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BRIGADIER GENERAL TADDASA BIRRU: A MILITRY-POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY (1922-1975)

BY

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Acronyms

AAU: Addis Ababa University

AAUP: Addis Ababa University Press

A.M.: *Amete Mihiret,* the same as Ethiopian Calendar

HSIU: Haile Selassie I University

IES: Institute of Ethiopian Studies

JES: Journal of Ethiopian Studies

JOS: Journal of Oromo Studies

MTSHA: Maccaa- Tuulamaa Self-Help Association

OFRAE: Office of the Fourth Revolutionary Army of Ethiopia

OLF: Oromo Liberation Front

OMN: Oromia Media Network

OSA: Oromo Studies Association

WMT: *Waldaa Maccaa fi Tuulamaa* (Maccaa and Tuulamaa Association)

Transliteration System

Oromo

I. All words, proverbs, songs, names and phrases of Oromo origin are spelled according to the writing and reading system developed for *Afaan Oromoo* using Latin alphabet to ease the problem of reading some words. Oromo has basically ten vowels; five short and five long.

Short Vowels	Long Vowels
a	aa
e	ee
i	ii
o	oo
u	uu

II. Length in vowels results in changes of meaning.

Examples; lafa-land bona- Ethiopian winter
laafaa-soft boonaa- proud
dhala- offspring
dhaalaa- inheritor

III. Sequence of more than two similar vowels is possible if separated by glottal (')

Example: yaa'aa, bu'uu, re'ee, boba'aa, qe'ee, sa'a

IV. Two different vowels can be used in sequence if separated by glottal(‘)

Example: Yaa'ii, bu'aa, boo'uu,

V. Oromo consonants are stressed by doubling the similar phonemes.

Example: gadda, guddaa, adda, .
Here also doubling of consonants results in change of meaning.
Example:- gubaa-hot - bitaa- left
-gubbaa- above, up there -bittaa-transaction

VI. There are five paired phonemes that are formed by two different consonants. These are ch, dh, ny, ph and sh. Of these dh, ny and ph have different sounds from the English consonants.

dh: voiceless, dental, implosive-as in *dhalaa* (Female) or *dhadhaa* (butter)
ny: voiceless, palatal, nasal-as in *nyaata*-food or *funyaan* (nose)
Ph: voiceless, bilabial, injective, stop –as in *laphee*- chest or *haphee* (sticker)

VII. The following consonants: (c), (q) and (x) have different sounds from the English consonants.

C: as in *Caffee*-assembly or *Maccaa*-Oromo clan.
Q: as in *qamadii*- wheat , *qaanii*-shame
X: as in *xurii*-dirt, *xuuxuu*-smoke

Amharic

I. The seven sounds of the Sabean alphabets are represented as follows:

1st ሀ=Ba

2nd ሁ =Bu

3rd ሂ= Bi

4th ሃ= Ba

5th ሄ= Be

6th ህ= Be/B

7th ሆ=Bo

II. Palatalized sounds are represented as follows:

ሸ=sh
ቸ=ch
ኘ=gn
ዠ=z
ጀ=J

III. Glottalized sounds are represented as follows:

ቀ=q
ጠ=t
ጨ=ch
ፀ/ደ=Ts
ጰ=P

IV. Germination is indicated by doubling.

Examples: ደጃዝማች = Dajjazmach ደጃች = Dajjach
ከበደ = Kabbada ተሰማ = Tasamma
ታደሰ = Taddasa ራስ= Ras
ብሩ = Birru ፊታውራሪ = Fitawrari

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Abstract

Brigadier General Taddasa Birru: A Military-Political Biography (1922-1975)

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In this study, discussion on the concept of biography is taken as an academic exercise to address the disciplinary and conceptual frameworks of biography in order to situate this study within the broader field of historical inquiry. This dissertation examines the military and political activities of Brigadier General Taddasa Birru. It investigates how his military career proceeded from an ordinary guerrilla fighter in 1936 to the rank of Brigadier General in October 1963 and how his political movement followed after he joined the MTSHA in 1964. It looks into how he subsequently transformed the Association into a pan-Oromo movement and became a rallying figure of Oromo resistance since the middle of the 1960s. The dissertation examines how he used the MTSHA and its meetings as platform to promote Oromo unity and self-consciousness in order to mobilize the Oromo against the Imperial regime. It also investigates why he resumed his resistance despite regime change in 1974 and how he was captured and executed. The source materials used for this research are gathered from extensive oral interviews conducted with contemporary and knowledgeable informants, the archives of the IES of AAU, documents in private hands, including the Trial Document of the leaders of the MTSHA and his handwritten diary, newspapers, magazines, student papers and published works.

The synthesis, analysis and careful examination of the sources have proven the central thesis of the dissertation both empirically and logically. Though General Taddasa was dubbed Amharized before he joined the MTSHA, the concept does not fully explain his case. In this dissertation, I argue that initially he served the Imperial regime enthusiastically as a member of the military and made his own contributions for his country until he was conscious enough to understand the existence of discriminations against the Oromo. I contend that his speeches, actions and movements within the MTSHA and later were reflective of his deep-rooted belief in Oromo cause of equality and helped to develop anti- neftegna Oromo nationalism. Government repressive measures made him more militant and radical and pushed him to the corner to chair the foundation of the OLF. The importance of this dissertation includes its presentation of the place of an individual in history, its attempt to look into Ethiopian history from a different perspective and its focus on Oromo grievances through a biographical approach.

Preface

The major objective of this research is to reconstruct the military and political life of Brigadier General Taddasa Birru (1922-1975), who was a veteran of anti-Fascist resistance, a military and police officer of the imperial regime and a charismatic leader of Oromo resistance from the middle of the 1960s to 1975. In the course of his struggle for the Oromo cause, he was sentenced to death later commuted to life imprisonment by the imperial regime, released briefly by the *Darg* only to be executed in 1975.

For a period of more than twenty months the writer was collecting and examining various kinds of sources related to the subject. Accordingly, extensive oral interviews were conducted with his family members, individuals who worked with him in the police and the MTSHA, those who personally heard his speeches, knew him in Galamsoo, joined him to resist the *Darg* and heard about him from others. For this purpose, in addition to the capital and many other places, the writer has travelled to Salaalee, Arsii, Galamsoo and Meettaa to get relevant informants. Moreover, through library research, mainly conducted at the IES library, relevant secondary sources, archival and other documents are collected, examined and cross checked with oral sources. Documents from private collections, which include his hand written diary, the Trial Document of the leaders of the MTSHA and letters of Amnesty International, are also used. From the assessment of the literature and oral sources, it can be concluded that the life account of General Taddasa is reflective of the social, economic and political realities of the Oromo within Ethiopia during the Imperial regime and early *Darg* period.

Apart from the conclusion, this study consists of eight chapters which are arranged more or less chronologically with the exception of a few thematic presentations. Chapter one deals with the concept of biography, its historiographical development, and a review of related literature on General Taddasa Birru. It also includes statement of the problem, objectives of the research, significance of the study and the research methodology employed in this work.

Chapter two examines the historical, social, economic and political context into which Taddasa Birru was born. The background discussion would help to understand the Tuulamaa Oromo resistance tradition, with emphasis on Salaalee, that was developed against the Shawan kingdom and its subsequent harsh exploitations and maltreatment. This tradition came to have impacts on General Taddasa which could be seen from the way he joined the MTSHA and his subsequent activities and movements. The chapter also discusses his family background and early life up to 1935, the general reactions of the Oromo of Salaalee to the Italian occupation, the patriotic activities of the young Guwangul Birru, his capture by the Italians and his hazardous journey from Salaalee to Danane as Italian captive.

Chapter three discusses the military life of General Taddasa. It examines how he joined the imperial army as a Sergeant in 1941 and reached up to the rank of Brigadier General in 1963. This chapter discusses and examines his role as a police officer, especially as a founder and commander of the Police Emergency Force, in aborting the 1960 coup and in the training of Nelson Mandela. His activities as a chairman of the executive committee of the National Literacy Campaign Association and his place on the eve of joining the MTSHA are examined. This chapter is concluded by reassessing the claim of his Amharization just before he joined the MTSHA.

Chapter four examines the causes and grievances behind the foundation of the MTSHA which pushed its founders to come together in order to enable the Oromo to rely upon themselves. It also discusses the various reasons that eventually brought General Taddasa to the Association with his own determinations. The next chapter investigates how General Taddasa transformed the MTSHA from a self-help association to a pan-Oromo political movement. Here focus is given to the speeches he delivered at various meetings of the MTSHA and how these speeches contributed to the consolidation of Oromo consciousness and unity. This chapter documents some of his speeches at the headquarters of the Association, Itayyaa, Abeebee Qeerransaa, Dheeraa and other places and examines their contributions in promoting Oromo consciousness, unity and education. The collections of his speeches in this chapter are indicated as evidences of the fact that he was trying to develop anti-*neftegna* Oromo nationalism for national equality.

Chapter six looks into the overall difficult situations under which the MTSHA was allowed to operate and the government's hostile reactions against its activities from the beginning. The chapter examines the factors that pushed General Taddasa to make a coup plot with the other key members of the Association. It also discusses why the coup plot failed, his subsequent short-lived rebellion and how he eventually returned through the mediation of religious leaders. The chapter concludes by looking into the police siege of his house and how he managed to break the siege and escape.

Chapter seven discusses how a certain Abbaa Jifaar betrayed him and exposed his whereabouts to the Emperor leading to his eventual arrest. The chapter examines the details of the legal process, the court procedure, and the final verdict. Lastly, the chapter discusses General Taddasa's efforts to mobilize the people in and around Galamsoo after he was sent

there in banishment. The last chapter analyzes how General Taddasa's initial optimism on the *Darg* faded away and he decided to rebel against it. Thus the chapter examines his subsequent rebellion in Meettaa, capture and eventual execution. The last topic, but not least, to be examined under this chapter is his legacy in the subsequent Oromo struggle.

Thematically, the first chapter analyzes the concept of biography and the overall structure of the dissertation while the next two chapters focus on the resistance tradition in the area of Salaalee and the military life of General Taddasa that ranged from an ordinary guerrilla fighter to the rank of Brigadier General. The last five chapters deal with interrelated themes; General Taddasa's involvement in the Oromo cause, his contributions, the challenges he had encountered and his legacy. They cover the period from the time he joined the MTSHA to his execution by the *Darg* in March 1975. The chapters deal with his political movements that focused on Oromo grievances and are analyzed with similar perspectives and arguments.

In this dissertation, I used Taddasa instead of Tadesse because the Oromo commonly call him General Taddasa. Moreover, even though his highest military rank was Brigadier General, I often referred to him as General Taddasa in this work to save space and time.

Chapter One

Introduction

The study of the military and political life of Brigadier General Taddasa Birru (1922-1975) is a topic that employs a biographical approach of making historical inquiry. Hence, it is vital to take a brief look at the concept of biography and its historiographical development in order to situate the subject of the study within a broader field of historical knowledge. This chapter consists of a general overview of the literature on biography and General Taddasa, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, significance of the study and research methods.

1.1. General Overview of the Literature on Biography

Although formal definition of biography varies, it can be commonly defined as a written account of a person's life. It is broadly regarded as 'life writing.' Biography aims at recreating the life of an individual in written forms by using all the available sources which could be in written, oral and pictorial forms.[1] Biography is a broad and difficult genre to classify easily because of the absence of a clear standard basis of classification. It can be divided, for example, into six categories based on its rank from high to low levels of objectivity. These are Informative, Critical, Standard, Interpretive, Fictionalized and Special purpose biographies. From all this, Critical biography is a scholarly work and provides a genuine presentation of life with careful research, sources and validations.[2] Biographical literature can also be divided into different forms such as character sketches, single biography, serial biography, literary biography and hagiographic or sacred biography. The generic territory of biography can also be divided into five areas. These are popular,

[1] Paul Murray Kendall, "Biographical Literature," in *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th ed. Vol. 23, edited by Philip W. Goetz, (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc.,1986), p. 195.

[2] *Ibid*., pp, 196-198.

historical, literary, reference and fictional biographies while other authors still divide biography in different ways.[3] Biography can also take many shapes as the narrative, the topical and the essay forms.[4]

The term biography was originally derived from the Greek words, *bios* (life) and *graphien* (to write), but it was adopted into English in the 17th century. Though biography, as an independent genre, is largely associated with Western civilization, the production of biographical literature appears to be universal regardless of some differences between the Western and non-western traditions.[5] In other words, the study of biography flourished almost everywhere despite the existence of minor differences.

In terms of the subject of its study, while biography traditionally has focused on the lives of important historical figures, modern biographers have taken a wide variety of persons for their subjects, including women and individuals from underrepresented and marginalized ethnic groups or social classes. The best biography represents a reconstruction of an individual life which can help us to view the prevailing social, cultural, moral, political, institutional and economic realities within a given frame of time and space during the life and times of the subject. If we accept the fact that the historical process is the sum total of human actions, the best way to understand them is clearly by studying the actors behind those actions. Every subject selected for study in biography becomes a sort of a singular-made-universal, through which many of the different aspects of the subject's respective time can be

[3] Catherine N. Parke, "Biography: Writing Lives," *Studies in Literary Themes and Genres No.11,* edited by Ronald Gotsman(New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996),p.29.

[4] Catherine Drinker Bowen, *Biography: The Craft and the Calling,* (An Atlantic Monthly Press Book: Little Brown and Company, 1969), pp. 11-36.

[5]Frederick Liers, "Biography", in *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, Vol.1, editor Maryanne Cline Horwitz, (Thomas Gale, 2005), P.217; Binne de Haan and Hans Renders, "Towards Traditions and Nations," in *Theoretical Discussions of Biography*, edited by Hans Renders, BRILL, 2014,p.11-12.

perceived and captured through the biographical approach. This kind of approach represents one of biography's main advantages in which a single life becomes a focal point, an open window, a bird's eye view podium to observe a past time, space and society all together fully. It allows the historian who wants to have a wider picture of a particular past to gather the key pieces of the identified problem through the eyes, the actions, the ideas, the successes and misfortunes of the one life. For the biographer this approach of study provides the lens, the mirror, the mediator and the guiding line which is connected to politics, society, culture, morality and the economy of some past time.[6]

It is a common understanding that from ancient times to the present, the world has been shaped by the decisions, philosophies, inventions, discoveries, actions, leadership and overall activities of several personalities. As a result, it is obvious that our lives are immensely enriched when we learn about those individuals who have made their impact on the life we live in today. The study of biography relies on a perception of individuals as creators of meanings which form the basis of their everyday lives. Individuals take actions based on their understandings through which they make sense of social existence.[7] The main purpose of biographical research is to gain insights into individual lives as, perhaps, reflecting wider cultural meanings of the society. Biography, therefore, looks carefully into its subjects' personal lives, examines the times and places in which they lived, and the historical, social, and cultural forces that shaped and influenced their identities.[8] Accordingly, the selection of General Taddasa Birru is based on the assumption that the study of his military and political

[6] Jose Miguel Sardica, "The Content and Form of 'Conventional' Historical Biography," *Rethinking History: the Journal of Theory and Practice, Vol.17, No.3*, (Routledge: Taylor and Francise Group, 2013), pp.392-394.

[7] Brian Roberts, *Biographical Research* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2002), p.6.

[8] *The Hutchinson Encyclopedia*, 9th edition, (Random Century Group, 1990), p.137.

life would help to reflect part of the socio-economic and political grievances of the Oromo against the Imperial regime and the *Darg*, especially during the 1960s and the early 1970s.

Biographical research seeks to understand the changing experiences and outlooks of individuals in their daily lives and attempts to provide interpretations of the accounts they give of their past. It also reflects on how individual accounts of life experience can be understood within the contemporary socio-cultural, political and structural settings. It helps to understand major social shifts by examining how new experiences are interpreted by individuals within families, small groups and institutions. In general, biographical writing is deeply rooted that it was an important method of understanding society and its institutions through the agency of an individual.[9] Accordingly, by employing biographical approach the writer wants to examine the socio-economic and political grievances of the Oromo, at least the elite, through the agency of Taddasa Birru.

Having the above brief discussion on the concept and purpose of biography, we now turn to look briefly at the historiographical development of biography as a field of study. The study of biography is very old and its writings go back several thousand years to ancient Egypt, classical Greece, Rome, China and other ancient civilizations. It is one of the oldest forms of literary expression and its earliest writings probably consisted of funeral speeches and inscriptions which often praised the life and deeds of the deceased. In other words, it focused mainly on commemorating the deeds of ancient kings and heroes.[10]

[9] *The New Encyclopedia Britannica,* Vol.2, 15th ed.,edited by Robert Mc Henry, (The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 222.

[10] Catherine N. Parke, pp, 1-8.

A number of quasi biographical works appeared both in the west and the east if we can ideally divide the world in that way. One of the earliest surviving biographies of the ancient time include those contained in *De Viris Illustribus (*on illustrious men) written by Cornelius Nepos. It became a model for serial biography. Plutarch is probably considered as the most famous ancient biographer. His *Parallel Lives* contained forty six biographies assembled in pairs. Suetonius presented the life of Julius Caesar and the lives of the first eleven emperors in his *De Vita Caesarum*.[11]

For the Medieval and Renaissance periods the works of ancient biographers served as model. During the Medieval period several hagiographies were written focusing on the lives of Saints and religious leaders. Medieval hagiographers mainly emphasized on praising the spiritual qualities of their subjects and offered proofs for their work in which, however, both fact and legend were regarded as fundamental truth. During this period, several chronicles of saints and martyrs were produced mostly devoted to religious teachings of which the life and teachings of Jesus Christ attracted more attention. In general, the Medieval period was characterized as a period of biographical darkness because of its domination by priests who mainly shaped biography in favor of spiritual issues. During the Renaissance period, humanist biographers benefitted from the past experiences as they were mainly influenced by the available works on classical lives and the lives of saints. As a result, they borrowed extensively from the works of earlier biographers in addition to making their own immense contributions to cultural progress, especially in the field of art.[12]

[11] Frederiek Liers, "Biography", p.218.

[12] *Ibid.*, p.219; T*he Hutchinson Encyclopedia,* 9th edition,(Random Century Group, 1990),p.137; P.M.K, "Biographical Literature," p.200.

In general, until the 16th century, there were only few ordinary individuals who attracted biographical attention apart from kings, political and military leaders and the saints. During the 16th century biography was regarded as a field of literature. In the 17th and the early 18th centuries many types of life writings appeared which included diaries, letters, and memoirs. Some of the major works during this period included the *Five Lives* of eminent figures by Izaak Walton (1593-1683), the *Lives of Eminent Men* by John Aubery and others. But as a field of study biography became increasingly popular since the 18th century. During this century it became more appreciated with two major ground breaking works of Samuel Johnson, *Life of Richard Savage* (1744), and James Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (1791). Both were regarded as the leading biographers of their age and their works are regarded as pioneering biographies of the era. In general, the 18th century saw the rise of professional biographers. Though biography in the modern form emerged in the 18th century, with the development of the notion of the independent individual, it was in the 19th century that the concepts of 'career' and life course took root.[13]

The writing of biography has developed through time with the earlier works serving as bases. In other words, it was developing gradually from short narratives that mainly honor the activities of famous figures to more complex details that reveal the life of an individual. Accordingly, for example, the good works of the 18th century served as models for exhaustive and vast 19th century biographies. During the latter period, the primary biographical form was the Victorian style of 'life and times' approach. In the 20th century,

[13] *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol.2, 15th ed., p. 222;Catherine N. Parke ,pp. 15-19; *The Universal World Reference Encyclopedia*, V.S Thatcher(ed.),(Consolidated Book Publishers, 1965),p. 696-7; Frederiek Liers, p. 219.

biography reflected the rise of modernism. Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918) is a famous modern example. Since then biography has been changing in its forms.[14]

In the 1920s and 1930s it was applied to understand the process of immigration and the nature of social problems associated with it. William Isaac Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, two sociologists belonging to the 'Chicago School', were the pioneers of biographical research in the discipline of Sociology. They presented their well- known study, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* published in 1918. Clifford R. Shaw's *The Jack Roler* (1930) was a significant study in the development of biographical research. In general, the 'Chicago School' of Sociology went on to make extensive biographical materials in the 1920s and 1930s.[15]

Up to the 1970s and 1980s, the study of biography within the disciplines of sociology, anthropology and history largely focused on theoretical explanation and analytical investigation of issues related to subjectivity. It is not surprising that biography occupied an ambiguous place within the social sciences and history partly because Marxist and other schools attempted to undermine biography's epistemological potential.[16] There had been prejudice against biographical study because some considered political narrative and biography as 'deceitful fallacies', which reduced biography to a low status.[17] Moreover, radical postmodernists assume that historical biography is an impossible task because they argue that it picks up one life and leaves millions of other lives in the shadow. Thus these accusations overshadowed a recognition that biography deserves as an academic exercise.

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[14] Frederiek Liers,p. 219.

[15] Ciraj Shahid Rassool, "The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa," (PhD, History, The University of Western Cape, 2004), p.17.

[16] *Ibid*, p. 27.

[17] Jose Miguel Sardica, pp. 383-384.

Despite the criticisms, however, biography's widespread acceptance and general popularity among writers and readers has continued to rise.[18] As a result, in the late 20th century, biography witnessed the emergence of traditionally underrepresented groups, both as subjects and as biographers. Accordingly, feminist and other marginalized groups' life writings grew and continued to get more attention. This period also witnessed the globalization of biography. More importantly, with the revival of narrative as a privileged medium for historical writing, the genre re-entered the core of historical field. Thus, in the 1990s the revival of biography was expressed in what came to be known as the 'return of biography'. In this new revival of biographical approach there appeared a change of knowledge culture in which personal and social meanings gained greater prominence. Moreover, a new interest was developed to understand the different scopes of lived totality. By the late 1990s, biographical approaches had gained wider acceptance and biographers have been attempting to describe people as historically formed actors whose biographies help us to understand their historical action in context.[19]

Studies that came out during the close of the 20th century helped to prove that the study of a single representative life or event could throw light on society, economy, and political structure and long lived cultural values. Thus, with historiography witnessing both the return of the study of individual as well as the revival of political narrative, biography re-entered the heart of the historical research. It was since then that biography has been placed at the centre stage by all those who accept the fact that history is a study of mankind, real people and their

[18] I*bid*., pp. 388-391.

[19]Prue Chamberlayne (ed.), *The Turn to Biographical Methods in Social Sciences: Comparative Issues and Examples,* (Routledge: Taylor and Francis Group, 2000), p.1.

actions and the actually lived past. Thus instead of theorization, only the facts of the past should be the primary raw material of history's content.[20]

In general, since the 1990s one of the major theoretical concerns in biographical study is how to produce a biography in different cultural contexts and social situations, and the nature of analysis that can be exploited in the process. Indeed, in biographical research there is not only one single method but different ways of doing it and hence, there are different approaches and ways of doing biographical study. Historical biography well developed during the 20th century displayed a multitude of biographical methodologies.[21]

Biography and biographical methods are influenced by a number of disciplinary strands including history, literature, anthropology, sociology, psychology and education. These disciplinary influences have created methodological and conceptual discrepancy of biography. However, the major challenge is what makes biographical research distinct from other similar approaches. One major quality of biography is that it seeks to understand the changing experiences and outlooks of individuals in their life experiences and provide them with interpretations. In general, the term biographical research is used to refer to work which uses the stories of individual and other related materials to understand the individual life within its contemporary political and social contexts. As a result, approaches to life history may vary across various disciplines though commonalities do exist. Though there are various methodologies regarding the study of biography, what is more interesting is the growing

[20] Jose Miguel Sardica, p.385.
[21] Brian Roberts, p. 5.

sense of common purpose, to collect and interpret the lives of others as part of human understanding.[22]

In the early 21st century, biography is an increasingly global art and its writings spread all over the world which can be seen from the diversity of its subjects and forms.[23] However, one of the evidently great issues of historiography is concerning the problem of the individual in history and the place of the individual in historic explanation. It is this question that has influenced the place of biography in the discipline of history.[24] Conventional biography acknowledges that there was a 'real person' who was born, lived, died, and who may have influenced others. This real person was a real subject and as such could be written about.[25]

During the first decade of the 21st century historical biography underwent a renewal and seems to be much appreciated by the general audience. It underwent a major renaissance at the end of the 20th century. At the turn of the millennium the historical biography was in the process of a redeveloping historical writing. Traditionally, every biography is a study of life from cradle to grave or birth to death. But historical biography expresses interest in the individual, and its place in culture, politics and society. It raises the issues of politics, society, economy, culture, ethnicity and other related issues.[26]

The historical biography approach is a construction of human life and the representation of an historical individual. It is open to anyone. It represents one of the many ways of telling history. Traditionally biography places individual at the centre of the narrative, instead of

[22] Brian Roberts, p. 5.
[23] Frederick Liers, pp. 217-220.
[24] Ciraj, p. 18.
[25] *Ibid.*, pp.27-30.
[26] Prue Chamberlayne(ed.), *The Turn to Biographical*…,pp. 7-8.

larger analysis of dynamics, structures and events. It remained a methodology in understanding the significance of the historical individual and the subjective experience, instead of becoming a genre in itself. There is a need for biographers to find ways and reasons why they have chosen particular persons as subjects for biographical research. Therefore, qualitative researchers must explain their reasons for selecting a particular subject for their biographical inquiry. Traditionally, biographers have chosen exemplary or well-known individuals as subjects of their study. However, recent developments in the disciplines of sociology, history and other fields have highlighted the need to include underrepresented individuals constructed under different circumstances of power relations and prevailing discourses.[27] It is in line with this aspect that my study subject is selected because he revealed part of the grievances of politically marginalized Oromo. According to the new trend, one of the most important aspects was the emergence of the life-work-and times biography, in which the individual was contextualized in the light of contemporary society. A balanced analysis of the individual in connection with the context of the prevailing power structure and the dynamic interplay between the individual and the society is needed.[28]

I assess my study subject by focusing on his military and political lives because he had changing experiences which significantly shaped the course of his life. The life courses of many freedom fighters have changed with the changing experiences. For example, Mahatma Gandhi, entered into politics mainly due to the situations he had encountered in South Africa after he was taken there as a lawyer by an Indian company.[29] Partly, my subject's rise as a

[27] Lisa M. Given (ed.), *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods,* Vol. 1&2, (University of Alberta: Sage Publications Inc., 2008), pp.61-62.

[28] Ciraj, p.137.

[29] Bhiku Parek, *Gandhi: A Very Short Introduction,* (Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 5. South Africa was a turning point in Gandhi's life and within a week of his arrival there, he had an experience that changed the course of his life. He soon began to lead the struggle of the Indian immigrants in South Africa after he

military and police officer provided him with the opportunity to form close relationship with some of the key authorities of the Imperial regime which in turn helped him to understand the true nature of the Imperial regime and its leadership. It was this understanding which provoked him and eventually led him to resist the regime.

Thus in dealing with the lives of those individuals who devoted their time resisting discrimination and injustices, biography becomes an important aspect of historical study. For example, in South Africa, working within the broadened paradigm of resistance, studies of resistance and political mobilization at the local level was centred on biographies of local activists.[30] The study of biography reveals aspects of the experience of an individual, a class, an ethnic group or of a particular kind of economic enterprise. Each individual's life represents something of the common experience of a larger social group.[31] In the 1990s and early 2000s conventional approach to biography continued to manifest strongly in the academy. As a result, researches have been made on the lives of national and local leaders, as well as of ordinary people as part of the growing national discourse in order to overcome the silence in the historical record.[32]

Based on the conceptual analysis made so far, it is possible that Oromo resistance history can be narrated partly through the experiences and activities of its leaders. It is crucial to understand what was going on during the life time of the study subject in political, social and economic terms. In other words, without understanding the time in which Taddasa Birru lived it is very difficult to understand him, his activities, speeches and intentions fully. As

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witnessed their precarious situations. In South Africa he was confronted with many unusual experiences and challenges which profoundly transformed him.

[30] Ciraj, p. 153.

[31] I*bid*, p.158.

[32] *Ibid*, pp.190-200.

individuals are telling their stories, they are not isolated and independent of their contexts because they were very much connected to their social, cultural and institutional settings. The biographical approach assumes that the link between structure and individuals could only be understood sufficiently by analyzing the development of the individual personality in the life course. The biographical approach utilized in the study of Taddasa Birru's military and political life would help us to use his experiences to explore aspects of the condition of the Oromo during his lifetime (1920s-1970s). Thus, a biographical approach is used in this dissertation to reveal and examine the military-political life and experiences of my study subject as a 'lens' through which to look into part of the history of the Oromo people and Ethiopia in general during his life time. His experience after he joined the MTSHA is widely considered as being part and parcel of the Oromo grievances against the Imperial regime.

1.2. Review of Related Literature

Biographical study has a long history in Ethiopian historiography. It is assumed that at least beginning from the 14th century chronicles appeared focusing on the reigns of kings and the life of elites. So far the bulk of biographical studies on Ethiopia are produced on the 19th century and 20th century political leaders.[33] As a result, most of the professional biographical works conducted in the 1960s and 1970s and even later focused mainly on the political figures and leaders of modern Ethiopia. Accordingly, Emperor Tewodros II[34], Emperor Yohannes IV[35], Emperor Menilek II[36] and Emperor Haile Selassie I[37] took the lion's share as

[33] Bahru Zewde, *Society,State and History: Selected Essays* (Addis Ababa: AAUP, 2008), pp.1-2.

[34] Takla Tsadiq Mekuriya, *Atse Tewodros Ina Ya'Itiyophyia Andinat*(Addis Ababa: Kuraz Publishing House, 1981 *A.M*); Sven Rubenson, *King of Kings Tewodros of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: Haile Sillase I University, 1966).

[35] Takla Tsadiq Mekuriya, *Atse Yohannis Ina Ya'Itiyophiya Andinat*(Addis Ababa: Kuraz Publishing House, 1982 E.C);Zewde Gebre Sillase, *Yohannes IV: A Political Biography*(Oxford: Clarendon press, 1975).

biographical subjects. Apart from the emperors, there are also biographies which were written on prominent individuals who played key roles in the politics of the country and served the imperial regime at different times.[38] But still the study has been mainly limited to the political figures of modern Ethiopia.

Bryan Yates attempted to give emphasis to what he calls the 'invisible Oromo actors' who contributed a lot in the formation of the modern Ethiopian empire but neglected in Ethiopian historiography. In other words, his dissertation focuses on the elites of Oromo origin who were not given the place they deserved in Ethiopian historiography. He accuses the writers of Ethiopian history for this perceived neglect.[39] However, this does not mean that works on the Oromo figures are completely non- existent.[40]

Nevertheless, we do have very limited, if any at all, biographies written on individuals who had challenged the status quo from the view of the existence of various forms of discriminations and injustices on the basis of ethnic identity. Many of the biographical works available currently on Ethiopia are not written from this perspective. In other words, there was no biographical work produced on individuals who had challenged the Imperial regime or the status quo from the perspective of ethnicity or ethno-nationalism. There was no such work especially on the Oromo resistance leaders. This makes my study different from other

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[36] Darkawah, Kofi, *Shewa, Menilek and the Ethiopian Empire 1813-1889*(London: Heinemann, 1975); Harold Marcus, *The Life and Times of Menilek II Ethiopia 1844-19139*(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

[37] L. Mosley, *Haile Sillase, the Conquering Lion*(Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1965); Harold Marcus, *Haile Sillase I: The Formative Years 1892- 1936*(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Angelo Del Boca, *The Negus: The Life and Death of the Last King of Kings*(Addis Ababa: Arada Books, 2012) .

[38] Bahru Zewde, *Habte Abba Mala: Ke' Tor Mirkogninat Iska Hager Marinat,* (Addis Ababa: Eclipses Printng Press, 2008 A.M), pp.1-3; Tamrat Haile, "Yilma Deresa: A Political Biography (1907-1979)", (PhD Dissertation, History, AAU, 2016) .These are taken as examples but there are many other biographies written on prominent individuals in similar fashion.

[39]Bryan James Yates, "Invisible Actors: The Oromo and the Creation of Modern Ethiopia(1855-1913) ", (PhD Dissertation, History, University of Illinois, 2009).

[40] For example, there are biographical works on *Fitawrari* Habte Giyorgis, *Dajjazmach* Geresu Duki and more others who had served the Imperial regime at different times.

biographical works written in Ethiopian historiography. Accordingly, though there are a number of biographical works, as partly indicated above, they are different from the way the biography of my study subject is framed and analyzed. As a result, I do not go into the detailed discussions of critical biographies written on Ethiopian notables.

This dissertation focuses on the life of a dissident Oromo nationalist who, at the highest stage of his career, promoted Oromo grievances and dedicated the rest of his life for that purpose. There is a neglect of focus in the biographical studies in Ethiopia from this perspective which partly emanated from the prevailing discourse on Ethiopian history that persisted until recently. That is why Ezekiel Gebbisa argues that Ethiopianist political and academic elites have been viewing studies on ethnicity and individuals related to it from the interest of safeguarding Ethiopia as a unitary state and discouraging other works that deviated from this interest.[41] For example, this was clearly reflected when an informant told the writer that he should not waste his time studying the biography of Brigadier General Taddasa. In the words of an informant:

> *History is studied for the educative purpose of the future generation. But a history of Taddasa Birru cannot serve for that purpose because he was a man who divided the country along ethnic lines and the present protest happening in Oromia is his germination. Therefore, it is better if you do not waste your time on studying his biography.*[42]

Similar observation is made by Jacques Depelchin who argues that probably for economic, political and ideological reasons writers prefer to go along with the mainstream instead of

[41]Ezekiel Gebissa (ed.), *Contested Terrain: Essays on Oromo Studies, Ethiopianist Discourse and Politically engaged Scholarship* (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 2008), p. 5.

[42] *Informant*: *Ato* Tadele Bitul. The protest refers to the Youth (Qeerroo) led resistance against the TPLF dominated EPRDF government that eventually led to the appearance of reformist leaders, usually called Team Lemma, within the ruling party. The interview was made during the pick of the 'Oromo Protest.' Those who discredit the protest usually point their fingures to the beginning of Oromo national movement in the 1960s, for which General Taddasa was regarded its leader.

challenging the status quo.[43] The subject of this study had dedicated the rest of his life challenging the existing political establishment and the status quo since he joined the MTSHA.

We do not have a single work fully dedicated to General Taddasa Birru, though we do have fragmented pieces of information about him in many writings since the 1960s. Since the 1990s, however, we do have better references on him and his activities especially within the MTSHA. Accordingly, references are made to his name and activities in connection to various issues. Some of these included his roles in the *Fetno Derash* Police, the 1960 coup, the MTSHA, and finally his rebellion against the *Darg*. The latter two are his activities carried out mainly as an Oromo resistance figure. Of all references made to him, it is in connection with the MTSHA that he is given more attention by many writers who referred to him.

Now, we turn to the review of some of the major sources that referred to him in one way or another. When analyzed over all, sources referring to him range from few words and entry to *Encyclopedia Aethiopica* to generous coverage in book chapter in terms of depth. In terms of themes, the available literatures deal with various issues that begin from his guerrilla resistance in Salaalee against the Italians to his execution by the *Darg*. One of the earliest remarks on Taddasa Birru's activities as a commander of the *Fetno Derash* Police was given

[43] Jacques Depelchin, *Silences in African History: Between the Syndromes of Discovery and Abolition* (Dar Es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, 2005), p.1. In undertaking historical studies a historian should not tell the history of the past only from the perspective of a single centre but rather should widen his or her basis of analysis at least socially and geographically. This would help to entertain plural voices into the account. This dissertation exploits the approach of biographical study in one of its many dimensions by focusing on a biographical subject that also reflects, at least in part, the contemporary grievances of a numerically majority but politically marginalized Oromo people.

by Aemero Niguse in his book *Ye'Selam Zeb (*1956 *A.M*)[44]. He discusses very briefly how Colonel Taddasa reached up to that rank and describes the various awards he received in his career without further detailed explanations. The accounts of Aemero are very brief but important.

In the coup of December 1960, Colonel Taddasa took active part as the commander of the *Fetno Derash* Police and played a key role in aborting it. His decisive contribution in defeating the coup makers is almost recognized by various sources which are produced on the event.[45] The situation of his involvement, however, remained controversial. Some of the sources argue that he betrayed the coup makers after an initial agreement of cooperation[46] while for others this was unsubstantiated accusation. According to the latter view, Colonel Taddasa was told by the coup makers that he should cooperate with the Imperial Bodyguard in defeating the armed forces that rebelled against the Emperor. Olana Zoga writes that he was deceived by the coup leader, General Mengistu Neway.[47]

The dissertation is seeking to clarify the role of Colonel Taddasa during the coup of 1960 and the claim of his betrayal by carefully reviewing the available written sources and consulting oral sources. Though it is claimed that he was rewarded immediately for his loyalty to the Emperor during the coup, he had to wait until October 30, 1963 to be promoted to Brigadier General while many of the 1960 anti-coup leaders were promoted and appointed soon to higher positions. Moreover, it is evident that he did not become the commissioner of the

[44] Aemero Niguse, *Ye'Selam Zeb* (Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing Press, 1956 *A.M*), p. 197.

[45]Qale Kirstos Abay, *Ye1953tu Yemangist Gilbata Mukara Ina ka1908-1966 a/m YaItyopya Tarikawina Polatikawi Hidat*,(Addis Ababa, 1997 E.C), p.212; Tesfaye Mekonnen, *Yideres Lebalatariku, (*1983 *A.M*) ,pp. 131-132.

[46] Tesfaye Mekonnen, pp. 131-132.

[47] Olana Zoga, p.347.

Police though many had expected him after the Police Commissioner, General Tsige Dibu, was found dead during the coup.

In 1962 he trained an anti-apartheid leader, Nelson Mandela, on how to establish and lead his own guerrilla army equipped with the discipline of military science.[48] Some sources argue that through Nelson Mandela, Taddasa was able to learn about the nature of racial discriminations in South Africa.[49] The dissertation has attempted to add more information on the nature of relationship that existed between the two individuals. Moreover, though Colonel/General Taddasa was more introduced to the public through his service as a chairman of the executive committee of the *Fidel Serawit* (National Literacy Campaign), his contribution has not been documented. This work fills the gap in revealing his contributions and showing his unwavering stand on education.

Another important controversial point in the literature about him is that he is dubbed Amharized and loyal before he joined the MTSHA in 1964.[50] However, those who use these terms do not conceptualize and define the term Amharization clearly. The terms are used with vague meanings. The question here is that if he was 'Amharized' as claimed, how could he turn to become one of the leading Oromo nationalists? This work examines the contentious part of General Taddasa's identity just before he joined the MTSHA and puts into question the concept of Amharization at a time if it did exist.

[48] Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*,(Boston: Little, Brown Company, 1994), p. 265.

[49] Gada Melba, *Oromia: An Introduction to the History of the Oromo Peopl* (Minneapolis: Kirk House, 1999), pp.115-116 ; Gemechu Taye, "The History of Macha-Tulama Association," (BA, History, AAU, 1993), p.12.

[50] Bereket Habte Sillasssie, *Conflict and Intervention in the Horn of Africa*, (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1980), pp. 80-81; Mohammed Hassen, " The Mecha- Tulama Association and the Development of Oromo Nationalism," in Asafa Jalata (ed.), in *Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopian Discourse :The Search For Freedom and Democracy*,(Lawrenceville,NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1998), p. 200.

More than any other issue, the name of General Taddasa is raised in the literature in connection with his roles and activities within the MTSHA. Since General Taddasa and the MTSHA were very much interlinked, it is argued that the history of the MTSHA is also a shared history of General Taddasa.[51] It was through this Association that he challenged the Imperial regime and hence, attracted the attention of writers. Thus references to the MTSHA in one way or another often contained remarks on him. It was through the agency of the Macha-Tulama Association that Oromo nationalists, including General Taddasa, came together and attempted to change the situations of their own people within the Ethiopian milieu.

One of the major works so far on the MTSHA is Olana Zoga's *Gizitina Gizot (*1985 *A.M*) which is historical in nature and emphasizes the activities of the Association. It is a good general work on the Association and the activities of some of its leading members, including General Taddasa. We also have Gemechu Taye's senior essay, "History of the Macha-Tulama Association (1993)". Both works acknowledge General Taddasa's role in the MTSHA but their discussions of his activities and contributions are very brief because their focus is on the institutional role of the MTSHA, not on the role of the individual leaders. Thus, the accounts given on my study subject before he joined the MTSHA and after his banishment to Galamsoo are very brief. There is also another senior essay by Habtamu Berhanu entitled, "The Trial of the Macha-Tulama Martyrs" (1995) focusing on the legal aspect of the trial process of the accused leaders of the MTSHA, including General Taddasa. But in this dissertation, the Trial Document is reassessed with focus on General Taddasa.

[51] Mohammed Hassen, "General Taddessee Birru, 1921-1975" in *Goota Oromiyaa: Kitaaba Qarannoo Seenaa Dhuunfaa Gootota Oromoo,* edited by Daraaraa M. & Mohammed H., (Atlanta: Oromia Publishing LLC, 2008), p.339.

Three works by Mohammed Hassen give generous coverage to General Taddasa Birru. They are "Review Essay: Gezetena Gezot, Matcha and Tulama Self-Help Association, by Olana Olana Zoga," in *JOS, Vol.4, No. 1&2(1997); "*The Macha-Tulama Association and the Development of Oromo Nationalism," in *Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopian Discourse: The Search For Freedom and Democracy (*1998*),* edited by Asafa Jalata and, "General Taddessee Birru,1921-1975," by Mohammed Hassen in *Goota Oromiyaa* (2008), edited by Daraaraa M. and Mohammed Hassen. The last one is a compilation of a brief biography of General Taddasa and is heavily drawn on Olana Zoga's book and Mohammed Hassen's own earlier works. Since the three works focus mainly on General Taddasa's roles within the MTSHA, they are very useful sources for my dissertation. The works, however, do not contain the speeches of the General which were delivered at various meetings of the Association and other places. There is also an entry to *Encyclopedia Aethiopica* by Paulos Milkiyas as "Brigadier General Taddasa Birru," which deals very briefly with his biography. The entry is, however, characterized by some factual errors, including the dates of his birth and death.[52]

It is probably because of his charismatic leadership that some writers came to consider General Taddasa as a president of the MTSHA[53] though he was never its president. In other words, though he was the Association's most recognized leader, he had never been its president officially but chaired three boards.[54] In addition to the recognition of his leadership

[52] Paulos Milkiyas, "Brigadier General Taddasa Birru," in *Encyclopedia Aethiopica*, edited by Sighbert Uhlig,Vol.4 (Wiesbaden: Harrossowitz,Verlag, 2010), pp.808-809.

[53] Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991*(Addis Ababa : AAUP, 2002), pp.261-262 ; Tamrat Wasyihun, "A History of the Modern Ethiopian Police Force, 1942- 1991,"(PhD, History, AAU, 2016), p.115.

[54] Olana Zoga, pp. 29-31. Until the closure of the Association in November 1967, Colonel Alamu Qixxeessaa remained its president. The three boards he chaired were the Education, Branch Expansion and Advisory boards.

role, there are sources which even go further and confer upon him the status of a "father of modern Oromo nationalism"[55]while others consider him as a "moving spirit" of the MTSHA.[56] The study examines whether these claims are all substantiated with evidences or not.

Regarding the factors that initiated the General to join the MTSHA, sources are not unanimous but many agree that it was the provocations of the Amhara elites, especially that of the Prime Minister, Aklilu Habte Wold. According to *Gizetina Gizot*, the remark of Aklilu Habte Wold to curtail the literacy campaign among the Oromo was the major reason for General Taddasa's turn to the Oromo cause by joining the MTSHA in 1964.[57] On the contrary, according to Tesfaye Mekonnen's *Yidires La'Bale Tariku*, initially General Taddasa was sent by the Emperor to spy on the MTSHA.[58] Still other sources argue that there were other reasons which provoked General Taddasa.[59] From the debates it is clear that one or two reasons are not enough to help us understand fully what motivated General Taddasa not only to join the MTSHA, after a claimed initial refusal[60], but also to emerge as its widely recognized leader. This dissertation goes deeper and looks into all possible factors that initiated him to join the Association and emerge as Oromo resistance figure.

[55] Leenco Lata, "The Making and the Unmaking of Ethiopia's Transitional Charter," in *Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopian Discourse: The Search for Freedom and Democracy*, edited by Asafa Jalata (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1998), p. 75.

[56] John Markakis, 2011, p. 194.

[57] Olana Zoga, pp. 26-28; Mohammed Hassen," Review Essay: Gezetena Gezot, Matcha And Tulama Self Help Association, by Olana Zoga," *JOS Volume 4 No. 1&2*(1997), p. 210.

[58] Tesfaye Mekonnen, pp.131-132.

[59] Gemechu Taye, p.11 ; Bereket Habte Sellassie, pp.80-81.

[60] Olana Zoga, p.24.

Once he joined the MTSHA, his subsequent activities transformed the Association from a self-help one to a pan- Oromo political movement.[61] Sources indicate that his inflammatory speeches, delivered on various meetings of the Association, focusing on the grievances of the Oromo radicalized the Association and helped to attract thousands of members.[62] However, these sources made little or no attempt to record or quote any part of his speeches. As a result, his speeches and sayings which were delivered on various occasions of the Association have been ignored. Sources also disagree over the motives behind his activities. Some accuse him as an officer who was greedy for power[63] while others argue that he was motivated to challenge the prevailing injustices and discriminations.

When the Association started to unify the Oromo successfully, the regime began to use different pretexts to crack down the MTSHA and its leaders, including General Taddasa.[64] It seems that the regime was not happy from the very beginning with the MTSHA and hence, refused to give it a legal recognition for over a year. The membership of General Taddasa also increased the worry of the authorities. The Association's expansion to Arsii and other areas deeply disturbed the regime, which began to take provocative measures to supress the Association. Upon learning the incoming danger, General Taddasa and his team attempted, as a preemptive measure, a poorly planned plot to assassinate the Emperor in order to take

[61] Gada, p.116; Mohammed Hassen, "The Development of Oromo Nationalism" in *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Inquires,* edited by by P.T.W Baxter, J. Hultin and A. Triuliz, (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitute, 1996), pp.74-75.

[62] John Markakis, *Ethiopia: Anatomy of a Traditional Polity*(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974),pp. 179-180; Edmond J.Keller, *Revolutionary Ethiopia: From Empire to People's Republic*(Indiana University Press, 1988), pp, 160-163; Mekuriya Bulcha, " The Language Policies of Ethiopian Regimes and the History of Written Afaan Oromo: 1844-1994," *Journal of Oromo Studies Vol.1,No. 2*(1994), p. 105.

[63]Berihun Kebede, *Ye'Atse Haile Selassie Tarik*(Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, 1993 *A.M*), p.767.

[64]John Markakis, 1974, p. 181: Mekuria Bulcha, *Contours of the Emergent and Ancient Oromo Nation: Dilemmas in the Ethiopian Politics of State and Nation-Building*,(Cape Town: Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society(CASAS), 2011), pp. 524-525.

over state power. However, the attempt was unsuccessful.[65] There are no detailed accounts of these decisive and turning point events that shaped the political life of my study subject which basically antagonized him with the regime.

We do have some accounts of the general legal processes and charges brought against the leaders of the MTSHA after their capture and imprisonment.[66] There are sources which question the neutrality of the imperial courts, and this work carefully examines the available sources on the account of the witnesses, the judges and the court procedures. In the final verdict, General Taddasa received death penalty which was commuted to life in prison by the Emperor.[67] Sources are almost silent on why the Emperor spared General Taddasa while his colleague, Lieutenant Mamo Mazamir was hanged.

Written sources are again absent on his life in prison, especially while under house arrest in Galamsoo where he stayed until the 1974 revolution. Even the few available sources disagree regarding the end of his prison term, either release[68] or escape[69], and return to the capital during the confusion of the 1974 revolution.

There is also a contradiction between government newspapers accounts and written sources regarding the reasons for his rebellion against the *Darg*, a few months after it took power. Government sponsored newspapers claim that he rebelled resisting the new Land Proclamation[70] while other sources contend that he moved out before the Land Proclamation

[65] Olana Zoga, pp.108-133 ; *Informant*: Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa.

[66] Olana,pp. 251-265; Gemechu Taye, 20-24; Habtamu Berhanu, "The Trial of Maccaa-Tulamaa Martyrs: A Case Study of Criminal File No. 441/59," (LLB, AAU, 1995), pp.48-71.

[67] Olana Zoga, pp.271-272, 425.

[68] Paulos Milkiyas, pp. 808-809; Marina and David Ottaway, *Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution*(New York: African Publishing Company, 1978), pp.91-92; Berihun Kebede, p.768.

[69] Gada Melba, p. 120; Anga'a, 2008, p. 95; Tewodros Mulatu, p.168.

[70] *Ethiopian Herald March 14, 1975.*

and the *Darg* even speeded up the Proclamation following his revolt.[71] There are also sources which argue that it was the delay of the Land Proclamation which initiated him to move out to mobilize the landless peasants.[72] This dissertation carefully looks into the factors that forced him to move out to resist the *Darg* despite the regime change and the seemingly initial cooperation with the *Darg*.

Regarding the legacy of General Taddasa we do not have a thorough work and clear interpretation. According to Mohammed Hassen, however, his legacy was the consolidation of Oromo nationalism and the realization that only armed resistance would bring change for the Oromo in Ethiopia. It is argued that General Taddasa inspired those nationalists who formed the Oromo Liberation Front in 1974 and he too was one of the founding members of the front and its first chairman.[73]

In general, the available sources do not give us a satisfactory answer to the question of how an individual who was once regarded as 'Amharized' went a long way and participated in the foundation of the Oromo Liberation Front. Clapham states this fact when he writes, "The person who could have been a 'model assimilee' came to personify Oromo rebellion against assimilation."[74] Therefore, how this had happened is not well explained so far, one of the gaps which this dissertation attempts to fill. The available literature on General Taddasa mainly focus on his role in the MTSHA, even then without presenting any of his speeches, and ignores his pre-1964 military life and his life after his imprisonment in November 1966.

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[71] Leenco Lata, "The Making and the Unmaking…,", p.75; Leenco Lata, 1999, p.192.

[72] Addis Hiwot, *Ethiopia From Autocracy to Revolution*, Occasional Publication No.1,*Review of African Political Economy*(London, 1975): 109 note.

[73] Mohammed Hassen, "General Taddessee Birru, 1921-1975," pp.361-363; Gemechu Taye, pp.33-34; Leenco Lata, *The Horn of Africa as Common Homeland: The State and the Self-determination in the Era of Heightened Globalization* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004), pp. 122-123; Daniel Tefera J., *Dandi Ye'Negaso Gidada Menged* (Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press, 2003 *A.M*), p.79.

[74] Christopher Clapham, *Haile Silassie's Government* (New York: Praeger, 1969), p.81.

The study attempts to bridge this gap by carefully exploiting oral sources and the Trial Document of the leaders of the MTSHA to reconstruct the political life of the subject.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

The purpose of my dissertation is to address the gaps indicated in the literature review as discussed above. My initial intention was to focus on General Taddasa and the development of Oromo nationalism in order to analyze his contributions to the rise of Oromo national consciousness after he joined the MTSHA. This part, especially his activities and contributions within the MTSHA have been discussed by a number of writers to some extent though not sufficiently. However, the writer realized that it is difficult to understand Taddasa Birru as a rallying figure of Oromo resistance during the 1960s and early 1970s without understanding his life before he joined the MTSHA. Therefore, the writer decided to focus also on his military life from the beginning in order to understand his political life that came later, especially after he joined the MTSHA. The intention is to reconstruct his military and political biography which has not been done so far.

General Taddasa is such a highly controversial figure that he was generally dubbed as 'Amharized' or assimilated before he joined the MTSHA in 1964 but he rebelled against Amharization and became a leading Oromo nationalist during the 1960s and early 1970s.[75] There are gaps here. First, those who used the vague concept of Amharization did not clearly conceptualize the term. Second, the mystery that turned the so- called an Amharized General into Oromo nationalist is not well defined in any literature. This is why he was presented in most of the literature with two contradictory perspectives. Therefore, the issue of his

[75] Mekuria Bulcha, 2011, p. 519.

Amharization is a problematic concept which can only be settled through further research by studying his military and political life within the context of the contemporary socio-political conditions which had impacts on his life experiences. It can be argued that if he had been Amharized and had lost his Oromo identity, he could have turned deaf ears to the presumed provocations of the Prime Minister which was seen as one of the factors for his joining of the MTSHA to promote Oromo cause.

There is a gap in understanding the real situations of Taddasa Birru before 1964 and the resistance tradition of the Salaalee Oromo, the society among whom he grew up. This work fills this gap by examining the perceived impacts of the Salaalee resistance tradition upon his movements and activities which seem to manifest until his eventual execution by the *Darg*. Taddasa Birru was a veteran of anti-Fascist resistance who was taken to Mogadishu as a captive but fought back to his country and served the imperial regime as a military and police officer for a long time. After he joined the MTSHA, he tirelessly worked to bring the equality and freedom of his own people. As a result, he has been widely accepted as a distinguished Oromo hero among many Oromo resistance leaders. However, so far there is no single work that fully focused on him apart from a book chapter and article. The dissertation intends to fill this gap.

His speeches and activities within the MTSHA and later were evident of the fact that he was a determined Oromo, not an Amharized person, but his speeches and teachings were not recorded. This is one of the major gaps which this dissertation tries to fill by collecting his speeches, sayings and advises for the Oromo to make them aware of their conditions and strengthen their unity.

We do have limited written sources related to General Taddasa. What is more alarming is that we are also losing very fast many of his contemporaries who could provide us with their invaluable oral accounts. Thus, it is important to collect oral sources on the movement of the subject of the study before it is too late. These are the major gaps that initiated the writer to focus on General Taddasa.

1.4. Objective of the Study

The general objective of the dissertation is to reconstruct the military and political life of General Taddasa Birru within the contemporary context of Ethiopia from the early 1920s to his execution in 1975. The study has also the following specific objectives.

1. To examine the socio-economic and political conditions in which Taddasa Birru was born and lived in his early age.
2. To describe Taddasa Birru's services as a member of the military and the police forces.
3. To investigate the reasons why General Taddasa joined the MTSHA.
4. To discuss General Taddasa's contributions within the MTSHA, his imprisonment and activities in Galamsoo.
5. To examine the last years of General Taddasa's life and his legacy.
6. To identify General Taddasa's contribution to the birth and growth of modern Oromo nationalism.

1.5. Significance of the Study

This study documents the life of an individual who rebelled four times against the incumbent regimes. The first rebellion was during the Italian occupation for which he was taken to

Somalia as a prisoner. The other two were against Emperor Haile Selassie for which he was sentenced to death but changed to life imprisonment. The last rebellion was against the *Darg* for which he was executed. The first rebellion was conducted to defend his country from foreign aggression while the rest were in resistance to injustices and maltreatment against the Oromo. As a result, part of Taddasa Birru's life was devoted to Oromo nationalist resistance against the oppressive Ethiopian regimes and the prevailing status quo that appeared to be discriminatory towards the Oromo in many aspects of life. In this respect, this work is different from other biographical works in Ethiopia because it mainly narrates the life of a dissident Oromo military officer who turned against the regime he was serving. The value of this study lies in its attempt to reveal the issue of ethnicity and the relationship between the Ethiopian government and the Oromo, at least the elites, during the 1960s and early 1970s through a narration of an individual life.

The focus on General Taddasa helps to understand the fact that the so-called integration policy[76] that had been pursued by the Imperial regime was not successful even to embrace those Oromo elites who were willing to do so, let alone the wider public. Thus, almost all of the founders of the MTSHA were those Oromo elites who were not happy with the way the imperial regime had treated the Oromo. This shows the fact that the few Oromo participation in the leadership of the Ethiopian government did not mean that the Oromo were not discriminated. For example, those Oromo elites who were involved in the imperial institutions were often suspected of disloyalty, as it became evident after the 1960 coup. Thus, the study is significant in revealing this situation through a biographical narration and examination of an Oromo resistance figure. In doing so, this work also gives an insight into

[76]Various writers use different names to explain this situation. These include centralization, Amharization, assimilation, nation-building, national integration and etc.

the overall political economy and socio-cultural conditions of the country during the Imperial regime and the early days of the *Darg*.

This dissertation is hopefully one of the few studies conducted on the life of Oromo nationalist leaders who resisted the existence of perceived discrimination on the basis of ethnic identity in Ethiopia. Thus the study deals with a biography of a dissident Oromo figure, who tirelessly worked to promote Oromo self-consciousness. The biographical precedents in Ethiopian history either deal with the Emperors or constructed around a single episode. My work would be different from all other works mainly because it deals with an Oromo historical figure dubbed Amharized in the literature, but could not be put in that box.

The study contributes a lot to the scholarly construction of historical knowledge and encourages other researchers to conduct further research in the field. The study is hoped to be useful to historians, political scientists and others who are interested in Ethiopian history, especially in the issue of ethnic identity in Ethiopia. Thus the study has the prospective to advance a line of inquiry in the biographical studies in Ethiopia. Nevertheless, the writer does not think that this study is complete. What is given more attention in this work is his military and political life. Lack of sources even limited the discussion of some areas of his life, more specifically his role as a member of the army before he was transferred to the Police.

1.6. Research Methodology and Sources

Studying the military and political life of General Taddasa Birru from the perspective of the contemporary context makes it difficult to frame a clear methodological approach. This is because Taddasa's life has been viewed with two contradictory perspectives before and after 1964. Indeed, the disciplinary influences of various fields have created difficulties in

establishing a clear methodological and conceptual framework in the study of biography.[77] In short, because of his diverse experiences, it is difficult to put Taddasa Birru's life under a single theoretical lens though it is possible to follow a general approach of biographical narrative. Thus, phases in his life are treated differently with reference to specific analytical frame available in the wider literature of biographies.

The study is based on a critical examination of different types of sources that are relevant to the military and political life of General Taddasa Birru (1922-1975). Accordingly, though the scarcity of written sources is very critical and a major challenge in this study, the available primary and secondary sources are utilized. The available written primary sources include his incomplete and undated handwritten diary which exists in private hands, some documents in possession of family members, the Trial Document of the leaders of the MTSHA and different letters. His diary is a very useful source in narrating his patriotic activities in Salaalee, his capture and hazardous journey to Somalia as a young Italian captive. The family document includes photos and certificates awarded to him at different times. The letters were written mainly by the Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists requesting the release of the leaders of the MTSHA. The Trial Document contains the testimony of witnesses who had attended or heard most of his speeches delivered on various meetings of the MTSHA. It also includes the charges, the legal process and the final verdict. However, since the witnesses were brought against him by the prosecutor and some of them were police and security officers, who were involved in his capture, attempts were made to crosscheck the reliability of their accounts with other sources, especially with the contemporary oral sources. .

[77] Janet L. Miller, "Biography" in: The *Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, Vols. 1&2, ed.by Lisa M. Given, SAGE Publications, Inc., 2008, p.62.

The secondary sources include both published and unpublished materials. The first include books, journals, articles, periodicals, other forms of publications and research papers. The latter include undergraduate and graduate theses and other documents. These sources are mainly found in the Library of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies of AAU. Various newspapers and documents which are found in this library are also consulted to understand the view of the government regarding General Taddasa's activities, including his alleged plan to overthrow the imperial government and rebellion against the *Darg*. The reports in the newspapers also include his activities in the National Literacy Campaign.

However, there is a scarcity of written sources, especially regarding the life of my study subject before he joined the MTSHA. It seems that it is because of this reason that writers neglected his life during this period. In this study also, it was difficult to get detailed accounts of his military activities, especially until 1960, even from oral sources. But attempts were made to gather pieces of relevant sources to reconstruct his military services and other aspects of his life.

Thus owing to the scarcity of written sources, I have heavily relied on oral sources. According to Jan Vansina, in areas where there are no written sources, oral sources become the major sources for a reconstruction of the past particularly for the recent events.[78] Therefore, to fill the gap created by the scarcity of written sources, and to substantiate the existing ones, extensive oral interviews were conducted. Accordingly, oral informants were consulted especially to collect his speeches and sayings during the meetings of the MTSHA and later when he was sent to Galamsoo in banishment. Moreover, interviews were made

[78]Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology(*translated by H.M.Wright*), (*Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1965), pp. 1-2.

with informants who met him after he returned from Galamsoo. He lived in the capital with his family for several months and some of my informants met him during this time. My other informants met him and accompanied him to Meettaa when he moved out to resist the *Darg* in the early 1975.

For this purpose, I travelled to four major areas outside of the capital. The first is to Hidhabuu Abootee in Northern Shawa, Salaalee, where he was born and lived during his young age. The second is to Arsii, especially Itayyaa and Dheeraa towns, where he made moving speeches during the meetings of the MTSHA. The third travel is to Galamsoo, where he lived in banishment and strongly influenced the Oromo in and around it. The last site, but not least, is Meettaa Roobii[79], where he rebelled against the *Darg* but was caught at the end. In addition to these areas, interviews were also made in Adaamaa, Asallaa, Bishooftuu, Buraayyuu and Fiichee. For several reasons, the major site of interview was Finfinne or Addis Ababa. This was where General Taddasa had lived and worked for several years and hence there were many individuals who knew him personally and worked with him in the MTSHA. It is also here that members of his family and some of his contemporaries live today. Finally, I had the opportunity to meet with individuals who knew him when they came to the capital for various reasons.

Most of the oral sources which were collected through interviews consisted of eye witness accounts which were based on personal observation and experiences of my informants. The procedure involved individual and group interviews with different length of time based

[79] Last year, the former district of Meettaa Roobii was divided into two districts. The first one retained the name of Meettaa Roobii while the other was given the name Meettaa Waalqixxee. The latter name remained controversial among some of my Meettaa informants because there is a wish to use Meettaa Gooroo or Meettaa Minaaree instead of Meettaa Walqixxee. It was in the new district of Meettaa Walqixxee that General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu were captured in the specific area of Gooroo Maakoo by the *Darg*.

mainly on the depth of the narration they had. Many of my informants had seen him and listened to his speeches and advices. And a few of them were close associates who were members of the MTSHA and knew him very closely.

Conducting interview is a very useful tool not only as means of gathering data from another individual, but also as a means in which both interviewer and participants are constructing versions of what can be told within the context of their interactions as well as representations of self and other.[80] This can be evident that some of my informants in Dheeraa and Galamsoo became emotional while they were narrating the contributions and efforts of my study subject to imrove the conditions of the Oromo.

In utilizing the oral sources, the research followed appropriate methodology in order to avoid the impacts of the consciousness that developed later. Moreover, my informants had diverse backgrounds and some of them had different views about him. Thus in order to accommodate diverse views, the available secondary sources and archival documents are used to cross-check and authenticate the data obtained from oral interviews. Oral sources are also cross-checked against each other. The authenticity of the written sources is also evaluated by cross-checking with oral sources. Moreover, attempts are made to evaluate the situations and activities of General Taddasa within the context of his time, not with the view of the later developments. That is why it is argued that biographers tend to focus on making connections between the subjects' life and times.[81]

[80]Lisa M. Given(ed.), *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, Vols 1&2(University of Alberta: Sage Publications Inc., 2008), pp.62-63.

[81] *Ibid*

Chapter Two
Historical Setting, Family Background and Early Life of Taddasa Birru to 1941

In order to understand the family background of my study subject and his early life, it is important to look in to the conditions of the Oromo of Salaalee, and the Tuulamaa in general, before and after his birth. This is relevant partly because it helps us to understand the Oromo of Salaalee whose cultural impacts seem to have shaped the later life, activities and behavior of my study subject. It seems that the resistance tradition in Salaalee had partly encouraged him to become a guerrilla fighter at a young age and to join the military force after 1941. He became a bandit and guerrilla fighter at the age of fourteen not out of blind boldness but it was a common practice among the society in which he grew up. Moreover, some of the circumstances of his later rebellions against the Imperial regime and the *Darg* could be partly explained in terms of the resistance traditions in Salaalee with which he was familiar. This makes it important to begin the background discussion of his biography from Salaalee. Moreover, since he repeatedly stressed in his speeches, during the rallies of the MTSHA, on the invasion of the Oromo territories by the Shawan Amhara, it is vital to have some discussions on how the Tuulamaa, especially the Salaalee, were defeated and subjugated as a springboard to our background discussion.[82]

The Tuulamaa Oromo in general, including the Salaalee, had been resisting the military raids of the kingdom of Shawa for several decades and even centuries. In this course, they had paid

[82] He argued that the Shawan Amhara came out of the mountains and gorges of Menz and invaded the Oromo territories. He attributed the suffering and exploitations of the Oromo *gebbars* to the defeat of the Oromo in the late 19th century. See the testimony of Abbaa Jifaar Waaqayyoo and others in the Trial Document.

heavy prices, arguably, more than the rest of the Oromo groups.[83] At least three major annual raids were conducted against them during which they had lost tens of thousands of cattle and thousands of family members as captives. Their houses, farms and crops were also destroyed in addition to several onslaughts during the raids.[84] It was after the defeat of the Tuulamaa that the Shawan kingdom was able to invade the rest of the Oromo and other peoples to the south.

After their defeat, the Salaalee had developed a resistance tradition against the oppressive and exploitative system of the Shawan Amhara administration by using different mechanisms as will be discussed shortly.[85] Despite the existing resistance tradition, however, some of the Tuulamaa, especially the Salaalee, were made to serve in the expanding Shawan army during its further conquest of the south. This later development came to have some impacts on those individuals who joined the service of the regime to develop a belief that the system in place was also theirs.[86] Taddasa Birru was not exceptional in this case at least for some times until he rejected it later. Thus while he was serving as a military and police officer of the Imperial regime, it seems that he had shared this view until he joined the MTSHA.[87]

He joined the MTSHA in 1964, however, when he was convinced that the regime he had been serving was pursuing an undeclared discriminatory policy against the Oromo in many aspects of life, including basic education. He attempted to mobilize the Oromo by joining the

[83] The resistance of most of the other Oromo lasted for about a decade or less but that of the Tuulamaa lasted for several decades and even centuries as they always fought with their neighbor, the kingdom of Shawa.

[84] This is widely discussed by C.W Harris, British diplomat who accompanied Sahle Selassie during one of his expeditions.

[85] These resistances were mainly based on individual cases but with popular support. Taddasa Birru was born and grew up the Salaalee who used to praise those who resisted the prevailing oppressive rule through songs and other forms of expressions.

[86] *Informants*: *Qesis* Belay Mekonnen, *Obbo* Teshome Kebede.

[87] *Ibid.*

MTSHA. As will be clear during the discussions of the succeeding chapters, the Salaalee and the Tuulamaa in general had developed two reactions following their subjugation. On one hand, they developed a resistance tradition that sustained longer. On the other hand, some of those who joined the Imperial institutions and moved to the south came to develop a belief that the Imperial government was also theirs until they eventually realized that it was not. My study subject was not an isolated person and it is important to situate him within the context of the Salaalee resistance tradition in order to understand his later political life and activities.

2.1 General Conditions of the Tuulamaa Oromo, with focus on Salaalee area, from 1870s to 1935

Even though there is lack of clarity regarding the nature of the Oromo settlement in the pre-16th century, the various Oromo groups and clans have settled permanently, at least since then, in the areas where they live today. Accordingly, the Tuulamaa Oromo had settled over a vast area between Lake Danbal in the south and Walloo in the north, Maccaa highlands in the west and the territory of the Karrayyuu in the east. In other words, the Tuulamaa Oromo live in central Ethiopia, almost dominating the former province of Shawa.[88]

As with many African communities, subdivisions of the Oromo are portrayed or represented in kinship terms. Thus Tuulamaa is one of the major divisions of the Borana branch of the Oromo. According to traditions, Tuulamaa had three sons known collectively as *Sadeen Tuulamaa* (the three Tuulamaa). These were Daaccii, Bachoo and Jiillee. This is reflected in

[88]K.E, Knutsson, *Authority and Change: A Study of the Kallu Institution Among the Macha Galla of Ethiopia*(Gothenburg: Ethnografiska Museet, 1967), pp.32-33; Tesema Ta'a, " The Oromo of Wollega: A Historical Survey to 1910," (M.A. Thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1980), p.11.

the Tuulamaa traditional prayers as *Waaqa Sadeen Tuulamaa* (God of the three Tuulamaa). In some sources, however, Karrayyuu is also added as a fourth son.[89]

Daaccii, the eldest son of Tuulamaa, had again three sons: Galaan, Oboo and Sooddoo. Galaan, in turn, is said to have had six sons collectively referred to as *Ja'an Galaan* (the six Galaan). These were Jiddaa, Liiban, Abbuu, Ada'aa, Warra Jaarsaa and Gaadullaa. Oboo had seven sons: Gumbichuu, Gullallee, Oborrii, Yaayyaa, Eekkaa, Diigaluu and Gamuu. Finally, Sooddoo had three sons: Odituu, Liiban and Tum'ee.[90] These in turn had various minor subdivisions which cannot be exhaustively listed and discussed here.

Bachoo was the second son of Tuulamaa. He had six sons known as the *Ja'an Bacho*o (the Six Bachoo). These were Iluu, Keekuu, Garasuu, Uruu, Waajituu, and Meettaa. These families in turn were further divided into numerous sub families. It is also possible to further divide the Bachoo into five main branches based on the area of their settlement from south to north. These are Bachoo Warab, Bachoo Ejeree and Meettaa, Bachoo Salaalee, Bachoo Darraa and Bachoo Booranaa in Walloo.[91]

The settlement of the Bachoo Salaalee, to which the genealogy of Taddasa Birru is traced, extends up to the Abay and Jamaa Valleys. The three major Bachoo Salaalee are Uruu, Garasuu and Waajituu.[92] Of these Uruu had nine sons traditionally known as the *Saglan Uruu* (the Nine Uruu) which were divided into *Afran Diiramuu* (Four Diiramuu) and *Shanan*

[89] Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau, *History of the Oromo to the Sixteenth Century*,2nd ed., 2006, pp.117-136; Biratu Kenei, "A History of the Oromo In and Around Finfinne(Addis Ababa) from ca.1860s - 1974", (MA, History, AAU, 2010), pp.9-10.

[90] *Ibid.*

[91] Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau, pp.141-143.

[92] *Ibid.*

Hidhabuu (Five Hidhabuu).[93] The family of Taddasa Birru descended from the *Shanan Hidhabuu*. The third son of Tuulama, according to traditions, was Jiillee. Jiillee on his part had also six sons: Goonaa, Gusaa, Looyyaa, Waarree, Siibaa and Gindoo.[94] All these in turn had many smaller sub-families. The descendants of Jiille mainly settled in the eastern side of the Tuulamaa territory.

Regarding the overall pattern of Tuulamaa settlement, it is possible to draw three parallel lines from south to north to delineate the major areas of their settlement. Accordingly, the Bachoo settled in the west, the Daaccii in the center and the Jiillee in the east. This does not mean, however, that they did not cross into each other's territories. Indeed, some groups of Daaccii lived along with the Bachoo and vice versa that sometimes it is difficult to draw a clear boundary between them because they had deeply intermingled and lived together.[95] Therefore, it is sometimes difficult to put them apart on the basis of genealogy. At the same time one can find a single clan at different places. Accordingly, some of the Liiban remained in Salaalee while others settled between Mt. Cuqqaalaa (Ziquala) and Lumee.[96]

Similarly, though the original dwelling of the Gullallee is believed to be in Salaalee in a place called Yaayyaa Gullallee, northeast of the Mogor valley, some of them also lived in the Finfinne area. It was probably from the Salaalee area that a splinter group moved to the present day Finfinne before some of them were expelled during the foundation of the city.[97] Some of the Gullallee also settled between Adaamaa and Karrayyuu and even in Arsi after

[93] Alemseged Dabalee, "A History of Kuyu Warada, 1936-1991" (MA, History, AAU, 2010), p.13,17l.
[94] Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau, pp.117-133.
[95] Ronald J. Horvath, "Around Addis Ababa : A Geographical Study of the Impact of A city on Its Surroundings", (PhD Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1966),p.36; Biratu Kenei, p.10; Svein Ege, " Chiefs and Peasants…,"p.75.
[96] Biratu Kenei, p.11.
[97] *Ibid.*

they were displaced from the present site of Finfinne.[98] In general, Salaalee was largely inhabited by the Bachoo and Daaccii Oromo. The latter included the Gumbichuu, Gullallee, Yaayyaa and Oborrii.[99]

Of the Tuulamaa inhabited areas, the Salaalee is one of the major regions especially dominating its north western part. However, even though the geographical location of the Salaalee proper is clearly known, there is a slight difference over the origin of the name and the extent of its geographical coverage. Regarding the first, there are arguments on whether Salaalee is a name of a place, a clan or a person. According to one argument, the name was derived from a mountain in Yaayyaa Gullallee.[100] According to one oral source, however, the name Salaalee was derived from *Silaale* (I see you). *Silaalee* was believed to be one of the sons of Tuulamaa according to this source.[101] But it is difficult to get the name of *Silaalee* under the Tuulamaa genealogy. In general, though we do have at least two traditions regarding the origin of the name Salaalee, we do not have any clue as to how that typical name came to represent a wider territory of the present day Salaalee.

Regarding the second, Bairu Tafla locates Salaalee between Galaan in the southeast, the Maccaa Oromo in the southwest and west, Darraa and Abay gorge in the northeast and northwest, and Ensaro and Marabete in the east. According to this source, Jiddaa and Darraa

[98] Gutama Imana, "A History of Adama (Nazeret) Town from Its Foundation to 1974" , (M.A, History, Addis Ababa University, 1996), pp.28-29; Ahmed Hassen Omer, "Gullallee", a contribution in the *Encyclopedia Aethipica*, Vo1-2, edited by Siegbert Uhlig, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 2003, p.910; Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau, p.139.

[99] Alemseged Dabale, p.10.

[100] Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau, p.141; Evgenia Sokolinskaia "Salale" in *Encyclopedia Aethiopica*, Vol.4, 2010, pp. 483-484.

[101] *Informant*: *Qesis* Belay Mekonnen. It is difficult to get any descendant of Tulaama by that name. Probably Silaalee, from which the name Salaalee was derived, was derived from a commanding view provided by the mountain in Yaayyaa.

are not part of Salaalee.[102] It is also situated between the Abay River and its two main tributaries, the Mogor and the Jamaa rivers.[103] However, its southern boundary remains controversial. According to the past administrative boundary division, the Salaalee *awraja* included the area north of the Dubar River extending up to the Jamaa and the Abay Rivers. This included the current districts of Hidhabuu Abootee, Warra Jaarsoo, Kuyyuu, Dagam, Girar Jaarsoo, Yaayyaa Gullallee, Dabra Liibanos and Wucaalee. The districts of Darraa, Abbichuu and Jiddaa are, however, not considered as part of Salaalee .[104]

In another source, Muloo Faallee (also known as Muloo Faladaa) is also regarded as part of Salaalee.[105] One oral source even extends the southern boundary of Salaalee further to the Intoto area, just to the north of the capital, and rejects its confinement to north of the Dubar River. It is argued that Muloo, Sulultaa and Caancoo are regarded as part of Salaalee though they were detached and put under the former Menagesha *awraja* only for administrative convenience. Therefore, according to this view, Salaalee is bounded in the south by Finfinne (Addis Ababa), in the southwest by the Mogor valley, Ada'aa Bargaa and Meettaa, in the west by Abuna Ginda Barat, in the northwest by the Abay Gorge, in the northeast by Darraa and in the east by Insaro and Lammii, and in the southeast by Jiddaa.[106] In general, even though Salaalee is a vast region whose boundary could vary according to different sources, all of the sources agree that Hidhabuu Abootee, the birth place of Taddasa Birru, is at the heart of it.

[102]Bairu Tafla, "Some Aspects of Land-Tenure and Taxation in Salale under *Ras* Darge, 1871-1900," in *Journal of Ethiopian Studies, Vol.XII, No.2*, 1974, pp.1-2.

[103]Evgenia Sokolinskaia, 2010, pp. 483-484.

[104] *Informants*: *Obbo* Teshome Kebede, *Obbo* Tesema Qananii.

[105] Assefa Tefera Dibaba, " Ethnography of Resistance Poetics: Power and Authority in Salaalee Oromo Folklore and Resistance Culture"(PhD Dissertation, Indiana University, 2015), pp.66-68.

[106] *Informant*: *Qesis* Belay Mekonnen. It is also claimed that Meettaa is part of Salaalee. The administration of *Ras* Kasa which based itself in Fiche also included Meettaa and Ginda Barat. See IES MS: 1792 "Ye *Ras* Kasa Astedader Denb"IES MS.

Initially**,** the various Tuulamaa clans and groups, including those in Salaalee, had lived under a common *Caffee* (Gada Assembly) at Odaa Nabee. However, through time when the centrality of Odaa Nabee declined and became ineffective as a political centre, various clans began to establish their own local *Caffee.* The proliferation of the gada centres had continued down to the lowest level. This further weakened the Gada System as a political institution and system of governance which in turn affected the internal unity and strength of the Tuulamaa Oromo.[107]

Initially, it was the internal dynamics that led to significant socio-economic and political transformations to take place among most of the Oromo during the first half of the 19th century.[108] Accordingly, *Abbaa Duulaa* (war leaders) turned themselves into clan chiefs and began to stay in power more than the time limited by the Gada System.[109] This new development in turn made the Tuulamaa to enter into internal transformation which created frequent internal conflicts. It is argued that the various wars that were fought among the Oromo, including the Tuulamaa, were meant to create a pan-Oromo national state. Almost all of the Tuulamaa chiefs were expanding their own domains that would possibly bring unity of the Tuulamaa under a single or a more organized administration. However, because of the timing of the attack by the kingdom of Shawa, the nation building effort was aborted. As a result, the Tuulamaa as well as the Oromo at large had failed to put up a united resistance

[107] Richard Greenfield, *Ethiopia: A New Political History*(London,1965),pp.96-98; Gada Melba, *Oromia: An Introduction* (Kharthoum,1988),p.37; Mohammed Hassen, "Caffee", a contribution in the *Encyclopedia Aethiopica,* Vol.1, edited by Siegbert Uhlig, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 2003, p.662.

[108] Tesema Ta'a, "The Place of the Oromo in Ethiopian History: 2003 OSA Conference Keynote Address," *JOS, Vol.11, Numbers 1&2*(2004), p.3.

[109] *Ibid*. p.4.

against the conquerors.[110] This was because many of the chieftaincies were often in rivalry with one another for the supremacy and control of a wider area.[111]

As the decline of the Gadaa System became more pronounced among the Tuulamaa in the middle of the 19th century, a number of smaller Oromo chieftains flourished in many areas. Some of the early Tuulamaa chiefs who emerged during this period included Matakko Borja(oral sources make it Booji'aa), Abba Mallee,Marac, Moojoo Boxoraa, Bunee Abbaa Bullee, Birruu Xooroo, Bookan Jimaa, Shaamboo, Booxaa and possibly many others. Some of them later collaborated with both *Negus* Sahle Selassie and Menilek.[112] Due to the fragmentary and scanty nature of the sources, it is difficult to know about other chiefs who might have existed in this area. Matakkoo of Abbichuu and Abbaa Mallee of Salaalee were believed to be the major Tuulamaa chiefs who were contemporaries of Sahle Selassie. Matakkoo was regarded as the most courageous and powerful warrior of his time while Abbaa Mallee was largely recognized as a Mogor-Salaalee chief.[113]

The internal transformation of the Tuulamaa, which was characterized by temporary conflicts and disunity, was effectively exploited by the rising kingdom of the Shawan Amhara to its advantage. Thus, though internal development was the major factor in the change of Tuulamaa polity until the beginning of the 19th century[114], external factor also played

[110] Benti Getahun, "A Blind Person without a stick, a Nation without a City: Oromo Nationalism in a Historical Perspective and the Struggle for Addis Ababa", *OSA Proceedings of the 6th Annual Conference on Prospects and Challenges of the Oromo National Struggle for Freedom, Cultural and Political Factors*, edited by Ezekiel Gebissa, 2002 ,pp.43-44.

[111] Biratu Kenei, p.37; Alemayehu Haile, *Sirna Gadaa: Siyaasaa Oromoo Tuulamaa*, (Finfinnee: Oromia Bureau of Culture and Tourism, 2007), pp.279-281.

[112] Svein Ege, "Chiefs and Peasants: The Socio-political Structure of the Kingdom of Shawa about 1840",(Horedoppgavi historie, University of Bergen, 1978), pp.179-181.

[113] Odd Eirik Arnessen, "The Becoming of Place: The Tulama-Oromo Region of Northern Shawa"in *Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiries*(Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1996), pp.227-228

[114] *Ibid*. pp. 223-225.

significant role in further weakening of the Gada System and Tuulamaa unity.[115] The kingdom of Shawa used the competition among the rising Tuulamaa chiefs as a good opportunity to intervene by siding with one group against the other.[116] Some of the Oromo chiefs also sought external support in their internal conflicts which in turn facilitated the Shawan conquest of the Tuulamaa.[117] In general, before the Tuulamaa had completed their internal transformation, they encountered an external enemy. In other words, since time worked against them, they could not reform their unity to resist their common enemy.

Before we look at the actual conquest of the Tuulamaa by the kingdom of Shawa, it is important to make a brief look at the kind of relationships that had existed between them until then. The history of Tuulamaa Oromo, in general, is very much connected to the history of the kingdom of Shawa. For over four centuries their relationship had been characterized by conflicts and reconciliations[118]with more inclination towards the first.[119]

During the early 17th century the Oromo were in control of most of Shawa with the exception of a few pockets. One of these pockets, the area of Manz which was geographically well defended, served as a base for the reorganization and campaigns of the kingdom of Shawa against the Tuulamaa Oromo inhabited territories.[120] Accordingly, Nagasi Krestos and Abiye, after consolidating their power in Manz, moved out against the Tuulamaa Oromo. Abiye died while fighting against the Karrayu in 1745 but his son Ammeha Iyasus continued the fights

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[115] Asafa Jalalta, *Oromia and Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethno-national Conflict 1868-1992*. (Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), p. 22.

[116] Benti Getahun, "A Blind Person…,"pp.43-44.

[117]Lube Birru, "Abyssinian Colonialism as the Genesis of the Crisis in the Horn: Oromo Resistance(1855-1913)," *Northeast African Studies, 2,3* (1980-81),3,1(1981), pp.96-97.

[118] Teshale Tibebu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia, 1896-1974,* (Lawrenceiville: The Red Sea Press, 1995), p.17.

[119] Mekuria Bulcha, "Beyond the Oromo-Ethiopian Conflict," *JOS, Vol.1, Number 1*(1993), p.1

[120] R.H Kofi Darkwah, *Shawa, Menilek and the Ethiopian Empire,1813-1889,* (London: Heinemann, 1975), p.5.

against the Oromo.[121] It was almost starting from the time of Ammeha Iyasus that their relationship entered into a bloody and fierce conflict.[122] Thus, Ammeha Iyasus was busy fighting against the Abbichuu, the Galaan and the Karrayyuu. After winning military victories, he used to displace the Oromo and settle the Christians over their territories.[123] Upon his death in 1775 he was succeeded by his son Asfa Wossen. Asfa Wossen on his part began to build fortifications and Churches in the conquered Oromo areas, which were intended to serve as bases for further conquests and defense of occupied territories.[124]

Starting from the beginning of the 19th century the balance of power had changed in favor of the Shawan kingdom. Until then both had engaged in a balanced warfare though the Tuulamaa cavalry had the upper hand in most of the military engagements. During this period, however, the Shawan rulers were able to gain modern weapons from the European visitors and merchants who came to the kingdom. With its military superiority, the Shawan kingdom was able to conduct frequent expeditions against the Tuulamaa Oromo. When Sahla Selassie realized that he could not easily defeat the Oromo even with his military superiority, he attempted to attract some of the Oromo chiefs to his own side by using different mechanisms. These mechanisms included friendly relationships, recognition of autonomous existence, intermarriage, diplomacy, baptism into Christianity, appointment with titles and symbolic attires and promise of support in their own internal affairs.[125]

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[121] *Ibid.* ,pp.6-9.

[122] Bairu Tafla(ed.& transl.), *Atsme Giyorgis and His Work,'History of the Galla and the Kingdom of Sawa',* Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1987,p. 519.

[123] Bairu Tafla, *Atsme Giyorgis and His Work*…., p.521.

[124] R.H Kofi Darkwah,1975, pp.12-14.

[125] Admasu Shunkuri, "The Influence of the Abyssinian (Ethiopian) Political Culture on Oromo Nationalism and Rebellion," *JOS, Vol.2, Numbers 1&2*(1995), p.69. In general, the Shawan rulers used force and tact to subjugate the Tuulamaa Oromo, and indeed the rest of the Oromo.

Some of the major early chiefs to be attracted in this way were Matakkoo and Abbaa Mallee. Matakkoo was a brave and powerful warrior of the Abbichuu who resisted Sahla Selassie until he was won over to his side. At the time, it appears that, the standard of measuring individual heroism and military capability was Matakkoo Booji'aa. When appreciating the strength of individual warriors it was often said, "ልክ እንዴ መታኮ ነዉ" (He is just like Matakkoo). For example, Bezabih was regarded as "መታኮ በለጥ"(exceeding Matakkoo) by those who praised his strength.[126] It seems that it was by realizing his strength and bravery that Sahla Selassie made him the chief of the newly subjugated Oromo territories. [127]

Abbaa Mallee was also a distinguished warrior who emerged from the Saggoo family of the Oboo clan in northwest Shawa of Salaalee area. He allied himself with the expansionist Sahla Selassie against his rival Oromo chiefs and leaders. In the process, he was Christianized and became an agent of its expansion in the area at the expense of the traditional Oromo ritual and cultural practices. It was due to his collaboration with Sahla Selassie and the support he had obtained from him that Abbaa Mallee was able to distinguish himself as a more powerful chief in the Salaalee area.[128]

Sahla Selassie had used different strategies to divide and conquer the Tuulamaa Oromoo as indicated earlier. For example, he allied himself with the Abbichuu and subjugated the Galaan, Jiddaa, Oborrii, Illaammuu, Aagaa, Jirruu, Salaalee and the whole of Tuulamaa. The

[126] IES MS. 4614, "Ye'Gobana Dachi Sanadochi" (Files of Gobana Dacci)

[129] Svein Ege, "Chiefs and Peasants…", 1978, p.181; Jabeessaa Ejjetaa, *Seenaa Uummata* Oromoo *Hundee Irraa Hanga Ammaatti* (Addis Ababa, 1995), pp.170-174.

[128] Svein Ege, "Chiefs and Peasants….," 1978, pp.179-181.

existing internal conflict partly prevented the Oromo from mobilizing a strong and united force against the invaders.[129]

The campaigns of Sahla Selassie which were conducted for about three decades were characterized by burning, looting, extensive destructions and all kinds of brutality. The onslaught had been so immense that people of all ages were killed without any discrimination. It was considered to be unjustified brutality.[130] For his raids, Sahla Selassie could put on the field around 30,000 peasant soldiers. His major intention was to loot and run back, not to establish a permanent hold over the Oromo territories.[131] The Shawan kingdom used to derive its income mainly from plundering and looting of the neighboring Oromo territories in the form of thousands of cattle and slaves. Until the time of Menilek it was mainly the Oromo districts closer to the kingdom of Shawa that were affected severely by the annual cattle and slave raiding expeditions.[132] Sahla Selassie's expeditions were more or less successful due to the numerical superiority of the Shawan army and its possession of fire arms which the Oromo lacked. Other contributing factors for his success included his diplomatic skill of attracting some of the Oromo chiefs and lack of unity among the Oromo.[133]

In spite of his successes, however, Sahla Selassie met strong resistance from the other chiefs of Salaalee and the Tuulamaa in general. They were able to forge a temporary unity and

[129] Bairu Tafla, *Atsme Giyorgis and His Work,* pp.533-537.
[130] C.W Harris, *The Highlands of Ethiopia,* (London: Longman, Brown and Green, 1844), pp.193-199.
[131] Mohammed Hassen," A Short History of Oromo Colonial Experience 1870s-1990s: Part One 1870s to 1935,"*JOS, Vol. 6, Numbers 1&2*(1999), pp. 129-130.
[132] Mekuria Bulcha, " Beyond the Oromo-Ethiopian Conflict," *JOS, Vol.1,* Number 1(1993), p.5.
[133] R.H Darkwah, 1975, pp. 25-30. Some of the Oromo chiefs who collaborated with Sahle Selassie included Abbaa Mallee and Jaarraa of Muloo Faladaa or Faallee.

challenged the Shawan incursions for several decades. Widespread rebellions were common, especially following the death of kings or during their absence from their courts.[134]

At the beginning, it seems that the Salaalee area was not the major target of the Shawan raids. But when it was realized that the area had a huge potential for agricultural production, continuous raids were conducted into the area. After raiding the area for sometimes, Seifu established Fiche as an administrative centre of Salaalee. Fiche was strategically situated between the Oromo regions and the Ensaro-Merabete area, which was also under the control of Seifu. The availability of perennial water around Fiche also became another factor for its selection as a centre of administration. However, Seifu secured the water source after a strong resistance from a local chief who even killed one of Seifu's followers. As a punishment for the resistance he met, Seifu is said to have carried out the displacement of the surrounding Oromo, especially the *Torban Nashii* (The Seven Nashii) who were in control of the streams. They were punished with the confiscation of several *gashas* of their land. However, the displacement at this time was not widespread when compared to the later period.[135]

It was *Ras* Darge who later permanently conquered the Salaalee area with severe brutality. He consolidated his seat at Fiche and completed the conquest of the area. Accordingly, he attacked Hidhabuu Abootee area, the district where Taddasa Birru was born, through Dagam and Kuyyuu. This was because from the north and northeast the area was well defended by the difficult terrains of the Abay gorge and the Jamaa valley. Indeed, there was no threat against Hidhabuu from the direction of Darraa because it remained independent until the

[134] Bairu Tafla, "Some Aspects of Land-Tenure…,"1974, p.2.
[135] *Ibid*. p. 3.

whole of Salaalee was conquered.[136] In Morosee area, the small locality where Taddasa Birru was born, a local leader known as Gojii Barii resisted the occupying force. *Ras* Darge punished those local chiefs who resisted and refused to accept his authority. Some of them were forced to flee their homes and disappear eventually.[137] According to traditions collected by Wakene Firew, in Hidhabuu Abootee and Kuyyuu areas, *Ras* Darge is said to have emasculated many Oromo captives and asked a local chief known as Goshu Gissila to pass under the testicles he hanged for public display. However, it is reported that Goshu was able to escape from the scene and later avenged the barbaric act of *Ras* Darge by killing many of his followers.[138]

It seems that Darge's intention in doing this was to kill the spirit of resistance among the local Oromo. Later, when he was engaged in the conquest of Arsii in 1886[139] he repeated the same brutality this time by the mutilation of hands and breasts. He did so by gathering the defeated Arsii Oromo at Aannolee, under the disguise of making peace, and mutilated the right hands of men and the right breasts of women. According to Abbas, *Ras* Darge was a 'great mutilation expert' because he had repeated on the Arsii Oromo what he had done to the Salaalee Oromo earlier.[140] Therefore, it seems that the Salaalee Oromo, the society among whom my study subject was born and grown up, were the first victims of *Ras* Darge's mutilation exercises.

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[136] *Informants: Obbo* Teshome Kebede, *Obbo* Desta Zewde, *Obbo* Tesema Qananii.

[137] *Ibid.*

[138] Wakene Firew, "The Family of Ras Darge and the Church of Salale,"(BA, History, HSIU, 1973), pp.18-19.

[139] Bairu Tafla, "Ras Darge Sahla-Sellase, c. 1827-1900," *Journal of Ethiopia Studies, Vol.8, No.2*, 1975, p.29.

[140]Abbas Haji, "The Arsi Oromo Political and Military Resistance Against the Shawan Colonial Conquest(1881-1886)," *JOS, Vol.2*, Numbers 1&2(1995), p.15.

After securing the conquest of Salaalee, *Ras* Darge was appointed over Salaalee, Insaro and Marabetie with the title of *Dajjach* in 1871. Salaalee remained *Ras* Darge's centre and favorite administrative region.[141] He was also authorized to carry out further conquests of the areas adjacent to Salaalee. Thus when he crossed the Jamaa River to subjugate Darraa, he met a strong resistance from its leader known as Asanuu Wadaj. Asanuu made his base at Gundoo Masqal and resisted Darge until his death in 1871. Even after the death of Asanu, the resistance in Darraa continued for another eight years until 1878.[142] In general, by 1880 the Salaalee area was effectively occupied though the Kuttaayee continued to display resistance. Kuttaayee was part of the Salaalee administration at the time.[143]

Even though the conquest of Salaalee and the rest of Tuulamaa had been completed by the end of 1870s, resistance tradition that had started earlier in the area continued in one way or another. From the earlier times, the Tuulamaa clans who were living closer to the border of the Shawan kingdom had been fighting against incursions into their territories. In this regard, the Abbichuu were the most known, especially with their effective cavalry force and warrior tradition. Some of the leading fighters and horsemen of Tuulamaa, such as Matakkoo, Marac, Akkaa Buttaa and Goobanaa, were all from the Abbichuu Oromo. Their fierce resistance forced the Shawan leaders to use various conciliatory options in order to get their submission and support.[144]

Even if they appeared to be subjugated, the Tuulamaa resisted whenever they got suitable conditions. One of these was when the Shawan kingdom appeared to be weak, especially

[141] Bairu Tafla, "Ras Darge Sahla-Sellase,c.1827-1900," *Journal of Ethiopia Studies, Vol.8, No.2*, 1975, pp.25-26
[142] Bairu Tafla, "Ras Darge Sahla Sellase…," 1975, pp.25-26.
[143] Bairu Tafla, "Some Aspects of Land-Tenure…,"1974, p.4.
[144] Wakene Firew, p.5.

following the death of kings. For example, following the death of Wossen Saggad, the Abbichuu and the Galaan were able to attack the area between Debre Berhan and Qundii.[145] The Abbichuu were able to retake their land south of the Baressa River before they were pushed back again.[146] The death of Wosssen Sagad was followed by a widespread rebellion and according to Darkwah, "Throughout the development of Shewa the death of a ruler was an occasion for insurrection in one [Oromo] province or another."[147]

Regardless of their submission, the Abbichuu chiefs continued to offer strong resistance. One of the first chiefs to submit but also the first to launch a strong resistance was probably Matakkoo Booji'aa of Abbichuu.[148] It seems that the Amhara elites and clergy, who were not happy with the growing power of Matakkoo in the court of Sahla Selassie, conspired to create hostility between the two. They persuaded Matakkoo to request the daughter of the *Negus* for marriage for which they told him that the *Negus* would be happy. When Matakkoo formally presented his request, however, they were the first to oppose it arguing that it was a disrespectful act against the *Negus*. They interpreted it as a humiliation to the king. As a result, not only the request was rejected but also Matakkoo was imprisoned. However, Matakkoo was able to escape from prison and organize massive rebellion against Sahle Selassie.[149] During their vow to attack Sahle Selassie, the Oromo fighters were reported to have said, "Who is the king of Shawa, that he should trample upon men braver than himself?

[145] Bairu Tafla, *Atsme Giyorgis and His Work*…, 1987, p. 531.

[146] Svein Ege, *Class, State, and Power in Africa: A Case Study of the Kingdom of Shawa (Ethiopia) about 1840*(Harrassowitz Verlag: Wiesbaden, 1996),pp.32-33.

[147] R. H Darkwah, 1975,p. 19. Wossen Sagad was assassinated by the plot of the Amhara elites and the clergy because of his tolerance towards the Oromo, the Afar and other religions outside the Orthodox. In other words, he was killed for not becoming too harsh towards the Oromo neighbors and other subjugated peoples. See R. H Darkwah, 1975, pp. 15-19.

[148] Svein Ege, *Class, State and Power in Africa*…, 1996, pp. 193, 199.

[149] C.W. Harris, *The Highlands of Ethiopia*, *Vol.II*, 2nd edition, PP.99-121. It is reported that he mobilized a huge army from Muloo Faladaa, Intoto, Cuqqaalaa (Zequala) areas and from all the territories all the way to Abbichuu.

Here is our protector, and he [Matakkoo] alone shall be our king!"[150] In spite of initial successes during the attack at Angolala, Matakkoo was finally defeated[151]and killed with much brutality.[152] Following Matakko's death *Abagaz* Marac replaced him as tributary governor.[153]

Even though the first major rebellion was crashed, widespread rebellion broke out following the death of Sahle Selassie in which a number of areas were attacked and destroyed, including Sala Dengay. Even the royal funeral service of Sahla Selassie was carried out hurriedly due to the fear of Oromo attack. Very often the new ruler of Shawa had to deal with the rebellious Oromo as soon as he came to power.[154] There were Oromo rebellions in 1808, 1847, 1855 and 1860.[155] In fact, the rebellions continued well after 1860. For example, in 1868, when Menilek left for Walloo, a notable chief of Abbichuu known as Akkaa Buttaa rebelled but was defeated.[156]

Fear of Oromo rebellion persisted well into the middle of the 1880s. This time it was feared that the Oromo would rebel under the leadership of the aging *Ras* Goobanaa. There were indications that at his old age, *Ras* Goobanaa felt betrayed by Menilek when he was denied

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[150] *Ibid*. p.123.

[153] Svein Ege, "Chiefs and Peasants…", p.181; Jabeessaa Ejjetaa, *Seenaa Uummata* Oromoo *Hundee Irraa Hanga Ammaatti* (Addis Ababa, 1995), pp.170-174.

[152] C.W. Harris, pp. 137-144. According to Harris, following his defeat, Matakkoo was presented to the king through the mediation of the monks of Afaf Woira. However, when he was made to appear before the king with his bare hand for pardon, he was stabbed with five knives on his back by the guards of Sahle Selassie. Nevertheless, he managed to kill dozens of them before he too was killed. What is evident, as indicated earlier, was the individual bravery and heroism of Matakkoo which was widely accepted at the time. Even with his bare hand, he was feared too much.

[153] Bairu Tafla, *Atsme Giyorgis and His work*…, pp. 537-541.

[154] Bairu Tafla, "Ras Darge Sahla-Sellase…," p.19.

[155] Svein Ege, *Class, State and Power in Africa*….1996, p. 124. In general, the Oromo had always rebelled whenever there were suitable moments. As a result, there was no time wasted by the Tuulamaa, including the Salaalee, without resistance.

[156] Bairu Tafla, "Some Aspects of Land-Tenure…,"1974, p.4.

his promised governorship of Kafa and removed from his administration of the Gibe states.[157] As a result, during Menilek's absence from Intoto for the conquest of Hararghe, it was feared that the Oromo could rebel under *Ras* Goobanaa. The fear was consolidated when *Ras* Goobanaa had stayed behind, by changing his mind because of unknown reasons, after farewells to go to Wallagga. It is reported that the Oromo wanted to exploit the presence of *Ras* Goobanaa and the absence of Menilek as a good opportunity to rebel and reverse their existing situations. In the words of Afework, "[ኦሮሞዉ] የንጉሱን ወሬን መጥፋት፤ የራስ ጎበናን ባየ ጊዜ [የኦሮሞዉ] ባህሪይ በዳመና ይረጥባልና ሀገሩ ተናወጠ።"(When the Oromo observed the disappearance of any news about the *Nigus* and the presence of *Ras* Goobanaa; the country was shaken as the Oromo behavior requires little to set if off).[158]

When Empress Taytu heard of the Oromo movement, she quickly descended from Intoto down to the *Hora* Finfinnee and resided there in her recently built house. Other dignitaries were also given plots and began to construct their own residences. This was intended to divert the attention of the Oromo and to convince and tell them that nothing had happened to Menilek. When the Empress made herself and other dignitaries busy with the construction of new houses around the Hora Finfinnee, the Oromo assumed, as she calculated, that Menilek must be safe in Hararghe. It is argued that Empress Taytu was able to avert a possible rebellion of the Oromo.[159]

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[157] Mohammed Hassen, " A Short History of Oromo Colonial Experience 1870s-1990s: Part One 1870s to 1935,"*JOS,Vol.6, Numbers 1&2*(1999), p.135.

[158] IES MS. 768 (Tsehafe Tihizaz Afework, "Tarike Mengiste Shawa Iske Menilek., 1959 *A.M*"), pp.54-55.

[159]*Ibid.* It can be argued based on this evidence that Empress Tayitu was motivated to move her residence from Intoto down to the Hora Finfinne in the absence of Menilek in order to avoid the rise of the Oromo against Menilek under *Ras* Goobanaa. The fear of the Oromo rebellion should be taken into account as one of the factors that forced the transfer of the Imperial capital from Intoto to Finfinne, which soon renamed Addis Ababa.

In general, it is observed that the Tuulamaa Oromo had been resisting the Shawan kingdom until Menilek eventually conquered them permanently in the early 1880s.[160] The various rebellions of the Tuulamaa suggest that the Oromo had accepted the Shawan domination mainly because of 'fear and sense of insecurity' than love and other integrating forces. Thus whenever the Shawan kingdom appeared to be weak an outbreak of Oromo rebellion was a common phenomenon.[161] In other words, it was mainly force which tied the Oromo under the domination of the Shawan kingdom.[162] It seems that, if it was not for the lack of fire arms, the Tuulamaa could not have been easily defeated, even with their own internal divisions.[163]

After their defeat, many of the Tuulamaa, and the Salaalee in particular, were forced to participate as soldiers in the further conquest of the south, especially the Arsii. This has created among the Arsii a perception that the Salaalee had cooperated with their enemy. The Arsii requested the Salaalee soldiers to desert *Ras* Darge and move to their side to fight their common enemy, the Amhara invaders, but it was not successful.[164]

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[160] Bairu Tafla, *Atsme Giyorgis and His Work*…. p.613.

[161] Darkwah, 1975, p.20.

[162] Wakene Firew, pp. 3-4.

[163] Mohammed Hassen, "A Short History of Oromo Colonial Experience 1870s-1990s: Part One 1870s to 1935," *JOS, Vol. 6, Numbers 1&2*(1999), p. 134. He argues that in addition to other factors, the decisive factor for the defeat of the Tuulamaa was attributed to lack of modern weapons. Despite their strong resistance, the Oromo were defeated and held under subjugation mainly due to lack of modern fire arms. This was true to the other Oromo as well. For example, according to Harold G. Marcus, the Oromo to the north of Lake Stephanie begged a British officer, who was passing through the area, to train them on how to make guns so that they could resist the Abyssinian attacks (See Harold G. Marcus, "Motives, Methods and Some Results of the Unification of Ethiopia During the Reign of Menilek II," *Proceedings of the Third International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, 1966, pp. 272-273.

[164] Abbas Haji, "Arsi Oromo Political and Military Resistance against the Shawan Colonial Conquest (1881-1886)",*JOS, Vol. 2 Numbers 1&2* (1995), p.3. Indeed, the Shawan rulers were using one Oromo group against the other which further weakened Oromo unity. For example, after their defeat, the Abbichu Oromo, who had been resisting the Shawan kingdom for long, were either forced or persuaded to join the army of the Shawan kingdom in the conquest of the remaining Oromo. One of the leading figures of the Abbichuu in this case was *Ras* Goobanaa Daaccii. Similarily, the Salaalee were forced to participate in the conquest of Arsii under *Ras* Darge. According to Tsegaye Zeleke (2002, 72-75;104), the defeated Tuulamaa chiefs were threatened and forced to mobilize fighters. They were threatened with expropriation of their land and indeed, those who refused had lost their lands and became tenants. Some of them had no choice but to collaborate and participate in further conquests under *Ras* Darge in order to get relief of the *gebbar* obligations. Recruitment as

With the exception of some form of participation, however, the Salaalee were not willing to contribute fighting forces to the expanding Shawan kingdom. Joining the Shawan army was much disliked by the Salaalee *balabats* and hence, it is said that many of them preferred to lose their land instead. The refusal was followed by the displacement of several Oromo as a form of punishment which became even a point of concern for Emperor Menilek himself, who later came up with the 1904 decree. The decree is said to have requested the displaced Oromo to be re-entitled to their previous rights.[165]

Even though the Salaalee appeared to be collaborators during the conquest of the south, they remained resistant at home. Their resistance became an integral part of their local culture. The previous resistance tradition during the conquest was more intensified in reaction to the oppressive and exploitative system established after the conquest.[166] In this process, individuals often distinguished themselves to be appreciated and celebrated through *geerarsaa* (boasting) and songs by the Salaalee youth. Their names and deeds were glorified among the public.[167] On the contrary, those who were considered to be coward were not given the respect and recognition of manhood and they were even ridiculed in the songs. The Salaalee form of resistance was mainly characterized by individual actions with the blessing of the public.[168]

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a soldier was sometimes regarded as a relief from the harsh and oppressive treatment of Darge's administration (see Wakene Firew, 1973: 32-35). Abbas Haji (1995: *JOS, Vol.2 Numbers 1&2*,p.3*)*argues that the Shawan authorities forced every defeated group or clan to raise a contingent of fighters in the form of tribute which were used against other Oromo.

[165]Bairu Tafla, "Some Aspects of Land Tenure…,", 1974, pp.6-9.

[166] Admasu Shunkuri, "The Influence of the Abyssinian(Ethiopian) Political Culture On Oromo Nationalism and Rebellion," *JOS, Vol.2, Numbers 1&2*(1995), p.67.

[167]Asafa Tefera, "Ethnography of Resistance Poetics: Power and Authority in Salaalee Oromo Folklore and Resistance Culture"(PhD Dissertation, Indiana University, 2015), p.23.

[168] Alemayehu Haile, pp.186-187.

The prevailing harsh socio-economic and political exploitations in Salaalee had exacerbated the situation. At the beginning, the burden of feeding *Ras* Darge's soldiers and their dependents was directly put on the shoulders of the Salaalee Oromo, who were now made *gebbars*. The soldiers were assigned in groups to the villages and then to the houses of the *gebbars* for all their provisions. In the process, they treated their hosts badly with impunity, which left them at the mercy of their masters.[169] In the land of their birth, the Oromo were left to the mercy of the arrogant and brutal *neftegnas*. The abuse of the Oromo was so deep that they were relegated to landless and second class subjects.[170] Initially, the Oromo of Salaalee assumed that the Amhara soldiers would leave their territory as they used to in the past, when they looted and run back. It was because of this assumption that they used to say, "Sidamti amma indenti akuma taate godi" (the Amhara will leave soon, don't bother to tighten the rope) while building houses and fences for their new masters.[171]

However, instead of going back, the new conquerors settled down permanently as masters and divided up the land. Even the local *balabats* who received their *siso* had various obligations. These included the paying of annual taxation in honey, butter, bull, goat, grain, money and in different forms. They were also obliged to support in local administration and mobilize their men as fighters when required. The remaining two-third of the land of Salaalee was divided between the Church and the state which turned the former owners into *gebbars.*

[169] Bairu Tafla, "Some Aspects of Land Tenure…,"1974, p.5; Bairu Tafla, "Ras Darge Sahla Sellase…," 1975, pp. 31-33. See Mohammed Hassen, "The Militarization of the Ethiopian State and the Oromo," *Proceedings of the fifth International Conference on the Horn of Africa, (*Centre for the Studies if the Horn of Africa, 1991), pp.10-14. He argues that after the conquest, Menilek gave both the Oromo and their land to his armed settlers as their salaries, who dominated almost every aspect of life. Thus, armed settlers began to serve as soldiers, policemen, judges, governors while their newly owned land was worked for them by the Oromo *gebbars*. The Oromo *gebbars* were divided among Menilek's soldiers according to their ranks. The Oromo *gebbars* were harshly treated by the new masters who affected their self pride by dehumanizing them.

[170] Mohammed Hassen, *JOS,Vol.6, No.1&2*, 1999, pp. 139-140.

[171] Wakene Firew, pp. 32-35.

Ras Darge used the various items collected in the form of taxation to prepare lavish feast annually. *Ras* Darge himself was able to become a very rich person by exploiting the agricultural production of the area through the destructive and exploitative system he put in place.[172]

In view of the above mentioned treatments of the Salaalee after their conquest, Bairu Tafla's conclusion of Salaalee's fair treatment from the Christian Kingdom of Shawa is a difficult conclusion to accept. He argues that "The Salaalee Oromo *balabatoch* were indeed honored with the status of the *malkagna*."[173] Indeed, the conditions of the Salaalee had been deteriorating since their conquest by *Ras* Darge to the end of the Imperial regime, with a brief relief during the Italian occupation, by forcing them to migrate to the southern regions. In this process, extensive alienation and confiscation of land was carried out which consolidated the feudal serfdom and feudal landlordism. The new kind of relationship was established between oppressor and oppressed nationalities.[174] In general, the Oromo, including the Salaalee, became *gebbars* and were exploited economically, oppressed and alienated politically and subjugated culturally, and ascribed to inferior status. This situation continued until the Italian occupation.[175]

The situation of the Salaalee became worse during the administration of *Ras* Kasa and his sons. This was mainly because they carried out wide spread evictions of not only the peasants

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[172] Bairu Tafla, " Some Aspects of Land Tenure…," 1974, pp.6-9.

[173] *Ibid*, p.9. In fact the conquerors brought nothing to the Salaalee except their bare hands. Making people *Malkanya* on the land of their birth or their own cannot be taken as an honoring under any circumistance. Oral sources in particular, however, do not suggest this conclusion. The long time it took to subjugate the Salaalee and the Tuulamaa in general, had devastated the region due to the continuous raids of the Shawan kingdom. It has been documented by contemporary writers that the Shawan Kingdom conducted at least three major annual campaigns against them.

[174] Addis Hiwot, pp.3-4.

