

The Reactions of Limmu Oromo of Western Ethiopia During and After the Italian Occupation (1936-41)

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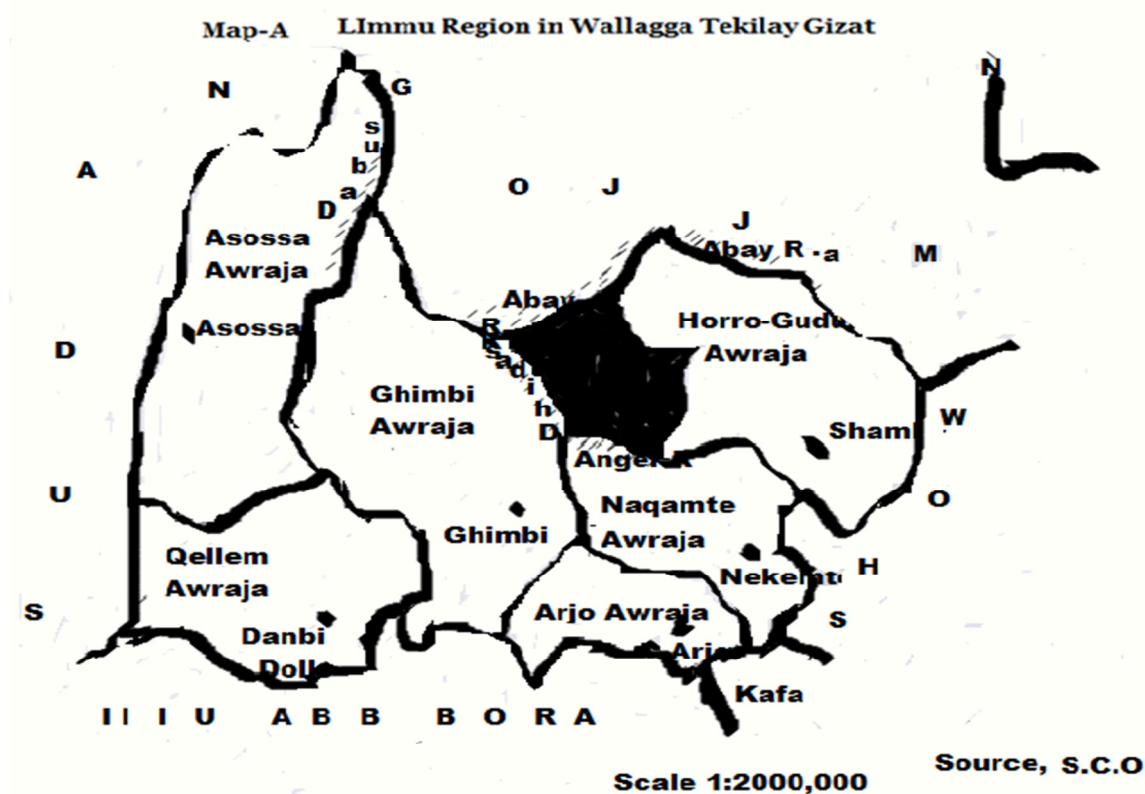
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Abstract

In this paper, it has been attempted to highlight the features of the five years administration system and the continuity and changes that took place during the Italy administration in the area. During the Italian Occupation, Limmu was the administrative center of the Italians for the Oromo of Western Anger River. Surprisingly, Limmu Oromo during the Italian occupation (1936-41) fought both the Italians and the naftañä settlers. According to genuine sources, during Italian Occupation (1936-1941) the naftañä-gabär system was removed in the study area. Accordingly, the most important event of this period was that the Limmu Oromo were liberated from the naftañä rule by their leader, Fitawurari Duguma Jaldeso. Relatively speaking, according to many written materials and oral sources, the Italian administration was better than the former administration system in Limmu. The Italian Occupation was a land mark in the history of the gabärs in the surrounding region in general and that of Limmu in particular. Soon after they stationed at Ayana (the capital of Gidda-Kiramu Woreda), the Italian military station for the areas between the Abay and Angar, Italians successfully abolished the gabär system in the area. But, in the post-Italian Occupation period, the pre- 1936 situation was restored without much change in Limmu from 1941 continued till 1974. These and other related situations were well assessed in this paper

