

Centralization Effort and Local Gumuz Response in North Western Ethiopia: The Lambicha Revolt and Its After Math (1960- 1961).

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Abstract

The Gumuz people of Mätäkäl are one of the peripheral marginalized peoples in northwestern Ethiopia. They were subjected to protracted slave raids by the rulers or agents of the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia, the Sudanese authorities and local regional lords. In fact, this characterized their history up to the first half of twentieth century. In due courses, the Gumuz started to put up an organized resistance to this age old discriminating and dehumanizing socio-political processes. This expressed itself in various forms such as taking subtle actions against their former masters or the neighboring ethnic groups; or by open revolt against the government. Hence conflict and violence dominated the relation of the Gumuz with both the government of various period and the neighboring ethnic groups. The government of Haile Sellassie devised and implemented various administrative reforms to contain and control these actions of the Gumuz. Administrative centers and police stations were opened in different districts of Mätäkäl deep in to the Gumuz land. The expansion of the political center in to the Gumuz periphery created conducive condition for the closer interaction of different peoples that facilitated the socio-economic and cultural transformation of the Gumuz people. In fact, the Gumuz have been seen considerable changes in their traditional way of life and different aspects of their life since then. For instance, the event paved the way for the birth of the Centre-Periphery approaches in to the Periphery-Centre developmental changes.

Keywords: Resistance, Autonomy, Self Administration, Marginalization.

1. Introduction

1.1. Geographical Setting

The Mätäkäl Region of Western Ethiopia is a vast territory located in the north western Ethiopia, bordering the Republic of Sudan to the north of Blue Nile. It is bounded in the north by Gondar, in the south by Wälläga and Asossa, in the east by the former province of Gojjam, and the Sudan along the west.¹ Before the Federal State structure, the region was also bounded by Begi-Meder and Semen, in the north, Qolla Dägä Damot in the north east, Sudan in the West, and Wälläga in the south.²

According to oral accounts, gathered from different localities of Mätäkäl Zone, and Taddesse, the word Mätäkäl is said to have been named after the coming of one of the Seven Awi Clans called 'Mitikili' in Awgni language, in to the region more probably at the end of the thirteen century AD³. Then the name of the area is said to mean a land reserved for future settlement.⁴ Abdussamad contends that the name Mätäkäl is also used to refer to a 7000 foot Mountain situated around Mandura *Wäräda* which is one of the seven *Wärädas* of the present day Benišangul Gumuz Regional State.⁵

According to the administrative structure set up by the *Dergue*, Mätäkäl region, was known as Mätäkäl *Awraja*, and put under the administrative region of Gojjam. By then, Mätäkäl *Awraja*, used to include ,Dibaṭé, Mandura, Dängur, Guangua, Wänbära and Guba *Wärädas*. Accordingly, the name Mätäkäl *Awraja* is used in the study to denote the region that was made of these six *Wärädas*. However, in the post 1991 period, the entire Guangua *Wäräda* and some parts of Dibaṭé *Wäräda* of Mätäkäl *Awraja* became part of the Amhara National Regional State of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.⁶ The area that lies north of the Abbay River comprises almost all parts of the former Mätäkäl *Awraja* of Gojjam Administrative region, except Guangua and some parts of Dibaṭé *Wäräda*, is characterized by extensive low lands with up and down plains, a hot, humid and

¹ Berihun Mebratie, "The Past in the Present: The Dynamics of Identity and Otherness among the Gumuz of Ethiopia" (PhD Dissertation: Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NINU), Trondheim, 2004), p.1; Berihun Mebratie, "Spontaneous Settlement and Inter-Ethnic Relations in Mätäkäl: North Western Ethiopia" (Department of Social Anthropology, Trondheim, 1996), p.73.

² Bogale Aligaz, "Conflict Resolution among the Gumuz Communities: Mangima Institution in the Twentieth Century" (M.A.Thesis in history, Bahir Dar: Bahir Dar University, 2013), P.1.

³ Taddesse Tamirat, "Process of Ethnic Interaction and Integration in Ethiopian History: The Case of the Agäw." *Journal of African History XXIX* (Addis Ababa, 1988b), p.11; Informants: Admassié Semeñ, Mäkönnän Agajie and Assäfa Abäjéhu.

⁴ Informants: Admassié Semeñ, Mäkönnän Agajie, and Assäfa Abäjéhu.

⁵ Abdussamad H, Ahmad, "The Gumuz of the Lowlands of Western Gojjam: The Frontier in History, 1900-1935", *Africa 50*,.5, (ROM:ex Africa Semger At iquid, 1995), pp.53-54.

⁶ Abdussamad, "The Gumuz of the Low lands...", pp.53-54; Charles T. Beke, "Abyssinia-Being a Continuation of Routes in that Country". *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society, Vol. XIV* (London, 1844), p.9.

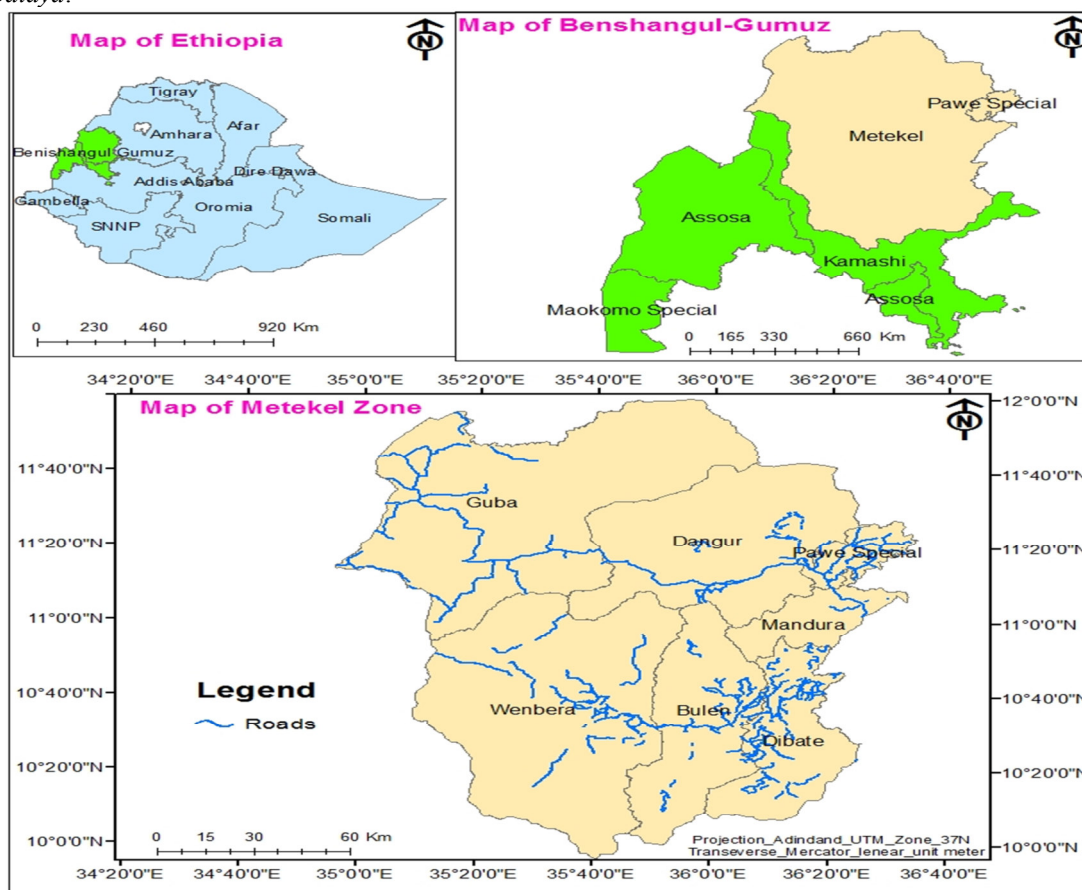
bare region.¹ This region fairly corresponds with Mätäkäl Zone. Perhaps this suggests of use of geographic features, river, for creating administrative units.

