

**Efforts and Challenges of Integrating Peripheral Ethnic Groups into Ethiopia 1902-1974:  
The Case of Nuer/Naath**

Shimels Ayele Yalew<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract**

*Ethiopia is home to diverse ethnic and religious groups. Some of these groups live in the peripheries of the country. The Nuer in Gambella are among the ethnic groups who live in the periphery. However, integrating the Nuer with the rest of the Ethiopian society has not been studied in depth. Therefore, this study aimed to reconstruct the history of efforts and challenges of integrating the Nuer. It is historical research based on qualitative analysis of primary and secondary sources. The Nuer were integrated with other ethnic groups of Ethiopia through a gradual process. Trade precluded imperial agents as a means of interaction for the Nuer. The arrival of government functionaries, the demarcation of boundaries, the introduction of modern institutions and Christianity integrated the Nuer with the rest of the Ethiopian society. However, the integration endeavors lost momentum because of many reasons. Inhospitable climate, classless political tradition, language barrier, and early nominal administration posed problems in the integration process of the Nuer.*

**Keywords:** Ethiopia, Nuer, integration, politics, social, institutions, and culture

---

<sup>1</sup>Department of History and Heritage Management, Faculty of Social Science, Bahir Dar University, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia.

Email: shimelsaye21@gmail.com

## 1. Introduction

The Nuer belong to the Nilotic language group who live both in South Sudan and Ethiopia. They begin crossing the Bahr el-Jebel to the east in the early 1820s. They expanded into large areas of South Sudan and Ethiopia following an easterly direction.<sup>1</sup> The eastward territorial expansion of the Nuer started before the expansion of both the Sudanese and Ethiopian states in the Upper Nile and Gambella regions. The Nuer proceeded at the expense of the Dinka and the Anuak throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

Many factors operated behind the Nuer expansion into different directions. Population pressure, climatic change, and frequent intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic conflicts were some of the major factors.<sup>3</sup> The timing and direction of the Nuer expansion was determined by either environmental reasons or political preoccupation of their neighbors. Unpleasant environment with recurring drought forced them to alter direction. The military capacity of their neighbors had also an effect on direction and time to expand.<sup>4</sup>

In their expansion, Eastern Jikany Nuer had followed the eastern direction and reached as far as the Ethiopian escarpment. By the early twentieth century, groups of Nuer penetrated into Anuak territory as far as the Laajak hills, near the present-day Anuak village of Akedo on the Baro River in Gambella. However, the pastoralist Nuer didn't resume their expansion after Akedo. The prevalence of animal disease in the eastern part of Gambella checked further expansion of the Eastern Jikany Nuer.<sup>5</sup>

Their initial settlement inside the Ethiopian territory was not permanent for environmental factors that forced them to shift their settlements depending on seasonal fluctuation. In the last quarter of the 19th century, the Nuer, as semi-pastoralists, would dispatch their cattle for grazing

---

<sup>1</sup> Noel stringham, "Marking Nuer Histories: Gender, Gerontocracy, and the Politics of Inclusion in the Upper Nile from 1400 – 1931", (PhD Dissertation, University of Virginia, 2016). P. 105

<sup>2</sup> Derege Feyissa, "The cultural construction of state borders: The view from Gambella," *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 4:2, 314-330 (2010), p. 315.

<sup>3</sup> Evans E. Pritchard, *The Nuer* (Britain: At the Clarendon press, 1940), p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas H. Johnson, *The Horn of Africa* (London, UCL press, 1994), P. 53

<sup>5</sup> Derege Feyissa, "The cultural construction of state borders: The view from Gambella," p.315

on the plains of Akobo and Jikow during the dry season (November-May). They also move to lands stretching along the Sobat River in South Sudan during the rainy season (June-October).<sup>6</sup> After annexing the territories in the east, southeast, and southern parts of the country, imperial attention was diverted to western and south-western regions. The need to control trade routes and challenges that originated from colonial expansion motivated Emperor Menelik II to send his forces for annexation.<sup>7</sup> After their incorporation, the Nuers became under the administration of the central state followed by an integration process.

Integration in this sense means the process of change from a less coherent to a more coherent form. It is incorporating formerly relatively independently functioning systems, further strengthening of relations within a system, and, relating additional actors or groups to an existing system and its core institutions.<sup>8</sup> Social integration refers to unity, coherence, and inclusivity of a society's social relations of all dimensions.<sup>9</sup> Political integration refers to a potential uniting of two or more political units by establishing a unified legal framework, creating common institutions, developing decision-making centres, and projecting identity.<sup>10</sup>

More than 80 ethnic groups of Ethiopia experienced different degrees of integration.<sup>11</sup> The Nuer integrated with the rest of Ethiopia gradually. There exist writers who accuse the imperial government of discriminating the Nuers. These writers claim that the area in which the Nuer lived remained a political, economic, and cultural backwater until the 1960s.<sup>12</sup> The interest of

---

<sup>6</sup> ዘ ጡዳ ዱባላ, ኢሉባባሪ (አዲስ አበባ: 1976), ገጽ 122.

