8. The Perplexity of Land Acquisition, Privatization and Ownership Issues of Birr and Ayehu Farms from 1978 to May, 2019

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Abstract

After the demise of the imperial regime, Derg declared a drastic land tenure policy and agrarian reform that facilitates the commencement of state farms in Ethiopia. This accelerated the trends of de-privatization and tenure rearrangements that favor state farms and agricultural collectivization. This study thus explores the nature of land acquisition, privatization and ownership issues of Birr and Ayehu farms" prior to June 2019. To do so, a mixed concurrent design was employed by collecting primary and secondary data sources via questionnaire, interview and document review. Then, data analysis and interpretation was done through statistics-by-themes and side-by-side comparison through joint display mechanisms. Birr and Ayehu farms were commenced during the Derg regime by gradually annexing a mammoth land through eviction of closest communities. By international pressure and privatization motive, the farms were sold to Ethio-Agri-CEFT, PLC in 2000 by secret and neo-patrimonial modality with denial of landholding rights of peasants. The farms operated without a contract for the last 18 years. Again, the dearth of recorded document about farms at the regional level makes the issue the hot spot in Amhara region. Pragmatically, the farms were exploited for wealth advancement utterly by party affiliated individuals under the mask of privatization and investment. Thus, the farms should be under the jurisdiction of the regional government to ensure legality and public interest.

Key words: land acquisition, privatization, ownership, state farms", commercial farms

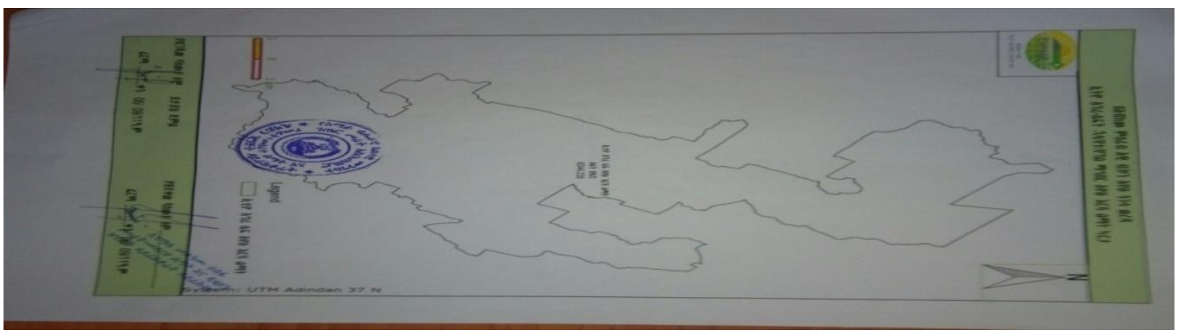
Introduction

Land acquisition for agricultural investment has become the major concern of sustainable land use and development strategy at a global level (Oberlack *et al.*, 2016). It has been given a key priority by both developed and developing countries to achieve development (Borras and Franco, 2012). In Ethiopia, the practice of commercial framing is traced back to the imperial regime though its expansion remained radical in recent years (Tsegaye, 2017; Addisu, 2016). Commercial farming is strategically promoted after the adoption of a Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) document to ensure food security in a middle income earning country. This in turn boomed rush land enclosure by making land a centerpiece in Ethiopian politics (Addisu, 2016).

However, the colossal land acquisition for commercial farming is generating hotbed contentions among scholars and the populace (Shephered, 2013; Brüntrup et al., 2016; Glover and Jones, 2016). On the one hand, some argued that land acquisition for agricultural investment devastates the wellbeing of local communities (Medina, 2014; Belachew, 2013; Bereket (N.D); and others claimed that land enclosure for investment facilitates development and ensures national food security (Shephered, 2013; World Bank, 2010; Shete, 2014). With these contrasting debates, huge land is allocated to investors engaging in agricultural investment either through eviction or expropriation in Ethiopia. This in turn threatened the livelihoods of entire communities since the production is geared for export (Oakland Institute, 2017; Belachew, 2013). Additionally, the capitalist intrusion of land acquisition provokes political unrest against investment sites (Shephered, 2013; Borras and Franco, 2012). Evidently, the farms of *Birr* and *Ayehu* in Amhara Region have remained a hotbed issue in social media and government-society meeting[i]. The commencement, privatization and operation of the two farms have become a point of controversy and source of political grievance. This beget dissatisfaction, a win-lose mentality and sense of exclusion on bordering communities. Again, the nature of land acquisition, privatization and ownership issues of Birr and Ayehu farms is still unclear and yet unexplored. This inspired investigators to conduct a study on the nature of land acquisition, privatization and ownership issues of Birr and Ayehu farms, in North-West Ethiopia.

