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The Gumuz of Mätäkäl and their Agäw Neighbours: A Historical Survey of Ethnic Interaction, 1898-1974

Teferi Mekonnen¹

Abstract

In Ethiopia, a home of more than eighty different ethnic groups, studies that closely examine the history of ethnic interactions of the different ethnic groups hardly exist. Ethiopian researchers seem to put the subject aside considering discussions relating to ethnic differences as sensitive one and even destructive to national unity. Therefore, this study is one of the few preliminary attempts to throw light upon the nature of Gumuz-Agäw interaction from 1898 to 1974. Of a mosaic of ethnic groups with their own distinct languages, cultures, and socio-economic formations has long inhabited Mätäkäl, the Gumuz and the Agäws were intentionally selected because of a noticeable difference between the two groups in their economic activities, socio-political organizations, and physical types. This study argues that these cleavages have shaped the pattern of Gumuz-Agaw interaction.

The study seeks to understand the dynamics of the long years of interaction between the Gumuz and the Agäws within the broad context of Ethiopian history. It argues that the Agäw chiefs remained instruments of the central state that sought to amass benefits from the resources of the Gumuz country, particularly after Nigus Täklä-Haymanot of Gojjam had established a direct and more effective administrative control over the entire Gumuz land in 1898. The study relies upon primary and secondary documents from a range of Ethiopian collections as well as fieldwork in the area. The study also claims that in spite of the long years of interaction and territorial integration, social-separation rather than assimilation or incorporation characterized Gumuz-Agäw ethnic relationship.

Keywords: *Agäw, Gumuz, Gojjam, Mätäkäl and ethnic interaction.*

I. Ethnic Profile of Mätäkäl

A mosaic of ethnic groups with their own distinct languages, cultures, and socio-economic formation has long inhabited Mätäkäl.² According to the 1984 census report, the vast Mätäkäl *awraja* was clearly composed of eight ethnic groups: Gumuz, Agäw, Amhara, Shinasha, Oromo, Fälasha, Qemant, and Kumfäl.³ The ethnic

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² In the remote past the place name, Mätäkäl is believed to have been a territory where the famous Agäw clan called Chuhay has now settled. But in this paper, the name Mätäkäl is employed to designate the vast territory of the former Mätäkäl *awraja* of Gojjam. The *awraja* was nearly tantamount to the total half of the traditional Gojjam region.

³ For the 1984 Census report of Mätäkäl See Dessalegn Rahmato, "Some Notes on Settlement and Resettlement in Matakäl awraja", *Proceedings of the Ninth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, V.I, Moscow: Nauka Publishers, 1988. But Dessalegn didn't fully mention all of the ethnic

composition in Mätäkäl is so diverse and complex to sketch their patterns of settlement in a definite territory. Therefore, the following outline of ethnic groups and their territories using the previous *wärädas* as main geographic unit should not be taken seriously. My aim here is simply to provide a general glimpse of their settlement pattern for better understanding of the main theme of the paper.

The Gumuz are believed to have been the earliest settlers of the area. They are the predominant ethnic group inhabiting the greatest part of Mätäkäl *awraja*. It is estimated that the Gumuz of Mätäkäl constituted 80 percent of the total Gumuz population who live in the traditional region of Gojjam.⁴ In Mätäkäl, the Gumuz have predominantly settled in the western lowland districts. Gubba and Mandura *wärädas* of the northwest that have common boundary with the Sudan are almost entirely inhabited by the Gumuz.⁵ The Gumuz are also the majority in Dibati and Dangur *wärädas*. Some pockets of Gumuz settlement are also found in highland areas of Mätäkäl.⁶ It is possible to say that no *wärädas* of Mätäkäl is there without Gumuz community.

The Agäws, in more broad terms, live in cooler highlands of Mätäkäl. Guangua, Mandura, and the mountainous parts of Dangur *wärädas* are the home of the Agäws.⁷ Apparently, pressures of the central state from the direction of Lake Tana and Eastern Gojjam, since the reign of Amda Seyon (r.1314-44), induced the Agäws to move to the then inaccessible highlands of Mätäkäl.⁸ This process was further facilitated when the land of the Agäws was incorporated and much of it was turned into royal or ecclesiastical tenure.⁹ Subsequently, the ceaseless westward expansion of the Agäws became a major factor to push the earliest settlers, the Gumuz, to the inhospitable lowlands of Mätäkäl.¹⁰

The Amhara live side by side with the Agäws in highland districts of Mätäkäl. They have cultural and physical similarities with the Agäws. It is noteworthy that a large number of Amhara settlements to the lowlands of Mätäkäl were very recent phenomena. The earliest episode dated to the middle of the twentieth century when a large number of Amhara from Wällo flocked to the area.¹¹ The Wälloyas obviously

groups of Mätäkäl. Hence, to fill the gap I was obliged to employ my own personal experience in Mätäkäl and a map prepared by the Ethiopian Nationalities Research Institute in 1986 and attached as an Appendix II in Bazezew Gelaw, "A History of Chagni Town to 1974", BA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1994.

⁴ Kedane Mariam Demellew, "The Shānqellā of Metekel: Some Tentative Notes", BA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1987, p. 1; Agdaw Asfaw and Wolde Selassie Abbute, "Utilization of Horticultural Products in the Beles Valley Resettlement Village" in Paolo Dieci and Claudio Viezzoli (eds.), *Resettlement and Rural Development in Ethiopia*. Milano: Franco Angeli Caprici, 1992, p.210.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Kedane Mariam, p.1.

⁸ Tadesse Tamrat, "Nilo-Sahara Interaction with Neighbouring Highlanders: The Case of the Gumuz of Gojjam and Wallaga", in *Proceedings of the Workshop on Famine Experience and Resettlement in Ethiopia*, Addis Ababa, December 29-30, 1988, Addis Ababa: Institute of Development Research, 1988, p.11.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ See note 47.

¹¹ Agdew and Wolde Selassie, p. 210.

sought the rich Mätäkäl after they had been recurrently hit by drought and famine in their home areas due to problems attributed to environmental degradation, exhaustion of the land and over population.

The Oromos' concentrated settlement is located in Wämbära *wäräda*,¹² just north of the Abbay (Blue Nile). They had predominance over the Shinasha and the Gumuz who lived around Wämbära and its surroundings.¹³ Apparently, the Oromos crossed the Abbay to this area during the period of their historic west ward movement. Evidence shows that after they had controlled the highlands of Wämbära, they further proceeded northwards to Dibati, Mandura, and Dangur until their movement forward was halted by the Agäws, led by their chief named Azaj Jangua, at the Dura River,¹⁴ near the present Mantawuhā town. It is interesting to note that the Gumuz are said to have allied the Agäws to stop the Oromo penetration.¹⁵ At that time the Oromos pushed the Shinasha northwards who in turn drove the Gumuz of Wämbära highlands further into the lowlands.¹⁶ The Gumuz in this episode again became the ultimate losers.

The Shinasha are the other major ethnic group of the Mätäkäl region. They are the only Omotic speaking group in the region. Apparently, the Shinasha people of these days are those who could survive from cultural assimilation by the Oromos.¹⁷ This people have mainly inhabited in Dangur, Dibati and Wämbära *wärädas*.¹⁸

The "Kumfal", Fälasha and Qemant speak a dialect of Agäwinna language. They are the minor ethnic groups of the area. The "Kumfāl" who call themselves "Qolonnoch" live in the lowland parts of Dangur *wäräda*.¹⁹ The Fälasha and the Qemant communities live in northern part of Mätäkäl near the province of Quara.²⁰

Therefore, the rich resources of Mätäkäl have long been a bone of contention among these various ethnic groups. Long years of interactions among these groups constitute a salient feature in the history of the Mätäkäl region. It is from this conception in mind that this paper is interested in dealing with the history of ethnic interaction between the Gumuz and the Agäws in the former Mätäkäl *Awraja*. The Gumuz and the Agäws are selected because of a noticeable difference between the two groups in their economic activities, socio-political organization, and physical

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ R.E. Cheesman, *Lake Tana and the Blue Nile*, London: Frank Cass, 1968, p.328.

¹⁴ Abdussamad H. Ahmad, "Hunting in Gojjam: The Case of Matakäl 1901-1932", *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. I, Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 1988, pp. 237-38.

¹⁵ Tsega Endalew, "The Oromo of Wanbara: A Historical Survey to 1941", MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1997, p.47.

¹⁶ Ernesta Ceruli, *Peoples of the South-west Ethiopia and its Borderlands, Ethnographic Survey of Africa*, London: International African Institute, 1956, p.15. In 1929 Major Cheesman also saw ruins of Gumuz villages around the edge of the highland areas of Wambara. F.O.371/15389, Confidential, R.E. Cheesman, "The Abbay: Second Reconnaissance Via Wambarā and Roseires", pp.2; 6; 21.

¹⁷ Tsega Endalew, p. 30.

¹⁸ Agdew and Wolde Selassie, p. 210.

