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**RESISTANCE AND INTEGRATION IN THE  
ETHIOPIAN EMPIRE: THE CASE OF THE MACCA  
OROMO OF QELLEM (1880s-1974)**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines peasant-state relations in Qellem, western Ethiopia, between the 1880s and 1974. The study revolves around one question: what conditions and strategies allowed a stratified peasant society with distinct cultural identity to survive in a sophisticated and militarised African empire whose overarching policy was to turn itself into a nation-state with a coherent national identity? The argument is that conquered and exploited peasants resist the state because they reject changes that would alter or endanger their subsistence economy—which in the case of Qellem came to be strongly associated with issues of sustaining cultural identity. The state was dominated by the Amhara, and the peasants were Macca Oromo. In order to prevent changes becoming a threat to their subsistence lifestyles, Oromo peasants found useful tools within their own historical consciousness—tools that stressed how the past is remembered, narrated and conjured.

But, this study is not just about resistance, it is also about attempts at political integration. From the beginning of the twentieth century the Ethiopian empire increasingly centralised its state structures, enacting laws that enforced the use of the Amharic rather than the Oromo language, supporting the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) and encouraging its local Oromo allies through various mechanisms to become more Amhara and less Oromo. When the imperial regime was overthrown by the 1974 revolution, however, very few in Qellem spoke Amharic, and large numbers of people had embraced Evangelical Christianity (EVC) as a form of protest against the state backed EOC. Further research will increase our awareness of how interaction between the imperial state and local people proceeded, and what its consequences were in the context of the broader conquered south. The process was more complex and dynamic in Qellem, resulting among other things in the survival and solidification

of the Oromo peasants, although they became economically more integrated into the state, adopting a number of Amhara values in the process.

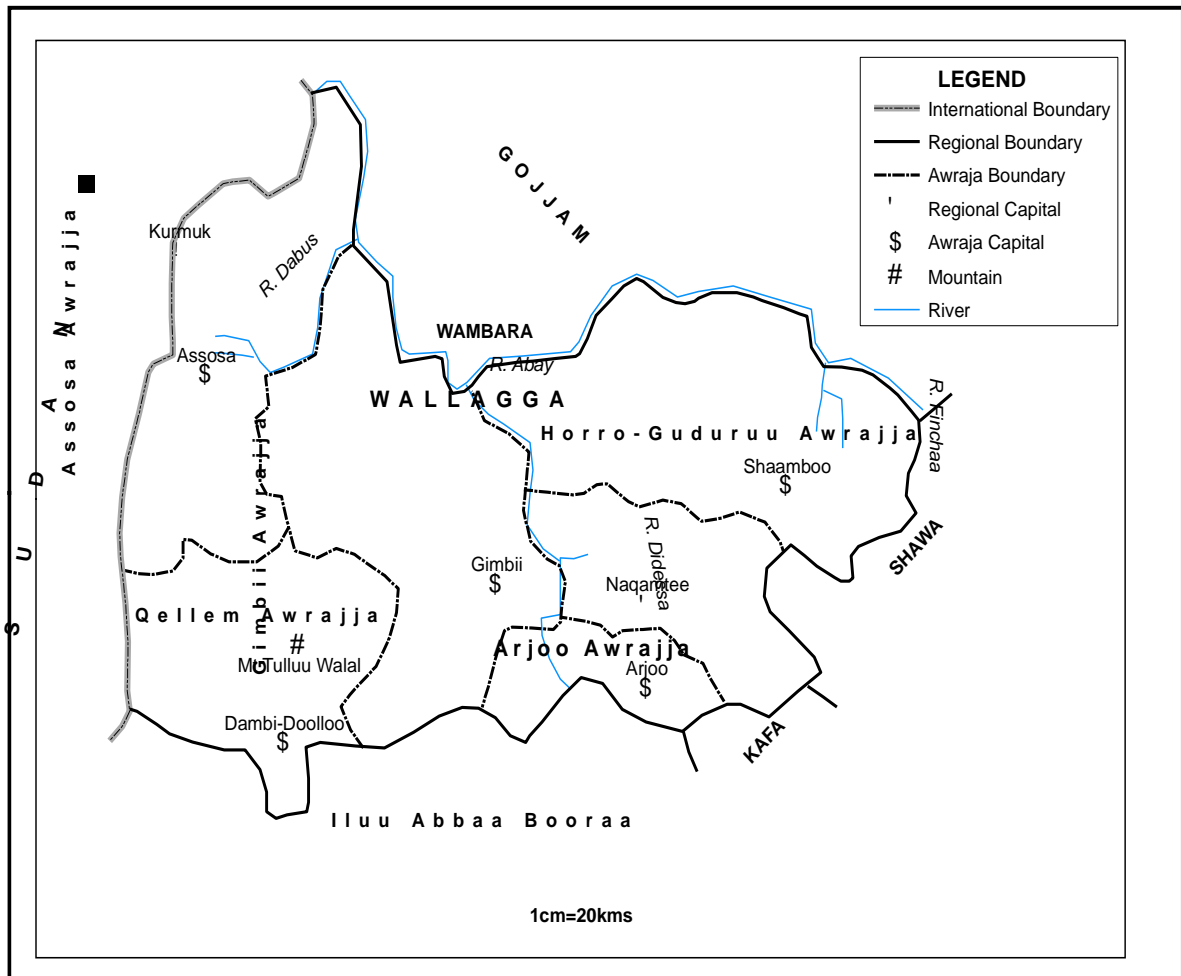
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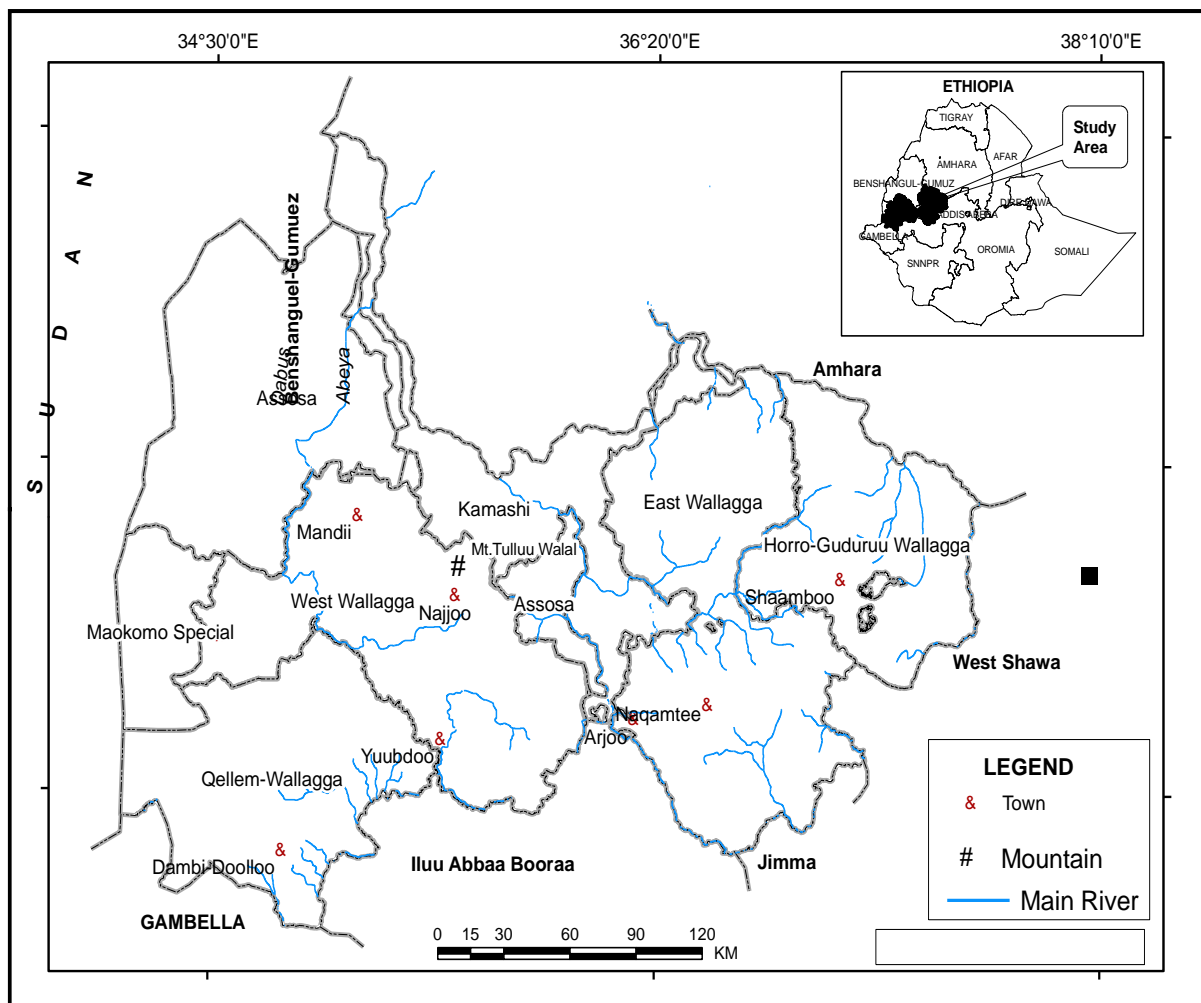


Map 1: Imperial Ethiopia, 1960-1974

Source: Maps of Ethiopia across times <http://www.haileselassie.net/maps-of-ethiopia-across-time/> (Accessed 15/01/2017)

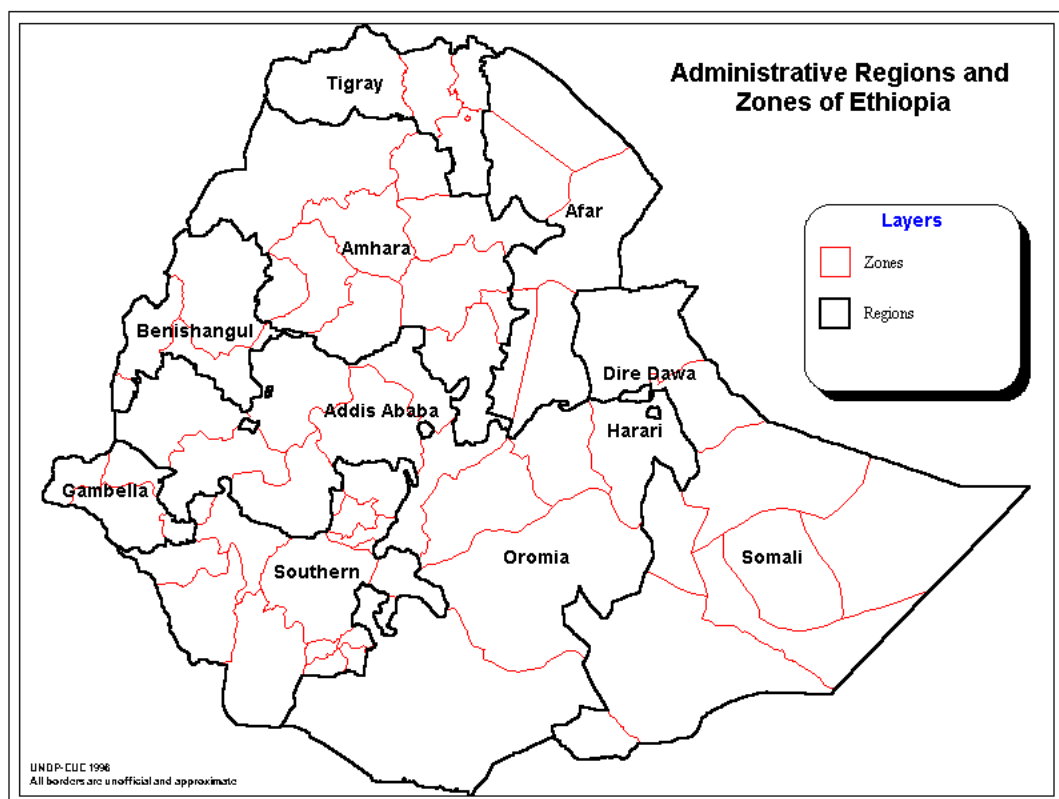


Map 2: Wallagga province administrative divisions, 1940s-1970s (Source Ethio GIS)



Map 3: Wallagga province administrative divisions, post 2005 (Source Ethio GIS)





Map 4: Current administrative regions and zones. Source: Images for map of Ethiopia [https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=Map+of+Ethiopia+by+regiona&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&client=firefox-b-ab&gfe\\_rd=cr&dcr=0&ei=8xEgWtSxDcXW8geXuaXICQ](https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=Map+of+Ethiopia+by+regiona&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&client=firefox-b-ab&gfe_rd=cr&dcr=0&ei=8xEgWtSxDcXW8geXuaXICQ), accessed 15/06/16.



Map 5: Qellem administrative units, 1940s-1974 (Source Ethio GIS)

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AOI	Africa Orientale Italiana
ASMAI	Archivio Storico del Ministero dell’Africa Italiana
ATFN	Alessandro Triulzi Field Notes
AWEM	Archives of Wallagga Ethnographic Museum
EC	Ethiopian Calendar
EOC	Ethiopian Orthodox Church
ESFC	Ethiopian Sayyoo Forest Company
EVC	Evangelical Christianity
FO	Foreign Office
IEAMI	Imperial Ethiopia archives of the Ministry of Interior
IEAPHS	Imperial Ethiopia Archives of Philadelphia Historical Society
IEAQA	Imperial Ethiopia Archives of Qellem Awrajja
IEAWGG	Imperial Ethiopia Archives of Wallagga Governorate General
IES	Institute of Ethiopian Studies
IEWTMRC	Imperial Ethiopia Archives of Wäldä-Mäsqäl Tariku Memorial Research Centre
SIR	Sudan Intelligence Report
WEM	Wallagga Ethnographic Museum
WO	War Office
WGC	Western Galla Confederation

## **Note on the Ethiopian calendar and Ethiopian names**

### ***Ethiopian calendar (EC)***

The Ethiopian calendar differs from the Gregorian calendar. A year comprises twelve months and an additional thirteenth month (Pagumè/ጳጉሜ). Each of the first twelve months have thirty days, but the thirteenth is only five days long (six during a leap year). Ethiopian New Year always starts on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Computing Gregorian calendar dates from the Ethiopian calendar is not always precise unless a specific date is clearly given. The year 1936, for example, in the Ethiopian calendar falls either in 1929 or 1928 depending on the specific month we are dealing with.

### ***Ethiopian names***

In Ethiopian naming tradition, the first name of a person is followed by the father's name. Surnames are simply not used. If necessary, further identification of a person is done by adding the grandfather's name. In citing sources with Ethiopian names, therefore, the name of a given source is used in the bibliography in the same way it was used in the footnotes. Mekuria Bulcha, for example, instead of becoming Bulcha Mekuria in the bibliography, remains the same in both the footnote and the bibliography.

## TRANSLITERATIONS

### AMHARIC

1. The seven vowel sounds of the Amharic language are represented as follows:

1 <sup>st</sup> order	በ	=	Bä
2 <sup>nd</sup>	ቡ	=	B
3 <sup>rd</sup>	ቢ	=	Bi
4 <sup>th</sup>	ባ	=	Ba
5 <sup>th</sup>	ቤ	=	Bè
6 <sup>th</sup>	ብ	=	Be
7 <sup>th</sup>	ቦ	=	Bo

2. Palatalised sounds are represented as follows:

ሸ	=	Sh
ቸ	=	Ch
ጸ	=	gn
ሯ	=	Z
ጺ	=	J

3. Glottalised sounds are represented as follows:

ቀ	=	Q
ጠ	=	T/t
ጨ	=	Č
ፀ/ጽ	=	Ts
፳	=	P

4. Germination is indicated by doubling:

Example: ደጃዝማች = *Däjjazmach*

### OROMO

1. For the Latin script employed in the transliteration of Oromo songs and proverbs, the seven sounds are represented as follows:

1 <sup>st</sup> order	በ	=	Be
2 <sup>nd</sup>	ቡ	=	Bu/buu
3 <sup>rd</sup>	ቢ	=	Bii
4 <sup>th</sup>	ባ	=	Ba/baa
5 <sup>th</sup>	ቤ	=	Bee
6 <sup>th</sup>	ብ	=	Be
7 <sup>th</sup>	ቦ	=	Bo/boo



2. Regarding second, fourth, fifth and seventh forms in the above list, it must be stressed that “u,” “a,” “e,” and “o” will only be doubled if the letters are stressed.

Examples:

Malkaa = Ford  
Uumaa = Creator  
Aadaa = Culture  
Beela = Starvation/famine  
Akkoo = Grandmother

3. Palatalised sounds are represented as follows:

ሸ = Sh  
ቸ = Ch  
ፕ = ny  
ጅ = J

**NB** It should be noted that the Latin script is not only used for the songs and proverbs quoted in the thesis; the spelling of Oromo names (people and places in particular) and key Oromo concepts used to elaborate arguments are also transliterated into Latin script.

Examples:

Macca  
Dambi Doolloo  
Sadii  
Jootee Tulluu  
Tufaa Heddee  
Mardaasaa Jootee  
Kumsaa Boroo  
*Hambifataa*  
*Abbaa-qabiyyee*

## GLOSSARY

**Abbaa** (Oromo) – owner, father. When combined with other words it can also refer to profession or public responsibility. For example, *abbaa-qabiyyee* pioneer settler, or the original holder.

**Asir-aläqa** (Amharic) – literally “commander of ten [soldiers],” the lowest military title.

**Asrat** (Amharic) – tithe, land tax.

**Ato** (Amharic) – a title equivalent to ‘Mr’.

**Balabbat** (Amharic) – A term originally used to refer to individuals with claim to *rist* land as a member of a descent group. After the conquest, some of the *abbaa-qabiyyee* were given the title of *balabbat* with land to serve as a medium between the conquered people and the state.

**Balagär** (plu. *balagäroch*) (Amharic) – rural land or person, peasant/s.

**Balambaras** (Amharic) – originally used to designate the head of an *amba*—a flat-topped hill surrounded by steep slope. Usually used as a low-level administrative title.

**Barya** (Amharic) – slave.

**Čiqinatachin** (Amharic) – derivative of čiqä, mud. A word Oromo peasants of Qellem employed in reference to what they believed was their ‘ancestral land.’

**Däjjazmach** (Amharic) commander of the gate. A Politico-military title below *Ras*. *Dajjach* a short form of *Däjjazmach*.

**Dhoqqee** (Oromo) – a reference to a plot of individual land inherited from one’s ancestors.

**Fitawrari** (Amharic) – literally “commander of the vanguard,” a politico-military title below *Däjjazmach*. Also employed by the state, at least once, for the Ministers of War.

**Gäbbar** (Amharic) – tribute-paying peasant or peasants either in the form of labour, produce, cattle or all of these.

**Hamsa-aläqa** (Amharic) – literally “commander of fifty [soldiers],” military tile above *asir-aläqa*.

**Indärasè** (Amharic) – literally “in my place,” plenipotentiary, Member of Parliament. Also in Qellem an Amhara governor representing absentee governor.

**Kätäma** (Amharic) – town, a military garrison in the conquered south. Many later became administrative centres and in time evolved into urban centres.

**Läm** (Amharic) – fertile, cultivated or developed land.

**Läm-ṭäf** (Amharic) – semi-fertile, partly cultivated land.

**Madäriya** (Amharic) – land granted to soldiers or state officials in lieu of salary. Also in Qellem *gäbbar* households counted, registered and given lieu of salary to Amhara soldiers so that they would live on their labour and wealth.

**Madbèt** (Amharic) – provinces designated by the state as direct tributaries of the crown.

**Maqqacaa** (Oromo) – derivative of the Amharic *mäqäča*, fine, penalty.

**Mäṭè** (Amharic) – alien, immigrant.

**Mato-aläqa** (Amharic) – literally “commander of one hundred [soldiers],” military tile above *hamsa-aläqa*.

**Mättaya** (Amharic) – present/s the Emperor received from his vassals and subordinates, sometimes for consideration of certain special local interests relating to the latter’s own province or as a gifts during public holidays.

**Näṭṭägna** (Amharic) – derivative of *näṭṭ*, rifle, gun bearers, colonists. A designation to Menilek’s soldiers and politico-military officers who settled in the conquered south.

**Näggadras** (Amharic) – literally “head of merchants.” Leader of a caravan traders, which later became a governmental title for customs officer and then Minister of Trade and Commerce.

**Qäläd** (Amharic) – “thong,” unit of land measurement, the system of land measurement, measured land.

**Qägnazmach** (Amharic) – literally “commander of the left,” a politico-military title above *grazmach*.

**Qurṭ-geber** (Amharic) – a fixed annual tribute.

**Ras** (Amharic) – literally “head,” one of the highest politico-military office, a politico-military title below *nigus*.

**Rist** – originally a principle of land tenure in the old state of Abyssinia, which later became a principle in the new Ethiopian Empire. *Rist* vested land rights to descent through male or female from a recognized original holder, known as founding father. In the context of the conquered south, it was a reference to land owned permanently and was hereditary.

**Sämon** – land granted to the EOC or held by its clergy in their service to the Church.

**Ṭäf** (Amharic) – uncultivated or undeveloped land.

**Waqeeta** (Oromo) – a measure of gold.

**Wäqèt** (Amharic) – a measure of gold.

**Warra** (Oromo) – literally “the people of,” for example *warra* Ilaa, *warra* Buukkoo or *warra* Sayyoo.

***Zena-mewa'il*** (Amharic) – chronicle.

***Zufan-chilot*** – crown court, the summit of imperial Ethiopia's judicial system which was presided over mostly by the Emperor himself or sometimes by a Minister directly appointed by him.

# INTRODUCTION

## Literature Review

This thesis is a study of peasant-state relations in Qellem, western Ethiopia, between the 1880s and 1974. The study's temporal scope encapsulates a key historical period in Ethiopia, both locally and nationally. By the close of the nineteenth century, the old Abyssinian state had conquered the peoples and annexed lands in the south to create the new Ethiopian Empire state within boundaries that still exist today. The state was created by—direct or indirect—forcibly grouping peoples with little or no common historical background or identity in a new political entity. The 1880s witnessed the conquest of the region by the aggressively expanding Kingdom of Šäwa (then the most powerful southern province of Abyssinia), while 1974 saw the Ethiopian revolution, overthrowing one of Africa's longest reigning imperial governments. The revolution was a turning point in the country's history, particularly for the conquered south and especially Qellem, since it abolished the system under which the peasants had been struggling for decades.

Based largely on archives, memoirs, travel accounts, intelligence reports and oral interview research, this thesis explores the complex and dynamic conflicts of the period under consideration. There have been many peasant-state conflicts across the world. The case of Qellem offers a unique opportunity to examine this theme more closely.

As a region overwhelmingly inhabited by Macca Oromo farmers, Qellem provided a suitable milieu for the Ethiopian Empire to impose its state institutions as the region became incorporated into its economic and political systems. After accommodating the indigenous socio-economic and political structures for a little more than a decade, the Empire imposed the *näṣṭagna-gäbbar* system—a paradigm of Ethiopian colonialism which allowed severe exploitation of labour and wealth. Under the new system, Oromo farming households were

required to provide the Amhara colonists with labour, unlimited tribute and sufficient produce to sustain the state civil and military functionaries as well as the clergy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC). This seriously threatened the subsistence lifestyles of the Oromo peasant households, particularly between 1917 and 1933. Threats to Qellem's peasant economy combined many anomalous elements into a period of peasant resistance lasting for nearly a century. The study emphasizes the peasants' viewpoints, although the role of elites remains important too.

The historical relationship between the Ethiopian Empire-state and Qellem's peasants was marked by ethno-cultural boundaries. In simple terms, the state's programs were controlled by ethno-culturally different Amhara elites who held the indigenous Oromo in low regard. This perceived slight to Oromo culture heightened the sense of threat to their basic subsistence, provoking continuous culturally-framed opposition. The resource extraction from peasant communities—innumerable taxes, tithes, forced labour and later limited access to land—led to the singling out of Amhara government agents and their local allies as the principal threat to the peasants' subsistence livelihoods and cultural identity.

Ethiopian historiography is characterised by an overemphasis on Abyssinia (northern Ethiopia), celebrating its developed literary tradition as exceptional in sub-Saharan Africa. While political biographies of the Abyssinian state and its central institutions abound, the conquered south remains neglected. Historical research was influenced by the legitimacy of the Solomonic dynasty based on the legend of the Queen of Sheba and the Šāwan hegemony.<sup>1</sup> The history of the peoples of the conquered south, particularly the Oromo, has traditionally been excluded. The early twentieth century Ethiopian intellectual Gäbrä-Heywät Baykädaññ argued that Ethiopian historians have misrepresented history of their country, mainly because they

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<sup>1</sup> Bahru Zewde, "A Century of Ethiopian Historiography," in *Society, State and History: Selected Essays* (Addis Ababa: AAU Press, 2008), 19, 25-26.

lacked a deeper understanding of past events, an impartial interpretive stance and a coherent writing style to communicate their interpretations.<sup>2</sup> Bahru Zewde believes Gäbrä-Heywät's critique was directed at official chroniclers and ecclesiastic scribes.<sup>3</sup> Aläqa Ašmä-Giyorges Gäbramäseh—another critic of the Ethiopian historiography and himself a prolific historian—reprimands the EOC clergy for flattering the exploits of kings rather than focusing on transformative historical events such as the Oromo population movements of the sixteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Although Ethiopianist historians, ably represented by Bahru, ascribe Ašmä-Giyorges's critique to his Catholic antipathy rather than a call for objectivity, misrepresentations of the Oromo in Ethiopian historiography continued unabated for centuries. The tone was set in the sixteenth century when Bahrey declared he was writing history of “bad people” and “their readiness to kill people, and brutality of their manners.”<sup>5</sup>

The information Bahrey provided became the cornerstone for official historical narratives and subsequent Abyssinian chronicles, which became basic references for scholars (both native and expatriate) writing about the Oromo. Their perspectives were also strongly coloured by their views of the Abyssinian political centre. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Oromo were presented as uncivilized, barbaric and savage, a menace God had brought to punish Abyssinians. Oromo victories were presented as disasters willed by God rather than triumphs of human activity. In the nineteenth century, the Oromo were portrayed as foreign invaders with no place in the survival of the Empire<sup>6</sup> and “barbarian hordes who brought darkness and ignorance into Ethiopia in their train.”<sup>7</sup> Ethiopianist scholars now label

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<sup>2</sup> Gäbrä-Heywät Baykădaññ, “Ašë Minilikinna Itiyopiya [Emperor Menilek and Ethiopia] (Asmara: Berhan Yehun, 1912), 336-7.

<sup>3</sup> Bahru Zewde, *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia: The Reformist Intellectuals of the Early Twentieth Century* (London: James Currey, 2002), 142-144.

<sup>4</sup> Bairu Tafla (ed.), *Ašmä-Giyorges and His Work: History of the Galla and the Kingdom of Šäwa* (Stuttgart, 1987), 78-102.

<sup>5</sup> Bahrey. “History of the Galla,” in C.F Beckingham and GWB Huntingford (eds), *Some Records of Ethiopia, 1593-1646* (London: Hakluyt, 1954), 111.

<sup>6</sup> Aläqa Tayyë Gäbrä Maryam, *History of the People of Ethiopia*, trans. Grover Hudson and Tekeste Negash (Uppsala, Sweden: Center for Multiethnic Research, Uppsala University, 1987).

<sup>7</sup> William Cornwallis Harris, *The Highlands of Aethiopia*, II (London: Longman, 1844), 72-73.

such interpretations as dated and unwise perspectives of less learned scholars, but such misrepresentations continue.<sup>8</sup> Such sustained ethnocentric view were recognised by Richard Reid, who commented: “[t]here can be few peoples in African history who have been as misunderstood, and indeed misrepresented as the Oromo...”<sup>9</sup>

The 1974 revolution brought radical economic and political change, closing an extended era of Ethiopian political history and opening a “highly contested chapter in the politics of its historiography.”<sup>10</sup> The revolution opened the door to alternative historical narratives. With the state now adhering to socialist ideologies, scholars felt freer to employ such analytical perspectives as ‘class struggle,’ finally giving a voice to the historically silenced peoples of the conquered south. This shift in focus coincided with the wider recognition of oral sources and eyewitness accounts as authentic historical sources, especially in African historiography.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps because of their numerical significance, the Oromo became the largest beneficiary.<sup>12</sup> Another feature of post-revolution Ethiopian scholarship was the replacement of the derogatory epithet *Galla* with the term *Oromo*. A major role in this historiographical shift was played both by the faculty and students (both graduate and undergraduate) of the History Department of Addis Ababa University.<sup>13</sup> As well as scholars who made genuine efforts to study and understand the Oromo people from Oromo perspectives,<sup>14</sup> Oromo graduates were by the 1970s and 1980s were beginning to produce MA

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<sup>8</sup> See, among others, Edward Ullendorf, *The Ethiopians* (London: Oxford University Press 1960), 76; Getatchew Haile. *Ya Abba Bahriy Dirsatoch Oromowochin Kamimalakatu Laloch Sanadoch Gara* [The Works of Abba Bahriy and Other Documents Concerning the Oromo] (Kolegville, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Richard Reid, *Frontiers of Violence in North-East Africa: Genealogies of Conflict since 1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 30.

<sup>10</sup> Ezekiel Gebissa. “Introduction: The Oromo in Ethiopian Studies,” *Contested Terrain: Essays on Oromo Studies, Ethiopianist Discourse and Politically Engaged Scholarship* (Trenton, 2009), 11.

<sup>11</sup> D. Crummey, “Society, State and Nationality in the Recent Historiography of Ethiopia,” *Journal of African History*, 31 (1) (1990), 105; Bahru, “A Century,” 26-27.

<sup>12</sup> Bahru, “A Century,” 27.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 19, 25-26; Ezekiel, “Introduction,” 11. This study has benefited from and acknowledges such high quality student theses, particularly those that have made Qellem the focus of their study.

<sup>14</sup> Prominent examples are works by Father Lambert Bartels, Paul Baxter, John Hinnant, Jan Hultin, Asmarom Legesse, Herbert Lewis, and Karl Knutson.



and PhD theses<sup>15</sup> significantly promoting our knowledge of the Oromo and constituting an important breakthrough in Oromo studies. Despite their ground-breaking efforts, these works did not achieve a clean break from historiographical traditions. “All these works,” Crummey concludes, “share a common methodology of oral history, which they deploy to the enrichment of Ethiopian historiography by extending it far beyond the Abyssinian core which previously had confined it.”<sup>16</sup>

Regardless of efforts to expand horizons of Ethiopian historiography since the revolution, the production of “a unitary, monolithic, master narrative” remained the underlying ambition of Ethiopianist historiography.<sup>17</sup> The Amhara-Tigrayans were arguably the earliest occupants of Ethiopia, and all other peoples were recent arrivals in the country. From a unified political viewpoint, however, Ethiopianist scholars argue that the two peoples created a new common identity and generated a shared history.<sup>18</sup> Menilek’s conquests of Oromo territories, for example, were conceptualised as an endeavour by the Ethiopians to protect the Oromo from warfare and slavery, and “from falling prey to European imperialism.”<sup>19</sup> They believe that

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<sup>15</sup> Prominent examples, in addition to some that were completed just before the outbreak of the revolution, are Mohammed Hassen, “The Oromo of Ethiopia, 1500–1850: With Special Emphasis on the Gibe Region” (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1983); Negasso Gidada, “History of the Sayyoo Oromoo of Southwestern Wallaga, Ethiopia, from About 1730 to 1886” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt am Main, 1984); Tesema Ta’a, “The Oromo of Wollega: A Historical Survey up to 1910” (M.A. thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1980); Idem, “The Political Economy of Western Central Ethiopia: From the Mid-16th to the Early 20th Centuries” (Ph.D. dissertation., Michigan State University, 1986); Guluma Gemed, “Gomma and Limmu: The Process of State Formation among the Oromo in the Gibe Region, c. 1795–1889” (M.A. thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1984).

<sup>16</sup> Crummey, “Society,” 115–116.

<sup>17</sup> Aleme Eshete, “Whose History Is Ethiopian History?” Paper presented at the International Symposium on History and Ethnography in Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa, and 18–25 November 1982.

<sup>18</sup> The list of works that argue about Abyssinia-cum-Ethiopia- historical unity and the melting down of ethnic identity into a single Ethiopian nation is too long. The following are noticeable examples. Getachew Haile, “The Unity and Territorial Integrity of Ethiopia,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 24 (3) (1986): 465–87; Takkele Taddese, “Do the Amhara Exist as a Distinct Ethnic Group?” in *New Trends in Ethiopian Studies: Papers of the Twelfth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, vol. 2 (Lawrenceville, New Jersey: Red Sea Press, 1994), 168–87; Negussay Ayele, “Reflections on Ethiopia and Ethiopianity,” *Ethiopian Review* 7 (2) (1997), 31–43.

<sup>19</sup> Donald Levine, “Meles Zenawi and the Politics of Ethnicity,” *Ethiopian Review* 2:2 (September 1992): 16; Levine, *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 26.

Menilek's nascent Ethiopia prevented Oromo colonisation by Britain, France or Italy.<sup>20</sup> Officially, scholars were expected to strengthen the existing political canon in the interest of retaining Ethiopia's territorial integrity, unity and history. Any study of the Oromo that fails to take into account the politically defined goal of safeguarding Ethiopia's territorial integrity and national unity tends not to be taken seriously. Decades after the revolution, studying the Oromo from the perspectives of the Oromo remained a 'treasonable crime.'

A second revolution in 1991 resulted in regime change and generated the recognition of a right to self-determination. Oromo studies encountered stronger resistance as the new regime that replaced the *Därg* (1974-1991) recognised the right of Ethiopia's nations to self-determination. Ethiopianists lamented the secession of Eritrea, blaming its loss on historical reinvention and declaring their determination to prevent other Ethiopian peoples—particularly the Oromo—from following the Eritrean example. "[I]t is ... incumbent on historians to set the record straight before another tragedy is unleashed [following the example of Eritrea's secession] in the name of history on this hapless country of ours,"<sup>21</sup> was a typical accusation levelled against Oromo studies.

In 1986 Paul Baxter stated, "If Oromo studies are to develop they must depend on research carried out in Oromo lands among Oromo people and increasingly by Oromo scholars."<sup>22</sup> In the early 1990s Oromo scholars began reframing their scholarship, winning substantial influence mainly because of their bold rejection of the Ethiopianists claim that Oromo studies has no intellectual validity if it refuses to subscribe to the basic assumptions of Ethiopian studies. Oromo scholars created a new historical narrative, presenting Menilek's conquest of Oromo territories as a development that imposed Ethiopian colonialism on

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<sup>20</sup> Charles McClellan, *State Transformation and National Integration: Gedeo and the Ethiopian Empire, 1895–1935* (East Lansing: African Studies Centre, Michigan State University, 1988), 3; See also Harold Marcus, "Imperialism and Expansionism in Ethiopia," in *Colonialism in Africa*, vol. 1 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 420–61.

<sup>22</sup> P. T. W. Baxter, "The Present State of Oromo Studies," *Bulletin des Etudes africaines*

independent Oromo states and various Oromo groups. In so doing they de-linked Oromo studies from the goals of Ethiopianist scholarship.<sup>23</sup> Like most African nationalist historiographies, Oromo studies seem to have chosen “a strategy of counter-discourse” as a manifestation of nationalism. It produced the earliest scholarly accounts of the past of the Oromo people through a lens of contemporary desires.<sup>24</sup> The process began in 1990 with Sisai Ibssa and Bonnie Holcomb’s *The Invention of Ethiopia*,<sup>25</sup> and was consolidated in 1993 by Asafa Jalata’s *Oromia and Ethiopia*.<sup>26</sup> Oromo studies seems to have set its primary objective as combatting the Great Tradition, that is, the Ethiopianist historical narrative that emphasises the safeguarding of Ethiopia’s territorial integrity and the preservation of its independence, and to promote the Oromo *gadaa* system. According to Leenco Lata:

‘[t]he survival of Ethiopia’s independence is perhaps due more to the ambitions of European powers cancelling each other out, than Ethiopian valour excelling that of the Ashantis, the Senegalese, the Zulus,’<sup>27</sup>

This is the deriding interpretation that targets the “Great Tradition.” The idea that “the Oromo genius for assimilation quickly claimed any non-Oromo, defeated or otherwise”<sup>28</sup> summarises the effort to promote the *gadaa* system. The sum of Oromo studies can be described as nationalist historiography—the utilisation of history in the interest of the Oromo people and their “national struggle against Abyssinian colonialism”<sup>29</sup>—a historical approach

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<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Mohammed Hassen. *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Idem, “Some Aspects of Oromo History that Have been Misunderstood, Part 1,” *Journal of Oromo Studies* 1 (2), 1994; Abbas Haji, “Arsi Oromo Political and Military Resistance against the Shoan Colonial Conquest 2 (1) (1995).

<sup>24</sup> Toyin Falola, *Nationalism and African Intellectuals* (University of Rochester Press, 2001), xx.

<sup>25</sup> Sisai Ibssa and Bonnie Holcomb, *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa* (Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1990).

<sup>26</sup> Asafa Jalata, *Oromia and Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethno-national Conflict, 1868-1992* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1993).

<sup>27</sup> Leenco Lata, *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads: Decolonisation and Democratisation or Disintegration?* (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1999), 150.

<sup>28</sup> Mohammed Hassen. *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 21.

<sup>29</sup> See among other Gaada Melaba, *Oromia: A Brief Introduction* (Minneapolis: Kirk House Publishers, 1999); Sisai Ibssa and Bonnie Holcomb, *The Invention of Ethiopia: The Making of a Dependent Colonial State in Northeast Africa* (Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1990); Lube Birru, “Abyssinian Colonialism as the Genesis of the Crisis in the Horn: Oromo Resistance, 1855–1913,” *Northeast African Studies* 2:3 and 3:1 (1980): 93–98; Asafa

that employs history to define the Oromo people and their future. These histories, and subsequent works including the birth of the *Journal of Oromo Studies*, offered a clean break from previously established Ethiopian studies.<sup>30</sup> The perspective of this study recognises the role of Oromo studies in expanding horizons of knowledge regarding the Oromo people, but does not subscribe to nationalist Oromo historiography, which prefers to assume the history of the Oromo as largely continuous, downplaying all forms of internal diversity, particularly social divisions, as a mechanism of building a strategy of counter-discourse to the Great Tradition. The analyses used in this study recognise internal divisions within the Macca Oromo society of Qellem as well as a range of dissonances and inconsistencies within imperial Ethiopia's state structure in order to unpack and conceptualise multiple forms of state-society relations that continued until the 1974 revolution. In this sense, discussions in this study take Qellem as a historical laboratory in which to set out the historical developments of what was visibly an evolving Oromo identity, one which clearly took a distinct form in Qellem, not something self-consciously national.

Revisionist works, such as *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia*, were already underway, and historiographic divergence invited its sequel, *Remapping Ethiopia*.<sup>31</sup> The result was a heated debate over specific and distinct historical themes as well as broader exchanges between Oromo scholars and Ethiopianists. The dichotomy is clearly understandable in the context of contemporary Ethiopia, where fighting over the past means fighting over the present,

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Jalata, *Oromia and Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethno-national Conflict, 1868-1992* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1993); Mekuria Bulcha, *Flight and Integration: Causes of Mass Exodus from Ethiopia and Problems of Integration in the Sudan* (Uppsala, Sweden: Nordic Institute of African Studies 1988); Idem, *Contours of the Emergent and Ancient Oromo Nation: Dilemmas of State Building in Ethiopia* (Cape Town: Credo Communications, 2011).

<sup>30</sup> See also Gaada Melaba, *Oromia*; Lube Birru, "Abyssinian Colonialism," 93–98; Gemetchu Megerssa, "Knowledge, Identity and the Colonising Structure: The Case of the Oromo in East and Northeast Africa" (Ph.D Thesis, SOAS, University of London, 1993); Mekuria Bulcha, *Flight and Integration*; Idem, *Contours of the Emergent and Ancient Oromo Nation*.

<sup>31</sup> Donald Donham and Wendy James (eds), *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia: Essays in History and Social Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Wendy James et al (eds), *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism and After* (Addis Ababa: AAU Press, 2002).

especially in terms of power structures and state ideology. Although there has been a substantial expansion of historical knowledge, popular resistance with an emphasis on the peasantry had not yet become a favoured theme. Almost all scholarship on Oromo-Ethiopian history concentrates on state-level issues, underlining the role of central government in damaging peasant livelihoods and addressing the ways in which the periphery reacted. However, this study questions the ways in which historical research interprets any form of self-expression that does not conform to the language of state-level politics, emphasising the way the masses—particularly the peasantry—lived and renegotiated their livelihoods with the empire (mainly by way of resistance, despite all the local problems it entailed) by engaging in a reciprocal relationship with the state. The focus is not on how the state saw the mass of Oromo peasants (and sometimes their elites), but vice versa. This approach enables a bottom-up re-conception of Oromo peasant resistance in Qellem.

The roots of peasant-state interaction in Qellem is limited to economic, political and contemporary cultural explications; relations also involve narratives, memories and discourses offering justifications for various forms of resistance. Oromo peasants, local elites, and the *näftägna* (settler colonists) unsurprisingly had different accounts, memories and understandings of institutions and events. The attempt to commercialize land through what was officially named the *qälad* system of land measurement, for example, generated among the Oromo discourses on land alienation because the measured land was to be sold to Amhara settlers or immigrants. The EOC clergy considered Oromo culture—even personal names—incompatible with Christianity, stimulating religious and cultural resentment from the Oromo peasants. Meanwhile, the Evangelical churches were considered more accommodating to local cultures, enabling fairly blunt transcripts of resistance, especially after 1941, in the form of court litigation against the *qälad* system. In an equal but diametrically opposite direction, peasants contributed money to challenge court rulings against local government denying land

for Evangelical churches or school buildings. Oromo historiography is partly about these differing responses, discourses, narratives and underlying memories.

The study is informed by resistance literature. James Scott's theory of moral economy is employed in understanding the peasants' preference for securing their subsistence over maximizing production. This risk-averse approach meant that peasants were willing to endure exploitation as long as their subsistence remained safe. At the heart of Scott's moral economy is the argument that "...exploitation and rebellion is...not just a problem of calories and income but is a question of peasant conceptions of social justice, of rights and obligations, of reciprocity."<sup>32</sup> This refers to perceptions of economic injustice and peasant views on exploitation—"their view of which claims on their product were tolerable and which intolerable."<sup>33</sup> Scott's theory informed this research in examining what constituted tolerable and intolerable degrees of exploitation within the context of Qellem.

In African historiography, accounts of resistance remain central. As modern African studies developed in the early 1960s, themes dealing with rejection of external rule and struggles against various forms of exploitation, domination and injustice were widely analysed. The focus on resistance-related topics coincided with anti-colonialism in Africa, and researchers were encouraged by what a growing wave of decolonization after the Second World War. A growing feeling that colonialism was grossly unjust inspired many scholars to investigate the extent to which Africans had resisted the forces of colonial or white settler rule.<sup>34</sup>

The framework for the study of resistance in Africa was set in 1958 by Shepperson and Price's *Independent Africa*, which examined rebellion in Nyasaland during the First World War

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<sup>32</sup> James Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (London, 1976), vii.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>34</sup> Klaas Walraven & Jon Abbink, "Rethinking Resistance in African History: An Introduction," in *Rethinking Resistance, Revolt and Violence in African History* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 1.

and the role of John Chilembwe. The book represented African reactions to colonialism as divisions between resistance and collaboration, taking precedence over studies linking modern nationalist struggles to early forms of violent resistance during the establishment of colonial rule. A pioneer of this approach was Terence Ranger, who argued that European colonialism kindled early forms of violent struggle (commonly known in the literature as primary resistance) and subsequent African nationalist struggles for independence (secondary resistance).<sup>35</sup> Yet there were also dissenting voices which considered African resistance to colonial conquest as “romantic, reactionary struggles against the facts, the passionate protest of societies...shocked by a new age of change...”<sup>36</sup> This view was similar to colonisers’ own perspectives and was soon discarded, and resistance themes became an important and pervasive dimension in studies of African nationalism.<sup>37</sup>

This representation of modern African history attracted critical responses arguing that representing the issue as a binary of resistance or collaboration oversimplified the complexities on the ground. At present, resistance and collaboration are largely perceived as alternating or concurrent strategies for defending African interests in the face of colonialism and capitalism. Glassman argues that early literature on African resistance was tarnished by a teleology that understood all forms of African resistance as leading to modern nationalism and decolonization.<sup>38</sup> Ranger, arguing for a “continuity of resistance emotion”, maintained that early African struggles against colonialism did not reflect later African national struggles for independence. He criticized work by Allen Isaacman for replacing his own version of the continuity thesis with a kind of “instant continuity” that attempted to establish links between

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<sup>35</sup> T.O. Ranger, “Connections between ‘Primary Resistance Movements’ and Modern Mass Nationalism in East and Central Africa,” *Journal of African History*, 9(4) (1968), 631-641.

<sup>36</sup> R. Robinson and J. Gallagher, “The Partition of Africa,” in F.H. Hinsley (ed.), *The New Cambridge Modern History*, vol.11 (Cambridge, 1962).

<sup>37</sup> L.Vail & L.White, “Forms of Resistance: Song and Perceptions of Power in Colonial Mozambique,” in D. Crummey (ed.), *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa* (London, 1986), 193.

<sup>38</sup> Jonathon Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856-1888* (London, 1995), 12.

early violent resistance and later nationalism. Reference was made to the 1910s peasant militancy in Mozambique alongside the Frelimo's struggle against the Portuguese in the 1960s.<sup>39</sup> Walraven and Abbink considered that arguments relying on direct linkage between early colonial resistance and modern African nationalist sentiments carries "the risk of anachronism."<sup>40</sup>

Initial African resistance literature was informed by Eurocentric perspectives representing early resistance as "romantic and reactionary struggles against reality," according to the underlying argument of its critics. The emphasis on African resistance implied a greater focus on African responses than on their genuine agency in history.<sup>41</sup> Scholars of modern African nationalism, like those of imperial history, generally focused on the part played by elites.<sup>42</sup> "...[T]he study of resistance has been extremely elitist, a bias contemporary African historians share with their Eurocentric predecessors..."—this was the fundamental criticism advanced by Allen and Barbara Isaacman in 1977.<sup>43</sup>

The 1970s saw another wave of literature moving towards Marxist-oriented analyses placing class structures at the heart of their arguments and arguing that African collaboration or resistance was based on specific alignments of class interest.<sup>44</sup> The approach coincided with a period of acute economic crises and political instability in Africa, and Marxist perspectives inspired a shift from nationalism to underdevelopment. It was largely believed that the early focus on nationalism and resistance hindered scholarly efforts to understand the extent to which Africans were unable to combat the organs of oppression, which was metropolitan capital,

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<sup>39</sup> See Isaacman, *The Tradition of Resistance in Mozambique* (London, 1976), and Ranger, "The People in African Resistance: A Review," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 4 (1), 1977, 130.

<sup>40</sup> Walraven & Abbink, "Rethinking Resistance," 3.

<sup>41</sup> T. Ranger, "Resistance in Africa: From Nationalist Revolt to Agrarian Protest," in G. Y. Okihiro (ed.), *In Resistance: Studies in African, Caribbean, and Afro-American History* (Amherst, 1986), 34.

<sup>42</sup> Glassman, *Feasts and Riot*, 11.

<sup>43</sup> A. Isaacman and B. Isaacman, "Resistance and Collaboration in Central and Southern Africa, 1850-1920," in *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 10 (1), (1977), 39.

<sup>44</sup> A. Isaacman and B. Isaacman, "Resistance and Collaboration," 41.



rather than white settler and/or colonial rule.<sup>45</sup> It was argued that “studies on the so-called ‘modes of production’ began the redefinition of proto-nationalist resisters in Africa’s colonial history into peasants fighting international capitalism.”<sup>46</sup> More recent critiques argued that all these interpretive perspectives—imperialist, nationalist, Marxist—were reflections of each other in that overarching traditional approaches lay at the centre of their arguments. The nationalists’ view was labelled neo-Weberian for its insistence on presenting African elites and peasants as having a unity of purpose, bound by their commitment to common “tradition.”<sup>47</sup>

The result of this debate is that conceptions and definitions of resistance have expanded enormously. Isaacman, for instance, illustrated resistance by the withholding of labour for cotton production by Mozambican peasants.<sup>48</sup> In his edited volume, *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa*, Crummey contended that “resistance may appear mute, and stealth may be one of its essential features.”<sup>49</sup> The chapters in Crummey’s edited volume—particularly Timothy Fernyhough’s—offered perspectives on linkages between banditry, peasant conceptions of justice and local structures in the Ethiopian Empire-state.<sup>50</sup> Fernyhough was later able to develop his perspectives into a book, *Serfs, Slaves and Shifta: Modes of Production and Resistance in Pre-Revolutionary Ethiopia*, although he died before its publication. His frameworks helped this study deal with nuances in the way segments within the peasantry responded to exploitation, and how and when they could be linked to banditry. It is important to note here that this work is also aware of the serious critiques levelled against Crummey’s conceptualisations of resistance. One such critique argues that it suffers from “causal

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<sup>45</sup> T. Ranger, “Resistance in Africa,” 34-36; Idom, “The People in African Resistance: A Review,” *Journal of Southern African Historical Studies*, 4 (1), (1977)130.

<sup>46</sup> Walraven & Abbink, “Rethinking Resistance,” 4.

<sup>47</sup> Glassman, *Feasts and Riot*, 11.

<sup>48</sup> Isaacman, “Cotton is the Mother of Poverty: Peasant Resistance to Forced Cotton Production in Mozambique, 1938-1961,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 13 (4), 1980, 34-36; Isaacman & Isaacman, “Resistance and Collaboration,” 47-62.

<sup>49</sup> Donald Crummey, “Introduction: The Great Beast,” in Crummey (ed.), *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 1986), 10.

<sup>50</sup> James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Every Day Forms of Peasant Resistance* (London, 1985).

<sup>50</sup> Vail & White, “Forms of Resistance,” 195.

generalisations” in the analysis of a rather complex historical developments observed “across diverse communities.”<sup>51</sup>

Scott’s *Weapons of the Weak* drew attention to the social basis of “everyday forms of resistance” for the subjugated and powerless.<sup>52</sup> Other scholars objected to the widening and overextension of the conceptual framework of resistance—eventually including everything from foot-dragging and dissimulation to “theft, social banditry, desertion, migration, arson, riot, poaching, conscription avoidance, any activity that helps to frustrate the operations of capitalism.”<sup>53</sup> For Walraven and Abbink, Scott’s work represented ‘an act of violence done to language’ in that such broad concepts of resistance distorted analyses instead of throwing light on the study of human behaviour. For them, analysing forms of resistance—particularly those given after the arrival of *Weapons of the Weak*—to the level of tax evasion, for instance—is acceptable, but interpreting such things as a meaningful attack on an underlying political order is to overstate the notion of political action enormously, in a manner reflecting Marxist reasoning. Comparatively under-emphasised, however, is that those wishing to avoid coercive retaliatory measures from militarized empire states generally use whatever is available to them—including such things as tax evasion. Leaving only the elderly and disabled at home, for example, were well known strategies of tax evasion in lowland colonial Mozambique during the arrival of tax collectors, and when this was done by significant portions of society, it did indeed become an attack on the state. Scott’s theories are helpful in collating various peasant survival strategies—court litigation, petitions, banditry, rebellion, outmigration—which were apparently widely spread and detached.

The array of debates outlined above suggests that there should be a clear definition of what is meant by resistance in this study. Offering a precise definition of resistance, with special

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<sup>51</sup> Frederick Cooper, “Conflict and connections: Rethinking Colonial African History,” *American Historical Review* (99), (1994), 1532.

<sup>52</sup> James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Every Day Forms of Peasant Resistance* (London, 1985).

<sup>53</sup> Vail & White, “Forms of Resistance,” 195.

reference to Qellem, will also introduce the study's major themes. The type of resistance we see in Qellem does not conform to primary resistance as defined in many parts of Africa, due to the absence of resistance either during the arrival of the Ethiopian forces or in the years immediately following incorporation into the Empire-state. Yet Isaacman's theory of withholding labour for cotton production applies to the 1920s resistance against the *näftägna-gäbbar* system. While we can accept Crummey's general definition as partly applicable to instances of resistance in the 1940s and 1950s, James Scott's definition is perhaps more relevant:

...class resistance includes *any* act(s) by members of a subordinate class that is or are either *intended* to mitigate or deny claims (for example, rents, taxes, prestige) made on that class by superordinate classes (for example, landlords, large farmers, the state) or to advance its own claims (for example work, land, charity, respect) vis-à-vis those superordinate classes.<sup>54</sup>

But the definition is problematic. The most important difficulty in applying it to Qellem is that it is based on class. Defining class in Qellem is difficult for four main reasons. Firstly, although some families among the Macca Oromo became low-grade government agents, titles to land were generally not inheritable, so class consolidation through inheritance was generally weak. Secondly, peasant lands were not secure, especially after 1944, and as successive state policies caused an acute shortage of land, the Oromo peasants resorted to legal battles—either in groups, individually, or even by representation through local elites. Thirdly, resistance in Qellem was usually culturally framed; the peasants defined their ethnic identity as their exploitation and subjugation lay in the hands of an Amhara hegemony supported by Addis Ababa. The Oromo deployed discourses, memories and narratives—often from their pre-conquest history—to express grievances against the state-imposed system. The overall nature of the narratives remained more or less constant across time, although details changed and were

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<sup>54</sup> James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 290.

reframed to fit specific requirements of the tactics the peasants believed in. Regardless of its limitations, however, Scott's definition is still helpful for analysing the forms of resistance presented in this study, particularly in Chapter Three.

Fourthly, defining class in Qellem is difficult due to the inherent instability of its social structure. Local ruling houses and elites (*balabbat*) could at times be part of the peasant question. Local *balabbat* were directly or indirectly involved in communal activities, serving as agents of the empire-state vis-à-vis local inhabitants, and as state representatives, "serving as both objects of central policies of domination and as subjects in their implementation and execution."<sup>55</sup> As the *balabbat* became part of the local administration, they acted as direct links with the central imperial authority.<sup>56</sup> Using such a mechanism limited *balabbat* sympathy for autonomy. The *balabbat* were offered social positions within the empire's architecture of domination, making them candidates for assimilation into the privileged and dominant Amhara stratum. Social intimacy blurred class boundaries after the superimposition of the Amhara elites. In view of the *balabbat* position in the hierarchies of power, particularly during the *näffägna-gäbbar* system in Qellem (1909-12, 1917-33), there was little social distinction between an Oromo *gäbbar* and an Oromo *balabbat*, who was responsible to the lowest rank of *näffägna*. While occupying ranks of power that may not appear influential beyond local state structure, the *balabbat* in practice (although in an ironic sense) served as the fulcrum of imperial Ethiopia. The *balabbat* served as judges and tax collectors (through their Oromo subordinates—*alangee* and *qoroo*), and served the state by passing orders and edicts to the people and recruiting soldiers in time of need. Meanwhile they reported to the state on any matters of public concern (although not always during land disputes). In simple terms, they constituted an essential linguistic bridge between the Amharic-speaking government and the Oromo-speaking society.

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<sup>55</sup> Alexander J Moly, *Revolutions, Nations, Empires: Conceptual limits and theoretical possibilities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 119.

<sup>56</sup> J. Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last*, 110.

Whilst they discharged their duties to imperial Ethiopia—generating for themselves socio-economic status in the process—the *balabbat* blurred the lines between the conquering, ruling, subjugating, colonising and “civilising” Amhara and the conquered, subjugated, colonised and “uncivilised” “Galla”—a pejorative term imperial Ethiopia’s bureaucracy employed in reference to the Oromo people. The *balabbat*’s socio-economic and political identity in some way resembles African intermediary services to the colonial state, in what a seminal historical work on the subject referred to as a “bargain of collaboration.”<sup>57</sup> The *balabbat* helped mediate interaction between local customary laws and those of imperial Ethiopia, crafting old rights work in new ways, negotiating access to resources and ultimately helping the construction of the state itself.<sup>58</sup> The office of *balabbat* (or *balabbatnät*, ባለባትነት) was therefore vital in imperial Ethiopia’s state architecture and in the state’s interaction with its subjects, particularly in the conquered south, in this case Qellem. *Balabbatnät*, as a historical concept, therefore lies beyond issues of domination and resistance.

The *näffägna-gäbbar* system had its own dynamics and complexities resulting from its capacity to enlist soldiers from various ethnic groups, including the Oromo, but the local population saw all the system’s enlistees as part of the colonizing process. This does not mean that the state always governed through coercion or direct rule. The mediation of *balabbat* remains important even during the most brutal era of the *näffägna-gäbbar* system. Imperial Ethiopia’s presence in the conquered south had been, like many European colonial states, broadly speaking, lacking in resources. However large the army in Qellem was, the *näffägna* and their cohorts remained very much smaller than the local population and were consequently unable to establish and administer direct rule. *Balabbatnät*, as a malleable office, had already

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<sup>57</sup> Benjamin Lawrence, Emily Osborn and Richard Roberts, “Introduction: African Intermediaries and the Bargain of Collaboration,” in Lawrence, Osborn and Roberts (eds), *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa* (London, 2006).

<sup>58</sup> Like chiefs in pre-independence South Sudan, see among others, Cherry Leonardi, *Dealing with government in South Sudan: histories of chiefship, community & state* (James Currey, 2013).

successfully imposed itself in pre-Ethiopian days, but with a different name—*abbaa-qabiyyee*—and was supported by coercive arms of the state, despite lying “outside the systematic restraints” which imperial Ethiopian state imposed on the forces it sent down directly from Addis Ababa (Amhara governors, *näffäгна* and their commanders). This was one of the ways by which the Macca Oromo *balabbat* of Qellem allied themselves with Ethiopia’s colonising officials to build new forms of power.<sup>59</sup> Where no *balabbat* had developed of its own accord in the conquered south, it needed to be created. The creation of the *balabbat* had, however, its own limitations that were dictated by specific situations over time and space. Since the *balabbat* would rely on local resources, it was cheap for the imperial state to maintain.<sup>60</sup> Although the *balabbat* had played indispensable roles in the process of constructing the new Ethiopian imperial state, the available literature in most cases presents them as simple subordinates executing the orders of Addis Ababa. However, analyses of *balabbat* negotiations, conflicts with the state and the creation in the process of independent opportunists working for themselves will produce a fresh take on the nature and key features of state-society relations in imperial Ethiopia. In this study, the historical concept of *balabbat*—and *balabbatnät*—are tools that will help us navigate beyond the dyads of domination-collaboration and resistance or colonised/coloniser and allow us to unpack the methods by which power in imperial Ethiopia was “deployed, engaged, contested, deflected and appropriated.”<sup>61</sup>

This research also relies on the useful conceptual framework given by Walraven and Abbink, who understand resistance as:

...intentions and concrete actions taken to oppose others and refuse to accept their ideas, actions or positions for a variety of reasons, the most common being the perception of position, claims or actions taken by others as unjust, illegitimate or intolerable attempts at domination. The concrete acts of resistance involved may or may not be acts of physical violence and extend also to other spheres of human behaviour.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> For similar roles of how chiefs in colonial Africa used their judicial roles to build entirely new forms of power see Justin Willis, “Chieftaincy,” in Richard Reid and John Parker (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern African History* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2013), 213-214.

<sup>60</sup> John Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last*, 11, 129.

<sup>61</sup> Derived from the sound argument made by F. Cooper, “Conflict and connections,” 1517.

<sup>62</sup> Walraven & Abbink, “Rethinking Resistance,” 3.

It is appropriate to define ‘peasants’ at this stage. In this study, peasants are rural farmers who use traditional and simple implements to produce mainly for subsistence and “for the fulfilment of obligations” to those who dominate them culturally, ideologically, politically and economically.<sup>63</sup> The birth of the peasantry in sub-Saharan Africa has been linked to the arrival of colonialism and capitalism in the nineteenth century,<sup>64</sup> although it existed in different forms in every part of Africa before that period, where subsistence farmers paid part of their produce as rent, tribute or taxes. Qellem was characterized by an agrarian culture where peasants cultivated a variety of crops (maize, sorghum, wheat, barley, peas, *teff*), a significant portion of which was appropriated to sustain the dominant and armed Amhara aristocracy as well as co-opted local Oromo elites. In other parts of Africa where land was more abundant, the hoe was used instead of the plough, and slave labour was more dominant than peasant labour. This was the case in much of sub-Saharan Africa, and Ethiopia was something of an exception in this regard.

Despite benefiting from the insights of resistance literature, the use of the concept of resistance in analysing historical developments in Qellem between the 1880s and 1974 has been framed in a way that overcomes weaknesses inherent in early Africanist historiography. While chapters in the UNESCO history of Africa bravely framed the “defence of African sovereignty” as a key undertaking of the early colonial period, J.F. Ade Ajayi had no doubt about framing the colonial era in Africa as an “episode in African history,” that is, a hiatus in African political history that was otherwise independent and continuous.<sup>65</sup> Terence Ranger

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<sup>63</sup> Gebru Tareke, *Ethiopia: Power and Protest: Peasant Revolts in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1991), 3; Teodor Shanin, “Peasantry as a Political Factor,” in T. Shanin (ed), *Peasants and Peasant Societies* (London, 1971), 240.

<sup>64</sup> John S. Saul and Roger Woods, “African Peasantries” in T. Shanin (ed), *Peasants and Peasant Societies*, 105.

<sup>65</sup> A. Adu Boahen (ed), *UNESCO General History of Africa: Africa under Colonial Domination, 1880-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); J.F. Ade Ajayi, “The Continuity of African Institutions

himself, as hinted above, openly argued—although he retracted his argument some time later—on behalf of a “continuity of resistance,” in favour of direct connections between the early African resistance against colonial conquest and the modern African nationalism and struggles for decolonization.<sup>66</sup> Such nationalist narratives developed a model of resistance that coined binary concepts—domination/resistance, resistor/oppressor, coloniser/colonised, or resistor/collaborator—that are too blunt when attempting a more careful and detailed analysis of dynamism within African societies. The use of binary concepts in African historiography, one critic argues, restricts our ability to analyse the contradictions emerging from particular “social structures within African.” It also downplays “tensions and inequalities within African societies” and can be expanded as a concept to the extent that it refuses to allow the resisters to live any other life outside the “resistance,” ultimately reducing politics in colonial Africa to a simple “anti-colonial-politics or to naturalism.”<sup>67</sup> John Lonsdale went even further, questioning the first generation of African historians for acting like “the Committee of Concerned Scholars for Free Africa.”<sup>68</sup> The use of “resistance” as an analytical frame in African historiography, as one historian of Africa puts it, “...was the key plot element in a continuous narrative of African history.”<sup>69</sup> The argument of the critics—which this study considers substantially—is that over extension of the concept of “continuous resistance” in early African historiographies concealed more dynamic factors within African societies (class and gender, for example), making the enterprise a lineal teleology rather than one of careful scrutiny and analyses.

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under Colonialism,” in Terence Ranger (ed), *Emerging Themes in African History: Proceedings of the International Conference of African Historians* (London: Heinemann Education, 1968), 189-200.

<sup>66</sup> T.O. Ranger, “Connections between ‘Primary Resistance Movements’ and Modern Mass Nationalism,” 631-641.

<sup>67</sup> F. Cooper, “Conflict and Connection,” 1519-1521, 1532.

<sup>68</sup> John Lonsdale, “States and Social Processes in Africa: A Historiographical survey,” *African Studies Review*, 24 (2-3) (1981), 143.

<sup>69</sup> F. Cooper, “Conflict and Connection,” 1520.



A narrative of lineal teleology in the conceptualisation of African resistance needs to be sidestepped in favour of a more meticulous historical analyses that enables us to see how the abilities of local populations during the colonial era became involved in the creation and contestation of power. Frederick Cooper's argument may sum up why resistance as an analytical frame is good enough when considering "questions of power," but may end up constricting instead of expanding an accurate description of the ways in which power is organised, the ways in which power is played out, disputed or challenged, rebounded and expropriated:

At one level, the concept of resistance is generally accepted and unproblematic. In the clash of African and colonial armies, individual acts of disobedience or flight, and elaboration of powerful arguments for liberation, colonial rule has been continually and severely challenged. But much of the resistance literature is written as if the "R" were capitalised. What is resisted is not necessarily clear, and "colonialism" sometimes appear as a force whose nature and implications do not have to be unpacked. The concept of resistance can be expanded so broadly that it denies any other kind of life to the people doing the resisting. Significant as *resistance* might be, *Resistance* is a concept that may narrow our understanding of African history rather than expand it.<sup>70</sup>

Building on Cooper's conceptualisations, this study has made attempts to focus on '*resistance*' and avoid '*Resistance*', i.e., to recognise and engage with the much greater power of imperial Ethiopia's local agents (Amhara governors, soldiers, civil servants, judges and police) in local state-subject encounters between the largely Macca Oromo subjects on one hand and a consideration of agency of the local people (largely peasants but with varying classes) and the local elites (*balabbat*, *qoroo*, *alangee*) on the other in defining the form the encounter achieved. The Ethiopian conquest of Qellem in ca.1886 came about through the peaceful submission of the strongest of the local pre-conquest governors (Jootee Tulluu), where the former's strong military presence in the region played a crucial role. The Ethiopian conquest of Qellem relied on the presence in the region of *negus* (later Emperor) Menilek's army under the command of *ras* Goobanaa, which helped Jootee pacify the region by crushing some of his

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 1532.

rivals. Meanwhile “the routinization of power” required negotiation and alliances with local notables. A meticulous reading of state-society encounters in Qellem reveals a definite sense of pathos: imperial Ethiopia’s coercive arm (the *näffäigna*, their commanders, and governors) sought the allegiance of local elites, and could not function independently of them even during the early period of the *näffäigna-gäbbar* system (1909-12) when the government in Addis Ababa felt it could do so and removed Jootee. Meanwhile, the imperial state’s “civilising mission” embodied in the proselytizing efforts of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church did not bring about the conversion to Orthodox Christianity of the entire population. Efforts by the state to appropriate land using legal and administrative tools did not take place until a wider consensus had been reached in 1944, and the state’s efforts to eradicate Evangelical Christianity (EVC) was brought to stalemate and had to be renegotiated. This is not just a history of Ethiopian conquest, or the subjugation and exploitation of the Macca Oromo, nor is it simply a history of the Oromo “adaptation” or “resistance” to imperial Ethiopia’s initiatives. Instead, this study argues that formal and informal state policies and ideology reflected how imperial Ethiopia’s institutions, terms of rule and the shape of administrative apparatus adopted (and resisted) the initiatives of the conquered south, in this case the Macca Oromo of Qellem.<sup>71</sup>

Unlike other parts of Africa, peasant defiance in Ethiopia—despite various localized uprisings—was generally uncommon and ineffectual. Rebellions stretched state resources, but mainly targeted specific ethnic, cultural or regional grievances. Occasionally, as happened in Qellem between 1909 and 1912, the peasants scored short term victories against the state, destroying local institutions and removing the *näffäigna* military aristocracy. Oromo peasant resistance was a factor of wider popular protests in Ethiopia, the nature of which varied from covert to collective disobedience. Gebru Tareke argues that “rebellions are invariably provincial ... in that they seek to protect a vanishing world, or to restore the past, really an

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<sup>71</sup> Derived from F. Cooper, “Conflict and connections,” 1531.

idealization of existing cultural values and social conditions.”<sup>72</sup> Peasant resistance in Qellem, however, also possessed many innovative elements.

Collective resistance, generally speaking, was uncommon. People resisted non-confrontationally to avoid violent repression by the state, but such resistance was generally ineffective in ending exploitation. This thesis considers rebellions and planned or spontaneous violent uprisings as equally important for shaping the course of history, but generally speaking covert and overt non-confrontational defiance were more common in Qellem than planned, violent uprisings. Both were intended to reduce exploitation and domination or to renegotiate mutual obligations. The term “resistance” in this study is used to analyse all individual, collective, covert and overt actions of the Macca Oromo peasants in Qellem.

It can be argued that resistance—if defined broadly enough—has been a behavioural characteristic throughout African history.<sup>73</sup> This raises a crucial question—what or who was the target of resistance? Did the Oromo of Qellem, like other primary resistance movements in Africa, resist the imposition of colonial rule, or were their actions directed at specific pre-capitalist economic relationships linked with Ethiopian rule? Was peasant resistance directed at the Ethiopian empire-state, which was perceived as alien, or at local Oromo elites who benefited from new socio-economic and political arrangements?

In the context of Qellem, addressing resistance means dealing with complex and multifaceted structures which characterised constantly evolving peasant relations with local state structures, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC), central government, and also with each other between the 1880s and 1974. Analysing the actions of resistance demands a good understanding of imperial Ethiopia’s institutionalized inequalities and requires analysis of the

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<sup>72</sup> Gebru Tareke, *Ethiopia: Power and Protest*, 3.

<sup>73</sup> Walraven & Abbink, “Rethinking Resistance,” 9.

internal social structures of those who resisted and those who were perceived as alien by those struggling to be spared from exploitation.

A system of resource extraction existed in Qellem long before the arrival of the Ethiopian Empire, but threats to the existing system of land tenure and changes in socio-economic and political structures were the underlying factors stimulating opposition to the Ethiopian Empire. Literature on pre-conquest Oromo land tenure systems considers both individual and communal holdings, and has presented the latter as a predominant feature.<sup>74</sup> However, the land tenure system in Qellem did produce social stratification on the basis of access to and produce from land.<sup>75</sup> This was the foundation for the birth of the conglomeration of Oromo states which survived in Qellem up to the Ethiopian conquest in 1886.

Peasant societies of Qellem were integrated vertically into economic groups and segmented horizontally into clans, kinship groups and religious affiliations. While these divisions generally discouraged collective resistance, they were not necessarily solid and permanent. They re-emerged as factors of and recreated new group cohesion whenever disruptive new policies were introduced by the state. Both vertical and horizontal segments dissolved into a cohesive local Oromo identity during the brutal *näffägna-gäbbar* system of 1909-1912 and 1917-1933, for example, to defend against severe exploitation. An example of the contrary process came when the Oromo peasants and local chiefs—who in 1909-1912 had rebelled together under the leadership of a member of the oppressive local Oromo political elite retained by the Emperor—became accusers of the same ruling house in 1933, alleging that they were suffering under the *näffägna-gäbbar* system because of its illegitimate collusion with the political centre. In both cases those resisting called themselves ‘poor Oromo peasants’ and yet

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<sup>74</sup> See among others, Eke Haberland, *Galla Sud-Aethiopiens* (Stuttgart, 1963), 773; G.W.B. Huntingford, *The Galla of Ethiopia, the Kingdom of Kafa and Janjero* (London, 1955), 27.

<sup>75</sup> Daniel Ayana, “Land Tenure and Agriculture in Sayyoo-Affillo, Western Wallagga, Ethiopia, 1880-1974,” (PhD Thesis, University of Illinois, 1995), 67.

simultaneously referred to themselves as ‘poor Ethiopians’ to avert any potentially brutal repression from the state. It is possible to observe hostilities arising from ethno-cultural differences between the ruled and the ruler, but not every conflict could be ascribed to such differences. The primary aim was to renegotiate their future survival through resistance.

Occasionally, specific acts by Amhara governors—and their local allies, although they quite often shifted their positions—caused peasant anger, but resistance in Qellem primarily resulted from contradictions between the exploitative Amhara state and Oromo cultivators. The latter perceived themselves as being exploited economically and despised culturally by the Amhara governors, especially in the period after 1941. Whether these cleavages reinforced or contradicted one another as mobilizing factors of resistance must eventually depend on actual historical and social circumstances. The issues between the peasants and local Oromo *balabbat* were too elusive and changed over time, constituting complex historical problems. On one side, the Oromo *balabbat* and the peasants were bound together by interdependent social and economic factors and by a system of shared cultural values which provided the basis for a reciprocal form of coexistence that transcended socioeconomic differences. Such reciprocities were exposed to erosion over time and were repeatedly renovated, depending on what one particular class believed it would from certain forms of engagement with another class or social group. On the other side, the local Oromo elites—*balabbat* in the main—proved vital to the imperial state, and the state’s dependence on them significantly complicated imperial Ethiopia’s political and socio-economic projects. These relations can be analysed carefully and clearly only in a specific historical situation, which succeeding chapters of this study will provide. In fact, the dyad of alliance/conflict should not be detached from its context.

The Oromo resisted the Ethiopian empire’s exploitation and domination partly because they were prompted to action by the *balabbat*, to whom they were tied by common cultural values. Although there were many instances when the peasants staged their own resistance, the

unity established between the Oromo peasants of Qellem and their elites underlines the peasants' flexibility in forging alliances with other classes. This characteristic helps us argue that resistance in Qellem was not based on a "false consciousness" impelling agrarian societies to resist the power of those who oppressed them, as some Marxist scholars might argue.<sup>76</sup> For Qellem, peasant resistance may have been instigated by Oromo elites, but it was the peasants themselves who calculated what they would gain by resistance as a distinct group. As well as issues of resistance and integration, this perspective also helps us to keep an eye on contestations and rivalries within the conquered population—in this case based on class. It helps us to maintain throughout the narrative

...the texture of people's lives, tactics and strategies of survival, of seizing or sustaining hold over the most important resource—land—within progressively changing rivalries within the people and between the people and the state; ultimately overcoming the possibility the narrative having been 'narrowed down to a single framework.'<sup>77</sup>

This study considers that the region's actors were driven by an active consciousness, rather than by spontaneous intermittent responses to external impositions. A full account of such culturally framed peasant resistance in Qellem should help challenge prevailing views of Ethiopian peasants in common and academic culture whilst enhancing the knowledge of the idioms of popular protest and resistance in Africa more generally.

If one target of resistance in pre-1974 Qellem was exploitation that threatened their subsistence, another was the perceived ethno-cultural suppression of the indigenous community. This, albeit unconsciously, confronted the Empire's attempts at political integration. The Ethiopian Empire's attempts at political integration were enacted as a facet of state centralization policies, and were linked to a maximization of resource extraction that had directly affected the peasantry. Emperor Hailä Sellassé's (r. 1941-74) major political

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<sup>76</sup> Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey N. Smith (trans. and ed.), *Selections from the Prison NoteBooks* of Antonio Gramsci (London, 1999), 196-200.

<sup>77</sup> F. Cooper, "Conflict and Connection," 1533.

innovations between 1930 and 1974 intensified pressures on the peasantry (with regional variations), on local “traditional power wielders” and on the state itself.<sup>78</sup> By extending control over local resources, the empire produced many local grievances, provoking the peasants into action against the state and dominant classes. In Qellem’s case this overlapped with ethno-cultural suppression. Although the state and land-owning classes were traditional allies in exploiting the peasantry, the latter also stood against the former as rivals for control of the land and its produce. Administrative corruption and violence by the armed forces fuelled already complex local problems. All of this was competently analysed in Gebru’s *Ethiopia: Power and Protest: Peasant Revolts in the Twentieth Century*, and imperial impositions led to armed rebellions in two regions in the north (Gojjam and Tigray) and one in the south (Bale). Such regional disparities belie any generalisation of Oromo-Ethiopian peasantry as docile and passive—as in Robert Hess’s *Ethiopia*—or as resolutely resistant, as in John Markakis and Nega Ayele’s *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia*.<sup>79</sup> The study of Qellem shows that both positions elide the subtlety of the empirical reality.

Local dynamics in Qellem allowed the peasants to continue their struggle non-confrontationally, avoiding violent repression by developing new transcripts of resistance. The most important factor here was opposition to the Empire’s *qālad* policy of land measurement (1944-1974). Although the declared objective of *qālad* was the commercialization of land to transform the tenure system and increase productivity, this study argues that the system was in fact designed to integrate the conquered south politically. It aimed to provide a political-legal basis giving the *nāftägna* preferential access to land through nominal transfer and other kinds of transferral. Qellem’s peasants continuously stood against the implementation of *qālad*. The Oromo *balabbat* were occasionally part of the opposition too, because they understood that the

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<sup>78</sup> Gebru Tareke, *Ethiopia: Power and Protest*, 11.

<sup>79</sup> See Robert L Hess, *Ethiopia* (London, 1970), 148; John Markakis and Nega Ayele, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Nottingham, 1978), 26.

system would diminish their local powers. The dispute revived pre-conquest laws regarding access to land. By drawing on tradition, the peasants argued that their forefathers had held the land for over seven generations, giving them an inalienable claim to it.<sup>80</sup>

At continental level, one research identified two salient features characterizing recent studies of resistance, especially those of the 1990s: “...internal differentiation in communities involved in rebellions,” and “...the role of coercion in the mobilization of people for the rebellious cause.”<sup>81</sup> The inclusion of and interplay between these two factors raises intricate and multidimensional conceptions of the meaning and objectives of resistance, as well as its structure and development. Literature approaching resistance from such perspectives is largely absent in Oromo-Ethiopian historiographies, and this study offers insights to fill this gap.

What were the outstanding types of resistance in Qellem that helped it negotiate its survival, and how significant are they in broadening our understanding of the region and the period more generally? Compared to the relative paucity of peasant rebellions in the recent history of Ethiopia, Qellem provides an excellent opportunity to examine this mostly unexplored subject thoroughly. Qellem’s experiences differed from the Mechele peasant uprising of 1960 in Gedeo, where the introduction of *qālad* system did not damage the local socio-economic order. Even the brutal *nāftägna-gābbar* system did not alienate land from the local peasants.<sup>82</sup> Gedeo should be an exception in this regard. The historical process by which Qellem peasants employed innovative approaches against violent state repression is quite distinct from the peasant rebellions of the 1940s and 1960s in the north—the Wäyyané rebellion of Tigray and the peasant revolt in Gojjam. It is also dissimilar from the Bale peasant rebellion of the 1960s. The historian Gebru examines the causes, complexities, and outcomes of these

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<sup>80</sup> Peasant Petition submitted to the Ministry of Land Reform by Bantii Waggaa and Daaqaa Uggaa, dated Yäkatit 13, 1953 E.C (22/03/1961).

<sup>81</sup> Walraven & Abbink, “Rethinking Resistance,” 10.

<sup>82</sup> For issues related to tenancy and its consequences in Gedeo see Berhanu Tesfaye Aragaw, “Contested Land: land and tenancy disputes in Gideo, southern Ethiopia (1941-1974),” (PhD Thesis in History, SOAS, University of London, 2009), 315-317.



rebellions, arguing that popular protests were not consequences of capitalist commercialization and exploitation, resulting instead from the birth of a bureaucratic and multi-ethnic Ethiopia. Gebru believes that the Wäyyané, Gojjam and Bale rebellions lacked urban links, and were rooted instead in local problems resulting from Emperor Hailä Sellassié's political innovations. They were non-revolutionary, and in Gebru's view there were similarities and differences that distinguished these movements. They were all caused by local grievances, but resistance in Bale survived longer because of Somalia's involvement, which provided arms, ammunition and food. Gebru believes that ethno-cultural identity was involved in the Bale conflict—linked with politico-economic and regional problems—but he is not convinced that this explains why the peasants became so effectively mobilised. He emphasises the lack of national integration which contributed to the localisation of the revolts, mainly due to a lack of organizational capacity.

Gebru's work appears to be influenced by Hobsbawm, Scott, Skocpol, Paige, and Wolf, although he does not directly analyse their theories in the light of his sources. While his interpretations tend to be guided by a neo-Marxist thought, Gebru does not examine why some issues of ethno-cultural suppression were apparently insufficient to mobilize the peasants, and he still believes that a lack of national integration was caused by the ethno-cultural oppression of the Bale peasantry. The peasant rebellion in Qellem from 1909 to 1912, despite not being exclusively intended to defend local Oromo identity, contradicts Gebru's conclusion that ethno-cultural suppression in such regions would result in an all-out rebellion.<sup>83</sup> Although the temporal and spatial focus of Gebru's *Ethiopia: Power and Protest* are far from those of this study, his analytical frames are helpful in analysing Qellem's 1909-1912 peasant rebellion.

Another seminal work informing this study is Steven Feierman's *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania*. Feierman offers innovative analytical frameworks to understand the men and women who led organized local peasant movements significant enough

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<sup>83</sup> Gebru Tareke, *Ethiopia: Power and Protest*, 71-72.

to shape the long-term course of Tanzania's history. He describes peasant intellectuals as "men and women who earned their daily livelihood by farming," and "organized political movements of the greatest long-term significance, and in doing so elaborated new forms of discourse." He called them "peasant intellectuals" in order to define "their historical role at moments of leadership, moments of organization, and moments of direction."<sup>84</sup> His study benefited from the conceptual framework of peasant intellectuals as representing peasants over ownership of land, as well as those who organised fundraising whilst taking crucial roles in framing peasant appeals, petitions and litigation and working as peasant opinion makers. They were usually men well-versed in history and culture who had earned respect among the peasants, and were the recognised voices of the peasants in their respective localities. Feierman's framework is also beneficial when examining the roles played by Oromo evangelist teachers who, when their Evangelical churches encountered repression from the state-backed EOC, mobilised their peasant adherents in their support. In short, peasant intellectuals in Qellem as semi-literate people of influence were broadly speaking (physically as well as in terms of opinions and morals) very much connected with the majority of the peasant population.<sup>85</sup>

Prior to Gebru's work, scholars established other themes relevant to Ethiopian peasant resistance. Crummey analysed banditry (*šifténet*) as part of the dynamics of resistance, finding few "links of a progressive or socially redeeming nature between the peasants and the institution of banditry [in northern Ethiopia]."<sup>86</sup> He argues that it was mainly the undertakings of the ruling classes that helped two Abyssinian emperors to power, Tewodros and Yohannes. Meanwhile Fernyhough argued that banditry had been an instrument of social mobility by which the

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<sup>84</sup> Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 18.

<sup>85</sup> This contrasts with the perspectives of Sharon Hutchinson, *Nuer Dilemmas: coping with money, war and the state* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 281. However, it follows the recent argument of Cherry Leonardi, *Dealing with government in South Sudan*, 7.

<sup>86</sup> D. Crummey, "Banditry and Resistance: noble and peasant in nineteenth century Ethiopia," in Crummey (ed.), *Banditry, Rebellion*, 133-134.

nobility had assumed office and negotiated for local power. He suggested that northern banditry was a factor partly responsible for social mobility in both directions between peasantry and nobility. Political banditry, writes Fernyhough, recruited followers from all social ranks until it was discouraged by Hailä Sellassé, who reduced its scope by absorbing local nobility into his administrative hierarchy and magnifying banditry's criminal nature.<sup>87</sup> Crummey and Fernyhough differ in their analytical perspectives and on the degree of peasant involvement. Crummey viewed the peasants as victims, whilst for Fernyhough they were friends of the bandits, while the true victims were merchants. Both authors refer to Hobsbawm's concept of "social banditry," which argues that bandits rob the rich to give to the poor, although nowhere in these works can one clearly see how Hobsbawm's theory applies to northern Ethiopia.

Hobsbawm's social bandits differed from other brigands through their organic relationship with the peasantry and their determination to destroy structures of exploitation.<sup>88</sup> Social bandits perfectly fitting Hobsbawm's definition, one critic argues, are largely absent from Africa,<sup>89</sup> although Hobsbawm's conceptual definition has sometimes been held as universally applicable because of its wealth of data from disparate localities. His concept enabled this study to examine—and in some cases re-examine—forms of peasant resistance, but examples from Zimbabwe and Mozambique suggest that it often lacks applicability in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>90</sup> Like in Zimbabwe and Mozambique, the emergence of Hobsbawm's social bandits in Qellem was inhibited by a specific mix of local factors. Qellem's 'social bandits' tended to distinguish themselves from other outlaws, and their composition violates Hobsbawm's theory of deliberate acquisition of wealth in response to exploitation. Such bandits

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<sup>87</sup> T. Fernyhough, "Social mobility and dissident elites in Northern Ethiopia: the role of bandits, 1900-1969," in Crummey, *Banditry, Rebellion*, 152-153. See also Richard Caulk, "Bad Men of the Borders: Shum and Shifta in Northern Ethiopia in the Nineteenth Century," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 17 (2) (1984), 201-227.

<sup>88</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Social Bandits* (London, 1969), 14.

<sup>89</sup> A. Isaacman, "Social Banditry in Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) and Mozambique, 1904-1907: An Expression of Early Peasant Protest," in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 4 (1), 1-30.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*

were born from the *näftägna-gäbbar* system, which sustained extreme economic exploitation and ethno-cultural suppression. Their behaviour appears to have been shaped by a combination of the perceived depth of external suppression, local fostering-detering factors and the nature of state reaction. In contrast to examples from Zimbabwe-Mozambique, and in support of Hobsbawm's theory, these local bandits were hardly revolutionary. This study argues that banditry, while much older than the arrival of Ethiopian colonialism, had a different character in Qellem during the period in question. In Qellem, banditry was not an undertaking of the elite. It was neither an instrument of social mobility nor a force to negotiate local power. Unlike northern Ethiopia, banditry in Qellem seems to fit Hobsbawm's concept of social banditry, albeit with some differences.

As already stated, commonplace non-confrontational forms of ongoing resistance included appeals and petitions, court litigation, individual and mass outmigration and rapid conversion to alternative Christianity in the form of Evangelical Christianity (EVC). In combination, these factors contributed to the long-term evolution of a peasant consciousness. Ever since Scott named such methods as 'weapons of the weak' and 'everyday forms of resistance,' scholars have offered divergent analyses of their relative significance. Scott's work collated some of the most important debates on the matter. Scott's critics contend that resistance achieves changes in the policies of capitalist or colonial states, or at least contributes to their transformation. Meanwhile Scott strongly disagrees with those who argue that resistance must achieve revolutionary results. For him resistance is anything peasants do to deny or mitigate the aims of exploiting classes or groups, or to advance their own claims *vis-a-vis* these superordinate classes. However, there are points of agreement between Scott and his critics. Both state that scholars must focus on less obvious and non-confrontational types of resistance and protest. They also agree that all peasant survival strategies constitute resistance in their own right. These less-studied forms of resistance, particularly for the conquered southern half of

Ethiopia, constitute “... a vast and relatively unexplored middle-ground of peasant politics between passivity and open, collective defiance.”<sup>91</sup> Qellem is no exception to this. The difficulty with Scott’s critics is that their analytical framework is largely inapplicable to the forms of resistance we discover in Qellem. Culturally framed Oromo peasant resistance was non-revolutionary, but played a visible and considerable role in the relationship between the local population and the central state. However, the nature and efficacy of petitions and appeals in filing their grievances to the state the appellants, “were both recognising the authority of the state and seeking its recognition of their rights.”<sup>92</sup>

My study attempts to benefit from the historical literature discussed above. By examining how the peasants of Qellem lived with and looked at the Ethiopian Empire-state, the study helps us understand a uniquely African structure of dominance. It helps explain how peasants interact with sophisticated and militarized empires armed with a literary tradition and examines the tensions between society and state and the broader subject of peasant resistance.

### **Ethiopia’s imperial state in Qellem: key structural features**

The Ethiopian state was introduced into Qellem through what might be considered as a negotiated conquest in ca.1886. Internal transformations within the various Macca Oromo groups in Qellem were consolidated in the second half the nineteenth century, leading to a number of socio-economic and political innovations. These were particularly reinforced in Qellem by years of rivalry and conflict between Oromo lords who were themselves results of conquest or innovation as the indigenous Oromo *gadaa* system became exposed to deterioration and gave way to emerging petty monarchies, the process of which is discussed in

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<sup>91</sup> Jim Scott and Benedict J. Kerkvliet, “Introduction,” in James Scott and Benedict J. Kerkvliet (eds), *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance in Southeast Asia* (Routledge, 1986),1.

<sup>92</sup> Borrowed from Cherry Leonardi and Chris Vaughan, ““We are oppressed and our only way is to write to higher authority”: the politics of claim and complaint in the peripheries of condominium Sudan,” in Emma Hunter, *Citizenship, Belonging, and Political Community in Africa: Dialogues between Past and Present* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016), 87.

Chapter One. These conflicts gave rise to emergence of Jootee Tulluu, the strongest of the lords and a man who defeated most of his rivals and—although with strong exceptions—conquered a large part of the territories in south-western Wallagga that would soon come to be called Qellem after Jootee’s place of birth. However, Jootee lacked sufficient military capacity to withstand the Mahadist invasion; he was deposed, and subsequently sought alliance and support from Menilek’s expanding forces. Allied with Jootee, Menilek expelled the Mahadist forces and overthrew Jootee’s rivals, bestowing on him the Ethiopian politico-military title *Däjjazmach*. Menilek’s war general appointed him governor of the whole south-western Wallagga region and in this way successfully carried out the negotiated conquest of Qellem, making it a province of the Ethiopian empire. Erecting structures of administrative control and maintaining them in rural Qellem, as well as keeping peace and order, were contingent upon the implicit acceptance of central rule by the local population and a “bargain of collaboration” with their elites, in which Ahmara agents of imperial Ethiopia were often only one of the participants, and were not the ultimate arbiters.<sup>93</sup> Ruling and maintaining domination in the province, similar to many European colonial states in Africa, required much more than the employment of a brute force, and turned out to be a complex exercise. “Colonial domination,” as Bruce Berman notes for European colonial states in Africa, “turns out ... to have been an extraordinarily complex social [and economic] process involving far more than the use of force.”<sup>94</sup> Coercion was not ruled out completely as a tool of daily governance of the rural community, but it faded away significantly. A closer look at this complex exercise helps us understand what the imperial Ethiopian state was like, how it regenerated itself in the conquered south and how it negotiated with indigenous peoples and their governors, ultimately becoming a sophisticated state.

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<sup>93</sup> See Chapter One.

<sup>94</sup> Bruce Berman, “Structure and process in the Bureaucratic States of colonial Africa,” in Bruce Berman and John Ionsdale (eds), *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa, Book One: state and class* (James Currey, 1992), 152.

In most of the conquered south, and in Qellem more particularly, imperial Ethiopia's agents of rule were indigenous elites, with whom the state collaborated. These elites were responsible for resource extraction and domination, despite varying levels of involvement by Amahara colonists over time and space. It is important to note that imperial Ethiopia's rule in the conquered south carried out one of the more serious efforts to reorganise and modify the region's socio-economic systems. At the same time, it is vital to recognise that imperial Ethiopia's attempt at socio-economic engineering did not succeed in the same way as was planned in Addis Ababa.<sup>95</sup>

Imperial Ethiopia's rule of Qellem through local Oromo elites (Jootee and his subordinates) led to brutal and violent conflict within little more than a decade after which time local Oromo actors renegotiated the positions of their subservience to Addis Ababa. More importantly, they also played crucial roles in negotiating the nature and practices of state power at local level, drawing on a longer history of local socio-economic relations and customary laws, particularly regarding authority over the right to access and use land. Such authority changed over time. It was subordinated to Jootee after the conquest, further compromised after Jootee's removal, revived and renovated in 1933, strengthened under the Italians, challenged, contested and negotiated with the restoration of the imperial state in 1941. However, the role of local actors always remained vital for maintaining a smooth relationship between the state and society and indeed for the very survival of imperial Ethiopia itself. In fact, in a fashion that strongly reflects the conceptualisations and suggestions of recent Africanist literature, local agents of the state sent from Addis Ababa, despite being the strongest authorities in the local state structure, encountered a complex socio-economic and political matrix which they could barely comprehend, and were manipulated by local notables and the local state structure which

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<sup>95</sup> Chapters Two, Three, and Five give illustrious examples of how imperial Ethiopia's socio-economic engineering did not succeed as planned.

was run for the locals' own benefit.<sup>96</sup> Authority contracted to them by the state was to the local elites a vital tool on which they relied to maintain the respect and obedience of their population. The local elites—the *balabbat* in particular—had crafted for themselves roles in local state-society interactions that were similar to many types of African intermediaries in colonial states. While the *balabbat* played a crucial role in Qellem as representatives of the local imperial state, they constituted only one of the variegated agents of the imperial state in Qellem.