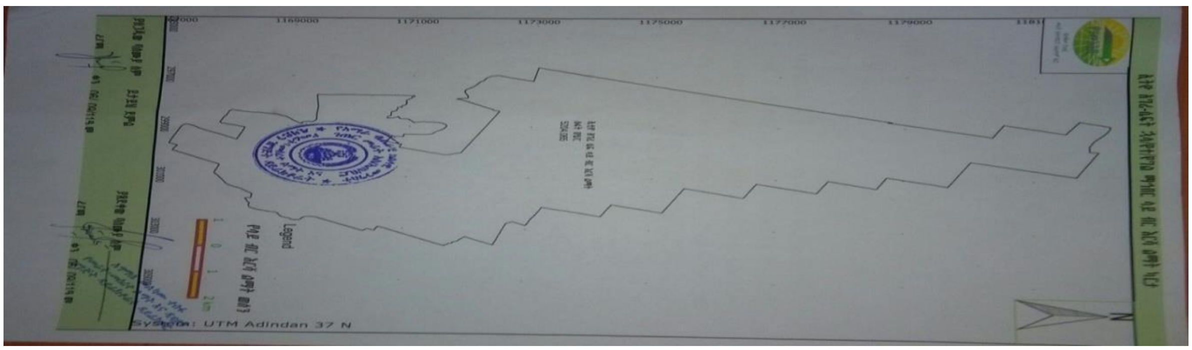
1. Description of the Study Area Setting

Ayehu farm is geographically found in the current *Ayehu Guagusa Woreda* within the Awi Administrative Zone, in Amhara region. It was the third state owned farm established next to *Birr* and *Beles* in Gojjam during the socialist regime in *Ankasha Guagusa Woreda*. But *Ankasha Guagusa* Woreda was divided into *Ayehu Guagusa* and *Ankasha Guagusa Woreda* in 2017, and following the division, *Ayehu* farm has been incorporated into *Ayehu Guagusa*. Until the commencement of *Ayehu* farm, the area was named *Embi Bita*, a combination of Embi (Amharic) and Bita (Awgni) to mean refuse and land respectively (Kassahun, 2018). Prior to the state farm, Ayehu was covered by forests and was an important ground for hunting. After the gain of political power by Derg, the area was selected for state owned farm. Cognizant of such a fact, *Ayehu* state farm commenced in 1982/83 by changing the historic name of *Emebi Bita* to *Ayehu* state farm by taking the name of River Ayehu.

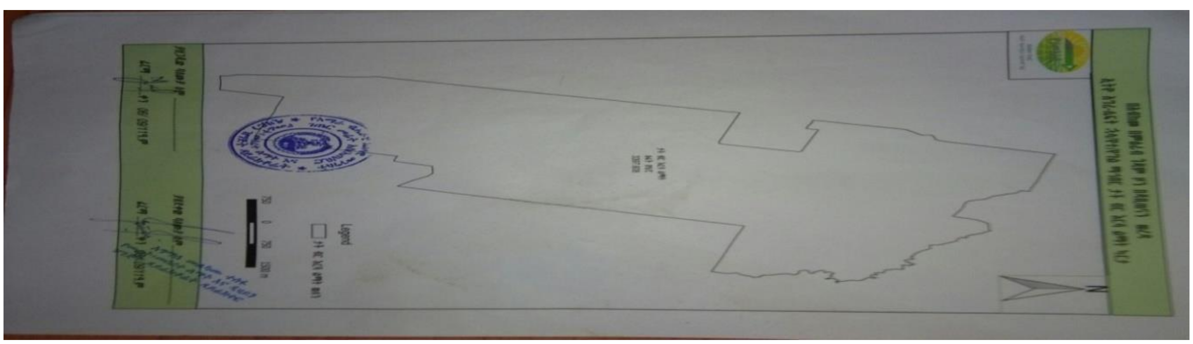


1.1. Map of Ayehu farm taken from Regional Rural Land Administration and Use Bureau

By the same token, Birr farm is located in *Jabi Tehnan* woreda within West Gojjam Administrative Zone, Amhara Regional State. The majority of the population are dependent on agriculture and their *woreda* is identified as the most productive among the *woredas* in West Gojjam Administrative Zones. It is the *Woreda* that involves agricultural investment sites that range from small to large scale commercial farms. Among the agricultural investment sites, Birr farm is the earliest farm in Gojjam. The farm has two sites; upper and lower *Birr*.



