
Pioneers of the Ethiopian Resistance against Fascist Italian Occupation: 1936 - 1937

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Abstract

In the epoch of African resistance and challenge against European colonialism, the Ethiopian case occupies a unique position. Italy and Ethiopia entered into bitter periods of hostility twice, one in 1895-96 and the other in 1935-41. In both periods Italy attempted to colonize Ethiopia, and the latter strove to protect and respect its sovereignty. In the 1st epoch Ethiopians scored a decisive military victory at the Battle of Adwa over Italy in 1896 and, thus, assured Ethiopian independence, whereas in the 2nd Italy conquered Ethiopia and declared it its colony. But Italy's declarations to the external world of their victory over Ethiopia were more political than a true account of the real situation in the country. The Ethiopians soon resorted to resistance which they conducted in two phases: the transitional phase (1936-37) and the popular phase (1937-41). Both phases were characterized by an unbroken spirit of resistance. However, scholars have paid not only less attention to the Ethiopian resistance in general and the transitional phase in particular but their studies are, in the main, skewed more to Europe than to Ethiopia. At the national level published works offer a chapter or so or at the most biographical works or a case study of some aspects of the resistance. In this respect, there is no specific study on the transitional phase. So, this formative period of the Ethiopian anti-Fascist Italian opposition deserves more attention by scholars. This study, therefore, aims to bring some aspects of the transitional phase more to the open by focusing on certain issues such as formation, leadership and attempts and challenges at coordinating the struggle. The study is chiefly based on the historical analysis and interpretation of published and unpublished sources as well as oral information. Some of the findings include lack of modern arms and logistics of warfare on the part of the Ethiopians, inability to transform the opposition in terms of

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techniques of warfare from conventional to guerrilla war tactics and, again, inability to win and ally some disaffected people towards the Ethiopian case. It is hoped that this study would fill in some of the gaps in the Ethiopian resistance.

Introduction

In the history of African resistance and challenge against European colonialism, the Ethiopian case occupies a rather unique position. Following the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, European countries mainly Britain and France set out to partition most parts of the continent of Africa. Thus, in 1885 – 1900 the rest of Africa was partitioned among European powers whereas Ethiopia remained independent because it scored a decisive military victory against Italy at the Battle of Adwa in 1896. Again, in 1941 Ethiopia became the first African country to regain its independence only after five years of foreign occupation (1936-41). The reason for this had to be sought in the fighting tradition of the Ethiopian people. This study is a discussion of some aspects of that tradition.

Italy was perhaps the most anxious colonial power that developed strong interest in Ethiopia. Thus, Ethiopia and Italy experienced two major periods of bitter hostility, one in 1895 – 1896 and the other in 1935 – 1941. In both occasions, the problem emanated from Italy's long – standing ambition to have Ethiopia as a protectorate or as a colony.¹ In both periods, initially Italy tried to have a possession of

¹Soon after signing the Treaty of Wechale (2 May 1889) with Ethiopia, Italy concluded with Britain two boundary agreements regarding their spheres of influence in East Africa in general and Ethiopia in particular. In the 1st treaty (24 March 1891) they agreed on a boundary line stretching from *Rās Kāsār* on the Red Sea coast to the Blue Nile in the west, and in the 2nd treaty (5 May 1894) they drew a line from Juba to the Blue Nile. Italy also succeeded in reaffirming the terms of the two treaties in the Tripartite Treaty (13 December 1906). Similarly, In the Anglo-Italian treaty of 1925, Italy claimed to have gained more economic and other influencing rights in Ethiopia against which the latter protested to the League of Nations as a violation of its sovereignty. Again, in the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance it signed with Ethiopia (2 August 1928), Italy hoped the treaty would serve her as a charter for economic and cultural penetration of Ethiopia. Moreover, Italy's endeavors of legitimizing its interests in Ethiopia were backed by the pro-Italy stand of Britain which states, "From the Treaty of Ucciali onwards a right of colonial priority in Abyssinia was always recognized to Italy."

Ethiopia peacefully by signing agreements such as the Treaty of Wechālé (1889) and the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance (1928). In the first treaty, Italy declared that it had established a protectorate over Ethiopia, whereas, in the second one it hoped to have the leading economic and advisory position in Ethiopia. On the part of Italy failure to meet this or that demand was tantamount to first frustration and then war. This was exactly what Italy tried to do in both epochs.

On the other hand, despite Italy's expectations, in both occasions Ethiopia became stubborn in respecting Italy's sovereignty or quest for land and resources. Instead, Ethiopia demanded that Italy should correct Article XVII of the Wechālé Treaty which signifies the idea of protectorate according to the Italian version.² But Italy found it embarrassing to forfeit the idea that Ethiopia had not become its protectorate. Similarly, in the second period of hostility, despite its expectations, Italy found herself not the most but the least favored European nation in Ethiopia.³ Thus, an irreconcilable situation was created. Therefore, Italy resorted to military means to realize its colonial ambition in Ethiopia. In the first instance, the Ethiopian military action was so decisive that Italy's colonial aspirations over Ethiopia were dashed at the Battle of Adwā in 1896; whereas in 1935-1936, Fascist Italian forces scored victory over Ethiopian forces and Italy occupied the Ethiopian Empire until 1941.

For more information, see FO 371/20191, Sir E, Drummond, Rome, N. 426/166/99/86/5, April 1936.

² For the contents of the Treaty of Wechālé, see Hertzlet, *The Map of Africa by Treaty*, V. II. London: Frank Cass, 1967, pp, 456-57. For further analysis, see Sven Rubenson, *Wichālé XVII. The Attempt to Establish a Protectorate over Ethiopia*. Addis Abeba, 1964, pp.64-74; *idem*, "The Protectorate Paragraph of the Wichālé Treaty", *JAH*, V.2, 1964; *idem*, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence*, Addis Ababa, Kurāz Publishing Agency, 1991, pp.384-98.

³ In addition to the various treaties it had already signed with Britain and France, Italy expected the Treaty of Friendship of 1928, would give her special position in Ethiopia. It made these and other efforts clearer in the document it submitted to the League of Nations at Geneva in 1935, the central point of which, Italy believed, Ethiopia should have given preferential treatment to Italians in commerce and manufactures. For more elaboration, see CAB 44/81, *Italian Policy of Collaboration*. Part I.

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On 5 May 1936, Italian forces captured the imperial capital, Addis Ababa and subsequently, Italy established Africa Orientale Italiana (AOI) or Italian East Africa (IEA) comprising Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia under a new administration called *Governo Generale dell’Africa*, headed by an official entitled *vice – re* or viceroy. Four days later, the head of the Italian government, Benito Mussolini declared to the world that the war in Ethiopia was over and Ethiopia had become Italian.⁴ Mussolini added that “the chiefs and *rāses*, defeated fugitives, no longer count and no power on earth can make them count...”⁵ Mussolini and other Italian generals such as the commander in – chief of the Italian army in the northern war front, Pietro Badoglio, thought that this was the end of Italy’s military mission in Ethiopia.

But Italian authoritative declarations were more political than a true account of the real political situation in Ethiopia. Evidence shows that at this time about two thirds of the country was still in Ethiopian hands.⁶ Moreover, many Ethiopians were armed because they had returned from the war front without surrendering their weapons. Furthermore, many Ethiopians did not fall into despair after their defeat at the war front but retained a strong spirit of resistance towards enemy rule. Moreover, in much of the unconquered areas and even in the regions occupied but not fully controlled, the “defeated fugitives” led the first phase of the resistance (May 1936 - February 1937). In fact, they led organized resistance soon after the rainy season had begun.

In short, unlike what Italian officials declared, the war did not stop, precisely because Ethiopian resistance continued. The resistance can be conveniently divided into the transitional phase (1936 - 1937) and the popular phase (1937 – 1941). In both phases there was an unbroken spirit of resistance against Fascist Italian occupation.

⁴Pietro Badoglio, *The War in Abyssinia*. London: Methuen Publishers, 1937, p.169; Eric Rosenthal, *The Fall of Italian East Africa*. London: National Book Association, 1949, p. 9.

⁵Badoglio, p. 169.

⁶Seltene Seyoum, “A History of Resistance in Gojjām (Ethiopia): 1936 – 1941.” PhD Thesis. History Department, Addis Ababa University, 1999, p. 47.

This study assesses the transitional phase of the struggle. This was an important period of fighting against Fascist Italy after the latter's declaration of occupation of the Ethiopian Empire. There is plenty of literature on the war of 1935 -1941, though skewed more towards Europe than to Ethiopia. In addition, most scholars have given less attention to the Ethiopian resistance in general, and the transitional phase in particular. From the well – known writers of the Italo – Ethiopian war, Angelo del Boca was the one who assessed the period of transition in a fair and more balanced way.⁷ However, his assessment is not only brief but also depended almost entirely on European sources.

From the Ethiopian side, there are a considerable number of works that narrate the resistance at general and specific level.⁸ Many of the

⁷Angelo Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale, la Caduta dell'Impero*. Roma: Arnold Mondadori Editore, 1982, pp. 10 – 26. See also Anthony Mockler, *Haile Selssie's War*. Oxford: Signal Books, 1984, p.175; Alberto Sbacchi, *The Legacy of Bitterness: Ethiopia and Italy, 1935 -1941*. Lawrenceville and Asmara: Red Sea Press, 1997.

⁸For a deeper comprehension of the issue three major types of works, which expound our knowledge of the period, can be discerned: the 1st written by contemporaries or participants of the struggle, the 2nd scholarly accounts at BA or PhD level and the 3rd scholarly articles or chapters by researchers. Major works on the 1st category include: Tāddāsā Méchā, *Tequr AnbässāBāMerāb Ethiopia* (1943 EC); Gārimā Tāfārā, *Gondāré Bāgāshāw* (1949 EC); Säifu Abāwālo, *Yatarik Qers*(1953 EC); Tāddāsā Zāwāldé, *Qārin Gārāmāw: YāArbännoch Tārik*(1960 EC), Haddis Alāmāyāhu, *Tezetā* (1985 EC), and Lesānu Habtāwāld, “Selā'Yāmāizānāgāw Welātā: Yā'Shāwā Arbännochēnā Yā'Tentāwit Etiopia Jāgenoch Māhebar Tārik. Ed. Māsēfen Lesānu. 1st Ed., 2008 EC.). Sample works on the 2nd type – produced by undergraduate and postgraduate students – include: Yohannes Berhanu, “The Patriots of Gojjām; a History of Resistance” (BA 1972), Abābāch Afāwārq, “A Biography of Abārā Kāssā” (BA 1973); Abābā Kiflāyāsus, “The Career of *Liul Rās* Imru” (BA 1973); Teshome Agiro, “*Rās Abbābā Arāgāy* (1904 -1960)”(BA 1976); Dāgnenāt Lāke, “*Bitwādād Māngāshā Jāmbāré*” (BA 1988) and Seltene Seyoum, “A History of Resistance in Gojjām (Ethiopia)” (PhD 1999). The 3rd type include: R. Pankhurst, “Italy and Ethiopia: The First Four Years of the Resistance Movement”, *Africa Quarterly*, 9, (1970); Sālomé G/Egziabhér, “The Ethiopian Patriots, 1936 – 1941”, *Ethiopia Observer*, 13,2 (1970); Haile Selassie (*Qādāmāwi*), *Heywātenā YāEthiopia Ermeja*, Vol.II (1966 EC); Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia* (1991), Tāsāma Tā'a, “The Bonnāyā Incident and the Italian Occupation of Nāqāmté (1936- 1941)”, (*ICES*, Kyoto (1997), and Wudu Tāfātā,

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general works are written by participants or contemporaries of the patriotic struggle. However, though much of it is still at a biographical level, there is no parallel to the amount of scholarly works produced by undergraduate students of the History Department of Addis Ababa University. Similarly, Seltene's PhD thesis (1999), which treats the Ethiopian resistance in general and that of Gojjām in particular, is the same department's contribution on a much wider scale of the patriotic struggle against Fascist Italian occupation. These scholarly works at BA and PhD level have tried to see the issue not only from the Ethiopian perspective but they also made much use of oral information which the researchers elicited from elders at the grassroots level. This effort must have given us great opportunity to look into the Ethiopian resistance from a wider perspective. In addition, Seltene's work has made extensive use of new materials particularly from British and Italian archival centers and libraries abroad. It is, thus, a valuable addition to the literature on the Ethiopian resistance. There are also published works on Ethiopian history that offer a chapter or so on the Ethiopian patriotic resistance in general but much less on the transition period in particular. A particular example on this is Bāhru Zewdé's work on the modern history of Ethiopia (1991).