<sup>7</sup> Yonas Adaye, "Conflict complexity in Ethiopia: case study of Gambella regional state," (PhD. Diss., University of Bradford, 2014). p.10

<sup>8</sup> Flip Lindo, "The concept of integration: theoretical concerns and practical meanings", Asselin et al. *Social integration and mobility*, Lisbon, centro de estudos geograficos, 2005, pp. 7-20. P. 11

<sup>9</sup> Elif Kısar Koramaz, "The Spatial Context of Social Integration," *Social Indicators Research*, March 2014, Vol. 119, No. 1 (March 2014), pp. 49-7, Springer. p. 50

<sup>10</sup> Nikola Lj. Ilievski, "the concept of political integration: the perspective of neo functionalist theory," *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs* | Vol. 1, No. 1, 2015 | UDC 327 | ISSN 1857-976, the Institute for Research and European Studies. P. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Von Alexander Meckelburg, "From "Subject to Citizen"? History, Identity and Minority Citizenship: The Case of the Mao and Komo of Western Ethiopia," (PhD dissertation, University of Hamburg, 2017). P. 15.

<sup>12</sup> WRITENET, independent analysis, Ethiopia: The Gambella conflict – Structure and Prognosis, UK, <http://www.refworld.org>pdfid>, 2004. Accessed on January 12, 2021, p. 1.

Ethiopian governments in the region was taken mainly as economic. Efforts of political integration were considered as interest in boosting the wealth of the central government. This was particularly related to flexible border administration.<sup>13</sup> The establishment of the Enclave of Gambella was not also recognized.<sup>14</sup> Those writers believed that the Nuers were not integrated into the political economy in general and the strategic trade of the Baro.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, there are accusations of social discrimination and alienation.<sup>16</sup> The causes of limited central authority and development to link the region with the rest of Ethiopia was owing to incapability of the state, its lack of interest in the borderlands, and hospitality of the climate of the region limited development in the region.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, the diverse people of Ethiopia established lines of communication and interdependence via trade, migration and other processes. The continuous communication and interdependence resulted in the evolution of united cultural and ecological community. The process of territorial incorporation provided extra opportunities for integration.<sup>18</sup> As a result, the Nuer have been integrating economically, politically and culturally. The successive efforts of Majid Abud were practical manifestation of the integration effort.<sup>19</sup> After the establishment of provincial administration many Nuers were promoted to political power. In addition, successive administrators and civil servants were sent to the Nuer from the political centre.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the

---

<sup>13</sup>Derege Feyissa. The cultural construction of state borders: The view from Gambella, p. 327

<sup>14</sup> Medhane Tadesse, Gambella The impact of local conflict on regional security, *Institute for Security Studies*, Pretoria, South Africa. 2002P. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Ojulu Ojot Miru, "Large scale land acquisition and minorities' indigenous people right. under ethnic federalism in Ethiopia: A regional case study of Gambella Regional State," (Phd. Diss., University of Bradford, 2013). P. 117.

<sup>16</sup> Wondwosen Michago Seide, "The Nuer pastoralists- between large scale agriculture and villagization:A case study of the Lare District in the Gambella Region of Ethiopia," *Current African Issues (CAI)* No 6. Nordic Africa Institute, (2017). P. 19.

<sup>17</sup> John Young, Along Ethiopia's Western Frontier: Gambella and Benishangul in Transition, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Jun., 1999, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Jun., 1999), pp. 321-346, Cambridge University Press.p. 323.

<sup>18</sup> Donald N. Levine, *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of Multi-Ethnic society*, the University of Chicago Press, USA, 1974.

<sup>19</sup> Bahir Zewudie, "Relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan on the western Ethiopian Frontier 1898-1935," (Phd. Diss, University of London, May 1976). p. 269.

<sup>20</sup> ዘ ውዴ ዱባ ለ , ገ ጽ . 387.

Nuer also participated in the trade across the Baro River. They supplied ivory to the traders from Sudan and Ethiopia.<sup>21</sup>

However, the effort to integrate the Nuers with the rest of the Ethiopian society has not been researched. Therefore, this research is aimed at revealing the political, economic, and social integration made during the imperial period. In so doing, the paper answers the following research questions.

- ✓ How was the integration process undertaken?
- ✓ How was the reaction of the people to this process?
- ✓ What were the difficulties in the integration process?

This study was primarily designed to reveal endeavors and adversities within the process in advancing our understanding of the integration process of the Nuer during the twentieth century. It is historical research based on qualitative analysis of both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources exploited for this research mainly included informants in the study area and archival materials. Secondary sources used in this research include books, articles, dissertations, and others.

## **2. Integrating the Nuer**

### **2.1. Trade as a prelude to government agents**

The interaction between highlanders and Nuer predated the arrival of government agents at Gambella. The Nuer call the people from Ethiopian highland who live above the Baro salient “*Bouny*” literally meaning “the one who bows”.<sup>22</sup> According to oral tradition of the Nuer, this connotation was given to the highlanders due to the greeting seen when they meet with Prophet Ngundeng Bong. In the highlanders’ culture, when the younger or ordinary meet with elders or ruling families, the former has to bow for the latter. Thus, they did the same when they met with Prophet Ngundeng Bong.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Bahiru Zewudie, *society, state, and history; selected essays*, Addis Ababa University Press, Addis ababa, 2008. P. 151.

