

**Political and Socio-Economic History of
Asossa *Wäräda*, 1941-1991**

**A Thesis Presented to the School of Graduate Studies of Addis
Ababa University in Partial Fulfillment for the Requirement of
the Degree Master of Art in History**

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**Political and Socio-Economic History of Asossa Wäräda,
1941-1991**

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Key to Transliteration systems

In writing Ethiopian names, the following translation system has adapted to write this thesis.

I. The seven Ethiopian alphabet sounds are represented in the following way:

Vowels	Symbols	Examples
1 st order (ge'ez)	ä	Käbädä
2 nd order (Ka'eb)	u	Tulu
3 rd order (sales)	i	Gizän
4 th order (rabe)	a	Fana
5 th order (hames)	é	Béggi
6 th order (Sades)	e	Temeheret
7 th order (sabe)	o	Jotè

II. In the six order (Sades), it must be note that “e” will not be suffixed to the letter only if the letter is vocalized. The symbol “e” also not required if the six order (sades) is the last letter of the word.

Example ? Bebet

? Geter

III. Consonants which have palatalized sound represented in the following way:

ቸ = Ĉä

= śä

ጥ = nä

፥ = zä

VI. Consonants which have Glottalized sounds are represented as follows:

ᵐ = ṭä

ᶕ = q̣ä

ᵐᵐ = ç̣ä

ʰ / ʰ = Ṣ̌ä

ʰ = P̣ä

V. Germination sounds always be written in the following way:

ᵐᶕᵐ = Ḅäqq̣älä

ʰᵐᵐ = Abḅäḅä

Abbreviation

AA	Addis Ababa
AAU	Addis Ababa University
BA	Bachelor of Art
CSA	Central Statistics Agency
EFDR	Ethiopian Federal Democratic Republic
EPDR	Ethiopian People Democratic Republic
EWP	Ethiopian Working Party
HIS	Haile Selassie I University
IES	Institute of Ethiopian Studies
IES, WMMRC	Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Wäldä Mäsqäl Memorial Research Center
MA	Masters of Art
Ms	Manuscripts
NALA	National Archive and Library Agency
PHD	Philosophy of Degree
PSIR	Political Science and International Relation

Glossary

<i>Ato</i>	A civil title given to ordinary people, equivalent to Mr.
<i>Akababi Asetädadär</i>	Regional Administration
<i>Aweraja</i>	Administrative sub- province.
<i>Balabat</i>	Hereditary owner of <i>rest</i> land
<i>Mäshehét</i>	<i>Bulletin</i>
<i>Çeqaşum</i>	Village chief empowered to collect tax during the imperial regime.
<i>Däga</i>	Cold climate zone
<i>Däjjazmaç</i>	A military title below <i>Ras</i>
<i>Daña</i>	Judge
<i>Fitawerari</i>	Commander of the Vanguard, a military title below <i>Däjjazmaç</i>
<i>Gaşa</i>	Unit of land measurement equivalent to 40 hectares
<i>Gazêta</i>	News paper
<i>Gemja Bét</i>	Treasury
<i>Gerazmaç</i>	Commander of the left, a politico- military title, non hereditary right to collect tribute from landowners.
<i>Karros</i>	Political title equivalent to <i>Çeqaşum</i>

<i>Källa</i>	Illegal trade controlling place
<i>Lej</i>	Child, Honorific title generally reserved for sons of royal family and of the upper nobility
<i>Meketel wäräda</i>	Administrative unit below <i>wäräda</i>
<i>Pallé</i>	Small and sharp iron with wood handle used for digging
<i>Qäbällé</i>	Lowest administrative unit
<i>Qänazmac</i>	Commander of the right, a political military title above <i>Grazmac</i>
<i>Qolla</i>	Hot climatic Zone
<i>Ras</i>	
<i>Ŝäria</i>	Islamic Law
<i>Sheikh</i>	A religious title given to Muslims
<i>Ŝehfät Bét</i>	<i>Bureau, Office</i>
<i>Ťäqelay- Gezat</i>	province
<i>Temehert Bétoć</i>	<i>Schools</i>
<i>Wäqqét</i>	unit of measurement equivalent to about 31grames
<i>Wäräda</i>	Administrative unit below <i>aweraja</i>
<i>Zämac</i>	Campaigner

Preface

This thesis attempts to reconstruct the history of Asossa *wäräda* between the 1941 Ethiopian liberation to the 1991 collapse of the military government. The first chapter outlines the geographic settings, the coming to the area of the Bärta, ethnic interactions, foreign aggressions, incorporation of the area into the Ethiopian Empire and socio-economic as well as political developments of the area during the Italian invasion.

The second chapter deals with how Asossa *wäräda* was organized under the Wällägga *Ṭaqelay* -Gezat (provincial administrative unit) and how indirect and self administrative system was followed by the imperial regime. The political and administrative systems of the military government and the subsequent political contests in the area are assessed. The role of politically dissatisfied groups including the indigenous people of the *wäräda* in struggling against the Därg rule is also discussed.

The third chapter deals with the socio-economic and environmental developments in the *wäräda* during the imperial and the military governments. The resettlement processes in the *wäräda* and their consequences are outlined. The socio-economic services provided to the people of the *wäräda* and infrastructural developments are also studied.

In conducting this study, oral sources and other available written literature are utilized. Archival materials that could have supported this historical study had been damaged by the political instability of the 1989-1991. This study, therefore, is based mainly on oral sources collected from the study area in December 2010 and March

2011. Attempts have been made to supplement these oral testimonies with written sources in an effort to write this thesis.

Aiming at overcoming the weakness entailed in using oral sources, necessary efforts have been made in selecting appropriate informants, evaluating their information cautiously, and in cross-checking the collected data with available archival and secondary sources. This work is deals with the rural history of the area. The works of other historians are limited either to the pre-1941 period or to the urbanization process of the town of Asossa. Although this work is far from being complete, it is hoped that it can initiate and give a clue to other historians who have the interest to study the history of the *wārāda* further.

Abstract

The focus of this thesis is reconstructing the administrative and socio-economic history of Asossa wäräda from 1941-1991. The study covers the period from the restoration of Emperor Haile Selassie I to power in 1941 till the downfall of the military government in 1991, in which the people of Asossa wäräda, similar to other rural populations of Béla-Şangul, experienced significant political and socio-economic developments.

The thesis deals with the role of strategic location and natural resources of the wäräda in attracting foreign powers. Local traditions, cultural setup and the conflict of the local chiefs to get control over political power and properties are studied. Tremendous efforts, on the other hand, have been made to assess the decline and complete termination of local self-administrative system during the imperial and the military regimes respectively.

In fact, the indigenous Bärta rulers were appointed to rule over their people at different political units during the imperial period. However, the central government did not allow the people to select their immediate governors except in some cases. The study, moreover, deals with the complete rejection of the self-government and administration in the area and its subsequent political contests in the wäräda.

Moreover, the thesis deals with the massive social interaction between the indigenous people and the highland peasantry after the 1974 Ethiopian revolution and the socio-cultural, economic and environmental changes that followed it. Comparisons are also made on to what extent the socialist ideology was practiced on the indigenous and the newly arrived highland villagers.

Chapter One

1. General Background of Asossa *Wäräda*

1.1. Geographic Background

Asossa *wäräda* in which Asossa town, the capital of Bénéšangul Gumuz Regional State is found is situated in the Ethio - Sudanese border. The regional state is located on a low-laying plain, some 5,000 feet above sea level. It has undulating character and it is doted with several small hills. It covers extensive lowland areas, which are terminated in the west by a steep escarpment.¹

Asossa *wäräda* is located at an altitude of 1,500m with the land elevation falling away from Asossa town in all directions.² Asossa town is located at a distance of 687-kilometers west of Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia.³ The territorial coverage of the current Asossa *wäräda*, however, is not similar with that of the pre-1991 Asossa *wäräda*. The pre-1991 Asossa *wäräda* which was organized immediately after the 1941 Ethiopian liberation consisted of the present day Kurmuk, Khomoša, Bambäsi and Asossa *wärädas*.⁴ It was located in Asossa *awraja* under Wällägga provincial administration.⁵ Asossa *awraja* was bounded in the west and Northwest by the Sudan and in the north and northeast by the Blue Nile. It was separated by common boundaries with Qélläm *Awraja* in the south and southeast and with Gimbi *awraja* in the east.⁶

Out of the total area of the *awraja*, 15, 200 square kilometers, the pre-1991 Asossa *wäräda* covered 3,056 square kilometers.⁷ It was bounded in the west and northwest by the Sudan, in the east and northeast by Béla-Šangul *wäräda* and in the south by Béggi *Wäräda*.⁸ Even though there are a few peaks and ranges that dot the lowlands and stretch out in parts of the plateaus towards Béggi, Asossa constitutes low laying plains.⁹ The *wäräda*'s altitude ranges from 900 meters above sea level starting from the Sudanese frontier to above 1,500 meters above the sea level around the region of Asossa town. It falls under *qolla* climatic classification. The size of population, soil fertility and abundance of surface water decreases as one moves towards the northern parts of the *wäräda*. Although generally the *awraja* and the *wäräda* specifically endowed with numerous seasonal streams and big rivers such as Dabus, Šärkolé and Tumat, except the first of these water sources all of them dry out during the dry season.¹⁰

Most of the *qolla* portion of the Asossa *awraja* is known for its abundant gold. The existing shortage of surface water to pan gold is, however, a major problem for the inhabitants. In fact, the western and southern parts of Asossa *wäräda* are relatively rich in ground and surface water resource. The high annual average rainfall of the area, which is 1285mm, is the source of permanent supplies of water. Big rivers like *Hoha* and *Hafta* and different streams, many of which never dry throughout the year are in these parts of the *Wäräda*.¹¹ On the other hand, towards the low-laying Ethio-Sudanese borderlands, the temperature becomes extremely high in March, April and May. Similarly,

towards the north and east, the vast plains of the region gently drop from the hilly western part and the scarcity of water increases.¹²

The annual average temperature of Asossa region is 25⁰ centigrade. The highest annual temperature is about 30⁰c and even higher in some places in the northern and eastern parts of the region. The lowest annual average temperature of the area is 12⁰ centigrade. The rainy season starts around the middle of May and ends in October or sometimes in November. The highest amount of rainfall is recorded between July and September.¹³

Béniśangul National Regional State in general and Asossa *wärāda* in particular is rich in natural resources. These natural resources include gold, metals, potash and forest products.¹⁴ In relation to minerals, the area was renowned for its gold resource for a long period. Before the region was incorporated into the Ethiopian Empire towards the end of the nineteenth century, its gold resource had been exploited by different foreign powers like the Funji of Sénnar, the Turco-Egyptians, the Mahdists and the Christian highland kingdom of Ethiopia.¹⁵ Even after the region became part of the Ethiopian Empire, gold served as a gift by the local governors to the ruling families to create smooth diplomatic relation. In 1899/1900, gold from Asossa region constituted a considerable part of the total gold export through Addis Ababa.¹⁶ (see also appendix I). The central government of Ethiopia also collected gold from the region in the form of tribute through out the twentieth century.¹⁷ As soon as the region became part of the Ethiopia Empire, the representatives of

the central government collected hundreds of *wäqet* of gold annually. In 1903, for instance, *Däjjazmac* Gäbrä Egziabhér was able to collect about six hundred *wäqet* of gold from the region.¹⁸

The *wäräda* is largely covered with various types of plants. Among other plant species, the area is renowned for its bamboo (*Oxytenanthera Abyssinica*) forests. Since the day-to-day life activities of the people in the area are related to it, this plant species has been exploited throughout the history of the region. Almost all indoor and outdoor materials including houses of the Bärta people are made of bamboo. Chairs, beds, fences, water towers and bridges are constructed from bamboo.¹⁹ The indigenous community of the area also use the offshoot of bamboo as sources of food particularly during shortage of food.²⁰ Scholars have asserted that the Southern *wärädas* of the region in the post 1991 Asossa and Bambäsi *wärädas* are *characterized* by forest free land due to high population density and mechanized agricultural activities.²¹

In relation the current economic activities of the *wäräda*, the life of the people is mainly based on farming. Cultivating crops is largely practiced by the Amhara settlers who came into the *wäräda* during the 1980s government sponsored resettlement schemes. The natives of the *wäräda*, the Bärta people are known for their trade, mining, hunting, pottery and subsistence farming mainly using *Palle* (small and sharp iron with a wood handle used for digging).²²

Similar to other *wärādas* in the Bénišangul Gumuz, Asossa *wärāda* is poor in terms of infrastructural development. Expansion of education, for instance, is a very recent phenomenon in the area. Before 2007, only a single senior secondary school was found in the capital of the region. Now days, however, four senior secondary schools are established in different rural areas of the *Wärāda*.²³ Though the people of the *wärāda* are exposed to different types of disease like malaria due to the hot climate of the area, health facility is remained inadequate. For instance, only a single hospital, which is serving the whole community of the region, is found in Asossa town. It was only after the Beginning of the third Ethiopian Millennium that the opening of clinics and expansion of health extension programs were given emphasis though many of these institutions are not well equipped.

The main infrastructural problem of the *wärāda* is that it is without significant improvement is road transportation. All weather roads are inadequate and limited to the town. Only the road that connects Asossa town to Addis Ababa is asphalted. Other roads connecting different *qābälés* of the *wärāda* are used only in the dry seasons. It is too difficult to travel on them even on foot during the rainy season. Moreover, the *wärāda* has only dry weather roads that connect it with the surrounding *wärādas*. As I have observed during my fieldwork, however, there are preparations to construct a paved road from the *wärāda* to the Sudan through Kurmuk.

According to the Central Statistical Agency Report, the population of the region in 2000 was 560, 080. Out of this, Asossa *wäräda* takes the largest share, 104,147. The population of the *wäräda* is ethnically diversified. Among the existing ethnic groups, the Bärta are larger in number next to the Amhara settlers.²⁴ The Asossa Bärta also display minor cultural and linguistic variations with the Bärta which inhabit other *wärädas* like Mängé, Khomoša, Šärqolé and Bambäsi.²⁵

The 1994 Ethiopian Population and Housing Census Report states that the Amhara and the Oromo dominated the Asossa *wäräda* together with the indigenous Bärta.²⁶ Generally, out of 104, 147 population figure the ethnic groups of the *wäräda* in 2008 were Amhara (48%), Bärta (38%), Oromo(8%) and others (6%). In terms of religious composition 63.3%, 31.18%, 5.22%, 0.2%, and 0.1% of the *wäräda* people are Muslims, Orthodox Christians, Protestants, Catholics and traditional religion followers respectively. More than ninety-five percent of the Bärta people are followers of Islam. On the other hand, more than half of the Amhara and Oromo inhabiting the *wäräda* are orthodox Christians.²⁷

1.2 Historical Background

Asossa *wäräda*, which was re-organized under Wällägga province after the 1941 Ethiopian liberation is the product of long historical processes since the ancient period. According to scholars who conducted research on the earlier history of the region, the first inhabitants of the *Béla – Šangul* region were the

Mao and Goma. Alessandro Triulzi, for instance, argues that these scattered groups of people had owned the area around the Tumat valley as their original homeland and they were probably the first settlers of the Ethio-Sudanese border lands. After the coming of the Bärta to the region in the 17th century, however, these people have been pushed southward into Fadasi (later Bambäsi) and Béggi areas.²⁸

Although the Mao and Goma were displaced by the migrant Bärta, they remained independent group with their own- social and political organizations. In fact, detailed information with regard to these organizations is not adequately accessible. Some of my informants and Desalegn asserts that elders of the groups were playing a significant role in advising the traditional community and local chiefs.²⁹ Triulzi also indicates that the group lost its independent social and political organization only towards the end of the nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth century. The cultural and political influence of the Oromo from the East and the Bärta from the West and the slave raiding activities particularly after the Second half of the 19th century were responsible for the disturbance and discontinuation of the Mao and Goma with their original identity.³⁰

The earlier history of the *Béla – Šangul* region is highly related to the history of the largest established group of the region, the Bärta. The Bärta inhabit the region south of the Blue Nile on both sides of the present day Ethio-Sudanese borderlands. The term “Bärta” is applied to both the people and their dialects.

