

8. Ethnic Interaction and Traditional Administrative Systems in Metekel, Northwest Ethiopia, 1898—1991

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Abstract

This Paper investigates cultural interactions and traditional administrative systems within different ethnic groups in Metekel during the past nearly one hundred years, 1898—1991. These ethnic interactions between different ethnic groups of the region had different social-bonding systems and had different names between different ethnic groups. For instance, between Agaw and Gumuz Mijim or Shimya and Wodaj were major cultural and social forms of interaction. Mijim, Michu, and Harma Hodha were major forms of cultural interaction between Gumuz, and Shinasha and Oromo. Cultural interactions between these ethnic groups began with their settlement in the region. Of these ethnic groups, Gumuz and Agaws were the earliest inhabitants of the region. The other ethnic groups that settled in the region at least beginning from fifteenth century include Shinasha, and Oromo beginning from eighteenth century. In addition to cultural bonding systems between different ethnic groups, these peripheral communities also had their own traditional administrative systems. Particularly, Gumuz and Shinasha had better structured traditional administrative systems. To organize this paper, the researcher collected data from available primary and secondary sources and critically analyzed. Thus, the research result indicates that Oromo, Shinasha, Agaw, and Gumuz had strong social-bond that tied them together during the long course of history in the region. Generally, this paper will increase our knowledge of ethnic diversity and types of ethnic interaction and social-bonding systems in Ethiopia, particularly, northwestern Ethiopia, Metekel region or western part of former Gojjam province. Furthermore, it will help as a stepping-stone for other researchers to undertake further investigations in the region.

Key Words: Metekel, Interaction, Cultural-bonding and Traditional Administrative systems.

Significance and Methodology of the Study

Understanding cultural and historical roots of peoples' interaction will help government and other concerned bodies to find solutions for conflicts arising. Certain ethnic groups in Metekel

had an age-old cultural-bonding system that enabled them peaceful coexistence for historic periods. Some of these cultural-bonding systems were *Shimya* and *Wogaj* between the Agaw and Gumuz, and *Mijim, Michu* and *Harma Hodha* between Gumuz, Shinasha and Oromo of the region. In addition to these cultural-bonding systems between different ethnic groups, Shinasha and Gumuz had their own well-structured and organized traditional administrative systems. In spite of such historical experiences between Peoples of Metekel, politically driven conflicts are shaking region since post 1991 period. Hence, government and non-government organizations who engaged in conflict resolution activities in Metekel should work on restoration and promotion of the earlier cultural-bonding systems of the people in order to establish sustainable peace in the region.

Data for this study was gathered from primary and secondary sources. Oral data was intensively collected from different districts of Metekel during the researcher's field work in the region in 2016 and 2017. Written documents were also collected from different districts of the region during the field work period and from different libraries in Addis Ababa and Archive center of Debre Markos University. These data were critical verified and analyzed to organize this article. The study employed qualitative methodological approach that has provided an in-depth understanding of societal interaction in the region.

1. General Background

Metekel is a region located in the Northwest Ethiopia that occupied western half of the pre-1991 Gojjam province extending up to the Sudan border.⁴ Its latitudinal and longitudinal location lies within 9° 57' to 12° 04' North latitude and 34° 55' to 36° 52' East longitude.⁵ The geographical scope of the study is limited to pre-1991 political boundary of Metekel.

Metekel bounded on the east by the highlands of Agaw Midir, which consist of chains of hills west of Fudi mountain extending from Messela to Chajja and Wumbiri areas in the South. Dinder River in the north also forms natural boundary between Dangur district of Metekel and

⁴ Tsega Endalew, *Inter-Ethnic Relations on a frontier: Metekel (Ethiopia), 1898—1991* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006), p.1

⁵ Ye Semien Mi'erab Ethiopia Plan Qetena Tsifet Bet, " Metekel Astedader Akababi Ateqalay Getsita (Bahir Dar 1980 E. C), p.4

Quara district of north Gonder. Sudan in the west and Abay River in the south forms a natural boundary between Metekel and Wellega province.⁶

