

The *Gaz* Raids and Reconstruction of the Ethiopian Empire: The Final *Gaz* in Tigray and Northern Wollo, 1941–1942

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A type of raid known as the *Gaz* occurred in northeastern Ethiopia in 1941–1942. The raiders, from Wajirat and Raya Azebo in southern Tigray and northern Wollo, attacked the Afar, causing chaos in this region. The raiding coincided with the beginning of the British-supported reconstruction of the Ethiopian empire following five years of Italian occupation. Attempts to stop the raiding were marked by administrative, organizational, and financial difficulties. This analysis of the *Gaz* describes the internal difficulties and social disturbances faced by the Ethiopian government and British military and the reactions to the political and social changes resulting from the withdrawal of the Italians and the reconstruction of the empire.

Key words: Tigray, Wollo, raiding, *Gaz*, Wajirat, Raya Azebo, Afar, history

1. INTRODUCTION

Following liberation from Italian occupation, Ethiopia faced various disturbances and widespread social disorder. In Tigray, the northernmost area of Ethiopia, a type of raid known as the *Gaz* occurred soon after liberation. This practice continued for more than a year, causing severe disruptions in northeastern Ethiopia. This paper describes the *Gaz* from its beginning to its suppression by the central government, highlighting both the social disorder associated with decolonization in Ethiopia and the reactions of the central government to this disorder. Although raids have often occurred in southern Ethiopia—and continue to occur in this area even today—they are less frequent in northern Ethiopia. In this article, I focus on the practice of *Gaz*, a traditional form of raiding among populations in northeastern Ethiopia, which last occurred in 1941–1942.

In this last *Gaz*, the main raiders were the Wajirat and the Raya Azebo peoples from southern Tigray and Wollo. These groups began to attack the Afar soon after liberation from Italy, causing social chaos in northeastern Ethiopia.

At the time, the Ethiopian government had the arduous task of reconstructing a new regime after five years of Italian occupation. Each region was in chaos and lacked sufficient administrative structure. The *Gaz* of 1941–1942 occurred in the midst of this confusion, but it was ultimately suppressed by the central government.

This article also examines how the new regime responded to social disorder during this era. The process by which the regime responded to the raiding illuminates the confrontation about regional politics between the Ethiopian government and the British military, which supported the reconstruction of the Ethiopian empire. I additionally examine the suppression of the raids by the government

and underscore the ways in which the *Gaz* demonstrates the social and political dynamics characterizing Ethiopia soon after liberation as well as local community reactions to the chaos during this era. The *Gaz* case was not peculiar to Ethiopia after liberation and offers a key to understanding social reactions to decolonization and construction of new regimes.

The *Gaz* had been prohibited under the preceding Italian occupation. However, the practice resumed in 1941, soon after liberation, and was led by the Wajirat and the Raya Azebo. That the raiding tradition survived the prohibition suggests that peripheral areas such as those of the Wajirat and the Raya Azebo were less influenced by the provincial administration and that traditions and self-administration were preserved in the northern highland. The *Gaz* in 1941–1942, which was finally suppressed by an expedition of Imperial military personnel supported by the British military, constituted the final raids in the northern highland. The demise of the *Gaz* related to the establishment of a new regime that aimed to centralize and modernize the empire. After the suppression of the *Gaz*, the central and provincial governments assumed control of the region and eliminated self-administration in these areas. The analysis of how the *Gaz* ended also reflects the process by which central administration expanded into peripheral areas in the northern highland.

My research relied on records maintained by the British War and Foreign Offices during British military participation in the campaign against the *Gaz*. British records document the policies of the Ethiopian government and the military strategies used against the *Gaz*. I also refer to the Sandford Collection preserved in the Institute of Ethiopian Studies.

I also interviewed participants in the *Gaz*.⁽¹⁾ These interviews provide important descriptions of the dynamics of the raids (e.g., motivations, mobilization, collaboration, reactions to the central government). They also reveal the histories of the *Gaz* and of community relations with other ethnic groups. Based on analyses of these materials, I describe the *Gaz* of 1941–1942 as well as the central government's attitude toward this phenomenon.

2. THE WAJIRAT AND THE GAZ: BACKGROUND

2.1 Previous Research on the Gaz

The *Gaz* is generally defined as “a traditional system of raiding that mainly occurred on the border regions between northern Amhara, Tigreigna-speaking areas, and Afar lowlands, especially in Southern Tigray and Northern Wollo” (Tarekegn 2005: 717). Several studies have examined the *Gaz* in modern Ethiopian history.

