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History From Below: Politics of Resistance among Gedeo during Imperial Ethiopia, 1958-1960

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Abstract- Depending on the definition of power, different types of activities would count as resistance. However, within resistance studies across the globe, there exists a plurality of concepts and definitions of resistance. On the other hand, the opposition of subject peoples against various kind of domination during imperial Ethiopia is under researched. Many literature are silent in depicting aspects of Gedeo's refusal to the new invaders during the post-1900 imperial Ethiopia. Since resistance studies in Ethiopia focus on a few case studies and some forms, misconceptions of resistance prevail; often connecting resistance to reactionary ideologies, unusual explosions of violence, and emotional outbursts. This particular study is dedicated to the resistance of the Gedeo, one of the ethnic groups of Ethiopia, against feudal rule (with its oppressive system known as neftegna-gebbar system) and northern domination between 1958 and 1960.

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History From Below: Politics of Resistance among Gedeo during Imperial Ethiopia, 1958-1960

Eshettu Tesfaye Retta

Abstract- Depending on the definition of power, different types of activities would count as resistance. However, within resistance studies across the globe, there exists a plurality of concepts and definitions of resistance. On the other hand, the opposition of subject peoples against various kind of domination during imperial Ethiopia is under researched. Many literature are silent in depicting aspects of Gedeo's refusal to the new invaders during the post-1900 imperial Ethiopia. Since resistance studies in Ethiopia focus on a few case studies and some forms, misconceptions of resistance prevail; often connecting resistance to reactionary ideologies, unusual explosions of violence, and emotional outbursts. This particular study is dedicated to the resistance of the Gedeo, one of the ethnic groups of Ethiopia, against feudal rule (with its oppressive system known as *neftegna-gebbar* system) and northern domination between 1958 and 1960. The major factors behind the Gedeo discontents between 1958 and 1960 were land alienation, the introduction of *qalad, asrat* and *erbo* systems, heavy taxation and various other extortions and cultural and social exploitations of the imperial state since the incorporation of the area into the Ethiopian state towards the end of the 19th century. Adopting the historical method of narrative and analysis and interrogating available primary and secondary sources on the subject, this study argues that the patterns and natures of both domination/power and resistance changes in historical time and space as they are not mutually exclusive. The past offers understanding in terms of contemporary new phenomenon which is still in its initial stage and thus contributing in increasing the historical awareness; comprehend a contemporary problems and impacts thereof.

Keywords: gedeo people, imperial ethiopia, domination, politics of resistance, qalad, asrat and erbo.

I. Introduction

Depending on the definition of power, different types of activities will count as resistance. However, within resistance studies across the globe (Vinthagen & Lilja, 2007) there exists a plurality of concepts and definitions of resistance. On the other hand, the resistance of subject peoples against various kinds of domination during imperial Ethiopia is under-researched. Literatures are silent in depicting aspects of Gedeo's resistance during the post-1900 imperial Ethiopia. Since resistance studies in Ethiopia focus on a few case studies and some forms, misconceptions of it prevail; often connecting resistance to reactionary ideologies, unusual explosions of violence, and emotional outbursts.

This particular study is dedicated to the resistance of the Gedeo, one of the ethnic groups of Ethiopia, against imperial conquest and Amhara domination after 1895. This imperial conquest under the hegemony of northerners and the local Gedeo resistance were of vital historical importance for the following reasons. First, it represented one of the most bitter struggles against domination in the region. The human and material losses it provoked was huge. It even led to atrocities which most of the contemporary European colonial powers practiced in the rest of Africa. Second, from a historical point of view, this study makes a very comprehensive insider observation from conflicts perspective, which enables us to well understand contemporary historical-political dynamics and conflict generating experiences and tendencies in the Gedeo region and the greater Horn of Africa today. Third, Gedeo resistance has turned out to be instructive in the sense that when any group of people face domination, they did not remain silent rather engage in various types of resistance, even wage war, against their adversaries without any fear of consequences.