The term Metekel refers to, “Mitikili”, one of the founding fathers of Agaws of Gojjam (the Seven House Agaw — *Langeta Awi* in Agaw Language)⁷. It also refers to clan territory occupied by the descendants of the first founding father, Mitikili in Agaw language, which located east of Dura River. During the Gonderine period, Atse Yohannes I (1667—1682) and later his son Iyasu I (1682—1706) conquered and assimilated Metekel Agaws. Iyasu the Great particularly promoted *Azazh Chuhuay*, local chief of Metekel Agaws, to the Position of *Fitawrari* and entrusted him to conquer the neighboring Gumuz territories. Using this opportunity, Agaws extended political power over vast territories of Gumuz and Shinasha territories.⁸ Thus, using the political power that they played as a channel of communication between central state and the Gumuz, Agaws extended the name Metekel over vast territories west of Durra and even up to some parts of Dangur. However, the territorial size of Metekel under the influence of Agaws was shrinking and expanding based on the strength of central state. During the era of princes, Metekel fell either under the control of neighboring Agaw chiefs or regional warlords of Gojjam and Dembya in north Gonder.⁹ Metekel took the final shape after the 1898 conquest of Negus Tekle Haimanot the whole Metekel and the 1902 boundary delimitation between Ethiopia and Anglo-Egyptian Sudan¹⁰. However, when *Negus* Wolde Giyorgis was appointed over Agaw Mider and Begemider in 1916, western most district of Metekel, Gubba, was taken away from

⁶ Debre Markos University Archive Center (here after DMUAC) ,The 1970 Awra Report to provincial Administration Fol. No. 163, File No. 278 ; Getachew WoldeMeskel, “The Consequences of Resettlement in Ethiopia” in *African Affairs*, Vol. 88, No. 352 (July 1989), pp. 362—363; Berihun Mebrate, p. 2

⁷ Tsega Endalew, *Inter-Ethnic Relations on a frontier: Metekel (Ethiopia), 1898—1991* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006), p.1

⁸ Tadesse Tamrat, “Early Trends of Feudal Superimposition on Gumuz Society in Western Gojjam” in *International Symposium on History and Ethnography in Ethiopian Studies*(November 16—25, 1982), p. 12

⁹ Tadesse Tamrat, pp. 13—14

¹⁰ Tsega Endalew, pp. 62--64

Gojjam and made to be administered under Qwara district of North Gonder.¹¹ Gubba stayed under North Gonder until 1947. However, as of 1948, Gubba once again made part of Gojjam.¹²

2. Ethnic Interaction

Metekel is one of the regions of Ethiopia where multiethnic societies live together. Agaws and Gumuz were groups of people who had long history of political and economic interaction at least since the Aksumite period.¹³ The presence of Shinasha people in Gojjam was also mentioned in Ethiopian history at least beginning from the reign of king Yisshaq (1413—1430).¹⁴ Oromos, on the other hand, started settlement in the eastern parts of Wombera (Dangab region) towards the end of the seventeenth century. During the second half of the eighteenth century, Oromos occupied larger part of western Wombera.¹⁵ Amharas also settled in the highland parts of Wombera at least beginning from the 1898 conquest of Nigus Tekle Haimanot.¹⁶ The earliest inhabitants of the region were the Gumuz. Before the settlement of Agaws, Shinasha, and Oromo in the region, the only people who inhabited in Metekel and larger parts of Gojjam were the Gumuz.¹⁷ The researcher preferred to emphasize here the socio-cultural-bonding systems of Gumuz, Agaw, Shinasha and Oromo because the researcher feels that the role and functions of these peoples' interaction systems were less investigated. Furthermore, understanding internal dynamics and social values of ethnic groups has paramount importance for administration and conflict resolution. For instance, though they paid tax to the central state, the Gumuz prefer to abide by their own traditional administrative system than being under strict control of central

¹¹ Ayenew Fenta, "A Short History of the Awi People" Senior Essay in History (KCTE, Addis Ababa, May 1998), p. 29

¹² See the Letter written by Ministry of Interior on Nehasse 10, 1939 E.C with ref. No. 29/18/92, addressed to Dejjazmatch Kebede Tessema, Gojjam Teklay Gizat Enderassie, DMUAC, Fol. No. 639, File No.--

¹³¹³Tadesse Tamrat, "Early Trends of Feudal Superimposition on the Gumuz Society in Western Gojjam," in International Symposium on History and Historiography in Ethiopian Studies (November 18—25, 1982), p. 4

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 6

¹⁵ Tsega Endalew, "The Oromo of Wombera: A Historical Survey to 1941" MA Thesis in History (Addis Ababa University, June 1997), pp. 34—36

¹⁶*Ibid.*, pp.56—57

¹⁷ Tsega Endalew, *Inter-Ethnic Relation---*, p. 15.

government. Hence, this paper also briefly discusses traditional administrative structures and functions of Gumuz and Shinasha societies of Metekel.