Abdussamad, based on oral tradition he collected from Dängur and Mandura, claims that the Gumuz have lived around the high lands covering extensive territories that used to stretch from Zage, Lake Tana, to the east, and Bahir Dar from the north east to south wards through the present days of Dangela, Injibara, Kossobar, Bure, Dabrä Marqos up to the Abbay River Basin bordering Gojjam with Šhewa and Wälläga to the south and the south east.²

Similarly, Taddesse's illustration depicts the territory inhabited by Gumuz to stretch up to the *Fudi* High lands of the present day, Awi Zone. The term *Fudi* is a Gumuz word meaning "see the black men or the Gumuz" to the west of Kossobar up to Čagni that used to be inhabited by the Gumuz in the recent past.³

In time, the ever increasing encroachment of the highlanders, is said to have forced some of the Gumuz to retreat down to the hot and remoter low lands of the western periphery where as the rest are said to have crossed the Blue Nile to Wälläga.⁴

Currently, the Benišangul Gumuz Regional State is located in the western part of the country. Astronomically, it is situated between 09° 17'-12° 06' North latitude and 34° 10'-37° 04' East longitude. The region has a total area of approximately 50,380 square kilometers with altitude ranging from 580 to 2,731 meters above sea level.⁵ Benišangul Gumuz National Regional State comprises Kāmaši Zone, Asossa Zone and Mätäkäl Zone. The latter, Mätäkäl Zone, alone constitutes about 51.6% of Benišangul Gumuz National Regional State.⁶ Its altitude varies from 600 meters above sea level (m.a.s.l.) around the Ethio-Sudanese border to 2488 m.a.s.l. at Mt. *Bäläya*.⁷



¹ Dabella Alemu, "A Historical Survey of Asossa Town to 1991." School of Graduate Studies (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, 2007), p.3.

² Abdussamad, p.66.

³ Taddesse, Tamirat "Process of Ethnic Interaction and Integration...1988b), p.10.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ Benišangul-Gumuz Regional Food Security Strategy, Beureau of Finance and Economic Development "Report"(Asossa, 2004), p.5.

⁶ Melkamu Bessie, "Fiscal Decentralization in Benišangul Gumuz Region: A Review of Problems of Fiscal Imbalance" (M.A.-Thesis in Regional and Local Development Studies, Addis Ababa University, 2004), p.62.

⁷ Wolda-Sellassie Abute, "Nature, Culture and Encroachment: Indigenous Resource Management of Gumuz under Stress in Metekel, North Western Ethiopia." *Proceedings of the XIVth International Conference of the Ethiopian Studies* (Institute of Ethiopian Studies: Addis Ababa University, 2002), p.3.

1.2. Political Autonomy and Self Administration

As Jira cited in Gabre (2001: 61), the 1960s Gumuz revolt in Mätäkäl, particularly in Mäntawuhä and Dibaṭé was a protest made against the encroachment of highlanders into their territory and the continuous re-settlement program of the central government. Even worse, the exploitation made by the newly appointed government officials over the Gumuz and some other Nilotic group living together with them was enforced the early settlers to break the revolt against the new comers.¹

Based on the oral accounts documented by Jira from the highland informants, what helped the Gumuz to strengthen them was the support they gained following the abolishment of the slave trade. For instance, the reward given by the Emperor during the liberation struggle and aftermath of the war as well as collecting of the fire arms from the Italian camped forts during and after the major war increased their effort and “made them to feel as if they were stronger than others because they were socially despised, discriminated and enslaved”.²

Even though there was high discrimination and enslavement, the Gumuz were relegated (marginalized) in all level of development. Since the declaration of the legal abolishment of slavery and its slave trade although it was a pretext in some cases, and other related improvements supported them to demand the freedom for humanity and neglecting of their equal involvement with their neighboring highlanders either economically or in political aspects. Therefore, a “subordinate minority ---my react to years, decades, or long lasting centuries of oppression and discrimination and stand up to say enough”³.

As regards to the causes for the outbreak of the 1950s and 1960s Gumuz revolt in Mätäkäl, the following can be cited as the prerequisite factors; firstly, the political title allowed by the Emperor immediately following his re-entry never satisfied their economic benefits as comparing with the relief where they received from the Italians during its occupation. Secondly, the pressure of tax assessing committee where they imposed on the Gumuz to bring the tax before the fixed year, even some times more than once a year. Thirdly, intensification of cheating from the government side by considering the Gumuz as the one who has no knowledge in the case of understanding about what the government has declared and outlawed. For instance, the total amount of annual tax assigned on the Gumuz was only birr 3.50, however, the committee enforce them to pay a fat goat in the form of kind than cash. Finally, the continuous re-settlement program of the highlanders closer to the Gumuz lands and the endless harassment resulted from the local chiefs and their representatives of the government⁴.

