



**A HISTORY OF LAND TENURE AND TAXATION SYSTEM  
IN KOFALE WOREDA (1941-1974)**

**BY MUSTEFA JIFAR WOSHE**

**MADDA WALABU UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF SOCIAL  
SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES**

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND HERITAGE  
MANAGEMENT**

**A Thesis Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master's  
Degree of Arts in History and Heritage Studies**

**January 2025**

**Robe-Bale**



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**MADDA WALABU UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
MASTER’S THESIS DEFENCE**

**BOARD OF EXAMINERS APPROVAL SHEET**

As a member of the board of examiners of the master’s thesis open defense, we certify that we have read and evaluated the thesis prepared by the student, **Mustefa Jifar Woshe** under the title, **“A History Of Land Tenure And Taxation System In Kofale Woreda (1941-1974)”** and made recommended that it can be accepted as fulfilling the thesis requirements for the degree of **Masters of Arts in History and Heritage Management.**

.....  
Name of External Examiners      signature      Date

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Name of Internal Examiner 1      signature      Date

.....  
Name of Internal Examiner 2      Signature      Date



### **STATEMENT OF the AUTHOR**

First, I declare that this thesis is the result of my own work and that all sources of materials used for this thesis have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for M.A. degree at Madda Walabu University. I solemnly declare that this thesis is not submitted to any other institution anywhere for the award of any academic degree, diploma, or certificate.

**Name: Abduro Aliyi**                      **Signature: \_\_\_\_\_**

**Place: Madda Walabu University, Madda Walabu**

**Date of submission: \_\_\_\_\_**

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate my thesis to my late reverend father Balambaras Jifar Washe, who affected and had been affected by land tenure system.

### **STATEMENT OF AUTHOR**

First, I declare that this thesis is the result of my own work and that all sources of materials used for this thesis have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for M.A. degree at Madda Walabu University. I solemnly declare that this thesis is not submitted to any other institution anywhere for the award of any academic degree, diploma, or certificate.

**Name: Mustefa Jifar Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Place: Madda Walabu University, Madda Walabu**

**Date of submission:** \_\_\_\_\_

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My thanks also go to all my informants without whom the thesis would have been unthinkable. Last but not least, I am also thankful to my wife for her support in all up and down in my life.

## GLOSSARY

### Afan Oromo Terms

### Meaning

Gosa-----	clan
Gumaa-----	blood price/compensation
Mana-----	house, family
Obboo-----	title of respect for men
Odaa-----	a sycamore tree chosen for the performance of religious rituals as well as political action.
Seera-----	the traditional law of Oromo people
Warra-----	extended family

### Amharic Terms

Awraja-----	sub-province of Ethiopia before 1991
Balabbat-----	hereditary ownership of the rest land; is an appointee at district level by state to serve as subordinate land administrator or local landlords
Balambaras-----	head of the amba; a low level administrative title
Derg-----	committee
Gabbar-----	tribute paying peasants either in kind or money
Gibir-----	agrarian tribute, invariably paid in kind, tax
Gasha-----	unit of land measurement equivalent to forty (40) hectares
Kebele-----	the lowest administrative structure in a district, a sub-country (the post 1974 name for villages)
Lam-----	cultivated land
Lam tef-----	semi-cultivated land
Maderia-----	land granted to government officials
Neftegna-----	from neft, 'refile' name given to Emperor Menelik's warriors of northern origin, who later settled in south
Negus-----	king
Ras-----	head, the highest traditional title next to negus
Rist-----	a lineage system of land ownership
Woreda-----	district
Zemacha-----	campaign

## Preface

This research paper, titled “A History of Land Tenure and Taxation System in Kofele *Woreda* (1941-1974),” aims to explore the evolution of land tenure and taxation in Kofele Woreda, Arsi Zone, from the mid-20th century through to the eve of the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution. It is a comprehensive study that examines how land policies and tax systems impacted the rural population, particularly peasant communities, and the broader social, political, and economic conditions of the time.

In order to compile this history, a variety of sources were used, including archival documents, government proclamations, historical texts, and local records. Oral history from interviews with older community members, along with secondary sources on Ethiopian history and agrarian systems, were also instrumental in shaping this study. These sources have been critically analyzed to understand the complex relationship between land ownership, taxation, and the peasant experience in Kofele.

**Chapter 1: Geographical and Historical Background of Kofele Woreda** This chapter provides an introduction to the geographical setting of Kofele, a district located in the central highlands of Ethiopia, in the Arsi Zone. It also traces the historical background of the area, including the traditional governance structures that shaped land ownership and taxation practices before the mid-20th century. The chapter explores the concept of land tenure security and its evolution leading up to 1936, when significant changes began to take place under imperial rule. Additionally, the taxation system prior to 1936 is examined, along with the impact of the Italian occupation (1936-1941) on land policies and tax structures.

**Chapter 2: Land Tenure System from 1941 to 1974** this chapter delves into the feudal land ownership system that dominated Kofele after the end of the Italian occupation. It covers the developments in land tenure from 1941, following the return of Emperor Haile Selassie, and analyzes the attempts at land reform, including the 1951 land proclamation and its local impacts. The chapter also addresses the 1967 agricultural income tax, its enforcement, and the reactions from peasants. The shifting political landscape, including resistance movements and grievances among peasants, is discussed in the context of the path toward revolution. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the landlord-tenant relationship, tenancy problems, and the role of agriculture in the socio-political environment.

Chapter 3: Taxation System in Kofele Woreda from 1941 to 1974 This chapter focuses on the evolution of taxation systems in Kofele during the imperial period, emphasizing key reforms such as the 1967 agricultural income tax. It examines the government's efforts to introduce new tax policies, their impact on peasant communities, and the responses of local farmers to these impositions. The chapter also touches on how taxation was linked to land tenure and the broader economic conditions of the time. The dynamics of political unrest and its influence on tax-related issues are explored in the context of the lead-up to the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution.

By analyzing these historical changes, this paper aims to offer a nuanced understanding of the interplay between land tenure, taxation, and social unrest in Kofele, shedding light on how these systems shaped the lives of ordinary peasants and contributed to the broader dynamics of Ethiopian history during this critical period. The study highlights the persistence of feudal-like structures, the impact of reform efforts, and the economic and political pressures that ultimately led to revolutionary change.

## Table of Contents

Contents	Page
Board of examiners approval sheet.....	i
Certification of the thesis.....	ii
Statement of the author.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Statement of author.....	v
Acknowledgments .....	vi
Glossary.....	vii
Preface .....	viii
Table of Contente_.....	viii
Abstract.....	x
1. Geographical and Historical Background of Kofale woreda.....	1
1.1. Geographical Setting .....	1
1.2. Historical Background.....	2
1.2. 1.Traditional Governance in Kofale <i>Woreda</i> .....	7
1.2.3. Land Tenure system to 1936.....	10
1.2.4. Changes Leading Up to 1936.....	11
1.2.5. Taxation system to 1936 .....	12
2. Land Tenure System from 1941 to 1974 .....	16
1. Feudal Land Ownership: .....	16
2. Post-1941 Developments: .....	16
3. The 1951 Land Proclamation of Ethiopia and its effect on Kofele woreda.....	17
4. Attempts at Reform: .....	18
5. Path to Revolution:.....	18

2.1. Government Land Reform and the Conditions of Peasants .....	20
Land Tenure System Before the Ethiopian Revolution .....	20
Economic Conditions .....	26
Social Conditions .....	27
Political Conditions .....	27
2.2. Land lord-Tenant Relationship and Tenancy Problems .....	28
2.3. Land Tenure System and Agriculture.....	34
1. Feudal Land Tenure System:.....	34
2. Imperial Policies:.....	34
2.4. The 1967 Agricultural Income Tax (Proclamation No. 138/1967) and its Reality in Kofele Woreda.....	43
2.4.1. Effects of the 1967 Agricultural Income Tax on Kofele District, Arsi Zone include ..	44
2.4.2. Reality of the 1967 Agricultural Income Tax in Kofele .....	45
3. Taxation system in Kofale woreda from 1941 to 1974.....	46
Clan (Gosa).....	49
Land Lords (Baalabbaata) .....	49
District/Wored (aAanaa).....	49
3.1. Tax Reforms .....	56
3.2. Peasants Reactions to Tax Reforms and its Imposition.....	58
Conclusion .....	61
References.....	64
Unpublished Sources.....	64
Published Sources .....	65
List of Informants .....	71

## **Abstract**

*The objective of this study is to reconstruct a History of Land Tenure and Taxation System of Kofale Woreda from 1941-1974, revealing the complex interplay between geography, history, and cultural identity in Ethiopia. The incorporation of Kofale woreda into modern Ethiopian state as a result of Menelik's territorial expansion brought a profound transformation in land tenure and taxation system which disrupted traditional ownership of land. The Italian occupation further exacerbated these challenges through land appropriation and heavy taxation, leading to social unrest and economic strain among peasants. The analysis highlights the persistent inequalities rooted in the concentration of land ownership and the exploitative practices of landlords, which hindered economic mobility and fueled discontent among the rural populace. Despite attempts at reform during the imperial regime, land distribution often favored the elite, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality. The article underscores the importance of understanding Kofele's historical context to address contemporary land rights issues and foster equitable development. Ultimately, it argues that the lessons from Kofele's past are vital for shaping future policies that respect local traditions and promote social justice within Ethiopia's ongoing journey toward sustainable governance and development. Additionally, this study used both primary and secondary sources.*

# Chapter One

## 1. Geographical and Historical Background of Kofale woreda

### 1.1. Geographical Setting

Kofele is a district located in the Oromia Region of Ethiopia, named after its administrative center. Situated within the West Arsi Zone, it shares borders with Kokosa to the south Nations and Nationalities of Peoples' to the west, Shashamene District to the northwest, Kore to the north, Gedeb Asasa to the east, and Dodola to the southeast. Other towns in the district include Wabe Gefersa<sup>1</sup>.

The elevation in Kofele ranges from 2,000 to 3,050 meters above sea level, with Mount Duro being the highest point. The district features several rivers, including the 35-kilometer Anjelo, 30-kilometer Totalamo, and 35-kilometer Ashoka, all tributaries of the Shebelle River. Land use in the district shows that 30% is arable, 29% is pasture, 2.9% is forested, while the remaining 38.1% is categorized as swampy, mountainous, or otherwise unusable. Vegetables are a significant cash crop, and hides and skins are the main exports from Kofale (cultural and tourism Beureu).

According to the 2007 national census, the district had a total population of 178,950, with 89,729 men and 89,221 women; 15,448, or 8.63%, were urban residents. The majority of the population is Muslim (94.32%), while 2.88% identify as Ethiopian Orthodox Christians and 1.94% as Protestants<sup>2</sup>.

As 2005, data from the Central Statistical Agency, Kofele's estimated population was 251,761, with 126,891 men and 124,870 women; 20,874, or 8.29%, lived in urban areas, which is below the zone average of 12.3%. The district covers approximately 1,187.66 square kilometers,

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<sup>1</sup> *Socio-economic profile of Arsi Zone* Government of Oromia Region (last accessed 1 August 2006).

<sup>2</sup> *2007 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia: Results for Oromia Region*, Vol. 1 Archived 2011-11-13 at the Wayback Machine, Tables 2.1, 2.5, 3.4 (accessed 13 January 2012)

resulting in a population density of 212 people per square kilometer, higher than the zone average of 132.2<sup>3</sup>.

The 1994 national census recorded a population of 179,708, with 89,443 men and 90,265 women; 11,665, or 6.49%, were urban dwellers. The predominant ethnic groups in Kofele are the Oromo (94.86%) and the Amhara (3.83%), while other ethnic groups make up 1.31%. Oromo is the first language for 94.59% of the population, with 4.55% speaking Amharic and the remaining 0.86% using other languages. The majority are Muslim (55.63%), with 44.01% identifying as Ethiopian Orthodox Christians<sup>4</sup>.

## 1.2. Historical Background

Kofele is one of the districts of the Oromia region of Ethiopia. The majority of people who inhabit Kofale *woreda* are the Arsi Oromo. They are people of the same origin and culture, following a patrilineal descent system<sup>5</sup>. The largest level of descent organization among the Arsi Oromo is the clan (Gosa) which in most cases is also a territorial unit<sup>6</sup>. Although, a few number of ethnic groups (such as Sidama, Amhara, Guraghe, Wolaita, and a few minority groups such as Chawa and Wottile are found in small numbers in kofale *woreda*, the overwhelming majority are the Arsi Oromo. The Arsi Oromo in Kofale *woreda* speak Afaan Oromo, which belongs to the Eastern Cushitic language family<sup>7</sup>.

The Arsi Oromo is one of the Oromo branches inhabiting the Oromia region mainly in the present day Arsi, Western Arsi, Bale and part of eastern Shewa zone. They have descended from a single individual called Arsie<sup>8</sup>. According to Arsi oral traditions, their Original homeland is

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<sup>3</sup> CSA 2005 National Statistics Archived 2008-07-31 at the Wayback Machine, Tables B.3 and B.4

<sup>4</sup> 1994 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia: Results for Oromia Region, Vol. 1, part 1 Archived 2009-11-15 at the Wayback Machine, Tables 2.1, 2.13, 2.16, 2.20 (accessed 6 April 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Mamo 2006:9

<sup>6</sup> Mamo 2006:9

<sup>7</sup> Jeylan Adam and AdemKedir.1998 EC. "Construction of Additional Blocks in Kofale Primary School" ( Unpublished official document).

<sup>8</sup> Jeylan Woliyye, 2005: 15-58

Beredu Kurkuru, somewhere on the boarder of present day Arsi and Bale. This tradition also shows that, the name Arsi is derived from the ancestral founding father called Arsi (Arsie) who had two sons: Sikko and Mando. They in turn gave birth to five and seven children respectively. It is further stated that these twelve sons of Sikko and Mando were the forefathers of the current Arsi Oromo groups. Descendants of these people seem to have dispersed in the region of Bale, Shewa and Sidama<sup>9</sup>. The descendents of Sikko crossed the Wabe Shebelle River in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and settled in today's Arsi. On the other hand, Mando stayed behind and still live in Bale<sup>10</sup>.

The Arsi people who are found in Kofale *woreda* belong to Mando branche of Arsi Oromo. In other words, according to Alemeyehu Haile et.al (2006), Uta and Wayu clans of Mando branches are found in West Arsi. However, the writers failed to treat the clan interactions in Kofale *woreda* between Uta and Wayu.

Before Menilek's conquest of the southern region and the introduction of Islam among the Arsi in the latter half of the 19th century, their social life was primarily shaped by kinship units, moiety clan lineage structures, and the egalitarian socio-political organization known as the Gada system. Therefore, until the mid-19th century, both these social structures played dominant roles in Arsi Oromo society. The Arsi Oromo's social fabric was intricately woven with these structures, influencing their cultural, religious, and socio-political organization<sup>11</sup>.

The first significant social structure among the Arsi Oromo was the moiety clan lineage structure, which followed a genealogical thread. The Arsi were divided into two major groups: Sikko, the elder with five sons, and Mando, the younger with seven sons. Over time, Mando came to be recognized as senior while Sikko became junior, based on their agreements under Gada laws. The descendants of Sikko crossed the Wabe Shebelle River in the 16th century and settled in what is now known as Arsi. Meanwhile, many of Mando's descendants remained in Bale, with some settling in western Arsi, southern Shawa, and parts of Sidamo. This migration

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<sup>9</sup> Almaw Kifle, p.3

<sup>10</sup> Abbas, 1982, 1; Abdurehman, 1991: 4; Ketebo, 1991, 16

<sup>11</sup> Mohammed Hassen, 2006. "A Historical Survey of *Arbagugu*", pp.10-12, Katabo Abdiyo, 1999. "A Historical Survey Of Arsi...", p.1, Abbas Haji, 1982. "A History of Arsi...", pp.12-14.

and settlement pattern fostered strong cultural, religious, and social ties among the Arsi, particularly those living on either side of the Wabe River<sup>12</sup>.

The social organization of the Arsi was hierarchical, structured into five main levels: clan (Gosa), village (balbala), ward (Aanaa or Ardaa), extended family (Warra or Ganda), and nuclear family (Mana or Ibibda). Membership in these units was patrilineal, with each level serving distinct social and territorial functions within Arsi society. The highest unit, the Gosa (clan), often overlapped with territorial boundaries and was subdivided into balbalas, which in turn were further divided into wards and extended families<sup>13</sup>.

In addition to the clan-based social structure, the Arsi Oromo practiced the Gada system, a complex institution that provided political, social, and cultural leadership through a system of generational classes that rotated leadership responsibilities every eight years. The Gada system was integral to the socio-political life of the Arsi Oromo before the 19th century, although its continuity was disrupted by external influences such as Menilek's conquest and the spread of Islam into the region<sup>14</sup>.

Despite these external pressures, elements of the Gada system persisted in pockets of Arsi society, such as Ilka Bebe in Kofale district, where certain gada practices continued. Each clan had its own Abba Gada (leader), reflecting the autonomy and independence of the clans within the broader Arsi community<sup>15</sup>.

Overall, the traditional governance structures of the Arsi Oromo in the Kofale area were characterized by a blend of moiety clan lineage structures and the Gada system, which together shaped their social cohesion, cultural identity, and territorial organization before significant external influences altered their socio-political landscape<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Katebo Abdiyo, 2010. "The Political Economy of Land and Agrarian Development in Arsi...", P.4.