Gumuz

Gumuz inhabited in western edges of Ethiopian plateau since time immemorial stretching between Nilo-Saharan people in the west and Cushitic people in the east. The Gumuz of Metekel inhabited west of Durra and South of Dinder Rivers. The Gumuz are also found beyond the Ethiopian territory straddling Ethio-Sudanese border.¹⁸

The Gumuz of Gubba and western Dangur have four major clans. These are Fugn/Gubbawi, Abromolla, Funquusso, and Kodallo. Gubbawi and Abromolla trace their ancestry from Funj kingdom (1500—1821) of Sudan.¹⁹ Funquusso and Kodallo claimed themselves as the original inhabitants to the area but mixed with Gubbawi and Abromolla clans by marriage. Local elders also confirmed these clans as native inhabitants to the area.²⁰ The Gumuz called their clans *Shaka*. The four major clans or *Shaka* are divided into many sub-clans. Written and oral sources indicate the existence of about ninety sub-clans/*Shakas*/ in the region of Gubba and western Dangur. Each clan has its own territory that is owned communally by all members of the clan. All members of a clan trace common ancestor through their male. By their tradition, Gumuz males marry outside their clan so that there is no counting clan ancestry through female line. A clan has extensive territory that is divided among its sub-clans and villagers who settled sparsely in vast territories.²¹

Different Gumuz clan groups also inhabit territories east of Gubba and lowland parts of eastern Dangur. For instance, Gublak was found at the center of Dangur some sixty kilometers away to

¹⁸Tadesse Tamrat, "Early Trends of Feudal Superimposition ---", pp.1—2.

¹⁹ O. G. S. Crawford, *The Funj Kingdom of Sennar* (Glovescor: John Bellows Ltd., 1951), p. 143; Kidanemariam, p.5

²⁰ Oral Informants: Alheir Mohammed, Sheik Rejeb Algamer Banjaw, and Zahra Mohammed, and Abdul Dene; Kidanemariam, pp. 8—9; I.E. S, MS 1933, "Ye Gumuz Bahil ena Wog Achir Mender derya Tinat," Manuscript obtained from I. E. S (Be Keren Birgade Propoganda ena Bahil Committee yetekahede Tinat, 1977 E. C), p. 18.

²¹ I. E.S, MS 1933, p. 4; Oral Informants: Alheir Mohammed, Sheik Rejeb Algamer Banjaw, and Zahra Mohammed, and Abdul Dene.

the west of Pawe settlement area, and different Gumuz clan groups like Dachichaha, Dapura, Dubahiya, and Dibate inhabited in the region. These clan groups used Gublak village on Chagni—Mankush highway as market place for exchanging different items. The village was established at the beginning of 1980s as campsite for Chagni—Gubba road construction workers. After the end of the project, the site became a meeting place for different Gumuz clans of the region and developed into a small town and market center. At present Gublak served as center of sub-administrative unit of Dangur district. Damtaya clan is located on the right bank of Beles River, about thirty kilometers away to the south from Mankush (administrative center of Gubba district) in Baabi-Zanda kebele.²²

Agaws mainly inhabited on the highland plateau of Dangur and Belaya region. Agaw inhabited kebeles on the plateaus included Dek Maryam, Borenja Sillassie, Dangur Michael, Sanja ena Bargotoch (Brikti), Dawit (the seat of Zeleke Liku), and Chamchi ena Ankesha. These highland Agaws had dominant political position in the region in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. *Fitwarari* Zeleke Liku and his family centered at the plateau of highland Belaya played a great role as mediator of Gojjam Governorate General. Zeleke was chief representative of Ras Hailu of Gojjam in the region of Agaw Midir and Metekel regions. He was the chief of Tumha and Belya Agaws who conducted series of slave raiding campaigns against the Gumuz of Metekel during early twentieth century. Later, his sons, Eyasu and Shiferaw Zeleke, served as governors of Dangur and Mandura districts during the imperial period between 1940s and 1960s.²³

The Gumuz clans inhabited in the Beles Valley area and its surrounding include Dizzela, Gizi, Dugissa, Dabo, Mambuke, and Fakaya. The territory of these clans extends up to Dinder valley to the north and northwest, and Gubba and Wombera to the southwest. Dac clan occupied territories across Dinder River.²⁴ Gumuz clans that are found to the east of Beles River in the

²² Woldesillassie, Dissertation, p. 13.

²³ Oral Informants: Abyou Engida, Agirew Worku, Assefa Abejehu and Adam Endalew; Abdussamed Haji Ahmed, "Gojjam: Trade, Early Merchant Capital and the World Economy, 1901—1935," PhD Dissertation (University of Illinois at Urbana-Campaign, 1986), pp. 135—136.