¹⁹ Kedane Mariam, p. 1. The name "Kumfāl" has a pejorative connotation in Mätäkäl area.

²⁰ Bazezew Gelaw, Appendix II.

types. The Agäws are settled agriculturalists. On the other hand, the Gumuz make their living as shifting cultivators, and hunters and gatherers. The Agäws had social class and an advanced socio-political organization. Unlike the Agaw, the Gumuz represent egalitarian communities organized at a tribal and communal level, except the Gumuz of Gubba who had an Islamic polity west of the Bäläs River. The Gumuz have much darker complexion than the Agäws who have light brown skin colour. It was these cleavages that shaped the pattern of Gumuz-Agäw interaction since the dawn of history. Indeed, as it will become evident later, the Agäws used their dominance in socio-economic organization as well as political power to exploit the human and the natural resources of the Gumuz.

II. The Gumuz of Mätäkäl to 1898: A Historical Background

The Gumuz (previously known by the derogatory generic name -“*Shanqella*”) are linguistically grouped under the Nilo-Saharan language family of the western lowlands of the Ethio-Sudanese frontier.²¹ They live both in the Ethiopian and Sudanese territories. In the Ethiopian side, the Gumuz settle roughly stretching from Mätäma, in the North, down to the Dädessa valley of Wällaga, beyond the Abbay (Blue Nile), in the South.²² The socio-political formation of the Gumuz, in broad terms, is characterized by tribal form of socio-political organization, where elders (locally called *ganzas*) constituted the highest authority. The Gumuz also excessively relied upon nature for their livelihood.²³

The history of the Gumuz of Mätäkäl before the fifteenth century still remains somewhat vague and obscure. There is no reliable source that throws light on this dark past. The Gumuz were not specifically referred to in domestic as well as foreign sources up until the fifteenth century,²⁴ viz. ancient inscriptions, ecclesiastical scripts, royal chronicles, and travellers' accounts. The only available testimony for historical interpretation of the Gumuz, other than some secondary sources that simply forward a hypothesis that the “Negroes” or the “*Shanqellā*” as pre-Cushite settlers of the highlands of Ethiopia,²⁵ is their oral tradition. Therefore, due to this paucity of concrete and substantiated historical testimony, the pre-fifteenth century history of the Gumuz of Mätäkäl can be christened as the “pre-historic era”. Thus to fill this lacuna, an attempt will be made to examine their oral tradition.

The Gumuz have various decorated oral traditions about their origin and settlement in Mätäkäl area. Only two of these traditions, which are thought to be pertinent to this paper, are raised here. On the basis of these traditions, the Gumuz society of Mätäkäl can be divided into two major groups. The first group would be the Gumuz of Gubba

²¹ Marvin L. Bender, *The Ethiopian Nilo-Saharan*, Addis Ababa, 1975, p. 1.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 61; Taddesse, “Nilo-Sahara...”, p. 9.

²³ Wendy James, “Lifeline Exchange Marriage Among the Gumuz”, in Donald Donham and Wendy James (eds.), *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia*, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 12. For the role of the *ganza* in Gumuz socio-political organization see Kedane Mariam, p. 14.

²⁴ See note 37.

²⁵ Cheesman, *Lake Tana ...*, p. 95.

and parts of Dangur *wärädas* near the Ethio-Sudanese border. The Gumuz clans, namely Fun or Gobbawi, Abromolla, Fungusso, and Kodallo of this area connected their historical origin with the Sudanic Kingdom of Funj (1500-1821).²⁶ The Gumuz belonging to these clans narrate that when the Funj Kingdom was on the state of decline their ancestors migrated to the area where they live today.²⁷ They are predominantly Muslims in their religion. It was this group who founded the Gubba Islamic polity west of the Bäläs River.²⁸ The chiefs of Gubba claimed blood ties with the kings of Funj. For example, Hamdan Abu Shok or *Däjjazmach* Banja, who ruled Gubba in the first half of the twentieth century, claimed that he was a direct descent in the seventh generation from the line of the kings of the Funj Kingdom.²⁹

The second group envelops the rest of the Gumuz of Mätäkäl. These are the Gumuz of Mandura, Dibati, Guangua, Wämbära, and parts of Dangur. This group traces its original homeland to the neighbourhood of Lake Tana, around the present Bahir Dar city.³⁰ They say that colour segregation and enslavement of their offspring, whenever they failed to pay their annual tribute, by the light brown people induced them to move into the lowland areas of Mätäkäl.³¹ It is noteworthy that their presence in the highlands of central and southern Gojjam is an historical fact attested by the traditions of their Agäw neighbours and travellers' accounts. The oral traditions of the Agäws say that the Gumuz had been earlier settlers of the area before their founding fathers came from Lasta,³² a place in Northern Wällo. Foreign travelers like James Bruce,³³ Henry Salt,³⁴ and Charles T. Beke³⁵ also substantiated the aforementioned tradition in their accounts, by documenting Gumuz presence in the interior highland parts of Gojjam in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

However, it would be far from convincing to argue on the basis of their traditions that the Gumuz society has two distinct origins. Had the two major groups of Gumuz were of two different origins, they would have been basically differed in their languages, cultural traditions, socio-economic formations and other ways of lives. Thus the traditions of two different origins need not deserve historical credence. But the traditions seem to have indicated the different socio-political influences that these two major Gumuz societies experienced and the extent of the territory that had once been inhabited by them. It is worth mentioning that due to their geographical location in

²⁶ O.G.S. Crawford, *The Fung Kingdom of Sennar*, Glovcester: John Bellows Ltd. 1951, p. 143; Kedane Mariam, p. 5.

²⁷ Kedane Mariam, p. 5.

²⁸ F.O.371/20940, Abyssinia Confidential, "Records of Leading Peronalities in Abyssinia", 4 May, 1937, p. 5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.9.

³⁰ Kedane Mariam, p. 9.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Since I grew up in the area, I am well acquainted with the oral tradition of the Agäws.

³³ James Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile*, Vol. II, Edinburgh, 1790. pp. 416-17, 438.

³⁴ Henry Salt, *A Voyage to Abyssinia and Travels into the Interior of that Country*, London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd, 1967, pp. 380-82. He noted that the Gumuz were in endless conflict with the Agäws of Banja and Matakäl. Obviously, the Banja Agäws have settled in the mountainous parts of central Agäw Midir.

³⁵ C.T. Beke, "Abyssinia-Being a Continuation of Routes in that Country", *Journal of the Geographic Society of London*, XIV, 1844, pp. 10-11.

the Ethio-Sudanese border, the Gumuz had long been exposed to pressures and influences from the directions of the West and the East.³⁶ Hence, it is possible to say that the first tradition might indicate little more than the origin of the ruling class of the Gubba or it is merely a reflection of the existence of strong influence of the Funj Kingdom in the area.³⁷

The post-fifteenth century period of Gumuz's past can be named their historic era. This period has both national and foreign written sources. According to scholars or students of Gumuz history, the first precise mention of the Gumuz is believed to have appeared in an Amharic song in praise of Emperor Yeshaq (r. 1413-1434).³⁸ A verse of the song that refers to the Gumuz reads as follows: "Let 'Shanqella' testify, He who pays tribute in goats."³⁹ In this song, the Gumuz are mentioned to pay tribute in goats to king Yeshaq. Since then we have references to the Gumuz by their generic name of "Shanqella" in domestic sources as well as travelers' accounts. In the latter the Gumuz are largely mentioned in relation to slave raids; whereas in the former sources they are largely described in matters pertinent to emperors' expedition to Mätäkäl area.

Medieval Ethiopian kings led sporadic campaigns to the Mätäkäl area. It is apparent that these campaigns were primarily motivated by the rich natural resources of the area. These rich resource of Mätäkäl enunciated by Taddesse Tamrat as follows:

Small and big game of different types including elephants for ivory; incense and various other trees; oil seeds and spices; honey; cotton; herds of sheep and goats and more important still, alluvial gold traditionally panned from the numerous streams of the lower Abbay basin.⁴⁰

Tacitly, Yeshaq and his successors led military expeditions to Mätäkäl area to procure these resources. In the sixteenth century, Alvarez, reported that a large amount of gold at the court of Lebna Dangel,⁴¹ according to Taddesse, which was most probably brought from Mätäkäl in the form of tribute. Both Shihab al-Din and his contemporary Christian chroniclers are said to have recounted that Ahmad Gran also

³⁶ Frederick J. Simoons, *Northwest Ethiopia: Peoples and Economy*, Madison, 1960, p.55.

³⁷ Wendy James, "From Aborigines to Frontier Society on Western Ethiopia", in Donald Donham and Wendy James (eds.), *Working Papers on Society and History in Imperial Ethiopia: The Southern Periphery from the 1880s to 1974*, Cambridge: African Studies Centre, 1976, p. 121. She noted that existence of strong influence of the Funj Kingdom, the Turko-Egyptian and the Mahdiyya over Gubba until the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

³⁸ To mention: Cerulli, p. 15; Taddesse, "Nilo-Saharan...", p.11.

