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**Centralization and Regionalism on Northwestern Ethiopia: 1942 -1974**

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**Abstract**

*Emperor Haile Selassie I introduced the first written constitution in 1931 and brought the autonomous power of hereditary regional lords in Ethiopia to an end. On Northwestern Ethiopia, on Begiemder and Semien province, as instrument of centralization of the regional administration, the emperor appointed governor-generals dominantly from Shewan origin and introduced various socio-economic programs in the post-1941 period. However, the history of centralization and regionalism on Begiemder and Semien province is not properly studied. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to examine how much the imperial government was successful in centralizing the provincial administration and in what way the local people and officials responded to that endeavor on the province from 1942 to 1974. This paper argues that the imperial regime employed various mechanisms to centralize province. However, none of them achieved the intended result; instead they strengthened the regional sentiment of the local people and officials on the province. This paper is reconstructed based on primary and secondary sources. The oral information is collected from informants in the province.*

**Keywords:** *Begiemder, Shewa, Haile Selassie, centralization, regionalism*

**1. Introduction**

Recently, there is improvement in Ethiopian studies by conducting research on the frontier areas showing their overall relations with the central government. In this regard, few historians and social anthropologists are at the front position. The book (1986) edited by Donald Donham and Wendy James<sup>1</sup> is valuable in the analyzing the relations between the central government at Addis Ababa and the peripheries in the course of

modern Ethiopian state formation in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The book contains anthropological and historical essays on the provinces found in the southern Ethiopia. Although the book does not incorporate issues in the Emperor Haile Selassie regime and topics on northern Ethiopia, methodologically it is a useful work for understanding the concept of center and periphery. It also shades light on the importance of local sources to analyze their relations properly. Similarly, John Markakis' book (2011) is importance work that focuses on the process that led to the formation of modern Ethiopian state among the

<sup>1</sup>Donald Donham and Wendy James (ed.), *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia: Essays in History and Social Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp.5-9.

pastoralists who lived in the lowland frontiers like Afar, Somali, Borena, South Omo, Gambela and Beni Shangul Gumuz. Markakis properly indicates the differences between the center and peripheries in the form of imbalanced power distribution, geographical location, economic marginalization, and cultural discriminations. Although Markakish does not touch the northern provinces, his discussion covered a longer period, from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 2000s. In center-periphery relations, the basic feature of the center is domination of power at different levels of the government structure. Whereas the periphery is characterized by either its marginal place in the distribution of government authority in a country or it's barring in the distribution of decision making power. Geographically, the periphery is relatively remote from the center and lacked infrastructural developments.<sup>2</sup>

The center has been the Emperor and his higher officials like the ministers and provincial governors. In terms of province, the multi-ethnic province of Shewa, around the capital (Addis Ababa), was the power house that had about 70% of higher officials in post-1941 imperial regime; the other provinces were peripheral that had very low number of higher officials at varying degree.<sup>3</sup> Recently, some individuals have conducted historical studies on the province of Begiemder and Semien. However, they have predominately focused on the history of districts, towns, resistance movements, social services, and agricultural practices at

varying geographical areas. They do not give attention as a whole to the attempts of the imperial regime to centralize the province and responses of the local people and officials. Therefore, this paper is analyzing the relationships between the imperial government and the local inhabitants and officials on the province of Begiemder and Semien from 1942 to 1974.

## 1.1. Objectives of the Study

### General Objective

The general objective of this paper is to investigate the relationship between the central government and the local administration on Begiemder and Semien province from 1942 to 1974.

### Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this paper are:

- to investigate who were the governor-generals and their administration system
- to examine the main features of centralization and regionalism on the north-western province
- to analyse how the local people and officials reacted towards the centralization strategies of the imperial regime

## 2. Methodology

Since the study is a historical study, it employed historical research methods. The data for this research is gathered from primary and secondary sources. The archival documents and eye witness accounts obtained from informants are the primary sources. The archival documents are collected from the former North Gondar Administrative Zone Record Office

<sup>2</sup> John Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers* (Rochester: James Curry, 2011), p.7-8

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Clapham, "Centralization and Local Response in Southern Ethiopia", *African Affairs*, Vol. 74, No. 294. (1975), pp.72-73

(NGAZRO) (now the Central Gondar Zone) at Gondar city, the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES), Wolde Mesqel Tariku Memorial Archive Center (WMTMAC) at Addis Ababa University, and the National Archives and Library Agency of Ethiopia (NALA). The secondary sources include the unpublished and published resources like articles, books, pamphlets, and magazines. The oral information is gathered from selected people who were active participants in the history of the province as local officials and spectators during imperial regime. The various sources are seriously verified and analyzed in the course of writing this paper.