The Bārta, both in the Sudan and Ethiopia have kept their own cosmology and self-identity though they faced series of cultural and political impositions from different foreign allies.³¹

Scholars are not unanimous as to when the Bārta people exactly came in to the Ethiopian land and through which direction they expanded. Nevertheless, all of them seem to agree with my informants that their origin was in the mountainous area called *Gérr*i in the Sudan. Wendy James argues that the Bārta came in to their present day lands in the 16th century.³² On the other hand, however, Triulzi and Ateib are of the opinion that the Bārta had certainly settled in the region by the early 17th century. As quoted in Triulzi, the accounts of Esteven Pereira /1892-1900/ indicates that the Bārta were already settled in the early 17th century in the Ethiopian border lands during the 1617 Campaign of Emperor Susenyos into the area.³³

The reason why the Bārta came into the Ethiopian plateau needs further and deep investigation. Traditions and written sources are non-existent to determine the exact factor for their migration. Some historians, like Triulzi and Desalegn, in fact, argue that the increasing population number of the people in the Sēnnar and lack of security were perhaps responsible for their gradual movement into eastern direction.³⁴ In supporting this argument, Tariku claims that search for arable land due to population increment and disputes that might have been among themselves forced the Bārta to leave their homeland in the Sudan for Ethiopia.³⁵

On the basis of oral traditions scholars try to indicate how the Bärta people came into the Ethiopian borderlands and gradually into the present day Asossa area. *Nari* (traditional Bärta diviner) suggested the Bärta's first *Agur* (king) to move to the eastern highlands by abandoning *Gérri*. The *agur*, then, led the Bärta to the east and they settled around the Tumat valley in which rocks were found. Since the first *Śangur* (traditional divine practice) ceremony was observed and their *aguri* (plural to *Agur*) were buried and this rock became the symbol of unity for this group of Bärta. On the same spot, the village called *Béla-Śangul* (rock of Śangur) was established as ancestral site and the name has began to be used for the whole region.³⁶

In their further stage of movement, the Bärta settled in a different site called *Jäblesud* (literally Black mountain) around Asossa region, which was formerly occupied by Mao and Goma. Gradually they continued to move southward and finally settled in as far as *Béggi*,³⁷ beyond Sa'id. The name Sa'id was used by the Sudan Arabs to express the upland on which the Bärta had settled. This Arabic word represents the whole area of the present day Asossa zone.³⁸

Based on their legend, the Bärta elders indicate that all the Bärta people claim descendents from the same ancestors. This legend shows that the people originated from one father and one mother named '*Bärtu*' and '*Endäli*' respectively and eventually scattered throughout the whole region.³⁹

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, other population movement from the *Sénnar* to the land of Bärta was observed. This group of people was called

Funji of Sénnar who were able to establish themselves as politically dominant group over the less-well organized Bärta. Since these immigrants were “wise” in preaching Islamic religion and in assimilating with the Bärta ruling class through marriage ties, they became dominant over the Bärta. Although the Bärta associated their identity to the newly arrived groups and paid tribute to them by adopting *Funji*’s title called *Mékk*, they insisted in keeping their own language, custom and culture. They were politically supervised by the *Sénnar of funji* under the *Mékk* system. Because of their active participation in trade activities, their economic domination over the indigenous group helped *the Funji* to take the political leadership position.⁴⁰ As a result of marriage relation between the two groups, another generation was created with the name of *Jabalwin*.⁴¹

Different scholars who conducted research on the region do not agree as to when the *Funji* of Sénnar began to occupy the Sa’id. Deselegn claims that the *Funji* came to the sa’id area since the seventeenth century.⁴² Ateib and Tariku, on the other and, argue that they began to come into the region by the first half of the eighteenth century.⁴³ Debela and Bruce are of the opinion that these political group appeared in the area towards the end of the eighteenth century.⁴⁴

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, however, the Sudanese Arab descendants called “*wetawiş*” arrived in the region. The *wetawiş* were able to rule the whole Sa’id which had once been under the *Funji* rulers by dividing

into, *Béla-Şangul*, Khomoşa, Aqoldi and Fadasi Shiekhdoms. They also established their rule in Fazugli and Kéili.⁴⁵

Initially the Arab merchants came into *Béla-Şangul* region as traders and preachers of Islam. As time went on, however, they gradually were able to establish their ascendancy over the whole people by systematically integrating themselves into the Bärta ruling families.⁴⁶

As they were active in trade activities, preaching of Islamic religion and creating smooth relations with the highly assimilated *Jäbalawin* and the Bärta through marriage ties, the *weṭawiṭ* became the most dominant group both economically and politically. In addition to their roles in politics and socio-cultural assimilations, the heavy blow of Turco-Egyptian expedition in 1882 and the rise of Mahdists in the Sudan had helped the *weṭawiṭ* to put the Bärta under their aristocracy.⁴⁷

The Turco-Egyptians, in fact, did not extend their governorship over the Ethiopian Bärta lands. Their expedition, which led to the collapse of the *Funji* political structure in the Sudan⁴⁸ reached as far as the Sa'id on the eastern bank of the Blue Nile where they were stationed.⁴⁹ In order to achieve their economic goal, the Egyptians launched massive slave raids as well as imposed heavy tax over the Bärta of Ethiopia. This forced many of the Bärta to disperse from their home areas and lead a bitter life. This situation had helped the minority, but wise *Weṭawiṭ* family to take economic and political dominance over the majority.⁵⁰

The collapse of Turco-Egyptian rule in the Sudan because of the rise of the Mahdists in the early 1880s forced the sa'id inhabitants to feel the immediate and long lasting effects. As soon as the Mahdists arrived in the sa'id they expanded Islamic religion without interfering in the political and other social affairs. The existing local sheikhs independently continued to administer their people. The Mahdists extended their influence as far as Asossa region. After the death of the Mahdi and the accession to power of Abdalahi, however, the Mahdists began to impose their exploitative and oppressive administrative system in 1885.⁵¹ Their aggressive rule led to a stiff resistance by the Bärta people towards the end of the 1880s. Finally, in 1890 the rule of the Mahdists in the northwestern Ethiopian lands came to an end while the army of Khalifa Abdillahi was turned back to the north understanding the unruly behavior of the Sa'id people.⁵²

The most important long lasting effect of the Mahdists rule in the Sa'id was the power transfer from the local Bärta ruling families to the *weṭawiṭ*. Due to the economic exploitation and human operation, descendants of the *weṭawiṭ* family began expansion southward from Khomoša proper. During the Mahdist period, a *weṭawiṭ* born trader, Mohammäd Wad Fadlah moved from khomoša and settled in *Aqoldi*. In *Aqoldi*, he had a son named Al-Hassän from a Bärta woman. Al-Hassän became the first *weṭawiṭ* born to bring the existing traditional Bärta ruling line under his own family.⁵³ It was in this way that this ruling family started to dominate and rule the Asossa area. In fact, there are controversial arguments concerning the coming of Al-Hassän himself into

Asossa. Triulzi's explanation is that Al-Hassān came to the area before his son, Sheikh Khojälé arrived in the region.⁵⁴ On the other hand, depending on oral informants, Hosaena argues that it was in the village called *Aqoldi* that Al-Hassen was taken into Omdurman prison by the Mahdists where he died before continuing his expansion to Asossa, 18kms south of *Aqold*.⁵⁵

My Informants, in fact, explain that it was Khojälé who expanded southwards from Aqoldi to Asossa for economic and political reasons. Economically, he wanted to control the southern trade routes and trade activities, as well as fertile lands. Politically, Khojälé needed his southern march to be free from both internal and external powers due to the growing enmity between the Khomoša and Béla-Šangul chiefs as well as the Aqoldi *weṭawiṭ* and the harsh treatment and exploitation of the Mahadists.⁵⁶

Although the sheikhs enjoyed autonomous power after the departure of the Mahdists at the end of 1890, their independence was immediately followed by frictions among chiefs. The conflict was to control the southeast and the southwest trade routes that linked the area to the southeast and southwest Oromo lands.⁵⁷ Drought that led to agricultural failure in Béla-Šangul also made the trade routes preferable by the competent chiefs of the period.⁵⁸

The most significant treat to the sheikh's autonomous power, however, came from the Šāwan hegemony which successfully incorporated the whole of western Wälläggä from 1886-1888. The claim of emperor Menilek to Béla-Šangul region to be included into the Ethiopian empire was seen in his letter

sent to the colonial powers in 1891.⁵⁹ However, the emperor's southwest expansion policy reached its peak in 1898 after the Battle of Adwa in which the whole of Béla-Ŝangul region was incorporated.⁶⁰

Scholars who conducted research on the area agree that the Šāwan expansion into Béla-Ŝangul was attributed directly to economic motives. In the first place, the area was known for gold resource since earlier period.⁶¹ Secondly, its geographical proximity would allow the Ethiopian empire to have trade relation with the Sudan. Finally, the strategic location of the region also attracted the attention of the Emperor to use both the Blue and White Niles for navigation purpose.⁶²

External factors which took place in the Horn of Africa, according to some historians, were responsible for the annexation of Béla-Ŝangul into the Ethiopian empire. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, Italy became the main threat to Ethiopian sovereignty other than the Mahdist due to the complete rejection of the Wučalé Treaty of 1889. In order to keep political balance, the Emperor established smooth relation with the Mahdists from 1893-95. The Mahdists also sought "cordial intent" with Ethiopia due to the Anglo-Egyptian expansion in the Sudan. The French were also encouraging the interest of the emperor to make part of the right bank of the White Nile Ethiopia's legal territory and to establishes diplomatic relation with the Mahdists. This was because, the French government needed to advance its interest to make the Sobat and upper Nile her protectorate through Ethiopia.

As a result these external factors together with the skillful diplomatic discourse of the emperor with the Khalifa initiated and accelerated the occupation of *Béla-Śangul* by the Śāwan army.⁶³

On the other hand, my informants assert that the khalifa's recognition for the annexation of the region was associated with internal factors. Towards the end of the 1880, Sheikh Al-Hassān, Sheikh Mahmud and Sheikh Abdul Al-Rahman of Aqoldi, Khomośa and Béla-Śangul respectively were becoming more disobedient. They joined forces and attacked the Ansar (Mahdists) using guerrilla tactics. Finally, the Ansar left the Sa'īd allowing the Śāwans to bring the region under their control.⁶⁴

In 1897, the army commanded by *Ras Mākonnēn* and supported by different contingents like *Dājjazmać* Gābrā Egziabhēr of Nāqāmté, *Dājjazmać* Joté Tulu of Qéllām and the Gonderian army under *Dājjazmać* Dāmissé in Arjo began its campaign to Béla-Śangul. The army stationed in Māndi to penetrate into Béla-Śangul crossing the Dabus River. The number of the army, according to Triulzi and Debela was about 80,000.⁶⁵ However, Desalegn and Jaba point out that the number was not more than 20,000.⁶⁶

Having heard the news of the stationed Śāwan army, the three Sheikhs were said to have agreed to fight against their common enemy by ignoring their local enmity. Emphasizing that his mission was not to exploit and devastate the region but to reconcile the dispute among themselves, *Ras Mākonnēn* sent a letter demanding the surrender of the Sheikhs. Convinced by his promise

Sheikh Khojälé of Asossa sent a group of men with gift of gold to study the strength of the Šäwan army at Mändi and to express his peaceful submission. Torél Guri (Abd Al-Rahman Khojälé) and Wad Mahmud, on the other hand, continued their resistance. Unfortunately, they were defeated because of their inferiority in power and firearms. When Torél Guri fled in to Famka in the Sudan, Wad Mahmud escaped to the mountainous area of Joroko. Although the two defiant sheikhs were not captured, their countries were devastated and the peoples became captives.⁶⁷

The Asossa region remained untouched since Khojälé had peacefully submitted to the Šäwan army. As a symbol of full integration of the region into the Ethiopian empire, *Ras Mäkonnen* sent sixty horsemen carrying Ethiopian flag to be hosted in the border areas where it was intended to show the Ethiopia boundary. Finally, by representing Khojälé and Alnazir Ali to administer the region until the central government assigned its appointee, the *Ras* returned to Addis Ababa.⁶⁸

Soon after the incorporation of the region, Wad Mahamud and Abdal-Rahman submitted to *Ras Dämessäw* who was distributing Ethiopian flag among local chiefs in the region. Even though Khojälé had peacefully submitted to the central state, he was imprisoned for nine years with those who resisted due to his secret negotiation with the British who were eager to bring Béla-Šangul under their control.⁶⁹ The imprisonment of the three sheikhs and the effective annexation of their territories brought about changes in the political leadership

of Béla-Śangul. The region begun to be ruled by non-local governors who where new both to the people and their culture. From 1898 to 1903, the region was ruled under *Ras Dämessäw*. The period was characterized by heavy customs duties paid by the people and extensive exploitation. For instance, the people of Asossa Proper were expected to pay 300 ounces of gold annually which took the largest portion of the whole of Béla-Śangul region.⁷⁰ From 1903 to 1918 Béla-Śangul was again ruled under *Däjjazmać Gäbrä Egziabhér*, the governor of Léqa Näqämté. Debela points out that the incapability of the people to pay heavy duties and the heavy burden imposed by Dämessäw forced the central government to bring Béla Śangul under Gäbrä Egziabhér.⁷¹ Rashid and Deselagn, on the other hand, state that Dämessäw with his army left the region due to the harsh climatic condition of the low land area.⁷²

The period of *Däjjazmać Gäbrä Egziabhér* particularly in Asossa Proper was characterized by turmoil and unrest. The first cause for the turmoil was the initiations made by different group leaders to achieve their proposed objectives. Civil war broke out between Khamid, who replaced Khojälé and wanted the restoration of Khojälé's rule⁷³ and Musa Täman who wanted to replace Khamid.⁷⁴ Musa was also said to have been influenced by Joté Tulu who needed the unrest to expand his territory to Asossa.⁷⁵ The second source of unrest in Asossa was the local peoples' disobedience with the new effective administrative system implemented by *Däjjazmać Gäbrä Egziabhér* through his generals *Fitawrari Kaba* and *Fitawrari Girata*. When the people insisted to resist the new administrative system, the army of the two generals used force

to suppress the rebellion and to devastate Asossa town. As a result, death of people and migration into the Sudan and other neighboring British occupied territories led to a remarkable population decrease in Asossa proper.⁷⁶

In 1908, the three sheikhs of Béla-Šangul were released after being awarded Ethiopian titles. *Däjjazmač* and *Fitawrari* titles were given to Torél Guri and Wad Mahmud respectively. Khojälé, however, remained with his previous title, sheikh, at his own preference.⁷⁷ After being released a considerable attention was given to him by the emperor to establish smooth relation with Khojälé of Asossa at the expense of different prominent chiefs and *Däjjazmač* Gäbrä Egziabhér himself. Oromo lands to the southeast of Asossa became source of complaint to the emperor by Khojälé and Joté Tulu who subjugated Béggi in 1903 while Khojälé was arrested. The emperor settled the complaint in favor of Khojälé.⁷⁸ Two years later, the sheikh transferred his capital from Asossa to Béggi.⁷⁹

After he was empowered in manipulating the politics of the country, *Leji* Eyasu brought all the territories of the northern neighboring sheikhs, khomoša and Béla-Šangul under the control of Sheikh Khojälé Al-Hassen in 1914.⁸⁰ In 1924 Khojälé also got Wabara, the territory west of Béggi, from Joté Tulu.⁸¹ In addition to his success in securing his semi autonomous status, the sheikh moreover, was able to get 10,000 Maria Theresa Thalers and 1,000 cattle to rehabilitate and to rebuild the Asossa region which was devastated both by the civil war and the force of the central government.⁸²

Scholars forwarded their different arguments to answer why the central government decided to cultivate smooth and strong relation with Khojälé of Asossa at the expense of the other local rulers. Based on his oral informants, Debela is of the opinion that his previous secrete relation with the British helped the Sheikh to be favored by the emperor. The emperor became suspicious that Khojälé would continue his negotiation with the British in the southwestern Ethiopian lands unless ambiguous relation between the “centre” and “periphery” was resolved.⁸³ Others, on the other hand, state that the skillful nature of Khojälé diplomatic approach to the central government through gifts in gold and slaves gave him an opportunity to be subsidized economically and promoted politically by outshining his rivals.⁸⁴ Whatever the case, beginning from 1908 until the Italian invasion of the country Khojälé was said to have ruled the whole Béla-Śangul region without interference from the central government. Full responsibility and power was given to him in collecting and sending tributes directly to the central government.⁸⁵

However, this period of Khojälé was not free from revolt and disturbance. Particularly at the beginning of the third decade of the twentieth century, the Bārta people of Khomośa and Béla-Śangul Proper rebelled against the governorship of Khojälé of Asossa. This revolt was mainly caused by the extensive slave raids and gold exploitation by the sheikh to use them as gifts to the central government. The revolt was led by Mustafa Abda-Rahman of Bela-anshgul and Musa Mahmud of Khomośa.⁸⁶ The burden of taxation laid on the

shoulder of the people also aggravated the frequent rebellion in Béggi and Fadasi.⁸⁷

Hearing the news of the Italian invasion against Ethiopia and the collapse of imperial rule in western Ethiopia, the war against Khojälé was intensified. Confusion was observed at Asossa, Khojälé's administrative center. In 1936, the Italians freed Mustäfa and Musa who had been imprisoned at Addis Ababa by the imperial government since 1934. As soon as they arrived at Asossa area, they continued to be major enemies of Khojälé .⁸⁸