Unfortunately, there is not even a biographical work on some of the pioneering patriot leaders. A good example is, the case of Wändwäsän Kāsā, the rebel chief of Bégémder-Lāstā. As will be seen in this study later, Wändwäsän, had played not only a significant role in arousing the local people to raise arms and fight against Italian occupation, in north-central Ethiopia but also tried to coordinate and unify the anti – Fascist Italian struggles in the same region until his execution by the enemy in December 1936. In this regard, an attempt will be made to re – construct the role and contribution of Wändwäsän largely depending on fragmentary Italian archival and other published sources.⁹ Again, in the last section a similar attempt will also be made in order to bring some aspects of *Rās* Imru Haile Selassie's less explored stay in western Ethiopia first in the capacity

“*Däjjāzmāc* Häylu Kābbädä and the Patriotic Resistance Movement in Wāg, 1935-41”, (ICES, Kyoto, (1997).

⁹There is a corpus of archival materials, kept in bundles in the Italian language, specifically on Wändwäsän Kāsā and Häilu Kābbädä in Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome.

of regent and then brings to light the part he played as military commander against Governo General more to the open.

Thus, the formative period of the Ethiopian anti – Fascist Italian opposition deserves more attention by scholars. The whole objective of the study is, therefore, to bring the transitional phase of the resistance more to the open by focusing on certain aspects of the issue in consideration.

Resistance Formations

The origins of the patriots' movement goes back to 1936, to the period following the Italian defeat of the Ethiopian army at the war front, and their capture of Addis Ababa. The seeds of the revolt were sown in 1936 -1937. This is why it becomes mandatory to study the essence of the formative period of the resistance, which nobody has ever sufficiently tried to bring more to the surface except Del Boca's brief but definitely insufficient treatment.

Two major events augmented the Ethiopian spirit of resistance. Firstly, for many Ethiopians the defeat of the Ethiopian army at the war fronts did not mean the end of the war. A case in point was Emperor Haile Selassie, who became instrumental for the resistance to be initiated in the country. In this regard, Seltene Seyoum had to state the following in his work:

The emperor took several important measures to strengthen and continue Ethiopian resistance to Italian occupation. Soon after the Battle of Māichāw and when he returned to Addis Ababa, the emperor ordered his generals and warriors to return to their respective territories, stir up large – scale rebellions, and resist Italian rule in the form of guerrilla warfare.¹⁰

The emperor also took another important measure. In order to coordinate resistance activities in the country, he set up a Provisional government that survived his exile in western Ethiopia. Abroad, the emperor, leading the Ethiopian government in exile, continued

¹⁰Seltene Seyoum, pp. 57 – 8.

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diplomatic and political struggle against Italy's claim of occupation of Ethiopia primarily at the headquarters of the League of Nations in Geneva. As it is going to be seen later, the emperor's diplomatic struggle abroad had also kept the Ethiopian government at home alive for the following five months.

Secondly, in the summer of 1936, which had become troublesome to the enemy, a more favorable condition was created for the Ethiopian resistance to develop. The rains that hampered the further movement of the Italians gave respite to the Ethiopian rebels to organize their opposition.¹¹ This is corroborated by an Italian Armed Staff report that confirms the mushrooming of a bigger magnitude of rebel formations along the most inaccessible forested or rugged mountainous terrains of the country.¹²

As the Italian military staff account states, this vast region suddenly became the center of early Ethiopian opposition to the Fascist Italian occupation. It also confirms that *Rās Seyoum Mängäshā*, *Rās Käbbädä Mängäshā*, *Rās Imru Haile Selassié* and the *Kāsā* brothers – *Wändwäsän*, *Abärā* and *Asfawäsän* - were among the early leading figures of opposition. All were war generals who remained in the field with their loyal troops, following Haile Selassie's declaration of resistance. Seyoum and his forces settled along the middle course of the *Täkazé* River while *Käbbädä* and his troops entered the thick forest of the lower *Awāsh* in the east.¹³ (Appendix)

¹¹ Del Boca, *Gli Italiani*, p. 24. Del Boca rightly states that the patriots had become more aggressive from May to November 1936. See also Seltene, pp. 68-9.

¹² On 9 May the Italian Military Staff, made a survey of the general political situation in Ethiopia. The map in the Appendix is adopted and worked out from the report of the military staff. (Hereafter, referred as Appendix). Its report is contained in AUSSME, Governo Generale, AOI, Stato Maggiore, *Il 1° Anno dell'Impero*, Vol. I, 1936.

¹³ It is interesting to note that the Italian Military Staff report agrees with local sources. Soon after the Battle of Maichäw, Emperor Haile Selassie ordered Seyoum Mängäshā, Käbbädä Mängäshā, Abärā Kāsā and Wändwäsän Kāsā to join the forest and stage guerrilla resistance by inciting the people to rebellion and make the stay of the enemy difficult. For more information on *Rās Seyoum*, see Adolph Parlesak, *Yä'Habäshā Jäbdu*, 1989 EC, p. 297; for the rest, see Käbbädä Täsämmä, p. 160.

Rās Imru returned from the Sheré war front in Tegrāy and made his former governorship, Gojjām his center of resistance. But, as will be discussed later, Imru was soon forced to change his center of opposition from Gojjām to Ilu Abbāborā in western Ethiopia. Similarly, the three sons of *Rās* Kāsā Häilu, namely Wändwäsän, Asfāwäsän and Abärā, following their return from the Tämbén - Mäichäw battlefield in Tegrāy, took rebel position in their respective regions of Lāstā, Bégémder and Sälälé in Shāwā (Appendix).

In Bégémder the Asfāwäsän-led opposition was initially supported by *Däjjāch* Ayāléw Berru of Semen.¹⁴ Similarly, the position of *Däjjāch* Wändwäsän was enhanced by the rebels of Wag led by *Däjjāch* Häilu Käbbädä and the rebels of Tegrāy headed by *Däjjāch* Gäbrähiwät Mäshāshā.¹⁵ At the war front Häilu and Gäbrähiwät had been among the major commanders of the army under *Rās* Kāsā and *Rās* Seyoum respectively. Being reinforced by these and other rebel chiefs, Asfāwäsän and Wändwäsän emerged as rallying figures of the restive people in north – central Ethiopia. However, as will be seen later, at the same time, both Häilu Käbbädä and Gäbrä Heywät, heading rebel formations of their own, stood as patriot chiefs, allying first with Wändwäsän and later standing on their own.

As noted above, another rebel formation led by *Däjjāch* Abärā Kāsā emerged in Sälälé. Following the Battle of Mäichäw, Abärā reached Feché, his political seat and capital of Sälälé, ahead of Emperor Haile Selassie and received the latter on his return to Addis Ababa from the war front.¹⁶ Moreover, the emperor ordered Abärā to incite the people to raise arms and fight against the enemy in the form of guerrilla

¹⁴ Achile Starace, *La macia su Gondar*, Milano: Mondadori, 1936, p. 128. Generale Starace was commander of the Italian troops who conquered the vast region between Gondär and Däbrä Märqos.

¹⁵ Unlike his boss *Rās* Seyoum Mängäshā, who had submitted to Italian authorities after staging resistance for a short while, *Däjjāch* Gäbrähiwät formed his own core of resistance against the enemy and was drawn into the orbit of *Däjjāch* Wändwäsän. This was true of *Däjjāch* Häilu Käbbädä, the patriot chief of Wäg.

¹⁶ Dämesé Tolā, *Käzämän Guzo Achir Tārik, Yä'Arbännoch Māstāwāshā*, Addis Ababa: Märeha Tebāb Press, 1949 EC, pp.13-4.

warfare.¹⁷ More importantly, Dämes remarks that the emperor reinforced the position of Abärā by handing him a lot of firearms before his departure from Feché to Addis Ababa.¹⁸

The growing patriot leadership position of Abärā soon attracted many other rebels to join him. On one hand, following the order of the emperor, many of the remnants of the Imperial Guard such as *Shālāqä* Mäsfen, *Azāzh* Bogälā and many others joined Abärā.¹⁹ This was also true of the Holätā cadets. As will be noted below, one group of the cadets had formed the *Tequr Anbässā* resistance organization in western Ethiopia. Similarly, another group of the Holätā cadets such as Nägā Haile Selassie, Esāyās Gäbrä Selässie, Mängestu Newāy, Märid Mängäshā and others had left the academy and joined Abärā at Feché in Sälälé, Shawa.²⁰ Moreover, several other Shāwān patriot chiefs such as *Bālāmbārās* Abbbä Arägāy and Häilä Märiām Māmmo, who had already formed rebel formations of their own, were also drawn towards Abärā. On the other hand, Abärā, through wide agitation and propaganda, stirred the people in Sälälé and other neighboring territories to ally with him and fight against Italian occupation.²¹ As Tāddäsä Zāwäldé rightly expressed, this action earned Abärā wide support as well as fame and recognition. In fact, in a meeting they held at the Monastery of Däbrä Libānos, the Shāwān patriots nominated Abärā as coordinator of the Shāwān rebellion.²² One of the earliest outcomes of this coordination was the unsuccessful Shāwān patriots' assault of Addis Ababa in July 1936.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹ Asfā-Wossen Assräté, *Der Letzte Kaiser von Africa: Triumph und Tragodie des Haile Selassie*, Berlin: Ullstein Buchverlage GmbH, 2014. Trans. by Peter Lewis, 2015, p. 125; Tāddäsä Zāwäldé, p.224-26. While Asfāwäsān states Emperor Haile Selassie, in a memo he issued, ordered the remnants of the Imperial Guard to place themselves under the command of *Däjjäch* Abärä Kāsā in Féché, Tāddäsä writes, Mäsfen Seläshi, burning his house and leading remnants of the same guard, joined Abärā in Feché.

²⁰Del Boca, *The Ethiopian War*, p. 17.

²¹Tāddäsä Zāwäldé, p. 224.

²² ASMAI, pos. 181/47, f.220, Governo Generale, Addis Abeba, al S.E. Ministro Colonie, Rome, 24 luglio 1936.

In doing so, how much link Abärā had maintained with his brother Wändwäsän, the rebel chief in north-central Ethiopia or with *Rās* Imru in the far west, at the moment, there is no sufficient information to relate. But from the limited Italian evidence available, and as will become clearer in the course of this discussion, it is not difficult to state that Wändwäsän and Abärā appear to have been operating not in isolation. In fact, and as will be explained soon, there are indications that Abbäbä Arägāy's patriots in Shāwā had some link with that of Wändwäsän who appears to have been operating through his emissaries like Tāffäsä Biāmtātu who, according to Italian sources, had participated in the July 1936 assault of Addis Ababa.²³ This is suggestive that there might have existed some unity of action of the anti-Fascist Italian struggle at least among the leading patriot chiefs such as Wändwäsän, Abärā and Abbäbä Arägāy. It was not without reason, therefore, that Graziani accused the Kāsā brothers – Abärā, Asfāwäsän and Wändwäsän – as architects who had kept the Shāwān rebellion against Governo Generale alive.²⁴ As will be seen later, the Ethiopian opposition was growing as a serious threat that Graziani had been harboring to erase the Kasa brothers soon from the scene.

In north – western Ethiopia, and specifically in Gojjām, there also emerged four major resistance leaders: *Rās* Imru, *Däjjāch* Mängāshā Jāmbäré, *Däjjāch* Sebhātu Yegzāw and *Fitāwrāri* Zälāqā Liqu. The latter three rebel chiefs were *meslānés* or district chiefs of Méchā (a territory where Bāhir Dār is located), of Dénsā (also called Yelmānā Dénsā) (a district immediately south of Bahir Dar) and Bälāyā region in Mätākāl respectively.

²³ From available but limited Italian sources, it is not difficult to relate that the patriot chiefs such as Abbäbä Arägāy and Tāffäsä Biāmtātu have been not only involved in the patriots' assault of Addis Ababa of July 1936 but they were also operating over a wider landmass that connected the territories of Shāwā and Wällo (a territory where Lāstā is located).

²⁴ ASMAI, pos. 181/47, f.220, Graziani, Addis Abeba, a S.E. Ministro Colonie, Roma, Tel. N. 439, 4 ottobre 1936. Why Graziani preferred to call it "Shāwān" rebellion appears to have been deliberate so as to alienate other people from the general Ethiopian opposition to Italian occupation.

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As soon as he returned from the war front to Däbrä Mārḳos, his seat of power in Gojjām, Imru tried to rebuild his position; staged armed resistance and attempted to block any Italian advance into the rest of Gojjām from the direction of Bāhir Dār.²⁵

Likewise, the other Gojjām chiefs formed rebel formations of their own. For instance, *Däjjāch* Mängāshā Jāmbäré, a loyal army commander under *Rās* Imru at the Sheré war front, returned with the *rās* to Gojjām. Next, Mängāshā made the territory between Sārāqo and Gallabat, along the border with the Sudan, his place of resistance.²⁶ Likewise, Zäläqä Liqu and his son Täfärā rebelled on the Bälāyā massif (Appendix). Similarly, *Däjjāch* Sebhātu Yegzāw of Dénsā, dug out trenches in the bush of the Amādāmit Mountains adjacent to the territories of Dénsā and *Méçhā* from the south. The rebel leaders remained in that capacity until Imru's withdrawal from Gojjām to western Ethiopia.