The Reactions of Limmu Oromo to the Italian Occupation

Before Minilik II conquest Limmu Oromo clans had exercised their own democratic *gada* system for a long period of time. They founded their own socio-political center at Awad and Harbu Tuma. Each clan had sent its representative either to the *gada* center *chafe* of Awad or *chafe* Harbu Tuma. The Limmu Oromo lived such participatory political and social system for a long period of time. This system continued, until the Gojjame and later Menelik conquered the region. Above all, after Menelik of Shawa conquered the region, the Oromo social-political and social-cultural aspects came under pressure to the Italian occupation 1935/36. But some of the Oromo socio-cultural elements have managed to survive till the present time. The paper is also assesses how could this happened.



To begin with, as we know Italian introduced their administration system, after occupying Ethiopia. They divided Ethiopia into six major regional divisions (governorates) and merged it with the Italian colonies of Eritrea and Somaliland. Their new governorates were: Eritrea including Tigray, Amhara including Begemder, Wallo and northern Shawa, Oromo and Sidama (incorporating the southwestern and southern provinces), Addis Ababa (later changed to Shawa), Harar and Somaliland including Ogaden.¹ The Italians attempted to use Oromo against their previous rulers by changing the oppressive land holding system. As Assafa indicates, “To win over the Oromo people to the government, Italians gave many of them full rights to the land cultivated under *naftañä* landlords.”²

The Limmu Oromo during the Italian Occupation (1936-41) fought both the Italians and the *naftañä*. During the Italian occupation of Ethiopia the army of Horro-Guduru including Limmu and Arjo were led by *Bitwaddad* Mokonnen Damisaw, who was the governor of the area. His army was around 30,000 fighters, who were recruited from these areas. The soldiers of Mokonnen in northern front fought beside the Ethiopian army led by the war minister *Ras* Mulugeta Yigazu. *Bitwaddad* Mokonnen and many of his followers were killed at Amba Aradom by the Italian advanced force.³ At that time, most of the Limmu Oromo *balabbats* had participated in the war. Similarly, some of the local notables fought at the battle of Maychew. Some Limmu Oromo *balabbats* and other personalities were died at the battle of Maychew. For instance; *Fitawräri* Mashasha Kaasaa, *Fitawräri* Bidu Qana’ii, *Kanasmach* Raba Qana’i and his son Burayu Raba and others. Finally, after they defeated at the Battle of Maychew, the survivors including the *naftañä* soldiers returned to their locality.⁴ After they return, there were two types of reactions in Limmu. Among the other, this paper is designed to present the reactions that took place in the area during the Italian conquest. These reactions were; collaboration with the Italians and collaboration with the *naftañä* to put-up patriotic resistance. Hence, most of the *naftañä* soldiers who survived at the battle of Maychew joined the guerrilla fighters against the Italian rule. However, the majority of Limmu Oromo were organized themselves under the leadership of *Fitawräri* Duguma Jaldeso to eliminate the *naftañä* in the Limmu and the surrounding areas.⁵

As written and oral tradition elucidate the reaction of Horro-Guduru community during the Italian conquest of Wollega, the western Horro-Guduru Oromo chiefs including Limmu, Gidda, KIRAMU, Hebantu and Amuru opposed the *naftañä* and supported the Italians to expel the *naftañä* from their respective territories. On the contrary, the Oromo chiefs of eastern Horro-Guduru including Horro, Guduru, Jimma and Jarte opposed the Italians in favor of protecting the *naftañä* and support the guerrilla struggle against Italians. According to Oljira, the attitude’s of eastern Horro-Guduru chiefs was shaped by their kinship ties with the *naftañä* officials by marriage. According to him, “In Eastern part of Horro- Guduru only *Fitawräri* Oljira Amanu supported the

view of Western Oromo chiefs which was attributed to his desire of revenging the death of his grandfather Abishe Garba, in the hands of the Gajjame soldiers who still live in Horro-Guduru in large number".⁶ The western Horro-Guduru chiefs and the Oromo fighters returned to their villages were, organized to take revenge action against the *naftañä* oppression. Among the notable came back to their locality, *Fitawräri* Duguma Jaldeso was one of them.⁷ He organized western Horro-Guduru Oromo chiefs to expel the *naftana* from the area. Oljira also mentioned the role of *Fitawräri* Duguma Jaldeso in this respect as follows:

