

The Administration of Italian Buildings & Holdings in Gondar Town (1941-1974)

Girma Tayachew*

Abstract

The city of Gondar was established in 1636 as permanent seat for the Christian Kingdom. Italians also made Gondar in their five year occupation in the country a major city by building of more than 352 houses with new master plan for the first time. Between 1936 and 1941 Gondar was decorated with Italian buildings and architectural designs that laid the foundation for the present master plan. It is perplexing how members of the royal family took all holdings found in Gondar after liberation. The main objective of this study is to investigate how Haile Selassie I appropriated Italian buildings in Gondar town for his personal benefits. So far, this peculiar event has not been studied by any historian or professional to this date. In conducting this study, the researcher consulted pertinent archives at North Gondar Zone Administrative office. In addition, attempts have been made to gather qualitative data through interviews and critical review of published and unpublished literatures. The study reveals that from morrow of liberation, it was patriots' lack of political nerve which allowed Haile Selassie I and his families to seize Italians' buildings and holdings including lands and houses as "enemy's property" and enabled them to utilize it as their own throughout the period (1941-1974. The officials enjoyed and led luxurious life at Gondar and Addis Ababa without facing the troubles of daily hardwork. Their only duties were the collection of tribute from peasants, and follow ups on the sources of threats and security issues etc. As these officials left the city following the down fall of Haile Selassie I's regime in 1974, the Derg confiscated and nationalized all their belongings including those Italian buildings.

Key Words: - Holding, Haile Selassie I, Sack, Administration

* Lecturer, University of Gondar, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Department of History and Heritage Management. Email: bealugirma50@yahoo.com

Statement of the problem

For centuries, Ethiopian people have been subjected to lack of good governance and injustice. One of the areas which had been disadvantaged during the time of Emperor Hayle Selasie I was Begemider and Simen. Between 1936 and 1941 the people of Begemider and Simen had been suffering from war of resistance against the Italians. After liberation the people of Gondar and its surroundings did not enjoy the fruits of independence. All Italian buildings and holdings including land were taken by the families of Emperor Hayle Selasie I. Despite the considerable practice of government looting of public property, no systematic research has been conducted so far and hence, not much is known about the historical backgrounds and former names of the Italian buildings in Gondar town. The researcher thus believes that it is relevant to examine the Imperial Government's seizure of public property in Gondar Town and its surroundings, and discuss the response measures taken by the Derg with regard to the Italian holdings.

Research Objectives

The general objective of this research is to investigate the looting of buildings and holdings in Gondar town and its surroundings by the families of Emperor Hayle Selassie I following the withdrawal of the Italians. The study has also the following specific objectives.

- To show the relationship between British forces and the newly restored government of Ethiopia in Begemidir and Simen governorate general following the liberation period;
- To find out the former names and uses of the Italian buildings in Gondar town;
- To look in to the Italian architectural designs and constructions in and the master plan they drew for Gondar town; and
- To analyze the administration system of the Ethiopian government in Begemedir and Simen Awraja (province) which latter was configured as a governorate general (Teqelay gizat).

Methodology

In 2015/16, while looking for archival sources and so called 'dead files' with Dr. Fantahun Ayele, (Academic staff of Bahir Dar University) in the North Gondar Zone of Administration office, the researcher came across some interesting documents. A close examination of these files seemed to imply that the families of Emperor Hayle Selasie I have looted the Italian buildings and land against the law without facing any form of legal challenge. The researcher collected the documents exchanged between these officials and carefully analyzed their contents. Moreover, in order to augment the data gathered from these documents, other relevant published and unpublished sources were consulted and interviews were also conducted with key informants. The information collected from these sources was systematically cross-checked and interpreted.

Introduction

After the collapse of the Zagwe dynasty in 1270, the Ethiopian Empire had no fixed capital rather mobile camps nearly for four centuries. In the century the continuation of conflict between the Christians and Moslems, and the emerging Oromo expansion forced the Christian kingdom to move its political seat from Shoa to the Lake Tana region, Guzara, Gorgora, and

Danqaz. Later Fasiledes made Gondar, a permanent seat for the Christian highland kingdom in 1636 (Mengistie, 2007, p.10)

Before the beginning of Zemene Mesafint in 1769, there was fascinating development in architectural designs and constructions in Gondar as evidenced in the Castles of Fasiledes and his bath room, and the churches in and outside the palace. Among these, Fasil's Palace, and his bathing room have been registered by UNESCO as world heritage sites in 1978. The period from 1769 to 1855, which is known as "*The era of Princes*" has adversely affected the architectural progress. . (Shitara, 2006, p.15). Although the foundation for the modern state in Ethiopia was laid by Tewodros II in 1855, urbanization in Gondar remained at a rudimentary stage until the coming of the Italians.

