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**THE MYTH AND REALITY OF EMPIRE BUILDING:
ITALIAN LAND POLICY AND PRACTICE IN ETHIOPIA,
(1935–1941)**

**A Thesis Submitted To
University Of London
In Fulfilment Of The Requirements For
The Degree Of Doctor Of Philosophy**

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TO ADAMA, IYANNA, MANITO, PAULINE

AND

BELOVED PARENTS

ABSTRACT

Apart from being Italo-centric, the vast majority of scholarly work on the short-lived period of Italian occupation of Ethiopia is mainly preoccupied with political events and particularly with their repercussions on international diplomacy. With the exception of a few pioneering studies, Italian rule and its impact on Ethiopia is given marginal importance.

The present thesis confines itself to one specific key area of Italian policy - land. Search for an outlet to settle Italy's excess population and deploy its surplus capital, had sustained Italian imperialist ambitions from the 19th century and justified the conquest of Ethiopia against quasi universal international opposition. With the conquest of Ethiopia, Italy claimed to have become one of the 'satisfied' nations.

Unlike the older Italian colonies that were described as a useless "collection of sand", Ethiopia, with its varying climate and fertile soil, was portrayed as an El Dorado where Italy's long-standing imperial aspirations could be effectively fulfilled. Yet impressive land colonization programmes, aiming at settling Italian colonists with a mission to transform, within a short time, the agricultural sector into "the granary of Italy" and the Ethiopian Empire into an extension of a *Magna Italia*, were an unmitigated failure. The building of the Empire proved extremely difficult, largely because realities on the ground had vastly hampered practical results.

Nevertheless, the attendant policies accelerated the process of change already set in motion and had a lasting effect on traditional Ethiopian social structure. Each chapter discusses key aspects of these policies, highlighting the forces contributing to the great contrast between their formulation and their actual achievement and, particularly in the conclusion, their impact on an independent Ethiopia.

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Interest in the present research developed when I realized the gap left by the vast literature dealing with Italian colonialism in Ethiopia. While too much attention is paid to the episode of Italy's aggression of Ethiopia and its impact on international diplomacy, Italy's colonization *per se* is ignored or dismissed in a few perfunctory paragraphs. Honourable exceptions to this formidable body of literature are the recent works by Grassi and Goglia, Angelo del Boca and Alberto Sbacchi. Grassi and Goglia's anthology has totally neglected the Ethiopian context nor do they incorporate, or even acknowledge the existence of, Ethiopian sources. Del Boca and Sbacchi are, in a way, pioneers on the working of Italian colonialism in Ethiopia and its impact on Ethiopian society. Although less Italo-centric, these studies, unlike the present research and notwithstanding their differences in interpretation and methodology, engage themselves in a much wider issues of the Italian presence in Ethiopia and its impact on the Ethiopian society. In addition, their shortcomings are amply addressed in Alessandro Triulzi's review article¹.

The present work aims to describe the workings of Italian colonialism in Ethiopia with the view to throwing additional light on the nature of European colonialism in Africa. Although its major focus is land, attempt is also made to explore a number of subsidiary issues.

Students of colonial history find many similarities between Italian colonialism and that of other colonial powers in the African soil. Like them, Italy was confronted with enormous practical problems: unprecedented resistance even from a supposedly docile population, general public apathy at home after initial enthusiasm, insufficient support from the metropolitan government and inadequate funds to carry out rapid

¹. Alessandro Triulzi, "Italian Colonialism and Ethiopia", *JAH*, 23, (1982):237-43; See also John Markakis, "Italian conquest and colonisation", *ibidem*, 28, (1987):168-9.

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developmental work. Yet, in some respects the Italian case also reveals interesting features that had little or no parallel with the experience of other colonial powers. Italy's primary interest in colonies was to use them as a convenient receptacle for its surplus population and a source of primary goods to the mother country. Agriculture, as conducted by other European powers typically took the form of a large farm or ranch employing entirely African labour. The result was a relatively small European population and a restricted market for the local produce.

Italy's state sponsored peasant settlement schemes aimed at transforming the Empire into a *Magna Italia* - an extension of the mother country. According to these plans, the peasants would work their own farms with a minimum help from the indigenous population and become independent landowners who would form the backbone of an Italian society and transform the Empire into a profitable possession to the motherland. Although on a few occasions France and Portugal, and even Britain, had flirted with similar enterprise, as a rule this type of settlement policy was, if not essentially foreign, of secondary interest to them and other colonial powers in Africa. But such distinction should not be pushed too far. In expanding these facets of Italian colonialism, this thesis will elucidate how Italy's plans, like the policy of any imperial power, was shaped, among many other things, by the physical nature of the landscape and the widely different responses of the local population. With this it is hoped to throw new insights onto comparative African colonial history. The reader, examining in detail how Italy attempted to build its Empire, can conclude for himself to what extent Italy's imperialist ideas and practice were different from that of other European colonial powers.

The bulk of this research was conducted in Rome at *Archivio Centrale di Stato* and, under very difficult conditions, in the widely dispersed and badly organized historical archives of the *Comitato Per La Documentazione dell'Opera dell'Italia in*

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Africa, successor of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1882-1912), the Ministry of Colonies (1912-1937) and the Ministry of Italian Africa (1937-43).

Anybody with research experience in Italy will be aware of its peculiar rewards and difficulties, and especially of the problems dealing with the documents of the *Comitato*. Consultation of some documents which may have been useful was denied for reasons unknown to the author. Although the use of other more relevant sources has made these documents redundant for the purpose of the present research, the author shares the views expressed elsewhere that the Ministry's arbitrary approach and lack of clear guidance are harmful to serious scholarly research². The *Comitato's* recent extensive publications of over forty volumes dealing with Italy's work in Africa cannot fill this vacuum. Both the *Comitato*, which is a body mainly manned by "ex-colonial governors and state functionaries" and its works, which is largely subjective in approach and "celebratory in intention", cannot be taken as fully dependable historical sources³.

The most important data was collected in the *Archivio Documentario* of *Istituto Agronomico Per L'Oltremare [IAO]* in Florence⁴ and the *Fondazione Einaudi* in Turin where access was gained to the documents of the then Minister of Finance, *Conte Paolo Thaon Di Revel*. But without the use of learned institutions such as state and private libraries in Rome and Florence, who are the depositaries of current important periodicals, and the extensive reports and memoirs by the contemporary British

². Triulzi, op.cit.:237-8.

³. R. Rainero, introduction to Sbacchi, Il colonialismo Italiano in Etiopia, 1936-1940, (Milano: Mursia, 1980).

⁴. Despite a written recommendation to the author by the Foreign Ministry "that the most fruitful research could be done at the IAO in Florence", the author was faced with a number of obstacles from the same authorities whose discordant voices helped only to frustrate his work.

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officials and their agents available at the Public Record Office, which throw important light in the workings and the difficulties of the Italian regime in Ethiopia, the research would have remained incomplete. Historians of Italian colonialism may not fail to criticize the use particularly of the Italian periodicals and newspapers as they are regarded by many as simple propaganda literature of little or no historical value. It is true that most of their authors were men on the payroll of the Ministry of Propaganda who, along those employed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Italian Africa, diligently published a plethora of articles throughout the occupation. Although these articles took a stereotyped course through platitude to beatitude, hailing the most tenuous progress as a prodigy of achievement, and giving to the plans all the quality of performances, they cannot simply be dismissed. Attentive reading with the understanding of the contemporary linguistic garb of the Fascist administration reveals that under these apparently propaganda material lies untapped wealth of information that was left out or dealt only cursorily by sources commonly regarded as authoritative.

Accessible Ethiopian sources are consulted and invaluable information was gained from those who were closely affected by the Italian land policy itself. In compliance with their wishes, the identity of the sources is not disclosed.

While stressing none of the persons is responsible for the opinions herein expressed, I have to admit that the research would not have been completed without the useful criticism and technical advice, moral support, continuous encouragement and daily inspiration of many people.

I wish to express my deep gratitude to Africa Educational Trust for sponsoring me and being close to me throughout the research period, and particularly during the troubled period of field work, providing financial and moral support. Without such generous help the study and its completion should have been unthinkable. AET's generosity far exceeds my ability to repay

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it adequately. Thank you for your confidence in me and keep up the good work of supporting research and scholarship. I include in this thank Dr Anthony McAdam who encouraged me to apply and strongly supported my application.

I owe great debt to my supervisor Professor R. Gray for being a continuous inspiration, encouragement and patient listener. The completion of this research was due to his unflinching attention, indispensable assistance and advice.

Inestimable thanks are expressed to many Italians - friends, private individuals, government officials, public bodies, some of whom played a part in the colonization of Ethiopia - for their time, hospitality and knowledge. I wish particularly to thank the staff and the management of *Biblioteca Nazionale* in Rome and Florence and those of *Istituto Italo-Africano*.

In Florence a special debt is owed to the Director of IAO who allowed me free xeroxing facilities and, together with his indefatigable staff, made my stay in Florence pleasant according me all the help I needed; to *Centro Internazionale Studenti* for its succour to provide me a shelter over my head.

In Rome I wish to thank the Head of *Servizio Storico E Documentazione of Archivio Storico* of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dr Enrico Serra, who graciously provided me important published materials and introduced me to a number of important individuals and institutions; the Superintendent of the archives, Ruffo di Scaletta, whose intervention facilitated access to the archives of IAO; Mario Gazzini, archivist for the *Comitato*; Dr Ludovica de Curten and her friendly staff of *Archivio Centrale di Stato*.

When approached many former colonial officers refused to be interviewed under a variety of pretext. But some were more than helpful. A particular gratitude is owed to Dr Attilio Scaglione and Pier Marcello Masotti, for their reminiscences about the settlers' life and voracious appetite to land; Gr. Ufficiale Mario Buschi, a former settler landowner at Holätta

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I am also indebted for their kind assistance in my relation with the same Ministry to Professors Loggia, Chancellor of Accademia Nazionale Dei Lincei, and Giampaolo Calchi-Novati, the Director of IPALMO.

In Turin I am very grateful to the former journalist and versed writer on Italian colonialism, Angelo del Boca for putting me in touch with personalities who illuminated me in the workings of Italian land policy. Whenever in difficulty, I resorted to Professor Gian Carlo Stella. Delving into his rare and rich bibliographical collection in Ravenna, he wrote me full and informative letters elucidating important and obscure questions and despatched valuable extracts. I owe him a large tribute of gratitude.

Many other, friends and academics - some of whom I came to know in the course of the research and only a few of which are named - gave generously invaluable advice, documents, criticism and help of all kind which words fail to describe. In England the list includes Dr Muhammad Hassan, Mr Mulugéta Dory, Dr Richard Hayward, Dr Richard Pankhurst, Angela Raven-Roberts, Dr Tenker Bongor. I am also deeply grateful to Dr Osvaldo Rainieri [Rome], Dr Alberto Sbacchi [USA], Dr Tekeste Negash [Sweden], Rev. Vincent Twomeysud [Ireland], and to the agronomist and crop-physiologist, Mr Yaqob Edjamo [Ethiopia] from whose

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I must offer my heartfelt thanks to Dr Deborah Jane Birket who enthusiastically read the proofs. The rare combination of her eagle eyes, solicitude, critical scrutiny and sharp lance of a pen prevented some of the worst solecisms from slipping into the text. While acknowledging her assistance, I must emphasize that she bears no responsibility for any grammatical inexactitude or obscure semantics where I failed to heed to her advice. On a more personal level, my debt of gratitude to her is heavy for her delightful, entertaining and delicious meals, moral support and encouragement.

Last and not least I wish to express my indebtedness to Iyanna, Manito and Pauline who were continuous sources of joy and inspiration.

The question of transcribing Ethiopian names is always a vexing one. My decision involved a compromise, that is, altering spellings which had little resemblance to linguistic reality, and retaining others on account of their familiarity.

ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Addis Ababa.
AAI	<i>Annali dell'Africa Italiana.</i>
AC	<i>L'Agricoltura Coloniale.</i>
ACG	Acting Consul General.
ACP	[Directorate for] Civil and Political Affairs.
ACS	Central State Archives [<i>Archivio Centrale di Stato</i>].
AE	[Directorate for] Economic Affairs.
AI	Italian Africa (<i>Africa Italiana</i>).
Am	[Royal Governorate of] Amara.
AMAR	Museo Africano Archives in [<i>Istituto Italo Africano</i>]
AOI	Italian East Africa (<i>Africa Orientale Italiana</i>)
AP	Parliamentary Papers [<i>Atti Parlamentari</i>].
As	Åsmåra.
AS	Historical Archives [<i>Archivio Storico</i>].
ATdR	[Luigi Einaudi Foundation (Turin)] Archives of the Minister of Finance, Paolo Thaon di Revel.
B	Box [<i>Busta</i>].
BUCE	<i>Bollettino Ufficiale della Colonia Eritrea.</i>
BUGA	<i>Bollettino Ufficiale del Governo dell'Amara.</i>
BULMAI	<i>Bollettino Ufficiale di Legislazione del Ministero dell'Africa Italiana.</i>
CAG	Jimma Agricultural Consortium.
CC	<i>Consulente Coloniale.</i>
CD IAO	Archives of Overseas Agricultural Institute [<i>Istituto Agronomico Per L'Oltremare. Centro documentazione</i>].
CD	House of Deputies [<i>Camera dei Deputati</i>].
CE	<i>Corriere Eritreo.</i>
CFA	Fascist Farmers Union [<i>Confederazione Fascista degli Agricoltori</i>].
CFLA	Fascist Agricultural Workers Union [<i>Confederazione Fascista dei Lavoratori dell'Agricoltura</i>].
CFI	Fascist Industrialists Union [<i>Confederazione Fascista degli Industriali</i>].
CG	Consul General.
CI	<i>Corriere dell'Impero.</i>
CL	Colonization and Labour Office.
CM	<i>Corriere Mercantile.</i>
Cotetio	Ethiopian National Cotton Company [<i>Compagnia Nazionale per il Cotone di Etiopia</i>].
CS	<i>Corriere della Sera.</i>
DAF	Directorate of Financial Affairs.
DD	Diplomatic Documents [<i>Documenti diplomatici</i>].
DG	General Directorate [<i>Direttorato Generale</i>].
DGov	Decree of Governor/Governorate.
DIM	Interministerial Decree [<i>Decreto Interministeriale</i>].
DM	Ministerial Decree [<i>Decreto Ministeriale</i>].
DS	Central Directorate [<i>Direttorato Superiore</i>].
E.C.	Ethiopian Calendar.
ECAI	Italian African Cotton Company [<i>Ente per il Cotone dell'Africa Italiana</i>].
Eccles.	Ecclesiastical usage.
ECPE	"Puglia of Ethiopia" Colonization Agency.

ABBREVIATIONS

ECRE	"Romagna of Ethiopia" Colonization Agency.
EDR	Thesaurus De Rege Colonization Board.
EI	<i>Espansion Imperiale.</i>
EO	Ethiopia Observer.
EOC	Ethiopian Orthodox Church.
Er	[Royal Governorate of] Eritrea.
f	file [foglio].
FO	Public Record Office.
G	Governor/ate.
GAD	<i>Giornale di Agricoltura della Domenica.</i>
GV	<i>Gazzetta di Venezia.</i>
GG	Governor/ship General.
GI	<i>Il Giornale d'Italia.</i>
Gm	Jimma.
Gn	Gondär.
GP	<i>Gazzetta del Popolo.</i>
GRA	[Central State Archives] Marshal Graziani Files.
GS	[Royal Governorate of] Galla and Sidamo.
GU	<i>Giornale Ufficiale del Governo Generale dell'AOI.</i>
GUGS	<i>Bolletino Ufficiale del Governo Generale dell' AOI e Bollettino del Governo dello Scioa.</i>
GURI	<i>Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia.</i>
GV	<i>Gazzetta di Venezia.</i>
Hr	[Royal Governorate of] Härär.
HSIU	Haile Sellassie I University.
IA	Agricultural Office [<i>Ispettorato di Agricoltura</i>].
IACI	Colonial Agricultural Institute [<i>Istituto Agricolo Coloniale Italiano</i>].
IC	<i>L'Italia Coloniale.</i>
ICAI	Italian Cotton Enterprise Corporation [<i>Società Anonima Impresa Cotoniera Italiana</i>].
ICI	Italian Cotton Institute [<i>Istituto Cotoniero Italiano</i>].
IDC	Institution of cotton district of.
IEA	Italian East Africa.
IFPLAOI	Fascist Inspectorate for Production and Labour [<i>Ispettorato Fascista di Produzione e Lavoro</i>].
INFAIL	Fascist National Institute for Insurance against Industrial Accidents [<i>Istituto Nazionale Fascista per l'Assicurazione contro gli Infortuni sul Lavoro</i>].
INFPS	Fascist National Institute For Social Security [<i>Istituto Nazionale Fascista per la Previdenza Sociale</i>].
IGA	General Inspectorate for Agriculture.
II	<i>Impero Italiano.</i>
IOM	<i>L'Italia D'Oltremare.</i>
JAH	Journal of African History.
JES	Journal Of Ethiopian Studies.
Lit.	Literally.
MAE	Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
MAI	Ministry of Italian Africa.
MC	Ministry of Colonies.
MCP	[Central State Archives] Ministry of Information Files [<i>Ministero della Cultura Popolare</i>].
Mg	Mogadishu.

ABBREVIATIONS

Mil.	Military usage.
Misc.	Miscellaneous.
MTD	Maria Theresa Thaler.
ONC	Army Veterans Association National Agency [<i>Opera Nazionale di Combattenti</i>].
PI	<i>Popolo di Italia</i> .
PNF	[Central State Archives] National Fascist Party.
PR	<i>Popolo di Roma</i> .
PS	[Central State Archives] Ministry of Public Security.
PSSFA	Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
R	Royal.
RC	<i>Il Resto del Carlino</i> .
RD	Royal Decree.
RDA	<i>Rivista di Diritto Agrario</i> .
RDL	Royal Decree Law.
REAI	<i>Rassegna Economica dell'Africa Italiana</i> .
REC	<i>Rassegna Economica delle Colonie</i> .
RIA	Royal Agricultural Institutte [<i>Regio Istituto Agronomico</i>].
RISS	<i>Rivista Internazionale di Scienze Sociali</i> .
Rm	Rome.
RSAI	<i>Rassegna Sociale dell'Africa Italiana</i> .
Sc	[Royal Governorate of] Shäwa [Scioa].
SCCCE	Eritrean Cotton Marketing Company [<i>Società Per La Coltivazione Del Cotone Nella Colonia Eritrea</i>].
S.I.A.	<i>Società Imprese Africane</i> .
SIOM	Italian Syndicate For Beyond Märäb [<i>Sindacato Italiano d'Oltre Mareb</i>].
Sm	[Royal Governorate of] Somalia.
SM	General Staff.
SPDR	[Central State Archives] Special Secretariat of Duce [<i>Segreteria Particolare del Duce</i>].
Supl.	Supplement.
UA	Agricultural Office [<i>Ufficio Agrario</i>].
£.	<i>Lira</i> .

GLOSSARY

Äbba	Eccles. Father. Reverend.
Äbbat	Father; ancestor.
Äbunä	Eccles. Title of a Bishop. The Head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.
Addi	Country, Village [Tegreña].
Äläqa	Leader; eccles. Head of a Däbr.
Äntafi	Eccles. Upholsterer.
Äqabé Säat	(Lit. Custodian of hour); eccles. Title of the Abbot of Däbrä Häyeq.
Äqabit	Eccles. Church-keeper, Custodian.
Äqänna	Settle, Colonize.
Äqeñi Äbat	First Settler, First Occupant, Original Father.
Äsrat	(Lit. "tithe"); part of a tax on produce.
Ätabi	Washer; eccles. Cleaner of Church Utensils.
Balabbat	(Lit. "Indigenous or one with the father"); a local low level official who mediated between the people and the government.
Bétä-Kehnät	(Lit. "the house of clergy"). Ecclesiastical order.
Bétä-Mängest	(Lit. "the House of Government"); royal household; public domain.
Capo	(Ital. lit. "Head, Chief"); title associated with Mussolini; foreman.
Cat	A narcotic widely grown in the south-eastern regions.
Cegurafgottät	See <i>Shäna</i> .
Ceqa	Mud.
Ceqa Shum	(Lit. "Chief mud"); a minor official appointed for a fixed period from among the elders of rest-owning peasantry to act as intermediary between the government and the peasants of the area.
Däbr	Eccles. Abbey or an Endowed Church.
Däbtära	Eccles. Learned but unordained cleric who acts as chorister, poet, astrologer.
Däga	Highland [2,400-4,600 m].
Dähena Märét	Semi-fertile land.
Däjach	See Däjazmach.
Däjazmach	(Mil. lit. "Commander of the Gate"); a nobleman's title equivalent to count.
Dawulla	Weight measurement unit consisting of 20 <i>gunna</i> or about 100 kg.
Duce	(Ital. lit. "Leader"); title associated with Mussolini.
Ecägé	Eccles. Title of the Head of Däbrä Libanos Gädam who was also the administrative head of the EOC.
Ekkul Ärash	(Lit. "tiller of half"); share-cropping system whereby the produce is divided in half between the parties.
Ente (pl. -ti)	Ital. Agency, Corporation.

GLOSSARY

Erbo Ärash	(Lit. "tiller of a quarter"); share-cropping system where the produce is divided on a rate of one quarter.
Fitawurari	(Mil. lit. "leader of the vanguard"); title equivalent to viscount.
Gäbäz	Eccles. Administrator of a Church.
Gäbbar	Tax-payer. Peasant, farmer.
Gädäm	Eccles. Monastery.
Gan-gäb	Land whose tax is allocated to the central government.
Gasha	A land unit of between 30-40 ha or one <i>qällad</i> .
Geber	Tax; part of land tax traditionally paid in kind for the <i>gult-gäz</i> [gult-holder].
Ghebbi	Royal Court, Palace.
Gult	Land granted for a particular purpose or service; fief; benefice; administrative unit.
Gult-gäz	(Lit. "gult-ruler"); official holding gult rights over an estate; administrator.
Gundo	Capacity measurement used mainly for honey [Gundo Mar] consisting of 60 berelé or [500x60 gm].
Hudad	Public Domain; land temporarily set aside and worked by statute labour for the benefit of a governor.
Kahenat	Clergy.
Madärya	Land allocated to state officials in lieu of salary.
Mad-bét	See Gan-gäb.
Mäggabi	(Lit. "one who administers; feeds"); quarter-master; eccles. administrator of a <i>gädäm</i> .
Maläfeya	Fertile; beautiful.
Mämher	Teacher; eccles. head of a monastery.
Mär	See Gundo.
Märét	Land; soil.
Mätefo märét	Unproductive land.
Näftäña	(Mil. lit. "Gun-carrier"); northern soldier-settler in southern Ethiopia.
Negus	King.
Qällad	Land measurement unit consisting of about 83.328 sqm.
Qés Gäbäz	Eccles. A priest Gäbäz.
Qolla	Lowland [below 1,400 m].
Ras	(Mil. lit. "Head"); a nobleman's title equivalent to duke.
Rest	Inherited land; use of such rights.
Restä-gult	A hereditary gult.
Sämon märét	(Eccles. lit. "Weekly land"); land burdened with the obligation to provide weekly mass.
Shäna	Village or Communal land tenure system involving periodical distribution.
Sisso Ärash	(Lit. "Tiller of one third"); share-cropping system where the produce is divided between the parties on a rate of one third.

GLOSSARY

Téf	An indigenous cereal widely grown in highland areas.
Tekklačña	(Lit. "the one who is planted"); settler.
Wanna Äbbat	(Lit. "main father"); the first settler; ancestor.
Wärräganu	Royal herdsmen.
Wäynä-däga	Midlands [1,400-2,400 m].
Yä-	Preposition meaning "Of; belonging to"; e.g. "yäsämon märet = land of sämon; yä-bétä mängest = belonging to royal household, state.

CHAPTER I
THE EVOLUTION OF ITALIAN COLONIAL POLICY

MISSIONARIES, ADVENTURERS AND COLONIZERS

The 1935-41 Italian occupation of Ethiopia is rooted in a long and turbulent history that began in the early nineteenth century when both countries were emerging as unified modern states. From this early period, Ethiopia was idealized as a place where Italian colonial aspirations, could be realized. Ethiopia was thought to provide a demographic outlet for Italy's surplus population and a valuable market from which Italian industry could draw raw materials and to which it could sell manufactured goods. These same ideas inspired and shaped the agricultural policies and practices of 1935-41 and were the driving force of the Italian colonialist movement which justified the conquest of Ethiopia in 1935, as much as it earlier did the occupation of Eritrea, Libya and Somalia. It was in these three colonies that the first major attempts were made to translate these ideas into action.

The forerunners of Italian colonialism in Ethiopia were the Italian Catholic missionaries who were competing with Islam and Protestantism for the last reserve of disposable souls. They were later followed by scholars, travellers, visionaries and by those discontented with the anti-imperialist stand of the newly formed Italian state¹; there were speculators and arms dealers who looked for government subvention². Fascist historians would address this heterogeneous group as "our colonial predecessors". In background and interest, this group resembled its counterparts in other European countries. As in

¹. The position advocated by the anti-colonialist movement was expressed through phrases such as *Politica rinunciataria* (politics of resignation) or *Politica delle mani pulite* (clean hands) or *piedi a casa* (firm foot at home).

². Angelo del Boca, Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale, vol. I: Dall'unità alla marcia di Roma, (Rm-Bari: Editori Laterza & Figli Spa, 1976), p.4.

France and Germany, numerically it was tiny but politically vociferous.

Among the Catholic missionaries, the Ligurian clergyman, Father Stella, of the Congregation of the Turin Mission³, played an important role. He considered colonies as centres of settlement and thought the Eritrean province, Hämasén, where he thought Europeans would easily feel at home, was an ideal location. He painted an enticing portrait of the area as the most fertile and the richest in all Abyssinia, where "there is an unlimited quantity of land available belonging to nobody, for their old owners have either emigrated or are dead"⁴. In his former mission station, Bogos, where he was once "a moral dictator and amphitryonic judge" of seventeen Bilén villages⁵, Stella set up, in 1867, the first Italian agricultural colony on a 1,000 sqkm concession. It was situated 1,200m above sea level and within six km from Kärän, the main town and took the name of *Colonia Italo-Africana di Sciottel*, or Italo-African Shotäl Colony⁶. According to the plan, the new immigrants were expected to assert themselves as incontestable masters of the land and develop it into a flourishing metropo-

³. In 1839, De Jacobis, a clergyman, and Montuori, a medical doctor, had joined the mission, but their arrival did not augur major changes.

⁴. AMAR, Misc. f4, Lettera di Padre Stella to Cavour, 3-3-1859; CDDD, XV, Libro Verde: Etiopia, (Rm: Tip. CD, 1890), doc. 7, pp.15-6; Romain Rainero, I primi tentativi di colonizzazione agricola e di popolamento dell'Eritrea (1890-1895), (Milano: Marzorati, 1960), pp.38-9.

⁵. G. Lejean, Voyage aux deux Nils (1860-1864), (Paris: Hachette, 1865), p.154.

⁶. The new agricultural community consisted of capital investors, known as *coloni capitalisti cooperatori*, and manual workers. Though predominantly Italian, the group was a mixture of nationalities united by the prospects of easy gain. There were 25 Italians, two Germans, one Spanish and one Hungarian. [Cfr. Del Boca, op.cit., pp.19-22]; MAE, L'Italia in Africa: Avvaloramento e colonizzazione, I, Tomo II, (Rm: Soc. Abete, 1970), p.33 (hereafter cited as MAE, Avvaloramento)].

litan commercial enterprise under the Italian protectorate⁷. But infighting, a hostile climate, lack of Italian government support and capital took its toll and by 1870 nothing was left of the colony but ruins⁸.

If the plan failed in practice, the legacy of Stella's vision of a colony as a centre of population settlement lingered, sustained by geographical and exploration societies⁹ who were financed partly by the State and partly by public donations. In their effort to win the hearts and minds of the Italian public, the societies organized expeditions, widely publicized their cause in journals and public meetings¹⁰. But their attempt to justify their ambitions, like other European expansionists, as a search for markets and raw materials, and as a civilizing mission in the Roman tradition, fell on deaf ears. Italy that had emerged as a single nation in 1861 was not

7. AMAR, loco cit.

8. Orazio Antinori, Viaggio fra i Bogos, (Rm: 1887), p.95.

9. Exploration and geographical societies mushroomed in most of Italy's commercial cities. The most important were: *Società Geografica Italiana* of Florence (1867), whose first president Cristoforo Negri prompted the Italian missionaries in Ethiopia to promote metropolitan interests in the territory; *Società di Esplorazioni Commerciali in Africa* of Milan, which had on its executive board high ranking figures of Lombardian business who played a crucial role in economic and political penetration of the Italian African colonies and later Ethiopia; *Club Africano di Napoli* which, founded in 1880, in the immediate aftermath of the occupation of Asäb by Rubattino Navigation Company, transformed itself into *Società Africana di Italia*. Other societies worked in the same direction in most Italian commercial cities: *Società Coloniale di Studi* in Florence, *Associazione di Geografia Commerciale* in Bari, *Comitato Per le Esplorazioni in Africa* in Turin, *Società D'Esplorazione* of Genoa. [Cfr. Del Boca, op.cit., p.51-5; R. Ciasca, Storia coloniale dell'Italia contemporanea, (Milano: Hoepli, 1940, p.35)].

10. Leading journals included Manfredo Camperio's *L'Esploratore*, "a journal of journey and commercial geography that has nothing to do with "abstract science"; *L'Africa Italiana* of the *Società Africana d'Italia*.

only politically weak and divided but economically backward, and these arguments meant little.

However, Italy's emigration problem made the issue of the demographic myth nationally emotive. Between 1861-1911 the population grew from 25.7 million to 35.9 million, increasing the density from 87 persons to 123 persons per sqkm. Geography offered little immediate solution to this growth; almost four fifths of the peninsula was mountainous. Economically, Italy was a poor country and industrialization, even in the north, was advancing slowly and extensive development took place only at the turn of the century. In what came to be known as *Mezzo Giorno*, the Southern region, the social structure and land tenure systems further compounded the misery of the peasantry. In these circumstances, emigration was the easiest solution, reaching the proportions of a major exodus by the turn of the century, with regional shifts and variations according to economic tide. An upsurge in Southern emigration coincided with the world agricultural slump of the mid-1880s, while previously the bulk of emigrants came from the North¹¹.

A tense intellectual battle gathered around the emigration issue. Some felt it was a natural phenomenon offering long term benefits: socially, emigration served as a "safety valve" for domestic unrest, as the nation rid itself of discontented elements. Economically, the remittances from overseas were important in helping Italy's foreign balance of payment. The opponents discounted both arguments as irrelevant. In their view remittances could not offset the economic losses

11. C. M. Cipolla, "Four centuries of Italian demographic development", Population in History, ed. D.V. Glass and D.E.C. Eversley, (Chicago: 1965), pp.576-87; C. Gini, "Il fattore demografico nella politica coloniale", AAI, 4 (settembre 1941):811; J. S. McDonald, "Italy's rural social structure and emigration", Occidente, 22 (settembre-ottobre 1956):437-56; A. Capanna, "Economic problems and reconstruction in Italy", International Labor Review, 62 (June 1951):607-52; M. Rossi-Doria, "Land tenure system and class in southern Italy", American Historical Review, 64 (October 1958):46-53.

of the investment in the upbringing and education of the emigrant, and dependence on other countries to dispose of social malcontents hurt national pride. The military saw emigration as a serious drain of manpower needed for national defence; the big landowners envisioned labour shortages and a rise in agricultural wages. Articles were published giving graphic descriptions of the wretched and hopeless plight of the emigrants in USA and South America. Episodes of outrageous treatment of emigrants were widely publicized¹².

The expeditions to Ethiopia highlight the close link between the trinity of politics, science and business. It is not possible in this context to recount the exploits of all the expeditions and their leaders. But mention should be made of "*The Great Expedition*" of 1875, led by the sexagenarian aristocrat and military careerist Orazio Antinori and organized by *Società Geografica Italiana*. On a 95 ha plot granted by King Menilik at Lät-Maräfeya, near his capital Änkobär, the mission set up the first modern agricultural station which was recognized by the International Association of Brussels and, until 1897, served as a centre for the members of the *Società Geografica*¹³.

Antinori saw Lät-Maräfeya as a springboard for effective Italian penetration of Abyssinia and expansion into the rich southern 'Galla' provinces. Although he held his Shäwan hosts in contempt, regarding them as morally devious, he

¹². For an authoritative account on emigration see V. Briani, L'emigrazione italiana ieri e oggi, (Rm: 1957); A. A. Castagno, "The Development of Expansionist Concept in Italy, 1861-1896", (PhD: Columbia University, 1957), pp.737; F. Manzotti, La polemica sull'emigrazione nell'Italia unita fino alla prima guerra mondiale, (Milano: 1962); G. Dore, La democrazia italiana e l'emigrazione in America, (Brescia: 1964).

¹³. Antinori's death in 1882 was followed by a rapid management change. Until the station was closed at the eve of Ädwa in 1895, Antinori was succeeded by Pietro Antonelli, the medical doctor Vincenzo Ragazzi, naturalist Leopaldo Traversi, and finally in 1894 by engineer Luigi Cappucci. [Cfr. MAE, Avvaloramento, p.334].

sensibly proposed that the expansion of Italian peasant families in Shäwa could be achieved "by acclimatizing itself with the country, intermarrying with the natives, learning the language"¹⁴. These liberal ideas were far in advance of the spirit of Fascism which forbade mixed race relationships and, by a complex body of discriminatory laws, upheld the racial status of the colonists.

The scientific missions came to a halt with Italy's ignominious defeat at Adwa and even the *Società Geografica* was ordered to close its station. Although the expeditions resumed after Italo-Ethiopian relations improved in 1903, their efforts to develop a *coscienza coloniale* or "colonial consciousness" proved futile as the Italian public failed to cultivate a lasting taste for colonialism. The brief peaks of popular enthusiasm for the Libyan war in 1911 soon foundered on long troughs of apathy, hostility and indifference, as they did later in 1935 with the conquest of Ethiopia¹⁵.

Nevertheless, the work of these expansionists offers a useful and stimulating insight into the psyche and preconceptions of the colonial pioneers. But more significantly, it is a valuable contribution to the sparse knowledge of contemporary Ethiopia. However, as works written in an atmosphere polluted by aggressive colonial climate and prompted primarily by political, patriotic or idealistic motives, they are marred with tendentious judgements. Ethiopia is presented as a country with unlimited economic potential but inhabited by idle and immoral people indulging in abhorrent practices of slavery and oppression and administered by savage rulers¹⁶.

¹⁴. Traversi, Let Marefià, (Milano: Alpes, 1931), pp.64-5.

¹⁵. Claudio G. Segrè, Fourth shore: Italian colonization of Libya, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), p.33; GRA 44/36-2, Furio Lantini to Petretti (Vice GGAOI), Rm 24-9-1937 (hereafter Lantini to Petretti).

¹⁶. G. Bianchi, Alla terra dei Galla, (Milano: Treves, 1884), pp.158, 175, 181; L. Traversi, *op.cit.*, pp.64-5.

Most significantly, it was the findings of these missions which contributed to shape Italy's imperial policy towards Ethiopia. It was also largely on the claims made by these "pioneers" that Fascist Italy would try to carry out its task of Empire building and the programme of demographic colonization.

THE ROLE OF THE ITALIAN STATE

When assessing the attitude of the Italian State towards the Ethiopian enterprise there are three distinguishable stages: the first stage, 1861-1881; the second, 1882-1896; the third, 1897-1935. Before 1861 the material and intellectual resources of the court of the Sardinian kingdom were almost exclusively absorbed by more serious and pressing domestic and international problems.

The official policy in the period between 1861-1881 was to encourage "commercial colonies" that "could offer Italy outlets for its industrial products and an opportunity to accomplish works of civilization"¹⁷. The early eighties inaugurated a more active Italian colonial enterprise which in 1882 unfolded in the decision by P.S. Mancini to purchase Asäb from the bankrupt Rubattino Navigation Company and his authorization to occupy Meswa. After the Berlin Conference (1884-5), Italy's hitherto cautious colonial diplomacy became bold. The scramble for Africa coincided with the beginning of mass southern emigration upon which hinged the appeal of the new policy. Demographic arguments were evoked to validate the occupation of Meswa, in addition to strategic considerations. As Mancini said, the occupation was part of an indispensable programme to direct migration "into hospitable lands under the Italian flag

¹⁷. J. L. Miede, L'Imperialismo coloniale italiano dal 1870 ai giorni nostri, (Milano: 1976), pp.16-9; E. de Leone, "Le prime ricerche di una colonia e la esplorazione geografica politica ed economica", L'Italia in Africa, II, (Rm: 1955):2.

rather than letting it be dispersed on the face of the earth"¹⁸. For the visionary Crispi, Ethiopia was one such land whose vast cultivable areas "will offer an outlet in the near future to that overflowing Italian fecundity which now goes to other civilized countries...[and] is lost to the motherland"¹⁹.

But both Mancini and Crispi failed to rally the public behind their expansionist programmes, and their policy lacked a strong sense of conviction. Mancini resigned following the Dogalé debacle in 1887, when the Ethiopian General, *Ras Alula*, put to rout the entire Italian expeditionary force. Crispi's government was also forced out of office after the Italians suffered a humiliating defeat at the battle of Adwa in March 1896.

With the Adwa defeat the ambitious plan of demographic settlement was laid to one side until resurrected by Fascism. Adwa also marked a historical watershed between aggressive imperialism that strived for the imposition of direct European political control and peaceful economic penetration resolved to operate within the restrictive social and political parameters of an independent African State. Thus territorial ambition was replaced with competition to economic prominence with concessions as its centrepiece. Through concessions Italy aimed at institutionalizing Rome's economic supremacy over a large part of Ethiopia and transforming the Solomon-ic Empire into an economic dependency and then, when the first favourable occasion arose, into a protectorate.

Broadly speaking there were three types of concessions: mining, agriculture and commerce. Italy's attempt to outbid Great Britain and France in these three fields proved disastrous. The concessions as an instrument to political pene-

¹⁸. P. S. Mancini, Discorsi Parlamentari, vol. VIII, pp.162-90 cited by Del Boca, *op.cit.*, p.182..

¹⁹. F. Crispi, Scritti e discorsi politici (1848-1890), (Torino-Rm, n.d.), p.738.

tration had the backing of the state but not of capital²⁰. The companies on whom the government relied lacked the spirit of entrepreneurship, adequate capital and necessary skills. Appalled by the heavy expenditure and far-reaching responsibilities that these initiatives entailed, the business class expected the Italian government to bear the costs.

The conduct of *Società Per La Coltivazione del Cotone Nella Colonia Eritrea* (SCCCE), a company engaged, since 1904, in cotton farming in Eritrea, is a case in point. When asked by the Italian government to despatch its agent to Addis Ababa (AA) for the negotiation of an important concession, SCCCE took the narrow view of the paramount interest of its shareholders²¹, making the despatch conditional upon the government's financial support:

If, in fact, His Excellency, for the benefit of all and to oppose the requests made by other foreigners, likes to make use of us to obtain the due protection of the Italian interest, we are disposed to do whatever His Excellency likes to tell us, provided the expenses, well known to us and to you and which are to be met in AA, are sustained by the government²².

The Italian government was appalled by the conduct of the business class but it had neither the will nor the resources to invest in the ventures²³.

²⁰. ASMAI 51/1, Presidente SIOM to MAE, Milano 18-5-1905.

²¹. At that time SCCCE was experiencing financial crisis because of continuous unprofitability of cotton. Ibid., SCCCE to MAE, Milano 17-7-1908; 27-7-1908.

²². Ibidem, Gino Lavelli De Capitani (Consigliere della SCCCE) to Marchese Salvago Raggi, As 6-5-1909.

²³. Ibidem; SCCCE to MAE, 17-7-1908; MAE to Legazione AA, Rm 27-5-1909; SIOM to MAE, Milano 31-7-1908; *Marchese Salvago Raggi to MAE, As 3-8-1908*. For the Fascist period see Luigi Federzoni, Venti anni di azione coloniale, (Milano: Mondadori, 1926), p.63; idem, Africa Orientale: Il posto al sole, (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1936), pp.153-4;156-9.

The policy of economic penetration was part of Italy's overall strategy of destabilization of Ethiopia and was backed up, particularly after the first decade of the 20th century, with the so called "politics of attraction", or "*politica periferica*", aimed at winning the goodwill of Ethiopian population, especially those in the frontiers of their two colonies, Eritrea and Somalia. Italy attempted to advance this partly by distribution of largesse to local chiefs, and partly by establishing schools, clinics and commercial agencies in key Ethiopian towns as means of information gathering, espionage and political infiltration²⁴.

These plans failed in their objectives but the legacy lingered, to be inherited by fascist Italy. Fascism added little new. The difference was only mainly of style and degree. Fascist Italy lacked the cautious diplomacy that characterized liberal Italy in its confrontation with great powers, and, after an uncertain start, its policy of destabilization of Ethiopia became increasingly aggressive.

Although their policies towards Ethiopia had received a series of set-backs, in their colonies the Italians did not fail to put some of their main colonial agricultural policies into practice. In formulating these policies, be it in Libya, Somalia or Ethiopia, Eritrea was often the classic point of reference²⁵.

²⁴. Del Boca, *op.cit.*, pp.838-9.

²⁵. Segrè, *op.cit.*; R. Hess, Italian colonialism in Somalia, (University of Chicago Press: Chicago & London, 1966); Irma Taddia, L'Eritrea - Colonia, 1890-1952, (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1986); S.F. Nadel, "Land tenure on the Eritrean plateau", Africa, XVI, 1-2 (1946):1-22; 99-109; R. Pankhurst, "Italian settlement policy in Eritrea and its repercussions," Boston University Papers on African History, I, (Boston: Boston University Press, 1964), pp.121-56.

ERITREA AS A MODEL COLONY:
"CAPITALIST" FARMING VERSUS "DEMOGRAPHIC" SETTLEMENT

Later nicknamed *La Colonia Primogenita* (first born colony), Eritrea was planned as a model self-sufficient agricultural colony where Italy's imperial aspirations could be realized. It was to serve as a centre of settlement and source of raw material. *Demographic colonization* aimed to direct to the colony the agricultural workforce emigrating overseas whereas *capitalist colonization* was tied up with the deployment of surplus private capital. The controversy over these two schemes, which later dominated Italy's erratic colonization programme in Libya and Ethiopia, plagued also Eritrea's agricultural development.

A. DEMOGRAPHIC COLONIZATION

Demographic settlement is associated with Leopoldo Franchetti who, in June 1890, was put in charge of Italian colonization in Eritrea, and subsequently became the head of the Settlement Office, or *Ufficio Per la Colonizzazione*²⁶. Franchetti seemed to possess the skill and experience that the programme required²⁷. He belonged to the school of thought which considered colonies an outlet for a surplus population²⁸ and

²⁶. Rainero, op.cit., pp.32,62,149-51,159-62. For a Franchetti's more detailed biography, see Leopoldo Franchetti, *Mezzogiorno e Colonie*, (Firenze: 1950), written as introduction to his major works by his collaborator and student Umberto Zanotti-Bianco.

²⁷. He was a philanthropist and expert on the agricultural and social problems of rural south Italy, and co-author with Sidney Sonnino of a celebrated report on the agricultural conditions in Sicily. He also edited, together with Sonnino, the *Rassegna Settimanale*, a journal concerned with social and agricultural problems [Cfr. Rainero, op.cit., p.32].

²⁸. This view he, as an energetic propagandist, expounded in the Chamber of Deputies, in journals, such as the *Nuova Antologia* and his own pamphlet *L'Italia e la sua Colonia Africana*

wanted to make Eritrea the show-piece of his ideas. He maintained that, in contrast to the desolate port of Meswa, the Eritrean highlands, with their cool and healthy climate, their altitude ranging from 1,400 to 2,300 m, and their sparse population, offered an ideal place for European settlement.

Franchetti opposed capitalist colonization based on privately financed large estates; this, he believed, would leave most of the country undeveloped and degenerate into land speculation and latifundism - a rural phenomenon with which he was familiar in his studies of southern Italy. His proposed peasant or "demographic" colonization envisaged small family-sized concessions, supported, if necessary, by the state²⁹. In his view, peasant settlements would create a large, stable and productive rural population that would defend the colony militarily and soon make itself economically self-sufficient. Private initiative, he argued, would confine the Italian presence to the military at great expense to the nation, and reduce the colony to an unproductive desert where "a little wealth would flourish on public misery"³⁰.

But Franchetti's plan was met with serious opposition. Crispi himself, unconvinced by the exclusion of private capital, regarded it as a noble but fanciful vision³¹. A Royal Commission of Enquiry, set up in 1891 to investigate into allegations of colonial maladministration, strongly disagreed with him³². Although the Commission shared Franchetti's con-

[Cfr. L. Franchetti, "L'Italia e la sua colonia Africana", Nuova Antologia, (Rm: 1891), pp.493, 498-509].

²⁹. L. Franchetti, "L'avvenire della nostra colonia", Nuova Antologia, (aprile 1895), pp.614,622-3.

³⁰. Ibidem, pp.622-3; Rainero, op.cit., pp.72-3,125.

³¹. Rainero, op.cit., p.58.

³². Ibidem, p.85; Relazione generale della R. Commissione d'Inchiesta sulla colonia Eritrea, (Rm: 1891), pp.178, 186,189; Pankhurst (1964), op.cit.:127].

clusion on the colony's potential as "an outlet for Italy's partial emigration" and eventual financial self-sufficiency, describing it as a "virgin and fertile land" awaiting Italian labour, it also asserted in no uncertain terms that both private capitalist farming and state sponsored peasant colonization were complementary and interdependent, and neither could stand or progress without the other³³.

Notwithstanding the controversy, in the latter part of 1890 Franchetti opened an agricultural experimental station just outside Äsmära. No fewer than 96 different types of seeds were sown. In the following year two additional stations were established; one in Akhälä Guzay at the Gura'e district and the other at Godofälassi, in Särayé. Satisfactory results in all these cases suggested the practicality of white settlement, even though at later stages the methods he used as well as the results obtained and the procedures in the selection of the area were strongly contested³⁴.

Colonization began at the end of 1893 when ten Lombard, Sicilian and Venetian families settled in stone houses built in advance at Addi-Wugri, a few miles from Godofälassi³⁵. Another five families followed shortly afterwards³⁶. Seeing "the

³³. Rainero, op.cit., pp.83,85-6.

³⁴. [E. Cagnassi], I nostri errori: Tredici anni in Eritrea, (Milano: 1898), pp.133-5 (hereafter I nostri errori); about the experiments themselves see B. Melli, La colonia Eritrea, (Parma: 1900), pp.52-3,73-4.

³⁵. The families consisted of 29 men, 15 women and 17 children. Of these 7 families were Lombards (Magentino), 2 Sicilians (Pedara) and 1 Venetian (Frioli). [Cfr. Rainero, op.cit., p.123; Del Boca, op.cit., p.517].

³⁶. Similar efforts of settling the landless peasantry was made by others. One was promoted by Association for Aid of Catholic Missionaries, or *Associazione Per Soccorrere I Missionari Cattolici*, of Senator Alessandro Rossi and the Apostolic Prefecture of Eritrea who, in early January 1896, brought in 128 strong 16 Venetian families [Cfr. Del Boca, p. 615].

promised land" the peasants were impressed³⁷. Each family was given 20-25 ha of land, agricultural tools, cattle, and provisions necessary to tide them over until the next crop³⁸. The families were expected to repay these, estimated in £.4,000 loan, over five years at 3% interest. Provided that they cultivated the land uninterruptedly during these years with their own means, they were promised ownership³⁹.

In his report of April 1894 to Parliament, Franchetti asserted that demographic colonization was firmly rooted in highland Eritrean soils and expressed his strong belief that the country would absorb within a few years a large proportion of Italian emigrants⁴⁰. But contrary to official expectations, there was no great wave of immigration. By the end of 1896 a total of 32 families were settled. By early 1898 all of them had left but one⁴¹. When in 1904 a member of Commission of Agricultural Labourers from Romagna sent to investigate settlement possibilities, ascended the slopes, he indignantly exclaimed - "Romagna shall never come here"⁴².

What went wrong with this attempt to establish an emigrants' paradise in Africa? Life was arduous, wages low,

³⁷. Looking at the land, the families cheered and kissed it and sang their country songs. The following year, the settlement was officially inaugurated taking the name of Umberto I.

³⁸. The animals consisted of 8 oxen, 10 chicken, and a pig.

³⁹. Ibidem, p.517.

⁴⁰. Franchetti seems to have put Italian immigration on an average at about 143,000 persons per year. On the basis of this estimate more than 5,720,000 individuals would have settled in Eritrea just in a span of two generations or over a 40 year period. In both accounts his assessment was flawed. The scale of Italian exodus grew rapidly. During the four year period of between 1887-1891, 717,000 Italians settled abroad. Although in the subsequent 15 years this figure had trebled, the number of settlers in Eritrea remained insignificant [Cfr. Ibidem, p.479].

⁴¹. Ibidem, p.753; Taddia, op.cit., p. 218.

⁴². F. Coletti, Dell'immigrazione italiana, II, (Rm: 1911), p.137.

communication difficult, and there was no easy access to market to sell goods. Most settlers were harassed by hail storms, locusts and the lingering rinderpest that decimated livestock⁴³.

Mistakes in planning and poor selection of farmers compounded the problem. In some cases shortage of supplies was acute. Some of the peasants were factory workers from Milan with no experience in farming, old persons too inflexible to change their life-style, and families from rival regions in Italy.

The policy was further frustrated by continuous opposition by successive Eritrean governors. Both Barattieri and his predecessor, General Gandolfi, undermined Franchetti. General Barattieri was explicit in his determination to fight proletarian colonization "with all available means ... convinced once and for all that the system cannot be maintained as an official policy at the expense of the state"⁴⁴. His decision to start his own colonization programme within the framework of the Commission's recommendation granting land only to those peasants or capitalists who had adequate capital and technical skill, led, in February 1895, to the resignation of Franchetti. Barattieri immediately seized the opportunity to abolish the Office of Colonization, personally assuming charge of the colonization programme. One of the stations was then suppressed. Franchetti vigorously protested to the MAE against the "works of disorganization and destruction of his colonization efforts". He was given a polite rebuff, clearly demonstrating that Rome had torpedoed his plans and opted for Barattieri⁴⁵.

The move marked the end of the myth of Eritrea as settlement colony and the triumphal assertion of capitalist colonization. With Franchetti's resignation, the state subsidy

⁴³. I nostri errori, pp.134-6.

⁴⁴. Rainero, op.cit., p.127.

⁴⁵. Ibidem, p.232.

to attract the colonists was cut off. The prospective settler family was invited to spend about £.2,500 or more with a very uncertain future ahead. On this an anonymous critic commented:

What farmer in Italy possessing such a sum would like to emigrate? And if he did, would he wish to risk his life and savings in a country where the results of European farming are still unknown? Would he not prefer to go elsewhere?⁴⁶

But the *coup de grâce* came with the Bahta Hagos uprising. The events leading to it were symptomatic of the basic incompatibility of interests between the colonizers and the colonized. The point at issue was Italy's confused and misguided land policy. Land was appropriated for colonization following the guidelines set out by the Royal Commission which recommended that settlement be directed towards better state lands, demanding that land legislation should be enacted with the ultimate goal being

to facilitate the colonization and agricultural progress, in other words, the easy transfer of lands into the hands of the Italians, and, among the Italians, of those who could best cultivate it⁴⁷.

This policy aimed at a gradual erosion of the traditional land system to serve the settlers' interest. As a result, in order to "remove a great obstacle to colonization", private property among indigenes was encouraged at the expense of prevailing communal or village ownership, as the latter hindered the sale of long term concessions because of the need to secure unanimous consensus from the community⁴⁸.

⁴⁶. Pankhurst (1964):150.

⁴⁷. Relazione generale, op.cit., pp.178-86.

⁴⁸. Omodeo Peglion et al., La colonia Eritrea; condizioni e problemi, (Rm: 1913), p.16; Pankhurst (1964):131.

CHAPTER I EVOLUTION OF ITALIAN COLONIAL POLICY

The Commission's recommendations on land policy did not reflect Eritrean customary law nor Italian civil code. It stressed that existing land laws and rights tended to be "incompatible with a rapid increase of agricultural and scientific colonization" and should therefore be dispensed with. It rejected the doctrinaire dogmatism that respected "all local laws and customs relating to land" as much as the rigid application of the Italian civil code. For the creation of state lands arguments were concocted on views based on extensive number of examples from, and incorrect interpretations of, Ethiopian traditional law. The policy rested on three major assumptions: firstly, ownership of land in Ethiopia was traditionally vested in the sovereign who could allocate it or appropriate at will; secondly, the state lands were not owned by their cultivators and those abandoning their lands forfeited to the state all rights of tenure; thirdly, that the needs of the Italian immigrants and the progress of agriculture being paramount, warranted the placing of vast estates at their disposal⁴⁹.

These assumptions were an outcome of gross misinterpretation of traditional legal systems and a self-serving distortion of facts. Undue emphasis on the sovereign's right failed to balance equally important claims by actual landowners. The Commission deliberately failed to see the circumstances in which lands were abandoned. Natural and political disasters had often been the cause for population dislocation. Land seemed plentiful only because the Eritrean highlanders had temporarily abandoned the area after a series of local wars, and the great famine and epidemics (1888-92). To the Commission such areas constituted "abandoned lands" irrespective of whether the owners might still be alive. But once the situation

⁴⁹. Relazione generale, p.156; Pankhurst (1964):128-9.

improved, the villages were reoccupied and the Eritreans resumed their cultivation, clashing with the colonists⁵⁰.

Franchetti was alarmed by what he called "disorderly extension of native cultivations" which threatened the success of his initiative and, in his report of 1893-4, demanded Crispi's "swift, economical and efficacious action" to stop the arbitrary occupation by 'natives' of "lands reserved by the government for Italian colonization"⁵¹. Crispi acted accordingly and ordered General Barattieri

to watch that native colonization should not bar the way for our domestic colonization nor that exaggerated scruples deter us from transforming into public domain lands which are effectively abandoned, *res nullius*, to the mercy of the first occupant⁵².

As a result, the expropriation of prime agricultural lands forged ahead. Out of Eritrea's estimated total productive land of 648,938 ha, by the end of 1893, 19,020 ha were made state domain. In 1894 alone Barattieri added 280,039 ha. By the end of 1895, the total figure had risen to 412,892 ha - almost two thirds of the productive land.

Expropriation was carried out amid mounting discontent and simmering rebellion⁵³. It was resented particularly by the Christians, and in December 1894 led to the revolt of a catholic convert and most trusted Italian agent, *Däjach Bahta*

⁵⁰. This was the conclusion reached by *Società Italiana per il Progresso delle Scienze*, a study mission, which looked into the Eritrean Highland popular uprising, in 1913. [Cfr. Peglion et al., op.cit., pp.16,17n,47-9. The same point will be emphasized by Agnese, the Director of Colonial Affairs in the MAE, at a congress organized by ICI in 1911, Cfr. ICI, Atti del II Congresso degli Italiani all'Estero, II, 1(1911):482-3.

⁵¹. L. Franchetti, AP CD, Appendice alla relazione annuale sulla colonia Eritrea, 28-4-1894, (Rm: 1894), p.17.

⁵². F. Crispi, La Prima Guerra d'Africa, (Milano: Treves, 1914), p.273.

⁵³. Rainero, op.cit., pp.197-202.

Hagos, the governor of Akhälä Guzay⁵⁴. The insurrection spilt over into Ethiopia, culminating a year later in the Italo-Ethiopian war in which the Italians suffered a humiliating defeat at the battle of Adwa in March 1896⁵⁵. The victory caused havoc amongst the settlers and "nearly all the Italians immediately ran away to the coast". From there all except one repatriated to Italy⁵⁶.

Per se the Bahta Hagos's revolt was an insignificant localized episode in the otherwise sporadic highland Eritrean resistance to Italian rule. It had none of the elements of a mass movement attributed by some Eritreanists⁵⁷. It was swiftly crushed and easily contained, and the cause of revolt came into clear perspective only at a later stage⁵⁸. What gave significance to the revolt was its Ethiopian dimension. Not only it did take place at a time when Italo-Ethiopian relations were at their lowest ebb but it also helped to precipitate the Adwa

⁵⁴. His epigram "from the bite of the black snake one recovers, but the bite of the white snake is fatal", which he used as a rallying ground, epitomized the deep ill-feeling towards the settlers. Cfr. Tekeste Negash, No medicine for the bite of a white snake: Notes on nationalism and resistance in Eritrea, 1890-1940, (Uppsala: University of Uppsala, 1986), pp.37-45.

⁵⁵. Ibid., pp.43-4; idem, Italian colonialism in Eritrea, 1882-1941, (Uppsala: 1987), pp.33-5; Marcus, op.cit., p.154-8; G.F.H. Berkley, The campaign of Adowa and the rise of Menelik, (London: 1935), pp.62-4.

⁵⁶. Segrè, op.cit., p.15.

⁵⁷. Tekeste Negash considers it as a mass movement but the evidence does not prove that it was so. See Tekeste Negash, Notes, pp.43-5; Italian colonialism, pp.124-5.

⁵⁸. Although few allusions were made to the land alienation as the cause of the rebellion, until the study of Alberto Pollera the motives were not clearly explained. [Cfr. Ernesto Ardemani, Tre pagine gloriose nella storia militare-civile-religiosa della colonia Eritrea, (Rm: 1901), p.90. Alberto Pollera, Il regime della proprietà terriera in Etiopia e nella colonia Eritrea, (Rm: 1913), p.67.

debacle. Adwa, however, was not fought over Italy's misguided land policy in Eritrea but over Ethiopia's fate as an independent Black African state. But its results had an immediate and long-lasting effect not only on Italian policy in Eritrea but also elsewhere: Adwa remained a constant reminder of Italy's crushing defeat by a Black power, and the Bahta Hagos's revolt would be used by dissenting voices at later dates to counter both settlers' voracious appetite for land and adventurous state land policies.

The civilian governments that replaced the military regime in the immediate aftermath of Adwa rejected the idea of Eritrea as a settlement colony and abrogated most of the decrees relating to public domains⁵⁹. Most of the land appropriated by the government for demographic settlement was restored to its original owners⁶⁰.

B. CAPITALIST FARMING

The resignation of Franchetti marked the triumphal assertion of a capitalist form of colonization based on market forces and involving only those who were technically and financially fit, or *colonizzazione libera*. The decree of April 1895 excluded from settlement those who did not possess the start up capital estimated at £.2,500-3,500⁶¹.

Following the three traditional Ethiopian agricultural classifications of land - the lowlands, or *qolla* (below 1,400m), the midlands, or *wäynä däga* (1,400-2,400m), and high-

⁵⁹. The Land Act of 1906 (RD 31-1-1909, no.378) declared that the existing land rights of the Eritreans would be respected. That of 1926 (RD.7-2-1926, no. 269), excluded any concession of land to the settlers in the highland areas.

⁶⁰. Pankhurst (1964):153; Del Boca, op.cit., p.837.

⁶¹. Rainero, op.cit., pp.216-9.

lands, or *däga* (2,400-4,600m²) - the Italians promoted a particular form of colonization. The trend reflected general Italian agricultural policy and had its justification in climate and demography. The densely populated highlands - both *däga* and *wäynä däga* - had a healthy climate and a complex and well advanced agricultural system. They were reserved for small scale and medium sized farms devoted in *wäynä däga*, to cereal farming, and in *däga* to cattle breeding and pasture. Small scale farms of 20-30 ha were given to those who had a start up capital of £.50 per ha. The concessionaire was expected to set up his residence inside the farm. Medium-sized farms were 30-300 ha and were granted to the farmers with a minimum of £.100 per ha. The scarcely populated, agriculturally less advanced and reputedly unhealthy lowlands were the realm of large concessions which, using Eritrean labour and Italian technical expertise and capital, engaged in cash crop farming. The farms consisted of between 300-10,000 ha⁶³.

All three types of concessions were granted on lease which, with the exception of large scale farms, could eventually be turned into ownership. The key feature of the concessions was their mutual interdependence. According to the Italian plan, within Eritrea, the highland concessions had, as their priority, to feed the settler population first and then export the surplus; the lowland concessionaires, whose target was cash crop for export, were to rely on the highlands for their subsistence. But the revenue from their export was expected to finance the highland concessions. In the wider context of the metropolis, the highland concessions had as

⁶². The three climatic zones reflected different type of flora grown in them and approximately corresponded to the Mexican classification of *tierra fria*, *tierra templada*, *tierra caliente*.

⁶³. Taddia, op.cit., pp.221-2.

their ultimate objective the absorption of metropolitan emigration and the lowlands its surplus capital⁶⁴.

To attract the capital, the state offered cheap land and tax advantages. In return, the concessionaire had to develop the land or face revocation. The model of development required the use of advanced technology. The concessionaire had to man the farms personally and no renting or share-cropping was permitted. By setting these conditions, the colonial authorities aimed to retain control over the land and discourage speculators and colonists without suitable agricultural experience⁶⁵.

Initially the government remained committed to the notion of a "populating" colonization and laid great emphasis on the small and medium investor in the highlands. But, contrary to the government's expectations, the concessions proved to be uneconomical and the areas politically sensitive. The majority of concessionaires possessed neither the will, skills nor capital, and, with a few exceptions, the technology they used was identical to that of the local farmers. The difference was that settlers monopolized the best lands and benefitted from state aid. Yet most of the concessionaires found leasing their concessions to the Eritreans, i.e. the same people whose lands were expropriated to give to the settlers, much more lucrative than working them personally. Even though the government intervened vigorously in 1907 repatriating most of the absentee landlords, this practice persisted, with virtually all the farmers leasing their concessions to the Eritrean peasants for a share of between one third and a quarter of the crop⁶⁶.

The poor productivity, particularly of the small concessions, and the sad realization that Eritrea no longer

⁶⁴. Ibid., p.231.

⁶⁵. Ibid., p.222; Rainero, op.cit., pp.216-9.

⁶⁶. Taddia, op.cit., p.237; Renzo Serolis Salis, L'Ordinamento Fondiario Eritreo, (Padova: 1932), p.91.

constituted the emigrants' haven, led in 1926 to a major reassessment and subsequent policy shift towards medium-sized and large scale farming⁶⁷. At the same time, however dimly, the government became aware of the necessity of modernizing traditional Eritrean agriculture. Until then any such attempts were opposed by the concessionaires and the authorities who feared competition for land and markets. In 1930s, Eritreans were eligible for government aid. But this initiative remained no more than a timid gesture involving a few specific cases. To provide substantial aid to the peasantry would mean allowing them to produce more, threatening the colonists continually. Wary of any possible disruption both in production and the political situation, the metropolitan government maintained a policy of minimum interference in Eritrean economic and social organization⁶⁸.

The policy shift away from the small farmer to medium and large farms failed to attract rich investors. Settler concessions remained static from 1907 to 1931 when economic depression left a number of large scale farms bankrupt⁶⁹. With their concessions starved of capital and themselves lacking entrepreneurship, the concessionaires were ready to give up farming whenever a better opportunity presented itself. Thus during the Italo-Ethiopian War many concessions were

⁶⁷. CD IAO 1965, UA Er, Attività agricola in Eritrea dal 1923 al 1931; 2004, A. Maugini, Avvaloramento agrario dell'Eritrea e della Somalia, 1940; "La valorizzazione agricola della colonia Eritrea", REC, XIX, 3-4, (marzo-aprile 1931):365-79. I. Baldrati, "Lo sviluppo dell'agricoltura in Eritrea nei cinquanta anni di occupazione italiana", REC, VII, 1 (1933):43-53.

⁶⁸. The Eritreans sold their labour for low wages to supplement their income and pay their taxes which was a major source of government revenue. [Cfr. Tekeste Negash (1986), pp.22-36]. However, the number of Eritreans employed in agricultural sector was modest. In 1937, of 1.915 total workforce employed in 124 farms, there were 22 Italians and 1,842 Eritreans - 1,119 permanent and 722 casual [Cfr. Taddia, op.cit., p.252].

⁶⁹. See Table I.

abandoned as their owners found the war economy much more lucrative; others joined the government administration which was badly in need of labour⁷⁰.

TABLE I: LAND CONCESSION AREAS IN ERITREA (in ha)

OWNERSHIP TYPE	ZONE	1907	1930	1932	1939
CONCESSION	HIGHLAND	6,483	1,251	1,251	329
	LOWLAND	4,569	4,159	359	1,287
OWNERSHIP	HIGHLAND	==	4,654	4,654	4,150
	LOWLAND	==	67	67	282
TOTAL		11,052	10,131	6,331	6,048

Source:- Irma Taddia, *op.cit.*, pp. 236, 237.

One of the discouraging factors was the harsh fluctuating Eritrean climate⁷¹. In freak years, the farmers had to contract unbearable debts against which the government offered no protection. From 1927-32 locusts destroyed the harvest for five consecutive years. In 1927 wheat production slumped from 60,000 q1 to 5,000 q1 within one year, and other cereals were almost totally destroyed⁷².

The vagary of climate was partly responsible for lack of an advocacy for a monoculture, one of the most remarkable features of Eritrean settler agriculture. The Italians had prided themselves in quoting this as proof that

⁷⁰. Taddia, *op.cit.* pp.235,238; Segrè, *op.cit.*, p.15.

⁷¹. A. Maugini, Flora ed economia agraria degli indigeni, (Rm: MC, 1931), pp.116-7.

⁷². I. Baldrati, Mostra delle attività economiche della colonia Eritrea, (As: Stab. Tip. Coloniale Fioretti, 1932), p.15.

Italian colonialism was not exploitative and that their colonial policies were geared towards the development of a colony's internal economic needs. But the truth was monoculture demanded greater financial commitment at the initial stages and a stable labour market, and Eritrea offered neither. With a meagre state subsidy, large scale production was unaffordable. Labour was volatile and the concessionaires often had to make recourse to overseas markets⁷³.

After the Adwa defeat, the government, perhaps wary of any possible political backlash, adopted the posture of "hanging on" rather than really developing the colony. Out of its skeleton budget, expenditure in agriculture amounted to less than 1%, while defense and administration swallowed the rest⁷⁴.

TABLE II. ITALIAN COLONIES' NINE YEAR BUDGET (in million £.)

COLONY	R E V E N U E		EXPENDITURE	
	INTERNAL	STATE SUBSIDY	ADMINISTRATION	DEFENCE
Libya	1,087	3,189	1,753	3,380
Somalia	319	439	1,034	168
Eritrea	261	246	782	155

Source:- Irma Taddia, op.cit., p. 306.

However, within the constraints imposed upon it, the colonial administration financed and managed developmen-

⁷³. Del Boca, Gli italiani in Africa Orientale: La conquista dell'Impero, vol. II, (Bari: Ed. Laterza, 1979), p.32; Taddia, op.cit., pp.312,321.

⁷⁴. See Table II. This rate should be compared with that of Libya where government subsidy amounted to between 12-26%. Cfr. P. Lombardi, "La colonizzazione agraria in Libia durante il periodo del fascismo", paper presented to Seminario sulla Libia: Storia e Rivoluzione, Rm, 27-29 gennaio 1981, cited by Taddia, op.cit., p.307.

tal infrastructures that it considered to be conducive to agricultural development. Perhaps the most significant was the building of a rail and road network which could be used as much for the rapid deployment of the colonial army as exploitation of the peripheral areas. Between 1900 and 1930, up to £.100,000,000 had been invested in this sector.

TABLE III: TASSANAY COTTON FARM. AREAS UNDER CULTIVATION (Ha)

<u>AS STATE FARM</u>		<u>AS PRIVATE FARM</u>	
<u>YEAR</u>	<u>COTTON</u>	<u>YEAR</u>	<u>COTTON</u>
1925-6	700	1932-3	1,230
1926-7	1,500	1933-4	1,480
1927-8	1,000	1934-6	2,147
1928-9	1,200	1936-7	**
1929-30	1,600	1937-8	**

** No figures available

Source:- Piccioli, *La Nuova Italia D'Oltremare*, Milano: 1933), vol. 1, cited by Irma Taddia, *op.cit.*, p.323; CD IAO 1245, M. Gubellini, *Un triennio di osservazioni economiche nell'azienda agraria della SIA a Tessenei*, 1936.

Another important undertaking was the exclusion of non-Italian capital. This was one of the unique features of Italian colonialism. But this protectionist policy left the colony hostage to an indifferent and weak metropolitan capital, thus hindering the exploitation of agricultural resources. Unlike other Italian colonies, particularly Libya, Eritrea had no agricultural credit facilities. Government intervention in the lowland concessions was sporadic, while in the highlands it was conspicuous only by its absence. In 1930s steps were taken to set up credit institutions but they

were no more than token gestures, either too narrowly restricted to particular groups and crops or totally inadequate⁷⁵.

One exception was Täsänäy, near the Sudanese border, where in 1923 the state intervened with massive investment on a cotton farm pioneered by SCCCE, which had fallen into bankruptcy after 10 difficult years. A dam was built on Gash river with a potential to irrigate up to 16,000 ha⁷⁶. After a vain attempt to involve Italian capital, the government had little option but to run it as a state farm. Named *Azienda Agricola Statale di Tessenei*, it was predominantly run using share-cropping system with Africans, similar to the Gezira cotton scheme⁷⁷. The state provided small irrigated plots of between 1-4 ha, ploughed mechanically and ready for sowing. It distributed seeds and cash advances at three fixed intervals - sowing, weeding, and harvest. It provided health care and assisted in the building of dwellings. The company insisted that the peasant raised food crops on half of his land and a cash crop of cotton on the other half. The peasant

⁷⁵. The assistance was predominantly given to cultivators of coffee on the eastern slope (*pendici orientale*) and cotton. For a more detailed discussion on credit institutions and their limitations see Taddia, op.cit. pp.284-90.

⁷⁶. The initiative is associated with Governor Gasparini, who, like De Vecchi and Luigi di Savoia, then engaged in Somalia in building two similar projects - Genale State Farm (*Azienda Agraria Governativa di Genale*) and *Villaggio Duca d'Abruzzi (Villabruzzo)* - wanted to leave his personal imprint. Like these two schemes, Täsänäy farm was motivated more by the Fascists' quest for prestige and glory than economic considerations. On the two schemes cfr. G. Scassellati-Sforzolini, *La Società Agricola Italo-Somala in Somalia*, (Firenze: IACI, 1926); Del Boca (1979), pp.80-6; (1984), pp.214-6; Hess, op.cit., pp.163-6.

⁷⁷. For Gezira scheme see A. Gaittskell, *Gezira: a story of development in the Sudan*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1959); A. W. Abdel Rahim, "An economic history of the Gezira Scheme 1900-1956", (PhD: University of Manchester, 1968); Tony Barnett, "The Gezira Scheme: production of cotton and the reproduction of underdevelopment", in Ivar Oxaal and al., ed., *Beyond the sociology of development*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), pp.183-207.

did all the manual work from sowing to harvest until the cotton was deposited in the company's store. In exchange he received a daily ration for his maintenance. At harvest, cereal crops were partitioned equally between the company and the peasant, while the peasant's share of cotton was purchased by the farm⁷⁸. Described by some as "a cathedral in the desert", the enterprise was a disappointment and exposed the failure of state entrepreneurship in Eritrea⁷⁹. Out of a planned 16,000 ha, the state was able to develop less than 3,000 ha. Rather than an economic miracle, Täsänäy's name remained associated in the popular mind with the death toll by malaria that decimated the labour force⁸⁰.

As an outlet for emigration, the colony was a disappointment. Between 1890 and 1905 an estimated total of over 3,500,000 Italians emigrated⁸¹. And yet the Italian population in Eritrea totalled only 3,949. In 1931, it had increased to

⁷⁸. A similar method was followed in Somalia [Cfr. Hess, *op.cit.*, pp.164-5].

⁷⁹. See Table III. This is how one visitor describes: "In Italy there is much talk of Täsänäy scheme. Magnificent photographs show us dams and canals: no doubt these are wonderful works even from a panoramic point of view. But, after seeing the pictures, one has to look at the balance book. Within 1930, Täsänäy farm will need another £.3,000,000 to repair the damages incurred during these 20 months. So, to cultivate 3,000 ha of land a total of between £.35-36,000,000 is needed", R. Martinelli, Sud. Rapporto di un viaggio in Eritrea e in Etiopia, (Firenze: Vallecchi 1930), pp.256-7. The damages were caused by flooding of the river between 1927-8. This colossal figure was three times more than the colony's ordinary revenue. The concession went from one crisis to another. In 1926 and 1928, an attack by *Helio Thrips Indicus* halved the crop. Then at the end of 1928, the world cotton price slump left it badly debt-ridden [Cfr. Del Boca (1979), p.34; Taddia, *op.cit.*, p.328.

⁸⁰. Giannino Marescalchi, Eritrea, (Milano: Bietti, 1935), p.124.

⁸¹. Del Boca, *op.cit.*, p.479; Segre' almost trebles this figure [p.14].

4,182 and to over 46,000 at the end of 1939⁸². In 1913, out of 1,617 adult male Italians in the colony, only 62 classified themselves as agriculturalists, as against 834 in the military, 349 in industry and 219 in commerce. In 1939 the farming population totalled 112, of which 98 were owner farmers. With the slow decline of the area under cultivation, the dream of Eritrea as a small farmers' paradise also evaporated. In 1907, 29,553 ha were set aside for colonization. By 1913, the total area under cultivation consisted of 1,146 ha, increased to 6,048 ha in 1939⁸³.

Agricultural self-sufficiency also remained untenable. Eritrea was only a model colony in supplying colonial soldiers to aid Italy's imperial expansion and consolidation in Somalia, Libya and Ethiopia⁸⁴. Although the illusion of transforming Eritrea into the white man's paradise lingered on even

⁸². See Table IV; VII Censimento generale della popolazione, 21-4-1931, Rm 1935, p.34; Pankhurst (1964):135-6.

⁸³. Peglion et al., op.cit., pp.6-7; Pankhurst (1964):155; Taddia, op.cit., p.237. Other Italian colonies fared better. In 1939, in Somalia, where only capitalist colonization was practised, out of 64,936 ha of land under concession, 33,604 were cultivated. According to 1933 statistics, there were 115 concessionaires. Of these, SAIS owned 25,000 ha at Villabruzzi, the 100 concessionaires of *Azienda Agraria Governativa at Genale* had 20,142 ha and 14 private farms 15,483 ha. SAIS had developed 10,000 ha, reserving the rest for pasture, and the Genale State Farm 18,000 and the 14 farmers about 10% of the total area [Cfr. Hess, op.cit., pp. 163-6]. In Libya, where both settlement schemes and capitalist enterprise operated, in 1937 there were 840 farms, 384 still in concession and 411 owned outright. Out of 364,723 ha of land under concession, in 1940, 222,386 ha were cultivated. During this same period, 8,782 agricultural families were settled, numbering 29,876 individuals [Cfr. Ernesto Massi, "Economia dell'AI", RISS, XLVIII, XI (Maggio 1940):429-33; Segre', op.cit., pp.97-100].

⁸⁴. Eritrea assumed this role in 1912, reaching its climax with the invasion of Ethiopia towards which the colony supplied 60,000 soldiers. The invasion drastically altered the demographic map of Eritrea [See Table IV].

after the conquest of Ethiopia⁸⁵, the colony became neither the privileged field of financial magnates nor the ideal destination for a prospective Italian emigrant.

TABLE IV:- ERITREA AS DEMOGRAPHIC OUTLET IN 1940

PLACE	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
ADDI KUALA	121	29	150
ADDI QAYEH	59	22	81
ADDI WUGRI	499	104	603
AQUIRDAT	175	25	200
ASMARA	-	-	30,000
ASAB	1,492	89	1,581
DAQAMEHARA	5439	905	6,344
GHINDAE	122	33	155
KARAN	400	202	602
MESWA	5633	304	5,937
SAGANAYETI	598	107	705
TOTAL	14,538	1,820	46,358

Source:- "Il Popolo Italiano ha creato col suo sangue l'Impero e lo feconda col suo lavoro", Il Popolo Fascista(Salerno), 25-2-1939; "Quanti Connazionali Vivono nell'Impero", GI, 25-2-1939.