## 2.1. Historical Background

In modern Ethiopia, the centralized forms of government was initiated following the coronation of Emperor Tewodros II (r.1855-1868) and continued under his successors.<sup>4</sup> However, Gondar lost its political center for Addis Ababa in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Soon after the province of Begiemder and Semien increasingly became marginalized province, both politically and geographically. Politically, the governors on the province were dominantly come from Shewa. Moreover, instead of administering the province as one unit, Emperor Menelik partitioned it into different administrative unites and gave the over lordship to men who had close relation with him. For instance, in 1889, the Emperor appointed *Ras Wolde Selasie* over Semien and other local officials on areas of Begiemder under

the over lordship of *Ras Wole Betul*.<sup>5</sup> Yet, *Ras Wolde Selasie* did not support Menelik's campaign against *Ras Mengesha Yohannes* of Tegre. Soon *Dejazmach Zewdie* defeated *Wolde Selasie* and his son *Negash* in 1890 and the emperor appointed him to govern *Begiemder* and *Semien* with the title of *Ras* under *Ras Wole's* over lordship. However, *Ras Zewdie's* rule was harsh and brought discontent in the province. He also rejected *Wole's* over lordship. As a result, *Zewdie* was removed and imprisoned in *Shewa*. In 1894, *Wole* was appointed over *Begiemder Proper*, the region south of *Reb River*, and *Rasbitwoded Mengesha Atikem* was made governor of *Begiemder* west of *Lake Tana* and north of *Reb*.<sup>6</sup>

In 1901, Emperor *Menelik II* appointed *ras Gugsu Wole*, his son-in-law, over *Begiemder*. However, because of the 1910 palace coup that removed *Empress Taytu*, *Gugsu* and *Gesese* of *Semien* left their positions and imprisoned until the coming to power of *Empress Zewditu* in 1916. Soon *Ras Wolde Giorgis Aboye* from *Shewa* assigned as governor *Begiemder* and *Semien* and he was in position until his death in 1918.<sup>7</sup> Soon *Ras Gugsu* was appointed as governor of *Begiemder*. However, *Gugsu's* second rule that lasted until 1930 was weak because of conflict and power struggle with the regent, *Ras* (later *Negus*) *Teferi*. The regent wanted to centralize the local

<sup>4</sup>Sven Rubenson, *King of Kings Tewodros of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: Oxford University Press, 1966), p.18.

<sup>5</sup>Gebre Selase, *Tarik Zemene ZeDagmawi Menelik Negus Negest Ze-Itयोpeya* (Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing Press, 1959E.C), p.155

<sup>6</sup>Setegn Getaneh, "State and Society on Ethiopia's Northwestern Borderlands: *Chilga Awraja*, 1935 - 1991"(PhD Diss., AAU, 2020), pp.39-43

<sup>7</sup> Bairu Tafla, "Two of the Last Provincial Kings of Ethiopia: *Negus Takla Haymanot* and *Negus Walda Giorgis*," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. XI. No.1 (1973), p.52

administration of the province and the revenue of Metema custom post that was used by Gugsu for years. The power rivalry and conflict ended with the defeat of Gugsu at the battle of Anchim in March 1930.<sup>8</sup>

Immediately after his coronation, Emperor Hayle Selasie I strengthened the centralization of the government by appointing as usual Shewan nobles as provincial governors and by introducing the 1931 written constitution which was designed as a legal document to restrict the power of the regional lords. After Gugsu, *Ras Kasa Haylu* was appointed over Begiemder and Semien and he delegated on the province his son, *Dejazmach Wondwosen*.<sup>9</sup> For various reasons Wondwosen could not establish a stable administration in the province. Realizing the problem, in 1934, the Emperor had a plan to shift *Ras Kasa* from Begiemder to Gojjam and *Ras Emeru Hayle Selasie* from Gojjam to Begemder. The idea was not materialized because *Ras Emeru* wanted to linger on Gojjam for reasons.<sup>10</sup>

The centralization effort of the Emperor was interrupted by the 1936 Italian invasion. Politically, the Italians even used the centralizing effort of the provincial administration and Shewan domination in the province as a device to create disunity among the local people and nobles and thereby to rule easily. They disseminated anti-Shewan propaganda among noblemen of

Begiemder by saying the Shewan officials had been dominant in the provincial administration and they did not give a politico-military title above *dejzmach* to local officials. And the Italians had permitted titles above *dejzmach* to them in the province.<sup>11</sup> This Italian idea had not only some success in gaining collaborators during the early years of the occupation but also had effects on the relations of the central government at Addis Ababa with Begiemder and Semien province after liberation. Thus, this paper tries to examine the post-1941 imperial government efforts to centralize the provincial administration and the regionalism sentiment of the local officials and people expressed in various ways.