... He is said to have appealed for the position in order to revenge the Gondore... he ordered the evacuation of the Gondore from his domain. Upon their hesitation he instantly organized punitive campaigns that destroyed many Gondore villages including their churches. The remnants left for eastern Horro-Guduru to save their live...⁸

The root cause of the opposition was due to the intolerable form of exploitation and oppression of the Showan *naftañä* administration system. According to some informants, the severity of the *naftañä* rule have forced many Limmu Oromo to leave their home and begin new life in the other areas like; Nekemte, Ghimbi and Kellem in Wollega and Wanbara in Gojjam. Following Italian occupation such peoples were the ones who later became the leading figures in the campaigns for the elimination of the *naftañä* from their area. *Fitawräri* Duguma's role was unforgettable in this respect in Limmu and neighboring regions.

The Role of Duguma Jaldeso in Limmu (1936-41)

Duguma was a prominent person who led resistance against the *gabär-naftañä* system in the area under investigation starting from c.1890s. According to informants, when he started the resistance struggle against the system the local *balabbats* rather than supporting him, they saw his struggle with suspicion. As I tried to indicate earlier, he had already left for Leka Nekemte to escaping the *gabär-naftañä* system.⁹ After he arrived in Nekemte, he was welcomed by two individuals like; *Fitawräri* Abose Deso and *Fitawräri* Kiti Neno who moved from Limmu to Nekemte before Duguma. Those individuals also left their original homeland for the same purpose. *Fitawräri*; Abose Deso and Kiti Neno facilitated the way for Duguma to communicate with *Dajjach* Kumsa Moroda, the governor of Leka Nekemte. *Dajjach* Kumsa Moroda accepted him and supervised his commitment through his officials. *Dajjach* Kumsa interested in his commitment, intuition, and physical fitness gave him important position in the body guard. After he assigned as a body guard, Duguma started to communicate with *Dajjach* Kumsa.¹⁰

During the reign of Kumsa Moroda there were various local conflicts arose among his administration territories. According to informants, the reason for the conflict was that, from the very beginning various Leka Oromo clan leaders were not willing to accept Kumsa's administration. *Dajjach* Kumsa sent Duguma to the area; Duguma settled the escalating problem through forceful and peaceful negotiation. For instance, during the campaign of Gimbi, *Dajjach* Kumsa sent large number of troops under the leadership of Duguma. Duguma's troops landed the area and declared the war against the Gimbi's local resistance and the force of Duguma crushed the opposition and recorded remarkable victory over the opposers. After he returned back to Naqamtee *Dajjach* Kumsa become happy with his work and gave him the title of *gräzmäch*. He was also sent to other local campaign such as Wamagalo, Billo Boshe and surrounding regions to crush the forces of bandits against the ruler of Kumsa.¹¹ Besides, the local conflicts, Dhugumaa also participated in the Ethio-Italian war of 1935/36.¹²

According to Limmu Culture and Tourism Bureau manuscript, when the Fascist Italians pushed their aggression in to the interior of the country, Emperor Haile Sillassie informed the regional governors to provide soldiers to encounter the invention. The manuscript further states that:

... The successor of Kumsa Moroda, his eldest son, Habte Mariam Kumsa accepted the call of the Emperor and organized 600 soldieries to be sent to the front. *Dajjach* Habte Mariam and his higher officials assigned Duguma to lead the soldier of Leka to the north... after assigning as a commander Leka Nekemte's force, Habte Mariam also gave him the title of *Fitawräri*. Then *Fitawräri* Duguma led the troops of Leka Nekemte to Addis Ababa, after he reached Addis Ababa, combined with the northern front under the commander in chief of Ras Immiru Haile Sillessie...¹³

Actually, Duguma and the Ethiopian army in general were badly defeated at the Battle of Maychew in April 1936. After defeat at the Battle of Maychew *Fitawräri* Duguma and other survived troops returned to their villages. When *Fitawräri* Duguma and the remaining troops left Addis Ababa for Leka Nekemte they faced serious challenges on the way. There was no peace and order following Emperor Haile Sillessie's departure to England. On top of this, Bahru Zewde asserts that the situation of the country during Haile Sillassie's withdrawn in 1936 as follows: "For three days between the flight of the emperor and the entry of the Italians, Addis Ababa was caught in the grip of mass violence. There was a total breakdown of law and order. Burning, looting and random shooting became the order of the day..."¹⁴

