



ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

**HISTORY AND IDENTITY IN NORTHEAST
ETHIOPIA WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO
RAYA-AZÄBO, 1543-1974.**

BY: NEGGA MENASBO

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ADDIS ABABA

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Submitted to:

**The Department of History in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
History.**

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Department of History

Transliteration

I. The seven sounds of the Ethiopic alphabet are represented as follows:

1st order ሰ Bā

2nd order ሰፊ Bu

3rd order ሰፊፊ Bi

4th order ሰፊፊፊ Ba

5th order ሰፊፊፊፊ Bè

6th order ፊፊፊፊፊ Be

7th order ሰፊፊፊፊፊፊ Bo

II. Regarding the sixth form in the above list, the “è” will be suffixed to the letter only if the letter is vocalized or stressed. Otherwise it won’t be required at all. As a general rule also, the “e” is not required when the sixth form is the last letter of a word.

Examples:

ጸግግፊ = Megeb

ቅይፕ = Qeyet

III. Palatalized Sounds are represented as follows:

ṅ̃ = Šä

ṅ̃ = Chä

ṅ̃ = Ñä

ṅ̃ = Zhä

ṅ̃ = Jä

IV. Glottalized sounds are represented as follow

ṅ̃/ṅ̃ = Qä

ṅ̃ = Ṭä

ṅ̃ = Čä

ṅ̃ = Šä

ṅ̃ = Khä

V. Germination should always be indicated by doubling.

Example: Däbbäbä Täsämma

VI. General Examples:

ጮርጮር = Čärcär

በዝባኝር = Bäzbazh

ፀሐይ = Šähay

ቁር = Qur

ጅራፍ = Jeraf

እዉቀት = Iwqät

ሸከት = Šäkät

መኸኒ = Mäkhonni

ቈመት = Qumät

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Similarly, I would also like to thank the librarians working for the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) as well as those of the Ethiopian National Library (NALA) for making readily available to me relevant materials for this research work when they were asked to. Financial support from the Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries (SAREC) obtained through Addis Ababa University, spent to finance the field research, also deserve to be gratefully acknowledged.

I am indebted to my relatives priest Harägot Wälday, Priest Mäsala, *Ato* Kälali Abraha, *Ato* Berhanu Haftä, *Mämeher* Yerga Afära, for accompanying me to various parts of the study area

when I was in the field work to gather oral data and other relevant materials utilized to produce this work. Moreover, I must also acknowledge all my informants for their warm reception, willingness and readiness to share their knowledge with me whenever they were asked to sit with me for an interview for more than once or twice depending on the type of the informant. I would also like to thank all members of my family- my wife Terhas Bahlebi, my sister-in-law, Hiwät Bahlebi as well as my sons Na'od and Zä-Amanuel for motivating and encouraging me throughout the study period.

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Abstract

This paper is an ethnographic study of the peoples of Raya-Azäbo sub-province situated in northeastern Ethiopia. It deals with why, how and when each section of the study area was settled/ resettled by about half a dozen peoples namely the Dobe'a, the Tegraña, the Oromo, the Amhara, the Agäw and the Afar beginning from the middle of the sixteenth century well up to the second half of the twentieth. The other vital theme discussed in connection to this issue deals with the sort of interethnic relations that have existed between each one of the aforementioned groups and how they gradually transformed themselves from a discordant connection to an amicable one as viewed from the vantage point of time and space. The next relevant problem dealt with in this paper is that the key role of the Ethiopian state played in shaping intergroup relations. Heads of states ranging from Zära Yaeqob cum his son/ successor, Bä'edä Mariam, in the fifteenth century, to Eyasu II in the eighteenth and Yohannes IV at the end of the nineteenth century are, in this case, worth mentioning as the prominent ones.

In connection to this point the study shows that the emperors at times to protect their own economic interests meaning either to collect annual tribute or to keep open the long range caravan trade traversing through the region or else to provide security to the Christian Amhara/ Tegrean highland cultivators, who were repeatedly menaced by the incursions of the adjacent Dobe'a, Afar and Oromo pastoralists groups, led them to involve deeply in matters of communal strife and thereby they played a crucial role in shifting the balance of power in favor of the former. The concluding point of discussion in this study is the issue on how the multitudes of peoples of Raya-Azäbo have managed to overcome the earlier mutually hostile inter-group relations as well as how they steadily come together to constitute a community of identical socio-cultural make up. In this regard, agrarian transformations on the side of the pastoralist lowlanders and acute shortage of land and oxen on the side of highland cultivators are considered as the main catalysts that facilitated a continued economic and social interaction between the members of the six groups in the Fertile Valley. Thus, the aforesaid symbiotic economic and social relations, in time, gave rise to exogamous intermarriage and other forms of social contact between each one of them and thereby prompted them to form a collective identity termed as Raya.

Preface

Since the past few decades several academic research works have been produced focusing on the ethnography of the peoples of Raya-Azäbo mainly conducted as partial requirements for first and second degree level studies. Although a great deal of the data emanating from such works are utilized in the current work, they all have one common limitation in that if, for example, anyone researcher has studied a small section of the study area, there is a high tendency on part of that researcher to identify the entire peoples of Raya-Azäbo with any one group alone.

To be clear, now that we take into account the work of someone, who has studied the history of the people of Dobe'a in the district of Alamaṭa, though he has done his work on a multi-ethnic setting, he is usually disposed to conclude, without consulting the data for the rest of the districts inhabited by the Tegrans, the Afar, the Oromo and the like, that the ethnic identity of the whole people of that sub-region is Dobe'a.

Moreover, with the politicization of identity, particularly ethnic identity, in the Ethiopian mainstream politics since the last three decades ago, the history of the peoples of Raya-Azäbo has increasingly grown to be one of the most debatable issues among scholars, politicians, political activists and the common people as well. Thus, in an endeavor to claim or counterclaim for territory several persons, originating from the Amhara, Oromia and Tegray regions, have authored books on the history of the peoples of Raya-Azäbo, though most of them are not historians by profession, in Amharic, Tegrëña, *Affan* Oromo and English languages. However, as they represent the interests of the group or region they originated, they tend to over emphasize on issues that would satisfy the territorial interests of their respective regions.

Amidst such controversy I found myself in a state of confusion about what the history and identity of the peoples of Raya-Azäbo is. As a result, I began to consult any type of work, at my disposal, produced on the history of the peoples of the study area and to discuss with people who have the interest and knowledge about it. But it should also be noted that more than a decade ago, I studied, as a partial requirement for the M.A. program, a topic dealing with land tenure and tribute collection system of Emba Alajä, one of the constituent districts of Raya-Azäbo sub-province, has aroused a great interest in me to do more on the study of the history of the peoples of this area from the vantage point of the peoples.

Accordingly, as opposed to the aforementioned authors who strongly argue that the contemporary peoples of Raya-Azäbo are merely the descendants of one or two groups (Dobe'a or Oromo stock) who, in time, have been assimilated into the Amhara and Tegrean peoples; in this study I discovered that in the course of the long history of human settlement in northeast Ethiopia different parts of Raya-Azäbo has been inhabited by a multitude of ethno-linguistic groups namely the Dobe'a, the Oromo, the Tegreans, the Agäw, the Afar and the Amhara, who, after long drawn out social conflicts, had established amicable relationships amongst one another.

Gradually, such amicable interethnic relations gave rise to several types of symbiotic economic and social interactions between each one of them as they all had congregated in the Fertile Valley to meet their respective economic necessities. In the final analysis, exogamous intermarriage and other forms of social contact, which occurred after they had come into closer social relations, have fused together the diverse peoples of the study area whereby they ultimately formed one common identity.

Acronyms

ANDM: Amhara National Democratic Front.

EPRDF: Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front.

MOIA: Ministry of Interior Archives.

OPDO: Oromo People's Democratic Organization.

TPLF: Tigrayan People's Liberation Front.

Glossary of Terms

The meaning of Amharic, *Affan* Oromo and Tegrēña words and phrases, not listed in the glossary here under, are explained in the main body of the dissertation.

Ato: a title equivalent to Mr.

Addi: literally a country; but it could also mean a village, district or even a single house in the case of southern Tegray.

Awrajja: sub-province.

Aläqa: a learned man.

Abba: father (especially for religious leader)

Bäda: uncultivated land

Bä'al: holyday.

Balabat: landlord, local hereditary governor.

Dekka: boundary/ territorial limit.

Dämär: gathering of adult males so as to discuss matters pertaining to land division or other issues.

Därg: literally committee. Here, it is applied in reference to the military regime that ruled Ethiopia between 1974 and 1991.

Gerat: farmland.

Faqih: a Muslim theologian.

Fitawrari: commander of the vanguard forces.

Gerazmach: commander of the left.

Heza'ety: regulated community pasture.

Karrora: a type of acacia tree found in the study area.

Lalläba: declaration.

Naib: formerly a title given to the governor of the port of Massawa and its vicinities.

Qäñazmcah: commander of the right.

Ras: chief commander of the imperial armed forces.

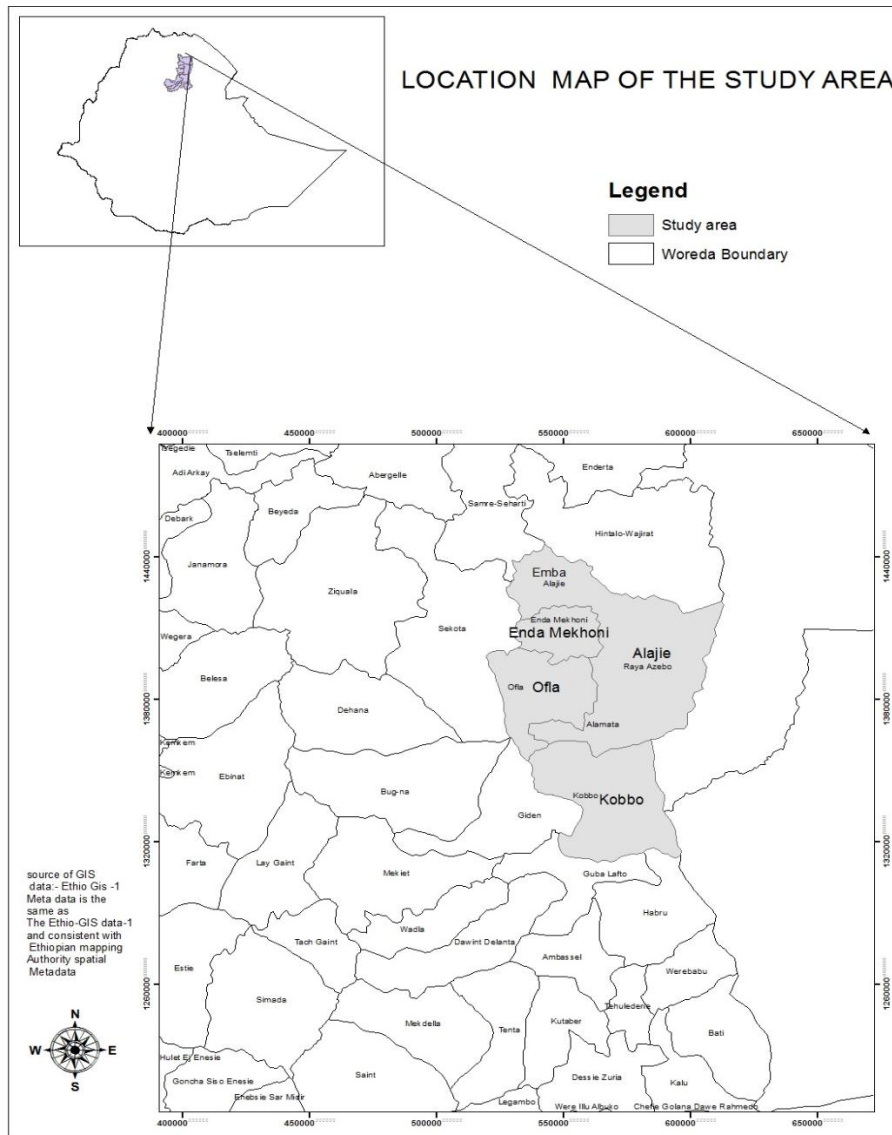
Šum: governor/appointee.

Terfi: in this context profit earned from trade.

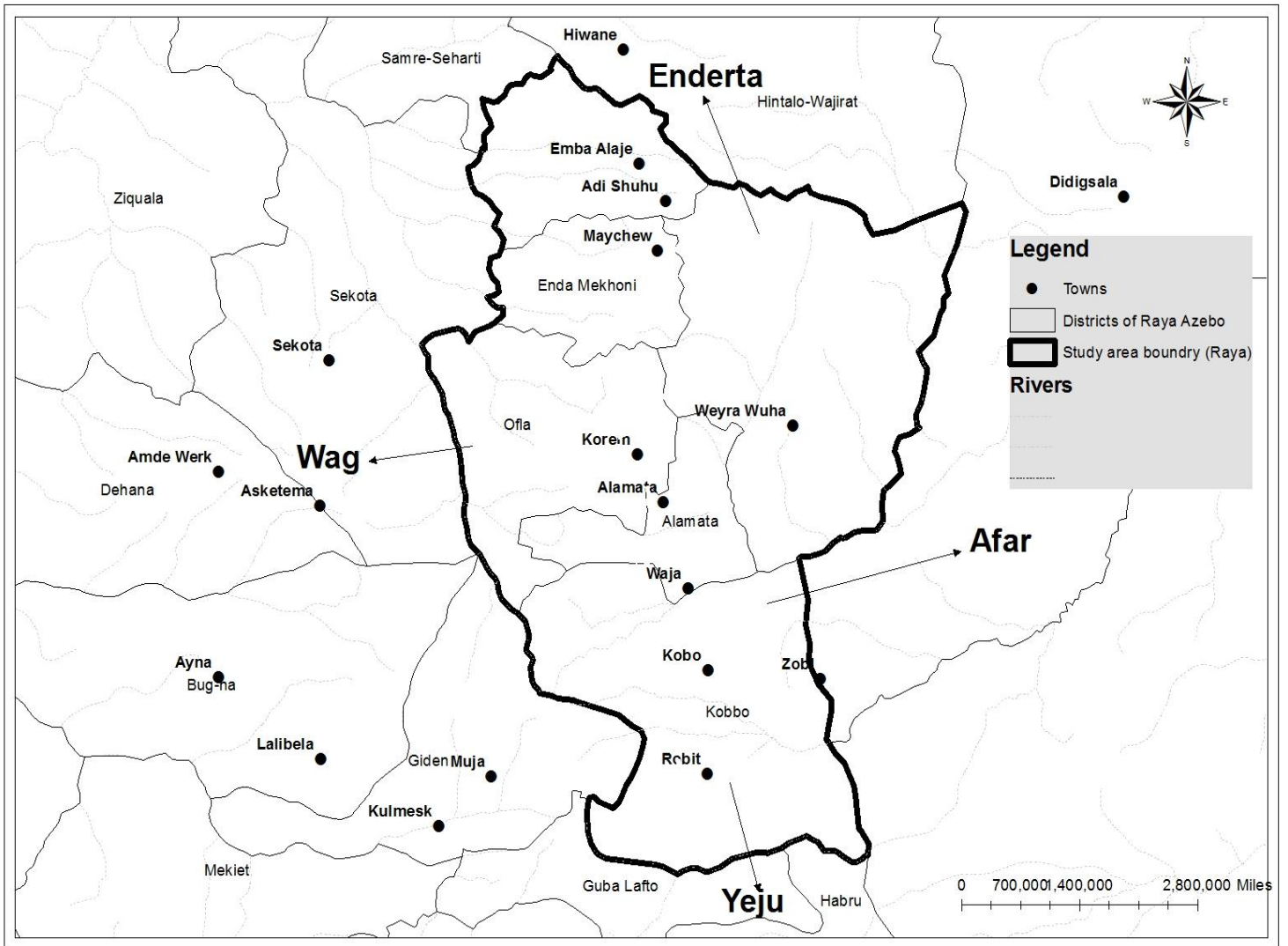
Wäräda: district.

Zämächa: campaign especially military campaign.

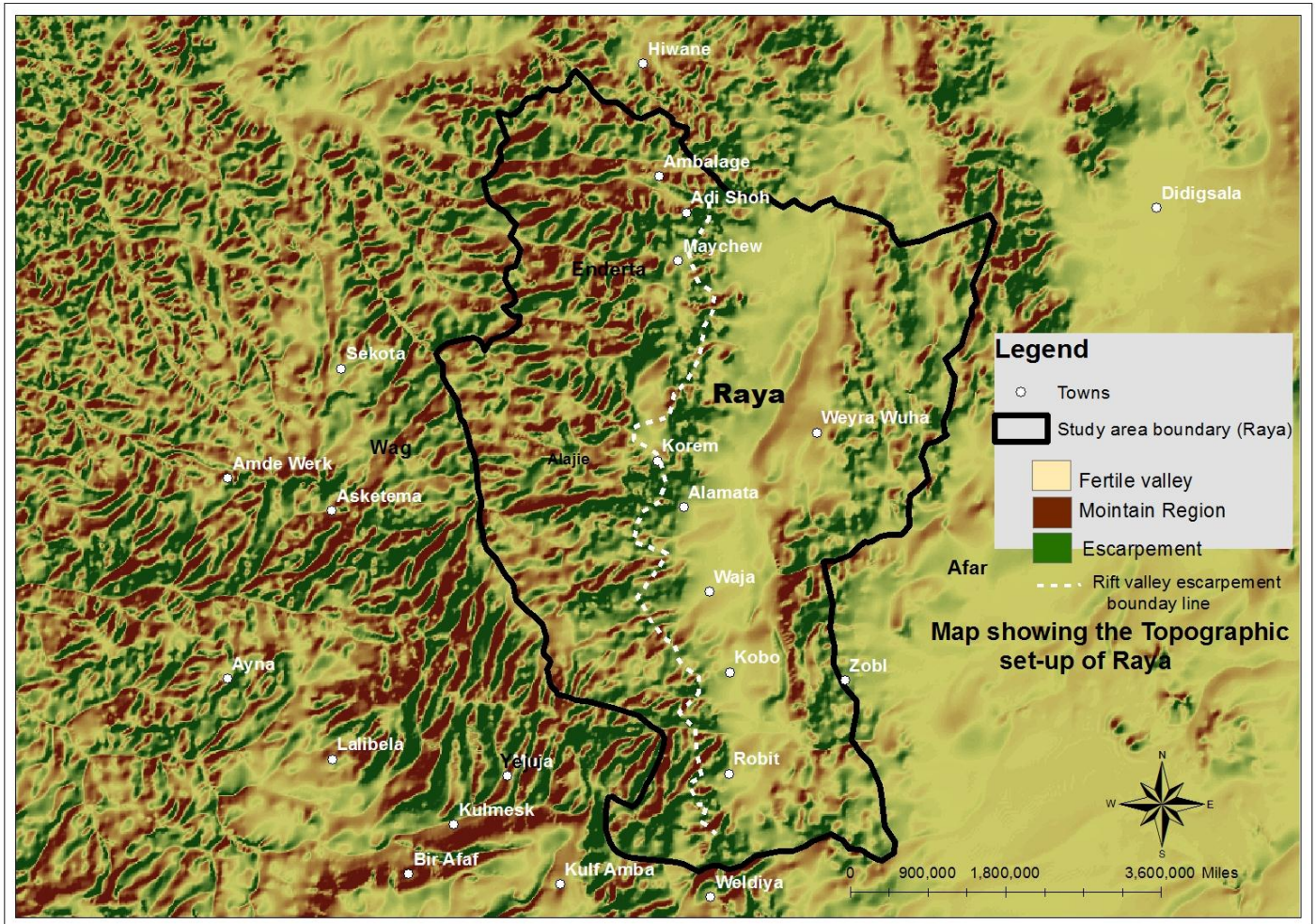
Maps



Source of Data:- Ethio-GIS-I and GIS data from Tigray Bureau of Finance and Economic Development (Planning Directorate)



Source of Data:-Ethio-GIS-I and GIS data from Tigray Bureau of Finance and Economic Development
(Planning Directorate)



Source of Data:-Ethio-GIS-I and GIS data from Tigray Bureau of Finance and Economic Development (Planning Directorate)

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Physical Environment of the Study Area.

The study area, Raya-Azäbo, is currently one of the six zones of the National Regional State of Tegray. It is officially known as the Southern Zone of Tegray. Its approximate location extends from 7⁰62'41" and 13⁰10'14" N latitude to 39⁰26'24" and 39⁰22'45" E longitude.¹ It is found along the main highway at about 670 kilometers north of the capital, Addis Ababa. It is bounded by Endärta in the north, Yäjju in the south, Wag and Lasta in the West and the Afar lowlands in the east. Its total area is estimated at 665,772.21 hectares. According to the 2007 estimates of the Central Statistics Authority it had a population of about 862,833.²

It has comprised eight district administrative units of which three of them i.e. Maycäw, Koräm and Alamaṭa are urban administrative units having equal political and administrative status as the rural districts (*wärädas*) of Emb-Alajä, Enda-Mäkhonni, Ofla, Rural Alamaṭa and the town of Mäkhonni and its surrounding rural qäbälès.³

In this study the name Raya-Azäbo, in popular parlance called Raya, includes not only the above listed four rural and three urban districts. For reasons which are explained below, it also includes Raya-Qobbo which is today part of the neighboring Northern Wällo Administrative Zone of the Amhara National Regional State. For a researcher, who is engaged in the study of ethnography, it does seem inappropriate to confine himself to political boundaries, drawn by regimes, who have come to power at different times in the long history of the country, for these territorial divisions

¹Office of Agriculture and Rural Development of Sothern Zone of Tegray Region Annual Report for 2017, p.7.

²Central Statistics Office Population Estimates for 2007, p.120.

³Working papers of the Office of the Administration of Southern Zone, p.5.

are usually not the logical outcomes of genuine considerations of cultural milieus of the people, environmental or other factors, psychological make-up of the society, administrative convenience or will of the people in question.

In other words, as the people, who live in both Raya-Azäbo and Raya-Qobbo, have common ancestry, more or less common historical experience, inhabit territories adjacent to each other, share common culture and to some extent mutually understand each other's languages deserve to be studied as one community rather than separately.⁴ These days some political activists, mainly from the adjacent Amhara areas, prefer to call the people of both Raya-Azäbo and Raya-Qobbo by the self-styled name Raya-Rayuma. But this naming is largely politically motivated aimed at creating a new regional administrative entity which would afterwards be integrated into the Amhara Regional State.⁵

Hence, in this study I prefer to call them by their former name Raya-Azäbo because, as sources show, Raya-Qobbo was a sub-part of Raya- Azäbo beginning from the early sixteenth well up to the middle of the twentieth. It was only at the end of 1958 that Raya-Qobbo was severed form Raya-Azäbo to create a new sub-province, allegedly, a political tactic employed by the Imperial regime to weaken the Rayans by dividing the same people into two competing administrative units following the *wäyanä* rebellion of 1943.⁶

Hence, leaving aside the administrative divisions put in place by various regimes, which came to power at different times in the long history of the country, as well as upon analyzing the data

⁴Several informants from Alamaṭa and Qobbo areas regretted that Raya-Azabo and Raya-Qobbo should have been placed under one administrative unit rather than under two different regional entities (i.e. Amhara and Tegray regional states).

⁵Alämu Kassa & Sisay Mängestè, *Yä Raya Hezeb Yämanenät Ṭeyaq'e ena Yämaekälawi Mängestat Melaš: Ka As'e Yohannes Aratäña eskä Ehadèg* [EPRDF], Graphic Publishers, 2013, p.45.

⁶Gebbru Tareke, *Ethiopia: Power and Protest, Peasant Revolts in the Twentieth Century*, The Red Sea Press 1966, p.96.; a large number of our oral informants also believe in this sort of 'conspiracy theory'.

collected for the study, I am fully convinced that these people deserve to be studied as one group. Geographically the areas in which the people under study reside include the three mountainous districts of Emba Alajā, Enda-Mākhonni and Ofla as well as those who live in the lowlands which extend from Ebbo, vicinity in southern Wājǰārat, in the north to the eastern gates of the town of Wāldya in the south.

The study area, Raya-Azābo, is divided into two geographic units in this study as the Mountain Region and the Fertile Valley. The districts of Emba Alajā, Enda-Mākhonni and Ofla are designated as the Mountain Region because most places in these three districts rise as high as or higher than 2500 meters above sea-level. Whereas, places such as Ebbo, Wāra Abayā, Gābatā, Qorbāta, Cārcār, Dayu, Alamata, Wajja, Qobbo, Qalem, Gura Wārǰè, Zobel and so forth are collectively classified as the Fertile Valley. The latter is an extensive valley, which runs from Ebbo in the north to Qobbo in the south, running parallel to the upper section of the Ethiopian Rift-Valley system. It is generally a lowland region having an elevation range between 1400 and 1800 meters above sea-level.⁷

However, the fundamental reason for dividing the study area into two as Mountain Region and Fertile Valley is not merely on the basis of a highland-lowland dichotomy *per se* but, as shown in the succeeding chapters, it is principally owing to the fact that people, who inhabit on both sides of the study area, have, initially, got distinct identities and thereby different trajectories of histories. Nevertheless, subsequent to long processes of peoples' interactions and intermingling they have come to form a common identity and history.

⁷part of this data was collected by the author through a GPS device and part of it is obtained from the papers availed to me by the experts of the Office of Agriculture and Rural Development, Southern Zone of Tegray Region.

Having been split into parallel sections, the Mountain Region and the Fertile Valley are distinctly divided into two almost equal halves by the escarpment which runs from Wäjjarat in the north to the skyline west of the Alamaṭa-Qobbo plains in the south. The escarpment which separates the Mountain Region from the Fertile Valley is also Raya-Azäbo's dense forest zone. The Department of Agriculture and Forestry of the Administration of Southern Zone of Tegray is in charge of the overall management of this forest Zone. Meaning, it is protected by law from those who cut woods for building purposes, for fuel or for some other consumption. For the sake of management conduciveness the Agriculture and Forestry Department has spatially categorized this forest belt into three sections. They are:

- I. Hegum Berda -Gera Kahu Forest Zone: It covers some 21,000 hectares of the total area of the study area. In this forest zone we find various species of trees and wild animals. To mention some of the animals and plants respectively are: chaetae, kudu, eshoo, hyena as well as many species of birds and from the plant kingdom ebony, podocarpus, kosso, olive tree and various species of the acacia tree are available.⁸
- II. Wäjjeg-Mahgo-Warrän Forest Zone: It covers 9000 hectares of the total area of the study area. The plant and animal species found in the above forest zone are also found in this forest zone except that in here various species of the acacia tree are dominant.⁹
- III. Ago-Šähafti Forest Zone: It covers some 3000 hectares of the total area of the study area and as compared to the above two forest zones it has smaller area coverage. The animal and plant species found in the first and second forest zones are also found here. Again, like the Wäjjeg-

⁸Office of Agriculture and Rural Development Annual Report...p.8.

⁹*Ibid.*

Mahgo-Warrän forest zones in this forest zone various species of the acacia tree are dominant.¹⁰

In Raya-Azäbo, as in other parts of Ethiopia, the cutting of wood for construction materials, agricultural implements as well as for fuel is common as people do not have other alternative sources of energy such as gas, oil or electricity. Moreover, the clearing of land for agriculture and grazing had destroyed most woody vegetation which was aggravated by the deliberate and accidental outbreak of fire. The isolated trees and clusters of trees that are found around churches and burial grounds of venerated Muslim sheiks, which are locally known as *mäšayakha*,¹¹ were not protected by law but out of respect for the dead or by superstition.

In the Mountain Region churches are surrounded by grooves of trees and these trees which crown many hills, plateaus and lofty mountains have added beauty to what is already most attractive mountain landscape of northeast Ethiopia. Particularly those preserved within church compounds are trees unrivalled in size by any of the same species growing in the above mentioned three forest zones.

The above mentioned three forest zones together with the attractive mountain landscape could serve as an additional means of income generating scheme through the promotion and development of selected tourist attraction sites by the region's office of culture and tourism. However, the state administration did not yet give due attention to develop this important resource. They are severely criticized by experts from the field for skewing much of the financial

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹Informants: Ato Čago Aämä interviewed at Hašängä on 24/02/ 2010 E.C.; Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan interviewed at 'Addi Abo Gošu on 25/02/ 2010 E.C.

and skilled manpower resources of the state to the mountain ecotourism and battlefield tourism of Adwa in central Tegray.¹²

The Mountain Region of Raya-Azäbo dominates the skyline of much of northeast Ethiopia. It is generally supposed that many of the highest mountain ranges of northeast Ethiopia are found here. In this case, the high peaks of Alajā, Färrah Emba, Däbri, Bokhra, Śärqäba and Wämbärät are some of them. The altitude of some of the highest mountain peaks in this region ranges from 3980 meters above sea level to 3200 meters above sea level. But the highest peak is Färrah Emba- not Śebbät.¹³

Although Śebbät is the hillside of the southern slopes of Mt. Färrah Emba itself, and a name of a *ṭabya (qäbälè)*, as the lowest administrative unit is known by such name in Tgray). However, developers of the regional primary education school curriculum as well as the electronic media, anchored in the region, wrongly put Śebbät instead of Färrah Emba, as the highest elevation in Tegray.¹⁴

As a result of its high elevation, this region could be termed a mountainous region even by the standard of a mountainous country like Ethiopia. It seems for this reason that the word *emba* is prefixed to the names of a number of places such as Emba Däbri, Emba Śärqäba, Emba Alajā, Emba Hasty, Färrah Emba, Emba Arrära, and so forth apparently suggesting the preponderance of several mountain summits in this section of the study area.

¹²In a discussion with experts in the field regarding the tourism development endeavors of the region, they critically related to me that there exists a discrepancy in budgetary allocation as well as other related resources between different sub-regions that constituted the province.

¹³Office of Agriculture and Rural Development Office Annual Report, ...p.11.

¹⁴Social Studies text book for grade 5, p.12; and the satellite television networks of Tegray, erroneously, call it by such name.

In the Mountain Region, like in some other places in the world, elevation or altitude plays a pivotal role in shaping the temperature, amount of rainfall, drainage system, vegetation as well as types of crops grown. Warmer, moisture laden winds from the Red Sea as well as the Indian Ocean, crossing above the Afar lowlands, east of the escarpment, sweep up the eastern lee ward sides of the mountains of Emba Alajā, Enda-Mākhonni, and Ofla as a result of which most mountain tips in these three districts are usually enveloped in heavy rain-swollen clouds, which begin to condense before *kerämt*, main raining season, and *bālg*, short raining season, commence respectively by the later period of June and from early March to early May.¹⁵

Most places in the entire Mountain Region fall in the *dägu'a* (Amh.*däga*) agro- climatic zone. This is due to the fact that the altitude of all areas in this region ranges between 2400 to 3980 meters above sea level. But some areas, which straddle between the Mountain Region and the Fertile Valley, are generally categorized under *wäyna dägu'a* whose elevation ranges from 1800 to 2000 meters above sea level. Places below 1800 meters above sea level are generally found in what is designated in this study as the Fertile Valley and the general agro-climatic name assigned to it is *qolla*.¹⁶

Elevation in this region, as in any part of the world, is a determining factor in shaping the range of temperature and vegetation type grown. Hence, in the Mountain Region temperature switches between -4 degrees Celsius (four degrees below zero) during the coldest period of the year (from October to December) to 20 degrees Celsius during the hot period of the year (from February to May).¹⁷

¹⁵Office of Agriculture and Rural Development Annual Report, ...p.10.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid.*

On the other hand in some places of the Fertile Valley temperature rises as high as 35 degree Celsius. But for most places the average annual temperature of this region ranges between 32 degree Celsius during the hottest months of the year and 15 degree Celsius during the cold period of the year.¹⁸ With regard to rainfall while the Mountain Region gets evenly distributed precipitation as high as 900 mm per-annum, the Fertile Valley gets only 400 mm per annum.¹⁹

Shaped by the relief system of the region Raya-Azäbo has got three drainage systems: the Täkäzä-Šerrärä drainage system, the Awaš or Afar basin drainage system as well as the Lake Hašängä drainage system. With regard to the first two basins the main reason why they are known particularly to experts of ecology and agronomy of the study area as ‘western’ and ‘eastern’ basins/drainage systems, respectively, is that because, though those entire rivers rise from the Mountain Region, they drain/flow towards the east and west of their sources. The Täkäzä drainage system comprises rivers such as Šerrärä, Gäräb Hara, Gäräb Därgua’egua’eta, Gäräb Chäläna and Gäräb Šanna. They are collectively known as the *Hamuštä Gäräb*, literally ‘the Five Rivers’.²⁰

Whereas the Awaš/Afar drainage system contains Gäräb Guguf, Gäräb Odda, Gäräb Gobbu, Gäräb Haya, Gäräb Hara, Gäräb Wa’ekhäl and Gäräb Foqisa. The famous Ala Wuha River is also grouped under the category of the Awaš basin.²¹ Of the two drainage systems discussed above, it is the Awaš basin which benefits most the local population as it drains the surplus producing areas of the Fertile Valley.²² In relation to this it has to be taken into account that of

¹⁸*Ibid.*; p.18.

¹⁹*Ibid.*; p.20.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹This information is obtained from Ato Achamyäläh Assäfa, a senior expert in natural resource management, at his office in the town of Maycäw.

²²*Ibid.*

the six zonal administrations in Tegray it is in this zone that we find the Awaš basin drainage system; the remaining five zonal administrations in this region fall under the Tākäzä drainage system (basin).²³

The third drainage system in Mountain Region is the Lake Hašängä basin. This basin, as compared to the above two river basins, has the smallest catchment area. A number of minor intermittent rivers drain from all directions to this lake. Lake Hašängä and Lake Hayq, found in southern Wällo, are known together as highland lakes of Ethiopia for both are situated at higher altitudes than the rest of all other lakes in the country. Previously Lake Hašängä used to cover 2120 hectares, and was twenty-five meters deep. But now due to siltation and other ecological factors the width of the lake is drastically reduced to 1930 hectares and its depth to sixteen meters.²⁴

In Ray-Azäbo in general, be it in the Mountain Region or in the Fertile Valley we have three types of soils. They are: clay, loam and sandy soils.²⁵ Their distribution varies from place to place. In the Mountain Region we find predominantly the clay soils whereas in the Fertile Valley we predominantly find loam soils.²⁶

The availability of the loam soils in this area is mainly due to the fact that those rivers which drain the eastern section of this area carry the loam soils from the Mountain Region to the Fertile Valley.²⁷ It is for this reason that farmers in the Fertile Valley conduct floods to their fields by digging drainage channels during the rainy season both to irrigate their crop fields as well as to

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵This information is obtained from Ato Hailè Kassa, a senior expert in cereal crop production and environmental conservation, at his office in Maycäw.

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷*Ibid.*

enrich the fertility of their already rich soils. The third type of soil, that is to say, sandy soil, is found in both geographical units but its distribution is very small in each area as compared to the other two types.²⁸

The crops grown/sown in the Mountain Region are different from those of the Fertile Valley resulting from the variation in the relief system, rain-fall amount, temperature, soil type, and some other agro-ecological factors. In the former the majorities of crops are sown in the main rainy season from June to July and are harvested between December and January; and the major crops grown in this region are: wheat and barley with many varieties and to some extent *tef* and a great variety of leguminous crops such as chick-peas, beans, lentils and flax.²⁹

In some areas having heights of more than 3000 meters above sea level only a single crop is grown: six-row barely; but as growing a single crop involves a lot of risks of crop loss, mainly due to hailstones and extreme cold weather, peasants in this area are involved in large scale rearing of cattle and sheep. Hence, owing to the large number of sheep and cattle that an individual peasant owns these people could be categorized as highland pastoralists.³⁰

In most parts of the Mountain Region double cropping is possible as the area regularly gets little rains between March and early May. This is what is known in the Ethiopian agrarian system as *bälg* growing area. In this season varieties of barely, beans, peas, chickpeas, and oil seeds are grown.³¹ As this area is well known for its *bälg* crop production four places in the districts of Emba Alajä, Enda-Mäkhonni, Ofla and Qobbo are named as *Bälgat* or *Bällago* denoting that

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹*Ibid.*

people harvest during this season nearly as much production as they do in the main harvest season.

In relation to this there is also a saying in the local area which goes' "...ካያ ደይራልጡዎ በልጊ የለይ",³² though it may connote a different meaning in the cultural context of the society concerned, it literally means: "There is no crop whatsoever which the people of Haya do not grow during the *bälg* season."

In the Fertile Valley the dominant crops grown are different varieties of *tef* and sorghum although maize and a few varieties of legumes are also sown. Despite the availability of huge potential in the sector both the Mountain Region and the Fertile Valley have no large-scale irrigation structures. But small gravity flow channels locally known as *fäläg* are used to cultivate every single place, where soil is available, along the right and left bank of the rivers. In these very limited areas onion, tomato, garlic, green pepper, various types of vegetables and perennial fruit crops are grown.³³

In the local sense of classifying seasons the people of the study area have known four distinct seasons *krämt* (the main rainy season which lasts roughly from the beginning of June to the end of August; *qaw'e*, harvest season which lasts roughly from the end of September to the end of December; *hagay*, a dry season of the year which lasts roughly from the beginning of January to the end of May and *sedya*, a brief season which ushers in the approaching of the rainy season

³²Informants: *Ato* Wäldä-Yohannes Zägyä, *Ato* Šägay Märäsa *Ato*, Kahsay Kalayu, *Ato* Haylä Rāda, *Ato* Färāja Aman interviewed in a group interview session at Laeläy Hayya on 29/12/2009 E.C.

³³This information is obtained from *Ato* Hailè Kassa a senior expert for cereal production and environmental conservation for the region under study.

and lasts roughly between the end of May up to mid-June. However, the last season, owing to its brevity, is not as distinct as the two seasons i.e. the rainy and the dry seasons of the year.³⁴

The vast majority of the people in the Mountain Region profess Orthodox Christianity whereas those in the Fertile Valley particularly sometime from the seventh century AD, when Islam was introduced into that area, to the end of the nineteenth they all used to worship Islam. When we take into consideration the working culture of the Christians of Raya-Azäbo, unlike their Muslim counterpart, they schedule the days of the week in a month based on their age old religion which is very much intertwined with the belief system, myth and culture of that society. Therefore, according to societal value system they have classified the days of the months in a given year into three categories as ‘*sa'eda serah*’, ‘*mahsy*’ and ‘*bä'al*’.³⁵

During the ‘*sae'da serah*’ days, literally ‘white work days’, people are free to do laboring works such as plowing, digging, harvesting, grinding flour and the like. Whereas during the *mahsy* days people do light works such as building hedges in order to keep domestic beasts out of sown farmsteads, dig flood diversion ditches so as to take flood waters away through and thereby protect farmlands from being flooded, purchase/sale something at nearby marketplace or visit relatives/ friends in the neighborhood.³⁶

Lastly, in the case of *bä'al* days, literally holydays, doing either laboring or light work is altogether not allowed by religious rules. Meaning, doing anything over the weekends, some of

³⁴Informants: *Mälakä Sälam* Kalayu Däsalän interviewed at the compound of the Monastery of Täklä Haymanot Maycäw on 14/12/2009; *Ato* Kalayu Käbädäw and *Ato* Käläläw Wäldä Maryam both interviewed at Känäyat on 27/12/2009; *Märgèta* Bärhä Haddes interviewed at the enclosure of the church of Yohannes Sébbät on 12/2/2010.

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶*Ibid.*

the main saints' days of a month, the saint's day of a local parish as well as the days of other revered saints is totally prohibited.³⁷

In the study area when peasants think that the soil of some field is exhausted, they fallow that field or rotate the crops sown. Crop rotation is practiced in accordance with the general traditional concept that supportive crops such as lentils, beans, chick-peas, and oil seeds such as flax, commonly known as legumes, enrich the fertility of the soil after such fields are repeatedly sown with what experts of agriculture call main crops such as wheat, barley and *tef*.³⁸

Particularly in the Mountain Region the best strategy of maintaining the fertility of the soil is/was fallowing. In earlier times, when population was small, the period between fallows was up to seven years. But as population steadily began to grow the periods between fallows declined between one to two years and recently fallowing was totally abandoned as land has become so scarce due to population explosion. Therefore, as a means of compensation for fallowing, peasants in the study area practice three consecutive plowings before sowing their fields which are locally termed as *fäg'a*, *aymi* and *täselas* literally first plowing, second plowing and third plowing respectively.³⁹

One of the principal reasons why I divided the study area, Ray-Azäbo, into two geographic units as the Mountain Region and the Fertile Valley is not merely based on highland/lowland dichotomy and the resulting temperature variation or some other variation between the two places. It has mainly to do with how the historical antecedents of the process of settlement and

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹Discussion with *Ato* Hailè Kassa whose idea is corroborated by several informants from the study area to whom a similar question is posed to.

displacement of the various peoples has unfolded in both geographic units and how each people had negatively or positively affected the other in the process of social contact.

Meaning, at least since about of the sixth century A.D. well up to the middle of the seventeenth, the Mountain Region had been exclusively a habitat of the Tegrean people.⁴⁰ On the other hand, the Fertile Valley was fully inhabited by a Muslim pastoral society known as Dobe'a since at least as early as the eighth century A.D well up to the first two decades of the seventeenth century. In connection to this, however, some church documents from the study area seem to indicate that this very area was inhabited, before the coming of the Dobe'a, by some Afar pastoral communities.⁴¹

Nevertheless, the advent the Oromo people in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has brought about profound changes in the population landscape of the region. Meaning, soon after the coming of the Oromo, the Dobe'a were forced to disperse into two opposite directions. A majority of this people had moved further east to the Afar lowlands while the remaining group had moved up to the Mountain Region west of the escarpment into the areas inhabited by sedentary Christian highlanders.⁴²

But it must be noted that Raya-Azäbo has not been solely the habitat of the Tegreans, the Dobe'a or Oromo populations. As a consequence of drought, famine and acute shortage of cultivable and pasture land, a considerable number of Amhara, Agäw and Afar populations from the adjacent

⁴⁰Haber Luis. (trans.) "The Chronicle of Emperor Be'ede Mariam (1468-1478)", *Ethiopian Observer*, Vol.VI, 1962, p.73. I cross-checked the original geez version against its Amharic and English translations which are found to be congruent to each other; many of those knowledgeable informants have also reported similar ideas to what we find in this chronicle.

⁴¹"*Gädlä Abunä Fiqqor*", MS, deposited at the Monastery of Täklä Haymanot, Maycäw. n.p.

⁴²Informants: Sheikh Adäm Abdulqader interviewed in Mäqälä 15/12/ 2009 E.C. and in Maycäw on 05/02/ 2010 E.C., Sheikh Mahdi Yassin interviewed in Maycäw 18/12/ 2009 E.C., *Mämher* Muhammad- Nur Bärhä interviewed in Maycäw on 16/12/ 2009; *Mämher* Bärhä Bäläy interviewed in Maycäw on 20/12/2009.

regions have moved and settled in the Fertile Valley amongst the Oromo. Soon after their arrival, the newcomers were interspersed with the Oromo people inhabiting in the area particularly beginning from the end of the nineteenth century up until the recent past. This issue will be thoroughly elaborated in the last two chapters of this dissertation.

1.2. Rationale of the Study

Some of the reasons which motivated me to take up the study of the history of the peoples of Raya-Azäbo as a topic of my dissertation are the following. First, in my previous study for the M.A. program, where I have dealt with issues of land tenure and tribute collection systems of the district of Emba Alajä, had paved the way for me to think and look further into the history of the diverse peoples of the sub-province of Raya-Azäbo. In relation to this it has to be noted that Emba Alajä is/was one of the component districts of the study area or Raya-Azäbo sub-province. In any case, this study has acquainted me with this region in particular and northeast Ethiopia in general and thereby aroused tremendous interest in me to conduct further research albeit with a different topic, wider area coverage and varying approach and methodology.

Secondly, with the increasing politicization of identity since 1991, this particular sub-region has become a bone of contention among those who claim to have a stake in it. For example, some Amhara intellectuals and political activists write in social media, publish books, and campaign through electronic and print media outlets that this region should have been part and parcel of the territory of the Amhara National Regional State.⁴³ They often blame the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), the ruling party in the region and a coalition of the Ethiopian

⁴³Alamu Kassa & Sisay Mangeste, *Yä Raya Hezeb Yä Manenät Teyaqè*...p.55.

People's Revolutionary Party (EPRDF) for becoming accomplice in ceding this region to Tegray National Regional State.⁴⁴

On the other hand Tegrean political activists and nationalists claim that this part of the region is an inalienable part of Tegray National Regional state since earlier times. They, like their Amhara counterparts, blame the Tegray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the other coalition party member of the EPRDF and the ruling party in Tegray, for not making the Ala-Wuha River (meaning including the sub-province of Raya-Qobbo) as the southern boundary of Tegray in 1991.⁴⁵ They regret that this area was lost to the Wällo Governorate General in the aftermath of the *wäyanä* rebellion of 1943 as a punishment by the imperial regime that is mostly considered by them as the promoter of Amhara interests.⁴⁶

The third claimant to this territory are the Oromo intellectuals and political activists spearheaded by the Oromo People's Democratic Organization known as (OPDO), the ruling party in the Oromya National Regional State and the third component coalition party member to the umbrella party-EPRDF. They, like their Amhara and Tegrean counterparts, have raised their claim through every modern means of communication available to them. Particularly, the Oromya Region's Bureau of Culture and Tourism has published a book in which a section of it is devoted to Raya-Azäbo. In this section the authors asserted that the whole of Raya-Azäbo and even including most parts southern Endärta are and hence should be, part of the Oromo territory for according to them this area was an earlier Oromo settlement place.⁴⁷

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵Haftu Kidanu, *Guma Ab Tarik Hezebi Tegray*, Mäqällä, Dayu Printing Press, 2006 E.C. p.35.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*; p.51.

⁴⁷Minale Adugna,(trans.), *History of the Oromo to the Sixteenth Century*, Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau, 2004, pp.269-273.

My intention here is not to review materials written on the study area. I will do that in the main bodies of the dissertation as deemed necessary. The reason why I raised it here is that because I want to convey the message that as a result of the above mentioned controversies, this time around, the question of history/identity has, from time to time, grown to be one of the thorniest issues both regionally and at a level of the state.

By and large, with respect to this region and the people who live in it, there is the perception in the popular and academic arena that the contemporary peoples of Raya-Azäbo are entirely descendants of the Dobe'a or Oromo, who as a result of long historical processes changed their identity largely into Tegrean or Amhara. This argument is partly true but principally wrong as will be elaborated in the last section of this research paper.

This notion, I believe, has emanated from lack of comprehensive and serious historical study which could shade light on these peoples' identity, settlement and the dynamics of their relations. Consequently, I became so curious to find out the history and identity of the peoples of Raya-Azäbo first by studying each group on its own right and secondly by looking at their common histories in time and space.

Upon deciding to proceed on studying the history and identity of the peoples of Raya-Azäbo, it has become necessary to me to consult some of the key source materials pertinently related to the study. After surveying the sources, it has become abundantly clear to me that the starting period for this study should be the eventful period of the sixteenth century particularly beginning from the year 1543 onwards.

This is because following the end of the prolonged wars, which were fought all over the country between the Christian state and the Muslim sultanate of Adal, several watershed events had taken place such as the resettlement of the Tegrean population in what is called in this study as the Mountain Region and almost a century or so later the arrival of the Oromo to this region particularly to the Fertile Valley. The coming of the Oromo to this region in particular had, as will be shown in chapters three and four, far reaching security, economic and demographic consequences to the peoples who had established permanent settlement in Raya-Azäbo and areas adjacent to it.

In the course of this study I wrote my research proposal and presented to the Department of History after taking four semester courses over a period of two years. During the proposal defense I met stiff resistance from a few of the department members that the study should begin either towards the end of the nineteenth century or the second half of the twentieth. Fortunately, many of the staff members including the head of the department stood on my side arguing that researchers should rather be encouraged to study the history of Ethiopia of the earlier periods.

On the other hand, this research has benefited considerably from the comments and suggestions made on the proposal by members of the department. In fact it was after they made helpful comments on my proposal that I was stimulated to rethink on the research topic whereby I changed it from *“The Peopling of Raya Azäbo, 1543-1991”* to *“History and Identity in Northeast Ethiopia with Particular Reference to Raya-Azäbo, 1543-1974.”*

In relation to this it is also imperative to describe briefly to the reader as to what does the term ‘identity’ stand for? Thus, in the context of this research work by the term ‘identity’ I mean the ethnic identity which continually formed and transformed as a result of the multifaceted and

dynamic processes of economic and social interactions between the diverse peoples of the study area and adjoining regions.

1.3. Data Collection: Methods and Approaches

In any case, after the proposal was approved, I continued to aggressively engage in browsing various libraries searching for materials written on the study area whereby I managed to gather a lot of corps of materials from secondary and primary sources. The materials I have been dealing with are written in English, Tegrēña, Amharic, Ge'ez and Italian languages. With respect to language proficiency, I do not face any problem in relation to Tegrēña, Amharic and English owing to the obvious reason that the first two are respectively my first and second languages and the third is a media of instruction in the Ethiopian education system with which I have long time acquaintance i.e. beginning from my elementary school education.

However, my difficulties in language have risen from the Ge'ez and Italian languages. So as to alleviate such a difficulty I decided to upgrade my Ge'ez language reading and understanding skills, which during my childhood I acquired some because my father had sent me to a nearby priest school to have some elementary skills of Ge'ez language for he thought that it would improve my reading and understanding ability when I went to modern school. In that regard he was right because later on it helped me a lot in enhancing greatly my learning skills though sadly he did not survive to see any of my academic achievements.

Whatever the case may be, to scale up my skills of that language I went and get registered at an institution situated nearby to St. Mary church at Amist Killo in Addis Ababa where the *Mahbärä Qedusan* (literally the Association of the Saints) Institute teaches Ge'ez language from elementary to a higher level to whoever is interested to learn that language. Every Sunday after-

noon I regularly went there for one year to take the course prepared for beginners. After a year, partly because I felt I had acquired fairly sufficient skills which would enable me to read and understand texts and partly due to time constraints I decided to drop out of that school.

The second and even more serious difficulty, which has to do with language competence, is related to the Italian language. Previously I had no knowledge or exposure to that language whatsoever. To tackle this problem first I attempted to look for some means of going to Italy and study it for about six months or so there. That did not materialize, however, due to financial constraints and some other technical reasons. Then I discussed the matter with Professor Tākästä Nāgash, who happened to be my adviser for this study for some time, encouraged me to study it by any means.

Professor Tākästä was coming to our department annually from Sweden as a visiting professor so as to offer courses and to advise students at the level of a Ph.D. Unfortunately, since the year 2017 he could not come to Ethiopia as usual to do his job as the university could not cover his travel and accommodation costs allegedly owing to financial constraints.

Consequently, I and the rest of his advisee, except two senior candidates, were told by the department to find a replacement for the outgoing adviser. The moment I heard the decision I was very much disturbed because during the short period we worked together I found Professor Tākästä to be very helpful in many ways. Afterwards, through the relentless efforts and recommendation of Dr. Tākaleñ Woldä Mariam the department has convinced and subsequently assigned Dr. Adhana Haile to take over the duty of supervising this research project from Professor Tākästä.

Coming to our main issue of the study and use of the Italian language for this research, I decided to take a short-term training at home. Hence, I went to Addis Ababa University Institute of Language Studies in which the Italian Language Unit is tied up as part of that institute. I had asked a person, who is in charge of the unit, that for the purpose of a research I am interested to study the Italian language but he told me that the unit is no more offering short-term training as they are fully engaged in training students at the level of a bachelor's degree program.