### 3. Result and Discussion

#### Centralization Strategies of the Post-1941 Imperial Administration and Local Responses

Despite the existence of armed groups and insecurity at several areas soon after liberation from Italy, the Emperor controlled the throne with little challenges.<sup>12</sup> While Margery Perham argued it was since Emperor Hayle Selasie was came back to Ethiopia after his exile with the help of British resource and army,<sup>13</sup> Harold Marcus Christine Sandford and Christopher Clapham gave much credit to the backing of Ethiopian people and the emperor's quality of taking

<sup>8</sup> Awoke Asmare, "The Career of Ras Gugsu Wale c.1877-1930" (MA Thesis, AAU, 1996), pp.35-39; Asfaw Tessema, "Ye-Ras Gugsu Wole Tarik", IES, Ms.no.998 (1969 E.C), pp.44-47.

<sup>9</sup>Anthony Mockler, *Haile Sellasé's War* (London: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp.11-12

<sup>10</sup>Emeru Hayle Selasse, *Kesemahut Kemastawusew*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Addis Ababa: AAUP, 2002 E.C), pp.253-256

<sup>11</sup> Gerima Tafere, *Gondere Begashaw* (Addis Ababa: Tesfa Gebre Selasie Matemya Bet, 1949 E.C), pp.23-24

<sup>12</sup> Christine Sandford, *Ethiopia Under Haile Sellasie* (London: J.M Dent and Sons Ltd, 1946), p.119.

<sup>13</sup> Margery Perham, *The Government of Ethiopia* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), pp.343-344.

power.<sup>14</sup> The post-1941 Haile Selassie's regime was witnessed with the making of strong state power and resuming to centralize the of the country's administration system. These activities were observed in the organization of the military, financial system and provincial administrations. To this end, the central imperial regime had to effective control of its territorial domain and enforcing laws on it.<sup>15</sup> As a result, Ethiopia's administrative system was rearranged by the 1942 administrative regulation that created twelve *awrajas* (provinces). This regulation gave hegemonic power to the emperor at the center and greatly limited the authority of regional governors; it was the main legal means that Emperor Haile Selassie used to aggrandize his power.<sup>16</sup> One of these provinces created in the country by 1942 regulation was Begiemder and Semien.

In June 1946, the 1942 administrative regulation was amended and *awraja* became governorate-general (*teqelay gezat*).<sup>17</sup> Begiemder and Semien governorate-general was structured into six *awrajas* (sub-provinces) and 27 *woredas* (districts).<sup>18</sup> The province was extended from Tekezie River in the north to Abay and Ayima Rivers in the

south and Beshilo River in the east to Metema in the west. It was one of the 14 provinces in post-1941 imperial Ethiopia and shared boundaries with the Sudan, Eritrea, Tegre, Wollo, and Gojjam in the west, north, northeast, east and south, respectively. The total area of the province was about 74, 250 square kilometers.<sup>19</sup> With the coming of *Derg* its name was changed to Gondar Province in April 1977.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Harold G. Marcus, "Haile Sellassie's Leadership", pp.840-845; Christine Sandford, *The Lion of Judah Hath Prevailed* (London: J.M Dent and Sons Ltd, 1955),p.112; Clapham, *Haile--Selassie's...*, p.19

<sup>15</sup> Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991*. 2<sup>nd</sup> eds. (Addis Ababa: AAUP, 2002), p.201

<sup>16</sup>Negarit Gazeta, Decree No.1of 1942,"Administrative Regulations"; John M. Cohen and Peter H. Koehn, *Ethiopian Provincial and Municipal Government* (Michigan: Michigan State University, 1980), p.19

<sup>17</sup> Negarit Gazeta, Decree 6 of 1946, "Administrative Regulations Amendment".

<sup>18</sup>NALA code 17.1.13.24.05, a letter from Andargchew Mesay to the Minister of Interior, 21Tahsas 1939 E.C

<sup>19</sup>,"Ke-Begemder ena Semén Gar Metewaweqiya" IES Ms. no 1264,p.1

<sup>20</sup> NALA code 17.1.13.01.01, a letter from Melaku Tefera to Gondar Province, 26 Megabit 1969 E.C



Figure 1. The location of Begiemder and Semien province in relation to Gojjam, Eritrea, Tegre, Wollo, and the Sudan

Source: Taken from “YeBegiender ena Semien Teqelay Gezat Huletegnaw Ye-edeget Ena Lemat Seminar” (Gondar, 1963 E.C)