1.2. Map of upper Birr taken from Regional Rural Land Administration and Use Bureau



2.3 Map of lower Birr taken from Regional Rural Land Administration and Use Bureau

2. Research Methods

For this study, a mixed approach is appropriate to uncover the nature of land acquisition, privatization and ownership issues of Birr and Ayehu farms because the problem studied has both objective and subjective aspects of reality. Basically, the engagement of local residents and displaced peasants about land acquisition, privatization process and the issue of ownership had been examined quantitatively. Again, the views and feelings of neighboring local communities about the land acquisition, the privatization process and the factors pushed them to submit a petition against the farms were addressed qualitatively. Moreover, a total of 150 respondents were selected through simple random sampling technique for questionnaire, and 26 individuals were selected by purposive sampling technique for interview. The study employed both primary and secondary data gathered through interview, focused group discussion, questionnaire and document review from September 2018 up to May 2019. After the relevant and credible data were accessed, thematic and simple descriptive statistics were used simultaneously to present, analyze and interpret via joint display mechanisms.

4. The Nature of Land Acquisition in *Birr* and *Ayehu* Farms

Table 1: Respondents information about the commencement of Birr and Ayehu farms"

Items	Response	Frequency	Percent
When did farms' embarks on?	Derg regime	150	100
Were farms state owned durin commencement?	Yes	150	100
Had local residents consulted while farms launching"	No	150	100
Was the land taken by the consent of local residents?	No	150	100
Was the land taken by farms' unutilized?	No	150	100
Did farms annexed pasture, forest and farmland illegally previously?	Yes	150	100
Had peasants' evicted by the governmen during the launching phase?	Yes	150	100

Land acquisition for *Birr* and *Ayehu* commercial farms was conducted during the military regime. Both farms were commenced by the state to reduce poverty in 1978 and 1982 correspondingly (Kassahun, 2018). Private investors were viewed as exploiters of labor force, raw material and financial resources of the country (Tewodros, 2014; Ethiopian Investment Agency, 1992). To ensure public interest, Derg empowered the Ministry of Natural Resources Development to establish state enterprises engaged in agricultural investment under Public Enterprises Proclamation No. 20/1975 (Tewodros, 2014). By doing so, private firms were nationalized and other state owned enterprises were established with a modernization motive as a tool to promote socialism (Endawoke, 2016; Tewodros, 2014). In this respect, an interviewee revealed that:

The April 1975 nationalization of land decree transformed land ownership and contributed to the development of state farms as the basis of agrarian socialist economy. Fabulously, Derg saw state farms as fundamental instrument for further development of socialist-oriented economy in revolutionary Ethiopia. In doing so, the government nationalized the big farm enterprises and established other new farms. In this regard, Birr and Ayehu state farms were established by Derg to achieve development[ii] (KII1, 30 March 2019).

Furthermore, the commencement of *Birr* and *Ayehu* farms was an imposition from above due to the totalitarian nature of the regime[iii]. The land was annexed by the government without involving peasants in land dealings[iv]. Concomitantly, the consent of peasants was not ascertained and compensation was not paid while the farms were embarked on (see table 1). This is because the regime had no room to the people while a developmental policy was enacted and enforced[v]. Again, the people had frustrated to challenge the government because an opposition to the policies of the regime was considered as anti-revolutionary[vi]. Despite private landholding was allowed for peasants to earn a living during emperor Menelik II, Derg nationalized and confiscated land without compensation from landholders (Deneke, 2001; Fasil, 1993). Likewise, *Derg* had controlled all economic issues to end up tenancy relations, to ensure equal access to cultivated land and establishment of large scale state farms (Yihenew *et al*., 2013). Nonetheless, the agrarian policies adopted by the regime distorted land allocation, violated the rights of the people and hampered land productivity (Elias, 2012). Thus, *Birr* and Ayehu farms were embarked as per the policy priority of the military regime with the motive of modernization and eradication of poverty.

4.1. The Scale of Land Acquisition in Birr and Ayehu Farms’

The degree of land acquisition in *Birr* and *Ayehu* farms was rush since inauguration[vii]. In this respect, Birr farm was embarked on within a small plot of land albeit it was expanded unprecedentedly in due time by dislocating residents of adjacent kebeles‘‘ (see annex 2). It was the first state farm in Gojjam commenced on a land size estimated around 965 hectare in southern Jabi Tehnan Woreda (Kassahun, 2018; Beyene, 2011). However, it expanded radically through evicting peasants‘‘, clearing forests and annexing communal pasture land without paying compensation (see table 1). Nearby communities held adequate farmland for farming and other purposes before confiscation. But after rush land enclosure, flanking communities were compelled to be a member of cooperatives and peasant associations during the Derg regime. And, the farm has continued to expand automatically after privatization[viii] by annexing a land important for alternative livelihood base to nearby communities (see table1). Evident to its gigantic expansion, the farm currently holds around 11 thousand hectares (Kassahun, 2018; Beyene, 2011).