[175] Mohammed Hassen, " A Short History of the Oromo Colonial Experience: Part Two, Colonial Consolidation and Resistance, 1935-2000," *JOS Vol.7, Numbers 1&2*(2000), p.110.

but also of the *balabats.*[176] The *neftegna* officials appointed over different districts of Salaalee were notorious in their treatment of the local people. One of them was *Dajjazmach* Layyeh of Warra Jaarsoo whose acts were almost equivalent to treating his *gebbars* like animals.[177] It is reported that the Amhara elites considered themselves as superiors while they hated and despised their *gebbars,* from other ethnic identity.[178] In connection with this, Oromo institutions were losing importance by the early 20th century in favor of centralized Amhara institutions.[179]

The subjugation of Salaalee and the subsequent landlessness promoted ethnicity as a major basis for social relations not important until then. Accordingly, the *gult*-holders were Amharic speakers while their *gebbars* were all Oromo.[180] In other words, clear ethnic divisions were created when the numerically insignificant Amharic speakers controlled the administrative offices while the Oromo were excluded. Let alone the ordinary Oromo, even the *balabats* had rare chances to be recruited into administrative structure.[181] It was probably to brighten the future of their children that some of the families decided to send their children to Church schools in order to learn Amharic, the language of the new administrators. According to informants, this was probably one of the reasons why his family sent Taddasa to the nearby Church school.[182] Harsh exploitation further consolidated the Salaalee resistance tradition and led to the emergence of ethnic heroes. Many of the defiant

[176] Alemseged Dabale,p.25; *Informants*: Teshome Kebede, *Qesis* Belay Mekonnen
[177] Tsegaye Zeleke ,p.81.
[178] Farago, 1935, p. 45.
[179] Cornelius J. Jaenen, "The Galla or Oromo of East Africa," *Southeastern Journal of Anthropology, Vol.12, No.2,* 1956, pp. 189-181.
[180] Donald Crummey, *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia: From the 13th to 20th Centuries*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p.221. This might have had contributed to the Salaalee resistance.
[181] Alemseged Dabale, p.38.
[182] *Informants*: *Obbo* Desta Zewde, *Obbo* Teshome Kebede.

individuals barricaded themselves mainly in the Mogor and Jamaa valleys as safe heavens.[183] With all this development, ethnicity became an important factor of social relations.[184]

One area of Salaalee resistance was visible in the field of religion. Even though the Tuulamaa in general knew of the existence of Christian religion, they hated it at the beginning.[185] During his travel with one of the military expeditions of Sahla Selassie, Krapf learnt that the Oromo were not in opposition to instruction but they hated the Amhara priests who taught them about Christianity in the language unknown to them. It was considered by the Oromo as a heavy yoke.[186] The Oromo also feared that after their conversion to the new religion they would die. As a result, they hated to see Christian governors appointed over them saying, "Ha batu! Ha batu!"(May he perish! May he perish!)[187] There was no time that Christianity was accepted willingly with joy in Salaalee during the early period probably with the exception of very few chiefs. During this period, the Salaalee expressed their hatred of the priests in songs, and hence forced conversion was evident in the area.[188]

As a means of imposing their socio-cultural values on the subjugated Tuulamaa Oromo, the conquerors built churches to expand Christianity and the first church to be established by *Ras* Darge in Salaalee was the Fiche Gannata Giyorgis, followed by twenty other churches. In general, more than eighty-five churches were built in the region during his life time.[189]

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[183] Asefa Tefera Dibaba, pp.156-157.

[184] *Ibid*, p.246.

[185] *The Journals of C.W. Isenberg and J.L. Krapf Detailing Their Proceedings in the Kingdom of Shoa and Journeys in Other parts of Abyssinia in the Years 1839, 1840,1841,and 1842*(Frank Class and Co. Ltd, 1968), P.100

[186] *Ibid* ,p.202.

[187] *Ibid* ,p.151.

[188] Serawit Bekele, " Hybridization and Co-existence of Qaalluu Cabsa Institution with Orthodox Christianity in Dabra Liibanos Area,"(MA Thesis, IES, AAU, 2009), p.24.

[189] Donald Crummey, *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia: From the 13th to 20th centuries*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p.221. This might have had contributed to the Salaalee resistance.

Moreover, local *balabats* of Salaalee were also obliged to establish churches in their own localities in order to be accepted at the Amhara courts and to win their favor. In spite of all this, however, until after 1900 there were only few churches in Salaalee especially in the Kuyyuu-Abootee areas and Christianity was introduced mainly after the political subjugation. [190]

As elsewhere in the South, Churches were built in Salaalee mainly on the traditional Oromo worship and rituals sites.[191] Accordingly, burial and places of worship of the Oromo were turned into church sites, including where the Fiche Gannat-Giyorgis was built.[192] One of the earliest Churches to be built in Hidhabuu Abootee area was Sire Madhanealem, where Taddasa Birru attended his religious education. It was built over the traditional ritual site of the surrounding Oromo, especially for the Liiban Oromo.[193] This situation was also a common phenomenon in several Oromo territories because many of Oromo the cultural, religious shrines and ritual sites were replaced by those of the conquerors.[194]

Even if they appeared Christianized, the Oromo of Salaalee had kept most of their traditional ritual practices merging with the new faith. Moreover, as Larebo argues, the Orthodox Clergy

[190] Odd Eirik Arnessen, pp.230-231.
[191] Wakene Firew, pp. 28-30.
[192] Dereje Niguse, pp.20-21.
[193] *Informant*: *Obbo* Teshome Kebede. For example, in the early 1990s when Oromo culture was revitalized and the ancient ritual sites were rediscovered, the Liiban Oromo identified that the site of Sire Madhanealem Church used to be their ritual ground in the past ("bakki irreeffannaa keenyaa asuma jechuun uummati achitti walga'ee ture"(People gathered there claiming that it was their traditional ritual site).
[194] Mohammed Hassen,"The Militarization of the Ethiopian State and the Oromo," *Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on the Horn of Africa, Centre for the Study of the Horn of Africa*, 1991, p.17. Indeed, both Islamic shrines and Christian Churches were constructed on the site or near the environs of the sanctuaries of the Oromo religion. For example, though the Afran Qallo was widely converted to Islam later, there were many Christian Churches built on their historical and religious sites. These Churches included the Qullubbii Gabriel Church of Oborraa and the Girawa St. George Church in Gaara Mul'ataa. Both were built over the traditional religious, politico-military and cultural centres of the Afran Qalloo. They used to serve as the major centres of Raaba-Doorii court during the Gada System. Raba-Doorii was a centre of teaching the Gada tradition and initiation ceremony. It was also the assembly of the elders and that of the military commanders respectively. Later Teferi used the same site as a prison fortress, where he imprisoned Lij Iyasu. For the detail see (Badri Kabir, PP.27-31).

was not committed to undertake effective evangelical mission in the newly conquered territories, including Salaalee.[195] But as the state and the Church were working closely in the southward expansion, the first served as an agent of religious diffusion by making a military settlement among the conquered people.[196] Even though many Churches were built, at least at the beginning, the Oromo refused to be buried in these Churches. As a result, the authorities had been threatening to confiscate the land of those who buried their relatives outside the Church. For example, when Kennee Badhaasaa died, whose godfather was *Ras* Darge, his relatives were forced to bury him in the Church. However, for fear of confiscation they put wood and soil in the coffin and buried in the Church while they buried the actual dead body in the traditional grave site during the night. In general, many families used to put wood in the coffin and buried it in the Church while they buried the real body secretly in the traditional grave sites.[197]

Apart from refusal to be buried in the Church, there was also a resistance to fasting rules after baptism in several parts of Salaalee.[198] There are several stories regarding this situation. According to one story, a new convert was told by his godfather to refrain from consuming animal products on Wednesdays and Fridays. When the priest unexpectedly visited the new convert on the morning of one of these days he was drinking milk. When the priest asked the new convert why he broke the fasting rules, the latter astonishingly requested the priest to baptize his cow as well so that he could drink his milk all the seven days without any

[195] Haile Mariam Larebo, "The Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Politics in the 20th century: Part II," *Northeast African Studies, Vol.9, No.3,* (1987), p.9

[196] *Ibid*, pp. 3-4. Some of the requirements from the new converts included circumcision, baptism, wearing of *matab* (a string of silk), building Churches and making offerings of grain to the priests. These requirements were observed in Shawa Meda (See *The Journals of C.W. Isenberg and J.L. Krapf*, p.243).

[197] Asefa Tefera, p.107

[198] Tsegaye Zeleke, p.79

interruption.[199] For the Oromo, prohibition on animal products was almost equal to denying food, the basic means of survival.

It is possible to argue that even though the Oromo of Salaalee accepted Christianity, they syncretized it with their own traditional culture and ritual values. As a result, even in areas like Dabra Libanos, where Orthodox Christianity is believed to have been deep rooted, there are evidences that the Qaalluu institution and the Orthodox faith have been merged and used by the local people.[200] As will be indicated later under the Itayyaa meeting of the MTSHA, General Taddasa, who appeared to be strict in terms of religion, crossed the traditional religious boundary when he made the Christian and Muslim members of the Association to eat meat together.

With the control of land by the state apparatus, the conditions of the *gebbars* continued to deteriorate.[201] Control over the land became the key source of power for the state to subjugate and exploit the rural producers. This kind of land tenure eventually defined itself along ethnic and class divisions in the form of *neftegna-gebbar*.[202] The transformation of the *neftegna-gebbar* into landlord-tenant relationship forced many of the southern peasants to

[199] Asefa Tefera, p. 108.

[200] Serawit Bekele, p.24. For example, (See Almseged Dabale,p.59), much later, when a new Church was consecrated in Kuyyuu in the 1970s there was a disagreement between the Oromo elders and the Amhara priests over who should slaughter a bull for the occasion. The Oromo elders claimed that they had to do it according to their old custom. It is possible to argue that even though the Salaalee accepted Christianity, they did not completely give up their own ritual practices even within enclaves considered as the domain of strong monasteries, like Dabra Liibanos. It seems that the Oromo of Salaalee were not only defending their own traditional cultural and ritual practices but also they were sharing it with others. In general, the Tuulamaa Oromo have defended many of their ritual practices and sites, including the Hora Arsadii at Bishooftuu, which are also observed and attended by the Orthodox followers. As a result, the *Irreechaa* (thanks giving ceremony) at Bishooftuu has been attended not only by the ordinary Orthodox followers but also by high level priests of the Ortodox Church. A good example is the case of *Qesis* Belay Mekonnen, an Oromo from Salaalee, who annually participates in the Irreechaa ceremony. He even published a book focusing on the fact that the Oromo traditional belief and the teachings of the Bible are not basically contradictory.

[201] Tesema Ta'a, *JOS, Vol.11*, 2004, p.5.

[202] Tsegaye Zeleke, p.106.

lose their rights to land which traditionally belonged to them. This situation continued to create resentment until the 1975 land reform.[203]

The Salaalee Oromo used to resist the tenancy system in different forms. One of these was running to the inaccessible Mogor, Abay and Jamaa valleys after killing or harming arrogant landlords and their associates or refusing to accept orders.[204] These acts of resistance were wide spread but limited to individual cases.

The other resistance mechanism was migrating to the southern regions where situations were relatively better and the demand for land was not very aggressive. Sources give different reasons, however, as to why the Oromo of Salaalee migrated to the south, especially Arsii and Baalee. According to Charles McClellan, it was to escape the assimilative pressures they had encountered at home. After they reached in the south, however, some of them often identified themselves as members of the ruling group simply because they came from Shawa regardless of their ethnic identity.[205]According to informants, their migration to the south was not only motivated by the refusal to be unjustly treated but also to launch further resistance from the inaccessible forests of the south. Indeed, the Oromo of Salaalee did not migrate to the capital, which was nearer to them than Arsii and Baalee.[206]

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[203] Charles McClellan, " Observations on the Ethiopian Nation, Its Nationalism, and the Italo-Ethiopian War," *Northeast African Studies, Vol.3, No.1*(New series) 1996,p.59.

[204] *Informants*: *Obbo* Teshome Kebede, *Obbo* Desta Zewde, *Obbo*Tolasaa Kishee.

[205] McClellan, 1978:275. This can be taken as one possible explanation for the unwillingness of the Salaalee to integrate themselves into other culture. In general, it is difficult to generalize about the Salaalee because there was a difference between those who remained at home and those who moved further south as officials and joined the Imperial institutions. While those Salaalee who remained at home were hostile to the Amhara rulers, those who joined the Imperial institutions wanted to exploit their place of origin in northern Shawa for better treatment in the south. This is why in the south some of them were accused of allying with the Amhara ruling class.

[206] *Informants: Qesis* Belay Mekonnen, *Obbo* Teshome Kebede, *Obbo* Desta Zewde. This southward movement had continued in the post 1941 with more intensity.

Another possible pull factor for their southward movement was the presence of earlier migrants, who provided accommodations for the new migrants until they became self-reliant in these areas. This region was also endowed with fertile land and attracted the Salaalee tenants with comparative fair treatments. In Arsii, for example, the tenants had become largely *ekul arash* (half share) unlike in Salaalee. Arsii and Baalee were also appreciated and glorified in Salaalee for their fertility in various ways, including songs, mainly based on the accounts of early migrants who returned to visit their relatives left behind in Salaalee. This contributed to make Arsii and Baalee to become the major favorable destinations for the Oromo tenants from Salaalee and Tuulamaa as a whole. According to this argument, even the Oromo in the environs of Addis Ababa mainly desired to go to Arsii and Baalee instead of wishing to migrate to the capital when they decided to leave their villages.[207]

The capital was not a favorable destination for the Salaalee while in Arsii and Baalee they felt at home because they had the opportunity to continue the same economic activity, namely farming and cattle breeding, with which they were familiar in Shawa. Moreover, the same culture, custom and language awaited them in Arsii and Baalee unlike in the capital though religious difference with the original inhabitants was observed. Blackhurst observed the continuity of some Gada practices among the migrant Tuulamaa in Arsii and Baalee because of the existence of suitable conditions.[208] These were some of the pull factors that had possibly attracted the Salaalee tenants to Arsii, Baalee and other areas in the south when their condition in Shawa became harsh.[209]

[207] Biratu Kenei, pp. 100-101.
[208] Hector Blackhurst, pp.246-249.
[209] Biratu Kenei, p.102. There were songs related to this situation encouraging the tenants to escape to Arsi and Bale from the arrogant and oppressive feudal lords in Salaalee. The movement was widespread in the post 1941.

Eventually, however, some sort of misunderstanding was created between the Arsii and the migrant Oromo from Salaalee and Tuulamaa in general when the latter were viewed as land seekers, like the Amhara conquerors. They were also accused of collaborating with the Amhara against the Arsii and others. The rift between the Arsii and the migrant Salaalee was exacerbated by religious differences and divisive propaganda of the *neftegnas* which remained untackled until 1960s. As will be seen later in connection with General Taddasa's speeches during the Itayyaa and Dheeraa meetings of the MTSHA, his main effort was to heal the existing misunderstanding between the two sides and to strengthen Oromo unity. He was very well aware of all these situations of the Oromo of Salaalee. Eventually when he decided to struggle for the Oromo cause, he never retreated.

In connection with the above discussed situation, a few of the Oromo chiefs, including those of Salaalee, who moved to the south and who joined the imperial institutions, were deceived to believe that the Imperial political system was also theirs. They developed this belief at least for two main reasons. First, they came from Shawa the centre of the empire builders. Second, they took part in its formation during the conquests of the south. As a result, they tended to form close relationship with the ruling elites and closeted their own Oromo identity for sometimes until their belief was shaken.[210] As will be discussed later, it seems that General Taddasa had this kind of belief when he initially declined to become a member of the MTSHA. He had developed this belief when he was serving in the Imperial institutions as a member of the military and police officer since 1941.

I argue that the resistance tradition in Salaalee had its own impact on Taddasa Birru as he was born and grown up in that society. Though Taddasa had his own reasons, he was

[210] *Informant*: *Qesi*s Belay Mekonnen.

undoubtedly motivated by that tradition to become a bandit and guerrilla fighter at a very young age. As will be discussed in the later chapters, his later rebellions against the Imperial regime and the *Darg* could be partly explained in terms of the Salaalee resistance tradition in which resisting a perceived injustice, without fear of its consequences, was a common act of heroism.

Having said this on the situation of the Tuulamaa, including the Salaalee, it is now important to situate Taddasa and his family within the Salaalee Oromo socio-economic and political conditions. This is important because it is difficult to understand Taddasa better without situating him within the Salaalee context.

2.2 Family Background and Early Life of Taddasa Birru to 1935

As indicated earlier, the Salaalee area is largely inhabited by the Bachoo and Daaccii Oromo. According to oral traditions, Uruu, one of the sons of Bachoo, had nine sons (*the Saglan Uruu)* from two wives known as Diiramuu and Hidhabuuu. They had four and five sons respectively. The nine Uruu are Kuyyuu, Darroo, Dhaayee, Amuumaa, Baantuu, Ariiroo, Abaadhoo, Nya'aa and Waajuu. Of these, the *Afran Diiramuu* are Kuyyuu, Darroo, Dhaayee and Amuumaa while the *Shanan Hidhabuu* are Baantuu, Ariiroo, Abaadhoo, Nya'aa, and Waajuu.[211] The *Afran Diiramuu* settled largely in the present day district of Kuyyuu while the *Shanan Hidhabuu* mainly in Hidhabuu Abooteee though it is difficult to draw a distinct boundary between them.[212]

According to one tradition, of the two wives of Uruu, Hidhabuu was said to be very strong, defiant and not easily persuaded while Diiramuu was considered as obedient to her husband.

[211] Alemseged Dabalee, p.13, 17.
[212] Alemseged Dabale, p.16; *Informants*: *Obbo* Ijaaraa Simee, *Obbo* Desta Zewde.

Probably due to her aggressive behavior, the sons of Hidhabuu received a territory that was relatively full of ups and downs when compared with that of their brothers from Diiramuu.[213] The suitability of Hidhabuu area for the cultivation of pepper was also regarded as a reflection of Hidhabuu's uncomfortable behavior to her husband in the tradition.[214] In a similar tradition, it is reported that Uruu had also given the status of seniority to the sons of Diiramuu. Accordingly, Baantuu became the *angafa* (Senior*)* of Uruu. Today, in the Hidhabuu Abootee area, it is common to hear in the local traditional prayers, "Waaqa Saglan Uruu, Waaqa Afran Diiramuu, Waaqa Shanan Hidhabuu."(God of the Nine Uruu, God of the four Diiramuu, God of the five Hidhabuuu).[215]

Taddasa Birru's family belonged to the Liiban clan who in turn had descended from the *Shanan Hidhabuu*. The Liiban also came to have many children who live today in different geographical localities, mainly in Hidhabuu Abootee. Accordingly, they are better known as Liiban Muxxee, Liiban Dabalee, Liiban Kontoree and Liiban Takloo among others.[216] The Liiban clan was divided into Tum'ee and Oborraa. The latter was further descended into Diimoo and Dagaagaa smaller families. The Diimoo came to have several sons including Bonayyaa,[217]from which the family of my study subject descended. There is, however, another tradition that makes Bonayyaa a *guddifachaa* from the Maccaa Oromo.[218]

The Liiban clan in general was noted for its cultural and ritual preservations. It had its own *Kallacha* and *Caaccuu* and lived according to this custom long after the subjugation of

[213] *Informant*: *Obbo* Teshome Kebede.
[214] *Informant*: *Obbo*Teshome Kebede. It is assumed in the tradition that Hidhabuu was burning her husband like pepper.
[215]*Informants: Obbo* Desta Zawde, *Obbo* Alamu Tadesse.
[216] *Informant: Obbo* Teshome Kebede.
[217] 'The Handwritten Diary of General Taddasa.'
[218] *Informant*: *Obbo* Eda'oo Boruu.

Salaalee. *Kallachaa* and *Caaccuu* were highly sacred cultural objects not only among the Liiban and Salaalee but also in the whole of Tuulamaa and even beyond. Though the Salaalee accepted Christianity, the inner core of their faith was governed by these cultural values. The Liiban Oromo practised their own typical rituals like *Wadaaja, Ateetee, Booranticha,* and *Dhibaayyuu*. These rituals were carried out with the blessing of elders according to the status of their seniority. During local ceremonies, blessings were offered by the descendants of Higguu but in their absence elders from Bonayyaa or Jaarsoo could replace them. The Kennee Jiloo family also lived according to this custom.[219]

Kennee Jiloo, the grandfather of Taddasa Birru, had seven children, five males and two females. They were Badhaanee, Beekaa, Jorroo, Birruu, Daadhii, Kumee and Jabbiluu Kennee. Of these, Jabbiluu had died at early age before having her own children while Daadhii left the area at early age and lived in Harar by changing his name to Belay Tesema. Daadhii was unknown to the wider local people except to his brothers and close family members because he left the area at a young age and never returned. The Kennee Jiloo family was a big family that used to live according to the Oromo custom. He had given Oromo names to almost all of his children. The name of his father, Jiloo, was an indication that the pilgrimage to the land of Abbaa Muudaa had been practiced and honored at a time. The name *Jiloo* was usually given to those children who were considered to be honest and pure similar to the *Jilaa (pilgrims)* who travelled to the land of Abbaa Muudaa. That is probably the reason why General Taddasa explains the meaning of his grandfather's name, Jiloo, in his diary as, "pure, honest and clean, contrary to its Amharic meaning and sense [i.e fool] ." It

[219] *Informants: Obbo* Teshome Kebede, *Obbo* Dasta Zewde, *Obbo* Tesema Qananii. According to Alemayehu Haile, (see *Sirna Gadaa Siyaasaa Oromoo Tuulamaa*, 2007, pp. 221-222), the original *Kallachaa* is believed to have fallen from the sky. Both *Kallachaa* and *Caaccuu* were taken out during rituals and internal conflicts in order to restore peace and bring reconciliation. They have been playing significant roles in ensuring sustainable peace and harmony among the Tuulamaa Oromo in general.

seems that the Kennee Jiloo family was very much attached to Oromo culture and rituals until the situations changed after the conquest, especially after the establishment of Churches in the region. His son Birru was born at about the same time as the area was conquered by *Ras* Darge in the 1870s.[220]

Even though the family of Taddasa was probably one of the early converts to Christianity, the traditional Oromo ritual practices have survived and remained the core of their beliefs. For example, according to informants, the wife of Taddasa's *guddifachaa* brother, Nagasee Birru, lived according to the traditional Oromo culture and used to celebrate the *Ateetee* until she died recently.[221] Attachment to Oromo cultural and ritual beliefs was not something confined to the family of Kennee Jiloo but was a common practice of the local community in general. Taddasa Birru emerged out of this strong Oromo family and society. His background was well placed in Oromo culture. Until he departed from the area at a young age, he lived and grew up witnessing this Oromo culture even if he was sent to a church education.[222]

Like any other Oromo family, Taddasa's parents wished to have children of their own but they were unlucky to do so at least for sometimes. As a result, they were obliged to adopt a child through *guddifachaa* from their relative known as Birraatuu Waaqee.[223] Indeed, *guddifachaa* was a common practice among the Oromo in general. According to Oromo custom those who failed to have their own child usually adopted. It was carried out for various purposes but mainly to inherit property, secure the continuity of the family and other purposes. It was believed that the adoption of a child would bring to his parents another

[220] *Informant*: *Obbo* Desta Zewde; 'The Handwritten Diary of General Taddasa'.
[221] *Informants*: *Obbo* Dasta Zewde, *Obbo* Tesema Qananii.
[222] *Informants*: *Obbo*Teshome Kebede, *Obbo* Dasta Zewde.
[223] *Informants*: *Obbo* Kabada Sime, *Obbo* Desta Zewde.

child, this time their own.[224] This was what had happened to this family because Taddasa and his sisters were born later after their family got a *guddifachaa* son, Nagasee Birru. It is reported that Taddasa was born when his father was close to fifty years of age and was very eager to have a son of his own. It seems that Birru gave the name Taddasa to his son from the assumption that his life was 'renewed' as a result.[225]

Birru Kennee, who was born at about the same time as the conquest of the area, lived as a farmer, peasant soldier and village chief. He had a deep sympathy for his fellow poor people and was always on their side.[226] It is reported that Birru was a good and generous person who loved and supported his own people. He was considered by many as their backer during hardships. His wife too had a similar reputation. Taddasa argues that because of their generosity and support for others, his parents had no wealth left in excess to inherit their children when they died.[227] It seems that Taddasa had inherited his sympathetic behavior to support the poor and the disadvantaged from his father as will be seen later when discussing the reasons for his membership to the MTSHA. It was probably while serving as a village chief that Birru had realized how much the little education available mattered to create difference in the local administrative system at a time. As a result, he decided to send his son to Sire Medhanealem Church School, the only school available in the area. By the early 1920s, when Taddasa was born, the impact of the conquest was clearly felt by the local people that Christianity had begun to get ground.[228]

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[224] Bekele Nadi, "Adoption Among the Oromo of Shawa," in *Ethnological Society Bulletin, No.8,* edited by Alula Pankhurst, AAU, 2002,pp.311-315.

[225] *Informants*: *Obbo* Kabada Sime, *Obbo* Desta Zewde.

[226] Aemero Niguse, pp.195-196. It was probably his involvement and service at the lower level of local administration that led to his Christianization and induced him to send his beloved son to a Church School.

[227] 'The Handwritten Diary of General Taddasa'.

[228] *Informants*: *Obbo* Kabada Sime, *Obbo* Tesema Qanani.

Taddasa Birru was born on *Nehase* 14, 1914 *A.M* (ca. August 20, 1922) in the former Salaalee and Merhabetie *awraja* in the Hidhabuu Abootee *warada* in the locality of Muxxee Araddoo Buusaa[229] He was born to his father Birru Kennee Jiloo and his mother Boontuu Desta.[230]According to Hidhabuu informants, however, his mother was Boontuu Waaqjiraa.[231] The variation is on the name of her father. There are no indications whether her father had two alternative names or not. But the account of her son is a more reliable source. She was born in Qarree Looyyaa in Jaarsoo. Taddasa was born of the Liiban and Yaayyaa Oromo clans through his father and mother respectively.[232] Informants could count his genealogy back up to nine or ten generations. It is as follows: Taddasa- Birru- Kennee- Jiloo- Masoo- Buttaa- Mogor- Darraa- Abootee- Filchat- Dhootoo.[233]

While referring to the specific site of his birth, there are different localities which are mentioned by various sources. Of these the most important ones are Siree Madhanealem[234]and Siree Morosee.[235] Siree was a big territory inhabited by the Liiban Oromo clan and was divided into different localities. These were Siree Fardaa, Siree Heexoo, Siree Madhanealem and Siree Morosee. The first was used to be a suitable ground for horse riding and race while Siree Heexoo was a territory that was associated to a notable Oromo known as Heexxoo before it was overshadowed by another name, Siree Medhanealem, after the establishment of a Church there. The latter was a territory known by another notable

[229] 'The Handwritten Diary of General Taddasa' . According to informants, Araddoo Buusaa was a local chief. The site is also known by another name, Muxxee Liiban, a rising hilly land.

[230]*Ibid*.

[231] *Informants: Obbo* Desta Zewde, *Obbo* Tesema Qananii.

[232] *Informants: Obbo* Desta Zewde, *Obbo* Alamu Tadesse.

[233] *Informant*: *Obbo* Desta Zewde. He could count only upto Dhootoo. When asked to go further, he told me what is said in the tradition, "Dhootaan maree gola jabbii si buuse."(I coverup you with *dhota* and put you in calf's section). *Dhota* is a liquid or wet substance that comes out of cows just before giving birth or delivery. In other areas when one is unable to go further in counting, it is said, "Duubaan hallayyaa" (beyond is a deep gorge). In general, it is uncommon to say "I do not know."

[234] Ahimero Niguse, pp.195-196.

[235] Gemechu Taye, p.11.

Oromo, Morosee Didaa Barii. It is now a name of a rural peasant association, where Taddasa Birru was born.[236] Therefore, it is possible to locate the birth place of Taddasa Birru specifically. He was born in Salaalee[237], in the Hidhabuu Abootee district, in the rural peasant association of Siree Morosee, in the village of Muxxee Liiban or Muxxee Araddoo Buusaa.[238]

In general, Taddasa came to have two sisters and a *gudiffacha* brother. One of the sisters died at early age. His remaining sister was known by different names but commonly called Wubitu or Abebech. According to an informant, Abebech did not have her own children. As a result, she adopted one of the children of her *guddifacha* brother. However, currently none of them are alive and it was impossible to trace their whereabouts. It is important to underline here that *guddifachaa* was a common practice among the family of Taddasa. In other words, his father, his sister and Taddasa himself later had practiced *guddifacha*. [239]

Taddasa was the only son, Nagasee being a *guddifachaa*, born of his family for which he received a great care. That was probably one reason why they had enrolled him to the Church School of Siree Medhanealem out of the wish to have their only son get educated. With the absence of a single school in the area, until much later when Taddasa himself established a school in the middle of the 1960s, the family had no option but to send their son to the only existing religious school.[240] At Siree Madhanealem School, where he attended an Orthodox

[236] *Informant*: *Obbo* Desta Zewde.

[237] In terms of administration; Salaalee was combined with Marabatie as Marabetie and Salaalee *awraja* until 1960. It was only after the 1960 that Salaalee was made a separate *awraja* (Sub-province).

[238] Muxxee refers to a hilly land that is located just nearer to his village.

[239] *Infromant*: *Obbo* Desta Zewde.

[240] *Informant*s: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa, Captain Tilahun Fayisaa, *Obbo* Shiferaw Demise. According to Abreham Mekonnen (1998:5), there was no secular school in Salaalee area before the Italian period.

Church education, he completed reading and writing in Amharic.[241] Moreover, he completed the courses on Gospel and the hymns of David. Through the Church education, Taddasa was exposed to the new religion, Amharic language and Amhara values. Even though the Church education was the basis of Taddasa's education, he later criticized its content for its little contribution to critical thinking and analysis apart from preparing pupils mainly for liturgy, reading and understanding.[242] The main objective of Church education at the time was indeed mainly to train young pupils for the service of the Church as deacons, priests and scribes.[243] As a result, the pedagogy of traditional Church education was criticized for its focus on memorization and repetition instead of critical reflection and discourse. Undoubtedly, however, it contributed to the literacy development.[244]

Until the age of fourteen, Taddasa grew up in the hands of his parents enjoying happiness by swimming, riding horses and playing with his peers like any other children of Salaalee.[245] While he was doing these and pursuing his education, the Fascist Italians invaded Ethiopia. As in the other parts of the country, the Salaalee were also mobilized under their governors and *balabats* to the war front. Here, it is important to look into the general reactions of the Salaalee against the Italian invasion and occupation.

[241] Aemero Niguse, pp.195-196.
[242] 'The Handwritten Diary of General Taddasa'.
[243] Girma Amare, "Aims, Objectives and Purposes of Church Education", *Ethiopian Journal of Education* ,I, A.A, 1967, p. 36.
[244] Tilahun Sineshaw, "The Ethiopian Literacy Canon: Ambitions and Frustrations," *Thirteenth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies,* Vol.3,1997, pp.506-507; see also Donald Levine, 1972,p.89.
[245] *Informant*: *Obbo* Tesema Qananii.

2.3 General Reactions of the Salaalee to the Italian Occupation, 1936-1941

The study of reactions to foreign aggressions, including African reactions to the European colonial rule, remains broad and controversial due to the diverse nature of the reactions. Even in the study of the Ethiopian reactions to the Italian occupation it is not an easy task to reach a definite conclusion. But depending upon the nature of the Ethiopians' reactions, it is possible to divide them at least into two groups as collaborators and resistance fighters. In this process those who had collaborated with the Italians, though they had their own reasons, have been despised as *banda* or collaborators for siding with the enemy while those who were engaged in the resistance fighting have enjoyed respect and recognitions as *arbagna or* patriots.[246] However, the circumstances under which they resisted and collaborated are ignored in this case. Therefore, it is better to look at the socio-political and economic conditions of the country on the eve of the Italian occupation before we look at whether the Oromo resisted or collaborated. Both depended on the existing realities at the time.

In most cases, it is even difficult to divide those who took part in collaboration and resistance because they had combined the two at different times. In general, those who resisted or collaborated with the Italians had their own reasons for taking that action. Similar to the other peoples of Ethiopia, the Oromo either collaborated or resisted the Italian invasion. The collaboration was not to change Ethiopian colonialism for Italian fascism but due to hatred for the harshness of the Ethiopian government. Similar to the Amharas, Tigreans, Eritreans, Somalis and other peoples, some Oromo fought for the Italians mainly motivated by the good wages they were receiving from them. This was a good reason when compared with the

[246] Tesema Ta'a, "The Bonayya Incident and the Italian Occupation of Naqamtee: 1936-41*," Ethiopia in Broader Perspective, Papers of the Thirteenth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, 1997, p.263.

unpaid free labor services they were providing to the *neftegna* settlers earlier.[247] Therefore, in order to understand the reasons for the collaboration of many of the Oromo *gebbars*, it is important to look back to the nature of the conquest of Menilek and its subsequent impacts on them.

The Emperor and his ruling elites mainly focused on consolidating their own power instead of establishing a harmonious national unity in the years before the Italian invasion. There was a weak loyalty to the existing state and the bondage of unity under the Ethiopian nationhood was not strong. Indeed, the Italian invasion of 1935 had exposed the weaknesses and contradictions that had existed in the Ethiopian empire, especially in the recently conquered southern regions, including the Salaalee. As the Italians were also well aware of these internal contradictions, they attempted to exploit it to their own advantages.[248] Knowing this fact, the Emperor was concerned about the loyalties of other ethnic groups and some of his feudal rivals on the eve of the Italian invasion.[249] Therefore, during their occupation in 1936, the Italians had a fertile ground to implement a divide and rule policy in Ethiopia.[250] This was because divisions between the conquerors and the conquered were already in place and there was no significant attempt on the part of the imperial regime to reconcile these divisions or neutralize them. Thus it is possible to argue that the Italians did not bring any new division but they exploited the already existing one.

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[247] Alberto Sbacchi, *Legacy of Bitterness: Ethiopia and Fascist Italy, 1935-1941*(Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1997), p.176.

[248] Abbas H.Gnamo, *Conquest and Resistance in the Ethiopian Empire, 1880-1974: The Case of the Arsi Oromo*, The Netherlands: Koninklise Brill Nv. Leiden, 2014, pp.302-303.

[249] Charles McClellan, "Observations on the Ethiopian Nation, Its Nationalism, and the Italo-Ethiopian war," *Northeast African Studies, Vol.3, No.1* (New Series) 1996,p.60.

[250] *Ibid,* p.59.

The Oromo had a number of grievances during the decades preceding the war which in turn had impacts on the nature of their reactions. For example, following the conquest of Menilek, they were exposed to harsh political, economic and cultural subjugations. They had lost control over their land and had to pay various kinds of taxes and tributes to the new Amahara landlords and their dependents. The Oromo *gebbars* had been suffering from the consolidating landlord-tenant system into which ethnic, cultural and other elements of oppressions were entrenched in the decades before the invasion.[251] Similarly, grievances related to the new land tenure system, the Amhara settlement over their land, and their harsh treatment deterred the people of Salaalee from providing a genuine support during the war. In many areas, the Oromo even asked the *neftegna* settlers to leave their territory which they had occupied by force.[252]

Though the Oromo were mobilized, there was a lack of common interest and motivation between the Abyssinians and the Oromo in defending Ethiopia against Italian aggression. The Oromo *gebbars* were not mobilized to defend a common homeland with brotherly solidarity and equality with the Abyssinians but as master and servant.[253] More specifically, the Salaalee had their own grievances on the eve of the Italian occupation which were highly connected to their defeat by *Ras* Darge. Their subsequent dispossession of their land and mistreatment under the administration of *Ras* Kasa and his sons deteriorated their situations. Let alone among the ordinary *gebbars*, the view that the Amhara displaced them of their land

[251] Ezekiel Gebissa, "The Italian Invasion, the Ethiopian Empire and Oromo Nationalism: The Significance of the Western Oromo Confederation of 1936," *Northeast Africa Studies,* Vol.9, No.3(2002), pp.76-77.

[252] Alemseged Dabale, pp.55-56.

[253] Mekuria, 2011: 470. This became evident in a number of incidents that took place during the war, including the rebellion of the Raayyaa- Aseebuu and the Western Oromo Confederation. The first widely collaborated with the Italians because of their harsh treatment under Haile Sillase's rule while the latter attempted to establish their own separate administration by rejecting the Imperial rule.

was fresh even among those Oromo chiefs in the service of *Ras* Kassa.[254] *Ras* Kassa had, indeed, harshly squeezed the people of Salaalee through his detailed administrative rules and regulations.[255] In general, the oppressive rules of *Ras* Kasa and his sons consolidated the resistance tradition in the area which had its own impact on the loyalty of the Oromo of Salaalee on the eve of the invasion.[256]

In spite of all this, however, following the mobilization order the Oromo were mobilized to the war front. Those who refused were threatened to lose their land or with harsh treatments. Many of the *gebbars* who were mobilized did not have enough time to understand why they should fight side by side with their masters. Many Oromo from Salaalee had participated in the defense of the country and were killed as a result.[257] Those Oromo who remained at home also supported the war effort by providing material and moral supports. Accordingly, they had made a lot of contributions for the war effort, including preparation of supplies and other necessities needed for the war front. [258] For example, the people of Salaalee were required to pay additional one birr per household to support the war expense.[259] *Dajjazmach* Abera had participated in the war against the Italian invasion by leading the army of Salaalee which was composed of the Oromo cavalry and Amhara fighters from Insaro. However, many of the campaigners were killed by the Italian poison gas.[260]

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[254] Abebech Afework, p.47.

[255] See for example, "Ye Ras Kasa Astedader Denb" IES MS.**1792.** His administrative regulation contains the various kinds of tributes, taxes and services his *gebbar*s should pay and render.

[256] Abebech Afework, "A Biography of Dajjach Abera Kassa(1906-1936)," (BA, History,HSIU, 1973), pp.1-2

[257] Abbas H. Gnamo, *Conquest and Resistance*…, pp. 302-303. See footnote number 6; *Informants*: *Obbo* Tesema Qananii, Captain Tilhanun Fayisaa.

[258] Gada Melba, p.68.

[259] Tsegaye Zeleke, pp. 106-109.

[260] Abebech Afework, p.15.

Among those killed by the Italian poison gas was the family of my study subject, the Kennee brothers, their sons and relatives. Like many other Oromo from Salaalee, the sons of Kennee Jiloo were mobilized to the war front in order to fight the enemy. They were Birru, Beekaa, Badhaanee and Jorroo Kennee. Some of them had campaigned with their sons. They fought in the northern front as part of *Dajjazmach* Abera's army. However, except Beekaa, the other sons of Kennee Jiloo were killed by the Italian poison gas during the war. These were Birruu (the father of Taddasa), Jorroo and Badhaanee Kennee. The latter was killed along with his son, Nagawoo Badhaanee.[261] Therefore, during the war against the enemy many of the Kennee brothers, their sons and close relatives were killed. The young Taddasa lost his father, who was killed along with his brothers and other Oromo fighters in Debre Tabor area.[262]

The war brought an immense tragedy on the Kennee Jiloo family which became a talking point among many in the area. The event was locally refered to as "Dhumaatii Warra Kennee Jiloo" (The extermination of the Kennee Jiloo family). The incident was so shocking that it became even a point of reference during local *kakaa* (swearing) to testify ones innocence. It was often said, "Dhumiitii warra Kennee Jiloo sana nuuf haa kennu."(May the perishing of the Kennee Jiloo family fall upon or happen to us).[263]

In spite of the combined efforts and sacrifice of many, however, the Ethiopian forces were defeated. When he lost the battle of Maichew, the Emperor telegraphed his wife, "…the

[261]'The Handwritten Diary of General Taddasa.'According to an informant, *Obbo* Desta Zewde Beekaa, however, the Kennee brothers were not killed by the Italian poison gas but by a highly communicable disease known as *Qasheemaa* (a kind of malaria). It is reported that they caught the disease while returning home from the war front and many of them died in Debre Tabor. Of the brothers, Beekaa, my informant's grandfather, returned safely whileJorroo managed to reach home but died shortly. But the account of General Taddasa seems more plausible since he was very close to Beekaa than my informant.

[262] Asefa Tefera, p.258.

[263] *Informant: Obbo* Dasta Zewde.

Oromo helped us only with shouts not with their strong right arm." This would probably indicate that the Emperor did not get the support he expected from the Oromo. Even worse, on his way back from the northern front, he had to defend himself against Oromo attacks, especially from the Raayyaa and Aseebuu, which forced him to change the route of his return to the capital. The Crown Prince, Asfaw Wossen, was also molested by the Walloo chiefs but managed to escape from falling into their hands.[264] In general, Haile Selassie lost the war not only because of the Italian military superiority but also because of weak internal unity.[265] In addition to some Oromo collaboration with the Italians, Amhara chief *Ras* Hailu and Tigrayan chiefs Haile Selassie Gugsa and later *Ras* Seyoum also collaborated with them.[266]

The defeat of the Ethiopian army and the flight of the Emperor enabled the oppressed groups to turn their guns against their masters and collaborate with the Italians. The Italian occupation created an opportunity for the Oromo to express their true intentions and provided a suitable condition for the emergence of proto-type Oromo nationalism.[267] Thus when the news of the Italian approach was heard, the Oromo of Salaalee attacked and looted the store and the granary of *Ras* Kassa located at Dabbis Washa and destroyed the settlement at Shinkurti as a form of revenge.[268] Let alone the mass, even the *balabats* who were serving as

[264]Alberto Sbacchi, *Ethiopia Under Mussolini: Fascism and the Colonial Experience*(London: Zed Books, 1985), pp.35-36.

[265] Mohammed Hassen, *JOS*, Vol.7, No.1&2, 2000, pp. 111-112; Tesema Ta'a, 1997, p. 268.

[266] Alberto Sbacchi, *Ethiopia Under Mussolini: Fascism and the Colonial Experience* (London: Zed Books, 1985), pp.35-36. Though there were Oromo collaborators like others, there were also prominent Oromo patriots at the national level.

[267] Okbazghi Yohannes, *JOS, Vol.8*, 2001: 50-51. According to Mohammed Hassen, (Mohammed Hassen, *JOS, Vol.7, No.1*&2, 2000:113), the formation of the WOC in 1936 had indicated a number of issues. But to mention only one, it was an indication that the Abyssinian domination was accepted only by force both among the peacefully submitted and forcefully subjugated Oromo. What happened with the Italian occupation in 1936 was that the coercive force that had subdued the Oromo was broken and enabled them to express their true intentions. Through forming the WOC they had attempted to restore their autonomy though not successful. This was in fact facilitated by the emergence of leadership class which was composed of both traditional chiefs and young educated leaders.

[268] Tsegaye Zeleke, p.110.

close advisors of the Kassa family were found to be not loyal. That was why they allegedly wrote a letter to Graziani in December 1936 accusing the Shawan Amhara rulers for reducing the Oromo to servitude and harshly treating them. They even temporarily saw the Italians as their liberators.[269] Similar situations were common in other Oromo areas.

The Italians were well aware of these internal problems of the Ethiopian political system, and wanted to exploit the situation to their own benefit. They hoped that the Oromo would rise against the Imperial regime, facilitate their victory and embrace their rule. To win their support, the Italians attempted to present themselves as liberators by humiliating the Amhara landlords before them. The Italians began to take positive measures in favor of the Oromo. Oromo tenants were given their land and freed from various dues and obligations which was seen as a relief when compared with the previous exploitative feudal system, especially for the poor Oromo *gabbars.*[270] The Italians had changed the oppressive landholding system and abolished slavery. Afaan Oromo replaced Amharic in courts and schools in Oromo areas. The Italians emphasized the sufferings of the Oromo under the Amhara administration as a major theme of their propaganda to attract the Oromo to their own side.[271] In other words, Oromo language was used in court and on radio for the first time and some literature appeared in the Oromo language.[272]

Because of the above positive measures, a vast majority of the Oromo viewed the Italians as their liberators from the Amhara oppression and domination, though they were apprehensive of the Italian real long term goals. The Italians were very careful not to loose the trust of the

[269] Abebech Afework, pp.35-50; see alsoTsegaye Zeleke, pp.110-112.

[270] Alberto Sbacchi, pp.157-158; Asafa Jalata, *Oromia and Ethiopia*…, pp.83-84; Jabeessaa Ejjetaa,pp.278-279;Tesema Ta'a, "The Place of Oromo in Ethiopian History:2003 OSA Conference Keynote Address," *Journal of Oromo Studies*, Vo.11(2003), p.6.

[271] Alberto Sbacchi, 1985, pp.160-161.

[272] Gada Melba, p. 68.

Oromo people by prohibiting the Amhara from regaining any political power over the Oromo people.[273] The Italian occupation brought some kind of relief from the burden of the *neftegna* rule by weakening the Abyssinian feudal lords and the *neftegna* power. This relief from the earlier bondage of the Abyssinians was expressed as: "Xaaliyaaniitu ba'aa biyyarraa buuse." (The Italians relieved the people of their burden). [274] Preference of the Italian rule was also expressed in the form of song, "Haa addaatu shaashii gaabii wayya, ha ammaatu Xaaliyaanii wayya" (Even if it is white, to wear cotton cloth is better; even if it is harsh, Italian rule is better). [275]

According to Holcomb and Sisay, it should not be a mystery for some people to understand why the colonized people seemed to prefer the Italian rule over that of the Abyssinians. Under the Italian rule complicated layer of bosses was removed for the colonized people. In view of the measures they had taken, the Italian rule seemed better.[276] What seems to have placed the Italians in a better light in comparison to the Amhara rulers, in addition to their land policy and other measures, was the humane behavior reflected by the Italians soldiers and workers in the eyes of non Amhara peoples when compared with the *neftegna* settlers.[277] In fact, when viewed overall, the Oromo had gained more than the Amhara from the Italian occupation.[278]

Some of the Salaalee chiefs who collaborated with the Italians included *Fitawrari* Alamu Ejersaa, *Girazmach* Jaankaa Nagawoo and several others. However, only a few joined the

[273] Alberto Sbacchi, 1975, pp.267-270.
[274] Tsegaye Zeleke, pp.110-112.
[275] Tesema Ta'a, "The Bonayya Incident and the Italian Occupation of Naqamtee: 1936-41*," Ethiopia in Broader Perspective, Papers of the Thirteenth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, 1997,p. 278.
[276] Holcomb and Sisay, 1990, p. 197.
[277] Mekuria, 2011, p. 470.
[278] Alberto Sbacchi, 1975, pp. 275-277.

resistance force led by *Ras* Abebe Aregay.[279] When the Italians approached Salaalee, *Dajjazmach* Abera attempted to lead a resistance in the area but was in a dilemma. The Oromo notables around him did not give him full support. Instead, they wanted to get rid of the Darge descendants once and for all. As a result, it is reported that the Oromo *balabats* of Salaalee had written a letter to Graziani ensuring him that they would remain loyal subjects to the Italian government. In their letter they stated how the landlord-tenant system worked and how the family of *Ras* Darge had been oppressing and exploiting their people. They feared that *Dajjazmach* Abera might reestablish his power over them even by collaborating with the Italians. They did not want to see *Dajjazmach* Abera to continue to rule them by collaborating with the Italians.[280] His followers began to suspect him due to his correspondence with the Italians and pressure on *Ras* Abebe Aregay to surrender.[281]

By abolishing the pre-existing master-servant relationship, the Italians put both the master and the servant at the same level as the colonial subjects of Italy.[282] By doing so, they wanted to avoid a unified resistance and seek the support of the Oromo. They took all these measures not to benefit the Oromo intentionally. This is because as Abbas Haji rightly argues, "It is well known that colonizers do not establish colonies to protect the well-being of their colonial subjects."[283]

In spite of the above discussed nature of Oromo collaboration and the Italian sympathy towards them, there were Oromo resistances throughout the occupation period. From the very

[279] Asefa Tefera, p.155.

[280] Abebech Afework, pp.35-40. As a result, some of the Oromo notables around him did not want to see him reestablish authority over them by collaborating with the Italians. Hence, they wanted to get rid of him.

[281] Solome Gebre Egiziabeher, "The Patriotic Works of Dejazmatch Aberra Kasa and Ras Abebe Aregaye," *Proceedings of the Third International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, 1966, pp. 297-298. *Ras* Abebe Aragay was a leading resistance figure in Shawa during the occupation period.

[282] Abbas H.Gnamo, *Conquest and Resistance*…., p. 303.

[283] *Ibid*. p.305.

beginning the Oromo did not invite and facilitate the invasion of their country. After the occupation, several individuals continued to resist and distinguish themselves as heroes in the process.[284]. Many of them fought the Italians, not to restore the Ethiopian empire, but to defend their own freedom.[285] The initial tendency of collaboration faded away gradually as the Italians became more oppressive and aggressive. [286] Even though the Oromo gained more from the Italian occupation, they were not always collaborative and lived up to the expectations of the Italians. They realized that not much had changed for them.[287] The Oromo were able to understand the true intentions of the Italians which were hidden behind some of their initial positive gestures. The Oromo then began to fight to restore their rights and to ensure their equal treatment.[288] It seems that the Italian sympathy for the Oromo did not prohibit them from launching guerrilla resistances in various parts of the country.[289] Therefore, even though there were initial tendencies of collaboration among the Oromo of Salaalee, there were resistances as well. One of the resistance fighters in Salaalee was the young Taddasa Birru, whose patriotic name was Guangul Birru.

2.4 Taddasa Birru as a Young Patriot and Italian Prisoner

The war had brought immense impact on the young Taddasa. As indicated earlier, his father, Birru Kennee, had campaigned to the northern front and killed by the Italian poison gas attack. Taddasa and his mother had heard the death of his father after forty days which turned their happy house into sadness and mourning. Taddasa claims that since their marriage, his

[284] *Ibid*., pp. 302-303.
[285] Mekuria, 2011, p. 470.
[286] Tesema Ta'a, *JOS, Vol.11,* 2004, P.6; See also Albero Sbacchi, 1997.
[287] Alberto Sbacchi, 1985, pp.160-161.
[288] Alberto Sbacchi, "Ethiopian Opposition to Italian Rule, 1936-40," *Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Ethiopian Studies*, edited by Robert L.Hess, 1978, pp.583-585.
[289] Alberto Sbacchi, 1985,pp.160-161.

parents had lived in peace and love, and the news of his father's death had deeply shocked his mother. The grief of the loss of her husband was so deep that she could not recover. Thus she died forty days later. Taddasa became an orphan at the age of fourteen. He was left without any means of survival and support.[290]

In general, the event of the death of the Kennee family was so shocking that the family was expected to disintegrate. Beekaa Kennee, the only surviving son of Kennee tried his best to reverse the fortune of his family. Accordingly, he purchased horses for his own sons and those of his deceased brothers and used to appear in group frequently during local ceremonies boasting in the name of their dead family members. Those who had assumed that the Kennee family had disappeared were surprised to see that the family was still alive and strong. Taddasa was also among the group, before he joined the guerrilla band, praising the name of his father, Birru Kenne. All this was intended to change the image of the Kennee family that was devastated by the Italian war.[291]

After the tragic loss of his family, Taddasa tried a number of activities as a means of survival. He tried to engage in farming but there were no oxen. As a result, it is reported that, when he had no where to go he went to the family of his mother, who lived in the locality of Qarree Looyyaa. There, he was given a plot of land to dig it using hoe and cultivate sorghum. It is said that after trying it for a day long, he realized that he could not continue it as a means of livelihood. Eventually, he hanged the hoe over a tree and disappeared. The tree used to be called 'Muka Taaddasaa Birruu' or 'Boqota Taaddasaa Birruu'. Eventually, he

[290] 'The Handwritten Diary of General Taddasa.'
[291] *Informant*: *Obbo* Dasta Zewde.

returned to the village of his birth with no hope.[292] His family did not haveenough property that could sustain their children longer. For example, when his mother had died there were only two oxen, a cow and a donkey. The two oxen were slaughtered for the *taskar* (a ceremony in commemoration of one's deceased family) of both parents. The remaining cow died while a donkey either disappeared or was stolen. The little grain available was also exhausted as a result. Taddasa and his sister stayed in the house of their uncle, *Balambaras* Beekaa, as they were orphans and had nowhere to go.[293]

When his conditions deteriorated as a result of impoverishment, Taddasa was forced to leave Siree Morosee to become a servant of *Dajjazmach* Abera Kasa at least to support himself. Though joining the service of *Dajjazmach* Abera was seen as a mark of honor at the time, it was a free service without any salary just for food. However, when he began his services to the new master, even getting food on regular basis became a difficult exercise. It required Taddasa to be courageous enough to grab whatever food available in order to survive. He found out that his life was not better than the previous one. Even worse, he was infected with typhus and was forced to return to that destitute village, where he left earlier. When he managed to return home, he found that his village was affected too as the disease was an epidemic outbreak that covered a wider area. The damage caused to the village was so deep that there was a moment when about eleven members of a family were killed by the disease. Heartbreakingly, it was his relatives who were seriously affected from the village and no one dared to approach their houses. It became a double burden on the young Taddasa.

[292] *Informant*: *Obbo* Desta Zewde. The tree was located in the locality of Qarree Looyyaa in present day rural peasant association or *Kebele* of Halqoochii Qarree, where his grandmother lived. It was called *Boqota Taaddasaa* Birruu because he took rest under it when he got tired of digging the ground. Eventually, it is reported that, he hanged his hoe over it and went away never to return to the field.

[293] 'The Handwritten Diary of General Taddasa.'Their *guddifachaa* brother had probably returned to his family during this time of hardship partly because there is no mention of his name in Taddasa's diary.

Fortunately, however, he recovered quickly and was able to spend a lot of energy taking care of his sister by preparing food and fetching water. But even though his sister and other relatives recovered shortly, what remained with him was the challenge to survive from starvation.[294]

After all these challenges, he was convinced that he could not earn a living through farming. Then what appeared to him as a viable way of survival was to become a guerrilla fighter.[295] In fact, joining the guerrilla forces was not an easy task for the young boy. For example, he could not find their place to join them. While his intention was to do this, his other friends, advised him to join the Italians. He initially declined to accept the proposal to join the service of the Italians because of two major reasons. The first was due to the teaching of the Church. He was taught that the Italians were cruel enemies who would eat human flesh and force people to change their faith. The second reason was that the Italians had already killed his father, uncles and many of his relatives. The combination of these factors led him to refuse to join the Italians. However, since he had no support and nowhere to live, he continued to look for the whereabouts of the patriots. When he could not find them and his conditions deteriorated further, he took into consideration the idea of joining the Italians as an alternative. Then together with his other friends he went to Fiche to join the Italians.[296]

Upon reaching Fiche, they met an Italian officer and explained their intentions. He referred them to a junior officer, who told them to return after lunch for registration. During the lunch time as they were wandering around to see the town of Fiche, they saw a strange thing that quickly changed their mind. They saw an Italian soldier slaughtering a pig by removing its

[294] 'The Handwritten Diary of General Taddasa'.
[295] *Ibid.*
[296] *Ibid.*

hair after putting it in a barrel of boiled water. Upon seeing this, they were shocked because they assumed that he was slaughtering a human being. Indeed, when the pig was washed and its hair removed, it appeared to them like a human body. They never saw such a thing before and assumed that they would be the next to be slaughtered. They did not even take time to ask other people and clarify what was happening. They soon started to run back to their village as if the Italians were chasing to capture and slaughter them. He realized what he had heard in the Church that Italians would eat human flesh. What he saw in Fiche permanently closed the idea of joining the Italians, the idea which he had accepted hesitantly when he had nowhere to go.[297]

Then after, Taddasa had no choice but began to search for the location of the patriots with great determination and intensity by travelling from one district to another in Salaalee. While doing this, he came closer to falling into the hands of the Italians on many occasions. On one occasion, for example, he escaped because of an old woman who begged the Italian soldiers claiming that Taddasa was her grandson who came to visit her. One of the major factors which attracted the attention of the Italian soldiers towards the young boy was his long hair, which was considered as the hair style of the bandits at the time. That was probably why the Italians used to suspect those men with long hairs as *shifta* or bandits. On another occasion, he was captured to be sold into slavery. But while they were dealing over his price, he managed to escape.[298]

Eventually, he was lucky to begin his guerrilla resistance by borrowing a gun from the son of his uncle, promising him to return. He joined with another bandit who was alone and looking

[297] *Ibid.*

[298] *Ibid.* The resistance fighters were often called *Shifta.* In his Diary, Taddasa also tells us that he became a *Shifta*..

for a friend too. The two were again joined by another two non-armed bandits. This was the core of Taddasa's resistance group which consisted of four members. This group had two armed and non-armed members and their weapons created status difference. Since Taddasa was too young, they bought him a face covering mask and began their operation by looting those returning from the market. This was the only means of survival at the time since there was no supply system. In one day operation, for example, they had looted about 600 Maria Theresa Thalers and divided the money according to their rank. Accordingly, the two gun holders took 200 each while the rest received 100 each.[299] Taddasa was, therefore, one of the founders of a small resistance group consisting of about four members, and it was only later that he joined his uncle, *Balambaras* Beekaa, when he moved out for the second time.

The Salaalee guerrilla fighters had two major areas of operations; the Jamaa and the Mogor valleys, in addition to, of course, the various gorges and forests near them. The Mogor valley was also used by other resistance fighters from Ada'aa Bargaa, Meettaa, Ginda Barat at least and other areas.[300] Therefore, the Mogor and Jamaa valleys had served a lot to the Salaalee heroes and other people around these valleys as a hiding ground against the regime that had been oppressing them.[301] As will be discussed later, General Taddasa Birru had also attempted to move to the Mogor Valley three times during his rebellions against the imperial regime and the *Darg*.

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[299] *Ibid*. According to Donald Crummey, becoming a *shifta* or *shiftenat* was a common practice during the Italian occupation and it was merged with a guerrilla resistance against the Italian rule. Its practice had a long history in Ethiopia. It includes both rebellion and banditry. Both of them stood against an established law and order in a different manner. Accordingly, rebellion took a political form while robbery was a criminal act. See Donald Crummey, "Banditry and Resistance: Noble and Peasant in the 19th century Ethiopia," in *Banditry Rebellion and Social Protest in Africa*, edited by Donald Crummey (James Currey,1986), p.135.

[300] *Informant*: *Obbo* Tolasaa Kishee.

[301] *Informants*: *Obbo* Tesema Qananii, Captain Tilhun Feyisaa.

The small group of Taddasa was able to join with the other group of patriots and they became a strong force. For about three years they had been creating troubles by moving around and hiding in the gorges of Salaalee. It is reported that as a young member of the group, Taddasa was loved by his colleagues and commander. Since Taddasa was too young, he had the courage to go forward for actions often at the risk of his life. He often assumed that he would not be harmed or killed and very often he was successful.[302]

In the mean time, when their leader heard that *Ras* Abebe Aregay had started to deal with the Italian officers, he also began to negotiate and eventually agreed to surrender. Nevertheless, Taddasa had no intention of surrendering to the Italians because of the reasons indicated earlier. As a result, he tried to hinder the negotiation though his idea was rejected. In the end, when the negotiation was finalized, they went to Fiche and formally surrendered to the Italians. It is reported that they were welcomed and allowed to live peacefully in their own respective areas. They were given thirty birr each to establish themselves and were allowed to hold their weapons. But they were ordered not to allow any *shifta (*as the resistance fighters were generally called at the time) to cross into their territory.[303]

With the money paid to him for his surrender, Taddasa bought new clothes and went back to his village. But since he had changed his name to Guangul Birru during his guerrilla life nobody knew him that the son of Birru Kennee was a resistance fighter. As a result, his relatives were not molested by the Italian soldiers or *bandas* for having a patriot or a guerrilla

[302] 'The Handwritten Diary of General Taddasa'.

[303] *Ibid.* It is, however, not clear whether they were under the command chain of *Ras* Abebe Aregay or operated on their own. According to Alberto Sbacchi (1985, 201), *Ras* Abebe was obviously the major patriot leader in Shawa. Through time, however, when he was unable to feed his followers and they began to desert him, he started negotiations with Marshal Graziani from the mid 1937 onwards. It is said that he intended to get support of ration for his followers and to buy time. In the mean time, however, he attacked the people of Fiche for cooperating with the Italians which showed that he did not have a genuine intention of negotiations.

relative. It was assumed that they had no relative who was a guerrilla fighter because he had changed his name and operated as Guangul Birru.[304] The collaborators or the local *bandas* had a list of those who had joined the guerrilla resistance which helped them to pressurize their families to convince them to return. The guerrilla fighters, on the other hand, used to attack the collaborators for harassing their families by using different mechanisms. The people of Salaalee became victims of violence from both sides and were sandwiched between the bandits and the Italian soldiers on one hand and the resistance fighters on the other hand.[305]

When Guangul Birru went back to his village, it became strange for his relatives because he was Taddasa Birru. They asked him to go away because they feared the reprisals of the collaborators and Italian soldiers. Moreover, the majority of the local Oromo were in favor of the Italians partly because the guerrilla fighters were looting the people and hindering travels from place to place. Therefore, Guangul Birru was not welcomed in his village and was forced to move only in the night even to get food. Since it became difficult for him to sustain in hiding, his uncle, *balambaras* Beekaa, bribed a local *banda* leader known as Hordofaa Nagawoo and helped Taddasa to join him. Hordofaa was a local *balabat,* who was allowed to collect two birr from the so called *Beal Shari*. *Beal Shari* refers to those who disrespected the days of the Saints and work in their own farm. This had been one means of exploiting the local people in the name of religion. Part of the collected money was used to be divided among the priests. When he joined Hordofaa Nagawoo in this activity, his uncle and relatives

[304] 'The Handwritten Diary of General Taddasa'.
[305] Asefa Tefera Dibaba, p.155.

felt relieved from the forceful collection of *Behal Shari*. He worked for about three months and gained a little share of the money.[306]

In the mean time, however, he was forced to resume his guerrilla life after a quarrel that took place among the sons of his uncles. It took place between the sons of Beekaa and Badhaanee. The cause of the conflict was related to the issue of property inheritance. The quarrel that led to a loss of life started as follows. Badhaanee had two wives. Of these, the first one had two sons and a daughter while the second wife had no child of her own at all. When Badhaanee was killed during the war, she took Sanyii, a son of Beekaa, in *guddifacha* and inherited him her possessions. The remaining son of Badhaanee known as Gaarii opposed it. This was the major reason for their quarrel. Therefore, the quarrel had started between Gaarii, the second son of Badhaanee, and the sons of *Balambaras* Beekaa over the issue of inheritance. The eldest son of Badhaanee, Nagawoo, was also killed in the poison gas. Beekaa's sons were armed with guns, though they carried it secretly, while Gaarii was not. Since the latter was alone, because his brother Nagawoo was killed in the poison gas, he aligned himself with those individuals who were competing with *Balambaras* Beekaa for recognition. The quarrel deepened and Sanyii Beekaa killed Gaarii. Now, the whole family of Beekaa moved to the forest and joined the guerrilla camp. Since Taddasa was living with the family of *Balambaras* Beekaa, he had no choice but to join the guerrilla camp for the second time.[307] It was only during this time that Taddasa joined his uncle in the resistance.

[306] 'The Handwritten Diary of General Taddasa; *Informant*: *Obbo* Zewde Desta.

[307] *Ibid.* According to an informant, however, the cause of the conflict was not related to the issue of inheritance but it was instigated by a quarrel over a woman. But it was Taddasa who was very closer to the event than my informant. In fact, except the cause of the quarrel both sources agree on other details related to the event.

After conducting a guerrilla life for sometimes, they received a letter of pardon from the Italians. This was the time when the patriotic activity was weakened for different reasons and many were unwilling to join them. As a result, his uncle was willing to surrender but again Taddasa claims to have resisted surrendering for the second time. But it was difficult for him to refuse the decision of his uncle because he lived with that family. They eventually accepted the pardon and returned home.[308]

Despite the pardon, however, when they went out to attend the day of St. Mary, commonly known as *Astario Mariam,* on January 21, 1931 *A. M* (January 29, 1939) they were surrounded by the collaborators and other people who went to attend the ceremony. It is reported that they were chased by a big crowd that forced them to run in different directions. Thus, *Balambaras* Beekaa and his other son run together but were captured that evening. While defending themselves, Taddasa and his colleagues, Sanyii and Gebrewold Beekaa, ran to the nearby gorge below the Siree Medhanealem Church. That gorge is now named after General Taddasa Birru in memory of that patriotic activity. They were fired at from all directions but were able to hide themselves in the gorge and kill one of those who surrounded them. In the gorge they were able to defend themselves but they did not have any way out as they were completely surrounded. The crowd closed all the routes and forced them to surrender after twenty eight hours of starvation without any food and water. *Balambaras* Beekaa, who was captured earlier, was threatened to convince them to come out of the gorge before they would be eliminated with aerial attacks.[309]

[308] *Ibid.* It was *Dajjazmach* Tekle Markos, former special secretary of Haile Sellassie, who had sent them a letter of forgiveness from the Italians.

[309] *Informants*: *Obbo* Desta Zewde, *Obbo* Tesema Qananii; See also the Handwritten Diary of General Taddasa'.

After their capture, they were taken to the district prison at Ejeree. His sister begged her husband, who was the chief of that prison at the time, for reconsideration of her brother. General Taddasa in his Diary claims that they were given the opportunity to escape when they were allowed for toilet in the evening with their hands and legs untied. They were even left to seat at a distance from the guards where they could easily escape. They hoped that this kind of relaxed situation showed that the Italians were not harsh and might release them soon. Therefore, even if they could escape, they did not use the chance with the hope of fair treatment. The next day they were taken to Fiche and were photographed. As soon as they reached Fiche, their capture was reported to the higher authority in Addis Ababa. At Fiche they regretted for not escaping during the previous night. This was because they heard a rumor that they would be executed the next morning as people were invited to witness their death. It was a disturbing night for them at Fiche. The way they were chained together, the tight control and their denial to go to the toilet confirmed the rumors that they were on the verge of death. Fortunately, however, before people gathered to see their death, the higher officer in Addis Ababa requested through telegram that they should be sent to the capital. Taddasa was able to learn about this drama when he was told by a soldier when they were allowed for toilet. Shortly, they were taken to Addis Ababa. [310]

After they were taken to Addis Ababa, they were stationed at a temporary prison near *Fitwrari* Habte Giyorgis Bridge. Upon reaching there, they were allowed to take shower and shaved their long hairs. Their clothes were also put into a parasite killer boiler. They did not know what was going on and what would happen to them next. Taddasa started to predict that they were made to shave their hairs and take shower to be slaughtered like the one he

[310] 'The Handwritten Diary of General Taddasa' .

saw in Fiche. After a while they brought their dried clothes and allowed them to wear and join with other group of prisoners, whom Taddasa believed were also ready to be slaughtered. But here, they were disappointed when asked to pay for candle while they were in fear for the lives. We learn from his diary that Taddasa started to develop a tendency of opposing injustices even at this early period. [311]

While they were in the capital, there was an attempt by a relative to bribe an Italian officer who promised him to reduce their punishment by half.[312] This deal, however, failed when it was decided that they should be taken to Mogadishu. After staying for a week in Addis Ababa, they started the long journey to Mogadishu. They did not know where to go and hence, they were deeply disturbed when two Italian officers started to call their names in the order of their arrest. They were chained in pairs and put on the car which was heavily guarded by soldiers. They were about thirty prisoners when they started their long joiurney and were forbidden to talk to each other.[313]

As he was from a remote countryside, Taddasa was astonished by the big size of the capital while they were crossing it. He had never seen any river in Addis Ababa and questioned himself how people were able to wear clean clothes. His coat and trousers were never washed in two years. What he realized later was that the rural people still admired and astonished by the advanced life of the urban dwellers unaware of the fact that it was with the rural resources that they enjoyed. In his own words: "ከተሜዉ የሚበለጨለጨዉ በገጠረዉ ሀብት መሆኑን አለመረዳቱ ነዉ።" (The ruralists do not understand that it was with their resources that

[311] *Ibid.* Taddasa and his companions felt unjustly treated when they were strongly asked by the earlier prisoners to pay for candle while they were extremely concerned for their own survival. Then shortly they began to sympathize with and support those prisoners who arrived after them.

[312] Accordingly, he agreed to receive 500 Maria Theresa to reduce the death penalty to life imprisonment, life imprisonment to 20 years and 20 years to 10 years of imprisonment.

[313] 'The Handwritten Diary of General Taddasa Birru'.

the urbanites decorate themselves). As they continued their journey, Taddasa was very much surprised by the beauty of the city.[314]

On the first day, they were able to reach Awash. The next morning they continued their journey and spent the night between Awash and Dire Dawa. They were unable to reach Dire Dawa because of the difficult road. On the third day, they were tied in pairs and helped in the pushing of the car and reached Dire Dawa on time. After a short stay, they proceeded to Harar prison. They stayed for two days in Harar prison until their car was repaired. Taddasa makes a comparison between the Harar and Addis Ababa prisoners regarding their reactions to the new incoming ones in which the Harar ones were considered as the most sympathizers. The Harar prisoners wished them good luck when they began their journey to Mogadishu.[315]

They reached Mogadishu in five days. As they were getting closer, they were able to see the wave of the sea from a distance which appeared to them like a reflection of corrugated iron sheets. It appeared to them like a big city. Upon reaching the site, however, they could not find a city. Instead, it was a big sea which they had never seen not only in their real life but also in their dreams. At this moment, they began to think that they were brought there to be dropped into the sea. Soon they saw the city of Mogadishu which was covered with trees. They passed through the city on their way to Danane, which was located at about 40 km from Mogadishu. When they reached there, they were kept in a separate tent for fear of bringing communicable diseases to the earlier prisoners. Initially, they were relatively treated well in order to enable them endure the hot weather. They laid down on the floor of hot sand and

[314] *Ibid*. This was his first impression of Addis Ababa and it puts many questions in his mind. It was probably from this view that he came to realize urban-rural dichotomy and later he was able to view the Oromo case through the rural side.

[315] *Ibid*. One of his uncles, Daadhii Kennee, had lived in Dire Dawa for more than 40 years by changing his name to Belay Tesema after he left Salaalee at a young age. Fortunately, they were able to get him when the car stopped.

Taddasa had only a *gaabii* (a cotton cloth used as a blanket) which his sister threw on him at Fiche. It served him both as a bed sheet and a blanket. [316]

The first food served to them in the prison was pasta with bread. Since they had never seen pasta before, they began to ask each other what kind of *kosso* (tapeworm) was it. When the servers went away, they buried the pasta in the sand and spilled the tea and ate only the bread for three days. They had never drunk tea before but they were told from those who drank it that it tested like human blood. When their servers heard this, they gave them rice, instead of pasta, which they ate delightfully. Pasta was the best food given to prisoners and it was seen as equivalent of meat. For sometimes, they were mocked at in the tent by the senior prisoners. They stayed in the tent for about two weeks. [317]

After two weeks, the Italian officers registered all the prisoners according to their specific talents or skills and assigned them to various activities accordingly. Since Taddasa had no special skill and was young, he was assigned to drive cart transporting water, stone and other materials for construction. From about four thousand prisoners in the camp at the time, only twenty prisoners, including Taddasa, were assigned to drive cart. In the Danane prison camp, according to the Diary, there was no work harder than driving a cart. The cart drivers were forced to work the whole day and were beaten by the supervisors if they could not drive faster. The other prisoners were very much touched by their suffering and some even wept. If not well fed and replaced the horses often died. Many of the houses were built by stones, bricks, water and cement transported in this way. Since the sea water could not be used to mix cement, they supplied water by travelling about one and half kilo meters for the big

[316] *Ibid.*
[317] *Ibid.*

construction of houses. There was no rest as they dropped a barrel full of water and picked up the empty ones and ran back. He was forced to depart from many of his friends, when they spitted blood and sent to hospital. They never returned and were replaced by others. When expressing the magnitude of his suffering, Taddasa writes in his Diary, "I spoke a word only after I ate and rested for a while to show that I am a human being who could speak."[318]

The only reason he did not die was because of the additional food he used to get from his group. Unlike Taddasa, they were given better jobs. Accordingly, *Balambaras* Beekaa became a garden keeper, while his sons, Gebrewold became a tailor and Sanyii worked in the Abujadi factory. They had even salaries and ate food from outside the camp. They also got additional incentives. They met at the camp for dinner and since they did not need dinner that much, they used to give him their leftover. This was very crucial for him because without it he could not have survived and might have died like his friends.[319]

He says that because of the nature of his hard work, he was unable to learn even a word of Somali and Italian languages. Apart from his assigned work, the only thing he could do was reading the Bible. He borrowed and read until the light was off.[320] It was while he was leading this kind of hard life in Danane that the Italians were attacked by the British forces from Kenya. When the camp was liberated, the young Taddasa was recruited by the British officers. He fought his way back to Ethiopia and joined the Ethiopian military which will be discussed in the next chapter.

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[318] *Ibid.*
[319] *Ibid.*
[320] *Ibid.* It seems that devotion to his religion was one of his consistent qualities that remained with him.

Chapter Three

Taddasa Birru as a member of the Military and the Police Forces: From Sergeant to Brigadier General (1941-1963)

This chapter discusses the career of Taddasa Birru within the military after he joined the Imperial army in 1941. As a member of the army Taddasa worked in various parts of the country and reached upto the rank of Major. Sources are very scarce regarding his military life and activities unitl he was transferred to the police force in 1954. But attempts were made to collect pieces to reconstruct this part. Sources are relatively better after he joined the Police force and it was as a police officer that he became well known to the public because of his various activities. Accordingly, he founded and led the *Fetno Derash* Police, took part in aborting the 1960 coup, trained Nelson Mandela, led the National Literacy Campaign Association. These activities of Taddasa are discussed in depth by using various documents, newspaper reports and oral information. The chapter eventually examines General Taddasa's rising popularity and the claim of his 'Amharization' on the eve of joing the MTSHA.

3.1 Sergeant Taddasa as a member of the Military Force (1941-1954)

When the Mogadishu area, including the prison centre of Danane, was liberated by the British army during WWII, thousands of prisoners were set free from the Italian prison. Taddasa Birru was one of the prisoners freed as a result. After he was made free by the British officers, Taddasa was given two options: either to return home or join the military. Indeed, the British officers recruited those prisoners who were capable of and willing to take formal military training and join the ensuing battle against the Italians. The British commanders identified Taddasa as a promising young soldier and asked him to undergo

military training which he accepted gladly. Taddasa was then taken to Mombasa in Kenya where he successfully completed his training and was at once given the rank of Sergeant. Upon the completion of his training, he was deployed to the front where he fought battles against the Italians until he eventually returned to Addis Ababa with the British forces.[321]

When he returned to Ethiopia he was interested to pursue his career as a member of the military. As indicated earlier, this was partly because he had no other options and means of livelihood owing to the loss of both parents. As a result, he preferred to continue within the army and shortly when the Third Battalion was established he was recruited as a Sergeant Major and worked there for two months. This was the beginning of his formal military career under the Imperial regime.[322]

With the rank of Sergeant Major, he was sent to Ciroo[323] in 1941. While working at Ciroo he was promoted to the rank of Second Lieutenant in January 1942.

[321] Aemro Nigusse, *Yesalam Zeb(Guard of Peace)*, (Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing Press), 1956 *A.M*, p.197.

[322] Aemero Nigusse, p.197; *Informan*t: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa. See also Gemechu Taye, p.10.

[323] It was then called Asebe Teferi but later reclaimed its former name Ciroo.



Figure 1: Taddasa Birru with the rank of Second Lieutenant in 1942 in the Imperial Army.[324]

The same year he was admitted to the Holataa Military Academy for further training in military science. The duration of officers training at Hoolataa usually lasted between six months to one year and the trainees were recruited from among the rank and file and the veterans of the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935-41.[325] After completing his training, Cadet Taddasa was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant in December 1942. He became a

[324] In the Possession of *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

[325] Yohannes Abate, "Ethiopia: The Origins of Military Intervention," *Northeast African Studies, Vol.2,No.3*(1980-81), 3.1(1981), p.3.

commanding officer or *Mekonnen*.[326] After graduation from the Hoolataa Military Academy, he returned to the Seventh Battalion.[327] According to Paulos Milkiyas, however, he was assigned to the Fifth Battalion in Addis Ababa.[328]

It was while serving as a young member of the military that Taddasa started a relationship with his future wife, Work-Abeba Gebre Medhin, probably towards the end of 1941. At that time, she was a widow and older than him by two years. It seems that they met accidentally and eventually both agreed to marry each other. However, her family rejected the proposal initially because in their view Taddasa was an Oromo and an ordinary soldier, who did not match to be their son-in-law. Her father, Gebre Medhin, was a *Dajjazmach* and an Amhara from Menz. Therefore, her family assumed that Taddasa did not qualify to marry their daughter and the marriage would lower their dignity. When Taddasa learnt that her family did not accept their marriage, he took Work-Abeba and went to Ciroo. Her family pursued them to Hararge and accused him of taking their daughter without her will. When he was summoned by the authorities on the case, his wife was on his side and argued that she did not even know the accusers. Therefore, the first attempt of the family to separate them ended unsuccessfully. Their marriage took place towards the end of 1941.[329]

Work-Abeba had to wait for about eight years before she became pregnant with the first baby to see her family. She used the opportunity of her pregnancy to return to her family for delivery and to make reconciliation because she knew that her family were eager to see their

[326] See Appendix- I. It is a certificate given to him showing his promotion after completing his training at the Hoolataa Military Academy.

[327] Aemero Nigusse, p.197.

[328] Paulos Milkiyas, "General Taddasa Birru" a contribution in the *Encyclopedia Aethiopica, Vol.4*, pp. 808-809. The account of Paulos are, however, full of errors in many aspects, including the dates of his birth and death, and they contradict with some sources, including the contemporary ones, especially in the area of his military service.

[329] *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

grandchildren. However, even though the first baby was born, her family still did not want to let their daughter go back to Taddasa. As a result, they planned to snatch her baby and marry her to another person of their choice. Nevertheless, when Taddasa heard of the plan, he hurriedly came to Addis Ababa and took his wife back to Hararge. It was only after she became pregnant for the second time that her family dropped the idea of divorcing them.[330]

Taddasa had a total of eight children but two daughters died at an early age; one at the age of two while the other died within months. The remaining six grew up and they are as follows according to their age: 1. Almaz Taddasa 2.Tsehay Taddasa 3.Asafa (renamed Belete when he was sent abroad) Taddasa 4. Kassa Taddasa 5. Muse Taddasa 6. Marta Taddasa. Except for the death of Kasa a few years ago the rest are alive. The youngest one, Marta was born a few months after the 1960 coup. Apart from his own children, General Taddasa had also two g*uddifachaa (*adopted*)* sons. One was also known as Kassa while the other was Tirfe.[331] Therefore, it was while he was a young and junior military officer that Taddasa established his own family. Despite General Taddasa's political views, the family remained united and it was only his execution which separated him from his family.

[330] *Ibid.*

[331] *Ibid.* As discussed under his life in Galamsoo, it is reported that he had a son known as Dereje Taddasa while there but the main family refused to recognize him.



Figure 2: The family of General Taddasa: his wife and six children (standing from right to left: Tsehay, Workabeba (wife), Belete, Kassa; seated from right to left: Muse, Almaz and Martha. The picture was taken shortly before his arrest in 1966).[332]

While serving at the Seventh Battalion, he was readmitted to the Holataa Military Academy in 1937 *A.M* (1944/1945) as an instructor.[333] Here, he was able to distinguish himself as a brilliant teacher and capable military strategist which also won him the attention of the Emperor.[334] While in the Academy, he was appointed as a deputy commander of the 23rd Battalion of the 4th Brigade of the Hoolataa Military Academy in 1939 *A.M* (1946-7). In April 1950 he was promoted to the rank of *Shalaqa* or Major[335] and shortly, he became a

[332] In the possession of *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.
[333] Aemero Nigusse, p.197.
[334]Mohammed Hassen, "General Taddessee Birru, 1921-1975," in *Goota Oromiyaa: Kitaaba Qarannoo Seenaa Dhuunfaa Gootota Oromoo.* Edited by Daraaraa M. & Mohammed H. *(*Atlanta: Oromia Publishing LLC, 2008), pp.327-328.
[335] See Appendix- II.

commander of the 24th Brigade. He served in the 24th Brigade for 3 years and 8 months and eventually became a deputy administrator of the Third Division.[336] In general, as a member of the military, Taddasa worked and lived in various areas. These included Ciroo, Hoolataa, Addis Ababa, Nageellee Booranaa and Harar. He was a young and dedicated military officer who was capable of performing his duties efficiently and effectively. This was probably one of the reasons why he was selected and entrusted to establish and lead the new police battalion, the Emergency Police Force.[337] In 1954, he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and was transferred from the military to the police.[338]

3.2. Lieutenant Colonel Taddasa as a founder and commander of the *Fetno Derash* Police Force (1955-1964)

The Imperial Police force was established immediately after the restoration of the Imperial regime in 1941. The British had dominated the Ethiopian Police Force, especially its officer corps, for over a decade after 1941 during which they had been serving as the Imperial police commanders and chiefs of the various provinces. From 1942-1954, the Imperial police had five British commanders. In 1945 Major Mekonnen Deneke was appointed as the first Ethiopian deputy police commander. It was only in 1954 that Colonel Tsige Dibu became the first Ethiopian to become the police commander.[339]

During the early years of the post 1941, the police offices and services existed only in major towns like Addis Ababa, Harar, Dirre Dawaa, Dasse, Jimmaa and Nageellee Booranaa.[340] One of the major police divisions to be established in the middle of the 1950s was the Riot Battalion or the Police Emergency Force. It was commonly known as the *Fetno Derash*

[336] Aemero, p.197.
[337] *Informants*: *Aadde*Tsehay Taddasa, *Obbo* Hulluuqaa Baabsoo (earlier known as soldier Camadaa)
[338] Aemero Nigusse, p.197.
[339] *Dajjach* Damisse Wolde Amanuel, "A Report on the Development of the Imperial Ethiopian Government Police Force between the years 1944 and 1956," April 1957: p.1; Gunter Schroder, "Police" in *Encyclopedia Aethiopica*, Vol.4, 2010, p.167.
[340] Gunter Schroder, "Police" in *Encyclopedia Aethiopica*, Vol.4, 2010, pp.166-167.

police. The idea of establishing a reserve striking force during emergencies was in fact suggested earlier in 1945. [341] It was also the wish and the interest of the Emperor to have the police emergency force.[342] But it was not put into practice until ten years later when General Tsige Dibu became the commissioner of the police in May 1954. Thus in February 1955 a Rapid police force was established mainly through the efforts of Tsige Dibu.[343]

As a commander of the police, General Tsige recruited capable members of the military force for the new battalion of the police. The one selected to lead this new police force was Taddasa Birru. General Tsige knew the potential of Colonel Taddasa as they had worked together in the Third Division in Hararge and other areas. As a result, he put Taddasa in charge of establishing the new Police battalion with 478 recruits and a staff of 12 army instructors.[344] It is reported that Taddasa's personality as an agent of peace was one of the major criteria to transfer him from the military to the police as a trainer and leader in March 1955.[345] His transfer was also accepted by the Emperor who hoped that Colonel Taddasa would contribute in the modernization and effectiveness of the Police force in order to ensure the public safety. [346]

The new police battalion was established in the premises of the police training school at Kolfee, the centre that earlier belonged to the Ministry of Commerce. The training school was moved out to Sandaafaa.[347] Though the *Fetno Derash* was a special force maintained and trained for emergencies, it often assisted the city police of Addis Ababa and the Shawa

[341] *Dajjach* Damisse Wolde Amanuel, pp. 26-33.
[342] *Policina Irmjaw, Yekatit* 15, 1953 *A.M.*
[343] *Dajjach* Damisse Wolde Amanuel, pp.26-33.
[344] *Ibid.*
[345] Aemero Niguse, p.197.
[346] *Policina Irmjaw,* Yekatit 15, 1953. Taddasa was transferred from the military to the police force in the early 1955 with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel to establish the *Fetno Derash* battalion which came in to existence in March 1955.
[347] *Dajjach* Damisse Wolde Amanuel, pp.26-33.

province police in large operations like parades, displays, public celebrations and other occasions.[348] Under the leadership of Colonel Taddasa, its first commanding officer and trainer, the *Fetno Derash* police battalion became powerful.[349] He was one of the key police officers who had consolidated the police force after it was delegated to the Ethiopian officers.[350]

Under his leadership, Taddasa trained a number of police officers for the Rapid Force in various fields apart from the usual police training. For example, from about 100 trainees who graduated towards the end of January 1961 (*Tir* 16, 1953 *A.M*) fifty of them were soon employed in the police force while the rest who excelled in their academic performance were allowed to pursue additional one year further training in fingerprint expertise. These were assigned to the Central Crime Investigation Police Office and the provinces to link and organize their records with that of the centre.[351] Some of the trainings given by the *Fetno Derash* training centre included crime investigation, police vocational works, law, traffic control, administration, radio communication, and various kinds of techniques. Therefore, though it was established to provide the police emergency service in the empire, it used to train recruits from various provinces in different fields. Accordingly, in February 1961 alone about 478 students who had taken courses on crime investigation for one and a half years graduated.[352] In general, there is no doubt that the *Fetno Derash* under the effective leadership of General Taddasa had trained several police officers in various fields of study and significantly contributed in building the capacity of the Police force. The trainees

[348] Memorandum on the Ethiopian Imperial Police issued in June 1960 Available at the National Archive and Library Agency.

[349] Aemero Niguse, p.197.

[350] Brigadier General Moges Beyene, *Gizena Police* (Time and Police), (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press), 1970, p.157.

[351] *Policina Irmjawu*, *Tir* 30, 1953 *A.M*.

[352] *Polisina Irmja, Yekatit* 15, 1953 *A.M*.

provided their police services throughout the country. Indeed, General Taddasa, together with his assistants, played a key role in making the *Fetno Derash* a popular police battalion.[353]

In general, my study subject had received a number of awards at different times for his long service as a member of the military and the police force. During the commemoration of the Independence Day on *Miazia* 29, 1948 *A.M* (May 1956), he received a medal of honor from the Emperor in recognition of his contributions. Other police officers also received the medal. He received Menilek II's Cavalry Level Medal.[354] He also received a medal from Marshall Tito, the President of Yugoslavia on December 3, 1958.[355] In July 1958 he was promoted to the rank of Colonel[356] and in addition to his post as a commander of the *Fetno Derash*, he became the chief of the Police Property Department.[357] By 1960, Colonel Taddasa was a commander of a strong police battalion which was to play a key role in aborting the 1960 coup attempt against the Emperor.

3.2.1 Colonel Taddasa and the Aborted Coup of 1960

During the 1950s the Emperor was very careful in order to minimize the potential threat from the Ethiopian military against his power. He used a divide and rule mechanism by exploiting the rivalry and personality conflicts among the leaders of the armed forces. Nevertheless, the threat of a coup attempt was not totally eliminated in the 1950s even if the army became increasingly conscious of the political developments later.[358]

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[353] *Ibid.*
[354] *Addis Zemen, Sene* 4, 1948 *A.M*.
[355] Appendix III.
[356] *Addis Zemen, Hamle* 26, 1950 *A.M*.
[357] Aemero Niguse,p.197.
[358] Yohannes Abate, "Ethiopia:The Origins of Military Intervention," *Northeast African Studies, Vol.2,No.3* (1980-81), 3.1(1981),p.11.

Among some of the key leaders of the army who had been suspected of plotting a coup during the 1950s, a good example was Major General Mulugeta Bulii. It was probably because of the growing suspicion against him that he was removed from his key posts of the Commander of the Imperial Bodyguard and the chief of the Special Cabinet Security. He was transferred to the relatively safe office of the Minister of Community Development. Therefore, it seems that it was Mulugeta who was potentially feared by the Emperor for intending a coup plot during the 1950s.[359]

One of the factors which increased the suspicion of the Emperor was the growing popularity of General Mulugeta within the armed forces. Among many members of the armed forces, he was generally considered as the 'Father of the Army'.[360] This in turn made the Emperor to feel threatened. Moreover, there was jealousy against his growing power, especially by those authorities around the Emperor. They used to inform and warn the Emperor that General Mulugeta had the intention to overthrow him. They continuously urged the Emperor to remove him from his powerful position to other non-significant position.[361]

On his part, it is reported that, General Mulugeta was not happy with the way the authorities were leading the country. Thus his grievance was not only against the Emperor but also against the council of Ministers, whose members were accused of working not for the growth and prosperity of the country but for their personal glory and benefits. He believed that its members spent a lot of their time by listening to and fabricating false news and propaganda, and abusing their authorities. They were accused of rejecting any guiding principles and

[359] Bahru Zewde, 2014, p., 58; See also Qale Kristos Abay, pp. 128-29; *Informant*: Brigadier General Wasyihun Nigatu.

[360] Tadesse Tele Salvano, *Ye'Anabsit Midir: Ye'Itiyophiya Serawit Tarik Zegeba Ke 1927-83 A.M*, (Addis Ababa: Rome Printing Press Enterprise), 1999 *A.M*. p.83; *Informant*: Brigadier General Wasyihun Nigatu.

[361] Alemneh Ragassa, Y*e'Zemenawi Wutidirina Abbat: Major General Mulugeta Buli, 1906 to 1953 A.M*, 2009 *A.M*, pp.108-109.

procedures and acting on their own will. It is reported that General Mulugeta had the intention of removing them by force. It is said that a secret letter that he wrote to a foreign embassy was disclosed and presented to the Emperor as an evidence of his plan to make a coup against him and change the government.[362] Many believed that this was why he was transferred from his powerful position to another office.

Eventually, however, it was not General Mulugeta but General Mengistu Neway who attempted a coup against the Emperor. Why and how he attempted the coup is not the interest and attention of this dissertation. Instead, this work focuses on the involvement of General Taddasa Birru, Colonel at the time. Colonel Taddasa had played an important role in the suppression of the coup[363]until he himself tried it a few years later. How he was involved in the event is our next discussion.

The coup started on Tuesday evening (*Tahsas* 4), by imprisoning some ministers and high dignitaries.[364] At the beginning the attempted coup was kept secret. Let alone my study subject, even Workneh Gebeyehu, who was generally considered to be the third leader of the coup, was informed of it at a late stage.[365] Colonel Workneh Gebeyehu and General Tsige Dibu were brought to the coup at a very late stage and were not part of the initial conspiracy.[366]

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[362] Alemneh Ragassa, pp. 127-128.

[363] Bahru Zewde, 2014: 56-57; Sisay Nigusu, "Ye'Salalewu Fanno': Hagari Tullu," in *Terarochin Yanketekete Tewuldi, Vol.2*, Mega Publisher,1993 *A.M* , p.217.

[364] Berhanu Asres, *Mani Yinager Yenebere… Ye'Tahsasu Girrigirina Mezezu*,(Let those who were present to speak: The December Turmoil and Its Consequences),(Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press), 2005 *A.M*, pp.165-174.

[365] Bahru Zewde, *The Quest for Socialist Utopia:The Ethiopian Student Movement c. 1960-1974*, (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press), 2014, pp. 56-57.

[366] Fantahun Ingida, *Be'Qedamawi Haile Selassie Astedader Golto Yewetu Poletikawi Chigirochina Tigilochi Beqirbi Balewualachew ye'Hiyewot Tarik Meneshanet Sigemegemu*,(Major Political Problems and

The involvement of General Tsige, the commander of the police, in the coup was debatable. But many agree that he was not part of the initial plot. General Mengistu brought General Tsige, the commander of the police, to the coup not by telling him the truth (about the coup) but by deceiving him as if he wanted him to be present at the dinner invitation he had prepared for Girmame's departure to Jijiga. Through this mechanism he took Tsige to his office and disarmed him. In his office, General Mengistu is said to have even assigned soldiers to watch him for fear that Tsige could commit suicide.[367]

Mamo Wudineh argues that General Tsige Dibu remained in the Imperial Bodyguard headquarters not as a participant of the coup but as a captive of General Mengistu Neway.[368] Accounts from individuals closer to the event suggest that General Tsige was detained in the office of General Mengistu and the coup itself started with the detention and coerced cooperation of General Tsige Dibu. Just after the beginning of the coup, General Mengistu addressed some of the officers of the Imperial Bodyguard informing them that the armed forces had rebelled against the Emperor by using his absence as a good opportunity.[369]

It is reported that General Tsige had informed Colonel Gashaw that he was almost under arrest; watched by soldiers and could not even go to the toilet alone. He continually requested him to inform his situation to Colonel Taddasa and other police officers.[370] Informants also

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Struggles During the Reign of Emperor Haile Selassie through the assessment of the life of His close friend)(Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing Press), 1997 *A.M*, pp. 154-157.

[367]IES MS.2551 B- "Brigadier General Mengistu Neway le'Fird Bet Yesetew Qal",(Brigadier General Mengistu Neway's Testimony to the Court), p.69. Girmame Neway was the brother of General Mengistu Neway.

[368] Mamo Wudineh, *Yedereskubet: Gile Tarikina Tizitawoch* (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, *Hamle* 1997 *A.M*), p.187. He knew about General Taddasa very well because he used to work on the police newspaper, *Polisina Ermijaw.*

[369] Berhanu Asres, pp.165-174.

[370] Tadesse Tele Salvano, *Gedle Mefenqile Mengist be'Itiyophiya ye 1953 a.m Mefenqile Mengist Liyu Mistiru,*(The Story of the Coup d'etat in Ethiopia: the 1960 Coup Secrecy) (Addis Ababa, 2004 *A.M*),pp. 105-

agree that General Tsige was taken to the office of General Mengistu without being informed of the existence of any plot.[371]

Following the coerced cooperation of General Tsige with the coup makers, other key leaders of the police were summoned to the headquarters of the Imperial Bodyguard. Accordingly, on the morning of *Tahsas* 5, 1953 *A.M* (December,1960) Lieutenant Colonel Gashaw Kebede(chief of Addis Ababa police), Major Yohannes Misikir and Captain Baye Tilahun went together and brought Colonel Taddasa to the office of General Mengistu. When they went to his headquarters at Kolfee and requested him to follow them immediately, he was confused and asked Colonel Gashaw in private about what had happened. He was told that General Tsige was in the office of General Mengistu with a disturbed mood or face which might show that he was forced to ally with them. Colonel Taddasa then consulted his assistant, Major Mulugeta Wolde Yohannes, even to refuse to go and reject the request. But he was advised to go and clarify what had happened. Then he left, leaving the camp to his assistant, with his two guards and reached the office of General Mengistu just after 7 am in the morning of *Tahsas* 5.[372]

Upon his arrival, General Mengistu told him that he was requested for assistance to stop General Merid Mengesha and General Kebede Gebre, who had betrayed the Emperor and moved their forces. He added that General Tsige and other important leaders were with him. At this point, when Colonel Taddasa requested to see General Tsige he was told that Tsige was leading another meeting. But when Taddasa insisted that he would not leave without meeting General Tsige he was brought from a room escorted by two soldiers. When he asked

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109. This was reported in the letter which Colonel Gashaw Kebede wrote to General Merid Mengesha on *Tahsas* 8, 1953 *A.M*

[371] *Informant*: *Ato* Seyoume Tekle Berhan Moges, 77, July 24, 2017.

[372] Appendix IV- VIII.

Tsige about what was going on, he told him that, "ግድ የለም፤ ቤቱ ለቋሚዉ ነዉ። " (Don't worry! The house belongs to its pillar). Colonel Taddasa was able to learn from this that the coup would not be successful. Tsige advised him to accept whatever General Mengistu had ordered him. When General Mengistu joined them and repeated the betrayal of the leaders of the army, General Tsige gave Taddasa a sign of disapproval through eye contact (T*iqsi*). With this sign, he learnt that the one who betrayed the Emperor was not the armed forces but the Imperial Bodyguard.[373]

It was after getting this hint that he returned to the office of General Mengistu and requested that he did not have a radio communication and the frequency code of the Imperial Bodyguard. This request was intended to enable him to follow up the radio communications of the Imperial Bodyguard. After receiving what he requested he quickly returned to his camp. Indeed, this helped him to follow up developments on the side of the Imperial Bodyguard within hours.[374]

It is also reported that during their conversation, Colonel Taddasa had asked General Mengistu three questions. First, he wanted to understand if there was any contingency plan in case the armed forces would come to attack them. Second, he asked for ration to be used by his soldiers during the inevitable fighting which would come soon. Lastly, he demanded for radio communication and the secret code to get access to the radio frequency of the Imperial Bodyguards. He was given the radio and frequency code but the first and the second questions were not addressed.[375] General Mengistu had requested him to align his forces with

[373] *Ibid.*
[374] *Ibid.*
[375] Tadesse Tele Salvano, 2004 *A.M,* pp.48-49.

the Imperial Bodyguard Brigade under the command of Major Tefera Wolde Tensaye during the inevitable attack against the armed forces.[376]

Now the main concern of Colonel Taddasa was how to leave the office of General Mengistu and return to his camp safely. Thus under the disguise of getting ready for the order, he requested Mengistu that he had to go back to his camp quickly. But Girmame and Colonel Workneh insisted that he should stay with them like General Tsige. But when he argued that by staying there he could contribute nothing to them as his forces were scattered, General Mengistu allowed him to go saying, "If he could not help us by staying here let him go and gather his forces." Colonel Taddasa used the remark of General Mengistu as a good opportunity to disappear from the scene. While he was quickly leaving, it seemed that Girmame and Colonel Workneh had convinced General Mengistu that Colonel Taddasa should not be allowed to go, he was called back. But while hearing their call, he turned deaf ear and hurried to Kolfee by driving fast.[377]

Upon reaching his camp, Colonel Taddasa made an alert whistle and gathered his forces. He told them that he was summoned by General Mengistu Neway and ordered that the *Fetno Derash* should cooperate with the Imperial Bodyguard in order to crash the rebellious armed forces. He also told them his own assessment that in reality it was the Imperial Bodyguard which had rebelled against the Emperor and captured General Tsige Dibu and detained him in the office of General Mengistu. According to his own observation General Tsige was there as a prisoner, not as a collaborator. At this point, some of the soldiers became emotional and vowed to release General Tsige by attacking the Imperial Bodyguard. In general, he made

[376]Tekeste Melake," The 1960 Coup D'etat in Ethiopia", (MA Thesis, History, AAU, 1990) , p.148.
[377] *Informant: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

clear that the Imperial Bodyguard and the Armed Forces faced each other; the first against the Emperor while the latter were in his defense. Eventually, he requested his soldiers to make their stand clear in the mounting crisis; whether they liked the Emperor or the Crown Prince. They all agreed that they knew no one except the Emperor and vowed to defend him. He too confirmed that he would support the Emperor and would not cooperate with the Imperial Bodyguard.[378] According to an informant, even though Colonel Taddasa had the intention to support the coup makers he had to respect the decision of his men.[379]

Immediately, two soldiers were sent to Kolfee by the coup leader with the mission to bring him back or kill him if he refused. At Kolfee they told him that General Mengistu requested him to his office because there was another issue which he wanted to discuss with him. However, when they put pressure on him, Colonel Taddasa ordered their arrest and interrogation. They were found armed and admitted that they were ordered to kill him in case he refused to go with them.[380] General Mengistu did not follow up what had happened to the two soldiers and hoped that *Fetno Derash* was still with the Imperial Bodyguard. Moreover, he even notified Colonel Taddasa on the next measure to be taken and its time as well.[381]

After returning to his camp and fully alerting his soldiers, Colonel Taddasa began to take practical measures. He attempted to communicate with the leaders of the armed forces but failed to get either General Merid Mengesha (the commander-in-chief) or General Kebede Gebre (commander of the ground forces) because the telephone line was cut. Then he sent

[378] *Informants*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa, *Ato* Seyoume Tekle Berhan, *Basha* Wolde Senbet Teklu; Tadesse Tele Salvano, 2004 *A.M*, pp.159-160. The latter informant, Basha Wolde Senbet, who was a member of the *Fetno Derash* Music Band, alsoclaims that he was his hair barber in the camp. He was a Walaytan who was a member of the MTSHA. He even claims to have cut Mandela's hair while he was receiving training under General Taddasa.

[379] *Informant:* Colonel Sahilu Birri.

[380] *Informants: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa, *Ato* Seyoume Tekle Berhan.

[381] *Informant: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

two regiments composed of 160 soldiers to the old airport to create a suitable condition for further communication. Upon their arrival, however, the Imperial Bodyguard soldiers were already in control of the area. The *Fetno Derash* joined them, as if they were sent to assist them, but soon overwhelmed, disarmed and took them to their camp as captives. All the sixty eight (68) captives were taken to the *Fetno Derash* camp. This enabled the *Fetno Derash* to control the airport area.[382] The regiment of the Imperial Bodyguard which was completely defeated and taken captive was led by Captain Abebe Getaneh.[383] Even after this event, General Mengistu continued to communicate with Colonel Taddasa as if the presence of General Tsige in his office was a guarantee to the cooperation of the *Fetno Derash*.

In the meantime, the leaders of the armed forces were able to establish contacts with Colonel Taddasa but sources refer to different individuals for bringing them together. According to Berhanu Asres, the leaders of the armed forces had contacted him through Colonel Kebede Wagaye. He argues that Colonel Taddasa had changed his mind when he discussed the issue with Colonel Kebede Wagaye that he knew only the government of Emperor Haile Selassie and agreed to cooperate with the armed forces. Colonel Kebede told this to Major General Merid who sent him back with the message if Taddasa was willing to take an order. Colonel Taddasa expressed his happiness to take any assignment that would be given to him. According to this view, General Merid was happy to snatch the *Fetno Derash* from the hands of the coup makers. The cooperation of the *Fetno Derash* created an atmosphere of happiness and confidence in the camp of the armed forces. This was in fact mainly because the strength

[382] Appendix IV-VIII. The letter was in the possession of Tadele Tele Salvano.
[383] *Tobia Bulletin*, 4th Year, No.3, *Tahsas* 1988 *A.M*, pp. 28-34.

and quality of the *Fetno Derash* was closer to that of the Imperial Bodyguard and it was hoped to cover and augment the weak side of the armed forces.[384]

It does not seem that Colonel Kebede was the first to bring the leaders of the armed forces and Colonel Taddasa together. According to more reliable sources, the armed forces had established contacts with Colonel Taddasa by sending Gebre-Wold Beekaa, who was a member of the military and his close relative, to know the stand of the *Fetno Derash* in the ensuing crisis. He assured them that his battalion had decided to support the Armed forces.[385] This was also supported in the press release by General Kebede that they contacted him through his relative, who was a member of the armed forces but he did not remember his name. Colonel Taddasa confirmed that he was with the armed forces and the assurance from him boosted the confidence of the armed forces to emerge victorious if it came to a military show down. [386]

Moreover, there are different interpretations regarding the collaboration of Colonel Taddasa with the leaders of the armed forces. Accordingly, some call it a mind change[387] while others regard it as an act of betrayal. According to Tesfaye Mekonnen, one of the major reasons for the fall of the coup was the betrayal of the *Fetno Derash* police under the command of Colonel Taddasa. Tesfaye characterizes what he calls the 'betrayal' of Taddasa as something like "piercing the back of the Imperial Bodyguard soldiers with spears from behind." He argues that the counter attack against the coup makers began with the betrayal of Colonel Taddasa.[388] In general, there is no satisfactory evidence to show that the *Fetno Derash* leader

[384] Berhanu Asres, p. 211.
[385] *Informant: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.
[386] IES MS. 2163: 'Testimony of General Kebede Gebre to the Press', pp.1332-1333.
[387] Berhanu Asres, p.211.
[388] Tesfaye Mekonnen, *Yidres Lebale Tariku* 1983 *A.M*, pp. 115-116.

had made a mind change or a betrayal. The presence of General Tsige Dibu in the office of General Mengistu alone could not guarantee the cooperation of Colonel Taddasa. The coup leaders failed to make regular contact with him and made no attempt to ensure his cooperation.[389]

General Mengistu misinformed him that it was the armed forces which rebelled to overthrow the Emperor and ordered him to defend the Emperor. Colonel Taddasa soon learnt the reality and remained dedicated to the support of the Emperor. There is no betrayal in this situation and it was General Mengistu who deceived him. In this case it is difficult to say that he made a betrayal. According to an informant, Colonel Taddasa did not trust the coup makers because he could see no major difference between the young coup makers and the old ruling elites of the Imperial regime.[390]

From the afternoon of *Tahsas* 5 on, the old airport was completely under the control of the *Fetno Derash*. In the night of the same day, the *Fetno Derash* cooperated with the Air Force in which about four military cargo planes moved from the air force base at Bishooftuu, flew northward and finally landed at the old airport. They acted as if they were transporting soldiers from the provinces to the city. This was intended to buy time by deceiving and frightening the Imperial Bodyguard that the armed forces had received reinforcements. Initially, the Imperial Bodyguard had a numerical superiority.[391]

The next morning around 10:00 am a small Egyptian air force craft arrived at the airport carrying fifteen military and civil officials. The team was led by Colonel Mustefa Mohammed Ibrahim. Soon after he was informed of their arrival by his officers on the scene,

[389] Tekeste Melake, 1990, p. 149; See also Merid Mengesha's Statement to the Press.
[390] *Informant: Obbo* Tadesse Tele Salvano, August 3, 2017.
[391] Appendix IV- VIII; Tadesse Tele Salvano,2004 *A.M* , p. 123.

Colonel Taddasa went to the airport and asked them why they came for and who they wanted to communicate with. They told him that they wanted to meet with the ambassadors of USA and Egypt, and General Mengistu Neway and Girmame Neway. Colonel Taddasa introduced himself as if he were Colonel Workneh Gebeyehu, special assistant to General Mengistu, and sent to receive them. He asked them to follow him to meet the required individuals. Colonel Mustefa told him that he came to inquire the military and economic assistance needed by the new government formed after the coup and to report it to the Egyptian government. It seems that the Egyptian government hoped that the coup was successful and it wanted to establish a close relationship with the new government to be formed. Colonel Taddasa took the delegation not to the office of General Mengistu but to the First Army Division headquarters and handed them to General Kebede Gebre and told them that he was General Mengistu Neway.[392] In this way he was able to cut the foreign contact which the coup makers had attempted to establish.