In 1942, as part of his centralization of the imperial government, the Emperor placed the administration of Begiemder and Semien province together with the administration of Wollo under his son, Crown prince Asfawosen. The Emperor informed to his son that the arrangement was intended to give the crown prince a better administrative knowledge skill by administering those two larger regions together.<sup>21</sup> However, in reality the emperor did not get a faithful native governor-general who could implement the centralized administrative system on the province. The crown prince did not directly govern Begiemder and Semien province rather he initially entrusted *Dejazmach* Mesfin Gemech (who was Italian collaborator during the occupation) over the province until October 1942 and then

<sup>21</sup>“Be-Wollo ena BeBegiender Teqelay Gezatoch Endihum BeDebre Sina Akababi Yenebere Astedader”, IES Ms no. 3532

*Dejazmach* Asrate Kasa until May 1944.<sup>22</sup>

The delegation of power to these men bought dissatisfaction and regionalism among local officials of the province and it was expressed in various forms as ignoring the orders of governor-generals, refusing to pay tax, and sometimes local uprisings. Officials in the province were appointed with no difference among patriots, collaborators of the Italian rule, and the exiled men during the resistance war.<sup>23</sup> Former Italian collaborators were staffed at various levels of the provincial administration. At the top, *Dejazmach* Mesfin and *Dejazmach* Asrate’s cases are mentioned as an example. The other top positions were the provincial advisory committee established at Gondar in 1942 to

<sup>22</sup>Addis Zemen, “Ye-Afenegus Mesfin Gemech Ereft”, 12 Nehase 1954 E.C.

<sup>23</sup> NALA code 17.1.13.24.07, YeGondar Awraja Yeheg Memeriya Meker Bet Amakariwäch, “YeBegiender ena Semén Gezat Yager Akuahuan”, Addis Ababa, 13 Nehase 1935 E.C

give recommendation on administration system to the governor, and President of the Higher Court. The president the Higher Court in 1945 was an Italian collaborator and Shewan origin, *Afenegus Atenafe Seged*.<sup>24</sup> Their positions at district and sub-provincial levels were too many to mention them here. In the early 1940s, among the appointed officials on eight *meselene* territories from Metema to Reb River, seven of them had been collaborators of Italians during the military rule.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, the emperor uprooted intentionally the well-known resistance leaders of the province for positions in other areas as *Dejazmach* Wubneh Tesema and *Dejazmach* Dagnew Tesema's cases show. While the former was assigned as senate member from 1942 to 1944, the latter was appointed to govern Ambasel district in Wollo. Wubneh returned to Gondar in 1944 by taking the director position of the province. For a short time, Dagnew returned to his native province to govern Reb River to Metema district with the death of its governor, *Dejazmach* Ambachew Gesese at the end of 1943. However, Dagnew soon left his position for Addis Ababa as a senate member in 1945.<sup>26</sup> Thus, soon after liberation, the resistance leaders on Begiemder and Semien received lower administrative positions than the former Italian collaborators. Of course, Emperor Hayle Selasie clearly notified in 1941 when

he came back to Ethiopia that after liberation of the country he would not retaliate Ethiopians who supported the Italians during the occupation.<sup>27</sup> The cover pseudo reason of appointing former Italian collaborators on higher and better positions was believed that they obtained administrative skills and knowledge from the Fascists. However, the Italians did not give higher positions to them. Hence, the main motive of the Emperor was to consolidate his power and control the activity of the "patriots". To this end, he incorporated patriots, exiled men and collaborators in the administrative machinery and thereby to create rival groups against each other.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> NALA code 17.1.13.24.07, YeGondar awraja Yeheg...

<sup>25</sup> Setegn, pp.110-112

<sup>26</sup> NALA Code 17.1.13.24.05, a letter from Andargachew Mesay to Dagnew Tesema, 26 Nehase 1941 E.C; Addis Zemen, "Yekebur Dejach Dagnew Tesema Zena Ereft", 24 Yekatit 1952 E.C

<sup>27</sup> Hayle Selase, *Heywotie...*, vol.II, p.228.

<sup>28</sup> Clapham, pp.20, 73; Charles McClellan, "Observations on the Ethiopian Nation, Its Nationalism, and the Italo-Ethiopian War", *Northeast African Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1996), p.63