Contrary to early optimistic forecasts, settlement possibilities in Italy's African colonies remained patently untenable. And contrary to expectations, and despite a considerable expenditure of finance and effort, the colonies were more of a liability than economic asset to the mother country. Yet such a history of continuous failure did not cause Italy to alter its colonial aspirations, nor did it deflect from targeting Ethiopia as a place where such aspirations could be fulfilled. To achieve this, Ethiopia had to be peacefully

182. The latest attempts at colonization by Governor De Feo was opposed by Graziani [Cfr. GRA 43/34-22, Graziani to Lessona, AA 2-11-1937; Lessona to Graziani, Rm 4-11-1937].

subdued. This had become a remote possibility, particularly under Haile Sellassie. The policies of subversion, which intensified from 1929, and peaceful economic penetration proved unworkable. Refusing to acknowledge that the era of colonial conquests had passed, Italy embarked, under the slogan of "expand or explode", on conquering Ethiopia⁸⁶.

⁸⁶. Renzo de Felice, Mussolini il Duce : Gli anni del consenso (1926-36), (Torino: Einaudi, 1974), p.374; "Fame coloniale", Echi e Commenti, 25-1-1931.

CHAPTER II
ETHIOPIAN LAND TENURE AND ITS DEVELOPMENT BEFORE 1935

The main justification for Italy's ambition to dominate Ethiopia rested on the proposition that traditional Ethiopian society was incapable of achieving economic progress by itself. Full scale reform was necessary and this could only take place if Italy assumed responsibility for the transformation. Severe criticism was directed against what was known as *gäbbar* system. Interpreted as a mechanism by which the ruling class appropriated the surplus of the peasant's produce, *gäbbar* system had always been an emotive issue. Both progressive Ethiopian opinion and foreign writers had alleged an appalling exploitation through the *gäbbar* by parasitic landlords and church officials, providing Italy with material to exploit¹.

The *gäbbar* must be looked at in the perspective of the country's land tenure system. Politically, Ethiopia may be a nation. But from a sociological, ethnico-cultural, and geographical point of view it is a conglomerate of societies producing highly differentiated forms of land ownership and utilization. Land tenure not only varies from one ethnic group to another, but within each group, from place to place.

A distinction can be made between the land tenure systems in the north and those in the south. The north is the heartland of ancient Abyssinia which, with the help of European military hardware, imposed its 'political model' on the southern areas.

¹. ASMAE 2/1, Paterno' to MAE, AA 20-6-1931 where he describes the Ethiopians as "inherently corrupt, decadent and reactionary, steeped in slavery and feudalism"; G.C. Baravelli, The last stronghold of slavery: What Abyssinia is, (Rm: Soc. Ed. di Novissima, XIII), p.41 where he reports the statement of the wife of the British ex-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Lady Simon, in support of the need of foreign intervention to establish a new state in Ethiopia.

NORTHERN LAND TENURE PATTERNS

Ancient Abyssinia refers to the geographical regions comprising the north and north central highlands of modern Ethiopia - the Eritrean plateau, Bägémdér, Gojjam, parts of Tegray, Shäwa and Wällo. Ethnically, it is inhabited by two major groups, the Ämhäras and the Tegreans, who belonged to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) and, since the establishment of the modern Empire State in the last quarter of the 19th century, remained economically and politically dominant. Land provided the social and economic basis for public administration and national defence. State employees, both civilian and military, were granted land in lieu of salary. Socially, land was the most valued asset, conferring status, endowing membership of social organizations and giving access to political office. An Amharic proverb says: "To be landless is to be subhuman"². All those who did not own land, such as merchants, artisans and religious minorities were excluded from political life. Concern for land possession and rights were jealously defended and backed by physical force³.

². Cfr. Mesfin Wolde Mariam, at the introduction to "Some Aspects of Land Ownership in Ethiopia", paper presented to Seminar of Ethiopian Studies, HSIU, 1965; idem, Rural vulnerability to famine in Ethiopia, (London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1986), pp.76-7.

³. This discussion is based on a vast literature indicated in the bibliography. The major studies are: Gebre-Wold Engda Worq, "Ethiopia's traditional system of land tenure and taxation, EQ, V, 4 (1962):302-9; Mahtämä Sellassé Wäldä Mäsqäl, Zekrä nägär, (AA: 1942 EC [1950]); Idem, "The land system of Ethiopia", EQ, I, 9 (October 1957):283-301; A. Hoben, Land Tenure among the Amhara of Ethiopia: The dynamics of cognatic descent, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973); F. Bauer, "Land, leadership and legitimacy among the Inderta Tigray of Ethiopia", (PhD Thesis, University of Rochester, 1972); S. F. Nadel, op.cit.; M. M. Moreno, "Il regime terriero abissino nel GS", REAI, 25, 10 (ottobre 1937):1496-1508; E. Brotto, Il regime delle terre nel Governo del Harar, (AA: Serv. Tip. GGAOI 1939).

The variety of functions and services attached to land gave rise to an elaborate system of land tenure and tribute deeply rooted in tradition and sanctioned by biblical myth⁴. There were two basic forms of land ownership, based on two fundamental principles distinct in theory but often overlapping in concrete situations. The first principle was of *eminent domain* under which the state owned all the land and distributed it as it pleased. This generated *gult* tenures⁵. Coexisting with the dominion right was the principle of first occupancy which gave rise to *rest* tenures. From these tenures a variety of land-holdings evolved, broadly classified as church, private, government, and kinship or communal.

Under *rest*, the "land of a parent was divided equally among all his or her biological children without regard to seniority or sex"⁶. In addition to actual ownership of land, it also gave the right to claim a share of land by tracing kinship through either parent to a recognized and often fictitious original occupant or founding father⁷. With few exceptions descent was ambilineal and traceable over a number of generations, allowing one to obtain plots scattered over a wide area.

⁴. R. Pankhurst, State and land in Ethiopian society, (AA: HSIUP, 1966), p.55; Addis Hiwet, Ethiopia: From autocracy to revolution, (London: Review of African Political Economy 1975), p.21; A. D'Abbadie, Douze ans de sejour dans la Haute-Ethiopie (Abyssinie), (Paris: 1868), pp.101, 130; Hoben (1973), op.cit., pp.82-5; M. Perham, The government of Ethiopia, (London: Faber and Faber 1969), p.281.

⁵. The technical language used refers mainly to Amharic unless stated otherwise. The etymology does not necessarily correspond to Tegraña.

⁶. A. Hoben, "The role of ambilineal descent groups in Gojjam Amhara social organization", (PhD thesis: UC, Berkley, 1963), p.43.

⁷. In Tegraña the point of reference is *enda*, a group of families claiming to have descended from a single ancestor. The most important element in the claim is biological descent from either parent. Thus, children born out of wedlock (*deqala*) suffer no disability and have equal claims.

The success of a claim hinged upon a number of factors, such as the claimant's political skill and ability to influence the elders in charge of allocation and the local judges, his social standing in the community, his financial capability to prolong litigation, the availability of land on the area of his claim and the importance of the claimant⁸.

Technically, *rest* referred not to right of ownership but usage - *utendi et abutendi* - within the restrictions imposed by the collective interest of the kinship group in whom was vested the reversionary right⁹. *Rest* could be enjoyed for life, leased and, at death, passed on to siblings. But it could not be sold, mortgaged or forfeited through absence and the dictum "*rest bäshi ämätu läbaläbētu*"¹⁰ seems to reinforce this common belief. *Rest* lands were subordinate to state's paramountcy which, under the principle of *eminent domain*, could confiscate in case of rebellion or inherit in the absence of successor. However, such a principle was rarely invoked¹¹. *Rest* made chances for social

⁸. John Markakis, "Review of land tenure among the Amhara of Ethiopia: The dynamics of cognatic descent by Allan Hoben", JMAH, XII, 2 (1974):341-2.

⁹. P. Schwab, "Rebellion in Ethiopia", East Africa Journal, 6, 11 (November 1969):29.

¹⁰. "*Rest* returns to its owner even after a thousand years".

¹¹. Indeed people talk of *rest* as a "fundamental" and "sacred" possession and the proverb - "as land is fixed by nature and cannot be moved, equally the *rest*-holder cannot be moved from *rest*" - clearly denotes that *rest* provided almost absolute security to its holder. This is contrary to absolute power of the state, reported in western travellers' account, such as Lobo's: "The King's authority is so unlimited that no man can in this country be called with Justice Proprietor of anything, nor doth any man when he Sows his Field knows that he shall Reap it", [Lobo A., A voyage to Abyssinia, (trans. by Mr. Le Grand), 1735, p. 263] and more recently Douchesne Fournet mission according to whom the "authority of the Emperor is unlimited... The people are his and his empire is his property" [J. Douchesne-Fournet, Mission en Ethiopie (1901-3), I, (Paris: 1908-9), p.261.]. This view seems to derive from a mistaken or literary interpretation of popular proverb "the land belongs to the king". As a group of Eritrean elders expressed,

mobility greater and assured security of tenure. As it allowed access to land to all freeborn Abyssinians, it minimized landlessness and tenancy.

Where it existed in the north, tenancy was associated only with either submerged caste groups, religious minorities - commonly considered as 'foreigners' - or young *restāñās* who sought more land¹². The status of the landlord and the tenant were not necessarily equal, but the tenancy was seen as a joint venture by two or more people who combined their resources of land, oxen, labour and seed for mutual advantage. Each shared the output in proportion to their input. The contract was entered by a landlord who had more land than he could work or who, for some reason (old age, ill health, lack of plough-oxen), was incapable of working. If the tenant was a 'foreigner', he first had to make sure that no one among his relations or fellow villagers was interested in the work.

Among the considerable number of tenancy systems, the most widespread were *erbo ärash*, *sisso ärash* and *yä-ekkul*

rather than "a juridical concept" the statement intends to "affirm that the earth belongs to the king in the same way as the heavens belong to God. We allude to this statement when we wish to enhance the power of the state, but do not thereby intend to refer to the ownership of the fields. [It]...refers only to that kind of command relating to the imposition of taxation on land and prevention of power abuse and violence. But no-one can take away our lands; the state awards rank, office and *gulti*, and can take them away, but it cannot deprive us of our lands except in case of confiscation resulting from such crimes as we may commit"[C. C. Rossini, Principi di diritto consuetudinario dell'Eritrea, (Rm: 1916), pp.115-6.

¹². Abyssinian culture equated craftsmen with outcasts and manual labour done for others with low status. As the Tegrēña proverb - "aslamay addi [awdi] yäbellu, sämay andi yäbellu (as the sky has no pillars, the Muslim has no land [threshing floor] - the Muslims were the largest religious group excluded from rest ownership in the Christian areas. Emperor Yohannes IV's attempt at their forceful conversion to christianity opened access to rest for many Muslims, several of whom were described as *mäalti krestiyān läyti aslam* (christians by day but muslims by night) [Cfr. R. Perini, Di quà del Maréb, (Firenze: 1905), p.344.

ärash, respectively translated as "tiller of one fourth", "tiller of one third", "tiller of one and half". The form adopted was largely determined by the degree of fertility of the land and the quantity of labour required. For this purpose, the land was usually divided into four categories: *mätefo märét*, *mäna märét*, *dähena märét* and *maläfeya märét* - "arid land", "semi-arid land", "fertile land", "very fertile land"¹³.

In all three tenancies, the cultivator either resided inside the plot - in which case he became *cisäña* - or lived somewhere else carrying out the work as *tämäj* or *mofär zämach*. In *erbo ärash*, the landlord, in addition to grazing land (*maqomeya*) to be used as pasture for his cattle by the cultivator, provided him with reclaimed land. The cultivator contributed plough animals, agricultural implements, seeds and labour. At harvest, as in all three forms, land tax or *äsrat* valued at one tenth of production, was levied. One fourth of the remainder was allocated to the landlord, while the tenant retained the rest plus the straw and the chaff, with a right to graze his cattle on stubble. *Sisso ärash*, the most widespread, was identical to *erbo ärash* except that the landlord was paid one third of the remainder.

Yä-ekkul ärash varied according to the type and scale of input provided by the parties. The landlord, in addition to reclaimed land, provided a plough with one or two oxen and with part or all of the seed. The produce was divided equally on a 50-50 basis. Unlike the other two rental forms, in *yä-ekkul ärash* often no grazing land, or *maqomeya* was provided and the tenants owning cattle had to make separate rental arrangements often with the same landlord. The benefit was that the tenant was not obliged to provide services tied to the grazing land, such as making available his labour to the landlord five days per year.

¹³. CD IAO Sc 3025, T. Moreschini, Principali contratti agrari indigeni dello Scioa: Relazione presentata al VII Congresso Internazionale sull'agricoltura tropicale, (AA: 1939), pp.3-4; J. Cohen and D. Weintraub, Land and peasants in imperial Ethiopia: The social background to revolution, (The Netherlands: Van Gorcum & Co., BV-Assen 1975), p.53.

But to maintain good relations with the landowner, the tenant provided supplementary services, assisting him in house-work at family celebrations, house repairs and providing him with eggs and chicken. The assistance was usually reciprocated¹⁴. Normally the landlord gave burnous or other garments to the tenant's family. When the tenancy was between an ordinary man and a man with authority and power, the tenant often became one of the landowner's retinue, visiting him frequently with gifts, escorting him on journeys and to church services. When such *extra economic* relationship became paramount, the landlord's share tended to be less than the customary amount. For the honour and support he provided to the landlord, the tenant received help in court litigation, political protection and an occasional gift¹⁵.

An important variation of *rest* is *village tenure*, known as *shāna, déssa, cigurafgottet*. These were restricted to the Eritrean highlands, particularly Hamasén and Akhälä Guzay and part of Tegray Province. Under this tenure, land was collectively owned by the village and eligibility was based on residence rather than descent. Need to accommodate new members and correct inequality and fragmentation necessitated distribution, often by lot, each 5 or 25 years, with each member of the village entitled to an equal share of the land¹⁶.

The *rest*-holders, known as the *restāñas*, were proud of their system and the laws regulating it. But close examination reveals *rest*'s in-built flaws: it encouraged innumerable

¹⁴. Cohen and Weintraub, *op.cit.*, pp.50-5. Cfr. CD IAO Sc 3025, p.9; Hoben, *op.cit.*, 1973, p.138.

¹⁵. Such combination of servitude and tenancy normally occurs when the landowner was a *gult*-holder [Cfr. Hoben (1963), p.182; Nadel, *op.cit.*, 1:17].

¹⁶. Bauer, *op.cit.*; Cohen and Weintraub, *op.cit.*, pp.33-4; Ambaye Zekarias, Land tenure in Eritrea, (AA:1966). But the most authoritative research is by the anthropologist Dr Nadel who worked in the Eritrean highland under the British military administration. Cfr. Nadel, *op.cit.*, 1:11-5.

claims and counterclaims that led to long-drawn and costly court disputes and made ownership insecure as a successful claimant could take it away at any time. Village tenure attempted to eliminate the grave injustices embodied in *rest*, but periodic redistributions aggravated insecurity and tended to minimize the incentive for proper care of the land. Constant division and subdivision in *rest* fostered excessive fragmentation and diminution of plots. *Restäññas* clung to all their privileges. Even under village ownership, they maintained narrow and rigid economic and political privileges. The village chiefs, known as *ceqa-shums*, were elected only from their ranks. As a result, a large section of the population was permanently excluded from political life and kept in a state of dependence and economic insecurity¹⁷. Attempts to reform were restricted to particular areas¹⁸.

Owing to the gradual imposition of *gult* over *rest*, the two systems had been always lived in a state of tension, actual or potential. Etymologically *gult* simply means "grant"¹⁹, but popular opinion put the *gult* holder into a distinct powerful class. In fact, *gult* indicated a territorial unit of administration where the state renounced part or all of its fiscal rights in favour of a *gult* ruler²⁰. *Gult* was also a major mechanism of surplus appropriation - labour and produce - and also the only

17. Nadel, op.cit., 2:108; Dessalegn Rahmato, Agrarian reform in Ethiopia, (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1984), pp.18-9; Perham, op.cit., pp.291-2; Cohen and Weintraub, op.cit., pp.47-50.

18. The most important intrusions were the edicts attributed to Emperor Yohannes IV and his General, Ras Alula, who sanctioned legal ownership tantamount to *rest* after forty year's undisputed occupancy. According to Nadel his edict "crystallized in a period of considerable immigrations and military colonization" enabled many landless 'foreign' squatters to buy their entry into the "jealously guarded ranks" of the *restäññas* [Nadel, op.cit.,:11,18].

19. From the Ge'ez word *gwollätä* (to donate), *gult* indicates "an officially sanctioned reward".

20. Pankhurst (1966), p.29.

way whereby a large estate could be accumulated. The *gult*-holder was a lord but not a landowner except in his own personal *hudad* - state land attached to his office. He was not involved in the process of production. Peasants owning the land produced what they liked and in whatever way they liked; the *gult*-holder only dispatched his agents at harvest time to collect his dues²¹.

Gult rights were granted by the state to its favourites, unsalaried local government officials, religious institutions, local gentry and others. With such grants it secured support and loyalty from politically influential groups or rewarded meritorious servants while it discouraged opposition by threats of dispossession. Theoretically, *gult* was not hereditary, but in practice many *gults* transmogrified into some kind of *rest*, giving rise to a hybrid form known as *restä-gult*. But the state retained the ultimate right to modify, upgrade, abolish, or transfer the original grant. *Gult* estates were classified according to the status of the grantee, the specific services attached and the time length imposed. The broadest distinction was between that destined for religious dispensation - *bétä-kehenät* - and secular administration - *bétä-mängest*. The best known *gult* of the religious institutions was *sämon*; its secular counterpart was *hudad*.

Hudad land became available as uncultivated land, lands confiscated for tax evasion, high treason or rebellion. The *hudad* allocated for public administrators, civil servants and military personnel in lieu of salary became *madärya* or *restä-gult*, depending on whether it was temporary or permanent²²; those providing supplies for the Imperial court were known, as *gan-*

²¹. The *gult*-holder or his agents visit the crop three times - harvest, piling and threshing - after notified by the peasant. Cfr. Mahtämä Sellassé Wäldä Mäsqäl [1950], pp.333-44 where he gives detailed regulations sanctioned by the decree of *Tegemt* 7, 1914 EC.

²². G.W.B. Huntingford, The land charters of northern Ethiopia, (AA: 1965); Tadesse Tamrat, Church and state in Ethiopia 1270-1527, (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1972), pp.100-3.

gäb (brewery), *mad-bét* (kitchen) and *wärä-gänu* (stud-breeder) and were directly administered by central government²³.

What did *gult* actually entail to its holder? Two clearly distinct but overlapping rights were involved. For taxation purposes, the landowning class can be divided into *gäbbar* - who were *rest*-holders on ground of descent - and *tekkleña* (settler) - who obtained their land through the goodwill of the state²⁴. All land was burdened with two forms of taxes: *äsrat* (tithe) - a form of land tax - and *geber*²⁵ - a form of rate. *Äsrat* was paid to the central government, in one tenth of produce per *gasha*. The bulk of *geber* was paid in labour. Both *gäbbar* and *tekkleña* paid the same amount of *äsrat*, but how they fulfilled their *geber* differed substantially.

For the *gäbbar*, *geber* was mainly in statute labour with a small payment in kind, varying according to locality: regions renowned for a particular type of produce, such as honey, white *téf*, or horses had their taxes commuted with one of these items. Others had a fixed annual payment in *gämäta* (salt

²³. R. Pankhurst, Economic history of Ethiopia (1800-1935), (AA: HSIUP, 1968), p.148.

²⁴. *Tekkleña* commonly refers to military, as virtually all *gult*-holders were originally either military-men or linked to some form of military service. Analysis of ownership reveals that the holders included: fusiliers, artillerymen, avanguardists, quartermasters, spear and gun-powder manufacturers, drummers, makers and transporters of the Imperial tent, baggage transporters, muleteers, cavalrymen and horse-breeders, game animal suppliers, foragers, prison-wardens, tailors, kitchen-gardeners, postmen, land surveyors. The services were to be provided both in peace and war time. These lands were originally given on temporary basis but through the course of time most of them took a permanent character and have all the features of *rest*. Here the term *tekkleña* is used to indicate all category of people who obtained their land in the form of *gult* rather than descent.

²⁵. In Amharic *geber* is a generic form and means "banquet, tax" and does not specifically relate to this second form of tax. But like *äsrat*, the term *geber* is Ge'ez - so not Amharic - and means "work, labour", thus specifically denoting the nature of the taxation.

bar). The statute labour, normally one day in every three reserved for the *gäbbar*, involved assistance in construction of fortifications, buildings and storage bins and maintenance of major trails as well as the cultivation of *hudad* for the benefit of political appointees or the Imperial court. In monetary terms, the total tax (*äsrat* and *geber*) amounted almost to one fifth of the produce²⁶.

The *geber* of the *tekkläña* was commuted with a specific service attached to the land, either religious or secular, and was comparatively less onerous than that paid on *gäbbar* land. As the obligations were on land rather than person, the holder lacking the specific skill attached to the land had the duty either to relinquish the land or make arrangements with someone to furnish it. If, for example, a woman inherited a piece of land which had to supply soldiers or clergymen, it was her duty to raise and equip them²⁷.

At the lowest administrative level, the *gult*-holder, whether religious or secular, was almost the sole link between the provincial government and the local *gäbbar*. He administered justice and settled local disputes, subject to appeal to higher authority. He was also responsible for maintenance of civil order, communication of government decrees, organization of statute labour and the collection of *äsrat* and *geber*. He made proclamations concerning public work. He also ensured that the

²⁶. For example, on a revenue of 100 *dawulla* produce of one *gasha* land, which is 400MTD, the total tax consisted in 82MTD or 20.50% of the total produce. This was composed of:

<u>ÄSRAT</u>	MTD 12.00+
<u>GEBER:</u>	
1 <i>gundo mar</i>	MTD 12.00+
3 <i>dawulla</i> cereal	MTD 12.00+
Corve' labour	MTD 18.00+
Total	MTD 82.00

[Cfr. CD IAO 794, *Centurione P. Ciocca*, *Elementi di diritto fondiario e tributario nello Scioa*, n.d., pp.65-74. For other regional variations see Pankhurst (1968), pp.511-9.

²⁷. The normal practice was to hire against payment or rent part of the land to a third party who had the skill.

gäbbar provided government officials and guests in transit with food, drink and lodging as might be required. In his work he was assisted by the village chief, *ceqa-shum*, who was elected annually by and from among the local landowning class. If he was a provincial governor he appointed all the functionaries under him and conferred military titles up to the rank below his own. In return, he was expected to maintain a personal army and provide military assistance to the central government whenever required²⁸.

The most important benefit accruing to the *gult*-holder was the *geber* of the *gäbbar* under his jurisdiction which he used in the way he deemed fit for the common good. He was normally exempt from *geber* on his own personal *hudad*²⁹ which he administered often aided by his representative, *wäkil*³⁰. He might also be allowed to keep market and court fees for himself. *Hudad*, however, consisted of unsettled land and, unless there were peasants to cultivate it, was worthless. However, an entrepreneurial *gult*-holder might exploit it in a number of ways: using statute labour of the *gäbbar*, or under some form of rental arrangement or leasing it for an extended period. In exceptional cases, when particularly it was a *restä-gult*, it was sold or settled with landless who became his *gäbbar*. This latter often was much more profitable as the *gult*-holder - transformed

²⁸. D. Donham and Wendy James, ed., The southern marches of imperial Ethiopia, (Cambridge: CUP, 1986), p.9; CD IAO 794, p.29; Nadel, op.cit.:4; Hoben (1973), pp.77-8.

²⁹. *Gult*-holders paid *äsrat* on their personal *gult* but not necessarily *geber*. Their service was accounted for the latter. Those exempted from *äsrat*, made a token payment which had largely symbolic significance.

³⁰. Hoben, op.cit., p.77. It should be emphasized that the right of the *gult-gäzi* [*gult*-ruler] included land only if the land was given to him as *hudad*, or as a source of personal subsistence or *restä-gult* in which case he had the power to evict and repossess his land. *Rest*-holder could be evicted only for failure to pay tax. In this case the land was given to a better candidate promising to ensure the future revenue.

into a landlord - in addition to proceeds from sale, secured a life-time income in the form of *geber* or *äsrat* or both³¹.

In each village a portion of land amounting to a maximum of one third of the total land area was set aside for the purpose of church service. The nomenclature of these lands varied from place to place, but the most common term *sämon märét* indicated a wide variety of lands. The broadest distinction was between land allotted as **endowment fund** and **personnel emolument**. The first referred to lands reserved for the church as an institution. It was administered by a *gäbäz* (church administrator) who allocated part to his dependents - four person per *gasha* - and leased or rented the rest, with the revenue supporting the poor³². The second group were allocated to individuals who exploited it as they liked³³.

³¹. Sale was rare and, depending on the nature of the land, it had to be approved by the state. The *gult*-holder's right to *äsrat* and *geber*, if his land entailed him to it, remained unaffected by eventual transaction. Theoretically, those owning such land became the *gäbbar* of the *gult*-holder for their taxes were paid to him. This process largely took place in the south where massive sale of *gult* lands gave rise to *yämälkäña gäbbar* or *gäbbar* of the *mälkäña*.

³². Under this group came the lands known as: *yä-tabot* (the Holy Arch), *yä-qurban* (Eucharist).

³³. This land is normally divided in three categories:

- I. *Yä-sämonäña märét* [land reserved to the weekly mass celebrant priests and deacons - normally five per week] included:
 1. *yä-qéssenna* (priesthood).
 2. *yä-diqunna* (diaconate).
 3. *yä-haymanotä-äbäw [änbabi]* ([reader]of Book of our Fathers).
- II. *Yä-däbtära märét*. [land belonging to the church musical group]:
 1. *yä-däbtära* (musician),
 2. *yä-somä-deggua*(Lenten music).
 3. *yä-säatat Quämi* (horologer).
 4. *yä-zäynägges* (Psalm reader).
- III. Church wardens:
 1. *yä-äntafi* (upholsterer).
 2. *yä-atabi* or *yä-wälway* (washer/cleaner).
 3. *yä-äqabit* (keeper).

Gult grants are largely associated with the two higher institutions, *gädam* (monastery), and *däbr* (abbey³⁴). Unlike other categories of grants, which could be temporary and revocable, church *gults* were, at least in theory, permanent and irrevocable, because the church is a legal person that cannot die and, as *Fetha Nägäst* rules, "what goes into the church shall not come out of it", for "what has been given to God cannot be taken away"³⁵. The overall administration of *däbr* land was in the hands of *äläqä* who normally bore a special title that was unique to each *däbr*. *Gädam* land was under the *mäggäbi*³⁶.

4. *yä-däwway* (bell-ringer).

5. *yä-guäzguaz* (person in charge of covering church floor with dry grass).

6. *yä-qärafi* (wood-cutter). It seems appropriate to put in this same category lands reserved for some purposeful animals such as *yä-demmät märét* (cat). The owners of these lands either worked them personally or rented or leased them but they were not allowed to sell, mortgage or exchange them in other ways.

³⁴. In *gädam* and *däbr* institutions, the ecclesiastical population is much larger than the *gätär* church and so the amount of land and the variation of their nomenclature. For more detailed information on the three church institutions - *gätär*, *däbr* and *gädam* - see Haile M. Larebo, "The EOC", in Pedro Ramet (ed.), Eastern christianity and politics in the twentieth century, vol. 1, (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1988), pp.381-3; Idem, "The EOC and politics in the twentieth century", Northeast African Studies, vol. 9, 3(1987):1-15.

³⁵. *Fethä Nägäst* is a traditional civil and religious code. See *Fetha Nagast* [Law of Kings], trans. by Paulos Tzadua, AA: HSIU (mimeographed), p.498; Berhanou Abebe, op.cit., p.140. Ownership had been often unclear and source of continuous dispute between the cultivators who consider themselves as *restāñas* and the church who regards them simply as share-croppers [Cfr. G. Villari, "I 'gultí' della regione di Axum", REAI, 26, 9 (Settembre 1938):1434-6].

³⁶. The practical distribution of the *gädam* land between the monks varied depending on whether the *gädam* is coenobitic (*yä-ändennät*), or idiorrhtmic (*yä-gurrit*). Detailed studies on church lands are few, making description and analysis difficult. Although limited to a specific area, the following are the most important: CD IAO 791; Villari, op.cit.:1430-1444; Dagne Haile Gabriel, "The gebzenna charter, 1894", JES, IX, 2 (1972):67-80.

TABLE V:- BISHOFTU'S EOC POPULATION ANS REVENUES IN 1930S.

R E V E N U E S										
AREA	NO. OF CHURCHES	NO. OF CLERGY	SAMON LAND*	LANDHOLDER				STATE		
				CEREAL				CEREAL		
				DAWULLA	Q UNNA	WOOD LOAD	CASH (MTD)	DAWULLA	Q UNNA	CASH (MTD)
AQAQI	13	160	134,75	227	109	777	27	8	-	45.00
XDDA	13	160	122,50	187	147	1,213	65	111	12	139.00
CHAFFADANSA	8	98	64,25	80	53	504	28	11	-	56.00
MOGGIO	18	233	180,50	314	91	1,474	142	15	-	220.00
BALCI	40	515	453,75	225	222	1,963	88	152	36	866.00
ZUQUALA**	875	182	182,00	671	20	78	30	802	10	3,022.00
TOTAL	975	1,348	1,137.75	1,100	642	6,009	380	1,099	58	4,748.50

* The list does not include *gult* lands. The largest holder was Zuquala' *Gädam*. The two churches of the *Gädam* - St. Abbò and Wämbärä Maryam seem to have about 746 *gasha* between them.

** The figure includes the two churches of the Zuquala' *Gädam* where about 800 individuals lived³⁷.

Source: CD IAO 791, Commissariato di G. di Bishoftù, La Chiesa Etiopica nel R. Commissariato di Bishoftù, Moggio 31-12-938.

Church lands were meant to support the church's activities, its clergy and those who provided various liturgical and related services. Depending on their status, they were exploited in the same manner as an ordinary *gult* or *rest* with the church acting in much the same way as a secular *gult*-holder or kinship group. Church land, however, was more attractive, for

³⁷. With the decree of GG 18-6-1937 no. 79276 and 8-8-1938 no.118321/A-3-B/6 the Italian government set to 200 the maximum number allowed to live in the two churches of Zuquala *gädam*. As part of the financial settlement, the abbot was acknowledged as a *gult*-holder. He was allocated an annuity of £.13,041 while the *gädam* received £.24,000 per annum.

the holders owed their *geber* to the church which was judged as less onerous³⁸.

THE FORMATION OF SOUTHERN TENURES

The prevalent characteristic of the southern Ethiopian land tenure system was widespread private ownership. Its emergence was inextricably linked with Abyssinian expansion during the last quarter of the 19th century. The conventional view was that the invaders expropriated land indiscriminately. But the state was careful not to disturb the vernacular structure partly because it had neither the administrative manpower to govern these vast areas nor the technical and material resources to exploit them; and partly because of the cultural heterogeneity of the conquered peoples and the need to stifle opposition from the traditional authorities. Certainly serious abuses and brutalities took place. It was also true that the state claimed all conquered lands as its own, but practical assertion of this claim depended upon the level of resistance to conquest, the degree of cultivation of the area and the productivity of the land, as well as climatic conditions³⁹.

Conquest was brutal where the local leaders fought the new invaders. The leaders and their followers were killed, deported or sold as slaves, their land confiscated and declared state property. But the masses were left in their land which the state aimed to exploit by imposing what has been called the **Abyssinian model of administration**. This chiefly consisted in

³⁸. The *geber* consisted in construction and repair of the church building, supply of fire-wood and some fees payable in cash or kind.

³⁹. Both Enrico Brotto, adviser to the Härär governorate during the occupation, and Martino Mario Moreno, an official of the MAI, reject the view of massive and arbitrary expropriation. Brotto did his field research in Härär, Arsi and Balé, and Moreno in the GGS. Their view is supported by a number of other writers. This belies Italian propaganda which capitalized on this issue.

massive re-orientation of the existing economic and political relations by introducing *gult* grants and maintaining such a system by force. Where suitable for colonization, land was divided into two categories: inhabited land already under cultivation, *yä-gäbbar märét*, and underdeveloped areas, *yäsägäla märét*. The latter comprised land confiscated from the resistance leaders, rebels and those who fell into political disgrace, and pasture or forest which, in the perception of the Abyssinians, was considered as under-populated and under-utilized⁴⁰.

In inhabited areas *gult* grants involved reducing the local population, some of whom had previously lived in relatively unstratified societies, into tribute paying peasants, or *gäbbar*. As in the north, the *gäbbar* system affected neither the original status of, nor the existing transactions in, land ownership; it only demanded the transfer of tributes due to the central administration to the *gult*-holders, who mainly were the settler soldiers. Having developed a roster of tribute payers, a number of lesser *gäbbars* were regrouped together to form a full *gäbbar*⁴¹ - normally four per *gasha*. In uncultivated areas the land was measured by either *qällad* or "by eye" and organized in *gasha* and classified as fertile, semi-fertile or poor. Then a number of full *gäbbar* or *gasha* lands or both were allocated in lieu of salary to a wide range of people and institutions on the basis of their merit, rank, social status or importance⁴²: northern

⁴⁰. For a detailed account of the consequences of conquest Cfr. Donham and James, op.cit.; Charles W. McClellan, "Reaction to Ethiopian expansionism: The case of Darassa, 1895-1935", (PhD: Michigan State University, 1978).

⁴¹. A full *gäbbar* was one able to pay the full amount of tax laid on a *gasha*.

⁴². As in the north, the lands took a variety of names depending on the status of the grantee, the purpose they were meant to serve and the fiscal obligation laid upon them. Thus lands given to the State officials in lieu of their salary were known as *madärya* and as such the grant was a temporary one; church institutions and the leading clergymen took land in the form of

officials who came to administer the areas⁴³; ecclesiastical institutions who were given the task of expanding the christian religion; the local chiefs who were incorporated into the new polity as the low level functionaries developing local government system. These were invested with a new title of *balabbat* and fulfilled a role similar to that of the northern *ceqashum*⁴⁴. Surplus *gasha* lands were either given gratis or sold for a ridiculously low price as an incentive to private developers, including central and provincial elites, loyal to the crown, and peasants moving from the north under demographic pressure⁴⁵.

Those areas which showed little or no resistance to Abyssinian expansion were left with their independent status, albeit surrounded by imperial agents who acted as spies. As a price for their administrative, financial and military autonomy, they paid a fixed tribute to upkeep the royal court, *madbét*. There were six provinces, all of them fairly commercialized with five of them located in the west near the gold rich tributaries of the Abbay river. But over time, tributes became heavier, and with increasing centralization their autonomy was undermined to the extent that at the time of the Italian occupation, only the

sämon or *sämon gult*. For more detailed information on the variety of land nomenclatures see Joanna Mantel-Niecko, The role of land tenure in the system of Ethiopian imperial government in modern times, (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 1980); Cohen and Weintraub, op.cit., pp.36-47.

⁴³. *Ras* and *Däjach* took thousands of *gäbbars*; *Fitawurari* 300 and *gäñazmach* 150; the soldiers according to their seniority, 10, 15 and 20. The state fixed the number and the *balabbat* allocated the land and the people.

⁴⁴. John Markakis, Ethiopia. Anatomy of a traditional polity, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp.115-6; Cohen and Weintraub, op.cit., pp.35-6,38; Donham and James, op.cit., p.39.

⁴⁵. Cohen and Weintraub, op.cit., pp.35-6.

rulers of Nāqāmti, Béni Shangul and Äusa remained more or less in their independent original relationship with the centre⁴⁶.

Central control remained equally tenuous in the lowland areas inhabited by hunters, pastoralists and shifting cultivators. In these areas, *gäbbar* system was never instituted partly because the population was much harder to control and partly because the land was not suitable for colonization by highland agriculturalists. Initial extraction consisted in periodical raids for both cattle and slaves by the nearby settlers. But with the increasing assertion of the central government and shortfall of the commodities, the raids gradually regularized into tax collection, particularly when local leaders were brought into the realm of central administration. With the establishment of *balabbat* a fixed rate was imposed on cattle⁴⁷.

DEVELOPMENTS UP TO 1935

At least theoretically, the situation of the peasantry in the north and south was identical. And in both areas land was more than a simple commodity exchangeable in a market economy: it had multiple attributes that reflected the composition of social and political organizations. The relation between land and man bonded men together in political units. Rights over land use and ownership rather than being absolute or exclusive, were often multiple and overlapping. Not all people held these lands rights. There were three distinct strata in

⁴⁶. Donham and James, op.cit., pp.37-8,51-68; for other studies Cfr. Herbert S. Lewis, A Galla monarchy: Jimma Abba Gifar. Ethiopia, 1830-1932, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press 1965); Peter P. Garretson, "Shaykh Hamdan Abu Shok(1898-1938) and the Administration of Guba", in Joseph Tubiana, ed., Modern Ethiopia from the accession of Menelik II to the present, (Rotterdam: A.A.Balkema 1980); Maknun Gamaledin Ashami, "The political economy of the Afar region of Ethiopia: A dynamic periphery", (PhD: University of Cambridge, 1985).

⁴⁷. Donham and James, op.cit., pp.42,148-71,219-45.

society: the landed, landless and slaves. Slaves were widely used for domestic purposes especially in the houses of the rich, but much less in agriculture; the landless were linked to land through a variety of share-cropping systems. Among the landed, the most important classes were *gäbbar* and *tekkleña* both supporting the Ethiopian state in a way that involved mutual responsibilities: provisioning and labour services on one hand, administrative, judicial and military obligations on the other. The elaborate systems of land tenure and taxation with all their provincial variations represented the different means by which the state ultimately appropriated or rewarded services. But the backbone of the economy was *gäbbar*, as it was his labour that materially sustained the state apparatus⁴⁸.

Despite the inferior social position, it is wrong to equate the *gäbbar* with slaves or serfs. He was not legally bound to the *gult*-holder as, for example, the slave was. The *gäbbar* owned his lands but, unlike the serfs, he could leave and set up homestead elsewhere. It was a fluid term and refers to no distinct social class. A study conducted at Balci in Bishoftu indicated that the Emperor Haile Sellassie himself was one of the *gäbbars* of the church of Somsa Mädhäné-aläm at Näc Dengay where he held a land burdened with *gäbbar* associated services. As tribute was based upon land and not person, anybody could be a *gäbbar* as long as satisfactory arrangements were made to provide the services⁴⁹.

Considering the regime's decentralized structure and the absence of a money economy, and taking full account of the material and manpower resources at its disposal, the *gäbbar* system efficiently financed local government and remitted residual revenue to the central treasury. The state was able to administer a vast country without resorting to loans from European powers or 'international finance' at a time when tech-

⁴⁸. Perham, *op.cit.*, p.278.

⁴⁹. *Ibid.*; Markakis (1974), pp.341-2; CD IAO 791, p.97.

nologically more advanced African and Asian countries had been occupied or reduced to satellites of a foreign country under the pretext of avoiding bankruptcy. But it did so at the expense of the *gäbbar* themselves who gained little or no material benefit from the taxes they paid⁵⁰. But this need not be dramatized into describing the system as ruthlessly exploitative or barbaric.

Like any taxpayer, the *gäbbar* owed dues to the central government or his representative, in kind and labour. The relationship between the *gäbbar* and the *gult*-holder tended to be patrimonial - personal in nature and diffuse in content, varying according to the character and disposition of individual *gult*-holder. In a country where the central authority was remote, the politics often fluid and in situations where the *gäbbar* happened to be in a weak position, this gave opportunity to an unscrupulous *gult*-holder for arbitrary extortion. But despite the wide scope of his authority, a *gult*-holder could not afford to consistently antagonize his *gäbbar* who, at least in theory, could always leave and set up homestead elsewhere or, if he was daring, appeal to central government⁵¹.

In the popular mind, the evils of *gäbbar* were largely associated with the landlessness and harsh treatment experienced by southern peasantry. But no governmental decree existed that made their situation different from that of the northern peasantry, nor were the *rest* guarantees that existed in the north eliminated in the south. The *gäbbar* system functioned differently in the south because of a combination of cultural differences and the inroads of modernization. Northern peasant-

⁵⁰. ASMAI 54/21 (1914-28), *Informazioni commerciali: Finanze Etiopiche*, n.d; Harold G. Marcus, Haile Sellassie I: The formative years (1892-1936), (Berkeley: UC Press, 1987), p.41..

⁵¹. Perham, *op.cit.*, p.279; Hoben (1973), p.79; Donham and James, *op.cit.*, pp.185-6.

ry, though well aware of the inadequacies of the system⁵², prided itself as part and parcel of its organization. But not so for the recently conquered south where its imposition was seen as an unwarranted intrusion in land that had been freely enjoyed. The brutal force used in the process helped only to highlight its alien character. In the north *gäbbar* and *gult*-holder belonged to the same ethnic group, shared the same religion and were often united by kinship ties. In the south, the northern settlers interpreted their military superiority culturally and viewed their position in terms of a 'civilizing mission'. The northern peasantry, through its long exposure, had developed an appropriate defence mechanism to resist the insatiable exactions of the rapacious *gult*-holder. The southerners lacked such valuable experience; the language barrier only worsened this⁵³.

The relatively rapid advance of protocapitalist agriculture in the south helped only to increasingly exacerbate the condition of the *gäbbar*. In the north, political turmoil, severe soil erosion and poor communication kept the region agriculturally static. Improved communications, and in particular the AA-Djibouti railway revolutionized the fertile southern countryside. The metamorphosis had made the south by the late 1920s into the Ethiopian government's "large colony of exploitation - meant in the most rigorous sense of the term"⁵⁴. The developments witnessed the rise of coffee as the area's prime agricultural resource, the flourishing of new

⁵². The following verse reveals the awareness of the peasantry of the exploitative nature of the system:

If land tax we must pay,
So must the monkey,
For is it not the same land,
That it scratches with its hand.

Quoted by Mesfin Wolde Mariam (1986), p.25; A. Hoben (1973), op.cit., p.81.

⁵³. Donham and James, op.cit., p.8;

⁵⁴. E. Cerulli, *Le popolazioni ed i capi dell'Etioopia sud-occidentale*", in ASMAI 54/34-137, Zoli to MAE, Rm 8-1-1927.

commercial towns competing with or in the place of the old military garrisons, and rapid transformation of land into a marketable commodity. As speculation on land intensified, undeveloped areas were put under cultivation. In Ārsi, for example, the *gult*-holders sold their *hudads* as *rest* to both Āmhāras and Oromos who were squeezed out by commercial developments in AA and became the *gäbbar* of the *gult*-holders. Identical trends were in operation in Härär⁵⁵.

These developments had a drastic effect on the southern *gäbbar* in two ways. The settler increasingly saw him as a resource to be exploited for his own benefit and made constant and heavy demands on his labour⁵⁶. With increasing monopolization of his labour by the *gult*-holder, the *gäbbar* devoted less and less time to the care and cultivation of his own plots and the state lost desperately needed revenue. Ultimately, several were forced to sell their land and turned into share-croppers. In Ārsi, as grazing land became scarce the collapse of the traditional pastoral economy had the effect of forcibly transforming the one time cattle herdsmen into tenant cultivators⁵⁷.

The changing role of the settler at the periphery was matched with the growing assertion of authority at the centre. In the early 1930s, the process was complete. The progressive Täfäri had made hollow Italy's **peripheral policy** which, by bribing the provincial leaders with money and the masses with schools, hospitals and clinics while pretending to

⁵⁵. Brotto, op.cit., pp.58-60, 95-7;101; Moreno, op.cit., pp.1504;1506-8.

⁵⁶. Somehow the plight of the southern peasant may not be different from that of Ānkobär, most eloquently talked by Āsbä Häyly. The article captures the human dimension by its moving and graphic description on the conditions of the *gäbbar*. Berhanenna Sälam, 21-7-1927, reproduced at length in English by Addis Hiwet, op.cit., pp.71-3.

⁵⁷. Brotto, op.cit., pp.92-7.

maintain friendly relation with the regime in AA, aimed to subvert AA's efforts at centralization⁵⁸. According to one Italian official, Emperor Haile Sellassie's modernization policy was impressive and bound "to lead Ethiopia through a phase of rapid evolution to form a country different from the traditional Abyssinia to which we have up to now been accustomed"⁵⁹.

Haile Sellassie was of the view that the *gult* system had outlived its usefulness and progressively eroded the *gult*-holders power and institutions on which the latter depended for its support. His agrarian reforms, set in motion while he was still regent, aimed to boost revenues for the central treasury. But to carry out his objectives, he had to contend with *gult*-holders' greed for land and labour. His immediate victims became those economically-minded provincial lords whose contribution

⁵⁸. *Politica periferica* counted much on the rebellion of the two scions of old aristocratic families who were opposed to Täfäri's reforms: Empress Zäwditu's husband, Ras Gugsa Wolé of Bägémdér, who belittled the western educated Young Ethiopians who run the government; Ras Häylu of Gojjam, an acutely business-minded and arrogant snob who publicly scorned them as "people from nothing who were only simple stablemen during Menilik's time". But it was great disappointment. Gugsa's revolt was the nadir of the policy but it was easily crushed. Ras Haylu's rebellion was skilfully preempted; and the half million bullets rushed by the Italian adventurer Franchetti were too late to be of any help to him after his arrest. Contrary to their expectation, there was no massive upheaval of Gojjamese who felt rather relieved by his arrest as they hated his penny-pinching ways. [Cfr. ASMAE 3/1-1, Raimondo Franchetti, *Situazione Etiopica dopo l'incoronazione del Negus*, AA dicembre 1930; 7/1-7, Scamacca to R. MAE, AA 2[illegible]-11-1932; Marcus, op.cit., pp.92-5;120; ASMAE 7/1-5, *Spese politiche* (1924-33) contains accounts of money spent on the Ethiopian notables and spies.

⁵⁹. ASMAI 54/31-124, *Lessona to ministro*, Rm 27-7-1931. The Italians were not anyhow refrained by such reality. The call was rather to strengthen the policy. Hence the Eritrean Governor Astuto wrote: "If the policy of Täfäri since 1917 was to transform [Ethiopia] from a feudal to a modern state, the peripheral policy should aim to obstruct this policy by fomenting - with all precautions required to avoid our game being publicly exposed - the ego of these chiefs encouraging them to passive or active resistance" ASMAE 2/4, *Astuto to ministro*, As 29-7-1931.

to the centre was not generous and who made *gäbbar* life unbearable. Not surprisingly, he used the complaints of the *gäbbar* as a pretext to eliminate the landlords⁶⁰.

Towards the end of 1920s, taxation was rationalized by the introduction of receipts, making the provincial lords accountable for any loss of taxes. If a reasonable number of peasants complained about arbitrary treatment, the offending governor was called to AA. This was a prelude to much greater reforms initiated by Täfäri, to the satisfaction of the peasantry, when he was still a young and ambitious governor of Härär⁶¹. More fundamental changes took place in 1930s, with the introduction of a standardized system of land measurement and survey by an independent body, tax incentives to develop the uncultivated areas and a curb on land speculation. The most important was the decree of September 1934 which, in its attempt to stamp out the abuses of the *gult*-owners, encouraged tax payment in cash rather than in kind and labour, and drastically curtailed personal services. Owing to inadequate manpower and finance, the application of most of these measures proved slow and costly. Moreover, while they were welcomed in most of the south, in the traditional north they were invariably resisted⁶².

Attempts to educate the peasantry using modern methods of cultivation were not successful. In 1931, the Emperor's proposal to exploit the country's agriculture with the formation of joint Italo-Ethiopian venture did not materialize. The Emperor wanted to set up farms similar to his *Érär*

⁶⁰. The case of *Däjach* Balcha Abba Näfso, one of Menilik's ablest commanders and the hero of Adwa, and that of *Ras Häyilu* was a typical example [Cfr. Haile Sellassie I, My life and Ethiopia's progress, 1892-1937, trans. & ed. Edward Ullendorff, (London: OUP, 1976), p.151-2, 204-5; Marcus, op.cit., p.120.

⁶¹. Ibidem, pp. 38-41, 73.

⁶². In part of Härär they were most effectively applied. Mahtämä Sellassé Wäldä Mäsqäl (1950), pp.128-30,138-41; idem (1957), pp.296-7; Ciocca, op.cit., p.91-5; Brotto, op.cit., pp. 55-6, 58-61.

Farm, one of the several model farms established since the *early decades* of the twentieth century by the Ethiopian and foreign concessionaires⁵³. Consisting of 1,000 ha, Erär farm was established in 1925 and run by an Italian adventurer Pastorelli who, by 1931, had developed about 100 ha⁶⁴.

When approached by the Ethiopian government the Italian authorities were put in a predicament. The scheme was acknowledged "as a useful instrument to penetrate the country economically and politically". But as the difficulties of finding Italian capital or willing settlers were insurmountable, the authorities clung to their strategy of peripheral politics⁵⁵. As one official pointed out, for Italy's policy of destabilization, agricultural collaboration with the Emperor will not be a good investment, as are schools and clinics which,

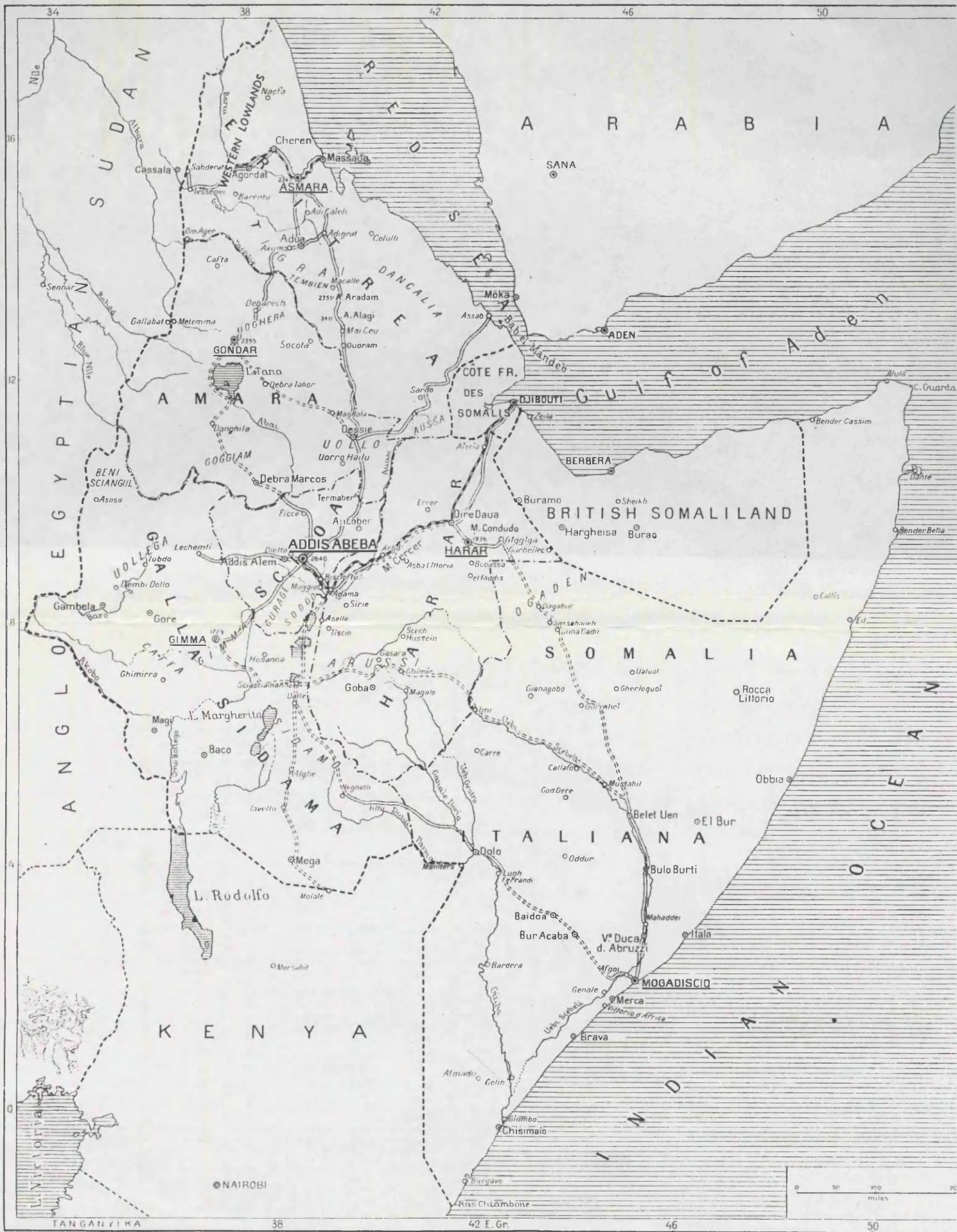
apart from being an end in themselves, will be used one day when a definite settlement with Abyssinia comes (and which I believe is quite imminent) as bargaining chip for our specific legitimate interest⁶⁶.

⁵³. Pankhurst (1968), pp.208-9.

⁵⁴. Dissatisfied with his employer and instigated by Fascist agents, Pastorelli contacted Mussolini urging his intervention and played some influence in the resurgence of idea of peasant settlement in Italy. He wrote embellished letters, describing Ethiopia's agricultural potential as enormous. In a letter to his cousin, Di Vittorio presented to Mussolini, he particularly pointed out that Ethiopia "is the country where Italy should concentrate its energies for its compelling needs of demographic expansion and that our *Duce* should devise the most appropriate means for our people and capital to find here an immediate and vast field of action" Pastorelli to Di Vittorio, Dirè Daoua 30-11-1932, in ASMAE 8/4-1, Di Vittorio Angelo to Benito Mussolini: Brevi cenni illustrativi sull'opera colonizzatrice svolta da Pastorelli Arcangelo, Rm 24-7-1934.

⁵⁵. ASMAE 2/2, Paterno' to MAE, AA 4-4-1931; Ibidem, Grandi to RMC, Rm 14-4-1931; De Bono to MAE, Rm 23-4-1931.

⁶⁶. Ibidem, Guariglia to RMC, Rm 24-4-1931.



Italian East Africa
 (Eritrea—Amara—Scio—Galla Sidama—Harar—Somalia Italiana).

CHAPTER III

THE CONTOURS OF LAND POLICY

THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

Italy's land policy developed within the framework of the colonial administration - a cumbersome, under-manned, and under-financed machine with tangled lines of authority. Overlapping military and civilian jurisdiction and influence wielded by the government and Nationalist Fascist Party officials, who played a far greater role in Ethiopia than in Italy, left the administration in a parlous state¹.

The Italian administration was based on the theory that colonies were an extension of the Motherland to be populated by Italian settlers and exploited by Italian capital. The objective was to transform the colony into a region of *Magna Italia*. The chief architect of this policy in Ethiopia was the first Minister of Colonies, Lessona. The policy was characterized by excessive centralization and the exclusion of foreign capital, and failed to enlist the co-operation of the subject population. These factors contributed to the failure of Italy's ambitious programme of agricultural development.

In order to conquer Ethiopia, the total dismemberment of the existing administrative structure of the Empire was necessary. Everything was hurriedly reorganized *ex-novo* cutting across religious and ethnic divisions. The most outstanding feature was the total disappearance of Ethiopia as a geographical unit, the name surviving only in the king's subsidiary title of Emperor of Ethiopia. The frontiers were dismantled and the Ethiopian Empire was merged with two former colonies - Eritrea and Somalia - to form an Italian East Africa (IEA) or *Africa Orientale Italiana* (AOI). This was divided into six semi-autonomous governorates which "behaved as if they were more or less five States unwillingly joined together by a capital mini-

¹. FO371/22021/J1224/40/1, CG Bird to Lambert, AA 12-2-1938 (hereafter Bird to Lambert, AA 12-2-1938); Del Boca, Gli italiani in Africa Orientale: La caduta dell'impero, vol. III, (Bari: Ed. Laterza, 1982), pp.137-58; D. Fossa, "L'intervento del Partito nel governo dell'impero", REAI, 20, 3 (marzo 1939):255-62; P. M. Masotti, Ricordi d'Etioopia di un funzionario coloniale, (Milano: Pan Ed., 1981), p.48.

state"². Of these, Ethiopia proper consisted of four territories - Shäwa in the centre, Ämara in the north, Galla and Sidama (GS) in the west and Härär in the east with their capitals AA, Gondär, Jimma and Härär respectively. The two governorates of Eritrea and Somalia were expanded by adding the present province of Tegray to the first and the Ogaden to the second. Each governorate was then divided into a dozen districts known as *Commissariato* and these in turn into a varying number of sub-districts or *Residenza*. The districts and sub-districts never had a definite shape and their number and boundaries fluctuated³.

Each governorate was administered by a governor who resided in the respective capital and was subject, theoretically at least, to the Governor General (GG) in AA who bore the title of the Viceroy of the King of Italy and Emperor of Italian Africa. The Viceroy took his instructions from the Ministry of Colonies (MC), lately changed into Ministry of Italian Africa or *Ministero dell'Africa Italiana* (MAI)⁴. Each governor was assisted by an Executive Council, a Secretariat, a gamut of technical and administrative departments staffed by officers drawn from the MAI or loaned by other ministries in Rome. At the head of each district there was a commissioner (*commissario*) and at that of sub-district an officer or *residente*. Most of the commissioners and sub-district officers were ex-army officials. Many of them had no administrative skill and their colonial experience had been largely gained commanding 'native' troops. Attempts to replace them with civilian staff was hampered by shortage of applicants, for whose recruitment the Ministry relied on newspaper advertisements. Within the Empire, these posts were treasured, for they held sway in administrative, judicial and political matters within their areas. The admini-

². ATdR 24/108, Relazione viaggio AOI, Rm 1937, p.2.

³. F. Quaranta, Ethiopia; An empire in the making, (London: P. S. King & Son Ltd., 1939), pp.1-5.

⁴. Ibid., p.1. The Ministry itself was subject to constant reshuffles.

stration, however, was demanding covering a vast territory, further exacerbated by language barriers which often required the employment of three or four interpreters⁵.

An inevitable corollary of Italy's colonial policy was the exclusion of the subject population from all forms of power-sharing. This was no different from in other Italian colonies. In the Ethiopian case, there was a brief flirtation with 'indirect rule' under the governorship of General Badoglio, using leading chiefs as "intermediary organs" and "giving some concessions to the old order"⁶. Badoglio's approach rested on an ideology associated with elements of the old colonial school, dubbed *indigenophiles*. This view contradicted the Fascist style of government which judged any power-sharing with the feudal lords as unacceptable. Mussolini imposed direct rule from Rome, epitomized by Lessona in his motto "no power sharing with the Rases"⁷. This alienated many traditional leaders who had collaborated during the conquest with the hope of gaining wider territorial control and a share of the power lost under Emperor Haile Sellassie. Instead they found themselves stripped overnight of the little power and privilege they had. The salaries and titles given for their collaboration did not satisfy them⁸.

As the chief architect of the policy, Lessona made it clear that the aim of his 'native' policy or *politica*

⁵. Abysmal performance by the colonial officers led to the formation of the Fascist Academy for AI (*Accademia Fascista dell'AI*) where university graduates selected for a colonial career were expected to attend a two year specialised course [Cfr. Ibid., p.4; Masotti, op.cit., pp.49-50,55-6,160].

⁶. R. Pankhurst, "Economic verdict on the Italian occupation of Ethiopia (1936-41)", *EO*, V, 4 (1971):72 (hereafter "Economic verdict").

⁷. GRA 45/41-4, Lessona to GGAOI, Rm 5-8-1936, p.1 (hereafter Lessona to GGAOI); Lessona, *Memorie*, (Rm: 1958), p.296.

⁸. GRA 40/33-14, Regente Governo Redini to DSAPGG, As 14-6-1937; ibdim., Lessona to Graziani, Bengasi 14-3-1937; Alberto Sbacchi, *Ethiopia under Mussolini*, (London: Zed Books, 1985), pp.129-40; Pankhurst, op.cit.:81.

indigena was to subordinate the indigenous population's interests to metropolitan politics. He did not see as necessarily incompatible with humanitarian objectives that Italy claimed towards its Ethiopian subjects as a "civilizing nation"⁹. The policy culminated in racial laws that set out rigid rules of separate development¹⁰. Wherever Italy had effective control, particularly in urban and settlement areas, these laws were rigidly applied. The policy entailed massive forced removal of Ethiopians from their residences to new quarters. A form of *apartheid* was in the making, with the settlers and the Ethiopians living in geographically distinct quarters, each of them with their own social amenities and exclusive way of life¹¹. They were forbidden to have any social contact with each other. In large urban centres Ethiopian ghettos developed which Europeans needed a permit to enter. Plans to restrict the education of Ethiopians to elementary level and exclude them from skill training were underway. Most of the pre-war educational establishments and health facilities were already devoted to exclusive use by the Italians. During the occupation the Ethiopians had unprecedented employment opportunities, but they were relegated to the most demeaning jobs and explicitly excluded from participation in any sector of the economy where they might compete with Italians¹².

⁹. Lessona, op.cit., p.298. In an interview with the author on 24-5-1984, Lessona still claimed: "We went there to improve the life of these poor people [quella gente povera] but things did not go as planned. As you can see they are still suffering". [He was referring to the 1984 Ethiopian famine].

¹⁰. CD IAO misc. 1038, Alberto Pollera, Europei e indigeni nella valorizzazione e nell'economia dell'impero, As 7-10-1938, pp.2-5.

¹¹. Alfio Berretta, Con Amedeo D'Aosta in AOI in pace e in guerra, (Milano: Casa ed. Ceschina, 1958), p.139.

¹². FO371/23376/J574/41/1, CG Bird to Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (PSSFA), AA 2-1-1939. For a more detailed discussion see R. Pankhurst, "Fascist racial policies in Ethiopia 1922-1941, EO, XII, (1969):270-86; RSAl, (May 1948):478; Universalità Fascista, (novembre 1937):7; Davide Fossa, "Sane norme economiche e morali per i cittadini dell'impero", AC, 26-1-1939.

The ruthless imposition of these rules led to a protracted guerrilla war that sapped the settlers' moral and material resources and led to constant reshuffling of the administrative machine. The 'pacification' programme demanded an extensive road network. The Italians, setting great store by the Imperial Roman dictum that roads are the basis of a military control and prosperity, within twenty four months of their conquest completed no less than 2,000 miles of fully metalled and tar-treated roads at an average cost of £12,000 a mile and employing an Italian workforce which at the peak period stood as high as 60,000 men. As a result, provinces were brought closer to each other than ever before, greatly undermining the power of the unruly provincial elites. But the roads ate up a disproportionate amount of the budget and led the Empire into near bankruptcy. Financial stringency demanded the slowing down of work and the expensive European labour force was gradually replaced by the local Ethiopian labour. By May 1939 the former was reduced to 12,000, while the latter had reached 52,000¹³.

Nor were military objectives that justified the construction of these roads achieved. In the governorates of Härär and GS, organized armed resistance came to an end with the capture and subsequent execution of *Ras Dästa* in February 1937. But passive resistance continued in a variety of forms. In the traditional Abyssinian heartland, such as Ämara and Shäwa, Italian control was confined to areas close to highways and major towns. In the rest of the countryside, including other minor urban centres, the rebels had a firm foothold¹⁴.

This situation aggravated the difficulties caused by what was virtually a permanent war economy forced as a result of sanctions and the immense cost of conquest and led to high

¹³. [During this same time the African labour had reached 52,000]. Cfr. Quaranta, *op.cit.*, pp.74-93.

¹⁴. FO371/22021/J1321/40/1, Sir M. Lampson to PSSFA, Cairo 21-3-1938; *ibidem*, J1221/40/1, Mr Starling to Mr Campbell, London 25-3-1938; Masotti, *op.cit.*, pp.38,40,42. Additional information on resistance given in Bibliography: see Dämsé Wäldä Ämanuél, Gäräma Tafärra, Käbbädä Täsämma, R. Pankhurst (1970), Salome Gabre Egziabher.

inflation, chronic problems in balance of payments and a reduction of commercial contacts with the outside world. The rigid measures of autarky increased taxation and created a serious shortage of imported goods. The beleaguered economy only benefitted the arms dealers who made fat profits, while business suffered severely from rigid trade restrictions¹⁵. Trade was worsened by soaring transport costs and expulsion of well-established foreign firms. An acute shortage of foreign currency prevented efficient use of the Djibouti-AA railway, and the diversion of trade to roads only spiralled the costs¹⁶.

As in Eritrea, in Ethiopia absence of foreign competition and monopolistic rights gave the new Italian businesses a protected market. But owing to their severe lack of real information of and contact with the country, most trade dried up or was reduced to a fraction of its former level. Trade was further disrupted by forced replacement of MTD with Italian currency and the requisition of agricultural produce from the Ethiopians below market price. Except in flourishing black market export of lira, the policy was a dismal failure¹⁷.

DEBATE OVER STRATEGIES.

The series of pre-occupation expeditions and studies had equipped the colonial administration with considerable knowledge of Ethiopia's agricultural environment and productive potential. In the highlands of Eritrea, the land tenure system and use was almost identical to that of Ethiopia. Yet surprisingly, despite their long contact with the area, the Italians claimed that, to their great dismay, their knowledge of

¹⁵. F0371/22020/J657/40/1, CG Bird to Mr Lambert, AA 14-1-1938; Pankhurst (1971):76-7.

¹⁶. F0371/23380/J1776/296/1, CG Stonehewer Bird to Viscount Halifax, AA 1-4-1939.

¹⁷. R. Pankhurst, "A chapter in Ethiopia's commercial history: Developments during the Fascist occupation 1936-41", XIV, *EQ*, (1971):47-67 (hereafter Pankhurst, "A chapter"); *Idem* (1971):74-5; F0371/24635/J5/5/1, CG Gibbs to Viscount Halifax, AA 27-11-1939.

Ethiopia at the time of the occupation was "fragmentary and unreliable"¹⁸.

Technical and agricultural experts followed in the footsteps of military conquest. Data were collected concerning climatic conditions, natural environment, ploughing methods, terracing and cultivation systems, seeds and implements, as well as market conditions, aided by photographic materials, for the **Agricultural Department** (*Direzione dei Servizi Agrari*) in the MC. Their reports urged caution against the prevailing enthusiasm for mass settlement¹⁹.

But those who captured the popular imagination were the hand-picked journalists, uniting the nation - north and south, Catholics and Protestants (Waldensians), liberals and republicans, socialists and nationalists - in the cause of conquest²⁰. The poet, Vittorio Emanuele Bravetta eulogized:

People of ours
emigrate no more
to suffer;
The colon's labour feat
will make Ethiopia flourish.

The *nägarit* roars no more
Hurrah, Emperor-King!
Fight whomever wills
the land usurp
that is already Roman²¹.

¹⁸. AA. VV., *La costruzione dell'Impero*, AAI, III, I (Milano: Mondadori, 1940), p.947.

¹⁹. CD IAO AOI 1923, Promemoria per il Sign. Direttore Generale dell'AOI circa lo studio del problema fondiario ai fini della formazione di terreni per uso agricolo, Rm 1-7-1936. In a footnote to the document A. Maugini, after having read the agricultural technicians' report, urges the Minister of Colonies (Lessona) "to put a bit of cold water on the ardour of agricultural colonization". A. Di Crollanza, "La valorizzazione agricola dell'impero", REAI, 25, 4 (1937):491 (hereafter Di Crollanza, "La valorizzazione").

²⁰. Del Boca (1982), III, pp.8-9; MCP 18bis/261, Servizio radiofonico speciale per l'Impero, Rm 24-11-1938.

²¹. Virgiglio Savona, Michele Straniero, *Canti dell'Italia Fascista* (Milano: Garzanti, 1979, pp.261-2; Del Boca, op.cit., pp.9-10.

Once again Ethiopia was portrayed as the key solution to Italy's long, agonizing and humiliating emigration problem, and as a fruitful field for Italian labour.

Such an optimistic view was shared and vigorously argued by the regime's intellectuals who maintained that the agricultural possibilities of the Empire were almost inexhaustible, contrasting it with the conditions of the other colonies now described as no more than "a collection of deserts"²². Ethiopia was depicted as an El Dorado, an earthly paradise waiting to be exploited by Italian labour and technology, in order to make this wealth available to the civilized world²³.

This propaganda momentarily succeeded in making large scale settlement extremely popular in Italy, where unemployment and poor living conditions made the prospect of a better life very grim indeed. Those foreign newspapers, sceptical about those optimistic assertions that became part of Fascist orthodoxy, were discredited and labelled malicious propaganda; Italians, who failed to subscribe to the El Dorado myth, were regarded as unpatriotic. Once the war was over, economic, political and strategic factors made large-scale settlement seem even more plausible. Apart from providing the settlers with employment opportunities, the presence of a large Italian population in the Empire was thought to enable the colony to become self-sufficient economically and offer the Motherland a protected market²⁴.

The urgency of settlement was further dictated by the geographical distance separating the Empire from the Motherland and the hostile colonial powers surrounding it. The settlers were thought to fulfil a function like that of the Siberian

²². L. Cipriani, Un assurdo etnico: L'Impero etiopico (Firenze: 1935), p.324; B. Pace, L'Impero e la collaborazione internazionale in Africa, (Rm: 1938), p.37.

²³. Lessona, op.cit., pp.353-5; Cipriani, op.cit., p.323.

²⁴. R. Trevisani, "Originalità nelle direttive e nei metodi di colonizzazione fascista", REAI, XXVI, (1938):538; Carlo Giglio, La colonizzazione demografica dell'Impero, (Rm: Ed. REAI, 1939), p.12; L. Diel, Behold our new Empire - Mussolini, (London: 1939), pp.68-9.

Cossacks in Tsarist Russia, both as a ready army to defend the Empire and, in case of need, the motherland, as well as a "centre of radiation of Fascist and Italian civilization in Africa"²⁵. The military factor remained an overriding argument of the pro-settlement lobby²⁶. At a later stage, D. Fossa, the Fascist Party Inspector in IEA, described how:

If it is the plough which traces the furrow it will be the sword which must defend it. The workers are soldiers and the soldiers workers. Legionaries are those who conquered the Empire, legionaries will be those who with their toil will render it fertile²⁷.

Peasant settlement was the most archaic and expensive form of imperialism and yet the Fascist authors were at pains to contrast it with earlier types of colonization attempted by other powers, particularly the British, and to emphasize its uniqueness, based on the supposed fecundity of the Italian race. Their arguments, based on a few platitudes and generalizations, were remarkable for their pomposity rather than factual accuracy. Thus Nicolò Castellino claimed that the Italians had in their favour,

... all the conditions which other colonizing peoples lacked or lack: the numbers which were missing to the enterprise of the Portuguese, the youth which cannot fortify British imperialism; the dignity of race so often forgotten by the Spanish

²⁵. Giglio, op.cit., p.12; Trevisani, op.cit., p.583; J. Kulmer, "The return of Haile Sellassie", The Contemporary Review, CLIX, (1941):291.

²⁶. Giglio, op.cit., 12; Terruzzi, "L'economia dell' AI nel secondo Anno dell' Impero", REAI, XXVI, (1938):366; G. De Michelis, "La valorizzazione agricola dell'Impero", REAI, XXVI, 1 (1938):6.

²⁷. MCP 236, Guerriero, Capitale e lavoro nell'Impero italiano in Etiopia; D. Fossa, Lavoro italiano nell'Impero, (Milano: 1938), pp.484-6; IFPLAOI, Tre anni di attività, (AA: 1940), pp.164-6.

conquistadors and now abandoned and disowned by the French²⁸.

Italian colonialists boasted that with their unique colonization techniques, they eschewed the plunder and exploitation that was so characteristic of the traditional "industrial capitalist colonization" whereby a relatively small number of Europeans mercilessly exploited an indigenous population and squandered the colony's resources. A respectable academic stated,

We cannot allow ourselves the luxury of 'doing it the English way', that is to live and get rich at the expense of others. We must take to our Empire our own peasants, our own workers, our own artisans, which up to now wander around and are dispersed throughout the world²⁹.

And another commented:

Our imperialism differs profoundly from the English in an essential point: we have the demographic possibilities which the English do not have³⁰.

The Italians worried, however, that an influx of lower class Italians might damage their prestige and dominance, as Italians and as Europeans, over subject Ethiopians³¹. The "industrial-capitalist" colonization tried to avoid this by

²⁸. N. Castellino, "Il problema del meticcio", Nuova Antologia, CCCXCIX, (1938):394; cfr. C. Poggio, Politica economica imperiale con particolare riguardo all' AOI, (Hr: 1939), pp.35-8; A. da Marsanich, "Per l'autonomia economica dell' Impero", REAI, XXVI, (1938):849-50; Marco Pomilio, "I problemi attuali dell'Impero nel pensiero di Attilio Terruzzi", Autarchia Alimentare, (agosto 1938):7; also in L'Alimentazione Italiana, (13-31 agosto 1938).

²⁹. G. Gennari, "La colonizzazione agraria di popolamento nell'economia corporativa dell' Impero: Osservazioni di un legionaro", I Georgofili. VI, II(1936):511; idem, "L'agricoltura nell' AOI", REAI, XXV, (1937):1916.

³⁰. Giglio, op.cit., p.9.

³¹. The Italians were aware that in the pre-occupation period the Ethiopians had a very low opinion of the Italians. Cfr. R. Pankhurst, "Italian and "native" labour during the Italian Fascist occupation of Ethiopia, 1935-41", Ghana Social Service Journal, 2, 2 (1972):56.

employing a relatively small number of Europeans in managerial positions while the indigenous population did the heavy work. The most universally held view was that in the case of Italian colonialism, the "prestige of the white race" would be maintained by educating the workers in an imperialist mentality and employing a vigorous policy of racial segregation. The point of reference were 'native' reserves in Kenya and South Africa³². Such a device, combined with the "prodigies of civilization that the white man introduces through the construction of roads, aqueducts, schools, buildings and all forms of gigantic works", would keep the prestige of the white man undiminished³³.

Settlement was conceived in the most grandiose terms. Soon after his victorious entry into AA, Marshal Badoglio declared that the figure of one million settlers within a year "was not an exaggeration"³⁴. Another Fascist official talked glibly of 6,250,000 souls, consisting of 1,250,000 heads of families, who would be settled on 50,000 plots, each plot consisting of 1,000 ha. This was all to take place within the early part of the occupation³⁵. Although by the end of 1939 it was clear these claims were unrealistic, Party officials and some journalists continued to perpetuate the illusion³⁶.

Opinions were divided over the policy to be followed in transforming Ethiopia into a settlement colony. The MC, led by Lessona, argued for state-sponsored colonization. Lessona was a man with rich colonial experience. Once an enthusiastic

³². Giglio, op.cit., p.10; Gennari (1936):508; Lessona, op.cit., p.298.

³³. Gennari (1937):1916; C. Poggiali, Albori dell'Impero: L'Etiozia come é e come sar , (Milano: 1938), pp.517-20.

³⁴. GP, 30-6-1936; Del Boca (1982), p.199.

³⁵. CD IAO AOI 1778, C. Poggio, Rilievi e proposte per la pronta colonizzazione dell'Impero", pp.13-4. Later he had reduced this figure to 1,562,500 agricultural settlers. See C. Poggio, "Colonizzazione capitalistica e demografica nell' AOI", Illustrazione Coloniale, dicembre 1939.

³⁶. Dottrina Fascista, (January 1939):97.

student of colonial problems, before he became Minister he served as Under-Secretary to the Colonies (1929-1936). During this period he was credited with spearheading a campaign that accelerated colonization under state direction at the expense of individual enterprise. His policy in Ethiopia owed much to his Libyan experience. Yet his main objective was to make of the IEAn Empire a model colony where the shortcomings of Libyan colonization could be eliminated and experiments pursued on a wider scale.

Lessona envisaged four distinctive forms of colonization corresponding to four categories of lands.

1. National demographic colonization implemented by state-run colonization agencies. The peasants would settle in legions of militia and function as military garrisons. After a given period, the land under cultivation would become the property of the peasant.

2. Small settlements where small and medium-sized estates would be worked by Italian farmers who had modest initial capital and know-how.

3. Industrial colonization where estates, impractical for demographic settlement, would be given to competent Fascist confederations which would work under the supervision of the MC and local government.

4. 'Native' settlements would include estates under Ethiopian ownership. In view of both improving and increasing local production and elevating the life style so Italian goods would be purchased, the Ethiopians would cultivate these lands with the government providing them with technical expertise, including high-yield seeds and advanced agricultural tools³⁷.

Lessona stressed demographic colonization, pointing out its importance and uniqueness. Demographic settlement had its precedents in American colonization, and aspects had also been practised by the French and the British in their coloni-

³⁷. Lessona to GGAOI, p.8; Lessona, op.cit., pp.303-4; R. Pankhurst, "A page of Ethiopian history: Italian settlement plans during the Fascist occupation of 1936-41", XIII, 2 EQ, (1970):145 (hereafter Pankhurst, "Italian settlement").

es³⁸. But Lessona rejected any comparison to the Italian scheme, including that of French in Algeria which was traditionally seen by many Italians as a model³⁹. Indeed, Lessona's programme had certain distinctive aspects: settlements were regional in character, whereby people of the same province in Italy populated an area which reproduced the atmosphere of the region from which they sprang. According to Lessona, this was devised with two functions in mind: it would rouse the *ego* of the provinces to compete with each other to provide initial capital expenses for agricultural development; secondly, it was hoped that it would facilitate group solidarity⁴⁰.