In line with tax assessing Committee assigned from the center, the following local chiefs were played a vital role in collecting taxes from the Gumuz of Mätäkäl either based on the rule and regulation or based on their knowledge. Some of these were; *Fitawrari* Deresso Täsamma in Zigām, *Fitawrari* Zäläqä Berru in Mäntawuhä, *Gerazmaç* Ereta Takle in *Massi*, Kābbädä Alemu in *Akako*, *Qāñazmaç* Morka Gayo, *Gerazmaç* Gobbana Kumbi and *Fitawrari* Ejeta Biftu all together in Wānbāra, *Fitawrari* Wolde- Mariam Yetu in Bullān, *Fitawrari* Embiala Gesassa in Guangua, *Fitawrari* Eyasu Zäläqä in Mandura and some others below in hierarchy were carried out their missions during the period under discussion.⁵

At the end, this restless exploitation and suppression resulted from the government chiefs marked the beginning of Gumuz revolt since 1960. Although the revolt seems individual conflicts, it grew progressively and spread towards different Gumuz villages such as Dibaṭé, Mäntawuhä, Mandura and other neighboring Gumuz inhabited areas of Mätäkäl. This Gumuz resistance above all was led by the Gumuz bandit, called Lambiça Wubani and the revolt was also known as Lambiça revolt. The revolt was lasted from 1960 to 1963⁶. The center of the resistance was around the hills and plains of Mäntawuhä, where Lambiça himself was ambushed. He was the bandit who called himself with the title *colonel*, as if he were well equipped, militarily experienced, technically rich and excellent in leader ship quality in both coordination and re-organization comparing with those locally appointed government officials (armed forces)⁷.

The revolt was intensified as far as Wānbāra, Dibaṭé and Mandura immediately soon after Mäntawuhä, where both Ambage and Sese, the two Gumuz rebellion leaders, led the revolt equally with Lambiça, in Wānbāra and Mandura respectively. Ambage was said to have been organized the resistance as far as *Bobohi*, the Gumuz village in Dibaṭé where he firmly re-challenged the revolt against the local chiefs advanced from the center.⁸

During the major uprisings, the Gumuz rebels cut the penis, right arm and female breast from the dead. In fact, killing and mutilating of the females is unacceptable in the cultural history of the Gumuz society. After having looked the event, the Wollo Muslims in Mäntawuhä, tried to leave the area to their previous homeland.⁹ Similarly, Sese was organized and led the revolt around different Gumuz villages in Mandura district side by

¹ Jira, “A History of---,2008),p.39.

² *Ibid*

³ Tsega Endalew.” Conflict Resolution Through Cultural Tolerance---,2002),p.19.

⁴ Informants: Mäqonnän Agajie, Dābbāsu Yésmaw, Mäsfēn Arqāw; Bazāzāw Gālāw, A History of ---,1991), p.38.

⁵ Informants: Yāšēwas Mamo,Qānaw Gobbāna, Tiruworq Eyasu,Assāfa Abājēhu, and Admassiē Semen.

⁶ Informants: Mäkönnän Agajie, Ašābēr Woldu, Qānaw Gobbāna, and Assāfa Abājēhu.

⁷ Informants: Assāfa Abājēhu, Qānaw Gobbāna, Ašēbir Woldu, and Mäsfēn Arqāw.

⁸ Fekadu Jaletta,”Oromo – Šinaša Relations in---“ ,2000),p.19.

⁹ Informants: Qānaw Gobbāna, Zāwdu Čakol, and Mäkönnän Agajie.

side with Lambiča, where they looted the properties of non-Gumuz society by devastating their villages. For instance, Lambiča and his forces were said to have been plundered many cows from Mandura, Dibaṭé, Mántawuhā and other villages of the highlanders and distributed to their home people. In line with this, the following Amharic poem can still illustrate about his looting and re-distribution of the plundered property to the Gumuz people as:

ኮላኔ ልሳምቦቻ Colonel Lambicha
ሀዝቡን አደረገ ወላምቦቻ made the people rich in cows.

The government was still demanded the Gumuz elders to resolve the problems in the region through discussion than the actual war. They were discussing on the security problems intensified by the Gumuz individuals against the Awi and the highland settlers. However, the negotiation and discussion conducted between the two failed to bring any solution due to the demand of the Gumuz elders presented to the center underlining exempting from tax payment totally, restoration of their captured guns during 1940s and 1950s and finally government's appointment of the Gumuz elders with in different political fields. But the state resisted and cancelled the demands presented by the Gumuz representatives.²

What triggered the situation and forced the government to deploy the formidable army against the Lambiča uprising was the death of Agaje, who was an Awi tax collector around the Gumuz areas. The government army was accompanied by the local militia recruited mostly from different highlands in Mätäkäl, such as Awi, Oromo, Šinaša, and other non-Gumuz communities. Uhis Kwacha was suspected to be the killer whose action provoked government information to suppress the revolt. However, in 1960 the stiff resistance of Lmbica was broken by the highland forces above all commanded by *General* Lamessa Bedaso, who was the *General* of the Federal army at the time. Since then, Dibaṭé and Mandura; the major centers of the war were placed under the state security.³

As cited in Jira (2008:41), during the major war against Lambiča, the highlander forces from Wānbāra were joined with the central army. This part of the army was led by *Fitawrari* Bāyāna, the governor of Wānbāra during the uprising. Finally, the war was ended by the victory of the army from the center. Thus, Lambiča was captured and said to have been taken to Dabre Markos and then to Addis Ababa by plane where as Sese was captured and taken to Čagni town where he was shot down⁴.

2. Steps under taken by the State Following the Defeat of the Rebels

Immediately following the victory, the government set up patrolling sites and stations in different areas of Mätäkäl. This event laid the base for the foundation of police stations at Mántawuhā, Dibaṭé and Mandura, where both Dibaṭé and Mandura" were later developed in to *Wārāda level*". By doing so, the government tried to control any offending activities of the Gumuz from their home villages'. Gradually, these stations established for the security purpose had adverse effects than transforming political power from center to periphery.⁵ In line with this development, Berihun has indicated two long lasting effects revived within the political sphere of the center-periphery connections as follows:

Firstly, the movement of the Gumuz away from these newly established stations cost them a considerable part of their land permanently, and secondly, it created conducive environment for other highlanders, for instance, the Šinaša and Oromo, to expand their holdings further to north.⁶

At the end, the event marked the advance of the Oromo people from their home base, Wānbāra to Mántawuhā, where the latter was also attracted migrants from Wollo following the re-existence of famine due to bad climatic conditions.⁷

According to my oral informants conducted in Čagni and Mandura towns, while they were running government duties with the power of the secretary of State Administration and other related works around Mätäkäl *Awraja* from 1961 to 1974 ,they have seen that the Gumuz were evicted from their lands and forced to pay back payment either in cash or 'cattle's' in kind.⁸

Besides, the government forced them to handover their guns and even bows too. Accordingly, they personally narrate about the consequences that brought the Gumuz under the victim of the central government following the end of Lambiča uprising with Amharic version as follows:

¹ Informants: Zāwdu Čakol, Mākonnān Agajie, Qānaw Gobbāna, and Ašābér Woldu.