The western "Galla [Oromo] Confederation" which was established in mid-1936⁸⁹, after the fall of the Hailä Selassié's government at the center, was another internal threat to Khojälé's survival. Khojälé, who feared losing his communication passage to Gore where *Ras* Emeru was stationed, tried to have smooth relation with important figures of the Confederation through gift of gold. However, one of the organizers of the Confederation, *Fitawrari* Yohannes Joté, has subjugated Béggi, Khojälé's most lucrative province.⁹⁰

In order to overcome internal revolts and threats, Khojälé requested the assistance of the central army stationed at Goré under *Ras* Emeru, representative of the central government.⁹¹ Nevertheless, he did not get immediate response because the target of the patriots at Goré was to liberate Addis Ababa than suppressing internal dangers.⁹² In August 1937 the hope of the sheikh in Asossa was revived when tens of Ethiopian patriots arrived in his region before the coming of the Italian army. He had been reinforced by them

and crushed the revolt in Khomoša and Béla-Šangul. In return, the sheikh promised the patriots to collaborate with them in fighting against Italians. Khojälé was said to have helped the patriots by providing elders and his son, Abdul-Rahim to guide them to pass into the British Sudan.⁹³

Scholars argue on the departure of Italians and their way of entrance into Asossa differently. According to Hosaena, they departed from Gondär and followed the way of Guba and Hor Khalifor crossing the Nile to enter Asossa.⁹⁴ Desalegn argues that the Italian army came into Asossa from Gojjam via Mätäkäl.⁹⁵ Ateib and Debela explain that they followed the Guba direction to come to the region. After passing Guba, the group branched in to two. One group moved into Wänbära and the rest came into Asossa. The Italians entered Asossa in October 1937 without significant resistance and made Asossa their center of administration.⁹⁶

Using his previous behavior in wellcoming foreign powers, Khojälé got the advantage of regaining Béggi in 1938, which he lost in 1936 and was promoted in to Sultan to administer their Béla-Šangul commiseriate.⁹⁷ On the contrary, hereditary rulers of Khomoša and Béla-Šangul Proper and the Ethiopian patriots in the British Sudan continued their struggle against the invaders. As a result, the sheikh was ordered to mediate between the rebels and Italians in Béla-Šangul region. Finally, in the mediation Sultan Khojälé was accidentally wounded and died from gun fired by an unknown shooter.⁹⁸

The Italian period in Ethiopia in general and in Asossa in particular was the time in which significant socio-economic developments were observed. Asossa town was transformed from a village to a town. The Italians had built their offices, residences and started construction of roads and buildings following a city-plan. Constructions of dry-weather roads connecting Asossa to the surrounding areas were also their contributions. Following the building of roads and bridges, trade with the Sudan merchants and the Oromo producers was revived.⁹⁹ The existence of neither custom duties nor *kéllas* which were started by the Šāwans during *Däjjazmač* Gäbrä Egziabhér period helped the trade activity to be flourished.¹⁰⁰

Although relative peace was seen after the death of Khojälé, the forced labor particularly in road construction embittered the people and it led to a strong resistance movement in Asossa. Being informed that the emperor had arrived in Khartoum, the people massively picked up arms against fascist Italy. Finally, the Ethiopia patriots and the British troops entered Asossa in 1941 when the Italians left the whole *Béla-Šangul* region.¹⁰¹

Chapter Two

2. Formation of Asossa *Wäräda* and Its Administrative History 1941-1991

2.1. From Libration to Revolution, 1941-1974

The post-1941 administrative history of Asossa *wäräda* is directly related to the aftermath of the Italian period. Although Rashid in his thesis explains that Sheikh Khojälé died without naming hereditary successor to rule over his domain,¹ my informants including his grandson, strongly assert that the Sheikh preferred Almahadi and Aśafi to be heirs. Elders, thus, begun to favor Almahadi. Considering the interest of the local people, the Italians put Almahadi in power. However, Almahadi was poisoned by the Italians themselves due to his anti-Italian activities. Secret accumulation of gold and other precious resources to strength his economic capacity to revolt against the colonialists was the immediate cause for his death. Aśafi, Almahadi's brother was empowered by the Italians in 1939.² Aśafi ruled over the area for only two years. Because, the Italians brought him together with other local rulers to Jimma fearing that they would provide information to the British force. Immediately after the liberation, Aśafi was appointed by Emperor Haile Sellassie over Asossa-Béla-Śangul awraja.³

Different groups of oral informants give slightly different argument on why Aśafi Khojälé was preferred by the emperor among other chiefs and his family members who were in conflict to control the political position. Most of his

relatives were also ambitious to inherit properties of their father using political power.⁴ One group of elders agrees that the emperor took into consideration the governing experience of Aśafi in the area since his father passed away. Aśafi was active diplomatically in his effort to settle disputes with the neighboring chiefs. Therefore, the acceptance of Aśafi by the central government, according to this group of informants, was the long-term result of his governing ability and experience.⁵

The other group emphasizes that Aśafi's authorization to rule over the region was directly associated with his imprisonment in Jimma during the Italian period. For instance, Abbas, Aśafi's own son and others explain the reason as follows:

He /Aśafi/ was arrested in Arjo and later on taken to Jimma. In the year when the country was liberated, he and other detainees became free. In the same year, Aśafi went to Addis Ababa on his way to Asossa. This situation helped him to meet the emperor whom he informed the death of Sheikh Khojälé. Aśafi also informed his majesty that he was administering the area based on the wellbeing of his father before his death. After expressing his condolence to the death of Khojahe, his reliable ally in the western boarder lands, the emperor promised Aśafi that he should rule over the area in the future. Keeping his promise, the emperor assigned Aśafi to administer Asossa Awraja in 1942 and Asossa wäräda in 1943.⁶

Based on the analysis of the information collected from the two groups of informants, we can argue that Aśafi, other than his relatives and competent Chiefs, was allowed directly by the Emperor to govern Asossa. His political position before he was arrested also seems to me another possible factor for his

appointment over Asossa awraja. However, the quality of his leadership over the area as a possible reason is questionable.

In 1942, the imperial government announced a decree reorganizing the empire into a new administrative system. The country was divided into fourteen *Ṭäqelay-Gezat* (governorate-generals), one hundred and three *awrajas* (provinces), five hundred and five *wärädas* (districts) and nine hundred and forty nine *meketel wärädas* (sub-district). The purpose of the new administrative division was to simplify land assessment and tax collection system and to control various government agencies in the empire. Administrative units were mostly created on the basis of their historical background. Different petty chiefs throughout the empire, were re-assigned to be governors of their respective areas, but without autonomous status.⁷

The 1942 national decree, however, was not implemented in Asossa-Béla-Šangul region until 1943. It was only in 1943 that the semi autonomous status of the region came to an end. The region classified into different administrative units. The *awraja* came under the Wällägga Provincial Government constituting Asossa, Béla-Šangul and Béggi *wärädas*. The *wärädas* were also further subdivided into *meketel wärädas*. Governors of these administrative units, particularly at the *Ṭäqelai Gezat* and *awraja* levels, were appointed by the emperor directly.⁸

Oral testimony and Däbäla in his MA thesis claims that the request of Ašafi to the central government was the major cause for the end of the semi

autonomous status of the region. The governorship of Aśafi was characterized by conflicts among the children of Khojälé due to conflicting economic and political interests. The opposition against Aśafi's power reached its peak when his younger brother, Abdulrahim organized his brothers and sisters to complain to the central government of his economic and political ill-treatment. The failure of Khojel's children to organize themselves against their common enemies led to continuous revolts by the neighboring chiefs. The chiefs who led the dispute forwarded their dissatisfaction to the emperor in Addis Ababa expressing the humiliation and injustice imposed on them by Aśafi. Thus, the emperor sent a committee to deal with the internal friction in the area. Although the committee sent from the emperor's palace favored Aśafi's continuation in power at the expense of other chiefs, Aśafi strongly asked to bring about an end to the semi-autonomous status of the region.⁹ "... Aśafi requested Dañña/central government appointee/to support his administration.... The emperor appointed a central representative over the whole of Béla-Śangul...."¹⁰

Taking Aśafi's request as a major factor for the formation of different administrative units and the appointment of central government representatives over the region seems less convincing. Since its incorporation by Menilek in 1898, the region was effectively administered as part of the empire. The 1942 administrative regulations on the other hand, was a national decree to be applied over the whole empire.¹¹ Therefore, it would be more

convincing to say that the request of Aśafi to get *Dañña* was a pre-text for the central government's real intention to bring the region under its direct control.

Under Asossa-Bélaşangul *awraja*, Asossa *wäräda* was divided in to five *meketel wärädas*. These were: Gumba, Bäşer, Khomoşa, Bambäsi and Mägälé. The administrative centers of these sub-districts were Asossa, Gämäl, Dull, Bambäsi and Mägälé respectively.¹² In 1943, the *awraja* governorship was transferred from Aśafi to Kidanä Mareyam, a central government appointee. Aśafi was again preferred by the emperor to rule over Asossa *Wäräda*.¹³ Out of about one hundred thousand people of Asossa *awraja*, Aśafi governed forty thousand inhabitants. Though fewer in number than the native Bärta, other ethnic groups like the Amhara, Oromo, Guraghe and Tigre came to the *Wäräda* either as traders or government employees.¹⁴ Aśafi governed the *Wäräda* until his death in 1969.¹⁵

Throughout his lifetime, Aśafi gave emphasis to stay in power simply aiming at monopolizing the properties of his father. For instance, after the semi-autonomous status of the area ended, Aśafi did not concentrate on competition to get additional territories. Due to this extreme interest to monopolize properties and political position, his period was characterized by chaos and hostility. The disorder was created by his relatives who disliked his greedy behavior related to properties of Khojälé, and by neighboring Bärta chiefs who wanted to replace him.¹⁶

Knowing Aśafi's weak ambition to control extra territories, Hailé Bera, who was the governor of Asossa *awraja*, recommended to the Ministry of Interior and transferred him to Béggi *wäräda*. In 1963 Abdalrahim Khojälé, the governor of Béggi *wäräda* and the strong challenger against descendents of Joté Tullu of Qélläm to control Wabära, was transferred to Asossa *wäräda*. Transferring Aśafi to Béggi and Abdalrahim to Asossa was calculated by Hailé Bera who favored the family of Joté to remove *Däjjazmač* Abdälrahim from Béggi area. Abdarahim, however, refused the transfer by complaining to the central government and after a year, Aśafi was returned to his position in Asossa.¹⁷

Informants assert that Aśafi was popular in his relations with the Emperor and the central government appointees at the *awraja* and provincial government levels. He was active in advising the *awraja* governors. The informants claim that the 1963 complain of *Däjjazmač* Abdälrahim was accepted by the emperor aiming at putting Aśafi in Asossa where the *awraja* center of administration was founded.¹⁸

Due to the experience he had when he moved with his father to the imperial palace, Aśafi was active in cultivating smooth relation with the emperor. Ethiopian titles like *Qāñazmač*, *Fitawrari* and *Däjjazmač* were given to him by the Emperor in 1957, 1960 and 1963 respectively. The acceptance of Aśafi by the central government and his staying in power for a long period were followed by series of demotions and promotions of other governors over Asossa *wäräda*.

After the death of Aśafi in 1969, *Gerazmač* Mohammed was appointed over the *wäräda*. After two years, however, Almahadi Abdurahim replaced him. Similarly in 1972 Abbas Aśafi became the governor of the *wäräda* until he was removed from the position by the *Därg* government in 1974.¹⁹

Aśafi's dominant role in the administrative history of the *wäräda* and his success in gaining subsequent Ethiopian political titles were decisively the results of his ability to cooperate with the central government. He acquired this personal quality during the lifetime of his father.²⁰

Like the *wäräda* governor, the local chiefs of the respective areas governed all *meketel wärädas* under Asossa *wäräda*. One of the descendents of Sheikh Khojälé called Babäkir administered Gumba sub district, which was the central and the strongest of all. Anzir Ali who was from among the nobles of the area during Khojälé's period was appointed over the Bäšer sub-district, the northeast sub-district of the *wäräda*. After his death, his son named Ibrahim Anzir who stayed in power until the 1974 Ethiopian revolution was replaced. Al-Badawi Aba Moti and Musa Mohammäd were appointed to govern over Bambäsi and Khomoša sub-districts respectively.²¹ The Khmoša sub-district was situated in the northern part of the *wäräda*, whereas the Bämباسi sub district had common boundary with the Béggi *wäräda* in the south.²²

Based on oral informants, Debela points out that the *meketel wärädas* under Asossa *wäräda* were only four in number. This difference seems to have

emanated from his informants' limitation in memorizing or suspecting what would have happened before their existence in the *Wäräda*.²³

In 1964, *meketel wärädas* were abolished and additional *wärädas* were created in many parts of the empire as part of the development effort. The trend was to abolish *meketel wärädas*, which were economically poor (below \$17,000 tax revenue).²⁴ Bäqqälä, who was in the Asossa area to collect data for his BA thesis, clearly puts that in 1968 there was a strong intention to implement the above nationwide programme to abolish *meketel wärädas*.²⁵ Supporting this idea my informants underscore that in 1969 Asossa *wäräda* was reorganized consisting of only four *meketel wärädas* that Debela mentions. This was because the two small *meketel wärädas*, Gumba and Mägälé were combined to constitute one *wäräda* with their center at Asossa. The Kurmuk area, which was part of Khomoša *wäräda*, was also separated from Asossa *wäräda* to be an additional district by taking extra territory from the Béla-Šangul *wäräda*.²⁶ Therefore, it seems to me that the memorial capacity of Debela's informants is limited to the post 1969 events.

Under the governors of *wäräda* and *meketel wärädas*, there were government agents who were active participants in facilitating the imperial bureaucratic administrative system. These were the *balabats* and the *Ĉeqašums (Karros)*. During the imperial period, all *balabats* in Asossa *wäräda* belonged to the two politically dominant families from which the *Weṭawit* family descended. These families were the *Albideria and Alräkabia*. Informants underscore that the

Albideria group were descendants of one Islamic warrior called Bider who came to Asossa area and established himself as a known *balabat*. The *Alrekabia* group, on the other hand, were named after Ali Ibnu Talib, the known general of Fadalāh, who came from the Sudan to Khomośa and gradually took the political domination from the *Albideria* through marriage ties. As time went, however, the two groups intermingled and their descendants, the *weṭawit* continued to dominate in the governorship of the Asossa *wārāda* area.²⁷

My informants, infact, do not put the time when the original descendants of these groups came to the region. But all of them unanimously underscore that until Sheikh Khojälé, one of the descendents of the *weṭawit* family was assisted by *Ras Gobäna*'s army, other groups, except the 'slaves' who did not have ethnic name ,like *Jäbalawi* and *Alyakobab* were not completely captured. Most *balabats* of these people were competent enough in resisting their neighboring *balabats*.²⁸

Except the *Alyakobabs* who were found only in Béla-Śangul *wārāda*, all groups of Bärta inhabited Asossa *wārāda*. The *Jabalwi*, the first settlers of the sa'id had better prestigious social and political status than the slaves. The most discriminated group was the 'slave' group. The responsibility of this group of the indigenous people was serving the *balabats* both individually and in group. Accomplishing all indoor and outdoor activities was the duty laid on the shoulder of this group. ²⁹

The division of the country into units and sub-units came with a new change in the administrative history of Asossa area. Before Asossa was annexed by the Ethiopian government, there were both aristocratic and democratic systems of appointment of *balabats*. This system continued even after the annexation though the central government appointed its representatives to high positions. The appointment had aristocratic element because it followed hereditary line. Only members of the families of the deceased *balabat* had the right to inherit the *balabat* position. It is also democratic in its nature. The people administered under the *balabat* had the right to participate in the election of the *balabat* among the deceased's family based on his ability and their wish. The last will of the deceased *balabat* and his family was not solely considered to appoint the future *balabat*.³⁰

Both direct and indirect systems of democracy were also observed. Individually or in-group the people were allowed to bring complaints and wishes directly to the *balabat*. On the other hand, indirect system of democracy was also seen among the local people of the area. If group dissatisfaction is observed, the people selected a better speaker, most of the time among the elders, to present their common case to the *balabat*. In most cases, the *balabat* consented to the will of the local people because he knew that he came to power by the will of the people. The election of the *balabat*, in fact, was not periodic. The *balabat* could be deposed from his position at any time by the people.³¹

Both the *balabat* and the subjects had duties and responsibilities. The *balabat*, firstly, had power to interfere in different social lives of the subjects. ‘*Śaria*’, Islamic law was his reference to mediate such serious social cases as treason, divorce, and murder. His quality of mediation was measured by his ability to settle such social problems among his subjects. Secondly, protection of his territory and people from external aggression was also his major responsibility by which his subjects measured his strength. In return, the *balabat* expected his people to pay tribute in gold annually. Rendering personal service was also another form of their duties. ³²

After Asossa *wārāda* was reorganized under the post -1941 new administrative system, the only aristocratic element of appointment remained. The traditional democratic way of appointing of *balabats* was rejected. The central government became the sole responsible party to endorse the *balabat* title to the first-born son of the deceased *balabat*. The right of the people to appoint and to remove their immediate rulers was partially denied. After this period, the right of the people was limited to the appointment of the *Ĉeqaśum*, the lowest administrative organ. In appointing and removing the *Ĉeqaśum*, the will of the people was considered by the *balabat*.³³

In the *wārāda*, most of the *balabats* were appointed by the central government as *meketel wārāda* governors. Most of them were also descendants of Sheik Khojälé. The *balabats* were actively participating in most administrative functions together with the governors of the *wārāda* and *meketel wārādas*.