This condition of disorder happened all over the country. For example, when *Fitawräri* Duguma and his soldiers reached Horro- Guduru areas on their way to Leka Nekemte the organized bandits tried to loot their

armament and planned to kill *Fitawräri* Duguma. He was wounded on his leg and survived and reached Nekemte. After Italians controlled the area, *Dajjach* Habte Maraim did not resist and he accepted them peacefully and agreed to work with them in the future. Following the agreement with *Dajjach* Habte Mariam, Italians asked him to propose active and competent governors from his former officials. On top of this *fitawräri* Duguma was one of the former higher officials of *Dajjach* Habte Mariam, who was first assigned to rule Ghimbi areas of Western Wollega province. *Fitawräri* Abose Deso was assigned to rule Limmu areas of eastern Wollega. Both *Fitawräri* Duguma and *Fitawräri* Abose Deso were originally from Limmu. *Fitawräri* Abose Deso was not willing to go and rule Limmu.¹⁵

Dajjach Habte Mariam assigned *Fitawräri* Duguma instead of Abose Deso to rule Limmu and the neighboring districts including the present: Haro-Limmu, Gidda, Kiramu, Hebantu and Amuru areas. *Fitawräri* Abose was sent to Ghimbi areas of western Wollega. Following his assigned, *Fitawräri* Duguma to rule Limmu and its immediate neighbors; he settled in the village of his birth place called Key-Hamus. After he settled in the above mentioned area with his troops, Duguma started to rule over the area as the agent of Italy.¹⁶

The most important issue during this period was that, Limmu Oromo liberated from the *naftañä* rule by their leader *Fitawräri* Duguma Jaldeso. *Fitawräri* Duguma used various methods to eliminate the pre- Italian *naftañä* administration in his area. He continued eliminate the local *naftañä* directly or indirectly from the area. Finally, they left Limmu and other immediate neighbors under his control. The departure of the *naftañä* from Limmu and other neighboring areas resulted in positive outlook for Duguma in Limmu and other adjacent areas.¹⁷ Due to this and his other contributions; poem was adjusted to praise his heroism in afan Oromo as follows:

<i>Dhirsä Akkaamee Abeetuu;</i>	<i>The husband of Akkame Abetu;</i>
<i>Itti aggaamee hin deebisuu</i>	<i>He never retreated back;</i>
<i>Dhugumaa Farda adii;</i>	<i>Duguma the owner of white horse;</i>
<i>Zinnarii isaa sadii;</i>	<i>His bullets' belt is three;</i>
<i>Lama jala baatuu;</i>	<i>Two belts were carried by his servants;</i>
<i>Yoo dhume itti laatu;</i>	<i>When finished the first he would be give another;</i>
<i>Goota amma odeessanii;</i>	<i>Hero like his name;</i>
<i>Jimmaa gadi keetii;</i>	<i>The land below Jimma Horro is yours;</i>
<i>Jirmaan gad reebi.</i>	<i>Subdue by force.¹⁸</i>

In short, the poem reveals his heroism and determination in facing his enemies. In 1938 *Fitawräri* Duguma constructed: his palace, fortification, church and his future grave around his administration site. His palace is registered as the third important palace in Wollega zone next to *Dajjach* Kumsa's palace of Leka Nekemte and *Ras* Mokonnen Damiso's of Arjo *awräjä* during this study conducted. Nowadays Duguma's palace, fortification, church, grave are still significant historical heritage of Limmu. See the following picture.



Figure 1. Fitawräri Duguma Jaldeso's Palace, constructed in 1930 E.C/1938. Photo taken by the author, February, 9, 2013.

Fitawräri Duguma Jaldeso Palace, constructed in 1930 E.C/1938 G.C, served as Italian administration center during that time. This house has two parts (underground part and above ground part). The underground part of the house had served to jail those individuals committed crimes. Whereas, the upper part of the house was used as administrative palace and justice court of the Italians.



Figure 2. Fitawrari Duguma's tomb. Photo taken by the author, February, 9, 2013.