However, there was nothing new in Lessona's advocacy for state intervention. Many before him had favoured state-run colonization agencies as the best means of providing the financial and technical resources that private entrepreneurs usually lacked. However, sceptics pointed out that forty years previously Franchetti had pursued unsuccessfully an identical scheme in Eritrea⁴¹. Lessona retorted that Franchetti's plans had only one flaw: they had not been carried out energetically⁴². Like Franchetti, Lessona was unsympathetic to private initiative, knowing from his Libyan experience that it would lead to land speculation and the formation of *latifundia*. But Lessona was inconsistent. Even though he continued to maintain that the best lands be kept for demographic settlement, it was

³⁸. A typical example was the Tennessee Valley Authority, the French settlement scheme in Algeria. Cfr. A.F. Robertson, People and the state: An anthropology of planned development, (Cambridge: CUP, 1984), pp.14-5;107-8; 130-1.

³⁹. According to Lessona the Fascist corporative state was not comparable to others. A. Lessona, "L'agricoltura tripolitana", in Scritti E Discorsi Coloniali, (Milano: 1935), p.130.

⁴⁰. Lessona, op.cit., pp.283-4.

⁴¹. See Chap. I, pp.11 - 20

⁴². A. Lessona, "Lo stato Fascista e l'economia coloniale", in Scritti E Discorsi Coloniali, op.cit., pp.49-50.

capitalist initiative that gained paramountcy, nor were the settlements he encouraged exclusively regional⁴³.

State-supervised colonization was the brain-child of Armando Maugini, a man with much agricultural experience and knowledge. As an agricultural officer in Cyrenaica during World War I and as organizer of the colony's technical services, he had gained a rare insight into the problems of settlement schemes, later becoming the major architect of Libyan colonization. He was a convert to the cause of state-funded and directed projects of land settlement, which he had opposed until 1932 when he was called upon to develop plans for the mass colonization of Cyrenaica. Initially, he offered qualified support; but when he realized that it was a politically motivated enterprise, he upheld it wholeheartedly, arguing strongly for the creation of a special corporation that would promote demographic goals rather than a reliance on private colonization⁴⁴. During the Ethiopian conquest, Maugini became chief technical adviser to the MC as well as Director of the *Istituto Agronomico Coloniale* (Institute of Colonial Agriculture) in Florence⁴⁵, a leading institution for the study of tropical agriculture and the training centre for agricultural technicians.

Maugini believed that the Italian presence would make itself felt in Ethiopia within a very brief period provided that there was good will and appropriate technology. But he maintained that colonization had to be centrally planned and preceded by proper study. In his view demographic goals could be economically implemented by para-statal organizations with financial and technical resources - thus not exacting undue sacrifice from central government⁴⁶.

⁴³. CD IAO AOI 1936, Ministro to GG, Rm 2-6-1937; IA to GG, Rm 23-6-1937.

⁴⁴. Segrè, op.cit., p.96.

⁴⁵. Presently is known as *Istituto Agronomico per l'Oltremare* - Overseas Agricultural Institute.

⁴⁶. ATdR 24/100, Relazione Prof. Maugini sul viaggio compiuto al seguito di S.E. Tassinari, gennaio-febbraio 1937, p.16.

Maugini distinguished between areas where work should start immediately and those requiring long-term development. But in this he was neither clear nor consistent. On the one hand, he argued that the programmes be started immediately, although with a limited range and clear objectives. On the other, he called for common sense and caution. He stressed that demographic colonization, even in its most economically ideal conditions, was a very costly affair, requiring solid financial, administrative and technical organization⁴⁷. He pinpointed the existence of large estates with excellent conditions for demographic colonization in many of the areas he visited; yet he claimed that, despite their healthy climate and enormous agricultural potential, their location did not qualify them as areas of immediate activity. Ethiopian competition, absence of adequate infrastructure and poor markets made other areas unattractive. Maugini believed that, unless there was a guarantee of prosperity to offset the sacrifices of colonization, it would not be easy to persuade any prospective peasant settlers to move to Ethiopia⁴⁸.

In dealing with Ethiopian peasant farming, Maugini maintained that this needed progressive improvement. According to him, improved life standard of the Ethiopian masses would increase their purchasing power of Italian manufactured goods, whilst increased cereal, particularly wheat, production would contribute to the Empire's agricultural self-sufficiency. In his view, the improvement could be carried out in two stages; the first would involve the expansion of existing agricultural produce, using intensive methods and the construction of silos for storage; the second would be to introduce cash crop agriculture or the expansion of existing crops, so that the colony could supply the raw materials needed by the motherland and earn itself foreign currency. He urged the government to use

⁴⁷. Ibid., p.15.

⁴⁸. Ibid., p.14.

intensive propaganda and create the necessary incentives, especially by purchasing the produce⁴⁹.

Like Lessona, Maugini was unsympathetic to private agricultural enterprise⁵⁰. He stressed, with the exception of a few experimental cases, that this be channelled into areas economically ready for capital investment (close to urban centres), as any attempt to direct it into remote zones, no matter how great their economic potential, would encounter insurmountable difficulties⁵¹.

Although not as loud as those of advocates for state-sponsored mass settlements, the dissenting voices were considerably strong and were primarily expressed by Tassinari, the Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture. Tassinari had travelled extensively in Ethiopia in the company of Maugini and two other officials. As declared in his report, Tassinari went under instructions from the *Duce* to "take note of all and everything: agriculture, economy, society, military and ethnology; report all of this to me in absolute truth⁵²".

Like Maugini, Tassinari stressed that colonization should be a gradual process, but unlike him, advanced the idea that the major task of implementation should be left to "private initiative" which "must be guided, directed and controlled by the state in line with the Fascist norms of life", while the government should provide the basic economic infrastructure. His view was that capitalistic colonization could create a number of conditions that would facilitate progressive Italian settlement, including a demographic one⁵³.

⁴⁹. Ibid., pp.18-9.

⁵⁰. Ibid., pp.17-8; "L'agricoltura nelle colonie. Esperienze e nuovi doveri", *AC*, XXX, 11 (1936):417.

⁵¹. ATdR 24/100, pp.16-7.

⁵². CD IAO AOI 1990, G. Tassinari, "Relazione al Duce del viaggio compiuto attraverso i territori dell'Impero", Rm 23-3-1937, p.1.

⁵³. Ibid., pp.7-9,15..

The main reason determining Tassinari's position was economic. He estimated that the initial cost of settling a family, even in ideal economic conditions, would be enormous: one thousand families would need an expenditure of £.50,000,000, ten thousand families £.500,000,000 and so on. In addition to this, demographic settlement would demand roads, hospitals, schools and churches, so that the life-style of the settler would not become 'debased' to the level of that of the Ethiopians⁵⁴.

Tassinari's decision to publish a section of his data in the country's leading newspaper, *Corriere della Sera*, contradicting the MC's view and claiming that it corresponded to Mussolini's thought, worsened the already delicate relationship between himself and Lessona⁵⁵. Yet Tassinari's conclusion was sustained by a Commission of members of the Fascist Farmers Association, *Confederazione Fascista degli Agricoltori (CFA)*, despatched by Lessona himself with the

task of reporting in detail the impressions and considerations gained during their journey of an economic, financial, technical and social character that could have a bearing on agricultural colonization as well as native farming⁵⁶.

After having thoroughly discussed the crucial problem of availability of colonizable land and the enormous economic cost necessary for demographic colonization, the Commission concluded that the

tides of colonization and the activities of the nationals should be limited to those forms and entities that can develop by themselves, let us say, by virtue of their own energy, by their own direct initiative, whether encouraged or given all possible assistance or not, but

⁵⁴. Ibid., pp.7-8.

⁵⁵. Lessona (1958), p.285.

⁵⁶. ATdR 24/103, "Relazione di una missione di agricoltori in AOI, 5 marzo-9 aprile 1937", (Firenze: IACI, 1937), p.5.

stimulated by a healthy concept of economic profit⁵⁷.

They were even more emphatic in suggesting that the best means to achieve the goal of agrarian development of the Empire more rapidly and economically, was by employing the local population. Dealing with demographic colonization, they stressed the fact that the country was not suited to a massive influx of colonists, as the basic economic infrastructures favourable to the purpose were virtually non-existent. They warned the colonial administration to move cautiously. According to the report, in this manner valuable experience could be gained and mistakes corrected as they arose⁵⁸.

With these and other similar recommendations the MC was uncertain how to proceed. Its early enthusiasm for demographic colonization soon dampened, and attempts were made to defer its execution. When this was voiced, the advocates of an immediate transfer of masses of peasants felt outraged and accused the authorities of betrayal. Giuseppe Pironti di Campagna's statement was not an isolated feeling:

Any policy that tends to limit and hinder the emigration of nationals towards the colonial territories frustrates the basic reasons of the foundation (of the Empire), betrays its defence, and is against 'the interests of the Empire'. Indeed, the very fact of delaying the flow of migration waves towards the colonies, after so many sacrifices have been made, is an absurdity contrary to our national cause and aversion to our interest that was established with the proclamation of the Empire⁵⁹.

Towards the beginning of 1937, the controversy between the two factions became so acute that Lessona, blamed by the supporters of both capitalist as well as demographic

57. Ibid., p.45.

58. Ibid..

59. Giuseppe Pironti di Campagna, La difesa dell'Impero, (Rm: Libreria Editrice Cattolica Internazionale, 1937), p.66.

colonization for trying to thwart every initiative, was forced to defend his position in parliament:

I would like to assert solemnly in front of you, honourable comrades, that the demographic colonization of IEA is and remains one of the fundamental objectives of the Fascist government. Certain groups have given themselves to doubt, stating that the implementation of the programme is neither easy nor practical. The government does not hide the difficulties as it did not fail to curb the enthusiasms. This is a part that, though unpleasant, we have assumed willingly knowing that problems of such magnitude do not admit magical solutions but it is essential that they should be seriously studied and worked out. If, on the one hand, I feel compelled to curb, after all the justified impatience of many comrades and important entrepreneurial classes, on the other hand, I have also to declare firmly that, should we abandon the decision of settling a large mass of Italian workers, we will frustrate one of the central pillars of the Ethiopian enterprise, so solemnly and repeatedly proclaimed by the Duce in his honourable speeches to the Italian people⁶⁰.

Attempting to reconcile the political goals of colonization with the realities of the Ethiopian environment and Italy's financial resources, towards the end of March 1937 Lessona enlisted the cooperation of the Agricultural Council. This was one of the supreme bodies created by Lessona himself to coordinate economic activities in the colonies with those of metropolitan Italy. Its role can be described as the Minister's own 'mini-cabinet',⁶¹.

The Council, known as *Consulta di Agricoltura*, included men with considerable experience in colonial agriculture, almost all of them advocates of colonial expansion. Their conclusions would hold considerable weight with the policy makers. A Special Commission was set up to study Lessona's

⁶⁰. A. Lessona, AI nel I^o anno dell'Impero, (Rm: Edizioni REAI 1937), p.11.

⁶¹. Lessona (1958), p.286.

programme in detail, in which most of the interests already operating or intending to operate in Ethiopia were represented. The two major Fascist farming associations, *Confederazione Fascista dei Lavoratori dell'Agricoltura* [CFLA] and *CFA*, were represented by Dr Dallari and Ing. Romadoro. There was Mazzocchi-Alemanni Nallo, Inspector of the *ONC*; Conte Livio Gaetani, National Secretary of the *Sindacato Nazionale Fascista Tecnici Agricoli* (Agricultural Technicians National Union), an organization involved in establishing the Empire's agricultural services; Rienzi, Chief Secretary of *Consiglio Tecnico-Corporativo* of the MC. Maugini was the Commission's chairman and Dr Pirro its secretary⁶².

The Commission rejected the views held by advocates of immediate mass peasant transfer into Africa as simplistic. A strategy of gradual colonization was also dismissed as cowardly. But the Commission failed to give clear guidelines on how to proceed and its conflicting views are recorded in the minutes of meetings held between April-July 1937. The outcome of these deliberations was an endorsement of Lessona's ideas, which continued to mould Italian colonial land policy even after he was demoted from his ministerial position⁶³.

Despite differences amongst the members in particular policies to be adopted, especially relating to the degree of State intervention, the Commission reached consensus on the main objective of Italian agricultural activity. It summed up the objective in three points:-

⁶². CD IAO AOI 1775, Processo verbale della Commissione di Competenza Per L'Agricoltura. Seduta, 7-4-1937, Rm 12-4-1937, p.1 (hereafter cited as CD IAO 1775, Seduta). Most of the material on the background of the personalities was provided by Prof. Gian Carlo Stella under the title "Qualche nota su organizzazioni agricole Fasciste", Ravenna 3-8-1985.

⁶³. CD IAO AOI 1776, Relazione della Consulta per l'Agricoltura a Ministro per Africa Orientale sui problemi relativi all'avvaloramento agrario dell'Impero, Rm 23-9-1938, pp.3-4 (hereafter CD IAO AOI 1776, Relazione). The report is published under "L'avvaloramento agrario dell'Impero", in REAI, (ottobre 1937), pp.1561-1575 (hereafter Consulta, "L'avvaloramento").

a. To seek urgently and in the most complete manner seek self-sufficiency in food-stuffs, whereby the Empire would become independent from external supply.

b. To create centres of settlement and employment opportunities for Italian rural populations.

c. To secure low cost raw materials for the Italian economy and, in the long run, create a new economy in the Empire, bent towards capturing neighbouring foreign markets⁶⁴.

Yet the question remained as to how these goals would be achieved. In this regard, the Commission only repeated the well-worn options of demographic colonization, capitalistic colonization and 'native' cultivations. A number of intermediary forms were excluded, and the mutual relationship and influence between these forms were not considered. The Commission itself made these limitations abundantly clear⁶⁵.

The Commission regarded the transplantation of Italian peasants and their way of life as the best means of guaranteeing Italian sovereignty, civilizing the indigenous population and developing the colonial economy. It was of the conviction that, if earlier mistakes were corrected, the scheme had a good chance of success. The Commission urged the government to create a few, trust-worthy and efficient para-statal organizations, *enti di colonizzazione* (colonization agencies), whose chief purpose would be to transform into small independent landowners the landless and unemployed families who migrated from Italy. The agencies were envisaged as effective institutional tools, useful in eradicating many of the problems encountered by earlier planned settlements and offset the financial burden that weighed heavily on government. According to the plan, the *enti di colonizzazione*, directed and controlled by the state, were to provide the settlers with techni-

⁶⁴. CD IAO AOI 1776, Relazione, p.1; Consulta, "L'avvaloramento":1561.

⁶⁵. CD IAO 1775, Relazione, p.2; Consulta, "L'avvaloramento":1561-2.

cal and financial assistance⁶⁶.

Another central theme in the Commission's recommendations was that, unlike in Libya where environmental and other exigencies demanded a special approach, in IEA the idea of profit must be the guiding principle. It stressed the important role that private commercial farming had to play, particularly in the production of raw materials. The Commission urged the government to give this form of business interest maximum freedom of action and not to saddle the prospective concessionaires with obligations to settle or employ immigrant families as had been the case in Libya⁶⁷.

While the Commission carefully considered settler farming, only vague and fleeting interest was paid to indigenous agriculture. Of eleven meetings held, four were dedicated to demographic and capitalistic colonization, one for the examination of the relationship between these two, and only one dealt with 'native farming'. The Commission maintained that indigenous farming should be subordinate to the interest of settler agriculture and opposed its modernization, particularly where it could compete with settler agriculture or where there was need of cheap labour⁶⁸.

The Commission based its investigations on the premise that agricultural transformation was an outcome of partnership between the state and enterprising individuals or agencies. Limited state intervention was justified on the grounds of the political and social goals of colonization. Thus it proposed as incumbent upon the government to be responsible for roads, law and order, economic and civic organizations, market discipline, long-term credits, the selection of settlers, the allocation of land and African labour. The Commission stressed that colonization would remain purely academic unless the government took immediate action to create vast

⁶⁶. Consulta, "L'avvaloramento":1563-7.

⁶⁷. Ibidem:1568-71.

⁶⁸. Ibidem:1575; CD IAO 1775, Seduta, 15-7-1937; Relazione, pp.2,42.

crown or *domainial*⁶⁹ lands and carry out a land survey of the country⁷⁰.

LIMITS AND NATURE OF LAND POLICY

In his report to the MC on his fact-finding mission immediately after the conquest into the main areas controlled by the Italian army, Maugini confirmed the great agricultural potential of the Empire:

The optimistic impressions of my first journey to the new territory are reinforced more than ever. At last, we have colonies that will guarantee positive results in the economic sector as well⁷¹.

However, he considered lack of sufficient vacant land as the single major handicap for Italy's ambitious programme of colonization. Maugini's solution to the land problem was *in-demaniamiento* - transforming into domainial lands the estates belonging to the ex-Emperor or rebels, or those confiscated from the Ethiopians, and the church⁷². This was in line with the general practice followed by the Italians in other colonies. But Maugini vacillated, for in his view any attempt to establish domainial lands was fraught with serious difficulties:

Domainial lands, in order to be disposable for colonization, should be freed from their life-long share-croppers, which raises a delicate problem that is not only economic, but above all political and social. Thus domainial lands or land that has been confiscated is not necessarily to be equated with land disposable for colonization⁷³.

⁶⁹. The thesis uses "*domainial* land", "crown land", "state land" or "public domain" interchangeably to indicate land belonging to the state.

⁷⁰. CD IAO AOI 1776, Relazione, pp.4,6; Consulta, "L'avvaloramento":1562-3.

⁷¹. ATdR 24/100, p.2.

⁷². Ibid., p.12.

⁷³. Ibid..

Maugini was alluding to the expropriation in Eritrea by Barattieri, the main factor behind *Dājach* Bahta Hagos's 1893 uprising that had brought to an abrupt halt Italy's early colonization attempts. Maugini alerted Lessona to base his land policies on sound knowledge of indigenous agrarian activities and customs⁷⁴.

Indeed, the creation of domainial lands proved long and arduous. The task was given to Caroselli, an expert in colonial issues and Governor of Somalia (1938-41). He was to explore the best method "that will rapidly and with the Fascist spirit, but in consonance with the current political situation, allow the creation of domainial land"⁷⁵.

To give the study an authoritative voice, Caroselli worked out a plan for a Five Man Commission established by RD and working directly under the MAI. The Commission included eminent personalities with wide colonial experience such as Massimo Colucci, Vallilio Erennio, Giangastone Bolla and Arnando Bertola. All of them were well-established jurists. Colucci and Erennio were Supreme Court magistrates. Bolla and Bertola were university professors. Colucci, who became the President of the Commission, worked out a meticulous programme, involving at least six months field-work in various parts of the colony, to collect the necessary economic and legal data on land institutions as well as the extent of Ethiopian ownership⁷⁶. The RD instructed the Commission to study land ownership and devise strategies necessary for the organization and operation of agriculture related services⁷⁷.

Before it even began, the programme was threatened by one crisis after the other. The Ministry of Justice was not

⁷⁴. Ibid., p.13.

⁷⁵. ASMAI Africa VI-11, Missione studi AOI, Ministro to Colucci, Rm, n.d.

⁷⁶. Ibidem, Massimo Colucci to De Rubeis, Schema di studi sul regime fondiario in AOI, Firenze 28-9-1937.

⁷⁷. RD 3-6-1938, no.965, Istituzione di una commissione per studi fondiari nell'AOI, GU, 16-7-1938, no. 160; "Land tenure in AI", The Times, 19-7-1938.

prepared to release its officials. For the Ministry of Finance, the plan was too ambitious and costly, and ought to be stopped. The behaviour of these ministries exacerbated already tense relations with MAI whose officials were stunned by "the incomprehension and obstructionism of all sorts" coming from "the ignorant and short-sighted bureaucrats"⁷⁸.

As some members of the Commission were reluctant to be posted as permanent employees in the colony, the MAI felt that it was left with no alternative but to fight. With the decree of 3 June 1938, it looked as though the programme was rescued from oblivion and heading for success. Yet the expectations of many were irreparably frustrated by its lugubrious proceedings. Although to maintain a façade of accomplishment, the Commission published its findings in 1940, the truth was the mission was a total disaster. Owing to another turbulent year, the Commission was able to go to the colony only in early August 1939. Each member of the Commission was assigned a particular field of research. Within a week of its arrival, the Commission was shaken by the abrupt departure of Bolla whose task was "The Comparative Study Of Systems Of Agricultural Concessions In IEA". Bolla claimed that the state of emergency declared by Italy on 15 August had made the position of the Commission untenable. But for Colucci, who dismissed Bolla's behaviour as "cowardly and selfish" and his work as a useless medley of "legalistic data" lacking originality, such a conclusion was reckless. The clash of personalities between the two men served only to frustrate the work⁷⁹.

Further set-backs arose, provoked by the unstable military situation which severely limited the activity of the Commission, the difficulty in finding interpreters and the local authorities' lack of co-operation. The Commission was

⁷⁸. ASMAI Africa VI-11, De Rubeis to Colucci, Rm 30-9-1938.

⁷⁹. ASMAI, Colucci to Bolla, AA Ottobre 1939; Colucci to DGCLMAI, Hr 15-11-1939; Massimo Colucci to GGAA, DSC (n.d.).

forced to cut short its programme and return home after a troubled four month stay⁸⁰.

As an attempt to provide a coherent land policy for the colonial administration, the Commission's findings were open to many criticisms. The survey of Ethiopian land tenure was based on inconclusive data from extremely restricted areas under Italian control. Ideally, study of land tenure demands a long and painstakingly careful examination of legal institutions, familiarity with the languages and cultures of each region, the presence of a sizeable personnel knowledgeable on the area, and substantial financial resources. The Commission had very few of these requirements.

Even though the restoration of the Abyssinian monarchy made them useless, the findings were illuminating. The Commission, rather than launching a new policy, codified existing practices, providing the state with a legal framework to pursue its policy of land alienation from the Ethiopians⁸¹.

Since the occupation, such a policy was based on political expediency. Military tactics were combined with economic pressure, and the lands of rebel and exiled leaders were confiscated along with those of the royal family. These same measures had formed the pillar of Italian agricultural policy in Libya, Eritrea and Somalia, where they were conceived as a means for asserting Italy's sovereignty as successor to the vanquished State⁸². It was thought that there was no other more conspicuous and efficient way of manifesting such sover-

⁸⁰. Ibidem, II libro fondiario nell'ordinamento della proprieta' mobiliare dell'AOI, p.1; MAE, Avvaloramento, p.351; "La valorizzazione Agraria e la colonizzazione", in AAI, II, III (Rm: Casa Ed. A. Mondadori, 1939), pp.197-8 (hereafter cited as MAE, La valorizzazione); Sbacchi (1975), p.406. Almost identical problem was faced by the local officials who attempted to complete the work started by the Commission. Cfr. ASMAI, loco cit., Brotto to Colucci, Gm 18-2-1940; Dalle 26-3-1940.

⁸¹. Ibidem, Colucci, schema, pp.1-2,5; MAE, La valorizzazione, p.197.

⁸². Cfr. For Eritrea see above p.; Segrè, op.cit., pp.49-54; Macksmith, op.cit., pp.38-9; Hess, op.cit., pp.112.

ignity than punishing those implicated in challenging Italy's authority either with armed resistance or by means of propaganda abroad.

As a general rule, this category of land was added to the public domain. But a somewhat different interpretation was, at least initially, given to sequestered lands. Part of these lands belonged ~~either to~~ people under arrest or executed, to active rebels or exiles against whom no measures of confiscation were declared, or to people assumed to be absent, i.e. away from their normal abode and whose whereabouts could not be traced⁸³. The official view was that this group of land was not part of the public domain and the state, who administered them, was considered only a care-taker. The revenue from them was set aside, subtracting only what was needed for the upkeep of dependants and administrative costs⁸⁴. But such a practice was rather an exception, and sequestration almost always led to confiscation, or compensation in kind or cash, or both, and involved no restitution of the original land.

Eager to amass land for colonization, the government also claimed as domainial any land which could be made so without political and social complications. This included land on which tax was owed, where Ethiopians were least able to prove their right, uncultivated land, or land the government thought had not been cultivated efficiently or was in excess of the need of the local population⁸⁵. The practices were sanctioned, claiming they were more humanitarian than the brutal spoliation allegedly adopted by the British in their colonies or the French in Algeria⁸⁶.

⁸³. MAE, La valorizzazione, pp.189-96; CD IA AOI 1847, GHrDCL, Verbale della terza riunione del Comitato di Colonizzazione, n.d., pp.3-4.

⁸⁴. MAE, La valorizzazione, p.189; CD IAO, 1847, p.3; Brotto, op.cit., pp.113-4.

⁸⁵. ASMAI Africa VI-11, Mussolini to GGHrGmGnAsMg, Rm 19-5-1936? [1938].

⁸⁶. Le Colonie, 9-4-1940; MAE, La valorizzazione, pp.185-96; Macksmith, op.cit., p.109; Guglielmo Nasi, "L'opera dell'Italia in Etiopia", Italia E Africa, (Rm: n.d), p.18; Ernesto Massi,

Confiscation began in November 1935 when the lands of some leading northern nobility were declared state domain. Soon lands belonging to the royal family, the exiled leaders as well as resistance fighters in Härär, GS and Shäwa were also confiscated⁸⁷. As the case of Achäfär stands to show, sometimes the entire region was subjected to these measures whenever loyalty was questionable⁸⁸. Few confiscations were preceded by a proper study of the status of the land⁸⁹.

Even though we have no accurate information on their quantity and quality, it appears these were prime lands. In some areas, they amounted to thousands of hectares. In Lake Tana it was reportedly to be 1,000,000 ha. In Achäfär and Wagerat, lands confiscated from the population for their alleged sympathy with the patriotic leader Babile totalled 180,000 ha⁹⁰. In Härär, by the end of 1937, 80,000 ha and in a GS subdistrict, Däräsa alone, 49,655 ha were made domainial⁹¹.

op.cit.,:448.

⁸⁷. DGG 30-7-1936, no. 135: Confisca beni del suddito coloniale blattenghietà Herui, GU, II/8 [supl.], 26-4-1938; 15-10-1937, no. 738: Confisca beni dei sudditi indigeni, GU, II/22, 16-11-1937 where the land of 61 people was confiscated; 25-10-1937, no. 751: Confisca beni di sudditi indigeni, GU, II/23, 1-12-1937 which affected the land of 47 people; no. 752: Confisca beni di sudditi indigeni, GU which implicated 70 people; Brotto, op.cit., pp.107-12.

⁸⁸. DGov 9-2-1938, no. 72412 AA.FF: Indemaniamiento del territorio dell'Uogherà (zona di Dabat), BUGA, III/2-3, febbraio-marzo 1938; DGov 17-3-1938, no. 53303 AA.FF: Indemaniamiento dell'Uogherà (zona Amba Ghiorghis), Ibidem; DGov 5-6-1937, no. 46144: Indemaniamiento del territorio dell'Acefer, Ibidem, III/4, 16-4-1938; DGov 8-6-1937, no. 46204: Indemaniamiento dei territori del Ginfrancherà, Uorchemder, Gianorà, Tseghede', Gusquam, ibidem.

⁸⁹. Brotto, op.cit., p.46

⁹⁰. UAGr, "L'Acefer", AC, XXXII, 2 (1938):56.

⁹¹. Sbacchi (1975), pp. 396-9; Brotto, op.cit., pp.112-3; GRA 44/36-1, A. Ricagno to GG DSAE, Assegnazione di terreni demaniali, AA 18-5-1937, where the list of confiscated lands in AA area are given with the name of their respective owners and the areas involved; IC, 15-9-1938; Guido Guidi, Nel territorio dei GS. Rilievi ed aspetti politici, sociali, economici. La Residenza dei Darasa, Rm 1938, quoted by Del Boca (1981), p.198.

Although there was plenty of land, as Maugini also rightly pointed out, it was not vacant but densely populated and intensely cultivated. A bulk of it could not be profitably commercially farmed: although fertile, it consisted of fragmented small plots often intersected by other privately owned lands which the Italians pledged to honour. But protection of Ethiopian interests and development of settler agriculture remained difficult to reconcile, and the Italians had to make recourse to a number of devices. The following chapters will tackle the nature and limitations of these and their repercussions on Italy's overall strategy of Empire building.

CHAPTER IV.

MILITARY SETTLEMENT: OPERA NAZIONALE COMBATTENTI [ONC]

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS

Military settlement was part of the demographic colonization scheme. While later regional settlement schemes focused on a particular province of Italy, military settlement was nation-wide, aiming to settle landless peasants from all over Italy. The experiment began while the military operation of the Ethiopian campaign was still underway and before the Agricultural Council came into existence. Much of the Council's opinion was influenced by this initiative. Contrary to later claims, the scheme did not come about as part of a broad and conscious vision, but was born of economic and strategic crisis.

Contrary to optimistic forecasts that the Empire would become a granary for Italy, it swallowed most of the metropolitan's food exports. In the second half of 1936, Italy supplied the Empire with 75,000 tons of wheat at a cost of £.43,000,000. The prospects for 1937 were no better. Even though in 1936 the Empire imported 45% of all Italian exports, the situation was by no means beneficial to Italy as it did not bring in foreign currency and meant the loss of foreign markets. While the Empire absorbed the metropolitan's product, it gave little in return¹.

It was against this critical situation that on 21 October 1936 Lessona, while visiting AA, cabled to the president of the ONC, Di Crollalanza, to establish two agricultural stations, Holätta and Bishoftu:

I have examined the question of agricultural colonization of the governorship of AA territory. A number of government lands have been verified with a total area amounting to several thousands of hectares and others will be verified in the near future. In line with our conversation, I count on the intervention of the ONC to translate into action the programme of the *Capo*. In the two centres

¹. Sbacchi (1975), p.360.

of Holätta and Bishoftu, I will give you vast plots of land to immediately start developmental work through locally mobilized peasant militia in Africa. I request you to look to an immediate despatch of personnel with authorization to act at once to begin the work in agreement with the local government. Indeed, all this is a matter of extreme urgency and so I appeal to your immediate personal attention².

The choice of ONC as the first colonization agency, i.e. the use of soldiers as settler farmers, was well-calculated. ONC was a veterans association which did reclamation and colonization work throughout Italy, including the much publicized Pontine Marshes, south of Rome, and had a successful record in Libya. As an established agency - ONC had capital and technical expertise - it would pose little financial burden on the government's already strained budget and could start the colonization programme immediately³.

The unsettled political situation made reliance on ONC for the initial phase of demographic colonization even more important, while also dictating use of the military. The decision by the political authorities to confine settlements within gendarmerie posts, or *praesidia*, established by the military authorities indicates the gravity of the situation⁴. As appears from Ciano's notes in December 1937, even someone like Italo Balbo, one of the founders of Fascism and Governor of Libya, whose name was linked with demographic colonization of Libya because of the mass migration of *Ventimila* - the

². Di Crollanza, "Relazione sui programmi di colonizzazione demografica nell'impero da parte dell'ONC", REAI, 26, 5 (maggio 1938):739 (henceforth: Di Crollanza, "Relazione").

³. ATdR 24/100, p.15

⁴. CD IAO AOI 1936, Graziani to GASGnHrGmMg-GGSM-GAA, AA 8-4-1937 (hereafter Graziani to GGAOI); Kulmer J., "The return of Haile Sellassie", The Contemporary Review, CLIX (1949):291.

twenty thousand colonists that he had transported in a single mass convoy in October 1939⁵ - used to advise "certain people not to go to Abyssinia because of conditions of grave insecurity in the country"⁶. In the light of this, the settlement of the ex-servicemen in the proximity of AA was seen as a useful means to prevent popular insurgency in the region that displayed the "most resistance to Italian rule"⁷. The area would form a formidable military outpost, providing a fence for AA. The settler community, in case of emergency, could become soldiers. In the long term, it was through these groups that the cohesion of the Shäwan Christian Amhāras would be broken and their strength weakened.

The scheme had its economic advantages too: with the settlement of demobilized soldiers, already in Ethiopia, the enormous economic cost of bringing agricultural families from Italy could be spared. It was Mussolini's belief that out of almost 500,000 Italian soldiers in Ethiopia, at least 400,000 of them were farmers⁸. It was said that these could be lured by land concessions and economic incentives. The decree of December 19, 1936 tried to do just that⁹.

The two farms at Bishoftu and Holätta were model farms owned by Emperor Haile Sellassie, producing cereals, milk and its by-products, chicken, tobacco and grapes in amounts

⁵. Segrè, op.cit., pp.102-11.

⁶. G. Ciano, Ciano Diary, 1937-1938, (London: 1938), p.103.

⁷. Polson Newman, The New Abyssinia, (London: 1938), p.103.

⁸. Sbacchi (1975), p.353.

⁹. Legge 10-6-1937, no. 1029: Conversione in legge del RD 19-12-1936, no.2467, che conferisce un diritto di preferenza nella concessione dell' terre dell'AOI a coloro che hanno ivi partecipato alle operazioni militari in qualità di combattenti, GU, II/15, 1-8-1937; GURI, 10-7-1937.

sufficient to meet most of the capital's needs¹⁰. In an interview towards the end of 1936, Lessona made it clear that he wanted to make the two stations part of a large scale plan of white settlement based on the employment of Ethiopian labour, to include the best part of Shäwa province around AA. As a result, the Empire's capital

will be surrounded from all sides by an area which will be intensively cultivated and densely populated by Italians. In fact, what we aim at in this particularly favoured zone is the formation of small Italian agricultural owners. The *Duce* has said that the Fascist Empire will be the Empire of the people and indeed, this order of the *Capo* will be applied to this form of colonization¹¹.

The two localities, even though not endowed with the agricultural potential the Fascist propaganda machinery attributed to them, offered an ideal climate and topography for European settlement. Bishoftu farm was located 50 km south-east of AA, close to the Djibouti railway, the capital's main outlet to the sea, and was flanked by the imperial highway to Moggio. Holätta, 40 km from AA, was situated on the main road running westward to Näqämté and, during Haile Sellassie's regime, was a military training centre¹². Bishoftu was 1,800-1,900 m and Holätta 2,200-2,400 m above sea level, and their soils were volcanic in origin and eminently argillaceous, with modest productive potential¹³.

¹⁰. Adrien Zervos, L'Empire d'Ethiopie, (Imprimerie de l'école professionnelle des Frères: Alessandria: 1936), pp.130-1; Poggiali, op.cit., pp.198-200.

¹¹. IOM, 20-12-1936, p.19.

¹². See Figure II.

¹³. CD IAO AOI 1338, Vincenzo Manusia, Relazione sui risultati ottenuti nel campo di orientamento agrario di Biscioftù nel 1938; Di Crollalanza, "Relazione":739.

In addition, the presence at Holätta of a mixed population of Amhara and the largely tenant Oromo was thought to be an advantage, as it would prevent concerted local opposition. The location of the two farms close to AA assured their products easy access to the largest and the most lucrative market of the Empire as well as to luxury goods, spare parts for machinery and rapid military assistance¹⁴. The favourable topography and climate compensated for poor fertility, making the two places ideal for the first experiment in demographic colonization "in a complete form, with relative speed, minimum expenditure, with minor risks and greater advantages"¹⁵.

Di Crollalanza and Mazzocchi Alemanni worked out plans of settlement that won the consensus of both the GG and the MC, and met with Mussolini's approval and encouragement. The scheme envisaged an initial settlement of 100 families in each of the two farms, on 10,000 ha each - later upgraded to 12,000 ha. These were to be provided by the GG before June 1937, the beginning of the big rains. In such a way, the agency would be in a position to make full use of the land. At the end of the big rains, towards mid-September, ONC would begin to build the first 200 colonists' houses, 100 on each farm. The plan was to settle 1,000 families on each farm within a period of four to five years in 50,000-60,000 ha.

LAND PROBLEM

On the 2 November 1936, Di Crollalanza despatched the first batch of agricultural experts. In compliance with Lessona's recommendations, they were three directors, of whom

¹⁴. MAE, *La valorizzazione*, pp.268-9; CI, 22-2-1939; Quaranta, *op.cit.*, p.VII; Newman, *op.cit.*, p.103.

¹⁵. Di Crollalanza, "La Valorizzazione":492.

one was the chief, an engineer, an administrator, four foremen, and two land surveyors¹⁶.

Lessona did not specify the area to be granted to ONC and little was known about its legal status except that it was state land. Although Di Crollalanza later claimed he had been promised 50,000 ha, Lessona agreed to grant immediately 1,000 ha at Holätta and 500 ha at Bishoftu; no details were given about where and when additional lands promised "within a short period" would be made available¹⁷.

It was generally believed that in the two areas there were ca.25,000-27,000 ha available for immediate colonization¹⁸. Bishoftu was believed to have 12,000-15,000 ha, much irrigated by the rivers of Wädächa, Bäläla or those of neighbouring lakes. Holätta was assumed to have several thousands of hectares of fairly fertile undulating plains, well-watered by two rainy seasons, the big rains between July-August, and the small rains in April-May. Considerable use could also be made of the nearby Holätta River which, despite its meagre flow, offered multiple possibilities for irrigation¹⁹.

Of the several thousand hectares promised, only a few hundred were made available at Holätta where a hurriedly selected 120 *century* of demobilized militia of Sabaudia Division were accommodated by the GG as salaried workers at £.20 a day. The ONC officialdom had reservations about the merits of the scheme, yet accepted it reluctantly and with few modifica-

16. Idem, "Relazione":738.

17. Del Boca, op. cit., III, p.202; CD IAO AOI 1936, Di Crollalanza to MAI, 13-5-1939 (henceforth CD IAO 1936, Di Crollalanza to MAI).

18. Pankhurst, "Italian settlement":148-9.

19. Di Crollalanza, "Relazione":739-40.

tions²⁰. Contrary to the agreement, the GG continued to procrastinate in the handing over of Bishoftu farm. But most frustrating of all was the fact that necessary equipment for initial work of the land was lacking and 20 tractors were lying idle for three months at Djibouti port. As a result, the expertise of the agency's staff already in place, and the militia workforce was under-utilized. The situation so heavily strained the agency's budget that at the end of the contract, it ended up paying half a million in salary alone²¹.

The situation worried Mussolini who, for his own propaganda purpose, wanted to transform the land confiscated from fugitive Emperor Haile Sellassie into model farms. Di Crollalanza left for AA to speed things up, arriving in January 1937 with the inspector of the Pontine Marshes, Nello Mazzocchi Alemanni²². Even though Di Crollalanza succeeded in setting up part of the Bishoftu farm, his views on the whole were not encouraging. As appears from his report to Mussolini, the two areas, as most parts of the Empire, far from being "the earthly paradise that the unwarranted optimism of the amateurs, the colourful descriptions of the impressionist journalism, the oversight of some pseudo-technicians and the uncritical infor-

²⁰. £.20 settlement was reached after the discontent of the settlers with the early *mobility allowance* payment of £.5 per day. Ibidem:739; Di Crollalanza, "L'avvaloramento agricolo dell'impero: Esperienze e realizzazioni dell'ONC", REAI, 27,11 (novembre 1939):1198 (henceforth: Di Crollalanza, "Avvaloramento"); CD IAO AOI 1839, Promemoria per S.E. il Capo del governo sull'attività colonizzatrice dell'ONC in AOI, 7-7-1938, p.2; Poggiali, op.cit., p.219.

²¹. CD IAO AOI 1839, p.2; the military authorities provided board. Cfr. Di Crollalanza, "Avvaloramento":1198.

²². Del Boca, op.cit., III, p.201. With him there was also Ing. Ugo Tedaro, the Head of Reclamation Service [Cfr. ATdR 24/124, "Promemoria per S.E.il Capo del Governo", gennaio 1938, p.1].

mation of a few returners portrayed or hinted"²³, were of limited productivity. They were also occupied by a considerable number of Ethiopian farmers who cultivated the land to which they had usufructuary right. The State land itself was composed of small plots and scattered amidst non-state lands. Confiscation of these lands seemed a politically sensitive issue as most of their inhabitants were Oromos, an ethnic group assumed to be largely sympathetic to the Italian conquest. As a result, the government seemed to have little choice but to respect the rights of the existing owners²⁴.

Although the Italians took over the two farms within a relatively short time of the fall of the AA regime, they claimed that most of the equipment was lying waste and in a state of neglect. Dwellings and shelters at Holätta made of *ceqa* (mud), which formed the imperial *gebbi*, royal summer residence, were taken over by Italian military authorities. At Bishoftu, farms were destroyed except the storage, millstones and a number of small rectangular huts used for animals. Even though the farms had been productive in the past, Di Crollalanza claimed no land improvement had been carried out²⁵.

Early enthusiasm for utilizing these lands was soon replaced by cautious realism and uncertainty. Di Crollalanza joined the rank of those who came to be known as "procrastinators"²⁶. Following Tassinari, he urged the colonial administration "to call a halt on several undesirable projects" and advised it to take a "cautious and piecemeal approach to

²³. Di Crollalanza, "La valorizzazione":489; "Relazione":740.

²⁴. Idem, "Relazione":740.

²⁵. Ibidem:739.

²⁶. CD IAO AOI 1839, p.3; Di Crollalanza, "Avvaloramento":713.

each developmental initiative", including demographic colonization²⁷.

TABLE VI:- LAND ALLOCATION AT HOLATTA FARM (ha)

Arable Land	2060
Pasture	943
Garden	16
Fallow	1646
Unproductive	301
Scrubs & Wood	4
Vineyard	4
Water	335
Buildings and Road	652
TOTAL	5861

Source:- MAE, "La valorizzazione", p.265; "L'ONC per l'avvaloramento agricolo dell'Etiopia", Le Colonie, 6-7-1940.

This shift in outlook also tempered Di Crollalanza's attitude towards ONC's settlement programme. Like any other demographic colonization, he wanted it to proceed "gradually and with a realistic sense of timing"²⁸. In his view, the limited agricultural knowledge of the country and the numerous practical problems, combined with the agency's own restricted technical and financial resources, provided no other option. Yet reflecting Mussolini's plan, he wanted to ensure the ONC's activities

should not serve merely as a laboratory test, but inherent in their plan such pioneer farms must supply the government, by their scale, organization and economy, not with theoretical or even scientific models, but with elements of concrete study and judgement that would serve to regulate the conduct of subsequent demographic colonization²⁹.

²⁷. CD IAO AOI 1839, p.2.

²⁸. ATdR 24/124, p.3

²⁹. CD IAO AOI 1839, p.3.

Land remained one of the chief constraining factors on ONC as the government failed to provide sufficient land as promised in the initial agreement. Of the first 12,000 ha promised before the beginning of the big rains of 1937, only 3,000 ha were made available. About three quarters of these uncultivable; part was rocky, and part marshy, needing intensive reclamation work. A year later, the whole concession amounted to 3,316 ha, 1,516 at the Holätta farm; of this, only 495 ha were granted under formal agreement. Of the remaining 1,800 ha at Bishoftu farm, 900 ha were uncultivable³⁰.

As ONC's frustration increased and its financial resources became stretched, Di Crollalanza made a strong protest to the MAI urging the handing over of the remaining land. He also made a passionate personal appeal to Mussolini for his direct intervention³¹. But as a result, only 5,000 ha were secured at Holätta and an additional 700 ha at Bishoftu, registering a total of 6,600 ha - 7,400 ha short of that promised³². Later on, 500 ha were added to the Holätta farm. In 1940, the total holding of this farm had the composition given in Table VI.

Bishoftu farm was even more modest, consisting of only 2,000 ha. By 1939, the government, out of an estimated budget of £.6,000,000 needed for the work, had allocated £.3,500,000 towards the reclamation of ca.15,000 ha. The Wädächa river was diverted for parts of its course to a new concrete bed, but only 1,800 ha, or just over a tenth of the land, was recovered. Thus, out of 24,000 ha initially to be handed over to the ONC towards the end of May 1937, by the end of 1940 ONC had secured c.7,500 ha, and this was due to Di Crollalanza's

³⁰. Ibidem, pp.3,8; Di Crollalanza to MAI, p.3; ATdR 24/124, pp.2-3; Di Crollalanza, "Relazione":747.

³¹. Di Crollalanza to MAI, p.4; ATdR 24/124, p.13.

³². CD IAO AOI 1839, p.8.

strenuous struggle with the colonial authorities and petitions to Mussolini³³.

The expansion of the farms followed a scheme developed by Mazzocchi Alemanni. In his attempt to make each farm an unbroken unit and free large areas of land needed for settlement, Alemanni had worked out an ingenious method believed to meet the needs of both settlers and Ethiopians. It was known as *accorpamento per permuta* - annexation through a system of exchange. According to the scheme, Ethiopians were offered land at the government's disposal in another part of the country in exchange for their land adjoining a tract of government land pinpointed for colonization³⁴.

It was thought this system would enable the formation of large unbroken domainial lands on which settlement could begin. Whenever possible, exchange would involve respect for the principle of fair compensation. Differences in value were to be offset by the concession of larger plots, the award of special prizes, or by carrying out work such as digging wells, drinking troughs, or assistance in the building of dwellings. Only the landlords were to be displaced; the tenants, as a rule, would remain unaffected and continue to farm within the settler's agricultural enterprise, forming an integral part of each farm.

With this programme the settlers' farms could be an organic whole. Fragmentation into small units scattered amid Ethiopian farms was thought not only uneconomic but also to have serious repercussion on the prestige of the white man³⁵. Under the scheme, the Ethiopian would assist the colonist, his

³³. CD IAO AOI 1839, p.11, ATdR 24/124, p.13.

³⁴. ATdR 24/124, p.3; Di Crollalanza, "Relazione":740.

³⁵. Di Crollalanza, "Relazione":741; Maurizio Montefoschi, "I centri agricoli di Olettà e Biscioftù: Successo di un esperimento", IC, maggio 1939 (hereafter "I centri agricoli").

new landlord who, although alien, was taken for granted as being more beneficial to the Ethiopian because of his assumed racial superiority. Ethiopian assistance involved both working on the settler's farm and looking after his livestock³⁶. As a result, the Ethiopian farmer would remain attached to the land and become a stable element in the population. The political advantages of such stability for peaceful Italian penetration into the country were obvious³⁷. Mazzocchi Alemanni explained:

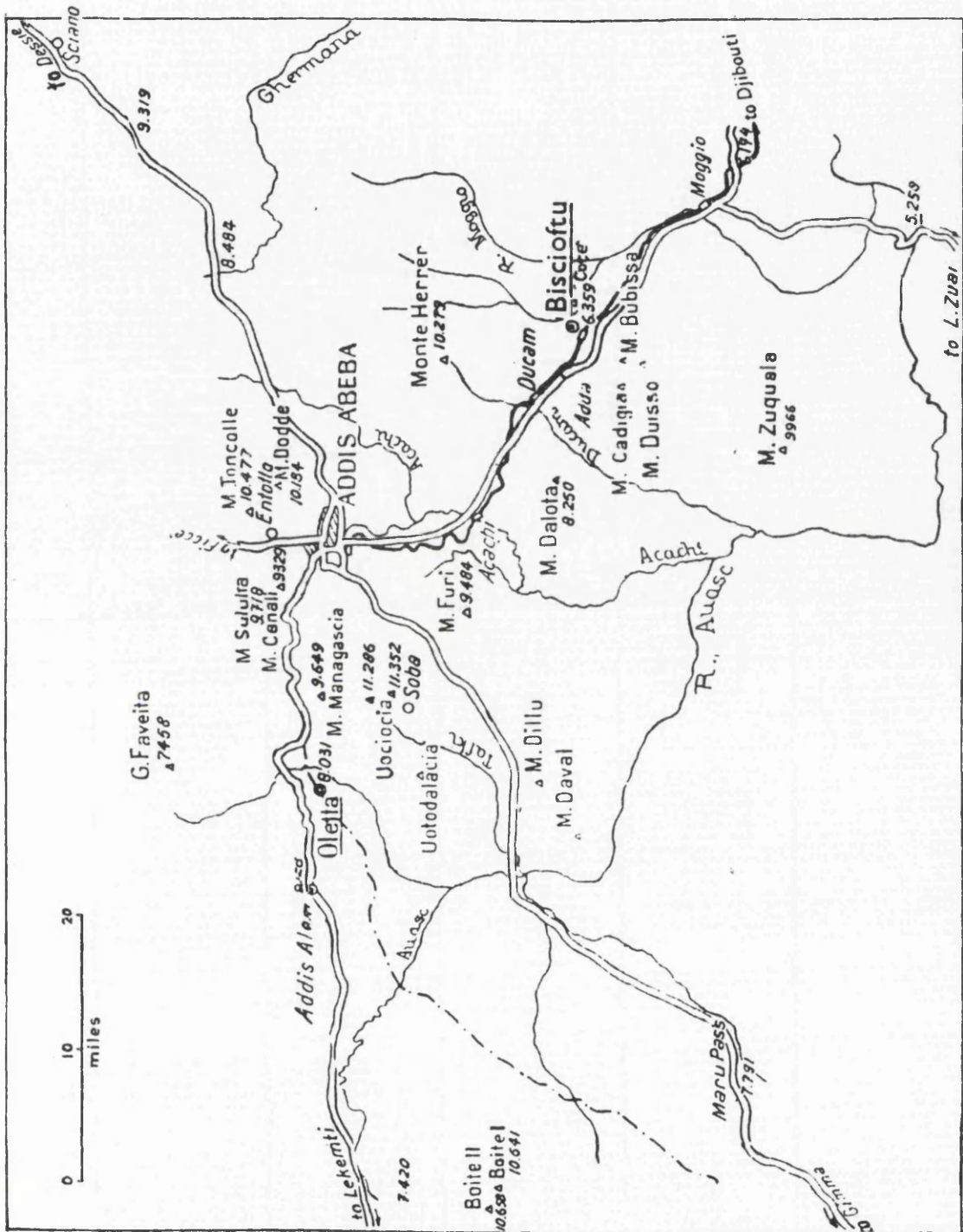
The most important element in the execution of exchanges lies in the fact *that the Ethiopian population is not removed from the area*; while the owner is transferred onto the new land given to him in exchange, the peasant, instead, remains on the original land. This responds to the already mentioned economic contingencies of associating in a number of ways, but essentially, more or less, through customary forms of share-cropping, the Ethiopian labour (farmers and shepherds) to the metropolitan farm. In fact, the political significance of such a policy, whereby, for example, 50 owners are transferred while 2,000 peasants remained in the place, are obvious, for the Ethiopian population only in this manner, i.e., by remaining in their abode and in their day to-day activities, can contribute to the metropolitan's work of developing the country and, while ensuring themselves a better life, become the most peaceful auxiliaries for the penetration of our civilizing activity³⁸.

³⁶. FO371/22021/J2512/40/1, Lord Perth to PSSFA, Rome 24-6-1938; ATdR 24/124, op.cit., pp.9-10.

³⁷. Perth to PSSFA, Rm 24-6-1938; Di Crollalanza, "Relazione":742.

³⁸. A. N. Mazzocchi, "Orientamenti nella valorizzazione demografica dell'Impero: Prime realizzazioni dell'ONC", AC, XXXII, 4 (aprile 1938):166 (hereafter Mazzocchi Alemanni, "Orientamenti").

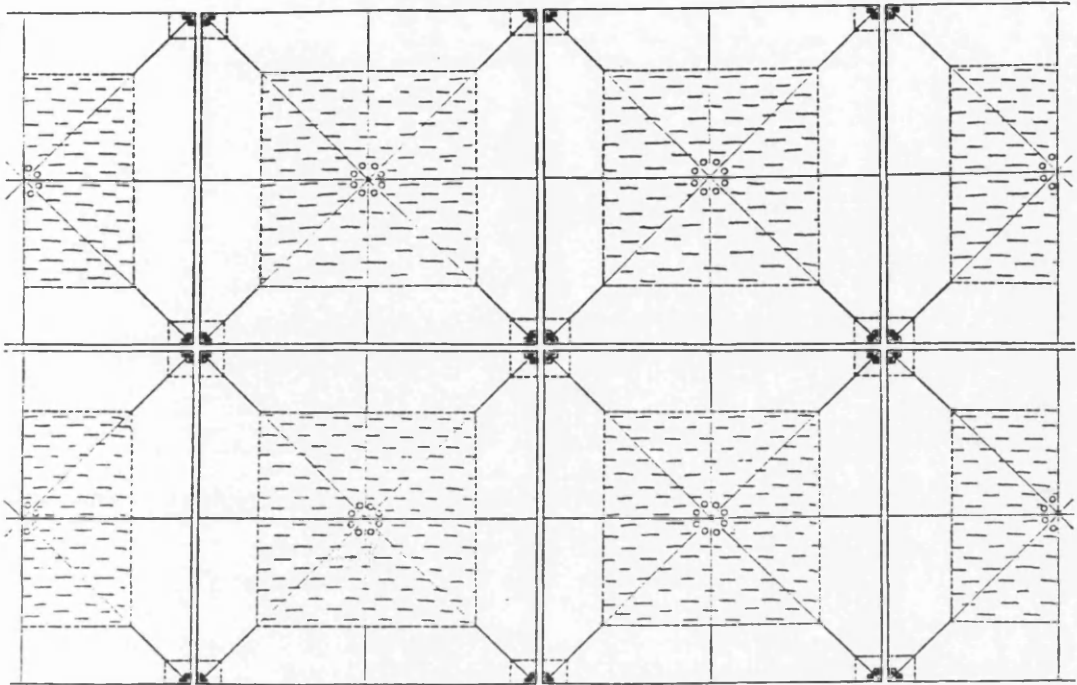
FIGURE II:- ONC SETTLEMENT CENTRES



Source:- Quaranta, op.cit., p.41.

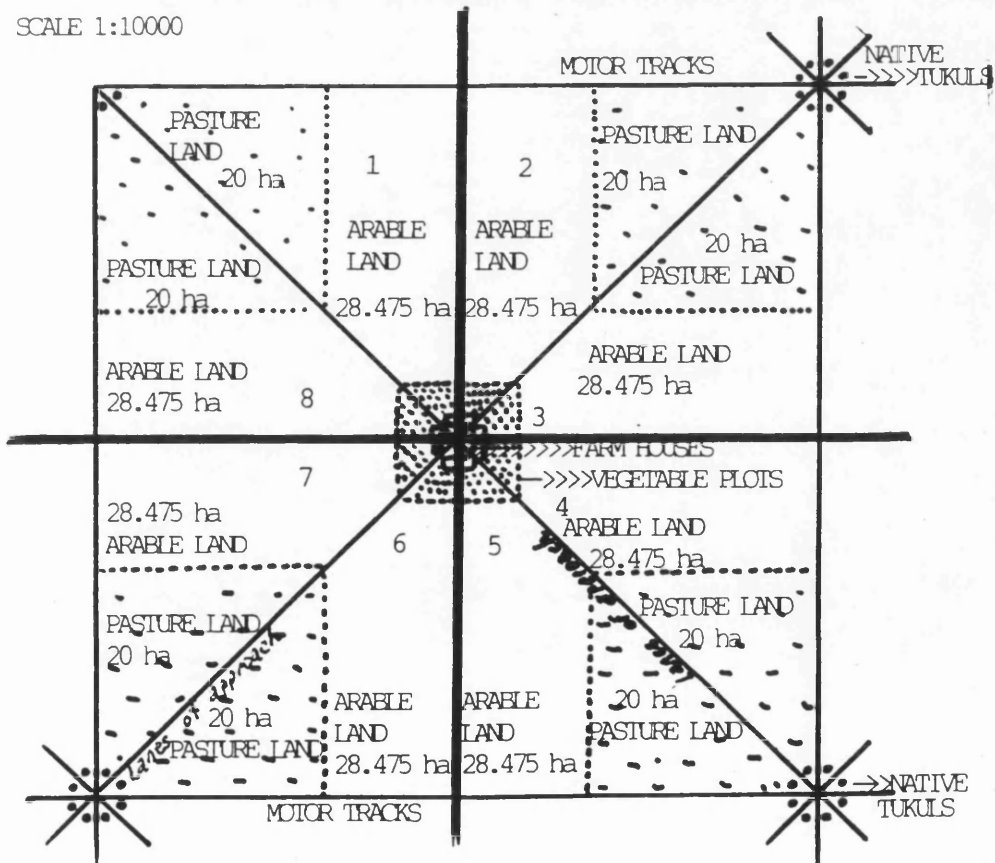
FIGURE III:- ONC SETTLEMENT SCHEME.

A. GENERAL SCHEME.



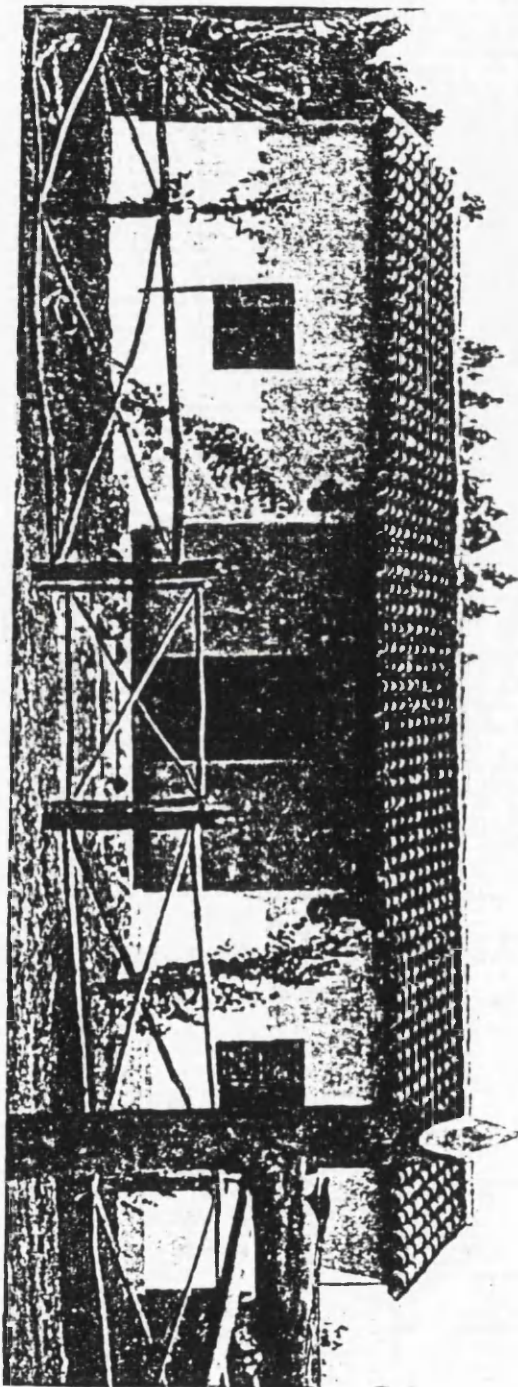
B. DETAILS OF GROUP OF EIGHT HOUSES.

SCALE 1:10000



Source:- Quaranta, op.cit., p.44; Mazzocchi Alemanni (1939), 21; MAE, La valorizzazione, p.265.

FIGURE IV.
A MODEL SETTLER HOUSE: A TYPE OF HOUSE BUILT BY OMC



CHAPTER IV

MILITARY SETTLEMENT: ONC
ONC FARMING AT BISHOFTU

FIGURE V:



As a whole the scheme looked more optimistic than rational and its implementation seemed deceptively easy. But the planners gave little or no importance to the social and political vagaries which became a source of considerable frustration. In fact, no matter how determined the technical experts were, the practical difficulties on the ground made their task a difficult one.

Exchange of land, though easy in theory and simple in formulation, proved to be an arduous task. Despite a number of enticements attached to it, several hundred Ethiopian farmers were unwilling to relinquish their land or work for new masters. Technical experts, apprehensive of the political repercussions of land alienation, proceeded in a scrupulously logical fashion. At a preliminary meeting in the presence of political authorities, the local Land Survey Committee, established in June 1938, would explain the government's guidelines to the Ethiopians. The Committee included a representative of either the agricultural department or the government office, with the district chief and the village chief. Afterwards, the Ethiopian was shown the land put at his disposal, allowing him certain choice among land available; effort was made to ensure that the new land was agriculturally equal to, if not better than, the one to be exchanged. When this was impossible, the authorities increased proportionally the size of the land. After a formal acceptance by the Ethiopian, a Committee of Elders defined the boundaries of the land. The transfer normally took place after the harvest period in order to allow the Ethiopian to prepare the new land for sowing before the big rains. The Ethiopian was allowed to take with him whatever mobile property he had, such as fences or *tukul*. The government normally paid £.80-100 towards rehousing, a *prima facie* value established by special Committee after an on-the-spot-inspecti-

on. The trees were also paid for with a proviso that they should not be removed³⁹.

The transferee was settled in areas considered to be of no relevance for future metropolitan colonization, far removed from the motorway or important communication networks. Cases where these arrangements were met with the transferee's approval were not uncommon. But he did so reportedly for fear of possible further displacement, a not unusual occurrence. Yet many others refused such arrangements, often under the pretext of the government's inability to control the area and guarantee safety. The transferee occupied the new land under identical rights, ownership or otherwise, that he had held over the previous land. With such a plan, the authorities avoided to impair future decisions by the Land Survey Commission *which* was expected to make a definite pronouncement on the legal status of the Ethiopian's claims to the land⁴⁰.

Resistance to relocation took a variety of forms. Sometimes delay tactics were used to frustrate the actual transfer; the Ethiopians either went ahead with sowing the land to be evacuated so the authorities were faced with a *fait accompli*, or protested to the central authority. There were cases when he repeatedly failed to turn up for an appointment on the date fixed and, later on with a great show of sincerity, apologised on the grounds of his inability to remember it. No practical remedy could be found except, as one technical officer noticed, "a remarkable dose of patience"⁴¹.

Other times it was the chief, who had previously accepted with seemingly great enthusiasm, who secretly connived

³⁹. Moreschini Tullio, "Il problema della disponibilita' delle terre per la colonizzazione nello Scioa", I Georgofili, VII, 7 (1941):108-9.

⁴⁰. Ibidem.

⁴¹. Ibidem:109.

with the transferee. This was often the case when the transferee went to settle in an area that fell outside the jurisdiction of the chief. But with the generous pecuniary reward upon each successful operation, many chiefs co-operated⁴².

The situation was easier when dealing with tenants, claiming no ownership or usufructuary rights. They were given the choice of either following their former landlord, provided that he consented, or accepting new arrangements made by the Italian authorities. A number of tenants followed their former landlords; nevertheless, the agency made sure that a considerable number of them remained in place. This was dictated by political considerations and the economic advantages to the settlement. There was fear that massive displacement would alienate the peasantry to the point of open warfare, and the agency's success depended on the availability of sufficient manpower⁴³. In the face of such political and economic imperatives, the general tendency was to employ most of the tenants on their original homeland in such a way that, through a home-grown *metayer* system, they were tied to the ONC's farms as share-croppers, with only one difference: the white colonist supplanted the Ethiopian landlord. So, at the boundary of each colonist's farm there were usually two or three Ethiopian families to supply him with labour.

The relationship with the settler's farm took one of three forms. Whenever surplus land was available, the Ethiopian family was provided with a plot estimated to be sufficient enough to supply him with basic foodstuffs and grazing land. As the new landowner, the colonist received one third of the produce from this land and as employer, he engaged his labour by paying him a salary at the market rate⁴⁴. In the second form,

⁴². Ibidem.

⁴³. Ibidem:109-10.

⁴⁴. CD IAO, AOI 1839, p.17.

instead of giving a certain percentage of his product, the Ethiopian agreed to supply the colonist 'X' days of labour during various periods of the year for a salary considerably inferior to the market rate. Both the dates and the salary were to be fixed in advance. Under the third form, the colonist engaged, under a contract of an annual salary, payable partly in cash and partly in kind, the labour of the Ethiopian family who was normally allowed to make use of a small piece of land, usually located at the outskirts of the farm. Under this arrangement, the Ethiopian normally worked at least 200 days a year, 8 hours a day, for a monthly salary of £.150. Of this £.100 was paid in kind assessed at the local market rate and £.50 in cash. This same arrangement applied to other members of the Ethiopian's family in case the colonist decided to employ them. The only exception was that children under 16 and women were paid half rate⁴⁵.

Of the three forms, the third was the most widespread, particularly at Holätta Farm. The plots at the disposal of the Ethiopians had a maximum size of $\frac{1}{2}$ ha and normally of modest productivity. Emphasis was laid on the condition that the Ethiopian should cultivate it using only traditional methods. Such a device, combined with the limited fertility of the Ethiopian's land, guaranteed a profit margin to the colonist. Otherwise, it was argued, the latter, new to the environment, unfamiliar with local farming and using costly modern machinery, could not survive competition from the Ethiopian. Underlying this assumption was that the Ethiopian, unlike the settler peasant, could produce cheaply and had a

⁴⁵. Ibidem; Di Crollalanza, "Avvaloramento":1206-7. As regards salary payment and labour problem see Chap. VI, pp.250-66.

life style of limited requirements⁴⁶. The Ethiopian could not own at any one time more than 4 cattle and 8 sheep and any numerical changes either by way of birth, purchase, death or sale were to be reported for approval by ONC⁴⁷.

The process of land exchange, impossibly slow and complex under the best of conditions, was further compounded by conflicts between political directives and technical imperatives of colonization. This was specially true under the rule of Duke of Aosta who resolved to introduce a sense of direction into the almost chaotic programme of colonization and respect Ethiopian land rights, threatening the entire demographic colonization scheme⁴⁸. The Duke maintained that land alienation should not be enacted "through rough and reckless measures that are always unwelcome by the Ethiopians, but through the slow work of persuasion". In his view, land could not be alienated without prior study of tenure systems and the feasibility of colonization itself⁴⁹. Accordingly, the local authorities were urged to proceed with caution and at a gradual pace⁵⁰.

The Duke of Aosta's policy reflected the recommendations of two economic experts, G.Cusmano and Roberto

⁴⁶. [Carlo Giglio], "Rapporti della colonizzazione demografica con la colonizzazione capitalistica e l'agricoltura indigena", REAI, 26, 10, (ottobre 1938):1564 (henceforth: "Rapporti").

⁴⁷. Di Crollalanza, "L'Avvaloramento":1207. Moreschini, op.cit.:110.

⁴⁸. N. Villa Santa and al., Amedeo Duca D'Aosta, (Rm: 1954), p.238.

⁴⁹. "Land grants presume ascertaining of land rights. If we do not create a public domain, we cannot weigh up either the true political implications or the relative importance of concessions; we have to give the Ethiopians the certainty that the lands acknowledged as their properties will be strictly cultivated by themselves" [Ibidem, p.212; CD IAO AOI 1936, Amedeo D'Aosta to MAI, 5-1-1938 (henceforth: Amedeo to MAI)].

⁵⁰. Sbacchi (1975), p.351.

Corvo, authorized by the Viceroy himself. In their secret report of April 1938, they made clear that the country was not suited for a massive influx of Italian peasants. In their view, at the early phase of colonization, private enterprise and capital should be encouraged as the dominant mode of development. In order to avoid the opening of the Empire's resources to land speculators, the report urged that colonization be restricted to undisputed public domain lands and be strictly controlled by the State through a central co-ordinating body. The experts equally rejected the existing system of land transactions. Their report pointed out that expropriation, even with extensive compensation, would transform the best peasantry, mostly the Oromo, into a multitude of have-nots, who would subsequently swell the resistance movement⁵¹.

The Duke of Aosta's unsympathetic stand on demographic colonization brought ONC's activities to a standstill. Land exchange and alienation at both farms, particularly at Bishoftu, stopped, with serious implications for work in progress⁵². Only after Mussolini's intervention, ONC was allowed to operate in other areas⁵³. But the practical steps were taken only in February 1940 when ONC's activities were extended to Guani, in Dänkäl; Wänqi, in the Upper Awash River basin, and Märäquo, in Guraghé region⁵⁴. The three areas were selected on the basis that they possessed most of the prerequisites for demographic colonization in terms of climate, communication network and

51. ATdR 24/128, Cusmano G. & Roberto Corvo, AA, 1-4-1938, pp.8-9.

52. CD IAO AOI 1839, p.7; Villa and al., op.cit., p.232. According to Scaglione the Duke of Aosta was reluctant to give land to any agency, including ONC until the economic outcome of each developmental strategies were clear.

53. CD IAO AOI 1936, Sottosegretario di Stato Terruzzi to GGAOI, Rm 26-4-1938.

54. Villa and al., op.cit., p.232; Quaranta, op.cit., p.48.

topography, and were reported to have extensive "promising lands"⁵⁵. But the decision came too late, and the plan remained on the drawing board. Only at Wänqi, ONC had succeeded to sow 2,300 ha out of 7,500 ha obtained towards the end of 1938.

As the exchange of land scheme proved unworkable, ONC, like most of Italian enterprises, capitalist as well as demographic, made ample use of *metayer* system to farm lands that their Ethiopian claimants were unable to cultivate. These lands fell under what came to be known as *zones of influence* which entitled the Italian titular of the adjoining land to cultivate them jointly with Ethiopian claimants⁵⁶.

Like the exchange system, the objective of *zone of influence* was to concentrate the best land in the hands of Italian settler at the expense of Ethiopian landowner and guarantee the settler cheap Ethiopian labour. Theoretically, all colonial policies were intended to foster these goals, and the Italians were not an exception. But they differed in their pride, in their mission to "civilize" the Ethiopians and their persistent claims for their system's unique concern for humanitarian values. But owing to discontent caused by the abuse of the zone of influence by settlers, the system was suppressed. Many Ethiopians questioned the Italians' true intentions and viewed the scheme as a stratagem for robbing them of their land under the pretext of cultivating it temporarily. Some were reluctant even to consider the deal. Even those who had initially accepted had second thoughts. Some refused to sow and others, instead of sowing, ate the seed. In other instances, the chiefs in charge of seed distribution failed to deliver. In this chief Mammo Tädächa of Bishoftu excelled. The cooperation

⁵⁵. Quaranta, *op.cit.*, p.48

⁵⁶. CD IAO AOI 1930, Graziani to DSACP and al., "Incremento culture alimentari", AA, 11-5-1937; Promemoria Per il Vice Re, n.d.; AOI 1837, P. Bono, "Memoranda sulla situazione degli agricoltori italiani in Etiopia", 19-2-1941.

that was gained rested on bribery and other forms of allure-ment⁵⁷.

FARM ORGANIZATION AND SETTLEMENT PROGRAMMES

ONC's settlement programme aimed to avoid the fragmentation and dispersion of the farms, secure the conditions of safety, make little demands on technical organization, and safeguard racial prestige⁵⁸. Scattered homesteads as at Pontine Marshes were rejected as those in a country "so new and so far from the motherland" were considered a safety hazard. Concentrated villages were also discarded as this would necessitate a relatively long journey to and from the farm⁵⁹. Instead homesteads of as many as eight adjoining holdings were grouped together as spokes of a wheel, triangular in shape⁶⁰. Near the apex of each eight triangles were placed the individual farmhouses. This arrangement, reminiscent of the Roman *agri vectigales*⁶¹, enabled the sharing of a bakery and wells located at the centre and reconciled economy and security: within a radius of a couple of hundred yards lived about forty, armed, able-bodied farmers, large enough to offer mutual assistance, and protection⁶². The houses, situated inside their plots, were grouped around a vast central courtyard, easily transformable

⁵⁷. Sbacchi, op.cit., p.368.

⁵⁸. "I centri agricoli".

⁵⁹. Perth to PSSFA, Rm 24-6-1938; ATdR 24/124, p.10; Di Crollalanza, "Avvaloramento":1198; MAE, La valorizzazione, pp.263-4.

⁶⁰. Cfr. Figure III.

⁶¹. FO371, Perth; Quaranta, op.cit., p.44; MAE, La valorizzazione, p.264; Di Crollalanza, "Relazione":743.

⁶². Di Crollalanza, "Avvaloramento":1200.

into a fort in case of emergency⁶³. This system also removed the need to build an extensive inter-farm communication network⁶⁴.

Each farm measured 50-60 ha, an area larger than the average holding in Italy. A number of reasons determined this size: whereas in Italy cultivation was intensive in character, it was expected that, initially, a more extensive system would show the quickest returns in Africa. In Italy the peasant, helped by members of his family, normally did all the work on his holding; in Ethiopia, the employment of Ethiopian labour would enable a larger area to be farmed. Furthermore, the colonist had to save sufficient money to transfer the land into his ownership. Other considerations included: the increase of the settler's own family, which, in the course of time, would demand the splitting of the farm between the heirs of original settlers; limited productivity of the land; and the tendency of tropical land to rapidly decline in fertility. Thus, ample precautions were taken for future exigencies⁶⁵.

Each farm was divided into three parts⁶⁶: in the immediate vicinity of each farm house a small patch was reserved for vegetables and fruits intended for the settler's daily consumption; here he could plant fruit trees and vines. At the periphery of the farm there were c.20 ha destined for forages and cattle grazing. The arable land, amounting to 35-40 ha was located in the centre, where diverse crops could be cultivated with the assistance of Ethiopian labour. The Ethiopians' residences were situated on the outskirts of the farm, at 1½-2 km from the house of the settler - distant enough to keep the

⁶³. MAE, *La valorizzazione*, pp.263-4.

⁶⁴. Di Crollalanza, "Relazione":741-2.

⁶⁵. "I centri agricoli"; MAE, *La valorizzazione*, p.264.

⁶⁶. See Figure III, B.

two races apart, yet close enough to control the Ethiopian and promote economic interaction⁶⁷.

The farmhouse itself was planned and built in such a way as to promote the prestige and decorum of the white man in Africa. Even though most of the hitherto discussed schemes were within the framework laid down by the Agricultural Council, in its housing programme ONC, like some of the other agencies, followed slightly different criteria. The Agricultural Council had debated whether to build temporary or permanent dwellings. Its conclusions were mixed. On the one hand, it emphasized the advantages of low-cost housing in that it saved resources which could be allocated to transplanting a large number of unemployed families. But it equally made clear that if their quality were inferior to that which the peasants had at home, they might fail in luring them to Ethiopia. On the other hand, it argued that the "the elevated cost of rural constructions could, by itself alone, be seriously detrimental to demographic colonization, compromising from the start its happy development".

The Agricultural Council left it to the policy-makers whether to opt for a few families with comfortable and expensive houses or the maximum possible number of peasants in more modest dwellings. Yet its own views were quite clear: it recommended that "complete, perfect solutions should be avoided and transitory measures adopted"⁶⁸. ONC followed the middle ground: it built permanent houses capable of extension. The underlying assumption was that economy houses decreased total

⁶⁷. Quaranta, op.cit., p.44; Di Crollanza, "Relazione":743.

⁶⁸. Consulta, "L'Avvaloramento":1565; CD IAO AOI 1776, Relazione, p.14. For the actual debate see Seduta, Rm 5-5-1937, pp.1-2.

cost of reclamation, thus enabling the peasant to pay off his debts and save for extension⁶⁹.

Concern for economy dictated maximum use of local materials, the rational utilization of space, and the provision of basic furniture. Yet in line with the Agricultural Council's advice, racial prestige demanded that the dwellings excelled the Ethiopians' homes in comfort, design and architectural beauty. The settler's house was a bungalow 13m long and 3.40m high. At Holätta, where basalt was abundant, stone was used; at Bishoftu, bricks and mud. It had a plain tiled roof of Italian design so that the farmer would feel at home. One colonial writer claimed that the sight of each roof gave "the visitor an impression of a bit of Italy transported as if by magic to this distant part of the world". The interior consisted of two bedrooms

equipped with a few simple pieces of furniture, and of a large, comfortable lounge-kitchen in the centre. Access is gained through a kind of veranda formed by an overhanging roof and a niche sunk into the façade, which is coated with white rough-cast.. A wooden gate and a fence of pleasing appearance accentuate the rustic note⁷⁰.

A foreign journalist admiringly but mistakenly described it "as a solid-stone built bungalow" with "large windows looking out on a really beautiful countryside with mountains and lakes like those in the Alps"⁷¹.

Each of the houses was intended to accommodate a family of up to six and to offer all the comfort and the simple

⁶⁹. [Carlo Giglio], "Di alcuni problemi della colonizzazione demografica", REAI, 26, 12 (dicembre 1938):1875-6 (hereafter "Di alcuni problemi"; Di Crollanza, "Avvalramento":1200-1.

⁷⁰. Quaranta, op.cit., p.47.