I then moved to the Italian Cultural Center, as a last resort, to have training of that language. After being admitted by the institute, I began to take the training which lasted for a period of three months paying seven hundred birr per month. At the end of the third month, I managed to accomplish the training successfully in that it enabled me to obtain a *Level One Certificate* which is awarded for those who acquired a very elementary skill of that language.

In order to have a good command of that language I decided to continue the training at any cost up until I acquire sufficient skills which would enable me to understand texts written in that language. Unfortunately, however, the institute declined to offer the training due to the fact that its policy does not allow conducting training mainly for Levels II and above now that the class size is less the five trainees.

Finally, having acquired very little reading and comprehending skills from the Italian language training school, I was left with only one option: That is to employ technology. Particularly two Italian authors, Carlo Conti Rossini and Raimondo Franchetti have, in the 1920s and 1930s, written extensively on the study area. Their works are so relevant that anyone who is engaged in the study of a topic, like the one, which I picked to study, cannot afford to neglect them.

Consequently, I decided to use a Google translator technology and software to translate texts from the Italian language into the English language. The problem in relation to this is that, however, R. Franchetti's voluminous book which contains more than five hundred pages and Conti Rossini's three articles which contain all in all more than one-hundred pages could not be found in the form of a soft copy in all websites consulted. As a result, I was forced to change the materials which I obtained in the form of a hard copy to a soft-copy or to words by typing thorough a computer which is a rather costly task both in terms of money and time.

This job is so hectic that it is not only the financial and temporal costs I incurred that matters it is rather the editing and the task of cross-checking the materials, converted into word, against the original material that matters most. This is because unless one feeds the Google translator or the software an accurate word, a sentence or a paragraph, one would not obviously get the required outcome or no outcome at all.

Moreover, in order to extract crucial evidence from materials, which are relevant for the study, a great deal of efforts has been made and much time has been spent to read secondary literature written in English, Amharic, Tegrēña and Ge'ez languages. However, getting access to church documents from some of the churches and monasteries found in the Mountain Region was not an easy job for me. It took me a lot of time and effort to strongly negotiate and convince the clergy that I wanted the documents for the purpose of research and I had nothing to do with illicit trafficking of heritages which they suspect everyone of who approaches and demands them to have a look at any document at their disposal.

Eventually, I produced a letter, as per their demand, from the office of the zonal administration addressed to the Mayčāw Diocese Secretariat and from this office another letter was dispatched

to each of the concerned *wärüdas* or district diocese secretariat and finally from there to each of the churches or monasteries where such documents are supposed to have been found. As this task of collecting church documents was done side by side with collecting oral tradition, the long process of obtaining permission to get access to such documents, by going from one office to another office, has consumed a great deal of my time and energy which I otherwise could use to go and collect oral tradition from the surrounding countryside.

I have also searched material for the study from journal articles, proceedings and miscellaneous papers which are deposited in the library of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies and the Ethiopian National Library Agency as well. Archival materials originating from the former Ministry of Interior have also been meticulously gathered and analyzed. However, such archival materials are usable for the later part of the study that is to say the 1940s and 1950s.

As an important and integral part of source material for the study, a fairly sufficient time, energy and finance has also been allocated to gather, organize, analyze and synthesize oral traditions. Hence, upon accomplishing collecting data from primary and secondary sources, I traveled to the study area in two intervals in which I stayed for about six months to gather oral data from a great number of knowledgeable interviewees. However, it is regrettable that due to financial and time constraints I could not stay for more time than I did in the study area to learn more from my informants.

During my stay in the study area particularly in localities found in the Fertile Valley, I realized that the more time I stayed there, the better I understand the people and their history. Interview was not one shot; depending on the knowledge of informants each one of them were interviewed

either once, twice or even for a third time. When asked, some knowledgeable informants were found to be willing for interview even for more than three times.

Most of the informants were, however, interviewed only once. As all of my informants know either Tegraña or Amharic or both, interviews were conducted in both languages depending on the knowledge of the informant. Oral data collection was carried out through a modern sound recording device. Some fifteen cassette recorders, which were stored after being used in the previous study, have also been utilized in the current study as deemed necessary.

In connection to this it should be noted that to make a full transcription of the voices of all interviewees it has taken a great deal of time and energy. I have also used a GPS device to register the latitude, longitude and altitude of some specific places which may appear in the maps that will be utilized for this study to illustrate important landmarks in the history of the people of Raya-Azäbo.

The other serious problem I faced though it was only in a single place in the Fertile Valley particularly at a place called 'Addi Kuayaru was that after I arrived in their village a group of informants whom I asked to interview demanded payment in the form of cash before we sit for an interview.

I challenged them why they were asking me for money as other people in the neighboring villages such as those at Wargeba did not demand likewise. They replied by saying that it was because a 'Chinese woman' (in fact she was a Japanese women) bought and gave for many of them solar energy generator panels and to one of the key informant she was reported to have

covered the medical expenses of the informant as well as his wife by taking both of them to a private hospital in Mäqälä.

This was a Japanese anthropologist by the name Chicag'e who was doing a comparative study of the oral traditions of Raya-Azäbo Oromo and that of the Boräna Oromo in southern Ethiopia. However, after a long conversation, I managed to convince and thereby interview them arguing strongly that I did not have as much money as the Japanese woman had which would be given out amongst informants.

The other major challenge to me while in the field was related to security issues. In October-November 2017 I was moving between the neighboring towns of Alamata and Qobbo to meet informants where the security situation was very tense. Every moment I checked the social media I read polemic war of words between proponents and opponents of this idea or that idea. Finally, the match between Mäkälä and Wäldya football teams, which was supposed to be held in the town of Wäldya, added fuel to the fire.

Early in the morning on December 2, 2017, I met the Mäkälä-football team and their fans at Qobbo heading to Wäldya. Immediately after they arrived at their destination in the town of Wäldya, it was reported that the Mäkälä foot-ball team and their fans began to exchange insults with those in Wäldya; soon things went out of control in which we saw the tragic death of innocent people and senseless destruction of property.

When I checked the social-media, time and again, which is a natural thing to do it more frequently in times of political crisis, I read a number of texts written by some youngsters from the Qobbo-Wäldya region and adjacent areas which urged the local people to watch out that

some ‘spies’ from Tegray were there allegedly to spy on the political activities of those groups in the Amhara region. I was scared that I would be identified with those ‘spies’ and be the target of a heinous attack.

Fortunately for me this disturbance had occurred at a time when I was on the verge of finalizing my task of gathering oral information from the great majority of those people who were identified beforehand as key informants. Hence, I decided to immediately and more swiftly leave the town of Qobbo and its vicinity for Koräm before the Qobbo-Alamata road was temporarily closed.

Upon coming back from field research to Addis Ababa, I was fully occupied in analyzing the various source materials at my disposal so as to organize them into coherently well-fitted chapters. As a whole, this dissertation contains five chapters. Chapter one is an introductory section which attempts to familiarize readers with what is generally intended to come up with in this research project; whereas chapters two, three and four deal respectively with the history of the peoples of Tegray, Dobe’a and Oromo in Raya Azäbo. It has to be noted, however, that Raya-Azäbo has also been a habitat of the Agäw, Amhara and Afar peoples. Nevertheless, unlike the former the latter had not come to this region *en-masse*.

Meaning, individual Agäw, Amhara and Afar persons have arrived in this region on individual basis, at different times, lived interspersed with the Tegray, Dobe’a and Oromo long after these peoples had already established permanent settlements through successive waves of mass movements/migrations. As a result the relatively newer Agäw, Amhara and Afar settlers have melted into the previously settled and numerically dominant populations and hence they gradually became culturally and linguistically part and parcel of these societies. Therefore, the

history of these peoples will be treated in conjunction with the history of the peoples of Tegray, Dob'ea and Oromo.

Chapter five discusses the process on how Raya identity has originated; developed and has taken shape in time and space. In this chapter an attempt is made to show how the intensification of ethnic interaction and the intermingling of diverse peoples have woven together the various strands of the groups that made up today's Raya-Azäbo sub-province. Meaning, in the last part of this dissertation I will pay a major focus of attention particularly to the various mutual economic and social interactions and the resulting exogamous intermarriage between the Oromo and the neighboring Amhara, Afar, Agäw, Dobe'a and Tegray peoples.

In this situation, though the above listed six groups of peoples, when they initially came into contact, each had had its own distinctive religion, language, culture, socio-political organization and other forms of social identity, in the long run, they all intermingled with one another, biologically as well as culturally, thereby each of them had contributed its respective share of heritage for the formation of Raya identity. However, how this process has taken place and subsequently developed, in time, to bring about a newer social identity in northeast Ethiopia shall be dealt with as a major issue of discussion in the last chapter.

Chapter Two: A History of the People of Tegray in Raya-Azäbo.

2.1. Ramifications of the Wars of the Sixteenth Century.

Based on the evidence originating from oral traditions and written secondary sources, the history of resettlement of the Tегrean people in the Mountain Region of the study area dates back to the middle of the sixteenth century. However, it must be clearly understood that, as evidence emanating from primary written sources such as church manuscripts and royal chronicles reveal, this region has been inhabited by the same Tегrean people long before the aforementioned period.⁴⁸ Owing to its closer proximity to the ancient kingdom of Aksum, there was widespread activities of missionaries and an act evangelization of the local people spearheaded by a couple of missionaries belonging to the Nine Saints and the subsequent establishment of churches such as the monastery of *Abba* Gubba some twenty-five kilometers west of the town of Mayčäw as well as the forty-four churches established in the mountains of Zobel beginning perhaps from the late fourth to the end of the sixth century A.D.⁴⁹

It is well known that the *jihadic* wars waged by Ahmed Ibrahim *al- Ghazi* on the highland Christian kingdom of Ethiopia had constituted a major turning point in the history of the country in general and the Mountain Region of the study area in particular. As mentioned above, the Mountain Region was reportedly resettled in the aftermath of the war. This is because whenever informants are enquired to relate an account of their origin, they almost unanimously assert that their ancestors had occupied this area shortly after the middle of the sixteenth century; after the

⁴⁸The Chronicle of Emperor Be'ede Mariam...pp.73-75.; *Gädlä Abunä Fiqtor*,...n.p.

⁴⁹Haftamu Amare, "A Study of the Cultural Heritage of *Abba* Guba Monastery, Southern Tegray", B.A. Essay, Department of Archaeology and Heritage Management, Addis Ababa University, 20014, pp.9-10.; A hagiography of *Abba* Guba, MS deposited at the Monastery of *Abunä* Guba, n.p.

war was over and the Christian state was reinstated.⁵⁰ In connection to this they utter the phrase ‘*grañ täfi*’ by which they literally mean that the Mountain Region was devastated by the war and afterwards resettled as its former residents were subjected to death, enslavement; and according to the same sources there was also a large scale burning down of churches and monasteries as well as the plundering of cattle and other properties. They also claim that those who escaped death or captivity for enslavement were believed to have fled the area which in turn exacerbated the depopulation of the region.⁵¹ Some written secondary sources are also congruent with the hypothesis of our informants regarding the argument of ‘*grañ täfi*’.⁵²

The ‘*grañ täfi*’ argument, which claims that the war had utterly exterminated the inhabitants of the Mountain Region, cannot be rejected out of hand as improbable, sheer exaggeration or purely hypothetical. It should not be accepted wholesale either because even the most horrible disasters may leave some survivors. Rather, all stories tied to such claim should be treated with caution by subjecting the information, emanating from various oral accounts and written secondary sources, to critical evaluation.

In general, it is well known that the Christian state had incurred incalculable human, material and spiritual costs but the Mountain Region of the study area appears to be peculiarly affected by the prolonged war. This was mainly owing to its commanding position; it had become a major theatre of war, where three major battles, which had direct and negative consequences on the fate of its inhabitants, were fought here. They were:

⁵⁰Informants: *Mämher* Käbädä Baraki, interviewed in Mayčäw on 11/12/2009; *Mälakä Sälam* Kalayu Däsäläñ interviewed at the compound of the monastery of Täklä Haymanot Mayčäw on 14/12/2009; *Ato* Kalayu Käbädäw and *Ato* Käläläw Wäldä Maryam both interviewed at Känäyat on 27/12/2009; Sheikh NurHussein Edris interviewed at Mäkhan on 07/12/2009; *Märgèta* Bärhä Haddes interviewed at the enclosure of the church of Yohannes Šebbät on 12/02/2010.

⁵¹*Ibid.*

⁵²Haftu Kidanu, *Guma Ab Tarik*...p.11.; Kebrom Assäfa, *Yä Raya Hezeb Bahel ena Tarik*, Addis Ababa, Far East Printing, 2013, p.46.

- A. After the Muslim army had completed its operations in many parts of central, eastern, southern and western parts of Ethiopia, it marched to what was the northern half of the country where the old province of Angot and Tegray were found. In areas bordering the two provinces (northern Angot and southern Tegray) the *Jan-Amora* and *Jan-Qanṭafa* army regiments, which were stationed there for long, fought fierce battles against the Muslims which ended up in the disastrous defeat of the latter. Upon the completion of the battle, therefore, by the order of the Imam, it was reported, twenty-three top army commanders amongst whom to mention some of the most noticeable ones Jan-Nahad, Qasim and Hanna were captured and mercilessly executed.⁵³
- B. When the Portuguese army, led by Christovao Dagama, arrived in Ethiopia to fight on the side of the Christian state, in their first encounter with the Muslim army, they fought the first major battle in the Mountain Region whose exact location is difficult to certainly locate today. In this battle the Portuguese won a major victory in which the Adal leader himself, Ahmed Ibrahim, narrowly escaped death but had sustained wounds. Shortly after wards, the Muslims retreated south towards to the strategic mountains of Zobel where, since a century ago or so before, the *Jan-Qanṭafa* army division was stationed to defend the provinces of Amhara and Angot from attacks that would be directed from the Afar lowlands.⁵⁴
- C. The other most decisive battle, fought in 1542, was at the district of Ofla in the plain fields just at the southern shores of Lake Hašängä. After the previous battle, Ahmed's retreat to the impregnable mountains of Zobel was mainly tactical. First, he contemplated that his army would not be attacked from the rear because he was well-aware of that he would enjoy the support of the local Afar people who, with a long tradition of resistance to the Christian state,

⁵³Shihab ad-Din Ahmed, *Futuh al-Habesha: The Conquest of Abyssinia* (16th Century), USA, Tsehai Publishers, 2013, p.204.

⁵⁴Whiteway, R.S, *The Portuguese Expedition to Abyssinia in 1541-1543*, Nendein: Krause Reprint Ltd, 1965, p.59.

would support his war efforts. Secondly, due to this place's proximity to the sea he knew it would enable him to call reinforcements from Turkey and Arabia who would be a match to the strong four hundred Portuguese troops. After some time, he had managed to receive some nine hundred Turkish musketeers and cannon men as well as a number of Arab infantry forces. The arrival of the Turkish and Arab forces had changed the military balance in favor of the Muslim army which enabled it to inflict heavy casualties on its adversaries such as that the commander, Christovao, who, captured wounded, was eventually beheaded by the direct order of the *imam*.⁵⁵

Moreover, besides to the three catastrophic battles fought between the two armies in the Mountain Region the problem was compounded by the offence waged by the Dobe'a on their neighbors. In other words, the Dobe'a had also played their part in aggravating the condition of depopulating this area. It is interesting to note in this connection that one principal reason for stationing the *Jan-Amora* and *Jan-Qaṭafa* army regiments, very long before the Adal war, was to ward off the Dobe'a, the fiercest Muslim pastoralists, from ravaging the sedentary Christian Tegrean and Amhara populations of the region. However, the complete and disastrous defeat of both army divisions in 1535 at the hands of the Muslim army seems to have emboldened the Dobe'a to pursue their tradition of plundering cattle, killing people and the burning down of churches and monasteries at even larger scale than before.⁵⁶

At the same time one important fact, which further proves the '*grañ ṭāfi*' argument to be true, undoubtedly, is that the disappearance of two major towns from the map of the study area. At the

⁵⁵Täklä-Šadeq Mäkuriya, *Yä Ethiopia Tarik: kä Asè Lebnä Dengel eskä Asè Tèwodros*, Addis Ababa, Berhanena Sälam Printing Press, 1968, pp.59-62.

⁵⁶A number of primary and secondary sources have repeatedly mentioned in their accounts that the Christians, who inhabited in the Mountain Region, and the Muslim pastoralist Dobe'a, who inhabited in the Fertile Valley, had been embroiled in a sever social conflict long before the wars of the sixteenth century.

eve of the Adal war Qorqora and Mandalay were repeatedly mentioned in the contemporary royal chronicles, travel accounts, and church manuscripts as very well established commercial and administrative centers in the entire region of northeast Ethiopia. However, in the immediate aftermath of the war no town by such names existed neither in the literature nor in the physical landscape *vis-a-vis* the study area.⁵⁷

Finally, Shihab ad-Din's work presents a summation of what has been discussed so far in relation to the Muslim-Christian conflicts of the sixteenth century and their impacts at the level of the study area in particular and at the level of the country at large. The *Futuh*, a work which contains page after page reports of death and destruction gives a complete account or a full impression to its reader and illustrates the '*grañ ṭāfi*' argument very well as can be seen from the quotes below:

The wars of Gagn, or the left-handed, as he is often called had immense consequences. These included the conversion to Islam, albeit in many cases only temporary, of a vast proportion of the Ethiopian population; the virtual collapse of the traditional Christian Ethiopian Empire; the breaking down of long established feudal relationships, and related taxation; heavy loss of life, by combatants and civilians alike; the capture and dispatch to Arabia (also to India) of innumerable slaves, the destruction of some of the country's finest Christian churches, monasteries, and treasures; and bringing to Harar, and export to Arabia, of considerable quantities of gold, used in part by the imam for the purchase of fire-arms and other weapons.⁵⁸

To conclude, as a result of the series of three catastrophic battles fought in the mountain region between 1535 and 1542 and the ensuing famine and epidemic disease which occurred in the wake of the war, it is possible to deduce that the inhabitants of the Mountain Region were at least severely depopulated or at most exterminated though not to the last person because some of our

⁵⁷Francisco, Alvarez, *The Prester John of the Indies*, London: the Hakluyt Society, 1961, p.187; Shihab ad-Din Ahmed, *Futuh al-Habesha...*pp.349-350.; Gètachäw Hailè (trans.), *Däqiqä* Eṣṭifanos, Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2011, p.147.

⁵⁸Shihab ad-Din Ahmed, *Futuh al- Habesha...*p.xviii.

knowledgeable informants relate that there had been very few remnants when their ancestors were resettled in the area.⁵⁹

In the long history of the Ethiopian state several watershed events had taken place. One of which was, due to internal and external factors, there occurred a continuing shift of the seat of the state from north to south. For instance, it is well known that following the decline and subsequent fall of the Aksumite Kingdom, the political and economic epicenter of the Ethiopian state had moved south to Adafa in Lasta- the seat of the Zagw'e Dynasty.⁶⁰

Beginning from this era the economic, military and political significance of the Mountain Region, due to its close proximity to the contemporary capital of the Zagwe government, appears to have risen to a higher level than ever before. Hence, ever since the ascendancy of the Zagw'e over state power in Ethiopia four major military garrisons were created partly to serve as launching pads for operations against some unruly pastoral communities which had frequently threatened the stability of the state and most importantly to keep open the long range caravan route connecting the capital of the Christian state situated in northern Šäwa and the Red Sea port of Massawa.⁶¹

In this circumstance three segments of the *Jan-Amora* army regiment were posted in such a way that they were arranged, from north to south, in a straight line fashion and at almost equidistant

⁵⁹Informants: *Ato* Kiros Kassa interviewed at 'Ayba on 30/12/2000 E.C.; *Ato* Negus Täfära interviewed at Täkhe'a on 26/12/2000 E.C.; *Ato* Tämäsgän Amayä interviewed at 'Addi Gollo on 29/02/2010 E.C., *Ato* Šägay Equar interviewed at Hegum Berda on 26/02/2010.

⁶⁰Sergew Hable Selassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270*, Addis Ababa: United Printers, 1972, pp. 237-239.

⁶¹Professor Merid in his article entitled "Military Elites in Medieval Ethiopia..." p.39 asserts that the establishment of military garrisons at different strategic places of the Ethiopian state had begun during the Zagwè rule in which he assertively argues that even the term '*jan*' itself had originated from the Agäw language.

from each other. In other words, the first segment of the *Jan-Amora* army was stationed west of the Alajä mountain chains which were famous battle grounds in Ethiopian history.

Whereas the second one was posted at approximately fifty kilometers south of the first at a place called Šemṭa, some eight to ten kilometers west of the modern town of May Čäw; and the third was posted at approximately between fifty and sixty kilometers south of the second just west of the modern town of Qobbo, at a mountain massif which marks as boundary line between the south-western section of the Fertile Valley (today known as Raya-Qobbo) and the south-eastern part of the former *Wag Awraja*.

The fourth army regiment, the *Jan-Qanṭafa*, was, however, garrisoned at a place which was relatively far removed from the above three at a place called Zobel, a mountain stronghold located at the eastern flank of the town of Qobbo, apparently to defend the medieval Amhara and Angot provinces. It is interesting to note in this connection that these places, where the various medieval army regiments had garrisoned, have retained the term *Jan-Amora*, as a place name, up until the current time, despite the fact that this region has seen many upheavals and that it changed hands between various ethno-linguistic groups as a venue of permanent settlement following the recurring population movements which is a defining feature of the history of Ethiopian Peoples in general.

The underlying reasons for the establishment of garrisons at various places of the study area were, therefore, basically two: First, as briefly discussed above, to block the incursions of the Muslim pastoralist Dobe'a on the Christian highland populations and the second and probably the most important reason for posting the various *Jan-Amora* and *Jan-Qanṭafa* army regiments, in addition to protecting the sedentary Christian people from the lowland Muslim pastoralists,

was guarding caravan merchants from highwaymen and largely from the same Dobe'a, who were also badly reputed for robbing the caravan traders who passed through this area.⁶²

Since the emergence of Ethiopia in the Horn of Africa as a viable state well up to the beginning of the twentieth century, the economy of the state seems to have largely depended on two most important economic sectors namely agriculture and trade. In the medieval and later part of Ethiopian history, for example, the state used to collect revenues chiefly for two purposes: on the one hand to feed the royal family, court retinues, servants and other guests thereby various kinds of cereals, honey, butter, cattle, sheep, goats, chicken and the like, collected for the daily consumption of the court, came from government estates or *gult* lands and from tributaries exacted from the societies they ruled.⁶³

On the other hand, to finance the function of the state, another important source of revenue, which was spent to purchase fire-arms, clothing, and other luxury items, was generated by exporting ivory, gold, silver, slaves and great varieties of spices. So as to raise such funds the ruling classes were involved through the agents of the state in trading such precious items, which were used instead of cash, for both domestic and international transactions and at the same time by taxing long distance-traders heavily.⁶⁴

As has already been noted above, therefore, in order to protect caravan merchants from being intercepted by robbers, several segments of the powerful army regiments, *Jan-Amora* and *Jan-Qanṭafa*, were posted in the study area which was strategically situated along the middle course of the eastern trade route. In the economic history of the Ethiopian state there had been several

⁶²*Ibid*, pp.44-45.

⁶³*Ibid*.

⁶⁴Merid Wolde Aregay, "Gonder and Adwa: A Tale of Two Cities", *proceedings of the VIIIth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Tokyo, 1990, p.57.

commercial routes two of which were situated in the northern realm of the country. The first one, whose departure and destination points respectively were, Šāwa and Massawa; and the second, which came into being with the emergence of Gondar as the capital of the Ethiopian state in the seventeenth century, was the Gondär-Adwa-Massawa route (which was also termed as the western route).⁶⁵

However, the “eastern route [which passed through the area under study] was the more frequented, and hence the better known because it was the shortest route to Shawa where for nearly three centuries the court of the emperors was located.”⁶⁶ Therefore, it has to be taken into consideration that trade was the basic reason why the two important urban centers, Mandalay and Qorqora, had blossomed in the Mountain Region of the study area up until the wars of Ahmad Ibrahim *al-Ghazi* had unleashed on the highland Christian kingdom towards the end of the first two decades of the sixteenth century.

Mandalay and Qorqora, as discussed above, are mentioned a number of times in a number of royal chronicles, travel literature, and contemporary church documents as important commercial and administrative centers. Particularly Mandalay, up until the eve of the devastating wars of the sixteenth century, was reported to have been serving as a commercial hub of not only northeast Ethiopia and its adjacent regions but also the world at large.⁶⁷

Arab Merchants from the modern day Maghreb states namely Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria and from the Middle- eastern cities such as Cairo and the eastern Red Sea coast port of Jeddah, as well as Greeks from Europe, Turks from Asia-Minor and Indians from the Far-East frequented

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Francisco Alvarez, *The Prester John*....P.187.; Shihab ad-Din, *Futuh al-Habesha*....p.349-350; Gètachäw Hailè, *Däqiqä Estifanos*,....pp.147-150.

Mandalay with great quantities and varieties of merchandize. In general it was ‘a town of very great trade, like a great city or sea port’.⁶⁸ It is interesting to note in this connection that King Lebnä Dengel (r. 1508-1540) is reported to have collected a great quantity of tribute in the form of gold from the inhabitants of the town of Mandalay annually. Consequently, the people of this town were reported to have been resentful at having been taxed exorbitantly at extortionate rate by the king.⁶⁹

Currently, it is difficult or otherwise impossible to indicate exactly where the town of Mandalay was located for even the name of that important medieval urban center is missing from a list of place names of the area under study. In other words, in the post-war period this town was scarcely mentioned in the historical or other related literature produced concerning the study area for which scholars, who, for one reason or another have dealt with it, are left to make only an intellectual guess by pursuing the routes of the journeys of travelers indicated in their travel report.⁷⁰

As for Qorqora, though not economically and politically as vibrant as it was half a millennium ago, unlike Mandalay, it exists at least in name, till this time, as a relatively big village, just some twenty kilometers towards the northwestern foothills of Mt. Emba Alajä or in the immediate vicinity of the emerging town Hewanä. In this circumstance it seems imperative to suggest that archeological survey, research and subsequent excavation should be carried out by concerned government agencies and academic institutions in order to bring to light as to how and why Mandalay and Qorqora were founded, developed and eventually disappeared from the map of the study area.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

⁷⁰Hussein Ahmed, *Islam in Nineteenth...*, p.140.; Merid Wolde Aregay, ‘Political geography of...’,p.622.

2.2. The Resettlement of the Tegrean People in the Mountain Region

Be that as it may, following the devastation, caused by the invasion of the Muslim army, this area was resettled by new settlers, who originated, as oral and written sources show, from the Tegrēña speaking areas north of it.⁷¹ Owing to its location on the main north-south highway of the long-distance trade, its importance as a militarily strategic position as well as its possession of vast arable lands with black lava soils which are counted amongst the most fertile in northeast Ethiopia, where in years of even minimal rainfall double cropping is possible, the state appears to have had attached special importance to this region.⁷²

As discussed above, prior to the war, several segments of the two army regiments, *Jan-Amora* and *Jan-Qantafa*, were posted there with the stated aim of protecting caravans from being intercepted by highwaymen and to check the incursions of the lowland Muslim pastoralists on the neighboring Christian highlanders. However, the contemporary ruler of the Ethiopian state, Emperor Gälawd'ewos (r.1540-1559), unlike his predecessors, did not seem to have reinstated the system of locally based garrisons of soldiers generally known as *čäwa* with the complete defeat and annihilation of the latter in 1535. Instead, he was reportedly resorted to have moved a sizeable Christian Tegrēña speaking population from the north and settled in the entire Mountain Region.⁷³

⁷¹Haftu Kidanu, *Guma Ab Tarik...*, p.6.; Mäsfīn Zär'aberuk, *Kab Eritrea Kesab Ethiopia: Zantan Wälädon*, Addis Ababa, Sämayata Press, 1997, P.107. Gäbrä Iyäsus Abay, *Mäsärät 'Alèt Hezebi Märäb Melaš*, Asmara, Kokäb Šebah Printing Press, 1974, p.35; Informants: *Mämher* Abäbä Adhana, *Mämher* Täfäri Harägäwäyen, *Ato Haddes Abreha*, *Ato Machä Adhana* and several other informants have suggested similar idea regarding this issue.

⁷²This region had served as a temporary seat of power for several rulers of the Ethiopian state at different times in the history of this region.

⁷³Masfi Zarabruk, *Kab Eritrea kesab...*, p.136; J.W. Bruce, "Land Reform Planning and Indigenous Communal Tenure: A Case Study of the Tenure Chiguraf gwoses in Tigray, Ethiopia", PhD Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1976, pp.88-89.

As oral and written sources show, the new occupants of the area were not only ordinary farmers but also combatants and their commanders, who were reputed to have strongly resisted the invasion of the Muslim army when the latter had marched to conquer their areas.⁷⁴ Whatever the case may be the new settlers occupied the agricultural and settlement places stretching between Gäräb Buyä in the north, a river immediately south of the town of 'Addi Gudom in Endärta and as far south as the upper basins of the Ala River near the northern outskirts of the town of Wäldya. It had constituted the present day district of Emba Alajä plus some territorial additions from southern Endärta, Enda-Mäkhonni, Ofla and the rocky terrain west of the plain fields of Alamaṭa and Qobbo.⁷⁵

This territory had reportedly assumed the name Enda-Mäkhonni due to the fact that the people who settled in it particularly those of the *mārho* (leaders) were said to have been people of noble-birth or *Mäkuwanent* whereby the toponym Enda Mäkhonni came into being - meaning in the Tegrëña language a habitation of the *mäkuwanent* or the nobility. They were, it is believed, resettled there partly to take over the responsibility of filling the security gap created by the disastrous defeat of the *čäwa* regiments as well as to re-establish the agrarian and settlement regimes on a solid basis.⁷⁶

There are scattered references in the literature that from the middle of the sixteenth century well up to the first quarter of the twentieth, this area extending from Buyä River in the north to the Ala River in the south, had existed as one large Enda-Mäkhonni *Awraja* (sub-province) governed under one ruler. For example, when in 1902 Emperor Menilek II (r.1889-1906) divided Tegray

⁷⁴J.W. Bruce, "Land Reform Planning...", p.90.: Gäbrä Iyäsus Abay, *Mäsärät Alèt Hezebi*...p.43.

⁷⁵Informants: Ato Abäbä Guangul interviewed in May čaw on 14/12/2009 E.C.; Mämher Abäbä Adhana interviewed in Mayčäw on 11/12/2009 E.C. ; Mämher Käbädä Baraki and Mälakä Sälam Kalayu Däsäläñ both interviewed at the enclosure of the Monastery of Täklä Haymanot Mayčäw on 14/12/2009.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*

into three administrative regions, to be given to three powerful nobles of the Tegrain ruling house, Enda-Mäkhonni was counted amongst one of the most prominent sub-provinces such as Endärta, 'Agama, Aksum, Šerä and the like.⁷⁷

Even as late as the year 1962, Enda-Mäkhonni was by far greater in terms of the territory it encompassed and the higher administrative status it had attained than it was in the recent past.⁷⁸

By then Tegray was organized into eight administrative sub-provinces one of which was Raya-Azäbo *Awraja*. Under Raya-Azäbo *awraja*/sub-province there had been two *wärädas* (districts) namely Enda Mäkhonni and Čärcär.⁷⁹

Some six decades ago Enda-Mäkhonni district was made up of a relatively large size of territory in contrast to what it comprises today. Meanwhile, documents demonstrate that it was organized, as one of the main component parts of Raya-Azäbo *awraja*, having comprising six *mektel-wärädas* or sub-districts under it.⁸⁰ Three of the sub-districts were from the major parts of the area, designated in this study as Mountain Region, and the remaining three are from the inner eastern section of the escarpment or the northwestern part of the Fertile Valley. In other words, it had constituted: (1) Alajä *Meketel Wäräda*- a sub-district whose administrative center was the town of Bètmara (2) Mähal Agär [Maekäl 'Addi] *Meketel-Wäräda* -a sub-district which extended from the southern foothills of Mt. Emba Alajä to the northern and northeastern slopes of the Däbbar plateau ax. Its administrative center was the town of 'Addišho.⁸¹

⁷⁷Mekonnen Berhane, "A Political History of Tigray: Shewan Centralization versus Tigrean Regionalism 1889-1910", M.A. Thesis in History, Addis Ababa University, 1994, p.106.

⁷⁸*Yä Agär Gezat Minisetèr Mäshèt* (Bulletin of Ministry of Interior), Addis Ababa, *Hedar* 16, 1954 E.C., pp.2-6.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*

⁸⁰*Ibid.*

⁸¹*Ibid.*; pp.7-9.

(3) *Däbbar Meketel wäräda*- a sub-district which constituted localities surrounding the modern town of Mayčäw up to areas bordering the sub-district of Maekäl 'Addi in the north and Wag *Awraja* in the south and southwest. Its administrative center was the town of Mayčäw.⁸²

(4) *Ebbo Meketel-Wäräda*- a sub-district bordered in the north by Wäjjärat, in the south by Qorbäta, in the west by Däbbar and Maekäl 'Addi and in the east by Čärčär. Its administrative center was Bacha. (5). *Wärä Abayyä and Gäbbate Meketel Wäräda*- a sub-district bordered in the south by Dayyu, in the north by Qorbäta, in the east by Čärčär and in the west by Däbbar. Its capital was Mäsuaet. (6). *Qorbäta Meketel Wäräda*- a sub-district bordered by *Wärä Abayyä-Gäbbatä* sub-district in the south, by *Ebbo* in the north, by *Čärčär* in the east and by *Däbbar* and *Maekel 'Addi* in the west. The capital to both the sub-province, *Raya-Azäbo*, and the district, *Enda-Mäkhonni*, was *Mayčäw*.⁸³

In the administrative history of Ethiopian regions, *Enda-Mäkhonni*, as a name of a sub-province, had waned and ultimately replaced by *Raya-Azäbo*. Although we do not exactly know as to why such change occurred, it was after the reign of Menelik II that *Raya-Azäbo* prevailed over *Enda-Mäkhonni*.⁸⁴ In Ethiopian history it is not uncommon to observe that a name of a relatively big administrative unit, such as that of a province or a sub-province, to completely disappear or become a name of a lower administrative unit encompassing a smaller territory.

A case in point is the old province of *Angot*, which before some six centuries or so ago, had equal administrative and political status to *Baher Meder* (today's Eritrea), *Tegray*, *Šäwa*, *Bäg'emeder* and *Gojjam* has now been erased from the map of the Ethiopian state to represent

⁸²*Ibid.*

⁸³*Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁸⁴Mekonnen Berhane, "A Political History of" p.122.

only a tiny local parish in the highlands of Wadla Dälanta at a particular district called Angot representing a qäbälè. Conversely, the name of a small place or a tribal chief such as Wällo or for that matter Raya itself had evolved to be a name of a big province and a sub-province respectively.⁸⁵

Whatever the case may be in dealing with the question of origins and identity of the new settlers, which occupies a center stage at this study, I have employed a strategy of posing primarily the question, to all informants contacted, as to who were the pioneer settlers of their respective localities and the way how their forefathers had divided the agricultural and settlement areas among themselves.

In the section of Raya-Azäbo, which I call the Mountain Region, informants reiterated that the pioneer settlers or the founding fathers or *qäññi*; (Amharic *Aqññi*) are known to them as *märho* and *säbbato*. These special terms, which had become the folk-etymology of each parish in this section of the study area, have for centuries carried important political and economic implications to the society as discussed below.

According to some written and oral sources the term *märho* was used to distinguish the original founders of settlement and *resti* estates in a given local parish from those who come later. But the term *säbbato* stands for those founding fathers who settled a locality sometime later than the *märho*. In order to have a clear conceptual frame work regarding these local terms it seems

⁸⁵G.W.B. Huntingford, "Lost Provinces of Ethiopia" *Proceedings of the IIIrd International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Addis Ababa, 1966, pp.113-115.

imperative to see the connotative meaning of the two terms, *mārho* and *säbbato*, from the point of view of the society under study.⁸⁶

Anyone who understands the Semitic languages of Amharic, Ge'ez and Tegraña, he/she would easily comprehend what the term *mārho* means. In short, this term stands for the concept which has to do with leadership.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the term *säbbato* is too parochial that it sounds to be too difficult to understand for someone, who does not know the nitty-gritty of a locality specific Tegraña dialect which deals with settlement pattern and the general agrarian system.

Therefore, based on written and oral sources at our disposal the term *säbbato* appears to stand for the concept “followers”. In other words, a *säbbati* is one who made settlement in a given locality after some other people before him/her have already established permanent settlements relatively longer before him/her. Through the passage time, however, this term has begun to take a new semantic meaning. To clarify the point under discussion well: whenever a south Tegrañan person says: ... አብሉ ሰብቱ ቻርዩ... he/she exactly means that someone has moved from his original settlement place to permanently settle in another area in which his ancestors were not founders of that particular settlement.⁸⁸

In any case, once the *mārho* set foot in the Mountain Region, in the wake of the war, according to the tradition of the Ethiopian church they were reported to have been engaged in rebuilding the churches, on the sites of the ruins of the earlier churches as each group of founding fathers

⁸⁶Informants: *Ato* Hagos Wäldä Yohannes interviewed at 'Addišo on 3/01/2000E.C.; *Liqä Kahenat* Hadära Täsfay interviewed at Emba Hasty on 11/02/2010; *Ato* Haftä Negus interviewed at Šebbät on 12/02/2010; *Ato* Šägay Equar interviewed at Hegum Berda on 28/02/ 2010; *Mämher* Kābādä Baraki interviewed in Mayčāw on 16/12/2009 I have also used *Mämher* Kābādä's manuscript which deals with the founding fathers of Enda Mākhan district ; J.W. Bruce, “Land Reform Planning....” ,p.50.

⁸⁷Kidanä-Wäld Keflè, *Māšhafä Säwasew wä Ges wä Māzgäbä Qalat Hadis*, Artistic Printing Press, 1948 E.C.,p.607.

⁸⁸Informants: *Qaši* Harägot Wälday interviewed at Tākhe'a on 28/12/2009 E.C.; *Ato* Mānasbo Zälälāw interviewed at Mākhan on 07/02/2010 E.C.; *Qaši* Kahsay Sebhatu interviewed at Enda Hegum on 07/02/2010 E.C.; *Ato* Berhanu Färädä interviewed at Emba Hasty on 11/02/ 2010 E.C.; *Ato* Hailä Selassè Tägāñ interviewed at Šebbät on 12/02/2010E.C.

had come to their respective areas with their *tabbots*, an ark which represents the ark of the covenant, and resettle and develop the lands whose residents had been severely depopulated or in the worst case scenario exterminated by the war and disease as well as famine which were themselves the consequences of that war.⁸⁹

As sources show, upon the arrival of the new settlers, we observe a regular pattern of establishing residential and agricultural settlements.⁹⁰ In other words, in every new place of settlement, in each of the three districts of the Mountain Region, it has been found out that the magnitude of the settlers ranges between a couple to five in most cases and in a few cases such as in Mahgo-Elebat more than a dozen.⁹¹ The possible reason behind the variation in the number of settlers in different settlement areas had been apparently depending on the carrying capacity of the settlement area in question varying number of settlers had been assigned. This sort of patterned settlement might probably have emanated from the fact that such settlements were in the first place state sponsored.

In order to elaborate further this point it seems crucially important to take at least one parish from each of the three districts of the Mountain Region as case studies. Hence, from the district of Emba Alajä the parish of Täke'a, from the district of Enda-Mäkhonni the parish of Bällota; and from the third district, Ofla, the parish of Hayyalo, are taken as exemplary ones to the whole of the Mountain Region.

⁸⁹Informants: *Märegèta* Bärhä Haddes interviewed at Šebbät on 9/12/2009; *Mälakä-Sälam* Kalayu Bäyänä interviewed in Maycäw on 07/12/ 2009 E.C. *Resä-Däbri* Haddes Bärhä interviewed at Bällota on 28/12/2009E.C.; *Ato* Aymut Märäsa interviewed at Tahtäy Haya on 29/12/2009 E.C.; *Malakä-Hail* Hailä Selssè Mähari interviewed at Bälotta on 23/02/2010; *Afä-Mämeher* Zawdä Negussä interviewed in Koräm on 20/02/2010 E.C.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*

⁹¹Informants: *Haläqa* Kasayä Tädla interviewed at 'Addišo on 06/01/2000E.C.; *Ato* Abay Hannes and *Ato* Kahsay Wäldä-sänbat both interviewed at Elebat on 03/01/2001 E.C. enumerated the magnitude of founding fathers in their locality to be something like ten which is twice or three times the number of *qäññis* for the parishes of Bètmara and Wägälän in Emba Alajä district.

Tables showing samples of early settlement pattern in the Mountain Region of the study area.

2.1 Emba Alajä District Founding Ancestors

Locality	<i>Märho</i>	<i>Säbbato</i>	Parish church
Täke'a	Zära Abrahm	Abbo Šomo	Maryam Täke'a
	Berhano	Awäl	
	Arwa	Abbo Šawel	
	Nere'ä	Zänay	
		Tensa'au	

2.2 Enda-Mäkhonni District Sample Founding Ancestors

Locality	<i>Märho</i>	<i>Säbbato</i>	Parish church
Bällota	Semon	Daña-Ab	Giyorgis Bällota
	Tärbinos	Keflay	
	Täsfo	Lätä-Berhan	
	Yosèf	Lätä-Qurban	

2.3 Ofla District Sample Founding Ancestors

Locality	<i>Märho</i>	<i>Säbbato</i>	Parish church
Hayallo	Elyas	Där'atkomu	Maryam Koräm
	Asma'a	Särsuy	
	Säfay	Kefluy	
	Asfo	Alle	
	Hamälmal	Ali	
	Yämano	Adäm	
		Dändär	
		Morofa	
		Heray	

Thus, the above table demonstrates that both groups of founding fathers, *märho* and *säbbato*, had lived interspersed with each other, sharing the same territory as their common residential area. Nevertheless, we observe that there existed for quite some time a critical distinction between them in the spheres of economics, social status, politics as well as religious matters.

In connection to this the most noticeable thing, which occupies a central place in our discussion, is the place of land in this community's world view as a spiritual, social, political, as well as economic heritage/resource and the source of identity for the earlier and later generations. Hence, while the *märho*, as pioneer founders of agrarian settlements were granted lands with a

higher grade of fertility, the relatively less-fertile ones with poor soils were reserved for the *säbbato*.⁹²

The other area where we observe that there was a sort of class distinction between the *mārho* and *säbbato* was regarding the right to hold local political and ecclesiastical administrative offices. In this respect the office of *ceqennät* an official in charge of the smallest administrative unit, '*addi*', in the hierarchy of state administration, was exclusively occupied by the *mārho* and their descendants. This lower state official was responsible for the administration of local matters including tax assessment and collection as well. Moreover, the office of *gebezena*, an office in charge of church treasury, was also exclusively occupied by the same *mārho* and their descendants despite the fact that the *säbbato* too professed the same Orthodox faith as the former were.⁹³

In relation to this in a few parishes of the Mountain Region the *säbbato*, informants claimed, were even nick named as '*mäkhan*' which literally means sterile, someone who lacked something valuable (in this context the church, the *tabbot* and some other important components of the Orthodox Christian religion).⁹⁴

By and large the relationship between the two classes of the contemporary society, *mārho* and *säbbato*, remains very obscure mainly due to lack of sufficient and pertinent written records on this particular issue. However, in some localities of the study area oral testimony holds some

⁹²Informants: *Ato* Gäbrä-kiros Wändem interviewed at 'Addišo on 05/01/2000 E.C.; *Haläqa* Hailä Wälde Giyorgis interviewed at 'Ašäla on 30/12/2000 E.C.; *Ato* Bärhä Adhänä interviewed at Emba Hasty on 11/02/2000E.C.; *Ato* Bärhä Šumeyä interviewed at Tahtäy Hayya on 29/12/2009 E.C.; *Ato* Haddes Mängestu interviewed at Šemta on 23/12/2009; The manuscript written by *Mämher* Käbädä Baraki also contains the same idea as those of the informants regarding this issue.

⁹³*Ibid.*

⁹⁴Informants: *Mälakä Mehrät* Alämu Wäldä- Mikaël interviewed at Wägälän on 3/13/2000 E.C.; *Qaši* Negussä Gäbrä-ab and *Ato* Nägaš Täklä both interviewed at Täkhe'a on 28/12/ 2000 E.C.; *Ato* Negussä Hailu, *Ato* Kähassa Negussä and *Ato* Mähari Meteku (three of them were) interviewed at Säränga on 24/12/2009 E.C.

vital clues, which would lead us, to arrive at a conclusion that the *säbbato* were the social inferiors of the *märho*. For example, a certain Feqadu, who was said to have been one of the direct descendants of the *Šamontä Jan-Amora*, literally referring to the eight founding fathers of the parish of *Jan-Amora* in what is today *Šemṭa Qäbäl'e*, was branded as '*Feqadu Hašawi*' or literally 'Feqadu the Liar'.⁹⁵

According to informants Feqadu was accused, by the corporate group, to have leaked information to the sister or wife, they are not sure which, of the eighteenth century powerful noble *Ras Faris*, who was the governor of a large part of northeast Ethiopia, as one, which included the present day provinces of Tegray and Eritrea as well as Wag and Lasta under Emperor Iyasu Adyam Sägäd (r.1730-1755).⁹⁶

The issue in question was reported to have been regarding the acquisition of arable lands. The lady was said to have been looking for land from this locality, which she wanted to hold as *khudad*, a means of land holding open solely for the ruling classes, by selecting and setting aside a parcel from among the good and fertile irrigated lands lying in the parish of Arba'eta B'et; which they said wanted to hide from the attention of that lady. After he was found to be guilty of what he had been charged with, Feqadu was not only castigated for being a liar but was also reduced to the rank of the *Säbbato*, a status which had precluded him from holding the position of *čeqnnät* and *gebzenna* and also not to be counted among the important persons when matters

⁹⁵*Ibid.*

⁹⁶*Ibid.*

of public concern were discussed in the *dämär* session- a locality level meeting usually held at a village square. Feqadu's children were also reported to have bequeathed his lowly status.⁹⁷

Finally, Bruce, J.W., who tried to understand the basic differences and the relative status of the *mārho* and *säbbato* in the 1970s, notes that: "...there is a house in which a Merho and several Sebbatos will stay the night. There is only one bed. The Merho sleeps on the bed and the Sebbatos sleep on the floor".⁹⁸ While I was in the field, I tried to corroborate Bruce's claims but I could not find any verification, as all informants contacted in the whole of the Mountain Region, are not aware of his assertions.

In any case, once the process for the establishment of stable agricultural villages was accomplished in the whole of the Mountain Region towards the end of the sixteenth century, the descendants of the founders of the new settlements and *resti* estates, *mārho* and *säbbato*, or *qäññi* as they also call them, were said to have recited genealogies principally for practical uses. In other words, when the need arose to divide, sub-divide and re-divide the *resti* estates of their ancestors among themselves in response to demographic changes, genealogical links were reconstructed for every generation. Moreover, genealogies were also told not only to substantiate rights over land but also, particularly among the descendants of the *mārho*, to appoint, on a turn by turn basis, a person to the local ecclesiastical, *gäbäz*, and secular, *čeqa šum*, offices.⁹⁹

As indicated in the three tables above, each parish had a certain number of founding ancestors and a story which relates how they established that parish church and their *resti* estates, which

⁹⁷Informants: Ato Haddes Mängestu interviewed at Šemša on 23/12/2009 E.C. and at Känäyat on 27/12/2009 E.C.; Ato Bärha Gäbru interviewed at Šemša on 23/12/2009 E.C.; Ato Käbädaw Täsefa'au interviewed at Šemša on 23/12/2009 E.C.; Ato Haddes Wäldä- Samuel interviewed at Šemša on 23/12/2009 E.C.

⁹⁸J.W. Bruce, "Land Reform Planning...p.492.

⁹⁹Informants: Ato Haddes Mängestu interviewed at Šemša on 23/12/2009; Mämher Käbädä Baraki interviewed in Mayčäw on 12/12/2009; Qaši Täsfay Täka interviewed at Känäyat on 27/12/2009 E.C.; Ato Šägay Equar interviewed at Hegum Berda on 28/02/2010 E.C.

were according to the principle of *resti* landholding system, subject to divisions over and over again among the siblings equally. In connection to this the descendants of the *säbbato* had always recited the names of their ancestors by word of mouth, from generation to generation, to prove that they were the rightful descendants of the first ancestral landholders and thereby to claim land units and the benefits vested in them.¹⁰⁰

But in the case of the *märho*, unlike the *säbbato*, their descendants readily got the names and account of their ancestral figures. This was due to the fact that the names of the *märho*, though not in all parishes of the Mountain Region, were committed to writing in the golden gospel of the parish church concerned.¹⁰¹ In this situation inside some large ecclesiastical institutions, which are locally called *däbri* and *gädam*, a gospel written in a piece of parchment is available in which blank papers are appended at the end of that hand-inscribed book mainly for registering the founders of the church and the settlement adjacent to it. As they had had no secular alternative for registering matters of land transactions, they used the upper and lower margins of the book to register such issues once the papers left for this purpose are full.¹⁰²

A case in point is that of the Monastery of Täklähaymanot Maycäw in Enda-Makhonni district- a parish church where the names of a certain Kahsu and Läbasu were registered in the lower margin of the golden gospel which has been deposited in that church. In this gospel the names Kahsu and Läbasu, *märho* for the parish called Qayeh Sa'ery, was registered leaving out the names of the other founding ancestors due to the fact that they were *säbbato*.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² This is what I personally observed during the field research in various localities of the study area.

¹⁰³ *Wärqi Wänjäl'* (literally the golden gospel), MS, deposited at the Monastery of Täklähaymanot in the parish of Qayeh Sa'ery situated in the immediate vicinity of the town of Maycäw; n.p.

In a similar manner in the gospel, which has been deposited at Giorgis Bällota, a monastery located at an elevation higher than 3000 meters above sea level, overlooking the vast expanse of the mountains to the south and a large part of the valley surroundings towards the east and southeast. In this monastery although there were almost equal number of *säbbato* as compared to their *märho* counterpart, the names of the former were barely remembered by even their descendants as time passed.

But with respect to the *märho*, as mentioned above, we learn that their names are registered in the golden gospel of Giorgis Bällota as clearly demonstrated by the following Ge'ez text.

“ዝመጽሐፍ ዘሰብአ በሎታ ዘእጽሐፎ በንደዋዮሙ [በንዋዮሙ] ይኩኖሙ መድኅኒተ ነፍስ ወስጋ ዘወሀብዎ ለጊዮርጊስ በሎታ በዘመነ ዮሐንስ ተርቢኖስ፣ ስጦዖን፣ ዮሴፍ፣ ተስፎ...ዘሰረቆ ወዘፋሐቆ። ውጉዝ ለይኩን በስልጣነ ጴጥሮስ ወዳውሎስ፣ ለይኩን ወጉዝ ለይኩን።”¹⁰⁴

This book belongs to the people of Bällota which they had it ascribed with their own money to be a salvation for their soul and flesh. It is given to Giorgis Bällota in the year of John by Tärbinos, Semon, Yosef and Täso. Whoever steals or erases it, let him be condemned by the power of Peter and Paul. Let him be condemned; May it be, May it be.