Equally important in the process—particularly for Qellem—were the agents of the imperial state (Amhara governors, judges and police)—to whom the government in Addis Ababa entrusted the responsibility of running the local state (mainly in the post-1941 period). These were given with the most powerful elements of power, but there were dilemmas in consequence. One was the extent to which they could press on and advance directives passed on to them from Addis Ababa, particularly regarding the extraction of local resources and the collection of various forms of taxes imposed by imperial laws. The local population often responded to such activities with disobedience and forms of resistance, thereby threatening the peace and order the imperial and indigenous elites had collaborated to maintain. The work for Amhara imperial authorities in Addis Ababa reflected the extent to which local agents of the imperial state and local collaborators were able to accommodate local socio-economic forces in a way in which the very processes of such work did not provoke the latter's ability to undermine the interests of the central imperial state in the capital. In most of the conquered south, the paradoxes between the imperial state and local socio-economic forces collectively designed the state's contradictory features of centralisation and fragmentation. On one hand there were channels of state apparatus linking the central government in Addis Ababa and regional structures of the state (*täqalay-gezat*/province and/or *awrajjja*/district), and on the other

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<sup>96</sup> See, for example, C. Vaughan, *Darfur: colonial violence, sultanic legacies and local politics, 1916-1956* (James Currey, 2015); Cherry Leonardi and Chris Vaughan, ““We are oppressed.”



there were links between agents of the state and indigenous elites and the local population. In the period up to the 1974 revolution the prevalence of most of the inherent administrative challenges by imperial Ethiopia (meagre financial resources, difficult ecological conditions and the resulting barriers of communication) as well as a multiplicity of socio-economic forces meant that local agents of the imperial state and its indigenous co-opted class enjoyed their own forms of autonomy and discretion.

This meant that imperial policies, directives, orders and decisions passed from Addis Ababa to the local state were subject to compromise, negotiation and in some cases even reversal. As we examine crucial issues of state-society relations down state structure levels and beyond the façade of centralisation and a unitary state, we will discover that the nature of the Ethiopia's imperial state was fragmented, fractured and included personalised characteristics representing hierarchies and tensions between Addis Ababa and Qellem on one side and within Qellem itself on the other. Successive chapters of this thesis (particularly Three, Five and Six) present stories of fragmented, fractured and tensions-ridden relations within the state as well as between the state and society. The survival of the imperial state itself relied to a considerable level on the fact that it allowed such discretion to local socio-economic forces. As John Lonsdale accurately argues, "the paradox of rule [is] that power could not be exercised without giving some of it away."<sup>97</sup>

This means that conceptualizations of the state in this study will attempt to distance themselves from notions of the Ethiopian imperial state or Macca Oromo society of Qellem as singular, uniform structures, or even as being inevitably detached from one another. Instead the study underscores the manifold "contingent points of interaction" between the society of Qellem and individual state players; "interactions which constitute the very making of the

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<sup>97</sup> John Lonsdale, "Conclusion; the European scramble and conquest in African history," Roland Oliver (ed), *Cambridge History of Africa*, vol 6 (Cambridge, 1985).

state.”<sup>98</sup> This approach is already well-established in recent historical scholarship that emphasises state formation in Africa and elsewhere in the world as a process which happens in the course of local interaction, contestation and negotiation. Perspectives in such scholarship emphasise the manners through which state programmes and policies are resisted, avoided or arrogated by local societies by methods that essentially shape how the state is expressed at local level.<sup>99</sup> Hagmann and Péclard’s argument that “states must be seen as historical processes that include and span the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods,” is a useful framework for understanding how state making processes embedded in local social contexts unfolded in Qellem, although there are distinctive features in the case of Ethiopia.<sup>100</sup> “[T]he idea that states are external to society,” it is strongly and convincingly argued, “is erroneous.”<sup>101</sup> The analysis in this study therefore attempts to understand the notion of the state as a process, not a separate or autonomous entity. To this effect the study draws on understandings of state theory which, by inquiring the state as a comprehensible thing, underscores the state as an effect or an idea.<sup>102</sup>

The Ethiopian imperial state in Qellem was certainly incoherent, fractured and fragmented, aspiring to manifold, often ill-conceived schemes. The significance of personal or group aspirations in Qellem is conspicuous, whereby incoherence and inconsistency created avenues for the local people, particularly the peasants and the *balabbat*, offering them openings to influence, shape and reshape the state in Qellem. While the imperial state was attempting to assert itself and extract resources, labour and later land, it also struggled hard to mould itself as being contingent on local situations and interests. While imperial state officials in Addis

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<sup>98</sup> C. Vaughan, *Darfur: colonial violence*, 6.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Tobias Hagmann and D. Péclard, “Negotiating Statehood: Dynamic of power and domination in Africa,” *Development and Change*, 4 (41), (2010), 542.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> C. Vaughan, *Darfur: colonial violence*; Philip Abrahams, “Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State,” *Journal of Historical Sociology*, vol. 1 (1988), 58-89; Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton, 2000); Bruce Berman, “Structure and process in the Bureaucratic States, 140-176; T. Mitchell, “The limits of the state: beyond the statist approaches and their critics,” *American Political Science Review*, 85 (1991), 77-96.

Ababa, including Emperor Haila Sellasse during the later period, made considerable efforts to demonstrate the appearance of an isolated and non-aligned “stateness,” such efforts were usually undermined by the refusal by local officials to translate imperial orders into practice. Meanwhile, the schisms among Amhara imperial governors at various levels revealed weaknesses in policy by the state itself. More importantly, local elites were capable of manipulating those fracture lines in policy to serve their own aims, which in some cases also created paths of self-expression for the weak—the peasants. Like European colonial states in Africa, the ambiguity, incoherence and often contradictory character of structures and processes are key characteristics of the imperial state of Ethiopia. This demonstrates “contradictory social forces” working in imperial Ethiopia’s conquered south, and these social forces had on one side a considerable degree of influence in the evolution, consolidation and eventually survival of the imperial state and on the other the existence of inroads through which they were themselves reshaped and altered by the imperial state.<sup>103</sup> The imperial state in Qellem was thus always a fragmented, fractured, incoherent, inconsistent and tension-ridden. In most cases state officials were participants in rather than arbiters of the process of contestation, bargaining and negotiation which characterised the politics in Qellem.<sup>104</sup>

It is thus imperative to stress that imperial Ethiopia, particularly in the conquered south, had developed a substantial modern political project to alter, create or re-create all-inclusive social structures. This effort was centred on its policy of political integration, which was basically a process of assimilation which aspired to create a single national identity for Ethiopia. “It was taken for granted that integration meant assimilation and Ethiopia was to become Abyssinia writ large,” argues one longtime observant and careful scholar.<sup>105</sup> It is, however, no wonder that imperial Ethiopia’s national project of social re-engineering did not triumph as

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<sup>103</sup> Bruce Berman, “Structure and process in the Bureaucratic States, 141.

<sup>104</sup> C. Vaughan, *Darfur: colonial violence*; Bruce Berman, “Structure and process in the Bureaucratic States,” 140-176.

<sup>105</sup> John Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last*, 125.

planned in Addis Ababa. The national project was exposed firstly to ambiguity, incoherence and often contradictory bureaucratic processes and fractures, and secondly by and incongruities within the imperial state structure itself. This was then contested through various means before being compromised and negotiated and re-negotiated at local level. The state itself was legitimated—and resisted—through these variegated processes and this incoherent structure, eventually producing more unintended consequences than intended ones, which will be clarified in the process of this thesis.

## Location

Qellem (today the Qellem-Wallagga administrative zone of the Oromia National Regional State, Ethiopia) is located to the west of Gimbii and Najjoo, south of the Benishangul-Gumuz region, and north and northwest of Iluu Abbaaboora. Following its incorporation into the Ethiopian Empire state in the 1880s, Wallagga was divided into three provinces: Leeqaa-Naqamtee and its dependencies under *Däjjazmach* Kumsaa (alias Gäbrä-Egzabiher) (1889-1923), Qellem under *Däjjazmach* Joote Tulluu (1855-1918), and Arjoo and Horro-Guduruu, administered by officials directly appointed by Menilek. Geographical divisions were made for the convenience of the government in Addis Ababa and ignored socio-economic and political realities.<sup>106</sup>

The Ethiopian Empire underwent various administrative changes after its creation at the close of the nineteenth century. By the 1974 revolution it had been divided into fourteen provinces (*täqalay-gezat*), each of which was subdivided into districts (*awurajja*). The administrative divisions were in constant flux, and their boundaries were at times inconsistent. Between the 1890s and 1974 they underwent considerable organizational changes.<sup>107</sup> After the

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<sup>106</sup> See Tesema Ta'a, *The Political Economy of an African Society in Transformation: The Case of Macca Oromo (Ethiopia)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006).

<sup>107</sup> Ethiopian Mapping Agency, *National Atlas of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: 1988), p.3; Mesfin Wolde Mariam, *An Atlas of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, 1970), 4; Alberto Sbacchi, *Legacy of Bitterness: Ethiopia and Fascist Italy, 1935-1941* (Lawrenceville: The Red Sea Press, 1997), 137.

initial formation of the Empire, districts became fundamental administrative units. Around 1910 Emperor Menilek appears to have personally restructured his Empire into six administrative regions—a completely new administrative structure that differentiated the Empire from its previous traditional provincial administrative style.<sup>108</sup> Although some historians claim that population density, lifestyle, geography, language, soil fertility, historic ties and politics governed the administrative divisions, the entire terrain of its evolution suggests a more complex set of ideas which belie simplistic classification. A clear indigenous approach to administrative restructuring reflected political elites' philosophies on the Empire's social and economic system. The introduction to one of Mahtama Sellasse's papers dividing the Ethiopian Empire's administrative structures into four on the basis of typology of land tenure substantiates this.<sup>109</sup> Suffice it to say that prior to the Italian occupation of 1935/36, districts were the main administrative units.

As part of Italian East Africa (*Africa Orientale Italiana*) the Italians organized the empire into five Governorate Generals, each sub-divided into various administrative units. Following the 1941 Italian evacuation, the restored Empire underwent administrative reorganization in which sub-counties, *meketel wärāda*, were introduced as the lowest unit of administration below district level. These were soon succeeded by counties: *wärāda*.<sup>110</sup> Wallagga was one of fourteen provinces (*täqlay-gezatoch*), a huge territory which included what is now the Benishangul-Gumuz National Regional State. Wallagga was predominantly

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<sup>108</sup> The new administrative divisions had no particular name. In Menilek's chronicle authored by Gebrse Sellasse they were simply *kifil*, which translates "parts" after which the various provinces/districts constituting each region are to be listed. See Gabra-Sellasse (Tсахafe-tizaz), ታሪክ ዘመን ዘዳግማዊ ሚኒሊክ ዘኢትዮጵያ [History of Ethiopia during the Reign of Menilek II] (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, 1959 EC), 337-338.

<sup>109</sup> Mahtama-Sellasse Walda-Masqal, *ሰለ ኢትዮጵያ ስሪት አስተዳደር ጥበር ጠቅላላ አስተያየት* (General Reflections on Ethiopian Land Tenure System). His classifications are four: (1) regions where *qälad* land measurement was implemented (*qälad yäwädäqäbachäw agäroch*), (2) regions not measured by *qälad* and those with *gäbbars* paying fixed tax (*qälad yalwädäqäbachaw agäroch*), (3) regions paying fixed tributes (*qurt gibir yämiägäbiru agäroch*), and (4) regions of hereditary *rist* system (*yä rist agäroch*).

<sup>110</sup> Ethiopian Mapping Agency, *National Atlas of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: 1988), p.3; Mesfin Wolde Mariam, *An Atlas of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, 1970), 3.

inhabited by various groups of Macca Oromo, whose biggest moieties were the Leeqaa, the Sibuu and the Sayyoo. It was bounded by the Abbay (Blue Nile) in the north, the Baro River basin in the south, the Dhidheessa River in the east and a long international boundary with the Sudan to the west. No one really knows what Wallagga means in any Ethiopian language, and no literature offers anything about its meaning or how it was named. According to earlier imperial archives and some scholarly productions, Wallagga initially comprised the Sibuu and Sayyoo lands—six districts which were further divided into forty-nine counties. Wallagga was one of the Empire’s biggest provinces.<sup>111</sup> Qellem<sup>112</sup>, one of its six districts, was situated in the south-western part (See Map 2). On the eve of the Ethiopian conquest the whole of Wallagga territory, except Benishangul, had been ruled by various Oromo monarchies which had undermined the indigenous *gadaa* system. The most important of these were Leeqaa Naqamtee, Leeqaa Sibuu, Leeqaa Qumbaa, and Qellem.<sup>113</sup> Since the military regime, the *Därg*, that ruled the country between 1974 and 1991 more or less affirmed imperial Ethiopia’s administrative structure, there has been little demographic change during this period.

Between 1992 and 2005 Wallagga was divided into two administrative zones (East and West Wallagga) within the Oromia National Regional State. Qellem was placed within West Wallagga, with its provincial capital at Gimbii. After 2005, the Oromia National Regional State reorganized Wallagga in the west—like Boorana in the south, Arsii-Baalee in the south-east, and Šäwa at the centre—into four new administrative zones, in which the imperial regime’s Qellem and Horro-Guduru districts were restored as separate administrative units and respectively renamed Qellem-Wallagga and Horro-Guduru-Wallagga. Their former provincial

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<sup>111</sup> The six districts were Naqamtee, Arjoo, Horro-Guduruu, Gimbii, Qellem, and Asosa.

<sup>112</sup> Qellem, the name now used to describe the region of south-western Wallagga, was originally the birth place of Jootee Tulluu in the Leeqaa region, and is located northwest of Gidaamii. The Ethiopian government later named the whole region once ruled by Jootee after the name of his birthplace.

<sup>113</sup> Tesema Ta’a, “Political Economy of Western Central Ethiopia From the Mid-16<sup>th</sup> to the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries,” (PhD Thesis in History, Michigan State University, 1986), 132.

capitals, Dambi-Doolloo and Shaambo, were also restored as zonal capitals. The former Naqamtee province took what was the Arjo province into a 'new' administrative unit of East Wallagga, keeping Naqamtee as its area capital. Therefore, Wallagga province today constitutes four of the seventeen (plus one) zonal administrative units in Oromia (See Map 4).

Today, Wallagga includes the regions of Sayyoo<sup>114</sup>, Leeqaa, Amaara, Jimma, Jidda and the Horroo Oromo clans (See Map 3). The largest part of the province is inhabited today by the Sayyoo, who occupy territories between the southern headwaters of the Dabus in the north and the Birbir River in the south, and from the western headwaters of the Birbir River in the southeast to the Gare and Sakkoo rivers in the west and south.<sup>115</sup> Dambi-Doolloo, the district's major town, is located in the Sayyoo country about 480 miles south-west of Addis Ababa. The Amaara, a loosely defined collection of several smaller clans, live on the cool highlands south of the Walal Mountains and north of the Galaan region. The Jidda, Horroo and Jimma clans live north of Walal. In the Anfillo forest to the west of the Sayyoo region live the Mao and the Bussase peoples, while the Majangir, Kwama and Kwegu peoples live southwest of Anfillo and west of the Sayyoo regions, mainly along the Godäre River. Scattered and sparsely populated settlements of the Majangir are found in the lowlands of the Birbir and Sakkoo rivers.<sup>116</sup> Due to the paucity of statistical data it is difficult to know the region's exact population. According to the 2007 census the people of Qellem totalled 803,701 (404,905 male, 398,796 female).<sup>117</sup> About ninety percent of the population identify themselves as Oromo, whilst the rest are descendants of pre-Oromo people.

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<sup>114</sup> Sayyoo is the name of a Macca Oromo group (western Oromo) in the Ethiopian empire. There are three Sayyoo regions. The one I refer to here covers the region south of the Walal Mountains, home to the Sayyoo branch of the Macca Oromo. The second is around the Jorgoo Mountains east of the Birbir River. The third is the region immediately east of upper Gibee. For more information see Negaso Gidada, *History of the Sayyoo Oromoo of Southwestern Wallaga, Ethiopia from about 1730 to 1886* (Addis Ababa, 2001), 1-10.

<sup>115</sup> Negaso Gidada, *History of the Sayyoo*, 1.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 1-2.

<sup>117</sup> FDRE Population Census Commission, *Summary and Statistical Report of the 2007 Population and Housing Census: Population Size by Age and Sex* (Addis Ababa, 2008), 72.

## Structure

This thesis addresses nearly a century of relations between the Macca Oromo peasants in Qellem and the Ethiopian Empire state. Rather than discussing the two subjects as separate units of analysis, they are examined firstly from the perspectives of strategies of survival and resistance, and secondly as a project of political integration by looking at imperial endeavours to forge a nation-state from a multi-national Empire. This approach helps unpack key issues relating to both, and unearths overriding features whilst providing insights into key areas and features of interaction. The result is a clearer understanding of the inner functioning of the Oromo society at the local level, the forces that generate conflicts between peasants and the state and how the combination creates disputes among various groups in Ethiopian society.

Labour and land were vital resources for the farmers of Qellem, as were projects intended to exploit these resources, which had serious implications on the peasants' ability to use them. Beyond fighting for the usage of resources, peasants would have a determining role in establishing their socio-economic standing within the community. Since there were marked ethno-cultural borders between the peasants and the state, the ability to use these resources affects the relations between the two ethno-cultural features.

The main body of this thesis is presented in six chapters. Chapter One analyses the formative era in peasant-state relations. After discussing the historical settlement pattern of the Macca Oromo, the chapter analyses the process of state formation in Qellem and the nineteenth century Ethiopian conquest as well as the early years of Qellem under the empire. Chapter Two covers the period from 1909 to 1933 and examines how and why ruling Qellem, exploiting its resources and integrating it into the empire became complicated following the Ethiopian conquest, particularly after the administrative system known in Ethiopian historiography as indirect rule ended. The chapter focusses on the imposition of a new administrative structure (the *näfṭägnä-gäbbar* system) and attempts to highlight the roots of dynamic peasant resistance



that lasted for nearly a century and the ways in which the resulting interaction transformed the local social structure in the short run. Chapter Three investigates the complexities and consequences of the *näffägnä-gäbbar* system as it unfolded in Qellem between the start of its second phase in 1917 and its demise in 1935-36 with the Italian occupation. Chapter Four analyses the Italian period in Qellem (1936-41), a period that influenced Oromo self-consciousness considerably. By removing the coercion of imperial Ethiopia from the conquered south, the Italian occupation firstly demonstrated the degree of integration of the conquered regions and their peoples within Ethiopia. Qellem fell into the territory in which western Oromo local rulers established the short-lived Western Galla Confederation (WGC). Chapter Five examines the dynamics of the *qälad* system of land measurement from 1944 to 1974, a period that was marked by imperial Ethiopia's systematic reversal of the transformations of 1936-41 and the multiple reactions it generated. The overarching themes of the chapter are the processes and consequences of the installation of the *qälad* system, the resistance it generated and the repercussions of various interactions within the process as a whole. By discussing the historical interactions that invited the introduction of Evangelical Christianity (EVC) into a conquered region already claimed as the exclusive preserve of the EOC, Chapter Six sets EVC within the political and socio-economic context of imperial Ethiopia between 1941 and 1974, and deals with the multiple reasons for its survival.

## Sources

Much of this study has been undertaken at local level to reverse the emphasis by turning the periphery of previous studies into the centre of this research. Micro-level research (or historical research at grassroots levels<sup>118</sup>) represents the foundations of thorough research. However, undertaking historical research at local levels—particularly in the Ethiopian context—is a

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<sup>118</sup> Negaso Gidada, *History of the Sayyoo*, x.

challenging exercise due to the paucity of sources and issues surrounding their accessibility. The rarity of local sources is less of an issue than the ability of the researcher to actually find them, as they are not readily available in libraries and archival centres. Accessing and utilising sources required sustained effort, especially in relation to archival collections still located in government administration facilities due to the difficulty of securing authorised permissions. Ethiopia imposed strict media control following disputed 2005 election, so accessing archives in the provinces requires that researchers obtain written permission from the authorities, which is extremely difficult. The archivists themselves are overworked, and are not always ready to allow access to the archives just because they see authorised permission. In fact, archivists are laws unto themselves and securing their permission and help requires diplomacy. Accessing various archival centres in Dambi-Doolloo, Naqamtee and Addis Ababa required considerable effort.

In the context of the wider Oromo-Ethiopian historiography, information on Qellem is difficult to obtain. Few written historical sources devote much attention to the region, and when it does appear, it is often mentioned obliquely in accounts of neighbouring regions, or in the shadow of better-known regions like Kaffa and Jimma. This makes the archives indispensable resources for the study. This thesis employs a number of Ethiopian archival sources whose location, state of preservation and organisation are important for researchers.

I began the field research during the run-up to the 2010 national election, but was forced to temporarily abandon it because of state restrictions. The provincial archives of the former Wallagga Governorate General and those of Qellem *awrajjja* in particular vary widely in their degree of preservation, organisation and accessibility. The files are generally categorised into ‘active’ or current files and ‘dead’ files. Most, if not all, of the archives worthy of historical investigation are categorised under the latter heading. In order to identify the files, I employed ‘inventory files’, in respective government agencies in charge of the archives. ‘Inventory files’

are records of archival holdings in various provincial or sub-provincial ministerial offices prepared by outgoing archivists for an incoming archivist as transfer documents. While working in various archival collections in Naqamtee and Dambi-Doolloo, I made use of this cumulative inventory to trace and identify numerous official documents.

In March 2010, as I came out of a retired archivist's house in the town of Naqamtee, the head of an official of ruling party, Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Front (EPRDF), surrounded by armed men asked me if I was a journalist. He had a good reason to ask me since I was carrying in my hand a mini tape recorder and had already interviewed and recorded a couple of informants. I was taken to *waajjira gandaa*, the village administration office, where I was detained for a day. I was later released after being told by the chief administrator that I could not work unless I had written permission from the Security and Administration Office of the Oromia National Regional State. The restriction was apparently only for making interviews, but the tone of the warning was so stern that I had to discontinue my research and leave the area. The ruling party was too sensitive about the flow of information in the country and was rigorously scrutinising the access to the public in any form—including academic researchers—during the electoral period. I waited out the election period and resumed work after the ruling party declared victory and the National Electoral Board confirmed the results. At this point, I went directly to Dambi-Doolloo, the administrative capital of Qellem-Wallagga Zone, rather than Naqamtee.

In Dambi-Doolloo, the pre-Italian period archives were initially kept at the municipality. However, when this was taken over by the *Darg* during the military-socialist regime (1974-91), they were moved to a different building with inadequate space to contain all the files properly. In May 1991 the building was occupied by the victorious rebels, and the files were allegedly destroyed. I was unable to trace any of them. Given that pre-Italian period archives are extremely scarce in Ethiopia, I found this very disappointing. However, the post-1942 files of

Dambi-Doolloo are mostly well-preserved, and I was lucky to obtain the help of a retired archivist who knew where they were. The files were shelved according to the subject they dealt with, and I was able to browse those I considered relevant to my research. Generally, the archives provided essential information on historical accounts, urban land transactions, market tax records, 1942-43 police records and municipal administration issues from the 1950s and 60s.<sup>119</sup>

Even more useful were the archives of the former Ministry of Finance, Dambi-Doolloo Branch. They housed records of land measurement, land and property taxes, and included a cumulative inventory file which was tremendously useful in locating relevant documents systematically. Files from the former Ministry of Land Reform and Administration were stored in a separate room, and included records of peasant appeals and petitions as well as land litigations. These archives had no cumulative inventory file, making the identification of files relevant to my research extremely tedious.

In Naqamtee, the administrative capital of the former Wallagga Governorate General, there were equally useful archival repositories. The first was at the former office of the Wallagga Governorate General (now the East Wallagga Administration Office), where most imperial era administrative correspondence is kept. Locating relevant documents was more a matter of luck than systematic. The most important archives were those of the former Ministry of Finance, Wallagga Branch, which was—comparatively speaking—the most organised. A copy of the registry of land measurement in Qellem, and records of land and all taxation in the post-1941 era were all located here. There is a registry of incoming and outgoing letters, but this was not helpful in locating the files. I relied on a retired archivist, who was extremely knowledgeable about which files were located in which folders. After I secured permission to

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<sup>119</sup> Archives obtained from archival collections of government offices in Qellem (all of which are in Dambi-Doolloo) are quoted throughout the thesis as IEAQA, which stands for Imperial Ethiopia's Archives of Qellem *Awrajjja*.

work in the archive with him he was able to help me show the folders I chose from the cumulative inventory to the other archivists. Eventually I was allowed to go to the shelves and check for the folders I needed, accompanied by the archivists. I explored a great deal of important historical information useful to understanding the roots of peasant discourses and narratives employed in their appeals, petitions and litigations in a struggle lasting for nearly three decades.<sup>120</sup>

Another important repository of information in Naqamtee is housed in the Wallagga Ethnographic Museum (WEM), where correspondence between Qellem and Addis Ababa (mainly from the late 1920s to early 1930s) are kept since the 1980s alongside a collection that Alessandro Triulzi and Tesema Ta'a refer to as 'Naqamtee Papers'.<sup>121</sup> These papers consist of five *māzgāb*, leather-bound ledgers, of Amharic documents relating to the administrative history of western Wallagga by the Naqamtee rulers *Däjjazmach* Gäbrä-Egziabher (alias Kumsaa Morodaa) and his son and successor *Däjjazmach* Habtä-Mariam, between the late 1880s and the 1930s. All five volumes were marked by the same call number (in Amharic): numbers of the volume/Wa[llogga]/mu[seum]/025.17. I have drawn on the contents of all these *māzgāb* except the fifth volume, which was not relevant to Qellem. Most documents are published in Triulzi and Ta'a edited volume.<sup>122</sup> I took notes from letters which were not included in the volume to use alongside them. The Naqamtee Papers are primarily concerned with developments in Leeqaa-Naqamtee and its dependencies, they contain marginal information on Qellem, especially for the period between 1898 and 1916. Given that archives on this early period in Ethiopia have been extremely scanty, the Naqamtee Papers are crucial as they provide consistently accurate local information on peasant-state interactions in

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<sup>120</sup> Archives obtained from archival collections of government offices in Naqamtee are quoted throughout the thesis as IEAWGG, which stands for Imperial Ethiopia's Archives of Wallagga Governorate General.

<sup>121</sup> The collection was later published as, A. Triulzi and T. Ta'a (eds), *የወላጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች-ከ1880ዎቹ እስከ 1920ዎቹ (ኢ.ኢ.አ)* [*Documents for Wallagga History: 1880s to 1920s (E.C)*] (Addis Ababa: AAU Press, 2004).

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

particular for the period between 1917 and 1933. The paucity in the Naqamtee Papers is nevertheless significantly compensated by information provided by the archival collections on Qellem found in the National Archives of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland.

In Addis Ababa, I collected valuable archival sources from two holdings. The first is the National Libraries and Archives of Ethiopia (now part of the FDRE Ministry of Culture) where the archives of the former Ministry of Interior have been stored. The archives of each province are organised systematically according to the general themes they covered. They were assigned specific numbers, and multiple files were then computerised, but the system is not easy to use. With the help of archivists I was able to identify a list of Wallagga folders and their broad subjects, from which I chose those relevant to my research dealing with issues surrounding land tenure, taxation, *balabbat* and some other related themes in Qellem.<sup>123</sup>

A second useful cache is the archives of the former Ministry of Land Reform and Administration, currently stored at Addis Ababa University. Organized into an archival centre by the faculty and graduate students of the History Department, the offices were renamed as the Wäldämäsqäl Tariku Memorial Research Centre (WTMRC). The archival collection contained files dealing with Qellem land disputes, peasant and *balabbat* appeals and court litigations, offering detailed coverage of the 1960 Wallagga *balabbats'* protests in defending their class interests. At the time of my research, the archives at WTMRC had no archivist, no catalogue, and no cumulative inventory. Folders containing files dealing with broad themes were shelved with little or no clue as to how to locate or classify them. To find any file of value, one has to ask for a key from a guard and go back and forth between hundreds of shelves. Locating historical files useful for research at WTMRC was more a matter of luck.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Archives obtained from the National Archives are quoted in throughout the thesis as IEAMI, which stands for Imperial Ethiopia's Archives of the Ministry of Interior.

<sup>124</sup> Archives obtained from Wäldämäsqäl Tariku Memorial Research Centre (WTMRC) are simply as IEWTMRC, which stands for Imperial Ethiopia's archives from WTMRC.

The post-1941 imperial archives I found in Dambi-Doolloo, Naqamtee and Addis Ababa offered both opportunities and challenges. They record considerable details of peasant concepts, perception and understanding of the state, and thus informed the tactics and strategies they employed to secure their survival and avoid state violence. Most peasant petitions and appeals narrate substantial details of peasant life, as well as economic and social challenges the peasants encountered regarding the land tenure system the state introduced in 1944. Archives also record how the state viewed the peasants and their methods of struggle, and the approaches it took to defeat them. The archives present as many challenges as opportunities. In the first place, they are incomplete and sometimes undated. Some of them are indecipherable, usually because of bad storage and moisture, but also because of bad handwriting (a good half of them are handwritten). Since the larger part of Ethiopia's society was illiterate, peasant appeals and petitions were written by those few who got the opportunity to learn to read and write in Amharic. The archives therefore focus overwhelmingly on peasant problems, and tend to gloss over resources and advantages they have. This was a strategy chosen not by the peasants themselves, but by the elites who represent them. In fact, the archives are by nature not a historical repository of fact. A critical scholar concludes that, "The Archive is made from selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past and also from mad fragments that no one intended to preserve and just ended up there."<sup>125</sup> Oral interviews helped reduce such challenges significantly.

In addition to imperial Ethiopia's archives, this study also used materials from the UK's own National Archives at Kew, London, and Rhodes House, Oxford University Library. Using bibliographical references, I was able to locate files that helped explain how cross-border issues from the British Sudan and Qellem's neighbours at the Ethiopian Empire's outer limits were

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<sup>125</sup> Carol Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*, quoted in Alexis Ramsey et al, *Working in the Archives: Practical Research Methods for Rhetoric and Composition* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010), 1.

infused into peasant-state relations and Qellem-Addis Ababa relations more broadly. I utilised Foreign Office files organized under series FO 1, 141, 371, and 401 at the National archives, as well as Sudan Intelligence Report (SIR) files at Rhodes House that, in addition to Sudan and Egypt, provided considerable information on various Ethiopian matters. The problem with SIR files was that they were not readily available at the National Archives. Very few of them are, and even then there is no particular filing system. Instead they are dispersed haphazardly throughout numerous folders covering information on Ethiopia. Initially, I found SIR files missing from the National Archives at Rhodes House in the Bodleian Libraries at Oxford. But once unearthed, the archives offer a great opportunity to access historical developments between the late nineteenth century and 1936, a period where the Ethiopian archives are very weak in terms of the limited detail they present and the mistakes they make on personal names and locations.

Here, I will break the narrative of locations and the nature of the sources for a moment in order to highlight another feature that defined the terms of state-society interactions as well as the ways in which power was deployed and the methods by which it was engaged, contested and appropriated. More importantly it will demonstrate how the quality of the historical sources this study has relied on—imperial Ethiopia’s archives of peasant petitions, appeals and litigations relevant to Qellem—are implicated in the process. The local state structure and the central imperial government to some extent received, listened to, and tactfully absorbed some elements of peasant grievances in order to reduce the *balabbat*’s ability to exploit the circumstances and advance their own interests whilst undermining the potential for unified action between the two. This happened in a way that would not damage the state’s alliance with the *balabbat*, demonstrating to the peasants the potential efficacy of their protests in their efforts to undercut the state’s efforts to permanently appropriate their land. Peasant petitions and appeals that were submitted to various levels of the state apparatus were received,



listened to and tactfully absorbed in distinctive ways. Their constructions did not simply deploy local historical consciousness and genealogy by claiming ownership of and access to land, but more importantly were orchestrated by local peasant intellectuals who knew enough about how imperial Ethiopia's state architecture functioned. This enabled those who could do so to articulate peasant grievances most effectively after quick orientation by those more skilful and knowledgeable. The deployment of deliberately constructed historical consciousness and genealogy in building peasant grievances into substantive petitions and appeals was therefore effective when merged with the knowledge and skills of local intellectuals who knew the best ways of articulating grievances most effectively. We need to reflect on this, however briefly, because it exemplifies the main features of the form of historical sources upon which the analysis of this chapter is based.

This study was also enriched by oral data, filling gaps left by written sources. Oral data, as a distinct historical source, offers an alternative path through the past, and in the case of Qellem, the lack of solid historical documents meant that was very difficult to comprehend the past fully without oral sources. During and after my archival research in Qellem in 2010 and 2011 I carried out oral interviews in various locations. However, from the point of view of methodology and the nature of the data, carrying out such research is no less challenging than dealing with written sources. In using oral sources, historians must be as rigorous as possible<sup>126</sup> not simply because they are oral but primarily because they need to be checked and cross-checked against each other and all available written sources. I conducted group interviews in Qellem, where narrators were listened to by contemporaries who not only supplemented details he missed but also corrected the speaker whenever he made mistakes. Some participants in the historical drama of the era studied had already died by the time of my field research, but I was

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<sup>126</sup> L. White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 51-53.

grateful to interview others. While some lived in the research region, others stayed in and around Addis Ababa. When selecting my informants, I made attempts to involve key figures from religious and ethno-cultural groups and social and economic classes. Some of these key informants died in the years that followed, some survived longer, and a few are still alive. Alessandro Triulzi's field notes of the 1970s, which represent another layer of memory, have also been used in this study, but only where they fitted the focus of the research.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **THE PROCESS OF STATE FORMATION AND THE ETHIOPIAN CONQUEST**

This chapter discusses the settlement pattern of the Macca Oromo groups and offers an analysis of state formation in Qellem and the nineteenth century Ethiopian conquest, examining Qellem's early years within the Empire. The chapter is presented in three sections. The first discusses the historical circumstances that led to the rise of various Oromo states and broadly outlines the relationships they had with their neighbours. The second analyses the process that led to the Šāwan Amhara conquest of these Oromo states and the region's effective incorporation into the Ethiopian Empire. The third evaluates early relations established between peripheral provinces predominantly inhabited by Macca Oromo groups (and the conditions of their inhabitants), with particular emphasis on Qellem and what the Ethiopian historiography generally designates as "indirect rule."

The chapter argues that various internal subtleties which played leading roles in facilitating the process of Macca Oromo settlement in Qellem also worked in transforming society, paving the way for the birth of indigenous social and political stratifications which eventually led to the rise of the Oromo monarchies. The transformations that resulted from the settlement process also underpinned and facilitated the Ethiopian conquest, and very much defined the foundations of future relationships between Oromo peasants in Qellem and their overlords, as well as amongst themselves, and their views on new state institutions. The process included complexities that determined the form, nature and content of continuities and changes, which in turn shaped various dynamic developments for decades after Qellem's incorporation into the Empire—developments that lasted until the 1974 revolution.

## The process of state formation

The current Oromo settlement pattern in Ethiopia is a direct result of their sixteenth century population movements, which has led to six major groupings: the northern Oromo (consisting of the Rayyaa, Yajjuu and Assaboo), the western and south-western Oromo (the Macca), the central Oromo (the Tuulama), the south-eastern Oromo (the Arsii and Karrayyuu), the eastern Oromo (the Ittuu, Humbannaa and Afran Qalloo), and the southern Oromo (the Gujii and Boorana).<sup>1</sup> A monarchical institution evolved within the Macca Oromo at the cost of the *gadaa* system.<sup>2</sup> The Macca Oromo today form the predominant population of the Oromia provinces of West and South-west Shawa, Wallagga (four administrative zones), Jimma and Iluu Abbaaboora.

Although Ethiopian historiography includes various misconceptions, misunderstandings and even misrepresentations of the sixteenth century pastoral Oromo movement, research into Oromo studies not only convincingly shows various sources that challenge the general pattern of the Oromo movement in the south-north direction but also defy the thesis that confines their primal homeland to the southern highlands of Ethiopia.<sup>3</sup> Not only were the Oromo indigenous to the southern Ethiopian region, they also lived in the heart of various Abyssinian provinces long before the sixteenth century. Recent historical studies posit that a significant number of sedentary agrarian Oromo groups lived there as far back as the tenth century.<sup>4</sup> To examine such claims is beyond the remit of this discussion, but such

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<sup>1</sup> Tesema Ta'a, "The Place of the Oromo in Ethiopian Historiography: 2003 OSA Keynote Address," *The Journal of Oromo Studies* (JOS), 11 (1&2), 2004, 3-5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo and the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia, 1300-1700* (Oxford: James Currey, 2015), 15-137; Negaso Gidada, *History of the Sayyoo Oromoo of Southwestern Wallaga, Ethiopia from about 1730-1886* (Addis Ababa: Mega Printing Enterprise, 2001), 13-137; Mekuria Bulcha, *Contours of the Emergent and Ancient Oromo Nation: Dilemmas of State Building in Ethiopia* (Cape Town: Creda Communications, 2011), 82-84; 131-222.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo and the Christian Kingdom*, 15-137.

evidence invalidates the idea of an Oromo “invasion” of Abyssinia during the sixteenth century and seriously challenges established ideas that “... most Oromo led an independent existence as neighbours with, but beyond military control and political influence of Abyssinia,”<sup>5</sup> until the end of the nineteenth century.

The westward expansion of the Macca into Qellem began on the uplands that formed the right bank of the Birbir River, and they subsequently expanded into lower but still hospitable areas.<sup>6</sup> The Macca assembly seems to have instructed their juniors—the late-comers in this case—to go further west across the Dhidheessa in search of new hospitable land, and the early settlers were therefore left behind. Further waves of expansion became vital to secure sufficient pasture lands further from the villages, which were heavily populated and farmed. Smaller Macca lineage groups such as the Leeqaa, Amaara, Jidda, Jimma and Horro took the cool and fertile highland territories surrounding Tulluu Walal, the highest mountain in western Ethiopia. Once established, they organised themselves further and travelled southeast to the still friendly area of Laaloo-Qilee.<sup>7</sup> The non-Oromo peoples already living in this region seem to have offered little resistance at the time. Details of the process of the Maccaa Oromo advance into what is today Southwestern Wallagga (later Qellem) have been competently dealt with elsewhere and need not be repeated here,<sup>8</sup> but it must be stressed that the Macca Oromo, like many other branches of the Oromo, did not find the territories they settled uninhabited. Before they expanded into Qellem, the region was largely populated by peoples belonging to Omotic and Nilo-Saharan groups.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Mohammed Hassen, “Some Aspects of Oromo History That Have Been Misunderstood,” *JOS*, 1 (2), (1994), 83.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Ayana, “Land Tenure,” 42.

<sup>7</sup> Lambert Bartels, *Oromo Religion: Myth, and Rites of the Western Oromo of Ethiopia—An Attempt to Understand* (Berlin, 1983), 66-67; Yilma Dheressa, *የኢትዮጵያ ሕዝብ ታሪክ* [The History of the Ethiopian People] (Addis Ababa, 1959), 242-243.

<sup>8</sup> See, among others, Negaso Gidada, *History of the Sayyoo*; Lambert Bartels, *Oromo Religion*, 9-88.

<sup>9</sup> Omotic and Nilo-Saharan are two of the four families of languages spoken in Ethiopia, the other two being Semitic and Cushitic. Linguists have recently identified the Omotic languages spoken by peoples in the Omo River basin as the place where they are supposed to have originated. The name was adopted by Fleming,

Because their economy was based on mixed farming, once the Oromo prevailed over indigenous peoples and came to control much of Qellem, various Macca Oromo clans competed to claim uninhabited lands. This resulted in conflict among the Oromo and with non-Oromo groups.<sup>10</sup> Oromo settlement in Qellem was not completed in a single movement; instead a series of waves of expansion followed the pioneers. Although dating Oromo settlement in Qellem with accuracy is difficult, available sources tend to suggest that the Macca Oromo controlled parts of Qellem at least by the first half of the seventeenth century.<sup>11</sup> Negasso Gidada's chronology agrees with this dating.<sup>12</sup>

As the Macca Oromo pioneers occupied fertile lands in east and central Qellem, each lineage was recognised as the owner of the land on which it had settled. This system of collective ownership was directed by the *gadaa* system of landholding, the *qabiyyee* system, which recognised the right of precedence. One of the principal pieces of legislation by the *gadaa* council, *caffee*, was that land was owned by the pioneer settlers, *daggal-saaqii*.<sup>13</sup> Those who first occupied the land established themselves as seniors, *hangafa*, and advised latecomers to pass by and occupy territories of their own.<sup>14</sup> The Macca Oromo law of *hangafa* (senior) emphasised the precedence of the senior son over his juniors, and *hangafummaa* (seniority) carried with it the law of family property and inheritance.<sup>15</sup> Despite this, late arrivals would be allowed to settle on land claimed by earlier settlers under two conditions: they had to be either

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who made an extensive study of the language and discovered the features that distinguished it from the Cushitic. See M.L. Bender et al (eds.), *Languages in Ethiopia* (London, 1976).

<sup>10</sup> Informants: Asefa Boroo (08/08/2010), Baalchaa Deentaa (22/08/2005), D/Doolloo; Alessandro Triulzi Field Notes (ATFT here in after), "Interview with Qes Gidada Soolan and Nagawoo Tulluu" (1972), 4.

<sup>11</sup> Bairu Tafla (ed), *Aṣma Giyorgis and His Work: History of the Gällä and the Kingdom of Šawä* (Stuttgart: Wiesbaden, 1987), 331.

<sup>12</sup> Negaso Gidada, *History of the Sayyoo*, 48.

<sup>13</sup> Dinsa Lepisa Abbaa Joobir, "The Gada System of Government and Sera Chafe Oromo," (LLB Thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1975), 162.

<sup>14</sup> Informants: Dabalaa Maammadee (07/08/2010), Galataa Noonisee, 03/08/2010), D/Doolloo; Waaqjira Hiixuu (Canqaa, 23/08/2010).

<sup>15</sup> "የወረ በከረ ዜና መዋዕል [The Chronicle of Bäkärè Family]," in Alessandro Triulzi and Tesema Ta'a (eds), *የወላጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች፡-ከ1880ዎቹ እስከ 1920ዎቹ (እ.ኤ.አ)* [Documents for Wallagga History: 1880s to 1920s (E.C)] (Addis Ababa: AAU Press, 2004), 273.

members of the lineage, or they had to accept that the land was owned by the first settlers. This process continued unabated until the beginning of the nineteenth century. This pattern of settlement became law and was confirmed, according to local documentary evidence, in Oromo states that were born of this process.<sup>16</sup>

Local traditions recognised the earliest occupiers as *abbaa-qabiyyee* (literally land holders)—a reference to their right and authority to distribute land to relatives, dependants and latecomers. As a symbol of effective occupation they would build temporary huts, and like some West African and Kenyan societies, they cleared the forest with fire as a way of claiming the overgrowth and staking their rights to the land. Kraals were constructed around the huts,<sup>17</sup> and land acquired in this process was referred to as *qabiyyee*.<sup>18</sup> Communal land—ritual places, grazing land, lakes, water and watering points—remained elastic because of the lineages’ desire to expand their territories, perhaps driven by growing human and cattle populations, and such areas could not be claimed by individual families.<sup>19</sup> Traditions indicate that during the process of distributing land, the *abbaa-qabiyyee* offered different areas to different sub-lineages, and boundaries were marked out along family lines.<sup>20</sup> The result is that although land was owned individually, it was claimed collectively—an underlying narrative in peasant appeals, petitions and court litigations of post-1944 land disputes in Qellem.

Paradoxically, the pioneer settlers had themselves been juniors who marched to the frontiers (in peace or through war) to become wealthy and powerful in both social and demographic terms. On the frontiers they built for themselves a status of seniority they could not obtain in the society they had left or in places where they initially settled. As the juniors

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<sup>16</sup> “የወረ በከረ ዜና መዋዕል [The Chronicle of Bākārè Family],” 273.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid; Tanure Ojaide, “Modern African Literature and Cultural Identity,” *African Studies Review* 35 (3) (1992), 39.

<sup>18</sup> Negaso Gidada, *History of the Sayyoo*, 115-137.

<sup>19</sup> L. Bartels, *Oromo Religion*, 110, 349-350.

<sup>20</sup> Informants: Dabalaa Maammadee (07/08/2010), Galataa Noonnisee (03/08/2010), D/Doolloo; Waaqjira Hiixuu (Caanqaa, 23/08/2010).

marched, they found an organized community analogous to one they left behind to seek out new opportunities. The authority of seniors over juniors was deeply embedded, so conflict between descendants of pioneer settlers, *warra-qabiyyee*, and those of late arrivals, *warra-galaa*, became inevitable. Natural population growth had a hand in promoting these conflicts,<sup>21</sup> and this period seems to have presented early challenges to the *gadaa* system as the development of the land tenure system came to be dictated the outcomes of the conflicts. The definition of power and control over resources laid the foundation for the birth of various petty states and monarchies.<sup>22</sup> The result by the mid-nineteenth century was the birth of various Macca Oromo states—Haawwaa, Galaan, Qooxa’oo-Sadii (all in Sayyoo), and Qellem among the Leeqaa to the north of Sayyoo, to mention only the more well-known ones—in the Macca Oromo territory (Qellem, southwestern Wallagga) that would later become one of imperial Ethiopia’s western provinces. Local traditions and histories of the Macca Oromo elites of Qellem, who would become intermediaries in the post ca.1886 era, root them in “time immemorial” and represent the first coming of presumed lineage ancestors.<sup>23</sup> They were in control of discourse of lineage seniority until the 1974 revolution.<sup>24</sup>

The appropriation of surplus, which in debates on the emergence among the Oromo of the monarchical form of government, has been the latest explanation of the process, played a clear contributory role throughout the Macca Oromo region. There was rivalry and conflict among the descendants of the pioneer settlers on one hand and between descendants of the pioneer settlers and the late arrivals on the other, which also contributed to the region that later

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<sup>21</sup> ATFN, “Interview with Qes Gidada Solan and Nagawo Tullu” (1972), 4.

<sup>22</sup> Negaso Gidada, *History of the Sayyoo*.

<sup>23</sup> For similar histories of chiefs elsewhere in the continent see Sara Berry, *Chiefs Know their boundaries: essays on property, power and the past in Asante, 1896-1996* (Oxford: James Currey, 2001); Paul Richards, “To fight or to farm? Agrarian dimensions of the Mano River conflicts (Liberia and Sierra Leone,” *African Affairs*, 104 (417), 571-590.

<sup>24</sup> This reflects perspectives in the argument, for example, of John Giblin, *A history of the excluded: making family a refuge from state in twentieth-century Tanzania* (Oxford: James Currey, 2005).



came to be known as Qellem.<sup>25</sup> Here, the process involved the making and unmaking of allies and enemies. The rise into prominence of Tufaa Heddee (Abbaa Oofaa) and the eventual formation of the Hawuu chiefdom in Haawwaa, for example, resulted from competition, rivalry and conflict in the Dhaa'ee region, its conquest by Anfillo and its eventual re-conquest by Hawuu.<sup>26</sup>

The formation of the Galaan kingdom, on the other hand, resulted from the growth of the Galaan region of Bakakkoo Tufaa (Abbaa Dhaasaa) which conquered the Hawuu chiefdom, Garjeeda, Laaloo-Cabal, Amaara, Yamaalogii, Jida, and Hindina.<sup>27</sup> Conflicts in Sadii between the Qooxawoo and other lineages ended with the former's victory, who were initially considered as latecomers with no right of precedence over land or resources. After substantial military victories over its neighbours, Qooxawoo became a dynasty that ruled the entire Sadii territory. The rise of Gumaa Oshoo (Abbaa Dantaa) of Qooxa'oo-Sadii, who later established the short-lived state of Sayyoo, resulted from these conflicts.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps most importantly, Tulluu Guddaa of the Leeqaa clan in Qellem had by the mid nineteenth century already centralized power to establish a chiefdom.<sup>29</sup>

By the second half of the nineteenth century, various Macca Oromo groups in Qellem<sup>30</sup> were ruled by contenders who were fighting each other for supremacy. The most powerful

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<sup>25</sup> See, among others, Mordechai Abir, "The Emergence and Consolidation of the Monarchies of Enarea and Jimma in the First Half the Nineteenth century," *The Journal of African History* (JAS), 6 (2) (1965); H.S. Lewis, "A Reconsideration of the Socio-political System of the Western Galla," *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 9 (1964); A.Triulzi, "The Gudru Oromo and their Neighbors in the Two Generations Before the Battle of Embabo," *The Journal of Ethiopian Studies* (JES), 13 (1) (1975),47-64; Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990),84-113; Tesema Ta'a, *The Political Economy*,49-68.

<sup>26</sup> Negaso Gidada, *History of the Sayyoo*, 165-200.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 201-226.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 227-242.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 245-329.

<sup>30</sup> Qellem, as a territorial designation which now refers to a sub region of southwestern Wallagga, was initially the name of a small village in the Leeqaa region northwest of Gidaamii. The village was, after the Oromo settlement in the region, the *qabiyyee* of warra-Wanaagaa, family of Jootee Tulluu and his ancestors. In fact Qellem was the birthplace of JooteeTulluu. The Ethiopian Empire later renamed the whole region of southwestern Wallagga after Jootee's birthplace. Unless used in a specific reference to a Leeqaa territory in Gidaamii "Qellem" in this chapter—and throughout the thesis—is used to mean the entire province of southwest Wallagga.

contenders in pre-conquest Qellem were Tufaa Heddee (Abbaa Oofaa) of Haawwaa, succeeded by Buraayyuu Barii (Abbaa Gosaa); Bakakkoo Tufaa (Abbaa Dhaasaa) of Galaan; Guumaa Oshoo (Abbaa Dantaa) of Qooxa'oo-Sadii, succeeded by his son Hirphaa Guumaa (Abbaa Daannoo), and Jootee Tulluu of Qellem, son and successor of Tulluu Guddaa of Wanaagaa.<sup>31</sup>

By 1882, Jootee Tulluu had conquered all Leeqaa clans north of Mt Tulluu Walal (Jimmaa, Horroo, Maleekoo, Daawutoo) as well as those west of the Walal massifs (Garjeeda, Laaloo of Garree), and ruled territories previously held by Bakakkoo Tufaa (Laaloo of Ko'ii and Yamaalogii). The Daallee, who were in conflict with their neighboring clan, the Laaloo, peacefully submitted to Jootee. Around 1884 Jootee invaded and conquered Sadii, driving its ruler Hirphaa Gumaa (Abbaa Daannoo) into exile in Daaphoo Gaachoo, although he was later able to reconquer the country. In addition to ceding territory to the Sadii, Jootee was unable to subdue the Anfilloo.<sup>32</sup> Sadii and Anfilloo rulers would become powerful contenders in the final showdown. Jootee made a massive territorial expansion, but failed to take control of the entire region. However, it was the once tiny state of Qellem in the Leeqaa region of Gidaamii (to the north of what would later become Qellem province), which grew to include all the territories of Jootee's other rivals. The whole of southwestern Wallagga came to be known to the public and Ethiopia's officialdom as Qèllem/**ቂለም** or **የጁቴ አገር**/the country of Jootee.

Among the pre-conquest Oromo states in the region, only Qellem was offered the chance to have its most transformative era documented in a traveler's account. Juan Maria Schuver's *Travels in Northeast Africa, 1881-1883* (which has recently been translated into English from various European languages) presents accounts of lost Macca Oromo industries, its political history, the 1880s mindset and preoccupations with local freedom. One is struck by the advanced level of the Oromo iron smelting and leather processing technologies, producing

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<sup>31</sup> Negaso Gidada, *History of the Sayyoo*, 245-329.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 236.

chain necklaces, razors, tweezers and soft leather coats. The volume of products is also intriguing, given the absence of long distance trade at the time—especially with the Gibe region, an area with which scholars are familiar.

Schuver's observations on the suicidal discord among Oromo political units are also informative. Small scale territorial units of Oromo monarchs or *gadaa* republicans defended local freedoms, leading to frequent conflict. In general, peace came with large scale territorial units and military strength. Jootee, according to Schuver, could mobilize a large army of twenty thousand soldiers that could only have been drawn from and supported by a large state with broad sources of revenue. While Jootee's ability to mobilise such an army was possible, it would not be a regular army, as Schuver was led to believe. Schuver's estimate of Jootee's army size represented the entire population of a small state, and they must have been ready for extremely rapid mobilization at a call from the Oromo monarch. There was a duty imposed on them, and the country was ready to face potential invasion by the neighboring Turco-Egyptian state, especially in relation to slave hunting. Schuver's documentation of the limits of Jootee's tax base and its implications for his inability to withstand an external threat are illuminating. In attempting not to encroach on the freedom of the country's inhabitants, Jootee suffered from weak defenses. Schuver's observations place Qellem within the context of pre-colonial Africa. His account is unique in his consideration of the Oromo without Ethiopian influence.<sup>33</sup> This was the situation in southwest Wallagga before the giant conquerors came from the east and the west—the Šäwa and Mahadists respectively.

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<sup>33</sup> Wendy James, G. Bauman, D. Johnson (eds), *Juan Maria Schuver's Travels in Northeast Africa, 1880-1883* (London: Hakluyt, 1996), 42-104.

## The Conquest

Although the region's peasants were partly victims of their elites' rivalry for ultimate supremacy (which gathered momentum in the 1880s), they were apparently less aware of the external threats coming from the Mahadists in the west or later from Menilek's Šäwa in the east. But the threat from the west dates back to the 1820s, when Mohammed Ali established a garrison in Kirin, north of Qellem, after the successful conquest of the Sudan with the intention of controlling the region's gold mines.<sup>34</sup> The primary significance of the Turco-Egyptian conquest of the Sudan was that it expanded the riverine agriculture which was heavily reliant on slave labour.<sup>35</sup> The Egyptians' arrival in the region had a more significant influence through its officers' involvement in the slave trade. According to some sources, underpayment affected the Turco-Egyptian rule of the region immediately north of Qellem, destabilizing it.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, Europeans who had been assigned to state enterprises, mercenary soldiers and Ali's officers chose to take wives or concubines from among the "light colored" Oromo women.<sup>37</sup> The result was an increase in the demand for slaves, a threat which was brought to Qellem by the Dinka—who after escaping enslavement sought refuge with Jootee "...offering their services as herders and as mercenary troops in exchange for reluctantly agreed peace."<sup>38</sup>

One visible impact of this threat was that Qellem lost its ability to obtain modern firearms, and its capacity to create larger states or political units was largely prevented. Qellem

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> M.W. Daly, *Empire on the Nile: The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan 1898-1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 231-232.

<sup>36</sup> Wendy James, et al (eds), *Juan Maria Schuver's*, 27-41; See also A.Triulzi, *Salt, Gold and Legitimacy: Prelude to the History of No-Man's Land, Bella-Shangul, Wallaga, Ethiopia, ca.1800-1898* (Napoli, 1981), pp. 9-98.

<sup>37</sup> R. Gray, *A History of the Southern Sudan 1839- 1889* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 6; P. Santi and R. Hill, *The Europeans in the Sudan: some manuscripts, mostly unpublished, written by traders, Christian Missionaries, officials and others* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), 3, 126 ,138.

<sup>38</sup> Wendy James, et al (eds), *Juan Maria Schuver's*, 68; Douglas H. Johnson, "On the Nilotic Frontier: Imperial Ethiopia in the Southern Sudan, 1898-1936," in *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia*, 232. The enormous size of 'Dinka' Juan Maria Schuver saw at Qumbaabii, then Jootee Tulluu's capital, were refugees from the Sobat and the White Nile and most likely included non-Dinka, particularly the Anuak, too.

was able to defend itself against threats from the north, but reduced its own opportunity to develop contact with the European world by doing so, diminishing the possibility that interaction with outside world—particularly regarding the acquisition of firearms—would help its ability to build a larger and more powerful Oromo political entity.

In the northern part of the region, Jootee conquered neighboring Oromo territories to unify the north under his rule. In the east, less powerful political-military elites in Sadii, Noolee and Arjoo had established an alliance against a more powerful ruler in part of Sayyoo, Bakakkoo Tufaa (Abbaa Dhaasaa) of Galaan.<sup>39</sup> This alliance helped Hirphaa Guumaa (Abbaa Daannoo) of Sadii overthrow Bakakkoo Tufaa in 1879/80. In the years between 1880 and 1886, the Arjoo-Noolee-Sadii regions were governed by allied rulers.<sup>40</sup>

Ethiopia's conquest of territories to the west and the southwest was conditioned by the outcome of the Battle of Embabo (6 June 1882), in which Menilek defeated *negus* Täklä-Haymanot of Gojjam, and the meeting at Borumèda where Emperor Yohannes IV (r.1872—89) decided to allow Menilek a free hand over the vast and resourceful Gibee region while restricting Täklä-Haymanot to a small territory south of Blue Nile (Abbay).<sup>41</sup> At Embabo and Borumèda, Menilek was offered opportunities that enabled him to extend his conquests further, to all territories west, south and southwest of the Blue Nile. Consequently, in 1882-83 Goobanaa was able to match as far west as Sayyoo, Qellem and Anfillo and as far southwest as Iluu Abbaa-boor and Gimra.<sup>42</sup>

As Menilek's conquests expanded rapidly from the east, the threat the Egyptians posed to Qellem in the west was replaced by the Mahadists, who in 1881-1882 purged the Egyptians from Sudan. After conquering Benishangul to the north, the Mahadists proceeded to invade

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<sup>39</sup> Negaso Gidada, *History of the Sayyoo*, 245-329.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> R.A. Caulk, "Territorial Competition and the Battle of Embabo," *JES* 8 (1), 1975, 80-83.

<sup>42</sup> Nägädä, "የሬስ ገበያ ታሪክ [A History of Ras Gobäna]," IES, memeo, 7.

territories under the control of Jootee in 1884-1885.<sup>43</sup> Jootee had achieved an enormous expansion of his domains, but there were two areas of resistance to his overall claim of supreme authority. With the introduction of modern firearms into the wider region by the 1880s, the precarious balance of power in Qellem changed significantly. In 1881, Jootee was reported to have possessed firearms. According to Schuver, there were sixteen “Arab” gunmen who had been sent to Jootee by the Bertha chiefs.<sup>44</sup> By the beginning of 1882, the number of Jootee’s gun-bearers had risen to a military unit of ninety soldiers.<sup>45</sup> It also seems that Jootee acquired firearms from the Mahadists who had been Qellem’s northern neighbours in Benishangul since 1882.

The Mahadist presence in Benishangul proved important in shaping the pattern of events before the Ethiopian conquest of Qellem. Trade had hitherto been the most important bridge linking the two regions. Qellem supplied Benishangul with coffee, tobacco and iron, and in return received salt and manufactured products which were brought to Benishangul from the Sudan in further trade exchanges.<sup>46</sup> The arrival of the Mahadists in Benishangul resulted in the influx of large numbers of traders—who brought Islam with them. Between 1882 and 1885, Islam made a peaceful appearance in Benishangul. By 1885 all Benishangul’s local chieftains had submitted to Mahadist rule and began to pay tax to Omdurman, the capital of the Mahadist state.<sup>47</sup> But Islam had not yet arrived in Qellem by 1885.

A number of sources suggest that Jootee may have been converted to Islam, but the role Islam played during this particular period remains undefined.<sup>48</sup> Whether or not Jootee was

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<sup>43</sup> A. Triulzi, “The Background,” 151.

<sup>44</sup> Wendy James et al (eds), *Juan Maria Schuver’s*, 83.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 161.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 8-69.

<sup>47</sup> A. Triulzi, *Salt, Gold*, 144-153.

<sup>48</sup> Regarding conflicting reports on Jootee’s conversion to Islam see A. Triulzi, “The Background,” 149-150; ATFN, ATFN, Asosa-Beggi Interviews (1972), 23/02/1972; Idem, Interview with Dembi Dollo Elders, 04/03/1972; Yosef Jotè (*Qägnazmach*), “የከቡር ደጃዝማች ጆቴ ሱሉ አጭር የህይወት ታሪክ [A Short Biography of *Däjjazmach* Jootee Tulluu,” (Amharic MS, n.d), 4; Enrico Cerulli, “The Folk Literature of the Galla of Southern Abyssinia” Reprint from *Harvard African Studies*, III (Cambridge, Mass, 1922), 43.

converted, he made massive efforts to turn the firearms obtained from his neighbors to his own advantage. A local documentary source states that Jootee invaded Anfillo and Sayyoo, his traditional enemies, with the help of the Mahadists. Jootee's invasion of Anfillo ended in a significant defeat.<sup>49</sup> By 1884 the news of Menilek's victory at Embabo and of Goobanaa's advance in the territories to the south and the southwest became known in Qellem. Rulers and citizens lived in fear of a new and approaching enemy. Jootee halted his planned campaigns against Anfillo and Sadii and was reported to have appealed to Anfillo and Sadii rulers to form an alliance under his leadership against the Amhara. The two rulers (Abbaa Gimbii of Anfillo, and Abbaa Daannoo of Sadii) agreed to Jootee's terms, and that all three rulers would be left to govern their old domains under Jootee's overall rule. It was also negotiated that neither Anfillo nor Sadii would pay tribute to Jootee, but that all three would build a united regional army to defend their countries from invaders. The three rulers sealed their agreement with a solemn oath, *kakaa*.<sup>50</sup> After the negotiations, Anfillo and Sadii remained neutral in the wars of conquest Jootee fought with other neighbors to the east and west of his old domain.<sup>51</sup>

In short, Jootee sought Mahadist help for his own territorial conquests. The Mahadists, who were once Jootee's allies, now came to be regarded as conquering enemies, although they were not militant towards Qellem during this period (1882-1885), but a dramatic turn of events in Sudan would soon change this. In June 1885 Mahdi died and Khalifa Abdallahi replaced him. The rise of Abdallahi brought more aggressive policies to the frontiers of the Mahadist state.<sup>52</sup> In addition to launching a number of jihadist wars against Sudanese rulers who resisted the Mahadist cause or whose Islamic faith had lapsed, the new leader sent provocative letters to Khedive Ismail of Egypt, Yohannes IV of Abyssinia and even Queen Victoria of Great

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<sup>49</sup> “የወረ በከረ ዜና መዋዕል [The Chronicle of Bākārè Family],” 276-277.

<sup>50</sup> Negaso Gidada, *History of the Sayyoo*, 236-237.

<sup>51</sup> Informants: Oliiqaa Eebbaa, D/Doolloo (14/08/2010), Waaqjira Hiixuu, Caanqaa (23/08/2010), Yosef Innooroo, Bishooftuu (11/10/2010).

<sup>52</sup> A. Triulzi, “The Background,” 151.

Britain.<sup>53</sup> Jootee was the first victim of this new Mahadist militancy as the Mahadists decreed rigid adherence to Islamic laws, imposed poll taxes on people and demanded a much higher tribute from Jootee.<sup>54</sup> It was said to have been Jootee who first rebelled against the Mahadist rule, calling for the Šawan-cum-Ethiopian assistance.<sup>55</sup> He began attacking Ansara (Mahadist soldiers) who entered his domain through Begi. But as Jootee directed all his efforts to repulsing the Ansara, Anfillo broke its neutrality and attacked Jootee from the back. Unable to withstand a two-pronged attack, Jootee fled to Naqamtee to ask for help from *Däjjazmach* Morodaa Bakaree, who, having peacefully submitted to Goobanaa in 1882, was already part of Menilek's expanding empire. By the time Jootee arrived in Naqamtee, *Ras* Goobanaa was apparently close, having been invited by Morodaa Bakaree—who was himself under the same Mahadist threat from the northern Sibuu country.<sup>56</sup> As he arrived in Naqamtee, Goobanaa was received both by Morodaa and Jootee.<sup>57</sup> The Chronicle of Bäkärè Family/**የወረ በከረ ዜና መዋዕል**, recorded:

...Thus *Däjjazmach* Jotè came to *Däjjazmach* Moräda and told him that the Anfillo had exterminated his people and asked him [Moräda] to help him... But he [Moräda] replied, 'what can I do for you?' appeal...to *Ras* Gobäna.' And *Däjjazmach* Jotè offered many gifts (*mätaya*) and appealed to *Ras* Gobäna. *Ras* Gobäna immediately appointed *dajjazmach* Jotè as *Däjjazmach* and made a proclamation for the campaign. By crossing the Dabus [River] through Gambel, *Ras* Gobäna devastated the [country of] Mao [of] Tulluu Arbaa. Returning from there, he made a campaign to Anfillo on his way back. Camping ... at a place called Amaara Caabbii ... and crossing a river called the Laga Bowa he confronted the Afillo who came to face him. Because the area was densely forested, the Anfillo blocked the way ... for two days. Thus, *Ras* Gobäna took a detour through a place called Gofgofi ... and camped at Garjéda... The ruler of Anfillo, Abbaa Gimbii ... came to Garjéda and paid tribute to *Ras* Gobäna. He [Gobäna] immediately and without spending the night, tied up his [Abbaa Gimbii's] hands and gave him over to *Däjjazmach* Jotè...<sup>58</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> ATFN, Muggi informants, 03/03/1972, Idem, Interview with Dembi Dollo Elders, 04/03/1972.

<sup>55</sup> Yosef Jotè, “የከቡር ደጃዝማች ጆቴ ቱሉ አጭር የህይወት ታሪክ,” 2.

<sup>56</sup> “የወረ በከረ ዜና መዋዕል [The Chronicle of Bäkärè Family], 277.

<sup>57</sup> A. Triulzi, “The Background,” 151.

<sup>58</sup> “የወረ በከረ ዜና መዋዕል [The Chronicle of Bäkärè Family],” 277.



As much as it provides accurate and useful information, the evidence presented here has its weakness too. Printed in 2004 in the volume edited by Alessandro Triulzi and Tesema Ta'a, the document has itself been reconstructed to negotiate the traditional leadership of the Bakaree family of Naqamtee under the modernizing requirements of the central government of imperial Ethiopia, which included literacy. The document was written by *Däjjazmach* Gäbrä-Egziabher (alias Kumsaa) Morodaa. The Bäkärè family at first appeared to have failed considerably in the exercise when in December 1923 the state printing press turned down its request to publish the “History of the Western Oromo Provinces” reconstructed from the family’s own perspective.<sup>59</sup> However, a decade later in November 1933, Addis Ababa requested that the family document the origin and history of the Macca Oromo groups in the western provinces.<sup>60</sup> It is no surprise, therefore, that the information presents the warra-Bäkärè, the ruling house of Naqamtee, as being far more powerful than any other, including Jootee, although by that point both Jootee and Morodaa had been equally humbled by the Mahadist threat and were both waiting for military support from Goobanaa in order to reassert themselves. At the same time, the narrative conceals key developments which resulted in the defeat of Anfillo. The submission of Abbaa Gimbii, then governor of Garjeeda, resulted from internal rivalry within the ruling house of Anfillo.<sup>61</sup> However, the family chronicle should not be wholly discounted as historical source, as the accuracy in its narrative, in naming places and people and providing historical contexts, particularly in the data quoted above, is impressive.

The course of events that followed Goobanaa’s meeting with Morodaa and Jootee suggest that they agreed on a plan of war, although sources are contradictory regarding the chronology. According to The Chronicle of the Bäkärè Family, a military expedition comprising Goobanaa, Morodaa and Jootee went to Anfillo first, built garrisons in Sibuu and

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> H.H. Wilson, “Report on the Expedition to Gore, Saiu, Afillo, Gidami etc,” WO 106/227, *SIR*, No. 126 (January 1905), Appendix A, 14.

then returned to Šawa. Later, when the Mahadists overran the Sibuu, he went there and defeated them.<sup>62</sup> Jootee's biography discusses only the arrival in Qellem and Anfillo of Goobanaa and excludes all other details.<sup>63</sup> A local documentary source from Benishangul, on the other hand, discusses both events without offering any clue to the chronology.<sup>64</sup> Every local documentary source appears to provide a different account based on its own presumed interests.

Whether the military alliance led by Goobanaa went to Anfillo first or to Sibuu, it was Goobanaa's triumphant march across southwestern Wallagga that crushed all of Jootee's rivals in the region, including Abbaa Gimbii of Anfillo—a victory Jootee had failed to achieve on his own. As Goobanaa marched across Qellem with Morodaa and Jootee he defeated the Anfillo with little difficulty and cleansed the region of any Ansar militancy that remained in isolated pockets of the region. With the fall of Anfillo and other areas of resistance, Jootee was confirmed governor of the whole of southwestern Wallagga, which would henceforth be renamed after his birthplace, Qellem.<sup>65</sup> Goobanaa bestowed on Jootee the title of *Däjjazmach* and declared him governor of the region to the west of Morodaa's territory, with the exception of Benishangul to the north, including Gambella. Jootee agreed to pay annual tribute to Menilek, to be converted to Orthodox Christianity and to allow the evangelization of the people.<sup>66</sup>

By the late 1880s, a direct relationship was established between Qellem and Menilek's government in Addis Ababa, although this relationship would survive for only thirteen years. Jootee was to pay an annual tribute, in return for which his domain would be free from settlement by *näſſagna/ነፍጠኛ* (literally gunmen), a politico-military class that was vital to the

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<sup>62</sup> “የወረ በከረ ዜና መዋዕል [The Chronicle of Bākärè Family],” 278.

<sup>63</sup> Yosef Jotè, “የከቡር ደጃዝማች ጆቴ ቱሉ አጭር የህይወት ታሪክ,” 2.

<sup>64</sup> Bakura Seyon Telahun, “የአሰላ የቤንሻንጉል አውራጃ ግዛት ታሪክ [The History of Benišangul Province]” (1953 EC, IES MS 359), 19.

<sup>65</sup> Yosef Jotè, “የከቡር ደጃዝማች ጆቴ ቱሉ አጭር የህይወት ታሪክ,” 2; “የወረ በከረ ዜና መዋዕል [The Chronicle of Bākärè Family],” 277.

<sup>66</sup> “የወረ በከረ ዜና መዋዕል [The Chronicle of Bākärè Family],” 277-278.

survival of the imperial state.<sup>67</sup> Jootee's annual tribute to the government of Addis Ababa was fixed at five hundred measures (*wäqèt/ወቂት*) of gold, four thousand pounds of ivory, two hundred slaves and seven thousand Maria Theresa thalers. Jootee would rule the whole of Qellem with a considerable level of internal autonomy as long as he remained obedient to Menilek's ultimate authority. He would be answerable only to Menilek, and there would be no administrative barrier separating the Emperor from his vassal.<sup>68</sup> In the first phase of Qellem's life under the Ethiopian Empire, which lasted from roughly 1886 to 1898, loyalty to Menilek and the annual tribute were the cost Jootee had to pay to retain autonomy in his Oromo province.

The remaining Oromo princes in Qellem were all placed under Jootee's rule. In the eastern part of Qellem, Hirphaa Guumaa (Abbaa Daannoo) of Sadii was reduced to the status of *abbaa-qabiyyee* in his own country. Bakakkoo Tufaa (Abbaa Dhaasaa) was subordinated to Jootee and was given part of Sayyoo to govern. Anfillo, as stated above, fought *Ras* Goobanaa for five days before its defense was broken, at which point the country was placed under Jootee.<sup>69</sup> Buraayyuu Barii of Haawwaa (popularly known as Braayyuu Abbaa Gosaa), one of the local rulers in Sayyoo—who had been on hunting expedition when Goobanaa arrived in Qellem—was also reduced to *abbaa-qabiyyee*.<sup>70</sup> Buraayyuu Barii, however, would have bearings on Jootee's hold over Qellem, and would soon prove a power to be reckoned with. Buraayyuu Barii swiftly allied himself with the Amhara nobilities, particularly Jootee's enemy *Ras* Täsämmaa Nadäw. He proved his military abilities—a resource the Ethiopia badly

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<sup>67</sup> Tesema Ta'a, "Defending Regional Autonomy and Cultural Identity: The Case of Leeqaa Naqamtee & Leeqaa Qellem (1882-1937)," JOS, 15 (1) (2008), 48-49.

<sup>68</sup> Statement of Fitaurari Ammaia, brother of Dejaz Joti, and Lij Merdasa, son of Dejaz Joti', Kelly; Sudan Intelligence Report (herein after SIR) No. 202 (May 1911), Appendix, 4.

<sup>69</sup> Informants: Rev. Ulaa Fiixumaa (14/08/2010, Dambi-Doolloo), Nägaš Shuuramoo (10/08/2010, Dambi-Doolloo), Baalchaa Deentaa (22/08/2005, Dambi-Doolloo).

<sup>70</sup> Yosef Jotè, "የከቡር ደጃዝማች ጆቴ ቱሉ አጭር የህይወት ታሪክ," 1-5; Negaso Gidada, *History of the Sayyoo*, 330-334; Enrico Cerulli, *Etiopia Occidentale*, vol.II (Roma: 1933), 100.

needed—at the battle of Adwa, and his country slipped out of Jootee’s domain.<sup>71</sup> Buraayyuu was given the title *fitawarari* and continued to work for Addis Ababa quelling rebellions in Gambella.<sup>72</sup> The creation in Jootee’s country of Haawwaa as an enclave accountable directly to Addis Ababa, rather than to Jootee, would become a political headache for Jootee over the coming years.

Thus, Qellem was conquered by the Amhara of Šawa and added into the Ethiopian empire state. Rivalry, conflict and war among the rulers and their principalities created a setting in which they used their energies to overcome one another. When they failed to achieve that, the strongest of them allied themselves with the restless Šawan Amhara state, which was already making huge military conquests in the region. It was this competition among local actors and their eventual conquest by the Šawan which determined the nature, content and form of relations between Qellem and Addis Ababa, laying the foundations of future relationships between Oromo peasants and their overlords that lasted until the outbreak of the 1974 revolution.

Despite the initial agreements defining Qellem’s internal autonomy, Menilek introduced tollgates in the post-Adwa period to collect taxes from traders, a responsibility that had until then come under Jootee’s jurisdiction.<sup>73</sup> The introduction of this administrative reform ended the first post-conquest phase, when Menilek’s only demands were an annual tribute and commerce. The subsequent growth of Jootee’s power in the region, in addition to Menilek’s gradually declining confidence in him as an Oromo ruler (augmented by the work of his enemies) eventually resulted in loss of imperial favour. It was these dynamic relations between

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<sup>71</sup> Nagash Shuramo, “A Biography of *Fitawrari* Burayyu Abba Gosa, 1845-1925” (BA Thesis in History, AAU, 1989), 28-38.

<sup>72</sup> Bahru Zewde, “Relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan on the Western Ethiopian Frontier, 1898-1936,” (PhD Thesis in History, SOAS, 1976), 115.

<sup>73</sup> Emperor Menilek to *Däjjazmach* Jootee Tulluu, Sänè 30, 1899 [07 July 1907], in Paulos Nñoonñ, **አጼ ሚኒልክ አገር ውስጥ የተጻፉት ደብዳቤዎች** (Emperor Menilek’s Domestic Correspondence) (Addis Ababa, 2003 E.C), 35.

central government and the local Oromo administrative structure that created the foundations upon which Menilek acted to remove his once highly trusted vassal and introduce a brutal *näffagna-gabbar* system. This system further complicated peasant state-relations, enabling the former to resist the latter. The multiple internal subtleties that had enabled the Ethiopian conquest and shaped Jootee's autonomy in Qellem in its early relations with Addis Ababa were also vital in terminating the Jootee-Menilek alliance. They were also in turn was crucial not only in defining the nature of relationships between Oromo peasants in Qellem Oromo peasants and their Amhara overlords, but also the social structure within peasant society. The process was thus decisive in determining the form, nature and content of the continuities and changes which shaped various dynamic developments for decades.

During this period (1886-1898) the resources Jootee needed (gold, ivory and slaves) to pay his annual tribute were abundantly available to him. He obtained ivory as tributes from his subordinates, who themselves collected it as taxes from hunters who killed elephants in the frontier zones of Qellem (in the forests of Sayyoo, Anfillo, and the Baro plains). Jootee himself was an enthusiastic elephant hunter in the region; he had his own team of professional hunters who brought him abundant ivory.<sup>74</sup> Jootee ensured that he had enough ivory to pay his annual tribute by monopolizing the ivory trade in his province. No hunter had any right to sell ivory to anybody but Jootee himself. British merchants filed serious complaints to Menilek about the matter, but Menilek was happy with Jootee's monopoly on ivory as he believed it would finally end up in his own hands—although that was not entirely true. The British Minister in Addis Ababa, who seemed not to understand how trade and tribute were inseparably linked, made repeated complaints to the Emperor, but to no avail.<sup>75</sup> When the number of elephants yielding ivory dwindled over time, Jootee himself became the only hunter, a career which Menilek

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<sup>74</sup> L. Vannutelli and C. Citerni, *Seconda Spedizione Bottego: l'Omo viaggio di esplorazione nell'Africa orientale* (Milano, 1899), 460-462.

<sup>75</sup> WO 106/234, SIR, No. 136 (November 1905), Appendix B, 7-10.

gladly allowed him to continue by offering him the monopoly.<sup>76</sup> Jootee also occasionally delivered various forms of presents, *mättaya*/ ሙታያ, sometimes for consideration of certain special local interests relating to his own province or as a gifts during holidays.

In addition to ivory, Jootee's subordinates also paid him tributes in gold, honey and clothes.<sup>77</sup> The Birbir valley, where gold and silver were mined, came under Jootee's jurisdiction.<sup>78</sup> The abundance of gold in the region led Vannutelli and Citeri, once Jootee's Italian prisoners of war, to conclude that all the gold circulating in 'Abyssinia' came from Qellem.<sup>79</sup> Jootee's slaves were the Goma (known to the Oromo as Komo), one of the pre-Oromo peoples who had inhabited a territory in Gidaamii (Jootee's home area) around Gaara Gemii, between the Dota and the Jikau Rivers.<sup>80</sup> Conquered by Jootee like all neighbouring Macca Oromo clans, they were ruled through a governor appointed by Jootee. Jootee's governors in Goma bore the title of *warra-gooftaa* (family of the lord), and used every excuse to enslave the Goma, despite the fact that they paid the regular annual tribute required of them in ivory, cotton and honey through the *warra-gooftaa*.<sup>81</sup> In short, Jootee met his annual tribute without pressing hard on his peasant subjects, which meant tht Qellem prospered under pre-Ethiopian socio-economic and political structures.

In the second phase of Qellem's existence under the Ethiopian Empire (1898-1908) the relationship between Menilek and Jootee became more complex. Goobanaa's arrival in Qellem resulted in the region's inclusion into the Ethiopian Empire—laying foundations for further changes in Qellem's socio-economic and political order—and hindered the advance of Islam

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<sup>76</sup> Menilek to Jootee, Sänè 30, 1899 [07 July 1907], in Paulos Nñoonño, 214.

<sup>77</sup> H.H. Wilson, "Report on the Expedition to Gore," *SIR*, No. 126 (January 1905), Appendix A, 14.

<sup>78</sup> A. Cecchi, *Da Zeila Alle Frontiere del Caffa*, vol. II (Rome: 1885), 487, 585.

<sup>79</sup> L. Vannutelli and C. Citeri, *Seconda Spedizione*, 42.

<sup>80</sup> The settlement of Goma people was not limited to Gidaamii, in Qellem. They inhabited a territory bounded by the Benishangul in the north, the Jikau River in the south, the Sudanese Dinka and the Nuer in the West, the Anyua in the southwest, and the Leeqaa Oromo in the east. See Tesema Ta'a, "A Brief Historical account of the Goma of the Ethio-Sudanese Frontier (ca.1880s-1950s)," in Bahru Zewde (ed), *Land, Gender and the Periphery: Themes in the History of Eastern and Southern Africa* (OSSREA, 2003),167-168.

<sup>81</sup> Yasin Mohammed, "The Komo of Gidami" (Addis Ababa University, BA Thesis in History, 1982), 13.

by expelling the Mahadists. This expulsion, in about 1886, impeded any further expansion of Islam into the province until the Tijaniyya managed to obtain a foothold much later, although even then it remained in isolated pockets and could not gain a wider influence. The Tijaniyya order was originally founded by Ahmed Al-Tijani in Fez, Morocco, in 1780. But it was a Nigerian, Sheik Al-Faki Ahmed Oumer, popularly known as *Sheekii Dambii*, who introduced Islam to Sayyoo, before attempting to expand it to other parts of the province.<sup>82</sup> However, the Ethiopian conquest imposed the introduction of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) into the province.

### **Conquering the mind: an introduction of the EOC**

As part of his agreement to submit to the Ethiopian conquest in ca. 1886, Jootee was converted to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity and took upon himself the introduction and expansion of the EOC.<sup>83</sup> Having converted to Orthodox Christianity himself, Jootee had all his family and kinsmen baptized by *Mämhir* Hailä-Mariam, the EOC priest responsible for the introduction of the new religion and the construction of its first church (Gidaamii Mariyam Church/St Mary's Church of Gidaamii) in Qellem. Jootee then proclaimed that all of his subjects should come to Gidaamii to be baptized into Orthodox Christianity. While a considerable number did as instructed, many local people did not come to Gidaamii.<sup>84</sup> In fact, much of the older generation resisted Jootee's proclamation, openly insisting on remaining worshipers of their

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<sup>82</sup> H.S. Lewis, *A Galla Monarchy: Jimma Abba Jifar, Ethiopia, 1830-1932* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), 4.

<sup>83</sup> ATFN, "Interview with *Mämhir* Walda-Sellasse," D/Doolloo, 28/02/1972; Negaso Gidada and Donald Crummey, "The Introduction and Expansion of Orthodox Christianity in Qélém *Awraja*, Western Wälläga, From About 1886 to 1941," *JES* 10 (1) (1972), 104-105. Some sources suggest an earlier date of the EOC's introduction to Qellem. Such sources claim that Jootee met *Mämhir* Hailä Mariam for the first time during his campaign against the Laaloo, which took place sometime before the arrival of *Ras* Goobanaa. However, there is no evidence to indicate the pre-1886 presence of the EOC in Qellem, although the EOC patriarchate list claims there were some outposts of the religion. The opening of a number of the EOC churches as well as the conversion of local people happened only after 1886.

<sup>84</sup> ATFN, "Interview with *Mämhir*," 3-10; Idem, ATFN, Asosa-Beggi Interviews (1972), 23/02/1972; Idem, Interview with Dembi Dollo Elders, 04/03/1972.

traditional deity, *Waaqa*. Jootee did not react to this disobedience, because Hailä-Mariam would soon begin touring in the region to apply mass baptisms.<sup>85</sup> Jootee proclaimed his support for the EOC not because he was an ardent believer, but because it was a requirement imposed on him by the Ethiopian Empire. Given his submission to the Ethiopian conquest, he seemed to have understood clearly the links between his willingness and ability to expand the EOC and his own legitimacy to rule—which after 1886 was regarded as more of a result of Addis Ababa's benevolence than anything else.

Jootee and Hailä-Mariam pressured subordinates who refused to convert. Hailä-Mariam was ordered to visit the domain of every *balabbat* to identify Oromo elites who were determined to resist conversion to the EOC. Local traditions relate that the resisters were only willing to allow the gradual conversion of their children, but not themselves. “We are not against conversion of our children; as for us, we shall continue to sacrifice to our parents’ *qolo*” (a holy place reserved for worshipping near every household's residence) was among well quoted answers Hailä-Mariam received from those who refused to convert. As Hailä-Mariam identified such *balabbat* and reported to Jootee, he gave them a choice between accepting the conversion and leaving their land—the foundation of their socio-economic status and political power. In many places where the *balabbat* delayed answering, Hailä-Mariam had himself escorted with armed soldiers back to their dwellings, where he performed conversion rites in their own homes.<sup>86</sup>

Forced conversion during this early period eventually compelled the Oromo *balabbat* to formally attach themselves to the EOC, although they secretly continued to worship *Waaqa*. The forced conversion did not effectively expand Orthodox Christianity among the *balabbat*.<sup>87</sup> But the advent in Qellem of the EOC was not a simple introduction of new religion, it was part

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<sup>85</sup> ATFN, “Interview with *Mämhir*,” 3-10. This rare source provides insights into unique method of EOC imposition on local elites, but it has a limit since there is serious lack of similar sources (both oral and written).

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.



of the conquest. According to the traditions of the EOC priests, *Mämhiri* Hailä-Mariam gave no instruction in the Christian faith before baptism. Instead, his preachings—and those of his assistant priests who came after him—were characterized by vociferous attacks on Oromo cultural practices, which they believed stood against EOC moral standards. They actively discouraged *qaalluu*, *dhibaayyuu*, *buttaa*, *ateetee*, *dancii*, polygamy and many other traditional Oromo practices.<sup>88</sup> Conversion to Orthodox Christianity had little to do with proselytization but was instead a marker of one's social standing in Qellem society and of recognition by the state authorities. Unless a man was known as an adherent of the EOC, he was forbidden from taking part in feasts organized by regional governors and below, *gibir/ ግብር*, and from sitting at table with his superiors. He could not expect to be recognised by an Amara official. This is how the Šāwan Amahara conquest of Qellem became a way of introducing the EOC into the region of as part of the conquest.<sup>89</sup>

Between 1886 and 1908, the EOC priests were rumoured to practice cannibalism. When corpses were taken to churches for burial, and students recruited for Christian classes taught in Gidaamii did not return home at all, a considerable number of Qellem's inhabitants were led believe that "EOC priests were eating human flesh." During the foundation of Abbo Church at Saarii, Qaaqee (in eastern Qellem), the rumour spread like wildfire. A popular song in Qellem summarises the content of the campaign against the introduction of the EOC. The lyrics of the song instilled fear about anything that related to the EOC:

**Oromo**  
*Bataskaana Saariitti*  
*Lafa awwaala gaarii*  
*Rarraasanii dhaquu*  
*Fattaasanii qalu.*<sup>90</sup>

**Rough translation**  
 At the Church of Saarii  
 Where the burial place is so good  
 [The dead] are carried there hangd [on people's shoulder]  
 But they are butchered there

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<sup>88</sup> Informants: Rev. Ulaa Fiixumaa (14/08/2010), Nägaš Shuuramoo (10/08/2010), Baalchaa Deentaa (22/08/2005), D/Doolloo; Negaso and Crummey, "The Introduction and Expansion," 105.

<sup>89</sup> ATFN, "Interview with *Mämhiri*," 3-10.

<sup>90</sup> Informants: Fiixee Birrii (05/08/2010); Baalchaa Deentaa (22/08/2005), Dambi-Doolloo.

This example shows how traditionalists denied the EOC a free social space; they confronted the church with suspicion and rumour. After his arrival in Gidaamii, *Mämhér* Hailä Mariam used one of big buildings Jootee had built him as a school, and made early efforts to teach Amharic. Although his earliest students were Jootee's children, the school was soon expanded to include the sons of other Oromo *baläbbat* from various parts of Qellem. Given the distance between their parents' home and Gidaamii as well as Jootee's commitment to providing student accommodation and provisions, some students rarely returned home, and many never returned at all.<sup>91</sup> The song likens this to the burial of dead bodies in and around the Orthodox Church, which was a new phenomenon, and accused Orthodox priests of eating human flesh, both dead and alive.

This challenge, however strong it may have been, did not last for very long, but the EOC was still seen by the local population as an alien institution. Over the coming decades, the EOC became part of the brutal *näffagna-gäbbar* system, particularly after 1917. The Oromo thus saw the EOC as an agent of oppression and exploitation, rather than a force of evangelization. The local people in Qellem knew of the EOC's connection with the forces of conquest, so it came as little surprise when the locals were mobilized by Protestant missionaries, who, in sharp contrast to the EOC priests, arrived with the Bible already translated into *Afaan Oromoo* (Oromo language), a language the EOC actively discouraged and despised. The Protestant missionaries' evangelization involved the use of Oromo cultural elements in support of the Oromo culture and in opposition to the EOC. Over the course of time, particularly from the 1940s onwards, the EOC became weakened by the gradual influence of Evangelical Christianity (EVC). The process became complex and sophisticated as the state came to the aid of the EOC. This is covered in much more detail in Chapter Six.

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<sup>91</sup> Negaso and Crummey, "The Introduction and Expansion," 104-105.

When *Mämhir* Hailä-Mariam was removed in 1917 by *Däjjazmach* Biru Wald-Gabriel (who was sent by Addis Ababa as Qellem's Amhara governor after Jootee's deposition, there were at least eight EOC churches in Qellem.<sup>92</sup> The geographical spread of the churches suggests that they were constructed where the local *balabbat* were genuinely converted and in areas directly ruled by Jootee's relatives. Accordingly, Jootee's brothers Diimaa Tulluu (governor of Jimmaa), Araddaa Tulluu (governor of Tajjoo), and Ashanaa Tulluu (governor of Waabaraa) established EOC churches in their domains. Hosanaa, the son of Jootee, established one in Sayyoo (Tabor), where he was governor. *Fitawrari* Buraayyu Barii (Buraayyu Abba Gosaaa) established his in Mojoo (at Jaalallee)—although he did this quite independently of Jootee, because of he was given separate autonomy by Menilek. The remaining three churches were erected by *Fitawrari* Yaaddressaa Guumaa of Sadii at Oogiyoo; *Fitawrari* Qajeelaa Abbaa Gimbii of Anfillo at Heenachee and Abbaa Dhasaa at Haawwaa.<sup>93</sup> Generally the EOC lacked sufficient missionary zeal, and did little to expand itself in the Oromo territory it was given as its exclusive domain. In fact, most of the success it achieved in Qellem was derived from the socio-economic and political advantages it offered its followers. It did not encourage any initiatives of its own to safeguard its position.

In addition to running the local Church and making baptismal tours in the region, *Mämhir* Hailä-Mariam opened a church school in Gidaamii, designed for the children of the ruling elite and other Oromo notables. The first recruits were *Däjjazmach* Jootee's own children—Adabaa, Mardasaa, Odaa, Innooroo, Hosanaa, Dhufeeraa, and Caalaa. As the students joined him, Hailä-Mariam's first job was to change their Oromo name to Amharic and Biblical variants. Adabaa was renamed Solomon, Odaa became Yohannes and Caalaa became Bälläṭa. Mardaasa kept his name until his death, and there is no available documentation on

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<sup>92</sup> Informants: Rev. Ulaa Fiixumaa (14/08/2010), Nägaš Shuuramoo (10/08/2010), Baalchaa Deentaa (22/08/2005), Dambi-Doolloo; ATFN, "Interview with *Mämhir*," 3-10.

