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Centre- Periphery Relations in Ethiopian Empire: The Case of Benishangul Gumuz, 1898 - 1941

Binayew Tamrat Getahun

Adama Science and Technology University, School of Humanities and Law, Adama, Ethiopia

Alemseged Debele Tsega

Adama Science and Technology University, School of Humanities and Law, Adama, Ethiopia

Abstract:

*Extended from South west to North western edge of Ethiopia along the Sudanese border, Benishangul Gumuz region is composed of former Bella Shangul, Assosa/ Aqoldi/ Khomosha and the Sheikdom of Gubba in the Gumuz inhabited Western fringe of Gojjam to the north of Blue Nile(Bahiru,2002:19) Beni Shangul Gumuz is a lowland area of around 50,000 square kilometers, divided into two by the Blue Nile. Its landscape is undulating and covered by a thick savannah and bamboo woodland. The largest number of its early inhabitants (i.e. Bertha, Mao, Komosha and Gumuz or Beja) belonged to the Nilo-Saharan family.*¹ The Bertha to the south of the Blue Nile and the Gumuz to the north are dominant (Gondalez, 2010:6) In terms of religion, Islam has a wider adherent than Orthodox Christianity, which has been the dominant religion at the political centre. Economically, there is a marked difference between the highlanders who has been dominating the politics of Ethiopia and the inhabitants Benishangul Gumuz areas. The former predominantly practice sedentary peasant agriculture, while the latter derive their livelihood from hunting, shifting agriculture, and extraction of alluvial gold. On the basis of religious, economic and historical grounds, the ruling powers from Christian Amhara-Tigrayan society reinforced the peripheral position in the region and its diverse ethnic groups were culturally marginalized(Andreas Zimmermann, 2012:69) At least up until 1990s the Benishangul _Gumuz has been subjected to peripheral position by the central government of Ethiopia.*¹*

This article attempts to investigate and analyze the relationship between Beni Shangul Gumuz and the central government in the period between 1898 and 1941 in the context of center-periphery theories. The article consisted of two parts. Starting with a brief historical survey of the frontier areas along western Ethiopia, the first part deals with how war of resistance conducted by the Benishangul and Gumuz peoples to maintain their autonomy. The tactics and strategies used by the agents of the Ethiopian Emperor to integrate Benishangul and Gumuz region is also included. The second part of the article, investigates the socio-economic and political relationship established between the years 1902 and 1941. The two dates are taken as land marks for obvious reason that in 1902 Benishangul Gumuz was officially integrated to Ethiopia by an international border agreement with Great Britain. Following the restoration of the emperor to power in 1941, Benishangul Gumuz began to be administered by governors appointed by the central government.

1. The Condition of Ethio- Sudan Frontier before Incorporation

Since, antiquity, there had been a cross-border grazing, trading and interaction among the communities in the border lands. Gradually, the free interaction and inter relationship between the different communities on the margins between Sudan and Ethiopia faced challenges from the neighboring states. At least from early 4th century A.D, for instance, the Gumuz people were exposed to expansionist drives of states established in Ethiopia and Sudan. Powerful states Meroe in the Sudan and Aksum invaded and enslaved the less powerful and less organized Gumuz peoples (Tsega Endalew,2006:36) As cited in Andreas Zimmermann(2012:69-70) in inscriptions of Aksumite period it is stated that the Gumuz or the Beja, a name which the Gumuz used to refer themselves.

During the medieval period, by virtue of their location, the Benishangul Gumuz peoples began to fall under influence of the two states; the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia and the Funji Kingdom in Sudan. The Funj sultanate of Sudan existed in some form or another from around 1400 CE up to the time of the Turko-Egyptian conquest in 1820/21. Until the date of establishment of Turco -Egyptian rule in the Sudan, the peoples inhabiting in frontier lowland between Ethiopia and Sudan were peripheral to the administration of Sudan and Ethiopia (Bahiru, 2002:26; Abdusamad, 1999:57)

1.1. The End for the Old 'Safe Havens'

Though Funji sultans brought the various ethnic groups in the Ethiopian-Sudanese borderland under their influence, their occupation and rule that lasted from 1685 to 1821 was lenient. At some irregular times Christian Ethiopian kings too were involved in raiding the areas. The frontier peoples were there for under the influence of the two states. But 'in those days there was no regular and systematic exploitation. The role of the two competing states was limited to the nomination of local rulers

ostensibly responsible to the rulers of central governments of the region – the Funj sultanate or the Ethiopian Christian kingdom. During that period there was free interaction of people in a free space in James Wendy's words in "a safe haven" between the Ethio-Sudan frontier areas. In the course of interactions with the Sudanese the Nilotic lowland peoples such as the Berta and the Gumuz exposed to Islamic and Arabic influences (Abdusamad, 1999:57; James, 2010:114; Tesema Ta'a, 1990:278-280).

Following the defeat and fall of the Funji kingdom in 1821, however, the border territories inhabited by Benishangul Gumuz had been subjected to harsh rule in the hands of the Turco-Egyptian governors. Afterwards, the Turco-Egyptian administration of Sudan under Mohamad Ali and his successor, Khedive Ismail Pasha decided to control and exploit the fertile resources of frontier lowlands (Bahiru Zewde, 2002:26; González-Ruibal, 2010:1-2)

In 1859 the first Turco Egyptian rulers conducted raids in the Ethio- Sudan frontier areas that stretch from Mettema to southern part of Benishangul. The Ethiopian regional lords on their part entered into the scene of competition to control the rich resources of the Ethio-Sudanese frontier lands. These competitions between the Turco-Egyptian Sudan and the governors of Christian State of Ethiopia brought the "safe haven" or freedom of the peripheries to an end. They rather fell under constant threats of war from the two states and became victims of slave raiding (Bahiru, 2002:26; González-Ruibal, 2011:276).