As pointed out above the study, the memorization and analysis of lineages had therefore been a matter of more than mere historical importance. In the first place accounts of these types were used primarily to claim lands and rights vested in them. And secondly a very common use of genealogies all over the study area and perhaps beyond was to justify the existing stratifications between the two classes of societies as well as to legitimize access to and competition for the

¹⁰⁴ ‘*Wärqi Wänjäl*’ (literally the golden gospel), MS, deposited at the Church of Giorgis Bällota, n.p.

above mentioned local secular and ecclesiastical offices. In short genealogies were also employed to justify why someone would occupy that office.¹⁰⁵

For instance, in the parish of Jan-Amora, today's Šemṭa *Qäbälè*, located some ten kilometers west of the town of Maycäw, informants relate that there were eight *märho* and four *säbbato*. The names of the *märho*, as listed below, are the following ones: Mängäday, Zäqurban, Šahfälam Säršo, Šahfälam Ya'eqob, Mele'etä Šaga, Täsfo, Gua'edad, and Kebbdät. Similarly the names of the *säbbato* are also indicated below as follows: *Ra'esi* Faris, Zägaymääl, Feqadu and Hannesso. ¹⁰⁶

The process for the appointment of a *čeqa šum* and a *gäbüz* to each parish in the study area, had been taking place annually as the term of office of both positions was only a single year. The procedure (ways and means) of the election of such local officials was conducted by casting lots in such a way that the descendants of each of the above listed eight *märho* would, for instance, meet at the compound of the house of the incumbent *čeqa šum* to cast lots and thereby assign a person for both offices. The meeting was presided over by the outgoing *čeqa šum*.¹⁰⁷

To be a little bit more analytical each of the parties concerned would be given marked sticks (locally known as *'eša* or *šentur*) to represent the house of each of the eight founding fathers. If for example, the house of Kebbdät won the lottery for the day, that house would in turn cast a lottery among the descendants of Kebbdät to assign officials for the upcoming year. This system went on and on without a break beginning from the resettlement of the area in the first half of

¹⁰⁵Informants: *Mämher* Käbädä Baraki, *Mälakä Sälam* Kalayu Däsaläñ, *Ato* Alämu Bäjänä, *Ato* Gäbrä Germay four of them interviewed, as a group, at the enclosure of the Monastery of Täklähaymanot Maycäw on 14/12/2009 E.C.; *Resä-Däbri* Haddes Bärhä, *Mälakä-Hayel* Hailä Selassè Mähari and *Leqä-Kahenat* Hadära Täsfay three of them interviewed, as a group, at Emba Hasty on 11/02/2010 E.C.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷Informants: *Ato* Haddes Mängestu, *Ato* Käläläw Wäldä Maryam, *Ato* Kalayu Käbädäw and *Ato* Täka Alämä four of them interviewed, as a group, at Känäyat on 27/12/2009 E.C.

the sixteenth century up until the eruption of the Ethiopian Revolution in 1974, which made that system largely irrelevant to the society in question, when the Därg regime had decided to assign a *qäbäl'e* administrator instead of the *čeqa šum* and when the position of the *gäbäz* waned as a result of the radical land reform of the same regime which nationalized large estates owned by the church.¹⁰⁸

As discussed above in greater detail, the *säbbato* were kept in a distinctive and relatively subordinate social position. However, with the passage of time the two groups had intermingled with each other, mainly through intermarriage, which had eventually resulted in the formation of one single society in each of the locality in the Mountain Region.¹⁰⁹

Despite the presence of class distinctions between their forefathers in earlier times, the current communities of the Mountain Region consider themselves to be descendants of the ancestral first holders of the land. When enquired to tell the account of their origin, they always say ‘we came from Tegray’ by which they mean the Tegrëña speaking population north of the study area that includes Tegray proper and the Eritrean highlands. But when they say ‘we came from Tegray’ they obviously mean their ancestors whom they variously call them as *märho*, *säbbato* or more generally- *qäññi*.¹¹⁰

The history of their resettlement, as discussed above in greater detail, was highly associated with the sixteenth century war. As repeatedly mentioned above, the Christian state had resettled the

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*

¹¹⁰Informants: *Mämher* Abäbä Adhana and *Mämher* Täfäri Härägä-Wäyn interviewed in Mayčäw on 18/12/2009 E.C.; *Ato* Abäbä Guangul interviewed in May čäw on 14/12/2009 E.C.; *Ato* Nägaš Täklä interviewed at Tärke'a on 29/12/2000 E.C.; *Ato* Kiros Kassa interviewed at 'Ayba on 24/12/2000 E.C.; *Ato* Negus Täfära interviewed at Tärke'a on 26/12/2000 E.C.; *Ato* Käläläw Wäldä-Mareyam interviewed at Känäyat on 27/12/2009E.C.; *Ato* Haddes Mängestu interviewed at Šemṭa on 23/12/2009E.C.; *Afä-Mämher* Zäwdä Negussä interviewed in Koräm on 20/02/2010 E.C.; *Ato* Šägay Equar interviewed at Hegum Berda on 26/02/2000 E.C.; *Märgeta* Bärhä Haddes interviewed at Šebbät on 12/02/2010 E.C.

area by Tegrēña speaking population partly because, prior to the war, it was inhabited by people of the same stock.¹¹¹

In the history of the protracted war, between the Muslim Sultanate of Adal and the Christian state, the Muslim army had, for the first time, encountered a major military set back in what is today the Eritrean highlands particularly at the sub-province of Sārayä. Several notable army war generals and other close confidants of the *iman*, Ahmed Ibrahim, had died there; the most prominent among whom was *Wazir* Addoli. Addoli was only second in command to the *iman* and was instrumental for causing crushing defeats to his adversaries. He was also responsible for conquering province after province in the battles, fought between the two foes, in eastern, southern, central and northern parts of Ethiopia.¹¹² He was killed by an equally able and determined commander of the infantry forces of the Christian army by the name Täsfa-le'aul. Shortly afterwards, however, Täsfa-le'aul, who was a *šum* of Sārayä, was killed and his army defeated.¹¹³

The battle of Sārayä had set the stage for what would happen at Wäyña Däga in 1543. As a result of the heavy casualties inflicted on the Muslim army, the tough resistance of the people, famine and disease, which also claimed the lives of a large number of the Muslim army and their companions, the *iman*, at the head of his debilitated army, was forced to totally abandon both Tegrēña speaking provinces and left for the northwestern provinces of Bägèmeder and Gojjam.¹¹⁴ The Eritreans at that time, unlike at the close of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty first centuries, had unquestionable loyalty to the Ethiopian state. The province, Eritrea,

¹¹¹*Ibid.*; Mäsfen Zäraberuk, *Kab Eritrea Kesab...*p.136.

¹¹²Yelma Dèrèssa, *Yä Ethiopia Tarik bä Asrasedesteñaw Kefelä-Zämäne*, Addis Ababa, Emay Printers Plc., pp.120-123; Gäbrä- Iyäsus Abay, *Mäsärät 'Alèt Hezebi...*p.43.; Shihab ad-Din Ahmed, *Futuh al-Habasha:*...pp.368-369.

¹¹³*Ibid.*

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*

then known as Bahr Meder, governed by the *Bahrä Nägaš*, or governor/king of the sea, was one of the core provinces of the old Ethiopian state like Šäwa, Gojjam, Bägèmeder, Angot as well as its immediate neighbor-Tegray.

In any case, the second fundamental reason, which could possibly be suggested, why the contemporary ruler of the Christian state, Emperor Gälawdèwos (r.1543-1559), desired to populate the Mountain Region by Tегreans from the central highlands of Eritrea, in addition to the very reason that the same area was inhabited, long before the war, by the same Tegrean people, could obviously be, therefore, for having done well in the war against the Muslim army, the king must have felt grateful to them and be induced to award them such a cool, healthy and fertile area to settle and prosper.¹¹⁵

Nevertheless, oral informants from this part of the study area, Mountain Region, do not explicitly state the fact that their ancestors had specifically come from what we call today the central highlands of Eritrea. They rather grossly claim that their ancestors came from Tegray.¹¹⁶ If this is the case, how can we then assertively claim that the originators of the settlements of this area had specifically come from the aforementioned region (Eritrean highlands)?

In this situation it is interesting to note that the reason I claim so, with conviction, is not based on pure speculation; but rather there are various sources related to the matter at hand, at our disposal, which are directly and indirectly related to such an argument or claim.

¹¹⁵Mäsfen Zäraberuk, *Kab Eritrea kesab*...p.136.

¹¹⁶Informants: *Ato* Negus Mesgun interviewed at 'Addi Šem-Berket on 19/02/2009 E.C.; *Ato* Käbädä Kahsay and *Ato* Šägay Equar interviewed at Hegum Berda on 24/02/2010 E.C.; *Qaši* Heluf Asgädom and *Märegèta* Rädai Šagay interviewed at 'Addi Ašgäba on 29/02/2010; *Ato* Nägaš Täklä interviewed at Täke'a on 25/12/2000 E.C.; *Qasi* Täka Wäldä-Sänbät interviewed at Täke'a on 25/02/2000 E.C.

To begin with there are scattered references in some secondary literature where we obtain materials which contain crucial information in support of this argument. In spite of the fact that these materials put correctly, the date of resettlement of the people under study as the middle of the sixteenth century, they, however, suffer from some limitations such as that they do not clearly tell the story why and under what circumstances that these people had moved from the Eritrean highlands to the mountains of southern Tegray.¹¹⁷

Moreover, in addition to secondary written sources and oral traditions, we have several lines of evidence which emanate from the physical landscape of the study area itself and through crude analysis of linguistic materials (or language spoken by the society) under investigation. Close scrutiny of these materials has indirectly proven the fact that there had certainly taken place the process of settlement, displacement and resettlement of peoples as a consequence of catastrophic wars accompanied by calamities such as famine and epidemic disease that had generally befallen the Ethiopian state in the sixteenth century.

Taking geographical place names into consideration, for example, there are several places which share common names both in the central highlands of Eritrea and the Mountain Region of the study area which are inscribed ever since the sixteenth century into the landscape by the people who resettled it. To mention some of these place names will be helpful to enhance our understanding of the issue under consideration. They are listed below: Gädgäd, 'Addi Hanesso, Čäguaro, Šäkät, Čäqua, Laqän, Šäsära, Näfasit, Mändäfära and 'Addi Qayeh.¹¹⁸ It should be

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*; Mäsfen Zäraberuk, *Kab Eritrea kesab...*p.136.

¹¹⁸As a person born and grown up in the Mountain Region as well as due to my research interests to this area, I came to know the names of these places through experience. Whereas, for places on the Eritrean highlands, I managed to get the information from an Eritrean television network in which they broadcast every Saturday afternoon, in a series of programs, regarding the etymology of the names of some places in that country.

noted, however, found in the district of Wäjjärat, the last place which appeared in the list, 'Addi Qayeh, currently, is not administratively part of the study area.

But unlike today Wäjjärat was part and parcel of the Mountain Region for much of its history.¹¹⁹ Taking into consideration the Tegraña dialect they speak, the general cultural milieus and psychological makeup of the inhabitants of Wäjjärat, there is a very closer resemblance to the people of Raya-Azäbo than to Endärta to which it is attached as a sub-district.

In relation to this it is worth mentioning that, it is a universal phenomenon, when people move, as a result of various motives, from their ancestral homeland to new places of settlement across rivers, mountains and seas or oceans, one can observe that there is generally the tendency to replace the names of their new settlement areas with those from which they have originally had come. This may perhaps be due to the fact that people feel nostalgic for places where they spent part of their lives.

The second common defining feature between the Tigreans in the Eritrean highlands and their descendants in the Mountain Region is that they both used rivers and lofty mountains as dividing lines between territorial entities such as provinces, sub-provinces, districts and sub-districts. However, a cautious approach must be taken in our argument in order to avoid hasty generalization. In other words, employing such natural boundaries, as dividing lines between two or more administrative units, could be a universal practice in the whole of Ethiopia and probably the world at large. What I am saying here is, it must be clearly understood, that this method is

¹¹⁹Tarekegn Gebreyesus ,”Change and Continuity in the Traditional Institutions and Mechanisms of Local Governance and Conflict Resolution among the Wejerat: An Ethno-Historical Study”, M.A. Thesis in Social Anthropology, Department of Social Anthropology, Addis Ababa Universiy,2005, p.56.

more frequently applied here than in any other part of Ethiopia including other parts of the province of Tegray.

Therefore, what is more frequently observed in relation to this is that people in the Mountain Region of the study area and in Eritrea while applying natural boundaries as dividing lines between territorial entities, added the term *melaš*, as a suffix, to a name of a river or a mountain in question. For instance, the latter have employed the famous Märäb River, one of the major tributaries of the Täkäze River, to serve as a boundary line between the province of Tigray and Eritrea; hence, referring to it as *Märäb Melaš*. On top of that in order to indicate lines of demarcation between local territorial administrative units within Eritrea itself they have employed this term which they also have referred to it as *Bambelo-Melaš* and so forth.¹²⁰

In a similar manner the latter had also identified or employed the Ala River as a line of demarcation between the provinces of Tegray and its southern counterpart- Wällo and hence referring to it as *Ala Wuha Melaš*. Again, now that one takes the lofty mountains of Alajä and Däbbar as reference points, places and administrative entities in the immediate north of the former are referred to as *Alajä Melaš* as well as places and administrative entities in the southern foothills of the latter are also termed as *Däbbar Melaš*.¹²¹

As shown above, therefore, place names contain the very essence of crucial information/evidence by retaining historical material for a very long period of time than other alternative sources do. However, these days there is a growing concern among intellectuals of the study area that the TPLF, the ruling party in Tegray, in memory of its deceased fighters, has been changing the

¹²⁰Gäbrä-Iyäsus Abay, *Mäsrätä 'Alèt Hezebi...*,p.8.; Mäsfen Zära Beruk, *Kab Eritrea kesab...*p.55.

¹²¹Informants: *Mämher* Abäbä Adhana and *Mämher* Täfäri Harägä-Wäyen interviewed in Maycäw on 18/02/2009 E.C.; *Ato* Kiros Kassa interviewed at 'Ayba on 23/12/2009 E.C.; *Ato* Abäbä Guangul interviewed at 'Addišo on 09/03/2010 E.C.

names of a number of places to name them after someone, who had been killed while fighting the Därg army during the seventeen years of its insurgency.¹²²

The second factor, in addition to place names, which identifies people in the Mountain Region with those in the central Eritrean highlands, is names of persons. In both areas people are mostly marked by the following personal names: Mähari, Asmärom, Rädai, Heray, Bayru, Harägot and Baraki are to mention some of the few. Nevertheless, it should be noted that these names of persons are not exclusively applied only to these areas; one may find people called by such personal names in other parts of the Tegraña speaking regions such as Endärta, 'Agamä, Tämbèn, Aksum and Šerä but what exactly in this case I mean is these names of persons occur with surprising frequency in the Mountain Region of the study area and in the central Eritrean highlands.¹²³

The third and probably the most important factor, besides to place names and personal names, which clearly demonstrates the existence of ancestral ties between these peoples has something to do with the Tegraña language. It is interesting to note in this connection that with the rapid growth and spread of satellite television networks all over the world in the last decade or so people of the study area particularly those who live in small or big urban centers, who have the access to listen or watch electronic media including the state owned and state run Eritrean

¹²²In the midst of our discussion with Dr. Tämäsġän Negus and *Ato* Kiro Haddes regarding the study area as a whole they forwarded their ideas to me in that institutions should be named after such deceased fighters rather than places.

¹²³Initially this idea was my own direct observation; but In order to get confirmation I made a suggestion to several other people, who for one reason or another, have interest in the subject under study. Moreover, I also discussed this matter with my adviser, Dr. Adhana Haile, before I wrote the draft paper, in that he agreed with my suggestion that it is possible to use this material for the study at hand.

television network (Eri.Tv), wondered at the state of affairs why a high degree of resemblance has been exhibited between the Tegrēña dialect spoken in the study area and that in Eritrea.¹²⁴

In order to further elucidate the above idea it seems imperative to see it from the point of view of the science of linguistics. Linguistics as a science is not only concerned with the nature of language and communication but also, it is argued, deals with the sub-areas of a given language as well.¹²⁵ Hence, Tegrēña, like all other world languages, has possessed several accents and subparts which are mutually intelligible variations to each other.

But before we deal with the various Tegrēña dialects and accents, it seems appropriate to define both technical terms so as to fit them into the context of our argument. In other words, what do linguists exactly mean by the terms accent or dialect of a given language? They define them below in the following manner:

‘Accent’ refers to the way in which a speaker pronounces, and therefore refers to a variety which is phonetically and/or phonologically different from other varieties. ‘Dialect’ on the other hand, refers to varieties which are grammatically (and perhaps lexically) as well as phonologically different from other varieties.¹²⁶

Having this concept in mind, therefore, it is now possible to proceed to apply the method of approaching the study of identity seeing through the prism of linguistics. The very close resemblance between the Tegrēña accent and dialect in Raya-Azäbo and that in what is today the state of Eritrea particularly that of the Hamassèn accent and dialect has remained a complete mystery almost to virtually everyone, who in one way or another, has become interested in the language and identity of the people of the study area.

¹²⁴My friends and colleagues Ato Hagos Täsfay, Dr. Tämäsgän Negus, Ato Mulu Abera and Ato Kaysay Hagos are to mention a few among those who have keenly observed the close similarity exhibited between the Tegrēña spoken in the study area and that in Eritrea.

¹²⁵J.K. Chambers & Peter Trudgill, *Dialectology* (2nd ed.) Cambridge University Press, 2004, p.3.

¹²⁶*Ibid*, p.5.

However, such a mystery has been, to some extent, resolved when a Russian linguist by the name Yareslov has thoroughly studied Tegrēña dialects spoken both in Eritrea and Tegray. Based on new developments in linguistic theory, Yareslove has classified the Semitic language Tegrēña into five broad categories. They are according to his study: The Šerā dialect, the Aksum-Adwa-Akalā-Guzay- Sārayā dialect, the 'Agamā dialect (presumably Keltā-Awla'elo included here), the Endārta dialect, (presumably Tāmbèn included here) and finally the Hamassèn-Raya dialect.¹²⁷

To conclude, the sub-province of Hamassèn in the state of Eritrea and the sub-province of Raya-Azäbo in the Ethiopian province of Tegray are geographically far apart from each other. There are at least four sub-provinces (*awrajas*) namely Endārta, Keltā-Awla'elo, 'Agamā and Akalā-Guzay in between. Despite that however, as has already been thoroughly discussed above, peoples of both sub-provinces are found to be speakers of the same dialect, which is a subpart of the Semitic language Tegrēña, has proven without any doubt, our grand argument that there had taken place a north-south movement of people just more than four and half centuries ago.

¹²⁷Some nine years ago, in an interview on the Voice of America (VOA) Tegrēña Service, Yareslove has discussed his research findings regarding issues related to the various Tegrēña dialects spoken in Eritrea and Tegray. In relation to this I posed a question to Professor Bayä Yemam as to what do linguists exactly mean by a dialect? He answered to my question by saying that speakers of the dialect of a given language are usually found to have used and known identical words and phrases (lexicons) which has indirectly proven the argument in the above text.

Chapter Three: A History of the Dobe'a People in Raya-Azäbo.

3.1. Origin and Early History.

The people known in Ethiopian history by the ethnonym-Dobe'a, had, for about a thousand years or so, dominated the entire Fertile Valley, a territory extending from Ebbo, a locality around southern Wäjjärat, in the north to the Ala River in the south.¹²⁸ The early habitat of the Dobe'a, designated in this research as the Fertile Valley, comprises an elongated valley surrounded, in the eastern and western directions, by chains of mountains with altitudes ranging between 2000 and 2500 meters above sea level.¹²⁹

For quite a long period of time the origins and early history of the people, Dobe'a, remained obscure. At the outset the Dobe'a principality appears to have been a conglomeration of several tribal groups whose economic way of life had totally depended on cattle herding. Through time it appears that the various clans and tribes, who constituted it, managed to develop a strong sense of ethnic unity whereby the dense forests and toll grasslands of the vast valley had come to be their stronghold ardently defended by them arguably before being displaced by the Oromo in two waves the first being c.1563 and the second one in 1623.¹³⁰

The Dobe'a clearly had been an important people who assumed a preponderant position in the history of the region since they are referred to in oral traditions as well as written primary and secondary sources of history, which deal with political, religious and, to a lesser extent,

¹²⁸Regarding this point various sources, which deal with the early history of the Dobe'a, confirm that the entire Fertile Valley was their domicile before the Oromo displaced them sometime in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; such sources shall be mentioned, one after another, in the succeeding paragraphs below.

¹²⁹General information related to vegetation cover, climate, and altitude and so forth of the study area is obtained from working papers of the Offices of Agriculture and Rural Development in Maycäw and Qobbo towns.

¹³⁰In the hagiography of the life of *Abunä* Fiqṭor, a saint reputed to be the first to evangelize the populations in the Mountain Region, MS deposited at the Monastery of Täklähyamanot Maycäw (n.P), hints that the entire Fertile Valley was inhabited by fierce Afar pastoral groups sometime in the fifth century long before they embraced Islam as their faith; J. Spencer, Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, London, 1952, p.81.

economic nexus of state and society in Ethiopia from early on well up to the recent period. Based on these diverse and rich recollections of history, the story of origin of the Dobe'a people is, emphatically but to a greater extent erroneously, told in relation to the emergence of Islam in Arabia at the dawn of the seventh century A.D.¹³¹

In connection to this point it is imperative to note that two decades after the establishment of one of the great religions of the world, Islam, the political landscape of Arabia began to take a new shape particularly with the death of prophet Mohamed in 632 A.D. principally due to succession problems as well as to the emergence of an Arab empire. Following his death four caliphs namely Abu Bäkär (r.632-634), Aumär (r.634-644), Ausman (r.644-656) and Ali (r. 656-661) governed Arabia. When Ali became a caliph in 656 A.D., to fill the power vacuum created by the assassination of his predecessor, Ausman, an armed uprising broke out against him, mainly on two fronts, on the pretext that the new caliph, Ali, had failed to find and prosecute those who had murdered Ausman.¹³²

The first rebellion against the government of Ali was organized and led by Aisha, who was the daughter of Abu Bäkär, the first caliph, and the widow of prophet Mohamed. Meanwhile a civil war broke out between the two which ended in the defeat and subsequent capture of Aisha.¹³³

The second opposition came from Mu'aweya, who was the governor of Syria and the nephew of the murdered caliph, Ausman. Owing to his rebellious behavior, Ali wanted to purge him from power as the governor of Syria, which was at the time one of the most important provinces of the

¹³¹Bairu Tafla, *Asme Giorgis and His Work, History of the Galla and the Rise of the Kingdom of Shewa*, Stuttgart, 1987, p.84.; Tayä Gäbrä Maryam(*Aläqa*), *Yä Ethiopia Hezeb Tarik*, Addis Ababa, Central Printing Press, 1914 E.C., pp.68-70.; Michael Hasama Raka, *Zanta Eritrea*, . . ., p.90. Furthermore, almost all of our oral informants enquired on the subject of the story of the origin of the Dobe'a people strongly claim that that the entire society has got Arab ancestry.

¹³²John, L.Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, Oxford University Press, 2005, p.35.

¹³³*Ibid.*

Islamic Empire of Arabia. But Mu'aweya never heeded the orders of the caliph and defied to step down from his position of provincial governorship. In the meantime Ali was forced, once again, to order his army to put down the rebellion as a consequence of which a second civil war broke out in Arabia between the caliph, Ali, and Mu'aweya, the provincial governor.¹³⁴

In the course of the protracted civil war government forces began to emerge victorious over the forces of Mu'aweya as a result of which the latter was forced to consider a peaceful means of resolving the conflict. Ali agreed to accept the peaceful settlement of the conflict through negotiations but this had infuriated some of his supporters, who had greatly desired to see the rebellion be crushed militarily. But when this did not materialize, a breakaway faction, who came to be known as *Kharijites* (meaning in Arabic 'extremists',¹³⁵) came into existence in the political scene of the Islamic Empire of Arabia. As its name indicates, this minority group had separated itself from the vast majority of the Islamic community of Arabia, who rallied behind the moderate idea of the caliph, and hence they subsequently waged a struggle against Ali.¹³⁶

Owing to their hard-line stance on the issue of religion and the occupation of the position of the caliphate they killed the open-minded caliph, Ali, in 661 simply because he had committed himself to settle the dispute peacefully. But the basic motive behind the assassination of the caliph was to install one of the two sons of Ali as the leader of the caliphate; because, as our sources clearly show, the *Kharijites* strongly believed and demanded that the leadership of the

¹³⁴Philip, K.Hitti, *History of the Arabs: From the Earliest Times to the Present*, London, the Macmillan Press LTD, 1970, pp.139-141.

¹³⁵Discussion with Adām Kamile Faris, an assistant professor in Islamic Studies, currently he is working as a researcher for the institute of Arabian and Ethiopian people's relations. He is well versed in Arabic and has translated several books from Arabic into Amharic.

¹³⁶*Ibid.*

whole Islamic community of Arabia should be restricted to Ali's descendants on the ground that the latter was not only among the few pioneers in embracing Islam but he was also the cousin as well as the son-in-law of the prophet- Mohamed.¹³⁷

Nevertheless, contrary to their expectations the death of Ali had paved the way for Mu'aweya, their mortal enemy, to become the next caliph of the whole of the Islamic Empire of Arabia. In relation to this it should be clearly understood that the root cause of the succession problem in Arabia was not least because of the fact that the prophet had left no rules and regulations on how and/or by whom he would be succeeded upon his death.¹³⁸

Whatever the case may be, the *Kharijites* had quarreled with the vast majority of the Islamic community, as discussed above, for killing the caliph, Ali, as well as for making an assassination attempt on the life of the newest caliph, Mu'aweya, though unlike the former the latter had narrowly escaped death, while sustaining wounds. It should also be mentioned that their original plan was to kill Ali, Mu'aweya and the ruler of Egypt simultaneously but they could not inflict any damage on the third one as they could not find him in a place where he was supposed to be found.¹³⁹

At that time Egypt, like Syria, was a province which was one of the components of the vast Islamic Empire. Therefore, due to their extreme politico- religious views the *Kharijites* had splintered off from the vast majority the Muslim community of Arabia; and as a result of the political upheavals they caused in the whole of Arabia they were brutally suppressed including the massacre of a large number of the rank-and-file members of their movement. Furthermore,

¹³⁷Ibid.

¹³⁸Philip, K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*...., p. 139.

¹³⁹Discussion with Adäm Kamile Faris; we discussed on this issue in his office found at Bolè sub-city in Addis Ababa on 10/11/ 2019.

those who survived massacre and other forms of political repression, were forced to flee Arabia to different parts of the world including the Horn of Africa in which the region under study is situated in close proximity.¹⁴⁰

Here, it should be noted that the reason for dwelling in relative detail on the early history of Islam in Arabia in this part of the dissertation is that because it is necessary to investigate the long-held view of our oral informants as well as a number of written secondary sources, which tend to identify, in an exaggerated way, the entire people, which came to be called Dobe'a, had originated from the Arabian stock and arrived in this part of Ethiopia sometime around the seventh century A.D. in the wake of political upheavals in the region.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, a close inspection of these traditions and some secondary written sources have clearly revealed the fact that a small group of the members of the *Kharijites* movement had managed to elude government repression in Arabia and took refuge in what would become an administrative unit called Raya-Azäbo, particularly in a place designated in this study as the Fertile Valley.¹⁴² Sometime after such a minority emigrant Arab community had arrived in the Fertile Valley, the people with whom they established contacts as well as the place they occupied seems to have gradually assumed the name Dobe'a.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰Hussein Ahmed, *Islam in Nineteenth Century Wollo, Ethiopia: Revival, Reform and Reaction*, Leiden: Brill Publishers, 2001, p.62.

¹⁴¹Michael Hasama Raka, *Zanta Erirea*, p.90.; Tayä Gäbrä Maryam, *Yä Ethiopia Hezeb...*, pp.68-70.; including many of our most knowledgeable oral informants such as Sheikh Mahdi Yasin interviewed in Mayčäw on 18/12/2009; Sheikh Nur-Hussein Enderis interviewed at Mäkhan 7/2/2010; Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan interviewed at Addi Abo Gošu on 25/02/ 2010; Sheikh Nurudaim Awäle interviewed at Hašängä on 26/02/2010 strongly claim descent from Arabian political emigrants.

¹⁴²Hussein Ahmed, *Islam in Nineteenth Century...*, p.30. In this part of his book Hussein clearly demonstrates that in the wake of every political and military crisis in Arabia has resulted in the immigration of populations from this region to the Ethiopian hinterland.

¹⁴³Doba'un is name of place in Hadramout, Yemen as shown in some maps. Thus, we can certainly suggest that the Dobe'a in our study area, as name of a place and people, must have steamed from it.

Prior to the advent of these people to this part of Ethiopia although we do not know for certain, by what name this place and its inhabitants were called; taking cautiously into consideration the claim of our informants, which states that their ancestors had come from southern Arabia, as well as the fact that there appears in some maps a place by the name Dobe'a around the province of Hadramout in what is today the southern Yemen, we can safely suggest that there had certainly taken place an influx of some Arab bands to this particular region. In connection to this it is interesting to note that in Ethiopian history and most likely the world at large whenever people move from their original settlement places to new ones, it is not uncommon to witness that they tend to give the names of those places, which were their former abode, to the new ones.¹⁴⁴

To be more precise when the carriers of the name Dobe'a arrived in this region during the above mentioned period, the area they occupied, as their permanent settlement place, was not a no man's land. In other words, an old *Ge'ez* document, which is believed to have been composed very long before the alleged arrival of the Arabs to the region, clearly states that places situated immediately towards the east of the modern town of Maycäw (meaning the northern part of the Fertile Valley) had been inhabited by a pastoralist Afar clan.¹⁴⁵ Hence, it is possible to deduce from this argument that the Dobe'a had superimposed themselves over such an Afar clan that had already established settlement in the area very long before the former's arrival.

In connection to this it is important to note that the available written and oral evidence strongly suggests that around the late seventh century A.D. this small group of fugitive Arab bands were, through a peaceful process of infiltration, intermingled with the host community. This had resulted in, on the one hand, the emigrant *Kharijites* who, as agents of Islamicization, had

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵*Gädlä Abunä Fiqtor* (A Hagiography of *Abunä Fiqtor*), MS deposited at the Monastery of Täklähaymanot Maycäw, n.p.

become instrumental for converting the Cushitic speaking Afar to the new monotheistic religion -Islam.¹⁴⁶

On the other hand over the course of a long period of interaction the newcomers had been interwoven with the host community, Afar, thereby racial and religious fusion had been effected between the two communities. Furthermore, as they came into regular and continuous contact with the indigenous, relatively large majority, Afar society, this small group of Arab community was completely absorbed by its host society without leaving any linguistic, cultural, or racial traces. However, these days whenever most Muslim informants from the study area are asked to tell the story of their identity, contrary to the facts on the ground, they tend to give greater emphasis to that of the Arab element than the African one which had already been subsumed under the latter not very long after the two groups were tied together through strong kinship and religious bonds.¹⁴⁷

Nevertheless, it is interesting to note in this connection that the Dobe'a are not the only people, who strongly claim Arab descent, in Ethiopia in particular and the Horn of Africa in general. In other words, although we are concerned here only with the Dobe'a in northeast Ethiopia, this phenomenon has a number of similar regional manifestations. In Ifat, northeastern Šäwa, for instance, Muslim Communities in the principalities of Argoba, Doba, Qacno and Šagura,¹⁴⁸ as well as the Muslim sultanates, which flourished between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries in

¹⁴⁶Several scholars, who specialized on the field, strongly assert that as agents of Islamization, it was Arab traders, politico-religious emigrants and clerics who were responsible for the propagation of Islam in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa in general.

¹⁴⁷Informants: Sheikh Mahdi Yasin interviewed in Mayčäw on 18/02/2009; Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan interviewed in Koräm on 28/02/2010; Sheikh Nurudaim Awäle interviewed at Hašängä on 24/02/2010 and many more Muslim informants invariably share this claim.

¹⁴⁸Bayru Tafla, *Asme Giorgis and His...*, p.; Tayä Gäbrä Maryam, *Yä Ethiopia Hezeb...*, p.69.

southern and southeastern Ethiopia, namely Dawaro, Hadeya, Bali and Fäṭāgar also share the same story of Arab lineage.

Moreover, the ruling dynasty of the Yäjju Oromo, Wärä Shaykh, who dominated the factional politics of north-central Ethiopia from the middle of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth, are also reported to have claimed origin from Arabian ancestry.¹⁴⁹ In a similar manner the Somali clans such as Isaq, Draod, Hawiya and Dir even trace descent to the pedigree of the prophet and founder of Islam-Mohamed.¹⁵⁰ We cannot afford to automatically reject or rule out the traditions of descent from eponymous Arabian ancestors because as some serious scholarly studies demonstrate, very well, on how the population in the Ethiopian state was diversified and that there were generally ‘three main sources of periodic influx’ into the Ethiopian region and the Horn are identified. These were: “Sudanic peoples in the west, Semitic peoples in the east and Mediterranean peoples in the north”.¹⁵¹

Furthermore, the fact that the two regions, the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, are situated in close proximity to each other, particularly at the strait of Bab el- Mandeb, where they are separated by only twenty miles, has greatly contributed to augment the inflow of Arabs into Ethiopia for more than thirty centuries, without interruption, in the shape of traders, clerics and religious dissidents.¹⁵² Indeed, the Red Sea was more of a bridge than a barrier for the populations inhabiting on the eastern and western sides of the sea.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹Hussein Ahmed, *Islam in Nineteenth Century...*, p.18.

¹⁵⁰I.M., Lewis, *Peoples of the Horn of Africa: Somali, Afar and Saho*, London, 1955, p.17.

¹⁵¹Levin, Donald, *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multi-Ethnic Society*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1974, p.30.

¹⁵²*Ibid*, p.31.

¹⁵³Fattovich, Rodolfo, “The Afro-Arabian Circuit: Contacts between the Horn of Africa and Southern Arabia in the third to second millennia B.C.”, *The international Journal of Interregional Contacts in the Later prehistory of Northeast Africa*, Volume VII (1996): 395-402.

So, the periodic arrival of these various Muslim groups in the wake of political and military conflicts in the Islamic heartland as well as through trade had played a pivotal role in the introduction, consolidation and expansion of Islam in Ethiopia and the greater Horn region in general. To put it in another way: “Arab traders, artisans and adventurers were the chief medium of Islamic expansion and coming as they did as individuals and not as tribes they naturally lived in close touch with the natives, adopted their language instead of imposing Arabic, and intermarried with them”¹⁵⁴.

To sum up, sources which focus on the study of Islam reveal that the ascription of the origin of almost all of Ethiopian Muslim societies to the Middle East particularly Arabia, despite the fact that those Arabs who had come to proselytize them were very small in number, was due to the fact that this region, where their religion, Islam, originated, has become a source of pride to them.¹⁵⁵ Ulrich Braukamper has amply demonstrated this circumstance in the following terms: “... from the tenth century A.D. onwards there had been a steady infiltration of Muslim Arabs into the Horn of Africa. In order to increase their own prestige, Islamicized populations started to refer to them as their ancestors and integrated them into their genealogical framework...”¹⁵⁶

It should be noted, however, that this tradition/notion is not exceptional to Ethiopian Muslim communities alone. It is/was rather a pan-Ethiopian worldview. As this region, Middle East, is the cradle of several brilliant civilizations and the origin of the three great religions of the world namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the Ethiopian Jews (Bètä Israel or Fälaša) and those Ethiopians who worship Orthodox Christianity, likewise ascribe their myth of origin to Israel in

¹⁵⁴Hussein Ahmed, *Islam in Nineteenth Century...*, p.39.

¹⁵⁵Ibid; I.M., Lewis, *peoples of the Horn...*, pp.16-17.

¹⁵⁶Braukamper, Ulrich, “The Islamicization of the Arsi Oromo”, *Proceedings of the International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Lund University, (1982): 767-777.

order to confirm their much praised claims for civility as well as for legitimating power particularly on the side of the ruling classes.¹⁵⁷

Whatever the case may be, well from the last part of the seventh and the beginning of the eighth century A.D. northeast Ethiopia had witnessed the rise of one of the most formidable peoples. The Dobe'a had continued to be as one of the most powerful group of peoples in this region for at least a thousand years that is to say from the eighth century AD until the advent of the Oromo to the region in the seventeenth century. The Dobe'a, as a distinct and separate people, are first mentioned by name in a record which dates back to the early thirteenth century. In relation to this it is important to note that basing himself on an old *ge'ez* document Trimmingham claims, among other things, that the Dobe'a territory had been an autonomous Muslim principality, centrally governed by a powerful chief, whose name was Yaheya.¹⁵⁸

As time proceeded, they had succeeded to develop a social organization strong enough to unite all the sub-clans into a single cohesive communal entity. Ever since the Dobe'a had entered into recorded history such as Acts and hagiographies, travel accounts, and royal chronicles they were portrayed to have lived in a state of chronic tension with the Amhara-Tegrean Christians of the surrounding highlands for which they had acquired a fearsome reputation as warriors.¹⁵⁹

The first major war in a five hundred-year series of conflicts broke out during the reign of Bä'edä Maryam (r.1468-1478). By the time a number of factors had accounted for the long-standing conflict between the Muslim Dobe'a and their Christian neighbors on the one hand; and the Dobe'a and the central state on the other. Although the account in the chronicle of Bä'edä

¹⁵⁷Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270-1527*, Oxford, Clarendon press, 1972, pp.64-68.

¹⁵⁸J. Spencer, Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia...*, p.81.

¹⁵⁹*Ibid.*; Merid wolde Aregay, Population Movement as a possible Factor in the Christian Muslim Conflict of Medieval Ethiopia, in *History miscellania*#17,p.275.; Michael Hasama Raka, *Zanta Eritrea....*,p.90.

Maryam is silent about the immediate causes for the catastrophic wars fought between the central state and the Dobe'a in the early 1470s, however, on the part of the latter mention can be made such as the refusal to pay their annual tribute, raiding the neighboring Christian highlanders or robbing the long-distance caravan traders, who had been passing through this vital north-south commercial axis, may have been the plausible reasons for this to happen; because, during the medieval period, one or all of these factors had served as the common denominator in all episodes of conflict between the Christian state and the Muslim lowland pastoralists in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.¹⁶⁰

In any case, for one reason or another, in the year 1471 the emperor, Bā'edā Maryam, had assembled a mighty army, which was raised from the various medieval provinces under his domain, so as to launch a punitive military expedition against the Muslim pastoralist Dobe'a who had been dwelling in the entire Fertile Valley. So, upon accomplishing his preparations, accompanied by his entourage, most importantly the queens of the right and left and the bishop of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the emperor had set out from Šäwa and, without a delay, marched northwards at the head of several provincial governors, commanders of the various army regiments and many other lower religious and political dignitaries, who after a few week's journey, had arrived and camped in the southeastern environs of the Dobe'a borderlands.¹⁶¹

Soon after the emperor along with his followers had arrived at the Fertile Valley and pitched his camp there, having been so furious at the rebels, he had instantly rushed into combat seemingly without preparing carefully his assault plan and overall military strategy. In other words, upon

¹⁶⁰Merid Wolde Aregay, "Military Elites in Medieval..." pp.34-39.; J. Spencer, Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia...*,p.194.; Wallis, Budge, *A History of Ethiopia, Nubia and Abyssinia*, London, Metuea and Co. Ltd. 1966,p.315.

¹⁶¹Luis, Haber (trans.), "The Chronicle of Emperor..." , pp.72-75.

establishing his camp at the southern frontier zone of their settlements, somewhere beyond the northern foothills of the mountain chains of Zobel, the emperor deployed his vanguard forces to launch the first stage military offensive against the enemy forces which, he thought, would pave the way for the final onslaught. However, contrary to his expectations his forces were decisively defeated by Dobe'a fighters¹⁶², who, through their traditional 'surprise raids, hit-and-run attacks and day or night ambushes', a military tactic preferred by and specific to all warring bands of lowland Muslim pastoralists of that era, managed to inflict heavy damage on the imperial army.¹⁶³

A small number of remnant soldiers, who escaped death or capture, retreated in a disorderly manner to the royal camp with the awful news of the disastrous military defeat. The survivors were blamed for the initial military failure for which they were harshly punished. Thereafter, the emperor insisted on conducting a second round of campaign, following a brief tactical reorganization, by sending Jan Zeg Garad of Bali (the governor of the medieval province of Bali), but then to the dismay of the emperor the Dobe'a emerged victorious, once again, over the imperial army routing that huge cäwa (army) and killing its renowned general.¹⁶⁴

This time round the emperor dared not to blame anyone for the humiliating military failure and the disastrous defeat of the two army divisions. Now it seems that it became sufficiently clear to him that he would not easily beat the Dobe'a, whose fighting capacity was underestimated at the outset, by sending one contingent after another deep into the heartland of the enemy territory. As a result, he took a number of steps, which he thought, would guarantee victory over his adversary. In this circumstance one of these measures the emperor took had to do with the

¹⁶²*Ibid.* p.75.

¹⁶³Merid Wolde Aregay, "Military Elites in Medieval..." p.53.

¹⁶⁴Wallis, Budge, *A History of Ethiopia, Nubia...*, p.316.

reconsideration of his previous military plans and strategies meaning instead of sending an elite force, time and again, from a single direction to the enemy stronghold, waging a full-scale war on the enemy, from several directions, at once, would be a more effective way of dealing with the matter.¹⁶⁵

The second and perhaps the most important measure he took was to shift his command and control center from the land of Dobe'a in the Fertile Valley, whose elevation in many areas is as low as 1400 meters above sea level, where malarial infestation and other illnesses related to intestinal problems were said to have claimed the lives of a large number of soldiers and civilian retainers alike to a cool and healthy place in the Mountain Region called Haya.¹⁶⁶

This place, mentioned repeatedly in Bä'edä Maryam's royal chronicle, located at nearly a half way between the modern towns of Maycäw and Koräm, has, until today, retained this name. Immediately after he established his camp at Haya, the emperor ordered for a temporary suspension of all sorts of military operations owing to the fact that in the previous two engagements the imperial army had sustained heavy casualties as a consequence of which it was suffering from low-morale. In the meantime he seems to be convinced that he could rebuild the deteriorated morale of his army while at the same time he could have adequate time to evaluate previous mistakes, learn from them and hence make better plans and preparations for the final onslaught.¹⁶⁷

The last one but equally important measure, which the monarch took, was that so as to reinforce his military power he called back, a segment of the Jan Amora army division, which

¹⁶⁵Luis, Haber, "The Chronicle of...", pp. 74-75.

¹⁶⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷*Ibid.*

had been dispatched, prior to the eruption of the conflict in the area under study, to fight a certain Amba Nahad, a rebellious governor of Śālāmt, a territory “wedged between the lofty heights of Semen province and the deep valley of Tekezze.”¹⁶⁸ This Jan Amora army regiment, as discussed in greater detail in chapter two, was stationed in three strategic places of the study area, to block the encroachment of the Muslim Dobe’a on the Christian highlanders as well as to keep open the caravan routes by providing protection to merchants from being plundered by highwaymen.

Now the emperor was fully engaged in the task of reorganizing the various army units, at his disposal, in a way that would enable them to upgrade their combat capabilities, including boosting their morale, which was then in a state of deterioration, subsequent to the previous two disastrous defeats. Side by side with planning operations, coordinating and reorganizing his forces the emperor fasted and made his prayer for victory as it was then the order of the day to attribute military defeats to the wrath of God. Furthermore, he sent gifts to the large ecclesiastical institutions such as churches and monasteries found in the provinces of Angot, Amhara and Tegray. In relation to this it is worth mentioning that he had donated a thousand ounces of gold for distribution among the poor and monks of Tegray, so that God might hear his supplication and answer his prayers.¹⁶⁹

After the accomplishment of all strategic adjustments, the various units of the imperial army were now regrouped into a number of corps. However, before he launched the major military operations a considerable amount of infantry forces, which could intercept retreating Dobe’a warriors, commanded by the governor of Tegray and the Śahefālams of Qèda and Damot, were positioned in the northern frontiers of the Dobe’a territory. In the meantime the Afar chief, who

¹⁶⁸*Ibid.*; Merid Wolde Aregay, “Political Geography of Ethiopia at the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century” in *IV Congresso Internazionale di Studi Etiopici* (Roma, 1974), p.620.

¹⁶⁹Luis, Haber,” *The Chronicle of...*, p.75.; Michael Hasama Raka, *Zanta Eritrea...*,p.90.

was now in friendly terms with the emperor, was said to have presented various kinds of valuable items as a gift to his overlord; and more importantly he also vowed to block all paths through which the Dobe'a might retreat down to the arid lowlands.¹⁷⁰

Hence, the Dobe'a principality was now placed under effective state of sieges in which there was no any other route at all they could take to retreat. As the imperial army had launched a full-scale military offensive, the Dobe'a came under attack from all sides whereby their fortresses and defense lines were easily broken. Eventually, overpowered by the royal forces, Dobe'a resistance totally collapsed, though their combatants had posed a stiff challenge when the war began.¹⁷¹

The war had caused an immense damage on the Dobe'a principality. As documentary sources reveal the magnitude of loss of human lives, material destruction, and social dislocation were so large that the political, economic and religious aspects of the life of the civilian society were worst affected by the conflict. In relation to this it is reported that the victorious army took much booty consisting of traditional armaments and probably some other items of high value to the emperor and his followers. Moreover, numerous herds of cattle were looted and driven off from the Fertile Valley to the Mountain Region, which, the emperor had eventually entrusted them to the *Jan Amora* and *Jan Qänṭafa cäwa* army regiments to graze and breed them in their respective localities.¹⁷²

After his subjugation of the Dobe'a, Bä'edä Maryam had asked every member of the vanquished society to embrace Christianity. However, it seems that while a majority of them had apparently opposed to this policy some had welcomed it right away. Hence, on the basis of the response of

¹⁷⁰Ibid.; Wallis, Budge, *A History of Ethiopia, Nubia...*,p.315.

¹⁷¹Michael Hasama Raka, *Zanta Eritrea...*, p. 90. ; Luis Haber, "The Chronicle of...", pp.72-75.

¹⁷²Luis Haber, "The Chronicle of...", pp.72-75.; Wallis, Budge, *A History of Ethiopia, Nubia...*, p. 316-317.

each section of the society he took two categories of measures. Those Dobe'a, who accepted Christianity wholeheartedly, were reinstated in their land and the cattle looted from them were also restored to them. Moreover, so as to encourage the newly converted Dobe'a, they were granted, as an incentive, additional heads of cattle, over and above what they had, from the emperor's own possession. On the other hand a strong pressure was exerted on those Dobe'a Muslims, who refused to renounce their faith and submit to the Christian state, whereby they had been forced to flee to some other distant places so as to save their lives and profess their religion freely.¹⁷³

In connection to this some pertinent secondary documents clearly attest that after the campaign of Bä'edä Maryam, the Dobe'a, who stubbornly resisted his political and religious policy, were dispersed, far and wide, to different parts of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa.¹⁷⁴ In relation to this it is essential to mention that in northern Šäwa there is a district known as Doba, predominantly inhabited by Muslims up until the present time.¹⁷⁵

Thus, taking into account the congruence of the names of the two places and the fact that the two societies worship the same religion, Islam, strongly suggests that the Muslim populations inhabiting in northern Šäwa today were most probably those who had been captured and resettled there by Bä'edä Maryam soon after the campaign. The objective of the policy of resettlement pursued by the monarch could probably be two: First, placing a segment of the Dobe'a people in close proximity to his court in northern Šäwa, would give him the power to keep them under strict control; and secondly removing a substantial number of people from their stronghold in

¹⁷³*Ibid.*; Michael Hasama Raka, *Zanta Eritrea*,..., p.90.

¹⁷⁴Michael Hasama Raka, *Zanta Eritrea*,..., p.90.

¹⁷⁵Volker, Stitz, "The Amhara Resettlement of Northern Shewa During the 18th and 19th Centuries", in *Rural Africana, African Studies Center*, Michigan State University, 1970, p.82.

the Fertile Valley, would diminish their capacity to wage war again so that they could be no more a threat to the interest of the Christian state.¹⁷⁶

In a similar manner, it is also worth mentioning that we have another district in eastern Hararghe called Doba where Muslim populations live in greater numbers. Here, one may suspect that this area too was, most likely, named after another group of Dobe'a people who migrated from their abode in the Fertile Valley to the afore-mentioned area in the wake of the fifteenth century war.

Furthermore, a third fraction of Dobe'a society, who is said to have migrated further north particularly to west-central Eritrea in the sub-province of Kärän, had mingled with the Mänsa'e people who are claimed to be the original inhabitants of the region. But it should be noted that, unlike in northern Šäwa and eastern Hararghe, in Kärän, the term Dobe'a does not appear either as an ethnonym or eponym in our source documents. In time, however, all the three Dobe'a groups, who moved to different parts of the Horn of Africa, were assimilated by the societies whom they had joined and hence eventually lost their original trait.¹⁷⁷

As a concluding remark for this section of the paper, the question of the Dobe'a people seems to have been a serious political and security concern to the emperor, Bä'edä Mariam, as can be inferred from the measures he took against them and the vast military and economic resources he devoted to address the problem they caused. In order to completely pacify this region the young emperor, Bä'edä Mariam, who untimely died at the age of thirty, stayed in this region for solid four years out of the total ten years he lived as a reigning monarch.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶There is an indirect reference to this fact in Merid's *Military Elites in Medieval Ethiopia...*, p.51.

¹⁷⁷Michael Hasama Raka, *Zanta Eritrea...*, p90.; J. Spencer, Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia...*,p.81.

¹⁷⁸Luis, Haber, "The Chronicle of...", pp.72-75.; Merid Wolde Aregay, "Military Elites in Medieval...", p.51.

The area repeatedly mentioned in his royal chronicle, which he chose for his command and control center as well as for his temporary seat of power, does seem to have been his favorite place of residence, is located in the Mountain Region. As he ascended up from a certain place in the Fertile Valley to the Mountain Region, for reasons mentioned above, he is reported to have uttered the following words as written in his chronicle: “Warriors establish here your homes: I myself have chosen for my residence this locality [Haya], as my father, Zara Yaeqob, has chosen for his Debre Berhan...”¹⁷⁹

Furthermore, he had also created and assigned two new additional army regiments of the *cäwa*, before he left the area for Šäwa, namely *Dawit Amba* and *Bamon Gudafo*, in addition to the three segments of the *Jan Amora* army regiment posted in three strategic places of the Mountain Region and the *Jan Qänṭafa cäwa* army division stationed in the mountains of Zobel, a district located towards the southeastern flank of the Fertile Valley, though unlike the latter we cannot trace names of *Dawit Amba* and *Bamon Gudafo* from the places where they were posted.¹⁸⁰ Mention should be made concerning the fact that a great deal of the royal chronicle of the emperor is devoted to discuss the hostile relations between the state and the Dobe’a, as compared to other activities of the state, clearly denoting that the Dobe’a were prioritized as one of the top state affairs of the day in the imperial court.

Although our source material for the Dobe’a, after the war, is comparatively so meager, the next mention on them occurs on the travel accounts of Alvarez. The Dobe’a, as discussed above, had certainly suffered at the hands the Christian state in its desperate attempt to bring their area under

¹⁷⁹Interestingly enough in the chronicle of Baeda Maryam and in Budge’s book, which are cited several times in this research, explicitly state that Haya as “...land of Tigre...” confirming the fact that before the arrival of the Oromo to the Fertile Valley the area designated in this paper as the Mountain Region was in its entirety the Habitat of the Tigrean society.