³⁹ In Taddesse, "Nilo-Saharan...", p.11.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Francisco Alvares, *The Prester John of the Indies*. (ed. By C.F. Beckingham and G.W.B. Huntingford), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961, p. 426. Although on this page Alvares did not precisely mention the source of the gold, he documented what he heard about the existence of great amount of gold in Gojjam on page 459.

led a similar expedition to the rich Mätäkäl area though they disagree on his success.⁴²

The shift of the political center of gravity to the Lake Tana region in the sixteenth century dramatically transformed the kings' intermittent expedition to the vast rich region of Mätäkäl. Successive campaigns were carried on to incorporate the peoples of the area. It is reported that Sarsa Dangel (r. 1563-97) led successful, albeit temporary, campaign to this region.⁴³ At that time the region of Western Gojjam is said to have been a vital source of food for the troops of the king.⁴⁴ Similarly, other medieval Ethiopian kings, namely Susenyos (r. 1607-32), Fasiladas (r. 1632-67), Yohannes I (r. 1667-82), Iyyasu I (r. 1682-1706) and Yostos (r. 1710-16) conducted a more organized expedition to the Agäw and Gumuz inhabited areas of Mätäkäl.⁴⁵ There is no doubt that their motive was to control and exploit the great wealth and slaves of the region. Such tradition of waging sporadic campaigns to the Gumuz country was also reported on the eve of the modern period of Ethiopian history. *Däjjazmach* Kassa Haylu, the future Tewodros II of Ethiopia, undertook several raids to the Gumuz country in late 1840s, 1851, and 1852. Through these raids Kassa is said to have brought many male and female slaves from the land of the Gumuz.⁴⁶

As a result of the medieval kings' expeditions, the incorporation and Christianization of the Agäws were finally made possible in the seventeenth century. But the process of establishing direct control over the entire Gumuz land of Mätäkäl lowlands was not completed until the end of the nineteenth century.⁴⁷ In this period the responsibility of ruling the Gumuz and procuring their resources was largely carried out through the Agäw chiefs of Mätäkäl who were incorporated into the socio-economic and political framework of the Ethiopian state. The Gumuz were the worst losers in these struggle to keep the most fertile, favourable, and well-watered highlands of Agäw Midir and Mätäkäl. In the process of the expansion of the exploitative and predatory central state to the region, the Gumuz were pushed into the less accessible remoter malaria infested lowlands of the western periphery and a section of them were also obliged to cross the Abbay (Blue Nile) to the Dädesa Valley of Wällaga.⁴⁸ The Agäw agriculturalists didn't extend their expansion beyond the edge of the plateau to the lowlands where the land could not be permanently cultivated and the climate is favourable for a breeding of disease-bearing insects for their cattle. As a result, in broad terms, there is a marked ecological barrier between the Agäw highlanders and the Gumuz lowlanders.

⁴² Richard Puncckhurst, "The History of Barya, Shanqala, and Other Ethiopian Slaves, from the Borderlands of the Sudan", *Paper Submitted to the Conference on Ethiopian Feudalism*, Addis Ababa, 1976, p. 8; Tadesse, "Nilo-Sahara...", p. 12.

⁴³ Cerulli, p. 15; Mordechai Abir, *Ethiopia and the Red Sea*, London: Franc Cass and Company Ltd., 1980, p. 160; Tadesse, "Nilo-Sahara...", p. 12.

⁴⁴ Abir, p. 160.

⁴⁵ Cerulli, p. 15; Tadesse, "Nilo-Sahara...", p. 13.

⁴⁶ Puncckhurst, p. 10.

⁴⁷ See note 51.

⁴⁸ James, "Lifelines ...", pp. 138-39; 129.

In spite of the conquest, the Agäws maintained their traditional rulers. The Christian kings had a strong Agäw local ally whose name was Chuhay to whom they entrusted the affairs of Mätäkäl. Chuhay had his headquarter at Sigadi, about five kms east of the present day Chagni town, and conducted sporadic campaigns into the Gumuz country of the lowlands.⁴⁹ After the death of Chuhay, his descendants were given similar responsibilities by successive Ethiopian kings. Up until the creation of Agäw-Bahir Dar *awraja*, in the immediate years of the post-liberation period, Agäw chiefs with the title of *Agäw-azaž* ruled over the whole of Agäw Midir including the Gumuz country.⁵⁰ These Agäw chiefs had been playing the role of middlemen between the central government and the Gumuz. Therefore, a very significant point for Gumuz-Agäw relations was that the latter appeared as agents of the central government for the former. This pattern of Agäw-Gumuz relationship, which was described by Taddess "patron-client", perpetuated up until the demise of the Imperial regime in 1974.⁵¹

III. Gumuz-Agäw Ethnic Interaction, 1898-1974

Gumuz-Agäw ethnic interaction as neighbouring peoples with distinct socio-economic formation dated since time immemorial. The Agäw chiefs remained instruments of the central state that sought to amass benefits from the resources of the Gumuz country. In this pattern of interaction the involvement of the central state as a third party had been limited until direct and more effective administrative control was established over the entire Gumuz land in 1898. But the period between 1898 and 1974 witnessed high degree of involvement of the central state in Gumuz-Agäw interaction than ever before. Therefore, in this paper 1898 is taken as a landmark in the history of Gumuz-Agäw interaction.

In 1898, *Negus* Täklä-Haymanot of Gojjam (r. 1881-1901) marched to the country of the Gumuz commanding 10,000 troops. This lastly broke Gumuz resistance and the entire Gumuz land of Mätäkäl fell under the direct and effective administrative control of the *Negus*.⁵² Divergent interpretations have been advanced in attempts at reconstructing the history of *Negus* Takla-Haymanot's expedition to the Gumuz country in 1898. To mention: Windy James associated the episode with an increasing demand for slaves during the reign of Menilek as a drive factor behind his campaign to the Gumuz inhabited area.⁵³ Abdussamad H. Ahmad has also substantiated James'

⁴⁹ Taddesse Tamrat, "Process of Ethnic Interaction and Integration in Ethiopia: The Case of the Agaw", *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 6, Moscow: Nauka Publishers, 1988, p. 16.

⁵⁰ Shibabaw Wole, "Yä Gojjam Kiflä-Hägar Biheräsäboch Bahlawi Gätsita", Bahir Dar, 1981 E.C., p. 83.

⁵¹ Taddesse, "Nilo-Sahara...", p. 14. Taddesse not convincingly, in my view, went to the extent of compering Agäw-Gumuz interaction with that of the Tutsi and the Hutu in Rwanda.

⁵² Takla Iyasus, "Yä Ityopiya Tarik: Nigus Täklä-Haymanot", Institute of Ethiopian Studies, MS 254, Addis Ababa University, folio, 105-106; Bizualem Birhane, "Adal Abba Tanna Nigus of Gojjam and of Kaffa 1850-1901", BA Thesis, Haile Sellassie University, 1971, pp. 46-47; FO/403/275, Mr. Rodd to the Marquess of Salisbury, 26 August 1898.

⁵³ Wendy James, "Notes on the Gumuz: Their Cultures, History and Survival", *A Paper Presented to the Ethiopian Origin Conference held at School of Oriental and African Studies on 28th and 29th June, 1979*, pp. 9-10.

argument by stating slave raiding as internal factor of Täklä-Haymanot's expedition.⁵⁴ Bizualem Birhane, on the basis of his Gojjame informants, stated that the desire for gold was the main factor behind his expedition to the Gumuz country.⁵⁵ The other interpretation that many writers including Abdussamad have forwarded is that European or colonial powers encroachment from the direction of the Sudan induced Täklä-Haymanot to wage expedition to the Gumuz country.⁵⁶ The last interpretation together with the old tradition of Ethiopian kings' territorial expansion seem more pertinent to describe *Negus* Täklä-Haymanot's march to the Gumuz area. One who examines Agäw-Gumuz interaction before and after Täklä-Haymanot's march to the area can easily disprove the first interpretation. Since the exploitation of both the human as well as the natural resources of the Gumuz country was not significantly changed after 1898. It is noteworthy that the Gumuz were not totally outside the political control of the Ethiopian state. This is quite sufficient to convince us that slaves and other kinds of resources of the Gumuz could have been exploited without a huge expedition and direct control over the area. To conclude, emphasizing the issue of slave raiding in the reconstruction of Gumuz history is no doubt always emanated from heavy reliance on foreign sources without taking the broad historical, social and psychological situation of the Ethiopian society into consideration.