The Development of Infrastructure

The Italian occupation period (1936-1941) was marked by dramatic infrastructure change in Gondar town. Italy opened its consulate at Gondar since 1920's for intelligence purpose. A month before the fall of Addis Ababa, Italian troops put Gondar was under control on 1st April, 1936. Then, the Italians established their residence and buildings north of Fasil Castles. After two years, Gondar was chosen as the capital of Amhara, and a new master plan for the town was developed by Gherardo Bosio in 1938 (Rifkind, 2011, p.494)

The implementation of the second master plan in 1938 began with dividing the residences in terms of race and class. Italians lived west and north of Fasil Castles whereas Ethiopians and other expatriates lived east of Ghebbi (Ibid, p.496)

The colonizers had settled in military camps, agricultural and industrial centers. They also settled in towns by establishing military stations to defend the forces of British, French (in Eastern Africa) and the Amhara people (Mengistie, 2007: p.23). According to informants, the Italians constructed more than 352 houses in Gondar town for two reasons: to meet their officials' need for luxurious life style, and to allure and brain wash the local people and patriots into submission (Informants: Aba Yigzaw Mekonen and Nigusie Desie)

Of course, the Italians were determined to make Gondar flourish and promote it as a key town parallel to Addis Ababa and other towns although urbanization was based on segregation. With regard to the features of the second master plan, Tomahiro stated:

"The Italian army developed Gondar as a capital city of the province of Gondar, which served as the centre of politics, commerce, and defense in northern Ethiopia. The maximum population of Italian immigrants, including both soldiers and civilians was expected to be 10,000. In the central part of the city, the Italian army segregated Gondar Ethiopians and Italians, placing Italians in higher-elevation neighborhoods and Ethiopians in lower-lying areas for security as well as environmental factors such as scenery and temperature. The urban master plan was based on topographical conditions. Flat lands were limited in Gondar. Thus, the Italian army focused new construction on small, flat, island-like areas along main roads. The Italian districts received the main infrastructural improvements, including asphalt roads, water lines, electricity networks, and principal buildings such as governmental buildings, residences, shops, hotels, and hospitals. In contrast, the Italian built only one elementary school, one hospital, and a few governmental buildings in the Ethiopian districts. Fasiledes Palace was protected as a structure of historical heritage and maintained by Italian engineers."(Shitara, 2006, Pp.16-17)

According to this account, the Italians partitioned Gondar town in to different quarters like Arada, Piazza, Bellicco, Autoparco, Chechela and Azezo. The buildings were constructed for governmental, civil and military purposes like banks, hotels, residences for soldiers and civilians, and hospital. It was based on this master plan that all Italian buildings including bridges were well built. The Italians also built the main road from Addis Ababa to Gondar and constructed a formidable bridge to cross the Abbay gorge. The buildings at Gondar were not above Ground+3 stories. All Ground+1,2, and 3 buildings were allocated for top officials and military offices and residences. Totally during the period of occupation, Italians built 352 houses in Gondar and Azazo towns. (Ibid, p.18). Most of these houses were built to the northwest of Fasil castle and the residences for whites were located in what is known today Qebele (also Kebele) 2, 3, and 13. The local people still call these villages “Chewa Sefer” or “*Decent Quarter*” though the name was given before the Italians (Informant: Askal Wasihun).

Table 1. Distribution of Italian buildings in each qebele (Gondar Town)

| Qebele No | No of buildings | In % | Qebele No | No of buildings | In % |
|-----------|-----------------|------|-----------|-----------------|------|
| 1 | 7 | 7 | 12 | 5 | 1% |
| 2 | 70 | 20 | 13 | 23 | 7% |
| 3 | 58 | 16 | 14 | 0 | 0% |
| 4 | 28 | 8 | 15 | 11 | 3% |
| 5 | 1 | 1 | 16 | 26 | 7% |
| 6 | 0 | 0 | 17 | 21 | 6% |
| 7 | 0 | 0 | 18 | 0 | 0% |
| 8 | 6 | 2 | 19 | 0 | 0% |
| 9 | 3 | 1 | 20 | 0 | 0% |
| 10 | 6 | 2 | 21 | 83 | 23% |
| 11 | 4 | 1 | Total | 352 | 100% |

Source: Shitara, 2011, p.19

Table2. The current use of the Italian Buildings

| Current use | Number of buildings | Percent |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|---------|
| Commercial buildings | 25 | 7% |
| Government offices | 47 | 13% |
| Mixed use | 6 | 2% |
| Factory | 3 | 1% |
| Hospital | 11 | 3% |
| Hotel | 5 | 2% |
| [Residence] house | 195 | 55% |
| House &commercial buildings | 14 | 4% |
| School | 30 | 8% |
| Other house | 16 | 5% |
| Total | 352 | 100% |

Source: Shitara, P.19

One of the first G+1 buildings constructed by Italians in 1936/7 has served as the Ethiopian Postal and Telegraph Office since its completion and is currently serving as an office for Ethio Telecom.



Fig 1. One of the Italian buildings in Piassa now serving as an office for Ethio Telecom. (Photo by the Researcher)

The other Ground+3 building was the *command truppe* (military command) which was used for military offices. It was designed by the chief designer, Gherardo Basio. The other building is the current office of North Gondar Administration Zone.



Fig 2. Italian building currently serving as the North Gondar Administration Office. (Photo by the Researcher)

The other Ground+3 building located in front of *command truppe* was used as *circolo militare e coloniae* (social organization for service men and civilian colonialists). Currently, it is being used by the North Gondar Administration Zone High Court and Justice Department. On the centre of piazza is the *opera Nazionale Dopo lavoro cinema* founded in 1938 (Refind, 2006, p.496) which to date continues to serve as the main cinema hall for the city renamed as *Gondar Cinema House (Gondar Cinema Bet)*.



Fig 3. Another Italian building; currently the North Gondar Zone High Court Office. (Photo by the Researcher)

Like other colonialists, Italy also took agricultural land from local *rist* holders. A good example was Abba Samuel Agricultural fields/farm house in Azazo. Prior to the Italian occupation, it was a seedling centre owned by Negus Wolde Giyorgis and other noble at different times. It was then improved by the Italians who constructed a number of houses for workers and sheds for cattle. (Informants: Abba Yigzaw Mekonene; Ethiopia Wubineh). The Italians planned to stop the import of grain from outside and they paid salaries for ascaries and themselves. They also further planned to produce surplus to earn foreign exchange. (Rifkind, 2011, p.498). Abba Samuel was one of the target areas for agricultural production (especially edible fruits).