Fourth, the sacrifice of thousands of fighters and martyrs in defense of their dignity and freedom seems to have become a rallying point, a symbol of ancestral struggle against domination and a source of inspiration in the quest for the political identity of the Gedeo nation. Last, but not least, attempting to write at least some aspect of the historical experience of one of politically submerged peoples seems to have a challenge (and one way of correction) to the mainstream position of Ethiopia historiography, which is established on the premise of ignoring the history and culture of the oppressed and peripheral peoples such as, the Gedeo. It will also provide a case-study which add-on to resistance studies (which is one of the emerging social science fields) or contribute a case-study from which resistance studies may fruitfully build to develop valuable concepts, insights, and theories for understanding contemporary conflicts. This is because it provides or suggests the distinguishing elements of resistance while maintaining its plurality of forms in

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different contexts (by initiating a list of resistance types) through time and space.

By outlining the historical process and context itself, this research paper considers the dimensions of economic, social and political domination from an external as well as internal point of view, emphasizing the resistance of the Gedeo with the larger Imperial social and, political system. Thus, the resistance of local Gedeo ethnographic aspects and, ultimately the global level can be analytically integrated. The study bases its argument on the employment of historical method of narrative and analysis, by interrogating available primary and secondary sources on the subject.

II. The General Context: the Emergence of Modern Ethiopian Empire under Menilik II

The so-called Abyssinia, with its Christian state on the northern plateau, claimed to have a long and continual history of many centuries. But modern Ethiopia which is three or four times bigger than traditional Abyssinia with its borders and its tens of nations, nationalities and peoples, came into being as a result of brutal military conquest during the second half of the 19th century (Seyoum Hamesso and et.al. 1997;and Seyoum Hamesso, 2001).The philosophy behind the actual welding together of different peoples and the eventual unequal yoking of same into an administrative framework from which Ethiopia emerged in 1900 has markedly been political and economical; with motives of primarily empire-building (imperial ambition for expanded territory and power consolidation) and wealth acquisition (resource exploitation).

The empire building project was started by emperor Tewodros II (1855-1868) and completed by king Minilik of Shawa, the later emperor Minilik II of Ethiopia. Teshale Tibebu even considers Minilik II as "the only black African leader who effectively participated in the scramble for Africa" (Teshale, 1995). Several other writers also (Assefa Jalata, 2005; Habte Selassie, 1980; Markakis, 1974) view the process as colonial conquest. Triulzi (1983) stated that "Ethiopia is cited as a de facto colonial power where colonial violence was used in incorporating adjacent territories and colonizing its peoples in spite of some obvious but not crucial differences with European Colonialism". Moreover, Habte Selassie (1980) invoked connotation used by the imperial regime itself in using terms that related to colonization and wrote: "The Southern region was referred up to the last days of Emperor Haile Selassie as *Yekign Hager* (conquered or colonized territory). Moreover, Addis Hiwet (1975) describes the whole socio-economic structures of post-conquest Ethiopia by using the term military-feudal colonialism. Furthermore, McClellan (1978) describes Ethiopia's position of late-nineteenth century when he wrote: "I have alluded already to Ethiopia's unique position among African nations. Not only was she successful in fighting off European attempts to colonize her, but she was also an important participant in the scramble for Africa." Hence, the march of the traditional highland Christian kingdom of Ethiopia towards the South, Southeast, and Southwest (which includes my study area, Gedeo) is termed as colonialism. The terms incorporation and conquest are simultaneously employed.

In this conquest, the larger portion of the country's landmass was incorporated into the empire and resulted in the present geographical shape and cultural, linguistic, and ethnic compositions in the beginning of the 20th century. In this case, the Amhara hegemony subdued many nations, nationalities, and peoples. The conquest was resulted in the institutionalization of feudal system of exploitation, massive population movement and settlement from the north, the imposition of Amhara language, Orthodox Christian religion and other forms of culture in the expense of the indigenous cultures (Tibebu, 1995). Except for members of the Amhara ruling elite and to some extent the Tigre, Gedeo people (like all other conquered groups) were left marginal to the political, social, economical, and cultural privileges. The forceful imposition of a politico-administrative system called *neftegna* rule on the peoples of Gedeo from the1900s has left its sad legacies of pain, turmoil, endless bloodbath, and litigation among hitherto democratic, egalitarian and republican peoples.