Although they were bridges between the government and the people due to their traditional prestige, the *balabats* were not getting salary in the form of cash. The governors of the *wäräda* and *meketel wärädas* were employees of the central government with monthly salary. The salary for *wäräda* governors extended from seventy-five to five hundred Ethiopia birr. For example, Aśafi, who controlled the *wäräda* governorship for along period, was earning 250-birr salary with additional 100 birr for his *Däjjazmac* title.³⁴ The salary of *meketel wärädas* was also extended from thirty to three hundred fifty birr with non periodic revision of salary scale.³⁵

Even though there was no cash payment from the imperial government, the *balabats*' major benefits were labor services rendering by the local people individually or in-group. Moreover, their respected position would give the *balabats* internal satisfaction. Since they were both religious and government leaders of their own respective areas, the local people gave priority to them and to their families in all social activities.³⁶

Wäräda Governors were appointed by the emperor upon the recommendation of the Ministry of Interior. The *awraja* governor also had the right to recommend the potential *wäräda* governors to the Governor-General who had the right to submit such recommendation to the ministry of interior.³⁷ Here, what made the appointment of Aśafi special was that the recommendations of both the *awraja* governor and the Ministry of Interior were not as such considerable. Because, according to my informants, the emperor himself

directly promised the position to Aṣafi before these government organs were organized.³⁸

Governors of *meketel wärädas* in Asossa *Wäräda* were appointed, on the basis of recommendation given by the Asossa *awraja* governor, by Wällägga provincial government. With the exception of the Asossa province, all *awrajas* under Wällägga had no *meketel wärädas*.³⁹ Out of the twelve *meketel wärädas* under Asossa *awraja* five of them were found under the Asossa district. Furthermore, like the *wäräda* governor, the imperial government from the local *balabats* selected most *meketel wäräda* governors. The imperial government did not emphasize the level of formal education for appointment of *wäräda* and *meketel wäräda* governors. Most of the governors were not able to read and write in the official language. They merely used Arabic language using translators.⁴⁰

The imperial government allowed the existence of various *meketel wärädas* in Asossa *awraja* generally and in Asossa *wäräda* particularly due to the historical and traditional values of the local people. Firstly, the central government was conscious that the indigenous Bärta people in the *wäräda*, did not share political values in common with other Ethiopians for along period of time.⁴¹ Therefore, bringing the *balabats* to different administrative positions might strengthen the political attachment of this people to Ethiopia.⁴²

Secondly, it seems that the imperial government considered the *balabats* to be the most capable and acceptable to deal with the local Bärta people using their

own language and traditional way of administration. For a long period, for instance, the local Bärta did not give more respect and acceptance to the imperial government. The people gave considerable respect and acceptance for the *balabats* and the traditional religious leaders. Supporting this idea Triuizi states that the Bärta people respected their *nérry* (traditional religious leader) than the emperor himself. ⁴³

Not only in Ethiopia, but also in various nations of the world the authorities of the central government in many cases could get more acceptances by the urban society. In addition, central governments are isolated from the frontier population due to huge traditional and cultural differences.⁴⁴ Therefore, the imperial government used the existing traditional local nobles or *balabats* and *Çeqaşums* or *Karros* to reconcile with the indigenous local people and to introduce them to the new Ethiopian political administrative system. ⁴⁵

Although initiated by few politically dissatisfied *balabats*, political rebels against the imperial regime were not observed in organized way. The political rebellion was intensified only after the 1974 Ethiopian revolution following the complete rejection of the local respected *balabats* and religious elites of their political position.⁴⁶

In Asossa *wäräda* both *wäräda* and *meketel wäräda* governors had minor differences in their functions because, they performed dual activities. They acted as *balabats* as well as governors. In their area of jurisdiction, they maintained peace and security. They also worked for the promotion of

collection of taxes from the local people.⁴⁷ The only visible difference was that the court instituted in Asossa town was headed by the *wārāda* governor. *Meketel wārāda* Governors, however, were only judges to deal with minor crimes and to enforce rules and regulations of the imperial government.⁴⁸

Under the *balabat*, there were other government servers without formal cash payment from the central government. These administrative organs were called *Ĉeqasums* (Karros). These agents were appointed by the *balabats* to transmit orders and regulations to the common rural people. They were directly, responsible to the *balabats*. They could not make decision and take action of their own in any situation. Their major duties were initiating the people to pay their tax to the *wārāda* treasurer on time. Dividing the land among the people and interpretation of Islamic laws were also other functions accomplished by the karros. They were, moreover, the right hand of the *balabats* to get information in various civil and criminal issues. Similar to the *balabats*, labor service from the common people and mental satisfaction emanated from the social and political respect were their benefits for their position.⁴⁹

Concerning taxation and financial administrative system of the *wārāda*, the local administrators and representatives of the central government had no power to generate and utilize budget in their own way and will. All local government organs and machineries were used as facilitators of both income and expenditure collected from the local people passed on to the central government and *visa versa*. The *wārāda* treasurer whose office was instituted

in Asossa town was responsible in initiating ways and means for the prompt collection of taxes. Preparing balance sheet for the income and expenditure of the *wäräda* was also his duty. The *wäräda* and *meketel wäräda* governors were responsible for their failure in collecting the expected amount of income from tax in their respective areas.⁵⁰

Standardization of land tax was proclaimed by the imperial government in 1942, which highly affected the local people of Asossa area. This decree brought two basic changes in the history of the area. The traditional tax collection system in gold by the chiefs was replaced by new taxation system in cash. Each family head holding land was registered and land tax assessment was implemented. Secondly, the 1942 land tax decree also included all the cultivated and uncultivated lands occupied by the rural people of the *wäräda*. According to the decree, the amount of money collected was 15, 10 and 5 birr for cultivated, semi cultivated and uncultivated lands respectively.⁵¹

The governor of the *wäräda* was responsible passing orders and to enforce *meketel wäräda* governors to collect income for the central government relatively equal to the expected amount. Annual income expectation from taxation in the *wäräda* was done based on land and property assessment techniques. Since the local people of Asossa *wäräda* were not as such familiar with cultivation of land, mostly, the assessment was made on the number of cattle. The tax was levied by considering animals owned by each family head.⁵² *Meketel wäräda* Governors were charged with the duty of selecting tax-

assessors in each area. The selected assessors were also expected to be recommended by the *balabats* of their area and to make an oath to be free from bias.⁵³

The subsequent tax decree of 1944 also increased the amount of tax payment expected from each family head. Until 1966, taxpayers were classified under five categories based on the number of cattle and the amount of land they were cultivating. From the first to the fifth classes, taxpayers were expected to pay 32, 27, 24, 16 and 8 birr respectively. Although the tax levied on the majority of the *wäräda* people was eight birr, the amount expected from the lowest class, the poor local inhabitants of the area were not able to pay it.⁵⁴

Moreover, the second problem which complicated the life of the people was the hardship they faced in traveling from their extreme frontier areas to Asossa town where the *wäräda* treasury was situated. Each family head was expected to pay the tax levied by the assessors directly to the *wäräda* treasury. The amount of money, time and labor force utilized by the local people in their journey to and their stay in town was more than the money they were paying. The journey day and night crossing rivers and mountainous areas covered with bushes and grasses aggravated the problem.⁵⁵

In 1962, however, Aśafi and the *meketel wäräda* governors appealed to the central government through the Asossa *awraja* governor for reduction of tax by considering the life of the poor local people under each government units. The imperial government, however, did not give immediate response. After a series

of appeals, in 1966 the central government responded that the taxpayers should be categorized into eight classes.⁵⁶

According to the 1966 revised tax payment, the amount of tax expected from the local people from the highest to the lowest tax payers were 32,24,18,16,8,6,5 and 2 birr annually.⁵⁷ However, my informants assert that the Bärta people in the *wäräda* were paying the tax amount expected from the last three classes. These amounts of tax were 6, 5 and 2 birr. This revision of tax and classification of the people in to eight classes was recommended for the whole Asossa awraja people.⁵⁸ This information implies directly that the first four classes of tax payers belonged to the people of Béggi *wäräda* who cultivates farm lands rather than rearing animals. The informants added that the same amount of taxes were levied on the Béla -Šangul *wäräda* people since they followed the same economic activities as the Asossa Bärta.⁵⁹

In relation to the hardship, the local people faced in traveling to Asossa town from their villages, as far as 120 kilometers, Abass Ašafi who became the governor of Asossa *wäräda* in 1972 responded in this way:

*By considering the previous problem of the people, the wäräda governor assigned and ordered tax collectors to go to each meketel wäräda administrative centers to simplify the distance related problem. This system how ever, was applied for only two years, 1967 and 68. This was because the wäräda governor feared to take the responsibility of the probable loss of money and robbery.*⁶⁰

Moreover, since the life of the people depended on hunting and gathering, tax in cash remained unpopular in the *wäräda*. Most of the land in the *wäräda*

came under government control due to the failure of the people to pay tax. From 1940s to 1970s, the number of people escaping to the Sudan or shifting their original place was increased.⁶¹

Generally in Asossa *awraja* and particularly Asossa *wäräda*, the amount of income collected from the rural society and from other social services in the towns far outweighed by the expenditures cost by the central government to provide different social and political services. For instance in 1965 the imperial government collected only about 164, 518 Ethiopian Birr. However, the annual expenditure utilized in the *awraja* was about 329, 702 Birr. Only about half of the expenditure was covered by the income the central government collected from each *wäräda* and *meketel wäräda*. The other statistical data also proves this argument. In 1966, the total income the central government collected from the *awraja* was only about 199, 482 Birr and on the other hand, the expenditure was about 296, 772 Birr.⁶²

2.2 Administrative History and Political Contest in the Wārāda during the Military Government (*Dārg*) Period, 1974 – 1991.

The administrative and political systems of the *Dārg* government in the *wārāda* were characterized by exclusion of the traditional rulers and undermining the culture and identity of the rural people. As we have discussed earlier, various nobles and their descendents were appointed by the imperial government to administer different hierarchies of government. However, there were nobles who were not satisfied by the existing administrative system. As Baqqala explains “In Ethiopia in spite of order No. 43 of 1966 proclamation, an order to establish local self administration ... there is still no representative and responsible local government. The people do not directly participate in any discussion which concerns them.”⁶³

In fact Baqqala’s strong conclusion is more or less true, but there were discussions in which local governors of the *wārāda* and *meketel wārādas* took part though they were insignificant. For instance, the 1966-land tax revision in which Aśafi himself and other governors participated attests to this fact.⁶⁴ In addition to the insignificant participation of the local governors, the interest of the imperial government to use them only as its agents through whom orders and regulations were passed from the center to the local people led to political protest by the Bārta nobles.⁶⁵

The protest gained its root in 1963 when nobles like *Däjjazmač* Yešaba of Guba and Yoséf Šämid begun to mobilize the people secretly. In the beginning of the 1970s a series of discussions were held by the local people. This secret discourse among the Bärta people was initiated by important personalities like Abdulrahim Yassin. Finally, before the protest were put to practice the region of imperial government ended and was replaced by the Military regime following the 1974 Ethiopia revolution.⁶⁶

The coming to power of the military regime was followed by the complete rejection of different *wäräda* and *meketel wäräda* governors. The ambition of the nobles and the former governors to get influential positions at the *awraja* and the provincial level died. Many of them were arrested and Abas Ašafi, the then governor of Asossa *wäräda*, was removed from his position together with other ‘retired’ governors. Representatives of the Military government were assigned to all administrative positions in the *wäräda*. This period witnessed the complete absence of the local people in dealing with their destiny, which was declining from time to time.⁶⁷ Moreover, the assigned representatives were not voluntary to work in remote parts of Asossa administrative region. Therefore, most parts of the region had no government appointees to rule over the Bärta.⁶⁸ (see also appendix II).

Moreover, what aggravated the existing and the newly created political dissatisfaction was that the cadres who were in the villages of the people begun to undermine the culture and identity of the Bärta people. They used mass

insulting their usual habit to express the people as 'uncivilized'. The cadres always were expressing that the people lagged behind the civilized society of central Ethiopia and who were never introduced to trousers, shirts and injera.⁶⁹

As a result, in 1977 a secret discussion was held by some of the Bärta people in Asossa. The discussion resulted in a popular agreement to struggle against the Military government. After three or four months, anti-government group was established. In the some year another politically dissatisfied members from Mao, Komo and Gumuz nationalities joined the anti-Military government movement. Immediately after the group was formed different members came with their own interest to give a name for the newly established political group. Part of the group proposed a name "*Bärta Derejit*" (lit. Organization of the Bärta) and the rest preferred a name "*Jabha Waṭania*" (lit. Local Liberty Movement). However, this disagreement was removed by giving a name for the organization that was concerned with all members of the group. It was named "*Fana*" (lit. Bright).⁷⁰

In the same year, hierarchical structure of the *Fana* was strengthened by appointing selective members to coordinate activities of the group. The selected members were charged with the responsibility in searching financial sources and in organizing military training. In December 1977, this anti-government group formation was exposed to the military government. However, before

military measure was taken to bring them under control, the group fled to the Sudan.⁷¹

In Sudan, in a town called Dāmazin the members continued their anti-military regime discussion. The number of members in the group, according to the informants was not less than thirty. They also had only about seventeen firearms that were taken by a man called Kādir Ahmād from Ethiopia. However, their number increased when the Bārta soldiers serving the Sudan government begun to join the *Fana*.⁷²

Following the exile of the Fana group, the Military government aimed at destroying the forests of Béla-Šangul which would serve the local people as a host in revolting against it, planned to resettle people in the area from central and northern Ethiopia. In the second half of 1970s, a group of men from the central government arrived to study the proposed resettlement area. The study group selected Šärqolé and Gizän areas through which the *Fana* rebels took their exile into the Sudan. Later on, however, the study group in collaboration with the Asossa *wäräda* governors preferred areas around the Asossa town. Heavy forests and grasslands around the town were selected for resettlement sites due to their water resources.⁷³

In 1979/80, the Military government transported thousands of Amhara settlers from Wällo area to Asossa *wäräda*. Thus, the first government sponsored resettlement scheme was started in the *wäräda*. Different scholars who studied about the resettlement scheme argue that the aim of the programme was to

help the exploited land of northern Ethiopia in recovering its soil fertility and forests. Hunger and famine caused by drought in Wällo was the immediate cause for resettlement scheme of the 1979/80.⁷⁴

Others, on the other hand, argue that the government wanted the re-settlers in this area to recruit militias and police forces to guard the frontier area day and night from internal and external threats.⁷⁵ My informants, selected among the re-settlers clearly underscore that in 1979/80 there was no drought and hunger in their homelands in the north. They were accidentally transported into the area from market places, meetings and their homes forcefully. As soon as they arrived in the *wäräda*, representatives of the military government began to recruit military and police forces, and to encourage the re-settlers to clear dense forests. Thus, this oral testimony clearly shows that the anti-government group stationed in the Sudan might have been the cause for the resettlement.⁷⁶

The *Fana* anti-government members in Sudan faced two major problems. Firstly, they could not get financial support from any foreign party. Formerly they were getting their daily food and money from the local Bäerta people in Asossa and other areas. In Sudan, conversely, these facilities were not accessible.⁷⁷ Secondly, the labor forces of Sudan were mainly constituted of the Béla-Šangul people. Thus, the Sudan government did not allow them to recruit and train military force in the Sudan. This prohibition of the Sudan government might have emanated from two possible reasons. In the first place,

it feared loss of labor force in the country. Additionally the government would be suspicious for the creation of insecurity in the area.⁷⁸

In 1985, their military problem was relatively solved because another politically dissatisfied group in the northern part of the country trained members of the group. The EPLF (Eritrean People Liberation Front) extended its financial and military assistance for the *Fana*. In 1984/85, the second and massive government sponsored re-settlement scheme was accompanied on the rest of forest lands of Asossa *wäräda*. In fact this phase was mainly caused by the 1984/85 extreme famine in Wallo. ⁷⁹

In 1989, the TPLF (Tigrayan People Liberation Front) also supported the *Fana* financially and in giving Military training. In spite of deforesting the area by the *Därg*, the *Fana* was returned to Asossa region and its name was changed in to BPLM (Bénišangul People Liberation Movement). In the place called Högärä Sälam, about three hundred members of the BPLM were trained by the TPLF in 1989. During their war against the *Därg* regime, the local Bärta people in different villages like Abrahamo and Qäšemängäl played a remarkable role particularly in providing food. After a strong confrontation in collaboration with the EPLF and OLF, the BPLM was able to see the end of the *Därg* regime which was its dream. ⁸⁰