While doing so, Colonel Taddasa had continued to make radio communications with General Mengistu until the middle of *Tahsas* 6th. On this day, he made two radio communications with General Mengistu Neway. In the first, he informed him that he had secured the airport and the key areas around it by chasing the armed forces. In the second communication, he told him that an Egyptian air force carrying fifteen military officers had arrived at the airport and wanted to see General Mengistu and Girmame Neway. He advised him that he should come with Girmame to the airport and meet the Egyptians which would be vital for the success of the coup. General Mengistu agreed to the request but when he raised it to Colonel Workneh, he was told that they could be arrested there. Thus General Mengistu refused to go

[392] Appendix IV-VIII. It is not clear how this secret mission would want to see the ambassador of the US because USA and Egypt had hostile relations at the time.

to the airport and this was the last communication between the two.[393] Through this mechanism, Colonel Taddasa wanted to capture the two key leaders of the coup, General Mengistu and his brother, but failed to do so as they did not come to the airport.[394]

On *Tahsas* 6, Colonel Taddasa was able to make radio communication with the Emperor through the Eritrean Police as he entered Eritrea. The Emperor encouraged him to continue his cooperation with the armed forces in order to crash the coup makers and told him that he would arrive soon in Addis. He gave him an assignment to tell to the public by using loud speakers that the Emperor would arrive within hours and the public should come out and capture the coup makers. Taddasa did as he was ordered starting from the afternoon of *Tahsas* 6 until noon of the next day. This was essential because the national radio was under the control of the coup makers and this was one of the few mechanisms available to reach the public.[395]

When General Mengistu ordered military assaults against the armed forces, Colonel Taddasa was not present but it seems that he was informed to attack the armed forces base with Major Tefera Wolde Tinsaye.[396] After all these events, why he was still given orders was not clear. He was ordered to be ready for the assault that would begin at 2:30 pm local time. In turn, he informed the leaders of the armed forces about the time of the attack which enabled them to alert their forces and change their commanding centre.[397] Moreover, he also gave the radio frequency code of the Imperial Bodyguard to General Kebede so that he would follow up the

[393] Tadesse Tele Salvano, 2004 *A.M*, pp. 50-51; Appendix IV-VIII.
[394] Appendix IV-VIII.
[395] *Ibid.*
[396] *Ibid;* Tadesse Tele Salvano, 2004 *A.M*,. p.52.
[397] Tekeste Melake,1990, pp. 158-159.

development of events. General Kebede on his part asked him to protect the airport from any attacks and promised reinforcement. [398]

Following the order of General Mengistu, in the afternoon of *Tahsas* 7, the Imperial bodyguard mobilized its fighters against the headquarters of the First Army Division. Accordingly, the deputy commander of the First Brigade, Major Tefera Wolde Tinsaye, moved from Menilek Square through Churchill Avenue and Tegbaraed. In the meantime, he communicated with Colonel Taddasa to get assistance as he was told. But Taddasa asked him to come to the airport to command the operation so that he would mobilize his *Fetno Derash* Forces to capture General Merid and General Kebede himself. Major Tefera became happy and drove to the airport to meet Colonel Taddasa but upon his arrival he was disarmed and captured. Taddasa asked him to order his brigade officers to stop fighting and surrender themselves to the armed forces and the police. Upon his refusal, Taddasa ordered his guards to take him away and execute him. But at this point, Major Tefera ordered his brigade commanders to stop fighting and surrender. This was crucial in the defeat of the Imperial Bodyguard and the victory of the armed forces because the attacking forces of the first disintegrated while the later was able to mobilize a counter attack with little resistance. He also passed the same message to Major Haile Mariam Leencoo, falsely telling him that the Emperor had arrived from Eritrea and was with him at the airport. He asked him either to stop fighting and retreat or surrender himself. Major Haile Mariam fully trusted him and accepted his order and since then the fighting spirit on the side of the Imperial Bodyguard collapsed; its soldiers surrendered, killed or ran away. Accordingly, thousands had

[398] Appendix IV-VIII.

surrendered to the *Fetno Derash* and it took 2647 captives of the Imperial Bodyguard soldiers.[399]

It was clear that the contribution of Colonel Taddasa in aborting the coup was decisive. Even though the *Fetno Derash* Police was under the command chain of General Tsige Dibu, the assistance it made to the armed forces was immense. General Merid, the leader of the anti-coup group, confirmed this in his statement to the press, when he said, "... እዚህ ላይ ሳልጠቅሰው የማላልፈው አንድ ነገር አለ። ይህም እቅዳችንን አንድ መልክ ሊያስይዝልን የቻለው ለንጉሰ ነገስቱ ታማኝ የሆነው የፖሊስ ፈጥኖ ደራሽ ሻለቃ እርዳታ ነው።(…There is something I should mention here. What helped us to move as we planned is the support we got from the *Fetno Derash* Battalion, which is loyal to its Emperor.)[400] His control of the airport for the use of the armed forces enabled them to make radio contact with the Emperor and to get reinforcement by air.[401]

General Kebede Gebre's statement also further confirms the role of the *Fetno Derash* in the defeat of the coup makers. He argues that it was after obtaining the support of the *Fetno Derash* that the armed forces were able to move from defending themselves to making offensive against the coup makers. Even more decisively, it was Colonel Taddasa who informed its leaders of the time of the attack of the Imperial Bodyguard and its targets. He told them that there was a plan to attack the commanding centre of the armed forces with heavy weapons. Based on this information they were able to transfer their commanding base to other area and shortly the Imperial Bodyguard attacked their initial base with tanks. According to General Kebede, if the commanders of the armed forces had remained there

[399] *Ibid*.
[400] IES MS.2163 : General Merid Mengesha's Statement to the Press, p.1324.
[401] Paulos Milkiyas, "Brigadier General Taddasa Birru", in *Encyclopedia Aethiopica*,Vol. 4, 2010, pp.808-810.

they could have been eliminated by the heavy weapons of the Imperial Bodyguard. But thanks to the information they received from Colonel Taddasa, they were able to evacuate the area. Initially, the leaders of the armed forces had planned to begin their own offensive on Friday by making preparations on Thursday. But Colonel Taddasa informed them that the Imperial Bodyguard would begin its attack on Thursday afternoon between 2:30 and 3:00 pm local time.[402] He used to get reliable sources from the two police officers who pretended to cooperate with the coup makers but used to inform him of the developing events every hour.[403]

The radio communication facilities in the possession of the *Fetno Derash* also helped to create contact with the Emperor because other means of communications were either cut down or were under the control of the coup makers. Accordingly, Kifle Dadi was able to deliver the message of the Emperor to Colonel Taddasa by using the radio communication of the police force at Gonder. According to Tekeste Melake, the English version of Kifle's telegram reads, "…the loyal and patriot officers of the Police Emergency Force: Be faithful to the military oath you have taken and carry out your patriotic duty by taking action against those ill motivated bandits who have risen to make trouble in Addis Ababa. I am also coming." It is also reported that when the message was read to the soldiers it moved them to join the army against the rebels.[404] But as we have discussed earlier, Colonel Taddasa had attempted to join the armed forces right from the beginning. In general, it is a recognized fact

[402] IES MS. 2163: Testimony of General Kebede Gebre to the Press, pp.1332-1333.
[403] *Policina Irmjaw, Tehsas* 15, 1953 *A.M.*
[404] Tekeste Melake, 1990, 137; OFRAE Vol.5, p.1404.

that the *Fetno Derash* led by Colonel Taddasa was one of the three groups which decisively defeated the coup makers. The other two were the armed forces and the air force.[405]



Figure 3: Colonel Taddasa Birru in December 1960 just after the aborted coup[406]

As will be seen in the next chapter, though Colonel Taddasa had played a key role in the defeat of the coup makers and the return of the Emperor to his throne, it seems that he was not fully rewarded compared to the other officers. It was after two months in February 1960 (*Yekatit* 14, 1953 *A.M*) that the commander of the *Fetno Derash* and his assistants received awards of Medal for their contributions in aborting the coup. They were Colonel Taddasa

[405] Mamo Wudineh, p.187. See also *Addis Zemen, Tahsas* 11, 1953 *A.M.*
[406] The picture was taken from *Policina Irmijaw* newspaper *Tahsas* 15, 1953 *A.M.*

Birru, Lieutenant Colonel Bekele Gebre Igzhi, Major Reta Demeke, Major Mulugeta Wolde Yohannis and other junior officers. In general, a total of more than thirty members of the *Fetno Derash* police received the awards of medal.[407]

Before the award of the medal, when the Emperor visited the *Fetno Derash* camp to inaugurate the new building constructed for the police club, Colonel Taddasa made a moving speech. His speech mainly focused on the activities of the *Fetno Derash* police under his leadership. As it was only months after the coup, he also remarked in his speech the importance of resolving whatever minor problem arising through close attention. He said, "If one does not weed and take care of the planted crop, it does not give the desired fruit" and concluded his speech with a kind of religious remark that one should not follow the sinful (wrong doers) for revenge.[408]



[407] IES MS.2163: "Ye1953 tu YeMefenqile Mengist Mukera Adiragiwoch Zirzir",p.1364

[408] *Policina Irmjaw, Yekatit* 15, 1953 *A.M*. This was probably an indication that he was not happy with the way the Emperor had handled the captives of the defeated Imperial Bodyguards.

Figure 4: Colonel Taddasa with the Emperor followed by crowd during the inauguration of the *Fetno Derash* Police Club building in February 1961.[409]

3.2.2 Colonel Taddasa and the Training of Nelson Mandela

As a commander of the *Fetno Derash*, the other significant contribution of General Taddasa was the training of one of the leading figures of African resistance movement. Accordingly, he received and trained the anti-apartheid leader of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, in his camp. Why the Emperor entrusted the training of Nelson Mandela to Colonel Taddasa was not clear but there could be many reasons. According to my informants, the reasons could include his leadership quality; his ability to carry out the duty and the suitability and strategic location of the Kolfee training camp in the outskirts of the city. Potentially, the Imperial Bodyguard could have taken this role but it was disorganized and became weaker after the coup while the *Fetno Derash* remained stronger.[410] Moreover, Colonel Taddasa knew English language so that he could easily understand and communicate with Nelson Mandela. Mandela was in Ethiopia to receive this training by changing his name to David Masomay. He was given an Ethiopian passport as a journalist. He was in Ethiopia to receive military training on how to be a commander of the armed wing of the African National Congress. Taddasa Birru became not only a trainer but also a good friend of Mandela.[411]

In Kolfee, Mandela was expected to learn the art and science of soldiering under Colonel Taddasa at least for six months. However, his training lasted only two months because he was forced to interrupt and go back immediately when he received an urgent call from his African National Congress party. During the two months in Kolfee, Mandela received two

[409] In the Possession of *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.
[410] *Informants:* Colonel Sahilu Birri, *Basha* Wolde Senbet Teklu.
[411] "The Man Who Taught Nelson Mandela to be a Soldier", by Penny Dale, BBC Africa, December 9, 2013.

basic trainings. The first was to develop his skill of fighting to become a physically and technically fit soldier. This training was given to him by Colonel Fekadu Waakennee. The second training was to equip him with leadership qualities because Mandela was planning to establish and lead his own army. The lectures on military science were given to him by Colonel Taddasa. In Mandela's own words, "From 4 pm into the evening I was lectured on military science by Colonel Tadesse… In my study sessions, Colonel Taddese discussed matters such as how to create a guerrilla force, how to command an army and how to enforce discipline."[412]

It was evident that the relationship between the two was not limited to the normal lecture hours. Mandela tells us that Colonel Taddasa used to advise him on the nature of the relationship he should create with the army he was going to establish. Accordingly, one evening he was told,

> *Now, Mandela, you are creating a liberation army not a conventional capitalist army. A liberation army is an egalitarian army. You must treat your men entirely different from how you would in a capitalist army. When you are on duty, you must exercise your authority with assurance and control. That is not different from a capitalist command. But when you are off duty, you must conduct yourself on the basis of perfect equality, even with the lowliest soldier. You must eat what they eat; you must not take your food in your office, but eat with them, drink with them, not isolate yourself.*[413]

Mandela frequently visited the house of his trainer, which was located inside the camp. According to my informant, one day, when he came to the house as usual, they raised and discussed on the cruelty of the apartheid system in South Africa and the necessity of armed struggle to end it. My informant claims that her father was touched by the story he heard and

[412] Nelson Mandela, *A Long Walk to Freedom*, (Boston: Little Brown Company 1994), pp.362-363.
[413] *Ibid.* p.363.

promised Mandela saying, "እናንቴ ተሳክቶላችዉ ውጊያ ከጀመራችዉ መንግሥትን አስፈቅጄ የራሴን ጦር ይዤ መጥቼ እረዳችኋለሁ።(If you manage to start armed struggle, I will come [to South Africa] to your assistance with my own army by requesting permission from the government.) [414]

Mandela was a sociable person who established good relationship with the family of my study subject. For example, my informant remembers that he asked her what she wanted to be in the future after completing high school. When she told him that she would want to be a medical doctor, he said, "If I will become successful in having my country liberated, promise me to come and work in my country."[415]



[414] *Informant: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

[415] *Ibid.* Later she used to say that, "I did not become medical doctor, and Mandela did not liberate his country." This was before Nelson Mandela was released from prison and elected as the president of his country.

Figure 5: Colonel Taddasa and Nelson Mandela at Kolfe Training Camp. It seems that the picture was modified.[416]

Colonel Taddasa did not only train Mandela on military science but also supervised his overall wellbeing, including his security. After receiving Mandela, Colonel Taddasa assigned two secret guards for him. These were Captain Guutaaa Dinqaa and Debebe Eshete. In the meantime, however, Mandela's safety seemed to be threatened when Captain Guutaa was approached by two individuals through his friend. According to this story, Guutaa was given two thousand pounds and a camera to assassinate Mandela and take his picture as a confirmation of his death. Moreover, Guutaa was promised to be taken abroad together with his friend. However, the plot failed when Captain Guutaa reported the case to Colonel Taddasa, who supervised his overall safety.[417] He reacted quickly by putting both Mandela and Captain Guutaa under close security surveillance. It is reported, however, that the issue was kept secret and Colonel Taddasa did not want to make it public probably because he did not want to divert the attention of Mandela from his training. [418]

My informant, however, argues that the assassination attempt on the life of Mandela was unlikely and unconvincing. She had heard her father only saying that he should be watched against the Israelites, especially in the food he used to eat. At the time, there were many Israeli instructors in the police, including in the *Fetno Derash.* During that time, according to my informant, Mandela was an ordinary black man who was making a preparation to begin armed struggle for the liberation of his country. Nobody predicted that he would

[416] In the Possession of *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

[417] Interview with Captain Guutaa Dinqaa by Seifu Fatahun on EBS TV program known as 'Seifu Show.' The interview is available at Seifu Show archives. Captain Guutaa caims that he was one of the secret agents assigned for Nelson Mandela by General Taddasa Birru.

[418] "The Man Who Taught Nelson Mandela to be a Soldier," by Penny Dale, BBC Africa, December 9, 2013. The interview video is available at https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa.

become a president of his own country and an international icon. She adds that at the time his name was not Mandela at all.[419]

In the meantime, Mandela was forced to interrupt his training when he received a telegram message requesting him to return home urgently. When his return became inevitable, it was Colonel Taddasa who arranged his departure. This is clearly stated in the words of Mandela when he says, "Colonel Taddasa rapidly arranged for me to take an Ethiopian flight to Khartoum. Before I left, he presented me with a gift: an automatic pistol and two hundred rounds of ammunition. I was grateful, both for the gun and his instruction."[420] It is reported that in addition to the gun he also gave him, the picture of Emperor Haile Selassie.[421] The wife of Colonel Taddasa also sent a gift of cultural dress to the wife of Mandela. It was sewed in Mercato in the size of Mandela. When people around laughed at the situation, he responded that Winnie too used to wear his jacket.[422] No doubt that General Taddasa had most probably learnt from Mandela why he was forced to undergo military training and the situations in South Africa. In other words, he must have learnt about the injustices of the apartheid system which Mandela was preparing to fight after the completion of his training.

3.2.3 Colonel/ Brigadier General Taddasa and the Literacy Campaign Association

The National Literacy Campaign Association was established to coordinate the activities of various institutions and groups which were engaged in teaching the illiterate citizens in their own respective areas. Those institutions which were already carrying out 'the learn and

[419] *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa
[420] Mandela , p.363.
[421] "The Man Who Taught Nelson Mandela to be a Soldier," by Penny Dale, BBC Africa, December 9, 2013. The interview video is available https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa
[422] *Informant: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa

teach' program by teaching their surrounding communities included Addis Ababa University College, Young Men Christian Association, the *Fetno Derash* Police Battalion, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the World Lutheran Federation, the Air Force at Bishooftuu, Shimelis Habte School, Qoqa Electric power authority and others. The intention was to enable the illiterate ones to read and write in Amharic. The idea expanded to different schools and institutions and got permission from the Ministry of Education. [423]

Eventually, these institutions and groups which were undertaking the literacy campaign came together and elected an executive committee and a board. They came together under a slogan '*andu andun yastemir*!'(Let one teach one) and elected a committee in the meeting they held at the Empress Menen School to coordinate the various fragmented activities already underway. The committee intended to provide opportunities for those who were unable to benefit from the regular programs. The target groups, according to *Addis Zemen* newspaper, included shoemakers, newspaper sellers, and micro retailers, guards of government offices and private companies, workers of private companies, individuals hired as laborers, soldiers, farmers, cattle keepers and others who were employed in various activities. The major objective was to enable them to read and write in the language of the government, Amharic.[424]

In the meeting that was held at the Empress Menen School on July 21, 1962 (*Hamle* 14, 1954 *A.M*) members of the Board and Executive committee were elected. Accordingly, board members and 9 executive committee members were elected.[425] It was through these meetings that the National Literacy Campaign Organization, or better known as the *Fidel Serawit*

[423] *Addis Zemen*, *Sene* 18, 1954 *A.M*.
[424] *Ibid.*; *Informant*: Professor Ephraim Isaac.
[425] *Addis Zemen*, *Hamle* 16, 1954 *A.M*.

Mahiber, was established in 1962 when different voluntary organizations came together to carry out a coordinated literacy campaign. The campaign was carried out with funds provided from individuals and other donors. Its executive committee and board members included high level government officials.[426]



Figure 6: Colonel Taddasa Birru. This picture was taken in 1962. This is the most popular photo of General Taddasa and is also available on social media.[427]

In the next meeting held in the Empress Menen School on July 27, 1962 (*Hamle* 20, 1954) members of the executive committee elected Colonel Taddasa Birru as their chairman. The other members of the committee included Lule Tesfaye, Martha Gebre Tsadik, Merry Tadesse, Abera Jembere, Dr. Mengesha Gebre Hiwot, Dr.Aklilu Habte and Captain Tesema Abba Derash. Since then the executive committee started to make consecutive meetings in

[426] Germa Amare, " An Appraisal of the Ongoing Literacy Campaign in Ethiopia," *Northeast African Studies, Vol.13*, No.2&3(1991), pp.75-76.

[427] In the possession of family but also available on social media.

order to enable the Association to function effectively.[428] Through the relentless effort of its chairman, the *Fidel Serawit* Association was able to make practical activities. It started its duty by preparing a document of twelve pages which contained the overall objectives and guidelines of the Association.[429]

In the summer of 1954 *A.M* (July and August of 1962) the Association was able to teach thousands of people. [430] It was reported that until June 1963 about 15, 000 people were educated and were given certificate. In the following months of July and August 1963 the National Literacy Campaign planned to teach about 50,000 people.[431] In order to attract more attention to the campaign, the committee decided and celebrated *Sene* 29 and 30, 1955 (July 7 and 8, 1963) as the National Literacy Days and the major logo distributed on the occasion was entitled '*Hullu Yimar!'*-All should learn!. Though initially the committee had intended to teach about 50,000, it was forced to revise its plan and worked to reach about 80,000 people because of increasing requests from various areas.[432]

[428] *Addis Zemen, Hamle* 23, 1954 *A.M.*
[429] *Addis Zemen, Hamle* 30, 1954 *A.M.*
[430] *Addis Zemen, Meskerem* 8, 1955 *A.M.*
[431] *Addis Zemen, Sene* 19, 1955 *A.M.*
[432] *Addis Zemen, Tahsas* 22, 1956 *A.M*



Figure 7: General Taddasa with Artist Lemma Guyyaa giving certificate to the trainees of the Literacy campaign Association in Ada'aa.[433]

General Taddasa worked relentlessly with those groups who were willing to contribute to the activities of the *Fidel Serawit* Association. He sought assistance from government offices, embassies, non-governmental organizations and other concerned bodies. In all opportunities and meetings, he used to put emphasis on the importance of education and the need to extend the opportunity towards those seeking it. For example, while discussing with the district governors of the city of Addis Ababa on the objectives of the Literacy Campaign, he told them, "…What exceeds all in the world is education. Unless one works for his country, backbiting alone does not help. In Ethiopia since 99% of the population is known to have been illiterate whether soldier, merchant or civil servant all should serve their own

[433] In the possession of Artist Lemma Guyyaa (Honarary Doctor).

country."[434] This remark was very important because it was made months before he joined the MTSHA and it gives us hints of his views on the eve of joining the MTSHA. What General Taddasa disliked was those who spent their time simply talking about other persons without themselves contributing anything practical for the public.

Moreover, his speech to over a thousand people who were attending the literacy program in four centres in the Yeka Sub city of Addis Ababa was even stronger. His speech appeared on *Addis Zemen* Newspaper under the heading,

> *'እናት ለልጅዋ እሳት አታቀብልም!*
>
> *ለሀገሩ ተቆርቋሪና ቅን አሳቢ የሆነ ሰው ሁሉ፣ ማንኛውም ሰው በተደላደለ እና በተመዛዘነ የኑሮ ይዞታ እንዲኖር ይፈልጋል። ቅን ሰው፣ የወገኑ መደሀየትና የራሱ ሀብታም መሆን፣ የወገኑ መደንቆርና የራሱ መሰልጠን የሚያስደስተው አይደለም። እናት ለልጇ እንዲቃጠልባት እሳት እንዳለማቀበሏ መጠን የወገኖቹን መደንቆርና መደሀየት የሚፈልግም ሰው የለም።*
>
> *ሆኖም ማወቅና አለማወቅ ደግሞ ሰውን እንደሚያበላልጥ መዘንጋት የለብንም። የተማረ ወደኋላ መቅረቱ ወይም ከሌሎች በታች መሆኑ ይቆረቁረዋል። ይቆጨዋል። የነፃነትን ዋጋ የመብትን ትርጉም አውቆ፣ ይሄ ቀረብኝ፣ ይሄ ጐደለብኝ ለማለት የሚችል የተማረ ህዝብ ብቻ ነው። ... እራስን ከሌሎች ጐን እኩል ለማሰለፍ፣ አገርን ለማበልጸግ መሠረቱ ትምህርት መሆኑን... የትልቅነትና የትንሽነት ልዩነት የሚፈጠረው በትምህርት ብቻ መሆኑን በመግለጽ የትምህርትን ጥቅም አብራርተው አስረድተዋል።*

It is roughly translated as:

> *A mother does not give fire to her child!*
>
> *Any person who loves his country and is sincere wishes all to live a comfortable and good way of life. A sincere person would not be happy with his own richness and advancement, and the impoverishment and backwardness of his own people. As a mother does not give fire to her child to be burnt no one wants to see his own people remain illiterate and impoverished.*
>
> *Nevertheless, we should not forget that knowing and not knowing make difference among people. An educated person questions why he lagged*

[434] *Addis Zemen, Miazia* 9, 1956 *A.M.*

> *behind or feels sad for remaining inferior to others. He regrets. It is only the educated people who know the value of freedom and the meaning of rights, and ask for more or the denied rights… to level oneself with others and to develop a country the basis is education. It is only through education that status difference is created among the people.*[435]

This speech was made immediately after his membership to the MTSHA. He was questioning why the authorities who were leading a comfortable life failed to show sympathy to their illiterate and poor fellow citizens. He was criticizing the authorities and their selfish behavior.

Indeed, there were authorities who had the ambition to maintain their exploitative rule by keeping the people illiterate and impoverished. These authorities viewed the Literacy Campaign as a threat to their power and dignity and began to antagonize General Taddasa, especially with the Emperor. They accused him of using the literacy campaign as a pretext to incite people, especially the Oromo, against the Imperial government through propaganda and provocations.[436] His genuine effort of helping his own people through expanding basic education was paradoxically not welcomed. As a result, he was forced to work for the expansion of the *Fidel Serawit* under difficult circumstances. It seems that the higher authorities deliberately weakened its expansion and the report in one of the newspapers supports this assumption. It is reported that, "...የማጎበሩ እየተስፋፋ መሄድ ለአገሪቷ የአደጋ ምልክት መስሎ የታያቸው ባለሥልጣኖች እንደነበሩ ጠይቀን በአገኘነው መልስ ተረድተናል::(…we understood from the inquiry we made that there were authorities who viewed the continuous expansion of the Association[*Fidel Serawit* Association] as a sign of threat against the country).[437]

[435] *Addis Zemen, Nehase*14, 1956 *A. M.*
[436] Atinaf Seged Yilma, *Ye'Hiyiwote Mistir: Yetefetene Gabicha Iyobeliyu*, Addis Ababa, 2008 *A.M*, p.6.
[437] *Yezareytua Itiyophiya, Nehase* 4, 1966 *A.M*.

The following report is based on an eye witness account who was watching the debate between General Taddasa and a Minister, who was also a Board Member of the *Fidel Serawit*. According to this account, after a heated debate between the two, General Taddasa is reported to have said, "ይህ ህዝብ እስካሁን በጭቆናም በኃይልም ተገዝቷል። ከእንግዲህ ወዲህ ግን ሊገዛ የሚችለው በፍቅር ብቻ ስለሆነ ከአሁኑ በርትተን የማስተማር ኃላፊነት ስላለብን ለማጎበሩ መስፋፋት መድከም አለብን። " (So far, these people have been ruled by subjugation and force. Here after, however, since they can only be ruled by love, we have to carry out our responsibility of educating them by tirelessly expanding the Association).[438] However, it is reported that the response given to General Taddasa by the Minister was discouraging. He was said to have remarked that 'It should have been better to make General Taddasa a preacher of the Gospel'. Probably as a sign of disagreement or lack of respect, the minister was said to have entered his car and departed without concluding the conversation.[439]

In spite of these challenges, General Taddasa continued to work hard for the expansion of the Literacy Program. His unreserved effort was vividly reported in one document as follows:

> *The chairman of the executive committee is Honorable Brigadier General Tadesse Birru. He has taken closer guidance of the day to day work as his own. Aside From doing his office work, he visits centres and organize local help. Many have taken heart from his untying and unreserved leadership. General Tadase has been elected twice chairman of the executive committee. The organization has found a dedicated leader and worker in him*.[440]

Indeed, General Taddasa had been carrying out his duty with full dedication until he was imprisoned in November 1966, which was a big blow to the *Fidel Serawit* Association. The

[438] *Ibid.*
[439] *Ibid.*
[440] '*National Literacy Campaign in Ethiopia'*, Pamphlets: Nos 371.9-373.9 , Published in August 1965, p. 15.

activities of the Association began to decline sharply after his imprisonment and this was reported that, "ከዚያ ወዲህ እንደራሱ ስራ ቆጥሮ እንደዚያ የሚሯሯጥልን ሰው አልተተካም።" (Since then, no one, who would take it as his own duty and tirelessly worked like him, had replaced him.) In general, it is reported that, the pressure from the authorities of the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts paradoxically contributed to the decline of the once popular campaign of the *Fidel Serawit*.[441] Regardless of these challenges, General Taddasa had been making relentless efforts in spreading basic education among Ethiopians, including the Oromo. He was a rising Ethiopian police officer before he quarreled with the regime; joined the MTSHA and entered into a new political life. Therefore, it is better to make a brief look at his situations just before joining the MTSHA.

3.2.4 General Taddasa Birru as a rising Police Officer

In the early 1960s General Taddasa was a newly rising police officer of Oromo origin. He was a veteran of the anti-Fascist resistance and was serving in the Ethiopian military and police forces since 1941. By the early 1960s he had already received a number of medals for his contributions and services. Some of the medals he received were:

1. *Menelik II Anbel Yelelewu Medal* (Menelik II's Medal without ribbon)
2. *Menelik II Yeazazhi Mekonnen Medal* (Menelik II's Commanding Officers Medal)
3. *Yeanget Baleanbel Medal*(A medal with ribbon)
4. *Haile Sillassie I Anbel Yelelewu Medal* (Haile Selassie I's Medal without ribbon)

[441] *Yezareytua Itiyophiya*, *Nehase* 4, 1966 *A.M*. This comment came out in this newspaper after the imprisonment of many of the Board Members of the Fidel Serawit Association. It is a paradox that when the higher authorities were expected to encourage the expansion of the Literacy Campaign, some of them were practically working against it.

5. Fifteen Year Service Medal

6. Medal from Marshall Tito.[442]

7. *Ye'Itiyopiya Ye'Kibir Kokeb Ye'Azazh Mekonnen Nishan* (Ethiopia's Honorary Star Commanding Officer Medal). It was given on *Yekatit* 14, 1953 *A.M*.[443]

8. *Menilek II Feresenya Dereja* (Menelik II Chevalier Level Medal). This medal was given to him along with other high ranking police officers in commemoration of the Independence Day on *Miazia* 29, 1948 *A.M* (May 1956).[444]

His initial transfer from the military to the police was also a kind of promotion because he was selected for this duty and transferred from Harar to Addis Ababa. General Tsige Dibu trusted and nominated him while the Emperor was also convinced to accept him as a commander of the newly established important police battalion. According to Aemero Niguse, Taddasa was transferred to the police because of his personality as an agent of peace as the police work was generally believed to maintain peace.[445]

Later his involvement in the foiling of the 1960 coup brought him closer to the Emperor and other high ranking officials of the regime, including the Prime Minister, Aklilu Habte Wold. General Taddasa was able to get a direct contact with the Emperor after the coup, especially after the police force was made directly responsible to the Emperor. According to an informant, General Taddasa had permission to visit the Emperor at any time he wanted. After the 1960 coup, he seems to have had a close relationship not only with the Emperor but also

[442]Aemero Niguse, p.198; See also Olana Zoga's *Gizitina Gizot,* pp. 419-423. One of the medals given to General Taddasa was from Marshall Tito, the President of Yugoslavia. See the Appendix- III

[443] *Addis Zemen, Yekatit* 15, 1953, "Awards of Medals to military and Civilian Authorities"

[444] *Addis Zemen, Sene* 4, 1948, " Very High Prize-(Ijig Kef Yale Shilimat")

[445] Aemro Niguse, pp. 197-198

with the Prime Minister.[446] In general, in the early 1960s he was a rising Oromo police officer who appeared to have been closer to the Emperor and the Prime Minister. However, the seemingly good relationship with the two leaders lasted only until he joined the MTSHA.

As indicated earlier, Colonel Taddasa was entrusted to train Nelson Mandela on how to form and lead a guerrilla army for the liberation of the black South Africans from the yoke of the Apartheid rule. There could be different reasons why General Taddasa was chosen to carry out this responsibility. But most probably one of the reasons was the confidence of the authorities in his ability to carry out the task. Moreover, he was also a kind of person who could easily get along with others, be foreigners or Ethiopians, regardless of their background.[447]

The other major contribution of my study subject which introduced him to the wider public was his effort, as the chairman of the executive committee of the *Fidel Serawit,* to expand literacy among the ordinary citizens. He was not appointed by the Emperor for this position but was elected from among many well educated candidates. It was a free service outside the normal office hours. He was elected twice for this duty and served with full dedication until he was finally imprisoned in November 1966. General Taddasa was never admitted to a formal school and never graduated from a higher institution. He received only a traditional religious education and short term military trainings. He was a self-educated man who valued education more than anything else. According to my informant, once he was asked by

[446] I*nformant: Aadde*Tsehay Taddasa. The Police was earlier accountable to the Ministry of Interior.
[447] *Informants: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa, Colonel Sahilu Birri.

university students during the literacy campaign because they wanted to know his educational background. He told them that he was educated under the shade of a tree.[448]

The life of General Taddasa was partly shaped by his religious background. He was admitted to a Church School at an early age and remained a devout person in terms of religion. General Taddasa behaved like a priest and was devout in his faith. He had a spiritual personality based on the teachings of the Bible. He read the Bible very well and attempted to live according to its principles. This was probably why sometimes he was mocked at by the authorities and even his colleagues as "ይሄ ቄስ!"(This Priest!). His life was basically guided by the principles of the Bible and that was why he expected those authorities who were Christians to act according to this principle.[449] This was probably why he used to accuse some of those authorities for pretending to be devout Christians while they were committing sinful acts. He was not only a military officer but also a religious man.[450]

He had an active role in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and served as one of its representatives in the World Council of Churches to which the Church was a member. He used to read and even preach the Gospel on many occasions. Because of his deep involvement in the affairs of the Church, he had a close relationship with the Patriarch and other leading figures of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.[451] General Taddasa was also the president of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Gospel Association (*Ye'Ethiopia Orthodoksawit Ye'Sibkete Wangel Mahiber*) and through the Association he was trying to expand education

[448] *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.
[449] *Informant: Ato* Siyume Tekle Berhan.
[450] *Informant: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.
[451] *Ibid.*

by supporting schools.[452] He used to contribute money for the various churches and monasteries. For example, he renovated the St. Paul Church near the *Fetno Derash* camp for the use of the police and made donation to the Menagesha Monastery.[453] He had an active role within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Later, when he rebelled against the Emperor, it was through the mediation of the Patriarch, Abune Tewoflos that he gave up his first rebellion.[454]

His concern for the poor and disadvantaged had also won him respect among the ordinary citizens. He often distributed a good share of his salary to the poor and there were moments when he gave his jacket to the poor to sell.[455] It was clearly visible that he had a deep sympathy for the poor, a quality which he probably inherited from his father.[456] He was always on the side of the poor and the disadvantaged. According to my informant, at that time, there were new cars purchased for the generals but General Taddasa was not happy to use his new luxurious car and parked it in the police garage saying, "ህዝብ እንደዚህ የሚበላ አጥቶ በችጋር ሲሰቃይ እኔ በእንደዚህ አይነት መኪና ውስጥ አልቀመጥም::"(While the mass is suffering from having nothing to eat, I would not sit inside such a luxurious car).[457] He used to advise his own children that they might quarrel with their equal ones or even their seniors but never to quarrel or speak against their inferiors.[458]

[452] *Policina Ermjaw*, *Hamle* 30, 1956 *A.M*. General Taddasa was making relentless efforts to expand basic education not only through the Literacy Campaign Association but also through the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Gospel Association.
[453] *Informant*: *Basha* Wolde Senbet Teklu.
[454] *Ibid*; Olana Zoga, pp.131-132.
[455] *Informant: Aadde*Tsehay Taddasa.
[456] His father was used to be considered as a shield for his fellow poor Oromo *gebbars* in his village.
[457] *Informant:* Colonel Sahilu Birri.
[458] *Informant:* Aadde Tsehay Taddasa.

He was also a sociable person who used to involve in the social affairs of other people. He did not make a status difference in his involvements and used to participate actively in the social affairs of junior officers, including their marriage ceremonies. For example, he had provided cars during the marriage of junior police, and military officers in addition to his personal presence. For example, he had provided cars and was physically present during the marriage of my two informants: Colonel Sahilu Birri (then *Shambal*)[459]and *Basha* Wolde Senbet.[460]

If we take the case of Colonel Sahilu, as an example, Taddasa's involvement was as follows. Sahilu's fiancée was a daughter of *Dajjazmach* Kidane Mariam and her family requested Sahilu, in the message they sent through Colonel Alamu, to bring notable individuals on the occasion. In his own words, the message sent to him was, "አይን የሚሞሉ ሰዎችን ይዞ ይምጣ" (He should come with the dignitaries).[461] Sahilu began to worry about it because he did not have access to such dignitaries but shared the issue to his friend, Colonel Gebreyes Belete. Colonel Gebereyes advised him to invite General Taddasa. But *Shambal* Sahilu was hesitant to do so because he did not have such a close relationship that would enable him to invite General Taddasa to this occasion. Moreover, there was also a big difference in terms of military rank. But Colonel Gebreyes insisted that General Taddasa was not a difficult person to approach and Sahilu should invite him. But when Sahilu still hesitated he took upon himself the responsibility of inviting him on Sahilu's behalf. Contrary to Sahilu's expectation, however, in addition to his willingness to be present personally, General Taddasa allowed Sahilu to use his luxurious new car parked in the garage. He also brought

[459] I*nformant*: Colonel Sahilu Birri.
[460] *Informant*: *Basha* Wolde Senbet Teklu.
[461] *Informant:* Colonel Sahilu Birri.

the police music band for the occasion a generosity which is still fresh in the mind of the informant.[462]

His sociability was not limited to local relationships. When he visited different countries, he was able to establish personal relationships with some of his hosts. For example, during his visit to the state of Israel where he led a group of police officers, the Israeli officials personally asked him to give them one of his kids to be educated in Israel as a mark of friendship. He agreed to do so during his next visit but this did not happen. His delegation was well received and planted trees.[463] There were many Israeli trainers in the police, including the *Fetno Derash* and they had arranged the visit and consolidated the relationship.



Figure 8: General Taddasa Birru visiting Israel as a police officer.[464]

According to my informants, when he returned from Israel after the visit, General Taddasa brought about six jars of water from the Jordan River. He ordered the *Fetno Derash* soldiers

[462] *Ibid.*
[463] *Informant: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.
[464] In the possession of *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

to line up and distributed a glass of it to each of them. He told them that he brought the water from the same river where Jesus Christ was baptized and those who drank from this water would be blessed. He also told them that the corpse of those who drank from this water would not decay.[465]

Physically, General Taddasa was attractive. He was handsome and had a straight and good physical appearance and personality built around military discipline.[466] His speech was very attractive and was sophisticated with religious spirit. He did not like ornaments and artificial things. He expected his police members to be strict in their discipline and manners.[467]

In general, on the eve of joining the MTSHA, General Taddasa Birru was a person of many qualities and contributions. There were many police officers who were not happy because he was not made their commander after the death of General Tsige during the coup. The police commander was brought from other area. Even though General Taddasa was one of the key contributors in the foiling of the 1960 coup attempt, he had to wait patiently for nearly two years to get promotion. There were other officers who were promoted soon after the coup. Finally, it was on October 30, 1963 that he was promoted to the rank of Brigadier General.[468] Even though the promotion was delayed, it created an atmosphere of happiness among many of the members of the *Fetno Derash* police. They joyfully contributed fifteen birr each and prepared a big feast. He was considered as a father by many members of the *Fetno Derash* soldiers.[469] There are, however, some sources which argue that his promotion to Brigadier

[465] *Informants: Basha* Wolde Senbet Teklu, *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa. The number of jars of water he brought might not be exactly six but it was true that he brought the water from the Jordan River.

[466] *Informants: Basha* Ijigu Imiru, *Obbo* Aman Maddaa.

[467] *Informant: Basha* Wolde Senbet Taklu.

[468] *Negarit Gazeta* General Notice No. 313 of 1963.

[469] *Informants*: *Basha* Wolde Senbet, *Basha* Ijigu Imru. According to the first informant, his promotion created an atmosphere of happiness among many members of the *Fetno Derash* Police. There are, however,

General was a reward for his loyalty during the previous coup and his betrayal of the coup makers.[470] However, this accusation is not substantive because he had to wait until October 1963 while there were many officers who were promoted and appointed shortly after the coup. Indeed, by the end of April 1961 (*Miazia* 23, 1953 *A.M*) Colonel Taddasa was appointed as a deputy commissioner of the Police[471]though he was not the only deputy. He also became one of the guardians of the Police newspaper, *Policina Ermjaw.*[472]

During this period, as a deputy commissioner of the National Police Force and Commander of the Rapid Force, he enjoyed respect and fame for his leadership qualities and mastery of military science. He was a rising police officer who seemed closer to the Emperor and the Prime Minister at least for sometimes. But with increasing exposure through visiting foreign countries and contacts with individual freedom fighters like Mandela, he became opponent of the prevailing injustices and maltreatment under the Imperial regime.

On the eve of joining the MTSHA in 1964, he was dubbed as a loyal servant of the Emperor and 'Amharized' military officer. He was regarded as a deeply assimilated Oromo.[473] Paradoxically, it was this person who turned against the Emperor and became a leading Oromo nationalist by joining and transforming the MTSHA. How this happened will be seen in the next chapter with the reasons which pushed him to join the Association.

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other sources which indicate that his promotion to Brigadier General was a reward for his loyalty to the Emperor and betrayal of the coup makers during the previous coup attempt. Regarding this view one can see the remarks of Tesfaye Mekonnen, p.124. However, it is difficult to conclude in that way because General Taddasa had waited for a relatively longer time in comparison to other military officers who were promoted soon after the coup.

[470] Tesfaye Mekonnen, P.124. Though his promotion was more or less smooth, he had to wait until October 1963 to be promoted to Brigadier General. However, there were officers who were immediately promoted.

[471] *Addis Zemen*, *Miazia* 25, 1953 *A.M*.

[472] At least since June 1961 it is possible to see it from the newspaper itself.

[473] John Markakis, *National and Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, Zed Books, 1990, p.260.

3.2. 5. The Claim of General Taddasa Birru's 'Amharization'

Some writers and informants dub General Taddasa as Amharized on the eve of his joining of the MTSHA. Some of their reasons for this claim include the fact that he had an Amhara wife, was a devout Orthodox Christian, spoke Amharic and only few people knew about his Oromo ethnic background.[474] Clapham argues that many did not know that Taddasa was an Oromo and for him he was a model of assimilated Oromo.[475] However, it was this so-called Amharized or assimilated officer who turned to become a leading figure of Oromo resistance by joining the MTSHA.[476]

The above two contradictory views make him a controversial figure and raise a question that how an Amharized person could turn to become a leading figure of Oromo resistance. Those who claim that he was Amharized do not make a clear conceptualization of the term Amharization. If he gave up his Oromo identity and adopted the Amhara identity fully, there was no sufficient reason for him to become Oromo resistance leader. His usage of the Amharic language and acceptance of the Orthodox Christianity were not enough to consider him as Amhara.[477] This puts the claim of General Taddasa's Amharization into question and makes the concept of Amharisation a problematic concept, not suitable to explain his real situation before he joined the MTSHA.

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[474] Patrick Gilkes,1975, p.226; Mekuria Bulcha, 2011,519.; Mohammed Hassen, "The History of Oromo Nationalism: 1960s-1990s," in : *Arrested Development in Ethiopia: Essays on Under Development, Democracy and Self-Determination*, edited by Seyoum Hamesso and Mohammed Hassen, pp. 249-50; *Informants*: Leencoo Lataa, Colonel Sahilu Bairri. My informants claim that *Inni akka Amaaraati (*he was like Amhara) before his membership to the MTSHA.

[475] Christopher Clapham, *Haile Selassie's Government*, (Longmans, Green and Co. Lt , 1969), p.81.

[476] Leenco Lata, *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads: Decolonization and Democratization or Disintegration?* (Lawrenceville: The Red Sea Press, 1999), p.178-179; *Informant*: Leencoo Lataa.

[477]This is because many of the founders of the MTSHA also spoke Amharic and were devout Orthodox followers.

Here, it is important to make a brief remark on the general concept of assimilation from which the concept of Amharization seemed to be derived or as both were used interchangeably to refer to his case. The concept of assimilation has a colonial connotation and was mainly promoted by the Portuguese and the French colonial theorists. Portugal initially applied the policy of assimilation to its colonies in Africa mainly to show that its government was non-racist so that anyone in the colonies could absorb Portuguese civilization. Individually, the intention of the policy was mainly to make him lose his identity, to 'colonize him mentally.' Eventually, though there were attempts in urban areas to integrate with the colonial system, Portugal did not succeed in destroying or significantly weakening the culture of its colonized African peoples. The majority of the rural population refused, maintained and defended their languages and cultures. Even some of those who were considered assimilated eventually returned to their sources by reverting to the masses from which they came.[478]

The French model of assimilation was proposed towards the end of the 19th century as one of the three possible alternative colonial policies forwarded to deal with its colonized subjects. The other two were subjection and autonomy. According to the French model, assimilation would be successful if the colonies way of life was destroyed completely.[479] For example, to be accepted by the French society, North Africans were expected to detach themselves in public from part of their ethnic identity. The dominated were inculcated with a sense of inferiority, while the dominators grew up feeling superior. These feelings on both parts

[478] Eduardo de Sousa Ferreira: *Portuguese Colonialism in Africa: the End of an Era*-with Introduction by Basil Davidson, (Paris: the UNESCO, 1974), pp. 114-126. Thus though repressed and persecuted, African culture survived all the challenges in the spirits of the generations who were victims of colonialism. In other words, it was like the seed which buried in the soil and long awaits conditions favorable to germination in order to flourish again.

[479] Martin Deming Lewis, "One Hundred Frenchmen: The 'Assimilation' Theory in French colonial Policy," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol.4, No.2 (January 1962) , pp.131-133.

remained with the people. Evidences support that the existence of dual identities testifies that assimilation has partially failed in France as well.[480]

In general, the concept of assimilation has been applied in connection with the study of European colonies in Africa and the immigrants in industrialized western societies. For example, three different theories of assimilation have been advanced to explain the situations in the USA. These are "Anglo-Conformity", the "Melting pot", and "Cultural Pluralism". Anglo-Conformity has been the most prevalent approach in which others have to conform totally to the values of the Anglos in the United States to be accepted as Americans.[481] This led to the process of Americanization, a process of "becoming American," through organized efforts to encourage the transformation of immigrants into "Americans". It did exist both in informal and formal ways and often used interchangeably with assimilation.[482]

Later in the 1960s and after, black rights and other movements led to multiculturalism.[483] Social and political pressures of assimilation have, however, generated opposition and social divisions.[484] Eventually, even though some form of cultural behavior might reflect Anglo-conformity, a complete assimilation was impossible. As a result, theorists began to look for alternative views such as cultural pluralism and ethno-genesis because the traditional assimilationist model does not explain the persistence of ethnicity regardless of pressures

[480] Jessica Brooke, "Dual Identity in the Context of North African Assimilation in France", *Undergraduate Journal of Global Citizenship*, Vol.1/Issue 2, Article 5, 2012.p: 20-23.

[481] Leonard Dinnerstein, "Assimialtion," *New Dictionary of the Historty of* I*deas,* edited by Maryanne Cline Horowitz, Vol.1, 2005, Thomas Gale, P.160.

[482] Michael R. Olneck, "Americanization," *New Dictionary of the Historty of Ideas,* edited by Maryanne Cline Horowitz, Vol.1, 2005, Thomas Gale,Pp. 60-62. Though Americanization was hoped to be inculcated through common schools which were often regarded as "cultural factories", it became a term of shame or disgrace together with assimilation with the coming of the idea of multiculturalism.

[483] *Ibid.*

[484] Andrada Costolu, "Thematic Articles- Migrants' Integration in Host Societies: Modes of Minorities Integration: Explaining historical, Economic and Political Factors," *Journal of Identity and Migration Studies*, vol.2, no 2, 2008, pp. 3-4.

even in USA. Assimilation theorists seem concerned mainly with certain cultural features of the adaptive process while ignoring issues related to economic and political subordination and inequality.[485]

Hence, assimilation has become one of the most controversial words of the colonial vocabulary and hence, there is no single well-articulated satisfactory definition.[486] For example, one can identify two fundamental meanings; becoming similar and complete absorption or conversion.[487] The two meanings are interrelated but they also differ significantly in their affective implications, moral and political suggestions, and intellectual respectability.[488] Thus, it is seen as a complex and gradual process in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups.[489]

There are at least seven different processes of assimilation which are identified as a general adaptation to the core society. These are cultural, structural, marital, identification, attitude, behavior and civic assimilations.[490] These all complex processes make the assimilation policy to become difficult, especially its relevance to an individual. In addition to its diverse contextual meanings, the term assimilation also reflects the concept of hierarchy of cultures.

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[485] Joe R. Feagin, pp.32-35.

[486] Lewis D., "The Assimilation Theory in French Colonial policy," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. IV(2), 1962, p. 202-203.

[487] Those who use the concept do not identify which meaning explains the case of my study subject.

[488] Both cases do not accommodate differences and had discriminatory structure. Non- American theorists and researchers use the term incorporation, integration and inclusion and they either avoid the word assimilation or are critical of it. For some theorists integration is situated somewhere between assimilation and multiculturalism, while for others it is a form of assimilation. One major problem with integration is the way it accommodates diversity. For some writers integration is simply another term for assimilation while others prefer to use the terms inclusions, incorporations or participation. Still some see no difference between integration and assimilation.

[489] Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, *Introduction to the Science of Society*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1924: 735 quoted in Joe R. Feagin, p. 28.

[490] Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964: 72-73 cited in Joe R. Feagin: 29. Thus because of the very complex nature of the concept, we have to be careful when examining the level of assimilation of a specific group or an individual.

Accordingly, it assumes that there are 'higher' and 'lower' or 'weak' and 'strong' cultures and hence pressurize that the 'lower and weak' cultures have to be sacrificed in favor of the 'strong and developed' cultures.[491]

When we come to the Ethiopian case with the above general conceptual background, assimilation is often used interchangeably with Amharization because the imperial government had tried to achieve national integration through imposing the Amhara cultural values over the other subjugated peoples or through assimilating them into the dominant Amhara culture.[492] However, there is no agreement among writers whether the policy of Amharization did exist or not during the Imperial period. There are scholars who totally refute that assimilation was not even attempted in Ethiopia. Rene Lefort, for example, argues that assimilation was a myth which was not even attempted.[493] Many argue that it did exist under the cover of different names. These included centralization, nation building, national integration, and other positive terms. According to Donald N. Levine, the Amharization policy of Emperor Haile Selassie was masked under centralization process which led to the adoption of laws that forbade the use of *Oromiffa* or Oromo language in publications and replacement of Oromo names.[494]

The policy had emanated from the attempt to transform an empire state of Ethiopia into a nation state through homogenization of language and culture. It was this process which was given a decent name of 'nation building' but it attempted to destroy the identities of other

[491] Abbas Haji, "Arsi Oromo Political and Military Resistance against the Shoan Colonial Conquest (1881-1886)," *JOS*, Vol.2, Numbers 1&2(1995), p.2.

[492] John Markakis, "The Bone of Contention in the Horn of Africa," in: *Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, edited by Georges Nzongola Ntalaja, Atlanta Georgia: African Studies Association Press, 1991, p.23.

[493] Rene Lefort, 1981, pp. 36-37.

[494] Donald N. Levine, *JOS, Vol.14, No.2,* 2007, p. 55. Several Oromo place names were changed after 1941, including Nazereth, Bishoftu etc.

nations and nationalities and impose a dominant culture. According to Abbas Haji, nation building was actually a non-offensive term used instead of assimilation or Amharization because its target was to bring homogenization under a single ethnic core, the Amhara identity.[495] The ruling Amhara elites perceived and attempted to shape the national identity in the image of their own ethnic and cultural character.[496] It was this attempt of assimilating the Oromo into the heart and soul of the Amhara values which came to be considered as Amharization.[497] Even if the capacity of the Ethiopian state to plan and execute it was questionable, it was the suppression of other identities and imposition of the Amharic language and culture on others which came to be known as Amharization.[498]

It is possible to argue that both Assimilation and Amharization are synonymous in this case because the officially projected "Ethiopian national identity" proved similar with the Amhara persona at the expense of others.[499] In the Imperial Ethiopian case, both refer to the policy pursued to impose the Amharic language and culture on the non- Amhara peoples of the empire.[500] Generally, what existed was the vague policy of Amharization which focused on selective incorporation of ethnic elites into the ruling class.[501] As Leenco Lata argues, it seems that there is a dichotomy regarding this policy if it did exist at all. On one hand, it

[495] Abbas Haji, "Arsi Oromo Political and Military Resistance…", *JOS, Vol.2, Numbers 1*&2 (1995), p.2.

[496] John Markakis, "The Bone of Contention in the Horn of Africa," in: *Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, edited by Georges Nzongola Ntalaja, Atlanta Georgia: African Studies Association Press, 1991, p.23.

[497] John Markakis, 2011, pp. 13-14.

[498] Mekuria Bulcha, 2011, p.473.

[499] Leenco Lata, 1999, pp.172-3; Teshale Tibebu, 1995,p. 13; Young, 1976,pp.524. Leenco argues that Amharaness and Ethiopianess were deliberately made to overlap that one had to adopt some of the main features of the "core Amhara culture' in order to be accepted as an Ethiopian. Thus promoting the Amhara values was made tantamount to promoting the glory of the nation while the reflection of other identities was regarded as tribal, divisive and anti-Ethiopian unity.

[500] Mekuria Bulcha, 2011,p.473; Azlan Tajudin, "Ethnnonational Oppression and International Apathy: Comparing the Struggles of the Oromo in Ethiopia and the Moro in the Philippines," *JOS, VOL.14*, No.2, 2007,p. 15); Saadia Jouval, 1963, p. 137.

[501] Edmond J. Keller, 1988, pp. 149-150. However, Keller does not define the term clearly.

seems that the subordinate groups wanted to be assimilated into the dominant group. On the other hand, it also seems that the dominant groups saw the process as a threat to their privileged status.[502] It was probably for this reason that the education of the Oromo was viewed as a threat. As it is discussed shortly, when General Taddasa attempted to spread literacy among the Oromo, he was advised to curtail it by the Prime Minister.

Haile Selassie had the dream of achieving national integration through the Amharization of the Ethiopian peoples.[503] In fact, even during the pre-Italian period, some of the elites educated in France and influenced by the French assimilationist theorists were proposing that the Oromo should be assimilated into the Amhara. It was hoped that Oromo would be turned into Amhara through education, the army and redrawing of provincial boundaries and settling the Amhara among the Oromo.[504] As part of the general effort, there were clear interests to bring language homogenization during this period which was reflected in the early 1930s when the need to formulate a clear language and education policy was underlined. Accordingly, it was made clear that the government would be happy if its entire people living in different parts of the country speak in Amharic. For this purpose, the missionaries were asked to conduct education only in the Amharic language because it was assumed that language unity would bring people together.[505] But Rene Lefort argues that the imposition of

[502] Leenco Lata, 2004, pp.121-123.

[503] Paulos Milkiyas, *Haile Selassie, Western Education and Political Revolution in Ethiopia*, Youngstown, New York: Cambria Press, 2006, p.53.

[504]Tedle Haile, quoted in Bahru Zewde, *Poineers of Change in Ethiopia: The Reformist Intellectuals of the Early Twentieth Century*, Addis Ababa: AAUP, 2005, pp. 131-133. As quoted in Bahru's book, Tedla Haile, the main proponent of the assimilation policy in the pre- Italian period, also warns the need to control the education of the Oromo and the danger of leaving it freely to the missionaries because it would give a possibility for Oromo nationalism to flourish, which would in turn challenge the assimilation project. Tedla feared that the Amhara and the Oromo would evolve into two different hostile nations if the latter were not assimilated into the first.

[505] Lapiso G. Dilebo, 1983 E.C: 113; See *Berhanena Selam* December 19, 1926 under the heading *Andinet*. Later in August 1944 it was decided that Amharic was the language of education.

the Amharic language served as an instrument and symbol of the Amhara 'cultural oppression' and political domination.[506]

The prevailing situations that had happened in the post 1941 forced few Oromo who joined the Imperial institutions to adjust themselves into the dominant culture promoted by the government.[507] Thus the few Oromo who joined the government institutions and those in urban areas were made to adjust themselves in order to get access to social services and other privileges.[508] They were expected to detach themselves from that of their own people and learn the language, culture, history and adopt the values and the ideologies of the dominant group.[509] In the process, some of them were forced to wear the Amhara 'mask' in order to hide themselves from the inferiority complex that eventually developed.[510] In fact, in heterogeneous society, the disadvantaged groups often seek adjustment into the dominant culture because it would help them to get access to employment and social acceptability.[511]

Those Oromo who refused to do so were subjected to various forms of discriminations and exploitations.[512] For example, the language policy significantly affected the opportunity of the Oromo students to get access to modern education in the post 1941 because of the language barrier and the Amharization of the Ethiopian school system.[513] As the proficiency

[506] Rene Lefort, pp. 96-97.
[507] Lemmu Baissa, 1998, p.81.
[508] Asafa Jalata, *Oromia and Ethiopia* … p. 161; Azlan Tajudin, *JOS, VOL.14,* No.2, 2007, p. 15. See also Mekuria Bulcha, 1993; Markakis, 1987.
[509] Hamdesa Tuso, 1987, pp. 20-21.
[510] Asafa and Mohammed, 2014, p. 65.
[511] Amare Tekle in Marina Ottaway, 1990, p.33.
[512] Mohammed Hassen, "The Militarization of the Ethiopian State and the Oromo," *Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on the Horn of Africa* (New York, NY: Marden Reproductions, Inc.1991), p. 94. Many of them were physically victimized, socially and culturally humiliated and devalued as human beings; Aberra Dagafa, "Language Choice in Multilingual Societies: An Appraisal of the Ethiopian Case," *JOS, Vol.5, No.2*(2008), pp. 76-77.
[513] Paulos Milkiyas, *Haile Selassie, Western Education and Political Revolution in Ethiopia*, Youngstown New York: Cambria Press, 2006, pp. 53-54.

of Amharic became a requirement to state employment and social mobility,[514] the Oromo were marginalized both economically and socially[515] leading to their domination and exploitation.[516] Thus, instead of homogenization, the policy elevated the Amhara identity and culture as symbols of Ethiopian nationality[517]and it had left no space to accommodate the different cultures into a national context.[518]Thus those who adjusted themselves represented only themselves and served only the interests of their patrons.[519]

Incongruous with the above view, there is a different opinion and argument which sees 'Amharization' as a process of acculturation, not an aspiration to 'become Amhara.' It is argued that Shawa, where General Taddasa Birru was born, had a separate identity different from that of the Amhara identity due to the long interaction between the Amhara and Oromo in that area.[520] According to this view, dividing the situation in Shawa along ethnic lines into

[514] John Markakis, 2011, pp. 13-14.

[515] Azlan Tajudin, *JOS, Vol.14*, No.2 (2007), p. 15. See also Mekuria Bulcha, 1997, pp.33-36.

[516] Leenco Lata, 1999, p. 174; C.M. Young, 1976, p. 524; See also Basil Davidson and Teshale Tibebu. This was probably because the dominant group feared for their own privileges. Moreover, for the same reason it is reported that even baptism itself was not carried out because of economic and social interests attached to it. See Mohammed Hassen, "A Short History of Oromo Colonial Experience: Part Two, Colonial Consolidation and Resistance, 1935-2000," *JOS*, Vol.7, Numbers 1&2(2000), p.119.) There is a popularly told joke regarding a failed baptism of an Oromo known as Badhaasaa, "Hin taane Kiristinnaan Badhaasaa irra deebiyaa kaasaa". A newly converted Oromo who was told by his godfather to avoid the consumption of milk and meat on Wednesdays and Fridays continued to consume when his god father visited him deliberately on those days. Finally, it is said that he asked his godfather to baptize his cow since he could not stop consuming milk, butter and meat. It is reported that an Oromo who was irritated by his godfather, who often received money for prayers of forgiveness, said: Anis aannan dhuguu hin dhiisu isinis birrii fudhachuu hin dhiiftan (I do not stop drinking milk and you will not stop receiving money).

[517]Azlan Tajudin, *JOS*, Vol.14, No.2 (2007), 15. See also Mekuria Bulcha, 1997, pp. 33-36; Edmond Keller, 1998: 121; Mohammed Hassen, *JOS*, Vol.7, No.1&2(2000), pp. 119-122; John Markakis, "Ethnic Conflict and the State in the Horn of Africa" in *Ethnicity and Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, ed. By Katsuyoshi, 1994: 225

[518] Mekuria Bulcha, 2011, pp. 9-10; See also Edmond J. Keller, 1988.

[519] John Markakis, *National and Class*…..,P. 268. As will be discussed, though General Taddasa adjusted himself, he was able to detach himself later. They were unable to represent themselves let alone the wider population from whom they emerged though it has been claimed by some that the Oromo were always part of the government and not excluded.

[520] Christopher Clapham, *Haile Selassie's Government*, Longmans, Green and Co. Lt 1969, p. 81; Heran Sereke Berhan, "Ethiopia: A Historical Consideration of Amhara Ethnicity," *Twelfth International Conference on Ethiopian Studies*, 1994, pp. 754-755. It is argued that the first King of Shawa, Negassie was a self made Oromo leader who established his kingdom after the Abyssinian model.

Amhara-Oromo would be a distortion of historical fact because this view rejects the Amhara as a separate ethnic identity. Accordingly, the Amhara represents an elite group who emerged from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds and assembled around similar political, economic and social interests. In other words, it argues that the Amhara refers to the ruling elite which excluded even Amharas in other areas outside of Shawa.[521] This view rejects the existence of the policy of Amharization as an attempt to assemble others under the Amhara identity.

Clapham argues that Shawa was the place where the process of assimilation was intensified to the point that it would be difficult to make a clear distinction between the Amhara and the Oromo. His contention was that Ethiopia has always been a multinational state with a dominant core culture represented by Orthodox Christianity, the Amharic language, and the acceptance of traditions in the long Ethiopian history. He adds that by accepting this core culture, a small minority of the Oromo had always a place in the Ethiopian state though the majority of them were among the most exploited peoples. According to his view, the Oromo have been partly inside and partly outside the Ethiopian state with an ambivalent position. He contends that being an Amhara is a cultural behavior, instead of an ethnic identity.[522]

But as it is discussed earlier, the above argument is debatable. This is because in spite of long interactions between the Oromo and the Amhara in Shawa, there were also ethno-linguistic and cultural differences. The Amhara ruling elites had often tried to impose their own language, culture and domination over the others. This is stated, for example, by Anthony Smith who argues that both the Amhara of Ethiopia and the Pushtu of Afghanistan used a

[521]Heran Sereke Berhan, "Ethiopia: A Historical Consideration of Amhara Ethnicity," *Twelfth International Conference on Ethiopian Studies,* 1994, pp.765-769.

[522] Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia, 1988*, pp. 23-24. But he admits that its effectiveness would only be evaluated or determined during the time of crisis.

mixture of discriminatory and homogenizing measures to maintain their dominant rule. He contends that both attempted to create an Ethiopian and Afghan national identity in all their subject ethnic peoples, while preserving their own cultural and political supremacy respectively. Both were similar in that they tried to impose their culture on the projected larger group through the mechanism of absorbing the most talented Oromo and Tajiks into the dominant culture and hierarchy in their respective countries.[523] It was able to attract only few educated Oromo who were willing to sacrifice aspects of their cultural identity. They did this mainly because maintaining and promoting Oromo identity blocked access to goods and services and self-improvement.[524]

Though there was no openly declared policy of Amharization in the strict sense of the term, it was observed that the regime had worked towards it in the name of nation building, national integration and centralization. It is argued that Ethiopia has never been a nation and it was a state divided between the rulers and the subject nations. It was to bridge this gap that the imperial regime attempted to carryout nation building through Amharization.[525] John Markakis argues that the policy of centralization was extensively promoted by the Imperial regime and claims that Emperor Haile Selasssie was successful in this regard.[526] There are still those who use the term in reference to 'modernity', the socio-economic transformation

[523] Anthony D. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism*, The Camelot Press Ltd, 1971, p. 224.

[524] Asafa Jalata, 1993, pp. 161-162. But majority of the Oromo were not affected by this process because of limited interactions which helped the Oromo identity to survive continuous pressures to assimilate.

[525] Amare Tekle, "Continuity and Change in Ethiopian Politics," in T*he Political Economy of Ethiopia*, ed. by Marina Ottaway, John Hopkins University: Praeger Publishers, 1990, pp.33-34. According to Amare Tekle, Amharanization or Amharization refers to the attempt to create a political system based on the Amhara domination and the making of others to accept Amhara identities. The systematic policy of political repression of the cultural, social and religious values and institutions of other nationalities were carried out through the Orthodox Church, government school system and the Amharic language among others. Passing through these agents was a pre-requisite for employment and social acceptability. See his footnotes number 9 and 10 on page 48.

[526] John Markakis, "The Bone of Contention in the Horn of Africa," in *Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, edited by Georges Nzongola Ntalaja(Atlanta Georgia: African Studies Association Press), 1991, p.22.

and expansion of state power after the late 19th century. This view accuses the ethno-political groups and promoters for using the concept deliberately to propagate their own ethnic consciousness and solidarity.[527]

According to Gemetchu Megerssa, even though the concept of assimilation is applied to some extent to the study of industrialized western societies, it is not an appropriate approach to study the Oromo case mainly because it fails to see it from the Oromo view point.[528] He believes that the policy had attempted to disassociate the Oromo from his Oromo identity in order to qualify him as a good Ethiopian.[529] This remark suggests that there is no suitable theory to define the concept of Amharization or assimilation regarding the Oromo case in the Ethiopian situation.

The Amharization model is not enough to explain the case of Taddasa Birru. If an Amharized person is understood as someone who had changed his/her identity to that of the Amhara, including psychological makeup, there is no time that Taddasa Birru had denied his Oromo identity. Moreover, there was no reason for him to promote the Oromo cause that would antagonize him with the Emperor. If so, the question here is that why many people understood him as Amharized before he joined the MTSHA? It seems that some of those who regarded him as Amharized have probably based themselves on the overt features of his personality. As discussed elsewhere, some of these overt features included his devout

[527] Tsegaye Tegenu, "Ethiopia: What is in a Name?", *Thirteenth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Ethiopia in Broader Perspectives, Kyoto, 1997, pp.165-168.
[528] Gemetchu Megerssa, "Oromumma: Tradition, Consciousness and Identity," in *Being and Becoming Oromo*…, 1996, p.95.
[529] *Ibid.* p.101.

Orthodox, usage of Amharic, marriage to an Amhara wife and service to the imperial regime as a high ranking military and police officer.[530]

The case of General Taddasa was one piece of evidence that through the patronage of Amharization, it was impossible for the Imperial regime to destroy the identity of those Oromo who were in the service of its institutions to integrate them fully.[531] As a result, many of the subjugated people had retained their language, religion and culture without significant change.[532] The attempt to create a nation out of diverse peoples had failed not because of loose control but mainly because of the inequality perpetuated in the name of the policy[533]as the the movement of General Taddasa later showed. In general, there was no serious attempt to implement the policy of Assimilation, including Amharization, into practice with the intention to create a nation based on equality and equal opportunities.[534]

It was not only General Taddasa but many of the founders of the MTSHA who fulfilled the general cultural expectations of the time. They were Orthodox followers, married Amhara wives and spoke Amharic. But they eventually rebelled gainst Amharization and promoted

[530]*Informant*s: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa, Colonel Sahilu Birri, *Obbo* Leenco Lata; Mohammed Hassen, "The History of Oromo Nationalism: 1960s-1990s," in: *Arrested Development in Ethiopia: Essays on Under Development, Democracy and Self-Determination*, edited by Seyoum Hamesso and Mohammed Hassen, pp. 249-50 Indeed, what is undeniable is that he was sent to the nearby Orthodox Church School of Sire Madhanealem at a very young age. Shortly, he departed from his family due to their sudden death during the Italian occupation. He then joined the resistance fighters but was captured and taken to Somalia as a prisoner. Up on his return in 1941 he was recruited into the Imperial Ethiopian armed forces and joined the service of the regime. As a result, at the beginning, he came to have little opportunity to use his mother tongue both at home and at work though his wife knew it to some extent because she grew up among the Oromo in western Shawa. His marriage was accidental and he did not intend to marry only an Amhara wife. He did not have any intention to hide his ethnic identity but frequently used Amharic in his daily conversations. It seems that his characterization as Amharized was partly based on these overtly reflected behaviors which were actually not unique among the Oromo notables in Shawa.

[531] Addis Hiwot, 1975, p.99.

[532] Rene Lefort, 1983,p. 36.

[533] Baro Tumsa, "Decentralization and Natio Building (in Ethiopia), " LLB, HSIU, 1973, p.29.

[534]Martin Deming Lewis, "One Hundred Frenchmen: The "Assimilation" Theory in French colonial Policy," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol.4, No.2 (January 1962) , pp.139-153. According to Lewis much of the problem was not related to the illogicality and impossibility of assimilation but to lack of enthusiastic implementation of the policy.

their Oromo identity. Taddasa Birru, as a high ranking military and police officer, was expected to reflect the culture of the dominant Amhara elites and consider himself as part of it. As a result, though he was known to, at least, his close friends and relatives in Salaalee, he closeted his Oromo identity for sometime to fulfill the expectations. The founders of the MTSHA knew him very well and that was why they had made relentless efforts to bring him to the Association. According to an informant, the news of his membership created a big delight among the members of the Association.[535]

I contend that his later activities, speeches and movements, as will be seen in the next chapters, were clearly contradictory to the behavior of an Amharized person. Instead, they reflected that he rebelled against Amharization and promoted strong anti- *neftegna* Oromo nationalism. Moreover, we have to understand the difference between a fulfillment of observable cultural requirements needed by the regime and complete absorption when we talk about the concept of Amharization. I argue that it is because of the first reason that some claim him to be Amharized. For example, it seems that Prime Minister Aklilu was deceived by the overt features of General Taddasa when he told him the existing government secrets regarding the Oromo education.

It is unclear how Aklilu came to assume that Taddasa was an Amhara. According to an informant, since his wife was from Menz and involved herself in the Menz Association, Aklilu could have assumed that Taddasa too was a Menze.[536] It is reported that General Taddasa himself was heard saying that Aklilu came to consider him as Amhara probably

[535] *Informant*: Colonel Sahilu Birri.

[536] *Informant: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa. In fact, though General Taddasa had allowed his wife to participate in the Association, he prohibited her from taking his children to attend a get together organized by this association.

because he registered himself as Menze (someone from the region of Menz, the core centre of the Amhara rulers at the time) in 1941 when he joined the Imperial army.[537] According to a family member, however, he did not register himself as a Menze and he was not a person who could change his identity. His relatives in Salaalee knew him very well and he too also kept his contact with them.[538]

As indicated above, many of the founders of the MTSHA were Christianized Oromo and General Taddasa was not an exception. He was culturally fit and fulfilled the expectation of the regime. In fact, the political system of the regime did not encourage non-Amhara officials, especially the Oromo, to express their ethnic identity freely and to be proud of it. However, this does not mean that he lost his Oromo identity and became Amharized. If he was Amharized and dropped his Oromo identity, there was no reason for him to champion the cause of his own people by taking practical risks upon himself and his family members as was evident later. Moreover, if he was Amharized, as indicated in the literature, why could he be provoked by the remarks of the Prime Minister, which was regarded so far as a turning point for his joining of the MTSHA? He could have turned a deaf ear and enjoyed his luxurious life because the Oromo issue could no longer be his main concern.

What could be said of him at this time, in addition to the above mentioned conditions, was that he was not a nationalist. In fact, no one is naturally born as a nationalist and situations

[537]Olana Zoga, p.25. But Olana does not tell us why General Taddasa did this but he indicates that he regreted. However, one may question if this document was still referred to in the 1960s to identify the ethnic identity of the military officers and the authorities. Moreover, if we accept that he had registered himself as a Menze, probably he did it deliberately because he knew that those from Menz were favored, treated better, and got employment opportunities than people from other areas, including Salaalee. If so, we can assume that even in the early 1940s, he knew that the Salaalee Oromo and the Amhara from Menz did not have equal opportunities and he wanted to exploit it. This understanding, however, did not mean that he denied his Oromo identity because his target was to get employment and a means of survival. This was probably why he chose the safe way.

[538] *Informant: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa

force and convince individuals to become nationalists as it is discussed in the next chapter. Before his membership to the MTSHA, it seems that he did not have the stage to reveal himself as an Oromo publically. Later, when he realized that there were enough reasons and suitable conditions, he attempted to resist the status quo by putting himself unreservedly to the forefront. In fact, the spirit of resistance had grown up with him from the early age when he became a resistance fighter at the age of fourteen. As repeatedly argued elsewhere, the Salaalee, and the Tuulamaa Oromo in general, had a long tradition of resistance and rebellion against perceived injustices and maltreatment. I argue that this was reflected in the life of General Taddasa, especially in explaining his sudden turn to take actions, as is discussed in the next chapters, regardless of the consequences.

With the above discussion of the conceptual framework of Amharization, it seems fair to put the claim of General Taddasa's Amharization into question. In doing so, I argue that his Oromo cultural behavior was closeted for sometimes due to the existing pressure of the government sponsored Amharization. However, he rebelled against Amharization; joined the MTSHA and became a leading Oromo nationalist eventually.

Chapter Four
The Foundation of the MTSHA and the Membership of General Taddasa Birru

This chapter focuses on two points. The first is to examne the rationale behind the formation of the MTSHA while the second part carefully looks into the reasons that pushed General Taddasa to join the Association. Since General Taddasa emerged as a prominent leader of the Oromo movement through the MTSHA[539], it is important to look into how this Association was established. The intention here is not to write a detailed account of how it was formed but to focus briefly on the grievances that pushed its founders to establish the Association. As discussed below, the Association was formed and led by those Oromo elites who were disillusioned with the imperial system and attempted to address Oromo problems by mobilizing the people. Though General Taddasa's conversation with the Prime Minister has been regarded as a major reason for his joining of the MTSHA, he had several reasons to do so. Thus when he joined the Association, he had enough reasons not to return back. Oral and written sources are carefully explored to analyze this part.

4.1 The Formation of the Macha-Tulama Self-Help Association in 1963

When the Imperial regime permitted the establishment of self-help associations, the Oromo elites exploited it as an opportunity to express the prevailing ethnic grievances. In the absence of any other suitable stages, the self-help association was used to reflect the existing oppressive economic and political life of the country. One of the movements to fill this gap

[539]The Association initially intended to bring together the descendants of the two brothers: Maccaa and Tuulamaa, as the name indicates. But it was able to include other Oromo groups. It consolidated the Oromo unity and opened branches almost all over the country, especially in Oromo inhabited areas. Indeed, it was not limited to the Oromo and was open to all Ethiopians.

in the 1960s was made by the MTSHA. The other very important movement was made by the students.[540] In fact, since it was impossible to establish political parties or other organizations during the Imperial regime, the only available option was to establish self-help and other associations.[541] Of the associations that existed in the 1960s, the most notable ones were the *Fidel Serawit* (National Literacy Campaign) Association and the MTSHA.[542] Indeed, both Associations were led by General Taddasa[543]and this fact can be taken as a piece of evidence for his leadership qualities outside of his regular military and police careers.

The Oromo had long established grievances which were reflected on several stages of the Association. The Oromo grievances go back to their conquest and subjugation in the late 19th century when the majority of them, except some collaborators, became landless *gebbars.* The conditions of the Oromo *gebbars* continued to deteriorate throughout the Imperial regime. Even though there were protests against the oppressive Ethiopian government policies in many Oromo areas, it was only in the 1960s that the Oromo were able to come together under the MTSHA as a culturally united people. The Association dedicated itself to improve the living conditions of the Oromo as well as their self- confidence and pride.[544]

The MTSHA was, therefore, formed as one of the general responses of the Oromo against their maltreatment under the Imperial regime, regardless of their educational status and

[540]Teshome G.Wagaw, "Emerging Issues of Ethiopian Nationalities: Cohesion or Disintegration," *Northeast African Studies,* 2,3 (1980-81), 3,1(1981), p.70.

[541] *Ethiopian Herald,* August 3, 1968. It seems that in a country without political parties, the Association took political role and attempted to improve the conditions of the Oromo with the self-help through creating self-awareness among the Oromo.

[542]Fiseha Desta, *Abiyotuna Tizitaye,* Tsehay Publishers, 2008 *A.M*.,pp. 19-20.

[543] Contrary to the assumption of some writers, General Taddasa was never a president of the MTSHA. But undoubtedly he was a leading figure of the Association. The President of the Association until its closure was Colonel Alamu Qixxeessaa.

[544]Edmond J.Keller, "Revolution, Class and the National Question: The Case of Ethiopia," *Northeast African Studies, 2,3*(1980-81), 3,1(1981), p.60.

services. This was why the key founders of the association were members of the Ethiopian military, bureaucracy and private enterprises who felt ignored despite their services. Many of them realized that they were denied of the positions they deserved in view of their contributions to the regime when compared with others. They believed that those who had contributed little were promoted to higher positions. It was this realization which partly turned them against the regime and its system they had been serving for many decades.[545]

Thus though the founders of the MTSHA were relatively the most privileged, they felt excluded from the core decision making process within the imperial political establishment. They realized that in spite of their achievements they had been treated as inferiors due to their Oromo background. Though they were mainly Christians, culturally fit and spoke Amharic, they were not fully treated as equals by the ruling Amhara elites.[546] As a result, despite their attempt to adjust themselves culturally, they were denied full integration and fair share of power. They were systematically excluded from holding core positions within the Ethiopian bureaucracy.[547]

However, it was through their services to the Imperial regime that they became politically aware and learned more about the prejudices against the Oromo people. They began to be concerned and started thinking about how to improve the living conditions of their own

[545] *Informants*: Colonel Sahilu Birri, Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa. For example, they argue that after the 1960 coup and the susbsequent death of General Tsige Dibu, nobody expected that the police commander would be brought from other area while General Taddasa was within the police. Moreover, *Dajjazmach* Kebede Bizunesh, a distinguished patriot, could not go beyond *awraja* governor.

[546] Mohammed Hassen, "The History of Oromo Nationalism:1960s-1990s," *in Arrested Development in Ethiopia: Essays on Underdevelopment, Democracy and Self Determination*, edited by Seyoum Hameso and Mohammed Hassen,2006, p.249; see also Lemmu Baisa, 1998, p.81. Indeed, they were the sons of defeated and subjugated Oromo and their place seems to have been structurally well defined. It is true that there were Oromo individuals who had been serving the Ethiopian government with their full capacity. But they were not given equal recognition. Indeed, many of them had carried out cultural adjustment because their Oromo identity became an obstacle for them to get access to goods and services and self-improvement.

[547] Mekuria Bulcha, 1994, *JOS*, Vol. 1&2, p.104. The existence of individual Oromo in the service of the regime does not mean that the majority of Oromo were treated with fairness.

people. For this purpose, they started to organize themselves under the MTSHA to bring Oromo national development.[548] To mobilize and organize people for development activities, they found it important to create political consciousness. Hence, the meetings of the Association were often used as political stages,[549]to influence and challenge the government to respond to Oromo issues.[550] They wanted to make it an agent of social change and a united Oromo voice that could be heard within the larger field of Ethiopian politics. In other words, they wanted the recognition of Oromo identity within the larger Ethiopian identity.[551] The foundation of the MTSHA was based on the feeling that the Oromo inhabited areas were ignored and it was formed basically based on ethnic feeling of being discriminated. This was commonly known as provincial feeling at the time[552] but it was an expression of Oromo ethno-nationalism.[553]

In addition to their personal grievances, the Oromo elites understood that their fate was much related to that of their own people. Mazrui expresses similar circumstances in Kenya when he says, "In identifying his ultimate interests, a Kikuyu businessman sees his future in the survival of Kikuyu preeminence in Kenya much more than he sees his future in terms of a shared destiny with a Luo businessman."[554] The founders of the MTSHA felt that their conditions were not separable from that of their own people and through the Association they

[548] *Infromants*: *Obbo* Taye Badhaadhaa, Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa. See also Asafa Jalata, "Ethiopia and Ethnic Politics: The Case of Oromo Nationalism," *Dialetical Anthropology*, Kluwer Academic Publishers: Vol.18, ¾, Dec 1993, p.385.

[549] *Informants*: Colonel Sahilu Birri, Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa. See also Edmond Keller, 1988, pp. 160-163; 1998, pp.118-19.

[550] Mohammed Hassen, "The History of Oromo Nationalism:1960s-1990s," *in Arrested Development in Ethiopia: Essays on Underdevelopment, Democracy and Self Determination*, edited by Seyoum Hameso and Mohammed Hassen , p. 246.

[551] Mohammed Hassen, *JOS, Vol.7*, 2000, pp.125-126.

[552] Taye Gurmu, 1969, p.60.

[553] Bahru Zewde, 2014, pp.67-68.

[554]Ali Mazrui, 1982, p. 44. General Taddasa was highly frustrated at the deteriorating situation of the Oromo and that was why he was always concerned for the poor and was on their side.

expressed their resistance to their mistreatment.[555] They argued that the Oromo paid taxes for various purposes but did not get services they deserved in return. With this realization, some of them had already started to establish schools in their own respective areas. Eventually, they brought their individual efforts under the coordination of the MTSHA when it was formally established.[556] Its founders wanted to improve the declining material and social life of the Oromo through the mobilization of its human and material resources.[557] In short, the Association was established to challenge the discriminatory policy of the Imperial regime.

When we come to the actual foundation of the MTSHA, one of the roots was linked to the town of Amboo[558], where Hagere Hiwot Self-Help Association was initiated. It was established in 1956 by those individuals who were born in Amboo but lived in Addis Ababa. This self help association invited Colonel Alamu Qixxeessaa in 1960 to be a member. But before joining it, he wanted the association to be inclusive both in terms of geography and membership instead of limiting itself to a very small locality of Amboo. He argued that he himself was from Jalduu but Hagere Hiwot referred only to the town of Amboo. He suggested that its name should change from Hagere Hiwot to Jibaat and Maccaa to be more

[555]Asafa Jalata, " Socio-cultural origins of the Oromo National Movement in Ethiopia," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, 1993, Vol. 21, p. 273.

[556] *Informants*: *Obbo* Abera Mekonnen, *Obbo* Gugsa Mekonnen. For example, *Qagnazmach* Mekonnen Wasanu had established schools at Waajituu-Daalotaa and Sharaaroo (Debre Tsige) by organizing and convincing the local community on the importance of education. He also attempted to benefit the local community through different mechanisms. Indeed, the MTSHA eventually formed as a result of the consciousness that was developing in the 1950s and early 1960s. This was because many educated Oromo began to cultivate their sense of collective identity, consolidate their self- confidence and pride and confront the discriminations that targeted all of them regardless of their religious faith, education and gender. They believed that the Oromo lagged behind in terms of educational opportunities, health services, road construction and other basic infrastructure and they began to think ways and means to improve them. See Mohammed Hassen, 1998, p.155.

[557] Mekuria Bulcha, 2011, pp. 531-532. Before the actual formation of the MTSHA there were attempts among the Oromo to come together in different forms of associations. Accordingly, the Oromo youth also formed the Afran Qalloo and Biiftuu Ganamoo Musical groups in Dirre Dawa in the 1960s to promote Oromo culture.

[558]Ambo was renamed Hagere Hiwot by the Emperor as a general practice of replacing the Oromo names with others.

inclusive. The Oromo members were happy with the suggested name change while others who disagreed withdrew gradually. In the newly reformed Jibaat and Maccaa Self Help Association, Colonel Alamu was elected as its president.[559]

Colonel Alamu worked very hard to increase the membership of the new Jibaat and Maccaa Association and was able to bring many new members. One of the key individuals whom he contacted was Haile Mariam Gammadaa, who was to make another contribution by enlarging the Association. Both Haile Mariam and Colonel Alamu, as lawyers, often met at the Supreme Court taking different cases. When Haile Mariam was invited he expressed that he was not happy with the limited representation of the name Jibaat and Maccaa and insisted that it should be more inclusive. He remarked, "Oromoon bal'aadha maaliif maqaa awraja tokkoon dhaabdan?" (Since the Oromo is wide; why did you establish it only in the name of a single sub-province?). He added that there was another Association, the Tualamaa Self Help Association, in which he was a member. He asked Colonel Alamu to combine the two associations and form a bigger one in the name of Maccaa and Tuulamaa, their forefathers. Colonel Alamu replied that he could not decide by himself alone but promised him to bring the issue to the meeting of his association for final decision.[560]

Eventually, when the two Associations were brought together for combination and the name change was formally suggested, some non-Oromo members challenged it. They argued that the new name was not important. The Oromo members, however, argued that, "Abbaan barbaade dhiisee haa ba'u malee maqaan kun Oromoo waan walitti fiduuf mirkanaa'uu

[559]*Informant:* Colonel Sahilu Birrii. He argues that Colonel Alamu wanted a relatively inclusive association when he remarked, "My district is Jalduu and my town is also Jalduu. Hagere Hiwot refers only to Ambo. Therefore, rename the *Hiddir* as Jibaat and Maccaa."

[560]*Ibid.* This was possible because he had contacts with many individuals when he was serving as a defense lawyer of the armed forces.

qaba." (Whoever wants can leave the Association but since this name brings the Oromo together it should be approved).[561] After a hot debate, the name change was approved and the MTSHA was established on January 24, 1963.[562] The adoption of the name Maccaa and Tuulamaa was significant for many reasons. Of these, the most important one was its aspiration to restore Oromo unity.[563]

Following the establishment of the Association, Haile Mariam Gammadaa, who became the secretary of the Association, worked hard to get its legal recognition. However, the Association had to wait for a period of close to one and half years to be officially registered and recognized legally. Eventually, the Ministry of Interior and Public Security gave permission on May 19, 1964 with restriction of rights. Accordingly, it had to inform the Ministry fifteen days before its every general meeting so that the security agents could follow its activities closely.[564]

With the name Maccaa and Tuulama, the Association was able to cross to Arsii and spread to all over Oromo territories within a short period of time. With the intention of bringing Oromo unity as much as possible, the Association soon established its branches all over the country. Accordingly, it opened offices all over the former provinces of Wallaggaa, Kaffa, Sidamo, Baalee, Arsii, Hararge, Shawa, Walloo, Tigray and even Eritrea. In other words, MTSHA

[561] *Ibid.* See Olana Zoga, p.15 for the debate regarding the name change and the reaction of Zewuge Booji'aa.

[562] Olana Zoga, p. 15.

[563] Mekuria Bulcha, 2011, p.526. In the past the descendants of the two Oromo brothers had a common *Caffee* (Gada Council) at Odaa Nabee before they were separated. The formation of the MTSHA was probably an attempt to restore an old unity between the two major Oromo brothers which could be taken as a basis for the formation of modern Oromo unity. It seems that since the founders wanted to bring the descendants of the two brothers together, they preferred the name of their forefathers. Even though there is a small district called Maccaa in western Shawa, the name Maccaa refers to a wider territory from west of Tuulamaa up to the border of the Sudan. Thus the MTSHA initially represented central and western Oromo before it moved to eastern and other Oromo territories.

[564] Olana Zoga, pp. 20-22; Habtamu, pp.27-29.

that emerged in the administrative region of Shawa quickly expanded to the rest of the country. There was no other Oromo organization than the MTSHA that had attempted to gather as many Oromo living in different areas together until that time. As a result, it is safe to say that it was the first pan-Oromo organization of its kind, which rallied many Oromo from all regions of Oromia around a common cause.[565] It was General Taddasa, as will be seen in the next chapter, who played a key role in this respect. The Association also attempted to provide basic services to the Oromo.[566]

Regarding the objectives of the Association, both covert and overt, one of its founders explained earlier that,

> *Uummati keenna of baree walis baree dhiibbaa isarra jiru beekee mirga isaa akka gaafatu kakaasuu dha. Kun hojii keessa keessaan hojjetamu haata'u malee seera waldaa gubbaa irratti hojii Waldaa Maccaa fi Tuulamaa jedhamee wanti ibsame kan biraati. Kunis walgargaarree mana barumsaa, mana fayyaa, masgiida, bataskaana ijaaruu, karaa baasuu fi rakkataa gargaaruu dha.*
>
> *To enable our people to become conscious of themselves ; know each other and the burden on them in order to initiate them to ask for their rights. This is the activity which is done secretly but the Association clearly stated its objectives in its legal document. These include the establishment of schools, clinics, Mosques, Churches, construction of roads and the helping of the poor.*[567]

It is understandable that the Association had two different objectives stated explicitly and implicitly. The first was to improve the welfare of the Oromo people while the second was to create a conscious society that would struggle for its rights. In other words, though its clearly

[565]Benti Getahun, *JOS, Vol.9*, No.1&2, 2002, pp. 84-85. According to informants, when the Association expanded outside the Maccaa and Tuulamaa territories there was a suggestion of name change but it was feared that name change could attract the attention of the authorities who were suspecting the Association from the very beginning.

[566] Laphiso G. Dilebo, 1983 *A.M*, pp.271-272.

[567] *Barruulee Gadaa, Lakk.1, Sadaasa* 1992, pp.4-8. This was the account of Colonel Alamu Qixxeessaa, the chairman of the Association.

stated duty was to bring Oromo development through self-help, it had tried to resist the imperial oppressive rule by creating political consciousness among the Oromo. What the Association did was that it attempted to organize and mobilize the Oromo for both purposes.[568]

The establishment of the MTSHA was a clear expression of the fact that the Imperial regime had failed to integrate the Oromo, at least the elite, into the socio-economic and political system. We may agree that some of the Oromo elites were willing to integrate themselves but worked under difficult situations. The case of two individuals, Emmanuel Abraham[569] and General Taddasa, is important. The first was accused of educating only the Oromo while the latter was asked not to educate the Oromo. Though dubbed Amharized in the literature, General Taddasa dispelled this view by joining the MTSHA and distinguishing himself as a key leader of Oromo ethno-nationalist resistance against the Imperial regime and the *Darg*. He had several reasons which had forced him to do so. Though dubbed Amharized, the Oromo elites, including General Taddasa, eventually returned to the cause of their own people and they had many reasons for that.

4.2 Brigadier General Taddasa's Reasons for Joining the MTSHA in June 1964

Contrary to the claim of some writers and even informants who dub him Amharized, General Taddasa had a number of grievances and reasons which pushed him to join the MTSHA. Moreover, though the advice of Aklilu Habte Wold, not to expand literacy among the

[568] Asafa Jalata, "Emergence of Oromo Nationalism…,"p.6; Mekuria Bulcha, 2011, p.449; Ibsa Gutama, *Prison of Conscience Upper Compund Maikelawi: Ethiopian Terror Prison and Tradition*, New York: Barlabsi Gubirmans Publishing, 2001, p. 79. It was mainly the consciousness which was generated by the MTSHA that eventually led to the formation of the OLF in 1974. The founders assumed that in order to mobilize the people for development, it was important to make them politically conscious.

[569] Emmanuel Abraham, *Reminiscences of My Life*. Oslo, Norway: Lund Forlag, 1995, pp.63-64.

Oromo, is considered to be the major reason for his membership, he had many other reasons accumulated over time. It seems that he was closer to the Emperor and the Prime Minister after the coup of 1960 but he had his own complaints. During the coup, the Emperor was said to have made radio communication with him; thanked him for his loyalty and promised him to have a private discussion after his return. It is reported, however, that later when they met the Emperor provoked him by rejecting his request. He requested His Majesty to give pardon to the prisoners of the Imperial Bodyguard whom he had captured during the coup. According to informants, he requested, "I beg your Majesty to give pardon to those prisoners in my hands." But for the Emperor, who had expected the usual demands of either a request of reward or promotion, it was a provocative demand. It is reported that the Emperor could not believe what he had heard and warned Taddasa not to repeat such a request again. The Emperor is reported to have said, "ምን አልክ? ሁለተኛ እንዲህ አይነት ነገር መስማት አንፈልግም።" (What did you say? We never want to hear such a thing again).[570]

Equally important, the response of the Emperor was also provocative to Taddasa because he felt betrayed in the view of his contribution in defending the Emperor during the coup. Colonel Taddasa had earlier promised his prisoners, in the hope of positive response from the Emperor, that he would beg the Emperor for their release or at least their fair treatment. However, he felt ashamed and broken when the Emperor rejected his first request. He tried to convince him that the soldiers were forced to act according to the existing military discipline which required them to accept and implement the order of their commanders without any hesitation. In other words, he tried to put the blame on the leaders of the Imperial Bodyguard

[570] *Informants*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa, Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa. After the coup of 1960 the Police Commission was made responsible directly to the Emperor and this gave him an opportunity to become closer to the Emperor.

in order to make ordinary soldiers and junior officers innocent but in vain. He was sad for his failure to support them and eventually many of the prisoners were transferred to the remote region of Ogaden as a punishment.[571] Even worse, though Taddasa was appreciated by the captives for his good care and treatment, he was criticized by the higher authorities for his good treatment of the enemies of the Emperor.[572]

At least since this time, there were a number of issues which continued to provoke General Taddasa until he entered the MTSHA and even later. After the coup, there was a growing suspicion of the Oromo military officers in spite of their immense contributions in foiling it. After the coup, the regime began to follow a secret policy of controlling and limiting the promotion of high ranking officers of Oromo origin who were all on the side of the Emperor during the coup. Paradoxically, they were suspected of disloyalty and were exposed to discrimination. This encouraged them to think in terms of politics.[573]

The regime's interest to limit the promotion of Oromo military officers under the pretext of avoiding future challenge angered Oromo officers including Colonel Alamu Qixxeessaa, who began to worry about the future of his own people.[574] It is reported that while he was still working in the Ministry of Defense as a legal officer, Colonel Alamu received a letter which stated,

> *Oromoon' loltuu keessa baay'achuun wanta barbaachisaa hin taaneef kana booda saba biraa malee 'Oromoon' hojii loltummaa keessa akka hin galle.*

[571] *Ibid*. Earlier the police was responsible to the Ministry of Interior.

[572] Mamo Wudineh, *Yedereskubet:Gile Tarikina Tizitawoch*(Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, *Hamle* 1997 *A. M*), p. 218.

[573] *Informants*: Colonel Sahilu Birri, *Obbo* Taye Badhaadhaa. See also Mohammed Hassen, "General Taddessee Birru, 1921-1975," *Goota Oromiyaa*, 2008, pp.333-334; See also Olana Zoga, p.12.

[574] Olana Zoga, pp.12-13; see also Baxter, 1996, p.77.

> *Since the Oromo dominance in the army is not necessary, from now onwards, unless from other peoples, the Oromo should not be recruited.*[575]

When the officers from different departments of the Ministry of Defense met to discuss the implementation of this circular letter, it is reported that Colonel Alamu raised that why the Oromo were denied employment opportunity in the Ministry and the chance of serving and protecting their own country. He questioned whether the Oromo were not loyal to the government? But he was told that since the letter was from the higher authorities, there was no chance of reversing it. The Oromo officers who had heard about this letter were very sad and they began to discuss what to do in the future in the view of this discriminatory approach against them.[576] Despite the claim of large Oromo presence within the army, the reality was that even by the 1960 their number was still very small. For example, the survey made on the cadets of the Harar Military Academy in 1959-1960 showed that 53% Amhara, 26% Tigreans, 8% Adare and Oromo and no response 13%. According to the survey, the Oromo and the Adare constituted only 8% of the cadets in the Academy.[577]

After the 1960 coup, there was a general frustration on the side of the Oromo military officers, including General Taddasa, when they learnt the existence of restriction over the promotion of Oromo military officers and the recruitment of the Oromo into the military in general. For example, though Colonel Taddasa and Colonel Jagamaa Kelloo were among the military officers of Oromo origin who contributed a lot in the foiling of the coup, they were not happy with the way they were treated after it. According to an informant, for example, in

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[575] *Barruulee Gadaa, Lakk.1,* November, 1992, pp.4-8. The *Bulletin* made an interview with Colonel Alamu himself and as will be discussed later General Taddasa was also advised not to recruit the Oromo into the Police Emergency Force.

[576] *Ibid.*

[577] Donald N. Levine, "The Military in Ethiopian Politics: Capabilities and Constraints," in: *The Military Intervenes: Case Studies in Political Development*, edited by Henry Bienen, Rusell Sage Foundation 1968, p.15.

Jagamaa's case, while it was a known fact that he had a personal dispute with Colonel Debebe Haile Mariam over marriage competition, the latter was promoted to Brigadier General and was made the commander of the Imperial Body Guard while Jagamaa remained a Colonel and was made a Brigade commander. This situation angered and infuriated Jagamaa because he felt betrayed that he was not given the position he deserved that matched his contributions. This created an atmosphere of disappointment among the Oromo military officers in general.[578] It was this realization which became one of the major factors that pushed the Oromo officers to form and join the MTSHA.[579]

Regarding Colonel Taddasa, nobody expected that the police commissioner would be brought from other office, outside the police, in the view of his long service, experience and contributions during the 1960 coup. In the words of an informant: "Osoo Jeneraal Taaddasaan achi jiruu ajajaa Poolisii bakka biraatii fidu jedhee namni yaade hin jiru" (While General Taddasa was there [in the Police] nobody expected that they would bring the Police chief from other office [instead of promoting him]). Taddasa was not even made a deputy police chief until after some months. Eventually, he became one of the deputies.[580]

This situation led Taddasa to realize that there were Amhara officers and civilian officials who held high positions than him but less qualified and experienced. He felt that the posts he held were much lower than what he deserved to be. His expectation to become the commissioner of the police force, or a minister or a governor of a province remained

[578] *Informant:* Colonel Sahilu Birri. For example, though Colonel Jagamaa led the army in Addis Ababa against the coup makers he was not given what he deserved. This even pushed him to leave the military and go back to his home area of Dandi vowing to live by farming the land of his father. It was while driving to Dandii that he encountered car accident before reaching Managesha which left him with fatal injury. As a result, he was admitted to hospital and while there that he was promoted to Brigadier General.

[579] *Informants:* Colonel Sahilu Birri; Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa.

[580] *Informant:* Colonel Sahilu Birri. The Police Commission came to have two or three deputies.

unfulfilled. At personal level he felt that he was denied a post that matched with his talent, skill, ability and service which in turn hastened his politicization. He continued to believe that his status as a deputy commissioner of the police force and the commander of the small rapid force did not correspond with his long and dedicated service. As a veteran of anti-Fascist resistance and as one of the anti-coup leaders, he felt betrayed when he observed his position in comparison with other authorities who held higher positions. By 1963 General Taddasa realized that he was subjected to covert discrimination.[581] As discussed towards the end of this chapter, he argued that those who were once the servants of the Italian invaders were promoted to become governors.

General Taddasa was very much concerned about the low status given to the Oromo in the form of jokes and these jokes were circulated among the public. [582] He raised this issue in the speeches he made on various meetings of the Association. Its content and who originated the story will be explained under the next chapter when discussing the contents of his speech at Abeebee Qeerransaa meeting of the MTSHA. The most provocative part of this story was that the Oromo were put below cattle in terms of rank which deeply offended General Taddasa and other members of the MTSHA.[583] Some of his friends often mocked him focusing on this issue. My informant heard them saying: "ታደሰ አሁንስ ከከብት በታች ሆናችሁ አይደለም?"(Taddasa, now you became inferior to cattle?). This was why he frequently used the story to encourage the people to improve themselves.[584]

[581] Mohammed hassen, "General Taddessee Birru, 1921-1975," in *Goota Oromiyaa…*, 2008, pp.336-337. My informant, a family member, however, contends that he had no any wish for higher positions.

[582] IES MS: 1091, 39th Witness. There are evidences of ascribing the Oromo to a low status during the 1960s; *Informant*: Artist Lemma Guyyaa.

[583] *Informants*: *Obbo* Taye Badhaadhaa, Colonel Shailu Birri.

[584] *Ibid.*

The story was so common that some writers have raised it in their works. For example, Gemetchu Megersa says,

> *In more recent times, another myth has been fabricated and circulated in the form of a joke. According to this myth, God created the world in the following ranking order. Being a white God, he began by creating the white man. Then he created the Abyssinians, followed by their cousins the Gurage. Then he made the domestic and wild animals and finally he made the [Oromo]. The moral of this story is one which clearly put the place of the Oromo, in the world created by the Abyssinians.*[585]

Not only in the story fabricated and circulated among the public, but also in the works of professionals the Oromo were described as people without worthy material or intellectual culture to share to others. For example, according to the writing of Edward Ullendorf, the Oromo were regarded as the causes for the crisis which Ethiopia encountered in the 16th century and after. In general, Ullendorf regarded the Oromo as the burden of Ethiopia.[586] His remarks were provocative to the educated Oromo which Ullendorf himself explains, "I was severly upbraided by an Ethiopian student for some cavalier remarks about the Oromos which occur in the Ethiopians."[587]

As part of the Oromo society, the story also provoked the founders of the MTSHA and General Taddasa in particular as it was evident from the views he reflected on various meetings of the Association. Despite their relative achievements, the Oromo leaders felt that they had inferior status to the Amhara ruling elites due to their Oromo national identity.[588]

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[585] Gemetchu Megersa, p.293. The ranking order, however, differs according to different sources.

[586] Edward Ullendorf, *The Ethiopians: An Introduction to Country and People*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p.76.

[587] Edward Ullendorff, *The Ethiopians: An Introduction to Country and People*, 3rd edition, (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. xi.

[588] Mohammed Hassen, 1998, p. 155.

This in turn encouraged them, including General Taddasa, to work for the improvement of their own people.

General Taddasa often disliked backbiting and going around. Instead, he preferred to be direct even with issues which were difficult to express in public. This had happened, for example, in one of the meetings with the Emperor. During their usual meeting with the Emperor, military officers were often expected to inform him about rumors circulated among the public regarding the Emperor or the government. One day, the Emperor asked General Taddasa to tell him about what he had heard. But when he had nothing to tell, the Emperor was offended and said, "Why you do not know and follow up because you are a police officer?" Taddasa had no response. At another time, however, when he was asked the same question, he responded, "It is rumored that Haile Selassie takes children to Debre Zeyt to sacrifice them to the devil." My informant claims that many were shocked by this remark and regarded it as too heavy and uncommon. It was observed that General Taddasa did not hesitate to put forward whatever issue he believed to be right regardless of its consequences. It is reported that the Emperor had never asked him again.[589] The issue related to the sacrifice of children was also supported by other written sources.[590]

Long before coming to the Oromo cause, General Taddasa had the feeling that the authorities were not doing enough for the benefit of the ordinary people and the development of the country in general. This internal feeling of General Taddasa was clearly reflected during his

[589] *Informant: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

[590] IES MS: 2396/01/11('Patriarch nenyi yemil Abba Tewoflos be'Hagerituana beBetekristiyan lay yaderesewu bedel). For example, one of the accusations against Patriarch Abune Tewoflos was similar to the remark of General Taddasa. Accordingly, the Patriarch was accused of joining the Emperor in prayers when he sacrificed a human to a devil in Bishooftuu. The Patriarch was also accused of doing the same thing when it was claimed that the Emperor sacrificed a two year old baby to the devil in Haro Maya Lake. It is difficult to prove whether these accusations were based on facts.

travel to Eritrea in the early 1964 when he visited the port of Massawa. He toured the port with Mamo Wudineh accompanying and driving the car given to him by the Eritrean police. Upon reaching the port, both rested for a while in the hotel they rented and went directly to the port and observed some war and trade ships on the beach. Since General Taddasa wanted to know about these ships both went to the office of the Port Management. When the port authorities told him that the ships came to the port for different duties, he asked them how many ships Ethiopia had from among many ships anchored at the port. He was told that Ethiopia had only two or three trade ships and many of them belonged to foreign countries and companies. General Taddasa left the office and went directly to the beach of the port and sat down on a stone, where Mamo had encountered a strange situation. He saw General Taddasa weeping until his chins was washed down with tears. He claimed to have begged him to stop weeping and when eventually inquired the reason he was told:

> *While having this beautiful country and sea what we did with it? Is our duty only to accuse, quarrel and hurt one another? It was better if I did not tour, see and know the foreign countries*.[591]

Mamo testifies that beginning from the time he met General Taddasa before the 1960, he had this kind of deep feeling. He argues that it was that deep feeling which burst and forced him into tears and in fact, it was not something strange for Mamo.[592] This remark can be taken as a piece of example that General Taddasa had had a deep vision and concern for the future development of the country. He accused the authorities for their selfishness and jealousy instead of working for the development of the country.

While still at the port of Massawa, General Taddasa made an appointment with Prince Asrate Kassa, the Emperor's representative in Eritrea, to have a private discussion. When they met,

[591] Mamo Wudineh, pp.216-218.
[592] *Ibid*. p. 218.

after a short conversation, General Taddasa asked him whether the country would receive their corpse or dead body?[may be for their wrong deeds?]. Mamo writes that the Prince agreed that it should not accept their corpses and warned that the country was entering into a crisis from which it would not recover.[593]

Mamo argues that both conversed over various issues including the limit on the authority of the Crown Council, the kind of education and knowledge which should be provided to the public, land tenure system and the mutual relationship to be established with other countries. They raised that the ruling elites should first be able to understand each other instead of one trying to eliminate the other. Mamo believes that the two officials discussed various issues openly because after the 1960 coup there was a general feeling among many top conservative elites that the same kind of coup could happen again. In other words, it forced them to retreat from their rigid position and listen to a different opinion. That was probably why the Prince was willing to listen to General Taddasa according to Mamo's observation.[594] It was clear that at the time General Taddasa was dissatisfied with the existing situations and was clearly looking for some sort of reform.

It seems that General Taddasa's views were also shaped by his own experiences. It is beyond the shadow of doubt that the military and the police institutions had contributed their own share in widening his understandings of the existing political realities of the country.

[593]*Ibid*. According to Mamo (1997 *A.M*: 218), the Prince responded: "It should not accept our corpse; for what son it will accept our dead body? We live by discrediting the idea of one another and attempting to devalue the plan of each other; when I present my work through the front door, you enter through the back door to falsify it. Therefore, this country is entering into a crisis from which it will not recover and I understand your feeling."

[594]Mamo Wudineh, pp. 218-219. Mamo argues that the two individuals had played their own roles in defeating the 1960 coup makers. More specifically, General Taddasa played a key role in tackling the fighting tactics of the Imperial Bodyguard and in making radio communications with the Emperor while he was in Brazil.

Accordingly, he learnt a lot through his patriotic activities, service in the army and the police, training of Nelson Mandela, service in the *Fidel Serawit* Association, his visits to various countries and his close relationship with the higher authorities, including the Emperor and the Prime Minister as discussed elsewhere in this work.

According to Gemechu Taye, his understanding of the situation of blacks in South Africa through his contact with Nelson Mandela helped him to draw comparison with that of the Oromo case in Ethiopia. This comparison was frequent in his speeches especially during the peak of the Association's movement.[595]

Oral sources argue that General Taddasa was interested in the Oromo issues even before he joined the MTSHA. In other words, before he was interested in the MTSHA, General Taddasa was interested in Oromo issues and politics. In connection with this situation my informant was told at the time: "Maaliif akka ta'e hin beeknu malee waa'ee Oromoo waraqaa fi kitaaba adda addaa dubbisaa, qorachaa jira."(We do not know why but he [General Taddasa] is reading and studying books and papers written on the Oromo people*).*[596] When my informant met him personally, General Taddasa asked him:

> *Maali aabbee Nugusa wajjin taatanii horii keenya nyaattuu? Horii keenya fixxanii silaa eessatti ergitu isinii? Eenyutu isin wajjin nyaata? Warri Qeesii kun isinirraa ni hirmaatuu? Waan xinnoollee Oromoof hin laattanii?*
>
> *Why you, together with the Emperor, consume our money? You finished our money, where do you send it? Who are eating the money with you? Do these priests share from you? Don't you give a little share of it to the Oromo?*[597]

[595] Gemechu Taye,p.12.
[596] *Informant*: *Obbo* Bulchaa Dammaqsaa.
[597] *Ibid.* My informant was working in the Ministry of Finance at the time.

He threw these questions in order to get information about the financial expenditure of the regime from my informant because he knew very well that my informant was closer to the Emperor on issues related to finance.

The same situation was also observed by another informant, who was able to learn from his first contact with General Taddasa that he had deep grievances. Their contact began when General Taddasa wanted to establish a branch of the Literacy Campaign Association in Jimmaa and was looking for a coordinator there. He was told that my informant was there. When my informant came to the capital, Colonel Abera Ayyaanaa introduced him to General Taddasa. When they met, General Taddasa asked his name and when told, he said, "*Akkuma maqaa keetii jirtaa?*(Are you up to your name?) When my informant said, 'yes', the General told him that he was looking for such a strong person. Both then raised the issue of the Oromo in general and my informant asked him: "Maalif *Oromoon akka hin jirreetti ilaalama?"(*Why the Oromo are regarded as if non-existent?)[598] General Taddasa also raised his own grievance when he said: "Anayyuu sababan Oromoo ta'eef gadi naqabanii ga'ee yeroo fonqolchaa ani hojjedhe gadi xiqqeessanii ajajaa Poolisiillee na dhorkatan"(Because I am an Oromo, they oppressed me and devalued my contribution in foiling the 1960 coup d'état and denied me even to become the Police chief).[599]

My informant also narrated his own personal grievance to the General.[600] Beginning from this period, my informant was able to establish close relationship with General Taddasa and

[598] *Informant:* Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa.

[599] *Ibid.* He was from Jimma and his father was killed during the Italian period. *Ras* Imiru brought him to the capital. He was enrolled to Madhanealem and then Teferi Mekonnen Schools. He graduated from Gondar Health College and returned to his home region. It was while working in Jimma that he established relationship with General Taddasa.

[600] *Ibid*. When he was a 12th grade student at Teferi Mekonnen School, foreigners from Oxford University came to the class and requested someone who knew Afan Oromo. Moggaa raised his hand and said,

became one of the key members of the MTSHA. From his conversation with my informant, General Taddasa learnt that the prejudice against the Oromo was widespread. He encouraged my informant to work hard in his own area to support Oromo peasants. Accordingly, as soon as he returned to Jimmaa, my informant claims that he began to help peasants who had been exploited by the tax collectors. [601]

Both oral and written sources suggest that the existence of ethnic discrimination against the Oromo pushed General Taddasa to join the MTSHA. Most of the claimed discriminations were, however, related to the remarks made by the Prime Minister, Aklilu Habte Wold. Bereket Habte Selassie argues that Aklilu told General Taddasa in private that care should be taken in recruitment of the Oromo soldiers and the promotion of Oromo officers so that the number of Oromo in the army would be reduced deliberately.[602] The reason was not clear but was probably motivated by the unsubstantiated claim that the Oromo officers could try another coup in the future. As General Taddasa was the deputy commissioner of the Police and the commander of the Emergency Force, many Oromo youth were recruited into the police. He was told to restrict this but instead, it helped him to learn more about the existence

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"I am an Oromo and speak Afan Oromo." The foreigners were happy and told him that he would be given scholarship in England. They wanted to study the similarity between the Oromo and the Somali languages. However, he was denied this chance because the Minister of Education, *Ato* Akale Worq, told him that he would not send any student abroad in the Oromo language. Moggaa became extremely annoyed and this was a turning point for him to understand the prevailing ethnic prejudice of the regime against the Oromo. It is still fresh in his mind that when he raised his hand as an "Oromo" almost all of the students in the class were surprised and asked him to be sure whether he was really an Oromo. He learnt that the students did not have a good picture of the Oromo in their minds and thus they could not trust their own eyes that Moggaa was a physically well built and handsome young man that contradicted to their own image of the "Oromo" that had been drawn in their minds. This situation became an incentive for Moggaa to work for the Oromo cause.

[601] *Ibid.* According to this informant, if tax was not paid for three years the land was declared as *Gibir-Telli* (the land that belonged to someone who refused to pay taxes) and others had the right to claim it. In order to take away the best coffee land from the peasants, the tax collectors used to hide the tax receipts of the peasants for three years. In his own words: "*Lafa bunaa qotee bulaa jalaa fudhachuuf kaarnii dhoksanii erga wagga sadii tursiisanii booda gibir-telli jedhanii lafticha fudhatu."*(In order to take away the coffee land from the peasants, they hide the tax receipts for three years and take the land as if the owner refused to pay taxes.) He collected the tax receipts of many peasants and paid their taxes on their behalf. He attempted to help the peasants in this regard to avoid the disappearance of the receipts, which could cause the loss of their land.

[602] Bereket Habte Selassie, p.81.

of a secret policy to exclude the Oromo from the highest ranks of the government and military.[603] This remark provoked and pushed him to make the Oromo issue the centre stage of his political career.[604]

The other remark of Aklilu Habte Wold which provoked General Taddasa was related to the procedure on how to elect the Prime Minister. He told General Taddasa about the debates raised regarding whether to elect the Prime Minister by Parliament or to be appointed by the Emperor. He told him what he recommended during the debate as follows:

> *…The view of General Merid and General Abiy is that parliament should elect. But when it is said parliament should elect it means people would elect. In this way it is going to be elected from among the [Oromo]. However, since this cannot be it is better if the Prime Minister is appointed by His Majesty. Otherwise, the [Oromo] are going to lead our government and I asked them if they agree with this. They said no. Therefore, I told them that election does not work and the Prime Minister should be appointed only by His Majesty. He [Aklilu Habte Wold] told me. I swear to testify my word*.[605]

For the time being, General Taddasa preferred to keep quiet and did not express his disappointment to the Prime Minister. He argued that until that moment he was unaware of this situation and he believed in unity, not in ethnic discrimination, and that was why he was serving in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and other institutions with enthusiasm. After he had heard this ethnic discrimination, he was convinced that he was an Oromo and joined the MTSHA.[606] This encounter of General Taddasa was a clear testimony to the existence of discrimination against the Oromo in terms of any meaningful share of power.

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[603] Sorenson, 1998,pp.225-226.
[604] Asafa Jalata, 1993,p.156.
[605] 'The Trial Document of the leaders of MTSHA: General Taddasa Birru's First Response; See also Gemechu Taye, p.11.
[606] *Ibid*.; *Informant*: *Obbo* Taye Badhaadhaa.

It seems that Aklilu used to tell these secrets to General Taddasa because they used to be good friends beginning from the end of December 1960, just after the aborted coup, when General Taddasa was introduced to him as one of those key officers who defeated the coup makers. Because of their close relationship, General Taddasa acknowledged that, Aklilu used to protect him from the pressures and hostilities of the Police chief and his supporters in the police force and elsewhere. He used to inform him about what was going on in his back. Their friendship was so deep that when General Taddasa travelled to Germany for a duty Aklilu gave him 600 birr to supplement his travel expenses. Therefore, there was no doubt that Aklilu often invited General Taddasa to his home as a friend to have private discussions on various issues.[607] This close relationship with the Prime Minister of the regime helped General Taddasa to understand the undeclared policy of the Imperial regime that created partiality against the Oromo. It seems that Aklilu told Taddasa all this confidential government secret policies, which clearly reflected the inner working of the Imperial regime, taking him for an Amhara.