The first study was conducted by McCann (1987). Although never using the term *Gaz* in his analysis, McCann described raiding by the Raya Azebo in northern Wollo from 1928 to 1930, which he explained as a result of rivalry between the central government and a local noble, Ras Gugsä Wäle, the governor of Wollo. An additional factor contributing to this *Gaz* was social confusion resulting from a severe famine in Wollo. McCann described the raiders as soldiers mobilized in the service of their ruler's struggle for power. He analyzed the raiding in 1928–1930 in terms of household economics and the political relationship between the central government and local nobles. His analysis, which related the raiding not only to local politics but also to politics involving local nobles and the central government, underscores the importance of this article's focus on the *Gaz* of 1941–1942.

The second study on the *Gaz*, conducted by Tarekegn (2005), provided a comprehensive treatment of the areas involved, the organization, and the social significance of the participants. Tarekegn found that the *Gaz* involved a wider geographic area than that indicated by McCann (1987). He also noted the economic role of the *Gaz* insofar as it involved stealing livestock and demonstrating the raiders' prestige to the community.

In a third study, Gebru (1996) described the *Gaz* of 1941–1942 as one of the preludes to the 1943 *Wayyane* revolt in eastern and southern Tigray and noted the central government's efforts to suppress the raiding (Gebru 1996: 89–124). Although references to the *Gaz*, the Wajirat, and the Raya Azebo were limited, he explained that the latter areas enjoyed autonomy and often caused friction with the

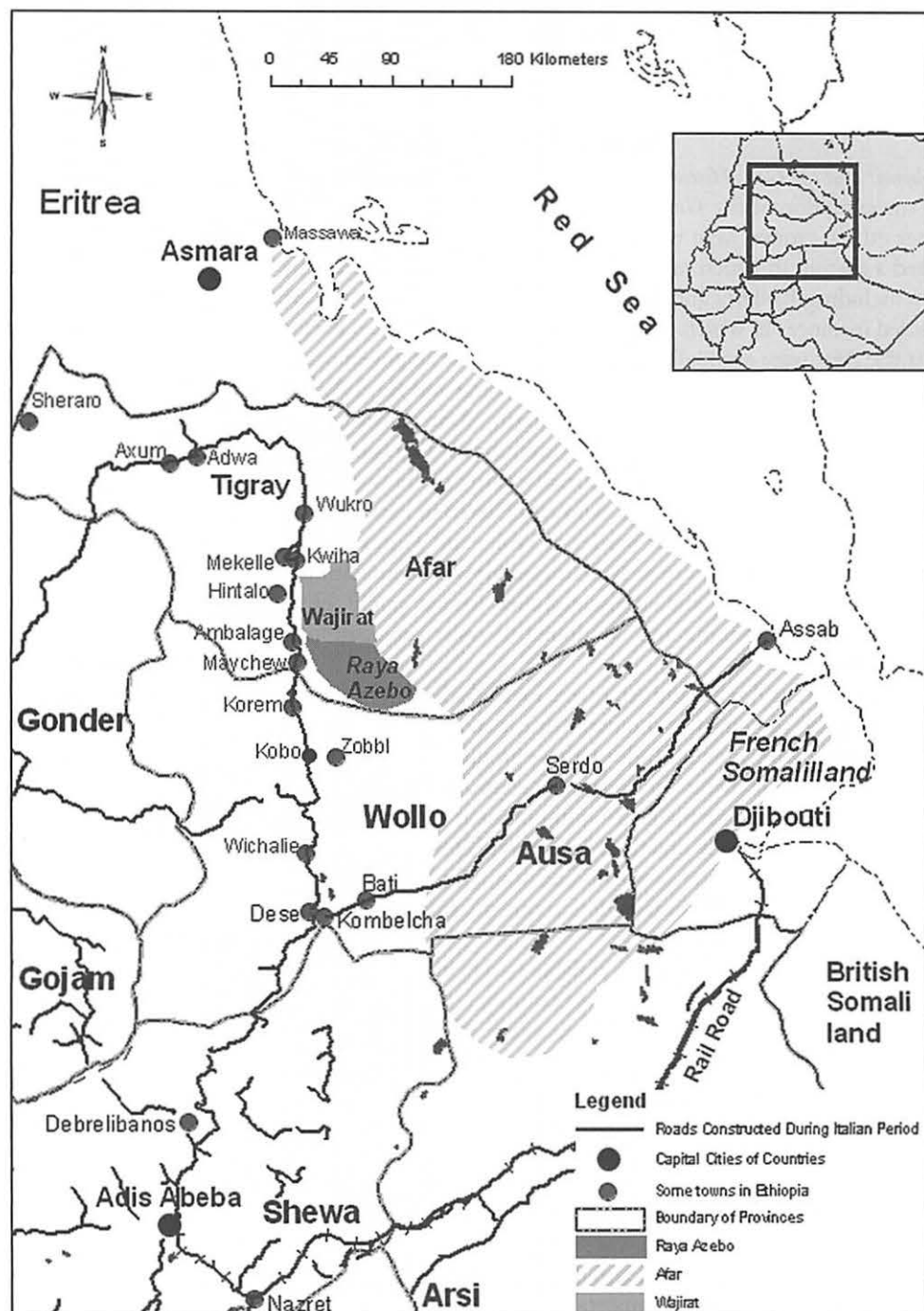


Fig. 1. Map of the Gaz⁽²⁾

Ethiopian state. However, the *Gaz* was not his main topic and his analysis of the *Gaz* ended with its suppression in 1942.