The other historical interpretation that *Negus* Täklä-Haymanot incorporated the Gumuz land in 1898⁵⁷ also needs to be corrected. This interpretation does not deserve historical credence. Because other historical studies of the earlier periods clearly and convincingly argue that the Gumuz had never been an independent people. Merid Wolde Aregay and Sergew Hable Selassie on the basis of domestic sources reveal that even since the reign of Susenyos (r. 1607-32) the Gumuz country was under the influence of either the Ethiopian state or the Funj Kingdom.⁵⁸ This was reflected in the boundary disputes between the two states that occurred in the Gumuz country. The two authors noted, "... we do not know the frontiers between these countries. We need not necessarily conclude that there were no boundaries between them or that their rulers did not know them."⁵⁹ A Dutch traveller, Juan Maria Schuver, cited for another purpose in James, who stayed for some twenty months in the Ethio-Sudanese frontier in 1881-82 more than sixteen years before Täklä-Haymanot's expedition to the area also recounted that "... Gubba already preferred to pay tax to the Ethiopian empire, to the governor of Belia who collected it on behalf of *Ras* Adal of Gojjam, rather than to the Turco-Egyptian Sudan..."⁶⁰ Clearly, although there was no strong presence of Imperial Ethiopian control over the Gumuz polity of Gubba and its surroundings, the area had never been free from Ethiopian influence. Therefore, the

⁵⁴ Abdussamad H. Ahmad, "The Gumuz of the Lowlands of Western Gojjam: The Frontier in History 1900-1935", *Africa Rivista Trimestrale di Studi e Documentazione dell' Istituto Italo-Africano*, Anno L., N. 1, Marzo 1995, p. 56.

⁵⁵ Bizualem, p. 47.

⁵⁶ Abdussamad, "The Gumuz...", p. 56.

⁵⁷ Bizualem, p. 47.

⁵⁸ Merid Wold Aregay and Sergew Hable Selassie, "Sudanese Ethiopian Relations Before the 19th Century", *International Conference: Sudan in Africa*, February 1968, Sudan Research Unit, Faculty of Arts, University of Khartoum, 1968, p. 4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶⁰ James, "Lifelines ...", p. 122.

Seyoum (the later *Ras Haylu*), *Ras Bitwäddäd Mängäsha Atikem*, and *Dajjāzmāch Dämisse* to govern Gojjam proper, Damot and Agäw Midir, respectively. *Dajjāzmāch* Seyoum had an ardent desire to get the vast rich region of Agäw Midir and the country of the Gumuz.⁶⁷ Apparently this induced him to involve in and intrigue that finally led to his incarceration.⁶⁸ Although it was not materialized, his successor *Ras Bāzabih*, in his short governorship over Gojjam proper, adopted the same policy towards Agäw Midir and the Gumuz country.⁶⁹

In 1905, Menilek reinstituted *Dajjāzmāch* Seyoum as governor of Gojjam proper only.⁷⁰ From 1906 onwards, Menilek's illness and the subsequent power vacuum, which was increasingly deputized by Empress Taytu, provided the future *Ras Haylu* with a good opportunity to consolidate his power as governor of Gojjam.⁷¹ After 1911, with the help of his son-in-law, *Leji Iyyasu*, Menilek's heir, *Ras Haylu* was able to procure the province of Damot and Agäw Midir with the country of the Gumuz step-by-step.⁷²

During the time of *Ras Haylu* the Gumuz polity of Gubba continued to be ruled under its own traditional ruler named Hamdan Abu Shok or *Dajjāzmāch Banja*. But *Ras Haylu* coerced the Gumuz polity of Gubba to pay tribute to him.⁷³ At that time *Rās Haylu* claimed not only Gubba and its small vassal polity Abu Ramala but also the province of Quārā on the ground that *Negus* Takla-Haymānot had ruled the area until 1901. Finally, the avaricious *Ras Haylu* renounced his claim to Abu Ramala by selling it to Hamdan of Gubba.⁷⁴ In the first three and half decades of the twentieth century, the Gumuz polity of Gubba remained one of the six autonomous area of the Ethiopian Empire.⁷⁵ Its ruler Hamdan was one of the honored guests at Haile Sellassie's coronation ceremony in Addis Ababa in 1930.⁷⁶ Hence, both *Ras Haylu* and his Agäw chiefs never exercised direct control over the Gumuz polity of Gubba.

However, the rest of the Gumuz society was destined to continue under the over lordship of the Agäws. It is noteworthy that the Gumuz society was a segmentary one. The Gumuz were divided into numerous groups, tribes or villages (called in Gumuz language *adäre*).⁷⁷ The *adäres* were divided among the Agäw chiefs or *balabats*. Therefore, each Gumuz group or *adäre* had its own Agäw chief or *balabat* after his

⁶⁷ Abdussamad H. Ahmad, "Trade and Politics in Gojjam, 1882-1935", MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1980, p. 45.

⁶⁸ Gabra Silassie, *Tarik Zaman Za Dagmawi Minilik Nigus Nagast Za-Ityopia*, Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, 1959 E.C., pp. 299-301.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 314.

⁷⁰ Abdussamad H. Ahmad, "Trade and Politics in...", pp. 45-46.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*; Garretson, p. 201.

⁷² Abdussamad H. Ahmad, "Trade and Politics in...", p. 46. In 1911, Säblä-Wängel Haylu was married to *Lij Iyyasu*.

⁷³ Garretson, pp. 201-202.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 201; 203.

⁷⁵ Mahtama-Sillassie Walda-Masqal, *Zikra Nagar*, (reprinted) Addis Ababa, 1962 E. C., p. 164. The rest of its contemporary autonomous areas of the country, according to this semi-official source, were: Jimma, Wallaga Laqamt, Wallaga Qalam, Benishangul, and Awssa.

⁷⁶ Cheesman, p. 368.

⁷⁷ Shibabaw, p. 16.

1898 episode was nothing but evidence of a much more closer administrative incorporation of the Gumuz to the central state than in earlier days.

From the point of view of territorial administration, the Gumuz country was continued to be governed by Agäw chiefs, but under more close supervision of the central state. After 1898, the task of governing the entire province of Agäw Midir and the Gumuz country was given to *Ras Mäsfin*.⁶¹ He was an Agäw lord previously known by the name of Azänagaw Dārässo. It is said that Azänagaw demonstrated himself brave fighter at the Battle of Adwa in 1896 under the command of *Negus Täklä-Haymanot* where he is said to have captured many enemy soldiers among them were two whites. Soon after *Negus Täklä-Haymanot* and his army had returned to Gojjam, Azänagaw married to *Nigist Täklä-Haymanot*, the daughter of *Negus Täklä-Haymanot*.⁶² Then after Azänagaw was christened Mäsfin and given the title of *Ras* with the governorship of the vast province of Agäw Midir by *Negus Täklä-Haymanot*. *Ras Mäsfin* governed this vast area from Dangila and Injibara.⁶³ Below him various Agäw chiefs were empowered to rule over the Gumuz. Apparently, the Agäw chief who were assigned in charge of Gumuz affairs were belonged to the Chuhay and Gagrissa Agäw clans of Chagni, and Bälaya and Tumha, respectively.

Therefore, *Negus Täklä-Haymanot* reaffirmed the power of the Agäw chiefs over the Gumuz. They were empowered to collect tax from the Gumuz and other ethnic groups of the Mätäkäl area.⁶⁴ The Gumuz of Mätäkäl outside the Islamic polity of Gubba, which had maintained greater internal autonomy, were under the sway of their neighbouring Agäw chiefs. In Gubba, *Täklä-Haymanot* kept intact its Muslim Gumuz traditional ruling class. Members of the Gubba ruling class were given new Ethiopian titles like *Däjjazmach*, *Fitawrari*, and the like and allowed to exercise much degree of internal autonomy of power. They were responsible to pass part of the tribute, which was collected from their subjects, to *Täklä-Haymanot*.⁶⁵

After the death of *Negus Täklä-Haymanot*, in January 1901, the process of creating a much more closer and direct administration over the Gumuz country was further strengthened when the Ethio-Sudanese boundary was demarcated and much of the country fell within the Ethiopian side, in 1902.⁶⁶ The Gumuz country and its rich resources also remained a major concern for *Täklä-Haymanot* successors. Their increasing interest over the area after the division of Gojjam clearly reflects this. Following the death of *Negus Täklä-Haymanot*, the traditional region of Gojjam was divided into three administrative units, viz. Gojjam proper, Damot and Agäw Midir together with the country of the Gumuz. Emperor Menilek empowered *Däjjazmach*

⁶¹ Bizualem, p. 47; Teferi Mekonnen, "A History of Dangila, C. 1900-1956", BA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1999, p.2.

⁶² Teferi, p.2.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Abdussamad, "The Gumuz...", p. 57.

⁶⁵ For example, *Dajjach* Banjaw was a title and a name given to Hamdan Abu Shok. Peter P. Garretson, "Manjil Hamdan Abu Shok (1898-1938) and the Administration of Gubba" in Joseph Tubiana (ed.), *Modern Ethiopia: From the Accession of Menelik II to the Present*, Rotterdam, 1980, p. 201. Garretson provides us with detail analysis of the political history of Gubba after *Täklä-Haymanot*'s march to the area.