¹⁸⁰Merid Wolde Aregay, “Military Elites in Medieval...”, p.51.; Luis, Haber, ’The Chronicle of...’, pp.72-75.

some degree of central control. But their morale and sense of independence were never broken throughout the fifteen and sixteen centuries. In the wake of the war they were not only recognizable as distinct people but they rapidly recovered from the displacement, massacre and dispersal, which had befallen on them, and became, as before, a threat to their Christian neighbors and by implication to the state at large. The travel accounts of the above mentioned Portuguese priest, Alvarez, who described the Dobe'a land in the early 1520s, vividly testified the security situation in the following terms:

The conquest of these Moors of Doba belongs to a great captain named xuum [*šum*] Janomora that is captain of the country. The captaincy is named Janamora, which is a large district with many people subject to it [who are called Giannamori], and all of it mountainous. They say that they are good warriors, and so they ought to be, for they always keep an eye over their shoulder. In the lands and mountains where they dwell, the moors come to burn the houses and churches, and carry off the cows from the enclosures. In this country I saw a priest with poisoned arrows; and I criticized it as being ill done, as he was a priest. He answered me. 'Look that way, and you will see the church burnt by the Moors and close to it they carried off from me fifty cows, and also they burned my bee hives, which were my livelihood; for that reason I carry this poison, to kill him who has killed me.' I did not know what to answer to him, with the sorrow that I saw in his face and perceived in his heart.¹⁸¹

3.2. The Advent of the Oromo to the Fertile Valley and their Consequences on the Dobe'a.

Throughout the fifteenth century, the Dobe'a, as mentioned above, had put up a stiff resistance against the well-organized troops of Zära Yaeqob and Bā'edā Mariam; and it should be noted that these were not the only wars waged against them; it could be assumed that there had been other similar wars, fought between them and the central state on the one hand and the provincial powers on the other, which, however, went unreported for a number of different reasons for the coming three hundred years. Nevertheless, despite the fact that many punitive campaigns were led against them, the Dobe'a fiercely fought back and managed to sustain their survival and

¹⁸¹Francisco, Alvarez, *The Prester John...*, pp. 193-194.

succeeded to uphold some degree of political autonomy for several centuries in their long history of resistance.¹⁸²

However, from the beginning of the seventeenth century onwards the Dobe'a, as they did before, were not able to survive the Oromo's intensive onslaughts which had gathered momentum during that particular time; in other words, the Dobe'a principality was shaken to the core by the advent and subsequent conquest of the Oromo. Though the Dobe'a were widely known for posing a fierce resistance against any invading enemy, they were now unable to withstand the Oromo offensive. In connection to this point informants have invariably related, which is more likely, that the Dobe'a could have been caught by a complete surprise. Meaning in their first encounter the Oromo were reported to have attacked the Dobe'a while the latter had assembled for a weekly market exchange at a place called Solloqua, an old marketplace found on the top of the plateau situated towards the northeast of the town of Čärčär overlooking the vast plain fields of Mächarä.¹⁸³ But one of the most plausible explanations, besides to the Oromo's employment of hit-and-run tactics, ambushes, night raids and surprise attacks against them, as to why the warlike and better organized Dobe'a had eventually surrendered themselves to the Oromo in the seventeenth century could be because, shortly before the arrival of the Barentu to the Dobe'a land, they were said to have been devastated and thereby debilitated owing to the military strikes of the troops of Emperor Minas in 1562, who were marching north through the latter's territory to fight against the coalition forces of *Baherä* Nägaš Yeshaq and the Turkish *Paša*, Ozdemir, who

¹⁸²J. Spencer, Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*,..., p.81.

¹⁸³Informants: *Mägabè-Ser'at* Hagos Haylä interviewed at the town of Mäkkhonni on 19/3/2010; Sheikh Mahdi Yasin interviewed in Mayčäw on 18/12/2009; Sheikh Adäm Abdäleqader interviewed in Mayčäw on 5/2/2010.

had stationed themselves in the adjacent highlands of Enda Mäkhonni sub-provine (or the Mountain Region as designated in this research work).¹⁸⁴

When we come back to the former issue the terrain extending longitudinally north and south of this marketplace, Solloqua, is a natural boundary between the Fertile Valley and the arid Afar lowlands. For this reason the Solloqua weekly market is reported to have provided the opportunity for contact between all peoples of the adjacent regions. Furthermore, as it was one of the biggest market centers of northeast Ethiopia, it was said to have been serving as a place where most locally produced goods were bartered, consumer items ferried from distant places were distributed to consumers and at the same time surplus local products were collected for delivery to regions where they were in high demand.¹⁸⁵

The Solloqua market massacre seems to be still fresh in the memory of the people particularly those who claim to be that they are the direct descendants of the Dobe'a. For this very reason the Solloqua incident is bitterly remembered as one of the single bloodiest episodes in the long history of social conflict in that region. Subsequent to the Solloqua massacre the Oromo continued to attack major Dobe'a settlements which culminated in the death of some prominent religious and political leaders of the society such as Sheikh Seid Kurawale and the famous jurist and theologian- *Faqih* Mussa.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴Merid W.Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia and the Christian Kingdom 1508-1708, with Special Reference to the Galla Migrations and their Consequences," Ph.D. Dissertation in History, University of London, 1971, p.205.

¹⁸⁵Informants: *Mägabè Ser'at* Hagos Haylä interviewed at the town of Mäkhonni on 19/03/2010; Sheikh Mahdi Yasin interviewed in Maycäw on 18/12/2009; Sheikh Adäm Abdälqader interviewed in Maycäw on 05/02/2010.

¹⁸⁶Informant: Sheikh Suläyman Abella interviewed at Gärijälä on 16/03/2010; Sheikh Nur-Hussein Enderis interviewed at Mäkhan on 7/02/2010; Sheikh Adäm Abdälqader interviewed in Maycäw on 8/02/2010; Kemal Abdulehab, "Critical edition, Analysis and Annotated Translation of Kitab Al-Tarikh Al-Anni of Raya (c.1769-1883); with the Study of His Life, Literature and Shrine," Ph.D. Dissertation in Philology, Addis Ababa University, 2012, p.14.

Sometime after the death of Seid Kurawale, his tomb had been transformed into a sanctuary, a place of ritual practices as well as a center of local pilgrimage. Moreover, the vicinity where his tomb lies, found at a locality called Mächarä, has come to be called Kurawale as it was named after him by the succeeding generation in honor him. The same is true for *Faqih* Mussa and others who are highly revered as saints by the local society up until the present time.¹⁸⁷

After they sustained heavy casualties, in the face of intensive Oromo onslaught, Dobe'a resistance instantly collapsed. As can be conceived from later developments, which unfolded following the wars between the Dobe'a and Oromo, it appears that the former were shocked and terrified by the traumatic experience they suffered at the Solloqua incident. Shortly afterwards, the Dobe'a had found themselves in a state of confusion and disarray; a situation where let alone to reorganize and defend their territory so as to maintain their internal autonomy and relative independence, they could not even manage to collect and move their property with them to where they were hastily fleeing.¹⁸⁸

In connection to this it should be noted that surprise assaults and night-time ambushes could most probably be the plausible answers for the question as to how the Dobe'a, people who managed to surmount the armies of a highly organized Christian state, easily surrendered to an adversary of their own cultural level in terms of organization like the Oromo. Oral informants have related in this connection that the moment when the Dobe'a were subjected to Oromo military assault, they fled their respective settlement quarters leaving behind their cattle. Hence,

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Informants: Sheikh Suläyman Abella interviewed at Gärrälä on 16/03/2010; Sheikh Adäm Abdälqader interviewed in Maycäw on 8/02/2010; Priest Hagos Haylä interviewed at the town of Mäkhonni on 19/03/2010; Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan interviewed in Koräm on 28/2/2010.

oral tradition of the area has it that the Oromo had found numerous herds of cattle in the wilderness, abandoned by the pepole, who were hurriedly running away to different directions.¹⁸⁹

Therefore, as a consequence of the Oromo invasion, a portion of the Dobe'a were said to have been to all intents and purposes vanquished; some were driven out from the Fertile Valley to adjacent areas and the remaining were believed to have been absorbed by the Oromo. However, a considerable number of the Dobe'a, who did not suffer captivity or death at the hands of the Oromo, had to flee, at least temporarily, from the Fertile Valley to two main directions: the Mountain Region in the west and the arid Afar lowlands in the east.¹⁹⁰ According to some pertinent source documents, produced in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Dobe'a were organized under twenty-four different clans each having its own *šum* or a leader as they solely occupied the entire areas of the Fertile Valley.¹⁹¹

It is imperative to note in this connection, excluding those, who were massacred and absorbed by the advancing Oromo, it is reported that a large segment of the Dobe'a society had moved east to the dry Afar lowlands and presumably melted into the pastoral Afar, who were their ancestral kinsmen and co-religionists. However, members of some clans had moved west, seemingly in a disorganized fashion, towards the Mountain Region, where the sedentary Christian Tegrean society had entirely inhabited for centuries since very ancient times, who would in time

¹⁸⁹Informants: Sheikh Suläyman Abella interviewed at Gärijälä on 18/3/2010; Ato Dargä Šamä interviewed at Jehan on 14/3/2010; Ato Barènto Lägässä interviewed at Kara Addi Šabo on 17/3/2010; C. Conti Rossini, "I Galla Raia," *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* (1940) Vol. XVIII, p.60. In here Conti Rossini claims that soon after they had arrived in the Fertile Valley, the Oromo found numerous wild cattle, in a no man's land, domesticated and subsequently divided them among different clans; but what he misunderstood is that the area was not unsettled and the cattle they found belonged to the Dobe'a.

¹⁹⁰J. Spencer, Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*,...,p. 81.; Merid Wolde Aregay, *Population Movement as...*, pp.274-275.; informants: Sheikh Adäm Abdälqader interviewed in Mayčäw on 8/2/2010; Sheikh Mahdi Yasin interviewed in Mayčäw on 18/2/2009; Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan interviewed in Koräm on 28/2/2010.

¹⁹¹Francisco, Alvarez, *The Prester John of...*, p. 194.

reorganize themselves into seven cohesive clans and dominate the region for at least the coming three centuries.¹⁹²

In relation to this point it should be clearly stated that before this time the escarpment, which extends all the way from Wäjjarat in the north to the southwest of the Alamaṭa-Qobbo plains in the south, had precisely delineated a borderline between the elongated valley, located east of the aforementioned escarpment, which was entirely dominated by Dobe'a Muslims; and the Mountain Region, situated immediately to the west of that same escarpment, which had been dominated by sedentary Christian Tегreans. Therefore, the Dobe'a, as shown above, had never set a permanent foothold in the Mountain Region, before they were displaced by the Oromo population movement, except in rare cases, where they had sometimes ascended the escarpment for short durations to ravage Christian settlements.¹⁹³

Whatever the case may be upon being pushed by the Oromo, the seven Dobe'a clans had in turn pushed the sedentary Christian Tегreans from the rich agricultural and pasture lands of what we call today Ofla and Enda Mäkhonni districts. The impact of spillover of the population pressure caused by the Oromo seems to have affected other neighboring societies as well such as the Agäw, who had been residing in the western fringes of both districts. It can be argued, as some circumstantial evidence show, that it was probably during this time that the Tегreans in turn had

¹⁹²J.Spencer, Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*,..., p.81.; Informants: Sheikh Mahdi Yasin interviewed in Maycäw on 18/12/2009; Sheikh Adäm Abdälqader interviewed in Maycäw on 5/2/2010.

¹⁹³Luis, Haber, "The Chronicle of..." , pp.72-75.; Merid Wolde Aregay, *Population Movement as...* ,pp.274-275.; J. Spencer, Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*,..., p.81.

to push their Agäw neighbors further west into the valleys of the lower courses of the various tributaries of the Tākāzzä River.¹⁹⁴

After pushing from their settlements of the Tegreans west of the main agricultural regime, the seven Dobe'a clans had carved out for themselves an enclave in the Mountain Region, which stretched all the way from the southern frontiers of Ofla district to the northern limits of Enda Mäkhonni district (along the border with Emba Alajā district) in the north.¹⁹⁵ Although we do not exactly know the reason why Emba Alajā was the only district in the Mountain Region, which was spared from Muslim Dobe'a invasion, it was presumably owing to the stubborn resistance they faced that they could not penetrate further north into this district and beyond.

Consequently, unlike in its southern counterparts, Ofla and Enda Mäkhonni, Islam as religion and Muslims as followers of that religion, are still not found in the entire rural areas of the district of Emba Alajā. It was only in the districts capital, Addi Šeho, where one can find a significant number of Muslim populations today. It is interesting to note in this connection that informants relate Islam was introduced into Emba Alajā, very recently, in conjunction with the foundation of Addi Šeho as a small weekly market town around the middle of the 1940s during the Italian occupation period. The Muslims at the time came as merchants trading in and

¹⁹⁴Towards the west of Enda Mäkhonni and Ofla districts we find places, whose name entails Agäweña, such as Särānga, Šärqāba and Nāqsāga denoting the fact that the area was, prior to this period, settled by some Agäw community.

¹⁹⁵Informants: Sheikh Nur-Hussein Ederis interviewed at Mäkhonni on 7/2/2010; Priest Tadssä Bärhä interviewed at Addi Abo Mussa on 25/2/2010; Ato Mohamed Neguss interviewed at Hegum Berda on 26/2/2010; Sheikh Nurudaim Awäle interviewed at Hašängä on 26/2/2010; Kebrom Assafa, *Yä Raya Hezeb...*, p. 34.

exchanging small items. But then even today of the entire residents of this town the number of Muslim population, as compared to their Christian counterparts, is so small.¹⁹⁶

Having been surprised and over powered by Oromo warriors, the Dobe'a, unable to withstand the attack, were forced to flee from their long established settlements in the Fertile Valley to the adjacent regions particularly to the Afar lowlands in the east and to the Mountain Region in the west. With respect to a section of the Dobe'a society, which descended to the Afar lowlands, it is reported, and it is can be rightly imagined, that they easily and immediately intermingled with the Afar as the latter were their ancestral relatives and their co-religionists. Therefore, it seems more likely that the whereabouts of them was unknown ever since they moved to this area.¹⁹⁷

Whereas, with respect to those seven Dobe'a' clans, who moved to the Mountain Region, where there had been a well- established, entrenched and thickly settled sedentary Christian Tegrean settlement, they had fought hard and eventually dislodged them from Ofla and Enda Mäkhonni districts to the fringes of the up lands of May Ma'edo and Näqsägä which were/are relatively less productive in terms of cereal production and animal husbandry.¹⁹⁸

In any case, soon after they had established permanent settlement in their new abode, *Hijra*, which in Arabic means migration,¹⁹⁹ had become a place name to several localities in Ofla and Enda Mäkhonni districts of the Mountain Region. Today, one can, for example, find *Hijra* at

¹⁹⁶Informants: *Ato Šägay Aräfaynä* interviewed in Addi Šeho on 3/1/2000; *Ato Heluf Gäbru* interviewed in Addi Šeho on 4/1/2000; *Mälaka-Mehrat* Alamu Wäldä-Michael interviewed at Wägällän on 3/13/1999; *Ato Kiros Kassa* interviewed at Ayba on 26/12/2000.

¹⁹⁷Informants: *Ato Wayu Kube* interviewed at Kukufto on 15/3/2010; *Ato Kiros Khabrä* interviewed at Mächarä on 21/3/2010; *Ato Gobä Abdu* interviewed at Kara Addi Šabo on 22/3/2010; *Ato Negussä Šaynä* interviewed at the town of Mäkhonni on 20/3/2010.

¹⁹⁸Informants: *Ato Šägay Equar* interviewed at Hegum Berda on 26/2/2010; *Ato Bärhä Alämayähu* interviewed at Addi Gollo on 29/2/2010; *Ato Eyasu Kebäde* interviewed at Mänkära on 27/2/ 2010; Priest *Tadässä Bärha* interviewed at Addi Abo Mussa on 24/2/2010; Sheikh *Mohamed Bäyan* interviewed in Koräm on 28/2/2010; Sheikh *Adäm Abdäleqader* interviewed in Maycäw on 8/2/2010.

¹⁹⁹K. Hitti, Philip, *History of the Arabs...*, p.116.

Wärabayä, base of the escarpment, at Mäkhan, at Tahtäy Haya as well as in Maycäw and its environs. But one can also find a place called Ajjura in the northern suburbs of the town of Maycäw which is at a stone's throw away from where Raya University is recently established. Some informants believe that the name of this place (also name of a big hamlet) was originally *Hijra* but has somewhat been deformed by Tegrëña speakers, who later dominated the area, in an attempt to make sense out of it, ended up in producing a completely distorted sound as compared to the original term.²⁰⁰

In a similar manner one may also find places known as Mäqaber Fänkeh, a locality found some twenty kilometers south of the modern town of Maycäw; and Däbbar, a mountain pass situated, along what had been once a caravan trail, at exactly the eastern foot hills the towering heights of Färrah Emba. Both places carry corrupted Arabic names, which in the accurate sense of these terms, while the former denotes 'tomb of the *Faqih*' the latter stands for a personal name in Arabic- Jobbir/Sheikh Jobbir. He was said to have been a powerful Dobe'a clan chief, who was responsible for dislodging the Tigreans from that locality and subsequently established his own settlement in their place. Shortly after his death, it is claimed; his tomb had been turned into a shrine and a place of ritual sacrifice.²⁰¹

The reason why the various Dobe'a clans had named *Hijra* their new settlement places was simply to denote that they emigrated from the Fertile Valley to the Mountain Region.²⁰² This was obviously done in accordance with the established belief of Islamic tradition. In other words, the

²⁰⁰Informants: *Ato* Bärhä Adhäna interviewed at Emba Hasty on 11/2/2010; *Ato* Berhanu Färadä interviewed at Šebät on 12/2/2010; Sheikh Nur-Hussein Edris interviewed in Maycäw on 7/2/2010; Sheikh Adäm Abdäleqader interviewed in Maycäw on 5/2/2010; *Mämher* Mohamed Bärhä interviewed in Maycäw on 16/12/2009; *Märgèta* Bärhä Haddes interviewed at the compound of the church of Yohannes Šebät on 12/2/2010.

²⁰¹*Ibid.*

²⁰²Informants: *Mämher* Mohamed Bärhä interviewed in Maycäw on 16/12/2009; Sheikh Mahdi Yasin interviewed at Maycäw on 18/2/2009; Sheikh Nur-Hussein Edris interviewed at Mäkhn on 7/2/2010.

emigration of the Dobe'a from the Fertile Valley to the Mountain Region was likened to the historic emigration, which took place in the first two decades of the seventh century A.D.²⁰³, of the ninety-four families from Mecca to Ethiopia as well as the emigration of the prophet himself along with his two-hundred followers from Mecca to Medina to escape active religious and political persecution at home.²⁰⁴

It is interesting to note in this connection that according to the suggestion of some secondary materials written on the early history of Islam and the views of some prominent Islamic scholars, contacted in the study area and in Addis Ababa, whenever Muslims are denied, at any time, freedom of worship, Islam's proper reactions would be either to resort to waging an armed-struggle (or *jihad*) or else if that does not materialize to flee from their long-established habitant to somewhere else where believers could enjoy to practice their belief freely.²⁰⁵

Shortly after they had occupied parts of the Mountain Region, stretching from northern Alamaṭa to southern Emba Alajä, the Dobe'a called their new abode as *Šäw'atä Emba* (ሻወጥተ ለምባ). The *seven embas* had comprised a stretch of territory, as listed below from south to north, Ofla, Hašängä, Mänkärä, Haya, Mäkhan, Hezba and Qaran Godba. Moreover, the *seven embas* had symbolic representation of the seven Dobe'a clans that were displaced from the Fertile Valley and settled in the Mountain Region in the wake of the Oromo conquest.²⁰⁶

²⁰³Ibid.

²⁰⁴L.Esposito, John, *Islam: the Straight...*, P.8.

²⁰⁵Informants: Sheikh Hezbulah Mohamed Amin interviewed at Jehan on 8/3/2010; Ato Adäm Kamile interviewed in Addis Ababa on 20/4/2010; K.Hitti, Philip, *History of the Arabs...*, P.117.

²⁰⁶Kebrom Asefa, *Yä Raya Hezeb...*, p.36; informants: Sheikh Nurdaim Awäle interviewed at Hašängä on 26/2/2010; Sheikh Mahdi Yasin interviewed in Maycäw on 20/2/2009; Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan interviewed at Addi Abo Gošu on 25/2/ 2010; *Märgèta* Därbäw Gäbrähiwät interviewed at Hašängä; Ato Ṭegabu Zägäyä interviewed at Addi Abo Mussa on 25/2/2010.

The whole chain of Dobe'a settlements, which extended from north to south, for about eighty kilometers, were united not merely by their common faith in Islam but also by their common ancestry, shared culture and history and most importantly by the pressing concern and the need for the establishment of a collective security system as they had now found themselves in a zone, which straddles territories, inhabited by two of their formidable rivals: the Oromo in the east and the Tegreans in the west.²⁰⁷

Upon the establishment of permanent settlement in different localities of the Mountain Region, the seven Dobe'a clans had created a distinctive as well as a highly organized system of public administration, administration of justice, organization of war and even management of funeral procession. In connection to this it is reported that the Dobe'a had fashioned an overarching socio-political organization by which its seven different constituent elements had been operating under the umbrella of a single authority while at the same time each clan had had the freedom to deal with matters that concerned specifically to each one of the members of the confederations of clans. In other words, each clan/*emba* had been, in its own right, a self-contained social and political unit in matters specific to itself.

Be that as it may, so as to deal with matters that required to be governed centrally each of the seven *embas*/clans was required to select and send unspecified number of representatives, who were known for their honesty, dispute resolution skill, general knowledge about society and environment, endurances as well as organization and leadership of warfare, to the annual gathering venue. The regular meeting place was located in the green meadows, which lies on

²⁰⁷Informants: *Ato* Muṣṭafā Abdālehaji interviewed at Hašāngä on 26/2/2010; *Ato* Machä Adhäna interviewed at Mäkhan on 7/2/2010; Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan interviewed in Koräm on 28/2/2010; *Liqä-Kahnat* Hadära Täsfay interviewed at *Emba* Hasty on 11/2/2010; *Ato* Hades Abraha interviewed at Mäkhn on 7/2/2010; *Ato* Čago Alämä interviewed at Hašāngä on 23/2/2010.

the eastern shores of Lake Hašängä. This meeting place, Abbinas, was chosen not because of the fact that it was located at an average distance from each *emba* which would qualify it to be convenient for all to easily walk and reach on the meeting place on time but by virtue of its significance as a burial ground for a certain most respected and revered sheikh whose name, *Abununas*, means, as informants claimed, ‘the father of all’. Ever since he was buried there, the surrounding locality is claimed to have assumed the name Abbinas which is the corrupted form of his Arabic name.²⁰⁸

The principal purpose of this annual gathering was claimed to be basically three: to enact laws, to oversee whether such laws, enacted by the legislative assembly were accurately applied by each *emba*, as well as to amend the laws, if a need arises to do so from the general assembly, which were put in place by the previous gathering. In this annual meeting, it is reported, that all issues of outstanding societal concern including defense, land holding system, management of grazing lands, marriage arrangements, dowry, divorce, rape, land litigation, theft, and so forth, which could be a potential source of conflict, between individual persons and the society at large were meticulously discussed at the general assembly and specific legal instruments were put in place for resolving each case.²⁰⁹

When representatives of a given clan set out to travel to the venue of the meeting, Abbinas, annually, they were well aware of that each *emba* would come with a sterile cow (*mäkhan lahmi*). According to the view of the society under investigation and most probably the Ethiopian society at large the meat of an infertile cow was/is preferred to the meat of a fertile cow or that of

²⁰⁸Informants: Sheikh Mahdi Yasin interviewed in Maycäw on 17/2/2009; Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan interviewed in Koräm on 28/2/2010; Sheikh Nurdaim Awäle interviewed at Hašängä on 26/2/2010; Sheikh Nur-Hussein Edris interviewed in Maycäw on 10/2/2010.

²⁰⁹*Ibid.*; Kibrom Asefa, *Yä Raya Hezeb...*, pp.34-35.

an ox. Generally they come to the meeting place, Abbinas, having a total of seven cows before the meeting had convened.²¹⁰

All the cows were slaughtered at once; thereafter each *emba* (clan) would share the cooked cow meat with each of its six counterparts. In other words, if for instance Hezba, one of the constituting seven *embas*, were the first to give the meat prepared to members (representatives) of Ofla, Hašängä, Mänkärä, Mäkhan, Haya and Qaran Godba, the remaining six *embas* would then follow suit on a turn by turn basis. In the second meal, members of each *emba*/clan would consume the food which was left-over after the distribution. The symbolism of collective meals, consumed over the course of two days, was a sign of peace, love, unity and solidarity to all the seven clans.²¹¹

Towards the closing session of the two-day annual meeting three persons, from each *emba*, were selected to make a speech regarding the overall conditions of the annual congregation. The Dobe'a were well-aware of the power of speech by which common understanding and thereby peaceful co-existence could be attained among individual members of their society and for that matter among members of some other society outside of their enclave.²¹² To put it differently; the Dobe'a, like other traditional African societies had very well recognized the powers of speech as a guarantor of peaceful-co-existence and mutual support in such a way that among

²¹⁰Informants: *Hajji Ibrahim Hussein* interviewed at Mäkhan on 18/2/2009; *Ato Ali Mohamed* interviewed at Mäkhn on 18/2/2009; *Ato Berhanu Mängäša* interviewed at Tahtäy Haya on 29/12/2009.

²¹¹Kibrom, Asefa, *Yä Raya Hezeb...*, p.36; informants: *Sheikh Mustäfa Ararso* interviewed at Tahtäy Haya on 29/12/2009; *Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan* interviewed at Addi Abo Gošu on 25/2/2010; *Ato Kahsay Bärhä* interviewed at Tahtäy Haya on 29/2/2009.

²¹²Informants: *Ato Mustäfa Abdäla Hajji* interviewed at Addi Abo Musa on 26/2/2010; *Sheikh Mahdi Yasin* interviewed in Maycäw on 28/2/ 2010; *Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan* interviewed at Addi Abo Gošu on 25/2/ 2010.

other things: "...speech creates, transforms, and destroys what already exists. Speech saves, it has the power to manage men, restore and maintain peace."²¹³

In the sphere of the administration of justice the Dobe'a society is reported to have achieved remarkable success. Each *emba*/clan had assigned three judges to resolve disputes, be it a civil or a criminal case, as much as possible, in a manner, which would satisfy the parties involved in a conflict. However, if a certain person was not satisfied with the decision of the local jury, he/she was entitled to appeal to the nearby *emba*, as for example in the case of Hašängä to Ofla or Mänkärä, or as in the case of Mäkhan to Haya or Hezba but if he/she is not still happy with such decision, he/she could appeal to Qaran Godba, an *emba* (clan) situated in the northern most part of the Dobe'a territory, found towards the northeastern part of where the present day town of Maycäw is located. This was an *emba* where judges, represented from all the seven *embas*/clans, would come together to give verdict on cases referred to them for adjudication. The decision of this higher community tribunal was final and binding; in other words there was no appeal to the decision passed by this court.²¹⁴

In connection to the administration of justice informants have related to me one interesting and puzzling court case. Though the story appears to be a myth, it is presented here as one of the relevant issues because informants have insisted that this was a fact which attests the collective wisdom of the Dobe'a society. The story deals with an anonymous person from Ofla, the southernmost *emba*/clan of the Dobe'a confederation that he had dreamt about, in the previous night, one of his neighbors had had sexual intercourse with his wife and took the case to the local court accusing the latter of adultery. Upon hearing the case, the court in Ofla decided that the

²¹³Bulletin of African Study Monographs Vol. 37, no. 1, p. 17.

²¹⁴Informants: *Ato Färäjja Aman* interviewed at Tahtäy Haya on 29/12/2009; *Ato Ali Mohamed* interviewed at Mäkhan on 7/2/2010; *Sheikh Mustäfa Ararso* interviewed at Tahtäy Haya on 29/2/2009.

defendant should give the plaintiff one cow in compensation for the damage he had suffered. However, the plaintiff was not satisfied with the decision of the local court in Ofla and appealed to the nearby court in Hašängä; but the court in Hašängä approved the decision of the Ofla court.²¹⁵

The plaintiff still unsatisfied took the case to the highest court in Qaran Godba. The court in Qaran Godba upon hearing the case ordered the defendant to give seven cows in compensation to the plaintiff. But before they handed over the cows to the plaintiff, the judges took the parties to the edge of a water reservoir along with the seven cows. They then told the plaintiff to take the mirror reflection of the seven cows in compensation for the alleged damage he had suffered and they told the defendant to take the real cows. When the plaintiff complained, the judges told him that he was under illusion in that he could not distinguish between a dream and a reality similar to the image of the cows which appeared on the surface of that water body.²¹⁶

The second area of focus, which had attained sufficient attention like other societal affairs, was the application of efficient and fairer public administration and proper management of natural resources. That was the reason why throughout the ages their legislative council had continuously instituted on how to resolve criminal cases such as murder, rape, theft as well as civil ones, which would arise particularly from, the use and management of grazing lands, foests and water points through just and fair means of administration of justice. The Dobe'a

²¹⁵Informants: *Ato* Ali Mohamed interviewed at Mäkhan on 10/2/2010; *Hajji* Ibrahim Hussein interviewed at Mäkhan on 11/2/2010; Sheikh Mustäfa Ararso interviewed at Tahtäy Haya on 29/2/2010.

²¹⁶*Ibid.*

community strongly believed that the prevalence of good governance and a working justice system would help strengthen the intra and inter-clan harmony among the seven confederates.²¹⁷

Moreover, the establishment of a collective defense mechanism was also a matter of top priority to the Dobe'a society as a whole. Surrounded by two powerful foes, the Oromo in the east and the Tegreans in the west, the seven Dobe'a clans/*embas* had always been vulnerable to attacks. That was the reason why to the Dobe'a, who had always been under a constant security pressure, forming a strong defense mechanism had, for a long period of time in their history, taken precedence over other societal needs.²¹⁸

For the seven clans as a whole it was one of the principal mechanisms of survival strategies. Informants reported that the terms of agreement entered between the seven *embas*/clans of the Dobe'a in establishing a joint defense system for the whole society was clearly aimed at achieving one common objective which they stated it in terms such as that if one or two *embas*/clans had come under attack from either of the two directions, the remaining five or six clans/*embas* would come to assist them. In that way they succeeded in defending themselves from a number of invasions directed against them.²¹⁹

Side by side with the organization of a strong defense system against their adversaries, the Dobe'a, who were also well aware of the necessity of resolving conflicts through peaceful negotiations, had to be part and parcel of an overall defense strategy rather than being embroiled, all the time, in a protracted and costly war. As repeatedly mentioned above, the Dobe'a had been

²¹⁷Kibrom Asefa, *Yä Raya Hezeb...*, p.34-36; Informants: Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan interviewed Koräm on 28/2/2010; Sheikh Nur-Hussein Edris interviewed at Mäkhan on 7/2/2010.

²¹⁸Ibid.

²¹⁹Informants: Sheikh Nurdaim Awäle interviewed at Hašängä on 26/2/2010; Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan interviewed at Addi Abo Gošu on 25/2/2010; Sheikh Mušāfa Ararso interviewed at Tahtäy Haya on 29/12/2009; Ato Kahsay Bärhä interviewed at Tahtäy Haya on 29/12/2009.

at war with the Oromo since the period when the latter had conquered and displaced them from the Fertile Valley. Nevertheless, the conflict between the two communities was intensified particularly beginning from the last two decades of the seventeenth century to the down of the nineteenth. At this juncture the Oromo had inflicted heavy damage on the Dobe'a.²²⁰

Consequently, the latter were said to have lost battle after battle in which a number of their notable warriors such as Mohamed Habalä and his companions were killed. As a result the Dobe'a were forced to take the initiative for a peaceful settlement of the dispute with their Oromo rivals. However, it should be taken into account that the protracted war, fought between the two societies, seems to have caused the diminution of each other's human and material resources; and it must have given them the primary motivation to be committed to a peaceful resolution of the dispute. Consequently, peace between the belligerent societies was brokered by the learned men of the Dobe'a, clan chiefs as well as by the few Oromo, who were then converted to Islam, on condition that each side had to be committed for an immediate cessation of hostilities and, above all, to establish permanent solidarity by overcoming the previous socio-political contradictions that existed between them.²²¹

Since they had frequently been penetrating each other's territories, first and for most, they agreed to draw a clear line of demarcation between the realm of the Dobe'a and that of the Oromo in that places where the olive tree grows would be, thenceforth, exclusively owned by the former whereas places in which varieties of the acacia tree grow would, in its entirety, belong to the latter. In other words, while the Oromo had recognized the two Mountain Region districts, Ofla

²²⁰Informants: Sheikh Mahdi Yasin interviewed in Maycäw on 18/2/2009; Sheikh Nur-Hussein Edris interviewed at Mäkhan on 7/2/2010; Ato Mohamed Negus interviewed at Hegum Berda on 26/2/2010; Ato Färäja Aman interviewed at Tahtäy Haya on 29/12/2009.

²²¹Ibid.

and Enda Makhonni, as legitimate Dobe'a territory, the latter, on their part, had agreed to accept that the whole Fertile Valley, east of the escarpment, would be the dominion of their Oromo counterpart. Moreover, the Dobe'a and the Oromo had also made a pact that enabled members of each group of society to participate in each other's marketplaces so as to exchange locally produced goods and services.²²²

So, through the intervention of such mediators the Dobe'a were eventually reconciled with the Oromo and hence from that time on the two communities started to live together a harmonious life and after years of war, a lasting peace prevailed between the two rivals. Following the agreement ending the war representatives of the Oromo were invited to attend the annual gathering at Abbinas regularly held towards the end of the first month of the Ethiopian New Year. At the Abbinas meeting the Dobe'a and the Oromo had made a pact with each other to live in concord. Under the terms of the Abbinas treaty of 1817, a final agreement was reached between them that had eventually transformed the overall inter-ethnic relations to a higher level of harmony than before.²²³

Based on this pact both sides had also agreed that the Oromo would be one constituent element of the seven Dobe'a confederates in that shortly afterwards their dual alliance came to be called as “*šäwe'atä emba šämenay galla*” (ሸውዓተ ለምባ ሸምናይ ዓላ) literally meaning the alliance of the seven Dobe'a clans in the Mountain Region with the Oromo principality in the Fertile Valley. From this episode onwards the intermingling of the Oromo and Dobe'a peoples was followed by extensive exogamous intermarriage, which from time to time became so common, as well as the

²²²Kebrom Asefa, *Yä Raya Hezeb...*, p.86. ; Informants: Ato Kahsay Bärhä interviewed at Tahtäy Haya on 29/12/2009; Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan interviewed in Koräm on 28/2/2010.

²²³Kebrom Asefa, *Yä Raya Hezeb...*, p.86.; Informants: Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan interviewed in Koräm on 28/2/2010; Sheikh Nurdaim Awäle interviewed at Hašängä on 26/2/2010; Ato Ali Mohamed interviewed at Mäkhan on 7/2/2010.

sharing of each other's socio-cultural and political world-views epitomized principally by performing in each other's ritual practices.²²⁴

Reconciliation between the two communities had ushered in freedom of movement of people and animals from the Fertile Valley to the Mountain Region and the other way round. In this circumstance whenever crises of any kind had occurred in any one of these places people took refuge, temporarily or permanently, as deemed necessary, in either of the two altitudinal zones. For instance, in times of war people used to move from a conflict zone to a safe haven; while in times of drought and famine people and animals shifted their habitat from areas of scarcity to areas of plenty; and in times of the eruption of epidemic diseases people as well as animals migrated from disease ridden places to healthy ones.²²⁵

The other issue which the seven confederates of the Dobe'a, *šäwe'atä emba*, used to forge a strong bond among themselves was through the custom of burying their dead bodies in a common cemetery (common burial ground). If, for example, someone from anyone of the seven *embas*/clans passed away, the corpse would be buried only at a place called May Aboqolä'au, for which that particular place came to assume the name '*qabri šäwe'atä emba*'- literally means 'tomb of the seven Dobe'a clans'. Geographically, this area is situated between La'eläy Haya and Tahtäy Haya or more precisely it is found at a distance of some five kilometers north of the

²²⁴Ibid.

²²⁵Informants: Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan interviewed in Koräm on 28/2/2010; Sheikh Nur-Hussein Edris interviewed at Mäkhan on 7/2/2010; Sheikh Suläiman Abella interviewed at Gärijälä on 18/3/2010; *Hajji* Ibrahim Hussein interviewed at Mäkhan on 7/2/2010; Mustäfa Kunè interviewed at Façagama on 18/3/2010.

emerging town of Mäswa'et or some fifteen to twenty kilometers away from southern outskirts of the town of Mayčäw.²²⁶

This practice/tradition had continued, it is said, for unspecified long period of time. However, the death of a certain person by the name Sheikh Säide Abdäle Nure, whose residence was at a particular place called Addi Däwta around the northeastern shores of Lake Hašängä, had brought about a major shift in the tradition and practice of the handling of funeral processions in the future from that time onwards.²²⁷

In accordance to the custom of the society his relatives and mourners were heading carrying the dead body of Säide Abdäle Nure to be buried, in the common grave yard, at May Abo qolä 'au, situated at a distance approximately between fifteen to twenty kilometers north of the home village of the late person. However, in what informants have regarded and claimed to be a miraculous thing; the corpse turned out to be too heavy for them to carry once they laid it on the ground to take a momentary rest. Thereafter, informants related of having been worried so much so that they did not know what to do with the matter. But whenever they tried to move the corpse southwards rather than northwards to May Aboqolä'au, where the common cemetery was located, it had become so light for them that they easily managed to lift it from the ground and managed to carry it to where that corpse was eventually buried.²²⁸

To a deeply religious and quite superstitious society such as the Dobe'a, this was a sufficient ground to conclude that God did not like the practice of burying dead bodies in such common

²²⁶Informants: Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan interviewed at Addi Abo Gošu on 25/2/2010; *Hajji* Ibrahim Hussein interviewed at Mäkhan on 8/2/2010; *Ato* Edris Jämal interviewed at Kukufto on 9/3/2010; *Ato* Färäja Aman interviewed at Tahtäy Haya on 29/2/2009; Sheikh Mustäfa Ararso interviewed at Tahtäy Haya on 29/2/2009.

²²⁷Ibid.

²²⁸Informants: Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan interviewed in Koräm on 28/2/2010; Sheikh Mahdi Yasin interviewed in Mayčäw on 18/12/2009; Sheikh Nur-Hussein Edris interviewed at Mäkhan on 7/2/2010.

burial ground. As a result the dead body of Sheikh Säid Abdäle Nur was buried in a nearby cemetery so close to his death bed at Addi Däwta. Following this incidence an urgent general meeting of the Dobe'a assembly was convened and promptly decided unanimously that from that time onwards every *emba*/clan was allowed to bury its corpses in its own vicinity.²²⁹

In connection to this it is imperative to note that the purpose of dealing with this issue is not to prove the truth of issues of religion or traditional belief system of the society under investigation. This is obviously not a concern of academic scientific research. However, the basic reason for dwelling in some degree of detail on such issue was on the one hand to demonstrate how the various Dobe'a clans had developed a system of sharing the same cemetery, one type of behavioral symbol retained by the society for quite a long time that had served them to maintain group solidarity and cohesion; on the other hand in line with what J. Vansina has remarked, here, like in west Africa and elsewhere in the continent, gravesites are reported to be special places where 'historical records carved into the landscape' have always provided societies with a means to obtain adequate information which would help them substantiate their traditional history.²³⁰

In relation to this it is worth mentioning that the Dobe'a had adopted throughout their history a dynamic socio-political system which was always responsive to continuously changing political, economic and social circumstances. A case in point is the issue at hand; meaning when, for example, with probably the gradual increase in mortality rate, from time to time, it became very difficult to bear the tiresome as well as time consuming task particularly on the part of the Haya clan bearing the burden of grave preparation and supply of grave goods; as well as carrying

²²⁹Sheikh Adäm Abdälqader interviewed in Maycäw on 5/2/2010; Sheikh Nur-Hussein Edris interviewed in Mäkhan on 7/2/2010.

²³⁰Jan, Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, p. 46.

corpses, to the common burial ground at May Aboqolä'au, from as far away as Ofla, in the south and Ashära in the north, along the border between Enda Mäkhonni and Emba Alajä districts, the Dobe'a had never hesitated to abandon it once and for all though, as thoroughly discussed above, under the guise of religious justification and prophecy.²³¹

But as a shrine this particular area has, until today, continued to attract people from all over Muslim settlements (from different localities of the Fertile Valley and the Mountain Region) where they gather every year and feast by slaughtering sheep or goats and by roasting various grains to commemorate the dead.²³²

3.3. The Interface between the Dobe'a and the Tегreans.

At around the eighteenth century the Dobe'a had accomplished the occupation and thereby the establishment of permanent settlement in parts of the agriculturally rich middle highlands of the districts of Ofla and Enda Mäkhonni. The Tегreans, who were pushed out of their ancestral lands, began to dwell in the unfavorable relatively uncultivable localities, west of their former abode, such as the very steep slopes and cold upper highlands along the mountain rims of May Ma'edo and Näbäqsägä.²³³ From the point of view of agricultural productivity and livestock rearing the areas, where they took refuge, were found to be, by far, less productive than their former habitations had been.

²³¹Informants: Sheikh Käder Abdäleqader interviewed in Maycäw on 5/2/2010; Ato Mustäfa Abdäl Hajji interviewed at Addi Abo Mussa on 26/2/2010; Sheikh Nur-Hussein Idris interviewed at Mäkhan on 7/2/2010.

²³²*Ibid.*

²³³Evidence emanating from oral traditions, chronicles and travel accounts, already cited in different sections of this paper, confirm that the middle highlands of Ofla and Enda Mäkhonni were the habitat of Christian Tегrean society. Moreover, since 2013 an ongoing archaeological excavation and research around Lake Hašängä corroborates the argument that before they were pushed out by the Dobe'a by the 18th century this area was entirely dominated by the Tегreans.

At the time the Tegreans were left with one option in that they had to devise a new mechanism, which would enable them, on how to learn to adjust themselves to the conditions of their new settlement areas so as to meet particularly the changing circumstances in the sphere of environment and agro-ecology. First of all these people were displaced from an agro-ecological zone where they could diversify their crops and thereby increase variety to their meals to a place where they could cultivate only a mono-crop i.e. six-row barely.²³⁴

Worse than that their new settlement areas have/had, agriculturally speaking, involved more risks as compared to their former habitat. In other words, the farms on the heights were environmentally so hazardous that there was a very high probability, for example, where crops, sown in the entire fields, could be destroyed by hail stones at any time from germination to fruition. The other challenge associated with this area was the problem of monkeys, which lived in the cliffs, had savaged the crops whereby watchmen had to be posted to protect the crops from such animals. Soon after they planted their fields with crops, farming households in each hamlet were compelled to hire a group of young men to do such a job, who would eventually be compensated in the form of cash or in cereals, which had in turn caused them to incur additional economic costs.²³⁵

Furthermore, as most of the farmlands were/ are situated in the upper slopes of the heights, soils were washed away by runoff water during the rainy seasons. Consequently, each farming family was required to carry out a regular terracing activity on one's land before the onset of the rainy season. Furthermore, the farmlands on mountain tops were particularly exposed to the ravages of

²³⁴Informants: *Ato Ĉago Alämä* interviewed at Hašängä on 23/2/2010; Priest *Kahsay Sebhatu* interviewed at Mäkhan on 9/2/ 2010; *Ato Eyasu Kebäde* interviewed at Mänkärä on 27/2/2010; *Ato Šägay Equar* interviewed at Hegum Berda on 26/2/2010.

²³⁵Ibid.

locusts by which crops were lost to them entirely in some harvest seasons. Ever since the sedentary Christian Tегreans were pushed out of their long established habitat by the Muslim pastoral Dobe'a, endemic boundary disputes sporadically arose all along the contact zone between the two societies. At the initial contact between the two societies the Dobe'a had grown to be extremely territorial in that they used to kill any intruder who attempted to encroach upon their enclave.²³⁶ But as time proceeded more and more Tегrean individuals had begun to establish symbiotic social and economic relations with the Dobe'a which involved interaction, mutual support and peaceful-coexistence. This contact gradually led to the prevalence, though on a limited scale, of improved intergroup relations. The commencement of such intergroup contact on its part seems to have reduced intergroup tensions.²³⁷

So, from the limited initial contact they experienced with their Christian counterparts, the Dobe'a appear to have conceived the basic concept that to have amicable relations would bring them together whereas intergroup conflict would draw them apart. In other words, the effect of contact had created fertile grounds to increase the level of understanding, reciprocity and tolerance between members of the two societies.²³⁸

Consequently, this notion had tended to reinforce the rapprochement between the Dobe'a and the Tегreans that had eventually resulted in bringing about cooperative interdependence for both societies. Such being the case, shortly after they had ascended from the Fertile Valley to the Mountain Region, the economy of the Dobe'a was set on the course of transformation from a

²³⁶Informants: *Ato Kälali Gäbru* interviewed at Ajjura on 12/2/2010; *Ato Molla Alämayehu* interviewed at Mänkära on 27/2/2010; *Ato Bärrha Alämä* interviewed at Mäkära on 27/2/2010; *Ato Käbäddä Kahsay* interviewed at Hegum Berda on 26/2/2010.

²³⁷Ibid.

²³⁸Informants: *Ato Teḡabu Zägäyā* interviewed at Addi Abo Mussa on 25/2/2010; *Ato Čago Alämä* interviewed at Hašängä on 23/2/2010; Priest *Tadässä Bärahä* interviewed at Hašängä on 25/2/2010; Sheikh *Käder Abdäleqader* interviewed in Mayčäw on 5/2/2010.

purely pastoral way of life to sedentary agricultural practices whereby they needed the agricultural expertise of the Tегreens. Moreover, mention should be made that eversince they had moved to the middle highlands of Ofla and Enda Makhonni districts in the seventeenth century, the Dobe'a are said to have adopted from the Tегreens the *rist* system- the most dominant land tenure system among the Amhara-Tегrean highland cultivators from very early on up until the promulgation of the radical land reform in 1975.²³⁹

As a result, this situation had in turn enabled the Tегreas to gain access to Dobe'a land based on various kinds of sharecropping arrangements. Moreover, several Christian Tегrean farming households, who were suffering from acute shortage of land, tended to arrange marriage affiliation with Dobe'a Muslim persons. In connection to this circumstance oral informants have widely reported that a considerable number of Christian persons had given the hand of their daughters to Muslim Dobe'a men so as to acquire better quality farm land as well as to send their cattle to graze in the rich pasture lands controlled by the latter.²⁴⁰

But it should be noted that such intergroup relations, limited to interpersonal intermarriage and interpersonal economic ties, did not produce the required outcome of an altogether peaceful co-existence at a macro level. As discussed below in greater detail, social conflicts between the two societies had continued intermittently throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, before we deal with intergroup relations predominantly characterized by hostilities, let's consider a couple of cases on how the various sharecropping arrangements and

²³⁹Informants: Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan interviewed in Koräm on 28/2/2010; Priest Tadässä Bärhä interviewed at Hašängä on 25/2/2010; Ato Molla Kalayu interviewed at Hegum Berda on 26/2/2010; Ato Mohamed Negus interviewed at Hegum Berda on 26/2/2010; Ato Eyasu Kedäbe interviewed at Mänkärrä on 27/2/2010; *Liqä Kahnat* Hadära Täsfay interviewed at Emba Hasty on 11/2/2010; Ato Hades Abraha interviewed at Mäkhan on 7/2/2010.

²⁴⁰*Ibid.*

exogamous marriage had played a pivotal role in bringing about rapprochement, though on a limited scale, between the two societies that were at war for long.²⁴¹

Share-cropping through leased-land, locally known as *gerat-ṭebna*, is generally regarded as a mutually advantageous, voluntarily entered contractual relationship. Through this arrangement a shared crop is produced by combining in various ways the land, the oxen, labor and seed of the land owner and the tenant. Accordingly, based on the classification of the land into fertile, semi-fertile and poor the share of the tenant and the land owner varied from one-third to two-third.²⁴²

Hence, according to such an agreement now that the fertility of the soil had fallen under the category poor (*rāqiq*) the share of the tenant, in this case the Tegrean peasant, would be two-third provided that he contributed the labor, the seed as well as the oxen; But if the land was categorized as a semi-fertile (*ma'ekhālay*) the share of the tenant, provided that after both parties had contributed equally all means of production, would be half of the total crops harvested. Moreover, in the case of fertile land (*rāgude*), after the tenant (Tegrean peasant) had contributed all the labor, the seed, and the oxen he would share the crops produced equally at harvest time with the land owner in this case the Dobe'a. This sort of economic interdependence had enabled them to stay in touch with each other and further strengthen their social, economic and cultural ties.²⁴³

The second type of social relations between the Tegreans and the Dobe'a manifested itself via exogamous marriage, which had significantly channeled interaction between the two groups,

²⁴¹Informants: *Ato* Mānasbo Zālälāw interviewed at Mākhan on 7/2/2010; *Mälakä Sälam* Kalayu Däsälāñ interviewed at the compound of Täklāhaymnanot Mayčāw; *Re'esä Dābri* Haddes Bärhā interviewed at Bällota on 23/2/2010.

²⁴²*Ibid.*

²⁴³Informants: *Ato* Čago Alämā interviewed at Hašängä on 25/2/2010; Priest Tadässä Bärhā interviewed at Hašängä on 25/2/2010; *Ato* Machä Adhäna interviewed at Mākhan; *Ato* Alämu Bāyänä interviewed at Mayčāw on 14/12/2009.

who had maintained strict social restrictions for a long period of time. Many Tegrean families gave in marriage their daughters to rich Muslim persons so as to gain access to arable agricultural land as well as to send their cattle to graze in the rich pasture lands of the Dobe'a controlled territory.²⁴⁴

The other factor which is claimed to have stimulated Tegrean Christian families to intermarry with Muslim Dobe'a should be viewed from the vantage point of a cost-benefit-analysis model. In other words, the reason why they used to give the hand of their daughters to Muslim persons, without hesitation, has mainly to do with the fact that in terms of levels of economic productivity female children, as opposed to male children, were regarded as less productive; secondly and most importantly upon marriage a girl would take wealth out of the family in the form of oxen, cows, horses, mules, money ,etc. for on the basis of the Tegrean culture it is the family of the wife who must pay the dowry to her husband when they get married.²⁴⁵

Hence, it seems that it was for this reason that according to the views of some informants in the localities of Hasängä, Addi Gollo, Haya and Hezba several rich men, including some religious figures/sheikhs, were reported to have married more than two wives at a time of which, at least, two or three of them had been Tegrean females who were, it is commonly claimed, sought after because of their beauty and good-temper.²⁴⁶

In the meantime marriage largely between Muslim Dobe'a men and Christian Tegrean women became very common. In order to elaborate further this point it is advisable to consider the story

²⁴⁴Informants: Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan interviewed in Koräm on 28/2/2010; priest Kahsay Sebhatu interviewed at Mäkhan on 9/2/2010; *Ato Machä Adhäna* interviewed at Mäkhan on 7/2/2010; *Mälakä Sälam Kalayu Däsälän* interviewed at the compound of Täklähaymanot Maycäw on 14/12/2009.