These three studies provide valuable clues for understanding the *Gaz* in northeastern Ethiopia. This paper will focus on the *Gaz* led by the Wajirat and the Raya Azebo in 1941–1942. I also analyze the social and political background of the Wajirat and the Raya Azebo, the autonomy these groups

enjoyed, and factors influencing the *Gaz* of 1941–1942. The period from 1941 to 1942 should be understood in the context of the Italian occupation and the reconstruction of the Ethiopian empire with the assistance of Britain. The political and social background of the *Gaz* as well as its suppression by the Ethiopian government and Britain are also analyzed.

2.2 *Wajirat and the Gaz: Historical Background*

With the exception of the *Gaz* conducted by the peoples of Wajirat and Raya Azebo, raids directed at other ethnic groups were not common in Tigray during the 1930s. However some informants reported a custom in which raids against the Afar were conducted by Tigray people living in eastern Tigray, including Enderta and Kilde Awalalo, which neighbor the Afar lowlands. This phenomenon resembled instances in which the Wajirat and the Raya Azebo participated in *Gaz* raids. These raids against the Afar were gradually prohibited by provincial governors and ended in this area before the Italian invasion, although they continued in Wajirat and Raya Azebo.⁽³⁾

Wajirat, a region in Tigray province bordering Afar, consisted of 20 villages and had its center in Dabob. The inhabitants of Wajirat were exclusively Tigrayan and Ethiopian Orthodox Christians who managed cultivation and were partially pastoral. However, most people in Raya Azebo were Oromo,⁽⁴⁾ a primarily Muslim group, who are believed to have settled the northern area in the 17th and 18th centuries. They lived on the border of Wollo and Tigray and had been historically governed by both administrations. Tigrayan or Amhara people were dominant in the region; they forced people in Raya Azebo to pay tribute and confiscated their land as *gult*.⁽⁵⁾ However, the people in Raya Azobo had long enjoyed autonomy and continued to resist subjugation and the forced tribute payment (Gebru 1996: 93).

The Wajirat, Raya Azebo, and Afar were located adjacent to one another. Because these areas were all located on the periphery and outside direct central control, they were also exempt from control by the provincial government. Indeed, these groups, peripheral both geographically and administratively, were under little direct administrative control and were thus autonomous and able to maintain their traditions—including the *Gaz*—without interruption.

The *Gaz* was still actively practiced in Wajirat before the Italian invasion; moreover, it was impossible to prohibit the Wajirat from raiding the Afar because of the superior fighting skills of the former. Interviews with Wajirat raiders about the *Gaz* and the administration in Wajirat are summarized below.

Those in Wajirat and Raya Azebo collaborated to organize *Gaz* raids. Both groups elected a leader (*Abo-Gaz*) to organize each raid before planning a *Gaz*. The number of participants and the terms of each *Gaz* differed according to the occasion. At times, a *Gaz* was conducted for several weeks and included hundreds of participants; at other times, it lasted for a month and involved more than 1,500 participants.⁽⁶⁾ During a *Gaz*, participants entered Afar territory primarily to steal cattle, sheep, camels, and other livestock. Severe battles, resulting in heavy casualties and the slaughter and kidnapping of women and children, were not rare.⁽⁷⁾ Notably, each *Gaz* was typically initiated in the absence of permanent leadership and within the context of political and social confusion.

Tareegn (2005) explained the raiding by those in Wajirat and Raya Azebo against those in the Afar as economic in that livestock was stolen and as social in that the prestige of raiders was enhanced within their communities. Gebru also emphasized economic motivations (Gebru 1996: 93–96). My interviews also underscored the importance of economic factors in raiding, as livestock was stolen and shared among *Gaz* participants.

