

Dynamics of Inter-Ethnic Relations, Peaceful Co-Existence, Conflicts, and Peace Building Mechanisms Between the Gumuz and Non-Gumuz Communities (1961-1974)

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Abstract

Scholars believe that there is difficulty of getting a clear definition for ethnicity due to the haziness of the objective and subjective criteria involved in the determination of members of the group. Usually, ethnicity shows grouping based on primordial ties like origin, language, culture, history, territory etc which are based on objectively determined factors. A person who does not fulfill these factors but who based on his subjective interests demands to be identified with a particular ethnic group may face problems if the group does not accept him. And inability to get a clear definition of ethnicity has even led to a tendency of avoidance approach to the search for definition (Hizkias, 2001: 110). The Gumuz of Matakal is renowned for their traditional conflict management institutions that play important role in harmonizing their relations with the neighboring "ethnic" group such as the Amhara, Agew and Oromo. However, ironically, spirals of conflicts that have continued to rent the region's peace and stability in general and Mandura and Dibaṭe Waradas of Matakal Zone in particular. These conflicts differ in their causes, nature, intensity, frequency; yet the peculiarities are often glossed over and depicted as typical inter ethnic conflicts between the highlanders or "settlers" on one side and the "indigenous" people on the other.

Keywords: Biography, Banditry life, Patriotic feeling, Resistance

1. Introduction

1.1. Inter- Ethnic Relations

Inter-ethnic interaction is a crucial event in the case of forming the mother state, like Ethiopia. Therefore, in countries like Ethiopia, the multi diverse ethnic groups formed many interacted groups through the gradual process of interaction before they began to inhabit in one particular area.¹ Thus, the presence of diverse ethnic groups in Mātākāl later resulted in either the individual or group based conflicts in the region. This small level conflict gradually grew and became beyond the control of the state. The hostile and friendly relations between the Gumuz and their neighboring ethnic groups, for instance, Awi, Shinasha, Oromo, Amhara and other spontaneous settlers of the later times put the region as the land of tension.²

What spoiled the inter-ethnic relations between the Gumuz and their neighboring highlanders was the biased political legacy of the local chiefs and bad perceptions left behind by the state governors and their representatives.³ As cited in Wolde-Sellassie (2004:244), the ethnic divisions and their hostilities between the local and the highlanders have left very wide depending on the long lasting "political power relationships that left the Gumuz at an inferior, stigmatized and marginal position."⁴

Beginning from the past, the relationships between the highlanders, particularly the Awi and the Gumuz were and still are characterized by being both hostile and friendly. Throughout their long lasting contact, the Awi exerted pressure on the Gumuz and established hostile and friendly relationships with the latter in their local villages. For instance, Awi and the Gumuz can share the common territory and cross border contacts based on their settlement but are different in every aspects of social, cultural, racial, religion and linguistic back grounds.⁵ Abdussamad illustrates the nature of Gumuz relationships with their neighbors in the following way:

---they have a long history of troubled relations with their dominant ethnic neighbors in Ethiopia and Sudan. They suffered both military conquest and slave raiding. Likewise, the relationship among the Gumuz, Awi and Amhara neighbors was historically a typical frontier relationship in which the latter's devastated for several centuries to bring the former under their control.⁶

1.2. Gumuz - Awi Relations

The Awi and Gumuz ethnic groups have an old "patron-client" association since the time immemorial where

¹ Dessalegn Amsalu, *The Nature of Awi-Gumuz Relations: The Dynamics of Ethnicity in Ethiopia* (USA: VDM verg, 2010), p.32; Bogale, "Conflict Resolution among---, 2013), p.29.

² Bogale, Conflict Resolution among---, 2013), p.29.

³ Bogale, p.29.

⁴ Wolde-Sellassie, "Gumuz and Highland Resettlers---, 2004), p.244.

⁵ Informants: Mākonnän Wolde-Giorgis, Admassié Semeñ, Dābāsu Yesmaw; Alemayehu, "State and Ethnic Interaction---, 2012), p.107.

⁶ Abdussamad, "The Gumuz of---", 1995), p.55.

their inter-ethnic interaction was said to have started since the Aksumite period. Since then, the Aksumite King Kaléb was interested to keep its own trade route passing through the Gumuz lands. Thus, the King was sought to receive gold from the region, what is now the Gumuz land of Mätäkäl through his representatives, mostly from Awi local chiefs.¹

According to the accounts of the informants, the Awi-Gumuz relation is highly visible and applicable in the market, where both share high socio-cultural values. For instance, when the latter brought gold, cotton, genger and oil seeds to the nearby Awi markets, such as Zigäm, Goha, Mäntawuhä, Mandura, Āgni, Dibaṭé, and other related markets; in return, Awi merchants exchanged with their products for consumption, such as clothing, salt, sugar, coffee and other related items.² In addition to trade exchange, both Awi and Gumuz have also developed their social interaction and economic cooperation by forming *Wodajinat* (literally an Awgni term to mean friend ship). Through this interaction, both Awi and the Gumuz established the net works of closest links for the development of their mutual benefit. In order to fulfill their personal needs, they both can maximize their day today interactions by re-arranging visiting times one over another either during feast or the time of difficulty.³ For example, the Gumuz were invited by their Awi friends during public holidays and social and religious festivals such as Easter, New Year, *Masqal*⁴ Celebrations, Christmas, Weeding, and any other minor festivities if any. Thus, by respecting its honor callings of their Awi friends (also called *Wudaj* in Awgni language but *Wadaj* in Amharic), the Gumuz, together with their families have come to their *wudaj* homes having their traditional musical instrument locally called *Duh* in Gumuz language and *Empelti*⁵ in Awgni language. To the contrary, their Awi friends in most cases never attend the Gumuz holidays and memorial ceremonies.⁶

Through the process of time, their interaction in the form of *Wadajinat*⁷ could be developed in to *Mijim*, the Gumuz word to mean the best friend. Comparing with the former, the latter indicates the closest friend ship association between the two bodies where as the former seems lesser and loose friend ship relation. It ceases according to the condition of the two groups. Its interaction may be short lived. Furthermore, in the case of *Mijim*, the succeeding generations on both sides never stop its interaction even after the death of the original parents. The family members again recycle it for the coming generations.⁸ For instance, during the association for *Mijim*⁹ ceremony, both the Awi and Gumuz were said to have slaughtered sheep or goat. Then, sprinkled the blood on both sides while swearing an oath in front of the already selected elders on both side and their spiritual fathers by underlining not to break (stop) their relation throughout their generation.¹⁰

Gradually, they both developed traditional conflict resolution mechanism. Therefore, *Mijim* was the type of friend ship that indicates the intimacy between the Gumuz and Awi equally with *Wadaj* system, where both contesting groups may solve their common problems by using it as the traditional conflict resolution mechanism.¹¹ In other words, the term *Mijim* is coined from the Gumuz language meaning best man, timely friend or long lasting friend. Thus, the term may be similar with the saying “the friend in need is the friend in deed.”¹² Besides the terms used above, the Gumuz also called their Awi friends “*Shimya*”, meaning my mother or our mother.¹³

Another factor that facilitated for Awi-Gumuz inter-relationship was the Cross-ethnic adoption also locally known as *Angua Şahugni* (meaning in Amharic as የቤት አባት ወይም የቤት ልጅ). This type of interaction is a parent-son relation, where both sides agreed to develop the socio-cultural and economic cooperation in the times of feast and difficulty among themselves. It is similar with that of *Mijim* in the case of promising ceremonies but its difference is in the case of acting and reacting as a “father” and “son” relation.¹⁴ In addition to the aforementioned manifestations, God-Parent relation was also the most important strategy developed by both Awi and the Gumuz. This type of traditional association between the two ethnic groups in and around Mätäkäl is remembered as *abäljit* or *abäljié*¹⁵ (literally meaning: የክርስቲና አባትና ልጅ ወይም እናትና ልጅ). This is a type of relation where Awi or Gumuz individuals could be promised in order to be a God father or mother for the newly emerged baby in either of them. However, due to the absence of involving themselves in the Orthodox faith, the Gumuz gave less attention for their friend ship relations related with this type of traditional peace building

¹ Dessalegn, “The Nature of Awi-Gumuz Relations---, 2010), p.32.

² Informants: Guadie Abäbä, Admassié Semeñ, and AŞebir Woldu.

³ Informants: Däbäsu Yesmaw, Admassié Semeñ, and AŞebir Woldu.

⁴ *Masqal*, a Christian holly day for cross.

⁵ *Empelti*, is an instrument used for blowing during the holly days.

⁶ *Ibid*

⁷ *Wadajinat*, is equivalent term for friend ship.