⁶⁶ James, "Notes ...", p. 10.

name it was often christened *yä egäle "shanqelloch"* (literary means the Gumuz of so and so).⁷⁸ The Agäw chiefs levy and collect taxes from their own respective Gumuz group or *adäres*. In some cases the Agäw chiefs empowered some prominent Gumuz under them with the title of *chiqashum* who helped them in activities like tax collection and other administrative affairs.⁷⁹ But it is important to point out that the Agäw chiefs had limited intervention in Gumuz's internal socio-political organizations. As it will become evident later, each Gumuz village had its own elders, called *ganzas*, with highest authority to decide matters involving their respective community. Therefore, the Gumuz retained their indigenous institutions especially in the judicial fields.

The Gumuz and the Agäws were also lined by several ties. The Gumuz practiced shifting cultivation as their major means of existence. This was substantiated by hunting, fishing and gathering.⁸⁰ They also washed gold from different tributaries of the Abbay River.⁸¹ The Gumuz had limited number of cattle due to Tsetse fly and other pests, which were prevalent in the lowland areas of Mätäkäl.⁸² Perhaps due to this and other cultural reasons, the Gumuz plough their land not with draught animals but by digging using simple handy tools.⁸³ They produced crops like sorghum, millet, corn, onions, and pumpkins. Particularly, the Gumuz were known for cotton and ginger that they most often brought to markets and sold to the Agäws and other highlanders.⁸⁴ In more broad terms, these items are not produced at the altitude level where the Agäws have settled. The Gumuz also kept domestic animals, such as goats, sheep, donkeys and cattle. Sometimes they also brought these animals to the market for exchange.⁸⁵ The Gumuz tended their domestic animals mainly for meat. They are said to have consumed the flesh of any animal but never without roast it with fire.⁸⁶ But the Gumuz didn't accustom milking of cows and never consumed milk. It is said that when their cows gave birth, the Gumuz gave them to their Agäw neighbours for milking.⁸⁷

The Gumuz-Agäw interaction had also a lot of social dimensions. To mention: in times of wedding and mourning ceremonies of their Agäw neighbours the Gumuz participation had always animation effect. The Gumuz would come with their musical instruments to enliven the above-mentioned traditional ceremonies of the Agäws. The Agäws provided the Gumuz, as repayment, with goats that would be cut and eaten by themselves.⁸⁸ But no information is available that shows Agäws' participation in Gumuz traditional ceremonies. In their social interaction the Agäws and the Gumuz

⁷⁸ Bazezew, p. 6.

⁷⁹ Berihun Mebrate, "Spontaneous Settlement and Inter-Ethnic Relations in Mätäkäl, Northwest Ethiopia", MA Thesis, Social Anthropology, Addis Ababa University, 1996, p. 12.

⁸⁰ Shibabaw, p. 16; Dessalegn, p. 123.

⁸¹ FO/371/15389, Confidential, R.E. Cheesman, "The Abbay...", p.2.

⁸² *Ibid.*; FO/371/15387, Sir S. Barton to Mr. J. H. Harris, 30 April 1931, p. 72.

⁸³ Shibabaw, p. 16.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*; James, "From Aborigines...", p. 41; Berihun, p. 5.

⁸⁵ Bazezew, p. 6.

⁸⁶ Shibabaw, p. 26.

⁸⁷ I heard this during my short stay in Mäntawuha town.

⁸⁸ Bazezew, p. 6.

called each other *wādaj* and *minijima*,⁸⁹ respectively, (the two terms literary mean friends). It is important to note that the Agāw officials were conversant in Gumuz language. Similarly, the Gumuz did speak Agāwinna.⁹⁰ Moreover, the long years social interaction also saw vivid cultural diffusion from the Agāws to the Gumuz. Although the Gumuz were not adherents of Christianity, they celebrated some of the Christian holydays, which were given special attention by the Agāws. For example, the Gumuz celebrated every year the major religious festival of the Agāws of the area *Mäsqäl* (the Cross).⁹¹ The Gumuz also observe the Sabbath or Sunday (in their language *wikumsa*) with their Wednesday in their language (*akuzaba* or “the day of the wind”) as holidays. On these two days the Gumuz never do any work.⁹²

However, this does not mean that Gumuz-Agāw interaction was always peaceful and without conflict. As it will become evident later, there was intermittent hostility between the Gumuz and the Agāws. Apparently, Agāws’ unlimited desire for Gumuz human and natural resources was a major source of conflict between the two groups. The Agāws waged ceaseless expansions to the country of the Gumuz coveting for fertile and well-watered land. They also raided Gumuz villages in search of looting and slaves. The abundance of different kinds of wild animals in Gumuz country was another cause of raids to the lowlands. Agāw and other lords conducted yearly raids to the Gumuz land because up until the recent past chasing and killing big animals was regarded as physical exercise and sign of valour.

The Gumuz also made sporadic raids to their Agāw and other ethnic neighbours villages. Perhaps the Gumuz did this as an action of revenge for the aforementioned raids. Moreover, some of their cultural practices induced them to wage war against their neighbours. Killing their neighbouring people was considered among the Gumuz not only as sign of valour but also it was a source of pride and glory. A Gumuz who succeeded in killing a man or big animal was called *gunza* (literally meant “male”).⁹³ He would have a special status and privileges in Gumuz society. The killer would be publically recognized as hero. He could brag or boast whenever other members celebrate ceremonies after killing a person. This was not allowed for those who didn’t kill a man or some number of big wild animals. Moreover, he would have his own separate drinking vessel and seat.⁹⁴ If a Gumuz killed a man to retaliate the death of his brother, he would enjoy priority to obtain the wife and the property of his passed away brother.⁹⁵ It is said that the Gumuz woman instigated her husband to avenge the death of a relative or a member of a group or *adäre* since respect and privilege was also extended to her.⁹⁶ It is noteworthy that whenever a member of a group was attacked, the Gumuz reacted together. If a member of an *adäre*, or Gumuz group was killed by an enemy, his body would be touched and buried only by the women. This

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Cheesman, *Lake Tana...*, p.336. I also personally observed this when the two groups communicate alternatively with Agāwinna or Gumuz at the Markets of Chagni, Mäntawuha, and Dibati.

⁹¹ Shibabaw, p. 30.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Shibabaw, p. 28, 31; Berihun, p. 89.

⁹⁴ Berihun, p. 89.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Shibabaw, p. 28.

was done due to their belief that if men touched and buried a victim of an enemy, they would be scared to take revenge.⁹⁷ The Gumuz traditional practice of sister exchange marriage also seems to have been another source of conflict among themselves and with their neighbours. A Gumuz to get married was obliged to give his sister in exchange. If he hadn't a sister, therefore, the Gumuz would go to war to get a girl whom would be adopted as his sister and exchanged.⁹⁸ These traditional practices often led to serious inter-ethnic conflicts that resulted great human loss and material destruction.

In the first three and half decades of the twentieth century, the better-organized Agäws raided the less organized Gumuz lowlanders. Indeed, until the proclamation of the abolition of slavery, among the many factors, these raids were also motivated by the desire for slaves.⁹⁹ The experience of slave raiding was not only prevalent in the period under discussion but also widely observed and documented in the earlier periods. The slaves that had been procured from the Gumuz area were either sold or used as domestic slaves by the Agäws. It is important to point out that the Gumuz themselves are also said to have participated in slave raiding and trading activities. Some sources indicate that the Gumuz were often at war against each other and captives were sold into slavery.¹⁰⁰ Some of their age-old cultural practices cited as a witness in this regard. For example, if a Gumuz woman committed adultery, she would be slaughtered like a sheep and her body would be thrown away to a river. But the man who committed the adultery would be arrested and sold into slavery. Elders of Gumuz community called *ganzas* passed such decisions.¹⁰¹ They were empowered to judge every matter involving their respective villages accordingly their customary laws without intervention from Agäw chiefs.¹⁰²

The Agäw clan called Gagrissa is said to have derived its name from its exploitation of the Gumuz human resources as slave labour. The Agäws belonged to this clan have settled from Bälāya to Tumha districts. The etymological origin of the name of this clan is narrated in the area as follows:

Once up on a time two men from different Agäw clans met at a market. One of them asked the other this question: "You are always in clean clothes, aren't you a farmer?" The man answered "Gagrissa" (meaning we have slaves or Gumuz to cultivate our land). Hence, from then on the name "Gagrissa" is said to have been given to the clan of the man who answered the question.¹⁰³

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*; Berihun, p. 90.

⁹⁸ For detailed discussion of sister-exchange marriage among the Gumuz people see Shibabaw, pp. 19-22; James, "Lifelines ...", pp. 130-38.

⁹⁹ Apparently, despite the fact that the issue of slave raiding has widely been exaggerated by some historians, until the proclamation on the "Abolition of Slavery" reached to this area through *Ras Haylu* there were some raids into the Gumuz country for slaves See Cheesman, p. 327.

¹⁰⁰ FO/371/15387, Sir S. Barton to ..., p. 72.

¹⁰¹ James, "Notes ...", p. 7.

¹⁰² Berihun, p. 6.

¹⁰³ This tradition is well known in Agäw Midir.