1.2. Establishment of Watawit Rule in the Border lands

From early 19th century onwards, sheikhdoms or Islamic enclaves began to emerge in the Ethio-Sudan frontier areas (Ahmad Kalid Abdella, 2010:99; Abdusaamad 1999:433) Among them the Sheikhdoms of Assosa or Aqoldi, Bela Shangul and Khomosha were established to the south of Blue Nile and the Sheikhdom of Gubba emerged to the north of the same river in Western edge of Gojjam (Bahiru,2012:19; 433Tesema Ta'a, 1990:278) The four sheikhdoms were founded by Muslim leaders of Sudanese origin who consider themselves as 'watawit'. The term Watawit refers to Arabized Bertha People who had entered and settled in Benishangul as traders and Islamic religious teachers in the late 19th and early 20th century (Bahiru, 2002:19; Abdusamad H. Ahmad, 1999:433-435)

To the north of Abay (Blue Nile) river within the Ethiopian territory predominantly inhabited by the Gumuz, a similar imposition was made and the Islamic state of Gubba was established. These Muslim leaders intensified the propagation of Islamic religion. Moreover, Islam had been freely propagated in the region along the Sudanese and Ethiopian border lands by itinerant Islamic teachers and Muslim merchants. As a result, Islam was deep rooted in the area.

1.3. Mahadist Influence in the Ethio-Sudan Borderlands

Islam and trans frontier trade along the frontier areas facilitated Mahadist incursion deep in to Ethiopia(Bahiru,2002: 19; M C Jedrej, 1996:3-5) The presence of well established Muslim community along the Ethio-Sudanese frontier areas enabled the Mahadists to be successful in their invasion in South western Ethiopia. When they were in struggle with Christian Ethiopia and Anglo-Egyptian colonialists for liberation in 1880s, the Mahadists of Sudan won the sheikhdoms of Bela Shangul and Khomosha to their side (Tesema Ta'a, 1990: 273-283; Almahadi, 1996:6)

Between 1882 and 1890 Benishangul Gumuz fell under rule of the Sudanese Mahdia. During the first phase of mahadist invasion (1882-1886) relations with local chiefs were peaceful. Thus in the early years of 1880s the mahadists were in a position to bring the chief leaders of the Ethio-Sudanese borderlands to their side in a seemingly "carrot and stick policy". They rewarded those Muslim leaders who supported them and punished others who rejected Mahadi's Mission. Mahmud Wad Mahmud of Khomosha, for instance, was rewarded by the mahadist leader with a titular gift as *amir*. Likewise in 1885 Jote's kingdom, Qellem in western Wallagga was invaded by mahadist forces. Soon afterwards Jote Tullu invited Menilik's Shoan commander, Ras Gobena, to expel them out of his kingdom, Leqa Qellam(James,2010 :117)*1 Al Hassen Mohamad, father of Sheik Khojale of Assosa on the contrary was persecuted in jail simply because he had refused to join their expedition to Wellega in 1888. However, the mahadists were not unanimously welcomed by the local population. The mahadists on their part, from 1886 onwards, decided to tighten their grip and conducted several devastating raids in Benishangul under the guise of a jihād. Soon their invasion extended in Oromo lands of south western Ethiopia as far as Nejo area of Wellega until Menilik's general Ras Gobena defeated and checked their advance at the battle of Gutu Dili in 1888 (Almahadi, 1996:6; Bahiru, 2002:59)

2. Open Resistance and Incorporation

By 3rd of August 1889 the Anglo- Egyptian troops defeated mahadist forces at the battle of Tushki. This brought the mahdist ambitions toward Egypt to an end. Moreover the mahadists were weakened by internal problems and by a great famine caused by bad harvest in 1889. Consequently, even before their final defeat of 1898 (at Omdruman) by the Anglo-Egyptian forces the mahadists rule in Sudan and Benishangul was weakened (Iris Seri-Hersch, 2009: 248; Tesema, 1990: 283)

On the other hand Menilik (king of Shewa 1870-1889 and Emperor from 1889 -1913) embarked on war of conquest. Motivated by its strategic and economic importance, Menilik directed his attention to the Western borderlands. From 1882 to 1886, his General Gobena Dache brought Leqa Qellam and Leqa Naqamte, two important Oromo Kingdoms in Wellega, under Menilik's rule after securing peaceful submission of their chiefs Jootee Tulluu of Leqaa Qellam and Kumsa Moreda of Leqaa Naqamte. As a reward for their peaceful submission and cooperation to Menilik, the two Oromo chiefs promoted to *dejzmach* with autonomous status. Jootee Tulluu of Leqaa Qellam and Kumsa Moreda for their part agreed to pay Menilik annual tribute. Internal affairs of the two kingdoms left to their respective kings and Menilik's rule was only indirect (Bahiru, 2002:19; Etana

*Jote Tullu (originally known as Bula),was independent chief of the Leka section of the western Oromo and his chiefdom very close to the edge of the plateau overlooking the Baro-Sobat corridor and the White Nile plains.