Alike Birr farm, *Ayehu* farm commenced in 1982 with 46 hectares of forest land (Kassahun, 2018). Nonetheless, the farm confiscated the locals in a gradual process before and after privatization. Unfortunately, the scale of expansion after privatization was automatic that reaches at the homestead of adjacent local communities by forcefully annexing the pasture and farmland of neighboring local communities[ix]. Evident to the unlawful expansion of the farm, the lands of many peasants were returned to landholders by court decision after 5 years appropriation. However, local residents at *Woficho Mender,* dominantly Amhara ethnic group*,* blamed that the decision of courts in *Enjibara* was ethno-centric until May 2019[x] because they were not treated fairly by respective government offices in Awi Zone. Furthermore, around 117.253 hectare of land unlawfully annexed was evicted from the investor and returned to the locals by the decision of the regional government in 2019.

Additionally*,* the hegemonic authority of the government in land ownership brought acquisition of the pasture and farmland of peasants in *Birr* and *Ayehu* farms since commencement. The expansion of farms was systematic and unlawful which was not halted by concerned governmental bodies[xi]. On the one hand, the illicit spreading of farms was not controlled as per the appeals of local residents because government bodies have frustrated the business entities[xii]. Again, the investor had established a strong intimacy with government authorities through rent seeking practices. This made the complaints of peasants to be unheard, politicized and labeled as anti-development[xiii]. By doing so, the company has made the voices of local residents unheard for the last 18 years[xiv]. This indicated that the scope of land acquisition by farms was booming before and after privatization through eviction of neighboring local communities. In relation to this, Cernea (2000) argued that people who are displaced forcefully from their livelihood base are exposed to a myriad of socio-economic risks. By and large, development induced displacement affected disproportionately the livelihoods of local residents and evictees (Colchester, 2000). Remarkably, neo-patrimonial regimes inspired leaders to create rents and discipline rent-seeking to expand income opportunities via productive investments. But after farms have become an agenda for all Amharas‟, the regional government has organized a committee that diagnoses the issues of farms since October 2018[xv]. The committee assessed and recorded the issues of farms at the farms‟ site, Ethio-Agri-CEFT main office at Addis Ababa and Ethiopian Investment Commission and submitted the findings to the regional government to pass a decision. Thus, the unlawful enclosure of land in Birr and Ayehu farms was not halted as a result of rent-seekers at different government offices.

There was no adequately recorded land size held by Birr and Ayehu farms regionally. Cognizant of the intricacy, the land size of the farms was registered differently at Woreda, Zonal and Regional levels. For instance, the land size of *Birr* farm was recorded as 8851[xvi], 8854[xvii], 8856.5[xviii], 8887[xix] and 7539[xx] hectares in different government offices. As proven by the committee organized by the regional government, the land size possessed by the company was the same as what was indicated in the sale contract in *Birr* farm. Contrastingly, the chief administrator of West Gojjam announced that the investor has appropriated over 60 hectares of land beyond what it paid as a tax for land use[xxi]. This is because the acquisition of land in Birr farm was not supervised by concerned government bodies after privatization under the mask of federal government discretion to avert public criticism[xxii]. Even worse, the investor kidnapped administrators and locals who opposed opposing the unlawful expansion and operation of the farm by security forces deliberately established by the company asking the recognition of their rights. Evidently, the former chair person of social affairs of *Jabi Tehnan Woreda* was kidnapped and imprisoned by the security forces of the company for one day[xxiii].

Similarly, the land size of Ayehu farm was registered as 6686[xxiv], 6688[xxv] without X, Y coordination (Kassahun, 2018), and 4975[xxvi] hectares in different offices. Again, the legal farmland allocated to the investor was proved to be 6506.45 hectare[xxvii]. Nonetheless, the company utilized 6,688 hectares of land illegally beyond what was indicated in the sale contract. The company has paid annual land use tax based on the land size indicated in the map prepared by the company despite it annexed huge land illicitly (Kassahun, 2018). As clearly indicated by the finding of the regional committee, the investor held 180.55 hectares of land illicitly without paying land use tax over the last 18 years. Most importantly, the illicit expansion of Birr and Ayehu farms‟ was backed by federal government by making the jurisdiction above the regional government. After Birr and Ayehu farms‟ become a hotbed contention in daily politics of the region, the regional government assigned professionals to measure the land size of both farms‟ with X, Y coordination. But the investor was making *Woreda*, Zonal and Regional administrators unauthorized over the farms for the last 18 years. Thus, the land size annexed by the company in *Birr* and *Ayehu* farms was lacking clarity and consensus among different stakeholders.