**Table1.** Governor-Generals and *Enderasie* of Begiemder and Semien Province, 1942 - 1974

No.	Name of the person	Entitled Position	Reining Period in G.C
1	Crown prince Asfawosen Hayle Selasie	Governor- General	January 1942 - April 1944
2	<i>Ras</i> Emeru Hayle Selasie	Governor- General	May 1944 - December 1945
3	<i>Rasbitwada</i> Andargachew Mesay	Governor- General	January 1945 – August 1952
4	<i>Dejazmach</i> Asrate Kasa	Governor- General	September 1952 - December 1955
5	Major General Mered Mengesha	<i>Enderasie</i>	January 1956 -November 1957
6	<i>Dejazmach</i> Keflie Dadi	<i>Enderasie</i>	December 1957 - January 1960
7	<i>Dejazmach</i> Ameha Abera	Governor- General	February 1960 - April 1962
8	Lit. General Nega Hayle Selasie	Governor- General	May 1962 - February 1965
9	Lit. Colonel Tamrat Yigezu	<i>Enderasie</i>	March 1965- April 1974

Source: developed from different Decrees of Negarit Gazeta, from 1942 to 1974

From the above table, it is clear that all of the nine governor-generals of Begiemder and Semien from 1942 to the 1974 Revolution had come from Shewa and they were connected with the emperor in blood or marriage. Even parts of them were military men. Although their differences were blurred, parts of them were appointed as governor-generals and others as *enderasie*. In the post-liberation imperial government, the numbers of senior officials at Addis Ababa recruited from Begiemder and Semien were also very few. Although Christopher Clapham states that albescence of men trained in modern education in the province as one possible rationale,<sup>29</sup> the main grounds was emperor Hayle Selasie wanted to centralize the administrative system under the Shewan supremacy.

Not only governor-generals but also directors of the provincial administration whose position was below the governor-general, as an assistant administrator, were largely dominated by Shewan origin nobles

until 1966 when the directorship position in the provinces was officially cancelled and replaced by vice-governor-generals or vice-*enderasie* position.

Parts of the patriots regarded those Ethiopians who were outside during the resistance movement as traitors. Thus, patriots argued no need of giving administrative positions to such individuals after the end of the Italian rule. Hence they opposed the emperor and his act of appointing them in his regime.<sup>30</sup> For instance, *Dejazmach* Asrate and *Dejazmach* Ambachew were not born and grew up in the province of Begiemder and Semien. Asrate was in abroad and Ambachew was detained by the Italians during the brief period of occupation.<sup>31</sup> Thus, former patriots of Begiemder and Semien did not welcome these men as delegated officials of the crown prince on the province and sometimes they fomented rebellions in various localities.

<sup>29</sup> Clapham, *Hayle - Sellassie's ...*, p.76.

<sup>30</sup> McClellan, p.64

<sup>31</sup> Addis Zemen, "SeleKebur Dejach Ambachew Gesese Mote", 6 Tahsas 1936 E.C.



**Table 2.** Directors of Begiemder and Semien Province , 1944 - 1966

No	Name of the person	Tenure
1	<i>Dejazmach</i> Wubneh Tesema	December 1944- April 1949
2	<i>Qegnazmach</i> Asfaw Abeje	March 1949- July 1951
3	Colonel Tamrat Zegeye	August 1951- March 1956
4	<i>Dejazmach</i> Gessese Reta	February 1956- March 1957
5	<i>Dejazmach</i> Tefera Mesfin	April 1957- September 1958
6	<i>Fitawrari</i> Wolde Semaet Tesema	October 1958- June 1959
7	<i>Qegnazmach</i> Bekele Zelelew	June 1959- March 1966

Source: Ministry of Interior, *Yager Gizat Metsehet*, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, No. 4, (1957 E.C)

Since they were dissatisfied with the imperial regime, local officials of the province at times embezzled the collected tax from the people for their personal purposes. They were not cooperative to the office of provincial treasury to collect tax appropriately from the peasants and there were tax arrears.<sup>32</sup> In the early 1940s, the refuse of paying tax were followed by sporadic peasant rebellion led by local officials in the province as the cases of peasants of Janora, Janifenqera, Fogera, Kemkem, Qaroda, Gayint and Meqetawa showed.<sup>33</sup> *Dejazmach* Asrate could not govern the province properly and mostly he was absent physically from Gondar for various reasons. Because of the difficulty of governing the province, in February 1944, a delegated official of the province, *Afenegus Aṭenafie Seged*, requested the Ministry of Interior to appoint a popular and respected governor-general to install peace on the province. To this end, *Ras Emeru Hayle Selasie* was appointed as governor-general in

May 1944.<sup>34</sup> Although he was from Shewa, the news of Emeru's appointment relatively reduced the resentment of local officials who were said to have happy since they knew his progressive administration while he was in Gojjam in the early 1930s. Initially, local officials showed initiation in their works. Nevertheless, Emeru did not travel to Gondar and start his work for seven months and this disappointed the local officials and people since they were governed by a care taker official.<sup>35</sup> *Ras Emeru* tried to restore peace by suppressing unlawful activities on the province. However, he was physically at Gondar for only ten months until January 1946, when *Bitwoded Andargachew Mesay*, the son-in-law of the emperor, replaced him as governor-general of Begiemder and Semien province.<sup>36</sup>