<sup>13</sup> Bahiru Zawude, 2005. *A History of Modern Ethiopia- 1855-1991*, p. 62.

<sup>14</sup> Informants: Bario Sondhi, 15/8/2024 and Tusa Wako, 02//2024.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

The annexation of the Arsi Oromo by Emperor Menilek of Shewa had a profound impact on the Arsi Oromo residing in the Kofale area. To fully understand this impact, it is crucial to examine Menilek's conquest of the Arsi. The incorporation of Arsi began with a series of military campaigns initiated by Menilek from 1882 onward, aimed at gaining control over land and trade resources to consolidate his power and expand his realm<sup>17</sup>. The Arsi Oromo, located in present-day Arsi, fiercely resisted Menilek's advancing forces, engaging in battles using spears and shields. The conflict escalated throughout the 19th century as the Shewan king mobilized troops to assert dominance over the territory and extract tribute from the Arsi<sup>18</sup>.

Facing determined resistance, Menilek eventually deployed soldiers to establish garrisons in the region, imposing heavy burdens on the Arsi populace. Many Arsi men were compelled to labor for the military stationed in these garrisons. The decisive confrontation between the Arsi Oromo and Menilek's forces occurred in 1886. Following Menilek's victory, he implemented the malkanya system, a feudal arrangement where his soldiers were granted authority over the local population. Each clan was required to pay annual taxes in kind to different landlords appointed by Menilek<sup>19</sup>.

Recognizing the limited resistance capabilities of the Arsi, Menilek encouraged northern farmers to settle in the region by offering them land grants, thereby introducing plough agriculture to exploit fertile lands. Over time, this influx of settlers, predominantly Amhara and Shewan Oromo, significantly altered the demographic and socio-economic landscape of Arsi<sup>20</sup>.

The integration of Arsi into Menilek's realm marked a pivotal transformation in their socio-economic, cultural, and political life. The traditional Oromo Gada institution was supplanted by a centralized administration under Shewan control. Churches were constructed for the new settlers,

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<sup>17</sup> Abbas Haji.1982. "A History of Arsi 1980-1935 ", (Unpublished B.A. Thesis), Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

<sup>18</sup> Abbas Haji, 1994. "The Dilemmas of Arsi Balabbats: A Study of Socio- Economic Positioning of Local Chiefs, 1886-1935". Proceedings of the 10th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, 1994 (Vol. I, pp. 585- 592). Paris, France.

<sup>19</sup> Teshome Kebede, 1982. "Some Aspects of Feudalism in Ethiopia", Edited by Sven Rubenson, in the proceedings of the seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, University of Lund, pp., 201-210.

<sup>20</sup> John Markakis, 1975. Ethiopia: Anatomy of Traditional Polity, Oxford: Clarendon Press, PP.90-91.

and the indigenous Arsi population was subjected to heavy tributes, leading to widespread discontent and resistance<sup>21</sup>.

Moreover, Menilek's arrival precipitated significant changes in Arsi marriage practices. Previously, the predominant form of marriage among the Arsi Oromo in Kofale district was "Gabbara" or bride wealth marriage. However, the upheaval caused by Menilek's forces and subsequent famines disrupted the economy, leading to a collapse of cattle wealth traditionally used in bride wealth. This situation prompted the adoption of "Wolgara" or exchange marriage, a new marital practice introduced during this period<sup>22</sup>.

In response to these socio-political changes, the wider Arsi population also increasingly embraced Islam as a form of resistance against the imposition of Christianity by Shewan authorities. This conversion to Islam was seen as a rejection of the religious policies enforced by the invading Amhara rulers<sup>23</sup>.

In summary, Menilek's conquest of Arsi and subsequent governance policies profoundly reshaped the socio-economic, cultural, and political dynamics of the Arsi Oromo in the Kofale area, marking a significant turning point in their history<sup>24</sup>.

As Ethiopia is predominantly an agrarian state, land in Kofele woreda has been a crucial means of production for both rural society and the ruling elite. For rural society land is very valuable because its entire life is depended on land. It served the people as its house; as a means of production. Even, land was taken as symbol of freedom in the pre-1974 revolutionary Ethiopia because only those people with land use right or *rist* land were considered as a liberated, while people without *rist* land were considered either as slaves for landowners<sup>25</sup>. For the rulers of the country themselves land has been the basis of their political and economic power. Therefore, ruling elite land used as political instrument to manipulate the people. For this reason, question

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<sup>21</sup> Bahiru Zawude, 2005. A History of Modern Ethiopia- 1855-1991, p. 62.

<sup>22</sup> Husen Bedaso. 2000. *The Arsi Oromo Marriage Custom. Finfine*: Commercial Printing Press.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> P.T.W Baxter, Jun Hultin and Alesandro Truilzi (ed.), 1996. "Being and Becoming Oromo", A Historical and Anthropological Inquires, In Nordiska, Africa Institutet, Uppsala, pp.185-188.

<sup>25</sup> Binayew, 2015:44

of land remains an economically critical and politically contested resource, reflecting the age-old antagonism between a landed aristocracy, the church and the peasantry, since 4th century<sup>26</sup>. From history, we understood that land policy issues have been driven politics in Ethiopia for several years. Up on seizing political power, each regime in Ethiopian has been promising the people about land ownership, another promise that previous administration could not materialize<sup>27</sup>. Similar trends also continued with incumbent government which promised the declaration of new land policy in similar fashion. Notwithstanding of the significance of land in the social, economic and political institutions of the Ethiopians, scholars on land tenure studies in relation to politics is limited until recent time<sup>28</sup>.

### **1.2. 1.Traditional Governance in Kofale Woreda**

Before Menilek's conquest of the southern region and the introduction of Islam among the Arsi in the latter half of the 19th century, their social life was primarily shaped by kinship units, moiety clan lineage structures, and the egalitarian socio-political organization known as the Gada system. Therefore, until the mid-19th century, both these social structures played dominant roles in Arsi Oromo society. The Arsi Oromo's social fabric was intricately woven with these structures, influencing their cultural, religious, and socio-political organization<sup>29</sup>.

The first significant social structure among the Arsi Oromo was the moiety clan lineage structure, which followed a genealogical thread. The Arsi were divided into two major groups: Sikko, the elder with five sons, and Mando, the younger with seven sons. Over time, Mando came to be recognized as senior while Sikko became junior, based on their agreements under Gada laws. The descendants of Sikko migrated across the Wabe Shebelle River in the 16th century and settled in what is now known as Arsi. Meanwhile, many of Mando's descendants remained in Bale, with some settling in western Arsi, southern Shawa, and parts of Sidamo. This

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<sup>26</sup> Alemayehu, 2007:2

<sup>27</sup> Miller and Eyob, 2008: 348

<sup>28</sup> Abdurrahman Kabeto.1991. "Allo-Arssi: The Institution of Customary Laws in the Upper Wabe Shebele Region", (Unpublished B.A. Thesis), Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Informant: Abdulkedir H/Bati (Obboo)

<sup>29</sup> Mohammed Hassen, 2006. "A Historical Survey of *Arbagugu*", pp.10-12, Katabo Abdiyo, 1999. "A Historical Survey Of Arsi...", p.1, Abbas Haji, 1982. "A History of Arsi...", pp.12-14.

migration and settlement pattern fostered strong cultural, religious, and social ties among the Arsi, particularly those living on either side of the Wabe River<sup>30</sup>.

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In addition to the clan-based social structure, the Arsi Oromo practiced the Gada system, a complex institution that provided political, social, and cultural leadership through a system of generational classes that rotated leadership responsibilities every eight years. The Gada system was integral to the socio-political life of the Arsi Oromo before the 19th century, although its continuity was disrupted by external influences such as Menilek's conquest and the spread of Islam into the region<sup>32</sup>.

Despite these external pressures, elements of the Gada system persisted in pockets of Arsi society, such as Ilka Bebe in Kofale district, where certain gada practices continued. Each clan had its own Abba Gada (leader), reflecting the autonomy and independence of the clans within the broader Arsi community<sup>33</sup>.

Overall, the traditional governance structures of the Arsi Oromo in the Kofale area were characterized by a blend of moiety clan lineage structures and the Gada system, which together shaped their social cohesion, cultural identity, and territorial organization before significant external influences altered their socio-political landscape<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Katebo Abdiyo, 2010. "The Political Economy of Land and Agrarian Development in Arsi...", P.4.

<sup>31</sup> Bahiru Zawude, 2005. *A History of Modern Ethiopia- 1855-1991*, p. 62.

<sup>32</sup> Informants: Bario Sondhi, 15/8/2024 and Tusa Wako, 02//2024.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

The annexation of the Arsi Oromo by Emperor Menilek of Shewa had a profound impact on the Arsi Oromo residing in the Kofale area. To fully understand this impact, it is crucial to examine Menilek's conquest of the Arsi. The incorporation of Arsi began with a series of military campaigns initiated by Menilek from 1882 onward, aimed at gaining control over land and trade resources to consolidate his power and expand his realm. The Arsi Oromo, located in present-day Arsi, fiercely resisted Menilek's advancing forces, engaging in battles using spears and shields. The conflict escalated throughout the 19th century as the Shewan king mobilized troops to assert dominance over the territory and extract tribute from the Arsi<sup>35</sup>.

Facing determined resistance, Menilek eventually deployed soldiers to establish garrisons in the region, imposing heavy burdens on the Arsi populace. Many Arsi men were compelled to labor for the military stationed in these garrisons. The decisive confrontation between the Arsi Oromo and Menilek's forces occurred in 1886. Following Menilek's victory, he implemented the malkanya system, a feudal arrangement where his soldiers were granted authority over the local population. Each clan was required to pay annual taxes in kind to different landlords appointed by Menilek<sup>36</sup>.

Recognizing the limited resistance capabilities of the Arsi, Menilek encouraged northern farmers to settle in the region by offering them land grants, thereby introducing plough agriculture to exploit fertile lands. Over time, this influx of settlers, predominantly Amhara and Shewan Oromo, significantly altered the demographic and socio-economic landscape of Arsi<sup>37</sup>.

The integration of Arsi into Menilek's realm marked a pivotal transformation in their socio-economic, cultural, and political life. The traditional Oromo Gada institution was supplanted by a centralized administration under Shewan control. Churches were constructed for the new settlers,

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<sup>35</sup> Abbas Haji, 1994. "The Dilemmas of Arsi Balabbats: A Study of Socio- Economic Positioning of Local Chiefs, 1886-1935". Proceedings of the 10th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, 1994 (Vol. I, pp. 585- 592). Paris, France.

<sup>36</sup> Teshome Kebede, 1982. "Some Aspects of Feudalism in Ethiopia", Edited by Sven Rubenson, in the proceedings of the seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, University of Lund, pp., 201-210.

<sup>37</sup> John Markakis, 1975. Ethiopia: Anatomy of Traditional Polity, Oxford: Clarendon Press, PP.90-91.

and the indigenous Arsi population was subjected to heavy tributes, leading to widespread discontent and resistance<sup>38</sup>.

Moreover, Menilek's arrival precipitated significant changes in Arsi marriage practices. Previously, the predominant form of marriage among the Arsi Oromo in Kofale district was "Gabbara" or bride wealth marriage. However, the upheaval caused by Menilek's forces and subsequent famines disrupted the economy, leading to a collapse of cattle wealth traditionally used in bride wealth. This situation prompted the adoption of "Wolgara" or exchange marriage, a new marital practice introduced during this period<sup>39</sup>.

In response to these socio-political changes, the wider Arsi population also increasingly embraced Islam as a form of resistance against the imposition of Christianity by Shewan authorities. This conversion to Islam was seen as a rejection of the religious policies enforced by the invading Amhara rulers<sup>40</sup>.

In summary, Menilek's conquest of Arsi and subsequent governance policies profoundly reshaped the socio-economic, cultural, and political dynamics of the Arsi Oromo in the Kofale area, marking a significant turning point in their history<sup>41</sup>.

### **1.2.3. Land Tenure system to 1936**

The land tenure system in Kofele woreda, like much of Ethiopia, underwent significant changes leading up to 1936, particularly under the influence of feudal structures and later modern reforms.

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<sup>38</sup> Bahiru Zawude, 2005. *A History of Modern Ethiopia- 1855-1991*, p. 62.

<sup>39</sup> Abbas Haji, 1994. "The Dilemmas of Arsi Balabbats: A Study of Socio- Economic Positioning of Local Chiefs, 1886-1935". *Proceedings of the 10th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, 1994* (Vol. I, pp. 585- 592). Paris, France.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> P.T.W Baxter, Jun Hultin and Alesandro Truilzi (ed.), 1996. "Being and Becoming Oromo", *A Historical and Anthropological Inquires*, In Nordiska, Africa Institutet, Uppsala, pp.185-188.

Pre-1936 Land Tenure System was diversified across seven social classes. These include<sup>42</sup>:

**Feudal System:** Prior to the 20th century, Kofele was part of the broader feudal land system prevalent in Ethiopia. Land was owned by the nobility and the emperor, with peasants working the land as tenants. The land was typically divided into large estates controlled by feudal lords, who collected rents and taxes from tenant farmers. **Peasant Land Rights:** While peasants had access to land for cultivation, their rights were often insecure. They had to pay a share of their produce to the landowners, and their tenure was dependent on their relationship with these landlords. **Traditional Practices:** Land use was largely based on traditional practices, with communal landholding in some areas. Farmers often cultivated specific plots, and communal grazing lands were common. **Imperial Authority:** The emperor and the central government held ultimate authority over land ownership and distribution. Local officials were often tasked with managing land disputes and enforcing the policies of the feudal lords. **Socioeconomic Impact:** This system led to social stratification, where a small elite held vast tracts of land, while the majority of the population remained landless or marginally secure in their holdings. This contributed to cycles of poverty among the peasantry.

#### **1.2.4. Changes Leading Up to 1936**

The land tenure system up to 1936 can be seen in two categories:

**First, Emperor Menelik II and Haile Selassie:** During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, reforms initiated by emperors Menelik II and Haile Selassie began to change land administration practices, though the feudal structure largely remained intact until the Italian occupation<sup>43</sup>.

**Second, Italian Occupation (1936):** The Italian invasion in 1936 marked a turning point. The occupiers implemented their own land policies, which aimed at reorganizing land use and

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<sup>42</sup> Bizuwork Zewude. 1992. "The problem of Tenancy and Tenancy Bills: With Particular reference to Arsi", (Unpublished M.A. Thesis), Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

ownership to benefit Italian settlers. This disrupted traditional practices and further altered the land tenure landscape in Kofele and beyond<sup>44</sup>.

Overall, the land tenure system in Kofele up to 1936 was characterized by feudal practices, limited peasant rights, and the overarching authority of the central government, setting the stage for significant changes with the advent of colonial rule<sup>45</sup>.

### **1.2.5. Taxation system to 1936**

The taxation system in Kofele woreda, prior to 1936, was closely tied to the broader feudal and administrative structures of Ethiopia. Here's an overview of the key features of the taxation system during this period:

#### *1. Feudal Taxation*

When we examine land taxation before 1936, Landlord Responsibilities was to land lords. Under the feudal system, local landlords (nobility) collected taxes from tenant farmers. These taxes were often in the form of a portion of the agricultural produce, known as sharecropping. Peasants were required to give a specific percentage of their harvest to their landlords. Taxes could include various forms of tribute, such as grain, livestock, or other goods. The exact amount depended on the productivity of the land and the agreements made with landowners<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> Cohen, John M. 1973. "Rural Changes in Ethiopia: A study of Land, Elites, Power and Values in Chilalo Awraja", (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis), University of Colorado, United States of America.

<sup>45</sup> Ketebo Abdiyo. 1999. "A Historical survey of Arsi, 1910–1974 ", (Unpublished M.A. Thesis), Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

<sup>46</sup> Bizuwork Zewude. 1992. "The problem of Tenancy and Tenancy Bills: With Particular reference to Arsi", (Unpublished M.A. Thesis), Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

In this period, the central government imposed additional taxes, which could include direct taxes on property, poll taxes on individuals, and taxes on trade. These taxes were collected by local officials on behalf of the emperor<sup>47</sup>.

As far as tax collection is concerned, Local administrators, often appointed by the central authority, were responsible for tax collection. They maintained records of taxable land and households and were tasked with enforcing tax compliance<sup>48</sup>.

The major Cultural and Religious Taxes Church Taxes. In some areas, there were taxes levied to support the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, reflecting the church's significant role in society. These taxes could take the form of agricultural produce or cash<sup>49</sup>.

Insecurity of Tenure: The feudal nature of landholding meant that many peasants faced insecurity in their tenure, which impacted their ability to meet tax obligations. Poor harvests could lead to difficulty in paying taxes, resulting in debts or loss of land<sup>50</sup>.

Corruption and Mismanagement: Tax collection was often subject to corruption, with local officials sometimes demanding excessive payments or misappropriating funds meant for the central authority<sup>51</sup>.

### ***5. Land Tenure System During Italian Occupation***

The Italian occupation known for the disruption of the feudal system. The Italian invasion in 1936 led to significant changes in taxation as the occupiers implemented their own systems to

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<sup>47</sup> Cohen, John M. 1973. "Rural Changes in Ethiopia: A study of Land, Elites, Power and Values in Chilalo *Awraja*", (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis), University of Colorado, United States of America.