Almost all twentieth century European travelers coming to the country were lodged at Che-che-la. The establishment of an Italian consulate in the 1920's gave additional impetus for Gondar town. During their occupation, the Italians built two types of hospitals, one for the local people and the other for Italians and foreigners. The later's which was commonly called Ospedale (Hospital in Italian) was located at Che-che-la; whereas that of the local people was placed at Samuna Bar. When the Italians left, the local's hospital was looted and

demolished (Solomon, 2004, p.4). Presently, it is part of the Gondar city administrative district structured under qebele eighteen “ Samuna Ber.”

The restored Imperial government and Italian endowments:-Italian government kept more military garrison in and around Gondar than it did in any other administrative centers in Ethiopia, in Eritrea, or in Somalia,. Consequently- the last battle between the Italians and the British forces in East Africa was fought here in Gondar at Qul Qual Ber in 1941 (Mengistie, 2007, p.67). This is to say that Gondar was the last battle ground in the struggle to win the country’s full independence. In 1942, Haile Selassie I appointed his son, Merid Azmach Asfa Wossen as a governor of Begemidir and Wollo though British asked the government of Ethiopia that the appointment of officials for Begemider should be done with the consent of British government. This request was repudiated by the so-called “*The New Ethiopian Government*”. An appointment letter was read as an proclamation (Awaj): ... ስለዚህ ለመልካም አስተዳደራችሁ፣ ለልማታችሁ፣ ለህብረታችሁ የምንደክምበትን ስራ ለመፈጸም ሙሉ እርዳታችሁ አስፈላጊ ነው፡፡ ለስመጥሩው ለበጌ ምድር ህዝባችን የሚያስተዳድራችሁ ገዥ የተወደደ ልጆችንና አልጋ ወራሾችንን ልዑል መርድ አዝማች አሰፋ ወሰንን ሰጥተናችኋልና የእሱን ቃል ሰምታችሁና አክብራችሁ እደሩ፡፡ እኛም በቅርብ ጊዜ መጥተን እንጎበኛችኋለን፡፡ (National Archive, File No.170, Ref. No 68, 02/05/ 1934 E.C). Hence, your full engagement is so important to our effort for your good governance፣ development, and unity. We assigned his highness, heir Azmach Asfa Wossen for the proud people of Begemider and obliged you to obey him. We will visit you in the near future.

Following the withdrawal of the Italians, British forces took control of Gondar looted Italian holdings in and around Gondar, and prohibited people from moving in and around the town. They stationed at Gorgora and asked the government of Ethiopia to recognize their authority over the area including 70 miles beyond the city of Gondar to Gorgora though the question was rejected by the Ethiopian government. (File.No. 364, Ref. No. 28, 02/05/ 1934 E.C). The first visit of Emperor Haile Selassie I to Gondar was prompted by an English Colonel, Daniel A. Sandford. But the planned visit was not successful because of the disagreement between the Ethiopian government and English commanders concerning the request by the British for land in Gondar. Meanwhile, the Big Four (USA, USSR, England, and France) were discussing with Italy on how to close World War II in which B. Mussolini and his allies were drafted. Ethiopia took this advantage to participate in the conference because after liberation no agreement was reached between the two countries. After lengthy debate in the Paris Peace Conference, July-August, 1946, the house decided that Italy should pay \$25 million dollars in war reparation. Second, Ethiopian government was given the right to nationalize the Italian government’s property in Ethiopia, excluding its embassy (Aklilu, 2010, Pp. 156-164). Following consolidation of his power in the following four years, and after the Paris Peace Conference, Haile Selassie I, made an official visit to Gondar in 1946. The people accepted him with warm ceremony. He extolled the brave resistance of the people of Begemidir and Simen against the Italians. But he was amazed by the beauty of Italian buildings in which he was overwhelmingly obsessed “ይህን ህንጻ ተሸክመው ወደ አዲስ አበባ የማይወስዱት ነገር” or “It is impossible to take and move these buildings to Addis Ababa.” The people of Gondar were not happy to hear that. The second reason for the displeasure of the people was his disapproval of the noble’s military stature which was given by patriots themselves during the resistance (1936-1941). The local people were shocked with the emperor’s remarks. (Informants: Tarekegn Gebru; Nigusie Desie)

Consequently, he visited Begemidir and the Simen repeatedly and issued different decrees in different occasions. But his frequent visits never brought changes to the people’s living conditions rather it intensified the grabbing of the Italian properties and materials (mostly

Italian buildings and lands) after they were legally received from the Italians in accordance with decision made in the Paris Peace Conference. Buildings or lands were not taken and governed in the name of the Emperor rather in his sons, daughters or relatives.

Who were the daughters, sons, and grand children of Hayle Selasie I?. The family genealogy of Emperor Hayle Selasie I are the following.