It is clear that the enslavement or the exploitation of the Gumuz human resource by their Agāw neighbours has long tradition. Indeed, it was a historical reality. Despite the fact that the issue of the slave raiding and trading in Gumuz-Agāw interaction of the first three decades of the twentieth century have grossly exaggerated by the foreign sources and some writers.

The role of the Gagrissa Agāw clan in relation to the exploitation of Gumuz's natural and human resources in the last century culminated when *Fitawrari Zäläqä Ligu* was empowered by *Ras Haylu* in charge of Gumuz affairs in the second decade of the twentieth century.¹⁰⁴ Zäläqä was a governor of Bälaya and Tumha in the period between 1905 and 1935.¹⁰⁵ *Ras Haylu* apparently assigned *Fitawrari Zäläqä Ligu* to get benefit from the riches of the Mätäkäl area, viz. coffee, gold, civet and ivory. *Ras Haylu*'s apparent policy of unlimited exploitation of the resources of the Gumuz country had a ripple effect on Zäläqä's sporadic raids to the lowlands. The Agāw court of *Fitawrari Zäläqä Ligu* at Mount Balaya had tremendous influence over the greater part of the Gumuz land. There is no doubt that this Agāw court became strong and its chief Zäläqä also grew in wealth and power through the exploitation of the human as well as natural resources of the Gumuz country. Up until 1935, the Agāw chiefs at Balaya conducted a series of devastating sporadic expeditions to the Gumuz villages or settlement areas. For instance, it was reported that in 1918, 1920, 1921, 1922 and 1924, Zäläqä and his son waged major expeditions with paramount importance to Gubba and the Gumuz lands bordering the Sudan.¹⁰⁶ Abdussamad H. Ahmad based primarily on reports from the Sudanese side and some British archives, has concluded that the aforementioned periodic campaigns to the Gumuz country were purely motivated by the desire for slaves.¹⁰⁷ These enslaved Gumuz were said to have been sold at the Dangila market.¹⁰⁸ But it seems safe to assume that other factors such as tribute collection, hunting, the desire to control trade routes and other resources of the Gumuz country behind Zäläqä's sporadic raids to the lowlands. It is noteworthy that the British sources provided quite contradictory information about slave raiding in Gumuz country in the first three decades of the twentieth century. To mention: in 1925 a report of Sir F. Lugard says that: "Generally speaking, in this part of Abyssinia [Mätäkäl lowlands], although the slave trade is still carried on, slave raiding may almost be said to be non-existence."¹⁰⁹ The British Consul at Dangila, Major Cheesman, also reported as follows: "I had been told in Addis Ababa, from more than one source, that Dangila is one of the biggest slave markets in Abyssinia..."¹¹⁰ but his actual observation in the area was reported to Sir S. Barton as follows: "During my seven years' residence in Dangila [1925-1932] I have heard of three cases of trading in slaves, all of which have appeared in reports."¹¹¹ He added

¹⁰⁴ Abdussamad H. Ahmad, "Trading in Slaves in Bela-Shangul and Gumuz, Ethiopia: Border Enclaves in History", *Journal of African History*, Vol. 40, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 439.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Abdussamad H. Ahmad, "The Gumuz...", pp. 61-65.

¹⁰⁷ Abdussamad H. Ahmad, "Trading in Slaves ...", p. 439.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*; FO/371/1294, Confidential, Major Doughty Wylie to Sir Edward Grey, East Africa, 31 August 1912.

¹⁰⁹ FO/37 1/10873, Confidential, Mr. Bentinck to Austen Chamberlain M.P., 13th June 1925.

¹¹⁰ FO/37 1/16096, Confidential, Consul R.E. Cheesman to Sir S. Barton, 20 May 1932.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

that: "I have not heard of a single slave-raiding party of Abyssinians going down there [to the Gumuz country] during my period of office...[but]...I heard of plenty of game-poaching parties [in the Gumuz country]..."¹¹² From this it is conspicuous that reports in the Sudanese side were produced based largely on hearsay. Therefore, the explanation that Zäläqä raided the Gumuz mainly for slaves is more partial and incomplete than comprehensive one.

The sporadic campaigns of the Agäws to the Gumuz area were always ended in victory of the former. This was because the Agäws were better organized and well equipped than the Gumuz. Although some sources indicate that the Gumuz have already began to possess some rifles in the period under discussion, they resisted the Agäws with bows and arrows.¹¹³ These sporadic expeditions obviously resulted massive displacement of the Gumuz. It was reported that the Gumuz were forced to migrate crossing the Ethio-Sudanese boundary and took refuge in Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. The Agäw chiefs, for example in 1916, were said to have asked the British administration in the Sudan to return the Gumuz who had crossed the border to them.¹¹⁴ Some Gumuz community also moved northwards to the areas near Mätäma.¹¹⁵ This was reported after Zäläqä's raid to the Gumuz area in 1924. The other form of reaction of the Gumuz to these sporadic Agäw raids seems to have been forging alliance with the British in the Sudan. The Gumuz polity of Gubba, in the border land, employed such a mechanism. For example, Zäläqä's son who led expedition to Gubba and the adjacent border land commanding 400 riflemen was shot by the slave patrol of the Sudanese Government in 1918.¹¹⁶ Moreover, in 1925 when Major Cheesman visited the Gumuz polity of Gubba, Hamdan had British trained guards.¹¹⁷ Evidently, due to its geographical proximity to the Sudan, the Gumuz polity of Gubba had established some sort of defensive alliance with the British against Agäw raids.

Besides these sporadic campaigns, hunting expeditions to the lowland of Mätäkäl adversely affected the peaceful climate of the Gumuz country. In every dry season, when wild animals were readily available, the impenetrable grass of the lowland was burnt, and rivers were fordable, the Gumuz country was turned into a hunting ground.¹¹⁸ According to Abdussamad, Agäw and other lords from the rest of Gojjam and Gondar were chasing and killing big wild animals in Gumuz country up until 1935.¹¹⁹ Like other matters, Agäw chiefs managed hunting activity in Gumuz country. In this regard the repeatedly mentioned Agäw chief, Fitawrari Zäläqä was responsible to collect the tusk and other trophies from every hunter and to hand over

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ James, "From Aborigines...", p. 41. Cheesman saw the Gumuz with seven rifles of Russian origin in 1929. He also said that they asked him for ammunitions. See FO/371/15389, Confidential, R.E. Cheesman, "The Abbay...", p.6.

¹¹⁴ Abdussamad H. Ahmad, "The Gumuz...", p. 61.

¹¹⁵ FO/371/10873, Confidential, Mr. Bentinck to Austen Chamberlain M.P., 13th June 1925.

¹¹⁶ Abdussamad H. Ahmad, "The Gumuz...", p. 61.

¹¹⁷ FO/371/15389, Confidential, R.E. Cheesman, "The Abbay...", p.27.

¹¹⁸ Abdussamad H. Ahmad, "Hunting in Gojjam...", p. 238.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

part of it to *Ras Haylu's* storehouse, which was found in the heart of Agäw-Midir, at Injibara.¹²⁰

More than plunder and forceful exportation of their natural and human resources, the Gumuz were segregated and looked in despise by their Agäw neighbours. The Agäws considered the Gumuz as a Negro tribe of racially lower status, heathen, and an inferior race. This was expressed in several stereotypes. The Agäws used a derogatory generic name of "*Shanqella*" for the Gumuz. The name "*Shanqella*" connotes backward, barbarous, naked or uncivilized.¹²¹ But the Gumuz in the immediate neighbours of the Agäws called themselves *Bega*,¹²² those who live within and near the Sudanese frontier use the name Gumuz for themselves.¹²³ With no exaggeration the age-old Agäw prejudice excluded the Gumuz from the family of mankind. They draw a clear racial dichotomy between Saw (man) and "*Shanqella*" (slave). This clearly reflected in *Fitawrari Zäläqä's* speech to a British official who visited to Balaya in the first decade of the twentieth century. Zalaqa said: "...though there were men [Agäw] living in Balayä mountain, all the low country between the plateau and the Sudan frontier was inhabited by his slaves [Gumuz]."¹²⁴ Clearly, Gumuz-Agäw interaction was rigidified by the increasing negative stereotyped attitude towards the first.

As a result, in spite of the long years' interaction and territorial integration, social-separation rather than assimilation or incorporation characterized Gumuz-Agäw relationship. The Agäws, at the level of the ruling class, hardly intermarry with the Gumuz.¹²⁵ Moreover, they didn't feel the necessity of spreading Christianity to the Gumuz. The reason why the Agäws didn't put rigorous efforts to convert the Gumuz to Christianity is not well established.¹²⁶ Although it needs its own meticulous historical investigation, it is possible to pass a tentative historical judgment that the spread of Christianity to the Gumuz area was impeded by the Agäws unlimited interest to Gumuz resources. Since, in those days, looting and enslaving the vanquished "heathen" by the Christians were not considered as sin or crime by the existing religious morality or legal code.¹²⁷ In short, the Agäws seem to have used Gumuz heathen practices as a moral excuse or justification for their devastating sporadic raids to the area.

