



Review

Rural unrest and resistance in Ethiopia: The experience of Wello and Shewa provinces. A comparative analysis

Temesgen Gebeyehu

Bahir Dar university, department of history

E-mail: temesgen777@yahoo.com

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In the early years of the Ethiopian revolution, peasant opposition was a countrywide phenomenon. A typical example was the case of Welo and Shewa which alarmed the *Därg*. Led by local notables, peasants put up an armed resistance in support of the deposed monarch. The prevalence of confusion and uncertainty within the local government in the provinces also contributed to agrarian unrest and revolt in Welo and Shewa. However, the initial attempts of the local gentry to stage counter-revolutionary uprisings in Welo and Shewa did not inspire enthusiasm for long. The momentum of peasant defiance soon started to evaporate within a short period of time. The opposition that lacked coordination and determination was, therefore, quickly put down. The new regime took immediate and cruel measures against them and thereby brought the situation under control. This was followed by a series of mopping –up operations by the security forces. This study highlights several points of paramount importance. It will try to investigate the factors that made the peasants of Welo and Shewa revolt against the new regime, the *Därg*. In this regard, attempts will be made to bring out the historical, political, and social origins of rural defiance in the region. Moreover, in this paper an attempt will be made to assess the degree of organization and intensity of the resistance. The study, therefore, will try to fill in some gaps in the study of peasant rebellions in the province under consideration.

Keywords: Rural unrest, Welo and Shewa, peasants, resistance

INTRODUCTION

Historical background

In 1974, the first African classical and social revolution destroyed the ancient "Solomonic Dynasty" of Ethiopia. With this, the country made a sharp break with the past. Haile-Sellse's regime that was impressive for its longevity was replaced by the provisional military Government.

Soon after it came to power, the new regime faced several opposition groups which can be categorized into two broad groups: the left and the right. The opposition of the left was urban-based and ideologically driven. This group included the intelligentsia, organized workers, trade unionists and the city's lumpen proletariat. Of this group, the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party (EPRP)

was the largest (Zegaw Asfera, "Some Aspects of Historical Development in Amhara, Wello:1700-1815"(B.A Thesis, Addis Ababa university, 1973), pp.1-3; Nega Ayele, "Centralization versus regionalism in Ethiopia: The case of Gojjam" (BA Thesis, Haile Selasse I University, June 1971), pp12-3; Gebru Tareke, *Ethiopia: Power and Protest, Peasant Revolts in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University press, 1991), p.163.). The EPRP and others opposed the Derg on the ground that the regime was not radical enough to lead a popular revolution. Leadership of the left (intelligentsia) was mainly provided by Marxist intellectuals who, during the old regime, has stayed in exile in western Europe and the USA. Following the 1974 upheavals, they returned home and established parties (Gebru, p.163).

The second group is the rightist opposition that emerged after the land reform. Although important, it has been virtually ignored by students of Ethiopian revolution. The existing literature has concentrated on the development at the center or on the early, violent and dramatic phase of the revolution. The *Derg* itself gave it little attention to it in comparison with the leftist opposition or the separatists (Nega, p.28.). It was mostly rural-based and its main supporters were the local gentry. The main actors were traditional forces who did not fight for the control of the towns in the 1974 movement. These included landlords, middle level officials, judges, local governors or members of parliament.

After the killings of November 1974 and subsequent crisis, the opposition of the local gentry to the policies of the military government became strong. In a number of rural areas of Wello and Shewa local landlords and former *Woreda* and *Awraja* governors launched armed opposition in an attempt to prevent the implementation of the reforms and, if possible, subvert the new political order (Nega, p.28; Temesgen Gebeyehu, "The History of the 1968/9 peasant Uprising in Eastern Gojjam" (BA thesis, Baher Dar University, June 2001) ,p.2.). Their opposition in Wello and Shewa was serious enough to alarm the military regime. From the right opposition, the reaction of the landed aristocracy to the military government was different from that of the gentry. The powerful, often absentee, landlords had positions of high authority in the imperial state apparatus. In 1974 the power of the aristocracy crumbled like a house of cards (John Markakis, *Ethiopia: Anatomy of a Traditional Polity* (London: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 76-7; Kiflu Tadese. *The Generation. Ethiopia: Transformation and Conflict. The History of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party. Part II* (Lanham: University Press of Americana, Inc., 1998), p.2,6.). This class put up no rural unrest when it was stripped of its authority and wealth. Moreover, no voice was heard, in both rural and urban areas, in its defence. Some members of the class were arrested or removed from power during their initial attempt at organizing opposition.