<sup>22</sup> The author heard this term, while he was working in Nuer zone, Gambella. They call bouny all brown colour highlanders of Ethiopia. One day, he asked his staff member James Ochan about the meaning of Bouny.

<sup>23</sup> Dereje Feyssa, “The Pur, the real, and the chosen: the encounter between Anywa, the Nuer and Highlanders in Gambella,” Flix Girke (ed), *Ethiopian images of self and other*, Universitatsveslag Have –Wittenberg, Germany, 2014. P. 172.

However, trade transformed the interaction between the Ethiopian Nuer and the highlanders. In fact, trade was not a well-known economic activity for the Nuer particularly prior to the closing years of the 19th century. The livelihood of the Nuer depended mainly on pastoralism. This caused the Nuer to ignore other types of economic activities in which other ethnic groups were involved.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, two major historical developments changed the Nuer attitude towards trade.

The first was increased interest of the Nuer in firearms. The arrival of the governments of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and Ethiopia brought modern firearms to the area that drew the attention of the Nuer. Moreover, the Anuak checked the Nuer eastward expansion and began to loot their cattle using the firearms because the Anuak accessed it earlier than the Nuer. Thus, the Nuer who sought to have modern firearms engaged in the trade for firearms.<sup>25</sup> The sources of firearms were from Ethiopian highlands. They traveled to Wunakoi, the place between Lare and Dembi Dolo, to sell cattle and ivory and purchase guns from Oromo, Greek, and Somali merchants.<sup>26</sup>

The second historical development was the trade going on along the Baro River that used the enclave of Gambella. Both domestic and foreign traders used to participate in the enclave trade of Gambella. The Nuer came to visit the enclave market of Gambella where they sold milk and cattle and purchased salt, sorghum, and clothes.<sup>27</sup> The British government in charge of the administration of the enclave allowed importation of foods and clothes and they waived tax on those items.<sup>28</sup> Trade had created opportunities for the Nuer to meet with diverse Ethiopian highlanders and foreign merchants.<sup>29</sup>

## **2.2. Legal Inclusion of the Nuer**

Negotiations to delimit frontiers between the British colony and Ethiopia started in 1900. While those negotiations were going on, the Colonial Government of Sudan began a preliminary survey work in the border area. This was made to obtain the necessary information for the final

---

<sup>24</sup> Evans E. Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (Britain: At the Clarendon press, 1956). P. 156

<sup>25</sup> Noel Stringham, P.231.

<sup>26</sup> Informant: Gatluak Buom, interviewed by the author, Gambella town, January 21,2018.

<sup>27</sup> Informant: Bol Bouny

<sup>28</sup> Bahiru Zewudie, society, state, and history; selected essays, Addis Ababa University Press, Addis ababa, 2008. P. 151.

<sup>29</sup> Noel Stringham, P. 232

resolution of the issue. The boundary survey team was established, and this team led by Major Gaym surveyed the region from the Blue Nile to Nasser on the Sobat. Major Gaym worked on the same project on the Ethiopian side of the border in 1901 with the consent of the Ethiopian government.<sup>30</sup> The boundary agreement was later concluded between Britain and Ethiopia which was written in the languages of the respective nations.<sup>31</sup>

The boundary arrangements contained the definition of boundary, demarcation of the boundary, construction works on the Blue Nile, River Sobat, and Lake Tana, and the right to connect Sudan with Uganda by a railway to be constructed through the Ethiopian territory.<sup>32</sup> In addition, in the 1902 boundary agreement, Emperor Menilek II leased a piece of territory, Gambella town, to the British to serve as an inland port for Ethio-Sudanese trade. The enclave was established with the hope of drawing in the resource-rich regions of western Ethiopia.<sup>33</sup>

The boundary issue stated under the first article of the treaty has the following to say:

The frontier between the Sudan and Ethiopia agreed on between the two governments shall be: the line which is marked in red the map annexed to this treaty in duplicate, and traced from Khor Um Hagar to Gallabat, to the Blue Nile, Baro, Pibore, and Akobo Rivers to Melile, thence to the intersection of the 6<sup>th</sup> degree of north latitude with the 35<sup>th</sup> degree longitude east of Greenwich.<sup>34</sup>

According to the first article of the treaty, the boundary between Ethiopia and Sudan was demarcated along the Baro and Akobo Rivers. These rivers served as natural boundaries. The treaty, like any other treaty in Africa arbitrarily divided homogeneous ethnic groups. The Nuer in the frontiers of Ethiopia and Sudan were separated by the international boundary.<sup>35</sup>

As pastoralist communities, the Nuer had to face closure and separation from temporary grazing lands. They were cut off from wet-season villages in Sudan and dry-season camps in Ethiopia. The Nuer were to cross the international border due to their transhumance economy. Most of

---

<sup>30</sup> Lazarus Leek Mawut, "The southern Sudan under British rule 1898-1924: the constraints reassessed," (Phd. Diss., Durham University, 1995). P. 61.