⁸ Informants: Admassié Semeñ, AŞebir Woldu; Dessalegn, “Awi-Gumuz Relations---.2010),p.39.

⁹ *Mijim*, is equivalent term for friend ship.

¹⁰ Informants : Mäkönnän Wolde-Giorgis, Worqnäh Käbädä, and Dässie Bäläy.

¹¹ Informants : Zägäyë Mängestu, and Admass Séyoum.

¹² Informants: Admassié Semeñ, and Däbäsu Yésmaw.

¹³ Informants : Däbäsu Yesmaw, Balata Lakew, and Mäkönnän Wolde-Giorgis.

¹⁴ Informants: Däbäsu Yésmaw, Admassié Semeñ, and yärägäl Mamo.

¹⁵ *Abäljié*, stands for God Son.

mechanism.¹

However, the relationship between the Gumuz and Awi were and still are characterized by being both hostile and friendly. There existed in the long lasting Awi challenge over the Gumuz and at times bad relationships were created. Following their early contacts with the Gumuz, the Awi was/were said to have developed both hostile and friendly relationships with the former in their timely secured localities.² Although the Awi –Gumuz relation has been affected by the factors like historical back ground, religious differences, cultural variations, and others, as neighbors’ and long-standing inhabitants in the region, they both share common historical past which is represented by Amhara cultural domination and subjugation. Despite these shared experiences, they have their own blesses against each other. As neighbors’ not only peaceful coexistence characterizes them, conflict erupts periodically done to several reasons.³

As pointed out above, since the arrival of the Amhara settlers in to the Gumuz land, they appointed local chiefs from Awi, who had a good knowledge and relation with the Gumuz. By doing so, Awi local chiefs ruled the Gumuz directly on the behalf of the Semetic Amharas and were said to have been raided the Gumuz for slavery, forced them to move in to the peripheries, and also looted their properties by using the land tax as the pretext.⁴ They have had a good knowledge how to approach the Gumuz. This was the language, where the Awi local chiefs had a good skill in the case of speaking and expressing their feelings by using the Gumuz language. Therefore, the Gumuz, who considered the Awi local chiefs as cheaters were lacked the confidence how to approach (trust) them and secured their properties.⁵

In line with this, oral traditions indicate that the Gumuz of Dibaté and Mandura accepted the old patrol – client (over lord ship) of the Awi local chiefs since their encroachment. Thus, these Awi local chiefs splinted the Gumuz of Madura and Dibaté among themselves and then brought them under their firm control. Accordingly, each Gumuz group was ruled by Awi appointees where each chief had its own slaves named under them. For instance, they were often called the slaves of somebody; either the slave owner has to be a local appointee or the one who he became the highest political administrator or whatever else. Example, slaves of someone or *egalie shangeloch* (“የእገሌሻንቅሎች”).⁶

According to the oral informants conducted in Mandura, the Awi -Gumuz relation was also expressed by the two most important festivities known as *Masqal* (Cross) and *Tazkar* (Mourning) celebrations, the most important occasions among the two ethnic groups.⁷ In line with these celebrations , the oral informants conducted at Mäntawuhä has special attention for *Masqal* festivity where the Gumuz give the highest value than other related holidays, and describes in the following way:

በጉምዝ ብዙረሰብ ከሚከተሉት በዓላት መካከል ትልቅ ቦታ የሚጠብቀው በዓል ሲሆን ብሄረሰቡ አዲስ ዓመት መጀመሩን የሚጠብቁበት ዘመን በመሆኑና የበቆላው እሻት የሚቆይበት ወቅት በመሆኑ ለመቀበል በዓል የሚከተት ትርጉም እጅግ በሚሰጠው አንደኛው ይገልጻል፡፡ በዓሉ ሲቀበርም ወዳጅ-ዘመዶቻቸው በአንድ ላይ ይሰበሰቡሉ፡፡ ጉምዞች መቀበልን ደኛው በሚለት ይጠሩታል፡፡ የስያሜው ሻ የተወሰደውም ከአገራችን ቃል ሲሆን በወደጅን ት ዘመናቸው ሁለተኛው አገረባች ህዝቦች በአንድ ዓይነት መገበባያ ይገባበሉ፡፡⁸

Among others, *Masqal* celebration in the Gumuz culture has given special place. This is due to the fact that the Gumuz people consider the ceremony as the beginning of the new year where they begin to taste the fresh maize whether its matured or not. They attend the festivity together with their closest relatives and friends too. The Gumuz have their own name for *Masqal* known as *Drus'a*, which is adopted from the Awi. The latter also called it *Drus'a*. This shows a profound socio-cultural exchange of both neighboring ethnic groups.

Besides, they both have had many socio-cultural interactions still exercised by them, for instance, during the times of wedding and mourning ceremonies of Awi, the Gumuz would come with their musical instruments like “*Duah*” meaning “*Empilti*” in Awgni language. In return Awis gave them goat or sheep for eating after having slought. Because of this and other related relations Awi and the Gumuz call each other as “friend ship” (close relatives) meaning *Wudaj* (ወዳጅ) in Awgni language.⁹ For instance, both Tiruwork and Semeñ, the two female siblings from the families of *Fitawrari* Eyasu Zäläqä, narrate that when their father was imprisoned following

¹ *Ibid.*
² Tsega, *Inter -ethnic Relations*, p.105.
³ Informants: Mäkönnän Wolde-Giorgis, Däbäsu Yésmau, Admassié Semeñ, and Ašebir Woldu.
⁴ Tsega, *Inter-Ethnic Relations*, p.105; Wolde-Sellassie, “Gumuz and Highland Resettlers---”, 2004), pp.246-247.
⁵ Tsega , p.105; Wolde-Sellassie , pp.246-247.
⁶ Informants: Adämu Éndäléw, Qänaw Gobbäna, and Mäkönnän Wolde-Giorgis.
⁷ Informants: Adämu Éndäléw, Qänaw Gobbäna, and Mäkönnän Wolde-Giorgis.
⁸ Informants: Mäkönnän Wolde-Giorgis, Adämu Éndäléw, Qänaw Gobbäna, Mäsfén Arqäw, and Abdel Deboč.
⁹ Informants: Adämu Éndäléw, Qänaw Gobbäna, Mäkönnän Wolde-Giorgis, and Albboro Dibbäbä. Bazawaw Galaw, *A History of Čagni Town---*, 1991), P.6.

the coming of *Dergue* to power, a group of Gumuz from Bäläya and Mandura presented a petition to the *Dergue* members underlining for the final release and governments amnesty for *Fitawrari* Eyasu Zäläqä, who was their likely hood *Wadaj* and great figure in leading quality.¹

Among others, there was a Gumuz elder whose name was Lekandi, who had a good skill in the case of diplomatic negotiations among the Gumuz of Eyasu's paroling villages and other advancing highland soldiers to develop periodic or long lasting peace together with *Fitawrari* Eyasu.² In order to consolidate the Awi- Gumuz friendly relations, both Tiruwok and Semeñ, my oral informants from the families of *Fitawrari* Eyasu Zäläqä in Mandura, more importantly describe as follows:

አባታችን ወደ ላምቦቻ ጦርነት ሲዘምቡ በቤታችን ውስጥ የነበሩት የሻንቅለ አገልጋዮች እና ለሌሎች ወዳጆቻችን አብሮ ዘምተዋል፡፡ በ1967ዓ.ም ደርግ ሥልጣን ወይም እንዳይዘ አባታችንን አስርት ነበር፡፡ ነገር ግን የአካባቢ ሻንቅለች በአቀረቡት አቤቱታ መሠረት እንዲፋቱ ተደርጎል፡፡ ሻንቅለ በጣም ይወደቸው ነበር፡፡ እሳቸው መጡ ከተባለ ማምጫ ሻንቅለው መሠሪያ አስቀምጦ ይሰግድላቸው ነበር፡፡³

While our father was marched against the war of Lambiča, our home servants and other friendly tied *Šanqella* were all together deployed during the war. Immediately following the 1967 E.C. revolution, the *Dergue* imprisoned our father. However, because of the petition of the *Šanqella*, the *Dergue* immediately released him. He was liked and generous to them. When they heard about his coming, they all kneel down and prayed by putting their guns in front of him.