<sup>48</sup> Ketebo Abdiyo. 1999. "A Historical survey of Arsi, 1910–1974 ", (Unpublished M.A. Thesis), Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

<sup>49</sup> Taddese Tamirat. 1972. *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270-1527*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

<sup>50</sup> Ketebo Abdiyo. 1999. "A Historical survey of Arsi, 1910–1974 ", (Unpublished M.A. Thesis), Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

<sup>51</sup> Addis Hiwot. 1975. *Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution: Review of African Political Economy*. London: Occasional Publication.

extract resources for their colonial endeavors. This further complicated the existing taxation structure and altered the relationships between farmers, landlords, and the government<sup>52</sup>.

Overall, the taxation system in Kofele woreda before 1936 was marked by a combination of feudal obligations, imperial taxes, and local practices, creating a complex and often challenging environment for the peasantry<sup>53</sup>.

During the Italian occupation of Ethiopia (1936-1941), Kofele woreda, like many regions in the country, experienced significant changes in land tenure and taxation systems.

As far as Land Tenure is concerned, it experienced the following events.

The Italians implemented a policy of land appropriation, often Not necessary, write in paragraph form displacing local farmers. They aimed to establish control over agricultural production, leading to a shift in land ownership from local peasants to Italian settlers and military officials<sup>54</sup>. New laws were introduced that favored Italian colonists. These laws often ignored traditional land tenure systems, undermining the rights of local farmers. The Italian administration imposed a more centralized control over land, which resulted in a loss of communal rights<sup>55</sup>. The focus shifted towards cash crops intended for export, which altered local agricultural practices. The emphasis on export-oriented agriculture often led to food shortages for local populations<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> Bahru Zewde. 1984. "Some Aspects of Post-Liberation Ethiopia 1941-1950", In *Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, 1984 (vol. 1, p.55), Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies.

<sup>53</sup> Asma Gorgis. 1987. *History of the Galla and the Kingdom of Shawa*. Translated and Edited by Bairu Tafla. Stuttgart: Franzsteiner Verlag Weisbaden GmbH.

<sup>54</sup> \_\_\_\_\_. 1991. *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1855-1974*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Addis Ababa University Press.

<sup>55</sup> Andargachew Tirunch. 1993. *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987: from aristocratic to totalitarian autocracy*. Cambridge, United States of America: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>56</sup> Asma Gorgis. 1987. *History of the Galla and the Kingdom of Shawa*. Translated and Edited by Bairu Tafla. Stuttgart: Franzsteiner Verlag Weisbaden GmbH.

Regarding taxation system, the Italian regime introduced heavier taxes on local populations, often in the form of land tax, poll tax, and agricultural levies. This increase placed a significant financial burden on the already struggling local farmers. The Italian authorities employed strict tax collection methods, including penalties for non-compliance. Failure to pay taxes could result in confiscation of property or imprisonment, further enforcing their control. The new taxation policies disrupted local economies. Farmers often had to prioritize cash crop production over subsistence farming to meet tax obligations, leading to food insecurity in some cases<sup>57</sup>.

The changes in land tenure and taxation during the Italian period had profound effects on the social and economic fabric of Kofele *woreda*:

Many local farmers were displaced, leading to social unrest and a loss of traditional livelihoods. The harsh policies contributed to resistance movements against Italian rule, as local populations sought to reclaim their rights and land. The legacy of these changes continued to influence land policies and social dynamics in Kofele and beyond even after the Italians left<sup>58</sup>.

Overall, the Italian occupation brought significant disruption to the traditional land tenure and taxation systems in Kofele *woreda*, with lasting impacts on the local population<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>57</sup> Bahru Zewde. 1984. "Some Aspects of Post-Liberation Ethiopia 1941-1950", In *Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, 1984 (vol. 1, p.21), Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies.

<sup>58</sup> Baxter, P. T. W. 1978. "Ethiopia's Unacknowledged Problem: The Oromo", *African Affairs: A Quarterly Journal of the Royal African Society*. Published by: Oxford University Press on behalf of The Royal African Society. 77(308):283-296.

<sup>59</sup> Bahru Zewde. 1984. "Some Aspects of Post-Liberation Ethiopia 1941-1950", In *Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, 1984 (vol. 1, p.41), Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies.

## Chapter Two

### 2. Land Tenure System from 1941 to 1974

The land tenure system in Kofele Woreda from 1941 to 1974 was characterized by a feudal structure that deeply affected agricultural practices and rural life. Here are the key features:

#### 1. Feudal Land Ownership:

The majority of land was owned by a small number of landlords or nobility, who exerted significant control over the agricultural output of the region. Peasants, who made up the bulk of the population, worked as tenants or sharecroppers. Peasants typically worked land in exchange for a share of the harvest, often paying high rents and taxes, which limited their economic mobility and stability<sup>60</sup>.

#### 2. Post-1941 Developments:

After the liberation, there was an increased awareness of the need for reform. However, the existing feudal structures remained largely intact. The government implemented various taxes on agricultural production, adding to the financial strain on peasants and fueling discontent<sup>61</sup>.

The inequities of the land tenure system led to significant discontent among peasants. Many expressed their frustrations through protests and demands for land reform. Local leaders and movements began to emerge, advocating for the rights of peasants and pushing for changes in land ownership and usage<sup>62</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> Dessalegn Rahmato .2008. *The peasant and the state: Studies on Changes in Agrarian Changes in Ethiopia 1950's - 2000* . USA.

<sup>61</sup> Bahru Zewde. 1984. "Some Aspects of Post-Liberation Ethiopia 1941-1950", In *Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, 1984 (vol. 1, p.21), Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies.

<sup>62</sup> Bahru Zewde. 1984. "Some Aspects of Post-Liberation Ethiopia 1941-1950", In *Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, 1984 (vol. 1, p.48), Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies.

### **3. The 1951 Land Proclamation of Ethiopia and its effect on Kofele woreda**

The 1951 Land Proclamation of Ethiopia, formally known as the "Proclamation No. 46/1951," was an important piece of legislation that marked the beginning of significant land reform in the country. It sought to regulate land tenure and ownership, which had previously been based on customary laws, and introduced a system that recognized the state's ownership of all land. Under this proclamation, land was made the property of the state, with individuals only holding the right to use it.

Effects of the 1951 Land Proclamation on Kofele District, Arsi Zone included the following<sup>63</sup>:

The proclamation led to the redistribution of land, particularly in regions where there were large estates or feudal landownership. In areas like Kofele, where traditional land use systems were prevalent, this redistribution could have had significant social and economic impacts, as people who had previously been under the control of large landowners might have gained more access to land.

Before the proclamation, land was typically owned by the nobility or the state, and peasants worked on it under a system of tenancy. With the proclamation, land tenure shifted to a more centralized state system, which often resulted in changes in the power dynamics in rural areas, including Kofele. Some local elites may have lost control over land, while others may have gained land rights.

The state asserted control over land, removing the local rulers' ability to allocate land. This potentially disrupted traditional land management practices in rural districts like Kofele. The government, through local administration, controlled the distribution and use of land, changing the way rural communities interacted with their land.

The regulation of land ownership and use could have had both positive and negative effects. On one hand, it gave more individuals legal access to land. On the other hand, it may have led to increased dependency on the state for land distribution, potentially reducing local autonomy. In Kofele, where agricultural activity was central, these changes likely had long-term consequences for agricultural practices and rural livelihoods.

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<sup>63</sup> Dessalegn Rahmato .2008. *The peasant and the state: Studies on Changes in Agrarian Changes in Ethiopia 1950's - 2000* . USA.

The 1951 Proclamation could have undermined or altered traditional land practices that were already in place in Kofele and other rural areas of Arsi Zone. Communities that had managed land according to customary rules were now subject to state laws, which could have eroded community-based decision-making processes and social structures related to land use.

In general, the 1951 Land Proclamation had a profound effect on Kofele district and other rural areas by reshaping land ownership, control, and the relationship between the state and rural communities. While it may have provided some peasants with greater access to land, it also introduced new layers of bureaucratic control and disrupted traditional land tenure systems<sup>64</sup>.

#### 4. Attempts at Reform:

While there were occasional attempts at reform during Haile Selassie's regime, such as initiatives aimed at improving agricultural productivity, they often failed to adequately address the underlying issues of land ownership and tenant rights<sup>65</sup>.

#### 5. Path to Revolution:

By the early 1970s, frustrations with the land tenure system had intensified, leading to widespread unrest. The disconnect between the ruling class and the peasantry became increasingly pronounced. The culmination of these tensions contributed to the overthrow of Haile Selassie in 1974, leading to radical changes in land policy and the eventual land reform of 1975<sup>66</sup>.

From 1941 to 1974, Kofele Woreda's land tenure system was marked by deep-rooted feudal structures that oppressed the peasant population. The struggles over land rights and the burden of taxation contributed significantly to the socio-political landscape, ultimately leading to

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<sup>64</sup> Dessalegn Rahmato .2008. *The peasant and the state: Studies on Changes in Agrarian Changes in Ethiopia 1950's -2000* . USA.

<sup>65</sup> "Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia: A brief Assessment," *Paper Presented at the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Lund: University of Lund, PP. 587-595.

<sup>66</sup> Eshetu Chole. 1982. "Towards A History of the Fiscal Policy of the Pre Revolutionary Ethiopian State 1941-1974". *Paper Prepared for the East African History Conference, Nazareth: Institute of Ethiopian Studies*, 1982, PP. 234-261.

revolutionary change in Ethiopia. The period was defined by inequality and resistance, setting the stage for the radical land reforms that followed the revolution<sup>67</sup>.

In an agrarian economy and infant democracy like Ethiopia, rural land tenure security plays a pivotal and central role in the advancement of sustainable development, democracy and good governance, and human rights realization. From a legalistic point of view, establishment of land tenure security, on the other hand, is the outcome of the cumulative effect of the legal constructs of the nature, the duration, the assurance, the enforceability, and the registration and certification of land rights. The extent to and manner in which these elements, or legal constructs of objective land tenure security are defined and regulated in statutory land tenure system indicates the status of security of land tenure of landholders<sup>68</sup>.

The conceptual dilemma confronting the concept of land tenure security in kofele is one of the factors for failure to establish a comprehensive conceptual framework so far. Consideration of the right to security of property as one component of the bundle of rights in the ownership and the piecemeal approach to study the objective elements of land tenure security have also undermined the establishment of the framework<sup>69</sup>. Moreover, the tendency to consider the private land ownership in kofele form as the best way to secure land tenure and non-appreciation of the nature of communal landholdings and collective land rights undermine the comprehensive and clear development of the conceptual framework of legal land tenure security that works for different nature of landholding and utilization systems. In addition, what role constitutional law plays, without affecting the flexibility of land policy, in providing constitutional protection to

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<sup>67</sup> Eshetu Chole. 1982. "Towards A History of the Fiscal Policy of the Pre Revolutionary Ethiopian State 1941-1974". *Paper Prepared for the East African History Conference, Nazareth: Institute of Ethiopian Studies*, 1982, PP. 234-261.

<sup>68</sup> Dula Abdu. 1978. "Land Reform in Ethiopia: A Prelude to Socialist Development". In *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Session B, Chicago:University of Illinois, Month and date 1978, PP. 729-740.

<sup>69</sup> "The Problem of the Oromo or the Problem for the Oromo? The

View from Arussi", *In Nationalism and Self-Determination in the horn of Africa*. Edited by I.M. Lewis London, pp. 142-143

land rights and guiding the enactment of subordinate legislation that defines the legal land tenure security is not well-articulated<sup>70</sup>.

## **2.1. Government Land Reform and the Conditions of Peasants**

### **Land Tenure System Before the Ethiopian Revolution**

Ethiopia was governed by monarchs for over two thousand years, and its land tenure system was predominantly based on customary practices without formal written laws. Traditionally, all land was considered the property of the king, with private individuals and institutions, such as the Church, acquiring rights through imperial grants known as gults. As a result, land ownership was concentrated among a small number of landlords and the Church, especially in northern regions.

Land tenure practices varied significantly between northern and southern Ethiopia due to historical and political factors. In the north, land was held through lineage systems called rist, where land granted or inherited remained within families, ensuring usufructuary rights tied to kinship. These rights were hereditary and protected from arbitrary interference. In contrast, the south, particularly after Emperor Menelik II's 19th-century expansions, saw more gult lands, which could be sold or donated. Gult holders had administrative authority and collected taxes from tenants, leading to a concentration of land among the elite<sup>71</sup>.

During Menelik's reign, extensive gult lands were distributed as rewards, reinforcing the power of the ruling elite and religious institutions. This system maintained upper-class dominance over land in southern regions, contrasting with the communal rist system in the north that provided peasants with usufructuary rights. Over time, southern Ethiopia began to experience privatization and commodification of land, resulting in increased insecurity and tenant exploitation<sup>72</sup>.

The distinction between *rist* and gult, as noted by scholars like Hoben and Crummey, highlights the complex dynamics of land tenure in Ethiopia. Rist represented communal usufruct rights

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<sup>70</sup> Merid Wolde Aregay. "Land Tenure and Agriculture Productivity, 1500-1855", Proceedings of the Third Annual Seminar of the Development of History. Addis Ababa

<sup>71</sup> Gilkes, Patrick. 1975. *The Dying Lion: Feudalism and Modernization in Ethiopia*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Informant: Husen Gemedi

<sup>72</sup> Teshale Tibebe. 1995. *The Making of Modern Ethiopia, 1896-1974*. Lawrenceville, New Jersey, The Red Sea Press, Inc.

linked to lineage, while *gult* granted proprietary rights and administrative authority to individuals. Despite some variations, these rights were crucial for understanding class relations and the evolving land tenure landscape in Ethiopia<sup>73</sup>.

The 1960 Civil Code confirmed private ownership rights in urban areas, but rural land reforms faced significant resistance, preserving traditional tenures and perpetuating rural inequalities. Legislative attempts to reform land tenure had limited success, reinforcing peasants' dependence on customary laws and sustaining feudal or patron-client relationships<sup>74</sup>.

Historically, the land tenure system in Ethiopia encompassed social and administrative constructs rather than physical or geographical ones. Land is among the most valued assets in human society, and land tenure includes a complex set of rights and obligations involving both the state and the peasantry. The most ancient form of landholding in Ethiopia is the communal land tenure system, which remains evident in various regions<sup>75</sup>.

This system allows all members of society communal rights to land, based on family, clan, and larger lineage groups. People could freely exploit land resources, a characteristic particularly prevalent among the nomadic populations of eastern Ethiopia, where a pastoral economy has long been established. Similarly, inhabitants of the western lowlands, organized in clans, enjoyed communal land rights<sup>76</sup>.

As agriculture emerged and social classes and states formed in the northern Horn of Africa (Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Somalia), traditional landholding gradually evolved. This change introduced new tenure forms and additional land ownership claims. Three key terms related to this development are *rist*, *gult*, and *riste-gult*. These landholding types were prominent during the imperial era, a time when land reform issues grew increasingly contentious<sup>77</sup>.

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<sup>73</sup> Hoben, 1973

<sup>74</sup> "Hailassellassie's Development Policies and Views (1916-1960)", in *the 10<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, V. I, 1994, Paris, PP. 541-548

<sup>75</sup> Temesgen, 2005

<sup>76</sup> Shiferaw Bekele (1995) "The Evolution of Land Tenure in the Imperial Era", Shiferaw Bekele (ed.) *An Economic History of Modern Ethiopia 1941-74*. Dakar: Codesria, ),

<sup>77</sup> Hoben, 1973

Rist refers to the land tenure system in northern Ethiopia's highlands, characterized as a collective right where land is owned by the family group. Over generations, land is divided and redivided among descendants, remaining within the family. Thus, the rist system provides a communal birthright to land, inherited according to local customary laws<sup>78</sup>.

It's important to recognize that the founding ancestors owned the land communally, but individuals held possession. Consequently, rist land represents a weaker form of private property, incorporating community rights and obligations—individuals possess and use the land but cannot sell it. Under this system, rist owners can distribute land among their sons and pass it to their grandsons<sup>79</sup>.

In the rist system, there is no landlord-tenant relationship, and theoretically, all land belongs to the state. However, in practice, peasant rights to use land were indefinite, representing a natural evolution from communal land tenure<sup>80</sup>.

Nevertheless, over time, the principles of the rist system became less practical, influenced more by power dynamics than by biological descent. Consequently, land redistribution became rare, typically confined to the first and second generations, with obligations increasingly individualized rather than community-based.

Gult differs significantly from rist and communal land ownership. It represents the right to collect tribute from landowners rather than actual land ownership, emerging with the early processes of state formation in northern Ethiopia<sup>81</sup>. Officials tasked with collecting tribute from peasant landholders were associated with specific gult areas, receiving various forms of tribute—grain, honey, livestock—from tenants. Part of this tribute was kept for personal sustenance, while the remainder was sent to the central government.

The gult system was particularly prevalent in southern Ethiopia, where large estates were the norm. Land was granted or sold by the state to individuals, leading to a system of landlords and tenants, in contrast to the north's communal system. Over time, some officials began passing

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<sup>78</sup> Molla, 1984

<sup>79</sup> WMRC, 1972: 56

<sup>80</sup> Ottawa, 1978

<sup>81</sup> Desaleng, 1984

their gult rights to their descendants, creating hereditary gult rights, known as riste-gult. However, this did not alter the fundamental nature of gult rights, which remained rights to collect tribute rather than land ownership<sup>82</sup>.

Following the end of Italian rule in 1941, land became a contentious issue, prompting the establishment of the Ministry of Land Reform and Administration in 1955, which aimed to address land reform through mandatory land measurement<sup>83</sup>.