In October 1946, Emperor Hayle Selasie, who was known in visiting the provinces,

<sup>32</sup> NALA code 17.1.13.23.07, a letter from Tsehay Desta to the Ministry of Finance, 2 Nehase 1936 E.C

<sup>33</sup> NALA code 17.1.13.24.07, a letter from Begiemder and Semien to the Ministry of Interior, 9 Ṭeqemet 1938 E.C

<sup>34</sup> NALA code 17.1.13.24.05, a letter from Atenafe Seged (the advisor of the governorate office) to the Ministry of Interior, 12 Ṭeqemet 1937 E.C

<sup>35</sup> NALA code 17.1.13.24.05, a letter from Atenafe Seged to the Ministry of Interior, 12 Ṭeqemet 1937 E.C.

<sup>36</sup> Dagnew Wolde Selasie, *Wuṭa Wuräd Yebezabet Hiywot* (Addis Ababa, 1987 E.C), p.19.

together with his higher officials visited Begiemder and Semien and did various activities such as gave *nishan*, medals, and titles to resistance fighters<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the Emperor issued a decree that removed  $\frac{1}{4}$  *asrat* of 1946, *melemel* (a tribute paid in goat and sheep), free education and financial assistance to families who lost parents in the war of liberation against Italy. The Emperor also gave official pardon to outlaws for various reasons to make reconciliation with the people.<sup>38</sup> With these deeds, for sometime the emperor seems decreased the discontent of the people in Begiemder and Semien on his administration suzerainty.

However, a year after the emperor's visit, a discontent against the imperial regime was resumed in the province because the administration of the area south of Ayima (Dinder) River was transferred to Gojjam. Before and after 1941, localities such as Guba, Abromola, Kerkaho, Al Menki and Aba Mendi were governed under Quara district and they paid tax in gold and other tributes to Begiemder officials.<sup>39</sup> In 1948, the Ministry of Interior detached these localities from Begiemder and added to Metekel *awraja* in the Gojjam province.<sup>40</sup> Various people in Begiemder challenged the action of the imperial regime and repeatedly petitioned to the various government offices claiming the area south of Ayima had been their rest land founded by their ancestors in the reign

of King Seyfe Ared (r.1344-1371).<sup>41</sup> The local people and officials blamed Emperor Hayle Selasie and *Rasbitwoded* Andargachew Mesay (the governor-general) for the dispossession of the land. Andargachew did his best endeavor to put the area under the administration of Begiemder, but he was not successful and did not satisfy the discontent of the local people.

As a result, the local officials and people developed regional feeling against the central government and refused to cooperate with governor-generals. After the end of Andargachew's rule in 1952 to 1965, Emperor Hayle Selasie changed repeatedly the general-governors of Begiemder and Semien. They were successively *Dejazmach* Asrate Kasa (for the second time), General Mered Mengesha, *Dejazmach* Keflie Dadi, *Dejazmach* Ameha Abera, and General Nega Hayle Selasie.<sup>42</sup> These five governor-generals were appointed in twelve years and this implies governor-generals faced difficulties in governing the province due to regional sentiment of the local people and officials of the province. Governor-generals stayed on their positions relatively for short period confined mostly in their office and left the province with little understanding of the local administration, people and officials. This condition was properly observed by the well known sociologist Donald Levine in the late 1950s when he was at Gondar for research. He says:

In accord with Haile Selassie's program of centralization, the

<sup>37</sup> Addis Zemen, "Ye-Gondaren Ketema Megobegnet", 25 Meskerem 1939 E.C and 2 and 9 Teqemet 1939 E.C

<sup>38</sup> Mereseazen, *Geremawi...*, pp.99-100

<sup>39</sup> NGAZRO, a letter from Hagos Tesema (governor of Quara) to Begiemder and Semien governor, 10 Ter 1937 E.C

<sup>40</sup> NGAZRO, a letter from the Ministry of Interior to Andargachew Mesay, 11 Hedar 1941 E.C

<sup>41</sup> NGAZRO, a petition of Begiemder *Ballabats* to Andargachew Mesay, 18 Tahsas 1941 E.C.