- A. The children of Prince Mekonen Hayle Selasie:- Highness Wossen Seged Mekonen, Highness Amhayess or Maikel Mekeonen, Highness Dawit Mekonen, Highness Tefera Mekonen, Highness Baede- Mariam Mekonen, and, Miss Mihret Mekonen(wife of Brigadier General Girma)
- B. The children of Princess Tenagnework Hayle Selasie¹¹:- Princess Ayda Desta, Hirut Desta, Seble, Sofiya, Eskindir and Ms. Tsigie Mariam (wife of Dr. Seyum Haregot)
- C. The children of Ayda Desta:- Seul Mikael Mengesha, Yohanis, and Estifanos Mengesha
- D. The daughter of Seble:- Elisabeth Kasa
- E. The daughter of Sofia:- Mihrete Selasie Dereje
- F. The children of Ejigayehu:- Samson, Fikre Selasie, Rahel, Mihret, Elisabeth
- G. The son of Romanework Hayle Selasie:- Dejazmach Merid and Lij Samson Beyene
- H. Son of Lij Samson Beyene:- Lij Sibstie Beyene
- I. Children of Ras Asrat Kasa and Zuriashwork G/E/r:- Lij Asfa Wosen, Lij Mulugeta, Lij Kasa Asrat Kasa, Lij Wond Wosen, Ribka, and Tenagnework

Who were the grand children of Etge Menen?

- a. The children of Desta Amdie:- Wosenyeleh, Yeshiwa Tsehay, andYaynie Tsehay
- b. The children of Yanie Tsehay:- Fikreselasie, Belaynesh, Hiwot & Amdie Menbere
- c. The child of Janitral Asfaw:- Belaynesh Asfaw
- d. The children of Janitral G/E/r:- Mulugeta G/E/r, Medferiashwork Abebe, Yeshashwork Abebe & Sara Gizaw (Report of Derg office, File.No. ፬, No.Ref.no,12/03/1967 E.C)

Following the withdrawal of Italy, the Emperor's daughters, sons, and grand children acquired holdings in Gondar town solely by being the daughters and sons of Hayle Selasie I. They became individuals who enjoy high living standards due to the income generated from the following unlawfully snatched holdings.

I. Etege Menen Hotel:- This building was constructed by the Italians for their own recreational purpose. When the Italians withdrew from the country, this hotel devolved to the Emperor's wife, Empress Menen as her property. The hotel was called by her

¹¹Princess Tenagnework 1st married Ras Desta Damtew and gave birth Ayda, Amha, Hirut, Fer Admiral, Iskinder, Seble and Sofia Desta. During exile she went to Europe with her father. Ras Desta died while fighting with Italians and she married Ato Abebe Reta in London and born Meri (Almaz), wife of Seyum Haregot. After returned from exile Princess Tenagnework married her 3rd husband Ato Andargachew Mesay and lived in Gondar (Fantahun Engdaw. ታሪካዊ ሙዝገባ በ ሰብካቤ ጥንት እስከ ዛሬ (Historical Biography dictionary: from Ancient to Present); Vol.1, Bole Printing Press; Addis Ababa, 2000 E.C, p.455).

name as “*Etege Menen Hotel*”. In the beginning, the hotel was rented by an Italian merchant, Commandatori Buski who worked on this hotel throughout 1950’s to 1973 and the money was directly sent to the Empress or for Hayle Selasie I. On 3 December, 1973, an Ethiopian man Mamo Habte Yohanis rented this hotel from Buski. In order to govern all hotels in Gondar and Gorgora in Lake Tana, one central office called “*Ras Hotels Administration*” was established (File.No.ሸ/2, Ref. No.፳፱ /1967, 29/07/1967E.C)

The purpose of this office was manage the overall activities of all hotels and report to the respective governing body. In the beginning of 1970’s this hotel was transferred to her son, Asfa Wosen Hayle Selasie. After 1974, the hotel was nationalized by the government and the name was changed to **Terara Hotel** (File. No. ፳; Ref. No. ኢ/ት/829/29/67, 14/05/1967 E.C). In 2016 the hotel was sold by the government to Eneye Takele as “*Eneye Takele Terara Hotel*”.

II. Grandubar Hotel: - This hotel was built by the Italians and for recreational purpose to be used exclusively by the Italians only. No local citizen could use it. They called this hotel Grandubar Hotel. After the liberation, the hotel was devolved to Emperor’s son, His Highness Mekonen Hayle Selasie as his personal holding. He also rented it, and opened a Bank account in commercial bank of Ethiopia account number M.29 to which the money collected from the rent was deposited directly . The floor was rented for eight men till 1967. On the New Year of 1968, the building was renewed and rented by two individuals, *Ato* Kidane Asegehagn and *Fitawurari* Tesfaye Asnakew, and on 1 January, 1968 they made a contractual agreement with Sayfe Selasie Liben, manager of Ras Hotels Administration. The monthly rental was 670 Ethiopian birr (File.No. ፳; No Ref. No, 05/05/1967 E.C)



Fig 4. Grandubar Hotel (now Quara Hotel). (Photo by the Researcher)

After the renovation of Hotel in 1968, the name Grandubar was changed to “*Leul Mekonen hotel*” and in 1972/73 the rent was increased from 670 to 1000 birr. Finally in 1974, the Derg confiscated it and changed its name to “*Quara Hotel*”(File. No. ጠ; Ref. No. ኢ/ጉ/829/29/67, 14/05/1967 E.C)

III. Ethiopia Hotel and other buildings:- This huge and beautiful building was constructed by the Italians as their residence. After liberation a number of houses including Ethiopia Hotel were given to Emperor’s daughter, Tenagnework Hayle Selasie, wife of Andargachew Mesay. Andargachew was appointed personally by Hayle Selasie I in 1945 to govern Begemidir and Simen. Moreover, he was also eager to take what he saw out of Ethiopia hotel and other eight buildings. Though he and his families led a luxurious life in these buildings but he was still not satisfied and took land like what is now Fasiledes Preparatory School (formerly Hayle Selasie I School) which was a vast open area with some houses in it. He also took the present MoHA Soft Drinks Factory which included the present Ethiopian