It was this experience of domination which enabled the subjected peoples to engage in resistance aimed at revitalizing their identity, historical background, and traditional values and inspired them to emphasize their distinctive identification against the Amhara/Ethiopian identity, culture and historical past. However, the pattern of domination and nature of resistance changes across time and space.

III. The Specific Context: the Socio-Political and Economic Background of Gedeo before Conquest

Historically, before the end of the 19th century, the people of Gedeo was an independent entity having their own political, social, cultural, and economic systems. The social and political systems of the Gedeo people mainly depend on their land resource. Their land was owned communally as other parts of southern Ethiopia. The Council of Elders in Gedeo allocates land who were organized at each village (Tadesse K., 2002). The holding of communal assemblies in each village was attributed to these councils (Dagne, 2004). The land has been used as center of social, cultural and political

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practices under the Gedeo *Hayitcha,* literally means elders or wise persons (Tadesse K., 2002)

The traditional Gedeo community maintained the peace and security of their land through the implementation of the *Gada* system, in the absence of codified law. These traditions and customs were highly respected by the members of the community (Demisse, 1988).

The Gedeo *Gada* has a well-established structure and hierarchy of authority. The three recognizable hierarchies *Hayitcha* (lower hierarchy), Abba *Roga* (middle hierarchy) and *Abba Gada* (higher hierarchy), work in collaboration with the local leaders. Moreover, the General Assembly (Oda Ya'a) and the local council (Songo) are important in making different decisions. The leaders highly exploit the fear of *Maganno* (Sky God) to enforce decisions. The head of the institution, *Abba Gada*, can only be nominated on hereditary bases from a clan called *Likko.* In fact, the Gedeo *Gada* is one of the institutions of leadership which is blended into the knowledge, practice, and belief system of the Gedeo people. (Paulos, 2005)

Politically, the most significant body was that of the local councils in which all men of majority seat, but in which the voices of the elders were generally decisive. These councils mediate disputes, distribute land and determined how to meet any incursions until the last decade of the 19thcentury. (Donham, 1986)

Linguistically, the Gedeo have their language known as Gedeuffa, which is one of the East Highland Cushitic languages (Wedekind, 1980)

Religiously, like any other society, the Gedeo's had their own traditional belief before their adoption of Christianity and Islam. *Maganno*, which meant the 'Sky God' is said to have created everything is the center of traditional Gedeo's religion. *Maganno* is the creator of everything on the earth and is the Supreme Being. He is the origin and sustenance of all things on the earth, the sun, the moon, and stars. (Demisse, 1988)

The people of Gedeo have maintained longstanding contacts with their neighbors. A special relationship is evident with the neighboring Gujji Oromo people in all directions except to the north in which they are bordered with the Sidama ethnic group. Communication between the neighbors have been facilitated since Gedeuffa; their language has incorporated much Oromo vocabulary, the many Gedeo themselves understand Gujji Oromo (Tesfaye, 2007)

A kind of symbiotic economic and social relationship existed between the Gedeo and Gujji Oromo for centuries, with frequent conflicts involving only the taking of hostages and demands for ransom. Accordingly, the Gedeo's acquire their livestock from the Gujji while the Gujji Oromo's acquire much of their enset, (a banana like tree widely cultivated for food in south and southwest Ethiopia, known also as "false banana) from the Gedeo. Moreover, in times of drought Gujji's sought refugee among Gedeo. (Dagne, 2004)

The Gedeo people practice mixed agriculture. These include raisings of crops and rearing of animals. However, the Gedeo agricultural economy is mainly based on the cultivation of two crops, namely coffee and enset. Enset is the prime subsistence crop cultivated and a staple food crop in the area, while coffee is an important cash crop cultivated in the area. These two crops play a crucial role in the various socio-cultural practices of the Gedeo community apart from their economic importance (Dagne, 2005)