Like northern Ethiopia, western Ethiopia also became the scene of resistance formations. Here two major formations of patriots emerged, one under the Provisional government, and, the other, the *Tequr Anbässā* or Black Lion organization. As already related, the Provisional government, set up by Haile Selassie, started operating in Illu Abbāborā with Goré as its political center. First, it was headed by the ex – president of the Senate, *Bitāwādād* Wäldä –Tsādeq Goshu. It undertook the responsibility to lead the already existing local administration and military in the region. Second, Haile Selassie reformed the leadership by declaring *Rās* Imru to be his regent in the country.²⁷ As already arranged, Imru reached Goré in June 1936 and took over the administration of the Provisional government and kept in touch with the emperor abroad via the Sudan until November of the same year.

²⁵ In an interview he gave to Del Boca, Imru confirmed his return to Gojjām where he staged armed resistance against further advance of Italian forces from Bāhir Dār southwards to Däbrä Mārḳos. See also Starace, pp.110, 111, 119; Del Boca, *The Ethiopian War*, p. 157.

²⁶ The map in the Appendix shows the respective spheres of resistance of the early pioneering patriot chiefs.

²⁷ Asfā-Wossen Assräté, p. 125. Asfā- Wossen states that Emperor Haile Selassie instructed Imru in a letter that he was nominated his regent of the Provisional Government.

As already indicated, the other independent patriot organization by the name *Tequr Anbässā* or Black Lion was founded by civilian intellectuals and military cadets of the Holätā Military Academy, near Addis Ababa. The cadets, who abandoned their studies to oppose the enemy, moved via Ambo in Shawa towards Wällägā where they formed the organization and nominated its leadership. Its leading figures were Alāmāwārq Bāyānā and Bālāy Hailā'Ab, the president and military commander of the organization, respectively.²⁸ In its stay in the west, the organization was swollen by some members of the local population and by many settlers who fled harassment from the local people.²⁹ On the other hand, as both Tāddāsā and Häddis confirm, it is interesting to note that this organization, on its way to the west, was also strengthened by fifty armed Eritreans who deserted the Italian camp and joined the Ethiopian cause.

Similarly, several other centers of resistance emerged in the rugged highland terrain of the southern highland plateau. They were chiefly led by former army commanders who had returned from the Ogādén and Gānālé - Dolo war fronts. In the south proper, *Rās Dāstā Dāmtāw*, *Dājjāch Bāyānā Mārid*, *Dājjāch Gābrāmārim Gāri* and others continued the anti – Fascist Italian struggle. *Rās Dāstā* had been the commander in – chief of the Gānālé - Dollo war front while the others were among his noted commanders who led troops of their own, Bāyānā in Bālé and Gābrāmāriām in Sidāmō. Furthermore, Dāstā's patriots were strengthened by over 600 armed Eritreans who, at different times, defected from the enemy side and joined the Ethiopian resistance.³⁰ *Rās Dāstā* emerged as the principal coordinating resistance leader in the south.

²⁸ Tāddāsā Méchā, pp. 25-34. Tāddāsā appreciates Bālāy Hailā'Ab for his capability as a commander as well as a military trainer. Häddis also extends similar appreciation for Bālāy. See also Häddis, pp. 152-53, 157-58.

²⁹ Tāddāsā Méchā, pp.86-7; Häddis, p.189.

³⁰ Sāifu Abāwālo, *Yātārik Qers*, Addis Ababa: Artistic Press, 1953 EC, p. 76. Since 1934 Sāifu relates that he was a government employee in Yergālām, the capital of Sidāmā; accompanied *Rās Dāstā* up to Dollo and returned with him to Sidāmā where he stayed with the *rās* until his execution. For some patriot activities in the region, see also the work of

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Besides, in the south - eastern territories, east of Sidāmā and Bālé, there emerged other rebel formations. Among the leading patriot chiefs were Hailé Abā Märsā and *Bäjerond* Feqräselässié in Arsi and Bäedä Gäbré and Shimäles Habté in Härärgé. These chiefs had been army commanders in the Ogādén war front under *Däjjāch* Näsibu who went into exile with Haile Selassie. However, after a while, some submitted to the enemy and several others joined other patriots. For instance, Bäedä Gäbré, after some resistance, took exile first in British Somaliland and later in Jerusalem where he died of illness, whereas Shimäles Habté moved westwards to Bālé – Arsi and then proceeded to Sidāmā where he joined forces with Bāyānā Märed, Gäbrämāriām Gāri and *Räs* Dästä.³¹

Moreover, Addis Ababa became another major supplier of patriots. A considerable number of men moved out of the capital and formed centers of resistance of their own, chiefly in Shāwā and Gurāgeland. Several of them were campaigners who returned home from the war fronts while many others had remained as guardians in the capital holding various government posts. Refusing to fall into enemy hands, they moved out of the capital to oppose the enemy, as the *Tequr Anbässā* cadets and their instructors had done earlier. For instance, while *Grāzmäch* Zäwdé Asfāw, *Shālāqā* Mäsfen Seläshi and *Shālāqā* Gäräsu Duki were among the returnees from the northern front, *Bālāmbārās* Abbäbä Arägāy and *Blättā* Tākälä Wäldāhawāriat had been among the guardians in Addis Ababa.³² The latter started his rebel career in Limmu in the west and later moved on to the north and joined Shāwān patriots. Several of these and other patriots of Shāwā posed serious challenges to the enemy, particularly from 1937 onwards.

Several other important patriot chiefs also came from a different social background, that is, *sheftenät*.³³ Before the war, several of them

Sälomé Gäbrä – Egziabhér, “The Ethiopian Patriots, 1936 – 1941”, *Ethiopia Observer*, 13, 2, 1970.

³¹Säifu, p.157.

³² Both Abbäbä and Tākälä were guardians in Addis Ababa, the former in charge of the police and the latter as director of the Addis Ababa Municipality.

³³ Though *sheftenät* has been a very old and sometimes a revered institution that would entitle a person to a higher position or social recognition in the past, in this context, the term is used as an old institution associated with rebelliousness

had led a life of brigandage or had held a semi – government position in their respective territories. During the resistance period, they lifted themselves from a lower to a higher status through *sheftenät*. Some *sheftās* or rebels had gone to the war front while others remained behind leading their own *sheftā* groups. Many of them largely came from the regions of Gojjām, Gondār and Shāwā. From Gojjām the rebel chiefs Bāyābel Dāstā, Māmmo Tāsāmmā, Gārāmāw Wāndawek and Bālāy Zālāqā belonged to the *sheftā* category of rebels, whereas others such as Webnāh Tāsāmmā and Kāsā Māshāshā Téwodros (Gondār) and *Lej* Hailāmāriām Māmmo (Shāwā) came from a semi – government position.³⁴

Many of the *sheftā* chiefs appear to have had rebellious character. As they had been unruly before the war, they also became a thorn in the flesh of the enemy later. They formed not only centers of opposition of their own, but also became rallying figures around whom people gathered to oppose the enemy. Interestingly, several of them were also able to transform themselves from common *sheftā* or rebel position into popular patriot leadership. Of this, Webnāh, Bālāy and Hailāmāriām are good examples.³⁵ They enhanced the emergent rebel opposition in the country.

As noted above, local opposition to Italian rule continued along different parts of the country. The various resistance activities exhibited a common phenomenon. They did not only show opposition to enemy rule, but they also delayed or at times even disabled the further occupation of the country by the enemy. Moreover, as will be seen later, this must have served as a prelude for Haile Selassie to continue his political struggle at Geneva. At home the opposition went another step further. On one hand, it had become so widespread and challenging that made the enemy embark upon large – scale

against the abuse of authority or power and the person who performs the act was called a *sheftā* or a rebel. For more information, see Seltene, p. 68.

³⁴ There are indications that the latter groups were burdened with the task of respecting law and order against ordinary brigands in their respective domains by the Ethiopian government. For Webnāh. see *Il l' Anno dell'Impero*, V.2, 1937.

³⁵ All of them were leading patriot chiefs known for exercising guerrilla warfare in their respective territories: Bégémder-Semén, Gojjām and Shāwā.

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military operations (October 1936-February 1937) that brought the fall of the principal pioneering patriot chiefs one by one. As will be discussed later, the new Italian campaign also enabled enemy forces to occupy most of the territories which had been held by the patriots. Why and how this happened, will be the subject matter of the last section. Now let us discuss the extent of the efforts of the leading patriot leaders in trying to bring the resistance into coordinated struggle. Why this happened and what went wrong would be the subject matter of the next discussion.

Attempts at Coordinating the Struggle

In the above discussion, efforts were made to show the emergence, distribution and leadership of the major centers of opposition to enemy rule. It is also necessary to study another feature of the Ethiopian opposition, that is, attempts at coordinating the struggle vis-a-vis the challenges it faced.

Immediately following the departure of Emperor Haile Selassie into exile in May 1936, two parallel developments took place, one in support and the other in opposition of the armed struggle. As Seltene's work shows, some chiefs abandoned their rebel positions and submitted to Italian authorities, while several others tried to coordinate their resistance activities in order to establish a unified front against the enemy. The discussion below is an assessment of the factors that either hindered or promoted the anti-Fascist Italian struggle.

As soon as the remnant Ethiopian fighters returned from the war front, there appears to have been an understanding among the rebels in Gojjām and Bégémdar-Semen to coordinate their plans of action against the common enemy as both Imru and Asfāwāsān Kāsā were governing adjacent territories on the upper course of the Abbāy (Blue Nile) River. In this regard, the Italian General Starace reports that in May 1936, *Rās* Imru and *Däjjāch* Asfāwāsān, who had embarked on forming centers of resistance in their respective territories, also made

a plan of attack on enemy garrisons in Bāhir Dār and Dābrā Tābor.³⁶ However, how much the plan was coordinated is difficult to ascertain. Nevertheless, before Asfāwāsān took action, *Dājjāch* Ayālēw Beru of Semen submitted to Italian authorities.³⁷ Thus, the planned assault was aborted. Moreover, because of the submission of Bégémder chiefs, Asfāwāsān felt so insecure that he was forced to shift his center of resistance from Bégémder to Sālālé, where he joined forces with his brother, Abārā Kāsā.³⁸ Despite such submissions, as Italian sources indicate, and, as it will be related later, surprisingly, at this early stage, Bégémder-Semen resistance has been already drawn towards Wändwāsān, the patriot leader of Lāstā.³⁹ What is not clear, however, is the process and extent how Wändwāsān was able to bring the patriots of extensive territories under his chieftaincy.

A similar event took place in Gojjām. When *Rās* Imru returned from the Sheré war front, as already related, local information had it that he issued a proclamation, urging the chiefs and people of Gojjām to stand on his side and fight against the enemy.⁴⁰ However, at this early stage, the notables of Gojjām were divided into two camps: one group welcoming the Italians and the other supporting Imru. While *Dājjāch* Gāsāsā Bälāw, the nephew of *Rās* Hailu Täklä Haimānot and his ally *Fitāwrāri* Tāmirāt Agāw and others, who in October 1935 had defected from Imru's camp at Dābāt and rebelled when they reached home, belonged to the camp that welcomed the enemy.⁴¹ On the other

³⁶ Starace, pp. 121, 129. Starace, through air reconnaissance, affirmed that the patriot chiefs had made about 5000 troops ready in Giänt, not very far from Dābrā Tābor. See also Seltene, p.66.

³⁷ Starace, pp. 126-7,128. Starace confirms that *Dājjāch* Ayālēw, following his submission on 14 May 1936 to Italian authorities, offered his services to capture *Rās* Imru in Gojjām.

³⁸ *Ibid.* p.126-7.

³⁹ *Il 1° Anno dell'Impero*. Vol. II. Allegato N. 30, 1936.

⁴⁰ Oral informants: Getāhun Endālāmāw and Negātu Alāwqé, interviewed in Buré, Gojjām in January 1995. They related that as soon as he returned to Buré from the war front, *Rās* Imru took two measures to boost Gojjām resistance against Italian occupation: (i) issued a decree urging the people to remain united and fight against the enemy, and (ii) tried to boost the morale of the people by offering traditional titles to local chiefs.