<sup>93</sup> ATFN, "Interview with *Mämhir*," 3-10. The EOC patriarchate lists 14, a claim not supported by any source.

Innooroo and Dhufeeraa.<sup>94</sup> Changing names was part of the daily job of EOC priests, and was considered as part of what they referred to as their “civilizing mission”.

In discouraging Oromo culture and setting new moral standards for Qellem, the EOC seemed conscious of what it was doing. By Christianizing-cum-Amharising the region’s inhabitants, the church was entrusted with the assignment of integrating the province into the Ethiopian empire that was dominated by the habäša politico-cultural core. This involved arming the church with resources—especially land and labor—and supporting its attempts to destroy its enemies—both perceived and real. This came to threaten the age-old Oromo peasants’ subsistence farming, as the Church-state alliance incited peasant opposition that sought to mobilize Oromo cultural elements (this will be discussed in Chapter Six).

The Ethiopian empire’s project of national integration was conceived as assimilationist. “It was taken for granted that integration meant assimilation and Ethiopia was to become Abyssinia writ large,” wrote John Markakis.<sup>95</sup> I will return to this subject at the conclusion of the thesis, but here it is sufficient to stress that a strong vassalage had been created by Menilek in Qellem. The introduction of the EOC into Qellem was a factor of the subtleties and complexities that determined the form and nature of continuity and change, which in turn shaped various dynamic developments for decades after Qellem’s incorporation into the Empire.

### **Qellem under the Empire: the beginning**

The details of the political arrangement—or more appropriately the agreement of conquest reached between Jootee and Goobanaa—that tied Qellem to Addis Ababa, suggest that at the beginning of the arrangement the most important bridge between the two had been the annual

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<sup>94</sup> ATFN, “Interview with Qes Gidada Solan and Ato Nagawo Tullu,” Dambi-Doolloo, 01/03/1972, 20-25; Idem, “Interview with *Mämhir*,” 3-10.

<sup>95</sup> John Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers* (James Currey, 2011), 125.

tribute the former paid to the latter. Tribute collection for the Ethiopian Empire, unlike the neighbouring European colonial states, was not a means to an end, it was an end in itself.<sup>96</sup> A broader view of the history of Abyssinia—and later the Ethiopian empire—indicates that demanding tribute usually preceded conquest. Accordingly, before the Battle of Adwa (1 March 1896) Menilek took little interest in Jootee's local administrative affairs. When he did so, there must have been good reason, such as issues involving capital punishment or relations with the neighboring provinces, particularly Benishangul and Iluu Abbaaboora. Menilek's bold determination to erode the autonomy of Jootee's province, as we shall see below, came in the aftermath of the Battle of Adwa. But before looking at the continuities and changes of the post-Adwa period it is important to look briefly at the structures of Qellem's administration that Jootee erected under imperial Ethiopia.

If vital relations between Addis Ababa and its provinces were shaped by tributes, then the same aspects also shaped local structures. Jootee's collection of taxes and tributes from his own subjects required an administrative structure whereby the *abbaa-qabiyyee* assumed a new role as *qoroo*, the pre-conquest Oromo title referring to the administrator of a number of villages under Oromo rule. The *qoroo* collected tributes and taxation through *abbaa-qabiyyee*, and were generally descended from pioneer settlers who took over the leadership of their lineage or clan. The *abbaa-qabiyyee* lost their traditional powers under the Ethiopian administration, but preserved their local influence because of their wealth. Knowledge of Oromo customary laws and fairness in executing them were the most important criteria for appointment, as well as property. While the first two criteria reflected local interests, the third, property, was imposed by Jootee as indemnification for taxes and tributes. As Jootee started building administrative structures under the Ethiopian Empire, he declared to all localities,

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<sup>96</sup> See, for example, Douglas H. Johnson, "On the Nilotic Frontier: Imperial Ethiopia in the Southern Sudan, 1898-1936," in *The Southern Marches of Imperial*, 219-245.

“send me your respected ones,” a system of representation inherited from the *gadaa* system under which elected and trusted men would be delegated to supervise and control communal issues.<sup>97</sup>

The system was known as *kennata* representation (from *kennachuu*, to send a delegate). The size of the land every *qoroo* represented varied depending on the size of its population.<sup>98</sup> The *abbaa-qabiyyee* were also responsible, where applicable, for collection of elephant tusks from hunters and gold from prospectors, and for collecting poll tax. Now they were given a new Amharic title by the Ethiopian Empire: *balabbat/ባለቤት*. *Balabbat*, in the Abyssinian homeland, referred to those with hereditary *rist/ርስት* tenure rights to land, and the term described people of a certain social standing. In the conquered south, the word denotes landlord.<sup>99</sup> From their role as *qoroo*, the *balabbat* grew to become a new administrative layer between Jootee and the Oromo peasants. Village heads, *alangee*, were appointed under the *balabbat*. Making use of the Ethiopian Empire’s new administrative machinery, descendants of the *balabbat* and *alangee* amassed enormous local economic and political power and emerged as landlords. Despite interruptions between 1908 and 1912, and 1917 and 1933, they came to represent the first and second phases of the *näftagna-gäbbar* system, and during the Italian occupation of 1936-41, these local elites’ descendants presided over issues of land and administration until the 1974 revolution.<sup>100</sup> Justice was deliberated under old Oromo laws, but capital cases had to be referred to Addis Ababa. Local judges held weekly courts, whose procedures were regular and strictly orderly. Both defendants and the plaintiff employed counsels for their cases.<sup>101</sup> In short, imperial Ethiopia’s structures of governance and its ability

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<sup>97</sup> Informants: Rev. Ulaa Fiixumaa (14/08/2010), Nägaš Shuuramoo (10/08/2010), Baalchaa Deentaa (22/08/2005), Dambi-Doolloo.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> John Markakis, *Ethiopia*, 110.

<sup>100</sup> Informants: Rev. Ulaa Fiixumaa (14/08/2010), Nägaš Shuuramoo (10/08/2010), Baalchaa Deentaa (22/08/2005), Dambi-Doolloo.

<sup>101</sup> FO 1/44, Major Gwynn “Report on the proposed Egyptian-Abyssinian Boundary Between The Blue Nile and The Soban rivers,” Enc. In Major Gwynn, R.E to the Director of Surveys, Egyptian Army (Cairo, May 1900), 8.

to rule was “strongly shaped by indigenous social forces” as the imperial state relied on and integrated a considerable number of local elites to govern.<sup>102</sup> In fact, as Tobias Hagmann and Didier Péclard strongly argue, “states are deeply embedded in social forces”; they are not external to society.<sup>103</sup>

Under Jootee’s rule, the old land tenure system remained unaffected.<sup>104</sup> By allowing Menilek to conquer southwestern Wallagga, Jootee not only crushed his old rivals and set himself up as overall governor, he was allowed by Menilek, consciously or otherwise, to act as one of the Empire’s most powerful vassals. The growth of Jootee’s power in Qellem helped enable Menilek in his systematic annexation of almost all of Qellem, and later the neighboring Benishangul, leading to the completion of Wallagga’s conquest. At the same time it also initially spared the people of Qellem from the direct *näftägna* settlement and feudal exploitation by the Šāwan Amhara.

Jootee also had to render military support to Menilek in times of need, and during the Empire’s major call to arms for the battle of Adwa, he recruited and sent soldiers to fight against the Italians. Menilek received a battalion of two to three hundred well-armed men headed by Jootee himself at Warra Ilu in Wallo, but he sent them back to defend the southwestern frontier against possible encirclement or aggression from other colonial powers.<sup>105</sup> It was this imperial order which in 1897 caused Jootee to punish an expedition of the Italian Geographical Society led by Captain Vittorio Bottego, who was killed along with many of his entourage.<sup>106</sup> The battle at Dhagaa-Roobaa, where Jootee destroyed Bottego’s party, won Jootee national pre-eminence

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<sup>102</sup> This conclusion is drawn in line with most recent literature that emphasizes the historicity of African states. See, for example, Tobias Hagmann and Didier Péclard, “Negotiating Statehood,” 542.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Informants: Asefa Boroo (08/08/2010), Baalchaa Deentaa (22/08/2005), Baay’ataa Bulii (14/08/2010), D/Doolloo; ATFN, “LQ 4—Interview with Qes Gidada Soolan and Nagawoo Tulluu” (1972), 4.

<sup>105</sup> Gabra-Sellasse (*Tsahafe-tizaz*), ታሪክ ዘመን ዘዳግማዊ ሚኒሊክ ዘኢትዮጵያ [History of Ethiopia During the Reign of Menilek II] (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, 1959 EC), 231.

<sup>106</sup> Vannutelli and Citerni, *Seconda Spedizione*, 350-463; A.Lavagetto, *La vita Eroica*, 219-238.

among the vassals of the conquered south.<sup>107</sup> It was one of the most important regional factors behind the rise of Jootee in the broader western Ethiopian region, and may also have inspired him to defy Minilek from time to time. For Menilek, Jootee's attitude would be an important factor in convincing Menilek to remove him, although this had not been officially declared yet.

Jootee was given a role in Menilek's post-Adwa conquests, and was ordered to participate in the conquest of Benishangul in 1897-98, shortly after Adwa. Qellem helped Menilek considerably in extending the Ethiopian Empire's border towards the Sudan. Meanwhile, Sheik Khojele Al Hassan of Assosa had sought an alliance with the British against Menilek.<sup>108</sup> A large Ethiopian army comprising three groups (Leeqaa-Naqamtee under Kumsaa Morodaa, Qellem under Jootee and others under *Ras* Mäkonnen) arrived at Mandii ready to fight the Benishangul forces.<sup>109</sup> Upon the arrival of Mäkonnen, Sheik Khojale is said to have sided with him against Tor Elguri, another Benishangul leader. Mäkonnen's troops did not enter Khojale's territory, and returned to Harar after nine months of campaign in Benishangul. Later, Sheik Khojele was found to be in league with the British, and although he submitted peacefully, the coalition forces took him prisoner and sent him to Menilek, who imprisoned him for the next nine years. Benishangul was put under *Ras* Dämissäw's lieutenant, *Fitawrari* Gulilat, but his soldiers were not popular, and Dämissäw's rule became increasingly chaotic over the subsequent five years, until Menilek put Benishangul under *Däjjazmach* Kumsaa Morodaa of Naqamtee from 1903 until 1908.<sup>110</sup> In 1898, Jootee also apparently mobilized his army in support of the 1898 Fashoda Expedition commanded by *Däjjazmach* Dämissäw Näsibu of Arjo.<sup>111</sup> Jootee's involvement in extending Menilek's Empire

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<sup>107</sup> Emperor Menilek to King Umberto, Miazia 7, 1889 [13 February 1897], in Paulos Nñonñ, *አጼ ሚኒልክ ወደ ውጪ ሀገራት የተገኘቸው ደብዳቤዎች* [Emperor Menilek's Foreign Correspondences] (Addis Ababa, 2003 E.C), 74.

<sup>108</sup> Atieb Ahmed Dafalla, "Sheikh Khojole Al-Hassan and Bella-Shangul (1825-1938) (BA Thesis in History: Addis Ababa University, 1973), 50.

<sup>109</sup> A.Triulzi, *Salt, Gold*, 176-178.

<sup>110</sup> Atieb Dafalla, "Sheikh Khojole," 42.

<sup>111</sup> ATFN, Asosa-Beggi Interviews (1972), 1-17.



lasted longer, and would become a source of conflicting historical and political narratives. The next generation of Oromo elites refused to be subjected to the lowest *näffägna* force Addis Ababa had sent to conquer Qellem, contending that they might have participated in conquering new lands for the Empire and that they had to be counted according to their wealth, not as fellow human beings. The argument sparked court proceedings which form the subject of Chapter Four, but it would suffice here to say that the military services Jootee had delivered as a vassal of the Ethiopian Empire were among key historical subtleties and complexities that shaped the form and content of the continuities and changes that lasted until the 1974 revolution.

In the context of Africa, Qellem's encounter with the Ethiopian empire is similar, but not identical, to the accommodation model of St. Louis and the Senegal River valley, where the local Muslim governors examined the French colonial system and came to an accommodation with the French intentions to their own advantage.<sup>112</sup> However, the case of Qellem does not fit into John Lonsdale's Kenyan conquest state model, where local governors acknowledged forcibly enforced colonial order but were soon nominated by the colonial state.<sup>113</sup> Again it is at odds with the Belgian Congo's *Bula Matari* model, where the colonial system was introduced with unprecedented brutality and sustained by violence that paid no regard to local socio-cultural and political realities or interests.<sup>114</sup>

The status and trust Jootee had enjoyed in Menilek's Empire was short-lived, as were the local infrastructures he built in Qellem. The demise and eventual fall of Jootee was to result in dramatic socio-economic and political transformations in Qellem, and came about due to both local-regional challenges to Jootee's administration and growing incompatibility between the expansion of Jootee's power and Menilek's post-Adwa desires to further his control over

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<sup>112</sup> David Robinson, *Paths of Accommodation: Muslim Societies and French Colonial Authorities in Senegal and Mauritania, 1880-1920* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000).

<sup>113</sup> John Lonsdale, "The Conquest State of Kenya," in J. A. de Moor and H.L. Wesseling (eds), *Imperialism and War: Essays on Colonial Wars in Asia and Africa* (Lieden: Brill, 1989), 87-120.

<sup>114</sup> Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative perspective* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994).

the wealth of the conquered south. The level of violent coercion Jootee chose to pursue against his old rivals and territories, particularly Anfillo, the Goma and their local governors, armed his enemies with a series of accusations to file against him to Menilek. Sheik Khojale Al Hassan of Assosa, *Ras Täsämma Nadäw* of Iluu Abbaaboora, and *Fitawrari* Buraayyuu Barii of Sayyoo took turns to ally themselves with one another in reducing—and finally destroying—Menilek’s trust in one of his most powerful vassals.

Anfillo, a territory Jootee was unable to conquer before 1886—and where, in fact, his forces were repulsed with huge military losses—became a source of early accusations filed against him in Addis Ababa. After Anfillo’s eventual subjection to his authority, Jootee made a number of raids on it. His reasons for these raids are not fully clear from available sources, but they appear to have been provoked by Anfillo’s resistance to increased tributes. One of Jootee’s wives, Mankalle (daughter of an Anfillo noble, Abbaa Caalaa), was from Anfillo, and Jootee himself had one of his daughters, Birriituu, married to a young Anfillo prince, Abbaa Kumsaa, who produced a son (Dagaagoo) but died in 1900 at a very young age. Sometime after the conquest of Anfillo in 1886, Jootee’s brothers-in-laws, sons of Abbaa Caalaa, defied Jootee’s authority. Jootee mobilized a large army against Anfillo, raided the country and captured his in-laws (seven in number), all of whom he hanged. His soldiers looted and killed dozens of people.<sup>115</sup> On Abbaa Kumsaa’s death in 1900, Jootee again raided Anfillo. This time Birriituu, his own daughter, led an organized resistance against her father’s military raid. After crushing this resistance, Jootee looted all of Abbaa Kumsaa’s properties and as much of everyone else’s as he was able.<sup>116</sup> Birriituu escaped to Addis Ababa with the help of *Fitawrari* Buraayyuu Barii, Jootee’s old rival.<sup>117</sup>

Supported by Sheik Khojale Al Hassan, who was said to have lent them gold worth

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<sup>115</sup> WO 106/234, SIR No. 188 (March 1910), Appendix C, 17-18; H.H. Wilson, “Report on the Expedition to Gore,” SIR No. 126, 14.

<sup>116</sup> H.H. Wilson, “Report on the Expedition to Gore,” 7.

<sup>117</sup> WO 106/234, SIR No. 188 (March 1910), Appendix C, 17-18.

fifteen thousand Maria Theresa Dollars to take their case to Menilek, the people of Anfillo presented their case to the Emperor in 1904. Menilek decided in favour of Anfillo, and summoned Jootee to Addis Ababa in the rainy season of 1905, a season during which the Emperor did not like his vassals coming to the capital, even when they requested to do so.<sup>118</sup> Jootee was told to return all the property he had looted from Abbaa Kumsaa and to pay compensation to all who had suffered from his military raids in Anfillo. Pending restitution, Anfillo was given an administrative status independent of Jootee.<sup>119</sup> To oversee the execution of his decisions, Menilek sent Bäläṭä Kätärto to Anfillo.<sup>120</sup>

Another source of Jootee's troubles originated from his claim over Beggi, a territory that would become a bone of contention over the coming decades between successive Qellem governors and Benishangul. Although he had subdued a number of territories surrounding an enclave bequeathed to him by his father Tullu Guddaa, Jootee did not appear to have conquered Beggi before the coming of *Ras* Goobanaa in 1886. Nor did he seem to have done so immediately after he had subdued the Anfillo with the help of Goobanaa. The territory of Beggi has a long history as an independent county governed by descendants of immigrants from the Sudan, whose traditions of origin were similar to those of the Sheikdoms of the Sa'id.<sup>121</sup> Beggi had been governed by a very strong chief, Kutu Golja—at least since the last quarter of the nineteenth century—who, like other Sa'id Arab Sheiks, had been paying tribute to the Turco-Egyptian government. Shortly before the Ethiopian conquest, Kutu Golja allied himself with Sheik Khojale Al Hassan and was reportedly paying him tribute.<sup>122</sup>

Jootee's inability to conquer Beggi in the 1880s was attributed to the region's

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<sup>118</sup> H.H. Wilson, "Report on the Expedition to Gore, 6; Informants: Rev. Ulaa Fiixumaa (14/08/2010), Nāgaš Shuuramoo (10/08/2010), Baalchaa Deentaa (22/08/2005), Dambi-Doolloo.

<sup>119</sup> H.H. Wilson, "Report on the Expedition to Gore," 6-7.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>121</sup> Wendy James et al (eds), *Juan Maria Schuver's*, 48.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* In 1821, Mohammed Ali, having occupied the Sudan, ordered the establishment of a garrison in Kirin, the capital of Kutu Golja, to control and develop the gold mines in the area.

attachment to the Turco-Egyptian government. Sheik Khojale Al Hassan also made no attempt to take control of Beggi for the same reasons. In 1898, Khojole Al Hassan was believed to have made secret deals with the British, inviting them to take control of his country. He was arrested by *Däjjazmach* Dämissäw Nasibu of Arjo, and taken to Menilek.<sup>123</sup> As Benishangul became part of the Ethiopian empire, and with *Shiek* Khojale Al Hassan taken prisoner, Jootee saw an opportunity to absorb Beggi into his province.<sup>124</sup> Kutu Golja objected to this, as he wanted Beggi to be treated as one Benishangul's three sheikdoms. Although *Däjjazmach* Dämissäw, the region's Amhara supervisor, had no objection to the transfer, the case was brought to Menilek who put it on hold and appointed Basha Zäwdè as an interim local governor in 1900.<sup>125</sup> Benishangul was placed under Dämissäw's supervision, which lasted until 1903, when Menilek transferred his responsibility to *Däjjazmach* Kumsaa Morodaa of Naqamtee.<sup>126</sup>

Dämissäw's supervision of Benishangul meant that Jootee was unable to gain direct access to Beggi after the conquest. But when Kumsaa Morodaa succeeded Dämissäw Nasibu as superintendent of Benishangul, he gave Jootee permission to incorporate Beggi into his domain. In translating this into practice, however, Jootee turned it into a bloody and deadly undertaking. He mobilised an army under the command of his famous war general *Fitawrari* Nadhii. At the battle of Gitten in 1903, Kutu Golja of Beggi refused to surrender, was defeated and fled to Iluu Abbaa-boor. According to British intelligence the population was "practically wiped out," and approximately sixty men and women who managed to make their way to Assosa were the only survivors.<sup>127</sup> Jootee had managed to occupy Beggi, although this would become a fertile ground for his enemies. Meanwhile, Täsämma was already in dispute with

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<sup>123</sup> A.Triulzi, *Salt, Gold*, 172-180.

<sup>124</sup> FO 1/47, Gwynne report in Cromer to Lansdowne, 27 June 1903; FO 1/44, Major Gwynn "Report on the proposed Egyptian-Abyssinian," (Cairo, May 1900), 8.

<sup>125</sup> FO 1/44, Major Gwynn "Report," 8.

<sup>126</sup> Bahru Zawde, "Relations," 179.

<sup>127</sup> WO 106/232, SIR No.190 (May 1901), "Some Notes on the Abyssinian Districts of Beni Shangul, Gomasha, and Assosa, compiled in the intelligence office Khartoum," 13.

Jootee for two main reasons. One was their rivalry over the control of Gaambellaa's trade, the other was Jootee's rejection of Täsämma's superintendence over his domain, an appointment which Täsämma was given as Addis Ababa gradually began to erode Qellem's post-Adwa autonomy. Täsämma was determined to take advantage of Jootee's bloody violence in Beggi, so he presented the case to Menilek, who summoned Jootee to Addis Ababa once again.<sup>128</sup> Menilek seems to have taken Kutu Golja's older raids on Jootee's territory into consideration (about which Jootee had repeatedly complained to Menilek) as provocations that had led to the confrontation, and asked Kumsaa Morodaa of Naqamtee to arbitrate the matter.<sup>129</sup> However, the type of pragmatic administrative approach Menilek subsequently chose to handle Qellem put Jootee in more trouble, locally as well as with his neighbours, but he chose to pursue it piecemeal until 1908 (his reasons will be made clear below).

The affectionate relations Jootee and Menilek had enjoyed during the first phase of Qellem's incorporation into the Ethiopian Empire (1886-1898) were absent during the second phase (1898-1908). From 1903, the same year Täsämma complained about Jootee's deadly violence in Beggi, Jootee's annual tribute was raised to four thousand pounds of ivory, two hundred slaves, one thousand three hundred *wäqèt* of gold and twenty thousand thalers in the post-Adwa period.<sup>130</sup> In September 1905, Menilek notified Jootee that he was overriding the latter's right to levy tax on traders and had decided instead to open a customs office in Jootee's province, run by Addis Ababa's own personnel.<sup>131</sup> Jootee furiously opposed the establishment of tollgates by Menilek in his province, and Menilek openly rebuked him, confirming his intention to install the tollgates.<sup>132</sup> Menilek sent a number of *Näggadras* to Qellem to collect

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<sup>128</sup> SIR No. 190, "Some Notes on the Abyssinian Districts," 13.

<sup>129</sup> Menilek to Gabra-Egziabher, Mäskäräm 12, 1898 EC [22 September 1905] in Paulos Nññoñño, 35; Idem, Menilek to Gabra-Egziabher, Hidar 6, 1898 [15 Nov. 1905], 53.

<sup>130</sup> "Statement of Fitaaurari Ammaia, brother of Dejaz Joti, and Lij Merdasa, son of Dejaz Joti," Kelly; FO 371/1111, SIR No. 202 (May 1911), Appendix, 4.

<sup>131</sup> Menilek to Jootee, Mäskäräm 12, 1898 EC [22 September 1905] in Paulos Nññoñño, 35.

<sup>132</sup> Menilek to Jootee, Miazia 08, 1900 [16 April 1908] in Paulos Nññoñño, 362; Idem, Menilek to Jootee, Mäskäräm 12, 1898 EC [22 September 1905], 35.

revenues at custom gates and markets. This was followed in 1907 by a tax on ivory.<sup>133</sup> By 1901 a ten per cent tax had been applied to gold and a tithe on grain, *asrat*, had been imposed throughout the empire.<sup>134</sup> To make matters worse, *Ras* Täsämma Nadäw, an Amhara governor from neighbouring Iluu Abbaaboora, was appointed as superintendent of Jootee's province in 1905.<sup>135</sup> When Jootee openly rejected Täsämma Nadäw's appointment, Menilek summoned both men to Addis Ababa—once again in the rainy season—and forced Jootee to accept Täsämma's superintendence over his domain.<sup>136</sup> In April 1908, capitalizing on local complaints that reached Addis Ababa, Menilek appointed an Amhara judge, *wänbär/ወንበር*, Ato Sorsu, over Qellem.<sup>137</sup>

Addis Ababa's inroads into Qellem's local administrative affairs pressured Jootee's ability to lead a stable administration and damaged his relations with neighbouring territories. Much of the added gold and currency demanded by Addis Ababa could only be obtained through increased ivory sales, which Jootee and his Oromo traders pursued aggressively. The result was increased trade not only in ivory but also in firearms, which Menilek was determined to avoid—especially in the conquered south. But raids and counter-raids increased instability in the wider Ethio-Sudanese border region on the western Ethiopian frontier.<sup>138</sup>

The growing Šāwan intervention in Qellem's internal affairs resulted in strained relations between Qellem and Addis Ababa. The measures Menilek had imposed between 1898 and 1908 collectively began to erode the autonomy of the Jootee's governorship of Qellem.

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<sup>133</sup> Gäbrä Egrzi'abhér to Menilek, Mäggabit 3, 1899, wä/mu/384 in A. Triulzi and Tesema T. (eds), *የወላጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች-ከ1880ዎቹ እስከ 1920ዎቹ (እ.ኤ.አ)* [Documents for Wallagga History: 1880s to 1920s (E.C)] (Addis Ababa: AAU Press, 2004), 70.

<sup>134</sup> Mähitämäsellassè Wäldämäsqäl, *ገዢ ገዢ* (Recollection of Times Past) (Addis Ababa, 1942 EC), 145; A. Triulzi, "Nekemte and Addis Ababa: Dilemmas of Provincial Rule," in *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia*, 60.

<sup>135</sup> Menilek to Jootee, Mäskäräm 5, 1899 EC [15 September 1906] in Paulos Nññoñño, 103.

<sup>136</sup> SIR No. 126 (January 1905), Appendix "A," "Report on the Abyssinian Expedition to Gore," 14.

<sup>137</sup> Menilek to Jootee, Miazia 2, 1900 EC [10 April 1908] in Paulos Nññoñño, 355.

<sup>138</sup> For the detailed analysis of how the increased tribute expanded trading networks, even going deeper into the South Sudan, see Douglas H. Johnson, "On the Nilotic Frontier: Imperial Ethiopia in the Southern Sudan, 1898-1936," in *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia*, 219-245.

Compared to the agreement reached between Jootee and Goobanaa when Qellem was absorbed into the Ethiopian Empire in ca.1886, the province now came under more direct control from Addis Ababa. By 1908 Qellem's internal autonomy had been significantly compromised, representing a major loss for local Oromo elites. But there was still a clear distinction between Qellem and regions in the conquered south that had resisted Menilek's claim over their land and had found themselves subjugated through war or conquest. Since the *ñäffañña-gabbar* system was still absent from Qellem, the local population—particularly the peasants' livelihoods—was left largely undisturbed.

Jootee's responses ranged from outright rejection of some of Menilek's orders, twisting some to his own advantage, and pulling down the Sayyoo tollgate. Jootee was turning into a difficult vassal to deal with.<sup>139</sup> Although he had been forced to accept suzerainty of an Amhara overlord, Jootee maintained pressure on Menilek to reverse his decision. One of his tactics was filing continuous accusations on Täsämma who, following Jootee's deadly occupation of Beggi, launched a series of raids into Jootee's domain through Kutu Golja (the former Beggi chief who took refuge with him). In fact, Kutu Golja's raids caused a number of difficulties which had serious implications on Jootee's capacity to maintain peace in the territories bordering Täsämma's domain, Iluu Abbaaboora.<sup>140</sup> While recognising the problem as a serious concern, Menilek's decision was one of conciliation,<sup>141</sup> despite the fact that he was often known for passing verdicts that bore serious consequences—particularly on matters

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<sup>139</sup> See among others, Menilek to Tasamma Nadaw, Maskaram 08, 1899 [18 September 19006], in Paulos Nñoonño, 104; Idem, Menilek to Jootee, Ginbot 27, 1899 EC [04 June 1907], 182; Idem, Menilek to Jootee, Nahase 14, 1899 EC [20 August 1907], 245; Idem, Menilek to Jootee, Țir 5, 1900 [14 January 1908], 294; Idem, Menilek to Jootee, Țir 25, 1900 [03 February 1908], 305; Idem, Menilek to Jootee, Yakatit 23, 1900 [02 March 1908], 328; Idem, Menilek to Jootee, Maggabit 3, 1900 [12 March 1908], 336; Idem, Menilek to Jootee, Miazia 8, 1900 [16 April 1908], 362.

<sup>140</sup> Menilek to Jootee, Mäkäräm 12, 1898 [22 September 1905] in Paulos Nñoonño, 35; Idem, Menilek to Jootee, Tiqimt 26, 1899 [5 November 1906], 48; Idem, Menilek to Jootee, Miazia 22, 1899 [30 April 1907], 161.

<sup>141</sup> Menilek to Jootee, Mäkäräm 6, 1899 E.C [16 September 1906], in Paulos Nñoonño, 103; Idem, Menilek to Jootee, Miazia 22, 1899 [30 April 1907], 162.

similar to Kutu Golja's—including capital punishment.<sup>142</sup> Jootee's efforts seemed to have borne fruit when his son *Fitawrari* Solomon, who was in the Addis Ababa at the time of Jootee's complaint, took a large present of gold and female slaves to the Emperor and urged the Empire's loyalty. Jootee's undemanded tribute won him strong support from the Empress Tayitu, with the result that Jootee was only ordered to pay his tribute through Täsämma.<sup>143</sup> Menilek then wrote letters to Jootee and Täsämma notifying them that Qellem's status would henceforth be similar to Naqamtee, and the region would become a *madbèt*, a rural administrative unit whose revenues were especially reserved for the 'royal kitchen,' which in practice transformed Qellem into rural domain in the conquered south responsible only to Menilek's palace. Menilek's edict effectively revoked Täsämma's superintendence.

To *Däjjazmach* Jotè,

Concerning the administration of your country, I have ordered *Ras* Täsämma not to interfere [in your internal affairs] and thus I offered you the same status as *däjjach* Gäbrä-Egziabhèr. Hand over to *Ras* Täsämma the same amount of two thousand birr every year, and he will not interfere [with your administration]. If there is any subject who feels mistreated in your country, let him come and appeal to me. But if there comes [from your country] any subject who appeals to me that he is unnecessarily mistreated, I will remove you [from your power] and give your country to another [man]. - Written in Addis Ababa on Miazia 22, 1899 E.C [30 April 1907]<sup>144</sup>

By "...the same status as *Däjjach* Gäbrä-Egziabhèr's" Menilek retracted his previous decision compromising the internal autonomy of Qellem that had placed its governor under the authority of a Šāwan Amhara ruling a neighbouring province. In view of what followed over the coming few years, the significance of Menilek's letter to Jootee was not that it restored Qellem to the former status it had enjoyed after it was conquered in 1886—although this was important too. The significance of the letter lies not in what it said, but what it did not say. In the first place, the letter made no mention of increased tributes or the establishment by Addis Ababa of

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<sup>142</sup> See, for example, a letter where Menilek said such raiders must be killed. Menilek to Jootee, Mākārām 13, 1900 E.C [24 September 1907], in Paulos Nññoñño, 103.

<sup>143</sup> H. O'Sullivan, "Report on Gambela Trading Post," WO 106/227, SIR NO. 136 (November 1905), 7.

<sup>144</sup> Menilek to Jootee, Miazia 22, 1899 [30 April 1907], in Paulos Nññoñño, 162.



tollgates in Qellem, which meant that these aspects of government would continue as they were. Menilek's letter offered an explicit threat that he would remove Jootee, if he received so much as a single appeal from one of his subjects alleging the mistreatment of an ordinary person. Despite the formal removal of Täsämma's superintendence (which was perhaps achieved because of pressures exerted by his wife Empress Taitu, as had happened on a number of occasions) the tone in the concluding section of the letter made it look as if Menilek, by 1905, was already looking for an excuse to remove Jootee.

The friction that had grown between Emperor Menilek II and *Däjjazmach* Jootee Tulluu seems to characterise an Emperor patiently disciplining a disobedient and disrespectful vassal. But the relationship was deeper and more complex than that. We have already examined the particular relations characterised by the 'unequal exchange' established between Addis Ababa and the local Oromo governors in the west, and it is important to keep in mind that these local governors had once been *mootii*, kings of their respective domains, who had suddenly been turned into imperial governors under Menilek's of. As far as the context in which this relationship functioned is concerned, the intricacies and frictions between Menilek and Jootee reflected the untiring efforts of the Oromo vassal to resist the fads and requirements of Menilek's government, which continually sought to expand and consolidate its central administration over the province and its resources. The gradual and inevitable imposition of the Empire's authority over the once autonomous Qellem turned it into an administered province within a decade.<sup>145</sup> The measures taken by Menilek, particularly in the post-Adwa era, highlighted the gradual incursion of centrally-imposed rules and regulations, eroding local prerogatives and Jootee's powers of negotiation. Addis Ababa wanted to discourage the accumulation of local wealth in favour of meeting the growing needs of its central

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<sup>145</sup> 'Unequal exchange' is borrowed from Jean-Pierre Chretien, "Confronting the Unequal Exchange of the Oral and the Written," in Bogumil Jewsiewicki and David newbury (eds), *African Historiographies: What History for Which Africa* (California: Sage, 1986), 75-90.

institutions.<sup>146</sup> In Qellem, as in many parts of the conquered south—and even in the provinces of the Abyssinian homeland, to some extent—Menilek’s expanding central state wanted to achieve the destruction of independent economic and political foundations of traditional rural elites and imposed centralised control over local “revenues in cash and kind to support a modern standing army and a new salariat.”<sup>147</sup>

Yet there were peculiarities in Qellem’s case. Jootee held the power of jurisdiction over the Gambella region and the Baro plains—and thus over Gambella trade since its inception in 1904, including elephant hunting in the region. He also controlled the age-old lucrative trade directed north to Benishangul. The fact that Qellem (as one of the most resourceful of the Empire’s provinces) had initially been left to him as a semi-autonomous region meant that Jootee’s economic and political power in western Ethiopia was growing unchecked. The Oromo administrative structure moulded to the Empire’s dictates with only slight modifications, and given the size and area occupied by the Oromo, the growth in Jootee’s power, consciously or otherwise, went far beyond normal levels in terms of personal or regional governor’s power. The local Oromo elites under Jootee enjoyed similar economic benefits, although they were not comparable to Jootee’s. Despite Menilek’s Amhara governors’ belief that the Ethiopian Empire “...was going to take rank as a great Christian Power,”<sup>148</sup> and to the dismay of the Empire’s long-term plan, the Oromo elites understood and appreciated “nothing of Menelek’s ideas of a new Abyssinian civilization.”<sup>149</sup> The local population, particularly the peasants, had been left largely undisturbed by transformations in structural relations the south had undergone since its conquest. Throughout the Ethiopian Empire, the Amhara civil and military officers and the clergy scorned the inhabitants of the conquered south “as backward,

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<sup>146</sup> James McCann, “Orality, State Literacy, and Political Culture in Ethiopia: Translating the Ras Kassa Registers,” in M.E. Page, S. F. Beswick, T. Carmichael, J. Spaulding (eds.), *Personality and Political Culture in Modern Africa*, Studies Presented to Professor Harold G. Marcus, Boston, 1998, 17.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> FO 1/44, Major Gwynn “Report on the proposed Egyptian-Abyssinian,” 8.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 10.

heathen, filthy, deceitful, lazy and even stupid,”<sup>150</sup> and as an observer in Qellem reported, “the Amhara affect to look down on the Galla as a conquered [people].”<sup>151</sup> The major problem was that despite Menilek’s regular and sustained efforts to increase the number of the EOC clergy and Amhara civil and military state servants in Qellem’s since conquest in ca.1886, there were very few of these in the province apart from some priests, clerks and interpreters who were required to help with communications between the Amhara and Oromo populations.<sup>152</sup>

The clerks, interpreters and officers working in Qellem during Jootee’s time were employed by local Oromo elites, or were at best economically dependent on them, despite Menilek’s orders to reserve *madäriya* (land to be given in lieu of salary) for them. The Amhara in “Jootee’s country” were subordinated to the Oromo, and their very survival depended on the local Oromo-dominated system. This constituted a threat to Menilek’s government, which sought to break such tendencies by portraying the Oromo as uncivilized, backward, enemies of Amhara, cruel and heartless fighters lacking in history, religion or any form of culture.<sup>153</sup> The idea of assimilation into the Šāwan Amhara dominated first the Empire, then the elites and subsequently the local population as Menilek sought to build a unified Amharic-speaking Empire which would be run according to Orthodox Christianity and acculturated to the principles of the *habäša* ethos.

Jootee appears to have been conscious of Menilek’s intentions to bring in measures directed at the erosion of the autonomy of his province. Jootee’s punitive expeditions to Anfillo and Beggi were directed at removing obstacles the Emperor had put in his way, although they were unnecessarily bloody and deadly. Menilek’s reaction to Jootee’s violent removal of these

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<sup>150</sup> Gebru Tareke, *Ethiopia: Power and Protest*, 71.

<sup>151</sup> H. O’Sullivan, “Report on Gambela Trading Post,” WO 106/227, SIR NO. 136 (November 1905), 7.

<sup>152</sup> FO 1/44, Major Gwynn “Report on the proposed Egyptian-Abyssinian,” 8.

<sup>153</sup> For the Empire’s framing of Gallaness, i.e beyond Ethiopian officialdom’s simple change of name of the ethno-cultural group from ‘Oromo’ to ‘Galla,’ see Bahrey, “History of the Galla,” in C.F Beckingham and G.W.B Huntingford (eds), *Some Records of Ethiopia, 1593-1646* (London: Hakluyt, 1954),111-113; Kidanewold Kifle (Aläqä), መጽሐፈ ስዋሰው ወግስ ወመዝገብ ቃላት ሀዲስ (New [Amharic] Grammar and Dictionary) (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, 1948 E.C.), 317.

local challenges—placing him under an Amhara lord, increasing Qellem’s annual tribute, introducing tollgates controlled only by Addis Ababa, and empowering local chiefs such as *Fitawrari Buraayyuu Bari*—were all manifestations not only of checking Jootee’s economic and political power but of ridding himself of an emerging regional political economy controlled by a system largely manipulated by the Oromo. The evolving relationship—which manifested itself in the form of central administrative ties and rebellion against them—was therefore structural. It was a struggle between a central authority and a strong Oromo regional lord who happened to be at the command of a semi-autonomous Oromo administrative structure, under whose wings were slowly rising economically strong local Oromo elites who were only minimally influenced by the political ideology of the Ethiopian Empire. Yet it appears that the local Oromo administrative structure was generally unaware of this larger-scale process. From the perspectives of the Ethiopian Empire under Šāwan Amhara control, removing a vassal like Jootee and destroying his local dominance would to all intents and purposes remove threats against the empire’s hegemony. If the Amhara elites were to govern Qellem as part of an Empire, and if they were to benefit from its economy and resources, then Jootee’s removal and the destruction of the Oromo-dominated administrative and socio-economic structure he had built was becoming an increasingly necessary step.

In 1908, the situation reached a point at which it appeared appropriate to take severe measures against Qellem. Menilek summoned Jootee to Addis Ababa in July, arrested him upon his arrival and sent him to Ankobär as a prisoner. Qellem was given to one of Menilek’s favourite lieutenants, *Näggadras Haylä Giyorgis*, Minister of Commerce and Foreign Affairs. Giyorgis in turn entrusted it to his representative, *Indärase, Fitawrari Sahlä-Giyorgis* (brother of *Ras Täsämma Nadäw*).<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Menilek’s letter, presumably to the public of Qellem, Hamilé 13, 1900 E.C. [20 July 1908], in Paulos Nñonñño, 454.

The letter Menilek wrote declaring the removal of Jootee is interesting, because it highlights the Šāwan Amhara view of an Oromo vassal governing frontier territory belonging to the Empire. The reasons Menilek cited for Jootee's removal and arrest were his acts of misgovernment and maladministration, the embezzlement of government money, and the prevalence of injustice in his domain, although all such matters were the hallmark of the Empire. While Jootee's arrears in tribute payment were supported by oral sources,<sup>155</sup> his harsh punishments were very much common to the local tradition.<sup>156</sup> There is little doubt that what Menilek deemed misgovernment and injustice were references to Jootee's measures against Anfillo and Beggi. There were other offences which Menilek did not mention, but which may have been the most decisive factors in convincing Menilek to finally remove Jootee. Menilek appears unwilling to mention the strained relations and the friction that prevailed between his government and Jootee, particularly in relation to increased tributes and taxes, the tollgates and Jootee's subjection to an Amhara superintendent. Although these factors could in themselves form an adequate reason for the removal of a vassal in Menilek's Ethiopia—particularly in view of tendency in growth of centralisation in the post-Adwa period—Menilek was unable to mention them in a formal letter, because it would have highlighted weaknesses in his own central government's dealings with a rebellious underling.

It has to be stressed that the political culture of the Ethiopian state was essentially oral, and so was political communication until the end of the nineteenth century. Studying political transitions in Ethiopia with particular reference to a key political biography in the Abyssinian homeland, James McCann convincingly argued that until the end of the nineteenth century important political communications went unrecorded, despite age-old literacy in

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<sup>155</sup> Informants: Rev. Ulaa Fiixumaa (14/08/2010, Dambi-Doolloo), Nāgaš Shuuramoo (10/08/2010, Dambi-Doolloo), Baalchaa Deentaa (22/08/2005, Dambi-Doolloo).

<sup>156</sup> ATFN, "Interview with *Qes* Gidada Solan and Nagawo Tullu," (1972).

Abyssinia.<sup>157</sup> The recent publication of surviving political correspondence suggests that this was true to a large extent until the first quarter of the twentieth century.<sup>158</sup> Menilek's letter quoted above is therefore more interesting for what it omitted than for what it explicitly said. The Šāwan Amhara elites had to contend with the slow rise in the western frontier province of an economically strong, assertive and defiant Oromo vassal, under whose protection were emerging subordinates with similar attitudes and growing status. The relationship between Menilek and Jootee in the post-Adwa period grew increasingly tense and hostile, leading to Jootee's eventual fall from favour. Jootee and his subordinates, as well as the inhabitants of the province, were only minimally influenced by the political ideals of imperial Ethiopia, which had been created by and for the benefit of the Šāwan Amhara elites. The situation in Qellem had slipped beyond the control of these elites, and represented the emergence of Oromo domination at the frontiers of Menilek's Empire. From the perspective of the Šāwan Amhara elites, Jootee's removal was long overdue. A particular type of Oromo domination in the Sibuu-Naqamtee region was tolerated because it remained under the firm control of Addis Ababa and was consolidating the Empire's presence in the regions whilst building and extending the frontiers of control of the Šāwan Amhara elites. But Jootee was becoming too powerful, and his actions overstepped his status as a vassal of Addis Ababa. Since Menilek was very cautious about frontier territories, the growth in Jootee's power augmented the subtleties that laid foundations for dynamic state-society relationships to emerge decades after Qellem's incorporation into the Empire, the results of which would last until 1974.

There was also another factor that hastened the fall of Jootee—perhaps the most important factor of all—the growing suspicion in Menilek's palace that Jootee was having

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<sup>157</sup> James McCann, "Orality, State Literacy, and Political Culture in Ethiopia," 19.

<sup>158</sup> See among others, Paulos N̄ñon̄ño, *አጼ ሚኒልክ አገር ውስጥ የተፃፉት ደብዳቤዎች* (Emperor Menilek's Domestic Correspondence) (Addis Ababa, 2003 EC); A.Triulzi and T.Ta'a (eds), *የወሊጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች፡-ከ1880ዎቹ እስከ1920ዎቹ(እ.አ.አ)* [Documents for Wallagga History: 1880s to 1920s (E.C)] (Addis Ababa: AAU Press, 2004).

“secret dealings with the British.”<sup>159</sup> Jootee and his sons dealt with the British on a number of issues ranging from border demarcations to trade since Britain’s colonisation of the Sudan in 1898, but it is difficult to tell which of these dealings were done with Menilek’s knowledge. The British intelligence reported once that Mardaasaa, Jootee’s son, had pleaded to buy arms from the British with the intention of raising a large scale Oromo rebellion, but that was years after the death of his father. There were no other occasions when similar reports were made during Jootee’s lifetime or his tenure of power in Qellem. In fact, British commercial inspectors often complained that Jootee and other governors in western Ethiopia hampered trade since by refusing to participate in any—particularly during the beginning of the Gambella trade—until they had received specific orders from Addis Ababa on the subject.

The story of Jootee’s secret dealings with the British was apparently based on letters forged by *Ras Täsämma* who, since the effective inclusion of Gambella into Jootee’s domain and the latter’s rejection of his superintendence, became an enemy of Jootee.<sup>160</sup> Täsämma formed an alliance with Bariituu, Jootee’s own daughter and the widow of Anfillo lord Abbaa Kumsaa. Bariituu had also been Täsämma’s mistress before her marriage and was finally uprooted from her fief as a result of Jootee’s raids that followed her husband’s death.<sup>161</sup> Menilek himself confirmed to *Ras Täsämma* the receipt of seven such letters in March 1908, which he said he would investigate further.<sup>162</sup>

What little power the authorities in Addis Ababa may have had in the frontier territories was dependant on the trustworthiness of the regional governors, which Addis Ababa often gained through bolstering the power of one against another.<sup>163</sup> The loss of trust in Jootee would mean a loss of control for Menilek, which was unlikely to be tolerated. At this point it is worth

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<sup>159</sup> WO 106/6225, SIR No. 264 (July 1916), 6.

<sup>160</sup> Menilek to Täsämma, Yäkkatit 28, 1900 [7 March 1908] in Paulos Nññoñño, 327.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Menilek to Täsämma, Yäkkatit 28, 1900 [7 March 1908] in Paulos Nññoñño, (EC), 327.

<sup>163</sup> Bahru Zawde, “Relations,” 2.

remembering that after the conquest of Benishangul in 1898, Menilek detained its three governors (Tor el Guri of Bella-Shangul, wad Mahmud of Khomosha and Khojali al Hassan of Asosa)—despite the peaceful submission of the last two—and freed them only in 1908, “when their country had been devastated by the Ethiopian occupation and definitely annexed to Greater Ethiopia.”<sup>164</sup> The period between 1898 and 1908 represents a time during which Addis Ababa consolidated its power in the western provinces. Menilek most probably tolerated Jootee during this period for similar reasons.

But there was a more important reason that forced Menilek to tolerate vassals like Jootee, particularly during the period 1889-1896. After *Ras* Goobanaa’s conquest of the Wallagga in the late 1880s, Menilek’s territories in the west were by and large entrusted to local indigenous rulers. Between his coronation as the Emperor of the new Ethiopian Empire in 1889 and the battle of Adwa in 1896, Menilek had focused on consolidating his authority in highland Ethiopia and guarding his Empire from aggression from surrounding European colonial powers. In a circular letter he distributed to European powers in April 1891 he notified them of what he believed were the traditional boundaries of Greater Ethiopia.<sup>165</sup> The letter tends to be more a diplomatic statement of intent than any formal expression of what he referred to as Greater Ethiopia. However this does not discount the fact that the western provinces of the Empire were considered the most important domains of Greater Ethiopia, and in the early 1890s the resources transferred from western Macca Oromo countries to Addis Ababa in the form of tribute was without equal in the Empire.<sup>166</sup> During this period, Menilek could hardly divert his attention to the removal and appointment of vassals in western Oromo countries, as it would have resulted in serious implications to the flow of the much needed resources.

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<sup>164</sup> A. Triulzi, *Salt, Gold*, 179.

<sup>165</sup> Circular letter of Miazia 14 1883 [21 April 1891].

<sup>166</sup> Harold Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik, Ethiopia 1844-1913* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 139-140.



By 1908 Menilek had consolidated his rule over the Ethiopia's western frontiers to the north of Qellem, so it was less likely that he would leave Jootee to wield so much power. After consolidating imperial rule in Benishangul, it was time to look to the south, where little could be achieved while Jootee remained in power. Threats from British Sudan had been minimised in Benishangul, but were still apparent in Qellem. Menilek was suspicious of the British, and he and his comrades in Addis Ababa believed they could use vassals like Jootee to claim territories from the Ethiopian Empire. *Ras Täsämma*, who was very close to Menilek and very much trusted by him, would have known of Menilek's sensitivities regarding the British and Qellem, and would have sent the forged letters to exploit the situation. British sources are silent on the subject, but intelligence reports associated Jootee's removal and imprisonment solely to the forged letters.<sup>167</sup>

Since Menilek's claim over it in 1898, Gambella had become part of Jootee's domain, but because of the hostility towards the highland governors, Ethiopia's control over the region was very weak. In fact, it was Ethiopia's tenuous hold over the region which led to a strong British desire to incorporate the lowlands of Baro into the Sudan. The opening in 1904 of the Gambella trading enclave, and the uncertainty of its legal status in addition to Addis Ababa's deteriorating trust in Jootee, were additional factors that increased Menilek's concerns.<sup>168</sup> From Menilek's perspective, Jootee's removal was long overdue. In view of the above discussion, the release after nine years' imprisonment and the return home in 1908 of the three traditional rulers of Benishangul and the removal and arrest of Jootee in the same year is more than coincidental. Menilek's imprisonment of Jootee changed the course of events in Qellem, imposing centralised administration onto the region which it had escaped when it was conquered in 1886. The *ñäffañña* settlement and direct Amhara rule changed the socio-

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<sup>167</sup> SIR No. 264 (July 1916), 6.

<sup>168</sup> Bahru Zawde, "Relations," 2-3; Harold Marcus, "Ethio-British Negotiations concerning the Western Border with Sudan, 1898-1902," *JAS* 4 (1) (1963), 81-94.

economic and political structure of the region. Jootee was released in 1912, but was unable to restore the structure he had held in place before 1908, and could therefore not regain his former strength and status. He was removed again in 1917 and died the following year, after which Qellem effectively became a territory directly ruled by Amhara governors appointed from Addis Ababa.

Over nine thousand soldiers, *ñäffañña* and their families, commanders (*mälkägna*), and the chief governor of the province, the chief *mälkägna*, came to depend on the labour and resources of the local Oromo inhabitants, whose subsistence farming lifestyles came under threat as a result. The new relationship established between the local Oromo inhabitants and the Šāwan Amhara governors and their military retinue created instability and tension, leading not only to various forms of peasant resistance, but also to frequent appointments and removals of governors by Addis Ababa. Thus began a long history of tension and friction involving multiple groups, the making and unmaking of alliances and enmities, setting the scene for a historical interaction that would continue until the 1974 revolution. The next Chapter will examine the first part of this dynamic interaction that lasted from 1909 to 1935.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the rise of the Macca Oromo states in Qellem, the Ethiopian conquest and the early governance of Qellem as a province of the Ethiopian Empire. The chapter has argued that the internal socio-economic and political transformations that followed the Oromo settlement in what is today Qellem were decisive factors leading to the rise of multiple states. The rivalry, conflict and war into which these states dragged one another resulted in the rise of Qellem as the strongest. The same process demonstrated to Qellem's ruler in the late nineteenth century that he could no longer survive alone, and convinced him to seek the alliance of the

Šāwan Amhara, an alliance that brought about Qellem's incorporation into the Ethiopian Empire—effectively the peaceful conquest of Qellem.

The gist of this chapter's argument is that the internal factors which had conditioned Oromo settlement in the region were also crucial in acclimatising societal transformation from the *gadaa* system to monarchies, eventually resulting in the Ethiopian conquest. This process was crucial in defining the foundations of relations between the Oromo peasants in Qellem and their Oromo overlords (and later with Amhara lords), their relations to one another, and their view of new state institutions. These subtle convolutions and intricacies determined the form, nature and content of the continuities and changes which in turn shaped various dynamic developments in the decades leading up to the 1974 revolution. The next chapter deals with the three decades that preceded the 1936 Italian Occupation.

## CHAPTER TWO

### DYNAMICS OF THE *NÄFTÄGNA-GÄBBAR* SYSTEM (1909–1935)

#### Introduction

Chapter One analysed the process of state formation in Qellem, examined how the outcomes of that complex process led to the nineteenth century Ethiopian conquest and addressed the early years of Qellem under the Empire. This chapter examines the dynamics of the *näftägna-gäbbar* system.

As soon as the region was annexed by the Ethiopian empire and placed under Addis Ababa's direct rule, the task of governing the region, of tapping its resources and integrating it administratively into the empire became complex and was sometimes characterized by violence. The salient features of the *näftägna-gäbbar* system are not new to students of Ethiopian history. It is, however, less well understood that the imposition of such a system affected the social structure of local society and provoked a series of innovative peasant resistance programmes that lasted nearly a century. The system was largely responsible for determining the course of local developments, which in turn determined the nature of Qellem's relations with its neighbouring territories and Addis Ababa. This turbulent history, which lasted until the 1974 revolution, turned out to be important in shaping changes within the peasantry, their relations with the *balabbat/ባለቤት* (the empire's local allies), and their interaction with the state. As local people and their elites challenged, contested and made claims on the local state through a variety of means, the latter's embeddedness in society was revealed, enabling the former to reshape it and to be shaped by it. Analysing the *näftägna-gäbbar* system in the light of features particularly relevant to Qellem helps understand complex historical relationships foreshadowing the 1974 revolution. This chapter argues that the extreme and unprecedented

exploitation of labour and wealth the *näffägna-gäbbar* system brought to the region threatened peasant subsistence and provoked a strong reaction and revealed to the peasants ethno-cultural boundaries between themselves and the Šäwan Amhara overlords, giving them reasons to mobilise elements of their culture to which they had hitherto paid little attention. This invoked a peasant consciousness that made the struggle generational, sustaining it until the the 1974 revolution. The gist of the argument is that the *näffägna-gäbbar* system created a peasant opposition that would become a force to reckon with over subsequent decades.

The chapter combines two major themes. The first analyses the dynamics of the two-phased *näffägna-gäbbar* system. The second discusses the impacts of this system as it unfolded in Qellem.

## 2.1 The *näffägna-gäbbar* system: the first phase (1908–12)

In geographical terms, contemporary Ethiopia was created by the close of the nineteenth century when Abyssinia annexed the peoples and lands in the south. The new Ethiopian empire organized its southern colonies into three categories, depending on the reaction of the conquered peoples. The first was made up of hitherto independent states which had submitted peacefully, which were declared *madbèt/ጣድቤት*, direct tributaries of the crown. Such states became provinces, and retained some degree of local autonomy despite being expected to pay *qurṭ geber/ቁርጥ-ግብር*, a fixed annual tribute. These states were also, as a general rule—but with a few exceptions—exempted from the settlement of *näffägna/ጥፍጠኛ*, the conquering imperial army and its retinue. Jimmaa Abbaa Jifaar, Leeqaa-Naqamtee, Asosa and Benishangul, as well as Awsa in Afar country, fell into this category.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mähitämäsellassè, *ገዢ ጥፍጠኛ*, 164–165; D. Donham and W. James (eds), *The Southern Marches*, 37, 199.

The second category contained areas where the conquest encountered resistance, and which were consequently put under the *näffägna-gäbbar* system. Northern governors were appointed over them from Addis Ababa, and local people were made near-serfs as *gäbbar/ገብር*, *näffäñña* was imposed upon them. Walaita, Arsii, Harar and Kāfa were some prominent examples.<sup>2</sup> *Mälkägna/መለኛ*, commanders of the conquering army, the governor (chief *mälkägna*) and imperial officials, and their retinue, as well as the *näffägna* were then given a number of *gäbbar* who would surrender a certain percentage of their produce and provide labour according to their military and social ranks.<sup>3</sup> The colonists were often co-opted by *balabbat*, indigenous elites. Ethiopian historiography alludes to this whole newly imposed administrative machinery of *gäbbar*, *näffägna*, and *balabbat* in the conquered south as the *näffägna-gäbbar* system, an exemplar of Ethiopian colonialism.<sup>4</sup>

The third category was composed of outlying fringe lowlands occupied by pastoralists, hunters and shifting cultivators.<sup>5</sup> But these principles were really little more than general rules; regions could turn from one category to another, as was the case with Qellem and other provinces. Larger regions were often broken down into various categories. Qellem does not fit neatly into any of the above typologies; it was direct tributary of the crown between c.1886 and 1908, before turning to the *näffägna-gäbbar* system between 1908 and 1912. In 1912 initial arrangements were restored, but in 1917 it was finally placed under the most brutal variation of the second category. Since the extraction of local wealth was the ultimate purpose of territorial conquests and military colonization, the peasants were key factors in the course of this interaction.

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia, 1800–1935* (Addis Ababa: Haile Sellasie I University Press, 1968) pp. 154–155; Mähitämäsellassè, *ገብር ገብር*, 164–165; D. Donham and W. James (eds), *The Southern Marches*, 37.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Caulk, “Armies as Predators: Soldiers and Peasants in Ethiopia. C.1850–1935,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 11 (3), 1978, pp. 466–467; Harold Marcus, *The Life and Times of Emperor Menelik II: Ethiopia, 1844–1913* (Lawrenceville, Red Sea Press: 1975), 190.

<sup>4</sup> It is simply referred to as the *gäbbar* system in some works.

<sup>5</sup> Mähitämäsellassè, *ገብር ገብር*, 164–165; D. Donham and W. James (eds), *The Southern Marches*, 37.

In the two decades following 1890, the southern half of the Ethiopian empire (recognised in simplistic terms as the area south of the Blue Nile and the Šawan plateau) was subjected to the full extent of the *näffägna-gäbbar* system. While the term *gäbbar* in the Abyssinian homeland referred to a tribute paying peasant who had secure land tenure, or *rist*, it signifies a markedly inferior social position in the south, where a *gäbbar* remained on his own land but had no legal claim to it. He surrendered part of his produce and provided labour depending on local circumstances and the dictates of his overlord. The system had its origin in the Abyssinian homeland, but was shaped to fit local circumstances in the conquered south, which in turn depended on variations in economy, culture, society and geography. The common feature of the system, despite its many variants, was the reallocation of the labour and wealth of the erstwhile freehold peasants to their Amhara colonists.<sup>6</sup> The theory set out at the political centre to introduce the system to the conquered south appeared uniform, but the practice was more complex and exhibited much internal variation.<sup>7</sup>

The *näffägna-gäbbar* system as implemented in Qellem is associated with two separate periods. The first was from 1908–12, when Jootee was summoned to Addis Ababa and imprisoned. This period was comparatively brief, and was followed by a short period of relief between 1913 and 1916, when the system was more relaxed after Jootee was reinstated. The second round was put into practice in 1917 after Jootee was finally removed, and continued until it was lifted and replaced with property tax, introduced to the region in 1933.

Jootee was taken and imprisoned in July 1908, and Menilek gave Jootee's domain to *Nägadras* Haila-Giyorgis Wäldä-Mikael, his minister of foreign affairs and commerce. Haila-Giyorgis was an absentee governor, so *Ras* Täsämma Nadäw, governor of the neighbouring Iluu Abbaaboor and the emperor's overseer of western provinces—and of the whole empire

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<sup>6</sup> Markakis, *Ethiopia: the Last Two Frontiers*, 99–100.

<sup>7</sup> D. Donham and W. James, *The Southern Marches*, 40.

from May 1909 when he became *Lej* Iyyasu's regent—appointed *Fitawrari* Sahlä-Giyorgis, his own brother, to take control of Qellem and introduce direct Amhara rule to the region.<sup>8</sup> Each peasant family, now *gäbbär*, was counted, registered and re-distributed under the Amhara colonists on the orders of the emperor.<sup>9</sup> Menilek himself wrote the directive under which his military colonists would be 'planted' (የሚተከሉበትን ደንብ, in its Amharic rendition, meaning 'the law according to which they would be planted').<sup>10</sup>

The *näffägna* was a large armed force serving the imperial state. The force was absolutely vital for the survival of the state and its economy. The *näffägna*, despite internal ethnic differences, retained a shared identity through their self-imposed isolation from the local peasants. Because of their strategic defensive importance, they often live in their own *kätäma*. This physical setting was a reflection of the social status they held.<sup>11</sup> One of Menilek's letters presents us with a rare primary source of the hierarchical categories of *näffägna* from the perspective of the Ethiopian empire state. There were two separate categories. The first group were those at higher levels, whom Menilek listed in top-down order in the military hierarchy as *Šämbäl* (ሻምበል), *Mäto-aläqa* (መቶ አለቃ), and *Hamsa-aläqa* (ሀምሳ አለቃ). In Qellem these groups received fifteen to one hundred-fifty *gäbbar* each, depending on the number of soldiers they commanded. The first category also included sub-commanders leading small units of soldiers, who were given seven to fifteen *gäbbar*, again depending on the number of soldiers serving under them. At the bottom of the first group were ordinary soldiers, *čäwa*, who were given two to eight *gäbbar* depending on their past military performance. This group formed the prototype of the modern Ethiopian army and were known in the empire's rubric as *täklägna*,

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<sup>8</sup> WO 106/227, *SIR* 126 (January 1905), Appendix 'A' "Report of the Expedition to Gore, Saiu, Anfilo, Gidami, &," 6. Naqi is remembered in the local tradition as "Naqe," and variously as Nake, Naki or Anake.

<sup>9</sup> A letter by Emperor Menilek II, perhaps to the public of Qellem, dated Hamile 13, 1900 E.C/ 20 July 1908 (declaring to the peasants that he had imprisoned Jootee and appointed a new governor and that they had to continue to be governed as before) in Paulos Nñoonñ, 454.

<sup>10</sup> Menilek to Täsämma, Pagume 2, 1901 [12 September 1909], in Paulos Nñoonñ, 570.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Ayana, "Land Tenure," 108.



colonists (literally “those who were planted”). They were known as *mālkägna* in other places, and lived on the produce and labour of peasants apportioned to them. Once the region had been occupied militarily, it was administered with the help of military garrisons, *kätäma*, established in various localities. Awsaa, Fiinchoo, Gaawoo, Daallee (later Tabor), Gidaamii, Sayyoo (later Dambi-Doolloo) were a few examples. The commander of this colonial army was Abba Šawul, a veteran of the army of *Ras* Mäkonnen Wälda-Mikael, former governor of Harar in eastern Ethiopia.<sup>12</sup> Abba Šawul headed some five thousand soldiers deployed across different parts of the province.<sup>13</sup> The second group comprised those left without allocation of any *gäbbär*, who were known as *qitabäl*, those who lived on allowances. They were linked to the commander of *täklägna* and often lived close to his residence, and their maintenance was generated from the tithes, *asrat*, collected from the peasants.<sup>14</sup>

The emperor ordered Täsämma Nadäw, now *Ras bitwäddäd*, to distribute economic resources—which in real terms meant peasants—among the *näffägna* in Qellem. The peasants were to be ‘eaten’ (a concept referring to their wealth and labour, in practice the wage the *näffägna* had to live on). The ethos of the system was best captured in the saying that they were given this region ‘to eat.’ *Agär bälla* (አገር በላ), the Amharic expression meaning ‘eating a country,’—where one was sent as *täklägna* to certain southern province outside the Abyssinian homeland—was a common saying among Amhara soldiers in Qellem when Cerulli visited the province.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This was not the first time Amhara military garrison was established in Qellem though. There had been a *näffägnä* garrison in the region as early as the 1890s. Sayyoo, what is now the town of Dambi-Doolloo, by 1897 was governed by certain Naqi. He was, however, functioning under Jootee for all practical purposes. See Vannutelli and Citerni, *L’Omo*, 444; Gäbrä Sellasè, *Tarik Zämänä Zä Dagmawi Minilik*, 231.

<sup>13</sup> S.F Newcombe, “Report on a Tour in South Western Abyssinia,” *Sudan Intelligence Report (SIR)* 204, July 1911, Appendix B.

<sup>14</sup> Menilek to Täsämma, *Pagume* 2, 1901 [12 September 1909], in Paulos Nñoñño, 570; Alula Pankhurst and Ezekiel Gebisa, “Lej Eyasu’s visit and the Removal of the “Gondäre” from Laqamté,” *Quaderni di Studi Etiopici*, vol.9 (1988), 85-86.

<sup>15</sup> Enrico Cerulli, *Etiopia Occidentale*, vol. II (Rome, 1933), 104.

The greatest impact the concept of ‘eating a country’ brought to the peasants of Qellem concerned the assessment and collection of *asrat*, or tithes. A tithe on grain was imposed throughout the empire in 1902/03.<sup>16</sup> The *näffägna*, who were given the duty to assess and collect tithes in Qellem, used the freedom they were allowed to enjoy within the system and renamed it *merṭ-asrat*, the tithes of the best. They used their powers to maximize extraction. During the assessment of maize farms, the larger ear cobs were deliberately selected, covered with leaves to set them apart from the lower quality crops to ensure they were submitted as tithes during the harvest. What was supposed to be one-tenth of the produce turned out to be much more in terms of both quantity and quality.<sup>17</sup> The best produce found in each peasant field was taken to the state granary to be consumed by colonists. The peasants were forced to wait for the *näffägna* tithe assessors before consuming any of their own produce.<sup>18</sup> The forceful imposition of this new system of governorship necessitated a politico-military structure in which the conquering *näffägna* made up a minority ruling class that treated the majority of the indigenous inhabitants as a subjugated class.<sup>19</sup> Although the system reflected power relations throughout Ethiopia, its process of implementation produced unique consequences in Qellem. All sorts of peasant resistance (both peaceful and violent) had their roots in this process.

The arrival of Abba Šawul brought administrative confusion in the division of duties between himself and Sahlä-Giorgis, who was appointed to run the regional civil administration alongside the new military occupation that effectively ruled by force of arms. During his brief stay, Abba Šawul repeatedly and rudely disobeyed Addis Ababa’s orders that were channelled

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<sup>16</sup> Mähitämäsellassè, *ገጽ ፳፭*, 332, A. Triulzi, “Nekemte and Addis Ababa: Dilemmas of Provincial Rule,” in D. Donham and W. James (eds), *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia: Essays in History and Social Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 60.

<sup>17</sup> Informants: Abdiisaa Tolaa, 10/01/10, Muggi; Asheber Karoorsaa, 26/01/10, Gidaamii; Alemayehu Ayyaanaa, 08/02/10, Dambi-Doolloo; ATFN, Interview with Abba Abärra, a *näffäñña* who served in Qellem, 29/10/72, Asosa, 1–9.

<sup>18</sup> Informants: Yosef Gammachuu, 27/01/10, Gidaamii, Kabaa Ujuluu, 27/01/10, Gidaamii.

<sup>19</sup> See for instance, “Old Abyssinia and the New Ethiopian Empire: Themes in Social History,” in *The Southern Marches*, 24–48.

to him through Sahlā-Giorgis.<sup>20</sup> As this period of administrative confusion overlaps with the rebellion that arose in the province (which will be discussed below), it apparently played its part in the violence that ensued. The two *Fitawrari* reflected divisions that existed at the political centre. Abba Šawul represented the imperial potentate *Lij* Iyyasu, and Sahlā-Giorgis his own brother, *Ras* Täsämma. As soon as Menilek appointed *Lij* Iyyasu heir to the throne in 1909, he became embroiled in conflict with the conservative Šawan aristocracy, producing political division in Addis Ababa between *Ras* Täsämma's Šawan nobility and *Fitawrari* Habtä-Giyorgis Diinagdee, the Minister of War, and Iyyasu's party.<sup>21</sup> Such cracks were not uncommon in the daily administration of Ethiopia's conquered south. One of the biggest challenges Täfäri Mäkonnen encountered was disobedience shown by the *näftägna* towards successive governors. Irrespective of who was appointed governor of Maji from 1910 onwards, it was the commander of the *näftägna Däjjazmach* Biru and his soldiers who exercised the most visible and consistent power in the province, controlling the majority of the *gäbbär*.<sup>22</sup> Qellem and Maji were only two examples of the challenges the imperial centre faced on governing the conquered south.

Soon after the system had been established, armed rebellion broke out in the western and northern sub-districts of Qellem. Lasting between February 1909 and 1912, the rebellion resulted in the disintegration of the Ethiopian administrative system in the Gidaamii, Jimmaa, Amaara and Horroo sub-districts of Qellem, presenting a serious challenge to Addis Ababa.<sup>23</sup> The rebellion was directly related to the establishment of the *näftägna-gäbbär* system, and

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<sup>20</sup> WO 371/1111, SIR 204, July 1911, S.F Newcombe, "Report on a Tour in South Western Abyssinia," Appendix B. Alessandro Triulzi, "Social Protest and Rebellion in Some Gäbbär Songs from Qellām, Wällägga," *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Rotterdam, 1980), 178-179.

<sup>21</sup> This eventually resulted in the 1916 palace coup d'état, which was organized and led by the Šawan nobility, overthrew Iyasu and brought to power *Ras* Täfäri Mäkonnen as the regent and heir apparent to the throne, and Zäwditu, Menilek's daughter, as an Empress.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Garretson, "Vicious Cycles: ivory, slaves, and arms on the new Maji frontier," in *The Southern Marches*, 204.

<sup>23</sup> WO 371/1111, SIR 204, July 1911, S.F Newcombe, "Report on a Tour in South Western Abyssinia," Appendix B. Alessandro Triulzi, "Social Protest," 178-179.

created circumstances in which it became practically impossible to collect tributes, tithes or use peasant labour, presenting a real challenge to the *näffäгна*'s 'eating of the country.' The *näffäгна-gäbbar* system in Qellem created a peasant opposition that brought to the imperial government a series of political and economic assignments it was unable to resolve for decades.

### **The rebellion of 1909–12**

In the rural areas of imperial Ethiopia, peasants rarely confronted the state openly and violently. But when such confrontations did occur, they were often significant enough to dissipate state resources and weaken the imperial regime. The limited frequency of open rebellion led some scholars to characterize the peasants as a docile and passive agrarian population. However, the few violent peasant rebellions in modern Ethiopia—apart from the bloody rebellion of 1632 that forced Emperor Susenyos to abdicate in favour of his son—convinced others to characterize the peasants as resolutely resistant and rebellious—the Wäyanè rebellion (1943), the Bale peasant uprising (1960–67), and the Gojjam uprisings (1968) are exceptions that are relatively well known in Ethiopian historiography.

In imperial Ethiopia, the *gäbbar* in the conquered south, in contrast to those of the Christian north, were too poorly armed to oppose their *näffäгна* overlords. Yet they were not without methods and skills of resisting when oppressed too severely.<sup>24</sup> There were many instances of armed resistance in the conquered south as well, which relied on the availability of a small number of arms, which were well dispersed. The prominent example—better known in the historiography—was the precedent set in Maji. In 1910 the transfer from Maji to Bägämeder of *Ras* Wäldä-Giyorgis created a catastrophic situation when *Däjjach* Damtè, commander of Wäldä-Giyorgis' *näffäгна* and the imperial soldiers, allowed the entire army to raid the province to capture as much booty as they could. Damtè's removal was followed by

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Caulk, "Armies as Predators," 474.

raiding and looting of the whole of Maji and its hinterlands. This was repeated over and over again until 1936, and there were about thirteen change-overs during this period.<sup>25</sup> As this cycle of violence continued, the indigenous population of Maji and its hinterland began to organize armed resistance, initially led by three *balabbat*, Debo, Serie and Mwanga, all of whom cooperated to mobilise recruits from Maji and the Boma highlands and joined forces with a few supporters from Gimra, Golda, and even as far as Akobo river. While Debo and Serie started the rebellion in retaliation to the raids, Mwanga had resisted the *näffägna-gäbbar* system from the time of its introduction. The resistance continued until 1918, and was followed by similar resistance of the Tishana—now purely involving peasants—which was not overcome until 1925.<sup>26</sup> The 1909–12 rebellion in Qellem is much less well-known in the literature.

In the face of the heavy burdens the *näffägna-gäbbar* system imposed, which had threatened the peasants' subsistence farming in Qellem as well as historical forms of social organisation, there was little reason for the peasants to refuse to cooperate with the local Oromo rulers who were preparing to rebel against Addis Ababa. The peasants were attracted to Mardaasaa's campaign of mobilization, and a large number of them became his followers. He established alliances even with those who did not wish not to join the rebellion and stayed at home. In December 1908, about five months after the deposition of Jootee, Mardaasaa, Jootee's son, hurriedly left Gidaamii and made his quarters at Buree, about three miles to the west.<sup>27</sup> This was after rebellious peasants received from Jootee's 'head-slave', perhaps under the orders of Mardaasaa himself, about two thousand rifles and left Gidaamii to camp at Tulluu Arbaa.<sup>28</sup> The empire's local army was swiftly mobilised to confront them but was immediately repulsed. Soon a demonstration demanding the departure of the Amhara governors was organized in

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<sup>25</sup> P. Garretson, "Vicious cycles," 202.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 202, 206.

<sup>27</sup> S.F. Newcombe, "Report on a Tour in South-western Abyssinia," *SIR* 204, July 1911, Appendix B.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 14.

Gidaamii.<sup>29</sup> Fearing the rebels, *Qägnäzmach* Godaanaa, the Ethiopian military commander in Gidaamii town hurriedly evacuated Gidaamii along with all his Amhara soldiers.<sup>30</sup>

Addis Ababa's response was more considered, fearing a sudden and much larger rebellion. The empire had long sought to prevent the Oromo peasants from possessing firearms to prevent any possible Oromo rebellion taking over all of western Ethiopia. The emperor immediately dismissed Godaanaa and dispatched a special force led by *Fitawrari* Abba Šawul, who had been in Qellem since removal of Jootee in July 1908. Contemporary British intelligence reported this armed unit as being the best in the whole empire. The force was divided into various units and was 'planted' across various parts of the province.<sup>31</sup> Abba Šawul carried out a bloody crackdown on both armed rebels and civilian peasants. He entered Gidaamii triumphantly, but was unable to restore peace across the whole region. Overwhelmed by Abba Šawul's military might and forced from Gidaamii, the surviving rebels reorganized themselves in the neighbouring territories north of Gidaamii, where they continued to uproot the *näffägna*.<sup>32</sup>

Although Addis Ababa had been lax in allowing firearms into the conquered south, the type of alliance it established with the ruling house of an Oromo highland periphery of Qellem on the Ethio-Sudan border appears to have compromised this trend. Menilek was wary of possible British encroachment on Ethiopia's western and southern borders, so on the march to Adwa he sent back four of his vassals (one of them being Jootee) with strict orders to guard "his country."<sup>33</sup> In 1897 Jootee had killed Captain Vittorio Bottego, the leader of Italian Geographical Society, and his party after the latter's refusal to acknowledge Menilek's power

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Gäbrä-Sellassè (Tsähafē-tizaz), *ታሪክ ዘመን ዘዳግማዊ ሚኒልክ ንጉሥ ነገሥት ዘኢትዮጵያ* /History of Ethiopia During the Reign of Emperor Menilek II (Addis Ababa: Birhaninna Salam, 1959 EC), 231. The other three were Gabra-Egziabher of Naqamtee, Abbäa Jifaar of Jimma, and Kawo Tona of Walaitta.

(see Chapter One), and this encouraged Menilek to give Jootee the task of guarding Ethiopia's borders.<sup>34</sup>

In 1911, Mardaasaa claimed that there were seven thousand firearms in Qellem, of which about one hundred and fifty were machine guns. After acknowledging the scarcity of ammunition because of seizures by Amhara forces the previous year, he petitioned a British officer to help him import one hundred thousand rounds of ammunition through the Sudan. The officer promised to submit his request but hinted at the impossibility of its realization.<sup>35</sup>

Mardaasaa now delegated leadership of the rebellion to two of his father's relatives, *Girazmach* Tuuchoo and Oonchoo of Bori, and left with Ammayyaa (Jootee's brother) to Khartoum to plead with General Wingate to influence Addis Ababa for the release of his father.<sup>36</sup> Wingate appears to have been unenthusiastic about the idea, but he wrote a vaguely-worded letter to *abunä* Matewos and the British Minister in Addis Ababa. It is not clear whether the *abunä* made any effort, but the British Minister made a restrained plea to free Jootee from the allegations levelled against him by Addis Ababa. He remained very doubtful about the success of his negotiations with the government in the light of the latter's deep-rooted suspicion of governors closer to the Ethio-Sudan border and particularly "the leaning of [Jootee] and his family towards the Sudan."<sup>37</sup> On his return, Mardaasaa was arrested and jailed near Gidaamii for two months, after which he was transferred to Addis Ababa for another month, then remained under surveillance in Addis Ababa for a further nine months.<sup>38</sup>

The rebellion continued unabated even after heavy losses caused by the arrival of Abba Šawul's army. The main job of Sahlä-Giyorgis, the administrator, "was confronting the task of

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<sup>34</sup> Vannutelli and Citerni, *L'Omo* (Milano, 1899), 350-463; A. Lavagetto, *La vita Eroica*, 219-238.

<sup>35</sup> H.H Kelley (Captain), "Report on A Journey From Malakal via River Sobat to Gidami (Abyssinia), Kurmuk and Gelhak (Western Nile)," SIR, 203, Appendix, June 1911.

<sup>36</sup> SIR, 179, 1909; H.H Kelley (Captain), "Report on A Journey from Malakal via River Sobat to Gidami (Abyssinia), Kurmuk and Gelhak (Western Nile)," SIR, 203, Appendix, June 1911.

<sup>37</sup> SIR 203, June 1911, Appendix.

<sup>38</sup> SIR 204, July 1911, Appendix B.

quelling Galla revolt,” said a British report of 1911.<sup>39</sup> H. Walker, a British Commercial Inspector, reported that Sahlä-Giyorgis was on the telephone to Addis Ababa every morning because of the instability of his province.<sup>40</sup> In mid-1910, while Mardaasaa and dozens of peasants were imprisoned in Addis Ababa, a renewed rebellion flared up which the Amhara government again combated at a heavy cost. This convinced the regime to send fresh troops and release Mardaasaa to help administer the region.<sup>41</sup> While still keeping his father in prison, Addis Ababa named Mardaasaa as *Fitawrari* and promised him rule over Jootee’s country in the same way it had been governed before his father’s removal. Having been instructed to restore peace and collect taxes, Mardaasaa was sent down to Qellem with *Qaññazmach* Naqi. He was able to restrain many armed rebels, but there are no available sources to tell us whether the tax collection was effective.<sup>42</sup> Despite Addis Ababa’s original promise, Mardaasaa was given only a half of the province and was placed under the guidance of Sahlä-Giyorgis, who went to Sira, near Tulluu Walal, with some six hundred soldiers.<sup>43</sup> In 1911, Mardaasaa was summoned again to Addis Ababa to be imprisoned at Ankobär, and a new Amhara governor was sent to govern the still rebellious Qellem.

At the core of the rebellion was the introduction of direct Amhara rule, imposed under the new *näffägna-gäbbar* relationship. The cumulative effect of the severe exploitation imposed by the *näffägna-gäbbar* system—tithes, various forms of tributes, labour and fines—had threatened subsistence farming. The Oromo peasant rebellion of 1909–1912 can therefore best be explained by the imposition of a new extractive and exploitative system. Imposition of the *näffägnä-gäbbar* system provoked the revolt, and the Amhara governors failed to govern

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<sup>39</sup> SIR 203; FO 371/111, 10.

<sup>40</sup> C.H. Walker, “Report on A Journey from Gambella Trading Post into the Country of Dejazmach Joti (Saiu, Walega),” SIR.188, March 1910, Appendix “C.”

<sup>41</sup> SIR 206, September 1911.

<sup>42</sup> SIR 204, July 1911, Appendix B.

<sup>43</sup> SIR 203; FO 371/111, 10.



or tax the country for three years (1909–1912).<sup>44</sup> More importantly, the way Addis Ababa reacted to the rebellion exposed the state’s weakness vis-à-vis the power of its peasant subjects.

This turbulent period, and the subsequent decades to the 1974 revolution, would be essential in shaping socio-economic and political transformations within the peasantry, their relations with the *balabbat/ባለቤት* (the empire’s local allies), and more importantly their interaction with the state. The extreme exploitation of labour and wealth that the *näffägna-gäbbar* system brought to the region had never been previously experienced, and threats to peasant subsistence had provoked a rebellion. Not only did the system provoke decades of peasant resistance, it also revealed to the peasants the ethno-cultural boundaries between themselves and their Amhara overlords and the extent of the contempt in which they held them, thus giving them reasons to mobilise elements of their culture they had not hitherto cared much about. The landlord-tenant relations were marked by ethno-cultural frictions, encouraging growth in peasant political consciousness and making the struggle generational, sustaining it until the outbreak of the 1974 revolution.

However, the rebellion could not be interpreted as a defence of Jootee’s governorship, as some studies argue. There is no doubt that this was an anti-Amhara rebellion, involving both peasants and the elite,<sup>45</sup> but there had never been much common ground between the Oromo peasants of Qellem and Jootee’s leadership. Jootee was known for his brutality towards the Oromo peasant population and non-Oromo residents (Anfillo, Mao and Abbigar) alike. His period in Qellem was characterised by brutality, severe injustice and harsh punishment (criminals were sometimes thrown from a cliff with heavy stones tied to their backs).

The rebellion presented a considerable challenge to the Ethiopian administration in the region, but was never strong enough to end the *näffägna-gäbbar* system. Instead, because of

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<sup>44</sup> S.F. Newcombe, “Report on a Tour,” *SIR* 204, July 1911, Appendix B.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Mekuria Bulcha, *The Making of Oromo Diaspora: Historical Sociology of Forced Migration* (Mineapolis, 2002), 158.

the empire-state's inability to quash the rebellion quickly, there came a short period when the *näffägna* were forced to live on whatever they could take from raids and looting. After a brief period of relief following Jootee's reinstatement in 1913, the *näffägna-gäbbar* system was re-established more vigorously and continued until the introduction of property tax in 1933.

### **The *näffägna-gäbbar* system: the second phase (1917–33)**

The rebellion in Qellem had not been completely quashed when Jootee was reinstated in 1913, following his release the year before. This first round of direct Amhara rule through the *näffägna-gäbbar* system (1908–12) was cut short by the rebellion and never got into full swing until its second phase began in 1917. The period from 1917 to the late 1920s was principally a time of anti-Amhara rebellions that are best analysed in a separate chapter. This section will focus only on the second phase of the *näffägna-gäbbar* system (1917–1933) and highlight its salient features. In the broader southern region, particularly in areas where the system had been in place since the time of the conquest, the *näffägna-gäbbar* system begun to break down in the early twentieth century for different reasons. The overwhelming flow of northern immigrants into the south (for example Harar and Sidamo) exceeded the number of available *gäbbar* and nearly caused the system to collapse, and the combined effects of paralysis in provincial administration and the increase in settler population strained the system still further in the south-western provinces such as Kafa and Gimra.<sup>46</sup> It was a time of new beginnings in Qellem.

Although Jootee had been reinstated, the *näffägna* forces deployed since 1909 were allowed to remain in place, 'eating the country,' particularly in the eastern and the southern regions. However, the level of exploitation was not as severe as when it was first introduced.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Menilek to Tafari Maskaram 26, 1901 [10 October 1908], in Paulos N̄ñoñño, 488; Timothy Fernyhough, *Serfs, Slaves and Shifta: Modes of Production and Resistance in Pre-Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: Rohobot Printing Press, 2010), 149–150.

<sup>47</sup> Yosef Jotè (*Qägnazmach*), “የከቡር ደጃዝማች ጆቴ ቱሉ,” 3–4.

But Jootee did not stay in power for long. His rule was precarious, and he was removed again in 1917.<sup>48</sup> This time his removal and the fate of Qellem was decided more by the balance of power at the political centre. In 1908 *Lej* Iyyasu, a mere boy of thirteen who was a product of the marriage between Menilek's daughter and a Wallo Oromo prince *Ras* (later *Negus*) Mikael, was declared heir to the throne by the ailing monarch. Iyyasu seems to have understood that Ethiopia was a divided nation and, since 1911, he had been striving to create a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state. Undoubtedly, he undertook a dangerous project in the presence of the well-founded and entrenched dominance of Šawan Amhara. One of his key policies was an attempt to create a multi-ethnic political elite by forging in marriage alliances at the political centre, represented by himself, and daughters of frontier elites. As he did in many peripheral territories of the empire, Iyyasu married Jootee's daughter, Askalä, when he visited Qellem in 1913, and Jootee—who was nursing the unwelcome *näffägna* presence in his home province—was happy to see his daughter married to the young monarch in the hope of reviving his power. Iyyasu married women of various ethnic groups, including Muslims. This, and the diversity of his political appointments both at the centre and the frontiers, opened a channel for forces other than the Šawan Amhara to come to power. At the forefront of this were issues of Islam and the Oromo. More specifically, Iyyasu's accession in a revisionist sense “would have meant the passing of the throne to an Oromo dynasty [Wallo Oromo], threatening the political hegemony of the Shoa nobility and the privileges it had accumulated under Menelik.”<sup>49</sup> It is hardly surprising that Šawa prevented this and reversed Iyyasu's policies via a palace coup in September 1916.

Zawditu, Menilek's daughter, was declared Empress, and Täfäri, son of *Ras* Mäkonnen Wolde-Mikael, Menilek's cousin, a regent. Mikael's determination to reverse the result of the

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<sup>48</sup> Gäbrä Egrzi'abhér to Täfäri, Tikimt 26, 1910 [16 March 1917], in Triulzi & Tesema, *የወላ ምኅረት ሰነድ*, 112.

<sup>49</sup> Markakis, *Ethiopia*, 108.

coup and Šawa's perseverance made a battle inevitable. Šawa was not prepared for an immediate showdown, and had to buy time through machinations of its formidable military strategist, *Fitawrari* Habtä-Giyorgis Diinagdee, who made an imperial call for war and imported firearms and ammunition. Jootee boldly refused to send any form of military contingent and provision against his son-in-law. When Šawa scored a spectacular military victory at the Battle of Sagalee on 27 October, the fate of Jootee, his family, and more importantly the peasants of Qellem was finally sealed. Jootee's removal and the re-establishment in the province of the *näffägna-gäbbar* system was the obvious outcome.

In March 1917 Täfäri removed Jootee and ordered *Däjjach* Gäbrä Egziabhèr Morodaa, the Oromo governor of the neighbouring Leeqaa-Naqamtee, that Qellem be placed under the direct jurisdiction of Addis Ababa and instructed him to take control of the province on behalf of his government. Gäbrä Egziabhèr remained in charge until the newly appointed Amhara governor, *Däjjach* Biru Wäldä-Gäbriel, arrived in October that year.<sup>50</sup> Biru's force of 7–8,000 *näfi'ägna* overran the region and occupied it.<sup>51</sup> This force was an addition to those settled in the province in 1908 who had been left there even after Jootee's reinstatement. Biru, along with his *näffägna*, built his garrison, *kätäma*, south of Gidaamii (Jootee's residence) at Awusaa, a hill located at the foot of Mt. Tulluu Walal, the largest mountain in western Ethiopia.<sup>52</sup> This marked the beginning of the second, longer, period of the *näffägna-gäbbar* system.<sup>53</sup> This was how the unremitting exploitation of the system was reintroduced into Qellem. By finally placing the province under direct Amhara rule, this period also signalled the complete termination of Qellem's local autonomy.

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<sup>50</sup> Gäbrä Egrzi'abhèr to Täfäri, Țiqimt 26, 1910 [05 November 1917] in Triulzi and Tesema, *የወላ ስታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 112.

<sup>51</sup> *SIR* 284, March 1918, 4.

<sup>52</sup> Informants: Asefa Ammayyaa 15/02/10, Oliiqaa Eebbaa. 17/02/10, Dambi-Doolloo; Negaso Gidada, "Oromo Historical Poems and Songs: Conquest and Exploitation in Western Wallaga, 1886-1927," *Paideuma: Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde*, 29 (1983), 36–37.

<sup>53</sup> Gäbrä Egrzi'abhèr to Täfäri, Țiqimt 26, 1910 [05 November 1917] in Triulzi and Tesema, *የወላ ስታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 112.

The job of reallocating the peasants among the *näffägna* retinue resumed and quickly undertaken, in much the same way as it had been in 1908. Soon the true face of Ethiopian colonialism that the Macca Oromo of south-western Wallagga had never experienced under Jootee—an Oromo governor labelled the cruellest by friends and enemies alike—or during the first time the system was introduced in 1908, started to unfold.<sup>54</sup> The arrival of additional *näffägna* numbering 7-8,000 men signaled worse exploitation and desperate times ahead, so the peasants—who during the first phase had gone to forest fleeing on an individual basis the unbearable miseries to which they were being subjected—now fled again. Some nine thousand of them migrated to the highlands of Beggi.<sup>55</sup> This mass outmigration, conceived by the peasants as continuation of resistance to the system, was the first reaction to the reintroduction of severe exploitation.

An Oromo *gäbbar* was required every month to pay four Maria Theresa thalers and five *qunna*<sup>56</sup> of grain to the *mälkägna*. In addition, peas, beans or cowpeas (depending on the season) were also demanded. The Oromo *gäbbar* also had to work two days a week on the farm of the *mälkägna*, who sometimes asked for cash in place of labour. Additional provisions would be required while the *mälkägna* went on a trip, be it for his master or for his own purposes. Wives of the *gäbbar* were required to grind grain and bring firewood, while children under 15 worked daily at the *mälkägna*'s residence. It was also the *gäbbar*'s responsibility to construct fences and build houses for his master when instructed to do so. Labour was also required to feed horses and mules.<sup>57</sup> Cases where the *mälkägna* fined his *gäbbar* for poor workmanship were also reported.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Habtä Mariam to Emperor Hailä Sellassie I, Tahsas 5, 1925 [14 Dec.1932], Letter-book of *Däjjazmach* Habtä Mariam, petitions to Addis Ababa Court, 1925 to 1927 EC.

<sup>55</sup> A. Triulzi, "Social Protest," 178-179.

<sup>56</sup> A measure of grain, about eight kilos.

<sup>57</sup> Triulzi and Tesema (eds), *የወላ ምዕራብ ሰነዶች*, 170–193; Informants: Abdiisaa Tolaa, 10/01/10, Muggi; Asheber Karoorsaa, 26/01/10, Gidaamii; Alämayähu Ayyaanaa, 08/02/10, Dambi-Doolloo.

<sup>58</sup> Triulzi and Tesema, *የወላ ምዕራብ ሰነዶች*, 170–193.

In addition, every Oromo *gäbbar* household paid tax to the state based on the number of oxen it possessed. A household with a pair of oxen or a single ox paid 3.25 and 1.10 Maria Theresa dollars each year respectively. Families without oxen were not exempted. The strength of the household labour was assessed and categorized as “strong hoe” and “small hoe.” They paid 1 and 0.1 Maria Theresa dollars respectively. But there was no differentiation on the honey tax each Oromo *gäbbar* was expected to pay. A tax of 2 Maria Theresa dollars was levied on each household. Those who grew coffee also paid 1 Maria Theresa dollar for every 40 fertile coffee trees.<sup>59</sup> In Qellem, the *näffägnä-gäbbar* system—an alien rule bitterly resented by the Oromo and generally characterized by ethnic stratification—exemplified power relations throughout the Ethiopian empire-state.