Habte, 2012:88-91) Initially this agreement and amicable relationship with the two rulers of Wellega, Jote and Kumsa, was very helpful for Menilik's generals to extend the frontiers of the Ethiopian empire westwards. (Bahiru,2002:66;Etana Habte,2012:92) Moreover, the collapse of the mahadist rule in the region and the European encroachment to the Ethiopian frontier lands served as additional incentives for Emperor Menilik II(r1889-1913) to advance westward into Beni (or Bela) Shangul country(Harold Marcus, 1994: 104-105).

After his victory at the Battle of Adwa (on 1 March 1896), the emperor sent one of his confident warlords, Ras Mekonen, to take up frontier areas in the Wellega region. Ras Mekonen escorted by Dejazmach Jote and Dejazmach Gebre Egziabhere(the former Kumsa Moreda) mobilized a large force to the area. With encroachment of a huge army towards Benishangul, the watawit leaders tried to forge an alliance in defense of their Sheikdoms (Bela Shangul,Aqoldi and Komosha). But one of the three Watawit leaders, Sheik Khojele al Hassen of Aqoldi/Assosa/ deserted them and was in secret links with the commander of the army, Ras Mekonen. At the same time the Sheik sided with Ras Mekonen's troops in the fighting against Tor el Juri of Bella Shangul².Incognizant of his significant contribution, Emperor Menilik left Shiek Khojele on power and his territory was not invaded by the imperial army (Bahiru, 2002:66; Etana Habte, 2012:93)

The other two leaders, however, tried to put up a strong resistance to the last. But the combined forces of Kumsaa Moroda, Jootee Tuulu and Ras Makonnen defeated them without much difficulty. Tor el Juri's armed forces easily beaten at the battle of Fadogno in 1897 and escaped to Fazoghli, a place located in the Sudan. Now it became the turn of Muhamad Wad Mahmud of Komosa, to taste the mighty hands of the huge army. His troops ferociously defended their territory but easily crushed and their leader, Wad Mahmud, escaped into Jebel Jerok, another place in Sudan. With the defeat Muhamad the resistance in Benishangul came to an end and the three sheikdoms of Beni shangul incorporated in to modern Ethiopian State in 1897/1898 (Bahiru, 2002:66-68; M C Jedrej, 1996:4-5)

After some negotiation with representatives of Ethiopia in Sudan, the two Sheiks Tor el Juri and Muhamad Wad Mahmud, surrendered to Ras Mekonen. However, their assent did not spare them from imprisonment. In 1900 Tur el Juri of Bela Shangul and Muhammad Wad Mohamad of Khomosha were taken and put in hostage in Addis Ababa. Sometime after their imprisonment, their deserter, shiek Khojele al Hassen of Assosa, accused by the government for conspiracy with the British in Sudan, and joined them as prisoner in to prison in Addis Ababa. The three Muslem leader of Benishangul were put in hostage for about nine years (M C Jedrej, 1996:4-5; Etana Habte, 2012:92-93)

The incorporation in to the Ethiopian Empire of Gumuz territories was quite different from that of Bella Shangul. For one, with transfer of the political center of the Christian kingdom to the Lake Tana region in late 16th to 17th century, the Ethiopian kings were conducting annual expedition to the Gumuz territory on regular basis. Successive Christian Kings who were ruling the Christian Kingdom from Gondar King Sartsa Dengel (1563-1597), Susenyos (1607-1632), Fasiledes (1632- 1667), Yohannes (1667-1683), and Iyasu the Great (1607-1706) had successively conducted devastating and destructive campaigns on the Gumuz territory for slave raiding (Abdussamad H.Ahmad,1995:56; Tadesse Tamrat, 1988: 10-18)

Perhaps because of their relative geographical proximity to capital city of the Christian State, Gondar, the Gumuz of West Gojjam north of Blue Nile were subjected to various forms of exploitation. For consecutive centuries, the Gumuz were exploited, raided and enslaved. Expeditions directed both from Ethiopia and Sudan were primarily concerned with slave raiding and exploiting of the rich resources of the Gumuz. The Gumuz people, who were too weak to resist their powerful neighbors, made to be reservoirs of slavery both by Sudanese and Ethiopian rulers^{*3} (Andreas Zimmermann, 2012:69; Tsega Endalew, 2006:38)

However, until the late 19th and early 20th century, expeditions to the Gumuz people were directed not to incorporate and integrate them to the invading states. Unlike the Bertha, who is massively Islamic, the Gumuz are divided in their religious beliefs. Most of them practice traditional religions. Some are Muslim and a few Christian worshippers. The majority of Gumuz people have been clung on their traditional religion and culture. In addition to their disorganized way of living, it was their firmness in their religion and culture that exposed the majority of the Gumuz for centuries of enslavement. As a rule enslaving co religionists was not allowed. Moreover, unlike the Bertha to the South of Blue Nile River, the majority of the Gumuz ethnic groups were stateless. In the face of their aggressive states, their statelessness also made the Gumuz victims of enslavement. Though it was not uncommon, with the intensification of slave trade, local rulers that belonged to their own ethnic enslaved and sold them for centuries. (Andreas Zimmermann, 2012:70; Wolde-Selassie Abbute 2005, 72-76) In this regard, the Gumuz state of Gubba, which was emerged in the 1880s, is worth mentioned.

