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FORMATION AND AMALGAMATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE HUBS IN THE METEKEL AREA (1941-74)

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The study focuses on the formation and amalgamation of administrative hubs in the Metekel area (1941-74). Metekel is renowned in administrative reforms. The administrative restructurings of Metekel areas placed with in Agewmider Awraja, then progressed into Metekel Awraja in the Gojjam administrative region until the decline of Derg. Since 1991, it existed under the region six or Benishangul Gumuz Regional state with consist of woredas such as Dibate Mandura, Dangur, Bullan, Guba, Wambara and with Pawie Special Woreda under zonal capital, Gelgel Beles. This administrative reorganization caused conflict between Gumuz and neighboring non-Gumuz communities in the 1950s and 1960s. The conflict triggered by the tax collection system that finally marks the Gumuz revolt under leadership of individual, Lambecha and his supporters. The revolt crushed by joint forces of government, Agewmider and Metekel Awrajas and it opened unending settlement of the non-Gumuz communities from Wollo, South Gondar and Gojjam. The continuous settlement of non-Gumuz communities in Metekel areas bring about enmity with Gumuz communities. However, their hostility could be solved by a bond of relationship was wadja.

Keywords: Metekel, Administrative, Conflict, Spontaneous

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1. Administrative Reconstruction of the Metekel Area

Metekel, the study area is located in Northwest Ethiopia along the Ethio-Sudanese border. Geographically, it is bounded by North Gondar zone in the north, the East Wollega and Assosa in South, Agaw- Meder and Bahir Dar in the East and North east, Sudan and the newly independent South Sudan in the West (Bogale, 2013:1). It was one of the peripheral regions started to rebuild by Emperor Haile Sellassie after his arrival of Addis Ababa in May 1941. The formerly loosely controlled and periodically raided region became the object of administrative reforms. The first was made in 1947. This placed much of Metekel with in Agawmider *Awraja*. A year later, a general administrative restructuring took place in the whole of Gojjam. Accordingly, Metekel was move up to *Awraja* status. In this organization, the districts of Guba and Dangur were put within Metekel. Chagni was made the administrative center (Berihun, 2004:266).

The area formed in the past, one of the provinces (*Awrajas*) of Gojjam administrative region comprising the districts of Guangau-Mandura, Dangur, Guba, Dibate and Wombera extending up to the borderlands of Sudan (Bezazew, 1991:1). After demise of the Derg in 1991, the administrative unit of the former Metekel *Awraja* was restructured and the boundary of district reshaped with Agewmider. The new political arrangement makes the shift in the former administrative unit of the Metekel *Awraja*. Accordingly, Mandura, Debati, Guba, Dangur and Wombara that had been formerly parts of Metekel *Awraja* under Gojjam province were detached and placed under the newly established Benishangul Gumuz Regional state or region six. Those woredas predominately inhabited by the Gumuz people formed the Metekel Zone with its capital at Pawi but later in 2000 the seats of the zonal capital shifted Gelgel Beles (Dessalegn, 2010:39). Now, it contains six Woredas such as Dibate Mandura, Dangur, Bullan, Guba, Wambara and with Pawie Special

Woreda (*Ibid*: 37; Melkamu, 2004:62). This administrative reorganization was introduced by the government not only to introduce modernizing projects to the periphery but also to control the dominant conflicts between the Gumuz and the neighboring non-Gumuz communities in Metekel area (Berihun, 2004:266).

The total surface area of Metekel is estimated to be 29,457km² (2,945,700ha). The altitude range varies from below 600m to 2,731 meters above sea level with a dominant area of low lands. It is characterized by hot lowland areas covered with undulating plains and thick tropical forest with heavy rainfall. The average annual temperature ranges from 17-29°C and the average annual rainfall varies from 700 to 1000mm, 85% of which falls during the rainy season from mid-May to mid-September (*Ibid*, 1996:2). Climatically, has three zones namely *Qolla* (54%), *Woina dega* (43%) and *Dega* (3%) (Abdussamad H., 1988:237).