The Gumuz on the other hand used a generic hatred name of *Mittiha* for the Agäws and other light brown skin highlanders. The derogatory name of *Mittiha* connotes

¹²⁰ Abdussamad H. Ahmad, "The Gumuz...", p. 65.

¹²¹ Kedane Mariam, p. 4.

¹²² Dessalegn, p. 117.

¹²³ James, "Notes ...", pp. 1-2. According to James, the name Gumuz is an Arabic term in reference to all the "*Shanqella*".

¹²⁴ As it was quoted by Abdussamad, "The Gumuz...", pp. 59-60.

¹²⁵ I have passed this judgment on the basis of my own personal observation in the area. Moreover, the literature, that I have been able to consult for the purpose of this paper, doesn't indicate the existence of marriage alliance between the Gumuz and the Agaw ruling classes.

¹²⁶ Kedane Mariam explained that the majority of the Gumuz were not Christians rather they were worshippers of natural objects such as mountains, rivers, moon, rocks, etc... Kedane Mariam, p. 25.

¹²⁷ For the legal code and religious morality of the Christians in relation to looting and enslaving, Punkhurst, p. 4.

cruelty and brutality.¹²⁸ It is said that the Agäws and other highlanders did something inhumanity upon the Gumuz. To cite a case, although it is almost implausible, it has been written that the Agäws cut off the hamstring of the enslaved Gumuz and made him partially lame so as to prevent the slave from escaping.¹²⁹ On the other hand, due to their deep hatred towards the highlanders, the Gumuz are said to have been perpetrating something savagery as follows: "When they [the Gumuz] succeeded in killing [a highlander] they cut off his right arms, dry it with smoke and beat their drums with it; this gives great honour to the killer."¹³⁰

Although the literature on the Gumuz in the Italian occupation period, 1935-41, is not very extensive nor is it satisfactory, available one shows no drastic change in the Gumuz-Agäw interaction. But this period marked considerable military bustle in the area. It is reported that some highlanders raided Gumuz villages for cattle. The raiders also forced the Gumuz to hand over honey and other items. As a result, some Gumuz groups sided with the Italians. After they had obtained arms from the Italians, these Gumuz groups attacked neighbouring villages of the highlanders.¹³¹ The Italians established a strong military camp at Gubba to defend possible British attack from the Sudan and to suppress local patriotic resistance.¹³² This camp provided reinforcement to the Italian military stations, which were found in Mätäkäl area. For example, when the patriots of the area besieged the Italian garrison at Däbrä Zäyit, in Wämbära, it was from Gubba that the Italians mobilized their force by air and by ground to reinforce the encircled contingent.¹³³ At that same time the Italians constructed the Gubba-Wämbära motorway to assemble their force, which has still provided service in Gumuz country.¹³⁴

Finally, on January 1, 1941 when the Gideon Forces entered into Ethiopian territory through Omedilla, the Italians retreated from Gubba¹³⁵ southward across the Abbay.¹³⁶ Some sources of the period reveal that the Gumuz allied with their Agäw neighbours and put stiff resistance against the Italians. Patriots of Gubba fought against the Italians under *Fitawrari* Zäläqä Liqu and later *Däjjazmach* Mängäsha Jämbäre. Seletene Seyoum listed the sons of *Däjjazmach* Banjaw, Muhammad and Osman Banjaw, and two others named Albushar Ahmad and Hasan Bazgum among the prominent patriotic leaders of the resistance period in Agäw-Bahir Dar-Mätäkäl.¹³⁷ The Gumuz who lived east of the Bäläs River also fought under the famous patriotic leader of Zigäme, Mätäkäl, and Wämbära areas called *Fitawrari*

¹²⁸ Wolde Sellassie Abbute Deboch, "Gumuz and Highland Resettlers: Differing Strategies of Livelihood and Ethnic Relations in Metekel, Northwest Ethiopia", PhD Dissertation, Social Science, Gottingen, March 2002, p.231.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.65.

¹³⁰ FO/371/15387, Sir S. Barton to ..., p. 72.

¹³¹ Kabada Tasama, *Ya Tarik Mastawasha*, Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, 1962 E.C., p. 243.

¹³² Tsega, p. 81; Seletene Seyoum, "A History of Resistance in Gojjam (Ethiopia): 1936-41", PhD Dissertation, Department of History, Addis Ababa University, 1999, p. 349.

¹³³ Tsega, p. 81.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Seletene, p. 348.

¹³⁶ Tsega, p. 83.

¹³⁷ Seletene, p. 181.

Zäläqä Birru.¹³⁸ Particularly in the end of the occupation period the Gumuz land was an indispensable area of linkage between the patriots and the British. The latter aided the former with arms and ammunitions.¹³⁹ It is noteworthy that the emperor Haile Selassie also returned from exile in 1941 through the Gumuz country after the evacuation of the Italians from Gubba.¹⁴⁰ This clearly indicates that existence of strong patriotic resistance in Gumuz country and the liberation of the area from Fascist occupation earlier than the other parts of the country.

In the post-liberation period Gumuz-Agäw interaction seems to have continued unchanged. But this period witnessed more sporadic Gumuz rebellion in the area than ever before. The major causes of Gumuz rebellion in Mätäkäl in the period roughly from 1941-1974 can be summed up and listed as follows: First, their defensive action against further expansion by the Agäws. Second, the attempt by the Gumuz to regain their lost territories. Third, as it will become evident later, some Agäw chiefs with hidden interests behind instigated the Gumuz to rebel and create chaotic situation in the area. In 1940s, the provincial government of Agäw-Bahir Dar *awraja* faced on and off rebellion from the Gumuz of Mätäkäl. The Gumuz rebelled against their Agäw chiefs. This induced disturbance and instability in the Mätäkäl area. This chaotic situation in Mätäkäl area was started soon after the death of a strong Agäw chief, named *Grazmach* Zäläqä Birru, who was the governor of Sigadi until 1944.¹⁴¹ This Agäw chief had strong army recruited from the Agäws and the Gumuz to maintain peace and order in the area and to carry out his responsibility of collecting taxes from the Gumuz and passed them to the central government.¹⁴² Apparently, a strong Agäw chief did not succeed him. Subsequently, the Gumuz of Dibati and Mandura refused to pay their annual tribute and openly rebelled soon after the death of Zäläqä. Zäläqä's Gumuz ex-soldiers spearheaded the 1940s rebellion against Agäw chief of Sigadi.¹⁴³ Although it was intermittent, the rebellion continued for the next three years, up until 1947, because no strong Agäw chief was installed at the post of Zäläqä to quell down the Gumuz rebellion and to resume peace and order in the area. Consequently, the other Agäw chiefs at the lower position were not able to collect taxes from the Gumuz effectively as it had been in the period of *Grazmach* Zäläqä Birru.

Within the central government there was a strong belief that the Agäw chiefs could settle the chaotic situation of the area. The long tradition of giving administrative posts to the Agäws continued. As a result, *Fitawrari* Embialä Gässässä was appointed as administrator of the area in 1947.¹⁴⁴ Soon after he had become governor of the area, Embialä started to resolve the problem through exchange of views with Gumuz elders who were frequently summoned to Chagni town. Unfortunately, however, his effort was interrupted before ripe due to another Gumuz rebellion in September

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.349; Bazezew, p. 19.

¹³⁹ Kabada gave detailed discussion on the correspondence between the Ethiopian patriots and the British and the Emperor in the Sudan in his book, pp. 345-380.

¹⁴⁰ Seletene, p. 349.

¹⁴¹ Bazezew, p. 19.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p.20.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.22.

1948.¹⁴⁵ An Agäw chief called Admassu Gugsä who was a governor of Zigäm district led this rebellion. Admassu claimed the post of Embialä and began to instigate the Gumuz to rebel against Embialä.¹⁴⁶ This clearly indicates that the Agäw chiefs had strong influence upon the Gumuz rebellion. Because whenever conflicts occurred among Agäw chiefs they involved the Gumuz. The conflict between the two chiefs and the Gumuz involvement further complicated the situation and created instability in Mätäkäl. This affected the normal trade traffic and other governmental activities like tribute collection. Finally, *Däjjazmach* Käbädä Täsäma, Emperor's *endärase* of the governorate general of Gojjam, personally marched with his army to Mätäkäl in October 1948.¹⁴⁷ First, he resolved the conflict between the two Agäw chiefs. It was resolved when Admassu, who was the mastermind behind Gumuz rebellion, was peacefully surrendered to *Däjjazmach* Käbädä at Chagni. Secondly, Käbädä set out to pacify the Gumuz country and visit Wämbära. The Gumuz did not put strong resistance to Käbädä's army. It is said that it was quell down with few incident where some death and imprisonment of the Gumuz.¹⁴⁸ As a result, peace reigned for some time in the area. *Däjjazmach* Käbädä Täsäma is said to have proposed the establishment of a new *awraja* administrative structure as a remedy for the existing peace and security problem that impeded the normal trade traffic and collection of tribute in the area. This was also believed to have enabled close administrative control over the Gumuz country.¹⁴⁹