The Wajirat people maintained a system of local self-administration, known as *Demer Gura Garbo*, which was responsible for administrative, law enforcement, and judicial functions in Wajirat.⁽⁸⁾ The *Demer Gura Garbo*, consisting of representatives from each of the 20 villages in Wajirat, actively negotiated with the provincial governor to protect their interests. On several occasions, the provincial governor tried to prohibit the *Gaz* against the Afar, but met with strong opposition from the Wajirat people. Additionally, the administrator deployed by the provincial governor to Wajirat was confronted by the opposition from Wajirat and was finally ousted by the *Demer Gura Garbo*.⁽⁹⁾ The *Demer*

Gura Garbo not only administered Wajirat but also played a vital role in maintaining an influential relationship with the provincial administration. The *Demer Gura Garbo* negotiated with the provincial governor and agreed to pay annual taxes in the form of honey while prohibiting the stationing of any administrator in Wajirat.⁽¹⁰⁾ The *Demer Gura Garbo* played a large role in initiating a *Gaz* and electing the *Abo-Gaz*. Additionally, the *Demer Gura Garbo* gave stolen livestock to the provincial governor as compensation and an act of apology if the provincial governor tried to punish Wajirat raiders for inflicting heavy damage on the Afar. The *Demer Gura Garbo* also punished those who raided the Afar in small groups or individually without first obtaining the permission of this body.⁽¹¹⁾

Tareken noted that the *Demer Gura Garbo*⁽¹²⁾ was a traditional democratic system involving a generally assembly in which political decisions were reached via member consent (Tarekegn 2007: 57). However, this long-standing self-administration was confronted with the Italian invasion and resulting occupation, their first modern experience with being governed by foreign power.

2.3 Political Background of the Gaz after Restoration of the Empire

Under the Italian occupation, Wajirat and Raya Azebo were controlled by the Italian military. The Italians authorized Eritrean *bandas*⁽¹³⁾ to assume control of the administration and ordered the Wajirat to submit to their direct governance. During the occupation, the Italians prohibited the Wajirat from raiding the Afar for security reasons. The Wajirat people explained that they initially fought against the Italians but had to surrender because of Italy's huge military advantage. The Italians established their administration in Wajirat and ordered the Wajirat to cease raiding and dissolve the *Demer Gura Garbo*. The Italians used Eritrean *bandas* who could speak Tigrigna for administrative functions.⁽¹⁴⁾ Although most people in Wajirat lived under the authority of the Italian administration, some escaped to the fields and mountains and continued fighting the Italians. The Italians and Eritrean *bandas* ordered the Wajirat people to capture the remaining fighters. The Wajirat people were also ordered to offer cattle and food to the Italians and to construct roads during the occupation. While the experience of the Wajirat under the Italian occupation did not differ much from that of other Tigrayans, this was the Wajirat's first experience with loss of sovereignty.

In contrast, the Raya Azebo Oromo had a close relationship with the Italians. When fighting the Ethiopian Imperial military at the beginning of their invasion, the Italians secretly contacted the Raya Azebo before the battle of Maychew.⁽¹⁵⁾ The Raya Azebo had suffered under the Imperial administration and were dissatisfied with their situation. The Oromo living in Raya Azebo collaborated with the Italians, and records maintained by the central government estimate that they received more than 30,000 guns from the Italians during the occupation.⁽¹⁶⁾ This was one cause of the hostility shown by the central government toward the Raya Azebo Oromo after liberation.

After the Italian withdrawal, governance of Tigray constituted a main dispute between the central government and the British, both of which had an interest in controlling Eritrea. When the British military marched into Tigray in 1941, they collaborated with local nobles who had been detained under the Italian occupation and sent to fight against Britain in the late 1940s (Sbacchi 1985: 147). The British made contact with Ras Seyum, who was the grandson of Emperor Yohannes IV and had governed northern Tigray before the Italian invasion and during the battle against the Italians. The British military officer in Eritrea planned to annex Eritrea and Tigray and place both areas under British military administration. The British and Ras Seyum discussed the status of Tigray, and Ras Seyum decided that Tigray should remain in Ethiopia.⁽¹⁷⁾ Even after Ras Seyum's decision, the British military used his influence to maintain order in Tigray, which was under British military control. The British military tried to appoint Ras Seyum as Governor of Tigray without the permission of Emperor Haile Selassie.⁽¹⁸⁾ The close relationship between the British military and Ras Seyum worried the Emperor, who was resistant to British influence in Tigray and Eritrea and wary of the role of Ras Seyum in Tigray. Although the Emperor recognized the British administration in Eritrea, he tried to keep Tigray under his control.

The Emperor attempted to disrupt the relationship between Ras Seyum and the British stationed in northern Tigray and to establish a new administration led by Amhara administrators sent from

Addis Ababa. Although the Emperor appointed Ras Seyum as Governor-General of Tigray on May 10, 1941⁽¹⁹⁾ since Ras Seyum was the legitimate heir of the Tigray dynasty, he ordered Ras Seyum to visit Addis Ababa on July 1, 1941 (Lord Rennell 1948: 144), and Tigray was placed under the control of the Ethiopian government on July 10, 1941. The British strongly opposed the treatment of Ras Seyum and tried to convince the Emperor that Ras Seyum's absence would cause serious disorder in Tigray. The Emperor prevailed but only after bitter negotiations with the British and a direct complaint to British Prime Minister Winston Churchill.⁽²⁰⁾

As negotiations continued, British patrols in Wollo and southern Tigray received reports of social disorder in these areas. However, the British military honored the decision about Ras Seyum made by the London-based British foreign office, which placed priority on the relationship with the Emperor. Ras Seyum was finally dispatched to Addis Ababa in July 1941, resolving the tension between the Emperor and Britain. Unfortunately, however, British fears of disorder in the Tigray administration in the absence of its influential local governor were realized.

