Media representations of Ethiopian Muslims civil rights movement

Yasin Mohammed Ali[1]

[1]Ankara University, Dept. of Psychology, Ankara, Türkiye, e-mail: yamali@ankara.edu.tr ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1834-0372

Article Info	Abstract
	The main objective of this study was to describe how the pro and anti-government media represented the civil rights movement of Ethiopian Muslims against religious indoctrination. Four online Media, two pro-government Media, and two opposition Media were purposefully selected to achieve this objective. The news and articles presented from April 2012 to March 2013 were rigorously analyzed using steps suggested by Johnson and Christensen (2004). The qualitative analysis resulted in three major themes and six subcategories under the major themes. The three major themes include the Aim of the Muslim civil rights movement, Government interference in religious affairs, and the Representation of Leaders of the Ethiopian Muslims Civil rights Movement. As hypothesized at the onset of the study, the two groups of online Media selected for analysis represented the Ethiopian Muslim civil rights movement in highly different ways. Generally speaking, the selected pro-government media has negatively represented the movement, whereas the opposition media exhibited positive representation.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the study

Ethiopia is a country where Christians and Muslims have lived together for more than 14 centuries. Since the first migration in Islamic history, some families and companions of Prophet Muhammad came to Ethiopia, the then Christian land of Habesha, to save their lives from the idol worshiper Quraish clan who wanted to destroy Islam and its followers from its outset. Since then, Islam has expanded in every corner of Ethiopia, and currently, Ethiopian Muslims account for 34% of the total population in the country (CSA, 2007). However, despite a remarkable degree of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christians, Christians have dominated the country's political system for centuries. Hence, Ethiopian history was part and parcel of systematically excluding Muslims from political, educational, and other essential government structures. However, since the ruling party came to power in 1991, the Ethiopian Muslims and other minority ethnic groups have exercised significant freedom and participation in the country's essential affairs. As a result, Muslims have registered considerable progress in economic, political, educational, social, and other vital sectors.

However, at the end of 2011 and early 2012, the Ethiopian government introduced a big project to forcefully indoctrinate the Ethiopian Muslims into a newly invented Islamic sect called Al-Ahbash, which is claimed to be moderate, modern, and more harmonious to other religions. However, the government and the Ahbash cult have faced firm resistance from Ethiopian Muslims from the onset, and the movement continued until now even though the government is taking harsh measures, including arrests, killings, expelling from the country, intimidation, and closings of religious schools and Islamic organizations. In indoctrination of the Al-Ahbash sect and hence demonizing the resistance movement by Ethiopian Muslims, the government has used Media as a critical tool. Similarly, Ethiopian Muslim civil rights activists are using their Media to expose the government's interference in religious affairs and its violation of the country's constitution, which separate state and religion. Thus, this social representation study attempted to show the pro and anti-government media representation of the Ethiopian Muslims' civil rights movement, which aimed at resisting religious impositions.

The main objective of this study was to describe how the pro and anti-government media represented the civil rights movement of Ethiopian Muslims against religious indoctrination. The present study can be one concrete evidence on how media shapes social representations. It shows how different groups of media represented the same social issues in different ways and hence they will shape the attitude of their audiences differently. The present study clearly showed the role media could play in making the unfamiliar familiar. Hence, the present study could be a corner stone to media and social psychological studies regarding the role of media in representing certain unfamiliar issue to the people and make it familiar.

2. Literature

2.1. The concept of social representations

Social representation theory is a social psychological framework of concepts and ideas to study psychosocial phenomena in modern societies. It maintains that social psychological phenomena and processes can only be adequately understood if they saw as embedded in historical, cultural, and macro social conditions. By doing so, it attempts to overcome the shortcomings of those currently general theories and approaches in social psychology based on methodological individualism and epistemology that functionally separates the subject from the object (Farr, 1996; Moscovici, 1973; 1984; 1993). Instead, a social representation is understood as the collective elaboration "of a social object by the community to behave and communicate" (Moscovici, 1963).

Moscovici, the founder of social representation theory, defines social representations as "universes of opinions" that individuals have about the objects in the social environment. Social representations are the thoughts shared by a social group or whole society to fulfill the individuals' need to understand the world (Moscovici, 1984, cited in Elif, 2007; Moscovici, 2000; 2001; 2007). Social representations concern the content of everyday thinking and the stock of ideas that gives coherence to our religious beliefs, political ideas, and the connections we create as spontaneously as we breathe. They make it possible for us to classify persons and objects, compare and explain behaviors, and objectify them as part of our social setting. Social representations transform the unfamiliar into the familiar (Höijer, 2008, Moscovici, 1988). By making the complex and unfamiliar world more unambiguous and comprehensible, social representations can adapt the individual to the social environment by reconstructing the social information related to the environment (Moliner and Tafani, 1997).

2.2. The role of media in social representations

Media plays a profound role in making something unfamiliar familiar. In the contemporary world, Media has become the primary tool of social representation, where its diversity and technological advancement are increasing. In modern times, mass media have added and established another system of meanings that is much more dynamic and less resistant to change than a society's cultural underpinnings. This system comprises representations of objects, events, and facts resulting from rapid scientific and technological advances and economic, political, and societal changes typical of contemporary societies (Wanger, 2012).