The end of the period of the imperial regime (1974) marked the end of the “patron-client” nature of relationship between Awi and Gumuz. This was due to the fact that the revolution opened the door for some Gumuz elders whom the *Dergue* elevated to run politics at local levels in the place of Awi local chiefs.⁴ More importantly, following the coming of *Dergue* to power, the Gumuz were allowed to have agricultural knowledge from their neighboring highlanders, particularly from Awi farmers based on their generosity. In this respect, Alemayehu has forwarded similar views in relation to the experience sharing in between the formers and the latter's, where the first enemies were turned to be the first friends as follows:

Among the reforms of the *Dergue*, agricultural cooperation significantly created rooms for mutual benefit between Awi and Gumuz. Thus, the *Dergue* tried to transfer the knowledge of agricultural system from better experienced Awi to less knowledgeable Gumuz. As the result, the Gumuz who had been poor in oxen draw plough, about milking cows and other related agricultural activities were made to be paired with Awi.⁵

Alemayehu also underlines that the agricultural policy of the *Dergue* had its own motive in transferring the socio-cultural values of Awi and Gumuz and diverting the image of the latter from bad impressions left behind by the former in to cooperative actions. Even though the transfer of knowledge from Awi to the Gumuz was not this much interesting, the reform laid the vital base in interacting and integrating the latter with the former, where Awi supported the Gumuz to change from their early history of hunting and gathering way of life in to farming, includes both sedentary agriculture and shifting cultivation.⁶

In relation to the economic ties, both Awi and Gumuz had mutual interactions in trade where the former supplying the latter with minerals such as copper, iron, beads, skins and hides while the latter brings gold, cotton, butter, honey and ginger to the former. There ore, based on their cross border trading, both neighbors had developed the knowledge of exchanging socio-cultural values, beliefs, language, traditions and others.⁷ Furthermore, during their strong friendly ties, the Awi sent their cattle to the Gumuz land aimed at grazing and kept by their Gumuz friends, and in return, they provided not only the food crops but also the shelter to them during the time when the Gumuz has affected particularly during the three successive summer seasons.⁸

1.3. Gumuz - Amhara Relations

Unlike other ethnic groups in Mätäkäl, the Gumuz-Amhara relation has been characterized in most cases by “hostility and seems to be more polarized than with all other groups.”⁹ Furthermore, concerning the Gumuz – Amhara relations, my Gumuz informants conducted at Amhara dominated areas of Mäntawuhä, and Gumuz dominated areas of Mandura and Dibaṭé, underlined what they had remember from their past historical

¹ Informants: Semeñ Eyasu, Tiruworq Eyasu, Mäkönnän Agajie, and Admassié Semeñ.
² Informants: Mäkönnän Wolde-Giorgis, Tiruworq Eyasu, and Semeñ Eyasu.
³ Informants: Däbäsu Yésmaw, Adämu Éndäléw, and Admassié Semeñ.
⁴ Informants: Mäkönnän Agajie, Däbäsu Yesmaw, Assäfa Abäjéhu, and Qänaw Gobbäna
⁵ Alemayehu, Inter-Ethnic Relation among Awi and Gumuz in---, 2015), p.67.
⁶ Alemayehu, p.67.
⁷ Tsega, Inter-Ethnic Relations---, 2006), p.105.
⁸ Informants: Mäkönnän Agajie, Däbäsu Yésmaw, Assäfa Abäjéhu, and Qänaw Gobbäna
⁹ Wolde Sellassie, Gumuz and Highland Resettlers---, 2004), p.246.

experiences particularly connecting with slavery and slave raids where it was severely exercised by the semetic armies mostly from Amhara through the agency of their local appointees.¹ For instance, following the Sixteenth Century Oromo expansion, the Christian highland Kings moved their political center from Shoa to the highland areas of the Lake Tana region. The gradual change of the political center had its own influence for the Gumuz people of Mätäkäl and its environs.²

In line with their change of seat, Tadesse stated that the Christian highland rulers tried to control the Gumuz lands, its resources and enslaved the people for full filling their daily needs lasting from 1563 to 1706, the time when they conducted the most destructive military campaigns against the latter under their local chiefs. Its motive was bringing the Gumuz inhabited areas of Mätäkäl under the state control. This form of the indirect move against the former was existed up to the demise of the Monarchy by the military regime.³

Furthermore, under the Awi local chiefs, the Amhara put the most serious pressure against the Gumuz who were said to have inhabited the present day places of the central and Southern parts of Gojjam where the latter were forced to retreat back to the very inhospitable low land areas of Western Ethiopia.⁴ However, the end of the imperial period by the *Dergue* marked the development of traditional conflict mitigating institutions locally called *Mijim* and *Wadaj*, where the Gumuz tried to form peaceful relationship with Amhara through the agency of Awi. That is why the term *Wadaj* literally in Amharic was said to have initiated to create a formal linkage with the Gumuz by Amhara. Where as in the case of *Mijim*, the relationship between the two, both Amhara and the Gumuz, was undermined by the former intentionally to gain the latter's land for cultivation through the lease accord with a small amount of payment.⁵ In line with this periodic accord, the Amharas not only asked the Gumuz, land for cultivation but also grazing lands for their cattle lasting from March to June. During the agreement, the Gumuz in return asked their *Mijim* Amharas to fulfill their demands of food and shelter for the cattle keepers.⁶

1.4. Gumuz - Shinasha Relations

As cited in Wolde Sellassie (2004:247), the relations of the Gumuz with Šinaša, like the predecessors was characterized by hostile and friendly. Although the emphasis given to their relation was said to be "a lower tone and scale", the type of approach in between them was much of harassing with threatening which finally resulted in the form of individual or mass conflicts.⁷

The Šinaša who inhabited in the low land areas of Mätäkäl, by neighboring the Gumuz have been shared the socio-cultural relations with the latter. They both had one thing in common, that is they were both similarly raided by the Christian highland rulers and their local chiefs from Awi, who allied and tried to control the major trade routes, trade items, over taxation, and ensuring political supremacy in the region on the behalf of them. Since then, they perceived the strategies how to secure their regions and defend themselves from such exploitations.⁸

Apart from their hostilities, both the Gumuz and the Šinaša shared the same culture in the case that both of them have been practiced exchange marriage, dressing styles and their traditional knowledge of smearing their bodies (body covering styels).⁹ They also have the same cultural celebrations during funeral and *Masqal* holidays. In both ethnic groups, the age of the deceased determined the intensity of mourning in order to celebrate the funeral ceremony. On the death of young or adult member, mourning was intense in which wept by throughing themselves to the ground uttering heart breaking mournings. To the contrary, mourning was not intense on the death of aged members. But rather they show speech songs for the next three consecutive days that would praise the deeds of the departed.¹⁰

When come to see their preparation for *Masqal* celebration, unlike the Gumuz society, the Shinasha gave special emphasis and celebrate it equally with other Christian ethnic groups in Ethiopia. Just before a month from the actual celebration day, for instance, girls, boys, and women were singing and dancing by moving every individuals home.¹¹ Whereas the Gumuz, who were in the most cases practicing traditional belief gave due emphasis for *Masqal* celebration without connecting with the memory for the foundation of the true cross. They celebrate it annually, where special attention was given for those individuals who honored their deeds.¹² These

¹ Informants: Adāmu Ēndäléw, Mégi Zélqāw, Zeguāfi Warb, and Nāni Wāzet.

² Wolde-Sellassie, *The Gumuz and Highland Resettlers---*, (2004), p.246.

³ Tadesse, "Early Trends of Feudal Supper Imposition---", 1982), pp.12-14.

⁴ Wolde-Sellassie, *Gumuz and Highland Resettlers---*, (2004), p.246.

⁵ Informants: Tāddāsa Lāma, Adāmu Ēndäléw, and Zeguāfi Warb.

⁶ Informants: Qānaw Gobbāna, Tāddāsa Lāma, Adāmu Ēndäléw, and Zeguāfi Warb.

⁷ Wolde-Sellassie, *Gumuz and Highland Resettlers---*, (2004), p.247.

⁸ Tadesse, "Nilo-Saharan---", 1988), p.7.

⁹ Informants: Tāddāsa Lāma, Qānaw Gobbāna, and Albboro Dibbābā; Jira, *A History of---*, (2008), p.84.

¹⁰ Bogale, *Conflict Resolution ---*, (2013), p.31.