²⁴⁵Ibid.

²⁴⁶Informants: Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan interviewed in Koräm on 28/2/2010; *Ato Färaja Aman* interviewed at Tahtäy Haya on 29/2/2010; Sheikh Mahdi Yasin interviewed in Maycäw on 18/12/2009.

of a certain Christian young woman, as a case study, by the name Tämärśa from May Ma'edo who was married, without her consent, to a certain Muslim Dobe'a man in Haśängä by the name Selä Hebbo through arranged marriage.²⁴⁷

By the time of her wedding she had converted to Islam and was subsequently commanded to carry out all activities that had to be done by a Muslim woman. As this was in this way, one Sunday morning she was instructed to grind grain which for a person like Tämärśa, a devout Christian sometime before her forced conversion into Islam, was a radical departure from the social norms to which she was accustomed.²⁴⁸

In connection to this it is interesting to note that the reason behind the acquisition of such type of belief system, among the Christian society, is fundamentally based on the tradition of the Orthodox faith whereby cutting wood, digging the ground, grinding flour, weeding, plowing and so forth, tasks considered as heavy work, is strictly prohibited to do on Saturdays, Sundays, the major saints' days in a month and major holidays as well. So, while she was on her grinding stone she sang a song in which she composed a poem of two verses which clearly show that she had bitterly resented the imposed marriage and the religious conversion that followed and generally the daily conditions of her life under the new environment:

ስእን ኣይ ስእን ድሓን ድሓን፣
ኣብፀሐኒ ዶ ሰንበት ኣብ ድጠሓን።²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷Informants: Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan interviewed at Addi Abo Gošu on 25/2/2010; *Ato* Mustäfa Abdäle Hajji interviewed at Addi Abo Mussa; Priest Tadässä Bärhä interviewed at Haśängä on 25/2/2010.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹Informants: Priest Tadässä Bärhä interviewed at Haśängä on 25/2/2010; Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan interviewed at Addi Abo Gošu; *Ato* Čago Alämä interviewed at Haśängä on 23/2/2010; Sheikh Nur- Hussein Edris interviewed on 7/2/2010; Sheikh Nurdaim Awäle interviewed at Haśängä on 26/2/2010.

Being alone without a guardian; in the absence of anyone to understand me,
I found myself grinding flour on Sundays.

Gradually the issue of intermarriage principally between Muslim men and Christian women and occasionally between Christian men and Muslim women became so pervasive in the Mountain Region. In the district of Ofla at a *qäbälè* called Addi Gollo, in an extreme case, where the son of a certain priest Hagos Woldä Giorgis, by the name Täsfay, was married to the daughter of *Gerazmach* Ambaw Ararso, who was one of the leading land rich Muslim persons in the locality. Informants relate in connection to this that a feast was organized at the home of *Gerazmach* Ambaw where the close relatives of Täsfay were invited.²⁵⁰

The meat of a sheep, slaughtered by a Muslim man, was given to him to eat in the presence of both relatives to make sure that he was sincerely converted to Islam. Shortly afterwards, Täsfay was given sufficient land together with an ox in addition to what he acquired as a dowry when he was married in a lavish marriage ceremony. It is reported that this phenomenon had become customary, for a long time, to the Muslim and Christian societies in the districts of Ofla and Enda Mäkhonni of the Mountain Region.²⁵¹

However, reversion from Islam to Christianity was reported to be a common phenomenon among those who were converted to get the benefits of land ownership particularly when everyone had got access to land particularly after the radical land proclamation of March 1975 decreed by the

²⁵⁰Informants: *Ato* Tämäsgän Amayä interviewed at Addi Gollo on 29/2/2010; Aräsa Eneyäw interviewed at Addi Gollo on 29/2/2010; Käbädä Kädänäw interviewed at Addi Gollo on 29/2/2010; Šäkolä Adhäna interviewed at Addi Gollo on 29/2/2010.

²⁵¹*Ibid.*

military regime. Men were said to have been so notorious for putting pressure over their wives to revert to Christianity after they had got what they wanted to get.²⁵²

After having given birth to some seven, eight, nine or more children, Muslim women negotiated from a weak position rather than from a strong position, as their chance of remarrying once again a new husband was very minimal; they were in most cases coerced to accept the harsh terms of their husbands which in the local Tegrēña vernacular goes as follows: ‘ከ’ ኸዚ እኸብረኪ ይእ ዋ ዕፃኸ እኸብርኒ’²⁵³ whose literal meaning is: “...so far I have respected you; it is now your turn to respect me...” which in other plain terms meant they were tacitly suggesting to their wives the idea that they were threatening them with divorce proposals unless the latter had embraced the religion of their husbands (Christianity) sooner or later.

As shown above the arrangement of exogamous marriages between Christian and Muslim persons was not out of respect or out of love for their spouses but to get economic gains and benefits out of that marriage arrangement. Nevertheless, towards the end of the twentieth century as the economic power of the Muslim Dobe’a diminished mainly with the nationalization of rural lands, it is reported that several Muslim families with the family of more than seven children were converted to Christianity. In some cases there were some families who were converted from Islam to Christianity with their grand-children and even with their great grand-children. Sometimes, however, some marriages were dissolved whenever wives refused to accept

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ Informants: *Ato Tämäsgän Amayä* interviewed at Addi Gollo on 29/2/2010; *Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan* interviewed at Addi Abo Gošu on 25/2/2010; *Ato Šäkolä Adhäna* interviewed Addi Gollo on 29/2/2010.

conversion from Islam to Christianity as such marriages were not, to begin with, marriages of love they were rather marriages of necessity.²⁵⁴

In general, as discussed above in greater detail, social intercourse between the two societies, though on a limited scale, gave rise to symbiotic social and economic relationships. However, it is also necessary to see the major episodes of conflict between the Dobe'a and Tigreans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries during the reigns of the two powerful emperors of the Ethiopian state namely Eyasu Adyam Sägäd and Yohannes IV.

After about more than three centuries, what eventually was called Raya-Azäbo had witnessed, once again, another large scale state led military campaign. Towards the end of the 1730s the Dobe'a from their newly established seven enclaves invaded the frontier areas; where they were reported to have killed the priests and burned the churches. At that time the contemporary ruler of the country was Eyasu Adyam Sägäd (r.1730-1755). In the meantime the emperor was fully and actively engaged in bringing a new bishop from Egypt as the incumbent bishop, *Abunä Krestodoulus*, had died in office.²⁵⁵

So as to attain such a major objective, which was by the standard of the time one of the highest state priorities, he raised a huge capital in the form of gold and formed a delegation of six persons composed of three expatriate Muslims, who were probably Arabs, as well as three Ethiopians. Shortly afterwards, the embassy was promptly dispatched to fetch a new bishop. Upon reaching the port, the delegation was intercepted and detained by the *naib* of Massawa who had also dispossessed the gold they had with them which would be used in payment for obtaining the said new bishop once they reached in Alexandria, Egypt. At that time the governor of central

²⁵⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵⁵Wallis, Budge, *A History of Ethiopia, Nubia,...*, p.455.

and northern Tegray was Mikael Sehul while the governor of much of eastern and southern Tegray including the sub-province of Enda Mäkhonni, as the sub-province of Raya-Azäbo was then known by such name, was a certain Wälido whose administrative center had been the immediate neighboring sub-province- Endärta.²⁵⁶

The Emperor ordered his subordinate, Mikael Sehul, to descend to Massawa and carry out a punitive military expedition against the *naib* but since the latter was secretly in league with the *naib*, he did not promptly act according to the desire and demands of the king. In due course the emperor decided to conduct the punitive military campaign in person- himself being a commander-in-chief of the imperial armed forces. The emperor's military plan was prepared in such a way that he would first march further north on to Massawa, attack the *naib* and secure the release of the detained delegation and then hastily move south towards Adwa so as to assault his disobedient and rebellious vassal-Michael Sehul.²⁵⁷

Nevertheless, while he was on his way to the Red Sea coast, he sojourned in Endärta for some time and learned from Wälido that the attack on the Christian community of the Mountain Region had culminated in the creation of a serious security concern whose consequence would be very grave if nothing was done on time. During the consultative meeting with Emperor Eyasu, Wälido had expressed grave concern about the Christian community's safety perhaps because the security situation seems to have reached a point beyond his capacity where he was not able to deal with the matter by deploying the forces at his disposal. In the meantime it was decided that the question of the security of this sub-region had to take precedence over other state concerns in

²⁵⁶*Ibid.* P.456.

²⁵⁷*Ibid.*

this case the release of the imprisoned delegates in Massawa as well as the subduing of an unruly sub-provincial governor such as Michael Sehul.²⁵⁸

As a result, the emperor had postponed the planned Massawa and Adwa campaigns to deal first with the Dobe'a and hence immediately turned south and launched a military assault from the rear in the direction of the Afar lowlands across the Fertile Valley where the imperial army had encountered a token resistance from some pastoralist Oromo clans, which was easily repulsed, while the army was marching to its main target areas in the Mountain Region.²⁵⁹

As Bā'edā Mariam had done to them three hundred years ago, the Dobe'a were now subjected to a serious military assault where the burning of villages, the killing of women, children and the elderly as well as cattle plundering including the looting of properties was committed by the mighty army of Emperor Eyasu. Shortly after having completed the campaign against the Dobe'a, the emperor along with his large army had returned to his capital, Gondar, but not before rebuilding the churches and monasteries devastated by the Muslim Dobe'a conquest.²⁶⁰

Moreover, the emperor had also built new churches in localities where they were exclusively and densely settled by the Dobe'a; a case in point is the Monastery of Täklāhaymanot Maycāw, whose establishment as a small parish church is highly associated with his name. It is probably for this reason that Emperor Eyasu is more popular in the oral traditions of the study area particularly among the clergy and knowledgeable Christian informants than any other ruler who

¹²⁹*Ibid.* p. 455-456.

²⁵⁹*Ibid.*

²⁶⁰*Ibid.*

was for one thing or another involved in the politico-religious affairs of this region.²⁶¹ Much later during the end of the nineteenth century Emperor Menilek II had raised this church to the status of a monastery, when he was returning victoriously from the glorious Battle of Adwa, he bestowed on it all the surrounding areas, situated near and far, to be its *gulti* land holdings.²⁶²

He had also furnished the new monastery with crosses, royal garments as well as several holy books including the voluminous golden gospel whose margin contains texts carrying a great deal of historical knowledge regarding the area under study and the country at large.²⁶³ The reason why the emperor became so generous for this particular church was because on his way to Adwa to fight the Italians, it is reported, all of a sudden many of his beasts of burden had fallen sick; but the ailing animals were instantly and miraculously cured upon drinking the holy waters found in the parameters of this church for which he was grateful.²⁶⁴

Intergroup hostility and subsequent human displacement, traded between the Muslim pastoralist Dobe'a and the sedentary Christian Tegreans, continued unabated up until the emergence of Emperor Yohannes IV to the political scene of the Ethiopian state. As viewed from the vantage point of religion, Yohannes was very well versed with the Old and New Testaments and the theological interpretation of holy books which had probably given him the impulse to be committed for the causes of the Ethiopian church and the well-being of its adherents.²⁶⁵ Politically speaking, however, his political personality seems to have been highly shaped by the

²⁶¹Informants: *Mämeher Kābādā Baraki* interviewed at the compound of the Monastery of Täklähaymanot Mayčāw on 11/12/2009; *Mälakä Sälam Kalayu Däsälāñ* interviewed at the compound of the Monastery of Täklähaymanot Mayčāw on 11/12/2009.

²⁶²Gäbrä Selassè, *Tarik Zāmān Zä Dagmawi Menilek Negussä Nāgäst Zä Ethiopia*, Addis Ababa, 2008 E.C., pp. 209-210.

²⁶³*Wärqi Wānjäl'* (literally the golden gospel), MS, deposited at the Monastery of Täklähaymanot Mayčāw, n.p.

²⁶⁴Gäbrä Selassè, *Tarik Za Dagmawi...*, pp. 209-210.

²⁶⁵Gebre Medhin Kidane, "Yohannes IV: Religious Aspects of his Internal Policy", B.A. Thesis in History, Haile Selasse I University, 1972, pp.1-5.

wars of the middle of the sixteenth century which led to the almost total collapse of the Ethiopian church and state.²⁶⁶

This was clearly reflected in his diplomatic letters addressed to various European powers. For instance in informing the British queen, Victoria, Yohannes wrote in lamentation in the following terms: “The Ethiopian kings became less and less powerful since Ahmed Gragn whereas the Muslims are becoming more and more powerful. Being not satisfied with what they have occupied, they want to rule the whole of Ethiopia.”²⁶⁷ He also thought, rightly, that before the sixteenth century the region which stretched between what is now southern Tegray and, which by the time, the southernmost Christian province, Šäwa, was entirely inhabited by a Christian society. As a consequence, from the moment he ascended into state power he was determined to reverse this circumstance: “I shall avenge the blood of Ethiopia. Gran Islamized Ethiopia by force, fire and the sword. Likewise, if we do not develop and lay the foundations of the religion of St. Mark, no one will do it for us.”²⁶⁸

As he was in such a state of mind, in the early 1870s, when he was at the zenith of his power, Yohannes heard that the routine act of burning churches and making incessant raids on Christian settlements had now been intensified in the entire Mountain Region.²⁶⁹

As a consequence of this the emperor, at the head of a large army, marched south from his capital, Adwa, to the Mountain Region to conduct punitive military expeditions against the Dobe’a Muslims. Upon arriving in the area, he took far reaching political, economic and

²⁶⁶Hussein Ahmed, *Islam in Nineteenth Century...*, p.170.

²⁶⁷Sven, Rubenson (ed.) *Acta Ethiopica* Vollume III: Internal Rivalries and Foreign Threats, 1868-1879, p.123.

²⁶⁸R.A., Caulk, “Religion and State in Nineteenth Century Ethiopia, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. X, 1972, p.26.

²⁶⁹Gebre Medhin Kidane, “Yohannes IV: Religiuous Aspects...”, pp.22-23.

religious measures which were unprecedented in the history of adversarial relations between this society and the central state. As mentioned above repeatedly, successive Ethiopian rulers from their seat of power either in Šäwa or Gondär, had led several military campaigns to this region; but the duration of their stay in the area, except for Bä'edä Mariam, was very short-lived in that they turned back soon after they had devastated settlements and driving off a large portion of the cattle of the Dobe'a. But in the case of Yohannes following a severe military assault, he set out to dramatically change the demographic and religious landscape of not only this particular area but also the wider region stretching between Tegray and Šäwa.²⁷⁰

Accordingly, one of the measures, which the emperor took, was carrying out large scale Christian settlements among the core Dobe'a settlements by encouraging people to move to this area principally from the marginal areas of the districts of Ofla and Enda Mäkhonni. Moreover, he also ordered churches to be built in all the seven *embas*; it was, therefore, during this time, among others, that the church of Michael Asgäda, found at La'eläy Haya; as well as what had later become a center of excellence for higher teaching-learning activities for the clergy, who had been coming from near and far off places, the Monastery of Däbri Michael, found by the side of Lake Hašängä, were erected.²⁷¹

Land was granted to the Christian settlers and the newly built churches by reducing from the Muslim holdings. For instance, for the one hundred and fifty deacons and priests assigned to serve in the Monastery of Däbri Hašängä each Muslim Dobe'a land owning person was instructed to appropriate one tenth of the land under his tenure. As a result of such policy one

²⁷⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

²⁷¹Informants: *Ato* Negus Hailu interviewed at Säränga on 24/12/2009; *Ato* Mähri Meteku interviewed at Säränga on 24/12/2009; *Ato* Kähasä Negussä interviewed at Säränga on 24/12/2009; Priest Tadässä Bärhä interviewed at Hašängä on 25/2/ 2010.

thousand parcels of arable land was amassed for the use of this monastery which that monastery continued to use it up until the 1975 radical land reform.²⁷²

The second set of measure taken was that all Dobe'a Muslims in the enclave were asked to be baptized and be converted to Christianity. At the time the Dobe'a Muslims responded to such imperial decree in several different ways. Some of them had sincerely embraced Christianity and saved their lives and livelihoods; while others had accepted Christianity outwardly, meaning they were Christian by day and Muslim by night. Whenever the emperor realized that the newly converted had not accepted Christianity whole-heartedly, those who transgressed were ordered to eat the meat of an animal with the Christians, which was slaughtered by a Christian man, take the Holy Communion, carry intermarriage with the Christians and exercise some other Christian practices.²⁷³

Whereas the fate of the a large section of the Dobe'a society, who defied to heed the imperial decree, was to leave for good their habitat for the nearby Fertile Valley, which was till then entirely inhabited by the Oromo, who were formerly their bitter enemy but later on since more than half a century ago became their ally and co-religionists after they were converted to Islam by the latter subsequent to the conclusion of the Abbinas pact between the two societies at the beginning of the nineteenth century.²⁷⁴

In connection to this oral sources claim that Yohannes had become too heavy-handed with the Dobe'a Muslims particularly with those, who stubbornly resisted either renouncing their faith in

²⁷²Ibid.

²⁷³Informants: *Mämeher* Mohamed Bärhä interviewed in Maycäw on 16/12/2009; Sheikh Nur-Hussein Edris interviewed at Mäkhan on 7/2/2010; Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan interviewed at Addi Abo Gošu on 25/2/2010.

²⁷⁴Informants: Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan interviewed in Koräm on 28/2/2010; Sheikh Mahdi Yasin interviewed in Maycäw on 18/12/ 2009.

favor of Christianity or else leaving their habitat in accordance with the imperial decree. Until the present time some Muslim informants tend to charge Yohannes for committing atrocious acts of brutality against their forefathers.²⁷⁵ However, as some scholars, who have carried out studies on this issue make it abundantly clear, the reason why he became so tough on them should not be attributed only to their usual acts of razing the churches and massacring the surrounding Christian populations nor to their refusal to accept Christianity by the time they were asked to do so.

But what is missing in this argument is one critical point, which had greatly contributed for such state of affairs to take shape, has to do with the activities of some Muslim chiefs around Hašängä and Zobel, who in clandestine, had established direct contact with the leader of Mahdist Sudan- Mohamed Ahmed Al-Mahdi.²⁷⁶

In the meantime seeking military assistance from foreign powers was not something uncommon to the Muslim communities in the whole of northeast Ethiopia who were hard pressed by the Christian state. For example, like the Muslim chiefs in our study area, a militant rebel leader from Argobba, northeastern Šäwa, by the name Sheikh Talha B. Ja'fare, had journeyed from his home district Argobba to Wälqayte, a sub-province located along the border with eastern Sudan, from where he managed to establish ties and was subsequently said to have received substantial military assistance from the same Mahdists. It was, therefore, more likely that using such military resources he was able to pose a serious challenge against Yohannes and Menilek who

²⁷⁵Informants: *Mämher* Mohamed Bärhä interviewed in Maycäw on 16/12/2009; Sheikh Nur- Hussein Edris interviewed at Mäkhan on 7/2/2010.

²⁷⁶R.A., Caulk, "Religion and State...", p.35.

were actively engaged in the propagation of Christianity among the Muslims of southern Wollo and northern Šäwa in the late nineteenth century.²⁷⁷

On top of that Egyptian military activities on the Red Sea and along the Ethio-Sudanese border in the northwest, particularly after the battles of Gundät (1875) and Gura (1876), seem to have greatly influenced Yohanneses' religious policy towards Ethiopian Muslims. It is widely known that at the time Yohannes was so much worried that if the Muslims of his country had made strategic alliances with the neighboring Muslim states, they would seriously threaten the existence of his country's independence and sovereignty as well as his own personal authority as a leader.²⁷⁸ Hence, the most plausible rationale behind the formulation of the emperor's religious policy, which could be a possible justification for his actions; meaning as to why he greatly desired to press so much his Muslim subjects to embrace Christianity was because he had a very strong conviction in the idea that unity of faith would bear the fruit of unity of state and society.²⁷⁹

The foundation of permanent Tegrigna Christian settlements accompanied by the erection of parish churches within the core settlement areas of the Muslim Dobe'a had been continuing at an accelerating rate even after the reign of Emperor Yohannes. Nevertheless, the inflow of Christian Tigrean society predominantly from their high mountain settlement areas of May Mae'do and Näbäqsägä to, where there was ample rich arable and pasture lands, the districts of Enda Mäkhonni and Ofla, had taken place at an unprecedented scale and magnitude during the time

²⁷⁷Hussein Ahmed, "The Life and Career of Shaykh Talha B. Ja'far(c.1853-1936)" *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. XXII, 1989, p.18.

²⁷⁸R.A., Caulk, "Religion and state...", pp.30-32.

²⁷⁹*Ibid.*

when *Däjach* Abära Tädla was the governor of Raya-Azäbo *Awraja* from the year 1916 until his death at the Battle of Maycäw in 1936 while fighting the Italians.²⁸⁰

In this episode a number of parish churches along with agrarian settlements were being established at places which had been solely occupied by Muslim Dobe'a societies. However, such large scale expansion of sedentary Christian settlements did not proceed unopposed. In other words, the Dobe'a had continued to pose a stubborn resistance against the encroachment of their longtime rivals- Christian Tegreans. When, for example, the Christian societies had commenced to erect new church buildings near to their homesteads in all the neighborhoods of the above mentioned seven Dobe'a enclaves, found in the districts of Enda Mäkhonni and Ofla, the latter resorted to set fire to the thatched roofs of the churches and burnt them down to the ground. They were also engaged in demolishing the stone walls of the churches in the evenings which the Christians had built by the day time.²⁸¹

Moreover, the Dobe'a had also expressed their displeasure with the encroachment of the Christian society on their territories sometimes through burning entire villages and newly built churches which gave rise to the suffering of newly arriving inhabitants. In response to such attacks and by way of defending themselves the Christian Tegreans had devised a mechanism of collective security structure. According to this system an adequate number of able-bodied adult males armed, most of the time, with traditional weapons such as spears, swords, knives, daggers

²⁸⁰Informants: Priest Kahsay Sebhatu interviewed at Mäkhan on 9/2/2010; *Ato* Haddes Abrha interviewed at Mäkhan on 7/2/2010; *Ato* Gäbrä Selassè Kābādä interviewed in Maycäw on 7/2/2010. The third informant, *Ato* Gäbrä Selasè, has, in addition to his own oral reminiscence he has generously made available to me manuscripts inherited from his father, *Fitawrari* Kābādä Gäbrä Selassè, governor of Näqsägä, Śaegebji and Śata sub-districts from 1933-1937 E.C., *Fitawrari* Kābādä had the habit of keeping records of local history such as how and when the town of Maycäw was founded as well as the ethnic and religious profile of the study area.

²⁸¹Informants: *Ato* Mānasbo Zālälāw interviewed at Mäkhan on 7/2/2010; *Ato* Kālali Gäbru interviewed at Ajjura on 12/2/2010; *Ato* Ṭegabu Zägäyā interviewed at Hašängä on 25/2/2010; Priest Tadässä Bārhä interviewed at Hašängä on 25/2/2010; *Ato* Śägay Equar interviewed at Hegum Berda on 26/2/2010.

and even stones and rarely rifles, were assigned for every night to guard, on a turn by turn basis, their respective villages and churches.²⁸²

By way of avoiding potential plunder or destruction, the clergy, who were in charge of the ark of the covenant, *tabot*, and other precious properties of the parish churches, were in several occasions forced to transport them from where they were deposited in custody, which is the inner most part of each church to some secured homesteads and from there to caves found in some inaccessible mountain cliffs and the other way round. In relation to this a number of informants reported that at times when the security situation got worse, the priests and deacons were forced to say mass outside of the compound of parish churches mainly within residential homes and inside some caves identified as safe for this purpose.²⁸³

Seeing the aggravating hostilities between the Muslim Dobe'a on the one hand and Christian Tegreans on the other *Däjach Abära Tädla*, Governor of Raya-Azäbo *Awraja*, although he wanted to continue Yohannes' policy of settlement of Christian population in Dobe'a land and thereby the propagation of Christianity in the area, the former differed significantly from the emperor's style of dealing with the matter or in methods of implementing his plans. As already discussed above, while the emperor was largely tended to apply coercion as a better means of executing his plans, *Däjach Abära Tädla* simultaneously employed both coercion and persuasion as deemed necessary depending on the kind of people he had been dealing with. In other words,

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

he exerted a great deal of coercion on those Dobe'a Muslims who resisted stubbornly Christian settlements and the building of churches in their respective localities.²⁸⁴

In most cases, however, he tended to prefer persuasion to coercion. For example at the beginning of the 1920s, when he set out to build a castle for his residence and adjacent to it the church of St. Mary at Hezba, which, as mentioned above, was one of the seven enclaves of the Dobe'a confederates, he was confronted with a stiff resistance by the local people. But instead of resorting to resolve the matter by force he approached Ali Abbato, chief of the Hezba Dobe'a clan, for land and eventually convinced him that he could proceed with his construction work in return for the latter's appointment as the *gäbäz* of the newly established church.²⁸⁵

Upon the accomplishment of the building of his own residence, by the standard of the time a magnificent castle, and the church of Maryam Hezba, *Däjach Abära* laid the foundation for the emergence of a small weekly market town which would eventually evolve to be, until the current time, as the administrative center of the sub-province of Raya-Azäbo having the name Maycäw. The Christian society in a nearby locality of Mäkhan, who like Hezba, was one of the constituent elements of the seven Dobe'a confederates, seem to have learned a lesson from Hezba and likewise gave the position of *gebezna* to Abdu Mussa-most influential and powerful Muslim Dobe'a person in that area.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴Informants: Sheikh Mahdi Yasin interviewed in Maycäw on 18/12/2009; *Mämher* Käbädä Baraki interviewed in Maycäw 11/12/2009; *Mämher* Täfäri Harägäwäyn interviewed in Maycäw on 18/12/2009; *Mälakä-Sälam* Kalayu Däsäläñ interviewed at the compound of the Monastery of Täklähaimanot Maycäw on 14/12/2009.

²⁸⁵Information extracted from the manuscripts of *Fitawrari* Käbädä Gäbrä Selassè Hailu n.p.; and informants: *Mämehr* Käbädä Baraki interviewed in Maycäw on 11/12/2009; *Mämher* Täfäri Haragäwäyn interviewed in Maycäw on 18/12/2009.

²⁸⁶*Ibid.*; and informants: Sheikh Nur-Hussein Edris interviewed in Maycäw on 10/2/2010; Priest Kahsay Sebhatu interviewed at Mäkhan on 9/2/2010; *Ato* Machä Adhäna interviewed at Mäkhan on 7/2/2010.

In both localities it is reported that upon the death of the parents, their descendants had inherited their position and these Muslim persons were reaping the benefits attached to that position in accordance with the rules and regulations applied for the administration of parish churches in the entire Christian society of the sub-region up until the eruption of the Ethiopian revolution and the subsequent promulgation of the radical land reform in February 1975.²⁸⁷

The irony is that any observer may well say that how on earth could a Muslim person serve in Christian churches as a treasurer and as an administrator. When we examine the internal working conditions of this system, however, we find out that the Muslim persons, who held that position, had to hire a priest who would do the job on behalf of them reportedly at a meager daily wage. This was a situation where most of the varieties of cereal grains, collected from each threshing floor at harvest time, would go to the Muslims without doing anything.²⁸⁸

As discussed in greater detail in chapter two, any one person from among the Christian society of a given locality, who would aspire to assume the position of *gebzena* and/or *cegenät*, had to be one who belonged to those descendants of the pioneer founders of agrarian settlement (*mārho*) as well as the church of that parish. Hence, the intention behind the appointment of a Muslim to the position of *gebzena* implicitly implies that such a decision was made to appease the Muslim community of the locality, whose territory was being encroached upon, by recognizing them officially that they were the pioneer founders of the agrarian settlement in that given locality.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁹ Information extracted from the manuscripts of *Fitawrari Kābādā Gābrā Selassè Hailu* n.p.; and informants: *Abba Hailä Selassè*, abbot of the Monastery of *Täklähaymanoy Maycäw*, interviewed at the compound of that church on 11/12/2009; *Ato Kābādā Gābrā Selassè* interviewed in *Maycäw* on 7/2/2010.

The struggle between the Christian Tegreans and the Muslim Dobe'a, which arose over territorial encroachments, continued into the late twentieth century where it ended with a defeat of the latter. Though, as repeatedly mentioned above, the Dobe'a had put up a strong resistance by burning and demolishing churches as well as attacking villages but as time passed it is noted that "peasant political behavior begins to change noticeably after the 1930s"²⁹⁰ as the degree of government centralization and control increased during the period starting from the reign of Yohannes until the last part of the reign of Haile Selassè.²⁹¹

In other words, in this period, particularly the post-liberation period, saw the introduction of a centralized public administration along with the establishment of court systems at all levels of administrative units in the whole country and this has redefined societal relations to a greater extent than ever before.²⁹² As a consequence of this new development, the Dobe'a realized that resistance to territorial encroachments through the accustomed violent ways of destroying religious institutions and vehemently attacking villages would produce a legal liability on them. So, anticipating that disputes over land could be resolved without resort to violence, they were involved in a prolonged and costly court litigations contesting all the way from the local court (*aṭbeya daña*) to the royal court in Addis Ababa.²⁹³

²⁹⁰Gebre Tareke, *The Ethiopian Revolution: War in the Horn of Africa*, Addis Ababa, Eclipse Printing Press, 2016, p.11

²⁹¹Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1855-1991*, Addis Ababa, Addis Ababa University Press, 2002, pp.145-146.

²⁹²*Yagär Gezat Minister Mäshèt* (Bulletin of Ministry of Interior), pp. 4-11.

²⁹³Informants: *Ato* Alämu Bāyānā interviewed at the compound of the Monastery of Täklähaymanot Maycäw on 14/12/2009; *Ato* Muṣṭafä Abdäle Hajji interviewed at Hašängä on 26/2/2010; *Ato* Hades Abraha interviewed at Mäkhan on 7/2/2010; *Liqä-Kahnat* Hadära Täsfay interviewed at Emba Hasty on 11/2/2010; Sheikh Nur-Hussein Edris interviewed in Maycäw on 10/2/2010.

In connection to this informants have mentioned by name several powerful and ingenious Dobe'a litigants from each locality in the districts of Enda Mäkhonni and Ofla. Unfortunately, however, this research could not benefit from the evidence, which could have been extracted from the offices of district and sub-provincial court archives, as it was all destroyed in the wake of the seventeen yearlong civil-wars fought between the Dergue regime and the T.P.L.F. In any case, though the Dobe'a were involved in a contest which usually required a prolonged and costly litigation, most filed cases were said to have been decided in favor of the Christian community. Muslim informants in particular deeply resented that this was due to the fact that most judges from lower to higher level courts, assigned to administer justice, were said to have thrown their weight behind the Christian society.²⁹⁴

This argument cannot be dismissed right away labeling it as a hasty generalization one now that we take into account the fact that it was a natural thing to expect that the administrative apparatus of the imperial regime could be biased against the Muslims due to the obvious and simple reason that during that period Orthodox Christianity was the official religion of the state.

Consequently, as pressure was mounting over them from time to time, the Muslim Dobe'a were left with two choices either to live in harmony with their longtime rival, Christian Tegreans, or to flee to the Fertile Valley, east of the escarpment, where there was sufficient land for agriculture, grazing and establishment of permanent settlement.²⁹⁵

²⁹⁴Sheikh Nur-Hussein Edris interviewed in Maycaw on 10/2/2010; Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan interviewed in Koräm on 28/2/2010.

²⁹⁵Informants: Sheikh Mustäfa Ibrahim interviewed at Mäswa'et on 25/12/2009; *Mälakä-Gänät* Mäsälä Machä interviewed at Laeläy Haya on 24/12/ 2009; Sheikh Nur-Hussein Edris interview at Mäkhonni on 7/2/2010; *Ato* Berhanu Mängäša interviewed at Tahtäy Haya on 29/12/2009.

Majority of them are said to have opted for the latter while some of them had attempted to live in conjunction with the Christian society by devising various mechanisms of survival strategy such as forming marriage alliances and other forms of social bonding. As a result, from time to time while the size of the Muslim population has continued to decline in each of the seven core settlement areas of the Dobe'a, the number of Christian society was gradually increasing at a constantly increasing rate ever since the second half of the nineteenth century particularly since the time when Yohannes IV had assumed power as the emperor of Ethiopia though empirical data cannot be obtained to corroborate such oral evidence.²⁹⁶

But this is conceivable as I personally noticed it during the field work. As I strolled through the seven main settlement areas of the Dobe'a, namely Qaran Godba, Hezba, Mākhan, Haya, Mānkāra, Hašāngā and Ofla, I observed that in a sea of Christian society there have been between five to ten Muslim family heads where each village has its own mosque, which looks much like the other dwelling houses; and is far less magnificent than mosques we find in urban centers and Christian churches in the vicinity. Mention should be made, however, in terms of the low population size of Muslims the only one exception being Hašāngā, where, according to the local authorities the number of Muslim residents is almost equal to their Christian counterparts.²⁹⁷

In general from time to time when a strong pressure was exerted on them, the Dobe'a proved incapable of withstanding that pressure and infiltration by the Tegreans. As they were continually being squeezed out of the agriculturally rich and healthy plains of the Mountain

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁷ I received the ratio of local Muslim -Christian population data from *Ato Rada'e Lebālo*, administrator of Ofla *Wärāda* (District), while we were discussing on how to contact informants found in various localities of that district on 16/2/2010.

Region, they trekked to the Fertile Valley. But at the time fortunately for the Dobe'a, the previous tension with the Oromo had subsided very quickly and gave way to a new ground for interaction following the Abbinas treaty, an ethnic pact painstakingly worked out to regulate social relations between them. Shortly after a final agreement was reached between the two societies towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, they began to live interspersed in the same region a situation which enabled both of them to share and use the same space.²⁹⁸

Meanwhile, the Dobe'a and the Oromo were widely intermarried with each other; and within a short period of time religious and ethnic fusion had been effected between them. Sources show that until the middle of the twentieth century the Dobe'a were distinguishable as a separate ethnic group in northeast Ethiopia but by the end of the same century they had undergone a complete social assimilation to a greater extent with the Oromo and to a lesser extent with the Tigreans. Consequently, by the last two decades of the same century the Dobe'a had virtually ceased to exist as a distinct ethnic group both in the Mountain Region and the Fertile Valley; but the term (Dobe'a) had endured to this day- a description, in rare cases, to mean simply a Muslim(s) but without any ethnic content.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁸Informants: Sheikh Mustāfa Ibrahim interviewed at Māswa'et on 25/12/2009; Sheikh Mohamed Bāyan interviewed at Korām on 28/2/2010; Ato Berhanu Māngāša interviewed at Tahtāy Haya on 29/12/2009.

²⁹⁹Informants: Sheikh Mohamed Bāyan interviewed in Korām on 28/2/2010; Priest Kabsay Sebhatu interviewed at Mākhan on 9/2/2010; Sheikh Mahdi Yasin interviewed in Maycāw on 18/12/2010; Sheikh Nur-Hussein Edris interviewed at Mākhan on 7/2/2010.

Chapter Four: A History of the Oromo People in Raya- Azäbo.

4.1. Popular and Scholarly Misconceptions about the History of the Oromo in Raya- Azäbo.

The history of the Oromo of Raya-Azäbo is one of the most misconstrued problems in the annals of Ethiopian history. This has mainly to do with the fact that though they have domiciled for centuries in this region, the history of the Oromo people as well as their horizontal relationships to the neighboring societies has not yet been systematically studied. When we investigate academic works as well as works produced by non-academicians, which deal with the history of the Oromo of Raya-Azäbo, they are, by and large, found out to be a sheer distortion and misrepresentation of the facts on the ground.

In this circumstance of all the works consulted for this research the work of *Aläqa* Tayä Gäbrä Maryam as well as a piece of work published by the Oromia Regional State are carefully selected for critical examination because both works stand out as typical examples that show how much the history of the Oromo of Raya-Azäbo is misrepresented in the whole corpus of academic and non-academic secondary literature. The second reason for selecting both works for reviewing, out of the many studied for this research, is merely based on the fact that while the former is one of the earliest works representing the views of the earlier generation of writers on the subject of Ethiopian ethnography; the latter is one of the latest works which represents the views of the contemporary generation of writers on the same subject but with differing perspectives. Thus, by doing so it is assumed that it will enable us to look at the issue from the point of view of writers across generations and divergent vantage points. But it should be noted that this part of the paper

is not to be confused with a review of literature of this chapter because that has already been done in the proposal section of this research project.

Aläqa Tayä, in his small but highly influential book, *Yä Ethiopia Hezeb Tarik* literally (*A History of the Ethiopian Peoples*) has briefly discussed the history of each one of nearly two dozen Ethiopian peoples including the Oromo of Raya-Azäbo, who are a fraction of the Oromo people.³⁰⁰ When we critically examine a section of his book, in which the author has discussed a history of the Oromo of Raya-Azäbo, though he should be credited for his devotion in the field of the study of the history of Ethiopian peoples, one of the neglected problems in Ethiopian studies, unfortunately his book lacks the quality of a standard work from which people could learn the true substance of history for he had committed several grave factual errors.

One of the major problems associated with this book has mainly to do with the three ancestral figures that the author, Aläqa Tayä, has identified as founders of the various Oromo social groups in the entire Raya-Azäbo sub-region. In relation to this it should be noted that according to Bahrey, our most valuable primary source on the early history of the Oromo, the origin of this society is traced from two major branches: Barentu and Boran. Thus, Tayä, seemingly basing himself on Bahrey, erroneously argues that sometime during the great Oromo population movement one of the six sons of Barentu, the youngest one, Humaba, had begotten three children namely Raya, Azäbo and Ašängè; and he continues to claim, wrongly, that all the above mentioned three sons of Humbana have occupied and subsequently established permanent settlement in the area under study.³⁰¹ However, after a cautious investigation of the key terms

³⁰⁰ Aläqa Tayä Gäbrä Maryam, *Yä Ethiopia Hezeb*,... p.64.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

Raya, Azäbo and Hašängä, we found out that this assertion is in direct contradiction to the available evidence extracted from diverse sources in the study area.

First and foremost, when the Oromo came to this region, demographically, they must have been a conglomeration of several groups/tribes each constituting hundreds if not thousands of individuals and; not three eponymous ancestors, as the author claims, because, to begin with, it cannot be imagined that three individual persons alone could manage to defeat and displace the Dobe'a, one of the most formidable societies in northeast Ethiopia, from their habitat in the Fertile Valley. Second, Hašängä (according to him Ašängè), a locality signifying the lake itself and the surrounding vicinity had never been occupied by the Oromo in its entire history. This area, as part of the Mountain Region, was beginning from thousands of years ago till today the realm of the Tегrean society though the Dobe'a, as already discussed in chapter three, occupied it for some time but was reclaimed later by the former.³⁰²

Third, with respect to the term 'Azäbo', etymologically a puzzling one, it never appears in any text written about the history of the Oromo people, including Bahrey's famous work, be it as a name of an Oromo ancestral figure or name of an Oromo tribe/clan. In relation to this it is interesting to note that two Oromo scholars, who have specialized in the field of *Affan* Oromo language studies, related to me that in the phonetic system of this language the sound 'z' does not exist in any form; consequently this idea undoubtedly further disproves the author's assertions.³⁰³ Finally and most importantly, this term, Azäbo, has been there since more than a millennium ago very long before the arrival of the Oromo to Raya-Azäbo. This is evidenced by

³⁰²This issue is discussed very well in chapter three based on diverse sources; hence it is a mere redundancy to mention the sources here again.

³⁰³Täfäri Kumsa and Täsfayè Tolosa are Ph.D. candidates, both are native speakers of Oromo language and their study deals with that language.

the fact that ‘Azäbo’ is mentioned in the text of the inscription of the sixth century Aksumite king, Kaleb, signifying one of the six army detachments which campaigned and, most probably, subsequently was garrisoned in this region so as to quell a certain unspecified Cushitic speaking rebellious tribe in the adjoining lowlands of what is today southeastern Tegray.³⁰⁴

Unlike Azäbo and Hašängä, the third term, Raya, has recently aroused a considerable controversy over its etymology. Several oral informants and a couple of authors, originating from the study area, who have written the history of this society using the Semitic languages of Amharic and Tegrëña, are more or less congruent with each other on the origin of the term Raya. Based mostly on oral sources and very limited written accounts the authors have come up with their own hypotheses about the origin of the term Raya. According to both sources the term Raya is reported to have originated from a certain person who had been a speaker of the Tegrëña language. In their respective works both groups of authors have claimed that once upon a time a certain Tegrëña speaking person is, accidentally, said to have uttered the word ‘*Re’aya!*’ which literally means ‘have a look at it!’ to one of his friends, while he was explaining his appreciation about the green fields and hills which, towards the end of the rainy season, were decorated with grasses, young and mature crops as well as various flowers. Thus, it is believed that from that time onwards the area is said to have assumed the name Raya.³⁰⁵

The likelihood that the origin of the term Raya might have come from a speaker of the Tegrëña language cannot be rejected right away as popular myth when we take into account the fact that it is mentioned, as a name of a place and people who live in it, more than ten times in the

³⁰⁴Y.M., Kobischanov, *Axum*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979, p. 96.

³⁰⁵Sisay Mängistè and Alämu Kassa, *Yä Raya Hezeb...*, pp. 1-2.; Haftu Kidanu, *Guma Ab Tarik...*, p.7.

hagiography of *Abba Yime'ata*.³⁰⁶ It is well known to students of Ethiopian history that *Abba Yime'ata* was one of the Nine Saints, who came to Aksum in the fifth century A.D., from Europe and the eastern Mediterranean region, to carry out missionary activities in different parts of the kingdom. Not long after his arrival in Aksum, Yime'ata went to the mountains of Gär'alta and founded a monastery there from where he could implement his missionary responsibilities. In connection to this it is reported that at the initial stage of their missionary movement the Nine Saints were deeply involved in the task of 'consolidating the moral life of the Christians as well as in converting and baptizing the non-Christian populations' of the vicinities where they themselves settled and the surrounding districts as well.³⁰⁷

In relation to this it should also be noted at that time the two priority cases for them were the transformation of temples into churches and the abolition of the cult of *zar* worship for they envisaged that these things would pave the way for the success of their missionary obligations. For Raya-Azäbo is not too far from Gär'alta, it seems more likely that part of this sub-region might have been under the jurisdiction of Yime'ata. Thus, it is in relation to the obstacles he faced and struggle waged against the cult of *zar* worship, which was at the time rampant in this area, that the term Raya, is repeatedly mentioned in the hagiography of the life of *Abba Yime'ata*.³⁰⁸

Hence, this would be a good historical basis to assume that it might have originated from the Tegrëña language, provided that we do not suspect the authenticity of the manuscript, the term Raya was employed, be it as a name of a place or people or both, since as far back as the end of

³⁰⁶Hagiography of *Abba Yime'ata*, manuscript obtained from Dr. Hagos Abraha, a staff of Mäqällä University, who did his doctoral research on philology based on this document, n.p.

³⁰⁷Sergew Hable Selassie, *Ancient and Medieval...* p.119.

³⁰⁸Hagiography of *Abba Yime'ata*, n.p.

the fifth century A.D, much earlier than the arrival of the Oromo in the region which is sometime after the two decades of the seventeenth century.³⁰⁹ In connection to this one important point that needs to be addressed here is that regarding the period as to when hagiographies have to be generally written? Based on the tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, a hagiography of a saint has to be written one hundred years after the saint in question has passed away though informants do not clearly state the reason as to why not before or after that period. In any case, according to this premise the hagiography of *Abba Yime'ata* must have been written towards the end of the seventh century AD as he was reported to have lived until the end of the sixth century AD. However, the hagiographical material of this saint, utilized in this research, is a copy of the original one which was said to have been composed in the fifteenth century. Therefore, we may safely conclude that as a name of a place, the term Raya had been there at least two hundred years before the arrival of the Oromo in the region.³¹⁰

Nevertheless, we cannot completely rule out the second version of the story which claims that the origin of the term Raya could be from *Affan* Oromo language because in the Arsi region of southern Ethiopia there still exists an Oromo clan having the same name, Raya, which could probably have branched out and moved to the study area whereby the sub-region could have been named after it.³¹¹ Therefore, taking into consideration the generally accepted fact that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Oromo people had moved from southern Ethiopia to northern Ethiopia and a group of our oral informants ascribe their origin to the Oromo clan of the Arsi region, we may probably suggest that a section of the study area, occupied and settled by a segment of that Raya clan, might perhaps have come to be called after

³⁰⁹*Ibid.*

³¹⁰This information is obtained from *Abba Haylä-Selassè*, Abbot of the Monastery of Täklä Haymanot Maycäw, while I was gathering data from oral as well as church documents from that locality. (Times new Roman)

³¹¹J. Spencer, Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia...*, p.231.

the name of that migrating clan-Raya.³¹² Nevertheless, we should also take into a serious consideration the fact that Merid's dissertation, one of the most authoritative works on Oromo population movement, clearly stipulates that only the Barentu Oromo tribes had moved and settled in northeast Ethiopia, not the Boran, there is very little likelihood to happen that a segment of that Oromo branch, Raya, could have come from Arsi to occupy part of the study area.

However, in relation to this it should be noted that this problem will continue to be a subject of considerable debate because using the sources at our disposal it seems too difficult to establish the etymology of this term; whereby, in the future, studies of this kind require more interdisciplinary research collaboration with several different subjects of study such as historical linguistics, archeology, historical anthropology, ethno-history and some other relevant disciplines as well.

Such being the case, the opinion *vis-à-vis* the names of the three fictional eponymous ancestors that is Raya, Azābo and 'Ašāngè' has long persisted as the standard view of most authors writing about the history of the Oromo People in Ethiopia in general and in the study area in particular. In other words, following Alāqa Tayä, a number of domestic and expatriate authors, who have cited his work, have in turn contributed in making this erroneous view to be so popular worldwide. From early on until recently the book has continued to exert its influence with popular and scholarly preconceptions to the extent that even a prominent scholar and a prolific writer such as Professor Gètachäw Haile, based on such misleading information, has repeated the

³¹²Informants: *Ato* Märawo Barènto, interviewed in Alamaṭa on 3/3/2010; *Ato* Bärhä Hawadä interviewed at Wargeba 4/4/2010.

same mistakes committed by his predecessor when he recently published his book on the history of the Oromo.³¹³

Moreover, in connection to this it should also be noted that written at the early twentieth century, using the official Ethiopian language Amharic, at the early stage of literary development in the country, Tayä's book has attracted a much wider readership until it has eventually become the conventional version of the history of the people of Raya-Azäbo and most probably that of some other peoples of Ethiopia on whom he wrote as well. As a result, this book has gradually grown to be so influential that it has been over communicated to so many individuals who live in different parts of the country. For instance, during the field research I have observed an increasing tendency among some of my informants, particularly with those who are literate ones,³¹⁴ to incorporate such misleading and incorrect information into the oral historiography/traditions of Raya-Azäbo for which David Hinge has coined the term 'feedback' to describe the process of alterations brought about in any oral messages by information acquired from written documents or vice-versa.³¹⁵

The second work reviewed in connection to the issue at hand is the book recently published by the Bureau of Culture and Tourism of the Oromia National Regional State entitled: "*History of the Oromo to the Sixteenth Century*". It is co-authored by several Oromo scholars from the disciplines of history and social anthropology of which the most prominent ones are Tesema Ta'a from the Department of History and Tadesse Beriso from the Department of Social Anthropology, Addis Ababa University. Both of them have taken part in the process of

³¹³Gètachäw Hailè, *Yä Abba Bahry Dersätoch Oromochen Kämimäläkätu Lèloch Sänädoch Gara*, Collegeville, Minnesota, pp.187-191.

³¹⁴Informants: Ato Gobba Abdu interviewed at Karra Addi Shabo on 27/3/2010; Sheikh Hezbulah Abdäl-Qader interviewed in Alamaṭa on 3/4/2010.

³¹⁵David, Hinge, *Oral Historiography*, Longman Nigeria Ltd., 1982, pp. 81-87.

publication this book mainly in an advisory capacity. As the title of the book is self-explanatory the intention behind the publication of this book is an endeavor to fill the rather huge gap of the history of the Oromo people before the sixteenth century a period when the Oromo are said to have started their movement to different parts of Ethiopia from their homeland deep in southern Ethiopian. This book was first published in *Affan Oromo* and later on translated into Amharic and English languages. In this book the ‘genealogy and settlement pattern’ of all Oromo tribes and clans, who had moved and settled in different parts of Ethiopia, are discussed of which one of them is the Oromo of Raya Azäbo-people who are a subject of investigation in this research project.

The publication of this book could be of some value for academicians and general readers interested in the ethnography of Ethiopian peoples. Nevertheless, taking into account a section of the book, which deals particularly with the history of the Oromo of Raya-Azäbo, though a piece of relevant information is extracted and used in this research, it is, by and large, found to be full of distortions, misconceptions and misrepresentations of facts on the ground such that the authors must make major revisions because this book cannot stand the test of the locally available evidence emanating from reliable primary and secondary sources. In other words, like Tayä’s book this work is not only inadequate but also misleading on several grounds. Below, it should be clearly understood that the reason why I have singled-out issues, specifically related to the history of the Oromo of Raya-Azäbo, is to scrutinize carefully some of the conspicuous shortcomings of the book by checking and cross-checking it against locally available primary sources and hence verify whether the authors of this book have evidence to support their assertions or not.

To begin with, any researcher, who attempts to study the history of the Oromo of Raya-Azäbo through an inside-out approach, he/she would undoubtedly be confronted with the fact that the authors of this book lack some basic knowledge to the following fundamental questions: Since when did the Oromo people begin to live in this region? Where/ or specifically which part of this sub-region, which has later come to be called Raya-Azäbo, did they control and establish settlement upon arriving there? How did the Oromo deal with the various peoples who had preceded them in the areas they occupied? What did the relationship between the Oromo and the various peoples, whom they found in Raya-Azäbo, look like when they first made contact with them?

First of all, the authors of this book have paid little or no attention to time and space, the two most basic concepts in the canons of the discipline of history, which affect immensely a sense of the past. This is evidenced by their claim, which they hardly substantiated, that since the early fourteenth century the Oromo have inhabited in Raya-Azäbo, particularly when the powerful medieval King, Amda Seyon (r.1314-1344), was a reigning monarch over the Ethiopian state. In connection to this the authors have claimed that the emperor had, meanwhile, recruited soldiers from among some of the Oromo warriors inhabiting in the area under study by the early fourteenth century.³¹⁶

Furthermore, they mention some places from the districts of Emba Alajä, Enda Mäkhonni and Ofla and beyond farther north particularly in the neighboring sub-province of Endärta over which, the authors stated, the Oromo made settlement much earlier than the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries contrary to what several serious academic works and local oral traditions assertively claim that the Oromo had arrived in this region in the course of the sixteenth and

³¹⁶Minale Adugña (trans.) *History of the Oromo...*, p.270.

seventeenth centuries and occupied only the area designated in this research as the Fertile Valley.³¹⁷ In other words, the Oromo did not permanently occupy the districts of Emba Alajā, Enda Mäkhonni and Ofla nor did they occupy any part of Endärta, at any time in the history of this region, though they periodically ascended up the escarpment to carry out surprise raids on villages of sedentary agriculturalist communities and retreated back down the same escarpment shortly afterwards.