IV. The Conquest of Gedeo: Aspects of Domination and Resistance

In the last decade of the 19th century, the Shoan Kingdom took territorial expansion towards the south. Accordingly, Gedeo fell under the expanding Minilik II's forces in 1895. As a result, Gedeo reduced to tributary status. Donald argued that the incorporation of the southern provinces was motivated by political and economic interests of the imperial government. Politically, the imperial government planned to effectively control the conquered territories through the newly coming northern landlords and political authorities and economically, the need to have access to and ensure the movement of valuable resources like gold, ivory, coffee, slaves and collection of taxes to maintain the state and to link the country with the international community (Donald, 1988)

As McClellan argued, the Shoan expansion in the region of Gedeo was purely attributed to economic reasons. In their place, the Shoan authority wanted to exploit the coffee rich region of Gedeo. The Gedeo land provided a considerable amount of wealth, particularly of coffee for the central authority of Ethiopia since the early 20th century (McClellan, 1988)

Moreover, Dagne also argued that in addition to the already stated motives, Minilik II also had a fear of the increasing pressure of the adjacent colonial powers, namely Britain, France and Italy in the region, which forced the emperor to expand to that area (Dagne, 2004)

With this, a forceful measurement and distribution of the native's land began by the invaders. Later on, after the incorporation of the area by Minilik's forces, the *gebbar* system of land tenure was introduced in and consequently, abolished the communal land tenure system. The people living in *gebbar* land became known to as *gebbars* who were subject to various dues in addition to land tax and were required to render personal services to government officials. The *gebbars* were also required to provide the landlord with necessities such as honey, meat, dried grass for the cattle of the landlord and other items. (Umer, 1997)

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After the forceful measurement and distribution of their land and till the coming of the Italians, the Gedeo's who were made tenants on their land were forced to give *erbo*, literally means, one fourth to the landlords. Therefore, a *chisegna* or a tenant who is forced to pay *erbo* used to give a fourth of his products to the landlords. In addition to the *erbo, (*a rent paid by the native's to the invaders either in cash or in kind), they had also been paying *asrat*, which literally means one-tenth of their agricultural products to the government each year.

Paulos argued that the expansion of European Colonial rule in Africa visibly marked the weakening of the indigenous economic, political, and social institutions. On the contrary, without a colonial presence in Ethiopia, indigenous economic, political and social institutions were either weakened or ceased to exist. (Paulos, 2005). This also holds for the Gedeo.

Long before their incorporation by the central kingdom, the Gedeo's had their traditional administrative system known as Gada, which was then destroyed by the expanding forces. As a result of the expansion, the social, economic, political and cultural autonomous of the indigenous society, as many others in southern Ethiopia, have been challenged by the expansion of the state power from the center. This expansion and incorporation of the Gedeo land into the Ethiopian state brought a fundamental transformation in almost all aspects of the indigenous society. (Dagne, 2004; Paulos, 2005)

Most of the traditional institutions of the Gedeo including the *Gada* system and their communal way of life, began to be altered with the appointment of *Dejjazmatch* Balcha Abba Nefso over Sidamo province in 1898. Under Balcha, who was appointed as governor of Sidamo three times, 1898-1908, 1910-1914, and 1917-1928, the traditional collective tribute system was institutionalized, particularly during his final term, 1917-1928. An individual Gedeo was assigned to a settler to provide him tribute and labor services. (Solomon, 2009)

The incorporation of the Gedeo by the Shoan kingdom in 1895 was also followed by the forceful conversion of the indigenous people into Orthodox Christianity. Those who were reluctant to be converted were forced to live their land. As a result of their conversions, the indigenous religion and social values began to disintegrate. (Zewdu, 1994).