Picture 3. St. Sillase Orthodox Church constructed by Fitawrari Duguma in 1930 E.C. Photo taken by the author February 9, 2013

The Fate of Fitawrari Dugumaa After Liberation

In 1941 following the restoration of the Emperor, guerrilla fighters launched corrective campaigns in different directions against *Fitawrari Dugumaa* Jaldeso. In 1941 many supporters of *Fitawrari Duguma* resisted the guerrilla campaign of the patriots led by *Ras Mesfin Sileshi*, who was one of the higher officials of Emperor Haile Sillassie. After bitter confrontations between *Fitawrari Duguma* and *Ras Mesfin Sileshi*, the army of *Ras Mesfin* controlled the area. Finally, the force of *Fitawrari Duguma* was defeated at the battle of Birbo Guchura, near his palace. According to eye witness informants, this ended after more than two weeks of bloody struggle between *Fitawrari Duguma* and *Ras Mesfin*. After many soldiers were killed on both sides, the forces of *Fitawrari Duguma* were put under control. Then *Fitawrari Duguma* was captured and finally taken to Addis Ababa. The case of *Fitawrari Duguma* was serious issue before the Emperor who passed death penalty against him. However, he was saved by the mediation of his companion at the battle of Maychew *Ras Immiru Haile Sillassie*.¹⁹

According to one informant, in saving the life of *Fitawrari Dugumaa*, *Dajjach Fikire Habte Mariam's* wife the granddaughter of Emperor Haile Sillassie's played a great role in presenting the case to the Emperor. After

his release freed from his court case with the help of the abovementioned individuals, he returned to Limmu and assigned as local *balabbat* till his death in 1951.²⁰

Post Independence

After the restoration of the Imperial rule, there were some changes in the administration and social economic system. Many of the pre-Italian socio-economic situations were relatively modified and conditions for peasants were not as bad as pre-Italian times.

Before the Italian Occupation Ethiopia was divided into 34 administrative units. After the liberation, Teshale indicates that the government of Haile Sellassie reorganized the country administrative units as below:

...In 1942, Ethiopia was reorganized into twelve provinces, taqlay gezats (governarates general)... It was not merely that the administrative units of the country had changed, but also that the power of regional notables was reduced extensively. By redrawing the internal territorial boundaries of Ethiopia, Haile Sellassie destroyed the traditional power base of the nobility of the geber system. With the formation of the teqlay gezat system, the task of supervising provincial administration was handled by the Ministry of Interior. The head of each taqlay gezat was appointed by the Emperor...²¹

Haile Sellassie dominated Ethiopian politics for more than 40 years. He was autocrat; he used to elongate his power by the mechanism of power sharing at the top hierarchy. The various regions of the country followed the pattern set by Addis Ababa. Under the *taqlay gezat* there had been *awräjä gezat*, *warada gezat*, *meketel warada gezat*, *atbiya dagna* (village judges) and *chiqa shum*.²² With the restoration of Emperor Haile Sillassie, the *naftanga* settlers of Limmu, who had earlier expelled by *Fitawräri* Dhugumaa Jaldesso, began to come back to the region and started life in Limmu. They were given one *gasha* land each as a way of compensation for earlier losses. They began to renew church services. Peoples were baptized in large numbers and the known *balabbats* were encouraged to build their own churches. Based on this, *balabbats*; those who did not have their own church did construct in their own territories. Accordingly, more than ten Orthodox churches were constructed in addition to the churches constructed earlier. After the restoration of Emperor Haile Sillassie's administration, Limmu was put under Wallaga *teqlay gezat* (Later *Kifle Ager*), Horro-Guduru *awräjä*.

After liberation, to establish effective administration, Limmu was divided into equal parts: Lay Kile (present day Limmu district) and Tach Kile (present day Haro-Limmu district). The River Kile being used as a boundary between upper and lower Kile.²³ Upper Kile, was called Lay Kile *metekel woreda gezat* centered at Ilaalaa and also the lower Kile called Tach Kile *metekel woreda gezat* centered at Kube (Tabata). Under these *metekel woredas*, there were sub-divisions of *qoroos*. Lower and Upper kile *metekel woredas* were again sub-divided into 24 (twenty four) *balabbats (qoroos)* upper Kile into twelve and lower Kile into twelve.²⁴