⁷¹. Diel, op.cit., p.184.

amenities to which the Italian peasants were accustomed⁷². The family shared, with the rest of the farm members: water from wells, normally 30-60m deep, pumped up by a motor; a grain mill; three or four communal ovens, and a store-house⁷³. All the houses were provided with a *zäriba*, a shelter built to local design, to keep farm animals, agricultural tools and machinery. The cost of each house at Bishoftu was £.38,000 and the estimate for Holätta was £.31,000-£.35,000 or £.10,000 a room. The agency personnel's houses had an additional three rooms and an extra toilet with water being supplied from a tank inside the house itself. There were also some differences in finishing touches and use of materials on the understanding that, because of their managerial status, they had greater needs than those of the average settler. It was meant to provide them with the minimum comfort that their position entailed and offset the sacrifices imposed upon them as a result of their residence in a still largely unknown land. The total cost of each of these houses was £.109,000 at Holätta, and £.115,000 at the Bishoftu farm⁷⁴.

According to the plan, groups of farms were to be joined together into *aziende*, or co-operatives, built with a State budget, where institutions that catered for the larger cultural and social needs of the farm were set up. These rural centres, or *villaggio nazionale*, were to include facilities, such as shops, the agency's administrative headquarters,

⁷². "Di alcuni problemi":47; Quaranta, op.cit., p.47.

⁷³. Pankhurst, "Italian settlement":149; Quaranta, op.cit., p.43.

⁷⁴. Di Crollalanza, "Relazione":747-8,750-2,757-9; "Di alcuni problemi":1876.

government offices, Fascist headquarters, church, school, cinema, clinic, post-office and store-house⁷⁵.

Settlement programme was a joint undertaking between the state, ONC and the colonists and its purpose was to bring the farms to the economic autarky so that the colonist's plot could be productive in the shortest possible time. The ONC was to provide expertise and financial help so the settler could, to use ONC's own much cherished phrase, "pass into the responsibility and dignity of a small landowner"⁷⁶. The details of such a transition were regulated by a contract between the State, the agency and the settler, as well as the Ethiopian peasants.

Under the contract, the State provided the land tax free, developed the basic infrastructures of communication network, public amenities and rudimentary social services. It was also the State's duty to select the prospective settlers in co-operation with the ONC and look after the transportation of families⁷⁷.

ONC drew up the development plans and implemented them; reclaimed the land and allotted it to the families; built houses, and provided agricultural implements, seeds, livestock, as well as direction and supervision, technical advice and the necessary capital; catered for material and moral needs of the colonists and recruited Ethiopian labour⁷⁸. ONC planned to regain all or a substantial part of its investment between 5-7 years. It was hoped that, thanks to the amount of land in his possession, the agency's support and the unfailing assistance

⁷⁵. Idem, "Relazione":745,749; "Avvaloramento":57; "I centri agricoli"; Quaranta, op.cit., p.43; Berretta, op.cit., pp.258-9.

⁷⁶. "I centri agricoli"; CD IAO AOI 1839, pp.14-5.

⁷⁷. Di Crollalanza, "Relazione":745; CD IAO AOI 1839, p.11.

⁷⁸. Di Crollalanza, "Relazione":749; "Avvaloramento":1205-6; Quaranta, op.cit., p.42.

of the Ethiopian with his cheap and experienced labour, the settler would repay his debts within the targeted period⁷⁹.

The contracts that regulated the relationship of the colonist and the agency, as approved by the government authorities, consisted of four parts:

1. An initial transformation period in which the agency, assisted by the settler, did the preliminary work to develop the farm. During this year-long period, the agency would clear, drain and plough the land, enclose the fields, provide the plots with communication networks and, immediately before the rains, begin sowing operations. Contrary to other demographic colonization agencies, ONC, frustrated with the early settlers who, as we have seen, were waged, had a programme to give the farmer his estate upon his arrival, thus elevating him from the very start to the status of a colonizer rather than keeping him as a share-cropper. This, of course, was a device to attach the prospective settler to his farm, a fact that Di Crollalanza himself openly acknowledged⁸⁰.

2. A secondary phase in which the farm would begin to produce a yield. At this stage, the settler, provided with the necessary equipment and an adequate loan, would take over the farm and Ethiopian labour to help him reap the first harvest while the building work of his house was underway; his status would become that of manager and director of his farm, although under the direct control and with the assistance of the agency which fixed the cultivation methods, norms of husbandry and care of animals, and marketed surplus products. The change in

⁷⁹. CD IAO AOI 1839, p.14; Di Crollalanza, "Relazione":749. ONC considered a period of between six and seven years as sufficient to transform a peasant into a landowner [Cfr. "Avvaloramento":1205-6; Quaranta, op.cit., p.42].

⁸⁰. CD IAO AOI 1936, ONC Azienda AO: Disciplinary provvisorio per i rapporti fra l'O.N.C. ed i colonizzatori nazionali, AA 10-6-1938, p.1 (henceforth: "Disciplinary"); 1839, p.14; Di Crollalanza, "Relazione":745; "Avvaloramento":1205.

the settler's social status was not purely nominal; it distinguished his position from that of the Ethiopian, whose economic life, as an employee of the former, would remain tightly dependent upon that of the farm-owner.

3. With his house built and harvest time at an end, the settler would be joined by his family.

4. At the advanced stage, the farm's production would be regularized, while the family would live on the provision that it had secured from the preceding year's harvest.

The colonist would now enter the phase of redemption whereby, now working a productive farm, he made long term arrangements with the ONC for a gradual repayment of the total cost of his farm⁸¹. In the meantime, he continued to benefit from the agency's technical and financial assistance. ONC registered his payments as credits in the account book, or *libretto colonico*. The booklet also included a cumulative annual balance which would establish the moment when he could become an independent landowner, and a list of his livestock⁸².

PROBLEM OF SELECTION

The shortage of prospective settlers and the low quality of those remaining in the Empire was disturbing. As appears from a British consular report, among those who saw the country few were keen to remain. Out of the fifty Italian officers, prisoners and others interviewed, only one was reported to have wished to settle. Of another fifty, not even one wished

⁸¹. Disciplinare, pp.1,3; CD IAO AOI 1839, p.15; Di Crollalanza, "Relazione":749; "Avvaloramento":1205-6.

⁸². Disciplinare, p.3; CD IAO AOI 1839, p.15; Di Crollalanza, "Avvaloramento":1206; Mazzocchi, "Orientamenti":24-5.

to stay. The same report suggested that a similar attitude had been reported by other foreigners⁸³.

Yet there was no dearth of applications, particularly in the early years. At the end of 1936, out of 500,000 soldiers claimed to be present in Ethiopia, 13,881 were reported to have decided to remain in the Empire. In 1937, a further 1,525 added their names. Of these only a few were judged suitable and accepted⁸⁴.

But the selection of the colonists proved arduous. In line with the Agricultural Council's recommendation, reflecting Fascist political thinking, families rather than individuals were to be recruited to ensure stability. A good war record was important, particularly in the Abyssinian Campaign. Other factors considered were the size, composition and health of the family; their attitude and morality, especially towards the Ethiopians whom they were going to 'civilize'; and their occupational background and experience⁸⁵. Yet political disloyalty, to the same degree as mischievous behaviour towards the Ethiopians, constituted a sufficient ground for the dismissal of a colonist and, ultimately, the dissolution of the contract. The same effect had circumstances that affected the working efficiency of the colonist's family and compromised the prospects of land redemption; indiscipline towards the ONC's staff, quarrelsome and immoral behaviour as well as criminal conviction⁸⁶.

ONC's task was not only to transform the recruits into small independent landowners but also instill in them

⁸³. FO371/20167/J56/45/1, Gibbs to PSSFA, AA 21-6-1936.

⁸⁴. Sbacchi, *op.cit.*, p.354.

⁸⁵. CD IAO 1775, Seduta, 5-6-1937, p.3; *ibidem*, Relazione, p.12; Disciplinare, p.2; Consulta, "L'Avvaloramento":1564; Di Crollalanza, "Relazione":744; "Avvaloramento":1205.

⁸⁶. Disciplinare, p.5; Di Crollalanza, "Avvaloramento":1206.

certain mental habits such as self-discipline, thrift and independence, that were essential for the success of the social and political goals of colonization. Di Crollalanza stated:

In allotment of farms absolute priority will be given to families of colonists who have been fighters in East Africa and, among them, to those deserving it and having proper skills, a large family, enterprising spirit, and will-power to win, with labour and adaptation to initial hardships, the ownership of land that will be granted to them, only in so far they prove themselves to be worthy of it⁸⁷.

Despite the ONC's claim to rigorous selection procedures, in reality most of its recruits did not live up to expectations. From the start of its operation up to the end of 1940, ONC recruited a total of 300 colonists. Of these only 93 stayed⁸⁸. Of 120-150 (figures vary) initial recruits, only 60 persevered until the end. ONC eschewed responsibility for such a modest performance blaming the military authorities of the time for their poor method of selection. Yet of another c.150 settlers, whom ONC claimed to have recruited "with special care", less than half remained.

Reports suggest that many recruits claimed to be farmers to escape military service and showed little or no interest in continuing agricultural pursuits once settled, attempting to enter the more rewarding field of commerce⁸⁹. Cases of expulsion for dishonest behaviour towards Ethiopians as well as fraud were not rare, and some settlers were con-

⁸⁷. Di Crollalanza, "La Valorizzazione":494.

⁸⁸. CD IAO AOI 1839, p.14; Di Crollalanza, "Relazione":739,744; "Avvaloramento":1198; Villa and al., op.cit., p.230.

⁸⁹. Villa and al., ibidem.

tinuously in and out of the prison-cell⁹⁰. After a probationary period of about four months, ONC expelled those unable to transform themselves into colonizers. These included individuals lacking strong commitment, technical skill, and above all, the tendency to save money and passion for field work⁹¹.

Di Crollalanza also sadly realized that a substantial number of early recruits were attracted by the salary and did not intend to become life-long farmers. His repeated attack on the salary system seems to illustrate how strong the wage mentality was among the settlers. Echoing the dominant thinking of most Italian colonial advocates, Di Crollalanza maintained that for Italy, poor of capital but rich of manpower, the salary system was costly. Its subsequent abolition caused many to leave⁹².

ONC's recruitment method and the slow pace of its work excluded many ex-soldiers and members of the workers militia, *centurie lavoratori*. This situation forced the government to devise other ways to accommodate the growing number of applicants of this group⁹³.

⁹⁰. Sbacchi, op.cit., p.422. Sbacchi provides extensive archival reference to which the present author was denied access.

⁹¹. CD IAO AOI 1839, p.14; Villa and al., op.cit., p.230; Di Crollalanza, "Relazione":744.

⁹². CD IAO AOI 1839, p.14; Di Crollalanza, "Relazione":744; Mazzocchi Alemanni, "Orientamenti":24.

⁹³. One of such initiatives was the creation of *La Prima Centuria Agricola di Precolonizzazione* in Gudär and Mäkanisa, near AA, aimed at settling destitute peasant militia. The initiative, manned by the Agricultural Offices which provided it with inputs and management, gave mixed results. The plan was to develop, by the end of 1940, 43 farms [12-14 ha each] in 650 ha at Mäkanisa and 149 [10 ha each] in 1,800 ha at Gudär. Eventually, 24 farms were developed at Mäkanisa and 45 at Gudär, at an average cost of £.26,000 per farm [Cfr. CI, 10-10-1939; GP, 19-6-1939; Villa and al., op.cit., pp.233-5.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND LIMITATIONS

ONC claimed that the delay in land allocation had serious repercussions on the rest of its activities, most importantly on cultivation and housing programmes. However, since the early days, ONC had cultivated those lands it did possess. Yet the task proved difficult because of ONC's skill shortage, scarce agricultural machinery and the relatively high cost of Ethiopian labour.

Both Holätta and Bishoftu farms were dominantly vertisol and its management remained one of ONC's key problems. Vertisol is rich of organic matters and has high water-holding capacity. Owing to the residual moisture, vegetation was luxuriant even during harsh summer seasons, giving the impression even to a sophisticated observer of extremely fertile soil. Such appearances are deceptive, for black soil to be productive requires advanced managerial skills. In winter it has the disadvantage of water-logging which suffocates crop growth and development. In summer it not only shrinks but also cracks which leads to root pruning that eventually reduces the yield. Modern technology had overcome these shortcomings by skilful soil management techniques such as proper drainage using cumber-beds, Broad-Bed Furrows (BBF) and fertilizer application. Over the centuries the Ethiopian farmers had intuitively adjusted sowing dates to rainfall patterns. The commonly used method was late sowing and drainage. In the absence of comprehensive scientific studies of the local ecosystem to guide ONC's work, the Ethiopians' farming methods could have been an alternative option. But having scornfully dismissed them as 'primitive', ONC initially followed a procedure of trial and error which in most cases proved disastrous⁹⁴.

⁹⁴. CD IAO AOI 1329, A. Ciccarone, Relazione sulla missione di Ambo; 1337, Vasco Gatti, Attività del campo di orientamento di Olettà nel 1937, marzo 1938; 1338, Benigno Fagotti, ONC azienda agraria di Biscioftù, Relazione dell'anno agrario 1937.

However, constant crop failure made late sowing an inevitable option. But, because of poor forecasting large areas had to be farmed within a short period, forcing ONC to rely on drainage ditch and minimum tillage just to cover the seeds and plough in the grass. As water-logged soil made mechanical farming impractical, time consuming and costly, this method too was abandoned⁹⁵.

The war-like situation withheld the release of tractors originally promised to ONC by the army. Broken-down tractors were reportedly abundant, but lack of spare parts made their repair difficult. The Italian tractors were not strong enough for tropical agriculture and ploughing virgin land⁹⁶.

Lack of foreign currency made purchase of foreign tractors unaffordable. Although by 1939 ONC had 4 Italian tractors of modest capacity, 40 Hanomag and 5 Caterpillar,

Ethiopian elders narrate an interesting case related to ONC's farm at Bishoftu. When the first crop was sown during the big rains in July the harvest totally failed. Then ONC was forced to consult local notables. *Qäñäzmach* Zärräfu, a chief renown for his wit and jokes, was approached. Zärräfu was reluctant to air his view claiming that he was in no position to give any adequate advice to them as their knowledge far exceeds his own. But when ONC insisted, he told them that in the future they should sow not in July but in June, i.e. when the big rains begin. Subsequently over 1,000 Ethiopians were requisitioned to farm parts of the land that was unsuitable for tractor use by their own oxen while the Italians ploughed the outer stretches by tractors. The crop failed to grow and when the Italians reproached him for his incorrect information, *Qäñäzmach* Zärräfu's answer was swift: "You should have known it better. Is it on my advice that you came all the way from Italy and occupied Ethiopia? Why do you use me as an excuse for the crop failure? If God has allowed too much rain what can I do about it? The best course to take would be to try it again next time but changing the date" [Information gained talking to one elder of the area].

⁹⁵. Other settler farms also were confronted with similar problems. Cfr. CD IAO 1921, Fuzzi, Relazione del Presidente, 11-1-1940, pp.8-10.

⁹⁶. CD IAO AOI 1800, Promemoria Per il Prof. Maugini; Carburanti agricoli in A.O.I, n.d. [31-12-1939], pp.2-3.

because of scarcity of fuel and shortage of spare parts, they were not used efficiently⁹⁷. In 1938 the price for agricultural fuel in Italy was £.0,81 per kg, while in Ethiopia it was £.2,77 per kg. ONC threatened to increase the price of foodstuffs unless the government took immediate action to lower fuel prices. Di Crollalanza himself brought to the attention of Mussolini the implications of such action to his policy of autarky and requested the *Duce's* urgent intervention⁹⁸. In July 1938 a formula acceptable to both the farmers and the oil companies was sanctioned by the government⁹⁹. Yet a stringent budget led ONC to use gas and coal instead of diesel fuel. This had its drawbacks, as only a few engines could be converted. ONC's attempts at converting its German Hanomag tractors at Holätta Farm were only successful with 6 out of 24. The high altitude also made the tractors function at half capacity¹⁰⁰.

Oxen seemed to offer better prospects and ONC made use of ox-power whenever possible. But since the Italian occupation the price of oxen had risen seven-fold and the Ethiopians were reluctant to sell their precious cattle¹⁰¹. However, ox-power, though advisable for normal ploughing of already broken land, was no substitute for tractors when farming virgin land and demanded a large supply of Ethiopian labour. As Di Crollalanza soon found out, the Ethiopian work--

⁹⁷. Ibidem, pp.1-3.

⁹⁸. CD IAO AOI 1839, p.19.

⁹⁹. DGG 22-8-1938, no.1026: Approvazione per la esecuzione del DGG 23-7-1938, no.828, relativo ai prezzi dei carburanti agricoli, GU, III, 17 [Supl.], 6-9-1938, pp.609-13.

¹⁰⁰. Sbacchi, op.cit., pp.375-6.

¹⁰¹. CD IAO AOI 1839, p.18; Di Crollalanza, "Avvaloramento":1203.

force did not prove either sufficiently cheap nor abundant, particularly at peak periods¹⁰².

Cultivation proved hard, particularly at Bishoftu Farm. Except for 200 ha ploughed in earlier years, Bishoftu land was covered with acacia stumps cut by local people without removing the roots. An abundance of couch-grass often demanded two or three ploughings. With only a short time left before the rains, the work was carried out late into the night, using electric light. In this way, 2,700 ha were ploughed and 2,050 ha of these were harrowed; 1,179 ha were sown, 947 ha by the settlers and 237 ha by Ethiopians on the *metayer* system. Sowing did not start until late July and, following the failure of seeds to arrive from Kenya and Italy, using local grains. As shown in Table VII emphasis was on diversification of crops. Implicit in such a strategy was as much to produce locally for domestic consumption as to minimize risk and gain useful experience¹⁰³.

Mechanical threshing took place in early December 1937 amid growing jubilation and publicity, with a sample being despatched to the *Duce*. In the following years the pattern of cultivation did not change, except for the introduction of experimental crops and the diminishing size of the area under cultivation. From 1938 low-yielding Ethiopian wheat was replaced with fast-growing and presumed rust-resistant Italian wheat, *mentana* and *quaderna*; and in 1939, experiments with oilseeds and castor oil were underway¹⁰⁴. Yet despite its alleged superior qualities, Italian wheat's results were poor. Soon it was realized that compared with Ethiopian wheat, it was vulnerable

¹⁰². CD IAO 1839, p.8; Di Crollalanza, "Relazione":743; "Avvaloramento":1199,1207.

¹⁰³. ATdR 24/124, p.8; CD IAO AOI 1338, (Manusio); Mazzocchi Alemanni, "Orientamenti":22; "Di alcuni problemi":1877; Di Crollalanza, "Relazione":750; "Avvaloramento":1202.

¹⁰⁴. Pankhurst, op.cit., p.149; Sbacchi, op.cit., p.373.

to *puccinia graminis*, locally known as *wäg* - a microscopic parasite which lived and fed on the plant tissue, arresting the plant's growth and reducing the crop's productive potential. *Wag* brought disastrous damages in 1938-1940. In 1940 the pathogene's damage to the Italian agricultural enterprise was so massive that the year was declared the "year of wheat rust"¹⁰⁵.

Despite encouraging reports of crop yields of 30.70 ql per ha in 1937, from Di Crollalanza's secret notes it appears the crop was below expectations. Depending on the area, the average did not exceed more than 4 and 5 ql. per ha. Di Crollalanza put the blame on the delay in sowing and the low quality of the grain used, which was provided by the military authorities¹⁰⁶. In 1938, 2,500 ha were reclaimed, 1,935 ha ploughed and only 450 ha sown with an average crop yield of 4 ql per ha. The situation slightly improved in 1939, ostensibly with extensive use of Kenyan Wheat, which in a few cases proved to be both a high yield and rust-resistant crop. Where successful, the average yield almost doubled rising to 7 ql per ha¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁵. CD IAO 606, Antonio Ciccarone, La coltivazione del frumento nell'AOI ed il problema delle ruggini, 1941; AOI 1329, Idem, Relazione sulla missione nel territorio di Ambo; 1221, E. Castellani, Ruggine e granicoltura nell'Africa tropicale montana, 8-3-1942.

¹⁰⁶. CD IAO AOI 1337 (Fagotti); 1338, Campo sperimentale di Biscioftù presso ONC 1937-38; 1839, p.5;

¹⁰⁷. CD IAO Sc 1801, pp.15-6. *Kenyan Wheat* was a home-grown variety known as *Kenya NB1 and 500*. Trial in 1938 at 625 ha of land gave a mixed result with average yield of 13,04 ql. per ha, with a maximum of 25,20 ql per ha and a minimum of 5,7 ql per ha. The difference in yield depended on a number of factors, among them the period of sowing, the altitude, and condition of the land. But the experiment was too limited to warrant it to be the best variety. Despite this fact, ONC, tempted by its resistance to rust, decided to grow exclusively this variety at its Holätta farm in 1940. On the other hand, a motley variety of indigenous wheat was tried in very small plots. Some of them gave much higher results than the *Kenya variety*. In case of S.463 Ethiopia variety the highest yield was 42 ql per ha and 32 ql per

However, as the rising transport costs had made modern fertilizers uneconomical, improved yield was not expected for a long time. As a result, ONC was forced to use manure instead. By the end of 1939, it had about 2,000 livestock, mainly ox and a few sheep, yet the manure they provided was far from adequate to meet the agency's needs¹⁰⁸.

By 1939, reclamation work was underway diverting part of the Wädächa river to a new bed made of reinforced concrete. The government had allocated £.6,000,000. But the work had only a limited success as, by 1940, only some 1,800 ha, or just over a tenth of the 15,000 ha available, were recovered, with a cost amounting to £.3,500,000 approximately. In 1939, the pattern of cultivation was as previous years, except for the additional production of oil-seeds and experiments in castor oil¹⁰⁹.

Things proceeded relatively smoothly at Holätta farm, as the topography of the land simplified draining operations, while the presence of the Holätta river eased irrigation. As a result, Holätta farm, was more advanced, although by no means extensive¹¹⁰. In 1939, for example, out of 5,400 ha provided by the colonial administration, some 2,157 ha were sown - over 1,105 ha by Italian settlers, using 24 tractors, and 1,052 ha by Ethiopians operating on the *metayer* basis. Each settler was assisted by two Ethiopian families, and the pattern of cultivation in principle was identical to that at Bishoftu.

ha for S106 Ib.454. And yet efforts made towards the promotion of these crops were modest.

¹⁰⁸. Di Crollalanza, "L'Avvaloramento":1202,1204; According to Berretta there were 1,400 oxen and 400 sheep [Berretta, op.cit., p.259].

¹⁰⁹. ATdR 24/124, p.5; MAE, La valorizzazione, p.269; Pankhurst, "Italian settlement":149.

¹¹⁰. See Tables VI and VII.

TABLE VII:- TYPE OF CROPS SOWN AT ONC'S FARMS

CROP	BISHOFTU FARM [1937]		HOLÄTTA FARM [1939]	
	AREAS SOWN (Ha) DIRECT	METAYER	AREAS SOWN DIRECT	METAYER
WHEAT	642	76	549a	112b
CHICKPEAS	182	66	---	---
TEF	105	32	12	305
BEANS AND PEAS	--	37	354	396
BARLEY	--	--	111	153
VEGETABLES	10	16	--	--
OATS	--	--	33	7
LINSEED	--	--	12	46
LENTILS	--	--	10	23
MEDICINAL PLANTS	--	--	9	--
NUG	--	--	6	3
MAIZE	4	5	1	--
MIXED HERBS	2	--	--	--
EXPERIMENTAL	2	--	--	--
DURRAH	--	--	--	7
LUPIN	--	--	4	--
COLZA OIL SEED	--	--	4	--
TOTAL	937	232	1,105	1,151

a. 485 ha of Kenya and 64 Ethiopian.

b. 78 ha of Kenya and 34 Ethiopian.

Source:- AOI 1839, p.9; MAE, *La valorizzazione*, p.266;
Fossa, *Lavoro Italiano*, op.cit., pp.472-3;
Pankhurst, "Italian settlement":148,150.

To offset expenditure and compensate for damages resulting from delays in land assignment, in early 1938 ONC received exclusive rights to fish Bishoftu Lake and exploit the nearby forest at Holätta. These two concessions soon proved a source of considerable revenue. Pike and trout, introduced from Italy into the Lake, soon found their way to AA market. A

saw-mill, set up at Holätta, provided both the settlement and the city with wood¹¹¹.

Yet ONC's achievements were negligible, as the figures for houses built and the colonists settled show. ONC, anxious to make economic housing a reality, resorted to a number of contractual schemes which met with limited success. Experiment with piece-work contracts using mason veterans, individual farmers and professional contractors all foundered. Private companies soon discovered that building materials were scarce, technical experts and supervisory personnel rare, and their financial resources inadequate. Appalled by the immensity of the task and the small and uncertain prospect of profits, the companies invested only a fraction of their capital¹¹².

The Fagioli Company, which won the first contract, was a typical example. Out of £.1,000,000 it claimed to have invested in the contract, only £.200,000 was transferred onto site. The effect was to hold up salary payments, alienating the workers and thus causing a shortage in the work-force. As a result, the dwellings were not completed by the date agreed, June 1938. The contract was taken over by Romanola Construction Company, which made no real progress and was forced to give up¹¹³.

The project was not completed until 1940, two years behind schedule. Even then, out of the planned 600 houses, less than 100 were built. Of these at the end of 1940, 84 were at Holätta and 16 at Bishoftu, some still incomplete. Only 93 families were settled¹¹⁴. Many of the houses were low quality and unhygienic, in contrast to ONC's promise to provide its

¹¹¹. Di Crollalanza, "Relazione":748; Quaranta, op.cit., p.43; "I centri agricoli".

¹¹². Sbacchi, op.cit., p.425.

¹¹³. Ibidem, p.426.

¹¹⁴. Villa and al., op.cit., pp.230-1.

colonists with economic, decent houses. After a heavy rain, complaints arose over the use of the local material, *ceqa*, and the undue economy made on cement. A number of walls collapsed, serious cracks appeared, and houses without ventilation were blackened by smoke. Lack of washing and toilet facilities caused considerable discomfort¹¹⁵.

Such a picture contrasted with the carnival atmosphere that had accompanied the departure of the colonists' families from Italy. The first group of 56 families¹¹⁶ sailed from Brindisi 20 February 1939 in the steamship *Italia* and arrived in AA on 4 March. An enthusiastic reception awaited them. Led by the ONC director, the column was led through the streets of AA lined with cheering crowds, to the workers' militia camp, where they were met by the inspector of Partito Nazionale Fascista (PNF), the Supreme Command of the Militia, Government officials and church notables. Soon they were accommodated in the main hall, duly decorated for the occasion, entertained by the Viceroy, (who had earlier personally inspected their new homes), and fed on a lavish dinner served by members of the Fascist Women's Organization. Then the convoy proceeded to their respective farms where the family heads were waiting¹¹⁷.

The press was silent on the reception that awaited the second group, while giving a detailed account of their colourful and spectacular departure from Italy. 28 families, left in 1 May 1939 on the steamship *Urania*. This 95-strong group was made up almost entirely of women and children; 3 under the age of 3; 22 between 3 and 12, while the remaining 31 were 12

¹¹⁵. Del Boca, *op.cit.*, III, pp.204-5; Sbacchi, *op.cit.*, p.427.

¹¹⁶. They consisted of 79 men, 86 women and 72 children.

¹¹⁷. GI, 8-3-1939; IL, 15-3-1939; Il Messaggero, 7-3-1939.

and above¹¹⁸. Their departure was also organized by *Commissariato Per Le Migrazioni E La Colonizzazione Interne E Nell'Impero* with the assistance of other government officials. For the send-off the *Segretario Federale dei Fasci di Combattimento*, who personally inspected the assistance given to the departees, the Head of the ONC's press office, the senior health inspector, and the Head of the Department of Colonization from the Commission for Migration were present. These vied with officials of the *Opera Maternita' E Infanzia*, with the administrators and workers of the Fascist Women Organization, and Rural Housewives to lavish every care on the departees¹¹⁹.

The festive atmosphere was believed to make less acute the anxieties the colonists might feel at leaving home. Everything was arranged to make the families feel important. When the steamship approached the port, the departees, some of them in the uniform of the Fascist organization to which they belonged, left the *Casa del Mietitore* (House of the Harvester), and walked through the streets of the city amidst chants and cheers of the well-wisher crowd. The local *Fascio* were much in view, with representation from all the organizations directly or indirectly involved in the Empire. Standing on the quay, carrying banners and streamers, they chanted slogans to the *Duce* and praised the Fascist regime, as local clergy blessed the steamship on its voyage to Meswa¹²⁰.

The new land seemed to present an opportunity to realize a dream. With the benevolent and paternal help of ONC, farms had been prepared for them, complete with a house; all supplies and facilities they needed for their new life were being furnished: tools, seeds, livestock and machinery, finance and technical advice. Most important of all, there was the

118. CI, 16-5-1939.

119. Il Messaggero, 2-5-1939.

120. Ibidem.

promise that with patience and diligence the prize of land and independence could be theirs. Yet for many the "promised land" had its imperfections. ONC's houses were not spacious enough to accommodate even an average Italian family. Up to 14 had to be crammed into a house which had only two small rooms and a kitchen which was also used as an entrance hall. In some cases, the situation was so bad that the MAI had to intervene directly requesting their enlargement, only to be rebuffed by ONC's president. Di Crollanza argued that ONC had neither anticipated a presence of families larger than 5 people nor had the resources to build additional rooms. Yet the question resurfaced during epidemics of conjunctivitis and scabies. At Bishoftu, some houses were built close to a bog, where malarial mosquitos bred, and many fell victim. Some farms lacked drinking water, and only after a strong protest from the authorities was ONC forced to install a purifier¹²¹.

ONC's settlement programme, when brought to a halt by war in 1941, was not promising. In both farms, there were only about 93 families, a fraction of what ONC had anticipated. Of these, 81 were at Holätta and 12 at Bishoftu, in all numbering about 400 people¹²². Not all of these matched the ideal: four were young bachelors, 11 married only immediately after their arrival and of these six of them by proxy, there being no adult females nearby. ONC had employed 53 artisans and 25 technicians¹²³.

The cost of such settlement was high. ONC had increased its budget from £.250,000,000 to £.400,000,000. It had

¹²¹. Del Boca, op.cit., III, pp.204-5; Sbacchi, op.cit., p.426.

¹²². Sources on the number of families actually settled are not unanimous. Some only 56 families and others 81 families, all of them at Holätta Farm [Cfr. "I centri agricoli"; CI, 20-6-1939]; Berretta, op.cit., p.259.

¹²³. CI, 16-5-1939; 20-6-1939.

claimed to have spent about £.55,000,000, with an average yearly investment of £.15,000,000; of this £.25,000,000 was spent on public works, such as housing, and inter-farm communication. Each hectare was brought into production at an estimated cost of £.1,000-2,000 - an average cost of £.98,200-£.109,560 per farm, not including the expense of transporting families and developing the social and economic infrastructure of the area and the land cost¹²⁴.

TABLE VIII:- ONC FARMER'S IN CREDIT

NUMBER OF FARMS	AMOUNT IN CREDIT (£.)
3	5,000 - 10,000
13	11,000
9	11,000 - 15,000
5	15,000 - 20,000
1	25,000
3	25,000 - 30,000
3	30,000 and Over

Source:- Sbacchi (1975), op.cit., p.452.

The ONC colonists enjoyed a privileged status. They were given their farms on credit and were considered owners. They paid no interest as it was paid by the AA government. Such favourable conditions enabled a number of peasants to establish some credit towards the payment of their farms. Of these, one family at least entirely discharged its debts; another ten were on the verge of being assigned land ownership. As demonstrated in Table VIII, another 37 had made considerable progress towards this same end¹²⁵. Yet they did so chiefly aided by their easy

¹²⁴. "Notiziario agricolo commerciale", AC, XXXII, 2, (febbraio 1938):90; Sbacchi, op.cit., pp.443,446.

¹²⁵. Sbacchi, op.cit., p.452.

access to the AA market where a very high price was fetched for their crops, and the availability of cheap Ethiopian labour. Their activities provided the Italian newspapers with many interesting photographs illustrating their sacrifices and hard-work as pioneers in developing virgin Ethiopian soil. But their meagre contribution to the army's food supply did not greatly reduce imports from Italy¹²⁶.

The ONC only realized a minute proportion of what it once hoped to achieve. With it the dream of creating a steady independent yeoman peasantry failed. At conceptual level, the scheme seemed perfect and a few doubted its plausibility. But a number of factors militated to make the plan more of a complicated nightmare than a reality, thus frustrating the fruition of ONC's well-planned settlement dream. Most of them were of the Italians own making. Of course, the very short period that IEA lasted will not warrant one to make a conclusive judgement. And yet there were strong forces at work that would have thwarted the materialization of the plan. The government's decision in 1938 to embark on other settlement projects that would cater for the needs of the destitute army veterans and peasants militia was largely symptomatic of its awareness and dismay with the inadequacies of ONC's performance.

¹²⁶. E. Weise, "Ethiopia Now", Harper's Magazine, CXV (1937):415-6; New Times And Ethiopia News, 24-3-1945.

CHAPTER V
DEMOGRAPHIC COLONIZATION: REGIONAL SETTLEMENTS

HISTORICAL SKETCH

Another scheme through which the Fascist regime attempted to develop a stable white population in its East African Empire was regional settlement. As we saw in Chapter III, this was the brain child of Lessona. With a few exceptions, it won wide support among the Italian elite, and from the outset Mussolini himself showed great enthusiasm. As its central objective, the programme sought to populate specific zones in Ethiopia with colonists from the more densely inhabited provinces of Italy, region by region, reproducing the atmosphere of the mother country from which they sprang. The new regions of the Empire would mirror those of the mother country which bore the same name¹.

This scheme not only endorsed the Italian claims to the uniqueness of their colonization techniques, but also held certain features that seemed to guarantee its feasibility: the settlement of those with common habits and traditions in a region identical in topography and climate to their Italian home would foster social cohesion; and conflicts with regional roots would be avoided. In the long term, a stable link would be maintained between the metropolis and the Empire through a continuous flow of ideas and men between the regions².

¹. FO 371/22020/J368/40/1, Lord Perth to Anthony Eden, Rm 22-1-1938; A. Maugini, "Primi orizzonti della valorizzazione agricola", Autarchia Alimentare, (June 1938):19 (henceforth "Primi Orizzonti"); Enrico Cerulli, "La colonizzazione del Harar", AAI, VI, 1 (1943):71; CD IAO 1921, Incartamenti e relazioni varie relativi all' 'Ente di Colonizzazione 'Romagna di Etiopia' (ECRE) 1944, P.8; Marco Pomilio, "Problemi e realta' dell' Impero nel pensiero di Attilio Terruzzi", Autarchia Alimentare, (ottobre 1938):39; Giuseppe Pini, "'La terra ricchezza dell'Impero: Romagna d'Etiopia", L'Azione Coloniale, 22-6-1939; Lessona (1958), pp.283-4.

². Lessona (1958), p.284; G. Pistolese, "Problemi dell' Impero", EI, Luglio 1938.

High on the list of benefits the regime hoped to reap from the programme of regional settlement was national and international publicity. The Fascist press played up the scheme as a new chapter in the methodology of Empire building. As the Rome correspondent of the *Sunday Times* reported with its "constant discussion" and "'press-agenting'", popular interest in the Empire appeared overwhelming³.

But approval of the scheme was by no means universal. Initially weak and scattered, dissension increasingly gathered momentum and by 1939 was strong enough to challenge the entire concept of regional settlement openly in Parliament. As appears in the notes of the meeting held on 24 October 1939 by the IEA Affairs Legislation Committee of the House of the Fascists' Second Corporations, the opposition's view was that regional settlements, in the long term, tended to be nationally divisive and racially degenerating. Accordingly, regional groupings would foster endogamy which, in the opposition's view, militated against Fascist racial doctrine. Effects from a language point of view were considered to be even more damaging. With regional settlements local dialects would flourish at the expense of a national language. As a result, national integration would be impaired and communication between different groups become difficult: different regional groups, when dealing with each other, would find Amharic the best means of common expression. In view of such a dreadful prospect, the opposition, with considerable sympathy from the rest of the House, called for a policy review, urging regional settlements to be replaced by nationwide groupings as in Libya⁴. Notwithstanding considerable sympathy, the opposition was not able to reverse the situation.

³. Sunday Times, 23-1-1938.

⁴. CD IAO 1921, Meregazzi to MAI: modificazioni al DL 6-12-1937, no.2300, sulla costituzione dell'ECRE.

International reaction to the government's publicity was mixed. Some journalists with Fascist sympathies were enthusiastic. In her admiration for the plan, Diel seemed to echo the sentiment shared by most: it was "the first time in the history of Empire building" that such "far-reaching methods" had been employed which "in favourable circumstances ... enable hundreds of thousands of Italians, notably small farmers, to make their homes in IEA"⁵. Other parties were more cautious, among them the British Foreign Office. One official remarked that the scheme was "an interesting experiment" but emphasized the practical difficulties militating against its success, noting that "the lot of the pioneers will remain far from easy"⁶.

Despite its enthusiasm for the scheme, in practice the government's behaviour was characterized by much publicity and little action. To the annoyance of its supporters and despite strong pressure, the government failed to outline how regional settlement would be translated into practice, not encouraging mass settlements other than that of ONC⁷. Obstacles such as proof of financial and technical fitness discouraged many potential applicants. State support was refused for destitute emigrants on the grounds of financial stringency⁸. A set of provisos meant to preserve economic order and stability

⁵. Diel, *op.cit.*, p.70

⁶. Perth to Eden, Rm 22-1-1938.

⁷. CD IAO 1936, Lessona to GG, Rm 10-3-1937; Graziani to GGAOI, AA 8-4-1937.

⁸. CD IAO 1854, Lessona to GGAOI, *Direttive sui problemi della colonizzazione agricola e dell'agricoltura indigena*, Rm 29-5-1937, p.4; MAI to GGAsGnGmHrMg, Rm 9-5-1937 (hereafter MAI to GGAOI, Rm 9-5-1937).

in the colony forbade land transactions⁹ and angered many willing settlers¹⁰.

Practical steps towards the formation of the much-awaited and much-publicized regional agencies proceeded at slow pace as internal squabbles handicapped the work of the Agricultural Council and, only towards the end of June 1937, was discussion on the matter at an advanced stage¹¹. The deadlock ended on 13 August with the announcement of the formation of three regional colonization agencies, with rough details of their areas of operation.

Each agency was promoted by a prominent Fascist personality: *Ente di Colonizzazione Romagna di Etiopia*, or Romagna Colonization Agency of Ethiopia, was Mussolini's. Having welcomed from the onset the regional idea, Mussolini wanted people from Romagna, his own native province, to be the first settlers. So Fossa, a person in his confidence, was given orders to make preparations for the dispatch of colonists¹². *Ente di Colonizzazione Puglia di Etiopia* (ECPE) was the brain-child of the Secretary of National Fascist Party, the Apulian Achille Starace who distinguished himself as a leader of *Colonna Celere*, a black shirt militia legendary for its exploits during the

⁹. DGG 4-10-1936, no.95: Norme che evitano nell'attuale periodo di sviluppo industriale e commerciale dei territori dell'AOI ingiustificati accapparramenti di terreni, GU, II/20, 16-10-1937.

¹⁰. The decree was unbanned within a month [Cfr. DGG 13-11-1937, no.805: Abrogazione dell'art. 1 del DGG 4-10-1937, no.95, riflettente le norme intese ad evitare ingiustificati accapparramenti di terreno, GU, II/23, 1-12-1937] to be re-imposed, a few month later, in a modified form [DGG 3-3-1938, no.155: Abrogazione dei decreti vicereali no.95 del 4-10-1937, no.805 del 13-11-1937, ed emanazione di nuove norme disciplinanti la materia delle alienazioni dei terreni, sia a scopo agricolo che a scopo edilizio, GU, III/10, 16-5-1938].

¹¹. CD IAO 1936, IA to GG, Rm 22-6-1937; The Times, 20-10-1937.

¹². CD IAO 1936, Lessona to GG, Rm 13-8-1937.

Italo-Ethiopian war¹³. *Ente di Colonizzazione Veneto di Etiopia* (ECVE) was presided over by Bergamese aristocrat, Giacomo Suardo (1883-1947), a man with a colourful political background and then vice president of the Upper House, *Il Senato*¹⁴. Other agencies never went beyond the planning stage¹⁵.

With the Royal Decree of December 1937, whose enactment was delayed largely due to sluggish bureaucracy and interdepartmental fighting over finance, the agencies gained legal status. In addition to defining operational areas, the Decree allocated resources and set out programmes for each agency. ECRE's sphere of activity was the governorship of Amara and the region of Wägära was allotted as its specific field of operation. ECPE was given the governorship of Härär and its site of settlement was the Cärcär highlands. ECVE, whose activity never went further than the planning stage, was allocated the

13. Ibidem; Starace's exploits is described in his book "La marcia su Gondar della Colonna Celere e le successive operazioni nell' Etiopia occidentale, (Milano: Mondadori 1936).

14. Lessona to GG, Rm 13-8-1937.

15. Ibidem; other planned agencies of regional or national character included: "Ente di Colonizzazione Sicilia d'Etiopia", financed by Banco di Napoli [Cfr. "Il finanziamento degli enti di colonizzazione demografica in AOI", REAI, 27, 2, (Febbraio 1939):155]; "Ente di Colonizzazione Piemonte d'Etiopia" and "...Liguria d'Etiopia" ["Problemi dell'Impero", EI, (Luglio 1938)]; "Aosta d'Etiopia" and "Marche d'Etiopia" [L'Azione Coloniale, 28-3-1940; Impero E Autarchia, 9-5-1940]. But practical steps were taken only towards the Italian Overseas Colonization Agency or, "Ente di Colonizzazione degli Italiani all'Estero". Even though the agency gained its legal status, practically no progress was made with exception of transfer of about 100 workers who remained at May Habar, in Eritrea [Cfr. Legge 25-8-1940, no. 1415, GU, 23-10-1940, no. 249; GUGS, V/48, 27-11-1940; Agenzia Le Colonie, 9-7-1940; L'Azione Coloniale, 12-8-1940; CD IAO 1916; CE, 2-12-1939; PI, 4-1-1940; GV, 9-1-1940; Regime Fascista, 24-10-1940; Rivista delle Colonie, agosto 1940].

governorship of the GS, but without any defined site of settlement¹⁶.

The chief purpose of each agency was to settle in the shortest possible time a maximum possible number of colonial families as small farm owners¹⁷. The initial target was 1,000 families within a period of six years¹⁸. The official view was that within a few years the colonists, with state support and favourable economic conditions, would be strong enough to counterbalance the local population and make the Empire Italian *in fact* as well as *in law*.

On the domestic front, the political authorities used the settlement programme as a safety valve to eliminate unemployment and quell political discontent. Since 1927, rural unemployment in Italy had been rapidly increasing. A down turn coincided with the mobilization for the Ethiopian campaign. During the winters of 1931-1935, between ten and fifteen per cent of the agricultural workforce was unemployed, a figure above that of industrial workers¹⁹. It was in the regions where the companies recruited their settlers, that there was a high rate of peasant unemployment and *braccianti*, day/seasonal labourers. These traditionally had been centres of social discontent and radical politics.

¹⁶. CD IAO 1921, Decreti costitutivi degli enti di colonizzazione Puglia, Romagna, Veneto d'Etiopia; See the same in: GURI, 25-1-1938; "Atti e Documenti", REAI, 26, 2 (Febbraio 1938):249-57:- "no.2300: Costituzione di ECRE":249-51; "no.2314: Costituzione di ECVE":252-4; "no.2325: Costituzione di ECPE":255-7 (henceforth, Atti e Documenti).

¹⁷. DIM 18-4-1939: Approvazione dello statuto dell'ECPE:- GURI, 27-4-1939; REAI, XXVII, 6 (giugno 1939):769-74; GU, III/22, 16-4-1939 (hereafter DIM 18-4-1939: Approvazione); DM 10-1-1941: Approvazione dello statuto dell'ECVE, GURI, 7-5-1941 (hereafter DM 10-1-1941: Approvazione).

¹⁸. Maugini, "Primi Orizzonti":19; The Times, 18-1-1938.

¹⁹. Segrè, *op.cit.*, p.82.

A notable example was the region of Veneto. According to a report by the local party official to the Secretary of the National Party in Rome, in 1937 the conditions in the region were explosive with incidents involving "singing of subversive songs". By 1939, crowds of unemployed peasants and workers were reported to be hanging around government buildings and Party offices "with an impatience and restlessness that cannot be further ignored"²⁰. Not surprisingly, Veneto had been one of the largest suppliers of colonists for the settlement programme in Libya. In 1938, 57% of the settler families and in 1939, 62% were immigrants from that region²¹. "Tens of thousands of peasants and workers" were thought to be eager to migrate to the Empire from this same region²².

SETTLEMENT AREAS: PHYSICAL LANDSCAPE

The Fascist propaganda claimed that demographic colonization was carefully directed from above and regulated in the smallest detail²³. The settlement zones were chosen for their healthy climate, high yield, and proximity to markets and major communication centres²⁴. With its rolling countryside and a salubrious climate likened to that of May in Italy, Wägära, the ECRE's settlement area, appeared to perfectly meet these requirements. As defined in RDL of 6-12-1937, the boundaries of

²⁰. PNF B11, Situazione politica delle provincie, (Padova 1928-1942); B26 (Treviso).

²¹. Segrè, op.cit., pp.140-1 where he gives the statistical data of emigration to Libya from each region.

²². PNF B11, Situazione Politica.

²³. Sunday Times, 23-1-1938.

²⁴. CD IAO 1936, Ministro to GG, Rm 4-6-1937; [Carlo Giglio], "Importanza dell'ambiente fisico-agrologico-economico nella colonizzazione demografica", REAI, 27, 1, (gennaio 1939):29-38 (hereafter "Importanza").

Wägära were marked to the north by the eastern and western high plateau of the Semén province, to the east by the regions of Bäläsé and to the west by the westerly slopes of the great Bära valley and the plains of Kosoyyé, the sub-district of Āmba Ghi-yorghis. It consisted of an area of 80 km long and 25 km wide²⁵. Its rich and black soil was compared by Almagia to the wheat lands of Russia²⁶; it had plenty of water, rainfall averaging 1,200-1,300 mm a year, and excellent communication via the Gondär-Āsmära road, then being asphalted. Though timber was scarce, there were numerous wild pine trees, while lime was available in the valley of Bära, west of Dabat, an important market on the road. It was ideal for the cultivation of both grain and vegetables, and crop failures were almost unknown. Moreover, there was good pasturage and cattle, goats, donkeys, horses, mules and sheep were in abundance. The highlands were well-suited for the rearing of long-haired sheep, and the lowlands for cultivation of cotton, rice, peanuts and coffee. The existence of wild grapevines suggested that vineyards could be established in warmer, more sheltered places. It was also pointed out that such spots were favourable for mulberry trees, and hence for raising silkworms, while the abundant rainfall afforded possibilities of hydro-electric development in the Semén area²⁷. The Head of Āmara government agricultural service, Mario Pavirani, summed up:

The advantages deriving from such initiative (demographic settlement) should be regarded as of a supreme importance, and; thus, of immense benefit for the function and influence in the Empire of the colony of the Āmara. Wägära on account of its

²⁵. RDL 6-12-1937, no. 2300: Costituzione dell'ECRE, GURI, no. 19, 25-1-1938; CD IAO 1806, Mario Pavirani, Uogherà, aprile 1937; GAM DAF Commissione Indemaniamanti, Accertamenti di terreni demaniali: rilievi di campagna eseguiti nell'Uogherà, Gn 14-12-1937.

²⁶. Fossa (1938), p.503.

²⁷. Fossa (1938), pp.504-6; MAE, La valorizzazione, p.294.

happy location would become a reservoir of resources and foodstuff products of absolute importance to all future problems²⁸.

Wägära was estimated to have approximately 200,000 ha of colonizable lands. ECRE was to make use of between 50,000-60,000 ha for the settlement of 1,000 Italian peasant families with an almost equal number of Ethiopians as labour reserve²⁹. Wägära was not chosen in a casual fashion. As Giuseppe Pini, the Head of the Supreme Council for the Public Work Division³⁰, pointed out Wägära had a number of characteristics in common with Italy's province of Romagna gently undulating land and vast horizons³¹. Most of the construction workers on the Gondär-Äsmära motorway were from Romagna, and the remarkably good state of their health suggested that the climate suited peasants from the region³².

The land for settlement by the ECPE, the Cärcär highlands consisted of two types: to the east there was a broken country with an average altitude of about 2,200 m and a

28. CD IAO AOI 1806, p.7.

29. CD IAO 1921, Programma d'azione per il primo anno d'attività, 7-1-1938 (henceforth: Fuzzi, Programma 1938); Pini, op.cit..

30. *Sezione del Consiglio Superiore dei Lavori Pubblici*.

31. Pini, op.cit..

32. Ibidem. The original plan was to begin settlement in the nearby Achäfär region where it was thought that about 180,000 ha of state land with excellent agricultural potential was available. Achäfär was a guerrilla stronghold, and as punishment the entire region was declared public domain. In addition to being malaria infested, the area was unsuitable for crop cultivation, with poor communications and difficult access to market. Owing to these factors the plan was dropped. [DGov 5-6-1937, no. 46144: loco.cit; CD IAO Ex AOI 600, Relazione sull'attività svolta dalla sezione della colonizzazione dalla data dell'occupazione al 28-2-1939, Gn 4-3-1939, p.8; UAGn, "L'Acefer", op.cit.:56,59; Le Colonie, 19-10-1938; CE, 27-9-1938; MAE, La valorizzazione, p.294].

cool but temperate climate; to the west was warmer undulating land with an average altitude of 1,750 m. In all it covered a total area of 285,000 ha, a quarter of it cultivable. Initial settlement was to start in the western part as it was judged to offer a better climate, and more abundant supplies of construction materials, particularly lime and limestone. It was sparsely populated thus necessitating less expropriation of Ethiopians. Yet all the land was considered fertile. The luxurious vegetation and the variety of crops under cultivation, including wheat, barley, oats, maize, *tef*, *durrah*, chick-peas, lentils, beans, peas, onions, garlic, as well as coffee and bananas, citrus fruit, castor and linseed oil, tobacco and cotton were evidence of immense productive potential. As the area was located close to both the AA-Härär road and the AA-Djibouti railway, communications were favourable. It was also within easy access to the nearby markets of Bädässa and Gälämsso, two centres that had been considerably developed after the occupation³³.

GS, the vast south-westerly governorship, allotted for settlement to Italians from Veneto, had excellent agricultural conditions. It included areas of rich cultivation yielding all kinds of cereals as well as coffee and cotton. Mario dei Gaslini described it as "perhaps the most suitable in all IEA for numerous and gradual national settlement"³⁴, a view shared by the journalist, Polson Newman, who saw it as "the best region for settlement" where the soil was of "exceptional

³³. CD IAO Hr 1847, Proprietà terriera nel Cercer; Giambattista Giannoccaro, "Prime tappe dell'Ente "Puglia d'Etiopia" in AOI", Africa Italiana, I, 1, (novembre 1938):25-26; "Importanza":37-8.

³⁴. Dei Gaslini M., "Colonizzazione del GS", RSAl, 11 (1937):182.

quality and the climate most suitable for Europeans"³⁵. And yet colonization in the GS area proceeded at a slow pace. This was largely because the territory was the last to be occupied militarily and was little known to the Italians despite the presence for several decades of the Consolata Mission who played a significant role in the occupation³⁶. There were few roads and it was far removed from the sea.

The situation was further compounded by ECVE's internal organizational problems and political complications between Rome and AA. As a result the agency never set foot in GS³⁷. Instead, two different forms of demographic enterprise emerged locally: De Rege Colonization Agency (EDR)³⁸, set up by the government of the GS, operated at Borä, about 10 km. from Jimma, on 2,000 ha. On the outskirts of Jimma along the road to Bonga, Jimma Agricultural Consortium (CAG)³⁹, was set up by the

35. P. Newman (1938), p.104.

36. Del Boca, op.cit., III, pp.26-34.

37. Not only the agency failed to win the co-operation of the colonial authorities inside the Empire but its President Renzo Morigi, ex-secretary of the Fascist Party, had poor entrepreneurial skills and hardly any tangible programme. This was sufficient enough to allay the confidence of the agency's financing institution, INFAIL. Cfr. Del Boca, op.cit., III, p.207. The Fascist media on the occasion of the President's visit to Ethiopia continued trumpeting for a month with the news of him obtaining between 20-25,000 ha of land on Jimma-Bonga road, which was sufficient enough to set up the first 500 farms [Cfr. La Tribuna, 31-1-1940; Corriere Padano, 28-3-1940; L'Azione Coloniale, 4-4-1940]. But Morigi's report to the Presidential Council points out that his attempt to secure a meagre 4,000 ha around Jimma was frustrated by the local authorities: [Cfr. CD IAO 1918, Documenti e relazioni relative all 'ECVE: Verbale della seduta del Consiglio di Presidenza in data maggio 1941, p.9.

38. *Gestione di Colonizzazione Thesaurus De Rege*

39. *Comprensorio Del Consorzio Agricolo Di Gimma.*

local Fascist Party⁴⁰. These two agencies operated in a quite different framework from the other three regional bodies⁴¹. The areas they operated were acclaimed as "healthy, with abundant waters, extremely fertile with good topography and extensive irrigation potential"⁴².

Contrary to official claims, the choice of demographic colonization centres was not preceded by an accurate and serious study because of inadequate financial, technical and personnel resources. The planners were lured by effortlessly growing vegetation rather than realistic edaphic and climatic assessment. Like ONC's settlement centres, the soil of the areas was predominantly vertisol, which required management

⁴⁰. The war stopped a number of agencies promoted by the Fascist Party in other parts. Two such were Arnaldo Mussolini at Asmāra and Azienda Agricola Adigrat in Tegray province [Cfr. Le Colonie, 18-3-1939; CM, 21-1-1939].

⁴¹. Even though a particular area predominated, the composition of EDR's and CAG's settlers had more a national rather than regional character. As its name suggests, the CAG was a co-operative to help those with limited technical and financial resources to develop their farms [Cfr. Berretta, *op.cit*, pp.181-3].

⁴². In the sources the two agencies are dealt with simultaneously and periodicals often confuse them. EDR was originally known as *Cavallieri di Neghelli*, an infantry unit led by Thesaurus De Rege who died as war hero in May 1936 while fighting at Malka Gulba, in GS. CAG was set up in April 1938 to man *Pattuglie Del Grano* or, Wheat (Production) Task Force, a farm established by 30 demobilized Blackshirts in May 1937 with the view of promoting wheat cultivation [CD IAO 1822 RGGs UA, *Attività agricola esistenti nel territorio del GGS, gennaio 1940*, p. 2-3; For a detailed account of the development of EDR and its initial tormented life see: 1821, *Esperienze della gestione di una agenzia di colonizzazione demografica, gennaio 1940*; Gm 2919, *Comprensorio di colonizzazione demografico De Rege in Gimma*, n.d. See also: Gm GS 845, *Brevi Notizie sul comprensorio "De Rege" - Gm, 1948*; L'Azione Coloniale, 30-11-1939; CE, 3-12-1939; GI, 27-11-1938; GP, 9-5-1940; IOM, 20-1-1940; Il Mattino, 24-11-1939; Il Messaggero, 4-7-1939; PI, 23-6-1938; 24-11-1939]; La Tribuna, 23-12-1939; Villa and al., *op.cit.*, pp. 235-6.

skills of the type that contemporary technology could not offer, and extensive use of labour⁴³.

Wägära was relatively densely populated by the AmhÄras, who were dedicated agriculturalists and cattle breeders⁴⁴. So attached were these people to their lands, that even the tangible gains offered by road construction were unable to lure them forcing the authorities to recruit Sudanese labourers. Public land in the area accounted for a few thousand hectares, scattered in plots of various sizes located at a considerable distance from each other⁴⁵. Italian peasant settlement in the area could not be effected without massive evacuation of the existing owners from their land. Without such measures, settlements confined exclusively to the existing public domain would not be economically viable⁴⁶. In addition, Wägära was one of the strongholds of national resistance. At the centre of ECPE's settlement, the presence of unhealthy marshlands demanded extensive reclamation⁴⁷. Like with the case of ECRE, the settlement of EDR required massive displacement of the existing land-owners⁴⁸.

The settlement centres were scattered over a wide area. For the colonial administration in Ethiopia, who had the

⁴³. Interview with Mr Yaqob Edjamo, crop-physiologist and agronomist 21-5-1988; Giuseppe Rocchetti to the author, Firenze 17-5-1984.

⁴⁴. The population, predominantly Christian with some Muslims and Fälashas, was estimated to be more than 35.000 at about between 20-25 person per sqkm [Cfr. CD IAO 1111, p.12; this conflicts with the figure given by another source according to which the population was no more than between 15-20,000 with density of 7-10 per sqkm. See "Importanza", p.36].

⁴⁵. CD IAO 1111, p.11.

⁴⁶. Ibidem, p.13; CD IAO 1806, p.4.

⁴⁷. "I servizi sanitari", AAI, III, (1940):783; CS, 27-1-1940.

⁴⁸. CD IAO Gm 2919, pp.1-2; 1916, p.13.

task of building the social and economic infrastructures and providing protection, this was a heavy burden on its already extremely tight human and financial resources⁴⁹.

These factors were the focal points over which a major clash developed between the Duke of Aosta and the MAI. For the Duke of Aosta, peasant settlement scheme as an answer to Italy's superfluous labour force was a commendable enterprise, but it was far too ambitious for the available finances. He saw capitalist initiative as the best option for initial development; with such a scheme the government would shoulder less responsibility and be in a position to direct its resources to more urgently needed areas; it would also allow a breathing space until complex problems of land tenure were studied and legally regulated, and give enough time to establish domainial lands and to draw up realistic plans. Yet the Duke of Aosta's appeal for a moratorium on demographic colonization was rejected by the MAI. Then he urged that, in line with the early plan, Shäwa be declared the first zone of colonization in view of forming around the capital of the Empire a belt of Italian population, and that the three agencies, - Romagna, Puglia and Veneto -, should

concentrate their work in Shäwa where I'll be able to provide them further facilities, but for the future, unless instructed otherwise, I will restrict myself to the above criteria which, understandably, do not preclude small private initiatives in the agricultural fields at the periphery of the main urban centres of each governorship or commissariat; but I repeat no dispersal of efforts and scattering of our farmers over different and remote regions⁵⁰.

⁴⁹. Villa and al., op.cit., pp.225-6.

⁵⁰. Ibidem; CD IAO AOI 1936, Amedeo di Savoia to MAI., AA 5-1-1938.

The MAI acknowledged the merits of directing all colonial activities to Shäwa; yet it was by no means prepared to countenance a major shift of policy on the grounds that:

the programmes of the demographic colonization agencies of Romagna, Puglia and Veneto - wanted by the *Duce* and organised by this Ministry in collaboration with the National Party - are already in an advanced stage of elaboration and implementation as experts have already studied on the spot the possibility of cultivation and the settlement of the colons and the respective zones have been so far allotted; thus it seems impossible to turn back and concentrate the activities of the agencies in Shäwa. As to the political-military situation demanding the formation of a strong national nuclei in Shäwa, it should be borne in mind that this need equally exists in the other regions, which, in fact, have far better agricultural and climatic conditions. And therefore it is important not to divert from the guidelines of march marked by the *Duce*, and in the meantime colonization in Shäwa, as the GG, rightly proposes, should be stepped up at its fullest strength, within the framework of the general needs of the Empire. It seems that the most suitable *ente* for such an objective is ONC which is locally better equipped and whose activity at present is the subject of so warm commendation by H. E. the Head of the Government⁵¹.

On the whole, the Ministry's position prevailed, but only after it had agreed to cut the size of the settlers of both the ECRE and ECPE, and defer indefinitely the activities of the ECVE⁵².

⁵¹. CD IAO AOI 1936, Terruzzi to GG, Rm 10-1-1938.

⁵². Ibidem, Amedeo di Savoia to MAI, AA 15-1-1938; Villa and al., op.cit., p.253.

OLD IDEAS IN NEW CLOTHING: STRUCTURAL CHARACTERISTICS

In carrying out their mission, the colonization agencies were assisted by a substantial legacy of ideas and institutions. The classic point of reference in formulating their policies, in overall practice although not in detail, was the work of the colonization agencies in Libya. In this respect, they were less of an innovation than an imitation of a number of mass settlement agencies operating in Libya. What made them different was their regional character and the nature of their finance. Other variations owed much to the different political and environmental settings in which they operated.

The most obvious sign of the close relationship between the Libyan colonization companies and those of the Empire was in their bureaucratic structures⁵³. The organizational pattern of each agency rested on the legal framework laid down by RDL 6-12-1937. The decree established, in addition to the office of a President, a Board of Directors, an Advisory Committee and a Board of Auditors, leaving to the byelaws of each agency the definition of their respective fields of action. The President was responsible for all the agency's affairs and decided matters of ordinary administration⁵⁴. But supreme power was vested in the board of directors, known as *Consiglio del Presidente*, or the Presidential Council, in which were represented, in addition to the Ministries of AI, Finance and Interior, all the organizations that were concerned, directly or indirectly, with colonization and agricultural development⁵⁵. The Council set the general guidelines of colon-

⁵³. For the Libyan experience see Segrè, op.cit., pp.89-101.

⁵⁴. DIM 18-4-1939: Approvazione; IAO CD 1921, Incantamenti: Statuto giuridico e trattamento economico (hereafter Statuto giuridico); DM 10-1-1941.

⁵⁵. In addition to the said ministries, these included: National Fascist Party, General Command of M.V.S.N., Commissariat For Internal Immigration and Colonization, CFA and CFLI and an

ization, appointed higher officers, decided on budgetary matters and, whenever consulted by the President, expressed its views on specific issues. It operated from Rome headquarters⁵⁶. As a legislative body, the glaring shortcoming of the Council was the absence of representatives from the colonies themselves. This was rectified only in early 1940. Such failure to take into account the needs of the colonies was one of many stumbling blocks in the smooth development of the programmes.

The Advisory Committee resided in the area of the concession and as such it was meant to fulfil the shortcomings of the Council, based at a remote distance from the centre of colonization⁵⁷. The Advisory Committee was a consultative body of government officials and experts living in the colony. Its task was to aid the President on a wide range of issues related to colonization. Thus it was not a decision making body nor had it any power on budgetary matters⁵⁸. The Board of Auditors, composed of three members, was responsible for the agency's finances. At the end of each financial year, it presented the annual budget for the examination of the Council who, together

expert on matters of colonization.

⁵⁶. While the composition of the Advisory Committee remained constant in all the agencies, that of the Presidential Council varied. So we had 9 members for the ECRE, 11 for ECVE and 12 for ECPE in the Presidential Council and seven for all three in the Advisory Committee [Cfr. Atti e Documenti].

⁵⁷. Ibidem.

⁵⁸. IAO CD 1921, Incartamenti, 1944, pp.5-9. In this incomplete document the opposition's view is briefly described; the MAI is challenged to explain clearly: the financial implications that the *enti* would have on the State treasury; excessive bureaucratic presence in the Presidential Council and the reasons for exclusion in other boards of institutions that are more closely affected; on how the difficult issues of land shortage and expropriation were going to be solved.

with the report of the auditors, passed it on for MAI approval⁵⁹.

The agency official most directly in touch with the day-to-day technical and administrative activities of the agency in the colony was the director, or *direttore*, or *vice direttore tecnico*. With the help of his immediate staff, he kept the President informed on the agency's conduct and, whenever necessary, proposed to him a programme of action for the agency in its concession⁶⁰. The exceptions to these general rules discussed so far were EDR and CAG, who operated under the management of their local agricultural office with rules laid down by the Viceroy⁶¹.

In the Presidential Council and advisers were merged various political, civil, military and labour organs. This demonstrates both the regime's predilection for bureaucracy and its desperate attempt to involve the whole nation and divergent interests in the enterprise. Such a scheme was seen as a showcase of the harmonious working of the corporative state. In practice, however, the relationship between different office holders and institutions towards the colonization agencies remained ill-defined and was often a source of serious friction. The president of ECPE, Giambattista Giannoccaro, ran the agency as if it were his own personal fief and delegated no authority⁶². Until his forcible removal from office, the direct-

⁵⁹. CD IAO 1921, Incartamenti: Statuto dell'ECRE; DM 18-4-1939.

⁶⁰. CD IAO 1921, Incartamenti: Ordinamento degli uffici; Hr 1992, ECPE, Ordinamento tecnico amministrativo contabile, allegato b, n.d..

⁶¹. DGG 16-10-1939, no.987: Istituzione presso il GGS della gestione di colonizzazione «De Rege» per la valorizzazione agraria GU, IV/26, [Supl.], 19-10-1939; FO371/24635/J376/18/1, CG Gibbs to PSSFA, AA 14-12-1939; Villa and al., op.cit., pp.235-6.

⁶². CD IAO Hr 1992, Maugini, Appunti per l'Ing. Giannoccaro, Firenze 27-5-1940.

or of ECRE was engaged in an acrimonious struggle with its President⁶³. The government of the GS had often to intervene to uphold the tottering authority of the management undermined by the continuous interference of the local Fascist Party officials in the administrative affairs of EDR⁶⁴.

If the division of responsibility between officials was vague, there were a good many obligations and not all that degree of security for the settlers. The rules governing the conduct between the agencies and the colonists were fairly similar and, in substance, did not differ greatly from the guidelines followed by the ONC. Such similarities are identifiable in the rules relating to the selection of families, the treatment of the colons, the development and distribution of farms⁶⁵.

It was understood that the agencies were temporary institutions who undertook to develop the project on behalf of the State and who were expected to dissolve once their goals were attained. Yet the agencies took a qualified view of the ideal of an autonomous peasantry. The future picture they had was that of a co-operative community of farmers capable of managing their affairs through a form of Landowning Settlers Consortium. Then the agency's role would be to assist them by providing managerial and technical know-how, credit facilities, marketing and processing services⁶⁶.

⁶³. Incartamenti: ECRE 1938, Appunti per il Duce, 23-7-1939.

⁶⁴. CD IAO GS 1821.

⁶⁵. Cfr. CD IAO 1937, MAI, Vari provvedimenti legislativi e governatoriali riguardanti le concessioni enti di colonizzazione demografica e privati in AOI. Owing to the trade union disagreement with the original draft, the official approval of the scheme took place only on February 1940 by the newly formed Agricultural Council after laborious work and a number of modifications. Cfr. L'Azione Coloniale, 19-2-1940.

⁶⁶. CD IAO 1937; Cerulli, op.cit.:72.

Before assuming ownership, the Italian peasant remained tied to the agency by two contracts: salary and redemptive. During the salary phase the peasant was employed as a wage labourer and a member of the workers' militia. He alternated communal work as defined by the agency with semi-military duties. The salary was attractive⁶⁷. It was supplemented by costs for accommodation, discomfort, and family allowance, including medical assistance, insurance fees, and *Dopo Lavoro* subscription. But a number of deductions at source and the high cost of living left very little in the pocket of the peasant⁶⁸. Part of the deducted money was directly sent to his family in Italy. It was argued, however, that the prospect of becoming a landowner compensated for low wages, making the peasant's salary more rewarding in the long-run.

The salary phase was a trial period and thought to be beneficial to both the agency and the settler. For the agency, it offered a breathing space to implement reclamation work and a housing programme. More importantly, it was a convenient way to assess the peasant's credentials as a worker

⁶⁷. For more detailed duties imposed upon the settlers see [Carlo Giglio], "Da colono al proprietario in AOI con la colonizzazione demografica", *REAI*, 27, 4, (Aprile 1939):401-5 (hereafter "Da colono al proprietario"). The salary was £.18 per diem for unskilled, £.20 for a semi-skilled and £.23 for skilled [Cfr. "Di alcuni problemi"]. ECPE paid slightly higher wages which was £.19,80 per diem for an unskilled, £.23,10 per diem for skilled and £.25,30 per diem for professional [Cfr. CD IAO Hr 1992, ECPE, Relazione ECPE, 20-11-1940].

⁶⁸. Nor ~~were such wages~~ comparable to those paid for others within IEA. The scale was not constant but that of 1939 was as follows:

Unskilled	£.30
Semi-skilled	£.35
Skilled	£.40
Unskilled Foremen	£.40
Semi-skilled Foreman	£.45
Skilled Foreman	£.50
Chauffeurs & Motor Mechanics	£.1200

[Cfr. FO371/23380/J575/296/1, CG Bird to PSSFA, AA 20-1-1939; *CI*, 15-1-1939.

and potential landowner and to eliminate unsuitable candidates. For the peasant, it gave him the opportunity to acclimatize himself; should he decide to leave he lost nothing. If he chose to stay, he was joined by his family to start the period of redemption. But critics castigated the salary phase for the unnecessarily huge financial cost it entailed to the agency and the psychological trauma that the peasant had to endure without his family, making him work badly. They maintained better to settle the whole family at once⁶⁹. For money starved agencies these economic arguments held great sway. In fact the two home-grown agencies, EDR and CAG abolished the salary period altogether, adopting the policies advocated by the critics⁷⁰.

At the beginning of the redemption phase the colonist received a family farm as his own personal property and shouldered a number of responsibilities: he had to upkeep the premises and see that all farming implements and household goods were put at the exclusive use of the farm. In addition to his duty to execute the agency's orders, he had to keep the family labour unit intact. This meant that he had to prevent his sons from drifting into temporary high-paying construction jobs or stop his daughters from seeking work as domestics or worse in the city. It was particularly important that he groomed the eldest son as the natural leader and successor to the farm⁷¹.

At the redemption phase, the existing agreements were replaced by *contratto colonico*, a labour code or a pact between the colonist and the agency regulating the conditions of rescheduling of debts before assuming a full title to the

⁶⁹. "Da colono al proprietario":402.

⁷⁰. CC, 25-12-1939.

⁷¹. CD IAO Hr 1992, Patto di ECPE; 1921, Incartamenti: Statuto dell'ECRE; DIM 18-4-1939; "Da colono al proprietario":405; Polson Newman (1938), p.102; Quaranta, op.cit., pp.49-50.

ownership of the farm. In this respect, the redemption phase differed from the Libyan experience where it was preceded by between five and ten years of share-cropping. The new contract consisted, as detailed in an account book, *libretto colonico*, of three sections; in the introduction there is a summary description of the farm and of its boundaries with the aid of a small map; a record of live-stock, household goods and farming equipment provided by the agency, with the services and other effects received in cash or in kind; finally, the debts and the credits accumulated over the years. The debts included the following expenses: housing and implements believed to be necessary by the administration to the settlement; deforestation and reclamation including machinery, tools, animals and seeds; improvements and extension to the farm; transfer of the peasant and his family from Italy; any additional financial assistance, in cash or in kind. Added to this was a 5% interest charge⁷².

No definite time limit was set for the settler to discharge his debt. The only stipulation was that before freehold ownership of the land was granted the amortized cost had to be cleared. It was entertained that this would take less than half time the time (i.e. ten years) required in the Libyan situation where the settler had to contend with a more hostile environment⁷³. In their efforts to force the settler to discharge his debts, agencies like ECPE imposed a number of "production incentives". But in actual fact the agencies ran the farms autocratically, controlling every phase of activity. The peasants had little say either in the disposal of their

⁷². CD IAO 1937, Schema di norme della convenzione per il finanziamento, allegato 2 (henceforth: Schema di norme); DIM 18-4-1939; Hr 1992, Patto di Colonizzazione, p.7; DGG 16-10-1939; Gm 2919; Gibbs to PSSFA, AA 14-12-1939; "Da colono al proprietario":402-5; Quaranta, op.cit., pp.49-50; Newman (1938), p.102.

⁷³. [Carlo Giglio], "Il finanziamento degli enti di colonizzazione demografica in AOI", REAI, 27, 2 (febbraio 1939):156-7 hereafter "Il Finanziamento").

labour or the expenditure of funds derived from it⁷⁴. Complaints by Maugini of wastage due to carelessness and lack of proper storage reinforce this point⁷⁵.

Theoretically, the subsidies were provided only for the trial period. Upon his admission to the farm, the colonist was obliged to pay the money back. But this was never the case because there was no year in which the gross income was greater than the annual subsidy. This was due partly to the agencies's failure to develop an adequate number of hectares as they had originally planned. As a result a considerable sum was spent in family allowances until the farm became fully productive and this ultimately served only to increase running costs of the farm. A typical case was ECPE, which provided its fourteen families with six hectares of reclaimed land. In 1939, the agency paid an allowances of £.169,611. Despite expansion of the cultivated area and improvement in the farming, in 1940 this increased to about £.180,000⁷⁶. This was a financial embarrassment for the agencies and an additional burden on their slim resources.

⁷⁴. As regards labour, ECPE's labour code shows that the agency could resort to the peasant's labour at any time. As regards disposal of the produce, the proceeds from the sale of this was divided into three parts: a fixed quota was put aside towards amortization credited with a 3% interest; 20% of the remaining was kept as reserve against the effects of freak years, generating 5% interest; the remainder was left at the settler's disposal [Cfr. DIM 18-4-1939; CD IAO Hr 1992, Patto di colonizzazione, pp.8-9.

⁷⁵. CD IAO Hr 1992, Situazione dell'ECPE al 31-12-1939, Rm 13-5-1940; Francesco Pierotti, Vita in Etiopia, 1940-41, (Rocca San Casciano: F. Cappelli, 1959), pp.36-8.

⁷⁶. CD IAO Hr 1992, ECPE: Bilancio consuntivo anno 1939 e bilancio preventivo per l'anno 1940, Rm 13-5-1940, p.19.

THE QUESTION OF FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

The success of colonization largely depended on good financing and the question of the best way of doing it had been a source of controversy among experts since early days⁷⁷. Unlike in Libya where the state was almost the sole investor in demographic colonization, the regime shared responsibility with other public or para-statal organizations. Each agency was given an advance of £.50,000,000 payable in six annual instalments. The payments progressively decreased⁷⁸.

ECRE, owing to its connection with Mussolini received privileged treatment: it was directly financed by the state. ECPE's quota was divided equally between the Banco di Napoli and the INFPS, which was involved in a similar programme in Libya. Each paid £.25,000,000. ECVE was supported by INFAIL. In addition, substantial sums were to be provided by the public administrative corporations of the provinces of origin, payable in six consecutive financial years. ECRE was allocated £.2,000,000 from public institutions of Ravenna and Forli, ECPE £.5,000,000 and ECVE £.3,000,000. Of the two home-grown agencies, EDR had a budget of £.6,000,000 and CAG £.1,000,000.

As agents of the state, the companies had legal standing and enjoyed tax exemption on any financial contributions made by welfare organizations, banks or acquired through bequests and donations. In areas of their operation, they had preferential rights to any new land incorporated into the

⁷⁷. CD IAO 1921, Incartamenti, 1944, pp.5-9; "Il finanziamento":154-6; RDL 5-9-1938, no.1607, GURI, no.241, 20-10-1938.

⁷⁸. The first year's payment was £.20 million; for the remaining four years was: £.15 million, £.8 million, £.4 million and £.1 million [Cfr. Atti e Documenti].

⁷⁹. Atti e Documenti; DIM 18-4-1939.

⁸⁰. Of this £.750.000 was paid by GG and £.250.000 by the Bank as a loan [Cfr. Villa and al., op.cit., p.236].

public domain, to the use of pasturage, and exploitation of natural resources. To minimize the cost of colonization, the agencies could combine farming with industrial and commercial activities. This enabled them to gain an exclusive monopoly over most resources in their area, such as cattle breeding, marketing and building contracts⁸¹.

The money was given in the form of a loan, repayable within a 50 year period starting ten years after the formation of the agency. But no specific arrangements were provided as regards to securities and interest rates, issues that were of vital importance⁸². Such shortcomings caused friction between ECPE and its creditors until accommodation was reached with the RDL of 5 September 1938 and the special convention of 6 October of the same year which brought substantial amendments to earlier arrangements. In the new agreements the interest rate was fixed at 5% and the period of repayment was reduced to 20 years, with amortization starting in the sixth year⁸³.

As collateral, the creditors were given wide ranging special privileges. This involved rights to all kinds of state lands at the agency's disposal, to works of improvements and agricultural developments accomplished in it, to live-stock and all types of assets including the eventual state contributions to land reclamation. The prerogative was to remain valid so long as the loan was not entirely settled. Any failure by the Agency to keep the agreement, even the payment of only one year's mortgage, would dissolve the contract and lead to an

⁸¹. CD IAO Hr 1992, ECPE: Relazione, Bari di Etiopia 20-11-1940, p.9; 1921, ECRE, Relazione del Presidente, Rm 7-2-1939, p.21; 11-1-1940, pp.13,32; 1792, Walter Caravelli E Zampighi Luigi, Lineamenti dell'ECRE a norma del decreto costitutivo e dello statuto, Rm 10-10-1938.

⁸². "Il finanziamento":155.