4.2. The Privatization Process and Issue of Transparency in Birr and Ayehu farms'

Table 2: Respondents‟ information about the privatization and ownership issues of farms

Items	Response	Frequency	Percent
Are the farms now privately owned?	Yes	150	100
If yes, have you informed while privatized?	Yes	27	18
	No	123	82
Have you consulted while they were privatized?	No	150	100
Was the privatization of farms' transparent?	No	150	100
Have farms' annexed land illegally after privatization?	Yes	150	100
Do you know the investor of farms' currently?	No	150	100
Are farms' transparent to nearby communities now?	No	150	100

Initially, Birr, Ayehu and Beles farms in Gojjam and Humera farm in Gonder were managed under Gojjam-Gonder State Farm Organization (GGSFO) during the Derg regime (Kassahun, 2018). Nonetheless, International Financial Institutions pressurized the EPRDF government to privatize state owned enterprises since 1991. In doing so, the incumbent government adopted privatization of public enterprises proclamation No. 146/1998 to privatize state owned enterprises (Endawoke, 2016). This has been done to change the role of the government in the economy to promote the country's economic development via encouraging the expansion of the private sector (Ismail, 2018). Ultimately, the privatization of public enterprises has been greatly acclaimed as one of free market ideas and a sort of democratic rule to ensure equitable distribution of wealth (Endawoke, 2016).

Birr and Ayehu farms stayed as state owned enterprises until 2000[xxviii] under public enterprises proclamation No. 25/1992[xxix]. Nevertheless, they were sold to Ethio-Agri-CEFT, PLC for 12,500,000$ in 2000 to finance the development activities of the government in a sale contract made with Ethiopian Privatization Agency (EPA)[xxx]. But the investor paid only 9,374,600$ to the Ethiopian Investment Commission[xxxi]. This implies that 3,125,400$ was not paid to the government despite proclamation No. 146/1998 article 9 (2) which obliged the investor to pay the value of the enterprise in the currency specified in the sale contract[xxxii]. Besides, the investors utilized the farms without having a contract either with the federal or the regional governments for the last 18 years[xxxiii]. Furthermore, the length of time, land size leased out and payment per hectare was not indicated in the sale contract[xxxiv]. Contrastingly, Kassahun (2018) maintained that the *Ayehu* farm was transferred to a private investor „Sheik Muhammad Hussien Ala-Moudi" for 99 years with 251 birr rental tribute per hectare. In contrary to this, the government of Amhara region declared that Birr and Ayehu farms were leased out to the investor without the knowledge of the region irrespective of administrative procedures[xxxv]. This clearly shows that the privatization process lacked transparency and exposed to rent-seeking activity.

Concerning the privatization process, 82 percent of respondents revealed that Birr and Ayehu farms were privatized by the government without informing nearby communities. And, the rest responded that the farms were leased out permanently by a negotiation undertaken between the government and the investor. This indicated that the process of privatization was not brought to the public for consultation. In this regard, Abbink (2011) noted that large hectares of land has been leased out in Ethiopia by the sole decision of the federal government via obliging regional governments. Similarly, the ways of land acquisition and privatization of *Birr* and *Ayehu* enterprises in post 1991 has become an incessant issue in government-society relations in Amhara region. This indicates that the land reform policies have continued to be a bone of contention among academics, policy makers and the public at large[xxxvi]. Hence, the hegemonic authority of governments in land ownership brought eviction of the pasture and farmland of peasants in both farms since inauguration.

Additionally, Ethio-Agri-CEFT, which purchased Birr and Ayehu farms, was not clear and thus created a sense of ambiguity. The committee organized by the regional government proved that

Ethio-Agri-CEFT was owned by Mohammad International Development Research Organization Companies (MIDROC) and Sheik Mohammad Hussien Ala-Amoudi. Again, MIDROC is also shared by Sheik Mohammad Hussien Ala-Amoudi and his wife. However, the vice administrator of *Jabi Tehnan Woreda* affirmed that *Birr* farm was not checked by whom it was owned and what it produced until the end of 2018 despite its presence in the *woreda*[xxxvii]. This indicates that the issue of ownership about the company, which purchased the farms, was unclear and vulnerable to fraud. With these complexities, the farms were transferred to a private investor with the rationales of ensuring free market economy and democratic rule on equitable distribution of wealth. But lack of publicity in the transferring of farms created opposition among the locals and became the subject of hot controversy[xxxviii]. The privatization of farms has practically brought rent seeking and corruption. Evident to the rent seeking act of the privatization process, Wodajo and Senbet (2017) noted that Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT) and MIDROC Ethiopia Investment Group were the only beneficiaries of the privatization program. These business groups benefited from the government and operated as a duopoly that undermines competitiveness (Wondowosen, 2009). Unlike EFFORT and MIDROC, many privatized firms were hindered by shortage of raw materials and competition from imports accompanied with political and economic shocks (Ismail, 2018). Moreover, the privatization of state owned enterprises lacked transparency and accountability (Wodajo and Senbet, 2017). Hence, the privatization of state owned enterprises was complicated, unclear and operated in a distorted market (Deneke, 2001).