² Informants : Mākonnān Agajie, Qānaw Gobbāna, and Ašābér Woldu.

³ Informants : Qānaw Gobbāna, Mākonnān Agajie, Assāfa Abājéhu, and Zāwdu Čakol; Berihun Mebrate, "Spontaneous Settlement and Inter-Ethnic Relations in---", 1996), pp.78-79; Jira ,A History of ---,2008),p.41.

⁴ Jira , "A History of---,2008),p.41; Informants : Māsḥēn Arqāw ,Abebe Abera, Dābāsu Guḩ, and Qānaw Gobbāna

⁵ Informants : Assāfa Abājéhu ,Qānaw Gobbāna , Mākonnān Wolde-Giorgis, and Zāwdu Čakol.

⁶ Berihun, " Spontaneous Settlement in---",1996),p.268; Jira, "A History of ---",2008),p.41.

⁷ Jira,pp.41-42.

⁸ Informants: Assāfa Abājéhu, Qānaw Gobbāna, Adāmu Endalāw, Admassié Semeñ and Yāšēwas Mamo.

በደበበጅ በመቶዳራ እንዲሁም በዳቸ አካባቢዳዮሩ የነበሩት ነገደ ሽንቅሎች እንዲያምጹ የአደረገው ሪሱን ኮሌጅል ነኝ በሚሉት ይህም የነበረው ላምባቸው ጋኒ የሚባል ጉምዝ ሲሆን ጦርነትም ከመከላከል መግባት ሽመጫዎች ጋር በ1953 ዓ/ም ተካሂዷል፡፡ በመጨረሻም ጉምዙ ተሸንፎ እንደ ወዘተ ግብር ከብድሩን እንዲያስረኩብ ታዳርጎል፡፡ የጦር መሳሪያንም አስረክቦል፡፡

Lambiçaw Gani, who called himself as a Colonel, agitated the Gumuz people of Dibaté, Mandura and Dach to break the uprising against the center by using the pretext of the encroachment of the settlers in to their lands in 1961. However, the uprising was crushed and the government forced them to bring the back payment in cash unless their cattle's in kind. Besides, they were also forced to surrender and handover their guns to the local governors.

Although the war was ended in favor of the imperial army, it did not bring the long lasting peace and order in the region. Even it did not erase the bad legacies away from the memories of the Gumuz. The war had an adverse effect due to the fact that the devastation, exploitation, suppression and wholly killings of the latter by the government forces created unforgettable memories and shocks among the Gumuz of Mäntawuhä, Dibaté, Mandura and the nearby Gumuz villages in particular. Whatever the problem was, some Gumuz individuals who personally participated during the war against the government forces by supporting Lambiça were still remembering the heroic deeds of the bandit who died for the name of their freedom².

To the contrary, some Gumuz elders in these areas were also adversely remembering the bad legacies of Lambiça, who agitated them to fight against the central army without their knowledge that later resulted for their final defeat and devastation. Furthermore, they were socially and economically exploited by the victorious army following their defeat. Their weapons and war time equipments including spears and bows were all over taken. Their land was allowed for the newly arrived settlers.³

Following the victory of the state army over the rebels, the Awi people, neighboring the Gumuz villages still remember Lambiça by the following poems:

ላምባቸው ጉምዝ ለህረግ ለህረግ you with fatty surface
ድኸሽሽክከህረግ፡፡ Let God dismiss with your race.
እንት ሚኸጋኔ ሊ the evil come with you
ትቲካ ይገደዳካ ካኒ ለ፡፡ made the cotton useless at outside.
ጋምባላሰ እዩሽቴታ Whatever you fenced your forts with Gambello tree
ቸወሰቲቸዊሊሰቴታ፡፡ you are not escaped from Lammessa's fire.

It was also said that the police force and the Awi local chiefs together devastated the Gumuz villages and took unrepeatabe measures against the captured rebels. Those innocent and unarmed Gumuz individuals were not even escaped from the inhuman measures. Their homes were all burnt and changed in to ash. While those who escaped from the punishment were left their areas and said to have left to Sudan.⁵ In line with this, the oral accounts documented by Alemayehu from Awi informants conceptualized the role played by the joint army both Awi and the police force in disarming the Gumuz arrogant with Amharic version as follows:

ከአገደዎቻችንና ከመቶከል አወራጃ ተወግጦ ከገለሰ ሀይል ጋር በጋራ ዘመቻውን ያካሄደው የአዊ መሳሪያ አንጋች ከጉምዝ ሽፍቶች መሳሪያቸውን እንደ ማዶ እንጨቴ አስደርደዋል፡፡ በዚህም አካባቢና አዋቂዎች በሰፈሩባቸው እላይ ደባብጅ ማዳራ አካባቢ የሰፈረው ጉምዝ አሜሪካ ጦር መሳሪያውን አወርዶ ሰደረደር የዳራ ወንዝን ተከትሎ እስከ አባይና ወላጋ ድንበር ድረስ የሰፈረው ጉምዝ ግን መሳሪያም አላወረደም ግብርንም አልከፈፍንም በሚሉት ወደ ሱዳንና ጎረቤት አካባቢዎች ተሻግረዋል፡፡⁶

Awi gun holders selected from Mätäkäl and Agäw Meder Awraja together with the police force made the campaign against Gumuz banditries and collected the disarmed guns as like as fire wood. The Gumuz who inhabited around Zigäm, Dibaté and Mandura handover their guns peacefully. While those who inhabited along the Durra River to Blue Nile bordering with Wälläga were refused to submit their guns and pay the tribute and left for the Sudan and other nearby border areas.