Fig 5. Ethiopia Hotel and other buildings. (Photo by the Researcher)

Electric Power corporation office, Atse Bakafa Elementary School which now serves hundreds of children. He went to Gorgora, 60 km far from Gondar, and took the Gorgora Ship Station and half of the town. He also claimed the highly valued area to the left of Qolladbbba town which stretches from Dirma River to Gorgora as his rist. (Anberbir, 1976,p.56)

IV. Ras Andargachew Mesay and Princess Tenagnework also got their share of trade profit in Lake Tana stations using Italian ships like Limalimo, Tatek, Andinet, Fasil, Dil Betegel, etc...as means of transporatation from and to Bahir Dar, Qunzila, Esey

Debir, Delghi, and Gorgora towns. Even after the withdrawal of the Italians, they continued to dominate the trade on Lake Tana under Musie Bisizi Mario in collaboration with Kibret Astatikie. But the lion's share of the revenue went to *Ras* Andargachew and *Princess* Tenagnework (Ibid, p.61)

On 3 December, 1951, the princess's daughter died in Gondar and the people of Begemidir and Simen governorate were forced to observe the funeral ceremony. All government offices in the governorate were closed and the people of Gondar and Debre Tabor were forced to come out onto the streets to show their sorrow and grief. The local officials sent letters of condolence to *Princess* Tenagnework on the following day. (File No. ω/8; Ref. No. 1117/14, 04/04/1944 E.C).

Then, the princess and her families fled to Addis Ababa and house numbers 195,196,197,198, 199,200,201, including Ethiopia Hotel were rented for 1800 Ethiopian birr. Andargachew stayed in Addis Ababa and ruled Begemidir and Simen governorate from Addis sending messages to his subordinate officials. His monthly salary was 1500 birr and his subordinate officials were paid not more than 120 birr. (March 1945, salary payroll of the governorate general). By the end of 1952, he was replaced by *Dejazmach* Asrate Kasa. Consequently, he packed all offices furniture and transported it to Addis Ababa as his own private property (File. No. ጠ; Ref. No. ኢ/ጉ/829/29/67, 14/05/1967 E.C)

V. Abba Samuel Agricultural land:- It was a place located in Azezo-Gomengie across Kiha and Shinta rivers. Before the coming of the Italians, the place was the *rist* land of Negus Wolde Giyorgis and other local nobles like *Fitawurari* Kasa Belete. Negus W/Giyorgis founded a seedling centre at the place which later was developed and modernized by the Italians. They constructed buildings, imported cars, tractors and foreign breed cattle, and employed 260 permanent and casual workers from Ethiopia, Eritrea and Italy. They imported seeds from Italy and planted them in the farm for meeting the medical and other consumption needs of their own. (File. No. U/3; Ref. No. 1057, 01/03/1935 E.C). Twenty five lire and one tin of flour was the daily salary for each worker. The daily expense was 1032 Ethiopian birr or 6610 lire which included 100 lire paid per day for each team leader. (File No. ω/8; Ref. No. 41, 02/13/1934 E.C)

The local officials asked for the allocation of some budget from the central government not only for Aba Samuel seedling center but also for conservation of forest and afforestation program. After the Italians left, the farm remained functional though its performance languished. When Andargachew visited the farm in 1945, he was impressed by the dense green garden and submitted a claim on the farm on behalf of his wife, Tenagnework to the *rist* shum office. The office chaired by *Ato* Kibret Asfa and Memhrie Abebe received the application. Opposition came from *Fitawurari* Kasa Belete, Admasu Tegegne, and Asfie Dessie as they claimed that Abba Samuel was their *rist* land. After a lengthy debate, on 13 November, 1945, the *rist* office decided that Abba Samuel garden area be given to *Princess* Tenagnework but she must pay 700 birr for *rist* owners as a compensation for the value of trees, and ordered *Ato* Admasu, *Fitawurari* Kasa, Asifu Desie and leave their residences after receiving the estimated compensation. After a while the decision concerning the trees was reversed as they were planted by *Negus* Wolde Giyorgis prior to the Italians' occupation and thus the family of Hayle Selasie I had no obligation to pay 700 birr. However, the chairman of Chilot, *Ras* Amoraw Wubineh Tessema, opposed this ruling which consequently led to his incarceration in Addis Ababa. As a result, the Chilot was run by another magistrate and the

new appointee decided in favor of Andargachew Mesay. (Informants: Nigusie Desie, Ambachew Kasa)

Amoraw Wubineh Tessema was one of the prominent and courageous patriots who fought against Italy during the occupation. As the British and Italians went to war, the British requested Ras Wubineh to support them in their fight against the Italians. Due to their inability to capture him, the Italians called him “*Bird*” or “*Amora*”. After liberation, he also tried to protect the looting of holdings in Gondar by the British government and the transfer of assets to Kenya. The oil factory and the iron factory in Gondar were founded in Italy but after the liberation the British forces transplant them, with other properties, to Kenya and Eritrea. (Informant: Ethiopia Wubineh). Like other patriots, the fate of Wubineh was to be put in jail in Addis Ababa. (Informants: Ambachew Kasa; Ethiopia Wubineh; Mekedash Abera).