Moreover, MEDIROC Ethiopia has close ties with EPRDF; consequently, it holds extensive plot of land in the country (Ismail, 2018). This connotes that *Birr* and *Ayehu* farms were transferred to Ethio-Agri-CEFT in a corrupted and distorted modality. After privatization, the investor had been preferentially treated by the government. This was verified when full payment was not addressed as indicated in the sale contract. The farms were sold to an investor having a strong connection with state authorities. This confusion of the public has created conflict and opposition several times. That was why the issue of farms became an agenda for adjacent local communities and all Amharas now days. In this regard, Endawoke (2016) noted that the ill designed modes of privatization of public enterprises bring legal and practical problems on the operations of enterprises in Ethiopia. Because most of the action plans and guidelines were held secret and implemented behind closed doors; hence, the process of privatization secured the interest of few individuals instead of the whole public (Deneke, 2001). There was no adequate and transparent information about the scope of land deals in Birr and Ayehu farms. As a reaction, peasants and youths submitted petition that recalls legality of farms and suspension of transporting farm products until transparency was ensured. Thus, the secrecy of the privatization process in Birr and Ayehu farms has engendered opposition to transport agricultural yields.

Generally, Ethio-Agri-CEFT has engaged in Agro-manufacturing industry, Livestock (milk, egg) and coffee production in Amhara region based on the license given by Ethiopian Investment Commission[xxxix]. However, the license given to the company does not clearly indicate the aforementioned businesses areas. The company has no investment license on farms alone albeit license was given in agriculture, forest and fish production. And, the company had no project planning document for farms in the main office notwithstanding its prior profitability assessment during the transition time. But the company agreed to be governed based on federal and regional laws and regulations concerning land use, lease and other payments[xl]. Unfortunately, the committee proved that the company violated the agreement made with the Ethiopian Privatization Agency. Unequivocally, Ethio-Agri-CEFT has imported various equipments exempted from tax without having any contract in land use[xli]. In this regard, patrimonial regimes are very strong in establishing a system that centralizes the management of economic rents for a long time via patron-client relations (Kelsall, 2011). Coupled with this, the major investors in post 1991 are party affiliated companies and individuals (Abbink, 2011). By doing so, neo-patrimonial regimes use rent centralization as an opportunity to increase party members to further ensure political stability (Kelsall, 2011). Thus, the overall privatization process of Birr and Ayehu farms was held secret due to the investor"s affiliation with the ruling regime.

4.3. The Dilemma of Ownership in Birr and Ayehu Farms after Privatization

The issue of ownership of Birr and Ayehu farms has been remained a contending issue among the public in the politics of Amhara region[xlii]. Some argued that the farms are owned by Generals of Tigray People Liberation Front, „*Bereket Simon"* or *Azeb Mesfin* and others believe the farms are owned by Sheik Mohammad Hussien Ala-ALmoudi[xliii]. The regional government too announced that the owner of *Birr* and *Ayehu* farms is unknown regionally[xliv]. Again, the deficiency of clear information about farms regionally makes the issue knotty and an agenda for all Amhara people in social media, government meetings and conferences these days. At regional level, the farms were not supervised after privatization because the discretion was allocated to the federal government. Owing to the complication of the privatization process, the majority of people argued that the farms were utilized by government officials under the banner of Sheik Mohammad Hussien Ala-Amoudi. This was highly exacerbated after the regional government failed to grant convincing justification about farms for the persistent claims of the public.

Moreover, the confusion of the public, *Woreda*, Zonal and Regional governments about the issue of ownership has created grievance, resentment and violent opposition within employees and among nearby communities in both farms[xlv]. In this regard, the acquisition of land without the consent of landholders, and investments lacking clarity and sense of responsibility exacerbates potential local resistance and political opposition (Smalley, 2014; Schoneveld, 2011). Thus, *Birr* and *Ayehu* farms have faced opposition from the locals and all Amharas at large. Coupled with this, Abbink (2011) explained that land is the traditional patrimony of the people and ethnic groups who have lived for a century in much of Africa including Ethiopia. State elites capture development projects that best suit their interest through the justification of public use (Arnal *et al*., 2013). Moreover, a study conducted by Africa Power Politics Program (APPP) witnessed that Ethiopia is identified as a developmental patrimonial regime, where resources are allocated to clients of the regime now days (Kelsall, 2011).