⁴¹ *Dājjāch* Gāsāsā Bälāw, a nephew of *Rās* Hailu Täklä Haimānot, heading his loyal local chiefs and their followers, returned to Gojjām where he ignited a civil war that ravaged

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hand, several other patriot chiefs such as Mängäshā Jämbäré, Sebhatu Yegzāw and Zäläqä Liqū raised arms in support of Imru and took defensive positions. As already remarked, the objective of the latter group was to block enemy advance further inland from the direction of Bahir Dar in the north. However, the plan of attack failed because of the quick advance of Italian troops inland and of collaboration of local chiefs with the enemy against them. The collaborating group moved inland to capture *Rās* Imru in Däbrä Märqos.⁴² These were some of the reasons why both patriot chiefs shifted their centers of resistance, Imru to Illu Abbāborā in western Ethiopia and Asfāwāsān to Sälälé in Shāwā.

However, this was not the end of the opposition in north – central Ethiopia. Before he left for western Ethiopia, Imru had formed a new local administration possibly with the hope that it would get acceptance by the people in its effort to coordinate resistance activities in Gojjām. To this effect, Imru appointed a man from the Täklä Haimānot family, Nägāsh Bāzābeh, as the new ruler of Gojjām, raising him from *fitāwrāri* to *däjjāzmāch*.⁴³ But Nägāsh was easily challenged by the overwhelming power of Italian troops who overran Gojjām soon. So, he was forced first to enter the jungle in Basso (south of Däbrä Märqos) but after a while submitted to the enemy who placed him as head of the *banda* troops in Buré Dāmot.⁴⁴

There also emerged another more challenging local opposition to Governo Generale in north - central Ethiopia. As already noted, the task of coordinating resistance activities fell upon *Däjjāch* Wändwāsān, the patriot chief of Lāstā. As evidenced from Italian sources, in addition to Lāstā and Bégémder, Wändwāsān was trying to coordinate the resistance struggles in Tegrāy, Wāg and northern

Gojjām for five months. Accordingly, the people were divided, those who stood pro - Gäsāsā and, hence, welcoming the Italians and those who supported Imru and, thus, opposing the enemy. Later, the Gäsāsā – led group collaborated with the Italian military not only by opposing Imru’s administration but also by facilitating the further occupation of Gojjām by the enemy.

⁴²Starace, pp.122-32.

⁴³Seltene, p. 103,159. Seltene substantiated this point by gathering rich oral information.

⁴⁴ For Nägāsh Kābbädä’s flight from Däbrä Märqos and his submission at Däjjān, see Seltene, p.103. The term *banda* refers to uniformed Ethiopian (local) irregulars who fought for Italy.

Shāwā.⁴⁵ The same source also related that patriot chiefs such as Gäbrāhiwät Māshāshā, Hailu Käbbädä and Abbäbä Arägāy were increasingly drawn more towards the orbit of Wändwäsän who was soon regarded as a serious threat to enemy positions in the area by the Italian command.

Similar attempts at coordinating the struggle continued. We have already seen that in western Ethiopia, two major patriot organizations were set up: the Provisional government and the *Tequr Anbässā*. As remarked earlier, Haile Selassie had formed the Provisional government that started functioning from its seat at Gore in Illu Abbāborā. As already noted, the primary duty of the government was to ensure the continuation of the Ethiopian government in the west, and to coordinate the resistance activities in the country. In this regard, as will be related, the Goré government tried to provide leadership and lend organizational support to the already existing local administration in the region.

In like manner, the *Tequr Anbässā* organization was also carrying out resistance activities in Wällägā. Its leadership was actively moving from place to place in the region advising the people to have a united stand against Fascist Italian rule.⁴⁶ At the same time, the leaders of the organization realized the further need of giving centralized leadership and organization to the patriot activities in the region. In this regard, they thought *Rās* Imru, leading the Gore government, would be ideal to lead the struggle. When they learned that he had an intention of crossing the border over to the Sudan, they promptly sent a delegation that asked Imru to abandon his idea and to join forces with them and lead the anti - Fascist Italian struggle at home.⁴⁷ For Imru at the moment it was rather sheer madness to oppose the enemy. However, notwithstanding his calculations, the *rās*, after some

⁴⁵Governo Generale, *Il 1° Anno dell'Impero*. Vol. II. Allegato N. 30, 1936; see also Seltene, p.74.

⁴⁶Tāddāsā Méchā, pp.57,82, 86-8, 95-6.

⁴⁷In their works both Tāddāsā Méchā and Häddis Alāmāyāhu, narrated eyewitness accounts that relate why and how the *Tequr Anbässā* delegates approached and convinced *Rās* Imru to lead the resistance in western Ethiopia. For more information, see Tāddāsā, p. 67; Häddis, pp. 73 74. See also, Del Boca, *The Ethiopian War*, p.216.

vacillations, accepted the invitation.⁴⁸ Thus, the two resistance formations merged into one, and Imru assumed leadership of the joint organization.

The furtherance of the coordination of the resistance rested on *Rās* Imru who started functioning along two lines. On one hand, via *Gāmbélā*, he maintained link with Emperor Haile Selassie who gave him encouragement, advice and additional administrative personnel.⁴⁹ On the other hand, *Rās* Imru embarked on giving leadership to the local administration in the west, and on coordinating opposition activities against the enemy. To make this more effective, Imru held a meeting of resistance leaders in which several patriot chiefs such as *Dājǰāch* Tākkālā Wāldāhawāriāt and *Dājǰāch* Tāyé Gulelāté and several others attended.⁵⁰ The outcome of the meeting was not clear, however. Nevertheless, one thing remained certain, and that was the absence of consensus regarding the method to be employed by the resistance. Regarding this, Greenfield reportedly said that Tākkālā advised Imru to disperse his large following and to hold a sizeable force of about 3,000 men so that he would be able to fight against the enemy in the form of guerrilla warfare.⁵¹ When Imru became reluctant and other chiefs opposed the suggestion, Tākkālā walked out and continued to lead an independent patriot formation of his own first in the west and then moved on to Shāwā where he stayed as a patriot chief until his entry into the Sudan as a refugee in May 1938.⁵² As will be seen later, Tākkālā rightly calculated that Imru would soon become a victim of the enemy unless he adopted guerrilla warfare tactics.

However, as the centers of resistance were widely dispersed along different regions of the country, the merger of the *Tequr Anbässā* and the Provisional government under Imru's leadership, and the

⁴⁸Tāddāsā Méchā, p. 65.

⁴⁹Haile Selassie, *Heywätēnā Yä'Ethiopia Ermejā*, Vol. II. pp. 25 – 27; Del Boca, *Gli Italiani*, pp. 34 -36, 37 -38.

⁵⁰Greenfield, *Ethiopia, A New Political History*, New York: Frederick A. Praegers, 1965, p.233; Mockler, *Haile Selassie's War, The Italian Ethiopian Campaign, 1935 – 1941*, New York: Random House, 1984, p.167.

⁵¹Greenfield, p. 233.

⁵²Greenfield, p.233; Häddis, p. 166. Häddis witnessed that Tākkālā abandoned Imru's camp as soon as the meeting was over.

coordinating function of the Kāsā brothers such as the *Däjjāches* Wändwäsän and Abärā were not enough. As already indicated, a similar activity was also taking place in the south. *Rās* Dästā Dāmtāw, the son in – law of Emperor Haile Selassie, following his retreat from the Gänälé– Dolo front, had been busily engaged with implementing a plan of integrating the struggles and actions of patriot forces against Italian occupation.⁵³ He emerged as the strongest rebel leader along the highlands of the southern plateau, having Sidāmā as his principal center of operation. In fact, Dästā appeared as the most promising unifying patriot leader of opposition as well as of salvation of the territories in the south. As will be discussed later, several patriot leaders such as Shimāles Habté from Harārgé and others joined forces with him and fought heroically afterwards. Having strong generals such as Bāyāna Mārid, Gäbrāmāriām and Shimāles, Dästā and his forces made it difficult for Governo Generale to make its forces cross Sidāmā and move northwards towards Addis Ababa from the south for the next nine months.⁵⁴

Attempts at coordinating the struggle also took place in Shāwā. In July 1936 Shāwān patriots held a meeting at the Monastery of Däbrā Libānos in which a considerable number of patriot leaders such as the Kāsā brothers (Abärā and Asfawāsän), Feqrāmāriām Yenādu, Zāwdé Asfāw and Abbābā Arāgāy participated. As noted in the preceding section, *Däjjāch* Abärā emerged as the principal coordinating figure of the opposition in Shawa, on one hand, the patriots also agreed to take offensive action on Italian positions in Addis Ababa and exterminate the enemy and liberate the capital, on the other.⁵⁵

Furthermore, other efforts to stimulate the resistance and to give it a centralized leadership also came from another direction. Ethiopian refugees in the Horn as well as in East African ports such as Jibuti

⁵³ Säifu, p. 141.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Graziani reported to Rome that the objective of Däbrā Libānos meeting was: i) to dislodge the Italians from Addis Ababa, and ii) to give protection to the Provisional government in western Ethiopia. For further information, see ASMAI, pos. 181/44, f.220. Graziani, Addis Abeba, a Ministro delle Colonie, Roma, N. 2067, 24 luglio 1936. See also Del Boca, p...; Seltene, pp.71-72.

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and Berbera, and other ports like Port Said in Egypt and Aden in Yemen, were reported to be shuttling from one port to another with the object of intensifying guerrilla warfare in the country.⁵⁶ However, at this stage how much coordinated activity existed between the exiles and the patriots is difficult to ascertain. Yet, the same sources relate that at Goré a palace had been built for the *negus* in exile to return home and to lead the struggle. The sources also added that the Ethiopians had intended to attack Italian garrisons defending Addis Ababa in June 1936. As will soon be related, this agrees with provocative leaflets that appeared in the streets of Addis Ababa in June. But the first assault took place not in June but in July 1936.

Another major event that compounded the worry of the Italians also occurred: the appearance of provocative leaflets in Addis Ababa, inciting the people to rebellion and resistance.⁵⁷ The leaflets underlined that the people should exterminate all Fascist Italians in Addis Ababa. Moreover, they invited the dwellers of the town to take similar action when the patriots attack the town from the surrounding hills. However, how much such events were the work of the patriots at home or that of the refugees in neighboring countries or of some other underground bodies is difficult to ascertain. Nevertheless, taking available sources into account, it is possible to argue that there appears to have been some understanding between the Ethiopian opposition groups at home as well as abroad. Though, as it had been anticipated, a coordinated action did not take place soon, the July 1936 attack of Addis Ababa seems to have been an outcome of such developments. But one thing remains certain. No matter how strongly they strove, at this stage, no patriot leader was successful in bringing effective coordinated leadership to the patriotic resistance.

Resistance and Challenges

We have seen the extent of the attempts made to coordinate the struggle against the enemy. The principal leading figures of

⁵⁶ ASMAI, pos. 181/41, f.220, D'ordine del Ministro MAE, Aff. Pol. – III, Roma, a R. Ministro delle Colonie, Roma. Tel. N.23713, 15 luglio 1936; ASMAI, pos. 181/47, f. 220, D'Ordine del Ministro, MAE, Aff. Pol. – aR. Ministero delle Colonie, Tel. N. 224203, 18 luglio 1936. See also Seltene, p. 68.

⁵⁷ ASMAI, pos. 181/55, f.255, Graziani al S. E. Ministro Colonie, Roma, 1 luglio 1936. See also ASMAI, pos. 181/47, f.220, D'ordine del Ministro MAI, Aff. Pol. – a R. Ministro delle Colonie, Tel. N. 224203, 18 luglio 1936; Del Boca, *Gli Italiani*, pp.89 -90.

opposition were *Rās Imru* in the west, *Däjjāch Wändwäsän Kāsā* in the north, *Däjjāch Abärā Kāsā* in the central - west and *Rās Dästā Dāmtāw* in the south. Though it is not known what link they had among themselves during the transitional phase of the resistance (1936 – 1937), it is evident that each principal patriot chief had been busy striving to achieve integrated action against Fascist Italian rule. However, as already noted, no matter how much hard they tried, at this stage, no pioneering patriot leader was able to emerge as a successful coordinating figure of the resistance. It, therefore, becomes more appropriate to assess the extent and magnitude of the resistance in light of the large – scale campaign *Governo Generale* launched that resulted in the fall of the major pioneers of the resistance one after another.

The first major daring patriot act took place in western Ethiopia. In June 1936 the Italians landed at *Bonäyyā* airfield near *Näqämté* with the objective of inciting the people against the Ethiopian local administration so as to extend their occupation of the rest of the country. But, it would be remembered that the *Tequr Anbässā* had already been there arousing the same people against Fascist Italian occupation. During the night of 26 June 1936 the *Tequr Anbässā* patriots suddenly attacked the three Italian planes that had landed at *Bonäyyā* airfield and killed eleven officers on board including high ranking officials such as the Air Marshal Magliocco and Colonel Calderini.⁵⁸ Soon after the incident, *Governo Generale* retaliated by bombing the site of *Bonäyyā* from the air, but casualties were reported to have been light.⁵⁹ Thus, having accomplished their mission, the *Tequr Anbässā* patriots returned safely to *Näqämté* on June 27. *Bälāy Häilä’Ab*, the military commander of the organization, planned the operation and the army accomplished it successfully.⁶⁰

⁵⁸Täddäsä Méchā, p.46; Del Boca, *Gli Italiani*, p.30. See also Täsämā Tā’a’s work, (*ICES*, Kyoto, 1997), Seltene, p.70.