The later years of Haile Selassie's rule saw significant developments and challenges regarding land tenure and the Qalad system. Ownership disputes intensified due to ecological crises and population pressures, complicating the tenure system and placing peasant communities at a disadvantage in legal matters.

The Ethiopian land tenure system evolved, particularly under the Qalad system, which initially classified newly measured lands as state property with no private claims. Different provinces managed surplus land in varied ways: some governments confiscated excess land, while others allowed holders to keep it by paying taxes and registration fees within a set timeframe<sup>84</sup>.

While land demarcation was regulated, inefficiencies often led to disputes, exacerbated by biased judicial processes and prolonged litigation requiring significant resources from both sides. Inconsistent land measurement methods further complicated these issues<sup>85</sup>.

The bureaucracy involved in implementing the Qalad system faced challenges, including frequent personnel changes and lack of coordination among government entities. Despite reform efforts, bureaucratic inefficiencies hindered effective land management and agrarian reform<sup>86</sup>.

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<sup>82</sup> "The Political Economy of Land and Agrarian Development in Arsi: 1941-1991", (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

<sup>83</sup> Bahru Zewde. 1984. "Some Aspects of Post-Liberation Ethiopia 1941-1950", In

*Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, 1984 (vol. 1, p.45), Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies.

<sup>84</sup> Dessalegn Rahmato .2008. *The peasant and the state: Studies on Changes in Agrarian Changes in Ethiopia 1950's -2000* . USA.

<sup>85</sup> Addis Hiwot. 1975. *Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution: Review of African Political Economy*. London: Occasional Publication.

Land redistribution emerged as a key political strategy during Haile Selassie's reign, symbolizing power redistribution. The complexities surrounding land grants involved numerous administrative hurdles and political processes, yet allegations of unequal land distribution persisted, revealing gaps between official narratives and actual conditions.

Diverse regional practices and interpretations of land ownership rights illustrated the intricacies of Ethiopia's land tenure system. The north's rist system, adapted in the south, faced criticism for hindering agricultural modernization. Efforts to reform land tenure encountered resistance from entrenched local interests, resulting in limited changes<sup>87</sup>.

Ultimately, the complexities and challenges within Ethiopia's land tenure system during this period contributed to political instability and social unrest, culminating in the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974 and the implementation of radical land reforms under a new military regime in 1975, which abolished private land ownership in favor of public possession<sup>88</sup>.

In summary, kofele's historical land tenure system before the Derg was characterized by communal rist rights in the north and individualized gult rights in the south. These systems had significant socio-economic implications, influencing land ownership, tenure security, and rural-urban dynamics throughout the country's history<sup>89</sup>.

In 1975, the Derg regime, a military council representing various armed forces in Ethiopia, successfully overthrew the Imperial regime. Criticizing the Emperor for his failure to enact land reform, the Derg adopted the slogan "land to the tiller." Upon taking power, the Derg implemented sweeping changes to Ethiopia's socio-economic and political landscape. One of the most significant reforms was the land reform proclamation of February 1975, known as

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<sup>86</sup> "Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia: A brief Assessment," *Paper Presented at the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Lund: University of Lund, PP. 87-92.

<sup>87</sup> Dula Abdu. 1978. "Land Reform in Ethiopia: A Prelude to Socialist Development". In *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Session B, Chicago:University of Illinois, Month and date1978, PP. 629-650.

<sup>88</sup> Addis Hiwot. 1975. *Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution: Review of African Political Economy*. London: Occasional Publication.

<sup>89</sup> *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1855-1974*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Addis Ababa University Press.

Proclamation No. 31 of 1975. This proclamation called for the "public ownership of rural lands" and received considerable support from the peasant population, as it transferred land to those who worked it<sup>90</sup>.

The proclamation declared all privately owned land—whether held by landlords, peasants, organizations, or the Church—to be converted to public ownership. It abolished landlordism and tenancy, freeing tenants from serfdom and the obligations of rent or debts to former landowners<sup>91</sup>. Large private farms were either redistributed to peasants or taken over by the state<sup>92</sup>. Importantly, the law stated that no compensation would be given for land, forests, or tree crops; however, movable properties and permanent improvements on the land were eligible for fair compensation<sup>93</sup>.

Peasants were granted usufructuary rights to the land, with strict prohibitions on its sale, exchange, mortgage, lease, or any other form of transfer, except for inheritance to spouses, minor children, or occasionally adult children<sup>94</sup>. The goal was to equalize land holdings among rural peasants, creating a society of self-sufficient farmers. Each farming family could receive up to 10 hectares of land, with only limited exceptions for hired labor<sup>95</sup>.

In June of the same year, a separate law was enacted for the nationalization of urban land and rental housing<sup>96</sup>. This law mandated the confiscation, without compensation, of all urban lands and additional rental properties owned by affluent urban residents. "Extra houses" referred to all rental units that had generated income prior to the proclamation, regardless of their size or rental price. Units renting for 100 Birr or less per month were placed under kebele administration,

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<sup>90</sup> Andargachew Tirunch.1993.*The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987: from aristocratic to totalitarian autocracy*. Cambridge, United States of America: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>91</sup> Proclamation No. 31 of 1975, Article 6: 3

<sup>92</sup> Proclamation No. 31 of 1975, Article 7

<sup>93</sup> Proclamation No. 31 of 1975, Article 3

<sup>94</sup> Proclamation No. 31 of 1975, Article 5

<sup>95</sup> Proclamation No. 31 of 1975, Article 4(5)

<sup>96</sup> Proclamation No. 41/75

while those with higher rents were managed by the Agency for the Administration of Rental Housing (AARH)<sup>97</sup>.

The aims of this proclamation included providing urban residents with access to credit and land for housing and businesses, as well as addressing wealth disparities and unequal service provision in urban areas. It mandated that all urban land be state-owned and strictly prohibited its transfer through sale, mortgage, inheritance, or other means<sup>98</sup>. Individuals seeking land for residential purposes could obtain up to 500m<sup>2</sup> free of charge, in accordance with directives from the Ministry of Public Works and Housing<sup>99</sup>.

Additionally, the proclamation limited ownership to a single dwelling but allowed the transfer of private houses through inheritance, sale, or barter<sup>100</sup>. All extra houses were classified as government property, and individuals, families, or organizations were prohibited from earning income from urban land or housing<sup>101</sup>.

## **Condition of peasants from 1941-1974**

The conditions of peasants in Kofele woreda from 1941 to 1974 were shaped by various political, economic, and social factors that influenced their daily lives and livelihoods. This period, spanning the end of Italian occupation through the imperial regime of Emperor Haile Selassie, saw significant challenges and changes for rural communities.

### **Economic Conditions**

Peasants primarily relied on subsistence farming, growing crops for their families while facing challenges such as soil degradation and changing climate conditions. Many struggled to produce enough to meet their basic needs. Following the Derg land reforms in 1975, land ownership was

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<sup>97</sup> Andargachew Tirunch.1993.*The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987: from aristocratic to totalitarian autocracy*. Cambridge, United States of America: Cambridge University Press.

Proclamation No. 41/75, Article 4(1)

<sup>98</sup> Proclamation No. 41/75, Article 4(1)

<sup>99</sup> Proclamation No. 41/75, Article 5(1)

<sup>100</sup> Proclamation No. 41/75, Article 11, 12(1)

<sup>101</sup> Proclamation No. 41/75, Article 20(1)

officially transformed, but prior to that, peasants in Kofele operated under a mixed system of traditional communal and landlord-based land tenure. Many were subject to high rents and exploitative practices from landowners. Access to resources such as credit, tools, and improved seeds was limited. Many peasants lacked the means to invest in their land, further entrenching poverty<sup>102</sup>.

### **Social Conditions**

Educational opportunities were sparse, particularly in rural areas. Limited access to education contributed to low literacy rates among peasants, impacting their ability to advocate for rights and improvements in their conditions. Access to healthcare services was inadequate. Many rural communities faced high rates of illness and limited access to medical facilities, which were often located far from their villages. Traditional social structures, including communal support systems, played a crucial role in village life. Kinship ties and community solidarity were essential for mutual assistance during times of hardship<sup>103</sup>.

### **Political Conditions**

During the imperial regime, peasants had limited political power. The government often ignored rural needs, and grievances regarding land tenure and agricultural policies went largely unaddressed. The landlord-tenant system entrenched social hierarchies. Many peasants lived under oppressive conditions, with landlords demanding high rents and controlling access to land. As dissatisfaction grew, especially in the 1960s, there were increasing calls for land reform and better treatment of peasants. This period saw the emergence of various movements advocating for the rights of rural communities. Overall, the conditions of peasants in Kofele woreda between 1941 and 1974 were characterized by economic hardship, limited access to resources and education, inadequate healthcare, and oppressive political structures. Despite these challenges,

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<sup>102</sup> Andargachew Tirunch.1993.*The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987: from aristocratic to totalitarian autocracy*. Cambridge, United States of America: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>103</sup> Andargachew Tirunch.1993.*The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987: from aristocratic to totalitarian autocracy*. Cambridge, United States of America: Cambridge University Press.

the resilience of local communities and their interconnectedness played a crucial role in navigating the difficulties of this turbulent period<sup>104</sup>.

Nothing specific to Kofale

## **2.2. Land lord-Tenant Relationship and Tenancy Problems**

The land tenure system in Ethiopia, particularly in the Kofele woreda, underwent significant changes during the period from 1941 to 1974. This period covers the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie, who implemented various reforms affecting land ownership and distribution across the country.

Before Emperor Haile Selassie's reign, land ownership in Ethiopia was largely feudalistic, with the majority of land held by a few landlords or the nobility. Peasants worked on this land in a system of sharecropping or as tenants, often with little security or rights<sup>105</sup>.

During Haile Selassie's rule, efforts were made to modernize and reform the land tenure system. In 1942, the Ethiopian government enacted the Rural Land Administration Proclamation, which aimed to redistribute land more equitably and provide peasants with more secure land rights. However, in practice, these reforms often fell short of their goals, with much of the land remaining in the hands of the elite. As a result, land ownership remained intact as in the system of Minilik regime feudalism holding the major parts of the land, and Peasants working on this land in a system of sharecropping or as tenants with little security or rights<sup>106</sup>.

One significant change during this period was the introduction of the "gult" system, which granted peasants hereditary rights to land, providing them with greater security and stability. However, the gult system also entrenched existing inequalities, as the distribution of land was often unequal, and the wealthy and powerful could acquire more land than the poor<sup>107</sup>.

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<sup>104</sup> “The Political Economy of Land and Agrarian Development in Arsi: 1941-1991”, (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Informant: Sado Tufa

<sup>105</sup> Teshale Tibebu, 1995. *The Making of Modern Ethiopia*, p. 115.

<sup>106</sup> Teshale Tibebu, 1995. *The Making of Modern Ethiopia*, p. 98.

<sup>107</sup> Baharu Zewde, 1991. *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1855-1974*, p.420; Informant: Gabramlak, 17- 19/6/2024 and Tusa Wako 02/12/2012.

In the Kofele woreda specifically, the impact of these reforms varied depending on local circumstances and the actions of local landlords and officials. While some peasants had benefited from increased land rights and security, others had continued to face exploitation and marginalization<sup>108</sup>.

The land tenure system in pre-1975 Kofele was one of the most complex and intricate systems as in the other southern part of Ethiopia. It represented the issue of power and governance in Ethiopia, as land was the major source of income and livelihood in this predominantly agrarian economy. The land tenure system varied from region to region due to the diverse geographical and cultural settings and the different socio-political events that occurred in different parts of the country. These different land tenure arrangements, in general, can be categorized into usufructuary tenures and private tenures. The usufructuary tenure systems include the rist, semon and maderia or yemengist forms that differ principally in the type of institution holding the ultimate reversionary rights over the land<sup>109</sup>.

The rist system was one of the oldest and most common forms of usufructuary tenures that characterised the land tenure system of northern and southern Ethiopia including Kofele Woreda where the community held the ultimate reversionary rights over land. Rist was a right, which a holder could claim a portion of lands from his or her ancestors who originally held the land. Village chiefs, who were usually appointed by the district's governors, administered the rist related land rights. These hereditary rights were subject to payment of taxes and provision of other services to the local administration or gult. Holders of the rist could bequeath their holdings but could not sell, mortgage or exchange it in any form<sup>110</sup>. This land tenure system featured communal characteristics and provided somewhat an assured access to land to all members of the rist. The security of individual holdings was also protected in this system through honouring of hereditary rights and denying access to 'outsiders'. Nevertheless, the possibility of a claim at any time to a part of the land that was protected by rist subjected rist holders to varying degrees of

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<sup>108</sup> Andargachew Tirunch.1993.*The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987: from aristocratic to totalitarian autocracy*. Cambridge, United States of America: Cambridge University Press. Informant: Gabramlak Guye, 17-19/06/2024. And Sheka kimo

<sup>109</sup> Dessalegn Rahmato, 1982. "Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia: A brief Assessment", p.172.

<sup>110</sup> Andargachew Tirunch.1993.*The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987: from aristocratic to totalitarian autocracy*. Cambridge, United States of America: Cambridge University Press.

insecurity. Farmers used to spend significant time in land-related court cases, sometimes even between close relatives<sup>111</sup>.

Another type of tenure system which was found in Kofele woreda was the *semon* system. The *semon*, a system where the church held the primary reversionary rights, arose when the Crown granted rural land to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to generate financial and material support for its services. The church during this period owned a substantial share of tax-free rural lands. As the church itself was not directly involved in farming, it leased out its lands to local farmers under sharecropping arrangements and collected the rents as well as land taxes (tributes) that would have otherwise gone to the government treasury<sup>112</sup>.

The third system of Land tenure in Kofele woreda was called *Maderia*. *Maderia* or *yemengist* lands were originally unoccupied lands that were declared state property, most of which were located in the south. When the imperial government conquered the south, south-west and eastern parts of the country, all unoccupied (unsettled) rural land were declared state property and given to officials and loyalists of the Crown. During the military advance by the emperor, militiamen were among those who received land in these regions. This constituted what was called the *gebbar* system, which is a form of freehold tenure. Holders of such rights had the privilege to transfer the land through sale, mortgage or exchange subject to payment of land tax to the government treasury. As most of the lands were granted to the powerful officials and loyalists of the Crown, the local populations in Kofele areas became landless and entered into tenancy relationships with landlords<sup>113</sup>.

Those loyalists to the king who were assigned land in kofele woreda were soldiers who served the king in military affairs during Haile sellasie. They are the following.

1. Nado wold e Tsadique

2. Ishetu Walde Tsadique

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid. Informant: Hasan Kimo

<sup>112</sup> Teshome Kebede. 1982. "Some Aspects of Feudalism in Ethiopia", Edited by Sven Rubenson, in *the proceedings of the seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, University of Lund, pp., 101-110  
Informants: Bulo Oria, 27/6/2024 and Tusa Wako, 02/8/2024.

<sup>113</sup> Dessalegn Rahmato, 1982. "Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia: A brief Assessment", p.173.

3. Hailu wolde Tsadique

4. Dinku wolde Tsadique

5. Abebe Wolde Tsadique

All of the above officials were the owners of the land occupied by Arsiclans such as Wege, Qoma, Chatimana etc.

All the rist, semon and maderia or yemengist tenures were similar in providing use rights to the holder while institutions held the ultimate reversionary rights over individual holdings were different. The nature of tenure arrangement and security of tenure on individual holdings was highly dependent on the holder's relationship with the institution governing access to land<sup>114</sup>.

In the Kofele Woreda, however, land was distributed to only a few people who were allowed to buy and sell land. As a result, most of the farmers were tenants, with sharecropping and fixed rents being the dominant forms of land contract. Even though absentee landlordism was prevalent, sharecropping was sustained because landlords could hire supervisors who lived in the same communities with tenants to enforce the contract. Even without supervision, landlords used threats of eviction and political power to enforce contracts, and usually determined the sharecropping arrangement<sup>115</sup>.

Resource pooling had played a critical role in the Kofele for the existence of sharecropping especially for the less powerful landowners that resided in the same community as their tenants and farmed part of their land. Landowners provided credit to their tenants, who supplied their labour and animal power. Fixed rents, on the other hand, resulted from absentee landlordism and inability to enforce contracts<sup>116</sup>.

In Kofele, there existed three major forms of sharecropping arrangements classified according to the share of harvest paid to the landowner as rent. In siso (one-third) arrangement, the tenant supplied all the inputs, mainly seed, oxen and labour, and paid one-third of the harvest to the landowner as rent. Since the tenant paid one-tenth of the harvest as land tax, known locally as

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<sup>114</sup> Andargachew Tiruneh, 1993. *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987: from aristocratic to totalitarian autocracy*. Cambridge, United States of America: Cambridge University Press, p.100.

<sup>115</sup> Informants: Kebeto Bedaso, 04/8/2024 and Gabramlak Guye, 17-19/6/2024.

<sup>116</sup> Baharu Zewde, 1991. *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1855-1974*, p.240.

asrat, before sharing the harvest with the landowner, the tenant effectively retained 60% of the harvest. In irbo (onequarter), the rental payment was one-fourth of the harvest after deducting the asrat, and so the tenant effectively retained two-thirds of the total harvest. In equl (equal) arrangements, the landowner sometimes supplied some of the inputs, especially oxen and seed, and after paying the asrat, the harvest was divided on a 50:50 basis<sup>117</sup>.

Of the three forms of sharecropping arrangements, siso was dominant. Informants in Kofele, indicated that of all the tenancy in the study area, 60% were under siso, 30% under equl, and 10% were hired farm labourers. Most of the sharecropping agreements were verbal and the terms were based on customary practices of each area. Upon termination of the agreement, the tenant was not compensated for any improvements he or she made on the land<sup>118</sup>.