V. The Nature and Pattern of Gedeo's Resistance, 1958-1960

The history of the struggle of Gedeo peasants for land and against the northern rule goes back to the period of Minilik II's expansion to southern Ethiopia. During the reign of Menelik and after him, the people of Gedeo waged a heroic unorganized, and unsuccessful struggle. Early in the reign of Minilik, *Dejjazmatch* Balcha, who has been the governor of Sidamo, ordered the land of Gedeo to be measured as *qalad* land which is distributed among his settled soldiers known as, *neftegnas*. The people of Gedeo at that time under the leadership of their *balabat Kegnazmatch* Chumbro opposed the measurement of their land as *qalad,* named after the rope used to measure land and its distribution among the northerners. The resistance did not last long, because of the suppression of the northerners and due to the spontaneous nature of the resistance. It came to an end when *Kegnazmatch* Chumbro was arrested and died in prison because of torture and mal-treatment. Two other people were also dead, and one another person was wounded during the fight between the Gedeo people and *Dejjazmatch* Balcha's forces. From this time on, the people of Gedeo came to be brutally oppressed by the northerners who expropriated the fertile and productive land of Gedeo people and made them tenants, literally *chisegnas* in Amharic on their previous land until the coming of Italians in 1936.[i]

Moreover, the natives also exposed to additional forms of exploitation. For instance, during the time where crops get ripe to be harvested, it was the *chisegna*, who used to call the landlord to come and collect *erbo*. In doing so, he also gives the landlords ten to twenty birr as a means to cover his transportation expense. In addition to this, he gives one sheep, which is also said to be for the dinner of the landlord. If a *chesegna* go to a landlord and call him to this way to come and to collect *erbo*, the peasant will be forced to pay double the amount of what he would have paid if he had gone earlier as a punishment.[ii]

The Italians during their occupation of the country (1936-1941) abolished the payment of *erbo* to the landlords and forced payment of *asrat* to the government. The abolition of the payment of *erbo* by the Italians gave a relatively improved economic and social conditions and relief to the peasants of Gedeo. Later on, with the defeat and withdrawal of Italians, the peasants of Gedeo were again forced to pay *erbo* to their northerners' landlords. It was not only *erbo* and *asrat* that the peasants of Gedeo were forced to pay; they were also forced to render services in the houses of the landlords; like fetching water from rivers and streams, gathering fire woods, erecting fences and houses of the landlords and they were even forced to till the landlords' plot of land.[iii]

The economic superiority they had established enabled the northerners to dominate Gedeo. The Gedeo were left with no possible alternatives to improve their standard of living. The most fertile lands were held as *qalad*, and the small holdings of the peasantry were heavily taxed. Moreover, the trade of most significant items like coffee, cloth, and others were dominated by the outsiders and the administrative apparatus in the

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Awrajja was mainly occupied by the new elements. The traditional system of administration, the *Gada* system, was eliminated, and the sense of ethnic solidarity was made losses. The *Abba Gada*, the *Sesse Roga* and the Mura had ceased to exist immediately after the conquest and only the *hayitcha* remained loosely keeping their position until the 1974 revolution (Paulos, 2005)

Solomon also argued as one cause of the Gedeo uprising that, although the people of Gedeo paid education and health taxes, they benefited insignificantly from these social services. For instance, in 1957/58, there were only six elementary and one junior school in Gedeo *Awrajja.* The available government and missionary schools were limited to the major urban centers of the *Awrajja* (mainly at Dilla and Yirga Cheffe), where the native's children had limited access and privilege to them. Although the Gedeo peasants paid taxes to these services, the beneficiaries were urban settlers (mainly non-natives) who did not pay education tax until 1968. Moreover, the economic deprivation prevented the Gedeo peasants from sending their children to schools. About the later social service, there was only one governmental clinic in the *Awrajja* until the 1974 revolution (Solomon, 2009).

In the 1950s, the peasants of Gedeo failed to tolerate their exploitation by the landlords and started to rise and appeal to the emperor. While the peasants' discontent over the loss of their land and the payment of *erbo* was already high, the landlords went one step further in 1958 and ordered a reassessment and registration of land. But the Gedeo opposed this and refused to register, which they knew will bring further bondage than freedom. After all, the landlords assisted by the government officers were forcing them to register.[iv]

Nicolas also argued that the relationship between the feudal lords and the peasants became even worse. The feudal lords controlled that no peasant would acquire fire arms and strictly supervised that peasants would not allowed make any kind of meetings. However, the situation was aggravated when the feudal lords were purchasing more and modern armaments and strengthening their power even more. Moreover, the increasing price of coffee and the improvement of transportation tempted the feudal lords to expand their *qalad* land. The feudal lords wanted to use the larger or the whole land for the cultivation of coffee rather than other staple food crops which the peasants wanted for food. The feudal lords wanted a modernized system of coffee cultivation and required larger areas. This reduced the peasants to the status of laborers in some places and affected their way of life. Traditionally, the Gedeo produced all food crops on their lands, but now, they came largely dependent upon the market economy to which the peasantry could not cope with. (Nicolas, 1972)