Probably the last remark of the Prime Minister which extremely provoked General Taddasa and pushed him to join the MTSHA, according to various sources, was related to the Oromo education. According to Olana Zoga, Aklilu offended General Taddasa, at a dinner invitation at his home, by saying: "Taddasa! After you have started to lead the *Fidel Serawit* you often say learn. It is good to say learn. But you have to know whom we have to teach. If the Oromo are educated they will flood us like a sea."[608]

[607] *Ibid.*
[608] Olana Zoga, pp. 24-26; *Informant: Obbo* Lubee Birru.

It is reported that Aklilu Habtewold advised General Taddasa to refrain himself from advocating education among the Oromo. He specifically told him that the plan of the government was to keep the Oromo back at least by a century. The Prime Minister was alarmed by General Taddasa's efforts as a chairman of the National Literacy Campaign to spread literacy among the Oromo. He advised him to hold it because he feared that if the large Oromo population was taught even in Amharic without any restriction, it would threaten the Amhara elites' clutch on power and domination of the country.[609]

Contrary to the observation of some writers, the intention of General Taddasa was not to spread Amharic among the Oromo through the Literacy Campaign. But his concern was the realization that lack of education even in Amharic had greatly hindered the Oromo from getting access to social services and other opportunities provided by the government. It was a known fact that the only permissible medium of instruction for educational purposes at the time was Amharic. He understood that illiteracy and language barrier (not knowing Amharic) had negatively affected and alienated the large Oromo people. The Oromo were exploited in the hands of language translators whenever they wanted to get government services. It was this situation which General Taddasa wanted to address through expanding literacy among the Oromo. The incident with the Prime Minister clearly showed him that let alone educating the Oromo in their own language, the education of the Oromo in Amharic itself was not welcomed.[610]

[609] *Informants*: *Obbo* Lubee Birru, Artist Lemma Guyyaa; Mohammed Hassen, "General Taddessee Birru, 1921-1975," in *Goota Oromiyaa*…, 2008, p.340; See also Olana Zoga,p.25.
[610] *Informants: Obbo* Lubee Birru, *Obbo* Taye Badhaadhaa.

This issue has been reported in various works and is considered as a major factor for General Taddasa's membership to the MTSHA. According to the account of Dr Negasso, in one of the meetings of the MTSHA, General Taddasa said:

> *I do have the intention to expand the Fidel Serawit to the Oromo children in Shawa. To ask this, one day I met Aklilu Habte Wold. But Aklilu was never aware that I am an Oromo and told me, 'Be careful! The Oromo is like a sea. If given education it swallows us'. He gave me a friendly advice and warning. However, this initiated me more to work for the Oromo cause and to educate them.*[611]

According to an informant, General Taddasa attempted to convince the Prime Minister saying:

> *Ani dura Goojjam dhaqee, Walaayittaa dhaqee barsiisuurra asuma warra hoomaa hin baranne Shaggar bira jirurraa jalqabuu qabna jedheeni malee Oromoon dura barsiisa jedhee itti yaadee miti*.
>
> *My intention is before moving to Gojjam and Walayita, we have to first start to teach those illiterate in the hinterlands of Shagar and I did not intend to teach the Oromo first.*[612]

It is reported that because of extreme irritation, General Taddasa did not eat the food and the drink served to him pretending that he was taking drugs. It seems that he had lost appetite because of extreme provocation. This incident pushed him to look back to and review his own past experiences with the authorities within this context and questioned himself that: *Edaa ani waanan Oromoo ta'eef gadi naqabaa turanii? Is it because I am an Oromo that they have been suppressing me?* He realized that the Oromo had no rights in this country. This realization became an incentive for him to join the MTSHA and work for the Oromo.[613] It seems that the remark he heard from Aklilu, officially the second person of the regime next

[611] Daniel Tefera, *Dandi: Ye'Nagaso Gidada Menged*, pp.67-69; *Informant*: Dr Nagaasoo Gidaadaa.
[612] *Informant*: *Obbo* Lubee Birru.
[613] *Informants:* Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa; *Obbo* Taye Badhaadhaa.

to the Emperor, had deeply shocked him. According to Olana Zoga, it had changed his mentality and convinced him to enter the MTSHA after initial decline.[614] He argues that it was after hearing this remark that he went directly to the office of the MTSHA and became a member on *Sene* 16, 1956 (June 24, 1964).[615]

Indeed, the authorities had deep worries about the expansion of education among the Oromo which had begun much earlier than this incident. For example, in 1947 Emmanuel Abraham, Director General of the Ministry of Education, was accused by his fellow colleagues for educating only the Oromo. However, it was proved to be false when the Emperor ordered school directors to identify and report to him the ethnicity of all students in Addis Ababa schools. The result showed that the number of Oromo students was very small.[616] Emmanuel was accused for educating the Oromo while General Taddasa was advised not to educate the Oromo.

From these two incidents and other realities, the Oromo education remained a contested issue. Aklilu advised Taddasa to curtail literacy campaign among the Oromo in order to keep the large Oromo away from modern education and power. It was feared that access to education through the Literacy Campaign might galvanize the Oromo masses and endanger the Amhara elites' control of political and economic power.[617] This created a dilemma for the Imperial regime because both allowing and denying the opportunity was perceived to be

[614] Olana Zoga, pp.24-25.
[615] *Ibid*.,pp.24-26.
[616] Emmanuel Abraham, *Reminiscences of My Life*,(Oslo: Lunde Forlag, 1995), p.64. There were some schools established in Oromo inhabited areas during the Imperial regime. The main question was not the number of schools but the students in those schools. Majority of the students were the children of the settlers and their dependants not the children of the Oromo. A few Oromo students who managed to come to these schools were pressurized to change their names to the Amhara ones.
[617] Benti Getahun, *JOS*, Vol, 9, No.1&2,pp.84-85.

dangerous.[618] Indeed, as John Markakis argues, modern education turned out to be a double edged weapon in the context of nation state building. On one hand, it brought the younger generation of the periphery closer and trained them mainly for state employment. On the other hand, it would create political consciousness that could challenge not only the authority of the imperial regime but also the legitimacy of the state itself.[619] This is probably why Emmanuel Abraham testifies that, as modern education expanded; the chief officials and authorities of the Imperial regime were felt threatened and wanted him to be removed from his post of the Director General of Education.[620]

As it is discussed elsewhere in this work, General Taddasa valued education more than anything else. His family too valued education and enrolled him to the only available education, Church education, at the time. This was the basis of his educational background. He was a self- educated person, who never joined a college or a university.[621] But he had a very deep belief in the value and importance of education. He believed that access to it would create disparity among the people. He was able to lead the Literacy Campaign very effectively after being elected as its executive chairman from among many well educated candidates.

Though the issue of education can be taken as a turning point, it is not the only reason that changed the mentality of General Taddasa. It seems that before this incident, he understood the existing exploitative and oppressive realities of the regime not in terms of ethnic discrimination but rural- urban dichotomy. He had observed that people living in towns

[618] Leenco Lata,1999, p.179.
[619] John Markakis, 2011, p.13.
[620] Emmanuel Abraham, *Reminiscences of My Life*, pp.63-64.
[621] In fact he had received military trainings both inside and abroad. He was a graduate of the Holata Military Academy and an instructor as well. He also received a military training in USA.

despised and exploited those who lived in the countryside. He believed that towns were the seats of those, which included the feudal lords, government officials and other oppressors, who harshly exploited the rural population. His understanding was what made the people of the countryside to be exploited and despised by the urban dwellers was their lack of access to education. He had a firm belief that education was the basis for a society to change. This was why he tirelessly worked as chairman of the executive committee of the Literacy Campaign to extend the opportunity to those who lacked it as indicated earlier. However, when he attempted to extend the opportunity to the Oromo, he was advised that they should not be allowed to learn en masse. This situation helped him to understand and view the urban-rural dichotomy in terms of ethnic prejudice.[622]

Through time, however, he was also able to realize that the urban-rural dichotomy was much related to the Amhara-Oromo relations respectively. Accordingly, he observed that those who were relatively educated and lived in towns were assumed to be Amhara while those impoverished and lived in the surrounding countryside were regarded as Oromo. This situation was more evident in the capital that some even came to associate the Oromo identity with rural life, characterized by poor dress and impoverished life. For example, this was evident later when General Taddasa was asked by one of his family members who observed the participants of the MTSHA: "Is there any handsome person like this among the Oromo?" He was provoked by this question but responded: "Look at me and look at my relatives coming from Salaalee. We are all Oromo. But the opportunity of getting access to

[622] *Informants*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa, Colonel Sahilu Birri.

education separated us."[623] Through time, he began to review his understanding of the urban-rural dichotomy in terms of ethnic identity.

One of the contentious issues regarding his membership to the MTSHA was the issue of why he declined to join the association initially and there is no agreement among my informants. According to an informant, he did not refuse to join it but said: "How can I be a member of a civil association while I am a military officer?"[624] Another informant corroborates this view and argues that it was Haile Mariam Gammadaa who first attempted to bring him to the Association because he knew very well the quality and motivation of this distinguished Oromo officer. Accordingly, Haile Mariam approached him on a ring tying ceremony of my informant for the first time. The story was wide but it began when the family of my informant's fiancé requested him to bring notable individuals and dignitaries on the occasion in the message they sent through Colonel Alamu. When my informant began to worry, his friend[625]advised him to invite General Taddasa.[626]

Later when the presence of General Taddasa on the occasion was confirmed, Haile Mariam Gammadaa said: "I will approach General Taddasa by using this opportunity if he comes." But my informant requested him not to do so because he feared that General Taddasa would be disappointed thinking that he was invited not to attend marriage ceremony but to be enrolled into politics. He even begged Haile Mariam not to raise this issue to him. Haile

[623] *Informant: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa. He tried to show that access to education had created opposite lives among the Oromo.

[624] *Informant:* Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa.

[625] Colonel Gebreyes Belete was an Oromo member of the police. He invited General Taddasa to be present on the occasion on behalf of Sahilu. Since Sahilu was a captain at the time, he did not dare to do so because he did not have such a close relationship that would enable him to invite General Taddasa to this occasion. Moreover, there was a big difference in military rank. Contrary to Sahilu's expectation, in addition to his personal presence, General Taddasa brought a car and music band for the occasion. There was a new luxurious car purchased for generals but General Taddasa was not happy to use it while many people were starving and parked it in garage. He allowed Sahilu to use this new car.

[626] *Informant:* Colonel Sahilu Birri.

Mariam kept silent. On the occasion, General Taddasa arrived by bringing a car and a Police Music Band which created an atmosphere of happiness for my informant. He could not believe the presence and generosity of General Taddasa who was only invited by his friend. His happiness was, however, short lived because, as he feared earlier, Haile Mariam approached General Taddasa as soon as he arrived.[627]

He did not know exactly what they had discussed, but he assumed that probably Haile Mariam introduced himself as a Secretary General of the MTSHA, General Taddasa left his own car to his driver and joined Haile Mariam. In his own words:

> *Jeneraal Taaddasaan konkolaataa isaa bareedaa dhiisee "Volswagen" dhiphoo Haile Mariam keessa seene. Makiinuma kee keessa teenya jedhe natti fakkaata. Yeroo kana nan dhiphadhe, sargii natti hin fakkaanne. Namichi kun na balleessee? Osoo fuuti kun natti hafee jedheen sammuun kiyya sirrii hin turre. Guyyaa guutuu wal duukaa oolan.*
>
> *General Taddasa left his own beautiful car and entered into a small Volkswagen of Haile Mariam. It seems that he [General Taddasa] preferred to sit in his [Haile Mariam's] car. At this time, I was disturbed; the program did not give me sense. I was worried that Haile Mariam damaged my life; I wished if I did not marry at all and my mind was not normal. They remained together the whole day.*[628]

My informant did not know exactly what they had discussed but both must have discussed the existing grievances in detail. It seems that both General Taddasa and the MTSHA wanted each other. My informant believed that this was the first time General Taddasa was contacted to become a member of the Association.

[627] *Ibid.*
[628] *Ibid.*

Two days after this event, during the annual meeting of the Association, Haile Mariam announced that the Association got a new member who would contribute a lot to the development of the Association. He also told the audience the message that was sent by General Taddasa: "It is a good Association and I hope that it will contribute a lot to the development of the country. Since I want to become a member, prepare the Association's membership ID card and send me."[629] The audience became extremely happy with this news. It was also a big relief for my informant who realized that General Taddasa's behavior and personality was completely different from what he had thought before. In his own words: "Isaan [General Taddasa] edaa ni barbaadu gara keenya dhufuu nuti garaa wal hin beeknu malee. Gara itti goranuu dhabaniiru" (We realized that he wanted to join us but we did not know each other very well. He was even looking for where to enter).[630]

Two weeks later Haile Mariam prepared a small feast and invited some Oromo Generals and notables along with the younger officers that included my informant, Gebre Selassie Waldiya and Taye Badhaadhaa, my other informant. The generals included Brigadier General Taddasa, Brigadier General Jagamaa Kelloo, Brigadier General Dawit Abdii, Brigadier General Waaqjiraa Sardaa, *Dajjazmach* Bekele Hordofaa, *Dajjazmach* Kebede Bizunesh and others. When they met, they discussed their grievances and raised that though they had contributed a lot to the country, they did not get what they deserved because of their Oromo identity. They also discussed the need to strengthen the Association and pledged to make financial assistance. Accordingly, they pledged to donate their one month salary which was to be used to purchase chairs, tables and other necessary equipment. Haile Mariam told them

[629] *Ibid.*

[630] *Ibid.* His fear was that if General Taddasa was disappointed he could send him to remote areas. In those days, those who offended their bosses were often sent to remote areas as a punishment and this was his major concern.

that there was a meeting after two weeks and all of them agreed to be present.[631] According to my informant, it was in this way that General Taddasa became a member of the MTSHA and he did not accept the claim of his initial decline.

However, the issue of his initial decline was also supported by the accounts of his wife shared to my informant. Accordingly, it is reported that Colonel Alamu had asked General Taddasa's wife to convince her husband, saying: "Abbaan warraa kee maali hiriyyoota isaa fi gosa isaarraa addaan ba'ee gorsi miseensa haa ta'uu" (Your husband is alienated from his colleagues and his lineage; convince him to become a member*).*[632] According to this story, when she tried to persuade him to become a member, he refused saying:

> *Since we are administering the country, what do we do by going down to a local self-help association? This is the regime which I reinstituted; we can accomplish whatever we want. Therefore, what do I do from a local self- help association in order to educate my own people? [633]*

It is possible to understand from this remark that General Taddasa believed that he was part of the core ruling elite of the country. He felt that he could help his own people with the position he had and there was no reason for him to go down to a local self-help association for this purpose. It was probably with this perception that he promised to help the efforts of the MTSHA in educating the Oromo through the Literacy Campaign Organization he chaired. However, when he entered into practical activity he was advised to stop it. [634]

The major problematic view among the Oromo elites in general, including General Taddasa, was their feeling that they were part of the core decision making elites of the imperial

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[631] *Ibid.*

[632] *Informant: Qesis* Belay Mekonnen. He had made extensive discussion with the wife of General Taddasa because he was once a member of a committee which was established to remember him by erecting a statue and other meanses. Thus he got an opportunity to discuss with her during this time.

[633] *Ibid*.

[634] *Ibid.*

government. They perceived themselves as equals with the Amhara ruling elites but they were often suspected of disloyalty. Indeed, General Taddasa was also a victim of this feeling. Eventually, however, the Oromo elites who were able to understand the existing reality began to move to assert their own equality and that of their own people through the Association within the Ethiopian political establishment.[635]

It is reported that after what he had heard from Aklilu, however, General Taddasa regretted deeply that he was wrong in hesitating to be a member. He also began to think that, the 1960 coup makers were right in their attempt to change this regime though he did not have confidence in them. He admitted that he was not aware of the existence of discriminations on the basis of identity at the level of government. One reason that delayed his awareness was the ambiguous approach of the Emperor who appeared to be lenient towards him and sometimes claimed that he had Oromo kinship.[636]

He began to make it clear that though the imperial regime was used to be regarded as if it also belonged to the Shawans; the Shawa Oromo [Tuulamaa] gained nothing. He made efforts to make them conscious of this situation.[637] According to an informant, he often complained about the harsh treatment of the Oromo of Salaalee area. It is reported that he raised the issue to the Emperor and informed him that the displacement of the Salaalee that

[635] Mohammed Hassen, 1998, p.215.

[636] *Informant*: *Qesis* Belay Mekonnen. At that early stage, he thought that betrayal was a sinful act while he believed that open resistance against whatever injustices was a blessed activity. He was often forward and did not favor doing things underground.

[637] *Informant*: Bulchaa Damaqsaa. He was able to mobilize the people through his moving speeches, his major mechanism of mobilizing the people in the absence of other alternatives at the time. There were no TV, Radio, social media and newspapers.

happened at the time did not even happen during the time of Menilek. Therefore, he was very much concerned about the displacement of the Oromo at the time.[638]

But now he was convinced that the discriminatory situation had to change in order to benefit all, including the Oromo. He believed that he should mobilize the people in order to bring the desired change and to do so; the MTSHA became a perfect forum.[639] It was in this way that he decided to join the MTSHA after initial hesitation.

Though the provocation of Aklilu was not the only reason for his coming to the MTSHA, as discussed above, it could be taken as a turning point in his decisions. He was said to have completely changed after what he had heard from the Prime Minister. Even to his family members the event was a turning point because it was since then that they observed a big change in him.[640] According to my informant, when he returned home from the house of Aklilu, he refused to eat his dinner. When his wife inquired about what had happened, he told her that:

> *Har'a baayyeen haare sababi isaas mana seexanaan deeme. Wanni inni jedhu'Oromoon yoo barate akka galaanaa nurra galagala waan ta'eef akka hin baranne. Biyya isaarras akka hin jiraanne, gara aangoottis akka hindhufne'. Kana yeroon dhaga'u nyaannis natti hadhaa'e, dhugaatii wuskiin naaf bu'es dhiiga natti fakkaate.*
>
> *Today I became extremely angry because I went to the house of a devil. He says, 'The Oromo should not learn because they would flood us if educated. They should be prohibited from living in their own territory*

[638] *Informant*: *Obbo* Lubee Birru. Later, after he joined the MTSHA, General Taddasa often asked if there were Oromo of Salaalee from among those who came to participate in the meeting from Arsii, Baalee, Jimmaa and other areas in the south. He then asked them to explain in their own words to the audience how they were originally displaced from their land in Salaalee and unjustly treated. The story they raised was heart touching.

[639] *Informant*: *Qesis* Belay Mekonnen.

[640] *Informant: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

and from coming to political power." When I heard this, the food served to me became bitter while the whisky tested like blood.[641]

General Taddasa was deeply provoked that he could not sleep that night. Since that day, he became a restless person and often said: "Biyya namni akkasii seexanni Muumicha Ministeeraa ta'e keessan jiraadhaa?"(Do I live in a country where a devil like person is a Prime Minister?).[642] He refused to meet the Prime Minister and since then while eating, drinking, talking and sleeping he never forgot the issue. In the meantime, according to my informant, he began to advise his wife:

Wattaaddara [loltuu] akkan ta'e na beekta mitii? Wattaaddarri [loltuun] gaaf tokko du'uu danda'a. Namni kamiyyuu du'uu danda'a garuu kan wattaaddaraa [loltuu] akka tasaa ta'uu danda'a. Kanaaf, ani hidhamus, du'us jabaadhuu ijoollee guddisi.

Do you know that I am a soldier? A soldier can die any time. Any person can die too but the death of a soldier will happen suddenly. Therefore, in case I die or imprisoned, you have to be strong enough to raise the children.[643]

Since then, General Taddasa had turned to become a different person even for his children because whenever they made comments on his views, he complained that they followed the line of their mother. Moreover, when the relatives of his wife came home for a visit, he often debated with them on the issue of ethnic identity saying:

እናንተ ከኛ የሚትበልጡት በምንድነዉ? ደጃዝማች እንትና፣ ፈታዉራሪ እንትና፡ ይኼ ነዉ አይደለም እናንተ የሚትኩራሩበት? እንዲያዉም ልንገራቹዉ፡ የሚትኩራሩበት ንጉስ ሣህለ ሥላሰ ጫማ እንኪን የሌለዉ መሆኑ ነዉ። ከጀርመን አገር እንደተመለሰ አንኮበር ሄዶ የንጉስ ሳህለ ሥላሰን ፎቶ አይቶዋል።

In what aspect are you better than us? Dajjazmach this, Fitwrari this; is it not with this that you boost youself? To tell you the truth, king Sahle Selassie, the one you are proud of, did not have even shoes [bare

[641] *Informant: Qesis* Belay Mekonnen. He had a discussion with the wife of General Taddasa before her death.

[642] *Ibid.*

[643] *Ibid.*

footed]). He visited Ankober and saw the picture of Sahle Selassie after he returned from his trip to Germany.[644]

My informants claim that General Taddasa was a kind of person who often wanted the right thing to be done. Shrewdness had no place in him probably because of his religious background. Even his children advised him to become either a priest or a monk and live in peace in a monastery instead of his aggressive political views. He could have accumulated wealth at the time but he did not have wealth in excess. He was not greedy for wealth. For example, he refused to use the land given to him in Salaalee and divided it among peasants. He was very much touched by the way the Oromo peasants of Salaalee were treated. He is said to have asked the Emperor as to why they were evicted during his rule, something which did not even happen during the time of Menilek. His initial intention was to have the discriminations and injustices be corrected.[645]

Written sources indicate that Aklilu Habte Wold and other elites have contributed a lot in changing the views of General Taddasa. It is argued that he came to join the Association much to the provocations of Aklilu Habte Wold and other Amhara leaders.[646] The conversation with the Prime Minister had deeply provoked him that he began to draw similarity between the wretched conditions of his people and the conditions of blacks in South Africa. He was able to understand about the situations in South Africa through his contact with Nelson Mandela.[647] In one of the meetings of the Association later, he is reported to have said that the Oromo were in bad situation in Ethiopia than blacks under the apartheid rule in South Africa. Soon after he joined the Association, he openly talked about

[644] *Informant: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

[645] *Ibid*. This is also supported by other written sources. Aklilu Habte Wold was made responsible for antagonizing him with the Emperor.

[646] Bereket Habte Sillase,pp.80-81.

[647] Gada Melba, p.115.

the position of his people with courage and a sense of determination to change it.[648] Therefore, General Taddasa had a number of reasons to join the MTSHA though the conversation with the Prime Minister on Oromo education can be taken as a turning point.

After he had joined the MTSHA, his actions and deeds seem to have been influenced by the Salaalee resistance tradition. Resistance was a celebrated tradition among the Salaalee and it has been regarded as a sign of *Dhiirummaa* (Manhood) that provided energy to take action even at the expense of one's life. This kind of Salaalee resistance tradition did not require precondition and it could happen in all of a sudden when one was provoked. It was characterized by immediate reaction to any perceived injustice and maltreatment. In the words of my informant:

> *Tarkaanfiin kun haala mijataa irratti kan hundaa'u osoo hintaane yeroo kamuu akka tasaa haala simudatu keessatti murtii ati murteessitee itti seentu dha. Murtiin kun kan amma siballeessu yookaan dhiibbaa guddaa sirraan geessisu ta'uu danda'a.*
>
> *This action is not based on any precondition and it is based on the decision you make when you encounter a situation any time. The decision you make can claim your life right at the moment or can cause big impact on one's life.*[649]

Thus the main concern of the Salaalee resistance was not the outcome of the action but the determination to resist what was felt to be unacceptable. Regardless of the status of the person, this kind of sudden reaction could come from anyone when felt that one's dignity and belief, which were obtained as part of the society, were attacked or humiliated. This situation of the Salaalee resistance tradition had happened in the case of General Taddasa. In the words of an informant:

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[648] *Informants*: Colonel Sahilu Birri, Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa.
[649] *Informant*: *Obbo* Teshome Kebede.

> *Jeneraal Taaddasaan jireenya mijataa keessa waan jiruuf gadi jedhee isa hindhaga'iin fakkaatee dhiisuu danda'a ta'a. Garuu aadaan hawaasa inni keessatti dhalatee akka kana yaadu yeroo hin kennuuf.*
>
> *Since General Taddasa had been leading a comfortable life, he could have ignored it [the provocation of the Prime Minister] turning a deaf ear. However, the culture of the society among whom he grew up would not give him time to think that way.*[650]

According to the Salaalee custom, under normal circumstance, a person might not seem to be a critic of the existing situation. But once felt offended he would react violently which could surprise others as if he were a different person. At this point, the person could become emotional; lose rationality and rush to take action while knowing that he could pay the ultimate price.[651] I have discussed in chapter two as a background about the Salaalee resistance tradition.

I argue that this Salaalee tradition came to have impacts on some of General Taddasa's later actions after he joined the MTSHA. Contrary to the remark of some writers who depicted him as an Amharized officer, I argue that, he rebelled against Amharization and some of his actions and deeds were reflections of aspects of Salaalee resistance tradition. Once he was convinced to join the MTSHA, General Taddasa was willing to pay any ultimate price which his actions could require as was seen later. He was completely changed after the incidence with the Prime Minister.[652] I contend that his joining of the MTSHA was not a sudden turn of an Amharized General but a reaction of a provoked Oromo who became Oromo resistance leader shortly after he joined the MTSHA.

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[650] *Ibid.*

[651] *Informant*: *Obbo* Teshome Kebede, *Obbo* Kabada Sime, *Obbo* Amantee Gizachew. This is, however, not limited to Salaalee only.

[652] *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa. He was completely changed and came to have a different personality.

Chapter Five

Brigadier General Taddasa's Transformation of the MTSHA into a Pan- Oromo Political Movement



Figure 9: Brigadier General Taddasa Birru when he joined the MTSHA[653]

This chapter examines how General Taddasa was able to transform the MTSHA from an ordinary self-help association to a pan-Oromo movement threatening the imperial regime with the potential of mobilizing the large Oromo population. For this purpose, his daring and fearless speeches, teachings and activities made in Itayyaa, Abeebee Qeerransaa and Dheeraa are taken as good examples. These are collected from informants who personally attended the

[653] In the possession of *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa

meetings and worked with him and the Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA which contains the testimonies of witnesses.

General Taddasa became a member of the MTSHA not just to become an ordinary member but to serve and transform it with enthusiasm. He came to the Association with much energy and determination.[654] According to an informant, he began to play a leading role from the day he joined the MTSHA. It is reported that he attended his first meeting at the St. George Cathedral. Before having its own office in Gullallee the Association's meetings were held in the compound of the Church. [655]

It is reported that when other dignitaries, who went there for registration, stood under trees covering their faces with scarves and clothes to hide themselves from the notice of others, he brought each of them to the meeting. Some of them felt uncomfortable to join the MTSHA inside the Church Compound where other dignitaries were present. General Taddasa brought each of them for registration saying: "ምንድነዉ የሚትደበቁ? ምንድነዉ ችግሩ? በእኛ ብቻ አልተጀመረም ማህበር ማቋቋም ማንኛዉም ህዝብ ነዉ ያቋቋመዉ።"(Why do you hide yourself? What is the problem? We are not the only founders of an Association, everyone has established it).[656] After the registration, he stressed that the area was not suitable for such a meeting. He underlined the need to rent a suitable office and for that purpose the high ranking Oromo members who did not feel comfortable in the open Church compound pledged to pay the cost needed for it. Eventually, an office was rented in Gullallee near the Pastor Institute.[657]

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[654] This has been discussed just above under the previous chapter.

[655] *Informant*: Colonel Sahilu Birri. Initially, the meeting place for the MTSHA was the St. George Church before it moved to Gullallee.

[656] *Ibid.*

[657] *Ibid.* In the past the site was known as the Yaa'ii Gaullallee, the Gullallee Assembly. It was located in front of what was then called the Muslim Burial or Islam *Meqabir*. As indicated earlier, he joined the

It seems that both the MTSHA and General Taddasa wanted each other. Following its legal recognition and the membership of General Taddasa, the Association was ready to restructure itself on December 17, 1964 to accommodate him and other high ranking officers which joined it. In the earlier structure there were about 26 non Oromo members in the leadership but now most of the places were taken by Oromo members. Its policy making Board of Directors increased to fifteen members and the committees were expanded from seven to thirteen. According to the new reform, General Taddasa chaired three committees: Education, Branch Expansion and Advisory Board.[658]

The leaders of the Association wanted to use his name, his rising fame, his charismatic personality for the image of the Association. They hoped that his acceptance within the government, his closeness to the Emperor and the Prime Minister would help them to protect and expand the activities of their Association.[659] They were eager to use him as a rallying figure because of his public image. An informant argues that it was the membership of General Taddasa that shifted the MTSHA from an ordinary self-help association to a political movement. In the words of a family member: "እሱ ባይገባ ኖሮ ከተራ ሙረዳጃ ማህበር ዉጭ ሌላ

Association with deep grievances which were partly reflected in the speech he made to the trainees of the Literacy Campaign in the Yeka sub city which appeared on *Addis Zemen* Newspaper. The speech which was made two months after his membership has a lot of implications.

[658] 'Waldaa Maccaa fi Tuulamaa Ayyaana Waggaa 30ffaa', p.7; See also Olana Zoga, pp.29-31; Mohammed Hassen, "Brigadier General Taddesse Birru, 1921-1975," in: *Goota Oromiyaa,* 2008, p.343; Mohammed Hassen, 1998, p.211. The education committee was very effective that the Association was able to build several schools and support many others. The good work of this committee was expressed clearly on *Addis Zemen* Newspaper on Wednesday *Nehase* 26, 1957 *A.M*. (September 1964). It was after his membership that the Association began to articulate on Oromo problems and grievances.

[659] Mohammed Hassen, "General Taddesse Birru, 1921-1975," in *Goota Oromiyaa*…. ,2008, p.343; See also Olana Zoga and *WMT Ayyaana Waggaa 30ffaa*; Mohammed Hassen, 1998, p.210.

የተሻለ ስም አይኖረዉም።"(If he did not become a member, the Association could not be better than any ordinary association).[660]

His membership boosted the image and popularity of the Association in a number of ways. It enabled the Association to attract more members; both Oromo nationalists and ordinary people, through his moving speeches in addition to the clearly stated objectives of the Association.[661] He elevated the status and transformed the image of the Association by providing his leadership qualities which enabled the Association to flourish within a short period of time. In the process, he transformed what had started as a self-help association in Shawa province into Oromia wide pan-Oromo movement.[662] It was almost after the membership of General Taddasa that the Association began to move outside of the capital with much energy. The Oromo were able to gather under a single leadership of the Association much to the contribution of General Taddasa.[663]

Since he joined the Association with much political spirit, it did not take time for him to attract more members to the Association. He used different mechanisms to recruit new members. One of these was by looking into Oromo names from the telephone addresses and inviting them to the Association.[664] His membership encouraged other Oromo elites to join the Association in large number, who in turn began to serve it with all their potentials.

[660] *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.
[661] Gemechu Taye,p.13; *Informant*: Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa.
[662] *Informant:* Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa.
[663] Mohammed Hassen, "General Taddesse Birru, 1921-1975," in *Goota Oromiyaa*…., 2008, p.339; Edmond J. Keller, "Revolution, Class and the National Question: The Case of Ethiopia," *Northeast African Studies 2,3*(1980-81), 3,1(1981), p.60.
[664] Olana Zoga, pp.29-31.

Membership was even considered as a mark of being an Oromo among the elites and the conscious ones.[665]

In fact it was not only the MTSHA that wanted General Taddasa but it was also General Taddasa that wanted to use the Association as means of spreading literacy among the Oromo.[666] The Association served him as a space where he could bring out his grievances and make a resistance against the injustices he perceived. In other words, the Association served him as a solid stepping ground from where he struggled against the regime he had served for decades. His membership was a turning point both in the life of the General and in the activities of the Association.[667]

General Taddasa was a gifted public orator who could make well organized speeches for hours without carrying any piece of paper in his hands. He had the capacity to persuade, convince and mobilize people.[668] In almost all meetings which he attended, General Taddasa was a keynote speaker. His speeches, as will be discussed later, focused on the unity of the numerically large but politically dominated Oromo people.[669] Most of his speeches had also targeted the oppressive status quo[670], which carried out economic exploitation, political domination and cultural dehumanization of the Oromo.[671]

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[665] Mohammed Hassen, 1998, p.211.

[666] *Ibid*., p.343; See also Olana Zoga and *Waldaa Maccaa fi Tuulamaa Ayyaana Waggaa 30ffaa*

[667] Mohammed Hassen, 1998,p.210.

[668] *Informants:* Colonel Sahilu Birri, Dr.Moggaa Firrisa.

[669] *Waldaa Maccaa fi Tuulamaa Ayyaana Waggaa 30ffaa,* p. 10. Infact, the most outstanding contribution of the MTSHA was its attempt to unite the Oromo people.

[670] Teshome G.Wagaw, " Emerging Issues of Ethiopian Nationalities: Cohesion or Disintegration," *Northeast African Studies, 2,3* (1980-81), 3,1(1981), p.70.

[671] Mohammed Hassen, "General Taddesse Birru, 1921-1975," in *Goota Oromo….,* 2008, p.339; Edmond J. Keller, "Revolution, Class and the National Question: The Case of Ethiopia," *Northeast African Studies 2,3*(1980-81), 3,1(1981), p.60.

Shortly after he joined it, Mohammed Hassen argues, General Taddasa was able to become the engine of the MTSHA who realized the importance of rapidly politicizing the movement.[672] Mohammed Hassen writes about the role of General Taddsa within the MTSHA:

> *By uniting the Oromo from every region of Oromia, he picked up the Oromo from the depth of hopelessness and restored their pride as a people and showed them that they are capable of struggling for their human dignity*.[673]

He did this through his daring speeches which openly criticized the regime for unjustly treating the Oromo. He argued that the Oromo were widely oppressed and confiscated of their land by the Emperor and his favorites, who in turn divided it among themselves and their followers. In other words, through his powerful speeches, which were delivered in almost all meetings of the Association, he focused on taboo subjects such as the issue of land and the exploitation of the Oromo.[674]

His intention was to inspire and mobilize the Oromo through the forums of the MTSHA to make their voices heard within the larger arena of Ethiopian politics. He attempted to reveal the injustices of the regime that had denigrated the self-respect and confidence of the Oromo people and the need to resist it. According to an informant, apart from making formal speeches, General Taddasa used to arouse the educated Oromo saying: "Maali isin calliftanii teessuu manni keessan nyaatamaa jiraa?"(Why do you keep silent when your home is being consumed). Though there were some Oromo who feared to hear his powerful words at the

[672] Mohammed Hassen, "General Taddesse Birru, 1921-1975," in *Goota Oromiyaa*…., 2008, p.343; See also Olana Zoga and *Waldaa Maccaa fi Tuulamaa Ayyaana Waggaa 30ffa.*

[673] Mohammed Hassen, "General Taddesse Birru, 1921-1975," in *Goota Oromiyaa*…., 2008, p, 338; Mohammed Hassen, 1998, p.211.

[674]John Markakis, 2011, p.194. During his speeches he focused on sensitive issues such as the land tenure, education, culture, language, the poverty and exploitation of the Oromo.

beginning, he did not hesistate to use every opportunity to make them aware of the ongoing injustices.[675]

Under his guidance, the Association was able to make mass mobilization through huge public meetings conducted in different areas. The gathering that had started in Giincii in 1964 continued until the famous Dheeraa meeting of October 1966.[676] Initially, General Taddasa was very much concerned about the poor development activities in Oromo inhabited areas in the sectors of education, health, road and other aspects of social life.[677]

Simultaneously, there were attempts to establish the Association's Youth League in order to mobilize the Oromo students. It is reported that Lubee Birru and Debebe Kumsaa had played key roles in bringing the youth together behind the Association. The members of the league met at least twice before the closure of the Association. They once invited Haile Mariam Gammadaa to give them guidance, advice and share his knowledge on Oromo history. He told them:

> *Ijoollee keenyaa nuyi boor ni darbina isintu itti fufa. Baga Waaqni wanta kana isinitti agarsiisee walitti dhufuu dandeessan. Sabni Oromoo isin barbaada, nuti amma humna keenyaa ni jalqabna. Kan fixu, kan bakkaan ga'u garuu isinii jabaadhaa.*
>
> *Our children, you will succeed us when we pass away tomorrow. Congratulations! Congratulations! For God has shown you the way to be able to come together. The Oromo people need you; we begin to work as much as we can but it is you who will finish and finalize it, be courageous!*[678]

[675] *Informant*: Bulchaa Dammaqsaa.

[676] Mohammed Hassen, "General Taddesse Birru, 1921-1975," in *Goota Oromiyaa….*, 2008, pp.343-344

[677] *Informant:* Hulluuqaa Baabsoo, Date: June, 2017, age-81. He was known by the name Camadaa Sabbooqaa when he was in the Police Emergency Force.

[678] *Informants: Obbo* Abera Mekonnen, *Obbo* Gugsa Mekonnen. Both were members of the Youth League of the MTSHA. They contend that the emerging Youth League had the intention to include youths from all over Oromo territories. Its members wanted to learn about the existing political reality, history and the problems of the Oromo in order to contribute their own share.

As will be seen, what General Taddasa wanted to achieve through his activities was the recognition of Oromo identity within the umbrella of Ethiopian identity. But what he rejected was the identity of Ethiopia that excluded and undermined the Oromo. His ambition was to see Ethiopia that embraces all its peoples, including the Oromo, with equality and dignity. He believed in the unity, equality and equal treatment of all Ethiopians and opposed the domination of a single ethnic group. It was to realize this ambition that he joined the MTSHA to use it as a platform.[679] According to an informant, his intention was: "Itiyoophiyaa keesaatti miidhaan Oromoorra akka hin geenye gochuu dha" (To struggle against the maltreatment of the Oromo in Ethiopia*).*[680] He wanted to restore the dignity of Oromo culture which he argued was destroyed at the hands of the Amhara rulers. [681]

By the middle of the 1960s, General Taddasa was able to become a leading figure within the MTSHA and the activities of the MTSHA from 1964-1967 was much related to the history of General Taddasa. According to Mohammed Hassen, he was at the centre of Oromo cultural nationalism and history since the 1960s. To use his own words, 'he was the heartbeat, brain and the guiding spirit' of that Association.[682] He was able to play this role mainly because of his devotion to the Oromo cause, his charismatic and his fearless personality, oratory and leadership qualities. His question was how long the numerically big Oromo would continue to be dominated economically and politically by a minority group.[683]

[679] Mohammed Hassen, "General Taddesse Birru, 1921-1975," in *Goota Oromiyaa*…., 2008, p.342, 347; Mohammed Hassen, 1998, p. 213.
[680] *Informant: Qesis* Belay Mekonnen.
[681] Edmond Keller, pp.160-165.
[682] Mohammed Hassen, "General Taddesse Birru, 1921-1975," in *Goota Oromiyaa*…., 2008, p.339.
[683] Mekuria Bulcha, 2011, p.522.

It was in recognition of his contributions within the MTSHA and later that some came to recognize him as a 'father of modern Oromo nationalism'. When he justifies the reasons for this recognition, my informant says:

> *Waldaa Maccaa fi Tuulamaa gara Siyaasaatti jijjiiruun isaa dhaloota tokko guutuu akka isaan itti yaadan jijjiire. Waa'ee Oromoo gadi baasuudhaan ifatti dubbachuu, sirnicha balaaleffachuu, qeequu fi mormuudhaan dhaloota keenya lafaa ka'aa jirru akka nuti itti yaadnu jijjiire. Sabboonaa Oromoo ta'uun amma sanatti qaanii ture; waa'ee Oromoo yoo haasofte gosaa polotikaa geggeessite jedhama, akka qaanfattu godhama. Oromoon Afaan Amaaraa xiqqoo dubbachuu bare lammata Afaan Oromoo hin dubbatu. Jeneraal Taaddasaan gadi ba'ee afaan dur gate deebi'ee ittiin dubbachuudhaan akkaataa itti yaadnuu fi itti ilaallu jijjiire.*
>
> *His transformation of the MTSHA into a political movement had changed an entire generation Oromo how they think. By publicly raising Oromo issue, criticizing, exposing and opposing the imperial system, he has changed our emerging generation the way we think. Until that time, it was shameful to become Oromo nationalist; if you raised about Oromo you would be accused of promoting ethnic politics and you were made to be ashamed of it. An Oromo who learnt to speak a little Amharic would refuse to speak Afaan Oromo again. When General Taddasa came out and began to speak in the language he had long forgotten, he changed the way we think and see.*[684]

Through his moving speeches, he made tremendous efforts which eventually led to the rise and transformation of Oromo consciousness to a new stage. Then, the Association shifted its demand from local developments to wider political and cultural issues that challenged the status quo.[685] His moving speeches came to have two impacts. On one hand, it enabled the Association to produce more members within a short period of time. On the other hand, it threatened the authorities that his movement could challenge their power. As will be shown in the next chapter, when it became clear that the government would attack the Association

[684] *Informant*: *Obbo* Leencoo Lataa.
[685] Edmond Keller, pp.160-65.

and its leaders sooner or later, General Taddasa determined to ignite the fire of Oromo nationalism by making moving speeches on various stages of the Association. [686]

General Taddasa, as indicated earlier, was chairman of the Association's branch expansion committee. By expanding its branches to several areas, he contributed a lot in making it a pan-Oromo movement in terms of geographical coverage, in addition to the diversity of its members.[687] According to Mekuria Bulcha, the MTSHA was the first forum to bring together the members of the Oromo branches from different areas for a common cause since the banning of the *Jilaa* pilgrimage towards the end of the 19th century. After the Association expanded to different parts of Oromo territories and beyond, a name change was suggested because Maccaa and Tuulamaa represented only a specific group of the Oromo. It was suggested that the name should be changed to a more collective name that could represent the entire Oromo. However, the recommendation was dropped because it was feared that the government could consider it provocative and use it as a pretext to destroy the Association. It was with this understanding that the name was accepted as a pan-Oromo movement even if it represented a certain group of the Oromo in terms of name.[688] The MTSHA became a pan-Oromo movement, mainly through the efforts of General Taddasa and his moving speeches which focused on taboo subjects such as the issue of land.[689]

[686] Gada Melba, p.115.

[687] Mekuria Bulcha, 2011, p. 502. It moved out of Shawa and established branches in Wallaggaa, Jimmaa, Iluu Abbaa Booraa, Arsii Baalee, Harargee and several other areas. The Association brought together people from parts of Oromo land and from different levels and all sections of the Oromo society. It created a suitable condition from which Oromo nationalism was able to develop.

[688] Mekuria Bulcha,2011, p. 527.

[689] John Markakis, *National and Class Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, Zed Books, 1990, p. 260.

In one of the meeetings at the Association's headquarters, General Taddasa emphasized on the exploitation of the Oromo peasants, especially those closer to the capital, and said to the audience:

> እስቲ ሩቅ ሳትሄዱ ከዚህ ከሱሉሉታ የሚመጣዉን ገበሬ ተመልከቱ። ኩበት ለመሸጥ ሲመጣ ይቀርጡታል፡ይሄ ገበሬ ከብት የጣለዉን እበት ሰብስቦ ላመጣ ለምን ይቀረጣል? በጉልበቱም ለባላባቱ ይገብራል፤ ለሚጠቀምበት መሬት እህልና ገንዘብ ይከፍላል፤ ከብቶቹ ከሜዳ ሳር ስለጋጡ ይገብራል፤ኩበታቸዉን ገበያ አዉጥቶ ሲሸጥም ይገብራል፤ እና ይሄ አርሶ አደር ምን ቀረዉ? ስጋዉ ተገሽልጦ አልቆ አጥንቱ ነዉ የቀረዉ። የሚሄደዉ በአጥንቱ ነዉ። ይሄንን አርሶ አደር ከብዝበዛና ጭቆና ነጻ ልናወጣዉ ይገባል። እናንተ የተማራችሁ! ይሄንን አርሶ አደር ከግፍና ብዝበዛ ነጻ ልታወጡት ይገባል።
>
> *Without going too far look at a peasant coming from Sulultaa. When he comes to sell cow dung they tax him. This peasant pays money for collecting and bringing what cattle have dropped. For the land he cultivates he pays in grain and money. When his cattle graze from the field he pays. When he brings their drop to the market for sell he pays. So what is left for this peasant? His flesh has been removed and only his bone remains. He walks only with his bone. We have to liberate this peasant from exploitation and oppression. You, the educated ones should liberate this peasant from oppression and exploitation.*[690]

In addition to the various speeches he made at the Assocaition's headquarters, General Taddasa also made speeches at Itayyaa, Abeebee Qeerransa and Dheeraa. In order to show how he consolidated Oromo unity, developed Oromo consciousness and transformed the MTSHA into a pan-Oromo movement, the latter three are taken for analysis. This is because his speeches and teachings in these areas could be taken as good examples.

[690]Daniel Tefera, *Dandi*: *Ye'Nagaso Gidada Menged*, pp.65-66; *Informan*t: Dr. Nagaasoo Gidaadaa. Nagaasoo began to attend the meetings of the MTSHA soon after he joined the Baeda Mariyam School in September 1965. At the time there were many Oromo students attending the meeting from Addis Ababa University. Thus he was taken to the headquarters of the MTSHA near the Pastor Institute by the senior students and he was an eye-witness of the speeches of General Taddasa here. General Taddasa continued to make speeches at the headquarters until the closure of the Association and his imprisonment.

5.1 General Taddasa Birru at Itayyaa

One of the major areas outside the capital where General Taddasa made an important speech was at Itayyaa in Arsii on *Ginbot* 7, 1958 *A.M* (May 15, 1966).[691] The Association moved out of its regional confinement of Maccaa and Tuulama areas to Arsii to become practically a pan- Oromo movement and to register another history. There were suitable conditions in Arsii that immensely contributed to the success of the Itayyaa meeting. First, Itayyaa and Dheeraa were considered as centres of Arsii resistance against the conquest of Menilek. Because of the strong resistance, Menilek was forced to make continuous campaigns into these areas with acts of brutality. One of the notorious brutalities was the mutilations at Aannolee only 10km away from the town of Itayyaa. The Arsii reacted to their military defeat by embracing Islam en masse in order to protect themselves from the religion and values of the conquerors.[692] In general, the memory of their brutal defeat and their subsequent maltreatment were the major Arsii grievances.[693] During the early 1960s, the people of Arsii had been suffering in the hands of incompetent and corrupt governors. They were under the notorious corrupt governor, *Dajjazmach* Sahilu Defaye, who was a close friend of the Prime Minister, Aklilu Habte Wold.[694]

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[691] Olana Zoga, p.51.

[692] Abbas H. Gnamo, *Conquest and Resistance in the Ethiopian Empire, 1880-1974: The Case of the Arsii Oromo*(The Netherlands: Konin Klisle Brill NV, Leiden, 2014), p.138 .

[693] *Informants*: *Obbo* Muhammed Jiruu, *Obbo* Girshaa Goobanaa. The extension of the activity of the association in to Arsii, particularly to the environs of Itaya where Menilek's cruel and harsh treatment of the Arsii was still fresh in the minds of the Oromo people frightened the regime more than ever before. Considering this as a serious threat and challenge to its authority, the regime and its governors in Arsii conspired to kill the members of the association while they were touring the province to organize the people.

[694] Abbas H. Gnamo, *Conquest and Resistance in the Ethiopian Empire, 1880-1974: The Case of the Arsii Oromo* (The Netherlands: Konin Klisle Brill NV, Leiden, 2014), pp. 253-256. According to Abbas H. Gnamo, *Dajjach* Sahilu Defaye served as a governor of Arsi from 1965 to 1974. He was a close servant of Habte Wold's family, the task which he inherited from his father. With the rise of the Habte Wold family he was appointed as a governor of various areas, including Arsi. He became the most corrupt, unpopular and notorious governor of Arsi. He was well protected by his guardian Prime Minister, Aklilu Habte Wold; see also

Probably as a reaction to their precarious situations, there were underground movements in Arsii which particularly focused on helping young Oromo in urban areas to get access to education. There was a concern that the Arsii Oromo were not getting access to education comparatively. It was mainly the leaders of these underground movements that soon became members of the MTSHA in Arsii. In general, there were fertile grounds in Itayyaa and its neighboring areas that initiated them to welcome the MTSHA.[695]

There were attempts to prevent the meeting from taking place. As a result, the organizers of the meeting were arrested on the eve while many of those who went to the town of Itayyaa to attend the meeting were intimidated. The authorities attempted to make preemptive measures by forcing hotels and restaurants not to give services to the guests for about two days. However, these provocations brought the Oromo even more closely to the level of eating and drinking together despite their religious differences. Oral informants unanimously blame a certain Abdii Duulaa for helping the authorities in the arrest and intimidation of those who took active part in the success of the meeting. The authorities depicted the meeting as anti-government with the intention to mobilize the people on them.[696]

The meeting of Itayyaa was attended by a huge crowd estimated to be seventy thousand to one hundred thousand. The major issues discussed on the meeting included Oromo landlessness, humiliation and suffering in the hands of the authorities and how to resolve

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Anga'a Dhuguma, 2008, pp.63-64. According to informants (Aman Maddaa and Mohammed Jiruu), some of the injustices he committed against the people of Arsii included over taxation, attempt to change the name of some towns and inventory of all domestic animals which forbade the owners to sell without the approval of the authorities.

[695] Olana Zoga, pp.51-53.

[696] *Informants*: *Obbo* Kuusaa Deettii, *Obbo* Muhammed Jiruu, *Obbo* Girshaa Goobanaa. Abdi Duulaa was later accused for corruption he committed with *Dajjach* Sahilu. Those who played key roles in holding the meeting were the notable individuals and elders like *Haji* Roobalee Turee, *Haji* Simbirree Hullufaa, Taasisaa Eebbaa, Daadhii Fayisaa and others(See the account of *Informants*: Haji Aliyi Tololaa, Haji Biiftuu Fayyisoo; Olana Zoga,p.51.

them. Thus, they discussed on how to strengthen their unity and make cultural revival.[697] One of the Arsii elders, *Haji* Simbirree Hullufaa, stressed the importance of unity when he said: "Burqaa xixiqqoon walitti yaa'anii laga ta'u. Lagni baay'een walitti yaa'anii garba guddaa uumu. Dhalli namaas akkuma kanaan walga'ee saba ta'ee biyyas ta'a" (Small streams come together and form a big river. Many rivers come together and form a sea. Similarly, human beings come together to form a nation and even a country). He urged that the Oromo should come together in order to get rid of imposed injustices against them.[698]

The Itayyaa meeting was attended by the key leaders of the Association who went there from the capital. These included General Taddasa, Lieutenant Mamo Mazamir, Colonel Alamu Qixxeessaa, Haile Mariam Gammadaa and many others. General Taddasa was advised not to attend a 'tribal' meeting of the Association that was regarded as hostile organization that deserved to be destroyed. However, he participated in the meeting with great determination because, as Mohammed Hassen argues, he had already established the centrality of Oromo issue in his mind. Moreover, he pushed other prominent leaders to make the struggle for the equality of the Oromo central to the Association's activities. In doing so, he attempted to move the Oromo to the centre stage of making their own history the fact which was only known to the key leaders of the MTSHA until 1966.[699]

The central figure in the Itayyaa meeting, indeed as in elsewhere, was General Taddasa with irrepressible determination urging the Oromo to stand together in unity against their common enemy. His speech encouraged the participants to come together and vow not to be

[697] Abbas H. Gnamo, *Conquest and Resistance in the Ethiopian Empire, 1880-1974: The Case of the Arsii Oromo*(The Netherlands: Konin Klisle Brill NV, Leiden, 2014), p.4.
[698] *Waldaa Maccaa fi Tuulamaa Ayyaana Waggaa 30ffaa*; *Barruulee Gadaa Lakk.*1, 1992, pp.4-8.
[699] Mohammed Hassen, "General Taddesse Birru, 1921-1975" in *Goota Oromiyaa*, 2008, p.345.

divided.[700] The meeting was addressed in Afaan Oromo.[701] General Taddasa is reported to have said on the meeting:

> *…we Oromo are about 17 million in number. However, since we have lagged behind in terms of education and socio-economic life we have to learn and transform ourselves. Otherwise we would be victims by global threats such as shortage of food and poverty.*[702]

In his speech, as usual, he focused on the importance of education because he believed that education was not only a means of overcoming poverty and enjoying better life, but also a means of demanding human and democratic rights. This was clearly reflected in his speech when he said: "...የኢትዮጵያ ህዝብ፤ /ልብ በሉ የኦሮሞ ህዝብ አልነበረም ያሉት/፤ ሰብያዊና ድሞክራስያዊ መብቶቹን ለማስከበርና ከድህነትም ለመላቀቅ በቅድሚያ ከመሃይምነት መላቀቅ አለበት።..."(The people of Ethiopia, bear in mind that they said the Oromo did not exist, in order to protect their human and democratic rights and to overcome poverty, they have to be first detached from illiteracy).[703]

The Itayyaa meeting was practically a turning point in the MTSHA's efforts to bring the Oromo together and become a pan-Oromo movement. It was indeed a turning point in several ways. First, it shattered the myth of hostile religious differences and boundary that had been drawn among the Oromo as part of the divide and rule policy of the Imperial regime. At Itayyaa, Oromo identity superseded religious identity, which was the choice of the Oromo people. The participants were able to bridge the social gap between the Muslim

[700] *Ibid*., pp.348-349.
[701] John Markakis, 1997, p.260.
[702] IES MS: 1091, "The File of the MTSHA".
[703] Atinaf Seged Yilma, *Ye'Hiwote Mistir: Yetefetene Gabicha Iyobeliyu*, (Addis Ababa, 2008 *A.M*), pp.6-7. Atiinaf Seged writes that this remark of General Taddasa alarmed the authorities of the Imperial regime, including the Emperor.

Oromo and the Christian Oromo when they ate and drank together.[704] When the authorities closed restaurants and hotels not to give services to the Christian participants, especially those who went from Addis Ababa[705], the organizers expressed their sadness to General Taddasa because they were unable to entertain their guests with their own resources.[706]

Because of the restrictions, it was only the Muslims who slaughtered bullocks while the Christians were prohibited. When the organizers could do nothing to entertain their guests due to the prohibition, they told General Taddasa about what had happened. This was because he was considered as a key leader and strict in terms of religion. It was here that he made a well matured decision that cemented Oromo unity and made the Itayyaa meeting historical. He made the Muslim and Christian Oromo to eat from the same dish.[707]

General Taddasa told this story to his wife and daughter later when they went to Galamsoo, where he lived in banishment, to visit him. As he took them through the town for lunch, he told his wife: "Look, in the Christian butchery (*lukanda*) there is no good meat and it is in the Muslim ones that we see fine meat, so what shall we do?" When his wife kept silent, he added another question, "Haven't you ever eaten any meat slaughtered by Muslims?" She said, 'never'. And then he asked her what she ate when they went to Itayyaa during the meeting of the MTSHA. He told her that the Christians never slaughtered and it was him, who ordered them to divide the meat slaughtered by the Muslims into Christian and Muslim

[704] Gemechu Taye, pp.15-16; *Informants*: *Obbo* Kuusaa Deettii, *Haji* Aliyi Tololaa. After the conquest, the Arsii continued their resistance through accepting Islam and rejecting Christianity. In the process, however, the picture drawn was that the Arsii Oromo were Muslims while the Christians were the conquerors whether the Amhara or the migrant Tuulamaa Oromo. Thus non Muslims were viewed through time as part of the ruling Amhara, and if not, as their collaborators. This situation was exacerbated during the Italian occupation when the Arsii took some sort of revenge against their earlier maltreatment and exploitations.

[705] Gemechu Taye, pp.15-16.

[706] IES MS: 1091-'The File of the MTSHA': General Taddasa's First Response to the Court'.

[707] *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

ones. She responded that she did not eat knowingly and it was him who should carry its sin. She is reported to have added that it was because of his sinful acts that he was imprisoned as a punishment of God.[708]

In justifying his own decision for doing it, according to my informant, he said:

> *They invited us with respect making preparations. But if we refuse to eat saying this is slain by the Muslims and not by the Christians, it will not be good; it drifts us apart. It has a negative impact on our unity.*[709]

His major concern was how to consolidate Oromo unity by establishing deep solidarity with the organizers, who were disturbed by their prohibition from entertaining their guests.[710] He understood the concern of the organizers and told them to divide the meat slaughtered by the Muslims simply into two, for Christians and Muslims. The Muslims then joined the Christian table because the meat was slaughtered by them. What happened on the occasion was that both the Muslims and the Christians became very happy; the Christians were happy because their Muslim brothers joined their dish. The Muslims were also very happy because their Christian brothers ate meat slain by them. With the exception of a very few participants, including the wife of General Taddasa, the majority knew that the meat was slain by Muslims because the Christians were prohibited to do so. It was General Taddasa who did this immense contribution of breaking the long established religious taboo. He was a strict Orthodox himself, as indicated earlier, but this was secondary to his vision of bringing the Oromo together.[711] At Itayyaa the Oromo leaders broke food taboo and in doing so, though

[708] *Ibid.*
[709] *Ibid.*
[710] *Ibid.*
[711] *Ibid.*

indirectly, they revitalized the traditional belief of the Oromo, the *Waaqeffannaa*. It is reported that about thirty bullocks were slaughtered and consumed in this way.[712]

Second, in addition to crossing the religious boundary, the MTSHA also crossed regional boundary which made its activity truly a pan- Oromo movement. The Oromo from different branches and clans came together giving priority to their unity. The Maccaa and Tuulama which belonged to the Booran Confederacy had already cemented their unity and crossed into the Baarentummaa Confederacy to include Arsii in order to bring the wider Oromo unity.[713] In other words, the move connected the central and western Oromo with those in the east and brought together the different branches of the Oromo.[714] The Oromo unity was consolidated by shattering all fabricated myths about disunity and the participants emotionally declared that they were one and the same; the sons and daughters of the same father who were inseparable, *eennaa-halaku*.[715] The meeting was a clear testimony that the Oromo could stand together and capable of struggling for their human dignity.[716] However, both religious and regional unity attempted by the Association was regarded as a clear challenge to the existing political establishment.[717]

Third, the meeting was used as a good opportunity to strengthen the unity between the Arsii and the migrant Tuulamaa in Arsii. Earlier there had been misunderstanding between the migrant Gullallee, Ada'aa, and Salaalee on one hand and the Arsii, on the other hand, going back to the time of the conquest of Menilek. During the conquest of Arsii, *Ras* Darge had

[712] Mekuria Bulcha, 2011, pp.524-525.
[713] Gemechu Taye, pp.15-16.
[714] *Ibid.*
[715] *Informants: Hajji* Aliyyi Tololaa, *Obbo* Kuusaa Deettii.
[716] Asafa Jalata and Mohammed Hassen, 2014, p.79.
[717] Mohammed Hassen, *JOS*, Vol, 7, 2000, p. 127. As a result, the government attempted to crash the Association as will be discussed later.

forcefully recruited the Oromo from Salaalee after subjugating them. It is reported that the Arsii had requested *Ras* Goobanaa to form a joint Oromo front against the conquerors. But when the request was ignored, the Arsii were forced to face the enemy alone. They were eventually defeated after a stiff resistance.[718] The Gullallee who were settled in Arsii were mainly those displaced from their residences where Addis Ababa was established.[719]

The Arsii began to consider them as land hungry and collaborative with the *neftegna* which had created misunderstanding between the two Oromo groups. During the meeting at Itayyaa, General Taddasa was able to bring together elders from both sides and told them that the division between the Oromo was purposefully triggered by the authorities for political purpose. He attempted to build brotherhood and trust between the two sides.[720] As will be seen shortly, this was done more during the Dheeraa meeting of the MTSHA.

Another important development in the Itayyaa meeting was the use of Oromo language for public speeches. Since then all subsequent meetings were addressed in the same language. Similarly, drama written in Afaan Oromo was also shown at subsequent meetings[721], including at Dheeraa as will be explained more below.

The authorities considered the Itayyaa meeting as provocative mainly because of its crossing of religious and regional boundaries, and its usage of Oromo language for public speeches.[722] Thus, though the meeting was completed with success for the Oromo, the authorities carried out wide scale intimidation and terrorization after the end of the meeting. The governor,

[718] Abbas H. Gnamo, *Conquest and Resistance*…,pp.148-149.
[719] *Informants*: *Haji* Aliyyi Tololaa, *Obbo* Kuusaa Deettii. Today only the name of the Gullallee survived in the capital.
[720] *Informant: Obbo* Kuusaa Deettii.
[721] Mohammed Hassen, "General Taddesse Birru, 1921-1975," in *Goota Oromiyaa*…., 2008, p.348.
[722] *Ibid.*

Dajjazmach Sahilu Defaye, ordered the people to gather at his administrative office in Asallaa and provoked them saying, "What country do you have here? Your country is Kenya." This remark extremely offended the elders of Arsii and the leaders of the MTSHA as a whole. Indeed, *Dajjach* Sahilu was one of the strongest opponents of the activities of the MTSHA in Arsii.[723] He also accused the leaders of the Association for inciting people against his administration.[724]

It is reported that the Emperor was offended by his speech at Itayyaa and is said to have summoned him and said: "... አንድ ጎሳ ከሌላ ጎሳ ጋር በማጋጨት ጥላቻ እንድፈጠር ታደርጋለህ...። እኛ ኦሮሞነት እንዳለን ታዉቃለህ ...? (You pit one ethnic group against the other and create hatred… Do you know that we [referring to himself] have Oromo identity?...).[725] After the meeting, the governor of Arsii, *Dajjazmach* Sahilu Defaye, is said to have provoked the people of Arsii, which indeed offended General Taddasa, when he said, 'What country do you have here? Your country is Kenya'.[726]

Now when he compared his earlier conversations with the Prime Minister, Aklilu Habte Wold, and the remark of *Dajjazmach* Sahilu, his determination of resistance grew stronger. Aklilu advised him that the Oromo should not be educated while Sahilu remarked that the Oromo had no land to claim in Ethiopia. This situation forced General Taddasa to develop a new idea. Accordingly, he was convinced that there was a need to establish the branches of the Association all over the provinces quickly. He also discussed with *Dajjazmach* Kebede

[723] Gemechu Taye, pp.15-16.

[724] *Barruulee Gadaa, Lakk.1,* 1992, pp. 4-8. He attempted to prohibit the other major meeting in Arsii, this time in Dheeraa, but in vain as will be seen shortly.

[725] Atinaf Seged Yilma, pp .6-7. Creating ethnic difference was the major accusation against General Taddasa during the the court debate. It seems that the Emperor wanted to sympathize with General Taddasa and other Oromo elites probably in order to exclude himself from the intrigues going among the ruling circle below him. As a result, there was a general tendency among the Oromo elite that the Emperor was also theirs.

[726] IES MS: 1091- 'The File of the MTSHA- General Taddasa's First Response to the Court.'

on what to do if this plan was hindered. One of the ideas he raised was to coordinate people from all over the provinces and initiate an uprising (ጦብ ማስነሳት). *Dajjazmach* Kebede, however, opposed this idea by stressing its difficulty and consequences and suggested instead to make peaceful demonstrations in several areas. They eventually agreed on this idea of making peaceful demonstrations.[727] Since then General Taddasa frequently appeared on the subsequent meetings of the Association with more determinations with the intention of preparing people for the inevitable show down with the regime either in the form of demonstration or uprising.

5.2 General Taddasa Birru at Abeebee Qeerransaa

The other important place where the leaders of the MTSHA, including General Taddasa, made moving speeches was at Abeebee Qeerransaa in Dandii District on *Hamile* 17,1958 *A.M* (July 1966). In addition to the people from the surrounding areas, the meeting was attended by representatives of the Oromo from different areas as far as Wallaggaa, Sidaamoo, Harargee, Arsii and other areas. The meeting started with the blessing of elders according to the traditional Oromo custom of opening deliberations. The key leaders, Colonel Alamu and *Dajjazmach* Kebede, admitted that they were wrong in speaking to them through translator and apologized for it. Accordingly, Colonel Alamu stood up and said, "We are sorry for speaking to you through translator while we were born out of (among) you." *Dajjazmach* Kebede on his part added, "I was born and grew up in Meettaa among you and I am sad to communicate here in Amharic through translator. They called me *Dajjazmach* for

[727] *Ibid.*

what I did during the five years enemy occupation. Still the members of the MTSHA are disliked and our enemies are many."[728]

General Taddasa delivered his speech in *Afaan* Oromo (Oromo language). One of the focuses of his speech was education and regarding it, he often said, "A person who has no education would fall down and break apart like a utensil."[729]

General Taddasa persistently used story telling in order to arouse and convince his audience. Some of the stories he used to motivate and convince the crowd are indicated below. The first story was related to the importance of education. Here, he used the story related to a monkey.

> አንድ ጅንጀሮ መላ አካላቱን እሾህ ወጋዉ ሌላዉ መጥቶ የትኛዉን እሾህ ልንቀልልህ ቢለዉ አስቀድሞ የመቀመጫዬን ንቀልልኝና መቀመጥ ስችል የቀረዉን እኔ እለቅመዋለዉ አለዉ።

> *A monkey was pierced in all of its body with thorn. Another came and asked it which thorn to remove first. Then it demanded the one at its seat be removed first so that it could remove the rest by its own*.[730]

According to an eye witness, he told the crowd that the three challenges encountering the people of the world were illiteracy, poverty and disease and warned that the current generation had to fight against them in order to survive. He raised the story of the monkey to show them that they could be capable of resolving their own problems if they were educated first.[731]

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[728] 'The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA', 39th Witness: *Ato* Yishaq Tikku, pp.132-133.

[729] IES MS: 1091-18th Witness : *Obbo* Bekele Mekonnen.

[730] 'The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA', 39th Witness- Yishaq Tiku, p.133. Here, General Taddasa wanted to underline that if the people were given education, they could resolve many of their own problems. In other words, he wanted to emphasize that education was a key to resolve other social, economic and political problems.

[731] 'The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA'- the testimony of Colonel Alamu Qixxeessaa, pp. 326- 327.

After emphasizing the importance of education he moved on to another issue with a story as follows:

> *While two persons were travelling they saw people passing by carrying a dead man on stretcher for burial. The first one asked, 'What happened to this man?' The other replied, 'He is dead and they are going to bury him. It is obvious that all of us are going to die; we are mortal.' As they continued their travel, they saw many people gathered in a big house making a lot of noises and the first one asked, 'What are these small people?' As they continued their way again they saw now few people chatting harmoniously and the first one asked again, 'What are these big people?' The other person was confused by the questions of his colleague and asked him to interpret the two stories. He replied that 'the person carried was already dead while still alive because of impoverishment and what is now dead was his already dead body, (ኦሆን የሞተዉ ረሳዉ ነዉ). When I said many people are small it is because they do not have unity and do not listen to one another. Why I said few people are big it is because they talk harmoniously and have unity'.*[732]

After telling them these stories, General Taddasa asked the crowd whether they were clear with the implication of the examples. The crowd responded that they were clear.[733] In the first story, he wanted to deliver the message that the prevailing impoverishment had deteriorated the living standards of the Oromo peasants. In the second story, he wanted to tell them that unity was a vital source of strength for any society to struggle against its oppressor. His concern for Oromo unity becomes very clear from his another story:

> *The father tied ten sticks together and gave its bundle to his son to break. When the son could not break it, the father separated the sticks and gave him one by one to break, which he now did easily.*[734]

He wanted to stress the importance of Oromo unity and urged the audience to stand together. This was because he strongly believed that it was the division of the Oromo that significantly

[732] *'The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA',* 39th Witness : *Ato* Yishaq Tikku, pp.132-133
[733] *Ibid.*
[734] *Ibid.*

contributed to its defeat in the past and its current miserable life. He underlined that the Oromo should strengthen their unity. In order to make the crowd more provoked and determined, he told them what he had encountered as a police officer. He told them:

> *One day while the Oromo were being recruited into the Fetno Derash Police, a certain Dajjazmach came and asked me why I recruited them and advised me to recruit instead from Merhabetie, Menz, Yifat and Debre Berhan. I said, 'What is wrong with the Oromo? Was it not the Oromo who established this country?' He responded, "They are coward and in the absence of the Amhara forcing them from behind [as commanders] their service would not be complete." I replied, 'I cannot prevent them from recruitment.'* [735]

According to the testimony of Colonel Alamu, General Taddasa used the above story because he heard that people did not come to the meeting in large number due to the fear of the warning of the authorities. He advised the people that they had to come out willingly for their own purposes and insisted that they should not expect others to force them. In his own words:

> *የግል ርስታችሁን ቆርሳችሁ ሰጥታችሁ የራሳችሁንና የልጆቻችሁን ዕድል ለማሻሻል በሚታደርጉት ጥረት ሌላ አስገዳጅ እንድኖራችሁ መፈለግ የራሳችሁ ጥቅም እንቅፋት መሆናችሁን የሚያሳይ ነዉ። ይህን የመሰለውን ተግባር ለመፈጸም አዛዥ መፈለግ ደጃዝማቹ እንደተናገሩት ያለትህዛዝ መሥራት የማይፈልግ ሕዝብ መሆኑን የሚሳይ ነዉ አሉ።*
>
> *In your attempt to improve your fate and that of your children by giving your rist land, if you expect someone to force you it shows that you are becoming obstacle of your own advantages. In order to carry out this duty [self-improvement] expecting someone to give order, as Dajjazmach said, shows that you are unwilling to work in your own.* [736]

General Taddasa did not always point his fingers towards the *neftegna* exploitations of the Oromo. It has to be clear that he often used story telling as good example to criticize the

[735] 'The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA'-The Testimony of Colonel Alamu Qixxeessaa, p.327; IES. MS 1091: 47th Witness- *Obbo* Filee Amantee.

[736] 'The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA'- The Testimony of Colonel Alamu Qixxeessaa, pp.326-327.

Oromo positively and encourage them to work hard for their own improvement. For example, he used the following remark for this purpose when he said:

> *I believe that unless you make your own efforts, what your Majesty will do for you? Help one another…The 25th year of the Emperor's return to his throne was celebrated yesterday. During this long period if you have built roads and got access to education you would not be ignored like this…you could wear good clothes and drive car like us. It does not help to say this governor ruled us and that governor imprisoned us…*".[737]

As indicated in the preceding chapter, once again he raised the story of *Ato* Birru Wolde Tsadiq. Birru Wolde Tsadiq was one of the settlers in Arsi who came from the north after the conquest of the area but was able to distinguish himself as a successful and rich farmer.[738] According to the testimony of Colonel Alamu, as a model farmer, he went to the USA to see an exhibition. It was while in the USA that he was asked by journalists about the people of Ethiopia. He told them with their ranks as follows: first-Gurage, second-Amhara, third- cattle and fourth-Oromo. According to the testimony, General Taddasa used the story to tell the Oromo that they need to work hard in order to improve themselves; learn and educate their own children at least to move to the third rank.[739] In reality, however, the ranking of the

[737] *Ibid.*

[738] His name was repeatedly raised in the *Addis Zemen* newspaper, for example, on *Tir* 23, 1954 *A.M*; *Sene* 12, 1954 *A.M.* He went to Siree area after the conquest of Arsii by Menilek II. Initially he bought one *gasha* of land and eventually he was able to buy upto 16 *gashas*. He was well known for his abundant production and rich. He had more than 1200 cattle and produced more than 4000 quintals of grains each year.

[739]"The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA- the testimony of Colonel Alamu Qixxeessaa, p. 327. According to the account of Colonel Alamu, *Ato* Birru had his own reasons for giving the ranks. For him, the Gurage were intelligent because they did not despise whatever work they got and were regarded as hardworking people. He ranked the Amhara second because for him they were advanced, learned and the rulers of Ethiopia. He ranked the cattle at third position because they were used for different purposes. According to *Ato* Birru, the Oromo were ranked fourth because while their land was fertile they did not like work and hence they were regarded as lazy people. Other witnesses, for example 39th witness, however, put the Amhara in the first rank but the account of Colonel Alamu is more reliable because he also heard it from the mouth of *Ato* Birru himself.

Oromo below cattle was deeply provocative and offensive according to a contemporary informant.[740]

According to the testimony, the crowd accepted his other advices and examples with great enthusiasm but was offended when it came to the issue of Oromo cowardice as indicated above. They listed down the distinguished Oromo patriots of the past like *Ras* Goobaanaa, *Fitawrari* Gebeyehu Gurmuu, *Dajjazmach* Baalchaa Saafoo and *Fitawrari* Habte Giyorgis Dinagdee among others. They asked him whether these were not Oromo and expressed their sadness to hear for the first time that the Oromo were called cowards.[741]

The other important issue which General Taddasa raised at various meetings, including Abeebee Qeerransaa, was the big demographic size of the Oromo. On this meeting he also said:

> *Once, I said the Amhara are five million and the Oromo are fifteen million. I was accused and brought to court. And I responded, 'I am wrong because it is even 18 million. If this is a crime show me the article and punish me'. Since there is no legal ground to punish me, they left me alone."*[742]

It seems that General Taddasa was happy in provoking the crowd into self-consciousness and this was one of the mechanisms by which he wanted to get popular mobilization. It is reported that his speeches in Abeebee Qeerransaa were generally regarded as fuel for the

[740] *Informant*: *Obbo* Taye Badhaadhaa.

[741] IES MS: 1091, 39th Witness- *Ato* Yishaq Tikku; 'The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA', 39th Witness, *Ato* Yishaq Tiku, pp.133-134 .

[742] IES MS: 1091, 47thWitness- *Obbo* Filee Amantee. But some say he was accused of saying 15million while others say 17 million. But they all agree that it was eventually corrected to 18 million. Asafa Jalata ("Socio-cultural Origins of the Oromo National Movement in Ethiopia", 1993, p. 267; Asafa Jalata, 1998, p.22), argues that the Ethiopian authorities used to hide the exact figure of the big Oromo population for fear of its political and other implications.

subsequent resistance tradition against injustices and exploitations in the region around Abeebee Qeerransaa.[743]

As shown in this chapter and elsewhere in this dissertation, General Taddasa was trying to consolidate the large Oromo population arguing that if it was possible to bring the Oromo together nobody could resist them. This fact is strengthened by the argument that the demographic factor of the Oromo, as they constituted about 40 % of the Ethiopian population, would place them in a potentially powerful position in the politics of Ethiopia.[744]

5.3 General Taddasa Birru at Dheeraa

The last major and eventful meeting of the MTSHA outside its headquarters, before its closure, was held in the town of Dheeraa in Arsii.[745] This was the second eventful meeting of the MTSHA in Arsii next to that of Itayyaa before its closure. There was immense pressure to prohibit the Dheeraa meeting from taking place. It was in the middle of this situation that one of the elders of the region, Hajji Roobalee Turee, went to the headquarters of the MTSHA to encourage its leaders not to be absent fearing the warning of the authorities.[746] When he arrived, the Association was holding its annual meeting and he was surprised to see a huge gathering; many of them were members of the military. He is reported to have said:

> *Are all these Oromo? They [the authorities] have abused us in inhumane way while you are here. They exploited us deeply to our bone. Do you*

[743] Olana Zoga, p.65.

[744] Ibrahim A. Gambari, "The Character, Fundamental Issues and Consequences of the Conflict in the Horn of Africa," in: *Conflict in the Horn of Africa*, edited by George Nzongola Ntalaja, Atlanta Georgia: African Studies Association Press, 1991, p.9. The exact percentage of the Oromo may be debatable.

[745] As in Itayyaa, Dheeraa area was where Menilek himself was defeated during one of his campaigns against Arsii.

[746] *Informants:* Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa. *Obbo* Taye Badhaadhaa.

know all the injustices they are committing against us? If you are really Oromo come to Dheeraa a week from today.[747]

In order to put a determination in them not to be absent, he told them about a story of a woman who wanted to meet her boyfriend when her husband would leave for a trip. But when her husband cancelled his trip, it is said, that she threw her child on him and went to meet her boyfriend once she had decided to meet him regardless of the difficult situation she would encounter. Indirectly he was telling the leaders of the MTSHA that it was shame for them to be absent from a meeting with their brothers in Arsii fearing the warnings of the authorities.[748] The Dheeraa area had a number of powerful elders, in addition to Hajji Roobalee.[749]

The governor of Arsii, *Dajjazmach* Sahilu Defaye, had already made it clear that he did not want to see another subversive meeting to take place against his administration within months. He tried to stop the meeting through the security office of the Ministry of Interior. He expressed his views on *Addis Zemen* newspaper that the people of Arsii did not want the meeting of the MTSHA to take place in their territory.[750] The elders of Dheeraa, however, sent a letter to the MTSHA through Aman Maddaa (my informant) which requested its leaders not to be absent because people were eagerly waiting for their coming.[751] However, *Dajjazmach* Sahilu ordered his subordinates to continue to warn and intimidate the people not to attend the Dheeraa meeting. This was mainly because he feared that General Taddasa would incite the people against his administration. In order to hinder the meeting, he arrested

[747] *Ibid*.
[748] *Waldaa Maccaa fi Tuulamaa Ayyaana Waggaa 30ffaa,* p.13; Olana Zoga, pp. 103-104
[749] They included Hajji Usman Qaabatoo, Gammachuu Seeraa, Yaamii Hawaas, Boosat Dagaagaa and several others.
[750] *Addis Zemen*, *Meskerem*, 24, 1959 *A.M.* However, *Dajjazmach* Sahilu was wrong because as it was observed the people of Arsii were eager to participate in the meeting.
[751] *Informant*: *Obbo* Aman Madda; Olana Zoga, pp.102-103.

the key organizers like Hajji Roobalee, Aman Maddaa and other notables on the eve of the meeting. They were imprisoned for organizing the meeting and inviting participants from Addis Ababa.[752]

The leaders of the Association made an emergency meeting and discussed what to do. It was raised that the Association did not commit anything different from what other associations were doing. General Taddasa said:

> *Yoo hafne uummati Oromoo addaan cita. Dhama'anii qophaa'anii nu waamanii hafuu hin qabnu. Garaagarummaan amantiillee waan jiruuf yoo hafne ni mufatu. Gama biraatiin yakka hojjenne hin qabnu waan ta'eef deemuu qabna.*
>
> *If we are absent, the Oromo people would be divided. They [elders of Dheeraa] made preparations and invited us. On one hand, since we do have a religious difference, they would be disappointed if we are absent. On the other hand, since we did not commit any crime we should go*.[753]

The Association decided and determined to attend the meeting. The Dheeraa meeting was held on October 15, 1966. Those who went to the meeting from Addis Ababa included General Taddasa, General Dawit, *Dajjazmach* Kebede Bizunesh, Lieutenant Mamo Mazamir, Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa, Bekele Mekonnen, Tesfaye Dagaagaa, Gabre Sillase Waldiyaa, Dejene Booji'aa, Ejjetaa Feyisaa, Soldier Camadaa and Haile Mariam Diimaa. Daadhii Fayyisaa also joined them with other members at Adaamaa and together they arrived at Dheeraa. General Taddasa and General Dawit were in the same car. When they arrived at Dheeraa

[752] *Informant: Obbo* Aman Maddaa. It was Aman Maddaa who was sent to the capital to give a letter to the leaders of the MTSHA and deliver the oral message not suitable to write on paper.`

[753] *Informant:* Colonel Sahilu Birri.

they were welcomed by numerous Arsii elders accompanied by several thousands of people.[754]

The leaders had assumed that *Dajjazmach* Sahilu would provoke them into violence. They were ready to resist his provocation if he would dare to do so. For this purpose, they went well armed and on reaching at Dheeraa except General Taddasa and *Dajjazmach* Kebede who led the meeting, the other leaders under the command of General Dawit Abdii were deployed to keep the security of the meeting area. Lieutenant Mamo was assigned to link the overall leader, General Taddasa, and the security chief, General Dawit and supervised the overall activity. In keeping the security, several armed local participants were also assigned. Daadhii Fayisaa took the responsibility of organizing them.[755]

Moreover, the Arsii participants came from wide areas well prepared with horses and whatever weapons they had.[756] According to informants, the number of attendants exceeded that of Itayyaa by far because they claim that the ground was not visible due to a huge crowd.[757] But according to the report of the *Ethiopian Herald*, about 16,000 people attended the Dheeraa meeting.[758] People came from areas like Doddotaa, Siree, Loodee Heexosaa, Koloobaa, Baadosa, Amiinyaa, Sabroo and other places. In general, people attended the meeting from the whole of Doddotaa and the surrounding districts of Siree, Heexosaa and others. My informant had attended the event with more than two hundred horsemen from the locality of Haxxee in Heexosaa alone. They arrived in Dheeraa lined up in three ranks and he

[754] Olana Zoga, pp.108-112; *Informant*: Dr.Moggaa Firrisaa. Colonel Alamu and Haile Mariam remained in the main office while others, including Colonel Sahilu, were also left behind in the capital to carry out intelligence activities.
[755] *Informant:* Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa; Olana Zoga, pp.108-112.
[756] *Ibid.*
[757] *Informants: Obbo* Aman Goobanaa, *Obbo* Aman Maddaa.
[758] *The Ethiopian Herald*, October 19, 1966.

was in the third rank. Accordingly, the first rank was composed of those who were decorated with lion skin (*warra gogaa leencaa uffatan*), the second group with tiger skin (*warra gogaa qeerransaa uffatan*), and the third group, the group of my informant, wore a special cloth (*warra lamdii uffatan*). People were mobilized underground to attend the meeting bringing various cultural food items like milk, bread, *marqaa*, *arancaata*, *cuukkoo, bicuu* and others.[759]

When the people gathered in the morning, the governor and the police chief of the Doddotaa district arrived and asked them to disperse; to go to their farm and collect their crops. They requested the crowd to reject the meeting because it was organized illegally without the permission of the governor of Arsii. However, the participants argued that if the organizers coming from the capital were illegal, the government could prohibit them from coming here and they should have been stopped there. They added:

> *Mootummaan waraqaa kenneefii uummata keessan barsiifadhaa jedhee oggaa eyyemu nama isin barsiifna jedhu akkamitti dhorgina? Badaa yoo nubarsiise ofirraa dhorguu qabna, waan gaarii yoo nubarsiise ammo fudhatuu qabna.*
>
> *When the government gave them a permission letter to go and teach their own people, how can we reject them? If they teach us bad things we should oppose them. But if they teach us good things we should accept them.*[760]

While they were making this conversation, the guests from Addis Ababa arrived. When he realized that the local authorities were trying to confuse the participants, General Taddasa rushed to the crowd and said:

> *Uummata keenya kan taatan as dacha'aa, uummata keenya kan hin ta'iin ammoo deemaa nurraa. Nuti uummata keenya barsiifachuu fi*

[759] *Informant:* Hajji Aliyyi Tololaa.
[760] *Informant: Obbo* Mohammed Jiruu.

> *wanta adda addaa itti himachuu barbaanna. Kanaaf, uummata keenya kan taatan as dacha'aa.*
>
> *Those who are our people turn back, those who are not go away. We want to teach our people and tell them a lot of things. Therefore, those who are our people return.*[761]

When the crowd turned to him, he stood on a chair and when that was not enough to reach the big crowd, he ascended a ***kuyyisaa (***termite made risen ground)**.** Now he commanded the attention of the crowd and said:

> *Waldaan Maccaa fi Tuulamaa kan mootummaan nuuf eyyeme kunoo waraqata qabna. Walga'ii kana gufachiisuuf jedhee warri duraan dhiiga keenya dhuguu barate nujala deemee isin faallessaa jiraa kana hin fudhatiinaa natti as galagalaa. Karaa isinii baasuu, bishaan isinii galchuu, bakka gabayaa isinii gochuu, wafcoo isinii dhaabuu, mana barnootaa fi hakiimaa isinii ijaaruuf dhufnee kana ni fudhattan moo ni diddan?*
>
> *This is a permission letter of the MTSHA which the government gave us. Those who were accustomed to drink our blood are here confusing you to hinder our meeting, ignore them and return to me. We came here to build roads, supply water, and establish market place; grain mills, schools and health stations, do you accept this or reject?*[762]

In the mean time, both the district governor and police chief approached General Taddasa and the governor asked him why they gathered the people illegally. Before answering the question, he asked him first to release Hajji Roobalee and others whom they had imprisoned in connection with this meeting. He insisted that illegal meeting would not be held and the Association had permission. At this point, he turned his face towards the crowd and said:

> *How long would the Amhara rule you forcefully? You suffer under their rule because of lack of unity… Here after nothing makes you fear and nobody will threaten you. We have to unite and retake our land that was taken from us by the Amhara. We used to quarrel in the past because of not knowing each other, but now we have to unite. Arm yourself, we are*

[761] IES MS: 1091, 39th Witness- *Ato* Yishaq Tikku and 47th Witness- *Obbo* Filee Amantee.
[762] *Informant: Obbo* Mohammed Jiruu .

everywhere in the left, right, front and the back. When we ignite fire from the centre, you have to start to burn from here.[763]

He continued his speech and said:

… Uummata Oromoo taatanii kuun kirrii hidhatee kuun amaamaa godhatee kan wal ajjeeftan hafuu qaba. Nuti ilmaan abbaa tokkoo fi haadha tokkooti diinati walitti nunaqe malee. Lammata akka wal hinajjeefne. Ati kan kirrii hidhatte Amaara miti, atis kan amaamaa maratte Araba miti, ilmaan Oromooti kan wajjin dhalate. Akka itti wajjin dhalattan ammo isinittin hima.

…The Oromo people, one group tying up thread (mateb) and other group wearing Islamic dress, have to stop killing each other. We are the children of one father and mother; it is the enemy who pitched us against each other. You should never kill each other again. You, the one who tied a thread [around your neck] are not Amhara, you the one who wear Islamic dress are not Arabs; but you are the children of Oromo who descended from the same father. I will tell you how you have descended from the same father.[764]

He then took a paper from his pocket and read the genealogy of the Oromo clans in order to show that the Oromo were descended from the same father. The crowd was amazed to hear that they were all descended from the same father. Having proved this, he continued his speech and said:

Kanaaf lammata wal-hinxuqiinaa. Diinni keessan ammo warra isin jala fiigee isin bulchuuf jedhu kanaa ofirraa balleessaa. Ummati Oromoo nuti walhinbeekne malee isheen as jirtu nama kudhan hin geessu. Uummati keenya osoo gaara Dilfaqaritti ol ba'ee gadi fincaa'ee lolaan isaa jara kana haree balleessa. Uummati Oromoo hanga yoomiitti gabra ta'ee taa'a? Nuti ilmaan abbaa tokkooti diinati addaan nu baase malee. Kanaaf, amma wanni isinii dhaamnu wal hinajjeesiinaa.

Therefore, do not touch each other again. Your enemies are those who run here and there to administer you; remove them. It is because we, Oromo people, do not know each other otherwise those who are here are even less than ten people; if our people ascend to Dilfaqar and urinate

[763] IES MS: 1091, 42nd Witness- Major Yigezu Zeleke; 35th Witness- *Ato* Yigezu Belay.
[764] *Informant*: *Obbo* Mohammed Jiruu.

> *the flood of our urine would wash them away. How long should the Oromo people live as slave? We belong to the same father but it is the enemy who divided us. Therefore, the message I deliver to you is that do not kill each other.*[765]

Now the district authorities became hopeless, as they were unable to get the attention of the people. The people of Arsii now betrayed them and even worse, they began to throw their spears in front of them. When he reported the situation to the higher authority, the district governor was ordered not to fire on the crowd and wait until the arrival of the *awraja* governor and police chief. [766]

Now, General Taddasa continued his speech and told the crowd that they had to sacrifice themselves to create a suitable environment for their sons and grand- sons. He told them a story as an example:

> *Namicha tokkotu muka dhaaba. Namni biraa muka kana maaliif dhaabda jedhee gaafate. Firee godhata ni nyaatama jedhe. Waggaa meeqatti ga'a jedhe. Waggaa soddomatti jedhe. Atihoo umuriin kee meeqa jedhe. Waggaa torbaatama jedhe. Kanaaf, ati ganaa waggaa dhibbaa booda nyaachuu heddaa ree jedhe. Ofiif miti, ijoollee koo fi ijoollee ijoollee koof jedhe jedhama. Akkuma kana nuti wanti qabsoo goonuuf booyyilee tana ofirraa buufnee biyyi keenya akka cunqursaa jalaa baatuu fi ijoollee keenyaaf haala gaarii uumuuf. Harreenillee yoo ba'aan itti guddate gadi jettee ofirraa jifkatti. Gaala kan waan itti fe'an hunda baatee lafaa ka'u. Akka gaalaa sana hinta'iinaa, yeroon akka gaalaa waan nutti fe'an hunda baannee adeemnu darbeera.*
>
> *A person plants a tree. Another person asked him why he planted. He responded it will make fruit to be eaten. The person again asked how many years it will take to be eaten. He responded thirty years. The person asked his age. He responded seventy. The person asked him if he would want to eat its fruit after hundred years. He responded I plant not for myself but for my children and grandchildren. When the load it carries becomes too heavy, even a donkey bends down to remove it*

[765] *Ibid.*

[766] *Informant*: *Obbo* Mohammed Jiruu; IES MS: 1091, 35th Witness, *Ato* Yigezu Belay- governor of Doddotaa District.

> *[from its back]. It is a camel which stands up carrying whatever loaded to it. You should not be like a camel; the time when we carry like camel whatever burden put on us has passed*.[767]

As indicated earlier, General Taddasa was often concerned about the low status that was associated to the Oromo in the form of jokes and he raised it here also. He asked the crowd whether he would tell them the story of *Ato* Birru or they would tell him. When the people insisted that he had to tell them, he told them that according to the ranking of *Ato* Birru the Oromo were put even below cattle in terms of importance. He said, "The flesh of cattle is consumed and its skin serves a lot. Is not the worthless are the Oromo?" When the crowd accepted his comment, he added:

> *You have been repressively ruled over the last twenty five years, it is now enough. Why you keep silent when an elderly man was imprisoned from among you? Here after if they touch you start burning from here and we will do our share that we have prepared in Addis Ababa; we will burn all the way from Addis Ababa to here. … Have you seen anyone from among you who became a prime minister and chief governor?" The people responded, 'Gooftaako mikittiliillee hin agarre' (We have not seen even a deputy). Now look at us, we do not have problems; we wear good clothes, eat good diet and drive cars. It is for you that we want to sacrifice our lives.*[768]

Indeed, according to Abbas Haji, the only Arsii Oromo notables who were able to become *awraja* governors up to that time were *Fitawrari* Wolde Mikael Buie and *Fitawrari* Bekele Ogato. They were able to reach that position only after they were baptized, converted to Orthodox Christianity and changed their names.[769] Therefore, the remark of General Taddasa was heartbreaking for the Arsii Oromo because it was a reality they knew very well.

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[767] *Informant*: *Obbo* Kuusaa Deettii. General Taddasa and other leaders of the MTSHA often said that their children would have the chance to see the fruits of their struggle, "እኛ አናይም እናንተ ግን ታዪታላችሁ"(We do not see it but you will see it). Their struggle has infact brought change for the latter generation.

[768] IES MS: 45th Witness- Geremu Hunde- a member of Dhera police.

[769] Abbas H.Gnamo, *Conquest and Resistance*…, pp.182-183.

While General Taddasa was making his speeches, the Cilaaloo *awraja* governor and the police chief arrived an hour after they were informed by the district authorities that they could not stop the meeting. They were accompanied by several police emergency forces. When they arrived, General Taddasa and *Dajjazmach* Kebede were holding discussions with the people. Upon seeing them, General Taddasa said:

> *Osoo Sahilun dhufee hiree qabna garuu inni hin dhufu achuma taa'ee erga. Isa nama hanqaaquu Xaaliyaaniif bilcheessaa ture Taqilay Gezhi godhanii as kaa'an. Inni hin dhufu. Sareen yoo nama nyaachuuf dhufte akkamitti ofirraa dhorgan? Haji Simbirree responded, "gadi taayan." Sirrii dha .Yoo inni dhufu jalaa gadi taayan, nagaallee hin gaafatiinaa. Taayaa gadi. Ana ilaalaa yoo inni natti tokkose kitimaa keessanin taya, yoo Waaqni nabaase ammo isatu kitimaa isinii tayaa taa'aa gadi tokkichi hin dhaabatiinaa.*
>
> *If Sahilu comes, we will be chanceful. But he does not come and sends others instead. They put him here as a governor-general, the man who was preparing eggs for the Italians. He does not come here. If a dog comes to bite us, how can we protect? Haji Simbirree responded, "By sitting down." General Taddasa said, 'Yes.' When he [awraja governor] comes, sit down; do not greet him and sit down! Look at me, if he fires at me I will become a sacrifice for you; if God spares me he will be your victim. And all of you sit down, no one should stand.* [770]

Following the order of General Taddasa the crowd sat down. As the authorities approached, General Taddasa continued his speech and said: "Ani kan eenyuuti? Ati keenya. Jarri kuni hoo? Hin beeknu"(Whose am I? You are ours. How about these guys? We do not know).[771]

The Cilaaloo *awraja* governor, *Dajjazmach* Asfaw, came closer to General Taddasa and asked him in Amharic why they gathered people illegally. According to an informant, General Taddasa ignored him and continued his speech:

> *Afaan kanayyuu hin beektanii hin dubbatiinaa kan beektanillee. Ani amma niishaaniin ofirraa qabu kuni kanuma Haile Selassien ofirraa*

[770] *Informan*t: *Obbo* Mohammed Jiruu.
[771] *Informant*: *Obbo* Aman Maddaa.

qabu dha. Amma uummata Oromoollee xiqqeessuuf anallee xiqqeessuuf namni kun osoo baarmexaallee mataarraa hin fudhatiin dhufee najala dhaabataa kunoo ilaalaa. Amma osoo nama isaanii Amaara kan ta'u taatee baarmexaa ofirraa fuudhuurra darbee mataan lafa xuqa achumatti. Uummata Oromoo xiqqeessuu asumarraa ilaalaa. Anallee niishaanii mootummaan natti godhe xiqqeessuu asumarraa ilaalaa. Kanaaf, Oromummaa kootiin gadi naqabuuf geefoon kun dhuftee bobaa koo jala dhaabatti.

You do not know this language; even those of you who know it do not speak. I am a man who has a medal; this is a medal which Haile Selassie himself has or carries. Now to humiliate the Oromo people and myself this man without taking his hat off stands under me, look at him. If I were their man, an Amhara, in addition to taking off his hat, he would touch the ground with his head at a distance before approaching me. You can see from this, their disrespect for the Oromo people. Look, how he humiliated me too by disrespecting the medal awarded to me by the government. Therefore, in order to embarrass me because of my Oromo identity this dwarf man came and stands under my armpit.[772]

Through his moving speech, General Taddasa took control of the attention of the audience and he did not give any opportunity for both the *warada* and *awraja* governors to speak to the people. Though the governors felt ashamed in front of the crowd, he continued his speech and said:

Kanaaf, uffati ani uffadhee deemu kun meeshaa ergisaati. Osoo ergisa ta'uu baatee asitti dhufee walga'ii kana dhiisii deemi jechuu mitii achi dhaabatee yeroo meeqa mataan gadi jedhee nabira dhufa. Meeshaan ergisaa kan isaanii waan ta'eef as dhufee nasalphisa. Kanaan booda walbeekaa, wal-eegaa, ijoollee keessan barsiifadhaa. Namni akka wal-hin lolle, kan amantiin addaan gargar nubaasanii wal nunyaachisaa turan lammata akka walitti hindeebine. Fuula duraaf ammo akka kanatti itti fufuu hin dandeenyu waan ta'eef waan dhufu eeggadhaa.

Therefore, the cloth I wear [referring to his military uniform] is a borrowed one. If it is not a borrowed one, let alone coming here to ask me to stop the meeting, he will bend down many times there before coming closer to me. Since the borrowed cloth belongs to them, he comes here and humiliates me. Here after, know each other, protect

[772] *Informant: Obbo* Mohammed Jiruu. General Taddasa was making these remarks by standing on a chair while the crowd was seated on the ground.

> *each other, and educate your children. Do not quarrel with one another; you should stop the one that they divided us along religious line to fight each other. For the future, however, we cannot continue like this and wait for what will come*.[773]

Shortly, the *awraja* governor and the police chief left the area because they could do nothing to stop the meeting. They were humiliated in front of the people they had ruled for a long time. While leaving the scene they regretted saying, "We ruled them [the Arsii Oromo] for eighty years but they betrayed us within ten minutes."[774]

Pointing at the authorities while they were leaving the scene, General Taddasa asked the crowd to curse them saying:

> *Let God eliminate those who come to hinder our plan; let them disappear like wind…The Amhara always tyrannically rule the Oromo…. How long will you be ruled like slaves?*[775]

He continued to emphasis that those who had contributed nothing or little to the defense of the country were given high position to oppress the people. He was indirectly referring to *Dajjazmach* Sahilu Defaye, the governor of Arsii at the time. He was offended as a veteran of anti-Fascist resistance fighter and said:

> *Those who traded in chickens, eggs and served in fetching tejj (mead) during the Italian occupation became chief governors today. Indeed, it is those who used to fetch water for the Italians and their servants who were promoted and now call themselves governors. But whose territory and land is it [they are ruling], is it not that of the Oromo? I am a senior*

[773] *Informant: Obbo* Aman Goobanaa. General Taddasa knew very well that something was going to happen and was warning people to prepare themselves for it.

[774] *Informants:* Aman Maddaa, Mohammed Jiruu. If we go back eighty years from 1966, the time when this event took place, we arrive at 1886. This was the time when the Arsii Oromo were defeated after fierce resistance and much bloodshed.

[775] IES MS 1091: 45th Witness- Geremu Hunde; IES MS 1091: 35th Witness- Yigezu Belay. In his own words*: Alaamaa keenya balleessuuf kan dhuftu Waaqni yaaballeessu jedhaa.*

> *to those officials who came here earlier but they came just under my armpit because I am an Oromo. It is embarrassing*.[776]

As it is discussed elsewhere, General Taddasa was chairman of the *Fidel Serawit* Association and the Education Committee of the MTSHA. He highly valued education and believed that the illiteracy of the Oromo made significant contribution to their harsh treatment and exploitation. It was to augment his campaign of Oromo education that a drama was written and produced by Lieutenant Mamo Mazamir in consultation with him. The drama was presented in many areas but the 'Drama of Dheeraa' was presented under tense situation. After the return of the authorities, General Taddasa concluded his moving speeches and left the stage for the drama to be presented promising the crowd to return in another meeting.

The core message of the drama was to encourage the participants to send their children to school. In the drama it was shown that those families who had educated their children were much better than those who did not send to school at all. It was a father called Booru Beekaa who educated his son in the drama and his name itself was significant.[777]

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[776] *Informant: Obbo* Aman Madda; IES MS: 1091, 45th Witness- Geremu Hunde. The issue of Sahilu's egg vendor is also indicated in another source, IES MS.2391/02/86: 'Ye'Sahilu Merdo'.

[777] IES MS: 1091, 45th Witness- Geremu Hunde; 42nd Witness- Major Yigezu Zeleke. Based on the account of the 45th Witness- Geremu Hunde, the drama shown at Dheeraa is briefly as follows: General Taddasa wrapped up his speech promising the crowd to return in another appointment. Then, he left his chair and moved to the corner so that the presenters would have space. From inside the tent a tall dark-brown man came out carrying a paper in his hand and said, "You man, while you eat, your brother sleeps empty stomach; while you use mule, your brother travels on foot." Then after, an old man with a dirty cloth and limping leg came out of the tent. Then the man who carried a paper in his hand said, "Akkam oolte?" The old man responded 'nagaa' and asked him whose son he was. He responded, "I am a son of Booru Beekaa". The limping man said, "The elder over there, yes I know that you are a son of Booru Beekaa". The young man asked the limping man where he was going. He responded, "I had one *xafir* of land taken away from me for which I have been in lawsuit over the past nine years to regain it. In the process, I have finished all of my property, lost my land and became poor and disabled as a result." The young man asked him whether he had a son or not. He said, "I do have". The young man asked him again, "Have you educated him?" He responded, "No". The young man said, "I am educated and my salary is thousand birr. With this birr I help my family. If you have educated your son, he would help you and you would get your land; if you educate your son he will help you regain your land." He responded, "If the salary is thousand birr, I will educate him." Having said this, he entered in to the tent and came out with two children with another man who acted also as a father. Two persons were waiting sitting on a

When the drama was concluded, General Taddasa brought numerous printed papers and dumped them in the middle of the crowd. He remarked that the leaders of the MTSHA had attempted to get it published on *Addis Zemen* Newspaper but they were denied. The audience was touched and rushed to take a copy of it.[778] The paper was a response that was prepared by Ejjetaa Fayisaa, one of the active members of the MTSHA, to *Dajjazmach* Sahilu's remark about the Association earlier. It was duplicated and distributed to the participants.[779]

After the drama was concluded, Hajji Roobalee praised General Taddasa for guidance and teachings. According to an informant, he said:

> *Taddasa kiyya nuuf turi nuuf jiraadhu! Mee harka olqabaa Waaqatti. Nuti amma walqabanna, gorsa keellee ni fudhanna duraan walwallaallee wal-nyaanne nama nugorsu dhabnee. Amma ati nubarsiiftee jiraadhu. Wanta ati nutti himte kana uummati keenya lapheetti qabatee kaayate*.
>
> *My beloved Taddasa long live! Stretch your hands to Waaqaa [God]! Now we unite and accept your advice; earlier we used to quarrel not knowing each other and not having anyone to advise us. Now, you advised us thank you! Our people have put in their heart what you told us*.[780]

Before his departure, General Taddasa encouraged the key figures of the MTSHA in the area and other notable individuals. He said: "Walbaradhaa, jabaadhaa of-eegaa akkuma galtaniin, ani yoon du'ellee jiraadhellee ilmaan keessan barsiifadhaa isa nuti walitti dhufne kanaaf nutti jiranii"(Know each other, be courageous to defend yourself as soon as you return home;

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table acting as a registrar. The two children were registered and were enrolled to school. In short, the drama urged the participants to send their children to school.

[778] IES MS: 45th Witness- Geremu Hunde.

[779] Olana Zoga, pp.108-112

[780] *Ibid*

whether I die or live educate your children because they [the authorities] are working against us because of our coming together).[781]

Hajji Simbirree Hullufaa also expressed his worries to General Taddasa that after his return to Addis Ababa, the authorities would come back and abuse them. In his own words: "Dhageettuu? Isin nubiraa deemtanii, meeshaa gaarii qabdanii, nama barate qabdanii, nuti niitii abbaa tokkooti booru yoo dhufe nudhaanaa maal taana?"(Do you hear? You depart from us; you have better weapons and educated individuals, but what is better for us because we are the wives of anyone who will come tomorrow to beat us?[782] General Taddasa encouraged him saying: "Nu eegaa hoomaa hin taatani. Yoo nu mataa qabne isin miila qabuu hin dadhabdan"(Wait for us, nothing would happen to you. When we catch the head, you will not fail to take the leg).[783]

Immediately, after the departure of General Taddasa and his team, the police fired on the crowd returning home. They pointed machine guns on the crowd and dispersed them looting the food prepared for the occasion. But it is reported that the people also challenged the police and even snatched guns. In the aftermath of the meeting, it was widely rumored and feared that the government was preparing to conduct aerial attacks on the Dheeraa area. The people knew that their forefathers had been punished at Aannolee, not far from Dheeraa, because of their resistance against Menilek. Now the aerial attack was feared reasonably. According to informants, it was only due to the intervention of local authorities like

[781] *Informant*: Hajji Aliyyi Tololaa
[782] *Informant*: *Obbo* Mohammed Jiruu.
[783] *Ibid*. It seems that the coup of General Taddasa which he made shortly, though failed, was an attempt to catch the head by assassinating the Emperor.

Fitawrari Bekele Ogatoo and others that the government suspended its intention to do so.[784] This was the understanding of the local people.

Even though the aerial attack was reportedly suspended; there was widespread imprisonment after the meeting. Hajji Roobalee was obviously one of the most important targets of the authorities and it was on the same day that the police was sent to arrest him. However, he managed to escape to the capital deceiving the policemen who went to capture him. He left a message that those who wanted him could pursue him to Addis Ababa because he went to appeal to the Emperor.[785] Other elders who went to follow him to appeal to the Emperor were prohibited from crossing the Awash River. Finally, they crossed through the Wonji Sugar Factory by disguising themselves as if they were its workers by adjusting their dress.[786]

The Dheeraa meeting had a number of significances. According to informants, one of its most important contributions was the consolidation of Oromo consciousness by bringing the Arsii and the migrant Tuulamaa in Arsii together for a common purpose. In the words of my informant:

> *Yeroo duraa namni Oromummaa ofiituu dagatee ture. Jarri dhufanii waan akkasii dhiisaa yoo jedhan hedaa nuti saba tokko, sanyii tokko jedhanii hubatan. Duraan kan Arsii fi Shawaan wal ajjeesaa ture achirratti waliigalee, ilmaan abbaa tokkoo fi haadha tokkoo ta'uu hubatee uummati keenya nagaa argate*.
>
> *At the beginning people forgot their Oromoness or Oromo identity. When they came and raised this issue, people realized that they were one nation descended from one family. Earlier the Arsii and the Shawa Oromo were killing each other but on this meeting they understood that they were the sons and daughters of the same father; since then our people gained peace.*[787]

[784] *Informants*: *Obbo* Mohammed Jiruu; *Obbo* Aman Maddaa.
[785] *Informant*: *Obbo* Girshaa Goobanaa.
[786] *Informant*: *Obbo* Amino Eda'oo.
[787] *Informant*: *Obbo* Kuusaa Deettii.

When expressing the change that came after the meeting, especially regarding the internal unity of the Oromo, an informant claims:

> *Walga'iin kun nugidduutti nagaa buuse, nuti Shawaatti godaanna, Shawaan nutti godaana, intala walirraa fuuna, walitti heerumsiifna, gabaa tokko wajjin oolla. Amma nama tokko taanee Oromummaa keenya beeknee waliin bulaa jirra. Isaan as diina isaa Arsiinillee beekee Shawaanillee beeke. Dhala abbaa tokkoo ta'uu isaanii hubatan. Waanti Jeneraal Taddasan fa'aa gaafas maanguddoota Shawaa fi Arsii walitti qabanii hojjetan sun biyya keenya nagaa nuuf godhe. Achirraa lolli tokko oddoo gidduu keenyatti hin deebi'iin nagumaan har'a geenye.*
>
> *The meeting has restored peace between us. We move to help each other during difficulties; we marry each other and we attend the same market. Now knowing our common Oromummaa (Oromo identity) we live together as one people. Then after, the Arsii and the Shawans were able to know their common enemy. They understood that they were the descendants of the same father. What General Taddasa did by bringing together elders from Arsii and Shawa was that he made our area peaceful. Since then without encountering any conflict between us we have peacefully reached today*.[788]

The attempt to heal the difference between the two groups was very significant. Earlier, before the Itayyaa and Dheeraa meetings, there had been misunderstandings between the two. According to an informant, the reason was:

> *Yeroo sana Shawaanillee Arsii diinuma se'a, Arsiinillee Shawaa diinuma se'a. Kanaaf, halkanillee walitti duulanii horii walirraa hoofuun, wal-ajjeesuun tureera. Jeneraal Taddasaan lamaanuu ilmaan abbaa tokkoo ta'uu hanga Booranaa-Baarentuu ga'utti lakkaa'ee itti himee amansiisee jira.*
>
> *At that time, the Shawans [Tuulama migrants in Arsii] considered the Arsii as enemy while the Arsii also considered the Shawans as enemy. As a result, they campaigned against each other; looted each other's cattle during night. General Taddasa described the genealogy of both until it*

[788] *Ibid.*

> *reached Booranaa- Baarentuu and convinced both that they descended from the same father*.[789]

It is reported that Hajji Roobalee was touched by the teaching of General Taddasa and expressed his regret saying:

> *Hanga ammaatti waan walwallaallee walwaraanneef wanti nuun gadii nubulchaa turte. Hedaa namni seenaa hinbeekne akka nama halkan deemuuti, fageessee hin argu. Hedaa namni sanyii ofii hin beekiin akka looniitti wal-nyaata.*
>
> *Until now since we fail to know each other and have been fighting among ourselves, a minority ruled us. Anyone who does not know history is like the one who travels in the night; he does not see at a distance. Those who do not know their identity rub each other like cattle*.[790]

Accordingly, General Taddasa brought two notable elders from both sides, *Hajji* Roobalee Turee representing the Arsii and Tajii Gadaa representing the Gullallee, and asked them to trust each other. Both elders said to each other: "Amma wal-amanne mitii? Akka duraanii way-wal-shakkinaa? Wal-amanne wal-hinshakkinu"(Now, haven't we trusted each other? Do we suspect each other like before? We have trusted each other, no more suspicion*).*[791] There after, according to an informant, whenever misunderstandings were created between them, elders from both sides handled the situation very carefully.[792]

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[789] *Ibid.*.

[790] *Informant: Obbo* Muktar Hajji Tuqaa.

[791] *Informant: Obbo* Girshaa Goobanaa.

[792] *Informant: Obbo* Kuusaa Deettii. For example, when the Arsii went to attend the funeral of a Tulama elder known as Roobii Xaamaa, an elderly from Jajuu began to weep appreciating the deceased saying, "Roobii dha hoofaa gaafa Saallanii"(It was Roobii, the one who took the cattle of Arsii during the battle of Saallanii defeating them). Immediately another elder, Dabal Birraa, from Jajuu stood up and forcefully interrupted him arguing that he used divisive terms. What happened at Saallanii, a place in Arsii, was that, during one of the conflicts, the migrant Gullallee defeated their Arsii neighbors and drove some of their cattle. If he was not stopped, the elder wanted to express this event as an achievement of the deceased. However, since conscious Oromo were created from both sides after the Itayyaa and Dheeraa meetings they were able to deal with the misunderstanding created between them then after.