Conclusion

In general as clearly stated above, during Italian Occupation (1936-41) Limmu Oromo fought both the Italians and the *naftañä* settlers. At the commencement of the war, Limmu Oromo *balabbats* were participated in the national struggle under the commander of *Betwadad* Mokonnen Damisaw, who was the governor of the area. Following the end of the war, Limmu Oromos fought the *naftañä* at large. The most important event of this period was that Limmu Oromo liberated from the *naftañä* rule by their leader, *Fitawurari* Duguma Jaldeso. But, in the Post-Italian Occupation period, the pre-1936 situation was restored without much change in Limmu till 1974. But there was better situation than pre-1936 period

Glossary

A. Afan Oromo

<i>Abba</i>	father, owner of something
<i>abba bokku</i>	holder of scepter
<i>abba gada</i>	president of the <i>caffee</i>
<i>balbala</i>	lineage/ door and sub-sub-lineage
<i>balabbat</i>	local notable
<i>Chafe</i>	gada assembly
<i>gada</i>	Oromo peoples socio- political system
<i>gachana</i>	shield
<i>geerarsa</i>	heroic song
<i>lola</i>	war/quarrel
<i>macca</i>	Big branch of Borena Oromo
<i>moti</i>	king
<i>odaa</i>	<i>ficus sycamores</i>

<i>Kabiye</i>	owner land
<u>B. Amharic</u>	
<i>awräjä</i>	sub-province
<i>bälambärs</i>	commander of the front
<i>balabät</i>	local chief
<i>chiqa shum</i>	local headman
<i>dajäzmäch</i>	general of an army
<i>fitawräri</i>	general of the vanguard
<i>gabär</i>	tribute payer
<i>gräzmäch</i>	commander of the left
<i>kanäzmch</i>	commander of the right
<i>kebelè</i>	local administration
<i>naftañä</i>	Menelik II's soldiers during conquest
<i>woreda</i>	district
<i>yahämsa alaqa</i>	head of fifty men

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Declaration

I declare that the paper entitled with “The Reactions Of Limmu Oromo of Western Ethiopia During and After the Italian Occupation (1936-41)” is my work and that all source materials used for the article have been duly acknowledged.

Notes

¹Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia (1855-1991)*, 2002:162.

²Asafa Jalata, *Oromia and Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethno National Conflicts 1868–1992*, 1993:84.

³Informants: Abebe Gudata, Tufa Gobeno and Kenea Merera; Boshera Jerbo, “Land Tenure System in Northeast Wollega Limmu *Woreda*”. BA Thesis, History, Addis Ababa University 1988:46; Gadaa Melbaa, *Oromia: An Introduction. Khartoum, Sudan, 1988:68.*, Oljira Jujuba, “Oromo-Amhara Relation in Hurro-Gudru *Awräjä* (1840s-1941)”.

MA Thesis, History, Addis Ababa University, 1994:130.

⁴Informants: Abdisa Gobena, Genati Tufa and Debalo Serba.

⁵Oljira, p.132; Informants: Ejigu Jebere, Kenea Merera and Geneti Tufa.

⁶Oljira, pp.135-136.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹Informants: Kenea Merera and Bayisa Abetu; Limmu Culture and Tourism Bureau, “The Role of *Fitawurari* Duguma...,” pp.10-11.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²Oljira, p.135.

¹³Limmu Culture and Tourism Bureau, “The Role of *Fitawurari* Duguma...,” pp.14-15.

¹⁴Informants: Debelo Seba, Kenea Merera and Tufa Gobano; Bahru, p.160.

¹⁵Informants: Abebe Gudeta, Debelo Serba, Kenea Merera and Tufa Gobeno.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Informants: Debelo Seba, Kenea Merera and Tufa Gobano.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹Informants: Debelo Seba, Kenea Merera and Tufa Gobano; Limmu Culture and Tourism Bureau, “The Role of *Fitawurari* Duguma...,” p.20.

²⁰*Ibid.* p.21.

²¹Teshale Tibabu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia 1896-1974*, 1995:115-116.

²²*Ibid.* p.124.

²³Bedasa Ayana, “A History of Gelila Town 1974-2008”, BA Thesis History, Wollega University, 2011:2.

²⁴Informants: Bogale Gerba, Sekata Duresa, Debelo Serba, Fufa Jirata

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