2. Methodology

This article has developed based on both oral and written sources. The oral sources were collected from Awi, Amhara and Gumuz informants who are living either together with the Gumuz or neighboring them. The informants who directly involved and have evidences about the history of Gumuz revolts in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s were interviewed in depth. The researcher has also exerted the archival sources from the Dabre Markos University Archival Center that give brief information about the study area. Written sources are collected from periodicals, document analysis, Thesis dissertations and internet sources. The collected data would be carefully examined, cross-checked, interpreted and analyzed, to give meaningful justifications for the study.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Conflict between Gumuz and the Neighboring non-Gumuz Communities

The conflict broke out between Gumuz and the neighboring non-Gumuz communities partly

related to the abolished practices of slave trade and raids. Legacies of the practices such as mutual distrust and hostile relationships initiated their conflicts (*Ibid*: 267). The gap between the Gumuz and the non-Gumuz communities continued to wide for three reasons. The first was the continuation after 1941 of kidnapping Gumuz people to sell them off as slaves. Slave kidnapping continued until the 1960s. Secondly, the possession of modern fire arms by the Gumuz aggravated the hostile relationship. This became a widespread phenomenon after Italian occupation and it had two effects. Then again, it created a relative power balance between the Gumuz and their highland neighbors. This in turn contributed to the spread of violence where individual feuds grew to large scale conflicts between Gumuz and the highland neighbors (*Ibid*: 273).

Thirdly, the reinstitutions after 1941, the local chiefs to their former position contributed to the deterioration of the relationships. Reinstitutions were evident in various districts. In Wombara, *Fitawarai* Ejeta Biftu, son of Biftu Anno, was given the former position of his father and ruled Wombara until his death in 1948(Debella,2000:26). Zeleke Biru also regained his former position in Gwangwa. In Guba, *Dejasmach* Mohammed succeeded his father as its governor. Again, Mohmmmed was succeeded by his brother Algimir as a governor of the district. In Mandura, the son of Zeleke Liqu, Iyasu Zeleke assumed power. These appointees had a common stand regarding their relation to the Gumuz, that is, the need to sustain the old order and to continue the old "Patron client" relationship. They were given responsibility to collect taxes and maintain peace and security in their respective districts in the post liberation period. The Gumuz, who demanded the discontinuation of such relation, expressed their hatred either by open revolt or hidden opposition through the interruption of tribute payment (Informants: Dimini, Kidanie).

3. 1.1. The Major Case of the Conflict

The major case of conflict between the Gumuz and the highland neighbors in the 1940's was the protest and refusal of Gumuz to pay tax. The Gumuz way of economic activity, shifting cultivation exposed them for illegal tax collection. After certain plot of land lost its fertility, the Gumuz cultivators moved to uninhabited areas in search of fertile soil. In the new areas that they settled, the Awi tax collectors considered as they came to here without paying tax. The Awi tax collectors forced them to pay additional tax. This brought the first conflict broke out between the Gumuz and their Agew masters in the 1944 (Berihun, 1996:7; Alemayehu, 2012:74). The Awi- Gumuz conflict was caused in the post liberation due to three main reasons. The first reason that resulted bloodshed between two people was the secrete continuation of the slavery and slave raids in Gumuz society. After 1941, the secrete enslavement of the Gumuz for home servants, agricultural labor works and further sale practiced by Awi in the 1950s and 1960s. The Gumuz refused this evil practices and provided the counter resistance. Secondly, the circulation of the firearms encouraged the Gumuz to kill Awi who had been their masters in the historical experiences. The expansion of the firearms exchange in the post liberation was the direct result of the Italian occupation of the Guba and neighboring Agew-mider. The distribution of firearms in the Gumuz inhabited areas of Mandura, Debati and Dangur accelerated the ethnic disturbance in Metekel between Gumuz in one and Awi, Oromo and Shinasha on the other hand. This circulation of firearms helped the Gumuz clans to defend the civil practices of the slave raids. The segregation of Gumuz from the political participation was the third and the most prevalent problem contributed the Awi-Gumuz conflicts in the post liberation period. Following the post liberation, Awi were assumed to rule Gumuz, who had no political participation (Alemayehu, 2012:68).

Four years later in 1948, the Gumuz expressed their protest by attacking an Agew chief, Embile.

This attack threatened the trade activity of the region. The trade routes that run from Bure to Guba and from Wombara to Zegie could not provide their normal function because of insecurity. The two routes met at Chagni, a place that had strategic significance for government tax collectors (Berihun, 1996:77). This uprising of the Gumuz to be caused by external instigation, it tends to be superficial, not fundamental cause. It was instigated by Embial's rival, Admasu in the competition for supremacy (Nebyou, 2004:110-111). In fact, the action taken by the Gumuz was so that it was able to get the attention of the government. The uprising was suppressed with the intervention of a government force. Consequently, the administrative status of Metekel was elevated to the *Awraja* level so as to control the situation more closely. This measure by the government and the new establishment forced the Gumuz to retreat into remote areas abandoning their villages. As a result, they lost a considerable part of their land (Berihun, 1996:72). But, the uprising of the Gumuz did not stop by the developments of 1948. It continued into 1950s and 1960s (Tsega, 2002:19).