<sup>42</sup> Negarit Gazeta, General notice No.154 of 1952, no. 218 of 1956, no.234 of 1957, no.286 of 1961, no.305 of 1962.

chief provincial administrators in Gondar are not local men. This has created a subtle problem for the national government. [...] As a result, Shoans in high offices at Gondar have found themselves boycotted by the natives. Their wishes have frequently been ignored by local subordinates or the local populace. They have not been invited to take in the social life of the Gondares. All this has made the lots of Shoan emissaries in Gondar frustrating and lonely.<sup>43</sup>

Due to the domination of Shewan officials, some local officials in the province remembered about the Italians had told them during their occupation about Shewan domination. The discontent of local officials was originated from absence of a faithful native governor-general to the province to the Emperor. The following poem aptly expressed the regional sentiment of the local people and officials:

የበጌምድር ላሞች ቁመታቸው ትልልቅ  
 ጸጉራቸው የነጣ፡  
 ዐይነ-ናስ አላቸው ለመካከላቸው ኮርማ  
 የሚያሳጣ፡

ሁልጊዜ ይግዛቸው ከሸቀ እየመጣ፡፡<sup>44</sup>

The cows of Begiemder are long and white  
 hair

There is evil eye among them that make  
 them bull less

Always governed them coming from Shewa

Since the people and officials of the province ignored the governor-generals, they did not govern the province properly. The various

<sup>43</sup> Donald Levine, *Wax & Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1965), p. 47

<sup>44</sup> Informants: Alemneh and Sisay

laws introduced by the imperial government had very little effect on the province, banditry and insecurity remained a deep-rooted problem especially along the border with the Sudan.<sup>45</sup> For instance, although the imperial regime repealed all traditional types of services and tributes given to local officials in kinds and the peasants were necessary to pay tax to the government offices,<sup>46</sup> they had continued to pay in the province. The feudal classes refused to end the customary forms of tributes paid to local officials since they manipulated the feelings of the peasant in the struggle against the central government.<sup>47</sup> As a result, local officials created challenges on the effort of the imperial regime in centralizing the fiscal and administrative system on Begiemder and Semien province.

Meanwhile, the emperor for the third time visited of the province in May 1959 and gave medals, *nesan*, titles and incentives to former resistance fighters, and heard administrative grievances. The emperor ordered the cancellation of the arrears of tax and *asrat* from 1947 to 1957.<sup>48</sup> As a result, the emperor attempted to reduce the dissatisfaction and the regional sentiment of the people.

The centralization attempts of the government in the 1960s and early 1970s brought the regional sentiment of the local people on one side and on the other side opposition against the imperial regime. The

<sup>45</sup> Informants: Hayle, Sisay, and Alemneh

<sup>46</sup> Negarit Gazeta, "Land Tax Proclamation", Proclamation No. 70/1944

<sup>47</sup> Setegn, pp.40-150

<sup>48</sup> Mastaweqiya Minister (Ministry of Pen), *YeAbay Wuha Lemat Mejemeriya Meseret* (Addis Ababa: Neged Printing Press, 1951 E.C), p.133

introduction of cash crop agriculture on the lowlands along the Sudanese border was one integrating mechanism of the imperial regime. In the 1960s, the imperial government allocated farmlands to Ethiopian and foreigners who wanted to spend in agricultural sector for economic purpose and to protect Ethiopia's national interest on the frontiers.<sup>49</sup> However, local people in the province challenged the government's action believing that the lowlands were their *rist* land (a land use right by birth) where their forefathers died while fighting against the Mahdists and the Italians. The peasants also claimed that they had been used the land for hunting games and grazing their cattle for years by paying tax for the government and various forms of tribute to the local officials.<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile, believing that the land that Ethiopian farmers cultivated belonged to the Sudan, the Sudanese force evicted Ethiopian farmers and destroyed their farmlands and imputes. As a result, the commercial farmers opposed the imperial government in the forms of petitions and demonstrations for not giving security to them.<sup>51</sup> These created regional sentiment among the local officials and people and opposition against the central government.

Settlement patterns from less productive and drought affected areas to the lowlands of Metema was the other effort of the imperial regime's integration means. In the early 1960s, the government settled Muslims from

Wore Himenu (in Wollo) and Gayint on Metema and Mahbere Selasie. However, the local people and officials at the centre like *Dejazmach* Wubneh Tesema (a Senate member), Senshaw Bitew (a Chamber of Deputies member) opposed the government and did not welcome Muslim settlers. They applied petitions to different government offices demanding the expulsion of Muslim settlers from the area because the land had been their *rist* lands and their forefathers had died there while combating the Egyptians, Mahdists and the Fascist Italians to keep the sovereignty of Ethiopia. They expressed similar reason to their opposition against commercial farmers.<sup>52</sup> Thus, this settlement program created unintended regional sentiment among the local officials and people in the province and opposition against the central government.