Rural Ethiopia, including Wello and Shewa province, did not take active part in the 1974 upheavals (Kiflu ,p.2,6.). Some months later, however, led by *balabbats* (local officials) and former officials, peasants of Wello and Shewa started an armed opposition against the *Derg*. There were a number of socio-economic and political factors for the outbreak of rural opposition in Wello and Shewa against the new regime. To begin with, let us start with land reform. Regarding the impact of land reform in northern Ethiopia such as Wello and Shewa, there is no common agreement among writers. Some, like Kiflu Tadese, argue that because of the nature of land ownership, the land reform proclamation did not have significant effect upon the day- to -day life of the majority of the peasantry. Instead, the main factor that led to peasant discontent and rebellion was the attempt of the

regime to mobilize the peasantry for the war in Eritrea (Ibid).

Others argue that land was the most important issue among the peasants of Wello and Shewa in particular and those in the north in general. According to them, in the past, land had been used by local *balabbats* for mobilizing the poor peasantry for the struggle against the process of centralization (Hoben, pp 73-8; Markakis, pp.84-86. Allan Hoben, *Land Tenure among the Amhara of Ethiopia* (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 1973), p 214.). In Wello and Shewa, *rist* land tenure was the dominant form of land ownership. The *rist* holders (peasants) regarded themselves as absolute owners of their land. The new land reform marked a sharp break from this tradition. Proclamation No 31 of 1975, which is entitled "Public Ownership of Rural Lands Proclamation", refers only to the use or possession right of the peasant over his holdings. The law prohibits ownership of land by individuals or organizations (Teshale, pp.79-82; Markakis, pp.84-87.).

Thus, the land reform was not welcome, at least initially, by the peasants of Wello and Shewa. The local gentry in particular attempted to persuade ordinary peasants that the new regime was threatening their *rist* rights. The land reform appeared in the *Negarit Gazeta* (the official gazette) at the end of April, 1975. The process of implementing the reform was delayed for sometime partly because of the general unrest in most parts of Wello and Shewa province (Christophor Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.3.). The popular grievance caused by the land reform received additional support from some urban dwellers following the proclamation on the nationalization of urban land and extra houses on 26 July 1975 (John W. Harbeson, *The Ethiopian Transformation: The Quest for the post-Imperial state* (West View Press, 1988), p. 82.). This proclamation, like the rural land proclamation, provided for the confiscation of all private extra urban lands and houses without compensation. In this regard, both reforms dispossessed the gentry whose dominant position had rested upon land ownership.

Secondly, the reforms were initiated without giving due attention to their implementation. Most government offices, except the offices of district or sup-province or Provincial administration, were still staffed by members and/or supporters of the land owners (Teshale, p. 167.). These included middle level and junior officials of the old regime. Such men exploited the situation to incite and support the revolt against the new regime and thereby undermined the reform processes. However, others wanted to restructure the imperial political order to a considerable extent probably to take the benefits and opportunities that were opened up as a result of the restructuring (Clapham, p.40; Bahru, p.229; Harold Aspen, "Models of Democracy_-Perceptions of Power. Government and Peasantry in Ethiopia," in Bahru Zewde

and Siegfried Pausewang (eds.), *Ethiopia the Challenge of Democracy from Below* (Stockholm: Elanders Gotab, 2002) p.p.61-63.).