<sup>31</sup> Treaty series, UK, treaties online. The 1902 boundary treaty between Ethiopia and Britain, <http://treaties.fco.gov.uk> Accessed on September 15, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>33</sup> Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency, a Memo from Blata Tsehay Desta to Ministry of Interior, memorandum regarding the way of life of Gambella people, August 31, 1957, Gambella sub-province administration.

<sup>34</sup> The 1902 boundary treaty.

<sup>35</sup> Bahiru zewudie, "Relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan on the western Ethiopian Frontier 1898-1935," p. 13.



these wet-season villages are located on the Sudanese side of the border. At the beginning of the dry season in November, the Nuer would move to their respective camps along the major rivers in Ethiopia. Moreover, some groups of Nuer have both the wet-season villages and dry-season camps on either side of the border.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, some of the Nuer (Eastern Jikany) were legally integrated with the rest of the Ethiopian society by the boundary treaty of 1902.

### **2.3. Early attempt at political integration**

During the first few years of its encroachment, the state lacked effective administration. The lack of effective administration of the Nuer was due to several reasons. The rivalries between local rulers in Gore and Sayo created a power vacuum in the area. Dejazmach Jote Tullu and Ras Tesema had been contesting over Gambella. After 1917 the competition of Jote and Tesma continued by respective successors Dejazmach Biru and Dejazmach Kebede.<sup>37</sup> Besides, the inability of the central government to attain effective control by deploying strong forces resulted in loose integration. Moreover, the presence of a precipitous environment and inhospitable climate were equally serious challenges. The region with a very hot climate and tropical diseases discouraged officials from going from the Ethiopian highlands. Consequently, the Nuers of Ethiopia were left under a nominal administration for many years.<sup>38</sup>

Nevertheless, the coming of *Qegnazmach* Majid Abud on behalf of Ethiopian authorities in 1914, to the region brought to the area major changes. Majid moved across Jikow, the small but important post at the confluence of the Baro and the Pibore rivers, crossed into Jikany Nuer areas. Then, he claimed the Gaajok and the Gaajak who graze in Ethiopia as subjects of the emperor since the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He also announced his intention to collect tribute as a sign of their submission and as confirmation of Ethiopian authority over its territory.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Derege Feyissa, "Alternative citizenship: The Nuer between Ethiopia and the Sudan," C. Vaughan et al (eds), *The border land of South Sudan*, 109-110, (2013), P. 110.

<sup>37</sup> Bahiru zewudie, "Relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan on the western Ethiopian Frontier 1898-1935," p. 14.

<sup>38</sup> Temesgen Gebeyehu, "Identity, centralization and resistance in Ethiopia: the case of Nuer and Anywaa," *African journal of political science and international relations*, Vol. 8(6), pp. 155-162 (2014). P. 152.

<sup>39</sup> Robert O. Collins, *Land Beyond the Rivers: The Southern Sudan, 1898-1918* (Yale University Press; 1971). p. 56



As part of the effort to integrate the Nuer with Ethiopia, Majid appointed Khoryom Tut over the Gaajak Nuer. Khoryom was a Gaajak Nuer chief living at Kurthony on the north bank of the Baro and adorned with a title *Fitawrari*.<sup>40</sup> *Fitawrari* Khoryom attempted to convince his fellow ethnic group about the benefits of being Ethiopian.<sup>41</sup> After Khoryom Tut, there were efforts to appoint other representatives from the local community.<sup>42</sup> The Nuer reacted in two ways – resistance and submission. They opposed nomination of representatives owing to their political tradition. However, the political activities of the government of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan angered the Nuers in the borderlands. It imposes strict control on the Nuers on the Sudanese side.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, the Ethiopian government was flexible and it openly embraced the cross border economic activities of the Nuer. This attracted them to incline towards Ethiopia in the competition over subjects with the British.<sup>44</sup>

The early attempt of political integration was interrupted by Italian occupation. The introduction of political tradition from the Ethiopian government resumed after liberation. As a result, many Nuer chiefs have been given new titles. They assumed these titles to the rank of *Qengazmach*. *Qegnazmach* Chuol Kid of Kwatgar, *Qegnazmach* pal Muon Chiek, *Qegnazmach* Pal Chay of Jikow were able to assume the title.<sup>45</sup> *Qegnazmach* Pal Chay was the father of Thuwat Pal (high ranking official of Gambella administrative region During the Derg).<sup>46</sup> Those *Balabats* of Nuer served the government until 1974.

### **2.3. Introduction of administrative structure in Nuer**

Although the Nuer were officially claimed as Ethiopian citizens at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, introduction of formal administrative structure delayed for decades. The only strongest move before Italian occupation of Ethiopia was the appointment of Mejid as frontier representative of

---

<sup>40</sup>Informant: Beyene Hamere Tibeb ( He was history Teacher in Gambella Teachers college) and Bol Bouny (He was A teacher in Gambella teachers College), interviewed by the author, Gambella town, December 10, 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Robert O. Collins, *Land Beyond the Rivers: The Southern Sudan, 1898-1918*, p. 57

<sup>42</sup>Informant: Beyene Hamere Tibeb.