During the period of Mahadist rule (1881-1898) the Gumuz Sheikdom of Gubba was recognized as autonomous state. In return for this recognition the sheikdom had to make a regular supply of tribute to mahadist. On the other hand in Ethiopia, as a case in other parts of Africa, state expansion and slavery went hand in hand. Thus, when the King of Gojjam, negus Teklehaymanot (r 1881-1902) incorporated Gummuz inhabited territories, his soldiers and agents were enslaving the Gumuz (Abdusamad, 1999:436) As Mahadist leaders did before him, Emperor Menilik and his vassal King Teklehaymanot, considered the sheikdom of Gubba as autonomous state. Its leader Manjil Hamadan Abu Shok (1898-1938) was treated with equal status as other prestigious subordinating chiefs like Dejazmach Kumsa Moreda of Wellega and others. However, the sheikh was demanded to

*The Bertha who is found in the former Wollega province and their watawit leaders had three Sheikdoms, Bela-Shangul, Khomosha and Aqoldi (Assosa). The place name Beni Shangul is also commonly used to refer to the wider area which comprised of Asosa; Beni Shangul, and Khomasa.

*In Ethiopian Fetha Negest or Law of Kings, the sale of Christians was prohibited and Christians were not allowed to sell slaves though they could purchase them. Thus it was the non Christians like the Gumuz, Khomos and others who became victims of slave raid.

pay regular tribute in slaves, gold and ivory to the imperial government in Addis Ababa (Bahiru, 2002:87; Abdusamad, 1999:433-434) Thus, Sheikh Hamadan Abu Shok pressurized to find ways of recruiting large number of slaves both for tribute to his masters and for his own service.

The incorporation of the Gummuz territories was more of peaceful. Following the collapse of the Mahadist State, King Teklehaymanot of Gojjam, vassal king of Emperor Minilik II⁴ conquered the small Gumuz chiefdoms between Agaw Mider and Beles River, a river on the proximity of Lake Tana (see fig.2) (Abdusamad H.Ahmad, 1995:53-54; Tsega Endalew, 2006: 51-52) Once after the Gumuz inhabiting in Western Fringe of Gojjam brought into the orbit of Menilik's empire by the end of 1890s, efforts were made to establish effective administration. However, their region was not pacified for many years to come. This is because on the one hand, as the agents of governors of Gojjam, the Agaw chief continued invading and raiding Gumuz territories for slaves. On the other hand, their own chieftain Hamdan Abu Shok, involved in raiding slaves from Gumuz people who were adherents of traditional religion (Tsega Endalew, 2006:36-37; Abdusamad H.Ahmad, 1995:53-54)

In the years between 1896 and 1899 the king of Gojjam made expedition as far as the lowlands bordering Sudan and founded a town at a gold rich place. He named the town Borena. After pacifying the lowland on the western fringes of Gojjam, King Teklehaymanot appointed one of his loyal gold smith as its ruler(Bairu Tafla,1973:43) Thus by 1898 the Gumuz inhabited territories to north of Blue Nile practically incorporated in to Gojjam and later it became a district to be known as Metekel(Abdusamad,1995:54).The vast majority of the the Gumuz inhabited areas to the West of Agaw land (See fig. 1 in the appendix) and north of Blue Nile were, however, under the rule of either Agaw Chiefs or trusted relatives of King Teklehaymanot of Gojjam (r 1881-1902) Unlike the Gummuz of Gubba , those Gumuz inhabiting between Agaw lands and Beles river rejected both Islam and Christianity. Even king Teklehaymanot's conquest did not made the to embrace Christianity (Abdusamad, 1995:57)

Following its total inclusion in to his Kingdom, King Teklehaymanot for example made his son in law Ras Mesfin as ruler of Agaw Medir and Gumuz country (Abdusamad H. Ahmad: 1995, 55-57) As compared with Gubba this part of the Gumuz inhabited territory integrated effectively. The relationship that prevailed between the Gumuz and their Agaw/Amhara neighbors was, however, a frontier type in which the latter were interested not only to impose their dominance, but also to raid the Gumuz for slaves

3. Relationship between Benishangul Gumuz -Addis Ababa (1902-1941)

In a border agreement signed between the British and Emperor Menelik in Addis Ababa following the establishment of Anglo-Egyptian Condominium rule in 1898 in Sudan, Beni Shangul and the Gumuz land to the north of Blue Nile River put under the Ethiopian administration(Wendy James, 2010:117; Tsega Endalew, 2006:61-63)

3.1. Effort to Maintain Law and Order in Benishangul

The borderland between Sudan and Ethiopia was for long been in creative instability. During the first few years after incorporation of Benishangul in to Menilik's Empire it is likely that there was a considerable migration of refugees into the Sudan. Using absence effective administration in the borderland, the local peoples have played one side off against another, pursued trade while retaining some autonomy, and found allies and safe refuge when necessary. For example, in 1905 Sit Amna, the wife of Khojali Hasan, fled with about 600 followers (Wendy James, 2010:105; M.C. Jedreji, 1996:5).

The reason to instability in the Ethio-Sudan frontier areas can be attributed to inconsistencies between interests of local authorities and the central government. One the one hand the government decided to control the region by assigning its own docile rulers to be recruited from military officers that involved in the conquest of Benishangul. Therefore, following the imprisonment its three Muslim leaders in Addis Ababa, the whole territory of Benishangul put under one of the junior military leaders named *Fitawrari* Gulilat. Nevertheless, Gulilat's rule became more hectic than ever before and soldiers became harsh and unpopular. During Gulilat's term of office, lack of effective administration in Benishangul resulted in instability. Looting, plundering and other kinds of crime as well as migration and slave raiding became rampant. Cross bordering bandits and thieves obtained hot beds to advance their interest. Etana Habte, 2012: 92-93; Kinfe, 2005:8).