True, many of the powerful nobilities or officials were removed through arrests, execution or retirement in 1974. For example, in the province of Wello and Shewa, except its supporters, without taking their ages and services into consideration, the *Derg* removed district and sup-province governors through retirement (Desalegn Rahamato. "Land and Agrarian Unrest in Wällo, Northern Ethiopia, Pre-and Post-Revolution Ethiopia" (Addis Ababa University, 1996), pp.32-3; Workneh Zemedkun, "EMALEDEH: A Brief Political History" (B ED Thesis, Bahir Dar University, June 2001), p.3.). This was probably made to weaken the local gentry whose power was entrenched in the rural areas. The traditional and strong vertical social ties linked former local officials with the peasants. This in turn enabled them to form a formidable rural unrest against the *Derg* within a short period of time (Clampham. Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary..., p. 51.).

Thirdly, there was an attempt to save one's life from summary execution by the *Derg*. The killing of the officials and ministers of the old regime in November 1974 was a warning to the imperial officials and their associates in the provinces (Desalegn, p.32.). As the *Derg* continued to arrest and sometimes execute important nobilities and officials, unrest broke out among the gentry, including members of parliament (Clampham., p.53.). The activities of the provincial representatives of the *Derg* also aggravated the political tension. For example, in the late 1975 over a thousand men were appointed and sent to different provinces, including Wello and Shewa. This was done to dislodge the entrenched imperial bureaucracy and replace it with a new and pro-*Derg* personnel (Clampham., p.51; Desalegn, p.35. Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux. *The Ethiopian Revolution* (London: Verso Editions and NLB, 1981), pp. 104-6 .).

The new appointees, called "apostles of change" included provincial, sup-provincial and district administrators, development agents and local staff of the Ministry of Land Reform (Desalegn, Pp. 588-9.). By the second half of the year, most of the gentry had been removed from their posts in the two provinces (Kiflu, p.2,6.). Yet, most of the appointees sent to Wello and Shewa were members of the army. In the first year of the revolution, the new appointees carried out a policy of terror in the town of Desse as well as in some *Awraja* and *Woreda* towns. Members of the old aristocracy, retired officials and the wealthy nobles were arrested in large numbers. Some of them were later executed. Such actions frightened even those who kept their heads down (Yezehaem Tesfa. "The Raza Operation" (B.A.Thesis, Bahir Dar University, 2001), pp.10-2.). Archival materials substantiate such developments.

Fourthly, the conservative nature of the rural Ethiopia can also be considered as contributory factors for the

peasant defiance in Wello and Shewa. This can be explained in terms of religion and loyalty to the Emperor (Teshome G. Wegaw. "The Burden and Glory of Being Schooled: An Ethiopian Dilemma," in *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, pp. 487-493.). In pre-revolutionary Ethiopia, people considered their king as the representative of God on earth. Thus, any one who opposed the Emperor was seen as a rebel against God (Ibid).

Finally, the role of bandits in organizing and escalating this popular discontent and protest was important. According to Crummey, banditry "in the nineteenth and twentieth century Ethiopia, represented the violent defiance of established authority" (Donald Crummey. "Banditry and Resistance: Noble and peasant in Nineteenth Century Ethiopia." In *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, pp. 588-89. Zegaw Asfera, "Some Aspects of Historical Development in Amhara, Wello: 1700-1815" (B.A Thesis, Addis Ababa university, 1973), pp.1-3.). In Amharic banditry is *Shiftnet*. In the mid of 1970s, banditry was the order of the day in Wello and Shewa. Belw,

Wello

In Wello, rural opposition against the *Derg* began just after the proclamation of the land reform in 1975. The rural unrest lasted for two and half years and the cost to both the security forces and the peasantry was very high. One of the first acts of the *Derg* after it seized power in September 1974 was the abolishing of the special Status of Wello, whose administration was vested in the crown prince and military men were appointed as administrators at all levels of the province (Fekadu Begna, "A Tentative History of Wello: 1855-1908" (B.A Thesis, Addis Ababa University, May 1972), Pp.53-57.). In fact, the *Derg* placed Wello under military administration on the ground that the governorate-general was suffering from drought and famine. The chief administrator of the province was now colonel Getahun Ejigu and all sup-provincial administrators were majors or major equivalents, except in Lasta (*Ibid*).