⁸³. RDL 5-9-1938, no. 1607; RDL 13-5-1940, no. 823: Modificazione dell'art. 7 del RDL dicembre 1937, no. 2314, costitutivo dell'ECVE, GUGS, V/34, 21-8-1940; GU, no. 166, 17-7-1940.

immediate payment in full of both outstanding debt and interests⁸⁴. Support for the agency's ability to meet the terms of the agreement was drawn from the findings of the Libyan experience where, it was alleged, the colonists, working in environmental conditions far less favourable than in Ethiopia, were able to pay their debts within 20 years. Yet some critics pointed out that this comparison overlooked a number of important differences. In their view, in Ethiopia unlike in Libya, practically no institutions were available to verify the state of land ownership and the rules of its transaction. It was true, they argued, that the Ethiopian soil was much more fertile than in Libya; yet it was equally true that the colonist had much less to fear in Libya than in Ethiopia in terms of competition from Ethiopian production and manpower. The critics focused mainly on the interest rate which in the context of the Ethiopian agricultural environment - virgin soil with everything to be built from scratch - was excessive. With high interest rates, the cost of each farm increased and made the production cost too high against Ethiopian competition⁸⁵.

What was to be done? How could the situation be altered? Once again the old question of state subvention was debated. Originally, the agricultural council recommended to vest in one agency the task of financing all forms of agricultural activities, mentioning the Institute of Mortgage Loan as an ideal choice. Basing itself on the Libyan experiment, it warned of the dangers and expenses of extensive state-subsidized settlement⁸⁶. Even for the state interventionists, the less resort made to state coffers, the better; yet for them a total lack of state intervention was fraught with dangers. They asserted that demographic colonization was a symbol of great

⁸⁴. Schema di norme.

⁸⁵. "Il finanziamento":155,157.

⁸⁶. CD IAO 1775, Seduta, Rm 15-4-1937, pp.11-9; 22-4-1937; 26-4-1937; Consulta, "Avvaloramento":1563-4.

power overseas and the means to create a large Italian population abroad. Because of this it had, in addition to economic, the highest political and social goals. Thus, if state subsidy from a strictly commercial standpoint was unremunerative, from the political point of view it was not unduly extravagant expenditure⁸⁷.

But as the cost of colonization became apparent, the agencies invariably complained of financial stringency and its limitation on their activities. They discovered the early optimistic estimate unit cost of settling a family, £.55,000-70,000 per farm, was unrealistic. Where the most economical means were employed, such as extensive use of Ethiopian labour and inexpensive material, the cost of a farm amounted to between £.120,000-140,000, excluding investment in infrastructure⁸⁸. A number of factors were blamed, including shortage of labour, rising wages, turbulent political conditions and the scarcity of building materials. ECRE estimated the minimum financial requirement for settling 1,000 families to be double of its actual grant⁸⁹. The feeling was stronger with the agencies that paid interest on the loan. Giannoccaro, the President of the ECPE, realized that, after interest deduction, the ECPE's entire loan in real terms amounted to only £.34,000,000. As it appears in a sketchy memorandum for the ECPE's board of directors, Giannoccaro regarded this as "too inadequate and absurd" to finance a programme on such a scale⁹⁰. Costs *might*

⁸⁷. The upholders of such a view called on the government to pay 3% of the interest due to the creditors and leave the remaining 2% to the agencies themselves [Cfr. "Il finanziamento":158].

⁸⁸. CD IAO Gm 2919, p. 6.

⁸⁹. Fuzzi, Programma, p.3.

⁹⁰. One of the solutions suggested by ECPE was for the government's intervention by paying about 4% of the interest. CD IAO Hr 1992, Relazione Ing. Giannoccaro al Consiglio della Presidenza, 24-3-1940, (henceforth: Relazione Giannoccaro); ECPE to Maugini, Situazione amministrativa contabile anno 1940, Rm

decline as colonization proceeded, but serious doubts had already been cast on the practicality of the scheme.

PLANS VERSUS REALITY

Settlement agencies did not operate uniformly. Need to accommodate to local demands gave rise to administrative and organizational differences. The common factor was that, owing to financial constraints, the settlements were run on a tight budget and, as much as possible, using local resources; and owing to the unsettled military situation, strategic considerations were given overriding importance in the pattern of house construction and farm organization.

The settlement plan of the ECRE was drafted by the agency's future director - Ing. Savini, under explicit orders from Mussolini⁹¹. Savini began his work in the early part of 1937 and in substance if not in detail, his settlement programme was identical to that of the ONC. He planned to settle 1,000 families within a maximum period of six years; this meant that each year 10,000 ha would be put under cultivation and 200 houses built. According to plan, the first 200 houses would be completed by the end of 1938⁹². Each family was to be given 50 ha of land, divided into three sections: two ha would be used for artificial and natural pasturage for cattle which would play an important part in the development of the farms; the remaining land would be ploughed, with the exception of one ha for vegetable growing. The size of the farm was justified on the grounds that it responded to the needs of an increasing family demanding its further partition, and the tendency to

11-4-1940 (henceforth: Situazione amministrativa).

⁹¹. Detailed information on the plan is given by Fuzzi in his report to the meeting of the Presidential Council and so Cfr. CD IAO 1921, Fuzzi, Relazione, 7-1-1938; CD IAO 1806, p.6.

⁹². Fossa (1938), p.497; Diel, op.cit., p.70.

rapid deterioration of tropical land under production requiring crop rotation.

Initially the plan was to build isolated homesteads, but for reasons of security this was abandoned. Instead Savini designed a single storey house with three rooms and a kitchen and an annexed courtyard enclosed by a solid wall. Four houses were situated in the corners of their plot and joined together by vast communal wall, forming a square with only one entrance. The courtyard was to serve as a shelter for the colonist's livestock, forage and tools. As their original architect, Tito Piccialuti, claimed the geographical set up of the houses with their solid walls, in addition to facilitating the sharing of communal services and relatively reducing the road network, gave its inhabitants,

specially at night, once the gate was closed, a sense of total safety as if they were in a small but well protected fortress⁹³.

ECRE began its operation in April 1938, seven months after schedule. Unlike other agencies, ECRE started from an advantageous position. It purchased four construction sites from the departing Äsmära-Gondär highway construction agency, Ragazzi⁹⁴. All the sites were equipped with basic services and stone-built premises, and at one site there were well furnished houses for the management. Each site was to serve as a settlement centre, each bearing district names similar to those of Romagna province. Eventually, work was started in only three of these. The main administrative and settlement headquarters

⁹³. T. Piccialuti, "Progetto per la formazione di una legione di lavoratori agricoli per l'AOI", REAI, 26, 2, (febbraio 1938):1999.

⁹⁴. G.B. Lusignani, "L'ECRE", L'Autarchia Alimentare, 15-12-1938, pp.36-7.

was Romagna Centre located at Dabat, 70 km north of Gondär⁹⁵. The settlement was cut in two by Dib-Dibit river which served for irrigation.

Activities were centred to the west of the river. In addition to the administration and social amenities, there were stables and mechanical workshops; in a nearby irrigated garden all sorts of vegetables were grown. The remaining two districts were located at Dära, distant 50 and 40 km each from Gondär and bore the names of Lugo of Ethiopia (*Lugo di Etiopia*) and Cesena of Ethiopia (*Cesena di Etiopia*) respectively⁹⁶. The first group of colonists who disembarked at Meswa numbered 124 men, 300 less than the original plan envisaged. They included, in addition to 10 agency officials and their assistants, 50 heads of settler families; the rest were workers with different skills, predominantly builders. In December 1938 and 1939 were added 65 and 340 individuals respectively, consisting exclusively of technicians, artisans and craftsmen⁹⁷.

ECRE's achievement was hailed as the pride of the Italian provincial schemes. But the reality challenged such claims. Even though the exact number of the workforce can only be approximated, by the end of 1940 there were about 450 people consisting of workers and day agricultural labourers, including

⁹⁵. As the main motorway construction site Dabat had premises that could accommodate 600 people [Cfr. CD IAO 1921, ECRE, *Relazione del Presidente*, 7-2-1939, pp.3-4].

⁹⁶. CD IAO 1921, ECRE, *Relazione del Presidente*, 7-2-1939, p. 19; 11-1-1940, pp.13,16-7; *L'Azione Coloniale*, 22-6-1939. As the names of the districts reflect the settlers' origin, it seems that the first settlers were natives of the respective district of Lugo and Cesena. Among the two, Lugo was at advanced stage and work had started since early 1939. Contrary to the report of some sources [Cfr. Pankhurst, "Italian settlement":151, who quotes P. Monelli's *Mussolini: An intimate life*, (London: 1953), p.19], Predappio d'Etiopia, though planned very early to be set up in the memory of Mussolini's birthplace, never came into light.

⁹⁷. They were mainly tractor drivers, farm mechanics, builders and carpenters [CD IAO 1921, *Relazione*, 7-2-1939, p. 12; Fuzzi, *Programma* 1940, 7-2-1939, p.4].

about 150 masons and 30 agency officials. The peasants accounted to less than 100 and none of them were united with their families⁹⁸. Of these some were settled at Lugo, but the majority were concentrated at the main headquarters, while Cesena was occupied almost exclusively by workers⁹⁹.

When assessing the agency's work, the role of Ethiopian labour which the agency employed "on a generous scale" with a normal intake of between 500-1,000 day labourers must be taken into account. On the housing side, at the beginning of 1940, a total of about 60 houses were built including storage and stables. Of these about 40 were completed and 20 were in progress¹⁰⁰. The pictures are equally meagre if the developed land area was examined. In the first year 240 ha were reclaimed. Of these 110 ha were worked exclusively by Ethiopians. Land sown amounted only to 105.45 ha. For 1939 the agency set out a "realistic" programme and intended to put a minimum of 2,500 ha under cultivation. Eventually, the total reclaimed land area, including the previous year, amounted to 1,013 ha and of these 873 ha were cultivated: 10 ha by Dabat Agricultural Office and 125 ha by Ethiopians on a share-cropping basis¹⁰¹. In 1940, the agency concentrated all its efforts on agricultural activities but it was able to sow a mere 1,250 ha¹⁰².

Colonization agencies had an integral approach to their settlement programme. In this respect ECRE's efforts to make its settlement self-sufficient could boast a number of

⁹⁸. CD IAO 1921, Ente Romagna d'Etiofia: Situazione febbraio 1940 (hereafter Situazione); 1793, Attilio Tomassini, ECRE: Promemoria, Rm 15-5-1944, p.2; 1792, op.cit., pp.3-4.

⁹⁹. CD IAO 1921, ECRE, Relazione del Presidente, 11-1-1940, pp.17-8.

¹⁰⁰. Situazione 1940; CD IAO 1792; Quaranta, op.cit., p.48.

¹⁰¹. CD IAO 1921, Relazione, 11-1-1940, pp.6-7.

¹⁰². Ibidem, Fuzzi to Maugini, AA 16-1-1941.

achievements. By the end of 1940, the settlement had its own clinic, a recreation centre and a post office. In addition to this there were: a wide range of agricultural machinery with spare parts and various implements; a well-stocked mechanical workshop, a carpentry shop, an electric generator, a brick furnace with annual production potential of a 500,000 pieces and two wells with a daily capacity of about 20,000 litres¹⁰³. Investment in cattle, albeit modest, was promising if the difficulties of purchasing them locally were taken into account¹⁰⁴. By the end of 1940 the animal stock was 429 consisting of 317 head of oxen, 37 horses, 62 pigs and 13 goats in addition to about 1,000 poultry¹⁰⁵.

The key stumbling block for the ECRE's activities was the perilous political climate and the regime of the land tenure, further compounded by internal administrative shortcomings and lack of co-operation from both local and central governments. Owing to policy differences between Rome and AA, ECRE was forced to start its activities with a manpower cut to less than half the size of its original plan, from 400 settlers to 130. Colonists were waiting for five months as the agency's

¹⁰³. The machinery consisted of tractors (14), mechanical sowers (18), threshers(3), reapers(2), binders(2), fodder press(1), trucks(5), harrows(23), ploughs(27), incubators(1) and a wide range of minor implements. [Situazione 1940]; Berretta, op.cit., pp.80-1. For a slightly different figures See Pankhurst, "Italian settlement":151].

¹⁰⁴. Despite the reported highly lucrative offer from the agency, the Ethiopians sold their best animal stock only when forced. [Cfr. CD IAO 1921, ECRE, Relazione del Presidente, Rm 7-2-1939, pp.17-8; Rm 11-1-1940, pp.13-14; Programma 1940, pp.12-3. Such difficulty was equally experienced by other agencies. [Cfr. Hr 1992, A. Maugini, Promemoria Per l'Ing. Giannoccaro, Firenze 27-9-1938].

¹⁰⁵. Owing to the difficulty of Italian poultry to adapt to high altitude (2400-2500 m), Italian fine quality chickens gave mediocre results, both in the field of pure and cross breeding. [Cfr. CD IAO 1921, ECRE, Relazione del Presidente, Rm 11-1-1940, p.13; Programma 1940, pp.13-4; Situazione 1940; Pini, L'Azione Coloniale, 22-6-1939.

efforts to start in September 1938 were deferred twice; the first, because of the insistence by the Ministry of the Finance that demographic colonization would not constitute any burden to the State treasury; then by the long debate between the MAI and the colonial administration in the Empire, who demanded the delay of the agency's activities until enough land was secured and the turbulent political climate of the area settled down. Further postponement was avoided only by the forceful intervention of Mussolini who ordered an immediate start, notwithstanding the realization that the economic consequences of such a move were damaging¹⁰⁶.

After a short burst of enthusiasm the saga of disappointments began, confirming the fears of the colonial administration in AA. According to plan, the agency was to carry out its work in 50,000 ha of land that would be formed by conversion of small *domainial* holdings into large plots through the principles of expansion and amalgamation as laid down by Mazzocchi Alemanni. But the government of Amara, apprehensive of the political situation and under pressure from the central government, withdrew from its original commitment to provide the agency with 20,000 ha immediately, and 50,000 ha within a few years. In the first year the agency hoped to cultivate 2,500 ha of land with expected yield of 20,000 ql which at the current market price of £.200 per ql, would have given the agency a revenue of £.4,000,000. Eventually the agency cultivated only 105 ha from which it made a very modest revenue of £.53,128.85¹⁰⁷.

Difficulties in obtaining land were symptomatic of the turbulent political climate. Wägära, ECRE's operational area, was a stronghold of national resistance¹⁰⁸. Dabät, ECRE's

¹⁰⁶. CD IAO 1921, Fuzzi, Relazione, 7-2-1939, pp.6-10.

¹⁰⁷. Ibidem, pp.1-8;14-5.

¹⁰⁸. On the operation of the patriotic movement in this area Cfr. Gärima Täfärra, Gondäré bägashaw, (AA:1949 E.C).

centre, was as a garrison under siege. At one stage the centre was ransacked and supplies had to be provided by air. The worsening situation led the Governor, General Mezzetti, to establish a task force at Dabat. Each four houses were protected by a barbed wire fence, and heavy artillery and machine guns, manned by Italian peasant militia. Every Sunday the farmers received military training and exercise in pitched combat, the use of hand grenades and automatic weapons¹⁰⁹. The fluid military situation frustrated the work of agricultural offices which were one of the oldest and had conspicuous presence in each major urban centres of the Amara governorship. As a result, the knowledge of the land tenure system of the area remained poor and the exchange of land slow.

In 1939, there was a remarkable improvement in political conditions largely due to a number of military offensives conducted by the new Governor, General Frusci, which led to the submission of a number of chiefs and allowed a degree of control over surrounding areas. However, the possibility of attaining total disarmament of the population and asserting effective control remained remote. And yet the Amara government took advantage of the lull to evacuate lands destined for demographic colonization and promote share-cropping between Ethiopians and ECRE. In the process a combination of force and the local chiefs was used to convince the Ethiopians. Deceptively, the initiatives seemed to proceed smoothly¹¹⁰. But soon the government was in retreat when it became clear that the land exchange measures worsened the delicate political situation. In the end, the agency, out of its planned 50,000 ha of land, was able to obtain about 5,600 ha and of this only 4,000 ha were useful for demographic colonization¹¹¹.

¹⁰⁹. CS, 1-8-1939; Sbacchi, op.cit., p.349.

¹¹⁰. CD IAO 1921, Fuzzi, Relazione, 11-1-1940, pp.18-9.

¹¹¹. Programma, 19-1-1940, p.2.

The strategy of share-cropping with its twin purpose of peaceful penetration and solving the problem of land scarcity, had modest success. Earlier, Ethiopian farmers agreeing to this form of contract were discouraged by the government's imposition of *äsrat*. This was done when no such obligation was imposed on other Ethiopian farmers. ECRE interpreted this as a deliberate policy meant to undermine its work. With the change of the Amara government at the end of 1939, these strictures were removed. But, despite the agency's use of intensive political pressure, only 350 contracts were signed. Although the harvest was good, the land covered only 95 ha¹¹².

Scarcity of land was not the agency's only problem. Since the early days, it experienced a leadership crisis that remained throughout its life span. The conflict between the General Director of the agency, Savini, and its President, Fuzzi, was so serious that Mussolini himself became worried by the publicity it generated. An urgent *ad hoc* committee led by the General Finance Inspector, Mola, attributed the conflict to a combination of personality and policy differences. Following the subsequent dismissal of Savini, the administration was restructured. But his departure left the agency with a leadership crisis from which it never recovered¹¹³.

The difficulties exposed ECRE to the mercy of competing political interests. For the Duke of Aosta, the situation offered an opportunity to fit the agency's programmes within his own colonization paradigm. With its programmes badly trimmed and its strength weakened by the internal crisis, ECRE was left with little option but to succumb. The developments forced the agency to divert a significant part of its actions

112. Ibidem.

113. Savini was removed in August 1939 and, by the beginning of 1940, four directors were appointed and then left or were removed. CD IAO 1921, De Rubeis A., "Appunti per il Duce", 23-7-1939; Relazione del Presidente, Rm 7-2-1939, pp.13,29; 11-1-1940, pp.2-3; Timo' Mansueto, Rm 9-2-1943; CS, 1-8-1939.

to other areas. In February 1938, it was given a once flourishing farm confiscated from a Russian adventurer, Babitchev, in Shäwa. Later in May 1938 and November 1939 two other farms were given, located in the Upper Awash Valley at Täfqī and at Tullo Bullu¹¹⁴.

Having confined Ensign Babitchev to Rode Island the Italians confiscated his farm, as they did most other foreign businesses¹¹⁵. The farm was located at Adda, within 50 km from AA, at an altitude of 1,800-1,900 m, protected by the surrounding Yärär mountains. As in the pre-Italian period, in post-occupation Ethiopia, Adda was one of the most important modern agricultural centres. It is rich in water resources from the Wädächa river and a spring situated in the lower slopes of Yärär mountain ranges. Apart from the threat of malaria from the palustral zones and stagnant waters along the Wädächa river, it has a healthy climate. With the completion of reclamation work and reorganization of the Wädächa river by ONC, it was hoped that the area would be suitable for demographic colonization. And yet the scarcity of land forced the agency to confine the settlement only to the families of agricultural managers and technicians, not peasants¹¹⁶.

¹¹⁴. Villa and al., op.cit., p.230; MAE, La valorizzazione, pp.269-70, 273; New Times and Ethiopia News, 1-7-1939.

¹¹⁵. DGG 24-3-1938, no.672, Espropriazione dell'Azienda Agricola appartenente al sig. Giovanni Babiceff sita nel territorio della Residenza di Adda, in GU, III/10 [Supl.], 21-5-1938; DGG 26-9-1938, no.819, Indennità da corrispondere al sig. Giovanni Babiceff per l'espropriazione dell'Azienda Agricola sita nel territorio dell R. Residenza di Adda, in GU IV/1, 1-1-1939. The Commission assigned a compensation of £.400.000. Following the plot against Graziani, the Italians began a ruthless attack on foreign interests. Non-Italian business of any importance was compelled either to liquidate or to enlist Italian interests in partnership and most opted to pull out [Cfr. FO371/22020/J641/40/1, CG Bird to PSSFA, AA 4-1-1938].

¹¹⁶. CD IAO 1921, ECRE, Relazione del Presidente, Rm 7-2-1939, pp.23-4; 11-1-1940, p.34.

The farm extended over about 180 ha made up of four plots varying in size and intersected by other properties. Both dry and irrigated farming was used. Although limited to a mere 20 ha, irrigated areas could be doubled through rational use of water resources. Cultivation took place using a mixture of share-cropping and direct management with contracted labour. The total labour force consisted of 120 peasants and their families who lived within the farm. Each family gave four days work to the farm in exchange for a ca.1,000 sqm irrigated plot, known as *carta*. Both forms of management involved part irrigation and part dry farming. Under share-cropping, dry farming was made up of ca.15 ha and irrigated ca.10 ha, while under direct management they consisted of 10 ha each. Crops cultivated in dry farms were cereals consisting mainly of *tef*, durrah, barley, wheat and chick-peas. In the irrigated farms under share-cropping were sweet potato and sugar cane, while on the plots directly manned the key crops were coffee, papaw, bananas and citrus fruits¹¹⁷.

Irrigation was shared with two other bordering groups: three days was allocated to the Oromo peasants of nearby Debasso area, who tilled about 120 ha, and *Qäñazmach Täsämma*, an owner of 40 ha farm. The Babitchev's farm had a four days quota from both the river and the spring: 12 day-time hours were allocated to the farm and 12 night-time hours were used by the *carta*-holders¹¹⁸.

Despite its reliance on traditional techniques, the Babitchev farm had all the features of contemporary modern farms established in the second half of the twentieth century¹¹⁹. It was equipped with a considerable number of residential buildings made of a mixture of stone and *ceqa*, animal shelters,

¹¹⁷. Ibidem, 7-2-1939, pp.22-24; 11-1-1940, pp.21-3.

¹¹⁸. Ibidem, 11-1-1940, p.23.

¹¹⁹. Pankhurst (1968), pp.208-9.

and silos. It also had a water-mill on Wädächa river¹²⁰. Its great disadvantage was the presence of brigands and resistant fighters in the surrounding Yärär mountains. In fact the farm had been the theatre of a number of military operations. This, combined with two years neglect, had left it in a pitiful condition. When the ECRE took possession, the farm animals were reduced to only ten head of oxen, two donkeys and a she-mule; the activities of the carta-holders were restricted to their own individual plots¹²¹.

Soon after the take-over, the farm, renamed after one of Mussolini's daughters Villa Anna Maria, was re-organized under the direction of C.M. Battaglia, a surveyor, and his assistant agriculturalist, Savorelli. Battaglia's work was facilitated by the fact that he was also Vice Resident of Yärär district, a political office that gave him considerable weight in his dealings with Ethiopians. Battaglia had at his disposal 14 Italian workers, composed of a market gardener, tractor driver, two agricultural workers, a store keeper, and eight road builders and labourers working under a superintendent on 10 km long Villa Anna Maria-Bishoftu Road construction project. Later with the addition of an accountant, an agricultural technician, a botanist, a horticulturalist and a herdsman, the farm could boast a well-qualified, though modest, agricultural team¹²².

According to the plan, Anna Maria farm was to be a model estate and an excursion venue for the inhabitants of AA because of its picturesque landscape, medium altitude, abundant water resources, and location a few miles from the capital. The scheme envisaged a total restructuring of the farm to make cul-

¹²⁰. CD IAO 1921, ECRE, Relazione, Rm 7-2-1939, p.23; 11-1-1940, pp.21-2.

¹²¹. Ibidem, 7-2-1939, p.24-5; 11-1-1940, pp.22,33,35.

¹²². Ibidem, 7-2-1939, pp.24,26; 11-1-1940, pp.34-5; 19-1-1940, pp.34-5.

tivation more rational and surveillance easy. This demanded the removal of the *carta*-holders occupying the most fertile areas of the farm and the owners of the criss-crossing or adjoining tracts of lands, including Oromo peasants. Such measures would ensure that the farm was a compact and unbroken unit and had little competition for water resources¹²³. Other operations entailed the organization of the plants in a row and terracing of the soil to make the plots easily accessible; the introduction of new domestic and imported plants and citrus fruits; the renewal of old plants; the extension of vegetable growing areas; the elimination of not easily marketable crops; finally, improvement of the irrigation system by a more rational use of available water resources¹²⁴.

To do this Battaglia relied on a handful of tractors manned by Italian personnel, and extensive use of Ethiopian labour. To counter eventual shortage of labour, he maintained the existing contractual arrangement between the farm and the *carta*-holders. Those *carta*-holders removed to make room for the farm were settled at its margins. In addition, an average of 75 Ethiopians were employed as day labourers, cattle keepers, guardsmen, in water regulation, in the services of mill and *gebbi*. The size of the farm was gradually expanded to about 350 ha through the usual practice of appropriation and confiscation of bordering lands. The measures sparked some revolts. In consequence, at the end of 1939 and the early part of 1940, the farm was the scene of a major military operation¹²⁵. Even though the fighting caused grave damage to the farm, the revolt was

¹²³. Ibidem, 7-2-1939, p.9; 19-1-1940, pp.33-4.

¹²⁴. Ibidem, 7-2-1939, pp.24-6.

¹²⁵. Ibidem, 11-1-1940, pp.24-5,35.

ruthlessly crushed. The agency was paid indemnity with which it was able to replenish its depleted livestock¹²⁶.

Improvement in the use of water was reached by either reducing the quota allocated to the Ethiopians or, according to the initial plan, removing them to other areas. The most important operation in the irrigated farms was the successful transplantation of a number of coffee and fruit trees; sugar cane plants and sweet potatoes were eliminated on the grounds of low market demand by the Italians and high water requirement. On the nursery side, ornamental plants both of local and foreign variety were extensively cultivated partly to meet the demand from AA inhabitants and the Town Hall¹²⁷.

Actual progress, however, was slow. The 1938 annual report did not fail to point out the modest nature of the achievements. It blamed the unsettled political situation and the scarce resources of men and material, but at the same time emphasized the valuable lessons learnt. The statistics of 1939 were not comforting. With the help of two tractors and extensive use of local workforce, 20 ha had been reclaimed and 75 ha sown - 65 ha dry farming, the rest irrigated¹²⁸. In 1940 the total cultivated area amounted to 136 ha, with 26 ha irrigated and 110 ha dry farming¹²⁹.

Upper Awash farms, of Täfqi and Tullo Bullu, were located along the AA-Jimma highway and within close range to Awash, one of Ethiopia's principal rivers. This, combined with their high productive potential, made the two farms one of the

¹²⁶. Despite the preventive treatment by the Zooprophyllactic Institute of AA, a 1939 epidemic killed most of the animals particularly oxen. The agency total livestock amounted to 86 animals - 30 oxen, 16 cows, 6 calves, 16 goats, 10 donkeys, 7 mules, 3 sheep and 2 horses [Ibidem, 11-1-1940, pp.11-2].

¹²⁷. Ibidem, 11-1-1940, pp.26,29-30; Fuzzi to Maugini, AA 16-1-1941, p.5.

¹²⁸. Ibidem, Relazione, 11-1-1940, pp.27-30.

¹²⁹. Ibidem, Fuzzi to Maugini, AA 16-1-1941, pp.5-6.

most promising sites for successful demographic colonization. In addition they were to serve as an experimental centre for the study of the agricultural potential of the region as well as water resources. Yet once again it proved difficult to obtain land. The *residentes* contacted were slow to act and only after long and laborious negotiations a total of ca.700 ha was obtained, approximately 350 ha at each place¹³⁰. As most of it was virgin land, work proved difficult. Using 10 agricultural labourers, 6 tractor drivers with 5 Caterpillar tractors under the supervision of a hard-working agricultural expert, Giacomo Fiumana, 400 ha were reclaimed at Tullo Bullu. At Täfqī, 150 ha were sown with *téf* (100 ha), chick-peas (40 ha) and *nug* (10 ha). As the farm was experimental, emphasis was laid on the cultivation of different varieties of local and imported crops. Wheat, fodder, oil-seeds, vegetable and citrus fruit were cultivated on the remaining land¹³¹. In 1940, the cultivated areas were beyond target. Against 1,200 ha planned, 1,600 ha were reclaimed and 1,049 ha sown, but, contrary to early expectations, the average yield, as in most of Shäwa lands, was poor¹³². As in other farms, the agency combined farming with cattle raising. By 1940 it had a modest but promising animal population of 16 cows for breeding, 12 draft oxen, 4 bullocks,

¹³⁰. The initial concession was at Busa, 24 km from the AA-Jimma highway but because of lack of accommodation and difficulty of getting supply, Täfqī was chosen where the agency's personnel occupied part of the military garrison. The change entailed the evacuation of the Ethiopian owners from their *rest* lands at Täfqī to domainial lands at Busa. The process proved very slow. At Tullo Bullu the work started immediately and accommodation was not a problem as the agency purchased the road construction sites from Parisi company [Cfr. CD IAO 1921, Relazione, 7-2-1939, pp.11-2; 11-1-1940, pp.37-8,44.]

¹³¹. Ibidem, 1-1-1940, pp.39-43,45.

¹³². Ibidem, Fuzzi to Maugini, AA 16-1-1941, pp.3-4.

8 mules and 3 horses¹³³.

ECPE fared no better. ECRE was credited with being the first regional demographic agency, but it was ECPE that first began actual settlement. Using funds advanced by the government of Härär, it started work even before its legal constitution had been approved. In many respects, ECPE's scheme was identical to that of ECRE and ONC, but differed in the pattern of house construction and organization. To its advantage, it had a relatively peaceful area with plentiful water and a sympathetic colonial administration. Its main problem was obtaining a sufficient indigenous workforce¹³⁴.

As no bank of information existed on the area's agricultural potential, the agency set out a number of rules of thumb to maximize economic resources and keep risk to a minimum. It planned to combine cereal farming on land directly manned by the agency with cattle husbandry¹³⁵. To reduce labour costs and remedy its shortage, mechanical farming was to be dominant. Animal husbandry was to involve both draft and - to meet the increasing demand of the growing settler community - industrial animals. Maugini emphasized the need to resort to political pressure to overcome Ethiopian reluctance to sell animals¹³⁶. But as was so often the case, plan differed from practice. The agency showed little stock raising interest and its animal population amounted to only about 70 oxen and a few poultry and horses¹³⁷.

¹³³. Ibidem, pp.5-6; Fuzzi, Relazione, 11-1-1940, pp.24-36; 11-1-1940, pp.32-6.

¹³⁴. As regards administrative structure see: Schema di norme; Statuto giuridico.

¹³⁵. CD IAO Hr 1992, Maugini, Promemoria, Firenze 27-9-1938.

¹³⁶. Ibidem, pp.1-2.

¹³⁷. Ibidem, ECPE, Bilancio consuntivo, p.24; Agostino Volpi, EPE: Relazione, Bari d'Etiofia, 20-11-1940, pp.9-10.

The agency planned to allot each settler family a large farms of 50 ha or more. But as a short term strategy, it allocated between 15 and 35 ha. On the remaining land the agency, using exclusively Ethiopian labour, carried out directly mechanical farming and cultivated crops of home and foreign variety. Emphasis was laid on lucrative industrial crops that could offset the financial cost of the project. After a while these plots were to be allotted to the settlers, while the agency explored and put new land under cultivation¹³⁸.

FIGURE VB. ECPE SETTLERS ON MILITARY TRAINING.



¹³⁸. "Di alcuni problemi":1877-8.

TABLE IX:- CROP ROTATION AT ENTE PUGLIA FARM

YEAR	SEMESTER	I (Ha.4)	II (Ha.4)	III (Ha.4)	IV (Ha.4)	V (Ha.4)	F A R M S I Z E
I	1	RENEWAL	HERBS	DURRAH	FALLOW	DURRAH	Buildings, Roads, ditches Citrus orchard, arboreta Rotation exempt grazing field Rotating herbal crop Fallow during rotation period 25 ha
	2	WHEAT	OIL-SEEDS	DURRAH	DURRAH	DURRAH	
II	3	HERBS	DURRAH	FALLOW	DURRAH	RENEWAL	
	4	OIL-SEEDS	WHEAT	DURRAH	WHEAT	WHEAT	
III	5	DURRAH	FALLOW	DURRAH	RENEWAL	HERBS	
	6	FALLOW	DURRAH	RENEWAL	WHEAT	OIL-SEEDS	
VI	7	FALLOW	DURRAH	RENEWAL	HERBS	DURRAH	
	8	DURRAH	WHEAT	WHEAT	OIL-SEEDS	FALLOW	
V	9	DURRAH	RENEWAL	HERBS	DURRAH	FALLOW	
	10	FALLOW	WHEAT	OIL-SEEDS	DURRAH	FALLOW	

K E Y

- A. RENEWAL: Potato, corn, broad-beans, beetroot.
- B. INDUSTRIAL: Oil plants, cotton, flax, castor, ground-nut, sun-flower.
- C. HERBAL: Fodder-crop.
- D. LEGUMINOUS: Lentils (subject to prior manuring), chick-peas, beans.

Source:- [Carlo Giglio], "Di alcuni problemi della colonizzazione demografica", -REAI, 26, 12 (1938):1879

The decision to allocate plots ranging between 25 and 35 ha hinged on a number of assumptions. On the productivity side, since Wächo Valley's agricultural and livestock resources were immense, if intensively cultivated the plots would be highly remunerative. On the settler's side, the farms were within the means and abilities of the colonist families. It was pointed out that in an average family of eight the maximum working members would be five. Such a family could not cultivate effectively a farm of 50 ha without the aid of Ethiopians. But owing to the scarcity of local labour and, above all, the desire to obtain as much land as possible, the settlers were not allowed to engage Ethiopians. The agency made allowance for the gradual enlargement of the settler's plot either after a five year period when the rest of his farm had become fully productive, or a part of it could even be given to the colonist's eldest son when he was ready to farm on his own¹³⁹.

Another strategy was extensive use of share-cropping contracts with Ethiopians. This system, in addition to ensuring revenue, had political advantages as it was thought to favour peaceful penetration into areas where the Ethiopian population was dense¹⁴⁰. Indeed, as indicated in land directly cultivated, the agency made a generous use of Ethiopian labour¹⁴¹. But in no place do its records attest that it practised any form of share-cropping.

¹³⁹. Ibidem; Situazione amministrativa, p.2.

¹⁴⁰. CD IAO Hr 1992, Maugini, Promemoria.

¹⁴¹. No data exists on number of the Ethiopians employed by the agency but records for 1939 and 1940 indicate that wages paid in 1939, including board, amounted to £.97,434.25 and those for up to 30-11-1940 consisted in a total of £.54.411 (wages) and £.854 (board). Allowing that the pay consisted of official £.2 per diem, it can be concluded that in 1939 ca.130 and in 1940 ca.78 Ethiopians were employed daily [Cfr. CD IAO Hr 1992, CD IAO ECPE, Bilancio, p.14; Ufficio Presidenza, Conto costi e redditi, Rm 11-4-1941].



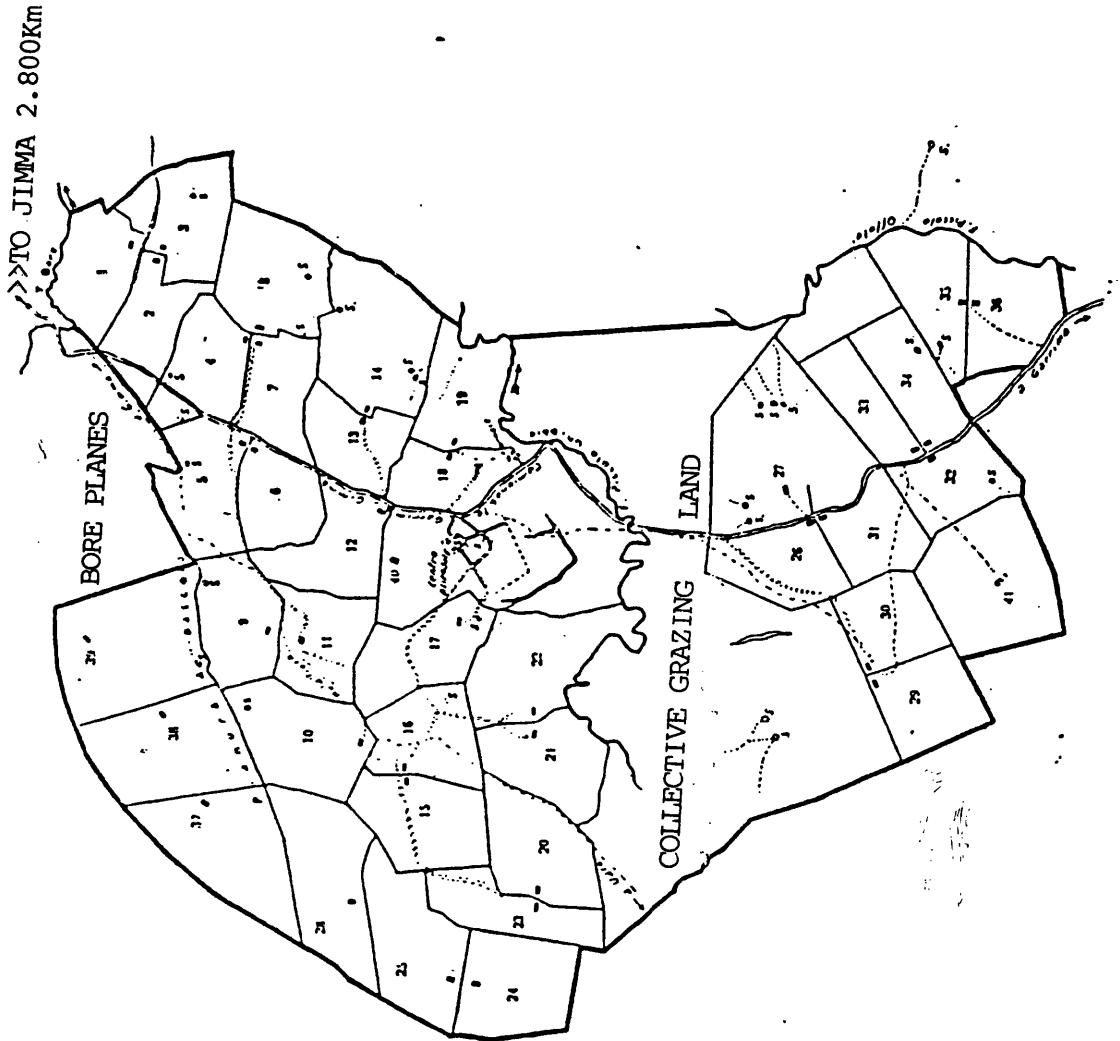
FIGURE VI . ECPE SETTLERS AT BRINDISI .





FIGURE VII. AN ECPE FAMILY AT WACHO (BARI OF ETHIOPIA).

FIGURE VIII. GENERAL PLANIMETRY OF EDR.



Source:- IAC, Main Features of Italy's Action in Ethiopia, 1936-1941, Firenze 1946, Plate LXXVI.

Construction of the colonists' dwellings proceeded hand in hand with the creation of the farms. But unlike ONC and ECRE, the houses were scattered along the road, in pairs with 50 m between them. Facing these were another pair at a distance of 80-100 m, separated by a road. The initial plan was to build five room stone houses with a central passage, kitchen and a small oven: a lounge at the centre flanked at its right and left by two separate rooms plus storage. Eventually only two bedroom houses were built with a lounge and kitchen. Unlike both ONC and ECRE who built communal bakeries and wells, ECPE equipped each farm with a baking oven with an overhanging hen-house and a well of its own, ostensibly to avoid bickering among the housewives. The farm's set up, as a whole, was intended to reduce inter-farm tracks and enhance close co-operation, and guarantee security¹⁴². At the end of 1940, about 120 houses were under construction, and only 27 were complete¹⁴³. Their inadequacy in design and size soon became apparent. The oven with the overhanging hen-house made the rooms smoky, hot and filthy. There were not enough rooms to accommodate large families, and storage for food and tools was lacking¹⁴⁴.

But ECPE should be credited for at least having settled a few families. The first 105 settlers, who embarked on 17 January 1938 from Brindisi, arrived at Wächo on 2 February. They came from Foggia, Lecce, Taranto and Brindisi and the plan was that each settlement was to bear the name of these districts and to be inhabited by people of that area. More than a year later, in June 1939, they were joined by an additional 99 settlers. The settlement was concentrated at Wächo and took

¹⁴². G. Giannoccaro, "Prime tappe", op.cit.:25-7; "L'ECPE", Italiani in Africa, suppl. no. 7, Africa Italiana, 9-5-1939; Le Colonie, 7-5-1939; GP, 14-1-1939; MAE, La valorizzazione, pp.281-4.

¹⁴³. CD IAO Hr 1992, Volpi, EPE: Relazione, Bari d'Etiopia, 20-11-1940, p.3.

¹⁴⁴. Ibidem, Situazione, p.2.

the name of *Bari di Ethiopia*. Towards the end of 1940 it had a population of 276. About 80 were construction agency workers, others were employed by the agency as mechanics and tractor drivers. The rest were peasant settlers. Among these 14 were with their families composed of 74 children aged between one and eighteen years. In all, they were 104 individuals. There had been three deaths and two births among the settler families¹⁴⁵.

These modest accomplishments were not matched on the farming side. In an attempt to overcome the prevailing uncertainties, ECPE relied on diversified cultivation. With the exclusion of 1 ha that was to be occupied by ditches, wells and building, the remaining 24 ha were partitioned in 6 sections of 4 ha each [see Table IX]. Of these 5 sections were set aside for rotating cereal crop cultivation. The type of crop subject to rotation each year varied according to climatic conditions as well as the crop cycle. Of the remaining section, 2 ha were allocated for arboriculture and the other 2 ha for grassland. Out of 6,000 ha planned for cultivation in the first year, 1,100 ha were reclaimed and 650 ha sown. In the following year, an additional 1,000 ha were reclaimed, but sowing remained confined to 200 ha. There was a substantial increase in land reclaimed in 1940, but land actually cultivated remained quite modest in size. Against 3,000 ha reclaimed, a mere ca.260 ha were sown, 103 ha by the 14 settler families and 157 by the agency itself¹⁴⁶.

EDR's scheme was to farm large plots removing its occupants to a nearby area, far enough away to avoid social

¹⁴⁵. Giannoccaro, "Prime Tappe", op.cit; idem, "L'ECPE", op.cit.; Le Colonie, 21-11-1939; CI, 24-1-1939; 21-6-1939. 25-6-1939; Il Messaggero, 24-1-1939; PI, 3-4-1939. Accordingly they came from: Lecce (29), Bari (18), Taranto (18), Brindisi (17), Foggia (10). CD IAO Hr 1992, Volpi, Relazione, pp.1-3, 6; "Le prime due nascite a Bari d'Etiofia", CM, 21-11-1939.

¹⁴⁶. "Di alcuni problemi":1878.

contact but close enough to guarantee a flow of labour supply. In this way the agency secured 2,500 ha. In the process 682 Ethiopian families were dislocated against compensation to their property, part in cash and part in kind and 700 houses, and 2,730 animal shelters were destroyed. Each family was given an average of 1.02 ha of land and compensation of £.366.50, with a total payment amounting to £.250,000. They were settled within 10 km from the farm¹⁴⁷.

In the construction of the houses and organization of the farms, EDR followed ECPE, but the labour code was quite different from other regional agencies. Owing to financial considerations, it excluded the salaried period and the peasant started with the redemptive phase. Its housing programme envisaged two types: 35 two-roomed houses for small families and 5 three-roomed houses for larger ones. Both had a kitchen and looked on to a vast porch. Some were isolated and others grouped in twos or threes, each within their own plot. Each group shared a communal oven and well¹⁴⁸.

By the end of 1940, EDR was able to settle 41 families. Thirty came from Italy while the heads of the remaining 11 were chosen from Jimma among the veterans of the Italo-Ethiopian war. Twenty five were from Bergamo, 5 from Abruzzi and the rest mostly from central Italy¹⁴⁹. EDR's the major shortcoming was in developing adequate land for the settlers.

¹⁴⁷. CD IAO Gm 2919, pp.1-2; 1916, p.13; Villa and al., op.cit., p.236.

¹⁴⁸. Gm 2919, op.cit., pp.2-4.

¹⁴⁹. The regions involved included Alessandria, Catanzaro, Cuneo, Littoria, Parma, Reggio Emilia and Napoli. They came in two batches. The largest contingent arrived on 9-12-1939 and was 162 strong. It included 120 children aged between one and half months and 10 years. The second group came in April 1940 [Cfr. Azione Coloniale, 23-11-1939; CC, 25-12-1939; "L'arrivo a Massaua dei coloni diretti nel Gimma", Corriere Eritreo Sportivo, 8-4-1940; GI, 24-11-1939; IOM, 20-1-1940; Il Mattino, 23-11-1939; 30-3-1940; Il Popolo di Sicilia, 12-12-1939; PR, 9-4-1940; La Tribuna, 12-12-1939].

The agency targeted to provide each family with 35-40 ha. At the moment of settlement the family would receive 10 ha already reclaimed and ready for cultivation and the rest as a pasture and woodland. Actually, EDR developed a total of 120 ha - far short of its planned target¹⁵⁰.

CAG followed a quite different approach. Unlike EDR, it left the Ethiopians on part of their original land, as their labour, particularly in heavy duty jobs, was of vital importance¹⁵¹. But like EDR, it introduced the settler and his family only after accommodation was ready and land sufficient enough to support them. Each settler received 5-6 ha of reclaimed land. Upon payment of a lump sum of between £.10-15 as part of its amortization, the settler was transferred onto the land. The settler assumed the status of an ordinary concessionaire and, with regard to the anticipations received by the way of housing expenses and start-up capital, his relation with the CAG was like that of a debtor vis-a-vis his creditor. As a result, the settler shouldered all the responsibility of the farm, including management. There was no time limit for the discharging of debt, but he was expected to do so as soon as he could. In case of extraordinary works, the CAG rented the necessary equipment. In this way, at the end of 1940, the CAG was operating on 700 ha and had settled 14 families. The head families were selected locally, and each was provided with about 50 ha¹⁵².

The picture that emerges is that regional demographic colonization agencies' achievements in transplanting Italian rural life to rural Ethiopia were modest. The fruition

¹⁵⁰. CD IAO Gm 2919, p. 5; GS 1822, pp. 2-3; CI, 23-11-1938; GP, 9-5-1940.

¹⁵¹. CD IAO GS 1822, pp.4-5; Villa and al., op.cit., p.236.

¹⁵². Ibidem, pp. 4-5; Azione Coloniale, 16-11-1939; CI, 14-4-1940; GP, 9-5-1940; Il Mattino, 24-11-1939; Il Messaggero, 17-11-1939; La Pattuglia, 30-12-1939; PR, 17-4-1940.

of the scheme was thwarted by a number of factors, some of them common to the Eritrean and Libyan experience. The agencies suffered from administrative confusion and managerial incompetence. The conduct of some agency officials bewildered the colonists. Giannoccaro was known for his dictatorial behaviour, avarice, and irresponsible conduct towards the peasants, as was also the case with De Rege's authorities. As a whole, the leadership lacked clear vision and a sense of commitment¹⁵³.

Equally important was the meddling of local organizations, ranging from the Fascist Party to the trade union and colonial administration, into the internal administration of the agencies. Each group expressed conflicting views on the plight of the settlers and on their administrators. For some critics, the agencies' sole purpose was to provide "cushy" jobs for a few party and government officials, medical officers and agricultural experts¹⁵⁴. The agency officials naturally saw the settlers' grievances in a rather different light. They believed that many peasants were simply fortune hunters who came to Africa lured by absurd promises made by irresponsible people, i.e. Party officials¹⁵⁵.

Close examination of the settlers' background suggests that the selection procedure was far from ideal. The official view of the peasant settler was a hard-working and large family man aged between 25 and 40, an ex-fighter with "robust physique, the Fascist spirit, and good character"¹⁵⁶, or as the Minister of AI described:

simple and honest men attached to bountiful turf by millennial racial instinct, people of resolute heart and loyal who

¹⁵³. CD IAO Hr 1992, Appunti per l'Ing. Giannoccaro, Firenze 27-5-1940, pp.1,7; GS 1821, op.cit..

¹⁵⁴. Pierotti, op.cit., pp.36-38; Stonehewer-Bird to Halifax, AA 1-4-1939.

¹⁵⁵. CD IAO GS 1821.

¹⁵⁶. Sunday Times, 23-1-1938.

have rushed from the motherland to remote Africa and who in a Roman style bring fertility to those lands barren for centuries¹⁵⁷.

Few met such an idealistic description. A random survey of the settlers of EDR and ECPE reveals the presence of social misfits and troublemakers¹⁵⁸. There were unskilled workers who jumped between jobs as miners, farm-labourers, and road workers, hoping to find in the Empire an easy life; pedlars and craftsmen who lacked elementary agricultural skills; former soldiers turned university students; adventurers who came to the Empire to escape domestic unemployment and accumulate fortune before returning home. A few had a farming background but before they came to the Empire, they changed to non-farming employment. There were quinquagenarian men and women whose ability to be successful farmers was questionable¹⁵⁹.

An overview of the health of many belie repeated claims of strict vetting. Out of 42 settlers repatriated to Italy by the ECPE, 28 were for ill-health¹⁶⁰. A number of EDR settlers had tuberculosis and heart trouble¹⁶¹. Most of the settlers were far removed from being the ideal Italian Mussolini depicted - ready to "Believe, Obey and Fight"¹⁶². Many

¹⁵⁷. Pomilio, (ottobre 1939):39; Le Colonie, 28-2-1939.

¹⁵⁸. The technical officers were unequivocal in their complaints about these group. The case in point is Mr Giuseppe Brescia's family, described as "lacking any dignity, apathetic, indolent, and of poor moral" [CD IAO Hr 1992, Volpi, Relazione, 20-11-1940, p.6].

¹⁵⁹. L'Azione Coloniale, 30-11-1939; PI, 24-11-1939; CE, 3-12-1939; CD IAO Hr 1992, Volpi, Relazione, 20-11-1940, pp.6-7.

¹⁶⁰. These included chronic bronchitis, dyspepsia, haemorrhoids, rheumatism, chronic fever, organic depletion [Cfr. CD IAO 1992, Relazione Ing. Giannoccaro, 24-3-1940; Volpi, op.cit., 20-11-1940, pp.4,6].

¹⁶¹. GS 1821.

¹⁶². GRA 45/41-5, Notiziario Radio [Supl.], 29-9-1937.

were repatriated for indiscipline. On occasion troublesome families successfully exploited the competing authorities and ignored the agency's rule with impunity¹⁶³.

Excellent farmers were in the minority. All of them had a biblical vision of Africa where land and food were in abundance¹⁶⁴. Disillusionment came with hard work, harsh climate, privations of all kinds and squalid living conditions. The optimism and confidence which characterized their journey to Africa evaporated once they came in contact with reality - a sharp contrast to the fanfare that marked their trips and was glowingly reported by the media. It was routine before leaving as pioneers of the 'second Roman Empire' for the colonists to be lavishly entertained. Equipped with the khaki cotton uniform of the Fascist colonial militia and supplied with some farm necessities including seed grain they paraded chanting "Giovinanza" and at each stop on their journey were greeted by enthusiastic crowds meticulously organized by Party cadres and government officials¹⁶⁵. The glowing picture which the leadership painted, combined with the ease and speed of the Italian victory over Ethiopia, lent weight that these promises could be realized.

To some extent, the settler was cushioned from the full rigors of frontier life by the facilities and services provided for him. He paid no tax, and received free medical

¹⁶³. Out of 105 settlers of ECPE, 42 were repatriated, 12 of them for indiscipline. CD IAO Hr 1992, Relazione Ing. Giannoccaro, 24-3-1940; Volpi, ibidem; GS 1821.

¹⁶⁴. They migrated because they saw better prospects in the Empire. Their enthusiasm shines through in their interviews - obviously written for propaganda purposes [Cfr. PI, 24-11-1939. Luxuriant growth of the first harvest prompts an elderly peasant to make a remark for a visiting Duke of Aosta: "It seems to me of being in the promised land. The potato is harvested three times. Even the most wretched grass has a height of no less than three metres" [Berretta, op.cit., p.182].

¹⁶⁵. Sunday Times, 23-1-1938. For the rest of the event see Chapter III, pp.130-4.

care. Yet the colonial life was also full of problems. There was the sluggish bureaucracy that distributed necessary tools and supplies only after long delays. Others found that the materials and livestock delivered inadequate or inappropriate. As in the case with the ECPE, food was insufficient and poor nutritionally, and accommodation depressing. The settler, particularly of good will, was demoralized by bad weather, draught, and insects that plagued his crops. He lived in constant fear of being attacked by Ethiopians¹⁶⁶.

Already at the end of 1939, the problem of recruitment had become acute¹⁶⁷. During this same period, the Italian authorities had begun to express doubts as to the viability of their colonization techniques. The achievements were mediocre but the costs were enormous. How much the agencies spent on their colonization projects during the years 1937-1941 is not known. But the Empire contributed only a small fraction of the expense. Out of a total budget of £.50,000,000 allocated to each of them, ECRE had spent more than £.35,000,000 and ECPE ca£.29,000,000¹⁶⁸.

Hopes and speculations vastly exceeded actual results. The enterprise which had begun earlier in a mood of optimism had lately become a more sober affair, beset by incertitude and anxieties. Demographic colonization was no more regarded as an effective way to solve Italy's population problem. The scheme was questioned, and in its place the capitalist methods, so strongly advocated by the Duke of Aosta, began to gain wider currency.

¹⁶⁶. Reports are full of locust invasion and draught that brought in havoc in the settler's as well as the agency's confidence. See Daily Telegraph, 21-2-1939;

¹⁶⁷. According to the agencies, the shortage was due to large settlements that took place at the Pontine Marshes and Libya. See Programma 1940, p.4.

¹⁶⁸. CD IAO 1792, op.cit., p.1; 1793, pp.1-2; 1992, Bilancio patrimoniale, 30-12-1940; Sbacchi, op.cit., pp.442-6.

TABLE X:- LAND ALLOCATED AND DEVELOPED BY DEMOGRAPHIC AGENCIES (in ha).

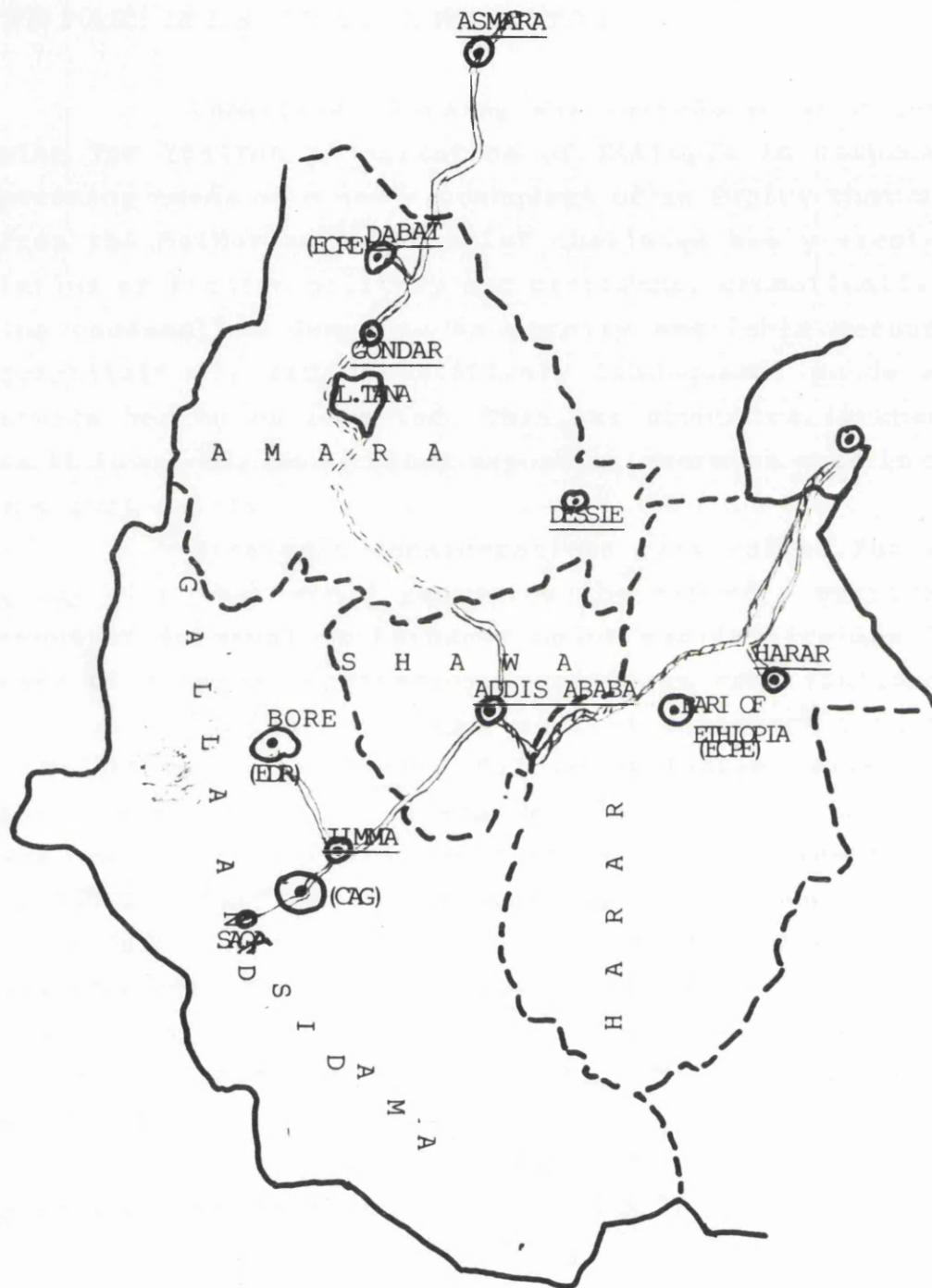
AGENCY	PLANNED	GRANTED 1938	1939	<u>RECLAIMED</u>		<u>CULTIVATED</u>		
				1940	1941	1938	1939	1940*
BCRE	60,000	5,600	380	1,013	-	148 ^a	1,227	2,431
BCPE	60,000	6,000	1,100	1,100	3,000	602	-	261
BDR	2,350	1,600	-	-	-	-	-	160
CAG	700	700	-	-	-	-	-	65
TOTAL	123,050	13,900	1,480	2,103	3,000	750	1,227	2,917

a. Inclusive of lands worked by the Ethiopians under share-cropping.

* No figures available for 1941.

Source:- CD IAO 1921, Fuzzi, Relazione del Presidente, Rm 7-2-1939, pp.5,25-9,48; Fuzzi to GAMDCL, Dabat 2-9-1940; Fuzzi to Maugini, AA 16-1-1941; Giannoccaro, L'ECPE, op.cit.:19; RGG UA, Attività svolta nei vari settori dalla costituzione dell'ufficio fino ad oggi, gennaio 1940, p.2; Villa and al., op.cit., p.2.

FIGURE VIII B. REGIONAL SETTLEMENT CENTRES.



CHAPTER VI
COMMERCIAL FARMING

THE POLICY IN ITS HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Commercial farming was introduced into the overall plan for Italian colonization of Ethiopia in response to the pressing needs of a sudden conquest of an Empire that was remote from the Motherland. The chief challenge was presented by the influx of Italian military and civilians, dramatically increasing consumption demands. As locally available resources were quantitatively and qualitatively inadequate, goods and food-stuffs had to be imported. This was economically unacceptable as it involved, among other expenses, enormous cost in transport and port duties.

Strategic considerations also called for a contingency plan that would guarantee the Empire's survival in the event of internal uprising or major war implicating Italy. In case of external aggression significant contributions towards such an objective were expected from demographic colonization and "native agriculture". But an exclusive reliance on both these sectors was judged economically unwise. "Native farming" was thought to require rapid transformation in order to meet production targets, achievable only if age-old habits were discarded¹. In the event of widespread internal insurgency, dependence on the "native" production was seen as a liability². Equally, a great deal of time, finance and organization was needed before demographic colonization could be sufficiently established³.

In the face of such shortcomings, the Italian government was prompted to pursue a policy of development based

¹. CD IAO AOI 1854, p.2; ATdR 24/99, Relazione sull'autonomia alimentare dell'impero: Appunti del De Benedictis, novembre 1937.

². Pier Buono, "L'impresa agricola privata nella colonizzazione dell'AOI", GAD, 13-11-1938; CI, 11-9-1938.

³. CD IAO AOI 1990, pp.7-9; ATdR 24/100, pp.14-5.

on commercialization of agriculture and encouragement of agrarian capitalism. The key objective was import substitution both in the colony and the metropolis. As Mussolini summed up, "in the battle for the attainment of autarky both the territories of the metropolis and the Empire formed an inextricable unit". This was within the framework of Italy's view of the Empire as a natural extension of the metropolis⁴. In the light of this, commercial farms were expected to fulfil twin objectives⁵ which Lessona summed up:

What must be clear from the start is the fact that the fundamental objective in the economic field must be *to secure the self-sufficiency of IEA in the shortest possible time and in the most comprehensive forms that can be effected*. Alongside with this but in as far as it does not conflict with the attainment of this primary objective, *East Africa must develop those trends of overseas trade predating our occupation and be able to produce raw materials that our country needs*⁶.

The need to rely on this sector became even more compelling when Mussolini set the end of 1938 as the deadline after which any kind of metropolitan foodstuff subsidy to the Empire would cease⁷. Since early 1936, there had been an under-

⁴. CE, 11-11-1938; CC, 25-11-1940; IC, 19-1-1940.

⁵. CD IAO AOI 1936, Promemoria per S.E. Il Capo del Governo, Agricoltura e colonizzazione nell'AOI, Rm, novembre 1937; ATdR 24/99. Autarky was a theme recurrent throughout the occupation. Cfr. "La politica autarchica e le sue ripercussioni sui traffici commerciali", EI, (luglio 1938); "L'impero nell'economia di guerra", ibidem, (maggio 1940). "L'AOI nel quadro dell'autarchia nazionale", II, (aprile 1940).

⁶. IAO CD 1854, pp.1-2.

⁷. GRA 44/36-2, Mussolini to Graziani, Rm 13-4-1937; Rm 30-7-1937. Mussolini's deadline originally set to 1-7-1938, later was brought towards the end of this same year. The immediate effect of the order was the rise of feverish activities that were largely disorganized and abortive. The most significant among these was the formation of a Civil Mobilization Committee and

standing within the Italian colonial administration that such an objective was not beyond reach. An annual production of between 800,000 and 1,000,000 ql of foodstuff was calculated to be sufficient to free the Italian settlers and their local collaborators from dependence on imported food and on "native" production⁸. This assessment optimistically predicted that the commercial farms, aided by demographic colonization, would bring into cultivation ca.20,000 ha per year. With such a pace of development it was thought that autarky would be a reality within five year period⁹.

The development of commercial farming was complicated by the struggle between the MC in Rome and the colonial administration in Ethiopia. The conflict was reflected in a wide range of issues concerning the type of farms that should be encouraged, the areas in which land should be granted and the mechanisms by which this should be accomplished. However, no well-defined position existed as policies and attitudes shifted with changes of personalities. In the early stages, specifically under the government of Graziani, the Ministry's enthusiasm for large-scale commercial farms was viewed inside the Empire with some apprehension. The main focus of the regime within Ethiopia was on the industrious small cultivator; its belief was that the Empire should be an open field of activity for all Italians and not for a privileged group, whether private capitalists or corporate bodies. Underlying such a position was the fear that the encroachment of large companies

Co-ordinated Supreme Defence Commission whose main task was to put the whole country on a war footing and requisition foodstuffs; yet both these institutions existed only on paper. Cfr. *ibidem*, AA 20-5-1937.

⁸. Bird to Halifax, AA 1-4- 1939, p.7.

⁹. CD IAO 1774, G. Pini, *Attività economica dei nazionali in AOI prima ed all'inizio della guerra*, febbraio 1941, p.2. In fact, the Minister of Colonies, Terruzzi, claimed that 700.000 ql would be produced in 1939. Cfr. Pomilio, (ottobre 1938):39.

would lead in the long term to a *de facto* monopoly. The outcome would be the concentration of land and agricultural products in the hands of a few companies at the expense of the small scale investor and of the organic and healthy development of the Empire's agriculture¹⁰.

The Ministry's argument rested on a realistic appraisal of the socio-economic condition of the Empire. The most significant consideration was that, as a backward economy on the extreme periphery of the world capitalist system, the Empire needed a massive infusion of capital and infrastructure. But the economic resources at the command of the State were meagre and skilled personnel scarce. Therefore, its ability to carry out such enormous pioneering work was lamentably limited¹¹. In the light of this, the Ministry found the expediency of partnership with big farms the only viable alternative. Underlying this belief was the view that, with sufficient backing in Italy, the companies should be able to invest enough capital in their holding, and furnish the necessary technical knowledge and managerial skills to ensure that the basis of agricultural development was properly laid¹².

With this approach the Ministry aimed to use large companies as a time-buying strategy until the basic organizational and developmental infrastructures were laid down. But its position appeared rather baffling, as in the meantime it

¹⁰. Villa and al., op.cit., pp.221-2.

¹¹. Del Boca, op.cit., III, pp.144-5.

¹². CD IAO AOI 1936, DGACL (Lessona) to GG. Produzione di frumento per fabbisogno AOI, Rm 12-10-1937, p.5 (hereafter Lessona to GG, Produzione frumento). According to Lessona private initiative would bring three advantages to the economy: 1. Ensures the transfer of sizeable agricultural machinery.

2. Enables the transfer of experienced and skilled farmers with their own equipment to start agricultural activity immediately.

3. Furnishes useful experience in the relationship between commercial farms and local "native" farmers.

reiterated its commitment to upholding the paramountcy of the social goals of colonization. Thus, according to the Ministry's plan a number of small and medium-sized private farms whose primary scope was to populate the land were to be promoted alongside large scale commercial farms. Families with adequate skills and capital were to be encouraged to take up farming¹³. Close control by the government, it was thought, would ensure promotion of such mass settlement initiatives and curb the eventual concentration of land in the hands of a few commercial farms. The strategies used for such control were mainly careful processing of applications for land concessions and imposition of strict contractual agreements. As we will explore later in this chapter, such a system strengthened the hands of bureaucracy. It became impossible to get anything done without going to innumerable offices in the capital of the respective governorate who all referred the matter to their superior in Rome. From the point of anti-monopolistic control and promotion of genuine investors, the measures also proved inadequate.

As initially envisaged, commercial farms were to be confined to a few carefully selected areas unsuitable for settlement but economically viable. Viability was measured in terms of the presence of abundant labour and the potential for large returns for capital invested¹⁴. But the plan was never translated into action and most commercial farms operated close to demographic colonization. In fact, the promoters of the scheme failed to see that from the start the plan was wrought with internal inconsistencies. The areas that were singled out included such scattered and remote regions as those surrounding AA to the Awash River basin in the south and south-west, from Erär Valley and the JeJega planes in Härär in the south-east,

13. Villa and al., *ibidem*.

14. CD IAO AOI 1936, Lessona to GG IA, Rm 9-6-1937.

up to the planes of Qobbo and Qorbätta in the far north¹⁵. But more importantly, some of these areas were beyond the Italian authorities' immediate political grip. Secondly, an abundance of vacant land did not necessarily mean that the land was conducive to commercial farming. In fact, as the Italians themselves discovered, labour tended to be extremely scarce, the climate unhealthy and communication difficult. In addition, despite their public pronouncements the political authorities in Rome and Ethiopia paid only lip-service to the policy and were more conspicuous in undermining than encouraging it. As we will see, the most glaring example was the allowance for a governor to issue certain concessions in his respective territory¹⁶. In some governorates this policy was pursued vigorously to the chagrin of the Viceroy's government in AA who was often forced to intervene to correct excessive abuses¹⁷.

ORGANIZATIONAL PATTERN

At the eve of Ethiopian Independence in 1941, there were farms of all dimensions and combinations differing in structure, organization and orientation. Towards early 1939 these were divided into three categories¹⁸.

A. There were small homestead farms developed by farmers with modest starting up capital. As in demographic colonization

¹⁵. Ibidem; ATdR 24/100, p.17.

¹⁶. CD IAO AOI 1936, Graziani to MC, AA 14-4-1937; Graziani to GGAOI, AA 9-5-1937; Lessona to Graziani, Rm 14-5-1937.

¹⁷. GRA 43/34-22, Graziani to Lessona, AA 2-11-1937; Lessona to Graziani, Rm 4-11-1937; CD IAO AOI 1936, GGAOI (Petretti) to MAI, AA 25-9-1937; GGAOI (Petretti) to GHR, AA 30-9-1937 (hereafter Petretti to GHR); AOI 1924, Terrzzi to Duce, 27-4-1938 (hereafter Terruzzi to Mussolini).

¹⁸. The division roughly reflected Lessona's ideas as developed in his master plan of 5-8-1936, where he envisaged four types of colonization [Cfr. Chap. II, pp.72].

these were largely composed of individuals entitled to the nation's gratitude who, in a sense, were social casualties: war veterans, particularly the demobilized soldiers of the Ethiopian campaign, fathers of large families and unemployed workers. Each farm ranged between 1 and 60 ha¹⁹. Located at the outskirts of an urban centre, the farms had as their immediate objective the provision of fresh vegetables and fruits to urban populations and military garrisons. However, like demographic colonization their ultimate aim was mass settlement and because of this they were treated favourably. But unlike demographic colonization, the concessions were given directly to a head of a household and not to a purposely formed state-funded agency²⁰.

B. Medium-sized farms included three distinct forms of concessions:

1. "Concessions directed towards agricultural development with or without obligation as to require peasant land settlement".

2. Agro-pastoral.

3. Forestry.

The first group were divided into two categories. One was oriented to mass land settlement. In this case the land was granted as either a concession transferable into a definite ownership upon the payment of, *in toto* or *pro rata*, the price of the land, or permanent concessions pending discharge of specific obligations. The size of the land ranged from 61 to 500 ha and its price was assessed at market value; and so, unlike small scale commercial farming, the concessions were not subject to special treatment. But like small scale concessions, they were given to the head of a household. In the second category, the lowest holding was 500 ha and maximum 2,000 ha. Yet cases of 5,000 ha were not uncommon. An element common to

¹⁹. According to some sources they covered an area ca.1-15 ha, while according to others they consisted of ca.1-50 ha.

²⁰. MAE, *La valorizzazione*, p.210; *La Stampa*, 9-8-1940.

this and other categories of concessions was that the land was not transferable into permanent ownership; they were leased for a 30 year period and renewable for a maximum of 99 years.

The holdings of the agro-pastoral concessions were of variable size with a maximum limit of 10,000 ha. The forestry concessions included companies charged with either re-forestation or exploitation of existing forestry resources and their by-products. As for size, re-forestation entailed an upper ceiling of 5,000 ha and for the first twenty years was rent-free. For the concessions connected with forestry exploitation, there were no clear conditions set on the size, the duration or lease. Both size and lease were computed on "the value of the wood and secondary products, putatively extractable from the forest". Upon such evaluation also depended the time scale which, however, "will not in any event exceed twenty years period". Medium-sized farms originally were made up of those members of CFA who had as their mission imperial self-sufficiency in food-crops, particularly wheat. Non-members, for whom wheat was optional, engaged themselves in other crops assumed to be more lucrative and less risky. This development, combined with the continuous failure of wheat, forced CFA at a later stage to diversify production and involve themselves in industrial farming²¹.

C. Large-scale concessions were to produce industrial crops such as cotton, sugar cane, indiarubber, coffee, tea, oil seeds and textile fibre, with a twofold target: to provide the raw material required by the metropolitan industries and to conquer the foreign market. Most of the farms were *ad hoc* creations, and some were subsidiaries of large metropolitan companies. The companies held concessions of variable sizes, with each holding extending between 500 and 30,000 ha. Practically, they were beyond the direct control of local authorities as they were directly accountable to the MAI. This arrangement was a frequent

²¹. MAE, *La valorizzazione*, p.210; Il Messaggero, 2-11-1937.

cause of political friction between local authorities and companies.

Among large scale farms the most important were the Cotton Districts, controlled by *Ente per il Cotone dell'Africa Italiana [ECAI]*. This agency was established 7 January 1937 by the RDL with a capital of £.25,000,000 partly paid from the State Treasury and partly by the *Istituto Cotonero Italiano [ICI]*. Its task was "to oversee the development, regulation and exploitation of cotton in IEA". Within a year the agency set forth its programme, establishing a number of Cotton Districts each measuring on average one million hectares. The underlying concept of the organization of these Districts was to boost the production of cotton in preference to other cultivations²². Among other large companies worthy of consideration were SIMBA which operated in Härär governorate - mainly, Asälla, Fadis, Villa Baka - and Società Nuova Africa. These two companies employed considerable capital in both men and material²³.

This threefold division, though inadequate, was considered to meet the existing administrative conditions and serve as point of reference for future concessions. But the Italians were not able to give theoretical and practical justification for such categorization.

²². For a more comprehensive discussion on Cotton Districts and biographical references see Chap. VII, pp.293-322.

²³. MAE, La valorizzazione, p.210; Giovanni Pesce, "Disciplina giuridica delle concessioni agrarie: Gli obblighi e le facoltà del concessionario", L'Azione Coloniale, 7-7-1939 (hereafter Pesce, "Disciplina giuridica"); Gennaro Mondaini, "Tradizione e innovazione nell'incipiente ordinamento fondiario dell'AOI", I Georgofili, VII, 7 (1941):121-2.

TABLE XI:- CONCESSION AREAS (1941)²⁴.

TERRITORY	ACREAGE IN HECTARES				TOTAL	%
	0-60	61-500	501-2000	2000 >		
SHAWA	550.5	3096	10110	4500	18256.5	10.9
HARAR	1185.7	2620	3600	40000	47405.7	28.4
ARSI	606	300	700	13000	14606	8.8
BALE	-	-	4000	7500	11500	6.9
BAGEMDER	515	255	-	-	770	0.5
WALLO	291	2134	2200	-	4625	2.8
KAFFA	270	3100	-	28000	31370	18.9
SIDAMO	72	760	-	35000	35832	21.5
TEGRAY*	152.2	571	1550.7	-	2273.9	1.3
WALLAGA	-	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	3642.4	12836	22160.7	128000	166639.1	

* Figures available only for 1939.

Source: CD IAO Sc 1801; AOI Sc 1802; 1808, GAM UA, Relazione sulla colonizzazione e servizi agrari dell'Amara, Gn giugno 1940; Hr 1813, L'attuale organizzazione dei servizi dell'agricoltura nel governo del Hr all'inizio 1940, n.d.; GS 1822, RGGG UA, Attività agricole esistenti nel territorio del GGS, gennaio 1940; 1984, Elenco delle aziende agricole e dei piccoli coloni di Asella, n.d..

Three censuses of 1938, 1939 and 1940 summarily deal with the status of commercial farms in each governorate²⁵. But like any survey, these censuses are limited in their range, chronology, and consistency of data²⁶. But the censuses are valuable for

²⁴. The figures are elaborated by the author.

²⁵. CD IAO 1808; GS 1822; Hr 1813; Sc 1802; Sc 1801.

²⁶. Owing to these limitations, it is not possible to give an exact picture of the annual rate of expansion in each province, the activities engaged or the amount of capital at the concessionaries' command.

the fragmentary data they give. A remarkable common feature is the staggering growth of commercial farms and their steadily increasing concentration in southern regions.

TABLE XII:- CONCESSIONAIRES ACCORDING TO THEIR FARM SIZE²⁷

TERRITORY	-----> FARMS IN HECTARES <---				TOTAL	%
	0-60	61-500	501-2000	2000 >		
SHĀWA	19	15	10	1	45	20.1
HĀRĀR	45	13	3	2	63	28.1
ĀRSI	15	1	1	2	19	8.5
BALÉ	--	--	3	2	5	2.2
BĀGÉMDER	23	2	--	-	25	11.2
WĀLLO	13	12	2	-	27	12.1
KĀFFA	7	10	--	1	18	8.0
SIDAMO	5	3	--	1	9	4.0
TEGRAY*	9	2	2	-	13	5.8
WĀLLĀGA	--	--	--	-	--	--
TOTAL	136	58	21	9	224	100

* Only 1939 figures are available.

Source: CD IAO Sc 1801; Sc 1802; AOI 1808; Hr 1813; GS 1822.

When considering the difficulties under which they operated, the pace of development was rapid, even if far below official expectations. Towards the end of the 1940s, there were approximately 224 farms holding about 166,639 ha. According to some sources, 50% of these were engaged in cattle-breeding, 38% in cereal production, 8% in industrial cash-crop and 4% in banana and coffee production²⁸. In terms of their size, about 61% were made up of small farms which owned over 2% of the total land area. Medium-sized farms consisted of 35%, holding a total of 21% in terms of land area. The remaining 77% of the area

²⁷. The figures are exclusive of Cotton Districts.