<sup>43</sup> Robert O. Collins, p. 57.

<sup>44</sup>Derege Feyissa. The cultural construction of state borders: The view from Gambella, p. 327

<sup>45</sup> Informant: Bol Bouny

<sup>46</sup> Informant: Tut pal. He is son of Qugnazmach Pal chay and brother of Thuwat Pal.

the Ethiopian government on both banks of the Baro River.<sup>47</sup> The formal administrative structure was introduced after liberation in the 1940s.

Emperor Haile Selassie took the most far-reaching measure of centralization in the country. In 1942 provincial and local administrative reform was launched through the promulgation of Decree No 1/1942. It was declared to modernize and standardize provincial and local administrations. As part of the reform, the Emperor redrew provincial and sub-provincial boundaries.<sup>48</sup> Thus, the Nuer were under Illubabour province and specifically in Gambella sub-province. Illubabour province had five sub-provinces of which Gambella was one. *Fitawurari* Belachew was sent to organize and administer Gambella sub-province since the decree and stayed there until 1953. *Fitawurari* Belachew may be the appointee of Dejazmach Tasew Walelu, governor of Illubabour, and later replaced Kibre Abe Zrufael.<sup>49</sup>

Gambella sub-province shared borders with Gore sub-province in the east, Mocha in the southeast, and Wollega province in the north. In the west and southwest, Gambella sub-province was bounded by Sudan. The sub-province was divided into six districts namely Gambella, Abobo, Gog and Jor, Itang, Akobo, and Jikow. The people who have been living in those districts were mainly Anuak and Nuer. Akobo and Jikow and later on Itang were the districts that have been the places where the Nuer live. According to the population census held in 1968/69, the sub-province had 56,494 individuals. Except for the district of Akobo, the census was accurate in all other areas according to the report. Akobo district was difficult to reach and the census was not conducted due to security reasons, but an estimate was forwarded. However, the report didn't identify the ethnic groups of the population.<sup>50</sup> To make it more specific at the district level the number is tabulated (Table 1).

---

<sup>47</sup> Bahiru Zewudie, "Relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan on the western Ethiopian Frontier 1898-1935," P. 164

<sup>48</sup> Yonas Adaye, "Conflict complexity in Ethiopia: case study of Gambella regional state," p. 110

<sup>49</sup> ዘ ጤዳ ዱባ ለ , pp, 377-387.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*

Table 1. Size of population in the sub-province of Gambella in 1968/9<sup>51</sup>

No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
Name of district	Gambella	Itang	Jikow	Abobo	Gor and Gog	and Akobo	Gambella Town	
Number of population	2057	3338	9216	2331	32070	6224	1258	56494

In line with the political integration that defined the second half of the twentieth century, the administrators were sent to those districts from Gore or from the Ministry of Interior in Addis Ababa. Akobo and Jikow districts were not exceptions. Demiss Zewde, Asefa Negash, and Mele Zema were sent one after the other to administer the Jikow district since 1953. Alemu Garde and Asefa Dadi respectively administrated the Akobo district one after the other since 1953.<sup>52</sup>

Indeed, the building up of administrative structures was not without difficulties. Many of the administrators were new to the social, economic and political lives of the people. They had been communicating with the Nuer through translators. The challenge was complicated when the positions of district administrators were left vacant. The Administrative Office of Akobo, for instance, was vacant after the resignation of Qengazmach Asfaw Admasie in 1968.<sup>53</sup> The difficulty of the environment caused by malaria was also a pushing factor. Consequently, governors and civil servants in the Nuer districts were disinterested to stay in their positions. Poor infrastructure of the districts was a serious challenge to supervision and to efforts to establish contacts with the people. Lack of vehicles complicated the problem which was frequently raised by the appointees and it led them to leave the area after a while.<sup>54</sup>

In addition, the budget allocated for those district administrators was much less than those in Anglo-Egyptian condominium Sudan. Since the districts of Akobo and Jikow are situated near the international boundary, governors had information about their neighbors. The allocated

<sup>51</sup> Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency, A memo from Ministry of Interior to Illubabour Province Administrative Office, Addis Ababa, March 1966.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>53</sup> Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency, Lema Gebremariam (governor of Gambella Awuraja), A memo to Fitawrari Worku Enku Selassie (Governor of Illubabor Province), (Gambella, June 1968).

