Qarree* through political narration about OLF and the harsh measures made by TPLF on Oromo people. Therefore, the source of these evident confusion scenarios emanated due to lack of understanding clearly the role and mandates of individual politician, political party/s, and activists.

Second, there is still lack of strong trust between *Qeerroo fi Qarree* of west shewa zone and ODP (Oromo Democratic Party) in the current reformation process. The party has been serving the interest of the dictator TPLF for more than two decades than the interest of the people it represents. In fact, since transition period the party has made necessary reformations. First, OPDO changed its name and logo to Oromo Democratic Party (ODP). Then, fourteen (14) long serving officials retired from the party and energetic individuals are assigned to foster the reformation process. Besides, the ‘Team Lemma’ group and PM collaboratively made decisive steps like lifting a state of emergency and free political prisoners which was a stepping stone to build the image of ODP among *Qeerroo fi Qarree*. However, lack ODP immediate response and weak stand on several ethnic-boarder conflicts and the death of innocent Oromo people regenerated uneasy relationship between ODP and *Qeerroo fi Qarree*. For instance, a large number of Oromo people have been living around Somali-Oromia borders were killed and the rest were displaced from their homes due to clashes on the border issue. An armed group from Benishangul-Gumuz killed and burned the houses of Oromo people in east wallaga zone. Furthermore, the issue of *Koye Foccee* condominium houses located in Oromia special zone which is handed by the Addis Ababa City Administration Savings & Houses Development Enterprise (AASHDE) on Wednesday, March 6, 2019, put the loyalty of the party under question. As a result, as one of *Qarree* respondent says,

*“Lemma Megersa is a strong leader of Oromia regional state. But, OPDO or ODP is simply changed its' name, not its old fashioned political trend. The party's mischievous practices still exist. Even though ODP got power by Qeerroo fi Qarree uninterrupted peaceful struggle, the party still cannot fully exercise its power. Thus, it is difficult to fully trust ODP. However, Qeerroo fi Qarree never back and hesitate to say enough is enough”* (Interviewed on March 3, 2019)

Lastly, lack of competent and financially strong opposition parties represent Oromo people makes *Qeerroo fi Qarree* uncertain about the current transition brought real democracy in the country. Among several parties representing Oromo people, OLF was a senior political party represents Oromo people. Briefly, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) is a political organization established in 1970 to struggle against the Abyssinian colonial rule. The OLF was part of a transitional government led by the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition when the *Derg* regime was overthrown in 1991. However, OLF left the



transitional government in 1992 due to political ideology difference happened between OLF and TPLF (Tigray People's Liberation Front). Since then the party has made a low-level armed struggle against the government to ensure the Oromo peoples' right to self-determination (Retrieved on February 28, 2019 from <https://unpo.org/members/7917>, 2015). The fundamental objective of the OLF is the right to national self-determination, terminate a century of oppression and exploitation, and to form, where possible, a political union with other nations on the basis of equality, respect for mutual interests and the principle of voluntary associations. However, As Jawar Mohamed (2009: 2) states "because of weak, undisciplined and incompetent leadership, through exile politics and a cult-like outdated organizational tradition, the OLF could not produce any result over the past decade." Thus, OLF cannot liberate Oromo people from tyrant TPLF governance for the last 27 years. Since OLF ceasefire and signed negotiation agreement with existing government in the transition period still there are pressures that cripple the party not step forward. As a result, *Qeerroo fi Qarree* did not get OLF as they are expecting for years.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Oromo people have been politically, economically, and socially marginalized for centuries. Since EPRDF came to power, the Oromo people decimations, displacement and evictions from their own land continues for the last 27 years in both systematic and forceful ways. Oromo people have made a continuous struggle to liberate from tyrant EPRDF governance. In the history of Oromo people struggle, the current *Qeerroo fi Qarree* protest movements are another successful chapter that shakes the Ethiopian politics within five years. *Qeerroo fi Qarree* have been protested in a well-organized manner when an incident such as the unlawful arrest of Oromo politicians, journalists, freedom fighters, activists, school dismissals related to student unrests, incidents of land grabbing, eviction of Oromo farmers, and so on occurs at any corner of Oromia. The incumbent government has used harsh measures to stop *Qeerroo fi Qarree* protest movements in the Oromia region. Unfortunately, they became unstoppable and source of Oromo unification. Their death, torture and arrest for the last five years lastly brought a political shift in the Ethiopia politics. As a result, the incumbent government forced to make internal reforms. New Prime Minister was appointed under the transitional government and the former dictator political elites dominantly from minority TPLF overthrown and even some of the party's highly corrupted officials put in jail. *Qeerroo fi Qarree* as the engine of current political transition, social media as the main medium of communication and activists (diaspora and local) as a wheel of the protest accomplished the first step mission which is liberating Oromo people from EPRDF dictatorship lead by TPLF in the pre-transitional period. In this first stage, *Qeerroo fi Qarree* guard the land grabbing through evicting Oromo farmers around Finfine, ensure freedom of speech, media freedom and partly other human and constitutional rights of Oromo people.

West shewa zone is taken as an epicenter of *Qeerroo fi Qarree* protest movements. *Qeerroo fi Qarree* of west shewa zone has protested and achieved indispensable roles for the current transition period. Since the transition period, there is relative peace and security, economic political stability in west shewa zone. However, lack of genuine reformation by the ruling party, ODP, lack of competent opposition parties due to internal and external problems and lack of *Qeerroo fi Qarree* political awareness to demarcate the role of politicians and activists create uncertainty about the success of the transition and changes to be expected in the post transition period among *Qeerroo fi Qarree* of west shewa zone. Lastly, the study urges that *Qeerroo fi Qarree* should see themselves as an independent body and play the watchdog role. They should not emotionally driven by any political party propaganda and act responsibly to any existing government misdeeds. Besides, the existing government should publicize the transitional roadmap and make unspontaneous discussion with *Qeerroo fi Qarree*. Moreover, politicians, activists and media should work hard with the responsibility to inform and enforce necessary reformations. ***This Research has methodological gap. The study used qualitative research approach with small size participants and limited setting to review and describe the issue under investigation. Thus, it recommends other researcher to investigate and analyze the issue thoroughly and bring a comprehensive and critical analysis.***

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