Conclusion

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This special issue of the *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. LIV (No.1) June 2021 includes six articles by notable researchers in the disciplines of history, anthropology, and linguistics. These authors provide their exhaustive studies on the, historic, Bela-Shangul as well as the new geographical remapping of the Beni-Shangul Gumuz Regional State established as it did following the promulgation of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, August 1995.

The Beni-Shangul Gumuz Regional State is a vast regional state that includes extensive semi-arid areas to the south and north of the mighty river Abbay (Amharic, literally, father of rivers). The inhabitants of Beni-Shangul to the south of the Abbay are the Berta, Mao, Komo, and Gumuz. The Berta live in much of the areas of Beni-Shangul. The Mao and Komo inhabit special *wãrãda* (Amharic, literally, sub-district) in the suburbs of Beggi and Tongo towns of the historic, Bela-Shangul. We shall come to discuss this in detail later. Some sections of the Gumuz survive in the drier areas of the Dabus, Diddessa, Angãr, and Abbay river valleys.

To the north of the Abbay in what is now Beni-Shangul Gumuz Regional State, the majority of the inhabitants are Gumuz. These Gumuz occupy the lowlands from the slopes of the western edge of the Injibara plateau in Agãwmidir and penetrating into the gorges of the Bãlãs river valley and further west up to the mountain of Bãlaya which has a height of 8,000 feet. The areas the numerous Gumuz clans inhabit are Guangua, Mandura, Dibati, Dangur, and Wãmbara. Wãmbara and Kitar hills had become the possession of the Oromo. This was because some Oromo groups from Limmu in Wãllagga crossed the Abbay northwards and took the Gumuz territories of Wãmbara and Kitar hills sometime in the 1780s.

The Gumuz language is classified under the Nilo-Saharan language family. This is because the Gumuz are to be found on both sides of the Abbay valley westwards across the fringes of the Sahara desert to the vicinity of Lake Chad. The Gumuz language as well as people are one of the least known languages and peoples in Ethiopia respectively. The Gumuz people have not received serious investigation by Ethiopian as well as expatriate scholars in the various fields of studies as of yet.

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Another group inhabiting the Gumuz country of Dangur, Dibati, and Wãmbara are the Shinasha, whom H.C. Fleming relates to the Gonga, Anfillo, and Kaffa, further to the south in Wãllagga and Kaffa. (See, H.C. Fleming, "Kaffa (Gonga) languages" in Marvin L. Bender, et al (ed.). *The Non-Semitic Languages of Ethiopia*. East Lansing: African Studies Center, 1976, pp. 35-76). The Shinasha were survivors of the Hamitic stock. They had arrived in the Gumuz country before the arrival of the Semitic-Amhara and had come to establish their main town Bulãn. In the end, the ultimate losers of their land possessions were the Gumuz, who in turn were displaced by the Shinasha, Agãw, and the Oromo to still lower lands. Other ethnic minorities in Gumuz country like Kunfal and Gonga, still survive further up in Dangur near the Dinder river. The Kunfal and Gonga live among the Gumuz, inhabiting the foothills below the plateau of Achãfar, a district to the northeast of Agãwmidir. The Kunfal, in a number of ways, resemble the Shinasha. These minorities such as the Shinasha, Kunfal, and Gonga, like the Gumuz were driven to the hot Bãlãs river valleys to struggle against malaria and other arid-land diseases by their more powerful Agãw neighbors. In the struggle to keep the most fertile and highly watered areas of the Gumuz country, the worst losers were the Gumuz themselves, the Kunfal, and the Gonga. In the final analysis, the fertile Gumuz territories were controlled by the Agãw of Guangua, Mãtãkkãl, and Bãlaya, and the Oromo of Wãmbara and Dangizha.

The Cushitic Agaw were the largest in number and the strongest in military power to have encountered the Gumuz. As has been indicated, following the military expedition of King Tãklã Hãymanot of Gojjam to the Gumuz country in 1898, the king gave appointments to his Amhara-Agãw soldiers. These Amhara-Agãw military class served the king as rulers, supervisors of taxes and controllers of the lucrative trade in the coffee of Wãmbãra as well as civet, gold, and especially ivory in the rest of Gumuz country. The Amhara-Agãw military class set out to build, Amharic, *kãtãmawoch*, literally, towns in the elevated and healthy areas of the Gumuz country and resided there, and hence, Chagni and Sigadi towns were built in Mãtãkkãl district.