The Oromo *gäbbar* were also obliged to work on Biru’s farms anywhere in the province during this period. His estates in Fiinchoo, northwest of Sayyoo town demanded a large labour force. Men were required for normal farm labouring, and women and children for weeding the crops. This labour was needed constantly until the crops had been gathered and stored in Biru’s granaries.<sup>60</sup> Consequently, labour was required in order that the appointed military commander and *näffäгна* governor were able “to eat” Qellem. Failure to fulfil or attempt to escape these requirements was seriously punished. One particular Awwoorii recalled how she was chained to pillars of a *mälkäгна* house for attempting to escape her responsibilities in Fiinchoo because her three children, all under ten, had been left behind without any care in Sayyoo town. Memories of Qellem traditions are immensely rich regarding the miseries the people suffered under direct Amhara rule.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Francesco d’Apice, “Le imposte fondiarie e I tribute nell’ Uollega,” *Rivista di dirto coloniale*, 2 (1) (January to March 1939), 60.

<sup>60</sup> Informants: Abdiisaa Tolaa, 10/01/10, Muggi; Asheber Karoorsaa, 26/01/10, Gidaamii; Alemayehu Ayyaanaa, 08/02/10, D/Doolloo; Solomon Igguu, 12/01/10, Muggi.

<sup>61</sup> See for instance Nagaso Gidada, “Oromo Historical Poems,” 327–340; A.Triulzi, “Social Protest,” 178–179; Informant: Baalchaa Deentaa 20/08/2005, D/Doolloo.

The system's features as described above should not be confused with slavery, as is often the case. Despite the beliefs of officials in Addis Ababa and local traditions, some foreign observers—and even some scholarly works—considered that the *näffägnä-gäbbar* system and slavery were separated only in name, but were one and the same in practice. Simply put, a *gäbbar* held the same status as a slave.

In January 1933, as the *näffägnä-gäbbar* system was lifted and the last Amhara governor of the system (*Däjjazmach* Mäkonnen Wäsänè) removed, local Oromo elites who had co-operated with the empire in its conquests—not only of their own province but also of the broader western Ethiopian region—complained that “they had become slaves” of the *näffägnä* after serving all imperial demands in their country.<sup>62</sup> This is an exaggeration, because they equated slavery with loss of a social standing and wealth, to become *gäbbar* when they had previously been people of highly respected social status. As Boorana (‘pure-Oromo,’) they had possessed power in owning their share of the land and in distributing it among society as a whole, and this power in some form managed to survive the Ethiopian conquest. As the new Ethiopian administration left internal matters of the province in the hands of the local ruling house of *Däjjach* Jootee, the latter bestowed titles below *Däjjazmach* on pre-existing Oromo elites in the empire's hierarchy. This group had accumulated wealth for generations, so in their opinion it might be fairly understandable that they came to consider themselves as ‘slaves’ because of being reduced to *gäbbar* and being depicted as *näffägnä*, the equal of the Oromo peasants.

There is evidence proving that the system created circumstances in which *gäbbar* and their children were effectively enslaved. Despite the widespread problem of converting labour into cash, the *näffägnä* tried to demand payment in cash in lieu of the two-day labour per week

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<sup>62</sup> Qoro and *baläbbat* petition of Qellem to Hailä Sellassiè,” *Ṭir* 19, 1925 [26 January 1933], in Triulzi and Tesema, *የወገን የታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 175.

they expected. The eventual lack of cash resulted in the confiscation of livestock owned by the *gäbbar*. After the depletion of livestock, the Oromo *gäbbar* would be imprisoned for non-payment, and when it was impossible for the *gäbbar* to present a guarantor, which was often difficult, the *gäbbar*'s children or the *gäbbar* himself would be enslaved. In extreme cases, children would be enslaved directly upon failure to pay in cash, a practise noted in a report sent to the Emperor Hailä Sellasè.<sup>63</sup> When sent down to oversee Qellem in the wake of the *näffägnä* violence and the peasant rebellion that had ensued following the removal in December 1933 of the last governor of the system, *Däjjach* Habtä-Mariam of Naqamtee reported that he had liberated dozens of Oromo children and youths enslaved when the system was in place and also during the course of the violence. He sent many first-hand accounts describing the system as one which, despite the Emperor's belief, could be referred to as synonymous to slavery.<sup>64</sup>

*Däjjach* Habtä-Mariam was a man from the same class as the local Oromo elites in Qellem, and described the above situation in association with their self-presentation as slavery. While they were not in fact slaves in the actual sense of the word, the idea that people of pure Oromo blood had been reduced to *gäbbar* or *aškär* (house servants) at the hands of the Amhara colonists was unpalatable to Habtä-Mariam, even though they were not elites and had lived as commoners. For Habtä-Mariam all Oromo were, despite their own pre-existing internal social hierarchies, "sons of men," (*yäsäw lej* in its Amharic rendition) which meant that they could never be slaves. Thus, in one of his reports to the Emperor he stated, "...even the slaves have got their freedom [during the time of your Majesty]. How on earth could the children of men be enslaved?"<sup>65</sup> In the same report he implied that there was a distinction between those among

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<sup>63</sup> Habtä Mariam to Hailä Sellassie, Tahisas 5, 1925 E.C [13 Jan. 1933], in Triulzi and Tesema, *የወላ ታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 175.

<sup>64</sup> In addition to note number 66 above see in Triulzi and Tesema, *የወላ ታሪክ ሰነዶች* the following reports Habtä Mariam's sent to Hailä Sellassie on issues of the *gaša-gäbbar* system, slavery and crack down on the *mälkäñña* raiders: wa/mu/2/9-11, Tahisas 17, 1925; wa/mu/2/12-14, Tahisas 25, 1925.

<sup>65</sup> Habtä-Mariam to Hailä Sellassè, n.d, in Triulzi and Tesema, *የወላ ታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 173.



the people who could be enslaved and those who could not under any circumstances: “...four *gäbbar* of Janhoy [Hailä Sellassè] who were sons of men (የሰው ልጆች) [said to me in a bitter complaint] ‘others are crying for their slaves but we [being sons of men] had our own children snatched [to be counted as slaves].’”<sup>66</sup> Slaves to Habtä-Mariam were, in accordance with the conventional view of the Abyssinian state and its inhabitants, ‘dark-skinned’ Nilo-Saharan and Omotic peoples captured in raids or wars, or bought from markets in the western and south-western Ethiopian region or the conquered south. When Habtä-Mariam arrived in Qellem he was greatly affected to see Oromo children and youths enslaved. For him, an individual of Oromo descent might be poor—he could even be a *gäbbar*, or could belong to ‘socially inferior’ groups like *faaqii* (tanners) *tumtuu* (smiths)—but he could never be reduced to the status of slave.

Habtä-Mariam’s impression of the inalienability of the Oromo’s social status was very much a reflection of the Macca Oromo’s conceptualization of social hierarchies. Before the Ethiopian conquest the Macca Oromo in general, and those of Qellem in particular, were composed of four social groups of varying status in society, namely the Boorana (pure-Oromo), the Gabaroo (adopted Oromo), the slaves and the “despised” occupational castes (*tumtuu* and *faaqii*).<sup>67</sup> One consequence of the *näftägnä-gäbbar* system was the removal of pre-existing social hierarchies within the Oromo. Thus levelled, the Oromo shared the social status imposed upon them by direct Amhara rule. Most of my informants shared an attitude that was common to early twentieth century Oromo elites’ complaints to the Emperor, insofar as they believed that the *näftägnä-gäbbar* system reduced them to slavery. They implied that the institution of slavery itself was introduced under the Amhara rule, despite the fact that it was very old even among the Oromo. What the Amhara system of colonial rule did achieve was the destruction

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> L.Bartels, *Oromo Religion*, 133–202.

of the pre-existing indigenous socio-economic systems, placing all conquered peoples onto an equal footing and reducing and selling into slavery whoever was susceptible.

Supported by an absence of cash, the system resulted in the enslavement of Oromo *gäbbar* and their children.<sup>68</sup> As already mentioned, children under fifteen served at the homes of the *mälkäñña* partly firstly to ensure the payment of the various tax demands, but more importantly so that the *mälkägna* could enslave them when they were transferred to their new fiefs. It was the claim made by the Oromo peasants for the freedom of their enslaved children and the insistence of the *mälkägna* to keep them that provoked a mass peasant outburst in December 1933 that caused violence that lasted weeks.<sup>69</sup> Only the timely arrival of Habtä-Mariam prevented larger-scale destruction which otherwise would have caused heavy casualties.<sup>70</sup> Slavery led to the effective uprooting of the captives on an individual and a mass scale.

It must be emphasised that the Oromo elites' claims of having being enslaved had meaningful and realistic implications when used in reference to the peasant life under the *näftägnä-gäbbar* system. Afäwärq Gäbrä-Iyyäsus's characterization of the Ethiopian peoples before Menilek's accession as mere "slaves...of soldiers,"<sup>71</sup> was, in a looser definition in nineteenth and early twentieth century Amharic, very much representative of the case in Qellem between 1917 and 1933. *Barya* (ባርያ), the Amharic word for slave, used to indicate absolute submission and obedience. It was common for southern vassals, especially non-habäša, to close their letters to the central government with phrases such as "says your slave/*barya*," or "says

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<sup>68</sup> Habtä Mariam to Hailä Sellassè, Tahisas 5, 1925 E.C [13 Jan.1933], in Triulzi and Tesema, የወላጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች, 175.

<sup>69</sup> *Fitawrari* Hailä Mariam is remembered in tradition as one of the most notorious *mälkägna* Qellem had ever seen.

<sup>70</sup> Habtä Mariam to Hailä Sellassè undated, in Triulzi and Tesema, የወላጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች, 172-173.

<sup>71</sup> L. Fusella (trans.), "Il Dagmawi Menilek di Afawarq Gabra Iyasus," *Rasegna di Studi Etiopici*, 17 (1961), 16-17.

your obedient slave/*barya*.”<sup>72</sup> Peasant petitions to regional governors and Addis Ababa begin and end with very similar phraseology, “we, your poor slaves,” or “we, your slaves.”<sup>73</sup>

The *näffägnä-gäbbar* system attracted bitter condemnation both at home and overseas. Ethiopian critics of the system found expression among the progressive *habäša* intellectuals writing in the columns of *Birhaninna Sälam*, an Amharic weekly. Reformist intellectuals like Kidanä-Mariam Abärä,<sup>74</sup> Afäwärq Gäbrä-Iyyäsus,<sup>75</sup> and Heruy Walda-Sellase<sup>76</sup> raised critiques targeting the *näffägnä-gäbbar* system, and rocked its foundations. The system itself became one of the core concerns of early twentieth century reformist intellectuals. Indeed, *Birhaninna Sälam* rose to national prominence in March 1925, only three months after its first print was issued, by questioning the absurdity of Ethiopia’s potential wealth and its real poverty as well as its complete lack of commercial interchange.<sup>77</sup> Nearly all answers focused on excessive levies imposed on the peasants and proposed the replacement of these indiscriminate and endless levies and labour demands with *qurṭ geber*, a fixed annual tribute system.<sup>78</sup>

The system was condemned even more ferociously by foreign observers. L. I. Athil, after characterizing the *näffägnä* retinue, military and civil, as “unproductive ... and rapacious” described the system as a blight on the countryside.<sup>79</sup> A correspondent from *The Times* considered the militarized colonial rule represented by the *näffägnä-gäbbar* system in Ethiopia’s south a system “...far worse evil than slavery.” He concluded that “[t]he Abyssinian peasantry (who form the bulk of the population) are, indeed, being sucked dry.”<sup>80</sup> One

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<sup>72</sup> See among others *däjjach* Gäbrä-Egziabher and *däjjach* Habtä-Mariam letters to Addis Ababa in Alessandro Triulzi and Tesema Ta’a, *Yä Wälläggä Yä Tarik Sänädoch*, pp. 57-218.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 184-185, 187.

<sup>74</sup> *Birhaninna Sälam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Year, No.29, 21 July 1927.

<sup>75</sup> L. Fusella (trans.), “Il Dagmawi Menilek,” 16-17.

<sup>76</sup> *Birhaninna Sälam*, 2 May 1925; Idem, 16 May 1925, 14 January 1926.

<sup>77</sup> *Birhaninna Sälam*, 26 March 1925.

<sup>78</sup> *Birhaninna Sälam*, 2 February 1925, Idem, 07 April 1925, 13 May 1926, 14 January 1926, 13 December 1925.

<sup>79</sup> L.F.I. Athill, “Through south-western Abyssinia to the Nile,” *The Geographical Journal*, 56 (5), 1920, 353.

<sup>80</sup> *The Times*, 18 April 1931.

monograph contended that the *näffägnä-gäbbar* system was in its purest form institutionalized slavery, although European observers and travellers failed to distinguish this.<sup>81</sup> *The Times* correspondent does not seem to stand alone in his observation. More and more reports from Qellem matched his perspective.

There was a thin but clear line separating *gäbbar* from slavery. A *gäbbar*, no matter how deep and wide the extent of economic exploitation and ethno-cultural oppression, was not uprooted from his land. Although Qellem was particularly representative of such a type, this cannot be taken as an outstanding factor of the system throughout the conquered south. The nature of the connection established between the local mix of circumstances and Addis Ababa depended on local events. In the neighbouring province of Iluu Abbäa-boor, for example, although what was given to the colonists in the beginning was merely the right to collect tributes and live off the peasants, this arrangement gradually became embedded over the passage of time. *Dajjach* Ganamee (1913–1916) began distributing the land itself, and this was exacerbated in the 1920s and 1930s. While there is little doubt that the consequences of the system in Qellem led to the introduction of slavery in a way unprecedented in the eyes of the local inhabitants, a slave and a *gäbbar* were never the same in status even under the worst aspects of the *näffägnä-gäbbär* system.

Despite the *The Times* correspondent's observations, there is little reason to believe that, in a relative sense, the *näffägnä-gäbbär* system was a "...far worse evil than slavery."<sup>82</sup> Nor can a claim that the system was "institutionalized slavery"<sup>83</sup> be substantiated with any historical evidence. There is enough room to doubt observations of newcomers in the region—British officer John Boyes, for example, shows some confusion in his understanding of the region, but did not fail to distinguish between *gäbbar* and slavery. There were few inexperienced observers

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<sup>81</sup> Guluma Gamada, "Subsistence, Slavery and Violence in the Lower Omo Valley, ca. 1898–1940s," *Northeast African Studies*, 12 (1), 13.

<sup>82</sup> *The Times*, 18 April 1931.

<sup>83</sup> Guluma Gamada, "Subsistence," 13.

who confused one system with another.<sup>84</sup> The best example was Whalley, who offered an impressive record of distinction between *gäbbär* and slaves in Maji.<sup>85</sup> While Ethiopia's early twentieth century Amharic reformist intellectuals saw much merit in replacing the *näffägnä-gäbbär* system with a fixed annual tribute, they apparently made their observations on theoretical bases from what they saw in the environs of Addis Ababa (the Tuulama Oromo for example). They knew little about the frontier regions, where the worst forms of the system were being imposed. By setting their reformist stances in Addis Ababa, and despite genuinely progressive intentions, it sounds as if they saw nothing in their proposal that was not already in place, for example in Qellem, and failed to spot any difference between the two institutions. Perhaps because their practical experiences were limited to Amharic-speaking *habäša* society in the Abyssinian homeland, where the lord and his peasants had cultural unity and the mitigating effects of kinship and ethnicity were still present, they remained oblivious to differences between the southern peasant and his northern counterpart. Little could they imagine that the economic exploitation they were attacking as the major problem preventing the country's progress was having an equally damaging parallel on another level—that of ethno-cultural oppression. Nevertheless, in the eyes of early twentieth century intellectuals, the exploitation of the south by the north was not a problem—the problem was rather its excessive practice. The reformist intellectuals in some ways constituted a part of the very system against which they were levelling criticism. Their rather blinkered viewpoint lasted well into the twentieth century and took a great toll on Ethiopia as it sought to modernize—a toll that was not inconsequential to the country's survival.

The upshot of dealing with comparisons between slavery and the *näffägnä-gäbbär* system is vital, because it clarifies the way the peasants in Qellem understood their lives under

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<sup>84</sup> John Boyes, *My Abyssinian Journey: A Journey through Abyssinia from the Red sea to Nairobi in 1906 in the Days of Emperor Menelik* (Nairobi, n.d), 33.

<sup>85</sup> FO 401/34, 44, Enc, "Extract from Consular Report," Maji, Whalley, 24 December 1932.

direct Amhara rule and why the Oromo elites co-opted by the state described the system they were serving as slavery. As the succeeding chapters of the thesis will show, the reason why Oromo elites sometimes found themselves allied with the peasants had its roots in their understanding of direct Amhara rule as revealed to them through the *näffägnä-gäbbar* system. In this way, the imposition of such a system in Qellem not only greatly affected the local social structure but also provoked a peasant resistance supported by imperial Ethiopia's local co-opts—a feature that further complicated state-society relations and one that fed peasant opposition lasting for many decades. This turbulent history, and the subsequent period that lasted until the 1974 revolution, was significant in determining changes within the peasantry, the type of relations they had with local elites, and more importantly their interaction with the state. The gist of the argument is that the exploitation of labour and wealth witnessed by the peasants during the *näffägnä-gäbbar* era was unparalleled in the history of imperial Ethiopia's state-society interaction, marked by rigid ethno-cultural boundaries and thus conditioned the birth of a long-lived peasant resistance.

*Däjjazmach* Habtä-Mariam Gäbrä-Egziabher (alias Hambisaa Kumsaa) is one of the key historical figures in this study, and at this stage he deserves a brief introduction in terms of his origins and experience in governance. Habtä-Mariam was born into the ruling house Naqamtee. His preeminence in the politics of imperial Ethiopia's western regions begins with the succession to his father in governing his home province, Naqamtee, and its dependencies in Sibuu land further west. He was born on 19 June 1910 and was brought up in his father's palace in Naqamtee, where he received an EOC church education. He was taught under key EOC priests (Mämrè Gäbru Wäldä-Mariyam and Abba Tsägga Näway) whom his father had brought to Gojjam. He was also given mentorship in French language by Ethiopian teacher

Tsägaye Wäldä-Tsadiq.<sup>86</sup> At only twenty-one, Habtä-Mariam assumed hereditary governorship of Naqamtee when his father *Däjjazmach* Gäbrä-Egziabhèr died of diabetes on 1 July 1923.<sup>87</sup> The central imperial government in Addis Ababa confirmed Habtä-Mariam's hereditary succession on 29 September 1924. With the assistance of his father's advisors, Habtä-Mariam embarked on the execution of state affairs.<sup>88</sup> The ruling house of Naqamtee, particularly during tenure of Habtä-Mariam's father, Kumsaa Morodaa (alias *Däjjazmach* Gäbrä-Egziabhèr)—which lasted from 1898 to 1917 EC—was particularly skilful in understanding imperial Ethiopia's socio-economic and political order, and attempted to manipulate the imperial directives to its own advantage, surviving multiple and complex challenges until the death of *Däjjazmach* Habtä-Mariam in 1936.<sup>89</sup> Naqamtee governors were determined to exploit rather than resist imperial Ethiopia's rapidly expanding central imperial state and the political culture it prescribed to them.<sup>90</sup> In the course of his career, especially regarding his achievements in Qellem, Habtä-Mariam clearly proved he was a very good student of his father's methods.

Like Emperor Menilek did for his father Gäbrä-Egziabher, Emperor Haila-Sellase also entrusted Qellem to Habtä-Mariam.<sup>91</sup> Habtä-Mariam arrived in Qellem at a critical time when the brutal *näffägna-gäbbar* system was reaching its climax and provoked peasant rebellion. He entrusted his home province Naqamtee to his closest associates (*Fitawrari* Dhinsaa Shonee and

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<sup>86</sup> Kebede Kejela, "A Biography of Dejazmach Habte Mariam Gebreigziabher," (BA thesis in History, AAU, 1989), 4.

<sup>87</sup> *Däjjazmach* Gäbrä-Egziabhèr to Empress Zawditu Menilek, Nāhasè 9, 1917 [15 Aug 1925], in Alessandro Triulzi and Tesema Ta'a (eds), *የወላጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 168.

<sup>88</sup> Kebede Kejela, "A Biography of Dejazmach Habte Mariam Gebreigziabher," (BA thesis in History, AAU, 1989), 14-15.

<sup>89</sup> A. Triulzi, "Nekemte and Addis Ababa: Dilemmas of Provincial Rule," in *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia: Essays in History and Social Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 60.

<sup>90</sup> Alessandro Triulzi and Tesema Ta'a (eds), *የወላጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች*, XLV.

<sup>91</sup> *Däjjazmach* Habtä-Mariam Emperor Haila Sellase, n.d, in Alessandro Triulzi and Tesema Ta'a (eds), *የወላጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 170.

*Fitawrari* Birraatuu Oljirraa, who were based in naqamtee and Arjoo respectively)<sup>92</sup> and arrived in Tabor, the administrative centre of Qellem, on 6 November 1932.<sup>93</sup> As will be discussed in the next chapter, his arrival in Qellem terminated the *näſſägna-gäbbar* system and instituted a property tax to replace it. He reorganised Qellem's administrative structure = after the model of his home province of Naqamtee and ruled the region in relative stability.<sup>94</sup>

Habtä-Mariam played a vital leadership role in the course of the birth of the Western Galla Confederation (WGC) of 1936, a short lived western Oromo independent government. He also became the founding leader of the WGC. Habtä-Mariam and his Oromo potentates hoped to form a semi-independent government under British protection, but the hope was dashed when the British supported the Italian takeover instead. With the Italians occupying Naqamtee and all the western provinces, Habtä-Mariam was appointed by the Italian government as a salaried ruler. Habtä-Mariam died shortly after the Italian occupation (in January 1937).<sup>95</sup> His death was mysterious and details are unclear.

## Impacts

The primary impact of the system on the local inhabitants was the disruption it brought to their social and economic lives. Since everyone over fifteen was registered as *gäbbar* in order to serve as an “economic resource to be eaten” by the colonists, disruption of the historical forms of local social organization became inevitable. The Macca Oromo peasant families relied fundamentally on household labour, but cooperative labour simultaneously played an equally important role. In traditional Macca Oromo peasant society, cooperative economic and social

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<sup>92</sup> Kebede Kejela, “A Biography of Dejazmach Habte Mariam Gebreigziabher,” (BA thesis in History, AAU, 1989), 40-59.

<sup>93</sup> *Däjjazmach* Habtä-Mariam to Hailä-Sellassé, n.d., in Alessandro Triulzi and Tesema Ta'a (eds), *የወሊጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 170.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Kebede Kejela, “A Biography of Dejazmach Habte Mariam Gebreigziabher,” (BA thesis in History, AAU, 1989), 31-39.



undertakings were strengthened by collective labour which various forms of activities of rural life (sowing, weeding, harvesting, ploughing, house building, road making) demanded. Such collective efforts as the communal appropriation of natural resources (water and plants) and extended forms of cooperation had been realized among the Macca Oromo through communal land ownership and the presence of various voluntary social and economic institutions.<sup>96</sup> In the pre-Amhara days, the Macca Oromo possessed many institutions for social and economic cooperation that even survived the Ethiopian conquest. *Daboo* and *daadoo* were the most important among them. *Daboo* was a form of economic and social cooperation in which between ten and forty people, sometimes more, came together when the head of a peasant household (in this case *abbaa-daboo*/father of *daboo*) asked the neighbourhood to provide labour on whatever he needed help with (work on his farm, building a house, making road) for a day of unpaid work. The *Abbaa-daboo* and his wife (*haadha-daboo*) would provide food and drinks for the day. *Daboo* was mobilized depending on *abbaa-daboo*'s social qualities: his sociability, pleasant manners, generosity and love of friends. This means that a poor man who possessed these qualities could enlist the cooperation of much more labour than a rich person who could prepare a fabulous feast at the end of the work.<sup>97</sup>

*Daadoo* was usually made up of a smaller group, whose members entered into long-term voluntary reciprocal cooperation on equal terms. The members worked for each other in turn, and like *daboo* the labour was unpaid. The number of members seldom exceeded eight or ten. A *daadoo* group would be made up of people from similar social group: a *daadoo* of girls or of boys, married men only, married women only, or a mixed one. *Daadoo* groups cooperated among themselves when harder work was required.<sup>98</sup> Both *daboo* and *daadoo* were

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<sup>96</sup> Tesema Ta'a, "Traditional and Modern cooperatives among the oromo," in *Being and becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiries* (Lawrenceville: the Red Sea Press, 1996), 203-204.

<sup>97</sup> Lambert Bartels, "Dabo, A Form of Cooperation among the Farmers of the Macha Galla of Ethiopia: Social aspects, Songs and Ritual," in *Anthropos* (1975), 883-925.

<sup>98</sup> Bartels Lambert, "Dado, A Form of Cooperation on Equal Terms among the Macha Galla of Ethiopia *Anthropos*, (1977), 497-513.

accompanied by various kinds of songs, including war songs and love songs. Both institutions were powerful, not only in terms of increasing agricultural productivity, but also in helping out the least well off and enabling them to be self-sufficient. The counting, registration and exploitation that the *näftägnä-gäbbar* system introduced never took *daboo* and *daadoo* into consideration. Both were immediately dismantled by a system that simply considered the local people as economic assets, reallocating them to different *näftägnä*. They separated husband and wife, fathers and children, brothers and sisters as well as members of a given *daadoo* or *daboo*. By destroying these associations, the system attacked the existing culture of hard work that had been fuelled by incentives driven by the labour provided by the associations. While a reduction in agricultural productivity was one result of this, immediate exposure of the poor to paupery was another. Local traditions clearly associate these crises with the advent of an alien rule that had disregarded historical forms of social organization.<sup>99</sup> Written sources are replete with reports of all of agricultural productivity despite the fertility of the land.

The socio-economic damage caused by the *näftägnä-gäbbar* system was not limited to the destruction of *daboo* and *daadoo*. According to local traditions the system delayed the marriage of the *qeerroo*, young but socially mature Oromo men, because of the exhaustion of their wealth by the system. Before the dissolution of Qellem's local autonomy in 1917, a *qeerroo* inherited part of the family land, crops from which supported him to produce his own wealth to be used as a dowry. With arrival of the *näftägnä-gäbbar* system, the *qeerroo* lost their traditional system of preparing for marriage on time. Parents also had no means of assisting their sons as their resources too had been exhausted by the system. As each child over fifteen in a family was recorded by the system to be included into household exactions, the *qeerroo* normally had no time to work for themselves in order to accrue wealth for marriage. When

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<sup>99</sup> Informants: Baalchaa Deentaa 20/08/2005, Dambi Doolloo; Abdiisaa Tolaa, 10/01/10, Muggi; Asheber Karoorsaa, 26/01/10, Gidaamii; Alemayehu Ayyaanaa, 08/02/10, Dambi-Doolloo; Solomon Igguu, 12/01/10, Muggi.

complaints reached *Däjjach* Biru, he threatened to give Oromo girls to his Kullo and Konta soldiers, which he had brought with him in great numbers.<sup>100</sup> Thus, the girls felt the resentment, and despite the lack of Oromo traditions for such boldness on their part, they encouraged *qeerroo* in public songs to marry them at the right time.<sup>101</sup>

The system reduced the people of Qellem to unprecedented levels of poverty and led to a proliferation of beggary on a scale never before seen in the province. As far as Qellem is concerned, begging was said to have begun with the arrival of the *näftägnä-gäbbar* system. “*Oromoon kadhattuu hinqabu*/the Oromo had no beggars” was a common saying. In 1900 an observer described Qellem as “delightful park-like country” and its Oromo inhabitants as “...prosperous ... farmers, raising good crops and owning fine cattle.”<sup>102</sup> In 1899 Qellem’s output was commented on by a traveller to the region as being “...the most valuable on earth”, its climate healthy and its population industrious. It was therefore hoped that this region, under the rule of Menilek’s empire, “would continue to advance along the path of peaceful progress”, an advance that would be beneficial not only for Ethiopia but also for its neighbouring countries.<sup>103</sup> In 1900 Major Austin also described Qellem as a “prosperous and seemingly contented ...country.”<sup>104</sup> Ironically, these extremely valuable resources were rapidly stripped while living standards deteriorated, and when local autonomy was finally dissolved in 1917 and handed over to Šāwan *mālkägna*, Qellem had become an impoverished country with numerous beggars. When he was ordered to take over Qellem in 1920 *Däjjazmach Gäbrä* Egziabhér of Naqmttee sent down his brother, who reported back to Addis Ababa that “the

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<sup>100</sup> Informant: Yosef Innooroo, Ababa Machii, Waaqjira Hiixuu, Nägaš Shuuramoo.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Charles Gwynn, “The Frontiers of Abyssinia: A Retrospect,” in *Journal of the Royal African Society* 36 (143) (April 1937), 155.

<sup>103</sup> Herbert Weld Blundell, “A Journey through Abyssinia to the Nile,” *The Geographical Journal* 15 (2) (Feb.1900), 118.

<sup>104</sup> Major Austin, “Report on a Tour in South-western Abyssinia,” 7 July 1900, FO 1/44.

country is already deserted and mostly abandoned, with a few scattered households left. The people have long left the farm work.”<sup>105</sup>

In the early 1920s, a missionary serving in Qellem referred to an unspecified but large number of beggars in the town of Sayyoo when describing the poverty of its inhabitants.<sup>106</sup> Gidaadaa Soolan’s memoir also mentioned more than once that roughly 160 beggars would assemble for a weekly hand-out from the American mission in a town with a population of less than three thousand.<sup>107</sup> Like many other African pre-colonial societies, the Oromo must have had their poor, but it can safely be concluded that it was the *näftägnä-gäbbar* system that had produced such a large number of beggars.

The *näftägnä-gäbbar* system practiced in Qellem also exposed Addis Ababa’s preferential treatment of the local Amhara *mälkägna*, even when compared to its most loyal Oromo vassal, *Däjjazmach* Habtä-Mariam. The Emperor ordered him to go quickly and “control the area ...protect it [Qellem] from looting.”<sup>108</sup> On paper, the idea of control applied to any unruly person, not excluding *mälkägna*. But Habtä-Mariam appears to have been well aware from his knowledge of Addis Ababa’s correspondences with his father that this was not the actual case. When he headed a large and well-armed provincial army he had to repeatedly write and make phone calls to the Emperor to get specific orders for detention of *Fitawrari* Hailä-Mariam Chärè, whom he found looting and enslaving the country in broad daylight.<sup>109</sup> Once Hailä-Mariam Chärè was in chains, eight major *Mälkäñña* refused to obey Habtä-Mariam, claiming they took their orders directly from Addis Ababa.<sup>110</sup> “በረታችን የጃንሆይ ነው፤

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<sup>105</sup> Gäbrä Egzi’abhér to Täfäri Mäkonnen and Empress Zäwditu, written on Tiqimt 17, 1913 EC/26 Oct.1920, 1/wä/mu Letter-book of *Däjjazmach* Gäbrä Egzi’abhér Correspondence with the Central government, 1898-1917 EC.

<sup>106</sup> Thomas Lambie, *Boot and Saddle in Africa* (New York, 1943), 26; *Idem*, *A Doctor*, 127-128, 133.

<sup>107</sup> Gidada Solon, *The Other Side of Darkness* (New York, 1972), 6, 10-14.

<sup>108</sup> Habtä-Mariam to Hailä Sellassè undated, in Triulzi and Tesema, *የወሊጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 170.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Habtä-Mariam to Hailä-Sellassié December 1933, in Triulzi and Tesema, *የወሊጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 171. These were *Fitawrari* Hailé Sellassié, *Fitawrari* Guwangul, *Fitawrari* Turé, *Fitawrari* Wäldäyes, *Balanbaras* Shibashi, *Girazmach* Guwangul, *Qäññazmach* Ambaw, Haylé Shibashi and Dasta Nigusé.

እኛም የመንግሥት ባሮች ነን/our guns belong to his Majesty [the Emperor] and that we are servants of the [Ethiopian] government”<sup>111</sup> was their outspoken answer to the new Oromo governor. Resistance by this group of *mälkägna* clearly reflected the ethnic stratification which underlay the empire. In the Ethiopian empire-state, class or status was not simply a function of property or office, but also of ethnic, economic, and socio-religious identity.<sup>112</sup> When these Amhara *mälkägna* claimed they were gun bearers of the Emperor and servants of the government, they were calling on the ethnic stratification and the preferential treatment they felt they deserved for being Amhara, even over an Oromo regional governor loyal to Addis Ababa. The policy had in fact already been set in place by Emperor Menilek (in 1897) when he appointed Dämissäw Näsibu, an Amhara governor of Arjoo and Horro-Guduruu, as superintendent, *yäbäläy täbbaqi*, above peaceful and loyal Oromo governors, Jootee of Qellem and Kumsaa of Naqmttee.

Paradoxically, another important consequence of the *näftägnä-gäbbar* system was the blurring of powerful social distinctions that developed among the Macca Oromo. Before the Ethiopian conquest, the Macca Oromo were composed of four social groups of varying status within society, namely the Boorana, the Gabaroo, the slaves, and the despised occupational castes.<sup>113</sup> The Boorana comprised the upper social stratum. They were considered few and believed to be first born, and of ‘pure’ Oromo descent. They assumed all the best traits of traditional Macca Oromo society: they considered themselves closer to *Waaqa*, God, for whom they acted as a medium.<sup>114</sup> Every *qaalluu* and *qaallittii*, male and female ritual leaders in the *gadaa* system respectively, would be raised only from the Boorana class.

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> U.S. Foreign Economic Administration, “Ethiopia: Handbook of Current Economic Information,” memo (Prepared for the U Technical Project to Ethiopia, 1944), 47.

<sup>113</sup> L. Bartels, *Oromo Religion*, 133-202.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 133-160; Alessandro Triulzi, “Frontier History in Ethiopia, Western Wallagga: The Making of A Frontier Society,” in *Proceedings of the Eleventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Addis Aababa, 1994), 339-350; Idem, “United and Divided: Boorana and Gabaro among the Macha Oromo in Western Ethiopia,” in Baxter, Hultin and Triulzi (eds), *Being and Becoming Oromo*, 251-164.

Unlike the Boorana, the Gabaroo were regarded as numerous, but held no seniority over rituals practiced in the *gadaa* system. They were mainly pre-Oromo peoples, the Mao and the Ganqa, who had been adopted into Oromo society through its popular system of adoption, *moggaasa* and *guddifachaa*. They were regarded as free people, and intermarried with the Boorana.<sup>115</sup> Like any other pre-colonial society, slaves also existed in the pre-conquest Macca Oromo system. They made up the lowest social stratum, providing labour for all domestic services and agriculture.<sup>116</sup> *Tumtuu* and *faaqii* (respectively blacksmiths and tanners) were despised castes of artisans who collectively formed a social stratum between the Gabaroo and the slaves—they were inferior to the former, yet superior to the latter.<sup>117</sup> Despite the fact that the *gadaa* had been replaced by a monarchical system, and whatever the cause, these social strata survived even after the Ethiopian conquest.

The advent of the *näftägnä-gäbbar* system in 1917 did away with three of the strata and left a relatively cohesive Oromo group. The socio-economic and political power associated with the pure Boorana group was completely destroyed. This meant that the Gabaroo, under the new system, joined the Boorana as Oromo *gäbbar*. The result was mixed for the slaves, some of whom were classified as *gäbbar* along with their masters, while the rest were taken into the same status under the new system by the *mälkäñña* on several precepts. The social distinction linked to *tumtuu* and *faaqii* remained the same, despite their similarity to the rest in physical appearance.<sup>118</sup>

To summarise, the *näftägnä-gäbbar* system so bitterly resented by the Oromo inhabitants of Qellem brought them from various social classes into one single class,

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<sup>115</sup> L. Bartels, *Oromo Religion*, 161-165.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 182-202.

<sup>118</sup> Triulzi and Tesema (eds), *የወገን የታሪክ ስነ-ልቦና*, 171-177. It is interesting to note that in his report to the Emperor used Oromo concepts of free people, *birmaduu/mucaa namaa*, literally in Amharic texts, i.e. *Yä säw lijoch* (literally children of human being) to identify free people from slaves.

strengthening Oromo identity and consciousness, which was manifested more among those Oromo who experienced miseries of the *näftägna-gäbbar* system than those who did not. This awareness, combined with Addis Ababa's preferential treatment of its local *näftägna* agents, united various Oromo ruling houses which had previously been rivals onto one side, and the ruling houses with the common people onto another in a combined effort to resist the Ethiopian empire state. I will consider this at greater length in the chapter dealing with Oromo resistance in the region.

The fact that the imposition of such a system on Qellem affected the social structure of the local people to a great degree and provoked peasant resistance that lasted for nearly a century is less well understood in the Ethiopian historiography. The imposition of the system and its impacts determined the course of local development, which in turn shaped the nature of Qellem's relations with its neighbouring territories and with Addis Ababa. Having been melted down into analogous socio-economic status, the peasants were forced to create survival strategies in which they found their culture more useful than ever. When this began to manifest itself in various forms in the 1920s, peasant resistance became more culturally defined.

One major work undertaken by the Amhara governors appointed over Qellem was the expansion of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC). There were different reasons behind this project. First, the *näftägnä-gäbbar* system was run and maintained by non-Oromo soldiers, civil servants and their families, all of whom were traditionally adherents of the EOC. To practice their religion they needed a Church wherever they were 'planted'. Second, and more importantly, the EOC was a vital ideological mentor of the state, something that was badly needed in the conquered south to propagate and win ideological leadership for the empire over the local population. The EOC had been there since the region came under Ethiopian rule in ca.1886, and had been gradually expanding ever since. Introducing the EOC to the conquered territories was an idea that was as old as the Abyssinian state itself, and the local governor of

Qellem, like all other governors in the south, had an obligation to be converted first, before introducing and expanding the effective presence of the Church. Although there were only twelve churches by 1917, the period of direct Amhara rule (1917–1933) increased this to thirty-one. Building more EOC churches meant putting aside large tracts of land, *sämon* land/ሰሞን መሬት, church land, to feed the clergy and to generate income for its central patriarchate.

Despite its tremendous growth the EOC had a comparatively weak influence on the peasants. It conducted mass baptisms without any prior Christian instruction to make official claims of conversion which were used in reports sent to the EOC's central patriarchate. It presented its weekly sermon in the Geez language that even the majority of the peasants in the old Abyssinian provinces could not understand, let alone those in the conquered south. Both methods of evangelism claimed service to the mass of peasants, which stressed the EOC's association with the colonial structure and failed to persuade the peasants away from some aspects of their traditional religious practices. The EOC's attempt at converting the people in Qellem resulted in a conversion of sorts, but the EOC's influence was considerably stronger within the local Oromo elites and their families. This created strong local co-operation, but was set back by the *näftägnä-gäbbar* system when the elites themselves were made *gäbbar*. Only in the post-1933 period, when the introduction of property tax restored the elites to their old status, did they resume cooperating with the state.<sup>119</sup>

The social and cultural rifts the EOC created were exploited by Protestantism, which was introduced to the region shortly after the advent of direct Amhara rule. The Amhara governor, *Däjjazmach* Biru, and his colonial army in 1918 encountered a serious threat from the "Spanish Flu," pandemic which was sweeping across western Ethiopia.<sup>120</sup> As Addis Ababa itself was already rocked and was unable to help, Biru turned for help to the nearby Sudan. Dr

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<sup>119</sup> Kumsa Boro, *Kumsaa Boroo: Jiruu fi Jireenya (Life and Times)*, 393.

<sup>120</sup> Richard Pankhurst, "The Hidar Bashita of the 1918," *The Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 13 (2) (1975), 103–131.



Thomas Lambie, a Presbyterian missionary, was invited to take on the role of providing medical care, and was at the same time given permission to start Protestant teachings.<sup>121</sup> This compelled the Amhara governor of Qellem to allow what he and his habäša state would otherwise had never permitted in their empire, namely western missionaries and their version of Christianity. By making use of the Oromo language (which the Orthodox clergy despised) Protestantism exploited the region's contemporary socio-economic and political conditions. It quickly trained indigenous evangelists to reach the mass of Oromo people in Sayyoo and around, and offered its clinic and school, both based in the Sayyoo mission compound, as attractive centres for evangelism.<sup>122</sup>

Imperial Ethiopia's policy of assimilating the conquered into Amharic culture rested on a dual foundation of financing a robust expansion of Amharic language and culture on one hand and destruction of indigenous languages and cultures on the other. Protestantism, however, used the Oromo language in its preaching and teaching. It translated the Bible into Oromo, produced various materials in Oromo and displayed these to the peasants. But the teachings of Protestantism were intended for religious, rather than political purposes. In addition to becoming a strong rival to the EOC, the introduction and growth of Protestantism produced and supported the inevitable systematic growth of something the elites wanted to see destroyed, namely the Oromo language. As the project of expanding Protestantism in the region was run and eventually owned by indigenous evangelists or their children—who were often themselves peasants—it came to present an institutionalized challenge to imperial Ethiopia's fundamental intention of creating an "Ethiopian" nation-state within a multi-national empire. It comes as no surprise that Evangelical churches became home to the growth of local Oromo self-consciousness. As the state realized this, it embarked upon the violent destruction of

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<sup>121</sup> Thomas A. Lambie, *A Doctor*, 122.

<sup>122</sup> Kumsa Boro, *Kumsaa Boroo*, 393.

Protestantism, but the church explained this to the peasants as damage the state was inflicting upon its own people. The church rapidly became an instrument of peasant resistance. The details of this dynamic development will be covered more fully in Chapter Seven, so it will suffice here to say that the coming of the *näftägnä-gäbbär* system directly impacted the introduction of Protestantism to Qellem, provoking the fermentation of tools that would help local resistance last much longer than might have been envisaged by the state.<sup>123</sup>

Another impact of the *näftägnä -gäbbär* was provocation of what I have conceptualized in this study as evolving transcripts of resistance. The system's exploitation was not limited to the economy, it had another side too. As the conquered peoples of the south belonged to ethno-cultural groups that were distinct from the colonists, the kinship and ethno-cultural bonds that united peasants and their rulers in the Abyssinian homeland were lacking here, and economic exploitation was combined with ethno-cultural oppression.<sup>124</sup>

Because of its strategic importance for defence, the colonists often built their *kätäma* (garrisons) on hilltops, and this physical setting also reflected their social status.<sup>125</sup> According to Harold Marcus, the colonists built "rigid social relationships" among themselves.<sup>126</sup> When asked about social relations between Oromo peasants and the *näftägnä* Abba Abärra, a *näftägnä* who served in Qellem from 1918 onwards stated that they neither dined with, chatted with nor befriended any Oromo. Eating with them, Abba Abärra believed, was equivalent to breaching a religious taboo, even though the colonists had obtained all their food provisions from the local Oromo.<sup>127</sup> This rigid behaviour of the governing *näftägnä* underlines their distinctiveness and the ethno-cultural oppression this system of governance brought with it.

Since the system classified the Oromo peasants as a subjugated class and the conquering

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<sup>123</sup> See Chapter Six.

<sup>124</sup> Bahru Zewde, "Relations," 51.

<sup>125</sup> Daniel Ayana, "Land Tenure," 108

<sup>126</sup> Harold Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II, 1844–1913* (Lawrenceville, 1975), 194.

<sup>127</sup> ATFN, interview with Abba Abärra, 28 Feb. 1972, Dambi-Doolloo," 10.

*näffägna* as a ruling class, institutionalized and culturally defined conflict between the two groups was soon in full swing.<sup>128</sup> In their own historical narrative, the Macca Oromo of Qellem interpreted the period of direct Amhara rule as the beginning of *bittaa oromaa* or alien rule.<sup>129</sup> Peasant resistance in Qellem was similarly culturally defined from the outset. The ongoing socio-cultural conflict strengthened the peasants' determination to express their grievances via cultural idioms. From the early 1920s onwards, local Oromo identities were redefined more strongly, and came to be increasingly framed in reference to the exploiters, the Amhara. The establishment of direct Amhara rule was, therefore, a turning point in popular consciousness as its imposition brought drastic changes.<sup>130</sup> It symbolized the end of independence and imposition of rule by a people whose language, culture and manners were different from their own. The *näffägna-gäbbär* system provoked long-lasting peasant resistance as much as it practiced extreme exploitation and ethno-cultural oppression. Political and socio-cultural conflicts between the Amhara settlers and the indigenous Oromo were reinforced with every daily encounter, although this was not the case before 1917.

The *näffägnä-gäbbär* system endangered peasant subsistence and linked this threat with a particular ethno-cultural group, the Amhara. It introduced a system of exploitation in which peasants were taxed according to their wealth, not according to the size of the land they cultivated. Under such a burden, the peasants' subsistence came under threat, along with their historical forms of social organisation. And as if such rapacious exploitation was not enough, the Oromo peasants of Qellem, like many other peoples in the conquered south, were spurned by their Amhara overlords, the soldiers, and even more by priests. They were permanently

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<sup>128</sup> See for instance, Donald Donham, "Old Abyssinia and the New Ethiopian Empire: Themes in Social History," in *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia*, 24–48.

<sup>129</sup> Informants: Fiixee Birrii (05/08/2010), Ulaa Fiixumaa (14/08/2010), Nägaš Shuuramoo (10/08/2010), D/Doolloo; Yosef Jotè, "የከቡር ደጃዝማች ጆቴ ተሉ," 4–5.

<sup>130</sup> Bahru Zewde, "A Biography of Dejazmach Jote Tulu, Abba Iggu (1855-1918)," (BA Thesis, *Hailé Sellassié I* University, Department of History, 1970), 51; Nagaso Gidada, "The Impact of Christianity," 5-6; Mitiku Tucho, "Impacts of Pastoralism on the Oromo of Qellam, Wollega," (BA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, Department of History, 1983), 18.

mocked and devalued as inferior in terms of both culture and identity.<sup>131</sup> They were conquered and defeated, but they too had their “weapons of the weak”<sup>132</sup> with which they interacted within a relatively sophisticated and militarized empire-state. When they started protesting against exploitation and those who were exploiting them—even when this referred to Oromo *baläbbat*—the Oromo peasants resorted to their pre-conquest cultural and ethnic values as an expression of their discontent. These complex relationship and issues of resistance will be the subject of the next chapter.

## Conclusion

This chapter attempted to highlight the salient features of imperial Ethiopia’s paradigm of colonialism, the *näffägnä-gäbbär* system, as it unfolded in Qellem. It was practiced in two separate periods, 1908–12 and 1917–33. The level of economic exploitation was so high, especially during the second phase, that it indiscriminately subjected all social groups as *gäbbar*. The colonists were Amhara elites who practiced a different culture from the inhabitants, and by allying themselves with the EOC clergy they deliberately worked towards destruction of local culture. The system showed signs of clear ethno-cultural subjugation in addition to extreme economic exploitation. This turbulent time, and the subsequent period that lasted until 1974 revolution, turned out to be important in shaping changes within the peasants, their relations with the state and its agents. The gist of the argument is that the *näffägnä-gäbbar* system was vital in creating a peasant opposition that would become a force to be reckoned with over subsequent decades. This feature would help expand peasant consciousness, turning the struggle generational, sustaining it until the revolution.

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<sup>131</sup> See note number 17 above.

<sup>132</sup> James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 29, 350.

It is less well understood in Ethiopian historiography that the imposition of such a system in Qellem greatly affected the social structure of the local people and provoked a peasant resistance that lasted for nearly a century. The system was largely responsible for determining the course of local developments, which in turn determined the nature of Qellem's relations with its neighbouring territories and Addis Ababa. Having been pulled together into a similar socio-economic and political status, and having indiscriminately introduced similar economic exploitation and ethno-cultural subjugation, peasant resistance was culturally defined as it began in the 1920s. Despite putting up with similar experiences in the conquered south, early expressions of peasant grievance in Qellem were presented as rare events of resistance. It is these early forms of resistance to which the next chapter is committed.

## CHAPTER THREE

### EARLY FORMS OF SOCIAL PROTEST, REBELLION, AND REFORM (1918-1935)

The *näffägna-gäbbar* system as it unfolded in Qellem introduced structural changes that seriously threatened peasant subsistence and provoked the peasants to fight back for survival. From the structural changes that were suddenly injected into state-society relations in the early part of the twentieth century emerged conditions that encouraged both non-revolt and revolt. The implementation in Qellem of the *näffägna-gäbbar* system provided conditions for both violent and non-violent resistance. In order to survive severe exploitation, the peasants employed multiple tactics. They mobilised, relying on a historical consciousness of how their past had been memorised, narrated and interpreted.

This chapter examines the complex and multiple consequences of the *näffägna-gäbbar* system in Qellem between the start of its second phase in 1917 and its demise in 1935-36 under the Italian occupation. It looks at how the severe exploitation of labour and resources were linked to early forms of peasant resistance and attempts to show how processes of state formation were embedded in local social contexts that unfolded on the ground. The chapter argues that the local state was the primary locus of discourse and practice of rights and belongingness to the state. These discourses and practices—beyond domination-resistance issues—also abetted the construction of a translocal concept of the state, to which both the local elite and the peasants recurrently appealed (in various forms) in the progression of local struggles for survival. The Macca Oromo peasants of Qellem had been exploited and subjugated—severely in the period covered by this chapter—by *näffägna* colonists. However, evidence presented in this chapter mainly indicates that the local population and their elites had stubbornly engaged with state power, albeit for their own respective interests, and made serious

efforts to turn it to their own benefit. This interpretation resonates with recent Africanist literature.<sup>1</sup> The first section of this chapter therefore begins with the contextualisation of mitigating and fostering factors for rebellion and explores how and why—despite exploitation and ethno-cultural oppression—peasant rebellion became a rarity. It shows how peasants, faced with new challenges, invented their own strategies of passive resistance, negotiation, and survival. In particular, it analyses the earliest attempts at court litigation where imperial Ethiopia's political periphery—Qellem's Oromo elites—would confront the political centre (the *näffägna*, the *mälkägna*, and the governor) in a bid to shield themselves and the province from the *näffägna-gäbbar* system. The second section deals with the other side of the interactions—various forms of peasant rebellions in Qellem. Here the Chapter illustrates its argument with cases of peasant tactics of terrorising the *näffägnä*, as well as their support for and encouragement of banditry and mass outmigration.

### **Mitigating and fostering factors of rebellion, 1918–35**

In practice, the *näffägna-gäbbar* system removed the necessary labour from the peasant household and the consequent wealth the peasants relied on when hard times came. Peasant subsistence farming was severely threatened—but were these factors sufficient in themselves to cause a peasant rebellion? The unlimited exploitation of peasants by the state or landlords could in theory inspire rebellion, “but it is far from a sufficient cause.”<sup>2</sup> From the broader view of history, acquiescence to oppression and exploitation is more prevalent than collective resistance. Oppression and exploitation may cause rebellion, but not on their own. Rebellion is in fact among the rarest outcomes of exploitation.<sup>3</sup> If exploitation alone constitutes adequate conditions for a rebellion, the daily lives of most developing countries would be characterized

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<sup>1</sup> See, among others, C. Leonardi and C. Vaughan, ““We are oppressed,”” 74-100; C. Leonardi, *Dealing with government in South Sudan*.

<sup>2</sup> James Scott, *The Moral Economy*, 193.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

by almost constant conditions of civil war.<sup>4</sup> This question therefore compels a brief analysis (with emphasis on Qellem) of what conditions, when added to exploitation, would increase the likelihood of peasant rebellion, and what circumstances, despite the prevalence of exploitation and oppression, would mitigate the possibility of rebellion.

To study rural resistance—or indeed any collective action in imperial Ethiopia—is to examine the precise ties between the unequal socio-economic and cultural conditions in which the people were forced to live and those people’s popular awareness. This involves an examination of structural and historical restrictions that worked against peasants as well as the alternatives that were available to them. Imperial Ethiopia’s socio-economic order possessed many institutional arrangements that ruled the peasants’ relations with one another and with the state. These multiple arrangements and the peasants’ response to them had the conflicting effects of mitigating and fostering rebellious tendencies. For Qellem’s peasants, as with those in many parts of Ethiopia’s south, land and their own labour were the major source of livelihood. Despite the general trend in many parts of Ethiopia’s south, the empire’s process of land appropriation, the *qälad* system, did not occur immediately after Qellem’s inclusion into the empire. This is another complex dynamic which demands separate treatment, and will be the subject of Chapter Five. Instead Qellem went through the *näffägna-gäbbar* system—a form of labour and wealth exploitation rather than land appropriation (although there were some exceptions). In this process it is important to ask why the peasants of Qellem sometimes openly rebelled and at other times resorted to passive forms of resistance.

From a broader view of of peasant politics, submission is more common than rebellion. Nevertheless, economic factors alone do not fully explain why some peasant societies are in general terms submissive, or why some peasant societies are more susceptible to rebellion than

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



others.<sup>5</sup> As highlighted above, for a rebellion to break out, there should be vital additional factors to add to exploitation and repression. Such questions cannot be fully answered *a priori*. While theoretical considerations relevant to the broader issues of peasant politics remain important, disparities in the social bases of resistance suggest that they can only be adequately answered in relation to tangible settings. Economic and social inequalities, for example, may be major factors provoking a rebellion, but peasant outbursts cannot be structurally determined.<sup>6</sup> There needs to be an empirical and concrete historical and social setting in which questions relating to peasant rebellions can be asked and answered. This chapter attempts to answer these questions with Qellem as a historical laboratory.

So what are the vital circumstances that, when combined with exploitation and repression, boost the possibility of peasant rebellion, and what situations make it less likely? Scholars of peasant politics suggest that exploitation and repression results in outright rebellion only when combined with two interwoven conditions related to sudden changes affecting peasant lives: changes that would threaten peasant subsistence and the capacity of external factors to affect the lives of substantial numbers of the peasant population.<sup>7</sup> Generally speaking, peasants tend to rebel particularly when their villages' habitual rights of securing subsistence—the “peasant moral economy” in Scott's terms—<sup>8</sup> are compromised and breached, or when demands from them are abruptly and randomly raised.<sup>9</sup> These changes are very much related to an impasse in peasants' subsistence, which takes into consideration the relative significance of the nature and timing of exploitation, deprivation or repression as well as its level. As Barrington Moore observes:

The timing of changes in the life of the peasantry, including the number of people simultaneously affected, are crucial factors in their own right. I suspect that they are more

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<sup>5</sup> Gebru Tareke, *Ethiopia: Power and Protest*, 4-5.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 1-11; James Scott, *The Moral Economy*, 5.

<sup>7</sup> James Scott, *The Moral Economy*, 193.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Gebru Tareke, *Ethiopia :Power and Protest*, 1-11; James Scott, *The Moral Economy*, 5.

important than the material changes in food, shelter, clothing, except for very sudden and big ones. . . . what infuriates peasants (and not just peasants) is a new and sudden imposition or demand that strikes many people at once and that is a break with accepted rules and customs.<sup>10</sup>

The breadth and the abruptness of changes negatively affecting peasant subsistence are vital for three distinct reasons. Firstly, only a shock of larger proportions will be capable of presenting a communal cause to act to a sufficiently sizeable peasant population. If the shock happens abruptly, it is problematic for a community's "moral economy" to deal with, and tends to encourage a radical deviance from existing norms of reciprocity. "Much of the potential for the peasant rebellion must be understood, then, in terms of the structural vulnerability of the peasantry to the kinds of shocks in question."<sup>11</sup>

At the heart of the peasant "moral economy" is the argument that "...exploitation and rebellion is ... not just a problem of calories and income but is a question of peasant conceptions of social justice, of rights and obligations, of reciprocity."<sup>12</sup> This is a reference to perceptions of economic justice and peasant characterizations of economic exploitation—"their view of which claims on their product were tolerable and which intolerable."<sup>13</sup> While the moral economy of the Macca Oromo of Qellem—like that of Scott's study (peasant groups in Burma and Vietnam)—is symbolic of peasants elsewhere, their conception of secure subsistence appears deeply rooted in and associated with their cultural identity. All their agricultural production methods, their labour mobilization, and the use of the products that have been vital for family and generational survival, were centred on and relatable to core cultural values. Tolerable and intolerable degrees of exploitation were to a large extent culturally defined. This will be fully explained when we deal with the rebellion.

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<sup>10</sup> Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: lord and peasant in the making of the modern world* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 474.

<sup>11</sup> James Scott, *The Moral Economy*, 194.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, vii.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

The second and equally important factor relevant to peasant rebellion concerns the reasons for the absence of rebellion despite the exploitation, misery and repression. One reason is related to adaptive mechanisms that can at least temporarily weaken threats of insecure subsistence. Some of these mechanisms are collective (social banditry, for example), some are individual (short-term migration), and some are related to opportunities created by elites in order to minimize the likelihood of revolt (food relief, short term employment). The third concern calls attention to the fact that the fundamental restraint is not the adaptive strategies available to the peasants, but instead the peril of rebellion.

The idea of sudden changes closely linked to peasant livelihood fosters two factors that have powerful potential to propel rebellion: collective consciousness of the fact of exploitation and repression, and the need to act against them. According to Theda Skocpol:

What is at issue is not so much the objective potential for revolts on the grounds of justifiable grievances. It is rather the degree to which grievances that are always at least implicitly present can be collectively perceived and acted up on.<sup>14</sup>

Skocpol's view suggests that the collective consciousness of the fact of exploitation, deprivation or repression, and the belief that they could be alleviated by collective human action, which Gebru Tareke calls "two essential ingredients,"<sup>15</sup> are also of paramount importance to provoking peasant rebellion. The ways in which groups of people occupying subordinate positions in social hierarchies understand the dynamics of power, exploitation and oppression and control, and then decide to take collective action, is strongly related to historical conditions as well as state structures and activities. The political choices by which varieties of grievances might be routed are closely associated with the cultural setting in which they are experienced and justified.<sup>16</sup> When institutionalized economic and social inequalities are

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<sup>14</sup> Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analyses of France, Russia and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 115.

<sup>15</sup> Gebru Tareke, *Ethiopia: Power and Protest*, 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 5-6.

merged with ethno-cultural oppression, as was the case in Qellem and many other southern provinces in the Ethiopian empire, the political choices through which the economic grievances are channelled tend to be informed by the ethno-cultural particularities of the peasants. This tendency was partly attached to the empire's institutional arrangements and partly to the peasants' own internal dynamics.

To understand revolt and non-revolt situations with particular reference to Qellem it is important to understand three factors: the available alternative methods for survival and non-revolt, the structural setting of revolt, and the Ethiopian empire-state's architecture of exploitation and repression. To reflect the chronological patterns relevant to Qellem, we first briefly look at non-revolt conditions. To begin with, the analysis of available alternative methods of survival and non-revolt starts with the characteristic features of rebellion. Moments of rebellion are "moments of madness,"<sup>17</sup> says Aristide Zolberg. To speak of peasant rebellion is to pay particular attention to those unusual moments when peasants strive to reinstate or remake their world by force—but this ignores the fact that such moments in history are rare and only exceptionally result in revolutions. It also ignores the fact that the peasant is usually a casualty of violence, but most of all it ignores the fact that even during these "moments of madness," the main concern revolves around the effort of the peasant family to secure sufficient food for itself. The peasant, as a farmer with a set of essential and acute needs rather than an "ideologue with a long view," inescapably captures such moments to use them as survival strategies, which James Scott refers to as "opportunities."<sup>18</sup> Such peasant survival strategies in times of sudden dilemmas of subsistence vary greatly over time and space. In Scott's Southeast Asian context they took the form of eliminating valued ceremonial obligations, sharing, emigrating, serving in the local landlords' gangs and seeking charity.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Aristide Zolberg, "Moments of Madness," *Politics and Society*, 2 (2), 1972, 183-207.

<sup>18</sup> Barrington Moore, *Social Origins*, 474; James Scott, *The Moral Economy*, 204.

<sup>19</sup> James Scott, *The Moral Economy*, 204.

The pattern of historical development in early twentieth century Qellem points to some mechanisms as collective (petitions, court litigations, banditry), and some as individual (forcing all of the family to obediently serve the *mälkägna*, serving the *mälkägna* as informers against one's own villagers, working for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church). Some are both (individual and mass outmigration), while others relate to marginal opportunities created by regional commerce (employment as porters in Sayyoo-Gambella trade).

Such mechanisms mostly involve unlimited human cost. Conceptualization of this jumble of assembled themes is not an easy task, although they possess the potential to affect the likelihood of rebellion. As far as the marginal opportunities they offer to the peasantry to relieve short-term subsistence needs are concerned, they tend to minimize the likelihood of more direct and violent reactions. Additionally, while working as deterrents to open rebellion, such themes—especially in the case of Qellem—represent faces of resistance. The concept of resistance in this study is conceived as:

...any act(s) by members of a subordinate class that are either *intended* to mitigate or deny claims (for example, rents, taxes, prestige) made on that class by superordinate classes (for example, landlords, large farmers, the state) or to advance its own claims (for example work, land, charity, respect) vis-à-vis those superordinate classes.<sup>20</sup>

We now turn to the analysis of concrete historical settings marked by complex state-society interactions in imperial Ethiopia, where various forms of peasant reaction to exploitation and ethno-cultural oppression in Qellem possessed attendant contradictory effects of both deterring and fostering open rebellions.

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<sup>20</sup> James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday forms of Peasant Resistance* (London: Yale University Press, 1985), 290.

## Early Court litigation

Before delving into local attempts to scrap the *näffägna-gäbbar* system through court litigation, we must briefly examine political rivalries in the Addis Ababa palace, and how these link to the situation in Qellem. When Biru was recalled to Addis Ababa, he was replaced in January 1921 with *Näggadras* (later *Bäjäron*) Yiggäzu Bähabtè, the empire's Minister of Foreign Affairs under Iyyasu and now Minister of Finance. In the interim period (September to December 1920) Addis Ababa entrusted the province to *Däjjazmach* Gäbrä-Egzi'abhér Morodaa, hereditary governor of the neighbouring Leeqaa-Naqamtee.<sup>21</sup> One immediate peasant response to the *näffägna-gäbbar* system was mass emigration to the neighbouring Benishangul territory to the north, to areas in Qellem where the *näffägna* system had not been established, and to a Catholic mission centre at Sakkoo. As *Däjjazmach* Gäbrä-Egzi'abhér took control of the province, he reduced taxes and stopped the unlimited and irregular tributes and labour associated with the system. By doing this he managed to pull back two to three thousand *gäbbar*.<sup>22</sup> Unaware of the appointment from Addis Ababa of a new Amhara governor replacing Biru, the *gäbbar* hoped that improved conditions would last.<sup>23</sup>

When *Däjjazmach* Biru was recalled, *Ras* Täfäri also ordered Gäbrä-Egzi'abhér not to uproot the military colonists Biru had planted in the province.<sup>24</sup> Biru was told to travel to Addis Ababa with his two divisions commanded by a *šambäl* (captain of a thousand) and *yämäto aläqa* (boss of a hundred) and his *Indärasè*, *Qaññazmach* Ašimä Giyorgis.<sup>25</sup> Before his death in 1918, Jootee had a *siso* inhabited by about two thousand *gäbbar* in Gidaamii. Following

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<sup>21</sup> Gäbrä-Egziabhér to Täfäri, Mäskäräm 22, 1914 EC [2 Sep.1921], in Triulzi & Tesema, *የወላ ስታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 143; T. Lambie, *A Doctor's Great Commission*, 134-135.

<sup>22</sup> Gäbrä Egziabhér to *Ras* Täfäri, Hidar 1, 1913 EC [10 Nov.1921], in Triulzi & Tesema, *የወላ ስታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 143.

<sup>23</sup> Informants: Dabalaa Maammadee, Raagaa Turaa, D/Doolloo (07/08/2010).

<sup>24</sup> Gäbrä Egziabhér to *Ras* Täfäri, Hidar 17, 1913 EC [26 Nov.1920], in Triulzi & Tesema, *የወላ ስታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 123.

<sup>25</sup> Gäbrä Egziabhér to *Ras* Täfäri, Yekatit 19, 1913 EC/26 February1921 in Triulzi & Tesema, *የወላ ስታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 139-140.

Jootee's death, Gäbrä Egzi'abhér took away half of this and settled more military colonists sent down from Addis Ababa. It was no surprise that the first challenge in this interim period came from Jootee's family, now headed by his son and successor *Fitawrari* Mardaasaa. *Ras* Täfäri was now in charge of the central government in Addis Ababa, and had a deep loathing of Jootee's family. Jootee had strong ties with Täfäri's deadly enemy, *Lij* Iyyasu, who had helped secure the release of Jootee, and shortly afterwards married his daughter Askalä. During the palace coup in September 1916 in Addis Ababa, Jootee's family, especially Mardaasaa, supported their in-law and openly opposed Zäwditu and Täfäri's accession to power. Mardaasaa also headed an open rebellion opposing Tafari's dismissal of the cabinet in 1918.<sup>26</sup> Täfäri had enough reason to disempower the family and dispossess them of their economic resources.

In January 1921 Yiggäzu quickly sent down his *Indärasè Fitawrari* Ledätè and relieved *Fitawrari* Jiraataa, Gäbrä-Egzi'abhér's *Indärasè*, who had been in charge of the province over the last four months. Ledätè arrived in Qellem at the head of over two thousand soldiers and their families.<sup>27</sup> It is important to stress here that Ledätè's soldiers did not come to replace Biru's troops, although it was standard practice in the conquered south for a removed governor to leave with all his soldiers and officers. But despite Biru's removal, his soldiers and officers were all allowed to remain in Qellem. The regent, Täfäri Makonnen, sent a clear order to Gäbrä-Egzi'abhér, “...ደጃዝማች ብሩ የተከለው ትክለኛ ማደሪያውን እንደያዘ ይቆይ... let the grantee [*tiklañña* [i.e. *näffägnä*] whom *Däjjazmach* Biru planted remain on their holding [*madäriya*] unperturbed.”

<sup>28</sup> It is important to note that *madäriya* (ማደሪያ), an Amharic word meaning land given in lieu of salary to civil and military servants of imperial Ethiopian state, does not in fact pertain to land in this case. Instead, it refers to local peasant households—including every child aged ten

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<sup>26</sup> Tasisa Ebba, የመርዳላ ጅቱ ሰንሰለት ('Märdasa Jotè's Chain') (Addis Ababa, unpublished script, 1974 EC); Terrefe W/Tsadik, "The Unification of Ethiopia (1880-1935): Wallaga," *JES* 6 (1), 1968, 73-86.

<sup>27</sup> Gäbrä-Egzi'abhér to *Ras* Täfäri, n.d, i in Triulzi & Tesema, የወላጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች, 143-144.

<sup>28</sup> Täfäri to Gäbrä-Egzi'abhér, Hidar 17, 1913 [26 Nov. 1920], in Triulzi & Tesema, የወላጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች, 123.

or over—who were counted, registered and distributed to Amhara soldiers as ‘economic resources’ to live on. This would have affected the vast majority of the local peasants.

As he arrived in Qellem Yiggäzu found a province that had been smashed by the brutally exploitative system. A few years of the *näffägnä-gäbbar* system had reduced living standards by rapidly depleting valuable resources and gravely compromising the peasants’ enthusiasm for increased production. To produce surplus was to invite further exploitation. To be as unproductive as possible appeared to have become a widely accepted norm. The impact of the system reduced the peasant population to unprecedented levels of poverty. While those peasants who had better stores of cereals (achieved by hiding stock from local *näffägnä* informants) survived such poverty, those without such capacity made begging a means of livelihood. One major impact of the *näffägnä-gäbbar* system in Qellem was in fact the proliferation of beggars on an unprecedented scale in the province’s history. In the early 1920s a missionary who served in Qellem referred to large numbers of beggars in Sayyoo (later Dambi-Doolloo) when describing the poverty of its inhabitants.<sup>29</sup> Gidada Solon’s memoir also stated that beggars assembled to get weekly help.<sup>30</sup> As soon as he sent to Qellem a governor ruling the province on behalf of Addis Ababa, Gäbrä-Egzi’abhér warned Täfäri Mäkonnen that he had not enough provision to feed Addis Ababa’s *näffägnä*, implying that there was a potential that the army would pillage the country.<sup>31</sup> The report underlined the fact that “the country is already deserted and mostly abandoned, with a few scattered households left. The people have long abandoned their farm work.”<sup>32</sup> When Yiggäzu arrived there was only a thin—

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas Lambie, *Boot and Saddle in Africa* (New York, 1943), 26; *Idem*, *A Doctor*, 127-128, 133.

<sup>30</sup> Gidada Solon, *The Other Side of Darkness* (New York, 1972), 6, 10-14.

<sup>31</sup> Gäbrä-Egzi’abhér to Ras Täfäri, *Tiqimt* 17, 1913 EC [26 Oct.1920], 1/wä/mu, in “Letter-book of *Däjjazmach* Gäbrä Egzi’abhér Correspondence with the Central government, 1898-1917 EC” (Wallagga Ethnographic Museum).

<sup>32</sup> Gäbrä-Egzi’abhér to Ras Täfäri and Empress Zäwditu, *Tiqimt* 17, 1913 EC [26 Oct.1920], 1/wä/mu in “Letter-book of Gäbrä-Egzi’abhér.”



albeit clear—line between revolt and non-revolt. There was a pressing need for certain types of collective action.

As soon as Yiggäzu arrived in Gaawoo (north of Sayyoo) in January 1921 as the new governor and the news spread throughout the province, the hope in which the Oromo *gäbbar* returned to their villages was dashed. Those who had experienced the system under Biru believed the appointment of a new Amhara governor would be catastrophic, although there was no evidence that specifically matched experience with expectation.<sup>33</sup> The Oromo *gäbbar* song inherited from the earliest period of the *näffägnä-gäbbar* system (1908-12), for example, makes no distinction between Amhara governors, all of whom were presented as “alien robbers.”<sup>34</sup> The peasants expected no good to come from Yiggäzu, and instead they started looking around for mechanisms of survival. As the system introduced by Biru had dissolved socio-economic boundaries between the *gäbbar* and the elites (*abbaa-qabiyyees*) withdrawal did not now seem to be the first option.<sup>35</sup>

The *Abbaa-qabiyyee*, along with a few representatives from the people, chose to counter the *näffägnä-gäbbar* system by legal means aimed at redressing the wrongs they suffered under the system, and demanding the reinstitution of the old *hambifataa* system.<sup>36</sup> In February 1921, an allied group of Oromo *Abbaa-qabiyyee* and *gäbbar* presented a case to *Däjjazmach* Yiggäzu against the system. The *abbaa-qabiyyees* who took it upon themselves to organize the case served as advocates, representatives of their particular locality or coordinators. The *näffägnä* also had their own advocates. The case was presented at Gaawoo, Yiggäzu’s garrison town and centre of administration. The Oromo *abbaa-qabiyyee* from Gidaamii employed an Amhara whom they believed was knowledgeable in Abyssinian traditional laws.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Informants: Dabalaa Maammadee, Raagaa Turaa, D/Doolloo (07/08/2010).

<sup>34</sup> Negaso Gidada, “Oromo Historical Poems,” 332-33.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Informants: Dabalaa Maammadee, Raagaa Turaa, D/Doolloo (07/08/2010); ATFN, Asosa-Beggi Interviews, 1-17.

<sup>37</sup> ATFN, Asosa-Beggi Interviews, 1-17.

Each group of *näffägna* argued with respective local representatives from various localities of Qellem. A participant *näffägna*, Abba Abärra, whose group of *näffägna* encountered legal advocates of the Leeqaa-Karraa, summarised the process of deliberation at Yiggäzu's court:

There were (Oromo) *balabbat*. They rose against us when their people were divided. We debated this hotly. The soldiers [*näffägna*] debated against the [Oromo] *balabbat*. The Qellam brought an advocate called Towki Shumale and others from Qaqqe, Dambi Dollo. The Sibü and the Leqa Karra also brought advocates and we debated against each other. The Wanaga brought a tall person called *Balambaras* Korsa as their lawyer. A person called Amante Gutama came as a lawyer for the Leqa Karra and the Sibü. Amante Gutama was a eunuch (*selb*). He was brought in as a lawyer. There was also a person called Jaldu. The Qaqqe, Sadi Dalacha brought him as their lawyer. There was also another person in Dalle. They brought him also as a lawyer. From Dambi Dollo they brought *Fitawrari* Wayyessa, the Governor of Bani. They brought these lawyers (for the debate) ... They (the *gabbar*) said: 'We will not come under you. Our fathers were also *naftanya*. They participated in the expedition to the Nach Abbay (the expedition led by *Ras* Damissaw in 1898 to the Blue Nile was accompanied by the Oromo troops of Jote).' This was the accusation of the Galla. When their fathers died, their children lifted up their fathers' guns and claimed to be *naftanya* ... 'All of you will become our *gabbar*,' we said, 'all together you will become *gabbar*,' we repeated ... 'We will not pay, nor will we become your *gabbar*,' they said. 'You will become *gabbar*.' – 'We won't, for we have also gone to Nac Abbay. If you are soldiers, so are we.' – 'But we are government's (soldiers) and you are Jote's; your positions are not yours anymore, but ours. You are now given to us. So you have to become our *gabbar*,' and we said to them ... The Galla brought their lawyers and so did the Amhara. The Court was at Gawo ... A lawyer was brought in to speak for all the twelve companies of Ittiye Taiyitu's *naftanyoch*. Our *shambal* was headed by *Fitawrari* Walda Mika'el and *Qanyazmach* Walda Kidan. The lawyer who spoke on behalf of the *naftanyoch* was in Qaqe at that time. His name was Abbaba Shiraf; he was the *Balderabba* (go-between) of *Fitawrari* Mangasha.

Then we began the debate. The debate took place in Gawo. Our debate was with the Leqa. The lawyer of the Leqa Karra was called Amante Gutama. All the others stood there in their respective places. Then we started debating with that Amante Gutama, the *selb* ... In the debate he [*Fitawrari* Walda Mika'el] held with them, he said: 'While in the desert, a priest doesn't eat his meal. Even if you claim that you have gone to Nac Abbay with *Dajjach* Jote, we cannot help you since your own master doesn't rule anymore and [the former Amhara governor] *Dajjach* Biru has been given the land. It is ours by law. You have to be our *gabbar*. And you don't have any solid ground for your refusal [to become our *gabbar*]. Since we were given your land, you have to serve us and pay tax to us.' So, the case in the court was ended and a judgement was made in favour of the *naftanya*.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

On the surface, the above text seems to propose that the entourage of the former hereditary Oromo governor, *Däjjach* Jootee, was claiming simple *näffägna* status on the basis of their direct participation in the 1898 Fashoda Expedition. However, a closer examination of the local socio-economic and political scene captured in the above text and from the traditions I gathered suggest a more complex situation. The lowland territories of the White Nile are known for malaria, and most of Jootee's entourage did not take part in the march. Instead, Jootee recruited *abbaa-qabiyyee/balabbat* from among local peasants, taking into account the recruits' knowledge of the route through the lowlands and their physical strength. This was clear both for the plaintiffs and defendants, and the *balabbat* were putting forward their demand on the basis of the recruitment role they played in their respective jurisdictions. The peasants, now *gäbbar*, made their claims for having contributed their "fathers" and "sons," and by extension, their provisions. In the court argument, these "fathers" and "sons" from the past were presented as gun-bearers, *näffägna*, of the Ethiopian empire-state, under which both the *balabbat* and the *gäbbar* deserved equal status with Biru's *näffägna*, and hence allow the rights to be inherited to themselves. The *balabbat*, by virtue of coordinating the recruitment order that came to them from Addis Ababa via Jootee and the peasants by contributing their "fathers" and "sons," should therefore be relieved from the *näffägna-gäbbar* system.

The decision of local Oromo elites and some representatives of the people to go to Yiggäzu's court was a deliberate non-revolt tactic adopted in a bid to remove the direct Amhara rule placed on them through the *näffägna-gäbbar* system. In the legal argument, the local Oromo group deliberately selected aspects from the past that they believed would be the most powerful in defending their interests, and conveniently 'forgot' other parts of their history. The *abbaa-qabiyyee*'s status, for example, evolved twice before the Ethiopian conquest. Between their emergence in the mid nineteenth century and the close of the century (when Jootee had conquered all but those in Anfillo and Sadii) they had been *de facto* chiefs over their respective

locality (as discussed in Chapter One). Under Jootee's rule they became *qoroo*, an Oromo title referring to the administrator of a number of villages subordinated to Jootee. As Jootee himself peacefully submitted to the Ethiopian conquest, the *abbaa-qabiyyee*'s status—despite those areas that resisted the conquest—survived, but their office was renamed *balabbat* and their status reconfigured in the interest of fitting into the administrative structures of imperial Ethiopia. The new reconfiguration introduced into Qellem a system in which the old *abbaa-qabiyyee* had to serve the empire-state in their respective jurisdictions, which included the recruitment of soldiers in time of need, in return for protection of their old status. In the argument at Yiggäzu's court, the old *abbaa-qabiyyees* seemed unwilling to mention the fact that their pre-Ethiopian socio-political status was reconfigured and retained as an office co-opted to the empire-state.<sup>39</sup> Such was how historical consciousness was mobilised to confront exploitation of the state.

If the *abbaa-qabiyyee* recruited soldiers for the empire's Fashoda Expedition, they did so because it was part of the local reconfiguration under Jootee in which Qellem was made an autonomous province, an imperial *madbèt*, not because their "fathers" and "sons" did favours to the empire. Their self-presentation and defence at the court, through their selective memory of the past, exemplifies the tactics they used to try to restore their lost status. Interestingly enough, the Oromo group made a serious attempt to impose on the *näffägna* the old status they had enjoyed during pre-Ethiopian days, and later under Jootee. The reclamation of this old status was designed to put an end to the *näffägna-gäbbar* system. At the same time, this selection of factors from the past reflected their knowledge of the empire's philosophical foundation, through which it conferred upon its colonial forces the power to rule and "eat the people as economic resources." The Oromo elites and peasants used the argument at Yiggäzu's court as a distinct form of protest against the *näffägna-gäbbar* system.

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<sup>39</sup> See Chapter One.

On their part, the *näffägna* chose their own advocates for each district of Qellem and represented them at Yiggäzu's court. The *näffägna* group argued that both the *abbaa-qabiyyee* and participants in the campaign should be subjected to the *näffägna-gäbbar* system with full obligations. They stated that the Oromo gun-bearers of Qellem were only soldiers of the deposed *Däjjazmach* Jootee, whilst they themselves were soldiers of the Ethiopian empire state—**የመንግሥት አሸከሮች**/servants of the state in its Amharic rendering—and as such qualified for higher socio-economic and political status.<sup>40</sup>

*Däjjazmach* Yiggäzu's court ruling dismissed the cultivators' claim of participating in the Fashoda Expedition through their Oromo "sons" and "fathers" and confirmed their *gäbbar* status. The *balabbat* were reduced to *gäbbar* status too. However, Yiggäzu offered minor concessions to the *balabbat*, who demanded *näffägna* status by virtue of their "merit" in recruiting soldiers for the expedition from their respective jurisdictions. They were freed from *gäbbar* status, but required to pay *asrat*, tithes,<sup>41</sup> and were thus placed above to the *gäbbar* but below the *näffägna* in the local socio-economic structure. In short, Yiggäzu's court ruling categorically created two classes of different status within the local Oromo. Yiggäzu's ruling corroborates the idea that the mere participation of recruits from conquered peoples in the Fashoda Expedition did not render them equal to *näffägna*, just as being of higher standing than *gäbbar*, in this case the *abbaa-qabiyyee* who recruited soldiers for the expedition.

The substances in the arguments and counter-arguments at Yiggäzu's court went beyond simple court debate, and were not limited to elite matters or disputes between small groups. Instead, they reflected conflict over control of resources and a struggle over the past. They represent how, in a militarized, relatively sophisticated and unique African empire, the weak selectively remembered the past, conveniently—and deliberately—forgot parts of it, and

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<sup>40</sup> ATFN, interview with Abba Abärra, Asosa; Informants: Dabalaa Maammadee, Raagaa Turaa, D/Doolloo (07/08/2010).

<sup>41</sup> Informants: Dabalaa Maammadee, Raagaa Turaa, D/Doolloo (07/08/2010).

sometimes reinvented it as a means of survival. Conflicts over the past mirrored structural conflicts on the ground, and were not limited to issues of resources and definitions of the past. They were also struggles over identity. The mechanisms by which the Oromo *gäbbar* and *abbaa-qabiyyees* framed the past—their demand to be exempted from Ethiopia’s colonial exploitation of the *näffägna-gäbbar* system—were informed by the ethno-cultural stratification that underlay the empire. They unsuccessfully constructed an identity which they believed would be acceptable before the Amhara governor. On the other hand, when the Amhara *näffägna* said that they were soldiers of the imperial government (when in fact they were *Däjjazmach* Jootee’s Oromo gun-bearers on the March to the White Nile) they were claiming their Amhara ethno-cultural identity by merit, and believed that they should be considered above those with Oromo identity. Because of that, they felt they deserved preferential treatment.

When it came to what the Oromo *gäbbar* really wanted to achieve from Yiggäzu’s administration, their desires may not have been as rigidly constructed as their fervent court rhetoric implied. When *Däjjazmach* Gäbrä Egzi’abhér governed the province between September and December 1920, thousands abandoned their refugee lives and returned home, and those who stayed to endure the system accepted Gäbrä Egzi’abhér’s offer, although he did not dismiss the *näffägna-gäbbar* system. There was still dissatisfaction, but Gäbrä Egzi’abhér controlled the more extreme and irregular extractions and abuses, silencing the peasants and keeping them inside their *qee’ee* or homesteads. Local traditions I collected suggest that the *gäbbars* hoped to obtain conformation from Yiggäzu of the improved conditions Gäbrä Egzi’abhér had put in place. When Yiggäzu’s verdict confirmed Amhara overlordship and Oromo servitude (with the exception of a few *abbaa-qabiyyees*), news of the verdict spread throughout the province, and many of the Oromo *gäbbar* who had experienced the worst aspects of the *näffägna-gäbbar* system saw the verdict as prognostication of more bad times

ahead. The continuation of the *näffägna-gäbbar* system in practice meant the further addition of Amhara soldiers over each peasant household, because the latter was an ‘economic resource’ for the former to live on. Ledätè’s soldiers were assigned to each peasant household, whose labour and wealth they exploited as a means of survival, placing an extra drain on peasant resources as a burdensome addition to soldiers who had already been living on their output for the last four years. The peasants turned to other forms of resistance—direct confrontations with *näffägna*, support for banditry and mass outmigration. The peasants in Qellem in the 1920s and early 1930s did not simply rebel because of state exploitation; other vital circumstances which, when combined with exploitation and repression, boosted the possibility of peasant rebellion, had been met. The extreme form of exploitation brought to Qellem by the *näffägna-gäbbar* system (discussed in Chapter Two) was in itself insufficient cause for rebellion, although it certainly established its foundations. The tipping point at which brutal exploitation resulted in rebellion came only when combined with two further interconnected conditions relating to abrupt changes that negatively affecting peasant lives even further. These were the changes that threatened peasant subsistence – namely the arrival of additional soldiers under Yiggäzu, Yiggäzu’s court ruling that allowed the system to continue at an even worse level whilst refusing to co-opt local elites—and the ability of these factors to affect the lives of a sufficiently large number of the peasant population.

The significance of dealing with local attempts in Qellem to revoke the *näffägna-gäbbar* system through court litigation and the empire-state’s response through Yiggäzu’s court as part of this chapter is twofold. Firstly, it was an exercise that prepared local conditions for other forms of confrontations. It set the background against which the peasants considered other options to confront state exploitation, creating different tactics that helped them challenge the grip of local state structures over them and their resources. Secondly, and equally important,

it became a foundation for the type of peasant resistance that prevailed in the post 1944 era: appeals, petitions, litigations.

Yiggäzu's court ruling resonates more with imperial Ethiopia's political considerations than its commitment to justice, and exemplifies the ethno-cultural stratification that underlay the Ethiopian empire.<sup>42</sup> Yiggäzu showed considerable political pragmatism, in contrast to his predecessor Biru, in allowing the restoration of an Oromo class of local elites, at least in a reduced form. Viewed through the arguments and deliberation at Yiggäzu's court, therefore, the conditions in Qellem do not demonstrate continuities, nor were they a showcase of central government's interests replicated at local level. The encounter was instead a series of compromises, bargains and negotiations over access to the state, which the recent literature accurately treats as having been vital for state construction—not only for Ethiopia but for many other African countries too. As a chief representative of the imperial state at local level, Yiggäzu had to negotiate and reconstruct authority and power as a dynamic tool, rather than continuing the methods his predecessor, in a way that could engage local actors.

However, as stated at the beginning of this chapter, the significance of debates at Yiggäzu's court takes us beyond the binary of domination-resistance, which, as the material presented above show, are also important. That peasants in Qellem were severely exploited and reacted to it in multiple ways is undoubtable, but that was not the only thing that was happening. By taking their case to Yiggäzu's court, the *abbaa-qabiyyee* and peasant representatives were trying to turn political and socio-economic changes—still in their infancy but successfully accommodated by the government in Addis Ababa—to their own advantages. The situation of

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<sup>42</sup> Yiggäzu seems to have pursued a precedent set by the founder of the empire, Emperor Menilek II, "...in judicial proceedings between northerners and southerners, his [Menilek's] judgement was qualified by political and administrative needs. He invariably favoured *naftagna* in their disputes with *gabbar*." In Qellem—and perhaps throughout the southern highland territories of the Ethiopian empire—whatever complexities and multiplicities of dynamics characterized state-society interactions, the empire's preferential treatment for the politico-military forces that ensured its very survival was undisputable. See Harold Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menelik II: Ethiopia, 1844-1913* (Red Sea Press, 1995), 197.



the *abbaa-qabiyyee* and representatives of the local people taking the *näſſägna-gäbbar* system to a state court headed by Yiggäzu suggests that people imagined that by virtue of being under the rule of imperial Ethiopia they were entitled to some rights both individually and collectively. Their actions demonstrate they had shown their efforts at engaging with and claiming state power and pursuing their case to achieve recognition by imperial Ethiopia. Equally important is that by taking their case to Yiggäzu's court the *abbaa-qabiyyee* and the peasants were recognising the state apparatus imperial Ethiopia had installed after removing Oromo overlord Jootee Tulluu.<sup>43</sup> The practice of the local people to obtain rights and recognition through litigation at Yiggäzu's court, in the case of Qellem, was the first available record of the way people were now choosing to communicate with the state. The local people's argument against the colonists at Yiggäzu's court therefore demonstrates the negotiation of subjecthood and even to some degree a claim to citizenship within the Ethiopian empire.

The local people's cause was, broadly speaking, rejected, but it had successfully set a precedent in local state-society encounters yet to come over the following decades. Yet, whatever the level of effectiveness and efficiency, the encounter at Yiggäzu's court demonstrates the expectation that, despite the instalment of the brutal *näſſägna-gäbbar* system, the state should recognize their demands and address their grievances. In this sense, the encounters at the court and their consequences can be understood as one of the earliest tools that helped imperial Ethiopia's project of local state construction. As Jocelyn Alexander has argued, "[i]t is in the local struggles over the power and authority that states must take root."<sup>44</sup> In fact, in line with suggestions by the most recent Africanist literature, one can understand

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<sup>43</sup> This interpretation draws on Leonardi and Vaughan, and Jocelyn Alexander, who in the case of the colonial condominium Sudan and Zimbabwe (both colonial as well as post-colonial) argue that by complaining to authorities at local and higher levels "individual subjects were both recognising authority of the state and seeking its recognition of their rights." See Leonardi and Vaughan, "'We are oppressed,'" 87; Jocelyn Alexander, *The Unsettled Land*, 5-7.

<sup>44</sup> J. Alexander, *The Unsettled Land*, 5.

these local interactions as pivotal to the very process of state formation.<sup>45</sup> The encounters at Yiggāzu’s court, therefore, went beyond stories of subjugation, conquest and exploitation and demonstrate the embeddedness of the state in society. In this sense the state is not a fixed entity, but instead represents “ideas, discourses and imaginaries, as well as institutions, actors and processes.”<sup>46</sup> State construction, as recent works argue, has not been limited to the political centre. It was—especially in the Qellem’s example—as much constructed, shaped and re-shaped, contested and resisted at the local level as it was at the centre.

### Confrontations

When Biru was recalled in the summer of 1920, Addis Ababa’s decision on the fate of Biru’s *näffägna* retinue after his departure was specific and clear: “...Let *Janhoy*’s servants [the *näffägna*] planted by *Däjjazmach* Biru stay with their *madäriya* [land]. Do not remove them...”<sup>47</sup> and “...soldiers of *Däjjach* Biru should be given their provisions as has been done before.”<sup>48</sup> There was, however, a contrasting scenario from the peasants’ point of view. The departure of Biru sparked a general call for an attack on the *näffägna*.<sup>49</sup> Despite imperial orders, most of the *näffägna* were uprooted from their possessions and fled with their families into *kätäma*, garrisons, on the hills of Fiinchoo, north of Sayyoo, Gaawoo, or to Gidaamii. It was only the arrival of *Fitawrari* Oljirraa as a representative of interim governor *Däjjazmach* Gäbrä-Egziabhér at the head of a large army, that rescued the *näffägna*.<sup>50</sup> Oljirraa’s arrival brought immediate restraint to the impending peasant action. He promised to limit the irregular

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 5-7; C. Leonardi, *Dealing with government in South Sudan*, 7; C Leonardi and C. Vaughan, ““We are oppressed,”” 96.

<sup>46</sup> C. Leonardi, *Dealing with government in South Sudan*, ” 5.

<sup>47</sup> Gäbrä-Egziabhér to Ras Täfäri, Hidar 17, 1913 EC [26 Nov.1920], in Triulzi & Tesema, የወላጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች, 123.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Informants: Dabalaa Maammadee, Raagaa Turaa D/Doolloo (07/08/2010).

<sup>50</sup> Gäbrä-Egziabhér to Ras Täfäri, Tiqimt 17, 1913 EC [27 Oct.1920], in Triulzi & Tesema, የወላጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች, 133.

*näffägna* exactions and overwhelmed the region with additional military presence to ensure the efficiency of his administration.<sup>51</sup>

In 1922 Biru was freed and restored to Qellem.<sup>52</sup> Between Yegäzu's departure and Biru's arrival, the peasants had organized themselves into larger quasi-military units armed with spears and shields, and had evicted all *mälkägna* from their respective villages, forcing them to abandon their extraction of resources and collection of state taxes.<sup>53</sup> In fact, after the 1909-12 rebellion that took place following (although not necessarily because of) the removal and arrest of Jootee in July 1908, the practice of terrorizing the *näffägna* between the departure of an outgoing governor and arrival of a new one became a traditional means of resistance and survival. This happened almost every time a governor was replaced between 1912 and 1935, and the changes of governor in 1920 and 1922 discussed above were no exception. Between 1908 and 1935 Addis Ababa made ten removals and appointments.<sup>54</sup> In all these interim periods, oral tradition and written sources describe local peasants seizing the opportunity of the power vacuum to call for targeted attacks on the *näffägna*.<sup>55</sup>

Biru's 1922-27 administration marked another difficult period for the *näffägna-gäbbar* system. Most of the traits that had characterized his governance in 1917-20 were reignited, but this later administration respected the decisions of Yiggäzu's court. However, the *näffägna*'s continued depletion of household wealth and a return to harsh treatment led many peasants to look for an alternative means of survival. As Sayyoo-Gambella trade expanded in the 1920s, it

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<sup>51</sup> Informants: Dabalaa Maammadee, Raagaa Turaa, D/Doolloo (07/08/2010).