Conclusion

The agrarian reform of the military regime allowed the confiscation of land to establish state farms. The launch of state farms was labeled as innovative and a magic bullet to mudslide poverty. Hence, *Birr* and *Ayehu* state farms were inaugurated in the current *Jabi Tehnan* and *Ayehu Guagusa Woredas* in 1978 and 1982 respectively by implantation of state ideology and anti-market fundamentalism at the cost of private farms. The farms started operation within a limited plot of land. However, they spread radically by holding pasture, forest and farmland areas of nearby communities. The inauguration of farms was unilaterally decided by the government without involving the locals in land dealings and ascertaining public consent. Accordingly, many peasants were displaced vigorously without compensation. Initially, the commencement of *Ayehu* farm was motivated by the then state elites to administer the area safely because the area was the center of looting and plundering for bandits and government oppositions. Meanwhile, the peasants considered these state farms as oppressive as feudalism and the revived form of tenant-lord oppression. Thus, the peasants continued to be adversarial and hostile against farms as a result of rush land acquisition and exploitation of peasants.

Additionally, Birr and Ayehu farms were sold to Ethio-Agri-CEFT in 2000 via unclear sale contract under the authority of the Ethiopian Privatization Agency. The privatization aimed to generate revenue for development activities undertaken by the government even though the process was secret and exposed to rent seeking acts by the regime. The privatization process neither indicated the length of time and land size leased out nor amount tribute paid per hectare. Shamefully, Ethio-Agri-CEFT extracted public assets over the last 18 years without having contract either with the federal or regional governments by unlawfully annexing the pasture, forest and farmland of nearby communities. Moreover, the repressive and oppressive operation of farms was unhalted by government bodies. Nonetheless after the farms became the hottest issue, the regional government noticed that the privatization process had distorted administrative procedures and perpetrated secretly without its knowledge. This is highly linked with the ideals of neo-patrimonial regimes through which public resources are allocated to party affiliated investors. Despite land acquisition has been rationalized for national development, the land enclosure and privatization of *Birr* and *Ayehu* farms remained oppressive to bordering local communities. Hence, the nature of land enclosures and privatization of farms was best explained through the lens of State Dispossession theory. To sum up, the issue of ownership and governance of Birr and Ayehu farms has resonated and continued to be a recurring contention among the public in Ethiopian Politics.

Recommendation

In Ethiopia, large scale agricultural investment was labeled as a midwife to speed up economic development and to ensure national food security during the Derg and the EPRDF regimes. However, the success of state owned farms was discouraging and spoiled by successive government intervention and centralization policy at military regime. Similarly, the incumbent government strongly acknowledged the role of large scale agricultural investment to generate hard currency and employment opportunities. Thus, based on the major findings of this empirical investigation, the following recommendations have been suggested.

Initially, government offices concerned with land administration should follow up the legality and adherence of laws and proclamations by the company. Secondly, the privatization process of farms and its legality should be clarified to the public to alleviate public confusions about ownership issues of farms. Thirdly, the *Woreda*, Zonal and Regional government offices should frequently follow up and supervise the land size held by Ethio-Agri-CEFT with concrete evidences having X:Y coordination. Fourthly, the land annexed by Ethio-Agri CEFT unlawfully shall be returned to the original possessors through the intervention of the government and appropriate measures should be taken against the company. Finally, the regional government should make a prior investigation about the political, economic, social, cultural and environmental inconveniencies of large scale farms before projects are commenced.

Additionally, the company should abandon itself from unlawful engagement of land acquisition by depriving the land rights of adjacent local communities. The actions and activities of farms shall be open to the public and recognize the overall wellbeing of employees and nearby villages. Besides, the company should hold wider public consultation with employees, government bodies and nearby local communities to clarify public confusions about ownership and governance issues of Farms. By and large, the company should be governed under the proclamations, policies and rules of the Amhara National Regional State so as to ensure its legality.

Furthermore, local communities should ascertain their rights and wellbeing through peaceful mechanisms rather than opt for violent means. In addition, local communities shall frequently expose the wrong deeds of farms without fear in government meetings, to concerned human right activists and higher level managers of Ethio-Agri-CEFT genuinely. The locals should abstain from illegal destruction, violence and robbing of the farms‟ agricultural production. Moreover, local communities shall be strong enough to influence government bodies and the company to ascertain their landholding rights and stop unlawful land evictions. Finally, the locals‟ shall bring cases which require court decision to either at regional or federal level to ensure land and human rights.