²⁸. The data do not clarify whether these figures are inclusive of the activities in the old colonies. Cfr. CC, 25-3-1940.

belonged to large concessions which formed only 4% of the total farms. The combined holding of mass settlement oriented farms - small and medium first category - totalled 16,478.4 ha or about 10% of the total land under commercial farms. Thus most of the land was concentrated in the hands of large companies²⁹. This reveals Rome's claim that monopolistic tendencies would be tightly controlled as a hollow pronouncement³⁰.

The census throws additional light on geographical aspects of commercial farming. Regional distribution showed that most farms were centred at Härär and Shäwa provinces. Despite their great agricultural potential, commercial interest in Sidamo and Käffa developed late, whereas in Illubabor, Wälläga and Gämu Gofa it was conspicuously absent. A number of reasons contributed to this. Primarily, the effective occupation of the regions took place comparatively late. Illubabor, Wälläga and Gämu Gofa were isolated by lack of communications, and Sidamo and Käffa were the last to have a motorway to AA. Another deterrent was their distance from the port of Meswa, 1,600-2,000 km away. Even though the opening of the Asäb-Däse road reduced such distance substantially, it still remained considerable (1,200-1,600 km). This weighed heavily on the transport costs of machinery, seed and other products, and encouraged many farmers to settle in agriculturally less favourable but otherwise more convenient areas³¹. The situation was aiming to make the two regions the field of monopolistic concessions which, unlike small farms, had resources to absorb these difficulties. Despite the predominance of small and medium-sized farms, in Härär and Shäwa

29. See Table XI.

30. Pomilio, "I problemi attuali dell'impero nel pensiero di Attilio Terruzzi", L'Alimentazione Italiana, (13-31/8-1938).

31. GS 1985, pp.1-2; GS 1822, pp.1-2.

there was a relatively balanced presence of all forms of enterprises³².

TABLE XIII:- TRACTORS OWNED BY VARIOUS GROUPS IN IEA IN 1940

GOVERNORATE	AGRICULTURAL OFFICES	DEMOGRAPHIC COLONIZATION AGENCIES					COMMERCIAL FARMS		TOTAL TRACTORS
		OWC	BCRE	BCPE	EDR	CAG	No. OF OWNERS ^a	No. OF TRACTORS	
AMARA	3	-	14	-	-	-	14	22	39
GS	**	-	-	-	7	2	10	27	35
HARAR	38	-	-	15	-	-	14	71	124
SHAWA	4	44	7	-	-	-	26	85	140
BRITREA	1	-	-	-	-	-	9	21 ^a	22
SOMALIA		-	-	-	-	-	3	344	344
TOTAL	34	44	21	15	7 ^a	2	76	570	704

* Includes Tegray where two companies had 7 tractors.

** Tractors at its disposal are those same indicated under EDR.

a Inclusive of Companies of Cotton District.

Source:- CD IAO 1800; Gm 2919; Hr 1813, p.8.

The geographical distribution of the farms reflected concern for economic viability and political conditions of the regions. Almost all the concessions were situated along highway routes and in areas with relatively abundant water resources and at above 2,000 m sea level where there was little threat from malaria or endemic diseases. Economically, proximity to a highway meant easy access to markets was guaranteed and transport costs reduced; politically, an Italian presence along highways was thought to ensure their continuous functioning and, in an emergency, military assistance could be easily provided.

³². See Tables XI-XII.

TABLE XIV:- ANNUAL PRODUCTION AT A MEDIUM-SIZED FARM OF SCAGLIARINI ROBERTO & SONS

YEAR	CULTIVATED AREAS (IN HA.)	PRODUCTION (IN QL.)
1938-39	150	1000
1939-40	350	3000
1940-41	300	300

Source:- CD IAO Documenti AOI, Concessione agricola "Scagliarini & Figli" - Ambo, Rm 8-3-1941. Scagliarini had 2 Lanz tractors of 45HP, 2 of 35HP and one Balilla tractor of 16HP and a substantial array of implements. Cfr. CD IAO AOI 1936, Macchine ed attrezzi agricoli per la lavorazione del terreno esistenti presso le aziende agricole costituite nella zona di Ambo, AA 11-4-1938; AOI 1800.

In Härär, Sidamo, Käffa and Ärsi, where more peaceful circumstances prevailed, farms were scattered over a relatively wide area. Where the political situation was precarious, they were concentrated in one or two areas: on the high plateau of Mount Säqälti, between 15-30 km from Gondär, in Bägémder; Boruméda and Ciaffa, in Wällo; Mäqälé and Ädwa, in Tegray³³. In Shäwa, they were restricted to the west and south-west along the AA-Jimma, AA-Härär motorways and along the belt of Awash River basin. The vast majority operated at Ambo where they represented 24% of the total farmers holding more than 50% of the total land area under commercial farming in the region. The dispersion showed inconsistencies in the government's policy which, as we mentioned earlier, aimed to channel commercial farming to a few carefully selected areas that were unsuitable for mass settlement³⁴.

³³. CD IAO Am 600, pp.1-3; GS 1820, p.6; GS 1822, pp.5-14; CI, 27-12-1938; Le Colonie, 14-12-1939.

³⁴. More importantly, the developments particularly in these regions had a historical significance that went beyond the period of occupation. In fact, it was largely in these same areas that the phenomena of commercial capitalism appeared in 1960s and 1970s.

TABLE XV:- YEARLY PRODUCTION AT MEDIUM-SIZED FARM OF BISACCHI UGO AT AMBO*

YEAR	CULTIVATED AREA	PRODUCTION (IN£.)	PRODUCTION COST (IN £.)**	DEFICIT (IN £.)
1938-39	180	218,623	673,560	455,937
1939-40	425	738,195	1,363,571	625,376
1940-41	N.A.	***	***	****

TABLE XVI:- COST OF PRODUCTION AND REVENUE

TYPE OF COST	YEAR 1938-1939				YEAR 1939-1940			
	HA	REVENUE	EXPENSES	%	HA	REVENUE	EXPENSES	%
CAPITAL ^a	180	218,623	915,000	60.5	425	738,195	333,000	20.98
LABOUR			232,020	15.3			735,221	46.32
OPERATIONAL			336,900	22.3			477,430	30.08
MANAGEMENT			29,240	1.9			41,566	2.62
TOTAL	180	218,623	1,513,160		425	738,195	1,587,217	

* The agricultural year starts in April 1 and ends March 31.

** The cost does not include capital investment. For more detailed information see Table XVI.

*** The report states that the production was much lower than that of 1939-40 because of unexpected smut attack just before harvest.

**** The concessionaire claims that the deficit is higher than that of 1939-40 but does not give details.

^a. This indicates capital investment.

Source: CD IAO Documenti AOI 1837, Azienda agricola Bisacchi Ugo, Comprensorio di Ambo, n.d..

The concessions were expected to develop primarily as enclaves, independent of traditional Ethiopian agricultural farming techniques. Indeed farms like those of SIMBA and, to a lesser degree a number of those belonging to CFA members, were highly mechanized. In addition to an extensive array of agricultural implements, SIMBA had 30 tractors³⁵ and the 21 farmers of CFA had 85 tractors³⁶ between them. But according to a census carried out at the end of 1939, there was a total of ca.210 tractors, and of 224 farmers only 65 had a tractor³⁷. Over 70% of the concessionaires, who had no modern agricultural machinery, relied totally or partially either on traditional methods of farming, i.e. use of animals³⁸ or a few hired tractors³⁹, or were dependent upon government assistance⁴⁰.

What proportion of this land was actually developed at the end of 1940? With the exceptions of Käffa and Sidamo, information on other regions is incomplete. Nevertheless, the answer depends on a number of factors, including age, size and location of the concession. As regards age, the majority of the

³⁵. See Table XVIII.

³⁶. See Table XIX.

³⁷. See Table XIII.

³⁸. Some of the concessions operating under such a method produced exceptionally good yields, as was the case with the concession of De Zorzi in Käffa where an average production of between 15-20 ql per ha was obtained. Cfr. CD IAO GS 1822, p.11.

³⁹. The government tractor hiring scheme was well organized only in Härär where the UA, in addition to a large variety of agricultural implements, possessed 38 tractors, 13 threshers and a fully equipped repair and maintenance workshop. In other regions, such facilities were uncommon at either private or governmental level [Cfr. CD IAO Hr 1813, pp.8-11; all. 1, GHrDCL IA, Norme per il noleggio di macchine agricole agli agricoltori; Le Colonie, 24-5-1938].

⁴⁰. This was particularly the case with small farmers around Gondär who had the initial ploughing work done gratis by the tractors of the UA [Cfr. CD IAO Ex AOI Am 600, p.6]

concessions belonged to the land rush period of 1937 and 1938. From the end of 1938 onwards, there was a gradual but considerable decrease. Exceptions were Käffa and Sidamo where there was a sustained interest in contrast to the restrained attitude of the earlier period. One of the most remarkable post-1938 phenomenon was the rapid growth of profit-oriented, large-sized farmers at the expense of mass settlement oriented farms.

As regards areas developed, the fragmentary nature of the available data makes nation-wide assessment difficult. But sources attest that there was not a single farmer who succeeded in cultivating all his holding. Even the achievements of the old and relatively well-equipped concessionaires was far from satisfactory. Table XIV shows the example of the farm of Scagliarini Roberto & Sons. The concessionaires belonged to CFA group and began work in early 1938, making use of modern machinery. But out of 1,000 ha of highly fertile land at Ambo, they cultivated a mere 150 ha in the first year, 350 ha in the second year, which, in the third year, was reduced to 300 ha.

Of course, there were regional variations. In Shäwa and Härär, where the farms had been established for a longer period and, in case of Härär, under more peaceful circumstances, they were considerably developed. But the limited development by farmers of CFA in Wällo and those of Käffa and Sidamo regions suggests there was no spectacular success both at individual or regional level. The six CFA members of Wällo began their operation in early 1938 on 3,170 ha⁴¹. They had a sizeable stock of modern machinery and a variety of agricultural tools. Yet the total area cultivated at the end of 1940 amounted to about 1,500 ha⁴². Regionally, in Sidamo and Käffa provinces, of the total

⁴¹. In 1940 it had increased to 3,794 ha [Cfr. CD IAO Ex AOI AM 600, p.7; AOI 1808, p.18].

⁴². CD IAO AOI 1808, p.18.

concession area of 67,202 ha belonging to the commercial farms, a paltry sum of 805 ha was developed⁴³.

Similarly, the level of production was lamentable. With a few exceptions, in a good year the average yield of wheat totalled between 4-6 q1 per ha. Each year the farmers had to contend with climatic hazards attendant upon any agricultural enterprise, and marauding insects. In 1939, crops at Härär and Arsi uplands were considerably damaged by the combined assault of excessive rainfall, invasion of locusts and depredation of pests, in particular the larvae of the Noctuid moth⁴⁴. In 1940, the harvest was so ridiculously poor that many of the farmers did not even bother to *gather* it⁴⁵. Reduction in production affected even coffee. This staple export crop had plummeted to its lowest level in 1938. In September 1937, its export to Italy was *severely* curtailed. Exporting firms were allowed to send to the metropolis consignments equivalent to 30% of their exports to other countries. In 1931-4 inclusive, total export averaged 17,000 tons per year. But at the end of 1936 export had practically stopped to the extent that a rich coffee-producing country had to import from Brazil. With the recovery of 1938, coffee export totalled 4,533 tons. Of this 1,360 tons (value £.9,620,000) went to Italy. But in 1939, production was reduced to 2,000 tons⁴⁶. The government undertook a number of special

⁴³. CD IAO GS 1822, pp.5-14.

⁴⁴. Gibbs to Halifax, AA 27-11-1939, p.3.

⁴⁵. CD IAO Documenti AOI, Concessione Scagliarini; AOI 1837, p. 6; AOI 1838, p. 5; AOI 1929, Pavirani to T. Testa, Aselle 4 Novembre 1940; GS 1328, Antonio Ciccarone, Relazione sulla missione del dott. Ciccarone alle concessioni cerealicole del comprensorio di Aselle, AA 16-9-1940; EX AOI Sc 1329; E. Tischer to De Benedictis, Togonà 3-11-1940.

⁴⁶. MCP De Palma 7/74, 9-5-43; Bird to Halifax AA 1-4-1939, p.9; Gibbs to Halifax, AA 27-11-1939, p.3.

measures to boost production but the results remained limited⁴⁷. Härär, where the government conducted a concerted campaign and where a number of European concessions existed before the occupation, provides the best illustrative example. In 1931, a total of 10,000 tons of coffee was produced. Production for the whole of 1935-7 amounted to 8,000 tons, reduced to about 3,000 tons in 1938-9. One European plantation which, before the occupation, had an annual production of ca.7-8,000 q1, by 1937-8, had an output of only 2,000 q1s and over 900 q1. by 1938-9⁴⁸.

Low output was matched by soaring production costs which seriously shook the enthusiasm of many farmers⁴⁹. The situation made their need to resort to state subsidy more acute. This was an embarrassment to the colonial administration, for the shortcomings of the farmers exposed the inadequacy of its control aimed to preventing the establishment of unprofitable farms.

STATE ASSISTANCE AND CONTROL

Recognizing that the growth of commercial farming was not possible without state intervention, the colonial government undertook a number of measures to ensure rapid but planned development, aided by a host of learned institutions within Italy. Assistance came through the formation of a network of agricultural offices and experimental stations and in the form of a variety of incentives. Control was exerted through a careful processing of applications for land and imposition of an agreed development programme. But the government's objectives were seriously limited by the combina-

⁴⁷. CD IAO Hr 1813, alleg. II, GHr DCL IA, Provvedimenti a favore degli indigeni coltivatori di caffè, Hr 27-4-1938; alleg. no. 9, UARGHr, no. 13357, Vivai di caffè, Hr 20-2-1940; MCP De Palma 7/74, 9-5-43, p.6.

⁴⁸. CD IAO, Relazione sulla situazione caffearia Hararina alla fine della campagna 1937-1938, AA luglio 1938, pp.1,6.

⁴⁹. See Tables XV and XVI.

tion of inadequate official support, random and ill-defined directives and meagre financial commitment.

The agricultural institutions in Ethiopia provided technical assistance, propaganda and surveillance. But their achievements were far more limited than officialdom claimed. Their involvement began with the enactment of the decree of 16 June 1936 which saw the creation in the *Reale Accademia D'Italia* of a research centre, known as Study Centre, whose task was to:

a. Promote and carry out through its own missions' scientific research in IEA with the view to supplying precise information necessary for development by the State and private companies.

b. Coordinate and set guidelines to all private initiatives that have similar objectives and capital to invest.

c. Examine requests and proposals that *would* be submitted to it by the MC.

The Centre was jointly financed by the *Reale Accademia D'Italia* and the MC and had its headquarters in Rome with a branch in AA⁵⁰. The Director General of the MAI participated in almost every activity that the Centre carried out in its Rome headquarters. The Centre despatched a number of exploratory missions which collected valuable scientific and agricultural information; but the findings offered no immediate solution to the problems facing the farmers.

The Centre's role was overtaken by the IACI of Florence which, alongside other para-statal as well as private agencies, carried out useful investigations through specialized commissions. Founded in 1903, the Institute was one of the leading bodies for the study of tropical and sub-tropical agriculture and served as a centre for the diffusion

⁵⁰. MAE, L'avvaloramento, pp. 342-4. Among such missions that of Lake Tana, led by one of the founders of the Institute, Giotto Danieli, is of considerable academic importance in terms of seriousness and the wide range of topics covered.

of colonial propaganda. Most of the technical directors, experts and supervisors of the colonies were trained there and its ex-students and staff carried out a number of valuable missions. The Director, Professor Armando Maugini, was also the Head of the Department of Agricultural Services of the MAI.

As it had in the older Italian colonies, the Institute played a crucial role in the development and organization of the agricultural services inside the Empire⁵¹. In each of the four governorates an agricultural department, *Ispettorato Agrario*, was set up with an experimental station. The *Ispettorato* was divided into seven units specializing in areas such as "native" agriculture, stock-raising, phytopathology and plant-breeding as well as experimentation⁵². For the commercial farms the most important unit was Land Reclamation and Agricultural Colonization Unit⁵³. This unit had the task of allocating land and overseeing development, assisting and controlling activities and providing fuel; in some instances, but particularly where other units were not operational, it had an extremely wide remit. An important role was also played by the experimental stations, many of which carried out valuable research on local and foreign crops and animals. Most significant of these were those of Mälco in GS, Amaräsa in Härär, Gudär and Mäkanisa in Shäwa, and Pirzio Biroli in Amara. The experimental work undertaken at these

⁵¹. Ibidem; ATdR 24/116, RD per l'ordinamento del RIA-AI: Relazione al Consiglio dei Ministri; 24/119, RD ordinamento dei servizi dell'agricoltura dell'AI.

⁵². On the work of these institutions see agricultural departments' reports: CD IAO Sc 1801; Hr 1813; AOI 1808; GS 1819. At the later stage the Experimental Department became independent from the UA and the areas of its action widened [Cfr. RD 29-7-1938, no.2221, Ordinamento dei servizi dell'agricoltura nell'AI, GU, 15-3-1939, n.63.]

⁵³. *Sezione Bonificazione e Colonizzazione Agricola*.

stations aimed to assist the farmers with new and lucrative crops⁵⁴. The law envisaged the extension of each unit to every district and sub-district; in the event, only in part of Härär was this the case⁵⁵.

The agricultural offices had wide ranging and demanding activities which often overshadowed their main tasks of technical assistance, propaganda and surveillance of commercial farms⁵⁶. These extra duties extended from land to topographical and agricultural surveys of the soil which, in case of small and medium-sized farms, entailed parcelling out into plots of 60 and 500 ha and partitioning further into smaller units for the purpose of assessing the annual rent and operational capital; evaluation of a development plan with reference to irrigation, availability of drinking water, transport facilities, access to market, and labour supply; and land exchange plans, involving eventual compensation for and resettlement of displaced inhabitants and study and composition of charters of concessions, or *discipline*⁵⁷.

Despite their impressively elaborate appearance, the agricultural departments were largely underfunded, undermanned and undermined. Considering that agriculture was the key area that the government wanted to promote and the life-blood of the country, the budget devoted to agriculture was minute⁵⁸. For example, Härär's annual budget amounted to

⁵⁴. Archival material on the experimental stations and their works is vast: cfr. CD IAO 1323; Ex AOI Hr 1325; Hr 1335; Gm 1336; Sc 1337, 1338; AOI 1808; GS 1817 and Hr 3034.

⁵⁵. RD 29-7-1938, no.2221, GU, 15-3-1939.

⁵⁶. CD IAO GS 1820, *Il Problema della colonizzazione capitalistica nei GS*, gennaio 1940, p.6; Sc 1801, p.2.

⁵⁷. CD IAO Sc 1801, p.2; GS 1820, pp.2-9.

⁵⁸. According to a sexennial plan, the total fund earmarked for agricultural development amounted only to £.200,000,000 or 1.8% of the total budget. This was almost 30% less than that allocated to defence (4.5%) and higher only than that allocated

.1,100,000 while the minimum it needed to maintain its basic performance was £.2,000,000. But owing to the large presence of commercial farms in the territory, Härär received relatively generous treatment⁵⁹. The same can be said as regards personnel, which at the end of 1940 consisted of about 150 individuals⁶⁰. Of these only 50 had higher qualifications of any kind. Most of these were stationed in GS, which by 1940 appears as the only governorate comparatively adequately equipped in terms of both number of departments and manpower, although still poor in financial resources⁶¹.

TABLE XVII:- AGRICULTURAL PERSONNEL IN 1940

GOVERNORATE	PROFESSIONAL	SKILLED	SEMI-SKILLED	UNSKILLED	TOTAL
AMARA	9	13	1	3	26
GS	17	34	7	33	91
HARAR	14	11	1	--	26
SHAWA	10	1	-	1	12
TOTAL	50	59	9	37	155

- Professional group include agronomists (31), graduates (16), planners (3).
- Skilled consist of mainly nursery (19), clerical workers (13), assistant agronomists (8), tractor drivers (8), surveyors(3), gardeners (2), mechanics (2), apiculturalists(1), horticulturalists (1), carpenters (1), smith (1).
- Semi-skilled involves nursery assistants (9).
- unskilled include workmen (27), storekeepers (4), footmen (2), stablemen, (2), shepherd (1), messenger (1).

Source:- CD IAO Sc 1801; AOI 1808; Hr 1813; GS 1819.

to communication (0.5%) and mining (0.91%) [Cfr. ATdR 24/79, MAI, Piano sessennale delle opere e delle spese per l'AOI, Rm 1937].

⁵⁹. CD IAO Hr 1813, p.5.

⁶⁰. See Table XVII.

⁶¹. CD IAO AOI 1808; GS 1819; Hr 1813; Sc 1801.

Lack of manpower and finance was compounded by inadequacy or total lack of premises. With a few exceptions, in the early stages departments operated from temporary shelters. Even as late as 1940 there were complaints of inadequate office space. Almost all the peripheral units functioned either from a temporary *harish* or from a room shared with other government organizations⁶². To further aggravate smooth functioning, there was a network of overlapping political and military jurisdictions and a relative lack of autonomy that "made interferences inevitable and harmonious and profitable co-operation often difficult"⁶³. The overall perception that the concessionaires had about these agricultural departments was negative. Most recurrent complaints directed against them were that they were dilatory and unsympathetic to their enterprise. They were blamed particularly for supplying seeds that were inadequate or inappropriate or after long delays⁶⁴.

The technical officers were not only numerically inadequate but they lacked specialized training. As most of their experience was gained in the field, they lacked time to absorb the growing amount of information about the agricultural environment. Thus there was little wonder that even those devoted men among them did little to meet the expectations of most of the farmers. Reports talk of their enormous frustration with the rigors of frontier life. An early report by Härär agricultural department contrasts the conducive agricultural environment of the governorship with the depressed state of agricultural officers. On the one hand, there was one of the most peaceful regions ruled by a governorate

⁶². Ibidem Hr 1832, IAHR, Promemoria to Prof. Maugini, 12-9-1938; Hr 1813; Sc 1801.

⁶³. CD IAO Sc 1801, p.2.

⁶⁴. Ibidem, Concessione Scagliarini; AOI 1837, pp.4-5; AOI 1838, p.5.

interested in colonization and agricultural development. On the other, stood a relatively well-qualified but apathetic personnel, demoralized by the uncomfortable life-style. To further complicate matters, the Director was reportedly unpopular and ill-disposed towards the *IACI* and its graduates from where a substantial number of his staff came. The list of complaints from technicians were many. They included lack of accommodation and equipment, job dissatisfaction due to over-work, confusion in job boundary, favouritism, political interference. Reports attest how the work of these officers was hampered by lack of funds, the vast areas they had to cover, transport difficulties, a hostile indigenous population, and an intractable bureaucracy. Owing to this, propaganda and technical assistance remained largely limited to quick visits to experimental centres by concessionaires, or extension work by one of these over-worked technical officers, trying in a hurried visit to persuade the farmer to use improved farming techniques such as hoeing or growing a particular crop. However, in 1940, in some areas even such practices were reduced to the exchange of a few words during one of those sporadic contacts between the concessionaires and the technical officers⁶⁵.

As regards incentives, these were provided in the form of subsidies which largely consisted of reduced agricultural fuel, supply of seeds, free travel up to the port of destination for the personnel to be employed on the farms, free transport of equipment and machinery. For some crops, such as wheat, a guaranteed price was offered which the colonial authorities thought would provide an adequate profit margin. To encourage extensive cultivation of virgin lands, a land reclamation fund was set up consisting of £.250 per ha of

⁶⁵. CD IAO 1832, Appunti relativi sull'IA di AAAsHrSm, 1938; RGGS UA, Attività svolta nei vari settori dalla costituzione dell'ufficio ad oggi, gennaio 1940, pp.3-4 (hereafter RGGS, Attività); GS 1820, p.6.

land put under cultivation⁶⁶. Farmers were also exempt from payment of *äsrat* to which all Ethiopian farmers were subject⁶⁷. In addition, there were special aid packages of short term measures adopted on a nationwide or regional basis either by the central administration or by the respective governorate in special circumstances. These included assistance in building a house, free access to a tractor, a special subsidy in case of crop failure or loss due to climate or locust invasion⁶⁸.

Most of the subsidies were obtained through a sustained pressure that involved acrimonious dispute and long negotiations. This was particularly the case with the land reclamation fund and agricultural fuel⁶⁹. The Viceroy's government in AA was impervious to the plight of the farmers who found themselves in the unusual position of having to

⁶⁶. Lessona to GG, Produzione frumento; Lessona to CFA, Trasferimento in AOI di imprese di coltivazione, Rm 20-11-1937 (hereafter Lessona to CFA, Trasferimento); GGAOI [Cerulli] to MAI DGACL, Concessioni provvisorie per le semine di cereali, AA 25-3-1938 (hereafter Cerulli to MAI, Concessioni provvisorie); AOI 1936, Ugo Rossi and al. to Marcello Bonfondi [Segretario Federale di AA], Promemoria, AA 30-3-1937 (hereafter Rossi to Bonfondi, Promemoria); AOI 1800; AOI 1936, Carburante agricolo e disciplina della sua distribuzione (hereafter AOI 1936, Carburante agricolo); Prezzo dei carburanti agricoli, DGG 23-7-1938, no.828, GU, III/15, 1-7-1938; DGov 31-12-1938, no.206152, BUGA, IV/6, 15-31.3-1938; DGov Sc 13-2-1940 no.201, GUGS, V/25, 19-6-1940; Villa and al., op.cit., p.240.

⁶⁷. Bird to Halifax, AA 1-4-1939.

⁶⁸. CD IAO Am 600, p.6; Le Colonie, 24-5-1938; Tribuna, 7-2-1940; GV, 7-4-1940; G. Piani, "Rassegna di alcune attività autarchiche del Hararino nel campo agrario", Autarchia Alimentare, (ottobre 1938):38.

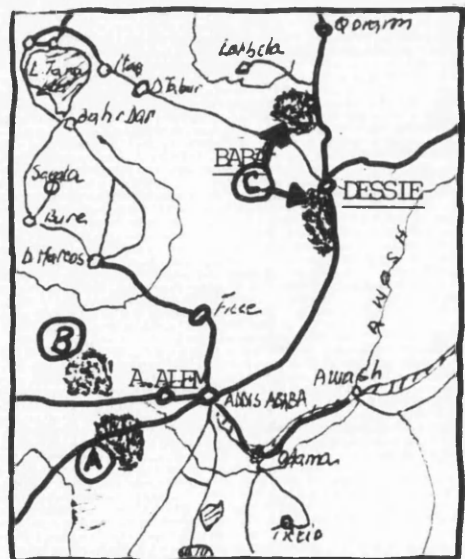
⁶⁹. For the Government in AA, price reduction in agricultural fuel entailed price increase in other sectors of the economy and tax exemption affected its revenue. Cfr. CD IAO AOI 1839, p.19; Petretti to GHR; AOI 1926, Terruzzi to Mussolini.

persuade the sympathetic MAI to intervene on their behalf⁷⁰. AA suspected that the commercial farms wanted to capitalize upon the government's anxiety to increase agricultural output and put the blame for shortcomings in their performance largely on poor technical skill and managerial incompetence of the farmers. For the farmers such a view reinforced their own perceptions of the colonial authority's unsympathetic attitude towards their painful situation arising largely from the tremendous lack of knowledge about the physical, social and economic conditions of the areas in which they operated.

Ambo's CFA group turned out to be the most vociferous critics. As pioneers of wheat production, they ridiculed government's suggestion of speculative intentions; they pointed out that most of their problems were the outcome of broken promises and misleading information on the part of the colonial authority. In addition to severe lack of extension services, they pointed to unacceptably slow land allocation, supply of poor seeds, and unsafe political conditions. Quite rightly, they claimed that although wheat prices were guaranteed in advance, in fact they were paid less than they would

FIGURE VIIIC.
THE TWO CFA GROUPS' SETTLEMENT CENTRES*.

- A. AWASH VALLEY AREA.
- B. AMBO AREA.
- C. DASE AREA.



⁷⁰. Ibidem AOI 1936, G. Pini to DSAE, Situazione primi concessionari, AA 19-12-1937 (hereafter Pini, Situazione); AOI 1929, Appunto dettato dalla S.E. Testa, 13-3-1941.

*. For details see pp.236-250.

have received on the open market⁷¹. But they were in no way willing to face the rigours of international market and Ethiopian competition.

The concessionaires do not ask for either annual contribution nor any sort of bounties from the Government General. But only a guarantee to purchase [at agreed price] at harvest - a guarantee that is in no way denied for a much higher amount to firms engaged in road construction⁷².

The colonial authority gave in to most of the pressures of the farmers' lobby, and the differences were largely settled towards the end of 1939. Nevertheless the farms continued to experience a number of difficulties. One such problem was the absence of credit institutions that specialized in lending money at reasonable rates of interest for productive rather than commercial activities. Though its need was strongly emphasized by the Agricultural Council as early as 1937 and despite persistent requests by the farmers, the Agricultural Loan Bank never came into existence. As a result the farms suffered from shortage of capital. Those seriously affected were small and medium-sized farms most of whom were chronically undercapitalized and operated at a

⁷¹. Initially the agreement was to purchase a quintal of wheat for £.200 provided that the production unit was 8 ql. per ha. But this was modified after protracted wrangling that followed the failure by the farmers to produce the agreed target per ha.. The second agreement took into account a production level lower than 8 ql. per ha. and set graduation in purchasing price in such a way that it increased in parallel to the decrease of output. In this way, for example, a quintal of wheat produced at the scale of 4 ql. per ha was purchased for £.305. [Cfr. CD IAO AOI 1936, MAIIA (Lessona) to GGHRGnGm, Rm 25-10-1937; Lessona to CFA, Trasferimento; Rossi to Bonfondi, Promemoria; Cerulli to MAI, Concessioni provvisorie]. At about this same period the cost of a quintal of wheat in AA was £.326, in Jimma £.398; while the cost per quintal of wheat flour amounted to £.383 in AA, £.302 in Hr, £.353 in Gondar and £.355 in Jimma. Cfr. CD IAO AOI 1936, GGAOI DSAE (Graziani) to MAI, AA 3-11-1937.

⁷². Rossi to Bonfondi, Promemoria.

loss⁷³. After a number of unfulfilled promises to meet the repeated pleas by the farmers for credit institutions, only towards the end of 1940 the government seemed determined to create co-operatives and set up an agency that would facilitate their financing. In addition, it was thought that this same agency would take over the allocation of land in order to free the would-be applicant from undue bureaucratic delays⁷⁴.

MECHANISMS OF CONTROL: MEASURES, EFFECTS AND TRENDS

Delays in land allocation were largely caused by the government's desire to control each phase of agrarian development and transfer of land so that the Ethiopian cultivator was not sacrificed for the speculator, nor the genuine investor with capital discouraged from using surplus land. The antidote was sought in careful processing of applications and the imposition of a demanding contractual agreement. However, both mechanisms proved neither efficient nor practical. The effect was rather to antagonize many *bona fide* applicants. Archival material reveals denunciations, and sometimes even violent disputes, between the colonial administration and commercial farmers, most of whom had been enticed to the Empire by the government's own propaganda machine. They were indignant about the way the colonial admini-

⁷³. Ibidem AOI 1848, Gustato Fonti to GHr, Concessione Agricola Foschini G. Ravioli - Bisidimo (Hr), Hr 2-12-1940; AOI 1837, op.cit.; "Cose e case dei produttori", CE, 24-6-1939.

⁷⁴. Equally CFA's plan to set up a Consortium or Assistential Agency to small and medium-sized farmers was not put into operation. Cfr. Consulta, "Avvaloramento":1571; Rossi to Bonfondi, Promemoria; Pini, Considerazioni sull'attività agricola in AOI: Credito agrario, n.d (hereafter Pini, Considerazioni); L'Azione Coloniale, 23-3-1939; 7-12-1939; Le Colonie, 2-3-1939; CC, 25-3-1939; Il Piccolo, 6-2-1939; "Per lo sviluppo dell'agricoltura nel GS", Rivista delle Colonie Italiane, 19-5-1938; La Stampa, 13-6-1939; Villa and al., op.cit., pp.254-5.

stration tempered their enterprise while the latter viewed their behaviour as undisciplined and embarrassing⁷⁵.

The procedure for obtaining land was complex and subject to much administrative and political confusion. Regardless of the type of the concession or authorizing body, for all but a very few party officials and large influential commercial farms, acquisition of land took a long time and involved lengthy bureaucratic procedures:

The applicant has to wait from a minimum of six months to a year from the moment he presents his application until he gets the possession of the land, naturally, under a simple temporary permit, and this without considering the time that he had spent in the selection of the land itself. Faced with such a situation many of them are discouraged and, as a rule, they give up; only those whose financial resources would allow them to live in the capital destined for the agricultural enterprise endure. Would so much be necessary for carrying out the measures necessary for the handing over of the concessions? In so far the system currently followed stood, "yes"⁷⁶.

Three bodies were empowered to process an application depending on the amount of capital to be invested: the Agricultural Council, CFA and local governments. Farms with a capital in excess of £.100,000 applied directly to the Agricultural Council who made a preliminary investigation as to whether the concessionaire had sufficient capital and tested technology at its command, and examined the feasibility of the scheme. The criterion was to allocate land on the basis of £.1,000 per

⁷⁵. Pini, Situazione; Rossi to Bonfondi, Promemoria; A. de Rubeis, Promemoria per S. E. il SottoSegretario: Semine di frumento da parte degli agricoltori organizzati dalla CFA, Rm 12-5-1938.

⁷⁶. Ibidem GS 1820, p.2; K. Gandar Dower, Abyssinian Patchwork, (London: 1949), p.235; G. L. Steer, Sealed and Delivered, (London: 1942), p.196.

ha, the maximum size of the holding to be 500 ha⁷⁷. But this rule was not always followed and, as we saw earlier, many companies were given holdings as large as 30,000 ha or more⁷⁸.

The Council's obvious weakness was its negligible knowledge of the Empire. Most data was gained through reading secondary sources or flying visits undertaken in one of the "scouting missions"⁷⁹. In official circles, the Council was viewed as an anachronistic institution dominated by internal strife and self-interest. A high party official frankly remarked:

Why is it that rather than residing in Rome and making decisions for a country that is unknown and between 4,000 and 5,000 km away it cannot be constituted in IEA itself. Indeed, matters are executed in a chaotic way⁸⁰.

Owing to remote control of the Council, the final endorsement of concessions rested on the central administration in AA. From here, the applications were passed on to the appropriate governor. However, AA showed but fleeting interest in the orders from Rome:

Sometimes the Ministry (of the Colonies) had to wait in vain for months in order to get a reply on some specific cases. Sometimes repeatedly sent urgent messages were allowed to fall into a vacuum⁸¹.

⁷⁷. This limit applied even when the capital was above £.500,000.

⁷⁸. Ibidem AOI 1982, DGC, Domande di concessioni agricole in Etiopia, Rm Ottobre 1938; Quaranta, op.cit., p.73;

⁷⁹. SPDR 87/w-r/1-LA, Davide Fossa to Osvaldo Sebastiani, AA 10-9-1937; Lantini to Petretti, p.3.

⁸⁰. SPDR 44/242-r/39, Farinacci to Mussolini, Cremona 25-12-1938.

⁸¹. SPDR 87/w-r/1-LA, Lessona to Fossa, Rm 16-9-1937.

In their assessment of applications the governorships took into consideration the availability of domainial land and the feasibility of the programme, a process involving many. This is how one CFA official described the bureaucratic entanglement preceding any land grant:

The destination of a specific agricultural land for colonization involves not only the direct interest of Directorate of Economic Affairs and through it the Agricultural Inspectorate ..., but also that of Directorate of Political Affairs concerning the ascertaining of whether there are or are not native interests to be safeguarded; that of the Ministry of Finance, with regard to the expenses involving surveying and diagramming of the land; that of the Quarter Master General with regard to the execution of preliminary supplies needed for the setting up of the farm; and again that of the Command of the Armed Forces for matters regarding the precautionary safety measures connected with the isolated life of the metropolitan in an environment that is not yet totally peaceful⁸².

As close examination of some unsuccessful applications reveals, there were no nationally valid criteria for which an application was rejected or accepted. Each governorate acted according to its own set of rules. In Härär, the key determinant was the size of the holding, whereas in Amara the location mattered most. So while in Härär most of the applications were refused because they exceeded the maximum ceiling permitted, in Amara the main ground was the unsuitability of the site⁸³. Some made the acceptance conditional

⁸². Pini, Considerazioni, p.4.

⁸³. Ibidem AOI 1982. The GAM, whose main concern was security, held a position that the concessions should be close to communications, markets and water supplies and be confined to the territories of Wällo Yäjju, Gondär and Lake Tana. In Härär where the key problem was population density, security was not an issue.

upon the applicant's prior execution of a particular task, such as an inspection of the site⁸⁴.

When the capital invested was less than £.100,000, the application was made through CFA which, as a fascist trade union organization, played an important role in the development of IEA agriculture⁸⁵. But such an organization with powerful vested interests and strong ideological allegiances may not have given an independent and unbiased assessment to an applicant.

Finally, each governorate was empowered to grant small concessions, mainly in the vicinity of urban centres, for kitchen gardens⁸⁶. However, no guidelines were set specifying either the size of land to be granted by these governorates or the department empowered to do so. Lack of clarity in the latter case led to a number of abuses and interdepartmental struggles over claims to the administration of concessions⁸⁷. Equally, failure to set a ceiling encouraged some governors to take a cautious view whereas it induced others to a broad interpretation. The administration in AA kept a close watch on the governorships' dealings and the behaviour

⁸⁴. In a number of cases such conditions proved effective in putting off applicants lacking seriousness. This was the case with 42 applicants to Agricultural Council who withdrew when summoned to inspect the site. Cfr. Ibidem AOI 1982, p.5; GS 1820, p.3.

⁸⁵. Ibidem AOI 1982.

⁸⁶. Ibidem AOI 1936, Graziani to DGAOI, AA 14-4-1937; Graziani to GAAAmGnGmMgHr, AA 9-5-1937; Lessona to the IA, Rm 14-5-1937.

⁸⁷. Typical example was Härär where the struggle between Land Office (Ufficio Terriero) and the Directorate of Colonization (DCL), presided by ex lieutenant colonel of artillery, Malvani on one hand, and the Agricultural Inspectorate, chaired by Giovanni Piani, on the other, had developed into serious conflict. Cfr. Ibidem AOI 1802, Piani to De Benedictis, Hr 12-7-1939; De Benedictis to Maugini, [AA] 1-8-1939.

of liberal governors caused frequent friction⁸⁸. From the central administration's point of view, such approach not only did become the source of a tacit, albeit unintentional, encouragement for the creation of isolated and scattered farms that were unable to stand on their own feet but also a burdensome addition to the works of the governorates that were hard-pressed by slack financial resources and manpower shortfall. As such it undermined the colonial administration's much cherished initial plan to concentrate commercial enterprise in a few selected areas in order to avoid dispersion of farms and minimize cost⁸⁹.

In the absence of clear guidelines, the governorates pursued a tortuous method that largely destroyed initiatives and discouraged enterprise. For the applicants it was a source of uncertainty and confusion, and several of them repatriated disgruntled and bankrupt⁹⁰. The practices followed, normally, involved:

- a) - Technical advice from the Land Office.
- b) - Planimetric survey of the land.
- c) - Verification of the domainiality of the land.
- d) - Verification of the candidate's good moral, civil and political conduct as well as:
- e) - proof of his technical skill and,
- f) - financial fitness.
- g) - Compilation of the charter of concession.
- h) - Examination and endorsement by the governorate⁹¹.

The verification of (d), (e), and (f) depended on information supplied from Italy, taking several months. In

⁸⁸. Ibidem AOI 1936, Petretti to MAI, AA 25-9-1937; Lessona to GG, Rm 11-11-1937. It refers to the GGS who, broadly interpreting the clause, had begun to grant plots that in the Viceroy's eyes were not small; cfr. also Pini, Considerazioni.

⁸⁹. Ibidem AOI 1936, Graziani to GG, AA 8-4-1937; Petretti to GHR; AOI 1854, p.6.

⁹⁰. Ibidem GS 1820, p.2; FO 371/22021/2376/40/1, CG (D.F.S. Filliter) to Lord Perth, Naples 7-6-1938; Bird to Halifax, AA 1-4-1939.

⁹¹. CD IAO Sc 1801, p.2; GS 1820, p.2.

addition, the completion of stages (a), (b), and (c) paralysed work for months. Contributing to the delay was severe lack of equipment, personnel and finance. The scattered location of lands requested further compounded the problem. The administration was of the view that it had to think carefully before taking any initiative because it could not afford to keep a technician in a far away place for many days each time there was an application for a concession, which in many cases was not followed up by the applicant. The situation was further worsened by uncertainties surrounding the definition of a public domain and lack of clear guidance for the composition of contracts. The decision on domainiality of a particular piece of land was often left to the discretion of the district or subdistrict officer, who behaved arbitrarily. Lands that one officer, defying all evidence to the contrary, declared private property at later inspection proved to belong to nobody. Equally, fresh surveys had to be conducted and work in progress halted when lands acknowledged by another officer as public domain were subsequently challenged by their Ethiopian owners⁹².

The composition of the agricultural contracts was a technical officers's nightmare as it required shuttling between the battery of government offices in the colony and liaising with superiors in Italy. Until the end of 1939, no guidelines existed and the agricultural officer had to depend upon his common sense. This was a taxing task for a number of the contracts had to be rewritten several times to the satisfaction of the political authorities who refused endorsement until a particular clause, e.g. supply of manpower, was included or removed. "Different personalities held different views" and much time elapsed before a final draft was thrashed out⁹³.

⁹². Ibidem GS 1820, p.4.

⁹³. Ibidem, pp.3-4; Pini, Considerazioni.

As mentioned earlier, the contracts had two objectives: to discourage land speculation and the anarchic competition of adventurers; ~~and to~~ ensure rapid development by setting out clearly the rights and duties of each concessionaire. In the final analysis what these contracts reveal is the colonial administration's underlying lack of confidence in pure economic motives to provide sufficient incentive to concessionaires to develop the land properly. Detailed prohibitions and sanctions corroborate this view. For example, the farmer was specifically forbidden forming partnership with Ethiopians, or lease to them his land *in part* or *toto*, without prior approval by the administration. These practices would have encouraged bold speculators. Such restrictions were intended to prevent a repetition of the problems of Eritrean colonization⁹⁴. They also show that the administration thought the spontaneous behaviour of the Italian settlers was not necessarily compatible with the aims of the State⁹⁵.

Built within each contract were two key elements whose main objective was to ensure quick development of the land: annual rent and developmental clauses. Continuous possession of the concession depended upon the discharge of an annual rent. This was computed on the basis of the productivity and the geographical location of the land, bearing two facts in mind - that of minimizing the need for supervision, on one hand, and encouraging the rapid development of the concession, on the other. The underlying philosophy behind rent charge was that it would serve both as a stimulus to the concessionaire to engage himself in the development of the farm motivated by the need to find the necessary revenue that

⁹⁴. See Chap. I, pp.20-5.

⁹⁵. "Notiziario agricolo commerciale AOI", AC, XXXII, 1 (gennaio 1938):44; Azione Coloniale, 20-7-1939; Le Colonie, 11-7-1939.

would enable him to discharge his rental obligation, and as a curb on a rush on land. Reasonable annual rent was thought to discourage land profiteering and to allow the concessionaire considerable saving to invest on the concession⁹⁶. But despite such intentions, in fact the authorities imposed only a nominal annual rent ranging from £.5 to £.25 per ha. With few exceptions, most of the concessionaires did not pay even this modest amount. The government itself waived the first quinquennium's rent for those cultivating virgin land. By so doing, the administration deprived itself of what it thought as a potentially effective means of control⁹⁷.

Though varying according to size and organization of the farms, the contracts specified the envisaged land improvement model. Broadly speaking this model was of two types - those designed for profit-oriented medium-sized and large scale companies and settlement-oriented farms, including medium-sized of the first category. As stated earlier, the first type of concessions were granted on a 30 year lease, automatically renewable for 90-99 years. Such longevity was a stimulus to the big investor. In the settlement-oriented concessions it was the opportunity of ownership that would attract emigrants to IEA. After a trial period, the concessionaire was given the option to purchase as a private property⁹⁸.

Development was built around five or ten year plans in which were specified the improvements that should take place as well as the system of cultivation - whether it had to be cash crop or animal breeding or a combination of

⁹⁶. CD IAO AOI 1936, Lessona to GG IA, Disciplinari di concessioni di terreni per uso agricolo, Rm 27-7-1937; Petretti to GHR; Hr 1847; Consulta, "Avvaloramento":1570-1; Pesce, "Disciplina giuridica".

⁹⁷. CD IAO Hr 1847, p.2.

⁹⁸. MAE, La valorizzazione, p.210.

the two. For settlement-oriented concessions, a five year schedule was fixed: within three months of the contract the concessionaires should take up the farm; within six months, delimit the boundary; within a year, start development work; by the first year 20%, third year 50%, and fifth year 100% of the agreed programme had to be implemented⁹⁹. Concessions whose holdings were below 50 ha had a considerably reduced timetable. As a rule the total development had to take place within two years from the date of the concession¹⁰⁰. In profit-oriented concessions, the concessionaire had to develop at least one third of the farm within the first quinquennium of the concession. The whole programme had to be completed within ten years¹⁰¹. The required improvements consisted in clearing land of stones, breaking up the soil, planting hedges, digging wells, and planting trees. The concessions were to be periodically visited by agricultural officers who were to draw up progress reports that would be validated by joint meetings between the officials of the administration and

⁹⁹. DGovSc 17-7-1939, no.145: Col quale viene accordata al sign. Tedeschi dott. Aldo una concessione agricola, GU, IV/29, 8-11-1939.

¹⁰⁰. DGovSc 9-3-1939, no.223: Concessione accordata al sign. Marini Antonio di un lotto di terreno sito in località Uriel per sfruttamento agricolo, GU, IV/15, 2-8-1939; DGovSc 10-3-1939, no. 224: Concessione accordata al sign. Liri Clemente di un lotto di terreno sito sulla destra della strada AA-Moggio, per sfruttamento agricolo", GU, IV/15, 2-8-1939; no.225: Concessione, a scopo agricolo, di un lotto sito nei pressi della strada AA-Gm al sign. Carlo Cataldo", GU, IV/24, 4-10-1939; 19-9-1939, no.264: Concessione agricola ai sigg. Barbieri Orlando e Peta Francesco, GUGS, 9-3-1940; 1-6-1940, no. 88: Concessione al sig. Pettini Cosimo per la durata di anni nove di un lotto di terreno, GUGS, V/25, 19-6-1940.

¹⁰¹. CD IAO Hr 1813, where three types of charters are provided with another fourth temporarily employed until 1939 as annex; Disciplinare tipo per concessione agricola, in GS 1822; Disciplinare, in Sc 1801. Material on forestry concessions is vast: cfr. DGG 23-11-1939, no. 1774, GUGS, V/7, 14-2-1940. Extensive material is provided in the Bibliography. For material on cotton relating to Cotton Districts see Chap VII, pp.293-322.

representatives of the farmers. The farmers were allowed to use extensive Ethiopian labour by the way of salary or share-cropping, *compartecipazione*, or other forms of contracts to be ratified by the political authorities¹⁰².

Common to both types of concession was the requirement that the concessionaire had to man the concession personally and build his principal residence on the site. This was not so much to bind individuals permanently to the soil as to assure direct modern farming of the land and combat abuse by those concessionaires who intended to live in the metropolis "on the rent of or subsidies coming from their concessions"¹⁰³. But the post-1939 contracts made such requirements compulsory only to settlement-oriented concessions whose holders had to cultivate them together with their family¹⁰⁴. Political expediency demanded that the holders of profit-oriented concessions be only required to reside in IEA and man the farm either personally or employing "a well qualified manager"¹⁰⁵. Doubtless such a policy shift was in response to

¹⁰². The agricultural contracts or charters, known as *Disciplinare*, took a certain consistency only towards the end of 1939 and since then, if not in details, in their general principle, they were identical in almost all governorates. A point of significance is that some of them put a special clause forcing the concessionaire to dedicate a certain percentage of his land to farming a particular crop or breeding a specific animal suitable to the area, i.e. coffee or sheep in Härär and GS regions. The researcher is not able to find a facsimile for large scale concessions except for Cotton Districts and Forestry related companies. Equally no copy of charter for the concessions operating in the Amara Governorate area is available.

¹⁰³. Pesce, "Disciplina giuridica".

¹⁰⁴. The exceptions were medium-sized first category farmers who, like profit-oriented concessionaires, were allowed to reside only in IEA and, in exceptional cases, employ a skilled technical director.

¹⁰⁵. DGG 22-4-1939, no.373: Concessione Agricolo-Pastorale nella zona di Mencherrà (lago Ascianghi) accordata a S.E. Rodolfo Graziani marchese di Neghelli", GU, IV/16, 9-8-1939; Pesce, op.cit..

the inroads of a powerful interest group that had already become part of rural scene. A brief look at the applicants throws a sufficient light at this background.

To begin with, there was an impressive number of applicants. During the early period of the occupation, requests were mostly for small and medium-sized concessions. At the end of 1938, 231 requests were made to the Agricultural Council of which 126 were approved and CFA received 117¹⁰⁶. Even though this figure hardly supports the description of "a numerous army of applicants", requests were considerable¹⁰⁷, the vast majority directed to the governorate of Shäwa and Härär. Unfortunately, lack of clear data for both of these areas does not allow us to construct a nationwide trend. The Amara and GS governorates received 652 and 200 applications respectively. Out of these 81 were accepted in Amara and less than 30 in GS¹⁰⁸. It is impossible to attribute the high drop-out rate simply to bureaucratic red-tape, as some technical officers suggest¹⁰⁹. Many applicants may have been speculators deterred by uncertainty of profits¹¹⁰.

Even among those settlers who took up concessions, those who possessed the inclination, expertise, capital and labour to make a success of their venture seem few and far between. The official imagery of these men as motivated by a passion for farming, rather than sheer economic incentives, and who found in the Empire a territory for developing their talents, needs qualification. Like at any frontier, the concessionaires were an atomistic group which included people with different skills, resources and motivations. There were

106. CD IAO AOI 1982.

107. Ibidem AOI 1801, p.2.

108. Ibidem Am 600, p.2; GS 1820, p.1;

109. Ibidem Am 600, pp.2-3; AOI 1808, pp.14-5.

110. Ibidem GS 1820, p.1.

some lively and colourful characters: adventurers "searching for a rapid fortune by grabbing whatever comes into their hands"¹¹¹; high-ranking government officials and their protégés with no farming experience¹¹²; individuals who wanted to join in the race for the legendary wealth of the Empire¹¹³; and lapsed Fascists ordered to make "atonement" in Africa¹¹⁴. From the perspective of promoting agricultural development, this motley could only be viewed as marginal.

The colonial authorities forced several farmers to relinquish their concessions on the grounds of "lack of technical fitness and financial resources". In Amara, 15 such cases were reported by the end of 1939 and 22 in the middle of 1940¹¹⁵. By the beginning of 1940, 11 instances appear in the list of concessionaires of the GS¹¹⁶. With these the administration dealt severely. But it was powerless in cases

¹¹¹. Lessona (1958), pp.273-4; Villa and al., op.cit., pp.273-4; CI, 4-9-1938; Fossa, "Sane Norme", op.cit..

¹¹². Among this group the most prominent were: Graziani himself who had, in addition to 500 ha in Juba (Somalia), 500 ha at Menchere near Lake Ashanghé [cfr. CD IAO AOI 1936, UAer, Promemoria VI (1938); DGG 22-4-1939, no.373]; Nerio Poggi who came to Eritrea with three lorries and two years later, with another partner, owned 1,150 ha engaging himself in all sorts of speculations [A. Del Boca, "Tre generazioni di uomini per domare un oceano di sabbia", La Settimana Illustrata, 21-8-1956]. Cfr. also Masotti, op.cit., pp.103 where he mentions of a settler who boasts his friendship with Mussolini and had as a mission to keep other colons trigger happy and not let them return to Italy.

¹¹³. Del Boca, op.cit., III, pp.211; Villa and al., op.cit., p.206.

¹¹⁴. Typical example was former Party official of Somalia, Marcello Serrazanetti, who was rehabilitated by setting up an agricultural concern in Jimma. Tullio Mussolini had a farm of 600 ha near Dire Dawa, with a mission to remind the Italians of the rural origin of the *Duce's* family [cfr. Del Boca, *ibidem*, p.211].

¹¹⁵. CD IAO Am 600, p.3; AOI 1808, p.14.

¹¹⁶. *Ibidem* AOI 1984; GS 1822, pp.6-14.

related to people with influence and connection within the State or Party¹¹⁷, although such people did not directly manage their concession. They lived in AA or Italy cashing in on the proceeds from their farms worked by Ethiopians¹¹⁸.

It can be concluded that scrutiny of the applications, despite the exasperatingly long time it took, was not as vigorous as the authorities claimed and the applicants' motives were not always genuine. The colonial authorities were outraged at being taken advantage of. Expressing such anger, the Duke of Aosta made it unmistakably clear that land be granted only to "authentic" farmers. On 5 January 1938 he circulated a letter to governors and military officials, as well as MAI, demanding that

land grants should not, I repeat should not, be considered as a reward that can be given to individuals who, notwithstanding their great service [to the country], do not possess the necessary requirements of technical and financial fitness to develop it. Unless we are firm on this point we will be heading for a chain of more or less covert concessions, i.e. land speculations: this must be stopped by all possible means. So, the order of the day is this: land should be given to the farmers¹¹⁹.

However, nothing would be more erroneous than to conclude that all concessionaires were mere speculators. According to the authorities these formed a tiny minority. The majority were "honest and upstanding individuals" who struggled as best they could to turn their land into a thriving concern. The enormous gamble that some concessionaires took

¹¹⁷. ASMAI/III, Archivio Segreto, 2a Guerra Mondiale, Pacco IV, Generale Mezzetti to Terruzzi, 13-8-1938 (hereafter cited as ASMAI AS, Mezzetti to Terruzzi); Masotti, op.cit., pp.102-3.

¹¹⁸. These included people such as Graziani, Volpi and Temistocle Testa, the Prefect of Fiume and the owner of SIMBA.

¹¹⁹. CD IAO AOI 1936, Amedeo to MAI, AA 5-1-1938; Villa and al., op.cit., p.225.

in massive investment to develop their farm partially supports this claim. But despite eulogistic reports by technicians, the internal correspondence of some successful farms reveals serious managerial and administrative shortcomings. One such case was that of SIMBA which operated three large concessions in Arsi and Härär¹²⁰. The company had an enormous investment in machinery and wheat production at its Arsi farm in 1939 amounted to almost one third of the entire contribution made by the settler section. Yet the company was blamed for poor and unrealistic planning and bad management¹²¹. A secret report of 1940 gives a verdict on what officialdom described as one of the most successful commercial farms:

As regards the personnel I can describe the situation I found at Asälla as simply tragic: extreme staff shortage, total I ~~could~~-not-care-less attitude among the workforce and complete lack of any sort of attachment to the company by all... One thing which I had already denounced to the Director is that in my estimate there is 30% inefficiency by farm inspectors - brave men as far as one wishes but capable only to run a family kitchen garden. In terms of administrative efficiency, we are below zero and of this one becomes aware of only when assessing the amount of material employed. The vast majority of the workforce is mediocre, machine breaker, indifferent and apathetic¹²².

¹²⁰. See Table XVIII.

¹²¹. CD IAO AOI 1929, Maugini to Testa, Rm 18-5-1940.

¹²². Ibidem, M. Pavirani to Testa, Aselle 7-6-1940.

TABLE XVIII:- SIMBA CONCESSIONS

PLACE	YEAR OF CONCESSION	NUMBER OF TRACTORS	AREAS GRANTED (IN HA)	AREAS CULTIVATED (IN HA)		
				DIRECTLY	SHARECROPPING TENANTS	OWNERS
PADIS	1938	30 ^a	10,000	616	354	----
ASALLA	1938		11,831	9000	--	----
BAKA	1938		30,000	250	2800	1500

* The tractor number involved for the entire three concessions was 30, mainly of foreign make. In addition the Company had a variety of implements of all kinds including lorries, sowing machines and a thresher.

Source:- CD IAO 1929 SIMBA, Appunto dettato dall'Ecc. Testa, 13 marzo 1941; 1800; "Vita dell'Impero: Possenti macchine al lavoro", GV, 7-4-1940.

EFFECTS OF LAND ALLOCATION POLICY: THE CASE OF CFA FARMERS

The frustrating difficulties of commercial farming were nowhere more evident than in the case of CFA¹²³, the first pioneers of commercial farming, resembling the white settlers in Kenya. At the end of 1936, several CFA farmers, consisting of both agricultural technicians and entrepreneurs, were given by the then MC and their own trade union organization the task of exploring possible areas of rapid agricultural enterprise, and told to report on "the impressions and considerations gained during their research"¹²⁴. Nine of the men were pressurized by the MAI to cut short their tour and engage in wheat production. They were joined later at the end of

¹²³. For additional information on the background of the group see Pier Buono (1938), op.cit., pp.397-8. The same article in L'Azione Coloniale, 17-11-1938.

¹²⁴. See Chap. III p. ; ATdR 24/103, p.1; Tito Pestellini, "I territori dell'impero e la loro valorizzazione agraria", I Georgofili, III, 3 (1937):340-60; MAE, avvaloramento, pp.345-6; Quaranta, op.cit., pp.51-2.

1937 by another 21 entrepreneurs and their entourage of 114 personnel consisting of farm assistants and skilled technicians. This group brought with them substantial agricultural material. In addition to 1,000 q1 of implements, there were 53 high-powered tractors with ploughs, sowing and harvesting machines, 40 motor vehicles consisting of workshop vans, small trucks and motor cars. An account given by one of the second group sums up the initiative:

Towards the end of 1937, the CFA, in agreement with the MAI, held several meetings with various farmers of Upper Italy in Rome at its headquarters of Palazzo Margherita in the presence of representatives from the Ministry and the Fascist Party. The meeting has the scope of convincing the invited farmers to undertake in IEA and with their own means the cultivation of the land. During the session a five year (1938-39-40-41-42) contract for cereal farming was presented on behalf of the Armed Forces of the GG of AA, where a minimum price was set up and all related conditions agreed such as a pledge on the part of the Armed Forces to anticipate and supply fuel and oil at the foot of the farm for a fixed price and collect the produce from the mouth of the machine inside the concession itself as well as to advance, in addition to the fuel and oil, also all the seed needed. In one of these meetings, some farmers, including myself, asked to go first to Africa to the site of the concession in order to assess the soil and then be in a position to provide the most appropriate equipment. The tendency was then to do everything at once and no time was given to do what instead turned out to be of maximum importance. As a result few went with suitable equipments. The formal promise of the eventual transfer of the concession into ownership and the quinquennial contracts for the farming of cereals were to delude all the farmers into starting, without

any delay, and at once take up the life of a pioneer in IEA¹²⁵.

The first group settled in the immediate surroundings of AA before they were accommodated at Addis Alām, 50 km west along the motorway leading to Nāqāmti. On this same route 125 km away at Ambo, part of the second group operated. Of the remaining, one was settled at Wānji, in Shāwa and the rest were stationed at Ciaffa and Boruméda near Dāsé, in Wällo. Despite some differences, the vicissitudes of both groups were very similar¹²⁶.

Soon after their arrival an agreement was struck between the first group and the *Intendenza Militare*, a Quarter Master General branch entrusted with the promotion of grain production directly or through military commands stationed in Shāwa. The agreements in essence were those mentioned by Valducci. The farmers were to operate in the areas of Moggio and Ambo where the government at the initial stage would grant to each of them at least 500 ha of free land and modern agricultural machinery. It also pledged to advance seeds and purchase the entire produce at a fixed price. It soon proved that the government's pledge was untenable. As usual the main stumbling block was to find lands of public domain with extensive and unbroken holdings. Such miscalculations called for modification of the original plan in the scheme that came to be known as *zone of influence*. The term was not meant to have any political connotation but only agricultural reference. In order to maximize cultivation, the military chiefs were urged to arrange special agreements between the Italian farmers and the Ethiopians in lands under

15. CD IAO AOI 1938, Vincenzo Valducci to Maugini, Firenze 10-1-1942, p.1; "Notiziario agricolo commerciale AOI", AC, XXXII, 1 (gennaio 1938), p.44.

¹²⁶. L'Azione Coloniale, 7-12-1939; CM, 17-11-1938.

their respective control. The order set out the type of lands implicated and the modalities of the operations.

The lands should not have to be exclusively public lands ... but also vacant private property whose owners declare not to be in a position to cultivate it ... Consequently, the agricultural activity stemming therefrom, cannot take place on vast organic plots, but desultorily departing from one centre of expansion, in all lands that can be found in the aforementioned conditions¹²⁷.

The farmers were grouped in four zones that formed their residential and operational headquarters. The division closely met the agricultural conditions of the respective territories. A system that came to be universally known as *compartecipazione*, a bizarre form of share-cropping, developed which had its justification in tradition. A variety of contracts were signed in the presence of the Italian authorities and local chiefs. In each, the share of produce depended on the contributions afforded by the contracting parties. As a rule, the Ethiopian farmer provided land and carried out all manual work in the field that was to be ploughed by the Italian using modern agricultural equipment. In addition, the Italian advanced the seed and, in some cases, threshed the harvest¹²⁸.

¹²⁷. Graziani, Incremento Culture, AA 11-5-1937, p.1.

¹²⁸. The contracts can be summed up in four different forms after the deduction of the amount of seed provided by the concessionaire from the total produce:

THE AMOUNT SHARED

BY THE CONCESSIONAIRE WORK INPUT

CASES

a.	$\frac{2}{3}$	All the mechanical work (from threshing to ploughing).	Boidi.
b.	$\frac{3}{5}$	All less ploughing.	Gentile, Borgino, Sammartino.
c.	$\frac{1}{4}$	As in b less supply of seeds.	Boidi, Gentile, Borgino.
d.	$\frac{1}{4}$	Supply of seeds and threshing.	Raisi.
e.	$\frac{1}{4}$	Threshing.	Boidi.

The scheme evoked the old idea of economic partnership whereby Ethiopian labour and land, on one hand, and the capital, expertise and management of the Italian, on the other, entered into a working relationship. Of course, the Ethiopian remained in the role of adjunct to the Italian, assisting and not really controlling production. Reportedly a large number of contracts were signed involving an area of 20,000 ha. Of these only 8,000 ha were actually cultivated and 12,000 q1 of seeds distributed by the Italians and, as a result, an increased production was obtained. Pini, a representative of CFA, enthusiastically describes these developments and their future implications:

To it owed the peaceful and spontaneous emergence of very many share-cropping contracts between the metropolitan concessionaires and the natives (who were involved individually) sanctioned as a guarantee by the local chiefs. It gave rise to extensive distribution of seeds by our farmers and set in motion friendly relations which, while, on one hand, permitted the whites, lonesome in treacherous territories, maximum freedom of movement and action to promote farming activities, on the other, gave hope to effective assertion of favour-

Cfr. CD IAO AOI 1930, Promemoria Per il Vice Re, n.d. [1938]. This contract was later modified at the Sábbäta meeting that took place on 7-12-1937 for the reasons that will be discussed in the following pages and took the form indicated in Table XX. Mechanical threshing was considered as "an indispensable means for rational and full utilization of the produce in which was spent so much work and sacrifices", but it was not made compulsory. And yet many Italian farmers, lured by the revenues that this offered, forced against their will many of the peasants, including even those outside of *zone of influence*, to use their machinery despite the official instruction that this should be done only through the propaganda and persuasive work. The metropolitan farmers' action stirred a lot of discontent among the peasants and, as we will see, was one of the causes for the intervention of the government authorities and the modification of the original contracts [Cfr. Ibidem, Petretti [Vice GG] to DSAP, Contratto con agricoltori nazionali, AA 27-11-1937, p.3].

able relations between native labour and Italian capital and management¹²⁹.

This was a view shared by political circles in both Rome and the Empire, where the experiment was watched with particular interest. For them too it seemed to offer a classic example of co-operation of Italian capital and management with Ethiopian land and labour. The short term beneficial effects of such collaboration were not only the sizeable increase in production that was thought to bring the ideal of imperial self-sufficiency within reach, but also a valuable insight into the agricultural resources of the country and an opportunity to test the new machinery. It also had political and psychological bearing beyond crude economic considerations. It meant a symbolic presence for the state in remote and hostile rural areas. At the same time, the use of mechanical tools would enhance the prestige of the Italian farmer in the face of the Ethiopian familiar only with 'rudimentary methods' of farming. The scheme also aimed to gradually free land from the Ethiopians for colonization and secure a flow of labour into the farms of the Italian settlers¹³⁰. The authorities were led to believe that such a task, though cumbersome, was by no means difficult to achieve. With incentives, such as a salary, Ethiopians eventually would be convinced to relinquish their land and work under Italian guidance¹³¹.

Initially, the experiment seemed promising. As Pini described,

The initiative moved, until the period of harvest, to the mutual satisfaction

¹²⁹. Pini, *Situazione*, p.1.

¹³⁰. CD IAO 1936, *Lessona to GG, Concessioni di terreno ed utilizzazione degli indigeni che vi esercitano l'agricoltura*, Rm 17-9-1937 (hereafter *Lessona to GG, Concessioni*); *L'Azione Coloniale*, 17-11-1938; Villa and al., *op.cit.*, p.223; MAE, *La valorizzazione*, pp.271-2.

¹³¹. *Lessona to GG, Concessioni*.

of the parties: for a multitude of the natives who never dedicated themselves with much intensity to the field works served as stimulus and encouragement; the peaceful work of penetration carried out by the nationals was of such efficacy that it induced even armed groups to give in and set to work; hundreds of hectares that were never put under production were cultivated¹³².

But the drawbacks became conspicuous close to harvest. All manner of claimants came out of hiding and a wave of disputes was set off as to rights to share of the crop. The authorities believed that only abolition of share-cropping system would prevent a serious political backlash. Once again Pini, in a graphic description of the plight of CFA farmers, provides insight into some of the causes:

With the approach of harvest operations, numerous meddlers, pseudo-land-owners, who have hardly any evidence to substantiate their hereditary rights, contemptible even by the same local chiefs, priests, posed to transform an ecclesiastical right to the tithe into claims of ownership, have in the later days swelled the rank of the claimants and sought to instigate the masses of peaceful share-cropping farmers hoping to find a safe play in the current political circumstances in view of driving away these pioneering concessionaires whose activities have so far contributed, and continue to be of further avail, to the increase of production by the natives¹³³.

Pini's account gives only a partial picture of events that unfolded in what one district officer lamented as a "highly undesirable state of things"¹³⁴. The account was

¹³². Pini, Considerazioni.

¹³³. Pini, Situazione, p.2.

¹³⁴. Cerulli to MAI, Concessioni provvisorie; Villa and al., op.cit., p.223.

criticized by Graziani for its "inaccuracies and exaggerations"¹³⁵. Poor understanding by the Italians of the complexities of Ethiopian land tenure systems, which allow multiple claimants to one piece of land, was the primary cause of breakdown of the initiative¹³⁶. Added to this was the ambiguity that the concept of *zone of influence* entailed. For many of the concessionaires, the concept opened not only a fertile field for economic activity but also gave them effective control over Ethiopians in their *zone of influence*. As Graziani pointed out the "farmers often behaved towards the natives in a thoughtless or bullying manner"¹³⁷. A number of contracts were exacted by use of sheer force, in clear defiance of the government's order that

It is necessary that land should be occupied only after a free consensus was reached with the owners to whom may be given in exchange either a rent or a share of the produce within the limits to be agreed by the parties¹³⁸.

This situation was further aggravated by the license granted to each farmer to have an armed police patrol to protect his farm and the right to collect tributes from the Ethiopians on behalf of the government in his *zones of influence*. Owing to such extra-economic powers, those acquiring farms ended up as *imperium in imperio*: they punished reluctant elements in the population and nominated new village chiefs, sometimes removing even those appointed by the central authority. Others engaged themselves in illicit speculative activities and signed numerous agreements promising

¹³⁵. CD IAO AOI 1936, Graziani to MAI. Concessionari agricoli del CFA, AA 28-12-1937 (hereafter cited as Graziani, Concessionari).

¹³⁶. See Chapter II, pp.34-50.

¹³⁷. Graziani, Concessionari.

¹³⁸. Graziani, Incremento culture.

exorbitant rent knowing very well that they had neither the financial resources nor technical capability. Instances where the concessionaire lived in a nearby city from where orders were passed to the Ethiopian farmers to cultivate the land were not unknown¹³⁹, reminiscent of the feudal lords of the *ancien regime*.

Other contributing factors to the setback of the initiative, mentioned by Pini himself, were less of the Italian farmers own making. Tractors promised by the government either arrived too late or were not strong enough to cope with the terrain. Largely owing to this, many of the farmers were unable to maintain their part of the agreement and farming was carried out by Ethiopians using traditional methods. Problems were further compounded by the modest yield of newly introduced crops of the Italian variety for which the Ethiopians held the Italians to be largely responsible. Because of this, the Ethiopians strongly objected to sharing their produce, unmoved by the barrage of threats and abuses by the Italian farmers. Endless disputes and conflicts supplanted the initial phase of friendly co-operation. Some Italians received arrest warrants charging breach of contract, malpractice and gross-misconduct against the Ethiopians. Some farmers were attacked by a gang armed with spears, knives and staves¹⁴⁰. Their sense as a master race in the eyes of the Ethiopians and prospects for a more solid co-operation in years ahead were soon shattered.

¹³⁹. This is a case mentioned by Sbacchi which the present researcher is not able to substantiate from the sources at disposal. Cfr. Sbacchi, op.cit., pp.370-2.

¹⁴⁰. Pini, *Situazione*, pp:2-3; Pini, *Promemoria*, AA 2-6-1938. Pini points out that the Ethiopians owned 6,770 q1 to CFA members and interprets it as being an "irreparable loss of the produce with significant economic damage for the concessionaires and the development in the minds of the native the belief that he could get away with impunity from the obligation that he had freely taken, which was ratified by the government, and appropriate for himself what rightfully belongs to the White".

The situation was tense, and the sub-district officers feared that unless swiftly addressed, discontented Ethiopians would turn to the nationalist cause, providing the patriotic movement with a greater flow of recruits. It was against this background that, on 7 December 1937, a meeting was convened by the then AA governorate at Säbbäta, about 25 km from AA at AA-Jimma motorway. It was attended by the farmers and the local officers from the respective *zone of influence*. In the major review that followed the controversial *zone of influence* with all the attributes attendant upon the term, including police force and tax collection, was abolished¹⁴¹. With one exception, the existing share-cropping contracts either were revoked or modified. The Italian farmers were persuaded to settle for a share from the preceding year's harvest that was drastically "reduced to a bare minimum". Yet even this was strongly resisted by a substantial number of Ethiopians, with the authorities either conniving with their resistance or impotent to intervene¹⁴².

Two brothers, Sostene and Carlo Boidi, were exempted. Unlike their fellow-countrymen, the Boidi Brothers had earned a high standing among the Ethiopians with the result that they commanded the respect even of hard-line Fascists. The key to their success was their business ethics,

¹⁴¹. CD IAO AOI 1930, Amedeo di Savoia to GG Comando Forze Armate Per Intendenza AOI, Contratti con agricoltori nazionali, AA 28-1-1938. In this letter not only he declares the term *zone of influence* abolished but also removes all extra-economic activities that were attributed to the farmers; mechanical threshing becomes optional to Ethiopian farmers even though the respective political authorities were called to give support for the publicity work of the farmers among the Ethiopians for its use. Villa and al., op.cit., p.223.

¹⁴². On 23-2-1938, the government ordered to compute the quantity owned by the Ethiopians and settle it promptly; yet as it appears from Pini's complaints [Ibidem, Pini, Promemoria, AA 2-6-1938] no action was taken by early June 1938.

entirely alien to Fascist thinking: they combined thrift and hard work with respect for local tradition and friendly treatment of the Ethiopians. By a communique of 19 April 1938, their activities were officially sanctioned. This document defined their areas of operation and set out in great detail the different type of share-cropping contracts they were allowed to establish. Their work went ahead smoothly, and within a few years they were able to conclude 3,000 contracts covering an area of more than 2,000 ha¹⁴³.

Even though the government pursued the policy of "avoiding, as a matter of general principle, share-cropping contracts with the Ethiopians" and grant land for direct cultivation, it was not able to devise a better method of handling the problem of land and labour shortages. Later a modified version of share-cropping was introduced in Shäwa. Despite the Ethiopians' resistance to its restoration, the contracts of the Boidi brothers with the local population remained the proto-type for this new scheme¹⁴⁴.

However, the sudden policy shift outraged most of the "pioneer column", who denounced it as betrayal and cowardliness. In their view the government was simply capitulating "to the most puerile complaints by Ethiopian intriguers" and to malevolent advice from fellow countrymen "who never even deigned to follow closely the life of their farms". They pointed out the political dangers in allowing the Ethiopians to win an "outstanding concession"¹⁴⁵. Indeed, the government's

¹⁴³. Cerulli to MAI, Concessioni provvisorie; Idem to GGS and Commando Settore Occidentale [Ambò], Contratti di compartecipazione con gli indigeni, AA 19-4-1938; Idem to MAI, Contratti di compartecipazione con gli indigeni, AA 22-6-1938; GRA 43/34-26, Renato Trevisani [Delegato centrale per l'AOI della CFI], Relazione sulla missione svolta in AOI, aprile-maggio 1938, p.37. Villa and al.,, op.cit., p.240.

¹⁴⁴. Cerulli to MAI, Concessioni provvisorie.

¹⁴⁵. Pini, Situazione, pp.2-3.

action had serious moral and material repercussions upon the farmers. A memorandum written on 13 May 1938 gives a brief but clear picture of their feeling when it graphically describes their situation as

too mortifying for it reduced to totally absolute inertia and economic passivity those very ones who were the first and most courageous agricultural entrepreneurs to reach the colony and sacrifice their time, health and capital with the sole hope of developing the conquered land. Mortifying and equally humiliating because it established conditions of inferiority, that were less than dignifying, vis-à-vis the natives, who took every care not to maintain their (freely assumed) commitments towards the concessionaires who found themselves powerless and without any prestige¹⁴⁶.

Turned from the confident Empire builders of a year ago to rather desperate and cantankerous entrepreneurs, the farmers became an economic drain. Political authorities were deluged by letters from CFA headquarters crying for "an authoritative intervention before the first initiative of colonization was irreparably compromised"¹⁴⁷. The CFA officials castigated the government's behaviour in AA towards "their patient work of penetration" as lethargic at its best and hostile at its worst¹⁴⁸. The government in AA insisted any action would only create disturbances without having the desired effect. Orders from Rome combined with internal pressure led the colonial administration to agree to a "package

¹⁴⁶. CD IAO AOI 1936, Promemoria: situazione dei concessionari del I Gruppo, 13-5-1938, 2-3. The document deals with the whole range of problems encountered by the first and second CFA groups.

¹⁴⁷. Pini, Situazione, p.4.

¹⁴⁸. Ibidem, p.3.

deal" with the

intent of helping the national farmers who, in the first year of their activity, for a number of complex circumstances were unable to obtain just remuneration from their work¹⁴⁹.

In light of this, early agreements were substantially reviewed. Payment for seeds due at the end of 1937 was frozen; fuel repayment was suspended up to February 1940 and amortization of the agricultural machinery, originally expected to be over by the end of 1939, was made to start by early 1940¹⁵⁰.

According to the agreement reached between CFA and MAI, 21 farmers of the second CFA group were to be provided with 1,000 ha each in Ambo and Däsé. It was mistakenly believed that in these areas there was at least 15,000-16,000 ha of public land¹⁵¹. The available land was of poor quality and attempts to direct their activities towards more fertile zones were frustrated by absence of land free from Ethiopian claims. The Ethiopians were reluctant to move off the land even where exchange was arranged. Lack of security, combined with high fuel and labour costs, made the life of the farmers even more uncomfortable¹⁵². Two repatriated, the rest pressed for the revision of the existing agreements and were able to win a number of concessions. The guaranteed price of wheat was brought from £.200 per ql for an average yield of 8 ql per ha to £.305 per ha whenever the production unit per ha was 4 ql. The price decreased in proportion to the increase of

149. Cerulli to MAI, Concessioni provvisorie.

150. Ibidem.

151. CD IAO AOI 1936, Muzzaini [President of CFA], to MAI IA, Rm 28-9-1937; Produzione; CFA accordi; Lessona to CFA, Trasferimento.