⁵⁹Täddäsä Méchā, p. 48.

⁶⁰ Täddäsä Méchā relates well how the operation was organized and successfully accomplished under the command of *Bälāy Häilä’Ab*. For more information, see Täddäsä, pp. 42-4. *Ato Täklämārim Kuflom*, whom I interviewed in 2003 in Addis Ababa, and who claims to have been a close friend of *Bälāy Häilä’Ab*, gave me

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The Bonäyyā incident was the first organized great patriot attack on Italian staff since the occupation of Addis Ababa in May 1936. How much impact the *Tequr Anbässā* action at Bonäyyā brought on the resistance movement is difficult to account. Nevertheless, there are indications that the patriots popularized this event in some regions. For instance, the merger of forces of the Provisional government and that of the *Tequr Anbässā* followed the incident immediately. Italian sources also confirm that *Däjjāch Wändwäsän Käsä* and *Däjjāch Abärä Käsä* had respectively tried to incite the people of Lästā and Sälälé to raise their arms because they spread the idea that Ethiopian and British assistance had already reached western Ethiopia.⁶¹ It was also about this time that the Ethiopian exiles in the Horn associated the word *negus* [emperor] with Goré in their propaganda: that the Ethiopians were ready to counter – attack soon from the provinces not yet occupied, that at Goré a palace had been built for residence of the *negus* and that British assistance would be coming soon.⁶² Moreover, though its author is not exactly known, it was about this time that a similar idea was also propagated in Addis Ababa through provocative leaflets.

The Bonäyyā incident could also be seen from another angle. It also impacted on some exiles in London who arose as a pressure group on the emperor (*negus*) that he should return home and lead the struggle.⁶³ These cases show that the act of the *Tequr Anbässā* had become a source of inspiration for patriots as well as exiles by urging the people to intensify their struggle. On the other hand, as it will be

the following information: Bälāy was of Eritrean origin and his father Häilä'Ab was under the service of *Rās Imru*, 1st in Härär and then in Däsé. He was first educated at Menilek School and next at Täfäri Mäkonnen School and then joined the Holätā Military Academy where he earned the rank of Lieut. Colonel.

⁶¹ ASMAI, pos. 181/55, f. 220, Ministro degli Affari Esteri, Aff. Pol. – Roma, a R. Ministero delle Colonie, Roma, Tel. No. 23713, 16 luglio 1936. See also ASMAI, pos. 181/55, f. 255, Graziani al S.E. Ministro Colonie, Roma, 1 luglio 1936; ASMAI, pos. 181/47. 220. D'ordine del Ministro Mai, Aff. Pol. – a R. Ministero delle Colonie, Tel. N. 224203, 18 luglio 1936.

⁶² ASMAI, pos. 181/41, f.220. D'ordine del Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Affari Politici – III. Roma, a R. Ministero delle Colonie, Roma, Tel. N. 23713, 15 luglio 1936.

⁶³ Ibid.

elaborated later, this occasion must have added worries on the part of the Italians who watched the development of events closely.

On the other hand, the Bonäyyā incident worsened the amicable relations in development between the *Tequr Anbässā* and *Däjjāch* Häbtämāriām Gäbrä Egziabhér, the native chief of Qälām. Pressed by other Oromo chiefs, the *däjjāch* soon banished the *Tequr Anbässā* patriots from his territory.⁶⁴ Häbtämāriām appears to have taken such drastic move because, among other things, it appears that he feared that his territory would become a battleground between the Ethiopian forces and that of the enemy. According to Del Boca, Padre Borello, a member of the Italian Consolata Mission in Wallaga, did not only urge but also threaten the Oromo chiefs that they would be subjected to terrible reprisals if they did not accept Italian domination over their territories.⁶⁵ On the other hand, the Italians assured the people that they would get protection if they accepted Italian rule.⁶⁶ Eventually, *Däjjāch* Häbtämāriām and other Oromo chiefs accepted Italian sovereignty. Such problems notwithstanding, the *Tequr Anbässā* moved further west where they hoped of coordinating their struggle with that of *Rās Imru*.

On the other hand, Italian reports of July, August and September 1936 show that Ethiopia was far from being a peaceful occupied territory. As early as 5 July of the same year, exactly two months after the capture of Addis Ababa, Governo Generale began to feel local threats against its positions in Addis Ababa.⁶⁷ In addition, the same source mentions that some acts of desertion had also been reported among the *banda* troops in Gojjām, notably Bāhir Dār region. Besides, the report indicated that some regions in Lāstā (a

⁶⁴Tāddäsä Méchā, p. 68.

⁶⁵The growing weakness of the Ethiopian administration over the western territories appears to have encouraged foreign agents, particularly Erskine (British consul in Goré) and Padre Borello (Italian Catholic missionary who lived in Wälägā for over 20 years) to sway the Oromo chiefs to the interest of their own respective governments. In some literature Borello was sometimes addressed as *padre* or 'lieutenant'. For more information, see Del Boca, *Gli Italiani*, p. 33.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

⁶⁷AUSSME, D – 6, racc. Comando Forze Armate Diario Militare Bimestre, luglio – agosto 1936.

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territory where Lālibālā is located) and Gojjām were also reported growing turbulent. This naturally must have created not only uneasiness on the part of Governo Generale but it also made the latter suspicious of the newly submitted but reinstated local *meslānēs* in Gojjām and other rebels in Lāstā as well as in Gojjām.⁶⁸ The execution of *Däjjāch* Sebhatu Yegzāw, the *meslāné* of Dēnsā, with his son and son in-law in September 1936 in Bahir Dar was an outcome of this suspicion.⁶⁹

Similarly, the Italian chief of Ambāsäl, Wällo region signaled that a revolt was under preparation in Tegrāy, Bégémder, Lāstā, Gojjām, Dālāntā and Yājju and it would commence on 19 July of the same year.⁷⁰ As can be understood from the report, the revolt had a widespread character, extending from Tegrāy in the north to Addis Ababa in the south.

As it has been already indicated, *Däjjāch* Wändwäsän was behind much of the revolts in north - central Ethiopia although little has been known of the *däjjāch* as a rebel leader and coordinator of the patriot activities in the region. As previously mentioned, following his return from the Battle of Māichāw (31 March 1936), Wändwäsän had stayed in the bush defying Italian calls for submission. However, sometime during the 2nd week of June 1936, surprisingly and perhaps unexpectedly, Wändwäsän came out of the bush and made submission to Italian officials in Lālibālā. The enemy welcomed him. In fact, the Governor of dell' Amārā, Alessandro Pirzio Biroli, had to report on Wändwäsän to Graziani as follows: "The *Däjjāch* is helpful, intelligent, educated

⁶⁸Ibd.

⁶⁹*Däjjāch* Sebhatu Yegzāw's arrest and subsequent execution is also attested by rich oral literature as well as Italian sources. For accounts narrated by local contemporary elders, see Seltene, pp. 76 -77; see also, AUSSME, D – 6, racc. 171, R. Governo dell' Amara, Comande Forze Armate, Diario Storico Militare, settembre 1936; *Il 1° Anno dell' Impero*, S.E. Pirzio Biroli, Gondar al Governo Generale, Addis Abeba, 30 settembre 1936. Italian sources assert that *Däjjāch* Sebhatu has been identified as hostile to Governo Generale who had intended to attack Bāhir Dār garrison on the occasion of *Mäsqäl*, a feast day celebrated for the Finding of the True Cross.

⁷⁰ AUSSME, D-6, rac. 171, Comando Forze Armate Diario Storico Militare Bimestre, XIV, luglio –agosto (Col. Alfredo Marcheggiano, afterwards referred as AUSSME, Macheggiano). See Also AUSSME, D-6, 171, Pirzio Biroli, Asmara 12 luglio 1936. Dālāntā and Yājju are territories in the region of Wällo.

in Europe, furnished with a particular culture and of open heart.”⁷¹ Moreover, in his conversation with Italian officials of the 24th Battalion, Wändwäsän had, among others, stated, “I do not fight (act) for me, but for history...to beckon the independence of Ethiopia.”⁷²

Why Wändwäsän submitted to Governo Generale is not clear. This naturally leaves a room for speculation that he might have wanted to be seen respecting Italian calls for submission or to get respite or to make some reconnaissance of the situation or for some medical reasons. Whatever the reason was behind his submission, Wändwäsän soon stunned the Italians by taking a rebel position. Sometime in July 1936, he escaped from Lālibālā and re – entered the bush in Lāstā.⁷³ In other words, Wändwäsän resumed his patriot chief position. This was a shock to Governo Generale.

On the other hand, there is no indication that a revolt broke out in central Ethiopia on 19 July 1936 as had been reported from Ambāsāl. Instead, another major daring patriot act against Italian rule took place under the leadership and coordination of Shāwān patriots. As it has been already agreed, on 28 July 1936 the Shāwān patriots launched a joint attack on Italian positions in Addis Ababa. The coordinator of the assault, Abārā Kāsā had the bishop patriot *Abunä Pétros* with him. The objective of the attack, as already stated in the preceding section, was to bring to an end the Italian administration in the capital and to install an Ethiopian one in its place. However, the patriots were unable to dislodge the enemy because, on one hand, they lacked proper coordination and commitment, and, on the other, as Seltene’s work affirms, the enemy had got wind of the attack and, hence, made necessary preparation, including surrounding the capital with barbed wire.⁷⁴ The patriots retreated but *Abunä Pétros* was

⁷¹ Pirzio Biroli reports to Graziani: “Il Degiac ē aiutante, intelligente, educato all’Europa, fornito di una certa cultura e di mente aperta.” Wändwäsän has been to Europe accompanying *Rās Täfāri* in his tour of 1924, but that he has been educated in Europe cannot be corroborated by other sources. For further information, see Del Boca, *Gli Italiani*, p.58.

⁷² *Ibid.* Its Italian version reads: “Io non opero per me, ma per la storia, come per accenare... all’indipendenza dall’Etiopia.”

⁷³ ACS, FG, *I Primi Venti Mesi dell’Impero*, as cited by Del Boca, *Gli Italiani*, pp.58 – 59.

⁷⁴ Seltene, pp.71 – 72.

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captured and shot on 30 July 1936 in the capital.⁷⁵ Italian action on the rebel bishop shocked many Ethiopians. This action on the bishop served a source of inspiration for many Ethiopians to rebel against enemy rule by joining the bush. Nevertheless, this was the first major coordinated joint attack on Addis Ababa since its occupation by the Italians on 5 May last. Though the assault was unsuccessful, it appears that the Addis Ababa episode had shown the possibility of carrying out other similar attacks on Italian positions further.

A case in point is that other patriots exerted armed strikes in central Ethiopia. According to Italian sources, on 20 August 1936 local patriots led by Grāzmāch Tāffāsā Bāimtātu assailed the Italian garrison at Wārā Ilu (a region in Wällo) but were repulsed by enemy forces.⁷⁶ The report adds that Tāffāsā was a Gojjāmé who had already taken part in the patriots' attack of Addis Ababa on 28 July last.⁷⁷ Whether or not Tāffāsā was a lieutenant of Wändwāsān, at the moment, it is difficult to confirm. Yet, the situation again leaves a room to speculate that the patriots under Wändwāsān might have taken part in the July attack of Addis Ababa, along with the Shāwān patriots such as Abbābā Arāgāy who was also at other times drawn towards Wändwāsān in the north.

Another patriot action followed. Wändwāsān himself came to the open soon and led his patriots who took offensive action against Governo Generale. Evidence shows that between 7 and 12 September 1936, the *dājjāch* launched an attack on enemy positions in Lālibālā but was repulsed after heavy fighting.⁷⁸

Still another rebel action took place in Gojjām. It will be remembered that *Dājjāch* Sebhātu Yegzāw was executed in Bāhir Dār on the pretext of attempting to disturb public security. In his place *Fitāwrāri* Terfé Kāsā, from Bahir Dar, was appointed *meslāné* and sent to disarm the people of Dénsā.⁷⁹ The latter retaliated. In October 1936

⁷⁵ Poggiali, *Diario AOL 15 giugno 1936-4 ottobre 1937*. Milano: Langanesie Co., 1971.

⁷⁶ AUSSME, Marcheggiano, 1936.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Del Boca, *Gli Italiani*, p. 60.