3.1.2. The Uprising of Gumuz in the 1950s and 1960s

In the 1950 and 1960s, the Gumuz attacks on the neighboring communities and merchants took a more furious character. They blocked the route from Chagni to Bullan and from Bullan to Barbar up to Wombara. They chased state tribute collectors, hunters, group or individual merchants and burnt non-Gumuz villages. People were forced to divert to another route to Gojjam. Tribute collection not only from Gumuz but also from other communities became practically impossible. Complete turmoil and chaos reigned on the Dura river valley (*Ibid*). Disruption of free traffic resulted in the decline of commercial activities. The revolt of the Gumuz took not only in their own village but also attacked the town of Chagni at night time. The cause for the uprising of Gumuz in the 1950s and 1960s in Mandura and Dibatie districts was

the tax collection system (Bazezew, 1991:38). Gebre (2001:61) revealed that the 1960s Gumuz uprising was a protest against the encroachment of highlanders into their territory and subsequent settlement. He describes it as Gumuz resistance against the resettlement of highlanders in Metekel. Their ideas shared by Berihun(2004:268) as the exploitative and abusive nature of the system as well as the ever growing incursion of outsiders into the Gumuz territory caused conflict. He adds that individuals appointed by the Government were corrupt and squeezed the Gumuz excessively for their own personal benefits.

A Gumuz of Metekel were socially despised, discriminated and enslaved. They were marginalized in all level of Development. The legal abolition of slavery and the slave trade and other related improvements were good opportunities to Gumuz to demand more freedom and the interruption of their subordinate relation to their neighbors and the local chiefs (Tsega, 2000:19). As also mentioned earlier, the titles given by Emperor Haile Sellassie to different individuals in the various districts of Metekel could not bear economic benefits as before. Consequently, they resorted to apply various abusive mechanisms to generate income from their Gumuz subjects. Demanding taxes for more than once a year and forcing them to pay the demanded amount were among the mechanisms. Intensification of cheating was the other on the government side (Bazezew, 1991:48). The unbearable burden of fulfilling the demands of the local chiefs and their representatives; added with the expansion of the highlanders settlement at the expanse of their dislocation were considered as the immediate cause for the outbreak of individual revolt was Lambicha revolt from 1960-61(Jira,2008:40; Wondim,2018:43).

3.1. 3.The Lambicha Revolt (1960-61)

The continuous government chief's exploitation and suppression resulted the beginning of Gumuz revolt since 1960. Although the revolt seems individual conflicts, it grew progressively

and spread towards different Gumuz villages such as Dibaṭe, Mantawuha, Mandura and other neighboring Gumuz inhabited areas of Metekel. This Gumuz resistance above all was led by the Gumuz bandit called LambichaWubani and the revolt was also known as Lambicha revolt. The revolt was lasted in 1963. The center of the resistance was around the hills and plains of Mantawuha, where Lambicha himself was ambushed. He was the bandit who called himself with the title *colonel*, as if he were well equipped, militarily experienced, technically rich and excellent in leadership quality in both coordination and re-organization comparing with those local appointed government officials(Wondim,2018,43; Informants: Zawdu, Yeswas, Shituneh). He organized the rebels from Mandura, Zigam, Dangur, Debatie and Guba for against the rebel fronts of Awi (*Ibid*).

The revolt was intensified as far as Wambara, Dibaṭe and Mandura immediately soon after Mantawuha, where both Ambage and Sese, the two Gumuz rebellion leaders, led the revolt equally with Lambicha, in Wanbara and Mandura respectively. Ambage was said to have been organized the resistance as far as Bobohi, the Gumuz village in Dibaṭe where he firmly re-challenged the revolt against the local chiefs advanced from the center. Sese urged Lambecha to continue the rebellions actions and instigated the Gumuz of Mandura (Wondim, 2018: 43; Alemayehu, 2012:78; Jira, 2008:40; Informants: Zawdu, Yeswas, Shituneh). During the major uprisings, the Gumuz rebels cut the penis, right arm and female breast from the dead. The rebel leader politicized the Gumuz community not to pay any tribute to the Awi tax collectors. They destroyed government institutions and offices in the Mandura, Debatie, Dangur, Guba, Dak and Zigam. They also set fire on the residential Awi houses and the harvested crops, killed Awi cattle keepers and slaughtered the innocent peoples on the market days. In fact, killing and mutilating of the females is unacceptable in the cultural history of the Gumuz society. After having looked the event,