The family of Hayle Selasie I received Aba Samuel- Gomengie, and Che- Che-La as their *rist* land. The couple (husband and wife) accepted the area legally from the ministry of administration on 5 July, 1964 under Ref. no. 1/15692 though they begun to benefit from the area since 1945. (Anberbir, p.58) This garden produced a variety of fruits and vegetables which were sold to the local community. The garden was run by Biga, an Italian expatriate till 1971 (Informants: Ambachew kasa, Mekedash Abera)

All the properties in the garden like cars (number plate 303 Sheriat Volkswagen, number plate 357 Ditson, and more than 200 head of cattle became personal property of Tenagnework (File. No. ጠ; Ref. No. ሊ/ጉ/829/29/67, Mulugeta Sayfe Ared, Manager of Gondar kifle Hager Municipal office, 14/05/1967 E.C); Informant: Ethiopia Wubineh). At present this place is part of the main city of Gondar and the land is allocated to a real estate’s called Abba Samuel, Quara, Yayine Real Estate.

VI. Ayda Desta (grand child of Hayle Selasie and the daughter of princes Tenagnework) took hold of the different dashing houses adjacent to Ethiopia hotel as her property.

VII. Yeshashwork Yilma also claimed one of the Italian houses formerly called “*Bes Campany*” as her own. The Emperor did not directly involve himself in the looting rather he did so through his relatives. This strategic move justified his canny leadership of Ethiopia and his strategic exploitation of Gondar town down to woreda level.

VIII. *Ras* later *dejazmach* Asrate Kasa, one of the Emperor’s son-in-laws also took a number of houses and an open area called “*Hawariaw Paulos*”. He was the governor of Begemidir and Simen twice (1943-1945 and 1953-1955). The only institutions built during his administration were, “*Baeta Wohni Bet*” or “*Baeta Prison House*” found in gebele 09 in Gondar and “*Yeatibia Dagna*” or “*Magistrate System*” in each sub woreda of governorate general which created a fertile ground to exploit the people of governorate. (Anberbir, 1976, p.46). Like Andargachew and other former governors, he stayed in Addis Ababa and administered through Directors, Regents....

VIII. The other privileged man was *Ras* Seyum Mengesha who had close relations with the Shoan nobility through marriage. He took a big house which is now used as the residence of the chief administrator of North Gondar Zone as well as other buildings.

The other building near Fogera Hotel was acquired by Ms. Tesemialesh Kasa, daughter of *Ras Asrate Kasa*.

All the buildings were rented out and the revenues were deposited at their respective accounts. The revenue was high; for instance, between the years of 1965 to 1970

- Highness *Ras Seyum Mengesha* received 43,267 birr (the highest one),
- Tenagnework H/Selasie received 40,764 birr in each year, and
- *Fitawurari* Demis Berihun got 1,398 birr (the least) (Anberbir, p.48)

The houses were rented in Ethiopian birr since 1945 because in that year the country started printing its own currency (paper money) and begun to use it as a medium of exchange. In 1945, Ethiopia proclaimed a currency law which in 1946 was amended. The Currency and Legal Tender Proclamation of 1945 on Negarit Gazeta under No. 81 of 1946 reads as follows:

All holders of Maria-Theresa Dollars shall forthwith sell their holdings of Maria Theresa Dollars to the state Bank, Agricultural Bank, and its appointed dealers shall buy all such Maria Theresa Dollars at the rate of one Maria Theresa Dollar to Ethiopia\$ 1.50. From the date of the coming in to force of this proclamation, no person shall tender or exercise market in any manner deal in Maria Theresa Dollars ...Any person who contravenes any provisions of this proclamation provision ...shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding Ethiopian \$ 5,000 or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding five years or to both such fine and imprisonment. (Negarit Gazeta, 6th year, No.3, Vol.30, 1946)

This proclamation has two provisions. The first one notified the issue of coins: Ethiopian birr on a guarantee of gold. The second stipulated the legal measures to be enforced against those who fail to use the new currency in their financial transactions. It created a good opportunity for officials to collect tax in Gondar.

It is known that Emperor Hayle Selasie I himself took part in the looting of materials in Gondar hospital. Following independence in 1941, the government moved equipments and furniture from Gondar hospital to Addis Ababa. In March, 1945, Wolde Giyorgis W/Yohanis, Minister of Pen gave direct order to do so to *Ras Imiru* in a telegram message no. 11819/21 for which the latter gave a deaf ear to. This entailed the direct intervention of the Emperor. As quoted by Solomon Getahun, Hayle Selasie I forwarded the following telegram message (no. 590) to *Ras Imiru* on 18 May 1945 :

Haylu Lewute on arrival here in Addis Ababa has informed us that there are between one thousand two hundred and one thousand three hundred (otherwise the existence of one thousand of them guaranteed) ward beds and excess medicine in Gondar hospital. He has also told us about the existence of five hundred beds with complete set of head—tables. From the excess medicine and which is not needed in the locality, medicaments that could expire soon due to stay (depending on the evaluation of the Physician) should be sent on rented trucks. But, incase trucks are not available, lets know the number of vehicles needed once you have made sure that the articles are ready for delivery. (Solomon, 2006)

The implication of this letter is that the Emperor had a sense of disgrader to the people of the governorate general. The ordinance to send all properties to Addis Ababa failed to indicate the

number of ward beds. The other implication is the Emperor's negligence to take any measure against Andargachew Mesay who had taken the furniture from different offices in Gondar and pocketed it as his own in Addis Ababa. Some people showed their dissatisfaction and began to oppose the system through students at Hayle Selasie I School. The peasants tried to assassinate Andargachew Mesay and his wife by shooting down the plane around Debre Tabor Awraja. This unsuccessful assassination attempt led to the government's bloody revenge on the people. (Anberbir, p.66)

Ownership of Holdings after 1974

As discussed above, the officials of the Imperial government in Gondar city and its surroundings had devoted their time mainly to two activities: looting the people's and government's property and collecting tribute, and taking caution on the matter of security. This does not mean that they were not involved in activities like big action on economic and social agenda. The lack of accountability and responsibility enabled the top officials to loot and plunder people's property as 'enemy belonging'. This had been a key factor that prevented the growth of Gondar town. The officials were appointed at the level of woreda governorate general, for the purpose of getting service rather than giving service to the people. They were assigned as "governor" (ገዥ) rather than as "administrator" (አስተዳዳሪ) (Fikre Selasie Wogderes, 2006, Pp. 172-173). Meaning, during the imperial period the officials were considered as individuals blessed by God to obtain revenue, and other benefits without the need to toil for it.