After the Military regime collapsed, generally the Béla-Šangul region and particularly the Asossa *Wäräda* came under the control of the two political groups. They were OLF (Oromo Liberation Front) and the BPLM. Finally, Asossa

became a battleground between the two groups in an effort to dominate the area. The two political groups fought at different battle fields, firstly at Dull, Šetalo, Molo Mägälé, near Khomoša-Gizan and later on at Qäšemängäl, in Asossa *wäräda*.⁸¹

The confrontation among different political factions extremely affected the life of both the urban and rural societies of the *wäräda*. The agricultural lands of the peasantry became a burial ground for the dead. Crop and grain plants were damaged before they became ripe. Trading with firearms by both the urban and rural people became source of tremendous income and it led to robbery. Many people moving individually or in groups to accomplish their daily life activities were killed in the forests. Mass Killing was also done surprisingly by groups of soldiers who carried firearms as it happened in the Village called Qäšemando, about 2 kilometers to the south of Bambäsi *meketel wäräda*.⁸²

In urban areas like Asossa, institutions of the government and the civil servants were destroyed. Mechanized Agricultural production materials on which the life of the rural re-settlers depended on were damaged or robbed. Moreover, the irreplaceable documentary materials, which were crucial to conduct research on the area, were burnt-out or robbed.⁸³

Generally, the administrative system of the Military government was bitterly opposed by the indigenous people of Asossa *wäräda* than the administrative system of the imperial government. The imperial government systematically ruled over the area in the name of local administration by appointing the

former *balabats* to different administrative units. Although there were some dissatisfied nobles, majority of them were represented as government employees and agents in the *wäräda* and *meketel wärädas*. The rest of the influential elites were serving the governors and most of them were allowed to be *balabats* and *karros*.⁸⁴

The complete change of administrative system in the *wäräda* under the *Därg* government led the mass of the natives to be on the side of the anti-government groups. Because, their tradition of governing their own local people declined from time to time and came to end.⁸⁵

The administrative system of the Military government among the Amhara re-settlers also had no full acceptance. The aggressive action of the cadres of the military government in penalizing elders and women using ropes and sticks still remained in the minds of the resttlers.⁸⁶ The hierarchical flow of power which was more organized and applied to administer the re-settlers strictly denied the freedom of the people. About fifty five peasant associations were organized in the *wäräda*. Each peasant Association has one unit leader called *Méda Alafi* whose responsibility was mainly to communicate with the *wäräda* and *awraja* governors. Under the unit leader there were also chairmen, Managers and group leaders to rule over peasant associations (about 500), 100 and 25 Family heads respectively. These government agents among the re-settlers were charged with the power to work together with the cadres for the achievement of the socialist production system.⁸⁷

The aggressive and forceful measures taken by the cadres for minor civil and criminal issues forced the re-settlers to search ways to return to their original place. Less attention was given to the peasantry for the attainment of the central government's nation wide development plan. The unsystematic administrative system led the farmers to create informal resisting techniques against the Military government's production plan. They expressed their resistance in the following way:

Absenteeism was common. We were going to the clinic to get sick leaves. We expressed our interest to get medicine in tablet form. This was aimed at throwing the medicine in our home because we were healthy. ⁸⁸

Most of them also explain that representatives of the military government also affected the lives of the rural peasantry by arresting them without satisfactory reasons. All these direct, forceful and unsystematic political and administrative systems led the military government to get less support among the poor rural re-settlers and the indigenous Bärta community. ⁸⁹

The military government did not also look at things passively. In addition to covering the forest frontier area by the re-settlers and recruiting militias and police forces to avoid the threat of guerrilla fighters, the *Därg* used different measures to get support from the local people. The first action was to remove *awraja* and *wäräda* governors who were passive in propaganda and action. In 1975 the provisional military council appointed Commander Addisu Märdasa to administer Asossa *awraja*.⁹⁰ Promotion and demotion of *wäräda* governors

in Asossa was also common. Informants clearly explain that the military government represented a number of *Wäräda* governors only for not more than one or two years. Except Anagaw Wällé and Jirata Dänu who governed the *wäräda* from 1978-83 and 1985-87 respectively, others did not stay in their political position for a significant period.⁹¹

The next measure taken by the military government was the result of its failure to win the trust of the common people in the *wäräda*. Since its coming to power in 1974, the *Därg* ruled the people using direct and forceful administrative systems. However, in the eve of the 1989 proclamation that declares the new administrative structure of Ethiopia, the *Därg* began to follow indirect system of ruling in the *wäräda*. A Bärta born youngsters like Abdi Yetman, Atäib Ahmääd, Šampel Khamis and Almahadi Abdärahim Khojälé came to the political positions to govern the *wäräda*.⁹² According to the proclamation No 26/1989, Wällägga provincial administration and Asossa *awraja* become separate administrative units. Asossa administrative region was created and constituted five *awrajas* under it. These *awrajas* were Dul, Bénišangul, Mänäsibu, Béggi and Gidami. The previous Kurmuk and Asossa *wärädas* were also incorporated in to Dul *Awraja*. Civil servants and political elites of the *wäräda* were transferred to *awraja* offices and the *wäräda* offices were closed.⁹³

The third action taken by the *Därg* was focused only on the rural re-settlers and the urban society in the *wäräda*. This action was mainly focused on

expansion of political propaganda using meetings and schools. This system was begun to be applied particularly towards the end of the 1980s. Various archival materials indicate that schools in the towns and rural areas were the center of political propaganda.⁹⁵ This expansion of propaganda in this period gained emphasis due to the increasing anti-government actions by different groups in the north and central part of the country ⁹⁶ and in Asossa area (see also appendix III&IV). In Asossa area teachers were charged by the government to expand its propaganda. Due to these activities teachers were taken by the anti- government groups into forests though their destiny was not known.⁹⁷ (see also appendix V).

Establishing different clubs in the schools and in the *qābällés* was the fashion of the day to inculcate socialist ideology in the minds of the youth and to react against the propaganda of the rebels.⁹⁸ (see also appendix VI). History and geography subjects were given in the propaganda programme aiming at introducing the youth with the military success of the country in the past and to introduce the topographical settings of the country. For instance, in December 1988, 12, 397 students and 261 school teachers attended the propaganda session which was held in 31 schools in Wällägga provincial government in the name of Ethiopian History.⁹⁹(see also appendix VII). This activity was extensively held in Asossa town and other rural schools of the Asossa *wärāda*.¹⁰⁰

Using dancing and singing, the anti-rebels propaganda and the socialist ideology were also conducted among the newly resettled peasantry in various Qäbällé peasant Associations. Each year, on September 12, on which the revolutionary government came to power, political propaganda using Alcohol and singing to attract the attention of the peasants was Common throughout the *Därg* period. However, the propaganda was not significantly applied on the rural Bärta people due to their sparse settlement .¹⁰¹ However, none of these actions could protect the *Därg* from its collapse in 1991 as we have discussed previously.

Chapter Three

3. Socio-Economic Developments of the *Wäräda*

3.1. Causes and Courses of the Asossa Resettlement Schemes

Although the area had been a periphery in terms of its political history and geographical location, it had been the center of social and economic interactions among the indigenous people, the Sudanese arrivals and the Ethiopian highlanders.¹ Before the government-sponsored resettlement was undertaken in the *wäräda*, the coming in to the region of other Ethiopians was not massive.² The history of interaction between the Bärta of Béla-Šangul and the highland Ethiopians goes back as early, as the 17th century. Sources indicate that in 1617 emperor Susynious Marched into the area to capture the region³ though they do not clearly indicate why the goal of the campaign failed.

The second significant interaction had also been made in the 18th and 19th centuries when the Amhara traders especially from Gojjam and the Oromo from the Southwest neighboring lands came to the area for trade activities.⁴ A relatively considerable interaction took place towards the end of the nineteenth century. The Šäwan army Marched from the Wällägga territories in 1898 to incorporate the region into the Ethiopian Empire.⁵ After this period, representatives of the central government and military forces like militias and police forces continued to come into the area to accomplish their own respective missions.⁶ (see also appendix XI).

Moreover, after the 1941 liberation of the country from the Italian rule, the Asossa *wäräda* has been highly inhabited by both government employees and ordinary people from the highlands together with foreigners and the indigenous Bärta. This existence of the highlanders relatively in large number was attributed to the Italian invasion of the area. In the *wäräda* in general and in the Asossa town in particular various shop keepers and local drink vendors inhabited Asossa together with the Italians who gave the town its present shape.⁷ Beyond the town, the northern portion of the *wäräda* was also occupied by the imperial military and police forces. In the Ethio-Sudan frontier lands of the area like Kurmuk and Gizän the highlanders were settled among the Bärta to keep peace and stability of the western border area of the empire.⁸

The establishment of various political and social institutions of Asossa-*Béla-Šangul awraja* in Asossa town also contributed a lot for the coming of the highlanders to the *wäräda*. *Awraja* governors, treasurers, municipal workers, police forces and militias came to the *wäräda* following the 1943 administrative restructuring of Asossa-*Béla-Šangul awraja* under the Wällägga provincial administration.⁹ However, the existence of these highlanders except the police forces and the militias was mainly restricted to the town.¹⁰ This was because throughout the imperial period, almost all administrative activities in the *wäräda* and *meketel wäräda* levels were done by the local Bärta traditional rulers who knew the tradition and the psychology of the local people.¹¹

During the imperial period, although proposals and requests were made by the *awraja* governors of the area to settle the high land people in the forest and scarcely populated areas of Asossa, it was not implemented.¹² For instance, in 1964 *Qāñazmac* Hailé Bera who was the *awraja* governor of the area in the period wrote a letter both to the emperor and the ministry of defense requesting the settlement of ex-soldiers and politically dissatisfied people in the Bārta land.¹³

However, the attention of the central government during this period was to undertake settlement programme in the southern and central parts of the empire rather than the Béla-Śangul area. For instance, in 1950, and 1960, the imperial government recruited re-settlers from among the ex-soldiers, family heads whose children were many in number and farmers whose inhabitants were affected by drought and famine. These recruited settlers were settled in Awasa, Śawa, and Sodo in Sidamo where large size state farms had existed.¹⁴ until the beginning of the 1970s, peasants from Wällo, Tegrai, Gojjam and Bägēmeder were redistributed to other southern and south western parts of the empire.¹⁵

It seems that it was due to this reason that the local people of Asossa area were not significantly hostile to the imperial government and settling the highlanders in the region was not considered. In other parts of the country collectivization and villagization processes were undertaken aiming at keeping peace and political stability, creating smooth public relations, utilizing natural

resources properly and to satisfy the social and educational needs of the people easily.¹⁶

However, following the accession to power of the military government, the most considerable and massive contact between the highlanders and the lowlander Bärta community of the *wäräda* was observed. The resettlement programme which was sponsored by the government brought about deep and extensive contact and later social and cultural interactions between the Bärta and the Wällo peasantry.¹⁷

According to oral testimony and secondary sources, there are different possible causes for the resettlement schemes implemented in different parts of the country generally and in Assoa *wäräda* in particular. The first reason is associated with political goals intended by the *Därg* government to be achieved. "... the provisional military government of Ethiopia viewed the Béla-Šangul region as economically very useful with its virgin land and its strategic importance to counter balance the Sudan government encroachment activities in Western part of Ethiopia and to secure the boarder land better than ever."¹⁸

As we have discussed in the previous chapter the *Därg* government undertook the resettlement schemes particularly in 1978/79, the first phase of the project aiming at reducing the grass and forest coverage of the area and to recruit militias and police forces to over come the problems of anti-government activities in the area.¹⁹ The political reason for the resettlement programme during this period was not attributed only to the Asossa *wäräda*. Other similar

schemes were under taken in Asossa in other portions of the country to attain *Därg's* political goals. For instance, partially aiming at establishing a paramilitary defense force on the Ethio-Somali border lands, resettlements were made in the area.²⁰

The second factor which initiated the military government to put into practice the resettlement programme was related to environmental and demographic problems. The frequent occurrence of droughts and the growing population increment in the northern part of the country had resulted in subsequent loss of lives and sufferings.²¹ Famine and drought particularly in the early 1970s had significantly played a role in over throwing the imperial government and the coming to power of the military government. As a result, the new government was highly convinced that "... resettlement would provide a lasting solution to the hard pressed peasantry and particularly to the population living in drought prone areas."²²

In fact, the 1972 and 1973 starvation and death in Wällo and Tegray administrative regions might have initiated the *Därg* to propose the resettlement scheme in the country generally. The view that the under utilized lands which are suitable for agricultural activities and for human habitation cover large portion of the country was the corner stone of the resettlement projects in the country.²³ However, this view could not be fully acceptable in the case of the Asossa project. Because, the area was neither suitable for human habitation nor for agricultural activities. There are two basic problems

which the area has been endowed with naturally. The first and the most significant one is related to weather and climate of the region and the subsequent diseases like malaria and deharea which are dangerous for the re-settlers and trypanosomiasis (Africans sleeping sickness) and render pest for their cattle.²⁴

Before the highland re-settlers came to the area, these diseases had negatively affected the lives of the indigenous Bārta people and their livestock.²⁵ Moreover, the problem was highly aggravated on the newly arrived settlers who had no experience to live in a very hot climate with rampant malaria. As a result significant number of settlers lost their lives and their family members. Due to the remoteness of the project site health centers established by the government were also not well equipped with medicines and well trained professionals.²⁶

In addition to the health problem, the second was the natural environmental problem which is related to the type of soil in the settled *wārāda*. The soil type is almost similar throughout the *wārāda*. Red clay type of soil which is suitable only for limited kinds of crops and cereals production was selected by the *Dārg* government. Though virgin the agricultural land was not much fertile naturally. As a result, the peasantry could produce crops and cereals to satisfy their household food needs and it was not more than a decade since they settled in their respective areas.²⁷

The productivity of both the land and the peasantry decreased from year to year. Moreover, this problem was also exacerbated by water and soil erosion which took away the existing limited fertile soil. The topography of the area and the bad habit of the Wällo settlers in cutting and destroying the forests of the *wäräda* were responsible factors for the increasing occurrence of soil degradation in the Wäräda.²⁸ Now a days as I have observed during my fieldwork, the settlers are changing their living and cultivation areas. Thousands of family heads are resettled in the previous Bambäsi *meketel wäräda* territories by eradicating the remaining forests of the region.²⁹

The 1975 land reform which was applied based on the March 4, 1975 government proclamation was also one event to change the environmental and demographic history of the *wäräda*. Based on this proclamation which brought about an end to the existing land tenure system, a settlement authority had been established in 1976.³⁰ Before the 1974 revolution of the country, the *wäräda* land was owned by the descendants of the previous *balabats* privately.³¹ However, the proclamation number 31 of March 1975 which allowed the nationalization of rural lands gave a chance for the government to transport the Wällo peasantry to the *wäräda* to attain its political and environmental related objectives.³²

“...In 1979 the settlement authority and the Awash valley authority were integrated into RRC (Relief and Rehabilitation Committee).”³³ RRC was responsible government organ in recruiting potential settlers and in making

follow ups after the project has been undertaken.³⁴ In 1978 peasants in Wällo were recruited by members of the RRC at village level. Although secondary sources generalize that farmers were selected mainly based on their willingness,³⁵ many of my informants who came into the *wäräda* during the first phase of the resettlement programme strongly oppose this idea and stress that they were captured by force before they were given any information or made preparations. As they refused to accept the proposed resentment, most peasants were tied up with ropes by the government until the recruitment process had been completed.³⁶

At the national level there were two types of resettlement schemes planned by the RRC. These were Low Cost Settlement Schemes (LCSS) and Special Settlement Schemes (SSS). The former was characterized by short distance transportation. 250 family heads were settled in a single unit on 625 hectares of land. Moreover the areas selected for those kinds of projects were free of animal diseases like trypanosomiasis because plowing using oxen was applied rather than using tractors.³⁷

The second type of resettlement scheme, the SSS in which the Asossa project was included was different from the above kind of scheme by its cost and distance of transportation, number of settler family heads per unit and by its mechanized plowing techniques.³⁸ The Asossa *wäräda* project covered a large distance and high cost to transport the Wällo farmers to Asossa through the hot climatic area of Asaita in Afar in 1978.³⁹ About 500 family heads were

assigned to settle over a single unit, plowing using tractors purchased by the socialist government of Ethiopia were utilized than plowing with oxen.⁴⁰

Three possible and interrelated ideas are forwarded by the 1978/79 re-settlers on why the military government took them to Asaita where they were stationed for more than five months rather than transporting them directly to the destination area. The first idea is related to the economic benefit they contributed to the government using their labor force. Staying in Asaita where there was large-scale state farm, the peasantry were engaged in collecting cotton and crops mainly sorghum for a long period of time. There, the labor force of the peasantry was highly exploited by the *Därg* by forcing them to work day and night. Their rest time was only on Sunday in the afternoon, for only four hours a week.⁴¹