3. THE EVOLUTION OF THE GAZ

3.1 The Start of the Gaz and Its Early Influence

During negotiations between the British military and the Emperor about dispatching Ras Seyum to Addis Ababa, British military patrols began reporting serious social disturbances led by the Wajirat and the Raya Azebo peoples. Tigray came under British military control in January 1941, and the final battle in Tigray between the Italians and the Ethiopian military, supported by the British military, ended on May 18, 1941. The raid against the Afar started in about June 1941⁽²¹⁾, soon after the withdrawal of the Italians.

The raid was reported to the central government by a British military officer who moved from Asmara to Addis Ababa and also by British political officers stationed in Wollo and Tigray. Following liberation, the Raya Azebo started using weapons obtained from the Italians to commit robberies on the main road. The British military patrol was alerted and launched an investigation.

Initially, the central government did not take the raiding seriously. Continuing battles between the British and Italians in other parts of Ethiopia were considered higher priority. However, the British viewed the situation as serious. A British officer in Addis Ababa recalled the Emperor's attitude at the start of the raid: "Our military authorities urged the Emperor to embark on military operations against these people (the Wajirat and the Raya Azebo) some months ago but His Majesty preferred first to form his own estimate of the situation and try to remedy it by peaceful means ..."⁽²²⁾ Although the Emperor asked the British military patrol to investigate the situation, papers obtained from the British Foreign Office clearly indicate that the central government missed its initial opportunity to suppress the raids.

The Wajirat and the Raya Azebo gradually intensified their raids against the Afar. Following fighting between raiders and a British military patrol in late October 1941, the raids became a very high priority for both the central government and the British. On October 29, a British military patrol came under attack by 300 Wajirat raiders around Sordo in Wollo. During the half-hour battle, the Wajirat lost more than 50 men, whereas the British patrol lost 10 African soldiers and 1 British officer. Following this clash, the Wajirat lost nearly 200 men in a battle with the Afar.⁽²³⁾ Despite their actions, the Wajirat said they had no intention of fighting the British. Their main goal was still to attack the Afar and steal their livestock. The battle with the British patrol had been accidental.

Although it is impossible to know the exact damage caused by the *Gaz*, some British reports provided rough estimates of the damage caused by raiding. The Afar reportedly lost more than 20,000 cattle and 40,000 sheep and goats in the *Gaz* raiding.⁽²⁴⁾ A report stated that, "Hundreds more Danakil⁽²⁵⁾ cattle were threatened with starvation because Galla raids precluded the use of outlying grazing ground," and added that "How many Danakil have been killed no one can say." The report also mentioned that the attacks had expanded to Djibouti.

In light of this damage, both the Ethiopian and British governments came to realize the importance of addressing the *Gaz*.

3.2 *The Government's Reaction to the Gaz*

Even after the battle between the raiders and the British military patrol, the central government failed to react quickly, and the raids expanded over a larger area that included Afar territory and Djibouti. There are four possible explanations for the ineffective reaction of the central government to the initial stage of raids.

First, Ethiopia was experiencing widespread internal social confusion after liberation, and *Gaz* raiding was not the only disruption. For instance, the central government had to re-conquer southern Ethiopia, where the Italians had expelled the northern highlanders who had governed these regions before occupation. In addition, other Italian influences remained in some parts of Ethiopia. Borana, bordering Kenya, experienced severe conflicts between the Borana and the Somali (Perham 1969: 360). Moreover the central government lacked the military power and budget to respond to all of the disturbances.

Second, the central government was relatively weak and was just beginning reconstruction after five years of Italian occupation. Although the central government had British support in many areas, it had also lost many skilled administrators and the Emperor was suspicious about whom to trust.

Third, after five years of Italian occupation, the Ethiopian government lacked the military facilities and capital needed to conduct offensive operations in troubled areas. Although the Emperor summoned Ethiopian nobles and *ex-ərbāgña* (patriots) to participate in military campaigns, the delay in quelling the raids was primarily due to the central government's inability to provide military facilities and supplies.

Fourth, discussions between Britain and Ethiopia were progressing toward an amicable Anglo-Ethiopian agreement, which finally established the status of Britain and British support for Ethiopia. Given that further British support was required for the Emperor's return to Ethiopia, for additional operations to remove the Italians, and for reconstruction of the empire, the Ethiopian government placed a higher priority on its relationship with Britain. The central government continuously negotiated with British officers about Britain's role in Ethiopia. In January 1942, they signed the Anglo-Ethiopian agreement and military convention. The military convention between the British government and the Emperor of Ethiopia outlined the status of the British military in Ethiopia and the specifics of British support to Ethiopia. The convention restricted the mission of the British military to "raising, organizing, and training the Ethiopian Army" (Lord Rennell 1948: 549).