Many studies have been done on the role of media in representing various events and social phenomena. For instance, Wanger et al. (1999) conducted a series of studies on how British TV represents madness, mental illness, and people with mental health problems. Their studies uniformly conclude that mentally ill people are stigmatized in the Western media, primarily through their association with violence. In 2001, the Australian government published a large-scale literature review examining portrayals of mental health in the media (Francis et al., 2001, as cited in Edney, 2004). After considering dozens of studies that analyzed news and entertainment media from around the globe, the review determined that media representations of mental illness promote negative images and stereotypes—notably, the false connection between mental illness and violence. Many other studies have found a definite connection between negative media portrayals of mental illness and the public's negative attitudes toward people with mental health issues (Coverdale et al., 2002; Cutcliffe and Hannigan, 2001; Diefenbach, 1997; Olstead, 2002; Rose, 1998; Wahl, 1995; Wahl and Roth, 1982; Wilson et al., 1999, cited in Edney, 2004). In another study, Inthorn (2006) found that the media play a crucial role in shaping European identities. His study explores how British and German press coverage since 2001 ascribes civic and cultural components to EU membership.

2.3. The Ethiopian Muslim civil rights movement

To show the brief historical background of the Ethiopian Muslims civil rights movement, the researcher has borrowed the brief description given by Yuunus (2012) in his article Ahbash, Government and Ethiopian Muslims Protests as follows:

Ethiopia is a country where Islam sets its foot during the lifetime of the prophet Muhammad. In the early years of his prophethood, when the pagans of Mecca prosecuted his followers, the prophet advised some of his followers to seek refuge in Ethiopia, where there was a just king who didn't oppress anyone because of his faith. Accordingly, many of his early followers, including his daughter Ruqayya and her husband, the caliph Uthman ibn Affan, came to seek asylum under that pious king (called "Armah" by Ethiopian writers and "Al-Nagashi" by Muslim writers). Since then, with Orthodox Christianity, Islam has established itself as one of the two dominant religions in the country. Ethiopian Muslims say that "the Ahbashism campaign" officially began in July/2011 when the Ministry of the Federal Affairs of Ethiopia and the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (Majlis) arranged a training session for 600 Muslim clerics elected from different parts of the country. The luxuries training had occurred on one Haramaya University campus (located in eastern Ethiopia). The Minister of Federal Affairs announced that the government allocated more than 11,000,000 Ethiopian Birr (around 800 000 USD) to give training on peace and religious tolerance. The trainers came from Beirut, where the Ahbash headquarters locate. However, most Muslims explain that the training was not focused on religious tolerance, as the Minister of Federal Affairs said. The main course of the session was titled "The Evil caused by the preexisting Islamic teaching in Ethiopia." The government gave similar pieces of training throughout the whole of the country. Those who refused to participate in the pieces of training would be removed from the leadership of the district and Zonal "Majlis" and from being imam of the mosques. As a result, thousands were thrown out of the mosques where they served the community for many years. Since August 2011, government officials have been undertaking a terrorizing media campaign. On one occasion, the Minister of Federal Affairs said, "The government has officially declared 'Wahhabiya' to be an extremist sect that strives to topple the constitution and install an Islamic state." The state-run media broadcasted Documentary films and Radio programs. The press owned by the government continuously published propaganda articles supporting the Ahbashism campaign. The government expressed its support to the "Majlis" when the latter deposed the committees of different Islamic madrasa (schools). It also stood on the side of the "Majlis" when it sacked 50 teachers of Aweliya Islamic College, and the college was put under the board of directors led by Majlis representatives; some are well-known members of Akbash. The Ahbashism campaign was met by an "Anti-Ahbashism Campaign," in which most Muslims expressed their discontent and disapproval of the Ahbashism campaign. Many writers have challenged the legality of the government's intervention in the religious affairs of Muslims. By using different media outlets and the press, many people are warning about the evil motives of the Ahbashism campaign. Through different websites and social networking channels, they are telling the world about their challenges in their faith. Nationwide unrest started in December 2011, when the government dismissed the administration of the Awoliya religious school in Addis Ababa because it perceived the institution to be a breeding ground for Islamist radicalism. It then remained a weekly public rally confined in Aweliya College and its surroundings, where hundreds of thousands of Muslims pray the mandatory Friday Prayer (Salatul Juma) together and speak against "the Ahbashism campaign" in one voice. On the third public rally at Aweliya (January 28/2012), the mass movement's attendants elected a committee representing them and speaking on their behalf. Through massive networking and petition collecting activity undertaken in a few days, the committee has received support from millions of citizens. The government approved the committee's legal status and invited it to discuss the demand of the Muslim society. Three critical questions were presented to the government: a) The current leadership of "Majlis" does not represent Ethiopian Muslims, so it must be substituted by elected representatives of the Muslim society (it is said that the last election of Majlis leadership was undertaken in 2000) b)The "Majlis" should stop indoctrinating the people with Ahbash ideology (But Ahbash can preach its ideology independently) c) The Aweliya Islamic institute should be administered by an independent board of directors which has no attachment to the "Majlis" At the start the government resembled a positive arbitrator. It promised to answer the questions positively and appointed the committee members for another discussion. However, when the discussion was held on the planned date, it turned back against its words. The government openly said, "The country's problem is not Ahbash. It is Wahhabiya that has been fueling religious tensions in the country. Churches and mosques were burned, and Wahhabiyya slaughtered many people. Places like Aweliya were serving the Wahhabiya sect to expand. We will not allow this anymore. Having heard the government's response, the mass of Ethiopian Muslims has increased their opposition on all fronts. The protests spread from the "Awoliya compound" to the mosques of Addis Ababa. On April 20/2012, about one million demonstrated in Aweliya institute and other places to shout for the right of Ethiopian Muslims. Similar protests continue in the whole of the country.