<sup>54</sup> Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency, Tilahun Abebe governor of Illubabour, 1988, annual report on security issues of Gambella, (Metu, August 22, 1988).

budget for district administrator in Akobo and Jikow was 500 Ethiopian birr.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, as was mentioned by Tsehay Desta, provincial and district governors of the Sudan had better skill and qualification than their Ethiopian counterparts.<sup>56</sup> As a result, those districts stayed without governors many times. The allocated budget had been wasted. In their absence from work, it was very difficult to replace the position. However, the Jikow and Akobo experienced a greater national integration after the appointment of General Lemma Gebre Mariam as its governor in 1962. The appointment of General Lemma as governor of Gambella was characterized by a stronger and active Ethiopian state presence in its peripheral sub-province. After he had come to Gambella, he appealed for the socio-economic improvement of the people in the sub-province.<sup>57</sup>

#### **2.4. Promulgation of Modern Institutions**

The introduction of modern institutions into the Nuer was the product of public demands and governments effort to compete British colonizers. The introduction of modern institutions to the sub-province of Gambella in general and the districts of Akobo and Jikow, in particular, were late. The remoteness of the area and its hostile environment posed challenges against the introduction of institutions and infrastructure. In addition, the area was effectively administered much later than other regions.<sup>58</sup> The Nuer had been appealing to the government against poor infrastructure and institutions in the region through their representatives called *Balabats*. They appealed to district and sub-provincial governors many times. They demanded to get access to modern institutions such as schools, clinics, and others. Those representatives in the districts and sub-provinces understood the motive and passed the plea over the central government through official letters. However, lack of modern institutions was not unique to the Nuer. It was apparent in other areas of Illubabour.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency, Mengesha Asefa ( Secretary of Illubabour Province Administrative Office), a memo to Ministry of Interior, (November, 1970).

<sup>56</sup> Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency, Gambella sub-province Governor, 1958 annual report (Tsehay Desta, Gambella, June 24, 1958).

<sup>57</sup> Informant: Thuwat Pal. Interviewed by the researcher through telephone. He was one of the top officials of Gambella administrative region during the Derg. He learned during the imperial period in Gambella.

<sup>58</sup> Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency, An application letter from local Balabats to Jikow district governor in August, 1974.

<sup>59</sup> Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency, Gambella sub-province Governor, 1958 annual report (Tsehay Desta, Gambella, June 24, 1958).

As the Nuer were highly dependent on pastoral economy, they usually needed institutions that delivered veterinary services. They had owned a large number of cattle, goats, and sheep. However, the presence of animal diseases especially tsetse fly killed cattle in the region. They had to travel a very long distance to get medical care. The nearest organized clinic was found in Itang and Gambella town.<sup>60</sup> Hence, they demanded the introduction of modern health institutions that would deal with the diseases.

The government responded by putting in place modern social services and infrastructure. Undoubtedly, it was part of the effort to integrate the people. Provincial and sub-provincial administrators had been struggling to establish modern social services and infrastructure. They sought to make the people better in education, culture, economy, in any work habit, and to be helpful for modern political administration.<sup>61</sup> Priority was given to modern education. Some factors influenced the government to give priority to education. First, education was thought to be the means of integrating the Nuer. Second, the quest of Nuer through their representative (usually the *Balabats*) was concerned more with education than other services. Third, the government needed to compete with neighboring Sudan through introducing modern institutions. And the Nuer *Balabats* had been expressing that unless the schools were opened for them, they would be forced to send their children to neighboring Sudan. Therefore, measures were taken to solve the problems of schools for the Nuer towards the end of the 1950s.<sup>62</sup>

According to a report handed in by General Lemma (the then Governor of Gambella Awuraja) in 1969/70, there were two functional schools in the areas settled by the Nuer. The following table shows the figures of those schools.

---

<sup>60</sup> Gambella sub-province Governor, 1958 annual report (Tsehay Desta, Gambella, June 24, 1958).

<sup>61</sup> Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency, Fitawurary, Wolde Semayat Tesama to Endalkachew mekonenn, memo concerning the money needed to expand education in Gambella, October 30, 1959, ministry of interior from Illubabour province.

<sup>62</sup> Gambella sub-province Governor, 1958 annual report.

Table 2. Schools, number of teachers and students in 1970<sup>63</sup>

Name of school	Number of Students			Number of Teachers		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Jikow	28	4	32	2		2
Akobo	76	4	80	2		2

The available schools were not enough in comparison with the general population. Nevertheless, there was high rate of dropouts. The reason for this was the absences of continuous support (clothes and food and finance). It was difficult to collect taxes from the people due to the mobile nature of the Nuer. District governors were complaining usually about the shortfall of tax collection. Besides, the number of teachers was too small. The subjects to be taught were only English and Amharic.<sup>64</sup>

Moreover, the area needed other infrastructure like roads, bridges, and district offices. There was a single road built from Gambella town to Jikow and Akobo districts. The road was not operational during the Ethiopian rainy season when the districts of Jikow and Akobo had been flooded. The flood in the district of Jikow damaged the bridge that connected Ethiopia with the Sudan. The bridge needed to be repaired every year at the end of the summer season. After the evacuation of the British from Sudan the burden to repair that bridge was left to the Ethiopian government.<sup>65</sup>

## **2.5. Cultural integration**

The Nuer have had indigenous religion. They believe in sky god called Kout Nhial.<sup>66</sup> In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the two sects of Christianity (Protestantism and Ethiopian Orthodox Church), were introduced to the Nuer. The Ethiopian Nuers first embraced Protestant Christianity due largely to their close cultural interaction with South Sudan. Missionaries and evangelists arrived in Southern Sudan and started converting the people there since the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>63</sup> Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency, a memo from Lemma G/Mariam on March 3, 1970.