<sup>52</sup> Gäbrä-Egziabhér to Ras Täfäri, Hidar 17, 1913 EC/26 Nov.1920, in Triulzi & Tesema, *የወላጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 123.

<sup>53</sup> Baalchaa Deentaa, D/Doolloo, 22/08/2005; Waaqjira Hiixuu, Canqaa, 23/08/2010.

<sup>54</sup> The governors were *Fitawrari* Sahlä-Giorgis, 1908; *Däjjazmach* Jootee, 1912—17; *Däjjazmach* (later Ras) Biru Wäldä Gäbriel, 1917-1920 and 1922-1927, *Däjjazmach* Gäbrä Egziabhér Moroda, September—December 1920, *Däjjazmach* Yiggäzu Bähbètè, 1921; *Däjjazmach* Mäkonnen Wäsäné, 1928-1932; *Däjjazmach* Habtä Mariam Gäbrä Egziabhér, part of 1927 and part of 1932-1933, *Däjjazmach* Ashänafi Wälda Mariam, 1935.

<sup>55</sup> Informants: Dabalaa Maammadee, Raagaa Turaa, D/Doolloo (07/08/2010); Gäbrä-Egziabhér to Ras Täfäri, Hidar 17, 1913 EC/26 Nov.1920, in Triulzi & Tesema, *የወላጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 123; Idem, Gäbrä-Egziabhér to Ras Täfäri, Hidar 17, 1913 EC/26 Nov.1920, in Triulzi & Tesema, *የወላጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 133.

employed hundreds of runaway *gäbbar* as porters. Down from the hills to Gambella, the porters carried on their heads the chief trading item that was in great demand by the British in Sudan—coffee.<sup>56</sup> In 1925, for example, £E267,558 worth of coffee was imported into the Sudan from Ethiopia, and coffee to the value of £E209,955 was exported via Gambella; the rest was shared almost equally between the Matamma-Gedaref route and the Kurmuk-Roseires route. Coffee constituted almost the entire import trade into the Sudan, although the two other routes also supplied cattle and tombac. Other trading items included Beeswax, rubber, hides and ivory.<sup>57</sup>

Qellem was one of only two sources in the rapidly growing coffee trade (the other being the neighbouring Iluu Abbaa-boor), and it demanded a growing number of porters. As the Sayyoo-Gambella trade was run by foreigners (Greeks, Armenians, and Arabs) there was no direct challenge on any runaway *gäbbars* seeking employment as porters on arrival at the town of Sayyoo.<sup>58</sup> On their return journeys they brought products like liquor, as well as *abujedid*, unbleached sheeting that was widely used throughout the Ethiopian empire for making clothes and tents, into the highlands of Qellem.<sup>59</sup> These *gäbbar* come home only occasionally and at night to avoid immediate arrest by the *näffägna*. Sayyoo-Gambella trade became a conduit of survival for the desperate and impoverished Oromo *gäbbar*. Biru had to establish a number of camps to intercept further outflow.<sup>60</sup>

In March 1927 Addis Ababa transferred Biru to Sidamo and sent *Däjjazmach* Habtä-Mariam of Naqmttee as caretaker governor. Although Biru's days in Qellem were characterised by severe economic exploitation, social disruption and cultural oppression, his administration

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<sup>56</sup> On Sayyoo-Gambella trade and the integration into the world economy of Qellem and the wider south-western Ethiopia see among others Bahru Zawde, "Relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan on the Western Ethiopian Frontier, 1898-1935 (SOAS, PhD Thesis, 1976), 226-385; Daniel Ayana, "Land Tenure," 152-199.

<sup>57</sup> Bahru Zawde, "Relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan," 244-254.

<sup>58</sup> Galataa Noonnisee, D/Doolloo, 03/08/2010; Oliiqaa Eebbaa, D/Doolloo, 14/08/2010; Yosef Innooroo, Bishooftuu, 11/10/2010.

<sup>59</sup> Bahru Zawde, "Relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan," 244-254.

<sup>60</sup> Informants: Galataa Noonnisee, 03/08/2010; Oliiqaa Eebbaa, 14/08/2010, D/Doolloo; See also Negaso Gidada, "Oromo Historical Poems," 337-338.

was praised for having successfully combatted various forms of criminality by an apologist of the colonial system, *Birhaninna Sälam*, an Amharic weekly.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, Biru and his administration were known for their unqualified destruction of the local Macca Oromo culture, and the peasants were pleased to see the back of him.<sup>62</sup>

In April 1928, *Däjjazmach* Mäkonnen Wäsänè, former commander of the imperial cavalry, was appointed the new governor of Qellem.<sup>63</sup> Before his arrival, *gäbbars* from Jimmaa and Horroo in northern Qellem withdrew to the neighbouring Asosa. Under the impression that the *gäbbar* had emigrated because they were disappointed to see the removal of a governor they liked (Biru), *Birhaninna Sälam*'s author asks why they felt it necessary to withdraw before witnessing the behaviour of the new governor.<sup>64</sup> But the arrival of newly appointed governors in the conquered south always resulted in immediate exactions to welcome the governor and his army, and the *gäbbar* had a great deal of experience of this. Only months of negotiations and the promise of reduced taxes and fair justice brought them home.<sup>65</sup> But the *gäbbar* returned only to face another round of exploitation as Mäkonnen enforced the continuation of the same system.<sup>66</sup> No change was seen until Mäkonnen himself was transferred to Walayta in 1932. When Mäkonnen was removed, Habtä-Mariam was sent again as a caretaker governor.

As *Fitawrari* Hailä Mariam Chärè, *Däjjazmach* Mäkonnen's *Indärasè*, and his army began their preparation for departure, a new surge of peasant-*näfṣägna* confrontation engulfed the region. In May 1932, Hailä-Mariam advised his *näfṣägna* retinue to collect their "salaries"—which meant looting whatever was available in the country before departing. When

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<sup>61</sup> *Birhaninna Sälam*, 2 June 1927, 106-107; Informant: Waaqjira Hiixuu, Caanqaa, 23/08/2010.

<sup>62</sup> Informants: Oliiqaa Eebbaa, D/Doolloo, 14/08/2010; Baalchaa Deentaa, D/Doolloo, 22/08/2005; Yosef Innooroo, Bishooftuu, 11/10/2010; Abbabee Machii, Addis Ababa, 02/10/2010.

<sup>63</sup> *Birhaninna Sälam*, 31 March 1927, 102.

<sup>64</sup> *Birhaninna Sälam*, 26 July 1928, 235.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Informants: Glataa Noonniisee, Fiixee Birrii, D/Doolloo (07/08/2010).

the *näffägna* were told that their leader had been transferred to Walayta, they made extensive plans for departure. It was reported to Addis Ababa that:

...nobody but he [*Fitawrari* Hailä-Mariam himself] knows what his master [Mäkonnen] told him, to cause such a disaster in the region. But I heard he told his soldiers saying that ‘so that you may not claim later on I did not tell you this, beware that we were strictly ordered [by higher authority] to get our salary from the people.’ Hence, he and his soldiers decided to loot before Mäsqäl [i.e. celebration of the finding of the true cross which falls on Mäskäräm 17 E.C. (27 September) every year]. The looting started six months ago...<sup>67</sup>

On the departure date (28 November 1932), they drove dozens of *gäbbar* and their children—who had been taken captive or enslaved for inability to pay their tribute—to be sold for domestic slavery, along with thousands of head of cattle.<sup>68</sup> The Oromo, who had suffered all forms of exploitation, including the enslavement of their children for domestic servitude, were tempted to confront the armed *näffägna* as they made preparations for departure taking the children with them. Victimized families enlisted support from numerous peasant families and there was a stalemate for about two months. The well-armed *näffägna* embarked on a process of mass imprisonment and the barbaric treatment of women and children.<sup>69</sup> The *qoroo* and *baläbbat*, whom Yiggazu’s verdict of 1920 had declared free, were not spared.<sup>70</sup> But the stalemate meant that Hailä-Mariam and his *mälkägna* could not set off with the enslaved children and looted cattle because of the peasant uprisings. All possible routes of departure were blocked by the peasants. The peasants cut down large trees and used them to block the roads between Walal and Sadii in the east. The peasants would not have to guard the roads day and night waiting for the departing *näffägna*, and any attempt to circumvent the roadblocks would force Mariam and his entourage to travel through the farmlands—traditional peasant

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<sup>67</sup> Habtä-Mariam to Hailä-Sellassé, n.d., Gäbrä-Egziabhér to *Ras Täfäri*, Hidar 17, 1913 EC/26 Nov.1920, in Triulzi & Tesema, *የወሊን የታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 170.

<sup>68</sup> Habtä-Mariam to Hailä-Sellassé, n.d., Gäbrä-Egziabhér to *Ras Täfäri*, Hidar 17, 1913 EC/26 Nov.1920, in Triulzi & Tesema, *የወሊን የታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 172-174.

<sup>69</sup> Informants: Glataa Noonnisee, Fiixee Birrii, D/Doolloo (07/08/2010).

<sup>70</sup> Habtä-Mariam to Hailä-Sellassé, n.d., Gäbrä-Egziabhér to *Ras Täfäri*, Hidar 17, 1913 EC/26 Nov.1920, in Triulzi & Tesema, *የወሊን የታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 172-174.

strongholds where their presence would be quickly discovered. The peasants declared this an all-out campaign against the *mälkägna*.<sup>71</sup>

Eventually, the peasant uprising was suppressed by force. The number of families taken into slavery remains unrecorded, as does the number of looted cattle, and local claims appear to be gross exaggerations. The new governor reported the release of forty enslaved children,<sup>72</sup> but never mentioned the total number of enslaved people and looted cattle other than admitting that the list was incomplete. However, the report indicates that the number was large, and the Emperor would “be very sorry if [he had] seen the whole list of petitioners,” who appealed to him on behalf of their children held in slavery.<sup>73</sup>

On 6 November 1932, Habtä-Mariam arrived in Tabor, the new administrative centre of Qellem.<sup>74</sup> His arrival opened a new door for Oromo peasant resistance—not only against *Fitawrari* Hailä-Mariam Chärè and his *näffägna*, but also against the local ruling government stratum. First, a legal case was unleashed against those who had taken Oromo children and adults into slavery at gunpoint. As Habtä Mariam had already passed many local complaints he’d heard since arriving in Qellem to Addis Ababa, the need was confirmed for further action. Hailä-Mariam Chärè was arrested, put in chains and forced to appear in a special court organized by Habtä-Mariam. Much to the dismay of the *näffägna*, Habtä Mariam held legal proceedings at Aayira, about seventy kilometres east of Tabor, and the verdict called for the immediate restitution of all children to their parents and the immediate freeing of all enslaved *gäbbar*.<sup>75</sup> This won Habtä-Mariam sympathy from the entire Oromo population in the province.<sup>76</sup> The dispute they had lost at Yeggazu’s court turned to victory in November 1932,

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<sup>71</sup> Informants: Glataa Noonnisee, Fiixee Birrii, D/Doolloo (07/08/2010).

<sup>72</sup> Habtä-Mariam to Hailä-Sellassé, n.d., Gäbrä-Egziabher to Ras Täfäri, Hidar 17, 1913 EC/26 Nov.1920, in Triulzi & Tesema, *የወሊጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 172-174..

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Habtä-Mariam to Hailä-Sellassé, n.d., in Triulzi & Tesema, *የወሊጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 170.

<sup>75</sup> Habtä-Mariam to Hailä-Sellassé, Hidar 17, 1913 EC/26 Nov.1920 in Triulzi & Tesema, *የወሊጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 172-174.

<sup>76</sup> Informants: Fiixee Birrii, Raagaa Turaa, Galataa Noonnisee, D/Doolloo (07/08/2010).

when Habtä-Mariam's court condemned the notorious *näffägna* commander, *Fitawrari* Hailä Mariam Chärè and his soldiers.<sup>77</sup> Informants claim that this was the only case the Macca Oromo of Qellem won over the *näffägna*, and further research proves they were very probably right.<sup>78</sup>

Because of this the Oromo peasants of Qellem set much store in Habtä Mariam's governorship, although his primary concern was issues surrounding his own wealth and power and satisfying the interests of the imperial state. These aspects of course hinged on to his ability to restore peace in the region. Putting hope in Habtä-Mariam represented an identification of the peasants with him, drawing on local Oromoness. In the memory of the Macca Oromo of Qellem, Habtä-Mariam's administration represented a time of compassion and justice, just as much as the rule of the Amhara Yeggazu stood for injustice and exploitation. While Yeggazu's court is only one example, the peasants generally believed that all Amhara governors and their *näffägna* were the same, and regarded them as alien intruders however long they spent with them. Local tradition reiterates this clearly:

Oromo	Rough translation
<i>Naqeen nugaggabse</i>	Naqee/Nake choked us
<i>Saahileen nuqaqqabdee?</i>	Is Saahile/Sahle going to rescue us?
<i>Manni Simaa Guumaa</i>	The house of Sima, the son of Guumaa
<i>Jalli citaadhuma</i>	Its bottom walls are straw
<i>Naqeenii fi Saaleen</i>	Both Naqee and Saalee
<i>Jarri Sidaamuma</i>	They are Amhara
<i>Saahileen abbaa keetii?</i>	Is Saahile/Sahle your father?
<i>Laaxee albaateetii</i>	You wallow in diarrhoea
<i>Hundumaa Sidaama</i>	All of them are Amhara
<i>Hundumaa sisaama</i>	All of them fleece you. <sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Habtä-Mariam to Hailä-Sellassé, Hidar 17, 1913 EC/26 Nov.1920 in Triulzi & Tesema, *የወላጋ የታሪክ ስነ-ጥናት*, 172-174.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Informants: Baalchaa Deentaa, D/Doolloo, 22/08/2005; See also Negaso Gidada, "Oromo Historical Poems," 333.



Soon after he took over, Habtä Mariam wrote a detailed report to the Emperor describing severe disruption to the *näffägnä-gäbbar* system in Qellem, relying on empirical data drawn from individual cases. He explained the subject in depth, arguing that the system not only impoverished the region, causing waves of *gäbbar* outmigration, but also wasted a huge potential for revenue and wealth that could have become a significant measure of state income. From Habtä-Mariam's point of view, the problem was caused by the state's inability to introduce the *qäläd* system, which had been in place in his own province since 1910.<sup>80</sup> Mariam immediately set a limit on the severe exploitation of the *gäbbar* by *näffägna*,<sup>81</sup> and suggested to the Emperor that one immediate result of abolition of the *näffägna-gäbbar* system would be the return to their homesteads of thousands of Oromo *gäbbar* who had emigrated over many years to the neighbouring Benishangul. Mariam complained that Khojale al Hassen of Benishangul had already erected border checkpoints to prevent this happening and pleaded with Addis Ababa to stop Khojale from doing this.<sup>82</sup> As Habtä-Mariam continued to send a series of reports on how best to reconfigure local administration, relax state-society relations and introduce the *qäläd* system,<sup>83</sup> the Emperor finally instructed him to hold a meeting with local Oromo notables to discuss the possible implementation of the *qäläd* system, with example of Habtä-Mariam's province in mind, and to send him details of ideas they agreed on in writing.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Habtä-Mariam to Hailä-Sellassé, Tahisas 5, 1925 [14 December 1932], in Triulzi & Tesema, *የወላጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 175-176.

<sup>81</sup> Habtä-Mariam to Hailä-Sellassé, Tir 23, 1925 [31 January 1933], in Triulzi & Tesema, *የወላጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 183-184.

<sup>82</sup> Habtä-Mariam to Hailä-Sellassé, Tahisas 22, 1925 [31 December 1932], in Triulzi & Tesema, *የወላጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 180-182.

<sup>83</sup> Habtä-Mariam to Hailä-Sellassé, Tahisas 25, 1925 [3 January 1933], in Triulzi & Tesema, *የወላጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 180-182; Idem, Tir 23, 1925 [31 January 1933], 183-184.

<sup>84</sup> Habtä-Mariam to Hailä-Sellassé, Yekkatit 22, 1925 [1 March 1933], in Triulzi & Tesema, *የወላጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 192-193.

## Banditry

Discussions on banditry and rural criminality in African contexts have produced a sizeable canon of literature over the last decade. Inspired by the works of Eric Hobsbawm, Africanists initially emphasised bandits in colonial African societies, notably Kenya, Algeria, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and South Africa.<sup>85</sup> However, recent studies have concluded that banditry was not confined to colonialism, neither was it limited to feudal systems or capitalist modes of production.<sup>86</sup> Very similar conditions pertained in Ethiopia, where banditry is “as old as the hills.”<sup>87</sup> Extant sources assert that active brigandage in Ethiopia can be traced back to the early days of the Aksumite state.<sup>88</sup> In short, the Christian kingdom of Abyssinia, before its conquest of lands to the south of the Blue Nile and the Šawan Uplands in the late nineteenth century, had a well-established tradition of banditry. Donald Crummey offers a detailed and nuanced analysis of the salient features of nineteenth century banditry in historic Abyssinia: the nobility’s domination of *šeftenāt* (an Amharic word that captures both rebellion and banditry), the use of banditry as an instrument of political mobility for the nobles and the incongruity of local governors’ attitudes to brigandage as the ruling class maintained the law to ensure peasant suppression, yet openly transgressed it to advance their own agendas.<sup>89</sup> To Timothy

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<sup>85</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (Manchester. 1959), 13-29; *Idem*, *Bandits* (London, revised edn, 1981), *Idem*, “Social Banditry,” in H.A Landsberger (ed), *Rural Protest: Peasant Movement and Social Change* (London. 1974), 142-57; E.J. Keller, “A Twentieth Century Model, the Mau Mau transformation from social banditry to social rebellion,” *Kenya Historical Review*, 1 (2) (1973), 189-205; D.A Maughan-Brown, “Social Banditry: Hobsbawm’s Model and ‘Mau Mau’,” *African Studies*, 39 (1) (1980), 77-97; A. Isaacman, “Social Banditry in Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) and Mozambique, 1884-1907, an expression of early peasant protest,” *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 4 (1) (1977), 1-30.

<sup>86</sup> Timothy D. Fernyhough, *Serfs, Slaves and Shifta: Modes of Production and Resistance in Pre-Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, Shama Books: 2010); David M. Hart, *Banditry in Islam : Case studies from Morocco, Algeria and the Pakistan North West Frontier* (Whitstable: Menas Press, 1987); Donald Crummey (ed.), *Banditry, Rebellion and Social protest in Africa* (London James Curry, 1986).

<sup>87</sup> T. Fernyhough, *Serfs*, 229. For historiographical assessment of banditry in northern Ethiopia see Timothy D. Fernyhough, *Serfs, Slaves and Shifta*, 229-61.

<sup>88</sup> W. Schoff (ed). *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (London, 1912), 23; G.W.B. Huntingford (ed), *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (London, 1980), 20; Sergew Hable Sellassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270* (Addis Ababa: United Printers, 1972), 93-94.

<sup>89</sup> Donald Crummey, “Banditry and Resistance: noble and peasant in nineteenth century Ethiopia,” in Crummey (ed), *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest*, 133-49.

Fernyhough we owe the exploration of the multiple roots of northern Ethiopian banditry since 1900 as well as a sound argument that *šeftenat* was an institution which allowed social and political mobility.<sup>90</sup>

The southern marches of imperial Ethiopia led by Menilek in the late nineteenth century introduced northern feudal relations to the southern areas of the country. If banditry played a considerable role in historic Abyssinia, it was not an exclusive northern monopoly. Within the context of rural resistance against imperial Ethiopia, Gebru Tareke identified strong links between peasant resistance and banditry. Gebru's point supports Fernyhough's argument on northern *šeftenat* and southern outlaws that "a political centralization after 1889 clearly failed to sever the link between insurrection and banditry."<sup>91</sup> Eric Hobsbawm was perhaps the earliest historian to link banditry to peasant modes of resistance. Taking encouragement from Hobsbawm, a brief glance at banditry in Ethiopia's conquered south (in this case Qellem) offers the opportunity to put some of his analytical concepts into a specific historical setting. Hobsbawm argues that bandits thrive in two stages of rural evolution: first, the development of social formation from one founded on kinship relations to one resting on class and state; and second, the change within rural society from peasant-based agriculture to agrarian capitalism.<sup>92</sup>

An assessment of the political economy and topography of the conquered south helps explain the setting in which brigands thrived—although a conducive setting alone does not produce bandits. Causes that convince individuals to take up banditry were very diverse. More often than not the individual bandits would have taken into account a range of available alternatives, and weighed up various opportunities. The resort to the career of banditry in the south, as in north, was usually regarded as the last resort of economic desperation. Therefore,

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<sup>90</sup> T. Fernyhough, "Social Mobility and Dissident Elites in Northern Ethiopia, the role of bandits, 1900-1969," in Crummey (ed), *Banditry, Rebellion and Social Protest*, 151-73.

<sup>91</sup> T. Fernyhough, *Serfs, Slaves and Shifra*, 232.

<sup>92</sup> E. Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 9-18.

various themes characterize the analysis of banditry in Ethiopia's conquered south. The most important of these presents banditry as a practice of social protest and resistance.

In Ethiopia's conquered south, bandits proliferated after the introduction of the *näffägna-gäbbar* in the 1890s (a date that did not apply to Qellem). In most places the system survived intact until the Italian occupation, and although its defining features were largely similar, administration patterns were far from uniform. In general, the *näffägna* elite initiated the intense appropriation of labour and land. In the Abyssinian homeland, the common ethno-cultural background of rulers and peasants alike, as well as the latter's direct access to land, mitigated images of class exploitation. Although Qellem had its distinctive features—mainly because of the delay in the implementation of the *qälad* system until 1944—in the newly conquered southern territories indigenous cultivators and pastoralists were deprived of their ancestral land before being decisively tied to it as *gäbbar*.<sup>93</sup> Extremely heavy tithes paid to an alien state and governing *näffägna* in taxes, tribute and labour reduced the southern peoples to serfdom and made them *gäbbar*. It was therefore quite easy to see why many individuals in Qellem, as in Maji and much of the southwest where imperial Ethiopia's hands fell most severely, turned to banditry to protest, resist and survive.<sup>94</sup>

As the *näffägna* demands for labour and surplus reached critical levels, many peasants took up banditry. Bandits as agents of protest and resistance in Qellem can be more clearly defined against the resurgence of new power dynamics installed through the return of the *näffägna-gäbbar* system in 1917. When some *gäbbar* chose to withdraw to territories in Qellem where there survived autonomies responsible to Addis Ababa, many turned to banditry.

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<sup>93</sup> See John Markakis, *Ethiopia: Anatomy of A Traditional Polity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 104-142; John M. Cohen and Dov Weintraub, *Land and peasants in imperial Ethiopia: the social background to a revolution* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975), 11-15; Donald Crummey, *Land and society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia: from the thirteenth to the twentieth century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000.), 242-243.

<sup>94</sup> See T. Fernyhough, *Serfs*, 263-300.

As Oromo bandits flared up, so did the predatory *šifta*. These distinctions will be discussed at greater length in the analyses presented below.

Although Ethiopia banned the sale of firearms in its conquered territories, and took great care that the Oromo would not acquire firearms—as observed by Koettlitz—banditry in Qellem relied on the few available weapons.<sup>95</sup> My informants relate that banditry generally flared up after the introduction of the *näftägna-gäbbar* system<sup>96</sup> and remained one of the most important peasant reactions to the system until the outbreak of the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935, which effectively removed the coercive arm of the Empire. Local traditions state that Oromo bandit gangs usually targeted the notorious *mälkägna* who benefitted most from the system. The degree to which the bandits targeted individual *mälkägna* to avenge their exploitation varied widely from place to place, and is difficult to determine in some cases. Famous leaders of bands of rebels associated with the 1920s full-time banditry were Kitaabaa, Oliiqaa Dingil, Likkaasaa Wageetii, Mootii Abbaa Malkaa, and Lamuu Kuraa. The career of Kitaabaa will suffice to illustrate how banditry in Qellem served as a means of social protest and resistance against the *näftägna-gäbbar* system. Kitaabaa made Gaawoo, to the north of Sayyoo, his headquarters,<sup>97</sup> a densely forested area east of and very close to the Walal Mountains. Kitaabaa was, according to observation of Thomas Lambie, a missionary who worked in Qellem:

... very powerful, and had thousands of followers; the whole countryside was in league with him. When threatened by a large body of Amharas, he would retreat into the thick forest, where it was impossible to find him. The people concealed his whereabouts. He had his officials and functionaries ... all belonging to the robber band...<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> R. Koettlitz, “A Journey through Somaliland and Southern Abyssinia to the Shangalla or Bertha Country and the Blue Nile, and through the Sudan to Egypt,” *Scottish Geographical Magazine* (Edinburg, 160), 467-490.

<sup>96</sup> Informant: Waaqjira Hiixuu, Yosef Innooroo, Nägaš Shuuramoo.

<sup>97</sup> Lambie, *A Doctor's Great Commission* (Van Kampen Press, 1954), 135.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

By presenting Kitaabaa as a bandit with “thousands of followers,” Lambie must have meant the *gäbbar* themselves, who were in fact living permanently at their homesteads rather than as part of Kitaabaa’s mobile rebel band. They were followers in the sense that they supported his career of banditry, accepting it as legitimate local government. Every person paid tribute to him and he protected them from interference by the *mälkägna* and other bandits. It is in this sense one can see that “the whole countryside was in league with him.” That is how the local tradition remembers Kitaabaa’s “rude government.”<sup>99</sup> Kitaabaa had the support of the *gäbbar*, not because he and his rule were popular, but because he, as the strongest bandit, was able to offer protection from the many smaller bandits as well as extreme exploitation by the *näffägna* system.

Kitaabaa “maintained a sort of rude government...for he had...acolytes, generals and captains.”<sup>100</sup> His bandit followers had labour divisions running different administrative and cultural duties. He had officials and functionaries and “*qaalluu*,” all belonging to the *shiftaa* band. His *shiftaa* soldiers and the agents he appointed as administrative functionaries toured at night among the *gäbbars*, collecting tributes and ensuring that they safely reached the forest camp. Meanwhile the “*qaalluu*,” (whom Lambie referred to as “priests”) had by the early twentieth century already become a new variant of their own, losing their original religious-political roles of the *gadaa* era and becoming exploiters by reverting to their old status. In this particular territory, they stood alongside Kitaabaa’s bandits. Because the *näffägna-gäbbar* system became the arch contender in exploiting the *gäbbar*, the “*qaalluu*” (discussed in Chapter Six), entered into direct confrontation with the system and were beaten.

By exalting the merits of a social hierarchy that put Kitaabaa and his bandit class at the top instead of the *näffägnä* class, the “*qaalluu*” helped reconfigure existing social orders. Much

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<sup>99</sup> Baalchaa Deentaa, D/Doolloo, 22/08/2005; Waaqjira Hiixuu, Caanqaa, 23/08/2010.

<sup>100</sup> Lambie, *Boot and Saddle*, 33.

like the agency of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the Abyssinian homeland, they became an effective instrument of relations of exploitation. The *qaalluu* of the *gadaa* era were known among the Macca Oromo of Qellem as “*warra ayyaanaa*,” the family in possession of *ayyaana*, the spirit of *Waaqa*<sup>101</sup>, the Supreme Deity.<sup>102</sup> The “*qaalluu*” used their power as possessors of *ayyaana* and its associated rituals, building a large following by entrenching in people’s minds the idea that they could save those who believed in them and obeyed, but could kill those who did not.<sup>103</sup> This reconstruction of spiritual power began with the decline of the *gadaa* system in the early nineteenth century, and by the beginning of the twentieth century the *qaalluu* had successfully managed to install a climate of fear into society.<sup>104</sup> In every corner of Qellem there was at least one influential *qaalluu*.<sup>105</sup> In and around Gaawoo, the same source of power was put to use in a slightly different form. Instead of declaring themselves makers and unmakers of everything, the *qaalluu* presented themselves as part of Kitaabaa’s “rude government.” They were, according to local oral tradition, the spiritual force behind the rise of Kitaabaa and the weakened *näffäгна* government.<sup>106</sup> Supported by invented tradition, enjoying direct access to the production of the peasants, the *qaalluu* played the part of consolidating Kitaabaa’s rule. The intermarriage in this region between banditry and *qaalluu*, however, was far from perfect. The fusion was occasionally disturbed by Kitaabaa’s ruthlessness, and he was reported to have murdered a number of *qaalluu* to enforce strict obedience.

Until 1920 Biru’s *näffäгна* were unable to dislodge Kitaabaa. The *näffäгна* were denied the chance of confronting him in their military capacity because the *gäbbars* backed him by covering his whereabouts,<sup>107</sup> and because his band was based in the densely forested hills,

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<sup>101</sup> Waaqa, in traditional Oromo religion, was both the sky and sky God.

<sup>102</sup> Kumsa Boro, *Kumsaa Boroo*, 151.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>104</sup> Gidada Solon, *The Other Side*, 11-12; Kumsa Boro, *Kumsaa Boroo*, 153.

<sup>105</sup> Kumsa Boro, *Kumsaa Boroo: Jiruu fi Jireenya (Life and Times)*, 153.

<sup>106</sup> Informants: Baalchaa Deentaa, D/Doolloo, 22/08/2005; Waaqjira Hiixuu, Caanqaa, 23/08/2010.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

giving him the upper hand against any military expedition that attempted to penetrate into deep forest. Kitaabaa solicited information from the peasants on *näffägna* movement from their traditional military camp, *kätäma*. He seems to have made occasional surprise attacks on their *kätäma*, which were usually repulsed with losses. In short, he proved to be the terror of the *näffägna* government in eastern Qellem.<sup>108</sup> Kitaabaa had all the trappings of modern guerrilla fighters but without the long-term objectives. The strong backing he won from Oromo peasants seems to have been due to their hatred of the *näffägna* government rather than the protection he offered them. Although Kitaabaa's "rude government" resisted the *näffägna-gäbbar* system, it also became an additional "burden of tribute and fear,"<sup>109</sup> as it occasionally preyed on traders and peasants.<sup>110</sup> Clarity on the amount of tribute Kitaabaa's rule imposed, how regularly it was collected, and what mechanisms were employed to ensure collection are undermined by the paucity of data.

What made Kitaabaa's banditry in and around Gaawoo more interesting is the mix of dynamic issues it brought, which affected not only the local course of events but also relations between the local government and Addis Ababa. The *näffägna* presence was still there; they had never been ousted from Gaawoo. As Kitaabaa's presence grew ever more menacing, *näffägna* collection of tribute and the demands for labour became almost impossible. Kitaabaa made it his job to threaten government employees whenever they set out to collect tribute. Although they were always armed, the main drawback for the *näffägna* was that they went individually to the homes of the *gäbbar* whom they were assigned to extract produces from, whilst Kitaabaa's men travelled in groups. The *näffägna* often made irregular visits to *gäbbar* to intimidate them and extract whatever they needed, not to kill or engage in any sort of armed

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<sup>108</sup> Lambie, *The Doctor's Great Commission*, 135.

<sup>109</sup> T. Fernyhough, "Social Mobility," 163.

<sup>110</sup> Baalchaa Deentaa, D/Doolloo, 22/08/2005; Waaqjira Hiixuu, Caanqaa, 23/08/2010.



conflict.<sup>111</sup> Given the efficiency of Kitaabaa's social-political networks, they were usually ambushed before they could reach their destination. For the *näffägna*, these irregular visits to the *gäbbar* under their domain was their only livelihood, and any hindrance was a real threat to their survival. Kitaabaa's strength in the regions put *näffägna*'s lives at risk.

Nevertheless, they lived with this problem until 1917-18, when Biru's *näffägna* themselves became bandits in the same region. They organized themselves into groups, went beyond Gaawoo and started to rob *gäbbar* and traders travelling to and from markets, targeting market days in particular.<sup>112</sup> Banditry itself became a contested territory. Farming and trading declined further and peasant insecurity grew. The *näffägna* bandits expanded their robbery to the north, where Biru himself was based. Biru's presence apparently discouraged their careers as rebels, so they started cross-border raids into the Sudan. Evidence does not directly implicate Biru in these raids, but frontier banditry in the Ethio-Sudanese border region had in its history a well-established habit of local governors' involvement, sometimes openly, sometimes covert,<sup>113</sup> and was one of the most lucrative businesses in the area.<sup>114</sup> Täfäri communicated his views of Biru's action to *Däjjazmach* Gäbrä-Egziabhér; his words imply personal misdeeds and does not exclude the possibility of wrongdoings of men under him, "...የማይገባ ሥራ ቢሰራ እጁን ይዘነዋል/we have arrested him because of his wrong-doing."<sup>115</sup> Biru was recalled to Addis Ababa and put in chains,<sup>116</sup> but as far as the *gäbbar* were concerned, his removal and arrest resulted from his refusal to listen to their appeals and petitions against the severity of his rule, although Addis Ababa had willingly and knowingly sent Biru and his *näffägna* to use them as

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<sup>111</sup> Informants: Galataa Noonnisee, D/Doolloo, 03/08/2010; Oliiqaa Eebbaa, D/Doolloo, 14/08/2010; Yosef Innooroo, Bishooftuu, 11/10/2010.

<sup>112</sup> Informants: Abäbä Machii, Addis Ababa, 02/10/2010; Asefa Boroo, D/Doolloo 08/08/2010; Asefa Ammayyaa D/Doolloo, 11/08/2010.

<sup>113</sup> See Bahru Zewde, "Relations," 107-167.

<sup>114</sup> Informants: Galataa Noonnisee, D/Doolloo, 03/08/2010; Oliiqaa Eebbaa, D/Doolloo, 14/08/2010; Yosef Innooroo, Bishooftuu, 11/10/2010.

<sup>115</sup> Gäbrä-Egziabhér to Ras Täfäri, Mäskäräm 27, 1913 EC [07 October.1920], in Triulzi & Tesema, *የወላጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 132; Lambie, *A Doctor's*, 134-135.

<sup>116</sup> Gäbrä-Egziabhér to Ras Täfäri, Mäskäräm 27, 1913 EC [07 October.1920], in Triulzi & Tesema, *የወላጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 132; Lambie, *A Doctor's*, 134-135.

economic resources for their livelihood.<sup>117</sup> Recurrent political instability in Addis Ababa meant that regional governors sent to such distant frontier provinces as Qellem began to show disobedience towards the centre. Given the uneasy relations between Täfäri and Biru, the possibility of the former using such conditions as an excuse to arrest the latter appears to be a readily available option.

As the *näffägna*-bandits grew stronger, the Oromo *gäbbar* suffered and grew more disobedient towards Kitaabaa's "rude government." Kitaabaa reacted with a heavy hand and produced deadly enemies within his own band. The *qaalluu* had already begun slipping away and escaping into areas far beyond Kitaabaa's control. Eventually, he lost support of the peasantry.<sup>118</sup> In the end he was murdered by the brother of a man he had killed, and his followers dispersed.<sup>119</sup>

The dispersed bandits continued to prey on the Oromo peasants. Sometime after the fall of Kitaabaa an eye witness reported that the great forests in Qellem were still infested with bandits and that the Oromo peasants in Humbii, some fifteen kilometres southwest of Sayyoo (later Dambi-Doolloo), captured three of them and mercilessly murdered them.<sup>120</sup> The Oromo resistance that had manifested itself in banditry was in the end unable to sustain itself, mainly because of the violence carried out by Kitaabaa on the peasants and the absence of any long-term objectives. The rise and fall of the Oromo bandits before the Ethiopian conquest, those who flared up after the fall of Kitaabaa and a few of his contemporaries operating independently, and the *näffägna*-bandits all symbolise two principal features of banditry in Qellem: banditry for economic aggrandizement and for social mobility, subjects which lie beyond the scope of this thesis.

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<sup>117</sup> Baalchaa Deentaa, D/Doolloo, 22/08/2005.

<sup>118</sup> Informants: Abbabee Machii, Addis Ababa, 02/10/2010; Asefa Boroo, D/Doolloo 08/08/2010; Asefa Ammayyaa D/Doolloo, 11/08/2010.

<sup>119</sup> Lambie, *A Doctor's*, 135.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

In terms of Hobsbawm's analytical concepts, the bandits in Qellem grew strong during one of the phases he identified; the transition from kinship-based social formation to the birth of stratified classes. Although banditry in the region thrived during the period of Amhara direct rule (1917-20) under the distinctive *näffäгна-gäbbar* system of labour appropriation and resource extraction, it also existed long before Menilek's conquest of Qellem in ca.1886. Banditry in the region was not born because of the *näffäгна-gäbbar* system.<sup>121</sup> In those regions of Ethiopia below the Abbay River and the Šawan Plateau, class differentiation and state formation predated the Ethiopian conquest. The social institutions of the Sayyoo Oromo during the time of their settlement in Qellem suggest that they were non-egalitarian and had already undergone class differentiation.<sup>122</sup> After the Macca Oromo completed settling in Qellem, and after the demarcation of boundaries between lineages had been made by the early eighteenth century, there followed what my informants call "*jabana gaalamootaa*," (the era of anarchy), a period during which administrative and military hierarchies and enforced order were established in different Sayyoo regions. In the process, the stronger chiefs defeated the weaker ones, who would rebel by becoming frontier bandits. The victors in most cases won the submission of the bandits through negotiation.<sup>123</sup> The result was that petty states were formed between 1780 and 1830, which matured into centralized monarchies by end of the century.<sup>124</sup> Banditry was in the process of competing with the already undermined *gadaa* system, and the rise of powerful chiefs involved in the making of these states as Menilek's army conquered centralized states and imposed a developed class structure.

Hobsbawm's analytical concepts have mixed relevance in Qellem. The fact that frontier banditry became a norm in the process of state formation in the region validates Hobsbawm's

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<sup>121</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>122</sup> L. Bartels, *Oromo Religion*, 211-217.

<sup>123</sup> Informants: Yosef Innooroo, Bishooftuu, 11/10/2010; Galataa Noonnisee, D/Doolloo, 03/08/2010; Oliiqaa Eebbaa, D/Doolloo, 14/08/2010; Yosef Innooroo, Bishooftuu, 11/10/2010.

<sup>124</sup> See Negaso Gidada, *History of the Sayyoo*, 165-242.

contention that brigandage escalates as rural societies develop beyond kinship. But since the transition to the birth of a well stratified classes was not accompanied by any element of banditry, Hobsbawm's notion that ties class and state does not fit the case for Qellem, nor does Kitaabaa's career neatly fit Hobsbawm's definition of "social bandit," as he not only protected the peasantry but also preyed on them and finally became their enemy. Kitaabaa's banditry also differs from the subjects of Allen Isaacman's case study of social banditry, emphasizing the Mozambique-Rhodesia borderland where his two social bandits—Mapondera and Dambukashamba—harassed the Portuguese. While Mapondera was a traditional chief who, "well before...the imposition of colonialism...had gained an unparalleled reputation as the guardian of the 'traditional' order,"<sup>125</sup> all of Qellem's social bandits were born from the brutal and exploitative rule of the *näffägna-gäbbar* system. Like tax evasion and flight, banditry in Qellem provided a forum for collective defiance by helping to vent individualized frustrations and anger.

### **Outmigration and reform**

Outmigration—by deterring collective peasant action—constitutes part of what James Scott refers to as a "weapon of the weak." In the literature, outmigration has been known as "flight", or is more generally categorized under various forms of avoidance protest. For most incidents of outmigration, the evidence is much sketchier, the process of interpretation often based more on speculation and inference. In his analyses of Javanese outmigration in Indonesia, Michael Adas divided the concept into three categories: the protest of denial (resistance from within), the protest of denial (exit), and the protest of retribution.<sup>126</sup> His definition of the second

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<sup>125</sup> Allen Isaacman, "Social Banditry in Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) and Mozambique (1894-1907): An Expression of Early Peasant Protest," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 4(1), 1-30.

<sup>126</sup> Michael Adas, "From Footdragging to Flight: The Evasive History of Peasant Avoidance Protest in South and Southeast Asia," in James Scott and Benedict Kerkvliet (eds), *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance in Southeast Asia* (Rotledge, 1986), 64-86.

category as “flight or transfer of peasant services and loyalties”<sup>127</sup> exemplifies one of the famous peasant resistance movements in Qellem. Outmigration as an instrument of resistance in Qellem began as early as 1909, a year after the first Amhara colonists were planted in the region, and reached its zenith in 1921 following the arrival of Yiggäzu Bähabtè, the region’s new governor and Biru’s replacement, who immediately turned down an appeal by allied local Oromo peasants and *balabbat* to be freed from the *näffägna-gäbbar* system.

Following Yiggäzu’s verdict, about nine thousand Oromo *gäbbar* escaped north to Beggi. The wave of outmigration hit Jimmaa, Horroo, Gidaamii, parts of Haawwaa and Halaku, areas of Qellem adjacent to Benishangul, which had been badly and irregularly exposed to extractions. Emigrants were favourably received by *šäykh* Khojäle Al-Hassan, governor of Benishangul—mainly because of long-standing conflict over matters of trade and rule over Beggi between him and successive leaders of Qellem. Khojäle was always willing to receive peasants from Qellem in his cool and fertile highland,<sup>128</sup> and tradition states that Khojälé received them well, assigned them farmlands and provided new opportunities.<sup>129</sup> Yiggäzu’s verdict created a new opportunity for the Oromo peasants of Qellem to exploit Khojälé’s animosity and manifest their resistance to the continuation of the *näffägna-gäbbar* system in their country. Their mass outmigration revived Khojälé’s influence over the region.

Individual family outmigration to areas where the *näffägna* were not planted had been under way since the beginning of the second phase of the *näffägna-gäbbar* system in 1917. Such pockets included Haawwaa and Galaan, where hereditary Oromo governors were allowed autonomy because of their fathers’ peaceful submission, and thus remained responsible only to Addis Ababa. The hereditary rulers of these territories were exempted from local tribute, yet

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 68-69.

<sup>128</sup> Gäbrä-Egziabhér to Täfäri, Mäskäräm, n.d, i in Triulzi & Tesema, *የወገን የታሪክ ስነ-ልቦና*, 171; Atieb Ahmed Dafalla, “Sheik Khojele, 61-62; A. Triulzi, “Social Protest,” 179. 27, 1913 EC [07 October.1920],

<sup>129</sup> Informants: Dabalaa Maammadee, Fiixee Birrii, D/Doolloo (07/08/2010).

still regarded themselves as landlords. Although the peasants living in these regions were subject to *erbo* (a tribute of a quarter of their produce) and state tax, this encumbrance was much lighter and thus attracted *gäbbar* fleeing *näffägna* atrocities. Attempts by Amhara governors to block this flow were largely unsuccessful as the journeys were carried out at night or via routes unknown to the *näffägna*.

The other area of sanctuary for *gäbbar* fleeing the system was Sakkoo (in south Sayyoo), where twenty five thousand hectares of forestland were granted by the regent Täfäri Mäkonnen to G. Barlassina, an Italian, in return for three decades of timber concession. The Ethiopian Sayyoo Forest Company (ESFC), as Barlassina's timber production project was known, had its agreement in place since 1921. The agreement establishing the ESFC allowed local people to use the forest for hanging beehives and any related purposes. In terms of timber production, the ESFC did not make much headway. Instead, after Barlassina opened the Consolata Catholic Mission on the land, the ESFC became the main vehicle for the introduction of Catholicism into Qellem. In 1932 there were fifteen Italians working at Sakkoo Catholic Mission Centre (SCMC). Despite its success as a timber producing company, the ESFC became one of the most important refuges for Oromo *gäbbar* fleeing the *näffägna-gäbbar* system.

Equally relevant to the subject of outmigration as a challenge to the *näffägna-gäbbar* system in Qellem were the old historical networks established throughout the wider region of west and south-west Ethiopia. The Ethio-Sudan boundaries affecting peoples on the fringes (Nuer, Anuak, Burun, Koma and others) were agreed in 1902, and in 1903 Burun and Koma, along with Daga (in the territory of Warragarra), were transferred from Qellem to the Sudan. Nevertheless, Burun and Koma continued to send their tributes to Gidaamii, then the political centre of Qellem, and acknowledged Oromo overlordship.<sup>130</sup> The long-established traditions of the Nilotic peoples living in the Ethio-Sudanese border areas, which allowed them to

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<sup>130</sup> WO 106/235, *SIR* 213 (April 1912), 3.

accommodate and assimilate Oromo runaways from the highlands of Qellem, became important. It was not uncommon for people on the borders of the Ethiopian and British empires to absorb displaced persons and families, as they were themselves used to being assimilated into other societies. Oromo refugees who fled from atrocities of the *näffägna-gäbbar* system were welcomed by the Nilotic peoples at the border.<sup>131</sup> This acceptance of internal assimilation stimulated additional mobility in the region, seriously damaging the *näffägna-gäbbar* system, as the flight of hundreds of Oromo *gäbbar* to the Anuak and Nuer of the plains in the 1920s attests.<sup>132</sup>

Such activity threatened the survival of the system. The *näffägna* were not themselves landlords and did not possess land, but lived off tributes. They were unwilling to work the land and live off its produce. Under the *näffägna-gäbbar* system in Qellem only the highest *mälkägna* (the chief governor) possessed tracts of land worked by *gäbbar* corvée labour. In fact only rarely did the system lead to land dispossession, even in the broader region of southern Ethiopia. The mass emigration of the *gäbbar* directly threatened the survival of the *näffägna* retinue, as their only source of subsistence was the *gäbbar* themselves. The lowest stratum of the *näffägna* class, *qitabäl* (those who were not given *gäbbar* and lived on an allowance) became the first victims as the state granary was reported empty.<sup>133</sup> It was feared that this would lead to the resurgence in Qellem of army looting the remaining *gäbbar*.<sup>134</sup> When conditions became difficult, the Ethiopian imperial army looted their own country's peasants as they did their enemies—it was a practice as old as the birth of the Ethiopian army itself.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Douglas Johnson, "On the Nilotic Frontier," 222, 241.

<sup>132</sup> Informants: Yosef Innooroo, Bishooftuu, 11/10/2010; Galataa Noonnisee, D/Doolloo, 03/08/2010; Oliiqaa Eebbaa, D/Doolloo, 14/08/2010; Yosef Innooroo, Bishooftuu, 11/10/2010.

<sup>133</sup> Gäbrä-Egzi'abhér to Ras Täfäri and Empress Zäwditu, Tiqimt 7, 1913 EC [26 Oct.1920], 1/wä/mu Letter-book of *Däjjazmach* Gäbrä-Egzi'abhér Correspondence with the Central government, 1898-1917 EC."

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> See among others, Richard Caulk, "Armies as Predators: Soldiers and Peasants in Ethiopia, c.1850–1935," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 11 (3), 1978, 466–467.

There were, however, some reserves left for the rest of the *näffäгна*, which had been provided by the *gäbbar* on whose tribute they would live. Most of them had enough cereal reserves in their private granaries to help them survive for a month or two. The real threat at this particular stage was the fear that the *näffäгна* would turn on the better off *näffäгна* as the *qīṭabäl* no longer had enough *gäbbar* left to loot. This exerted significant pressure not only on Yiggäzu's administration but also on Addis Ababa. While the north, west, and north western regions of Qellem largely chose withdrawal as a mechanism of survival and resistance, in the east Yiggäzu had to continuously fight banditry, while those who remained behind reluctantly chose to support whatever choice they thought best in order to survive.

Building on Habtä-Mariam's detailed report sent to the Emperor regarding the miseries the *näffäгна-gäbbar* system had brought to their region, the *qoroo* and *balabbat*, presumably under the guidance of Habtä-Mariam himself, resurrected a legal case that had already been lost in 1920 at Yeggäzu's court, which was connected to the latest developments and then submitted to the Emperor in the form of petition for the abolition of the entire *näffäгна-gäbbar* system.<sup>136</sup> In the same petition their old Oromo ruler, Jootee Tulluu, was presented as a man whose wrongdoing had undeservedly reduced them to *gäbbar* status.<sup>137</sup> These local Oromo *balabbat* did not represent the interests of the common people, but the question they raised—the abolition of the *näffäгна-gäbbar* system—was a big one. For the Emperor, Oromo notables were his local allies who would ensure the empire's smooth relations with the people, while the *näffäгна* were the force that ensured the very survival of the imperial system over which he presided. He had to compromise with both. He agreed that the *gäbbar* must be relieved, but the *qäläd* system—which would require land measurement throughout the entire province—was deferred, and would not be realized until 1944. Instead, Habtä-Mariam effected a system

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<sup>136</sup> Qellem *balabbat* and *qoroo* to Hailä-Sellassé, Tir 19, 1925 [27 Jan.1933], in Triulzi & Tesema, የወላጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች, 184-185.

<sup>137</sup> Habtä-Mariam to Hailä-Sellassé, Tir 19, 1925 [27 Jan.1933], Habtä-Mariam to Hailä-Sellassé, 184-185.



which was a great deal more liberal than the much-resented *näffägna-gäbbar* system by introducing a property tax.<sup>138</sup>

Property tax was an old system imposed upon occupants of unmeasured land in the Macca Oromo territories of Sibuu, Leeqaa and Horro-Guduruu before the land apportionment of 1910.<sup>139</sup> The property tax introduced by Habtä-Mariam divided the people into three classes depending on wealth. The first included those who would be taxed according to family size and the type of livestock they possessed, the second were the *abbaa-qabiyyee*, who were taxed on the amount of land they possessed, and the third included those who had one or two head of cattle in addition to other forms of income. The introduction of the property tax would benefit the Oromo *balabbat* who, as well as enjoying lighter tax demands compared to their wealth, won different feudal titles before Habtä-Mariam's departure.<sup>140</sup> However, the system was still burdensome to the Oromo peasants, mainly due to lack of circulating cash.<sup>141</sup>

The *näffägna-gäbbar* system—imperial Ethiopia's variant of colonialism—was terminated against the will of the imperial government. It was imposed against effects of multiple forms of contestation and resistance (court litigation, rebellion, banditry, outmigration) that had apparently once been completely defeated, as well as the government's ability to negotiate through various means (frequent change of governors, the re-creation of its structure of exploitation and rule, combating bandits yet dealing with the support they had in its own way, requesting emigrant peasants to return home, and finally appointing an Oromo governor). By boldly terminating the *näffägna-gäbbar* system and introducing the property tax system instead, *Däjjazmach* Habtä-Mariam, a Macca Oromo governor from Naqamtee, when

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<sup>138</sup> Imperial Ethiopian Government Ministry of Land Reform and Administration, “የባለቤት መሬት ጉዳይ/Issue of *Balabbat* land,” *Yakkatit* 27, 1937 [24 February 1945].

<sup>139</sup> Gäbrä-Wäld Ingida-Wärq, *የኢትዮጵያ መሬትና የግብር ስም*/Names of Ethiopia's Land and Taxes (Addis Ababa, 1948 EC), 64.

<sup>140</sup> Habtä-Mariam to Hailä-Sellassé, Tir 19, 1925 [27 Jan. 1933], in Triulzi & Tesema, *የወላጋ የታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 184-185.

<sup>141</sup> Daniel Ayana, “Land Tenure,” 127.

Emperor changed his concerted efforts to immediately introduce the *Qälad* system, evidently achieved substantial success in engineering a greater degree of compliance with state rule. He removed the brutal *näffägna* soldiers and governors, which won him immediate peasant support. He promoted local Oromo elites (*qoroo* and *balabbat*) who were already recognised as mediators at Yiggäzu's court and included into the same class those who had lost such status under *näffägna-gäbbar*, rebuilt them into the same class and re-connected them to the imperial Ethiopian state structure. By doing so, Habtä-Mariam expanded and further consolidated the state's embeddedness in society whilst simultaneously enabling society to reshape the state and expanding the ways in which it could be shaped by it. The various methods of contestation and the government's variegated responses demonstrate not only how the Ethiopian state was imagined, negotiated and partially legitimated in Qellem, but also how it was resisted.

In August 1933, Qellem came under the direct control of the Emperor as part of his policy of centralization to secure the revenue from the region, and *Fitawrari* Ašānafi Wäldä-Mariam, the region's first salaried official, replaced Habtä-Mariam. *Fitawrari* Ašānafi had been deputy governor of Boorana in 1931-32.<sup>142</sup> The following folk-song, which is drawn from an interview with a key informant in the town of Dambi-Doolloo, was allegedly sung by the peasants on the departure of Habtä Mariam in June 1933. The words of the song suggest that the peasants were still as desperate as they had been when the *näffägna-gäbbar* system was first introduced.<sup>143</sup>

**Oromo**  
*Dajjach Hafte*  
*Egaa in galtee?*  
*Horii Sayyoo sassaabbattee?*  
*Dubbiin Sayyoo garaatti haftee?*

**Rough translation**  
*Dajjach* Habtä Mariam  
 Did you go home?  
 Gathering the wealth of Sayyoo  
 Leaving the question of Sayyoo in [your] heart.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> FO 401/28, Mr Broadmead to Sir J. Simon, Intelligence Report for the Quarter Ending September 30, 1933, Addis Ababa, October 26, 1933; Habtä-Mariam to Hailä-Sellassé, Nähasé 7, 1925 [13 Aug. 1933], in Triulzi & Tesema, *የወሊን የታሪክ ሰነዶች*, 200-201.

<sup>143</sup> Informants: Baalchaa Deentaa, Fiixee Birrii, Nägaš Shuuramo, D/Doolloo, 22/08/2005.

<sup>144</sup> Informant: Baalchaa Deentaa, D/Doolloo, 22/08/2005.

Yet there was a difference between Habtä-Mariam and the Amhara governors. The Oromo peasants made a clear distinction between the two on the basis of their ethno-cultural origin. The severe exploitation of the Amhara—which was only one step removed from slavery—went hand-in-hand with ethno-cultural oppression for the Oromo. The *näffägna* created a corporate identity by maintaining strictly self-imposed isolation from the local Oromo peasants, regardless of their ethnic origins. Although they later discovered that Habtä Mariam had chased wealth like his predecessors, they recognized that he did not maintain their severe exploitation, but instead broke the vicious circle. Above all, the Oromo did not see any ethno-cultural boundary between themselves and Habtä-Mariam,<sup>145</sup> although they had associated the heavy exploitation and ethno-cultural domination they had faced with the Amhara governors. Meanwhile it became clear that the peasants always looked after their own interests, which were fundamentally different from those of the elites, as shown by their grievances against Habtä-Mariam for dashing their collective hopes in June 1933. Their enthusiasm to downplay exploitation that had accompanied Habtä-Mariam can be seen as an indication that expressing their grievances as part of their culturally informed consciousness was a matter of choice.

As soon as he was appointed, Ašānafi felt that he was “not eating enough” from his salary, and with full support of remnants of the *näffägna* he attempted to supplement himself by taking a share of local taxation, as was standard practice. He was soon accused of maladministration (despite the fact that maladministration was the hallmark of the period) and when he defied the order of the Emperor to stop interfering in the duty of customs agents, he was removed, arrested and taken to Addis Ababa.<sup>146</sup> In August 1935, Ašānafi was replaced by

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<sup>145</sup> Informants: Oliqaa Eebbaa, D/Doolloo, 14/08/2010; Yosef Innooroo, Bishooftuu, 11/10/2010.

<sup>146</sup> Mähitämäsellassè Wäldämäsqäl, *ገገጌ ገገጌ*, 376, 389; FO 401/35, Sir Burton to Sir John Simon, Intelligence Report for the Quarter Ending December 31, 1934.

*Däjjazmach* Mängäša Wubè, Ethiopian Ambassador in Rome, as a salaried official.<sup>147</sup> Mängäša's governance was interrupted by Italian invasion.

## Conclusion

This chapter examined the major consequences of the *näffägna-gäbbar* system in Qellem. It explored the structural changes the Ethiopian empire introduced during the early part of the twentieth century, which resulted in conditions of both non-revolt and revolt. In both cases, the peasants mobilised multiple tactics as methods of survival, resistance and negotiation. This chapter has argued that such interactions presented the local state as the primary arena in which discourses and practices of rights and belongingness to the state surfaced, but that these discourses and practices also helped construct a translocal conception of the state, to which both the local elite (*abbaa-qabiyyee*) and the peasants appealed to in the course of evolution of its struggles for survival. The encounters at Yiggäzu's court, confrontations with the *näffägna*, banditry, outmigration, and the response of the state that finally came in 1933—the introduction of the property tax system—could be taken to have contributed, albeit unconsciously by the people, to the construction of local state apparatus. This in some way constitutes a type of “implicit and unwritten bargain struck with government,” which Leonardi and Vaughan observed in colonial South Sudan.<sup>148</sup>

What followed was a new kind of socio-economic and political interaction, the *qälad* system, that would be not be reversed in Ethiopia's south until the 1974 revolution, although in Qellem its basic feature—landless tenancy—was halted in 1965. But before then the Italian interlude—from 1936 to 1941—overthrew decades of Amhara domination. The arrival of the Italians as an occupying force in 1935-36 forcefully removed the *näffägna* ruling class and

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<sup>147</sup> FO 401/35, Records of Leading Personalities in Abyssinia, As amended by Addis Ababa Dispatch No.54 of March 18, 1937.

<sup>148</sup> C. Leonardi and C. Vaughan, ““We are oppressed,”” 86.

integrated itself into the dynamics of local interaction. The forceful removal of the *näffäгна* ruling class not only overthrew the *näffäгна* regime but injected a new level of Oromo peasant consciousness into state-society relations, which will form the subject of the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE ITALIAN OCCUPATION, DISINTEGRATION OF THE ETHIOPIAN EMPIRE AND CONDITIONS IN QELLEM (1936-1941)**

#### **Introduction**

On 25 May 1936, twenty days after the fall of Addis Ababa to the Italian forces, Däjjazmach Habtä-Mariam Gäbrä-Egziabhèr, the ruler of Leeqaa-Naqamtee, met with sixty notables in his home town of Naqamtee. At this meeting they decided to expel the näfṭagna provincial governors and take over the regional administration.<sup>1</sup> The main rulers of the Western Oromo territories—Yohannes and Hosanaa Jootee of Qellem, a representative of the ruler of Jimma, and Sheikh Khojäle al-Hassan of Benishangul—as well as Habtä-Mariam himself—agreed to unite their people and to offer themselves to the League of Nations as a mandate territory with a view to establishing a future Oromo government. They established the Western Galla Confederation (WGC).<sup>2</sup> This dramatic move came months after Italian invasion of the Ethiopian empire.

An analysis of the Italian period in Qellem—and perhaps much of the conquered south—is important for five reasons. Firstly, removing the coercive arm of imperial Ethiopia from the conquered south demonstrated the degree of integration of the conquered regions and peoples to the empire state of Ethiopia. Qellem fell into the territory where western Oromo potentates established the short-lived WGC, an institution of great significance widely discussed in modern Oromo nationalism. Secondly, the hiatus of the Italian occupation, although short-lived, allowed the introduction of a new system in which the peasants were granted modest rights, spurring their later resistance and negotiations with the restored

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<sup>1</sup> FO 371/20206, Documents Granting Habtä-Mariam the power to lead the WGC. Seals of the sixty Oromo notables were stamped in the document.

<sup>2</sup> FO 371/20206, Erskine to Eden, 18 June 1936.

Ethiopian imperial state. Building on the political consequences of the *näṣṭägna-gäbbar* system, the period also promoted a grassroots consciousness and created within the peasants the realisation that it would be difficult for a state to function efficiently without significant peasant support. In short, the Italian period had a considerable influence on Oromo self-consciousness. Thirdly, the WGC was important because it offered a unique opportunity to understand how far the integration of this region into the Ethiopian statehood had progressed over the previous four decades. Fourthly, the Italian occupation created conditions in which the *habäša* ethnic ruling class, the *näṣṭägna*, became vulnerable, set as it was amid a hostile *gäbbar* population. By 1941 it had become imperative for them to drop their stubborn pre-war attitude towards Addis Ababa and accept tighter central government authority than they had previously experienced. In this sense, the Italian occupation directly contributed to centralization of state power. Fifthly, and perhaps most importantly, the Italian period created fertile conditions in Qellem for the birth and growth of a powerful tool of protest, Evangelical Christianity (EVC), which would help constitute peasant resistance in the period from 1941 to 1974.

This chapter argues that the Italian interlude in Qellem promoted peasant political consciousness and influenced the subsequent nature of state-society relations in the period between 1941 and 1974. Developments in Qellem transcended local matters, overlapping with issues in the neighbouring Oromo and non-Oromo provinces, and in the later period exerting lasting influences on modern Oromo political activism. These developments also took a very distinctive path. While appreciating key historical developments that linked Qellem to the neighbouring provinces in what would later become Wallagga *ṭäqlay-gizat*, the focus of discussion in this chapter will be on Qellem. The chapter is organized into two sections. The first discusses how the western Oromo in general and those of Qellem in particular reacted to

the disintegration of the Ethiopian empire. The second briefly analyses features of the Italian rule—and its consequences—in the region.

### **Reaction to the disintegrating empire: the Western Galla Confederation of 1936**

The Italian invasion of Ethiopia on 3 October 1935 from their base in Eritrea ended in the fall of Addis Ababa on 5 May 1936. The period between October 1935 and May 1936 was marked by appalling conditions. A three-pronged attack by the Italian colonial army used modern firearms, and in less than two months the Italians controlled all territories between the Märäb River and Mäqälè. The Ethiopian counter-offensive came only in January, allegedly for strategic and diplomatic reasons, and the empire lost battle after battle. The final showdown on the northern front happened at Maičäw on 31 March 1936, where Ethiopian army was defeated and put to flight. The fleeing soldiers were mercilessly attacked by the Raayyaa and Azabo Oromo, who had past scores to settle, and were showered with mustard gas and bombs in Ašängè, located a little to the south of Maičäw. After the battle of Maičäw the Italian army faced little resistance in its march south, while the north largely became an open zone where they encountered little or no resistance.

The Ethiopian army on the southern front suffered another disastrous defeat between 12 and 14 January 1936, and the whole counter-offensive ended in a complete fiasco.<sup>3</sup> Bahru Zewde succinctly notes the prevailing psychology on both side, “[t]he memory of Adwa had pervaded the war. Italians sought to erase the record of humiliation. Many Ethiopians fought in the confidence of another victory. Yet the Battle of Adwa could not be repeated.”<sup>4</sup> The arrival of Marshal Pietro Badoglio on 5 May at the vanguard of the Italian army heralded the fall of Addis Ababa and ushered in Ethiopia’s merger with the Italian colonies of Eritrea and

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<sup>3</sup> Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991* (AAU Press: Addis Ababa, 2002), 150-157.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 158.



Somalia. The region soon came to be known as Italian East Africa or, in its Italian rendering, *Africa Orientale Italiana* (AOI).

The Italian Empire had six major administrative divisions covering the area: Eritrea (including Tigray) with its capital at Asmara; Amhara (incorporating Bägämeder, Gojjam, Wallo and northern Šäwa) with its capital at Gondar; Harar with its capital at the city of Harar; Addis Ababa (later renamed Šawa) with its capital at Addis Ababa; Somalia (including the Ogaden) with its capital at Mogadishu, and Galla-Sidama (combining the south and south-western provinces of the former Ethiopian empire) with its capital at Jimma. Below these major administrative units, in a descending hierarchy, came district commissions, residencies and vice-residencies. The key Italian unit of control was the residency.<sup>5</sup> Qellem—and the Wallagga province in general—was placed under the Galla-Sidama regional government along with the entire western Oromo and Sidama peoples. The Italian army was not able to reach the remote province of Qellem until November 1936.<sup>6</sup>

With the defeat of the Ethiopian army, provincial administrations all over the country collapsed. In the western Oromo country, the course of action that would be followed in the event of disintegration of the Ethiopian empire was unclear. Three options were open to the people. The first was complete independence from both the Ethiopian administration and the Italians, which meant joining the WGC. The second and the third options were to collaborate with the Italians or resist their rule and hope for the restoration of the Ethiopian administration.

As far as the first option was concerned, in May 1936 the political movement for the creation of the WGC under the leadership of the *Däjjazmach* Habtä-Mariam Gäbrä-Egziabhër was initiated in Naqamtee.<sup>7</sup> Before discussing the details of the rise and the fall of the WGC,

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<sup>5</sup> Alberto Sbacchi, *The Legacy of Bitterness: Ethiopia and Fascist Italy, 1935-1941* (Red Sea Press, 1997), 103-122.

<sup>6</sup> Alemu Shuie, "Wallagga During Italian Occupation (MA Thesis in History, AAU, 2002), 30-31.

<sup>7</sup> See FO 371/20206, June 11 1936, 219-220.

it is important to discuss how the Oromo-inhabited areas—and to some extent the conquered south—responded to the disintegration of the Ethiopian empire, whose survival was mainly dependent on the presence of armed *näſſäḡna* in these regions.

During the Italian invasion, rebellion against the disintegrating Ethiopian empire included even the core provinces of the former Abyssinia. A number of traditional governors who happened to be dissatisfied with the process of Hailä Sellassè's drive for centralization defected to the Italian side and were appointed as governors of their former domains. What was different about the rebellion in the south is that it came in the form of the collective rejection of Abyssinian colonialism in the region, rather than an opportunity to settle individual scores. In various parts of the Oromo country the rebellion took diverse forms, ranging from the immediate declaration of an independent confederacy to military confrontations. The creation of the WGC—because of the nature of its formative duties and the political genius of its founders—was recorded in various British archives, but the military confrontations waged in many places were not. Even in their rare occurrences in some historical records they are presented as outbreaks of lawlessness, chaos and complete disorder rather than encounters between two rival forces vying for power.

In the Oromo territories, grievances against economic exploitation, cultural domination and eroded local autonomy ran deep. The autobiography of *Ras* Imiru Hailä Sellassè, the Emperor's cousin, commander of the Shire front in 1935-36 and leader of Black Lion Resistance operations in the southwest, mentioned the nature and location of the confrontations, although it distorts some of the information.<sup>8</sup> Describing the situation, Imiru laments, "...the Oromo people completely went out of our hands and was only waiting for [an

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<sup>8</sup> See for instance Imiru's description of violent resistance he encountered at Naqamtee (pp.290-91), Beddellee (p.282), Guumaa (294-95) etc. Imiru Haila Sellase (*Leul-Ras*), *ካየሁት ከማስታወሻው* / From what I saw and Memorized, 2nd ed (Addis Ababa: AAU Press, 2009).

opportune moment] of the approaching Italian army.”<sup>9</sup> He was not surprised, for example, that Hosanaa and Yohannes Jootee, sons of Qellem’s former hereditary chief, refused to reply to his plea to join him in the resistance operations and instead declared themselves governors of their father’s former domains, announcing also their independence from the Ethiopian empire. Imiru was also surprised when factions that he expected should have died protecting the interests of the Ethiopian empire (such as the Šāwan Amhara soldiers) sided with the Italians instead.<sup>10</sup>

Ever since the Oromo had been conquered in the late nineteenth century, their resistance had taken the form of outright rebellion, embracing Islam and Protestant Christianity, banditry, and outmigration. When the Ethiopian empire disintegrated under the Italian invasion and was forced to remove its military might to support its counter-offensive efforts in the north, Oromo elites and peasants seized the opportunity to reclaim their sovereignty. While the Raayyaa and Azabo Oromo attacked Ethiopian soldiers fleeing from the battle of Maičāw in 1936, the Oromo of Jimma deposed and expelled Amhara governors in a final rejection of colonial rule.<sup>11</sup>

During the early months of the Italian invasion, Goree became a new political centre for the exiled government under *bitwāddād* Wäldä-Tsadiq (the former Minister of Interior) as Prime Minister and *Ras* Imiru as viceroy.<sup>12</sup> Goree, in south-western Ethiopia, had the advantage of hosting a British consulate, giving it a means of communication with the outside world, particularly London. Economically, the south-west was already a British zone of influence, and in the view of the western Oromo elite a British mandate would have been better than either Abyssinian or Italian rule. Just before Imiru’s arrival in the south-west, the Oromo potentates

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<sup>9</sup> Imiru Haila Sellase, *ካየሁት ከማስታወሻው*, 286.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ezekiel Gebissa, “The Italian Invasion, the Ethiopian Empire and Oromo Nationalism: the significance of the Western Oromo Confederation of 1936,” *Northeast African Studies*, 9(3), 2007, 77.

<sup>12</sup> Alberto Sbacchi, *Ethiopia Under Mussolini: fascism and the colonial experience* (London: Zed, 1985), 81.

established the Western Galla Confederation (WGC), and were appealing to British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden for recognition and protection.<sup>13</sup>

*Däjjazmach* Habtä Mariam of Naqamtee quickly acknowledged the historic opening the Italian defeat Ethiopia had created by destroying the latter's coercive might. In fact, he began consulting with other Oromo notables in good time, planning what to do in the event of the overthrow and collapse of Addis Ababa's government. The result was that they established the WGC on 25 May 1936.<sup>14</sup> Sources have little to say about how and why the non-Oromo governor of Benishangul, Sheikh Khojäle al-Hassan, expressed a desire to be part of this move, although plausible reasons can be assumed. He was paying tributes to the exiled Emperor and the Amhara government in Goree,<sup>15</sup> and it is important to stress that the flight of the Emperor meant the loss of a powerful protector, exposing him to reprisals from those he had overcome in the process of building his power.<sup>16</sup> Khojäle might have thought that joining the WGC would reduce his former hostility with Yohannes Jootee, who was a co-founder of the Confederation. He may also have believed that in the event of the Confederation's success, his province of Benishangul would be an important—and perhaps the only—outlet for the WGC to the Sudan. He may also have been tired of paying tribute to two bodies at the same time (the government of Goree and the Emperor in Britain). Given all these potential reasons, Sheikh Khojäle al-Hassan's agreement to establish WGC with Oromo notables may have represented not only a strategy to avoid a potential conflict in the future but also an expression of his desire to side with the strongest force in the region for his own benefit.

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<sup>13</sup> Anthony Mockler, *Haile Selassie's War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 163-164; Patrick Gilkes, *The Dying Lion*, 211-213.

<sup>14</sup> FO 371/20206, Documents Granting Habte Mariam the power to lead the WGC. Seals of the sixty Oromo notables were stamped in the document.

<sup>15</sup> G.N. Britten, "Some Ethiopian Responses to the Italian Conquest and occupation, 1935-1941" (MA Thesis, SOAS, 1971), 40.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

Either way, the establishment of the WGC was the reaction of the western Oromo and their notables to decades of exploitation and oppression, rather than a result of confusion created by a disintegrating Ethiopian empire. According to a contemporary British report, the sentiment across the whole region was the desire

...for an administration by mandate [of the League of Nations] which would restore the [Oromo] people their rights, remove them from their subjection to the Amhara, and give the [Oromo] chiefs equal standing with the Amhara officials of the late Abyssinian Government.<sup>17</sup>

As early as 1911 Mardaasaa Jootee, son of the former governor of Qellem, was complaining that his people and the notables of Qellem (as well as other western Oromo notables and their peoples) were fed up with the system of rule under the Ethiopian empire. In fact Mardaasaa was leading an armed revolt against the Ethiopian administration. More importantly he claimed that measures were being taken by major western Oromo notables (Kumsaa Morodaa, alias *Däjjazmach* Gäbrä-Egziabhèr of Naqamtee, Abbaa Jifaar of Jimmaa and himself) to form an alliance seeking to rebel against the Ethiopian rule and create a union among themselves.<sup>18</sup> He was bitterly critical of the *näffäñña-gäbbar* system, which had become characterized by severe economic exploitation and cultural oppression. His resentment of the Ethiopian rule was matched only by his admiration for the Sudanese one:

...God did two things which he [Mardaasaa] could not understand: he made Abyssinia a good country with bad government; and Sudan a bad country with good government, and compared the methods of taxation. In Abyssynia, money was collected and kept by high officials; in the Sudan, even if people were taxed heavily, the money always went back to them owing to the fine buildings, railway, & c [sic] which employed so much labour with good results.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> FO 371/20206, Erskine to Eden, 21 August 1936.

<sup>18</sup> WO 106/6224, SIR 204, July 1911, Appendix B, 14

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

The fact that Mardaasaa's resentment was based on the first phase of the *näffägna-gäbbar* system (1908-1912), which in comparison to the second phase (1917-1933) can safely be said to have been lighter, strengthens his argument. The peasants' immediate reaction to the catastrophic second phase, as discussed in Chapter Three, was characterized by mass outmigration and banditry.<sup>20</sup> Mardaasaa was not alone in thinking of rebellion as a way to create self-government. Kumsaa Morodaa of Naqamtee, despite rapidly increasing interventions by Addis Ababa in the internal matters of his autonomous province, had been able to show complete submission to—and his complete obedience to—the capital Addis Ababa. But even he, “an intelligent man, cautious and very careful not to do anything that would offend Abyssinians, [was] obviously against them at heart.”<sup>21</sup> British agents repeatedly discouraged Mardaasaa and other western Oromo chiefs from starting a rebellion to break away from the Ethiopian empire and take their people and their territories under British protection as tactical mechanism of gaining eventual independence.<sup>22</sup> The eagerness of Qellem Oromo notables in particular led them to believe that repeated visits by British commercial inspectors (more appropriately intelligence agents) were “preliminary to British interference in the affairs of the province.”<sup>23</sup> Captain H.H. Kelley—after his study of political conditions in Qellem and the neighbouring Naqamtee which was conducted under the guise of organizing a commercial report for the Sudan government—observed a widespread spirit of defiance and readiness by the western Oromo to rebel against the Ethiopian empire. He suggested to his government a potential for alliance with the western Oromo and their notables in the event of military operations becoming necessary in south-west Ethiopia, stating that:

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<sup>20</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>21</sup> WO 106/6224, SIR 204, July 1911, Appendix B.

<sup>22</sup> FO 371/111 SIR 203, June 1911, 10.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

...the attitude of the Gallas in Dajaz Kumsa's and Dajaz Joti's provinces [Qellem and Naqamtee] could be counted on as being entirely friendly; supplies in both are plentiful, especially at the two headquarters of Nekempti [Naqamtee] and Gidami.<sup>24</sup>

A contemporary British commercial inspector, Captain S.F. Newcombe, rightly suggested this kind of defiance did not immediately result in "a general Oromo revolt."<sup>25</sup>

Consequently, among most of the Macca Oromo the mobilization call of Addis Ababa's government against the Italian invasion of 1935 was not accepted out of any patriotic sentiment.<sup>26</sup> Most of the *balabbat* did not want to endanger their *siso* rights, and those who did not choose to participate in the campaign were being forced to surrender their rifles to compensate for a national shortage of the firearms.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile the peasants, as usual, could either pay for their exemption or participate in the campaign by offering their labour.

East of Qellem, Habtä-Mariam Gäbrä-Egziabhèr of Leeqaa-Naqamtee had a plan ready even as the war broke out. Although he pretended to obey his sovereign's order, he was not actually prepared to help the regime he so despised at the time of its greatest need. He was reluctant to recruit fighters for the war when mobilization was ordered in 1935. Habtä-Mariam and his vassals were prepared to use the opportunity of the Italian invasion to end Abyssinia's domination of the Oromo. While the war raged on the northern front, Habtä-Mariam was preparing a plan to declare his country independent as soon as the government in Addis Ababa collapsed.<sup>28</sup> But this was not practiced overtly. Habtä-Mariam was formally, especially before the Emperor, one of the most submissive governors. However, in times of war he was resolute not only in mobilizing human and material resources but also in his determination to go to the war front himself.

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> FO 371/20206, "Situation in Western Ethiopia, A Report from Consul Erskine to Foreign Office (London)," June 24, 1936.

<sup>27</sup> Alemu Shuie, "Wallagga During Italian Occupation (MA Thesis in History, AAU, 2002), 30-31.

<sup>28</sup> Tesema Ta'a, "The Bonayyaa Incident and the Italian Occupation of Naqamtee (1936-1941)," in *Ethiopia in Broader Perspectives: Papers of the 13th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, (Kyoto, 1977), 266.

The hereditary rulers of Qellem, *Fitawrari* Hosanaa Jootee and *Fitawrari* Yohannes Jootee, reacted in the same way. When the war broke out Jootee's sons were living under close observation of Addis Ababa's government (as an alternative to imprisonment) near the capital. They were accused of making "a secret deal" with Britain which would pave the way for British annexation of their country. With the fall of the capital to the Italian forces, Jootee's sons returned home and openly declared themselves independent rulers of their hereditary land, Qellem.<sup>29</sup>

Following the collapse of the Ethiopian empire, a number of former *näffägna* governors in western Ethiopia were either evicted from their fiefs, expelled or killed by local peasants. *Näffägna* military commanders returning to their former fiefs in the wake of their defeat were denied passage. *Däjjazmach* Mängäša Wubè, the governor of Qellem before the war, tried to return his governorate, but his passage was blocked in Naqamtee, the epicentre of the movement against *näffägna* rule. His Oromo soldiers abandoned him along the way and the voracious *näffägna* that had endured in Qellem were disarmed by *Fitawrari* Yohannes.<sup>30</sup> Deprived of his forces, Wubè lacked the power to force his way through to Qellem. Further east, another former Amhara governor, *bitwädded* Mäkonnen Dämis of Leeqaa-Arjoo, who had left with his soldiers for the northern front, never returned to his fief, having been "killed by the eastern [Oromo] at Mekele."<sup>31</sup> A similar fate befell *Ras* Imiru as he tried to pass through Wallagga on his way to Goree.<sup>32</sup>

The creation of the WGC was in one way a consummation of Macca Oromo peasant grievances. By late June WGC leaders had mobilized the local population and soldiers in their respective localities and "disarmed the Amhara officials and soldiery in their areas. The [Oromo] hereditary chiefs [had] assumed control of the government in their areas." The police

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<sup>29</sup> FO 371/20206, Erskine to Eden, 18 June 1936.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Imiru Haila-Sellasse, *Kayahut Kamastawusaw* (From what I saw and can remember), 280-296.



and the WGC established firm control and the western Oromo country was spared the anarchy that was engulfing the rest of Ethiopia. As they strove to maintain law and order, the leaders worked to gain international recognition for the WGC. On 23 May 1936, Habtä-Mariam appointed WGC delegates and authorised them to deliberate and negotiate “the future relations between the Western Galla and British Government.”<sup>33</sup>

Before the delegation formally met with the British officials, the latter were notified of the intentions of the Western Oromo. After the WGC’s founding conference in Naqamtee, Habtä-Mariam sent a petition signed by western Oromo notables to Captain J.K. Maurice, the British government envoy in Gambella, who received it on 1 June 1936. Maurice considered that the proper channel for the petition would be through the Goree consulate, not Gambella, and directed the delegation to meet the British consul there. A few days later, *Fitawrari* Yohannes and *Fitawrari* Hosanaa, governors of Qellem, sent similar letters to Maurice. In their letter to King Edward VIII of England, Hosanaa and Yohannes of Qellem openly requested that the WGC be represented at the forthcoming negotiations of the League of Nations in Geneva as they did not wish to be represented by the Abyssinian delegation under a non-operational government.<sup>34</sup> Their letter reads:

To His Majesty the King of England, London, England. We, who in time past have suffered greatly and have been the oppressed, desire that your Majesty may become our Protector. This is the desire of the majority of the Galla chiefs and people; thus the time is present for action ... That we may present our petition in person before you and League of Nations we desire for an aeroplane to come to...take three of our members as representatives of Galla nation to Europe...<sup>35</sup>

The British District Commissioner adds that, “...these Galla chiefs [Yohannes and Hosanaa of Qellem] do not now intend to visit Gore before the arrival of *Ras* Imiru and he emphasises his

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<sup>33</sup> FO 371/20207, Eden to Avenol, 26 September 1936.

<sup>34</sup> FO 371/20206, Acting Governor General of the Sudan to High Commissioner of Egypt and the Sudan, 30 June 1936.

<sup>35</sup> FO 371/20206, A letter submitted to British District Commissioner in Gambella who transferred it to High Commissioner of Egypt Kelly in Cairo, who in turn sent it to the Foreign Office, 08 June 1936.

[*Fitawrari* Hosanaa] conviction that they will not again submit to Amhara rule without fighting”. Yohannes and Hosanaa put in extreme effort and played prominent roles in the establishment of the short-lived WGC. Their efforts suggest these “peacefully submitted regions” whose wealth had been significant in supporting the early years of imperial Ethiopia had, despite the formal gestures recorded in their correspondences with Addis Ababa, been far from politically integrated into the habäša-dominated Ethiopian state. Such a radical rebellion does not appear to be an overnight creation, and must have been brewing in the decades before disintegration of the empire. The spirit of rebellion of Jootee’s sons apparently reflected the uneasy history of the relationship between their father and Addis Ababa.

Three days after the meeting with Captain Maurice in Goree, the delegation organized records of the deliberations of the Naqamtee Conference and submitted them to the British consul at Goree who would forward them to the British government.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, anxious for the future of south-western Ethiopia, Graziani decided to send a delegation to Habtä-Mariam. On 26 June 1936, three aircraft carrying a delegation of thirteen Italians landed at Boonayyaa near Naqamtee.<sup>37</sup>

The Italian mission, however, was compromised by the presence in Naqamtee of about three hundred Abyssinian military officers who had graduated from the Hoolota Military Academy, and fifty Eritreans who had arrived in Naqamtee months earlier. The officers’ mission was to train and build an organized armed force to resist the advancing Italian army. They established their organization, *Tiqur Anbässa* (Black Lion), in Naqamtee, where they also formed its leadership.<sup>38</sup> On the night of 26 June 1936, some sixty Abyssinian soldiers of the Black Lion, regardless of Habtä-Mariam’s disapproval, attacked the Italian mission, killing

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<sup>36</sup> FO 371/20206, Yilma Deressa to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Anthony Eden, 11 June 1936.

<sup>37</sup> See Gustav Arén’s account of the event for a view based on reports by Swedish missionaries who were in Naqamtee at the time. Arén, *Envoys of the Gospel in Ethiopia*, 490–93.

<sup>38</sup> Ezekiel Gebissa, “*The Italian Invasion*,” 87.

eleven of the officers, including Air Marshal Magliocco, and burning their planes.<sup>39</sup> The Boonayyaa incident, as this event came to be known in Ethiopian history, ushered in a period of turmoil and uncertainty. It caused considerable unrest among the population and made every white person a target of Abyssinian brigandage. The incident provoked fury among the Italians—but more importantly it seriously undermined the WGC's chances of success.

In all probability, the Boonayyaa incident effectively sealed the fate of the Confederation. Graziani vowed revenge for the lives of his countrymen. Habtä-Mariam immediately expelled the Black Lion forces from Naqamtee, and unsuccessfully tried to dissuade the Italians from retaliating. Only a few days after the Boonayyaa incident the Italians bombed the Black Lion encampment in Naqamtee. In early October 1936, the Italians finally conquered Naqamtee, and Habtä-Mariam himself was captured and killed in mysterious circumstances, allegedly poisoned by the Italians.<sup>40</sup> However, the failure of the WGC could not be solely attributed to the incident at Boonayyaa. Britain also played a principal role. Contemporary British records indicate that British officials, including the Foreign Secretary Sir Anthony Eden, clearly understood the intentions of the western Oromo. Eden refused to transmit the WGC's petitions submitted to him by its delegates to the League of Nations. By refusing to notify the League or to help the western Oromo attain self-rule, the British chose to maintain their strategic and diplomatic cooperation with Italy.<sup>41</sup>

The WGC was created by the western Oromo hereditary ruling classes with support from the peasants, who had begun to rebel against their former *näffägnä* governors before the WGC had been launched. The WGC was, in the words of Patrick Gilkes, a movement in which

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<sup>39</sup> Arén, *Envoys of the Gospel in Ethiopia*, 490; See Angelo del Boca, *The Ethiopian War 1935–1941* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 214.

<sup>40</sup> Ezekiel Gebissa, "*The Italian Invasion*," 88-89.

<sup>41</sup> See among others FO 371/20207, Eden to Avenol, 26 September 1936; FO 371/20208, Eden to Secretary General of the League of Nations, 28 September 1936.

class interests were subordinated to national ones.<sup>42</sup> There is little doubt that the demands of social cleavage within the western Oromo society were downplayed in the course of the formation of the WGC, but not necessarily for the same interest across all classes. For the peasants, the realisation of the WGC represented an effective removal of the *näffägnä* governors and military colonists who had conquered, exploited and subjugated them and who had looked down on them for a little less than two decades. It must be underscored that the last governor of Qellem before the Italian occupation (*Däjjazmach* Mängäša Wubè) was the second salaried official (the first being *Fitawrari* Ašānafi Wäldä-Mariam), rather than a proper Amhara military colonist. Before him, *Däjjazmach* Habtä-Mariam's takeover in Qellem had already uprooted the *näffägnä-gabbar* system and instituted a property tax system some four years before the Italian occupation. However, it is again important to recall that the peasants were, by the time of Habtä-Mariam's departure, not as happy as they had been when he arrived in Qellem in November 1932. The removal of the *näffägnä* was therefore by this time more symbolic than structural in meaning. The main interest of the peasants was to see the *näffägnä* and all of their dependents, whether they held meaningful power or not, leave Qellem.

The Oromo elites too wanted the *näffägnä*, their permanent local contenders for power, to be removed, but for a purpose different from that of the peasants: the elites wanted to seize the opportunity to re-assert their autonomy. The potential for rebelling against the central government—and in the name of the local people's interest at that—as explained above had always been present, but the target was usually to exploit, not resist, the interests of the expanding imperial state, turning it into opportunities to assert or re-assert their local power. As representatives of Ethiopia's central imperial state, they were obeying the pursuit of their own interests, which collapsed as structures of governance disintegrated. From 1935-36 the

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<sup>42</sup> Patrick Gilkes, *The Dying Lion: Feudalism and Modernization in Ethiopia* (London: Julian Friedmann, 1975), 206.

Macca Oromo elites, under the leadership of *Däjjazmach* Habtä-Mariam, resolved to replace imperial Ethiopia with a central government of their own through the formation of the WGC.<sup>43</sup> The obvious class interest of the elites, however, did not detract from their ability to mobilise the peasants to help them in establishing the WGC. It was well-suited to the mood of the time and strengthened their ability to mobilize. In short, there is little doubt that class interests within the Macca Oromo were downplayed in the interests of forming a government, namely the WGC, but not necessarily for the same cause across all classes. Yet the ambition of forming the WGC did not succeed as planned.

The WGC failed for two basic reasons. Firstly, the British seemed to have no enthusiasm for a scheme that would have inevitably created misunderstandings with the Italian government. One official document vividly underlines the attitude of the British officials, stating that if the Oromo petition was to be put before the members of the League at Geneva, nothing would convince the Italians that the whole scheme had been developed without the secret involvement of the British. Secondly, the Italians conquered and controlled the region before any success could be achieved, thereby forestalling the success of the WGC.<sup>44</sup>

After Naqamtee fell, the Italians advanced further west and south. The administrative seat of Qellem was taken in November 1936. In the final analysis, the failure of the WGC left Qellem and western Oromo with two options: fighting against the Italian rule or collaborating with it. The region initially welcomed the Italian, who favoured the Oromo over the former Ethiopian government—at least until they had consolidated their power. Later on, however, guerrilla resistance became widespread among the western Oromo.

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<sup>43</sup> See for example A. Triulzi, “Nekemte and Addis Ababa,” 49-68.

<sup>44</sup> FO 371/20206, “Situation in Western Ethiopia, A Report from Consul Erskine to Foreign Office (London),” June 24, 1936; see also P. Gilkes, *The Dying Lion: Feudalism and Modernization in Ethiopia* (London, 1975), 213-214.

## **Qellem under the Italians, 1936-41**

Qellem was relieved from the *näffägnä-gäbbar* system when in November 1932, the Emperor notified *Däjjazmach* Habtä-Mariam of the annexation of Qellem into his province, and ordered him to go there to establish an administrative structure covering the two provinces together. Habtä-Mariam's administration, however, lasted for just over eight months. In August 1933 Qellem came under the direct control of the Emperor, who sought to secure revenue from the region. *Fitawrari* Ašānafi Wäldä-Mariam (deputy governor of Boorana in 1931-32) replaced Habtä-Mariam in Qellem. The Emperor's drive to raise more revenue was resented by the local *näffägnä*, and *Fitawrari* Ašānafi was soon accused of crimes ranging from maladministration to disobeying the Emperor. Removed and put in chains, Ašānafi was replaced in August 1935 by *Däjjazmach* Mängäša Wubè, Ethiopia's Ambassador in Rome, as the new governor of Qellem. Only months later, Mängäša's governorship was interrupted by the Italian invasion, and Mängäša was himself called to join the army to prepare for war.

The Italian army that occupied Qellem in November 1936 was commanded by Alberto di Prajano.<sup>45</sup> The first Italian soldiers came on three war planes that dropped bombs in selected locations in Dambi-Dooloo, Tabor and their surroundings. After harassing the population with bombardments and noise from the planes, the Italian soldiers dropped leaflets, the contents of which told of the surrender of *Däjjazmach* Habtä-Mariam of Naqamtee. The advice was for the population of Qellem to surrender immediately. Informants recall the contents of the leaflets: "The Italian government has come to replace decades of slavery with freedom for all western Oromo."<sup>46</sup> It is interesting to observe that Italians attempted to ingratiate themselves with the population of Qellem as they did in Naqamtee. A contemporary Swedish missionary in Naqamtee reported the content of leaflets dropped by Italian planes shortly before the

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<sup>45</sup> FO 401/37, Acting Consul-General Bond to Mr. Eden, Addis Ababa, February 5, 1937; *Idem*, Memorandum Respecting the Southern section of the Sudan Ethiopian Frontier.

<sup>46</sup> Informants: Glataa Noonnisee, 03/08/2010; Fiixee Birrii, 05/08/2010, Dambi Doolloo.

Boonayyaa Incident: “Peace. Peace. Peace. No danger. We rule this country. We land at Bonayyaa. Send us mules. We come tomorrow.”<sup>47</sup> In fact, by 1935 the Italian government had already designed a “...programme for the service of the propaganda and political information in the [Oromo] lands (Bale, Uollega [Wallagga], Sidamo, Soddu-Ualamo [Soddo-Walamo], Gimma [Jimma], Caffa [Kafa], Ilu Ababor [Iluu-Abbaaboor].”<sup>48</sup> This was intended to establish information services in the key southern and western Oromo locations,<sup>49</sup> and was clearly an expedient strategy given the rugged topography and deeply afforested nature of the southwest, and the cost it would have required to start any sort of conventional war. The Italians were presenting themselves as liberators rather than colonizers. They seem to know enough about resource and labour exploitations the local population endured under the *näffägnä-gabbar* system and the hierarchical ethno-cultural relations it established between the ruling Amhara and Oromo subjects.