More than 1000 people, including the movement's leaders, were imprisoned, and the government forces killed more than 50 Muslim protesters. However, the Ethiopian Muslim civil rights movement continues using different non-violent resistance methods.

3. Methodology

3.1. Method of data collection

The primary purpose of this study was to identify how the pro-government and opposition Media represented the civil rights movement of Ethiopian Muslims. Two pro-government and two opposition online Media were purposefully selected by the researcher, considering their affiliation to the government and the Muslim civil rights movement. Moreover, the accessibility of their news and articles archives regarding the Muslim rights movement since its onset was also considered in the selection decision. Besides, their popularity in the government and among Ethiopian Muslims Civil Right Movement supporters was among the criteria for choosing the four online Media. Accordingly, East Africa Forum and Ayga Forum were selected from the pro-government Media. In contrast, Dimisachin Yisema (Let Our Voice be Heard) and Bilal Communications were selected from the pro-Ethiopian Muslims Civil Right Movement. Because of the voluminous news and articles regarding the Ethiopian Muslims Civil Right Movement since its inception at the end of 2011, this study only selected the news and articles from April 2012 to March 2013.

3.2. Method of data analysis

The collected data via online media analysis has been organized in file folders to answer the specified research questions. Then, the collected data via online media analyses are printed out, and that news and articles in the local language are translated into English (with the help of my two colleagues who are Ph.D. students in Turkey), and an attempt was made to keep the originality of the research. The next step was the process of general reading and memoing information to develop a sense of data and begin making sense of data. Finally, after thoroughly reading the row data, the researcher was engaged in developing categories or codes and reducing the information in the extensive database into manageable sets of themes.

The researcher aggregated the data into about six categories (categorical aggregation, as indicated by Creswell, 2007), collapsed them into three themes, and presented them in narrative form. The interpretation was supported by extracts from the original text of the collected data. In the final section of the study, the discussion was made supporting by relevant literature. Finally, conclusions and implications have also been made based on the study's findings. Generally, in analyzing the voluminous data collected through online media analysis, the following steps, which the researcher adapted from the work of Johnson and Christensen (2004, pp. 501-514), were followed as follows:

Transcribing: - to carefully analyze qualitative data, transcribing one's data is vital. Transcription transforms qualitative research data such as audio recordings of interviews or field notes written from observation into a typed text (Johnson and Christensen, 2004). In this study, this step is already done by the selected media since the obtained data is text news and articles.

Segmenting: - involves dividing the transcribed data into meaningful analytic units. It can be a word, a single sentence, or several sentences, or it might include a more significant passage such as a paragraph or even a complete document (Johnson and Christensen, 2004). Hence, the researcher has segmented the text data based on their specific meaning to the present study by considering how a specific segment differs from the text before and after. Brackets around each segment are used to clarify where each segment started and ended.

Coding: - is the process of marking segments of data (usually text data) with symbols, descriptive words, or category names (Johnson and Christensen, 2004). Segmenting and coding go hand in hand because segmenting involves locating meaningful data segments, and coding involves marking or labeling those segments with codes or categories (Johnson and Christensen, 2004). Thus, the researcher has placed a descriptive word or phrase in the left-hand margin next to each text segment as a code. As new codes are developed during coding, they are added to the lists of codes if they were not already on the list. According to Johnson and Christensen (2004), codes can be inductive or priories. A researcher generates inductive codes by directly examining the data.

In contrast, prior codes were developed before examining the data. They asserted that because of the inductive nature of most qualitative research, qualitative researchers rationally generate their codes or category names directly from their data. Hence, the researcher has used inductive codes by directly examining each segment using

terms used by the selected media and well-known social science terms. Johnson and Christensen (2004) stated that inductive codes could be based on emic terms (terms that the participants use) and familiar social science terms well-known by the researcher.

Enumeration: - at this stage attempt was made to know how frequently words or coded categories appeared in the data. Listing frequencies can help the researcher identify prominent themes in the data (e.g., what things did the participants say many times?) (Johnson and Christensen, 2004). Hence, the three themes and sub-themes described and interpreted in this study have higher frequencies in the segmented and coded data.