In the first years of the revolution, there was confusion and uncertainty in Wello. In January 1975 major Atnafu Abate, the second most powerful man in the *Derg* at the time, had authorized the deployment of a rapid deployment force in Dessie. However, a force of this size was inadequate to provide protection to a province as large and as inaccessible as Wello. The *nechilebashes* (local militia) were one of the early victims of the revolution as they lost the land they had for their service and thus they were among the first group to oppose the revolution (Kiflu, p. 6; Tefera Haile Selasé. *The Ethiopian Revolution (1974-91): From a Monarchical Autocracy to a Military Oligarchy* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1997), p. 193; Molla Tikuye. "System of Land Tenure and

Peasant Protest in Gubbalafto Woreda:1785-1974".(B.A Thesis, Addis Ababa University,May1984),PP.2-5).

Wello was also becoming the active center for organized insurgent movements such as the EPRP, TPLF and EPLF. In addition, by the last quarter of 1975, EPLF armed and supported Ali Mirra, the traditional sultan of the Afar, who became active in northeast Wello and central Yejju (Molla, PP.2-5). Here, we may ask who were the rebels and what were they fighting for? To list the names of rebels is difficult yet the leaders were a former judge, governor, *nechelebahes* and so on. The majority of the rebel leaders had traditional titles ranging from *Balambaras* to *Dejazmach* (Ibid).

The first outbreak of armed rural unrest occurred in Lasta led by Dejach Berhane-Mesqel Desta. On 14 March 1975, his forces attacked Lalibela, the sup-provincial capital. He also attacked and over-ran Sekota, capital of Wag *Awrajja*(sup-province) (Molla Tikuye. "System of Land Tenure and Peasant Protest in Gubbalafto Woreda:1785-1974".(B.A Thesis, Addis Ababa University,May1984),PP.2-5). Just as the time of 1960 anti-tax revolt, Wadla Delanta was again in the forefront of oppositional activity. *Grazmach* Hailu Barenti and *Kegnazmach* Assefa Tarekegn were leaders of the insurrection. In Wore Himano opposition was spearheaded by *Fitawrari* Ali Faris, one time governor of the *Awrajja*. In Wore Illu *Awrajja* *Kegnazmach* Mekonnen Assefa was reported to be actively preparing and leading the insurrection. In September – October 1975, there was total explosion of opposition activity especially in western Wello (Asnake Ali, "Aspects of the Political History of Wello:1872-1917"(M.A Thesis,Addis Ababa University ,June1983),pp.2-5 ; Dessalegn Rahmato, "Land and Agrarian unrest in Wallo, Northern Ethiopia, Pre-and Post-Revolution Ethiopia" (Addis Ababa University, 1996),pp.5-6; Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia (1855-1974)* (Addis Ababa: AAUP, 1991)pp.140-45).

Most of the *Awrajas* fell under the rebels which caused desperation among senior officials of the new regime. The peasants were advancing to Dessie. Yet, the *Derg* responded quickly. At Kuta Ber, the peasants were decisively beaten. This ended the attaining of the gentry to defeat the revolution. After the battle of Kuta Ber, the government sent air-borne troops to Wore Himeno and Wadla Delanta to re-establish government and control over these areas. But much of the western regions of both Wore Himeno and Wadla Delanta *Awraja* continued to be under rebel control. Here, the main rebel figure in 1976 and early part of 1977 was *Fitawarari* Mekonnen Melaku who was supported by Colonel Tadesse Seralign and his forces. Yet, peasants' strength declined gradually (Desalegn Rahmato. "Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia: A Brief Assessment," *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (University of Lund, 1984). Pp.588-9; Dessalegn Rahmato, "Land and Agrarian Unrest ...p.76).