To change their status and make their grievances known to the central government, peasants expressed their dissatisfaction in different ways. They began resistance against the confiscation of land and land grants to the outsiders. In the pre-1950s, they repeatedly appealed to the *Awrajja* and *Teqlay Gezat* Courts through their *balabats*. But, they did not succeed. As a result, some of the Gedeo began to migrate to different areas. Some became refugees among their relatives where relatively better treatment existed, while others went to distant areas to settle and work there, and still others left for towns to live as laborers. (Solomon, 2009)

After 1958, with the absence of indigenous *balabats*, the *hayitchas,* (traditional clan leaders), took the responsibility of organizing and leading the protest. Six *hayitchas* namely Hirbaye Sharo, Shale Abay, Nunu Boroji, Adula Mako, Boko Garayu, and Xeko Adula organized the people and decided to make a coordinated effort to get justice for their demands. Accordingly, the native's asked that the land tax receipt should bear the name of the peasant who paid tax and to whom that land traditionally belonged rather than the name of a settler *balabat*. Moreover, they also demanded the banning of *erbo* payment. Finally, they appealed to the *Awrajja* and Province governors that the reassessment and registration of the native's land were unjustifiable as it increased the number of *qalads*. (Solomon, 2009)

According to archival sources, after the end of the year 1958, the people of Gedeo many times held a meeting in their respective *Woredas* and *Kebeles* (the lowest administrative structures of the government), in which every adult man participated and passed a resolution against the landlords. The resolution of the peasants was not to give *erbo*, *asrat,* and other services to the landlords, since the land they till belongs to themselves, but not to the landlords. The peasants after passing the resolution elected representatives. The representatives were sent to the emperor taking, the appeal of the peasants. The appeal of the peasants was that the resolution they passed legalized and secondly that a warning is given to the landlords so that they could not take any action against them. The landlords who were shocked and frustrated by the organized action of the peasants throughout the *Awrajja* appealed to the provincial administrative office and the emperor that the peasants have organized themselves to take action against the northerners.

The peasants, who became hopeless by the *Awrajja* and Province governors, discussed the issue and sent six individuals namely Gebre Mariam Hiro, Xeko Gano, Xero Adula, Berasso Shabe, Sida Bilate, and Bedasi Bashagn to the imperial court in Addis Ababa to present their case. The representatives hired a lawyer, Tadesse Dilnesaw, to present their case. But, the delegates return to Gedeo with no promising solutions.

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Some of the delegates were imprisoned in the *Awrajja* capital, Dilla when they return, and they took Xeko Gane to the province capital, Yirgalem, for prison, accused of inciting the people to rebel. The measures taken by the *Awrajja* police disappointed the traditional clan leaders and the peasants. Thus, they lost hope in the legal system and were forced to take arms against their oppressors. (Solomon, 2009)

According to an archival source, in the year 1959, the peasants stood firm in their resolution and refused to give *erbo* to the landlords. This time clashes broke out in some places between the landlords and the peasants. It was again this time that the *Awrajja* administrator went particularly to Yirga Cheffe *Woreda,* where the movement was highly organized and intensified to settle the clashes between the peasants and the landlords peacefully. However, in Yirga Cheffe, the *Awrajja* administrator simply accused the peasants as rebels and passed a decision against the peasants that they must pay 5,000 Ethiopian birr (local currency) as a punishment and compensation for their action. The decision of the *Awrajja* administrator was went to the provincial administration for approval. The provincial administration office, which thought the amount of money as very small revised the *Awrajja* administrator's decision that the peasants pay ten thousand birr, and this was to be paid by each peasant of the *Woreda*.