The above factors were pertinent to Ethiopia as a whole, but the *Gaz* phenomenon was related primarily to the struggle between the Ethiopian government and the British for control of Tigray and Wollo. Indeed, the politics of Tigray constituted one of the important issues for the Ethiopian government and the British military. The Ethiopian government was planning to integrate Eritrea into Ethiopia after liberation, and Tigray was a strategic point in this future annexation.

The Ethiopian government collected information on the *Gaz* and was concerned about order in Tigray and Wollo. Wollo province was historically important for the Imperial family, and Prince Asfa Wosen, the Emperor's eldest son, was assigned to rule Wollo in 1930 after the rebellion of Ras Gugsa Wäle was suppressed (Perham 1969: 303–304).

Following liberation, the Emperor sent an expeditionary force led by the prince to not only suppress the raiding and punish the raiders but also to demonstrate Imperial strength. The central government exchanged information on the *Gaz* with the British military. However, although the Ethiopian government could have asked the British to suppress the raiders, it was considered more important for the independent Ethiopian state to do this by itself and to limit British influence.

3.3 *Suppression of the Gaz*

While the Ethiopian government and British military continued to discuss the *Gaz*, the *Gaz* phenomenon expanded and grew more serious. In January 1942, a second clash among raiders, the

Imperial military, and a British military patrol occurred. The Imperial army lost 14 soldiers, suffered two wounded men, and captured three Wajirat raiders.⁽²⁶⁾ This incident coincided with the climax of negotiations on the Anglo-Ethiopian agreement and military convention, which established the status of the British in Ethiopia and their support for the country.

Attacks by the Wajirat and Raya Azebo people increased in size even after the battle in January. The number of raiders was estimated at several thousand, and the attacks extended to locations around Aussa. The Afar living in Aussa complained to the British military about these attacks. After receiving reports about the damaging raids, a British officer complained to the Deputy Chief Political Officer in Addis Ababa, saying that "The failure of the Ethiopian Government to deal with this Galla menace—over eight months—is now regarded as a most serious dereliction of duty."⁽²⁷⁾

The Ethiopian government and British military agreed to suppress the *Gaz* soon after the signing the Anglo-Ethiopian agreement. As negotiations continued, preparations for this operation proceeded. The governments finally signed the Anglo-Ethiopian agreement on January 31, 1942.

Soon after the agreement was signed, the military force assigned to suppress the *Gaz* was dispatched to northern Wollo under the leadership of Prince Asfa Wosen (the governor of Wollo) and Ras Seyum (the governor of Tigray). This military force was organized by both governors and included Ras Abbaba Damtaw and other Ethiopian nobles who commanded Ethiopian soldiers. The British military stationed in northern Wollo also supported and contributed to the force. The central government estimated that the effort would cost £40,000. Because of lack of funds, the Ethiopian government asked the British to provide financial and military support to this operation.⁽²⁸⁾

An estimated 15,000 to 30,000 persons took part in the raids⁽²⁹⁾ and may have plundered more than 30,000 livestock. The raiders were well armed with weapons given to them or left by the Italians. However, the Imperial military that reached Wollo had increased to more than 40,000 fully equipped soldiers by May 1942. Although the military budget allowed only limited rations for soldiers, suppression of the raiding was critical to restoring order in northeastern Ethiopia and demonstrating the authority of the newly reestablished central government. The central government was concerned about whether its military ground force was sufficient to suppress the *Gaz* and discussed the possibility of using the British Royal Air Force to bomb the raiders.⁽³⁰⁾

The raiders gradually realized the expanding Imperial military presence in northern Wollo. They understood that a large force had been sent from Addis Ababa that would be impossible for them to fight. The Imperial military sent a mission to persuade the raiders to stop raiding the Afar. Given the huge military force supported by the British, the raiders surrendered and agreed to stop raiding. The Imperial army confiscated 3,000 rifles from the raiders and ordered them to surrender an additional 15,000 rifles and 50,000 livestock before May 5, 1942, or face further military action.⁽³¹⁾ A report dated May 12 from Dessie stated that many rifles and 10,000 cattle were surrendered. As a result, the Imperial military began its retreat from the region.⁽³²⁾

4. THE END OF THE *GAZ*

The suppression of the *Gaz* in May 1942 did not directly end the raiding. The Wajirat and the Raya Azebo stopped raiding the Afar and surrendered all the livestock they had stolen, but they were never seriously punished. The central government faced many challenges and chose not to devote more resources to this area after the raiders had surrendered. The only punishment the raiders received was confiscation of guns and livestock, although the Imperial military allowed them to keep some guns for self-defense.