Creating a hierarchical category system: - sometimes, categories can be organized into different levels. For example, a set of subcategories might fall beneath a specific category, and that particular category might fall under an even higher-level category (Johnson and Christensen, 2004). Here, the researcher has developed hierarchical categories in a bottom-up fashion, as suggested by Johnson and Christensen (2004), which means that the lowest level categories are the closest to the actual data collected in the study. This bottom-up or inductive strategy is the most common approach used by qualitative researchers (Ibid).

Identifying relationships among categories: - qualitative researchers use the term relationship to refer to many kinds of relations or connections between things, including but not limited to variables. This step is not better or worse; it is just different (Johnson and Christensen, 2004). This step was done to facilitate the strict inclusion of subcategories into more significant themes (X is a kind of Y) (Ibid). Strict inclusion is a typical relationship in qualitative data analysis (Ibid).

Developing themes (major and sub-themes): - at this stage, an effort has been made to bring inclusive categories into the study's major and sub-themes. In doing so, the steps mentioned above were vital.

Presenting descriptions and interpretations: - at this stage attempt has been made to present each theme and sub-themes identified in the above procedures. The study's findings were presented using an in-depth description and interpretation of themes by using direct quotes of what the selected media expressed and the reflective analysis and interpretations I made regarding the issue under investigation. Moreover, discussions on significant research themes were supported by related literature and previous findings on similar research. The researcher used this reporting style because, as Polknighorne (1989) states, it would give the reader an accurate, clear, and articulate description of an experience.

4. Findings

In this part, an attempt was made to present the data collected through document analysis. Three broad themes with six sub-themes under the major themes were constructed in analyzing the data. The first theme explores the Aim of the Muslim civil rights movement; the second depicts Government interference in religious affairs, and the last discusses Representations concerning leaders of the Ethiopian Muslims Civil rights Movement.

4.1. Aims of the Muslim civil rights movement

The rigorous media analysis of pro and anti-government Media revealed that these media groups try to depict the Aim of the Ethiopian Muslims' civil rights movement in two opposite extremes. The pro-government media tries to show the political motive behind the Muslim movement and tries to convince their audiences that the movement aims to form an Islamic 'sharia' government by toppling the secular state. On the other hand, the anti-government and pro-Muslim movement media try to state the movement's Aim as only ensuring religious freedom and stopping the forceful imposition of a new religious sect on the believers.

4.1.1. A movement aimed at toppling the government and forming Islamic "sharia" government in Ethiopia

As stated above, the pro-government Media analyzed for this study repeatedly questioned the political Aim behind Ethiopia's Muslim movement. For instance, Horn Affairs (02.05.2012), in its news headline: Prime Minister Meles on the Ahbash, Salafi, Wahabi controversy, stated the following:

Answering questions from MPs in the House of Peoples Representatives about religious extremism last week, Prime Minister Meles noted that a few extremists in Ethiopia were violating the constitution. For example, a few extremist Salafists were to be seen in the Al Qaeda cell captured in Arsi and Bale, and some had been trying to establish an Islamist Ethiopian state.

Similarly, Ayga Forum (27-04-2012), under the news headline: Constitutional rights for religion and the rule of law, wrote the following:

…….The second hot potato to have confronted the government and the society with anxious concern is Islamist Extremists zealot's cunning plot to ventilate in the open air so far held in check plan to seize state power, not through the ballot box, but by their religion. The government has no mandate to favor one religious sect at the expense of another. Events have made it clear that Islamist Extremists now want to circumvent the constitution by arguing wrongly. For instance, they claim that Ethiopian Muslims outnumber Ethiopian Christians and that Muslims have the right to establish an Islamic state in Ethiopia.

4.1.2. Movement for religious freedom with no political motive

The pro-Muslim movement Medias analyzed for this study generally attempted to defend the movement's only motive as ensuring religious freedom of Ethiopian Muslims with no motive of controlling political power. For example, Dimisachin Yisema (Let Our Voice be Heard), in its press release held on January 4, 2013, stated the three questions that the Muslim civil rights leaders presented to the government as follows:

The 17-member committee summed up the demands of the Muslim community in three points and presented them to the Ministry of Federal Affairs. The three demands were:

1. *The unelected leadership of the Majlis (Islamic council) should be dissolved, and new leadership should be elected with the active participation of the Muslim community.*

2. *Moreover, the government was asked to stop interfering in religious affairs and forced the imposition of al-Ahbash.*

3. *The Awolia Islamic Center should be administered by a Board drawn from the Muslim community.*

In another news on July 28, 2012, regarding the Friday protest against the government intervention in religious affairs, Dimisachin Yisema (Let Our Voice be Heard) reported the following:

Friday in Ethiopia has become a day for the Jum'a prayer and a day for the continuing peaceful resistance and protest of Ethiopian Muslims demanding justice, equality, and freedom against religious oppression. This Friday, June 26, was even more important when Ethiopians staged demonstrations worldwide. In their demonstrations, the Muslims opposed:

- *the ongoing violations of religious freedom*

- *trumped-up charges*

- *closing and taking-over of mosques by the government-controlled Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council (Mejlis)*

- *the propaganda war through state media against Muslims, and the detention of hundreds of Muslims all over the country.*

Nur Mosque at the heart of Addis Ababa was chosen as the day's venue for the Friday demonstration instead of the usual Anwar Mosque just a few hundred meters away. Hundreds of thousands of Muslims flocked to the mosque and the surrounding for the Friday prayer and the peaceful resistance with new emotions. After the prayers were completed, loud voices started crying out with messages demanding freedom.