The landlord-tenant relationship and the rist system continued to be the dominant land tenure institution in most parts of the woreda until the military took over power in 1974, to begin what is known as the Derg regime. The Derg launched a radical land reform programme that covered all parts of the country. The March 1975 decree ended all forms of customary land tenure and landlordism. All rural lands were declared state property and redistributed to the tillers, primarily based on family size and quality of the land in an attempt to create equity and fairness in land acquisition. The same decree also banned all kinds of land transactions and wage labour in rural areas to ensure that the tillers remained the beneficiaries of the land. Accordingly, farmers could neither sell, mortgage, lease out, and transfer the land allocated to them, nor use hired labour. Land rental and farm labour markets legally ceased to exist<sup>119</sup>.

The power and responsibility to allocate and administer land was given to the local Peasant Associations (PAs), the lowest administrative unit of the regime. Following this major agrarian reform, rural farmlands in Kofele had belonged to the 'people' but controlled by the government. The only formal way of obtaining access to land was through membership in the PA and periodic redistribution of existing crop and pasture lands among households based on family size and land

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<sup>117</sup> Bizuwork Zewude. 1992. "The problem of Tenancy and Tenancy Bills: With Particular reference to Arsi", (Unpublished M.A. Thesis), Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Informants: Husen Gemedi, 16/5/2024 and Gabramlak Guye, 17-19/7/2024.

<sup>118</sup> Informants: Kebeto Bedaso, 04/6/2024. And H/Husen Wakeyo

<sup>119</sup> Katabo Abdiyo, 1999. "A Historical Survey of Arsi...", pp.20-21, Abbas Haji, 1982. "A History of Arsi...", pp.7-10.

quality. Subsequent measures of land redistribution, collectivisation, villagisation, and resettlement programmes were undertaken<sup>120</sup>.

The demand for land by the rapidly growing farmer population in rural areas could not be met through land redistribution. Although tenancy and use of hired labour were banned by law, farmers gradually started to informally lease out their lands to close relatives and friends and temporarily give out part of their holding as gift to their newly married relatives, due to population pressure and increasing landlessness. The practice of lending and gifting land, with the freeze on land and rural labour transactions, suggest an altruistic motive on the part of landowners to support the incomes of their relatives and friends. However, as we shall later see, lending and gifting of land continued even when the freeze on land and rural labour transactions were lifted<sup>121</sup>.

In 1990, the Derg regime issued the so-called 'mixed economic programme' that liberalised some of the highly centralised system of economic management. The reform conferred a transférable and life-long lease to holders of rural lands. With this reform, the ban on temporary land lease was lifted and farmer-to-farmer land contracts became official. Thus, the government intervened only to formalise an on-going process. The reform, however, did not establish legal procedures and institutional mechanism to allow the development of formal land markets. Nevertheless, more and more farmers started to engage in various kinds of informal land markets<sup>122</sup>.

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<sup>120</sup> Andargachew Tirunch. 1993. *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987: from aristocratic to totalitarian autocracy*. Cambridge, United States of America: Cambridge University Press. Informants: Gabramlak, 17-19/4/2012 and Bariso Sondhi, 15/4/2012.

<sup>121</sup> "The Political Economy of Land and Agrarian Development in Arsi: 1941-1991", (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

<sup>122</sup> Dula Abdu. 1978. "Land Reform in Ethiopia: A Prelude to Socialist Development". In *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Session B, Chicago: University of Illinois, Month and date 1978, PP. 429-450. Informants: Gabramlak, 17-19/4/2012 and Bariso Sondhi, 15/4/2012.

Overall, the period from 1941 to 1974 saw attempts to reform Ethiopia's land tenure system and address inequalities in land ownership, but progress was often slow and uneven, and many peasants continued to face challenges in accessing and securing land<sup>123</sup>.

### **2.3. Land Tenure System and Agriculture**

The land tenure system and agriculture in Kofele Woreda from 1941 to 1974 were shaped by significant political, social, and economic changes in Ethiopia, particularly during the reign of Haile Selassie.

#### **1. Feudal Land Tenure System:**

The traditional feudal system dominated the land tenure structure. Land was owned by a few wealthy landlords (the nobility), while the majority of peasants were tenants or sharecroppers, working the land in exchange for a portion of the harvest. Peasants often faced high rents and oppressive working conditions, leading to widespread dissatisfaction and a desire for reform<sup>124</sup>.

#### **2. Imperial Policies:**

Following the liberation, there was a growing call for land reform. The government began to recognize the need to address the grievances of peasants, although substantial changes were slow to materialize. The introduction of taxes on agricultural production further burdened peasants, often leading to resistance and protests<sup>125</sup>.

Agriculture in Kofele was primarily subsistence-based, with farmers growing staple crops such as teff, barley, and pulses. This limited agricultural diversification hindered economic growth.

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<sup>123</sup> Katebo Abdiyo, 2010. "The Political Economy of Land and Agrarian Development in Arsi: 1941-1991", p. 283.

<sup>124</sup> Shiferaw Bekele (1995) "The Evolution of Land Tenure in the Imperial Era", Shiferaw Bekele (ed.) *An Economic History of Modern Ethiopia 1941-74*. Dakar: Codesria, Informants: Kesib Jarso and Sado Tufa

<sup>125</sup> Dula Abdu. 1978. "Land Reform in Ethiopia: A Prelude to Socialist Development". In *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Session B, Chicago:University of Illinois, Month and date1978, P. 110.

Farming techniques were largely traditional, with minimal access to modern agricultural tools and practices, which affected productivity<sup>126</sup>.

The dissatisfaction with land tenure and taxation led to the rise of peasant movements, advocating for land reform and better living conditions. The government's occasional attempts at reform were met with mixed reactions. While some reforms aimed at modernizing agriculture and land ownership, they often fell short and led to further unrest<sup>127</sup>.

By the early 1970s, discontent had reached a boiling point. The accumulation of grievances regarding land rights, taxation, and lack of support for agricultural development set the stage for broader revolutionary movements. The eventual overthrow of Haile Selassie in 1974 led to radical land reforms in 1975, redistributing land and abolishing the feudal system. However, this reform would bring its own challenges and complexities.

From 1941 to 1974, Kofele Woreda experienced significant tensions related to land tenure and agriculture. The feudal system created deep inequalities and unrest, while the central government's slow reforms failed to adequately address the needs of the peasantry. This period set the stage for transformative changes in Ethiopia's land policies in the wake of the 1974 revolution<sup>128</sup>.

During the period from 1941 to 1974 in Ethiopia, including the Kofele woreda, the taxation system underwent significant changes, especially under the rule of Emperor Haile Selassie<sup>129</sup>.

Landlords in Ethiopia typically held vast estates, known as "gult" lands, which were inherited through generations. These lands often encompassed large portions of the countryside, including areas within the Kofele woreda<sup>130</sup>.

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<sup>126</sup> "Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia: A brief Assessment," *Paper Presented at the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Lund: University of Lund, P. 67

<sup>127</sup> Keller, J. Edmond. 1981. Ethiopia Revolution, Class and National Question, *African Affairs*, 80(321), pp. 420-434.

<sup>128</sup> Andargachew Tirunch.1993.*The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987: from aristocratic to totalitarian autocracy*. Cambridge, United States of America: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>129</sup> Shiferaw Bekele (1995) "The Evolution of Land Tenure in the Imperial Era", Shiferaw Bekele (ed.) *An Economic History of Modern Ethiopia 1941-74*. Dakar: Codesria, ), Informants: Yisma Nigatu, 13/6/2024 and Dejenu Tafesse, 29/8/2024.

<sup>130</sup> Edmond J. Keller, 1981. Ethiopia Revolution, Class and National Question, *African Affairs*, 80(321), pp. 519- 549.

Peasants living on landlord-controlled lands were subject to various forms of land tenure arrangements, such as sharecropping or tenant farming. In these arrangements, peasants would work the land owned by the landlords in exchange for a portion of the harvest or rent<sup>131</sup>.

Landlords had significant power over the distribution and management of land within their estates. They often determined land allocation, rent rates, and other terms of agricultural production<sup>132</sup>.

So, the Southern part of the country particularly Kofele woreda was affected by massive political intervention in the land grabbing favoring landlords and political authorities. They were forced to pay heavy tax and tribute system (gult) that Northern settlers had imposed up on the indigenous population. They had been victimized because they used most of their small production to pay taxes, rents, debt payments, and bribes to the feudal land lords and their affiliates<sup>133</sup>. As a result of feudal exploitation system about 4/5 of the population were subsistence farmers lived in miserable poverty during this period. Particularly, majority of the peasants in the south and west were transformed into tenants (locally known as *Chisegna*) live and work under uncertain conditions and excessive dependence on the predominantly northern landlords and imperial representatives. Tenants were subjected to feudal dues like working on the landlord's farm and giving him presents on special occasions for fear of eviction<sup>134</sup>. In addition, Southern peasants had faced problem of eviction basically emanated from introduction of mechanized farming took place in 1960s; because land transferred from owners to new investors in form of sale. Like his predecessor, Haile Sellassie also maintained grant land to different groups in form of compensation. Particularly after the Italian war (1935 to 1941), intensive land grant was carried out to those groups like patriots, exiles, soldiers and civil servants as private property<sup>135</sup>. Cumulative effect of the land policy had created political inequality and social structure among

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<sup>131</sup> Bahiru Zewde, 1991. A History of Modern Ethiopia 1855-1974, p, 192.

<sup>132</sup> Getachew Raggasa, 2006. "A Historical Survey of Chilalo Awraja, pp.23-41.

<sup>133</sup> Bizuwork Zewude. 1992. "The problem of Tenancy and Tenancy Bills: With Particular reference to Arsi", (Unpublished M.A. Thesis), Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

<sup>134</sup> Bahru Zewde, 1984. "Some Aspects of Post-Liberation Ethiopia 1941-1950", In Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, 1984 (vol. 1, p.33), Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies; Eshetu Chole, 1982. "Towards A History of the Fiscal Policy of the Pre Revolutionary Ethiopian State 1941-1974," Paper Presented for the East African History Conference (Nazerath: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 1982), p. 242.

<sup>135</sup> Eshetu Chole, 1982. "Towards A History of the Fiscal Policy of the Pre Revolutionary Ethiopian State 1941-1974". Paper Prepared for the East African History Conference, Nazareth: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 1982, PP. 234-261.

ethnic groups. In most extreme case, the regime deprived of fundamental rights of Southern farmers, and reduced them to second class citizens in relation with northern landlords and government officials. Land was also used as political instrument of obtaining fidelity from subjects because those disloyal subjects were punished in return which finally created grievances against imperial government. In general, the system was politically unjust and exploitative; economically inefficient and unproductive, due to the fact that it did not give incentive to tenants during production process. Even though Ethiopia achieved an economic growth of average of 4% per annum during 1960 to 1974, it did not improve the lives of most Ethiopians<sup>136</sup>.

On the other side, Italian invasion of Ethiopia (1935 to 1941) had also its own effect on traditional land ownership in Ethiopia. The most victims of Italian invasion were not poor peasants, but nobility and land owners. By appropriating gult and rist lands Italians distributed it to their loyal servants. As a result, the existing tenure system was disrupted. With this occasion the nobility and other land owners who had been closely associated with the ruling class became victims of the Italian land grabbing policy. By doing so, the Italians seriously weakened land owning nobility and in some parts of Ethiopia, they totally eliminated it. This event can be taken as a turning point in the history of lord tenancy relationship and the whole land tenure system in Ethiopia. Before Italian invasion nobility maintained their privilege in land owning because no one could intervene. But during Italian invasion (1935 to 1941), this status was taken away from them<sup>137</sup>.

Apparently land tenure system during this period was characterized by absolute power imbalance between feudal lords and peasants, given that the importance of land resource used as a source of power that served Monarchy and the Feudal land lords as institution to exploit the masses. The Emperor had absolute right over all land with the authority to grant and withdraw land rights at

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<sup>136</sup> “Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia: A brief Assessment,” *Paper Presented at the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Lund: University of Lund, P. 80

<sup>137</sup> Horold G. Marcus, 1994 . “Hailassellassie’s Development Policies and Views (1916-1960)”, in the 10th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, V. I, 1994, Paris, PP. 641-648. Bahru Zewde. 1984. “Some Aspects of Post-Liberation Ethiopia 1941-1950”, In *Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, 1984 (vol. 1, p.33), Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Informants: Bariso Sondhi and Turi Genemo

all levels<sup>138</sup>. The power of Emperor was clearly asserted in the 1931 constitution and 1955 revised Ethiopian constitution. Article 6 of 1931 constitution declares that, in the Ethiopian Empire supreme power rests in the hands of the Emperor. Similarly, Article 26 of 1955 revised constitution declared that Sovereignty of the Empire is vested in the Emperor and supreme authority over all the affairs of the empire is exercised by Him as the Head of State, in the manner provided for in the present Constitution<sup>139</sup>.

These rights not only privileged him to control and enforce his obligation on peasants but also on his follower"s like war lords, governors and nobles. So, rewarding local and regional authorities for their political support by handing out land as quid pro quo was common practice. Political power is largely linked to the size and quality of land owned. This means men who enjoyed high positions of secular authority usually controlled much land and placed at the top of a redistributive economic organization<sup>140</sup>. They collected tax and tribute from those over whom they held authority and expended a large portion of it again on the feasts and followers that were essential to the maintenance of their political power and their legitimacy in the eye of their subjects. Consequently, while aristocrats and the church owning most arable land, tenant farmers (mostly in the southern part of the country) paid excessive rents. Surprisingly, this period was a time when more than 70% of the fertile land was possessed only by 1% of the property owner of the entire population in Ethiopia. The existing system restored and continued after Ethiopian liberation with help of British military in 1941)<sup>141</sup>.

Prior to Haile Selassie's reign, Ethiopia had a decentralized system of taxation, with local rulers collecting taxes in various forms, including in-kind contributions such as crops or labor.

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<sup>138</sup> Teshome Kebede. 1982. "Some Aspects of Feudalism in Ethiopia", Edited by Sven Rubenson, in *the proceedings of the seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, University of Lund, p. 110

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> "The Political Economy of Land and Agrarian Development in Arsi: 1941-1991", (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

<sup>141</sup> Getachew Raggasa, 2006. "A Historical Survey of Chilalo Awraja (1941-1974)", p.77. Shiferaw Bekele (1995) "The Evolution of Land Tenure in the Imperial Era", Shiferaw Bekele (ed.) *An Economic History of Modern Ethiopia 1941-74*. Dakar: Codesria, ),

However, with the establishment of centralized governance under Haile Selassie, there were efforts to standardize and modernize the taxation system<sup>142</sup>.

Under Haile Selassie's rule, a more structured taxation system was implemented. Taxes were collected by the central government through appointed officials rather than local rulers. The taxation system included various forms of taxes, such as land taxes, income taxes, and taxes on trade and commerce<sup>143</sup>.

In rural areas like the Kofele woreda, land taxes were particularly significant. These taxes were often based on the size of the landholding and its productivity. Peasants were required to pay a portion of their agricultural produce or income as taxes to the government. However, the implementation of these taxes varied across regions and influenced by local power dynamics and administrative practices<sup>144</sup>.

In addition to land taxes, other forms of taxation, such as taxes on trade and commerce, also existed. Merchants and traders were required to pay taxes on their goods and transactions, which contributed to the government's revenue<sup>145</sup>.

After returning from exile in 1941, Emperor Haile Selassie I tried to modernize Ethiopia's legal system. In particular, he attempted land tenure reforms with the adoption of different legal instruments. Given the historical insecurity of land tenure, especially among the southern peasants, one might presuppose that the land tenure reforms were aimed at the protection and improvement of the land access and tenure security of the previously landless and overburdened and unsecured peasants. The examination of the legal reforms is done under the heading of tax burden and securing land rights<sup>146</sup>.

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid. "The Political Economy of Land and Agrarian Development in Arsi: 1941-1991", (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

<sup>143</sup> Addis Hiwot. 1975. *Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution: Review of African Political Economy*. London: Occasional Publication.

<sup>144</sup> Kofale District Rural and Agricultural Development Office. 2009. Land Use and Land Cover of Kofele district, (Unpublished official document)

<sup>145</sup> "The Political Economy of Land and Agrarian Development in Arsi: 1941-1991", (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Informants: Abdulkedir H/Bati, 20/4/2024 and Huseen Bedaso, 30/5/2024.

<sup>146</sup> Bahru Zewde. 1984. "Some Aspects of Post-Liberation Ethiopia 1941-1950", In *Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, 1984 (vol. 1, p.45), Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies. Informant: H/Abu Gameda

The tax burdens of the peasants that conditioned the exercise of their land rights in both the North and South in the form of tributes, tithe, and compulsory labour were reformed by tax legislation enacted in the year 1941 to 1967. Information obtained from the informants suggest that this was also true to Kofele woreda<sup>147</sup>.

During this period, the Emperor's regime promulgated four sets of peasant-related tax laws: The 1941, 1942 and 1944 land tax laws; the 1947 education tax law; the 1959 health tax law; and the 1966 and 1967 income tax laws. The main justification for the promulgation of these tax laws was not lightening of burden that the tributes and labour service imposed on peasants' land utilization. They were rather aimed at enhancing the government's revenue from taxation either by broadening the tax base, or by avoiding wastage in the process of tax collection, because the Emperor's regime, that intended to modernize the country in all spheres, believed that the traditional tax and its collection through *gult* holders had not generated enough revenue to the state<sup>148</sup>.