The Derg toppled the Imperial government on 12 September, 1974. Hayle Selasie I was asked to return all properties i.e. capital assets and cash. According to Derg officials, Hayle Selasie I and his family gave their property in inheritance to the Ethiopian people. Derg officials began to check the National Wealth and Development Office under the Ministry of Finance. (File.No.ሸ/2, Ref. No.መ/1967, 29/07/1967E.C). This office used a pretext of collecting the country's revenue for the benefit of the government when they were really working for that of the Emperor. (Fikre Selasie, 2006, p.92). The Ministry of Finance wrote to Begemedir and Simen Kifle Hager Bejirond office on 5 December, 1974 Ref. No. ሐአመ53/3/3, concerning the issue of Hayle Selasie's property in Gondar. A part of this letter reads:

ግርማዊ ሆይ በውጭም ሆነ በውስጥ ያለውን የሚንቀሳቀስና የማይንቀሳቀስ ንብረት ሁሉ ለኢትዮጵያ ህዝብ በስጦት የማውረስ ኑዛዜ መሠረት በስማቸው፤ በልጆቻቸው፤ በልጅ ልጆቻቸው እንዲሁም በእትጌ ስም ጭምር የተመዘገቡ ንብረቶችን በውርሱ መሰረት ተቆጣጥራችሁ በብሄራዊ ሃብት ልማት እንዲሆን ታዟል። (File No. ሸ/2፤ Ref. No. ሐአመ53/3/3, 2/4/1967 E.C)

According to his Majesty affidavit, the whole holdings of Hayle Selasie in and outside of Ethiopia both in capital asset and in cash willed to giving to the peoples of Ethiopia. Thus, ordered in terms of Hayle Selasie's bequest all property found in his name, children and grand children, and in the name of Empress be listed and control under National Wealth and Development Office.

This order was directly given to the governorate general by Negash Desta, Minister of Finance. The Municipality of Gondar listed the property in terms of order and informed the governorate National Wealth and Development Office on 22 May, 1975. It was reported that the Emperor had no property in his own name. Reported were like holdings of Etege Menen Hotel which was owned by crown prince Asefa Wosen who rented it out at Eth\$ 2500 per

month; Quara hotel (formerly prince Mekonen hotel) which was rented out at 1000 Ethiopian birr per month; eight buildings including Ethiopia hotel which were rented out at 1800 Ethiopian birr per month; and the Abba Samuel garden area including the vegetables and trees, heads of cattle (107 in number), two cars, and four modern houses found in it. These properties were nationalized and transferred to be administered by the National Wealth and Development Office. (File. No. ጠ; Ref. No. ኢ/ት/829/29/67, 14/05/1967 E.C)

The car ownership transfer was delayed for three years, and in 1977, *Grazmach* Haylu Abebaw, head of Abba Samuel agricultural branch organization requested Gondar Municipal office to change the cars ownership right to animal and animal product corporation which was under the authority of Agriculture and People's Resettlement Ministry. (File. No. ጠ; Ref. No. ጎ/አ/125/70, 20/07.1970 E.C)

On 2 June, 1979 *Shalleqa* Melaku Tefera wrote to the province's transport office giving the ownership right to animal and animal product corporation. A part of this letter reads: የ ሰሌዳ ቁጥራቸው 303 እና 357 ሽርቶችን ሸልሰሽገን መኪናዎች ቀደም ሲል ስሙን ብረትነታቸው በተናኘደር ቅሃ/ስላሴ የነበረው አሁን አገልግሎት በመስጠት በመንግስት ስም በእንሰሳትና እንሰሳት ተዋፅኦ ኮርፖሬሽን ስሙን ብረትነቱ ተዛውሮ የባለቤትነት መታወቂያ እንዲሰጥ እናሳውቃለን፡፡ Literarly, The two cars, number plate 303 and 357 which were owned by Tenagnework Hayle Selasie, now became the property of animal and animal product corporation and thus we notify to provide number plate (File. No. ጠ; Ref. No.5502/3-1/46, 25/10/1971 E.C). In such ways, all the property in Gondar that had been owned first by the Italians and latter by Hayle Selasie I's families, relatives and officials were confiscated and acquired by the Derg government under the principle of *Ethiopia Tikdem* or "*Ethiopia First*".

Conclusion

Even in the absence of peace and security, the Italians have tried to make Gondar a remarkable town beautified with grand and aesthetically pleasing buildings. They built not less than 352 buildings in Gondar town including Gondar hospital. Soon after the Italians' withdrawal, the British took sizable fortune and property including cars. The remaining property in cash and capital assets like buildings were put in the hands of the Emperor's family after they were legally acquired from the Italians at the Paris Peace Conference. The Italians monopolized and abused the resources of the city throughout the occupation period (1941-1974) and moved medical equipments from Gondar hospital to Addis Ababa. Hayle Selasie I and the officials (including low ranking district officials) took land from the people and made it their *rist* land. The leadership skillfully manipulated and politicized financial issues for its own benefit. This created greater discomfort for the people of Begemidir and Simen, and discouraged people's investment and industriousness. Following the overthrow of the imperial government, the Derg confiscated and nationalized official's property and what it called extra houses in Gondar and acquired them as properties of the government.