²⁴ Wolde Sillassie, p. 58.

districts of Mandura and Dibate areas immediately west of Gwangwa district include Dadush, Dushka-shwa, Dagujji, Gisis, Daffili, and Dabatsi. These clans had a system of clientage or client-patron type of relationship with different Agaw chiefs who were found along their border. For instance, an Agaw family known as *Ashebrti* had clientage with Dadush clan of Gumuz in Mandura. Similarly, Agaw family named *Dungti* had clientage with Dushka-shwa clan of Gumuz in the same district. The family of *Grazmatch* Reta Teklie had clientage with the clan named Dagujji which was found west of Bizra Kani. The Family of Belay Woldemaryam had also clientage ties with Gumuz clan of Gisis and Dafili. Other Agaw chiefs like *Bilata* Yohannes Bogale and *Aleqa* Aligaz had clientage with different Gumuz clans.²⁵

There are also different Gumuz clans in Bullen and lowlands of Wombera district. These include Dechoka, Dawopa, Demwoya, Demera, Deqoka, Deguba, Banniya, Dewie and Dobbi. These clans also had clientage ties with Oromo and Shinasha chiefs along their respective territories.²⁶ These clientage ties had different names among different ethnic groups of the region. For instance, the Gumuz called these clientage ties with non-Gumuz ethnic groups as *Mijim* and *Wodaj*. The term *Mijim* in Gumuz language means ‘best man, or a longtime friendship.’ Agaws, on their part, identified similar concept or Gumuz friends as *Shimya*, which means my man or our man. Both Agaw and Gumuz used the term *Wodaj* to say friend or my friend.²⁷ Sources could not trace when and how these clientage ties were established between Gumuz and Agaws, or with other ethnic groups. However, elders narrate that Gumuz entered into clientage ties to find protection against slave raiders during earlier times. These elders mention different cases that their fathers fought against slave raiders and casualties incurred. Agaws also supplied their Gumuz friends with salt and other commodities which they brought from different markets of Gojjam. The Gumuz in turn provided Agaws with free labour service when they needed it. They also served as intermediates whenever Agaws entered into conflict with non-friend Gumuz

²⁵ Oral Informants: Abeyou Engida, Yibas Guke, Tesema Neya, Waki Jani, Adam Endalew, and Bewketu Belay.

²⁶ Oral Informants: Haffa Bekie, Dheressa Demera, Chinqarro Tsinno, Dheressa Yadeta and Amsalu Teferi

²⁷ Bogale Aligaz, p. 7.

groups. It was the duty of *Mijim* Gumuz to find the enemies of their friends or to bring reconciliation between the counter parts.²⁸

Mijim or *Shimya* social bond between Agaws and Gumuz was non-breakable and long lasting. This type of relationship passed from generation to generation between *Mijim* Agaws and Gumuz descendants. To establish *Mijim* or *Shimya* relation, it required familiarity through frequent contact and readiness for mutual support and cooperation during the time of problem or happiness. Upon the agreement of the two individuals, any one of the counter parts might use any opportunity to introduce each other and institute *Mijim*.²⁹

After the expression of one's interest and got acceptance from the other side, they fixed the date to organize the ceremonial event. Then, they nominated five elders with balanced ethnic representation from both sides to attend the final ceremony. On the day of final ceremony, the one who requested for institution of *Mijim* expected to arrive at ceremonial place earlier. He should provide the other party a goat or sheep with a local drink or liquor.³⁰ The counter party prepared honey, milk, and heifer for the individual who requested *Mijim*. The ceremony began and ended with the blessings of elders. After the first blessing, the two counter parts slaughtered the sheep and they joined their thumbs together and plunged into the flowing blood. This symbolized that the two persons tied together by blood and no any situation should break their long lasting relation. Moreover, the two parties gave oath pledging to maintain the bond, help each other, and protect one another from enemies. Thus, the relation remained securely fixed and long lasting that could pass from one generation to another.³¹ These institutions faded away after the 1974 Revolution because government bodies began to interfere on the social and cultural affairs of the community and began to degrade the role and function of traditional institutions.³²

²⁸ Oral Informants: Abeyou Engida, Yibas Guke, Tesema Neyya, Waki Jani, Adam Endalew, and Bewketu Belay.

²⁹ Bogale, p. 37.

³⁰ Oral Informants: Abiyu, Yibas, Tesema, Waki, Adam, and Bewketu

³¹ *ibid.*; Bogale Aligaz, p. 37

³² Oral Informants: Abeyou, Yibas, Tesema, Waki, Adam, and Bewketu.