From the suppression of the *Gaz* in 1942 until the end of 1945, the fate of the Wajirat and the Raya Azebo depended on regional politics. As a result of the series of incidents described below, both the *Gaz* and the self-administration of the Wajirat came to an end under the new administration.

In May 1943, the sub-provincial governor of southern Tigray tried to attack the Wajirat and subsume them under provincial rule. His plan had the opposite result. Not only did the Wajirat defeat

the military force organized by the sub-provincial governor (Maki 2006: 41–48), they also captured the sub-provincial governor, who had been appointed by the Emperor. The Wajirat had no intention of conquering other areas; they simply wanted to retain their self-administration. When the central government received news of the incident in Wajirat, they sent the son of the Governor-General of Tigray to negotiate with the Wajirat for the release of the sub-provincial governor.

This incident in Wajirat was a direct factor in the *Wayyane* revolt in Tigray in 1943, one of the largest revolts against the central government at the time. Since many studies of modern Ethiopia have discussed the *Wayyane* revolt (Gebru 1996; Perham 1969; Gilkes 1975), I focus on the relationship between the Wajirat and the *Wayyane*. Some scholars have noted that the Wajirat participated in the *Wayyane* revolt with other southern Tigrayans. However, the Wajirat explained that their participation in the *Wayyane* revolt around Mt. Alaje was partial and based on a misunderstanding by the Wajirat, who were afraid of the central military operation.⁽³³⁾

The most decisive factor in ending the *Gaz* and the self-administration in Wajirat was the suppression of the *Wayyane* revolt by the Imperial and British militaries, especially with the use of air bombing. The central government now controlled the whole of Tigray by force and stationed military and police in every village in southern Tigray. Wajirat was no exception. The Wajirat acknowledged the strength of the Imperial military, as backed by the British military, and realized it was impossible to resist the new administration. They relinquished their push for self-administration and accepted the rule of the local provincial governor.

The relationship between the Wajirat and the Raya Azebo also changed after the suppression of the *Wayyane* revolt. The Imperial military stationed in Wollo and southern Tigray ordered the Wajirat to participate in conquering their allies in the *Gaz*, the Raya Azebo. The central government was hostile toward the Raya Azebo for causing social disorder and for collaborating with the Italians in 1935–1941. In a battle led by the Imperial military against the Raya Azebo, the provincial government captured a *säfta* (robber band) and threatened communications in the area. The central government also decided to divide the Raya Azebo land among the Imperial soldiers who had participated in the operation against them. Ultimately, the central government divided the areas of Raya Azebo across Wollo province and placed them under control of the Wollo.

5. CONCLUSION

Although the *Gaz* is rarely mentioned in Ethiopian history, it is a key piece in understanding the social relationships between highlanders and the Afar. The *Gaz* experience illustrates the persistence of several customs in areas outside direct central control, including the tradition of raiding neighboring communities. The 1941–1942 *Gaz* underscores the difficulty of the political transformation from liberation to reconstruction of the empire in the highlands, and shows the resistance by local populations.

This analysis also demonstrates how the end of the *Gaz* phenomenon was influenced by the process of reconstructing the empire and by the British influence on the politics and military affairs in Ethiopia. The 1941–1942 *Gaz* was similar to raids in southern Ethiopia, and the process by which the Imperial army and the British military suppressed this practice may resemble those in other areas of the country. This process demonstrates the vulnerability of the central government, which lacked adequate staff, facilities, and funds during the time of transition. In Wajirat, even after suppression of the *Gaz*, the inappropriate appointment of a sub-provincial governor by the Emperor caused even greater political confusion and ultimately another rebellion, the *Wayyane*, in southern Tigray.

The situation of Wajirat and Raya Azebo from 1935 to 1945 can be understood in terms of three stages: occupation by the Italians (i.e., suppression of local traditions), liberation (i.e., revival of traditions), and direct administration by the central government (i.e., another form of suppression, by an Ethiopian governor). The *Gaz* phenomenon also highlights the social confusion in southern Tigray and northern Wollo after the Italian withdrawal and during the reconstruction of the central gov-

ernment. In this era of widespread political change, local populations should not be understood as passive. The Wajirat and the Raya Azebo, who were not main actors of political change, reacted in various ways to political changes (e.g., the Italian invasion, liberation, and reconstruction of the empire). In a local context, the *Gaz* of 1941–1942 could be understood as a revival of traditional practices that had been suppressed by the Italian occupation. The Wajirat had enjoyed a system of self-administration without the direct influence of a central administration before the Italian occupation and almost succeeded in reviving this system after liberation. Further research is needed to determine how the Wajirat and the Raya Azebo came to be governed under the new Imperial administration and to analyze the *Wayyane* revolt.