Furthermore, on January 4, 2013, Bilal Communication reported the following under the headline Ethiopian Muslims under siege:

Ethiopian Muslims participated today in a massive nationwide demonstration against measures taken by the government in Addis Ababa to limit religious freedom. The protests took place everywhere except the capital, where demonstrations are banned because it will host next week's celebration of the 50th anniversary of the African Union. Today's protests are neither new nor surprising. Tens of thousands of Ethiopian Muslims have demonstrated across the country each Friday over the last year, protesting the new government measures that have threatened their freedoms. Their demands are not to establish a shari'a-compliant polity. Instead, they seek a secular state according to the laws enshrined in the constitution. Since this government came to power in 1990, it has sought to control its people by dividing them along ethnic and religious lines. More recently, it has singled out Muslims, alleging they are influenced by radical elements seeking to subvert the regime. In the name of security, the government has adopted various measures to stifle their freedoms by forcing them to submit to the religious leaders appointed by the government, as it did with the dominant Orthodox Church. As a result, hundreds of Muslims have been arrested, imprisoned, or even tortured.

In some cases, houses have been ransacked, and Qurans have been confiscated. The charges include terrorism and attempting to establish Sharia law. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) November 2012 expressed that it was "deeply concerned about the increasing deterioration of religious freedoms for Muslims in Ethiopia." USCIRF Commissioner Azizah al Hibri warned of ongoing "attempt(s) by the Ethiopian government to crush opposition to its efforts to control the practice of religion by imposing on Ethiopian Muslims a specific interpretation of Islam."

4.2. Government interference in religious affairs

The other dominant theme in the media analysis of selected pro and anti-government Media exhibited a great degree of controversy in the government's interference in Muslim's internal affairs. Pro-government Media insists on the government's innocence in imposing religious sects and interfering in Muslims' internal affairs. On the contrary, the pro-Muslim civil rights movements Media claim apparent interference of the ruling party in Ethiopia in imposing a new sect of Islam and interfering in overall Muslim affairs.

4.2.1. Separation of state and religion

The news and articles analyzed in the pro-government Media argued the absence of the government's interference in the recent widely prevailed claims of the government's direct intervention in indoctrinating Ethiopian Muslims with the new sect called Al- Ahbash. Strengthening this, Horn Affairs (August 7, 2012) stated the following under the headline no interference in religion:

.....To help settle a standoff between the two parties (the Islamic council and the Muslim protesters), the government, although insistent that the election of the Islamic Council was the issue of the Muslim community, indicated it was arranged to moderate discussions in the interests of peace and security. It firmly underlined that the constitution forbade any government interference in religious affairs. It could not and would not express any view about the doctrines of one sect or another. Any allegations to the contrary are untrue. The government has a positive duty to ensure the freedom of religion in the country and that others do not affect this.

Similarly, Ayga Forum (April 17, 2012) presented the following news following the parliament speaker of the late prime minister as follows:

While responding to questions raised by parliamentarians during the 25th regular session of the House of Peoples' Representatives here on Tuesday, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi underlined government does not interfere in any affairs of religion and vice versa. However, the government is responsible for safeguarding the constitution from religious extremism.

4.2.2. Direct Government interference in religious affairs

The analyzed pro-Muslim civil rights movement Media frequently claimed the government's direct interference in recent religious impositions. For instance, Dimisachin Yisema (Let Our Voice be Heard), on October 20, 2012, reported the following:

The Ethiopian government, led by the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), has been engaged in this adventurous project of imposing this little-known sect on the Muslim population under the excuse of "fighting extremism."

The adoption of the Ahbash sect is believed to be recommended by a Tel Aviv University scholar of Ethiopian and Middle East studies, Prof. Haggai Erlich, as a panacea for the perceived threat of extremism. Erlich describes the sect as "a moderate form of Islam."

Since early January last year, Muslims across Ethiopia have been protesting against the unconstitutional government interference in religious affairs and the attempt to impose the teachings of al-Ahbash forcefully. The interference initially manifested in a series of indoctrination training seminars jointly organized by the Ministry of Federal Affairs and the Majlis. The indoctrination seminars were conducted by al-Ahbash sheiks, who came from Lebanon upon the invitation of the Ethiopian government.

Similarly, Bilal Communication (March 24, 2013), under the headline Ethiopian government: Stop interfering in religious matters, stated as follows:

The Ethiopian constitution states, "The state shall not interfere in religious matters, and religion shall not interfere in state affairs" (Article 11, sub-article 3). However, the state never stops interfering in religious

matters. Concerning the constitution, the regime constantly abuses it. For example, the state trained a group of people called Ahbash in Beirut, Lebanon, as a new Islamic religion and introduced them by force to the Ethiopian Muslims. The Ahbash group was trained by Israel and UK governments and funded by both. The Ethiopian Muslims immediately rejected the idea of the Ahbash group. Then the state tried several ways to harass Muslims, and many people were arrested. First, the security forces arrested many Muslims from mosques. Second, imams of Tigray Muslim mosque leaders were forced to be trained by Ahbash's new religion group at Mekele University and other educational centers throughout the country. Muslims were warned that they would be fired if they rejected the conversion. Third, the Tigray mosque leaders and Imams were given field allowances by the government that also covered their transportation costs.