Shinasha and Oromo had similar clientage ties with different Gumuz clans. They had institutions known as *Michu* and *Harma Hodha* to establish social bondage with neighboring communities or Gumuz clans.³³ *Michu* is a type of friendship established to maintain mutual protection and interdependence among Gumuz, Shinasha and Oromo of Wombera. *Michu* provided free movement and security for the people within their respective territories. This institution also allows getting a farmland for a temporary period through exchange with cattle, goats, sheep, or payment in grains when Shinasha and Oromo needed land from the Gumuz territory.³⁴

They could also move their cattle to Gumuz territory for grazing from March to June. The Gumuz were expected to provide food, shelter and other provisions for cattle herders. Reciprocally, the Gumuz needed protection, guidance, and security whenever they moved to Shinasha and Oromo territories. The Gumuz also needed protection and guidance for their commercial interactions in Shanasha and Oromo market places.³⁵ They put goods in the houses of their *Michu* and receive orientations on the nature of costs of buying and selling goods. The Gumuz children sheltered in the houses of Shinasha or Oromo friends while attending education around towns. Because of the social bond created by *Michu* institution, Shinasha and Gumuz used honey bee trees, water wells, and pasture communally. Thus, *Michu* served the communities of the area in daily interactions. It also served as an institution to solve social problems arising within the communities of Bullen, Dibati, and Wombera areas.³⁶

Harma Hodha, on the other hand, is a kind of social bond established through “breast sucking”, thus parent-child (son) or godfather relationship between individuals. The *Harma Hodha* social bond established through a ceremony where a “son” licks or sucks honey mixed with milk and dabbed on a breast or usually the thumb of his godfather called *Abba Harma* (breast father).³⁷ This type of social bond required strong moral and social commitment for mutual assistance and acting as father and child between the two individuals at personal and family level. The two

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 7

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32; Wolde Sillassie, dissertation, p. 273.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Oral Informants: Alboro, Filatie, Demilew, Ejjeta Awi, Fasil Tewchew, and Haffa Bekie

³⁷ *Ibid.*

persons gave oath to help and protect each other from any problems. From the day of oath giving, *Harma Hodha* relation remained securely fixed and unlikely to breakaway for generations to both families. An individual who wanted to establish *Harma Hodha* relation with a person should give a goat or sheep to would be *Abba Harma*, and the other party would give him a heifer.³⁸ In most cases, Shinasha or Oromo gave a heifer to his *Harma Hodha*. The Gumuz society gave more emphasis to such relationships so that they gave more land freely and took cattle and goats of their *Harma Hodha* for keeping.³⁹

The *Harma Hodha* relation was usually exercised between Shinasha and Gumuz because Shinasha wanted it to get farm and grazing land, and to have access for extracting gold from Gumuz territories. Individuals who established *Harma Hodha* relation expected provision of shelter, food, protection, guidance, and security from their Gumuz *Michu* or *Abba Harma* while passing through their territories. In return, Shinasha provided the same services for their Gumuz friends whenever they came to Shinasha territories for market or other purposes. Furthermore, Shinasha provided their Gumuz *Michu* or *Abba Harma* with seeds during cultivation period and plough their land with oxen. Thus, close relationship that is compared with the relation of father and son was established between Shinasha and their *Gumuz Michu* or *Abba Harma*.⁴⁰

3. Traditional Administrative Systems

Metekel is a peripheral region where there were no modern communication systems until recent time. Consequently, the administrative institutions of central government were either none existed or less effective because of inaccessibility of the region until the beginning of the Derg period. Thus, traditional administrative institutions that were headed mainly by elders played a great role in leading the peoples of the region.⁴¹ Both Gumuz and Shinasha people had clan based social organizations. Traditional administrative institutions of Gumuz are discussed below.

³⁸ *Ibid.*; Bogale, p. 34.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Bogale., pp. 34—35.

⁴¹ Kidanemaryam, p. 12.

Gumuz

The Gumuz of Metekel had depended exclusively on traditional system of administration, which gave authority to the elders of the clan, called *Ganzas*. These *Ganzas* carried out the role of executive body for the whole community.⁴² However, the social organization and administrative structures were not uniform across the whole Gumuz people of the region. Thus, traditional administrative systems of the Gumuz of the region were broadly divided into two kinds that pronounced mainly among Gumuz of Gubba and Western Dangur, and the Gumuz of Eastern Dangur and the rest Gumuz people found east Beles River.⁴³