Two of the war planes landed safely at Humbii-Karoo, a few miles southwest of Dambi-Doolloo, but the other crashed, causing loss of life and damage to military equipment. Sources are too scanty regarding what happened as Italian forces arrived in Qellem. All we know is that the prominent Oromo chiefs in Qellem (Hosana and Yohannes Jootee, Guutamaa Birbir, Wayyeessaa Bakakkoo) accepted Italian rule.<sup>50</sup> Weeks after the occupation, the Italians disarmed the population of Qellem, collecting weapons that varied from guns to home-made-knives. Out of fear of resistance, the people were required to dull the sharpened edges of their knives. People who resisted the disarmament were killed on the spot. Prominent among those executed for resisting Italian disarmament in Qellem was Dhoosaa Abbaa Qoroo, who hid his

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<sup>47</sup> See Swedish sources quoted in Gustav Aren's, *Envoys of the Gospel in Ethiopia*, 490–493.

<sup>48</sup> Archivio Storico del Ministero dell'Africa Italiana (ASMAI) 181/17 R—Legation of Italy in Ethiopia of High Commission for Western Ethiopia under the control of Colonel M. Calderini, Addis Abeba, 25 May 1937, Object Propaganda Service and Information Among the Galla.

<sup>49</sup> ASMAI 181/17 R—Legation of Italy in Ethiopia of High commission for Western Ethiopia under the control of Colonel M. Calderini, Addis Abeba, 25 May 1937, Object Propaganda Service and Information Among the Galla.

<sup>50</sup> Negasso Gidada, “The Impact of Christianity in Qellem Awrajjja,” 6-7.

gun at Guutee Boroo and refused to hand it over.<sup>51</sup> With the rainy season over and disarmament complete, a larger Italian ground force led by Colonel Malta arrived from the direction of Gimbii in the east. This group was mainly made up of *Askaris*.<sup>52</sup>

After taking control of Qellem, the Italians dissolved the local authorities and replaced them with Italian commissariats, residents and vice-residents.<sup>53</sup> All Ethiopians who had occupied higher administrative posts were systematically and ruthlessly liquidated,<sup>54</sup> although Ethiopian chiefs were not eliminated. The Italians did not uproot most of the Oromo chiefs in Qellem, except those who had been opposed to their rule. Instead, they allowed them to retain their authority.<sup>55</sup>

Alberto di Prajano recognized Hosanaa Jootee and left him in place. He changed the personnel for running the politico-administrative and judicial system, and Qellem became one of the twelve *Commisariato* of the newly created Galla-Sidama Governorate.<sup>56</sup> Di Prajano also endorsed other local hereditary rulers, including *grazmach* Raagoo Dhoosaa and *Qägnazmach* Wayyeessaa Bakakkoo of Galaan.<sup>57</sup> Under these local representatives, the Italians assigned other administrative workers who served them as clerks, interpreters, judges, guides and spies. All local Italian representatives were paid regular monthly salaries in Italian lire. Even the lesser administrative staff were paid according to their services to the Italian colonial government. In fact, greater and lesser chiefs were co-opted to Italian government by money.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Informants: Baalchaa Deentaa, D/Doolloo, 22/08/2005; Fiixee Birrii, 05/08/2010, Dambi Doolloo.

<sup>52</sup> Informants: Glataa Noonnisee, 03/08/2010; Fiixee Birrii, 05/08/2010, D/Doolloo.

<sup>53</sup> Informants: Baalchaa Deentaa, D/Doolloo, 22/08/2005; Ulaa Fiixumaa (Rev.), D/Doolloo, 14/08/2010.

<sup>54</sup> J.A Baker, *The Civilizing Mission: The Italo-Ethiopian war, 1935-1936* (Cassell, 1968), 304.

<sup>55</sup> Informants: Baalchaa Deentaa, D/Doolloo, 22/08/2005; Ulaa Fiixumaa (Rev.), D/Doolloo, 14/08/2010.

<sup>56</sup> FO 401/37, Acting Consul-General Bond to Mr. Eden, Addis Ababa, February 5, 1937; Archives of the former Wallagga Governorate General, Folder 71, File 10/1 Wallagga Awraja gezat wassan, "Elders and *Balabbat* Testimony," Sänè 19,1936 [June 26, 1944].

<sup>57</sup> Informants: Galataa Noonnisee, D/Doolloo, 03/08/2010; Ulaa Fiixumaa (Rev.), D/Doolloo, 14/08/2010.

<sup>58</sup> Alberto Sbacchi, *Ethiopia Under Mussolini*, 137, 151-52.



Accordingly, Hosanaa and Yohannes Jootee, as provincial superintendents working under the Italian colonial government, each had a salary of 15,000 lire. The judges were paid 400 lire and the scribes only 10.<sup>59</sup>

Under Hosanaa Jootee, ambitious peasants seized the opportunity to appoint themselves as headmen of various localities, along with a few *baläbbat* or *abbaa-qabiyyee*. The Italians bestowed on the peasants feudal Ethiopian titles of wide-ranging ranks.<sup>60</sup> To exercise control and offer security, the Italians recruited a number of local Oromo militia. In Sayyoo they mobilized about one hundred and fifty militia, known as Vinci's *Banda* after their Italian commanding officer.<sup>61</sup> In every county, five local Oromo elders were appointed as judges to referee non-political matters under customary Oromo law. These elder-judges were presided over by an Italian magistrate.<sup>62</sup> The five judges in Dambi-Doolloo were *Grazmach* Fayisaa Ushurii, Diggaa Ruufuu, Gabra Reebuu, Naannoo Bisiloo and Disaasaa Jaarraa (the latter four served under the title of *wambarii*). The scribes were Daaqaa Uggaa, Kumsaa Boroo, Jammoo Uggaa, Diggaa Guumaa, and Haile, and their headquarters were in Dambi-Doolloo, Tabor, Muggi (Anfillo) and Gidaamii.<sup>63</sup>

The Italians preferred to have as many lesser chiefs as possible. The fact that they were on the colonial state's payroll prevented them from asserting a negative influence on the people. Payment for several local chiefs cost the Italian colonial state over one hundred million Italian lire per year, but the chiefs were never fully satisfied because they lost many financial sources

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<sup>59</sup> Informants: Baalchaa Deentaa, D/Doolloo, 22/08/2005; Ulaa Fiixumaa (Rev.), D/Doolloo, 14/08/2010.

<sup>60</sup> Alberto Sbacchi, "Italian Colonialism in Ethiopia, 1936-1940," (University of Illinois at Chicago-Circle, Ph.D Dissertation 1975), 303.

<sup>61</sup> M. Massoti, *Ricordi d'Etiopia di un funzionario coloniale* (Milano: 1981), 131,135.

<sup>62</sup> Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) Microfilm, U.S. National Archive, Records of the Department of State Relating to Internal Affairs of Italy 1930-1939, Government of Italian East Africa. Embassy of the USA, Rome, to the Secretary of State, Washington, "Italian Administration and Development of Ethiopia," 8 November 12, 1936.

<sup>63</sup> Informants: Ulaa Fiixumaa (Rev.), D/Doolloo, 14/08/2010; Glataa Noonnisee, 03/08/2010; Fiixee Birrii, 05/08/2010, D/Doolloo.

along with power and prestige. But chiefs in the Governorship of Galla-Sidama had the highest salaries of all chiefs in Italian East Africa, although the reasons are not clear from available sources. Their income averaged 393 lire per month, even though this was the remotest of the Ethiopian territories.<sup>64</sup> The lesser chiefs were kept on the state payroll to keep them well-disposed towards Italian rule, and were brought in to perform any task the Italians wanted them to do. Such people were usually from peasant backgrounds, and had never enjoyed similar opportunities under the Ethiopian empire. They were apparently recruited because of their potential for complete submission and obedience.

In December 1936 Hosanaa reclaimed Gambella, which had been taken over by *Ras* Täsämma, the Amhara governor of the southern province of Iluu Abbaa-boor, from around 1908 because of its lucrative customs office. Gambella remained part of Qellem until the end of Italian rule.<sup>65</sup> The Italian administration named Colonel Artenelli as commissioner in Qellem, Lieutenant Pasqual as resident and Tenete Vinchi commander-in-chief of the army.<sup>66</sup> The local administration also commanded the Galla-Sidama Governorate General—an administrative unit of the Italian East Africa representing a huge 332,000km<sup>2</sup> area with its capital at Jimma. Its Governor General was General Gazzera.<sup>67</sup> These administrative divisions were never permanent, and their number and geographical extent changed often. The local administrative structures of Italian East Africa were formed taking into account the traditions of the local population. In Qellem, for example, they reorganised local administration according to the pre-Ethiopian administrative units, which had been integrated under Jootee's governance by dissolving the entities of his Oromo rivals. The Italians restored the old entities and

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<sup>64</sup> Alberto Sbacchi, *Ethiopia Under Mussolini*, 137, 151-52.

<sup>65</sup> FO 401/37, Acting Consul-General Bond to Mr. Eden, Addis Ababa, February 5, 1937; Archives of the former Wallagga Governorate General, Folder 71, File 10/1 *Wallagga awraja gezat wässän*, "Elders and *Balabbat* Testimony," Sänè 19,1936 [June 26, 1944].

<sup>66</sup> Alemu Shuie, "Wallagga During Italian Occupation," 46-47.

<sup>67</sup> Alberto Sbacchi, *Ethiopia Under Mussolini*, p.146; ASMAI 181/52, Gazzera to the Ministry of Colonies, "Political Report on the Galla-Sidama, 29 Janury 1937."

subordinated them to the broader administrative structure, but the overwhelming majority were Oromo. The old Abyssinian provinces (with the exception of Tigray and Eritrea) became another administrative unit.

Even though it was a pragmatic reorganization under the new Italian colonial administration, it was in practice established with little consideration for traditional laws, customs, religions or languages. For a new colonial administration such as this, it was too difficult to observe such criteria in Ethiopia—more so in the conquered south—because Ethiopia was, as Conti Rossini defined, “a complex mosaic of peoples.”<sup>68</sup> In fact, the Italians did not seek to invent a beautifully innovative or practical administrative structure for Ethiopia. They simply needed to consider different local dynamics in order to run a smooth and cheap administration whilst undermining any possibility of resistance.

As far as the administration of justice was concerned, *Fitawrari* Hosanaa complained that the Italian functionaries lacked colonial experience and gave justice without first acquainting themselves with local traditions and customs.<sup>69</sup> In fact, the Italians had no trained administrative personnel and 94 percent of the administrative officials were from the armed forces.<sup>70</sup> Disgruntled with Italian policy, Hosanaa later moved to Addis Ababa, and the peasants became the main functionaries of local Italian administration, collaborating with the unbending young fascist cadres which had so disenchanted Hosanaa.<sup>71</sup>

The Italian use of lesser chiefs had important political repercussions, because they could influence their people to accept Italian rule. In the Government of Galla-Sidama, where former Amhara governors had eliminated many local chiefs, governor Carlo Geloso pointed out that

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<sup>68</sup> Carlo Conti Rossini, “Il Regione Fondiario Indigeno in Ethiopia” in *Sidacato Tecnici Agricoli, Agricoltura Impero* (Roma, 1937), 613-620.

<sup>69</sup> A. Sbacci, *Ethiopia Under Mussolini*, 152-154.

<sup>70</sup> Tesema Ta’a, “The Bonayya Incident,” 274.

<sup>71</sup> Alberto Sbacci, “Italian Colonialism,” 303.

the Oromo chiefs appointed by the Italian government worked in close cooperation with the Italian authorities. Pietro Gazzera, the new governor of Galla-Sidama in 1938, helped realise the ambition of Oromo chiefs to regain dominance over their former local rulers. In fact the antagonism between the new Oromo chiefs and the deposed Amhara governors was exactly what the Italians wanted.<sup>72</sup> The lesser chiefs were involved in local administrative matters like observance of the Italian decrees, maintenance of law and order, administration of local laws, and—perhaps more importantly—feeding information of daily events to the commissioner. The chiefs had the authority to arrest criminals and were responsible for keeping the government informed about economic and social conditions. These minor chiefs were paid a regular salary by the Italian government, and they also helped the colonial officials collect taxes and assess landed property.<sup>73</sup> The residents usually met with the people on market days to ensure justice and listen to public demands. The government created for itself instruments of political penetration through a regular Italian presence among the local population. Qellem had one commissioner based at Dambi-Doolloo and was also responsible to Galla-Sidama Governorate in Jimma.<sup>74</sup>

In practical terms, by attempting to win over the minds of the people of Qellem the Italians ignored local administration personnel left behind by the Ethiopian Empire, and arranged instead a good measure of judicial autonomy largely run by Oromo personnel. By inverting the social bases of the Ethiopian Empire's local administrative structure, the Italians exploited the resentment of the local Oromo population against Amhara oppression to consolidate the basis of their own legitimacy and undermine Ethiopian resistance, which they believed was Amhara-driven.

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<sup>72</sup> A. Sbacci, *Ethiopia Under Mussolini*, 89; J.A Baker, *The Civilizing Mission*, 304.

<sup>73</sup> Alberto Sbacchi, "Italian Colonialism," 230-231.

<sup>74</sup> Informants: Galataa Noonnisee, D/Doolloo, 03/08/2010; Ulaa Fiixumaa (Rev.), D/Doolloo, 14/08/2010.

The regional chiefs complained that the Italian Residents were ignorant of local law and order and inclined to use brute force to control the local population.<sup>75</sup> In Qellem in particular, rebel punishment and disarmament policy was aggravated after an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Grazziani in February 1937 in Addis Ababa. After this episode, the Italian military became more ruthless, taking measures to hunt down local patriots.<sup>76</sup>

The Italian period also prompted a measure of social levelling, dissolving segments of social differentiation within the Oromo as well as between the Oromo, the *näffägnä*, and the slaves in Qellem. To begin with, Italians abolished corvée, the unpaid work done by peasants instead of paying taxes to their chiefs in all parts of Wallagga. *Mandoo*, as corvée labour was known locally (*mandoo* Abbaa Dhaasaa for example) was fundamentally different from *daboo* and *daadoo*, which were based on voluntary social relationships among the peasants.<sup>77</sup> The *näffägnä-gäbbar* system damaged social distinctions within the local Macca Oromo society, introducing a hierarchical difference between the *näffägnä* and the Oromo as a group—although slaves formed the lowest echelon, below the Oromo. The Italian administration cancelled all privileges the *näffägnä* once enjoyed and required them to live by their own efforts, effectively forcing to live at the same level as the peasants. Some of them became Italian *banda*, as collaborators were known.<sup>78</sup> Although the ordinary Oromo peasant felt equal with the *näffägnä*, he was also confronted by the new reality of freed slaves. The Italians freed all slaves in the region, claiming to have liberated 2,762 slaves in Sayyoo and its environs alone. Most of these freed slaves had been agricultural labourers, and continued to live with their former

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<sup>75</sup> A. Sbacci, *Ethiopia Under Mussolini*, 152-154.

<sup>76</sup> Informants: Glataa Noonnisee, 03/08/2010; Fiixee Birrii, 05/08/2010, Dambi Doolloo.

<sup>77</sup> Informants: Galataa Noonnisee, D/Doolloo, 03/08/2010; Ulaa Fiixumaa (Rev.), D/Doolloo, 14/08/2010.

<sup>78</sup> Informants: Baalchaa Deentaa, D/Doolloo, 22/08/2005; Ulaa Fiixumaa (Rev.), D/Doolloo, 14/08/2010. Alberto Sbacci argues that the *näffägnä* became collaborators to regain their lost status. See Alberto Sbacci, "Italian Colonialism," 238.

masters.<sup>79</sup> However, Qellem's oral tradition and some Italian sources suggest that freed slaves were recruited into *banda*, Italian *askari*, or even appointed to office over their former masters.<sup>80</sup> The Italian occupation was a defining moment in Oromo history, marking the point at which the Oromo *gäbbar* began living on equal footing with their former *näffägnä* lords.

The Italians also introduced a different land policy. One reason for the occupation was to provide land to Italian farmers and a safe place for Italian immigrants. The rather optimistic plan was that through Italian colonization, Ethiopia would become a granary that would satisfy Italian and Ethiopian demands for wheat and help realize Italian food self-sufficiency.<sup>81</sup> All land was declared the property of the Italian Crown,<sup>82</sup> and in the early part of Italian occupation (1936-37) over-ambitious Italian officers sought to confiscate land throughout Ethiopia and grant it to Italian farmers without respecting the traditional system of land ownership. In fact, enthusiastic Italian colonial officers had already begun the confiscation of land in some parts of the country.<sup>83</sup> The Italian government attempted to repair the damage by introducing immediate measures. First, it planned to introduce in all Governorates of Italian East Africa a system under which owners would be able to record their land in what it called the Land Register. At the same time it instituted a "Royal Commission," that would determine which lands were private and which were state-owned and inform the colonial government on issues of multiple and complex land holding systems, especially in the Amhara and Oromo inhabited territories and Muslim areas.<sup>84</sup> The Commission was set up to ascertain the actual *de facto* and *de jure* positions of all landed property to settle controversies over issues of rightful ownership.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> FO 401/38 Consul-General Stonehewer-Bird to Viscount Halifax, Addis Ababa Dec. 22, 1938, "Memorandum on the Assistance given to Freed Slaves, and their Employment in the Territories of Italian East Africa."

<sup>80</sup> Alberto Sbacchi, *Italian Colonialism*, 360.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 384.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Quaranta Ferdinando, *Ethiopia: An Empire in the Making* (London, 1939), 12, 26.

In Ethiopia there were many systems of land tenure. They varied widely from region to region and attempted to satisfy the differing socio-political needs of local people. Even in the conquered south the land holding system introduced under the *näffägnä-gäbbar* system did not seek to transfer land to the *näffägnä*, although eviction soon became inevitable in selected areas. The system made the original holders *gäbbar* on their own land, but never attempted total eviction in the interests of the Amhara colonists.<sup>86</sup>

In contrast to the Italian dream of making Ethiopia Italy's granary, the Italian troops and the 350,000-500,000 settlers had to be provided with wheat from Italy, which had no other option than to import it from foreign markets. The colonial government believed that within a few years Ethiopia would be self-sufficient, and although progress was made during the five year period of Italian occupation, this never happened.<sup>87</sup> The plan of colonial settlement was undermined by the unwillingness of Italians to go to Ethiopia. For those who managed to get there, the unsuitability of Italian farmer-immigrants and the concurrent leadership crises of Italian colonizing agencies, as well as a lack of technical support to help the new farmers, worked against the original plan.<sup>88</sup> The Italian dream was devastated by harsh reality.

The Italians were left with the option of coping with the existing land tenure system, which would decrease the cost of colonial governance whilst placating the local peasants. They made all lands the property of the Italian Crown, but instituted multiple methods of implementation. The Italian land policy in Qellem went with the pre-conquest Oromo individual holding system, satisfying the local peasants. Individual landholders had in return requested to pay a tithe on all crops, of which one per cent was retained by the headman in charge of collection. A new taxation system known as 'fixed tax' (**ቁርጥግብር**) was introduced,

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<sup>86</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, "Italian Colonialism," 360.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 421-422.

giving the peasants relief from the obligations of the pre-Italian *näffägnä* rulers.<sup>89</sup> Although the Royal Commission was nowhere near completion, the farmland of successive pre-Italian Amhara governors was reclaimed and taken by erstwhile Oromo peasants. In Sayyo, for example, the original holders took back estates—*hudad* lands which had been farmed in Fiinchoo and Hawwaa for successive Amhara governors since the days of *Däjjach* Biru. Under the *näffägnä-gäbbar* system, the confiscation of farmland was uncommon except in selected provinces of southern Ethiopia, but those who were unable to pay their *näffägnä* lords in whatever form was demanded and runaway Oromo who had fled their farms lost their land to the *näffägnä*. Such land was also reclaimed by former Oromo holders.<sup>90</sup> More importantly, Italian rule lifted all the obligations and tolls the *näffägnä* had imposed.<sup>91</sup> The restoration process would have much greater impact on peasants' conception of their relations with the state. The Italian period in Qellem thus promoted a peasant consciousness created under the *näffägnä-gäbbar* regime.

The legacy of the short-lived Italian period was not limited to issues of land alone. The period also opened the door to the Evangelical Church, which would become instrumental in the later forms of peasant resistance to the empire's systematic attempt of transferring land to Amhara settlers, businessmen, civil servants and governors (1944-74). Although several attempts were made to introduce Protestantism to Qellem, almost all attempts failed, and its successful establishment had its cornerstone laid only during the five years of the Italian occupation.<sup>92</sup> With the Italian occupation of Qellem in November 1936 the Oromo Christian congregation had its mission compound (where the chapel, clinic and a school were located)

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<sup>89</sup> A.Sbacchi, pp.384-428; Haile-Maryam Larebo, *The Building of an Empire: Italian Land Policy in Ethiopia* (Oxford University Press, 1994), Chapters 1 & 2 for Italian land policy; Oljira Tujuba, "Oromo-Amhara Relations in Horro-Guduru Awrajja (Northeastern Wallagga), c.1840s-1941 (MA Thesis, AAU, 1994), 146.

<sup>90</sup> Informants: Baalchaa Deentaa, D/Doolloo, 22/08/2005; Ulaa Fiixumaa (Rev.), D/Doolloo, 14/08/2010.

<sup>91</sup> Informant: Baalchaa Deentaa, D/Doolloo, 22/08/2005.

<sup>92</sup> See Chapter Six.



taken away by the Italian Catholic priests. They continued their worship and the Sunday school under a tree.<sup>93</sup> After many appeals, the Italian government gave them a plot of land in March 1937 on which they would be able to construct a new church of their own, which they completed on 1 May.<sup>94</sup> The Oromo built the first Evangelical Church, which came to be known as the Evangelical Church Bethel,<sup>95</sup> and began evangelism among the Macca Oromo of Qellem and beyond. This Church would prove an institutional battleground on which the empire unsuccessfully confronted a slowly rising peasant consciousness. Aware of what such formal recognition would mean in terms of legal rights for an Oromo-led Christian congregation, the local EOC saw this as an invasion of its imperial mission, dismissed all services to the Oromo-led congregation and denied them burial places too. The Evangelical congregation responded by burying their dead in the new Church grounds and found priests of their own, becoming a proper Church before end of the Italian period.<sup>96</sup>

By allowing an alternative version of Christianity—an Evangelical Christianity that gradually became owned and cherished by the peasants themselves—Italian occupation humbled the EOC, the former promoter of the *näffäigna-gäbbar* system which had exhausted the peasants. This played a significant role in the region’s political consciousness. While the EOC was introduced with noble patronage rather than as a mass popular movement, the local Oromo people had played an insignificant part.<sup>97</sup> Evangelical Christianity pursued exactly the opposite path, involving the Oromo peasants. Contrary to imperial Ethiopia’s language policy,

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<sup>93</sup> Kumsa Boro, *Kumsaa Boroo*, 33.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>95</sup> See Gustav Aren, *Envoys of the Gospel in Ethiopia In the Steps of the Evangelical Pioneers, 1898-1936* (Stockholm, 1999), pp.343-406; Debela Birri, *Divine Plan Unfolding: The Story of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Bethel* (Minneapolis, 2014).

<sup>96</sup> Informant, Fiixee Birrii, Ulaa Fiixumaa (2005). See also Negaso Gidada, “The Impact of Christianity,” p.10; Gidada Solon, *The Other Side of Darkness*, 34.

<sup>97</sup> Negaso and Crummey, “The Introduction and Expansion of the Orthodox Christianity,” 112.

it allowed the use of Oromo language in teaching and preaching, and this made Bethel Evangelical Church not just a Protestant Church, but an Oromo Evangelical Church.<sup>98</sup>

People construct a community or a society by telling stories they believe in and then attempting to implement them. According to J.D.Y. Peel, the history of evangelisation is a tale of effective story-telling, "...and conversion occurs when people are prepared to take that story as their own."<sup>99</sup> In a particular situation like in Qellem, where Evangelical Christianity was not introduced as the spiritual arm of imperial conquest, it had an opportunity to win acceptance within the wider public on its ability to embrace and nurture cultural Oromo elements. The Oromo language was rejected and denigrated by the EOC, although the Bible had been translated into *afaan-Oromoo*, Oromo language, as early as 1899.<sup>100</sup> The urge for Christianity to translate its Bible implies its recognition of peoples, or nations, as readily-available units to which its missions must speak.<sup>101</sup> The birth and expansion of Evangelical Churches in Qellem did not result in the creation of a cohesive nation (as it did in Nigeria—most notably Yoruba) but it played a vital role in shaping the Oromo's self-assertiveness in its interaction with the state. The role this dynamic process played in state-society interaction in the region, especially between 1941 and 1974, is the subject of Chapter Six.

Although the Italians invested heavily in the construction of social bases for their occupation, not everyone accepted Italian rule. The people of Qellem had their heroes in rebels such as Oliiqaa Dingil, Mammo Dästa, Kassa Latuu, Likkaasaa Wageetii, Firrisaa Torban and Gammachuu Jaankoo. Oliiqaa Dingil was the most prominent, and a synopsis of his career would suffice to describe the resistance movement in Qellem.

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<sup>98</sup> See Chapter Six.

<sup>99</sup> J.D.Y. Peel, *Religious Encounters and the making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 310.

<sup>100</sup> Gustav Aren, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia: Origins of the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* (Stockholm, 1978), 412.

<sup>101</sup> J.D.Y. Peel, *Religious Encounters*, 280.

Oliiqaa Dingil began his career as a young Oromo rebel committed to resisting the *näfi'äñña-gäbbar* system. He was born into a peasant family in the village of Laaloo Garree in Amaara Kaanchii, about twenty kilometres north of Biru's garrison town, Fiinchoo. He experienced first-hand many of the atrocities perpetrated to extract resources. He finally took up arms, the first victim of his banditry being Gäbäyāhu Šibäši, a *mälkägna* who had forcefully taken Oliiqaa's wife, although his ascendancy resulted directly from the exploitation and oppression under the *näfiägna-gäbbar* system, rather than from individual harassment. In the beginning, the dense forests of Amaara Kaanchii offered him a suitable base for surprise attacks on Amhara chiefs. He collected provisions from willing peasants and reportedly made several surprise attacks on the cruellest *mälkägna*. Many of his recruits were Oromo escapees from the system—he provided a safety valve, allowing Oromo peasants who were tired of the system to attack the *mälkägna* and then retreat to his forest camp. Unlike Kitaabaa, who was killed resisting the system, Oliiqaa was neither caught nor killed by the Amhara, and although he could not overcome the atrocities of the *näfiägna-gäbbar* system, he was able to survive many military operations against him.<sup>102</sup> When the Italians occupied Qellem Oliiqaa was an experienced rebel with many followers.

Oliiqaa Dingil harassed the Italian forces, killing and disarming many of their followers and collaborators in and around Dambi-Doolloo, Oddoo Butaa (in the jungle of Anfillo), Garjeeda, Walal, Daallee, Gidaamii and Laaloo Qilee.<sup>103</sup> When he came across the *banda*, he captured them and made them his followers. Any man resisting the Italian occupation joined forces with him. He usually came to urban centres such as Dambi-Doolloo, Gidaamii, Muggi and Tabor at night to gather information about enemy conditions and army mobilization

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<sup>102</sup> Informants: Baalchaa Deentaa, D/Doolloo, 22/08/2005; Fiixee Birrii, 05/08/2010, D/Doolloo; Galataa Noonniisee, D/Doolloo, 03/08/2010.

<sup>103</sup> Letter of Qellem Awrajja Administration dated Hidar 1, 1970 EC (10 Nov. 1977) to Wallagga Province Administration Office, and response of the provincial office of Hidar 24, 1974 GC (03 Dec. 1981) based on the request of *Woizero* Gännätäwärq Ašäna, wife of Oliiqaa Dingil, for financial support as her husband was a patriot.

programmes, and effectively employed guerrilla tactics; he regularly shifted his positions and escaped the traps set by Italians and their local allies. Unable to beat Oliiqaa in military operations, the Italian government declared that it would pay 40,000 lire for anyone who would bring Oliiqaa dead or alive, and in 1940 Oliiqaa was poisoned by his own friend, Baaburii Wagee, whose wife gave him a poisoned *kosso* (a cultural herb whose flowers was traditional medicine for expulsion of tapeworm). When Oliiqaa was weakened, Walattee called in an accomplice who killed Oliiqaa on the spot. Relieved from Oliiqaa's operations, the Italians gave Walattee thirty thousand lire and Wādajo ten thousand. Oliiqaa's body was tied to a standing pole and displayed in the open market at Dambi-Doolloo. Wādajo was eventually killed in reprisal.<sup>104</sup> All over Wallagga and beyond in western Ethiopia, Oliiqaa's name remained popular for his ardent resistance against Italians. Anthony Mockler compares Oliiqaa with Garasuu Dukii:

...two rival rebels were operating around Walisso on the Jimma road, Geresu Duki and Olana Dinkel [Oliiqaa Dingil]. Geresu was in the end better known-and longer-lived, but in his day Olana Dinkel was a legendary. The Italians put a price of 50, 000 lire on his head and the viceroy by special order doubled the price already put on Geresu Duki's head. Mockler finally verifies that Olana Dinkel was Wallagga Galla.<sup>105</sup>

Oliiqaa's career encapsulates salient features of the unique and short-lived European structure of dominance; how peasants interact with a sophisticated fascist empire and tensions between a European empire and its subjects. It also illuminates a short lived relationship between the Italian-dominated Ethiopia and the Oromo subjects that it treated as subordinates. Mockler's comparison of Oliiqaa with a prominent Ethiopian patriot *Däjjach* Garasuu Dukii—who is very prominent in Ethiopianist historiography—gives prominence to Oliiqaa as a legendary patriot fighting for liberation throughout the Italian occupation. Although Ethiopianist historiography

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<sup>104</sup> Atsè Zära Yakob Secondary School, "Oliqa Dingil: Yä Tarik Mätsihèt / Oliqa Dingil: History Bulletin," (1961 EC), pp.10-12; Informants: Baalchaa Deentaa, D/Doolloo, 22/08/2005; Fiixee Birrii, 05/08/2010, D/Doolloo.

<sup>105</sup> Anthony Mockler, *Haile Selassie's War* (Oxford, 1984), p.

is selective in its reconstruction of the history of resistance fighters against Italian rule, Oliiqaa Dingil—like many more in the south—had a history no less important than Bälay Zälläqä, Garasuu Dukii and others.

In their five years of occupation the Italians effected extensive changes in Qellem's political landscape. The land tenure system was returned to its pre-conquest form as the Italian government increasingly counted on local representatives to widen the basis of the legitimacy of their rule over the Ethiopian Empire-state. The Italians abolished the *näftägna-gäbbar* system and the political and economic dominance of the *näftägna*. They freed the slaves and paved the way for their gradual assimilation into the mainstream community. The pre-Italian hierarchical relationship between the *näftägna* and the Oromo peasants had disappeared by the end of the Italian period, preparing the ground for a struggle for equal access to land and local power. However, at roughly the same time, Italian rule was about to end as Italy joined the Second World War on the side of Hitler's Nazi Germany.

The Italian occupation of Ethiopia ended in 1941 with the help of British army, which sought to displace the Italians from East Africa, reinforce the defence of the Middle East and reinstate the exiled Emperor to power. Qellem was liberated by a Congolese army commanded by Belgian officers as part of a military strategy for the Middle East. The British plan was to restore the exiled Ethiopian Emperor Haylä-Sellasè to power.<sup>106</sup> In the battles fought in Gambella and Qellem the Italians had over seventeen thousand well equipped and well provisioned soldiers, while the Congolese had less than five thousand. General Pietro Gazzera, the regional Italian military commander, wished to attack the Sudan, but was restrained by the Duke of Aosta, the Italian commander-in-chief, who wanted a delay for political reasons. Instead of launching an attack on the Sudan, Gazzera focused on defence, and the confrontation

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<sup>106</sup> George Weller, *The Belgian Campaign in Ethiopia: A Trek of 2, 500 miles through the Jungle Swamps and Desert Wastes* (1941 Reprinted through the courtesy of The Chicago Daily News), 22-24.

lasted over a month. Dambi-Doolloo was liberated on 3 July 1941, and Anfillo followed with the fall of Italian garrison at Muggi in the same week. Despite the unmatched size, equipment and provisions the Belgian-Congolese soldiers captured an Italian army that included nine generals (including General Gazzera) and over three hundred officers. The liberation of Qellem and the British defences of South Sudan effectively severed the Middle East supply line at a decisive moment when the German army was pushing against British positions in Egypt. The Belgians handed over the Italian captives and the administration of Qellem to the British army in the company of *käntiba* (later *Däjjazmach*) Käbbädä Täsämma, and returned to the Congo on the same road by which they had come.<sup>107</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter examined the brief period of Italian rule and its impact in Qellem. The chapter highlighted the disintegration of the Ethiopian empire, the western Oromo rebellion and the Italian takeover. The significance in shaping the period that followed Italian rule has been discussed at length here, and the overarching argument of the chapter is that the impact of the Italian interlude in Qellem promoted peasant political consciousness and influenced the subsequent nature of state-society relations in the period 1941-1974. By allowing the introduction of a new system under which the peasants were granted modest rights, the hiatus of the Italian occupation worked to promote peasant political consciousness and arm the peasants with a tool of protest in the form of Evangelical Christianity that would help them confront the Ethiopian empire for the decades to come. The next chapter analyses the land policies of the reinstated empire in the form of the *qälad* system, which aimed towards the

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<sup>107</sup> George Weller, *The Belgian Campaign*, 11-18.

systematic transfer of the land to Amhara businessmen, governors and civil servants, and the peasants' resistance to this.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### RENEWED EXERCISES IN POLITICAL INTEGRATION: THE *QÄLAD* SYSTEM OF LAND MEASUREMENT (1944-1974)

#### Introduction

The period of Italian occupation (1936–41) resulted in the removal of imperial Ethiopian dominance from the conquered south and the introduction of a new system, under which the peasants of Qellem were granted modest rights. The occupation exposed structural weaknesses in the Empire and considerably influenced local Oromo self-consciousness. This chapter explores state-society interaction in Qellem between 1944 and 1974 through the analysis of contestations and negotiations over access to and use of the most important and influential resource—land. Land lay at the heart of daily sustenance, socio-economic and political status and more importantly at the very centre of state construction, not just for Ethiopia but for many African countries as well. The state had to reconstruct its authority and power as a dynamic tool, rather than returning to coercion, in a way that could effectively engage local actors. To assert its administrative, economic and political power over the local people the state had to prioritise rulings on agricultural land in terms of how it should be used, who had the right to access to it, who should exercise what type of authority over it. To achieve this, the state had to enable itself with institutional and discursive abilities that were strong enough to persuade both local elites and peasants that “the state was not only the legitimate but also appropriate agency to define and regulate rights of access to land.”<sup>1</sup>

This chapter analyses the dynamics of the *qäläd* system of land measurement during the period 1944–74, a period that witnessed a systematic reversal by imperial Ethiopia of the

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<sup>1</sup> J. Alexander makes a very similar point about the perspective of Zimbabwe. J. Alexander, *The Unsettled Land*, 10.



transformations of 1936–41 and the multiple reactions it generated. The overarching themes of the chapter are the process of the *qälad* system of land measurement, the resistance it encountered, and the repercussions of interactions within the process. The *qälad* system of land measurement was to be upheld by the creation of a distinct politico-legal basis from which local agents of the Empire (Amhara colonists, i.e. *tiklägnoch/ትክለኞች*) could obtain preferential access to land thereby emerging as the dominant land owners. They would then have the indigenous majority as their tenants, thus ensuring imperial Ethiopia's intention to achieve the political integration of the conquered south.<sup>2</sup> However, this did not succeed as planned at the national level. It was contested, compromised and reshaped through the active involvement of local social forces, and the transformative power of the imperial state was undermined in the process.<sup>3</sup> Prompted by memories of the brutal *näffagna-gäbbar* system and encouraged by the Italian period which equated the Oromo *gäbbar* with the *näffagna* ruling class, the Oromo resisted the system strongly. Referring to tax payments they had made since 1933, they contended that unlike most of the conquered south, Qellem was not a colony of Ethiopia. Instead, there were considerable land tenure parallels with the *rist* system in the provinces of the Abyssinian homeland, most notably Gojjam and Šäwa. The Oromo peasants declared that they had paid state tax, and were therefore entitled to keep their land. The peasants believed it was their right to refuse imperial Ethiopia's systematic appropriation of their farmland because they had paid state tax on it. The original imperial scheme was at local level by and large re-

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<sup>2</sup> See, among others, Joanna Mantel-Niecko, *The Role of Land Tenure in the System of the Ethiopian Imperial Government in Modern Times* (Warszawa, 1980), 133-148; Idem, "The Division of Ethiopia into Regions According to the Native Land Typology in use at the turn of the 19th and 20th Centuries," *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Rotterdam, 1980), 469-78; Tesema Ta'a, "The Basis for Political Contradictions in Wollega: The Land apportionment Act of 1910 and its Consequences," *Northeast African Studies*, 6 (1-2) (1984), 179-197.

<sup>3</sup> This perspective draws on interpretations of recent scholarship that has forcibly called into question the African colonial states' ability to achieve their intended goals, and instead emphasized how colonial schemes were compromised and reshaped by local African social forces. Such local contestation, bargaining and negotiation, it has been argued, determined what the state should look like at local level. See C. Vaughan, *Darfur: colonial violence*; T. Hagmann and D. Péclard, "Negotiating Statehood,"; Bruce Berman, "Structure and process in the Bureaucratic States; B. Lawrence, E. Osborn and R. Roberts, "Introduction".

channelled towards (re-)negotiation and bargaining through various means. This process was vital in constructing and shaping the imperial state in Qellem, not just according to the initial political projects and agendas designed at the national level but through compromise with local social forces. Equally importantly, between 1944 and 1974—and in fact beyond—the meagre financial resources, lack of rapid means of communication, plurality of local interests as well as Qellem’s location on the outer limits of the Empire encouraged discretion and the relative autonomy of local governors, which gave central government the dilemma of re-asserting control over local regimes of power. While recognising that imperial Ethiopia’s determined efforts after 1941 derive from the commercialization of land and the national integration of the Macca Oromo of Qellem, this chapter seeks to navigate the issue further by arguing that local contestations over the right to access land were significant in demonstrating how the Ethiopian state was imagined, negotiated and partially legitimised. It is also useful to see how it was resisted through peasant appeals, petitions and court litigations as the process of state construction was embedded into the local social context in Qellem.

This chapter is presented in two sections. The first discusses the restoration of the imperial Ethiopian state and the administrative restructuring of the the post-Italian period in order to explain the context in which land rights issues were defined in relation to implementation of the *qäläd* system. The second analyses the delicate process of implementing the *qäläd* system in Qellem and the way it affected the old system of imperial Ethiopia’s system of political co-optation. The intricate task of implementing a new system made resistance against the system much more complex, eventually precipitating a decision to abrogate the imposition of the system in Qellem. Both sections take into account the ways in which the process of state construction embedded in local social contexts unfolded in Qellem, through peasant appeals and petitions and their hope that the emperor would address their grievances through court litigations.

## Return of the imperial state and the roots of contradictions

When Imperial Ethiopia was busy expropriating and redistributing agricultural lands in the conquered south through the *qālad* system of land measurement, lands in Qellem remained unmeasured—partly due to cracks in the imperial system that had initially tied the region to Addis Ababa, and partly because of the efforts made by local actors—peasants/*gābbar*, local co-opts (*balabbat*) to keep the cracks open in order to slip between them. More to the point, Addis Ababa’s drive for centralisation—which came to Qellem in the form of the central government’s measures in establishing direct Amhara rule through the *nāffagna-gābbar* system—led to periods of instability marked by tough peasant-state relations ranging from social protests to mass migration and violent uprising. The priority was restoring stability and order, and remaking the administration, rather than introducing the *qālad* system, although some unsuccessful attempts were made.<sup>4</sup>

The result was that Qellem escaped the fate of the *qālad* regions—areas which resisted the conquest and were won over by the empire after military confrontations—and survived relatively unscathed. Qellem became an exception in the south of Imperial Ethiopia and gained opportunities for political discourses based on comparisons of the political status of their home region with that of provinces in the Abyssinian homeland, rather than with the rest of the conquered south. This comparison was not new in peasant-state interactions in Qellem, but was now re-created to fit new circumstances, which would aggravate local actors and forces sent by Addis Ababa—governors, *načlābaš*, scribes, military and civil state officials, the EOC

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<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Imperial Ethiopia’s Archives of the Ministry of Interior (here in after IEAMI), Biru’s attempt to measure land (Wallagga Provincial Administration to the Minister of Interior, “Yä Wallagga Agar Gizat Yasost War Rapor/Wallagga Prov *ṭäqlay-gizat* ince Quarterly Reportage,” Ginbot 30, 1935/June 7, 1943) and *Däjjazmach* Habta-Mariam’s efforts at introducing the *qālad* system (Habtä-Mariam to Haila Sellassè, Tahsas 5, 1925 [14 December 1932], wa/mu/2/7-8, “Letter-Book of *Däjjazmach* Habtä-Mariam Gabra-Egziabher: Petitions to Addis Ababa Court, 1925-1927 E.C (1932-1935),” WEM).

clergy—who were all expected to live on local resources. This does not mean that Qellem was the only region in the whole of imperial Ethiopia where conquest was not followed by land seizure. There were at least two more territories where land measurement was not carried out at all. One comprised the regions categorised by the state as countries of *quṭer-gäbbar* (የቁጥር ገባር አገሮች), or *gäbbar* territories (የገባር አገሮች), and the other was made up of *quṛṭ-gibir* (ቁርጥ ግብር) regions.<sup>5</sup>

The fact that Qellem’s agricultural land remained unmeasured until 1944 had serious consequences, because despite the exploitation and subjugation that accompanied the *näftagna-gäbbar* system, the local peasants remained landowners. From that standpoint, the peasants created for themselves in the post-1941 period political discourses which would help them present themselves as “owners of the land” within the empire-state’s legal framework. This represented a political narrative that would contest state agents who pressed for their political integration as “aliens with no right of access to land.” As discussions over the following pages show, the peasant practice of petitioning, appealing and litigating presumed that the imperial state—and its local agents—could be won over by employing its own laws framed by the use of key lexicographies of the state bureaucracy to demand rights and recognition.

Like the land measurement conducted by the old Kingdom of Šäwa in the late seventeenth century in the Oromo territories to its south and east,<sup>6</sup> those undertaken by Menilek and Hailä Sellasè had similar outcomes: they targeted the formation and institutionalization of an Amharan hegemony through land appropriation and redistribution under the control of central authorities. But there were limits imposed on interests of the central government. First,

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<sup>5</sup> Tesema Ta’a, “The Basis for Political Contradictions in Wollega: The Land apportionment Act of 1910 and its Consequences,” *Northeast African Studies*, 6 (1-2) (1984), 179-197; Mähitämäsellassè Wäldämäsqäl, *ገዢ ገዢ*, 105-130.

<sup>6</sup> See among others, Märsihè-Hazen Wäldä-Qirqos, *የአማርኛ ስዋሰን* [Amharic Grammar] (Addis Ababa, 1948 EC), 3; Kofi Darkwah, *Shewa, Menelik and the Ethiopian Empire* (London: Heinemann, 1975); Svein Ege, *Class, state and power*.

the central government's financial power and human resources. The scheme emanated from and was contingent upon the government's ability to control and define the right of access to and use of land, work which it entrusted it to local Amhara governors who had multiple interests of their own. The lack of fast and efficient communication and the very location of Qellem in the remotest western periphery limited central government's ability to control the ways in which local interactions were channelled. Meanwhile, local resistance by the peasants and the *balabbat* became another serious problem that challenged the overarching scheme the state wished to realise. The situation then drew in central government as one of the players—but not the most powerful one as was initially hoped. As the issues of measuring the land unfolded, the local Amhara governors came to represent more of the outcomes they themselves wished to see, rather than the ambitions of central government. This disjuncture exposed fragmentation within the state structure and the personalised character of local hierarchies. The local Oromo elites and the peasants became separate contenders. It is from this perspective that the struggle resulting from this new phase of land measurement in Qellem needs to be analysed.

The post-1941 era was characterised by the restoration and re-establishment, albeit in new forms, of *näftägna* descendants (the *näčläbaš*) and as the foundation of imperial Ethiopia's socio-economic and political bloc, with privileged freehold rights to land in the conquered south. Land occupied a central place in the daily lives of the Ethiopian people, for the peasants, the elites and the state. There was very little the imperial state could have achieved without systematic seizure of land; the state's revenue came from land, and it acted as a reward provided to individuals and institutions. Land provided a livelihood for Ethiopia's highland agricultural population. "From the land comes sustenance, status and often political power," as one scholar remarked,<sup>7</sup> to the extent that in highland Ethiopia, "...to have rights over land is to be

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<sup>7</sup> H.C. Dunning, "Land Reform in Ethiopia: A Case Study in Non-development," *Law Review* 18 (2), (1970), 271.

human...to be landless is to be subhuman.”<sup>8</sup> And as Sara Berry puts it, struggles over land in Africa “have been as much about power and the legitimacy of competing claims to authority as about control of property per se.”<sup>9</sup>

As soon as he returned to power in 1941, Hailä Sellase redrew administrative boundaries. Older administrative units were reorganised into a hierarchy of *täqlay-gizat*, **ጠቅላይ ግዛት** (provinces), *awrajja*/**አውራጃ** (sub-provinces), *wäräda*/**ወረዳ** (districts) and *meketil-wäräda*/**ጥክትል-ወረዳ** (sub-districts).<sup>10</sup> Qellem came under the new province of Wallagga, which was constructed from six pre-Italian administrative units (Asossa, Leeqa-Sibuu, Arjoo-Guduruu, and Qellem, and the sub-districts of Laaloo-Qilee, and Sibuu Siree).<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, the administrative units in Qellem were reorganised into four districts (Sayyoo, Daallee, Gaawoo, and Gidaamii), each with a varying number of sub-districts.<sup>12</sup> The vital change brought about by such restructuring was that it staffed *täqlay-gizat*, *awrajja* and *wäräda*, the key positions of governorship and clerks, with Šäwan Amhara men.<sup>13</sup> The Oromo officials (*qoroo* or *baläbbat*) were recruited to work below sub-district level for tax collection and implementation of orders down to village level.<sup>14</sup> The power to decide key issues relating to access to and use of land rested in most cases in the hands of Šäwan Amhara governors, although local Oromo elites (particularly *balabbat*) outside the formal state structure had considerable degrees of power that were recognised by the state. In short, there was a strong ethno-cultural stratification; the Šäwa Amhara assumed most central government offices, and

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<sup>8</sup> Mesfin W/Mariam, “Some Aspects of Land Ownership in Ethiopia” (A paper presented to seminar of Ethiopian Studies, 1965), quoted in John Cohen and Doy Weintraub, *Land and Peasants in Imperial Ethiopia: The Social Background to a Revolution* (Assen, 1975), 32.

<sup>9</sup> Sara Berry, “Debating the Land Question in Africa,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 44, (4), (2002), 639-640.

<sup>10</sup> Christopher Clapham, *Haile Selassie's Government* (Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1969), 21.

<sup>11</sup> Imperial Ethiopia's Archives of Wallagga Governorate General (here in after IEAWGG) Wallagga Awrajja Gezat, “A Memorandum by Bezuwarq Gabre to the Emperor,” Ginbot 28, 1953 (June 5, 1960).

<sup>12</sup> IEAWGG, Täfära Isṭifanos, Governor of Qellem, to Sahlü Defaye, Governor of Wallagga province, Tir 25, 1957 [2 February 1965].

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Ayana, “Land Tenure,” 209.

<sup>14</sup> IEAWGG, Qellem awrajja administration to Wallagga Awraja Gezat, dated Magabit 28, 1936 (April, 6, 1944); John Markakis, *Ethiopia: Anatomy*, 75.

the newly-built Wallagga *ṭäqlay-gizat*, *awrajja* and *wäräda* offices, leaving offices below *meketil-wäräda* for the local Oromo.

In the construction of such pyramids of power in Qellem lay one of the most intricate problems of state-society interactions. It was here, more importantly, where the making of the local state took root. The fact that imperial Ethiopia's state structure pushed down elites in Qellem to the lowest rungs of power does not seem to have succeeded in discarding elements of the local Oromo in engaging with power—in constituting it, aggregating, contesting and limiting it. Frederick Cooper argues that:

“...power in colonial societies was more arterial than capillary—concentrated spatially and socially, not very nourishing beyond such domains, and in need of a pump to push it from moment to moment and place to place [...in fact...] The relationship between imperial powers and subordinate societies has always been a rich field for compromises in human interactions. In the long term, a degree of cooperation in the interests of colonial survival makes subordination bearable, if not agreeable.”<sup>15</sup>

Like the African colonial states, imperial Ethiopia was not hegemonic in the strictest sense of the word. Instead, it “constantly struggled with its weaknesses and contradictions.”<sup>16</sup>

Having built such an ethno-culturally defined and stratified administration, the state then turned to another essential job, raising revenue from tax. As discussed in Chapter Three, property tax replaced the *näffagna-gäbbar* system in 1933. After the return of the Ethiopian empire's administration in 1941, the state exempted Wallagga from taxation in 1941–42 because of the destruction caused by the war. In 1942–43 and 1943–44, however, the empire collected taxes and the old property tax was restored in Qellem, for which the people were issued receipts.<sup>17</sup> The governor of Wallagga *ṭäqlay-gizat* in 1942–43, Abiy Abäbä, reported to the central government that the peasants had profound grievances regarding the taxation system

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<sup>15</sup> Colin Newbury, *Patrons, clients and empire: chieftaincy and over-rule in Asia, Africa and the Pacific* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1–2.

<sup>16</sup> B. Lawrence, E. Osborn and R. Roberts, “Introduction,” 8.

<sup>17</sup> Imperial Ethiopia's Archives of the Ministry of Interior (here in after IEAMI), *Balatta* Gäbrä-Tsadeq rapport to the Emperor, Hamile 5, 1960 [12 July 1968].

and that they were demanding land measurement.<sup>18</sup> The government officials believed property tax was generating revenue far below the expected amount, and proposed land measurement to increase revenues.<sup>19</sup> The peasants on their part anticipated a tax reduction (both in types and amount) after implementation of the *qäläd* system compared to what they had paid during the previous two tax years (1942-43 and 1943-44).<sup>20</sup> Šifaraw Balcha, Qellem's governor, also proposed land measurement, a proposal which was immediately supported by government employees in his administration (chief and deputy governors at various levels, police, judges and clerks).<sup>21</sup>

The reports and correspondence seem to suggest a smooth interaction within the administrative structure and between the state and the peasants, but a deeper look reveals complexities. The scenario conceals another powerful claimant on the land, the *balabbat*. Second, the Amhara provincial and district governors had, as will be seen below, intentions for land measurement that went far beyond raising state revenue from land taxation. Third, peasant dissatisfaction at the amount of taxation was not just about taxation, it was strongly associated with the rights they believed they possessed over the land, and this would be revealed as the central government and *ṭäqalay-gizat* and *awrajja* district authorities began to address the problem.

Because of the absence of the *qäläd* system in Qellem before 1941, the new administration had no option but to begin collecting taxes on land using the old property tax from before the Italian occupation. This left the *näčläbaš* with no rights of access to the land. The Amhara *awrajja* and *wäräda* governors encouraged the land measurement system because they believed that redefining rights of access to land would create a system favouring the

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<sup>18</sup> IEAMI, Abiy Abäbä to the Ministry of the Interior, Ṭir 21, 1935 [29 January, 1943].

<sup>19</sup> IEAMI, Šifaraw Balcha to Wallagga Awraja Gezat, Nahase 25, 1936 [31 August 1944].

<sup>20</sup> IEAWGG, Abiy Abäbä to the Ministry of the Interior from, Ṭir 21, 1935 [29 January, 1943].

<sup>21</sup> IEAWGG, Šifaraw Balcha to Wallagga Awraja Gezat, Nahase 25, 1936 [31 August 1944].



*näčläbaš* and civil and military functionaries of the state.<sup>22</sup> Under this system they would be without a source of livelihood and equal in status to common people. If “the empire-state belonged to the Amhara,” who believed they had a right to govern, this situation needed to be improved. Equally important was the state’s need to grant land to its local co-opts, the *balabbat*.<sup>23</sup> The redefinition of rights of access to and use of land to favour the *näčläbaš*, with nominal reward to *balabbat*, was an underlying reason behind the *täqalay-gizat* and *awrajja* governors’ recommendations of the *qälad* system.

The local Oromo *balabbat* also requested land measurement, although their reason was quite different from other interested parties. During the second phase of the *näſtagna-gäbbar* system (1917-1932) the *balabbat* benefited from *hambifataa*, where they retained a number of peasant households.<sup>24</sup> The restoration of imperial Ethiopia in 1941 left the *balabbat* holdings intact, but the *hambifataa* was revoked, rendering the socio-economic status of the *balabbat* even more equivocal. The *balabbat* therefore became ambiguous about their own social and economic status, and requested the introduction of land measurement in the hope that it would reintroduce some kind of clarity concerning their position.<sup>25</sup> But there were exceptions. Two groups of *balabbat* families objected to the proposed land measurement: descendants of Jootee Tulluu (*fitawraris* Yohannes and Hosanaa Jootee of Gidaamii) as well as Anfillo *balabbat* and their Busasse ruling house led by Gimbii Qajeelaa (the chief *balabbat*) who argued that all the land in Qellem belonged to them and should remain in their possession.<sup>26</sup>

Having abolished the *hambifataa* system, the imperial authorities began to push local Oromo *balabbat* to accept the status their Oromo counterparts in Sibuu had been offered after

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> IEAWGG, Asratä Kassa, Governor of Wallagga Province, to Department of Public Security, Ministry of the Interior, Ṭir 24, 38 [1 February 1946].

<sup>24</sup> IEAWGG, Wallagga Awraja Gezat to Minister of the Interior, “Yä Wallagga Agär Gezat Yäsost Wär rapor/Wallagga Province Quarterly Report,” Ginbot 30, 1935 [June 7, 1943].

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Informant: Abdiisaa Tolaa, 10/01/10, Muggi.

the land measurement of 1910. Conditions in Sibuu were exceptional in the conquered south; it was ruled indirectly through the Oromo ruling house of Naqamtee, and there were no *näffägna* settlements there. When the land was measured, the Oromo *balabbat* bought almost all of it, while individual peasant holders took over a small part of their land as freehold. The Oromo governor, *Däjjazmach* Gäbrä-Egziabhèr Morodaa, introduced a two-year credit system that allowed the more well-off peasants and the *balabbat* to buy land and retain freehold rights over it in their district. Organised by lineage, the peasant households collected money to buy land which they subsequently apportioned among themselves. Gäbrä-Egziabhèr himself accumulated more land than anybody else in the region.<sup>27</sup> By 1941, the Oromo *balabbat* in Sibuu were far better off than those in Qellem. Despite convincing the Oromo *balabbat* of Qellem with a Sibuu form of land measurement, the *ṭäqlay-gizat* and *awrajja* governors were determined not to replicate the conditions of Sibuu in Qellem. Given their equivocal status in the post-1941 period, the *balabbat* thus set their hopes on the prospect of the *qälad* system.

In this apparently attractive but tension-filled background, it was incumbent on *Däjjazmach* Šifäraw Balcha, governor of Qellem, to begin the land measurement process in earnest. Šifäraw preferred to start with the defiant Anfillo *balabbat*, Gimbii Qajeelaa, whose opposition he was able to obviate through a combination of personal diplomacy and threat.<sup>28</sup> Gimbii's persuasion was important because it would help keep the rest of the Oromo *balabbat* involved in the process. Many *balabbat* were sympathetic to the proposed land measurement, but uncertain of its outcome. In a political environment where Jootee's descendants were still defiant, where Gimbii had been successfully persuaded and most of the *balabbat* were ambivalent, any change of heart was dangerous for Šifäraw. The *ṭäqlay-gizat* and *awrajja* governors feared that any appeal to the Emperor against the proposed land measurement would

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<sup>27</sup> AWEM, Habtä-Mariam to *Hailä Sellassé*, Yäkatit 22, 1925 [28 Feb.1933], wa/mu/2/30, Letter-book of *Däjjazmach* Habtä-Mariam, petitions to Addis Ababa Court, 1925 to 1927 EC (1932/33-1934/35).

<sup>28</sup> Informant: Abdiisaa Tolaa, 10/01/10, Muggi.

impact personally on Šifāraw for his failure to build up consensus, peace and stability.<sup>29</sup> Šifāraw particularly wanted to avoid any appeal against him to Wallagga *ṭāqlay-gizat* governor, Asratä Kassa (1944—46), who considered him incompetent to govern the politically conscious Qellem and even encouraged the local Oromo *balabbat* to file complaints against him.<sup>30</sup> In the words of Asratä Kassa,

“...Governor of Qellem district *Däjjazmach* Šifāraw Balcha is incompetent to fit into the new administrative style, but not out of slackness. Since Qellem is a region on the border [with the British Sudan] and *its people are politically conscious* we would like to note that a stronger person should be appointed over it [Qellem].<sup>31</sup> (Emphasis added)

Creating the required consensus for the introduction of the *qäläd* system was for Šifāraw a necessity, not a choice. Land measurement was set to begin in Qellem with Gimbii’s agreement and with Jootee’s descendants resisting it. The rest of the Oromo *balabbat* had mixed feelings of acquiescence, ambiguity and hope, and the peasants were not consulted because there was no room for them in the political tradition of the empire. During this early defiance, the *balabbat* did not stand against the *qäläd* system in its entirety. They believed that the power to allocate, apportion and/or redistribute the region’s land was their own responsibility, and should be done with their approval, rather than against their will. For their part, the Amhara *awrajja wäräda* and *meketil-wäräda* governors were convinced that they had state power vested in them to carry out such works. The *balabbat* originally countered peasant claims to freehold rights and the Amhara authorities’ threats against their traditional power, rather the system itself.<sup>32</sup> But there was one problem; Anfillo *balabbat* openly rejected the *qäläd* system because their leader, Gimbii Qajeelaa, was, they argued, over one hundred years

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<sup>29</sup> IEAWGG, Wallagga Awraja Gezat, Abiy Abbäbä to Ministry of Interior, “Report on a Tour of Wallagga Province.” Ṭir 21, 1935 (January 29, 1943).

<sup>30</sup> IEAWGG, Asratä Kassa, “Ya Wallagga Awrajja Yasost wär riport / Wallagga Province Quarterly Report, Nahase 30, 1938 [5 September 1946].

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, IEAWGG, *Ya Qellam balabbatoch maret*, Makonnen Adaferesaw to Provincial Governor's Office, Nahase 20, 1947, [August 27, 1956]; *Ya Qellam balabbatoch maret*, Lt. Heruy Gabrakidan to Makonnen Adaferesaw, Nahase 17, 1947, [August 24, 1956].

old when he agreed to the proposal and had not consulted with them in the matter.<sup>33</sup> The reality was that they did not want to allow “outsiders” obtain right of access and use land in Anfillo, either on coffee plantations or uncultivated areas. A deeper analysis of this apparently silent move towards land measurement can only be made by examining and analysing the real intentions and interests of each group: the peasants, the *balabbat*, the *näčläbaš* and the state.

*Däjjazmach* Šifäraw’s resolute effort at persuading the *ballabbat* and the ruling house of Anfillo, and his determination to distance Oromo *balabbat* from any change of heart meant that the *ṭäqlay-gizat* and *awrajja* governors feared any appeal to the Emperor in case of Šifäraw’s failure. His mobilisation of men from the local state in support of the *qäläd* system underlines that the necessary tool to realise the *qäläd* land measurement in Qellem was consensus, not coercion; any change would be practiced only through negotiation. Despite the apparent gesture of imperial Ethiopia’s architecture of administration that made the state appear all powerful in making decisions and implementation, a wide range of actors were involved in realising the land measurement system, ‘both in cooperation and competition with the state’.<sup>34</sup> The central imperial government and its local agents were only two of many claimants, although they spoke during negotiation from elevated chairs. The tension-filled process of land measurement in Qellem passed through, clearly demonstrating even from the start the powerful significance of negotiation, rather than coercion. As Hagmann and Péclard forcibly argue, negotiation as opposed to common assumptions does not happen between “co-equal parties or in an all inclusive manner.” It involves parties that hold different resources, entitlements and legitimacy.<sup>35</sup> The negotiations carried out to start the process of land measurement had set a clear precedent regarding the path that the implementation of the *qäläd* system would take,

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<sup>33</sup> IEAWGG, *Blatta Waldakiros* Memorandum to the Emperor, “Sila Qellem Hizboch Abetuta.” *Miazia* 24, 1948 [2 May 1956].

<sup>34</sup> Adopted from T. Hagmann and D. Péclard, “Negotiating Statehood,” 543.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 545.

namely negotiation. But it would also be contested and resisted. The resistance to state policy on land and its distinct local version of attempts at implementation and contestation that followed, as we shall see below, were contestations “over access to the state and in turn helped to produce a translocal, hierarchical idea of the state.”<sup>36</sup> It was against these that the peasants and *balabbat* petitioned, appealed and litigated (sometimes separately, sometimes in unison) in the course of the contestations—a process, as persuasively argued by more recent scholarship, that was vital to the underlying dynamics of state construction.<sup>37</sup>

Given the contradictory perceptions outlined above there is little surprise that in Qellem the meaning of “owner of the land” as outlined in the Land Tax Proclamation of 1 November 1944 was highly contested. Although the proclamation set out clearly graded taxations that were expected to be paid in cash on various categories of measured land by their owners, the actual definition of “owner of the land” remained vague.<sup>38</sup> The *balabbat* believed they bore the traditional title *abbaa-qabiyyee* (literally father/owner of *qabiyyee*—the land) and convinced themselves that they would be given the highest priority on land set aside for sale by the state once the process of land measurement had been completed. The local Amhara governors, however, interpreted it more pragmatically; for them the “land owners” were the occupying peasants, who according to the proclamation would pay tax on the exact size of land they occupied and farmed. But this implementation would mean that there was no land on which to ‘plant’ the colonists (*tiklägnoch/ጥገኛዎች*) (*baläwuläta*, *näčläbaš* and all civil and military functionaries of the state and their families). If the Amhara governors translated the definition of peasant ownership into practice, they would get no land for themselves. However, they were unwilling to accept the *balabbat* interpretation either.<sup>39</sup> From the peasants’ point of view they

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<sup>36</sup> Drwan from C. Leonardi and C. Vaughan, ““We are oppressed,”” 96.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid; J. Alexander, *The Unsettled Land*; C. Leonardi, *Dealing with government in South Sudan*.

<sup>38</sup> Imperial Ethiopian Government, Proclamation No. 70 of 1944, *Nagarit Gazetta*, November 1, 1944.

<sup>39</sup> IEAQA, Minutes of Sayyoo Wäraäda Council, D/Doolloo, Yäkatit, 27, 1937/March 1, 1945.

were not only individual landowners, they own the land collectively as “generational property” inherited by birthright. The overall scenario suggests that political forces were at work, and understanding them would reveal how “...historical patterns of access to, control of, and exclusion from resources [land] emanate from and, in turn, mould competing meanings and cultural understandings of rights, property relations, and entitlements.”<sup>40</sup> It is to this complex issue that we now turn.

### Land measurement: process and consequences

The imperial state mobilised *qālad* veterans from the neighbouring Sibuu and carried out the measurement in 1944–45.<sup>41</sup> The standard *qālad* measure for Qellem, as in Naqamtee and Sibuu, was a leather rope 67 metres in length. A unit of land eight ropes in width and eleven in length constituted a *gaša* (or *qālad*), or roughly forty hectares.<sup>42</sup> The system of measurement employed blocks of ten *gaša* to re-distribute land into various groups recognised by the laws of the imperial state. There were four recognised groups; military and/or civil servants of the state, the *balabbat*, the EOC, and the state. Of every ten *gaša* of land, two were assigned as *madāria* land (*madāriya-märèt/ማደርያ መሬት*) to be used in lieu of salary or pension for military or civil service, two were *siso/ሲዕ* (freehold for the state’s local co-opts, the *baläbbat*) and one as *sämon* land (*sämon-märèt/ሰሞን መሬት*) run by the EOC. The remaining five *gaša* were state land (*yämängist-märèt/የመንግሥት መሬት*), reserved for sale.<sup>43</sup> This categorization clearly

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<sup>40</sup> Donald S. Moore, “Contesting Terrain in Zimbabwe’s Eastern Highlands: Political Ecology, Ethnography, and Peasant Resource Struggles,” *Economic Geography*, 69 (4), (1993), 383.

<sup>41</sup> Sometimes an event that happened in certain year is referred to, for example, as 1944—45, because of a mismatch between the Ethiopian calendar and the Gregorian one. The *qālad* system was implemented in Qellem in 1937 Ethiopian Calendar, but since this refers both to all developments that had taken place before and after January 1945 it becomes necessary to use 1944–45, unless otherwise we are dealing with a very specific date evidenced in the archives.

<sup>42</sup> *Däjjazmach* Habtä-Mariam to Emperor Haila Sellasse, in A. Triulzi and T. Ta’a (eds), *የወላጋ የታሪክ ስነ-ጥ*, 192; Tesema Ta’a, “The Political Economy,” 199–200.

<sup>43</sup> IEAWGG, *Blatta Walda-Kiros*, “Memorandum to the Emperor,” *Miazia* 24, 1948 [2 May 1956].

demonstrates that state land and *madäria*, added up together, constituted seventy percent of the measured land in Qellem.

Land classification not only relied on measurement; there was another equally important qualifying factor, perceived fertility, which in practice meant land productivity. Land was categorised as fertile (*läm/ለም*), semi-fertile (*läm-ṭäf/ለም-ጠፍ*) and poor (*ṭäf/ጠፍ*) depending on the population density of each *gaša*. A *gaša* of land accommodating five to ten peasant households was designated *läm*, two to four *läm-ṭäf*, and uninhabited *gaša* were considered *ṭäf* (even if they were farmed). Three fundamental intentions underlay this categorisation: to determine the price of land in each category, to benefit the *balabbat* by allowing them take *siso* (freehold) from each type of land, and to redistribute a certain proportion of land to each group categorised under imperial law.<sup>44</sup> The first two reasons were in most cases practical, the third was rarely used as the *balabbat* bribed the measurers to situate the largest part of their share in the fertile areas. The underlying assumption behind the peasants' exclusion from the list was that they would be placed as tenants under one of the four legally recognised groups, despite the fact that they considered themselves as the legitimate owners of the land—which is where the root cause of the confrontations lies.

The people who carried out the measurement of land took into account paid or promised bribes to estimate, instead of measuring precisely, the size of the land into a number of *gaša*. Land entered in official state register (*yäbahir-mäzḡäb/የባህር መዝገብ*) as two *gaša*, for example, would in practice constitute three or four, and sometimes more. According to state archival sources, at the completion of the *qälad* system, Qellem had six thousand seven hundred *gaša* of agricultural land, including forest, fewer than the geographical extent of the *awrajja* indicated. Some sources even elevate that estimate to between ten and forty thousand.<sup>45</sup> This

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<sup>44</sup> IEAWGG, Colonel Abiy Abäbä to the Ministry of Interior, Hamle 7, 1934 [July, 14, 1942], Yä Wallagga Gizat Yä *rist* Märät.

<sup>45</sup> IEAWGG, *Blatta* Waldakiros Memorandum to the Emperor, Miaziya 24, 1948 (May 2, 1956), “Selä Qellam Hezboch Abetuta,” Yä Agär Gezat Mätset, 1st year. No. 7, 25.

imprecision would over subsequent years support the local Amhara officials' proposal for the re-measurement of the land. In fact this became the substantive issue underlying local Amhara officials' arguments for the re-measurement of land over the following years, after the imposition of the *qälad* system led to consistent peasant resistance and the breakdown of the *balabbat*-state alliance.

After measurement, but before the *qälad* system was implemented, the Ministry of the Interior set up a commission to present an informed proposal to assist the implementation process. The commission acknowledged that tenancy had never existed in Qellem, and the peasants had paid tax according to the size of land they held as *rist* (hereditary). For this they received receipts for land tax collection in regions with unmeasured land. The commission recommended three clear guidelines for implementation of the *qälad* system. Firstly, people should not be deprived of their *rist* right. Instead, they should be allowed pay tax on it as per the requirements of the new *qälad* system. Secondly, unoccupied lands, *ṭäf*, should be measured and registered as state land. Thirdly, the *balabbat* must be given a choice between taking one out of ten *gaša* of land as *siso* from their older possessions or to relinquish *siso* and pay tax under the new land tax laws.<sup>46</sup> The commission declared the peasants as *de facto* owners of land, a decision that was unpopular with Amhara governors, *näčlabäš*, Oromo *balabbat* and central government. The governors had wanted to transfer land to Amhara settlers of various types (themselves included), while the *balabbat* wanted it for themselves. Central government quite often followed a balancing policy, but was far from enthusiastic about instigating some kind of social revolution. They all agreed that the peasants must not be offered right of possession. The proposal offered a smooth route to implementing the *qälad* system, but was not in the interests of local forces or the state. The commission's first two proposals were

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<sup>46</sup> IEAMI, Retta Habtä-Mikael to balata Balata Gabra-Tsadiq, "Report on investigation of land disputes in Qellem," Hamile 5, 1960 [12 July 1968].



largely disregarded. The *balabbat* were presented with the two options, and chose to take their *siso*.

The *balabbat* obtained more agricultural land under contract from the state, which they soon converted into *rist* lands by bribing responsible officials. They had such land formally registered in the official imperial land register,<sup>47</sup> which would later constitute one of the core points in the peasant struggle to have the *qālad* system of land measurement abrogated and get their land back.

As soon as the land had been divided into units of *gaša* and the *qālad* system had been fully imposed in Qellem, the practical meaning of “landowner” under the Land Tax Proclamation of 1 November 1944, effective as of 7 July 1945, became problematic. The law stated that all land was to be taxed, but that individual peasant households of Qellem, because of the unique historical circumstances discussed above, would remain recognised owners of the land until 1944–45. The basic assumption of imperial Ethiopia’s land law was that only freeholders would pay land tax directly to the state, for which they would be issued receipts guaranteeing their title to the land.<sup>48</sup> Property tax had been in force in Qellem since 1933, and the peasants paid tax to the state, receiving receipts that showed legal evidence of their rights over the land. The new land tax issued in November 1944 repealed the property tax.<sup>49</sup> While the imperial state did not recognise the peasants directly as a legal category under the new law, its provisions offered them state recognition of their rights over the land—although the peasants were not aware of this at the time.

With this scenario in place, local governors were faced with a serious challenge in collecting the tax for the 1944–45 tax year. Collecting tax according to the new land tax law would in practice establish the peasants as freeholders. The peasants would then distribute the

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Gäbrä-Wäld Ingida-Wärq, “Ethiopia’s Traditional System,” 306-307.

<sup>49</sup> Decree No.70 of 1944.

tax demanded by the state for each *gaša* among themselves, resulting in the registration of peasant family heads for tax purposes and the legal declaration at local level of peasants as having the title deeds to land they occupied. Continuing to implement the property tax system was now illegal, but its replacement would further strengthen the peasants' position. This circumstance was doubly problematic to the *balabbat*, further challenging their socio-economic status. The core of the issue also became whether or not it would be possible to collect tax for the current year.<sup>50</sup>

The provincial governor, Asratä Kassa, convened a meeting he hoped would resolve the problem. The meeting was held in Dambi-Doolloo, the district administrative centre, on 1 March 1945. Participants in the meeting included the district administration (represented by the governor and his secretary and the army commander) and representatives of the Ministries of Finance, Agriculture, and Justice. The local people were represented by a minor *balabbat* serving as a governor of a *meketil-wäräda* level locality in Sayyoo. Asked to explain the problem at the meeting, the district governor presented the situation as the problem of tax collection for the year 1944–45. All Amhara officials at the meeting argued against implementing the new land tax. The two Oromo men contended that the tax due be collected according to the provisions of the proclamation, but argued that they (the Oromo *balabbat* of Qellem) be given priority in buying state land reserved for sale<sup>51</sup> to secure freehold rights for themselves on the *madäria* land in addition to their own *siso*. The *näčläbaš* on their part rejected the interests of both the peasants and the *balabbat* directly and indirectly. In practice the Oromo men's attitudes concealed a bold line that separated the peasants from the *balabbat*. They based their demands on social and economic features, pretending to push class interests to the margins in favour of a purported unity of local demands against outsiders (Amhara

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<sup>50</sup> IEAMI, Imperial Ethiopian Government Ministry of Interior to *bitiwäddäd* Mängaša Jämbare, Tahisas 25, 1939 [3 January 1947]; Abäbä Gäbrè to Asratä Kassa, Nahase 19, 1937 [25 August 1945].

<sup>51</sup> IEAQA, Minutes of Qellem Wäraḍa Council, Dämbi-Dollo, Yäkkatit 17, 1937 [6 March 1945].

governors, civil servants, police, judges and agents of central state institutions). They also argued that *madäriya* land could not be sold to “an outsider,”/“የውጪ ሰው,” an indirect reference to Amhara state functionaries, along with the peasants who occupied the land.<sup>52</sup> While peasant interests were nominally represented, it is difficult to explain how the two Oromo men stood for peasant interests, and in fact the discussions at the meeting largely reflected the conflict between the Oromo *balabbat* and the *näčläbaš*, represented by the *awrajja* governor Šifaraw Balcha.

Despite a clear majority of state officials over local interests, and the *näčläbaš* over Oromo *balabbat* and peasants, the meeting agreed to ask for a specific direction from the Ministry of Interior at the request of Asratä Kassa. In practice this decision meant deferral of tax collection for 1944–45 too, a blessing in disguise for the peasants.<sup>53</sup>

The Ministry took a full two years to send its reply.<sup>54</sup> Its order ruled, among other things, that individual peasant households occupying land would not be offered freehold rights to it. The order confirmed the *balabbat*’s right to their *siso* land, thereby turning the peasants into tenants, *čisägna/ጩሰኛ*. It also recognised individual peasant households occupying the land as having the right of leasehold. On the other hand it made the *balabbat* tax collectors over *madäria* and state lands and imposed a distinct form of land tax called it called “farm rent,” (*የእርሻ ኪራይ*) which comprised *erbo/እርቦ* (one forth of the peasant’s produce) and a tithe (one tenth of the produce). However, the payment would still be made in cash and would be an equal amount to taxes levied on freehold lands. By inventing a unique form of taxation in a unique situation, the imperial government handed down responsibility to Aamhara local governors in Qellem, who in turn reformulated it, strengthening their position not only by denying freehold rights to the peasants but also in re-creating their power to define the right to access land. The

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> IEAQA, Šifaraw Balcha to the Emperor, “Yä Qellem Warada Gizat yä sira Gudday [Issues of Local Administration in Qellem],” Sänè 18, 1937 [25 June 1945].

*balabbat* immediately went to the peasants occupying their *siso* land, pushing them to pay the new tax as an effective exercise of their newly acquired power. The *balabbat* demanded that the peasants pay their tax in full and immediately for both tax years (1945–46 and 1946–47).<sup>55</sup> In short, the implementation of the new imperial order brought sweeping changes to rights of access and land use.

As the peasants became aware of how the new order affected them, any pretensions of peasant-*balabbat* alliance or unity displayed at the meeting chaired by Asratā Kassa disappeared. More importantly, the situation provoked decades of petitions, appeals, imperial court proceedings and litigation, creating new problems instead of resolving older ones. It must also be stressed here that the new order made no decision on whether the *balabbat* would be given priority on the lands set aside for sale, because the central government and local state apparatus were not willing to resolve the problem immediately, although not necessarily for the same reasons. Both central government and local state apparatus wanted to create a powerful class of Amhara landlords. While central government wanted to create such a class in order to bring about the political integration of the region, the local state apparatus wanted it in order to invent opportunities to ratify its own discrete socio-economic and political status. It was this type of disjuncture between the central government and the local state apparatus that exposed incoherence, fractures and fragmentations setting of many often ill-advised schemes in the course of state-society relations in Qellem.

By giving the Oromo *balabbat* the power to collect taxes from other categories of land in addition to their *siso*, the Ministry's order expanded their sphere of influence. Such a swift expansion of *balabbat* rights to land and its revenues rekindled the peasants' memories of the early settlement period, aggravating the situation. In practice, one outcome of the *qālad* system was that it empowered the *balabbat*, as descendants of pioneer settlers, to act as landlords over

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<sup>55</sup> IEAWGG, Minutes of Wallagga Council of Governors, Yäkkatit 1946 [February 1954].

lands under lineage entitlements dating back hundreds of years, turning individual peasant landholders into tenants, *čisägna/ጭሰኛ*. The Ministry's order officially set in motion a class conflict between the *balabbat* and the peasants.

Šifaraw's administration disregarded the demands of the *balabbat* and began granting *madäria* lands to the *näčläbaš* on the basis of imperial edicts dating from July 1942 and July 1944. The first order provided entitlement to one *gaša* of freehold land for those who had resisted the Italian occupation, refugees, children and the wives of the patriots, while the latter entitled state servants of the pre-1935 period and those who did not collaborate with Italian rule to one *gaša* of freehold land.<sup>56</sup> Such people were all referred to as *baläwuläta/ባለውሊታ*, — literally someone who has done a great favour to another person.<sup>57</sup> In Anfillo, the grants included coffee lands belonging to Gimbii Qajeelaa,<sup>58</sup> who immediately travelled to Addis Ababa to protest. He secured an audience with the Emperor, who made a decision encompassing the entire issue of land in Qellem. According to this decision, the peasants would continue holding their land and paying tax on their respective holdings, and their land should not be granted or sold to anybody else. In January 1947 the Ministry of Interior sent this imperial edict to Qellem.<sup>59</sup> The order halted extensive grants and blocked the *balabbat* claims to buy land, while opening the door for peasants to acquire freehold rights over their land. However, the governors employed a series of excuses to delay its implementation.<sup>60</sup>

Invigorated by the 1946 imperial edict, the peasants launched efforts to confront the *balabbat* right to *siso* through frequent petitions, litigations and appeals at all administrative levels. The central points of the peasants' argument remained fundamentally similar, centering

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<sup>56</sup> IEAMI, Retta Habtä-Mikael to *Blatta* Gabra-Tsadiq, "Report on investigation of land disputes in Qellem," Hamile 5, 1960 [12 July 1968].

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> IEAMI, Ministry of the Interior to Qellem district administration, "Ya Qellem Maret Abetuta," Tir 3, 1939 [11 January 1939].

<sup>59</sup> IEAMI, Petitions submitted to the Ministry of the Interior by peasant representatives, Yakkatit 7, 1953 [14 February 1961], and Yakkatit 13, 1953 [20 February 1961].

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

on certain culturally framed core points of argument. But before we turn to the analysis of the contents of peasant petitions and appeals, it is important to examine the nature of the archival sources from which such information is drawn. How far can these appeals and petitions be judged as legitimate peasant perspectives when the peasants themselves were not able to read or write? Who authored the petitions and appeals? In short, to what extent did these written petitions actually reflect the views of the peasantry? Their authors were a literate peasant class whose members were well crafted in making claims and offering opinions; they were mostly deeply knowledgeable in the history and culture of the Macca Oromo of Qellem and had built for themselves a sense of reverence among the peasants. They were renowned in their respective localities as men who were willing to speak on behalf of the peasants as well as for themselves. These men claimed deep knowledge on patterns of Macca Oromo settlement and the histories of land tenure dating back to the time of the pioneer Oromo settlers in the region. This means they were in part historians. They preserved or constructed local narratives of local history in a way that could easily be weaponised to defend peasant subsistence economy. The central idea in these narratives, as we shall see below, was one of alienation. Despite its continuous presence—with a brief interruption during the Italian occupation—the local state structure and its historic actions combined to make the Macca Oromo peasants undisputable owners of agricultural lands in the region. In this study these spokesmen are referred to as “peasant intellectuals” after Steven Feierman’s example.<sup>61</sup> The identity of these intellectuals will become clearer as discussions in this chapter progress.

So how did appeals and petitions authored by peasant intellectuals come to be taken as the views of the peasants themselves? The peasant intellectuals were themselves peasants; they drew their living from agricultural activities. The major difference between the peasant

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<sup>61</sup> Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

intellectuals and the peasants themselves was that the former were educated in EVC village schools as well as state schools, and most of them—if not all—were competent in reading and writing in Amharic. The most important issue on which the peasant intellectuals built their identity was the disputes over agricultural land—a resource for which they constructed stories of settlement and possession in order to present peasant grievances in a meaningful way. However this was not a resource for which they could fabricate anything and submit it as a peasant grievance. The subject matter of the appeals or petitions the peasant intellectuals wrote and submitted to the hierarchies of state authority must originate in real peasant grievances, although the peasants wanted them to be presented in the strongest possible terms. The peasant intellectuals themselves became important and earned respect mainly because they were believed to be advancing a well-rooted peasant grievance on the right to access and use land. All stakeholders (including local government) were aware of this. Besides, all appeals and petitions were financed by the meagre financial resources collected from peasants themselves. To go to administrative centres—which were always located in urban centres or rural towns—the peasant intellectuals had to collect money from the peasants which was used for the duration of their stay away from home and for the paperwork involved. The peasant intellectuals had to travel to key locations, collect the subject matter of major grievances and then read the appeal letters or petitions out to the peasants, having translated them into the Oromo language so that the peasants could understand them.

Meanwhile, the hierarchies of state authority, as will be seen in the following pages, would on multiple occasions use various tactics to access the peasants regarding their appeals. In short, the peasants not only provided information and money for the appeals, petitions or litigations advanced in their name, they effectively remained in control of them. The appeals, petitions and litigations advanced by the peasant intellectuals in the name of the Macca Oromo peasants of Qellem were, although given shape and structure by the intellectuals using creative

constructions of historical narratives, the “standard official discourse” acceptable in the empire’s bureaucracy, indeed peasant appeals and petitions. Since these appeals, petitions and litigations are treated as archives, however, they must be considered not simply as historical sources for a student of history, “but as creative and significant processes and products in themselves.”<sup>62</sup> The imperial Ethiopian archives we are discussing here became historicised resources and tools that were weaponised to advance particular claims. They were themselves products of deliberate, conscious interactions by multiple groups of people in a society who clearly understood the importance of written records and documentation. Archives inspired action, oriented behaviour, and opened up channels for claim making. It is this conscious construction and re-construction of ideas for contesting a very powerful resource as well as the stance that both society and the state took in the process that this chapter attempts to understand. The discussion will attempt to go beyond the confrontations to discover how embedded in the society the local state was, and how contestations turned out to be a feature of state construction.

As far as the contents of the appeals were concerned, historical narratives of the rights to access, possess and use land were common in the appeals and petitions. As outlined above, the petitions were constructed in a way that could effectively alienate the state and its local agents, despite their prevalence for decades before the land disputes. The gist of the peasant arguments remained fundamentally similar, centering on certain core points of argument based on historical-cultural framing:

(1) In 1937 [1944–45] when the *balabbat* took their *siso* after the *qälad* land measurement they also counted our own [land into their *siso*] and took it when they were supposed to get *siso* share only from their possessions; (2) the remainder [of the lands] were declared as state land and the *rist* owners [i.e. the peasants] were accordingly made to pay *erbo* [one-fourth] tax; (3) the rest was given out to *baläwuläta* and contractors.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> C. Leonardi, *Dealing with government in South Sudan*, 10.

<sup>63</sup> IEWTMRC, Petitions submitted to the Ministry of Interior by peasant representatives, Ginbot 1, 1949 [9 May 1957]. See also Petitions submitted to the Ministry of Interior by peasant representatives, Yakkatit 7, 1953 [14 February 1961], and Yakkatit 13, 1953 [20 February 1961]; Retta Habta-Mikael to *blatta* Balata Gabra-Tsadiq, “Report on investigation of land disputes in Qellem,” Hamile 5, 1960 [12 July 1968].



The *balabbat* had their *rist* respected by the state, as indicated in the appeal letter quoted above (and many more) as well as in litigations filed between 1946 and 1951. They also went against the established “cultural-historical boundary” and included into their *siso* peasant *rist* which “they had never had direct access to in the history of the region.”<sup>64</sup> At face value, the peasant claims directly accused the *balabbat*—especially regarding the first point—thereby distancing the indictment of the grievance from the imperial government. Examined more deeply, however, the appeals chose to attack the imperial system at its core, claiming that the peasants lost their “generational property,” i.e. their agricultural land, not only because of what they called a breach of cultural-historical boundary by the *balabbat*, but also because of the state’s additional claim on their land, which used a very similar mechanism as the *balabbat*. The peasants believed that they were not supposed to be tenants who would pay *erbo*, one-forth of their produce on the same land they had owned for generations. It should instead be incumbent on them to pay regular state taxes like any land owner. This was the gist of their allegation against the state, which went beyond accusing the *balabbat* and all local forces targeting the core of imperial foundations in Qellem. In this way, the peasant “historical consciousness—how the past is remembered, constructed, and invoked”<sup>65</sup> became a powerful foundation for their interaction with the state. When the peasants began framing their petitions, necessarily from a very low status, the imperial authorities apparently underestimated their capacity and comfortably assumed that the peasant case was something they had the power to control by whatever methods were at hand. But the issue would turn even more complex because of the involvement of other rivals, more notably the *balabbat*, and decades later the peasant perspective would push the regime onto a more defensive footing, weakening its position.

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<sup>64</sup> See, among others, IEAWGG, Minute of Wallagga Council of Governors, Mäskäräm 20, 1953 [30 September 1960]; IEAMI, Petition submitted to the Ministry of Interior by peasant representatives, Yakkatit 7, 1953 [14 February 1961]; Idem, Rätta Habtä-Mikael to *Blatta* Gäbrä-Tsadiq, “Report on investigation of land disputes in Qellem,” Hamile 5, 1960 [12 July 1968].

<sup>65</sup> D. Moore, “Contesting Terrain,” 383.

Although the Oromo peasants believed they owned the land they occupied, details of the narrative of their appeals, petitions and litigations were framed, shaped and reshaped by grassroots peasant opinion makers who were well-versed in the history and culture of the Macca Oromo. Such men had built for themselves a status of respect among the peasants, and in their respective localities were the recognised voices of the peasants. In particular, they claimed profound knowledge on patterns of Macca Oromo settlement and histories of land tenure dating back to the time of the pioneer Oromo settlers in Qellem. They made opinions, they educated, sometimes they directed. In the tradition of Steven Feierman's peasant intellectuals, they:

... organized political movements of the greatest long-term significance, and in doing so elaborated new forms of discourse. At other times these leaders would have spent much of their time farming. Even in the periods of intense political activity, most spent some time farming. To call them peasant intellectuals defines their historical role at moments of leadership, moments of organization, and moments of direction.<sup>66</sup>

Those self-appointed spokesmen of Qellem were, as far as available historical sources are concerned, men rather than women. They did not mobilise peasants in any form of social movement and were not community leaders *per se* as the social and political structure of imperial Ethiopia denied them any direct leadership role. Neither did they construct intricate new forms of discourse. Yet they drove opinions for peasant appeals, litigations and petitions at all levels, making use of histories of settlement pattern and land tenure on the basis of which peasants claimed the right of land ownership. They offered tactful opinions of resistance, contextualising them within the 'standard official discourse' acceptable in imperial Ethiopia's bureaucratic lexicography, and with good knowledge of the contents and intentions of contemporary land laws. These intellectuals were—in addition to their involvement in land

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<sup>66</sup> Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 18.

disputes in the post 1944–45 period—extremely powerful in mobilising peasants in support of the Evangelical Church (EVC), with which they identified themselves as a tactic of resistance against the persecution the peasants encountered from the EOC. In short, Qellem’s peasant intellectuals were themselves peasants deriving their living from farming, but having been educated in EVC village schools and state schools, most of them were confident in reading and writing Amharic. Because of their claimed knowledge of the past, they constructed a historical peasant consciousness—controlling the way the past is remembered, constructed and invoked for the particular use of peasant struggle for survival. This meant that peasant appeals and petitions in their struggle to win back their agricultural lands were all framed with heavy reliance on a peasant historical consciousness that was shaped by their own intellectuals.