The second group of informants, on the other hand, explains that the *Därg* took them to the hot area aiming at creating environmental adaptation in Asaita which has hot climate relatively similar to their destination site. They further explain that in Asaita the peasantry was highly affected by diseases like malaria and Deharea due to the climatic nature of the area and lack of cooked foods which resulted from a very limited number of women in this phase of the campaign.⁴²

The third explanation, additionally, given by the re-settlers of the period was related to testing and modifying the working culture and religious tolerance of the recruits who had different backgrounds. Majority of the recruited farmers

who came from the southern Wällo like Dässié, Kombolča and Qallu were Muslims in their religion. On the other hand, the peasants who were recruited from the northern parts of Wällo like Ambasäl, Lasta, Yäju, Dälanta, and Boräna were mainly followers of Orthodox Christianity. There, the government was successful in creating public relations and more or less in avoiding religious rigidity among the peasantry. For instance, working on Saturday and Sunday for the Orthodox Christians and on Friday for the Muslims was not common. However, this tradition was not followed by the campaigners due to the forced labor work.⁴³ As a result in Asossa, working on these and other holidays, was not new for the re-settler farmers. Although religiously their psychological well beings were not kept by the *Därg*, the peasants did not directly resist working on holy days.⁴⁴

In terms of strategy at a national level, there were two types of systems of resettling the peasants. The first one was conventional type which refers to settling the farmers on lands which were not utilized completely. The second kind of settling the farmers was an integrated type of settlement which was undertaken in sparsely populated or previously inhabited areas of the country.⁴⁵ In Asossa *wäräda* the first type of resettlement was implemented on most parts of the project sites. In some cases, however, particularly in the surrounding of the town the second type of resettlement had been put into practice.⁴⁶

According to elders, the land up to six kilometers north of the town was formerly occupied and cultivated by the indigenous Bärta inhabitants. Later on, when the Wällo settlers came to the area, the local people moved into different parts of the *wäräda* like Agoša, Ura and Qäsemängäl.⁴⁷ In fact, the military government allowed and advised the local inhabitants to live together with the highland peasants though they did not accept it. In different sites of the project there was a problem of integration with the local people. Misunderstandings arose among the newly arrived settlers and the local community.⁴⁸

In 1979 when the re-settlers arrived at Asossa they were stationed at Dabus camp, about five kilometers away from Asossa town. After a year, they were transported to a place called *Amba A'nd* (unit one) where their remnant dependent families and relatives had directly landed from Wällo.⁴⁹

In 1980 the government stationed about 6,000 family heads and 2,185 dependents in *Amba A'nd (Hoha)* farmers' village.⁵⁰ In *Hoha* farmers' village the settlers were accommodated without arrangements made for them. The camp was highly infested and vulnerable to serious epidemic disease. Lack of sanitary provision and limited medical facilities also aggravated the problem. Afterwards, it was decided by the Rehabilitation Commission to distribute the villagizers to three areas in the *wäräda*. As a result the present day *Amba Two (Finâca)* and *Amba Zäṭāñ* (unit nine) were established.⁵¹

Gradually, these farmers were redistributed to different sites in the *wäräda* together with their dependent relatives and families. In 1982, sixteen farmer villages called *Ambas* or units were created based on the supervision given by RRC consisting of 500 family heads. About 1, 250 hectares of land in the *wäräda* was given to each settlement unit. Each resettlement unit was allowed 1,000 hectares, 200 hectares and 50 hectares of land for cultivation activities, for forestry and pastoral land and for constructing their homes in a village form respectively.⁵²

The second phase of resettlement scheme in the *wäräda* was conducted in 1984/85. 69,489 heads of house holds and 151, 147 dependents were moved to Wällägga only from Wällo due to the famine and drought catastrophes. This number covers 68.8% of the Wällo settlers distributed to different parts of the country.⁵³ out of these family heads around 20,000 house hold heads were settled in Asossa *wäräda*. In this phase, the government moved a large number of family heads and independent members from drought and famine affected areas of northern and central parts of Ethiopia into various southern and southwestern parts of the country.⁵⁴

Contrary to the 1978/79 settlers, locally known by the name the ‘Seventy one *Zämaács*’ to refer to the campaigners of the 1971 Ethiopian calendar, the ‘Seventy sevens’ those who came in 1977 Ethiopian calendar were directly transported from Wällo to Asossa. These re-settlers were greater in number

than the first phase re-settlers (the campaigners). Now a days they are locally called “*Egerāñayä*” (followers of the campaigners).⁵⁵

All oral informants unanimously agree that the cause for the coming to the *wäräda* of the *Egerāñayä* was directly associated to the 1984/85 famine and drought who claimed the lives of many people in Wällo.⁵⁶ From November 17, 1984 to august 21, 1985 about 85, 069 family heads and 167, 673 dependents were moved to Wällägga province from Wällo, Tegray and Gondär.⁵⁷ Unfortunately, similar to the first phase all settlers moved to Asossa *wäräda* in this period were recruited also from Wällo only.⁵⁸

3.1.2 Consequences of the Resettlement Programme on the Environment and the Society

Among various resettlement projects implemented in Ethiopia, the Asossa project which was undertaken in wälläga was the largest scheme in its number of settlers and area of resettlement size. The project extended for about fourteen kilometers to the north and twenty two kilometers to the south of Asossa town. ³⁴ As a result, the social and environmental consequences which resulted from this project were directly proportional to the number of arrivals and the size of the area they utilized.⁵⁹

The most significant environmental change brought about by resettlement schemes in the *wäräda* was deforestation and the subsequent soil erosion and reduction in agricultural productivity. For instance, the number of settlers in 1978, the first group to arrive on the project site was only 143. However,

though they were few in number, they were able to clear about 263 hectares of forest land to produce maize, sorghum, pepper, *téff* and finger millet.⁶⁰

Beyond making the forestlands suitable for cultivation activities, the removing of forests were explicitly aimed at reducing spread of diseases in the project area. As quoted in the BA thesis of Lakech, the plan prepared by the settlement authority in collaboration with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) shows that removing the woodland and increasing the number of re-settlers in the area were the main control measures taken by the military government to reduce the impact of trypanosomiasis and rinderpest.⁶¹

Before the settlers came to the *wareda* there were only goats and donkeys that have from survived animal diseases which were severe in killing livestock. Since the animal health service in the area was very poor, the indigenous local people were helplessly watching their animals dying. However, after the forest destruction plan was implemented by the *Dārg* government, Cattle rearing has begun in the area extensively due to the subsequent reduction of the spread of animal and human diseases. The impact of malaria which was rampant and claimed the lives of the local Bārta and the re-settlers was also reduced in the *wäräda*.⁶²

After the resettlement project was undertaken, the highly forested land of the *wäräda* dwindled as a result of the socialist production plan. The *Dārg* used machineries to remove big trees and bushes beyond the labour force of the

newly arrived peasantry for agricultural and settlement lands. Accordingly, agricultural and settlement lands were extremely expanded in the *wäräda* and the ecological imbalance of the area had also increased.⁶³

After the resettlement programme ended influx of immigrants towards the study area was not stopped. Since the government did not allow the settlers to return to their homeland, most of them invited their remaining relatives who were in need of support to improve their lives. Therefore, the growing population in the *wäräda* increased the pressure on forests, grazing and wet lands.⁶⁴

The re-settlers' low level of education could do nothing for the maintenance of the natural environment. They often used wood for fuel, construction and for other domestic consumption. Nevertheless, their consumption level was inhospitable to the ecological aspects of the area.⁶⁵ It seems that the *Därg* government inculcated the tradition of removing big trees in the mind of the villagizers. Even after each peasant had got his/her respective farm land and land for housing compound, it was fashionable to cut trees including their roots and stems simply aiming at using only a single branch for outdoor and indoor tools and to feed their cattle its leaves. Moreover, this problem had also exacerbated the tradition of the Wällo re-settlers which allowed them to carry axe and move every where at any time.⁶⁶

After the *wäräda* land began to be used for cultivation extensively, the involvement of the indigenous Bärta people in sedentary farming system was

increased. Their existing tradition of selling forest products like charcoal and bamboo products in the town which grew more after the resettlement schemes also facilitated the deforestation of the area. Prior to the implementation of the government sponsored resettlement schemes and the influx of the immigrants in to the area, the Bärta were engaged in trade activities, traditional gold panning, hunting and gathering ways of life. Plowing using oxen was not significantly used by them (if not at all).⁶⁷ The manuscript by Bäkürä Şeyon clearly explains how the Bärta people undertook agricultural activities in different *meketel wärädas* under Asossa *wäräda* during the imperial period. According to this manuscript in Gumba, khomoşa, Bambäsi and Şärkolé *meketel wärädas*, less than half of the Bärta were engaged in farming. Moreover, only few of these farmers used oxen to plough the land, whereas majority of them used Pallé to dig the land.⁶⁸ In Bäşer *meketel wäräda* cultivating land using oxen was not at all practiced by farmers of the area.⁶⁹ However, after the coming of the re-settlers, the Bärta people increasingly used oxen and were even able to sell products like maize, sorghum and millet in markets.⁷⁰

Their increasing participation in sedentary farming together with their existing traditions in burning of forests for hunting purpose particularly after the *ero* (annual hunting ceremony) was celebrated contributed to the destruction of forests in the area.⁷¹ However, though the local people lived in their land since the 17th century, they did not completely destroy the natural forests. The re-settlers are more responsible for the ecological imbalance of the area than the

natives are. As compared to the lands covered by the natives, the area which the settlers cultivated repeatedly remained completely without forests. The decreasing productivity of the soil caused by water and wind erosion was also intensified in the Amhara occupied lands than the Bärta occupied areas.⁷²

During my fieldwork, the Amhara peasantry was producing not more than three quintal of crops per family. It seems that this problem is the long lasting effect of the problem of careless and exploitative utilization of land by the peasantry. In fact, the *Därg* government had a problem in selecting sites for the resettlement project. Informants explain that from the beginning the soil was poor. Due to lack of natural nutrients in the soil even the virgin lands of the *wäräda* were not productive unless the farmers used agricultural inputs like *urea* and *dup*. These inputs were supplied by the socialist government.⁷³

Aiming at coming up with solution for shortage of food products due to environmental destruction, the settlers have now engaged in changing their sites to the remaining forestlands along river courses.⁷⁴ Therefore, the concerned body should deal with this issue before they repeat their history in distracting the ecology of the area by removing the remaining bamboo forest to change into arable lands.

On the other hand, the coming and settling of the Amhara peasantry into the area brought a change in the social history of the *wäräda*. Changes in demographic, language and religious composition were the most observable ones. After the resettlement programme was accomplished in 1985 and the 55

settlement village sites were established the number of population in Béla-Şangul region in general and in Asossa *wäräda* in particular showed a radical increment. For instance, after the resettlement, the population number of the re-settlers reached 55,0075 out of the total population of the region numbering 208,155.⁷⁵ Therefore, the region which was known as “a no man’s land” was began to be known by a densely populated area.⁷⁶

The other important thing which the Amhara re-settlers brought with them was the Amharic language. Before the coming of the re-settlers the local Bärta including the common people and the nobles were not able to speak the official language. *Al-ruṭana* and Arabic were the most widely spoken languages in the area. Two out of the three main varieties of dialects of the Bärta people with insignificant differentiation were extensively used to communicate in the *wäräda*. These were the *Mayu* and the *Fadash*. The former is used by the arabized Bärta of the Asossa area and the latter is used to communicate with the Bambäsi area *Bärta*. The third dialect, the *undu* was used to communicate in the Béla-Şangul and the Khomoşa area Bärta together with Arabic.⁷⁷ However after the resettlement programme, the interaction between the Bärta people and the settlers in various social and civil institutions like markets, schools, mosques and offices helped them to be fluent in the Amharic language.⁷⁸

The religious composition of the *wäräda* was also changed due to the settlers arrived to the *wäräda*. Although the Bärta throughout their history were

known for their own traditions and religion, the villagization process of the military government had changed the composition of the religion in the area. Before the schemes were practiced more than 90% of the population were followers of Islam. However, since more than 50% of the Wällo settlers and the Oromo town dwellers in the town were Orthodox Christians,⁷⁹ the percentage of Islamic followers in the *wäräda* has been reduced. As a result, recently the Muslims in the district were only around 63% of the population.⁸⁰

The government sponsored resettlement schemes also had impact on the lives of the villagizers. The programme brought re-settlers from highlands to a completely different location in the lowlands. Their production system by clearing big trees and their survival in the new area demanded stressful adaptation to the hot climate and diseases. Together with insufficient medical facilities, the disease had claimed many lives before they adapted the climate.⁸¹

The resettlement site has only one harvest season a year. The rainfall in the area was abundant and heavy with frequent thunder, hailstorms and wind. On the other hand, the heat of the dry season is also very strong resulting in common wild bush fire that frequently destroyed crops. Such wild fires were not known in the home of the settlers land. The hot climate, new crops and cropping seasons had been changed and brought tremendous adverse effects on the adaptive adjustments of highland peasants.⁸²

The forced resettlement scheme of the first phase has also put its own psychological problem on the settlers. Transporting them forcefully using the

government militias caused dispersement and dismantling of social organizations. Personal relations and kinship groups became scattered as well. Most of the recruits of the 1978/79 were also forced to be transported leaving their farmlands, houses, livestock and other properties.⁸³

Like the new arrival re-settlers the indigenous local Bärta people in the *wäräda* were also affected by the resettlement schemes of the military government. Firstly, they moved into new sites abandoning their inhabitants. Many Bärta families who were living around Asossa town, for instance, left their farm lands with their plants like mango trees and moved to different areas beyond the resettlement Camps. Informants including the re-settlers and the Bärta themselves assure that properties and houses of the previous Bärta inhabitants in the project sites were burnt in the process of clearing the forest lands. They left their inhabitants after they lost their properties with out any compensation given from the government.⁸⁴

On the other hand, though not fully successful the *Därg* government began to implement the viillagization schemes on the local Bärta. For instance as part of the resettlement programme of the period the Bärta were gathered together by the government to create Bärta villages. In 1984/85 two hundred Bärta family heads were gathered in *Ura* from the surrounding areas and around three hundred Bärta families were taken from the Bela-shanguhl *Wäräda*.⁸⁵

Secondly, the increasing expansion of sedentary agricultural ways of life among the Bärta after the coming of the settlers was very crucial in reducing

the high labor exploitation of the Bārta women. In their history, most of their income highly depended on panning gold in a traditional way. Women spent hours panning heaps of gravel for an insignificant amount of gold. During dry season, when the rivers and streams dry out and the storage of water gets critical, alluvial gold mining could be unrewarding. They were profitable only during the rainy season and were engaged mainly on the laborious and time-consuming job. However, they gradually began to participate in the expanded sedentary farming which is simpler than the exploitative traditional local gold panning.⁸⁶

3.3. Infrastructural and Social Service Developments in the *Wäräda*

Although relatively significant changes were witnessed after the revolution, development of infrastructure which could provide public and private services for the community was sluggish in Asossa *awraja* generally and Asossa *wäräda* particularly.⁸⁷ The first reason for the low level development of public institutions was that though the annual budget allocated by the imperial government was greater than the annual tax collected from the region, it was not significant enough to construct institutions to serve the society. Moreover, the budget allocated for the *wäräda* was allowed mainly to pay government employees and for per diem and transportation purposes.⁸⁸ Secondly, the low level income of the inhabitants of the region was also responsible for the existence of weak infrastructural and social service developments. Neither

individually nor in group the inhabitants were capable enough to build social institutions which could provide social service for the people.⁸⁹

Expansion of educational institutions and services in the *wäräda* remained insignificant particularly before the 1974 Ethiopian revolution and the subsequent resettlement programme.⁹⁰ According to archival materials, in the history of Béla-Šangul and Asossa *wärädas* construction of educational institutions only began in 1945. In this year two primary schools in Béggi and Asossa town were established.⁹¹ In 1947 the Imperial government in collaboration with the Orthodox churches allocated budget for the salary of teachers and for other school workers and modern education began to be delivered in Asossa. For instance four thousand birr from the government and ten thousand birr from the churches were allocated for nine schools in the Asossa awraja.⁹²

In this particular year beyond the Asossa primary school which was established in Asossa town, three primary schools namely Bambäsi Primary School and Täkür Primary School in Bambäsi *meketel wäräda* and Dull Primary School in Khomoša *meketel wäräda* were established. These schools were administered directly by the respective *wäräda* governments.⁹³ As administrator of the schools, the *wäräda* governors were responsible to the Wällägga provincial government. The Orthodox Church had also played a big role in interfering in the internal and external affairs of the schools.⁹⁴ However, in 1960 the schools come under the direct control of the Ministry of Education

due to the expansion of the number of students and teachers and the budget needed for them.⁹⁵