In Gubba and Western part of Dangur Woreda, clan chiefs who traced their origin from Fuji kingdom of Sennar occupied top administrative position. Hence, Fugn or Gubbawi clan held the top administrative position in the region. A Sultan held the apex of administrative structure. He was elected democratically by the direct participation of all Gumuz communities of the region. The criteria for the election to the post of Sultan were his ability to administer and blood ties with the Fugn or Gubbawi clan members.⁴⁴

Two elected men held the position next to the Sultan and these men were known as *Wokil* and *Wozir*. *Wokil* was still elected from Fugn or Gubbawi clan members whereas *Wozir* was elected either from Abromolla or from native Gumuz inhabitants that represented *Fungusso* or *Kodallo* clans. Each of these figures had different duties or responsibilities in the administrative structure. Sultan exercised supreme executive power at the top administrative echelon while *Wokil* served as advisor of the Sultan.⁴⁵ The duties and responsibilities of *Wozir* were exercising the power of supreme judge and administering tax collection in the region. Under *Wozir*, two elected individuals played intermediary role between community and high officials. These individuals

⁴² Paolo Dieci, p. 120.

⁴³ Kidane maryam, p. 12

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.12—13

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13

were called *Degags* and were elected from community without reference to clan identity but they had to serve as *Wozirs* at lowest or local administrative levels⁴⁶.

Degags were officials who had great contact with the community members since they acted as bridge between the community and highest officials. They were directly responsible to *Wozir*. These officials collected taxes and passed down to the people every announcements issued by higher officials. *Degags* were highly respected elders who used to bless the community and known for their ability to keep the people together.⁴⁷ *Degags* did not interfere in the administrative affairs rather than reporting the problems prevailing within the community. The *Wokil* and *Wozir* summoned the people and discussed on different problems of the people. They reported their agreement with the people to the Sultan. Sultan could decline or approve the agreements of *Wokil* and *Wozir* with the people.⁴⁸

The religious affair was headed by Sheik not by the Sultan. In case of the death of Sultan, his eldest son or daughter took the throne until election held for the position. The tradition forbade females hold the position of Sultan or *Wozir* except the position of deputy during the transition period. There were also other officials responsible for the time of war. These military leaders were called *Megdem*. The criteria for the election of these leaders were their military skills and tactics, and experiences for their bravery.⁴⁹ *Wokil* and *Wozir* took the candidates selected from the society to the Sultan and the Sultan selected War leaders and donned them with special dress. These leaders did not have salary for their position except the privilege of booty during the war. They appropriated the booty as much as they could during the wartime. Even these leaders could take many wives or servants from the captives of war.⁵⁰ Except the war leaders or *Megdems*, the rest officials in the administrative structure of the region were paid for their services. The income

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Oral Informants: Alheir Mohammed, Sheik Rejeb Algamer Banjaw, and Zahra Mohammed, and Abdul Dene; IES, MS No. 1935, "Ye Shanqellaw Bihereseb Tarikawi Tinat, Be Zemecha Gizie ke Metekel ESePA Tsifet bet Yetegegne" (Nehassie, 1977 E. C), pp. 1—2; Kidanemariam, p. 13

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ IES, MS, No. 1935, "Ye Shanqellaw Bihereseb Tarikawi Tinat,..." p.2

of the Sultan derived from fines and taxes collected from the region. The Sultan also paid salary to *Wokil* and *Wozir* from the revenue collected.⁵¹ Thus, the Gumuz of Gubba and Western Dangur regions had well-structured traditional administrative systems. In addition, they were followers of Islamic religion contrary to the Gumuz Guminities that were found in the eastern side of Beles River. They were dominantly traditionalists.

The eastern Gumuz who lived in the districts of Eastern Dangur, Mandura, Gwangwa, Dibati, and Wombera had less structured traditional administrative system compared to the Gumuz of Gubba region. In the traditional administrative system of this region, the elders of community known as *Ganzas* had supreme executive power.⁵² The community members respected the decisions of elders and it was the responsibility of these elders to find solution for conflicts arising between clans or families. Within the Gumuz of this region, the council of elders acted as supreme executive body.⁵³

Below the council of elders, Gumuz had a traditional administrative structure known as *Siyaha*, which means leadership through elected villagers. *Siyaha* was derived from white and red stripped sheet of clothe that served as Turban for the elected person to symbolize his authority. This elected person was known as *Tissa* but the administrative institution was known by the name *Siyaha*. The community members or villagers elected much-respected individual from the villagers who is identified as *Tissa*. The term of service for *Tissa* was limited so that a *Tissa* could not stay in power for more than four (4) years.⁵⁴ *Tissa* had the responsibility to solve conflicts and judged conflicting parties. Below *Tissa*, an official known as *Wodeduwa* acted as a bridge between *Tissa* and community. He had the responsibility for collecting taxes and informing the *Tissa* the places where the problems arose in their locality. Solving the problem and passing the decision was the duty of the *Tissa*.⁵⁵ This administrative system was localized so

⁵¹ Kidanemaryam, p. 14

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 14—15

⁵³ Paolo Dieci, p. 120; Kidanemaryam, p. 14—15.