the Wollo Muslims in Manatwuha, tried to leave the area to their previous homeland. Similarly, Sese was organized and led the revolt around different Gumuz villages in Mandura district side by side with Lambecha, where they looted the properties of non-Gumuz society by devastating their villages (Alemayehu, 2012:79; Wondim, 2018:43). For instance, Lambicha and his forces were said to have been plundered many cows from Mandura, Dibaṭe, Mantawuha and other villages of the highlanders and distributed to their home people.

Following this incident, the Agew-mider and Metekel *Awraja* high-ranking officials agreed to peacefully manage the conflicts. However, the Gumuz elders rejected the peace proposal and assassinated the Agew tax collector named Agajie in the 1960. The death of Agajie was immediate reason for the involvement of government force to take harsh military measures (*Ibid*). The combined forces of the government, Agew-Mider and Metekel *Awraja* were taking the operations against the Gumuz rebels. They plundered the Gumuz villages in Mandura, Debatie, Dangur, Guba, Zigam and set fire on the Gumuz properties. They disarmed the rebels and confiscated their cattle and goats. Finally, the leader of rebel, Lambacha Wubani was captured and has been taken into Debra Markos and then to Addis Ababa by plane whereas Sese was captured and taken to Chagni town where he was shot down. In addition, large number of the Gumuz rebels exiled into Sudan and inaccessible areas of the Blue Nile. After the suppression of Gumuz revolt led by Lambacha was followed the establishment of police stations at Mandura, Debatie and Mentawha and later upgraded in to woreda level. This was made with an intention to maintain law and order by closely controlling the activities of the Gumuz. The crush of revolt also opened new opportunities for the settlement of people from Wollo, South Gondar and Gojjam in the Metekel area (Jira, 2008:41-43; Alemayehu, 2012:80; Wondim, 2018:43).

4. Spontaneous Settlement of the Non-Gumuz Communities

The action taken against the Gumuz revolt in the 1960s opened the way for the settlement of people from Wollo, South Gondar and Gojjam. Majority of them were Muslims. Shortage of land, drought or landlessness due to the land tenure system of the time and inability of the Muslims to own *rist* and were among the factors that forced them to leave their original areas. Additional case was expected to better life in the new areas. Following the 1960 suppression of Gumuz revolt, they moved into Metekel areas and took opportunity to settle in Mentawuha. Initially, the settlers maintained amicable relations with the indigenous, Gumuz (Jira, 2008:43).

But, the relations of the Gumuz and spontaneous settlers are mostly characterized by hostility through passage of time. Ceaseless

advancement of settlers to the land and resources of Gumuz communities caused enmity between them. Settler's ceaseless immigration into the areas of Metekel pushed the Gumuz away from their land resources. Their relation worsened due to the practical use of local stereotypes over the Gumuz Communities and random cutting of tree resources for faming system (Wolde Sellassie, 2002:248). በነገደ ወሎዎችና በነገደ ሻንቅሎች መካከል ይደረግ የነበረው ግጭት ለጊዜው ተግባር ስለሆነ ምንም ሆኖም ለፌዴራል መንግሥት የሚቻለው የሁለቱም ወገን የጦር መሳሪያ ሲሰበሰብ ስለሆነ ደጋግሞ እንደአመለካከት በዚህ መልክ መፈፀሙ ይጠቅማል፡፡(DMUAC, Folder No. 278, File No. 51, 1962 E.C; DMUAC, Folder No.278, File No. 51, 1963 E.C.). Clashes between Wollo tribe and *Shanqella* tribe are temporarily minimized in some extent. However, to achieve permanent security the confiscation of rifles from both sides would be essential.