Two reasons were mentioned for this. First, the traditional tax was collected by the *gult* holder who kept some of it for himself for the official duty he assumed, in the form of payment. The amount the *gult* holder was entitled to retain was not fixed. Consequently, what the government got was the remaining amount after satisfying the needs of the *gult* holder. Second, since the tax was collected in kind, government agents were required to take it into the market to convert it into cash. The marketing process most often took time and the value of the agricultural products (perishables) quickly diminished or dissipated altogether. Accordingly, the peasants' tax reforms introduced in the year 1941-1967 were not much concerned with the burden on the peasants. Quite to the contrary, they were intended to increase revenue for the government and were consequently regarded as inequitable and imposing a high burden on the peasants<sup>149</sup>.

Even so, the 1941 land tax decree did introduce two important reforms in relation to the tax system, among which one was related to the lightening of the peasant's burden. The first change

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<sup>147</sup> Edmond J. Keller, 1981. Ethiopia Revolution: Class and National Question, African Affairs, 80(321), pp. 412-420.

Informants: H/Husen Wakeyo and Abdulkedir H/Bati

<sup>148</sup> P.B. Henze, 2004. Layers of Time: A History of Ethiopia. Addis Ababa: Shama Books, p.229.

<sup>149</sup> R. Greenfield, 1965. Ethiopia: A New Political History, London: Pall Mall Press, PP. 271-276.

was taking away the *gult* holders' power of tax collection. Before this decree, the *gult* holder used to have three basic authorities among others over the subjects in his *gult* – tax collection, local administration and dispensing of justice. This decree required the tax to be paid directly to the government treasury and it outlawed the intermediary role of *gult* holders in this regard, although in some parts of the country, *gult* holders continued to collect it from their *rist* holding cultivators up until 1966.<sup>82</sup> The second reform was the abolishment of all forms of compulsory labour services imposed on the peasants in addition to the tax burden. As it is noted above, in addition to tribute and tithe, peasants were required to provide labour services to the *gult* holder or the landlord which took one-third of their time. However, the law in this regard wasn't applied and effective, and the peasants were in practice required to provide the compulsory labour services towards the landlords and *gult* holders even after the abolishment<sup>150</sup>.

In 1942, another land tax law, which had retroactive application and was amended in 1944, was promulgated. This tax law also introduced two basic reforms in the Ethiopian tax system in general. For the first time, it adopted cash rather than in-kind payment of tax<sup>151</sup>.

It required the peasants to pay the tax in the printed Ethiopian currency – *Birr*. Moreover, it changed the grounds for taxation from the amount of agricultural product to the level of fertility and size of the land. Along these lines, for a *gasha* of *lem*/fertile, *lem tefi*/semi-fertile and *xafi*/poor land holding 100, 50 and 30 *birrs* tax respectively was imposed<sup>152</sup>. In Kofele Woreda, where the land was owned by the landlords, the tax was imposed on the landlords. However, what the landlords did was that they transferred the tax burden to the tenants in the form of increasing their share from the share-cropping. This situation worsened the economic as well as the social status of the peasants<sup>153</sup>.

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<sup>150</sup> R. Greenfield, 1965. Ethiopia: A New Political History, p. 273; D. Crummy, 2000. Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia, from the Thirteenth to the Twentieths Century. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, p.237.

<sup>151</sup> Dessalegn Rahmato .2008. *The peasant and the state: Studies on Changes in Agrarian Changes in Ethiopia 1950's -2000* . USA.

<sup>152</sup> Informants: Hasan Kimo and Jemal Tusa

<sup>153</sup> Teshale Tibebe, 1995. *The Making of Modern Ethiopia, 1896-1974*. Lawrenceville, New Jersey, The Red Sea Press, Inc., p. 115. Bizuwork Zewude. 1992. "The problem of Tenancy and Tenancy Bills: With Particular reference to Arsi", (Unpublished M.A. Thesis), Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The 1942 land tax law was not clear with regard to its position on the previous tribute and tithe. Nevertheless, from the general aim of the tax reforms – collecting sufficient revenue - one can deduce the parallel application and the existence of both tax regimes in the absence of express or implied repeal<sup>154</sup>.

In 1944 another land tax law that repealed the previous one was also promulgated. This land tax law incorporated three basic reforms in the tax system, but still further burdened the peasants. The reforms related to the amount of tax, provincial variations, and clarified the status of the previous tribute and tithe systems. In relation to the status of the tribute and tithe system, the 1944 land tax law abolished other form of tax and labour services attached to the land utilization. It introduced a new tax scheme and also a tithe, depending on land fertility and size. However, with regard to the amount, the law had doubled the tax burden of peasants from the 1942 land tax law. It did not impose a uniform tax rate for all the peasants in the country. There were regional variations. Given where the nobility and ruling classes belonged, it is clear in which part the higher amount was imposed – the Kofele woreda as in the southern part of the country<sup>155</sup>.

As part of the project to collect sufficient revenue from the tax, the Emperor Haile Selassie's regime also introduced two additional taxes on the peasants. The 1947 education tax law and the 1959 Health Tax Decree imposed two additional tax duties on the peasants. This situation aggravated the peasants' burden of taxation and it added fuel to the peasants' grievances that led to further peasant rebellions in some parts. The then government seemed to have been obsessed with collection of as much tax revenue as possible. It couldn't have imagined its impact on the

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<sup>154</sup> Informants: Gabramlak Guye, 17-19/6/2024 and Abdulkedir Haji Bati, 20/6/2024; see also, Oromia Urban planning Institute Southern Branch, 2009. Kofale Town Revised Structural Plan: Physical, Spatial and Socio-Economic analyses of Kofale town, Shashemene, Ethiopia, pp. 26-30.

<sup>155</sup> Getachew Raggasa, 2006. "A Historical Survey of Chilalo Awraja, 1941-1974", (Unpublished M.A. Thesis), Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, PP.72-73. Dessalegn Rahmato .2008. *The peasant and the state: Studies on Changes in Agrarian Changes in Ethiopia 1950's -2000* . USA. Informant: Jemal Tusa

peasants' life. On the top of this, peasants' failure to pay the taxes resulted in the loss or deprivation of their land rights<sup>156</sup>.

Finally, in 1966 and 1967, the Emperor's regime tried to lighten the burden of the peasants. The 1966 land tax law totally abolished the *gult* system and amended the 1944 land tax law<sup>157</sup>.

Overall, during the period from 1941 to 1974, Ethiopia experienced changes in its taxation system, moving towards a more centralized and standardized approach under Emperor Haile Selassie's rule. However, the effectiveness and fairness of the taxation system varied, and there were often disparities in how taxes were levied and collected, especially in rural areas like the Kofele woreda<sup>158</sup>.

#### **2.4. The 1967 Agricultural Income Tax (Proclamation No. 138/1967) and its Reality in Kofele Woreda**

The 1967 Agricultural Income Tax (Proclamation No. 138/1967) was a key piece of legislation introduced by the Ethiopian government under Emperor Haile Selassie. The primary aim of this tax was to generate revenue from the agricultural sector, which was the backbone of Ethiopia's economy at the time, by taxing the income derived from agricultural production. The tax applied to both large-scale commercial farms and smallholder farmers, although it was designed to target wealthier landowners more heavily<sup>159</sup>.

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<sup>156</sup> See Baxter in Christopher Clapham, 1975. *Centralization and Local Response in Southern Ethiopia*. African Affairs, Vol. 74, No. 294 (Jan., 1975), pp. 72-81. Oxford University Press

<sup>157</sup> "Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia: A brief Assessment," *Paper Presented at the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Lund: University of Lund, P. 97

<sup>158</sup> P. T. W. Baxter, 1978. "Ethiopia's Unacknowledged Problem: The Oromo", *African Affairs: A Quarterly Journal of the Royal African Society*. Published by: Oxford University Press on behalf of The Royal African Society.77(308): 283-296. "The Political Economy of Land and Agrarian Development in Arsi: 1941-1991", (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

<sup>159</sup> "Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia: A brief Assessment," *Paper Presented at the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Lund: University of Lund, P. 97

#### **2.4.1. Effects of the 1967 Agricultural Income Tax on Kofele District, Arsi Zone include**

In Kofele, a predominantly rural area with small-scale farming, the introduction of the agricultural income tax would have posed a significant challenge to local farmers. Most farmers in Kofele were likely subsistence farmers, cultivating crops primarily for their own consumption, with limited surplus for sale. The tax burden would have been hard for these smallholders to meet, as their income from agriculture was minimal and often not easily monetized<sup>160</sup>.

While the tax was primarily aimed at wealthier landowners, small-scale farmers were still required to pay it, albeit at a lower rate. However, the administrative systems needed to enforce the tax were not always efficient in rural areas, and the reality in Kofele likely meant that many smaller farmers faced difficulties in proving their income or even understanding how the tax applied to them. This could have led to inequities in tax enforcement and created frustration among farmers.

The agricultural income tax could have contributed to increasing financial pressures on the rural population in Kofele. The tax was likely levied without sufficient regard for the actual ability of farmers to pay. In many cases, farmers in Kofele would have had to divert funds from investments in agriculture or household needs to pay the tax, which could have exacerbated poverty and hindered economic growth in the area.

While the tax targeted wealthier landowners more heavily, those with large estates and more extensive agricultural production would have faced a greater tax burden. In Kofele, where there might have been a few wealthier landowners or larger-scale farmers, they were probably more able to absorb the tax, but this might have led to resentment from smaller landowners or peasants who saw the tax as unfair or burdensome.

The tax policy, especially if poorly implemented or perceived as unjust, could have fueled dissatisfaction and unrest among rural communities like those in Kofele. Given that Kofele was part of the broader Arsi Zone, where peasant uprisings and resistance to central government policies were not uncommon, the 1967 agricultural income tax might have exacerbated local tensions, especially if farmers felt the tax system disproportionately affected them.

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<sup>160</sup> “The Political Economy of Land and Agrarian Development in Arsi: 1941-1991”, (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

In practice, the agricultural income tax might have been difficult to collect effectively in rural areas like Kofele due to the lack of infrastructure, limited literacy, and logistical challenges in administering the tax system. Many farmers might not have kept accurate records of their agricultural income, making tax enforcement problematic.

#### **2.4.2. Reality of the 1967 Agricultural Income Tax in Kofele**

While the 1967 Agricultural Income Tax law was theoretically designed to tax income derived from agricultural production, its implementation in rural areas like Kofele was likely fraught with challenges. Smallholder farmers who were already struggling to make a living would have found it difficult to comply with the tax, leading to dissatisfaction. Moreover, the central government's ability to effectively enforce the tax in a rural, less accessible district like Kofele was limited, potentially resulting in uneven tax collection and social unrest.

Thus, while the 1967 Agricultural Income Tax aimed to generate revenue from the agricultural sector, in the case of Kofele district, its reality likely led to economic hardship for smallholder farmers, created tensions between different social groups, and faced challenges in terms of administration and enforcement. The tax's success in generating revenue was limited by the economic and social realities of rural districts like Kofele<sup>161</sup>.

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<sup>161</sup> “The Political Economy of Land and Agrarian Development in Arsi: 1941-1991”, (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

## Chapter Three

### 3. Taxation system in Kofale woreda from 1941 to 1974

The taxation system in Kofele woreda from 1941 to 1974 was shaped by the broader political and economic context of Ethiopia during this period, which included the end of Italian occupation, the imperial regime of Emperor Haile Selassie, and the eventual rise of the Derg regime. Some key aspects of the taxation system during this time were:

The primary form of taxation for peasants was through agricultural levies based on their crop production. Farmers were often required to pay a percentage of their harvest to local authorities or landowners. A tax was levied on land holdings, which varied based on the size and productivity of the land. This tax burden often fell heavily on tenants and smallholder farmers. A fixed tax per individual was often imposed, which affected all adult male members of the household, irrespective of their income or land ownership. Taxes were also levied on livestock and the sale of produce in local markets, impacting the economic viability of farming<sup>162</sup>.

Tax collection was primarily managed by local officials and traditional leaders, who were responsible for assessing tax obligations and enforcing collection. This sometimes led to corruption and abuse of power. The kebele system, which emerged later, provided a structured approach to local governance and taxation. However, before its implementation, tax collection relied on less formalized systems<sup>163</sup>.

The tax system placed a significant economic burden on peasants, many of whom were already struggling to meet their basic needs. High taxes often led to debt and increased poverty among rural communities. Discontent with the taxation system contributed to social unrest. Many

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<sup>162</sup> “The Political Economy of Land and Agrarian Development in Arsi: 1941-1991”, (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Informant: H/Husen Wakeyo

<sup>163</sup> Informants: Hasan Kimo and Sado Tufa

peasants viewed the taxes as unjust, especially in the context of their limited returns on labor and production<sup>164</sup>.

The imperial government focused on extracting resources from rural areas to fund urban development and military expenditures, often neglecting the needs and rights of the rural population. Wealthy landowners often had significant control over the taxation process, as they could influence local officials to shape tax assessments in their favor, further disadvantaging the peasantry<sup>165</sup>.

By the late 1960s, there was increasing pressure for tax reform, as peasants demanded a fairer system that would alleviate their economic struggles. Following the Derg's rise to power in 1974, significant changes were implemented in the taxation system, particularly with the introduction of land reforms aimed at redistributing land and altering tax structures<sup>166</sup>.

The taxation system in Kofele woreda from 1941 to 1974 was characterized by heavy burdens on peasants, marked by a variety of taxes that contributed to their economic difficulties. The system was influenced by local power dynamics and the overarching political context, leading to widespread discontent and calls for reform that set the stage for significant changes in the years following the Derg's ascent<sup>167</sup>.

On top of the above, Landlords played a crucial role in the taxation system, especially concerning land taxes. They were responsible for collecting taxes from the peasants living on their estates and forwarding these payments to the government authorities<sup>168</sup>.

While landlords were required to pay taxes themselves on their landholdings, they often had considerable discretion in how they imposed and collected taxes from the peasants<sup>169</sup>.

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<sup>164</sup> Addis Hiwot. 1975. *Ethiopia: From Autocracy to Revolution: Review of African Political Economy*. London: Occasional Publication. Informant: Abdulkedir H/Bati.

<sup>165</sup> "Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia: A brief Assessment," *Paper Presented at the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Lund: University of Lund, P. 110

<sup>166</sup> Keller, J. Edmond. 1981. Ethiopia Revolution, Class and National Question, *African Affairs*, 80(321), pp. 442-449.

<sup>167</sup> "The Political Economy of Land and Agrarian Development in Arsi: 1941-1991", (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

<sup>168</sup> Abbas Haji, 1982. "A History of Arsi, 1980-1935", p.6.

<sup>169</sup> Informants: Yisma Nigatu, 13/06/2023 and HusenGemedi16/04/2024.

Landlords could exploit their position to extract excessive taxes from peasants, contributing to economic hardships and inequalities within rural communities<sup>170</sup>.

Every clan living in Kofele woreda had its own balebats/Landlords except a few. The names of Kofele landlords is presented in juxtaposition with their clans as follows<sup>171</sup>.

No	Names of Landlords	Clan
1.	Jifar Washie	Sayimana
2.	G/mach Wayu Chakiso	Qoma
3.	Figa Kolaso	Gomora
4.	Haso Hormicho	Ademonye
5.	Birmaji Ilmi	Tijo
6.	Haji Baffa	Tijo
7.	G/mach Turi Tula	Gofingira
8.	Wabe Koroso	Doda
9.	Gemedi Nuna	Qoma (Hawas)
10.	Woticha Milo	Wamanye
11.	Buba Ambo	Weegee
12.	Kabeto Felema	Chatimena
13.	Burka Tonossa	Chatimena

<sup>170</sup> Yilma Kebede, 1967. "Chilalo Awraja", Ethiopian Geographical Journal, 5(1):25-36.

<sup>171</sup> Informant: Hesén Kimo

14.	Kirte Gemmeda	Bameja
15.	Fuucharo Dube	Alkeso
16.	Wariyo Ari'a	Huduga
17.	Funano Ittiso	Coofira

Under all of the above landlords there were chikashumi who collect taxes under landlords. There were many chikashums in a clan. For example, Sa'immana alone has 16 chika shums under a land lord<sup>172</sup>.

Land lords of West Arsi Zone as compared to Kofele Woreda were many in numbers. In the time of the imperial regime, Kofele woreda land lords were numerous in number than all others in West Arsi Zone. This can be seen from the following table as gathered from the informants<sup>173</sup>.