There was no doubt that the Oromo unity was more consolidated after the Itayyaa and Dheeraa meetings of the MTSHA. Earlier, religious difference was used to be one of the major divisive factors between the Arsii and the migrant Tuulamaa groups. According to my informant:"Duraan Oromoon Kiristaanaa gara Amaaraa gortee turte Oromummaa ofii dagattee. Arsiinillee maalitti walbeekna jetti. Walga'ichaa as garuu walbeektee walqabatte" (Earlier Christian Oromo sided with the Amhara forgetting their Oromo identity. The Arsii also argued that they did not know each other. After the meeting, however, the Oromo came together and consolidated their unity).[793] There was a general consciousness in the region after the two meetings[794] much to the contributions of General Taddasa.

However, after the meeting not only the members of the Association in Arsii were intimidated and imprisoned but the key leaders of the MTSHA in general were also targeted by the authorities. During the Dheeraa meeting, the Emperor was on a foreign trip and was informed about the event while he was still abroad. General Taddasa learnt that the authorities had already fed the Emperor with false news and hence, refused to participate in his reception at the airport.[795] The event had clearly shown that the regime was ready to

[793] *Informant*: *Obbo* Aman Maddaa. In general, because of the consolidation of ethnic identity, the Oromo started to stand together despite religious and provincial differences. Thus the Oromo in Shawa and Arsii or other areas strengthened their unity under the banner of '*Ilmi Oromoo Tokko'(*the Oromo are one*)*. The gathering of the Oromo under this banner of unity was observed clearly by the middle of the 1960s (see IES MS.2395/02/3/7/5: *Tateq*: Worldwide Ethiopian Students Association Bulletin of a branch in Europe: *Ye'Biheroch Guday* (The Question of Nations) No.1, September to February 1965- prepared by Nigat Made, pp10-11.)

[794]As a result, the people of Arsii accelerated their pressure on the notorious governor, Dajjach Sahilu Defaye and his collaborators. According to *YeZareytua Ethiopia* Newspaper, *Magabit* 4, 1966, *A.M.*, the people accused him for consuming about 3 million *birr* collected in the name of development activities over the period of nine years he ruled Arsii. It is reported that there were about eighty seven committee members for the so called development activities who were suspected of sharing the money with the governor. The people petitioned to the house of the Senate and the Prime Minister. However, their petition to the Prime Minister was turned down. *Dajjach* Sahilu was accused for putting the public money in his private account in the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia Asallaa branch.

[795]*Informant:* Colonel Sahilu Birri. It was a common practice that the high ranking officials and military generals were expected to welcome the Emperor at the airport and accompany him to the palace.

attack the MTSHA and its leaders soon. It was also clear to General Taddasa and other leaders that they had two options; either to wait and see what the government would do against them or plan their own action as well. General Taddasa preferred to sacrifice himself and his family for the cause he had once picked up. He knew no return and after the Dheeraa tension he was ready to continue to challenge the regime. The conflict between the regime and the leaders of the MTSHA, led by General Taddasa, will be seen in the next chapter.

Chapter Six
The Coup Plot and Rebellion of Brigadier General Taddasa Birru

This chapter deals with the growing contradiction between the government of Haile Selassie and the MTSHA. It discusses the government's determination to destroy the Association through cracking its leaders and General Taddasa's attempt to take preemptive measure that culminated in the coup plot of Novemebr 2, 1966 with the intention to make regime change by targeting the Emperor. It examines in detail the events leading to the coup plot, how the coup was plotted and failed eventually. Then, it looks into how General Taddasa moved out of the capital to launch armed rebellion before he was persuaded to return through the mediation of religious leaders with the promise of pardon from the Emperor. The chapter eventually investigates why General Taddasa was provoked within a week and how he managed to break the police siege of his house and rebelled again. For the discussion of this chapter, the Trial Document of the leaders of the MTSHA and the account of informants who took part in the coup plot were carefully used to understand what had happened.

6.1 Government Pressures on the MTSHA and the Responses of General Taddasa

The regime had suspected the MTSHA from the very beginning despite the Association's mild objectives and openness to all Ethiopians, as discussed earlier.[796] For example, General Yilma Shibeshi had asked the president of the Association Colonel Alamu to change the name Maccaa and Tuulamaa because he believed that it would create a sense of ethnic

[796] Bahru Zewde, 2002, pp. 261-262. This has been clearly stated in the founding charter of the Association.

division,"የወገን ልዩነት የሚፈጥር ስሜት ይሰጣል."[797] It was mainly because of this suspicion that the Association was denied legal recognition for a period of more than fifteen months.[798]

The membership of General Taddasa and other members of the military increased the regime's suspicion of the Association.[799] It was out of this fear that the Amhara ruling elites determined to destroy the Association and its leaders.[800] For example, when Aklilu Habtewold heard the news of the membership of General Taddasa, it is reported that, he was shocked and hurriedly departed from his colleagues probably to plot something against him.[801] Shortly, Aklilu presented a proposal to the Emperor to transfer General Taddasa from the police to a remote area of Afar as a governor of Ifat and Adal *awraja*. The Emperor, however, rejected the proposal but transferred him from the police to the Territorial Army *(Biherawi Tor*).[802] Then he was appointed as the deputy commander of the Territorial Army.[803]

General Taddasa is said to have objected to his transfer from the Police and told the Emperor that it was not a fair decision. When explaining the reason, the Emperor is said to have told him, "ከሚትገዳደሉ ብለን ነው አንተን ወደዚያ የቀየርነው"(We have transferred you out of the concern that you might kill each other[i.e with General Dirase Dubale, the new police

[797] 'The Trial Document of the leaders of the MTSHA'- The testimony of Colonel Alamu Qixxeessaa, p.323.

[798] Olana Zoga, pp. 20-21. General Taddasa became a member a month after the Association was given legal recognition.

[799] Bahru Zewde, 2014, pp. 67-68. However, General Taddasa was never elected as the president of the MTSHA.

[800] Mohammed Hassen, "General Taddesse Birru, 1921-1975," in *Goota Oromiyaa*, 2008, p.343; See also Olana Zoga and WMT 30th anniversary.

[801] Olana Zoga, pp.25-26. This story was told to General Taddasa by one of those officials who were with Aklilu at the time.

[802] *Negarit Gazeta* May 18, 1965; Gemechu Taye, p.12.

[803] See Appendix- IX.

chief]*)*.[804] General Taddasa is said to have complained that, "If it was a fair decision both of us should have been transferred from the police and it is not a fair decision. How can I be a deputy commander of peasant militia force while I am a distinguished patriot and a professional soldier?"[805] He believed that injustice was done against him.

General Taddasa did not accept Dirase's position as a commander of the Police and challenged him by refusing to accept orders. General Dirase Dubale also became hostile to him and attempted to control his activities. According to informants, it was unacceptable to bring a police commander from another area while experienced Taddasa was there within the police. As discussed earlier, General Taddasa had contributed a lot in foiling the coup of 1960 but he was even unable to become Police Commander.[806]After he heard of his transfer from the Police, General Taddasa quickly left the compound of the Police Emergency Force, where he used to live, and moved to his private house around Atena Tera just located on the left side of the highway to the Wingate School.[807]

In the meantime, as remarked earlier, General Taddasa had heard the rumor that the Prime Minister had received permission from the Emperor to kill him in order to prohibit the duplication of what he had confided to him earlier regarding the Oromo education.[808] It was after this death threat that General Taddasa shared the issue to key members of the Association about all what he had heard from the Prime Minister in case he was killed. He

[804]This was due to the serious disagreement between him and General Dirase Dubale, the new police chief. He strongly complained that he did not deserve to become a deputy commander of the Territorial Army.

[805]*Informant*: *Basha* Wolde Senbet Teklu. * This was probably in reference to his earlier patriotic activities during the Italian occupation.

[806] *Informants*: *Basha* Wolde Senbet Teklu, *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa. The disagreement was between General Taddasa and General Dirase Dubale, the new commander of the Police.

[807] *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

[808] As discussed earlier, this was mainly related to the issue of Oromo education in which Aklilu told General Taddasa that the Oromo should not get wider access to education because there was a concern that they would not be governed if they were given the opportunity without any limitation.

did not want to die keeping it secret and in case he was killed others should know the reasons for his death. This had happened in 1965. Then the Association began to provide protection for him by assigning personal guards from within and outside the Association.[809] According to an informant, junior members of the army and other civilian officials were providing these services. Accordingly, the younger members of the Association like Bekele Mekonnen, Lieutenant Mamo Mazamir, Haile Mariam Diimaa, Tafese Gammachuu, Fiixumaa Hiiksaa, and Camadaa Sabbooqaa were all providing security services for other members and leaders of the Association, including General Taddasa.[810] However, it is difficult to understand how far they could protect him from the government.

There were individuals who carried messages from General Taddasa to the Prime Minister and vice versa. The purpose is not clear but according to Olana Zoga, there could be two targets. The first was that Aklilu might have wanted to control the information he shared by pushing General Taddasa towards the direction he wanted. The second purpose could probably be his own political ambition; Aklilu wanted the Oromo military officers to put some pressure on the Emperor.[811] The issue of Aklilu's hidden political agenda is also supported by an oral informant. According to this report, Aklilu often complained to General Taddasa, as a close friend, that he had no real power. He complained that though he was a Prime Minister and nominally next to the Emperor, he was overshadowed by Princess Tenagnework, the daughter of the Emperor.[812]

[809] Olana Zoga, pp.24-26.
[810] *Informant*: Colonel Sahilu Birri.
[811] Olana Zoga, pp. 26-27.
[812] *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

From the whole episode that had happened, it is clear that General Taddasa was antagonized at least for three major reasons at the time when his membership was heard. First, there were higher officials who did not like his campaign of 'education for all' because they believed that it would eventually deny them even servants, including shoemakers. It was heard that they accused him of saying, "…ጫማ ጠራጊ ሊያሳጣን ሁሉም ይማር ማለትን አበዛ"(...he frequently says all should learn to deny us shoe cleaner). Second, his membership to the MTSHA was interpreted as if he was looking for power though it is not clear how both were related. Finally, he was regarded as an Oromo from Salaalee. These three points had created concern for the authorities and hence, they regarded his membership as a threat to their positions. [813]

According to an informant, the authorities began to feel threatened before anything had happened arguing that *"ኦሮሞ ወታደር ጨስጥ ገብቶዋል፤ ጀነራል ታደሰ ብሩ ሰው እየሰበሰበ ነው"* (The Oromo [MTSHA] entered into the army; General Taddasa Birru is gathering people). Indeed, General Taddasa was a gifted orator and chief speaker of the Association who was able to attract many members to the Association from among government officials, students of the university, the military and police forces as well as among other sectors of the society. The increasing membership and popularity of the Association under the guidance of General Taddasa was a point of concern for the authorities.[814] Indeed, his growing popularity after the 1960 coup was not welcomed by some members of the ruling elites.[815]

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[813] Olana Zoga, pp. 24-26. It is not clear how his membership was related to seeking power.

[814] *Informants*: Colonel Sahilu Birrii, Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa.

[815] The ruling Amhara elites had the tradition of intriguing against any rising Oromo personality or officer to the higher power at least beginning from the time of King Sahle Selassie of Shawa. As indicated in chapter two, this had happened to the famous Oromo warrior, Matakkoo Booji'aa. Similarly,(see for example, Asafa Jalata, *Oromia and Ethiopia*…., 1993, p.53) there was complaint against the growing influence and

Realizing the concern and pressure of the government, the leaders of the MTSHA attempted to convince the government that they were not working against its interests. Accordingly, in order to get the confidence of the authorities, the Association used the third year anniversary of its foundation which was celebrated on January or *Tir* 29, 1958 *A.M*. (February 1966) as a good opportunity. The Association invited the higher officials of the regime to witness its activities personally in order to avoid their suspicion and that of the government in general. The leaders of the Association hoped that the suspicion of the government would be avoided if the authorities attended the event personally. They believed that they had nothing to hide from the government.[816]

Some of the invited dignitaries who attended the event included Ketema Yifru, *Dajjazmach* Daniel Abebe, Mikael Imiru, Astade Habte Mariam and others. According to an informant, it was kept secret but Princess Mahtsente also attended the event. Even she is reported to have complained that she was not treated with dignity as a wife of a royal family but as servant. She was the wife of Prince Sahle Selassie, one of the sons of Emperor Haile Selassie. The presence of the family of *Dajjazmach* Habte Mariam in the Association was seen as an important event. Atsade Habte Mariam was a very strong woman and it was with the advice of General Taddasa that Bekele Mekonnen recruited her to the Association who in turn

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power of *Ras* Goabanaa Daaccii which prevented him from establishing his power base among the Oromo where he had effectively secured their submission. Moreover, there were intrigues against Emmanuel Abraham, General Mulugeta Buli and even the seemingly loyal Yilma Deresa. For example, in February 1969 Yilma Dheeressaa was transferred from the Ministry of Finance to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism probably due to a political decision in fear of Yilma's growing influence. His Oromo background was used to discredit and get rid of Yilma by his opponents though his transfer could be partly attributed to the budget deficit (see Tamrat Haile, pp.314-320). As will be seen shortly, the name of Yilma was also raised in connection with the coup plot of General Taddasa. However, it has to be underlined that these political intrigues were also common outside the domain of ethnic background.

[816] *Informant*: Colonel Sahilu Birrii.

recruited many members from Wallaggaa. However, the invitation did not avoid the suspicion.[817]

In general, though its Third Year Anniversary was used as a major effort by the MTSHA to avoid the suspicion of the government against its activities, the government continued to view the MTSHA and its leadership as a threat against its stability. When the pressure from the government increased, the leaders of the Association began to work tirelessly to expand the branches of the Association for which General Taddasa was responsible. It was after this event that the Association held two major eventful meetings in Arsii, as discussed in the preceding chapter, which further stregthened the suspicion of the regime against it and its leadership. [818]

To counter the pressure, General Taddasa became even more determined and continued to exploit each and every stage of the Association to make further mobilization, especially after he was transferred from the Police to the Territorial Army. He was approaching and initiating Oromo members of the army for the inevitable and eventual confrontation with the government. According to an informant, for example, he requested *Balambaras* Minase Nagawoo, an Oromo Member of Parliament, to send him strong and reliable Oromo soldiers whom he knew from the army. Accordingly, he sent his own son, Behailu Minase, and Giyon Dheeressaa to his home. Both were members of the Territorial Army and when they met him at his home in the presence of his wife and Lieutenant Mamo Mazamir, he made them take ***kakaa(*** swear***)*** not to expose the secret he would tell them. He told them:

[817]*Informant*: Colonel Sahilu Birrii. Atsdade was an ex- wife of Major General Mulugeta Buli. Eventually, Atsede and Bekele Mekonnen married each other.
[818]*Ibid.*

> *Dhiibamee dhiibamee lolli gaafa ka'u jira. Sidaamni jibba keenya guddaa qaba; uummata keenya miidhaa jira. Gabbarrees jalaa ba'uu dadhabne. Kanaaf Sidaama irratti ka'uu qabna; hanga yoomiitti garba taanee tuffatamnee jiraanna? Minilik irraa kaasee hanga ammaatti miidhaa guddaan Oromoorra ga'aa waan jiruuf Oromoof jettanii du'uu qabdu. Isinis dabalaa nama barsiisaa uummata kakaasaa lolli hin hafuu.*
>
> *It is inevitable that war will start one day. The Sidama [Amhara ruling elites] have a deep hatred for us; they are oppressing our people. We are unable to get relief even by paying them tribute. Therefore, we have to rise against them; how long shall we live as inferiors being treated as slaves? Since the Oromo have been suffering from the time of the conquest of Menilek, you have to die for them. Teach and mobilize more people in your turn since war is inevitable.*[819]

When his wife commented on the young age of the two soldiers, he insisted that he wanted them for tomorrow. He knew clearly that some kind of confrontation with the regime was unavoidable and he was trying to attract Oromo members of the army.[820] Probably he hoped that he could mobilize members of the army and become stronger before the Emperor and his security agents noticed him. But the emperor had planted spies closer to him. My informant, while appreciating him as a brave soldier and thanking him for his 'opening of the eyes of the Oromo', questions how he dared to think that he could overcome Haile Selassie's complex security networks. It remains a mystery for my informant regarding how General Taddasa was able to come out so suddenly against the Emperor and the regime believing that he could do something and make a difference for the Oromo people. My informant believes that the act of General Taddasa was a suicidal act because he began to criticize the Emperor and his leadership openly without any concern for its consequences. This was unthinkable at the time let alone in the speech to the public but also in private conversations with colleagues. Therefore, how could it be that he was not afraid of the Emperor and the existing security

[819] *Informant*: *Shambal* Giyon Dheeressaa. He was one of the members of the Territorial Army who went to his house.
[820] *Ibid.*

network of the regime is a mystery to my informant.[821] It seems that General Taddasa was ready to accept whatever came to his life at this moment after continuous provocations.

As argued earlier, he had grievances before he joined the Association but it seems that only few people, among the founders of the MTSHA, knew his personal qualities and determinations. That was probably why many considered his membership as a sudden move against the regime he had been serving for a long time. Here, it is very important to take into account the nature of the Salaalee Oromo resistance tradition, where he grew up. According to this tradition, a person could react against any perceived injustice despite its consequences, even at the risk of life. It has been discussed earlier that General Taddasa was willing to accept such risks, as it was seen during the tense Dheeraa meeting. He even took more risks when he plotted to make a coup, as it is discussed below, against the Emperor. Therefore, it seems more appropriate to understand this intricate situation of his sudden turn and bold attempt to make a coup against the Emperor within the context of the Salaalee resistance tradition.[822]

It is evident that the repressive reaction of the regime against the activities of the Association had increased the determination of its leaders, especially that of General Taddasa, to politicize the movement.[823] Since the Itayyaa and Dheeraa meetings, his speeches focused on the injustice of the Imperial regime, expropriation of Oromo land, the political domination and exploitation of the Oromo, and the need to build Oromo unity for resistance.[824]

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[821] *Informant*: Bulchaa Dammaqsaa. Though we have seen in chapter four that General Taddasa had many reasons to join the MTSHA, some of my informants believed that he turned suddenly. Thus one of the critical issues not easy to understand about General Taddasa was his apparent sudden turn against the Emperor and the regime he had been serving for a long time.

[822] This has been discussed in chapter two.

[823] Gemechu Taye, p.14.

[824] John Markakis, 1974, pp. 179-180.

According to an informant, when General Taddasa decided to resist against the regime, he probably hoped that there could be many Oromo, especially the educated ones, who would follow him if confrontation happened. However, it appeared that the educated Oromo were few in number to come out with him, with the exception of a few dedicated ones. Regarding the reason for the failure to mobilize large followers, my informant argues,"Ani akkan ilaalutti yeroon isaa hin geenye. Sababni isaa barumsi wal-hingeenye, warri xiqqoo baratan ni sodaatu"(In my opinion it was not the right time. This was because education did not expand and those who were relatively educated were fearful). Moreover, it seems that General Taddasa did not get sufficient time to mobilize more people. [825]

Indeed, at the time, it was difficult to promote the issues of Oromo grievances for fear of repression. Thus even those individuals who either attended the meetings of the MTSHA or had contacts with its members were seen with suspicion by the government agents and their supporters. For example, since my informant had a close relationship with some of the members of the MTSHA, it was said, "Maali warri Oromoo kun garaan isaanii shaffateera, kunoo Bulchaanis isaanumatti deddeebiyaa jira mitii?"(Why is it that these Oromo are heartbroken; isn't it that Bulchaa is also communicating with them?). It was possible to see the existence of immense pressure, let alone on the key leaders of the Association like General Taddasa, even on the ordinary members of the Association and their sympathizers. The leaders took that burden and responsibility up on themselves. The intention was to raise the consciousness of the Oromo which seemed to be vital for the next action. Regarding this, General Taddasa often said: "Oromoon ija banachuu qaba ija isaa hin bananne."(The Oromo should open their eyes; they have not opened their eyes) and this strongly moved the people.

[825] *Informant*: *Obbo* Bulchaa Dammaqsaa.

He was a very determined man who knew very well that he could be killed for his actions. But nothing could stop him from moving forward.[826]

The drift between the leaders of the Association and the regime became clear after the Dheeraa meeting. They were accused of inciting the people against the government right after the meeting and General Taddasa was at the centre of this accusation. For example, Colonel Alamu, the president of the Association, was accused of not stopping General Taddasa. He was accused of, "Pirezidaantii waldaa kanaa taatee osoo jirtuu Taddasan akka mootummaa galagalchu gargaarte."(While you are the president of this Association [MTSHA], you supported Taddasa to overthrow the government). Colonel Alamu believed that since General Taddasa was the main actor in the Dheeraa meeting, the authorities believed that he had the intention to overthrow the regime. The Dheeraa meeting was characterized by tense situations that could turn into bloodshed. However, it was concluded with few incidents though it led to the regime's determination to crash the Association and its leaders.[827]

After the Dheeraa incident, the next meeting was held at the headquarters of the Association to assess what had happened in Dheeraa and to discuss what to do next. It is reported that General Taddasa said,

> *... While we were discussing how to establish clinics and expand schools, the awraja governor and the police chief came and said, 'Why you came to our country?'They interrupted us and dispersed people, fired bullets and even killed people. Who will revenge their blood? While we are attempting to expand education, the awraja governor, Dajjazmach Asfaw Shiamti, who is illiterate himself and could not even sign, chased us. We respected the words of the Bible, 'When one hits*

[826] *Ibid.*
[827] *Barruulee Gadaa, Lakk.*1, 1992, pp.4-8.

your right face give him also the left one' and came back [without any response]. This humiliation is not only ours but also yours.[828]

He told the audience that they were accused of fabricated stories and propaganda. He told them that they were accused of planning to chase the Amhara from their land and claiming the Emperor as half Oromo. He once again raised what he had heard from a certain *Dajjazmach* about the cowardice of the Oromo while he was recruiting them into the Police Emergency Force. As a result of this perception, he said, "ለኦሮሞ ጥፊ አነሰው ወይ ተባልን"(We were insulted, "isn't just enough to slap the Oromo in the face").[829]

Contrary to the comment he heard, he attempted to show that the Oromo were always heroes. He took the battle of Adwa as an example and mentioned the names of some of the distinguished Oromo patriots, *Fitawrari* Gebeyehu Gaboo Gurmuu and *Fitawrari* Habte Giyorgis Dinagdee. He questioned whether *Ras* Abebe Aregay, who was killed during the coup of 1960, was not an Oromo patriot as well. He told the audience that they would appeal to the Emperor for justice and said, "ንጉሱ ለሁሉም ሚዛኑን የያዙት እርሳቸው ናቸው። ሚዛን እንኳን ወደ በዛበት ነው የሚያመዝነው። እሳቸው በመጡ ጊዜ ዳኝነት አይከለክሉንም:.: (For all it is the Emperor who held the scale. In fact, the scale inclines towards the larger load. When he comes, the Emperor would not deny us justice). Here it seems that they considered the Emperor as neutral for a time being or a tactical move. He continued his speech and added, *"...* አለያይተህ ጊዛ የሚለውን ስስተም የሚጠቀሙ አንዳንድ ሰዎች አሉ። ዛሬ *ኦፍርካ ኦንድ በሆነበት ጊዜ ይቹ*

[828] 'The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA': 75th Witness- Colonel Gamoraw Belay, p. 387; The Document of the MTSHA: IES MS: 1091, *75th Witness*- Colonel Gamoraw Belay. He was one of the representatives of the Lasta and Wag Self-help Association but he came to request the MTSHA for help for the famine affected people of Lasta and Wag in Wallo. He attended the meeting held on *Tikmit* 13, 1959 *A.M.* at the Association's headquarters just a week after the Dheeraa meeting.

[829] He probably wanted to provoke the audience into more determination that they were wrongly accused as coward. His next remark is an indicative of this fact.

ስስተም ስህተት ስስተም ነው። (There are some individuals who use a system called divide and rule. To day, while Africa is becoming united, this is a wrong system).[830]

In the face of increasing confrontation with the government, the major concern of General Taddasa was that people were not conscious enough to the level he wanted. He expected popular rise to counter the mounting pressure of the government but it did not happen. It was to inquire the reason that he went to the home country and asked the people. The response he found was discouraging.[831] Regarding this, he said:

> *... ወደ አገር ቤት ሄጄ ምንድርነው ኦሮሞ ደሙ የቀዘቀዘው ብለቸው ኦሮሞ ደጋ አገር ስለሚኖር እና ወተት ስለሚጠጣ ነው አሉኝ። እንግዲያዉስ ከወተቱ ላይ ምጥምጣ እየነሰነሱ ቢጠጡት ያሞቃቸው ነበር ብዬ መለስኩላቸው። ... ዛሬ ቤቴ በዘብ ይጠበቃል። ብሞትም ምን አደርጋለሁ ከመቃብሬ ላይ አልቅሱ እንጂ።*
>
> *...When I went to the home country and asked why the Oromo are cold-blooded, I was told that it is because they live in the highland and drink milk. I recommended that it is better to add pepper to the milk to make them hot to rise. ...Today, my house is watched [under the siege of the security forces] by the guards; what can I do if I die [they kill me], just weep on my funeral.*[832]

He was very much concerned about the absence of popular rise expected from the Oromo to challenge the growing pressure of the government against the MTSHA and its leadership. When he became pessimist of the popular rise, he focused on the Association's members of the military. As part of his general attempt to organize the Oromo members of the army, he asked soldiers to stay behind when the program ended. He asked them to take a *kakaa* or oath saying, "አንድ ጦርነት ቢነሳ በወገኖቻችን ላይ አንተኩስም ቃል ለምድር ለሰማይ ይሁንብን በዚህም መካከል

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[830] 'The Triad Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA', 75th Witness- Colonel Gemoraw Belay, pp. 228-229; IES MS: 1091, *75th Witness*- Colonel Gemoraw Belay. This remark basically contradicts with the main accusation presented against General Taddasa, the attempt to divide the unity of the Ethiopian people. During the Dheeraa meeting the Emperor was abroad.

[831] Ibsa Guutama,p.80; *Informants*:Taye Badhaadhaa, Dr Moggaa Firrisaa.

[832]The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA', 75th Witness- Colonel Gemoraw Belay, p.229, p.387; IES MS: 1091, *75th Witness*- Colonel Gemoraw Belay; *Informants*: Colonel Sahilu Birri, Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa.

አንድ ነገር ብንሆን ረሳችንን ተፈላልገን አናነሳለን...።"(If fighting erupts we would not fire on our people; my word is to the land and heaven, in case something happens to us in the middle we have to collect the dead bodies of each other…).[833]

In addition to the members of the military, he also discussed with those participants who came from Baalee and Gindabarat in private and told them:

> *አንድ በቆይታ የሚንነጋገረዉ ነገር ስለአለ ነዉ እናንተን እዚህ ያሰገቧቸሁ። እናንተ ሁላችዉም የኦሮሞ ነሰ ከሆናችሁ ለኦሮሞ እደሚትቆሮቆሩ እርግጠኛ ነኝ። እኛ የኦሮሞ ዘሮች 17 ሚልዮን ነን። ነጃም ፊት ይክድ ነበር። አሁን ግን ማህበራችን ከተቋቋመ ወድህ ኦሮሞነታቸዉን አምነዋል። ስለዚህ ባለመተባበራችን እና አንድነት በማጣታችን ነው እንጂ በትንሹ ከ5 ሚልዮን በማይበልጥ አማራ አንገዛም ነበር።*
>
> *...I gathered you here because there is something which I want to tell you in private. If you are all Oromo I am sure that you are concerned for the Oromo cause. We Oromo are 17 million; earlier those in Gojjam used to deny [their Oromo identity] but now after our Association was established they reaffirmed their Oromoness. Therefore, it is because we do not have cooperation and unity otherwise we would not be ruled by a minority Amhara who do not exceed five million.*[834]

Even before November 1966, there were indications that General Taddasa had an intention to change the government. It seems that the major activities of the Association were used as codes to mobilize the people for this purpose. These were *menged* (road), *beshita* (disease), *dinqurina* (illiteracy) and *timihirt* (education). Accordingly, *Menged* referred to the need to change the government, *Beshita* represented the Amhara ruling elites who were accused of decimating the Oromo people, *Dinqurina* focused on those Oromo who were unaware or not conscious of the ongoing injustices while *Timihirt* indicated the need to expand the branches

[833] 'The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA'- 70th Witness- Taddese Worku, p. 220, p. 386; IES MS: 1091, *70th Witness*- Tadesse Worku. This soldier was sent by the security office to spy on the activities of the leaders of the MTSHA after the Dheeraa incident and this was clearly explained by the witness himself.

[834] IES MS: 1091, *78th Witness*- Abdulqadir Ahmed

of the MTSHA to facilitate the mobilization efforts as quickly as possible to all provinces and areas.[835]

With the understanding that government spies were within the meeting hall, General Taddasa often used *kakaa* to keep the secrecy of his speeches and advices. He emphasized that the Oromo had to keep their own secrets. He used one story to underline that failure to do so would bring consequences:

> *አንድ ንጉስ፣ አንድ የኦሮሞ ተወላጅ የሆነ ሰዉ በወዳጅነት አብረዉ ይኖሩ ነበር። ይህ ኦሮሞ ሀብታም ስለነበረ ንጉሱን ልጅህን ዳርልኝ ብሎ ጠየቀዉ። ንጉሱም እንደት ደፈረኝ ብሎ ሹማግሎቸን አባረረ። በዚህም ጊዜ ያ የኦሮሞ ሀብታም በዘሩ ተቆርቁሮ ንጉሱን ለመግደል መሳሪያ ታጥቆ ተነሳ። በዚህን ጊዜ የሀብታሙ ልጅ ሮጦ አባቴ ልገልህ መጥቶዋል ታጥቆ ብሎ ገለጸለት። በዚህን ጊዜ ንጉሱ አሰታጥቆ ይጠባበቅ ነበርና ኦሮሞዉ ስደርስ በሰይፍ እግሩን ተቆረጠ። ከዚህ ቦኃላ እርሱም ተንከባለዉ እስከ ንጉሱ ደረሰና አንገቱን ቆረጠዉ ይባላል። የኛም አለማቸን ሳይፈጸም አይቀርም። መቼም ልጅ አባቱን አሳልፎ እንደሰጠ አሳልፋችሁ ብትሰጡን ለእናንተዉ ለኦሮሞ ጎሳ ጉዳት ነዉ። ብዛታችን 17 ሚልዮን ሰለሆነ ብንተባበር ቻንሆይም ወደ እኛ ይሆናሉ ካልሆነ ጨዉ ለራስህ ጣፊጥ ካልሆነ ድንጋይ ነዉ ተብሎ ይወረወራል። የቻንሆይም ይኼ ነዉ።*

> *A King and an Oromo lived together in friendship. As this Oromo was rich, he asked the king to give him his daughter in marriage. The king, having felt that he was disrespected, chased away the elders who were sent to ask him. At this time, the rich Oromo, having felt that he was denied because of his Oromo identity, prepared himself to kill the king. But his own son went to the king and told him that his father would come to kill him. As a result, the king made himself and his soldiers alerted and when the Oromo arrived at his court he cut his leg but the Oromo managed to cut the head of the king. It is inevitable that our objectives will be achieved. If you expose our secret just like what the son did to his father, the impact is immense on you, the Oromo. Since our number is 17 million, if we cooperate, the Emperor will come to our side and if not, salt has to be tasty for its own sake not to be thrown away like stone. The same is true to the Emperor.*[836]

[835]IES MS: 1091, *78th Witness*- Abdulqadir Ahmed; 81st Witness- Miximida Hussein. These witnesses claim that he told them that the four were used as codes for security reasons.

[836]IES MS: 1091, *78th Witness*- Abdulqadir Ahmed; IES MS: 1091, 81st Witness- Mitmida Hussein; See The Trial Document of the leaders of the MTSHA, pp. 238-239.

Whenever General Taddasa discussed with people in private outside the main meeting, he often requested them to take a *kakaa* not to disclose any secret. Some of the common words of his *kakaa* include: "ምስጥር ካወጣን የዘራችን የኦሮሞ አጥንት ይጪጋን በሉ" (Say let the bone of our Oromo forefathers stab us if we expose secret).[837] As I remarked elsewhere, since General Taddasa had no other effective means of keeping secrets of his activities and the information he shared, he often used *kakaa or* oath. Indeed *kakaa* is deep rooted in the Oromo tradition and one of the earliest *Kakaa* is believed to be the great Oromo *Kakaa i*n the ancient time.[838] General Taddasa was exploiting this old tradition of the Oromo very often in the hope of keeping confidentiality because he knew that government spies were also within the meeting.

After the Dheeraa meeting, General Taddasa was planning to challenge the regime with the help of popular uprising. His earlier conversation with one of the court witnesses who came from Baalee but went to meet him in his house clearly reflects this assumption. When the person told him that he came to the capital due to land litigation because his land was given to another person, General Taddasa is reported to have remarked:

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[837] IES MS: 1091, *78th Witness*- Abdulqadir Ahmed. *Informants*: Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa, Colonel Sahilu Birri, *Obbo* Taye Badhaadhaa.

[838] Dinsa Lepisa Abba Jobir, "The Gada System of Government Sera Caffe Oromo: a Critical Examination of the Legal Institution of the Oromo People," LLB, AAU, 1975, pp. 70-71. According to Dinsa, *Kakaa* means oath and it has a long tradition in Oromo history going back to the great 'Kaka Oromo', which declared that, "an Oromo shall not kill another Oromo." This rule of law helped to keep Oromo unity in the past. Since the law forbade not only the killing of another Oromo but also the inflicting of fatal wound during fighting among Oromo, they fought with bent spears. As a result, when fighting broke out among the Oromo, they had to bend their spears with their foot before joining the fighting. In his own words,'Eeboo jallisanii ittiin wal-lolu turan". Though the great *Kakaa* was considered as the *Kakaa* of all Oromo, there were other *Kakaa*s at different levels by different groups. Traditionally, it is feared that people would not violate it. In the *Kakaa* there is *Abaarsaa (curse)* and it is the *abaarsa* which is feared most. In the past there could be other forms of punishing those who violated it. General Taddasa used the *Kakaa* on many occasions when he wanted to tell secrets to selected members and followers of the MTSHA. He attempted to exploit the traditional Oromo system of keeping internal secrets from the notice of their opponents.

እንኪን አንተ ያልዘመትከዉ እኛም ተነጥቀናል። ዝም ብለህ ወደ አገርህ ግባ። በጠላት ጊዜ እኔና ወንድሜ ብዙ መከራ አይተን ሞቃድሾ ታስረን ቤት ተመልሰን ስንመጣ ሌላ ወሮታ ስገባን ያባታችን ርሰት ተወስዶ ለማንም ባለዉለታ ተሰጠብን። በዚሁ መነሻ ወንድሜ ከአገር ግዛት ስመላለስ መሬት ሌላ ይሰጠን ስል ደብዳቤ ከጅማ ሲያመላልስ እዚያዉ ጅማ ሞተ። የእኛ ኑሮ ምን ጊዜም አይሻሻልም። አማሮች ሥጋችንን ሰልተዉ አጥንታችንን በመከስከስ ላይ ናቸዉ ያሉት… አሥር ሺህ ኦሮሞ ቢሆን አንድ ሺህ አማራ ነዉ። እኛ ኦሮሞዎች ቢንተባበርና ቃላችን አንድ ቢሆን ከኢትዮጵያ ዉስጥ አብዛኛዉ ኦሮሞ ስለሆነ ብንተባበር የፈለገነዉን መስራት እንችላለን… አባቶቻችን ተሞኝተዉ በግላስ ጨርቅ እየተታለሉ ግራዝማች በላምባራስ እየተባሉ ጊዜያቸዉን በከንቱ ጨረሱ… አንድ ሰዉ በታመመ ጊዜ በሽታዉ እራሱ ላይ በወጣ ጊዜ ይሞታል እንጅ አይድንም። እኛ ራሱን ስንይዝ እግር ማንሳት እንዳያቅታችዉ… ::

Let alone you who have not campaigned [against the Italian invaders], we are also snatched. Keep quiet and go back to your home. During the Italian invasion, I and my brother suffered a lot and imprisoned in Mogadishu. Having returned home, though we deserved additional compensation, even the rist of our father was given to any balawuleta [person in service of the government]. As a result, my brother, while travelling from Jimmaa to the Ministry of Interior and vice versa carrying a letter in order to get a piece of land as a substitute, died in Jimmaa. Our life would never improve; the Amhara, having finished our flesh, are consuming (መክሰክስ) our bone … . If the Oromo are ten thousand, the Amhara are one thousand. If we Oromo cooperate with one another and stand together, we can do whatever we want in Ethiopia because we are the majority… . Our fathers deceived by saddle cloth (ግላስ ጨርቅ) spent their time in vain being called Grazmach, Balambaras… . When a person becomes sick and the disease ascends to his head, he would not recover but die. When we catch the head, you should not fail to take the leg.[839]

Through whatever means he got General Taddasa was initiating people to prepare for the inevitable confrontation with the government. According to the above witness from Baalee, General Taddasa indicated that there was nothing to fear because in the MTSHA there were Oromo leaders ranging from ministers to generals and if unity was ensured, the Oromo would be able to get back their lost land. The witness claims that General Taddasa told those

[839] 'The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA'- 79th Witness: Abdulatif Danboobaa, pp.242-243; The MTSHA- IES MS: 1091, *79th Witness*- Abdulatif Danboobaa. He met with General Taddasa just after the Dheeraa meeting. The witness was a member of a group of individuals who came from Baalee and went to meet General Taddasa at his home to become members of the MTSHA. The last remark, if we catch the head you have to take the leg, was also spoken during the Dheeraa meeting.

who went to his house from Baalee that they would be notified of the date of the action through Kabir Hussein Suraa and warned them to be careful of the spies dispatched by the opponents of the MTSHA. They were told that the major opponenets were Aklilu Habte Wold, *Dajjazmach* Kifle Irgetu, Brigadier General Dirase Dubale and *Dajjazmach* Sahilu Defaye. According to this witness, General Taddasa told them this entire story with confidence because they came from Baalee, where armed resistance against the regime was already in progress.[840]

In reaction to the growing pressure from the authorities against the Association and its leaders, General Taddasa, together with Lt Mamo and other nationalists, pursued a militant course of action. For example, he often used an ambiguous expression, *Irsas gizu (*buy *Irsas)* during the literacy campaigns without indicating which one, bullet or pencil, as both were called *Irsas.*[841] According to my informant, in one of the Literacy Campaigns in Bishooftuu, he told the trainees who came from the countryside, "Maarashaa duwwaa miti kan bitattan Irsaasiis bitadhaa"(What you have to buy is not only plowshare but also *Irsaas* [which could be either bullet or pencil]).[842]

My informant was told by General Taddasa that the government was not happy with his activities within the Literacy Campaign Association and the MTSHA. He was told, "Oromoo barsiisuu koo akkuma polotikaa godhanii dubbii natti xaxaa jiru"(they are plotting against me by politicizing my efforts of educating the Oromo). My informant understood from the conversation he made with him that the General had the concern that the Oromo did not get education which made them to be considered as second class citizens. It was this concern

[840]IES MS: 1091, *79th Witness*, Abdulatif Damboba. He told them this secret with trust because they came from Baalee, where the people were in battle with the government.

[841] IES MS 2393/10/2.2: Urji Dima; *Informant*: *Obbo* Lubee Birrru.

[842] *Informan*t: *Obbo* Lubee Birru.

which initiated him to focus on educationg the Oromo through the Literacy Campaign Association. My informant claims that General Taddasa wanted him to succeed him as a chairman of the executive committee of the Literacy Campaign Association.[843]

The regime was watching the activities of the Association and its leadership closely. The authorities considered the events of the Itayyaa and Dheeraa meetings as provocative activities. On his part, General Taddasa knew very well that the regime was planning to eliminate him and the other leaders of the Association. Thus, he did not want to be an easy prey and was making preparations to mobilize the people for the inevitable revolt and confrontation with the government.[844]

He worked tirelessly to encourage the Oromo to stand together in unity.[845] In the various meetings of the Association, he used to expose the divide and rule strategy of the imperial regime, which wanted a fragmented Oromo for the purpose of national integration. The events of Itayyaa and Dheeraa were disturbing to the regime because they were intended to bridge the regional and religious differences between the Oromo.[846]

The government was deeply disturbed by the Association's usage of Oromo language during meetings and its leaders focus on sensitive issues of landlessness of the Oromo during their speeches.[847] General Taddasa's persistent focus on the exploitation of the Oromo peasantry

[843] *Informant*: Professor Ephraim Isaac. According to the *Ethiopian Herald* (Oct 26, 1966), Professor Ephraim (*ato* at the time) was the chairman of the committee for Ethiopian Literacy established by the Ethiopian students in North America. The committee was making significant financial assistance to the Literacy Campaign Assocaition led by General Taddasa.

[844] Gemechu Taye, pp. 17-18.

[845] Mohammed Hassen, " General Taddesse Birru, 1921-1975", in *Goota Oromiyaa*, 2008, pp.351-352

[846] John Markakis, 1974, pp.180-181. The regime considered the unity of the Oromo as a threat.

[847] John Markakis, 2011, p.194.

which he attributed to the confiscation of their land by the conquering *neftegna* was regarded as a dangerous move by the ruling Amhara elites.[848]

In general, the Association had grown powerful under the leadership of people like General Taddasa within a short period of time which alarmed the regime. This has been explained as follows:

> ... ከፍተኛ የጦር መኮንን በነበሩት ጀኔራል ታደሰ ብሩ አመራር ስር አቅሙና ምኞቱ በአጭር ጊዜ ዉስጥ ከፍተኛ እድገት በማሳየቱ መንግስቱን እያሳሰበዉ ሄደ። መሪዎቹ የማህበሩን አላማና አድማስ በማስፋትም ሆነ የአባላቱን ብዛት በማሳደግ አብዛኛዉን ኦሮሞዎች ለማዳረስ የቆረጡ ስለመሰለዉ ለመንግስት ስጋት መጨመር ምክንያት ሆነ። ማህበሩ በሚጠራቸዉ የህዝብ ስብሰባዎች ላይ መንግስት እንደጦር የሚፈራቸዉ የደቡብ ኢትዮጵያ የመሬት አልባ ጭሰኞች ብሶት ጉዳይ እየተነሳ በኦሮምኛ ቋንቋ ዉይይት እንድካሄድበት መሞከሩ መንግስት በአይነቁራኛ እንድከታተላቸዉ አደረገ።

> ... *under the leadership of General Taddasa Birru, who was a high ranking military officer,* the Association's *capacity and needs had increased within a short period of time which continuously worried the government. Since the government perceived that the leaders had the determination to promote and expand the objectives and membership of the Association to majority of the Oromo, it deepened its concern. In the meetings organized by the Association when the burning issues of landlessness in southern Ethiopia, which the government feared like a spear, were discussed in Oromo language, the government was forced to watch them closely*.[849]

The provocative speeches of General Taddasa and the fear of organized resistance heightened the alarm of the government.[850]As a result, the regime appeared to be intolerant and wanted to cut the Association and its leadership short before it was too late.[851] The intolerance was clear that, "A simple civic protest is enough to label an Oromo as 'the enemy' of

[848] John Markakis, 2011,pp. 178-179.

[849] Kiflu Tadesse, *Ya Tiwuld: YeItiyophiya Hizbawi Abiyotawi Party Tarik, Ke Ajemameru Iske 1967 A.M Dires, Vol.1*.(Translated from the *Generation*), Independent Publishers, 1967 *A.M*, p.44.

[850]Chritopher Clapham, "Centralization and Local Response in Southern Ethiopia" in *Government Miscellanea*.1, p. 80.

[851] Habtamu, p.1.

Ethiopia."[852] The intolerance of the local and provincial authorities started when the Association began to open branches. With the intention of coordinating Oromo resistances, the leaders of the MTSHA began to communicate with the leaders of the Baalee Oromo armed resistance.[853] The man who was largely responsible for the linkage between the two was Ahmed Bunaa.[854]

It is also clear that Hajji Adam Saaddoo had tried to facilitate the relationship between General Taddasa and the leaders of the Baalee resistance fighters. It was while carrying the letter presumably sent from the rebel leaders to General Taddasa that Hajji Adam fell into the hands of the security forces. By the time Hajji Adam arrived in the capital and telephoned to the house of the General, his house was under the control of the security forces. One of them, acted like General Taddasa, picked up the phone and asked Hajji Adam to stay where he was until he would send him a car to take him. Unaware of what had happened to General Taddasa just after the failure of the coup plot, Hajji Adam innocently waited for the said car. It was only after he got in the car that he realized he had fallen into the hands of the security forces. After he was taken to the police station, however, Hajji Adam insisted that he had to go to the toilet. His intention was to eliminate the letter he brought from Baalee before it was taken by the police as invaluable evidence. While in the toilet, Hajji Adam is said to have chewed the letter and told the police, who rushed to him suspecting that he could destroy evidence, confidently: "Waan garaa nu baate garaatti deeffannee waan barbaadde gadi fidi"(We put back what has come out of our heart; you can do whatever you want).[855]

[852] Okbagzhi Yohannes, *JOS*, Vol. 8, 2001, p.58.
[853] Asafa Jalata, 1993, pp. 156-157.
[854] Mohammed Hassen, 1998, p.208; Asafa Jalata, *Oromia and Ethiopia*…, pp. 134-135.
[855] *Informants*: *Obbo* Ahmed Bakar, *Hajji* Faqi Hassen, *Obbo* Aman Kadir, *Hajji* Abdurhaman *Hajji* Hussein Kormee. According to these informants, Hajji Adam used to confront the injustices against the Oromo,

It was in reaction to the growing pressure from the authorities that the idea of making a regime change came to the mind of General Taddasa. At the beginning, he believed that the Emperor was not part of the conspiracy that was plotting to destroy him and his Association. There was indeed a general tendency to consider the Emperor as neutral in the ongoing crisis.[856] It was partly for this reason that the leaders of the MTSHA preferred to appeal to the Emperor for justice after the incident of Dheeraa. The petition which was written on *Tikimt* 16, 1959 *A.M*. contained a list of problems facing the Association which its leader hoped that the Emperor would resolve. In the petition they argued that the Association was established not to contradict the government but to augment its activities. The petition listed the objectives of the Association which included fighting illiteracy, disease and hunger by bringing together the knowledge, money and effort of its members. It is added that the membership of the Association was open to all Ethiopians in all regions of the country, across ethnic and regional boundaries.[857]

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especially in Baalee, and dedicated the rest of his life for the same cause. In connection to the activities of the MTSHA and their attempt to create linkage between the Association and the Baalee rebels, Hajji Adam and other prisoners were sentenced to long years of imprisonment and forty lashes by the Baalee High Court. Hajji Adam is reported to have said to the judge who presided over the verdict, "*Ato* Walde, firdii karaa keetii ati faradde garuu Rabbi hin faradne; yoo rabbi jedhe ni baana"(Mr Walde, you have made your own judgment but God did not say it; if it is the will of God we will be set free). The verdict was given on Thursday and on Tuesday, when Hajji Adam was taken to the Goobbaa Health Station for check up whether he could endure the forty lashes or not, the medical expert named Dhaabaa Aagaa disappeared deliberately to delay the flogging. On Friday, an order came from Addis Ababa which requested the authorities to send the prisoners to the capital without any physical punishment. Thus Hajji Adam and other prisoners were sent immediately to the capital as requested. It is reported that the leaders of the Baalee resistance communicated Hajji Adam who in turn passed their message to Jamal Roobalee in Arsii who would contact General Taddasa and other key leaders of the Association. According to my informants, this was the channel of communication but as it is indicated above Hajji Adam also attempted to communicate General Taddasa directly before he fell into the hands of the security forces. It is also reported that Ahmed Bunaa used to facilitate the communication between the two.

[856] Mohammed Hassen, " General Taddesse Birru, 1921-1975", in *Goota Oromiyaa*, 2008, pp.351-352.

[857] IES MS: 1091, The Petition of the MTSHA to the Imperial Government written on T*ikmi*t 16, 1959 *A.M*. It seems that the leaders wanted to convince the Emperor that the Association was not limited to a specific territory and group of people contrary to the accusation of the authorities. In other words, they argued that it was an Association open to all Ethiopians as it was clearly put in its founding charter or legal document.

In the petition, the Association accused the security office for illegally forbidding its leaders from attending the meeting organized by the people of Arsii at Dheeraa. It also accused the governor of Arsii, *Dajjazmach* Sahilu Defaye, for ordering the Cilaaloo *awraja* governor *Dajjazmach* Asfaw Shiamti and the police chief Colonel Libseqal to disperse the meeting with the intention of hindering the people from building schools, roads and health stations. According to the petition, these authorities fired on those children, women and the elderly who were returning home from the meeting place with a provocative objective, "If we do not intimidate the Oromo today they would not be governed". The Arsii governors were also accused of imprisoning elected leaders for the Association and those who made donations for the construction of social services. The petition also accused the authorities for disseminating a false propaganda as if the Oromo were intending to eliminate the Amhara and overthrow the Amhara government. More importantly, it stressed that the authorities gathered the people of Arsii and provoked them saying, "Since your country is Kenya, we will send you there."[858] This provocative warning was indeed shocking not only to the Arsii Oromo but also to the rest of the members of the MTSHA, including General Taddasa, who were very much offended and outraged.

Though the government official who was directly accused in the petition was *Dajjazmach* Sahilu Defaye, Prime Minister Aklilu Habte-Wold was also indirectly implicated. For example, the petition indicated that in order to complain their unjust treatment, the elders of Arsii had attempted to see him for six days in vain. It was underlined clearly that the Oromo were unjustly treated despite their contributions in keeping the successive Ethiopian regimes in power starting from the time of *Ras* Goobanaa Daaccii to the military officers who aborted

[858] *Ibid.*

the 1960 coup. The leaders complained that it was regrettable that the Crown they had protected for long did not serve their interest. Strong accusation was directed against the security department for continuously curtailing the movement of the Association in its various letters written to the Association. In general, the leaders of the MTSHA complained that while people were moving to another planet at that moment of the 20th century, their rights of human freedom, equality, access to education, movement from place to place, freedom of speeches were violated and these were the reasons why they appealed to the Emperor for justice.[859] However, there was no response from the Emperor which revealed to them, especially to General Taddasa, that he was also part of the conspiracy against their Association. This in turn reinforced the idea of making a regime change by targeting the Emperor.

6.2 The Coup Plot of General Taddasa Birru

When he came under immense pressure from the government, General Taddasa was left with at least two options; either to sit down and accept whatever would come from the government or to resist and die with dignity. It happened that he took the second option, as this was the most favored in the Salaalee tradition, despite its grave consequences.[860]

As it was expected, the Emperor was unable or unwilling to respond to the petition of the Association which requested him to stop governmental attacks on the Association. With no response from the Emperor, General Taddasa was convinced that the Emperor himself was a

[859] IES MS: 1091, The Petition of the MTSHA to the Imperial Government written on *Tikmit* 16, 1959 *A.M.* It is indicated in the petition that *Dajjazmach* Sahilu Defaye had many powerful friends who protected him from any accusation. It was indicated that his main protector was clealy the Prime Minister. The Court, however, later regarded the petition as a means to cover up General Taddasa's fearless and daring speeches to cause bloodshed between the Amhara and the Oromo.

[860] *Informants*: Colonel Sahilu Birru, Dr Moggaa Firrisaa.

major obstacle which had to be removed by force.[861] As a result, he was forced to think of what was unheard until then even among his close circle; the idea of the physical elimination of the Emperor.[862] Now, the need to change the structural relationship between the Oromo as conquered people, and the Amhara rulers as conquerors was underlined. It was decided that such structural change could only be brought through armed struggle[863], and nothing short of it would bring even a little change as the peaceful activity of the MTSHA had revealed to them until then.

General Taddasa, and other leaders of the Association knew very well that politics is mainly about the control of state power and that was why he plotted a coup on November 2, 1966.[864] The attempt was to control the state power for the purpose of using it to bring equality for the Oromo as well as the other peoples of Ethiopia.[865] He knew very well that the authorities used state power to commit injustices and that was why he attempted to take control of it.[866] In this plot it was the Emperor who was made the main target because his elimination was hoped to create big chaos in the imperial establishment. Lapiso G. Dilebo argues that General Taddasa targeted the Emperor with the assumption that,"የዓሣ ግማቱ ከጭንቅላቱ*"(* A bad smell of a fish is from its head*)* because he was the symbol of the regime.[867] And once that

[861] Mohammed Hassen, 1997, p. 219; Thomas Zitelmann, "Macca and Tulama" in *Encyclopedia Aethiopica*, Vol.3, p. 619.

[862] Mohammed Hassen, " General Taddesse Birru, 1921-1975", in *Goota Oromiyaa*, 2008, p.352; See also Mohammed Hassen, 1997, pp.219-220.

[863]Benti Getahun, *JOS*, Vol.9, No.1&2, 2002, p.87

[864] Mohammed Hassen, *CMI-Report*, pp.30-31.

[865] Asafa Jalata, "Oromumma: Nationalism in Transition or Stagnation?" in: *OSA Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Conference: Prospects and Challenges of the Oromo National Struggle for Freedo, Cultural, Economy and Political Factors*, edited by Ezekiel Gebissa, 2002, p. 16.

[866] Asafa Jalata and Mohammed Hassen, 2014, p.54.

[867] Laphiso G. Dilebo, *Ya'Itiyopiya Ya'Gabar Sirihatina Jimir Capitalism*, *1900-1966 A.M* (Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press), 1983 *A.M*, pp.271-272.

symbol was attacked it was hoped that the regime would collapse and create a suitable condition for the success of the plot.

Even though the issue of making a coup was in his mind at least since the Itayyaa meeting, General Taddasa was unable to make a well prepared plan within that short period of time. But he decided to try it when events forced him to do so quickly. After the Dheeraa meeting, the leaders of the MTSHA learned through their own intelligence that the regime had decided to crush them after the end of the coronation ceremony of the Emperor on November 2, 1966 (*Tikimt* 23, 1959 *A.M.*). This situation forced General Taddasa to take his own measure before he became a victim of the inevitable assault of the government. General Taddasa and other leaders did not have other options except to take prompt action of their own. Thus a preparation began to be made by coordinating the Association's members within the armed forces.[868] General Taddasa was unwilling to be a victim of his own opponents without attempting his own actions. As I remarked earlier, here again, he resorted to his Salaalee tradition of resistance. Thus even if he knew that his plot could result in grave consequences, he attempted to kill the Emperor.

The preparation was made in the meetings held in the house of General Taddasa just beginning from the aftermath of the Dheeraa incident. In other words, there were secret meetings held in the house of General Taddasa including the one on October 22, 1966. The meetings focused on how to make regime change. It seems that General Taddasa had already discussed the issue with his close circles and ordered the purchase of weapons to be used for

[868] Olana Zoga, pp.118-119.

the operation.[869] Later, in the Trial Document, he was accused of establishing and leading a secret rebellious organization within the legally established MTSHA.[870]

According to my informant, the house of General Taddasa had often served as a meeting place which even forced his family members to live in the service rooms. Particularly after the Dheera meeting, it is reported that, his compound looked like a military camp as it was frequented by groups of people who came one after another. In the words of my informant,

> ምን እንደሚሉ ኦሮምኛ ባለመስማቴ ነዉ እንጅ ሁሉም ይፎክራሉ። ከፉከራቸዉም ብዛት የተነሳ በድንገት ርጩት ተኩሼ ምን እንደሚፈጠር ለማየት ፈለጌ እናቴ ልጆቼን ታስጨርሻለሽ ብላ ከለከለቸኝ።
>
> *I did not know what they were saying because I did not hear Oromo language but they all vowed. I was initiated by their excessive boasting to throw an explosive among them to see what would happen but it was my mother who forbade me saying 'you would make my children finished or killed'.*[871]

As indicated elsewhere, General Taddasa was trying to convince the Oromo members of the army to support the cause of their own people in the inevitable conflict with the government. Accordingly, many Oromo members of the Police Emergency Force and some members of the Air Force were recruited to be involved in the coup. My informant, who was one of the key members of the Association from the Air Force, participated in one of the meetings of the MTSHA and innocently energized the crowd that there was nothing to fear if action was needed. He claimed to have encouraged the participants saying that the Oromo members of the Air Force from Bishooftuu were ready to cooperate while in Baalee there was Waaqoo Guutuu, who was already in battle with the regime. He added, there was an active member of the Association, Brigadier General Dawit Abdii, who was a commander of the Artillery

[869] Tadese Tele Salvano, *Gedle Mefenqile Mengist BeItiyophiya*, 1953 E.C, 2004 *A.M*, p.8.

[870] 'The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA', p. 438. He was accused of planning to divide the country along ethnic lines to cause bloodshed as it was seen in Nigeria and Congo.

[871] *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa .

Division of the Ground Forces. He also indicated that Brigadier General Taddasa could mobilize members of the *Fetno Derash* Police and the Territorial Army. In short, his message was that the Oromo were capable of taking action if they were able to coordinate these forces. Through the planted agents in the meeting, however, the Emperor had heard the remark of my informant for which he was warned and transferred to Eritrea as a punishment.[872]

Another informant adds that General Taddasa had confidence on the other Oromo commanders of the army. For example, in the Fourth Army Division there was Brigadier General Jagamaa Kelloo while in the Third Division there was Major General Waaqjiraa Sardaa.[873] It was probably because of the potential power of the Oromo within the army that the Emperor felt threatened and requested the leaders of the Association to his palace a few days before the date of the coup. It is reported that only Colonel Alamu and Haile Mariam went to meet him. The latter was said to have told the Emperor that earlier they requested his Majesty to become the Honorary President of the Association because he too was an Oromo. According to my informant, however, the Emperor was offended by the remark of Haile Mariam and said, "Who asked you to tell us about this?"[874]

After the completion of a hurriedly made preparation, a meeting was held on November 1, 1966 (*Tikimt* 22, 1959 *A.M.*) in the house of General Taddasa. Regarding the nature of the meeting and the list of those who attended it, there is a slight difference among the sources. According to Olana Zoga, the leading participants under the chairmanship of General Taddasa were *Dajjazmach* Kebede Bizunesh, Ketema Yifru, *Dajjazmach* Daniel Abebe, Lt.

[872] *Informant*: *Shambal* Lemma Guyyaa,

[873] *Informant*: *Obbo* Lubee Birru.

[874] *Ibid.* My informant claims that the Emperor did not say that he was not Oromo though he was offended by the remark of Haile Mariam.

Mamo Mazamir, Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa, Bekele Mekonnen, Tesfaye Dagaagaa and other members of the armed forces. In the meeting, according to Olana Zoga, it was agreed to take action against the Emperor the next morning when he would come to St. George Church for his coronation ceremony. In the confusion that would follow this incident, it was hoped to take political power with the support of other members of the army. It is reported that after a lengthy discussion, General Taddasa gave orders to those who would take actions. Accordingly, it was decided that soldier Camadaa Sabbooqaa was ordered to throw the first bomb and others would follow him thereafter.[875]

According to an informant, the daughter of General Taddasa, however, *Dajjazmach* Daniel Abebe and Ketema Yifru came together and left together after discussing with her father. According to this informant, both of them did not come to attend the meeting but because General Taddasa refused to go to the Palace. It is reported that there was a phone call from the palace on the morning of November 1, 1966 (*Tikimt* 22, 1959 *A.M.*). But he refused to pick up the phone and ordered my informant to respond that he was not at home. Upon telling his absence from home, my informant received a message that 'he should come to the palace immediately'. General Taddasa heard it but refused to go. It was after this event that the two authorities went to his house and my informant does not believe that there was a meeting in the house on the specified date. It is claimed that General Taddasa was alone in his compound on this date and ordered his family members not to respond to any phone call and not to open the gate to anyone. It was shortly after the phone message from the Palace that Ketema Yifru and *Dajjazmach* Daniel Abebe arrived at his home. When they knocked at

[875] Olana Zoga, pp.118-119. Oral sources contradict with the account of Olana Zoga regarding the participation of Ketema Yifru and *Dajjazmach* Daniel Abebe on the secret meeting held in the house of General Taddasa on how to execute the plot.

the gate, my informant opened and admitted them inside knowing that Ketema Yifru was sent from the palace. My informant thought that General Taddasa would be happy to talk to them because they were higher officials. However, it happened that he was not interested to meet both of them at the time. This was made clear later after their departure because he asked my informant why she violated his order and allowed them to enter.[876].

According to my informant, the two individuals met and discussed with General Taddasa in her presence. But both of them had different messages for him. Accordingly, Ketema Yifru told him that the Emperor wanted to see him immediately in the palace because His Majesty wanted to know those who offended him by circulating rumors about the inferiority of the Oromo.[877] Ketema added that since the Emperor had the understanding of his feelings he was ready to listen to his grievances and punish those who were responsible for disseminating this false propaganda. In short, he advised him to go to the palace.[878]

Dajjazmach Daniel, however, insisted that he should not go to the palace. My informant claims that he even warned General Taddasa in strong terms saying: "አትሂድ ልገሉህ ነዉ። እዚያ ቤቴመንግስት ስትሄድ ልይዙህና ልገሉህ ነዉ የሚጠሩህ። እዚያ ሄደህ ከምትሞት እኔ እዚሁ እቤትህ ዉስጥ ብገልህ ይሻላል አትሀድ!"(Do not go; they will kill you. Why they call you to the Palace is to arrest you and kill you. It is better if I kill you here in your house if you prefer to go and die

[876]*Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa. This contradicts with the account of other informant (Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa), who claimed to have participated in the secret meeting and moved out with General Taddasa during the coup. According to this view, both Ketema and *Dajjazmach* Daniel had participated in the secret meeting held in the house of General Taddasa and remained with him even after he left his house until almost mid night. However, this was unlikely and they did not stay with him to the mid night. They came at lunch time and left shortly.

[877] As discussed in the previous chapter, General Taddasa was provoked by some circulating false stories that make the Oromo inferiority to even domestic animals.

[878] *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa. It was clear that after the Dheeraa meeting, General Taddasa had refused to meet the Emperor when he returned from abroad though military officers and high ranking officials were expected to welcome him at the airport as indicated earlier.

there. Do not go*)*. *Dajjazmach* Daniel clearly warned General Taddasa not to go to the palace. Eventually, the two individuals left when General Taddasa refused to go to the palace. According to my informant both came to the house at midday, not in the afternoon. [879] It is not clear why they came together if they had such differing advise.

Why the Emperor wanted him at that critical time in the palace was not clear. But in consideration of the tense situation that was developing especially after the Dheeraa meeting, the Emperor might have learnt that General Taddasa was plotting against him. The security forces were closely following his movements and this might have created a concern that he would endanger the coronation ceremony. In order to avoid this danger, the Emperor probably wanted to detain him on the eve but he did not want to mobilize forces to capture him at his him as well for fear that he could make confrontation. *Dajjazmach* Daniel Abebe probably knew this intention and that could be probably why he advised him not to go to the palace. It appeared that *Dajjazmach* Daniel himself had grievances against the Emperor, especially after the death of his father. My informant had heard that *Dajjazmach* Daniel, after he had joined the MTSHA, was complaining that: "የአባቴ ቤት ሳንባ ነቀርሳ ተባለ። ያ ማለት የማይጠፋ በሽታ መሆኑ ነዉ አይደለም?"(My father's house came to be called tuberculosis. That means, isn't it an incurable disease?).[880]

According to my informant, therefore, there was no meeting in the house of General Taddasa on the eve of the coronation ceremony that brought all the aforementioned participants

[879] *Ibid.*

[880]It is reported that the house of his father was confiscated under the pretext of not paying electric service bill debts. The compound that was originally owned by *Ras* Goobanaa Daaccii was inherited by his grandson, *Ras* Abebe Aregay. But after the death of *Ras* Abebe during the 1960 coup, it was confiscated for failure to pay electric service bills. It seems that the confiscation of the house of his father had deeply offended *Dajjazmach* Daniel. Later events showed that the two individuals who met General Taddasa at his home with different messages had encountered different fates. Accordingly, Ketema was given promotion while *Dajjazmach* Daniel was killed in a mysterious air crash.

together. But she did not know what had happened in the compound outside the house. She knew that people came to their compound in groups one after the other to meet with her father. Ketema Yifru and *Dajjazmach* Daniel, however, came together and left together. [881]

Therefore, though there is a claim that both Ketema Yifru and *Dajjazmach* Daniel spent the evening with General Taddasa until 11 pm and returned home to prepare what was to be broadcasted on the media following the success of the coup[882], it is difficult to accept it. It was true that both went to the house of General Taddasa. This was also confirmed by the testimony of Colonel Alemu who had met both of them there.[883] But they returned soon and did not move with General Taddasa to the Pipineta Hotel. For example, Bekele Mekonnen who joined General Taddasa later in the Pipineta Hotel does not mention the presence of Ketema Yifru and *Dajjazmach* Daniel in the hotel.[884]

According to another informant, who was assigned to take the first action during the coup, there was a brief meeting held in the house of General Taddasa. In this meeting, key members of the army were selected and given responsibility to take the necessary action against the Emperor at St George Church and other suitable areas with the use of hand grenades and automatic weapons. Those members of the army who were selected for the action were Camadaa Sabbooqaa and Lammeessaa Boruu from the *Fetno Derash* Police,

[881] *Infromant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

[882] *Informant*: Dr.Moggaa Firrisaa. See also Olana Zoga, p. 120. However, close assessment of the sources does not show that both Ketema Yifru and *Dajjazmach* Daniel spent the night in the Pipineta Hotel around Buraayyuu. Even Bekele Mekonnen joined General Taddasa later in the hotel because earlier, when he went to his house, he could not meet General Taddasa as he was busy talking with other persons. For the detail see the Trial Document: the Testimony of Bekele Mekonnen.

[883] See the 'Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA'- the Testimony of Colonel Alamu Qixxeessaa, p. 330

[884] See the 'Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA'- the Testimony of Bekele Mekonnen, p.72.

Hagari Tulluu from the Imperial Bodyguard and soldier Haile Mariam Diimaa.[885] Indeed, soldier Camadaa Sabbooqaa and Hagari Tulluu were the most reliable confidants of General Taddasa from the army.[886]

Though under close security supervision, the house of General Taddasa was selected for the secret meeting because many people often went to his house to greet him and for consultation. In other words, his house was already frequented by guests and it was hoped that it would not be suspected that there was a meeting.[887] In fact, there was a preparation of feast for the engagement of his elder daughter so that many people also hang around his compound for the event.[888]

However, the security office had planted agents who closely reported the progress of the meeting. When he learnt that the security agents were going to arrest him and his associates, General Taddasa decided to leave his home and move to other suitable area in the evening of November 1. Hence, he moved to Buraayyuu area and spent the night there in the Pipineta Hotel.[889]

Indeed, members of the security forces were closely following the meeting that was held in the house of General Taddasa. As a result, they were able to arrest some of those members of the army who were returning home after receiving the mission to be carried out the next morning. They were able to do this partly because they deployed all the taxis that could be used by those returning home from the house of General Taddasa. Accordingly, Seifu

[885] I*nformant*: Hulluuqaa Baabsoo. His name was Camadaa Sabbooqaa when he was serving as a member of the Police Emergency Force. Later he reclaimed his original name, Hulluuqaa Baabsoo. Camadaa or Hulluuqaa also played a key role when the house of General Taddasa was sourrounded later on.

[886] *Informant*: *Obbo* Lubee Birru.

[887] Olana Zoga, pp.122-123.

[888] *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa, Colonel Sahilu.

[889] Olana Zoga, p.120; *Informant*: Dr Moggaa Firrisaa.

Tesema, Haile Mariam Diimaa and Fiitumaa Hiiksaa were captured that evening. The other soldiers in the the police were captured the next morning when their names were called and inspected during preparation for the police parade to attend the ceremony.[890] Lammeessaa was captured before action with the bomb but Camadaa was able to escape. As will be seen shortly, Camadaa was again with General Taddasa when his house was surrounded later. Camadaa was never captured because he was able to return secretly to his home area of Jiillee around Maqii.[891]

With the arrest of the key members of the plot, the security agents took preemptive measures to foil the planned coup. Accordingly, they delayed the arrival of the Emperor at the scene up to 10 am and made strict control in the area. The security became so tight that soldier Camadaa was unable to carry out the mission assigned to him though he managed to reach there. Moreover, other soldiers who got the opportunities wasted them while waiting for the first assigned to begin the assault.[892]

In the early morning of November 2, from the Pipineta Hotel, General Taddasa with Tesfaye Dagaagaa, Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa and Bekele Mekonnen went up a hill in the temporary commanding centre while *Dajjazmach* Kebede went to Walmaraa to distribute weapons to his followers and to make preparation for armed struggle. Though General Taddasa waited until 10 am from his commanding centre around Kattaa area, there was nothing heard. He began to feel that the coup failed. My informant claims that he was sent to clarify what had happened and to report back. While my informant was carrying out this mission, he was surrounded by the security forces but managed to escape to Walmaraa to meet *Dajjazmach*

[890] Olana Zoga, p.121.
[891] *Informan*t: *Obbo* Hulluuqaa Baabsoo.
[892] Olana Zoga, pp.122-123.

Kebede. While the security forces were chasing him he was joined by Dajane Booji'aa, another determined member of the MTSHA. When both reached Walmaraa they found *Dajjazmach* Kebede distributing weapons to his followers.[893]

Having heard nothing about what had happened; General Taddasa moved to the direction of his house, around Kolfe Atena Tera, to see what was happening there. He saw from a distance that there were people under the fence of his house which he believed had come to kill him. He sent Bekele Mekonnen to clarify what had happened around his home. When Bekele entered the house, he met religious leaders, Abune Tewoflos and Abba Habte Mariam, who hurriedly asked him the whereabouts of General Taddasa. His compound was also surrounded by the security forces but Bekele was able to disappear from the area immediately. When General Taddasa was assured that his family members were not hurt, his group preferred to remain in the forest being dispersed. [894]

It has to be made clear that after the departure of General Taddasa, majority of his family members were taken to Walmaraa to the compound of *Dajjazmach* Kebede Bizunesh in the early morning of November 2. Those who remained at home were his *guddifachaa* (adopted) son known as Kassa and other dependents. His son Belete was also not among the family members who went to Walmaraa. He was taken to another place.[895]

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[893] *Informant:* Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa; Olana Zoga, pp. 120-125.

[894] 'The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA'- 18th Witness- Bekele Mekonnen, pp.71-74; IES MS: 1091, *18th Witness*, Bekele Mekonnen. What happened in the gun fire around his home was that his *guddifacha* son, Kasa, killed a policeman when the police entered the house and abused him. General Taddasa was able to learn later that no member of his family was hurt.

[895] *Informants: Aadde*, Tsehay Taddasa, *Obbo* Bekele Urgeessaa, *W/o* Aregash Alilu. It was my informant, Bekele Urgeessaa, who took the family of General Taddasa to Walamaraa because he was his driver. Bekele Urgeessaa served him for about seven years as his driver.

Around 1 pm, however, heavy gun fire was heard around his house. At this time they gathered again around General Taddasa to discuss what to do. He thought that the firing around his home had targeted his children and vowed to go and die with them. Though he was prohibited from going back, he was deeply offended; became sick and even could not speak for a while out of extreme irritation. [896]

Now, it was learnt that the coup had failed. The Emperor was not killed and it was heard from the radio that he safely returned to his palace. Those who were assigned to take actions could not carry out their mission due to the tight control of the security. Action takers were assigned in three different areas. The main site of operation was St George Cathedral where the coronation ceremony took place. The security forces used different mechanisms to avoid the ensuing danger. Accordingly, they tightened the security control; delayed the time of the arrival of the Emperor on the site and then kept the crowd at a distance. Therefore, it became impossible to take action at St George. The second chosen place was at Arat Kilo before he entered the Parliament and finally inside the Parliament building when he delivered a speech. At all three places, it was not possible to take action and the Emperor was able to return safely to his Palace. It was when the news of the safe return of the Emperor was heard on the radio that many who were waiting for the news learnt that the coup had failed without any attempt.[897]

Now, let us return to what was prepared if the coup was successful. According to an informant, if the coup became successful, there was a statement prepared and recorded to be

[896] 'The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA'- 18th Witness- Bekele Mekonnen, pp.71-74; IES MS: 1091, *18th Witness*, Bekele Mekonnen. What happened in the gun fire around his home was that his *guddifacha* son, Kasa, killed a policeman when the police entered the house and abused him. General Taddasa was able to learn later that no member of his family was hurt.

[897] *Informant*: *Obbo* Lubee Birru.

read on the radio. My informant claims to have heard the opening part of the statement when it was checked on a tape recorder in his presence. It read,

> ይህ የኦሮሞ ነጻነት ድምፅ ነው። የኦሮሞ ነጻነት በዚህን ሰዓት ለመቶ ዓመታት ተቀምቶ የነበረውን አገሩን እንደገና መልሶ በእጁ ማስገባቱን እናስታውቃለን። ጃንሆይ ተወግዶዋል። ከአሁኑ ሰዓት ጀምሮ መንግስትን የሚመራዉ ነፃነት የተባለዉ የኦሮሞ ድርጅት ነዉ። በየቦታውና በየጠቅላይ ግዛቱ ያላችው በሙሉ ከዚህ የሚከተለውን አዋጅና ደንብ ተከትላችው በያላችውበት በጸጥታና በሰላም በአድሱ መንግስት እንድትመሩ እናስታውቃለን።....
>
> *This is the voice of Oromo Liberation. At this time, the Oromo Liberation has taken over its country which it has been denied for a century. Janhoy [the Emperor] was eliminated. From now on the government would be led by an Oromo organization known as Liberation. All of you who are in the provinces and other places are requested to be led under the new government in a stable and peaceful manner accepting the following rules and regulations… .*[898]

The intention of General Taddasa was to make a regime change by targeting the Emperor. For example, some of the documents found in the hands of Lt Mamo Mazamir contain the plan to write a new constitution and prepare a new land reform that would enable tenants to own land.[899] With the intention to form a new government in mind, it is reported that, General Taddasa had a list of educated Oromo and some of them were short listed as cabinet members of the new government.[900]

According to the various documents that were found in the hands of Lt Mamo Mazamir during the police investigation, some of the proposed cabinet members were as follows:

1. General Taddasa Birru- as President

[898] *Ibid.* According to this informant, the statement was prepared in group but it was brought to where he was through Basazinehu Baayisaa and Dhinsaa Leephisaa. He was not sure but the voice of the reader seemed to be that of Teklu Tabor, who had a good voice on the Ethiopian radio. He was a member of the MTSHA. He believes that the tape recorder was hidden in the house of a certain police officer after it was learnt that the coup had failed.

[899] The Trial Document of the leaders of the MTSHA, p. 400. Indeed, Lt Mamo was the right hand man of General Taddasa who documents and writes after receiving guidance and direction from General Taddasa. He also served as a bridge between General Taddasa and others facilitating communications.

[900] *Informant*: Bulchaa Dammaqsaa.

2. Yilma Dheeressaa- as Prime Minister
3. General Abebe Gammadaa – as Minister of Interior
4. General Jagamaa Kelloo-as Minister of Defense
5. *Dajjazmach* Kebede Bizunesh- as Minister of Agriculture
6. Bulchaa Dammaqsaa -as Minister of Finance
7. Ketema Yifru, to remain where he was, as a Minister of Foreign Affairs
8. Qana'aa Gumaa- as Minister of Justice
9. Amanuel Abreham -as Minister of Education.[901]

In addition to the new cabinet proposal, the coup plotters had the intention to hoist their own Oromo flag based on the Gada philosophy instead of the existing Imperial flag. Accordingly, the new proposed flag had three colors drawn horizontally: black on the top, red in the middle and white in the bottom lines.[902] In short, the colors were Black, Red and White instead of the existing Green, Yellow and Red. The new proposed flag and the order of the colors had its own meaning in the Oromo philosophical view within the Gada System.

[901] 'The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA', P. 398. Whether General Taddasa had discussed this issue with the nominees or not is, however, unclear. According to the Trial Document (p. 274), when he personally gave his words to the court, Lt Mamo argued that the police did not get the paper that contained the list of proposed cabinet members from his house but forced him to write the list in the face of extreme torture while in prison. According to the sixth witness, Lt Colonel Mekonnen Wolde Dawit (the police officer who captured him), the paper that contained the list of new proposed cabinet members was found from the pockets of Lt Mamo. See 'The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA', pp. 50-51. According to an informant, *Obbo* Bulchaa Dammaqsaa, General Taddasa had the list of educated Oromo whom he knew.

[902] 'The Trial Document of the leaders of the MTSHA,' p.50, 399. The order of the colors reflects the overall structure of the Gada System and the Oromo world view. The black color represents the mystery of Waaqaa, His purity and the childhood in the Oromo lifespan. The red represents the generation that defends and administers the society. In other words, it symbolizes the active age in the life cycle of the Oromo that could defend the land and the society with its blood. The last color, white, represents the old age that promotes peace and speaks the truth.

It is reported that General Taddasa had interest in the documentation of Oromo history[903] and he was seen looking for documents and books written on the Oromo people.[904] The documents found in the house of Lt Mamo, but confiscated by the police and presented against him as evidence in the court, reveal that there was a grand plan to make a broader study on the history, political, social, economic and other aspects of the Oromo people and the country in general. For this purpose, according to the claimed paper found as evidence, a committee was established to carry out the study. Some of the members of the committee included: Seifu Tesema, Tesfaye Dagaagaa, Moosisaa Mazamir [more probably Lt. Mamo Mazamir], Dhinsaa Leephisaa Abbaa Joobir, Bekele Melse Abbaa Joobir, Guutuu Ejjetaa and Adane Magarsaa. Some of their tasks were to:

1. collect and document Oromo history
2. explain the existing conditions of the Oromo in political and economic terms. These include land ownership, educational status, health services, power share, cultural and social development of the Oromo people.
3. analyze the prevailing administrative system, justice system and the parliament structure.
4. dispatch annual news and reports about the activities of the MTSHA every six months
5. criticize or recognize the political figures of the country since the time of Emperor Menilek II.[905]

[903] Merera Gudina, *YeItiyophiya Polotika Misqilqil Guzo ena Yehiyiwote Tizitawoch: KeItiyophiya Temariwoch Niqinaqe Iske EPRDF*, 2005 *A.M*, p.56. It is reported that General Taddasa gave an assignment to Tassew Merga to write a history of the Oromo after he returned from Galamsoo.

[904] *Informant*: *Obbo* Bulchaa Dammaqsaa.

[905] 'The Trial Document of the leaders of the MTSHA', pp.397-398. These political figures who were either to be recognized or criticized based on their deeds include Emperor Menilek II, *Fitawrari* Habte Giorgis, *Ras* Goobanaa, *Lij* Iyasu, Emperor Haile Selassie I, *Ras* Mesfin Sileshi, *Ras* Abebe Aregay, General Merid

6. look into how the Prime Minster was elected
7. examine the existing hatred against the Oromo people
8. document the biographies of the Oromo figures.[906]

Though the coup plot came to an end within few days, it came to have several impacts. The news of the disappearance of General Taddasa as an act of rebellion forced the security condition of the palace to be tightened more than ever before. The protection and security for the higher authorities had also increased significantly. The existing check points became strict; especially those leading to the city and more check points were established including entrances to Churches.[907]

His coup plot and disappearance became talking points especially wherever people came together, including at bus station, hotels, cafeteria and other places. His rebellion boosted the moral of the conscious Oromo in general. It also encouraged those who had ignored their Oromo identity earlier to start to reaffirm themselves. It is reported that some families had even began to teach *Afaan* Oromo (Oromo language) to their own children. In general, his action boosted the moral and confidence of the Oromo who were earlier pressurized not to affirm their identity. It enabled them to come out and declare themselves as Oromo.[908]

Once he had learnt that the coup had failed, General Taddasa did not want to surrender and hence, began his movement to Walmaraa.[909] His team remained in the forest the whole day

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Mengesha, General Kebede Gebre, General Isayias Gebre Selassie, General Jagamaa Kelloo, and the Sons and Grandsons of *Ras* Kassa, who grabbed the land of the Salaalee Oromo.

[906]'The Trial Document of the leaders of the MTSHA', pp.397-398. However, it remained a plan because of the failure of the plot.

[907] Tadese Tele Salvano, *Gedle Mefenqile Mengist 1953 E.C*, 2004 *A.M*, p.9.

[908] Daniel Tefera, Dandi: *Ye'Nagaso Gidada Menged*, pp.65-66.

[909]Olana Zoga, pp.124-125. According to my informant, Hailu Gebru, General Taddasa brought Kasa, his *guddifacha* son, from Salaalee. After he killed a policeman Kassa was systematically admitted to Amanuel Hospital as if he were mentally sick. This was intended to make him not responsible for what had happened.

and travelled to Walmaraa in the night. The team was a group of four: General Taddasa, Bekele Mekonnen, Tesfaye Dagaagaa and Argaa. They reached Walmaraa the next morning but they could not meet *Dajjazmach* Kebede. They found and met only Waamii Araddoo.[910]

The reason why General Taddasa had decided to move to Walmaraa was that many of his family members were taken there. More importantly, he had to meet and discuss with *Dajjazmach* Kebede on what to do next. On the evening of November 2, Abba Habte Mariam arrived in Walmaraa and met *Dajjazmach* Kebede and the family of General Taddasa. He was sent by Princess Tenagnework who requested the coup plotters to return home before midnight and if not they were warned that the Imperial Bodyguard would be sent against them. At this point, *Dajjazmach* Kebede was provoked and vowed: "I will make here the third Maichew[911] and let her order whatever army she wants."[912] According to my informant, who was an eye witness, Abba Habte Mariam retreated and changed his approach into begging with the use of his cross. Eventually, he was able to convince him.[913]

The plan was indeed successful. According to my another informant,Tsehay, however, Kassa was one of the boys who were left without any support and frequented themselves around the cafeteria of the police at Kolfe. General Taddasa realized this situation and took the boy home.

[910] 'The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA'- 18th Witness- Bekele Mekonnen, pp.71-74; 40th Witness- Waamii Araddoo, pp.135-136; IES MS: 1091, 18th *Witness*, Bekele Mekonnen.

[911] Maichew was the battle where *Dajjazmach* Kebede distinguished himself as a known patriot of anti-Fascist resistance. He fought the Italians at Maichew, which was regarded as the first Maichew for him. His second Maichew was in Walmaraa, the site where he built his compound later, in which he killing many Italian soldiers as a guerrilla resistance fighter. Now when Abba Habte Mariam warned him to return, he vowed to make the third Maichew if the government would deploy forces against him.

[912] *Informant*: Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa; Olana Zoga, p.125.

[913] *Informant*: Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa. See also Olana Zoga, pp.126-127. According to an informant (Tsehay Taddasa), in addition to Abba Habte Maiam there were other persons, presumably the relatives of the Empress. They went there with the guidance of the wife of *Dajjazmach* Kebede, Almaz Wossen Hailu, who was also suspected of leaking secrets, which she obtained through close observation of the activities of her husband, *Dajjazmach* Kebede. It seems that she was instrumental in this process in two ways. First, she was informing the authorities about what was going on through closely watching the activities of her husband. Second, she prohibited the contact between General Taddasa and *Dajjazmach* Kebede by misinforming and misguiding the first through Waamii Araddoo. Waamii Araddoo was wrongly told that since *Dajjazmach* Kebede proceeded to Meettaa and requested him to follow him there, he had to take General Taddasa to Meettaa quickly.

Eventually after convincing *Dajjazmach* Kebede, who now felt that the coup had failed, and others who were with him, Abba Habte Mariam was able to take back some of the family members of General Taddasa. His reason was that Princess Tenagnework wanted the children back home because they could not endure the rural hard life. Those who returned that evening were his elder daughter, Almaz, and other two *guddifacha* sons: Tirfe and Caalaa. They were taken to the house of *Dajjazmach* Kebede after they met with Princess Tenagnework. That evening the wife of General Taddasa and other children, including my informant, remained in Walmaraa. They all returned the next morning when Abba Habte Mariam returned with *Abune* Tewoflos to take all of them, including *Dajjazamch* Kebede to the Emperor. The wife of General Taddasa was initially taken to the house of Princess Tenagnework and then to the Emperor. When she was presented to the Emperor, who knew that her father was a *Menze*, he is reported to have said to the Prime Minister: *"እሷ እኮ የኛ ናት አታዉቅም እንዴ? እና ታደሰ የሚጣላዉ እኮ ከራሱ ልጆቹ ጋር ነዉ።* "(She is ours, don't you know it? So, Taddasa is quarrelling with his own children." She was told to bring her husband back and Abba Habte Mariam was assigned to assist her in the search of his whereabouts.[914]

Likewise, the religious leaders had also convinced *Dajjazmach* Kebede that the Emperor was ready to give pardon to the leaders of the MTSHA. On his turn, when *Dajjazmach* Kebede was presented to the Emperor, he was asked, "*ምነዉ እጃችንን በእጃችን እድንበላ ታደርጉ? እርስ በርሳችን እንባላ?እኛስ ምን በደልናችዉ?*"(Why do you make us to eat our hand with our hand? Should we have to hurt each other? What wrong we did to you?). Then he pardoned *Dajjazmach* Kebede and other leaders if they returned saying, "እስካሁን ድረስ አዉቃችሁም ሆነ

[914] *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa. This conversation was made in the presence of my informant.

ሳታዉቁ ላጠፋችሁት ጥፋት ምረት ሰጥተናል።ወደ ቤታችዉ ግቡ። " (For the crimes you have committed so far knowingly or unknowingly, we have given you pardon; return to your house.) *Dajjazmach* Kebede was also ordered to bring back General Taddasa.[915]

As his wife began to search for the whereabouts of her husband, rumors began to circulate that he was seen around Bishooftuu. According to this story, it was said that he was seen in Bishooftuu with the intention to cross to Arsii and then Baalee to join the armed struggle there. It was Abba Habte Mariam who was leading the search team together with the General's wife. Abba Habte Mariam attempted to include my informant into the team but she declined when she was informed by unknown individuals that there was a plan to kill Abba Habte Mariam and take out both General Taddasa and his wife (Workabeba) through Arsii and Baalee if he was found in that direction. When Abba Habte Mariam and Workabeba reached Bishooftuu, Lemma Guyyaa told them that the general did not come to that direction. The news that he was seen around Bishooftuu was probably fabricated to divert the attention of the security forces from the western direction taken by General Taddasa.[916] Nevertheless, the route to Arsii was carefully watched by the police because it was suspected that he could move to that direction.[917]

However, as discussed above, Generaal Taddasa moved to Walmaraa to meet *Dajjazmach* Kebede. From Walmaraa he continued his movement to Meettaa under the guidance of

[915]Olana Zoga, p.128. When the religious leaders arrived in the compound of *Dajjazmach* Kebede, there were other leaders of the MTSHA like Zawuge and Sine Booji'aa, Qadiidaa Gonfaa and others. The family of General Taddasa had stayed with the wife of *Dajjazmach* Kebede until General Taddasa returned few days later. They could not return to their house because on November 2 the police had raided the house, looted property, including clothes, and destroyed almost all the household equipment. Moreover, locked windows and doors were broken.

[916] *Ibid.* It was at the house of Abbaa Jifaar that he reestablished his communication with *Dajjazmach* Kebede who also requested him to come back to Walmaraa.

[917] 'The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA," 41st Witness- Captain Amare Ishetu, p.139

Waamii Araddoo. When they reached Fo'ataa around the evening, General Taddasa became exhausted. His companions, Bekele Mekonnen and Tesfaye Dagaagaa entered a village and requested food pretending as if they came to buy land because they were carrying guns and wanted to avoid suspicion. They were given dinner; gathered their energy and continued their journey to Ada'aa Bargaa. In the meantime, General Taddasa heard that *Dajjazmach* Kebede had settled the issue peacefully with the Emperor and his family was safe and no one was hurt. He was told that it was his *guddifachaa* son who killed the police during the gun fire he heard earlier. It was after he had heard this that he was willing to go to the house of Abbaa Jifaar Waaqayyoo.[918]

It was on the third day of difficult travel that General Taddasa and his group reached the house of Abbaa Jifaar, which was located to the north of Ejeree (Addis Alam) town in the locality of Cirrachaa, after midnight. Upon reaching there, they found Asfaw Abdii, one of Abbaa Jifaar's dependents, who gave them a separate room to sleep. Abbaa Jifaar was informed of their coming only in the morning.[919] Later when Abbaa Jifaar himself was informed of their arrival, he came and greeted General Taddasa but asked him of why he ascended all the way up the hill, the terrain which was difficult even for a car. General Taddasa responded that he came all the way to seek his support hoping that he would help him in sending messengers to Gindabarat to mobilize the people against the regime.[920] In order to convince Abbaa Jifaar, General Taddasa was said to have remarked, "...አማራ ከድንጋይ

[918] 'The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA," 40th Witness- Waamii Araddoo, pp. 136-137; IES MS: 1091, *40th Witness*, Waamii Araddoo; Olana Zoga, pp.130-131; IES MS 1091: *18th Witness*, Bekele Mekonnen

[919] According to the existing custom, it was not usual to awaken a Qaalluu until the crowing call of a cock was heard twice because Abbaa Jifaar was a Qaalluu, traditional Oromo religious leader.

[920] IES MS: 1091, *34th* Witness, Asfaw Abdi. Abbaa Jifaar was a member of the MTSHA but later he betrayed General Taddasa when he disclosed his presence in his house to the authorities and facilitated his capture.

ዉስጥ ወጥተዉ አባቶቻችንን ፈጅተዉ እኛንም ይጨቁናል።ይኼም ሹማግሌ ንጉስ እነርሱን ነዉ የሚረዳዉ።"(Emerging out of stones, the Amhara killed our fathers and now they are oppressing us. This elderly Emperor also supports them).[921]

In the meantime, they received a message that *Dajjazmach* Kebede requested them back to Walmaraa. On Sunday they reached Walmaraa and the next morning on *Tikimt* 28, 1959 E.C (November 9, 1966) Abune Tewoflos, Abba Habte Mariam and *Dajjazmach* Kebede came and took him to the Palace to meet the Emperor.[922] When General Taddasa was presented to the Emperor for pardon, His Majesty is said to have asked him about what had happened to him and why he refused to tell him if he was mistreated. The Emperor told him that it was because of fabricated stories that he was pushed into this situation.[923] As was expected, the Emperor told him that he had forgiven him for what he had done knowingly or unknowingly before *Tikim*t 28, 1959 *A.M*. Then General Taddasa thanked the Emperor but requested him to release *Hajji* Roobalee Turee, an important figure in organizing the Dheeraa meeting and other elders.[924]

When *Hajji* Roobalee was to appear before the Emperor few days later following the temporary pardon, General Taddasa advised him to put all the blame on him. He told him, "Ana waan barbaadan haa godhanii isatu akkas nugodhe jedhaa."(Let them do whatever they want against me and put all the blame on me). But *Hajji* Roobalee is reported to have refused

[921] IES MS: 1091, *33rd Witness*, Abbaa Jifaar Waaqayyoo. It seems that that General Taddasa wanted to explain the fact that the Shawan Amhara kingdom came out of the mountains and gorges of Tegulet, Bulga and Menz and invaded the surrounding Oromo territories.

[922] IES MS: 1091, *18th Witness*, Bekele Mekonnen; Olana Zoga, pp.130-131

[923] *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

[924] Olana Zoga, p.133. According to an informant (Hailu Gebru Jimaa), the Emperor still appeared to be considerate towards General Taddasa and when he learnt that his house was damaged during the police operation, he is said to have ordered one thousand birr for replacement purpose. But it did not become effective because General Taddasa himself was practically put under house arrest and was chased by the Police few days later.

and said, “Si hingurguradhu, Arsiis maqaa hin balleessu.”(I do not sell you; I would not blacken the name of Arsii).[925] *Hajji* Roobalee was a very determined and fearless Oromo elder.[926]

As it is indicated above, the coup plot of General Taddasa had failed even before it was attempted. One reason for the failure of the attempt was the fact that the leaders of the MTSHA were not mentally prepared for an armed uprising from the very beginning. In other words, there was no psychological preparation for armed confrontation at least within such a short period of time.[927] It was the fast moving events which forced General Taddasa to confront with little preparation. Informants attribute the failure of the coup plot to the poorly and hurriedly prepared plan. In fact, even this hurriedly prepared plan was not hidden from the security agents as they were closely following it. Moreover, there was no contingency plan as an alternative if the first one failed. Because of these situations my informants came to consider the coup plot as a rashly attempted act of suicide.[928]

He did not have enough time to prepare a better plan because he was quickly pushed into this situation by the provocative and intolerable behaviors of the authorities. In fact some of his speeches were also provocative to the government as well. Despite his expectation and hope,

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[925] *Informant*: Muktar Hajji Tuqaa.

[926] Olana Zoga, p.133. After the two remarkable meetings of the MTSHA in Arsii, the governor of Arsii, *Dajjazmach* Sahilu Defaye, had repeatedly warned the Arsii Oromo that he would chase them to Kenya. For him Kenya was the original country of the Oromo. When *Hajji* Roobalee was released from prison and presented to the Emperor (on *Hidar* 3, 1959 E.C) through Colonel Alamu, he presented a remarkable question to the Emperor. He asked him, “Where is the country of the Oromo?” and begged him to tell him the answer. As indicated earlier, the remark of the governor had deeply offended General Taddasa and other leaders of the MTSHA.

[927] *Informants*: Colonel Sahilu Birri, Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa**.** Even though the Coup Plot of General Taddasa was foiled before it was attempted, what is more important is not whether it had succeeded or failed but the attempt itself and its implications. It was probably the first organized coup attempt by the Oromo against the Imperial regime.

[928] *Informants*: *Obbo* Bulchaa Dammaqsaa, Teshome Gebre-Mariam Bokan. In fact, General Taddasa knew very well about this from his experience of few years earlier during the 1960 coup that the failure of such a coup plot would bring disastrous consequences for the plotters, they were hanged publicly.

people were not mobilized to the level he wanted because of several decades of subjugation and exploitation. Moreover, at the time, there was no other means of mobilizing the people except through his moving speeches during the meetings of the Association. This was because the mass was almost illiterate and there was no newspaper, radio, TV or social media at the time to reach them.[929]

I argue that despite the poor preparations, General Taddasa had determined to challenge the mounting pressure against the MTSHA. The cultural tradition of the Oromo of Salaalee had pushed him to resist what he believed to be unjustifiable attack against him and his Association. The essence of this cultural tradition was that fighting against a perceived injustice to the risk of death was regarded as a sign of manhood while failure to do so was tantamount to death. The latter option was not the choice of General Taddasa. For example, one may question why he decided to break the police siege of his house without any preparation and pre-planned destination to run to. What was actually seen in this situation was that surrendering to an opponent was not in his mind. At the risk of his life, he decided to fight and die. He preferred to die while resisting instead of being captured at the hands of his enemies in front of his children and wife.[930]

Through the coup plot, General Taddasa had the intention to make regime change. By making the regime change, he wanted to reform the oppressive land tenure system and create equitable educational and economic opportunities at the national level. In other words, he wanted to establish a kind of government that would implement equal and uniform distribution of land ownership,

[929] *Informants*: Colonel Sahilu Birru, Dr Moggaa Firrisaa.

[930] As I argued in chapter two, the Oromo of Salaalee and the Tuulamaa in general had a resistance tradition against those who occupied their territories and used to oppress them. When he confronted the Imperial regime and the *Darg*, General Taddasa seems to have been influenced by this resitance tradition.

educational services and other opportunities.[931] Many Oromo who became happy earlier, when General Taddasa rebelled and moved out, now felt broken and devastated when they heard his return. For example, Negaso heard the reaction of one of the university students: "ከእንግዲህ እኔ ኦሮሞ አይደለሁም ። በስብሰባቸዉም ላይ ሁለተኛ አልሄድም። እንደዚህ እንቁላል ያድርገኝ! ይሄ ታደሰ እንዴት እጅ ይሰጣል? ፈሪ ነዉ። (Here after I am not an Oromo. I will not go to their meeting again. Let me be like this egg [broken]! How this Taddasa surrender himself? He is coward).[932] According to an informant, many expected him to be defiant at least for months and his return within few days was found to be embarrassing.[933]

Though General Taddasa had returned to his home through the mediation of the religious leaders, the pardon of the Emperor was broken within a few days after the completion of the Third annual meeting of the Organization of African Unity. It seems that the government wanted to protect its image by avoiding any possible danger that could be posed by General Taddasa at that critical moment. In other words, the government wanted to buy time through the mediation of the religious leaders in order to plan and eliminate the MTSHA and its leadership after the departure of the guests. Thus as soon as the meeting was over and the guests departed, General Taddasa was provoked despite the pardon of the Emperor.[934]

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[931] 'The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA," pp. 400-401; Gemechu Taye, pp. 21-22. According to the Trial Document, the coup plotters had the intention to create relationship with the Somali government to get external support. It is reported that they had a plan to record and send various Oromo songs and written documents to the Somali radio to mobilize the people and expose the Amhara government's exploitation of the Oromo people. In doing so, the objective was to inform the world that the Oromo were struggling for their freedom at the moment. The displacement of the Salaalee peasants, and other peoples, like Dorze and Darasa, from their land by the authorities of the regime were raised in addition to exposing problems in Baalee, Wallagga and Arsii at the timet.

[932] Daniel Tefera, *Dandi: YeNegaso Menged*, p.67.

[933] *Infomant*: Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa.

[934] Olana Zoga, pp.135-138. Eventually, as it was seen during court proceedings, the pardon of the Emperor did not get legal recognition. According to infroamnts, this was contrary to the generally established tradition in which the words of the Emperor, whether in oral or written form, were acceptable before the law. The authorities who provoked him did not consider the words of the Emperor as pardon but as an act of house arrest. They expected him to cut any communication with the public but he refused and allowed people to greet

Within a few days after his return, his opponents, especially those in the security office, began to accuse him saying, "Ammas hin fooyyofne dubbii barbaada."(He is still undeterred and plotting something). It has been repeatedly raised in the sources that Prime Minister Aklilu Habte Wold, *Dajjazmach* Kifle Irgetu and General Dirase Dubale were believed to be the main actors of the intrigues against General Taddasa and the MTSHA in general.[935] They felt that the Emperor was too lenient towards General Taddasa while they were relentlessly working to stop him from his presumed provocative activities. According to an informant, they were deeply offended when the Emperor ordered the replacement of his properties destroyed during the police raid. Hence, they falsely informed the Emperor that "አሁንም ልጆቹን ይዞ ሊጠፋ ተነስተዋል አላረፈም::"(He is still undeterred and is ready to run away taking his children). In doing so, they prepared themselves for another round of attempt to get rid of General Taddasa.[936]

It appeared that even though he was pardoned, he was closely watched by the security agents even by religious leaders. Abuna Tewoflos often went to his house and discussed with him mainly on issues related to religion. He was probably sent to control his activities and understand his heartbeat. General Taddasa was completely unaware that his opponents would provoke him within a few days after his return. As a result, when the police surrounded his house and knocked at the gate, he was on a private family talk. At the time, my informant, who was preparing to go to Germany, was telling him what would have happened to her if

him. Later he was also told by the judges that what was given by the Emperor was not pardon but permission to live under house arrest.

[935] *Informant*: Hailu Gebru Jimaa; Olana Zoga, pp. 134-144.

[936] *Informants*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa, *Obbo*Hailu Gebru Jimaa.

she had heard this news while in Germany. It was in the middle of this talk that the gate was knocked and things changed.[937]

When the gate was opened Captain Lammeessaa Badhaasee, Lieutenant Gebre Medhin Yosef and Captain Kebede Feleke entered carrying a letter sent from the Public Security Department which requested him to hand over weapons found in his hand. This was in the evening of *Hidar* 5, 1959 *A.M.* (November 14, 1966). The content of the letter put heavy restrictions on General Taddasa. Accordingly, it requested him to handover all weapons in his hands and forbid others not to visit him. The letter was designed to cut any relationship between him and others. It even presented the earlier pardon of the Emperor on *Tikimt* 28, 1959 *A.M.* as an order given to him to remain at his home without making any contact with the outside visitors. He was accused of disrespecting the order and hence, those visitors returning home were disseminating hostile news throughout the city. Therefore, the letter states that until another order would be given to him, he had to remain at his home without allowing any visitor to contact him. His house was also to remain under the siege of the security forces to implement the order.[938]

Captain Lammeessaa kissed General Taddasa as a sign of brotherhood and requested him not to refuse the letter. He received and read the letter but responded,

> እንግዲህ ለሜሳ የፖልስ ህግ ምን እንደሚል ታዉቃለህ። ህጉ የሚለዉ የፍርድ ቤት ትህዛዝ ካልመጣ በስተቀር ከ12 ሰዓት ቦኃላ እሰዉ ቤት ሄዶ መረበሽ ክልክል ነዉ። እኔ

[937] *Informant: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa

[938] IES MS:1091, *28th Witness*: *Shambal* Kebede Feleke. In practice, since the letter would make him a prisoner, those who sent the letter knew that he would not accept. Therefore, the intention was to provoke him in order to get a pretext to get rid off him. According to an informant, who went to greet *Dajjazmach* Kebede after the pardon, he did not allow visitors to enter his house and meet him. He put a written notice just outside his fence or compound which read: 'Just write your name on the notebook and go back to your home since I am not allowed to meet you. But General Taddasa refused to accept the order and allowed people to greet him at his home.

ስመጣም ያመጡኝ አቡነ ትዎፊሎስ እና አባ ሀብቴ ማሪያም ናቸዉ ምንም መሣሪያ ይዤ አልመጣሁም። አሁን ወደ ቤታችዉ ግቡና ነገ ጧዋት ስትመጡ መሣሪያዉ ያለበት ቦታ ወስጄ እሰጣቹዋለሁ።

Lammeessaa, you know what the police law says. The law says, unless there is a court warrant, it is illegal to go to ones house and disturb people after 6 pm. When I came home it is Abuna Tewoflos and Abba Habte Mariam who brought me; I did not bring any weapon. Now go home and when you return tomorrow morning, I will take you to where the weapon is and give you.[939]

He told the police officers clearly that since they came to his home illegally in the night, they had to return tomorrow. When they hesitated to leave, he stood up and insisted that they had to go. While the military officers were discussing with him inside, his compound was almost surrounded by the police. It was in the middle of this situation that his two close relatives, Haile Nagawoo and Zewude Beekaa, arrived from Salaale to greet him after his return. When my informant saw that the compound was surrounded by the police, she rushed back to inform him what was happening.[940]

He was deeply provoked but there was no concept of surrender in his mind. Thus he was determined to resist with few individuals he found around him. When his house was encircled by the police, Haile Mariam Diimaa and Camadaa Sabbooqaa [Hulluuqaa Baabsoo] were in his compound. They were there to provide him protection as there were threats against his life. General Taddasa said, "Harka hin kenninu falminee baana malee."(We should not surrender; we have to fight out). They were five in number who were ready to confront the siege. They were General Taddasa, Haile Mariam, Camadaa, Haile Nagawoo and Zewde Beekaa. The latter two were his relatives who came from Salaalee to greet him. Haile Mariam was in the compound already watching the police encirclement while Camadaa

[939] *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa; see also Olana Zoga, pp.150-151.
[940] *Informant: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

left General Taddasa while he was changing his clothes for the confrontation. When General Taddasa came out with his two relatives, Camadaa threw bombs in different directions of the compound to make a space through which they could escape. This was followed by automatic firing. When they moved to the southern direction, they encountered heavy fire. They were forced to move to the eastern side of the compound and were able to escape.[941]

My informant claims that in the confusion that was created by the bomb explosions, "አባባ ፖልሶቹ በተኙበት እየረጋገጣቸዉ በኮድ ማነዉ እያለ፣ በርቱ ጠብቁ እያለ አልፎ ሄዱ።"(My father travelled over the laying police asking them in code who they were and encouraging them to watch well).[942] According to Olana Zoga, when the well positioned police asked him who he was, he responded, 'I am a tiger." Then he was allowed to pass. The other members of the MTSHA who had heard the siege of his house also came to the area; opened fire from different directions to complicate the situation and to divert the attention of the police. In the process they created opportunities for him to escape. Some of those who took part in this operation included Mamo Kamiolcha, Qadiidaa Gonfaa, Tesfaye Dagaagaa, Dr Moggaa Firrisaa and Lt. Mamo Mazamir. They all provided cover with automatic fire from different directions.[943]

According to my informant, who took part in this operation, they rushed to the area as soon as they heard the siege of General Taddasa's house. They approached his house and tried to identify what had happened but when they heard gun fire around his house they also fired

[941] *Informant*: *Obbo* Hulluuqaa Baabsoo, June 5, 2017, age 81. According to the Trial Document of the leaders of the MTSHA (p.422), General Taddasa testifies that soldier Haile Mariam was earlier guarding his house but when he eventually moved out to escape, he could not find him. Some of the soldiers who were providing security services to the compound of General Taddasa included Camadaa Sabbooqaa, Haile Mariam Diimaa, Lammeessaa Boruu and Fiixumaa Hiiksaa. More importantly, they used to provide protection for General Taddasa, especially during the night time.

[942] *Informant: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

[943] Olana Zoga, pp.156-158.

towards the area. My informant believes that this served to ease the heavy police concentration around his house and opened a space for him to escape. When they were noticed by the security forces that besieged the area, they were chased all the way from Wingate area up to Abuna Petros Square.[944]

It seems that there was mistrust between the officers who went with Captain Lammeessaa to give the letter and the *Fetno Derash* Police who were sent to surround his house. General Taddasa was the founder and leader of the *Fetno Derash* Police for a long period of time. There were many members of the *Fetno Derash* police who supported his cause. As a result, it seems that Captain Lammeessaa shaped the whole episode in his own way though he surrounded his compound with his forces.[945]

Thus, though the police could have killed General Taddasa and his companions when they were breaking the siege, they were able to escape unharmed. During his escape it was understandable that some of the police had cooperated or did not become harsh at least. It seems that the police who went to surround his house had also opened ways for him to escape. He had many sympathizers among the *Fetno Derash* Police because he was regarded as their respected leader and hence, the sympathy shown to him was based on solid ground.[946] This was probably why General Taddasa was able to escape despite the heavy police presence and encirclement of his compound. When they broke the siege and left the compound, the five individuals departed from each other. Accordingly, General Taddasa with

[944] *Informant:* Dr. Moggaa Firrisaa; Olana Zoga, pp. 158-160. After this event, Dr. Moggaa escaped to Jimmaa, his birth place, and remained there until the issue was normalized.

[945] *Informant: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa; Olana Zoga, pp.156-158.

[946] Aemero Niguse, 2000, p.203. He argues that after the 1960 coup, there was a general feeling of dissatisfaction among the police that the Emperor had ignored them. This was related to the general understanding which the Emperor took that the police had cooperated with the Imperial Bodyguard during the coup. As a result, it seems that apart from following up the daily crimes, the police had shown reluctance to pursue with full energy those issues related to politics especially targeting the Emperor and his administration.

his two relatives took the western direction towards Gafarsaa while my informant took the eastern direction. Soldier Haile Mariam Diimaa also departed from them but was captured the next day. Only a distance of few steps forced them to depart as it was very dark.[947]

Following the heavy fire exchange after General Taddasa left his house, my informant informed Abuna Tewoflos about what had happened.[948] It was probably Abuna Tewoflos who had informed the Emperor about what had happened that the Emperor in turn ordered General Asafa Damise to follow the situation around the house of General Taddasa closely. Then General Asafa telephoned and said, "The Emperor has ordered me to evacuate the family; I wish I would come and take you out. But if Taddasa opens fire when I do this, we will all die." Instead, he encouraged the family that there would be no further bullet to be fired from the police and in case that happened they should notify him soon. He promised that nothing would happen to the family as he was in the palace closely following the event.[949]

General Dirase Dubale also telephoned and said to my informant, "Your father came out of a ditch dug for garbage in the compound and killed a policeman. He is still there in hiding but

[947] *Informant*: *Obbo* Hulluuqaa Baabsoo, June 5, 2017, age 81. After he separated from General Taddasa, my informant hid himself in the nearby gorges for three days without food and water. Eventually he managed to reach the house of his relative who lived in Marcato area. His relative (Lieutenant Tesfaye Dibaba, June 5, 2017, age 78), who was a member of the Addis Ababa *Fetno Derash* Police, when he heard about the incident of the shootout around General Taddasa's house, he was worried that Camadaa[Hulluuqaa] would be involved because he knew of his close relationship with the General. He assumed that Camadaa was either killed or imprisoned. After three days, however, the extremely exhausted Camadaa managed to reach his house. The next morning he accompanied him to Cuqqaalaa, where his relatives lived. From there he was guided to his home region of Jiillee Maqii. Camadaa was never captured though the police continuously searched his whereabouts. His photo was dispatched and 12, 000 birr was put on his head as a reward for anyone who could help his capture. He changed his name from Camadaa to Hulluuqaa Baabsoo.

[948] Earlier we have seen that General Taddasa returned through the mediation of Abuna Tewoflos, the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, who frequently came to his house during the few days after his return. After he was given pardon, General Taddasa was prohibited from making contacts with outside visitors, especially the Oromo. Abuna Tewoflos often came to his house and they together read Bible and discussed on different issues. Within few days after his return, however, people flocked to his house to greet him. Abuna Tewoflos was observing this situation. The Abun observed this situation.