Even at the end of the war, the government tried to deploy huge number of police force and the national defense in Dibaté, Mäntawuhä and Mandura. Consequently, the government made the Gumuz lands of Mandura, Dibaté and Mäntawuhä as the garrison centers, where both Dibaté and Mandura were elevated in to *Wäräda*

¹ Ibid.
² Informants: Qänaw Gobbäna, Assäfa Abäjähu, and Mäsfän Arqäw; Berihun, "Spontaneous Settlement in---", 1996), p.270.
³ Informants: Abdél Deboç, Bälätä Läqäw, and Zäwdu Çakol; Berihun, Ibid, p.270; Jira, A History of ---, 2008), p.42.
⁴ Informants: Guädíe Abäbä, Tíruworq Eyasu, Assäfa Abäjähu, and Adämu Éndäléw; Alemayehu, "Inter-ethnic Relation among Awi and Gumuz, North Western Ethiopia: A Shift from hostile to peaceful co-existence". *African Journal of History and Culture* (Ethiopia: Wollo University, 2015), p.66.
⁵ Informants: Mäkonnän Wolde-Giorgis, Qänaw Gobbäna, and Adämu Éndäléw.
⁶ Alemayehu, "State and Ethnic Interaction---", 2012), p.88.

status due to the revival of another security problems immediately following the Lambiça uprising since 1961.¹ In addition to the poems stated about Lambiça above, one of my informants, who participated during the war against the Lambiça uprising by leading the local chiefs from Čagni, has remembered me by using the following Amharic poems:

ሽፍታየ ለምበላኝ ን ጊዜ No rebels during my time
ለምበላኝ ን ጊዜ No thief during my time
ለምበላኝ ለምበላኝ ለምበላኝ Lambiça to be died with depressions.
መካከል ተኛ ተንፍሰህ በጊዜ: ² let you sleep on time without thinking.

There are also poems in Awgni language where the Awi inhabitants have being narrating about the Lambiça times connecting with the victory of the highlanders and the victim of the Gumuz around the Durra River in 1953 E.C.

Then, the following Awgni poem can illustrate this:

ከገብኩ አባጭ ካይግ ማ Whatever they took across Abbay River
ደኸኔ በላኖ ፍሻማ bypassing along the area of Bullän
ዘርፅፅ ኾጎን ደኮይግ ማ : But brought back by shooting them with rifle
Gondie
ግላቱ እንግሪ Heros of Gilat
ለምበላኝ ሆኖ : : who tested strong hand to Lambiça

3 .Methodology

Under this chapter, significant information and narrations about Ethiopia in general and the Mätäkäl region in particular, where the study is revolving should be discussed in detail. Besides, in each and every sub-unit; views, assumptions and illustrations of the scholars and eye witness accounts of the informants will be given due emphasis and conclusions are also included.

The sources used, in this study, are both oral and written sources. The oral sources were collected from Awi, Amhara, Gumuz, Šinaša and Oromo informants who are living either together with the Gumuz or neighboring them. In most cases, the informants from Awi, Amhara, Oromo and Šinaša 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 about the history of the resistance with its causes and effects either directly from their families or indirectly from the deeds of their descendants.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. The Immediate After Math of the Lambiça Revolt/1961-1963/.

As tried to state in the proceeding pages, the intervention of the government forces against the Gumuz revolt of 1960 created good opportunities for settling highlanders by bringing them from the drought affected areas of the country, mostly from Wollo, South Gondar and Gojjam. Following this and other related problems, for instance, “shortage of land, drought or landlessness due to the land tenure system of the time and inability of the Muslims to own rist land” initiated them to change their original home base areas to the less comfortable low lands of Mätäkäl.³ In addition to Jira and oral informants, Berihun has also mentioned additional causes that forced the Gumuz people to move from their home areas to different parts of Mätäkäl as follows; “expectation of a better life in the new area, the problem related with security and frequent theft of their property by their Christian neighbors”.⁴

A year later, in 1961, the government assigned both *Fitawrari* Asaged Käbbädä and Taddässä Jambare as the governors of Agäw Meder and Mätäkäl *Awraja* respectively. Additionally, the rural based security network forces, *Nač labaš*,⁵ from the center were deployed. These newly formed forces were distributed in the areas where the security problems threatened. The combination of both the police forces and the *Nač labaš* Security Networks minimized the intensity of the Gumuz resistance. However, the tension between the Gumuz and the highlanders was not reduced even after the government stationed these modern formidable forces.⁶

For instance, immediately following the end of Lambiça uprising, the Gumuz of Mandura and Dibäte were also refused to pay the tax for collecting committee. Even worse, they show hating gestures against them .As the result, this event leads clashing between the former and the latter in the local level. The Gumuz rebellion was broken at a local Gumuz village also called *Tseh*, bordering both Mandura and Dibäte. It was led by a Gumuz

¹ Informants : Zäwdu Čakol, Yäšéwas Mamo, Semeñ Eyasu, and Bälätä Läqäw.

² Informants: Mäkönnän Wolde-Giorgis, and Bälätä Läqäw.

³ Informants: Ašäbér Woldu, Yäšéwas Mamo, and Qänaw Gobbäna; Jira , “A History of---2008),p.43.

⁴ Berihun, “Spontaneous Settlement in ---”,1996),p.163.

⁵ *Nač labaš stands for security forces with the white military cloth.*

⁶ Informants: Qänaw Gobbäna, Assäfa Abäjéhu, Adämu Ęndäléw, and Däbbäsu Yésmau.

bandit known as Bengo Degger. This Gumuz resistance which lasted from 1963 – 1964 was defeated by the highlander force led by *Qānazmač* Qelkay Abaša, who was the governor of Mandura after *Fitawrari* Eyasu Zālāqā¹.

Following the war, the Gumuz tried to pay the tax and maintain peace and order with the highland settlers although its relation was short lived. This is due to the fact that individual killings in both sides was the day today activities resulted from the policy of the government on the one side, the encroachment of the settlers towards their farm lands where its agricultural settlements were established on the land of the Gumuz, where they inhabited before the arrival of any ethnic group towards it, and on the other side the land graving policy where their land was allowed for some notable individuals. For example, Jébril Bilal, a Muslim highlander and a private business man was said to have been leased and brought in and settled the highland peasants from Wollo and Gondar immediately following the end of the Lambiča uprising, for instance, in and around Māntawuhā².

This small scale individual conflicts in the region gradually developed in to large scale uprising where mass killings were seen as the the day today activities of the period. As an illustration, Jira conceptualizes the settler-Gumuz conflicts of the 1966 to 1970 that clearly observed particularly in Māntawuhā, Dibaṭé and Mandura districts. Thus, the engagement between the former and the latter resulted in the “consuming of the lives of people from both sides and led to the devastation of property”³.

In 1967, the Gumuz started selective killings against the highlander communities who inhabited by neighboring them. The problem was said to have emanated from the absence of strong leader ship from the patrolling centers following the retirement of *Fitawrari* Asaged Kābbādā. The Wollo settlers and Awi, who inhabited in Mandura, Dibaṭé, Dāngur and Zigām, were the prime victims during this uprising. Besides these inhabitants, the Gumuz rebels were said to have managed to kill the police forces and the regular *nač labaš*⁴.