¹¹ Informants: Tāddāsa Lāma, Albboro Dibbābā, and Qānaw Gobbāna

¹² Informants: Zeguāfi Warb, Nāni Wāzet, Wāndāyā Bukrus, and Bālātā Lāqāw

honored groups were allowed to sit on the side of killers and they were given drink with a separate utensil. While having drink, they started singing and dancing where the killers (who were also considered as heroes), were also started to show a war song (literally, *Fukara*¹) by stating their courage and achievements.²

Among other things, killing the non-Gumuz males and hunting of big animals such as elephant, would bring the special admiration during their occasion. However, killing females may bring nil honour and totally hated within their cultural history.³ Similarly, both the Gumuz and *Ŝinaŝa* had conflict mitigating traditional institutions known as *Michu* and *Harma Hodha* respectively, where the former literally stands for the friend ship while the latter stands for breast sucking in the language of Oromo, introduced following their arrival in to the region.⁴

Furthermore, Tsega stated *Michu* as “an adverse bond of friend ship summoned to discuss for serious problems of conflict and peace.”⁵ Therefore, *Miçu* is an institution said to have promoted for freely moving and stood for the security of the people, and their resources.⁶ According to my oral informants conducted at Dibaŕe and Bullän, the *Miçu* institution periodically gave mutual protection, cultural integration and interdependence for both communities in an equal sense. Thus, based on this mutual bond, the Gumuz permitted the *Ŝinaŝa* to cultivate their lands for short ranged periods of time. In return, the latter also allowed the former to have goats, sheep, and cattle’s in kind and also pay crops.⁷

Regards the market areas, the *Ŝinaŝa* gave protection and guidance to their Gumuz fellow ships such as placing (guarding) their goods in their *Miçu* houses where they were given orientations about the nature of market costs either for buying or selling purposes.⁸ When come to see the role of *Harma Hodha*, it is a system of creating closer linkage in between the two different and non-relative individuals in the form of a parent-son relationship. Such parent-son relationship has been marked by a ceremony where he who was considered as a son sucks parent’s finger with honey mixed with milk and said to have painted (dabbed) on the breast or with the thumb of his breast “father.”⁹ By doing so, the son motively seeks material assistance either in kind or in cash or a part of small plot of land for cultivation in return for his economic or political services which he gives to his *Abba Harma* (his breast father).¹⁰

Although the highlanders were said to have raided both *Ŝinaŝa* and the Gumuz together, the nature of exploitation was lesser than the latter. Their relationship with the Gumuz was almost similar with those highlanders already stated above; in both friendly and hostile. The hostility between the two was resulted from their devastations and extra displacements.¹¹ More importantly, data collected by Wolde-Sellassie during his conducting of his field work around the Gumuz and the *Ŝinaŝa* inhabited areas of Mätäkäl, informants from both ethnic groups stated the following justifications:

---they had severe conflicts in the past that had driven the Gumuz from their earlier locations now inhabited by the *Ŝinaŝa*. The Gumuz attributed the relatively lower scale and frequency of hostilities with the *Ŝinaŝa* to the latter’s mainly hoe-cultivation system, which has lesser adverse effects on the forest resources. However, the Gumuz still consider the *Ŝinaŝa* with suspicion, pointing out the latter’s similarity and strong association with the *Ŝuwa* categorical identification.¹²

The hostility between the *Ŝinaŝa* and the Gumuz is concerned, Tsega, in his article (2006:103), describes that the *Ŝinaŝa* has imposed the Gumuz to pay its tribute in the form of grain, meat and honey. Even worse, the former threatened the latter through magical agents like changing the climate in order to dry their croplands and facilitating locust invasion as well as the breeding of rats around their field.¹³ The underlining motive behind this issue was aimed at evicting the Gumuz from their lands and then to distribute these Gumuz lands among them. By fearing the magical knowledge of the former, the latter’s’ were said to have moved towards very distant low lands where they periodically sheltered until the re-arrival of their counter parts, particularly, the *Ŝinaŝa*.¹⁴

The *Ŝinaŝa* informants conducted at Bullän narrated me that although the *Ŝinaŝa* people have the knowledge of producing traditional medicines, they could not have the skill for re-producing the rats and sending or

¹ *Fukara*, stands for a song used for encouraging soldiers during the war.

² Informants: Zeguäfi Warb, Bäqäno Sänbäta, and Aŝebir Woldu; Bogale, Conflict Resolution---, 2013), p.32.

³ Informants: Täddäsa Läma, Adämu Ēndäléw, and Zeguäfi Warb.

⁴ Tsega, Conflict Resolution---,2002), p.26.

⁵ Tsega, Conflict Resolution---, 2002),p.26.

⁶ Tsega, p.26.

⁷ Informants: Täddäsa Läma, Albboro Dibbäbä, and Qänaw Gobbäna

⁸ Informants: Aŝebir Woldu, Täddäsa Läma, Albboro Dibbäbä, and Qänaw Gobbäna

⁹ Informants : Qänaw Gobbäna, Täddäsa Läma, and Wändäyä Bukrus; Bogale, Conflict Resolution---,2013),p.33.

¹⁰ Bogale, Conflict Resolution---,2013),p.33.

¹¹ Informants: Qänaw Gobbäna, Bäqäno Sänbäta, and Zeguäfi Warb.

¹² Wolde-Sellassie, p.248.

¹³ Tsega, Inter-Ethnic Relations---,2006),p.103.

¹⁴ Tsega, p.103.

ordering the locusts against the crop fields of the Gumuz. But the Gumuz, who feared the boastings of the *Ŝinaŝa* have been considered as if they were the magical gods. However, their ability of producing different traditional medicines rather than propagating anti crop insects and animals as well as climatic disasters is not deniable. To the contrary, the Gumuz people were said to have known in the case of producing magical medicines traditionally as equal as the *Ŝinaŝa*. To this fact, the *Ŝinaŝa* were not forced them to leave their home villages by using the magical medicines as a weapon.¹

In line with this, the Gumuz informants who inhabited neighboring the *Ŝinaŝa* justified that the latter has the knowledge of producing magical medicines for the purpose of protecting themselves from any events either man made or natural catastrophes. For instance, the *Ŝinaŝa* has magically healing and protecting power from bullet, spear or bow. When we directly shot a gun by keeping the exact target against them from clearly visible distance, they have never been beaten by the bullet.² In the same way, these informants were also unexceptionally stated that they themselves can produce some easiest medicines, for example, anti snake medicines, medicines for love, medicines for maximizing properties, medicines for belief in an evil eye and etc. Besides, know a days, many Gumuz have developed the knowledge how to produce the most organized and strong magical medicines from their *Ŝinaŝa* fellow ships and neighbor hoods.³

1.5. Gumuz -Oromo Relations

Regarding Gumuz relationships with the Oromo, it is important to note that the Gumuz were said to have welcomed the Oromos during their movements in to *Mätäkäl*. They also supported the newly arrived Oromos in any means what they need until the latter's consolidated their shelters. Thus, immediately following their settlement, both ethnic groups started supporting each other during their movements on both sides of the Abbay River. In fact, their relation was said to have been started in the 1880s, during their mass based expansions across the Blue-Nile in to *Wälläga* where they were given temporary hostage by *Moroda Bakare* of *Leqa Naqamet*.⁴

Moreover, *Moroda* made close alliance with the Gumuz through the Oromo local institution known as *Kakuu* (meaning peace pact) that provided safety and protection to them all. Since then, the Gumuz tried to minimize its hesitation for safety and trusted the Oromo with whom they lived peacefully by considering themselves as if they were from the Oromo line. Soon after their arrival to the Oromo areas of *Wälläga* and the Blue Nile valley, they adopted the language of *Oromiffa*.⁵ In return, the Gumuz supported the Oromo -ethnic groups during their movements in to different areas of *Mätäkäl*. Besides, the former gave assistance to the latter until they were aspired to set up their permanent settlements. It was also said that for the sake of land for settlement, the Oromos were said to have established their friend ship relation with the former.⁶ Through the gradual move, the question of economy and land for settlement, urged the Oromo people to adopt the *Miçu* institution with the Gumuz. More significantly, their strong and close inter-relations was said to have visible along the Southern parts of *Mätäkäl* since in the 18th century.⁷

For their closest intimacy and fellow ship relations, "economic needs" played a pivotal role, where the Gumuz were skillful in the case of producing cotton through hoe-cultivation. Thus, they allowed the Oromos to need the cotton because they did not have weavers unlike that of the latter. Then, due to the absence of the knowledge of weaving, the Gumuz tried to show jealousy against the Oromos, who were their vital intimate friends.⁸ However, the wrongly move of the Gumuz against the Oromos because of the latter's knowledge of weaving cotton was short lived. Reasonably, this was due to the playing role of *Miçu* institution, the traditional peace building mechanism among the Oromos since in the early years of their expansion in to the provinces of *Dängab*, *Wänbära*, *Bullän* and *Dibaŝé* in *Mätäkäl*.⁹

For example, by supporting the views of *Tsega* stated in (2006: 102), my informants from *Čagni* re-affirmed that even now a days, both the Gumuz and Oromo elders have been inter-changeably applied both *Miçu* (literally the Oromo term) and *Mangimma* (literally, the Gumuz term), for conflict resolution equally with *Miçu*.¹⁰ Therefore, based on this traditional institution, the relation between the Gumuz and the Oromo inhabiting areas of *Wänbära*, *Dibaŝé* and *Bullän*, in *Mätäkäl* Zone had been assimilated and also said to have been integrated through the gradual process of change. For instance, their friendly relations have inclined more towards the Oromos than the *Awi* and *Ŝinaŝa*, due to the fact that the former's needed lesser tension and enmity

¹ Informants :*Dämläw Bāyāna*, *Albboro Dibbābā*, *Bāqāno Sānbāta*, and *Qānaw Gobbāna*

² Informants : *Nāni Wāzet*, *Wāmpo Wāgad*, *Zeguāfi Warb*, and *Mégi Zélqāw*.