Boundary negotiation with the Sudan since 1965 also contributed a lot for the development of regionalism against the imperial government in the province. Farmers and local officials in the province and at the center criticized the imperial regime for starting boundary discussion with the Sudan. In 1967, unidentified member of the Chamber of Deputies representing Begiemder and Semien applied a petition to the House by stating the feeling of the local people. Among others, emanated from his regional sentiment, a person stated that Shewan officials dominated the imperial regime and the Shewan never fought against the Mahdists in the late 1880s while the

<sup>49</sup>Alemayehu Erkihun, "Borderland, Frontier, and the Boundary Issues Between Ethiopia and the Sudan, 1898-1991: From the River Sätit in the North to the Abbay (Blue Nile) River in the South" (PhD Thesis, Bahir Dar University, 2020), p.121

<sup>50</sup> Setegn, p.187; Imperial Ethiopian Government Ministry of Land Reform and Administration, p.18

<sup>51</sup> Setegn, pp.200-205

<sup>52</sup>WMTMAC, Folder name በጌግድር, a petition from Senshaw Bitew to the Ministry of Interior, 14 Yekatit 1956 E.C; a petition from Wubneh Tesema to the Ministry of Interior, 12 Genbot 1955 E.C.

people of Begiemder, Gojjam and Wollo sacrificed their lives and paid costs.<sup>53</sup>

Meanwhile, the appointment of Lt. Col. Tamrat Yigezu as *enderasie* of Begiemder and Semien in March 1965 was the imperial government’s last centralizing effort on the province by tackling regionalism that was manifested in many ways. Especially banditry and insecurity was a deep-rooted problem in the province because of lack of proper administration. This problem was clearly stated by Col.Tamrat in his first meeting with the seven *awraja* governors of the province narrates:

አዲስ አበባ ሆኖ እንደሰማሁት የዚህ አገር ጸጥታ መጓደል ህዝቡን እክፍተኛ በደል ላይ እንደጣለው ተረድቻለሁ። [...] ድረጊቱም እንደሚያሰረዳው ወንጀል ሰሪዎቹ ተቆጣጣሪ የለንም በማለት እንደተዘናኑ የሚያሰቁጥር ከመሆኑም በላይ የበደሉ አፈጻጸም የአመልካቹ ብቻ ሳይሆን የየክፍሉን አስተዳዳሪዎች የጸጥታውን መጓደል ተቆጣጥረው አገሩን ሰላም ለማድረግ የሚያስችሉት ሁኖ ይታያል።<sup>54</sup>

When I was in Addis Ababa, I had heard how the absence of security in this province has been a source of suffering to the local people.... The events indicate that not only do criminals believe that there are no officials who could control them, but also the ill-treatments and petitions undermine the efforts of every governor to establish peace in their territory.

To tackle the administrative problem of the province Tamrat obtained *Fitawrari* Bekele

Zezelew who was from Shewa and served as director of the province as vice-*enderasie*. Lit Col.Tamrat did various actions to bring stability in the province.<sup>55</sup> However, he was not successful because his nine years governorship of the province concurrent with events that ignited regional sentiment on the province: the introduction of commercial agriculture and the boundary negotiation with the Sudan. Meanwhile the February 1974 Revolution broke out. Following the 1974 Revolution, the administration of Begiemder and Semien went to bad conditions and the government aimed at improving it by appointing a native governor-general, Major General Nega Tegegn, as *enderasie* of the province in May 1974.<sup>56</sup> His appointment, however, was too late to solve the various problems of the province and bring stability.

4. Conclusion

After its restoration in 1941, the imperial regime resumed the effort of centralizing the provincial administrations in various ways. Although the imperial regime tried to centralize the administration of the province by different strategies, Begiemder and Semien province remained a peripheral area from 1942 to 1974. The appointment of governor-generals only from Shewan nobles was the basic cause of regionalism that was manifested in different forms. The geographical location of the province far from Addis Ababa was also one of the factors for the development of regionalism. The province lacked proper road networks until the early 1960s. The laws and orders of the imperial regime were largely ineffective

<sup>53</sup> “Be1959 E.C Yaltawoqe YeParilama Abal Sele Sudan ena Iteyopeya YeWosen Akelalel Guday Betemelekete Yetsafew.”IES. Ms.no.1120.

<sup>54</sup> NGAZRO, a minute of Begiemder and Semien provincial officials, 16 Genbot 1957 E.C

<sup>55</sup> Ibid  
<sup>56</sup>Negarit Gezeta, General Notice no. 458 of 1974.

among the people in the province. The local officials and people were not cooperative to the governor-generals of the Shewan origin. The regional sentiment of the people and local officials in province was however not developed into an organised and a full-fledged form of armed resistance of a political party until 1974. With the coming to power of Derg the province became home to the anti-Derg organizations like the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU) and the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Party (EPRP). This was because it was strategically situated sharing boundaries with the Sudan.

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