[949] *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

under the police siege. Move to a safe room for protection and do not go out". The whole family members were extremely disturbed that evening because they could not come out to see whether he was killed or able to escape. In the morning, General Dirase arrived and when the ditch was surrounded and seen there was no one inside and then he ordered the whole family to remain inside the compound. Shortly, however, all family members were imprisoned in the 6th Police Station. They remained in the police custody until after the capture of General Taddasa.[950]

Now it was proved that General Taddasa was able to escape, shooting his way out.[951] Following the confirmation of his disappearance in this way, regional governors and police chiefs were notified of it and the search for his whereabouts continued. He followed the western direction and the next day on *Hidar* 6, 1959 *A.M.* (November 15, 1966) he stayed in the bush and during the evening he was able to reach at the house of Dagafu Nagawoo which was located in Noonnoo Gafarsaa (also called Siga Meda). He reached there with his two relatives around 8 pm and told Dagafu about what had happened and how he was able to escape.[952] He told Dagafu that he had several opponents who were ready to kill him if he surrendered. He stayed the night in the surrounding bush refusing to be in the house. When they met the next day, he asked Dagafu to guide him to Sulultaa and Salaalee. His intention, according to the witness, was to come back to the capital and revenge what had happened to him. He asked Dagafu to communicate with Bekele Mekonnen but it failed because Bekele was under close security surveillance. On Wednesday evening Dagafu provided them dinner

[950] *Ibid.*
[951] Gada Melba, p.116
[952] Olana Zoga, p.169; 'The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA,'- 29th Witness- *Obbo* Dagafu Nagawoo, p.104. When he reached at the house of *Obbo* Dagafu and knocked at the gate , he presented himself as Tolasaa to those who opened the gate until he met *Obbo* Dagafu. In another account, it is reported that he introduced himself as Maccaa-Tuulamaa.

and gave a small radio to General Taddasa. He stayed in the bush until Friday evening. Dagafu who went to the capital was captured by the police and was forced to guide them to the place where General Taddasa was hidden. However, he was not found there. [953]

From Noonnoo Gafarsaa or Siga Meda, General Taddasa proceeded to Walmaraa and then Ada'aa Bargaa. But while traveling in the night he fell and broke his left leg. As a result, he was forced to change his earlier intention of moving to Gindabarat through Ada'aa Bargaa and Meettaa to the west where he could get mule for transportation. It is here that he separated from his two followers ordering them to proceed according to the plan and wait for him by establishing relations with key personalities.[954]

When he reached Gabaa Roobii or Kombolcha Lolaa he requested the peasants to take him either to the house of Mekonnen Mamo, Captain Haile Mariam Bachare or Abbaa Jifaar who were all members of the MTSHA. Since the first two were not available at their homes at the time, he was eventually taken to the house of Abbaa Jifaar. General Taddasa went to the house of Abbaa Jifaar few days earlier before he was persuaded to return.[955]

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[953] 'The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA,' 29th Witness- Dagafu Nagawoo, p.105; IES MS.1091: *29th Witness*, Dagafu Nagawoo. On Friday morning Dagafu went to the bush and told him that he wanted to go to Addis Ababa. Then General Taddasa asked him to buy a blanket as they were suffering from the harsh cold. Dagafu agreed to buy the blanket with his own money and went to Addis Ababa. After he purchased it, the police captured and imprisoned him. The next morning, the police forced him to show them the site where General Taddasa was in hiding but they could not get him there. His two relatives were still with him up to that time.

[954] Olana Zoga,p.171. According to my informant (Desta Zewde), his two followers moved to two different directions eventually. Accordingly, Zewde Beekaa disguised himself and returned to the capital while Haile Nagawo never returned to Salaalee and disappeared to Noonnoo Beenjaa, where he used to live since then.

[955] *Informant*: Mekonnen Mamo Sorsuu. Abbaa Jifaar lived in Cirrachaa and was a known *Abbaa Qaalluu*. This time General Taddasa wanted him to guide him to Gindabarat and mobilize people for him. According to Olana Zoga (pp. 134-144, 319), it was while he was travelling from Noonnoo Gafarsaa to Ada'aa Bargaa that bombs were exploded in the Addis Ababa Cinema house on *Hidar* 10, 1959 *A.M*. It was Lt. Mamo Mazamir who was made responsible eventually. But many assumed (see Gada Melba, p.116) that the government conspiracy led to the explosion of the bombs to place the responsibility on the leaders of the MTSHA and to accuse the Association itself as a terrorist. The explosions destroyed the image of the

Chapter Seven
The Imprisonment, the Legal Process and the Final Verdict against General Taddasa Birru

Following the failure of the coup plot, General Taddasa moved to Walmara, passed through Fo'ataa, Bargaa and eventually reached the house of Abbaa Jifaar in Carrachaa. Then he was persuaded to return through the mediation of religious leaders. Exactly within one week after his return, he was provoked by the security office. He was requested to handover weapons in his hands and to cut any communication he had with the people. He refused and broke the police siege that surrounded his house to implement the order. Unfortunately, he moved to the same house he ran to a week ago just to be handed over to the security forces.

This chapter deals with the capture, imprisonment, legal process, charges and final verdict against General Taddasa. Here, the Trial Document and oral sources were carfully examined to see how he was sentenced to death. Letters of the Amnesty International and International Commission of Jurists are also used as one possible pressure on the Emperor to change the death sentence to life imprisonment. Finally, the chapter focuses on his nationalist activities in Galamsoo while he was in banishment by exploiting the rich oral sources.

7.1 The Capture and Imprisonment of General Taddasa

It was a certain Abba Jifaar Waaqayyoo who facilitated the capture of General Taddasa when he went to his house which was located in the locality of Cirrachaa to the north of Ejeree town. When he managed to reach there for the second time on the morning of *Hidar* 13, 1959

Association which was shortly followed by massive imprisonments of its members. The explosions were used as a pretext to carry out widespread arrest of the leaders of the Association. There is no substantive evidence to show that the bombs were exploded by Lieutenant Mamo.

A.M., General Taddasa was alone with broken leg and physically exhausted. Abbaa Jifaar testified to the court later that General Taddasa told him he did not want to live under the existing government anymore and asked him to mobilize people for him and direct him to Gindabarat, where he could mobilize more followers. While pretending to be positive towards his demands, however, Abbaa Jifaar sent envoys to Addis Ababa to inform the Emperor that General Taddasa was in his home.[956] According to an informant, the message of Abbaa Jifaar was, "Namni isin barbaaddan ana bira jiraa kottaa fudhadhaa."(The man whom you are looking for is with me, come and take him).[957]

General Taddasa spent the day in the nearby bush without suspecting what Abbaa Jifaar was plotting against him. One of the closest associates of Abbaa Jifaar, Asfaw Abdii, took him to the nearby bush, brought water and washed his body and clothes as he was exhausted and did not change his clothes since he left his house. Asfaw Abdii also testified to the court that General Taddasa told him that he wanted soldiers and determined youths to follow him. It is also reported that he had discredited the Emperor whom he accused of ruling the country with the help of witchcrafts.[958]

When it became dark and too cold Abbaa Jifaar asked them to come home. However, while coming home, he became suspicious because he had heard the footstep of soldiers, who were deployed to capture him. Shortly, when he saw three individuals, he pointed his gun at them but was told that they were members of the family. When he came home, he requested Abbaa

[956] "The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA," 33rd Witness- Abbaa Jifaar Waaqayyoo, pp.118-119; IES MS: 1091: *33rd* Witness- Abbaa Jifaar Waaqayyoo.

[957] *Informant*: *Obbo* Lubee Birru.

[958] IES MS: 1091, *34th Witness*: *Obbo* Asfaw Abdii. This witness claims that General Taddasa informed him that the Emperor lived with the help of witchcraft in Bishooftuu and that was why in Addis Ababa it was common to hear the news about the disappearance of children. He was further told that the Emperor was even said to have sacrificed his beloved son, Prince Mekonnen, as an offer to the devil and he did not die of an accident. In fact, this remark has been expressed by other sources, as indicated in chapter four.

Jifaar to pack a mule for his travel in order to confirm whether his suspicion was right or not.[959] When Abbaa Jifaar was willing to pack the mule soon, he assumed that if there was anything dangerous he would not be willing to do it immediately. This made him to change his mind and delay his travel until moon rise. After the dinner, he was lying in bed and listening to a small radio unaware of what was going on outside the compound of Abbaa Jifaar to capture him.[960] These were the situations inside the house of Abbaa Jifaar.

From outside the house, the soldiers of the Imperial Bodyguard, who were brought to the site under the guidance of the envoys of Abbaa Jifaar, were laying siege around the compound in order to capture a lonely and broken leg General. Abbaa Jifaar, as the central figure of the drama, used to update the commanders of the soldiers about the conditions of General Taddasa inside the house. Even though General Taddasa was alone, the operation commanders were not sure whether they could successfully capture him with thirty four soldiers that surrounded him. Eventually, he was captured with the combined efforts of the dependents of Abbaa Jifaar, Asfaw Abdii and Teklewold, and the soldiers of the Imperial Bodyguard at about 10:30 pm where he slept.[961] It was Abbaa Jifar who betrayed and handed him over to the security forces.[962]

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[959]IES MS: 1091, *34th witness, Obbo* Asfaw Abdii. He did not see any tangible evidence but strongly suspected the situation. Indeed, he was right.

[960] IES MS: 1091, *34th witness, Obbo* Asfaw Abdii; IES MS: 1091, *33rd Witness, Obbo* Abbaa Jifaar. The small radio was given to him by Dagafu Nagawoo.

[961] IES MS: 1091, *30th Witness, Shambal* Gebeyehu Dube; IES MS: 1091, *34th Witness, Obbo* Asfaw Abdi; IES MS: 1091, *33rd Witness, Obbo* Abbaa Jifaar.

[962] According to an informant (*Obbo* Mekonnen Mamo Sorsuu), Abbaa Jifaar was rewarded for his act of treachery. Accordingly, he received two guns with 200 bullets and 5000 *birr*. Moreover, he was given the title of *Qagnazmach* and was allowed to visit the Emperor at anytime he wanted. He was given more responsibility to keep an eye on the future activities of the Oromo in that area and to inform the government if there would be any subversive activity. His associates were also rewarded. However, after this shameful act of treachery, it is reported that Abbaa Jifaar was hated by the surrounding people. In the words of my informant, "Qaalluun isaa irraa bade, namni ni jibbe, ashkaroonni isaa ni dhumte, qe'een isaa ni manca'e innillee ni du'e."(His deity disappeared, people hated him, his servants vanished and his residence (qe'ee) deteriorated and he too died.

The capture of General Taddasa was announced on *Addis Zemen* newspaper on *Hidar* 18, 1959 *A.M*.[963] It is not clear why the news of his capture was delayed until Sunday while he was captured on Tuesday evening. The other leading figures of the MTSHA were captured the next day on *Hidar* 19, 1959 *A.M*. Many of them were arrested after they were called to the Ministry of Interior to the office of *Dajjazmach* Kifle Irgatu. They included Colonel Alamu, Haile Mariam Gammadaa, *Qangazmach* Mekonnen Wasanu, Brigadier General Dawit Abdii and several other members of the Association. Then they were taken back to their respective houses for police investigation. Soon they were taken away and dispersed into different areas. Accordingly, Colonel Alamu was sent to Gayint in Gondar, *Qangazmach* Mekonnen to Debre Tabor, Haile Mariam to Gojjam, and General Dawit to Arsii. These leaders stayed there for three months before they were brought to the court in Addis Ababa. The authorities did this probably to prohibit communication among the prisoners and to avert a possible demonstration or popular uprising that was feared following massive arrests of the members of the MTSHA.[964]

Those who were imprisoned in Addis Ababa included General Taddasa, Lt. Mamo Mazamir, Daadhii Fayisaa, Lammeessaa Boruu, Tesfaye Dagaagaa, Bekele Mekonnen, Tafese Gammachuu, Qasim Mohammed, Fiixumaa Hiiksaa and Haile Mariam Diimaa. Initially they were imprisoned together but General Dirase Dubale ordered their separation after his sudden visit to the prison centre.[965]

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[963] *Addis Zemen*, *Hidar* 18, 1959 *A.M.* According to an informant, Tsehay Taddasa, his family heard his capture while still in the police custody through one of the police officers whom they bribed to bring them any news about him. They were told that he was captured and admitted to the Military Hospital due to his broken leg. His left leg was broken while jumping a ditch in the night on the way to Ada'aa Bargaa. Shortly, after his capture, however, the whole family members were released from the police custody.

[964] *Informant*:*Obbo* Abera Mekonnen; Olana Zoga, p. 166.

[965] Olana Zoga, p.193.

Following the imprisonment of the leaders of the MTSHA, there was an attempt to make a demonstration. For this purpose around three thousand people gathered around the headquarters of the Association. However, they were begged by the elders not to create further pretexts for the authorities to detain and suppress the remaining members of the Association and not to aggravate the situations of the leaders who were already in custody.[966]

The capture and imprisonment of General Taddasa had tremendous impact on his family as well as the Oromo struggle. Following his capture though the family was released from the 6th Police Station, it never returned to the house at Kolfee and moved to another quarter of the city known as Addisu Gebeya. After the imprisonment of General Taddasa, many people, including those who knew them very well, were afraid to approach his family members. In the words of my informant,"ሰዎች እንደ ተስቦ በሽታ ይሸሹን ነበር።"(People run away from us as if we were a typhus disease). Even worse, at the beginning there were unknown individuals who used to throw stones to their house during the night time.[967] The news of the capture and imprisonment of General Taddasa and other leaders of the MTSHA was heard with shock among many Oromo.[968]

Following his imprisonment, his family attempted to approach a number of authorities for his release or at least fair treatment. Among those consulted for help in this case were General

[966] *Informan*t: *Obbo* Lubee Birru.

[967] *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa. However, there were individuals who unreservedly supported the family during this critical time. Among many of these, Qadiidaa Gonfaa and Baaroo Tumsaa had made immense contributions. The first used to provide the family with house provisions and moral support while Baaroo used to approach the family without any reservation. He even took Belete, one of the sons of the General, to Dongoroo Mission School in Wallaggaa where he stayed for about a year. Baaroo did this out of concern that the opponents of General Taddasa could do something against his eldest son in order to further attack his moral. Shortly, Belete was taken to Sweden by a Swedish who was teaching at the Building College and knew General Taddasa very well. The Swedish instructor was shocked by the news of the arrest of General Taddasa and decided to help the family by taking Belete abroad.

[968] *Informant*: Dr. Nagaasoo Gidaadaa.

Jagamaa Kelloo and Ketema Yifru.[969] My informant claims to have approached even Aklilu Habte Wold who told her that he was free from the case of her father and requested her to come back to his office with her mother. When they went back together to his office, he said,

> እኔ ታደሰ ይታሰር እንደዚህ ይሁን በሚለዉ ላይ እጄ የለበትም። ከኔ ድረሴ ዱባሌ እና ሌሎች ጋር በመሆን ይኼንን የሚታደርገዉ የንጉሱ ልጅ ነች እንጅ የኔ እጅ የለበትም። ይኼንኑ ላረጋግጥላችሁ ነዉ የጠራዋችሁ።
>
> *My hands are free from issues related to Taddese's imprisonment. Who did this with the collaboration of Dirase Dubale and others is the daughter of the Emperor [Princess Tenagnework]; my hands are free. It is to confirm this fact to you that I called you here.*[970]

The family also attempted to make contacts with other individuals who were hoped to contribute to his escape or release. Accordingly, a person who was just released from prison, after being accused of insulting the Emperor, was contacted in order to get detailed information about the prison centre, including about the room where General Taddasa was detained. The family was also well aware of the unsuccessful plot made to kill the Emperor around Sabbataa by *Blatta* Takele Wolde Hawariyat. My informant claims to have had contacts with some of those who were involved in the plot, including Captain Wondimu.[971] The attempts of the family, however, remained unfruitful.

Indeed, in addition to the family and other members of the MTSHA, there were individuals who were not happy with the way General Taddasa was treated after his capture and imprisonment. One of these was a prolific writer, Mamo Wudineh, who strongly criticized

[969] These two individuals were, however, implicated in various sources for disclosing the secrets of the coup plot to the government but the family used to approach them for mediation.

[970] *Informant: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa. Why the family approached the Prime Minister who was regarded as a key personality in the imprisonment of General Taddasa was not clear. But it is clear that the concern of the family was to get him released by whatever means.

[971] *Ibid*. Captain Wondimu was a member of the Mechanized Brigade. According to a report of *Yezareytua Itiyopiya* Newspaper December 7, 1967 *A.M*, General Taddasa and *Blatta* Takele Wolde Hawariyat had good relations and that was why the first was sent to the latter earlier by the Emperor to persuade him to go back to Kaffa when he refused to do so after he came to the capital to mourn the death of his son.

the way he was treated and expressed after his imprisonment. He wrote a powerful letter to the commander of the Police, Brigadier General Yilma Shibeshi, informing him of the need to treat General Taddasa with leniency and tolerance if it would be difficult to set him free with pardon. The letter was written from Asmara on *Hidar* 18/1959 *A.M* testifying what he knew about General Taddasa. In the letter, he strongly expressed his disappointment regarding the way he was described and treated in *Addis Zemen* Newspaper which contradicted his knowledge of the General. He argued that before the court would strip him off his title officially it was unwise to disrespect him.[972]

Mamo believed that General Taddasa was a military officer who had contributed his own share to the unity and integrity of Ethiopia and hence, he should not have been degraded the way he was depicted after his imprisonment. He argues that before a year and four months (i.e at least beginning from July 1965), counting back from the time he wrote his letter in November 1966, General Taddasa was concerned for all Ethiopians, devoted to Ethiopian unity and religion. He claims that he knew these facts very well because of his close relationship with him. For example, he heard him saying, "...ሁላችንም ለኢትዮጵያ ድርሻችንን መፈፀም አለብን። ያለዚያ ይህች ሀገር ከመከፋፈል ላይ እንዳትወድቅ የሚጣጣሩላት ጥቅቶች ናቸዉ።" (...Unless otherwise all of us accomplish our own responsibility for this country, there are only few who try to save it from the danger of disintegration).[973]

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[972] Mamo Wudineh, *Yedereskubet: Gile Tarikina Tizitawoch* (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, 1997 *A.M*), pp. 221-223. Mamo consolidates the argument that General Taddasa had no question over the territorial integrity of Ethiopia and wanted to see it developed and prospered.

[973] Mamo Wudineh, p. 221-223. Mamo affirms the argument that General Taddasa had no question over the territorial integrity of Ethiopia and wanted to see it developed and prospered. Mamo wrote this letter from Eritrea nd earlier he had the opportunity to work with General Taddasa, when he was one of the guardians (በላይ ጠባቂ) of the Police Newspaper, *Policina Ermijjaw.*
This was probably the time when Mamo was transferred to Eritrea or the time when General Taddasa began his public speeches which the regime considered as provocative.

Mamo also consolidated the view which is repeatedly raised in this work that General Taddasa had a number of powerful enemies within the government. As indicated earlier, before Aklilu Habte Wold became hostile to him, he was protecting him from the repeated attempts made to transfer him from the Police. According to Mamo, it seems that General Taddasa also appealed to the Emperor for protection against the growing hostility towards him. For example, he heard General Taddasa saying, "... 'ግድ የለም እኛ እስካለን ድረስ የሚደርስብህ ምንም ነገር የለም' ብሎኛል ጃንሆይ"(Janhoy told me, 'Do not worry, nothing will happen to you as long as we[the Emperor] are present).[974]

Even after the imprisonment of General Taddasa, Mamo still argued that the crimes he committed were not clearly articulated. He contends that if he became a victim of religious difference and ethnic belief, his intention should have been explained. Mamo believed that even if he rebelled against the government of Haile Selassie, it was not his fault or mistake but fully the weakness of the security department. This was because, he argued, if his intention and idea was already known, it was the responsibility of the security office to work tirelessly in a polite manner to warn him and bring him back from his wrong way otherwise waiting until his eventual downfall was an outdated mechanism.[975]

Mamo stressed that even if it was true that the interest of General Taddasa was to promote ethnic grievance, it was better to handle the case with great care instead of disseminating it. His concern was that if the imprisonment of General Taddasa was connected to the issue of ethnicity, it would bring undesirable consequences. In short, he did not want its dissemination and believed that General Taddasa should be released with pardon. He

[974] Mamo Wudineh, pp.221-223.
[975] *Ibid.*

strongly opposed any tendency of revenge by the authorities and warned that his contributions should have been taken into account. Mamo warned the danger of amplifying some of the sentences he used during his speeches on various stages of the MTSHA. In general, he advised others not to disrespect and molest General Taddasa when he could not defend himself. In his own words, "...የዛሬዉ ስራችንም የነገ ዉጤት ነዉ። ነገ ደግሞ የሚፈርድለትና የሚፈርድበት አይታወቅም።"(Our today's work would be the basis for tomorrow's result. Tomorrow, it is unknown that against and for whom it will be decided*).*[976]

The Oromo started to think of what to do next which led to the emergence of study circles. According to my informant, Baaroo Tumsaa strongly insisted that the Oromo could not continue in that situation. Through Baaroo Tumsaa, the study circle of my informant got a book entitled the, "Algerian Urban Guerrilla." After reading the book, they planned to cut all the bridges leading to the capital. All the major roads entering the capital had bridges and it was intended to cut all of them. The dynamites to be used for the operation were found in the Mogor Cement Factory with the expertise who could use them. This was just after the death sentence in 1969 and the factory had started to be constructed, according to my informant. According to the plan, the cutting of the bridges would be followed by the distribution of underground paper to the embassies and other organizations stating that the attacks were carried out by the organization known as Oromo Liberation. This was what was discussed and planned at the level of study circle. The overall intention was to show to the government

[976] *Ibid*.p.223. Indeed, shortly after Mamo Wudineh's warning, those authorities who sentenced General Taddasa, Lieutenant Mamo and other leaders of the MTSHA to death were almost executed few years later when the Imperial regime collapsed. Mamo wrote the letter to the police commander not hoping that it would release General Taddasa from prison but to inform General Yilma Shibeshi that the issue had to be resolved peacefully before it would disseminate and mobilize the people along ethnic sentiment. The letter had also the intention to reveal the background causes that pushed General Taddasa towards this issue.

and the world that even after the arrest of General Taddasa and other leaders the Oromo did not give up their struggle.[977]

In the meantime, General Taddasa and the other leaders of the MTSHA were brought to the Imperial court for trial for their alleged crimes. However, the charges, the whole legal process and the final verdict given against them remain controversial as discussed below.

7.2. The Charges, the Legal Process and the Final Verdict

When the leaders of the MTSHA were detained, the government, especially the office of the Prime Minister, had written a letter not to the Attorney General, Teshome Gebre Mariam, but to his deputy, Colonel Tefera Gebre Mariam. According to my informant, the then Attorney General, this was because the authorities feared that he would sympathize with the prisoners as he was an Oromo himself. He claims that the authorities feared that he would not accept the unsubstantiated accusation against the prisoners which was not supported with factual evidences.[978] My informant, however, insisted that he wanted to exercise his authority and forbade his deputy from taking the case and asked the police to bring their evidences for the crimes they committed so that a charge file would be opened. My informant believed that the police could not bring any substantive evidence against the prisoners apart from using generic terms. Some of the generic charges used against the prisoners were that they attempted to harm the Emperor and his officials, mobilized the Oromo people against the government, and tried to dismember the unity of Ethiopia that had existed for a long time. When my informant suggested, as he claims, that the case be dismissed because of lack of

[977] *Informant*: *Obbo* Lubee Birru.

[978] *Informant*: *Obbo* Teshome Gebre Mariam Bookan. The name of his father was originally Badhaadhaa Bookan but he was renamed Gebre Mariam Bookan when he was baptized. It is to give recognition to his Oromo background that my informant includes the name of his grandfather, Bookan, in any official correspondence related to him as Teshome Gebre Mariam Bookan.

tangible evidence, he was in turn dismissed from his post and was transferred to Eritrea. It was following this event that his deputy took up the case.[979]

Within a few months after the imprisonment of General Taddasa and other leaders of the MTSHA, the security office attempted to divide them into defendants and witnesses. The defendants were General Taddasa, Lt. Mamo Mazamir, Seifu Tesema, Lammeessaa Boruu, *Qagnazmach* Mekonnen Wasanu, Daadhii Fayisaa, Colonel Alamu Qixxeessaa, Haile Mariam Gammadaa and Brigadier General Dawit Abdii. Those initially recruited as witnesses were young members of the Association and they were Bekele Mekonnen, Tesfaye Dagaagaa, Haile Mariam Diimaa, Fiixumaa Hiiksaa, Tafese Gammachuu and Qasim Mohammed. The latter were prepared to be witnesses after they were forced through tortures and promise of better jobs.[980] Eventually, as it was seen, the attempt of the security office failed because they refused to testify.[981]

After consolidating the charges, the prosecutor opened Charge File No.441/59 *A.M.* and started the legal process. The judges who presided over the case of the MTSHA prisoners were selected carefully mainly based on their loyalty. Some of the witnesses were obtained with bribes of money while others were given promises of appointments and ambassadorial positions.[982] It appeared to be difficult for the accused leaders of the MTSHA to receive a fair trial when they were depicted as anti-Ethiopian unity and the enemy of the Emperor from the beginning. Under these circumstances it was very difficult to expect that they would get a fair treatment when the state was the accuser, the evidence, the prosecutor and the judge at the

[979] *Ibid.* He refused to go to Eritrea and started his own private legal firm which he is still running until I met him in his office.

[980] Olana Zoga, pp.196-198.

[981] *Informants: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa, Colonel Sahilu Birri.

[982] IES MS: 1091: See the Charges of the prisoners of MTSHA; *Informant*: Colonel Sahilu Birri; Olana Zoga, pp. 222-263.

same time.[983] In addition to the Attorney General, who was systematically excluded from their case, *Fitwarari* Dajane Irgate, a judge who often presided over issues related to political cases, was found to be a relative of the wife of General Taddasa and was excluded from presiding over this case. [984]

Initially, the prosecutor arranged a total of thirty different but interrelated charges brought up against the prisoners. Of these charges, fifteen of them were directed against General Taddasa. Some of them were directed personally against General Taddasa while others were together with Lieutenant Mamo and the rest of the other prisoners. According to Charge File No. 441/1959 *A.M*. of the Imperial High Court, he was accused of:

1. inciting people to take up arms against the government
2. refusal to accept MTSHA's confinement to the western region, West Shawa
3. his remark that 'They are following us. In case they fire on us fire on them' and his claimed attempt to bring two members of the MTSHA from each region to go back and initiate people if something happened in the capital.
4. attempting to endanger the life of the Emperor and his officials in the month of *Tikimt* (i.e on November 2, 1966 during the Emperor's Coronation Anniversary). For this purpose, he was accused of distributing hand grenades and money for soldiers who would carry out the mission.
5. making illegal meeting at his house in the evening of *Tikimt* 22/02/ 59 *A.M* from 7 pm to 10 pm and ordering the distribution of hand grenades through the second accused for the actions to be taken the next morning.

[983] Habtamu, "The Trial of Maccaa-Tuulamaa Martyrs: A Case Study of Criminal File No. 441/59," LLB,AAU, 1995, p.116.

[984] Olana Zoga, pp. 254-255. It was probably feared that *Fitwarari* Dajane would become lenient towards General Taddasa.

6. moving to the Pepino Hotel[985] after ordering his followers to carry out the attack the next morning and spending the night there following the situation. He was accused of sending his family to other area assuming that the police might mistreat them.
7. firing on and chasing members of the police who were sent to keep the safety of those police officers who were sent to his home to ask him to handover weapons in his hands on *Hidar* 5/3/59 *A.M*.
8. rebelling against the government and moving around from *Hidar* 5/3/59 *A.M* to *Hidar* 13/3/59 *A.M* before he was captured in the house of Abbaa Jifaar.
9. giving direction to the second accused, who admitted that the various documents found at his home were written in collaboration with the first accused to change the government.
10. indoctrinating the third accused about the exploitation of the Oromo and asking him to persuade other soldiers in his turn.
11. giving 100 Ethiopian Birr for soldiers who would carry out the operation.
12. making provocative speech during the Dheeraa meeting.
13. possessing personal notes and other documents which were found at his home and indicate the genesis of the rebellion.
14. making relations with the Somali rebels.
15. endangering the security of the Imperial government and attempting to establish a new government.[986]

[985] It was located on the main road leading west to Addis Alem near the quarter known as Burayu Mariam. It originally belonged to foreigners.

[986] IES MS. 1091: The File of the MTSHA. The 'Somali rebels' was the name which the imperial regime used to refer to the Baalee Oromo guerrilla fighters. The government never recognized the fighters of Baalee as Oromo but as Somali rebels and General Taddasa himself was accused of making contacts with

These were the initial charge themes organized against General Taddasa. However, the main accusation against him and other members of the MTSHA, as testified by the police and security officers who were involved in their capture and interrogation, was that they attempted to endanger the life of the Emperor and his officials in order to make regime change.[987]

General Taddasa was also accused of blackening the name of the Prime Minister and making two contradictory remarks in which at one time he said there were Oromo authorities from ministers to generals and at another time, to show that the Oromo were excluded, he said there was no Oromo who became either a minister or a governor. The other crime was his claimed correspondence with the so-called Somali rebels, who were accused of disturbing the peace of Baalee by receiving weapons from foreign enemies. The regime wanted to associate the attempt and plot of General Taddasa with the plot of the foreign enemies that wanted the division of the country. In this case the leaders of the MTSHA were depicted as their agents. In other words, they were accused of collaborating with external forces to endanger the territorial integrity of Ethiopia.[988] General Taddasa was also accused of acting as a spokesman of the MTSHA by his own and establishing and chairing a hidden rebellious organization under the cover of a legally established Association and gathering members of the military for this purpose. According to this accusation, his return after the mediation of religious leaders was not for the sake of peace but to buy time since he did not get followers

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Somali rebels, not with other Oromo rebels. In other words, the regime refused to recognize the Oromo peasant resistance in Baalee as Oromo resistance and it preferred to call them Somali *shiftas* (bandits).

[987] IES MS. 1091: File of the MTSHA. It was simply a plot which was not put into practice. See the Charges against the leaders of the MTSHA.

[988] "The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA", p. 437; Gemechu Taye, pp. 20-24. It is clearly observable from the trial document that General Taddasa and other leaders of the MTSHA were accused of having contact with the Bale rebel leaders who were in turn accused as agents of the Somali government by revealing the conditions of the Oromo people in Ethiopia to foreign community through the Somali radio. The news about the event of Dhera and later on the arrest of the leaders of the MTSHA was put on air on this radio.

when he moved out. Finally, the case of why he broke out of the police siege and stayed for three days in Siga Meda to watch closely whether his followers would cause danger in the capital was brought up.[989]

In general, the major accusation against General Taddasa and other leaders of the MTSHA was plotting and conducting subversive activities against the regime in order to cause the disintegration of Ethiopia by instigating ethnic division among the Ethiopian people.[990] For example, General Taddasa, Lieutenant Mamo and Seifu Tesema were accused of planning to overthrow the Imperial regime by the use of force. In this process, they were accused of plotting to dismantle the constitution through illegal means especially from October 15, 1966 to November 25, 1966 by disseminating false propaganda and creating ethnic difference to shake the basis of the government.[991]

All of the defendants were accused of gathering the people to take arms and making illegal speeches to make hatred against the government. They were also accused of plotting to cause tribal hatred; distributing money for those who were recruited to assassinate government officials and attempting to overthrow the government. Many of the defendants were also accused of carrying different weapons in general.[992]

In the meantime, the prosecutor modified its charges to eight major cases. The prisoners shared the eight charges individually and in group. The eight modified charges were as follows.

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[989] "The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA," p. 438 .

[990] Marilyin Hall Baissa, " Civic-Military Elite Interaction in the Ethiopian Revolution: The Role of Students," *proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Ethiopian Studies*, 1978,pp.771-772; Gemechu Taye, pp.23-24.

[991] Gemechu Taye, pp. 23-24. In this case, the Dheeraa meeting was regarded as the practical beginning of the plot.

[992] *Ibid.*

1. General Taddasa and Lieutenant Mamo were accused of holding a meeting in the house of the first defendant and distributing bombs to those who would throw at Emperor Haile Selassie on November 2, 1966 during his coronation ceremony at St George and other suitable areas.
2. General Taddasa, Lt Mamo and Seifu Tesema, as their collaborator, were accused of plotting to change the government of Emperor Haile Selassie with the use of force from *Pagume* 5, 1958 *A.M* to *Hidar* 13, 1959 *A.M.*
3. This was again directed against General Taddasa, Lt Mamo and Seifu Tesema. From *Tikimt* 5, 1959 *A.M* to *Hidar* 13, 1959 *A.M* the first accused, with the collaboration of the second and third defendants, had attempted to disrupt the Imperial constitution and create ethnic difference with the intention of destabilizing the government.[993]
4. The fourth charge was brought against all the nine defendants. They were all accused of attending the various meetings of the MTSHA initiating the people against the government. More specifically, General Taddasa was accused of making provocative speeches at different areas, including at the Association's headquarters, at his house in September and October 1966, in Gindabarat in May 1966, Abeebee Qeerransaa in July 1966 and Dheeraa on October 15, 1966 in the presence of the other accused. He was accused of propagating to the Oromo to develop hatred against the government, recruiting bandits with the payment of money to kill the authorities, and initiating the Oromo to take arms. They were all accused of violating the order of the security office not to attend the Dheeraa meeting and signing the petition to the Emperor in support of the first accused. [994]

[993] "The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA," p. 364.
[994] "The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA," p. 365.

5. This was directed against the 6th, 8th and 9th accused. They were accused of failing to inform the government about the crimes of General Taddasa.
6. The sixth charge was presented against Lt Mamo and it was related to the bomb explosion on Hidar 10, 1959 *A.M* at the Cinema Empire.[995]
7. This charge was against all the accused from the first to the sixth and it was related to carrying different weapons.[996]
8. The last charge was directed against General Taddasa alone and it was related to his break of the police siege of his house which went to disarm him on *Hidar* 5, 1959 *A.M*.[997]

Of the eight modified charges, six of them were directed against General Taddasa. The prosecutor brought two different evidences to substantiate its charges. These were the personal confession of the accused and the testimony of the witnesses.[998] About forty witnesses were claimed to have testified against General Taddasa.[999]

According to an informant, when the issue of General Taddasa Birru was discussed high ranking Oromo officials, including Yilma Dheeressa, were prohibited from attending the court proceedings or hearings. Yilma often attended cases related to the Eritreans but when the issue of Oromo prisoners was discussed he was excluded from attending. It was feared that the high ranking Oromo officials could be influenced by the court procedure which would enable the prisoners to get sympathy from the educated and high ranking Oromo officers. It was not in the interest of the ruling Amhara elites of the regime to see the Oromo

[995] *Ibid.*
[996] *Ibid*.p.366.
[997] *Ibid*.p.367.
[998] "The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA,"pp. 368-394.
[999] *Ibid*.pp.424-425.

congregated around a common cause partly because of their numerical size. There were also concerns that the Eritrean nationalists might influence the Oromo and cooperate with one another. As indicated above, probably the first high ranking official of Oromo origin to be excluded from their case was the Attorney General, Teshome Gebre- Mariam Bookan. Both Teshome and Yilma were transferred from their posts sooner or later.[1000]

It was observed that the judges, the witnesses and even the defense lawyers were not free from the pressure of the government authorities. Accordingly, the first judge who attempted to dismiss the case was himself dismissed from his post and two defense lawyers were fined and given warnings. The defendants were not allowed to choose their own lawyers and were put in solitary confinement.[1001] Initially, the court hearing was allowed to be open to the public and other concerned bodies because the prosecutor was confident of the witnesses it recruited from among the young members of the MTSHA by using forceful and other mechanisms. The prosecutor had also police officers, members of the security forces and bribed individuals as witnesses. It was due to this confidence that the court procedure was made open to the public. However, when the witnesses, who were also members of the MTSHA, were brought to the court during the opening of the hearing, they cried loudly saying that they were forced to give false testimonies on their brothers. They attempted to disclose what was going on behind the scene to the court, the families and relatives of the

[1000] *Informant*: *Obbo* Bulchaa Damaqsaa. According to Tamrat Haile, however, there were other reasons for the transfer of Yilma from his influential post of the Ministry of Finance. But Yilma remained a minister while Teshome remained loyal to the Emperor.

[1001] Norman J.Singer, "Ethiopia: Human Rights, 1948-1978," *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Ethiopian Studies,* edited by Robert L .Hess, 1978, pp.668-669.

accused and other supporters who gathered there to witness the opening of the procedure.[1002] It was after this event that the hearing was made closed to the public attendance.

The legal process appeared to be partial and in order to deceive the public 81 witnesses were brought turn by turn to the court to make it as if the justice system was impartial. According to Olana Zoga, it did not even look like a court debate between the accuser and the defendants and it was difficult to separate the accuser and the witnesses. Many of the witnesses were members of the security forces, the police and their informants.[1003]

Moreover, there were serious violations of the rights of the prisoners. Their abuse in prison is reported that,

> *... they had been deprived of food for three days, then interrogated continuously for a week without being allowed to sleep or go to the toilet. They stated that they were put in separate lice-infested cells, bound hand and foot, beaten and forced to drink boiling hot drinks, swung from their arms until blood dripped, tortured by electric shock and other means*.[1004]

A close assessment of the accounts given by majority of the witnesses reveal that the testimonies are simply indicative of parts of General Taddasa's speeches on various meetings of the MTSHA, which focused mainly on the importance of Oromo unity and education. In other words, the accounts of many witnesses do not have substantive evidence to make him a criminal. It was based on these evidences that the court found General Taddasa and his associates guilty. For example, the court stated that,

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[1002] Anga'a Dhuguma, *Oromo Democracy and the Formation of the Macca- Tuulama Association.* 5th edition, Elmhurst, New York, 2008, pp.86-87; *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

[1003] Olana Zoga,pp.251-255; *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

[1004] Norman J. Singer, "Ethiopia: Human Rights, 1948-1978," *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Ethiopian Studies,* edited by Robert L. Hess, 1978, pp.668-669.

> አንደኛና ሁለተኛ ተከሳሾች በጎሳ ልዩነት እምነት ምን ያህል የተመረዙና ከዚህም እመም ሊፈወሱ የማይችሉ መሆናቸዉን በግልጽ መረዳት እንችላለን፡፡ ይህንንም ሊያሳምነን የሚችለዉ ማስረጃ የተጣራዉ አድራጎታቸዉ ብቻ ሳይሆን ለፍርድ ቤቱ ለክርክር በቀረቡት ጊዜ ሁሉ የጎሳ ልዩነት እምነት በአህምሮቸዉ የተቀረጸ ለመሆኑ በተናገሩትም ሆኔ በሚጽፉት ቃል ሳይጠቀስ የታለፈበት ጊዜ ባለመኖሩ ነዉ፡፡ በተለይም እያንዳንዳቸዉ በብዕራቸዉ የጻፉት ይኼንኑ ስሜታቸዉን ገልጾና አጉልቶ የሚያሳየዉ ማስታወሻቸዉ የስሜታቸዉ ጥልቅ ምስጥር ለመተርጎም ጥሩ መፍትሄ ቃላት ወይም ድክሽነሪ ሆኖ ነዉ የተገኘዉ፡፡
>
> *We clearly understand how the first and the second accused were contaminated/ poisoned with the belief of ethnic difference and they could not be cured of this disease. The evidence that convince us about this is not only their activities/actions but whenever they came to the court for their case, their belief of ethnic difference is so imprinted in their mind that it is evident from what they speak and write so that there was no time that this belief was unstated. In particular the inner intention of each of them is reflected clearly in what they write with their pen in their own notes and this helps us to translate their inner feeling which we found it as an important dictionary to understand their inner feelings.*[1005]

After hearing all the testimonies of the witnesses, General Taddasa defended himself on *Tahsas* 12, 1960 *A.M* (December, 1967) and revealed the partiality of the justice system during the court procedures. He argued that the witnesses did not testify against him in support of the charges brought against him and hence, asked the court to release him freely. He indicated some of the injustices committed against him during the legal process as follows,

> የአንድን ህዝብ ነጻነት የተሟላ የሚያደርገዉ ዝርዝሩ ብዙ ቢሆንም ቅሉ አብይ ጉዳይ በወጣዉ ሕግ ሚዛናዊ ፍርድ ሁሉም እኩል ስጠቀምበት ነዉ፡፡ ባለመታደል ወይም የተለየ ጎሳ በመሆኔ እንዴሆነ አላዉቅም ሌሎች ኢትዮጵያኖች ከግርማዊ ንጉሰ ነገስት በተሰጠዉ ትህዛዝ በልማድም ሆኔ በህግ እስከ ዛሬ ስጠቀሙበት የቆዩትን ለእኔ እነደማያገለግል ሆኖ በመከሰሴና በመታሰሬ እኔን ከማሳዘኑም ሌላ እንዴ እኔ ላሉት ፍጡሮች ተስፋ የሚያስቆርጥ ይሆናል፡፡ የግርማዊ ንጉሴ ነገስት ትህዛዝ ያረፈበትን ጉዳይ የቀረበለት ፍርድ ቤት ልመለከተዉ እንደማይችል ለማንም ሰዉ ግልፅ ነዉ፡፡

[1005] 'The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA', p. 436.

> *The detail of what makes the freedom of people complete is many but the core one is when all the people are equally benefitted from the existing law. But chanceless or because I am from a different ethnic group, I do not know, while other Ethiopians have been benefitting from the orders of his Majesty as a customarily or legally, I was accused and imprisoned because it did not work for me. In addition to making me sad, it would also discourage other people like me. It is clear that the court cannot review the case that carries the order of his Majesty*.[1006]

He complained that his military title was unlawfully removed only by the power of his accusers and according to the existing constitution it was only the Emperor who could appoint and dismiss. Thus it was impossible to remove a title of officers without the court order but in his own case it was neither the Emperor nor the court order which removed his military title. He argued that this was indicative of the fact that the existing law was not respected for him. As a result, in the mass media as well as in the court he was referred to not as Brigadier General Taddasa but simply as Taddasa Birru. The other area where his rights were violated was regarding the denial of his salary before he was convicted while this had never happened to other officers of his kind before. In his own words,

> ከእኔ ቀደም ብለዉ ታስረዉ አሁን በወህኒ ቤት ዉስጥ የሚገኙ መኮንንኖች ፍርድ እስካገኙ ድሬስ ደሞዛቸዉን ይቀበሉ እንደነበር ለማስረዳት ይቻላል። ምናልባት ከእነርሱ ጋር በጎሳ የተለያየን በመሆኑ ይሆን? እንደዚሁም ሌሎች መኮንኖች በፖልስ ጣቢያ ምርመራ ላይ ሳሉ ሳይዋረዱና ሳይደበደቡ በክብር ስመረመሩ እኔና ከእኔ ጋር የታሰሩት ጓደኞቼ በፖልስ ጣቢያ ሳለን ብዙ ግፍና ዱላ እየወረደብን የተሰቃየነዉ ለምን ይሆን*?*
>
> *Officers who were imprisoned before me and who are still in jail were receiving their salary before their final verdict. Probably is it because I am different from them in terms of ethnicity? Moreover, while other officers in police station were interrogated with respect without any humiliation and beating, why I and my friends have suffered and humiliated in the police station with brutality*?[1007]

[1006] IES MS: 1091- General Taddasa's Response to the Court on *Tahsas* 12, 1960 *A.M*.
[1007] *Ibid.*

From his responses to the court, it is possible to understand, General Taddasa believed that he and his associates were mistreated at the hands of the authorities and the judges because of their Oromo ethnic identity. As indicated earlier, one of the major accusations against them was that they attempted to create ethnic difference and dismember Ethiopia. Regarding this accusation, he has the following to say in his response:

> በትምህርት ወደ ኋላ የቀረዉን የኦሮሞን ጎሳ እንድማር በማድረጌ ወገን ለይተሃል ተብዬ ባልሰራሁትና ሞሰረት በሌለዉ ጉዳይ በዛሬዉ በ20ኛዉ ክፍለ ዘመን የዓለም ህዝብ የዘር፣ የጎሳ፣ የሃማኖት ልዩነት ሳያደርግ አንድነቱን አጠናክሮ ወደፈት እየገፋና እየሰራ በሚሄድበት ጊዜ በኔ ላይ እንደዚህ ያለህ ያረጀ አስተሳሰብ የሆነ የጎሳ ልዩነት ግፍ ተዉሎብኝ ባልሰራሁትና ባልፈጸምኩት ጉዳይ ማሰቃየት ለአሁኑ ለተማረ ህዝብም ሆነ ለመጭዉ ትዉልድ ሳያሳዝን እነደማይቀርና ጉዳቴንም ክቡር ፍርድ ቤቱ እንደማይዘነጋዉ እተማመናለሁ።
>
> *Because I helped the Oromo people who lagged behind in terms of education, I was accused of making ethnic division based on un-substantiated evidence of what I did not do in this 20th century when the people of the world are moving forward keeping their unity without making any disparity in terms of race, ethnicity, religion and sex; they make me suffer for crimes I have not done and committed because of this outdated thinking of ethnic discrimination which would inevitably be a sad story for the current educated people and the future generation and I am confident that the court would not forget my suffering.*[1008]

The other point he raised in his defense response was that he was imprisoned in the notorious Alem Beqagn (Worldly life is over for me) prison with those prisoners who were sentenced to death. Here, he complained that he was unjustly imprisoned there because there was no other officer of his rank who was imprisoned there. The other very important point that remained controversial throughout the legal process was the issue of the pardon of the Emperor which was given to General Taddasa and other leaders of the MTSHA. As indicated earlier, when General Taddasa returned through the mediation of religious leaders, the Emperor pardoned him orally for whatever he had committed knowingly or unknowingly

[1008] *Ibid.*

before *Tikimt* 28, 1959 *A.M*. (November 7, 1966) not to be accused and criticized. He had a number of witnesses when the pardon was given and argued that the order of his Majesty, whether written or oral, could not be reversed. However, the court rejected it simply arguing that the pardon was not in a written form. He tried to defend his case arguing that there was no law which rejects the order of the Emperor if it was not in written form and argued that the oral order of the Emperor was legally binding. In his argument, he asked the court to allow him to bring his own defense witnesses who knew of the Emperor's pardon. In his own words,

> አሁንም በህጉ በእኩልነት እንድጠቀምበት የሚደገፍ የሆነ እንደሆነ እኔም ሆንኩ ሌሎች የመጫና ቱላማ ማህበርተኞች ቢያጠፉም ባያጠፉም እሰከ ጥቅምት 28, 1959 ዓ. ም ለሆነዉ ነገር ሁሉ ማንም ሰዉ እንዳይነካ... ::
>
> *Still if it is acceptable that the law can equally work for me, not only me but also other members of the MTSHA, whether they committed crime or not, were pardoned for all what had happened before 28 Tikimt, 1959 A.M (November 7,1966)….*[1009]

However, the court rejected the issue of the pardon of the Emperor which confirmed the fact that the court was partial towards the defendants. Thus the issue of the pardon of the Emperor remained a controversial case throughout the court process.

The case of the leaders of the MTSHA also attracted the attention of the international communities, particularly Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists. Accordingly, both sent their representatives to Ethiopia and attempted to observe parts of the trial process.[1010] The two international organizations were informed about the case through Abera Mekonnen who was in Denmark at the time for scholarship. He had his father,

[1009] *Ibid.*

[1010] Norman J. Singer, "Ethiopia: Human Rights, 1948-1978," *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Ethiopian Studies,* edited by Robert L. Hess, 1978, pp.668-669.

Mekonnen Wasanu, and his brother, Bekele Mekonnen, jailed together with General Taddasa and other leaders of the MTSHA. With the collaboration of his friends and other lawyers, he appealed to the international community for intervention. Accordingly, he appealed to the Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists.[1011] Amnesty International telegraphed the Emperor on November 20, 1967 urging the immediate release of the political prisoners of the MTSHA. The letter listed down the names of the nine prisoners beginning from General Taddasa to General Dawit Abdii.[1012]

The International Commission of Jurists had also written letters to different relevant personalities seeking their views and comments on the report it had received claiming serious violations of the universal human rights in Ethiopia in connection to the case of the MTSHA prisoners. Accordingly, it wrote letters to the former Attorney-General, Teshome Gebre-Mariam, the Minister of Justice and the Dean of the Law Faculty of HSIU.[1013] The representatives of Amnesty International also came to Ethiopia and interviewed Teshome Gebre-Mariam secretly. He claimed to have told them that he was dismissed from his post when he requested objective evidences for the alleged crimes committed by General Taddasa and other leaders of the MTSHA. Teshome himself was accused of exposing the government to foreign agents and for his unreliability, as he was an Oromo.[1014]

On the Sixth International Assembly of Amnesty International held in August 1968, Abera Mekonnen was personally present to give his testimony on the situations of the prisoners and

[1011] *Infromant*: Abera Mekonnen; Appendix- XVII-XVIII.

[1012] Appendix- X The Telegram of the Amnesty to the Emperor. Amnesty International regarded the defendants as political prisoners, not ordinary criminals.

[1013] Appendix- XI. The International Commission of Jurists letter to Teshome Gebre-Mariam.

[1014] *Informant*: *Obbo* Tsehome Gebre Mariam. As indicated earlier, this was the major reason why he was transferred to Eritrea though he refused to go and established his own legal firm instead.

the general conditions of the Oromo in Ethiopia.[1015] It was Abera Mekonnen who made relentless efforts to mobilize the pressure of the International community which encouraged the two organizations to write a number of letters to Emperor Haile Selassie and other key individuals.[1016] Eventually, based on the allegations of human rights violations presented to it, the Sixth International Assembly of Amnesty International adopted a resolution that reads,

> *That Amnesty International investigates and if necessary sends a delegate to Ethiopia to make a thorough investigation concerning those conditions which according to a report received by the conference prevail in that country, especially with the respect to the [Oromo] tribe*.[1017]

Eventually, the court not only rejected the defense of General Taddasa but also ignored the pressure from the International agencies. Accordingly, in its final verdict on August 2, 1968 out of the nine accused leaders of the MTSHA, the court sentenced General Taddasa Birru and Lieutenant Mamo Mazamir to death. Their major crime as stated in *Addis Zemen* Newspaper was that,

> የኢትዮጵያን ህዝብ አንድነት ለማናጋት ስሞክሩና በኢትዮጵያ መንግስት ላይ ስያምጹ ተገኝተዉ በወንጀል ከተከሰሱት ዘጠኝ ሰዎች መካከል ታደሰ ብሩና ማሞ መዘምር በሞት እዲቀጡ ትናንት ያስቻለዉ ከፍተኛ ፍርድ ቤት ፈረደ... እነዚህ የተፈረደባቸዉ ወንጀለኞች የተከሰሱት የሃሰት ፕሮፓጋንዳ እየነዙ የሰላማዊዉን ህዝብ መንፈስ ለመበጥበጥ፤ የኢትዮጵያን ህዝብ ርስ በርሱ ለማለያየት፤ ከጥንት ጀምሮ ስያያዝ የመጣሁን የመንግስቱን ህጋዊ አቋም ለማናጋት፣ የዉጭ ሀገር መሳሪያ በመሆን፤ ከሽፍቶችና ከወንጀለኞች ጋር በማበር፤ በባለሥልጣኖች ሕይወት ላይ ጉዳት ለማድረስ ስሞክሩ ተገኝተዉ ነዉ።
>
> *From among those nine accused persons who were found while trying to crack the unity of the Ethiopian people and rebelling against the government, Taddasa Birru and Mamo Mazamir were sentenced to*

[1015] I*nformant*: *Obbo* Abera Mekonnen; See Appendix- Amnesty International July 17, 1970.
[1016] *Informant*: Abera Mekonnen; Appendix- XIV-XV, XVII. A letter written by Arne Thing Mortensen to Earl Bertrand Russell to pressurize the Emperor on the case of the MTSHA prisoners. Even if the letter does not mention the name of an individual for safety reason it is clear that Abera Mekonnen was the one who brought the issue to the notice of the international community.
[1017] Appendix – XIV.

> *death by the high court yesterday. These convicted criminals were accused because they were found disseminating false propaganda, disturbing the peace loving people, creating difference among the Ethiopian people, attempting to crack the long established legality of the government, becoming an agent of foreign country, allying with rebels and robbers and trying to harm the safety of the authorities*.[1018]

In general, the court sentenced them to death for claimed subversive activities against the government and for disseminating false propaganda in an attempt to divide the unity of the Ethiopian people.[1019] Other prisoners were sentenced to long years of imprisonment ranging from three to ten years while those members of MTSHA who were initially recruited as witnesses, but eventually refused to testify, all received ten years. They were Bekele Mekonnen, Tesfaye Dagaagaa, Tafesse Gammachuu, Corporal Fiixumaa Hiiksaa and Haile Mariam Diimaa.[1020]

Following the final verdict, however, both General Taddasa and the Prosecutor appealed to the Imperial Government of Ethiopia's Supreme Court. The appeal of the prosecutor was opened soon on *Nehase* 13, 1960 *A.M* with the File Number 1440/ 60 *A.M* while that of General Taddasa was delayed for several months until *Hidar* 28, 1961 *A.M.* Eventually his appeal was opened with the File Number 111/ 61 *A.M.* In his response to the appeal of the Prosecutor, General Taddasa once again reflected clearly the injustices committed against him and other prisoners of the MTSHA during the court procedures and the final verdict. He argued that the prosecutor did not bring any substantive evidence against him apart from simply requesting the confiscation of his property. He also objected that though the prosecutor accused him of distributing bombs to his followers to hurt the Emperor and his

[1018] *Addis Zemen*, *Hamile* 27, 1960 *A.M.*; see also Olana Zoga, pp.261-264. See also the Trial Document.
[1019] Balsvik, 2005, pp. 280-281.
[1020] Norman J.Singer, "Ethiopia: Human Rights, 1948-1978," *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Ethiopian Studies*, edited by Robert L. Hess, 1978, pp.668-669.

officials during his coronation ceremony at St George and any other suitable area, he could not identify those individuals who took his order and received the bombs. He appealed that he was severely tortured, interrogated, humiliated and was forced to confess what he had not done.[1021]

He once again raised his argument of the pardon of the Emperor for everything that had happened before *Tikimt* 28, 1959 *A.M*. (November 7, 1966) and seriously asked the Supreme Court to respect the order of the Emperor. It seems that he wanted this argument to become the major theme of his legal contest at this stage though nobody listened to his plea. He also accused the prosecutor for not identifying which witness testified on which charge apart from simply claiming that the witnesses have testified. He contested that none of the witnesses testified against him. In his appeal he urged the Supreme Court to reconsider his case focusing on two major issues. First, he argued that the prosecutor did not have substantive evidences for his charges. Second, he asked the court that he should be allowed to bring his witnesses that the Emperor had pardoned him not to be asked for whatever had happened before *Tikimt* 28, 1959 *A.M*. Therefore, he asked the Supreme Court to reconsider his case in line with these two major themes.[1022]

The court, however, never considered his arguments in its deliberation.[1023] The Supreme Court Special Bench came up with the final verdict in which it confirmed the decision of the High Court. The final verdict was given on *Sene* 6, 1961 *A.M*. and it appeared on *Addis Zemen* newspaper on *Sene* 8 under the heading:

[1021] 'The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA,' General Taddasa's response to the Prosecutor's appeal to the Imperial Ethiopia's Supreme Court on *Hidar* 28, 1961 *A.M*; See Olana Zoga, pp. 266-270.

[1022] "The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA"p.395. It contains General Taddasa's response to the Prosecutor's appeal to the Imperial Ethiopia's Supreme Court on *Hidar* 28, 1961 *A.M*; See Olana Zoga, pp. 266-270

[1023] Olana Zoga, p.26.

የኔ ታደሰ ብሩ ፍርድ ፀና

የጠቅላይ ንጉሰ ነገስቱ ፍርድ ቤት ዓርብ ዕለት ባስቻለዉ ችሎት አንድነቱ ጠንቶ የኖረዉን የኢትዮጵያ ህዝብ ለማለያየት የወንጀል ስራ ስሰሩ የተገኙ እነ ታደሰ ብሩ በሞትና በእስራት እንዲቀጡ ከዚህ በፈት የከፍተኛዉ ፍርድ ቤት የሰጠዉን ፍርድ አጠና።

'The verdict on Taddasa Birru and others confirmed'

The Imperial Ethiopia's Government Supreme Court on its bench on Friday sentenced Taddasa Birru and others, who were found guilty of committing crimes of dismembering the unity of the Ethiopian people that have lived for long, to death and imprisonment confirming the earlier decision given by the High Court.[1024]

Accordingly, the Supreme Court sentenced both General Taddasa and Lieutenant Mamo to death. It was decided that General Taddasa was to be killed by bullet while Lieutenant Mamo was to be hanged in public. Moreover, both were to be dismissed from the army, their military ranks to be stripped and their weapons confiscated.[1025] According to an informant, General Taddasa is said to have reacted to his death sentence saying, "ለእነርሱ መንግስት ዘጠኝ ጊዜ ሞቻለሁ። ለኦሮሞ ሕዝብ ግን አንድ ጊዜ መሞት አለብኝ፤ አይከብደኝም።"(For their [Amhara] government I died nine times. For the Oromo people, however, I have to die once; it is not difficult for me).[1026] Eventually, those who took part in his capture and became witnesses, judges, spies and others were all rewarded.[1027]

According to the existing law, the death penalty had to be confirmed by the Emperor before its implementation. Eventually, when Lieutenant Mamo was hanged in public at Karchalle or Alem Beqagn prison, General Taddasa was spared by the Emperor who changed it to life in

[1024] *Addis Zemen*, Sene 8, 1961 *A.M.*

[1025] 'The Trial Document of the Leaders of the MTSHA', pp. 440-442**;** Habtamu, pp.70-71.

[1026] *Informant*: Colonel Sahilu Birri. This was referring to the time when his life was threatened since he became a guerrilla fighter during the Italian occupation.

[1027] Olana Zoga, pp. 288-289. Finally many of those judges, officers and individuals who were involved directly or indirectly in dealing with the case of the MTSHA prisoners were rewarded with promotions, appointments and other benefits. Accordingly, Wag-Siyum Wossen Hailu, who was spying the General through family was given ambassadorial post. Abba Jifar and his servants were rewarded with 8000 thousand birr. Abbaa Jifaar received 5000 while Gebre Wold Gebre Hiwot, Asfaw Abdii and Wagii Daadhii received 1000 each for capturing and handing over the General to the security forces.

prison.[1028] Informants and some written documents give different reasons for the change of the death penalty to life imprisonment. But it seems that both external and internal developments might have pressurized the Emperor to become considerate towards General Taddasa.

Externally, as we have seen earlier, there were continuous pressures from the international agencies, especially from Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists. According to an informant, the pressure from the international communities could not be ignored and it was probably one reason why the death penalty was commuted to life in prison.[1029] It was the time when the Emperor was also losing external support even from friendly countries. For example, in 1969 when he traveled to Washington DC to demand economic and financial assistance from the US government, he did not get what he expected. Therefore, strong external pressure combined with internal opposition might have forced the Emperor to reconsider the death penalty of General Taddasa.[1030]

Internally, there were also pressures that forced the Emperor to commute the death sentence, at least, to life in prison. According to an informant, the strong remarks of military officers like General Debebe Haile Mariam might have created pressure on the Emperor. General Debebe is said to have suggested to the Emperor that if General Taddasa was to be killed, he himself could not have any hope on the Emperor.[1031] Indeed, General Taddasa, as a veteran

[1028] Olana Zoga, pp.277-78.

[1029] *Informant: Obbo* Abera Mekonnen.

[1030] Fiseha Desta: *Abiyotuna Tizitaye*, (Tsehay Publishers, 2008 *A.M.*) p. 49. Therefore, general international pressure on the Emperor towards the end of the 1960s forced him not to shade more blood.

[1031] *Informant: Obbo* Eda'oo Boruu. According to Olana Zoga (p.176), Earlier when the soldiers of the Imperial Bodyguard were deployed to capture General Taddasa, General Debebe is said to have strictly ordered his soldiers to handle him with respect and dignity if they could capture him alive. Moreover, following his capture, General Debebe quickly ordered the removal of his tattered cloth and the purchase of a good suit that matched his status.

of anti-Fascist resistance, had many sympathizers and supporters. He had served the regime for a long time as a member of the military and police forces. As a commander of the Police Emergency Force, he played a key role in aborting the 1960 coup which enabled the Emperor to return to his throne. According to an informant, when the Emperor reversed the death sentence, he is reported to have told General Taddasa that, "Based upon your service we have changed the death sentence to life in prison."[1032]

According to another informant, who is a family member, however, a religious father who came to Addis Ababa from Gojjam is said to have warned the Emperor saying, "የዚህ ሰዉ ደም በእጅህ ላይ ከፈሰሰ ለዘር ማንዘርህ አይበጅም።"(If the blood of this man [General Taddasa] sheds on your hand, it will not be good for your offspring). This probably forced the Emperor to change his mind to spare the life of the General because it is said that the Emperor had strong belief in religious issues.[1033]

In order to reverse the death penalties of the two leaders, Oromo nationalists prepared and distributed underground paper with warnings against the authorities. According to my informant, who claims to have participated in the writing and distribution of a seven pages paper, the authorities were warned that the Oromo would turn against them if the two were killed. In the words of my informant, the warning included:

> *Isin warri Oromoo balleechitan kun dubartiin keessan Oromoo dha, karra keechan kan eegu Oromoo dha, mogziitii Oromoo manaa qabdu kan ilmoo keechan guddiftu. YooTaaddasaa fi Maammoo ajjeeftan karaa itti isin balleechinu hedduu qabna.*

[1032] *Informant*: Colonel Sahilu Birri. When she heard the change of death sentence to life in prison, my informant, the daughter of General Taddasa, claims to have said to her father: "ዕድሜ ልኩ ባንቱ ዕድሜ ነዉ ወይስ በእሳቸዉ ዕድሜ ነዉ? (The Life imprisonment is based on your age or the age of the Emperor?)

[1033] *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

> *Those of you who are ruining the Oromo have Oromo wives, the keeper of your gate is Oromo, the caretaker of your children is Oromo. If you kill Taddasa and Mamo we do have many ways to eliminate you as well.*[1034]

Either because of the pressure or for other reasons, shortly the death sentence of General Taddasa was commuted to life imprisonment. In general, it seems that both internal and external pressures might have forced the Emperor to change the death sentence eventually. Even though General Taddasa was spared by the Emperor, Lieutenant Mamo Mazamir, his young companion and his right hand man, was executed regrettably. He was a rising young Oromo intellectual who had a big project of writing the history of the Oromo people. According to various sources, it was the draft copy of this work and his intellectual potentials which became his major crime that ultimately claimed his life though the bomb explosion was used as a pretext for public consumption to cover the true cause of his execution.[1035]

From his capture to final verdict, General Taddasa remained in prison in Addis Ababa for about four years. Shortly after the final verdict, he was sent to Harar where he was detained for a year before he was eventually sent to Galamsoo in banishment where he stayed until the 1974 revolution.[1036] When he was sent to Harar prison, General Taddasa was taken by train but it is not clear why he was sent to the area. As soon as he entered the prison, however, there was an attempt to kill him through food poison though he managed to survive after much vomiting. At another time, there was an attempt to attack his eyes but again he

[1034] *Informant*: *Obbo* Lubee Birru. It was a warning to the authorities. According to this informant, about two thousand copies of the underground paper were distributed for about three consequetive days. He was later captured by the security forces for distributing the paper and was tortured. After his release, he was advised not to attend the underground study circle because he was already marked by the security forces. As a result, he was sent to America for the same mission.

[1035] *Informant*: *Obbo* Lubee Birru; Olana Zoga,pp.427-428.

[1036] Olana Zoga, pp. 279-80. The rest of the prisoners were also dispersed to various areas. Accordingly, Colonel Alamu was sent to Debre Tabor, *Qangazmach* Mekonnen to Finote Selam, Brigadier General Dawit Abdi to Yirgalem, Bekele Mekonnen to Arba Minch, Seifu Tesema to Gofa. Some of the prisoners were kept in the capital. These included Daadhii Fayisaa, Lammeessaa Boruu, Haile Mariam Diimaa, Fiixumaa Hiiksaa, Tesfaye Dagaagaa and Tafese Gammachuu.

managed to survive. Even after he went to Galamsoo, General Taddasa had a great concern for his safety and was taking great care, especially regarding his food. Thus he consumed only from the hands of a few trusted hands.[1037]

In general, the closure of the MTSHA and the execution and imprisonment of its key leaders was a severe blow to the emerging Oromo national movement. However, the whole episode left the Oromo leaders with a sense of more determination to resist the injustices of the regime. One of those who became more determined in this way was General Taddasa who relentlessly worked to mobilize the people where he was living in banishment in Galamsoo. While there, General Taddasa is said to have been successful in creating political awareness among the surrounding Oromo which is discussed below.

7.3 Brigadier General Taddasa Birru in Galamsoo

After he was detained in Awzin prison in Harar for about a year[1038], the government transferred General Taddasa to Galamsoo in banishment. At this time, the government had released many of the other prisoners of the MTSHA. General Taddasa's transfer to Galamsoo came as sudden news to his family. For example, when his elder daughter went to visit him from Addis Ababa, she found him in Ras Hotel just released.[1039] It was my informant, one of the key leaders of the MTSHA, who received and took him to Ras Hotel as soon as he was released. General Taddasa was told about his release by *Dajjazmach* Workneh Wolde-Amanuel in the presence of my informant as follows: "ግርማዊ ጃንሆይ መልካም ፍቃዳቸዉ ሁኖ ከዛሬ ጀምሮ በነፃ ተለቀሃል። ለአንተ ጥበቃ ስባል መንግስት የመረጠ ቦታ አለ እዚያ ትቀመጣለህ።"(His

[1037] *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa. Indeed, according to Olana Zoga: 282, there were widespread concerns of such attempts against the prisoners of the MTSHA. For example, Seifu Tesema was killed through food poison while he was in Gofa in banishment.

[1038] *Ibid*.; Tewodros Mulatu, Akaldema, p.165; Gada Melba, p.116

[1039] *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

Majesty's goodwill has released you freely from today onwards. Since there is a place chosen by the government for the sake of your own safety you will live there).[1040]

Then my informant was ordered to take General Taddasa first to any hotel in the town. But when he argued that it would be difficult for him to take a high ranking military officer to an ordinary hotel, where he could not even guarantee his safety, he was allowed to take him to Ras Hotel. As a result, the day he was released from Harar prison, General Taddasa rested in Ras Hotel accompanied by my informant. My informant claims that he found him morally strong; more determined and fearless even than before. Early in the next morning, the Oromo officers in the army and those engaged in different activities, especially those teaching at Haro Maya Agricultural College, gathered to congratulate him as soon as they heard about his release. They contributed about two thousand birr in just one morning for the reestablishment of his new life in Galamsoo.[1041]

To the surprise of my informant, it was just in that morning that he had started to teach and agitate people focusing on the ongoing subjugation and exploitation of the Oromo people. As he was always on the side of the poor and the disadvantaged, as mentioned earlier, he began to distribute the money he had just received to the poor who gathered in front of the Hotel. In the words of my informant, "የተሰጣቸዉን ሁለት ሺህ ብር ሆቴሉ ፊት ለፊት ለተሰበሰቡት ድሆችና ጎስቋሎች በማከፋፈል ባዶ እጃቸዉን ቀሩ።"(He became empty handed after distributing

[1040] *Informant:* Colonel Sahilu Birri. It was while General Taddasa was in Harar prison that Colonel Sahilu was transferred to the remote Somali region of Gode as a punishment for his involvement in the MTSHA. Indeed, he was one of the key leaders who was not arrested in November 1966. But when he reached Harar on his way to Gode, he was told to remain there because he was suspected that he could escape or engage in other subversive activities in the border area. It was while he was working as a police officer in Harar that the regime released some of the prisoners of the MTSHA and allowed others to live in confinement in places selected by the government. Accordingly, General Taddasa was released from Awzin prison of Harar and transferred to Galamsoo to live under house arrest.

[1041] *Informant:* Colonel Sahilu Birri.

about two thousand birr given to him to the poor and the destitute who gathered infront of the Hotel). Because of his fearless agitation and increased gathering around the Ras Hotel, his movement to Galamsoo was speeded up. It was feared that the authorities could get a pretext to reverse the decision of his release. The Oromo crowd who gathered there organized his trip to Galamsoo; took him in their cars and asked the police to escort them. Thus many people accompanied him to Galamsoo and there they bought all the necessary house equipment that would enable him to lead his private life.[1042] In Galamsoo, he was given a two room house near the Habroo District Court and was thrown away like an ordinary person to lead the rest of his life in banishment.[1043]

It became clear that after having been detained for all these years his moral was astonishingly very strong. As discussed below, his determination was seen practically through his activities in Galamsoo. The reason why Galamsoo[1044] was selected for him was not clear. My informants suspect that it was intended to isolate and remove him from the central part of the country where he was known very well and hence, the regime probably wanted to keep him in remote area. At Galamsoo, his guard was carefully selected to follow him closely. The criteria included loyalty to the regime, knowledge of Oromo language and obligation to report annually to the authorities about his daily activities. Filling all these criteria, it was a retired soldier known as Bekele Fentaye who was selected. He used to follow the movements of General Taddasa wherever he travelled to.[1045]

[1042] *Ibid.*

[1043] Tewodros Mulatu, pp.165-166.

[1044] Galamsoo was one of the earliest garrison towns to be established in Hararge as a military settlement during the conquest of the region in the last quarter of the 19th century. *Dajjazmach* Wolde Gabriel was responsible for the conquest of the area; see R.H Darkwah, 1975, p. 193.

[1045] *Informants: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa, *Obbo* Ahmed Alhadi Husein. .

Nevertheless, it became a good opportunity for him that Galamsoo was even the most favored place for his activities. He was able to obtain the love and respect of the surrounding Oromo and was fortunate to be among his own people where he became successful in mobilizing them.[1046] In fact, when he was brought to Galamsoo, initially many people feared to approach him because he was depicted as an opponent of the Emperor and enemy of the regime. It is reported that Sheik Muhammed Reshid Bilal ordered his son, Ahmed Taqi, and other conscious Oromo to greet and approach the new guest.[1047]

Amhed Taqii, a young merchant at the time, was one of the first individuals to approach him in Galamsoo. Ahmed Taqi and other merchants of Galamsoo were relatively conscious when General Taddasa arrived there. This was probably because they had the opportunity to travel widely for their businesses which enabled them to make contacts with the other Oromo in different areas. They were also well aware of what had happened to the leaders of the MTSHA and knew well why General Taddasa was sent to Galamsoo. Ahmed Taqii organized his colleagues like Ahmedalhadi Hussein, Mohammed Bakar, Usmael Ammayyuu, Nejashe Usmael, Mutaqi Sheik Muhammed Reshid and many others and greeted him where he sat in front of his house.[1048]

Ahmed Taqi even requested the authorities to allow General Taddasa to spend with him during the day for which he would take the responsibility of bringing him back before 5 pm.

[1046] Gada Melba, p.116.

[1047] *Informant: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa. Sheik Muhammed Reshid was a well- respected man in the area of Galamsoo. Later, General Taddasa himself sent his daughter, when she went to visit him, to go to the house of Sheik Muhammed Reshid to thank him representing the family for what he had done and his kindness to her father. It was Ahmed Taqi who took her to present her thanks.

[1048] *Ibid.* My informant was astonished by the awareness of these conscious Oromo merchants when she saw the picture of Che Guevara in the shop of Ahmed Taqi in that remote area at that time. There was no one who was very close to the General than Ahmed Taqi in Galamsoo. General Taddasa sat down where Ahmed Taqi purchased coffee and used to teach the peasants who came to sell their coffee. This was his usual business.

Since he was a locally known merchant the authorities trusted him and allowed General Taddasa to spend days with him. He sat with Ahmed Taqii at his coffee porch and indoctrinated those peasants who came to sell their coffee and other commodities. There was no one who was very close to General Taddasa than Ahmed Taqi in Galamsoo.[1049]



Figure 10: General Taddasa on the left and Ahmed Taqi (Hundee) on the right at Galamsoo.[1050]

Ahmed Taqi and other merchants helped General Taddasa as a channel to communicate with the other Oromo in the area. These merchants used to provide almost all the provisions needed for him. Women also provided him with butter and other household necessities. Whenever his family went there for visit from Addis Ababa, these merchants welcomed them and often made gifts of clothes as a sign of intimacy. A merchant called Nejashe, who was his neighbor, even allowed General Taddasa to use his nearby coffee plantation in the garden for his personal use.

[1049] *Informants: Obbo* Sultan Umare, *Obbo* Yasub Sheik Muhammed Reshid, *Obbo* Ahmed Bissidimo
[1050] In the possession of Yasub Sheik Muhammed Reshid, the younger brother of Ahmed Taqi.



Figure 11: General Taddasa and Najashe with their children. The picture was taken in Galamso when the daughters of General Taddasa went to greet him. His daughters, Tsehay and Martha, are standing in the extreme left and right respectively while General Taddasa standing in the middle with hat on head and Najashe standing second from the left with his children.[1051]

Another young merchant known as Ahmedalhadi was also very close to him. General Taddasa went to his shop frequently to communicate with other people and listen to German radio news. In this shop he had a special seat reserved for him. He used the shops of all the above mentioned merchants to teach people when they came for market. This was indeed used to be his usual business.[1052]

Gradually, the strict control from the police assigned to him was relaxed when both learnt that they were originally from the same area, Salaalee. General Taddasa was able to convince his guard of the reasons of his suffering. As a result, his guard was willing to loosen his tight

[1051] In the possession of Tsehay Taddasa
[1052] *Informant: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

control and began to learn a lot from him instead of exposing him to the authorities. Because of this relaxed situation, General Taddasa was not only able to travel throughout the town of Galamsoo but was also able to come out in the night. Accordingly, it is reported that he dressed like a sheik and used to meet with merchants and other conscious Oromo in the house of Ahmed Taqi and other selected areas for secret discussions.[1053]

In general, according to informants, it is possible to divide General Taddasa's activities in Galamsoo into open and underground ones. In his openly conducted activities, he used to teach and influence people with enthusiasm whenever he got opportunities and by creating opportunities as well. For this purpose, he widely travelled throughout Galamsoo town and to its suburbs, especially on the market days, and sat down on the main roads entering Galamsoo town turn by turn to teach people on diverse issues. One of his major accomplishments in this regard was related to the poor and the destitute firewood sellers. In the words of my informant,

> *Dubartoota qoraan gurguruu deeman yoo arge ofitti yaamee meeqa haayyo qoraan kun jedha. Ammasi jetti. Yahaadha koo mee ofirraa lafa kaa'i jedhee maallaqa kennaaf. Isaan booda rakkinaaf gurgurtan moo maaliif gurgurtan jedhee gaafata. Achiin booda gorsuu jalqaba.*
>
> *When he saw women who carried firewood for sale he politely approached and asked, 'Mom, how much is the price?' When she told him the price, he asked 'My mother drop it' And gave her money. Then after he asked, 'Is it for a problem or why do you sell firewood?' Then after, he would start to advise them.*[1054]

Another informant also regrettably noticed what he saw at his childhood, when he was a cattle herder, as follows:

[1053] *Informant: Obbo* Sultan Umare.
[1054] *Informant*: *Obbo* Yasub Sheik Muhammed Reshid.

Yeroo tokko nama qoraan baatee gaara baay'ee dadhabe tokko argee irraa qoraan fuudhee lafa kaa'ee dugda isaarraa uffata urgufee qilleensa erga naqeefii booda maallaqa kenneef. Achumaan namtichi eessa isinii geessa jedhe waan irraa bite se'ee. Fudhaa deemaa, jedhaa deemaa jedhe. Yeroo namtichi deemu ilaalee mataa ofii dha'ee maarrabii baasee imimmaan haqate. Inni nama maallaqa isaa siif kennee siif boo'u dha. Osoo cinaan tokko dhumnee inni addunyaa kanatti nuuf deebi'ee maal ta'a?

One day, he saw a person who was exhausted after ascending a hill carrying a bundle of firewood. He took his firewood down, ventilated his back by airing his cloth and gave him money. After receiving the money the firewood seller asked him where to take it assuming that he bought it. Then he told him, 'Take and go, go. Seeing the person when he was leaving, he punched his own head; took his handkerchief and cleaned his tears. He was a man who gives you his own money and weep for you as well. What a good thing if half of us die and he returns to this world?[1055]

He often travelled through the market of Galamsoo and exploited every opportunity to teach and influence people. He attempted to improve the condition of the firewood sellers who came from the remote countryside but abused and mistreated by the urbanites. He was deeply offended by the way the Ittu farmers were treated.[1056] He was always on the side of the poor; he often waited for women who brought firewood, stopped them near Galamsoo prison and showed his sympathy. He scratched their back and said, "Akka harreetti majii baaftanii hedaa? Wayyoo intala koo dugdi kee si uratee akka dugda harreetti? "(Has your back become injured like that of a donkey? Oh my daughter! Has your back become so sore like the back of a donkey?). He also advised them not to carry up to the house of the buyers because the latter deliberately reduced the price, abused and humiliated them. He often intervened by encouraging the sellers to go away once they had received their money.[1057]

[1055] *Informants: Obbo* Taha Abdullahi, Sheik Muhammed Hussein.
[1056] Ibsa Ahmed, "A History of the Itu Oromo(1880s-1974)", (MA, History, AAU, 2007), p.92.
[1057] *Informants*: *Ato* Belete Zerefu, *Obbo* Yasub Sheik Muhammed Reshid .

He also worked hard in order to boost their moral and self- confidence and used to advise them to respond to provocative expressions that used to degrade their dignity. For example, he advised them saying:

> *When they call you the mother of firewood why don't you refuse to respond? The mother of firewood is wood; it was born of wood not of human being. How do you become the mother of firewood? Do not carry this firewood to their houses while they are looking down on you. Anyone who wants to buy should come here [to the market] and buy it. After buying, it is up to the buyer to take home. You should not carry to their homes and you have to refuse to do so once you sold it. If you carry up to their homes, you have to be paid additionally for your labor services.*[1058]

At the time, there were widespread abuses against the surrounding Oromo. According to an informant, at the time, the urbanites considered the peasants like cattle; they did not know about humanity and felt superior. During that feudal period, they used to maltreat the poor as they wished. General Taddasa was advising and initiating them to resist it. He initiated the local people to rise against the government and encouraged them to arm themselves with traditional weapons like *mencaa*, dagger, spear and knife. [1059]

In addition to initiating the firewood sellers, General Taddasa also used another mechanism o force those who mistreated them to restrain themselves. Accordingly, he is said to have fabricated and disseminated a story that, "Qoraan gurguruu deemtee jennaan dubartii Oromoo qabanii ajjeesanii mana fincaanii keessa buusan"(When an Oromo woman went to sell firewood, they killed and put her in the toilet). This story which was believed to have been originated by General Taddasa came to have significant impact by creating determination among the firewood sellers not to go around the house of the buyers. Even

[1058] *Informants: Obbo* Mohammed Jiruu; Mohammed said Abdurahiman, 2014, pp.122-124.

[1059] *Informant:* Haji Adam Siyyoo; Ibsa Ahmed, p.92. In fact, Galamsoo town was established as a garrison centre of the soldiers of Emperor Menilek II.

more, it was followed by their boycott which created acute shortage of firewood in the town of Galamsoo for sometime and General Taddasa was made responsible for this.[1060] He was also implicated to be behind the frequent petions and dissatisfactions against the authorities in Galamsoo area which became common after he went there.[1061]

Apart from moving throughout the town of Galamsoo, General Taddasa also sat on the main roads entering the town especially on market days to teach those coming to the market. He advised each and every one of them when they came to sell what they had. For example, when he saw women who carried butter, he asked them why they brought it to market instead of feeding their own children and argued that butter was much better than oil. When he saw those who carried honey, he advised them to feed their children in order to keep them strong and healthy. He also advised those who brought fattened goats saying, "Maali qaltanii ilmaan keessan hin nyaachiftanii amma nama biraa nyaachisuuf hooftan?"(Why don't you slaughter and feed your children instead of driving it to feed others?). When he saw those who carried milk, after asking the price and the reason why they had to sell it, he gave the price and requested, "Beenu galii dhugi ijoollee kees obaasi."(Go home and drink together with your children." He also told other marketers who were pouring into Galamsoo town from different directions saying, "When you go to the town there are Oromo merchants; they have everything you want. Buy what you need from them; do not enrich others on us". [1062]

He also advised people on how to improve their impoverished life with the resources at hand. In the words of my informant, he told them,

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[1060] *Informants: Ato* Belete Workneh Zerefu, Hajji Adam Siyyoo.

[1061] *Ibid.*

[1062] *Informants*: *Obbo* Sultan Umare, *Obbo* Yasub Sheik Mohammed Reshid. His advises had at least two major targets. First, he wanted the Oromo peasants to consume parts of what they carried to the market for themselves instead of simply feeding others. Second, he wanted the Oromo to become business customers for each other instead of buying from other non-Oromo merchants.

> *Our country is rich in water; there is water at the foot of this hill. Therefore, plant coffee and other crops in order to get out of poverty. Eat and drink well to have good body. Instead of bringing the good ones to the town for sell, slaughter and eat. Since this land is yours you have to work hard. Within a week you have to take shower at least once. You have to buy good clothes; if you do not afford wash what you have to become clean, buy shoes to your feet also.*[1063]

General Taddasa used to advise almost every marketer who used to come to Galamsoo. Accordingly, he encouraged not only the firewood sellers but also the poor who used to bring grass to the market to support their families. For example, when he met those who carried grass around finding no one to buy it, General Taddasa asked them the price and gave them the amount.[1064]

He was also able to move out of Galamsoo town to the nearby countryside to teach the people. Since he became well known in the region, even children who looked after the cattle in the outskirts of Galamsoo often stopped him on the way. My informants were among those children who used to stop him while they were herding cattle. They express it in their own words,

> *We do not allow him to pass on the road. There was time when all of us surrounded him and push him down. He gave us money and asked our names up to our grandfather. He encouraged those who could count well. Those who failed to count were given assignment to ask their parents and wait for him next time. He deliberately carried coins in his pockets since he knew that children would not allow him to pass.*[1065]

During his travels, whenever he saw farmers in the farm field, he talked to them and asked their identity or to explain who they were as indicated earlier. Then he reacted strongly to the different responses he got. When some of his respondents identified themselves as Muslims,

[1063] *Ibid.; Informant: Aadde* Lule Worke.
[1064] *Informants: Obbo* Hajji Umar, *Aadde* Lule Worke.
[1065] *Informants:* Taha Abdullahi, Sheik Muhammed Hussein.

Qottuu, or Ittuu, he rejected these identities and told them that they were all Oromo. For example, when they told him that they were Muslims, he opposed them saying,

> *Your religion is Islam but there is no identity known as Muslim. Islamic religion exists in many places; the Somali are Muslims and Arabs are Muslims. But you cannot be either a Somali or an Arab. Therefore, there is no Muslim identity and you have to know that your identity is Oromo.*[1066]

He also challenged those who identified themselves as Qottuu and convinced them to accept their Oromo identity by saying, "Qottuun jechuun warra lafa qottu ati sanyii hin qabdu jechuu dha."(Qottuu means those who plow the land and that means you have no identity). He also encouraged them to identify themselves as Oromo instead of Ittuu because the latter was the name of only a single clan. He taught people to be proud of their Oromo identity and gave responsibility to the other conscious ones to teach the rest of the society.[1067] As he had done to consolidate the unity of the migrant Tuulamaa and the Arsii in Itayyaa and Dheeraa, he made similar attempts in Galamsoo. Accordingly, he made tremendous attempts to unite the Christian Oromo from Shawa and the local Ittuu Oromo. Earlier there was a tendency to regard the Christian Oromo as Amhara because of the religious similarity with the northern settlers. By forming close realtions with the Galamsoo Sheiks and merchants, he taught that the Oromo should cross religious boundaries and come together.[1068]

As a result of his teachings and influences as discussed above, General Taddasa was able to become well known among the rural dwellers in the eight districts around Galamsoo. He was known among many as "Namticha bareedaa karaarra taa'ee nama gorsuu fi nama jaallatu

[1066] *Informants: Obbo* Ahmed Bissidiimoo (Ahmed Mohammed Usman), *Obbo* Mohammed Jibril, *Obbo* Sultan Umare, *Obbo* Yasub Sheik Muhammed Reshid.

[1067] *Ibid.* According to Badri Kabir Mohammed (1995:3), the word Qottuu does not have any meaning because it simply represents anyone that digs.

[1068] Ibsa Ahmed, "A History of the Itu Oromo (1880s-1974)",(MA, History, AAU), 2007, p.92.

sani"(That handsome man who advises and loves people sitting on the roadside). In comparison to the influence he made and the success he got there, he often regretted saying, .

> *If I were here all the years I spent in Addis Ababa and Harar as a prisoner, I could have accomplished a lot by this time. I failed to awaken the Shawans [the Tuulamaa Oromo] while I was a free General. But here, I have mobilized the Ittuu Oromo while I am a prisoner. If I were able to come here as a free General, I could liberate the Oromo by this time.*[1069]

It seems that he was happy with what he had done in Galamsoo and regretted that he had wasted his time before. In Galamsoo, he was an important figure who contributed immensely to the promotion of Oromo self-consciousness and was repeatedly visited by other Oromo notables who were also engaged in resistance against the imperial regime in one way or another. These included Sheik Muhammed Rashid Abdulle, Ayub Abubakr, Sheik Bakri Saphalo, Baaroo Tumsaa and other figures. Indeed, General Taddasa was able to make contacts with these personalities partly because of the cooperation of his guard, who allowed him to travel freely to the nearby areas. Moreover, he was able to travel widely throughout the district of Habroo to the regions of Darakkuu, Balballeettii, Gaara Goobaa, Weennii, Heewwanaa, Caffee Aannanii, Waaccuu, Bubbee, Laga Beeraa, even to Bookee and Malkaa Bal'oo. In all these areas, he used to encourage people to ask for their rights and improve their lives.[1070]

By travelling to these areas, General Taddasa discussed political issues and the situations of the Oromo under the imperial regime. He clearly explained to the audiences the harsh

[1069] *Informants: Obbo* Ahmed Bissidiimoo (Ahmed Mohammed Usman), *Obbo* Mohammed Jibril, *Obbo* Sultan Umare, *Obbo* Yasub Sheik Muhammed Reshid. As I indicated earlier, he went to Salaalee and asked why they could not rise up but the answer he got was disappointing.

[1070] *Ibid.* *Sheik Bakri Saphalo was also an important Oromo figure in this region and had contacts with the MTSHA. When General Taddasa was sent to Galamsoo in banishment in the early 1970s, Sheik Bakri is said to have visited him twice. Both must have discussed on issues related to the pan-Oromo movements against the Imperial regime. See Mohammed Hassen, *JOS, V.10*, 2003, p.152.

conditions under which the Oromo tenants were living. He encouraged them to protest against their maltreatment and exploitation. In doing so, he was able to play an important role in promoting the national consciousness of the Oromo in Hararge.[1071]

In Galamsoo, he was generally regarded as a farsighted and determined figure. While there, he preferred to communicate in Afaan Oromo or Oromo language and an eye witness account says, "በኦሮምኛ ብቻ ልናገር ብሎ ባይሟጨጩም በኦሮምኛ መነጋገሩ ደስ ይላቸዋል::"(Though he did not refuse to speak other language, he would be happy if conversation is made in Oromo language). He often listened to current issues on the radio, especially through the German Radio.[1072]

Shortly, he was able to become a central figure in the region of Galamsoo. It was probably in recognition of this fact that the new governor of the Habroo sub-province, *Fitwarari* Tesfaye, invited him to the house warming party in 1973. A new villa was constructed for the governor by the money collected largely from the local Oromo peasants. However, General Taddasa refused to accept the invitation as he did not want to eat and drink with agents of the regime. Moreover, he sent a powerful criticism against the party which was an indication of his firm stand as follows:

> *The wood this house is built of is the bone of my Oromo brothers, the plaster this house is sealed with is the flesh of my Oromo brothers, the water used to mix dirt for exterior plaster is blood of my Oromo brothers. Therefore, I cannot attend the house warming party you have organized for the house you have built.*[1073]

[1071] Mohammed Hassen, "The Evolution of Tenancy in Hararge (ca.1887-1975)", (PhD, History, AAU), 2016, p.404.

[1072] Tewodros Mulatu, pp.165-166.

[1073] Mohammed Hassen, General Taddesse Birru, 1921-1975", in *Goota Oromiyaa*, 2008, p. 359. Galamsoo was the capital of the Habroo sub province and the villa was built here. Accordinig to the daughter of General Taddasa, Aadde Tsehay, he was also very careful regarding the food he consumed. Earlier, he was poisned as soon as he entered Harar prison. Therefore, since then he was very careful.

In addition to teaching and influencing the people openly by using different mechanisms, as discussed above, General Taddasa is said to have worked underground with his close circle on how to promote Oromo armed struggle in the region. It is reported that his underground activities began when he met with Sheik Mohammed Reshid Bilal. Before his arrival in the area, Sheik Mohammed was appreciated for his knowledge and exposure among the Oromo of the area. When the two individuals came together, they were able to discuss on wide range of issues, including the situation of the Oromo and the ways to resolve it. The compound of Sheik Muhammed, which was located near the town of Galamsoo, was found to be suitable for such secret discussions.[1074]

In fact, there had been resistance tradition in the Carcar highland, which also included Habroo district, at least since the restoration of the Imperial regime in 1941. Accordingly, there were rebellious Oromo individuals in the region and some of them included Mohammed Jawwee, Mohammed Jiloo, Mohammed Hamid and many others. They had attempted to resist the injustices of the imperial regime before the government was able to win many of them to its side by integrating some of them into its army. Since the region of Carcar was largely given to the *neftegna* settlers, it was not difficult to mobilize the local Oromo against the regime. Thus, the arrival of General Taddasa in the area fomented the already existing spirit of resistance.[1075]

He was able to sow a revolutionary tradition in the region by preparing people for armed struggle. From the overall observation of the situations of the Oromo and his personal

[1074]*Informants: Obbo* Sultan Umare, *Obbo* Yasub Sheik Mohammed Reshid. Sheik Mohammed Reshid was the father of Ahmed Taqi, one of the closest associates of General Taddasa in Galamsoo.

[1075]*Barruulee Gadaa,* Lakk.4, 1994, pp.13-17; *Informants*: *Obbo* Ahmed Bissidimo, *Obbo* Mohammed Jibril

experiences of suffering under the imperial regime, he came to realize that the initiation of armed struggle was a necessity. This was put into practice with the beginning of armed struggle against the regime under the leadership of Elemo Qilxu.[1076] General Taddasa is said to have drafted the ideas and guidance that led to the emergence of armed struggle in the region. It is reported that Ahmed Taqi used to distribute messages sent from him to various Oromo nationalists including the former members of the MTSA and the leaders of the Baalee guerrilla fighters. Ahmed Taqi often served as a channel between General Taddasa and other Oromo nationalists in different areas as he had the opportunity to travel for his business. He also used to deliver messages between General Taddasa and his family.[1077]

It seems that it was through this correspondence that Elemoo Qilxuu also met him in Galamsoo and discussed secretly what to do and how to act.[1078] According to a knowledgeable informant, the central coordinating committee of the OLF had contact with the Oromo nationalists based in Aden who smuggled weapons from Aden to Addis Ababa through Wallo by using planted agents. Thus, Elemoo Qilxuu sent weapons to Addis Ababa and also came personally. From Addis Ababa he was sent to Galamsoo to meet with General Taddasa.[1079]

[1076] Mohammed Hassen, 1998, pp, 230, 297-298; Olana Zoga, pp.297-298; Mohammed Hassen, "General Tadddese Birru, 1921-1975," in *Goota Oromiyaa*, 2008, p.358. Elemoo Qilxuu was the Aden based part of the underground circle that was working to establish the OLF and begin armed struggle.

[1077] Mohammed Sayid, p.171.

[1078] *Informant: Obbo* Sultan Umare. According to this informant, it was Ahmed Taqi who contacted Elemoo with his two Afari trade customers. It was these merchants who later transported the weapons brought by Elemoo from abroad through Afar to Addis Ababa. From Addis Ababa part of the weapons was transported to Gubbaa Qorichaa near Galamsoo. After the arrival of the weapons Elemo was able to organize a small guerrilla force which included Ahmed Taqi, Abdal Sheik Shato, Dhugoomsaa Dhugaa, Ahmed Bissidiimoo, Sheik Jamal Bareedaa and others. The flag that was sewed in Galamsoo was hoisted by General Taddasa, Elemo and his army at a place called Darakkuu in the locality of Saddeeqaa. Then they moved to Gubbaa Qorichaa where they fought with the government forces.

[1079] *Informant*: Dr Diimaa Noggo.

While still in Galamsoo, a few months before his disappearance, he entered the forest of Xirroo to signal the beginning of armed struggle in the region.[1080] Based on the guidance of General Taddasa, Elemoo Qilxuu was able to establish a small force near Galamsoo. Then Elemoo came to Galamsoo; took General Taddasa and together they went to Darakkuu to signal the beginning of armed struggle in the region. It is reported that they had together hoisted Oromo flag of three colors with Odaa in the middle sometimes between January and February 1974. After a month, the government forces began to pursue this small force.[1081]

When the news of the beginning of armed struggle in the area was disseminated, the *neftenga* settlers were concerned and considered it as their enemy. For example, the settlers were reported to have said,

> ኦሮሞ ጠገበ። የተማሪ ወሬና እልም እዉነት መስሎት ግብር አልከፍልም ብሎዋል። እንዲያዉም ኦሮሞች አማሮችን እንጨርሳለን እስክሉ ነዉ የጠገቡት… .የኦሮሞ ነጻ አዉጪ ግንባር አማራን ለመጨረስ ቆርጦ ጫካ የገባ የሽፍቶች ቡድን ነዉ። ኦሮሞዉ በእርሱ የተነሳ ጥጋቡ ጨምሮዋል። ሽፍቶቹ እስካልተደመሰሱ፣ የተበተነዉ ተማሪ እስካልተቀጣ ድረስ የኦሮሞዉ ጥጋብ አይበርድም።
>
> *The Oromo became satiated. Believing that students' propaganda and dream are true, they vowed not to pay taxes. Moreover, the Oromo became satiated up to threatening to finish the Amhara. The Oromo Liberation Front is a group of bandits who entered the bush deciding to finish the Amhara and the satiation of the Oromo has increased because of it. Until the bandits are crashed and the dispersed students are punished, the satiation of the Oromo would not come down (reduced).*[1082]

Following the rumor of the beginning of armed struggle, General Taddasa was suspected by the government as the main engine behind this development. As a result, the control over him

[1080] Mohammed Hassen, "The Evolution of Tenancy…", 2016, p.404.

[1081] Mohammed Sayid, pp.163-164; *Informant*: *Obbo* Sultan Umare. Since Habroo was largely an open field, its base was moved to Gubbaa Qorichaa for its strategic importance.

[1082] Tewodros Mulatu, p.170.

was tightened which became a point of concern for Oromo nationalists, who were worried that he could be killed. As a result, it was decided that he should be taken out of the region and return to Shawa to launch similar struggle there. It seems that those who took part in the decision included General Taddasa himself, Elemoo Qilxuu, Ahmed Taqi and the coordinating committee of the OLF in Finfinne or Addis Ababa.[1083] The latter sent Ahmed Bunaa to Galamsoo to lead the operation that took the General to the capital. He was taken through Machaaraa to Arsii and finally to Finfinnee.[1084] Other notables of Galamsoo who waited for him in Finfinne after he left were Ahmedalhadi Hussein, Ismael Amayyu and others.[1085]

The news of his disappearance became a talking point for many in Galamsoo town. According to Tewodros Mulatu, he disappeared just after he heard the news of huge demonstration in the capital through German radio Amharic program. One day, while he was listening to the news as usual one of the headlines was about Ethiopia. When the news was read in detail it explained that more than one hundred thousand people went into demonstration in Addis Ababa demanding the government to stop ethnic and religious discriminations.[1086] It was in that night, according to Tewodros, that he was taken away by the Oromo Liberation front fighters under the command of Elemoo Qilxuu. His disappearance was a big issue in the town and many assumed that he was kidnapped by the government security agents. But he disappeared from Galamsoo the night after he had heard the news of the demonstration in Addis Ababa as a matter of coincidence.[1087] It is unlikely

[1083] Mohammed Sayid, pp,122-126.
[1084] *Informan*t: Dr Diimaa Noggo.
[1085] Mohammed Sayid, pp,122-126.
[1086] Tewodros Mulatu, pp.165-166.
[1087] *Ibid*.p.168. *Addis Zemen* newspaper reported on *Miazia* (April) 13, 1966 *A.M.* on Sunday that Ethiopian Muslims made a big demonstration in which more than 100,000 demostrators took part.

that there was a connection between his escape and the news of the demonstration. But the news was what he wanted to hear because it revealed that strong opposition was developing against the imperial regime even in the capital.

According to an informant, General Taddasa had secretly made preparations for his escape to the capital. For example, he had a new cloth sewed for him in the style of an ordinary rural man to avoid the notice of the security forces on his way back to the capital.[1088] When his disappearance from Galamsoo was reported, the main routes taking to the capital were put under police surveillance. Moreover, it was found that his photos were dropped on the main roads taking to the east of Galamsoo. It was not clear why his photos were found in many places east of Galamsoo. There were at least two assumptions. The first was probably to deceive the security forces and to guide them to the opposite direction that his photos were dropped from him accidentally. The intention was to mislead the security forces that he took the eastern direction while he actually took the western direction. The other assumption was that his photos were dropped by the security forces themselves to enable the local people to identify him easily and inform them his whereabouts.[1089]

Nevertheless, he was able to return to the capital by disguising himself as an ordinary peasant and was unnoticed by the guards over the Awash River at Malkaa Sa'aa when he crossed from Dheeraa to Adaamaa. He told his family how he crossed the tollgate at Malkaa Sa'aa,

> የቆሸሸ ሱሪ አንድ እግሩ ወደ ላይ የታጠፈ እና እድፍ ጋቢ ለብሼ፣ ከላይ ቆብ አረጌ፤ ዱላ ይዤ መሀል መንገድ ስሄድ የጥበቃ ፖልሶች አንተ ከብት ኦሮሞ ቦታላ መክና ይገጫሃል ዉጣ ወደ ዳር ብለዉ እየሰደቡኝ ከላዉን አለፍኩ።

[1088] *Informant: Obbo* Mekonnen Abebe. It was my informant who sewed his new cloth for the trip to Addis Ababa.

[1089] *Informant: Aadde* Lulee Warqee.

> *I was walking in the road centre wearing a dirty trouser, with one leg folded up, and a gabi with a hat on my head and carrying my stick. Then I crossed the tollgate while the police were insulting me saying, "You cattle Oromo get out to the road side before you face car accident.*[1090]

The journey from Galamsoo to Addis Ababa was a difficult one and it took his group about two weeks. They travelled mainly during night time and in one night they could travel up to six hours. However, there were moments when they could not travel at all probably for safety and other reasons. It seems that some of the former leaders of the MTSHA in Arsii, Adaamaa, and the capital knew about his escape. Ahmed Buna went to Galamsoo from Arsii and hence *Hajji* Roobalee and other key leaders knew of his return. From Dheeraa he was handed over to Daadhii Fayisaa in Adaamaa. From Adaamaa, Bekele Mekonnen received and brought him to the capital secretly.[1091]

It was because of the style of his dress that he was unnoticed when he crossed the tollgate at Malkaa Sa'aa; met with Daadhii Fayisaa and spent a few days there before he learnt the situation in the capital and established contacts with other key individuals. He was then brought to the capital secretly and first brought to the house of Legesse Dinagdee. It was here that members of his family met him for the first time after his return. Soon his wife consulted *Ras* Mesfin Sileshi, who was her relative, to mediate for his release by asking the Emperor. It is reported that *Ras* Mesfin encouraged her that the authorities were too concerned not about him but about the growing popular unrest against them. In the meantime, General Taddasa

[1090] *Informant: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

[1091] Anga'a Dhuguma, 2008, p.95; *Informant*: *Obbo* Asafa Baalchaa. Another informant, Teshome Gebre Mariam, also claims that his brother Mekonnen and *Ras* Mesfin Sileshi had communicated through codes to facilitate his travel from Adaamaa to the capital.

was moved to the house of *Qagnazmach* Mekonnen Wasanu, may be for safety and protection.[1092]

Eventually, when the new Prime Minister, Endalkachew Mekonnen, was consulted on the issue, he suggested that he could only allow him to live in banishment in the nearby areas like Debre Berhan. Endalkachew insisted that he could not set General Taddasa free because he escaped from Galamsoo. However, General Taddasa refused to go to Debre Berhan. In the meantime, it is reported that the Emperor allowed him to stay in the house of *Qagnazmach* Mekonnen when he asked him that, "Taddasan bakka mana hidhaa sana jeequmsi waan jiruuf nageenya isaaf sodaatee na bira dhufe, ni bade miti (Since there is a conflict in the prison area, Taddasa came to me fearing for his safety; he did not escape). It was after this green light that people began to greet him there, including many members of the MTSHA.[1093]

It has to be clear that General Taddasa had freed himself from house arrest at Galamsoo and his self- release was given recognition later. He left Galamsoo not released officially but through a coordinated and planned operation which enabled him to escape and return to the capital. It was after his return to the capital on his own that he was given amnesty officially. The amnesty was given when the *Darg* presented a list of some former political prisoners to the Emperor for pardon. Accordingly, those who were given full amnesty for the first time were seven individuals, including General Taddasa. It was reported in *Addis Zemen*

[1092] *Informant: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

[1093]*Informants*: *Obbo* Asafa Balcha, *Obbo* Abera Mekonnen, *Obbo* Gugsa Mekonnen. By renting the residential house at Kolfe Atana Tera to augment the diminishing income in his absence, his family was at the back of Semien Hotel on the way to Addisu Gebeya when he returned from Galamsoo. It was here that a feast was prepared to welcome him. After staying here for a short time, he moved to the back of Filamingo area on the way to Boolee and finally moved to Nifas Silk area near Villa Verde in search of a better house. It was from this residence that he moved out to resist the *Darg*. It was here that his family mourned his death when he was executed by the *Darg*. General Taddasa never returned to his house. There were attempts to confiscate the house but it remains in the hands of the family. Currently, it is rented to a Church.

newspaper on *Hamile* 23, 1966 *A.M*, about a month before the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie in September 1974, under the heading that 'Those imprisoned for political reasons were given amnesty'.[1094]

Following the official pardon, notable Oromo individuals like Baaroo Tumsaa, Haile Urgaa, Bekele Mekonnen, Qadiidaa Gonfaa, Rev Guddinaa Tumsaa and several others discussed how to welcome him. They prepared a big feast in which attendants from Galamsoo, including Ahmed Taqi, Ahmedalhadi Hussein and others, also participated. It was in this way that General Taddasa was given pardon.[1095] After his official release, people poured into his house from the military and the civil service to greet him. He was regarded as a symbol of Oromo pride. Shortly, people contributed money and bought him a new model Volkswagen car to facilitate his travel and to boost his moral against his enemies. This was the second time that people bought him a car.[1096]

Though General Taddasa left Galamsoo as discussed above, his legacy remained strong. He was credited for creating a general consciousness in the region at least in two interrelated ways. The first manifested through peaceful protest while the second through armed struggle. According to an informant, petitions and dissatisfactions became frequent in Galamsoo area after the arrival of General Taddasa.[1097] For example, one can see strong popular petition from the Habroo sub province to the office of the Prime Minister which also appeared in a

[1094] *Addis Zemen*, *Hamile* 23, 1966 *A.M*. The rest included Yayu Mohammed, Alimira Mohammed, Ayidahis Mohammed, Lieutenant Bekele Sagu and *Ato* Negede Gebreab.

[1095] *Informants: Obbo* Ahmedalhadi Hussen, *Obbo* Eda'oo Boruu

[1096] *Informant:* Colonel Sahilu Birri. According to a family member, however, there was a certain amount of money that was left unpaid and probably on the process. Earlier it was a Piyajo that was bought for him with money contributed largely by Asafa Duulaa, a private lawyer who was regrettably killed in a shootout with Lt Jaarraa Mesfin.

[1097] *Informant: Ato* Belete Workneh Zerefu

newspaper.[1098] The second one manifested itself in the form of armed resistance. The armed struggle led by Elemoo had started with a strong contribution of General Taddasa and the army remained active for sometimes even after the return of General Taddasa to the capital. Thus, Ahmed Taqi and Umar Adam directly joined the army of Elemoo when they returned from escorting General Taddasa to Addis Ababa. This military activity was believed to be the first armed struggle conducted in the name of the Oromo Liberation Front.[1099] It was Elemoo Qilxuu, Ahmed Taqi, General Taddasa and other individuals who lit the fire signaling the beginning of armed struggle in the region.[1100]

Shortly after its formation, the small army led by Elemoo began to engage in practical military operations. It moved through Bubbee to Hardim and found a notorious feudal lord known as Mulatu Temegn as he just collected tribute from his tenants. They killed him and distributed back the grain he had collected from the tenants.[1101] Soon after this event, it was propagated against Elemoo that he began to kill the Amhara. However, when he moved from Hardim to Gubbaa Qorichaa and took similar measure against an Oromo feudal lord known

[1098] *Ye'Zareyitua Itiyophiya*, Newspaper, Saturday, *Sene* 8, 1966 *A.M*. The petition came when the *Horaa* (salty water), *Boolee* and grazing land of about 8.5 *gashas* was given to the regime's servants or commonly called *balewuletas*. The land was earlier used by the surrounding people who brought more than one million domestic animals annually to the area to get access to the *Horaa, Boolee* soil and pasture. If the cattle did not get these provisions their hair and skin would scratch and expose them to various kinds of diseases. Eventually, they were able to reclaim the land for popular use.

[1099] Mohammed Hassen, 1997, p.230; See also Mohammed Hassen, "General Taddesse Birru, 1921-1975," in *Goota Oromiyaa…*, pp.358-360.

[1100] Mohammed Sayid, pp. 163-164. According to an informant, Leencoo Lataa, who knew it very well, when the OLF was established in small circle in 1973, General Taddasa was elected as its chairman in his absence while he was still in Galamsoo. The OLF claims that the small army led by Elemoo Qilxuu, which was completely destroyed in the early September 1974, was its first liberation army and General Taddasa had a big role in its establishment and guidance.

[1101] *Barruulee Gadaa, Lakk.*4, 1994, pp.13-17.

as Sheik Ahmed Aliyu, the intention of the movement became clear that the target was not the Amhara settlers but the feudal exploiters.[1102]

Following these two incidents a big army was dispatched against the small army led by Elemoo. While Elemoo and his soldiers were at a place called Xirroo, they were surrounded by huge government forces on September 5, 1974. After a strong resistance, Elemoo and his soldiers were killed.[1103] The enemy took only the dead body of Ahmed Taqi; dragged it on the ground through the town of Galamsoo in the form of public display and eventually dropped it in the Galamsoo police station.[1104] This was a huge blow to the Oromo struggle and General Taddasa, who had lost many of his close associates including Ahmed Taqi and Elemoo. This event made him a restless person even after he was given amnesty by the falling Emperor. After a few months, despite the regime change, he went out to launch an armed struggle himself against the new military government.

[1102] Tewodros Mulatu, pp.186-187.

[1103] Mohammed Sayid, pp. 168-169; *Barruulee Gadaa, Lakk.*4, 1994, pp. 13-17. Xirroo was located just on the right side of the road that takes from Waaccuu to Bookee.

[1104] Tewodros Mulatu, pp.186-188

Chapter Eight
Rebellion against the *Darg*, Execution and Legacy of Brigadier General Taddasa Birru

This chapter examines how the initial understanding between General Taddasa and the *Darg* turned into mistrust and eventually led to his rebellion when he found no Oromo issue in the agenda of the *Darg*. By using oral sources, with some available written materials, the chapter carefully analyzes how General Taddasa attempted to launch broad based resistance against the *Darg* by focusing on the issue of land. The chapter clarifies how he was eventually captured and executed quickly in what seemed to be a political decision. The chapter is concluded with a discussion on the impact of his death on the Oromo movement and his lasting legacy.

8.1. The Rebellion of General Taddasa against the *Darg*

Even before the *Darg* took power in September 1974, there was a kind of understanding between the *Darg* leaders and General Taddasa. As indicated earlier, shortly after his escape from Galamsoo, the *Darg* appealed to the Emperor and obtained amnesty for him and other political prisoners of the imperial regime. After he was made officially free, he began to think about what to do in the ongoing political crisis of the country. While he was closely following each and every development of the political situation, the leaders of the *Darg* also approached him for collaboration. They hoped that since he had suffered under the previous regime, he would cooperate with them. It was for this purpose that the *Darg* restored his

pension rights. Initially, General Taddasa hoped that if guided closely and advised, the *Darg* leaders would respond to Oromo questions and grievances.[1105]

Colonel Mengistu used to make him phone calls and tell him that the *Darg* had the intention to give him the position he deserved. Accordingly, he was asked to be reinstated to his previous duty; the chief of the Police but it is reported that he declined to accept the offer.[1106] According to the daughter of General Taddasa, Major Mengistu used to make contacts with her father, especially through telephone calls. My informant claims that Major Mengistu is said to have asked him to be the judge to preside over the case of the detained officials of the Imperial regime. But he refused to accept the offer again arguing that: "Since I do have hostility with some of these officials for obvious reasons, I cannot be their judge. You have to select an impartial judge."[1107] It is also reported that the *Darg* had intended to appoint him in the Ministry of Defense as a Chief Inspector.[1108] He was also asked to become the governor of Sidamo province.[1109] It is also reported that the *Darg* had suggested offering him the post of Minister of Interior but as usual he declined to accept it.[1110]

In general, it is reported that he was asked at different times to be given different positions because the *Darg* had continuously sought his collaboration in order to get the support of the Oromo peasantry. For example, he was suggested to be appointed as a governor of Shawa

[1105] *Informants:* Colonel Sahilu Birri, *Obbo* Hailu Gebru Jimaa.

[1106] *Informant: Obbo* Hailu Gebru Jimaa. My informant claims that General Taddasa declined to accept the offer arguing that he wanted to take rest after many years of imprisonment.

[1107] *Informan*t: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa. This response had probably disappointed Colonel Mengistu because he hoped that General Taddasa would delightly accept the offer to decide over the fate of his former enemies who ruined his life and made him a life priosner. In short, Colonel Mengistu had hoped that General Taddasa would revenge against them and make the *Darg* leaders also happy.

[1108] *Informant*: Dr Diimaa Noggo.