³ Informants: *Tuji Erāŝso*, *Hānna Filāte*, and *Zeguāfi Warb*.

⁴ *Tsega*, *Inter-Ethnic Relations in---*, 2006), p.102.

⁵ *Tsega*, *Inter-Ethnic Relations---*, 2006), p.102.

⁶ *Tsega*, *Inter-Ethnic Relations---*, 2006), p.102.

⁷ *Tsega*, p.102.

⁸ *Tsega*, *Inter-Ethnic Relations---*, 2006), p.102.

⁹ *Tsega*, p.102.

¹⁰ Informants: *Qānaw Gobbāna*, *Bāqāno Sānbāta*, and *Albboro Dibbābā*.

than the latter's.¹ In line with this, Wolde-Sellassie, after having compared their approaches, tensions, hostilities and treatments provided by the afro-mentioned highlanders over the Gumuz, has forwarded the following assumptions:

Although the Gumuz do not attribute equally brutal treatment to the Oromo (like that of Amhara and Awi), they are again sceptical in their relations with them as well. The basic factor of their uneasy co-existence is again encroachment on the land resources and other exploitative relationships based on the prevalent power politics of the dominant and the subjugated, the latter of which is predominantly true of the native Gumuz.²

Among the Gumuz inhabited areas of Mätäkäl, the Gumuz-Oromo relation was highly positive in the areas of Wänbära, Dibaṭé and Bullän, where the friend ship bond had been functional as like as the Šinaša, "however, lesser tension and hostility than with that of Amhara and Awi."³

1.6. Gumuz Relations with Settler Communities

As has been stated in the proceeding pages, the relationship between the Gumuz and spontaneous settlers are characterized mostly by the hostility than friendly. Due to bad climatic conditions from their initial home bases, the settlers began to advance in to the Gumuz lands continuously for the sake of searching land and its resources. Their encroachments then created enmity with the Gumuz. Because of these and other related factors, the latter were being pushed from their original home villages towards the remotest areas of Mätäkäl. For instance, the Gumuz of Bullän, Mandura, Dibaṭé, Pawe and other small villages were evicted from their land resources.⁴

Following the involvement of the elders from sides, the day to day tensions and killings between the spontaneous settlers and the Gumuz timely minimized. However, no one was refrained its own hand from harassing one over another until their rifles were taken over by the government.⁵ Through the gradual process of change, the Gumuz and the spontaneous immigrants tried to develop their friend ship bond through the *Wadaj* system. Therefore, the immigrants were said to have obtained plots of land from the former through this traditional institution. Since then, they both started to help each other during the times of difficulties.⁶

When the settlers asked the Gumuz for assistance, forinstance, the land for grazing and cultivation, the latter said ok, without changing mind and in return the former agreed to give support to the latter either in the form of clothing or sharing crops or special support during the summer seasons when the Gumuz lacked daily supply like food.⁷

1.7. Gumuz with Gumuz Relations (Relations Among themselves)

This part of the study has been discussed on the nature of relations and interactions to be observed on the Gumuz community among them. As I have tried to discuss about the nature of inter-ethnic relations and interactions in the preceding pages, the Gumuz community has also its own hostile and closely tie relationships with the same ethnic group. Although the Gumuz people have the same black skin color, they all have different behaviors where some of them are smooth and smile, some others are also aggressive. It does not mean that those Gumuz who having smooth ethical behaviors are free from deliberate killings or provoking anti-state moves or non-dynamic community.⁸

Hence, their action shows as if they were ethically disciplined where he/she would be think good things towards other ethnically similar or dissimilar communities. Distinguishing good from bad, correct from incorrect, justice from injustice is not being their business. However, they never like lying throughout their tradition. Lying is said to have been curse throughout their ideological World.⁹ For instance, those who killed the non-black origin, deliberately or incidentally, they never deny the event what they have committed. Even in front of the prosecutor, when the prosecutor tried to change the killers mind by saying unreal charges, they never accept what the prosecutor has narrated out of the real situations.¹⁰

Even though they were within the same ethnic line, there are individual differences among themselves clearly observed throughout their socio-cultural history. There are some cases where one Gumuz clan is different from other clan members of the same ethnicity. For instance, the *Dibaṭsé* Gumuz clan is different from those clans in Mandura, where the former has acquired many socio-cultural traditions from the nearby Oromo and Šinaša inhabitants and the latter has developed such traditions mostly from their Awi *Wudaj* (friends) during the

¹ Wolde-Sellassie, Gumuz and Highland Resettlers---,2004),p.248.

² Wolde-Sellassie,p.248.

³ Wolde-Sellassie, Gumuz and Highland Resettlers---, 2004), p.248.

⁴ Wolde-Sellassie, p.248.

⁵ Informants: Wändäyā Bukrus, Zewdu Čekol, Tuji Eräso, and MäkonnänAgajie.

⁶ Informants: Wändäyā Bukrus, Zewdu Čekol, Tuji Eräso, and MäkonnänAgajie.

⁷Informants : Qänaw Gobbäna, MäkonnänWolde-Giorgis, Admassié Semeñ, ,and Dässie Bäläy.

⁸ Informants: Mäkonnän Wolde-Giorgis, Bälätä Lekaw, Adämu Ęndälëw, and Assäfa Abäjehu.

⁹ Informants: Däbässu Yésmaw, Ašëbir Woldu, Zewdu Čekol,and Wändäyā Bukrus.

¹⁰ Informants: Wändäyā Bukrus, Mäsfën Arqäw, and Däbässu Yésmaw.

times of harmony.¹

Among other ethnic groups in Mätäkäl, the friendship relation and interaction of the Gumuz has clearly observed with the Awi, who were their earliest friends before the arrival of other ethnic highlanders in to the region of Mätäkäl. Although their relation and interaction has been hostile and friendly, in most cases, their friendship qualities has been expressed in the form of; firstly, by developing the traditional strategy known as *Anguo Şehuég* (adopting the Breast Father –Son relationship /association), where the individuals with the absence of any inheritance or descendancy (out of the blood line) have re-arranged the strategy to create their brotherhood with whom they believe.²

Secondly, both ethnic groups have also re-arranged the traditional association known as *Abalget* (the God father-Son relationship), where either of the ethnic group has the interest of creating friendship relation with each other and consolidating their interaction throughout their existence without any form of interruption. In this form of association, both sides must have swear and promised each other on the condition that their promise to be kept and long lasting, there will be no violation and any form of deny throughout their interaction.³

When come to see the causes for their hostile relations among themselves, there are factors that led the same ethnic group to contradict each other. When these causing factors are concerned, my oral informants particularly from Mäntawuhä and Mandura discussed that the Gumuz, like that of other ethnic groups in Ethiopia and Mätäkäl in particular, can create rivalry with other members of the same ethnic group. Let alone with other Gumuz clans, even there are skirmishes with in the same family. Their rival form of relation may be caused by individual/group insulting, abducting of girls when the individual's question of the exchange sisters' marriage has failed, adultery, violations' of clans for superiority, the problem of resource use, and other related minor problems among themselves may lead in to individual/group conflicts.⁴

2. The nature and Causes of Inter- ethnic conflicts

As explained by Tsega, ethnic conflict can be understood as the division between two or more ethnic communities depending on their day to day interactions such as social, cultural, economic, political and territorial claims either individually or mass based.⁵ Besides, the inter- ethnic conflicts in the *Horn* of Africa are multi dimensional. These conflicts involve nations, regions, ethnic groups, clans, lineages and they skirmished between and within states, regions and among themselves with in their communities. This individually started conflict later widened and became many sided where a group of community may involve within it.⁶ As Tsega cited in Markakis (1994:219 -220) "the major migrations of the past gave rise to endless strife, memories of which continue to nourish contemporary hatreds ... Occasionally, such conflict is emanated with major confrontations and it escalates out of control".⁷

Stefan Wolf, in his part also defines inter- ethnic conflict as "a form of group conflict in which one of the groups started naggings and forced the community to create ethnic group with basic causes."⁸ As stated by Wolde-Sellassie, the endless exploitation and the legacy of slave trade and also regular raids by the highlanders was one of the causes for the inter-ethnic conflict in Mätäkäl. Since then, they perceived miss-trust, prejudice (biased opinion towards others), disrespect, segregation (stigmatization) and other differences against the highlanders.⁹

The loss of their natural resources added with slavery and slave raid agitated the Gumuz to kill any highlander whom they believe to be red skinned, whom they also called the *Şoan* origin. Thus, the event left bad impression (unforgettable legacies) in each and every mind of the Gumuz people.¹⁰ Furthermore, the competition over land and natural resources between the Gumuz and the highlanders became one of the factors where the latter's' pushed the former to leave their home villages and the latter's' were relocated since their arrival, more significantly since the 1950s.¹¹

In line with the local-settler engagements, Bogale in his turn conceptualizes that the Gumuz were considering the whole Mätäkäl as their birth lands as if anyone could not take it even an inch of land. This wrong sense later aroused ethnic conflict in the region in the following ways: Firstly, the Gumuz motively aspired to dislodge the highlanders from their lands. In the second place, the Gumuz could demand the highlanders to void (cancel) the land contract agreement (rent accord) already signed between the two contesting groups before the

¹ Informants: MäkönnänAgajie, Yäşéwas Mamo, and Tiruwoq Eyasu.