⁵⁴ IES, MS, No.1933, “Sile Gumuz Bihereseb Bahil ena Wog Tinat...”, p. 4; Tsega, p. 136; Bogale Aligaz, p. 75.

⁵⁵ IES, MS, No. 1933, “Sile Gumuz....”, p. 4

that there were many *Siyaha* institutions in this region depending on their pattern of settlement and their clan system. *Siyaha* institution was not centralized like administrative system in the Gubba region.⁵⁶

Tissa had also officials named as *Legewidan* and *Tis-Muhin* who were responsible for peace keeping and public order. When they faced the problem beyond their capacity, they referred it to the *Tissa*. Again, when the *Tissa* found it beyond his capacity, he referred the problem to the council of elders. The decision passed by the council of elders was the final and abide by all community members.⁵⁷ The elders' council was responsible for the administration of overall affairs that included family cases, neighborhood, communal, intra and inter-clan affairs. Elders exercised unlimited administrative and judiciary responsibilities.⁵⁸

When severe conflicts that included bloodshed, abducting a girl, and the like, broke out between two clans, there was a special council known as *Mangema*, which was responsible for reconciliation of the feuding parties. *Mangema* literally means assembly and the place of assembly was known as *Temba*. *Mangema* was setup by recruiting elders from neutral clans and those who did not have any grudge with any one of the feuding parties.⁵⁹ The elected elders start the mediation process and their relentless efforts moving from one village to another continuously. After they got readiness from the two parties for reconciliation, elders' council chooses the meeting place or *Temba* outside the territories of the feuding parties. Thus, the main *Mangema* Council is held there and the killer and the deceased family are invited for final *Mangema* Ritual.⁶⁰

For the final ritual, the group or individuals who committed severe crime against the other was obliged by the elders to bring an ox and a goat for slaughtering. Elders brought the two feuding parties covered with cloth to protect the eye contact between the two parties until the final

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Tsega, p. 138.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Oral Informants: Abeyou, Yibas, Tesema, Waki, Adam, and Bewketu; Bogale, p. 76; Tsega, p. 140

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

process. The final *Mangema* ritual is mainly held around a river or stream. After the blessing of elders, the two parties are made to slaughter a goat inside the river and made the blood to flow in the water. Flowing of blood inside the water symbolized washing away of violence or spirit of enmity.⁶¹ The two feuding parties also made to wash their bodies and clean themselves. After this, they are unveiled and made to see each other. The great feast is held outside the river by slaughtering the ox, which made the end of the ceremony and enmity between the two groups. Finally, they swore an oath not to violate the reconciliation.⁶²

Shinasha

Shinasha elders had also strong power in their community administration and their decisions were abided by the all community members. Shinasha have three big clans named *Ennoro*, *Endibo*, and *Dowo*.⁶³ The representatives of these clans have the power to solve social problems arising within their community and play significant role in administrative and judiciary affairs in their regions.⁶⁴

According to the Shinasha culture, any decision or conflict resolution process was carried out by three elders that represented the three clans. Before the coming of the *Derg* period, Shinasha had their own hierarchies of administration that included *Burra*, *Neimma* and *Tseira*.⁶⁵ *Burra* was the lowest level of administration chaired by one person, which was equivalent to *Chiqa Shumein* Christian administrative institution. *Neimma* was court of justice headed by three persons, and at the apex of the hierarchy was *Tseira* mainly represented by one person. The individual who took the position of *Tseira* was called *Tseiro*, which means the last decision maker. Problems first managed at *Burra* level but those who not satisfied by the decision of *Burra* appealed to *Neimma* and from *Neimma* litigants could appeal to *Tseira* who gave the last decision. No authority could decline or reject the decision of *Tseiro*. All community members abided *Tseiro's* decision. If an

⁶¹*Ibid.*

⁶²*Ibid.*

⁶³ Oral Informants: Haffa Bekie Jebbo, Albboro Dibaba Didi and Demilew

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

⁶⁵*Ibid.*

individual attempted to refuse *Tseiro's* decision, community members remove the roof of his house and no one could cooperate with him to rebuild his house.⁶⁶