The periodic revolt of the Gumuz people in Mätäkäl became the major factor for the insecurity and absence of proper administration of the area. These revolts created problems in the regular flow of trade and tax-collection. The central government decided to make Mätäkäl a separate *awraja* to ensure effective control over the Gumuz. Agäw-Bahir Dar *awraja* was so vast to be effectively governed from its center, Dangila. Absence of effective transportation and communication networks made the administration of the vast *awraja* very difficult.¹⁵⁰ Consequently, the government eventually devised a new administrative reshuffling that separated Mätäkäl from the vast Agäw-Bahir Dar *awraja* and upgraded its status to an *awraja* administrative unit. The central government implemented the administrative rearrangement that was believed to have enabled to exercise close control over the Gumuz country and to maintain peace and order in the area when the vast Agäw-Bahir Dar *awraja* was disintegrated into three *awrajas* in 1956.¹⁵¹ At that same time the Gumuz country of Gubba and Dangur, which had been administered as outlying districts of the Governorate-General of Bägämidir in the post, liberation period were brought to be part of the new Mätäkäl *awraja*. Moreover, Wämbära, which had been independently administered as a peripheral district outside Agäw-Bahir Dar *awraja*, was also included as part of the new Mätäkäl *awraja*.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Berihun, p. 77.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*; Bazezew, p. 23.

¹⁴⁸ Bazezew, p. 23.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Teferi, p. 41.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*; Shibabaw, p. 83.

¹⁵² Bazezew, p. 24.

However, the sporadic revolt of the Gumuz continued throughout the years of the 1950s. The major revolt was in Dibati and Mandura districts. It was not easy to suppress and sometimes it went out of control. This rebellion was said to have been caused by the system of tax collection.¹⁵³ At that time, every Gumuz was required to pay an annual tax of five Ethiopian Birr. Due to their practice of shifting cultivation, the Gumuz did not have a constant territorial basis. They were moving each season in search of new land for cultivation. Thus Agāw tax collectors didn't always find the particular Gumuz group or *adäre* in its former location. Besides this the Gumuz did not have the tradition of keeping the receipt paper given to them after they paid the required annual tax. Tacitly, when they were obliged to repay the taxes, the Gumuz reacted with rebellion.¹⁵⁴ Apparently, some Agāw tax collectors used violence and intimidation at the time of tax collection whenever the Gumuz complained to pay that added more fuel to the burning Gumuz reaction of taxes.¹⁵⁵ As a result, a major Gumuz revolt was erupted and wide spread to different Gumuz villages in 1950s. It was reported that the rebellion went out of control and the Gumuz refused to pay their annual tax. They also began to assault the profile of towns, which were inhabited by non-Gumuz peoples, during the night.¹⁵⁶ The Gumuz attacked and killed people as far as Sigadi, at the heart of the Chuhay Agāw clan. Consequently, many civilians became victims of this rebellion.¹⁵⁷

The Gumuz rebellion culminated in 1960 when it was widespread and well organized under the leadership of an individual who called himself "Colonel" Lambicha.¹⁵⁸ There is still strong reminiscence of this Gumuz rebellion among the peoples of Matakāl area as the "War of Lambicha". In January 1960, the Gumuz shot an Agāw chief named Agaža Birru, who was responsible for government tax collection in Mäntawuha district and its surroundings.¹⁵⁹ Subsequently, Government involved the Agāws and other neighbouring ethnic groups to put down Gumuz rebellion. With a short period of time, the rebellion was suppressed and Lambicha was taken to prison.¹⁶⁰ To protect further Gumuz rebellion, the Government decided to set up a permanent police station in Mäntawuha and Dibati towns in 1960.¹⁶¹

The middle of the twentieth century witnessed the beginning of the influx of people from Wällo to the Matakāl area.¹⁶² The most pressing problems that drove the Wälloyäs to the Matakāl area were recurring drought, environmental collapse, over population and exhaustion of the land in their original settlement areas. This clearly indicates the continuity of the old tradition of searching Matakāl for its rich resources. This predominantly Muslim people could not settle with the Christian Agāws in relatively densely populated highland districts. The new comers having discussed

¹⁵³ *Ibid.* p.38; Berihun, p. 51.

¹⁵⁴ Bazezew, pp. 37-38.

¹⁵⁵ As it is widely said particularly in Mäntawuha and Dibati districts tax collectors used threat and force to introduce the "wild" Gumuz to the new tax in money.

¹⁵⁶ Bazezew, p. 38.

¹⁵⁷ Berihun, p. 50.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p.93; Bazezew, p. 35.

¹⁵⁹ Berihun, p. 51.

¹⁶⁰ Bazezew, p. 38.

¹⁶¹ Berihun, p. 50.

¹⁶² *Ibid.* p.145; Bazezew, p. 21; Agdew and Wolde Selassie, p. 210.

with the Agäw chiefs settled to the lowlands of Mätäkäl side by side with the Gumuz.¹⁶³ As a result the Wälloyäs became immediate neighbours of the Gumuz. The Gumuz and the Agäws began to live as distant neighbours. The age-old Gumuz-Agäw close interaction began to be superseded by a new aggressive conflict between the Gumuz and the Wälloyäs. Sometimes this conflict went out of control of the local Agäw chiefs and need the intervention of the central government.

In 1960s, the Mätäkäl area received a massive influx of the Wälloyä settlers. The Wälloyäs settled near by the Gumuz in agreement with the Agäw chiefs or *Balabats*. However, serious contradiction soon started between the Agäw *balabats* and the Wälloyä settlers which eventually brought the Gumuz into the scene in early 1960s. The main cause of conflict between the Wälloyä settlers and the Agäw *balabats* was the issue of land tax. The Wälloyäs refused to pay taxes to Agäw *balabats* on the ground that the latter continuously increased the amount of the tax required from them. At first it seems that the settlers and the *balabats* tried to resolve peacefully through local government courts. But whenever the case brought to the court, it was decided that the Wälloyäs to pay tribute to the government not to the Agäw *balabats*. For example, an Agäw *balabat* named *Grazmach* Rata couldn't succeed to get tax from the Wälloyäs through the local court when it was decided against his claim in 1963.¹⁶⁴ Therefore, after this the Agäw *balabats* attempted to evict the Wälloyäs by force. Some armed clashes were reported between the Agäws and the Wälloyäs that cost the life of the two groups. In this conflict the Gumuz sided with the Agäw *balabats* against the Wälloyä settlers.¹⁶⁵ Eventually, the Agäw *balabats* stopped open combat and used a hideous method of evicting the Wälloyäs indirectly through the Gumuz.

In Dibati, the Wälloyä settled after they had agreed with an Agäw *balabat* named Zalaqa Kidane. Accordingly the agreement, the settler agreed to pay to Zäläqä Kidane an annual payment of 20 Birr per household. Hence they paid for the next four years from 1963-1966. Zäläqä required them to pay double from 1966 onwards. The Wälloyäs complained but eventually they agreed to pay 40 Ethiopian Birr per household to the aforementioned *balabat* annually. Zäläqä raised the amount of the tax payment to sixty Birr per household in 1967. At that time the Wälloyäs refused to pay. Zäläqä ordered them to abandon from the land but they refused. He then began to instigate the Gumuz of Dibāti area to take up arms against the Wälloyä settlers. Consequently, the Gumuz killed the settlers, burnt their villages, and destroyed their grain harvest. This conflict wide spread and perpetuated, mainly as enmity between the Gumuz and the Wälloyä settlers, up until 1970.¹⁶⁶ The central government didn't intervene to stop the ongoing antagonism immediately. The fact that the delay was due to the 1968 peasant rebellion which was a major scene almost in the entire region of Gojjam induced by the enforcement of the newly proclaimed agricultural income

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Berihun, p. 137.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.* pp.137-139.

¹⁶⁶ Chernet Wakweya, "Land Tenure System and Self-Settled Wolloyes in Abe-Dongoro (1900-1974)", BA Thesis, Department of History, Addis Ababa University, 1988, p. 52.

tax.¹⁶⁷ Sadly, this political turmoil spurred the onslaught of the Gumuz on the Wälloyä settlers. In 1969, the Imperial Government dispatched a contingent of a police force called *fätno-därash* commanded by Colonel Lämessa. The *fätno-därash* succeeded in disarming the Gumuz rebels.¹⁶⁸ This rewarded for Mätäkäl area with peace and stability. Nevertheless, instigating the Gumuz against the Wälloyä settlers by Agäw *balabats* seems to have been continued until the 1974 Revolution. As it is very well-known the Revolution finally brought Agäw *balabats* strong claim of the Gumuz land to an end through its proclamation of "Land to the Tiller" in 1975.

¹⁶⁷ Allen Hoben, *Land Tenure Among Amhara of Ethiopia: The Dynamics of Cognatic Descent*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973, pp. 220-226.

¹⁶⁸ Berihun, p. 92.