[1109] Olana Zoga, pp. 310-311; *Informant: Obbo* Eda'oo Boruu.

[1110] Mohammed Hassen, "General Taddesse Birru, 1921-1975", in *Goota Oromiyaa,* 2008, pp. 360-361; see also Mohammed Hassen, 2002, p.23.

province if he would give up his Oromo issue. As usual, he refused and told my informant that:

> *Even if I wash it down, my Oromo identity would not leave me; hereafter, as long as I am alive, I would not retreat from Oromo struggle whatever they do against me. They can take away their post of governor but I do not retreat from the Oromo issue.*[1111]

In addition to oral suggestions or proposals for appointment, the *Darg* had also consulted him for comments whenever it took political measures. Following the summary execution of the Imperial officials, Major Mengistu is said to have asked him of his opinion hoping that he would be happy with the elimination of many of his former enemies. However, his response was quite different when he said:

> *If you have taken them to the court; explained their crimes to the public and taken the due legal process by bringing witnesses before taking this measure, it would have been good. But it is unacceptable to kill them summarily like this.*[1112]

His response reflects his genuine stand for justice that he is said to have criticized the *Darg* leaders in strong terms for their brutality following the execution of about sixty top officials of Emperor Haile Selassie. He argued that the decision should have been based on the due process of the law at least. In other words, he told them clearly that he was not happy with the measure taken against them even if some of the victims were responsible for his death sentence and life imprisonment under the previous regime. His reaction was contrary to the general expectation of the *Darg* that he would be happy with the measure taken against his former enemies.

[1111] *Informant: Obbo* Hulluuqaa Baabsoo.
[1112] *Informant*s: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa, Colonel Sahilu Birru.

It is reported that the *Darg* had also asked General Taddasa to testify the injustices committed against him by the Emperor and to disclose other secrets of the government. But he refused to do so. The suspicion of the *Darg* against him continued to grow and the drift between the two kept growing with the passage of time. General Taddasa on his part began to organize people underground.[1113] From the brutal acts of the *Darg*, he was able to learn that the junta was transforming itself into dictatorship with impunity. The widespread killing that continued in many areas further alienated him from the *Darg*. He began to complain that it would be difficult to live under such circumstances.[1114]

It was amidst this situation that Major Sisay Habte is reported to have asked him to mobilize the Oromo peasants behind the *Darg*. However, General Taddasa is said to have offended him by saying, "First, return the land to the peasants; if not I will mobilize them against you from corner to corner."[1115] In fact, even if the *Darg* took power in September 1974, the land proclamation was not issued until after his rebellion.

Initially, the *Darg* had regarded some officers who had suffered under the previous imperial regime as 'apostles of change'. Thus as of early November 1974, the *Darg* began to appoint some of those it considered as apostles of change to different government offices. Mainly because of their public acceptance, the *Darg* wanted to use them as traveling ambassadors to calm down the public and make them rally behind the *Darg*.[1116] Eventually, General Taddasa was made a special advisor to Major Kiros Alemayehu, a coordinator of the "Development Through Cooperation Program". For this purpose, he was able to travel to west Shawa and

[1113] Major Abebe Gebre Mariyam, an interview appeared on OMN, August 23, 2014. Available on OMN archives.

[1114] *Informant*: *Qesis* Belay Mekonnen.

[1115] *Informant: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

[1116] Andargachew Tiruneh. *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987: A Transformation from an Aristocratic to a Totalitarian Autocracy*. Cambridge University Press, 2004, p.170.

spent a week in mobilizing the people and encouraging the campaigners. Accordingly, he visited Amboo, Jibaat, Shanan, Noonnoo, Giincii, Holankomii, Gindoo, and Meettaa Roobii and returned. He was able to understand the grievances of the peasantry himself through this short tour.[1117]

In general, at least initially, though with suspicion, members of the *Darg* had showed positive gesture towards him and used to approach him to understand his opinion on various issues. It seems that both of them were studying each other of their true intentions. As time passed, the drift between them was expanding until General Taddasa decided to rebel. He lost any confidence on the military junta and found no better change for the Oromo under the *Darg*. He never hesitated to resist and move forward. He was always kept updated about the *Darg* from key companions like Colonel Hailu Raggaasaa and Major Abebe Gebre Mariam.[1118] It was mainly because of his growing suspicion of the *Darg* that General Taddasa continued to refuse the offer of high government post suggested to him at different times. Moreover, he was not happy with the *Darg's* philosophy of "Ethiopia First" which did not include about the question of nationality. All these combined together made him unwilling to serve within the existing system which had been unwilling to resolve nationality issues. He now decided that he should work towards the overthrow of the military junta.[1119]

In order to achieve this goal, he had no other option but to move to the countryside and mobilize the people. He knew very well that the Oromo had deep grievances, especially over

[1117] *Informant*s: Colonel Sahilu Birri, *Obbo* Eda'oo Boruu. This was probably towards the end of December 1974. According to Andargachew Tiruneh (2004:171), through the activities of the National Development Campaign, the *Darg* hoped to clear the rural population from backwardness, illiteracy, unjust land tenure system and other forms of exploitations.

[1118] *Informant: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa. He had consistently showed that he was a brave and bold fighter who was always ready to move forward even at the risk of his life.

[1119] Mohammed Hassen, "General Taddesse Birru, 1921-1975," in *Goota Oromiyaa,* 2008, pp. 360-361; see also Mohammed Hassen, 2002, p.23

the issue of land. He was confident that once he moved to the countryside he could mobilize the Oromo peasantry. He usually said, "Oromoon baadiyyaa jira waan ta'eef magaala keessaa maal hojjenna" (Since the Oromo are in the countryside, what do we do from the town). Indeed, he was very determined to push the Oromo question of land, equality and equal treatment forward while the *Darg* was also concerned that he had a strong potential to mobilize the Oromo people against the government.[1120]

As indicated earlier, with the passage of time, the suspicion and drift between General Taddasa and the *Darg* leaders had increased. According to the account of Major Abebe, one of the major contradictions between General Taddasa and the *Darg* was related to the issue of the confiscation of his pistol under the disguise of being carried illegally. It happened when Bekele Nadhii invited him to visit his beef diary around the Awash and both went there. But on their way to the site, soldiers who were patrolling the tollgate at Awash confiscated his pistol. This created a debate and even protest by the Oromo officers who worked within the *Darg* office. They argued that he was a revolutionary who was imprisoned and tortured under the previous regime and even criticized the *Darg* for it had done nothing to improve his life. Then the *Darg* reviewed his case and decided that he could come to its office and collect his pistol. However, the Oromo officers argued that his pistol had to be sent to his home. The *Darg* officials refused and insisted that he should come personally and collect it. General Taddasa also refused and insisted that it should be sent to his home. Eventually, both sides refused and General Taddasa never took his pistol.[1121]

[1120] *Informant*: *Obbo* Hulluuqaa Baabsoo
[1121] Major Abebe Gebre Mariyam, Interview on OMN

From the beginning, General Taddasa was not happy with the military's takeover of political power. He is said to have remarked, "Dubbiin kun ammas keenya miti. Ijoolluma isaaniiti kan mula'chaa jiru." (This situation [change] is still not ours. It is their children [children of the former ruling class] who are seen [in power]). This perception had made him to become pessimist of the new junta and increased his determination to continue the resistance.[1122] In other words, General Taddasa concluded that the *Darg* would not make any basic difference from the previous regime. He observed that it was mainly a continuation of the previous dominant group in one way or another since it came with the motto of 'Ethiopia First' and there was nothing about the Oromo issue. In other words, he understood that what was then seen was the struggle between the old feudal ruling elites and their educated sons and members of the army who had ultimately the same agenda of controlling and dominating others. The question of nationality was not in its agenda and, apart from the Land Proclamation which came several months later, the *Darg* was not willing to listen to other Oromo grievances at all.[1123]

In general, he could not hear any voice that could lead to the establishment of a system that would equally treat all its peoples. For example, there was nothing raised about the closed MTSHA, about the rights of nations and nationalities, their language and culture. Instead of issues related to the Oromo, what were frequently heard were the issues of class, revolution, 'Ethiopia First', socialism and related terminologies and political issues. Therefore, there was nothing to attract the attention of General Taddasa from the activities and directions of the new military junta.[1124] In other words, the main focus of the military junta became the

[1122] I*nformant*: *Obbo* Asefa Balchaa
[1123] *Informant*: *Obbo* Bulchaa Dammaqsaa.
[1124] *Ibid.*

defense of the state[1125] ignoring or undermining other sensitive issues, like the question of nationality and land. Thus, the initial optimism on the military junta to respond positively to the question of establishing the equality of all nations and nationalities remained unachieved[1126]though General Taddasa and other leaders of the MTSHA had suffered under the previous regime for that cause. He realized that the group who came to power in his view was as chauvinistic as its predecessors which needed to be resisted militarily.[1127] He did not see any basic political change for the Oromo people which pushed him to have said, "Kana teenyee ilaaluu hin dandeenyu yoo guyyaan keenya ga'eera ta'e ni duuna"(We cannot sit down and see this; if our day has come we die).[1128] Hence, within a few months after the *Darg*'s control of political power, General Taddasa was ready to confront it militarily.

While the above discussed situation was the reaction of General Taddasa, the Oromo elites had different views concerning the future of the Oromo nation. There were two major reactions at least. These were either to form partnership with the *Darg* or to struggle for the realization of self- determination. Initially, it was the first option that was preferred by many Oromo intellectuals. Many hoped to promote their national identity, language, culture and the return of land to the peasants. As it was seen a few months after the revolution, the issue of land reform was a forgone conclusion.[1129] The positive gesture of the *Darg* also further divided the Oromo elites. Accordingly, while some gave support to the *Darg*, others preferred to be neutral to wait and see what would happen. In the meantime, several former members of the MTSHA joined the new government and were appointed to various

[1125] John Markakis, 2011, p. 18

[1126] Teshome G. Wagaw, " Emerging Issues of Ethiopian Nationalities: Cohesion or Disintegration," *Northeast African Studies*, 2,3(1980-81), 3.1(1981), p.70

[1127] Paulos Milkiyas, "General Tadesse Birru," Encyclopedia Aethiopica, Vol.4, pp. 808-810.

[1128] *Informant*: *Qesis* Belay Mekonnen.

[1129] Mekuria Bulcha, 2011, pp. 562-66; Mohammed Hassen, CMI-Report,pp. 32-33. See also Rene Lefort, 1981,p. 110; Asafa Jalata,1998, pp. 10-11.

positions. General Taddasa continued to discuss with the leaders of the *Darg* but declined to accept the positions proposed to him.[1130]

The other group of the Oromo preferred to resist the *Darg* with military confrontation in order to realize an independent state. However, it did not have much support until many of the Oromo nationalists became increasingly disillusioned with the possibility of receiving fair treatment under the military regime.[1131] In 1974 some conscious Oromo were disillusioned by the gains of the revolution and came to have an independent Oromo state as a political goal. Though initially this group was a minority it continued to organize itself. This group included General Taddasa and other former leaders of the MTSHA and student leaders. General Taddasa had no great expectations from the new military junta because he believed that the *Darg* had the intention to continue the national integration through Amharization by even surpassing the imperial regime. According to Markakis it was this realization which forced him to fight for complete emancipation before the new government consolidated itself.[1132] After all his hopes were exhausted, he determined to continue his resistance. My informant had heard him saying, "Ani Taddasan lammaffaa kushiinaa Amaaraa keessa hin gugguufu!"(I, Taddasa, will never bow in the Amhara kitchen again!)[1133]

In general, there was no basic change in the months that followed the revolution even including the burning issue of land. This was a point of concern not only for General Taddasa and his close associates but also to the Oromo students in the National University or Addis Ababa University. Mainly out of this concern that the students held their meeting from November 2-3, 1974(*Tikimt* 22-23, 1967 *A.M*) and reviewed the condition of the Oromo and

[1130] Olana Zoga, pp. 310-311.
[1131] Mekuria Bulcha, 2011, p.567.
[1132] John Markakis, 1987, p. 262.
[1133] *Infromant*: Dr Diimaa Noggo.

the Development through Cooperation Campaign Program. After making a thorough review of the situations, they concluded that under the past Ethiopian regimes the Oromo people had been exposed to severe economic, political, social and cultural exploitations without basic change until that moment.[1134] They understood that the *Darg* was even becoming more aggressive towards the Oromo which was revealed to them through the brutality it showed to crush a popular uprising in the Carcar province of Hararge. Moreover, they opposed the Development through Cooperation Campaign and decided to continue their struggle until certain conditions were fulfilled. The demands were as follows.

1. The Oromo right to self-determination had to be recognized
2. Recognition of economic, political, social and cultural rights of the Oromo and the implementation of the new landholding system, "Land to the Tiller" policy.
3. The usage of Afaan Oromo in the court, religious institutions and other areas of social services and in mass media.
4. All nations should use their own languages in schools.
5. The establishment of popular government.
6. The release of political prisoners, especially Oromo political prisoners.
7. The restoration of Oromo names of rivers, towns, mountains and others to their original Oromo names.[1135]

From the above remarks, it becomes clear that the Oromo students at Addis Ababa University were not happy with the military takeover of political power and its subsequent

[1134] The students argued that the situation that had started during the reign of Sahla Selassie had continued unchanged up to that moment.

[1135] IES MS: 2395/04/45 "የኦሮሞ ተማሪዎች ዉሳኔ" (The Decision of the Oromo Students). The students agreed to continue their struggle until the above mentioned rights were respected and they concluded their meeting with an agreement to make armed struggle.

leadership. In lieu of their role in the overthrow of the Imperial regime, the students were not satisfied with the changes that came as a result.[1136] There was a growing opposition against the military junta when there was no sign of at least some form of regional autonomy for the Oromo.[1137]

The Oromo students also opposed the *Zemecha* (Development Through Cooperation Campaign) because they feared that it could mobilize public support for the *Darg* to consolidate itself.[1138] Even some of the students who took part in the campaign, and tried to restore the cultural and other rights of the ethnic groups, were discouraged by the cadres. For example, those campaigners who went to Innaangoo area of Wallaggaa and carried out literacy classes in Oromo language for about six months were stopped by the cadres. The cadres who were sent from the capital found the literacy classes in *Afaan* Oromo as subversive activity against the government.[1139] In general, there was a growing opposition against the *Darg* from some of the Oromo elites and students in the months after it came to power.

Once General Taddasa had determined to resist, he did not want to waste his time and allow the *Darg* to consolidate itself. He assumed that it was the right time for him to act quickly when the *Darg* appeared to be weaker in the face of growing opposition from different groups.[1140] The emergence of anti- *Darg* movements in many areas created an impression

[1136] Marilyin Hall Baissa, "Civic-Military Elite Interaction in the Ethiopian Revolution: The Role of Students," *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Ethiopian Studies*, 1978, p.776. The role of the students was well recognized by the wider public. For example, the songs during the *Irreechaa* ceremony at Hora Arsadee in Bishooftuu in September 1974 gave recognition to the students for the changes that had happened about a week earlier.

[1137] Ulrich Braukamper, "Ethnic Identity and Social Change Among Oromo Refugees in the Horn of Africa," *Northeast African Studies*, *4*,3 (1982-1983), p. 4.

[1138] Marilyin Hall Baissa, 1978, p.779.

[1139] Rene Lefort, 1983, pp.96-97.

[1140] *Informants*: *Obbo* Asefa Balchaa, Captain Gediyon Dheeressaa.

that *Darg* was near collapse and General Taddasa hoped to exploit this apparent suitable condition. It was feared that if the military rule was consolidated the Oromo question would take another long time to be addressed. And it was out of this fear that General Taddasa and other nationalists attempted to undertake practical activities.[1141]

According to an informant, before he left the capital, General Taddasa had held strong conversation with the *Darg* officials, including Major Mengistu Haile Mariam, over the issue of the Oromo. Some of the issues he raised in his conversations included the issues of land and flag. Regarding land, he argued that it was the Oromo land which was taken over and divided among the *neftegnas i*n the first place under the imperial regime. According to this informant, General Taddasa was not happy with the ongoing campaign of "Land to the Tiller" because he believed that it would further divide the Oromo land. Hence, he argued that it should be replaced by "Land to the Oromo Tillers". His reason was that it was the Oromo land which was originally taken away and divided among the settlers and others. He demanded strongly that land should be restored to its original owners, Oromo tillers because he feared that land to the tiller would simply divide the land to whatever tillers, not necessarily Oromo tillers. In other words, his concern was that the land to the tiller program would simply legalize the ownership of the Oromo land to other non-Oromo tillers.[1142]

[1141] *Informant: Obbo* Eda'oo Boruu.

[1142] *Informant*: *Obbo* Tadesse Tele Salvano. This informant has assured me that he has seen the video of General Taddasa's conversation with the *Darg* officials in the presence of Major Mengistu Haile Mariam. He got access to the document when he was working in the Defense Strategic plan with a special permission from the former prime minister. However, even he himself was denied to take the copy of the video but he has repeatedly watched it and took notes. He repeatedly assured me about the authenticity of the information he gave me. He is still alive and ready to give his testimony to anybody that needs it. The information I received from him is based on the alleged video of General Taddasa's conversation with the *Darg* officials before he moved out to launch armed struggle against the *Darg.*`

The other important issue he raised during the conversation was related to the Oromo flag. My informant claims that General Taddasa argued with the *Darg* officials that the Oromo were about twenty million, at the time of this conversation towards the end of 1974, while the Amhara were about five million. He questioned that, "ሃያ ሚልዮን የኦሮሞ ህዝብ የራሱ ባንዲራ ሳይኖረዉ አምስት ሚልዮን የማይሞላ ህዝብ እንዴት ባንዲራ ይኖረዋል?"(While twenty million Oromo have no flag of their own, how come that others who do not exceed five million came to possess it?). He reminded them that the Oromo had their own separate flag with three colors: black, red, and white. [1143]

He added that he had discussed the Oromo issue with various international leaders and notables like Nelson Mandela, Juliues Nyrere, Margaret Thatcher, Marshall Tito and the Prime Minister of Italy. He argued that freedom, justice and equality, as Mandela told him, would be ensured and restored in Ethiopia when the equality of the Oromo was guaranteed. It is reported that Colonel Mengistu objected to his remarks saying, "አሁን የሚናወራዉ ስለ ህዝብ ብዛትና ጥናት ጉዳይ አይደለም፤ ስለ ሕዝቦች ጉዳይ ነው።።"(What we are now talking is not about population size and study but about the people in general). General Taddasa had a firm belief that the Oromo should get their proper and rightful place in the political economy of Ethiopia. It was because of this firm belief that he quarreled with the Imperial regime and the *Darg* and paid the ultimate price.[1144]

[1143] *Informant*: *Obbo* Tadesse Tele Salvano. General Taddasa had repeatedly raised, as indicated elsewhere in this work, about the big numerical size of the Oromo people and their lack of real political power. General Taddasa was attempting to influence some of the *Darg* leaders to embrace the cause of the Oromo people but in vain.

[1144] *Ibid.*



Figure 12: General Taddasa and his wife after he returned from Galamsoo.[1145]

According to an informant, some of the key individuals with whom he had strong contact during this decisive period of dealing with the *Darg* were Colonel Hailu Raggaasaa, Major Abebe Gebre Mariyam, Abbaa Biyyaa Abbaa Joobir, the son of Ali Mira and probably many others. It was clear that his family was not happy with these frequent contacts with these individuals out of concern that he would resume his anti-government movement. When he was advised to stop it for the sake of the family, he refused and said, "I cannot sit down when I see what is going on; there should be a change for the Oromo people. My effort should not remain in vain like this. Instead of seeing my effort to become fruitless like this, I prefer to die." At this moment, his wife opposed him saying, "Even if you die, your corpse will not

[1145] In the possession of *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

enter my house." But his response was prophetic when he said, "Do not worry, when I die let my corpse be thrown anywhere."[1146]

Though General Taddasa had strong determination to resist the *Darg*, as indicated above, some written and oral sources claim that he was pushed and persuaded by others to rebel at the wrong time. For example, one of the key members of the *Darg* put the blame on Baaroo Tumsaa for initiating both General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu to rebel against the *Darg*.[1147] According to an informant, General Taddasa was persuaded: "If you go out, people would follow us; the Shawa Oromo would rise so that we could easily overthrow the *Darg*." This informant believes also that General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu were not happy with the rise of junior military officers to power.[1148]

According to another informant, however, Baaroo Tumsaa and other members of the underground Oromo organization advised him not to move out at the time. They insisted that it was better to spread the underground networks first but it seems that he lacked patience. Instead, it is reported that, he criticized them saying,

> *Waggaa torba guutuu ani mana hidhaa keessaa ture maal hojjechaa turtan? Kan waggaa torba keessatti hoomaa hin hojjettiin har'a maal hojjechuu dndeessu? Kana caalaa eeguu hin dandeenyu, jalqabnee ilaalla malee*.
>
> *What were you doing during all the seven years I spent in prison? What can you do now when you are unable to do anything within seven years? We can not wait any longer; we have to start and see it.*[1149]

[1146] *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa. As he predicted, his family has never seen and buried his dead body and was thrown away exactly as he prophesied.

[1147] Fiqre Selassie Wogderes, p.1997.

[1148] *Informant*: Brigadier General Wasihun Nigatu. General Taddasa expected popular rise but the Land Proclamation turned it down.

[1149] *Informant*: Dr Diimaa Noggo.

Though General Taddasa could have lived his own private life by cooperating with the *Darg*, he was reluctant to do so mainly because of his determination to bring a basic political change for the Oromo people.[1150] Hence, he had attempted many alternatives to promote the struggle of the Oromo. According to the account of Major Abebe, he was consulting prominent military officers of Oromo origin over what to do in the ongoing political crisis. He contacted General Abebe Gammadaa, General Jagamaa Kelloo and General Teferi Bantii through Colonel Hailu Raggaasaa and Major Abebe himself. But he got no positive response from all of them. For example, he asked General Abebe Gammadaa:

> *Go and station artilleries on Intoto and Sega Meda and then surround the Ministry of Information with tanks. I would mobilize people starting from Arsii, all the way to Meettaa and Salaalee at once to support you.*[1151]

But he refused to cooperate and said, "እኔ ከንጉሱ ጋር ቃል ክዳን ስላለኝ ቃል ክዳኑን ማፍረስ አልፈልግም።"(Since I do have an oath with the Emperor, I do not want to break it). Surprisingly, however, shortly after this conversation, he was taken to the *Darg* office as a prisoner. In other words, he was arrested on the same day General Taddasa consulted him. General Abebe was one of the sixty high ranking officials of the Imperial regime summarily killed by the *Darg* in November 1974.[1152]

The other military commander consulted by General Taddasa was General Teferi Bantii, who was told:

> *It is our time now. If we do not act at this time, things would slip out of our hand. On my part, I will mobilize people from all regions and in*

[1150] *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

[1151] *Informant*: Major Abebe Gebre Mariyam, an interview on OMN, August 25, 2014. Available on OMN archives. It was Major Abebe who took him to his office.

[1152] *Ibid.* This was before the actual take over of power by the *Darg* in September.

> *your side, you have to take your own solders and do something against them [Darg leaders]. Otherwise, they will not even allow you to live in the future.*[1153]

However, he too was not willing to cooperate and even warned General Taddasa saying, "እኔ መለዮ ለባሹ እና ሰፊዉ ህዝብ የሰጡኝን አደራ ትቼ እንደዚህ ዓይነት ነገር አላደርግም። ሁለተኛ በእንዲህ ዓይነት ነገር ላይ እንዳታናግሩኝ።" (Ignoring the responsibility given to me by the armed forces and the people, I will not do such things. Do not talk to me on such issue again).[1154] The third officer to be consulted was General Jagamaa Kelloo. He too refused to cooperate. General Taddasa was extremely disappointed that he failed to mobilize the support of the Oromo army officers.

Despite the refusal of the military officers, General Taddasa decided to launch a broad based popular resistance against the *Darg.* For this purpose, he had discussed what to do with various concerned Oromo nationals, who agreed to take practical measures and share responsibilities. Accordingly, Colonel Hailu Raggaasaa and *Dajjazmach* Kebede Bizunesh were assigned to mobilize people and create suitable condition between Meettaa, Salaalee and Gindabarat for the eventual show down with the *Darg*. Similarly, Salleessaa Jaalloo and other individuals were sent to Booranaa for similar reasons. Major Abebe claims that he was sent to Wallagga to communicate with Abiyu Galataa to inquire if they needed weapons and other assistances for the inevitable clash with the *Darg*.[1155] The intention of General Taddasa was to continue the armed resistance that he had initiated in the Carcar region but was

[1153] *Ibid.*
[1154] *Ibid.*
[1155] *Ibid.* Major Abebe was secretly working with General Taddasa though he was also a key official of the *Darg*. When he travelled to Wallaggaa and met the governor, Abiyu Galataa, he learnt that in Wallaggaa there were enough weapons but there were no expertise who could train people on how to use the weapons effectively. Based on the request, from Wallaggaa, General Taddasa then sent about six members of the Air Borne Force, who were members of those Oromo soldiers dismissed by General Getachew Nadow, with the mission to train people on how to use the weapons.

crashed when its leader, Elemoo Qilxuu and other fighters were killed. He wanted to establish a new armed resistance in central Shawa and other parts of Oromo territories. According to my informant, his objective was, "Yoo danda'e ofii isaa bilisummaa Oromoo dhugoomsuu yoo dadhabe ammo dhaloota itti qaree darbuu dha" (If he could, he wanted to realize the liberation of the Oromo and if not to mobilize the generation before his death).[1156]

According to the account of Major Abebe, General Taddasa had also discussed with the representative of the US embassy in Ethiopia. Both used to exchange messages through the envoys sent by General Taddasa. The major envoys were Major Abebe, Colonel Hailu and other third person. At the time, the US embassy had only a consul because the Ambassador had left the country. The three messengers of General Taddasa used to go to his house to deliver the messages. It is reported that they were given many promises of American aid which would include installation of communication facilities, ammunition and financial assistances. According to this account, the US embassy representative was also given brief account of how the Oromo people had been suppressed and exploited on their land of birth. The messengers informed the American official that the intention of the Oromo leaders was to establish a democratic system of government in Ethiopia. The American consul is reported to have told them that they would be provided with one hundred thousand US dollars until the US government would send them additional assistance. Moreover, the Consul also insisted that General Taddasa should work with other opposition groups which were working against the *Darg* at the time. Major Abebe claims that General Taddasa refused to take the offer arguing that it was too little for a super power like the United States of America.[1157]

[1156] *Informant: Obbo* Lubee Birru.
[1157] Major Abebe Gebre Mriyam, an interview on OMN, on August 26, 2014.

Even though it is difficult to substantiate the above oral account with written sources, there is a piece of evidence that shows the US diplomatic agents were closely following the movement of General Taddasa. It was revealed by the Wikileaks that the US Diplomatic and Intelligence Services knew that General Taddasa was trying to make armed resistance in the period between 1973 and 1976. This was beginning from the time when he established armed resistance in the Carcar region while he was in banishment in Galamsoo. Therefore, the US officials knew about his escape from Galamsoo, his return to the capital and preparation for armed resistance in Shawa. In general, the US diplomatic sources knew of his rebellion, capture and execution by the *Darg* and the impact of his loss on the Oromo movement.[1158] It seems that the US was interested in the movement of General Taddasa.

In general, having laid down the preconditions for the beginning of armed struggle inside the Oromo inhabited territories, his intention was to go abroad and seek military and financial assistances for what he had planned inside. Towards this end, he also made an extensive discussion with Ali Mirah, the Sultan of Afar, and his son Anfare on how to coordinate their activities and move out of the country to seek support for their plan.[1159] Anfare used to meet many of the opponents of the *Darg*, including General Taddasa. He appreciated General Taddasa for his bravery and determination and used to make contacts with him. When he went to Somalia earlier, he informed the Somali authorities about these qualities of General

[1158] Jawar Mohammed, "Wikileaks Files on the Oromo Movement under the Leadership of General Taddasa Birru and Colonel Hailu Regasa," posted by Madda Walaabuu Press, 04/09/ 2013. The file also indicates that the eventual capture of General Taddasa Birru was a big blow to the Oromo resistance as it would take time for them to get his likes.

[1159] Aramis Umed Sule, p.126. The relationship with Sultan Ali Mirah had started in 1965 when he was approached through Abba Biyyaa Abbaa Joobir to help the activities of the MTSHA. The Sultan was very positive and was willing to meet with the leading members of the MTSHA. Accordingly, he met with General Taddasa Birru and *Dajjazmach* Kebede Bizunesh and discussed how to create a strong relationship between the Oromo and the Afar people. They also discussed how to improve the administrative system of the Ethiopian government.

Taddasa. They requested Anfare to take General Taddasa to Somalia so that they could discuss with him.[1160]

However, since the *Darg* had suspected that General Taddasa could organize and lead Oromo resistance, it had assigned security agents to follow his activities closely. Moreover, some of those individuals who appeared to be anti-*Darg* and used to engage in some secret discussions with them later joined the *Darg* and it was feared that they could leak secrets. Anfare obtained reliable information that the *Darg* was going to take measure against them, including General Taddasa and was forced to cancel the specified date of their travel to Somalia together. Now, Anfare informed General Taddasa through the telephone line that was known to the security agents that their departure to Somalia was postponed for fifteen days. However, Anfare left for Somalia that evening.[1161]

It is reported that General Taddasa had intended to leave the country with Major Abebe Gebre Mariam. According to the plan, Abbaa Biyyaa Abbaa Jobir would take both of them up to the Awash River and hand them over to Ali Mirah. Then they would proceed together eventually to the Arab countries or Somalia to seek military and financial assistance for the planned struggle against the *Darg*. In the meantime, however, it is reported that Abbaa Biyyaa informed General Taddasa that since he was ordered to go to Jimmaa immediately for a duty, he could not take him as planned. Moreover, General Taddasa and his companions were pressed before preparing another option when the *Darg* dispatched an order prohibiting free movement of people. For this purpose, it stationed soldiers at various check points or

[1160] Aramis Umed Sule, pp. 112-113. According to this source, the Somali authorities were already helping the Oromo group called the Somali Abbbo but still the Somali wanted a strong Oromo leadership who cloud mobilize the people behind them. At the time they had the intention to consider the Oromo Abbo as part of the Somali.

[1161] *Ibid.*

kellas. The logistics department of the *Darg*, the office of Major Abebe, was also ordered to fuel all the military vehicles immediately. It was feared that the *Darg* was preparing to make an operation to arrest General Taddasa and his close associates within the *Darg*.[1162]

In the middle of this development, it was learnt that the close companions of General Taddasa, Colonel Hailu Raggaasaa and Major Abebe Gebre Mariam, were targeted. Both were ordered to return all government weapons in their hands. More specifically, Colonel Hailu was ordered that, "When you came from Ogaden, you did not return government properties in your hands. Therefore, you have to go there quickly and return the properties".[1163] Major Abebe on his part was ordered to return all the properties in his hands and go to the Ministry of Health, where he was assigned as an ombudsman officer. Major Abebe understood clearly that he and his colleagues were under close security follow up. This was confirmed to him through one of the intelligence officers he knew. The intelligence officer, Major Niguse Haile, used to give him tangible information on what was plotted at the back of the Oromo officers and told him that they were all going to be arrested soon together with General Taddasa. It was upon receiving this information that they decided to leave the city immediately.[1164] It was feared that the *Darg* was going to kill them.[1165]

It is reported that the threat against them was also confirmed to them by Taye Mamo, an Oromo officer in the Ministry of Interior. It is reported that he warned them: "Akka horiititti bakka ciiftanitti qalamtuu? Kunoo akka qabamtan ajaji darbee xalayaan ba'ee jira anuu ija

[1162] Abebe Gebre Mariyam, an interview on OMN, on August 25, 2014. Since General Taddasa had full confidence on Abbaa Biyyaa, he did not prepare a contingency plan or other alternatives. It seems that this was also connected to Anfare's telephone message to him there was something prepared against him.

[1163] Initially, he came from Ogaden and was assigned to teach in the Holata Military Academy. It was from here that he was transferred to the "Special Military Tribunal" as its deputy president. It was while working here that he closely worked with General Taddasa and Baaroo Tumsaa.

[1164] Abebe Gebre Mariyam, an interview on OMN, on August 25, 2014.

[1165] *Informants*: *Obbo* Abera Mekonnen, *Obbo* Gugsaa Mekonnen.

koon argeera" (Do you want to be slaughtered like an animal where you sleep? Order has been given for your arrest and I have seen a letter that is just prepared). My informant claims that he had met both General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu when they were leaving the city. He emotionally recalls that General Taddasa called him to his presence and said: "Kottuu nadhungadhu, isin hoomaa keessa hin galtan, qumnagara hin qabdan."(Come and kiss me, you are nothing and you do not have any value). My informant reacted that he would be ready to accomplish whatever was expected of him if given direction and guidance. Probably General Taddasa was referring to the fact that my informant was not part of the secret decision made to move out to challenge the *Darg* and he was indirectly telling him that there was something going on which he did not know. When my informant went to his office around Abune Petros Square, he met Colonel Hailu who also requested to kiss him. When my informant inquired the reason, he was told: "I want to go to somewhere; if it is the will of God, we will meet again but if not I want to say goodbye."[1166]

Colonel Hailu moved to Hoolataa immediately; picked up his weapons and then proceeded to Ada'aa Bargaa and Meettaa Roobii districts. He joined *Dajjazmach* Kebede at Incinni town and their intention was to mobilize people and wage popular resistance against the *Darg*.[1167] General Taddasa and Major Abebe also followed them to Ada'aa Bargaa. General Taddasa was taken up to Menagesha town by Terefe Qadiidaa because Major Abebe feared that in

[1166] *Informant*: *Obbo* Hailu Gebru. Shortly before General Taddasa and his team moved out, Colonel Hailu Raggaasaa, Takka Tulluu, Hailu Gebru and others gathered people at Shinoo and Incinni towns and discussed that there were no social services such as road, school, clinic and others in the region of Ada'aa Bargaa and Meettaa. However, there was a slight disagreement among them on the direction of the road that was to be constructed from Hoolataa to Minaaree whether to take the line of Hoolataa –Incinnii-Minaaree or Hoolataa-Shinoo-Minaaree. Colonel Hailu is said to have taken a neutral position and promised to donate his salary for whatever line the road would take.

[1167] Abebe Gebre Mariyam, an interview on OMN, on August 25, 2014.

case he was pursued by the security forces, General Taddasa could also be captured with him. From Menagesha, both travelled to Incinnii by fueling their car at Hoolataa.[1168]

On the last day he left the capital, General Taddasa had an appointment with my informant. Early in the morning, my informant claims, he made a telephone call and asked her whether she had seen any dream or not. Then he told her that he could not meet her because he had to travel to Adaamaa immediately with other persons. Instead, he assured her that Terefe Qadiidaa would come to meet her. When Terefe Qadiidaa arrived later, she observed that he was very much disturbed. When she insisted to know where her father travelled to, he replied, "I do not know where he went but he went with the Oromo."[1169]

As indicated earlier, the initial intention of General Taddasa was not to move to the western direction but he had no option as he was pursued by the security forces. This direction was, however, preferred in order to get protection and passage to the western Oromo territories. When they reached Incinnii, *Dajjazmach* Kebede had already disarmed the police; took control of the police station and allowed the abuse of some police members. Colonel Hailu and *Dajjazmach* Kebede disagreed over this measure when General Taddasa and Major Abebe reached Incinnii. When General Taddasa asked why they looted the police station, *Dajjazmach* Kebede argued that they should arm themselves. But General Taddasa objected the action arguing that it could attract the attention of the *Darg*. Colonel Hailu also put the

[1168] *Ibid.* The owner of the gas station, an Eritrean, suspected them and asked, "Dubbiin keechan natti hin miidhagne Kolonel Hailunis kunoo shaffatee, uummata fidee kaampii weeraruuf jedhanii kunoo wattaaddarri boolla qotataa jira."(I am not happy with your situation, Colonel Hailu has also rebelled and forced the soldiers to dig trenches because they feared that he would mobilize the people and invade the camp.

[1169] *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa. Adaamaa was raised probably to deceive the security forces about the direction of his movement.

blame on *Dajjazmach* Kebede for his failure to bring the weapons he had given to him earlier to Meettaa and other selected locations.[1170]

General Taddasa also ordered the confiscation of weapons in the Shinoo Police Station of Meettaa Roobii since it had once started at Incinnii. The team led by Colonel Hailu and Major Abebe carried out the operation. It seemed that they were in control of the two districts of Ada'aa Bargaa and Meettaa Roobii for a few days. During this short period, they organized the people and ambushed the police stations; confiscated weapons, looted government offices and armed the local people. They made an announcement on the market day at Incinnii town: "Har'aa jalqabee Dargiitti hin buliinaa akkuma Xaaliyaanii lolle sanatti lollee ofirraa hariinaa"(From today on refuse to be ruled under the *Darg;* as we did to the Italians we fight and chase them[the *Darg*] too.[1171] The rebels asked people to join them as fighters and General Taddasa addressed the crowd at Incinnii saying:

> *Hacuuccaan ammallee saba keenyarraa hin buune. Mootummaan Haile Selassie jigus namooti walqindeesssanii aangootti dhufan mirga Oromoo warra eegsisu miti. Kanaaf, hanga yoomiitti dhiitamnee teenya? Kanaan booddee naannoo keenya kan bulchu, kan to'atu nuyi waan ta'eef ajaja qaama biraa akka hin fudhanne.*
>
> *Our people have not been relieved of subjugation still. Even though the government of Haile Selassie collapsed those who came to power cannot respect the rights of the Oromo people. Therefore, how long do we live under subjugation? Here after since we are administering and*

[1170] Major Abebe Gebre Mariyam, an interview on OMN, on August 25, 2014 The *Darg* used to collect what it called illegal weapons from different individuals and before these weapons were registered, Major Abebe used to pick and give to Colonel Hailu. Colonel Hailu in turn used to bring them to Hoolataa when he returned from office every evening in the name of protecting himself. After bringing to Hoolataa, he handed the weapons to *Dajjazmach* Kebede who was given the responsible to take them to Meettaa and hide in other suitable areas for later use. However, *Dajjazmach* Kebede gave the weapons to one his loyal followers around Hoolataa and did not take them when he moved to Incinnii. This was why he insisted on the disarmament of the police and the looting of the police station. At Incinnii, when Colonel Hailu asked him about the weapons he told him that they were left behind in Hoolataa. This was the basic source of dispute between the two. Colonel Hailu did not expect *Dajjazmach* Kebede to commit such a mistake at this critical moment while *Dajjazmach* Kebede was offended by the reaction of Colonel Hailu and proceeded to Meettaa leaving both at Incinnii.

[1171] *Informant*: *Obbo* Mekonnen Mamo.

> *controlling our own area, you should not accept any order from other body [except from us].*[1172]

General Taddasa repeatedly raised the issue of Oromo subjugation under the successive Ethiopian regimes and said: "Sabni Oromoo mirga dhabee baddalamee jiraata; kan dhufu hundumtuu saba kana irratti sirbuu malee kan saba kanaaf dhaabbatu hin jiru"(The Oromo nation lives under subjugation without any rights; all those who came to power have never worked and stood for the people instead of dancing over it).[1173]

From Incinnii town they crossed the Jigaa River and ascended to the hill of Incinnii Guddichaa and spent a few days in the compound of Mamo Sorsuu, where they encouraged the local people to rebel and fight the *Darg*. Here on Incinnii Guddichaa, they began to give military training to the peasants, especially on how to shoot a target. Taye Mamo was one of the key organizers of the Incinni gathering with others.[1174] Leaving behind Taye Mamo and others in Incinnii to continue the popular mobilization, General Taddasa, Colonel Hailu, Major Abebe and other followers proceeded to Meettaa for similar activities. They moved to Meettaa and did the same thing. People welcomed them, followed, fed, accommodated and directed them to other destinations.[1175]

The *Darg* was seriously disturbed by the rebellion of these military officers because they were important and influential. All of them were Oromo from Shawa who had the potential to mobilize large number of followers near the capital. Colonel Hailu knew the secrets of the

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[1172] *Informant*: *Obbo* Teshome Saffisaa.
[1173] *Informant*: *Obbo* Hailu Gebru Jimaa.
[1174] *Informants*: *Obbo* Mekonnen Mamo, *Obbo* Tulluu Biqilaa, *Obbo* Hailu Gebru. Incinnii Guddicha was a strategic site from where earlier Mamo Sorsu, *Dajjazmach* Kebede and others fought against the Italians. Those prominent individuals who were present at Incinnii included General Taddasa, *Dajjazmach* Kebede, Colonel Hailu, Major Abebe Gebre Mariam, Taye Mamo, Teklu Tesema and others.
[1175] *Informant*: *Obbo* Teshome Safisa.

Darg and was a successful campaign officer and was a native of Meettaa. General Taddasa was even more important because he was regarded as a leader and symbol of Oromo resistance. It was mainly for this reason that during its propaganda campaign against the rebels, the *Darg* refused to mention the name of General Taddasa for fear of counter mobilization, sympathy and support.[1176]*Dajjazmach* Kebede was also an old patriot who was well known for his reputation of resisting the Fascist Italians in the region during the five years Italian occupation.[1177] It was these individuals who had started to challenge the *Darg*.

It seems that soon after General Taddasa and his companions left the capital, the *Darg* deployed large number of spies to follow them and identify their whereabouts clearly. Even though General Jagamaa Kelloo was accused by some informants to be responsible for exposing their location to the *Darg*[1178]; it is difficult to substantiate this accusation with tangible evidence. According to another informant, instead of General Jagamaa Kelloo, it was Takka Tulluu, a key member of the *Darg* and a closer friend of Colonel Hailu and General Taddasa, who was implicated. Soon after their departure, he was closely following their movement from the very beginning. Takka was expected to follow them in the resistance struggle but eventually it did not happen. It is reported that Takka sent a certain Legesse Gammadaa to Meettaa because he was very much concerned about his pistol which Colonel Hailu took and went away.[1179]

[1176] Major Abebe Gebre Mariam, an interview on OMN, on August 26, 2014.
[1177] *Informant*: General Wasihun Nigatu.
[1178] *Informant*: *Aadde* Foolii Gorbaa.
[1179] *Informant*: *Obbo* Hailu Gebru Jimaa. Takka feared that in case Hailu was captured with the pistol, Mengistu would kill him because he knew that it belonged to Takka. As a result, it is reported that Takka sent secretly a former school teacher, Legesse Gammadaa, to the area. Legesse soon began to imprison and torture the local people for hosting General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu which forced many of them to flee. Some of those who ran away from Lagesse went to the capital for protection and my informant met them there. They told him that, "Kunoo Laggasa Gammadaa biyya balleechee; guyyaa dhokachaa oollee halkan adeemnee

My informant who was working in the Ministry of Information attempted to know who authorized and sent Legesse Gammadaa to the area to terrorize people. He initially met the Security Chief of the Menagesha *awraja,* who told him that he did not know the name Legese at all let alone deploying him. Then he went to the Shewa Province Police Chief and received the same response. He then went to the office of Tesfaye Wolde Selassie, the Security Chief of all the provinces under the Ministry of Interior. Tesfaye picked up the list of all those sent to the various districts but Legesse Gammadaa was not found in any list. Finally, Tesfaye made a telephone call to Takka and contacted him with my informant, who claims to have told Takka:

> *We do not know who sent a certain Legese Gammadaa; he is gathering people, imprisoning and beating them. Some of them fled to the bush while others came to Addis Ababa for appeal and they are now with me.*[1180]

It is possible to understand from the response of Takka that he had sent Legesse to the area when he said:

> *Those who fled to the bush cannot go anywhere, they will return. Those who were imprisoned were not imprisoned without committing any crime and it will be verified. Listen to what I tell you now. Send back those whom you said came to Addis Ababa immediately before any measure is taken against them on the ground that rebels came to Addis Ababa.*[1181]

Moreover, on the third day after General Taddasa left the city, Takka made a telephone call to his house and told my informant: "Since your father was seen on the way to Amboo

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dhufne"(Since Legesse Gammadaa is terrorizing the people; we hid ourselves during the day and arrived here travelling in the night).

[1180] *Informan*t: *Obbo* Hailu Gebru.

[1181] *Ibid.* According to Andargachew Tiruneh (2004: 167-168), Major Takka Tulluu was one of the prominent members of the Darg. He was the chairman of the Security Office of the *Darg*.

mobilizing people with *Dajjazmach* Kebede, you have to convince him to return."[1182] From the above discussions, it is possible to see that Takka Tulluu was closely following the route of General Taddasa's movement and it was with this understanding that the security forces were deployed in this region at his footsteps. It can be argued that though some oral informants accuse General Jagamaa Kelloo of spying their whereabouts and giving information to the *Darg*[1183], it was Takka Tulluu who was implicated.

From Incinnii they moved further west to Meettaa and made public gatherings at different locations including Shinoo, Gilee, Tulluu Qacamaa and Gooroo Maakoo. Their major centre before they moved to Gooroo Maakoo was Gilee, the village of the family of Colonel Hailu. Here, it is important to make few remarks on Colonel Hailu because he was one of the key companions of General Taddasa to resist the *Darg* and was executed with him as well. Colonel Hailu was not deterred by the high position given to him to join this resistance. Colonel Hailu was born in Meettaa Roobii and his original name was Mo'aa while Haile Michael was his baptismal name from which Hailu was derived when he entered school. After completing his school, he was enrolled in the Hoolataa Military Academy and received military training. He was then assigned to Hararghe as a military officer where he served as a member of the imperial army. While in Hararghe he used to oppose some of the injustices within the military administration, especially during appointments, promotions and

[1182] *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

[1183] *Informant*: *Aadde* Foolii Gorbaa. She was the mother of Colonel Hailu and strongly put the blame for exposing her son and General Taddasa on General Jagamaa Kelloo. However, though General Jagamaa was the commander of the Territorial Army at the time, there is no evidence to show that General Jagamaa was responsible.

deployments. This was probably one reason why he was assigned to the remote area of Ogaden.[1184]

Even in Ogaden, he continued to challenge this situation. For example, in the meeting of military officers held under the chairmanship of General Haile Baykedagn in the Ogaden Hotel, he complained that those army officers in Ogaden were forgotten and denied any opportunity of promotion. He insisted that they had suffered from the harsh sun and dust while those in the capital were enjoying themselves with good automobiles and comfortable life. He argued that their condition was tantamount to punishment. But General Haile refused to answer his complaints directly and argued that Colonel Hailu was influenced by Major Mengistu Haile Mariam to raise such kind of questions.[1185]

While he was still in Ogaden, Colonel Hailu was wounded on his left hand during the fighting with the Somali forces and was admitted to hospital for medical treatment. While he was receiving medical treatment in hospital, the Emperor visited him and asked him, "ምን እንድናደርግልህ ትፈልጋለህ?"(What do you want us to do for you?). When he replied that he wanted nothing, the Emperor was reported to have been offended and asked other officers what Hailu wanted. The Emperor was told that he wanted promotion. Shortly, he was promoted to the rank of Captain which enabled him to move ahead of his course team.[1186] For example, when Captain Mengistu disseminated a protest paper in 1963 *A.M* (1970/1971)

[1184] *Informant*: Foolii Gorbaa. His parents were known locally as *Abbaa Mo'aa (Father of Mo'aa)* and *Haadha Mo'aa (Mother of Mo'aa)*. It was when he was baptized at the St. Michael Orthodox Church of Dhalataa that he was given a christen name of Haile Michael. His family was even not aware of the name change at school, and later when they went to the Hoolataa Military Academy to greet him, they were told that there was noone known as Mo'aa in the military compound.

[1185] Major General Mardasa Lelisa, *Ye'Itiyopiyawinete Tiwusta*, (Addis Ababa, 2008 *A.M*), p.42.

[1186] *Informant*: Brigadier General Wasihun Nigatu.

because he was denied a promotion to the rank of Major, Hailu had already reached the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. [1187]

Colonel Hailu was one of the active members of the MTSHA from among the members of the military and was a deputy chairman of the Hararge branch.[1188] General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu even came closer when the first was imprisoned in Harar. It was during this time that General Taddasa was reported to have influenced him saying: "Educate your own area, establish schools and build roads. What have you contributed for your people apart from serving as a soldier?).[1189]

Later on, Colonel Hailu was transferred to the Hoolataa Military Academy as an instructor and commander of the Academy. There he used to advise the newly enrolled Oromo candidates to speak their own language, educate their own brothers and sisters and to strengthen their unity. In the meantime, when the Imperial regime collapsed and the *Darg* took power, his colleagues, whom he knew in Hararge, especially Major Mengistu Haile Mariam, emerged as key leaders of the *Darg*. Thus they asked him to work with them. Accordingly, he was assigned as vice president of the Military Tribunal which was established to try former officials of the imperial regime.[1190]

However, differences began to emerge between Colonel Hailu and the other leaders of the *Darg*. One difference was related to the issue of land in which he was said to have the same view with General Taddasa that the land should be restored to the Oromo peasants, not necessarily to the tillers. However, when he insisted he was warned. This was before the

[1187] *Ibid*. He was wounded while chasing *Dajjazmach* Mektel in Ogaden. Colonel Hailu and Major Mengistu were close friends and the same course. He was a brilliant campaign officer.
[1188] Olana Zoga, pp. 63, 90.
[1189] I*nformant*: *Aadde* Foolii Gorbaa.
[1190] *Informants*: *Aadd*e Foolii Gorbaa, Brigadier General Wasihun Nigatu.

Land Proclamation of the *Darg* in early March 1975. Another issue was related to the case of Eritrea in which it was suggested that development activities should be carried out in the region to appease the Eritreans. Then Colonel Hailu is reported to have raised that Oromo region also needed development works when he said:

> *Those of us who are here, our peasants have a number of problems. They do not have their own land, economy and education. In order to get these services, should we have to do like them [the Eritreans]? Can't we get them through peaceful means?*[1191]

Earlier in the month of November, after the *Darg* came to power, Colonel Hailu went to his home region and updated the people on the direction of the new political development.[1192] It was due to his growing contradiction with the key leaders of the *Darg* that Colonel Hailu joined General Taddasa, with whom he had already contacts, to resist the *Darg*. Having said this briefly on him, we now turn to the earlier discussion of General Taddasa's movement from Incinnii to Meettaa.

When they reached the village of Gilee, they gathered people and said: "Hoolata irraa loltuu fi meeshaan waraanaa nuuf dhufa. Kanaaf, qawweefi rasaasii isniif kennama waan ta'eef loltuu ta'aa lolaa"(From Hoolataa soldiers and weapons would come for us. Therefore, since we give you guns and bullets join as fighters). The people responded positively. While they were holding a meeting as usual in the village of Gilee, it is reported that, a messenger came with a letter that requested them to return. According to informants the letter was presumably sent from Major Mengistu Haile Mariam and its main content was: "Come back so that we can negotiate and settle our differences. We planned it together; do not betray us

[1191] *Informant*s: *Aadde* Foolii Gorbaa, *Obbo* Teshome Raggaasaa.

[1192] *Informant*: *Aadd*e Kibitu Raggaasaa. He told them that: "Ofiin of bulchitu, gabrummaa jalaa baatu, baradhaa, raadiyoo bitadhaa waan jiru dhaggeeffadhaa"(You administer yourself, you will be free of subjugation, you have to get educated, buy radio and listen to what is going on).

and go away, you will regret."[1193] After discussing the contents of the letter, General Taddasa is said to have reacted:

> *We once came out of our home for the sake of justifiable cause; if it is the will of God we will survive otherwise we do not care if we die. We once came out not to be ruled under these liars and there is no reason to return.*[1194]

While sending a letter of negotiation, however, the *Darg* had deployed military commandos to the area, including the Mogor valley and other key routes along which they could move.[1195] General Taddasa and his companions spent about a week here during which they travelled back to Incinnii and other areas to hold public meetings. During this period, according to my informant, they refused to eat meat not to create a fertile ground for the government propaganda. They said:

> *Do not slaughter animals and even chicken for us because the Darg can propagate and accuse us that thieves are moving inside the countryside and slaughtering the cattle of peasants. We do not want our names to be spoiled in this way; avoid giving us meat.* [1196]

In Meettaa, they made declaration of "Land to the rightful owners" and advised people to educate their own children. It is reported that *Dajjazmach* Kebede had also redistributed his land in accordance with this declaration.[1197] For further mobilization of the people and for self- defense, they moved to the western part of Meettaa to Gooroo Maakoo. When they moved to Gooroo Maakoo, they left behind a locked box in the house of the family of Colonel Hailu at Gilee. But later the box was buried in the gorge known as Bowwaa Qilliftuu when they were captured. It was full of documents and bullets. Later a certain Kasa

[1193] *Informants*: *Obbo* Tulluu Biqilaa, *Aadde* Foolii Gorbaa, *Obbo* Dibaabaa Waaqtolaa, *Obbo* Ajjamaa Jiidhaa.
[1194] *Ibid.*
[1195] *Ibid.*
[1196] *Informant*: *Aadde* Foolii Gorbaa.
[1197] *Ibid.*

Shoollichaa, who found the box, sold the bullets and informed the authorities that the box belonged to Colonel Hailu. The box was finally taken by the governor of Meettaa Roobii, Haile Michael Dammasaa. It is reported that the document contained a list of those individuals who signed to join and support the movement. The list of many women was also found in the document according to informants.[1198]

Gooroo Maakoo was the last base for them to hold popular meeting before their capture. Their temporary base was the residence of Mekonnen Roobii Dabalee. They gathered people and requested them to fight the *Darg*.[1199] In Gooroo Maakoo, they had to convince the people because they had some questions on *Dajjazmach* Kebede. For example, during the discussion in one of the gatherings at Qacamaa participants raised strong questions against *Dajjazmach* Kebede as follows:

> *Earlier when you asked us, we contributed money for the construction of clinics and schools but we do not know where the money has gone. During the Italian occupation our fathers had shed their blood with you. But when you got authority, you refused to greet us and meet our representatives who were sent to you. Why you came to us now?* [1200]

During his patriotic activities and administration of the region, *Dajjazmach* Kebede came to have some opponents who felt mistreated. Now, when he moved to the region during this

[1198] *Informants*: *Aadde* Kibitu Raggaasaa, *Aadde* Foolii Gorbaa. Addunyaa Hurrisaa, the brother in-law of Colonel Hailu, was made responsible to hide the box. But shortly, a cattle keeper found it and a neighbor called Kasa Shoollichaa took it. After a year when Bowwaa Qilliftuu was cracked naturally, Addunyaa Hurrisaa was made responsible because the the crack was caused by the explosives which he received from Colonel Hailu and buried there. He was imprisoned and tortured which forced him to flee to Arsii.

[1199] *Informants*: *Aadde* Lataa Fayyee, *Obbo* Mekonnen Roobii, *Aadde* Foolii Gorbaa. The core members of the movement at Gooroo Maakoo included General Taddasa, *Dajjazmach* Kebede, Colonel Hailu, Major Abebe Gebre Mariyam, Teklu Tesema, Asafa Tufa, *Shambal* Dagife Naqe and others. The Meettaa area, more specifically Gooroo Maakoo, was strategically situated near the common boundaries bounded by Salaalee, Ginda Barat and Mogor valley. It was because of its strategic significance that *Dajjazmach* Kebede exploited the area well during his patriotic resistances against the Italian occupation.

[1200] Major Abebe Gebre Mariyam, an interview on OMN, on August 25, 2014.

critical moment, strong questions were expected. General Taddasa was said to have intervened and reacted to the questions arguing:

> *This is not the case, I, myself, was released from prison just recently. Even if they called him Dajjazmach and sent him to Adoolaa, he had suffered a lot there. When people went to his house, the authorities used to spy and follow him. That was not good for you as well and he did it not for your hatred but for your own safety.*[1201]

It seems that people were aware of the consequences of the movement. For example, an elder known as Shawaye Buttaa asked *Dajjazmach* kebede that: "Yaa Abbaa Marzoo duratti Xaaliyaanii yeroo lama nugubsiifte ammas jara kana nugubsiisuuf adeemtaa?"(Abbaa Marzoo [calling him in his horse name] earlier you provoked the Italians to burn us twice and now, are you making these guys [the *Darg* authorities] to burn us again?). When he was told that fighting would not take place in Meettaa but in Walamaraa, the elder was reported to have agreed and willing to participate personally in the fighting. Eventually, General Taddasa was able to calm the audience and mobilize the people behind the movement. On that day, capable fighters were selected in large number from among the participants and preparations began to be made for the battle of Walmaraa.[1202]

A big feast was prepared for the gathering in the compound of Roobii Dabalee in a local village called Gafaree. A big meeting was held on Sunday, a few days before their capture, in the nearby Tulluu Gooroo, just above the house of Roobii Dabalee. They asked for the recruitment of capable persons as fighters and when explaining their objective and just cause, General Taddasa told the crowd:

> *We do not give our country; we have to fight not to die again. At this moment, we do not have land and other properties in our hands. Since*

[1201] *Ibid.*
[1202] *Informant*: *Obbo* Lataa Fayyee.

> *we have nothing, we have to fight back. If we Oromo ascend the Egduu Mountain and urinate, our urine alone can wash away the Amhara oppressors*.[1203]

Moreover, General Taddasa was able to reconcile *Dajjazmach* Kebede and Colonel Hailu, after earlier misunderstanding at Incinnii, and the crowd vowed to stand together against the *Darg*. Then General Taddasa gave an order that informers should be planted with horses at different locations with certain intervals up to Hoolataa to inform them quickly when soldiers were dispatched from Holataa against them. But the order was not put into effect as many of the participants had returned home after the event for preparations.[1204]

8.2 The Capture and Execution of General Taddasa

It was while the preparation at Meettaa was under way hurriedly that the *Darg* mobilized huge force to crush the movement before its consolidation. According to an informant, "While we were preparing to fight, they came against us". The *Darg* soldiers approached the area with local guiders committing huge devastation; burning houses and killing people. Several soldiers were deployed to Ada'aa Bargaa and Meettaa Roobii districts in order to capture or kill the rebels. They surrounded the house of the family of Colonel Hailu and burned the car they had hidden in the straw. They accused his mother of hosting what they called the enemies of the revolution.[1205]

They also burnt the house of Kuusaa Yaadatee and killed three individuals, including Galataa Ayyaanee, a mentally sick person, when he questioned the soldiers why they burnt the house. Earlier, General Taddasa and other followers spent a night here before they moved to the house of Roobii Dabalee. The house of Tolaa Abbaa Baacaa was also burnt. It was observed

[1203] *Informants*:*Obbo* Lataa Fayyee, *Obbo* Giddoo Mo'aa .
[1204] Major Abebe Gebre Mariyam, an interview on OMN, on August 25, 2014.
[1205] *Informans*: *Aadde* Foolii Gorbaa, *Obbo* Mekonnen Roobii, *Obbo* Dibaabaa Waaqtolaa.

that the houses of those who accommodated, provided and accompanied them were all burnt down. It is reported that soldiers were also firing on those whom they found on their way.[1206]

It was while General Taddasa and others were still in the residence of Roobii Dabalee that soldiers were deployed against them. General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu had left the house in the early morning because they had an appointment with people from other villages. While *Dajjazmach* Kebede and Major Abebe remained around the compound, discussing what to do and observing the topography of the area, Teklu Tesema arrived galloping on a horse to tell them that a big force was mobilized against them. After a short while the house of Roobii Dabalee was attacked with heavy weapon fired from a distance. The soldiers placed heavy machine gun on a place called Hullufoo and fired in the direction of Tuulluu Gooroo or Qarree Gooroo. This was where the public gathering was made the previous day. Upon reaching Gafaree or Muka Guutuu, they burnt the house of Roobii Dabalee with stored grains over years.[1207]

Soon major fighting broke out around the house of Roobii Dabalee between the government forces and the resistance fighters. The fighting continued from the early morning to midday. It was in this fighting that Teklu Tesema was shot and killed. *Dajjazmach* Kebede and Major Abebe with their few followers continued the fighting. But when they were overwhelmed, they were forced to descend to the inaccessible terrain and eventually escaped.[1208]

Since Roobii Dabalee was an old man who could not run away unlike others, the soldiers found him around and beat him to death. They torched him for inviting what they called anti-revolution or anti-mass elements. While they were beating him he is reported to have said in

[1206] *Ibid.*
[1207] *Ibid.*
[1208] Major Abebe Gebre Mariyam, an interview on OMN, on August 25, 2014

regret of his disability due to old age: "Yaa Ayyaana Dabalee Araddaa osoo akka durii ta'ee taa'ee hin reebamu"(Oh! The protecting spirit of Dabalee Araddaa if it was in the earlier times I should not be beaten being seated). According to informants, during his young age he was unchallengeable person. Eventually, he was unable to recover from the severe beatings and died two years later.[1209]

When the soldiers could not get General Taddasa, Colonel Hailu and other leaders, they dispersed in all directions to pursue them. Widespread killings continued and two individuals, named Badhaadhaa Dabalaa and Alamu Dammasaa were killed at a place called Alaltuu.[1210] It is reported that Teklu Tesema fought bravely before he was killed.[1211] It was when the soldiers threw bombs against the positions of the resistance fighters that they were forced to depart to different directions. Accordingly, *Dajjazmach* Kebede and Major Abebe with few others were able to bend under the covering stones and escaped. Eventually, they were able to escape through Kuruphee and crossed to Gindabarat. Teklu Tesema and my informant moved to another direction. In the words of my informant:

> *We entered under a protective gorge while the Darg soldiers were on top of us. After a short while Teklu Tesema came out of the hiding assuming that the soldiers had left. At this time, however, the soldiers were laying on the ground avoiding any sign of their presence and pointing their guns down against us. When Teklu came out, they shot him below his waist. He fell down but managed to fire against them. When his gun M1 finished bullets he broke it against stone. He took out his pistol and did the same thing until it finished bullet. Then the soldiers finished him of with automatic shooting until his body was pierced with bullets.*[1212]

[1209] *Informants: Obbo* Mekonnen Roobii, *Obbo* Lataa Fayyee, *Obbo* Giddoo Mo'aa. Mekonnen Roobii claims that he remains defiant to this day and has been suffering from its consequences.
[1210] *Ibid.*
[1211] *Informant*: *Aadde* Foolii Gorbaa
[1212] *Informants*: *Obbo* Mekonnen Roobii.

My informant claimed to have watched this event from a short distance away, still in hiding, but he could do nothing to help him. The soldiers came down and took away his dead body because they assumed that it was the body of Colonel Hailu. Since the soldiers did not know Colonel Hailu physically, they were happy to kill him and took his dead body to show it to *Darg* leaders. They also took away the dead bodies of other soldiers.[1213]

On their way back, the soldiers forced the mother of Colonel Hailu to come and see the dead body of her son. The commander of the soldiers boasted to her that they had killed her son who became the 'enemy of the people'. But she became emotional and said, "Ilmi koo akka keessan miti inni goota kan biyyaaf xaaru, baga harka keessanitti hinqabamiin baga du'e ilil" (My son is not like you, he is a patriot who was tirelessly working for the country, I am happy that he did not fall into your hands). However, though they expected her to weep and become grieved, she became happy that her son was martyred and did not fall into their hands alive. But she was infuriated when she saw from a distance a burnt body laying on the ground. She became emotional and took the neck of the commander saying:

> A*ti dhiiga dibachuun kee ilma kiyya ajjeefteetii? Isa Sumaaleenuu keechaa dhiiga fixxee. Jedhi ana na ajjeesi, ilma haadharaa'u jedheen siliqsee qabadhe. Kan akkanaan ani hudhee qabadherraa wattaaddarri nafuudhee ilaa nadhidhiiti kaa, nacaccabsi kaa lafatti narra adeemanii najjeesan.*
>
> *Is it by killing my son that you anoint yourself with blood? The Somali had already drained his blood. I said 'idiot, kill me' and took his neck. When I took his neck giving him no breath other soldiers snatched me away, put me on the ground, and kicked me severely.*[1214]

[1213] *Ibid.* My informant surrendered few days later when he was persuaded by others to do so because the soldiers announced to destroy and confiscate all properties of those fugitives. After initial pardon, however, he was sentenced to eight years in prison.

[1214] *Informant*: *Aadde* Foolii Gorbaa. Shortly, it was found that it was not the body of Colonel Hailu but that of Teklu Tesema, the deputy governor of Meettaa Roobii district.

When she returned home, seven houses were burnt down to ash and there was nothing left. In her own words: "Hoomtuu hin hafne; handaanqoon mukarra teessi, sareen muka jala ciifti" (There was nothing left; a hen was sitting on a tree while a dog was sleeping under it). The seven houses were the main house, kitchen, granary, guest house and separate houses for oxen, calves and horses. She claimed that she attempted to commit suicide more than twice when she observed the destruction but was rescued by those who closely watched her. [1215] Having done this, the soldiers proceeded to Incinnii still believing that Colonel Hailu was dead. It was after they reached Incinnii town that the soldiers learnt that the dead body they were carrying was not that of Colonel Hailu but of Teklu Tesema[1216], a deputy governor of Meettaa Roobii district. They were told this by a certain Abate Girshaa who knew both individuals very well. At this point they dropped it at Incinni and returned to Gooroo Maakoo.[1217]

Informants have different versions, regarding how General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu departed from *Dajjazmach* Kebede and Major Abebe just before their capture. There are two different views. The first view is that when the soldiers began to attack the area of Gooroo Maakoo, *Dajjazmach* Kebede asked both of them to cross to Gindabarat providing them with guiders known as Raggaasaa Gissoo and Tesema Ayyaanee. General Taddasa made them to take *kakaa* or oath not to betray them before they started their journey. According to this view, it was these peasants who eventually betrayed them arguing that: "Isiniif jecha mitii balaan kun kan nurra ga'aa jiru, nu balleechuuf jettuu? Lafa Mangistiin nuuf kennee maal barbaanna?" (Isn't it because of you that we are devastated, are you going to make us perish?

[1215] *Ibid.*
[1216] Many of my local informants, however, call him Talkuu Tesema.
[1217] *Informants*: *Aadde* Kibitu Raggaasaa, *Obbo* Teshome Saffisaa.

The government has given us land, what else do we want?). Hence, they captured and handed them over to the security forces to get relief from the destruction of properties and killings carried out against them for collaborating with them.[1218]

According to the second view, which is more reliable, the peasants were manipulated by the security forces, who were also acting as typical local peasants. According to this view, in the early morning before the soldiers attacked the compound of Roobii Dabalee, General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu had left to attend a meeting that would discuss on how to mobilize the surrounding people.[1219] From their temporary base of the compound of Roobii Dabalee, they had travelled about an hour on foot with their guides and other peasant followers to reach a village known as Jogolaa or Laga Madaallee. Jogolaa was the last village before descending down to the Urgaa River.[1220] It is repeatedly raised by informants that the security forces also arranged guides for them and controlled the direction of their movement. In the words of an informant:

> *The soldiers entered the area dressed in the local style. They disguised themselves as peasants wearing ordinary clothes and hats but put short guns under their armpit. They travelled asking people whether they had seen Colonel Hailu and General Taddasa. They captured those who were found carrying guns. They arranged guides for them and moved ahead and waited for them in the gorges where they captured them.*[1221]

According to informants, the local people could not identify them because there were peasants who followed them all the way from Incinnii to Gooroo Maakoo. Among these peasant followers, however, there were members of the special commando forces who integrated themselves into the group and obtained the trust of General Taddasa and other

[1218] *Informants: Obbo* Mekonnen Roobii, *Aadde* Kibitu Raggaasaa, *Aadde* Foolii Gorbaa.
[1219] Major Abebe Gebre Mariam, interview on OMN.
[1220] *Informants*: *Obbo* Mekonnen Roobii, *Obbo* Lataa Fayyee. The river served as a boundary between Meettaa Roobii and Gindabarat, and could take to Salaalee as well.
[1221] *Informants*: *Obbo* Wasihun Bayyeechaa; *Aadde* Kibitu Raggaasaa.

leaders.[1222] According to the account of Major Abebe, the Special Commando forces had infiltrated and made themselves completely inseparable from the local peasants. They were completely dressed like the local Oromo peasants. In his own words:

> *They moved putting on local caps and clothes; hiding their automatic guns under their armpit. They had already moved beyond the house where we spent the previous night. They captured these two individuals while they were discussing with the people. They were captured at the meeting place. Then they ordered them to surrender. General Taddasa asked them to come and take his hand but then he took out his pistol and took the neck of one of them.*[1223]

The deployment of the security forces in the region is also supported by the accounts of the *Darg* officials as well. For example, one of the key leaders of the *Darg*, Fiqre Selassie Wogderes, describes the situation as follows:

> *ጄነራል ታደሰ በአከባቢዉ ሕዝብ የተከበሩና ተደማጭነት ያላቸዉ ስለነበሩ ብዙ ተከታይ አፍርተዉ ከመጠናከራቸዉ በፊት ዕቅዳቸዉን ማምከን አስፈላጊ መሆኑ ታመነበት። የአከባቢዉን ቋንቋና ባህል በሚገባ የሚያዉቁ ኮማንዶዎች ተመረጡ።በባዶ እግራቸዉ መጓዝ ተለማመዱ። የባላገር ልብስ ለብሰዉ፣ ፍጹም ገበሬ በመምሰል በተናጠል የጄነራል ታደሰን ጦር ተቀላቀሉ። ማንም አልጠረጠረም። አምስቱ ኮማንዶዎች ለጄነራሉ ቅርብ መሆናቸዉን ከአረጋገጡና ታማኝነታቸዉም ተቀባይነት ከአገኘ ቦኃላ አንድ ቀን የጄነራሉን አጃቢዎች በኮማንዶ ምት ጥለዉ በጉያቸዉ ደብቀዉ የያዙትን ኡዝ መትረየስ በማዉጣት በጄነራል ታደሰና በኮሎነል ኃይሉ ላይ ደግነዉ "እጅ ወደላይ!" አሏቸዉ።...*
>
> *Since General Taddasa was very respected by the surrounding community, it was decided to stop him before he produced a large number of followers. As a result, those commandoes who knew well the local language and culture were selected. They exercised to travel on bare foot. They wore ordinary clothes, acted like peasants and joined the army of the General individually. Nobody suspected them. One day when the five commandoes were sure that they were closer to the General and when their loyalty was recognized, they attacked the bodyguards of the General with commando hit; picked up the automatic*

[1222] Gada Melba, p.120

[1223] Major Abebe Gebre Mariyam, an interview on OMN, on August 25, 2014. According to Major Abebe, these Special Commando forces were trained in Dire Dawa and were sent to Somalia and Sudan earlier to capture suspects of the government.

> *guns they hidden under their armpit and ordered General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu to surrender.*[1224]

Informants give us their accounts how these disguised commandos eventually captured them as follows:

> *They wore short trousers; hid their Uzi guns under their armpit and travelled dressed like ordinary peasants. They followed the route they took and asked where they were as if they were their followers. When they were told by the peasants who accompanied them, "They are here we want them to take rest", they joined the peasants and captured them under a tree*.[1225]

Thus, some of my informants do not accept the claim of the *Darg* that peasants had captured and handed them over to the security forces. They explain that:

> *In order to deceive the public, those who actually captured them propagated that the two officers were betrayed and captured by those peasants who guided them to the meeting place. For this purpose, they persuaded the peasant guides with the promise of weapons to claim that they had captured and handed them to the security forces. It was the members of the Special Commando who were deployed to the area and disguised as local peasant followers who actually captured both General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu.*[1226]

Some of the local followers who accompanied them to the meeting site included Ajjamaa Jiidhaa, Badhaadhaa Fayisaa, Beegii Dabal, Beyene Belachew and others in addition to the two guides mentioned earlier. The guides put them in the trap of armed peasants, who were actually members of the Special Commando who moved ahead of them and blocked their way. When the two officers were surrounded and captured, these local followers were given signal to disappear since the main target was the two individuals. They were captured in the

[1224] Fiqre Selassie Wogderes, pp. 197-198.
[1225] *Informants*: *Obbo* Tolasaa Kishee, *Obbo* Tulluu Biqilaa.
[1226] *Ibid.*

locality of Looyyaa Jogolaa in Gooroo Maakoo while descending down to the Urgaa River.[1227]

There were two events taking place simultaneously. The first was the open military confrontation between the government soldiers and the resistance fighters led by *Dajjazmach* Kebede and Major Abebe around the compound of Roobii Dabalee, their temporary base. The second one was the movement and capture of General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu. It was while running away from the pressures of the soldiers that *Dajjazmach* Kebede and Major Abebe learnt the capture of General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu. It is reported that when Major Abebe ascended a tree and looked down to the only steeper road in front of him, the soldiers were bringing the two captives up. [1228]

As the topography of the area was very difficult, Major Abebe and *Dajjazmach* Kebede felt that they could not have any route to escape. There was only one route but since that route was already controlled by the security forces they could not return or go forward. They were lucky when they found an elder who told them: "Karaa hundaa yoo deemtan ni qabamtu, karaan tokkichi jiru yoo karaa jaldeessaa buutan qofa"(If you go either way[back or forward] you will be captured. The only way you have is if you take the road of monkeys). They had no option but to take the very difficult route of the monkeys in order to escape from the soldiers chasing them from behind and those soldiers coming in front of them taking General

[1227] *Informant*: *Obbo* Ajjamaa Jiidhaa. He was one of the followers who managed to disappear from the site when they were captured.

[1228] Major Abebe Gebre Mariyam, an interview on OMN, on August 25, 2014. General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu were captured while descending down to the Urgaa River but they were captured in the last village before reaching down the river. If they had reached the river they could either cross to Qacamaa or Ginda Barat or even to Salaalee. It was a deep gorge and forested area that served as heaven for dissidents and rebels.

Taddasa and Colonel Hailu. They faced an extremely difficult terrain as they travelled down to the valley of the Urgaa River.[1229]

There were attempts to free the two captives. When they saw the hands of General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu tied together, two persons, Badhaadhaa Dabalaa and Alamu Dammasaa, cried and attempted to challenge. But both were killed. Other peasants like Bayyeechaa Lataa and Saffisaa Tufaa wept when they saw the two officers with their hands tied and pushed. Both were captured but in the confusion that followed Bayyeechaa Lataa was able to escape while Saffisaa Tufaa was taken as a prisoner with them.[1230] Earlier, a group of other peasants were surrounded and captured at a locality of Walleensuu while attempting to resist following the death of Teklu Tesema. These peasants included Lataa Fayyee, Dabaloo Diggaa, Tarafa Hundee, Dhaabaa Hulata and Tufaa Bantii. Then they were forced to carry the dead body of Teklu Tesema up to Incinnii town.[1231]

After the capture of the two officers, the mother of Colonel Hailu was once again asked to see them because it is reported that Colonel Hailu demanded it. It was indeed his last view of his mother. She saw both of them seated and when she approached General Taddasa, he advised her saying:

> *My mother, a bad time has come. We intended something but we could not escape from this man [Major Mengistu Haile Mariam]. You have to educate your kids with determination. Since your residence has been destroyed, go back and ask people to build a hut over its ash and you have to remain there.*[1232]

[1229] Major Abebe Gebre Mariyam, an interview on OMN, on August 25, 2014.
[1230] *Informant*: *Aadde* Warqinesh Bayyeechaa.
[1231] *Informant*: *Obbo* Lataa Fayyee. They were taken to Addis Ababa and imprisoned initially at the Grand Palace together with General Taddasa for about a week and then transferred to Alem Beqanyi prison.
[1232] *Informant*: *Aadde* Foolii Gorbaa. In that last moment, General Taddasa advised her to educate her children and not to leave her residence despite its destruction.

By controlling his emotions, Colonel Hailu managed to speak to his mother and added:

> *Immaammiye akka gootuu daa'imman kana barsiifadhu. Kan ani barsiifadhe bade, du'e jettee daa'imman kana barsiisuu hin dhiisiin, barsiisi. Waa'ee kaan dhiisiitii daassii naaf godhaa jedhiitii qorqoorroo gubatte sana irra godhadhuu caljedhii taa'i.*
>
> *My mom what you have to do is to educate these children. Do not stop to educate them being discouraged that the one you educated has perished and died. Forget about other things and ask people to build a hut; put on it the partly burned corrugated iron sheets and sit down quietly*.[1233]

After their capture, they were taken to the capital and imprisoned in what was then called the *Fit Ber (*Front Gate*)* of the Grand Palace. Their arrest became now public and a headline news of the existing newspapers, including the *Ethiopian Herald* and *Addis Zemen*. The view of the *Darg* on the causes of their rebellion and how they were captured was expressed in the report of the *Ethiopian Herald* as follows:

> *Brigadier General Taddasa and Lt. Colonel Hailu Regassa together with five of their accomplices were arrested on March 13 by security forces in cooperation with the public for opposing the Ethiopian popular movement and attempting to incite rebellion. They were arrested at the village of Goro Mako in Meta Robi district where they have been hiding for some time. The seven men will appear tomorrow before the Special General court Martial on March 15. They were opposed to the present Ethiopian popular movement and in particular the recent government proclamation nationalizing rural lands. They went into hiding in the attempt to incite on tribal basis to cover their motives. Their place of hiding had been cordoned and sealed off by security men and eventually they were arrested with the help of the inhabitants of Meta Robi… Brigadier General Taddasa was among the political prisoners of the former regime freed by the military government which also instituted his pension rights on the grounds that he was opposed to the former regime and has a progressive outlook. Lt. Colonel Hailu, member of the ground forces, was among the highly educated officers selected to serve with the Special General Court Martial now trying former officials, of which he was its vice president. He was involved in the plot against the popular movement on account of his large land holdings. Major Abebe*

[1233] *Ibid*. Then they departed not to see each other forever because her later attempt to seem them was not successful.

> *Gebre Mariam escaped with 80, 000 birr raised for drought relief purposes.*[1234]

Addis Zemen newspaper also gave similar accounts and blamed the Imperial regime for dividing the Ethiopian people along ethnic lines in order to weaken and rule them. It reflects that it was this division which became the basis for the rebellion of the Oromo military officers. It accused the two prisoners, General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu, for using the ethnic issue as a cover up for their true intention of individual motives. It stated:

> በግል ጥቅም ዓላማ ተመርቶ የነሰ ልዩነትን ለዚሁ ዓላማቸዉ መሸፈኛ በማድረግ በሰፊዉ ህዝብ ጥቅም ላይ አምጸዉ ከሰፊዉ ህዝብ ጉያ ልደበቁ ያፈነገጡት ብርጋድዬር ጀኔራል ታደሰ ብሩና ኮሎኔል ታይሉ ረጋሳ ከአምስት ግብረአበሮቻቸዉ ጋር በህዝቡ ታድነዉና የፍጥኝ ታስረዉ ለመንግስት ተሰጥተዋል።
>
> *Initiated by their private motives using ethnic difference as a cover up, Brigadier General Taddasa Birru and Colonel Hailu Raggaasaa with five of their accomplices rebelled against the interest of the mass but were captured and given to the government with their hands tied while trying to hide among the public.*[1235]

.In general, they were accused of committing various crimes. These included opposition to the Proclamation of Land to the Tiller, stealing of large sums of money, developing a narrow nationalist sentiment and attempting to incite violence on the basis of ethnicity.[1236] They were accused of confusing the peasants and trying to mobilize them in their attempt to fight the *Darg*.[1237] General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu were captured on Wednesday, *Megabit* 3. They were taken to the Grand Palace on the night of the same day. On Thursday, their heads

[1234] *Ethiopian Herald, March 14*, 1975. It adds that another of their accomplices *Ato* Teklu Tessema, deputy administrator of Meta Robi district, was killed during a shootout while resisting arrest.

[1235] *Addis Zemen*: *Megabit* 5, 1967 *A.M*. The newspaper reports that after their hiding place was identified by the security agents, the area was surrounded denying them any route to escape. This fact is also supported by oral sources as indicated earlier. They were accused of being driven by personal ambition, benefit and pleasure and for not helping the peasants when they were exploited and oppressed by the feudal lords under the previous regime. They were depicted as the enemies of the Ethiopian popular movement who would receive their punishments soon. Colonel Hailu was accused of owning huge tracts of land and stealing about 80,000 birr with his accomplice Major Abebe Gebre Mariam.

[1236] Major Abebe Gebre Mariyam, interview on OMN on August 26, 2014. Major Abebe and Colonel Hailu were accused of stealing about 80, 000 *birr*.

[1237] Fiseha Desta, *Abiyotuna Tizitaye*, (Tsehay publishers, 2008 *A..M), pp.*154-155

were shaved and photographed and interrogated by Major Mengistu Haile Mariam and Atnafu Abate. It is reported that both Mengistu and Atnafu came together and questioned them. My informant describes some of the questions of Major Mengistu and the responses of Colonel Hailu as follows:

Mengistu: "Maal sigoonee deemte?"(What wrong we did to you to go [rebel]?)
Hailu: "Maal nagootanan jedhe?"(Did I say anything?)
Mengistu: "Birrii guurtee deemte essa naqxe?"(Where did you put the money you took away?),
Hailu: "Yooman fuudhe?"(When did I take it?)
Mengistu: "Qulfii makiinaa eessa goote?"(Where did you put the key of the car?),
Hailu: "Achuma barbaaddadhaa"(Find it there).[1238]

According to this informant, after a hot debate between the two, Colonel Hailu is said to have reacted to Major Mengistu:

> *You are a person who lives for himself. You do not have the capacity and power to respond to the question of this nation. Your role is to normalize the situation and return to your camp; it is not to take power and rule the country. Now as a matter of chance I fell into your hands, before I accomplish my objective. Here after, since I know as a soldier what a soldier can do when he captures and what will happen to him when captured, there is no secret I tell you even if you surrounded us with guns and threaten us.*[1239]

It is reported that Major Mengistu had also questioned General Taddasa as follows:

> *During the government of Emperor Haile Selassie you were unjustly treated, denied your pension rights and lived in banishment. This government [Darg] has now made you free and respected your pension rights. So what did you lack and why did you enter the forest with weapons to rebel against the mass?*[1240]

[1238] *Informant*: *Obbo* Lataa Fayyee. Since my informant did not know them personally, he asked Colonel Hailu, "Kan hidhii sitti ciniinnate kun eenyu?"(Who is the one who bites his lip against you?). He learnt that it was Colonel Mengistu.

[1239] *Ibid.* My other informant, *Obbo* Teshome Saffisaa, had also heard similar account from his father who was also one of the accomplices.

[1240] *Informant*: *Obbo* Teshome Saffisaa, Colonel Sahilu Birri.

According to my informant, General Taddasa responded to the remarks of Major Mengistu as follows:

> *It is like a story that when the stomach is satiated the head remains empty. Are you asking me 'Why I went to struggle because I am comfortable?' During the Imperial regime you do not know but we have made tremendous effort to enable you count alphabets and get education. When it was said that soldiers should not be educated above grade six because of the fear that they would not be obeyed, we enabled you and your likes to get opportunities to reach your current status. Now, we do have objectives which we may not realize but which our children will achieve. Now, there is nothing I can tell you that this and that is my secret. Instead, I tell you that you should look back to yourself.*[1241]



Figure 13: General Taddasa on the left and Colonel Hailu on the right tied together a few days before their execution.[1242]

Before interrogation, General Taddasa is said to have advised other peasant companions, including my informant, to deny any connection with both of them. He told them:

[1241] *Informant: Obbo* Lataa Fayyee. He was one of the accomplices of General Taddasa and his photo was shown to the public along with the two leading figures.

[1242] Taken from *Addis Zemen* Newspaper, *Megabit* 5, 1967 *A.M.*

> *Since they are going to kill both of us, you have to deny strongly any connection with us if you want to survive. On our part, we will tell them that 'These are ordinary peasants whom we have never seen at all but were brought here simply captured on the way'. On your part, you should also say the same thing and deny any connection with us saying, 'we are peasants and we do not know them at all'; otherwise you will be killed with us'.*[1243]

On Friday, they were interrogated. On Saturday *Megabit* 6, they were brought to the Special Military Court Martial, which sentenced Colonel Hailu to death and General Taddasa to life imprisonment.[1244] The verdict on General Taddasa was reviewed and changed to death. The verdict was opposed by some key leaders of the *Darg*, who brought the case to the Supreme Military Council. The latter established a committee on *Megabit* 7, 1967 *A.M* and ordered the committee members to review his case. The members of the committee who were selected to review his case were Major Berhanu Baye, Captain Fisseha Desta, Hailu Belay, Major Zeleke Beyene, Captain Tefera Deneke and Major Getachew Shibeshi. They soon presented their own pre-determined investigation to the Supreme Military Council which unanimously voted for his execution. General Taddasa was accused as the leader of the Oromo Liberation Organization.[1245]Some of the peasants who were accused as their accomplices were released freely because they denied any connection with the victims as advised by General Taddasa.[1246] Those who were set free were Saffisaa Tufaa, Baanee Shewaye, Asafa Hurrisaa and Niguse Gurmuu.[1247].

[1243] *Informant: Obbo* Lataa Fayyee.

[1244] *Ibid.*

[1245] Office of the Special Prosecutor, *Dam Yazele Dose: Ba'Giziyawi Wataderawi Astedader Darg Wayim Mengist Abalat Ba'nitsuhan Zegochi Layi Yetefetseme Wanjal Zagaba*, *Tirr* 2002 *A.M*, p.197.

[1246] *Informant*: *Obbo* Teshome Saffisaa.

[1247] Appendix -XIX. Their letter of release was signed by Daniel Asfaw. The rest of the peasants were sentenced to several months of imprisonment because they failed to deny appropriately as told to them by General Taddasa

According to the account of Babile Tola, initially the Supreme Military Court had sentenced General Taddasa, Colonel Hailu and the other four prisoners to life imprisonment. It was this decision which the *Darg* reversed and decided that all should be executed. It accused all of them for opposing the Land Proclamation but the two officers, General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu, did not oppose it.[1248] After the capture of both officers, their families were seriously disturbed. For example, the family of General Taddasa even refused to listen to the radio that week for fear of hearing the sudden news of his execution.[1249]

[1248]Babile Tola, *Ya'Tiwuld Ilqit (Qay Shibir Ba'Itiyopia)*, 2nd edition, translated by Awugachew Terefe, Empress Printng Press, *Hamile* 2008 *A.M*., pp.42-44.

[1249] *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa. The mother of Colonel Hailu, *Aadde* Foolii Gorbaa, also went to the capital in vain. But she was advised and encouraged by those who had heard about the capture of her son. It was at this time that she met the mother of Hagari Tulluu, who is said to have advised her: "My mother, we were hurt not today but when God put brave children in our womb. Last time, Diimtichi Raggaasa [referring to Colonel Hailu] was sitting beside me and encouraging me [after her three children were hanged in public at one place in Slaalee]. And now, I heard that he too was captured. She wept and departed saying 'Since the one who was captured would never come back, you have to go back and build a hut over ash of your burnt house'." Eventually, she was told by a police officer that she should go back home immediately and bring him food tomorrow morning since they were sentenced to imprisonment. But the police officer knew that she would not come back because their execution would be announced in the evening news. It seems that he wanted her to go home quickly not to hear the news before reaching home. Indeed, that evening the family heard on the radio that 'revolutionary measure' was taken against General Taddasa, Colonel Hailu and other prisoners.

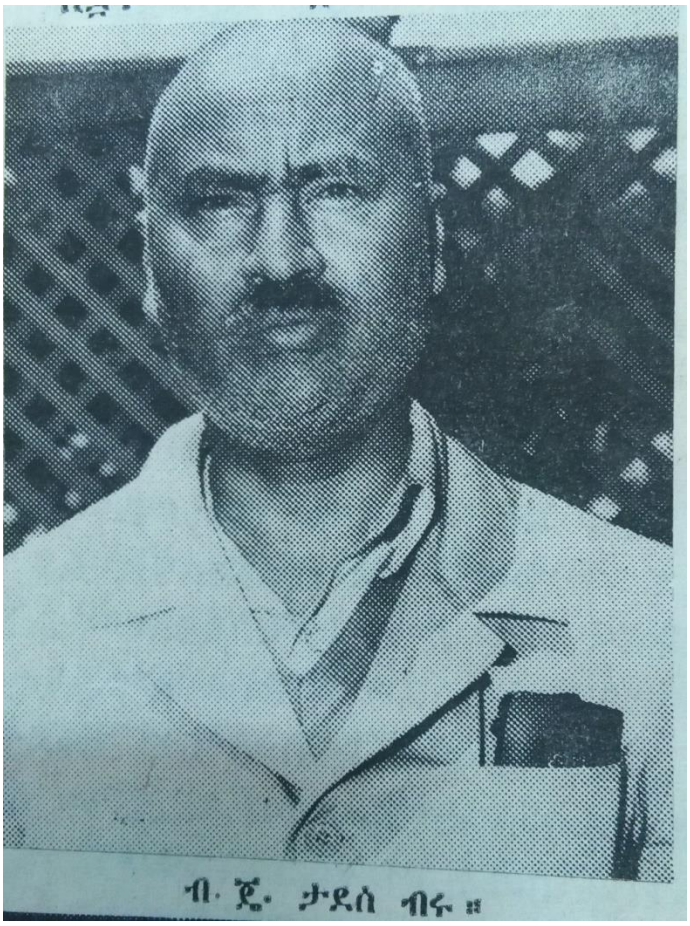

Figure 14: General Taddasa on the eve of his execution[1250]

The decision to reverse the initial verdict on General Taddasa and other prisoners appeared on *Addis Zemen* newspaper on *Megabit* 10, 1967 *A.M* under the heading, "በሰፊዉ ህዝብ ጠላቶች ላይ የሚሰጠዉ ፍርድ በይቅርታ አይለወጥም። ከጊዜያዊ ወታደራዊ መንግስት የተሰጠ ዉሳኔ" (The judgment given to the enemies of the mass cannot be exchanged for excuses", a decision given by the Provisional Military Government).[1251] According to *Addis Zemen,* the initial verdict of the Special Supreme Military Court was presented to the Head of State who reviewed the sentence according to the authority vested on him in the Article 16 of the

[1250] Taken from *Addis Zemen* Newspaper, *Megabit* 5, 1967 A.M.
[1251] *Addis Zemen Megabit* 10, 1967 *A.M*.

Declaration Number 7 of 1967 *A.M.* It is reported that he found out the sentences were not compatible to the crime they committed and hence, changed the imprisonment sentences to death. Accordingly, those who were sentenced to death were Hailu Raggaasaa, Taddasa Birru, Alula Bekele, Rezene Kidane, Meles Tekle and Gidey Gebrewahid. It is reported that Colonel Hailu and General Taddasa rebelled resisting the Land Proclamation. Regarding the rationale behind the change of initial verdict and the decision to execute them, it is reported that:

> በኃይሉ ረጋሳና በተቀሩት ፀረ-ህዝብ ወንበደዎች ላይ የተሰጠዉ ፍርድ ለወደፊቱ የማይረሳ ታሪካዊ ትምህርትና መቀጣጫ እንደሚሆን እንተማመናለን። በሰፊዉ ህዝብና በእናት ሀገር ላይ ለሚፈጸም በደል የሚሰጠዉ ፍርድ ሁሉ ፈጽሞ በይቅርታ የማይታጠፍ መሆኑን ደጋግመን እንገልጣለን። በእናት ሀገርና በሰፊዉ ህዝብ ጥቅም ቀልድ የለምና።...
>
> *We are confident that the verdict given on Hailu Raggaasaa and other anti-mass bandits will pass on unforgettable lesson and punishment for the future. We repeatedly make it clear that the verdict given for the crime committed against the mass and the mother country will not be excused….*[1252]

Accordingly, General Taddasa, Colonel Hailu and four other prisoners were all executed on *Megabit* 9, 1967 *A.M* or March 18, 1975. However, the *Addis Zemen* newspaper does not reveal who opposed the initial verdict given to General Taddasa. It mentions that the case was presented to the Head of State, General Teferi Bantii, who approved his execution.[1253] Fiseha Desta, one of the leading members of the *Darg*, also writes that when the other peasants were released, the case of General Taddasa was presented to the chairman of the *Darg* and it was decided that he too should be executed with Colonel Hailu and others.[1254]

[1252] *Ibid.*
[1253] *Ibid.*
[1254] Fiseha Desta, *pp.* 154-155. In fact, Fiseha Desta was one the members of the committee which suggested the execution of General Taddasa to the Supreme Military Council.

According to the *Ethiopian Herald*, it is difficult to put the blame on Genereal Teferi Bantii alone. It reports that:

> *The Special Military Court had earlier sentenced Hailu Regassa to death and the rest [including General Taddasa] to life imprisonment. The verdict was passed on to the Supreme Military Council which made a detailed study of the matter and over-ruled the decision of the Special Court on the grounds that the punishment meted out to the accused was not commensurate with the guilt they had committed against the Ethiopian people… .*[1255]

For the reversal of the initial decision, however, both oral and written sources point to Major Mengistu Haile Mariam and Major Sissay Habte. This was because the chairman of the *Darg*, General Teferi Bantii, was less influential within the *Darg* circle at the time when compared with the two influential vice chairmen.[1256] Some written sources put the blame on Major Mengistu for the execution of General Taddasa because he had accused him of opposing the Land Proclamation.[1257] According to my informant, the family of General Taddasa believed that the initial verdict was changed probably due to Major Sisay Habte. This was because earlier when Major Sisay asked General Taddasa to mobilize the Oromo peasants behind the *Darg*, he asked him to return their land first and threatened to mobilize them against the *Darg* if not. Referring to this remark, Major Sisay probably warned other *Darg* leaders saying: "Unless this person is eliminated, he will not give us peace" and persuaded them to agree on the need to execute him.[1258]

In the morning before his execution, General Taddasa is said to have asked the other prisoners if they had seen any dream. My informant claims to have told him what he saw,

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[1255] *The Ethiopian Herlad*, March 19, 1975. The two newspapers, *Addis Zemen* and the *Ethiopian Herald*, indicate two different bodies for the change of General Taddasa's initial verdict. Accordingy, the first says it was the chairman of the Darg while the latter says it was the Supreme Military Council.

[1256] John Markakis and Nega Ayele, 1986, p.181.

[1257] Paulos Milkiyas, "General Tadesse Birru", *Encyclopedia Aethiopica*, Vol.4, 2010, p.809.

[1258] *Informant: Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

"Darajaa kanarraa namichi diimaan tokko quba qabee gadi siharkisa."(A red man was pulling you down from this stage by holding your finger). It is reported that the night they were taken away for execution around 5 am, General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu were tied together with four other Tigrayans. General Taddasa left them wishing good luck. My informant was released after nine months of imprisonment at Alem Beqanyi.[1259]

The *Ethiopian Herald* reported that, "Six persons who were found guilty of opposing the Ethiopian popular movement and of causing acts of terrorism were executed yesterday after Trial. They were Hailu Regasa, Tadesse Biru, Alula Bekele, Rezene Kidane, Meles Tekle and Gidey Gebre Wahid."[1260] The reason why the *Darg* hurriedly executed them was not clear. But it probably wanted to use their execution as a warning to other members of the army who were resisting the *Darg* as well as those who had the intention to do so in the future. My informant believes that except gathering and addressing people, the two officers were captured peacefully without killing anyone and causing any damage. He argues that there was nothing that could lead to their execution. Moreover, given the very close relationship between Mengistu and Hailu, they should not have been killed. The intention of the *Darg*, according to my informant, was to victimize General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu in order to use it as a warning to other members of the armed forces not to dare against its authority. It hoped that the armed forces would give it peace and remain obedient for fear of similar fate if they had any intention to challenge. Therefore, they were executed hurriedly without any convincing reasons.[1261]

[1259] *Informant*: *Obbo* Lataa Fayyee.
[1260] *Ethiopian Herald*, March 19, 1975.
[1261] *Informant*: General Wasihun Nigatu. According to this informant, Mengistu and Hailu were close friends, the same course and were serving together in the Third Army Division for a long time..

According to another informant, Major Mengistu was hurried to get rid of both of them in order to break the backbone and moral of Oromo struggle and resistance.[1262] It seems that the leaders of the *Darg* wanted to get rid of him because it feared that he could constitute a danger at any time as a living symbol of Oromo nationalism.[1263] It is widely agreed that the *Darg* quickly killed them out of fear of possible Oromo uprising near the capital. The *Darg* accused General Taddasa of advocating the secession of the Oromo people.[1264] Addis Hiwot also argues that the junta's charge of opposing the Land Proclamation Act against General Taddasa was baseless because he had even threatened the authorities with Oromo revolt if the land act was not announced and implemented.[1265]

There is no agreement over the site where both General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu were killed. According to one informant, who was working in the Municipality of Addis Ababa as a bulldozer operator, their dead bodies were brought to the Municipality for burial because there was an assigned body to carry out such duties within the municipality. My informant had counted six bodies covered with clothes, including that of General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu. Those soldiers who brought the corpses to the Municipality had their faces covered not to be identified by others but quickly took away to the burial site with the workers of the municipality who were assigned to carry out the burial.[1266]

The family of General Taddasa believes that from the Grand Palace, where they were detained, they were taken to Sabbataa and killed in an open field used by the police as *Ilama*

[1262] *Informant*: *Obbo* Hailu Gebru.
[1263] Mekuria Bulcha,2011, p.568
[1264] Norman J. Singer, 1978, p.673.
[1265] Addis Hiwot, 1975 , see note 109.
[1266] *Informant*: *Obbo* Zewde Nagawoo. He was not free to give the full account of his knowledge probably for fear of being connected to the issue. He admits that he was called to the Municipality early in the morning before 7am local time. Since he was a bulldozer operator, he was probably wanted in that morning to dig their burial ground though he declined to disclose it. Though this was the situation, he only admits that he heard from others that they were buried in the St Petros Wapaulos, near the Wingate School.

metekosha (Target shooting ground). One piece of evidence was that while they were taken to the site for execution, it was heard that some of the victims who were with him were shouting in vain from a military convoy that morning on their way to Sabbataa that they were going to be killed. Later in the afternoon their execution was announced on the media. Though the place of their burial was not mentioned in the news, except that they were all buried, it was learnt that they were buried at St Petros Paulos Church.[1267] This was the end of a long chapter in the life and career of General Taddasa.

With the execution of General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu, it seemed that the struggle of the Oromo was hampered, at least for a time being, before it could challenge the *Darg*. One reason for the failure of the movement was that it became difficult to mobilize the people quickly. There was no means of reaching them on large scale. Initially even the government deliberately kept the rebellion of General Taddasa secret until the Land Proclamation Act for fear that the Oromo could turn away. By quickly declaring the land reform, the *Darg* attempted to cut away the main support line of the movement. In doing so, the *Darg* was able command wide support among the Oromo peasants for a time being. [1268]

It seems that the Land Proclamation Act had denied General Taddasa his potential support base. According to Rene Lefort, it was the fear of the Oromo uprising and the desire to avoid it that forced the *Darg* to take radical measures, including the land reform of 1975 itself.[1269] In other words, the Land Decree of March 4, 1975 was made quickly for fear of the

[1267] *Informants*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa, *Obbo* Hulluuqaa Baabsoo, *Obbo* Zewde Nagawoo. The latter informant confirms that he had heard they were buried in this Church though he refuses to admit that he had dug the ground with his bulldozer. As indicated earlier, Lieutenant Mamo Mazamir was also buried here after he was hanged at Alem Beqanyi prison during the previous regime.

[1268] John Markakis, 2011, P.195

[1269] Rene Lefort, 1981: 110; see also Mohammed Hassen, *JOS* ,Vol.7, No.1&2, 2000: 145. It is also reported that Major Mengistu wanted to take radical measure regarding land.

rebellious General Taddasa who could use the issue of land to mobilize the Oromo peasants. The issue of land was the most burning issue among the Oromo peasants and with the decree the *Darg* was able to cut the main source of his support. In doing so, the *Darg* not only denied him the major base of his support but also portrayed itself as a champion of the mass cause for a time being.[1270]. Oral informants argue that the Land proclamation was speeded up after the rebellion of General Taddasa.[1271]

According to Gada Melba, this was the second military failure for the Oromo between 1974 and 1975 within a period of few months. As indicated earlier, the first had happened when Elemoo Qilxuu and his small fighters were all killed by the government forces in early September 1974 just days before the overthrow of the Imperial regime. Then General Taddasa attempted to launch armed struggle in central Oromia in Shawa by moving to the countryside.[1272] In fact, as discussed earlier, back in early November 1966, there was a plot attempted by General Taddasa himself to overthrow the Imperial regime with the use of force. Therefore, this was the third military attempt by the Oromo to make a regime change or political transforamtion within a period of less than a decade.[1273] Though the causes were justifiable they all failed partly due to lack of popular mobilization due to different factors.

Later after the execution of General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu, there were attempts to make revenge by those who managed to escape from the capture of the security forces. They included *Dajjazmach* Kebede, Major Abebe, Beegii Dabal, Tulluu Biqilaa and many others.

[1270] Leenco Lata, 1999, p. 192; Leenco Lata, "The Making and the Unmaking…, 1998, p.75; Ethiopia's "Hidden War: The Oromo Liberation Struggle" in *Horn of Africa*, Vol.5, No.1, 1982, p. 63.

[1271] *Informants:Obbo* Leencoo Lataa, Dr Diimaa Noggo. It was also clear that the land issue was an urgent issue for the Ethiopian youth which had put tremendous pressure on the *Darg* but the latter was more threaten by the potential danger that General Taddasa and his other military officers could pose.

[1272] Gada Melba, p.120

[1273] Mohammed Hassen, "General Taddesse Birru, 1921-1975", in *Goota Oromiyaa*, 2008, pp. 360-361; See also Mohammed Hassen, 2002, p.23.

They reorganized themselves; attacked and burnt down the administration office at Shinoo, the capital of Meettaa Roobii at the time, and looted weapons and released prisoners. In the process, however, some of them were captured and sentenced to different years of imprisonments. Accordingly, my informant was sentenced to seven years of imprisonment.[1274] *Dajjazmach* Kebede and Major Abebe remained fugitive for many years. Later, Major Abebe separated from him and was able to escape abroad under difficult circumstances. *Dajjazmach* Kebede was killed in 1979 when his whereabouts was revealed to the security forces by his close dependent. He was killed with Beegii Dabal and others in the shootout with a big army sent against him from Hoolataa.[1275]

Simultaneously, the *Darg* continued to take preemptive measure against a possible uprising of the Oromo and hunted down notable Oromo individuals. A good example was the killing of *Qagnazmach* Mekonnen Wasanu at his home in February 1976 and several others.[1276]

8.3 The Legacy of Brigaier General Taddasa Birru

The loss of General Taddasa was a huge blow not only to his family but also to the Oromo in general. It was indeed a severe blow to his family. His family was in Nefas –Silk quarter of the city when he was captured and then killed. They heard and mourned his death while still there. While mourning his death, the family had once heard that his house at Kolfe was confiscated by the *Darg*. After a short stay in Nifas-Silk, the family moved to Afincho Ber

[1274] *Informant*: *Obbo* Tulluu Biqilaa.
[1275] *Informant*: *Obbo* Didhaa Bayii. Many informants argue that he killed himself when he realized that he could not escape from the huge army that surrounded him.
[1276] *Informants*: *Obbo* Abera Mekonnen, *Obbo* Gugsaa Mekonnen.

area. It was while at Afincho Ber that the house was restored and they moved to it. In general, his death was a huge blow to his family, children and relatives.[1277]

His execution was heard with shock among the Oromo people who knew him very well as a dedicated leader.[1278] My informant claims that the opponents of the Oromo movement used the circumstances of his capture and execution as good opportunity to discredit the struggle of the Oromo and its leadership. For example, it was said, "ኦሮሞ ቢሸፍት ከጓሮ አያልፍም"(If an Oromo rebels, he will not go beyond a garden).[1279]

The impact of his death was so great that some Oromo became even hopeless on the future of their struggle under Oromo leaders and hence, moved to join *Meison*, EPRP or other political groups.[1280] It had a big psychological impact on the morale of many conscious Oromo because they had lost their leader. In the words of my informant,

> *Nama akka Jeneraal Taddasa yeroo gabaabduu kana keessatti dhabuun ulfaataa ture. Oromoon akka dura deemaa isaatti ilaala. Namni akka isaa salphaatti hin argamu. Salphaattis bakka buufachuu hin dandeessu qabsoo yeroo dheeraa gaafata.*
>
> *It is difficult to lose individuals like General Taddasa within such a short period of time. The Oromo considered him as their leader. The likes of him could not be created easily. You cannot replace him easily and it requires a long time struggle.*[1281]

He was a charismatic leader, diplomat, sociable and elder who was often among his own people.[1282] It was through his unreserved struggle and determination that he was able to be

[1277] *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa
[1278] Gada Melba, p.120
[1279] *Informant*: Dr Diimaa Noggo. The expression had the connotation that the Oromo could not make a sustained rebellion which could not be easily crashed.
[1280] *Informant*: *Obbo* Leencoo Lataa. According to my informant, it was relatively safe at the time to join these political movements than joining the OLF because the latter was dubbed as a narrow nationalist.
[1281] *Informant*: Dr Diimaa Noggo
[1282] Anga'a Dhuguma, 2008, pp.113-114.

accepted widely as one of the leading Oromo heroes. He devoted a lot of energy in building Oromo self –consciousness. In early November 1966, he attempted to make a coup because he understood that taking state power would allow the Oromo to regain their political liberty and enjoy the fruit of their labor without exploitation and dehumanization. Therefore, he rebelled against Emperor Haile Selassie and launched armed resistance against the *Darg*. He had suffered a lot in his bold and selfless struggles for Oromo rights. He was beaten and broken, endured pain and suffered under two regimes.[1283]

He made an immense contribution to the Oromo struggle. He added respect and legitimacy to it. He developed Oromo consciousness and his exemplary role brought many youth to the camp of Oromo struggle. He removed the psychological inferiority of the Oromo and made psychological transformation. The underground organization, the OLF, enjoyed respect and popularity within a short period of time and it was sometimes even called the organization of Taddasa Birru. He created hope not only for the Oromo but also for other oppressed peoples from south Ethiopia. He created a turning point for the psychological departure of the Oromo.[1284] Eventually, he was able to be recognized as a 'Father of Modern Oromo Nationalism'[1285] or a symbol of Oromo Nationalism.[1286] Emerging from a humble background, he was able to become a symbol of courage and resistance for the Oromo people. Once he came to the Oromo cause by joining the MTSHA, he never turned back with

[1283] *Informant*: Dr. Moggaa Firriisaa. There is no consensus over the identity of individual figures in Ethiopian history. In Oromo oral history those leaders who are seen as criminals, bandits and slavers are seen (depicted) by others as heroes and builders of the 'nation'. Similarly, while General Taddasa is considered as hero for the Oromo others may accuse him as anti-unity and narrow nationalist.

[1284] *Informant*: *Obbo* Leencoo Lataa. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, he was regarded as a symbol of Oromo resistance. Today, it is observable that people are very proud of him and they have composed various songs for him, have his photos every where in their houses, cars, personal keys, T-shirts and etc.

[1285] Asafa Jalata, 1993, p.156; Leenco Lata, *The Horn of Africa*…, pp.121-123; Asafa Jalata and Mohammed Hassen, 2014, p.71; Mohammed Hassen, General Taddessee Birru 1921-1975, " in *Goota Oromiyaa*…, 2008, p.341

[1286] *Informant*: Dr Diimaa Noggo.

promises of better positions and even regime change. In other words, he remained firm in his stands even at difficult times with the risk of his life.[1287]

He sacrificed himself for the sake of his own people. He put the life of his family in danger for the sake of the Oromo people. Once he became conscious politically, he unreservedly gave his life so that his people advance the cause for which he devoted himself since 1964. His sacrifice was vital to put the Oromo consciousness on two feet. He awoke the Oromo people from a deep asleep.[1288] In doing so, his intention was not only regime change but to bring basic change in the political structure of the country that could accommodate diversity and equality. He wanted the establishment of a system that could fairly and equally treat all peoples including the Oromo. That was why he rebelled against both the imperial regime and military government. His causes are still unaddressed in the Ethiopian political system.

According to Mohammed Hassen, "By accepting humiliation, torture and sacrifice for the cause of his people, General Taddasa set a pattern for the new generation of the Oromo that was reared and brought upon story of his heroism." It was with this heavy price he paid that he was able to be recognized as a source of pride by the Oromo youth and his name came to have a big place in the history of the Oromo struggle.[1289] Thus today, his name is high among the Oromo.

The execution of General Taddasa was indicative of the fact that the new military government, like its predecessor of the imperial regime, was also intolerant towards any expression of Oromo ethnic movement. The new regime was even found to be more

[1287] Mohammed Hassen, "General Tadesse Birru," in *Goota Oromiyaa,* 2008, p.362.
[1288] Mohammed Hassen, "General Taddesse Birru, 1921-1975", in *Goota Oromiyaa*, 2008, p.365.
[1289] Mohammed Hassen, "General Taddesse, 1921-1975," in: *Goota Oromiyaa,* 2008, pp.365-366. Today, his name is high among the conscious Oromo and the youth.

aggressive and determined to crush any political movement representing the Oromo issue.[1290] Indeed, the *Darg* was brutal against all political oppositions throughout the country. According to my informants, the Ethiopian regime was more brutal against the Oromo than the white apartheid regime against the blacks in South Africa.[1291]

However, all these situations did not deter the Oromo from promoting their own cause and struggling for their own rights. Thus, following the suppression of the MTSHA and other associations, Oromo revolutionaries continued their struggle underground with more determination. It was under this situation that a guerrilla struggle began in 1973 under the leadership of Elemoo Qilxuu with the guidance of General Taddasa, as discussed earlier. When this movement was crashed by the government forces, General Taddasa attempted to start another armed struggle in central Oromia. Still, the foiling of this attempt and the execution of General Taddasa made the Oromo to become more determined. In short, it led to the consolidation of the OLF in 1976 and convinced the Oromo revolutionaries that it would be difficult to achieve democratic rights in Ethiopia through peaceful means. The prevailing situations convinced the conscious Oromo that armed struggle was the better option left to them.[1292]

[1290] Mekuria Bulcha, pp, 566-8.