By hopping to stop the uprising, the government appointed *Fitawrari* Haile Birra in the place of Asaged Kābbādā in 1967. However, he was not active enough to settle the problems intensified by the Gumuz. Even worse, he was blamed for his failure to deploy the police and the *nač labaš* forces in to the Gumuz areas where the problem was out of control. Then, due to these and other related problems, Haile was resigned from his position of Awraja administration, and in the place of him, the State appointed *Bitwodad* Ayaléw Mākonnān as the governor since 1969.⁵ The situation came again beyond the knowledge of the newly appointed administrator. Because his period was directly coincided with the ceaseless Gumuz revolt where they started lootings, firing the houses and un harvested crops of the highlanders, deliberate killings by targeting the innocent people in particular. Following this ceaseless uprising, the government failed to collect the annual tax in Mandura, Guba, Dāngur, Dibaṭé, Māntawuhā and other related areas of Mātākāl where the revolt was not even highly intensified.⁶

As the solution to these problems, the Emperor Haile Sellassie was said to have established more patrolling centers around the Ethio-Sudanese border lands where the illegal exchange of fire arms was high. However, this plan was said to have failed due to the latter’s continuation of supporting the Gumuz rebels against the former and vis-a-vis.⁷

To stop the further advance of Gumuz, the Emperor again made political promotions and appointed *Qānazmač* Haile Eyesus Felate, the provincial leader in Gojjam, by replacing *Bitwodad* Ayaléw Mākonnān in 1970. Comparing with the former governor, the latter (the newly appointed) was said to have been more diplomat who tried to implement conflict management strategies such as re-arranging discussion tables with the elders who represented the Gumuz rebels. After having discussed on the serious issues with the State governor, the Gumuz elders agreed on the condition for government’s promise in appointing the Gumuz *Čiqā Šums* instead of promoting the highlanders, like Awi’s in their localities. Thus, Haile Eyesus was said to have agreed on the pre-conditions demanded by the Gumuz elders and then appointed them on their domains.⁸

As the result, these newly appointed the Gumuz *ČiqāŠums* had the power of re-elevating themselves based on the rules and regulations of the State. Since then, the provincial governors stopped appointing Awi chiefs on the affairs of the Gumuz. By doing these re-arrangements, Haile Eyesus was able to collect the government dues and tax through the Gumuz *ČiqāŠums* regularly.⁹

It is important to note that the 1960-70 Settler-Gumuz conflict was caused by the death of a certain local tax collector from the center by unknown Gumuz individuals at a particular village called *Dač*. After having heard about the news of an event what happened, the State administration from Čagni, sent “a contingent of the police

¹ Informants: Mākonnān Agajie, Yāšéwas Mamo, Dābāsu Yésmāw, and Qānaw Gobbāna

² Informants : Zeguāfi Warb, Nāni Wāzet, Wāmpo Wāgad, and Guādié Abābā.

³ Jira Mekuria, “ A History of---, (2008), p.44.

⁴ Alemayehu, “State and Ethnic Interaction---, (2012), p.91.

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ Informants: Mākonnān Wolde-Giorgis, Mākonnān Agajie, Qānaw Gobbāna, and Adāmu Éndāléw.

⁷ Informants: Admassié Semeñ, Dābāssu Yésmaw, Dāssie Bālay, and Qānaw Gobbāna

⁸ Informants: Yāšéwas Mamo, Zāwdu Čakol, Ašābér Woldu, and Dābbāssu Yésmaw.

⁹ Informants: Mākonnān Wolde-Giorgis, Mākonnān Agajie, Qānaw Gobbāna, and Adāmu Éndāléw.

force, also known as *Fetno Daraś*¹ in to the Gumuz village, where an individual was killed”². The response of the central government was harsh. It deployed *paramilitary* police to the punitive measures against the Gumuz. When the resistance of the Gumuz was beyond the capacity of the paramilitary police, the government deployed the army. This army group came back after having accomplished the mission what has been given from the higher officials from Čagni, their political seat during the period under discussion. As the result, the special police force killed the suspects, plundered their property like goats and cattle’s and finally they threatened and disarmed the Gumuz³.

Even though the action seemed as if periodic solution the individual conflicts later intensified and knocked every Gumuz villages in different areas of Mätäkäl. For instance, the Gumuz forced the settlers to leave out from their lands and villages by using open revolts against them. This hostile and friendship relation among them was existed until 1970, the time when Haile Eyesus was said to have sought diplomatic moves with the Gumuz elders to develop peace and order in the region.⁴ However, the pacification effort was not long lasting due to the removal of *Qāñāzmač* Haile Eyesus in 1972. Since his removal, the Gumuz started chaos and instabilities in Mätäkäl. They expressed the uprisings in the form of plundering the non-Gumuz houses, crops, cattles, killings and whatever they want. Among others, the Wollo settlers in Mäntawuhä and the Awi inhabitants in Dängur, Zigäm, Dibačé and Mandura were the prime victims during this uprising.⁵

Accordingly, the uprising was said to have triggered by the new political *Šum Šers* (enthroning and dethroning) made by the newly appointed governors in Agäw Meder and Mätäkäl where they replaced the Gumuz *Čiqa Šums* appointed during the rule of Haile Eyesus Felate (1970-1972). Therefore, in the place of Gumuz, these new governors promoted the Awi *ČiqaŠums*. Immediately following their appointment, the Awi local chiefs were said to have over taxed the Gumuz people. Thus, the system of over taxation inspired them to provoke the serious uprising in the region.⁶

For these all problems developed in Mätäkäl, *Colonel* Tafara Malkamu, who succeeded Haile Eyesus Felate in 1972, was said to have blamed. Because of these and other related problems, he was then resigned in 1973, and in the place of him the government again appointed Sahile Ayahu over Agäw Meder, however, he was again immediately replaced by *Fitawrari* Abäbayehu Admassu. For the latter’s promotion, the informants gave testimonies for the government’s motive in appointing him was believed to take harsh and inhuman actions against the rebels and then to bring the long lasting peace and order in the region.⁷

This newly appointed governor was said to have discussed with Bahir Dar and Agäw Meder *Awraja* high-ranking officials to bring the long lasting peace and order in Mätäkäl. After having decided on the future fate of the region, these officials were agreed and deployed the *nač labas* forces selected from different origin. Then, these combined forces together with the police and the territorial armies was said to have devastated and massacred many Gumuz inhabitants.⁸