No	Name of Informants	Age	Sex	Place of Interview	Date of Interview	Remarks
1	Abetaw Tarkaw (Ato)	82	M	Pawie (village 24)	13/07/2005 E.C.	An Amhara settler who comes from Motta area that gives constructive idea about the spontaneous settlement, its impact and relations between Gumuz and settlers.
2	Deressa Tameche w (Ato)	77	M	Pawie (village 49)	14/07/2005 E.C.	He is Wollo settler who has detailed knowledge about the spontaneous settlement, its impact and the relation between Gumuz and settlers
3	Dimini Manjja (Ato)	82	M	Mandura	03/07/2005 E.C.	A Gumuz informant with good knowledge on the relations of Agaw with Gumuz. He has also detailed information on the conflict, Gumuz revolt and the impacts of 1950s and 1960s conflict on the settlers and Gumuz communities in the Metekel area.
4	Getu Denkaw (Ato)	87	M	Pawie (village 24)	13/07/2005 E.C.	A settler who came from Motta area with detailed knowledge on the relations between Gumuz communities with settlers through <i>Wadaj</i> .
5	Kidanie Bedeme (Ato)	77	M	Mandura	20/05/2005 E.C	He is farmer Gumuz elder who openly showed the causes for hostility of Gumuz towards Amhara and Agew, the relations of Gumuz with settlers. He has also detailed facts on the causes of conflict and

						conflict resolving of Gumuz communities with non-Gumuz communities in the Metekel area.
6	Shituneh Agalu (Ato)	78	M	Gumedia	21/05/2005 E.C.	He is Agew elder who has showed the cause of Gumuz uprising in the 1950s and 1960s and who knew about the Lambecha revolt and results of revolt.
7	Yeshiwas Mamo (Ato)	72	M	Mandura	20/05/2005 E.C.	He is farmer Agaw elder who very informative on the roles of <i>Wadaj</i> between Gumuz with Agaw and Amhara communities and who give factual evidences about the Lambecha revolt.
8	Zewdu Chekol (Ato)	79	M	Mandura	20/5/2005 E.C.	An Agaw informant with good understanding on the <i>Wadaj</i> institution and who explain briefly on the conflicts of Gumuz with settlers in the 1950s and 1960s.

This brought regular ethnic conflict and inimical relationship. The inter-ethnic relations between the Gumuz and the settler neighbors were mainly inclined into ethnic tensions and hostilities. However, their conflict was resolved by the involvement of elders selected from both Gumuz and spontaneous settlers (Informants: Getu, Abetaw, Derassa).

5. Relations with Spontaneous Settler Communities

The conflict resolution process was realized through the active involvement of elders (*Simāgléwoch* in Amharic) and *Obitsebīga* in Gumuz) in both parties. The conflict was resolved through traditional peace-making ritual between Gumuz and settler neighbor. As part of the ceremonial ritual, oxen were slaughtered with blessing of elders (Berihun, 1996: 127; Informants: Getu, Abetaw, Darassa). This was signified the beginning of relation between Gumuz and settlers. The settlers were formed a bond of friendship relation with the Gumuz through *Wadaj*, literary friendship in Amharic (Bogale, 2013:52). Settlers' motive in forming such relation with Gumuz was to get farming land either freely or with a minimum rent. They faced scarcity of land. Conversely, the Gumuz had abundance of virgin land. The settlers could obtain plots of land through the formation of bond relation with Gumuz. In addition, it was a common practice for settlers to send their cattle,

sheep and goats to their respective Gumuz (*Wadaj*) for better grazing. The Gumuz took full responsibility to treat the settler (*Wadaj*) by the provision of food and shelter. In return, settlers were accepted warmly by the Gumuz as a peculiar messenger through provision of food and the most preferable drink for Gumuz called *arekie* in Amharic. The Gumuz in rare case send their children to their settler (*Wadaj*) to attend modern education (Informants: Yeshiwas, Zewdu).

6. Conclusion

Metekel was peripheral region made administrative reconstruction since 1947. Primarily, it placed under Agew midir *Awraja*. Accordingly, the administrative rearrangement of Metekel upgraded into *Awraja* position under the Gojjam administrative region. After 1991, Metekel to be found in the newly established region six or Benishangul Gumuz Regional state with include of woredas such as Dibate Mandura, Dangur, Bullan, Guba, Wambara and with Pawie Special Woreda under zonal capital Gelgel Beles. This administrative reorganization initiated to the conflict between the Gumuz and the neighboring non-Gumuz communities. The cause of conflict between the Gumuz and the highland neighbors in the 1950s and 1960s was tax collection system. Their conflict result the Gumuz revolt led by individual, Lembacha from 1960-61. This revolt was crushed and opened

the way for spontaneous settlement from Wollo, South Gondar and Gojjam. Settler's ceaseless encroachment into the areas of Metekel caused enmity with the Gumuz communities. But, their hostility resolved by a bond of friendship relation with the Gumuz through *Wadaj*, literary friendship in Amharic.

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