[1291] *Informants*: Dr Diimaa Noggo, *Obbo* Lubee Birru. One piece of evidence was that while the apartheid regime imprisoned the black freedom fighter, Nelson Mandela, the *Darg* executed his trainer and Oromo freedom fighter, General Taddasa. The previous banning and the suppression of the Oromo movements, including the MTSHA, the Afran Qalloo musical group and the Baalee uprising, were all indicatives of the continuous refusal of the Ethiopian government to address Oromo grievances. The Ethiopian government continued to be brutal towards Oromo organizations and leaders.

[1292] Asefa Jalata, "Emergence of Oromo Nationalism…"pp.7-10; Hamdessa Tuso, 1987, p.22; *Informant: Obbo* Leencoo Lataa; John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People'e Liberation Front, 1975-1991*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p.113. General Taddasa had tirelessly worked to promote Oromo consciousness up to the date of his execution in 1975. And it was this consciousness which created conscious Oromo who began to discuss on the issue of Oromo liberation and eventually led to the formation of the Oromo Liberation Front. He was the opener of this road or a model followed by many Oromo.

There were two major accomplishments of General Taddasa Birru. First, he was able to overcome the divisive policies of the previous regime, especially in Itayyaa and Dheeraa areas of Arsii and in the Carcar region of Hararge. He had a firm belief in the unity of the Oromo, as indicated elsewhere in this work. He also rejected the religious divisions among the Oromo and made them secondary to *Oromumma* (Oromo identity). He had taught this in Arsii and Harargee enthusiastically. Second, it was this united spirit that General Taddasa cultivated which became the basis for the establishment of the OLF as a pan-Oromo political organization. The armed struggle that Elemoo and he had started served the OLF as a springboard to launch armed struggle against the *Darg*. General Taddasa had laid down the basis for the foundation of the OLF by preparing the required pre-conditions of promoting Oromo consciousness and unity.[1293]

Though the military junta hoped to destroy the symbol of emergent Oromo nationalism by executing him and crashing the movement in March 1975, it had created a more determined young Oromo nationalists.[1294] It was after the execution of prominent Oromo leaders, like General Taddasa, that the Oromo struggle was put on a solid ground with the establishment of the OLF.[1295] The suppression created more determination and did not deter the Oromo nationalists from moving forward.[1296] One of the lessons drawn from his execution was the increasing agreement among Oromo nationalists on the importance of armed struggle to bring change. [1297]

[1293] *Informants*: *Obbo* Ahmed Bissidimo, *Obbo* Sultan Umare, *Obbo* Lubee Birru, Colonel Sahilu Birri

[1294] Richard J. Reid, p.186.

[1295] *Informant*: Haji Biiftu Fayyisoo.

[1296] Mekuria Bulcha, *JOS, Vol.1*, 1994, P.1; Richard J. Reid, p. 187.

[1297] Mohammed Hassen, "General Tadesse Birru," *Goota Oromiyaa*, 2008, p.362. This was why the necessity of armed struggle had continued to be seen as a major option in the absence of any positive response from the government.

After a long suffering under the previous regime**,** General Taddasa had many options when it was overthrown in 1974. He could have lived accepting the offer of the *Darg* or could even go abroad and live there. But he did not want to refrain from the Oromo cause and became a martyr.[1298] He opposed the Ethiopian state political culture that was characterized by inequality and discriminations.[1299]He believed that the Ethiopian state power was monopolized by the Amhara elites who used it to marginalize the big Oromo population in the name of nation- building process.[1300] It was the struggle against this brutality which claimed his life and that of other martyrs.[1301]

According to an informant, one lasting impact of the movement of General Taddasa was the realization of the land proclamation. When General Taddasa moved out, there was ongoing debate on the land tenure system within the *Darg* whether to declare it or not. As soon as he moved out, he encouraged those who owned land to redistribute their land to the landless peasants. He wanted to consolidate on the land issue to mobilize the Oromo peasants against the *Darg*. The *Darg* also well understood this situation and rushed to the radical Land Proclamation. My informants strongly argue that the movement of General Taddasa contributed in speeding up the land proclamation. This can be regarded as a major lasting impact of General Taddasa's movement because the proclamation might not come so quickly in such a radical form to appease the peasantry.[1302]

[1298] *Informant*: *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa.

[1299] Leenco Lata, 1999, p. 152.

[1300] John Markakis, 2011, pp.14-15.

[1301] Mohammed Hassen, "General Taddesse, 1921-1975," in *Goota Oromiyaa,* p.364; See also Mohammed Hassen, 1998, p.215.

[1302] *Informant*: *Obbo* Leencoo Lataa. Eventhough there were different pressure groups on the *Darg* regarding the land issue, the *Darg* delayed the proclamation for several months after it came to power in September. It was shortly after General Taddasa moved out that the Proclamation came in a radical form.

His teachings about Oromo identity and nationhood have inspired an entire generation of the Oromo. His efforts led to the reaffirmation of Oromo culture, language and identity and the consolidation of Oromo resistance. He had attempted to influence the Oromo living in different regions than any other Oromo leader up to that time. For example, he was born and grew up in Salaalee; he lived mainly in Addis Ababa, made speeches and had the opportunity, after he joined the MTSHA, to make contacts with many Oromo coming from different provinces. He travelled to Western Shawa, Wallaggaa and Arsii to attend the meetings of the MTSHA. He travelled to Arsii more than twice where he had made historic speeches in which he attempted to bridge the religious and regional divisions between the Oromo. He attempted to create linkage between the MTSHA and the Baalee resistance leaders. For example, Hajji Adam Saaddoo was captured while trying to deliver the message sent from the Baalee resistance leaders to General Taddasa. After his death sentence was changed to life in prison, he was initially sent to Harar and then Galamsoo as a prisoner where he was sowing the seeds of Oromo nationalism and initiating armed struggle. He was a chairman of the coordinating committee that established the OLF in 1973. Eventually, he moved to Ada'aa Bargaa and Meettaa Roobii to launch armed resistance against the *Darg*. Therefore, his activities were not limited to a specific territory and section of Oromo society but were felt in several areas than any other Oromo leader up to that time.[1303]

From the close assessment of oral sources, it is possible to understand that General Taddasa appeared to be different when seen from a distance and at a close range. Though he was dubbed Amharized before he joined the MTSHA, close assessment of his views, activities and speeches does not support that claim. Moreover, though many considered him as a

[1303] *Informants*: *Obbo* Leencoo Lataa, *Obbo* Tolasaa Kishee, Colonel Sahilu Birri.

member of the upper class, he was found to be a mouthpiece of the poor. For example, during the discussions to establish the OLF in 1973, Baaroo Tumsaa proposed that General Taddasa should be its chairman while he was still in banishment in Galamsoo. My informant, who did not know him closely until then, claims to have opposed the proposal because at the time the OLF had the intention of addressing both the nationality and class issues. The argument of my informant was that by coming from the upper class, General Taddasa could not speak for the oppressed and the poor Oromo. But he was convinced by Baaroo that no one could surpass General Taddasa in the fighting for the rights of the poor. Indeed, my informant was able to confirm this when he met him after his return from Galamsoo and found him so dedicated for the cause of the poor beyond his expectations.[1304]

He was a recognized leader of the Oromo even when he was in prison. For example, the founding committee of the OLF, also known as the central coordinating committee, accepted him as its leader while he was still in Galamsoo. The committee used to send him reports to Galamsoo and receive his feedbacks secretly. He knew very well what the coordinating committee was doing. It was while this was going on that the 1974 revolution erupted.[1305] Until he moved out to initiate armed struggle against the *Darg*, General Taddasa remained the chairman of the OLF. Why the founders of the OLF chose him as their leader was that they wanted to use his popularity among the Oromo to mobilize support for the new organization. When he moved out, however, he did not inform the committee and my

[1304] *Ibid.*

[1305] Leenco Lata, *The Horn of Africa*.., pp.121-123; *Informan*ts: *Obbo* Leencoo Lataa, *Obbo* Asafa Baalchaa, Dr Diimaa Noggo. Some of the members of the Central Coordinating Committee of the OLF under the leadership of General Taddasa included: Baaroo Tumsaa, Magarsaa Barii, Abiyyuu Galataa, Leencoo (Yohannes) Lataa, Diimaa Noggo, Yusuuf Bakar, Addisu Bayana and probably Colonel Demisse Dheeressaa. Members of the Coordinating committee like Baaroo Tumsaa, Abbaa Biyyaa Abbaa Jobir and others used to meet General Taddasa in Galamsoo.

informant argues that he was joined by individuals who were not members of the OLF. However, he remained the chairman of the OLF until he was executed in 1975.[1306]

The contents of his speeches are still raised today by the Oromo nationalists and politicians regardless of differences in religion, region and political affiliations. He raised a number of issues in the 1960s and early 1970s that are still unaddressed. These included the issue of Oromo unity, equality and fair share from the fruits of this country. These are still points of concern for Oromo political leaders and the wider public, after more than half a century. His ambition to see the equality and equal treatment of the Oromo within a democratized Ethiopia is still a big question that needs to be addressed.[1307]

His speeches and lectures of about half a century ago have contributed a lot to the current general consciousness of the Oromo. He was one of those key Oromo figures who have built the basis of Oromo ethno-national consciousness. For example, my informant, who does not appreciate the rise of Oromo consciousness, recognizes this fact and linked the root of the ongoing Oromo Protest in 2016 to the works of General Taddasa in the 1960s and early 1970s.[1308]

General Taddasa was the main promoter of anti-*neftegna* Oromo nationalism, which can be seen from his speeches and teachings quoted in the previous chapters. His main target was the government system that favored the *neftegna* oppressors. He attempted to mobilize the

[1306] *Ibid.* The committee recognized him as their organization's chairman but it is difficult to know the view of the General with certainty. Eventually, the absence of any room to accommodate Oromo grievances and the execution of General Taddasa and other leaders clearly reflected that the Oromo had no other option but to continue the resistance in a more organized way.

[1307] *Informant*: Colonel Sahilu Birri.

[1308] *Informant*: *Ato* Tadele Bitul. The protest refers to the Youth (Qeerroo) led resistance against the TPLF dominated EPRDF government that eventually led to the appearance of reformist leaders, usually called Team Lemma, within the ruling party. The interview was made during the pick of the 'Oromo Protest.' Those who discredit the protest usually point their fingures to the beginning of Oromo nationality question in the 1960s, when he was regarded as a leader of the movement.

Oromo against the socio-political and economic domination of the *naftegna* settlers. He wanted the Oromo to know and understand their conditions in comparison with the *neftegna* settlers and the authorities who were oppressing and exploiting them. He was trying to mobilize and convince the people how the *neftegna* were oppressing them. Therefore, his efforts to develop anti- *neftegna* Oromo nationalism were clear from his speeches and activities as discussed elsewhere in this dissertation. He made relentless efforts to make the Oromo aware of their own situations.

Even if he usually used the name Amhara instead of *neftegna*, he did not have any quarrel with individual Amharas and hatred for them personally. For example, his wife was an Amhara but he lived in love with her until he was eventually executed. In fact, there were individual authorities who were trying to attack and eliminate him but it was not a personal case. These individual authorities, who are mentioned in the preceding chapter, were the representatives of the ruling Amhara elites or the imperial system. They were the leaders of the political system which manifested itself through the behaviors and actions of these individual leaders. The reason for his quarrel with them was his strong criticism against the *neftenga* exploitation and suppression of the Oromo and his mobilization of the people to resist it.

General Taddasa was a person of many qualities. He had a unique personal quality of struggling and suffering for the rights of others while he was himself at a precarious condition. In other words, he often tried to save the life of others while he was on the verge of danger. For example, when Hajji Roobalee was to appear before the Emperor in connection with the Dheeraa incident, after the so-called the pardon of the Emperor on November 7, 1966, General Taddasa advised him to put all the blame on him for what had

happened in the name of the MTSHA. Later when the *Darg* asked him to preside over the case of the detained officials of Emperor Haile Selassie, he not only refused to take advantage against his former opponents but also objected to their execution. Later in March 1975, when he was to be executed by the *Darg*, he attempted to rescue the life of other peasant prisoners whom he advised to deny any connection with him and Colonel Hailu. Accordingly, some of them were released immediately while the remaining ones were released after few months of imprisonment. Today, General Taddasa is regarded as a symbol of pride, courage, heroism and resistance for the current Oromo generation and his name is high among the Oromo regardless of their political, regional, religious and other differences.[1309]

[1309] Today, there is a school opened in his name in the capital Finfinne or Addis Ababa. In fact, there are two schools in his birth place, Hidhabuu Abootee's capital, Ejeree. One of the campuses of the Salaalee University is also named after him as General Taddasa Birru Campus. There are numerous Oromo resistances songs that mention his name and praise him.

Conclusion

In reconstructing the military-political biography of Brigadier General Taddasa, this study has dealt with a number of broader themes. First, an appraisal of the general trend of life writing is carried out. Though biographical studies in Ethiopia have long history, they focus mainly on the individuals who were political figures. Thus standard and professionally authored biographies either deal with Emperors (Yohannes IV: A Political Biography; The Life and Times of Menelik; H/S; The Formative Years; Kasa and Kasa etc) or constructed around a single episode. A military-political biography of my study subject is different from other biographical studies in Ethiopia for a number of reasons. One of the major reasons is that it deals with an Oromo historical figure dubbed Amharized in the literature but could not be put in that box.

In this work, an attempt is made to situate Taddasa Birru within a historical context to understand the social and political environment of the society among whom he grew up. As a result, a discussion of the Tuulamaa Oromo, especially of the Oromo of Salaalee, resistance tradition that had developed at least since the military expeditions of King Sahle Selassie is undertaken. This tradition came to have its own impact on Taddasa Birru that he became a guerrilla fighter at a young age and renewed that tradition when he turned against the Imperial regime and the *Darg* regime later. His determination to make a coup plot against Emperor Haile Selassie and subsequent movements were indicative of the impact of this resistance tradition which he inherited from the society among whom he grew up.

Because of the assimilative or Amharization pressure of the Imperial regime, his Oromo identities appeared to be closeted to some extent for some before his membership to the

MTSHA in 1964. It was this situation which probably made some writers and even informants to dub him as Amharized. Thus General Taddasa was a controversial figure who was dubbed Amharized before he joined the MTSHA but shortly turned to be recognized as a 'Father of Modern Oromo Nationalism' or a symbol of Oromo resistance against the Imperial regime and the *Darg*. The question is how an 'Amharized' person could become an agent of Oromo political consciousness? This dissertation puts into question the claim of his vague Amharization and argues that close assessment of his speeches, activities, movements and other evidences after 1964 do not support the claim. Instead, both oral and written sources corroborate that he was the main promoter of anti- *neftegna* Oromo nationalism.

The study covers the period from 1922-1975 during which many changes had happened in Ethiopian history which could be taken as historical contexts for the biographical study of General Taddasa. Instead of focusing on the individuality of the subject, this study focuses on the place of an individual within a historical context. Taddasa Birru was born to an ordinary Oromo family in Salaalee, northern Shawa, and resorted to the Salaalee resistance tradition at a young age and became a guerrilla fighter against the Italian invaders in 1936. After some patriotic activities in Salaalee, he was captured and taken to Somalia as Italian prisoner. After the liberation of Ethiopia in 1941, he returned home and joined the Imperial army. He served the Imperial regime enthusiastically as a military and police officer until he turned against it after 1964.

As a young military officer, he served his country as a member of the army before he was transferred to the police. After he joined the police, he became the founder of the Police Emergency Force, usually known as the *Fetno Derash*, which he led for about a decade. His involvement in the 1960 coup on the side of the Emperor enabled him to establish what

appeared to be good relations with the Emperor and the Prime Minister. In 1962 he had trained Nelson Mandela when he came to Ethiopia to receive military training to lead the liberation of his country from the Apartheid rule. General Taddasa's effective leadership of the National Literacy Association also increased his rising popularity among the public in addition to his active religious personality within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

However, his personal observation of the situation of the Oromo, the influence of freedom fighters, like Nelson Mandela, and his close relationship with the authorities enabled him to understand the injustices against the Oromo within the Imperial political establishment. These were important backgrounds which initiated him to have interests in politics to which he devoted the rest of his life until his eventual execution. Initially, General Taddasa was not conscious enough to see the prevailing conditions of the Imperial regime in terms of ethnicity. His initial understanding was in terms of urban- rural dichotomy, the first oppressing the latter, making him a sympathizer of the poor and the disadvantaged.

The study of his biography reveals the political projects of Imperial Ethiopia and a history of the process of its construction, implementation and eventual failure. It shows how the imperial system from the earlier period on chose to depend on few Oromo elites, who were required to wear the "Amhara Identity", using them in the political structure mostly in the military. But in doing so, it kept them uncomfortable and marginalized even when they were willing to fulfill the requirement and make adjustment. Many of the Oromo elites in the service of the Imperial regime were rejected and marginalized which indicated the fact that the Emperor's political establishment, despite his wishes, had limited space even for those Oromo who were willing to serve it, let alone the wider Oromo public. The case of my study subject is a good example in this case.

The understanding of the existence of ethnic discrimination pushed the Oromo elites to establish the MTSHA and forced General Taddasa to join it. Regarding the factors that initiated him to join the MTSHA, it is widely recognized that the remark of the Prime Minister, Aklilu Habte Wold, on Oromo education provoked him. However, there were several factors accumulated over time at least since the aftermath of the 1960 coup though this remark on Oromo education can be taken as a turning point.

Through the platform of the MTSHA, General Taddasa and other leaders were able to sow the seed of Oromo self-consciousness and nationalism. This situation partly emerged from the structural weaknesses of Imperial Ethiopia, self-defeat of its 'assimilationist' drive and its eventual failure. Its attempt to build a national identity out of the diverse nations and nationalities in the image of the dominant Amhara elites provoked reactions.

It is difficult to present and analyze the historical processes in which Taddasa Birru lived and built a career under a single theoretical lens. Phases in his life are treated in reference to the time he lived in and his biography is analyzed differently at different stages of his life. Hence, the study of his military-political biography can be divided into pre and post 1964 during which his military and political lives dominate respectively. When he realized that the regime had unjustly treated the Oromo, he put himself at the forefront of the critics of the imperial regime from which he never retreated. His high position at the time did not deter him from challenging the regime and indeed, he was in the service of the regime until he was detained in 1966.

Though he was never a president of the MTSHA, General Taddasa was generally regarded as its leader and had attempted to influence the Oromo living in different areas. Accordingly, he

travelled throughout Shawa, went to Wallaggaa to attend the meeting of the MTSHA and made moving speeches in the Arsii towns of Itayyaa and Dheeraa, where he attempted to bridge the religious and regional differences among the Oromo. He had tried to make contacts with the Baalee Oromo guerrilla fighters.

Through his daring speeches, actions and movements, he fueled the anger and grievances of the Oromo against the exploitative and oppressive system of the Imperial regime. In other words, he promoted anti-*neftegna* Oromo nationalism through his moving speeches, teachings, conversations and actions. He had brought a big change on the Oromo generation of the 1960s, especially the educated ones, by shaping positively the way they looked at themselves and their own people.

The membership of General Taddasa to the MTSHA publicized the Association and intensified the fear of the ruling elites, who attempted to eliminate both the Association and its leadership. General Taddasa also plotted a coup to challenge the increasing pressure of the government and to make a regime change. When his coup plot became uncovered, he moved out of the capital to reorganize armed resistance. Though he returned through the mediation of religious leaders and pardoned by the Emperor, after a few days, he managed to break the police siege that surrounded his house in the name of disarming him. It was here that he once again resorted to the Salaalee resistance tradition when he broke the siege and moved out by putting his life at risk. He was eventually captured and brought to the court.

When he was brought to the Imperial court, General Taddasa was accused of attempting to divide the unity of the Ethiopian people along ethnic lines. But, in actual fact, what he opposed was not the unity of Ethiopia but the prevailing conditions of subjugation and

exploitation in the name of unity. Since then this accusation has become a brand accusation against Oromo resistance leaders and organizations. Eventually, though he was sentenced to death together with his colleague, Lieutenant Mamo Mazamir; his verdict was changed to life imprisonment by the Emperor. Then, he was sent to Harar and then transferred to Galamsoo in banishment. Even in banishment, he was able to influence the surrounding Oromo with more energy and made Galamsoo the centre of Oromo nationalists. In Galamsoo area, he was able to ignite the fire of Oromo nationalism that culminated in the establishment of a liberation army under the leadership of Elemoo Qilxuu.

Following the outbreak of the 1974 revolution, he escaped from Galamsoo and managed to return to the capital. Towards the end of June 1974, the *Darg* presented his case to the Emperor and secured full amnesty that made him free. The *Darg* assumed that he was a political prisoner who was made victim of the Imperial regime because of his progressive ideas. It was out of this belief that the *Darg* initially wanted his collaboration but soon the drift between the two went wider. Eventually, he decided to resist the *Darg* militarily when the latter delayed to make the Land Proclamation, which was in fact hurriedly declared after he moved out. He moved to Meettaa but was captured while preparing to incite popular uprising and armed rebellion against the *Darg*. Within a few days of his capture, he was executed with Colonel Hailu Raggaasaa and others on March 18, 1975.

The spirit of resistance was so deep-rooted in General Taddasa that he was not deterred by many years of suffering and even regime change. His loss was a big blow to the Oromo resistance movement but his contributions would remain a source of pride for the young Oromo generation. His experience has shown that continuous repressive measures have led to the consolidation of Oromo movement instead of eliminating and undermining it. General

Taddasa risked his comfortable life for the cause of his own people and hence, determination, firmness and persistence remained his unshaken qualities. He worked tirelessly to bring unity among the numerically big Oromo for a common purpose. Hence, the importance of Oromo unity, the issue which he raised in the middle of the 1960s and for which he paid sacrifices, is still, after more than half a century, a point of concern for Oromo political leaders and the wider public. His ambition to see the equality and equal treatment of the Oromo within Ethiopia is yet to be addressed properly.

Therefore, his vision, determination, dedication and readiness to pay sacrifice for what he believed in made him an important figure in Oromo history. In doing so, he was able to become one of the key figures who built the basis of Oromo ethno-national consciousness. In other words, he is considered by many Oromo as the father of modern Oromo nationalism. This is because his teachings about Oromo identity and nationhood had inspired an entire generation of Oromo in the 1960s and 70s and led to the reaffirmation of Oromo culture, language, identity and other key elements. The causes for which he was executed are still sensitive and his name now becomes a source of pride for many conscious Oromo. This was the main reason why a statue was built for him at Fichee at a national level.

The focus on General Taddasa helps to investigate the role of an individual in the narration of dissidence against the oppressive status quo, which makes this study different from other biographical works written on prominent individuals of Ethiopian history. Indeed, the goal of biographical research is not only to understand individual cases in the context of individual life histories but also to get an understanding of societal realities. The study is vital to understand the life of a significant historical figure in Ethiopian history during the second and third quarters of the twentieth century who became the voice of his own people against

the prevailing injustices. The study also hopes to encourage other researchers to conduct further research in the field.

One of the challenges encountered during the conduct of this research is lack of sufficient written sources, especially archival documents. This is particularly challenging when it comes to the military career of the subject for which oral source is also shallow. However, attempts are made to fill the gap. The availability of sources is relatively better after he joined the MTSHA and later after he was brought to the court. Here, the voluminous Trial Document of the prisoners of the MTSHA is an important source containing his speeches, advises and remarks during the meetings of the MTSHA which were brought against him as evidences. Moreover, there is a rich oral source because some of his contemporaries are still alive. The other minor challenge was that the time of field research had coincided with the 'Oromo Protest' which created difficulty to conduct oral interviews in the rural areas. For example, while conducting interviews in Galamsoo, the writer was taken to the police station for questions but the issue was resolved within days. Though it is not claimed to be a total work on the subject, this dissertation has successfully met its aim because sufficient sources have been collected to reconstruct the military- political biography of General Taddasa Birru.

Glossary

Ateetee- Oromo traditional ritual practiced by women in honor of the fertility goddess
Awraja- Sub-province
Balabat- government chief, the title given to the elites of the native inhabitants conquered in the late 19th century
Balambaras- the title of a person who was put in charge of keeping and guarding any fortification in the past. It was generally a title granted to the smaller local governors.
Banda- the name given to those who collaborated with the Italian invaders
Behal Shari- a person who violates the religious tradition by working on holydays.
Darg- military committee that took power after the fall of the Imperial regime in 1974
Dajjazmach- rearguard commander, one of the highest military titles of traditional Ethiopia
Dhiirummaa- bravery
Fitawrari- commander of the vanguard
Gabbar- a tax- or tribute- payer
Girazmach- Commander of the left- wing
Guddifachaa- fostering, bring up
Kakaa- Oath
Malkagna- the title of a local government representative, who was responsible to maintain law and order, enforce tax collection, judge in conflicts between his peasants.
Mekonnen- military officer
Neftegna- riflemen, armed retainers, armed settlers
Ras- the second highest rank and title, after the *Negus,*in the feudal- military hierarchy of the Ethiopian empire
Shalaqa- Major
Shambal- Captain
Shifta- bandit
Warada- sub-district or district

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III. List of Oral Informants

No	Name	Age	Sex	Place of Interview	Date of Interview	Remarks
1.	Abdurhaman Hajji Hussen Kormee (*Hajji*)	75	M	Roobee	12/3/ 12	He knew very well about the activities of Hajji Adam Saaddoo and his

						attempt to communicate General Taddasa
2.	Abera Mekonnen (*Obboo)*	79	M	Finfinne	5/02/16	He had tried to publicize the imprisonnment of the leaders of the MTSHA to the international communitities, especially to the Amnesty International and International Commission of Jurists. He has the letters they had written to the Emperor and other individuals.
3.	Adam Siyyoo (*Hajji)*	63	M	Galamsoo	11/12/15	As young boy, he knew General Taddasa in Galamsoo while he was travelling to the nearby areas.
4.	Ahmed Bakar(*Obbo*)	70	M	Goobbaa	10/3/12	Knew about Hajji Adam Saaddoo
5.	Ahmedalhadi Hussein (*Obboo)*	66	M	Galamsoo	09/12/15	He was a young merchant whose shop was frequented by General Taddasa to talk with other people and listen to the Gerrman radio Amharic program news.
6.	Ahmed Mohammed (*Hajji*)	79	M	Asallaa	10/2/19	He is a distinguished Arsii elder who knew also about the Itayyaa and Dheeraa meetings of the MTSHA
7.	Ahmed Mohammed Usman (also known as Ahmed Bissidiimoo) (*Obboo)*	74	M	Adaamaa	30/01/18	He knew of General Taddasa's activities in Galamsoo.
8.	Ajjamaa Jiidhaa (*Obboo)*	75	M	Meetaa	25/05/16	He was imprisoned in connection with the activities of General Taddasa in Meettaa Roobii area.
9.	Aliyi Tololaa(*Hajji)*	87	M	Itayyaa	02/12/15	He was an elder of Itayyaa who attended the Dheeraa meeting of the

						MTSHA.
10.	Aman Goobanaa (*Obboo)*	74	M	Dheeraa	03/12/15	He was one of the attendants of the Dheeraa meeting of the MTSHA.
11.	Aman Kadir (*Obbo*)	76	M	Goobbaa	10/ 3/ 12	Knew about Hajji Adam Saaddoo
12.	Aman Maddaa Baldaa (*Obboo)*	80	M	Dheeraa	03/12/15	He was one of the active members of the MTSHA from Arsii.
13.	Amantee Gizachew (*Obboo)*	65	M	Galamsoo	10/12/15	He claims that he was sent by Mulu Asanu from Salaale with twenty other best fiighters to rescue General Taddasa when it was heard that he was surrounded by the *Darg* forces in the Gooroo Maakoo. But they reached the area one hour after his capture.
14.	Amino Eda'oo (*Obboo)*	53	M	Asallaa	1/12/15	He was well aware of the activities of the MTSHA in Arsii.
15.	Aregash Alilu (*Aaddee)*	70	F	Finfinne	11/11/17	She was a wife of Bekele Urgeessaa, the driver of General Taddasa.
16.	Asefa Baalchaa Corqaa (*Obboo)*	82	M	Finfinne	05/2/016	He knew of the activities of the Oromo during the 1974 revolution.
17.	Aselefech Asefa (*Aaddee)*	70	F	Galamsoo	10/12/15	Her husband had good relations with General Taddasa in Galamsoo.
18.	Bekele Urgeessaa (*Obboo*)	84	M	Finfinne	11/11/17	He was a driver of General Taddasa since the death of General Tsige Dibu. He took the family of General Taddasa to the compound of *Dajjazmach* Kebede during the coup plot. But was sick and in bed by the time he gave this interview.

19.	Belay Mokonnen(*Qesis)*	46	M	Finfinne	24/02/17	He had an extensive discussion with the wife of General Taddasa about his activities and intentions.
20.	Belete Workneh Zerefu(*Ato)*	77	M	Galamsoo	18/11/14	He knew General Taddasa in Galamsoo.
21.	Biiftuu Fayisoo(*Hajji)*	89	M	Asallaa	01/12/15	He was a former member of the MTSHA.
22.	Birraatuu Lammaa (*Obboo)*	92	M	Finfinne	04/09/15	He was an artist who came to the capital in the late 1940s and joined the imperial army. He knew of the situations of the Oromo beginning from this time.
23.	Bulchaa Dammaqsaa (*Obboo*)	86	M	Laga Xaafoo	07/03/17	He knew of the activities of General Taddasa during the Imperial regime.
24.	Dereje Taddasa (*Obboo)*	44	M	Adaamaa	01/01/18	He claims to be the son of General Taddasa in Galamsoo though there is a contest.
25.	Desta Zewde(*Obboo)*	54	M	Hidhabuu Abootee	26/11/15 04/04/17	His father had managed to escape with General Taddasa, when the latter house was surrounded by the police in November 1966.
26.	Dibaabaa Waaqtolaa (*Obboo)*	75	M	Meetta	25/05/16	He was one of the young peasant followers of General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu in Meettaa
27.	Didhaa Bayii (*Obboo)*	62	M	Meettaa	25/05/16	He knew the movement in Meettaa before the capture of General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu
28.	Diimaa Noggo(Dr)	69	M	Finfinnee	16/4/19	He was one of the members of the Central Coordinating Committee of the OLF that was

						established in 1973 and knew General Taddasa very well, especially after he returned from Galamsoo.
29.	Dirribaa Bayyeechaa (*Obboo)*	54	M	Buraayyuu	03/09/15	He heard very well about the activities of General Taddasa, Colonel Hailu and *Dajjazmach* Kebede Bizunesh in Meettaa.
30.	Eda'oo Boruu(Obboo)	65	M	USA, Minnesota	19/11/15	He gave the interview on phone. He was a recognized Oromo oral historian and knew about the movement of General Taddasa and his family.
31.	Ephraim Isaac (Professor)	80	M	Finfinne	16/4/18	He was assigned by General Taddasa to help the *Fidel Serawit* Association financially from America where he went for scholarship.
32.	Faqi Hassen (Hajji)	69	M	Goobbaa	10/3/12	He knew about Hajji Adam Saaddoo
33. .	Foolii Gorbaa(*Aaddee)*	95	M	Finfinne	19/09/15	She was a mother of Colonel Hailu Raggaasaa who was executed with General Taddasa in 1975.
34.	Giddoo Mo'aa (*Obboo)*	56	M	Gooroo Maakoo	04/02/17	He knew of the activities in Meettaa
35.	Girshaa Goobabaa (*Obboo)*	75	M	Dheeraa	04/12/15	He knew about the Dheeraa meeting.
36.	Giyon Dheeressaa (*Shambal)*	76	M	Finfinnee	01/11/16	He was a member of the Territorial Army who claims to have been approached by General Taddasa.
37.	Gugsaa Mekonnen (*Obboo)*	65	M	Finfinne	05/02/15	He was a son of Mokennen Wasanu, one of the prisoners of the MTSHA.
38.	Hailu Gebru Jimaa (*Obboo)*	70	M	Finfinnee	06/01/17	He met General Taddasa just before he moved to Meettaa and was a close friend of Colonel Hailu

						and Takka Tullu.
39.	Hulluuqaa Baabsoo(*Obboo)*	81	M	Finfinne	05/06/17	He was a member of the *Fetno Derash* police and had a close relationship with General Taddasa. During the coup plot, he was assigned to throw the first bomb and was also helped General Taddasa to break the police siege of his house latter. He was better known as solder Camadaa.
40.	Ijaraa Simee (*Obboo)*	57	M	Ejeree(Abootee)	09/04/17	He knew the background of General Taddasa's family.
41.	Ijigu Imiru (*Basha)*	86	M	Finfinnee	24/07/17	He was a member of the Patriots's Assocaition.
42.	Kabada Sime (*Obboo)*	80	M	Galamsoo	09/12/15	He was originally from Salaalee but lives in Galamsoo.
43.	Kibitu Raggaasaa (*Aaddee)*	70	F	Finfinne	21/05/16	She was a sister of Colonel Hailu Raggaasaa
44.	Kuusaa Deettii(*Obboo)*	60	M	Itayyaa	03/12/15	He knew about the Itayyaa meeting and was a well informed elder.
45.	Lataa Fayyee(*Obboo)*	82	M	Gooroo Maakoo	04/02/17	He was one of the accomplices who were imprisoned with General Taddasa from Meettaa.
46.	Leencoo Lataa (*Obboo*)	75	M	Finfinne	18/08/18	He was one of the founders of the OLF and knew General Taddasa before he went out to resist the *Darg.*

47.	Lemma Guyyaa(*Artist)*	88	M	Bishooftuu	09/8/16	He was a key member of the MTSHA in Bishooftuu and was a member of the Air Force there. But he is better known as an artist because of his art works.
48.	Lubee Birru (*Obbo*)	75	M	Finfinne	26/2/19	He was a young member of the MTSHA and knew a number of issues.
49.	Lule Warqe Dinagdee (*Aaddee)*	60	F	Adaamaa	30/01/18	She claims to have a son from General Taddasa when he was in Glamsoo in banishment.
50.	Mekonnen Abebe (*Obboo)*	88	M	Finfinne	21/05/16	He was a tailor in Galamsoo who claims to have sewed a cloth for General Taddasa in the rural peasant style to make him unnoticed while returning from Galamsoo to the capital.
51.	Mekonnen Mamo*(Obboo)*	76	M	Hoolataa	03/03/16	He knew about the Incinni gathering in Ada'aa Bargaa and his brother Taye Mamo was one of the orgnizers of the movement around Ada'aa Bargaa
52.	Mekonnen Roobii (*Obboo)*	75	M	Dhalata, Meettaa	25/05/16	General Taddasa and his companions had spent in the house of his father just before their capture. He involved in the fighting with the *Darg* forces before Teklu Tesema was killed.
53.	Melaku Jambere (*Obboo)*	46	M	Ejeree(Abootee)	26/11/15	He knew the family background of General Taddasa.

54.	Merid Mekonnen Roobii (*Obboo)*	44	M	Gooroo Maakoo	18/03/18	He heard of the public meeting held by General Taddasa in the compound of his grandfather in Meettaa
55.	Moggaa Firrisaa (*Dr.)*	81	M	Finfinne	08/02/15 09/8/16	He was a close follower of General Taddasa and an active member of the MTSHA.
56.	Mohammed Ahmed Musa (Mohammed Qophee) *(Obboo)*	59	M	Finfinne	06/06/17	He is well aware of the teachings of General Taddasa in Galamsoo.
57.	Mohammed Jibril (*Obboo)*	77	M	Adaamaa	30/01/18	He knew General Taddasa while he was in Galamsoo.
58.	Mohammed Jiruu (*Obboo)*	82	M	Dheeraa	04/12/15	He was a well informed Dheeraa informant and a participant of the Dheeraa meeting of the MTSHA..
59.	Muhammed Hussein (*Sheik)*	60	M	Galamsoo	08/12/15	He knew General Taddasa when he was in Galamsoo.
60.	Muktar *Hajj* Tuqaa (*Obboo)*	45	M	Itayyaa	03/12/15	He has gathered oral sources on *Safuu*. He is a relative of *Hajj* Roobalee Turee, one of the key organizers of the MTSHA in Arsii, especially the one at Dheeraa.
61.	Nagaasoo Gidaadaa (Dr.*)*	75	M	Finfinne	24/4/18	He attended the meetings of the MTSHA while he was a university student and heard some of the speeches of General Taddasa which he made at the Association's headquarters.
62.	Nigirt Gorbaa *(Obboo)*	60	M	Finfinne	17/6/18	He was a family member of Colonel Hailu

						Raggaasaa.
63.	Sahilu Birri (Colonel)	84	M	Finfinne	22/03/15 05/07/16	He was one of the founders and leaders of the MTSHA. He was its chief treasurer from the very beginning and had closely worked with General Taddasa.
64.	Seyoume Tekle Berhan Hagos (*Ato)*	77	M	Finfinne	24/07/17	He was a member of the *Fetno Derash* Police.
65.	Shiferaw Demisse(*Obboo)*	70	M	Ejeree, the capital of Hidhabuu Abootee	26/11/15	He knew about the situations in Salaalee after the conquest of the region.
66.	Sultan Umare (*Obboo)*	44	M	Galamsoo	09/12/15	He is well informed about the activities of General Taddasa while living in Galamsoo in banishment.
67.	Tadele Bitul(*Engineer)*	91	M	Finfinne	29/12/17	He criticizes General Taddasa for igniting the Oromo consciousness through the MTSHA which, he believes, be-came the basis for the prevailing Oromo nati-onalism that culminated during the recent 'Oromo Protest.'
68.	Tadese Tele Salvano (*Obboo)*	52	M	Finfinne	20/08/17	He claims to have accessed documents not accessible to the public and common researchers with special permission from the former Prime Mnister, Meles Zenawi.
69.	Taye Badhaadhaa (*Obboo)*	80	M	Finfinne	23/4/18	He was one of the founders of the MTSHA, served as a member of different committees and knew General Taddasa very well.

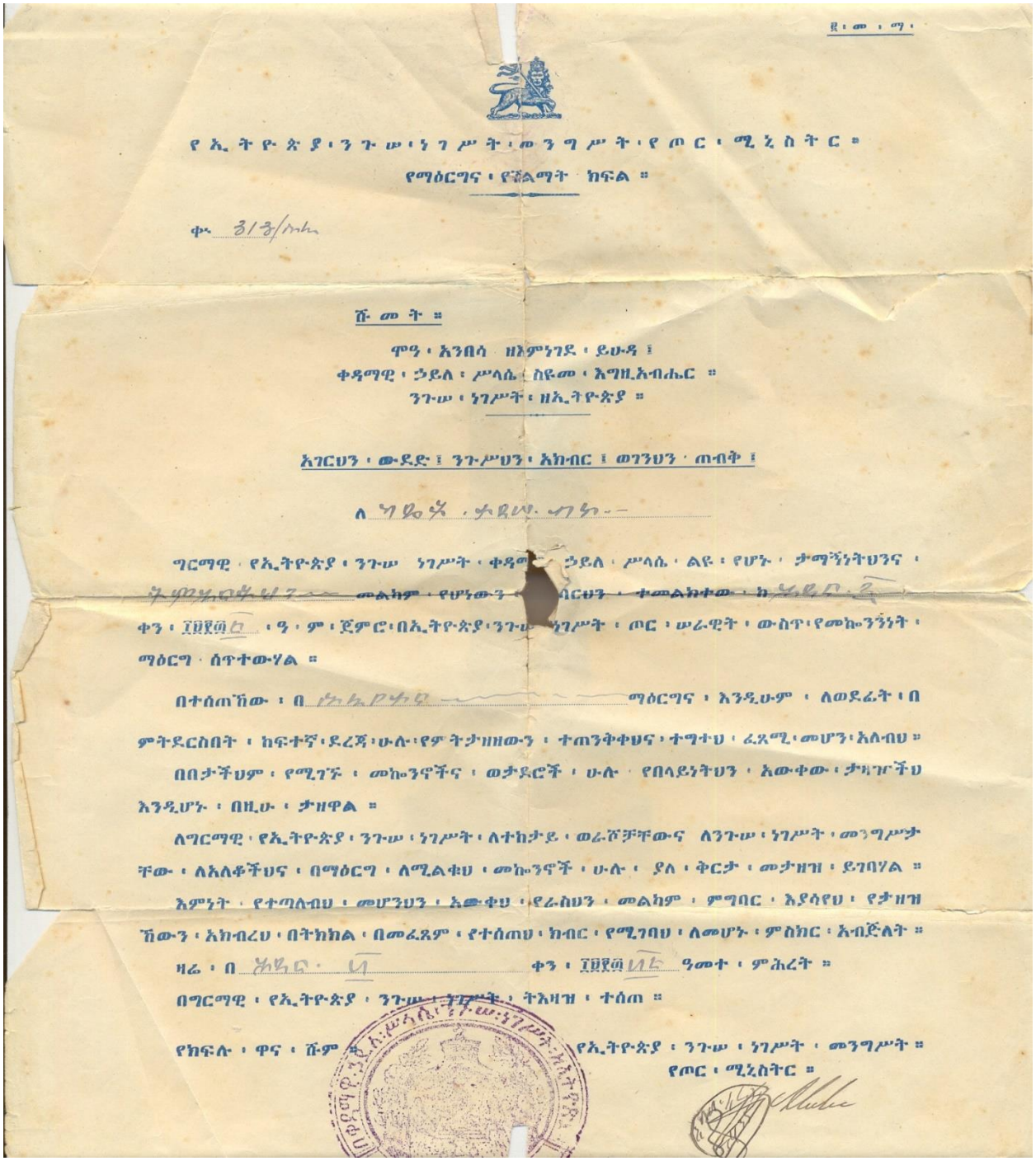
70.	Tesema Qananii (*Obboo)*	84	M	Hidhabuu Abootee(Ejeree town)	21/11/15	He was an informed elder from Hidhabuu Abootee, the district where General Taddasa was born.
71.	Tesfaye Dibaabaa (*Lieutenant)*	78	M	Finfnne	09/8/16	He was a member of the Addis Ababa Police and knew of the shout out around the house of General Taddasa when the police went to disarm him in Novemeber 1966.
72.	Teshome Aboye *(Obboo)*	60	M	Finfinne	017/6/18	He was a brother of Colonel Hailu Raggaa-saa and knew of his grievances.
73.	Teshome Gebre Mariam (*Ato)*	87	M	Finfinnee	02/03/16 17/08/16	He was the Attorney General when General Taddasa, Lieutenant Mamo and other prisoners of the MTSHA were accused. He was excluded from handling their case probably for fear of sympathy with the prisoners.
74.	Teshome Kebede Abayu (*Dr.)*	42	M	Finfinne	13/02/17	He knew of the resistance tradition of the Oromo of Salaalee
75.	Teshome Saffisaa (*Obboo)*	54	M	Finfinne	09/8/16	His father was one of those captured with General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu Raggaasaa in Meettaa as accomplices.
76.	Tilahun Fayisa (*Shambal)*	78	M	Fiche	25/15/15	He was one of the members of the Territ-orial Army.
77.	Tolasaa Kishee (*Obboo)*	58	M	Finfinne	05/02/17	He knew the activites of General Taddasa and others in Meettaa and their eventual capture.

78.	Tsehay Taddasa Birru (*Aadde)*	68	F	Finfinne	30/03/16 13/05/16 29/07/16 10/01/18 30/04/19	She is the daughter of General Taddasa and was interviewed at different times. She is the leading oral informant with invaluable accounts. Her age is based on the last interview.
79.	Tulluu Biqilaa (*Obboo)*	80	M	Gilee, Meettaa	25/05/16	He was one of the prisoners in connection with the activities of General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu in Meettaa
80.	Umar Hajji *(Obboo)*	68	M	Galamsoo	2014	Interviewed at Galamsoo for me by Mohammed Hassen when he was doing his PhD research.
81.	Warqinesh Bayyeechaa *(Aaddee)*	55	F	Mogor	28/05/16	She knew about General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu's mov-ement to Meettaa and their eventual capture.
82.	Wasihun Bayyeechaa *(Obboo)*	55	M	Finfinne	09/8/16	His father was one of those accused as accomplices of General Taddasa and Colonel Hailu.
83.	Wasihun Nigatu (Brigadier General)	75	M	Finfinne	02/09/15	He had worked with Colonel Hailu Ragga-asaa and Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam.
84.	Wolde Senbet Dhaabaa (*Obboo)*	80	M	Adaamaa	11/06/16	He was one of the young supporters of the MTSHA.
85.	Wolde Senbet Teklu (*Basha)*	71	M	Finfinne	24/07/16 11/11/17	He was one of the members of the *Fetno Derash* Police under the command of General Taddasa and knew very well about him.
86.	Yasub Sheik Muhammed Reshid	48	M	Galamsoo	07/12/15	He was a younger brother of Ahmed Taqi, a close

	(*Obboo*)					companion of General Taddasa in Galamsoo.
87.	Yimer Amano(*Obboo)*	56	M	Itayyaa	03/12/15	He was working the in the Culture and Tour-ism Bureau and knew about the Itayyaa mee-ting of the MTSHA.
88.	Zewde Nagawoo (*Obboo)*	73	M	Finfinne	6/11/18	He was working in the Municipality of Addis Ababa as a grader operator.
89.	Abebe Gebre-Mariam (*Major)*		M	Lives in Washigton DC		Series of Interviews on OMN on August 23, 25 and 26, 2014, available in the OMN archives related to General Taddasa. He was one of those who followed him to the bush.

Appendices

Appendix- I. It is in the Possession of *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa Birru



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ቁ. 31ኝ/ጦሐ

ሹ መ ት ።

ሞዓ ፡ አንበሳ ፡ ዘእምነገደ ፡ ይሁዳ ፤
ቀዳማዊ ፡ ኃይለ ፡ ሥላሴ ፡ ስዩመ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ።
ንጉሠ ፡ ነገሥት ፡ ዘኢትዮጵያ ።

አገርህን ፡ ሙደድ ፤ ንጉሥህን ፡ አክብር ፤ ወገንህን ፡ ጠብቅ ፤

ለ ካፒቴን ፡ ታደሰ ፡ ሻንቆ ፡

ግርማዊ ፡ የኢትዮጵያ ፡ ንጉሠ ፡ ነገሥት ፡ ቀዳማዊ ፡ ኃይለ ፡ ሥላሴ ፡ ልዩ ፡ የሆኑ ፡ ታማኝነትህንና ፡ ታምሃኖ[illegible] መልካም ፡ የሆነውን ፡ [illegible]ርህን ፡ ተመልክተው ፡ ከ ኅዳር ፡ ፭
ቀን ፡ ፲፱፻፴፫ ፡ ዓ ፡ ም ፡ ጀምሮ ፡ በኢትዮጵያ ፡ ንጉሠ ፡ ነገሥት ፡ ጦር ፡ ሠራዊት ፡ ውስጥ ፡ የመኰንንነት ፡ ማዕርግ ፡ ሰጥተውሃል ።

በተሰጠኸው ፡ በ ኮሎኔልነት ፡ ማዕርግና ፡ እንዲሁም ፡ ለወደፊት ፡ በ ምትደርስበት ፡ ከፍተኛ ፡ ደረጃ ፡ ሁሉ ፡ የምትታዘዘውን ፡ ተጠንቅቀህና ፡ ተግተህ ፡ ፈጸሚ ፡ መሆን ፡ አለብህ ።

በበታችህም ፡ የሚገኙ ፡ መኰንኖችና ፡ ወታደሮች ፡ ሁሉ ፡ የበላይነትህን ፡ አውቀው ፡ ታዛዦችህ እንዲሆኑ ፡ በዚሁ ፡ ታዘዋል ።

ለግርማዊ ፡ የኢትዮጵያ ፡ ንጉሠ ፡ ነገሥት ፡ ለተከታይ ፡ ወራሾቻቸውና ፡ ለንጉሠ ፡ ነገሥት ፡ መንግሥታቸው ፡ ለአለቆችህና ፡ በማዕርግ ፡ ለሚልቁህ ፡ መኰንኖች ፡ ሁሉ ፡ ያለ ፡ ቅርታ ፡ መታዘዝ ፡ ይገባሃል ።

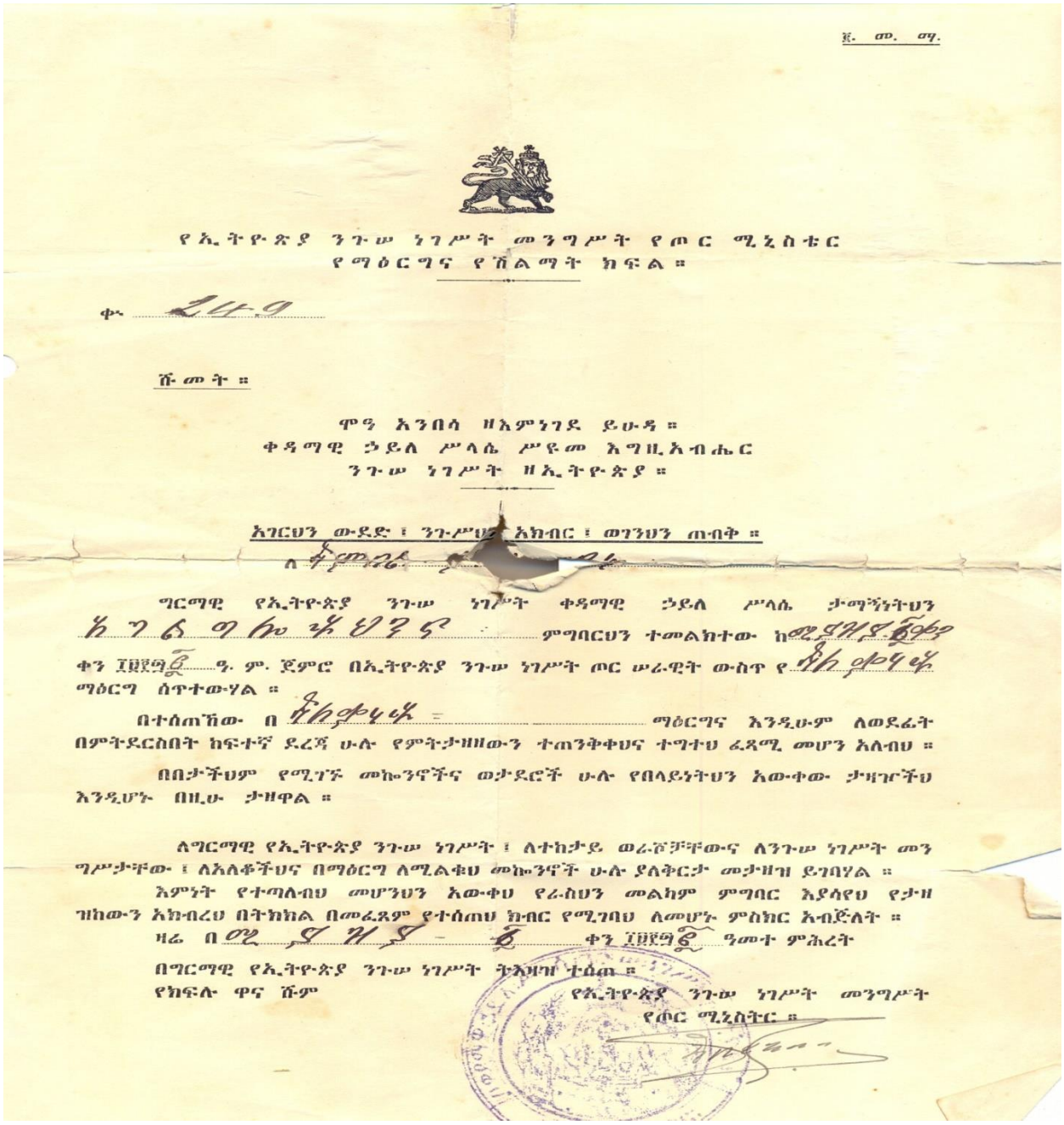
እምነት ፡ የተጣለብህ ፡ መሆንህን ፡ አውቀህ ፡ የራስህን ፡ መልካም ፡ ምግባር ፡ እያሳየህ ፡ የታዘዝኸውን ፡ አክብረህ ፡ በትክክል ፡ በመፈጸም ፡ የተሰጠህ ፡ ክብር ፡ የሚገባህ ፡ ለመሆኑ ፡ ምስክር ፡ አብጅለት ።

ዛሬ ፡ በ ኅዳር ፡ ፱ ቀን ፡ ፲፱፻፴፱ ዓመተ ፡ ምሕረት ።

በግርማዊ ፡ የኢትዮጵያ ፡ ንጉሠ ፡ ነገሥት ፡ ትእዛዝ ፡ ተሰጠ ።

የክፍሉ ፡ ዋና ፡ ሹም ፡ የኢትዮጵያ ፡ ንጉሠ ፡ ነገሥት ፡ መንግሥት ።
የጦር ፡ ሚኒስትር ።

Appendix-II. It is in the possession of *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa Birru



ጄ. መ. ማ.

የኢትዮጵያ ንጉሠ ነገሥት መንግሥት የጦር ሚኒስቴር
የማዕርግና የሽልማት ክፍል ።

ቁ. ፭፱፭

ሹመት ።

ሞዓ አንበሳ ዘአምነገደ ይሁዳ ።
ቀዳማዊ ኃይለ ሥላሴ ሥዩመ እግዚአብሔር
ንጉሠ ነገሥት ዘኢትዮጵያ ።

አገርህን ውደድ ፣ ንጉሥህን አክብር ፣ ወገንህን ጠብቅ ።

ለ[illegible]

ግርማዊ የኢትዮጵያ ንጉሠ ነገሥት ቀዳማዊ ኃይለ ሥላሴ ታማኝነትህን
ከገፋማኩሄ ሃይኖ ምግባርህን ተመልክተው ከሚያዝያ ፭ ፲፱፻፷፭
ቀን ፲፱፻፷፯ ዓ. ም. ጀምሮ በኢትዮጵያ ንጉሠ ነገሥት ጦር ሠራዊት ውስጥ የ ጸሐፊ ፯ ሻ
ማዕርግ ሰጥተውሃል ።

በተሰጠኸው በ ጸሐፊ ፯ ሻ ማዕርግና እንዲሁም ለወደፊት
በምትደርስበት ከፍተኛ ደረጃ ሁሉ የምትታዘዘውን ተጠንቅቀህና ተግተህ ፈጻሚ መሆን አለብህ ።

በበታችህም የሚገኙ መኰንኖችና ወታደሮች ሁሉ የበላይነትህን አውቀው ታዛዦችህ
እንዲሆኑ በዚሁ ታዝዋል ።

ለግርማዊ የኢትዮጵያ ንጉሠ ነገሥት ፣ ለተከታይ ወራሾቻቸውና ለንጉሠ ነገሥት መን
ግሥታቸው ፣ ለአለቆችህና በማዕርግ ለሚልቁህ መኰንኖች ሁሉ ያለቅርታ መታዘዝ ይገባሃል ።

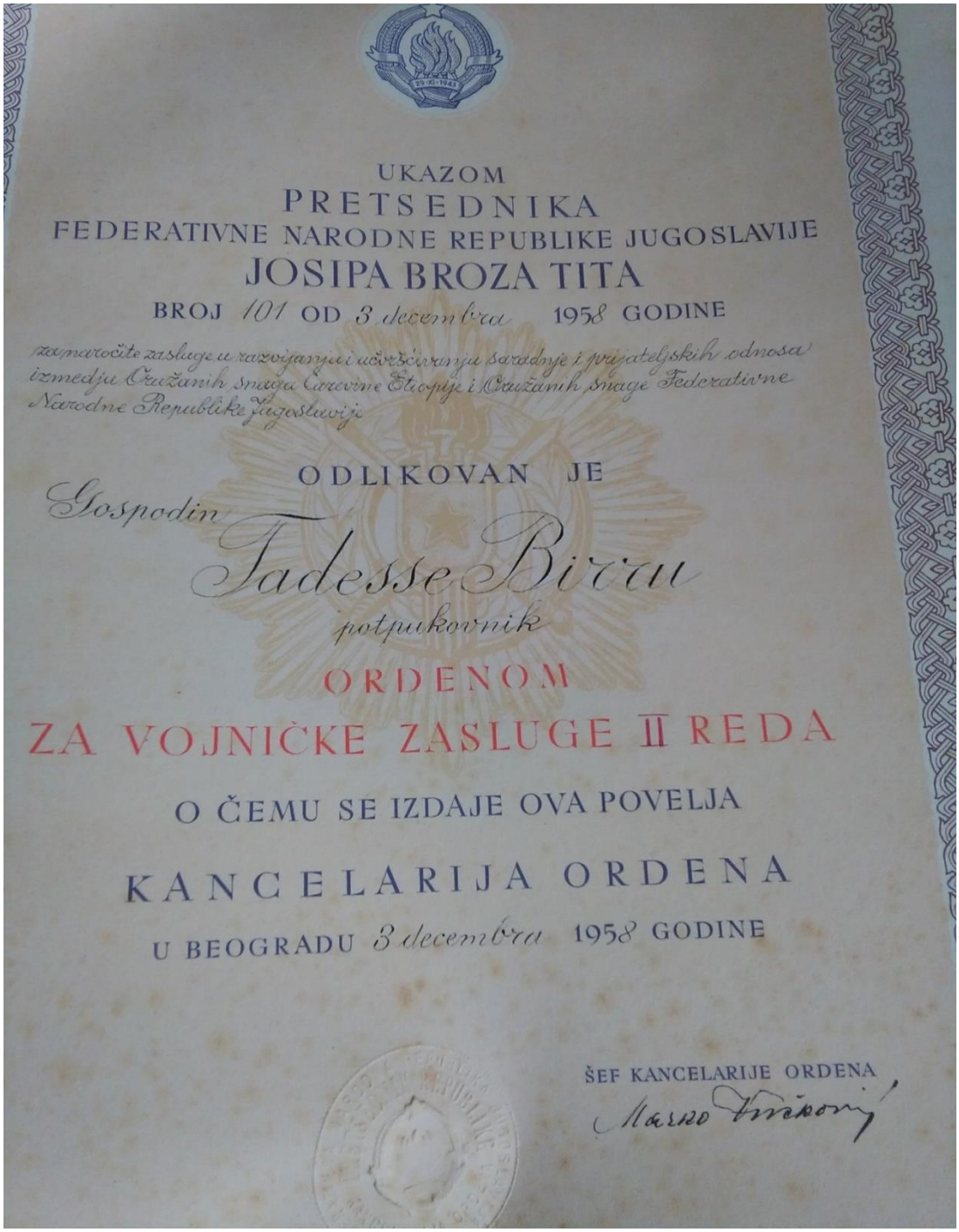
እምነት የተጣለብህ መሆንህን አውቀህ የራስህን መልካም ምግባር እያሳየህ የታዘ
ዝከውን አክብረህ በትክክል በመፈጸም የተሰጠህ ክብር የሚገባህ ለመሆኑ ምስክር አብጅለት ።

ዛሬ በ ሚ ያ ዝ ፭ ቀን ፲፱፻፷፯ ዓመተ ምሕረት

በግርማዊ የኢትዮጵያ ንጉሠ ነገሥት ትእዛዝ ተሰጠ ።
የክፍሉ ዋና ሹም

የኢትዮጵያ ንጉሠ ነገሥት መንግሥት
የጦር ሚኒስትር ።

Appendix-III. It is in the possession of *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa Birru



UKAZOM
PRETSEDNIKA
FEDERATIVNE NARODNE REPUBLIKE JUGOSLAVIJE
JOSIPA BROZA TITA
BROJ 101 OD 3 decembra 1958 GODINE

za naročite zasluge u razvijanju i učvršćivanju saradnje i prijateljskih odnosa izmedju Oružanih snaga Carevine Etiopije i Oružanih snage Federativne Narodne Republike Jugoslavije

ODLIKOVAN JE

Gospodin Tadesse Birru
potpukovnik

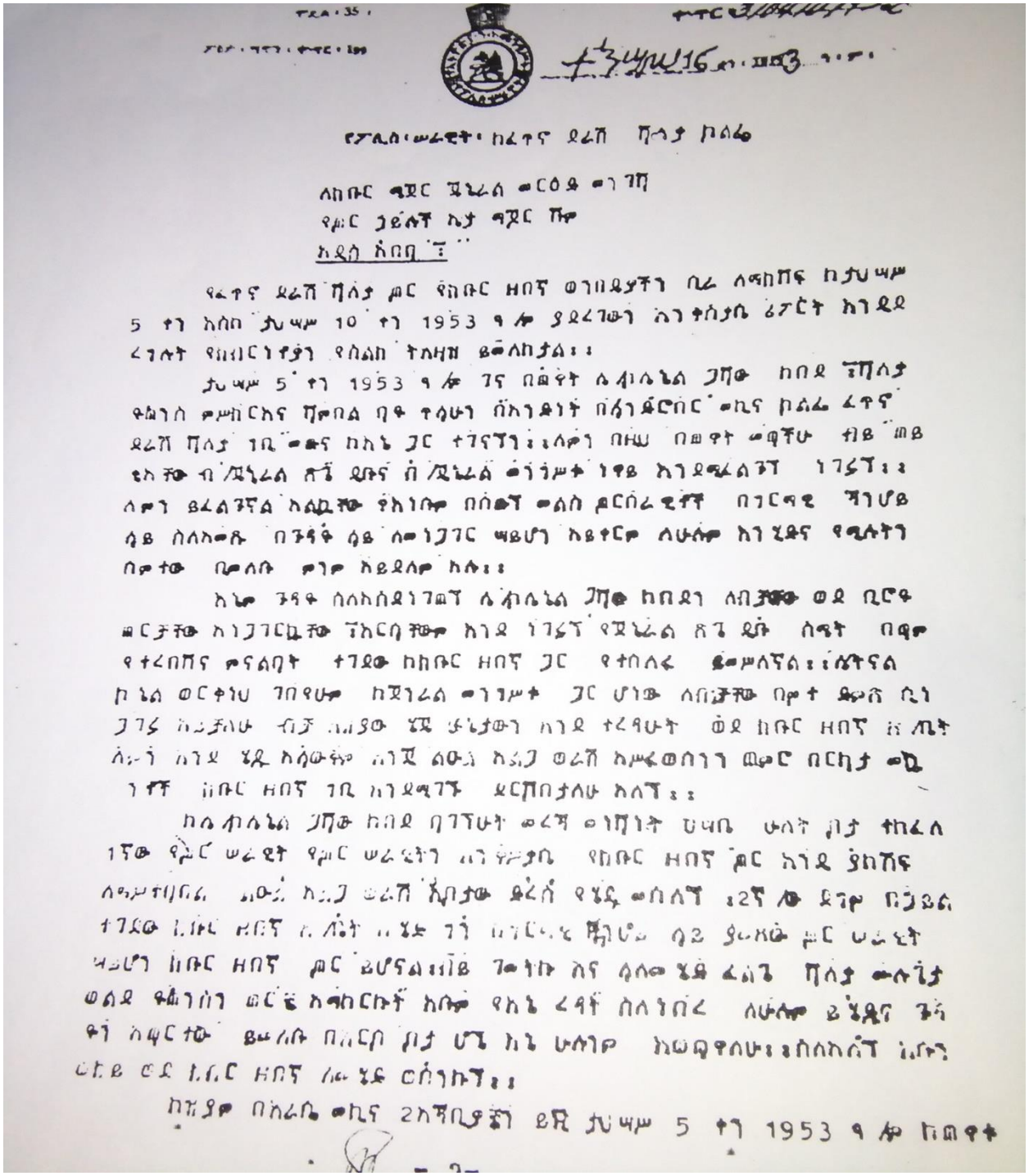
ORDENOM
ZA VOJNIČKE ZASLUGE II REDA

O ČEMU SE IZDAJE OVA POVELJA

KANCELARIJA ORDENA
U BEOGRADU 3 decembra 1958 GODINE

ŠEF KANCELARIJE ORDENA
Marko Vrhovnik

Appendix- IV. It is in the possession of Tadese Tele Salvano. It is also available in his book, *Gedle Mefenqile Mengist*.



የፖሊስ መሪዎች ከፈተና ደረሽ ሻለቃ ክለሬ

ለከቡር ጓደር ጄኔራል መርዕድ መንገሻ
የሥር ጋይሎች ኢታ ጓጀር ሹም
አዲስ አበባ ፤

የፈተና ደረሽ ሻለቃ ሥር የከቡር ዘበኛ ወገባዊያችን ቢራ ለጣከሽፍ ከታህሣሥ 5 ተነ አስከ ታህሣሥ 10 ተነ 1953 ዓ ም ያደረገውን ሕገ ቀስታሱ ሪፖርት አገደደ ረገሉት የበብርነቶታን የስልከ ትለዛዝ ይመለከታል ፡፡

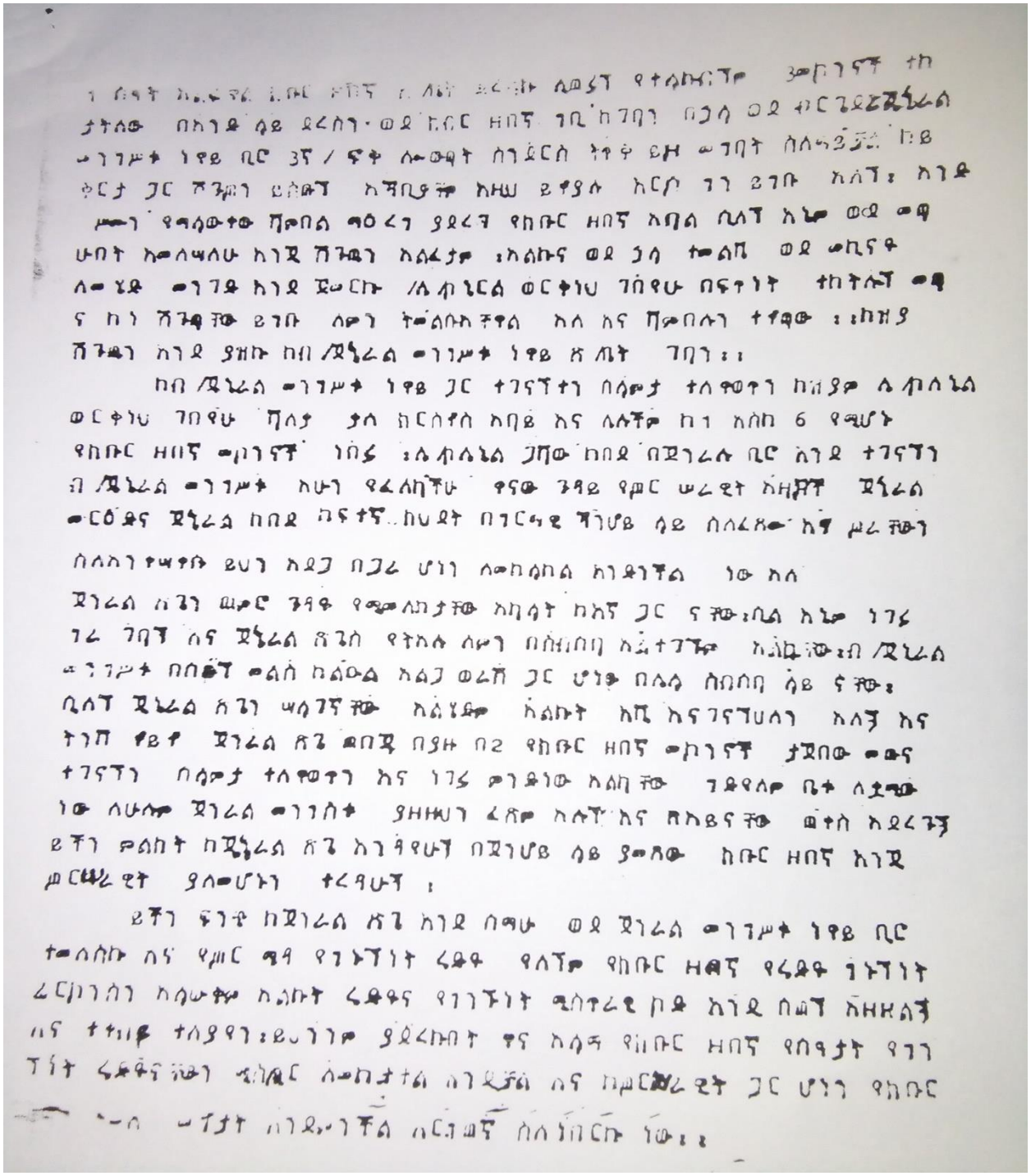
ታህሣሥ 5 ተነ 1953 ዓ ም ገና በጨዋት ሌ/ብሌኔል ጋሻው ከበደ ፕሻለቃ ቀሌነስ ሥዝርአስና ሻምበል ባቀ ተሳሁነ ሰአነደነት በሰገቆሮበር ሚና ኮሰሬ ረቀና ደረሽ ሻለቃ ነቢ ሥና ከአኔ ጋር ተገናኘነ ፡፡ለምነ በዚህ በመቀት ሥዊችሁ ብዙ ጠይቂአችው ብ/ሚኒረል ጽኌ ይቡና ሰ/ሚኒረል መነነሥቱ ነቀይ አነደሚረልንፕ ነገሬኘ ፡፡ ለምነ ፀረልንኖል አልቪችው የአነሱ በሰልኘ መልስ ልርሰረቂቶች በገርማዊ ሻነሆዩ ሳይ ስለአሥሱ በንፋቅ ሳይ ለመነጋገር ሣይሆነ አይቀርም ለሁለም አነሂዱና የሚሉትን ሰሙተው ቢመለሱ ምንም አይደለም አሉ ፡፡

አኔም ንፋቁ ስለአሰደነገጠኘ ሌ/ብሌኔል ጋሻው ከበደን ለብቻቸው ወደ ቢሮቁ ሠርቻቸው አነጋገርቢቸው ፕአርባቸውም አነደ ነገሬኘ የጀኔረል ጽኌ ይቡ ስሜት በዉም የተረበሸና ምናልባት ተገደው ከከቡር ዘበኛ ጋር የተስለሩ ይመሰለኛል ፡፡ሰዋናል ኮ ኔል ወርቀነህ ገበየሁም ከጀነረል መነነሥቱ ጋር ሆነው ለበቻቸው በሥተ ጨለሽ ሲነ ጋገሬ አጋቻለሁ ብቻ ለጠያው ሂዩ ሁኔታውን ለገደ ተረዳሁት ወደ ከቡር ዘበኛ ሰጪት ለራነ ለገደ ሄዲ አሳውቁም ለገጀ ሰውነ አሰጋ ወራሽ አሥፈወሰነነ ዉሮር በርካታ መቢ ነኖች ከቡር ዘበኛ ገቢ ለገደሚገኙ ደርሽበታለሁ አለኘ ፡፡

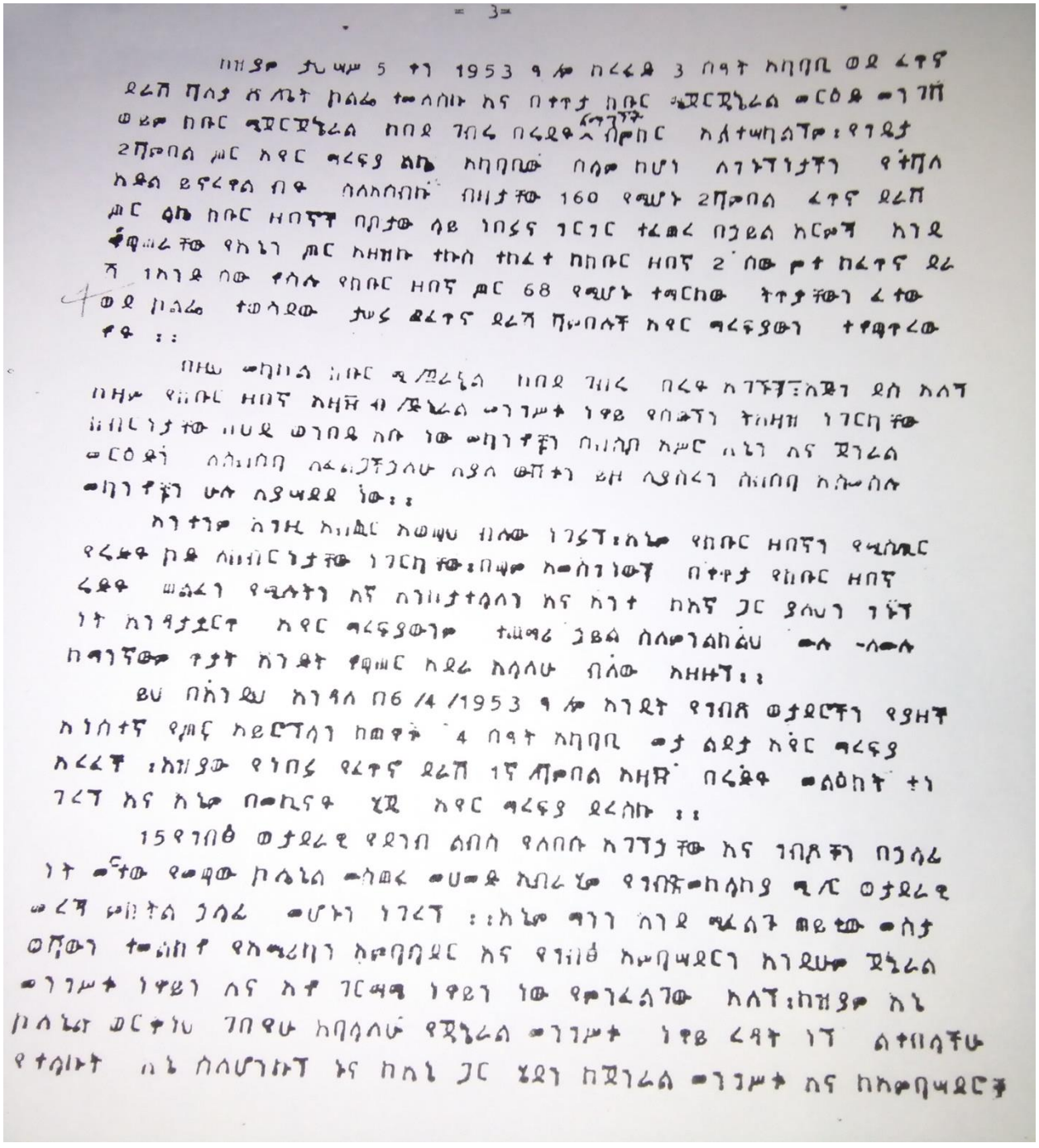
ከሌ/ብሌኔል ጋሻው ከበደ ባገኘሁት መረሻ መነሻነት ህዛቤ ሁለት ቦታ ተከፈለ ነኖው የጌር ሠራዊት የሥር ሠራዊትን ለነዯጅታቤ የከቡር ዘበኛ ጌር አነደ ያከሸና ለማሥተባበሬ ፤ወዲ አጋ ወራሽ አበታው ቆረሶ የሄዲ መሰለኘ ፤2ኛ ሎ ደግሞ በጋይል ተገደው ኒዙር ዘበኛ ሬ ለኔት ሬ ሄድ ገነ በገርሩሩ ሻነሆዉ ሳይ ያሬዛው ጌር ሠራዊት ዛሬሆነ ከቡር ዘበኛ ጌር ይሆናል ፤ነይ ገመነው አና ሳሰመ ሄይ ፈለጌ ሻለቃ ሙሉጌታ ወልደ ቀሌነስን ወር ቼ አጣርቡት አሉም የአኔ ረዳት ስለነበረ ለሁሉም ይሄጂና ጉዳ ዩን አሣርተው ይመለሱ በሬርቦ ቦታ ሆኜ አኔ ሁሉነም አመጣዋለሁ ፤ስለአሰኘ ነሥን ሀቲይ ወደ ኒቡር ዘበኛ ሬሬ ሄድ ወሰነኩኘ ፤

ከዚያም በአራቤ ሞኪና 2አሻቢቃኝ ይዞ ታህሣሥ 5 ተነ 1953 ዓ ም ከጠዋቱ

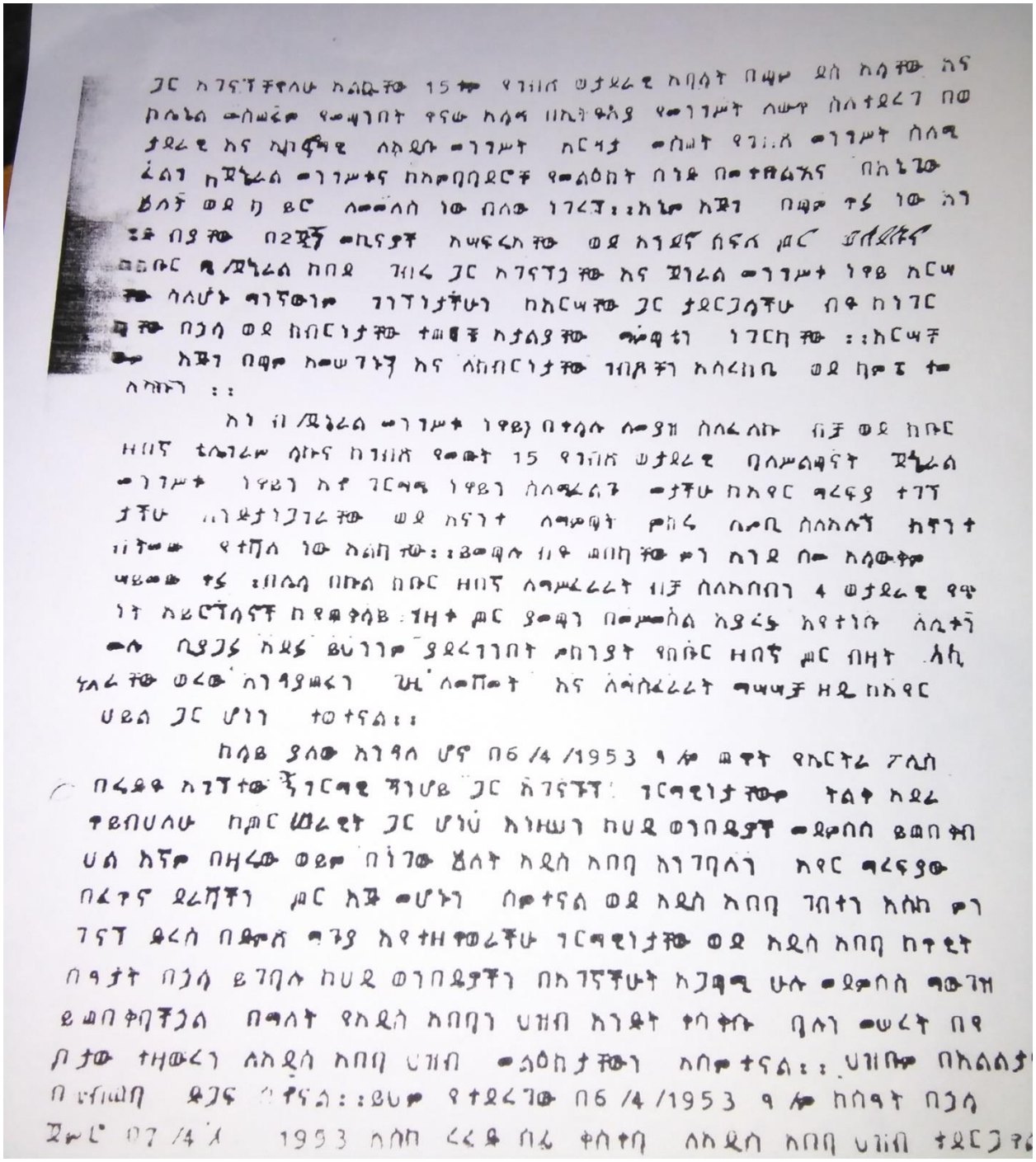
Appendix-V. It is in the possession of Tadese Tele Salvano. It is also available in his book, *Gedle Mefenqile Mengist*.



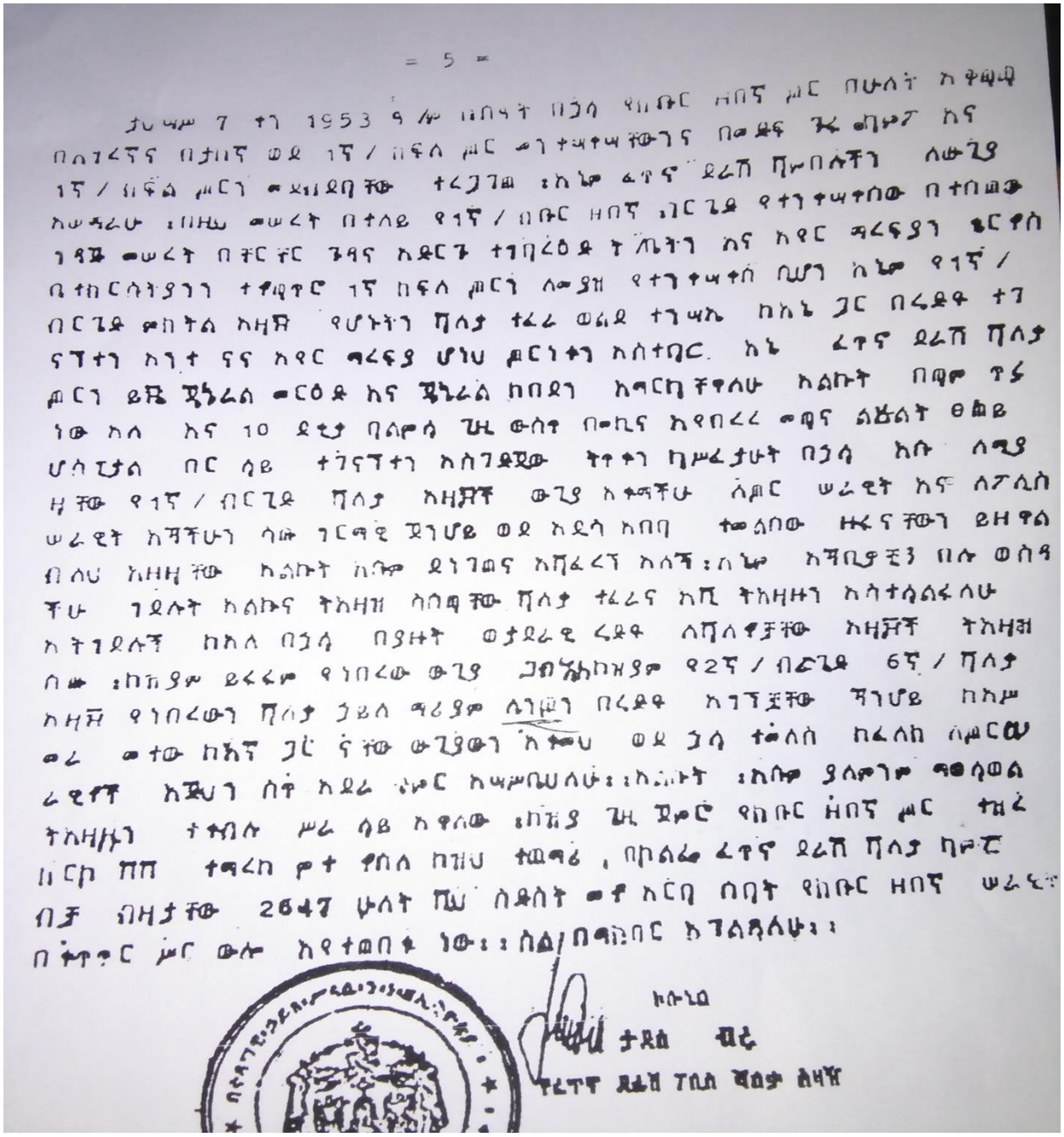
Appendix-VI. It is in the possession of Tadese Tele Salvano. It is also available in his book, *Gedle Mefenqile Mengist*.



Appendix-VII. It is in the possession of Tadese Tele Salvano. It is also available in his book, *Gedle Mefenqile Mengist*.



Appendix-VIII. It is in the possession of Tadese Tele Salvano. It is also available in his book, *Gedle Mefenqile Mengist*.



= 5 =

ታህሣሥ 7 ተገ 1953 ዓ/ም በሰላት በጋሳ የነበርር ዘበኛ ሥር በሁለት አቅጣጫ
በመገረናና በታክና ወደ 1ኛ/ በፍለ ሠር ሬገ ተጣተጣቸውና በመጨፍ ጊዜ ወግሶፖ አና
1ኛ/ በፍል ሠርነ መጨነደባቸው ተረጋገጠ ፡አኔም ፈጥኖ ደራሽ ሻሥበሉችን ለሙሪያ
አሠማራሁ ፡በዚህ መሠረት በተለይ የ1ኛ/ በቡር ዘበኛ ፡ገርጊደ የተገተጣተሰው በተበጠቅ
1ጻጅ መሠረት በቶርቶር ጉጳና አድርጉ ተገባረዕደ ትሸትን አና አየር ጣረፍያን ቄርቀስ
በተከርሳትያገነ ተቀጥሮ 1ኛ በፍለ ሠርነ ለመያዝ የተገተጣተሰ ቢሆነ አኔም የ1ኛ/
በርጊደ መከትል አዛዝ የሆኑትን ሻለቃ ተፈረ ወልደ ተገጣኤ ከአኔ ጋር በረደፉ ተገ
ናገተነ አነተ ናና አየር ጣረፍያ ሆነህ ሠርነቱን አስተባር አኔ ፈጥኖ ደራሽ ሻለቃ
ሠርነ ይዜ ጂኔረል መርዕዶ አና ጄኔረል ከበደነ አጣርኪቸየለሁ አልኩት በጣም ጥሩ
ነው አለ አና 10 ደቂቃ ባለሞሳ ጊዜ ውስተ በመኪና አየበረረ መጥና ልጅለት ፀጨይ
ሆስፒታል በር ሳይ ተገናገተነ አስገደጀው ትተቱነ ካሥፈታሁት በጋሳ አሱ ለሚያ
ዛቸው የ1ኛ/ ብርጊደ ሻለቃ አዛዝች ውጊያ አቁጣችሁ ሳጠር ወረዊት አና ለፖሊስ
ወረዊት አሻችሁነ ሳሙ ገርጣዊ ጀነሆይ ወደ አደሳ አበባ ተመልሰው ዙሩናቸውነ ይዘዋል
በለህ አዘዛቸው አልኩት ስጭ ደነገጠና አሸፈረነ አለኝ ፡አኔም አሻቢቃቿን በሱ ወስዓ
ችሁ 1ደሉት አልኩና ትአዛዝ ሳሰጧቸው ሻለቃ ተፈረና አሺ ትአዛዙነ አሳተሳልፉለሁ
አትገደሉኝ ከአለ በጋሳ በያዙት ወታደራዊ ረደፉ ለሻለቃቿቸው አዛዝች ትአዛዝ
ሰሙ ፡ከአያም ይፈሩም የነበረው ውጊያ ጋብኤከአያም የ2ኛ/ ብርጊደ 6ኛ/ ሻለቃ
አዛዝ የነበረውነ ሻለቃ ኃይለ ጣሪያም ሲገሠነ በረደፉ አገኘቿው ሻገሆይ ከአሥ
መረ መተው ከአኛ ጋር ናቸው ውጊያውነ አትመህ ወደ ጋሳ ተመለስ ከፈለክ ለሠርዉ
ሬዊየኛ አጁነ ሰቶ አደራ ፡ሥር አሣሥቤሠለሁ ፡፡አሰራት ፡አሱም ያለምነም ግፀሳወል
ትአዛዙነ ተቀብሉ ሥረ ሳይ አቀለው ፡ከአያ ጊዜ ጀምሮ የከቡር ዘበኛ ሠር ተጨረ
ከርክ ሸሸ ተጣረከ ምተ ቀሰለ ከገሀ ተዉጣሪ ፣ በኮልፌ ፈጥኖ ደራሽ ሻለቃ ካምፑ
ብቻ ብዛታቸው 2647 ሁለት ሺህ ስድስት መቶ አርባ ሰባት የነቡር ዘበኛ ሠራዊት
በትጥቅ ሥር ውሎ አየተወበቱ ነው ፡፡ስል/በጣኔበር አገልጻለሁ ፡፡

ኮሎኔል
ታደሰ ብሬ
ተረጥኖ ደፊዝ ፖሰስ ሻወታ ስዛዝ

Appendix-IX. It is in the possession of *Aadde* Tsehay Taddasa Birru



የኢትዮጵያ ንጉሠ ነገሥት መንግሥት ፡
የጽሕፈት ሚኒስቴር ፡

3505-25-ሃፖፖ/32

መጋቢት ፱ ቀን ፲፱፻፵፯ ዓ.ም

ለብሪጋዲዮር ጀኔራል ታደሰ ብሩ ፡

በግርማዊ ንጉሠ ነገሥት መልካም ሬቃድና ትእዛዝ ፡
የብሔራዊ ጦር ምክትል ኤታ ማዦር ሹም ፡ ሆነው መሾምዎን ፡
አስታውቃለሁ ።

ከሰላምታ ጋር ።

ፊርማ

ጸሐፌ ፡ ትእዛዝ ፡ አክሊሉ ፡ ሀብተ ፡ ወልድ ፡
፡ ጠቅላይ ፡ ሚኒስትርና ፡ የጽሕፈት ፡ ሚኒስትር ፡

Appendix- X. It is in the possession of Abera Mekonnen Wasanu

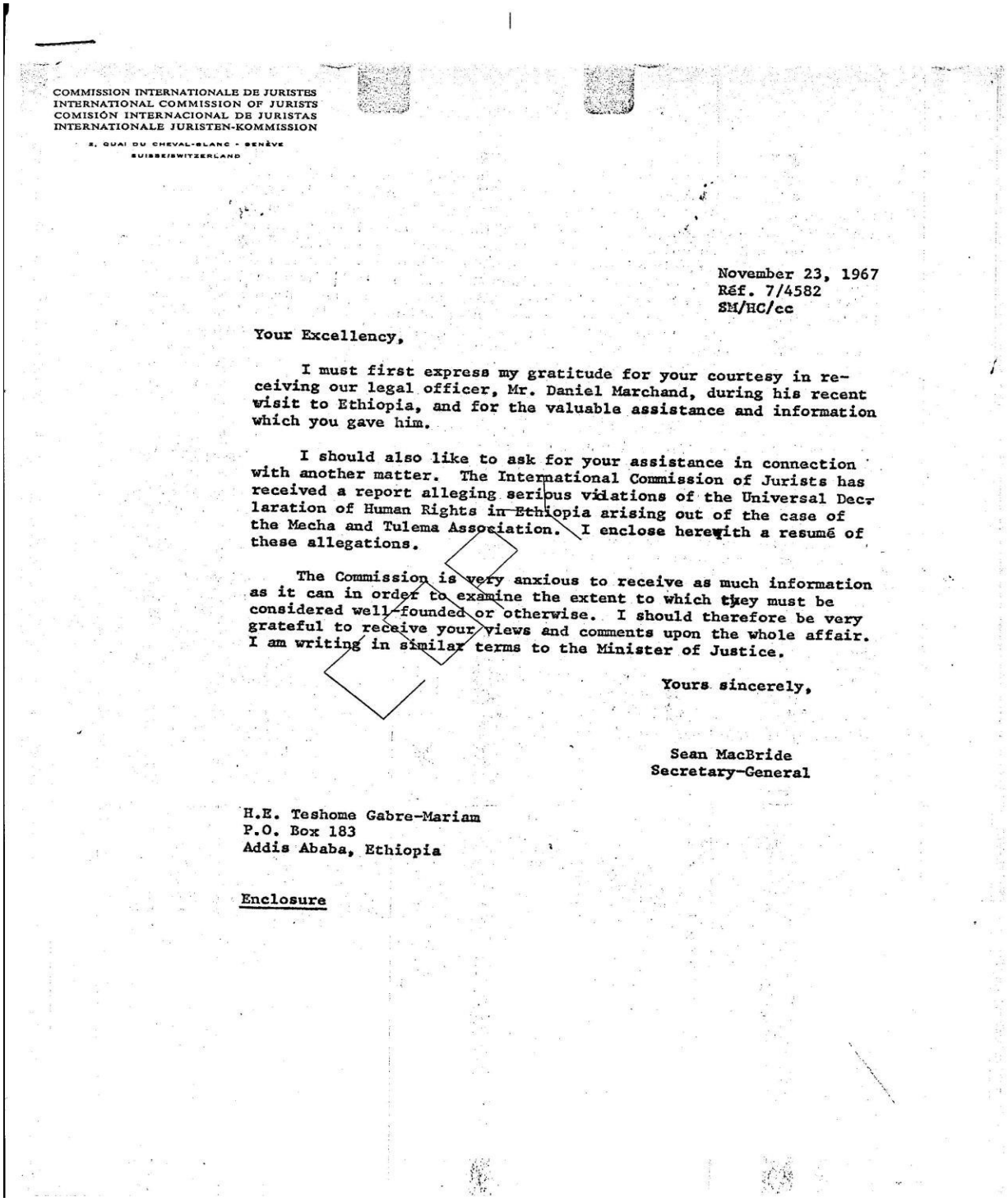
Lt-telegram den 20 november 1967

To his Imperial Majesty the Emperor of Ethiopia Addis Abbeba

The Swedish Section of Amnesty International, being an unpolitical humantarian organisation for the release of political prisoners in all parts of the world, urgently appeals to your imperial Majesty for the immediate release of the following political prisoners, subjects of your country, Taddesse Biru, Mamo Mezamir, Seife Tessema, Dadi Feissa, Lemmessa Boru, Makonnen Wossanu, Haile Mariam Gammada, Alemu Kitessa, Dawit Abdi'Bekele Mekonnen

Swedish Section Amnesty International
Ingrid Lilja Secretary

Appendix- XI. It is in the possession of Abera Mekonnen Wasanu



COMMISSION INTERNATIONALE DE JURISTES
INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF JURISTS
COMISIÓN INTERNACIONAL DE JURISTAS
INTERNATIONALE JURISTEN-KOMMISSION

2, QUAI DU CHEVAL-BLANC - GENÈVE
SUISSE/SWITZERLAND

November 23, 1967
Réf. 7/4582
SM/HC/cc

Your Excellency,

I must first express my gratitude for your courtesy in receiving our legal officer, Mr. Daniel Marchand, during his recent visit to Ethiopia, and for the valuable assistance and information which you gave him.

I should also like to ask for your assistance in connection with another matter. The International Commission of Jurists has received a report alleging serious violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Ethiopia arising out of the case of the Mecha and Tulema Association. I enclose herewith a resumé of these allegations.

The Commission is very anxious to receive as much information as it can in order to examine the extent to which they must be considered well-founded or otherwise. I should therefore be very grateful to receive your views and comments upon the whole affair. I am writing in similar terms to the Minister of Justice.

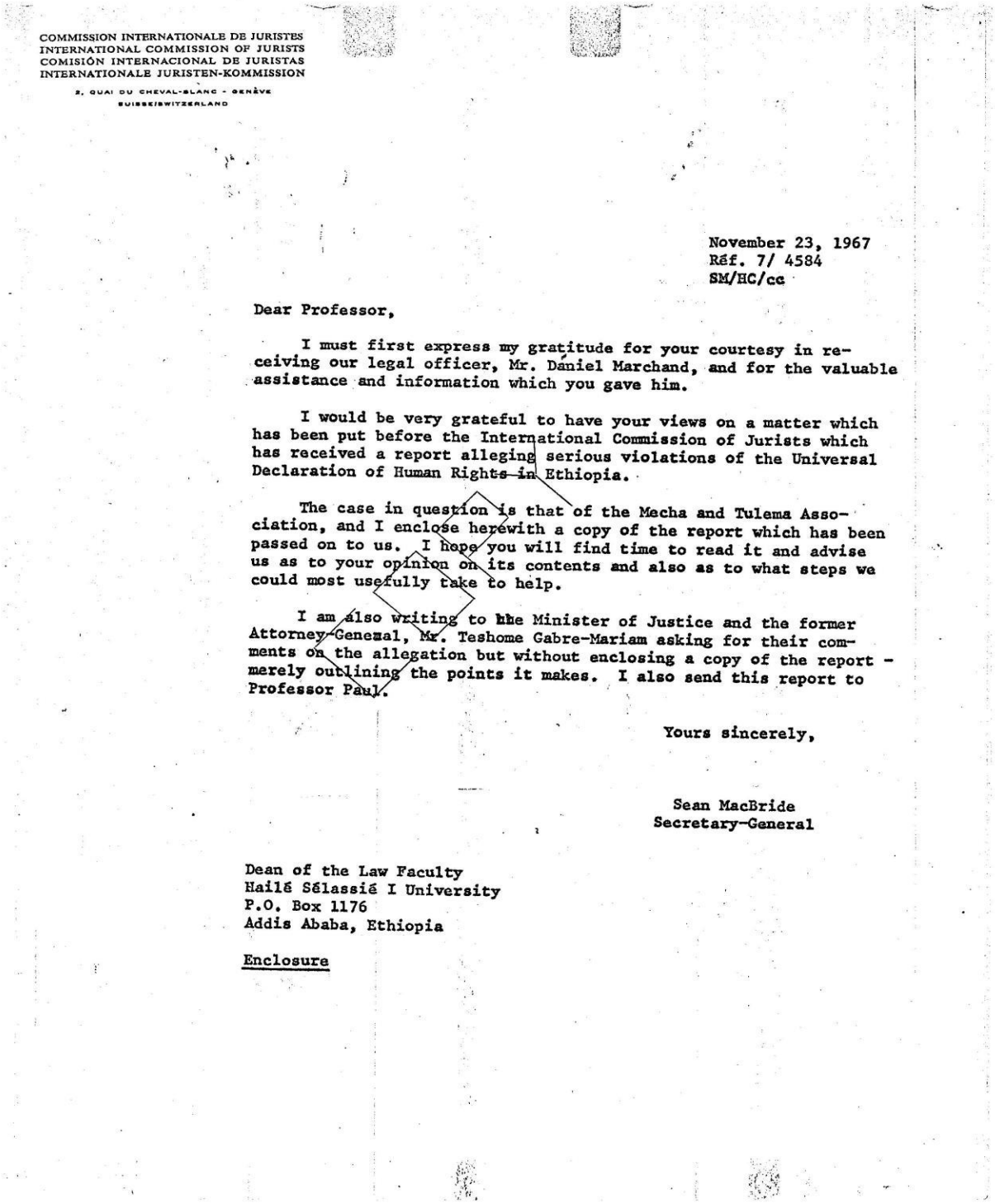
Yours sincerely,

Sean MacBride
Secretary-General

H.E. Teshome Gabre-Mariam
P.O. Box 183
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Enclosure

Appendix- XII. It is in the possession of Abera Mekonnen Wasanu



COMMISSION INTERNATIONALE DE JURISTES
INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF JURISTS
COMISIÓN INTERNACIONAL DE JURISTAS
INTERNATIONALE JURISTEN-KOMMISSION

2, QUAI DU CHEVAL-BLANC - GENÈVE
SUISSE/SWITZERLAND

November 23, 1967
Réf. 7/ 4584
SM/HC/cc

Dear Professor,

I must first express my gratitude for your courtesy in receiving our legal officer, Mr. Daniel Marchand, and for the valuable assistance and information which you gave him.

I would be very grateful to have your views on a matter which has been put before the International Commission of Jurists which has received a report alleging serious violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Ethiopia.

The case in question is that of the Mecha and Tulema Association, and I enclose herewith a copy of the report which has been passed on to us. I hope you will find time to read it and advise us as to your opinion on its contents and also as to what steps we could most usefully take to help.

I am also writing to the Minister of Justice and the former Attorney-General, Mr. Teshome Gabre-Mariam asking for their comments on the allegation but without enclosing a copy of the report - merely outlining the points it makes. I also send this report to Professor Paul.

Yours sincerely,

Sean MacBride
Secretary-General

Dean of the Law Faculty
Haile Sélassié I University
P.O. Box 1176
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Enclosure

Appendix- XIII. It is in the possession of Abera Mekonnen Wasanu

Per Federspiel
Lawyer
Copenhagen K
Gothersgade 109
Minerva 580017July, 1969
Hr.mag. Art. Aren Thing Mortensen
Huset Maj,
Overby Lyng
4582 Lumsaas
Thank you for your letter of 12 this month.
It is unfortunate I have to travel in this month. But I will comment to the International Commission of Jurist to intervene directly to the Emperor and to the Minister of Justus.
Naturally I am anticipating there will be a solution undoutly through the Commission contact in Ethiopia.

With best regards.

Appendix- XIV. It is in the possession of Abera Mekonnen Wasanu

Birgit Nielsen
Ordrupvej 37 A
292o Charlottenlund
Denmark

Copenhagen, 17th July, 197o

Amnesty International
c/o Mrs. Ingrid Lilja
Kammakare 2
Stockholm
SWEDEN

Dear Mrs. Lilja,

Reference is made to previous correspondence concerning the case against the members of the Mecha and Tulema Co-operative Association in Ethiopia.

As you remember, the members of the organization's executive board were sentenced to very long imprisonment by sentences on 2nd August, 1968. In this connection I refer to the enclosed document worked out by Amnesty International.

I want to draw your attention to the fact that until now none of the prisoners have been released and that they have been in prison since 1966.

Referring to resolution adopted by the Sixth International Assembly of Amnesty International, Stockholm, August 1968, which reads as follows:

> "That Amnesty International investigates and if necessary sends a delegate to Ethiopia to make a thorough investigation concerning those conditions which according to a report received by the Conference prevail in that country, especially with respect to the Galla tribe"

I want to ask if Amnesty International, Swedish Section, could investigate once more the possibilities of approaching the Ethiopian authorities in the matter. The health of the prisoners is very weak because of the very inhuman conditions under which they live and it is urgent that steps are taken to release them or to better their prison conditions. In this connection I can mention that Mr. Haile-Mariam Gemmeda is now dead.

I want to suggest a group of the Swedish Section of Amnesty International adopt this Ethiopian group of political prisoners.

I should perhaps explain my own involvement in the case: An Ethiopian resident in Europe who has family involved in

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Appendix- XV. It is in the possession of Abera Mekonnen Wasanu

the case has approached me and drawn my attention to the urgent need to reconsider the possibilities of helping this group of political prisoners.

Yours sincerely,

Birgit Nielsen

encl.

Appendix- XVI. It is in the possession of Abera Mekonnen Wasanu

COMMISSION INTERNATIONALE DE JURISTES
INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF JURISTS
COMISIÓN INTERNACIONAL DE JURISTAS
INTERNATIONALE JURISTEN-KOMMISSION

8, QUAI DU CHEVAL-BLANC - GENÈVE
SUISSE/SWITZERLAND

The Mecha and Tulema Co-operative Association

The Mecha and Tulema Association, formed under article 45 of the Imperial Constitution of Ethiopia, has its seat in Addis Ababa and has about 150,000 members (Constitution dated 16 Tir, 1955, Ethiopian calendar). This co-operative association has the following objects: education, the construction of hospitals roads, churches and mosques, and medical assistance. The members of the Association were suspected of using these objects as a façade under cover of which they were engaged in subversive activities. The police arrested about a hundred of its members at the end of 1959 (Ethiopian calendar) and 15 of them were detained in prison, 9 as accused and 6 as witnesses; one of the latter has however since been released.

Against this background, the report containes the following allegations:

1. Torture

During the fist three days these individuals received no food and were interrogated with no opportunity for sleep; they were beaten with hands and feet bound, and underwent other cruel tortures, of which the report gives a detailed descfiption, including torture by electric shock. These various forms of torture were repeated over a period of 6 months at the end of which the accused signed the ~~declarations~~ declarations required of them.

2. Prison conditions

The prison in which the men are detained contains 5,000 prisoners kept in groups of 15 to 20 in cells measuring 3 by 4 metres, without light. The food is abominable and completely inadequate, as are the clothing, sanitary conditions and medical services. The prison warders are extremely cruel and torture the prisoners for the slightest deviation from the rules. The prisoners have to do work of a nature so exhausting that some of them are killed by it.

There are 220,000 prisoners in Ethiopia, including 10,000 political prisoners some of whom have been transferred to provincial prisons and secretly assassinated.

3. Investigation and trial

The accused were kept in the strictest confinement so that they were unable to put forward their case. In court, some of the witnesses who went back on the statements extracted from them by torture were beaten. Defence counsel were not allowed to defend the accused; two who attempted to do so were fined and warned to be very careful in the future. It appears that the maximum penalty - the death sentence - will be demanded for the accused. They are to be sentenced very shortly.

Appendix- XVII. It is in the possession of Abera Mekonnen Wasanu

Arne Thing Mortensen
Jacob Erlandsensgade 9, V.tv.
2100, Copenhagen Ø
Denmark

Earl Bertrand Russell, O.M., F.R.S.
Plas Penrhyn
Penrhyndendareth
Merionethshire
Great Britain

Dear lord Russell.

I am writing to call your attention to the situation described in the accompanying material from Amnesti International in the hope that you may successfully intercede where that organization has not yet been able to. The Emperor Hailie Selassie might be susceptible to pressure from persons of the rank and eminence which you in fadt have, and in desparate cases such as this, it is necessary to try all possibilities. I have no way of knowing whether you are already involved but feel sure you will understand if anyone concerned should write you on the chance that your influence has not been called on.

I should perhaps explain my own involvement in the case: An Ethiopian resident in Europe has family involved in this particular case; he approached a close friend of mine who in turn has discussed the matter with me. In this way I became interested, and in this way I may be able to have access to further materialsperhaps not easily obtainable through orthodox channels. As to my own reliability, since you do not know me I have thought it wise to ask my former teacher, professor Jørgen Jørgensen, to write the accompanying note.

One remark is a propos the material from Amnesti International, since this point is not contained in the material itself: the first part is a report written by one of the

Appendix- XVIII. It is in the possession of Abera Mekonnen Wasanu

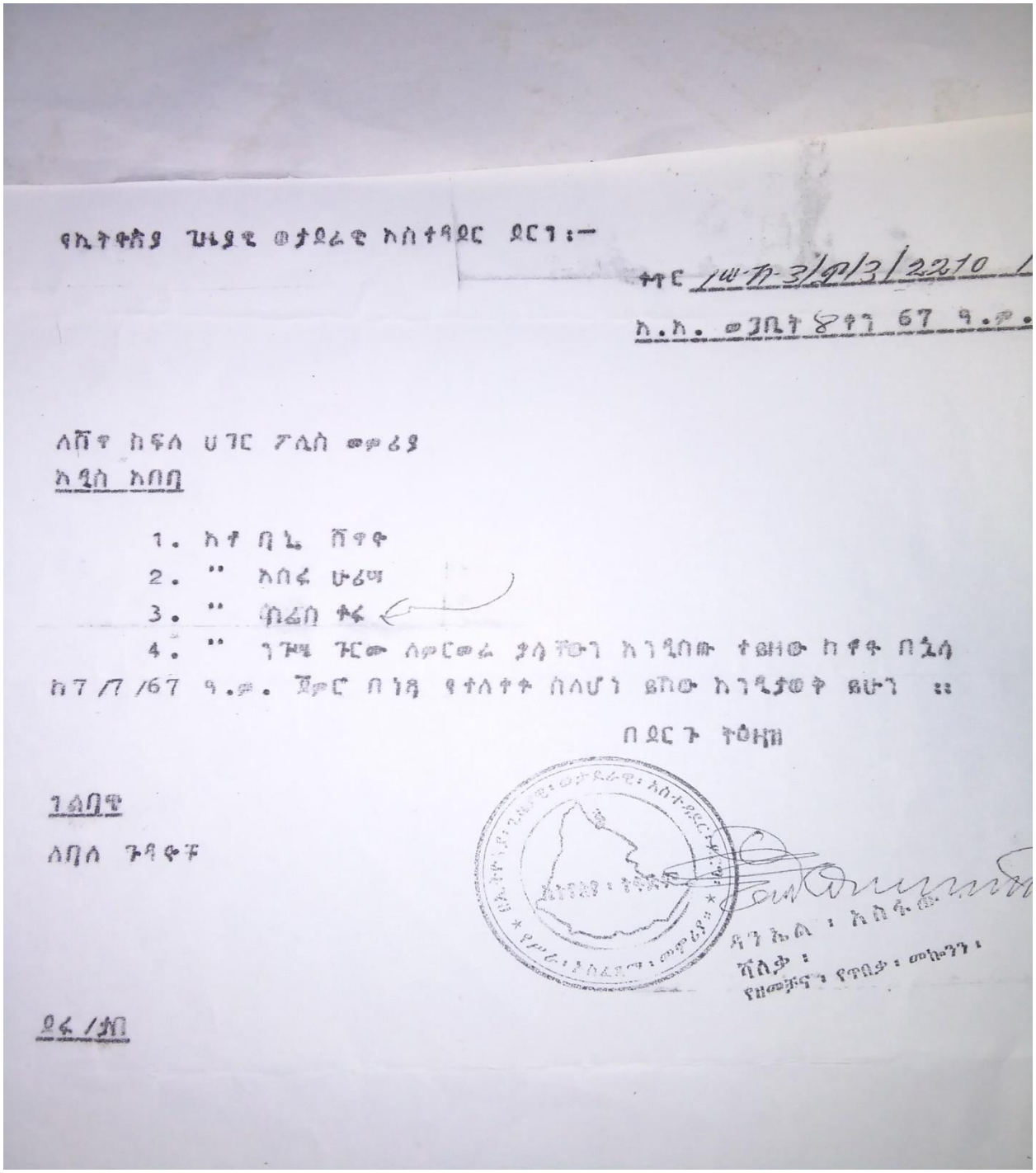
prisoners in question and the second part is the defence for the court written by General Tadesse Biru. It was brought out of Ethiopia to a reliable person in Europe, who translated it and gave it to the organization.

Please let me repeat that if you wish additional information on any point, from Ethiopian law to the personalities involved, I believe I can obtain it for you.

Yours

A. Thing Mortensen

Appendix- XIX. It is in the possession of *Obbo* Teshome Saffisaa Tufaa, his father's name is in the 3rd number.



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Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this dissertation is my work and that all sources of material used in the dissertation have been duly acknowledged.

Name: Biratu Kenei Aga

Signature: _____

Place: College of Social Sciences, Department of History
Addis Ababa University

Date of submission: July 2019