⁷⁹ Oral informants: Tāmer Shifārāw and Sirāk Zāgāyē, both from Dénsā, remember the event well. This is also recorded in the itinerary of Tāddāsā Gābrā Mādhen.

they killed Terfé Kāsā, beating him with heavy clubs, distributed the arms collected and rebelled openly by joining the jungle.⁸⁰ This was a big episode that set fire for Gojjām patriotism to spread further.

Following the summer rains of 1936, Governo Generale made a survey of the political and military situation in Governo dell'Amārā. They found out that the various local rebellions in Lāstā and Bégémder were under the direct order of Wändwāsān and his allying patriot chiefs such as Hailu Kābbädä of Wāg and Kāsā Sebhät of Tegrāy.⁸¹ As already indicated, Hailu had never submitted to the enemy. Moreover, the rebel territories of Dobā and Wārā Ilu were also reported under control of rebels commanded by Abbäbä Arägāy and other chiefs.⁸² The same report also states that, in collaboration with the emissaries of Wändwāsān, the rebel chiefs had stirred the country for action against Governo Generale.

When the rainy season was over, the Italians resumed major offensive operations, the objective of which was to destroy the Ethiopian opposition. One such operation concentrated on the core of resistance in north-central Ethiopia. Here the leading figures of opposition were the Kāsā brothers – *Däjjāch* Abärā and *Däjjāch* Wändwāsān. The former was the patriot leader of Sälälé while the latter was the chief coordinator of the struggles in Tegrāy, Wag. Bégémder and northern Shāwā. As already indicated, patriots between Tegrāy in the north and Shāwā in the south were increasingly drawn towards the orbit of Wändwāsān.

Next, Governo Generale took offensive action. As early as August 1936, that is, immediately after Wändwāsān's escape from Lālibälā, Governo Generale ordered intelligence study on the *däjjāch* and the rebels who followed him. The same sources also relate that aviation from Gondär, Bāhir Dār and Däsé continued bombarding the area

For more information, see "Letters written by Tāddāsā Gäbrä Mādhen to His Majesty Haile Selassie I and Other Figures during the Patriots' Period", N.1799, IES, AAU.

⁸⁰For more information, see Seltene, p. 108.

⁸¹*Il 1° Anno dell'Impero*, V.II, allegato N. 30, 1936.

⁸²*Ibid.*

where Wändwäsän was believed to have taken shelter.⁸³ Again, the same sources also relate that the villages between Lālibālā and Bilbelā Giyorgis were bombarded by planes day after day.

In order to escape from enemy pressure, Wändwäsän transferred his center of resistance, first to Säqotā Mountains with the hope of joining forces with *Däjjāch* Häilu Käbbädä, the rebel chief of Wag.⁸⁴ But the Säqotā terrain was no better safer place for Wändwäsän to withstand heavy enemy pressure and, hence, entered the woods of the upper Tākäzé valley.⁸⁵

Bombardment on Wändwäsän and his forces grew more intense and uninterrupted. Moreover, ordered from Graziani, the Governor of dell'Amārā, Pirzio Biroli on 6 November 1936 transferred his seat from Gondar to Däbrā Tābor to closely coordinate the campaign against the *däjjāch*. Again, because of heavy artillery for months, Wändwäsän sought of taking asylum in the Sudan.⁸⁶ But the intention of Wändwäsän was no secret to Governo Generale that blocked any possible route where he could escape. Studying his movements carefully, Governo Generale reinforced all garrisons, including all paths and passages across Gojjām, Lake Tana, Wälqāyet and Semén with special guards.⁸⁷ It also offered a reward of 5000 Maria Theresa thalers for anyone who could assist in the campaign to capture Wändwäsän.⁸⁸

The end of Wändwäsän was not far because Graziani was determined to eliminate him. Ground and air bombardment continued. Besides, the viceroy ordered Pirzio Biroli that Wändwäsän should not only be captured, but also be passed to the army for eviction.⁸⁹ The Wällo *banda* irregular troops of Captain Farello, who had a good knowledge

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ AUSSME, D-6, rac. 171, Pirzio Biroli, Gondär, al Governo Generale, 17 novembre 1936.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* See also AUSSME, d-6, rac. 171, Allegato N. 61, Pirzio Biroli, radiogramma- regione Gondar- Gojjam, Simien, Gondar 21 novembre 1936.

⁸⁹ AUSSME, P.I⁴- rac. Cart N.8, Notizie Militare dall A.O.I. dal 21 luglio 1936 al 1° marzo 1937.

of the valley and specially assigned for this purpose, aggressively followed the movements of Wändwäsän and his forces. They were assisted with heavy air and ground attacks as well as mustard gas. On the other hand, the *däjjāch* appears to have lacked mobility. On 10 December 1936, after four months intensive fighting, Wändwäsän was defeated and captured along the Tākāze valley, and as has been previously ordered, the army executed him the next day.⁹⁰

The impact of the fall of Wändwäsän on the resistance of the Ethiopian patriots must have been immense. The patriots missed one major chance to coordinate their early struggle against enemy occupation. Nevertheless, the people of north-central Ethiopia continued resisting enemy rule following other patriot chiefs such as Häilu Käbbāda, Gäbrä Hiwät Mäshāshā, Abbäbä Arägāy and others. In fact, *Däjjāch* Hailu appeared as the prominent unifying patriot leader who tried to coordinate the patriot struggles in the region. However, the fate of Häilu was no better than that of Wändwäsän except the fact that he sustained his position as a rebel leader of Wäg and other patriots until his execution by the enemy in September 1937.⁹¹ To the contrary, Gäbrä Hiwot and Abbäbä successfully continued as patriot leaders until the liberation of the country in 1941. This is because both rebel chiefs appear to have been more mobile guerrilla fighters than Wändwäsän or Häilu who had been still lingering more on frontal fighting than exercising guerrilla type of warfare.

This was not the end of the attempt to coordinate the struggle. On the other hand, Governo Generale was not only determined to liquidate the Ethiopian opposition but also to recover the territories it had lost to the patriots. Parallel with the campaign on Wändwäsän, it continued bombarding the Abärā – led patriots of Sälälé aggressively. The bombardment was so heavy and intense that Abärā sought of joining *Rās* Imru in western Ethiopia.⁹² However, when it discovered

⁹⁰ AUSSME, d-6, rac. Allegato N.50, Pirzio Biroli a Capitano Farello, Radiogramma, Gondar, 11 dicembre 1936.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Il 1° Anno dell'Impero*, V.III. Allegato N.64, Colona Belli al Governo Generale – Gabinetto, Addis Abeba, 9 ottobre 1936.

that Abärā had an aim to escape, Governo Generale asked *Rās* Häilu Täklä Häimānot, the Italian *banda* troops chief at Ambo, whether it was possible for Abärā to join Imru in the west.⁹³ The *rās* did not only dismiss the idea but also assured the Italians that it was rather impossible for Abärā to do so because the people of Gendäbärät had already turned hostile to him.⁹⁴

Like his brother Wändwäsän, Abärā did not only become less mobile but also appears to have lacked commitment to continue the struggle though he had fought a series of combats for months without break. Whether Abärā was earlier induced by his brother Wändwäsän to escape or to surrender to the enemy or more recently had known that Wändwäsän had already died, at the moment, there is no indication. What is certain is the fact that the enemy from time to time stepped up its scale of intensive land and air bombardment on Abärā and his forces.

The fall of Abärā was not far. The severity of Governo Generale's campaign, accompanied by false promises and negotiations, made Abärā show inclination to submit. As Tāddäsä Zäwäldé relates, gradually Abärā's camp was split into two: one group supporting his submission and the other stood in opposition.⁹⁵ Understanding the growing changing stand of Abärā for submission, many of the Shāwān patriots and their followers alienated themselves from him. As Tāddäsä writes, even *Shālāqā* Mäsfen Seläshi, who was said to have been close to Abärā, left the latter's camp and stood as a patriot leader of his own rebel formation as many of the Shāwān patriots had already done. This was also true of the Holätā cadets who abandoned Abärā and joined Hailāmāriām Māmmo, another patriot chief in Sälälé.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Tāddäsä Zäwäldé, pp. 230 -231. See also Lessānu Häbtäwäld, *SeläYämāizänägā Welätā*, USA, 1st Ed. 2015, p. 12; Tädlä Zäyohanes, *Itāliā BäEthiopia Kāwālwāl Eskā Gondār, Genbot 1927 – Hedār 1934*. Addis Ababa: Mānkusā Press. 1st Ed. 2004 EC, pp. 12- 124, 338; Bälätā Gäbré, *Bä'edme Godānā lāy Yäguzo Tezetā*. Addis Ababa: Chamber Press, 2004, pp.104 – 109. In the literature all the four authors express their dismay and tend to condemn the last act Abärā had taken.

Soon Abärā abandoned his patriot leadership position. On 21 December 1936 Abärā and his brother Asfā wäsān surrendered to the enemy at Feché on promise that their lives would be spared.⁹⁶ But the enemy executed them as soon as they submitted. This military action cut short the whole effort of Wändwäsān and Abärā to give coordination to the patriotic struggle extending from Tegrāy in the north to Shāwā in the south. Why Abärā surrendered when many of the Shāwān patriots preferred fighting to submission, still remains unknown. Nevertheless, it seems that Abärā had lacked imagination.

Next, Italian military action concentrated on western Ethiopia, a vast territory composed of extensive territories centered at Jimmā, Näqāmté, Goré and Gāmbélā. This was the same but still independent region where the Provisional government had already made its center of struggle against Italian occupation. As already indicated, in June 1936 *Rās* Imru had shifted his center of resistance from Gojjām to Goré. Being escorted by the remnants of the Imperial Bodyguard, who had returned with him from the Sheré war front, and other loyal followers notably from Gojjām, Imru soon assumed the position of regent that entitled him to lead the Provisional government previously headed by *Bitwädäd* Wäldätsādeq Goshu.

The new position authorized *Rās* Imru to administer the country on behalf of the emperor and to organize the people to resist any further Italian advance. The *rās* stayed in Gore for five months, that is, from mid-June to the end of the first week of November 1936. Unfortunately, there is little evidence to discuss how he had been communicating with other patriot chiefs and the extent he tried to influence the direction of the resistance movement in the country. Similarly, the *Tequr Anbässā* showed no remarkable achievement following the Bonäyyā episode of June 1936, except taking the initiative of coordinating their forces with that of *Rās* Imru, and envisaging grand resistance against the enemy.

At this juncture one thing must be clear. Whatever correspondence Imru had with the resistance chiefs or territorial governors, that

⁹⁶Del Boca, *Gli Italiani*, pp. 60-61; Täddäsä Zäwäldé, p.230-31.

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information appears to have been shrouded and kept in secrecy from ordinary people for obvious reasons. As there was no modern communication, Imru and others depended solely on traditional methods, that is, foot or animal transport. This can be easily understood from the works of Tāddāsā Méchā and Häddis Alāmāyāhu, though they narrated Imru's brief stay in the west, do not seem to have direct access to information of the time. So, it becomes imperative to depend much on Italian sources that also included intercepted telegram correspondence between Imru at home and the emperor abroad in Britain.

On the other hand, though there is no evidence indicating what Imru had been exactly doing to promote the task that has been entrusted to him, the scanty information available shows that, in the main, he was waiting for the external world situation around the emperor to change in favor of Ethiopia.⁹⁷ This can be attested by the exchange of numerous intercepted Ethiopian telegrams as well as dispatch of imperial messengers, notably the Heruy brothers – Fākādä Selāssié (Imru's son in-law) and Sirāk (former secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) - who had been shuttling between London and Goré via Gämbélā and the Anglo – Egyptian Sudan - as well as some other additional information from the works of Tāddāsā Méchā and Häddis Alāmāyāhu who both were in the camp of *Ras* Imru throughout his stay in the west.

To keep up and promote the Ethiopian resistance, Haile Selassie operated principally along two lines. On one hand, he made continuous efforts to reinforce the Goré government with additional manpower and advice, and, on the other, he conducted ceaseless political and diplomatic struggle at Geneva, headquarters of the League of Nations to which Ethiopia has been a full member since 1923. As can be summarized from available literature, the emperor had several reasons to defend the Ethiopian cause. On one hand, he argued that the Imperial Government was sovereign throughout western Ethiopia, discharging its duties peacefully and sustaining confidence in the League of Nations and, on the other, he asserted that Ethiopians had been waging an implacable guerrilla warfare and

⁹⁷ This appears to have been the general notion and expectation prevailing among Ethiopian patriots and exiles.

this would continue until either the enemy would be driven out of the country or they would be exterminated.⁹⁸ At the same time, the emperor accused that the enemy had continued to savagely massacre the Ethiopian people using mass weapons of destruction against which the Ethiopians, without resources and without sufficient arms would not be able to sustain resistance in the face of a projected Italian advance.⁹⁹

In line with this, Emperor Haile Selassie made appeals to the League members in which he underlined that the Ethiopians, no matter how hard they fought, would not be in a position to challenge the enemy and respect their sovereignty unless they received foreign assistance. He, therefore, renewed his request of a loan of 10 million pound sterling on international basis.¹⁰⁰

Haile Selassie's request received no positive response from Europe. Firstly, Italy strongly opposed any aid to Ethiopia on international basis because it argued that it had occupied Ethiopia. Secondly, Britain remained non-committal to entertain the issue at government level. Instead, it pushed the question of assistance further for the League of Nations to decide. In July 1936 the League did not only reject the emperor's request for international aid, but it also officially lifted its sanctions from Italy.¹⁰¹ This decision must have lowered the high Ethiopian expectation of the League at home as well as abroad.