Shewa

In spite of its proximity to Addis Ababa, Shewa during the imperial period as well as on the eve of the 1974 revolution remained one of the least developed and most traditional parts of the country. It was sometimes referred to as *Ye qirb ruq*, meaning that it was 'close yet far' from the political and administrative centre of Ethiopia (Pausewang, pp.87-93; John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: the Tigray People's Liberation Front, 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.1998),pp.12-17;Ahmed Hassen Omer, "Aspects of the History of Efrata –Jille Woreda(Shewa Region With Particular Reference to Twentieth Century".(B.A Thesis ,June 1987),pp.1-5).

During imperial times, the state hardly penetrated to the grassroots level in Shewa. For example, it was customary for landlords and petty government officials to expect and receive fattened sheep, butter and honey from the peasants as a gift, mainly on public holidays, at weddings and the like. If peasants did not submit these traditional gifts on time, they could be evicted from the land they had been farming for decades (Ibid).

In addition, Shewa had suffered continual droughts and famines. In the words of Seven Rubenson, the region is 'one of the most drought prone areas of Ethiopia'. We have, for example, a reference to drought and famine in this region as far back as the thirteenth century. It was also seriously stricken by the Great Famine of 1888 to 1892, which resulted in heavy loss of cattle and human life (Ahmed Hassen Omer, "Close Yet Far: Shewa under the Derg." In Wendy James, et al (eds.) *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism and after* .Oxford: James Currey).

During this period, the student revolts in Shewa began to influence the peasantry. Many of the students participating in the revolt came from a peasants' background. In 1965 students at Haile selassie I university were also spreading the slogan of 'Land to the Tiller' and this began to reach the consciousness of peasants (Aspects of the History of Efrata –Jille Woreda..).

Yet, the way the Derg deposed the emperor was a matter of concern to a majority of the people in Shewa, particularly the elderly. The majority of them did not approve the way the Emperor has been deposed. In fact, it was the killing of Ethiopian cabinet ministers and high government official on 23 November 1974 that produced the first real opposition to the Derg. Although support for these opposition scattered through out the country as a whole, it was particularly evidence in Shewa (Close Yet Far: Shewa under the Derg." In Wendy James ...pp.75-77).

In Shewa, the land reform decree of 4 march 1975 had both short-and long-term consequence for Derg rule. . The short-term consequence was that the land owning classes wee highly displeased from start by the Derg's

harsh steps because the pillar of their pride and joy, the main source of their wealth and political power, was taken away by stroke of the pen. In the region, a total of 30,473 gasha of land were confiscated by the Derg (*Ibid*;pp.80-85.).

Leadership and organization

The leadership of the rebellion had been provided by the gentry and their closest associates. Initially, in their respective localities, the leaders were able to sustain rebel solidarity. There were no dissents among individuals in the face of the common enemy, the Derg.

In Wello the command structure of peasants resembled that of the 1968-69 revolt. Except the main leaders, most of them were ordinary bandits. The selection of local leaders was based on social background and leadership quality (*Ibid*,pp.80-85;Chege,Michael.“ The Revolution Betrayed: Ethiopia, 1974-79,” *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 17,3(1979),pp.20-27.). Some of them like Dejach Berhane-Mesqel were popular because of their skill and fairness during their governorship. Some of them were also patriots during the 1936-41 anti-fascist struggles. This made their followers to believe that they would be capable of uniting and leading them to victory as they combined both political and military skills (*Ibid*,pp.80-85;Marina Ottaway, “Land Reform in Ethiopia 1974-1977.” In Alan K.Smith (Ed), *Peasants in Africa* . (Massachusetts: Cross Reads Press, 1978), pp.79-88.).