152. Rossi to Bonfondi, Promemoria.

yield per ha. In addition, there was a land reclamation fund of £.250 for each hectare reclaimed¹⁵³.

TABLE XIX:- LAND HOLDINGS AND TRACTORS OF CFA (1940)

CONCESSIONAIRE	PLACE	DATE OF CONCESSION	NUMBER OF TRACTORS	AREAS OF CONCESSION (IN HA)	% (IN HA)
BROS. S. & C. BOIDI	ADDIS ALAM	1937	11	900	5.49
BORGHINO CARLO	ADDIS ALAM	1937	3	320	1.95
GENTILE FRANCESCO	ADDIS ALAM	1937	2	350	2.14
MORELLO ORAZIO	ADDIS ALAM	1937	4	320	4.88
W. & G. RAISI	ADDIS ALAM	1937	5	430	1.95
SCOTTO ERNESTO	ADDIS ALAM	1937	4	260	2.62
BISACCHI UGO	AMBO	1938	5	1450	1.58
BUSOTTI PASQUALE	AMBO	1938	3	680	8.85
GREPPI GIUSEPPE	AMBO	1938	5	840	4.15
IOTTI E. & C.	AMBO	1938	3	750	5.17
MADELLA BENIAMINO	AMBO	1938	5	1400	4.57
MATTIOLI CESARE	WANJI	1938	3	700	8.55
RADDI & OSTI QUINTILLIANO	AMBO	1938	3	650	3.97
SCAGLIARINI ROBERTO	AMBO	1938	5	1500	9.16
TOSCHI L. & BROS.	AMBO	1938	2	490	2.99
VALDUCCI VINCENZO	AMBO	1938	4	1450	8.85
ATTI ENZIO	DASE	1938	1	290	1.77
BAGNOLI & ROBERTO RUGA	DASE	1938	2	664	4.05
MARTINI GINO	DASE	1938	1	500	3.05
PAVIA GIUSEPPE	DASE	1938	2	1100	6.72
RAMPOLLA	DASE	1938	0	140	6.72
ROGGERO BENIAMINO	DASE	1938	4	1100	0.85
TOTAL			85	15684	

* Figure not available

Source: CD IAO AOI 1808; AOI 1802;; Sc 1801; Hr 1813, p.21.

As Table XIX shows, in early 1940 the farmers' plight had slightly improved but the areas they were farming were of far more modest size than they had been originally

¹⁵³. Cerulli to MAI, Concessioni provvisorie; Promemoria: Avviamento alle imprese agricole dei concessionari del II gruppo, 13-5-1938; Am 600; Villa and al., op.cit., pp.240-1; Sbacchi, op.cit., pp.380-3.

promised. Rather than contributing to imperial self-sufficiency in food-stuffs, the concessionaires remained totally dependent on state subvention. None succeeded in cultivating their concession. Out of about 4,000 ha in Däsé, only about 1,500 ha were farmed. Of the six farmers, two had not commenced farming. The situation was by no means different in Shäwa, as the cases of Scagliarini & Sons and A. Bisacchi show¹⁵⁴.

These two CFA cases illustrate the disappointment common to many 'land hunters' and the colonial administration's incompetence and lack of direction. Their enterprise, which had begun in a mood of determined optimism, had become a more sober affair, beset by doubts and anxieties. Yet CFA's experience was not an isolated case, but the reality for many concessionaires¹⁵⁵.

THE ORGANIZATION OF LABOUR

The viability of commercial farming largely depended on the ability to tap and exploit cheap indigenous labour. As an official of MAI stated:

It is clear that it is futile to grant land for agricultural purposes unless it is possible to secure for the enterprises the labour at the scale required and at the most favourable terms of salary¹⁵⁶.

Contrary to all expectations, labour recruitment proved far from easy and throughout the occupation the companies experienced a serious labour shortage. Aware that labour was a critical factor for the success of the settlers'

¹⁵⁴. See Tables XIV and XV.

¹⁵⁵. CD IAO Sc 1328; Sc 1329.

¹⁵⁶. Ibidem AOI 1926, Angelo de Rubeis Promemoria per S.E. il Sottosegretario: Mano d'opera indigena per le aziende agrarie nelle nuove terre dell'impero, Rm 12-5-1938.

infant agriculture, the Agricultural Council had earlier called on the government to devise proper ways and means to settle the issue. It wrote that

rejecting *a priori*, for obvious reasons, any idea of compulsory labour by the natives, it is necessary to think of pursuing a policy that allows an influx into the white farms of numerous natives disposed to work for a low salary, in the same style practised in all Tropical African countries, which is indispensable to putting the enterprises on an economic footing. These problems cannot be solved without the continued good office of competent organs of the colonial administration and a comprehensive understanding of the needs of colonization¹⁵⁷.

Similar pleas were made by the concessionaires themselves. Much to the dismay of the interventionists, the colonial administration's response was cool at its best and inefficient at its worst. At a theoretical level, a number of measures had been worked out since early days to counter the problem, but in practice, they failed. The consternation of the concessionaires increased. For the majority of the settlers, the use of constraint was the only effective method for overcoming the 'inertia' of the Ethiopians. But the government was concerned about the political implications such a policy of forced labour might cause, and was reluctant to openly sanction compulsory recruitment as the farmers demanded. It equally understood that unless a conscious effort was made to meet the demands of the struggling settler farms, its vital interest would be seriously compromised. A statement by Nasi, the governor of Härär, sets out the government's dilemma:

It is necessary for the agricultural concessionaires to bear in mind that the government cannot and will not deal with the 'black slave trade' in order

157. Consulta, "Avvaloramento":1571.

to supply the native labour they require. Indeed, the government can and must help in every possible way in the recruitment of labour required by private farms. But this and 'the slave trade', which is being demanded, are poles apart¹⁵⁸.

Although labour proved an intractable problem, it was resolved to some degree, in connivance with the administration, by pressures and brutalities that had all the characteristics of forced labour elsewhere in colonial Africa. This makes the declarations of the Italian authorities against such measures appear hollow. At the time of Nasi's pronouncement, two dominant patterns had emerged as the standard forms of statutory exchange of labour: *waged*, or *salarariato* and *share-cropping*, or *compartecipazione*. Both were widely used with the tacit endorsement, and at times open encouragement, of the colonial administration. The two systems were modelled on labour codes prevailing in other Italian colonies, especially Somalia and Eritrea.

Waged labour was recruited by Ethiopian chiefs who, as in other parts of colonial Africa, were also the main instruments for raising forced labour for public road works, military and para-military services, and the cultivation of certain cash crops¹⁵⁹. In substance if not in detail, the pattern of recruitment was identical throughout the Empire. After a relatively careful census of the population, each chief was responsible for supplying a specified number of

¹⁵⁸. G. Nasi, Il Mio Credo. Raccolta di circolari del generale Nasi edita dal governo dello Sc., n.d. (1939), in Luigi Goglia and Fabio Grassi, Il colonialismo italiano da Adua all'impero, (Rm: Laterza & Figli Spa 1981), p.395.

¹⁵⁹. CD IAO GS 1820, p.10.; AOI 1929 Società A. SIMBA, Norme per la mano d'opera aziendale (henceforth Simba, Norme). Labour problems relating to Cotton Districts are extensively discussed in Chap VII, pp. 305-19.

workers from the able-bodied, including women and children¹⁶⁰, under his control. The amount of labour to be provided fluctuated, with its peaks at high agricultural season when its shortage was most intensely felt¹⁶¹.

However, as the chiefs and their subjects tried to resist the companies' wishes, labour recruitment proved extremely difficult. Initially, companies like SIMBA used the pre-Italian Amhara governors who successfully delivered the required labour, imposing on recalcitrants severe physical and pecuniary penalties - measures described in the company's records as "effective ascendancy over the subdued people". But with the emergence of the police force and the policy of de-abyssinization, most of these governors were stripped of their traditional power, and, replaced by warrant chiefs. Cases in which the latter were elected by their tribes on the proposal of company officials were not uncommon; but several of these chiefs lacked roots in tradition and, as a result, were often rejected by the population, making their efficiency in obtaining the required labour very low.

Data on chiefs openly conniving with their subjects against the company are extremely rare¹⁶², but, as a rule, gaining whole-hearted support from the chiefs needed long negotiations involving hard-work, great energy and additional financial inducements on top of a token monthly pay-

¹⁶⁰. Use of child labour was widespread and was widely reported. Thus Mrs Fanin, one of the Fascist admirers among the British aristocracy, states that during her visit in 1938 she saw "quite a number of children employed with the road gangs" [F0371/22030/310]. The Italians justified the employment of children on educational grounds [GRA 44/36-1 Archimede Mischi to GG, Autonomia nel campo alimentare, Moggio 15-5-1937].

¹⁶¹. Ibidem AOI 1848, pp.4-5; Pier Buono, op.cit..

¹⁶². A typical case is that of the local *cadis* at SIMBA's farms who, unlike the Amara leaders, refused to use force against their co-religionists unwilling to work for SIMBA [Cfr. Simba 1929, Norme].

ment as part of their service¹⁶³. But resort also was made to punitive measures, coercing the chiefs into active collaboration with the company officials. A typical example was SIMBA, which abolished the chiefs' monthly salary and introduced a remunerative system that was proportional to the size of workforce supplied. The system began to prove successful. But even then the companies continued to be confronted with the problem of a reluctant and generally inadequate workforce. Well-to-do peasants were often able to avoid any work by paying their way off to the chiefs¹⁶⁴. The recruits induced to work had to be organized into labour gangs - *squadra di lavoratori* - and closely supervised, often by armed guards. Otherwise they simply stopped work or fled¹⁶⁵.

The Ethiopian chief was only an auxiliary instrument. The real power rested in the *residente* and *commissario* who were the direct contact between the company and the chiefs. Any power the chiefs had was delegated from these officers. The success in labour recruitment, to a certain degree, was very much a matter of how committed these officers were to the 'civilizing mission'¹⁶⁶. Some officers did their best in collaborating with the management of the companies by talking to the chiefs and encouraging them to be loyal agents; explaining the significance of a particular crop to the metropolitan economy; and punishing and dismissing incompetent and unco-operative chiefs. But such measures offered no lasting remedy to the problem: puppet chiefs proved themselves to be in no better a position than their predecessors and, as a

163. Ibidem; CD IAO 1929, SIMBA: Generalita' e programmi di massima, 27-2-1942.

164. Simba, Norme.

165. Arrigo Chiuderi, "L'agricoltura indigena nel GS ed i mezzi per farla progredire", *AC*, XXXVI, 10 (1942):272; Masotti, op.cit., pp.138-9; See also Chap. VI, pp.312-3.

166. Ibidem, GS 1820, p.9.

result, they, in turn, succumbed to the same fate of dismissal and punishment¹⁶⁷.

In several areas the companies were allowed to recruit their own labour and, as far as this ran smoothly, the administration saw no reason to intervene. But the policy gave rise to ample abuses. Where the labour needs of struggling farms became acute, forced labour became an inevitable option. Thus SIMBA, for example, in its Villa Baka concession organized the inhabitants of the surrounding villages into eight 100-strong labour gangs who provided their service by turns¹⁶⁸. Each day before the start of work, the company checked each worker on a register. The absentees were immediately reported to the local police who searched out truants. At the beginning of the week, each worker was given a ticket on which each evening a company official recorded the quantity and the quality of work done. A ticket had to be completed within a week, and those failing to do so were required to work the following week; otherwise no payment was made¹⁶⁹.

The labour gang or 'ticket' system worked with some satisfaction, but at the expense of the peasants' own subsistence farming. The situation called for the intervention of the central administration who, recognizing the danger of unrest, sought to offer the Ethiopians some protection. At the end of 1938, the Viceroy's government demanded the companies to disengage and send home all peasants during the sowing and harvesting season¹⁷⁰. This measure had a devastating effect on the companies as they experienced a marked reduction in the supply of labour at a peak period of their ac-

¹⁶⁷. Simba, Norme.

¹⁶⁸. Later modifications set the number at 120, while the term was shortened from eight to six weeks [Cfr. SIMBA, Norme]. In GS it lasted a month [Cfr. Chiuderi, op.cit.].

¹⁶⁹. CD IAO AOI 1929, Pagamento mano d'opera.

¹⁷⁰. Chiuderi, loco.cit..

tivities. A compromise of sorts was reached whereby various *residences* of the region combined forces to supply a labour quota by turns. Although the system interfered less in Ethiopian subsistence farming, as a remedy for labour shortage it proved inadequate. Despite strict security, most of the workforce just melted away in the course of the journey. Those reaching the destination were subjected to a tough regime. Even then it was possible for incidents similar to those described by one officer in relation to the labour gang of Jubdo mines in Wälläga to occur:

If by any chance a leopard or any night animal had a nasty idea of strolling around close to their camps, it offered the best opportunity for total confusion whereby everybody returned to his homeland, where under normal circumstances a visit by a leopard would have hardly raised much emotion once they were locked inside their dwellings. In such a case it became necessary to start the recruitment afresh amid general annoyance - in the first place that of the *residente*¹⁷¹.

As the Italians were quite aware, one of the reasons for resistance was the realization by the Ethiopians of unprecedented opportunities opened for them by rival interest groups pleading for their labour¹⁷². Therefore, as one agricultural technician complained, the Ethiopians were reluctant to

¹⁷¹. Masotti, op.cit., pp.138-9. Assessing the severity used Masotti wrote that "I have to confess that I would never have liked to be the *residente* of Jubdo where a Genovese colleague only with his notorious harshness succeeded to keep them together".

¹⁷². Such awareness is also highlighted by Renato Trevisani, an official of CFI: "Despite all this (= attempt to control wages of the natives), the natives are already well aware that their services represent much sought merchandise, as stands to demonstrate it the fact that the success or failure of an employer's business depends on the profit margin that the native considers to be worth for his work" [GRA 43/34-26, Renato Trevisani, op.cit., p.40].

work in farms unless offered what he described as "absurd wages equivalent to those they earned from the construction and building companies"¹⁷³. But owing to the need to render their enterprise profitable and keep their produce competitive in the international market, the farms were not in a position to compete with current market wages¹⁷⁴.

Wages in road-building ran from £.4 to £.6 *per diem*, and construction workers in AA, Härär and other urban centres earned £.7 *per diem* and those with greater skills from £.10 to £.20¹⁷⁵. In contrast, an agricultural labourer's wages ranged from £.1 to a maximum of £.3 *per diem* depending on age, sex, conditions of work and, in a few cases, climate. The normal pay was £.3 for men, £.2.50 for women and £.2, £.0.50, and £.1 for children depending on performance and type of work¹⁷⁶. The payment of these wages in lire provided little inducement¹⁷⁷. As a result agriculture, alongside the mining industry, was left at the mercy of an unreliable Ethiopian workforce which knew that its labour was a much sought after asset. The effects were as devastating as in the early period of occupation when

many natives have abandoned the European estates; to make them stay the others have been obliged to increase agricultural wages; where coffee is

¹⁷³. CD IAO AOI GS 1820, pp.9-10.

¹⁷⁴. Fossa (1938), pp.238-9,253; M. Rava, "Diairo di un secondo viaggio nell'ovest Etiopico", CDV, (1939):135,153-4; F. Santagata, L'Harar, (Milano:1940), p.208; N. Bonfatti, "Tutela razziale del lavoro in AOI", REAI, XXVI, (1938):1407.

¹⁷⁵. Pankhurst, (1972):62-5.

¹⁷⁶. CD IAO AOI 1929 SIMBA, Pagamento mano d'opera; 1848, pp.4-5. Most common way of payment was part in kind and part in cash. Items paid were barley, *durrah*, *cat*, firewood or *dergo* - food ration [Cfr. Santagata, op.cit., p.210; GRA 43/36-26, Trevisani, op.cit, pp.40-1].

¹⁷⁷. GRA 46/41-19, Cusmano, op.cit., pp.24-31; 43/34-26, Trevisani, op.cit., pp.64-72.

collected from wild plants many natives who until last year were not paid, or else received very small wages and rarely, have also abandoned the old coffee work or have demanded a higher wage. In the small independent farms the natives have in some cases preferred to leave the coffee for building work where more favourable opportunities are offered¹⁷⁸.

The intense competition for labour resulted in considerable friction between various groups of Italian employers, notably between the farmers and the construction companies. The government was pressed to standardize wages throughout the country and as result a number of decrees were enacted to this effect. But the government possessed neither the political will nor the ability to carry out its decisions effectively¹⁷⁹. Orders prohibiting the employment of Ethiopians for non-agricultural work in the vicinity of concessions were also unsuccessful in arresting "the exodus from the fields"¹⁸⁰.

Although attractive in many ways, share-cropping too did not prove to be a lasting solution. The system took two forms depending on whether the land was domainial or under private ownership. In domainial lands, the Ethiopian resident was considered as a tenant and the concessionaire as a landlord. In such circumstances, share-cropping took the form of labour rent whereby, for the privilege of living on

¹⁷⁸. Prinzi, op.cit.:1716.

¹⁷⁹. Salary standardization was initially attempted by the GGS immediately after the occupation invoking severe penalties against the transgressors of both the salary limit as well as payment in thalers; yet this as well as the efforts of other governorates failed to attain their objectives [Cfr. GU, 11, 184, p.283, GUGS, I, 51, (1937), p.69; I, (1937), p.223; BUGA, II, (1937), pp.521-2 who introduced the law with the explicit view of penalizing "employers' abuses and unjustifiable cornering of labour].

¹⁸⁰. Santagata, op.cit., pp.210-1; GRA 43/34-26, Trevisani, op.cit, pp.39-40; CD IAO misc. 1038, p.18.

the settler's estate and receiving land for the cultivation of foodstuff, the Ethiopian paid a labour rent to the Italian landlord. As a rule, the small and medium-sized concessions tended to settle the Ethiopians at the periphery of their farms, forming villages or isolated homesteads that served as reservoirs of labour¹⁸¹. The practice on large farms was to allocate land in lieu of wages, and the Ethiopian tenant either appropriated the entire produce for himself or shared it with the concessionaire according to a pre-agreed clause. The tenant was obliged to supply his own and his family's labour, freely in the first case, or against some nominal payment in cash or in kind or both in the second¹⁸². Abuses by the concessionaires were common, as in Wällo where government officials and individuals with influence and connection demanded 40% of the produce without making any financial contribution to the production process¹⁸³.

The share-cropping system was quite deliberately and consciously fostered by the government which encouraged the Italian farmers to keep Ethiopian cultivators within their concessions¹⁸⁴. The contract aimed to bind the Ethiopians

¹⁸¹. The need for a native reserve, known as *Villagio indigeno*, modelled on that of Kenya and South Africa was advocated by many Italians. The Duke of Aosta, under whose regime racially segregated development policy was introduced, saw the advantages of dividing the entire country along racial and ethnic lines, further expounding it [Cfr. CD IAO Misc. 1038, pp.2-5; AOI 1936, Graziani to MAI, concessioni terriere; ATdR 24/104, G. R. Giglioli, Rapporto al MAI in relazione al viaggio nell'Unione del Sud Africa, Firenze 5-8-1937, p.31; Prinzi, op.cit.:1718-9; Villa and al., op.cit., pp.214-5].

¹⁸². Santagata, op.cit.; GRA AOI 1936, Concessionionari.

¹⁸³. Pini, Considerazioni.

¹⁸⁴. Most post-1939 concession charters contain a clause on the following model: "The concessionaire should stipulate with the native personnel within the concession area salary or share-cropping contracts ... and should be clear that they [the natives] cannot be displaced without the approval of the local political authorities and for reasons of well-proven incapacity

to the land of the company where they were 'gainfully' employed by establishing them in what was euphemistically described as cultivating settlements.

An interesting ramification of this was the emergence of labour colonies. The companies were unwilling to accept delays or shortfalls in production on their farms; to prevent such an eventuality, particularly where the local workforce was scant, labour was imported from elsewhere. This experiment, chiefly employed by the SIA Arussi in its ex-Belgian concession¹⁸⁵, directed by Jacopo Gasparini, the former governor of Eritrea whose name was associated with the Täsänäy State Cotton Farm, was gradually gaining ground¹⁸⁶. After a number of unsuccessful attempts to solve the labour problem, SIA Arussi brought in Härärgé näftäñas who had been confined to penal colonies¹⁸⁷. Later on the Sidamo migrants from surrounding areas joined them. The scheme aimed to gather each ethnic group into villages with its own chiefs, religious institutions and water supply. After agreement was

and indiscipline on the part of the [native] cultivators or the inability of the farm to effectively absorb their manpower" [CD IAO Sc 1801]. For the other governorships cfr. Ibidem Hr 1812, allegati nos.4,5,6; GS 1822, Disciplinary Tipo per Concessione Agricola".

¹⁸⁵. Formed in 1913 and known as *Société Belge des plantations d'Abyssinie*, the Belgian concession was one of the largest modern concessions predating the Italian occupation. Largely based on dry farming, it extended over 2,000 ha. Although coffee was the main cash crop, a variety of fruits were grown. At the time of occupation it had an estimated labour force of 2,000 and ca.1,700,000 coffee plants [Cfr. ASMAI 54/22, L'attività economica del Belgio e le aziende agricole nell'Etiopia sud orientale, AA n.d. [4-2-1927]; Fernando Santagata, "Il sistema economico degli Arussi", *REAI*, 27, 9, (Settembre 1939):1078-9; Cerulli (1943):74-5].

¹⁸⁶. See above Chap I, pp. 27-8.

¹⁸⁷. The Italian officials claimed that they settled them on humanitarian grounds as they needed urgent accommodation owing to the fact that, following the advent of the Italian conquest, their Somali subjects refused to work for them.

reached with the chiefs, a series of share-cropping contracts were established: the Ethiopian settler was given a piece of land for his own use with seeds and agricultural tools, and entitled to keep a few poultry and cattle. He was also provided with a hut, cash loans, medical assistance and a well for irrigation. In return he worked the company's land at a rate which varied according to the yield produced or inputs provided by the parties. Sources available fail to give details as to the magnitude of this programme. Yet we know that SIA Arussi, by about 1940, had settled two groups of Shāwan Amhāras from the JeJega areas. On the whole, this was considered one of the best long-term strategies to overcome labour shortages, particularly in areas where large companies operated. Yet the system was in its infancy when the war of restoration of independence broke out, and it would be speculative to contemplate whether it could have offered a lasting remedy¹⁸⁸. But a similar experiment in Somalia, where such a system was extensively used and for a long period, gave poor results. On the other hand, we know that there was already marked reluctance on the part of free Ethiopians to leave their homes and subsistence farming to work, virtually as slaves, for foreign masters¹⁸⁹.

Where land was under private ownership, the Ethiopian landlord allotted a certain percentage of his land to cultivate an industrial crop of interest to the company who purchased the produce at an agreed price¹⁹⁰. The most common procedure was to divide the harvest on the basis of input provided by the Italian concessionaire¹⁹¹. Whenever possible,

188. Cerulli (1943):74.

189. CD IAO misc. 1038, p.13; see also Chap. VII, pp.310-4.

190. CD IAO 1929, *Rapporti fra la società e gli agricoltori proprietari* (hereafter *Simba, Rapporti*); Santagata, *op.cit.*, p.210.

191. See Table XX.

the pre-existing tenancy arrangements were maintained. In such cases the landlord, i.e. a *gult*-holder, was the signatory who, however, listed his tenants who continued to pay him their customary duties¹⁹².

Share-cropping contracts were notarized by local authorities in the presence of the chiefs. They had to be fully explained to the Ethiopian and signed by both parties. The size of plots varied from $\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 ha, and the cultivator worked, in theory at any rate, if not always in practice, under the supervision of the concessionaire who distributed seeds and sponsored research¹⁹³.

As we saw earlier, ideally, the share-cropping system was a partnership between the Italian entrepreneur, and the Ethiopian farmer and avowedly served a double purpose: to uplift the material welfare of the Ethiopian by organizing rationally his agricultural enterprise and to provide the concessionaire with a secure source of production. Yet in practice, it was a mechanism to incorporate the Ethiopian population into the world market at an arbitrary level of remuneration. In the process, the Ethiopian peasant not only became the basis of exploitation, rooted in traditional economic structure, but also surrendered his independence to become the servant of business interests. A relatively independent community passed into the control of a remote financial magnate. Share-cropping was attractive to the Italians for its functional versatility: primarily, it could claim roots deep in tradition and local agricultural practices¹⁹⁴; in addition to coping with labour deficiency, it aided to expand

¹⁹². SIMBA, Rapportii.

¹⁹³. CD IAO AOI 1929, SIMBA: Rapportii esistenti fra la società ed i coloni.

¹⁹⁴. See above Chap. II, 36-8; CD IAO 794; Sc 3025. For other regions no study exists.

production keeping costs far below the market level. Finally, it helped to maintain the racial prestige of the Italian concessionaire as the manager and supervisor of the farm while the Ethiopian carried out all the demeaning work¹⁹⁵.

Originally, share-cropping system was intended as a stop-gap until Ethiopians were forced onto the labour market and the land problem was definitely settled. Instead it was becoming a permanent feature of the rural economy, and gradually took over from salaried labour¹⁹⁶. Reports attest that, with the exception of Shäwa, in many of the governorships share-cropping was the backbone of the activities of many concessions. In SIMBA's case, for example, of 970 ha of its Fadis Farm, 354 ha were share-cropped; equally out of total 5,724.85 ha at Villa Baka, 5,403.85 ha was conducted under the same system in which 1,030 Ethiopian tenants and owners were engaged¹⁹⁷.

The Ethiopians' response to the programme was on the whole unenthusiastic. At SIMBA's farm of Villa Baka, for example, the indigenous population reacted adversely while the Ämhäras surprisingly showed a remarkable degree of co-operation. As former lords and, understandably, Italians' key political adversaries, the Ämhäras had much to gain by co-operating with the new overlords. To overcome the resistance of the Ethiopians, political pressure was blended with punitive measures and economic incentives. Intense propaganda activity was carried out by the agricultural technicians who employed, as SIMBA's report points out, "at once patience, adequate rewards" and physical punishment - this later action

¹⁹⁵. Sbacchi, op.cit., p.367.

¹⁹⁶. Most post-1939 concession charters encourage the concessionaire to share-cropping contracts. Cfr. CD IAO GS 1822; Hr 1812, 1813; Sc 1801.

¹⁹⁷. Ibidem AOI 1929, pp.13-4; Bodini to DG Soc. An. SIMBA, AA 10-1-1941; Relazione su Fadis al 31-12-1940. As we will see in Chap VI the Cotton Districts almost entirely depended on it.

described by the company with the genteel expression of "fine exemplary measures"¹⁹⁸. Recalcitrant individuals were penalized and those co-operating rewarded. Thus the Amhāras who co-operated with SIMBA were allowed to maintain their former status of landlords or *gultāñas*¹⁹⁹. It was claimed that where their co-operation was successfully enlisted, the activities of chiefs and notables proved most effective. In such cases, some companies, such as SIMBA, strengthened their position by restoring, in agreement with the political authorities, part of their former powers with a view of enhancing their authority over their subjects.

Resistance took various expressions. Often little or no care was given to the company's unprofitable crop. Unprofitability gave rise to the most common phenomenon - moonlighting whereby the Ethiopians misappropriated the crop by night to transact it for a remunerative price at unofficial market:

Cases of joint land management with the natives are not rare. But the system has not been brilliant. Where he was not closely supervised and well-integrated, the native tended often to breach the trust laid upon him as an associate by ably stealing the common produce²⁰⁰.

Insufficient resources, combined with the problems of operating in an often inaccessible and vast area, made effective control difficult. Yet the concessionaires, in their drive to control production and fight fraud, continuously improved their methods of surveillance, devising new and more stringent measures.

¹⁹⁸. Ibidem, Generalità, p.16.

¹⁹⁹. CD IAO 1929, SIMBA. Agricoltura indigena.

²⁰⁰. Giovanni Piani, "L'agricoltura indigena nel Governo dell'Harar ed i mezzi per farla progredire", AC, XXXIII, 7 (1939):408.

TABLE XX:- SHARE-CROPPING CONTRACTS BETWEEN ITALIANS AND ETHIOPIANS²⁰¹

TYPE OF CONTRACT	SETTLER		SHARE OF PRODUCE	ETHIOPIAN		SHARE OF PRODUCE
	CAPITAL	LABOUR		CAPITAL	LABOUR	
1.	6 HARROWS 6 SICKLES	PLOUGHING THRSHING	44%	LAND SEEDS	SOWING OTHERS*	56%
2.	2 HARROWS 6 SICKLES	PLOUGHING THRSHING	33%	LAND SEEDS	SOWING OTHERS*	67%
3.	2 HARROWS 6 SICKLES	THRSHING	17%	LAND SEEDS	PLOUGHING SOWING OTHERS*	83%
4.	2 HARROWS 6 SICKLES		5%	LAND SEEDS	PLOUGHING SOWING THRSHING OTHERS*	95%
5.	SEEDS		SEEDS WITH 22% INTEREST	LAND SEEDS	PLOUGHING SOWING THRSHING OTHERS*	100% LESS SEEDS AND INTEREST

* It includes manuring, harrowing, weeding, harvesting, binding and transporting to the threshing floor.

Source: Cerulli to MAI, Contratti di compartecipazione.

A typical case was the system followed by SIMBA at its Villa Baka Farm where it fostered the production of crops that had little local consumption. In addition, it set up an *ad hoc* Commission, composed of members representing the interests of both contracting parties. Ethiopian interests were represented by two chiefs and the company by a valuator and

²⁰¹. Note that the % share of produce depended on input level.

registrar. Before the harvest period, the Commission toured each farm, assessed the total produce and the company's share and recorded them in two copies - one for the Ethiopian and one for the company - bearing the signatures of each member of the Commission. When depositing at the company's storage, the Ethiopian took with him his copy and was issued with a receipt. The company kept a register where all payments and evaluations were carefully recorded²⁰². Most of the crop was paid for in kind, with the exception of coffee and cat for which payment was usually in cash - in the region of £.1 if the plant was irrigated and £.0.50 if dry.

The Ethiopian could challenge the Commission's judgement by appealing directly to the company administration. But once the assessment was accepted, any failure to comply brought serious penalties. In the cases of coffee and cat, the normal procedure was to seize the crop and confiscate an equivalent amount to the monies due. Despite the company's boast of efficiency in production control and elimination of fraud, this system was the source of interminable disputes and subject of many amendments²⁰³. Rome was wary of its long-term repercussions. In a letter written to the Director General of the Company, Mario Dini, Maugini's verdict was:

The company's task should not be confined to exaction. This certainly is one of the worst solutions and it will not be too long before the consequences manifest themselves²⁰⁴.

The picture that emerges is that, contrary to the expectations of the colonial authorities, the policy of achieving self-sufficiency through commercial farms was a disastrous failure. Rather than contributing to economic self-sufficiency,

²⁰². SIMBA, Rapporti.

²⁰³. Ibidem.

²⁰⁴. CD IAO 1929, Maugini to Mario Dini, Firenze 28-1-1940.

the farms remained a drain on the slender resources of the State who had to ensure their survival through generous subsidy and fiscal concessions²⁰⁵. As both the cultivated areas and the yield gradually decreased, initial enthusiasm subsided. In 1940, an estimated area of about 20,000 ha was cultivated with a mere production of circa 130,000 ql. The estimate for 1941 was lower than this but 200,000 ql were expected²⁰⁶. But the optimism faded away when climatic change ruined most of the crop.

In official circles, the reason for failure was sought in the conventional explanation of the distrust of Italian capital to move into a new environment, particularly at a time of turbulent international conditions compounded by uncertain local markets. There is little doubt that these were significant contributing factors. But they were not the sole reasons. The policies for commercial farming rested on grandly conceived but impracticable ideas²⁰⁷. They were not preceded by any feasibility study nor did they seem to have balanced the impact that various interests might have during implementation. Their pace of development was determined by the interplay of three major forces: the technical knowledge of the farmers, availability of land and labour.

Despite eulogistic reports in the contemporary media, the settlers showed a low level of experience and technical expertise. Attempts to find land free from Ethiopian claims had little success. The continuous intervention of the political authorities, aided by a package of coercive measures, never succeeded in remedying the chronic labour shortage. The situation was further compounded by the lack of a coherent set of policies, administrative disorganization, personality

²⁰⁵. Del Boca, *op.cit.*, III, p. 212.

²⁰⁶. CD IAO 1774; Villa and al., *op.cit.*, p.252.

²⁰⁷. Villa and al., *op.cit.*, pp.221-2.

clashes, bureaucratic entanglement and inadequacy of economic and manpower resources. Under the best of circumstances, the Italians would have had to be patient as the official agricultural development strategy matured. But the brief period of the occupation simply was not long enough for their plans to come to fruition.

In spite of this failure, the government did not relinquish its commitment to settler farming. Yet a major reassessment of the government's policy resulted in a positive, though timid, gesture of encouraging Ethiopian farming as a way of maintaining revenue in view of achieving agricultural self-sufficiency and bolstering the fiscal base of the colonial state and subsidizing the survival of the settler farming.

TABLE XXI:- COMMERCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC CONCESSION IN 1941²⁰⁸

<u>CONCESSION AREAS</u>				
GOVERNORATE	NO. OF COMPANIES	GRANTED	CULTIVATED	UNCULTIVATED
AMARA	107	4,162	2,300	1,862
GS	112	21,381	6,500	14,881
HARAR	124	65,878	11,700	54,178
SHAWA	229	33,194	15,600	1,794
ERITREA	126	23,343	12,000	11,343
SOMALIA	129	28,780	25,500	3,280
TOTAL	829	176,737	73,600	103,137

TABLE XXII: SETTLER AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AND ANNUAL CONSUMPTION NEEDS AS IN 1941.

TYPE ^A	AMARA	GS	HARAR	SHAWA	ERITREA	SOMALIA	TOTAL PRODUCTION	ANNUAL NEED	BALANCE
WHEAT	10,000	2,000	25,000	28,000	5,000	—	70,000	1,010,000	-1,009,930
TÉF	3,000	100	400	4,500	5,000	—	13,000	979,500	-966,500
BARLEY	2,500	—	2,000	3,000	5,000	—	11,000	305,650	-294,650
DURRAH	—	2,800	6,000	3,000	8,000	—	17,000	735,000	-718,000
CORN	50	50	5,000	12,000	150	70,000	90,000	506,000	-416,000
OIL SEEDS	150	—	4,200	6,000	1,050	6,000	17,000	493,400	-476,400
COFFEE ^B	—	—	—	—	—	—	6,500	26,375	-19,875
DRY VEGETABLE	100	200	50	1,250	200	—	1,700	466,000	-464,300
POTATO & FRUIT ^C	500	2,300	2,000	810	2,000	500,000	507,600	193,000	+314,600
COTTON FIBRE	—	3,300	150	800	500	7,000	11,750	*	*
CASTOR FRUIT	—	100	5,000	100	—	1,000	6,200	*	*
POULTRY	500	500	500	2,000	5,300	200	9,000	3,060,000	-3,051,000
BEEF	25	10	10	10	25	—	80	154,566	-154,486
PORK	150	50	200	800	300	—	1,500	6,840	-5,340
LAMB	80	20	50	50	100	100	400	253,450	-253,050

— Figure Unknown.

*. No figure available.

A. Measurement unit: Cereal in ql and Animal in number.

B. Estimated at 2,619,000 plants and 0,25 kg per plant.

C. Total fruit 502,110 ql of which: GS (100), Harär (1,000), Shäwa (10), Eritrea (1,000), Somalia (500,000).

Source: CD IAO AOI 1774.

²⁰⁸. The data belongs to a CFA official, Pini, and, compared with those supplied by the Agricultural offices [See Table XII], are considerably inflated.

CHAPTER VII
IMPROVING ETHIOPIAN PEASANT AGRICULTURE ?

THE DIMENSIONS OF CHANGE

Until demographic and commercial colonization efforts patently failed and the first flush of Fascist enthusiasm died away, modernization of indigenous agriculture was a mythology included in the speeches of higher authorities for propaganda purpose^s. Vague thoughts of uplifting the peasantry, at least in view of preventing the spectre of "social problems", were not absent. They were expressed by a few "visionaries" in the proper political garb of the Fascist administration, and were accepted as indispensable declarations showing that all views were being considered.

The paramount concern of the Italians was to obtain enough land for their own settlers. Although the Italian authorities avowedly claimed to respect "legitimate" Ethiopian land claims, the issue of reconciling the imperatives of the metropolitan colonization with the interests of the Ethiopians remained unresolved¹. Colonization dictated that settlement be directed to areas where climatic conditions, the cost of manpower, and the security of capital were most favourable to making the enterprise profitable and large scale production feasible. But these were also areas that were densely populated and the settlers had to compete for agricultural resources with the Ethiopians who were almost exclusively dependent on land for their subsistence.

For the Italian authorities, dealing with indigenous agriculture entailed many complicated economic and political factors to which there were no clear cut solutions: massive displacement of the Ethiopians from the areas destined for settler agriculture might incite rebellion and open warfare, or cause migration to the urban centres where they might form a socially and politically restless proletariat. On the other hand, the Ethiopians' labour was essential to develop the colonists'

¹. Brotto, op.cit., p.24.

farms². Also the Ethiopians, by their sheer numbers, were regarded as a large market for metropolitan goods and their produce was gradually perceived as indispensable in achieving the goal of Imperial self-sufficiency in foodstuffs. But as the Ethiopians were believed to have far fewer wants and could therefore sell at a much cheaper price than the Italian settlers, there was also a constant fear that competition from their low cost produce might undermine any progress on the settlers' farms³.

Nevertheless, the Italians maintained that the occupation of Ethiopia delivered the Ethiopian peasantry from bondage and backwardness. Such a view was echoed by the chief intellectual architect of Italian colonization in Ethiopia, Maugini:

A new era of peace and state of well-being is opened to the masses of IEA as many of the present miseries that these people are experiencing will be once and for all eliminated⁴.

From the official point of view, the list of such miseries included archaic farming methods, absence of well-developed markets, and rudimentary socio-economic infrastructure which acted as bottlenecks to improving the peasant economy⁵. But it was in the land tenure system as manifested in the *gäbbar* system that the Italians saw the chief constraints paralysing Ethiopian agriculture:

the *gäbbar*, a tax-paying peasant, subject to the tyrannical rule of an Amhara landlord, with no title to land which belonged to the Emperor or his feudal lords or churches,

². GI, 9-3-1939; G. Mondaini, "I problemi del Lavoro nell'Impero", REAI, (maggio 1937):748-9.

³. Giglio (1939), pp.53-8; "Rapporti":1561-5.

⁴. Maugini, "Primi Orizzonti":20

⁵. Ibidem; G. Pistolese, "Problemi dell'impero", EI, (Luglio 1938).

burdened by tithe imposed by law and exorbitant taxes imposed by the lesser chiefs, robbed by raiders, compelled to maintain in his house the soldiers of the Emperor and those of the provincial governors, does not obviously feel any incentive to improve and increase production, nor, even if willing, will be in a position to carry out any initiatives in this respect; on the other hand, nor does such initiative come from the temporary *gult*-holders or, call them whatever you like, feudal-lords who, not having the security of permanent tenure, have no other interest than maximum possible exploitation, in collaboration with the wretched population⁶.

THE CHALLENGES OF RESTRUCTURING THE *GABBAR* SYSTEM

The reform of the *gult* system was interpreted as necessary for the creation of an economic environment conducive to healthy agricultural development, for *gult* was seen as the basis of Ethiopia's under-development and a source of exploitation of peasant production by the former rulers. Condemnation of *gult* system had been a lurid theme in Italian propaganda leading up to the invasion, and was thought of as a valuable political weapon to drive a wedge between classes within Ethiopia. In areas where draconian measures were pursued, its abolition led to an indiscriminate declaration of all *gult* tenures as public domain. Stiff resistance followed, forcing the Italians towards 1939 to distinguish between *gult of lordship* or *gult di signoria* and *hereditary gult* or *diritto terriero*. The first was recognized as public domain and the second as private property⁷.

⁶. ASMAI, B-245, Italo Papini, *La produzione dell'impero*, p.29. This view of proven inaccuracy, though amply refuted by, and contradictory to, the Italians' own findings, remained part of official orthodoxy. Cfr. Chap. II, p.52 et sequ.

⁷. CD IAO ASMAI 15.

The Italians congratulated themselves that with the abolition of *gult* system they erased the exploitation characteristic of rural life that had formed the basis of the Abyssinian Empire. However, needless to say, such claims did not square with reality. Their policy towards *gult* tenures was dictated more by political considerations and the need to expand public domain for colonization purpose than genuine concern for agricultural development .

Under Graziani (1936-1937), conversion of *gult* into state domain was implemented, particularly in regions recently conquered by the Abyssinians, as part of the so called *de-abyssinization* or *de-āmhārization* policy. By stripping the Āmhāras and their allies of their wealth and depriving them of their economic life line, he planned to accelerate 'pacification' and Italian domination over the territory. In his view, successful elimination of the Āmhāras from their position of power would enhance Italy's colonial prestige as a master race in the eyes of the Abyssinian's former subjects, such as the "Galla" and other ethnic groups⁸.

On the other hand, loyal chiefs, both of Āmhāra and other ethnic groups, were allowed to keep their *gult* and the privileges associated with it intact, or were given tracts of public domain from where they continued to levy tributes as in former times. Some chiefs, like *Ras Häyly*, who was made a commander of the Order of the Colonial Star for the part he played in the 'pacification' process, tried to appropriate whatever they could lay their hands on, sometimes using false claims. In places like *Kāmbata*, the indigenous leaders who were quick to confiscate, with the tacit approval of Italian authorities, the

⁸. GRA 38/33-3, Graziani to MC, 20-1-1937; Graziani to Commissariati Regionali Dembidollo and Irgalem, 17-1-1937.

gult of some rebel Ämhära rulers, were forced to reinstate them once the latter submitted⁹.

The exemption of church *gult* lands from state domain most belies Italian claims to have abolished *gult* tenures. Since the beginning of invasion, the Italians understood the need for the church's cooperation in order to secure control of the country. The church was also viewed as a stronghold of Ethiopian nationalism. Using various methods, including terroristic tactics, the indiscriminate massacre of leading religious personalities, the total dismantling of the administrative structure and severance with the outside link, the Italians succeeded in manipulating and weakening the EOC. But a *modus vivendi* was reached only when the Italians agreed to suspend for a decennium the law transforming the church *gult* properties into public domain in return for the church's cooperation¹⁰. Graziani, who saw church property as the only valid "powerful weapon to bend the church to our will", explained to Mussolini:

Given the great significance of the issue and taking into account that in the final analysis the transformation of *gult* into public domain boils down to a question of pure formality and that the influence of the church in this country is of much greater relevance, the best policy is to postpone for a period of ten years the nationalization of *gult* properties and leave to the church the total disposal. ... This will have an immediate effect in

⁹. GRA 40/33-5, Bocca to GGAOI AA 27-7-1937; Capo Gabinetto to Belly, AA 24-7-1937; Lessona to GG, AA 19-12-1937; Ibidem 40/33-9, Graziani to GG, AA 7-10-1937; Moreno to GG, Gm 18-10-1937.

¹⁰. GRA 46/41-15, Autocefalia della Chiesa Copta Abissina, p.52. This document, consisting of 74 pages, contains most of Graziani's correspondence with Rome concerning the EOC. The writer finds the tactics and intrigues used to sever EOC links with the Alexandrian See as the most revealing because it contradicts most of commonly-held view particularly as it relates to the conduct of the metropolitan, *Abunä Qérlos*.

allaying the mind of the clergy and winning its support, thus sparing the government from any financial cost. As a result [our] principle remains uncompromised while the task of pacification will be made much easier¹¹.

Of course, there were also economic considerations that presented the maintenance of *status quo* of EOC lands as a wise alternative, a point supported by a case study conducted by a dynamic and liberal *commissario* of the Commissariat of Bishoftu, Attilio Scaglione. Scaglione, who carried out a survey of 98 churches with a religious population of 1,311 and owning 1,137.75 *gasha* or ca.45,480 ha, warned that any abolition of EOC lands would bring unbearable costs to the state treasury¹².

The Italian decision to allow loyal *gult*-holders to maintain former privileges made their policy unpopular. But grievances over the arbitrary method in which the *gult* was transformed into public domain and massive evacuation of the original occupants to accommodate the settlers, combined with gratuitous harsh treatment by the government officials and the colonists, made most of the settlement areas highly combustible. Rather than searching for lands that were indisputably *gult*, the general procedure was to occupy a colonizable land on the assumption that it was *gult* and then invite any claimants to ownership to substantiate their claims. It was a procedure that gave rise to ample abuse. The Ethiopians had to present documents from the previous Ethiopian regime's land registry, or other records such as receipts for tax payments, all of which were not easy to procure. The situation helped only the "land hunters" who, on the advice of the authorities roamed from one governorship to another in search of domainial lands, and

¹¹. Ibid., pp.53-4.

¹². CD IAO 791, pp.I-X.

"picked the first green valley that befell to their eyes"¹³.

Contrary to the Italian claims, the public domains, where settlements took place, were not merely wastelands, lands with no other master than the state, or uncultivated lands whose occupation would have inconvenienced no one¹⁴. Even the *gult* belonging to rebels and their sympathizers or royal families were not lands empty of people. They were lands occupied by peasantry who for generations had ensured their productivity. Official claims that evacuation was peaceful is belied by the confidential correspondence¹⁵. Referring specifically to Härär where "colonization was being carried out in vast areas by expropriating the natives from their lands and deporting them somewhere else", and comparing it with the earlier misguided land policy of Eritrea, the Secretary of Italian Africa, Terruzzi, warned Mussolini of widespread and simmering discontent that, unless remedied quickly, would inevitably open the floodgate of " an eternal cycle of violence"¹⁶.

¹³. Mondaini (1941):115; Villa and al., op.cit., p.226; Pini, Considerazioni; Terruzzi to Mussolini, Rm 27-4- 1938.

¹⁴. Such claims were even made by General Guglielmo Nasi, the Governor of Härär, where such massive displacement took place. Comparing Italy's 'generous and progressive' land alienation policy with the precedents of his misconceived Abyssinian conquest, he wrote: "The key principle followed by the Italian government [in land alienation] was - unlike the Amhara conquerors who expropriated cultivated lands - to occupy and develop uncultivated lands". Cfr. Nasi, "L'opera":18.

¹⁵. Mondaini, op.cit.:115.

¹⁶. "From various parts but particularly from Härär, to which, because of major tranquillity that the region enjoys, applications are directed, concerns are being expressed to me against the way the present colonization is carried out, i.e. in vast areas expropriating the natives of their lands and deporting them somewhere else. Undoubtedly such a method can cause serious political repercussions. The revolt of Bahta Hagos in 1894 in Eritrea was caused exactly by the contemporary mistaken land policy and even currently one of the major charges directed against us by the rebels - by both Amhara and Galla - is that of

Nor was the discontent confined to the cultivators of *gult* lands. As we saw earlier, evacuation also affected private owners adjacent to *gult* lands to which, despite safeguards, their plots were amalgamated to make the fragmented colonizable lands economically viable. In exchange the owners were given lands elsewhere in areas that were assumed to be of little or no relevance for settlement.

The Italians were aware that land confiscation was a highly delicate matter to the Ethiopians who, immaterial of their ethnic origin and whether the land was *gult* or *rest*, felt very strongly about their possessions¹⁷. The Italians boasted that in most cases the Ethiopians were compensated fairly and that lands appropriated for colonization were few and far between. Strictly speaking it is true that the Ethiopians received compensation. But the two parties had totally different concepts of land values and usage, and therefore what counted as a "fair" price for the Italians was not so to the Ethiopians. Nor were the Ethiopians consulted on the price. The owners were summoned and told how much their land was worth after the land was surveyed, often by unqualified people. Theoretically, the Ethiopians could refuse to move without adequate compensation. But an interview with an individual, whose land at Bishoftu was appropriated in this way, reveals that the Ethiopians were likely to lose their land whether they agreed to it or not. Thus, most accepted the decision as a *fait accompli*. But the payments were slow. Thus, in AA between 1937-8 property worth about £.10,000,000 was confiscated for colonization and new urban planning, but less than £.2,000,000 was paid¹⁸.

expropriating for the white colonization their lands to which the natives, immaterial of their race, feel a particular attachment". Terruzzi to Mussolini, Rm 27-4-1938.

17. Terruzzi to Mussolini.

18. Sbacchi (1975), p.403.

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The Ethiopians were paid much less than the market value for their land. In AA, for example, land taken from Ethiopians was parcelled out into small plots and sold at between 15% and 60% higher than the price of compensation. The precise scale of such confiscations is not easy to establish. Yet cases suggest that the Italians, particularly at an early stage, did not hesitate to take any land thought essential for the viability of settler farms. By the end of 1939, lands given in this way to the settlers totalled 186,000 ha, not including lands made public domain but not yet allocated¹⁹.

The Cusmano and Corvo Commission in its secret report to the Duke of Aosta deplored the displacement policy as politically dangerous and exploitative:

Expropriation even when effected following the criteria of generously rewarding the owners will result in transforming the mass of best peasants, as is the case particularly with the Galla, into a mob of have-nots, who, ultimately by *force majeure*, will end up by dedicating themselves to banditry.... One should not forget that the bonds that tie a native are very few. ...What will one expect then when they are removed from fields which they cultivated for centuries and which represent for them, together with their herds, an integral part of their life?²⁰.

At least until 1939 the final decision on the status of *gult* and its transformation into domainial land rested on the exclusive judgement of often unqualified local authorities, who often behaved arbitrarily, aided by local chiefs. The latter were open to extortion, and cases where land concession was bartered with the colonists for influence and speculative purposes at the expense of the peasantry were not uncommon²¹.

¹⁹. Mondaini (1941):368; La costruzione dell'Impero, (Milano: Mondadori, 1939), vol. I, p.208. See p.56.

²⁰. Cusmano and Corvo Report, pp.11-2.

²¹. Masotti, op.cit., p.102.

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Most officers not only often ignored or condoned such practice but themselves issued many illegal permits often in connivance with the local Fascist Party or the colonization office. General Mezzetti, the Governor of Amara, attributed the rebellion of his governorship largely to such unauthorized dealings:

What is most serious and which is a particular cause of the disorder is that abusive seizures have been carried out by the higher representatives of the local Fascists as well as a member of the Fascist Federation of Gondär. The latter has occupied the vast planes of Grado - without any knowledge of the Governor at Gondär - and there he had set up a farm where 17 metropolitan workers are employed and has built a plant worth about £.250,000...A vast region that was demarcated as domainial and where also are settled a number of colonists, happened to be the property of our loyal leader who has at his disposal a very skilled lawyer and he is set about to assert his rights by legal means. I hope to come to terms with him²².

Like Governor Mezzetti, officers sympathetic to the Ethiopians felt incompetent to protect them against sharks or influential colonists who illegally seized large tracts of land. One such case was that of a certain official who had a vast concession on the outskirts of Däsé. He taxed the peasantry heavily and pocketed all the revenue, including the tithe due to the state. The peasants reported this to the local *residente* each time, carrying, in accordance with Ethiopian tradition, a pair of yokes on their shoulder as a symbol of their oppression. A tense relationship developed between the colonist and the *residente* whose authority was curtailed by the fact that the abusive concessionaire boasted a special relationship with Mussolini²³.

²². ASMAI AS, Mezzetti to Terruzzi; Del Boca, op.cit, III, pp.198-9.

²³. Masotti, op.cit., p.102-3.

In other instances, different *residentes* pursued policies that were glaringly contradictory. Thus, for example, where one *residente* declared all his sub-district *gult* land, the neighbouring officer claimed that the land under his jurisdiction was prevalently *rest*. On other occasions, the distinction between *gult* and *rest* lands was merely technical, which the officers agreed to ignore in the overriding interests of colonization. The agricultural office of the GS gave a typical example. To the south west of Jimma, 500 ha located 5 km from the centre of the city was acknowledged as private property, and yet the inhabitants were removed and the land confiscated; equally land lying at 6 km south of Jimma was recognized as domanial and subsequently dispossessed, even though the presence of *tukuls* and thriving coffee plants suggested otherwise²⁴.

These arbitrary land policies had the cumulative effect of alienating most of the Ethiopian population, including those who were reportedly indifferent or sympathetic to the Italian invasion²⁵. In Amara areas opposition was led by the middle ranking nobility who took to arms and, with land alienation as the rallying cry, commanded wide popular support, and succeeded in confining the Italian presence to a few garrisoned urban centres²⁶. With the exception of Shäwa, armed resistance in

²⁴. CD IAO GS 1820, p.4.

²⁵. Pankhurst, "Economic Verdict":81. For further information see above p.63.

²⁶. GRA 40/33-5, Graziani to Ministro Africa, AA 4-12-1937 where he reports that the rebels mentioned land alienation as one the motives in their plea for the defection of Ras Häylu: "Who will not be offended and whose heart will not boil with rage when seeing that his country is oppressed, his *rest* and property is confiscated". Similar message was sent to the Gojjamese people by Shäwan patriots: "You know that it [=Italy] had betrayed the Ethiopian people for having summoned to the capital [=AA] all the notables and elders from all regions it told them: "You will have no *rest*, no property, no cattle, no children. From now onwards everything belongs to me" [Cfr. GRA 36/31-12, Zeude Asfaw, *Blatta Tacle*, Mesfin Silesci to Notabili ed Anziani del Gojjam, 22-10-

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settlement areas was sporadic and, as in Ārsi, easily crushed. But the general condition in the countryside was a state of simmering rebellion and mounting discontent, while the cost of promoting the misguided policies drained the treasury.

Towards 1939 the government restrained from randomly creating domainial lands. Unless political and economic realities dictated otherwise, only lands that were indisputably *gult* would be transformed into public domain.

Earlier the government had re-imposed *äsrat*, which had been abolished ostensibly as a humanitarian gesture - to show the Ethiopians that the Italian government was a benevolent father who, unlike the exiled Ethiopian regime, did not intend to burden them with heavy taxes. But in reality, the government lacked human and economic resources to collect it. *Äsrat*, imposed on the existing Ethiopian principle - on products of the soil - and from which the Italian farmers were exempt for a decennium, was paid in kind. This was a clear departure from the policy of Emperor Haile Sellassie who, as we saw earlier, favoured payment in cash²⁷. Although a systematic fiscal system was not yet fully developed, the new taxes were neither less burdensome nor less complex than those they superseded²⁸. The sudden imposition of traditional taxes on agriculture resulted in a refusal to produce more crops than was necessary for personal consumption. This caused serious food shortage, particularly of wheat especially in the early 1938²⁹.

1937].

²⁷. See Chap. II, p.56.

²⁸. In addition to *äsrat*, there was tax on livestock, house, income; taxes on servants, improvements, consumption of electricity and even taxes on taxes in order to defray the cost of collection.

²⁹. Bird to Halifax, AA 1-4-1939; *Äsrat* for the year totalled only to 30,000 q1 [Cfr. GRA 43/34-26, Trevisani, op.cit., p.51].

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These policies make the declarations of the Italians void. Rather than creating an environment conducive to the development of Ethiopian agriculture, their handling of *gult* system had the effect of intensifying rural tension.

DEMOGRAPHIC VILLAGES

A number of incentives were offered to integrate Ethiopians into the new agricultural system and programmes created intended as propaganda and to increase local production. Any increase in the productivity of indigenous agriculture would decrease the financial burdens of Italy and bring the Empire towards self-sufficiency. The Ethiopian farmers who were selected to take part in these programmes were eligible for land, subsidies and tax advantages. As a rule, ploughing and threshing was done mechanically by the government, who also provided seeds³⁰.

There were two main types of settlements: the first directed to the accommodation of liberated slaves; the second to provide a work-force for settler agriculture. The work-force consisted of former *cisäña*, who were displaced by the Italian colonists, and the former landlords, the *Amhāra näftāñas* of the south, released from confinement following the Duke of Aosta's policy of "clemency and attraction"³¹. The exact number of villages constructed by the Italians is uncertain, but it was not more than a dozen. Ideally, these villages were supposed to parallel the settlements for the metropolitan colonists. Each Ethiopian settler was given a small plot, a farmhouse, an ox, and tools and supplies. A centre equipped with a school, a market place, a café and a health centre completed the picture.

³⁰. Piani, "L'agricoltura indigena":408; CD IAO Ex AOI 1097, GGAOI IA, Relazione sull'attività svolta dall'IA durante il 1939 in AOI, AA Gennaio 1940; msc.1038, p.13.

³¹. FO371/22021/J1214/40/1, CG Bird to PSSFA, AA 16-2-1938.

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The farms were expected to grow indigenous grains, with an emphasis on wheat³².

The settlement of former slaves was in the territory of Soddo residency, in the Lake Camo zone along the road from Dallé to Soddo, which used to be the heart of the greatest slave markets of the region 50 km from Tembaro, Boloso and Sorä³³. The land belonged to a well-known Abyssinian slave merchant, *Fitawurari Wubshät*, who was killed for his trade in human traffic. The village was known as *Villaggio Vittorio Bottego*, in memory of a ruthless explorer who lost his life at Dago-Roba, Wälläga, in one of his military-cum-scientific expeditions organized by the Italian government and *La Società Geografica Italiana*³⁴. By 1938, 70 families had been settled in well located and watered 400 ha. There was a plan to expand the scheme in case the size proved insufficient to the settlers' needs. The experiment was aimed to solve the problem of training liberated slaves and teaching them to become useful members of the community³⁵.

Other Ethiopian settlements were scattered everywhere and largely consisted of Amhāras released from various internment centres. Härär Governorate had four³⁶. At its Babile's Amhāra Settlement Centre, 60 families were settled, almost all of them deported from Jejega area to supplement SIA's labour shortage. Several hundred released from Dananä concentration camp were resettled with the government providing

³². Quaranta, op.cit., p.31.

³³. F0371/22021/J2728/40/1, Lord Perth to Viscount Halifax, Rome, 9-7-1938.

³⁴. Del Boca, op.cit., I, pp.746-9.

³⁵. Perth to Halifax, Rm 9-7-1938; Quaranta, op.cit., pp.30-1.

³⁶. They were located at Jejega, Siré, Asälla and Goba and set up during 1938 and 1939 agricultural campaigns [Cfr. Piani, op.cit.:408.

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them with lands, animals, £.1,000 to build a hut, and seeds. SIMBA resettled 120 destitute Amhāra families from Ancobār in one of its Ārsi farms under the same terms that SIA employed³⁷. In GS a number of Amhāras held in Filtu concentration camp were settled in domainial lands, giving one-fourth of their crops to the government³⁸. 682 families displaced by EDR were accommodated within 10 km distance from the agency's settlement area; on average each family was provided with 1.023 ha and £.250 as compensation for their lost property and start-up capital. Two settlements were at Gudār and Mākanisa at the outskirts of AA³⁹.

By the time of the restoration of independence, the programme of demographic villages had not gone beyond the drawing board. Yet the Italians claimed that in the case of the ex-slaves settlement in Soddo, the results so far achieved were encouraging⁴⁰. With the exception of the Native Settlement Centres at Mākanisa and Gudār, many of which were planned in each governorate, the rest were not centrally planned. They were isolated undertakings by the respective governorate to overcome local problems. What is more, the true purpose of their establishment was to serve either simply as a cheap labour depot for the nearby colonist settler farms, or as a penal colony for political suspects, or both as was the case at Mākanisa Farm⁴¹. In case of the former slave settlement, it had an additional social function. As one technician remarked, it aimed to bring

37. Sbacchi, op.cit., p.272.

38. Ibidem, p.271.

39. IAC, Main Features of Italy's Action in Ethiopia 1936-1941, plate LX; Sbacchi, op.cit., p.272.

40. Quaranta, op.cit., p.31; Perth to Halifax, 9-7-1938.

41. Sbacchi, op.cit., p.272.

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into the productive system those "agriculturally inactive" sections of the population⁴².

With the exception of the ex-slave settlement of Soddo and the Mäkanisa Farm which provide the best data, information on the demographic villages is scanty. *Villaggio Vittorio Bottego's* settlement was used as a show case. A letter published from Jimma emphasized that the village was proof that Italy's commitment to the abolition of slavery was not mere "humanitarian rhetoric"⁴³. The correspondent admitted that the Italian

civilization, based as it is upon a solid historical and social tradition, has no need of being wrapped in sentimentalism in order to be generous towards the vanquished and the weak. Populations which had never before understood that work is a human law from which no one is exempt, are now beginning to realize the civil necessity of individual work. The success of the first Village of Liberty proves it in a very clear manner⁴⁴.

The Italians insisted that the initiative had more than publicity value. It was one of the many strategies employed by the government to ease the problems created as a result of the proclamation ordering the abolition of slavery, issued simultaneously with the first advance of Italian troops⁴⁵. Among the hundreds of thousands of slaves liberated as a result, many were left with no means of subsistence and, in the eyes of the Italians, the initiative of GS governorate was being followed elsewhere.

But the slaves showed little enthusiasm, which technicians attributed as owing to indolence born of age-long

⁴². Gennaro Pistolese, "Le attività agricole dell'AOI", EI, (Febbraio 1939).

⁴³. GI, 3-7-1938; Perth to Halifax, Rm 9-7-1938.

⁴⁴. Perth to Halifax, Rm 9-7-1938.

⁴⁵. Ibid..

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servitude. The district officers combined physical punishments and persuasion in their attempt to overcome this and foster a sense of independence⁴⁶.

The Mäkanisa Farm consisted of about 32 plots, where an equal number of families were accommodated. The farm had a demonstrative and trial camp. The Ethiopian settlers were almost exclusively the *cisāña* families that were forcibly dislodged to make room for the Italian settlers of the nearby pilot demographic colonization farm consisting of *Milizia della Prima Centuria Agricola*⁴⁷.

These experiments were in their infancy. However, contrary to the authorities' claim, the results were not always encouraging. In places like Siré (Härär), for example, the programme was a disastrous failure⁴⁸.

AGRICULTURAL CAMPAIGNS

Among the institutions that closely affected the indigenous agricultural system were the agricultural offices established 1937-38. Each agricultural office had a department dedicated to *native agriculture*, with the task of studying indigenous farming and the application of measures whose purpose would be the increase of Ethiopian agricultural output. Some of these were equipped with research stations dealing with plant physiology and pathology and had their own model farms, where indigenous and foreign varieties of crops, such as Mentana and Kenya B1, were grown. Samples of local crops were sent for testing in the laboratories of the *RIA-AI* in Flo-

⁴⁶. Ibid; Quaranta, op.cit., p.31.

⁴⁷. Known also as *Prima Centuria Agricola di Pre-colonizzazione* [Cfr. Chap.IV, p.121,n.93; CD IAO Ex AOI 1097.

⁴⁸. Piani, op.cit.:408.

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rence⁴⁹.

The offices used various techniques whose stated purpose was the expansion of Ethiopian production. Open air schools in agriculture and visits to orientation farms were organized⁵⁰. Where there was a public press, articles of particular interest to peasants were published⁵¹. In the long term, the campaigns aimed at raising agricultural output and lifting the standard of life of the rural peasantry. In the short term, the chief concern was to produce food-crops needed for the continuously growing Italian population. Key difficulties were in the field of experimental research and organization of production.

Research demanded prior collection of data on the existing crops of the area, their relevance to the economy of the Empire, their ability to adapt to various seasonal conditions and resistance to parasite attack; in addition appropriate soil and altitude, and exact time for sowing had to be established. Once the type of crop to be promoted was identified, the technicians decided on the category of farmers to be targeted. As a matter of principle, the choice of crop for the Ethiopians had to preclude any potential or actual risk of competition, or interference, with metropolitan production. The way in which the decision to promote wheat production was

⁴⁹. Quaranta, op.cit., p.29.

⁵⁰. Giovanni Piani, "Attività Autarchiche nel Hararino", L'Autarchia Alimentare, (giugno 1938); IOM, 5-4-1939; Il Piccolo, 19-4-1940.

⁵¹. Glancing at articles published in the local weekly *Yä-qésar Mängest Mälektäña* and the periodical *YÄ-Roma Berhan* one finds articles such as: "Fertilize the fields"; "Noxious insects to agriculture"; "The locusts"; "From the moment of harvest think of sowing wheat"; "How you should improve the food of your cattle"; "Report in time the appearance of locusts"; "Plant trees"; "Increase the cultivable area of your land"; "Prize competition for winning native farmers"; "The family gardens"; "Roads, Commercial Development and Agricultural Machinery" [Cfr. CD IAO Sc 1801; Ex AOI 1097].

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reached in the governorate of the GS illustrates this point. Wheat formed a respectable, though minor, part of the local diet. As in the rest of Ethiopia, its cultivation started from an altitude as low as 1,700 m above sea level and went up to 3,000 m; it was most productive between 2,200-2,400 m. The Italian settlers in GS were numerically few and most of them were settled under 2,000 m, an altitude below the ideal conditions for wheat production. Under such circumstances an appeal to indigenous agriculture was the most appropriate option⁵². Most of the Ethiopians of the area were skilled farmers. What was more, the climatic and soil condition of the territory allowed the Italian settlers to dedicate themselves more profitably to other crops, such as coffee, tobacco, oil-seeds, vegetables and fruits, that could offer a much higher profit margin⁵³.

However, despite careful planning the risk from Ethiopian competition was not always avoidable. This was the case when Jimma market became saturated in 1938 with what the technicians called "useless potatoes produced and sold for a ridiculous price" by Ethiopians. Although a minor episode, for 15 days it shook the confidence of the colonists, unable to sell their own produce. Commenting on the case, one agricultural officer remarked, it was a frivolous event but "sufficient as a symptom of a situation which will not fail to manifest itself in a more decisive manner in the future"⁵⁴.

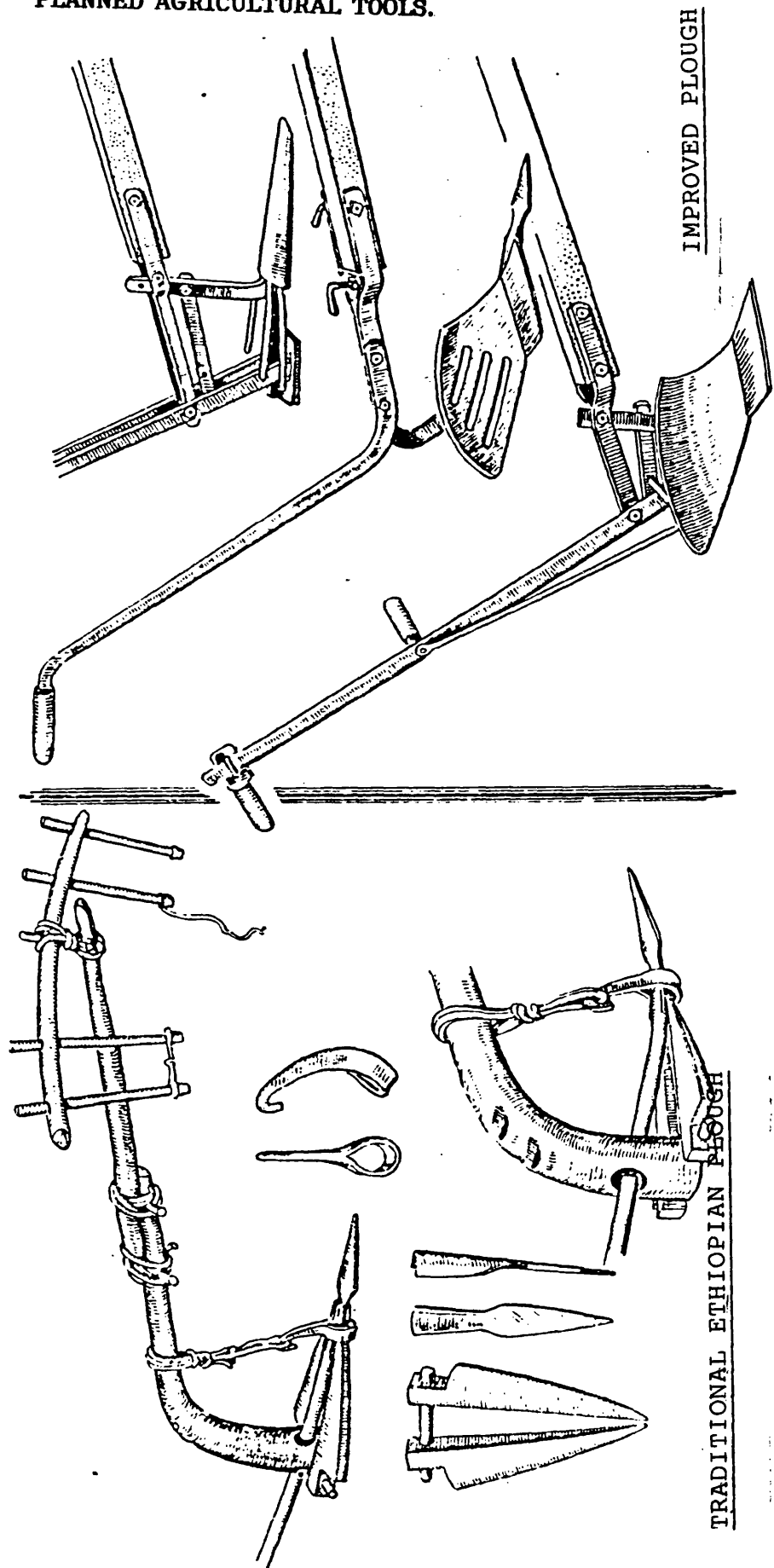
⁵². Arrigo Chiuderi, "Alcune considerazioni su una campagna granaria nel GS", I Georgofili, VII, 7 (1941):117; for the rest of the territories this same rule applies Cfr. Raffaele Ciferri, "Frumenti e granicoltura indigena in Etiopia", VI, 5 (1939):233-242; Guglielmo Mazzoni, "Prima impostazione del problema dei frumenti nelle terre alte dell'AOI", VII, 7 (1941):99-105; CD IAO RGGS UA, Attività, op.cit., pp.6-7.

⁵³. Chiuderi, op.cit.:119.

⁵⁴. CD IAO GS 1820, p.13.

FIGURE IX. PLANNED AGRICULTURAL TOOLS.

Source:- IAC, Op. cit., Plate LXIII



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Organizationally, agricultural campaigns were the result of the co-ordinated efforts of political pressure and technical assistance on the one hand, and the co-operation of the Ethiopians and their chiefs, on the other. The success partly depended on the harmonious working of all these groups. The political authorities in their respective governorate issued awards and guaranteed the purchase of the crop at harvest. All chiefs and local farmers were summoned to participate. With the aid of the technicians from the agricultural office, the *residente* or the *commissario* gathered the chiefs and the farmers under his jurisdiction; he explained the government's plan to increase production and communicated the facilities provided by the government to the farmers for this purpose.

The facilities varied according to the circumstances and the needs of the farmers, but, as a rule, destitute peasants were furnished with seeds from the government granary with the obligation to refund it at harvest; most of these consisted of *äsrat* collected earlier from the peasantry⁵⁵; for those applicants with lands inadequate to their working capacity, domainial lands were made available on a temporary basis; agricultural tools, such as improved harrows and ploughs, were distributed freely. Areas showing the best results were provided with threshing machines, an item much appreciated by the Ethiopians. The technicians of the agricultural office provided assistance throughout sowing, cultivation and harvest⁵⁶. The peasants could choose the plot to be reserved for the crop and in this they demonstrated, as a rule, considerable ability and skill. Financial incentives and medals were distributed by the tech-

⁵⁵. Ibidem; Chiuderi, op.cit.:118; G.B. Lusignani [Capo dell'UAAM], "Iniziativa cerealicole dell'UAAM", L'Autarchia Alimentare, (giugno 1938), p.37; Le Colonie, 28-6-1938; "Iniziativa agricole nel territorio di Borana e Hararino", EI, (luglio 1938); CE, 25-8-1939.

⁵⁶. CE, 28-6-1938; Il Piccolo, 1-7-1938; [13-14]-8-1938.

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nicians as prizes for the most successful farmers and chiefs. In Amara area, such awards were reserved for wheat production, in Shäwa for wheat and kitchen garden and, in Härär, for coffee. The amount of prizes was between £.400-1,000 and was given to a single farmer or village⁵⁷.

The local chiefs had the task of distribution of seeds and surveillance of the farmers' plots during sowing and harvest; any abuses on the part of the peasantry was reported by them to the authorities. As a reward, the chiefs were given the right to collect a certain percentage, normally between 2-3%, of the produce from farmers under their jurisdiction, assessed in cash. In Amara, chiefs of successful districts were paid substantial cash, between £.500-1,000 per person⁵⁸.

Participation of peasants in the campaigns took place through a written agreement by the chief or the farmer which stipulated the quantity that each subscriber agreed to sow or have sown. Those failing to sow the seeds taken from the government or the quantity specified in the written declaration were fined⁵⁹.

In some areas agricultural campaigns started as early as mid-1937, their origin closely linked with Mussolini's

57. CD IAO EX AOI Gn 1600; "Concorsi a premio per la coltivazione del grano e delle patate agli agricoltori indigeni", Decreto Reggente il Governo [DRegG], 21-6-1937, BUGA, II/3-4, maggio-giugno 1937; "Concorsi a premio da assegnarsi agli agricoltori indigeni che avranno ottenuto nel prossimo raccolto una maggiore produzione unitaria di grano ed altri cereali", no. 46, BUGA, III/15, 1-10-1938; "Concorsi a premio tra i coltivatori indigeni residenti nei territori del Governatorato di AA, nei Comandi Settori di Ambo', Debra Brehan e del Commissariato di Governo di Adama", DGG. 25-5-1938, no. 651, GU, III/15, 1-8-1938; CD IAO Hr 1813, GHrDCLIA, Provvedimenti a favore degli indigeni, op.cit.; L'Azione Coloniale, 21-6-1938; 1-9-1938; Le Colonie, 11-11-1938; 31-4-1939; IOM, 20-2-1938; La Stampa, 11-8-1938; Bird to Halifax, AA 1-4-1939; FO371/23380/J4710/296/1, ACG Gibbs to PSSFA, AA 1-11-1939.

58. DRegG 21-6-1937; DGG. 25-5-1938, GU, III/15, 1-8-1938.

59. Chiuderì, op.cit.:18.

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demand that the Empire should reach economic autarky by mid-1938. With some exceptions, the technicians' reports suggest that participation was relatively widespread; yet the outcome of the campaigns did not always match the expectation of the planners.

Friction between interventionist political authorities, particularly the Fascist Party members, and self-opinionated technical officers was a constant problem. During the early campaigns, the agricultural office, consulted only indirectly, gave lukewarm support. At other times the campaign suffered from inadequate preparation by technicians, as was the case with the 1939 campaign in GS: seeds were insufficient; proper storage was lacking and sacks scarce. At other times the technicians failed to carry out properly their auxiliary support, such as setting up orientation farms, supply of simple farm machinery and selected seeds. In areas like the Amara governorate where Italian hegemony was not fully asserted, the campaign was arrested by lack of co-operation by, or straight hostility from, the chiefs, and the distribution of seeds and technical assistance remained impossible⁶⁰. Propaganda was also drastically curtailed by fuel restriction that came into force as an austerity measure in September 1939⁶¹.

For the technicians, each campaign provided them with experience that allowed them to improve their subsequent action on the basis of lessons learnt. But their efforts were hampered by shortage of funds, the vast areas they had to cover, and language barriers which made conversing with the peasantry - who were by nature unresponsive to change - difficult. It was little wonder even those devoted men did not have much effect on existing agricultural practices. Their reports dwell also at length on the many technical mistakes that undermined the confidence of the Ethiopian farmers in

12. CE, 28-8-1938; Lusignani, *op.cit.*..

⁶¹. CD IAO Ex AOI 1097.

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them. They pointed to the introduction of new varieties of seeds which, distributed after hasty trials, showed poor resistance to parasites; this was the case with *mentana*, *cappelli* and other Italian varieties that were widely used, particularly in Shäwa and Härär. In 1939 - year of violent rains - they were completely destroyed by smut⁶².

Perhaps even more demoralizing was the technicians' continuous battle against bad weather, draught, marauding insects, and locusts. In 1939, the locusts destroyed many thriving fields in Wälläga, and north west areas of the GS territory; there were environmental limitations, the overcoming of which demanded extended time and long acquaintance with the area. They pointed out insufficient atmospheric precipitations that arrested the full development and maturation of the winter crops and prevented spring sowing⁶³.

'COMMERCIALIZING PEASANT AGRICULTURE': THE CASE OF COTTON

Attempts to develop an integrated Roman world economy led to the policy of dividing the Empire into sectors, to be granted to Italian concessionaires who would have the right to buy and market certain items of Ethiopian produce. The scheme was planned to cover every aspect of the Empire's agricultural life. Owing to the abrupt and sudden end of the occupation, none of the schemes were translated into action except that for cotton production.