<sup>64</sup> Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency, The 1960 budget request plan of Gambella sub-province by Wolde Semayat Tesema.

<sup>65</sup> Fitawurary, Wolde Semayat Tesama to Endalkachew mekonenn, memo concerning the money needed to expand education in Gambella.

<sup>66</sup> ዘ ጡዳ ዱባ ለ , P. 125

Protestant missionary schools opened at Malakal in South Sudan.<sup>67</sup> Protestant Christianity was introduced to the Ethiopian Nuer from the western direction. It enabled veteran missionaries in Southern Sudanese Nuer to get many converts. The government of Haile Selassie adopted a more pragmatic approach towards protestant missionaries. Missionaries were sought as additional energy for their modernizing capabilities.<sup>68</sup>

The next section of Christianity which arrived in the Nuer from the eastern direction was the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The church was first introduced to the region by representatives of the government. They attempted to assert government authority and create fertile ground in the integration process. Thus, the Church of St. Kidane Mihret was established in the sub-province of Gambella in 1947, but it was far from the Nuer. Next, St. Michael Church was built nearer the border in Jikow district in 1963. The church in the Jikow district employed a sustainable effort to evangelize the Nuer. Evangelists were sent to the church. As a result, many Nuers embraced orthodox Christianity. The number of converts had reached more than a thousand within two successive years after the establishment of the church.<sup>69</sup>

Nevertheless, this early influence of the Ethiopian Orthodox church on the Nuer did not last long. Several factors contributed to this loss of influence of the church among the Nuer. First, the church had been teaching using the language in which the Nuer were able neither to understand nor speak. It was very difficult for them to understand basic teachings. They have been requesting a book written in their language. Second, the sizing power of socialist Derg with secular ideology didn't give attention. Third, the most dominant factor was the arrival of missionaries who were experienced in evangelizing the south Sudanese Nuer.<sup>70</sup>

The American missionaries opened a center in Jikow district at Kuatgar village in the 1960s. From there they began to preach Protestantism to the Nuer. They used the Bible, which was

---

<sup>67</sup> Christian Falge, "The Nuer as Refugees: a study of social adaptation," (MA thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1997). p. 82.

<sup>68</sup> Blata Tsehay Desta to Ministry of Interior, memorandum regarding the way of life of Gambella people, August 31, 1957, Gambella sub-province administration.

<sup>69</sup> Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency, An application letter written by Hiruy Amde Sellassie, Evangelist in Jikow saint Michael church, to Gambella sub province, October 13, 1965.

<sup>70</sup> Lemma G/Mariam governor of Gambella 1972 report (Gambella, Gambella sub province, on march 3, 1970).



written in the Nuer Language.<sup>71</sup> This enabled missionaries to win the heart of the people easily. They had got a larger number of converts than the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. In addition, they influenced refugees that arrived to the land of Nuer. Due to the inability of the Orthodox Church, sub-provincial governor of Gambella had been requesting the government to allow missionaries for those remote areas.<sup>72</sup>

### **3. Conclusion**

The diverse Ethiopian ethnic groups integrated through gradual process. They interacted and exchanged different elements of economic, political and cultural aspects. Despite assumption of alienation of the Nuer, there were efforts of integration. The Nuer had participated in trade with the rest of the Ethiopian society through long-distance routes. The early integration process was strengthened by political inclusion after the 1902 boundary treaty. Political leaders were nominated and charged with coercive power. Governors and civil servants were sent from the highland part of the country to the Nuer. The intention of the government to integrate the people resulted in the introduction of modern institutions. The Nuer had started to abandon traditional religion and embrace Christianity from protestant missionaries and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The Nuer reacted to the integration process in two ways. There were resistance to the introduction of coercive political tradition, but they supported the issues such as political inclusion and development of modern institutions. However, there were hurdles for integration efforts. Underdevelopment, lack of specialization of economic activities, early nominal administration, and inhospitable climate in the area served as barrier for integration.

---

<sup>71</sup> ዘ ውዴ ዱባ ለ , ገ ጽ . 126

<sup>72</sup>Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency, The 1969 report from Lemma G/Mariam governor of Gambella sub Province.

## References

### Archival sources

- Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency. A Memo from Blata Tsehay Desta to Ministry of Interior, memorandum regarding the way of life of Gambella people, August 31, 1957, Gambella sub-province administration.
- Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency. A memo from Fitawurari Zewude Otores to ministry of interior, memo concerning infrastructure in Gambella, on December 6, 1974 Illubabour province v/c governor.
- Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency. A memo from Legesse W/Mariam to Illubabour province. General information on the people of Gambella. Minister of ministry of interior, April 28, 1977.
- Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency. A memo from Lemma G/Mariam on March 3, 1970.
- Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency. An application letter from local Balabats to Jikow district governor in August, 1974.
- Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency. An application letter written by Hiruy Amde Sellassie, Evangelist in Jikow saint Michael church, to Gambella sub province, October 13, 1965.
- Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency. Fitawurary Wolde Semayat Tesama to Endalkachew mekonenn, memo concerning the money needed to expand education in Gambella, October 30, 1959, ministry of interior from Illubabour province.
- Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency. Gambella sub-province Governor, 1958 annual report (Tsehay Desta, Gambella, June 24, 1958).
- Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency. Lemma G/Mariam governor of Gambella 1972 report (Gambella, Gambella sub province, on march 3, 1970).
- Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency. The 1960 budget request plan of Gambella sub-province by Wolde Semayat Tesema.
- Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency. The 1969 report from Lemma G/Mariam governor of Gambella sub Province.
- Ethiopian National Archive and Library Agency. Tilahun Abebe governor of Illubabour, 1988, annual report on security issues of Gambella, (Metu, August 22, 1988).