Nevertheless, the importance of leadership was not the same in both regions through out the period.In Shewa, the outbreak of the rural unrest was well coordinated and intense in comparison to that of wello. The two famous Biru brothers, Merid and Mesfin, were the main figures of the resistance (*Ibid*;pp.80-85;Siegfried Pausewang, *Peasants, Land and Society. A Social History of Land Reform in Ethiopia* (Weltforum pp. 87-93.-Verlag, 1983).). All leaders were members of the gentry. They were imperial officials. They managed to destroy the government force within a few days, during which solidarity was maintained (Close Yet Far: Shewa under the Derg.” In Wendy James ...pp.75-77; Pausewang, pp.87-93; John Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: the Tigray People’s Liberation Front, 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.1998), pp.12-17.).

In some areas, leaders had dual responsibilities. Parallel to military activities, they had administrative tasks. They resolved local conflicts and transmitted messages to their followers (Informants: Mohammed Ali, Alemneh Mengesha, Admasu Akalu). Moreover, leaders recruited new members for the on-going anti-Derg struggle. This was done in two ways: peaceful and forceful. The use of propaganda characterized the former method while the use of force was the characteristic of the latter (*Ibid*).

In most of the rural arras of Wello and Shewa, rural unrest had no organized army. It was the movement of a collection of armed groups. It had a more of traditional form of organization. The people of Wadla Delanta, Wore Himeno, Wore Illu,Wag and Yeju had the tradition of mobilizing themselves for fighting. In those areas the rebels were organized for a quick defensive or offensive action (*Ibid*).

Despite differences in motivation and commitment, in Wello Dejach Berhane-Mesqel. *Grazmach* Hailu Barenti and *Kegnazmach* Assefa Tarekegn *Kegnazmach* Mekonnen Assefa Fitawarari Mekonnen Melaku and others dominated the politics and military activities of their localities. The leaders and their supporters, in both provinces, disregarded the new system and attempted to form an authority that would satisfy their personal ambitions. They made temporary rules and regulations that gave legitimacy to their insurrection (Informants: Haregewoyn Mannaheloh, Alebacheww Kasa.).

But, when the Derg became more and more powerful, unity and solidarity among the rebels started to evaporate into the thin air. Just as the 1968-69 revolt in the province failed due to the absence of a strong organization, so was the 1975-76 rebellion in Wore Illu, Wag and Yeju (*Ibid*.). In this regard, we may ask why the rural unrest lacked unity and organization. The first reason was the death of the emperor. As well known, the concept of the emperor as a symbol of rural unrest had played an important role in the victory of the patriots over the Italians. Thus, if the emperor had lived or gone into exile, he would have provided leadership or organization for the rural unrest. But the emperor died (*Ibid*.).

Secondly, the Derg started to appoint the natives as Woreda and awraja officials. This made the rebels to some extent not to show commitment to wipe out government forces and sack the towns. Moreover, the reforms of the Derg were also welcomed by the Muslims and some Christians who were victims of the imperial regime. The Muslims and some settlers had no land because of the landholding system (For details see Hussein Ahmed, “Islam and Islamic Discourse in Ethiopia (1973-1993).” In Harold G.Marcus (ed.), *New Trends in Ethiopian Studies. Papers of the 12th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*. Vol.1. (East Lansing :The Red Sea Press, Inc., 1994), pp.776-785.). These men were sympathetic to the new regime and its reforms though they did not openly support it.

Finally, parochialism was another weakness of the rural unrest. The leadership and organization of the movement did not promote unity across provincial frontiers. Initially, according to official reports, there was correspondence among rebel leaders of Wore Illu and Shewa. Each movement was in a relative state of isolation. This and divergent interests prevented the founding of a common organization even among the rebels of Wello (Informants: Haregewoyn Mannaheloh, Alebacheww Kasa).In general, none of the leaders were successful in integrating

different territories and giving the struggle a unified and single leadership in both regions. This made the rural unrest very local and short-lived.