<b>Clan (Gosa)</b>	<b>Land Lords (Baalabbaata)</b>	<b>District/Wored (aAanaa)</b>
Aabbenna	Waayyoo Salgii	Dodola
Abbakara	Sa'idoo Wajagaa	Heeraroo Dodolaa
Adamoonyee	Ibraahim Hasoo Ciqaaqoo	Kofale
Awandallaa	Shaaquu Aggaaroo	Muunnessa
Awandallaa	Qaabattoo Boonsamoo	Kofale
Awlijaana (Allujaana)	Q/Hirbooroo Hamaadoo	Siraaroo Laga BIIaattee gama
Awlijaana	Goobee Bulee	Xan'a'a
Awlijaana	Q/Sanbattoo Worboo	Siraaroo
Baabboo	Qonxarii Wojagaa	Seerofta Dodola
Baamuda	B/Araarsoo Huu	Hasaasa
Baamuda (Qaqawwaa)	Haajii Gishe'e	Hasaasa
Badii	Hasoo Baantoo	Dodola

<sup>172</sup> Informant: Hasan Kimo

<sup>173</sup> Informants: Gebre amlak Guye, Hasan Kimo

Biddiiqaa	Buunkarii Araatoo	Seerofta Dodola
Caatimannaa	Waariyoo Xonnossaa	Kofale
Coofira	B/Obsee Sakakoo	Hasaasa
Coofira	B/Shumburaa Horataa	Hasaasa
Daawwee	Bariisoo Miiloo	Nageellee Arsii
Doodaa	Jamaa Sheymoo	Dodola
Doodaa	Waabee Korroosoo	Kofale
Doodaa	Dibbiloo Didhaa	Kokkossa
Dhaayee	Qaabatoo Heexoo	Kokkossa
Funya-mura	Wogee kajawoo	Nageellee Arsi'i
Funya-mura	B\Adam Badhaasoo	Shaashamannee
Futtallee	Tuuchaa Hooma'a	Seeroftaa Dodolaa
Gaalamaa	Hasoo Jaarraa	Seerofta Dodola
Gaalamaa	Simbiruu Kisii	Dodola
Gambo	Xaqaqoo Galatoo	Nageellee Arsii
Gannata	Waabee Duubee	Dodola
Garjeeda	Sa'idoo Kallee Roobaa	Hasaasa
Garjeeda	B/Kadiir Ebu'uu Goobanaa	Xana'a
Garjeeda	G/Aallee Waabee	Hasaasa(Baayyuu)
Garjeeda	Q/Waabee Shuubalee	Hasaasa
Gomora	Waatii Fiiga'a	Kofale
Goonnosa	Cirrii Bashiiroo	Hadaabbaa
Goonnosa	Bunoo Saqaqoo	Kofale
Goofingira	B/Waaqoo G/Turii Tuulaa	Shaashamannee
Hadaabbaa	Jinjimoo Waayyoo	Hadaabbaa
Hambeentuu	Leenca Aqaamoo	Shaashamannee
Hambeentuu	G/Mi'eessoo Nuuree	Siraaroo(waayyuu sinqillee)
Hangeddaa	Mariiboo Waayyuu	Dodola
Harannaa(Bulluq)	G/Roobaa Jiloo	Naansabo
Hawaxxuu	Waariyoo Ginnoo	Hadaabbaa
Hodhituu	Dawaanoo Heebanoo	Dodola
Hunxee	Hirriboo Saam'ee	hadaabbaa
Jiliinshaa	B/Badhaasoo Qaabatoo	Siraaroo

Kanshee	F/Jaldoo Ketoo	Shaashamannee
kuyyara	Waaqoo Korroosoo Badaasoo	Kokkossa
Laasandaara	Hamaadoo Baasharaa	Dodola
Lole	G/Xosaa Tabuu Eebbisoo	Kokkossa
Maadada	Abdajoo Dhiboo	Shaashamannee
Madarshoo	G/Juullaa Shobbee	Shaashamannee
Nansaboo(Warqaa)	G/Sahla-miikaa'eel baraartii	Nansabo
Qoomaa	G/Waayyuu Caakkisoo Ture'e	Kofale
Saalmalee	G/Waabee Miree Alaakaa	Kokkossa
Sa'immannaa	Burqaa Dimbaaroo	Hadaabbaa
Sa'immannaa	G/Xurbee Ottichaa	Kofale
Sa'immannaa	B/Jifaarii Washee	Hasaasa
Sinaana (Baaqaa)	Baammee Hamaadoo	Heeraroo Dodolaa
Sheedama	F/Jaarsoo Bu'ii Falamaa (F.W.M.B.F)	Dodola, Kokkossa, Hadaabbaa, Nansabo
Sheedama (Xurgee Gaalloo)	Mooyataa Tufaa	Shaashamannee
Sheelada	Danfaa Waadoo	Hadaabbaa
Waaji	G/Hinikkaa Bulliyyee	Nageellee Arsii
Waam'anyee	Wotticha Miiloo	Kofale
Weegee (Alaabaa)	Daadhii Oogatoo	Kokkossa
Weegee	Buubaa Amboo	Kofale
Weerara	B/Huseen Badhaasoo Boke'e	Shaashamannee
Wondo'o	Funaanoo Ittisoo	Kofale
Washarmina	Buttaa Baatolaa	Kokkossa
Washarmina	Limaasoo Xosaa	Kofale
Xiijoo	Birmajii Ilmii Aynoo Baraartii	Hasaasa(ka bara 1972 A.L.I, Dargiin ajjeese)
Xiijoo (Waaqenxeraa)	Haajii Baffaa	Hasaasa

To analyze the facts about the land lords of the West Arsi Zone, focusing on Kofale district and comparing it to other districts, we can break it down as follows:

We can consider the following Key Observations as far as the number of land lords in Kofele woreda is concerned.

When we see dominance of Kofale District, Kofale stands out for having a significant number of land lords (Baalabbaata), with a total of 18 entries (based on the table provided). This is notably higher than most other districts, especially when compared to Dodola, which has 11 land lords, and Hasaasa with 8.

In Gosa (Clan) Distribution, Kofale is associated with several different clans (Gosa), such as Adamoonyee, Awandallaa, Biddiiqaa, Caatimannaa, Doodaa, Gomora, Goonnosa, Qoomaa, and Saimmannaa.

This shows a diversity of clans involved in land ownership in Kofale, suggesting a multi-ethnic or multi-clan structure of land distribution in this district.

When we compare Landlords in Other Districts, Dodola: There are 11 land lords from this district, but the clans represented are relatively fewer in comparison to Kofale. Clans such as Baabboo, Doodaa, and Badii appear multiple times here. Hasaasa: This district has 8 land lords, with several clans, including Coofira, Garjeeda, and Saimmannaa, being well-represented. Kokkossa: A notable number of land lords are associated with this district (11 total), including from clans like Doodaa, Gomora, and Lole. Shaashamannee: Similar to Kokkossa and Hasaasa, this district also has a fair representation of land lords, such as those from Awlijaana and Sheedama.

There were Clans with Multiple Representatives. Some clans appear in multiple districts. For example, in Kofale, many land lords from the Awandallaa, Adamoonyee, and Biddiiqaa clans appear frequently. In Hasaasa, Choofira and Saimmannaa are repeated multiple times. In Doodaa Badii, Doodaa, and Waabee, seen in multiple instances.

When we consider detailed Comparison with Kofale, Kofale vs. Dodola: While Kofale has more land lords (18), Dodola also has a strong presence with 11 land lords. However, Dodola is home to fewer clans in comparison to Kofale, suggesting a more concentrated distribution. Kofale vs. Hasaasa: Kofale again surpasses Hasaasa in the number of land lords, with 18 compared to Hasaasa's 8. Both districts, however, have a broad range of clans, although Kofale appears more diverse in clan representation. Kofale vs. Kokkossa: Kokkossa has 11 land lords, a significant number, but still fewer than Kofale's 18. Kokkossa has more repetitive clan associations, such as Doodaa, whereas Kofale's land lords are spread across a wider variety of clans. Kofale vs.

Shaashamannee: The land lords in Shaashamannee are similar to those in Kofale in terms of clan diversity, but Kofale still outnumbers Shaashamannee in terms of land lords.

In general, Kofale District is the clear leader in terms of the number of land lords, boasting a higher variety of clans and an overall more distributed ownership structure. Other districts like Dodola and Kokkossa have significant representations, but they do not surpass Kofale in the number of land lords. There is a pattern of clan diversity in Kofale, with multiple clans holding land across the district, which is more pronounced compared to the other districts where some clans appear multiple times in specific areas. This analysis shows that Kofale is a major center of land ownership and a melting pot of various clans, which may have socio-political implications within the West Arsi Zone.

Landlords often held positions of power and influence within local administrative structures. They could exert significant influence over local governance and decision-making processes<sup>174</sup>.

Some landlords also held positions in the central government or had close ties to the ruling elite, enabling them to shape policies and regulations related to land tenure and taxation at the national level<sup>175</sup>.

Overall, landlords in Ethiopia, including those in the Kofele woreda, wielded considerable power over both the land tenure and taxation systems during the period from 1941 to 1974. Their influence contributed to the perpetuation of social and economic inequalities, often to the detriment of the peasant population<sup>176</sup>.

As far as the realities of Landlords in Kofele Woreda, Arsi zone regarding responsibilities, rights, and misdeeds during the Haile Selassie Regime is concerned the gathered data<sup>177</sup> shows the following facts:

During the Haile Selassie era in Ethiopia, the feudal system was deeply ingrained in the social and economic structures of rural areas, including Kofele Woreda in the Arsi region. Landlords in

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., and Informants: Yisma Nigatu, 13/06/2024 and Husen Gemedi,16/05/2024.

<sup>175</sup> Dessalegn Rahmato , 2008. The peasant and the state: Studies on Changes in Agrarian Changes in Ethiopia 1950's -2000. USA , p.27.

<sup>176</sup> Getachew Reggasa, 2006. "A Historical Survey of Chilalo Awraja, 1941-1974", p.3; see also CADU, General Agricultural Survey, (CADU publication, No.71, Assela, 1971), pp.61-63.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., and Informants: Yisma Nigatu, 13/06/2024 and Husen Gemedi,16/05/2024.

this area, often of various local clans, were granted significant rights and responsibilities under the imperial system. The reality of their rule was complex, with some fulfilling their duties as landholders while others abused their power. The following analysis discusses the responsibilities, rights, and wrongdoings of landlords in Kofele Woreda based on historical facts and the detailed table of landlords and their respective clans.

When we see responsibilities of Landlords, they were expected to serve as the primary authority figures within their domains. Their responsibilities included:

Providing land for tenants and peasants. Landlords held control over vast areas of land and were responsible for allocating land to peasants. This system of land distribution typically followed a tenant-farmer arrangement where peasants worked the land in exchange for protection, housing, or a share of the produce.

They act as Law enforcement agent. Landlords often acted as the local judges, overseeing minor disputes, enforcing customary laws, and maintaining social order in their territories.

They also serve in issues of military service. In times of conflict or war, landlords were expected to provide soldiers or military support to the Emperor's forces, sometimes by mobilizing their tenants for service.

They were in service of collection of taxes for the regime. Landlords played a critical role in the collection of taxes from the peasants under their control. They acted as intermediaries between the state and the local population, often taking a portion of the taxes for themselves.

As far as the rights of Landlords are concerned, they had several legal and social privileges. These include first, Land Ownership. The most significant right of a landlord was the ownership of land. Under the Ethiopian feudal system, all land was considered the property of the emperor, but landlords had permanent usufruct rights (right to use and profit from the land).

Secondly, they have rights in Economic Control. Landlords controlled the economic activities of their tenants, dictating the terms of land use, rents, and agricultural production.

Another right of the landlords was Exploitation of Peasants. Landlords were entitled to collect a share of the harvest from peasants, often as much as 50-60% of the produce. This system ensured that landlords maintained their wealth and power, often at the expense of tenant farmers.

They had also Social Privileges. Landlords held significant social status and power in their communities. They were often consulted on matters of governance and had the ability to influence decisions both locally and at higher levels of the imperial administration.

When we ponder on wrongdoings Committed by Landlords, one can understand crimes against the peasants they exploit as the following facts show.

Despite their responsibilities, many landlords in Kofele Woreda, like in other parts of Ethiopia, engaged in a variety of exploitative and sometimes oppressive actions toward the peasant population. Some of the misdeeds include:

They badly Exploit of Peasants. The feudal system heavily favored landlords, and tenants were often left in dire economic conditions. Landlords overtaxed peasants, demanding excessive rents in the form of a large share of agricultural production, leaving the farmers with very little for themselves and often forcing them into poverty.

There was also Unjust Land Redistribution. Some landlords misused their power to control land redistribution, denying peasants their rightful land or evicting them arbitrarily to increase their own holdings or wealth.

They abuse power. Landlords frequently abused their judicial powers, meting out harsh and sometimes unjust punishments to tenants or laborers who failed to meet their demands. Peasants could be fined, imprisoned, or even physically punished for small transgressions.

There was also corruption in Tax Collection. In some cases, landlords would inflate taxes or extort additional money from peasants, pocketing the surplus rather than passing it on to the state. This led to widespread dissatisfaction and resentment among the rural population.

They use their power in Violence and Coercion. Some landlords, especially in the more remote areas of Kofele, used violence or threats to maintain control over their tenants, further consolidating their power by creating a climate of fear.

When Landlords in Kofele Woreda are seen at their respective clan level, the landlords listed in the above table were typically associated with specific clans, which provided them with both social legitimacy and local support. These clans were often deeply entrenched in Kofele's social fabric, and the landlords wielded power within their own communities. The following provides an overview of the landlords and their respective clans:

Jifar Washie (Sayimana): A landlord from the Sayimana clan, Jifar Washie had enjoyed substantial influence in local governance, controlling land in the Kofele region.

G/mach Wayu Chakiso (Qoma): A powerful figure from the Qoma clan, G/mach Wayu Chakiso had been involved in tax collection and land distribution, exerting strong authority over his tenants.

Figa Kolaso (Gomora): Figa Kolaso, belonging to the Gomora clan, had been another significant landlord in the area, with considerable economic and social influence.

Haso Hormicho (Ademonye): From the Ademonye clan, Haso Hormicho had been involved in managing both agricultural production and the administration of his tenants' lives.

Other landlords, such as Birmaji Ilmi (Tijo), Haji Baffa (Tijo), and Kabeto Felema (Chatimena), also played critical roles in the local system, contributing to the wealth and power of their respective clans. However, as with many feudal landowners, their power often came at the expense of the peasant classes, who faced immense hardship due to the exploitative systems of land tenure and taxation.

The landlords in Kofele Woreda during the Haile Selassie regime held significant responsibilities but also abused their rights, often to the detriment of their tenants. While they were expected to provide land, protect the peasants, and contribute to the empire's administration, many failed to meet these duties in a fair manner. Instead, they used their power for personal gain, exploiting the agrarian classes and exacerbating social inequality. The exploitation by landlords, combined with oppressive taxation systems, contributed to widespread unrest and played a role in the broader context of political movements that eventually led to the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution<sup>178</sup>.

### **3.1. Tax Reforms**

The period from 1941 to 1974 in Kofele woreda was marked by significant socio-political changes that influenced the taxation system. Tax reforms during this time were closely tied to broader national policies and local conditions. The key aspects of tax reforms in Kofele woreda during this period were:

After the end of Italian rule, the Ethiopian government reinstated traditional forms of taxation, including agricultural taxes, head taxes, and land taxes. The system relied heavily on local authorities for collection. The reestablished tax system placed a significant burden on peasants,

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<sup>178</sup> Getachew Reggasa, 2006. "A Historical Survey of Chilalo Awraja, 1941-1974", p.3; see also CADU, General Agricultural Survey, (CADU publication, No.71, Assela, 1971), pp.61-63.

particularly as they had to pay taxes based on production levels that often fluctuated due to environmental conditions<sup>179</sup>.

Under Haile Selassie's regime, reforms were introduced to standardize land tax assessments. However, the implementation often favored wealthy landowners, exacerbating inequalities. The imperial government sought to finance modernization efforts and military expenditures, leading to increased taxation on rural populations. This pressure was felt acutely by peasant farmers. Local officials often exploited the tax system, leading to arbitrary assessments and unequal tax burdens. Peasants frequently faced corruption, which further fueled grievances<sup>180</sup>.

The high tax burden, coupled with limited returns on their labor, led to growing discontent among peasants. This unrest was exacerbated by a lack of political representation and responsiveness to rural needs. By the late 1960s, calls for tax reform grew louder, with peasants advocating for a more equitable system that would consider their economic realities and reduce their burdens<sup>181</sup>.

With the rise of the Derg regime in 1974, the landmark land reform proclamation transformed land ownership and taxation structures. Although this occurred after 1974, the groundwork for these reforms was laid in the years leading up to this change. The Derg aimed to abolish landlordism and establish public ownership of land, fundamentally altering the tax landscape. The focus shifted toward more equitable distribution and the alleviation of peasant burdens<sup>182</sup>.

Tax reforms in Kofele woreda from 1941 to 1974 reflected a complex interplay of local conditions, national policies, and socio-political dynamics. While the period saw attempts at reform and standardization, the system largely favored the elite and placed heavy burdens on

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<sup>179</sup> Bahru Zewde. 1984. "Some Aspects of Post-Liberation Ethiopia 1941-1950", In *Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, 1984 (vol. 1, p.56), Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies. Informant: Bariso Sondhi

<sup>180</sup> Gilkes, Patrick. 1975. *The Dying Lion: Feudalism and Modernization in Ethiopia*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

<sup>181</sup> Keller, J. Edmond. 1981. Ethiopia Revolution, Class and National Question, *African Affairs*, 80(321), p. 226. Informant: Jemal Tusa

<sup>182</sup> Andargachew Tirunch. 1993. *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987: from aristocratic to totalitarian autocracy*. Cambridge, United States of America: Cambridge University Press.

peasants, leading to widespread discontent and paving the way for significant changes with the Derg regime's rise to power<sup>183</sup>.

### **3.2. Peasants Reactions to Tax Reforms and its Imposition**

#### **Tax Reform During Haile sellasie**

During the Haile Selassie regime in Ethiopia, particularly in areas like Kofele Woreda, peasants' reactions to tax reforms were shaped by a complex interplay of economic pressures, social dynamics, and political changes.