According to Archival source and asserted by Solomon, in August 1959, when the peasants throughout the Gedeo continued not to give *erbo* and other services, and when the peasants of Yirga Cheffe *Woreda* requested to pay the 10,000 birr and stood firm their opposition, the local police in collaboration with the landlords took a great repressive action against the peasants. In some places where the movements widespread like Yirga Cheffe and Wonago *Woredas*, a great number of policemen sent to suppress the peasants' movement and enforce the payment of *erbo*. In Yirga Cheffe, the policemen arrested twelve people who were representatives of the people. Some of the representatives of the peasants who were in Addis Ababa were later on caught from Addis Ababa and arrested. They overall arrested more than sixty men from Yirga Cheffe and Wonago *Woredas* (the majority being from the former *Woreda*) and killed one man. They also confiscated property, house utensils, raped women beat up the old and children.

The peasants of Yirga Cheffe and Wonago *Woredas* after the arrest of their former representatives and the repression elected new representatives and sent them to Addis Ababa with fresh appeal. The peasants forwarded the new request to the emperor. It stated that the release of their arrested comrades and secondly that a measure is taken against the policemen and landlords who took brutal action and killed one peasant. The newly elected representatives hired a lawyer living in Addis Ababa who could take the case of the peasants to the court, to the bureaucratic officials, and the emperor. The lawyer was given the right to represent and handle the case of the peasants in the absence of the representatives.

When the movement started to intensify, and the appeal of the peasants against the police force continued from day to day, the central government feared as the movement may spread to other *Awrajjas* and Provinces, middle and higher hierarchal administrative structures respectively, set up a committee to investigate the problem and make a report to the central government. The committee members were selected from the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of pen and Ministry of Education. In September 1959, the committee left Addis Ababa for the Gedeo *Awrajja* capital, Dilla. In Gedeo, the committee stayed for two solid weeks. In its stay for two weeks in Gedeo, the committee talked with the landlords, police force and the representatives of the people. The landlords, government officials, and the policemen were afraid because the peasants might expose them to the committee and their atrocity against the people. Therefore, they tried to avoid the peasants from appealing to the committee. This time also the peasants elected new representatives who could take their appeal to the committee. In Yirga Cheffe *Woreda*, where the movement took shape and intensified, the peasants divided themselves into six and seven *gashas* and elected one man from each division. They choose 49 men as their representatives. The new representatives also appealed to the committee the following major questions. These include the immediate release of their comrades, under custody, the dismissal of *Dejjazmatch* Bekele Beyene, from his post as *Enderase* of Sidamo province, the dismissal of General Secretary of Gedeo *Awrajja*, a warning be given to the local police to stop their repressive action against the people and finally, to abolish the payment of *erbo* immediately. (Ministry of Interior Archive, file No. 2269, "Report of the committee sent to Derassa in February 1960)

The committee, as upon reaching the town of Dilla, gave orders to both the policemen and the landlords to stop the fighting and burning of houses. But, the police and the landlords refused to stop and continued devastating the villages of Mitchille, Alticho, and Dama in Yirga Cheffe *Woreda* and other villages in Wonago *Woreda*. The villages of Mitchille and Alticho were burnt and changed into ashes. Among the peasants who escaped from death and arrested fled to the forest and mountains to save their lives. In the forest, they stayed almost a week till the landlords and the policemen stopped killing and burning the villages. (Ministry of Interior Archive, file No. 2269, "Report of the committee sent to Derassa in February 1960)

The emperor who had ignored the problem for a long time sent a message when the conflict started to both the landlords and the peasants to stop the fighting

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between them. Along with his message, he has also ordered that judges be sent to Gedeo and held the case in a special court and give their judgment (Emperor's message to the people of Derassa, both *neftegnas* and *Chisegnas* dated February 13, 1960)