Intensity and Geographical Extent of the Resistance

The rural unrest did not cover the entire province. In Wello, the main centers of rural unrest were Wadla Delanta, Wore Himeno, Wore Illu, Wag and Yeju. Whereas in Shewa Afqera was the main center of the resistance. These areas were remote and inaccessible. The rugged terrain of the areas also facilitated the movement of rebels, unlike the plains, which could not be easily defended (Informants: Haregewoyn Mannaheloh, Alebacheww Kasa). In both cases, the main supporters came from the rural areas. In both areas movements were conceived, organized and waged in the countryside. In short, the rural unrest took place in a rural setting. Urban linkage was almost non-existent (Informants: Haregewoyn Mannaheloh, Alebacheww Kasa).

Regarding the intensity of rural unrest, because of geographical extent and mass participation, it is difficult to give a detailed picture of the level of violence. There were variations in place and time. Comparing with Wello, the rebellion in Shewa was intense and lacked spontaneity. That is, in the latter it was relatively more radical than in the former. Moreover, there was no sufficient and sustained internal cohesion throughout the course of the rural unrest in the former (Informants: Haregewoyn Mannaheloh, Alebacheww Kasa ; John Markakis, *Ethiopia: Anatomy of a Traditional Polity* (London: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 76-7).

In the past, the rebels (except the leaders) had lived in a regime that was markedly extractive and exploitative. But now they rebelled to defend that order. In the name of religion and land, they sought to protect a vanishing imperial regime. It was an attempt of preserving the existing political, social and economic order (Ibid). By taking harsh measures and using terror, the *Derg* successfully brought the revolt under control.

In most areas, the collapse of the rural unrest was instantaneous. Most peasants were not willing to move too far from their homes or territory. This partly led to the fragmentation of the uprising. In the absence of clear direction and political orientation, some were primarily concerned with their local interest (Gebru, p. 219,250; Informants: Melak Abatneh, Simachew Yeshewas).

Shortage of armaments was also another factor for the lack of readiness and commitment to armed struggle. In both cases there was no strong external source of support.

Abstention and desertion became common towards the end of the rural unrest which in turn weakened internal cohesion. Consequently, it became easy for the state to isolate and attack one *Woreda* or *Awraja* after another, as it happened in northern Wello in particular (Gebru, p.

219,250; Pausewang, pp. 87-93; Informants: Melak Abatneh, Simachew Yeshewas). From a comparative perspective, in both areas the majority of the peasants were not direct participants in the insurrection. In this regard, the 1975-78 rural unrest in Wello had similarities with its predecessor, the 1968-9 revolt. Both uprisings had similar pattern of evolution (Gebru, p. 219,250; Informants: Melak Abatneh, Simachew Yeshewas).

By contrast, the 1975-78 movement had its own peculiarities in both cases. The movement rejected the legitimacy of the *Derg*. In 1968-9, in Wello the peasants did not attack the legitimacy of the monarchy or the ideological roots on which the political and economic power of the regime rested. Furthermore, it had better leadership and affected wider areas as the principal leaders had been former officials and governors (Gebru, p. 219,250; Informants: Melak Abatneh, Simachew Yeshewas). They showed more determination to fight as the battles in Wadla Delanta, Wore Himeno, Wore Illu, Wag and Yeju, in Wello, and Afqera, in Shewa, demonstrate. In the case of the former, once the limited goals of the leaders were met, they abandoned their allies-the peasantry. In 1975-78, the opposite happened. As government forces became repressive, support of the masses started to be eroded. The followers betrayed their leaders and surrendered to the *Derg*. The main victims became the rebel leaders and their families (*Ibid*).

Finally, both rural unrests had no strong links with other anti-*Derg* fronts of the country, except the initial attempts in Wello with ELF and TPLF (*Ibid*; Zegaw, pp.1-3; Nega, pp.12-3;).