Acknowledgements: I am very much grateful to Dr. Fantahun Ayele, Bahir Dar University for his invaluable contribution to my research undertakings. I thank also Ms Price Judy coordinator of HDP at University of Gondar for helping language edition. My thanks also go to Ibrahim Damte (Ass. Professor at University of Gondar) who gave me suggestions and comments for the writing up of this paper.

References

I. Published and unpublished Sources

- Aklilu Habtewold (Tsehafe T'ezaz). (2010). *የ አ ክ ሊ ሉ ማስታወሻ* (Aklilu Remembers). Addis Ababa; Addis Ababa Printing Press
- Anberbir Mebrate.(1976). The movement of Gondar people prior to revolution, Gondar. (un published)
- David Rifkind. (2011). *Architecture and Urbanism for Italy's Fascist Empire*: Florida International University
- Fantahun Engdaw. *ታሪካዊ መዝገብ ሰብአዊ ጥንቶች እና ሐረግ (Historical Biography dictionary: from Ancient to Present)*; Vol.1, Bole Printing Press; Addis Ababa, 2000 E.C.
- Fikre Selasie Wogderes, (2006). *እኛ እና አብዮቱ (Āññaenna Abyotu : We and the Revolution)*; Tsehay Publishing, Addis Ababa
- Mengistie Desta. (2007). *Ethiopian's role in African history*. Addis Ababa:Shama books
- Solomon Getahun. *The Evolution of Development of the Public Health College & Training Centre in Gondar: the history of the Che-che-la, from an Italian Consular Office to Medical College (1950's –1970"s) accessed on*
- Tomohiro Shitara. (2006). *Present Condition of Historical Italian Buildings in Gondar*: Graduate School of Media and Governance; Keio University

II. Archival Sources

- Negarit Gazeta*, 6th year, No.3, Vol.30, 1946
- File No.ወ/8; Ref. No. 41, Wakka Zalalaw to Balambaras Mahteme Selasie Wolde Mesqel, 02/13/1934 E.C
- File. No. ሀ/3; Ref. No. 1057, Blata Tesfamariam to *Dejazmach* Mesfin, 01/03/1935 E.C)
- File No.ወ/8; Ref. No. 1117/14, chief secretary of Debre Tabor Awraja Administration office to Princes Tenagnework Hayle Selasie, Gondar, 04/04/1944 E.C
- Report of Derg office, File.No. ጠ, No.Ref.no,12/03/1967 E.C)
- File No. ሸ/2፣ Ref. No. ሐአመ53/3/3, Negash Desta, Minister Ministry of Finance to Begemedir and Simen kifle Hager Bejirond office, 2/4/1967 E.C
- File.No. ጠ; No Ref. No, Sayfe Selasie Liben, manager of Ras Hotels Administration, 05/05/1967 E.C)
- File. No. ጠ; Ref. No. ኢ/ት/829/29/67, Mulugeta Sayfe Ared, Manager of Gondar kifle Hager Municipal office, 14/05/1967 E.C)
- File.No.ሸ/2, Ref. No.መ/1/1967, Dinku Wubu, Manager of Etege Menen Hotel to Begemedir & Simen Kiflehager National Wealth Development office, 29/07/1967E.C)

File. No. ጠ; Ref. No.ሰ /አ /125/70, *Grazmach* Hailu Abebaw, head of Aba Samuel agricultural branch organization to Gondar Municipal office, 20/07.1970 E.C)

File. No. ጠ; Ref. No.5502/3-1/46, *Shalleqa* Melaku Tefera, chief administrator of Gondar Kifle Hager to Gondar Kifle Hager Road transport branch office, 25/10/1971 E.C

Oral Informants

| No | Name of informant | sex | Age | Date of interview & place | Remark |
|----|------------------------------|-----|-----|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Ambachew Kasa | M | 70 | 12/03/2008 E.C Azezo | He is the son of <i>Fitawurari</i> Kasa Belete who lost his land, Aba Samuel and remembered the action of it(now he is retired) |
| 2 | Askal Wasihun | F | 35 | 25/02/2006 E.C Azezo | She is a teacher in Azezo preparatory school and grew up in Gondar, qebele 09 |
| 3 | Asrat Kasa | M | 68 | 17/02/2008 E.C Azezo | He also the son of <i>fitawurari</i> Kasa who is a retired teacher |
| 4 | Ethiopia Wubineh | F | 73 | 18/01/2008 E.C Aba Samuel | She is the daughter of <i>Amoraw</i> Wubineh and lives in Azezo |
| 5 | <i>Emahoy</i> Mekedash Abera | F | 106 | 21/02/2008 E.C Azezo | She is the wife of <i>Ato</i> Admasu Tegegne who lost his rist land at Aba Samuel, and one of the women who displaced from Aba Samuel |
| 6 | Meseret Admasu | F | 40 | 21/02/2008 E.C Azezo | She is the grand child of <i>Ato</i> Admasu Tegegne |
| 7 | Nigusie Desie | M | 65 | 17/03/2008 E.C Gomengie | One of the son of Asfu Desie who lost his rist land in the same area |
| 8 | Yigzaw Mekonen | M | 85 | 21/02/2008 E.C Ayira Micael | The family of <i>Amoraw</i> Wubineh and vividly remember the action of Imperial government |