**Published sources**

- Bahiru Zewudie. *Society, state, and history; selected essays*. Addis Ababa University Press, Addis Ababa, 2008.
- Collins Robert. O. *Land Beyond the Rivers: The Southern Sudan, 1898-1918*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971.
- Dereje Feyissa. "Alternative citizenship. The Nuer between Ethiopia and the Sudan." C. Vaughan et al (eds). *The border land of South Sudan*.109-110. 2013.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The cultural construction of state borders: The view from Gambella." *Journal of Eastern African studies*, 4, 2, 314-330, 2010, <http://dx.doi.org/> . Accessed on September 12, 2017.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Pur, the real, and the chosen: the encounter between Anywa, the Nuer and Highlanders in Gambella," Flix Girke (ed), *Ethiopian images of self and other*, Universitatsveslag Have –Wittenberg, Germany, 2014.
- G.Marcus, Harold. A History of Ethiopia. University of California press. London 1994.
- H. Johnson, Douglas. *The Horn of Africa*. London, UCL press, 1994.
- Ilievski Nikola Lj. "the concept of political integration: the perspective of neo functionalist theory." *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs*.Vol. 1, No. 1, 2015 | UDC 327 | ISSN 1857-976, the Institute for Research and European Studies.
- Koramaz Elif Kısar. "The Spatial Context of Social Integration." *Social Indicators Research*. March 2014, Vol. 119, No. 1 (March 2014), Springer.
- Lindahl, Bernhard. Local history of Ethiopia. Nordic Africa Institute library. 2005.
- Lindo Flip. "The concept of integration: theoretical concerns and practical meanings." Asselin et al. *Social integration and mobility*. Lisbon, centro de estudos geograficos, 2005.
- Medhane Tadesse. "Gambella: the impact of local conflict on regional conflict." Institute of Security studies, Pretoria.
- N. Levine Donald. *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of Multi-Ethnic society*. The University of Chicago Press, USA, 1974.
- Pritchard Evans E. *Nuer Religion*. Britain, At the Clarendon press, 1956.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Nuer*. Britain, At the Clarendon press 1940.
- Temesgen Gebeyehu. "Identity, centralization and resistance in Ethiopia: the case of Nuer And Anywaa." *African journal of political science and international relations*. 2014. <http://www.academicjournals.org/AJPSIR>. Accessed on September 15, 2017.
- Treaty series, UK, treaties online. The 1902 boundary treaty between Ethiopia and Britain. <http://treaties.fco.gov.uk> Accessed on September 15, 2017.
- Wondwosen Michago Seide. "The Nuer pastoralists- between large scale agriculture and villagization:A case study of the Lare District in the Gambella Region of Ethiopia." Current African Issues (CAI) No 6. Nordic Africa Institute. 2017.
- WRITENET. independent analysis. (2004). Ethiopia: The Gambella conflict – Structure and Prognosis, UK, <http://www.refworld.org>>pdfid, Accessed on January 12, 2021.
- Young John. Along Ethiopia's Western Frontier: Gambella and Benishangul in Transition. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*. Jun., 1999, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Jun., 1999), pp. 321-346, Cambridge University Press.

ዘ ውዴ ዱባ ለ . ኢተባባሪ . አዲስ አበባ . 1976 ዓ .ም.

**Unpublished sources**

Bahir Zewudie. “Relations between Ethiopia and the Sudan on the western Ethiopian Frontier 1898-1935.” (Phd. Diss, University of London, May 1976). p. 269.

Falge Christian. “The Nuer as Refugees: a study of social adaptation.” MA thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1997.

Mawut Lazarus Leek. “The southern Sudan under British rule 1898-1924: the constraints Reassessed.” Phd. Diss., Durham University, 1995, <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/971/>. Accessed on May 5, 2018.

Meckelburg Von Alexander. “From “Subject to Citizen”? History, Identity and Minority Citizenship: The Case of the Mao and Komo of Western Ethiopia.” (PhD dissertation, University of Hamburg, 2017).

Ojulu Ojot Miru. “Large scale land acquisition and minorities’ indigenous people right. under ethnic federalism in Ethiopia: A regional case study of Gambella Regional State.” Phd. Diss., University of Bradford, 2013.

Stringham Noel. “Marking Nuer histories: Gender, Gernotocracy, and the politics of Inclusion in the upper Nile from 1400- 193.” Phd. Diss., University of verginia,2016.

Yonas Adaye. “Conflict complexity in Ethiopia: case study of Gambella regional state.” Phd. Diss., University of Bradford, 2014.