To elaborate further this point, when the Oromo first arrived in this region in the seventeenth century, as discussed in greater detail in chapter three, they displaced the Dobe'a from the Fertile Valley and replaced them to establish permanent settlements there in their footsteps. Concerning this issue the oral traditions of the Oromo relevant to the problem of their movement and settlement are in remarkable agreement with that of the Dobe'a traditions and with written evidence which clearly state that the former did not live in Raya-Azäbo any time before the seventeenth century nor do they speak of occupying any other places other than the Fertile Valley. By the same token, knowledgeable Amhara, Oromo, Tegrean and Dobe'a oral informants are in agreement with each other that the Dobe'a had preceded the Oromo in the Fertile Valley.³¹⁸

However, in an attempt to demonstrate the presence of the Oromo further west and northwest of their actual settlement areas, Fertile Valley, the authors of this work have mentioned a few place names something as evidence to support their allegations. Accordingly, from the three districts, mentioned above, namely Emba Alajā, Enda Mäkhonni and Ofla as well as from the neighboring sub-province of Endärta, based on speculation, a few place names which, when heard or read,

³¹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 271-272.

³¹⁸Informants: Sheikh Mohamed Bäyan interviewed in Koräm on 28/2/2010; *Mämher* Yerga Mäsälä interviewed in Alamaṭa on 4/3/2010; Sheikh Hezbulah Mohamed Amin interviewed in Alamaṭa on 8/3/2010.

give the impression of the sound of *Affan Oromo* language, were singled out and changed from Tegrēña to *Affan Oromo* to suit their political and territorial needs. For instance, Ofla is changed to Chittu Offa, Hašängä is changed to Ašangè, Koräm is changed to Kormè, Emba Alajä is changed to Abbo Alagè, Addi Gudame is changed to Adde Guddo, Mäkhonni is changed to Makone.³¹⁹

Some other places which do not conform to this modification or which do not make Oromifa sound are deliberately twisted so as to change the meaning of the original Tegrēña names of the places to *Affan Oromo* by them seemingly to satisfy their narrow ethno-nationalist sentiments. With regard to the term Azäbo, till now a place name for a major part of the Fertile valley, whose etymology is, however, not yet clearly known, is completely changed into Assabo so that it will give sense in *Affan Oromo* language. In other words, they wrongly claim that the term Azäbo is a corruption of the *Affan Oromo* term Assabo.

Surprisingly enough, even the term Dobe'a, which, in actual fact signifies a society, who, after being defeated and expelled from the Fertile Valley, were scattered over northeastern Ethiopia owing to Oromo expansion, are mistakenly described in this work as one of the constituent tribes of the Oromo people in Raya- Azäbo.³²⁰

In connection to this it is also worth mentioning that the authors of this book are not altogether acquainted with the geography of the area on which they wrote, as we may understand from the simple fact, that they do not locate what they believe to be Oromo settlement areas more definitely. In fact, had they had travelled to the area, which they claimed to have studied, to conduct a proper field research, despite their claim they did; they could have tapped valuable oral

³¹⁹Minale Adugña (trans.), *History of the Oromo...*, pp.270-272.

³²⁰*Ibid.*

data that would eventually enable them to come up with an objective history of the Oromo of Raya-Azäbo. For the same reasons, they fail to precisely indicate the direction and relative geographic location of districts/or localities where they claim Oromo settlements had been established much earlier than generally known to be.

In this circumstance, mention can be made, for example, that among other things they wrongly locate both Mt. Emba Alajä, the famous battle ground in Ethiopian history, as well as Addi Gudäm, a satellite town to the provincial capital, Mäqällä, south of the district of Wäjjärat.³²¹ However, taking Maycäw, the sub-provincial capital, as a reference point while the district of Wäjjärat is located some fifty kilometers northeast of it; Mt. Emba Alajä is situated some forty-five kilometers north of Maycäw and some twenty kilometers west of Wäjjärat. Moreover, with respect to the town of Addi Gudam it is located some ninety kilometers north of Maycäw and some forty kilometers north of Wäjjära, it should be noted, not south of it as they had attempted to inaccurately place it.

In the final analysis, close scrutiny of available sources has demonstrated that from around the Mountain Region (Emba Alajä, Enda Mäkhonni and Ofla districts) one can safely argue that no single mountain, hill, river, stream or a single place whatsoever has possessed a name derived from *Affan* Oromo language as such authors have claimed; and those places which they have attempted to give *Affan* Oromo names are based on groundless assumptions. In general, every place in the Mountain Region is named only in the Tegrëña language. In connection to this it is important to stress on the fact that had the Oromo had occupied these districts, they would have entirely changed the names of all places, including names of the local flora and fauna, to their own language as they have already done in the Fertile Valley and elsewhere in the country where

³²¹*Ibid.*

they occupied and subsequently established permanent settlements. Moreover, when residents of the three Mountain Region districts of Emba Alajä, Enda Mäkhonni and Ofla are asked to relate the history of their identity, contrary to what several secondary sources claim and subsequently accepted by scholars and popular biases, they, without the slightest hesitation, have ascribed their origin to Tegrean eponymous ancestors. Strictly speaking, they have never identified themselves as Oromo or to have originated from Oromo lineages.³²²

4.2. Routes of Movement and History of Settlement of the Oromo in Raya-Azäbo.

As opposed to the argument advanced by different authors, discussed above, the study area, designated in this research as the Fertile Valley, was occupied and settled by the Oromo at two different times, from two different directions of movement by several tribes and sub-tribes of the Barentu-one of the two main branches of the Oromo people. The southern part of the Fertile Valley, which recently came to be called Raya-Qobbo sub-province, was occupied and settled by the Karayu and Marawa tribes belonging to the Barentu division, sometime around the period between the end of the reign of Minas (r.1559-1563) and the beginning of the reign of Sarša Dengel (r.1563- 1597).³²³ However, the northern part of the Fertile Valley, Raya-Azäbo, was occupied by the Wara Dayea group which also belongs to the same Barentu branch in the early 1620s.³²⁴

In connection to the spectacular history of population movement in medieval Ethiopia sources clearly demonstrate that five tribes of the Barentu branch of the Oromo people that is to say Akachu, Karayu, Marawa, Warantisha and Wara Daye'a had been the ones who launched the

³²²In the three Mountain Region districts during the field research I tried to see whether there are places named in Affan Oromo but I could find none at all.

³²³Lewis, Herbert, "The Origins of the Galla and Somali", *The Journal of African History*, Vol. VII, 1966, p. 33.

³²⁴J. Spencer, Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*,..., p.194.

south-north axis of movement of the Oromo people in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Hailing from their native land, a region approximately situated between what is today southern Ethiopia and northern Kenya, all the five Barentu tribes were said to have primarily moved into the plains of Dawaro; and from there they proceeded towards the north, all along the bank of the Awaš River, one following the other, until they arrive in Ifat, northeastern Šāwa, where they temporarily halted apparently to decide which direction to take for the next journey.³²⁵

Shortly after they had reached Ifat, the Marawa and Karayu tribes, who were moving forward as vanguards, swiftly marched by way of the Borkana and Robi Rivers and took control of the southern part of the Fertile Valley/ Raya-Qobbo by driving away a section of the pastoralist Dobe'a society perhaps towards the northern part of the Fertile Valley where a major settlement of the Dobe'a was found.³²⁶ However, the Akachu and the Warantish tribes after they sojourned for a short period of time at Gedem (a district in northeast Šāwa) and southern Amhara (what is now the southernmost section of Wollo province), headed north following the footsteps of the Karayu and Marawa. The last wave, Wara Day'ea, who lagged far behind them to reach Ifat, instead of tracking the footpaths of the four tribes, who moved north in a prompt advance, it turned east and headed for the Afar lowlands.³²⁷

Upon arriving in the Afar region the Warra Daye'a overrun and occupied the two relatively most fertile parts of the arid Afar lowlands, Awssa and Mora, places located in the bank of the

³²⁵ Merid W. Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia and...", p.201.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ *Ibid.*

Awaš River, but not before killing the contemporary ruler of the Muslim Sultanate of Awssa, Mohamed Jassa, in the year 1583.³²⁸

The Warra Daya Oromo, before they expanded west to occupy Raya-Azäbo from the direction of Afar in the east, stayed for about fifty years in Awssa where the environment could not provide adequate pasturage for the persistently growing cattle population of the pastoralist Oromo society. Consequently, the Wara Daya had resorted to move to the northern part of the Fertile Valley, traversing the Awaš River, where they could find in abundance rich pasture and adequate water for the maintenance of their livestock.³²⁹

As they moved out of Awssa, the Wara Day'ea marched by way of the Alla and Golina Rivers, both tributaries of the Awaš, and finally reached in the heart of Raya-Azäbo in the early 1620s. It is for this very reason that when informants are enquired to relate the story where the Oromo came from? As well as how they occupied this section of the Fertile Valley? They often reply '*hawaš gama*' which literally means beyond the Awaš River\ or '*hawaš Galessa*' - which in *Affan Oromo* signifies: 'we came through the Awaš River'.³³⁰

Immediately after the various Oromo tribes and sub-tribes had occupied both the northern and southern parts of the Fertile Valley, each of the tribes and sub-tribes have changed the names of the places, which they took control, and named them either after the names of their former abodes where they originally came from or the names of their tribes or sub-tribes which occupied the area. For instance, in the southern Fertile Valley we find place names such as Qobbo, Sandafa, Aradu, Bole, Lafto, Suba, Tafo, Walete, Qillito, Gallan, Temuga, Ittu, Ćobbi, Wara

³²⁸*Ibid.*; J. Spencer, Trimmingham, *Islam in Ethiopia...*, p. 97.

³²⁹*Ibid.*, p.193. ; C. Conti Rossini, "I Galla Raya",... p.61.

³³⁰Informants: Sheikh Hezbulah Mohamed Amin interviewed in Alamaṭa on 8/3/2010; Ato Robsa Abbaye Aba Seru interviewed at Addi Borä on 11/3/2011.

Magana, Marawa and so on forth strongly suggests that these are places named by some of the Barentu tribes, who moved and settled in that sub-province by the later part of the sixteen century.³³¹

In connection to this it should be noted that once the various Oromo tribes had occupied their respective territories in the whole Fertile Valley, they tended to advance further west into the realms of the neighboring Amhara, Agäw and Tegrean peoples. For instance, along the terrain that separates Raya-Qobbo sub-province from Lasta, situated some forty-five kilometers southwest of the town of Alamaṭa, there is a site called ‘*ásmi galla*’, which, according to the evidence obtained from local sources, denotes a place where warriors of the Marawa Oromo tribe had been killed in greater numbers while fighting against the local Tegrean people.³³²

Moreover, sources reveal that the local population had repulsed many attempted Oromo incursions at vicinity which thenceforth came to be called Marawa (named after a tribe that occupied it). Meaning, after they were decisively defeated at Marawa instead of struggling to conquer further territories that lay ahead of them, the Marawa and Karayu tribes changed the direction of their invasions whereby they rapidly marched to northwestern Ethiopia, attacked and occupied Dämbya and Wägära at once.³³³

The various sub-tribes of the Warra Daya, who migrated from Awssa through the Awaš River, conquered a vast expanse of land extending from Ebbo, in southern Wäjjärat, to the vicinity where the modern town of Wajja is currently located. In connection to this point both oral traditions and written sources demonstrate that numerous tribes and sub-tribes of the Barentu

³³¹Ibid.

³³²Informants: *Ato Dämäqä Yemär* and *Ato Muläta Yaya* both interviewed in the town of Qobbo on 12/3/2010.

³³³Merid W. Aregay, “Southern Ethiopia and...”, p.411.

were spread over a wide area of the northern part of the Fertile Valle; and subsequently each tribe or sub-tribe gave its own tribal name or the name of its former habitation to a unit of territory which each had now occupied, understandably, by changing the original names of the places on which they established new settlements. A case in point is the small medieval province of Qeda and its immediate neighbor, Angot, which because of change in name, are described today as the ‘lost provinces of Ethiopia’ in the historical literature.³³⁴

Like the Karayu and Marawa, the Warra Daya, who controlled the northern part of the Fertile Valley in the seventeenth century, gave the name of a tribe or sub-tribe/ the name of its former settlement place to each locality by which it was respectively conquered and settled. For example, some of the most commonly known places are listed below: Warra Dayyu, Warra Ajo, Metta, Ekko, Bale, Bukko, Ṭaffe, Kukuftu, Kobolcha, Garjala, Fača, Adda’a, Hagallo, Sulula, Warra Harsu, Ganda Tola, Warra Warsu, Ganda Šabo, Ebbo, Ganda Aurtè, Warran, Ganda Badde, Ganda Jalla, Eborsa, Edenssa, Berru-Gala, Wayyu, Raga, Essa, Gabbate, Machre, Ćărcăr, Ṭemuga, Telewo, Ta’o, and so on forth are some of the many areas that could be mentioned in relation to this case.³³⁵

Upon establishing firm control in both the southern and northern Fertile Valley, it seems that all the different Oromo tribes and sub-tribes of the Barentu division had formed independent principalities with their own defined territories and tribal chiefs. Local traditions reveal that many of the Oromo tribes, who settled in contiguous areas, are reported to have been fighting one another for one reason or another. However, the conflict waged between the Karayu and Maawa tribes on the one hand and the Warra Daya sub-tribes on the other, principally fought

³³⁴G.W.B., Huntingford, “Lost provinces of...” p.113-115.

³³⁵Infrnants: *Balambaras* Assäfa Tadäg interviewed in Alamaṭa on 10/3/2010; *Ato* Kube Wayu at Garjale on 15/3/2010.

over territorial claims, was said to have been a protracted one. But after some time, it is reported that the Oromo groups who settled on both sides of the Fertile Valley have managed to resolve their territorial disputes through peaceful negotiations.³³⁶

Evidenced emanating from oral traditions and secondary sources have strongly suggested that the various Oromo tribes, who settled on both divide of the Fertile Valley; in an effort to heal the rift between them agreed a pact to demarcate the boundary line that would separate the north from the south. The delimitation of border, though we do not know exactly the period when the agreement was concluded, came to be known as '*karrora dekka*'³³⁷ which, in *Affan Oromo*, literally means the boundary line marked by the *karrora* groves.

It should be noted in this connection that *karrora* is one type of species of the acacia tree, which grows predominantly in the whole Fertile Valley. Today this place, which came to be known as '*karrora dekka*' in the history of this region is a specific place situated a few miles south of the town of Wajja-somewhere along the border between what is today the Northern Wollo Administrative Zone of the Amhara National Regional State and the Southern Administrative Zone of the Tegray National Regional State. Interestingly enough, people who live towards the south and north of that boundary line have eventually become Amharic and Tegrëña speakers respectively.

In relation to the issue of inter-tribal warfare some scholarly works have amply demonstrated that historically it was not uncommon to observe that Oromo tribes and clans or tribes belonging to other ethnic groups throughout Ethiopia were said to have been embroiled in a prolonged

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

³³⁷ Kibrom Assefa, *Yä Raya Hezeb Bahel...*, p.75; Informants: Ato Gobbä Abdu interviewed at Karra Addi Šabo on 22/3/2010; Ato Arbsä Mohamed interviewed at Addi Jello on 13/3/2010.

fighting among one another for one thing or another. In connection to this it is also reported that intertribal warfare be it among Oromo tribes or clans of other tribes for that matter had terminated after they were incorporated into the Ethiopian state in the nineteenth century most likely resulting from the growing centralization and firm control of the state.³³⁸

4.3. The Relationship between the Oromo and the highland Amhara-Tegrean Peoples.

Shortly after the numerous Barentu tribes had arrived and established settlement in the entire Fertile Valley, they began to move towards the north to acquire further territories. This gave rise to the intensification of fighting between the various Oromo tribes and the sedentary agrarian populations on the highlands of southern Tegray and northern Lasta. In this respect our sources clearly show that after the Warra Daye'a had arrived in the area in the seventeenth century, the study area and its surrounding regions were greatly menaced by repeated Oromo incursions. As a result, the contemporary governor of Tegray, *Tegrä-Mäkonnen* Täklä Giorgis, had paid a special attention to address the security threat posed by the Oromo.³³⁹

Among the various defensive measures the governor of the region took, meanwhile, to protect not only the abrupt invasion and total occupation of the highlands of southeastern Tegray but also to deter the Oromo from extending their conquest farther north into the heartlands of the province. One of the crucial defensive measures he took was the building of stone walls across the escarpment to check the incursion of the Oromo on the districts of Emba Alajā, Enda Mäkhonni and Ofla. Moreover, in an endeavor to promote security of the area what the governor of the province had done was to station contingents in some strategic posts. The other defense strategy which Täklä Giorgis adopted was the equally important decision he made to move

³³⁸Donald, Levine, *Greater Ethiopia...* pp.84-85.

³³⁹Merid W. Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia and..." p.506.

people from the frontier areas, which were more vulnerable to Oromo attacks and raids, to better secured places in case of the study area from the middle highlands to the easily defensible upper highlands of the Mountain Region.³⁴⁰

Although the governor had taken strong defense measures, from time to time, the security situation of the region had continued to deteriorate. Consequently, the provincial governor, Täklä Giorgis, was compelled to transfer his center of administration from Fremona, a place found in central Tegray around Adwa, to Henጅalo, a place in the sub-province of Endärta, so as to closely monitor the security situation of the region in person from a nearby place. In the year 1630, as part of the overall defense tactic, Täklä Giorgis managed to reinforce the mud and stone walls, built earlier, with mortar. The walls are said to have boosted the defense capacity of the highlanders for they were built using materials which could withstand concerted assaults coming from the line of attack.³⁴¹

Fortification of strategic posts and other related defensive efforts made by the governor of the region had greatly contributed towards checking numerous incursions of the Barentu tribes. In connection to this it is interesting to note that during the first half of the seventeenth century the burden of defending the sedentary Christian society against the invasion of the various Oromo tribes had become exclusively the duty of every regional ruler because the emperor, Susenyos, was, in the meantime, fully engaged in religious affairs as well as suppressing factional contention between members of the ruling dynasty and other pretenders for the imperial throne. Täklä Giorgis, who was the son-in-law of the emperor, Susenyos, was praised for the defensive measures he took that played a pivotal role in protecting people who were vulnerable to incessant

³⁴⁰*Ibid*, pp.506-508.

³⁴¹*Ibid*.

Oromo assaults. In the 1630s at the imperial court it was feared that the numerous Barentu tribes, who had settled in the Fertile Valley and to its south in Angot and Amhara provinces would, one day, penetrate the natural defense lines of the this sub-region and overrun the entire province of Tegray and beyond.³⁴²

Although the frontier districts of southeastern Tegray were subjected to repeated attacks, Täklä Giorgis's measures deterred the assailants before they could cause much damage. A parallel development, which prevented Oromo occupation of highland Tegray, was that the forces of the central government had devastated Karayu and Marawa settlements in the southerly provinces of Amhara and Angot. This attack had diverted the attention of the various Oromo tribes from attack to defense and induced them at least to halt temporarily conducting incursions in the north.³⁴³

In general, during the whole tenure of Täklä Giorgis as the governor of Tegray there was a noticeable improvement in the defense system of the study area in particular and the province in general. This is testified by the fact that the north-south corridor, which became impassable for traders and foreign delegates ever since the arrival of the Oromo into this region was now open for travellers. For example, by 1625 some Jesuit Missionaries, who were heading north via this region to the coast, after staying for some time at the imperial court in Dambya, are reported to have traversed through this route unharmed and with little concern for their lives even without escort.³⁴⁴

³⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 421.

³⁴³*Ibid.*, p.516.

³⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 516.

Nevertheless, beginning from the second half of the seventeenth century and continuing in the second half of the nineteenth conflict between pastoralist Oromo and Tegrean peasant farmers in the Mountain Region had intensified. The latter were continually exposed to Oromo attacks from the east in that the only alternative left to them was to organize their own defense system around their mountain strongholds when the state was not in a position to provide protection as was the case when Täklä Giyorgis was the governor of the Province. For almost two centuries further forays into the surrounding territories were launched on a more or less regular basis. Particularly sedentary agriculturalists in the lands of contact between the areas adjoining the Fertile Valley recently occupied after evacuating the Dobe'a by the Oromo and those areas of the Mountain Region long inhabited by the Tegreans had become venues of conflict between the two societies.³⁴⁵

Nevertheless, sometime between mid-seventeenth until the end of the eighteenth centuries our sources are silent about the issue how the sub-region under consideration was protected from the traditional Oromo incursions. But we can rightly anticipate that pressure by the perpetually expanding Oromo had been mounting all along the escarpment extending from Wäjjärat in the north to Qobbo in the south. This was because ever since their arrival in the region, the Oromo were generally known to have greater interests to expand their territory from the Fertile Valley to the more hospitable mountainous hinterland.³⁴⁶

Here it should be clearly noted that upon the arrival of the Oromo in the Fertile Valley and the subsequent expulsion of the Dobe'a, the Mountain Region was inhabited by both the latter and the Tegreans. How this historical process unfolded and took shape has been sufficiently

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 506-516.; also several informants in the three mountainous districts strongly assert that their region was repeatedly menaced by Oromo incursions since the latter had arrived in the region.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

addressed in the previous chapter and hence the relation between the Oromo and the Dobe'a and how they eventually came to friendly terms will not be discussed any more. What we will do here is that we shall deal with the relationship between the Tegreans, who inhabited in parts of the Mountain Region districts, which were not occupied by the Dobe'a, specifically northeastern part of the district of Enda Mäkhonni and the whole section of the most northerly district of Emba Alajā.

When the Oromo incessantly posed a serious threat to the safety and survival of the Tegrean sedentary community of the Mountain Region, the latter are reported to have used every means of defense at their disposal. Particularly in the absence of the traditional practice of placing organized army contingents by the state in the previously known strategic posts the local people were left with no option but to organize their own defense devices.³⁴⁷ In this situation it should be stated that the task of defending their territory was partly made easier by the inaccessible and defensible terrain that straddles between the realm of the Oromo and the Tegreans; whereby taking the full advantage of the topography and climate of their habitat, the latter had adopted various defense strategies that would safeguard them against ravagers.

In this regard, oral information gathered from the Mountain Region districts of Emba Alajā and Enda Mäkhonni clearly attests that in the overall activity of the organization of community defense people in all walks of life, including women and children, had actively taken part. One means of organizing defense was posting able-bodied men, every night, along the edge of the

³⁴⁷Informants: *Ato* Berhanu Färadä and *Ato* Bärhä Adhana both of them interviewed at Emba Hasty on 11/2/2011.

escarpment, mostly in places that are impenetrable and easily defensible, from which they would be hurling stones and throwing slingshots.³⁴⁸

Usually, as Oromo raiding bands used to carry out pillaging villages by night, women, children and the elderly would sleep either at home or in the nearby caves depending on the vulnerability of the hamlet. In defending their respective territories there had been division of labor between different sex and age groups of the community of each hamlet; whereby while men would do the actual fighting, the role played by women and children, during the day times, was collecting as well as making available rocks to male combatants which would be used against raiders in the evening.³⁴⁹

Moreover, as part of defense scheme many hamlets as well as parish churches were moved from areas where they were thought to be vulnerable to Oromo attacks to some other places where they could easily be defended. Also, whenever new houses were built extra precautionary attention was paid not to build them on areas easily accessible to Oromo raiding groups. A case in point is the parish church of St. Michael at Qolla Bällota, which, following a series of Oromo attacks the custodians were forced to move, from one place to another, the treasure of that church including the *tabot* to five different sites.³⁵⁰

Meaning, initially the church of St. Michael was moved from its original site, Bahri Kuhele, to Onna Bätäkheyan; and from there to another site called Šäraf, from Šäraf it was, once again, moved to a fourth site called Addi Hareya and eventually from there to Giorgis Bällota where

³⁴⁸Informants: *Mälakä Sälam* Kalayu Däsalañ interviewed in Maycaw on 14/2/2009; Priest Kahsay Sebhatu interviewed at Mäkhan on 9/2/2010; *Ato Kälali Gäbru* interviewed at Ajjura on 12/2/ 2010.

³⁴⁹Informants: Priest Hades Bärha interviewed at Bällota on 23/2/2010; *Märegèta Rādae Śāgay* and priest Heluf Asgädöm both interviewed at Ayba on 24/2/2010.

³⁵⁰*Ibid.*

because of the extreme difficulty of access to the last site, Giorgis Bällota, where, four men were enough to hold the two gates and stop anyone from approaching it.³⁵¹

The sedentary agriculturalist Tegreans tried, as much as possible, all kinds of defense tactics to fend off continual Oromo incursions. For example, in the neighborhood of Emba Hasty, situated some ten kilometers towards the northeast of the town of May Čaw, peasants, who were well aware of the fact that confrontation was not always the best way to ward off enemy attacks, though that was one particular incident, avoided frontal combats and instead they strewed the narrow path, which connects their homesteads to neighboring villages, with straw in the evening.³⁵²

As one side of the pathway runs along the edge of a steep cliff, that very path had become slippery due to the strewed substance. As a result, the ploy of the villagers had caused all members of the Oromo warring band to fall and die at once just before they ravaged the hamlet of Emba Hasty. The other mechanism of self-defense adopted by the society particularly at times when Oromo raiding groups had succeeded in breaking through the well-guarded passes and defiles of the highlands to ravage Tegrean settlements what the latter would usually do was intercepting and taking them by surprise as they were returning home from raiding campaigns.³⁵³

Tegrean sedentary cultivators in the mountainous Emba Alajā, Enda Mäkhonni and Ofla districts took the full advantage of the topography and climate of their habitation instead of fighting frontal battles against the Oromo. It is generally known that in the above three districts

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

³⁵² *Ibid.*

³⁵³ *Ibid.*

the morning hours of the day are/were extremely cold and because the Oromo warriors, who ascended up the escarpment were not accustomed to the frozen climatic conditions of the highlands, as they had come from the lowlands having very hot climatic conditions, in the event of a confrontation between the two often the latter were reported to have lost most battles to their adversaries.³⁵⁴

Thus, the reason for the defeat of the Oromo, time and again, was resulting from the freezing weather for which no combatants could manage to operate their daggers and knives, most widely used weaponries of war during the time. In general, the weather conditions of the mountain environment was said to have been too cold for the Oromo to defend themselves from the assaults of their enemies; whereby a great number of Oromo combatants were particularly said to have been perished at two battle fields. As a result, two places, the first one located along the border between Emba Alajä and Enda Mäkhonni districts specifically at Gaber Gaber, and the second one situated in south-central Enda Mäkhonni district mainly at the terrain between the localities of Mäkhan and Säränga have come to be called '*meqtaḷ galla*' which literally means a place where a great number of Oromo warriors were killed after being ambushed by their foes.³⁵⁵

To sum up, shortly after they had fully occupied both the northern and southern parts of the Fertile Valley between the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeen centuries, waves of Marawa, Karayu and Warra Daya Oromo tribes had relentlessly endeavored to penetrate deep into territories situated towards the north. However, the surrounding sedentary agriculturalist

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁵ *Liqa Kahnat* Hadära Täsfay interviewed at Emba Hasty on 11/2/2010; *Ato Macha Adahana* interviewed at Mäkhan on 7/2/2010; *Märgèta* Hades Bärha interviewed at Ashära on 24/2/2010.

society often aided by provincial and central governments managed to arrest the progress of the northward movement of the Oromo at the edge of the escarpment.³⁵⁶

Consequently, their movement was largely confined to the parameters of the valley environment from which they sporadically ascended across the escarpment to fight in small bands, constituting each not more than a dozen combatants, aiming at raiding cattle, ravaging homesteads, capturing/ killing people in the Mountain Region districts. This sort of hit-and-run tactics did continue unabated as something routine for several hundreds of years in this region.³⁵⁷

Social conflict arising from pillaging neighboring societies was said to have continued for long and ultimately became a tradition of the Oromo people as they began to call it '*lolla gamura*'³⁵⁸ which in *Affan Oromo* literally means 'raiding the highlanders'. In retaliation to the cattle raiding and burning down of homesteads the Christian populations of the districts of Wäjjärat, Emba Alajā , Bora, Seläwa, Enda Mäkhonni, Ofla, Lasta and Bugna also conducted periodic raiding deep into the Oromo settlements such as Qobbo, Alamaṭa, Dayyu, Warra Abaya, Machare, Čärcär, Balla and other areas as well. Eventually, the act of cattle raiding has changed its direction against the pastoralist Afar towards the east.³⁵⁹

In other words, the raiding activity which assumed the name '*gaz*', a term originating from Arabic, means to raid had caused an immense damage on the socio-economic life of the Afar people. The reason was that because, though we do not know how they eventually resolved their

³⁵⁶*Ibid.*

³⁵⁷Merid W. Aregay, "Southern Ethiopia and..." p.534.

³⁵⁸Informants: Sheikh Mohamed Yasin interviewed at Kukufto on 20/3/2010; *Haläqa* Belli Allä interviewed in the town of Mäkhonni on 21/2/ 2010.

³⁵⁹*Ibid.*

differences and come to friendly terms the Oromo, the Tegrans, the Amhara, as well as the Agäw were conducting a joint periodic organized raiding campaign against the Afar.³⁶⁰

Throughout the seventeen and eighteen centuries the Oromo were entangled in a series of small scale social conflicts with their neighbors which did not, however, attract the attention of the provincial and the central governments. But in the nineteenth century, there occurred three massive waves Oromo population movements towards the interior of the province of Tegray. These large scale Oromo population movements necessitated the involvement of the provincial and central powers to stem them.

One of these major attempts of incursions made was the one led by a certain Goje. He was governor of a large portion of the Oromo society inhabiting areas extending from the foot of the mountains of Lasta in the east to the borders of the Nile River in Gojjam. At the turn of the nineteenth century, after occupying the district of Lasta, he swiftly moved northwards at the head of forty thousand Oromo warriors of which a great number of the Oromo of Raya-Azäbo had joined the rank-and-file of Goje's warriors by whom they were instigated, and reached around Emba Alajä, which is not more than a day's journey to the town of Čalaqot, a seat of the governor of Tegray-Ras Wäldä Selsse of Endärta.³⁶¹

Shortly afterwards, alarmed by this state of affairs Wäldä Selasse raised a strong army of thirty thousand from the districts in the sub-province of Endärta, Wäjjärat, Selawa, Haramat, Gär'alta, Tämben and other parts of Tegray out of which about one thousands of them were horsemen, more than eight thousands of them were armed with matchlocks, the remaining were armed with

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁶¹ Henry, Salt, *A Voyage to Abyssinia and Travels to the Interior of that Country*, London: Frank Cass & Ltd., 1862, P.284.

spears and daggers. The Oromo, who heard the movement of Wäldä Selasse's troops retreated back southwards leaving behind them three districts of the Mountain Region namely Emba Alajā, Enda Mäkhonni and Ofla which they easily overrun and devastated during their northward movement.³⁶²

Finally, Oromo warriors under the command of Goje hold positions in the mountains of the district of Lasta in close proximity to his stronghold. In the final showdown the two armies met a place called Mezela in the district of Gedan, northeastern Lasta, towards the end of February 1808. Finally, Goje's army was decisively defeated and eventually Liben, another powerful Oromo chief and governor of Warra Himano, who was at the time in friendly terms with Wäldä Selsse of Endärta, intervened to mediate the conflict between the two belligerents. One of the important terms of the arbitration was that Goje agreed to commit himself not to invade, once again, territories under the jurisdiction of the Tegrean *ras*.³⁶³

Nevertheless, Oromo incursions have continued unabated particularly in the 1850s; they intensified ravaging the frontier areas of the escarpment bordering the districts of Enda Mäkhonni and Emba Alajā. In the meantime the vicinities of eastern Emba Alajā such as Mahgo and Elebat were repeatedly menaced by Oromo tribes, who settled in close proximity to them. Hence, fighting intensified between the Tegreans in Mahgo, Elebat and eastern and southern Wäjjärat and the Warsu and the Harsu Oromo clans who had established settlement around

³⁶²*Ibid.*, P.285-287.

³⁶³*Ibid.*

Qorbata (the locality including what is today the town of Mäkhonni and its environs) as well as Ebbo, a locality bordering Mahgo to the east, respectively in the seventeenth century.³⁶⁴

As the aforementioned areas were subjected to raids and incursions by both Oromo tribes, who frequently moved all the way up the escarpment, farming became difficult in several areas of this locality for several years. Consequently, fighting escalated between the two societies along the whole escarpment as the aforementioned Oromo clans attempted to penetrate deep further west beyond the eastern escarpment to areas such as Elibat, Sassat, Aśäla, Wägälän as well as to Ayba and Täkhe'a where there was plenty of pastures and ample water.³⁶⁵

Since the beginning of the 1860s the security situation in this region was deteriorating from time to time whereby the then governor of Enda Mäkhonni sub-province, appointed by Kassa Merça the future Emperor Yohannes IV, *Däjach Gäbrä Mädhén* (later *Ras*), who was ruling it from Bätmära, a small town situated towards the eastern foothills of Mt. Emba Alajä, marched to the area at the head of a large army and ultimately managed to drive back the Oromo from the escarpment to the lowlands of the Fertile Valley. In connection to this it is reported that out of thankfulness the people of Mahgo had granted 'one-eighth of the total of the land of Mahgo' which *Däjach Gäbrä Mädhén* in turn had divided/appropriated it between himself and his seven subordinates who took part as commanders of army units in that military expedition.³⁶⁶

It should be noted in relation to this that that Mahgo was one of the earliest settlement places of the sedentary Christian Tegrean society. It is mentioned in a church document together with the

³⁶⁴Informants: *Ato* Kiros Kassa interviewed at Ayba on 13/1/2000; *Ato* Abay Hannes interviewed at Elebat on 7/1/2000; *Ato* Alämu Bägänä interviewed at Hezba on 9/2/2010; *Ato* Negus Täfära interviewed at Täkhe'a on 21/1/2000.

³⁶⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶⁶Informants: *Ato* Barento Lägässä interviewed at Karra Addi Šabo on 17/3/2010; *Ato* Gälmo Wädajo interviewed at Addi Kuayaru on 18/3/2010; J.W., Bruce, "Land Reform Planning...", p.472.

vicinity of Lakhma in western Maycäw as well as Wätäg and Täkhe'a in Emba Alajä as the *gult* of Maryam Šeyon Aksum.³⁶⁷ Although the campaigns of *Däjach* Gäbrä Mädhn, had temporarily a tempering effect on the Harsu and Warsu Oromo, raiding and encroachment continued at an unprecedented scale in the eastern, central and southern part of the escarpment.

Thus, one of the reasons which prompted the monarch to launch large scale military expedition against the Oromo of Raya-Azäbo at the beginning of the 1870s has mainly to do with ending the recurrent Oromo incursions on the highland Christian society. The second motive was at a time when Egyptian military activities were becoming more and more dangerous for Yohannes in the north, Muzinger, the Egyptian agent, in an attempt to divert the attention of the emperor to the south, was reported to have created secret ties with the Oromo of Raya-Azäbo which was an attempt to stab Yohanes in the back.³⁶⁸

The third motive was regarding a certain *Däjach* Wäldä Yäsus, who was appointed as governor of the sub-region extending from the northern foothills of Mt. Emba Alajä, including the district of Wäjjärat, in the north, along the borders with Lasta in the south by Emperor Tewodros II. Towards the end of the 1860s as the power of the embattled emperor, Tèwodros, was declining Kassa Merça, was rising. Meanwhile, he was governing most parts of Tegray including much of the region north of the Märäb River. Nevertheless, until after the Napier expedition Kassa did not bring the territory governed by Wäldä Yäsus under his rule because the loyal vassal of Tewodros, Wäldä Yäsus, had refused to submit to him. In connection to this it should be stated that Wäldä Yäsus was, even in the latter's difficult times, the only local chief to resist British expeditionary forces, marching from the Red Sea Port of Massawa to Mäqdäla, by blocking the

³⁶⁷G.W.B, Huntingford, *The Land Charters of Northern Ethiopia: Studies in Ethiopian Land Tenure*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1965, p. 40.

³⁶⁸*Acta Ethiopica*, Foreign Threats and Internal Rivalries... p. 170.

narrow pass of Alajä forcing some of the vanguard columns detour of the British army to take roundabout route through Wäjjärat which elongated their journey by many miles. This was done in defiance of *Däjach* Kassa's authority who allowed them an unhindered passage throughout the region under his dominion.³⁶⁹

After Tewodros Kassa Mercha became one of the contenders for the imperial power upon controlling all the Tegrean regions including the area which Wäldä Yäsus was governing. After that Kassa appointed *Däjach* Gäbrä Mädhen in place of Wäldä Yäsus; in response to that measure the latter descended down the escarpment and took refuge amongst the Oromo in the Fertile Valley, who were by the time relatively independent from the control of any central authority. Wäldä Yäsus while operating from the lowlands of Raya-Azäbo refused to recognize the over lordship of Kassa. Moreover, he was also reported to have enlisted Oromo warriors into the rank-and-file of his retinues with which he continued to destabilize the districts under the prerogative of Kassa's appointees.³⁷⁰

So, one of the salient reasons that led him to go to war against the Oromo was to eliminate Wäldä Yäsus. To make the long story short, he was eventually killed by Umar Makone, an Oromo chief, who was a governor of most Oromo principalities of Raya-Azäbo, as a gesture of showing loyalty to Kasa and to be pardoned by him following his own militarily defeat.³⁷¹

Shortly after his coronation as king of kings of Ethiopia, Yohannes heard that many Christians were killed, churches burnt to the ground and the priests in them were massacred. This was the immediate reason which induced him to make an all-out war on the Oromo. But the main reason

³⁶⁹Markham, Clements, *A History of the Abyssinian Expedition*, London, 1869, p.271.

³⁷⁰Kemal Abdulwehab, "Critical Edition, Analysis..." p.246.

³⁷¹*Ibid.*

behind this military campaign was that the threat posed by Wäldä Yäsus, backed by the Oromo warriors, who had, meanwhile, raised a standard of rebellion against Yohannes' authority.³⁷²

Thus, in March 1872 Yohannes marched at the head of a large army towards Raya-Azäbo to carry out a decisive military campaign against Wäldä Yäsus and his patron, the Oromo, who allowed him to take refuge with them for several years since the time he was replaced by Yohannes' appointee as the governor of that region. Before commencing military operations the imperial army temporarily encamped in southeastern Emba Alajä district at a specific place called Emba Arära, a lofty mountain overlooking the lowland areas where the Oromo had established settlements.³⁷³

At Arara military plans were discussed and approved whereby it was decided that half of the army under the command of Yohannes IV himself had remained where it was until the other half commanded by his uncle, *Däjach Araya* (later *Ras Araya*), which was dispatched towards the areas of southeastern Maycäw at place called Emba Ćara, reached its destination. Thereafter, the emperor's army descended downwards to one of the northern part of the Oromo territory via a narrow pass penetrating the evergreen forests of Wäjjeg; at the same time the first army division commanded by *Däjach Araya* also marched east where they finally converged with the other under the command of the emperor at a place called Telewo, the heart of Oromo territory, as planned before.³⁷⁴

Shortly after arriving there, the combined forces of the emperor and *Däjach Araya* launched the first offensive on Telewo but after a token resistance it was easily crushed. The leader of the

³⁷² Bayru Tafla, *A Chronicle Of Emperor Yohannes IV, 1872-1889*, Weisbaden, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1977, p. 143.

³⁷³ Informant: Sheikh Mohamed Yassin interviewed at Kukufto on 20/3/ 2010; 20/3/ 2010; Abera Gessesse, "A Tentative History of the Oromo of Raya-Azabo", B.A. Essay in History, Addis Ababa University, 1980, p.14.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

various Oromo principalities, Abdälla, attempted to resist the army but he was overpowered and forced to evacuate his area and continue to fight by moving from one place to another. The remaining two Oromo chiefs of the locality by the name Rufu and Šebo gave up their resistance and surrendered to the imperial army. The next target of attack was Wara Abbayä, which was said to have been relatively more powerful and stronger than Telewo.³⁷⁵

Warabaya was the abode of Sheikh Mohamed Jamal al-Anniye, a Muslim clerk who was instrumental for the propagation of Islam among the Oromo of Raya-Azäbo in the nineteenth century. He was one of the most influential and powerful religious leaders amongst the Oromo there because he is reputed to have authored more than fifty books and tutored many students from the area itself and from far off regions in Ethiopia in his *madrassa* school which he established at Wara Abayä.³⁷⁶

Yohannes wanted to capture Jamal Al-anni, though he did not succeed in doing so, because the latter had declared *jihad* on Yohannes and using his influence he was able to instigate and arouse the people to fight against government army. As the war continued for several days in and around Warrabaya and as the war leaders of that principality such as Umar Makone were killed and as burning of villages and killing of people continued, his followers, who also served as personal guards had done everything in their power to save his life. In that regard notable war leaders like Dori and Hashim had stubbornly resisted and managed to elude his capture first by moving him to a place called Erba in Čaračär and from there to Yäjju where he died and buried as a fugitive leader. It should be noted that in the aftermath of the reign of Yohannes, Warabye continued as one of the important Islamic centers where his sons were allowed to return and

³⁷⁵*Ibid.*, pp.15-16.

³⁷⁶*Ibid.*

continue the role he had been playing. Both Christians and Muslims of Raya-Azäbo called him as well as his descendants ‘*Abbona/Abbuwa*’ (meaning our father) until the present time. After the imperial army controlled Wara Abayä the mosque there was demolished and houses around it were razed but for unknown reason no church was erected in the site where that demolished mosque stood.³⁷⁷

The second major battle fought between the imperial army and the Oromo was at Gabbate. Although these people had witnessed what had happened to the neighboring principalities they were not terrified and easily surrendered. Knowing well that Oromo warriors were not a match for the organized imperial army particularly after the first skirmish, they employed other tactics to defend themselves instead of fighting pitched battles. One of the strategies they employed was to deny water supply to the invading army.³⁷⁸

In this case, they were said to have built dams along the course of the rivers and the rivers were guarded by Oromo warriors so that the Christian army would not have any water to drink. It would have been very difficult for Yohannes’ army to fight in the dry season of the year in one of the hottest areas of the region, which are as low as something like 1400 meters above sea level, had the rains not rained in the highlands and caused the dams to collapse.³⁷⁹

The other technique they employed was to conduct surprise attacks, night raids and ambushes. Towards this end, our sources have recorded that in one incident the Oromo managed to approach very close to the camp of *Däjach Gäbru* and *Bä’al Gada Kasa* to launch an attack; but

³⁷⁷Kemal Abdulwehab, “Critical Edition, Analysis...”, pp. 66-68.

³⁷⁸Gebre Medhin Kidane, “Yohannes IV: Religious Aspects of...”, pp.24-25.

³⁷⁹*Ibid.*

were repulsed leaving behind many dead due to the fact that there was a very huge gap in fire power between the two armies.³⁸⁰

Gabbatie was the only Oromo principality that posed a serious military challenge to the imperial army whereby Yohannes and his generals were forced to reconsider their military strategy in that they decided to attack it simultaneously from all directions by deploying a large army. As a result, the army commanded by *Wagsum Teferi*, *Ras Hailu*, *Däjach Deräs*, *Däjach Gäbrä Täklä*, *Däjach Gäbrä Selasse*, *Fitawrari Wäldä Negus* and *Assälafi Täkolla* were assigned to give a final blow to Gabbtie. Ultimately, unable to withstand the coordinated assault of the army the Gabbatie principality had fallen.³⁸¹

Moreover, as a result of the fierce resistance they posed against the imperial army, the people of Gabbtie were treated more harshly than their counterparts in that a great number of houses were reported to have burnt and livestock confiscated. After subjugating Gabbatie completely Yohannes at the head of his large army made his way to other territories where other Oromo tribes lived and had not yet submitted. In this situation, Ebbo, Mächarä, Čärcär, Dandä, Mägallä, Kosimin, Ta’o and Bäri Täkläy were brought to submission one after another. It should be noted that at a time when one or two Oromo tribes came under attack, others did not come to offer assistance. This, in addition to the fact that they were fighting well-armed and organized imperial forces eventually brought about their total defeat.³⁸²

In the overall military strategy, the operations were planned in such a way that the army would proceed from north to south that is to say that the imperial army was attacking and subjugating

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Abera Gessesse, “A Tentative History of...”, p.15; Gebre Medhen Kidane, “Yohannes IV: Religious Aspects of...”, p.25.

³⁸² Gebre Medhin Kidane, “Yohannes IV: Religious Aspects of...”, p. 26.

one Oromo unit after another by first launching military operations at the northern tip of the Fertile Valley and would terminate when it reached at the southern end of the Oromo territory some were at the upper course of the Alla River. So, based on this plan the army marched swiftly southwards. The next targets were Dayyu, Alamaṭa, Wajja, Zobel, Qobbo and other Oromo people found south of these territories.³⁸³

The people in these territories were sufficiently aware of what had happened to the Oromo to their north. As a result, their leaders preferred submission to resistance whereby the tribal leaders of Basona, Ṭafe, Dayyu, Alamaṭa, Wajja, Qobbo, Qalim, Zobel and Gura Warqe appeared before the king with gifts of cattle, sheep, goats, horses, mules, asses, camels, grain, honey and butter and declared their peaceful submission. Yohannes felt pity for them and allowed them to return to their respective localities without inflicting any harm on them. With this came the end of military campaigns that lasted from April to August 1872.³⁸⁴

The military defeat and subsequent subjugation gave rise to the loss of independence of the Oromo had enjoyed before the war. Immediately after the war had ended, the emperor decided that the various Oromo tribes and clans inhabiting in the entire Fertile Valley had to be incorporated into the politico-religious system of the state. Hence, seemingly based on the dichotomy of the north-south administrative division, the emperor kept the incumbent governors of both Oromo territories of the Fertile Valley in their positions of power. In other words, an Oromo chief, Qubbi Abba Bona, was assigned as governor of the confederation of Oromo tribes

³⁸³ *Ibid.* pp.24-26.

³⁸⁴ Informants: *Ato* Robsä AbbayäAbba Seru interviewed in Qobbo on 13/3/2010; *Balambars* Assäfa Tadagä interviewed in Alamaṭa on 8/3/2010.

inhabiting in the southern part of the Fertile Valley namely Qobbo, Qalem and Gura Wärqè and the surrounding vicinities as well.³⁸⁵

For the confederation of Oromo tribes found in the northern part of the Fertile Valley that is to say territories comprising localities such as Wajja, Alamaṭa, Dayyu, Ta'ò, Ṭafe, Balla, Ćärcär, Kosimin, Kukufto, Warra Abbayä, Mächra, Dandä, Mägalla and the like, another Oromo chief known as Tola Abba Marawa was appointed as governor. As an incorporative method to the state both were converted to Christianity and subsequently given Christian names. In this situation Qubbi Abba Bona, was renamed Dasta or *Däjach* Dästa, whose God-father was *Ras Bitwädäd* Gäbrä-Kidan Zämo and Tola Abba Marawa, was renamed Gäbrä-Selasse after baptism and Emperor Yohannes himself became his God-father and like the former created *däjazmach* and came to be called *Däjach* Gäbrä Selassè.³⁸⁶

In order to establish his religious and political policies on a firm basis the emperor ordered mass baptism of the Muslim Oromo in the whole Fertile Valley and simultaneously erected churches at several places of the region. A case in point is the Church of St. Märqorewos was founded inside the dense forests of Wäjjeg close to the vicinities where the Harsu and Warsu Oromo clans have inhabited since the seventeenth century. In a similar manner the church of Iyasus at Alamaṭa, the church of Giorgis at Dima, the church of Mädhane Aläm at Qeleša, the church of Bita Maryam near Wajja as well as the church of St. Mary at Qobbo were all founded in the aftermath of the war and were endowed with *gult* lands of localities lying around the churches.

³⁸⁵Informants: *Ato* Märawo Barento, *Ato* Kassaw Bereye and *Ato* Arbesä Mohamed. Three of them are interviewed in Alamaṭa, as a group, on 12/3/2010; Agezew Hedaru, "The Political History of Raya-Qobbo, 1872-1943", B.A. Essay in History, Addis Ababa University, 2000, p.26-27.

³⁸⁶*Ibid.*

Moreover, Yohannes set out to establish forty-four churches which were said to have been founded in the district of Zobel in the early times, when Christianity was introduced to this region sometime during the seventh century A.D. by one of the nine saints, *Abba Gubba*, whose evangelical center had been some thirty kilometers west of the town of Maycäw.³⁸⁷ There is a strong tradition in the region that these churches were destroyed by the forces of Ahmad Ibrahim *al-Ghazi* in the sixteenth century. Owing to his great desire to restore the pre-sixteenth century prestige of the area Yohannes ordered his vassals, *Ras Bitwädäd Gäbrä-Kidan Zamo* and *Ras Gäbrä-Mädhen*, to erect the same number of, forty-four, churches in the sites where ruins of these churches stood previously.³⁸⁸

Zobel, a mountainous plateau district, had a remarkable religious and military history before the Muslim conquest in the sixteenth century and the subsequent Oromo population movement to northeast Ethiopia. As shown clearly in chapter two, this district owing to its strategic location in the frontier areas between the Afar lowlands in the east and the Christian highland province, Angot, in the west, one of the powerful army regiments, *Jan-Qanṭafa*, was stationed to fend off the raids and conquests of lowland Muslim communities. It had also served as a temporary seat of power for various Solomonic kings when they moved back and forth between Šäwa and their territories in the north.³⁸⁹

Knowing the religious and strategic importance of the area, the emperor garrisoned one-thousand well-armed soldiers under the command of *Ras Bitwädäd Gäbrä-kidan Zämänu* to protect the

³⁸⁷Informants: *Mägabe Serate* Hagos Haile interviewed in the town of Makhonni on 19/3/2010; Fekadu Begna, “Land and Peasantry in Northern Wollo: Yejjū and Raya-Qobbo *Awrajas*, 1941-1974”, M.A. Thesis in History, Addis Ababa University, 1990, pp. 28-29.

³⁸⁸Informants: *Ato Arbsä Maryè* interviewed in Alamata on 5/3/2010; *Ato Arbesä Mohamed Abajalè* interviewed at Addi Bore on 12/3/2010; *Ato Kiros Suba* interviewed in the town of Mäkhonni on 21/2/2010.

³⁸⁹Merid Wolde Aregay, “Military Elites in Medieval...”, pp.35-37; C. Conti Rossini, “I Galla Raya”,...p.59.

area from possible raids as well as to safeguard the safety of the newly founded churches as well as the neighboring Christian society in the adjacent highlands. He has also stationed soldiers in Ćärĉär commanded by *Däjach* Tädla Wahed having the same objective as those posted at Zobel. Moreover, he also moved Amharic and Tegrëña speaking people from Lasta and Tegray, constituting peasants and the clergy, and settled them amongst the Oromo largely in the following three vicinities of Alamaṭa, Zobel and Ćärĉär and there after he had granted them sufficient land for their sustenance.³⁹⁰

Traditions also show that Yohannes granted *gult* lands to many of his prominent vassals mainly in Zobel and Ćärĉär. Mention can be made in this regard, for example: while the localities such as Gattira, Dino, Ulaga were granted to *Negus* Menilek, *Ras* Michael, Ambaye Shanu of Lasta respectively as their *gult* lands from which they would collect tribute annually. Localities around Angot Mädhane Aläm, Mäqdäla as well as Tegrè Qäballè were also granted to *Ras* Adal Täsäma and *Ras* Alula Engeda respectively as *gult* lands. In a similar manner *Däjazmach* Zägäyä Berru of Yäjju, *Ras* Gäbrä Mädhene of Semen and *Ras Bitwädäd* Gäbrä-Kidan also took their fair share of *gult* lands in the district.³⁹¹

The governor of Ćärĉär and its environs and the commander of the army stationed there, *Däjach* Tädla Wahed, was granted vast *gult* lands from the area under his administration plus from Jehan- vicinity situated towards the northeastern suburbs of the modern town of Alamaṭa.