NOTES

- (1) Most interviews were conducted in Tigray in 2003–2005, and all informants mentioned here were farmers.
- (2) Map based on data obtained from ESRI, the Ethiop GIS, and the Tigray Bureau of Finance and Economic Development (BOFED) prepared by Habtom Gabremedhin.
- (3) Informant: G/M, (age: 81), July 19, 2004 (the date of the interview), Wajirat (the place of the interview).
- (4) Historical papers on the Raya Azebo Oromo use the word “Galla” to describe them.
- (5) Gult is a concept fundamental to the history of Ethiopian land tenure. It is understood as over-rights, the rights to tribute and rent, which the Ethiopian ruling class historically held in relation to land. Donald Crummey, “Gult” in Uhlig, ed, *Encyclopedia Aethiopia* vol. 2, pp. 941–943, 2005.
- (6) Informant: G/M, (age: 81), July 19, 2004, Wajirat.
- (7) Informant: A/H, (age: 82), June 1, 2003, Wajirat.
- (8) Informant: Y/K, (age: 79), August 7, 2004, Wajirat.
- (9) Informant: G/M, (age: 81), July 19, 2004, Wajirat.
- (10) Informant: H/R, (age: 81), August 15, 2004, AdiKaiya.
- (11) Informant: H/T, (age: 91), June 1, 2003, Wajirat.
- (12) Tareken used “Demer” to refer to Demer Gura Garbo. I use Demer Gura Garbo consistent with its usage in the interviews. Tareken Gebreyesus, “Traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution among the Wejerat and their neighbors,” in Smidt, Wolbert and Kinfe Abraham eds., *Discussing Conflict in Ethiopia; Conflict Management and Resolution*, LIT Verlag, 2007, pp. 56–85.
- (13) Banda means irregular indigenous troops and soldiers serving under the Italian colonial administration.
- (14) Informant: G/M, (age: 81), July 19, 2004, Wajirat. Another informant (Informant Y/K, (age: 79), August 7, 2004, Wajirat) noted that nearly 1,000 Italians were in Wajirat and that they constructed the road.
- (15) Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1855–1991*, Addis Ababa University Press, 2002 (second edition), pp. 156–157.
- (16) Sandford Collection, Wollo file, 96/76, “Operation against the Azebo and Raia galas.”
- (17) Erlich, H., “Tigrean Nationalism, British Involvement and Haila-Sellasse’s emerging Absolutism—Northern Ethiopia, 1941–43”, *Asian and African Studies*, vol. 15, 1981, pp. 191–227.
- (18) WO230/16, Telegram sent by Brigadier Sandford on April 23, 1941.
- (19) *Negarit Gazeta* no. 3, p. 28, issued May 29, 1942.
- (20) Sandford Collection, Seyum File. Telegram from Addis Ababa to Adv Force H.Q on June 15, 1941, regarding the letter from Emperor Haile Selassie to Winston Churchill
- (21) WO230/16/41, Note on the Tigre area, June 1, 1941 (author unknown). Sandford Collection, Wollo file, Report from Major Slaney, senior political officer in Dessie, on February 13, 1942. It reported that the raiding continued for eight months.
- (22) FO1015/55/242A, Cipher from Addis Ababa to the Foreign Office in London, March 9, 1942.
- (23) WO230/16, Telegram from the East African Commander to Troops RPT, Mideast and KAID, November 6, 1941.
- (24) Sandford Collection Wollo file, Report from political officer in Desse to the headquarters in Harar, March 23, 1942.
- (25) In historical papers, the word “Danakil” is used to describe the Afar.
- (26) Sandford Collection, Wollo file, 96/56, Telephone message received from Captain Footgaitakill to DCPO

- headquarters in Addis Ababa, January 29, 1942.
- (27) Sandford Collection, Wollo file, 96/60, "Wajirat raiders" from Major Slaney, Political Office in Dessie to DCPO in Addis Ababa, February 13, 1942.
 - (28) Sandford Collection, Wollo file, 96/89, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the British Legation in Addis Ababa, March 26, 1942.
 - (29) Sandford Collection, Wollo file, 96/73, "Memorandum on Proposed Military Operations against the Azebu and Raya Gallas" by the Ministry of War of the Empire of Ethiopia.
 - (30) Sandford Collection, Wollo file, 96/70-73, "Memorandum on Proposed Military Operations against the Azebu & Raya Gallas" by the Ministry of War of Ethiopia.
 - (31) Sandford Collection, Wollo file, 96/108 Statement by the Ministry of War to Sandford, May 3, 1942. This operation was led by the Prince and Colonel Asfa.
 - (32) Sandford Collection, Wollo file, 96/119, Telegram from the political office in Dessie to Brigadier Sandford, May 12, 1942.
 - (33) Informant: G/M, (age: 81), July 19, 2004, Wajirat.

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