In 1970, the Asossa First Cycle School was established by the Ministry of Education. In the same year, office of schools was organized to facilitate educational issues in the *awraja* and *wärādas*. This office was initially located in the compound of Asossa Primary School. After two years however, the office changed its location due to the expansion of students and shortage of classroom.⁹⁶

In spite of problems in the area related to shortage of classrooms and administrative buildings, the imperial government did not give emphasis to construct a separate building for the office of schools. Renting private house with 30 birr per month was the solution made by the government. Not only for education purpose but also for administrative office, the imperial government did not built a single office in Asossa. Old offices built by the Italians during their invasion of the area were used until 1974.⁹⁷ (see also appendix VIII). Experienced Teachers were brought from Nāqāmté and Béggi to administer and facilitate the works of the office in a modern way.⁹⁸ Beyond the shortage of buildings for offices and classrooms, absence of senior secondary school in the area was the main problem for students. Students who completed their junior schools were forced to go to Nāqāmté and Dambi Dollo.⁹⁹

Establishing senior secondary school in the *awraja* in general and in the *wärāda* in particular and constructing of extra classrooms in the previously

established schools was observed after the 1974 revolution. In 1980 the Asossa Senior Secondary School was opened in Asossa town.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, many primary schools were built in many villages. In addition to this, relatively a number of classrooms in different junior and primary schools were constructed.¹⁰¹

Informants underscore that the military government emphasized the expansion of schools in the region than the imperial government for different factors. Firstly, the number of students in the *wäräda* mainly after the resettlement scheme was accomplished had increased.¹⁰² Secondly, the government was interested to expand socialist ideology among the youngsters. As we have discussed earlier, schools were the centers where political propogandas were diffused. In this period, the *Därg* government was also significantly successful in eradicating illiteracy among the peasantry and the town dwellers by expanding basic education for adults.¹⁰³

Even though schools were constructed and modern education was delivered in the *wäräda* since the imperial government, the schools were mainly dominated by children of the re-settlers and other town dwellers. The Bärta children were far from modern education for various reasons. The demographic distribution of the indigenous people was one of the problems which deterred them to bring their children to the schools. They were sparsely settled and were far from the town where modern schools were opened.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, the *Därg* gave more attention only to the newly arrived villagers who lived in dense settlements.¹⁰⁵

The existing political administrative tradition in the region particularly during the imperial period was also responsible in making the Bārta children to be far from modern education. *Wārāda* and *meketel wārāda* governors, nobles, and *Ĉeqasums* were selected to rule over their respective areas without considering their modern education background. Therefore, to get the prestigious political position, their children were eager to get acceptance from the community rather than attending their modern school. Blood ties and ability to read and write Arabic language were enough to be potential political appointee. ¹⁰⁶

The hot climate of the region and the existence of disease mainly malaria and headache were also the problems of their children to attend modern education by moving to the few existing schools. Moreover, textbooks distributed in the *wārāda* schools were published in Amharic. Therefore, shortage of using the official language as instructional media was their problem to attend their education heartfully.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, sending their children to school to be educated in Amharic under the Christian teachers in Ethiopian schools was believed by the Bārta to undermine their religious faith. As a result, even those who could afford to educate their children especially the *karros* sent their children to schools in the Sudan. For instance, in 1966 out of 200 students in Asossa schools only 20 were children of the natives.¹⁰⁸ Other children of the Bārta were engaged in looking after the cattle.¹⁰⁹

As far as development of health institutions for both human and animals in the *wārāda* are concerned, there was relatively better improvement and expansion

after the 1974 revolution than during the imperial government. It was only during the military government that more health centers were established in the town as well as in the rural areas of the *wäräda*. The newly established health centers were also not proportional to the number and distribution of the population.¹¹⁰ During the imperial government only a single health center in the town of Asossa was established in the 1950s.¹¹¹ The relative development of health centers was also associated with the 1970s and 1980s resettlement programmes. For instance, the single hospital situated in the *wäräda* to serve the whole community in the region was established in the early 1970s aiming at treating the patients among the newly arrived re-settlers. Following the establishment of the hospital, clinics were constructed in different farmer villages.¹¹²

Similar to educational facilities, health centers in the *Wäräda* were limited to the town and resettlement sites. Through out the imperial and the *Därg* period the native Bärta remained far from modern health services. Though their inhabitant was known for malaria and yellow fever which claimed the lives of the natives, the central government did not pay attention to solve this social problem. In addition to human disease, trypanosomiasis which forced the natives to remain without livestock did not get the attention of the central government.¹¹³ In fact, Malaria Eradicating Center and Veterinary Centers were established in the 1950s and 1960s respectively.¹¹⁴ However, due to lack of trained professionals and equipments these institutions could not solve the problem.¹¹⁵

The other problem which was related to the hospital and health centers found in the town and rural areas was the imbalance between the number of patients and the capacity of these health institutions. Lack of equipments and shortage of bed rooms forced the patients to remain for a long period with out treatment. Due to the remoteness of the area, health professionals did not volunteer to serve the community for a long period by resisting the climatic hardship. Moreover, all clinics found among the re-settlers were robbed and completely destroyed during the political instability which took place in the area among the political factions towards the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s.¹¹⁶

In terms of transportation and communication services development, it was only during the Italian period that infrastructures were significantly built generally in the *awraja* and particularly in the *wäräda* of Asossa. Only limited works in road and bridge rehabilitations were done by the imperial period after the 1941 liberation. Throughout the imperial and the *Därg* regime, transportation using vehicles was possible only during the dry reason. The roads were neither asphalted nor gravealed.¹¹⁷

Under *Asossa awraja*, *Asossa wäräda* in which the capital of the *awraja* was found was the most advantageous in connecting with other parts of Ethiopia and the Sudan. There were four main dry weather roads spreading out in four main directions from *Asossa wäräda*. The first and the most important road to

connect the *wäräda* with Addis Ababa through Bambäsi and Mändi was used by big trucks and small cars like land rovers frequently.¹¹⁸

The second route which connected the *Wäräda* with the Sudan via Khomoša and Gizän and the third route that went to the Sudan through khomoša and kurmuk were the main outlets to export coffee to the Sudan and import trade items mainly 'Abujad' clothes and cooking materials to Asossa. These two routes were frequented by big trucks and pack animals. The fourth road line which goes from Asossa to Béggi *wäräda* crossing Bambäsi was predominantly frequented by the local traders who transported food crops and coffee from Béggi *wäräda* using mainly donkeys and rarely trucks.¹¹⁹

Throughout the imperial period no single new road was constructed. However, the *awraja*, *wäräda* and *meketel wäräda* governors of the area played significant roles in rehabilitating the roads which were damaged by the Italians during their departure in 1941 from the region. Fore instance the Asossa-Bambassi - Mendi road which was a short cut to connect the area with Addis Ababa was not in a way to provide service for the society due to the destruction of the Dabus river bridge by the Italians. The whole region beyond the river was isolated from the rest of Ethiopia after the liberation. In solving this problem the then Asossa *wäräda* governor, Aśafi Khojälé in collaboration with other *wäräda* and *meketel wäräda* governors and the *awraja* governor, Qāñazmać Hailé Birra actively participated in collecting money in cash from the community. Following the local community contribution, the central

government gave additional money and the bridge was rebuilt in 1956 ¹²⁰(see Appendix IX and X).

Air transportation service, in addition to surface transportation, was started during the Italian period and continued to provide service to the people of Asossa. However, though there was a three-day flight per week using two directions from Addis Ababa to Asossa, there were only a few passengers to use the service mainly from Asossa to Béggi and *vice versa*. The first flight from Addis Ababa to Asossa was Via Jimma, Goré, Dämbi Dollo and Béggi and returned through the same direction. The second line from Addis Ababa was through Näqämté, Nädjo, Mändi and Béggi.¹²¹ Due to the low level economic capacity of the people of Asossa and Béla-Şangul *wärādas* and their interest to move to the Sudan than other parts of Ethiopia,¹²² the air planes were often coming empty from Béggi to Asossa and returning empty from Asossa to Béggi .

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Telegram and postal communication services which began during the Italians invasions in the second half of the 1930 remained without significant improvement and expansion in the *wärāda*. In both the imperial and the Därg periods a daily telegram service and three days per week postal services were provided only for the people of the town.¹²⁴ During both regimes the rural and the indigenous people of the *wärāda* in particular and the *awraja* in general were not able to get communication services.¹²⁵

In terms of economic activity and infrastructural development distribution in the *wäräda*, Gumba *meketel wäräda* was advantageous than other *meketel wärädas*. This was because, Asossa town which was the center of the *wäräda* and the *awraja* was situated there and the majority of the farmer villages of the re-settlers were found in it. Schools, health centers, roads and other infrastructures were predominantly found in Gumba *meketel wäräda*.¹²⁶ although both the imperial and the *Därg* governments did not give emphasis to overcome water shortage in the *wäräda*, Gumba was the most advantageous in its water resources than other sub provinces. For instance, throughout their history the rural Bärta people in the Ethio-Sudan borderlands were affected by shortage of water. They were importing drinking water from the Sudan.¹²⁷ (See also appendix XI).

Conclusion

Asossa *wārāda* was the main political, socio-economic and cultural center of the people of Béla-Śangul. Prior to the advent of the Bārta in the region in the 17th century, the area was inhabited by the Goma people. After the arrival and expansion of the Bārta in Asossa proper, the region had been affected by different foreign invasions. Its frontier geographic location between the Sudan and Ethiopia and its environs valuable resources were the reasons for the invasion of the area by foreigners. Beginning from the 17th century to the last decade of the 19th century the area became the target of the Funji of Sēnnar, the Turco-Egyptians and the Mahdists. Towards the end of the 1890s, the Śāwa army also made campaign to get the submission of different Sheikhs who ruled over the region among whom Sheikh Khojälé, the Asossa proper ruler was the known. In 1898, the region was incorporated to Menilek's Empire. The Asossa proper had been the center of trade activities and trade routes for more than three centuries. This trade activity, however, was declined towards the end of the first half of the 20th century because of the strict trade control of the imperial government by establishing custom duty office and various Kéllas. These and other government institutions were organized to limit the import-export items between the Sudan and Ethiopia and to collect tax and custom from traders. However, these institutions were dissolved during the Italian period and trade activity with the Sudan was flourished.

The Asossa Sheikhdom had lost its semi-autonomous status in 1943 when the whole Béla-Šangul region was reorganized based on 1942 national administrative decree. In the same year the Asossa *wäräda* was formed. Though Asossa lost its semi-autonomous status, descendants of the former Sheikhs and nobles who ruled over the area were appointed by the imperial government. Through out the imperial regime all administrative units under the *wäräda* like the *wäräda*, the five *weketel wärädas*, nobles and *karros* were held by the sons of the pre-1941 liberation sheikhs. There fore in the *wäräda* the imperial government applied the indirect and self-government system.

The indirect and self-administrative system after the 1974 revolution, however, was completely changed in to direct and oppressive type of administration. The direct control of the local administrative units by the *Därg* appointees brought about an end to the political positions of the indigenous rulers which was declining beginning from the incorporation of the region in to the Empire towards the end of 1890s. The direct and oppressive system of the post 1974 government highly initiated members of the indigenous people to organize in to anti-government group, Fana which struggled and played a lot for the collapse of the Military government in 1991. The formation of the Fana was also finally resulted into the distraction of properties and loss of life which highly affected both the rural and the town people of the *wäräda*.

In terms of social interaction, traders, soldiers and government employees were the only Ethiopian highlanders to arrive in to the *wäräda* before the 1970s and

1980s government sponsored resettlement schemes. However, during the Därg regime thousands of Wällo peasants with their families arrived in the *wäräda* for different reasons. The first reason was related to the political goal of the military government. The *Därg* transported and settled the Wällo peasantry in 1978/9 in the *wäräda* by separated them from their willingness. The first goal of this phase of resettlement in the *wäräda* was to recruit local militia and police force to keep the peace and stability of the frontier area which was dominated by anti-*Därg* groups.

The second reason for the second phase of resettlement scheme in 1984/85 was related to drought and famine occurred in Wällo. Contrary to the first phase massive number of re-settlers came in to the *wäräda* based on their willingness. The ethnic interaction created between the Wällo villagizers and the indigenous Bärta followed by various consequences. Some of these were ecological imbalance due to deforestation and repeated plowing, change in demographic, religious, ethnic and language compositions and transformation of way of life between the two ethnic groups.

Social services and infrastructural development in the *wäräda* remained low during both regimes. In fact, education and health services which were started after the libration witnessed relative expansion during the military period. Public services got emphasis neither by the imperial nor by the military government. All main surface roads and air transport infrastructures were built by the Italians during their occupations.

Notes

Chapter One

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¹⁶National Villagization Coordinator Committee Office, “*Mändär Mesräta Käyät Wädät*”, IES, Ms. No.____, PP. 8-9.

¹⁷Informants :Däsalän Sisay and Abbas.

¹⁸Desalegn, P.34.

¹⁹Informants: Mulat, Däsalän and Amarä.

²⁰Desalegn Rahmeto, *Food Aid and Food Dependency in Ethiopia*. (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 1986), p.684.

²¹Informants: Abdu Hassän, Märima, Säid Amanu and Abdäla Yusuf.

²²Amezench W/Amlak, “Resettlement Programme in Ethiopia,” (BA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, Political Science Department, 1991), P.27.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴Informants: Mulat, Abtāw, Agāritu and Tiruyā Yimār.

²⁵Informants: Abbas, Amina and Aśa.

²⁶Informants: Mäku Fäyesa, Abbas and Mulat.

²⁷Informants: Abtāw, Mäkätä, Ali and Girmay Ĉäkolä.

²⁸Informants: Mulat, Abtāw, Mäkätä and Abbas.

²⁹Beginning from 2000E.C, the Amhara Peasants are shifting their cultivation, grazing and living areas mainly to a specific Place called Qäsemando No 2, No 3 and No, 4 in the Present day Bambäsi *wäräda*. Now days forestlands between Bambäsi *wäräda* and Béggi are highly distracted by he newly settled Peasants.

³⁰Lakech Kidane, “Resettlement in Ethiopia with Particular Emphasis on the Asossa Project,”(BA Thesis, Economics Department, Addis Ababa University, 1984) ,P.11.

³¹Informants: Abbas, Ibrahim, Aśa and Abdälmuném.

³²Informants: Mulat and Abtāw.

³³Shiferaw Beqqele, "An Empirical Account of Resettlement in Ethiopia (1975-1985)". *In the Proceedings of the 9th International Congress of Ethiopia Studies* (Moscow: Nauka Publishers, 1988), P.132.

³⁴Amezenech, P.33.

³⁵*Ibid.*, P.46.

³⁶Informants: Mulat, Abtäw, Ali and Hassän Abägaz.

³⁷ Amezenech, PP.48-49.

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹Informants: Abtäw, Ali, Tiruyä, Mäkätä and Mulat.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴¹Informants: Agäritu, Bÿänä Akalu, Abtäw and Addisu Yidäg

⁴²Informants: Tiruyä, Täsäma Ali and Abära Hailu.

⁴³Informants: Mäkätä, Abtäw, Adanä Alämu and Bayus Käbädä.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵Shiferaw, P.141.

⁴⁶Informants: Abbas, Aäsa and Almahadi.

⁴⁸Informants: Mulat, Taddäsä Käbbädä and Abbas.

⁴⁹*Ibid.* and Abtäw.

⁵⁰Desalegn, P.34.

⁵¹Informants: Abtäw, Mäkätä, Ali and Amarä.

⁵²Lakech, P.17.

⁵³Shiferaw, P.37.

⁵⁴Informants: Amarä, Gétaçäw Abatä and Ayaléw yimär; Shiferaw,
P.139.

⁵⁵Infromants: Ali, Abtäw, Mäkätä and Amarä.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Shiferaw, P.129.

⁵⁸Informants: Abbas, Amarä and Mulat.

⁵⁹Informants: Abbas,Mulat and Asadiq.

⁶⁰ Lakech, PP. 34, 37-38.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 39.

⁶²Informants: Däsalän, Sisay Kasaw, Agäritu and Yimär Ahmääd.

⁶³*Ibid.*

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

⁶⁵*Ibid.* and Abtäw.

⁶⁶Informants: *Ibid* and Mulat.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*

⁶⁸Bäkurä Šeyon, *PP.* 3-5.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, *P.*7.

⁷⁰Informants: Mäkätä, Abbas, Mulat and Asadiq.

⁷¹Informants: Ahmäd Kädär, Faço and Kädija.

⁷²Informants: *Ibid.* and Abtäw.

⁷³Informants: Ali, Mulat and Mäkätä.

⁷⁴Informants: Abbas, Asadiq and Kasaw Biša.

⁷⁵Desalegn, *P.*35.

⁷⁶*Ibid*

⁷⁷Tariku, *P.*35.

⁷⁸Informants: Ibrahim, Abbas, Tafäsä and Däsaläñ.

⁷⁹Tariku, *P.*23.