³⁹⁰Fekadu Begna, “Land and peasantry...”, pp. 53-54.; Agezew Hedaru, “The Political History...”, pp.28-29. Informants: *Ato* Arbesä Mohamed Abba Jale interviewed at Addis Bore on 12/3/2010; *Ato* Dargä Šamä interviewed in Alamaṭa on 14/3/2010.

³⁹¹*Ibid.*

Zäwditu Menelik upon her marriage to the emperor's son, Araya Selassè, in 1883 was given the locality called Bällago an area found in the sub-district of Qalem.³⁹²

The military action and other economic and political measures taken by the emperor had put the Oromo in a weaker political and economic position. The balance of power between the Oromo in the Fertile Valley and the Amhara-Tegrean sedentary agriculturalists in the highlands was changed in favor of the latter. This could be the main reason why the Oromo are not reported to have invaded and ravaged settlements in the highlands though there were intermittent skirmishes between them.³⁹³ In the meantime the emperor returned to Adwa, his capital, when he was informed of the Egyptian invasion of his territories in the north. Muzinger, who was waiting for an opportune moment to occupy Ethiopian territories, entered Bogos in April 1872 knowing that Yohannes was occupied in the south. The imperial army which had flexed its muscle on the Oromo of Raya-Azäbo would in the end confront at Gundet in 1875 when the Egyptian armies were routed decisively.³⁹⁴

³⁹²*Ibid.*

³⁹³*Ibid.*

³⁹⁴Zewde Gebre- Selasse, *Yohannes IV of Ethiopia: A Political Biography*, Oxford, 1975, p.48.

Chapter Five: The Genesis and Evolution of Raya Identity.

5.1. The Agrarian Conditions of the Peasantry in the Mountain Region since the early twentieth century.

Documentary and oral sources clearly demonstrate that beginning from the early twentieth century a profound demographic change has occurred in the northern and central highlands of Ethiopia. As the study area is a component part of this geographic setting, the three Mountain Region districts of Emba Alajā, Enda Mäkhonni and Ofla as well as the adjoining regions, situated towards the north and south of them, have, meanwhile, witnessed the prevalence of an unprecedented population explosion as clearly demonstrated by the following statements.³⁹⁵

At the opening of the twentieth century the populations of many regions of the northern highlands appears to have begun a period of recovery after the major famine/epidemic of 1889-1892. The recovery probably proceeded slowly, stumbling during the regional droughts or epidemics, and certainly slowing or halting during the 1917-19 influenza pandemic. Nonetheless, a clear pattern of general growth through the 1920s and into the post-war years emerges from the available sources.³⁹⁶

Regarding demographic dynamics there is a clear indication that since the 1920s the population of the region was growing at an accelerating proportion. Even in the immediate aftermath of the Italian evacuation period, the population size of the region had been relatively high although it seems unreasonable to argue that way for the number of people had been considerably reduced by a high death rate because of the catastrophic nature of the war on civilian life.

³⁹⁵Informants: *Ato* Gäbra-Mädhen Kälälāw interviewed at Tākhe'a on 4/1/2001; Priest Tāka Wäldä Sānbät interviewed at Takhe'a on 25/12/2000; Negga Menasbo, "A History of Land Tenure and Tribute in Emba Alajā Wārāda to 1991", M.A. Theses in History, Addis Ababa University, 2009, p.50.

³⁹⁶James, McCann, "The Myth and Reality of Agricultural Crises in Ethiopia: Empirical Lessons from History, 1900-1987," Marinna Ottaway (ed.), *The Political Economy of Ethiopia*, p.181.

In any case, population growth has caused deep impact on the amount of land to be allocated for food production, pasture and other purposes. To be more specific on the matter, rapid natural population growth in the Mountain Region districts, meanwhile, gave rise to a high pressure on available land. Meaning, the growing demand for land because of the rapidly increasing population has led the local people to start up new land for cultivation. In this circumstance oral informants have reported that in many localities of this area peasants were generally resorted to cultivate bush/forest lands, mountain tops/slopes, as well as hillsides and even pasture lands which were hitherto used for other purposes such as grazing and building residential houses and fences.³⁹⁷

An encroachment on community pasture, mainly by local chiefs, is continually reported as a consequence of this new agrarian development in the study area. In connection to this the reminiscences of some of our key informants is presented below, as case studies, thinking that they will shade light on the issue under consideration.

In this situation, the accounts of oral informants are congruent with each other on the subject that scarcity of land, owing to population growth, was observed by the dawn of the twentieth century. However, it was since the eve of the Italian conquest that the effect of population explosion over agrarian resources was vividly felt. That was the main reason why a large portion of virgin land in the Mountain Region, which had never been cultivated prior to the Italian occupation period, came under cultivation.³⁹⁸ In relation to this point Bruce has rightly observed how far the natural population increase, in the wider region, even beyond the study area, has

³⁹⁷Negga Menasbo, "Land Tenure and...", p.52.; Informants: *Ato Gäbrä Mädhen Heluf* and *Ato Negus Täfära* interviewed at Täke'a on 28/12/2000; *Ato Haftu Negussä* and *Ato Haile Selasse Tägän* both interviewed at Sébät on 12/2/2010.

³⁹⁸*Ibid.*

contributed toward the pressure on the available land when he states: "... Since the Italian occupation, the value of land is said to have increased three or four fold in some of the more densely populated regions of Tegray..."³⁹⁹

But it should be taken into account that besides to population pressure over available land, as a factor, that facilitated the expansion of agriculture to previously uncultivated areas the Italians, seemingly in an effort to win-over the heart of the local society, are reported to have encouraged them to pursue on the effort of the starting up of new land for cultivation an activity which the local society call it-'*bāda mewegae*'.⁴⁰⁰

Thus, shortly after the Italians had occupied the country and established their rule, they, in accordance with their new colonial administrative policy, while all personnel serving in the upper echelon of the imperial government offices were automatically dismissed, they kept in their former official duties those people, who had been serving in the lower strata administrative positions, such as village heads and sub-district administrators, most likely on the assumption that assigning an Italian official at grass-roots level administration could be of less effective for the latter would lack fundamental knowledge and skills necessary to deal with local matters.⁴⁰¹

The main point I want make in relation to this theme is that it was those village heads and sub-district administrators who were in charge of the overall administration of the affairs regarding the expansion of farming into lands thus far uncultivated by the local community. Hence, informants said, they were responsible for implementing the distribution of virgin lands among

³⁹⁹J.W, Bruce, "Land Reform Planning...", p.407.

⁴⁰⁰Informants: *Ato Mārāsa Śāgay* and *Ato Berhanu MāngāŠa* interviewed at Haya on 29/12/2009; *Ato Kālali Gäbru* and *Ato Kiro Kasa* both interviewed in Mayčāw on 12/2/2010.

⁴⁰¹Negga Menasbo, "Land Tenure and...", p. 52.

their respective local peasant communities on the basis of capacity to cultivate but after they had taken an amount of land that would suffice for their own use.⁴⁰²

In the meantime, informants asserted, another aspect, which speeded up the expansion of cultivation into mountain slopes, hillsides and grazing lands in the Mountain Region and adjacent districts, was, to some extent, the replacement of the indigenous rudimentary agricultural implements with new ones, imported from Italy, such as sharp axes, hoes, shovels, and spades. It is reported that these tools had enabled the peasants to easily dig the ground, cut down trees and bushes in their endeavor to prepare the land for cultivation. In this regard oral sources from the study area reveal that most woody vegetation, which used to cover vast areas of the Mountain Region, was said to have been deforested because of them. This could well be one of the strong indications of the result of uncontrollable population growth.⁴⁰³

The expansion of agriculture, resulting from a high rate of natural population growth in the Mountain Region districts, has continued at an accelerating degree also in the decades subsequent to the expulsion of the Italians from Ethiopia in 1941 as evidenced by the following two cases: In this regard the first case has to do with the decision of the peasants of the district of Emba and Enda Mäkhonni to petition *Ras Seyoum Mangasa*, governor of the province, to allow them to include uncultivated areas into cultivation.⁴⁰⁴

Peasant delegates of the two neighboring districts, who went to Mäqälä, provincial capital, to meet *Ras Seyoum* in the year 1956 returned home with a decision, made on their favor, whereby

⁴⁰²Informants: priest Täka Wäldä Sänbät interviewed at Täke'a on 25/12/200; Ato W.Yohannes Zägaya interviewed at Haya on 29/12/2009; Ato Šägay Aräfayne interviewed at Addišo on 3/1/2000; pries Kiros G.Yohanes interviewed at Ašäla on 4/1/2001.

⁴⁰³*Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁴*Ibid.*

the governor sanctioned the plea of the petitioners. Shortly afterwards, peasants launched intensive cultivation activities into areas which were not yet tilled. In relation to this point informants still remember that the next harvest season (1957) as a year of good harvest in both districts.⁴⁰⁵

Though, like the first one, the second case has taken place as consequence of acute shortage of land in the Mountain Region; the latter differs from the former in such a way that it has to do with the problem of an unprecedented encroachment, by land hungry local chiefs, on regulated community pasture locally known as *heza 'ety*.⁴⁰⁶

A case in point is the story related to *Fitawrari* Yekuno Amlak Tädla, governor of most parts of western Emba Alajä district, as well as Henṭalo, a district in southwestern Endärta sub-province, and a member of the ruling aristocracy. He was reported to have attempted to cultivate the grassy meadow of Säbhi Šeha, a community pasture of the nearby hamlet of Šekhät at Täkhe'a, one of the vicinities in western Emba Alajä district; but then he encountered stiff resistance from peasants to whom that meadowland belonged. Shortly afterwards, Yekuno Amlak made another similar attempt to cultivate Gerbado, a community pasture of the hamlet of Maygäda. However, because local peasants showed a firm determination to protect their common dominions he was once again forced to abandon from implementing his plan and decided to move somewhere else.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁵Informants: *Ato* Alämu Bäjänä interviewed at Hezba on 14/12/2009; *Ato* Abäbä Guangul interviewed in May Čaw on 10/12/2009; Negga Menasbo, "Land Tenure and Tribute...", pp.53-54.

⁴⁰⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁷Informants: *Märgèta* Bärhä Hades interviewed at Šebbät on 12/2/2010; *Ato* Kiro Kassa interviewed at Ayba on 26/12/2000; *Ato* Negus Täfära interviewed at Täkhe'a on 25/12/2000; *Ato* Hagos W.Yohannes interviewed at Addišo on 28/2/2000; Priest G.Kiros Hagos interviewed at Täkhe'a on 25/12/2000; Negga Menasbo, "Land tenure and...", pp. 55-56.

Shortly after his activities to cultivate regulated community pasture at Tākhe'a, western Emba Alajā district, was frustrated, Yekuno Amlak was made to shift his activities of cultivating pasturelands from Tākhe'a farther south of it. As a result, in the winter of 1948 Yekuno Amlak and his retinues, accompanied by fifty pairs of oxen, travelled from Tākhe'a south wards to Ayba in order to plow the community field called Mezra'e Senday. But there also he faced stubborn opposition from the peasants of Ayba. But the leading opponents of Yekuno Amlak were *Qäñazmach* Negusä and his son, *Gerazmach* Adhana Negusä.⁴⁰⁸

When Yekuno Amlak and his men commenced to plough the ground, both men, father and son, who were known as the richest and most powerful persons among the peasant community of the area, rushed to the scene to stop them. Soon gun battle broke out between them that ended up in the tragic death of *Qäñazmach* Negussä himself, his female slave, and his son *Gerazmach* Adhana Negussä, who died four days later after having been seriously wounded. *Bašay* Hailä Kiros, the younger brother of Yekuno Amlak, was also killed by *Gerazmach* Adhana Negussä.⁴⁰⁹

Fitawrari Yekuno Amlak, the culprit, narrowly escaped death; whenever one of the bullets fired from the gun of *Gerazmach* Adhana Negusä, had slightly missed him after hitting his hat and taking it off from his head. *Gerazmach* Adhana was said to have been one of the most renowned sharpshooters in the sub-region as a whole.⁴¹⁰

In connection to this informants reported that from that incident onwards people in the entire sub-province of Raya-Azäbo never doubted to believe, in the superstitious belief, that Yekuno Amlak has laid on his left arm a certain substance, having magical powers, which would help

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*

him avoid being hit by a bullet fired at him, whenever he was targeted, by his enemies. Furthermore, informants related that although Yekuno Amlak had paid a substantial amount of blood money to reconcile with relatives of the deceased, he had eventually grown to be one of the most feared and hated persons amongst the society of the study area.⁴¹¹

Like Yekuno Amlak, the governor of the neighboring district of Enda Mäkhonni, *Däjach Wäldä Kidan*, has planned to till the green meadowlands of Afajjä. So as to implement his plans he marched some eight kilometers north of his residence, Mayčäw, at the head of several pairs of oxen and their plowmen. However, the moment he and his retinues had arrived in the area and commenced to plow the field, they found themselves under attack by barrages of stones thrown at them, from the surrounding hills, by peasants of the localities of Bällago and Šebbät to whom that pasture land belonged. Shortly afterwards, Wäldä Kidan along with his plowmen and the oxen, under yoke, were forced to run in panic down the hill towards Mayčäw to save their lives.⁴¹²

As opposed to those at the locality of Ayba, the peasants of Bällago and Šebbät were lucky enough in the sense that they succeeded to protect their pasture land at a minimum cost that is to say they were able to defend their communal resource without killing anyone or anybody being killed amongst them. But it should be noted that Wäldä Kidan sued thirty peasants from the above mentioned two localities, Bällago and Šebbät, for committing a criminal offence, in the sub-provincial court in Mayčäw. Among the contemporary peasant community of these localities it is widely reported that in the legal proceedings of the case, the peasants were repeatedly fined

⁴¹¹*Ibid.*

⁴¹²*Märgèta* Bärhä Hades interviewed at Šebbät on 12/2/2010; *Ato* Abreha Kassayè interviewed at Bällago on 11/2/2010; *Ato* Berhanu Färadä interviewed at Emba Hasty on 9/2/2010; *Ato* Gäbrä Germay interviewed at Hezba on 14/12/2009.

three birr each for not appearing in court on the appointed day which is too much money taking into account the purchasing power of the Ethiopian currency of the day.⁴¹³

The reason why I have discussed the issue of land in a greater detail, here, is that because I want to demonstrate how population pressure has prompted peasants of the study area to encroach on pastures, mountain slopes, hillsides and so forth. But in connection to this it should be taken into consideration that although more and more land was put under cultivation in various localities of the Mountain Region beginning from the post-Italian period, a number of young men and women, who were of age to establish new households, could not have ample amount of land or no land at all because of the wide disparity between population size and the available inelastic amount of land.⁴¹⁴

Through time the unrelenting encroachment on uncultivable portion of rural lands, in the Mountain Region, has considerably lessened the amount of land formerly utilized for grazing, construction and other purposes. The decline in the amount of pasture lands, in turn, had brought about a remarkable impact on the economy of the society under study; because shortage of fodder directly signifies loss of oxen, which were/are one of the most crucial capital equipment, for farming households. So as to deal with the problem of scarcity of grazing and arable land as well as to resolve the difficulty of obtaining sustainable supply of oxen peasants have resorted to migrate from the Mountain Region to the Fertile Valley.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹³*Ibid.*

⁴¹⁴Informants: *Ato Aymut Märässa* interviewed at Haya on 29/12/2009; *Ato Negusä Šaynä* and *Ato Haftu Beli Wayu* both interviewed in the town of Mäkhonni on 19/3/ 2010; *Ato Barènto Lägässä* interviewed at Karra Addi Šabo on 17/3/2010.

⁴¹⁵Informants: *Ato Hades Abreha Tädla* and *Ato Mache Adhana* both of them interviewed at Mäkhonni on 7/2/2010.

In relation to this context the accounts of our informants reveal that beginning from the end of the nineteenth century and; particularly since the post-Italian occupation period, peasants from the Mountain Region, a highland section of the study area, steadily moved to the Fertile Valley in order to engage in different categories of tasks ranging from seasonal wage labor employment to taking up of permanent dwelling there.⁴¹⁶

By coincidence the political and economic developments, which have taken place since the beginning of the nineteenth century, have created fertile ground for the highland sedentary agriculturalist society to live and work, either temporarily or permanently, in the Fertile Valley, an area predominantly inhabited by pastoralist Oromo society.⁴¹⁷ In connection to this it should be noted, in the subsequent section of this chapter, that before I deal with the social and economic intercourse between the highland agrarian society, who have been inhabiting west of the escarpment; and the pastoralist Oromo, who occupied most areas east of the same escarpment, I will see the two most decisive factors, which had been major obstacles to the intermingling of societies, residing on both divides of the escarpment.

5.2. Factors that Hampered the Process of Interactions between the Oromo and their Neighbors.

Based on the above proposition the two basic reasons, which slowed down interethnic relations in the study area, before the mid-nineteenth century, with respect to the pastoralist Oromo on the one hand and Amhara, Tegray and Agäw sedentary agriculturalist societies on the other, are always attributed to the existence of enduring social conflict between them as well as the regular outbreak of an epidemic of malaria in the Fertile Valley. In the history of interethnic relations of

⁴¹⁶*Ibid.*

⁴¹⁷*Ibid.*

the study area sources clearly demonstrate that the Oromo and their neighbors were entangled, for hundreds of years, in a protracted conflict which manifested itself in recurrent raiding and counter-raiding of each other's settlements.⁴¹⁸

As a result, prior to this period, they were so hostile towards each other that there had been a very limited or no contact at all amongst them. However, we should note that as the issue of the history of interethnic relations particularly characterized by social conflict is sufficiently addressed in the previous chapters, here, we need to dwell fully on the second theme that is to say malaria epidemic, as major factor, which had played a pivotal role in inhibiting social intercourse between the Oromo and their immediate neighbors dwelling in the highlands west of the escarpment.

Thus, the second and probably the most important factor, besides to the threat of Oromo assaults, which barred the sedentary highland agriculturalists to move freely to various localities of the low-lying areas of the Fertile Valley, was the prevalence of malaria there. Taking into consideration the relatively high morbidity and mortality rates from that particular disease, the Fertile Valley must have been one of malaria epidemic prone areas in the country. The argument, which strongly suggests, the idea that malaria was endemic in that area, until the recent past, can be validated by the reminiscences of our oral informants interviewed in the districts of Mäkhonni, Alamaṭa and Qobbo.

In this case a group of informants from the above mentioned three districts related to me quite analogous story dealing with the fact that any person, who happened to be a newcomer to any

⁴¹⁸Informants: *Ato Mānasbo Zālälāw* interviewed at Mākhan on 7/2/2010; *Ato Haftu Negus* and *Ato Abreha Kassayè* both of them interviewed at Šebāt on 12/2/2010; Gètachāw Mārāssa, "The *Gaz* Tradition among the Raya and the Afar", B.A. Essay in History, Addis Ababa University, 1998, pp. 26-30.

part of the Fertile Valley, would catch malaria, the very day on which that person arrived there, and die overnight. For that reason, informants continue to recount that drivers of heavy trucks would not dare to stay the night in Alamaṭa or Qbbo towns even if they wanted to.⁴¹⁹

Lest they would contract malaria and die instantly from it, as had happened before to their colleagues, they were forced to drive some twenty kilometers north, by way of of the precipitous cum winding roads of Gera Kahsu mountains, so that they would spend the night in the malaria free highland town of Koräm; whereas those drivers, who were heading either to Dässiè or Addis Ababa or somewhere further south, had to drive some thirty kilometers southwards so as to stay the night in Wäldya.⁴²⁰

In a similar manner local judges, who had been adjudicating court cases during the day's working hours, had to ascend up along the Gera Kahsu Mountains in order to stay the night in one of the villages there; but only to return back to Alamaṭa, in order to execute their official task, to where they had been the previous day. In most cases it is reported that the outbreak of malaria spread used to ensue during the months of September and June subsequent to the major raining season in Ethiopia, *kerämt*, and the short raining-season, *bälge*, respectively.⁴²¹

In connection to this informants assertively claim that all farming households, who inhabited in different parts of the low-lying areas of the Fertile Valley, had to ascend up every evening, along with their families to the surrounding hill tops and mountain sides to stay the night there owing to the scourge of that disease. In relation to this point it is also said that at a time when malaria raged through this region, people, who came to the town of Alamaṭa from the neighboring

⁴¹⁹Informants: *Ato Arbesä Maryè* and *Ato Wädajo Gugsä Gedyäläw* both of them interviewed in Alamaṭa on 5/3/2010.

⁴²⁰*Ibid.*

⁴²¹*Ibid.*

districts for a weekly market exchange had to disperse at four o'clock local time, just before noon, for fear that they would contract malaria.⁴²²

By the same token, after liberation the imperial government had posted an army unit in the town of Alamaṭa to help maintain peace and security of that town as well as the surrounding districts; but shortly afterwards that battalion was transferred to the neighboring town of Koräm because the troops were incapacitated by malaria infections. Hence, the reason as to why two quarters of the modern day town of Koräm, namely 'Congo-Säfar' and 'Wälamo-Säfar,' are attributed to the names of these army units stationed in them. Furthermore, the significant numbers of Amharic speaking persons, who are currently a constituent part of the dwellers of that town, are reported to be descendants of the troops posted by the time there.⁴²³

Oral accounts, gathered from the neighboring district of Mäkhonni, relate a similar harrowing story to that of Alamaṭa and Qobbo regarding the fact that malaria had been a serious community health problem in their district as well. In this situation one of the key informants interviewed in the town of Mäkhonni witnessed that fifty-five bodies, which died of malaria, were buried in a single day inside the churchyard of Maryam Mäkhonni, when, as a young deacon, he was serving at that parish church some fifty years ago.⁴²⁴ In relation to this he added that in the area it had been a common phenomenon to observe the death of some thirty or forty persons per day in a period when malaria infections reached epidemic proportions.⁴²⁵

⁴²²Informants: *Mämeher Yerga Käbädä*, *Mämeher Yerga Mäsälä* and *Ato Wädajo Gäbru* interviewed in Alamaṭa, as a group, on 7/3/2010; *Ato Mogäs Mäsälä* interviewed in Qobbo on 14/3/2010.

⁴²³Informants: *Afa-Mämeher Zäwde Nigusä* and *Ato Haylä Mäläkot Gäbrä Mädhen* interviewed in Koräm on 16/2/2010.

⁴²⁴Informant: *Haläqa Belli Allè* interviewed in the town of Mäkhonni on 21/3/2010.

⁴²⁵*Ibid.*

Furthermore, as the periodic malaria epidemics broke out, a large number of individuals in that part of the study area were afflicted with the disease. In this circumstance, the disease was said to have taken a heavy toll of life thereby it created an increasingly difficult situation in the organization of the burial ceremony of the corpses of those, who died of malaria, as the tradition of the society necessitated.⁴²⁶

In this case it is continually reported that during the epidemic period dead bodies were buried in disused cereal storage pits, found within the compounds of dwelling houses, instead of inside churchyards. The reason for this was that because, meanwhile, people were too debilitated to carry corpses from their homes to where their parish church was situated. Moreover, by the time it is also said that almost everyone was so weakened by the disease that there was no body, strong enough, to dig graves at which the corpses would be buried.⁴²⁷

Nevertheless, one thing should be taken into consideration that it was only the corpses of those local dignitaries and rich persons that had the privilege of being buried inside churchyards. For instance, the corpse of Tädla Wahed, a governor of Ĉärĉär district and its surroundings, was buried at the churchyard of Märqorèwos Wäjjeg, which is some forty kilometers west of his residence. Moreover, it is also reported that the corpses of several local notables and highly influential persons, whose name not specifically mentioned by informants, were carried from various vicinities of the Fertile Valley to as far west as Täklähaimanot Mayĉäw or Maryam Śähafiti or beyond in localities of the Mountain Region.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁶Sheikh Ahmed Yasin interviewed at Addi Khuayaru on 17/3/2010; Ato Negusä Šaynä interviewed in the town of Mäkhonni on 21/3/2010.

⁴²⁷*Ibid.*

⁴²⁸*Ibid.*

Some archival documents, utilized in this research, have contained corroborating evidence for the testimonies of oral traditions, which frequently state the fact that malaria has been, for centuries, a leading health problem in the whole of the Fertile Valley, is said to have persisted even up until the 1970s and 1980s. A case in point is a study conducted by the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), based on clinical data obtained from the Alamaṭa- Qobbo plains, that shows out of the total 6,275 patients treated for several different types of diseases at a local clinic in the year 1976 while some 3,311 of them were malaria patients, 1,424 persons were treated for an eye disease and 231 were gastritis patients. Furthermore, the report of that research output also states that there were no patients at all treated for venereal diseases; whereas there were 1,309 patients treated in that local clinic for several other diseases other than those mentioned above i.e. (those categorized in that research report under ‘others’).⁴²⁹

As the above statistical data vividly shows, the number of persons tormented by malaria in that year was three times more than those persons afflicted with an eye disease and close to fifteen times more than those persons afflicted with gastritis and almost three times more than those persons infected by other diseases combined together. Thus, we can safely conclude that malaria has been a major health problem of peasant households not only for the Alamaṭa-Qobbo plain areas but also for the whole population inhabiting in the Fertile Valley.

Owing to its high morbidity and mortality rates, such a disease, malaria, had become a terror for ages to the highland agrarian society in the Mountain Region as denoted by the following local Tegraña saying: ‘ሰበይቲ ኣቦይ ሕግም ቆቦይ’ While the literal interpretation of this maxim suggests the notion: ‘The type of disease that catches someone in the district of Qobbo is as

⁴²⁹IES/MS/1612/3.

harsh as a stepmother is to her stepchild'; but metaphorically speaking the pain, suffering and loss of life caused by malaria, when somebody contracted it in the district of Qobbo, is taken the same as a cruel stepmother.⁴³⁰

In the context of the popular belief of the society under study and perhaps in the country at large most stepmothers are supposed and depicted as not caring or as not loving as biological/real mothers are to their children. Also, some stepmothers are alleged to be so unkind to their stepchildren that they are mostly blamed for mistreating and even for starving their stepchildren.⁴³¹

Be that as it may, prior to the Italian occupation period whenever malaria epidemic had erupted in the Fertile Valley, it used to claim the lives of a greater number of people. In this situation, informants, interrogated in different parts the study area, are congruent with each other on the issue regarding the casualty ratio. In relation to this they assertively claim that both indigenous people to that part of the study area as well as newcomers, who ventured from different parts of the surrounding highlands into Fertile Valley, had been generally a casualty of this disease. Nevertheless, in relative terms, the latter were said to have suffered heavy casualty as compared to the former.⁴³²

The underlying reason for the high disparity concerning morbidity and mortality rates between the indigenous people and newcomers could perhaps be owing to the fact that the former had developed immunity to the disease merely by virtue of being born there.

⁴³⁰Informants: *Ato Haylä Heluf* and *Ato Heluf Hagos* interviewed at Mäkhan on 8/2/2010; *Ato Eyasu Käbbädä* and *Ato Mola Alämayehu* interviewed at Mänkärä on 27/2/2010.

⁴³¹*Ibid.*

⁴³²*Ibid.*

However, most local people do not seem to have been fully aware of what caused the disease specially when they observe that individuals, who came from the surrounding highlands, were instantly dying sooner than they contracted the disease, they tended to attribute the high morbidity and mortality rates of newcomers to some evil spirits rather than to a disease transmitted by a mosquito bite. For that reason local people used to believe that such evil-spirits, thought to have domiciled in the surrounding big trees, caves, or streams, would selectively attack their victims for which the casualty rate had been relatively higher on newcomers and lower on those indigenous persons to the area.⁴³³

As far as remedies to malaria is concerned informants reveal that those, who better understood at least the direct cause of that disease was the bite of an unknown insect, they smear their entire body with fresh butter, before they go to bed, for they seem to have learned a lesson from experience that fats or for that matter most oily substances are by nature insect repellants. Moreover, whenever one of the family members had contracted the disease, malaria, they used to prescribe him/her to drink a cup of fermented butter, having high fat content in it, by which, it is reported, had enabled them to cure the person from a serious illness. And in some cases they used some herbs as a medicine to help them cure their patients from that disease. Nevertheless, malaria, as a chronic disease of the Fertile Valley, was not conquered until after the Italians came to Ethiopia.⁴³⁴

Hence, the establishment of Italian colonial administration in Ethiopia in the 1930s had brought about a new advance in the control of malaria in the study area which, in its turn, had enabled to

⁴³³ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁴ Informants: Sheikh Suleiman Abella interviewed at Gärjalla on 16/3/2010; Sheikh Yesuf Mohamed Yasin interviewed at Kukufto on 20/3/2010; *Mägabi Sera't* Hagos Haila interviewed in the town of Mäkhonni on 23/3/2010; *Ato* Abay Jämarä interviewed at Addi-Mäkhonni on 18/3/2010.

bring together the diverse groups of the region into closer contact. In other words, as both written and oral sources have clearly stipulated, the Italians were a pioneer in averting malaria from enduring as a chronic health problem in each of the localities of the Fertile Valley. They are, for instance, said to have taken malaria control measures such as that they supplied anti-malarial drugs to individuals who had contracted the disease.⁴³⁵

Moreover, in an effort to get rid of malaria from this area, they were also actively involved in spraying chemicals onto the walls of residential neighborhoods, stagnant water reservoirs; and onto the surfaces of anything where mosquito insects were thought to have harbored. Though applying a chemical, specifically known as DDT, has lessened the high vulnerability level of the local community to malaria hazards; but it is also alleged to have caused environmentally damaging side-effects epitomized by the fact that the yield of honey and milk had continued to decline ever since the Italian occupation period.⁴³⁶

In the long history of the peoples of Raya-Azäbo, malaria, which was endemic in the entire Fertile Valley, as well as social conflict, which manifested itself in the periodic raiding and counter-raiding activities, had been the major causes of the development of a marked ethnic borderline at the edge of the escarpment-separating the Oromo from the Tegray, Amhara and Agäw peoples. However, with the establishment of Italian colonial government in Ethiopia at national and local levels the mixture of the Oromo with the neighboring peoples, in the study area, had occurred in a degree unprecedented before for the following two fundamental reasons.

First, the Italians had managed to control malaria through the efficacy of modern anti-malarial drugs they provided to the society whenever the periodic malaria epidemics erupted. Secondly,

⁴³⁵*Ibid.*

⁴³⁶*Ibid.*

in an endeavor to restore peace and order in the region in the wake of the Italo-Ethiopian war, they were determined to put an end to the traditional raiding operations locally known as *gaz zamacha*. In other words, they were so strongly opposed to any form of ethnic friction or raiding campaigns that they flogged or hanged publicly at market places the perpetrators of such offense. As a result, they succeeded in bringing to an end the tit-for-tat raiding campaigns in the whole of northeast Ethiopia during the entire occupation period.⁴³⁷

But whenever resistance against Italian colonial rule began to gather momentum in most districts of the Mountain Region as well as the neighboring sub-provinces of Wag and Lasta, they made a significant shift in policy on the handling of ethnic relations. Meaning, in reprisal for the growing patriotic armed resistance waged against colonial rule in the region, the Italians fomented ethnic hostilities by instigating sectarian violence. As noted above, since the period of Yohannes' campaign in the region at the beginning of the 1870s, interethnic relations were increasingly improving from time to time until the Italians had seriously undermined them when they deliberately ignited previous ethnic hostilities.⁴³⁸

In line with the new divide and rule policy they adopted the Italians armed to the teeth Muslim Oromo warriors with modern rifles and munitions and subsequently instructed them to wage war on the society that has inhabited west of the Addis Ababa-Asmara road signifying the settlements of the Christian Tegrayan, Agäw and Amhara peoples.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁷*Ibid.*

⁴³⁸Informants: *Ato Arbesä Mohamed Abba Jale* interviewed at Addi Jello on 12/3/2010; *Ato Wayu Kube* interviewed at Gärjälä on 15/3/2010; *Ato Robsä Abyè Abba Sèru* interviewed at Addi Bore on 11/3/2010.

⁴³⁹Informants: *Ato Bälay Kăbädä* interviewed at Mănkărä on 27/2/2010; Priest *Kahsay Sebhatu* interviewed at Enda Hegum on 9/2/2010; *Ato Bărhă Găbru* interviewed at Šemta on 23/12/2009; *Ato Negus Hailu* interviewed at Sărănga on 24/12/2009.

After the Italians had supplied them with modern weapons, they changed the balance of power in favor of the Oromo whereby the latter managed to penetrate into as far west as Bora, Näqsägä, May Maedo and Säqoṭa that is to say deep into the impregnable strongholds of the Tегrean, Amhara and Agäw peoples in which the Oromo had never, hitherto, gained a foothold. Meanwhile, it is widely reported that men, women, children and the elderly were indiscriminately massacred. Moreover, parish churches, ancient monasteries as well entire villages were burnt to the ground in all these areas.⁴⁴⁰

In general, both warring sides had suffered heavy casualties as a result of the wars fought between Oromo warriors and the local patriotic resistance fighters in several parts of the Mountain Region and surrounding areas. In connection to this it is worth mentioning that it was during this time that one of the most prominent patriotic resistance leaders, *Däjach* Hailu Käbädä, posthumously Major General, was killed at the battle of Wäläh in late 1937. In the aftermath of the battle, the Italians had his head cut off and shortly after it had been displayed for all to see in the town of Koräm, on a market day, they were said to have sent it to Rome-Italy. *Djäch* Hailu was the son of *Wagsum* Käbädä, a member of the powerful regional nobility of the Agäw ruling house. Before the Italians had occupied Ethiopia, he was governor of Wag sub-province as well as the surrounding localities.⁴⁴¹

Nevertheless, following the evacuation of the Italians from Ethiopia in 1941 the conflict between the Oromo and their neighbors did not transcend to the post-occupation period denoting the fact that it was the Italians who used discordant interethnic relations to manipulate them for their own political ends. Thus, shortly after the occupation period the diverse social groups of the study

⁴⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴⁴¹*Ibid.*; C. Conti Rossini, "I Galla Raya",...p.60.

area and the adjoining sub-regions have come to terms in that relations were, from time to time, growing to be more and more harmonious. The main catalyst for the alteration of societal relations from a discordant form to an amicable one had been for the reason that major socio-economic developments have, meanwhile, taken place in both the Mountain Region and the Fertile Valley that eventually encouraged them to establish several types of mutually supportive relationships.⁴⁴²

5.3. The Economic and Social Interactions between the Oromo and their Neighbors.

The principal factors that caused such socio-economic developments to materialize in the area under study and its surroundings were; on the one hand, as discussed earlier at the beginning of this chapter, in the Mountain Region and adjoining districts, towards the north and south, there had occurred an acute shortage of farmlands as well as grazing grounds principally resulting from natural population growth; and on the other hand beginning from the dawn of the twentieth century the Oromo, who dominated most parts of the Fertile Valley, were steadily being transformed from a purely pastoral way of life to an agro-pastoralism and subsequently to a sedentary agrarian mode of economic activity.⁴⁴³

Such socio-economic developments that had taken place in northeast Ethiopia in general and the study area in particular prompted the Oromo and the neighboring Tegereña, Amhara and Agäw societies to come together so as to create different sets of socio-economic collaborations because

⁴⁴²Sheikh Mohamed Yasin interviewed at Kukufto on 21/3/2010; Ato Gobä Ali Abduyä interviewed at Addi Kuayaru on 20/3/2010; Ato Arbesa Mohamed Abajale interviewed at Addi Jello on 14/3/2010.

⁴⁴³J. Spencer, Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*...p. 194.

members of each group of society needed most the cooperation of the other side so as to ensure their respective economic survival by pooling land and labor resources at their disposal.⁴⁴⁴

It is well known that in Ethiopia land, labor and oxen are the three most determinant factors in the production equation of the rural economy. Meanwhile, as repeatedly shown above, the society in the Mountain Region was lacking two of the three important agrarian components that is to say land and oxen due mainly to population explosion; whereas the population in the Fertile Valley had lacked one important component of the three that is to say labor particularly labor force that has possessed considerable quality of expertise in agronomy. Consequently, the only viable alternative for both sides, which would help them satisfy their respective economic needs, was to focus on building amicable social relationships by abandoning altogether the previous hostile ones.⁴⁴⁵

In this circumstance the improvement of social relationships, in time, has stimulated them to make frequent intergroup contact and thereby they came to be increasingly interdependent on each other. In other words, the development of strong economic ties between each group of society seems to have shaped the worldview towards each other in that a member of one group began to see the other side as an opportunity for the betterment of one's livelihood rather than a threat, as was the case before, to one's life and belongings.⁴⁴⁶

Be that as it may, malaria control and eradication activities, which commenced during the occupation period, continued vigorously in the post-liberation period as well. In an attempt to

⁴⁴⁴Informants: Sheikh Suleiman Abella interviewed at Garjälä on 18/3/2010; *Ato* Kassaw Bereyā interviewed in Alamata on 12/3/2010.

⁴⁴⁵Informants: *Ato* Śāgay Equar interviewed at Hegum Berda on 26/2/2010; *Ato* Arbesä Maryè interviewed in Alamaṭa on 15/3/2010; *Ato* Abay Jāmarā interviewed at Addi Mākhonni on 18/3/2010; *Ato* Bārhä Hawadä interviewed at Wargeba on 18/3/2010; *Ato* Kalayu Kābädāw interviewed at Känäyat on 27/12/2010.

⁴⁴⁶*Ibid.*

bring down the prevalence and intensity of the transmission of the disease, malaria, the imperial government has introduced, among other things, malaria control program in the year 1959 at national level. Meanwhile, health-posts, staffed with a couple of medical personnel, were established at least in three different localities of the Fertile Valley. In time the malaria control endeavors of the government heralded a new era when the Oromo had come into closer social contact with the neighboring Tegrëña, Amhara and Agäw peoples at a degree unprecedented in the past.⁴⁴⁷

At any rate, during the post-Italian occupation period sedentary agriculturalist peoples in the Mountain Region and beyond, who could not meet the demands of life because they lacked either land or oxen or both, the basic means of production, have no other alternative but to move to the Fertile Valley to engage in different kinds of agricultural tasks where they would find various ways of sustaining themselves economically. Fortunately, the transformation of the Oromo from a pastoral mode of economy to sedentary way of life, through time, had created a favorable condition for the fulfillment of the demands of the immigrants that moved away from the surrounding districts.⁴⁴⁸

However, we should be cautious about the arguments of some written and oral accounts, which claim erroneously, that the Oromo had adopted agriculture from the neighboring Tegrëan and Amhara peoples at the beginning of the 1870s in the aftermath of Yohannes' punitive military

⁴⁴⁷Informants: *Haläqa* Belli Alè interviewed in the town of Mäkhonni on 23/3/2010; *Ato* Barènto Lägässä interviewed at Addi Mäkhonni on 19/3/2010; *Ato* Asäfa Amarä interviewed in the town of Mäkhonni on 27/3/2010; *Mägabi Sera't* Hagos Hailä interviewed in the town of Mäkhonni on 23/3/2010.

⁴⁴⁸*Ibid.*

expeditions and his subsequent settlement of the latter amongst the Oromo in some parts of the Fertile Valley.⁴⁴⁹

In actual fact originally the Oromo did acquire farming techniques from the Dobe'a Muslims by the dawn of the twentieth century when the latter had come under mounting pressure from the Tegrean people and the state whereby they were compelled to leave the two Mountain Region districts, Enda Mäkhonni and Ofla, to take refuge amongst the Oromo in the Fertile Valley. The basic reason for this to happen was that because the Dobe'a were the first people, who made intimate social contact with the Oromo soon after they were reconciled with them ensuing a protracted struggle between the two.⁴⁵⁰

When we come to the question as to why the Oromo had welcomed people, who emigrated from the adjacent highland districts, particularly by about the first half of the twentieth century was that because, meanwhile, newer economic and social developments had taken shape within the Oromo pastoral society itself. In other words, the fast moving economic transformation of the Oromo from herding to farming prompted them to give equal or more focus to agriculture than their former occupation that is to say animal husbandry. In connection to this it should be noted that as an economic activity, agriculture, when compared to livestock rearing in particular, is said to have required high amount of labor.⁴⁵¹

Thus, on the one hand while this new socioeconomic development had motivated the Oromo to interact with the neighboring Amhara, Agäw and Tegrean cultivators so that they would have

⁴⁴⁹J. Spener, *Islam in Ethiopia...*, p.194. Informants: *Haläqa* Belli Alè interviewed in the town of Mäkhonni on 23/3/2010; *Ato* Barènto Lägässä interviewed at Addi Mäkhonni on 19/3/2010; *Ato* Asäfa Amarä interviewed in the town of Mäkhonni on 27/3/2010; *Mägabi Sera't* Hagos Hailä interviewed in the town of Mäkhonni on 23/3/2010.

⁴⁵⁰See chapter three sections two to observe how relations between the Dobe'a and the Oromo were, in time, changed from rivalry to friendship.

⁴⁵¹Informants: *Ato* Kähasä Negusä interviewed at Säränga on 24/2/ 2009; Priest Täsfay Täka interviewed at Šemta on 23/12/2009; *Ato* Gälmo Wädajo interviewed at Addi Kuayaru on 18/3/2010.

access to labor especially labor that developed expertise, for centuries, in agronomy. On the other hand the ongoing economic change of the former had presented fresh opportunities to the latter societies who had abundant labor at their disposal at a time when they faced an acute shortage of land and livestock. Meanwhile, the best way, the Oromo and their neighbors found it to be important, to meet the needs of all the different groups of peoples, was to adopt a strategy that would help them complement each other's productive resources in such a way that together they formed a useful combination of land, human and animal labor so as to exploit the full potential of the Fertile Valley for surplus production.⁴⁵²

The rapid expansion of agriculture in the Fertile Valley since the first half of the twentieth century had continued to attract agriculturalists principally from the geographically proximate sections of the Mountain Region as well as areas situated further north and south of it. In the meantime, people, at the level of individuals and not in the form of mass exodus, kept on to descend down east of the escarpment to work as seasonal wage laborers or to stay there permanently.⁴⁵³

In this circumstance, a large number of Tegrean sedentary activators from Täläma, Egri Albä, Gäzämä, Ašäla-Wägälän, Sässat and Elebat and other contiguous vicinities to Emba Alajä district traveled a distance of two to five hours walk to a locality in the northern part of the Fertile Valley called Ebbo; while those from Abädda-Medri Wässän, Täkhe'a, Ayba and the surrounding localities of this district moved to Qorbäta, Machrä and the adjacent areas.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

In a similar manner, individuals from Dägu'a and Qolla Bällota, Emba Hasty, Šebbät, Gäläwsa and Šemta, northeastern part of Enda Mäkhonni district, moved to Qorbäta and Wara Abbayä. Whereas a majority of those from Hezba, Mäkhan, Laeläy and Tahetäy Haya as well as Säränga and other localities of the same district largely trekked to Wara Abbayä and Telewo.⁴⁵⁵

Also, individuals from various localities of the southernmost district of the Mountain Region, Oflla, largely went to nearby localities of Gäbbatä, Dayyu and Alamaṭa. But we should also note that districts and sub-districts, situated west of the Mountain Region, Seläwa, Bora, Näqsägä, and May Maedo, as well moved and settled in one or the other locality of the Fertile Valley mentioned here or somewhere else not mentioned here. Further south Amharic and Agäweña speaking agriculturalists, likewise, moved to certain localities of the Fertile Valley, located in their immediate proximity, for example; such as those from Yäjju to Zobel, Gura Wärqè and Qalem; and those from Giden, Bugna and Meqièt to Qobbo, Wajja and Alamaṭa and those from Säqoṭa and Zequala were said to have gone to Alamaṭa, Wajja, and Qobbo.⁴⁵⁶

Nevertheless, we should be cautious about one essential point concerning the specific places of the Fertile Valley where people chose to move and settle. To be clear, when we say that individual agriculturalists from the Mountain Region districts and beyond usually opted to go to the nearest possible places to their ancestral villages, it does not necessarily mean that people had never moved and settled too far away from areas to which they were indigenous. For instance, a number of Tegreña speaking individuals from the districts of Emab Alajä or Enda Mäkhonni

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁶ Informants: *Balambaras* Asäfa Tadäg interviewed in Alamaṭa on 12/3/2010; Sheikh Suleiman Abella interviewed at Gärjälè on 15/3/2010; *Ato* Wayu Kube interviewed at Gärjälè on 16/3/2010.

had moved and settled, in places located farther towards the southeast of their home villages namely in Wajja, Qobbo, Zobel and Gura Wärqè.⁴⁵⁷

Conversely, several Agäw and Amhra agriculturalists originating from the districts of Giden, Bugna, Meqet, Säqoṭa had also gone farther away from their native homesteads to settle at anyplace in the northernmost section of the Fertile Valley such as Mächarä, Ebbo, Ĉärcär or somewhere around. Here, what we exactly mean in this context is that a great majority of the emigrants had opted to move from their former abode to establish residence relatively in nearby places of the Fertile Valley of which they had had adequate information and prior knowledge about them.⁴⁵⁸

In any case, the Oromo and their neighbors were tied up in various types of interactions depending on the demand and interest of individuals who came into contact with each other. In this circumstance for young Tegrean, Amahara and Agäw farmers, who have inadequate land or no land at all, they had no option but to leave their homesteads for the Fertile Valley to work for Oromo farming households as quarter-share farmers locally known as *harästay rebe'ei/erbo araš*. Quarter-share farming was one of the many symbiotic socio-economic relationships between an Oromo household and a Tegrean, an Amhara or an Agäw young man by which the latter would get access to land and oxen while the employer (Oromo household) would have access to agricultural labor force.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁸Informants: Sheikh Yäsuf Mohamed Yasin interviewed at Kukufto on 19/3/2010; *Ato* Hades Mängestu interviewed at Šemṭa on 22/12/2009; *Ato* Gäbru Engeda interviewed at Šemṭa on 18/3/2010; AEMI/I/76/73/12/58

⁴⁵⁹Informants: *Ato* Kiros Suba interviewed in the town of Mäkhonni on 20/3/2010; *Ato* Märäwo Barènto interviewed in Alamaṭa on 14/3/2010; *Ato* Bärhä Hawadä interviewed at Wargeba on 17/3/2010.

In this type of working relationships the employee (farmer) would work as a servant under a direct control of the land owner. In exchange for the service he rendered to the employer, the farmer would receive a fourth of the total crops produced at harvest time from each of the parcels of land he cultivated. In relation to this it should also be taken into account that under the terms of the contract of employment the Oromo household would contribute the seed and the oxen; besides to that the former would supply his servant with clothing once a year.⁴⁶⁰

This sort of economic interdependence, between the employer and the employee, would gradually translate into an enduring social relationship whereby if the person hired, as a quarter-share farmer, performed his work to the maximum satisfaction of the employer, the latter would propose to him one of his daughters, who had reached the customary age of marriage but if he did not have one, he would propose to him the daughter of one of his closer relatives. In connection to this it is interesting to note that based on the marital norms of the Ethiopian society; it is a boy's father, not a girl's father, who ought to propose marriage. But in this case, contrary to social norms, the latter would do it, on one's own initiative, to propose such a marriage.⁴⁶¹

This was mainly because, informants strongly claim, when they were at their early stage of transition from a pastoral mode of economy to a sedentary one; the Oromo needed the agricultural expertise of the latter to help them expand production. In that way it had become one of the most common forms of intermarriage between a Christian Tegrean, an Agäw or an Amhara young man and a Muslim Oromo young woman provided that the former would accept

⁴⁶⁰*Ibid.*

⁴⁶¹*Ibid.*

the precondition, imposed by the latter's father, to convert from Christianity to Islam. It is widely reported that a vast majority of them did accept the terms of their father-in-laws.⁴⁶²

Herding cattle, like share-farming, had been one of the most important economic motivations for the immigration of the Amhara, Agäw and Tegrean young men into the Fertile Valley. As discussed above, the population explosion that occurred in the northern and central highlands of Ethiopia since the middle of the twentieth century gave rise to scarcity of land and thereby shortage of livestock. Understandably, lack of oxen, a key means of production in the economy of any rural society, entails a serious challenge for their livelihood. Thus, households, who for one reason or another lost their oxen, had to hire out their grown up male children to cattle rich Oromo households.⁴⁶³

Moreover young men, who wanted to establish new households, who had land but not oxen with which to plow their fields, likewise, found it attractive to go to the Fertile Valley to work for Oromo cattle owners. Under the terms of the contract of employment, Oromo households, who owned several hundred heads of cattle, entered into an agreement to give one bull per year in payment for the labor of cattle tenders. Thus, depending on the duration of his stay, a wage earner would obtain a single ox or a pair of oxen when he returned home after a year or two respectively. This sort of economic collaboration, in time, produced relations, having broader social importance, between the Oromo and the neighboring Amhara, Agäw and Tegrean peoples.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶²*Ibid.*

⁴⁶³Informants: *Ato Hailä Rädä* and *Ato Teumay Gulal* both of them interviewed at Haya on 29/12/2009; *Ato Haylä Heluf* interviewed at Mäkhan on 8/12/2009.

⁴⁶⁴*Ibid.*

Like those young men, who descended from the Mountain Region districts and contiguous areas to work for Oromo households as sharecroppers and livestock tenders, a large number of young women, who could not marry because they did not have cattle or money to give their husbands as dowry when they marry, as well trekked to the Fertile Valley to be hired in household tasks. The mid-twentieth century agro-pastoralist Oromo society of the study area needed more female labor, who could engage in household tasks such as food preparation, child care and most importantly dairy production than male labor engaged in cultivating fields.⁴⁶⁵

The reason was that because, up until recently, a vast majority of Oromo households are said to have owned as many as two hundred or more cows whereby each household needed a large number of milk maids to work in butter making activities. The process of butter making, done regularly every few days, was/is claimed to be one of the most labor intensive undertakings as compared to all other household tasks. In this situation milk maids had/have to accumulate the milk in several gourds, once or twice a day, after cows were /are milked by men, who usually did/do the milking. When the milk collected daily had/has curdled, the woman in charge would suspend the gourd in a wooden tripod and shake the suspended gourd back and forth for an hour or so until butter is made.⁴⁶⁶

In this part of the paper the main concern of dealing with the process of dairy production and agrarian labor employment in the study area, though peripheral to the major themes of the study, is to demonstrate clearly the point where the diverse peoples under study meet and how they influence each other in several different ways. Well for over a period of more than seven decades so many Amhara, Agāw, Dobe'a and Tegrean men and women had congregated in the Fertile

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Valley thereby biological and cultural intercourse had occurred between each other which in the long run immensely contributed to the making of current Raya society.⁴⁶⁷

The other aspect which brought together the Oromo and the above mentioned sedentary agricultural peoples was the need by the former for more labor force. From time to time agriculture continued to expand in the entire Fertile Valley at an accelerating rate and so did the demand for seasonal wage workers. Particularly during peak farm seasons, in which tasks such as planting, weeding and harvesting were/are, performed, there had always been an enormous demand for labor in each of the local labor markets. Meanwhile, households were forced to hire a number of day laborers, who would be paid in cash, over and above the quarter-share farmers paid by the year with grain.⁴⁶⁸

In this respect informants reported that due to the existence of a slight seasonal variance in agriculture, when most important farm activities are performed, between the Mountain Region and the Fertile Valley, peasants from the former area are said to have descended in great numbers down the escarpment, after they had accomplished planting with crops their own fields, to the Fertile Valley in order to supplement their income with wage labor employments.⁴⁶⁹

To be clear with regard to the said variation in agricultural seasons between the two areas whereas planting crops is accomplished between early to mid- June in the Mountain Region, the interval between mid-June to mid-July is a slack season for agriculture there; but it is a peak period of planting crops for those peasants in the Fertile Valley in that there wouldn't be any

⁴⁶⁷Informants: *Ato* Negusä Śaynä interviewed in the town of Mäkhonni on 19/3/2010; *Ato* Śumyè Abay interviewed at Addi Mäkhonni on 18/3/2010; *Ato* Robsä Abbaye Abba Seru interviewed at Addi Bora on 11/3/2010; *Ato* Mulata Yaya interviewed in Qobbo on 14/3/2010.