In his effort to set up effective administration in the region, the emperor removed Litenant Demisew from power and entrusted the administration of Bella-Shangul to Kumsaa (or Dejazmach Gebre Egziabehere of Leaq Naqamte) from 1903-1908*⁵ Dejazmach Kumsa Moreda was entrusted by the emperor with responsibility of collecting the tribute from Benishangul and to hand over it to the central government. But harsh exploitation and heavy tribute in ivory, gold and slaves made the inhabitants of Bella Shangul and Leqa Qellam to be unstable .Moreover, the emperor wrote a letter ordering his nominees to rule fairly and to treat the people leniently (Etana Habte, 2012: 92-93; Kinfe, 2005:8).

Members of the ruling family in Benishangul, wanted the office of Watawit sheikhs to be held by their own family members. One of Muhammad Wad Mohamad's brother Ibrahim wad Mahmud, conducted raids against the surrounding population from Jebel Jerok of Sudan. The 'rebel', Ibrahim Wad Mahmud, was captured and killed by the British in 1904 (Etana Habte, 2012:93). Nevertheless, the situation in Benishangul was not returned to its normal situation (M.C Jedrej, 1996:4-5) Perhaps being disappointed by his agents assigned to rule over the newly incorporated territories of Benishangul for their inability to install

⁴ After Menilik become emperor in 1889, he ensured King teklehaymanot to rule over Gojjam and Agaw medir(see Bairu Tafla,1973:41-42).

* Following the rule of Jootee (1886-1909 ruler of Leqa Qellam, imprisoned for a brief period from 1909 to 1912.In 1912 Dejjazmach Jotee restored and remained on power until his death in 1918 after wards Qellam Came under governors directly appointed by the central government.

effective administration, Emperor Menilik allowed (in 1908) the three sheikhs to return and continue ruling over their respective domains (Bahiru, 2002:68)

3.2. State Making by Empowering the Obedient Local Chiefs

As a rule, Ethiopian authorities used the locally dominant ethnic groups for policing and extracting revenue. While Jote Tullu, the powerful leader of Qellam, was in support of the imperial government by participating in the conquest of Benishangul in 1897-1898, he had given full autonomy to rule over his kingdom. But in 1900s Jote Tulu became reluctant to cooperate with the emperor; Menilik II (r1889-1913) began to take measures that could undermine the growing influence of 'disobedient', Jote Tulu. Jote Tulu for his part engaged in activities that could advance his own interest at the expense of his adversaries. In 1903, for example, by campaigning in the areas which were considered as buffer zones between Assosa and Qellem he raided slaves. The emperor then put Dejazmach Kumsa Moreda, loyal vassal to him, in charge administering the Sheikdoms of Benishangul. When Jote Tullu of Qellem complained and showed complete lack of interest to cooperate with central government, he was taken and imprisoned in Addis Abeba from 1908 to 1912. Moreover, one of his potential rivals, Shiek Khojale al Hassen, was encouraged and got full autonomy to expand in Benishangul and its locality at the expense of Jote Tullu and other local sheikdoms (Kinfe Berhie, 2005: 12; Etana Habte, 2012:92-93).

Even after their restoration to their respective domains in 1908/09, the rivalry between the sheikhs persisted and Khojali al Hasan was encouraged by the leaders of the central government. In addition to his involvement during the campaign in support of Menilik's force to conquer Bellashangul and Komosha in 1897/98 Kojale al Hassen's lavish gift in gold and slaves to the leaders of the central government, enabled him to get their favor. In 1912 Khojale ordered Tor El Juri's successor, Mohamad Tur El juri of Bellashangul, to pay him tribute. When his order was rejected, Khojale assisted by Menilik's soldiers defeated him. Then 1914 Shiek Khojale al Hassen became the overall ruler of the three Bela-Shangul sheikdoms (Bahiru, 2002:66-68; Atieb Ahmad, 1973:56;M.C Jedrej, 1996:5).

Assisted by the forces of the imperial government, in 1912 and 1921 Sheikh Khojali al Hasan fought and defeated Tor el Juri's successor, Mohammed Tor el Juri and the leader of Khmosha Wad Mahmud respectively. Mohammed Tor el Juri's state, Bela Shangul was invaded and subdued in 1917. Three years later, Wad Mahmud, the leader of Khomosha, faced a similar fate. While trying to collect tribute from villages that had been governed by Khojali Hasan, Wad Mahmud was attacked and badly defeated. One of the influential leaders of the central government, Ras Teferi, the later Emperor Haile Selasie (r1930-1974) was on the back of Khojale al Hassen. Following his defeat in 1921 Wad Mahamad was arrested and imprisoned (Tamador Ahmed _Khalid-Abdella, 2010:103; Etana Habte, 2012: 92-93)