² Informants: Qänaw Gobbäna, MäkönnänWolde-Giorgis, Admassié Semeñ, and Dässie Bälay.

³ Informants: Näni Wäzet, Wämpo Wägad, Zeguäfi Warb, and Mégi Zélqäw.

⁴ Informants: Dämläw Bāyāna, Albboro Dibbābā, Bāqāno Sānbāta, and Qänaw Gobbāna

⁵ Tsega, Conflict Resolution---,2002),14.

⁶ Tsega, Inter-Ethnic Relations---, 2006),p.93.

⁷ Tsega, p.93.

⁸ Stefan Wolf, *Ethnic Conflict: A Global Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,2006),p.2.

⁹ Wolde-Sellassie, Gumuz and Highland Resettlers---,2004),p.244.

¹⁰ Bogale, Conflict Resolution---,2013),p.54.

¹¹ Tsega, Conflict Resolution---,2002),p.16.

birth of the conflict among themselves.¹ When their demand was failed, the Gumuz started harassing against the settlers. Ethnic conflict may be resulted due to the disagreement, quarrel or strife between or among a group of individuals or communities as a whole over the supremacy of the social, cultural, economic and political or territorial issues.² The form of conflict may be expressed in the form of violence or non violence depending up on its causes. For instance, among other ethnic groups who neighbor the Gumuz, the conflict in between Awi and the nearby Gumuz following their debate on land and cattle raids could be the best illustrative.³ Although there are social, cultural, economical and political frictions among different ethnic groups in the region, there are also positive indications that clearly illustrate about their visible interactions among themselves. However, their interaction might be conditionally either positive or negative depending on the nature of problems created around their surroundings.⁴

Based on the evidence from BGRFSS (2004:18), even though there are relative peace and stabilities in most areas, local conflict is one of the most re=challenging issues in some *Wärädas* of the Benišangul Gumuz region such as Dibaṭé, Mandura, and in the areas of Awi Zone where the large number of Gumuz are living together with the Awi and highland re-settlers, for instance ,Amhara in particular. Therefore, in most cases, the conflicts have been observed between locals and re-settlers rather than among themselves.⁵ Based on the oral accounts of my informants conducted at Dibaṭé and Mandura *Wärädas*, the former described the conflict as one of the most worst socio-economic problems identified by the community, While the informants from the latter, stated it as among other ordinary problems that influence their daily life in lesser degree comparing with the problem in Dibaṭé.⁶

When come to see Mätäkäl Zone separately, there are indications of ethnic assimilations and integrations on the one hand, and its frictions and conflicts among the relatively organized highland communities on the other. For example: in between Awi and Gumuz, Amhara and Gumuz, Gumuz and Oromo, and Gumuz and Šinaša.⁷ Thus, the inter – clan relations among the Gumuz are manifested more in conflicts than in peaceful co-existence. As the result, the major causes for the inter-ethnic conflicts in different areas of Mätäkäl as well as the Gumuz inhabited areas of Awi Zone are in most cases related with the following facts; the encroachment over land resources, claims for the replacement of exchanged sisters in marriage, belief in an evil eye, their refusal to pay debt, abduction, adultery, plundering, land pushing and eviction, insults, deliberate killings for fame and, other related socio-economic issues.⁸

These socio-economic, cultural and ideological differences between the highlanders and the Gumuz have also become a provoking factor that pushed both ethnic groups to further conflicts. This might be probably due to the absence of knowledge (tradition) for mitigating the daily happening problems throughout their community.⁹

Furthermore, the hostility between the two was also resulted not only because the Gumuz lost their resources, but also because they have left marginalized from the help allowed to the settlers.¹⁰ Among others, both biases and prejudices imposed by the highlanders are the manifestations that caused ethnic conflicts more evidently in case of Gumuz like subordination, discrimination and marginalization of indigenous people.¹¹ According to the oral informants, conflict around Mätäkäl and its surroundings also occurred over the items of trade and natural resources.¹² The question to control gold, ivory, animal skins and civet were significant sources of contending among Gumuz, Awi, Šinaša, Oromo and Amhara. For instance, as tried to describe in the proceeding chapters, the state governors and local chiefs pressurized the Gumuz of Guba and Wānbāra districts to pay gold in the form of state tribute.¹³ As Awi's were under the harsh rule of the Solomonic line, they were enforced and pushed by the ruling government incase that collecting of tax over the Gumuz people is concerned.¹⁴

Revenge was also another source of ethnic conflict in and around Mätäkäl, where the Gumuz and the

¹ Bogale, Conflict Resolution---,2013),p.55.

² Informants: Qānaw Gobbāna, Dābāsu Yésmaw, and Adāmu Éndālēw; M.E.Brown, "Causes and Implications of Ethnic conflict." *In The Ethnicity reader: Nationalism, multi-culturalism and migration*, edited by M.Guibernaw and J. Rex,80-100,(Cambridge,1997),p.83. 1997),p.83.

³ Informants: Mākonnān Agajje, Mākonnān Wolde Giorgis, and Admassié Semeñ; Tsega, Inter-ethnic Relations--p.94.

⁴ Tsega, Inter-Ethnic Relations---,2006), pp.93-94.

⁵ Benišangul Gumuz Regional Food Security Strategy---, 2004), p.18.

⁶ Informants: Bāqāno Šānbāta, Albboro Dibbābā, Zedu Čekol, and Yāšēwas Mamo.

⁷ Tsega, Inter-Ethnic Relations---, 2006), pp.95-96.

⁸ Informants: Mākonnān Agajje, Mākonnān Wolde Giorgis, and Admassié Semeñ; BGRFSS, P.30; Wolde-Sellassie, Gumuz and Highland Resettlers---, 2004), p.240; Aysheshim, Crime and Custom---, 1987), p.32.

⁹ Wolde-Sellassie, Gumuz and Highland Resettlers---, 2004), p.169.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.169.

¹¹ Informants: Albboro Dibbābā, Zedu Čekol, and Yāšēwas Mamo.

¹² Bogale, Conflict Resolution---, 2013), p.55; Tsega, Conflict Resolution---, 2002), pp.15-17.

¹³ Informants: Dāmlāw Bāyāna, Albboro Dibbābā, Bāqāno Šānbāta, and Qānaw Gobbāna

¹⁴ Informants: Zewdu Čekol, Yāšēwas Mamo, Abdel Deboč, and Wāndāyā Bukrus.

highlanders were engaging on over another. Wait and see threatens among the ethnic groups put the inhabitants under tension. There were killings and lootings in different areas of Mätäkäl.¹ Killing has given special value with in the Gumuz community in particular. They considered it as heroism. The black (Gumuz) who killed the red (non-Gumuz highlander) was considered as hero. For example, when the killer from the Gumuz side is died either through age or incidentally, special attention was given during mourning and his funeral was celebrated in special ceremonies and memorial figures were erected on their graves.²

In the Gumuz socio-cultural tradition, the males must give respect ion for the order of their wives. Because in their tradition, the wives have had super power comparing with their husbands. Then, the husbands must full fill the responsibilities given by their wives. For instance, when the latter's' ordered the formers' in order to kill the non-black Shua men or a Gumuz enemy out of their clan, they must kill what they were told to do so.³ Even worse, the killers must show their wives whom they killed by taking some parts of the body from the dead. For instance, the killers must show them by mutilating penis, the part of the genital organ. The killer has even given special admiration and prestige by the wife in particular and by the society in general. The killer also displaced the head of the deceased individual in the form of hat and also cutoff the arms and dried either by the scorching sun heat or smoke and finally served it to beat their drums during the memorial holidays.⁴