In the case of EPRP, it had some link with the revolt of Shewa. In this period, EPRP was the main opponent of the *Derg* in the province. It was able to create tension and fear among the representatives of the *Derg*. This was the factor for the execution of many peasants and government employees including elementary school teachers. In some areas, by 1977 some peasants and urban dwellers had reached a desperate situation. The cruelty of the *Derg* and the widespread banditry made the people weary and exhausted. They were nearly to follow any movement that offered new hope. The EPRP established its local political network. In some parts of rural Wello the EPRP did not establish strong relations with the peasantry (*Ibid*).

The peasant rebel leaders were fighting to protect the imperial regime which was contrary to the aims of the EPRP (*Ibid*). Thus, it was only locally- educated young people who were ready and willing to accept the cause of the EPRP for the simple reason that they knew that their relatives and peasants had been mistreated by the imperial regime and the *Derg*.

Finally, both rebellions were defeated yet the discontent continued. The growing discontent in Shewa and Wello was mainly due to three important events: the dark years of the so-called 'red terror'; the 1984 famine;

and the massive forced conscriptions undertaken by the Derg to overcome the ever-growing internal threats (Ibid). As already noted in the previous section, by 1977 the peasantry in Shewa and Wello had reached a desperate situation. The peasantry was weary, exhausted, and therefore ready to listen to any newcomer with the promise of any new hope. This was provided by the Ethiopian people's Revolutionary party (EPRP) which had started founding its local political network in Shewa in particular by this time (Informant: Alebachew Kasa.).

Yet, the anti-Derg movement of EPRP in Shewa and Wello ended in complete disarray in 1978 to 1979. In consolidating its power, the Derg organized Commission for Organizing the party of the working class of Ethiopia (COPWE, or in the Amharic acronym, ISEPAKO) in December 1979. This period was a time when the Derg felt immensely strong so much so that one of its popular slogans went: 'We shall put not only reactionaries under our control but also nature!'. Nevertheless, this slogan was short lived as the 1984 famine developed (Informants: Qasim Ahmed.).

The Derg, who had failed to manage the problem of famine, implement the National Military Service and Civil Defense Proclamation in 1983. This proclamation was not accepted by the population. It was particularly resented by the people of Shewa and Wello, especially at the height of the famine. Shewans and Wello felt that conscription was the final burden that would destroy them totally (Informant: Haregewoyin Mannaheloh.).

Thus the people of Shewa and Wello were made fearful, hostile, and desperate. It was at this juncture that they became totally defiant of the authorities, breaking the law and resisting any form of co-operation with the regime. That is why the Ethiopian people's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) was allowed to pass through Wello and Shewa without opposition, an act that facilitated its eventual success in capturing and controlling the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, in May 1991 (Informants: Melak Abatneh, Semachew Yeshewas).

CONCLUSION

In 1973-74 there was popular unrest throughout the country. On 12 September, 1974 Emperor Haile-Sellase was overthrown. In June, different units of the armed forces, the police and the Territorial Army established the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC) or the *Derg* (Committee). During this initial stage, the revolution was characterized by mass involvement, spontaneity and absence of bloodshed. Soon, however, the military became totalitarian and dictatorial. It outlawed any form of opposition, demonstrations and strikes. Such developments and the continuous execution of "counter-revolutionaries" caused various ethnic, regional and political oppositions against the *Derg*. The oppositions can be categorized into rightist and the leftist. A typical

example of the former was the 1975-78 peasant rural unrest in Wello and Shewa.

The government's response to all oppositions was harsh. Everywhere, the anti-*Derg* movements were put down by force. The government forces killed or imprisoned many rebels and their relatives in the province. Government forces often conducted a series of mopping-up operations to suppress armed opposition. In the process, hundreds of civilians were killed. Thousands of rural homes were set on fire and large numbers of livestock were looted and slaughtered by security forces in both provinces. Such cruelty of the *Derg* against the peasants of Wello and Shewa contributed to the growth and spread of agrarian unrest in the province until the fall of the regime in 1991. The people were frightened and became hostile by continuous government campaigns. Consequently, in the last days of the *Derg*, the people challenged the local authorities.

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