While Wad Mahmud was in captivity in Addis Abeba his soldiers, becoming out of control embarked on theft and banditry activities. The refugees who had been temporarily under the control of Tor el Juri became victims of bands of bandits. Khojali al Hasan, who now considered himself as master of the two local dominions, Khomosha and Bela Shangul, ordered Tor el Juri to hold back the bandit raiders. Tor el Juri's inability to maintain law and order as desired by Kojale al Hassen encouraged him to appeal the case to the local agents of the imperial government. Consequently, in 1923 Tor el Juri went to Dami Dello by the order of the central government and arrested there by Dejazmach Birru and Khojali al Hasan. At the same time Dejazmach Birru and Khojali took strong measures against the soldiery and lieutenants of wad Mahmud. In effect this left Khojali Hasan as governor of the whole territory of Benishangul and began ruling by incorporating the domains of the two local Muslim leaders; Khomasa and Beni Shangul. In 1925, during the regency of Ras Teferi, Khojali was summoned to Addis Abeba because leaders of the central government wanted him to ensure his allegiance to them (Jedrej, ,1996:4-5)

3.3. State Consolidation through Devolution of Power to Frontiers' Chiefs

Although largely peripheral, the border communities did not lack powerful individual leaders. Sheikh Khojale al-Hasan of Asosa-Beni Shangul (Atieb Ahmed Dafalla, 1973:51) and Sheikh Hamdan Abu Shok of Gubba (Bahiru, 1994:9) can be mentioned as cases in point. Sheikh Khojale al Hassen of Benishangul and his Gumuz counterpart the Sheikh Hamdan Abu Shok of Gubba, ruled over their respective territories until 1938. In their long stay on power as autonomous rulers, the two frontier leaders had played a very significant role in maintaining sustainable relationship between the central government and their territorial units (Bahiru, 2002:87) In addition to devolving power, the Emperor Menilik assisted the two sheikhs in different ways. Sheik Khojele of Assosa for instance, consolidated his power with material and financial assistance from the emperor in Addis Ababa.

Right after his return to his dominion in 1908, the sheik for his part developed strong relationships with the imperial court in Addis Ababa. Even the death of Menelik in 1913 and the resultant confusion over imperial succession did not affect Sheikh Khojele's position. Khojele maintained his position by providing lavish tribute in gold, ivory and slaves to those who were in charge of the imperial government in Addis Ababa. However, the sheikh had no much contribution to integrate his society in the peripheral with the center. To the contrary, Khojale al Hassen himself had been part and parcel of the system that aggravated harsh exploitation and marginalization.

Perhaps, his ambivalent and opportunist personality made him to be harsh and to some extent tyrant on his own community. He had an ambiguous character, at some time (in 1897) the sheikh deserting his colleagues, Bertha sheikhs collaborated with forces of Ras Mekonen and fought against them (Bahiru, 2002:66-68) at other times he found intriguing with the British to offer Benishangul to be colonized by them (Etana Habte, 2012) And to maintain good relationship with leaders of the central government and to satisfy his trust for power and much wealth he enslaved those Berthas adhering traditional religion, Mao, Komo and others who belong to his ethnic group (Tamador, Ahmad Kalid Abdella, 2010: 103) and with the revenues of the slave trade he built himself a palace in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital.

On the one hand, he had a strong lure for maintaining his autonomy with maintaining good relationship with leaders of the imperial government in Addis Ababa. To that end he had to fulfill all which they demanded from him; tribute in gold, ivory and slaves. For that reason he as did by other powers alien that community, embarked on all forms of exploitation; heavy tribute from subjects, high taxation from merchants in Asosa, harsh labour in gold mines. Moreover, Khojele al Hasen and his large family members deeply involved in hunting and enslaving their own kinsfolk (Encyclopædia Æthiopica, 2007: 546-548; Abdusamad, 1999:437-438)

During the first two decades of 20th century, with the emerging need for an agricultural labour force to work in irrigation plantations in Sudan, demand for raiding and trading for slaves increased. On the other hand, with the augmentation of demand for slaves, various communities Benishangul and Gumuz became targets raiding for slave. This condition created good condition to Khojale and his families to make high profit out of the good slave market. People especially young and girls, who as slaves could be sold in high price, became targets of slave raid. Abducting and kidnapping became common. With growing harsh treatment Sheikh Khojale's subjects became instable and many of them used migration to the Sudan. Some of the minority ethnic groups such as the Komo and Gumuz, for instance, used to flock to the Sudan to escape enslavement and were seeking protection from the British who controlled the Sudan at the time (Abdusamad, 1999: 437; M.C.Jedreji, 1996:7) Some other victims of enslavement who could not cross the border to Sudan moved to inhospitable areas (Tamador, Ahmad Kalid Abdella, 2010: 100). The Mao and Komo for example were continually expelled from their lands and today they inhabit the most inhospitable and marginal frontier areas of Benishangul (Wolde-Selassie Abbute 2005) Among other factors Slave raiding and heavy taxation by Sheikh Khojele and his families were identified as major causes for mass migration and instability (M C Jedrej, 1996: 12) Asit Amna, one of the wives of Shiekh Khojale al Hasen was famous woman slave-trader. She played a significant role in providing, safeguarding, selling, purchasing and exchanging slaves, particularly female slaves, with whoever was interested (Tamador, Ahmad Kalid Abdella, 2010: 108; M C Jedrej, 1996: 12)

Shiek Khojele was also carrying out trade in ivory and coffee. Because of increasing demand of coffee in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in British Sudan the sheik was obtaining high profit. Moreover, Shiek Khojele was getting large revenue from collecting tax from Assosa Market. Assosa was one of the well known trading towns of the long distance trade that crossed the town to Sudan in the 19th century. Besides, the sheik had exploited the rich gold resources of his territory. According to Abdusamad (1999: 438-439) the sheik had made the Bertha to dig out gold in gold mines of Benishangul. All these revenues helped Khojele to be one of the wealthiest chiefs in the early 20th century Ethiopia. This in turn enabled him to build his own Palace in Addis Ababa (Kinfie Berhie, 2005:12; Bahiru, 2002:69) Moreover the Sheikh engaged in many investments in the capital. Thus while contributing for exclusion of his subjects in Benishangul, the Sheikh practically integrated himself and his families to center. In this regard, Khojale and his families in particular and the leaders of the central government were responsible for peoples of Benishangul to stay as peripheral.