The police force and the landlords' then decided to suppress the uprising from its base, Mitchille. They began to move to Mitchille on February 5, 1960. But, they faced unexpected strong resistance from the peasants, and all the roads to Mitchille were closed. The conflict continued on February 8, 1960, until a government delegation led by Afe Negus Eshete Gada came to pacify the tension. The arbitration commission leader, Afe Negus Eshete called for the end of conflict and submission of all peasants. After three days, both the landlords and the peasants were called to a meeting at Dilla for reconciliation. However, the peasants opposed the reconciliation request. Finally, the arbitration commission passed a decision to be observed by both conflicting parties. According to the decision, the government would pay compensation of three hundred birr for any deaths, one hundred to two hundred and fifty birr for those wounded, depending on their wound and two hundred birr for destroyed (irrespective of the amount) properties on both sides. With this, both parties were punished for fighting against each other rather than using legal procedures to defend their case. Ninety Gedeo *hayitchas* and individuals, believed to be the initiators of the conflict were fined 500 birr each. On the other hand, the landlords of the area were fined 1000 birr each for a *gasha,* i.e., one *gasha* is equivalent to forty hectares. The decision acknowledged the root causes of the conflict and provided 500 *gashas* of land in the neighboring areas of Gujji and Amaro to be distributed among Gedeo peasants. They were to receive a quarter of *gasha* each. The decision obliged peasants to continue paying taxes to the government and *erbo* to the landlords as well as giving services to the landlords as demanded. Furthermore, the decision prohibited any group from presenting any demands but instructed that appeals be made on an individual basis. Finally, both groups were ordered to refrain from any act of revenge. The *Awrajja* administration and police forces were mandated to implement the decisions on both sides. The decisions were aimed at maintaining the status quo in the area and at paralyzing any possible future uprisings. Following the conflict, the entire police force was replaced, but no officer was dismissed. (Solomon, 2009)

There were weaknesses in the preparation for war on the sides of the peasants. This was no single leadership and military discipline was lacking. The military superiority of the landlords, shortage of food and logistic, poor organization and lack of fire arms were also the other problems of the peasants. They were mainly driven by emotions. The peasants made no effort to mobilize other oppressed peoples of their own (lack of organization), unable to spread the movement to other parts of Gedeo (Solomon, 2009)

According to archival sources, the culmination of the rising could be attributed mainly to the active response of the government and the feudal lords and the military incapabilities of the peasantry rather than the peasants will resist. The end of the rising was indeed a relief to the Gedeo peasants who suffered greater causalities than their opponents. More than 200 people died from the peasantry while only four killed from the other side and property estimated to more than 1,000,000 birr was devastated.

In the post-1960 period, the state introduced no reform that benefited Gedeo peasants. The only thing that the peasants benefited from the uprising was they got a quarter *gasha* of land each. They used these lands, only paying taxes to the government. Moreover, in the post-1960 period, the Gedeo made no resistance until the 1974 Revolution, except, opposing the implementation of the 1968 land assessment scheme. The assessment team came to the Gedeo *Awrajja* of Qabado *Woreda* to implement the scheme. However, the violent reactions of Sidama and Gedeo peasants in the area halted the implementation. With the failure of the team, there was no further attempt of land assessment in other areas of Gedeo *Awrajja* (Solomon, 2009)

VI. Conclusion

Before the 1974 revolution, the Gedeo were among the most oppressed peoples of Ethiopia politically, economically, and socially. They continually, though sporadically resisted the feudal system from the very beginning of its installation.

The major factors behind the Gedeo discontents between 1958 and 1960 were land alienation, the introduction of *qalad, asrat* and *erbo* systems, heavy taxation and various other extortions and cultural and social oppressions of the imperial state since the incorporation of the area into the Ethiopian state towards the end of the 19th century. The conquest of Gedeo by Menelik's forces in 1895 and the subsequent domination of the northerners resulted in the prevalence of series of socio-political and economic crises in Gedeo land. After incorporation, the oppressive system known as *neftegna-gebbar* system was institutionalized.

With this, between 1958 and 1960, the Gedeo peasants took arms to remove all forms of exploitation of the northerners. This uprising was one of the serious challenges of the peasantry from the south against the imperial rule sine its restoration in 1941.

The uprising brought nothing good for Gedeo peasants. They continued paying taxes to the government and *erbo* to the landlords. Moreover, they continued to give labor services to the landlords as

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demanded. Their inferior social and cultural opposition continued until the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution, which marked the demise of feudalism in the state.

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