Although the government designed many strategies to bring the Gumuz under its control, the latter have never been stopped either individual or mass based revolts against the highlanders in particular and the state in general, throughout the revolutionary period. However, during the immediate post-revolutionary period, the *Dergue* high-ranking officials intentionally re-distributed the fire arms to the High Landers to beat the Gumuz rebels in Mätäkäl. This was deliberately done to check the further advance of the anti-*Dergue* moves from Mätäkäl and Agäw Meder.⁹

Since then, the settlers, who were well armed and equipped by the *Dergue*, attacked the Gumuz inhabitants, including innocents by penetrating through the bush low lands of their territory.¹⁰ Such re-current military operations further pushed the Gumuz to the fringes of the lowlands. During this period, the government also established the Mandura and Dibačé *Wäräda*, which used to be sub districts under Guangua to strengthen government control over the Gumuz.¹¹

Regarding its casualties and its victims, Jira views that the number of death and other similar causes on the settler side was estimated to be two thousands, where as the Gumuz lost an estimated number during the friction. Following the event, some settlers were said to have been left for their initial home land while some others were migrated to another regions, for instance, to Keffä and Wälläga.¹²

¹ *Fetno Daraś* stands for armies who are ready for taking immediate actions against the event.

² Jira Mekuria, “A History of---,2008),p.44

³ Jira,p.44.

⁴ Informants : Mäkonän Wolde-Giorgis, Mäkonän Agajie, Qānaw Gobbāna, and Adāmu Ēndäléw

⁵ Informants: Qānaw Gobbāna, Adāmu Ēndäléw, Assāfa Abājéhu, and Mäkonän Wolde-Giorgis.

⁶ Informants: Zāwdu Čakol, Yāšéwas Mamo, Semeñ Eyasu, and Bälätä Lāqāw.

⁷ Informants: Mäkonän Wolde-Giorgis, Nāni Wāzet, Zeguāfi Warb, and Aytānāw Yésälām.

⁸ Informants : Mäkonän Wolde-Giorgis, Mäkonän Agajie, Qānaw Gobbāna, and Adāmu Ēndäléw.

⁹ Informants: Mäkonän Wolde-Giorgis, Nāni Wāzet, and Zeguāfi Warb.

¹⁰ Informants: Abābā Tässāma, Mēgi Zélqāw, and Getanāh Bērhan; Jira, A History of---,2008), p.44.

¹¹ Informants: Mäkonän Wolde-Giorgis, Nāni Wāzet, Zeguāfi Warb, and Aytānāw Yésälām.

¹² Jira, “A History of ---,2008), p.44.

Following the outbreak of February 1974 Revolution, it was said that, the former officials of the Emperor from Mätäkäl *Awraja* in particular were imprisoned. Instead, the *Dergue* appointed Mulu Wassie as the first administrator of the Mätäkäl *Awraja*. However, he was not popular enough in the case of collecting tax. When the inhabitants refused to pay the tax, and then Mulu took in human actions against them.¹ In line with this event, Tsega states that following their failure to pay the tax to the government, the state forces from Mätäkäl *Awraja* attacked the Gumuz inhabitants with their traditional chief named as Bābe Dédi. In fact, the Gumuz did not believe the governors appointed “by the center and they used to pay the tribute through the *qoros* (gult-governors from Šinaša and Oromo) with whom they had formed strong ties of friend ship.”²

4.2. The Legacies of Lambicha and Its Intermittent Struggle in Matakakal.

Immediately following the 1974 Revolution, there was minor Gumuz –State conflict in Mandura, clearly resulted from the Gumuz man who was jailed by the police forces of the *Dergue* in 1974, five months after the revolution. To free the prisoner, the Gumuz from *Babissa qebele*, fifteen kilometers away from Mandura *Wäräda*, started fighting against the prison guards. To this response, the police forces together with formidable *ČiqaŠums* began the counter offense against the Gumuz. Among the *ČiqaŠums*, who played a pivotal role in cooling down the Gumuz in the local village of *Babissa* was named as *Blatta Mamo Alemu* (served as *ČiqaŠum* from 1973-1974). Although the war was short lived and lasted for a month, it was bloody and costly to the Gumuz of *Dekul* (a place name in Mandura *Wäräda*), where this minor war was also remembered by the local people as the *Dekul War* of 1974.³

Furthermore, concerning the state-Gumuz engagements during the war, the oral accounts of both the Gumuz and Awi informants from Mandura justified that the coalition forces from Mätäkäl *Awraja* led by Taddäsä Jambare were deployed to the Gumuz fortified village of *Dekul*, where the final war was fought. This war with in the memory of the Gumuz is said to be the summer war as the month when the war conducted was the rainy season.⁴ While they were marching towards *Dekul* area, the Šinaša forces from Dibaṭé were said to have annihilated the Gumuz inhabitants from a local village called *Debu*. At the end, the war was concluded by the victory of the State forces, where very huge number of Gumuz inhabitants were killed. Since then, the Gumuz started killing as whom they considered any one as red in skin (*qey*) selectively by avenging the worst action of the State over the Gumuz inhabitants.⁵

Although the continuous harassment was said to have emanated from the Gumuz, there was also another fresh opposition emerged from the neighboring highlanders in the border of Mätäkäl against State exploitation. Thus, by opposing the exploitative and the oppressive rule of *Dājzmač* Dästa Berru, not only the Gumuz but also different ethnic highlanders from different areas of Mätäkäl *Awraja*, for instance, Awi, Šinaša, Oromo, and the Gumuz, who inhabited along the western border of Ethiopia were presented the petition to the Office of *State Minister* 1974 (on June 18/1966 E.C.).⁶

In line with thieving and self killings among the Gumuz community in Mätäkäl, the *Federal Office* wrote strongly headed letters to Gojjam Administrative Office by underling the situation there and in turn, the State governors from Dābra Markos, the seat of Gojjam Administrative Region, wrote strongly headed letters to Mätäkäl *Awraja* Administration Office by underlining the situation in the region and the immediate capture of the Gumuz rebels who were said to have started self killings first and those who were also considered to be the thieves could be imprisoned. The type and the nature of the letter written from the Center to Gojjam Administrative Office by underlining the situation in Mätäkäl can be read in Amharic as follows:

ቁጥር 92033/8/191

ሰኔ 12/ ቀን 67

ለጎጆምክፍለ ሀገር አስተዳደር ጽ/ቤት

ደ/ሚ.ቆስ:-

በመክከል አወገጃ ኑሩ ጎራ ከተባለው ቀበሌ በ29/9/67 ዓ.ም ከቀኑ በግምት 7 ሰዓት ሲሆን በዚህ ቀበሌ ነዋሪ የሆኑት ነገዳ ሸንቅሎች ከከብት ጠባቂዎች 18 ከብት ቀምተው ከሄዱ በሆለ ዳካውን በመክታተል ከብቶቻቸው አግኝተው ደዘው ሲሞግሱ ሸንቅሎች እርስባርሰቸው ተከስ ከፍተው በተደረገው የተከስ ልውውጥ 1ኛ/ ጎቂ ሞዴል 2ኛ/ ናዋ ናቂ የተባሉትን በጥይት በመግታቸው የእነዚህ ሸንቅሎች የእርስ በርስ ግጭት

¹ Informants: Qānaw Gobbāna, Adāmu Ēndālēw, Assāfa Abājēhu, and Mākonnān Wolde-Giorgis.