Yet, the Emperor stood adamant that the Ethiopian resistance should continue as a symbol supporting his political struggle for independence abroad. According to Del Boca, there are indications when *Däjjāch* Nāsibu Zāmānu'él, the gallant commander of the

⁹⁸ This is reported by *The Times* correspondent from Geneva, depending on Emperor Haile Selassie's appeal to the League of Nations after receiving a telegram from the Gore government. For further information, see *The Times*, Geneva, October 23, 1936.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. Though difficult to recapitulate its development, in July 1936, *The Times* issued a statement from the Ethiopian Legation that Dr. W.C. Martin, the Ethiopian Minister in London, had also made a renewed appeal for at least 2,000,000 pound sterling for the defense and relief of inhabitants of western Ethiopia.

¹⁰¹ Asfā-Wossen, p. 125.

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Ogādén war front, had secretly met Montana, the Soviet ambassador in London, with the objective of transferring a subsidy of 1 million pound sterling (of the 10 million) to the Ethiopian government at Goré but with at utmost secrecy.¹⁰² In other words, the whole effort was, the Soviet Union, acting on behalf of Ethiopia, would receive the money from Britain and pass it over to the Ethiopian government at Goré, without revealing the position of the British government.¹⁰³ But there is no indication as to what happened to the Ethiopian effort. Nevertheless, this does not seem to have materialized because Näsibu suddenly died in October 1936 and there is no information regarding the issue afterwards.

In the meantime the situation at home increasingly grew complex. Both Mussolini and Haile Selassie competed to exert their influence that further affected the worsening situation in western Ethiopia. Being determined to show to the world that Ethiopia was an Italian occupied territory, Mussolini in October 1936, ordered Graziani that the western territories should be conquered urgently. It was, however, learned that Governo Generale had already smuggled agents who, in collaboration with Catholic fathers such as Padre Borello, had been working hard to make the Oromo chiefs in Wällägä oppose the Ethiopian administration, by propagating and equating it as “Shāwān domination”.¹⁰⁴ Regarding the development of the new events, evidence does not clearly show the position of *Däjjāch* Häbtämāriām of Nāqāmté until 8 October when the Italian flag was raised at the compound of the *däjjāch*.¹⁰⁵ Whether he had fully decided or not, it appeared that the *däjjāch* had thrown his lot with Italy.

At the same time, Governo Generale embarked on making necessary preparations to conquer the western Ethiopian territories. Simultaneously, since July and August of the same year Italian planes succeeded in landing at Nāqāmté and other strategic centers where they stored arms, munitions, food items and other materials.

¹⁰² In early September 1936 the Italians detected that there was a secret meeting between Montana and Nasibu regarding loan transfer. For more information, see Del Boca, *Gli Italiani*, p. 37.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Del Boca, p.33.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

Furthermore, the enemy cleared roads, controlled the bridge over the Dädéssā River, constructed small bridges at key points and built fortifications at strategic places. Adopting a passive defense system, the enemy was waiting for the rainy season to come to an end to take military action.

On the other hand, though the Ethiopian leadership at Gore was aware of what the Italians had been doing, they made little effort to change the new political situation. Neither the *Tequr Anbässā* nor the Provisional government took any noticeable measure in this respect. As will be soon related, this act would have serious negative impact on the expected coordinated Ethiopian resistance against the enemy later.

Despite the ever growing challenge on the ground, Haile Selassie kept the Imru - led Provisional government at home alive promising that international aid would soon arrive. This can be attested by the telegrams and messages Haile Selassie and Imru exchanged from July to November 1936. For instance, in one of his telegrams, the emperor said: “We have sent you a plane with one man [who] will explain [you] the whole situation.”¹⁰⁶

On 20 July 1936 a small Fokker plane piloted by Carl Gustav von Rosen landed at Goré with numerous messages from the emperor. As Del Boca states, the purpose of the mission was twofold: to find out if a Swedish Red Cross Ambulance could be effected, and with British compliance, to observe the situation of the Provisional government regarding its authority and its army.¹⁰⁷

Having observed the situation of the Provisional government, von Rosen returned to Europe soon. There is no information on what the pilot reported. Similarly, the contents of the letters von Rosen brought

¹⁰⁶ The Italian version reads: “Abbiamo inviato un aeroplano con una persona chi ti spieghera tutto la situazione.” The document is contained in ASMAE, Ethiopia, Fonde Guerra, b.109, f.6, as quoted in Del Boca, *Gli Italiani*, pp. 35-6. According to Del Boca, upon Imru’s request, Fākādā Selassié flew to Europe with von Rosen carrying a message from *Rās Imru*.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p.35.

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still remain unknown. But as Del Boca indicates, it seems certain that neither arms nor money appear to have reached Imru's Provisional government at the moment except that the arrival of the plane was propagated with the coming of assistance from the external world as particularly evidenced by the capture of two letters in north – central Ethiopia. One letter read: “We hope that God is our helper. The *Negus* with arms and British aeroplanes have reached Goré - Wällägā. The *Negus* has given orders to all peasants to become ready with their chiefs.”¹⁰⁸ The letter was found dispatched to the villages of Lāstā by a follower of *Däjjāch* Wändwäsän. The other letter was reported to have been directly addressed to *Däjjāch* Wändwäsän, in which the *Negus* conferred on Wändwäsän the title of commander of the patriots of Lāstā, Yājju and Bégémder and, moreover, assured the patriots of obtaining British assistance.¹⁰⁹ Whether this was one of the many letters Haile Selassie had sent earlier with von Rosen or later with Fākādä Selāssié Heruy, it is difficult to verify. It is apparent, however, that the letters convey a message that the resistance should continue.

Other events occurred that made the situation in western Ethiopia grow more complex. There is an indication that *Rās* Imru had sent a telegram in which he informed the emperor that resistance would appear to be impossible due to the growing disaffection of the local people against the Ethiopian administration.¹¹⁰ Moreover, Imru had sent Fāqādä Selāssié with von Rosen probably carrying a message

¹⁰⁸ Its Italian translation reads: “Speriamo che Dio aiuti. *Negus* con armi et aeroplani inglesi ginto Gore-Uollega. *Negus* dato ordini tenersi pronti tutti paesani. Noi stiamo fuori con nostro capo.” This telegram is contained in *Il 1° Anno dell'Impero*. Vol. III. Allegato N. 169, Pirzio Biroli, Gondar al Governo Generale Stato Maggiore, Addis Ababa, 26 ottobre 1936.

¹⁰⁹ *Il 1° Anno dell'impero*, Vol. II, Pirzio Biroli, Gondar, al Governo Generale Stato Maggiore, Addis Abeba, Allegato N. 182, 27 ottobre 1936. It is stated that Bälāy Täsämmā brought the letter of the *negus* to Wändwäsän who announced to his people that British assistance had already arrived in western Ethiopia.

¹¹⁰ Del Boca stated that on 21 July 1936 Erskine, the British consul in Goré, had telegraphed to the Foreign Office, London, describing the situation in Goré reflecting the view of *Rās* Imru that resistance would be rather impossible because of the disaffection of the local people in the western territories. Häddis's conversation with *Bitwädäd* Wäldä Tṣādeq also conveys a similar message. For more information, see Häddis, pp.145 – 147; Del Boca, *Gli Italiani*, pp. 35-36.

explaining the kind of disunity growing among the local population in light of Italian propaganda.

It is apparent that the emperor found the new situation disturbing. He decided that he should return to Goré immediately and play his traditional role as a unifying figure and restore amicable relations among the people.¹¹¹ To this effect, Haile Selassie requested the British government to facilitate his voyage home across the Sudan.¹¹² But London declined to entertain the emperor's request on the ground that it would be risky for the emperor if returned.¹¹³ On the other hand, a number of factors appear to have converged to worry Imru to the extent of developing a tendency to abandon the country: absence of a unifying national figure, advance of the Italians from time to time and their acceptance by the local people, and more importantly, the delay of Haile Selassie's response.¹¹⁴

In October 1936 Fäkādä Selāssié, who had left Goré for London with von Rosen, returned to Goré with an imperial letter to Imru. According to Erskine, the emperor did not only advice Imru to stay in the country but he also ordered him to conduct further resistance.¹¹⁵

Imru accepted the imperial order. This is attested by the following last telegram excerpts he and Haile Selassie exchanged. On 10 November 1936 Imru sent his final telegram to the emperor, saying: "We have made arrangements to march in unity with our people who have been waiting, and to defend ourselves from the enemy."¹¹⁶To this the

¹¹¹ Del Boca, pp. 35-6.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Tāddāsā Méchā, p. 58-60, 86-88; Häddis, pp. 137,165-66,175-76,189-192.

¹¹⁵ Erskine's telegram to the Foreign Office, 9 October 1936, as cited in Del Boca, *Gli Italiani*, p. 35.

¹¹⁶ In Italian translation the telegram reads: "Abbiamo disposto di metterci in marcia per unirsi alla vostra gente che ci attende e difenderci dal nemico." It is contained in ACS, b. 40, fs. 33/11, translated telegrams between Emperor Haile Selassie and Wāldä Tsādik and Imru.

emperor responded: “At the moment I am grieved not to be found among you. Let God assist you from falling into enemy hands.”¹¹⁷

In November 1936 the patriotic struggles of the transitional phase had reached their climax: the struggles led by Wändwäsän and Abärā in the north and that of *Rās* Dästā and his followers in the south could be cited as particular examples. Though late, *Rās* Imru also launched counter - offensive from the west. He ordered mobilization of forces under the Provisional government. Initially, his first plan of counter – offensive had several components: *Rās* Imru, heading his army and the *Tequr Anbässā* would move via Wällāga to Ambo, *Nägādrās* Wäldä Sāmā’et, Gore Customs officer, would lead the Gore army and join those of *Kāntibā* Tännā Gāshāw at Jimmā, and the latter two would proceed to Wäliso.¹¹⁸ From this it is not difficult to understand that the planned march was intended towards Addis Ababa.

At the moment, whether Imru was acting alone or in collaboration with other prominent patriot leaders in the country, is not strongly confirmed. Yet, it is not difficult to state that the *rās* has not been acting in isolation. Though little is known about the details, the numerous imperial letters von Rosen and Fäqādä Selāssié carried to *Rās* Imru and other chiefs at different times, and again those letters captured by the Italian command in central Ethiopia suggest that there may have been an attempt to exert concerted attack against Governo Generale.¹¹⁹ Again, according to Häddis Alāmāyāhu, Imru had written letters to *Rās* Dästā, *Däjjāch* Tāyé Gulelāté, *Däjjāch* Häbtāmāriām and others.¹²⁰ However, what he exactly stated in the letters is not known. Yet, it is again possible to assume that the *rās* at

¹¹⁷ The translated telegram reads: “Sono addolorato che in questa ora non mi trovi tra di voi. Che iddio vi assista da cadere in mano del nemico.” See ACS, b. 40, f.33/11, translated telegrams between Haile Selassie and Imru and Wäldä Tṣādek, 11 November 1936.

¹¹⁸ Tāddāsā Méchā, p. 75; Häddis, 75-76. See also Del Boca, p.36.

¹¹⁹ The various efforts and actions of the patriot chiefs convey a similar message.

¹²⁰ Notes taken from TV interview given by Häddis Alāmāyāhu to Häimānot Alāmu, *Face to Face TV Program*, December 30, 2001, Addis Ababa (Seltene took some notes of the interview). In his book, *Tezetā*, Häddis also confirms that *Rās* Imru informed him that he had dispatched messages to patriot chiefs such as *Rās* Dästā in Sidāmā and others in Bälé and Gāmo Gofā. For more information, see, *Tezetā*, p. 147.

least might have informed them that he would launch a counter – offensive against the enemy from the west and advance towards Addis Ababa. The information we gather from such fragmentary sources imply that Imru appears to have expected the other patriot leaders like *Däjjāch* Wändwäsän, *Rās* Dästā and others to launch similar counter - offensive against the common enemy and move towards Addis Ababa from various directions.¹²¹ But whether Imru had a comprehension of the status of the other rebel chiefs and the magnitude of the problem around them or not, the fact remains that by November 1936 both Wändwäsän and Dästā were under heavy enemy pressure. Again, if we closely analyze the prevailing situation, it would not be difficult to understand that the patriot leaders had been overstretched over vast territories with rare communication among themselves.