4.3. Representations concerning Leaders of the Ethiopian Muslims civil rights movement

The last dominant theme found in the media analysis of selected pro and anti-government Media showed how the leaders of the Muslim rights movement are represented in the two media groups. The result showed that the pro-government Media tried to defame and demonize the leaders. In contrast, the pro-Muslim rights movement Media represented the leaders as heroes and authentic representatives of Ethiopian Muslims.

4.3.1. Negative representation of Ethiopian Muslim civil rights movement leaders

Generally speaking, the two pro-government Media analyzed for this research negatively represented the Ethiopian Muslim civil rights movement leaders as self-appointing leaders, extremists, and terrorists. For instance, Horn Affairs (August 13, 2012), under the news headline recent religious violence in Addis Ababa mosques: who is behind it? stated the following:

The Federal Police Commission announced two weeks ago that it had foiled a series of illegal activities threatening the country's peace and national security. Over the last few weeks, a small group of extreme radical Muslims, claiming to represent the entire Ethiopian Muslim community, have been trying to incite violence in some mosques in Addis Ababa. They carry out illegal demonstrations, holding people hostage, destroying public property, and sparking clashes with police around the great Anwar mosque in Addis Ababa, turning peaceful Friday prayers into scenes of violence.

The recent riots have been an extension of the attempts of some individuals to present themselves as the only representatives of the Muslim community. They claim that only their group project an accurate understanding of Islam. The latest clashes were led by a self-appointed committee that claimed to be elected by the entire community of Muslims to speak on behalf of the community about grievances against the Islamic Affairs Council, the Mejlis. Despite questions about the committee's representative nature, government officials agreed to mediate between the committee and the Mejlis to try to help resolve the problems between the two sides. The main issue that surfaced in the discussion was the election of new members of the Mejlis and allegations of the "forced imposition of a certain sect on the Muslim community" through the Mejlis.

The government has said those arrested were involved in unrest and that the self-appointed leaders are extremists who want to create an Islamic state in multi-religious, secular Ethiopia. Around a third of Ethiopia's 94 million people are Muslims, according to the CIA World Factbook.

Another article Horn Affairs posted on November 14, 2012, titled A Comment on Amnesty International and Muslim 'protests' reads as follows:

…….. It is true that some members of 'the Muslims civil rights committee' have been arrested following violent protests. However, it is misleading to suggest that this 'committee' had been "chosen to represent the Muslim community's grievances to the government." This 'committee' was not chosen nor elected by anyone. It was made up of some of the same group of protestors who have been orchestrating and organizing the protests and whose principal activity appears to have been to contact Amnesty International and other organizations. It was, in sum, a small, self-appointed committee of protestors whose support in the community at large, as the recent election demonstrated, was minimal.

Similarly, the Ayga forum (May 20, 2012) posted an article titled: What can the Muslim population benefit from extremism as follows:

……Individuals primarily lead the Ethiopian Muslims movement with a hidden political agenda. Consequently, the so-called leaders are provoking violent conflict among the Muslims. They plan to violet the Ethiopian constitution and hinder the country's fast growth.

Furthermore, on May 9, 2012, the Ayga forum reported the following under the headline: A Minister Shiferaw warns again unnamed Muslim extremist:

The government will not have spare time to allow any ill-move by subversive groups that have been using Islam as a disguise to create instability recently, the Minister of Federal Affairs told parliamentarians yesterday.

Minister Shiferaw Teklemariam (Ph.D.) claimed that few extremist individuals and groups have started to openly advance their extremist agenda among the Muslim community through inducements and intimidations, according to the daily news by the Amharic language Addis Zemen.

The minister made the statement during his appearance at the parliament to present his Ministry's nine months performance report.

He added that the government could not sit by as these subversive groups tried to mislead the Muslim community, undermining the nation's stability and development.

The minister warned these unnamed individuals and groups to refrain from inciting the Muslims against the government using various media outlets.

Shiferaw indicated that, out of respect for the Muslim community and readiness to address public demands, the government held several discussions with individuals who have been advancing demands concerning Awolia Muslim school and the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council. Thus, the issues have been sufficiently addressed by the government.

4.3.2. Positive Representation of Ethiopian Muslims civil right movement Leaders

Overall, the two pro-Muslim civil rights movement Media represent the movement's leaders positively as genuine representatives of millions of Ethiopian Muslims and heroes who sacrificed themselves to the people who represented them until they were imprisoned and faced physical and mental abuse by the government. For example, Dimisachin Yisema (Let our voice be Heard), in its press release on January 4, 2013, stated the following:

Ethiopian Muslims Mark Anniversary of Peaceful Protests against Government Interference in Religion

As the Muslims' peaceful protests continued expanding across the country, the government media outlets, which the ruling EPRDF fully controls, started accusing "a few [unspecified] group" of "extremist tendencies" and "seeking to establish an Islamic government in Ethiopia."