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[i] *Amhara Mass Media Agency, 23 August 23, 2018 "on the influence of Birr farm on employees"*

[ii] An *interviewee working at Debre Markos University department of history and heritage management*

[iii] *An interviewee working at Bahir Dar University in Department of Political Science and International relations*

[iv] *A government official interviewee working in Amhara National Regional State Investment Commission*

[v] *Key informant interviewee working at Debre Markos University in Department of Agricultural Economics*

[vi] *Key informant interviewee working at Bahir Dar University in Department of Economics*

[vii] *Government official interviewee working at Amhara national regional State Investment Commission*

[viii] Local resident interviewee living in Jabi Tehnan Woreda, Fenket, Mankussa Abdegoma kebele

[ix] *Local resident interviewee living in Ayehu Guagusa Woreda, Woficho Mender village; government official interviewee working in Awi Administrative Zone Land Administration and Use office, see also appendix 3*

[x] *Local resident interviewee living in Ayehu Guagusa Woreda, Woficho Mender village*

[xi] *Bekur news paper, 25th year No. 16, March 30*

[xii]*Government official interviewee working in Amhara National Regional State Investment Commission*
[xiii]*Government official interviewee working as vice administrator of Jabi Tehnan Woreda*
[xiv]*Government official interviewee working at Amhara Region Rural Land Administration and Use Bureau*
[xv]*Government official interviewee working at Amhara National Regional State Investment Commission*
[xvi]*Government official interviewee working at West Gojjam Zone Land Administration and Use Officie*
[xvii]*Government official interviewee working at Amhara National Regional State Investment Commission*
[xviii]*A land size identified by the committee organized by the regional government as registered at the main office of the company without X, Y coordination*
[xix]*Bekur news paper, 25th year No. 16, March 30/2019*
[xx]*A land size registered in the web site of Ethio-Agri-CEFT in both upper and lower Birr sites (https://www.ethioagriceft.com)*
[xxi] *Bekur news paper*, 25th year No. 16, March 30
[xxii] *Government official interviewee working as vice administrator of Jabi Tehnan Woreda*
[xxiii]*Government official interviewee working as vice administrator of Jabi Tehnan Woreda*
[xxiv]*Government interviewee working at Awi Administrative zone land Administration and Use Office*
[xxv]*the committee organized by the regional government found the land size registered 6688 hectares without X, Y coordination*
[xxvi]*A Land size registered in the web site of Ethio-Agri-CEFT (https://www.ethioagriceft.com).*
[xxvii] *The committee organized by the regional government proved that land size after assessment*
[xxviii]*Government official interviewee working at Amhara Rual Land Administration and Use Bureau*
[xxix]*Local resident interviewee living at Ayehu Guagusa Woreda, Woficho Mender, near to Ayehu farm*
[xxx]*A government official interviewee working in Amhara National Regional State Investment Commission*
[xxxi]*The information was obtained from the study made by the committee organized by the regional government*
[xxxii]*The information was obtained from the study made by the committee organized by the regional government; The information was obtained from the study made by the committee organized by the regional government*
[xxxiii]*Government official interviewees working at Amhara National Regional State Investment Commission*
[xxxiv]*Government official interviewees working at Amhara National Regional State Investment Commission; Amhara National Regional State Rural Land Administration and Use Bureau*
[xxxv]*Bekur news paper, 25th year number 16, 30 March 2019*; *government official interviewee working at Amhara National Regional State Investment Commission*

[xxxvi] *An interviewee working at Debre Markos University in department of history and heritage management*
[xxxvii] *Bekur news paper, 25th year number 16, 30 March 2019*.
[xxxviii] *Bekur news paper, 25th year No. 16, March 30.*
[xxxix] *Government official interviewee working at Amhara National Regional State Investment Commission*
[xl] *Government official interviewee working at Amhara National Regional State Investment Commission*
[xli] *The information was obtained from the study made by the committee organized by the regional government; see also annex 8*
[xlii] *Government official interviewee working at Amhara regional Rural Land Administration and Use Bureau*
[xliii] *Government official interviewees working at West Gojjam and Awi administrative zone Land Administration and Use office*
[xliv] *Bekur news paper, 25th year No. 16, March 30*
[xlv] *Bekur news paper, 25th year No. 16, March 30; government official interviewee working as vice administrator of Jabi Tehnan Woreda*