On the part of Imru, there is no indication that he had made sufficient preparation to combat the enemy though he mobilized his forces to block any Italian advance towards the western territories. However, as already indicated, the Oromo of Wällägā did not only block but also attacked Imru’s forces, denying them any passage through their territories towards Ambo.¹²² In the fighting that ensued at Guyi along the Dädessä valley afterwards, much bloodshed was reported to have been shed on both opposing sides.¹²³ This time Imru and his advisers revised their plan and headed towards Jimmä with the objective of making it a center of operations. But when they discovered that Italian forces had already occupied the town, Imru’s forces retreated southward towards Käffā to join forces with *Däjjāch* Tāyé Gulelātē and cross the border to the Sudan.¹²⁴ But Italian forces pursued and mercilessly bombed them and their large following from the air.

¹²¹ The various actions that have been already taken such as that of July 1936 (on Addis Ababa) and several other attempts intended, for instance, by the Kāsā brothers (Abārā and Asfāwäsän) afterwards again on the capital, the movements of *Rās* Imru and *Rās* Dästā towards Addis Ababa support this view.

¹²² Tāddäsä Méchā, pp. 80-81; Häddis, 57, 151-153. See also Del Boca, p. 155.

¹²³ Tāddäsä Méchā, pp. 77-8; Häddis, pp. 151-56. This incident impacted Imru to change his first plan and moved towards Agāro- Jimmä.

¹²⁴ ACS, b.57, f. 32/1, Colonel Princivalle, Leqamte, al Governo Generale-Gabinett, Addis Ababa, 21 novembre 1936; Tāddäsä Méchā, pp. 93, 97-8.

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Several engagements took place, the battles of Gera and Gojāb River in Käffā being the heaviest. The Battle of Gera, which was fought the whole day from the morning till dusk, was recorded as the toughest in which Imru and his military council showed their leadership capability.¹²⁵ On the other hand, evidence shows that as much as it was heavy, this battle alone had drastically sapped much of the resources of the Imru – led resistance.¹²⁶ At the same time Italian forces relentlessly pursued and fell upon the exhausted Ethiopian warriors near the Gojāb River where, after some skirmishes, on 18 December 1936, Imru and his troops were forced to surrender.¹²⁷ These and other episodes brought the whole effort of the five months old Provisional government and the Imru-led one month long march from Goré to Gojāb-Bonga to an end. The consequence of Gojāb was so immense that Seltene also summarized it in another work as follows:

The capture of *Rās* Imru brought the struggle of the *Tequr Anbässā* to an end. Moreover, the Gērā – Gojāb incident cut short any possible coordination between the forces of *Rās* Imru, *Rās* Dästā and other patriots. The demoralizing effect of this on Ethiopian patriots must have been considerable.¹²⁸

Next, the hope of giving leadership and organization to the Ethiopian resistance lay on the shoulders of *Rās* Dästā Dämtāw, the last major and perhaps believed to be the most organized resistance leader against the enemy. However, lack of evidence precludes us from discussing the year-old Dästā – led patriotic resistance sufficiently. Nevertheless, I would like to wind up this study with some leading remarks on the resistance in the south.

Returning from the *Gänäle-Doriā* front, *Rās* Dästā made his rebel stronghold on the rugged highland terrain of Sidāmā where he strongly resisted enemy troops denying them any passage through Sidāmā for the following nine months. Here the *rās* used the Wādērā

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, p.99-100; Häddis, p.176.

¹²⁶ Tāddāsā Méchā, 103-110; Häddis described well how much the Battle of Gerā sapped the resources of the Ethiopian army, p. 176.

¹²⁷ Tāddāsā Méchā, p. 103-106; Häddis, pp.177-88.

¹²⁸ Seltene, p.74.

cave as his main stronghold as well as his center of operation. However, due to the prolonged and intense nature of the fighting and due to heavy loss of manpower and resources from time to time, Dästā was forced to leave Sidāmā for Bālē and Arsi where he continued fighting against the enemy for the next three months.¹²⁹

However, his fixation in Sidāmā and other adjacent territories for long appears to have brought strong impact on Dästā's resistance. For instance, it was when it became too late that the *rās* sought of moving to the western Ethiopian border in order to make the Gibe valley a center of resistance.¹³⁰ The same source relates that Dästā hired local Sidamā road guides to lead him the way to the valley but, after a while, the guides were reported to have betrayed him.¹³¹ Yet, the *rās* did not lose hope. He decided to take desperate action on the enemy in Addis Ababa. This time Addis Ababa was seized by panic because it was rumored that the *rās* would capture Addis Ababa and exterminate the Italians.¹³²

Graziani, who had a good knowledge of the intention and movements of *Rās* Dästā, did not take time to react. He mobilized air and ground forces that inflicted heavy casualties upon the war – weary and badly dwindled forces of the *rās* and that of his lieutenants.¹³³ Thus, on February 24, 1937, at the bitterly – fought Battle of Gojätti in Gurāgéländ, Dästā was captured and executed.¹³⁴ This was also true of the *ras*'s loyal lieutenants such as Bāyānā Mārid, Gäbrāmāriām Gāri, Bāzābeh Selāshi and Shimāles Habté – all of whom, heading a considerable number of gallant warriors, gave their lives to defending

¹²⁹Säifu, p. 157.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 184-189.

¹³¹*Ibid.*, pp.184-85.

¹³² Poggiali, p.71; Del Boca, p. *Gli Italiani*, p. 79. Poggiali was an Italian journalist who happened to be in Addis Ababa and kept a diary of the events at the time, while Del Boca related the spread of Dästā's propaganda, for instance, saying: that Dästā while marching towards Addis Ababa had defeated Graziani's troops, that Graziani was dead, etc.

¹³³ Säifu, pp. 185-89.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 184-90. For more information, see Del Boca, *Gli Italiani*, pp. 68-76; Seltene, pp. 150-51.

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their country from enemy occupation.¹³⁵ This episode formed another big blow that denied the Ethiopian resistance the establishment of a unified organization and central leadership.

In spite of the multiple and formidable Italian military challenges the pioneering fighters faced during the transitional phase, there arose a more formidable and successful popular resistance (1937 -1941) in which the Ethiopians fought the enemy adopting a new strategy of struggle, that is, guerrilla warfare, to the extent that the enemy was forced to hold a garrison state. But to discuss this is beyond the scope of this study.

Conclusion

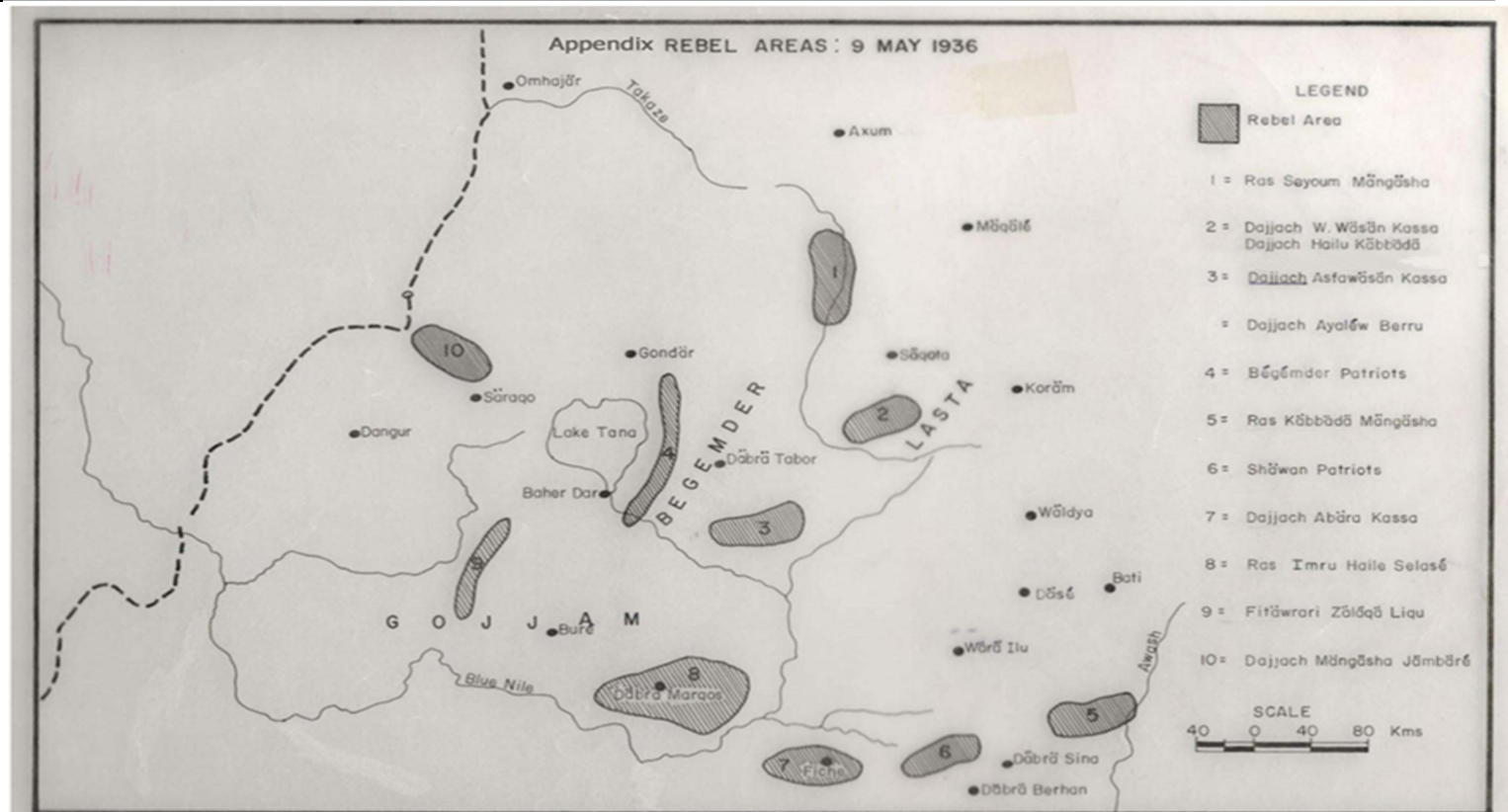
In the preceding discussion, considerable emphasis has been given to the endeavors the pioneering patriot leaders made to coordinate the Ethiopian opposition and the challenges they faced from the enemy during the transitional phase of the resistance (1936 – 1937). This time the patriot leaders tried not only to agitate the citizenry, give leadership and organization to the struggle, but also to coordinate it. Nevertheless, at this stage the centrifugal force from the center, that is, Fascist Italian forces, were too strong to bring the effort of the patriots to realization. Because of these and other factors, the pioneers of the resistance fell one after the other. Why this happened, the study has discerned a number of points.

First, the material and organizational preparation of the struggle were not a match to overcome those of the enemy. Second, the struggle was chiefly commanded and fought by the war – weary feudo-aristocratic leaders and their followers. This is to say, the leadership was fatigued and lacked commitment. Third, the patriot leaders were not able to devise a new strategy of warfare. In other words, though guerrilla warfare had been announced to be adopted as a method of struggle earlier, the patriot leadership not only largely dwelt on large – scale mobilization and mass confrontation, but it also lacked mobility. This was invariably a common characteristic feature of the prominent pioneering patriot leaders. This was obviously more advantageous to the enemy than to the patriots.

¹³⁵Säifu, pp. 171-181. For details, see Seltene, p. 151; Del Boca, *Gli Italiani*, pp. 68-76.

Fourth, the patriot leadership lacked ideological orientation. They were not able to devise new methods of propaganda and agitation so as to align the people on their side as what their successors, the popular resistance leaders, did and became more successful during the last phase of the resistance (1937 – 1941).

Fifth, several of the patriot leaders operated among disaffected people, who denied or gave them lukewarm support. This was particularly true in the regions where *Rās Imru* and *Rās Dästā* led – struggles operated. This has been a widespread phenomenon in Ethiopian history which necessitates the need of social institutions in order to overcome such recurring problems and enhance social integration and cohesion among the Ethiopian people.



Source:- This is adapted from Governo Generale, AOI, Stato Maggiore, II. 1° Anno de ll' impero, V.I. 1936. This map illustrates the distribution of the early major rebel areas and the pioneers of the Ethiopian resistance between the Takaze River in the north and the Awash River in the south.