However, the one who he killed the female in their tradition never get respect ion from the society. It's even hated within their socio-cultural history. Instead; the killer has given a nick name known as coward.⁵

What triggered the inter-ethnic conflict in Mätäkäl than even before was the encroachment of neighboring highland farmers, other immigrants, and government sponsored settlers in to the region immediately following the coming of the *Dergue* to power .Since then, the event has intensified the hostile moves among the inhabitants, particularly, in between the newly arrived settlers and the local people, who were believed to be the earliest settlers.⁶ Even worse, the miss trust among the inhabitants has created following the expansion of the re-settlers to the Gumuz lands due to land degradation in the areas where the resettlement and encroachment has preserved.⁷ In line with conflict in Mätäkäl, the oral informants conducted at *Jigda Sellassie* (a local village in Mandura *Wäräda* where both Awi and Gumuz ethnic group are living side by side) during my field study expressed their feelings with the Amharic version as follows:

የገጭብ ብሔራት ጋር አብሮ እያኖርን ነው፡ አስተሳሰብቸው ለይ ችግር አለ እንጅ ያህን ናቸው፡ ስንገር ግን ተለዋወጭ ባህሪ አላቸው፡ ደርግ ህገ-ሰነድን አምባቶ በረሰቸው ሜት ለይ እንዲሆኑ በሚረዱ ምርትና ምርታማነት ሲቀንስ ችግር ማግኘት ጀመሩ፡፡ በገበያ ቀን በያመገገዱ ቆዳዎቹ የሆነውን መገንዘብ መገደል ሲሆን ፡፡ የሰውነትን ብድር በተላከተም በእህልም ሆኖ በገንዘብ አንከፍልም አሸፈረን ማለት ጀመሩ፡፡ በእነዚህና በሌሎች ምክንያቶች የተነሳ ማሪያ አካባቢያቸውን እያለቀቁ ወደ በረሃ መጫወታቸውን እናምናለን ከቤተሰቦቻችን ምሁራን ጋር፡፡⁸

We are living together with the Gumuz. Except their changing of mind, they are kind and innocent. Following the encroachment and the resettlement program of the *Dergue* over their lands, the amount of production reduced. Due to this case, they started killings separately. Particularly those with red skin color were the first victims. Even worse, they refused to pay the debt back. Finally, by these and other related factors, they were said to have moved to the remote low land areas of Mätäkäl. This testimony is based on our personal knowledge and the narration of our families and the elders.

In spite of their inconsistent hostile relations with the highlanders, the re-settlers in particular, the Gumuz were said to have decided to react the consequences resulted from the tremendous range of the encroachments by indicating “changes in their livelihood experiences especially in the emerging renting land institutional arrangements of fallow fields with the plow cultivators.”⁹

Generally, based on the concepts described in Bogale (2013:64), ethnic conflicts can be divided in to Intra – ethnic and Inter-ethnic conflicts. Intra-ethnic conflict was said to have broken between two or more than two individuals within a given ethnic group. For instance, it might be broken following individual or group competitions or in the form of the whole organization. Intra-ethnic conflict was also broken due to socio-economic differences between the two rival groups.¹⁰ There were many manifestations for the intra and inter-clan conflicts among the Gumuz community. These were:

¹ Informants: Bāqāno Sānbāta, Albboro Dibbābā, Zedu Čekol, and Yāšēwas Mamo.
² Informants: Nāni Wāzet, Wāmpo Wāgad, Zeguāfi Warb, and Megi Zelkaw.
³ Informants: Zewdu Čekol, Yāšēwas Mamo, Abdel Deboč, and Wāndāyā Bukrus.
⁴ Informants : Qānaw Gobbāna, Wāndāyā Bukrus, and Nāni Wāzet.
⁵ Informants : Bālātā Lāqāw, Abdel Deboč, Embālā Qewi, and Zawdu Čakol.
⁶ BGRFSS, P.30.
⁷ *Ibid*
⁸ Informants: Zewdu Čekol, Yāšēwas Mamo, Abdel Deboč, and Wāndāyā Bukrus.
⁹ Wolde-Sellassie, Gumuz and Highland Resettlers---, (2004), p.169.
¹⁰ Bogale, Conflict Resolution---, (2013), p.64.

2.2.1. Intra-Ethnic Conflict

One of the causes that led to the intra-ethnic conflict among the Gumuz was adultery. This might happen when the young Gumuz has no sister for the exchange marriage or could not get wife or aimed at getting more than one wife. Both adultery and incest were the most hated traditions that became the first causing factors for the intra-clan conflicts within the Gumuz community. For instance, the husband whose wife was abducted either by the individuals within the same clan or out of the member caused to take retaliation against who committed adultery.¹ When come to see the incest, it is strictly different from adultery in the case that the former stands for inter-breeding within the same line among the closest relatives where as in the case of the latter, the Gumuz individuals can commit it's sexual mating mostly with non-relatives. However, it does not mean that making adultery with the relatives is totally free. For example, as my oral informants discussed, the Gumuz young man who tried to obligate the young girl from his lineage for the purpose of sex may agitate killings by another relatives.²

Incidentally, when the conflict was suspended among the relatives due to adultery and incest, then the local people called this type of conflict as *Manje Guşa*, in the local language meaning fire of sex, in order to indicate that the conflict was triggered by such events.³ Besides, adultery and incest, both belief in an evil-eye and the *Gafia* were also contributory factors for the intra-clan (ethnic) conflicts among the Gumuz community.⁴

2.2.2. Inter-Ethnic conflict

The Inter-Ethnic conflict is the type of conflict where one group of clan is fricted against another clan out of the lineage. The most frequently occurred and dynamic causes of inter-ethnic conflicts between the Gumuz (*Bega*) and *Suwa* (highland settler or Amhara) are the legacies of slave raids in the past.⁵ In his turn, Aysheshim also summed that the ceaseless encroachment on the land resources of the Gumuz and the slave raiding campaign that victimized them has left (imprinted) bad legacies in their minds and created a deep-rooted enmity towards their neighboring highlanders.⁶ Unlike the intra-ethnic conflict, the inter-ethnic conflict in the recent times is also caused by the following factors. Such as exchange marriage, bride price marriage, abducting girls, elopement, deliberate killings, resource use, insults, failure to pay back debts, and others.⁷

3. Methodology

This research was conducted based on the qualitative approach where both primary and secondary sources of data are significantly used. To mention some of them; key informants, focus group discussions, archival materials and analyzing both oral and written sources. The oral sources were collected from Awi, Amhara, Gumuz, Shinasha and Oromo informants, who are living either together with the Gumuz or neighboring them. In most cases, the informants from Awi, Amhara, Oromo and Shinasha were those who directly involved against the Gumuz revolts of 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and the 1980s. While some others were also those who knew more about the history of the resistance with its causes and effects either directly from their families or indirectly from the deeds of their descendants.

Some of the Gumuz informants whom the researcher interviewed were directly evicted from their lands because of their resistance against overdue taxation and the allocation of the settlers on their farm lands in the 1950s and 1960s. While some others were those who run into safety at the age of 15s and 16s in averages. Those who survived the protracted war grew with their relatives if any who escaped from the devastation. Furthermore, written materials were also tapped in an effort to fill historical gaps. The researcher has also exerted great effort and succeeded in accessing vital archival sources from the study area, Dabre Markos University Archival Center and National library and Archival Center.

4. Results and Discussion

Michu as an Institution for Conflict Resolution

As conflict mitigation mechanism is concerned, many researchers and scholars were used the terms like prevention, reconciliation, management and resolution in inter-changing manner. For instance, Tsega described conflict management as the part of theory and practice functionally facilitated for developing peaceful resolution for a given conflict which may result either from individuals or group based moves.⁸ It has ground rules based on the norms of a given society including reconciliation and arbitration where the strategy is above all led by the elders (by representing the society). These elders could use the systematic approach how to handle the two

¹ Informants : Zewdu Čekol, Yāšēwas Mamo, Abdel Deboč, and Wändäyā Bukrus.

² Informants: Nāni Wāzet, Asābér Woldu, and Dābāssu Yésmau.

³ Informants: Yāšēwas Mamo, Abdel Deboč, and Wändäyā Bukrus.

⁴ Wolde-Sellassie, Gumuz and Highland Resettlers---,2004),p.240.

⁵ Wolde-Sellassie,p.244.

⁶ Aysheshim, “ Crime and Custom: With Reference to the Shanquilla Nationality”(Senior Eassy in Law, Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University---,1987),p.61.

⁷ Informants: Yāšēwas Mamo, Abdel Deboč, and Wändäyā Bukrus; Wolde-Sellassie,Gumuz and Highland Resettlers---,2004),p.240.