This propaganda campaign by the state media soon translated into arresting committee members elected by the country's Muslim community to present their legitimate demands to the government and a dozen Muslim preachers, journalists, and artists.

After languishing for four months in a government detention facility, the members of the committee and the other Muslims who, a few months ago, were praised for their peacefulness and constitutionality, were charged, in late October, under the infamous anti-terror law, with engaging in terrorist activities.

In another news Dimisachin Yisema (Let our voice be Heard) (September 12, 2012), under the headline Ethiopian Muslim Leaders, Preachers, and Journalists Being Tortured reported the following:

Shocking reports are emerging from credible insiders at the Central Crime Investigation Department in Addis Ababa that representatives of the Muslim community, religious teachers, and journalists who have been in pre-trial detention since Mid-July were being brutally tortured.

According to insiders, the Muslim communities' representatives and religious preachers were held in separate cold dark rooms for more than ten days, where they were tortured at night.

Ustaz Abubaker Ahmad, the chairperson of the peoples' committee, was forced to stand upright for 18 continuous hours. Consequently, he suffered severe complications in his kidney and was taken to the hospital for treatment. Another Committee member, Sheikh Mekete Muhe, formerly president of the Supreme Shari'ah Court, also saw his body swelling.

Journalist Yusuf Getachew, editor-in-chief of Yemuslimoch Guday (Muslims' Affairs) magazine, was repeatedly beaten by intelligence officers who carried copies of the magazine on which he published articles critical of the government and the unelected Majlis (the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council). In

addition, two of Yusuf's colleagues were forced into exile after security forces searched their respective houses as the government started its crackdown on Muslim activists.

It is also confirmed that some detainees were tortured after being forced to be naked.

The brutal torturing of the detainees comes after the Muslim representatives refused to sign a prepared letter of apology. The said letter of apology is reportedly prepared so that the detainees would admit to having conspired to establish an Islamic government in Ethiopia, a crime under the Ethiopian Criminal Code is punishable by death.

Even though it might guarantee their release from prisons, the Muslim rights movement leaders know that obeying such government demands would jeopardize Ethiopian Muslims' nine-month-long peaceful and legitimate rights movement.

In the few months before the arrest of the Muslims' representatives, religious preachers, journalists, and several members of the Muslim community in Addis Ababa, the government was spearheading a propaganda campaign to portray the peaceful rights movement as having a hidden motive of establishing an Islamic government in the country. Unfounded as it was, that propaganda did not convince any section of Ethiopian society.

In a desperate move to portray the detainees as having links to overseas terrorist organizations, the security forces at Ma'ekelawi have reportedly forced the detainees into carrying the picture of Bin Laden and bundles of Ethiopian birr to take their photographs in such a state. Such photographs were meant to serve as evidence in court.

Similarly, Bilal Communication (March 6, 2013) reported the following news under the headline Muslims Protested in Addis Ababa and Adama Cities:

After the Friday prayer, Muslims protested against the government's interferences in religion in the Oromiya region of Adama city. Among the slogans chanted are: let our voice heard, free our heroes (leaders of the movement), the present Islamic council is not our representative, we all are the committee (the leaders of the movement imprisoned by the government), we are Abubeker (the chairman of the committee), we are Ahmedin Jebel (the spokesperson of the committee). In similar news, Ethiopian Muslims protested in Dila town and Addis Ababa.

In a piece of other news on May 2, 2013, Bilal Communication wrote the following news: Our leaders in "Kality" (the name of the prison in Ethiopia) challenge MP's visiting the Penitentiary.

"Why don't you cry out for the people you claim have elected you?" Our Committees (leaders of the Muslim movement)

On a supposed occasional prison visit, our leaders in Kality prison have challenged MPs in connection with the plight of Ethiopian Muslims. However, instead of complaining about their mistreatments in the notorious prison, our leaders instead chose to raise serious questions about the misery Ethiopian Muslims are currently facing. Furthermore, sources have revealed that our leaders criticized the silence and ignorance of the MPs despite a two-year-long peaceful cry out for constitutional religious freedom.

The committee chair Abubeker Ahmed, Kamil Shemsu, Ahmedin Jebel, Ahmed Mustafa, and Bedru Hussein were said to be the ones to have the heated discussion with the MPs who tried to answer the questions as per their understanding. Besides, strong and critical statements were raised by our leaders, such as "Have you forgotten why you are sitting in the parliament? Why is the peoples' peaceful demonstration being repelled with imprisonment, killing, and other human rights violations?"

We have not been able to make sure if the MPs arranged the meeting purposely to see how the Muslim leaders were doing or not. Follow up for more news on the matter.