Claims by a certain peasant territorial unit, as Hobsbawm and Ranger rightly argue, over “...some common land or right by custom from time immemorial often expresses not a historical fact, but the balance of forces in the constant struggle,”<sup>67</sup> of peasants in a particular territory against their overlords or against peasants from other territorial units. The historical accounts that furnish and constitute the bedrock of peasant resistance narratives—presented in series of appeals, petitions and court litigations between 1944 and 1974—were mostly the creative, innovative constructions of peasant intellectuals. This, however, does not mean that the narratives were mere invention. There were considerably legitimate grounds, whether historical or not, in the peasant grievances of Qellem. The peasant intellectuals often historicised grievances by turning them into “weapons of the weak”, ultimately alienating institutionalised forces (the state and its local agents) and gradually encroaching in order to make themselves tenants on their ‘generational property,’ in narratives of multiple peasant appeals and petitions referring to the land. They created a solid legitimate foundation, on the

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<sup>67</sup> E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, “Introduction,” in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 2.

basis of which the peasants reinvented Qellem as perceived here as a construction. They led opinions, they educated and sometimes they directed the peasants. The peasant intellectuals here are to some extent comparable to local elites in the peripheries of condominium Sudan who in the process of varied contestations “became adept at mobilising genealogy and history in order to acquire concessions from and make prerogatives upon the colonial state.”<sup>68</sup>

Antagonism between the peasants and the *balabbat* became so complex and sophisticated that the imperial government seemed unable to develop a coherent approach to the problem. Would answering peasant petitions hamper the commercialisation of land that aimed to increase state revenue? Or would such a move by the central government tend to damage the empire’s local co-opts? Or was there in fact no defined path the imperial state and local government could take to resolve matters to every party’s satisfaction? The answer lies in the complex political circumstances that evolved from the construction of the specific narrative the peasants preferred to use. In the face of multiple and dynamic demands on the land they occupied and upon which they relied for subsistence, multiple reactions were received from various groups over time. The peasant narratives were framed in cultural and historical contexts, and as such it seems imperative to examine how such narratives were presented to the central imperial government. Although the right to land possession remained the subject of confrontations for nearly three decades after 1944–45, each application came with a distinctively different substantive issue that depended on changes and continuities at local level. However, the petitions’ contents had some common and deeply-rooted features. One such peasant appeal submitted to the Emperor through the Ministry of Interior captured those common features very well:

We, the people of Qellem *awrajja* have been loyal and obedient to the Ethiopian government *since the time of Emperor Menilek* [II] and were [proud] of our *Itiyopiyawinnnet/ኢትዮጵያዊነት* (Ethiopianness). We, the present generation and our forefathers, have been surviving changes imposed upon us over time, and have held our

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<sup>68</sup> C. Leonardi and C. Vaughan, ““We are oppressed,”” 78.

own birth-land and paid tributes or taxes on it as *a century old generational property*. The land has for generations been a *[freehold] property [owned collectively] and used effectively in private hands*, transferring to succeeding generations or even selling it when the need arises. When the *qäläd* system of land measurement was implemented 17 years ago, however, one-fourth was taken [by the *baläbbat*] in the name of *siso* while *the remaining three-fourths, which had been held by the people, was expropriated from the people who inhabited it*, and distributed in gross disregard among *awrajja* governors, those *opportunists* who claimed to have served the state in the past and those state functionaries who demanded to be paid in land to serve the state in the future, including chief treasurers and even workers in various local government departments. This was *carried out through expropriation and with no respect for us who were owners [of the land] and colonisers/developers [of the land]* in the way explained above, and without distinctions being made on the types of land, *läm* [fertile] and *täff* [infertile] lands. All of this was done simply to benefit *every opportunist* [surrounding the local government]. When in protest of this we filed an appeal to His Majesty our Emperor [Hailä Sellassè I] he, in his genuine deliberation of justice and far-sightedness, made a decision *that the people of Qellem awrajja who until 1936 [1943] were holding the land must continue as freeholder owners without compromise on it*. This golden [imperial] edict reached the respected provincial administration on Tahisas 5, 1939 [14 December 1946]...but was kept hidden until now. We express our deepest gratitude and pray for the long life of the Emperor, for he has made a new imperial edict requesting the implementation of his initial edict...but we want to outline our grievances in brief regarding the fact that [the imperial government] stated both in the imperial edict [of December 1946] and what we are now told, that *lands already expropriated and redistributed by local administration would remain intact and must not be returned*...<sup>69</sup>

(Emphasis added)

Of the petitions submitted between 1946, when the first imperial edict arrived, and 1965, when the *qäläd* system of land measurement in Qellem was repealed by imperial decree, there were few peasant petitions that failed to frame demands based on the peasant narratives outlined in this appeal letter. According to these narratives, the peasants of Qellem had been *rist* holders since the formation of Menilek's empire, meaning that their land was considered as a patriomony to be passed from generation to generation. It had not been expropriated before, and the peasants were themselves "loyal and obedient subjects" on whose help the empire's founding Emperor had relied to help realise his dreams. Menilek's successors did not encroach on their *rist*, and the generation facing the *qäläd* system, like their forefathers before them, were in full possession of their agricultural land, and according to this narrative had been for at least a century before the *qäläd* system was introduced. The system was for them an

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<sup>69</sup> IEAMI, Peasant representatives to the Ministry of Interior, "Peasant Appeal on the Imperial edict of December 1946 and its sequels," *Yäkkatit* 12, 1953 [20 February 1961].

expropriation, not a measurement, designed to take away their generational property and hand over it to opportunists—the *näčläbaš* and their families, patriots, veterans and refugees. These were people the empire-state had referred to as *baläwuläta* (literally “my favourites”) in the imperial edicts of July 1942 and July 1944, and had provided for entitlement to one *gaša* of freehold land.<sup>70</sup> The peasants labelled the *baläwuläta*, *näčläbaš*, Amhara governors and their assistants as “outsiders.”

For the peasants of Qellem, imperial Ethiopia’s “favourites,” the *baläwuläta*, were “aliens” who had no right of access to land because they believed that land in Qellem could only be obtained through inheritance. It was in this context that they referred to the *qälad* system in terms of expropriation. The system was perceived as a breach against these historical and cultural backdrops. At the heart of the peasant protest was the contention that their land was a *rist* passed down from generation to generation and should not under any circumstances be susceptible to expropriation and redistribution, because—even in the context of the tumultuous past since Menilek’s conquest—it had survived multiple transformative historical processes in the region. Although the first victims of the peasant resistance to the *qälad* system were the *balabbat*, the appeal also set a confrontational tone against the Amhara-dominated government of Qellem *awrajja* and its supporters, as well as the central imperial government. It is also worth noting that the peasants’ conception of “outsiders” only referred to the *baläwuläta*, *näčläbaš*, Amhara governors and their assistants, and did not necessarily mean all non-Oromo. Despite their determined struggle against the *balabbat* and “outsiders,” the peasants did not put non-Oromo immigrants into this category. Though few in number, the Oromo peasant petitions began to win supporters from non-Oromo groups living in the region, including newly arrived migrants striving to improve their living standards—the Gurage and

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<sup>70</sup> See, for example, IEAMI, Rätta Habtä-Mikael to Blatta Gäbrä-Tsadiq, “Report on investigation of land disputes in Qellem,” Hamile 5, 1960 [12 July 1968].

the Amhara from Gojjam and Wällo. Support for the peasants' political discourse over the right to land ownership appeared to be rising dramatically.

However there is, as demonstrated in the appeal quoted above, a vital tool that was employed to maximize the effectiveness of their claim which was implicit in their recognition of imperial power—their subjecthood. This issue is centred on the key word *Itiyopiyawinnet/ኢትዮጵያዊነት* (Ethiopianness); imperial Ethiopia's word that translates as subjecthood or citizenship. The return of the imperial state brought home to the peasants its claim on their land, and also brought with it a powerful phraseology, despite the pre-Italian period, which defined imperial subjecthood/citizenship (*Itiyopiyawinnet*) by implicitly stating that those who were governed had some rights too.

We, the people of Qellem *awrajja* have been loyal and obedient to the Ethiopian government *since the time of Emperor Menilek* [II] and were [proud] of our *Itiyopiyawinnet/ኢትዮጵያዊነት* (literally Ethiopianness),”<sup>71</sup>

This phrasing became common in peasant appeals and petitions, although as Emma Hunter points out it was more of “a weapon in argument ... than reality”. Yet it is important to underline that the increasing use of such rhetoric in appeals and petitions demonstrates progressing interactions about the conception of rights and duties in imperial Ethiopia's state-society relations.

In order to back their appeals, the peasants sent their representatives to Addis Ababa by collecting in secret whatever money they could that would help peasant representatives to travel and stay in the capital for the duration of their appeals. This kept their cases alive and maintained strong pressure on the imperial authorities.<sup>72</sup> By imposing the *qälad* system, the imperial state at the centre had sought to integrate the region politically, although it linked that

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<sup>71</sup> Emma Hunter, “Introduction,” in Emma Hunter (ed), *Citizenship, Belonging, and Political Community in Africa: Dialogues between Past and Present* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016), 87.

<sup>72</sup> Informant: Abdiisaa Tolaa, 10/01/10, Muggi.

task to issues of revenue. However, what was planned in Addis Ababa and what actually happened in the process of implementing the *qalad* system in Qellem were quite different.

By this stage the peasant movement and the central government's response to their appeals had become a real threat to the *balabbat*, who reacted in 1950. In their petition to the Ministry of the Interior they stated that they were born to "conquering fathers," *daggal-saaqii*, who had inherited or bought land as their own *rist* long before the Amhara colonised the Oromo and reinvented rights of access to land in Qellem. They argued that their role had been indispensable in consolidating the Ethiopian empire in the region, and cited among other things their fathers' participation in the Ethiopian conquest of the lowland peripheries to the north and south of their home region (Benishangul and Gambella respectively), and their own roles in assigning the *gäbbar* to the *näftäгна* (1917–33) in which they provided for their livelihood through *hambifataa*. While the Ethiopian empire-state acknowledged such contributions and rewarded all Ethiopian *balabbat* through the *madäriya* land decree, very little compensation was offered to those in Qellem. During the introduction of the *qälad* system, the *balabbat* added, they had retained their *siso* and helped the state take over the remainder of the land in the region. The *balabbat* then protested against the peasants, referring to them as "tenants". They pleaded to the crown to make an edict halting the tenants' claims on their *siso* land.<sup>73</sup> The Ministry of Interior sent back their petition to Wallagga provincial government so that it could explore the problem and make a new policy.<sup>74</sup> This did not happen, although provincial and district governors continued to make efforts to reverse the 1946 imperial edict. Provincial governor *bitwäddäd* Mäkonnen Jämbärè, for example, had in March 1954 used the Wallagga Council of Governors to recommend to the Ministry of Interior that agricultural land in Qellem be sold to increase state income, a tactic which was in reality designed to override the provisions of the

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<sup>73</sup> IEAMI, Balabbat representatives to the Ministry of Interior, Magabit 6, 1942 [15 March 1950].

<sup>74</sup> IEAMI, the Ministry of Interior to Wallagga Province Administration Office, Mägabiti 28, 1942 [06 April 1950].



1946 edict, making the peasants landless by law. The Ministry turned down Mäkonnen's proposal.<sup>75</sup> As the issue remained unresolved for years, the local bureaucracy remained able to support provincial orders at village level, and the Amahara governors in Qellem believed that they could successfully muzzle the peasants, intimidate the *baläbbat*, and dismiss the whole issue of land disputes in the province. Thus, they restarted land grants that had for years been put on hold because of confrontations over rights of access to land.

At some point during 1955, peasant representatives went to the Ministry of the Interior and rekindled the imperial edict of 1946, which Amhara governors had for more than a decade been either denying or disregarding.<sup>76</sup> In a letter written on 25 November 1955, the Minister of Interior, *Ras Mäsfen Seläši*, told Wallagga provincial administration that it was wrong to dispossess the peasants of land which they owned and had paid tax on for many years, uprooting them and giving their land to "others." Mäsfen stressed that it was inappropriate to give away their lands, eventually making the people tenants and declaring all remaining land as state-owned simply because of the implementation of the *qälad* system. Mäsfen underscored that while the land measurement allowed the *balabbat* obtain their *siso*, it was illogical to render the mass of people in Qellem landless, eventually turning them into tenants. The letter ordered the provincial administration to penalise authorities responsible for such an act. More importantly it ordered the administration to return to the peasants all lands that had been expropriated by requesting from them receipts as proof of their taxation in the past so they could continue to pay tax on their land.<sup>77</sup> This decision once again reactivated the imperial edict of 1946 recognising the freehold right of the peasants to their holdings.

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<sup>75</sup> IEAMI, Mäkonnen Jämbärè to Abäbä Arägay, Minister of Interior, Yakkatit 25, 1946 [4 March 1954].

<sup>76</sup> IEAMI, Rätta Habtä-Mikael to *Blatta* Gäbrä-Tsadiq, "Report on investigation of land disputes in Qellem," Hamile 5, 1960 [12 July 1968].

<sup>77</sup> IEAMI, *Ras Mäsfen Selaši* to Wallagga provincial administration, Hidar 16, 1948 [25 November 1955].

Although the peasant-*balabbat* antagonism shows continuities, it also demonstrates remarkable changes from the mid-1950s onwards. When the old Anfillo *balabbat* Gimbi Qajeelaa died, his grandson Bantii Waggaa, still only twenty-six, took over his family's land possession issues. As the Ministry of Defence continued to send dozens of Korean War veterans with sealed orders to be granted coffee plantations in Anfillo, Bantii went to the Ministry of the Interior in 1955 and reactivated the imperial edict of 1946.<sup>78</sup> In its letters of 26 August and 6 December, the Ministry of Interior ordered Wallagga province to rescind all grants made in disregard of the imperial edict of 1946 so that people could resume paying tax on their possessions.<sup>79</sup> Reactivation of the imperial order meant a renewed recognition of peasant freehold rights to their land. Bantii apparently wanted to reactivate the edict in order to secure possession of his family's land, but it also became an opportunity for the peasants to benefit from the edict too. In a way it seemed that his achievement offered an opportunity for alliance, rather than antagonism, between the peasants and the *balabbat*.

The *balabbat*'s purpose opposed that of the peasants for obvious reasons. The intention of the *balabbat* was to repossess land that the Qellem administration had granted to *baläwuläta* and *näčläbaš*, to whom both the peasants and the *balabbat* referred to as “outsiders,” even as the sub-province administration embarked on a new round of grants to these “outsiders.” This concept of “outsiders” was the point of intersection—perhaps the only one—where peasant and *balabbat* narratives converged. Although the *balabbat* were apprehensive of peasants who might use the opportunity to challenge their *siso* rights—which had long been a bone of contention between the two—it was against the “outsiders” that the *balabbat* wanted to mobilize the peasants. The *balabbat* and peasant representatives from various parts of Qellem met in August 1955 in the house of Wayyeessaa Bakakkoo (one of the *balabbat*) in Gabaa-

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<sup>78</sup> IEAMI, *Blatta Wäldä-Kiros*, Memorandum to the Emperor, Hiddar 27, 1946 [6 December 1955].

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

Arbii village. At this meeting, the peasant representatives agreed with the *balabbat*—perhaps out of a desire to build trust and a fear of financial pressures—that the latter would meet the central government in Addis Ababa representing both themselves and the peasants.<sup>80</sup>

The meeting at Gabaa-Arbii resulted in the election of peasant and *balabbat* committees, which were given the tasks of constructing and maintaining strategic alliances between the two opposing classes, following up the execution of the reactivated imperial edict and appealing to the Emperor when the district authorities showed renewed defiance. The meeting drafted a new appeal letter and sent it to the Ministry of the Interior, reminding it to push for the execution of the edict.<sup>81</sup> However, the significance of the Gabaa-Arbii meeting lay beyond the policies and decisions that came out of it, because it brought the peasant intellectuals to the forefront of the disputes, whose role had been vital in peasant encounters with Addis Ababa's local allies and Amhara governors since the region became part of the Ethiopian empire at the end of the nineteenth century. At least two generations of peasant intellectuals had shaped the course of peasant interactions with the state and all other local forces. In addition to their roles in villages, where they influenced discourses and inserted themselves into social networks to disseminate necessary information, they now seemed to have obtained an opportunity to become peasant representatives.

Information about the possibility of the peasants winning back their land appears to have spread widely in the region, and by the mid-1950s a spirit of confrontation marked the relationship between the peasants and Amhara *awrajjja* governors on one side and the *balabbat* against Amhara governors on the other. The Oromo peasants were resisting the implementation of the *qäläd* system in its entirety, but they did not admit this directly to the Amhara authorities,

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<sup>80</sup> Informants: Ashebir Karoorsaa, 12/02/10, Gidaamii; Abdataa Lamuu, 25/12/09, Dambi Doolloo; Abdiisaa Tolaa, 10/01/10, Muggi; Minister of Interior to *blatta* Waldakiros, Ter 16, 1948 [January 24, 1956] *Yä Qellem balabbatoch Marèt Yizota Gudday*.

<sup>81</sup> IEAMI, Minister of Interior to *blatta* Wäldäkiros, Ter 16, 1948 [January 24, 1956], *Yä Qellem balabbatoch Marèt Yizota Gudday*.

nor did their petitions and appeals address it directly. Their rejection of the system was presented in lengthy appeals, petitions and litigations which were furnished with detailed explanations of how the introduction of the system had appropriated their land and reduced them to mere tenants. They divided their complaints into the “illegal and selfish” misdeeds of the *balabbat*, the arrogance and “illegality” of Amhara authorities and (in milder terms) the inaction of the central government in rectifying these issues. This does not mean that the essence of their resistance was unclear to the state or the forces that competed against them. Nevertheless, the conclusion in the appeal letters and petitions were often clear, centering on the rejection of the *qälad* system. The peasants chose a more careful political strategy because an outright rejection of the system would be interpreted by the imperial state’s bureaucracy as rebellion against the emperor which, according to the empire’s traditional law, would result in instantaneous eviction.

As part of the unfolding controversy, the Wallagga provincial administration’s council of governors, staffed mostly by Amhara, drafted a memorandum for Abäbä Arägay, the Minister of Defence, who was now in charge of issues relating to land disputes in Qellem, hoping to help him strike back at the reactivated imperial edict of 1946. Quoting the *balabbat* agreement to implement the *qälad* system which they confirmed with their signature, the memorandum proposed that the system be re-enforced and that agricultural lands in Qellem be sold, like those of Kaffa and Iluu Abbäa-boor. The memorandum presented the Anfillo *balabbat* rejection of the *qälad* system as a rebellion against the Ethiopian administration and opposition to the EOC, although all Anfillo *balabbat* were themselves EOC adherents. It also reminded the central government that their “rebellion” had the potential to spread throughout Qellem and perhaps beyond. The memorandum was sent to Abäbä Arägay by the governor.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> IEAMI, *Blatta Wäldä-Kiros* Memorandum to the Emperor, “Sila Qellem Hizboch Abetuta/Regarding Appeal of the People of Qellem,” *Miazia* 24, 1948 [2 May 1956].

Based on that August meeting, the *balabbat* went to Addis Ababa and submitted a renewed appeal to the Ministry of Interior, bringing the case before the Emperor once again. On 27 April 1956 *Ras Mäsfen Seläši*, the Minister of the Interior, who in 1946 had been instrumental in helping *Gimbii Qajeelaa* win the imperial edict, now presented the case to the Emperor as, "...the case of an imperial edict which lingered unimplemented by the governors at the time," and asked the Emperor to revisit the case. The Emperor replied: "...this is not [a case] to be arbitrated by a tribunal. Let all relevant documents be brought to us [the Emperor] and we will pass a necessary decision."<sup>83</sup>

The Emperor set a new appointment date (Säne 22, 1948/ 29 June 1956) for the case to be heard. Sometime between end of April and June the Emperor took the case out of *Ras Mäsfen's* hands and gave it to *Ras Abäbä Arägay*, the Minister of Defence.<sup>84</sup> The Emperor refused to entrust the case to any level of tribunal other than his own imperial court, *yä zūfan chilot*, and had snatched the case from the hands of one of the most influential figures in the imperial government's inner circle. *Ras Mäsfen* also happened to be one of the most notorious absentee landlords—he became the reason for the 1946 imperial edict—suggesting that the case was perceived as an item of high political sensitivity and one in which the verdict would have implications for the imperial edict. It was no longer an appeal—it had become litigation. The way the Emperor concluded the session on 29 June 1956 suggests this interpretation more strongly: *šifäraw*

This is a big issue. The land belongs to both the *balabbat* and the people, [but] it is difficult to pass a decision at the moment since only a small number of *balabbat* came [to attend the session]. It is also said that [representatives of] the people have not come. Let solicitors of the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Interior come into the session; let the people send some 10 to 15 representatives, also some 10 to 15 from the *balabbat*. Then the case

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<sup>83</sup> IEAMI, Rätta Habtä-Mikael to *blatta* Gabra-Tsadiq, "Report on investigation of land disputes in Qellem," Hamile 5, 1960 [12 July 1968].

<sup>84</sup> IEAMI, *Blatta Wäldäkiros*, "Memorandum to the Emperor," Miazia 24, 1948, [May 2, 1956], Sela Qellem Hezboch Abätuta [Regarding Appeal of the people of Qellem].

will be reviewed. In the meantime, no land [in Qellem] should be transferred to any person either in sale or gift.<sup>85</sup>

The Emperor ruled that the next session of the imperial court would meet a year later, on 27 May 1957, to deliberate issues surrounding the right of access to land in Qellem. In the meantime, he affirmed his 1946 imperial edict and halted a new round of land grants the Amhara governors had resumed. The Emperor's imperial edict of 29 June 1956 would be vital because of two immediate consequences. Firstly, they removed the state power Amhara governors of Qellem claimed to have possessed when they resumed district-wide grants to veterans, refugees, civil and military functionaries (*baläwuläta*), *näčläbaš* and their family members—in short, to all state backed Amhara settlers. They used as an excuse the limited number of Korean War veterans the Ministry of Defence had sent to help them obtain coffee plantation land in Anfillo. These edicts were sent instantly to Wallagga provincial government.<sup>86</sup>

Secondly—and more importantly—edicts resulting from the imperial court session of 29 June 1956 damaged the Oromo peasant-*balabbat* strategic alliance forged at the August 1955 meeting and restored the old peasant-*balabbat* class struggle. The peasants revoked from the *balabbat* the representation they endorsed in August 1955, and instead elected a fifteen-man committee that would represent them at any level of court hearings or meetings with any level of government office. The peasant representatives carried out fundraising campaigns that would help pay for travel, accommodation and other necessary expenses as they submitted and followed up appeals and petitions and attended litigations in the imperial court in Addis Ababa. The peasants now stated that the Oromo *balabbat* and the *näčläbaš* were one and the same, and that they were enemies. Peasant representatives produced stronger petitions directed against

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<sup>85</sup> IEAMI, Rätta Habtä-Mikael to *blatta* Gäbra-Tsadiq, "Report on investigation of land disputes in Qellem," Hamile 5, 1960 [12 July 1968].

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

both classes, taking their arguments against the Oromo *balabbat* in particular to a new level by refusing to recognise the *balabbat's* *siso* which they had accepted as their right during the preceding years. They contended that the *balabbat* had no right to claim *siso* or to grant it to others, and no reason even to be involved in the process of land redistribution. Land was collective property, it belonged to all members of society either before the Ethiopian conquest or after. The peasants argued that the *balabbat* had taken possession of freehold land for centuries in the name *siso*, and that their capacity in granting land to the *näčläbaš*, and the extraction of *erbo* (one-forth of the harvest) were all abuses.<sup>87</sup>

The Emperor's core statement at the imperial court hearing of 29 June that "...land belongs both to the people and the *balabbat*..." served to split the Oromo peasant-*balabbat* alliance; it was apparently coined to by the Emperor's closest ministerial echelons specifically for that purpose. However, it simultaneously derailed its own efficient implementation as it discounted the interests of the local Amhara governors and the *näčläbaš* from the formal imperial statements. Made nervous by the implications of the Emperor's recognition of the peasants' and the *balabbat's* legal rights to land as well as his formal acknowledgement of the birth of peasant representation, the Amhara district and sub-district governors turned to the use of local administrative power to challenge these rights. The district governor commenced a lengthy series of correspondences with the Ministry of Interior, in which he questioned the legal bases of the peasant and *balabbat* representatives. On their part, the governors of some sub-districts harassed peasants, imposing financial penalties on some of them for their contributions towards the financial enablement of the peasant committee, or forcing them to contribute towards local government office to cover expenses for these "punitive" measures.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Informants: Ashebir Karoorsaa, 12/02/10, Gidaamii; Abdataa Lamuu, 25/12/09, Dambi Doolloo; Abdiisaa Tolaa, 10/01/10, Muggi; IEWTMRC, Peasant Representatives to Ministry of Interior, Tiqimt 3, 1949 [28 September 1956].

<sup>88</sup> IEAQA, Qellem District Governor's report, Genbot 18, 1949.

By taking such measures, the Amhara authorities opened another door for the *balabbat* to align themselves with the peasants in resisting the state they themselves served.

The Amhara authorities had targets they wanted to achieve: they wanted to use intimidation and detention to thwart the imperial court hearing of 27 May 1957 and sought to persuade both the peasants and the *balabbat* to drop the case. As the date of the hearing approached, the intimidation intensified. The *näčläbaš* became active participants in supporting the Amhara authorities, enthusiastically volunteering as policemen to add to its meagre force. The police arrested some representatives and a number of *balabbat*, forcing them to go to the residences of sub-district governors and sign statements prepared beforehand by Amhara authorities. Those with no reading or writing skills were freed after signing the required statements, but some of the arrested peasant representatives and *balabbat* were not freed until after the May 27 hearing. Others were freed when it was considered too late for them to make it to Addis Ababa for the hearing. As they were released they all produced appeal letters and notified the Ministry of Interior that their signatures had been acquired through violent coercion. The Ministry sent the edict to Wallagga provincial government to investigate these allegations, which the province sent on to the district authorities. The latter appear to have shelved the order.<sup>89</sup> Such was the way the district and sub-district Amhara authorities overthrew the central government's tactical efforts to divide the peasants and the *balabbat*, and instead restored the spirit of alliance between the two groups.

Nevertheless, the intimidation and detentions the Amhara authorities undertook did hit the target. A limited number of peasant representatives and *balabbat* escaped and managed to arrive in Addis Ababa for the imperial court hearing of 27 May 1957. To the dismay of the

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<sup>89</sup> IEAMI, Peasant-*balabbat* petition of Jimma-Horoo sub-district, Ginbot 3, 1949; Riqituu Chone and Danuusa Tullu to the Ministry of Interior, Genbot 17, 1949 [May 25, 1958]; Idem, Gamachu Burar to the Ministry of Interior, Miazya 24, 1949 [May 2, 1958]; Idem, Minister of Interior to Feqraselassè Habtä-Mariam, Säne 18, 1949 [June 25, 1958]; IEWTMRC, Feqraselassè Habtä-Mariam to Qellam district governor, Sane 18, 1949 [June 25, 1958], Yä Qellem Awraja Gezat *balabbatoch* [Balabbat of Qellem Awrajja].



peasant representatives and the *balabbat*, however, the hearing was not held—although for a different reason. The Emperor was unable to attend the hearing as his son Mäkonnen had suddenly died. He authorised *Ras* Abäbä Arägay, the Minister of Defence, to postpone the case to another time, and it was set for 24 June 1958, a year later.<sup>90</sup> Between 27 May 1957 and 24 June 1958, however, the peasant-*balabbat* alliance crystallised in a way that was perhaps never expected by central government authorities. This would surface at the next hearing.

On 24 June 1958, forty-seven representatives from Qellem took part in the litigation meeting held in the compound of the Ministry of Defence and chaired by the Minister himself. The official state record divided the participants outside government officials into three: *balabbat*, peasants, and those who came for themselves. *Balambaras* Ayyaanaa Waddoo, Galaalchaa Maammadee, and Dasta Wayyeessaa, registered in the official records as solicitors of the *balabbat* (የባለቤት ነጋረፈኞች), represented the *balabbat*. Fourteen peasant representatives managed to attend meeting: Daaqaa Uggaa, Gabbisaa Baaroo, Ruudaa Kuraa, Foggii Guumaa, Shuumaa Hordofaa, Saagii Dabalaa, Oliiqaa Ungaashee, Gabbisaa Dotii, Gojamoo Sibuu, Shaambii Onchoo, Raggaasaa Täsämma, Ngaasaa Xintii, Taasisaa Turaa, and Mammo Corqaa. This second group was registered in the minutes under two collective names. They were introduced at the beginning as solicitors of the people (የሕዝብ ነጋረፈኞች) and referred to in the body as *balagüroch* (ባላገሮች, literally rural people), a typical Amharic reference to peasants.<sup>91</sup> Informants identified everyone in this group as peasants, although they believed that some had additional sources of livelihood.<sup>92</sup> These peasant representatives, as discussed above, had been formally introduced for the first time at a *balabbat*-peasant joint meeting held in Gabaa Arbii in August 1955.

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<sup>90</sup> IEAMI, Minutes of the Hearing at the Minister of Defence, Ya Qellam Awraja Gezat *balabbatoch* [*Balabbat* of Qellem Awrajja], Sänè 17, 1950 [June 24, 1958].

<sup>91</sup> IEWTMRC, Minute of 24 June 1958 hearing, “Yä Qellem Awrajja Gizat Balabbatoch,” Sane 17, 1950 [24 June 1958]; Idem, Minister of Interior to *blatta* Waldakiros, Ter 16, 1948 [January 24, 1956] “Yä Qellem *balabbatoch* Marèt Yizota Gudday” [Issue of Qellem Awrajja *Balabbat*]

<sup>92</sup> Informants: Abdiisaa Tolaa, 10/01/10, Muggi; Ashebir Karoorsaa, 12/02/10, Gidaamii.

The third group, referred to in the minute as “those who came for themselves” (በራሳቸው ለመከፋፈል የቀረቡ) was composed of people from two classes. The first were either *balabbat* or their representatives. To all intents and purposes they were part of the *balabbat* class, although they were registered as a distinct group. If there were any differences between them and the *balabbat* representatives, the latter were recognised by the state as having “legal representation” from all Oromo *balabbat* in Qellem, while the former came to attend the meeting in person. Their case was recorded as “land issues of Qellem *balabbat*.” Another eighteen people from the peasant classes whose names were not listed also constituted this group.<sup>93</sup> The Ministry of Finance was represented by its own solicitor and the Ministry of Interior by a deputy-minister and a solicitor.<sup>94</sup> While archival sources reflect how and why the process of litigation began, the people involved, and how it was undertaken on 24 June 1958, they do not explain why the Emperor did not attend the litigation in person. In fact, the case was formally and fully entrusted to the Minister of Defence, *Ras Abäbä*.

When asked to explain and defend their case, the *balabbat* argued that:

..as we were granted our *siso* and the state took over the reminder [of the land], the people were evicted from their possession and will likely remain evictees. We took into account the misfortune of the people and we are not looking for our own benefits alone. This is the reason why we have decided to leave behind the *siso* and are requesting that both the people and ourselves be allowed to pay tax on our [land] possessions.<sup>95</sup>

The *balabbat*, who claimed in their previous appeals that the peasants had no right of tenure and could be evicted at any time, now reversed their argument and defended the peasants’ rights to land and security of tenure. Their argument now was over the amount of *siso* land won for themselves and the remainder of the land taken over by the state when the majority of Qellem’s people became landless, turning them into tenants. It was their contention before a session

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<sup>93</sup> IEWTMRC, Minute of 24 June 1958 hearing, “Yä Qellem Awrajja Gizat Balabbatoch [*Balabbat* of Qellem Awrajja],” Sänè 17, 1950 [24 June 1958].

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

delegated by the imperial court that they were prepared to lose the foundation of their economic livelihoods and social standing, the *siso*, and pay tax on all the land they possessed with the people residing on it. Put more simply, the *balabbat* rejected the *qälad* system. Given the long-standing feuds between the *balabbat* and the peasants, and the nature and contents of the recent appeals and petitions from the two opposing sides, the imperial government authorities must have expected further schisms between the two sides, turning them against one another.

When asked to present their position, the peasants, after briefly summarising the damage the *qälad* system had inflicted on them, explained how and why they had reached this conclusion instead of presenting any substantive point of dispute, and declared to the authorities that there was no dispute anymore between them and the *balabbat* class:

...Before the introduction of the *qälad* system we paid tribute and tax based on *qufir-gäbbar* system, based on the amount of wealth (cattle and labour) [not on land]. We thus held our land as *rist*. With the introduction of the *qälad* system, agricultural tenure became based on land. Having obtained their *siso* [proportion] according to the rules [of the *qälad* system] the *balabbat* took away our *rist* and *čiqinna* in the name of *siso*. When we appealed [to them] they reviewed the issue and said we do not need *siso* anymore. *There is no dispute between us [the peasants] and the balabbat...*<sup>96</sup>

The key word in this appeal is *čiqinatachin*/ጭቅናታችን, a derivative of *čiqä*/ጭቃ (an Amharic word for mud, *dhoqqee* in Oromo), a word that referred to a plot of individual land inherited from one's ancestors. This had formed the central tenet of peasant appeals filed at different levels since the implementation of the *qälad* system in 1944–45. Since the share the *balabbat* were allowed to obtain through the *qälad* system's appropriation and redistribution was so small, they helped themselves, cutting into a share of common Oromo land. Following its restoration in 1941, the imperial state declared that it had abolished the *hambifataa* system, a system where the *balabbat* retained a limited number of peasant families for themselves and collected one-fourth of their produce from them while demanding one day's labour per week.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

But in practice the *balabbat* had expanded this process of local dispossession under the *hambifataa* system.

The peasant representatives argued that the introduction of the *qälad* system of land measurement abolished the *qufir-gäbbar* system that had recognised the land they occupied as *rist*—“generational property”—and replaced it with a system that gave the *balabbat* the right to *siso*, which also included their *rist* and/or *dhoqqee*. The remaining land, the peasants added, had been taken by the state as the Ministry of Finance had declared it unoccupied state land (ሰው እንዳልተሰራበት ጠፍ የመንግስት መሬት), despite the fact that no such category of land existed. The peasants held such lands collectively, in clans or sub-clan social organisations, and used it for communal peasant purposes, as grazing fields for cattle or for meetings when necessary. The *qalad* system therefore made them landless tenants on their own “generational property,” even though they had state receipts for the years of tax they had paid. The cause of their consternation was the introduction of the *qalad* system, and the peasants now joined the *balabbat* in expressing their rejection of the *qalad* system, openly stating that there was no dispute between the peasants and the *balabbat* (በኛና ባላባቶቹ መካከል ክርክር የለም [“there is no dispute of any kind between us two”]).

Faced with a united demand to abolish the *qälad* system in its entirety, the committee resorted to the use of imperial Ethiopia’s traditional weapon, bureaucratic hurdles, to wear out this form of resistance. The committee asked the *balabbat* and the peasants several questions they needed to answer, and to produce supporting evidence for those answers at the next meeting. Key among the questions the committee asked the *balabbat* were: “how many of the *balabbat* are willing to drop their *siso* and pay tax on all the land they are holding?”; “how many *gaša* of land does each *balabbat* possess?”; “on how many *gaša* of land is each of the *balabbat* paying tax at the moment?”; “which is greater in size—the land they received as *siso* or the land they are actually holding?” Meanwhile, the questions the committee asked the

peasants were: “since you have said in your written appeals you lost your *rist* because of the introduction of the *qäläd* system in 1944–45, and that you appealed to his Majesty who had made an imperial edict allowing you to pay tax on the land you have occupied, let us know if there exists in writing such an evidence of this edict,” and “where are the receipts you were issued with covering the period you said you were paying state taxes on your holdings?”<sup>97</sup> The proceedings indicated that the committee would, in the event of the petitioners’ failure to produce the required evidence, set another appointment date and send to Qellem an investigative team who would advise to the government on what course of action to take.<sup>98</sup>

The answers to the questions the committee raised were all in the imperial archives in Addis Ababa, and would have taken only a few hours to find if the committee had really wanted to see them. By asking the peasants and the *balabbat* a series of separate questions, the committee appeared ready to threaten the legal basis of their possessions, although the members were well aware that the answers were in the imperial archives held at the Ministries of Finance and Interior. The questions were tools the committee used to confront and undermine the alliance that had grown between the peasants and the *balabbat*. The next appointment date was set for the following year, 8 February 1959—but the problem for the authorities was that the peasants and the *balabbat* were both conscious of what the committee’s questions intended to achieve.

One feature of the litigation of 24 June 1958 was the ethnic overtones it raised. As a subordinate elite in the peripheries of the Ethiopian empire, the *balabbat* served as agents of the state in the eyes of the people, and as their representatives in the eyes of the state, “serving as both objects of central policies of domination and as subjects in their implementation and execution.”<sup>99</sup> As the *balabbat* now openly allied themselves with the peasants who were

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Alexander J Moly, *Revolutions, Nations, Empires: Conceptual limits and theoretical possibilities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 119.

working to achieve the dissolution of the *qälad* system in its entirety, they were opting to show the Amhara state for what it actually was—a state that had long been known to its people for its commitment to multiple exploitation and subjugation, as well as degrading their language and culture. The peasant resistance had at this point removed the *balabbat*'s support and exposed the fact that the dispute had ethnic overtones: it was a dispute between the Amhara authorities and the Oromo people of Qellem, rather than between the Oromo *balabbat* and peasants separately. In political terms, the state's loss of the *balabbat* to the peasants was seen as the loss of a powerful tool of exploitation, domination and stable administration. In its history of conquest and subjugation in the peripheries of its empire, the Ethiopian state was known for co-opting existing elite classes, or creating one where none had previously existed. Even when it seemed that the state did not to co-opt indigenous elites, it did its best to win them over using whatever means were at hand. In fact, the questions presented to the *balabbat* at the June 1958 meeting suggest that the state was committed to winning them back, not destroying them.

As the litigants returned home, the government embarked on its role of extending bureaucratic hurdles that would stretch down to the provincial, sub-provincial, district and sub-district levels, sending confusion to the former in order to redefine the rights of access to land in Qellem in a way that best suited the state's own interests. In 1959 and 1960, the Ministries of the Interior and Defence exchanged correspondence, sending copies to Wallagga province along with edicts to send the letters down the architecture of state administration to its endpoints, asking for proof of peasant and *balabbat* evidence on tax payments. The other focus of the correspondence concerned the pre-1941 nature of the land tenure system in Qellem. On some occasions the peasants accused the *balabbat*, and sometimes one of them tried to prove or disprove claims by the other. But the real challenge was that both parties were unable to find

tax receipts for years immediately prior to implementation of the *qäläd* system, particularly receipts for 1943–44 and 1944–45.<sup>100</sup> The peasants, meanwhile, produced taxation receipts for the period before Italian occupation,<sup>101</sup> constituting overwhelming evidence that prevented the re-imposition of the *qäläd* system.

In the meantime, the Ministry of Finance injected another form of access to land into the dynamics of the process, which would provoke yet more competition among various groups. Since the Emperor reconfirmed his imperial edict of 1946, putting on hold any type of sale or grant of land, the Ministry sent a guideline to Qellem under which the lands which had been classified as state land, or *madäriya* land during the implementation of *qäläd* system would now be made available on lease for two years with possibility of extension. The paradox is that this guideline had already been sent to the Qellem district administration in 1942, and had been there ever since, ignored by the district authorities.<sup>102</sup> Whatever the Ministry of Finance's intentions were, the peasants and the *balabbat* viewed the availability of land on lease as an opportunity to follow an indirect route that would lead them towards winning freehold rights over the land they occupied and farmed.<sup>103</sup>

The peasants perceived this as an opportunity, and rushed to submit applications to obtain leases on the land they had already been farming. The district and sub-district administration offices became flooded with peasant applications as the better-off peasants competed to lease state lands for cereal or coffee cultivation and eventual freehold rights. The *balabbat* too became involved in lease arrangements to obtain land for the same purposes.<sup>104</sup> In addition to the *balabbat* and the peasants, who saw the offer of leases as a demonstration of

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<sup>100</sup> IEAMI, Rätta Habtä-Mikael to *balatta* Gäbrä-Tšadeq, Minister of State for Ministry of Land Reform and Administration, Sela Qellam hezboch abetuta Hamle 5, 1960, [July 12, 1968].

<sup>101</sup> IEWTMRC, Petitions submitted to the Ministry of Interior by peasant representatives, Yakkatit 7, 1953 [14 February 1961], and Yakkatit 13, 1953 [20 February 1961].

<sup>102</sup> IEWTMRC, Ministry of Finance to Qellem district administration, Miazia 12, 1951 [04/20/1959].

<sup>103</sup> IEWTMRC, Petitions submitted to the Ministry of Interior by peasant representatives, Yakkatit 7, 1953 [14 February 1961], and Yakkatit 13, 1953 [20 February 1961].

<sup>104</sup> IEWTMRC, Qellem District Administration to the Ministry of Finance, Miazia 13, 1951 [04/21/1959].

their resistance to the *qälad* system, urban businessmen, traders and merchants also became attracted to the leasing system. These were mainly Amhara immigrants from Wallo, Gojjam, Gondar, and Gurage and Silti from Šawaas well as Greeks and Armenians who had settled there during the Sayyoo-Gambella trade period in the early twentieth century. Most of these men had become integrated into the *balabbat* social network and to some extent were also related to the peasantry—apart from the Gurage and Silti who usually kept their matrimonial circles within their own ethno-cultural circles because of the nature of their livelihoods.<sup>105</sup> The result of this leasing system made the ethnic profiles of the rivalry much more diverse, although the numbers that made up this group remained comparatively small. Although the availability of leasehold land brought the peasants, the *balabbat* and the Amhara immigrants into competition, it simultaneously extended the *balabbat*-peasant alliance. But whatever the nature of the third group was, and whatever its choice of alliance, the Ministry of Finance's actions had introduced a third rival group to claim the land.

Before the arrival of the old copy of guidelines for the leases, however, the governor of Qellem, *Däjjazmach* Šifäraw, had granted or leased land to local civil and military Amhara government functionaries in 1945–46. This was done in violation of the guidelines and the imperial edict of 1946. Leasing did not even come under the purview of the governors, and was supposed to be arranged by the Ministry of Interior. As the new land leases began, Amhara land grantees were threatened by the imperial edict of 1946—which the Emperor reconfirmed in 1956—and by the fact that the old guidelines were re-established. As if this was not enough, the peasants and the *balabbat* began fresh appeals and litigations against them.<sup>106</sup> Meanwhile the Amhara authorities in Qellem hit back at the Oromo *balabbat*. They mobilised *näčläbaš*, who were numerous and had matrimonial ties with Oromo *balabbat*. The authorities had the

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<sup>105</sup> IEWTMRC, Qellem District Administration to the Ministry of Finance, “Ya Qellem Hizboch Abetuta [Appeal of the People of Qellem,” Gibot 21, 1951 [05/29/1959]

<sup>106</sup> IEAMI, *Blatta* Wäldä-Kiros Memorandum to the Emperor, “Sila Qellem Hizboch Abetuta.” Miazia 24, 1948 [2 May 1956].



latter sign in fingerprints that they still agreed to have their *siso* and wished to see the re-imposition of the *qäläd* system. Forty-one out of a total of 135 *balabbat* gave their word to the *näčläbaš* and signed the document. The governors organised the signatures and filed accusations against the remaining defiant *balabbat*, who mostly came from the western part of the district, and were considered to be accusers of the Ethiopian state, transgressors of its ancient laws and enemies of the Emperor, and did not share the views of most of the Oromo *balabbat* in the eastern part of Qellem.<sup>107</sup> The accusations were the same old allegations against anything Oromo, but the intention now was to show the central government that litigations against the *qäläd* system in Qellem were not supported by all *balabbat*, and that any attempt to create a distinct social base on which the litigants agreed could be isolated and defeated.

Despite the presence in the June 1958 litigation of three *balabbat* whom the state recognised in its records as official representatives of the Qellem *balabbat*, and thirteen of “those who came for themselves”—again mostly from the *balabbat* and whose interests were recorded as ‘land issues of Qellem *balabbat*’—central government authorities did not hesitate to consider the accusation that intended to make the rebel *balabbat* a minority. While considerations of the accusations against the *balabbat* were proceeding, the litigation hearing appointed for 8 February 1959 was cancelled. Despite this, the representatives of both classes pushed on, filing as much evidence as they could and submitting it to the Ministries of the Interior and Finance.<sup>108</sup> Both ministries embarked upon a new wave of correspondence requiring the provincial and district authorities to explain various developments on the land tenure system in Qellem. Since the basis of evidence on taxation came from the 1933–35,

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<sup>107</sup> IEWTMRC, Qellem District Administration to the Ministry of Finance, “Ya Qellem Hizboch Abetuta [Appeal of the People of Qellem],” Gibot 21, 1951 [05/29/1959]

<sup>108</sup> IEWTMRC, Peasant representatives to the Ministries of Interior and Finance, Hamle 13, 1951, [July 20, 1959]; *Balabbat* representatives to the Ministries of Interior and Finance Hamle 15, 1951 [22 July 1959].

1942/43 and 1943/44 periods, the correspondence focused particularly on those periods too.<sup>109</sup> In December 1960, an abortive coup in Addis Ababa had *Ras* Abäbä killed and responsibility for Qellem's land litigation was returned to the Ministry of Interior.

Aware of the accusations against the *balabbat*, the peasant representatives filed another appeal, requesting the Ministry of Interior to reinstate the litigation session which had been pending since the February 1959 hearing had been cancelled. The *balabbat* followed suit.<sup>110</sup> The Ministry refused to restore the litigation session, but *Ras* Andargachäw Masay, Minister of the Interior, organised an investigative committee composed of three men who were ordered to visit Qellem, investigate the case in depth, organise hearings, and table a proposal for final policy measures. Two members of the committee were recruited from the Ministry of Interior, and the third was district governor himself, Colonel Täšomä Irgätu. The committee was led by Ayalaw Gètahun.<sup>111</sup> The investigation committee project became the state's third tactical move since the June 1958 hearing, the first and the second being the waves of official correspondence unleashed by imperial authorities to combat the peasant-*balabbat* alliance, and the beginning of the land-lease programme that had diverted peasant-*balabbat* attention away from petitions, appeals and litigations against the *qälad* system.

While these multiple layers of allegations and counter-allegations were going on, the hearing appointed for 8 February 1959 failed to take place.<sup>112</sup> The authorities gave no reason for its cancellation, and there is no such recorded note available in the archives. The state was apparently alarmed by the peasant-*balabbat* alliance, which, if allowed to proceed the way the litigations were going, would most probably defeat the state in the short term and achieve the

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<sup>109</sup> IEAMI, Abiy Abäbä to the Ministry of the Interior, Ṭir 21,1935 (29 January, 1943); Idem, *Blatta* Wäldä-Kiros Memorandum to the Emperor, "Sila Qellem Hizboch Abetuta [Regarding Appeal of the People of Qellem]," Miazia 24, 1948 [2 May 1956].

<sup>110</sup> IEAMI, *Blatta* Wäldä-Kiros Memorandum to the Emperor, "Sila Qellem Hizboch Abetuta." Miazia 24, 1948 [2 May 1956].

<sup>111</sup> Ibid; Yimam Biru and Ayalaw Getahun to Asfaw Minaläsawa, head of a directorate at the Ministry of Interior, Mägabit 23,1951 [1 April 1959].

<sup>112</sup> IEAMI, Rätta Habtä-Mikael to *blatta* Gäbrä-Tsadiq, "Report on investigation of land disputes in Qellem," Hamile 5, 1960 [12 July 1968]

peasant-*balabbat* alliance's target, which was the complete revocation of the *qälad* system. Given the intentions of imperial Ethiopia that were outlined at the beginning of this chapter, overturning the *qälad* system would mean abandoning aims for the political integration of the region's Macca Oromo. From the discussions and from what would follow it can be seen that the state had already created a different course by which it believed it could disperse the alliances of its enemies, create alternative alliances vital to repel its foes and best defend its interests. As the committee readied itself to embark upon its duty, claimants on the land now consisted of four groups of protagonists: the peasants, the *balabbat*, civil and military functionaries of the state and multi-ethnic urban traders and merchants.

From the state's perspective, the *qälad* system was a political project by which it could appropriate and re-appropriate land to create a distinct politico-legal basis from which the Amhara colonists could obtain preferential access to land. In short, the state was attempting to create a stratum of wealthy and powerful Amhara landlords at village level to promote the political integration of the region. The state's investigation committee planned to carry out two separate but related works. The first was to undertake an inventory of lands possessed by each *balabbat* in Qellem, checking that the size of land corresponded with the official state register as well as the local state registry records available in the government administration offices. The second was to investigate why land grants had been carried out in violation of the imperial edict of 1946.

The committee began its work by summoning each *balabbat* in Qellem, ordering him to register all land he possessed and giving him two options: to take *siso*, one-third out of ten (which meant obtaining freehold rights, hence confirming the re-imposition of the *qälad* system), or to pay tax on all of his land along with its inhabitants, which meant abandoning *siso* to share the tax load on the size of land with all its occupiers. This effectively meant that the *balabbat* wanted to revoke the *qälad* system. Either choice would involve re-measuring the

land. Eighty-four out of one hundred and thirty-five *balabbat* in Qellem chose to pay tax on their possessions, rejecting the *qälad* system; forty-eight agreed to take *siso* and confirmed the re-imposition of the *qälad* system. The remaining three were reported missing during the inventory.<sup>113</sup> Thus, the majority of Qellem *balabbat* rejected the *qälad* system, a confirmation of their representatives' statement during the June 1958 hearing in Addis Ababa. Official correspondence does not indicate any meeting the *balabbat* might have held to coordinate their responses, neither do intelligence reports make any mention of such a meeting. It appears that representatives had circulated the message orally. A comparison of the number of *balabbat* who rejected the *qälad* system and those who agreed to its re-imposition had implications on the extent to which imperial Ethiopia's political integration succeeded in Qellem, and we will return to this at the conclusion of the thesis.

The committee then embarked upon an investigation into why the authorities in Qellem had carried out land grants between 1946 and 1954, disregarding the imperial edict of 1946. *Däjjazmach* Šifäraw, Qellem's governor under whose governorship the *qälad* system of land measurement had been introduced and who had been the first governor to carry out the grants, had already been removed, and all his staff had been transferred to other responsibilities. Responding to questions from the committee, the Qellem authorities argued that there was no such imperial edict in their archive. Colonel Täšomä Irgätu, the governor in office and a member of the committee stated briefly and clearly: "the governor [who ruled Qellem] before me did not hand over to me any edict of this type."<sup>114</sup> The committee did not investigate any further, and nothing came of it.

As the committee completed its investigation, it submitted its findings and proposed certain measures to the Ministry of Interior. The committee reported that there had been no

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

tenancy in Qellem before the introduction of the *qälad* system, and peasants had been state *gäbbar*, paying taxes to the state (particularly in 1933–35 and 1941–44) on the land they held. Most of the *balabbat* had taken more lands than their own *siso*, and it was from the *siso* that the peasants were turned to tenants, suggesting that the peasants became landless and were turned to tenants by the actions of the *balabbat*, not by the *qälad* system itself. The committee reported that the majority of the *balabbat* had chosen to pay tax on all their possessions and rejected the *qälad* system, but did not make any policy recommendation based on this. The committee also highlighted in its report that the imperial edict of 1946 remained unimplemented.

However, it did not raise the point that the people who had been settled by the state (*baläwuläta*, *näčläbaš*, Amhara governors and their families, as well as civil and military functionaries) who had received land on grant and lease from the district administration between 1946 and 1958 had been offered this land in disregard of the imperial edict. Thus, in its recommendation to the Ministry, the committee underscored the idea that the Ministry should be committed to safeguarding the grantees and leaseholders of the province. In a nutshell, these were all state affiliated Amhara who according to the peasants were “aliens and outsiders”, but from the state’s point of view were favoured groups whom it wanted to control land in the hope of establishing them at the top of village level social structure, from which point they could engineer the political integration of the Macca Oromo of the region.<sup>115</sup> In short, the committee confirmed that the peasant claims reflected their decades-old petitions and appeals accusing the *balabbat* of abusing the *qälad* system, but pushed both of these to the margins and placed the claims of state sponsored Amhara settlers at the heart of the issue. The committee did not comment on the interests of the fourth group—the multi-ethnic traders and merchants—at all.

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

The Ministry took into account the fact that the confrontations were becoming more multi-faceted and complex than ever, but it did not take any immediate measures, neither did it declare the findings and recommendations of the committee to the people. It needed to consider the matter and devise new tactics and strategies, because declaring in favour of the rights of Amhara settlers who received land through grants and leases based on the committee's proposals would amount to a reversal of the 1946 imperial edict, as the grants and leases between 1946 and 1958 had been carried out in disregard of that imperial edict. Something would have to come from the Emperor himself. In the end the Ministry sent notes to the province in 1961 to the effect that the Emperor himself would be visiting Wallagga the following year and stating that he would finalise the committee's decisions on rights of access to land in Qellem.<sup>116</sup>

The Emperor arrived in Dambi-Doolloo, the administrative centre of Qellem, in February 1961. At the end of his visit he made an edict that favoured local agents of the state:

...we [the Emperor] found out that people who were granted land either as *madäriya* or *rist* did not take it by force, they were given it by government authority as per the proclamation. They should be allowed to continue holding the land and pay tax on it...People who secured land on contract trusting the government invested huge amounts of money clearing the forest, and planted between 20,000 and 30,000 coffee plants. If the contractor had no *rist* and he can prove he had developed the land himself, let him get a share of the land as per the proclamation...<sup>117</sup>

In short, the Emperor confirmed the pre-1958 grants and leases carried out in violation and gross disregard of the edict he had sent to Qellem in 1946 and had later reconfirmed twice. This was how the Emperor, despite his imperial edict of 1946, made it clear that there would be no compromise or negotiation under any circumstance regarding efforts at 'planting' as many Amhara as possible. The local Amhara governors were, generally speaking, in accord

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<sup>116</sup> IEAWGG, The Ministry of Interior to Wallagga Provincial Government, Mägabit 6, 1953 [15 March 1961].

<sup>117</sup> IEAQA, An edict declared in Dambi-Doolloo Town, "Bä Dambi-Dollo Katama Lay Yätänägärä Awaj," Yäkkatit 7, 1953 [14 February 1961].

with the interests of the imperial state, because despite the methods they pursued or the administrative mistakes they had committed, they had expropriated land and given it to their “favourites.”

In contrast to peasant narratives, the edict meant that the people on whose behalf the land had been expropriated were not “opportunists,” neither were they “outsiders and aliens.” They were, from the perspective of the imperial state, local supporters, helping the system run and remaining vital for its survival. Removing them demanded a heavy cost which Ethiopia was required to pay during the 1974 revolution that swept the country.<sup>118</sup> After all, the *qälad* system was based more on political motives than any other, although the Emperor followed for over two decades the policy of appeasing the petitioners and attempted to show himself as a fair Emperor trying to listen to the troubles of his people.

When the peasants and the *balabbat* no longer heard decisions made by the Ministry from Naqamtee, they made fresh appeals in December 1962 to Wallagga provincial government and took turns until 1965 to travel between Qellem and Naqamtee to follow up on the process. This was particularly exhausting and expensive for them. Their meagre financial resources had been consumed by bureaucratic processes, bribery, travel, stationery and related matters. The provincial governors, like the Ministry of Interior, could make no clear decisions on their appeals. In 1965, however, the provincial and district authorities openly recognized the imperial edict of 1946 and transmitted such information to the public via local government. They communicated the same decision when requested by peasant and *balabbat* representatives.<sup>119</sup> The news spread quickly by word of mouth, but not all peasants immediately understood its connotations regarding their status.

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<sup>118</sup> J. Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last Two*, 6.

<sup>119</sup> Informants: Ashebir Karoorsaa, 12/02/10, Gidaamii; Abdataa Lamuu, 25/12/09, Dambi Doolloo; Abdiisaa Tolaa, 10/01/10, Muggi.

That same year (1965) Sahlu Däḥayè, the newly appointed provincial governor, considered appeals that had been piling up for years, and asked the Ministry of Interior what it planned to do regarding pending decisions on land rights issues in Qellem—especially those pertaining to the decisions on the investigation committee’s findings. In a reply sent to the province the following year (1966), the Ministry stated that the people of Qellem should pay tax on their individual land possessions, a decision Sahlu Däḥayè orally communicated to peasant and *balabbat* representatives who were waiting for a response in Naqamtee. He then sent a copy of that same decision to the Qellem district administration in writing.<sup>120</sup> Put simply, the imperial government in Addis Ababa felt that it had established the *baläwuläta* and *näčläbaš* into secure bases, and could now revoke the *qäläd* system in Qellem. This information spread widely and quickly.

The period after 1965 became a time in which each group dealt with the paperwork confirming their individual freehold rights. This process was extremely slow, particularly for the peasants, who had already been exhausted by two decades of making financial contributions towards their appeals and petitions. The peasants had little money left to bribe local officials at the Ministry of Finance to push the paperwork through as quickly as possible, so the other two groups took precedence. Showing the officials tax receipts for the land they obtained during and after 1958, and quoting the now generally acknowledged imperial edict of 1946, the traders and merchants bribed officials and workers and had their lands quickly converted to freehold. With ready cash, they became the most influential group, and took advantage of the situation to amass more land. They were able to get vast tracts of land ranging between one and fifteen

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<sup>120</sup> IEAMI, Sahlu Däḥayè to the Ministry of Interior, Tahsas 12, 1955 [21 December 1965]; The Ministry of Interior to Sahlu Däḥayè, Tiqimt 17, 1959 [27 October 1966]; IEAQA, Sahlu Däḥayè to Qellem District Administration Office, Hidar 8, 1959 [17 November 1966].



*gaša* changed to freehold possession, both legally and illegally. The *balabbat* also exploited the situation and moved quickly to transfer their lands into freehold.<sup>121</sup>

For the peasants, having their title deeds recognised on paper was no less challenging than the confrontations they had endured over the last two decades. Not all peasants understood the repercussions of the state's final response regarding their right of access to land. There were important factors that kept them disenfranchised. Those who were very close to the process, and the dynamics of two decades of peasant petitions, appeals and litigations became more conscious than all the rest. Such peasants appeared to have understood the full implications of the Ministry of Interior's letter, and acted immediately to get their individual title deeds recognised by legal state documentation. Again, not all of them had sufficient financial capabilities to pay the bribes that were openly and regularly demanded by state officials. Those who could afford to pay the bribes did so and worked their way through the process sooner, but those who could not took traditional loans at high interest rates, *araaxaa*, from the *balabbat*, merchants or traders, or any kin. The loan amounts and the usurious interest rates meant that the money that would be unlikely to be paid back.<sup>122</sup> The 1974 revolution saved these peasants from losing their land altogether.

There were, however, many peasants who did not fully understand what the edict meant regarding their land. Unable to fully comprehend the news they had heard through word of mouth, such peasants had to look to the peasant representatives, the intellectual forces behind the struggle, for interpretation and explanation. Some of the peasant intellectuals were themselves busy travelling to district and sub-district administrative centres processing for themselves the paperwork that would legalise their own individual freeholds. The peasants had to wait, and when they realised that the edict meant that bureaucratic hurdles still blocked their

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<sup>121</sup> Informants: Abdiisaa Tolaa, 10/01/10, Muggi; Muggi; IEAQA, Rätta Habtä-Mikael to *blatta* Gäbrä-Tsadiq, "Report on investigation of land disputes in Qellem," Hamile 5, 1960 [12 July 1968].

<sup>122</sup> Informants: Ashebir Karoorsaa, 12/02/10, Gidaamii; Abdataa Lamuu, 25/12/09, Dambi Doolloo; Abdiisaa Tolaa, 10/01/10, Muggi.

progress, they were divided into those who could afford to pay the bribes to overcome them and those who could not. While some sold their right of access to land to those with ready cash, others insisted on facing whatever the process demanded. During the years between 1965 and 1974, this poorer group had to endure another round of distress caused by the process. For such peasants, the continuing dispute brought another decade of anxiety, periodic financial contributions to sponsor their petitions and appeals and the pain of yet more bureaucratic hurdles. Informants reported that three decades of peasant commitment to the struggle to win back their land had worsened their poverty. As if this were not enough, the state began to impose higher taxes on lands that had been converted to freehold.<sup>123</sup> Dealing with such anomalies emerging from the implementation of the same state order became the job of the newly created Ministry of Land Reform and Administration.<sup>124</sup>

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the imperial government's declared objective in implementing the *qäläd* system of land measurement was an effort to increase state revenue, but which was also clearly geared towards the political integration of the conquered south. This did not succeed as planned at the national level, because it was contested, compromised and reshaped through active involvement of local social forces who produced petitions, appeals and court litigation. In fact the transformative power of the imperial state was undermined in the process. As Leonardi and Vaughan explain in the case of Condominium Sudan, oppressed people often employ the appeal and petition hierarchy "to access the state itself."<sup>125</sup> A careful consideration of petitions and appeals submitted by both the peasants and the *balabbat* of Qellem using the imperial state's own land laws, edicts and orders suggests that the confrontations were also advanced with intention of making claims on the state. The most

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<sup>123</sup> Informants: Abdiisaa Tolaa, 10/01/10, Muggi; IEAQA, Rätta Habtä-Mikael to *blatta* Gäbrä-Tsadiq, "Report on investigation of land disputes in Qellem," Hamile 5, 1960 [12 July 1968].

<sup>124</sup> IEAQA, Rätta Habtä-Mikael to *blatta* Gäbrä-Tsadiq, "Report on investigation of land disputes in Qellem," Hamile 5, 1960 [12 July 1968]; Informant: Abdiisaa Tolaa, 10/01/10, Muggi.

<sup>125</sup> C. Leonardi and C. Vaughan, "We are oppressed," 86.

spectacular feature of the appeal, petition and litigation process was the growing consciousness among the local Macca Oromo peasants of the hierarchies of government and central government officials. The peasants and the *balabbat*, sometimes separately and sometimes in unison, appealed and petitioned to the highest central government offices (particularly the Ministry of the Interior) and its officials, including the Emperor, to protest against distinctive and specific methods of implementation of the *qalad* system by Amhara governors in Qellem, although there were occasions when they protested against the central imperial government itself. The assumption and thought that underlay the practice of appealing, petitioning and litigating was that the state could possibly be prevailed on in demanding rights by employing its own land laws. While the framing of the appeals, petitions and litigations were shaped by imperial laws, their content was heavily frameworked by issues of genealogy and historical consciousness, which the peasant intellectuals used to construct their narratives of resistance. The struggles over the rights to access and use agricultural land in Qellem were, therefore, also “struggles over access to the state, [which] in turn helped to produce a translocal, hierarchical idea of the state”<sup>126</sup> to which people and local elites appealed in the course their confrontations. These local processes—land appropriation, varying forms of protests, compromises and bargains—can, in fact, as the most recent literature suggest be unravelled as the process of state construction in themselves.<sup>127</sup>

The legal battles against the state took nearly three decades to resolve, but as far as the history of Ethiopia was concerned this was an exception, and perhaps the only example of the system of tenancy common in the conquered south being legally retracted. When the revolution that overthrew the imperial regime exploded in February 1974, the Ministry of Land Reform and Administration was ready to make decisions as to whether or not such transfers had been

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<sup>126</sup> C. Leonardi and C. Vaughan, “We are oppressed,” 96.

<sup>127</sup> See, for example, C. Leonardi, *Dealing with government in South Sudan*; C. Leonardi and C. Vaughan, “We are oppressed,” 96, 74-100; C. Leonardi, *Dealing with government in South Sudan*.

carried out in accordance with the laws of the Empire. The revolution overturned not only the significance of the work but also the position of the people who had for decades ‘illegally’ amassed agricultural lands in the region. Imperial Ethiopia’s innovation of the *qäläd* system was a well-defined political project designed for and practiced in the provinces of the conquered south. It was an innovation that specifically targeted the conquered south, revealing an overarching goal of the *qäläd* system that lay far beyond the simple commercialisation of land. Its intention and target was, as this chapter has argued with particular reference to Qellem, to achieve the political integration of the south.

## Conclusion

This chapter argued that the fundamental objective of imperial Ethiopia’s efforts to introduce and implement the *qäläd* system in the largely Macca Oromo territory of Qellem was to settle Amhara colonists, *tiklägnoch*, on agricultural lands, in the hope of making them wealthy and powerful landlords who would occupy the highest position of the social ladder at village levels. This did not succeed as had initially been planned in Addis Ababa. The overarching objective the imperial state wanted to achieve was compromised, negotiated and re-negotiated in the course of contestations, counter-contestations and bargains over the implementation of the *qäläd* system which the state had initiated itself. The state did not succeed as planned at the national level, because it was contested through peasant and *balabbat* petitions, appeals and court litigations. Indeed, the transformative power of the imperial state was undermined in the process. As the local people felt oppressed they employed the appeal and petition hierarchy to access the state itself. These variegated forms of contestation and subsequent state reactions to them revealed in the process the tension and dissonance within the state hierarchies of imperial Ethiopia, namely the considerable level of discretion of local governors and successive attempts by the central imperial government in Addis Ababa to re-assert control over local

regimes of power. This was especially apparent in the post-1946 period, when the matter of implementing imperial order was disrupted by local controversies and bureaucratic hurdles. In short, the multiple forms of state-society interaction analysed in this chapter demonstrate how the Ethiopian state was imagined, negotiated and partially legitimised in Qellem, as well as the ways in which it was resisted.

It became unpalatable for the Oromo *balabbat* to take a subordinate role to the lowest *näčläbaš*, as they had during the *näſſagna-gäbbar* system (1917–33), and the Oromo peasants refused to lay down their hereditary rights of access to land. Eventually the two groups formed an alliance, forcing the Empire to finally cancel the *qalad* system. The intention of the system to ease the political integration of the indigenous people into the empire was not well served in Qellem. The fact that the overwhelming majority of the *balabbat* (eighty-four out of 135) chose to reject the *qälad* system implies that the political integration project did not progress, not even within the co-opted class, let alone the peasants. Turning the peasants from landowning *gäbbar* to tenants further hindered the project. Whether or not tenancy helped the process of political integration in other parts of the conquered south remains a subject for future historical research. However, imperial Ethiopia's attempt at political integration did not depend solely on the *qalad* system, it also employed the EOC. The next chapter will analyse the role the EOC took in the Empire's drive for political integration, using Qellem as a historical laboratory.

## CHAPTER SIX

### EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY, THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH, AND THE IMPERIAL STATE IN QELLEM (1941-1974)

All forms of major religion in Ethiopia—Christianity and Islam as well as indigenous belief systems—helped shape vital parts of its society. They invariably informed the value systems, culture, social organizations, the politics and even the means of survival of diverse communities in Ethiopia. In the last few decades, a few historical and religious studies<sup>1</sup> have formed the basis of a canon of literature on their roles and significantly extended the horizons of our knowledge. It is not the intention of this chapter to reconstruct the history of Christianity. Instead it sets Evangelical Christianity (EVC) within the political and socio-economic formations of imperial Ethiopia, with a temporal focus on the period between the liberation and the revolution (1941–1974) and deals with multiple layers that accounted for its existence. The religious history of EVC has been documented, although not to an extent that matches its historical role, and the record reflects much less about the intense struggles experienced by the peoples of the south to survive deeply hidden political persecutions that were inseparably linked to their religious practices. More to the point, the post-1941 political integration the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) was designed as an attempt at cultural homogenization through proselytization—which included hidden political persecutions of the EVC—and the struggle by the people for survival in the light of this has not received adequate attention.

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<sup>1</sup> Prominent examples are the following: J.S. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia* (Oxford, 1952); Donald Crummey, *Priests and Politicians: Protestant and Catholic Missions in Orthodox Ethiopia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270-1527* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1972); Lambert Bartels, *Oromo Religion*; Gustav Aren, *Envoys of the Gospel in Ethiopia: In the Steps of the Evangelical Pioneers, 1898-1936* (Stockholm: Verbum Publisher, 1999); Tibebe Eshete, *Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia: Resistance and Resilience* (Wacor: Baylor University Press, 2009).

The purpose of this chapter is to show how the strategies of expansion and consolidation the EVC employed stood in contrast to the Ethiopian empire's local system of exploitation and cultural domination. EVC rembodyed the dynamics that represented a dissident voice which helped growth in peasant consciousness and enabled the peasants to negotiate and renegotiate with the state's local forces. More precisely, the chapter intends to examine peasant interaction with a sophisticated and unique African empire, in this case Ethiopian, by analysing the former's involvement in evangelical movements in Qellem and the severe reactions of EOC-state coalition. The Macca Oromo peasants of Qellem accepted EVC as a means of resistance against the Ethiopian empire's system of exploitation and domination. For the EVC leadership and local religious elites, maintaining and expanding the religion their predecessors had introduced required them to legitimise it in the eyes of the state, albeit unconsciously (through appeals and petitions) and to bargain with the state through various means, a process that eventually gave rise to the state's willingness to negotiate and compromise. The EVC leadership's practice of appealing to the state apparatus for fair treatment and justice was mostly based on peasant support (through petitions and fund raising). This worked in the same way as that peasant appeals, petitions and litigations on the *qäläd* system discussed in Chapter Five helped legitimise the state. This chapter argues that the introduction to Qellem of the EVC, its efforts to survive and expand, notwithstanding the violent challenges it encountered in doing so and tactics of contestation with the EOC-state it had to pass through, contributed considerably in the process to state construction. EVC's fundamental teaching that "every human being was created equal by God," in the peasants' own Oromo language was instrumental in creating awareness regarding the dignity and consciousness of their cultural identity.

The chapter is presented in three sections. It begins with a brief introduction to the birth of an Evangelical Church. The second section explores the crackdown the EOC-state coalition

declared on EVC, its complex roots and the reactions it courted. The third section deals with what one may call the period of respite and negotiation, the time when the state set EVC free in order to divorce itself from multiple factors of conflict the earlier period had generated.

### **The birth of an Evangelical Church**

The main encounter in Ethiopia, especially in the south, mirrored the broader situation where EVC encountered indigenous African beliefs, especially during its formative years. The larger part of the struggle in Qellem, however, was against the older and deeply entrenched form of Christianity, the EOC, which represented the dominant ruling system of the empire-state. The circumstances that eventually led to the emergence of African Independent Churches elsewhere were largely absent in Ethiopia.

The EVC achieved its first foothold in Qellem in 1910, entering the region through Sadii, an eastern sub-district which was at the time part of Arjoo—an Amhara ruled district under the patronage of a hereditary Oromo governor, *Fitawrari* Yaaddressaa Guumaa (1849–1926). In 1917, however, the Sadii enterprise failed when the mission school that had been open since 1905 had its teachers arrested, its students dispersed and the mission itself closed down on the orders of the EOC patriarch *Abunä* Matèwos.<sup>2</sup> A later and more successful EVC incursion into Qellem was linked to the region’s wider socio-political scene.

As the rapid expansion of the “Spanish Flu,”<sup>3</sup> pandemic threatened the survival of his army, *Däjjazmach* Biru, the Amhara governor responsible for the introduction of the brutal *näḥṣṣ’āñña-gäbbar* system invited Dr Thomas Alexander Lambie, a pioneering medical missionary in Sudan who had made several unsuccessful attempts to cross into Ethiopia, to

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<sup>2</sup> Debela Birri, *Divine Plan*, 212.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Pankhurst, “The Hidar Bashita of the 1918,” *The Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 13 (2) (1975), 103–131.



Qellem.<sup>4</sup> Upon arrival, Lambie was given eighty hectares of land located between two small streams in Sayyoo, Madaallee in the east and Harangamaa in the west.<sup>5</sup> At the time of Lambie's arrival (11 July 1919) the deadly influenza that had prompted his invitation had subsided, but Biru insisted that a modern medical service should be set up in his domain. Biru allowed Lambie free rein to preach the gospel and start a mission within a compound he would build to live and work in.<sup>6</sup> This was the place where the Sayyoo mission—as well as its school and the clinic that would later become the only hospital in Qellem—was opened.

Lambie left Sayyoo in 1922 on furlough to the United States,<sup>7</sup> and never returned, but the mission centre he established thrived under his successors.<sup>8</sup> In addition to its first convert, Gidaadaa Soolan, the mission in its infancy also converted a few young believers, all of whom would constitute the first generation of Oromo evangelist-teachers.<sup>9</sup> By 1924, the evangelist teachers-students were sent out to establish village schools throughout the province, where they preached and taught in the Oromo language.<sup>10</sup> The *näftägna-gäbbar* system, which had been in place since 1917, brought with it merciless exploitation and misery. The EOC was part of the system known to the peasants for its excessive exploitation and brutal subjugation, and not only became an additional burden through collection of tithe on grain, *asrat*, but was also seen to support the colonial structure on a daily basis. The EOC built its churches in various localities in Qellem, but unlike the EVC churches they were built not within areas of peasant habitation, but on hills where the colonial soldiers, *kätäma*, were planted. The *kätäma* were, at least up to the period of Italian occupation, viewed by the peasants as symbols of exploitation and subjugation, as were the EOC churches that supported them. The depth of misfortune the

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas A. Lambie, *A Doctor Without A Country* (New York, 1939), 122; Debela Birri, *Devine Plan Unfolding: The Story of Bethel Evangelical Church Bethel* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2014), 90–92.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 100.

<sup>6</sup> Lambie, *A Doctor's Great Commission* (Wheaton, 1954), 130.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Lambie, *A Doctor's*, 134.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 105, 123.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid; Debela Birri, *Divine Plan*, 116.

Oromo peasants endured is an important consideration, because it helps explain firstly the socio-economic and political conditions into which EVC was introduced and how those conditions worked on its behalf, and secondly how the peasants viewed the EOC. EVC found a battered and exhausted population, and by 1925 a large majority of Sayyoo town and its vicinities had nominally become Evangelical Christians.<sup>11</sup> If the EOC constituted an exploitative force linked to the state, the “*qaalluu*” was another, although it worked independently of the state.<sup>12</sup>

The arrival in Qellem of the Italian forces in November 1936, sparked the birth of the first protestant Church, the Bethel Evangelical Church. The Italian governors robbed the Evangelical Christians of their mission station, but the invasion was instrumental creating opportunities for EVC—notably by humiliating the EOC and allowing the Evangelical Church a plot of land in a site of its own choosing in March 1937—helping them establish an independent Evangelical Church.<sup>13</sup> The Evangelical Church Bethel began a programme of evangelism throughout Qellem and beyond, establishing the church as a force to be reckoned with in the decades to come. In February 1939, the Church gained its first priest, Maammoo Corqaa, who held his first service on 12 March—the date on which 146 converts were added and the Church was born.<sup>14</sup> The EOC had obtained a foothold in the region through noble patronage in which “the Oromo people played an insignificant role.”<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, the EVC, and the Evangelical Church Bethel, was a grassroots movement and its birth mirrored the struggle of the peasants against established state forces and the EOC.<sup>16</sup>

The dynamics of the birth and development of the Evangelical Church Bethel suggest that the version of Christianity introduced by the American missionaries created local

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 393.

<sup>12</sup> Gidada Solon, *The Other Side of Darkness*, 11-12; Kumsa Boro, *Kumsaa Boroo*, 153.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid; Debela Birri, *Divine Plan Unfolding*, 142-143.

<sup>15</sup> Negaso and Crummey, “The Introduction and Expansion” 112.

<sup>16</sup> See Gustav Aren, *Envoys*, 343-406; Debela Birri, *Divine Plan*.

“intellectual” elites who were able to confront internal economic exploitation as well as the wider socio-political systems of the Ethiopian empire. These were, like the “peasant intellectuals” whose role was discussed in Chapter Five, people who drew their living from farming but were at the same time involved in EVC church services. They were mostly men, but also included considerable number of women who had played key roles in the birth and growth of the Evangelical Church Bethel. These people were—in addition to their main jobs as farmers—evangelist-teachers, pastors, church elders and home-cell leaders. To call them intellectual elites is to define their leadership role during vital historical moments. They successfully initiated an Evangelical Church that grew to be owned and cherished by the peasants themselves.<sup>17</sup> The roles of these intellectual elites will become clearer as the discussion progresses.

### **The EOC-state response: a crackdown on the EVC, 1941-1955**

By the time the Emperor was restored to power in 1941 and the American missionaries returned, the Evangelical Church Bethel was already thriving and had branched out into at least eight organized local churches (which also functioned as schools during weekdays) as well as various home cells, despite a few minor repressions the Italians had levelled against its leadership. But this was followed not only by the restoration of the Amhara empire but also the restoration of EOC’s power as its ideological host. As soon as it was restored to power, the EOC allied itself with local Amhara governors and began several waves of persecutions against the EVC.

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<sup>17</sup> The name ‘intellectual elites’ is derived from Feierman’s ‘peasant Intellectuals.’ Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

### **The first wave of persecution, 1941–1950**

Although the EVC leadership hoped that return of the missionaries would encourage the American Presbyterian Church to take over the church and offer them financial help, a meeting with Murry H. Russel, son and successor of Fred Russel (himself Lambie's successor) in 1941 made it clear that it was against Presbyterian mission policy to take over any indigenous church. The American Presbyterian Church also refused to pump any financial resources into churches in Qellem.<sup>18</sup> More importantly, it became clear to the leadership that Church and mission works would be considered separately, although they might be able to help each other. Implied in Russel's response was that the Oromo church belonged to the Oromo and its leadership, and the mission to the white missionaries.<sup>19</sup> Given the empire's cautious attitude to foreign missionaries because of long-standing prejudices, this boundary was very important, and saved the mission from attack many times during the persecutions.

Preaching the gospel and teaching children in Oromo continued to be considered unpalatable to the EOC clergy. Both were seen as a threat to the restored Amhara hegemony. The *näffägna-gäbbar* system had been destroyed by the Italian occupation, and never resurfaced in its original form, but the restored empire was replacing it with a more modernized and monetized taxation system in order to sustain Amhara control. In 1944, only three years after its restoration, the empire declared its "Regulation on the Establishment of Missions,"<sup>20</sup> to protect the old hegemony and accelerate the process of nation-building. Besides legalizing deep-seated state prejudices against foreign missions and giving a great deal of space for local misinterpretation, the proclamation divided the empire into two zones based on its belief, and

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<sup>18</sup> Kumsa Boro, *Kumsaa Boroo*, 168-171.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 169.

<sup>20</sup> *Negarit Gazeta*, Decree Number 3 of 1944, "Regulation on the Establishment of Missions," 125. Since all Protestant churches were known to the public and the state as "missions" this was a proclamation set to regulate all activities of non EOC churches in Ethiopia in the name of the missions.

set out where the missions were entitled to work. These were Ethiopian Church Areas,— ‘Closed Areas’ where the population predominantly adhered to EOC, and ‘Open Areas,’ where the inhabitants were predominantly non-Orthodox Christian. While declaring Amharic a language requirement all churches had to fulfil if they wanted to teach in the country, the proclamation gave permission for the missionaries to use local languages only in the early stages of the missionary enterprise and for communication with the local population. By declaring Amharic as the only language for instruction or teaching, the proclamation directly targeted Oromo churches which preached their faith and taught their pupils in the Oromo language throughout Qellem.<sup>21</sup> The EOC clergy and local governors immediately began to use broad loopholes in the proclamation which were open to misinterpretation to set the stage for persecution against the EVC. The proclamation’s statement on the usage of Amharic, “the general language of instruction throughout Ethiopia shall be the Amharic language...,”<sup>22</sup> was quickly interpreted to be applicable not only for mission schools and schools established by the Oromo churches but for the teaching and preaching of the gospel as well.<sup>23</sup>

The EOC clergy reacted decisively in many areas. The strongest reactions were seen in 1945 at Churches in Sayyoo, Sadii, Anfillo and Haawwaa. In these areas, sub-district and village governors mobilized militia forces and raided the church schools. Teacher-evangelists were arrested, forced to carry chalk-boards on their heads, made to tour public areas as they were beaten.<sup>24</sup> Of the four sub-districts (Sayyoo, Sadii, Anfillo and Haawwaa) where heavy persecutions had been perpetrated between 1941 and 1950, the example of Sayyoo (particularly in Aannoo and Alaku areas) would suffice to illustrate the case. In Aannoo, violent scenes ensued as the EOC priests planted an Orthodox cross before the local evangelical church,

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 128.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Informants: Fiixee Birrii, 05/08/2010; Ulaa Fiixumaa, 14/08/2010, D/Doolloo.

<sup>24</sup> Bayana Gosaa (Rev.) et al, “Yäbètèl Wängèlawit [*Bètäkeristiyan*] Zèna” [News of Bethel Evangelical Church], unpublished type script, 21, archive of EECMY Qellem-Wallagga Synod

inviting police brutality and the jailing of many of its members. An EOC Church, St Mikael, was built only one hundred and fifty feet in front of the evangelical church within days.<sup>25</sup> This wave of persecution was sparked off by events in Alaku Fakkan, north-central Sayyoo, where Gätachāw Dāraš, a sub-district governor, and Säyfé Mārach, governor of Alaku, had many teachers and church members tortured and imprisoned.<sup>26</sup> Evangelist-teachers were told to pay two-thousand eight hundred birr to be released.<sup>27</sup> Such unrealistic and unaffordable fines were levied on evangelist-teachers, kindling a culture of raising money among the peasants to keep the churches. The fines, though extremely high, were raised in less than a week and paid<sup>28</sup>, a scenario which quickly established itself as the accepted norm of peasant reaction to all waves of persecution levelled against evangelical churches.

One important result of this round of persecutions was that the students were dispersed. The Reverend Gidaadaa Soolan, fighting against many obstacles, was able to negotiate the release of any remaining prisoners, but the churches remained closed despite the promise of the Emperor.<sup>29</sup> The written order sent to Sayyoo with Gidaadaa from the Ministry of Interior to release immediately all those imprisoned in relation to school matters fell on deaf ears,<sup>30</sup> and the struggle to release the prisoners continued for months. Their eventual release was achieved after a lot of challenges, and marked the end of the first round of persecution—which only set the scene for the start of another more organized and brutal second wave of persecution.

The intentions of the EOC clergy and the local state structure, and what the establishment exactly wanted to achieve from these measures will become clearer as we examine the second wave of persecution, but it must be underlined that the main accusation constantly levelled against Evangelical Christians was the allegation that they became

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Kumsa Boro, *Kumsaa Boroo*, 173.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Informants: Fiixee Birrii, 05/08/2010; Ulaa Fiixumaa, 14/08/2010, Dambi-Doolloo.

<sup>29</sup> Gidada Solon, *The Other Side*, 68.

<sup>30</sup> Kumsa Boro, *Kumsaa Boroo*, 173.

“adherents of *mäṭṭe-haymanot*/መጤ ህይማኖት [an alien religion] that deliberately worked to destroy Orthodox Christianity.”<sup>31</sup> While the EOC failed to engage the peasants, the EVC managed to, and a large number of the peasants embraced it as a form of protest against local state structures. It is to this complex issues of the making and unmaking of enemies and allies that we now turn.

### **The second wave of persecution, 1951–1955**

In 1951, all eighteen evangelical churches in Qellem were shut down at a single stroke. Some churches were pulled down and others were burnt. All pastors, evangelist-teachers and church elders were imprisoned and tortured, and some of them were chained, cuffed and driven through markets and towns. Selected believers were also imprisoned and taken to Dambi-Doolloo town, where they were also tortured. It immediately became clear that the persecution was coordinated by the governor-general of Wallagga province, *Däjjazmach* Mäkonnen Dästa.<sup>32</sup> This marked the beginning of the second wave of persecution, less spontaneous and more considered than the first wave. Its analysis is important in order to understand the political trajectories of peasant interactions with the empire. More specifically, it helps illustrate how hidden political persecutions came to the Oromo peasants in the name of religion, and allows a better understanding of the more conscious and subtle reaction it generated in the post-1955 period.

This round of persecution went far beyond imprisonment, torture and public humiliation. It involved agencies of subjugation that went much deeper. The most important of these were the denial of justice, unaffordable fines (*maqqacaa*, as they were called by the

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<sup>31</sup> IEAWGG, Mäkonnen Dästa, *Yä Wällägga Täqläy Gizat Silä agär astätdadär* (Wällägga Governorate-General, Concerning Governance), “Memorandum to the Emperor,” dated Mäskäräm 1943 (September 1950).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 190-194; Gidada Solon, *The Other Side*, 73-79; Informant: Rev. Ulaa Fiixumaa, 14/08/2010, D/Doolloo.

peasants), and public ridicule. At first, prisoners were given a chance to appear before courts. When taking the prisoners to the courts police officers publicly beat them one by one. Selected sites at public meeting places, particularly around markets and urban centres, were allocated for these beatings, a process that backfired, as we shall see below, and attracted more committed members than ever before. Judges then questioned the prisoners, treating them in groups as they had the same case to answer. The prisoners' answers were the same—as were the questions—so the judges usually lost patience and told the police to take them back to prisons.<sup>33</sup> The intention was to break their spirit. The courts demanded from the evangelical prisoners a declaration that they would drop adherence to EVC and join the EOC. This declaration was to be obtained by police interrogators.<sup>34</sup> Those arrested by the district police were sentenced to six months in prison, and those at sub-district level were given three months each. But the prison terms were repeated on many families through the period of 1951–1956.<sup>35</sup>

This short prison term had far reaching consequences on peasant families. Heavy labour such as tilling the land with oxen fell to the women and children, forcing many promising students to abandon their schooling and return home to cover this labour. Because the peasants had old institutions of supporting one another (*daboo* and *daadoo*) their livelihoods depended on their social institutions at all levels of agriculture, and the prison sentences became a burden for all. While they looked after the prisoners, they also had to support the family, which soon became a heavy responsibility.<sup>36</sup> The whole process of court deliberation became a tool of intimidation rather than a form of justice.

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<sup>33</sup> Informants: Rev. Ulaa Fiixumaa, 14/08/2010; Baalchaa Deentaa, 22/08/2005, D/Doolloo *Maqqacaa* (meaning—fine) was derivative of the Amharic *māqāṣa*/. Unable to pronounce the Amharic sound the Oromo peasants used it the best way they could.

<sup>34</sup> Kumsa Boro, *Kumsaa Boroo*, 175.

<sup>35</sup> Informants: Nägaš Shuuramoo, 10/08/2010; Fiixee Birrii, 05/08/2010), D/Doolloo.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. To understand how deeply interdependent the Macca Oromo peasants of Qellem were see among others, two of Lambert Bartels' works, "Dabo: A Form of Cooperation..." 883-925; and "Dado: A Form of Cooperation on Equal Terms among the Macha Oromo of Ethiopia," *Anthropos* 72 (1977), 497-513.



Serving a few months in prison, although it was particularly damaging when it came during the labour-intensive farming, weeding or harvesting seasons on peasant farms, was relatively easy compared to finding the means to pay the huge fines, *maqqacaa*, imposed on thousands of family heads, including women and even children. The prison terms did not replace the fine, and paying the fine did not help avoid prison. Those sentenced to three months in prison also had to pay twenty-five *birr* and those sentenced to six months fifty *birr*.<sup>37</sup> These were extraordinarily high amounts if imposed only once, but in fact they were imposed repeatedly, leading to a drastic shortage of cash circulation which meant that the peasant economy suffered and that many peasant assets were limited to grain and animals.<sup>38</sup> Even under normal circumstances, imperial Ethiopia suffered from an acute lack of circulating cash. The peasants' urgency to generate cash meant that they had to pay the fines by selling their animals or grain, which lowered the prices for such commodities, firstly by flooding the market and secondly because their owners were eager to get money and would accept whatever they were offered because the fine had to be paid immediately. It was difficult at the best of times to earn one hundred *birr* over the course of a year. The fines proved to be by far the most powerful tool of suppression, and reached far and wide to include the majority of church members. The fines exhausted the peasants and cast them into much deeper poverty.<sup>39</sup>

When the village schools the evangelicals built (alternative schools) were closed, children flocked to government schools, where they faced social ostracization and cultural humiliation. When ridiculed by fellow schoolmates and teachers, they were told to leave their 'dirty' language (i.e. Oromo) outside the school compound. Amhara and Orthodox school children (including Oromo) insulted those from EVC families as they passed. Common insults were, "stinky and rotten protestants," "Galla protestants," and "protestant enemies of St Mary."

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<sup>37</sup> Fiixee Birrii, *Seenaa fi Aadaa Oromoo*, 284-286.

<sup>38</sup> Daniel Ayana, "Land Tenure" 127.

<sup>39</sup> Informants: Asefa Ammayyaa, 11/08/2010; Ulaa Fiixumaa, 14/08/2010, D/Doolloo.

If the children spoke so much as a word in reply, teachers brought them before the school assembly where they beat and shamed them. Protestant students were predominantly Oromo, and they grouped themselves together while walking to and from the school for their own safety.<sup>40</sup> The same insults followed Protestant women in the markets and shops as well as men in taverns. It is interesting that many of those who ridiculed them with such insults as “Galla Evangelicals,” were themselves “Galla,” but adhered to the EOC. This indicates the existence of multiple layers of social status within the society, which in turn indicates the relatively strong influence of the Amhara imperial state.

By the 1950s the EOC was stronger than it had been in the 1920s. Its influence seems to have taken deeper root in particular social classes. Its influence, as mentioned in Chapter Four, began with the conversion of *Däjjäzmach* Jootee and his family, and continued to his vassals as a requirement which Jootee himself swiftly fulfilled when it was imposed by Addis Ababa. At least one EOC church was constructed in each sub-district—by force when necessary. The number of churches reached twelve in 1917, forty-three in 1935, and fifty in 1941.<sup>41</sup> The EOC always targeted the *ballabat* and other local notables, using its social status in society. The attitude of the local Oromo overlords was helpful, as it incited a kind of social inferiority complex, by which being non-Orthodox became linked to all the subtle meanings attached to the idea of “Galla.” Oromo notables themselves usually used the same ideological attack that local EOC clergy employed: “*Galla dägmo min haymanot aläw*/After all what religion do the Galla [Oromo] have?” Conversion to Orthodox Christianity not only displayed an adherence to a certain religion, it represented social status as well. In this sense, a powerful pressure existed towards conversion to the EOC, as adherence to it helped to remove “gallaness”, raising its adherents above the peasantry and providing equal footing with other

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Negaso Gidada and D Crummey, “The Introduction and Expansion,” 107.

Orthodox Christians—the *balabbat*.<sup>42</sup> The conversion of the local ruling class, the growing decline of indigenous belief systems and the institutionalization of concepts of “galla-ness” help explain the introduction and nominal growth of the EOC in Qellem. By the 1950s, this mechanism of EOC penetration appears to have grown much more entrenched.<sup>43</sup> This meant that the state and the EOC were not alone in the crackdown unleashed against the EVC, they had considerable backing from those who had been converted to the EOC from all walks of life, and of course the *balabbat*. An understanding of this social coercion not only explains the force brought to bear on Evangelical Christians but also how powerful they became in building a contrary ideology and defying the system. Except for ‘coerced’ local alliance of Oromo *balabbat*, the incorporation of Qellem within the Amhara imperial state ruled by Menilek II did not deeply change the organization of Macca Oromo of their political entity. However, the Amharization policy pursued by Hailä Sellasè created cleavages, especially through the agency of the EOC.

The birth of the *balabbat* class— fundamental allies of the empire’s local power base—that served the Amhara state until its downfall in 1974 lay at the heart of these local divisions. Through the respected status they enjoyed under the protection of the state, this group were a priority choice when peasant families needed God-father (*abbaa-kiristinnaa*), *abilijii*, *jaala*, arbitrator, guarantor or legal representative (*nagarafajjii*). The *balabbat* and their families obviously offered this to adherents of the EOC, which in turn became a considerable social force behind the *balabbat*. Successive Amhara governors appointed by the central government also created among the peasants small groupings similar to those linked to Oromo *balabbat*. These were those socially ostracized Oromo groups like smiths (*tumtuu*), tanners (*faaqii*) and weavers (*shammaanee*), and they served the governors as spies whenever needed.<sup>44</sup> When any

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 110-111.

<sup>43</sup> Informant: Nägaš Shuuramoo, 10/08/2010, D/Doolloo.

<sup>44</sup> Rev. Ulaa Fiixumaa, 14/08/2010; Baalchaa Deentaa, 22/08/2005, D/Doolloo.

conflict of interest arose, Amhara governors and Oromo *balabbat* fought each other to mobilize these social groups. Evangelical Christians became a separate group, and stood without the firm control of political arms of the state, giving rise to more serious transformations of the balance of local powers.

On another level, 1951 became a landmark year in the growth of the Oromo evangelical church. It had its two earliest pastors, Reverends Gidaadaa Soolan and Mammo Corqaa, ordained during the Italian period. Another three, Reverends Kumsaa Boroo, Lataa Waaqayyoo, and Bayyanaa Gosaa, were ordained in 1950. These five pastors became too thinly stretched to cover the rapidly-growing congregations, so in February 1951 the church enabled eight more to complete their pastoral training and ordained them. They were Reverends Bocoloo Lammeessaa, Daniel Sirbaa, Deebisaa Bariii, Hedaa Uggaa, Nageessoo Jimaa, Nuunnee Ribbii, Tarfaa Jaarsoo and Tarfaa Tiibbaa.<sup>45</sup> This raised the number of pastors to thirteen, which in turn brought about a new explosion in membership and new branch churches, intensifying the threat to the EOC. In this sense 1951 became a year in which the state brought all its force to bear against an institution it perceived to be a threat to its system.