⁸⁰Central Statistics..., 2007, *P.*58.

⁸¹Informants: Agäritu, Mäkätä, Ayaléw and Mulat.

⁸²*Ibid.*

⁸³*Ibid.*, Ali and Girmay.

⁸⁴Informants: Abbas, Ibrahim and Tafäsä.

⁸⁵Laqech, p.46.

⁸⁶Informants: Aśa, Amina, Abraham and Däsalän.

⁸⁷Informants: Ibrahim, Abbas, Mäkätä and Tafäsä.

⁸⁸NALA Archive, Folder No. 827, File No. 237, “Annual report From Wällägga Provincial Government to Imperial Ethiopian Ministry of Finance ,1949 E.C”, P.9.

⁸⁹Informants: Abbas, Mulat and Mäku.

⁹⁰Informants: Ibrahim, Abbas and Tafäsä.

⁹¹Asossa Wäräda Administrative Office Archive, Folder No. 351, File No. 77/34. “*Yä-Asossa Awraja Temeheret Edigät Tarik Ateñ budin*”, Hamelé 1975 E.C, P.2

⁹²*Ibid*, PP.2-3.

⁹³*Ibid*.

⁹⁴*Ibid*, PP 4-5 and Abbas

⁹⁵*Ibid*, p.3.

⁹⁶*Ibid*, P.4.

⁹⁷*Ibid*, IESWTMRC Archive, Folder no 513, File No, 671, A letter from Asossa Awraja to Wällägga Ṭäqelay Gezat Gemja Bét on Genbot 1962 E.C ;(see also Appendix VIII).

⁹⁸*Ibid*, PP. 4-6.

⁹⁹*Ibid*, P. 6.

¹⁰⁰Asossa Zone Capacity, Building Office Archive, Folder No 206, File No 163 Report from Asossa Wārāda Administration to Wallagga Provincial Government, on Hamlé, 1973 E.C”, p.4.

¹⁰¹Informants: Mulat, Tafäsä and Däsälän

¹⁰²*Ibid*.

¹⁰³*Ibid*; Amarä and Abtäw

¹⁰⁴Infomants: Mäku, Däsälän and Tafäsä

¹⁰⁵Informants: Gätačäw, Amarä and Mäku

¹⁰⁶Bäqqäla, Pp 54-55.

¹⁰⁷ “Yä-Asossa Awraja Temetheret Edegät Tarik...”, P.8.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid*; Beqqele, Pp. 55-56.

¹⁰⁹Triulzi, Salt p.15.

¹¹⁰Informants: Abbas, Mulatu and Däsälän

¹¹¹Tarik Ateñ Buden..., P.7; and Abbas

¹¹²Informants: Abbas, Almahadi and Säid

¹¹³*Ibid*

¹¹⁴Desalegn P.28.

¹¹⁵Indormants: Abbas, Säid and Alamhadi

¹¹⁶Informants: Mäkätä, Abtâw and Däsälän

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹¹⁸Informants: Abbas and Ibrahim.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*

¹²⁰IES WMMRC Archive. Folder No 514 file no 41/452 A Letter from Hailé Bera to Empror Haile Sellassie in Säné1956 E.C; *Yä Agär Gezat Mäšehét*, Vo.7, No. 2 ,PP.24-26; (see also Appendix IX and X).

¹²¹Beqqele, PP 15-16.

¹²²*Ibid.*

¹²³Informants: Ibrahim and Abbas

¹²⁴Informants: Ibrahim, Abbas and Tafäsä.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*

¹²⁶*Ibid.*

¹²⁷NALA Archive Folder No,---(Wällägga folder),File No. 41/452, A Letter from Hailé Bera to Emperor Hailä Selassié in Säné1955 E.C ;(see also Appendix XI).

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List of Informants

No	Name of Informants	Age	Placed and date of interview	Remark
1	Abära Hailu	75	Asossa, March, 2011	He had been peasant group leader in <i>Amba</i> Eight peasant village. He is a very good oral informant on the historical development of the <i>wäräda</i> during the military period.
2	Abbäbäc Läma	58	Asossa, December, 2010	She is one of the 1978/79 re-settlers. She knows about the process of recruiting, transporting and setting the Wällo peasantry. Her knowledge on the expansion of social services in the rural parts of the <i>wäräda</i> is quite important.
3	Abbas Ašafi	88	Asossa, December 2010	He had been the governor of the <i>wäräda</i> from 1972-1974. He is a remarkable oral historian on the political and infrastructural

				history of the <i>wäräda</i> .
4	Abdäla Hamas	82	Khomoša, December 2010	He had been <i>Êeqaşum</i> in Khomoša <i>meketel wäräda</i> . He has good memory on the administrative and social history of Asossa <i>wäräda</i> and Khomoša <i>meketel wäräda</i> .
5	Abdäla Yusuf	80	Asossa, March, 2011	He is the member of the 1984/85 re-settlers. He is a remarkable informant on the course and consequence of the resettlement schemes in the Asossa <i>wäräda</i> .
6	Abdälmuném Hassän	80	Khomoša, December 2010	He had been <i>Êeqaşum</i> during the imperial period. He is a remarkable informant on the general history of the region particularly on the administrative and social history of the <i>wäräda</i>
7	Abdu Hassän	75	Asossa, March 2011	He was one of the 1984 recruits for resettlement from southern Wällo. He has a very good knowledge on the interest of the

				re-settlers to move in to Asossa due to the famine in Wällo.
8	Abdulfatah Abdulkärim	90	Khomoša, March, 2011	He has lived in Gumba, Bäšir and Bambäsi <i>meketel wärädas</i> for long period of time. His knowledge on administrative, social service and infrastructural development in the <i>wäräda</i> is very good.
9	Abdulrahim Mohamäd	60	Asossa, December, 2010	He was one of the founding members of the Fana anti-military government group. His knowledge on the collapse of the <i>Därg</i> and frictions among political groups in Asossa area is important.
10	Abtâw Asfaw	55	Asossa, December 2010	He was one of the resettlement recruits in 1978. He has a good memory on the forceful transportation of the peasantry to Asossa by the military government.
11	Adanä Alämu		Asossa,	He had been unit manager in

			December,2010	<i>Amba</i> 14 peasant village. His ability in comparing and contrasting the forest coverage and soil fertility of the <i>wäräda</i> before and after the arrival of the villagers is quite important.
12	Addisu yedäg	60	Asossa, December 2011	He lived with the Wällo resettlers in Asossa <i>wäräda</i> since 1978. He is a very good informant on the social and ecological impact of the coming in to the <i>wäräda</i> of the resettlers.
13	Agäritu Awakaw	45	Asossa, March 2011	She was one of the recruited settlers in Lasta area. She has a good memory on the forceful labor exploitation of the <i>Därg</i> in Asaita in 1978.
14	Ahmäd Kädär	65	Bambäsi, March, 2010	An informant with knowledge on the history of the region particularly on the environmental degradation.

15	Ahmäd Khalifa	83	Asossa, December, 2010	He has lived for about 20 years in Bäsär <i>meketel wäräda</i> and 40 years in Gumba <i>meketel wäräda</i> . He is a very knowledgeable informant on the socio-economic and administrative developments of the <i>wäräda</i> particularly on the late 1960s and early 1970s.
16	Ali Yassin	80	Asossa, March 2011	One of the 1978 peasant recruits in Kallu in Wällo. He has good memory on how the military government forcefully brought them to Asossa letting their land, Crops, properties, families and relatives with out their willingness.
17	Almähadi Abdälmuném	83	Asossa, December 2010	He was the founding member of the <i>Fana</i> anti-military government group. He is a remarkable informant on the war among political groups in the area.

18	Al-qadir Aman	78	Kurmuk December, 2010	He is an elder oral historian particularly on the origins and interaction of groups in the Bärta population. His information on the political administrative history of the region is quite important.
19	Amarä Assäfa	60		He had been a chairperson of peasant Association in <i>Amba</i> two. He has a good memory on the forest coverage of the <i>wäräda</i> when the re-settlers arrived in the region in 1978/79
20	Amina Mustäfa	78	Kurmuk, December 2010	She was the wife of Ibrahim Aman, one of the <i>Êeqasums</i> in Khomoša. She has good knowledge on the political history of the area and the economic history of the Bärta women.
21	Aša Ibrahim	85	Kurmuk, December 2010	She was the wife of Abdäla Yassin, one of the nobles in Kurmuk area. She is very knowledgeable

				informant on the self-governance system of the <i>wäräda</i> .
22	Assadeq Abbas	30	Asossa, December, 2010	He is a grandson of Aśafi Kojälé and the son of Abbas Aśafi. He has quite important oral information on the political situation of the <i>wäräda</i> during the governorship of his grandfather and his father.
23	Ayaléw Yemär	60	Assoa, March, 2011	He had been a peasant group leader in <i>Amba Nine</i> . He has a very good knowledge on the social and environmental consequences of the resettlement schemes in Asossa.
24	Baguja Mahmud	78	Bambäsi, March,2010	He lived in the borderland between Bambäsi and Bëggi for more than 60 years. He has very good information on the political history of the area.
25	Bäšer Säid	40	Asossa	He was student during the Därg

			December, 2010	period in Asossa <i>wäräda</i> . He has important memory on the political propaganda diffused among students in the schools.
26	Bäyänä Akalu	70	Bambäsi, March, 2011	He had been peasant group leader in Bambäsi 47 village and has remarkable information on the increasing expansion of ecological imbalance and public services in the <i>wäräda</i> after the resettlement programme.
27	Bayus Käbbädä	50	Asossa, December,2010	She was one of women peasant resettlers transported to the area in 1978/79. Her knowledge on the shortage of women to cook food in Asaita and the socio-environmental consequences of their arrival in the <i>wäräda</i> is quire important.
28	Däsalän Sisay	40	Asossa, December 2010	He has conducted historical research in the Béla-Şangul region

				in 1995. He gained important historical information particularly on the imperial period. He lived in Asossa since the 1978 resettlement scheme. Therefore, he is remarkable informant on the socio-environmental impacts of the resettlement programme.
29	Fatiha Ahmäd	55	Asossa March, 2011	Her oral information on the origins and interaction of groups among the Bäarta the administrative and socio-cultural history of the region is very important.
30	Faṭo Al-Hassän	68	Khomoša, December 2010	She is the wife of Abbas Ali who was <i>balabat</i> in Khomoša <i>Meketel wäräda</i> . She has participated in traditional gold panning activity during the military period. Therefore, she is very knowledgeable informant on the political and economic history of

				the Bārta people in the <i>wārāda</i> .
31	Gérmay Ćäkolä	65	Asossa, March 2011	His knowledge on the recruitment, transportation and settling of the 1978/79 Asossa re-settlers is quite good.
32	Gétachäw Abatä	55	Asossa, March 2011	He had been a chairperson of <i>Fineêa</i> peasant association during the <i>Därg</i> period. His knowledge on the administrative history of the <i>wārāda</i> during the <i>Därg</i> period is quite good.
33	Hassän Abägaz	65	Bambäsi, March, 2011	He has a very good memory on the forceful resettlement scheme in 1978/79. He was among the recruits who tied up their hands due to their refusal to move to Asossa.
34	Ibrahim Seraji	80	Asossa, December 2010	He was one of the founding members of the <i>Fana</i> anti-military government group and lived for more than 60 years in the

				<i>wäräda</i> . He has good information on the imperial and the <i>Därg</i> period.
35	Ideris Kāmal	78	Bambäsi, March, 2010	He lived in Bambäsi town for more than 60 years. He is a very good oral informant on the history of the Asossa <i>wäräda</i> and Bambäsi <i>meketel wäräda</i> during the imperial and the <i>Därg</i> period.
36	Ismaél Abdārahim	78	Bambäsi, December, 2010	He has very important oral information on the administrative system and way of taxation during the imperial region.
37	Ismaél Yusuf	48	Asossa, December, 2010	He was one of the founding members of the <i>Fana</i> anti-military group. He has important memory on the collapse of the <i>Därg</i> and the conflict among political factions in the Asossa area.
38	Kādeja Musa	60	Kurmük, December 2010	She was active participant in the traditional gold panning activity.

				She also knows the activities of the <i>Fana</i> group in various villages of the <i>wäräda</i> .
39	Kamid Säid	75	Asossa, December 2010	A very knowledge oral historian on the activities of anti- <i>Därg</i> groups and the social developments in the <i>wäräda</i> particularly during the Military regime.
40	Kasaw Biša	60	Bambäsi, March, 2010	He was one of the 1978/79 re-settlers in Asossa. He has a good memory on the gradual distribution of the peasants in to different unites and on the socio-ecological effects of the resettlement programme.
41	Mahmud hassän	75	Asossa, March, 2010	He is the sun of Hassän Aman who was one of the <i>balabats</i> in <i>Bäßer meketel wäräda</i> . His information on the political and social developments of the area is very crucial.

42	Mahmud Hassän	75	Asossa, March, 2011	He has inhabited Bambäsi <i>meketel wäräda</i> since 1940s. He knows well about the administrative and socio-economic history of the <i>wäräda</i> and the <i>meketel wärädas</i> .
43	Mäkätä Däräsä	75	Asossa, March 2011	He had been peasant group leader in <i>Amba</i> two during the Därg period. He is a very good informant on the effect of the resettlement on the indigenous Bärta surrounding Asossa town and on the environmental impacts of the schemes in the <i>wäräda</i> .
44	Mäku Fäyesa	65	Asossa, March 2011	He has lived in the <i>wäräda</i> for more than 40 years serving as government employee. He is a remarkable informant on the infrastructural developments in the <i>wäräda</i> and the problems of the Bärta children to join modern school.

45	Märima Abdu	60	Asossa , March 2011	She has good information on the interest of the people during the second phase of Asossa resettlement scheme. She has a good memory on the 1984 Wällo famine.
46	Mulat Mäkonän	55		A very knowledgeable informant on the impact of the resettlement scheme in Asossa <i>wäräda</i> . He has lived with the peasant settlers in Asossa
47	Nägasi Abära	75	Bambäsi, December, 2011	He lived in Gumba and Bambäsi <i>meketel wärädas</i> since his childhood. His knowledge on the environmental, political and socio-economic history of the <i>wäräda</i> is very important.
48	Näjat Kämäl	60	Kurmuk, March, 2011	She is one of womern Bärta oral historians whose explanation and knowledge on the administrative history of the <i>wäräda</i> during the

				imperial period is important.
49	Ordofa Kämäl	80	Bambäsi, December, 2010	He was one of the nobles in Bambäsi <i>meketel wäräda</i> . He knows about the amount of salary paid for the governors of <i>meketel wärädas</i> during the imperial period.
50	Säid Ahmädo	80	Bambäsi, March, 2010	He has very crucial information on the political and tax collection system of the imperial period in Asossa <i>wäräda</i> .
51	Säid Amanu	78	Asossa March2011	He was one of the 1984 recruits of resettlement from southern Wällo. He has a good memory on the interest of the settlers to transport in to Asossa due to the 1984 famine in Wällo.
52	Sisay Kasäw	45	Asossa, December, 2010	His knowledge on the recruitment, transportation and resettlement processes of the Asossa Schemes is quite good.

53	Taddäsä Ayäle	45	Asossa, March, 2011	He was a student in Asossa town during the military period. He has important memory on the way of expanding socialist ideology among the youngsters in the schools.
54	Taddässä Käbbädä	62	Asossa, December, 2010	He had been unit manager in <i>Amba</i> 16 peasant village. His ability in comparing and contrasting the forest coverage and soil fertility of the <i>wäräda</i> before and after the arrival of the villagers is very important.
55	Tafäsä Fufa	48	Asossa, December 2010	He is a well-informed oral informant on the general history of Asossa. He lived in the region for many years during the <i>Därg</i> period serving as government employee in different <i>meketel wärädas</i> . He mainly is informed on the socio-economic

				developments of the <i>wäräda</i> .
56	Täsäma Ali	70	Asossa, December, 2010	He lived with the Amhara peasant resettlers in Asossa <i>wäräda</i> . He has important information on the post resettlement environmental situation of the Asossa <i>wäräda</i> .
57	Tiruyä Yemär	55	Asossa, March 2011	She came in to Asossa resettlement site in 1979 after her husband was taken by the <i>Därg</i> letting his land, property, and children.
58	Yassin Abdirazaq	90	Khomoša, March, 2011	He has lived in Khomoša and Bäser <i>meketel wärädas</i> for more than 70 years. He is a very good oral informant on the political situations and economic developments of the area during the imperial and the <i>Därg</i> period.
59	Yassin Mahmud	68	Bambäsi, March, 2011	He had been <i>Êeqaşum</i> in Bambäsi <i>meketel wäräda</i> . He has a very good memory on the imperial

				administrative system in the <i>wäräda</i> .
60	Yemär Ahmäd	60	Bambäsi, March, 2010	His knowledge on the willingness of the peasantry to come in to Asossa and the subsequent impacts of the resettlement in Asossa area is quite good.