² Tsega Endalew, *Inter ethnic Relations on Frontier: Metekel/Ethiopia/* Germany, Wiesbaden, 2006), p.72.

³ Informants: Mékés Beki, Wāmpo Wāgad, and Yāsēwas Mamo.

⁴ Informants: Mākonnān Agajie, Qānaw Gobbāna, and Ašābēr Woldu.

⁵ Informants: Embālā Qewi, Abdél Deboč, Mégi Zélqāw, Mékés Bāké, Wāmpo Wāgad, and Yāsēwas Mamo.

⁶ NALA Center, Folder No.154, File code-17.10.60, Letter from Yā-Agār Astādādār Tātābābāqi Wānā Director to Lā- Gojjam Tāqlay Gezat Šéfāt Bét (Authorizing the Case study for the Petition Presented by the Border Inhabitants in Mätäkäl by Opposing the Exploitative rule of *Dājzmač* Dästa Berru), Ref.No.19950/35/56/60 ,Date June 18/10/1966 E.C.

እንደቀጠለ በመሆኑ የመካከል አወጃጀ ፖለቲካ ማህፀን በቀጥታ 6198/9/26/ በ3/10/67 ዓ.ም በተጻፈ መጻሕፍቱ ስለሰጠው ጥያቄ : :¹

Generally, the history of the high land settlers and Gumuz interaction in and around Mäntawuhä from 1960s -1974 was characterized by frontier conflict in which the settler neighbors of the Gumuz wanted to assert their power over the latter. The period also witnessed the development and expansion of political centers towards the periphery, where the friction was the day today activity of the period. To end this minor individual clashes, the government established administrative centers in various parts of Gumuz inhabited areas of Mätäkäl.² In order to maintain law and order in these administrative centers, the local chiefs from Awi, Oromo, Šinaša and Amhara elites with higher political hierarchies were appointed. Those Gumuz people whom they believed to be loyal to the government were also given power with low status.³ By doing this political re-arrangement, the government tried to cool down the situation in Mäntawuhä, Dibaṭé Mandura, and the nearby Gumuz lands even temporarily. Even though the government's calculation of implementing the policy of low and order in the region was significant, it was short lived.⁴

Similarly, depending on his oral informants, Jira elaborates that the Gumuz were said to have paid what was being required from them although they gained nothing from the new political power re-arrangement implemented by the government. Even worse, by using the highland settlers as the military weapon, the government tried to suppress any forms of Gumuz uprising and then assigned "the elites of these groups as administrators and tax collectors from all over the Gumuz land later enforced the Gumuz to rise up repeatedly against the state".⁵

The avenging actions committed by the Gumuz deteriorated the security problems around their common settlement areas evidently in Dibaṭé, Mandura, Zigām (in the local areas of Kelma, Wingi, Serkaysa, and Abbay Kollem), Dängur and other related areas continued until the post revolutionary periods. Besides, the bad legacy left behind by the government over the Gumuz since the early medieval times was not forgettable. Even worse, some Gumuz elders are still narrating about the nature of devastation and anti humanity actions committed by the local appointees in relation to extra taxes either in cash or in kind, confiscating their properties, evicting from their lands, slavery and the slave trade and the like.⁶

5. Conclusion

Mätäkäl is a vast territory located in the north western part of Ethiopia, in the present day Benishangul-Gumuz National Regional State. It is the largest Zone among the three Zones in the region. This Zone is then made of six major and one minor Waradas such as Bullän, Mandura, Dibaṭé, Guba, Wänbära, Dängur and Pawe. It is also characterized by diverse climatic zones where the *Qolla* zone alone covers the highest percentage where as the *Daga* zone accounts only the smallest.

The Gumuz are one of the Koman branches of the Ethiopian Nilo-Saharan language speaking people located along the Blue Nile River Valley and its tributaries. Originally, they used to live in the region of Mätäkäl up to the shores of Lake Tana, as far as the low land areas of Awi Zone, in the Amhara National Regional State. By using the northwest Ethiopia as a pass way, they reached as far as Šuwa, where they settled; and again due to demographic factors they were forced to move into Gojjam and adjacent territories south of the Abbay River.

The Gumuz in Mätäkäl had suffered for long (more probably beginning from the 13th century or earlier up to the second half of the 20th c.). The Gumuz and other inhabitants in the region were under the victims of the expeditions of Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia and the Sudan. Therefore, slavery and the slave raid in the region was extremely so high. Although, there is generally a relative peace and stability in the region, local conflict in the form of either individual or group has continued for several years. Even worse, some Gumuz elders are still narrating about the nature of devastation and anti humanity actions committed by the local appointees in relation to extra taxes either in cash or in kind, confiscating their properties, evicting from their lands, slavery and the slave trade and the like.

¹ NALA Center, Folder No.154, File No.11.21. 08, A Letter from Yä-Ethiopia Gézeawi Wätädäräwi Mengést Yä-Agär Astädädär Minister to Lä- Gojjäm Täqlay Gézat Astädädär Šéfät Bét (Authorizing the case study in *Nuru Gora* with full information concerning Self Killings and the immediate capture of the criminals), Ref.No.92033/8/191, Date June, 12/10/1967E.C. (See Appendix-V).

² Focus Group Discussions: Qanaw Gobana, Mekonnen Agajie, Mekonnen Wolde Gyorgis.

³ Informants : Mäkönnän Wolde-Giorgis ,Abäbä Tässäma, Séyoum Bäqälä, and Qänaw Gobbäna

⁴ Informants: Mégi Zélqäw, Näni Wäzet, Mékés Bäké, Assäfa Abäjähu, and Yäšewas Mamo.

⁵ Jira , "A History of---, 2008), p45.

⁶ Informants : Abdél Deboč, Embälä Kewi, Bälätä Läqäw, and Asäbér Woldu.

Conflict of Interests

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