Were all these things done simply to bring about the destruction of the EVC? It is harder to understand the dynamics that gave rise to such crackdown when they are treated separately from the socio-economic and political transformations that were taking place simultaneously. It is necessary to assess the more complex set of issues responsible for the advent of this round of persecution, which will also provide insights into understanding other forms of conflict in the region.

The last chapter examined how the imperial order of 1946 ignited a new level of contention that would involve appeals, petitions and court litigation. For the next three decades, successive district and provincial governors took two approaches to the 1947 imperial order:

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<sup>45</sup> Debela Birri, *Devine Plan*, 193.

complete denial of its existence and diligent attempts to have it reversed.<sup>46</sup> It was this second approach that brought the EVC of Qellem centre stage in this political drama.

*Däjjazmach* Mäkonnen Dästa, who succeeded Asrtatä Kassa as governor-general of Wallagga province, undertook an extensive tour of Qellem in September 1950, in full knowledge of the imperial order of 1946 which he cited in his correspondences with Addis Ababa.<sup>47</sup> While his predecessor had unsuccessfully attempted to subtly reverse the imperial order of 1947, Mäkonnen chose to do the same thing under the cover of religion. After his tour, he submitted a memorandum to the Emperor, proposing to redraw the district of Qellem with the intention of embracing Benishangul, a vast lowland territory to the north whose major inhabitants were—and still are—the Berta, and Gambella to the south, both of which had been part of Qellem at one time or another. At the heart of the memorandum was the enlargement of what he called the “Christian Curtain” to cover the sub-district of Gidaamii,<sup>48</sup> the seat of Jootee Tulluu until 1917, even though Gidaamii represented the earliest foothold of the EOC since c.1886.<sup>49</sup> Building elementary schools for the Berta was part of the proposal. The same memorandum suggested that the Christian Curtain be extended to the mission-evangelized Oromo inhabitants, an indirect inclusion of all the territories where the eighteen EVC churches had been erected. In an attempt to win over the Emperor, Mäkonnen portrayed Jootee’s descendants—Mardaasaa, Yosef, and Yohannes, signatories of the Western Galla Confederation (WGC) of 1936 that had unsuccessfully claimed an independent Oromo state in western Ethiopia, and also collaborators with Italian rule—as scoundrels. But even these rogues were adherents of the EOC. Mäkonnen accused them of rejecting *qälad* and *siso* on their three hundred *gaša* of land in Gidaamii, with the intention of keeping the Amhara at bay and

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<sup>46</sup> See Chapter Five.

<sup>47</sup> IEAWGG, Mäkonnen Dästa, *Yä Wällägga Täqläy Gizat Silä agär astätdadär* (Wällägga Governorate-General, Concerning Governance), “Memorandum to the Emperor,” dated Mäskäräm 1943 (September 1950).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Negaso Gidada, “The Impact of Christianity,” 15-18.

preventing them from obtaining land in their fief. He even stated that the Emperor was not loved among the Oromo of the area. Although his memorandum focuses on Gidaamii as an illustration, it strongly suggests the extension of the Christian Curtain into the enlarged Qellem.<sup>50</sup> In practice, Mäkonnen was proposing the reintroduction of *qäläd* to Qellem, since there should be an economic resource for agents of the Christian Curtain which could have only come from the land. The implementation of this plan would mean the reversal of both the Land Tax Proclamation of November 1944 and the imperial order of 1947. Probably excited by his proposal of schools for the Berta, the Emperor sent Mäkonnen to Akaläwärq, the Minister of Education and Fine Arts.

Mäkonnen left Addis Ababa for Naqamtee, the seat of the Wallagga governorate-general, without any concrete achievements, but continued with his subtle attempts to foil the imperial order of 1946. Between 6 November and 17 December 1950, barely a month after he had submitted the memorandum to the Emperor, he convened a meeting of the Council of Wallagga Governors,<sup>51</sup> which also included *Abunä* Yaqob, the EOC bishop of the province. All available pretexts were used at the meeting to persuade the council to come up with feasible ideas which would be effective in reversing the order. The case of confrontations surrounding Qellem's *qäläd* system became distorted and was discussed within the general framework of access to land in the entire province. The overriding objective was to "plant" more Amhara, who, according to Mäkonnen's memorandum, would help change the hearts of the Oromo for the better in the province.

At this meeting various allegations were levelled against the EVC, *mäṭṭe haymanot*. Report after report was heard of how the EVC were cluttering the entire province with grass huts, setting them up as churches under the pretext of calling them schools. The Evangelical

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<sup>50</sup> See note 47 above.

<sup>51</sup> Council of Governors in all of the fourteen administrative units, Täqläy Gizats, of the Ethiopian Empire, was made up of the governor-general and his deputy, the EOC *abun*, governors and deputy governors of all districts and sub-districts.

Christians were swiftly spreading their influence by building huts in peasant villages in the name of school construction, “spoiling” the people with their teachings and preaching deliberate anti-Orthodox doctrine, teaching the Oromo Bible and expressing a lack of interest in using Amharic. The meeting also heard that people were leaving the beautiful and robust buildings of the EOC to go to scruffy grass huts in great numbers.<sup>52</sup> It was felt that the EOC was being undermined by the EVC. The major outcome of the meeting was that Mäkonnen “ordered the Evangelical movement be stopped throughout the province, giving all local rulers authority to place any Evangelical Christian, minister or leader in prison up to six months without trial, and promising to take care of any appeals that might reach Addis Ababa, in case Evangelicals appealed there.”<sup>53</sup>

Accusations brought against the spread of EVC are more readily understandable when taking into account the Empire’s conceptualization of national integration. The spread of *lisanä-nigus/ልሳነ-ገዢ* (the language of the Emperor) and *lisanä mängist/ልሳነ-መንግሥት* (language of the state), as Amharic was framed by the empire, was the main instrument of Amharization, which in practice meant learning the Amharic language, converting to Orthodox Christianity, and assimilation into Amhara culture. In 1933 Sahlé Tsädalü, a conservative Ethiopian Minister of Education, wrote, “Amharic and Ge’ez should be decreed official languages [and ... all other] religions ... and all pagan languages should be banned.”<sup>54</sup> Although this was written decades before, and despite the fact that the state did not make any clear proclamation of this type after 1941, this was the standard perception of officials appointed to any significant office in imperial Ethiopia. Thus after the introduction of modern education, when various Ethiopian education officials talked of the “Ethiopianization” of the

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<sup>52</sup> IEAWGG, *Yä Wällägga Täqläy Gizat* Mikirbet *qälägubae* (Minutes of the Council of Wallagga Governorate-General), dated Tikimt 27-Tahisas 7, 1947 (6 November and 17 December 1950).

<sup>53</sup> Archives on Imperial Ethiopia, obtained from the Presbyterian Historical Society (here in after IEAPHS), Carl J. Kissling to Glenn P. Reed, January 25, 1951, Record Group (RG) 209. I am grateful to the Culture of Resistance Scholarship for having funded digitisation of relevant IEAPHS files for me.

<sup>54</sup> Sahlé Tsädalü, Ministry of Pen Archives, IES Memo. Hamilè 29, 1925 (05/08/1933).

school system, they were in practice advocating Amharization. But the expansion of Amharic did not only rely on propagating and subsidizing the language. Just as important was the fact that the empire, mainly to ease the road of the chosen official medium, sought to eradicate all other languages, including Tigrigna,<sup>55</sup> and the Oromo language. A secret document produced after an extensive tour by central government agents in Qellem stated in its section on education that, "...they [the pupils] had no industrious teacher to teach them our education, love of their country and the Emperor than foreign education and language."<sup>56</sup> While "foreign education" was a reference to modern education introduced by the missionaries, "foreign language" clearly stood for English, so this was only one step short of suggesting traditional education of the EOC.

A police officer in Qellem, when asked why more than sixty people including women, children and old people had been arrested at Kolli Church in Anfillo in June 1952, stated that the Evangelical Christians "spoiled people by wrong teachings". This shows how little understood evangelicals were by the authorities—indeed the entire state apparatus perceived the EVC as its enemy.<sup>57</sup> It was widely feared among the governors and the EOC clergy that it would be end of the EOC altogether in this part of Ethiopia if such rapid growth of Oromo evangelization was not halted.<sup>58</sup> Such views supported the idea that religion had crossed into the territory of politics, and that it was becoming hard to separate the two. The allegations and persecutions from the state indicated its perception of this inseparable connection.

The blow that struck all eighteen of Qellem's churches came with the return of district and sub-district governors from a meeting that Mäkonnen had convened—and chaired—

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<sup>55</sup> John Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last*, 125-126.

<sup>56</sup> IEAWGG, "Talaq mistir, Yä Qellem Wārāda Gizat rappor/ Top Secret: A Report on the Province of Qellem." Although the date at the top right corner of the document is blurred, internal evidences suggest that it was written sometime after December 1944. Two authors of the document signed it at the end but did not mention their names.

<sup>57</sup> Gidada Solon, *The Other Side*, 70.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.



allegedly to discuss land disputes, which he framed as issues of access to land throughout the entire Wallagga province, but which ended up declaring an immediate crackdown on the EVC churches in Qellem as well as designing subtle mechanisms of foiling the imperial order of 1946. There was a direct connection between the meeting of the Council of Wallagga Governors and the advent of a more coordinated persecution against Evangelical Christianity in Qellem. Despite previous justifications for the first wave of persecution, this round of persecution did not bother using excuses or allegations, it simply closed down churches and imprisoned the leadership and some of its members. Mäkonnen personally commanded these measures against Protestantism.<sup>59</sup> The choice of Gidaamii, the oldest stronghold of EOC in Qellem, was seen to exemplify the extension of Mäkonnen's 'Christian Curtain', and his focus on mission-evangelized areas indicated his intention of causing the maximum possible damage to Evangelical Christianity. Mäkonnen and his colleagues had reasons for this. In the context of Wallagga, and especially Qellem, the destruction of EVC was relevant to the Empire's overall strategy towards the Oromo, and the hidden political suppression attached to the destruction of the EVC was ranked as a priority.

As early as Emperor Menilek's time, all armed Oromo *balabbat* had been summoned to Addis Ababa for Orthodox baptism which could just as easily have taken place at their respective home provinces.<sup>60</sup> Although Ethiopia banned the sale of firearms in its conquered territories, and took great care that the Oromo would not acquire firearms, many *balabbat* were offered guns as a reward for helping the daily functions of the empire's power structure.<sup>61</sup> The EOC studied their loyalty through its teachings, citing them as examples for the peasants as well. It was perhaps for this reason that when one of them, *Fitawrari Yaaddressaa Guumaa*

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<sup>59</sup> Kumsa Boro, *Kumsaa Boroo*, 174.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 132.

<sup>61</sup> Reginald Koettlitz, "A Journey through Somaliland and Southern Abyssinia to the Shangalla or Bertha Country and the Blue Nile, and through the Sudan to Egypt," *The Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society*, vol.19 (1900), 18.

(1849–1926) of Sadii, opened a school run by mission educated teachers in 1915, *Abunä Matēwos* became angry and closed it in 1917.<sup>62</sup> One of Yaaddressaa’s sons, *Qäññazmach Shuuramoo*, had been a devout Evangelical Christian and had even supported prisoners from his Church and beyond during times of persecution, which naturally resulted in his own incarceration.<sup>63</sup> Allegations of “spoiling” the people had some measure of truth in this sense. Some Oromo political elites were openly accused on many occasions of reading the Oromo Bible and were threatened with being stripped of power.<sup>64</sup> During its inception, Sayyoo School relied on Orthodox priests for teaching Amharic, but they appeared to have made blunt accusations against the teaching of Oromo language and use of Oromo Bible a more rewarding job than teaching itself.<sup>65</sup> The priests had what they called “*lisanä amlak/ልሳነ-አምላክ*” and “*lisanä Egziabhèr/ልሳነ-እግዚአብሔር*,” respectively “language of the Lord” and “language of God,” in reference to Geez and, as stated above, “language of the state and language of the Emperor” for Amharic, and any sort of rejection of these was deemed to run contrary to the Amhara state.<sup>66</sup> In fact, when Oromo evangelists in various parts of Oromo country taught the Bible, they reached out to their people with *Afaan Oromoo*. The Amhara clergy was furious, so much so that they labelled the book as “dangerous in the hands of the common [Oromo] man.”<sup>67</sup>

The empire-state and the EOC thought that Oromo self-consciousness was what had been rising under the shadow of the EVC, and this accusation was not without foundation. An eyewitness missionary, Don McClure, who was in Sayyoo in 1951–1952, made the following observation:

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<sup>62</sup> Gustav Aren, *Envoys*, 153.

<sup>63</sup> Kumsa Boro, *Kumsaa Boroo*, 181.

<sup>64</sup> Gustav Aren, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia: Origins of the Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* (Stockholm, 1978), 427–428.

<sup>65</sup> Kumsa Boro, *Kumsaa Boroo*, 132.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 155.

<sup>67</sup> Ezekiel Gebissa (trans & ed), *Evangelical faith Movement in Ethiopia* (Lutheran University press, 2009), 153.

The great and basic trouble is not religious, but tribal—that is, the rise of the Oromo people .... The Amharas, who are the ruling class, are beginning to fear that the Oromos will become educated and demand a greater share in the government of the country. This is certainly true, since already some of the educated Oromos are pushing their way upward in government circles and the Amharas are beginning to see what may happen in the years to come. So, some of the Amharas are determined to keep the Oromos down.... When the Oromos come to realize their strength and power, they may well make trouble for the Amharas.<sup>68</sup>

McClure's words are a good illustration of the Ethiopian empire's long-standing deliberate neglect to keep the mass of the Oromo in Qellem as uneducated as possible. An eye witness observed such an approach:

...Closing our churches, imprisoning our leaders and believers and beating them never satisfied the Orthodox priests and their cohorts. I believe that they hated our Oromoness. It was little more than teaching the gospel in our language and reaching our kids through modern education, but it burned them like flames in strong sunlight. So when they finished closing our churches, they even burnt them down in some places... They hated the fact that we were teaching modern education to our kids in our own language, so they campaigned against us. They were ready and prepared to destroy our language and the modern education our kids were getting. In this regard, I can say that the same problem we faced during the *mälkäñña* era is still pursuing us.<sup>69</sup>

This quote reflects real historical experiences, although not necessarily in its conclusion. True, the Amhara state persecuted Oromo evangelists for its own reasons, but not simply because they were Oromo *per se*. It was definitely a struggle for ideological leadership. Comparing the “*mälkägna* era,” the author's—and the Oromo peasants'—reference to the period of the *näftägna-gäbbar* system (1917-1933), with the 1950s persecutions introduced many problems, since the two periods not only differ significantly in their level and context of persecution but also in their intentions. To say the least, most methods of exploitation that had exposed the peasants to severe problems during the *näftägna-gäbbar* era had been lifted a decade previously when the Emperor was restored to power. The author's idea of linking Oromoness and access

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<sup>68</sup> Charles Partee, *Adventure in Africa: The Story of Don McClure* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1990), 258-259.

<sup>69</sup> Kumsa Boro, *Kumsaa Boro*, 187, 174.

to education in Oromo language is more appropriate, since this partly explains how a combination of the two worked against the empire's drive for Amharization. It is still evident from numerous episodes of intimidation, harassment, persecution and untenable and unjustifiable accusations against many individual Oromo elites, students, even state functionaries of different generations that the state officials in alliance with the EOC clergy had formed a powerful pressure group. This group was trying to enforce the EOC as a means of safeguarding the dominance of Amhara culture as well as confronting Oromo consciousness, which seems to have found an outlet in the evangelical movement. The second round of persecutions against Oromo evangelicals in Qellem—initiated and coordinated by an ambitious Mäkonnen in the name of extending the Christian Curtain—was only one episode that marked the start of state persecutions in the name of religion.

A discussion of the persecutions the EOC and the local state carried out against the EVC and the latter's perception and reaction is important, because the process, beyond issues of religion, explains the roots and narratives that shaped state-society relations. The accusations filed against the Evangelical Christians and their church leadership were never linked to breach of law, they were mainly allegations that they were adherents of *mäṭṭe-haymanot* (መጤ ህይማኖት), “alien religion”. While the peasants regarded local state agents as “outsiders,” (የውጪ ሰው), and the EOC as an ally of the state, the EOC in return accused adherents of EVC as followers of an “alien religion” that would like to see the EOC destroyed. They were “enemies of St Mary,” and “enemies of Ethiopia”. It is interesting to observe that the Amharic word “*mäṭṭe*/መጤ,” which the EOC invented to criminalize the EVC and its adherents, seemed equally relevant to all three institutions: the EOC, the state, and the EVC. The main features of the persecution—the criminalization of Oromo Bible, the closing of Oromo schools and the beating, arrest, humiliation and trial of key staff who ran these projects—does not suggest that the persecution was mere competition between two Christian denominations. Instead it was a politically

motivated state project. The entire process, beginning with allegations levelled against the EVC at a meeting of Wallagga province council of governors, the persecutors choice of shutting down the churches and the schools run by Oromo language, dispersing the students and sending those who could afford to survive the distance and the cost involved to state schools, were all consistent with the Ethiopian empire's policies of Amharisation highlighted above. Perhaps aware of the potential consequences, the EOC clergy and the state attempted to hide their persecution by framing them as religious matters. They attempted to show that the persecutions were levelled against "alien religion" and had very little to do with the mass of Oromo peasants and their cultural identity, although their daily rhetoric against Oromo schools and Oromo Bible continued unabated. The sum of the rhetoric used by the EOC clergy and the measures taken against the churches and schools and their key staff suggest that the EOC wanted to destroy the Oromo language and political consciousness that was rising under the wings of the EVC. However, it was also consistent with what the *qälad* system of land measurement intended to achieve.

The problem for the EOC was that with their growing political consciousness, the peasants were well aware of the measures being taken against EVC; they interpreted the persecutions and contextualised them. The peasants' interaction with the three "*mäṭṭe/መጡ*" or "alien" institutions (the EOC, the state and the EVC) suggests that conscious choices and rejections were involved. The peasant support for Oromo evangelist-teachers was a measure of revoking the "*mäṭṭe/መጡ*" identity of the EVC and the reworking of it as their own. In fact, the Oromo peasants of Qellem embraced the EVC as a means of resistance against the empire's system of exploitation and domination. In this process, the EVC was able to write itself into the history of the local Oromo peasants. The interaction, however, did not result in the creation of a nation (as happened to the Yoruba in Nigeria)<sup>70</sup> as the Macca Oromo of Qellem identified

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<sup>70</sup> J.D.Y. Peel, *Religious Encounters*, 278-309.

themselves as part of the larger Oromo people (diverse not only in religion, but also in social organisation, geographical zones and dialects). Such a relationship was significant, as the peasants' indigenization of one of the three “mäṭe/መጤ” —the EVC—played a considerable role in the process of creating enemies and allies. The peasants' indigenization of the EVC was necessarily in direct confrontation with the EOC, because the latter wanted to reverse the peasant-EVC alliance.

### **Reactions and the cost of resistance: the struggle to reopen Oromo churches and schools**

The history of the evangelical movement in Qellem was not only a history of persecution, it was a history of resistance and negotiation as well. Because it promoted the consciousness of the peasant mass, the iron-handed persecutions perpetrated since the early 1940s drove the peasants towards an alternative Christianity. The fact that the persecutions did not prevent the growth of EVC was conclusive evidence of the peasants' reaction. The brutal policies the state chose to pursue provoked the people and backfired very badly. As soon as the second round of attacks was in full swing, members of various congregations whose churches had been closed organized themselves into grassroots women's, youth and men's associations. They came up with methods of raising financial resources for the dark times of court deliberations.<sup>71</sup>

The peasant reactions to the persecutions rapidly spread EVC throughout Qellem. When the state violently shut down all the Churches, every home turned into a Church. Rev. Kumsaa Boroo explains this in his memoir:

If there was ever any significant form in which our Church expanded in those days of aggressive persecution, it was with the growth of home 'churches'. When a church was closed, more flared up from believers' homes. Every home turned to church. Nine branches would come out of a single hole where they uprooted one. When one preacher was imprisoned, nine would step into his place. If one was prohibited [from preaching], nine would succeed him. When we were banned [from worship] during the day, we worshipped

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<sup>71</sup> Gidada Solon, *The Other Side*, 70; Kumsa Boro, 185-186.

at night in [believers'] homes. When we were banned from ringing bells to gather believers, we gathered them by whistling. As the persecutions grew stronger, so did our churches, and vice versa.<sup>72</sup>

Those who were spared from prison, even though they had not received sufficient education themselves and therefore were not fully qualified to run home churches, continued to teach the gospel in their Oromo language. Even administrative meetings were regularly held in peasant homes. The persecutions included Oromo schoolchildren who, following closures of their alternative schools, went to those belonging to the state based in major urban centres, where they were forced to stick together to avoid persecution. Men and women began to protest openly in the markets and on the streets.<sup>73</sup> Although prominent figures in the leadership were handcuffed, chained and driven through towns with the object of humiliating them and scaring their followers, peasants became adherents of the EVC *en masse*. A number of internal primary sources indicate that many more believers joined home churches (a fundamental vehicle for eventual growth of the church) during the period of intensified persecution than they had during the comparatively longer period that pre-dated it.

The Amhara attitude towards the Oromo subjects largely encouraged the process. The Amhara looked down on the Macca Oromo “as backward, heathen, filthy, deceitful, lazy and even stupid.”<sup>74</sup> Stories of such stereotyping were strengthened by various cultural and psychological hurdles that divided the conquerors from the conquered. This strain between = agents of the state and the local Oromo subjects solidified as the latter grew more conscious of and created awareness about their dignity through basic Biblical teachings, which stated that every human being was created equal by God. This understanding was reinforced by daily

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<sup>72</sup> Kumsa Boro, *Kumsaa Boroo*, 185–186.

<sup>73</sup> Fiixee Birrii, *Seenaa fi Aadaa Oromoo (History and Culture of the Oromo)* 2nd edition (Addis Ababa: Yemisrach Dimts, 2013), 284-286; Informants: Rev. Ulaa Fiixumaa 14/08/2010, Nägaš Shuuramoo, 10/08/2010, Baalchaa Deentaa, 22/08/2005, Dambi-Doolloo.

<sup>74</sup> Gebru Tareke, *Ethiopia: Power and Protest*, 71.

stories detailing how their relatives, friends, church elders and pastors were treated at the hands of Amhara police officers and judges, and how the visitors themselves were ridiculed.<sup>75</sup>

Oromo peasants and *ballabat* who had been promoted by the occupying Italian forces had been reduced after the reimposition of control by Addis Ababa to serving beneath local Amhara governors. The decade that followed the Italian occupation marked a period in which these peasants and *ballabat* became more conscious of the status the empire attached to their language and culture.<sup>76</sup> The Oromo village schools became much admired among the peasants, especially after local Amhara governors shut them down so violently, and even the poorest of peasants and those who had no children of school age participated in their support.<sup>77</sup> When cases were brought before local governors the peasants, with little knowledge of written law, disregarded the governors' allegations about the churches and schools and focused solely on the fact that the churches and schools were built on land the peasants had provided themselves, an argument they used to claim the right to retain institutions whose buildings were erected on lands not under state possession.<sup>78</sup> This was only a step away from saying the state had no right of control over such institutions. After six decades under the Ethiopian empire, the peasants still regarded the empire's Amhara local governors as illegitimate conquerors of their own land. In fact, as discussed in Chapter Five, the peasants regarded the state and all its local agents as "outsiders," who had no hereditary right to land, and such feelings lay at the very heart of peasant argument against the *qālad* system of land measurement. The struggle to get Oromo language schools reopened was considered part of the overall struggle to survive as a people and to transfer their identity as well as their possessions to the next generation.

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<sup>75</sup> Informants: Baalchaa Deentaa, 22/08/2005; Nägaš Shuuramoo, 10/08/2010, D/Doolloo.

<sup>76</sup> Informants: Nägaš Shuuramoo, 10/08/2010; Dabalaa Maammadee, 07/08/2010, D/Doolloo.

<sup>77</sup> Informants: Rev. Ulaa Fiixumaa, 14/08/2010, Nägaš Shuuramoo, 10/08/2010, Baalchaa Deentaa (22/08/2005), D/Doolloo.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.



The peasants considered it important to get schools teaching their children in or near their own village, although there had not been such high levels of optimism attached to these schools when they first started. Many peasants at the time were not prepared to send their children to school at all. The first generation of evangelist-teachers went door-to-door persuading peasant families to send their children to the new village schools, but they had a very tough time. Only a few peasants were able to send their children to school with the support of family ties and social networks. Local churches worked hard in the course of such upheaval, attempting to convince the peasants of the significance attached to village schools.<sup>79</sup> Encouragement came when families who had their children schooled began to get help from them in terms of reading tax receipts (from the state and the EOC) and dealing with court papers, which usually entailed long trips to find someone able to read them. Even Oromo bibles were printed in Geez alphabets. Some students were able to write applications of various kinds on behalf of their families to the nearest unit of governance and the lowest governors, and families used their children as interpreters in local court cases, especially on land disputes.<sup>80</sup> Such students replaced Amhara interpreters—*turjumaana*, as the peasants called them—whose prices were not cheap. Interest in sending children to school grew only gradually, but when the schools were shut down by Amhara governors who looked down on them with no respect for their language and culture and from whom they had suffered exploitation and harassment, the peasants came to understand what it meant to send their children to schools offering a modern education in the Oromo language. Unaware of the empire's ethno-cultural stratifications before this period, the peasants seemed to have little understanding of the use of village schools working in Oromo.

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<sup>79</sup> Informants: Nägaš Shuuramoo, 10/08/2010, Baalchaa Deentaa, 22/08/2005, D/Doolloo.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

In the eyes of the peasants, the Amhara state functionaries were the embodiment of evil, occupying their ancestral land and closing their Churches and schools.<sup>81</sup> Although the enmity of the state towards the peasantry tried hard to manifest itself as being primarily targeted towards the EVC, it was inseparably linked to issues relating to the Oromo language, and this became clearer to the people in the course of their dealings with the state. The closure of the churches also meant closure of their children's schools. Like the reopening of their churches, the reopening of the Oromo schools became the subject of prayers in various home congregations in the wake of the persecutions. For them, especially between 1951 and 1955, and evidently because of the local elites (the evangelist-teachers) the introduction of EVC had created, the closure of their churches and schools was interpreted as state persecution against their collective identity, an interpretation that was not far from what the EOC and the local state structure actually sought.<sup>82</sup> In this sense, home churches also served as centres of awareness for the promotion of collective identity.

Despite nominal attempts by the EOC clergy, there were no boundaries placed between issues of ethno-cultural identity and religion in the course of state measures against the churches, so the peasant understanding was that they were the same thing, which meant that religion and ethno-cultural identity became inextricably connected. As the Amhara colonial oppression had never have made any proper distinction between politics and religion, or between state and church, these two aspects were seldom separated during the struggles and challenges of the Evangelical Christians and the Macca Oromo of Qellem. The governors, police officers, judges and EOC priests who closed the churches and schools were all Amhara, (although they were theoretically supported by some Oromo *balabbat*), while the Evangelical Christians, their leaders and pastors were all Oromo. Oromo pastors, evangelists and EVC

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<sup>81</sup> Informants: Ulaa Fiixumaa, 14/08/2010); Baalchaa Deentaa, 22/08/2005), D/Doolloo.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

church leaders inspired the peasants with a greater sense of enthusiasm as a result of these complex circumstances. The peasant struggle was inseparably associated with the battle to maintain their collective dignity as a cultural group and fend off the unbearable exploitation to which they were being subjected.<sup>83</sup> Although previous work<sup>84</sup> has done much to document the persecutions, they have largely omitted its political facets, which were vital primary factors underlying the social and political tension between the conqueror and the conquered that brought about the crises between 1951 and 1955. The Oromo of Qellem embraced the EVC as a profound act of protest against the widespread violence that the alliance of Amhara state officials and the EOC clergy were committing.

Such understandings are also clear from replies of uneducated peasants in court litigations, who were not literate in Amharic and were dependent on interpreters. In one of the local courts in Sayyoo, to take one of many examples, a peasant was asked by an Amhara judge why he refused to return to “his forefathers’ old religion” (a traditional reference to the EOC) the peasant replied:

“Behold, I did not know Christ until the missionaries came and preached to us in 1928. Until then I did not know Christ, although there was an [Orthodox] Church [near us]. I did not hear anything [about Christ]. You said ‘[Orthodox] was your forefathers’ religion,’ it was not. In the past our ancestors prayed under the trees and on the hillsides.”<sup>85</sup>

While still in prison, the leadership started to fight back to win their release and get their churches re-opened. In June 1952 Gidaadaa and other colleagues wrote letters to a former student of American Mission School in Goree, Käbbädä Abozin, who now held an influential position in the High Court in Addis Ababa. Käbbädä sent a letter to the Sayyoo court, and in August brought two colleagues, Gidaadaa and Deebisaa, to Addis Ababa where they were

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> For example, Debela Birri, *Devine Plan*; Gustav Aren, *Envoys*.

<sup>85</sup> Kumsa Boro, *Kumsaa Boroo*, 176.

placed under house arrest. This embroiled the Church in a fresh course of court battles at *zufan ċilaot*, the Emperor's highest court in Addis Ababa. Gidaadaa and Deebisaa went back and forth to the court over the next four months, until Gidaadaa finally obtained an opportunity to see the Emperor's personal secretary, Tāfārra-Wärq Kidanāwäld, who arranged for him an audience on 10 January 1953. However, the blind Gidaadaa fell and injured himself, and was admitted to hospital the same morning he was due to see the Emperor, and the appointment was cancelled. But another opportunity was created when the Emperor visited hospital patients, and Gidaadaa got chance to present his case in detail. The Emperor immediately created a three-man committee and ordered it to scrutinize details of the case and come up with a proposal for a decision. Like the litigations of the *qälad* system of Qellem, the committee was chaired by *Ras Abbäbä Arägay*,<sup>86</sup> Minister of War in 1949–1955.

In the meantime, all EVC church leaders, elders, pastors and believers kept in different prisons in Qellem were released. Perhaps the state believed that their release would undermine the role they played in the course of the struggle, but their churches remained closed. However, the church was soon involved in another series of struggles with the provincial administration at Naqamtee. Church leaders organized a committee whose job was to send its members on a fundraising expedition to Naqamtee. They appealed against closure of their churches and the “blatant robbery” of their members in the name of fines. The church representatives stayed in Naqamtee waiting for reply to their appeal from Wallagga governor-general for months, courting multiple intimidation at the hands of the Amharic bureaucracy. Finally, to get them out of the door of the governor-general's office they were given in 1952 a letter whose central message (“let it stay as it had been/አንደኑረ ይቆይ”) was controversial. The Amhara governors of Qellem, who were well-trained in the state bureaucracy, interpreted it as an order that the churches should remain as they were—closed—but the Oromo pastors, who knew Amharic

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<sup>86</sup> Gidada Solon, *The Other Side*, 71-78.

very well but not its deceptive lexicography, thought it meant the churches should be opened. They went again and again to Naqamtee but their struggle did not yield any direct results.<sup>87</sup>

The same committee also designed a new tactic to combat the officials' "robbery" of their members in the name of fines. They started collecting receipts for the fines and worked to spread rumours throughout the province that the receipts were wanted for the Emperor's inspection. This turned out to be a useful weapon for two main reasons. First, local officials, despite issuing government receipts for the fines, sometimes just pocketed the money. Second, those same local officials were unsure of how their violent measures against the Evangelicals would be seen by the Emperor, as most of them had acted on verbal orders. The committee declared (truthfully), while still looking for more receipts in peasant homes, that it had collected receipts worth more than eight thousand birr, nearly half the amount the government annually collected from tax, a significant amount of money.<sup>88</sup>

The imperial court in Addis Ababa followed the same slow process as the committee, and it took two full years to come up with any decision. Gidaadaa was backed by other church elders, and in August 1953 they were told that a decision had been reached to reopen eight of the eighteen churches in Qellem. It took another three months to obtain a written order, but in October 1953, after two years of court battles, the Oromo church elders and pastors in Addis Ababa received a written imperial court order to open the eight churches that had been built before the reinstitution of the imperial government in 1941. Those erected after 1941 were deemed to have been illegally built. The demand by the leaders to get another order to have the fines their people repaid was effectively turned down.<sup>89</sup> They were informed that another national law was about to be issued to regulate religious matters at national level. The church

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<sup>87</sup> IEAPHS), Carl J. Kissling to Glenn P. Reed, January 25, 1951, Record Group (RG) 209; Kumsa Boro, *Kumsaa Boroo*, 193.

<sup>88</sup> Informants: Ulaa Fiixumaa, 14/08/2010; Baalchaa Deentaa, 22/08/2005, D/Doolloo; Kumsa Boro, *Kumsaa Boroo: Jiruu fi Jireenya (Life and Times)*, 195.

<sup>89</sup> Gidada Solon, *The Other Side*, 71-78.

elders returned home in November and handed the letter to *Fitawrari* Mäkonnen Adäfris, the governor of Qellem.<sup>90</sup> It is interesting to note that although the court was fully aware of the schools attached to the churches, it never made an issue about them, and this signalled the effective closure of modern education in Oromo language during the imperial era.

Implementing the order involved more strenuous work, and resulted in disputes with the EOC clergy and many local governors. It became too difficult for *Fitawrari* Mäkonnen and his colleagues to immediately translate the letter of the imperial court into practice. Although partly resolved at national level, the issue became a local dispute in the rural Qellem. The district governors stated that there were ambiguous statements in the legal documentation which needed further explanation and for which they were drafting a letter in reply. The implementation was suspended, provoking more grievances. Months passed, and the governors asked for patience; when a year had passed they asked for more patience, and during this period home churches further expanded the idea of praying against an “enemy” that was insisting the churches stayed closed.

In the beginning of 1954 some local regions became impatient and opened their local churches independently. While some churches continued to open under threats of permanent legal sanction, some were closed again as EOC priests unleashed heavy accusations. Appeals from Church members continued to deluge government offices in some sub-districts.<sup>91</sup> Sadii and Sayyoo were at the top of that list. Although the officials apparently rebuked the applicants’ representatives, administrative notes in the imperial archives indicate that dealing with them became part of their daily job.<sup>92</sup> The governors used every excuse available to them to delay the execution of the letter, and it took two full years to reopen the eight churches in line with

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid; IEAPHS, Carl J. Kissling to Glenn P. Reed, January 25, 1951, Record Group (RG) 209.

<sup>91</sup> Informant: Baalchaa Deentaa, 22/08/2005, Dambi-Doolloo.

<sup>92</sup> IEAWGG, *Yä Wällägga Täqläy Gizat Yä mäte Haimanot säwoch abètuta* [Wallagga Governorate-General, Appeals of the people of alien religion], various dates between Mäskäräm 21-Tahisas 22, 1947 (1 October and 26 December 1954).

the Emperor's order. It was not until the Emperor declared the promulgation of the Revised Constitution of 1955 that all eight churches were reopened. As the road was cleared, the mother church at Dambi-Doolloo became the first to be reopened. From that point on, the remaining seven churches and all the other ones were reopened with only minor challenges, and the church regained all its eighteen branches.<sup>93</sup> Disregarding an imperial order in Ethiopia was almost certainly a norm, for three main reasons. The first lies in the fact that the political centre relied heavily on local alliances and the willingness of its Amhara agents to execute its decisions. The second was relates to poor infrastructure and the enormous geographical extent of the empire, while the third relates to concerns that political elites around the Emperor, for reasons known or unknown to him, might form independent alliances with local governors. The irony of the matter appears in the fact that such conflicts in the cabinet involved only a few men of humble origins and ministers of noble origin headed by the Emperor<sup>94</sup> who held an entrenched conservative Orthodox faith. The latter group was in fact the very group responsible for survival of the Emperor and the whole *habäša* imperial system.

Although endless fines had exhausted the church members to the extent that its leadership was embarrassed to ask for further financial contributions towards the church's battles in Addis Ababa courts and Naqamtee, it appears that a growth in the collective consciousness kept the peasants on track as far as the struggle to get their churches and schools reopened was concerned, a struggle they imagined was one staged for both survival and dignified peoplehood.<sup>95</sup> The fact that they had achieved a legal victory yet were denied its implementation for two years appears to have added fuel to the growing ethnic consciousness.

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<sup>93</sup> Gidada Solon, *The Other Side of Darkness*, 71-78.

<sup>94</sup> For a good understanding of such dichotomies see Emmanuel Abraham, *Reminiscences of My Life* (Lund, 1993), chapters 6, 10.

<sup>95</sup> Informants: Baalchaa Deentaa, 22/08/2005; Nägaš Shuuramoo, 10/08/2010, D/Doolloo.

As such, imperial Ethiopia's grip over its Oromo subjects in this region resulted in the opposite of its original intention, which was Amharization.

Although the EOC-state alliance intended to destroy the EVC in Qellem the practice was far from coherent. As discussed in the last chapter, the imperial state itself had its weaknesses—inconsistency, incoherence and breaks in communication—which were revealed in the way it dealt with peasant appeals and petitions. However, the state's approach to the challenges produced by EVC was markedly different and involved different approaches to the problem, as explained in the previous sections of this chapter. However, the results of central government's encounters with peasant petitions on land issues of and the way it dealt with EVC share a considerable degree of similarity. There were visible tensions between Qellem and the central government regarding the handling of EVC. The attempts by local EVC leadership to appeal or petition against damaging measures taken towards the church and its adherents were almost completely turned down. The local governors closed EVC churches, despite the fact that the *tāqlay-gezat* and central government authorities (particularly the Emperor himself) had some degree of tolerance and listened to EVC appeals as part of its efforts to find some form of accommodation. While local authorities remained adamant and used violent measures to close the EVC churches and disperse their adherents, central government officials produced imperial orders, albeit offered after lengthy deliberations and a long bureaucratic process, which sanctioned the existence of some of the the churches. This approach by the Amhara imperial authorities in Addis Ababa, like their methods of handling appeals against implementation of *qālad*, was related to their concern regarding the state's local agents' and its local collaborators' ability to to accommodate local social forces through approaches which would not exacerbate the latter's capacity to undermine interests of the central imperial government. Local governors were not always ready to translate into practice imperial orders authorising the re-opening of churches or the re-consideration of *maqqacaa* (fines), which



would challenging and even sometimes reverse their own decisions. Implementing the decisions of the central imperial government in many cases required further correspondence, discussions, consultations and bargaining. In other words, imperial orders and decisions passed from Addis Ababa to the local Amhara governors and the EOC clergy in Qellem were subject to compromise and negotiation, revealing tensions within the the imperial state, which created within its structures cracks that weakened its powers at local level. These weaknesses enabled the EVC leadership and believers to take advantage of any fractures and inconsistencies within the system of government, offering them openings that put them in more advantageous bargaining positions. The history of the EVC's attempts at consolidation and expansion on one side and the EOC-state reaction to these attempts—mainly through persecutions—presented in the discussions above exemplify the fragmented, fractured and inconsistent approach of the imperial state and its church, the EOC. Negotiations became a necessity, not merely a theoretical idea. It is to these processes of negotiation and their results that we now turn.

### **Respite and negotiations (1956-1974)**

If the period between 1941 and 1955 was one of hidden political persecution of the rising Oromo consciousness under the shadow of the EVC, the next eighteen years represented a great relief for the Church, although a time came when internal discords struck it at its heart. The post-1955 era marked a period in which the imperial system designed a more sophisticated mechanism of handling the church. In terms of peasant interaction with the empire-state, 1955 became a turning point. The coming of the Revised Constitution of 1955—a constitution mainly designed to serve as an impetus for national integration—ushered in a new era in which the imperial system appeared to learn from the past and adopt a much more delicate approach. This was not without consequences for both sides. For the Oromo churches, it meant that the period of creating an easy association between ethno-cultural identity and religion came to an

abrupt end. Since the Church's prime object was to preach the gospel and expand Christianity, (a job that persecutions had been impeding) and in the course promote peasant consciousness and mobilize its support, it could no longer mobilize the peasants on the basis of the neglect of their language and culture. For the Empire-state it meant handing to the already experienced church another expedient tool that would help it guard itself from any looming danger, a legal blow to the local EOC clergy.

The imperial system seems to have realized that it needed to approach the Oromo matter in Qellem more subtly, rather than meeting it head-on with a show of force. If bureaucracy was to function smoothly and maintain its local allies, a visible boundary had to exist between issues related to ethno-cultural Oromo consciousness and the EVC. Separating them would be important to deracinate the growing ethno-cultural consciousness that was working against nation-building projects and re-root the EVC. For the Emperor's nation-building projects to be realized, such strong tendencies towards ethno-cultural consciousness under the shadow of a legal institution had to be halted or reversed.

Following the declaration of the Revised Constitution of 1955, an unspoken policy of dealing with the Oromo language and identity began in earnest. None of the churches in Qellem were closed again until the fall of the imperial regime in 1974. Indeed, the number of churches grew to one hundred and thirty-two during that time. The growth of EVC in this period was unprecedented as it reached far and wide, covering all villages it had been unable to reach before 1955.<sup>96</sup> Although persecution against the Church had ceased by 1955, it appears that it continued its job of evangelization with the same zeal. No practical obstacle was set its way, although Oromo language issues and alternative schools remained in abeyance.

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<sup>96</sup> Kumsa Boro, *Kumsaa Boro*, 194-196; IEAPHS, Carl J. Kissling to Glenn P. Reed, January 25, 1951, Record Group (RG) 209.

The retreat by the EOC and the state from multiple forms of persecution they were exerting on the EVC's leadership and believers was to some extent a recognition of the structural weaknesses within the state. The EVC's subsequent ability to expand quickly in Qellem illustrates the compromises and negotiations that took place between the state and the EVC. Negotiations or "negotiation arenas", according to a recent study, are not limited to formal discussion and dialogues carried out around tables. Instead they help structure social actors' scope by conditioning—but not pre-determining—their "inclusion in or exclusion from negotiation process. 'Negotiation arenas' have special, social and temporal dimensions..."<sup>97</sup> In Qellem, the situation in which the EVC and its community of peasant believers allied themselves against decades of persecution, their persistent appeals and petitions on one side and the state's willingness to compromise and ease tensions as of 1955 on the other are examples of "negotiation arenas." The EVC and its supporters had through petitioning and appeals protested visibly against persecutions that had been levelled against them, but more importantly, consciously or otherwise, employed these petitions and appeals "to access the state itself."<sup>98</sup> As Leonardi and Vaughan rightly point out, such methods of complaint—appealing to and petitioning the government—could be taken both as the appellants' recognition of the government's authority and a method of pursuing the latter's recognition of their rights.<sup>99</sup> The EVC leadership and its peasant community of believers imagined that by being subjects ruled by imperial Ethiopia they had certain rights both as individuals and as a community of believers. This was, like the appeals against the *qälad* system, the imbedded and accepted perception of bargaining, a perception they also seem to have imagined as having been guaranteed by the Revised Constitution of 1955.

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<sup>97</sup> T. Hagmann and D. Péclard, "Negotiating Statehood," 550.

<sup>98</sup> C. Leonardi and C. Vaughan, "'We are oppressed,'" 86.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 87.

Local intellectuals and peasant evangelicals in Qellem persisted in networking and worshipping through a time that saw multiple forms of violent persecution levelled against them. Their practice of petitioning at many levels within the EVC leadership successfully restricted the state from the traditional hardline orthodoxy of the EOC clergy in order to allow them the minimum space they need to practice their own version of Christianity. This was not, however, achieved on their own. The Emperor's interest in measured compromise in a way that would not infuriate the key figures of his government too much, reflected a similar interest from a number of government officials who worked at various levels as well as the EOC clergy's patience in dealing with these measures. In this process of compromise and negotiation the EVC leadership, working with local evangelists and peasant intellectuals not only altered the state's approach towards them but were changed themselves during the process. As far as preaching and teaching in the Oromo language, for example, they were not as worried as they had been before 1955, and they agreed to accept the state's policy of using Amharic. However, this was limited in practical terms to towns, because finding interpreters for every local church was not only impossible, it would have been too expensive for an infant church even if it had been possible. These were plausible reasons for the church leadership to have condoned the continuing use of Oromo in services to sustain the strong connection between local churches and the surrounding peasant communities. The process of bargaining and negotiation changed both sides, and despite the façade of its peripheral position, it resulted in the EVC playing a considerable role in local state construction.

Now the time came when the main requirement, the use of Amharic language in teaching and preaching, in the "Regulation on the Establishment of Missions,"<sup>100</sup> had to be effectively implemented. In relation to handling what the empire-state calls "the missions," i.e. Evangelical Churches, it was only through this law that the empire would achieve full

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<sup>100</sup> *Negarit Gazeta*, Decree Number 3 of 1944, "Regulation on the Establishment of Missions."

realization of integrating the conquered south. It seems the state thought that the assimilation it had wanted to see had not been achieved in Qellem in the period before 1955. The very Church that had initiated teaching and preaching in Oromo—and was loved for it—was ordered to do the same jobs in Amharic. There was no room left to hide, and while the church was freed from persecution and was not discouraged in its spiritual career, it was now required to undertake preaching and education in the only elementary school it was allowed to possess in its Sayyoo mission compound, in Amharic.

The church had no alternative but to accept, albeit nominally, the new framework set out by the government. It immediately started to use interpreters for sermons preached in its mother church in Dambi-Doolloo.<sup>101</sup> There was little chance of continuing the struggle in any form to get the Oromo schools back, and the church stopped attempting to do so. It stopped appealing on behalf of the schools and it seems to have been generally believed that the responsibility to struggle for political rights had been passed to the next generation. The state had therefore largely succeeded in this regard.

Opposition against the state that had been coordinated by the church and its leadership—and agitated by the local intellectuals the church created in the course of its birth and growth—was mainly based on the diluted idea that the state's suppression of the church was at the same time suppression on Oromo language and culture. This idea was useful in mobilizing the peasants in the course of the struggle, because the state was naturally exposed by its own behaviour as the enemy of Oromo language and culture. When the state allowed the reopening of EVC churches it had closed and permitted relatively free access for the evangelistic work in the region, the church could no longer push against the state, although it still called itself an evangelical church and boasted that it had achieved enough freedom to do

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<sup>101</sup> Informants: Ulaa Fiixumaa, 14/08/2010, Fiixee Birrii, 05/08/2010, D/Doolloo.

its work. The empire's policies placed a clear boundary between evangelistic work and the question of freedom of Oromo language and culture. The Empire had clearly detached its association between local Oromoness and Protestant religion in Qellem. This, however, did not appear to have translated into other more important success for the state—its desire to use the church for its project of Amharization.

The EVC apparently complied with the order, but in practice continued to use Oromo language for its services throughout the province, Dambi-Doolloo being an exception. The state apparatus was informed of this and immediately began to threaten renewed persecution. The church replied with excuses, the most important of which was an acute lack of human resources literate in Amharic. The state faced a dilemma in its handling of this, and finally suggested help with provision of Amharic teachers who would work with the Church. The state's suggestion raised another excuse—these teachers should be converts to Evangelical Christianity, something almost impossible to arrange, since many Amharic teachers were, at least until the early 1970s, themselves Amhara and followers of Orthodox Christianity.<sup>102</sup>

When it was discovered that no progress was being made, the district administration sent a command to pull down all the church buildings in Qellem except for the eight churches which had been granted legality by the imperial verdict of 1953. The reason given by the state was interesting. Referring to the decree of August 1944, "Regulation on the Establishment of Missions," the entire territory of Qellem was claimed as part of the EOC. The church chose to appeal to the higher authority and budgeted three thousand birr for this process.<sup>103</sup> Whilst earlier periods had been defined by the closure of Evangelical churches and the arrest of their leaders and members at the slightest provocation, matters were now being dealt with more respectfully and basic issues were dealt with in formal letters. Now the church, in addition to

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Minutes of the Qellem Synod Meeting of *Miazza* 15, 1959 (April 23, 1967), EECMY Qellem-Wallagga Synod archive. No any further files taking up the matter to high levels found. Nor did any informant recall serious following up of the case on both sides.

matters in Qellem, began to deal with the continued growth of branches it had opened in parts of west and south-western Ethiopia (Maji, Bench, Pokwo/Akado and Goree).

The schoolchildren were kept under strong Amharic tutelage in elementary schools. Many of them had become assimilated into the drive towards Amharization. The paradox was that Amharic became restricted to schools (as far as students are concerned), while the public still used Oromo. Keeping the students active in their mother tongue was little problem for families. What was absolutely impossible was getting children a modern education in Oromo.<sup>104</sup> It must be stated, however, that despite all efforts to get children to schools, enrolment rates in Qellem, as in many southern provinces, were extremely low. Provincial and district student enrolment data is very different, but there is insufficient space here to analyse the comparatively better national statistics. Informants state that for many peasant families sending their children to school and keeping them there was not only a resistance to Amharization but also a struggle for survival. The previous lack of enthusiasm for sending children to school that characterized the earlier periods when modern schools started the persecutions of the 1940s and early 1950s added to the consciousness of how important it was to be in schools for their siblings.<sup>105</sup>

By the early 1960s some of the students who had grown up under such troubles—and the mentorship of local intellectuals and the earliest American missionaries—were ready for pan-Oromo national struggle. As there was not a single secondary school in Qellem before 1964 many of them went back to their parents to live, and became peasants. Only a few children, whose parents had either money to afford their travel and living costs or relatives where secondary education was available were able to attend secondary schools. Even those who were able to send their children to far away towns obviously depended on income from their

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<sup>104</sup>Informants: Nägaš Shuuramoo, 10/08/2010; Baalchaa Deentaa, 22/08/2005, D/Doolloo.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

agricultural produce, and September was a bad time for this. Those who had coffee plantations would borrow money from merchants at one hundred percent interest, *araaxaa*, reimbursable in coffee in January.<sup>106</sup> Those from poorer parents became another addition to local elites, despite mostly living as peasants, while the other group went to various urban centres like Naqamtee, Goree, Adama/Nazreth, Bishooftuu/Däbrä-Zäit and even Addis Ababa, but still enrolled at missionary schools, graduated from colleges and were working in various capacities. Some even went overseas to attend tertiary education and came back. By the early 1970s these small groups of students delivered politicians and military men who joined the first generation of modern Oromo nationalists and soon established the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF).<sup>107</sup>

It could be argued here that the local evangelist-teachers' involvement in issues beyond religious matters—petitions, appeals, litigations and controversies about the importance of Oromo schools and churches—dragged them into political contestations. Consciously or otherwise, their efforts to survive EOC-state persecutions transformed these evangelist-teachers and those around them from people with no ability to exert any meaningful influence on how power was constructed, engaged, contested and deflected into people who possessed such abilities, albeit implicitly. Despite their claims of being subjected to oppression by imperial Ethiopia's alliance with the EOC and some of the local Oromo elites, the EVC and its leadership in Qellem became an active political community. Ironically, although the EVC and its leadership asserted that they were oppressed, they were in fact the most active participants in the ways in which power was constructed, contested and negotiated in Qellem.

There is little surprise therefore that the children of some of the Oromo evangelist-teachers in Qellem became from the late 1960s onwards active players in broader Oromo nationalist political activism. Some of them became prominent politicians who founded the

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<sup>106</sup> Ibsaa Guutamaa, *Prison of Conscience: Upper Compound Maa'ikalawii, Ethiopian Terror Prison and Tradition* (New York: Barlabsii Gubirmans, 2003), 84-85.

<sup>107</sup> Informants: Nägaš Shuuramoo, 10/08/2010; Baalchaa Deentaa, 22/08/2005, D/Doolloo.



first modern political part the Oromo people have ever had—the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). Yohannes/Leencoo Lataa, the son of Reverend Lataa Waaqayyoo (who had been in the second generation of evangelist-teachers in the Oromo church of Qellem) was among the founders of the OLF, and served at different capacities in its leadership. His younger brother Abraham/Abbaa Caalaa was a senior member of the OLF and served in several positions in the party. The children of Reverend Kumsaa Boroo (who came from the same generation as Reverend Lataa Waaqayyoo) also played their part. Nagaasaa Kumsaa and Martha/Kuwee Kumsaa were active members of the OLF. Nagaasoo Gidaadaa, son of Reverend Gidaadaa Soolan, also joined, and later went on to become a member of the EPRDF. Ibsaa Guutamaa, son of *Fitawrari* Guutamaa Birbir of Dhaa’ee (on whose fief Sayyoo mission was established in 1919), was also among early students of the Sayyoo mission school who shaped the OLF in its infancy, but he was soon jailed, and not released until 1989. Prominent among those from poor peasant families were Dheeressaa Kittie, Wadaajoo Gosaa, Nagarii Firrisaa, Tarfaa Kumsaa, Fiqiru Käbbädä, Yohannes Dinqaa, all of whom went to the Sayyoo mission school.<sup>108</sup>

As well as the dissonances and incoherence that characterized the imperial state, the empire had insufficient strategic power to command the realization of its policy of integrating the Oromo through assimilation into the Amhara culture. In terms of Amharization it relied heavily on local allies. It is very difficult to appreciate its efforts nearly a century later. It has been strongly suggested that such a policy of assimilation could not hope to succeed when the conquered peoples were being robbed of any economic surplus.<sup>109</sup> The penetration of Amharic was also limited to major urban centres. Some writers argue that instead of effecting assimilation and integration, the imperial system in fact succeeded in promoting and

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<sup>108</sup> Ibsaa Guutamaa, *Prison of Conscience*, 84-85; Informants: Leencoo Lataa, 12/03/15, skype.

<sup>109</sup> H. Darley, *Slaves and Ivory* (London, 1926), 116-117; John Markakis, *National and Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa* (Cambridge, 1987), xvi; Edmond Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia: From Empire to People’s Republic* (Bloomington, 1988), 52-53.

maintaining the Oromo identity.<sup>110</sup> When the revolution erupted in 1974, the Amharization policy pursued by the *habäša* state was beginning to rebound. In the process of interacting with the Empire, the cultural identity of the Macca Oromo peasants of Qellem had been affected very little. Instead, they became cultural reservoirs for the Oromo, and Protestantism helped in this process. The survival of their cultural identity after nearly a hundred years of co-existence with the *habäša* system was particularly significant, because it targeted the very heart of the Empire's policy—the policy of Amharization. This does not mean, however, that Protestantism kept the Macca Oromo cultural elements intact, it did not. Instead, it significantly transformed their existence.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter explored the way the socio-economic and political dynamics of the early twentieth century dictated the introduction into Qellem of EVC, factors that that favoured and challenged its expansion, and reaction from the state-backed EOC. In particular, the chapter highlighted the process in which EVC won over the hearts and minds of the peasants. The crushing defeat it suffered in the early 1950s associated it even more strongly with the peasants and magnified the idea of the EOC-state alliance as the 'enemy' in the eyes of the local population. This chapter also analysed the persecutions Evangelical Christianity suffered within the broader context of the imperial Ethiopian system and its conceptualization of the version of Christianity the American Presbyterian missionaries introduced. The association between Oromo peasants and the EVC was mutually beneficial. The EVC became a shelter for weak, exploited and ill-considered peasants, and the peasants in return became key to the EVC struggle to reopen its churches and schools. The chapter argued that the introduction of the EVC into Qellem, its

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<sup>110</sup> F.Halliday and M.Kolyneux, *The Ethiopia Revolution* (London, 1981), 158; Gebru Tareke, *Ethiopia: Power and Protest*, 29-31; and Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia*, 161.

endurance in survival and its ability to expand in the midst of persecution as well as its strategies of confrontation with the EOC-state, significantly contributed to the process of state construction. Even though the Macca Oromo peasants of Qellem embraced the EVC as a tool of resistance against imperial Ethiopia's system of exploitation and domination, for the EVC leadership and its local elites enduring the challenges and expanding their own version of Christianity required them to legitimise and accept the state structure through appeals and petitions. Although this was probably an unconscious process, bargaining with it through various means eventually gave way to the state's willingness to negotiate and compromise. The EVC leadership's practice of appealing to the state apparatus for fair treatment and justice—mostly based on peasant support—gave the state an increased sense of legitimacy. The process of bargain and negotiations transformed both the EOC-state and the EVC. In other words, the EVC too played considerable part in state construction at local level.

## CONCLUSION

The premise of this thesis is that by understanding the nature and the degree of association between peasants and the available resources of their subsistence farming— land and labour—we can acquire greater insights into the type of historical interactions that developed between the state and the peasants, in this case the Macca Oromo of Qellem and the Ethiopian empire-state and its local apparatus. The inferences one can obtain by examining peasant narratives (recorded in oral texts as well as in their petitions, appeal letters and court litigations kept in state archives) and that of the state (represented in its archives) are certainly more vibrant than those obtained from any other historical sources. Labour and land have been vital means of survival to the peasants of Qellem, and any threats to the use and control of these resources were defended as strongly as possible by mobilising all available instruments.

This study benefitted from the insights of resistance literature, and the use of the concept of resistance in examining the historical developments in Qellem from the 1880s and 1974 has been framed in a way that overcomes flaws that characterise early Africanist historiography. Instead of pursuing nationalist narratives that developed a resistance model which has coined binary concepts—domination/resistance, for example—that downplay tensions and imbalances within African societies, the study favoured pursuing a meticulous historical analyses which reveals the ability of Africans to involve themselves in the creation and contestation of power. Building on concepts set out by Cooper, this study has made attempts to focus on ‘*resistance*’ and avoid ‘*Resistance*’,<sup>1</sup> to recognise and engage with the power of imperial Ethiopia’s local agents in local encounters between the state and the largely Macca Oromo subjects on one hand

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<sup>1</sup> F. Cooper, “Conflict and Connection,” 1532.

and the consideration of the agency of local people and local elites in defining the form of the encounters themselves on the other.

The sources employed in this thesis, in addition to revealing the structure of power, the way imperial Ethiopia's state apparatus functioned at local level and the complex nature of the country's land tenure system, offer us an opportunity to look closely into peasant perspectives through the issues that were framed in their petitions, appeals and court litigations rather than from the traditional perspectives recorded in state archives. In this thesis, these perspectives have been supplemented by oral sources too. By making use of fresh and underused historical information, this study has shown that there is great potential for micro-level research, which could function as a foundation for new perspectives. Broadly speaking, this study represents a contribution towards the understanding of a unique African structure of dominance in which peasants interacted with a sophisticated and militarized empire armed with a literary tradition as well. It is also a contribution towards understanding the broader subject of peasant resistance in the context of the tensions between society and state.

The complicated and tenuous state-society relations which commenced in the last quarter of the nineteenth century culminated in the spontaneous eruption of the Ethiopian revolution of the 1974. Since the 1970s opposition to the monarchy (conspiracies, student activism and peasant rebellions) has received much focus from Ethiopianist scholars, and various works have addressed these issues over the last few decades. But no link has yet been made between the various and dynamic types of peasant resistance in the provinces of the conquered south (in this case Qellem) and defining events at the national level. This thesis explores this link in depth.

Both the regime and the students who had been calling for revolutionary change—even the most radical of them—were quite unprepared to experience it, let alone direct it. The

eruption resulted in a protracted and countrywide process of improvisation of the mass of the peasants that ultimately delivered Ethiopia into the rule of a totalitarian dictatorship, the *Därg* (literally military council). With the deposition of the Emperor in the autumn of 1974, *de facto* military rule was established. Political power was vested in the *Därg*, the military committee which wrested power, which appointed a government to head the administration of the country. An extensive reshuffle of civil servants followed, the general pattern being the ouster of well-known sympathizers of the Emperor were removed and young intellectuals put in their place.<sup>2</sup> One dramatic and immediate result of the revolution was the 1975 a land reform proclamation.

In early 1975 a land reform proclamation, the Rural Land Proclamation, was prepared, and when the harvest season was over land reform was officially proclaimed. The proclamation itself stands out as a policy measure designed to radically transform the land tenure system. It was immediately evident that the government did not possess sufficient administrative resources to implement such a far-reaching proclamation from above. Consequently, it decided to send students into the countryside in December 1974 to teach the rural population and implement the land reform proclamation. All university students, as well as pupils in the two highest grades of secondary school, were ordered to enroll in *Zämächa*, as the campaign was known. An elaborate organization was created to execute the program, which became known as the Campaign for Development Through Cooperation for Enlightenment and Service, established in October 1975, a year after the *Zämächa* was announced. Although the students' criticism of this campaign was strong and many students refused to enroll, the government still managed to send the majority (some 60,000 students) out to rural areas. When the land reform was proclaimed, the *Zämachoch* (as the campaigners were known) were officially given the

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<sup>2</sup> Bahru, *A History*, 228.

role of communicating the content of the proclamation to the peasantry, and to help them implement the legislation.<sup>3</sup>

Tenancy was legally abolished in Qellem in 1965, but it was the 1974 revolution and the subsequent implementation of the land reform proclamation that halted the complex process (marked with changes and continuities) of conflict that had been set in motion several decades previously. The Rural Land Proclamation made the peasants legal owners of usufruct rights over land they worked, although the state still claimed overriding ownership. As the socio-economic and political structure of imperial Ethiopia was built upon control of access to land, this meant that the proclamation had abolished, at least symbolically, the local Amhara regime. In fact, the 1974 revolution showed that the empire had backfired when identities that had apparently been defeated in the process of its state construction since the beginning of the twentieth century flared up again, asserting themselves in opposition.

Lasting nearly for a century, the disputes over the control of land and labour witnessed in Qellem had been shaped by multiple factors generated by the intentions and actions of an empire that was determined to turn itself into a nation-state through effective control over and use of labour and access to land. In this state, the language and culture would be homogenous. But the state had reckoned without the dynamic responses of the peasants, who not only wanted to protect and sustain their subsistence farming livelihoods, but who also, in the course of varying forms of confrontations with the state, developed a consciousness that would match the empire's project in their province. Unnoticed by much of the research literature, opposition in this Macca Oromo region had employed—especially since the beginning of the twentieth century—varying forms of what James Scott referred to as “weapons of the weak”: outmigration banditry, and terrorising local governors (Chapter 3), creating, developing and

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<sup>3</sup> David Hamilton, “Ethiopia’s Embattled Revolutionaries,” *Conflict Studies*, (London: 1977), 126.

maintaining alternative forms of Christianity and schooling (Chapters 4 and 6), court litigations and appeals (Chapter 5).

Interactions between the Macca Oromo of Qellem and the Ethiopian empire-state commenced in ca.1886 when the strongest of the Qellem region's emerging Oromo monarchies submitted to *Ras* Goobanaa's forces. The internal factors which had conditioned Oromo settlement in the region were also crucial in acclimatising the transformation of its society from the *gadaa* system to a monarchical form of rule which eventually resulted in the Ethiopian conquest. This same process was crucial in defining the foundations of relations between the Oromo peasants in Qellem and their Oromo overlords (and later the Amhara lords), their relations with one another, and their view of new state institutions. The *näftägna-gäbbär* era (1908–12, 1917–33) saw the highest level of economic exploitation, in which almost all groups were indiscriminately turned into *gäbbar*. The colonists carried out unprecedented levels of exploitation: they were a class of Amhara elites who practiced a culture different from the local inhabitants. The Amhara elite, in alliance with the EOC clergy, despised and worked assiduously to destroy the local Oromo culture. The system showed signs of ethno-cultural subjugation as well as severe economic exploitation. However, it is less well understood in Ethiopian historiography that the imposition of such a system in Qellem not only affected the local socio-economic structure but also provoked a peasant resistance that lasted for nearly a century. This turbulent history, and the subsequent period that lasted all the way up to the 1974 revolution, turned out to be important in shaping changes within the peasants, as well as their relations with the state and its agents. This feature would help expand peasant consciousness, making the struggle generational and sustaining it until the outbreak of the 1974 revolution.

The structural changes the Ethiopian empire introduced into state-society relations in the early part of the twentieth century resulted in conditions of both non-violent resistance and



outright rebellion. In both cases, the peasants mobilised multiple tactics, which represented methods of both survival and resistance. What followed was a new kind of socio-economic and political interaction, the *qälad* system, between peasants and landlords which would be reversed in Ethiopia's south only by the 1974 revolution, although in Qellem, tenancy and landlessness were effectively halted by imperial decree in 1965. But before then it was the Italian interlude (1936-41) that overthrew decades of Amhara domination.

The arrival of the Italians as an occupying force in 1935-36 forcefully removed the *näffägnä* ruling class and strove to integrate itself into the dynamics of local interaction. The forceful removal of the *näffägnä* ruling class not only abolished the *näffägnä* regime but injected into state-society relations—at least in this part of Ethiopia—a new level of Oromo peasant consciousness. In the post-1941 era, perhaps in an effort to suppress local assertiveness that had thrived under Italian rule and re-establish the empire, the restored empire introduced the *qälad* system, established new bureaucracy, (re)negotiated its local influence with the *balabbat*, and was confronted by more complex national issues which accompanied British presence.

The period between the end of Italian occupation (1941) and the Ethiopian revolution (1974) is central to modern Ethiopian history. The drive political centralization in the Ethiopian empire was pioneered by Emperor Tewodros II (r. 1855-1868) in the old state of Abyssinia in the nineteenth century was concluded with the establishment of absolutism under Emperor Hailä Sellasè I in the second half of the twentieth century. The *qälad* system, a process of land measurement in its official definition, but more appropriately a systematic transfer of land in the south from the peasants to the Amhara state functionaries, supporters and royal associates, replaced the archaic *näffägnä-gäbbar* system of the pre-war period. This in turn promoted ethno-national hegemony and the growth of counter-hegemonic identities beneath the official

nationalism. Various forms of resistance, especially peasant rebellions, a rather intermittent occurrence before Italian occupation, became more frequent in the post-1941 period.

Paradoxically, the same period also saw the demise of the imperial system, which encountered stiff opposition which became widespread after 1941, gradually built up momentum to the 1974 revolution and eventually brought about the downfall of the regime. The empire increasingly centralised its state structures, enacted laws that enforced the use of the Amharic language rather than the Oromo language, encouraged the EOC and invigorated its local Oromo allies through various mechanisms to become more Amhara and less Oromo.

The state heightened its determination for political integration into Qellem when it introduced the *qäläd* system of land measurement in 1944. The intention, despite the official rhetoric of increasing state revenue through commercialisation of land, was to settle Amhara colonists, on the agricultural lands of the conquered south, in the hope of making them wealthy and powerful landlords who would occupy the highest position of the social ladder at village level, ensuring the political integration of the indigenous people into the imperial state. The vital goal was to transfer the lion's share of the land to the Amhara, empowering them as a class and allowing them to reach an unassailable social status in order to help enforce political integration. It became unpalatable for the Oromo *balabbat* to take a subordinate role to the lowest *näčläbaš* as they had during the period of the *näffağna-gäbbar* system (1917–33), and the Oromo peasants refused to abandon their hereditary rights of access to land. Eventually the two groups formed an alliance with each other, eventually forcing the empire to cancel the *qäläd* system—a system which was set up to help enforce the Amharization process, but which only provoked greater levels of defiance.

One striking result of the peasant-*balabbat*-state land disputes of 1944-1965 was the fact that the overwhelming majority of the *balabbat* (eighty-four out of one hundred and thirty-five) finally chose to reject the *qäläd* system in 1960. The difference between the

overwhelmingly large number of *balabbat* who rejected the *qälad* and the smaller percentage who acquiesced its re-imposition had huge implications for determining the extent to which imperial Ethiopia's political integration succeeded in Qellem. In a way, the *balabbat*'s rejection of the *qälad* system and refusal to accept subordination to the lowest echelons of the emerging Amhara political hierarchy implied that the imperial state's policy of political integration project did not progress very far—not even within the co-opted class, let alone the peasants. Turning the peasants from land owning *gäbbar* to tenants further hindered the project. In short, the intention of the *qälad* system to carry out the political integration of the indigenous people did not succeed in Qellem because both the peasants and the local elite made common cause in the rejection of the imposition of what they considered an alien political order and social structure.

When the imperial regime was overthrown by the 1974 revolution, very few people in Qellem spoke Amharic, and large numbers of people had embraced the EVC as a form of protest against the state backed EOC. The fact that the EOC, as an ally of the state, pushed pressured the peasants to accept its version of Christianity drove the latter to embrace EVC. Between 1941 and 1974 peasant resistance in Qellem was therefore manifested not only concerning issues of land disputes, but also in the form of taking sides with the EVC when it encountered a violent crackdown from the state. The association between the Oromo peasants and the EVC was dialectical. The EVC became a shelter for the weak, exploited and down-trodden peasants, and the peasants themselves became key to the EVC struggle to survive state violence. This thesis shows that the process of state measures against the EVC solidified peasant-church alliances against state violence, how the church became an instrument of resistance for the peasants, and how the peasants became a shield helping the EVC survive multiple instances of violent repression.

However, that both the state and the state church did not fully succeed in integrating Qellem must not be taken to mean that imperial Ethiopia's presence in Qellem, and in the conquered provinces, a total failure. What is true is that the imperial venture did not succeed in imposing Amharization on the people. In fact that aim backfired in the form of Oromo nationalism. The presence of imperial Ethiopia was nevertheless palpable. For example, in the fact that the EOC—a church introduced, maintained and empowered by imperial Ethiopia—survived in the post-1974 era when church and state, at least theoretically, became completely separate entities. No EOC Church was reported to have been closed because of the lack of adherents or income, and none of its local churches, their members or clergy were reported to have been alienated after the fall of the imperial regime with which it had been identified for almost a century. It certainly lost the social respect bestowed upon it, as well as its economic resources (notably land), but it did not lose its members.

These are indications of the Church's gradual success in winning over the hearts and minds of a good number of people—at least those adherents who, during the days of imperial Ethiopia had not necessarily been members *per se* but had frequented the Church in search of social status. They also show that imperial Ethiopia's presence had, through the agency of its local agents daily lives and the EOC, made social bonds over time which did not seem to have been broken after its demise. Moreover, most of the food items common in today's Qellem are not those of pre-Ethiopian days, but were introduced, created and recreated during the course of Imperial Ethiopian rule. Some pre-Ethiopian Oromo food customs were infused with new ideas while others kept their independent existence. This exemplifies the ways in which some Macca Oromo of Qellem had—consciously or otherwise—adopted a number of Amhara cultural values in the process of their interaction since the arrival of the Ethiopian state. As a group of people who inhabited the outer margins of an empire, the peasants in Qellem had been conquered, subjugated and exploited by imperial Ethiopia. However, evidence presented in this

study shows that the peasants, either directly or through representation in various forms, engaged with state power or made remarkable efforts to turn it to their own benefit, or at least “limit its excesses,” as Leonardi and Vaughan put it in the case of Condominium Sudan. This suggests that people from even the most neglected territories “were making claims on the state and seeking recognition of their rights,” in ways that navigate beyond the dyad of domination/resistance. This became in the case of Qellem the most common way of engaging with the state.<sup>4</sup> Simply put, the local-translocal politics this study analyses occasioned a vigorous progression of negotiating connections with a distinctive African imperial state through mass withdrawal, banditry, riots, protest, rebellion, petition, appeal and litigation.

Discussions in this thesis demonstrate that the conundrums that existed between the central imperial government and the local socio-economic forces form the state’s contradictory features of centralisation and fragmentation. The frictions, tensions and inconsistencies inherent in the channels of state apparatus between the central government in Addis Ababa and regional structures of the state, as well as links between agents of the latter and the indigenous elites and the local population, had up to the 1974 revolution allowed the local agents of the imperial state and its indigenous co-opted class to enjoy autonomy and discretion in their own ways. In other words, imperial policies and decisions that were passed from Addis Ababa to the local state were compromised and negotiated, and occasionally even reversed. Successive chapters of the thesis (particularly three, five and six) examined crucial issues of state-society relations within the state structure, and showed that the apparently centralised and unitary state was façade behind which the fragmented, fractured and personalised character of its hierarchies represented the more authentic nature of the imperial Ethiopian state. The survival of that state relied to a considerable level on the fact that it allowed a degree of discretion to local socio-

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<sup>4</sup> Cherry Leonardi and Chris Vaughan, ““We are oppressed and our only way is to write to higher authority”: the politics of claim and complaint in the peripheries of condominium Sudan,” in Emma Hunter, *Citizenship, Belonging, and Political Community in Africa: Dialogues between Past and Present* (Athens: Ohaio University Press, 2016), 77.

economic forces. The study therefore builds on well-established recent historical scholarship and attempts to conceptualize the state as manifold “contingent points of interaction” between the society of Qellem and individual state players; “interactions which constitute the very making of the state,”<sup>5</sup> rather than uniform structures, or even as structures that have become detached from one another. Imperial Ethiopia’s structures of governance and the state’s ability to rule was “strongly shaped by indigenous social forces” as the imperial state relied on and integrated a large number of local elites to help govern it.<sup>6</sup> In fact, as Tobias Hagmann and Didier Péclard strongly argue, “states are deeply embedded in social forces,” they are not external to society.<sup>7</sup> This study therefore attempted to comprehend the idea of the state as a process, rather than as a separate or autonomous entity.

As far as the nature of the Ethiopian state is concerned, materials in this study demonstrate that the imperial state in Qellem was characterised by considerable levels of incoherence, fracture and fragmentation, as well as various different ambitions and only loosely connected schemes. The incoherence and fragmentation of the state created opportunities for society and the elites, enabling them to influence, contest, resist and reshape the state in Qellem. While the officials in Addis Ababa—including Emperor Hailä Sellasse in the later period—made gestures of an isolated and non-aligned statehood, their efforts were often confronted by the laxity on the part of local officials to translate imperial orders into practice. The dissonance that reflected the behaviour of Amhara imperial governors at various levels revealed disorders within the state which enabled the elites to manipulate fracture lines in the state structure in order to pursue their own aims, creating paths of self-expression for the weak—the peasants. Imperial Ethiopia was thus always a fragmented, fractured, incoherent, inconsistent and tension-ridden milieu in which state officials were in most cases participants in rather than

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<sup>5</sup> C. Vaughan, *Darfur: colonial violence*, 6.

<sup>6</sup> This conclusion is drawn in line with the most recent literature emphasizing historicity of the African states. See, for example, T. Hagmann and D. Péclard, “Negotiating Statehood,” 542.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

arbiters of the processes of contestation, bargaining and negotiation which characterised the politics of Qellem.<sup>8</sup>

It is essential to underline the fact that imperial Ethiopia had in the conquered south developed an extensive modern political project to reengineer social structures—a scheme of political integration that roughly speaking followed a process of assimilation dominated by Amharic cultural values. The problem was that imperial Ethiopia's national social re-engineering project did not succeed as planned. It was exposed in the first place to ambiguity, incoherence and often contradictory bureaucratic processes and fractures as well as incongruities within the imperial state structure itself. It was then disputed in multiple ways before being bargained, negotiated and re-negotiated at local level. The state itself was legitimised—and resisted—through these multiple practises and rambling structures, ultimately resulting in consequences that were more often than not unintended.

Imperial Ethiopia had largely succeeded in binding Qellem's economic lives with Addis Ababa before the 1974 revolution, a bond one can count as economic integration of the region. But instead of building on such social and economic foundations in an attempt to achieve national goals, the empire-state preferred to do it through appropriation of land and labour, and was fiercely resisted even by its own local Oromo co-opts who would have been expected to be collaborators. Future researches will expand our awareness of how interaction between the imperial state and local people proceeded, and what its consequences were in the context of the broader conquered south, but as far as Qellem is concerned the process was complex and dynamic, resulting among other things in the growth of political consciousness of Oromo peasants and the survival and solidification of local Oromo identity.

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<sup>8</sup> C. Vaughan, *Darfur: colonial violence*; Bruce Berman, "Structure and process in the Bureaucratic States," 140-176.

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#### IV. Interviews

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- Abdiisaa Tolaa, Muggi, 10/01/10.
- Alemayehu Ayyaanaa, D/Doolloo, 08/02/10.
- Asefa Boroo, D/Doolloo, 08/08/2010.
- Asefa Ammayyaa D/Doolloo, 11/08/2010.
- Ashebir Karoorsaa, Gidaamii, 12/02/10.
- Baalchaa Deentaa, D/Doolloo, 22/08/2005.
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- Nägaš Shuuramoo, D/Doolloo, 10/08/2010.
- Oliiqaa Eebbaa, D/Doolloo, 14/08/2010.
- Raagaa Turaa, D/Doolloo, 07/08/2010.
- Solomon Igguu, Muggi, 12/01/10.
- Ulaa Fiixumaa (Rev.), D/Doolloo, 14/08/2010.
- Waaqjira Hiixuu, Canqaa, 23/08/2010.
- Yosef Gammachuu, Gidaamii, 27/01/10.
- Yosef Innooroo, Bishooftuu, 11/10/2010.

## Appendices

Appendix 1: WGC files (FO 371/20206). Sample documents detailing signatories of the WGC granting *Däjjazmach* Habtä-Mariam the power to lead the new Oromo entity. The following three files show seals and signatures of sixty Oromo notables.

### 1. Seals and signatures of Sibuu-Siree and Sibuu Cingii *balabbat*





2. Seals and signatures of Leeqaa-Biilloo *balabbat*

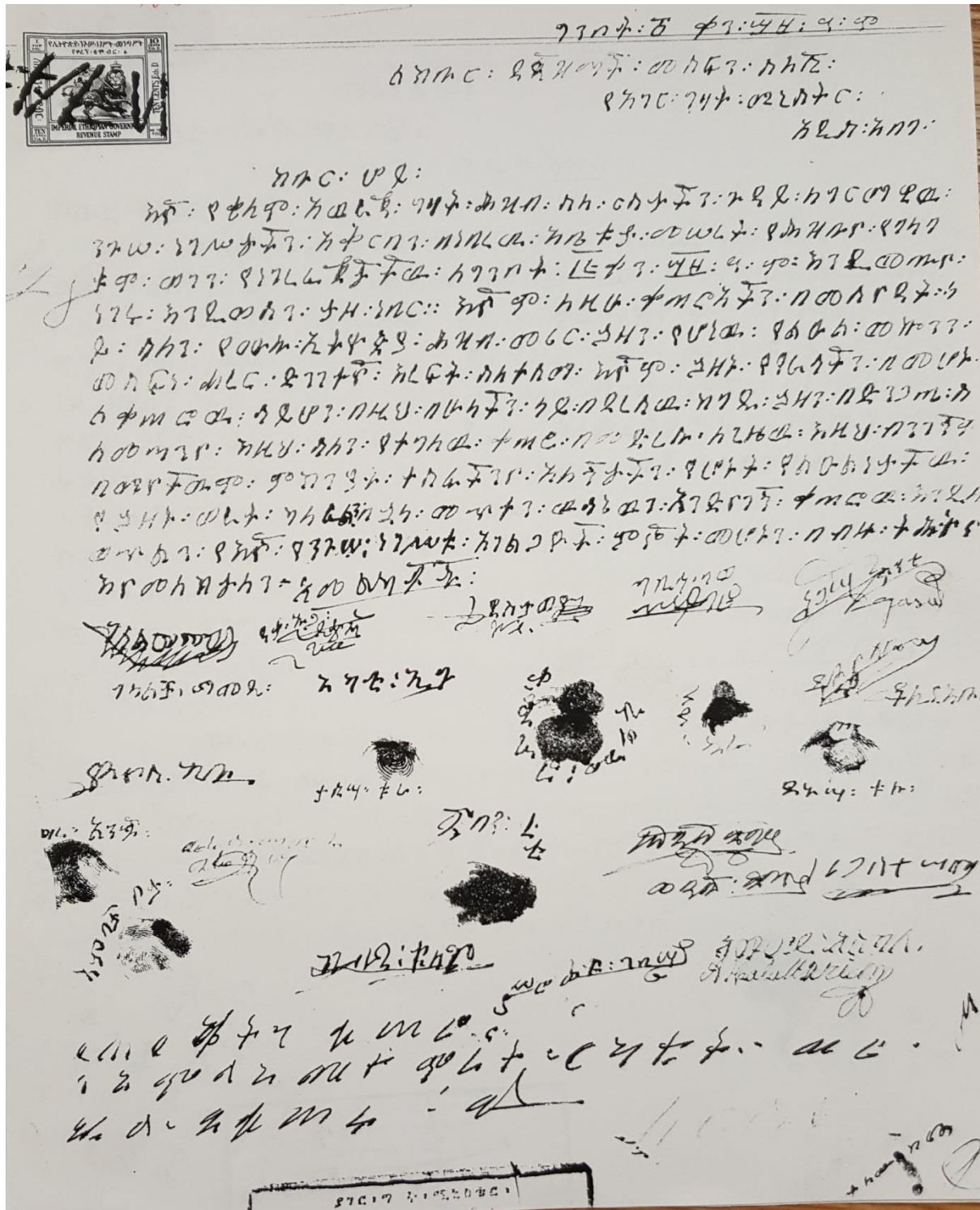






## Appendix 2: Sample letters peasant appeals, petitions

A petition to get new appointment after cancellation of the argument session of Ginbot 13, 1946 EC [21 May 1954] because of the sudden death of the Emperor's son, reminding the imperial state that they would not turn back until they get justice regarding their 'generational property,' their agricultural land.







~~Primary and Secondary~~







ለሞቹ የተለመደ የመሪነት ቅጥር አስከፊ 400 ጋራ ሲሆን በመጽሐፍ ውስጥ  
ካይ በተመሳሳይነት ገንዘብ መንግሥታዊ ተሳታፊነት ለማድረግ በአንድ ዓመት ውስጥ  
ደረጃ መሆኑ የማይታወቅ ሲሆን አንድ ዓመት የገንዘብ ሥርዓት ለማድረግ አይቻልም፡፡  
"የሞቹ ደህንነት አደጋ ምንጭ ማድረግ የገንዘብ ሥርዓት ለማድረግ አይቻልም፡፡  
የደህንነት ደረጃ የሚገልጽ፡፡

(ሀ) ያንገንዘብ ሥርዓት የሚገልጽ መሆኑ ታላቅ ጥቅም ሲሆን የተጠቀሰው ገንዘብ ትክክል  
አይደለም ብሎ ማመልከት የሚገባ ተሳታፊነት ለማድረግ በአንድ ዓመት ውስጥ  
አንድ ዓመት ውስጥ የሚገልጽ መሆኑን ማረጋገጥ አለበት፡፡

(ለ) አንድ ዓመት ውስጥ የሚገልጽ መሆኑን ማረጋገጥ አለበት፡፡ የተጠቀሰው ገንዘብ  
በቀላሉ ማንኛውም ዓመት ውስጥ ማረጋገጥ አለበት፡፡ የተጠቀሰው ገንዘብ  
አንድ ዓመት ውስጥ የሚገልጽ መሆኑን ማረጋገጥ አለበት፡፡ የተጠቀሰው ገንዘብ  
ወደፊት ለማረጋገጥ አለበት፡፡

(ሐ) መሪነት ማረጋገጥ አለበት፡፡ የተጠቀሰው ገንዘብ በአንድ ዓመት ውስጥ  
ወደፊት ለማረጋገጥ አለበት፡፡ የተጠቀሰው ገንዘብ በአንድ ዓመት ውስጥ  
ወደፊት ለማረጋገጥ አለበት፡፡ የተጠቀሰው ገንዘብ በአንድ ዓመት ውስጥ  
ወደፊት ለማረጋገጥ አለበት፡፡ የተጠቀሰው ገንዘብ በአንድ ዓመት ውስጥ  
ወደፊት ለማረጋገጥ አለበት፡፡

በሌላ ጉዳይ ላይ የተጠቀሰው ገንዘብ በአንድ ዓመት ውስጥ  
ወደፊት ለማረጋገጥ አለበት፡፡ የተጠቀሰው ገንዘብ በአንድ ዓመት ውስጥ  
ወደፊት ለማረጋገጥ አለበት፡፡

A secret note produced for the governor of Wallagga province by two imperial spies, reporting on the governor of Qellem, *Däjjazmach* Šifāraw, that he was unqualified for the post on account that he was lagging behind compared to the level of political consciousness in the region Qellem and that the region itself was a peripheral territory where high level of political caution was needed (Tir 1, 1937 EC [9 January 1945]).

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የተገኘው የዓፄነተው ሐይቅ፣ ኢየሱስ ክርስቶስ ስምን በሰማው ሰዓዊ  
 ስብት በጊዜው ስላልነበረው ሆኖ ያነገገው ህግ፣ በስዓት አገራችንም ያለው መሆኑ  
 ላይ በሚኒ ሆኖ የሚታወቅ ህግ፣ ስለሰጠው መሆኑ ያስረዳል/

ደኛ-ሰው ገዢዎች ሁሉ በግልጽ ለሚገኙት የወጭ-  
አገር ዜጎች በግልጽ ለገንዘብ መቀመጥ ሁሉ የሚመገብና የሚረዳው አዲስ  
መቼት የገጠሞ ሥራ መጠቀም የሚያስፈልገውን ህዝብ እድገት

52/ የወረዳው ዲሬክቶር ያሳይቀር ንግድ (የ)፡ ነህት ገጠኛ ዲሬክቶር ያገዙት  
ቃላት አሳይቀር ንግድ ይገኛል፡ አሳይቀር - አያስፈልገውም

፩°/ ከዚሁም ዋና ዋና ስራዎችን ማጠናቀቅ ለ፳ ሰዓት ለዚሁም ስራዎችን ማጠናቀቅ ለ፳ ሰዓት ለዚሁም ስራዎችን ማጠናቀቅ ለ፳ ሰዓት

83/ ምስክር ኃይለማርያም/ ዓሳጣክዝ መገገሚያ ላክ ሥላሳን/ ዓሳኦቲ ንውጉ-ኑ  
 ርዎኛ መጠጠባቂ ዓሚቸሉ ገሺቶ ድድፃ መገገሚያ ለጉሉ ኣገራ ቅንጢሉ ይህ-  
 ዲህሩ ስላሳ ለ ዲሊግባቲ ደተኸሉ መስኮ ኃይለማርያም ሀሳባኝን/ ገሊጾን ይ  
 ቀበላገ ዘገራ በተካቶ ፍርሀት ን ፍቅር ለገጥሞኦን/

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778-77007

ሪፖርት ከገባ. ዓክል ዓም ፳፻፲፱

[illegible]



[illegible]

፩ኛ/ በዚህም ፋክታዩ መሠረት ከቤተሰቡ ጋር በደረጃው እንዲቆይ =  
፪ኛ/ በቀበላው ከገረ የመገገሙ አድርጎ መሪው ምን ያህል ገዥ እንደሆነ  
፫ኛ/ መሪው አሁን ወደ ጠፍቶ መሆኑ፤

፬ኛ/ከዘይታወቀው ሁሉም ሰራተኛዎች መካከል ስለሚገኝ ስርዓተ ስራ ማረጋገጫ ማድረግ፡

375





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የካቲት ፲፱፻፶፩ ዓ.ም. ሚያዝያ ፲፱፻፶፩ ዓ.ም. ከተማ፡ ካቲት

፲፱፻፶፩ ዓ.ም. የተሰጠው ደብዳቤ፡

የወሰነው፡ ጠቅላይ፡ ህዝብ፡ ከሙሉ ጋር፡ በመጠንቀቅ፡ 2

16፡ ህዝቡ ሆኑ፡ ልዩ ልዩ፡ ተባብሮ፡ በሙሉ ከድህረ ገጽ ጋር

ጋር ሲገናኙ፡ ተመልክተው፡ በጠቅላላው፡ የወሰነው፡ ጠቅላይ፡ ህዝቡ፡ ከ

ዘጠኙ፡ ተባብሮ፡ የሚቀረጡት፡ ከቀዳሚው ካህን፡ ከሰባቸው ስላሉ፡ በተ

መሳሰሉ፡ ዛሬ፡ የምናገኛቸው ናቸው፡

6) የገንዘብ፡ ዕርዳታ፡ ህንጻዊ ልማት፡ ከጠቅላላው፡ ህዝቡ

ጠራ፡ በየክፍሉ ላይ፡ ህዝቡ ሲገኙ፡ ህንጻዊ ልማት፡ ከድረ ገጽ ጋር

7) ህንጻዊ ልማት፡ መሠረት፡ ህንጻዊ ልማት፡ ከጠቅላላው፡ ህዝቡ፡

ቀዳሚው፡ መሠረት ላይ፡ ህንጻዊ ልማት፡ በዘጠኙ ላይ፡ መሠረት

ሆኖ፡ ከቀዳሚው ካህን፡ የተሰጠው ህዝቡ፡ ከሰባቸው ስላሉ፡ የሚገኙ

ደም፡ ነው፡ ህዝቡ፡ በጠቅላላው፡ ህዝቡ፡ ህዝቡ ሲገኙ፡ ህዝቡ

ተጠራ፡ ህንጻዊ ልማት፡ ከዘጠኙ ጋር፡

17) ከሆኑ፡ ህዝቡ፡ የሚሰማው፡ ወላጅ፡ በደንበኝነት፡ በደን

ቢ፡ ህንጻዊ ልማት፡ ህንጻዊ ልማት፡ ደንበኝነት፡ ከሆኑ

ከ፡ ህንጻዊ ልማት፡ ከዘጠኙ ጋር፡

ማህተም ሠርዐት የሚሰጥ ነው፡

ሠርዐት የሚሰጥ ነው፡

ሐሰት ከሆነው፡ ህዝቡ

*[Signature]*

14/12/55

ተሰጠው ደብዳቤ፡



20/12/53

የኢትዮጵያ ፍትሕ ሚኒስቴር

የወለጋ፡ ጠቅላይ፡ ግዛት

አዲስ አበባ፡

19.12.53

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ቀጥር : \_\_\_\_\_

ቀን : ጸሐይ    ሐ. ም.

የኢትዮጵያ : ንጉሠ : ነገሥት : መንግሥት :

ያገር : ግዛት : ሚኒስቴር ።

ለከበር ደግሞች ፍቅር ወላጅ ሀ/ጥር ይዞ ፤

የወላጅ ወጥላይ ገዢ ፤

ለጥቅ ፤

ጉዳዩ፡- የቴሌግራም አገልግሎት ለሰጠው የወላጅ አቤቱታ፤

ከበር ሆይ ፤

በኦርክስትራ ስለተወሰነው ጉዳይ ነጠላ 9/54 ዓ.ም፡ በቀጥር 4 / 12630 የባለቤት ደብዳቤ በግብይት ፡፡.....

ስለዚህ ጉዳይ ጥቅምት 3/54 ዓ.ም፡ በቀጥር 118/24/1 የተባረሰ ደብዳቤ ደርሶን ተሰብስብኖልኩ ፡፡.....

አላይ በተወሰነው ቀጥር በተባረሰው ደብዳቤ አገልግሎት ለሰጠው የነበሩት ገዢዎች ያተረፉት ሀሳብ በመጠየቅ ላይ ስለሆነ ጉዳዩ ጭነት አገልግሎት የሚገልጽበት መሆኑን በግብይት አገልግሎት ፡፡.....

ከግብይት ሰላምታ ጋር ፤

ገለባጭ ፤

ለቴሌግራም ገዢ አቤት ፤

ደብዳቤ ይዞ ፤

በቀጥር 3369/20 የባለቤት ደብዳቤ ፤

ዘለ/ዘ/