Shinasha had rules of administration called *Neimmo*. *Neimmony Torra* in Shinasha language means *Be'Hig Amlak* in Amharic that means on the behalf of law. In case of murder, they had special institution to solve the problem of blood-shed. Blood father called *Nynahoo* headed this institution.⁶⁷ A Shinasha who killed another shinasha had to notify the incident soon to blood father and shelter himself there from the revenge of the deceased family. The *Nynahoo* soon called the assembly of elders and began investigation of the case. The elders asked the criminal to brief the details how he committed the crime.⁶⁸ Lying was strictly forbidden in Shinasha culture so that the criminal should tell the truth. The process of briefing how crime was committed called in Shinasha culture as *Fala*. They called this process as the course of repenting or expressing the regret.⁶⁹ If the Killing found deliberate, the punishment would be severe but when it was happened accidentally or in the course of defending himself, the punishment might be less severe. Thus, maximum punishment was alienating the killer from the community for seven years. There was no tradition of imprisoning the criminal in the Shinasha culture. After the decision of elders' assembly chaired by *Nynahoo*, the criminal was cursed and sent to the forest to leave there until he completed his sentence period. This process of cursing the criminal by the elders' assembly was known *Sheir-Amma*.⁷⁰

During his life in the forest, the criminal should not communicate with any one of the community members because he was cursed to leave alone in the forest with beasts. He killed the person because of his cruelty like the beasts of the forest. Until he completed his sentence, the criminal should not cut his hair, nails, and should not wash his body and could not change his

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

⁶⁷*Ibid.*: Ejjeta Awi, Filate Jirata, Fasil Tewachew, Chinqarro Tsino; Abebe Anno and Addisu Adamie, Ye Boro-Shinasha Achir Tarik enna Bahilawi essetoch (Assosa: TiGy Advertisement and publication works organization, 2007), pp.38—43.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

clothe.⁷¹ This sentenced criminal had to live on gifts of the forest. In case when he could not find any food from forest, he could shout to the villagers being at a distance that could be heard but should keep himself out of the sight. The community knew the language of shouting and took food to the place where they heard shouting on non-returnable utensil and put it somewhere in the forest but should not have eye contact with the criminal.⁷²

When the criminal completed his sentence and stayed alive, his family and community members organized special ceremony. He was sent to forest through cursing so to refute this cursing, they organized a blessing ceremony before the criminal mixed with his community members. This ceremony was comparable with big festivity of wedding, which was known as *Sheiro*.⁷³ The Community members gathered around a stream and called on the deceased family. Individuals from a different clan of the criminal were also sent to the forest to bring the criminal. These individuals made the criminal to wash his body, cut his hair and nails, and change clothes. Then, they brought him to the blessing ceremony place. The criminal made to stand across the stream behind the curtain descended and the deceased family made to stand on the other side of the stream. There should not be eye contact between the deceased family and the criminal. Elders headed by Nynahoo began the blessing ceremony expressing avoidance of enmity between the two families and wishing peaceful and happy life in the future.⁷⁴

After completion of blessing ceremony, representatives of the deceased family and the criminal made to slaughter a sheep inside the stream and they threw it there. People did not eat the meat of this sheep. Then, the whole attendants of ceremony moved to the villages of the two families where a big feast prepared by slaughtering an ox. It was by slaughtering ox that formal reconciliation made between the two families. The two families made to eat together in the house

⁷¹*Ibid.*

⁷²*Ibid.*

⁷³*Ibid.*

⁷⁴*Ibid.*: Ejjeta Awi, Filate Jirata, Fasil Tewachew, Chinqarro Tsino; Abebe Anno and Addisu Adamie, Ye Boro-Shinasha Achir Tarik enna Bahilawi essetoch, pp.38—43.

of criminal's family and the deceased family. The ceremony concluded through blessing and payment of compensation or blood price contributed by the relatives of the criminal.⁷⁵

Conclusion

Metekel in northwestern Ethiopia is a region where multiethnic societies live together. Of these ethnic groups Gumuz, Agaw, Shinasha and Oromo were the earliest settlers of the region. They had established strong cultural-bonding systems among themselves which shaped their peaceful coexistence and served as institutions of conflict resolution when problems arose. The cultural bonding systems between different ethnic groups had different naming like *Shimya*, *Mijim* and *Wodaj* between Agaw and Gumu; *Mijim*, *Michu* and *Harma Hodha* between Gumuz and Shinasha or Oromo. In addition to these cultural bonding systems, Gumuz and Shinasha in particular exercised their own traditional administrative systems until these systems faded away because of government interventions since the Derg period. Traditional administrative systems had well organized structures and elders of these communities played significant role.

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⁷⁵*Ibid.*

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