⁴⁶⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁹*Ibid.*

overlap of agricultural schedules between the two areas during which agricultural tasks are performed.⁴⁷⁰

Farming households in the Fertile Valley had to hire extra labor in seasons when they perform tasks such as weeding and harvesting. Next to Sorghum, *teff* is one of the major cereal crops grown in the Fertile Valley. This crop, *teff*, as opposed to several other cereal crops, necessitates the grower to carry out a thorough weeding undertaking. Should any peasant, who planted his fields with *teff*, wanted to have a good harvest; one has to pick the weeds over at least twice between the germination and fruition of that crop.⁴⁷¹

Though performing weeding activity at a crucial stage of development of the crop is a decisive undertaking to boost productivity, in terms of money it is said to be one of the most costly one, as compared to other tasks, for employers are required to hire a number of day laborers at a short interval of the agricultural season. At any rate, peasants from the Mountain Region districts and adjacent areas commonly crossed the escarpment into the Fertile Valley, in their thousands, attracted by off farm income they would receive from wage labor employment.⁴⁷²

Informants claim that beginning from the post-Italian occupation period well up to the eve of the 1974 revolution the daily wage for laborers ranged between birr 1.00 and 1.50. On top of that the employer would supply his employees with lunch and supper. However, with the persistent decline of the purchasing power of the Ethiopian currency, the payment for wage earners tended to increase from time to time. Furthermore, it should be noted that though female laborers, like

⁴⁷⁰*Ibid.*

⁴⁷¹*Ibid.*

⁴⁷²Informants: *Ato* Negusä Bärwo interviewed at Mächare on 17/3/2010; *Ato* Molla Kabada interviewed at Qeleša on 12/3/2010; *Ato* Wayu Abreha interviewed at Čärcär on 21/3/2010; Sheikh Hamid Yasin interviewed at Addi Kuayaru on 17/3/2010.

male laborers, were hired to perform the same weeding task the wage they earned was, however, said to have been, by one-third lower than the total amount of money paid to their male counterparts.⁴⁷³

Another type of economic connection established between the Oromo and the sedentary agriculturalist society was through the coming of poor men and women particularly unmarried young women or widowed female household heads to the Fertile Valley. For the reason that they solely come during the harvest season they came to be called *qawa'o*, which literally means the poor who come to an area during the harvest season alone. That is why the adjectival word, *qawao*, a derivative of the noun *qawe'e* (meaning harvest season in the Tegraña language) has been applied to them.⁴⁷⁴

These poor people do not come to this area to be employed for which they have mostly been regarded and treated as beggars rather than wage laborers though they sometimes lend a helping hand to farmers, at some moments, when the latter are extremely busy with various tasks related to grain harvest. A great majority of them came to the area holding grain sifters, some traveling a distance of more than two hundred kilometers north of the study area, mainly from the drought prone areas of the sub-province of Agamä and Kheltä Awlaelo and to a certain extent from the neighboring sub-province of Endäarta as well. But the poor have also come from the neighboring areas one or two hours walk west of the Fertile Valley.⁴⁷⁵

At any rate, they returned home accumulating up to five quintals of, *teff* and sorghum, grains at the end of the harvest season not so much as payment for services they rendered; but because the

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

cultural and social norms of the Rayans make them leave a considerable amount of grain in the threshing floor for the support of the poor.⁴⁷⁶

The fact that the Rayans are so generous in giving what they have to the have-nots is evidenced by the following phrase they always utter, ‘ፆስ ዑፍይ ዛፍይ እብልዐኒ’, before they throw the first fistful of grains to the ground while they plant their fields with crops via the customary technique of broadcast sowing of seeds. This Tegraña phrase literally means “Oh! Lord, allow me to consume this [the crop the farmer is sowing just then] with birds and trees around.” Here, by the ‘trees’, metaphorically speaking, they mean other creatures including other human beings that would not participate in the production process of the crop being planted by the time.⁴⁷⁷

Among other things that induced the Oromo to get involved in the formation of a strong social and economic bonding with the Tegreans, with the Endärta Tegreans in particular, was the latter’s vigorous participation in salt transport and trade. In connection to this mention should be made that oral and written accounts are congruent with each other in that the Endärta Tegreans, as opposed to the rest of all Tegreans found in other parts of the province, have been exclusively engaged in the production, transport and trade of salt mainly because of the geographical proximity of their sub- region to the salt mining area, Arho, found in the Afar depression.⁴⁷⁸

At any rate, since the end of the nineteenth century, the Oromo and the Endärta Tegreans have had a reciprocal arrangement whereby the Oromo, who, besides to the numerous heads of cattle,

⁴⁷⁶Informants: *Ato* Haile Selassè Kābādā interviewed in Mayčāw on 11/12/2009; *Hamsa Alāqa* Asāfa Alāmu interviewed in Alamaṭa on 5/3/2010; *Ato* Haftu Belli Wayu interviewed in the town of Mākhoṇni on 17/3/2010.

⁴⁷⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁸Informants: *Ato* Arbesä Mohamed Aba Jalè interviewed at Addi Jelo on 9/3/2010; Sheikh Suleiman Abella interviewed at Garjäläon 16/3/2010; Tsegay Berhe Gebrelibanos, “The Political Economy of Salt Production and *Arhotot* Trading System in Northeastern Ethiopia (c.1831-2005)”, PhD Thesis in History, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), 2011, p.144.

had kept herds of camels that rented them to the latter with which they would transport rock salt from the salt mining area to various market centers of northeast Ethiopia. As per the arrangement between members of both societies, the Oromo, owners of pack animals, and the Tegreans, who rented the camels from the former, would share the profit earned from salt trade equally between them -an agreement locally known as '*terfi gara*'.⁴⁷⁹

A great majority of Oromo households, who had a few donkeys and mules at their disposal, as well rented their beasts of burden to Endärta caravan drivers not so much to benefit from salt trade; but for salt is an important component of human diet, it is added to various foodstuffs so as to give them better flavor or to preserve them. Moreover, they also used salt to leak their cattle should they desire to fatten them or to cure them from abdominal parasites mostly caused when they graze green grasses.⁴⁸⁰

On the contrary, for some well to do households, who owned a large number of camels, salt trade has been a lucrative enterprise from which they obtained a substantial amount of profit. Informants reported that the rich peasants of Karra Addi Šabo, a locality found in the northern part of the Fertile Valley, were said to have made a great fortune arising from the high rate of return on monetary assets in a salt trade. In any case, the persistent commercial transactions between the Oromo and the Tegreans had ultimately bounded together the two communities by culture and other aspects of social life.⁴⁸¹

The economic and social relationships between the host society, Oromo, and the neighboring Tegrean, Amharic and Agäweña speaking sedentary agriculturalists were not limited to salt trade

⁴⁷⁹*Ibid.*; Tsegay Berhe Gebrelibanos, "The Political Economy of...", p 233.

⁴⁸⁰Informants: *Ato Arbesä Mohamed Aba Jalè* interviewed at Addi Jelo on 9/3/2010; *Sheikh Suleiman Abella* interviewed at Garjälä on 16/3/2010.

⁴⁸¹*Ibid.*

and the various types of wage labor employments discussed above. These societies were also brought into contact through a number of land tenure systems. Since the first half of the nineteenth century, two parallel developments had simultaneously taken place in the entire region where these peoples have inhabited. On the one hand while there had been a rapid expansion of agriculture in the Fertile Valley, on the other hand there occurred an acute shortage of land in the Mountain Region and adjacent districts, principally caused by demographic explosion, as discussed earlier at the beginning of this chapter, at about the same period.

The problem of shortage of land, understandably, gave the highland sedentary agriculturalists the impetus to approach their Oromo counterpart for acquiring virgin lands that would help them expand their production. In the earlier times, when the size of the population was relatively small, for the peasants of the Mountain Region districts and adjacent areas in order to preserve the fertility of their soils one of the most viable strategies they adopted was fallowing their fields for quite a number of years.⁴⁸²

Nevertheless, when the population of the region continued to increase from time to time they were forced to shorten the periods between fallows at the beginning from seven to two years and eventually fallowing, as an agrarian activity practiced to improve the productivity of soils, was totally abandoned at a particular point where the population size of an area had by far exceeded the amount of available farmlands in this region.⁴⁸³

However, planting fields with crops successively, without fallowing and for many years, is said to have drastically decreased the productivity of all farming households. In response to such new

⁴⁸²Informants: *Ato Sahelä Selassè Gäsassä* interviewed in the town of Mäkhonni on 18/3/2010; *Ato Alämu Bägänä* interviewed in Maycäw on 14/12/2009; *Ato Gäbrä Germay* interviewed in Maycäw on 14/12/2009; *Ato Negus Hailu* and *Ato Mähari Meteku* both of them interviewed at Säränga on 24/12/2009.

⁴⁸³*Ibid.*

agrarian development, peasants of the study area were bounded to resort to a different type of landholding system locally termed as *mofär zämät*.⁴⁸⁴ This term entails the concept of land tenure system whereby peasants travel, for quite a long distance from their homesteads, to somewhere else in far off places to cultivate land in the event that they faced shortage of it at home. In these circumstances peasants of the Mountain Region and adjoining districts situated towards the south had moved to the Fertile Valley, cleared forests and cultivated as much land as they could and they desired.⁴⁸⁵

The Oromo were not opposed to the encroachment of the sedentary agriculturalists on the adjoining forest lands because, meanwhile, there was an immense amount of land that was not yet put under cultivation; moreover the Fertile Valley, an area fully dominated by the Oromo, was thinly populated back then. Crop growing over farmlands acquired by way of a *mofär zämät* landholding mode is recounted to have been important, in two counts, to the peasants of the Mountain Region and surrounding districts south of it. First of all that sort of land tenure system had enabled them to fallow their fields for as many years as they wished; or else up until the fields, exhausted as a result of uninterrupted farming, were brought into cultivation.⁴⁸⁶

Secondly, cultivating fields in two different agro-ecological zones would enable them to harvest a variety of crops that would help them obtain alternative cereal crops for their own domestic consumption as well as to gain access to a better marketable produce. In relation to this informants recounted that was the main reason why peasants of the Mountain Region and surrounding areas had continued to cultivate fields in the Fertile Valley despite the fact that farmlands at home were not under fallow; and though those involved in *mofär zämät* agriculture

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

were required to devote a great deal of time and the efforts of animal and human labor as they spent a considerable amount of time shuttling between their homesteads and the new fields there.⁴⁸⁷

However, other than *mofär zämät*, by which peasants cultivate land without leaving their ancestral homelands by going back and forth between their farmlands and residence places, another avenue of landholding system, *lalläba mewqae*, was opened for the sedentary highland agriculturalist societies.⁴⁸⁸

In the latter case, as opposed to *mofär zämät*, peasant households, who were attracted by the abundance of arable fields and rich grazing grounds, are said to have completely deserted their native villages to take up new stable settlements at all vicinities of the Fertile Valley. In the process of integration of a newcomer into a local Oromo community an Oromo chief of a certain tribal territory, say the chief of Telluwo, had to follow a standard procedure of land allocation. In this situation, the first step in a series of things the newcomer had to do in order to acquire land was primarily to approach the chief of that Oromo tribal unit where the former had envisaged establishing permanent settlement.⁴⁸⁹

In this circumstance shortly after an individual peasant was allowed to settle amongst any one of the Oromo tribes in any part of the Fertile Valley, he was required to provide the concerned chief with a fattened sheep or a goat or buy him clothes, or else give him the equivalent amount in honey- meanwhile in terms of cash all of which did not worth more than three Ethiopian birr. Locally this sort of payment came to be called as *mäwgäeya* literally payment made by a settler

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

peasant to an Oromo tribal chief for the commencement of the cultivation of virgin lands. Subsequent to receiving the required amount of payment the local chief would allocate him land both for cultivation and for building his residence.⁴⁹⁰

The whole process for this type of land grant was known as *lalläba mewqae*- a blend of *Affan* Oromo and Tegraña lexicons. The Oromifa term, for this kind of land allocation, *lalläba*, stands for a term that has something to do with the notion of ‘declaration’. By declaration the contemporary Oromo society meant that the tribal chief of a locality would call a general meeting of his fellow tribe’s men so as to tell them publicly that some amount of land would be allocated for any one Tegraan or an Amhara newcomer that he would use it for cultivation as well as for the construction of habitation. Starting from the very period onwards, when the newcomer acquired land, he would live amongst the local Oromo society having equal rights and responsibilities, on all societal affairs, as any one of the indigenous members of that tribe.⁴⁹¹

However, with respect to the second one, *mewqa’e*, the literal interpretation of such term in the Tegraña language is ‘to hit’-in the sense that after the newcomer was recognized as a full member of a tribe, the actual allocation of land would be effected in such a way that in the presence of the chief of the tribe, accompanied by some men from the vicinity, the person to whom land would be granted would go to the place where the parameters to the extent of the

⁴⁹⁰Informants: *Ato* Arbsä Maryè interviewed in Alamaṭa on 5/3/2010; *Ato* Dämäqä Yemär interviewed at Wajja on 20/3/2010; *Ato* Märäwo Barèntu interviewed in Alamaṭa on 14/3/2010; *Ato* Kiros Suba interviewed in the town of Mäkhonni on 20/3/2010; *Ato* Wayu Kube interviewed at Garjäle on 15/3/2010; *Ato* Bärhä Hawada interviewed at Wargeba on 19/3/2010.

⁴⁹¹*Ibid.*

land allocated to him would be identified. This was commonly done by cutting marks in the bark of trees, using any sharp metal object, at quadrangle points.⁴⁹²

Thereafter, the newcomer would soon clear the forest and put that forest land into cultivation. Now that he wanted to enlarge his tenure he could, in consultation with the local chief, simply expand it by clearing the forests contiguous to his existing holdings. In relation to this point informants reported that much of the land mass of the Fertile Valley, up until the introduction and the expansion of intensive agriculture, was covered by dense woods and tall grasses in which several species of big mammals including lions, tigers, buffalos as well as reptiles of diverse species such as serpents were said to have domiciled.⁴⁹³

In general land has played a central role in shaping the history of the interrelations of the peoples of the study area and adjoining districts situated towards the north and the south. Moreover, as we may understand from reminiscences of our oral informants, the fact that land resource, which could be used whether for farming or pastoral practices or human settlement was plentifully available had spared peasants of the area from a severe economic exploitation as evidenced by the politico-economic development that had taken place in the aftermath of the peasant rebellion of 1943. In this case, archival as well as oral sources clearly demonstrate that the armed uprising of the peasants of southeastern Tegray, *wäyanä*, had, among other things, resulted in the appropriation of the land of those who, allegedly, rose in rebellion against the imperial regime.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹²*Ibid.*

⁴⁹³*Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁴*Ibid.*

Thus, soon after the regime had put down the rebellion militarily, two third of the holdings of each peasant household was appropriated. While a small portion of the total land confiscated was said to have been sold out to rich business men originating from the nearby cities of Maqälä and Dässè; a vast portion of the land was granted to the upper and lower nobility and to members of the royal family as well. As a result, local peasants became tenants to the new holders on the land that had been their own possessions prior to the rebellion. Nevertheless, four male and one female peasant households, namely Abay Jämara, Robssä Šumyā, Haftu Robssä, Täka Sumyā and Fetalä Šaynä, who were dwellers of the vicinity called Awuy Mäkhonni, situated a few miles west of the modern town of Mäkhonni, together decided to desert their homestead and resettle themselves somewhere amidst the woody areas of a locality called Wargeba.⁴⁹⁵

After they had relocated their settlement venue to, a place situated some twenty kilometers east of their former abode, Awuy Makhonni, they divided the new land equally among each of the five farming households. Subsequent to clearing the forests around them, besides to lodgings, built and furnished their own parish church namely Michael Wargeba. They named their new settlement area, Addi Mäkhonni, after the name of the former one (a name indicative of the notion that the new settlement place was the abode of those who migrated from Awuy Mäkhonni in the post-*wäyanä* rebellion period).⁴⁹⁶

Established some more than seven decades ago, by only as few as five farming household heads, Addi Mäkhonni has now grown to be a habitation of hundreds of individuals. Furthermore, informants claim that the story of the dwellers of Addi Mäkhonni is also the story of the inhabitants of today's several other villages in the Fertile Valley who much preferred to evacuate

⁴⁹⁵Informants: *Ato* Abay Jamarä and *Ato* Šumyā Abay both of them interviewed at the small town of Čäqon on 18/3/2010.

⁴⁹⁶*Ibid.*

their settlement sites to the exactions of the lion's share of the fruits of their land and labor to landlords. Having avoided working on tenanted farms, they were spared from filling the granaries of landlords for they would have been required to pay two-third of their total produce to the latter much like a vast majority of the peasants, whose fields had fallen under the *qälad* system, from 1943 until the promulgation of the radical land reform in 1975.⁴⁹⁷

In the final analysis, we may now conclude this chapter by briefly discussing the net result of the process of the manifold economic and social interactions between the Oromo and the neighboring Amhara, Tegray, Dobe'a, Agäw and Afar societies had ultimately helped lay the foundation for the formation of stable intergroup relationships. To be more precise, understandably, so as to sustain the mutual socio-economic interests, epitomized to a larger extent by agricultural labor exchange and to a certain extent by salt transport and trade, the diverse peoples of the study area; though when they, at first, came into contact, each society had had, to some extent, its own distinctive religion, language, culture and other forms of social identity, in the long run, they intermingled with one another both culturally as well as biologically.⁴⁹⁸

In due course they have undergone such a remarkable metamorphosis that they all come together to build a common identity somewhat distinct from the previous separate feature each group had retained solely as its own. As a result, a new social entity known as Raya has emerged in the ethnic landscape of northeast Ethiopia. In the process of the making of Raya identity each group had contributed a set of identity markers that functioned as building blocks of that new identity. However, it should be noted that the Amhara and Tegray peoples by virtue of the

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*; Informants: *Ato Asäfa Amarä* interviewed in the town of Mäkhonni on 21/3/2010; *Balambaras Asäfa Tadäg* interviewed in Alamaṭa on 11/3/2010; *Ato Barènto Lägässä* interviewed at Karra Addi Šabo on 17/3/2010.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

numerical, cultural and political superiority over the rest of the aforementioned groups, their language and culture has emerged dominant in the southern and northern parts of the Fertile Valley respectively.⁴⁹⁹

In this regard, owing to the continued infiltration of the neighboring peoples into the Fertile Valley, which became a meeting place for those who sought to acquire either arable land or engage in different types of agricultural labor employments or else to secure other forms of economic subsistence, the Agäw, the Afar, the Dobe'a and even the host society, Oromo, were fully integrated into the Amhar-Tegray orbit. For instance, because of the Tegrayan society's dominant position in intergroup relationships in the northern Fertile Valley, a territory extending from southern Wäjjärat in the north up to the southern outskirts of the town of Wajja, anyone who settled there, whether the Amhara, Agäw, Afar, Dobe'a, as well as the Oromo, have become speakers of the language of the dominant society- Tegrëña.⁵⁰⁰

In a similar manner in the southern Fertile Valley, a territory extending from Wajja in the north up to the upper course of the Ala River in the south, which since 1948 came to be called Raya Qobbo sub-province, people who happened to inhabit there be it the Tegrëans, Agäw, Afar as well as the Oromo have become speakers of the Semitic language Amharic.⁵⁰¹

In general, the increased social contact and exogamous intermarriage between members of the diverse peoples of the study area has speeded up the process for the development of an identical language and culture in both the northern and southern parts of the Fertile Valley. As shown

⁴⁹⁹Kibrom Asafa, *Yä Raya Hezeb...*, pp.117-134.; Informants: *Ato* Arbsä Maryè interviewed in Alamaṭa on 5/3/2010; *Ato* Dämäqä Yemär interviewed at Wajja on 20/3/2010; *Ato* Märäwo Barèntu interviewed in Alamaṭa on 14/3/2010

⁵⁰⁰Informants: *Ato* Arbesä Mohamed Abajalè interviewed in Alamaṭa on 19/3/2010; *Ato* Asäfa Amarä interviewed in the town of Mäkhonni on 21/3/2010.

⁵⁰¹*Ibid.*

above, in the northern Fertile Valley after the Tегrean society has emerged as dominant in the sphere of interethnic relations, the Oromo, the Dobe'a, the Agäw, the Afar and the Amhara peoples have all embraced the Tегreña language and culture largely by renouncing their respective cultures and languages.⁵⁰²

However, in relation to this it should be noted that the Oromo, inhabiting in the northern part of the Fertile Valley namely in Ebbo, Qorbäta, Wärra Abaya, Tullwo, Gäbbatä, Mächarä, Čärcär, Dayu, Almaṭa and Wajja for the first time learned the Tегreña language from the Dobe'a (not from the Tегreans) by the dawn of the nineteenth century when the latter came to the area from various localities of Enda Mäkhonni and Ofla districts to take refuge there ensuing the pressure exerted on them to leave the area by the Tегreans. That was the reason why some elderly informants tend to reply "*Aff-Dobe'a*", literally the "tongue of the Dobe'a", instead of Tегreña, when they are probed to relate the process as to how and when the Oromo and related peoples of the northern Fertile Valley adopted the Tегreña language. Thus, from this we may deduce that ever since they had made contact with each other, the Dobe'a and the Oromo appear to have used Tегreña as their medium of communication.⁵⁰³

Furthermore, it should be noted that the Dobe'a starting from early on are said to have been Tегreña speaking although we do not know the time when and the process how they have become speakers of the Tегreña language. But the fact that in their recent history the Dobe'a had never used any other language other than Tегreña and because there is no such language, called Dobe'a, mentioned in the list of Ethiopian languages we can certainly suggest that they were Tегreña speakers for quite a long time in their history.

⁵⁰²*Ibid.*

⁵⁰³Informants: Sheikh Suleiman Abella interviewed at Gärijale on 16/3/2010; Sheikh Yäsuf Mohamed interviewed at Kukufto on 14/3/2010.

Nevertheless, it should also be taken into account that the cultural and linguistic influence that occurred among the diverse peoples of the study area had not been one-sided. Meaning, although the Oromo had forsaken their language several *Affan* Oromo terms are incorporated into the Tegraña language in that linguistic research should be conducted so as to explore to what extent the Raya Tegraña dialect is enriched by vocabularies originating from *Affan* Oromo language and other languages spoken around. For instance, during the field research I noted that numerous vocabularies emanating from Afarña and Amharic languages are incorporated into the local Raya Tegraña in that people use them without noticing that they originated from other languages and they pronounce them the Tegraña way.⁵⁰⁴

To sum up, the cultural and linguistic influence of the peoples of the study area on each other involves a two-way process as evidenced by the fact that several strands of the cultural elements of the Oromo and the Afar have steadily become part and parcel of the Tegrean and Amhara cultures although whoever ventures to the northern part of the Fertile Valley has been fully assimilated into the Tegrean culture and hence finally they all became Tegreans; and likewise, anyone who journeyed and established permanent settlement in the southern part of the Fertile Valley be they the Tegreans, the Afar as well as the Agäw ended up in being assimilated into the Amhara language and culture and as a result of which they all come to be regarded as Amhara.⁵⁰⁵

As time proceeded, distinct Raya identity has evolved following the sustained socio-economic interactions amongst each of the diverse peoples of the study area. There are a substantial

⁵⁰⁴Informants: Sheikh Hizbulah Mohamed Amin interviewed in Alamaṭa on 13/3/2010; Ato Sahelä Selassè Gässasä interviewed in the town of Mäkhonni on 20/3/2010; *Mämher* Täfäri Harägä-Woin interviewed in Maycäw on 11/12/2009.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

number of common cultural features that are regarded as clear manifestations of the existence of Raya identity. They are, among other things, the following ones: peculiar dressing style (epitomized by sandals shoe locally made from cattle skin that is to say *šefay sa'eni* as well as clothing locally called *boffê*, music particularly the *gumayä* song, women's hair dressing style, women's smoke bathing custom, smearing one's hair, body and clothes with butter, participation of women in public affairs or important rituals through their institution locally known as *debartä*, their war-like attitude mainly characterized by the annually held youth wrestling rituals locally called *wäfä wugeya/* or *wäyanä* and so on.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁶*Ibid*; Berhe Derebew, "Cultural and Natural Heritage of Raya and its Potential: A Survey with a View to Establish Museum in Selected Areas of Southern Tegray Zone", M.A. Thesis in Ethiopian Studies, 2010, pp.43-54.

Conclusion

The study area, Raya-Azabo, was inhabited by several distinct groups of peoples who occupied their respective distinct territories. The highland part of the sub-region designated in this research as Mountain Region was since about more than a thousand years ago, exclusively inhabited by the Tегrean people. But the valley situated towards the east of the Tегrean settlement was inhabited by the Muslim Dobe'a people. The borderline between the habitat of the Tегrean and the Dobe'a peoples was delimited by the escarpment which stretches from Wājjarat in the north to the southern tip of the Alamaṭa-Qobbo plains in the south.

Both primary and secondary sources show that the highland sedentary Christian Tегrean population inhabiting in the mountains and the Muslim pastoralist Dobe'a peoples, who occupied the entire valley environment, were reported to have been entangled in a protracted social conflict for centuries. One of the main causes of the conflict between the two peoples was that the Dobe'a were continuously raiding settlements of the former situated immediately towards their west.

Moreover, the Dobe'a were plundering caravan traders that traversed through the Mountain Region as the trade route extending from Šāwa, the political and administrative center of Ethiopia roughly from the last part of the thirteenth to the first half of the sixteenth centuries, and the Red Sea port of Massawa.

Thus, in order to block the incursions of the Muslim Dode'a into settlements of the highland Christian cultivators as well as to keep open the caravan route it had become necessary for the state to station contingents of soldiers in four strategic sites of the study area. In this case, King

Zära Yaeqob (r.1434-1468) had placed three detachments of the *Jan Amora* army division in three strategic places of the study area particularly in what is today Emba Alajä, Enda Mäkhonni and Qobbo districts. In a similar manner he was also reported to have posted the fourth army unit, *Jan Qanṭafa*, in the highlands of Zobel- a district situated towards the eastern flank of the Alamaṭa-Qobbo plains.

As noted above, the main purpose of stationing four army detachments in the aforementioned four different places of the study area was to protect the highland sedentary Amhara-Tegrean peoples from Dobe'a raids as well as to safeguard the long distance caravan traders from plunderers. However, by the second half of the fifteenth century despite the fact that four army units were posted in the aforementioned places, the act of ravaging settlements of the sedentary highland cultivators as well as razing churches and homesteads had worsened. Moreover, the Dobe'a are also reported to have often intercepted and plundered caravans passing through this region.

In order to address the security problem caused by the Dobe'a the Christian state had organized large scale military expeditions against them. One of the most prominent military campaigns waged against the Dobe'a was the one that was conducted by King Bäedä Mariam (r.1468-1478) in the year 1471. As mentioned in the royal chronicle of this king, besides to ravaging Christian settlements and razing their religious institutions, the Dobe'a might have refused to pay annual tribute owed to the state.

Meanwhile, Bäedä Mariam left Šäwa and marched north wards at the head of a huge army to suppress the rebellion of the Dobe'a. Sources clearly demonstrate that during the first showdown between the Dobe'a and the forces of the state the former had succeeded in inflicting heavy

damage on a couple of his vanguard army regiments. Subsequent to the defeat of his two army divisions the king was seriously engaged, among other things, in reorganizing his combatants, preparing better military plans as well as boosting the low morale his army. Upon accomplishing all the necessary military preparations, the king had waged an all-out war against the Dobe'a. As the monarch had launched his offensive on the Dobe'a simultaneously from all directions, the latter were decisively defeated soon after the war had begun because they could not be a match to the well-organized and relatively well-armed state army.

In the course of the war the Dobe'a land was devastated in that besides to the huge casualties they suffered in human life; they also incurred heavy losses in terms of cattle resources and other properties. Furthermore, some portions of the Dobe'a people, who had apparently resisted forced conversion to Christianity, were dispersed to different parts of the Horn of Africa whereby in the wake of the war they were reported to be considerably weakened demographically, economically and militarily.

Although the Dobe'a were decisively defeated by the armies of Bāedā Mariam in 1471, sources denote that they seem to have quickly recovered because, after the war, they are said to have continued to be a menace to the neighboring sedentary highland cultivators for at least the next one hundred years or so. Nevertheless, the advent of the Oromo to the region had adversely affected the Dobe'a more than anything else. When the Oromo had conquered the Dobe'a land, while a portion of the Dobe'a was massacred and absorbed by the Oromo; perhaps a vast majority of them were displaced from the Fertile Valley and immigrated into two opposite directions.

Meaning, following the Oromo onslaughts, a segment of the Dobe'a was said to have moved east and joined the Afar. The fact that the Afar are/were the ancestral relatives and coreligionists of the Dobe'a prompted them to well-come the latter and instantly absorb them into their social fabric soon after they had arrived in their realms. However, a portion of the Dobe'a people had moved west of the escarpment to occupy what is today a major part of Ofla and Enda Mäkhonni districts by pushing away the sedentary Tегrean populations into the western peripheries of these districts.

As a result, fighting had erupted between the Dobe'a and Tегrean peoples in the seventeenth century and continued throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth and the twentieth centuries mainly over the control and use of rich pasture and cultivable land. However, intergroup relations steadily began to improve and ultimately transformed from conflict to cooperation. In other words, the relationship between the Dobe'a and the Tегrean peoples, which ranged from exogamous intermarriage to several other types of social bonding, continued to be more and more amicable as time proceeded.

Soon after the Dobe'a were displaced from their habitat in the Fertile Valley, they moved west wards and established settlement in seven different localities of Ofla and Enda Mäkhonni districts. As this was in this way, the Dobe'a and the Oromo had also fought prolonged wars for several hundreds of years along the contact zone (escarpment). However, as the war between the two peoples had extended, it seems that the human and material resources of the two belligerent groups had been exhausted. Consequently, the Dobe'a were ultimately reconciled with the Oromo and a lasting peace prevailed between them. Resulting from extensive exogamous

intermarriage and other forms of social contact, the Dobe'a were steadily integrated into the Oromo.

Subsequent to the arrival of the Oromo in the study area, sometime between the end of the sixteen and the beginning of the seventeen centuries a number of devastating wars were fought between them and the highland agriculturalist peoples such as the Amhara, Tegray and Agäw peoples. One of the main causes of the wars was that after the Wärra Daya, Märäwa and Käräyu Oromo tribes had fully occupied the Fertile Valley; they frequently made incursions into territories inhabited by the aforementioned sedentary agriculturalist peoples.

At times when the Wärra Daya, Käräyu and Märäwa Oromo tribes had attempted to occupy areas in the neighboring highland regions, the latter are reported to have organized their own defenses using every means of defense at their disposal; and in most cases they succeeded in halting the advance of Oromo tribes towards the north and southwest of the study area.

However, whenever several waves of Oromo tribes launched large scale movements towards the north, provincial and central government forces were quickly dispatched to the area to defend the highland agriculturalist populations and to stop them along the border with the Tegrean territory in the Mountain Region before the former could penetrate deep into central Tegray and beyond.

In this circumstance, sources show that beginning from the seventeenth century well up to the end of the nineteenth a number of military expeditions were carried out to ward off Oromo invasions into the highlands of the study area. Mention can be made, for instance, the contemporary governor of Tegray, Tegrè Mäkonnen Täklä Giorgis, had stationed army units in some of the strategic mountain chains of the study area and built defense walls along some of the

mountain passes and narrow defiles whereby he had managed to arrest waves of Oromo tribes from proceeding beyond the escarpment for most decades of the seventeenth century.

At the dawn of the twentieth century *Ras Wäldä Selassè*, like his predecessors, carried out two military expeditions in the year 1809 and 1810 against the Oromo after the latter had ravaged Christian settlements in the Mountain Region. Furthermore, more than six decades after Wäldä Selassè, Emperor Yohannes IV also carried out military expeditions, which lasted from March 1872- August 1872, against the Oromo for the latter had razed churches, killed priests, and raided cattle of the sedentary cultivators in the highlands.

The impact of Yohannes' campaigns had far reaching economic, political and social consequences on the Oromo as compared to the previous ones. In the aftermath of the war, the Oromo were weakened demographically and thereby militarily as a result of which, they are not more often mentioned in our sources, as they did before, for menacing settlements of the sedentary agriculturalists in the Mountain Region and adjacent areas situated towards the north and the south.

In general, for almost three hundred years peoples of the study area had fought endless wars against one another. In this case, the Dobe'a had fought a series of wars against the Tегreans, they had also fought against the Oromo since the time when the latter had arrived in the region to dispossess their territories. In a similar manner the Oromo had also fought against the Amhara, the Agäw as well as the Tегreans when they attempted to expand and occupy territories that belonged to the latter. Later in the nineteenth century the Amhara, the Agäw, the Tегreans as well as the Oromo, motivated by economic and social reasons, had jointly raided the Afar. The

campaign periodically organized by the aforementioned peoples was locally called the *gaz zämächa*.

Nevertheless, for a number of economic and political reasons social conflicts had been transformed into economic cooperation/ interdependence. Since the second half of the nineteenth century, on the one hand a new agrarian development had taken place in northern and central highlands of Ethiopia in general and in the Mountain Region of the study area in particular where because of population explosion peasants had encountered acute shortage of cultivable land as well as pasture land and thereby shortage of oxen with which they would plow their land. On the other hand it was during this time that the Oromo began to transform from pastoral mode of life to sedentary agriculture whereby they highly demanded the agricultural expertise of the highland Tegray, Amhara and Agäw peasants.

As a result, peasants of the Mountain Region and adjacent areas trekked to the Fertile Valley, places where the Oromo predominantly inhabited, principally in search of arable land, oxen or agricultural labor employment. As a result, symbiotic socio-economic relations were established between the Oromo and their neighbors.

The economic and social interactions between the Oromo and their neighbors had provided a better opportunity for the highland sedentary agriculturalist peoples of the study area in that young men from the Mountain Region frequently descended across the escarpment to the Fertile Valley to work for Oromo households as quarter-share farmers, livestock tenders, milk maids (young women who were engaged in butter making undertaking). In addition to that the Oromo and the Tegrays, especially the Endärta Tegrays, were tied together by salt trade and transport

in that while the former had provided pack animals, the latter had contributed their labor and ultimately both are said to have shared equally the profit earned from salt trade.

Moreover, peasants who needed to supplement their farm income also moved to different parts of the Fertile Valley to engage in seasonal wage labor employments particularly during peak farm seasons to perform tasks such as planting, weeding, and harvesting. But from time to time many peasants of the Mountain Region districts as well as from neighboring areas also continued to move to the Fertile Valley to establish permanent settlement there after they were granted land for building dwellings, cultivation and grazing as well by Oromo tribal heads through various modes of land holding system.

Finally, the multifaceted economic and social interactions between the Oromo and their neighbors had eventually resulted in the making of Raya society. Meaning, people of various ethno-linguistic backgrounds, who continued to move to various parts of the Fertile Valley, seeking cultivable/ pasture land, agricultural labor employment or to involve in salt transport and trade, intermixed with each other as well as with the Oromo to form a peculiar social group in the region.

In the process of continued ethnic interactions be they the Amhara, the Agäw, the Tegreans, the Dobe'a, the Afar or the Oromo partially or fully renounced their former distinct language, religion, culture and other forms of social identity to constitute a new identity. But it should be noted that in the northern part of the Fertile Valley because of the numerical, cultural and political superiority of the Tegrean society everyone whether the Amhara, the Agäw, the Afar, the Dobe'a and even the host society, Oromo, eventually became Tegrëña speaking and largely adopted the Tegrean culture.

However, we should take into account that even if Tegrēña, language of the dominant people, is the *lingua-franca* of the sub-region a large number of *Affan* Oromo, Amharic, Afarña and most probably Agäweña vocabularies have become an integral part of the Raya Tegrēña dialect spoken in the area. Moreover, several strands of Amhara, Oromo, Afar as well as Agäw cultures are embedded into the dominant culture.

In a similar manner, because of the Amhara people's dominant position in intergroup relations in the southern part of the Fertile Valley everyone who had ventured there whether the Tegrēans, the Agäw, the Afar had all eventually ended up in being Amharic speaking and adopted the Amhara culture. But it should be taken into consideration that though Amharic, language of the dominant society, had become a *lingua-franca* of that sub-region, a number of Tegrēña, *Affan* Oromo, Afarña and probably Agäweña vocabularies have become the component parts of the Amharic dialect spoken in that sub-region.

But other than the Amharic and Tegrēña languages there are several common cultural features that fused together the diverse peoples of the study area and adjacent regions to form a single Raya society. Such common cultural features are mostly regarded as markers of Raya identity: similar dressing style, an ethno-music (the *gumaya* song which is peculiar to the people of Raya), women's hair dressing style, women's smoke bathing custom, smearing one's hair, body as well as clothing with butter are some of the most noticeable ones.

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Hagiography of *Abba* Guba

Hagiography of *Abba* Yime'ata

Gospel deposited at the church of Giorgis Bällota

Gospel deposited at the Monastery of Täklähaimanot May Ĉaw.

Manuscript by *Mämher* Kábädä Baraki written on some aspects of the history of Enda Mäkhonni district.

Manuscript by *Fitawrari* Kábädä Gäbrä- Selassè written on the history of the town of May Ĉaw and the ethnic and religious profile of its early inhabitants.

Yä Agär Gezat Ministèr Mäshèt (Bulletin of Ministry of Interior- deposited at the IES Amharic section).

List of key Informants

No.	Name	Age	Place of interview	Date of interview	Remark
1	Adām Abdälqader (Sheikh)	57	Maycäw	5/2/2010 E. C.	He is a native of Hezba, one of the seven settlements of the Dobe'a people whereby he is well informed about how the Dobe'a people are related to other groups in the study area.
2	Abäbä Adhana (Mämeher)	76	Maycäw	18/12/2009	He is a native of Endamäkhnni district. He served as a school teacher and as administrator of many of the districts of Raya-Azäbo for which he acquired a great deal of knowledge regarding the history of the various peoples and their relations.
3	Abäbä Guangul (Ato)	80	Maycäw	14/12/2009	He is a member of the regional nobility for which he served as district administrator to several areas of the sub-province; and hence he was able to acquire sufficient knowledge particularly about the administrative history of the region.
4	Alämu Bāyänä (Ato)	78	Maycäw	14/12/2009	A farmer who knows much about the history of land tenure and agrarian relations in the study area.
5	Arbsä Maryä (Ato)	82	Alamaṭa	5/3/2010	During the Imperial era he was a member of parliament. He also served as a district administrator in southern Wollo. He knows well about intergroup relations in the study area.
6	Arbsä Mohamed Abajalè (Ato)	83	Addi Jello	12/3/2010	He is one of the most knowledgeable informants in the region. He provided valuable information on the overall history of peoples of Raya-Azäbo.
7	Abay Jämare (Ato)	86	Čaqon	18/3/2010	He has provided me with firsthand information on how the post- <i>wāyanä</i> rebellion land sale policies of the imperial regime had impacted local peasants.
8	Assäfa Amarä (Ato) (Mämeher)	56	Mäkhonni	21/3/2010	In addition to Amharic and Tegraña he is also well versed in <i>Affan</i> Oromo for which he was helpful in telling the meaning of the names of places in the latter language when I was in the field to collect data.

9	Arässa Eneyäw (<i>Ato</i>)	50	Addi Golo	29/2/2010	He has a good knowledge about the economic and social relations of the Dobe'a and Tegrean communities in Oflla district.
10	Assäfa Tadäg (<i>Balambaras</i>)	83	Alamaṭa	10/3/2010	He knows much about the administrative history of the study area. He is also well informed about the relationship between the different ethnic groups of Raya-Azäbo.
11	Aymut Märäsa (<i>Ato</i>)		Tahtäy Haya	29/12/2009	He has a great deal of knowledge about labor relations between the Oromo and their neighbors
12	Abay Hannes (<i>Ato</i>)	82	Elebat	3/1/2001	By virtue of the location of his residence, he knows well regarding the earlier discordant relations between the Oromo and the Tegreans.
13	Alamu Wäldä Mikael (<i>Mälakä-Mehrät</i>)		Wägälän	3/13/2000	He has a great deal of vital information regarding the overall history ethnic relations in the study area.
14	Ahmed Yasin (Sheikh)	80	Addi Kuayaru		He is well acquainted with the direction of movement and settlement of the Oromo in Raya-Azäbo.
15	Abreha Kasayè (<i>Ato</i>)	83	Šebbät	12/2/2010	He knows well about the history of agrarian settlement of his locality.
16	Belli Allä (<i>Haläqa</i>)	63	Mäkhonni	20/3/2010	He is well versed in the issue of the impact of malaria on intergroup relations.
17	Bärhä Alämayähu (<i>Ato</i>)	76	Addi Golo	20/2/2010	He is a key informant in the economic and social relations between the Dobe'a and the Tegrean societies.
18	Bäläy Käbadä (<i>Ato</i>)	72	Mänkärä	27/2/2010	He knows well regarding settlement and displacement of peoples.
19	Bärhä Alämä (<i>Ato</i>)	73	Mänkärä	27/2/2010	He knows much about the relations between the Agäw and the Dobe'a peoples.
20	Bärhä Haddes (<i>Märgèta</i>)	74	Šebbät	12/2/2010	He is one of the most knowledgeable informants I have ever interviewed. He usually supports his claims with folk poetry and proverbs.
21	Bärhä Adhana (<i>Ato</i>)	78	Emba Hasty	11/2/2010	He is well versed in agrarian settlement and the expansion of agriculture in his locality.
22	Berhanu Färädä (<i>Ato</i>)	80	Emba Hasty	11/2/2010	He knows well about the history of settlement of the locality he resides.
23	Berhanä Gäbru (<i>Emahoy</i>)	82	Mäkhan	26/12/2010	She knows much about the economic and social relations of the Dobe'a and Tegrean peoples in her locality.

24	Bärhä Gäbru (<i>Ato</i>)	78	Šemṭa	23/12/2009	He knows well about the early history of agrarian settlement of his locality.
25	Bärhä Bälay (<i>Mämher</i>)	76	Maycäw	20/12/2009	He is knowledgeable about interethnic relations particularly about the <i>gaz</i> raiding practices.
26	Barènto Lägäsä (<i>Ato</i>)	91	Čaqon	17/3/2010	He has a great deal of knowledge about the earlier hostile relations between the peoples of the study area.
26	Bärhä Hawadä Robsä (<i>Ato</i>)	68	Addi Mäkhonni	18/3/2010	He knows a lot about how the various Oromo tribes had occupied and settled various localities of the study area.
27	Čago Alämä (<i>Ato</i>)	80	Hašängä	23/2/2010	He is a native to the locality. He knows well about the process of the integration of the Dobe'a into the Tegreans.
28	Dargè Šamä (<i>Ato</i>)	73	Alamaṭa	14/3/2010	He knows well about the history of relations between the Oromo and their neighbors.
29	Därbäw Gäbrähiwät (<i>Märgèta</i>)	70	Hašängä	25/2/2010	He has a great deal of knowledge regarding the cultural exchange between the Dobe'a and Tegrean peoples in his locality.
30	Eyasu Kebäd (<i>Ato</i>)	53	Mänkärä	27/2/2010	He narrates well the earlier discordant ethnic relations between various groups.
31	G.kiros Wändem (<i>Ato</i>)	74	Addišeho	5/1/2000	As a native of the area, he knows well about land tenure and land use history of the region.
32	Gobä Abdu Ali	80	Addi Kuayaru	22/3/2010	He has a great deal of knowledge about the genealogy of the various Oromo tribes in the study area.
33	Gäbrä-Selassè Käbädä	70	Maycäw	7/2/2010	He has a great interest in understanding his region. He keeps his own records and of his father from which he allowed me to take notes on some important developments.
34	Hagos Hailä (<i>Qaši</i>)	58	Mäkhonni	19/3/2010	He is knowledgeable about the intermingling of various peoples in the Fertile Valley.
35	Haddes Mängestu (<i>Ato</i>)	76	Šemṭa	23/12/2009	He knows well about the history of the founding ancestors of the area he resides. He is also locally reputed to be as the most knowledgeable person in terms of the recitation of genealogies.
36	Hailä Heluf (<i>Ato</i>)	61	Mäkhan	26/12/2009	He is one of the most knowledgeable persons regarding the economic and social interactions between the Oromo and their neighbors.
37	Hailä Wäldä Giorgis (<i>Haläqa</i>)	63	Ašäla	30/12/2000	He has a good deal of information on population movement and settlement.

38	Haddes Abreha (<i>Ato</i>)	66	Mäkhan	7/2/2010	He knows well on the interface between the Dobe'a and Tegrean peoples.
39	Hadära Täsfay (<i>Liqäkahenat</i>)	81	Emba Hasty	11/2/2010	He is one of the most knowledgeable persons on the issue of warfare between the Oromo and the Tегreans along the escarpment.
40	Haddes Bärhä (<i>Re'esä-Däbri</i>)	78	Bällota	23/2/2010	He knows well on the issue of earlier and later settlers of his locality and how they allocated land for settlement and agriculture.
41	Hizbulah Mohamed Amin (Sheikh)	64	Jehan	8/3/2010	He is a learned Muslim clerk. He knows well the cultural and linguistic transformation of the Oromo in the study area.
42	Kiros Kassa (<i>Ato</i>)	83	Ayba	24/12/2000	He has a good deal of knowledge about the relationship between the Oromo and the Tегreans.
43	Kahsay Wäldä-Sänbät (<i>Ato</i>)	85	Elebat	3/1/2000	He has a lot of information about the etymology of the names of places in his locality.
44	Kasayè Tädla (<i>Ato</i>)	81	Addišeho	6/1/2000	He has a great deal of relevant oral data on settlement and land use rights of the people in the district.
45	Käbädä Baraki (<i>Mämher</i>)	63	Mayçäw	11/12/2009	He is a veteran school teacher. He provided me with quality data orally and from a manuscript he wrote about the history of his locality.
46	Käläläw Wäldä-Mariam (<i>Ato</i>)	89	Känäyat	27/12/2009	He provided me with very crucial information on genealogy for which he is best known in the locality.
47	Kahsay Sebhatu (<i>Qaši</i>)	80	Mäkhan	9/2/2010	He narrated points mainly related to the struggle between the Dobe'a and the Tегreans for the control of land in the locality.
48	Kälali Gäbru (<i>Ato</i>)	75	Ajura	12/2/2010	He described how the Dobe'a moved from the highlands to the lowlands of the study area.
49	Märäwo Barènto (<i>Ato</i>)	58	Alamaṭa	10/3/2010	He has a great deal of relevant information on how the Oromo were integrated into the Amhara and Tegrean peoples.
50	Mogäs Mäsälä (<i>Ato</i>)	72	Wajja	19/3/2010	He is knowledgeable about the process of the movement of peoples from the highlands to the lowlands of the study area.
51	Mulata Yaya (<i>Ato</i>)	76	Qobbo	21/3/2010	He provided with relevant information on how group relations were transformed from conflicting to amicable ones.

52	Mohamed Bäyan (Sheik)	66	Koräm	25/2/2010	He is well versed in the traditions of the origins of the Dobe'a people. He also knows well how they integrated to other peoples
53	Negusä Gäbrä-Ab (<i>Qaši</i>)	78	Täkke'a	28/12/2000	He is knowledgeable about the traditions origin of the Tegrean people in the study area.
54	Nägaš Täklä (<i>Ato</i>)	71	Täkke'a	25/12/2000	He has got a great deal of information about the settlement patterns of the Tegrean people in the highlands of the study area.
55	Negus Täfära (<i>Ato</i>)	69	Addišeho	26/12/2000	He provided me with reliable information regarding the general agrarian history of the study area.
56	Negusä Hailu (<i>Ato</i>)	73	Säränga	24/12/2009	He provided me with relevant data about the history of relations between the lowland Oromo and the highland Amhara, Tegrean and Agäw peoples during the Italian occupation period.
57	Nur-Hussein Edris (Sheikh)	60	Mäkhan	7/2/2010	He knows well about the discordant relations between the Dobe'a on the one hand and the Tegreans and the Oromo on the other.
58	Suleiman Abella (Sheik)	82	Garjallä	16/3/2010	I found him to be highly knowledgeable informant regarding the general history of the Dobe'a and Oromo peoples.
59	Sendayo Habä (<i>Wäyzäro</i>)	60	Koräm	20/2/2010	She knows well about the settlement pattern and land allotment of the society in her locality.
60	Šägay Equar (<i>Ato</i>)	73	Hegum-Berda	26/2/2010	He has provided me with a great deal of relevant data regarding interethnic relations in his home district beginning from the last four hundred years up until the recent period.
61	Šägay Aräfaynè (<i>Ato</i>)	87	Addišeho	3/1/2000	He provided me with relevant data about the history of tribute collection system of his home district.
62	Täka Wäldä-Sänbät (<i>Qaši</i>)	77	Täkke'a	25/12/2000	He knows well about the growth of population and its impact on environment and ethnic relations.
63	Tämäsgän Amayä (<i>Ato</i>)	84	Addi Gollo	29/2/2010	He provided me with relevant data on ethnic relations.
64	Tadässä Bärhä (<i>Qaši</i>)	83	Hašängä	25/2/2010	He knows well the settlement pattern and ethnic relations of the Dobe'a and Tegrean peoples in his home district Ofä.
65	Wayu Kube (<i>Ato</i>)	60	Garjallä	15/3/2010	He is the most knowledgeable person regarding the genealogy of the tribe settled in and around Garjallä.

66	Wädajo Gugsä (<i>Ato</i>)	78	Alamaṭa	4/3/2010	He knows well about the administrative history of the Alamaṭa-Qobbo area and its surroundings.
67	Yäsuf Mohamed Yasin (<i>Sheikh</i>)	80	Kukufto	20/3/2010	He is a learned Muslim clerk for which he earned high respect amongst his community. He is the most authoritative person on the subject of religion, culture and history of Raya-Azäbo sub-province as a whole. I also found him to be so taking into account the quality and relevance of the data he provided to me.
68	Yerga Käbädä (<i>Mämher</i>)	60	Alamaṭa	3/3/2010	He is a veteran school teacher. As a native of the town, he knows well how people of different ethnic backgrounds have intermingled with each other and co-exists harmoniously in his home district.
69	Zäwdä Negusä (<i>Afämämeher</i>)	89	Koräm	20/2/2010	He is a church dignitary. He knows well who the founders of settlements and the modes how land was apportioned amongst pioneers and late comers to the area he resides.

DECLARATION

I. The undersigned, declare that this thesis is my work and that all sources of materials used have been acknowledged.

Name _____

Signature _____

Place, College of Social Sciences

Addis Ababa University

Date of Submission, December 2020