A similar process of enslaving and exploiting conducted on the Gumuz people inhabiting to the north of Blue Nile the western margin of Ethiopia. Actually, with the exception of the small state Gubba, which was established on the Ethio- Sudanese frontier, the Gumuz were stateless and weak. Statelessness and scattered way of living appears to have made defenseless in the face of their war like Amhara and Agaw neighbors who subjected them for enslavement (Abdusamad, 1999:436) Following his conquest of much of the Gumuz lands, King Teklehaymanot of and his son, Ras Hailu of Gojjam (r 1911-1932) gave Agaw chiefs power to rule over and collect tribute from Gumuz areas. Consequently, the Agaw chiefs particularly Qegnazmech Zeleqa Ligu, had intensified hunting and slave raiding. Until Zeleqa's removal in 1926, young Gumuz girls and boys became focus of attention for enslavement for they were sold with higher price. During that time even the Gumuz of Gubba who had been under an autonomous rule of their own chieftain were not in a position to defend themselves because Qegnazmach Zelaqa and his masters had superior armaments. The Gumuz were brave fighters. But they were in position in possession of traditional weapons like spears, shield and knives, which could not match with Amhara and Agaw sophisticated guns. The Agaw and Amhara military classes were engaging in periodic campaigns to hunt the Gumuz slaves. As a response to their hunters, the Gumuz generally developed a sense of abhorrence towards their Amhara and Agaw neighbors. Killing Amhara or Agaw had been taken by the Gumuz as flattering act (Abdusamad, 1995: 56-61)

The counterpart of Khojele al Hassen, the Sheikh of Gubba, Hamdan Abu Shok (r 1898-1938) was not harsh in treating his subjects. Unlike Shiekh Khojele Benishangul (r1914-19938), Shikh Hamadan Abu Shok did not directly involve in enslaving his subjects. Refraining himself from raiding and trading in slaves, Hamdan Abu Shok of Gubba engaged in a profitable coffee trade. He exported coffee to British Sudan with whom he maintained good relation. Moreover, the sheikh developed cotton plantation worked by slave labor. (Abdusamad, 1995:62; Abdusamad, 1999)

Though not directly involved in enslaving the Gumuz, Hamdan Abu Shok could not defend his people from enslavement by other powers. In 1918, the son of one of Agaw chiefs, Fiawerari Zelaqa's son invaded Gubba but killed the British slavery patrol at the Ethio- Sudan border. Two years later Zeleqa himself overrun the state of Gubba with superior force to that of Shiekh Hamadan's (Abdusamad, 1995:61-62) Moreover, the sheikh collaborated with different state authorities both in British Sudan and in Ethiopia to strengthen his power.

The Gumuz people inhabiting on the margins of Sudan and Ethiopia took self seclusion as a mechanism to defend themselves from their 'bad' neighbors. Their closest neighbors, Christian Agaws on their part were not interested to convert and integrate the Gumuz with them. Instead of incorporating them to civilization of Christian Ethiopia, the Agaws left the Gumuz as ethnic boundary in the frontier to the west of Agaw mider /Gojjam. Long years of competition from rival lords in need of controlling Gumuz territories from Sudan and Ethiopia also had its contribution for their as a periphery (Abdusamad, 1995:66)

3.4. Resistance and Collaboration in Benishangul Gumuz During Italian Occupation (1935-1941)

During the Italian occupation period, Benishangul Gumuz, regardless of its rich mineral and strategic importance, did not kindle the interest of both Italian and Ethiopian forces. As it happened in other parts of the country, the local powerful leaders such as Shiek Khojale of Benishangul tried to coordinate his people to resist the fascist Italian forces. Sheik Khojele had initially submitted to Italians and tried to maintain his power by showing his allegiance to the conquering force. But once the Italians made it clear that they had no intention of ruling the country with involvement of Ethiopian nobles, Khojale changed his mind and began to resist the Italians (Almhadi Abdurehman, 1996:45). Other rival local leaders, who had been seriously marginalized by the leaders of the central government, attempted to use the Italian occupation as good opportunity to avenge their former masters. Siding with enemy, they fought and weakened Sheik Khojale's regional state (Encyclopedia Æthiopica, 2007: 93-94).

The Gumuz people, who simply formed an ethnic boundary in the lowland to the west of the plateau of Agaw Mider, had sometimes used to past 'evil days' by taking refuge in Sudan. As they did at other times, in September 1935 the Gumuz hating involvement in the either side of the war to be broke out between Ethiopia and Italian forces, fled to Sudan via Gallabat. However, after the Italians issued a decree that makes slaves free, they forcefully recruited those Gumuz slaves who could fit, to serve in to the Italian army (Abdusamad, 1999:445). Following their occupation of the region 1936, Fascist Italians, as they did in other parts of the country, made some administrative arrangements in the Benishangul and Gumuz lowland areas. In the new ethnic based Italian administration, Benishangul, which is located to the south of Blue Nile and predominantly inhabited by Bertha become part of Oromo Sidama region of Italian East Africa, and the Gumuz located to the north of the same river added to the Amhara region (Bahiru, 2002:161).