5. Discussions and conclusion

The main objective of this study was to describe how the pro and anti-government media represented the civil rights movement of Ethiopian Muslims against religious indoctrination. Four online Media, two pro-government Media, and two opposition Media were purposefully selected to achieve this objective. The news and articles presented from April 2012 to March 2013 were rigorously analyzed using steps suggested by Johnson and Christensen (2004). The qualitative analysis resulted in three major themes and six subcategories under the major

themes. The three major themes include the Aim of the Muslim civil rights movement, Government interference in religious affairs, and Representations concerning Leaders of the Ethiopian Muslim Civil Rights Movement. As hypothesized at the onset of the study, the two groups of online Media selected for analysis represented the Ethiopian Muslim civil rights movement in highly different ways. However, generally speaking, the selected pro government Media has negatively represented the movement and defended the government's innocence in religious interference.

Moreover, pro-government Media tried to demonize the movement's motives and questioned the leaders' trustworthiness. They represented the movement as terrorists, extremists, self-appointed leaders, criminals, and individuals with hidden political agendas. On the other hand, the opposition media positively represented the Ethiopian Muslims' civil rights movement. They accused the government's interference in religion by trying to forcefully indoctrinate the believers to the strange sect of Islam called Al-Ahbash. Moreover, they represent the movement as a religious freedom movement free from a political motive. They also represented the leaders of the movement as genuine representatives of Ethiopian Muslims and heroes who sacrificed their personal and family life for the freedom of Ethiopian Muslims.

This difference in the representation of the Ethiopian Muslim civil rights movement could imply that different groups/ individuals might have different representations of similar objects or events in social representations. The other explanation for the difference in representation between the two groups of Media might be the result of the effort made by the media to serve their group interest and maintain their group identity by creating a representation that serves their interest best. The functions of social representations include providing knowledge about the object to the group, maintaining group identity, guiding action and practices regarding the object, and justifying those practices (Abric, 1994a, cited in Wachelke, 2011). On top of this, Breakwel (1993) stated that Social representations are public rhetoric used by groups to engender cohesiveness and maneuver relative to other groups. Representations serve different types of group interests, and Moscovici describes three: diffusion, propagation, and propaganda.

The polarized representations of Ethiopian Muslims' civil rights movement by the selected pro-government and opposition Media might significantly impact the attitude and behavior of their followers. Hence, this can be the topic for future research as a continuation of the present study.

Author contribution statements

The authors contributed all to the research's design and implementation, the analysis of the results, and the writing of the manuscript.

Disclosure statement

The author reported no potential conflict of interest.

Ethics committee approval

All responsibility belongs to the researcher. All parties were involved in the research of his own free will.

References

Breakwell, G.M. (1993). Social Representations and Social Identity. *Papers on Social Representations*, 2, 198-217.

Central Statistical Agency (2010). *Population and Housing Census Report-Country – 2007.* http://www.csa.gov.et/

Creswell, J.W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among the five approaches-the USA*, Sage publications, inc.

Elif, S.O. (2007). *Social Representations of the European Union*. Unpublished Master's thesis, METU, Ankara, Turkey.

Farr, R. (1996). The roots of modern social psychology. Oxford: Blackwell.

Höijer, B. (2008) "*Sociala representationer i medietexter [Social representations in media texts]*," in M. Ekström (ed.) *Mediernas språk*, pp. 139-64. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Inthorn, S. (2006). What Does It Mean to Be an EU Citizen? How News Media Construct Civic and Cultural Concepts of Europe. *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture*, 3(3), 71-90.

Johnson, B. & Christensen, L. (2004). *Educational research: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Approaches*. Boston: Prison Educational Inc.

Moliner, P. & Tafani, E. (1997). Attitudes and Social Representations: A Theoretical and Experimental Approach. *European Journal of Social Psychology,* 27, 687–702.

Moscovici, S. (1973). Foreword', pp. Xiii in C. Herzlich: Health and Illness. A Social Psychological Analysis. London: Academic Press.Moscovici, S. (1984a) 'The Myth of the Lonely Paradigm: A Rejoinder', Social Research 51: 939-967.

Moscovici, S. (1984b). 'The Phenomenon of Social Representations', pp. 3-69 in R.M. Farr and S. Moscovici (eds) Social Representations. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Moscovici, S. (1988). Notes Towards a Description of Social Representations', European Journal of Social Psychology 18: 211-250.

Moscovici, S. (1993). The Invention of Society. Psychological Explanations to Social Phenomena. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Moscovici, S. (2000). Social Representations. Explorations in Social Psychology. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Moscovici, S. (2001) .'Why a Theory of Social Representations?', pp. 8- 35 in K. Deaux and G. Philogéne (eds) Representations of the Social. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.

Moscovici, S. (2007). Psychoanalysis. Its Image and Its Public. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing (first published 1961).

Wagner, W. (2012). Social representation theory. In D. J. Christie (Ed.), Encyclopedia of Peace Psychology. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Wagner, W. et al. (1999). Theory and method of social representations [online]. London: LSE Research Online. Available at: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/2640

Wachelke, J. (2012). Social Representations: A Review of Theory and Research from the Structural Approach. Universitas Psychologica, 11(3), 729-741.

Yuunus, H.M. (2013). Ahbashism, Government & Ethiopian Muslim Protests. In LEBMA (Eds). The Civil Right Movement of Ethiopian Muslims: context, Defining futures, & Implications. Belgium.