Economically, many peasants found the tax reforms to be burdensome, especially given the existing economic hardships. Increased taxes on land and agricultural products often exacerbated their struggles, leading to dissatisfaction and resistance. In some cases, peasants organized protests or engaged in passive resistance against tax collectors. This could include non-compliance with tax payments or public demonstrations, reflecting their frustration with the government's policies<sup>184</sup>.

Socially, the tax reforms sometimes intensified conflicts over land ownership. Many peasants were tenants or sharecroppers, and changes in tax policies could disrupt traditional land arrangements, leading to tensions between landlords and peasants. On the other hand, some peasants may have viewed the reforms as an opportunity for modernization and improvement in agricultural practices. There were expectations that tax revenues could lead to better infrastructure and services. The ability of peasants to communicate grievances and mobilize

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<sup>183</sup> "Agrarian Reform in Ethiopia: A brief Assessment," *Paper Presented at the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Lund: University of Lund, P. 98

<sup>184</sup> "The Political Economy of Land and Agrarian Development in Arsi: 1941-1991", (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Informant: Dejjenu Tafesse

against oppressive policies was crucial. The presence of local leaders or networks often influenced their reactions, fostering a sense of solidarity among the community<sup>185</sup>.

The reactions of peasants in Kofele Woreda to tax reforms during this period were marked by a blend of resistance, economic struggle, and the search for better living conditions amid a rapidly changing political landscape<sup>186</sup>.

### **Tax reform during 1974**

The Derg regime, which came to power in 1974, introduced significant changes in land ownership and taxation aimed at transforming Ethiopia's agrarian economy. The reactions of peasants in Kofele woreda to these tax reforms were shaped by their experiences under previous regimes, expectations for improvement, and the realities of the new policies. Here are the key aspects of their reactions:

#### *1. Initial Support for Reforms*

Initially, many peasants welcomed the Derg's land reform proclamation, which promised to abolish landlordism and redistribute land. There was hope that the reforms would alleviate their financial burdens and empower them as landowners. The idea of public ownership of land resonated with peasants who had long faced exploitation under the feudal system. The abolition of previous landlord-tenant relationships was seen as a positive step towards social equity<sup>187</sup>.

#### *2. Disillusionment and Resistance*

As the Derg's policies were implemented, many peasants faced bureaucratic inefficiencies and corruption. Local officials often mismanaged the distribution of land and resources, leading to

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<sup>185</sup> Gilkes, Patrick. 1975. *The Dying Lion: Feudalism and Modernization in Ethiopia*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Informant: Hasan Kimo

<sup>186</sup> Keller, J. Edmond. 1981. Ethiopia Revolution, Class and National Question, *African Affairs*, 80(321), p. 94. Informant:

Abdulkeidir H/Bati

<sup>187</sup> Informant: Adem Eba. Dula Abdu. 1978. "Land Reform in Ethiopia: A Prelude to Socialist Development". In *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Session B, Chicago:University of Illinois, Month and date 1978, P. 89.

frustrations among the rural population. Despite promises of equity, the new tax structures often resulted in higher taxes on production, which some peasants perceived as another form of exploitation. The inability of the Derg to effectively manage these changes led to discontent. Many peasants found that while land was redistributed, the lack of support in terms of resources, credit, and infrastructure meant that they struggled to improve their livelihoods. This led to a sense of betrayal and disappointment<sup>188</sup>.

### *3. Protests and Mobilization*

Discontent over tax burdens and inefficiencies in land redistribution sparked local protests. Peasants organized to voice their grievances, demanding more equitable tax policies and better support for agricultural practices. The hardships experienced under the new regime fostered a sense of community solidarity. Peasants began to unite in their calls for reform, utilizing traditional social networks to mobilize collective action<sup>189</sup>.

### *4. Coping Mechanisms*

In response to the new taxation regime, many peasants adapted by altering their agricultural practices, seeking alternative livelihoods, or engaging in informal economic activities to supplement their incomes. Some peasants attempted to negotiate directly with local officials regarding tax assessments and agricultural support, seeking to find a balance between compliance and their economic realities.

The reactions of peasants in Kofele woreda to the Derg's tax reforms were characterized by initial optimism followed by disillusionment and resistance. While the promises of reform offered hope for a more equitable system, the realities of implementation led to increased burdens and community mobilization against the regime. Ultimately, these dynamics reflected the complex interplay between governmental policies and the lived experiences of rural populations during a transformative period in Ethiopian history<sup>190</sup>.

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<sup>188</sup> Informant: Adem Eba

<sup>189</sup> Informant: Hesun Kimo

<sup>190</sup> Informant: Adem Eba

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Kofele woreda serves as a vivid representation of the dynamic interplay between geography, history, and cultural identity in Ethiopia. Situated in the Oromia Region, Kofele is not only notable for its geographical features and rich biodiversity but also for its profound historical significance shaped by the Arsi Oromo's social structures and the impactful events of the late 19th century. The region's traditional governance systems, such as the Gada system and clan-based organizations, have endured significant transformations due to external pressures, notably Menilek II's conquest, which altered the socio-political landscape and introduced new economic dynamics.

The complexities of land tenure, reflecting deep-rooted socio-political tensions, underscore the ongoing relevance of historical narratives in contemporary Ethiopia. Understanding Kofele's past is crucial for addressing current land policy issues, which remain central to the lives of its inhabitants and the broader socio-political context of the nation. As Ethiopia navigates its path forward, the lessons gleaned from Kofele's history can provide valuable insights into fostering social cohesion, recognizing cultural heritage, and promoting equitable development.

The historical and socio-economic landscape of Kofele woreda has been profoundly shaped by a combination of traditional governance structures, external conquests, and subsequent changes in land tenure and taxation systems. Before Menilek II's conquest, the Arsi Oromo enjoyed a complex social organization characterized by kinship ties and the Gada system, fostering social cohesion and cultural identity. However, the integration of Kofele into a centralized imperial system marked a significant turning point, disrupting these traditional frameworks and imposing a feudal structure that marginalized local populations.

The Italian occupation further compounded these challenges, instituting policies that not only appropriated land from local farmers but also imposed heavy taxation that strained the agrarian economy. This disruption led to displacement and social unrest, highlighting the vulnerability of traditional livelihoods in the face of colonial ambitions.

Understanding the evolution of land tenure and taxation in Kofele is crucial for comprehending the ongoing socio-political dynamics within the region. The legacies of these historical changes

continue to influence contemporary land rights issues, making it essential to consider both historical context and the aspirations of local communities in discussions about land reform and governance today. As Ethiopia continues to navigate its path towards sustainable development and democratic governance, lessons from Kofele's past can inform more equitable policies that respect local traditions and promote social justice.

The land tenure system in Kofele woreda from 1941 to 1974 exemplified the enduring challenges posed by feudal structures in Ethiopia. The concentration of land ownership among a small elite perpetuated a cycle of inequality, with peasants subjected to exploitative labor arrangements that stifled economic mobility. Despite a growing awareness of the need for reform following the end of Italian occupation, efforts to address the inequities of the land tenure system were largely inadequate, failing to disrupt the entrenched power dynamics between landlords and tenants.

The period was marked by significant discontent among the peasantry, who increasingly voiced their grievances through protests and demands for land reform. Although some attempts at reform were made, they often fell short of addressing the fundamental issues of land rights and tenant protections, ultimately leading to widespread unrest and contributing to the revolutionary changes that followed. The complex interplay between traditional landholding systems—rist in the north and gult in the south—further complicated efforts at modernization and equitable land distribution.

As these tensions simmered, the failure to achieve meaningful reform set the stage for the overthrow of Haile Selassie in 1974 and the subsequent radical land reform of 1975, which fundamentally altered land ownership in Ethiopia. This historical context highlights the critical importance of addressing land tenure security as a foundation for sustainable development, social justice, and political stability. Understanding the dynamics of this period offers valuable insights into the ongoing challenges of land reform and governance in Ethiopia today.

The period from 1941 to 1974 in Kofele woreda was marked by significant socio-economic and political challenges for peasants, deeply rooted in a feudal land tenure system that perpetuated inequality and exploitation. Despite initial reforms under Emperor Haile Selassie aimed at

modernizing land ownership, the realities of land distribution often favored the elite, leaving the majority of peasants vulnerable as tenants under oppressive landlord arrangements.

Economically, many peasants relied on subsistence farming, grappling with issues such as soil degradation and inadequate access to resources. The burdens of high rents and taxes further entrenched poverty, while educational and healthcare access remained limited, stifling opportunities for improvement. Politically, peasants had little power or representation, leading to discontent and the rise of movements advocating for reform.

While the gult system provided some hereditary rights, it often deepened existing inequalities, and the harsh realities of sharecropping and fixed rents created an atmosphere of insecurity. The ultimate dissatisfaction with these conditions contributed to the revolutionary climate of the early 1970s, culminating in the Derg regime's radical land reforms in 1975.

Thus, the years leading up to the revolution were characterized by a complex interplay of resilience among rural communities and systemic oppression from a feudalistic structure that favored the privileged few over the needs of the majority. The lasting implications of this period would shape the future landscape of land tenure and agricultural practices in Ethiopia, illustrating a pivotal chapter in the struggle for rights and equity among the nation's peasantry.

The taxation system in Kofele woreda from 1941 to 1974 exemplified the struggles of rural populations under shifting political regimes in Ethiopia. The heavy tax burdens, primarily imposed on peasants, were a reflection of broader socio-economic inequalities exacerbated by the exploitative practices of landlords and local officials. Despite attempts at reform, particularly during the imperial era, the taxation system largely favored the elite and contributed to widespread discontent among the peasantry.

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## List of Informants

No	Name of the informants	Sex	Age	Place & date of interview	Remarks
1	Hasan Kimo ( <i>Obboo</i> )	M	57	Ela 18/7/2024	He, knows very well about Balebats of kofele woreda and he himself was one of the chikashums of kofele woreda under landlord Jifar woshe.
2	Sheka kimo ( <i>Obboo</i> )	M	55	Ela 14/9/2024	He is the most valuable informant on the history of Kofale district.
3	Abdulkedir H/Bati ( <i>Obboo</i> )	M	80	Abosa-Adamonye 20/7/2024	He has good memories about corves labor in the district during the Emperor, Peasants were used to work on the extensive farmland of the landlords
4	Adem Eba ( <i>Obboo</i> )	M	52	Ela,19/8/2024	He has a good knowledge about Kofale
5	Sh/Aliyi Turbe	M	57	Ela 23/9/2024	He has a good memories about establishments of Gofer and Ardayita state farms
6	Ashiya Mamo ( <i>Addee</i> )	F	50	Alkasowamangne, 24/7/2024	She is from Gofingra clan, currently married to Alkaso clan.
7	Bariso Sondhi ( <i>Abba Gada</i> )	M	64	IlkaBebe 15/9/2024	He is elder of the district and <i>Abba gada</i> , he has good me memories about Italian post Italian developments in the district
8	Abu Beriso	M	62	Denda, 30/8/2024	This informant had good knowledge of kofele woreda from his father.
9	Bekele Abayo ( <i>Addee</i> )	F	79	Alkasowamangne, 25/7/2024	She has a good knowledge about this community.
10	Bereket Kedu ( <i>Obboo</i> )	M	45	Gurmicho 26/9/2024	Professionally, he is a teacher. He has good knowledge of <i>Cawwa</i> community, he was born and grown up in Gurmicho <i>Kebele</i>
11	Jemal Tusa	M	83	Hasasa town, 27/8/2024	He is an elder of the district; he was served in the district during the time of the <i>Darg</i> . He has a good memories about peasant esistances toward <i>Darg</i> and Hailasillassies policy in the district

12	Dejenu Tafesse (Ato)	M	61	Kofale town 29/7/2024	He has good memories about the presence of <i>balabbats</i> in the district
13	Ebiso Batola (Obboo)	M	67	Weege Qanqu 18/9/2024	Elder of the district. He was a valuable informant on the Arsi marriage custom and traditional conflict resolution.
14	Feleke Zewude (Ato)	M	79	Kofale 13/8/2024	He was a valuable informant particularly for the history of Gobe Cattle breeding center. He was served in this center for many years.
15	Gabramlak Guye (Obboo)	M	67	Kofale town, 17-19/8/2024	Currently, he is serving in Kofale <i>Woreda</i> , in bureau of culture and Tourism, he knows very well about the peripheral communities in the district. He is also has good memories of about impacts of <i>Neftenya Gabbar</i> system in the district. He has also good memories about the period of the <i>Darg</i> in the district
16	<i>Galgalu</i> Argo (Obboo)	M	56	Gofer 30/7/2024	Garage worker in Gofer state farm, he knows very well about Gofer state farm
17	Gamada Soge (Obboo)	M	64	Wege-Dare 28/9/2024	Elder, his land is bounded by Gofer state farm.
18	Garado Feto (Obboo)	M	70	Hasano 29/8/2024	Elder, He has a good knowledge about the effect of state farm on the local communities
19	Hassen Gamada (Obboo)	M	72	Gurmicho, 30/7/2024	He is from Gofingira Gurmicho. .
20	Hayato Jibicho (Obboo)	M	81	Gurmicho 15/8/2024	He was a valuable informant; particularly for the history of Gobe Cattle breeding center.
21	Hussen <i>Sheik</i> Ahimad Jilo (Obboo)	M	50	Arsi Negele/ MejaKiltu 2/9/2024	He has good memories of The Arsi Oromo social organization based on clan.
22	H/Husen Wakeyo	M	57	Ela 30/7/2024	He has good memories about corves labor in the district during the Emperor, Peasants were used to work on the extensive farmland of the landlords
23	Husen Gemedi (Obboo)	M	61	Kofale 16/8/2024	Elder of the district, he has a good memories about Menilek Conquests and subsequent developments in the district

24	Kadir Gada ( <i>Obboo</i> )	M	74	Tulo 16/9/2024	He ,knows very well about Gofer state farm
25	Nebi Hebo	M	78	Kofale 28/7/2024	He has good knowledge of Cattle breeding centerin Ardayita. He was worker in the center for many years.
26	Kebeto Bedaso ( <i>Obboo</i> )	M	59	Kofale 04/7/2024	He was a valuable informant particularly forthe history of the district during the <i>Darg</i> period.. He was a district administrator during the <i>Darg</i> time. He was also a committee of one of the <i>Darg</i> 's peasant Association
27	Kebeto Soge ( <i>Obboo</i> )	M	77	Wege-Dare 12/8/2024	Elder, he knows about Gofer state
28	Kero Beriso ( <i>Obboo</i> )	M	85	Gurmicho 26/9/2024	He was from <i>Cawwa</i> community. He has a good knowledge about the problem with local communities. Approximately he was the riches of all <i>Cawwas</i> in Kofale <i>Woreda</i> .
29	Kesib Jarso ( <i>Obboo</i> )	M	63	Kofale 27/7/2024	He has a good memories about how the people of the area had lost their own land and considered as tenant
30	Aman Tusa ( <i>Ato</i> )	M	65	Ela 30/8/2024	knows very well about this state farm, of Ardayita.
31	Mohammed Bedaso ( <i>Obboo</i> )	M	63	Gurmicho, 02/9/2024	He has good memories about <i>Arsi</i> marriage system.
32	H/Abu Gameda	M	12 7	Ela 04/8/2024	He was an elder from <i>sayimmana</i> community; he has a good knowledge about status of <i>Arsi</i> during the period of Emperor Hailasellassie, Italian conquest and their

					status during the period of the <i>Darg</i> .
33	Husen Ibrahim	M	72	Ela, 02/9/2024	He was expert of cattle breeding during the period of the <i>Darg</i> .
34	Sado Tufa ( <i>Obboo</i> )	M	61	Wege–Dare 07/7/2024	He has a good memories about H/Selasie land tenure system as his father was a land lord during that time
35	Daksiso Jifar	M	88	WEla 09/8/2024	Elder, He has a good knowledge about the effect of state farm on the local communities
36	<i>Sheik</i> Hussein Ali ( <i>Sheik</i> )	M	90	Kofale 03/9/2024	Jimma settler. Born in Jimma; served as Quranic teacher and <i>Imam</i> of Anuwar Mosque in Kofale.
37	Semira Kedu ( <i>Adde</i> )	F	32	Kofale town, 22/7/2024	She was grown in Gurmicho and attends her primary education in Gurmicho elementary school with sons of <i>Cawwa</i> .
38	Tusa Wako ( <i>Abba Gada</i> )	M	70	Kofale town, 02/8/2024	He is Abba Gada, from Kafitu clan, grade 11 complete, he has good memories about Arsi traditional law. He has also good memories about the achievements Italian in the district
39	Turi Genemo ( <i>Obboo</i> )	M	50	Shashemane 12/9/2024	Government employee who has good knowledge about the post 1987 political development in Kofale. He has also good memories of Arsi social organization.
40	Usman Churiso ( <i>Obboo</i> )	M	45	Gurmicho, 26/7/2024	He was from Gurmicho <i>Kebele</i> , neighboring with <i>Cawwa</i> .

41	Waritu Gesha ( <i>Obboo</i> )	M	69	Kofale town 11/8/2024	He has served in Kofale Municipality for many years, he has a good memories about infrastructural developments in the district during the time of Italian, Hailasillassie, and the <i>Darg</i> time
42	Husen Sekeki ( <i>Ato</i> )	M	86	Ela 13/9/2024	<i>Elder</i> of the district, he He had also a good knowledge about the per 1975 economic activities