⁸ Tsega, Conflict Resolution---,2002),p.14.

offending groups by allowing them to discuss in the round table and then find the solution after having understood their problems turn by turn.¹ It was also said that *Miçu* and *Harma Hodha*, the traditional institutions for peace building strategies have played a per amount role in the case of solving conflicts not only in between the *Śinaša* and the Oromo but also among the different ethnic groups in the region namely; Awi, Amhara, Gumuz and others.²

The coming of Oromos in to *Mätäkäl* marked the development of both peace building strategies among the different ethnic groups in the region. Both institutions promoted smooth relationships among the members and then developed cultural tolerance and the commercial links when necessary. These institutions had multi modal services in the case that on the one hand it facilitated the relation and integration of the *Śinaša* with other ethnicities such as in *Dibaṭé*, *Dāngur*, *Bullān*, and *Wānbāra* areas and on the other hand, it played as the system of conflict mitigation strategy.³

The term *Miçu* is the Oromo term where the Gumuz also called *Mangima*, meaning friendly tie where they used for solving any problems occurred in their community. Therefore, both communities used *Michu* as a peace seeking strategy for conflict resolution to the disputes, enmity and conflicts that broke out among the different ethnic groups of the *Mätäkäl* region and its surroundings.⁴ *Michu* (friendly tie) also known as “*Wudaj*” by the Awi natives refers to the most important strategy in order to handle ethnic conflicts and establish an environment of tolerance and mutual coexistence among the ethnic groups in *Mätäkäl*.⁵ During the *Miçu* institution, a ceremony is held in the institutional station where the contending groups slaughtered an animal and both groups were ordered to mix their blood to show complete friendship. Besides this, they break a bone to indicate, as they have broken their old quarrels. Finally, they swear an oath in order not to deny each other, if either of them denies let his/her descendants be broken up to the last seven generations.⁶

In *Mätäkäl*, the Awi had traditional conflict resolution mechanism equally important with *Miçu* institution where the former can handle problems with the Gumuz, Oromo, *Śinaša* and the Amhara. This traditional re-counseling strategy among Awi is said to have called *Wudaj*, in Awgni language meaning, friend. In the case of Amhara, this institution is literally called *Wadaj*, similarly meaning friend. This *Wadaj* system institution is the most important strategy in solving the problems created between Awi and the Gumuz in particular.⁷

Like other neighboring ethnic groups, the Gumuz have its own conflict management strategies above all lead by the elders. These Gumuz elders summon a meeting of their communities to negotiate the conflicting groups. They are skillful enough to resolve the problems where the rival bodies have presented the issues to them by seeking the solution accordingly. At the end, the elders set out compensation to be paid by the offender. No questions for the final decisions approved by the elders. Their decisions are accepted, and are seriously practiced.⁸ Similarly, Dessalegn also conceptualized that the Gumuz elders and leaders had the power of exercising their authority as the reconciliation effort is concerned. For instance; they have the power to punish those who stood against the traditional laws and customs of the Gumuz community.⁹

In addition to the elders, the Gumuz have also another traditional conflict reconciliation system known as *Gafia*. It is magico – religious authority exercised by the wizard where his or her action shows as if he/she would be a doctor and the protector of their community.¹⁰ Apart from this, it played to resolve the intra-ethnic conflict among the Gumuz with the coalition of the elders.¹¹ Equally with other institutions stated above, *Siyaha* system was also said to have applied in the Gumuz community where the elders were elected by the villagers where their *Mangima* assembly center was known as *Tamba*.¹²

Generally, *Mangima* (the Gumuz term for assembly), has been the most important traditional conflict-resolution institution, particularly in solving the intra-clan (ethnic) conflicts and lineage level enmities among the Gumuz community in *Mätäkäl*.¹³

5. Conclusion

As the marriage style is concerned, Polygamous marriage system among Gumuz and marriage arrangement by parents without the consents of the woman is one of the main causes of women subordination.

¹ Informants: Adāmu Endalāw, Mākonnān Agajie, and Assāfa Abājēhu; Bogale, Conflict Resolution---, 2013), p.62.

² Informants: Adāmu Endalāw, Mākonnān Agajie, and Assāfa Abājēhu.

³ Informants: Hānna Filāte, Tuji Erāso, and Qānaw Gobbāna

⁴ Informants: Zewdu Čekol, Yāšēwas Mamo, Abdel Deboč, and Wāndāyā Bukrus

⁵ Informants: Dāmlāw Bāyāna, Albboro Dibbābā, Bāqāno Sānbāta, and Qānaw Gobbāna

⁶ Informants: Mākonnān Agajie, Mākonnān Wolde Giorgis, and Admassié Semeñ.

⁷ Informants: Mākonnān Wolde-Giorgis, Bāqālā Mākuraw, and Qānaw Gobbāna

⁸ Fekadu Wamber, “Yé Gumuz béhéreséb açir yé bahil zāgābā” (A brief cultural report of the Gumuz people, 1998), p.4.

⁹ Dessalegn Rahamato, “Resettlement and Indigenous population of ---”, 1988), p.19.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.19.

¹¹ Informants: Tāddāsa Lāma, Hānna Filāte, and Tuji Erāso.

¹² Informants: Nāni Wāzet, Zeguāfi Warb, Wāndāyā Bukrus, and Ašeber Woldu.

¹³ Informants: Embālā Qewi, Bālātā Lāqāw, Abdel Deboč, and Qānaw Gobbāna

Among the marriage systems exercised by the Gumuz community, exchange marriage system is one of the dominant marriage type that denies the right of the girl and done without the interest and willingness of both women (the bride and exchange one). Inheritance marriage is also another subordinating factor in which the household properties and investment kept only in the male line. In such marriage arrangements a widowed is not in a position to refuse the wish and interest of her husband's family. Thus, any form of refusal on the female side may lead to loss of any property including her children and put her in risk of unaccepted by the society.

The Awi are major population group in Mätäkäl who, according to the tradition, are said to have come from Seqota Lasta in the north at the end of the thirteen century AD. The *Seven House Agäw*, named after the seven Awi brothers: Ankeši, Azeni, Bänji, Čari, Kuwakri, Metikili, and Zigämi, are said to have come down to settle in Gojjam, Agäw Meder and Mätäkäl regions from Lasta. There are no still common agreements as regards to why the Awi people were advanced from their ancestral lands of Seqota in to the south-western part of the country, the present day Awi and Mätäkäl areas. Some legend sources revealed that their coming was closely linked with the bad legacy of the dominance of Amharanization.

After having studied the area, they were said to have come to southern Gojjam together with their closer relatives. Since then, they have adopted the climatic conditions and said to have pushed the Gumuz, who were the earliest settlers in the region, in to the inhospitable far west. In the continuous processes of raids, the Amhara - a Semitic speaking Christian society -gradually settled in various parts of Mätäkäl. Since the mid twentieth century, the settlers' started flocking in to the region from South Gondar, Gojjam and Wallo.

Due to landlessness because of the land tenure system and the inability of the Muslims to own *rist* lands in these provinces, they were forced to move and settle in Mätäkäl. Population pressure and environmental degradation were equally pushing factors. Thus, because of the presence of abundant natural resources in the region, Mätäkäl attracted a huge number of the Amhara communities who flocked continuously and settled with the incorporation of the region since in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The Oromo are other population group that transformed the peopling of Mätäkäl since their arrival in to the region from south of the Abbay River valley, particularly in the eighteenth century. Since then, they were said to have settled around Wänbärä, Dibatie and gradually in other areas. The Oromo expansion beyond the Durra River to the Awi territory, however, met with resistance. A certain Awi chief, *Azaž Ĵangua* is mentioned as having tried to check the Oromo advances into Agäw Meder. The major causes of conflicts between the Gumuz and other ethnic communities include encroachment, alleged evil eye, abduction, adultery, murder, thieving, the question of land and other minor causes.

The Gumuz have maintained distinct types of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms with each ethnic group who inhabited in the region. For instance, *Micu* and *Luba Bassa* with the Oromo, *Mangima* within Gumuz communities, *Harma Hodha* with the Sinaša, *Wudaj* with the Awi and *Wadaj* strategy with the Amhara. In spite of this spiral, of conflicts have been affecting the region's peace and stability. Hence, the issue of conflict resolution needs immediate attention as a precondition for any sustainable development and food security in the region.

The relationship in between Awi and Gumuz is likewise characterized by both hostile and friendly. The latter were indirectly ruled by the local chiefs appointed by the state from the former. Thus, the former was said to have raided the latter continuously for the slaves. However, they both have tried to develop the socio-cultural, economic and political interactions beginning from the eve of the 1991 democratic revolution in the country.

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