Despite its military and strategic importance, the Italian did not give due attention to the Benishangul Gumuz region. Even in the towns there was no effective military (and civilian) administration in Benishangul-Gumuz. The region was occupied by small forces and played mostly a secondary part in the conflict. Most of the Italian outposts established along the border with the Sudan were undermanned and poorly armed. The forces that held the frontier were mostly colonial troops recruited in Africa, along with some irregular retinues provided by local chiefs. These detachments were, however, commanded by Italian officers (Shirreff, 1994: 851-854).

Until the time of his death In 1938, Shiek Khojale continued to play significant role in Benishangul Gumuz and died after a wound inflicted in Komosha. On the arrival of Gideon Force and Mission 101, along with a large number of Ethiopian patriots, the Italians fled into their fortresses for safety. When Haile Sellassie entered Gojam on 20 January 1941, he and Wingate encountered an enemy already defeated by its own mass paranoia. After restoration of Imperial Authority, however, indigenous administration in Benishangul was totally replaced by appointees from Addis Ababa. This brought rule by indigenous local chiefs to an end. (Encyclopedia Æthiopica, 2007:93-94; Harold Marcus 1996:152)

4. Conclusion

In this article an effort is made to show the Ethiopian center periphery history with unequal relationships that prevailed between the ethnic groups in the frontiers areas and those who controlled the power at the centre by taking Benishangul Gumuz as a case. Before its incorporation, with exception of periodic invasion and exploitation of resources, Benishangul Gumuz was marginal to the states established in Sudan and Ethiopia. Rivalry among its larger titular ethnic groups for power and resource and the use by central government leaders of 'divide and rule' as a strategy as well as shifting of alliance with fluid nature, facilitated Benishangul's incorporation to the Christian state. Treatment as reservoir of slave and hunting ground by Christian rulers, made the Gumuz to develop a sense of abhorrence towards those neighbours who were not belonged to them. The Christian rulers on their part wanted the Gumuz only for its resources (natural and slave) In any case, before 1941 there had been exclusion and marginalization of the peoples inhabiting in the frontier regions to the political economy of the country. The cause of this peripherality and marginality was however attributed both to leaders in charge of the central government and to local traditional chiefs of Benishangul Gumuz peoples. The leaders of the central government incorporated the frontier regions to the center not for true state making but rather initially as buffer zone and later to serve them as source of wealth and natural resources like minerals tribute collection. Local chiefs on their part worried more concern about how to survive by disregarding the possible consequences that would happen in their own society. Some leaders went to the extent of taking harsh measures with equivocal cruelty by raiding, enslaving and trading in peoples belonging to their own ethnic groups.

5. References

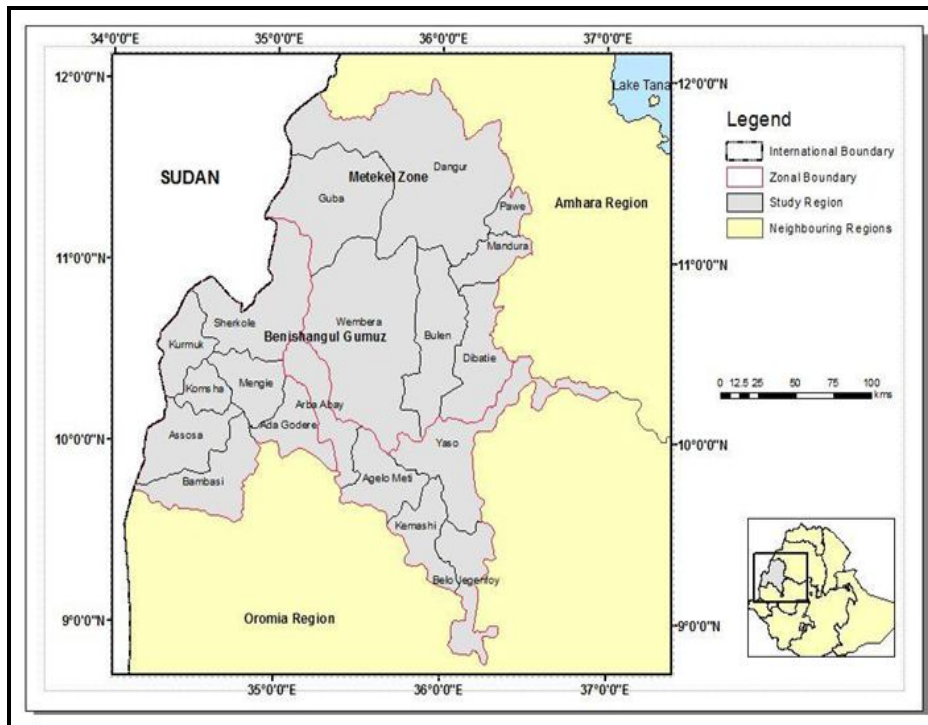
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Annexure



Map 1: the region of Benishangul-Gumuz with the main roads and outposts of the Italian Period. In capitalized italics, the name of the ethnic groups that inhabit the area. (Source: Gonzalez, 2010, 6)



Map 2: The present day Benishangul-Gumuz National regional state of Ethiopia (source: Tsega Moreda, 5)