Given the significance of cotton to the Italian metropolitan industry, great attention was given to the pos-

⁶². "Problemi fitopatologici dell'impero: Osservazioni ed orientamenti", I Georgofili, VI, 5 (1939):554; Ettore Castellani, "Ruggini e granicoltura nell'Africa tropicale montana", ibid., VII, 8 (1942):127.

⁶³. Chiuderi, op.cit.:118; CE, 3-2-1939; CI, 24-8-1938; CM, 17-12-1938; "I cereali della zona di Macallé", II, (dicembre 1938); Le Colonie, 23-12-1938; Lusignani, op.cit..

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sibility of growing cotton. Even though cotton was grown in Southern Italy, Eritrea and Somalia, the needs of Italian industry were not met⁶⁴. The policy of self-sufficiency following international trade sanctions led to a rapid increase in domestic production matched with a small rise in the colonies, as appears from Table XXIV. The cotton produced in Italy and the colonies amounted to just 5½% of the total needs of the domestic industry. With the sharp decrease in supply (Table XXIII), the sanctions exposed the vulnerability of dependence on foreign imports. It was estimated that Italy needed to cultivate a minimum of 900,000 ha producing an average of 525 kg of raw cotton per ha⁶⁵.

It is against such increasing domestic economic pressure that expansion of cotton production in the Empire has to be assessed. Increased dependence on export and the crisis that followed the sanction, led to the Royal Decree of 7 January 1937, which saw the creation of a government concern ECAI, an affiliate of the ICI⁶⁶, itself an association of all the Italian cotton industrialists for co-ordination of cotton production. The agency had a capital of £.25,000,000; of this

⁶⁴. Bird to Halifax, AA 1-4-1939. What had been done in Eritrea was very little, while in Somaliland there were flourishing cotton plantations in the restricted regions watered by the Juba river along the banks of the Wabi Shibälé, where two crops were taken annually, planting taking place in April-June and again in September-October. There was a government owned ginnery at Vittorio d'Africa, a few miles inland from Merca.

⁶⁵. Guido Mangano, "La politica del cotone", I Georgofili, VI, 5 (1939):270; "La cotonicoltura in Etiopia", AC, XXXI, 5 (maggio 1937):202.

⁶⁶. The task of the Institute with regard to cotton was:-

1. Information gathering.
2. Market regulation.
3. Manufacturing regulation.
4. Co-ordination of raw cotton supply.
5. Enforcement of liquidation of bankrupt firms, establishing new ones, and arbitration of labour dispute [See Quaranta, op.cit., p.59].

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half was contributed by the State and half by the ICI. The agency's publicly stated goal was " to develop, regulate and expand cotton farming in Italian Africa", including Libya⁶⁷. As expanded later such a task involved:-

a) To research the cotton resources of the Empire and lay out schemes of development.

b) To regulate all cotton production in the Empire, administer and co-ordinate sales.

c) To advise the concessionaires.

d) Promote the production, plant protection, provision of insecticides and disease control⁶⁸.

Once approved by MAI, the decisions of the agency had statutory power and were binding upon all those engaged in activities related to the agency's field of action. The agency was run by a Board of Directors, consisting of a President and ten other members appointed by the joint decree of MAI and the Ministry of Finance.

An overview of the composition of the Board reflects the presence of interlocking interests of which the agency was an expression. Two of the members were nominated by MAI, three by the ICI; the rest were representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Ministry of Corporations, GG of both IEA and Libya and Textile Products Corporations; each of these appointed one member. The Board was headed by Angelo de Rubeis, the Director General of Colonization and Labour of MAI; Guido Mangano, a specialist in cottoniculture, acted as its General Manager. Despite such an impressive composition, as a decision making body the Board excluded among others the indigenous representatives whose presence was vital to the successful cultivation of cotton. This was the weakest point of the scheme.

⁶⁷. Guido Mangano, "Programma di massima di attivita' dell'ECAI", AC, (Settembre 1938):414.

⁶⁸. Ibidem.

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The agency operated under the joint supervision of the MAI and the Ministry of Finance and had Rome as its headquarters, making the agency an organizationally amorphous body with no independent existence of its own. Inside the colonies its presence was limited to a few experimental stations at Alamata, Adama and Abala. The results achieved in these three stations were insignificant. Only in the Abala they were fruitful⁶⁹. For important decisions the agency largely depended on the reports of *ad hoc* commissions carried out during their short but expensive trips to the colonies. The commissions charged exorbitant consultancy fees and, as a result, were disliked by the colonial administration⁷⁰.

TABLE XXIII:- ITALY'S COTTON IMPORT, 1929-1938.

YEAR	USA	INDIA	EGYPT	OTHERS	TOTAL
1929	1.662.369	480.539	239.763	62.110	2.444.831
1930	1.328.439	478.845	185.437	54.675	2.047.396
1931	1.047.009	365.024	215.717	76.907	1.704.657
1932	1.465.651	146.068	230.652	50.630	1.902.001
1933	1.649.526	263.132	255.367	29.739	2.197.764
1934	1.153.101	320.276	335.446	64.192	1.874.015
1935	868.975	264.351	290.974	62.835	1.487.335
1936	735.123	68.372	138.226	71.869	1.014.040
1937	982.847	177.079	299.207	205.102	1.664.235
1938	951.509	136.196	263.520	210.497	1.570.722

Source: Guido Mangano, "La politica del cotone", I Georgofili, VI, 5 (1939):268.

⁶⁹. Villa and al., op.cit., p.249; CD IAO AOI 1830, Pesarini Alfredo to Maugini, Relazione distretti Gobbo-Uoldia, e Legemti, n.d., p.3; 1826, Achille Pajella, Brevi notizie ed osservazioni sul Distretto Cotoniero del Lago Margerita, Rm 1-3-1943, p.10.

⁷⁰. GRA 46/41-19, Cusmano and Corvo to Amedeo d'Aosta, AA 4-6-1938.

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TABLE XXIV:- COTTON PRODUCTION IN THE METROPOLIS AND COLONIES.

YEAR	ITALY	COLONIES	TOTAL
1932	2.600	11.000	13.600
1933	9.500	9.000	18.500
1934	8.000	10.000	18.000
1935	18.600	10.400	29.000
1936	38.600	6.000	44.600
1937	42.000	6.000	48.000
1938	82.000	6.400	98.400

Source: Guido Mangano, op.cit:270.

After preliminary studies, the government was faced with two options: that of setting up large scale irrigated farming along the lines used at Gezira, in Sudan, Täsänäy in Eritrea and Lower Juba, in Somalia; or rely on mobilizing existing indigenous farming through propaganda and assistance, as was the case in some African colonies, such as Uganda and Congo and, to a small degree, Eritrea and Somalia. From the government's point of view, the first method was unremunerative; it required extensive work involving building dams and canalization, and clearing and levelling of lands. The government therefore favoured the second alternative as the best paying method⁷¹.

Once the technicalities on method of exploitation were over, affairs began to operate on two major problems. How to organize the production geographically, and to whom to give its management? The first issue was settled with the creation of Cotton Districts in 1938. As set out in the RD of January 1938, these were areas mapped out as specially favourable for cotton growing and within which the administration, through the ECAI,

⁷¹. CD IAO 1106, IAO, Rapporto schematico sulle attività cotonicole svolte dall'Italia in Etiopia, Firenze 11-8-1949, pp.1-2; Paolo Vicinelli, "L'Istituto del "Distretto Cotoniero" nell'AOI", AC, (novembre 1938):34; MAE, L'avvaloramento, p.392.

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aimed

to increase, in preference to other crops, cotton production, using the free co-operation of the native populations, understanding that the production of food-crops and animal breeding, indispensable to the life of these same populations, is respected⁷².

The authority of creating such Cotton Districts rested with the MAI who also had the task of granting concessions. It also defined the boundaries, approved the contracts and granted special privileges to the concessionaires. The colonial administration, on the other hand, issued rules concerning cotton farming and measures regulating import of seeds and protecting them from insects and other diseases, while the daily control *in situ* rested with the agricultural offices and the local administration⁷³. Within four months, three Cotton Districts were created - Qobbo, Awash Valley and Mätamma Donghur. In December of the same year those of Soddo, and Nāqāmti were added. By 1940, a total of nine Cotton Districts had been mapped out as suitable for cotton farming, including those already existing in the two old colonies, Täsänäy in Eritrea, and Juba in Somalia⁷⁴.

⁷². RD 7-1-1938, no.443: Istituzione di distretti cotonieri nell'AOI, GURI, 10-5-1938; see the same in GU III/13, 1-7-1938.

⁷³. Ibidem.

⁷⁴. The Cotton Districts were scattered throughout the Empire. They were located in the following areas (See the attached Map under Figure X):

1. Qobbo Cotton District, centred on Alamata, a town situated 370 miles north of AA, on the main highway to Äsmära in Eritrea, with an area of about 9,000 sqkm (Cfr. DM 16-5-1938: Istituzione del Distretto Cotoniero di (IDC) Cobbò, GU, III/17, 1-9-1938).

2. Awash Valley Cotton District, along the Awash river, centred on the town of Adama, situated some 65 miles south-east of AA on the Djibouti railway at 5,600 feet above sea level, with an area of 10,000 sqkm (Cfr. DM 16-5-1938: IDC Auash, Ibidem).

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As to the second problem, the government was to take the commercial farms in partnership, planning to give the organization and management of each Cotton District to private companies. But the government was torn between the needs of safeguarding its authority over the conduct of the enterprise and that of guaranteeing the profitability of the scheme. . . . In a bad bargain the commercial farms might acquire too much power and end up being an *imperium in imperio*. Equally, too much

3. Mätamma Dongur Cotton District, located at about 2,500 feet above sea level, along the Sudan frontier to the west of Gondär, centred on Mätamma, with an area 14,000 sqkm (Cfr. DM 16-5-1938: IDC Metemma-Dongur, Ibidem).

4. Lake Tana Cotton District, in various localities around Lake Tana, centred on Gorgora, 42 miles away from Gondär, with an area of 14,000 sqkm.

5. [L]Näqämti Cotton District, along the Sudan Frontier in the Wälläga province, centred on Sayo, with an area of 17,000 sqkm (Cfr. DM 1-12-1938: IDC Lechenti la cui organizzazione e la gestione vengono affidate alla ICAI, GU, IV/12, 16-6-1939.).

6. Soddo Cotton District, situated at 6,900 feet above sea level at 190 miles from AA centred on Lake Camo, 40 miles away from Soddo at 4,200 feet, with an area of 32,000 sqkm (Cfr. DM 1-12-1938: IDC Soddu la cui organizzazione e la gestione vengono affidate alla ICAI, Ibidem).

7. Baro Cotton District, along the Baro river, centred on Gambéla, with an area 40,000 sqkm and was run by Compagnia Cotoniera del Baro, a subsidiary concern of the Cotetio.

Bako-Burgi Cotton District, at the south-west of Soddo, never became operational [CD IAO 1106, p.3]. The cotton production in the old colonies, Eritrea and Somalia, were restructured along the lines of the new policy. Täsänäy State Farm became Täsänäy Cotton District and was given to S.I.A.; while in Somalia there was Lower Juba Cotton District run by S.A.I.C.E.S.. Cfr. DM 1-12-1938: IDC Basso Giuba, GU, IV/4, 16-2-1939; GURI, no.105, 10-5-1938; BULMAI, no.6, giugno 1938; Bird to Halifax, AA 1-4-1939; "Notiziario agricolo commerciale AOI", AC, (marzo 1938):235; Paolo Vicinelli, op.cit.:41-3; Villa and al., op.cit., pp.246-7; Quaranta, op.cit., pp.62-3; MAE, op.cit., I, pp.393-7; G. Edward Nicholson, " A general survey of cotton production in Ethiopia and Eritrea", The Empire Cotton Growing Review, XXXII, 1 (1955):5,10-4.

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stringency on the part of the government was bound to generate little interest in the scheme. It was an understandable fear of reconciling wider national objectives with limited commercial interests. The government saw as the most important factors in this regard the period and the size of the concession as well as the financial incentives. The result was that a compromise was struck. The concessions would operate for a limited period. Thus each Cotton District was granted for only 25 years, with an option for a further 25 years extension. The government had the right to terminate the concession earlier if it considered the management unsatisfactory for political or economic reasons. In case of early termination, the companies would retain the ownership of their industrial plants and the accessories as well as the land they stood on, together with the eventual cotton stock and other mobile property. But clauses empowering the government to purchase them at a price assessed by a three body commission composed of representatives of the Governor General, the ECAI and the company concerned, show the government's anxiety to safeguard its own position⁷⁵.

As regards the size of the concessions, the government made sure that the Cotton Districts were extensive enough to make the scheme an attractive enterprise. Districts were scattered all over the Empire, on average stretching over half a million hectares of land⁷⁶. Theoretically, the granting of a concession to a company did not entail any ownership of land, except for that allotted for its processing plants and experimental fields, and the building of administrative and residential centres. The government upheld its right to carry out public and reclamation works, as well as granting of lands to third parties⁷⁷. Equally, the existing rights of the Ethio-

⁷⁵. "RD 7-1-1938, no. 443".

⁷⁶. CD IAO 1106, p.3.

⁷⁷. These rights are clearly stated in a clause in article 7 of the contracts.

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pian cultivators and the methods of land transaction were not to be affected. And yet the companies successfully asserted their claims to state lands within their districts to which they had preferential rights. Included among these were lands where Ethiopian rights were "partial". Otherwise, what the company really had within each Cotton District was an exclusive right of exploitation consisting in commercial monopoly over trade of cotton produced by the Ethiopians to the exclusion of other competitors. Except in a few cases, even the settlers' farms, willing to cultivate cotton within such districts, were no exception to this rule⁷⁸; these cultivated cotton only after having obtained clearance from the company beforehand, and strictly abided by the rules prevailing inside each district⁷⁹.

In its bid to attract private capital the government pursued an open door policy. Any company with proven financial and managerial ability and technical knowledge was welcomed. Undertakings were made to create conditions that would ensure the long-term profitability of cotton production⁸⁰. As an additional incentive, the government offered extensive economic inducements without being too stringent on what the companies

⁷⁸. As it appears from the article 7 of the contracts, a special arrangement was to be made for the agricultural farms whose work within a particular Cotton District predates that of the concessionaire company.

⁷⁹. Vicinelli, op.cit.:37.

⁸⁰. Angelo de Rubeis summed up the measures to be adopted to this effect inside the Cotton Districts. Accordingly, the government would:

1. involve largest possible number of cotton outgrowers.
2. enforce measures necessary to promote cotton production.
3. establish a fair purchasing price.
4. create conditions and infrastructure that would make cotton production more attractive.
5. ensure that the administrative personnel, *residente* and *commissario*, are knowledgeable in economic and political matters [Cfr. CD IAO AOI 1936, Angelo de Rubeis, "Promemoria per S.E. il Sottosegretario : Produzione cotoniera a mezzo degli indigeni", Rm 12-5-1938].

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should do⁸¹ and a ten year clemency period during which the companies as well as their subsidiaries were exempt from all taxes except for a token payment of registration and commission fees⁸².

Despite such favourable terms, the metropolitan capital remained unimpressed. Only two companies showed interest: ICAI and *Cotetio*. Both of them were of recent foundation, thus with limited operational experience. *Cotetio* was formed in July 1936 by the Italian industrialists through ICI and had a capital of £.14,000,000 which, by 1940, was raised to

⁸¹. The bounties granted by the administration consisted mainly in:

a) promoting cotton production among the Ethiopians through the state machine; purchasing raw cotton, regulating the local markets and ensuring stable labour.

b) remittance of inputs up to their destination.

c) granting gratuitously lands required for administration, plants and residence.

d) facilitating foreign exchange for the purchase of inputs (such as seeds, machinery) from overseas.

e) providing and maintaining feed roads.

f) granting fiscal exemptions as contemplated by the law.

g) concession of favourable freight tariffs on railway, motorway and waterway transport.

h) grant of all facilities that in future would aim to benefit new concessionaires of cotton districts.

⁸². The main fiscal concessions were:

a) exemption from direct income tax on industrial revenues.

b) exemption from taxes on lands and buildings.

c) reduction of commission fees to quarter of the normal rate.

d) exemption from customs duties on seed imported seeds, agricultural machinery and vehicles as well as their spare parts.

e) exemption from stamp duty and exchange, administrative fees connected with the concession including contracts related to building constructions, supplies and insurance and all acts proving the fusion and increase of capital. Cfr." RD 7-1-1938, N. 443: Istituzione di distretti cotonieri nell'AOI", GU, III/13, 1-7-1938; "DIM 18-5-1938: Distretti cotonieri, agevolazioni in materia fiscale e doganale", *ibidem.*, III/18, 16-9-1938; "DIM 1-12-1939: esenzioni e riduzioni fiscali a favore dell'ICAI", *ibidem.*, IV/13, 1-7-1939; "DM 31-5-1940: Concessione alla *Cotetio* di alcune esenzioni e riduzioni fiscali e doganali sui tributi coloniali", *ibidem.*, V/35, 31-8-1940.

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.50,000,000. ICAI was formed in 1938 by Milanese industrialists. Its capital was £.1,000,000. Both companies operated from Milanese headquarters. Nāqāmti and Soddo Cotton Districts were granted to ICAI⁸³, while Cotetio retained a monopoly over the rest⁸⁴. How much of their capital these two companies transferred to their respective concessions is unknown. But what records make clear is that they functioned on a shoestring budget and their technical know-how proved inadequate. Owing to such financial limitations, ICAI was forced to give up its Nāqāmti concession to Cotetio, who thus exercised a near monopoly of cotton production⁸⁵.

The obligations laid upon the concessionaires were minimal and vague⁸⁶. One clear example is clause (d) of article 2 which demanded the companies to obtain "as much production as is possible to procure within the first two years through intense propaganda". Even the description of the Cotton Districts defined as areas destined for cotton production "in preference to other crops, ... provided that the production of staple food-crops and animal husbandry" required to the life of the Ethiopian population is maintained, lent itself to differing interpretations. The decree did not specify how such requirements were to be assessed; equally, it said nothing about the nature of these same requirements: was it exclusively for consumption or extended also for sale?

Ambiguities such as these were the source of occasional conflicts. A typical example was the campaigns con-

⁸³. DM 1-12-1938: IDC Soddu; DM 1-12-1938: IDC Lechenti.

⁸⁴. DM 16-5-1938: IDC Cobbò; DM 16-5-1938: IDC Auash; DM 16-5-1938: IDC Metemma-Dongur.

⁸⁵. DM 31-5-1940: Revoca della concessione del distretto cotoniero di Leqemti alla ICAI e passaggio dello stesso alla Cotetio, GUGS, V/35 (Supl.), 31-8-1940.

⁸⁶. The obligations were standard as were the inducements. In addition to their respective Charters, see also CD IAO 1106, p.2.

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ducted by Cotetio in 1938 which led to a showdown between the company and the authorities in AA. On balance the relationship between the companies and the district political officers, though not always idyllic, was good, sustained by racial sentiments and a deep sense of "civilizing mission". But the situation with the higher authorities, particularly the regime in AA, was quite different. Perhaps resentful of being excluded from negotiations in the metropolitan capital between the MAI and the companies, from the outset AA displayed a fleeting interest in the Cotton Districts, further exacerbated by an ill-defined relationship between the companies and the colonial administration within the IEA.

The 1938 campaign revealed that the companies' commercial interests did not necessarily tally with national objectives. The companies' main aim was to secure within a short time part of its operating revenue and recuperate investment on processing plants. By broadly interpreting the ambiguous clauses, Cotetio not only had forced many peasants to cultivate cotton at the expense of staple food production but also ventured into areas where the possibilities of cotton farming were reportedly poor. The government feared that ventures into unpromising lands would undermine Ethiopian farmers' confidence in the scheme. It also viewed overemphasis on cotton as compromising its efforts towards ensuring self-sufficiency in the production of food-stuffs. The Duke of Aosta protested against the company's conduct, but was rebuffed as unwarrantably interfering into the company's internal affairs. The dispute was settled only after an appeal to the MAI who empowered the colonial administration to set the target of food-crop production in each Cotton District⁸⁷.

Ostensibly, the Cotton Districts were not under the direct management of the concessionaire company. Such a role

⁸⁷. Villa and al., op.cit., p.247; Cerulli (1943):67; Article 2(c) of IDC of Soddo and Lägämti.

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belonged to the Ethiopian farmers. The company was to provide them with extension services, advance cash and food-stuffs. These were deducted from the cotton price at sale when paying the growers. The farmers were expected to continue to live as they had in the past, the only difference being that in addition to growing the usual cereals and cattle herding, they were now "encouraged" to undertake cotton farming as well and sell the crop to the company at a mutually agreed price. Such an undertaking relied much on the willingness and capacity of the indigenous population to participate in the scheme⁸⁸.

The Italian authorities did not doubt that such co-operation would materialize. Given the many obvious advantages that the scheme offered, they expected the Ethiopian would welcome it. The enterprise was not something super-imposed from outside, because the social system to which the Ethiopian farmer was accustomed remained undisturbed. He cultivated cotton on his own property using family labour. What was more, cotton cultivation was an ancient practice and had considerable importance in the country's social and economic life. Accounts on the eve of Italian occupation reveal that cotton was the most popular of commodities on sale in AA market⁸⁹. Of course, most of this cotton was reportedly poor quality, consisting of either spontaneously grown wild plants, or plants cultivated, rather carelessly, by families in a little patch within their compound walls or intercropped. Nevertheless, being exclusively rain grown, it had the advantage in that it required no capital outlay or technical innovation. It was on this cotton that an old and widespread family-based local cotton craft industry thrived. Such acquaintanceship with the crop was invaluable, and the Italian administration understandably thought the

⁸⁸. Villa and al., op.cit., p.247; Quaranta, op.cit., p.60; CD IAO 1106, p.2.

⁸⁹. Ladislao Farago, Abyssinia on the eve, (London: Wymann & Sons, 1935), p.44; Raffaele di Lauro, "Panorama politico-economico dei GS", REAI, 26, 7 (luglio 1937):1084.

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promotion of cotton for export was building upon a locally produced commodity. More importantly, the guaranteed price, combined with intense propaganda, was thought to convince the Ethiopian farmer that by growing cotton he was making a good financial investment with opportunities to raise his standard of living⁹⁰.

But contrary to the authorities' optimistic forecasts, the picture that emerges from the few existing authoritative reports was that of strong Ethiopian resistance, rudely shattering Italian expectations. Resistance was by no means coordinated and uniform, but widespread and consistent enough to be the most crippling constraint on both the expansion of cotton and the enthusiasm of the concessionaire companies⁹¹.

Administratively, each Cotton District was divided by the Companies into blocks of various sizes, known as *zona*. In each *zona* two forms of cotton cultivation were followed. Private fields consisting of a number of small plots set aside by each tax-payer and cultivated exclusively by family labour. In most cases this land belonged to the cultivator and in a few cases it involved state land given to landless peasants. The fields were scattered and their supervision was administratively exacting. Collective fields consisted of either state lands granted to the company's use or suitable plot chosen by the peasants themselves. Most of these fields were strategically located in a few selected areas and employed unpaid communal labour extracted from surrounding villages. These two types of fields within a block ranged from a handful to over one thousand. At Dugunà block in Soddo Cotton District for example, private fields only numbered 900. On the other hand, some collective farms had the potential of engaging more than 1,000

⁹⁰. Quaranta, op.cit., pp.59-60; CD IAO 1826, pp.3-4; 1830, p.4; Chiuderi (1942):6; CD IAO 1106, p.2.

⁹¹. CD IAO 1106, p.4.

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day labourers, as was the case with 600 ha Motoarato field at Bonaya, Näqämti Cotton District⁹².

The technical and administrative control and the agricultural efficiency of these was vested in the block inspector (*capo zona*) who was responsible to the district chief (*capo distretto*). The block inspector had extremely tight schedule: he had to help and, above all, control the Ethiopian farmers - a hard and demanding task. This involved a regular tour to the private fields instructing the Ethiopian farmer to farm well, informing him about the sowing programme, keeping him up to date with his work, purchasing cotton by weighing it and paying cultivators. He maintained constant contact with Ethiopian chiefs upon whose "politics of collaboration" he depended for supply of labour to collective fields which absorbed most of his daily energies. He ran a small meteorological observatory from where he despatched the monthly data to District headquarters. In the execution of such tasks he was aided by his assistants who supervised part of the crops. In each Cotton District there were a handful of civil and mechanical engineers for the construction of buildings, technicians for the manning of machinery and, in Soddo District, an administrator who was in charge of a plethora of tasks ranging from accounting, workshop and carpentry, to construction and correspondence with the headquarters in AA. In a well staffed Cotton District like that of Soddo, the personnel was between 10 and 15 strong. But it was the block inspector and district chiefs who were responsible for the agricultural efficiency of the project. Their actions were backed by the local political authorities who criss-crossed the districts during key periods in the agricultural calendar to enforce cotton growing⁹³.

Legally, the district chiefs should have had at least one field inspector for each 1,000 ha and one Ethiopian chief

⁹². CD IAO 1826, pp.3-4; 1830, p.4; Chiuderi (1942):273.

⁹³. CD IAO 1826, p.2.

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for every 300 ha under cultivation⁹⁴. But in practice this was often not the case. Instances where field inspectors were in charge of as many as 1,500 ha were common⁹⁵. The issue, however, was not only that of inadequacy of personnel, but also the level of energy and competence of those working. As appears from a secret report by Alfredo Pesarini, a man with twenty years experience in cotton fields in Egypt, lack of job satisfaction combined with poor wages and bad working conditions meant the technical officers showed little enthusiasm for their work and many anxiously awaited the termination of the contract, when they would be repatriated or engaged in more lucrative activities within the Empire⁹⁶. Management came and went on average within a year. Such a rapid turnover of officials threatened the continuity of carefully studied program-

⁹⁴. A clause in article 2 of the contracts asserts that "the district chief employed by the company must have at his disposal for the purpose of supervision of, and propaganda amid, the natives at least one assistant per 1,000 ha, and one native chief cultivator per 300 ha, that are effectively farmed".

⁹⁵. CD IAO AOI 1826, p.5.

⁹⁶ The list of salaries available is only for the Soddo Cotton District personnel whose monthly, is given as follows:-

Chief District	£.6,000
Administrator	£.5,000
Assistant Chief District	£.3,300
Capo Zona	£.3,000
Assistant capo zona	£.2,000-2,500
Mechanic	£.1,500-2,000
Carpenter	£.1,500-2,500
Builder	£.1,500-2,000
Driver	£.1,500

Each month £.300 from the workers', between £.500-£.550 from the personnel of the district headquarters and £.800 from the technicians's salaries was deducted to cover meals' cost. The company paid the full wages of the workers' servants, and part of that of the personnel while the technicians paid for their own. With the exclusion of the technicians posted in AA, for the rest of the personnel the employment was on a yearly basis [Cfr. CD IAO AOI 1826, pp.9-10].

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mes⁹⁷. This situation was further aggravated by the fact that generally they did not speak the local language and no systematic approach to cotton cultivation had been worked out. Work continued in an *ad hoc* and haphazard fashion⁹⁸.

This, however, does not mean that cotton production was left to chance. On the contrary, the companies conducted "cotton campaigns" in their Cotton districts. As a pamphlet issued in Amharic by Cotetio in June 1938⁹⁹ reveals, the campaigns were orders instructing the peasantry on production techniques and conservation. This involved proper ploughing, row planting, proper care and maintenance, weeding and picking as well as selling exclusively to the company. The peasants were ordered to use only new seeds distributed by the company and to destroy local ones¹⁰⁰. The district chiefs saw that such orders were translated into action. Directives were passed to the block officers who allocated the minimum amount of land that each field inspector should aim to get cultivated in his block¹⁰¹.

Given the limited resources at their disposal, the block officers found the quota unrealistic. Those who attempted to meet the target at any cost met disastrous consequences. A typical case was the collective camp of Motoarato of Bonaya, in Läqämti Cotton District where in 1940, against expert advice to limit cultivation to 200 ha, agreement was made with tractor drivers to cultivate 600 ha. The avaricious contractors plough-

⁹⁷. Ibidem 1826, pp.9-10; 1830, pp.3-4.

⁹⁸. Ibidem 1830, pp.3-6.

⁹⁹. See Appendix II.

¹⁰⁰. CD IAO AOI 1936, Cotetio, Norme elementari per la coltura del cotone [*BäIteyopeya west yätet kumpaneya, Tet lämäzratenna lämälqäm yätädänäggägä yämäsärät hegg*], AA, n.d. (date given in pencil indicates June 1938). See Appendix II.

¹⁰¹. CD IAO 1826, p.5; "La produzione del cotone nell'Impero", *IC*, 15-4-1939.

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ed through the night but with such carelessness and haste that the seeds failed to germinate. The incident only served to undermine the confidence of the labourers in the technical experts. When instructed to sow the field again, 400 labourers, whom the authorities had recruited with difficulty, vanished. Convincing them to return proved an impossible task¹⁰².

The peasants were reluctant to produce the goods required by the companies. What becomes clear from the technicians' reports is that such resistance was not open or organized but subtle, local, day-to-day and passive, similar to peasants' reactions elsewhere in colonial Africa or in American slave plantations¹⁰³. An official from Soddo Cotton District complained that the peasants expressed great enthusiasm for each proposition put by the company, but they signed agreements without having the slightest intention of carrying them out. During their inspections, the field officers discovered that only the worst land was allocated to cotton or, where there was no continuous weekly inspection by the company officials, no care was given to cotton fields. The large number of private fields existing in any one block, the need for a continuous presence in collective fields and the variety of tasks to be performed in any one day by the field inspectors, made any attempt at rigorous inspection almost impossible¹⁰⁴.

Confronted with such difficulties, the companies shifted their emphasis from reliance on private fields to collective fields. Administratively, the strategy seemed to offer better control of the production of cotton and labour. But for its opponents, this method was only a tool of 'lazy' technicians who wanted to sacrifice productivity to administrative expediency, surrendering to the Ethiopians' demands. They

¹⁰². CD IAO 1830, p.5.

¹⁰³. Documents speak that "open opposition was not uncommon" but do not describe the nature of it [Cfr. CD IAO 1106, p.4].

¹⁰⁴. Ibidem 1826, pp.2-3.

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pointed out that the collective fields had unfailingly proved to be unproductive largely because the Ethiopians reserved the best lands for their own food-crops¹⁰⁵. In practice, the shift from private to collective fields neither eased the administrative problems nor improved production efficiency, but aggravated existing difficulties.

Collective fields seemed to offer more satisfactory use of labour, which was unpaid and easily recruited. But in practice passive resistance left the companies impotent, dependent on the co-operation of the chiefs. Yet not all chiefs were willing to collaborate and the State had to make frequent recourse to the use of force. Some chiefs were replaced and others fined. In some places stringent measures were adopted allocating to each chief a labour quota proportional to the number of people under his jurisdiction. But, despite their spurious claims to authority, even willing chiefs found difficulty in persuading the people they 'ruled' to work in collective fields. Sometimes the labour force they despatched was far below the requirements of the company. In the case of Motoarato Camp in Nāqāmti, the chiefs were able to supply only 460 workers per day against 1,000 stipulated. Once in the fields, this same labour proved recalcitrant and used every pretext to avoid work or to suddenly disappear and walk back home¹⁰⁶. Reading through the available data one often comes across laments like this officer:

To cultivate a very modest acreage enormous effort was put. The chiefs promised manpower and totally failed to despatch it. Each labourer sought to work the minimum possible; labour was not the same every day and because of this, for example, after one has ultimately succeeded in convincing the labourers that the seed should not be planted deeper than one or two centimetres, the following day most of

¹⁰⁵. Ibidem 1830, p.7; CD IAO 1106, p.4.

¹⁰⁶. Ibidem, p.5; 1826, p.7.

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them do not turn up and so everything has to be explained afresh to the newcomer¹⁰⁷.

As with all agricultural undertakings, demand for labour fluctuated seasonally according to the area. At peak season, cotton in areas like Nāqāmti and Baro Cotton Districts demanded a large workforce and competed for scarce manpower. Near Baro Cotton District, Jubdo had a well-established mining industry belonging to Italian national Alberto Prasso, which had become the property of the Italian government after his death in the Nāqāmti massacre¹⁰⁸. Like the Cotton Districts, these mines depended on *corvée* labour whose recruitment was identical to that of the Cotton Districts in collective farms. Every two months each *Residenza* provided a certain number of people who were forced to work in the mines in exchange for very small pay and equally small tax exemption. The pay was normally in kind, such as food; contrary to what some sources allege, cash payment was an exception¹⁰⁹.

The chiefs who recruited labour were not beyond reproach. As in collective cotton farms, it was largely the financially underprivileged who ended up in the mines while the well to do often gained exemption by illicit means. Earlier the companies were dismayed when they discovered that most of their recruits happened to be, as one official described it, the old, crippled and half-blind. A medical test was introduced whereby each labourer underwent a relatively rigorous examination. Escorted by a dozen uniformed officers, the workforce trekked on foot to the work-place. Despite strict security, many absconded during the journey¹¹⁰. Those who reached the mines were subjected to an extremely tough regime of control and, like in

107. Ibidem 1826, pp.3-6; 1830, p.7.

108. Masotti, op.cit., p.137.

109. Ibidem, p.138.

110. Ibidem, pp.138-9.

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Somalia, the measures adopted against the would-be-dodgers was so brutal as to be "indistinguishable from slavery"¹¹¹.

Mining was not the only competitor for labour. The demand from public work such as road-building, settlers' farms and subsistence agriculture was equally acute. As labour became increasingly difficult to obtain tension developed and the Government in AA had to intervene. In Wälläga Cotton District an additional clause had to be incorporated cautioning the company not to upset the local labour market¹¹². In Soddo the intervention was aimed to protect subsistence agriculture and balance labour demands between the company and public work. Resistance in this District had often strained the fragile relationship between the *Residente* and company officials. The block inspector at Umbo, Achille Pajella, gives an illuminating example. The Ethiopians were given order by the *Residente* to repair a road. To evade work in the collective cotton farms, the peasants presented the *Residente's* order to the company, demanding 10-20 days absence. As it was an order from the political authority the block inspector had no option except to let them go. Afterwards the peasants informed the *Residente* that they were prevented by the company's technician from carrying out the road repair and went to attend to their own plots. When he realized that the work was not completed within the scheduled time, the *Residente* wrote angry letters of complaints demanding the company to discharge the Ethiopians immediately so that they could attend to road repairs. The

¹¹¹. Ibidem; Margery Perham to the Editors, The Times, 7-7-1948.

¹¹². DM 31-1-1940: IDC Uollega", GUGS, V/29, 17-7-1940 where in art. 2 clause (b) is incorporated demanding the company "not to divert, for the purpose of cotton farming, the manpower necessary to new cultivations which the administration of the IEA wishes to expand in the areas of the Cotton District, to the existing cultivations within and which the administration wants to increase and to the mineral enterprises which are already operating in the District or will be set up inside the District or its bordering zones"; see also Chiuderi (1941):272-3.

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Residente was not convinced by the company's explanation, and in order to avoid misunderstandings the latter had to resort to actions such as taking the *Residente* around the cotton camps where there were no workers and then to road site where there were no workers either. Both the company and the government had to give in to the peasants. An agreement stipulated between the company and the district chiefs and sanctioned by the *Residente* and *Commissario*, timetabled six working days per week - three to cotton cultivation, and three to the peasant's own work¹¹³.

Why was the peasantry so unresponsive to incentives to involve it in cotton production? and what were the reasons for cotton fields to be unattractive. In the collective fields, the workers were provided with food while at work to spare the need to work on their own fields. But the work was carried out under duress and without pay. Moreover, as one technician quite perceptively lamented, the cotton field "does not belong to the peasant and so he does not care about it"¹¹⁴.

The official explanation for the peasant resistance was a conventional stereotyping of naturally idle and thriftless Ethiopian peasantry with a deep-seated uneconomic attitude and apathy to change¹¹⁵. One official of the Soddo Cotton District wrote:

The Wällamo has the treacherous character of a person who tries to evade in any possible way any form of imposition. He obeyed his Abyssinian master for he commanded him with whips, an instrument which we Italians do not feel at ease to use. To each proposal of work he always replies affirmatively but he rarely or never keeps his word. He prefers the pleasant idleness to the hard work of cotton alternating the sitting under the shade of a tree

¹¹³. CD IAO AOI 1826, pp.7-8.

¹¹⁴. Ibidem 1830, p.7; CD IAO 1106, p.4.

¹¹⁵. CD IAO 1106, p.4.

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while looking after his cattle with a little care to his small plot¹¹⁶.

But rather than lazy and apathetic, the peasants appear hard-working and calculating. When they were searched out in their villages, they were not caught sitting idle, feasting or drinking but attending to their own food production¹¹⁷. It is a colonial bias to equate hard-working and progressive peasantry with those working to the interest of the settlers. In this respect the Italian official thinking was no exception.

The peasantry was acutely aware of the disadvantages associated with cultivating cotton. Firstly, cotton was primarily an export crop, vulnerable to the bewildering fluctuations of the world market and lacking the flexibility characteristic of subsistence crops. It could at no time be used as part of the diet. It was planted during the long rains and harvested in December-January. These were critical months for the subsistence crops in which manpower was already severely stretched. Unlike cotton, these serve as staple food in domestic consumption. Their surplus could be exchanged for items such as salt and clothing, and, in years of disastrously low yield, could be held back as means of famine relief¹¹⁸. Cotton cultivation competed with these well tried and flexible subsistence crops and could not be done without necessarily disrupting their production or cutting back labour from them. Moreover, unlike the local variety, the cotton distributed by the Italians showed minimum resistance to parasite, extreme susceptibility

¹¹⁶. Ibidem 1826, pp.4-5.

¹¹⁷. Ibidem, p.8.

¹¹⁸. John Tosh, "Lango agriculture during the early colonial period: land and labour in a cash-crop economy", JAS, XIX, 3 (1978):428; Megan Vaughan, "Food production and family labour in Southern Malawi: The Shire Highlands and Upper Shire Valley in the early colonial period", JAS, XXIII, 3 (1982):362-3.

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to changes in weather conditions, and needed abundant rains¹¹⁹. This made the crop extremely unreliable.

Secondly, cotton was labour intensive and all crops had to be sown afresh each time on laboriously prepared ground. Before harvest, the cotton plants demanded periodic thinning and weeding - time consuming jobs¹²⁰. By contrast, subsistence crops were less demanding of labour, except perhaps at harvest time. Under the circumstances the peasants were not prepared to compromise their own best plots or waste their labour in order to maintain an unpredictable government imposed export crop. So, like African growers elsewhere, the Ethiopian peasantry continued to insist on allocating the best possible lands for their staple food crops¹²¹.

Added to these drawbacks was the lack of economic incentives for cotton production. The price paid for cotton never fully compensated for the loss of labour which otherwise would have gone into food production. The price of foodstuffs had risen tremendously since the conquest and the Ethiopians had begun to earn high revenue from it. Thus

when the company (ICAI) put before the natives that cotton was a profitable crop they did not find the idea very convincing, for they easily infer that the profit that can be made from one and the same plot used for cultivating cotton or corn, the earning from the first one is very modest. In fact from 2,000 sqm of cotton field is harvested on average 40 kg of cotton from which by selling to the company

¹¹⁹. CD IAO AOI 1826, pp.1-2.

¹²⁰. CD IAO 1106, p.4.

¹²¹. A. O. Anjorin, "European attempts to develop cotton cultivation in West Africa, 1850-1910", Odú: University of Ife Journal of African Studies, III, 1 (1960):13; Henry Slater, "Land, labour and capital in Natal: The Natal Land and Colonisation Company, 1860-1948", JAS, XVI, 2 (1975), pp.257-83; Tosh, op.cit.:425-7; Robin Palmer, "Working conditions and worker responses on Nyasaland tea estates, 1930-1953", JAS, 27 (1986):109-11; 116-8; Thomas Bassett, "The development of cotton in northern Ivory Coast, 1910-1965", JAS, 29 (1988):272-4.

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could make only £.80, whereas the cultivation of corn in this same plot could earn about 150 kg which in 1940 was sold at the Soddo market for £.140¹²².

For cotton to be attractive to the peasant in any significant way, it had to be equally, if not more, profitable than food crops. But the political authorities, to protect the companies from a capricious world market to which cotton was subjected, adopted from the outset the policy of keeping the price paid to the Ethiopian peasant ridiculously low¹²³.

Such a price should start from the premises that cotton should be produced at a very low cost so that it would offset the heavy transport and freight expenses and provide the metropolitan industry with fine raw cotton at economic price. Therefore, the native should be paid little for his cotton particularly at the early stage since the native can never understand any later price less than what he earlier enjoyed¹²⁴.

In Soddo, where ICAI purchased fine quality cotton for £.2 per kg, the same quantity of low quality cotton of local variety was sold for over £.10 in the local market¹²⁵. As a producer of fine quality cotton the peasant could have obtained a higher price, but the monopoly by the companies prevented previous free market practices.

¹²². CD IAO AOI 1826, p.5.

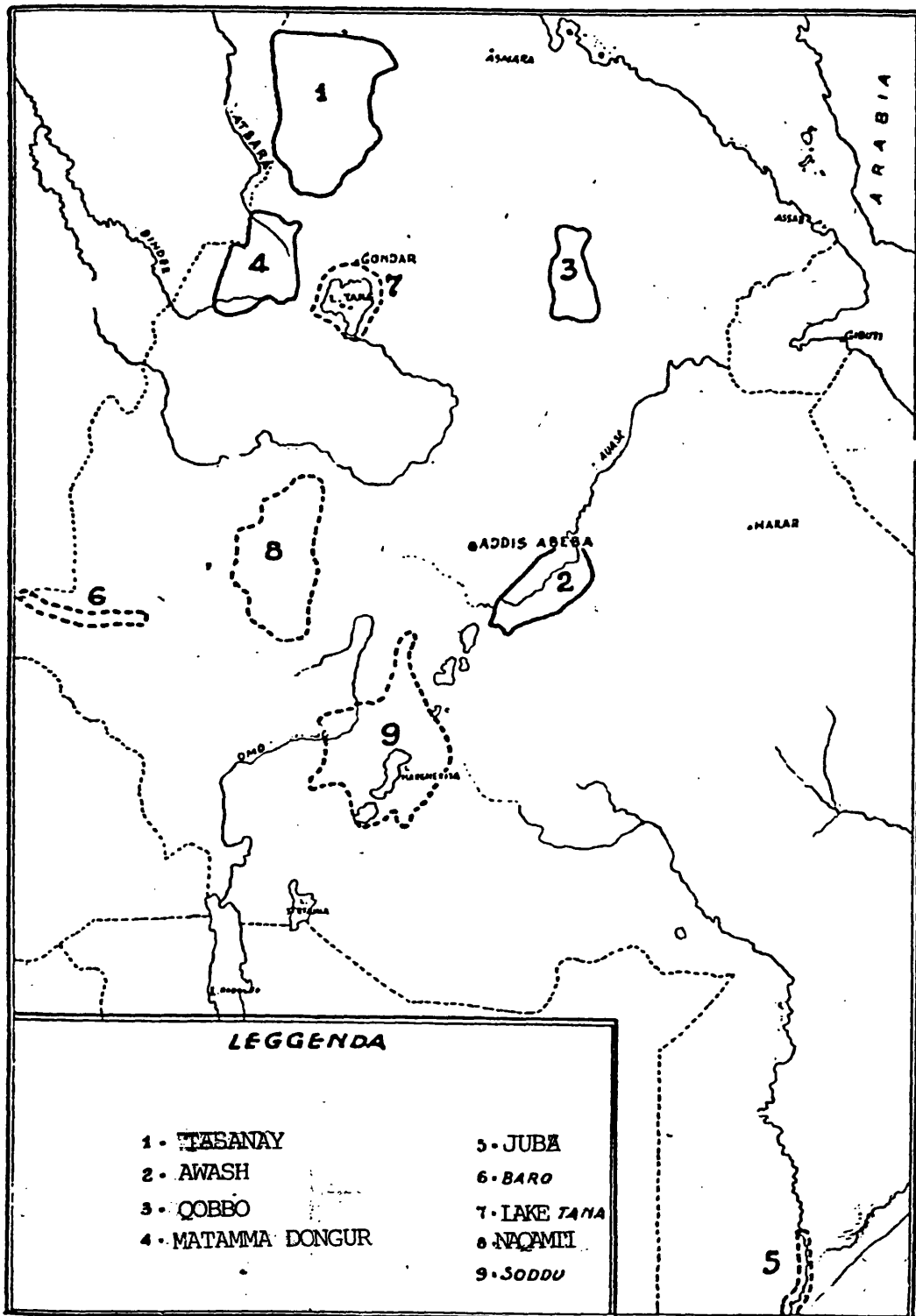
¹²³. CD IAO 1106, p.5.

¹²⁴. CD IAO AOI 1936, Angelo de Rubeis, "Promemoria Per S.E. Il Sottosegretario: Produzione cotoniera a mezzo degli indigeni", Rm 12-5-1938.

¹²⁵. CD IAO AOI 1826, p.9. This same author suggests that ICAI intended to reduce the price further on the grounds that in the Belgian Congo the cotton was purchased for 60-70 cents per kg. But he does not support such a view; according to him, at the beginning cotton should be paid £.4-5 per kg. and then be reduced very gradually to the current price once the cultivation becomes extensive and the native gets accustomed to it and discovers its economic importance.

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FIGURE X. COTTON GROWING DISTRICTS.



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The most tangible effect was a sudden revival of local 'black markets' and an outbreak of cotton theft "whereby the farmer harvested cotton at night and hid it in order to sell it in one of the remote markets"¹²⁶. The political authorities seemed to be aware from the start of the obstacles facing export cotton from a well-established local industry. In order to export cotton, the local market must be saturated. To do so a clause in the charter of the companies demanded the companies to leave at the disposal of the Ethiopians cotton "sufficient enough to the customarily made local craft"¹²⁷. Whether the companies complied with this obligation is uncertain. But the existence of such a parallel market formed a formidable challenge to the monopolistic tendencies of the companies and became the haven for those dissatisfied with their merciless exploitation. Theft was widely reported, especially in the private fields. Anybody caught was subjected to harsh punishment.

As efforts to eradicate petty theft proved ineffective, the political authorities concentrated their fight mainly against more serious cases. As the case of Soddo Cotton District reveals this involved:

Whenever the theft was discovered, it was reported to the *Residenza* who ordered the arrest of the culprit; but the fact is it was not possible to arrest so many thousands of the natives and so the tendency was to eradicate the fraud by executing those who committed serious theft while inflicting corporal punishment for lesser thefts¹²⁸.

¹²⁶. Ibidem.

¹²⁷. Article. 2(d) of RD 7-1-1938, no.443. This condition is incorporated in Article 4(c) or 5(c) of the contract of each cotton district.

¹²⁸. CD IAO AOI 1826, p.9.

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Despite the severity of the measures, the political authorities were incapable of totally eradicating cotton theft. Nor did the package of coercive measures help the companies to overcome the chronic labour shortage or improve the level of production¹²⁹. Plans with forced resettlements in scarcely populated area came to an abrupt halt when the malcontent of those resettled intensified. Most of them inhabited previously much more fertile, and healthy areas of the Ethiopian highlands and were reluctant to move out¹³⁰.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the companies carried out three campaigns. When compared to the size of the territory covered by the Cotton Districts, the results achieved were modest¹³¹. Progress was made only in Adama, Alamata and, above all, Soddo where the companies succeeded in setting up experimental fields, laboratories, and ginneries. Some of the premises and ginneries were found to be still in a good state in 1955¹³². The type of cotton grown was American Upland consisting of several varieties - Acala, Delfos, Stoneville 5, Cliett, Bagley, Rogers 3, Cocker Wilt 100, Lankart Watson. Towards the end of occupation, U4 strains from Barberton Experimental Station was introduced. The best results were obtained only with varieties Acala and U4. Yields ranged between 150 and 200 lb of lint per acre. In some sections of Soddo district, where the best results were obtained, there were reports of 750 lb. per acre with Acala variety¹³³.

The "insistent and paternal advice" with which the authorities intervened made cotton production unpopular. Yet unpopular or not the Cotton Districts, like the agricultural

¹²⁹. CD IAO 1106, p.4.

¹³⁰. Villa and al., op.cit., p.249.

¹³¹. CD IAO 1106, p.5. See Table XXV, XXVI.

¹³². Nicholson, op.cit., pp.10-12.

¹³³. Ibidem; CD IAO 1106, p.4.

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offices, laid down many infrastructures. With them began the transformation of rural life, for cotton companies and agricultural offices' campaigns brought into rural areas for the first time agricultural experts and administrators. Numerous studies of the land and soils were undertaken and in some areas technological changes were promoted. For example, the use of new varieties of cotton and cereal crops, much improved agricultural tools, such as ploughs and other implements, were introduced. Even though they remained at the initial stage, a coordinated attempt was being made to introduce the Ethiopian peasantry to growing cash crops. The very fact that the cotton companies and agricultural offices tried to make use of traditional social and economic units of production was better than a plantation agriculture where the labourer worked far from home.

At the end of the occupation, only Täsänäy survived¹³⁴, but cotton remained one of the important crops grown in a number of other Districts¹³⁵. Finally, the work of the cotton companies and agricultural offices attempted to contribute to what was a very marked feature of European colonialism, i.e. the preservation of the pre-colonial social and even economic structures while at the same time trying to promote the production of large surpluses for the world market.

The expressed view of the cotton companies was that of raising the welfare level of the peasantry without involving any serious disruption to the existing agricultural structure.

¹³⁴. Ibidem:14. According to this report, in 1955 Täsänäy Cotton District comprised 40,000 acres. Of these, 10,000 acres were cultivated by 2,000 share-croppers consisting of about 6,000 individuals.

¹³⁵. Ibidem:10-4; Awash Valley became one of the key cotton plantation centres after 1960 [Cfr. Maknun Gamaledin Ashami, op.cit.]. The most conspicuous legacy, however, was the spinning and weaving mill of Diré Dawa set up by *Società Cotoniere Meridionali* which still is the country's most important cotton manufacturing plant [Cfr. CD IAO 1106, p.6].

But in practice it became increasingly clear that the primary purpose of the scheme was to forcibly milk the rural agricultural and labour surplus in order to meet pressing metropolitan domestic needs. The scheme was largely formulated in the interest of the metropolitan textile industry at the expense of the indigenous population. Thus government's commitment to uplift the standard of life for the indigenous population had little substance but much rhetoric.

TABLE XXV:- COTTON PRODUCTION IN 1938-39 CAMPAIGN

PLACE	CULTIVATED AREAS (HA)	PRODUCTION RAW (QL)	PRODUCTION GINNED(QL)
ÄWASH	834	260	--
GAMBELA	10	30	--
NÄQÄMTI	80	40	100
QOBBO	550	320	--
SODDO	1,100	1,800	--
TANA	60	30	600
TÄSÄNÄY	1,800	4,225	1,450
SOMALIA	6,184	15,121	5,041

TABLE XXVI:- SCALE OF UNGINNED COTTON PRODUCTION, 1938-1941

YEAR	CULTIVATED AREAS (HA)	PRODUCTION (QL)
1938-9	2,534	2,156
1939-40	6,740	7,070
1940-1	7,100	10,000

Source: "Notiziario agrario commerciale", AC, (novembre 1940):483.

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We have examined in some detail the nature, scope and dynamics of Italian land use policy in Ethiopia during the brief period of occupation. The policies, though devised as responses to pressures from the metropolitan's combined demands for a social outlet for its surplus population, reliable source of agricultural raw materials, and the need to consolidate the Empire as economically self-supporting, were far from being carefully integrated programmes demanded by later planning techniques. Yet they did maintain some continuity with Italian colonial tradition as manifested in its other colonies, both in terms of problems they addressed and the methods by which they attempted to tackle them. Emerging from this was the development of similar institutional frameworks which, in turn, were shaped by the presence of the same personalities.

As in Libya, the key criterion of Italian agricultural policy remained the 'demographic myth', with its stress on settlement. This was the cornerstone of Italian imperial policy, and constituted its distinctive feature vis-à-vis that of other colonial powers. In contrast to Libya, Ethiopia contained much more fertile land so it seemed that the conquest would make this dream real. Alongside these schemes, a bewildering variety of interests had to be accommodated, giving rise to a number of initiatives, differing in their orientation and methodology. These were individually justified by the diversity of climate and geo-ethnographic conditions, as well as economic factors in the various territories in which they operated.

Mussolini's vision of conquering Ethiopia to settle millions of Italians and solve Italy's economic problems was an attractive idea. It contributed considerably to the popularity of the Fascist regime. But once the country had been conquered the regime neither had clear ideas on how to implement this vision nor the necessary means and proper personnel. Despite his ministers' propaganda informing the Italians that the *Duce* personally guided everyday the course of imperial

policy, in fact once the heroic deeds of conquest were over, he showed little interest in the development of Ethiopia. The popular exuberance of the Italians themselves also subsided once the excitement of easy victory was over.

The settlement of large numbers of Italian peasant families - the main economic argument to justify the conquest - proved unworkable. On April 27, 1940, less than a fortnight before Mussolini's entry into the European war, the then Minister of Italian Africa, Terruzzi, indicated that 3,550 families were settled on 113,760 ha of land. But it appears from other sources these were much inflated figures. The peasants actually transferred numbered no more than 400 and of these about 150 were joined by their families - a very far cry from the often proclaimed millions. Despite the tremendous publicity, by the end of 1939 the recruitment of peasant families willing to move to Ethiopia had become an arduous task.

As an outlet for emigration, Ethiopia was a total failure. In 1939, the total Italian population of IEA numbered about 130,000, of which about 60,000 were settled in Ethiopia. Yet the Italian population of New York was still ten times more than that of the entire Italian Empire. But the trend was that Italians "were returning to Italy rather than coming out to the Empire"¹.

The dream of the Empire as a land of opportunity also evaporated as the prospects of employment became poor, and many experienced extreme poverty, housing shortage and spiralling living costs. At the end of 1936, there had been 146,000 Italian workers. By June 1939, this number dropped to 23,000. During this same year the number of Italian unemployed in AA alone was estimated to be between 6-7,000. Many lived in great squalor in a camp on the outskirts of the town, often begging

¹. F0371/23380/J1776/296/1, Bird to Halifax, AA 1-4-1939].

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Ethiopians for food - thus making the so called "racial prestige policy" a mockery².

TABLE XXVII:- ITALIAN POPULATION IN ETHIOPIA(1940)

PLACE	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
AA	-	-	26,952
ADWA	200	30	230
AMBO	-	-	4,500
DERÉ DAWA	3,370	174	3,542
GONDAR	-	-	2,000
HARAR	3,018	436	3,453
JIMMA	12,544	626	13,170
MAQALÉ	92	43	105
KORAM	97	12	109
SODDO	170	3	173
YAVÉLLO	57	5	62
TOTAL	19,605	1,329	54,296

Source:- Il Popolo Fascista, 25-2-1939; GI, 25-2-1939; "Quadro demografico di Gimma", CI, 2-3-1940.

Despite the claims made for it, colonization did little or nothing to help solve Italy's pressing social problems. At best, perhaps the foundation of the Empire served as a comforting way to distract the Italian people from the reality of economic depression and dictatorship that surrounded them. For the handful of settlers the *coup de grâce* came with the collapse of Italian rule in 1941 with which they lost their *raison d'être*. Following the Anglo-Italian agreement effected in the midst of World War II, they were repatriated to Italy to start a new life³. With their return to a war-stricken homeland

². FO371/24635/J467/18/1, ACG Gibbs to PSSFA, AA 28-12-1939.

³. ECRE survived until 1946 in Eritrea where some of its members operated four farms at the outskirts of Asmara "bid... their time in view of making the life of the occupying enemy difficult". But soon it was exposed as "the nest of Fascism",

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the dream of Italian demographic settlement definitely faded, a "myth" that had besieged the minds of a section of its most influential intellectual and political elite since the early days of independence.

Another premise on which the conquest of Ethiopia was justified was the commercial advantages and the profitable source of raw materials it was thought the country would provide. Italy's imports from her colonies in 1938 were little more than 2% of her total imports and she had spent ten times as much on administering the Empire as the total volume of trade with it. Quite apart from the continuing military expense, which was kept secret, the cost of organizing and exploiting the Empire was over a thousand million lire in hard currency each year. This was more than one-tenth of the total foreign reserves available in 1938 and 1939⁴. For some Fascists this was an investment which would prove rewarding in the end. But for the Minister of Foreign Trade, Felice Guarnieri, such a rate of expenditure for more than a few years could not be afforded by the Italian State⁵.

Far from being self-sufficient as Mussolini had ordered, Ethiopia had to import most of the food for her Italian expatriates and industrial equipment. Italy exported to her East African Empire in 1938 goods to the value of over £.2,000,000,000, nearly twenty times as much as she received. Thus far from solving Italy's economic problems - apart perhaps from providing a secure market for some Italian products, such

and, contrary to the plan, its members "lived miserably, despised and hated by the anti-fascists and members of Free Italy or *Libera Italia*, closely watched and harried by the British Intelligence and the Eritrean Police Force and in constant fear of being interned at any moment the enemy wishes or believes it appropriate" [Cfr. CD IAO 1921, Timò Mansueto, *Attività dell'Ente Romagna*, Rm 9-2-1943].

⁴. Guarnieri Felice, Battaglie economiche tra Le due grandi guerre, (Milano: Granzanti 1953), vol.2, p.404.

⁵. Guarnieri, op. cit., p.198.

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as textiles - it only aggravated them. Rather than strengthening national self-sufficiency and assisting Italy's balance of payments, the Empire, according to Guarnieri's own statement, was swallowing Italy itself⁶. The diversion of goods to Ethiopia that might have been sold elsewhere for foreign exchange and the use of ships more profitably employed on transatlantic routes made the deficit even worse. So exasperating was the whole economic condition that, whereas Italians had counted on abundant supplies of coffee from the Empire, 1938 saw the beginning of a serious coffee shortage in Italy.

Underlying such poor achievement was bad planning which can be understood by the speedy conquest that astonished not only the Italians but the entire world. The MC in Rome was unprepared for the many pressures coming from different quarters - largely unleashed by the multi-media Fascist propaganda machine: the unemployed of the immediate post-depression era searching for work and land to cultivate; the social adventurers with their strong desire to see with their own eyes the mythical lands; demobilized masses of military recruits urgently needing settlement; a strong business lobby wanting to expand its enterprise; strategic and economic considerations calling for the Empire's self-sufficiency. The temptation was also great to show international opinion, hostile to the conquest, that Italy was on top of events and its initiation of developmental activities.

These multitudinous pressures were so overwhelming that any suggestions to delay action until the country was effectively pacified and the land tenure system was carefully studied, was felt to be an unaffordable luxury. The inevitable outcome of such pressures was the emergence of an unco-ordinated and chaotic agricultural policy. Overnight the MC in Rome had to improvise a bold programme of development, but which in practice was little more than a collection of projects lacking

⁶. Macksmith (1976), p.121.

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coherence and realism. Its inherent flaw was the tremendous lack of knowledge about the physical, social and economic conditions that prevailed in Ethiopia. There was a lack of hard facts for realistic prognoses and plans. The men who devised the programmes, did so on knowledge acquired either during a brief flying visit or by reading often unsubstantiated accounts. The programmes seemed deceptively easy to implement, yet in practice proved far from workable.

The first to realize their unworkability were the authorities in Ethiopia who had the task of translating the programmes into action. With their badly paid, numerically insufficient and qualitatively poor personnel, they were burdened with the uneasy task of accommodating a wide range of conflicting metropolitan interests following the conquest: they had to provide the Empire with a solid organizational and administrative structure in a land that was not totally pacified; they had to provide assistance, hospitality, military escort and means of transport to the representatives of agencies or groups of farmers who came to choose land for their prospective farms. The cost of the settlements' protection, the construction of roads linking each centre, and the erection of schools and hospitals and other social amenities, was an intolerable burden on the authorities' shoestring budget.

This situation was further complicated by the multiple, and largely hostile, 'traditional' local interests which the administration had to keep reasonably satisfied. Overburdened by the enormity of such responsibilities within the country, the administration in Ethiopia repeatedly called on Rome to slow down, and if possible to halt, the agricultural programmes until such time that a comprehensive and realistic policy was worked out. But Rome was not in a position to fully grasp the situation in the colony. The colonial administration in Ethiopia thought Rome's plans had been conceived in the peaceful confines of the ivory tower of the MAI by arm-chair

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intellectuals, and offered only lukewarm support. The immediate bearing this had on colonization was to slow down its progress.

The centre of contention was understandably land. The first objective of the Italian administration was to constitute a group of domainial lands, under the jurisdiction of the state. The bulk of these lands was owned by rebels or active political exiles in addition to lands belonging to the Ethiopian state and the royal family. Lands seized in this way had various destinations: they were allocated to the settlers or kept for future needs of colonization or redistributed to Ethiopian allies or given in exchange to those Ethiopians displaced to make room for Italian settlers.

To accommodate the new settlers, the colonial administration in Ethiopia had to pursue policies that were largely drafted in Rome and which were also in clear contradiction to Rome's own avowedly stated policy of respecting the 'legitimate' land interests of the Ethiopians. These were often moved off their lands to make room for new Italian farms. Even though the Ethiopians were given other lands in exchange, the land was normally relinquished reluctantly and under severe pressure. Nor was the process fast enough to satisfy the land rush that immediately followed occupation. Initially, the Italian regime was led to believe that it had physical power to repress any Ethiopian resistance to land alienation but as the economic costs of doing so became increasingly unacceptable, it proceeded fairly cautiously. The slow pace angered the "land hunters" and led to violent disputes with the colonial administration.

The immediate impact of such a scarcity of land was the emergence of settlement enclaves, scattered and remote from each other. Dispersion in time and space made the sharing of experiences difficult and brought greater expense for the settler and intolerable cost for the government at a time when its overstretched human and material resources were desperately needed elsewhere. Attempts to create unified zones of coloniz-

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ation that were contiguous to each other, by means of a gradual elimination of interpolating Ethiopian properties through purchase, exchange and other pressures resulted in further alienation of the Ethiopians, who charged the government with robbing them of their lands to benefit the white settlers.

Scarcity of land and hasty selection had led some demographic colonization agencies to settle in areas that were unhealthy, of high political risk or with no possibility of expansion. Both the ECRE and ONC had to divert most of their operation to other areas on political grounds and for lack of free land to expand. In both cases, the cost to the agencies as well as to the central administration was enormous.

Demographic colonization was also undermined by its own internal weakness. The agencies were directed by remote bodies. In most cases, the leadership proved poor and incompetent. The farms were run autocratically and the peasants had little say in the expenditure of funds derived from their labour. The overwhelming majority of the colonists failed to possess those precious qualities and sentiment of racial prestige, social and economic responsibility, physical and technical fitness that constituted the ideal for their selection. Their behaviour stultified the workings of the "racial prestige policy", forcing the government to have recourse to legal measures. And the economic resources were inadequate, so the demographic colonization was forced to function on a shoestring budget. The production, based on cereal crops, was threatened by competition from the Ethiopians, who, notwithstanding the statutory restrictions, nevertheless produced at much lower cost.

The trends within commercial farming were no more encouraging. With the exception of a few large companies, the commercial farms were reluctant to move their capital to Ethiopia. This can be attributed to the natural mistrust that these business interests had towards a new environment where the technical and economic potential was still unexplored, the

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climatic conditions unknown, the security of capital uncertain and profits only in very long-term. *Notwithstanding* this general reluctance, a number of companies or private entrepreneurs ventured, lured by attractive appearances: an agreeable climate, vegetation growing effortlessly with no or minimal irrigation, food crop prices that permitted fantastic profits even with the smallest yields, and above all, very cheap manpower. However, the enthusiasm even of those 'outstanding and honest farmers' was soon dampened once the stark reality of the enterprise revealed itself in all of its severity and the enormous difficulties that they had to contend with became apparent: a government that lacked coherent policies; an intractable and amorphous bureaucracy which allocated land at an exasperatingly slow pace; an unsafe political environment; scarce and costly manpower. Most of their efforts were also frustrated by bad weather, drought and continuous battle with marauding insects, against which their technical skill offered little remedy. Despite media reports to the contrary, archival materials clearly reveal the low level of experience and technical expertise of those men who found themselves located in a region totally new to them. The cumulative effect was dismal results and high operational costs that at the beginning of 1940 left most of the farms in a lamentable state. For their survival they depended upon a generous subsidy from the government on whose anxiety to bolster production they capitalized.

One of the most notable legacies of Italian agricultural policy was the introduction of racial competition and conflict over land and production. In the colonization zones, Ethiopians were under severe pressures to move off their lands to make room for Italian farmers. A host of mechanisms that gained their justification in often mistaken interpretation of local agrarian customs and traditions, were employed to perpetuate this harmful policy. Only complicated political and economic considerations prevented wholesale deportations from the colonization zones. Despite its obvious limitations,

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Ethiopian production helped relieve the tax burden on the Italians. Ethiopians were needed in the countryside as, without their labour, the colonists' farms were doomed to bankruptcy.

As labour became an intractable problem, the key issue remained not the terms on which the Ethiopians would be driven off their lands but how they would be permitted to settle. The government's policy quite deliberately and consciously aimed to force them into a system of integration with the settlers' farms through a variety of schemes such as share-cropping contracts, whereby Ethiopians were offered land in return for labour. And yet the Italians feared the challenges posed by the competition of Ethiopian farms whose success they felt would undermine the development of settler farming. By 1940 it had become clear that the two economies could not co-exist. The suggestion was made to extend the racial segregation policy to agriculture, whereby Ethiopians would be allowed to farm only within their own 'reserved' zone - land marginal to settler agriculture. This policy went against claims that the Italians attempted to upgrade the life style of the Ethiopian population.

Certainly the Italians introduced modern agricultural techniques and offered technical advice to stimulate indigenous agricultural production. And yet these were only timid gestures meant largely to guarantee their own position by distributing a few crumbs. As its racial policy as well as a draft document on "zone of colonization" show, the Italian regime, like the rest of the European colonial powers, had little intention of granting genuine economic advancement to the Ethiopians. Of course, as it was dependent on their labour, the regime planned to integrate them into its own scheme of 'development'. Otherwise, Ethiopians benefitted from the Italian colonization only after independence. Any economic benefit that may have accrued to the Ethiopians during the occupation resulted from accident and not design.

However, the real achievements during the period under consideration have to be seen in a perspective that incor-

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porates some notion of the underdevelopment of the country before the occupation. When considered against this background and with full account taken of the shortage of trained agriculturalists and the short timespan and intractable political, social and economic climate in which the regime operated, the transformation of the agricultural economy, particularly in areas solidly controlled by the regime, was not insignificant. Whatever their motives, and notwithstanding the brutalities they committed, the Italians had laid down developmental infrastructures and initiated agricultural policies that had the effect of vigorously forcing Ethiopia into greater participation in the world capitalist system. They had done much to dismantle Ethiopian traditional structures and replace them with what they considered to be more modern institutions conducive to exploiting the country's rich agricultural potential.

Perhaps one of the most important of such changes was the curbing of the power of the traditional elites who vetoed most of Haile Sellassie's earlier attempts at land reform: once powerful regional armies and their commanders were either eliminated or made effectively powerless because of their collaboration; the church had been weakened. Most significantly, more than 4,000 miles of all weather roads were built which linked the main regions of the Empire as never before. These roads can be used for the agricultural exploitation of the peripheral areas and marketing of the produce. The monetization of the economy was stimulated by the encouragement of the production of cash crops to satisfy the needs of soldiers and settler families. A limited consumer society emerged, particularly among those who collaborated with the Italians in commerce and government. These accomplishments greatly strengthened the restored regime which reinstated most of the agricultural changes that the Fascist regime introduced and made reforms that further eroded the power of the regional lords.

Considerable pioneering work was carried out in the field of agriculture. The Italians were the first to put forward

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an outline development plan which made provision for surveys, research as well as actual development work. Perhaps even today it would be difficult in Ethiopia to mention any major project, whether still under discussion or already implemented, which had not been investigated, sometimes in a fair amount of detail, during the period of occupation.

We know little concerning the extent to which the post-independence planning in agriculture was inspired by the Italian experience. And yet although the Italian initiatives were halted in mid-stream, their ideas and the debates they generated had some influence in the long term. Of the many other Italian colonial developmental initiatives which have a place in the history of Ethiopian agriculture, commercial farming is worth mentioning. Retrospectively, the picture that emerges is that the policy and practice of achieving self-sufficiency through commercial farms within a short period did not materialize. Yet it will be interesting to study its impact on the subsequent economic policies pursued by Imperial Ethiopia in the 1960s and 1970s, as those very ideas and notions of development based on commercialization of agriculture and encouragement of agrarian capitalism (import substitution policies) became the cornerstone of the country's development policies.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX II: COTTON CAMPAIGN

ETHIOPIAN COTTON COMPANY⁸
ADDIS ABABA

BASIC COTTON FARMING RULES

To sow cotton prepare the soil over which no cotton plants have been before.

Sow after the first rains so that the land be ready to receive the seed and this can germinate quickly.

Make with plough as many furrows as possible each distant from the other two steps. Put the seed in small holes at the bottom of each furrow within a few distance from each other. Put only four grains in each hole and immediately cover them with soil.

So while you are passing with plough, your son can follow you depositing it inside the ground; four grains in each separated by a small step and cover them with soil using his feet.

The seed is expensive and difficult to get and yields a very good cotton. Thus take care not to misuse it.

Do not sell it and, [if you do], you will be punished. If anyone asks you to have some, do not give it. Your friend can take it from us.

The seed yields ten times more than the cotton you already have in your plot.

Remember that for a land with 100 steps length and 100 steps width you need six *gunna* seeds.

Destroy all old plants of cotton of previous years. It is bad and may harbour diseases that can kill even the good plants that you obtain from our seed stock.

When the plants are as high as two hands leave only two in each hole and destroy the rest.

Use hoe to work the land and prevent grass from growing. Grass infested cotton-field gives bad and small yield.

Do not be hasty to harvest the cotton, nor should you wait until it falls down on the ground: both early and fallen cotton will fetch you low price.

⁸. Amharic original attached.

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As it can be stained by smoke, do not store the cotton that you picked up in a *tukul* where there is too much smoke; nor store it on the floor as it can get dirty.

As dirty cotton that is adulterated with leaves, straw, pebbles and soil will fetch for you low price, try to bring to us immediately after you picked it.

Do not mix the cotton produced using our seeds with the old cotton you have in your plot. We will notice it easily and tender reduced price accordingly.

Be aware that the cotton you produced can be sold to nobody but us. Nor can you keep it at home for yourself.

We will purchase your cotton for a fair price as fixed by the government.

We will also give you clean cotton sufficient enough for the needs of your family.

Once the cotton is picked up, pull out all cotton plants and burn them. For the following year you will be provided with far improved seeds.

You will sow this in a different land in the same manner that you have been instructed before.

ETHIOPIAN COTTON COMPANY

በኢትዮጵያ ውስጥ የጥጥ ኩባንያ
አዲስ አበባ

ጥጥ ለመዝራትና ለመልቀቅ የተደነገገ የመሠረት ሕግ

ጥጥ ለመዝራትና ለመልቀቅ ስትረገጥ ባለፈው ዓመት የጥጥ ለትክልት ያልነበረበትን ቦታ አሰናፃፍ
ከመጀመሪያው ዝናብ በኋላ ጥጡን ዝራ ይህም መሆኑ መረቱ ዛሬን እንደሌላ እንዲቀበለውና በቀሉ
እንዲበቀል ነው።

ሁለት ሁለት እርምጃ እያረፈቀህ በማረሻ ብዙ ፈር ቅድድ፣ ከዚያ በፊት ውስጥ በነበረው እርምጃ ልክ እያ
ረፈቀህ ትንሽ ቀዳዳ እያበጀህ ዘሩን አስቀምጥበት፤ በያለንዳንዱ ጉድጓድ ውስጥ አራት ደ ፍራ ብቻ ግስቀመጥ
ነው፤ ታስቀመጥከም በኋላ ያነውኑ አፈር መልሰበት።

ግለት ለንተ ሞረርህን ይዘህ አፈሩን ስትቀድ ልጅህ ከኋላ ኋላህ እየተከታተለ ከአፈሩ ውስጥ ልክ በሰው እር
ምጃ ቀዳዳ ቀዳዳ እያበጀ ደ ደ ፍራ እያስቀመጠ ወደዚያው በእግሩ አፈሩን ሊረምርምበት ይችላል።

የዘሩን ፍራ በከንቁ አታጥፋ አታባክን ሞጋው ብዙ ነውና ለግጥኘትም እጅግ ችግር ነው፤ በጣም መልካም
የሆነ ጥጥ እንዲሰጥ ተመርጦ የተገኘ ነው።

እንዳትሸጠው ተጠንቀቅ ሸጠህ ስትገኝ፤ ተጠንቀቅ ተጠንቀቅ ተጠንቀቅ ስህ እንዳትሰጠው ያ የሚጠይቅህ ወዳጅህ
ከኛ ላይ ለመውሰድ ይችላል።

አሁን ዛሬ የምንሰጥህ የጥጥ ዘር ካንተ መረት ላይ ከሚገኘው ከዱርው አይነት ጥጥ ፤ ጊዜ ይበልጥ ጥጥ
ያረፈልህ።

ስድስት ትንሽ ቀዳዳ ዘር ለመዝራት ቆመት መቶ ትላልቅ እርምጃ የሆነ ዳግም ስፋቱ መቶ ትላልቅ እርምጃ
የሆነ መረት አስፈላጊ መሆኑ ተረዳ።

ጥንት ትሠራው የነበረውን የዱርውን የጥጥ ዛፍ በፍጹም አጥፋ፤ የዱርው ዛፍ በጣም መጥር ነው በሽታ
ም በብዙው ይገኝበታልና ከኛ ዘር የምታገኘውን መልካሙን ዛፍ ሊገልብህ ይችላል።

የሁለት ጋት ያህል የጥጥ ዛፍ ሲያድግ በያለንዳንዱ ጉድጓድ ውስጥ አንድ ወይም ሁለት ብቻ መተው ይገ
በሃል፤ የተረውን እየነቀልክ ጣለው።

አረም እንዳይበቅልህት መረቁን በደግ ቆፍር፤ ግሳው ከአረም ያልጠራ እንደሆነ የሚሰጠው ጥጥ ትንሽ ሆ
ኖ ወዲህም ብላሽ ይሆናል።

ጥጡን ለመልቀቅ ለትክልት ስለሆነ ገን አውቆ መረት አስቲወድቅ ድረስ አትጠብቅ፤ መረት ከወደቀ በኋ
ላ አንስተህ የጥጥ ለትክልት ወይም አስቀድመህ ጊዜው ሳይደርስ የምትለቅመው ሞጋው በጣም ያንስብሃል።

የለቀምከውን ጥጥ ብዙ ጭስ ያለበት ሲሆን ውስጥ ያስቀመጥከው እንደሆነ ጭሱ ይነትበዋልና ጭስ ባለበት
ቤት ውስጥ አታስቀምጠው፤ አመራትም ላይ አታስቀምጠው ይቆሽሻልና።

ያደረግና የቆሽሽ ጥጥ ቅጠል ያለበት ሰር ወይም ጠጠር ወይም አፈር ያለበት ሞጋው ትንሽ ይሆንብሃልና
ጥጡን እንደለቀምክ ወደኛ እንደተቻለህ በቀሉ አምጣው።

ጥንት ከመረትህ ላይ እያበቀልክ ታገኝ የነበረውን አታደባልቅ፤ ከኛ ዘር ከበቀለው ጋራ አደባባይ ወደኛ
ብታመጣው ቀሉ ብለን ልናውቅብህ እንችላለን ሞጋውም ያንስብሃል።

ጥጡን ለግንም ቢሆን ለመሸጥ የግትችል መሆኑን አውቀው ያመረትከውን መሸጥ የሚገባህ ለኛ ብቻ ነው፤
እቤትህም ልታስቀምጠው አትታልም።

መንግሥት በትክክል ለመዘገዥ የወሰነውን ሞጋ እኛው እንከፍልሃለን።

ከጥፍጥረው የነጸውን መልካሙን የጠራውን ጥጥ ለቤተ ዘመድህ የሚያስፈለገውን ያህል ትቀበላለህ።

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በጣም የተሻለ እንሰጥሃለን።

ይህንኑም ለወደፊት የምንሰጥህን ፍራ ከሌላ መረት ላይ እንዳይመለከትንህ ሁሉ ትዘረዋለህ።

በኢትዮጵያ ውስጥ የጥጥ ኩባንያ

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