The Agãw-Amhara ruling class as well as the military class raided the Gumuz for slaves. In the main, the Gumuz country remained a geographical fringe of Agawmidir and a natural pool for providing child slaves for the first three and a half decades of the twentieth century. The Gumuz possessed spears, shields, and knives. Nevertheless, such weapons were no match to the rifles of the Agãw and Amhara. Accordingly, some of the Gumuz, who follow traditional belief and were fearful of the slave raids of the Agaw and Amhara military class retreated to freedom and joined their kith and kin, the Muslim Gumuz in

British-Sudan. It is apparent, therefore, that the Gumuz were not amenable to the political and religious influence of the Amhara-Agãw Orthodox-Tewahdo Christian courts in Chagni, Sigadi, and the foothills of Bãlaya mountain. Moreover, the integrating factors such as the use of Amharic language, professing Orthodox-Tewahdo Christianity and miscegenation between the Gumuz and the core Amhara-Agãw highlanders were absent.

The Gumuz of the western lowlands of Gojjam in their own accord had developed a common identity of their own. They had come to refer to the Amhara-Agãw as "red" people. The numerous groups in Gumuz country identified themselves in accordance with lineages, localities, and the monotheism of Roboqua religious beliefs, clans, confederations, and linguistic affiliation. As a matter of fact, the various Gumuz clans in the Gumuz country to the west of Gojjam had come to develop their own religious beliefs and an awareness of a common or similar environment, a similar economy and a broadly similar way of life with the Muslim Gumuz in British-Sudan. These Gumuz of various religious beliefs, the monotheism of Roboqua and Islam had come to form a common identity. They had come to accept their differences as part of Gumuzness. Gumuzness in turn had been welcomed as part of the unity with diversity of the various and numerous Gumuz clans in Ethiopia as well as the Muslim Gumuz in the Sudan to date.

By way of conclusion, Alexander Meckelburg summarizes the significance of the palace of *Sheikh* Khojele in Addis Ababa in the following ways. The palace gave the visiting German traveler Max Gruhl (1884 – 1941) the impression as "a tiny corner of the Sudan" in Ethiopia. Khojele managed to keep his "semi-autonomy" in the empire state of Ethiopia. The palace had been an expression of the manifestation of Khojele's political and economic importance as a supplier of gold and slaves to the imperial palace in Addis Ababa. The palace of Khojele had been an illustration of the political and economic relationships of a peripheral Sudanese vassal and the imperial Shãwan-Amhara lords in Addis Ababa. Khojele had become an investor in the imperial capital, Addis Ababa. He built a number of houses for rental purposes in Addis Kãtãma and around the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railroad main station in Addis Ababa. He also owned *Cinima* Adwa in the *Piazza* of Addis Ababa. The remains of the palace demonstrate the power, control, and social significance of the mighty past of Khojele. He had been a successful politician and merchant, whose interests focused mainly in the imperial center in Addis Ababa. The palace of Khojele demonstrated the economic interdependence between the periphery on the Ethiopian-Sudanese border and the imperial center of Addis Ababa.

Sophie Kuspert-Rakotondrainy provides the conclusion that the Mao Komo special sub-district in the present day Beni-Shangul Gumuz Regional State is also home to some of the minority Berta and Oromo ethnic groups. Many of these different ethnic groups such as the Mao, Komo, Berta, and Oromo profess Islam. The Christians among them make a small minority. Many of the Mao are in the main to be found in Oromia Regional State. Her article discusses the Mao in four main parts: Mao as an ethnic group, Mao as a linguistic term, Mao as a political term, and Mao as a term denoting status. She also relates, following a contested political process between Beni-Shangul Gumuz and Oromia Regional States, the border demarcation between the two states occurred as it did in 1995. As a result, Tongo went to Beni-Shangul Gumuz Regional State and Beggi came to be included in Oromia Regional State. Historically, a considerable number of the highland Mao surrounding Beggi town came to be absorbed into the dominant culture of the Oromo. And, many of the Mao have come to speak Afaan Oromo as a mother tongue. Whereas, the Mao in the outskirts of Tongo town, more generally, speak Gwama as a mother tongue.

Teferi Mekonnen offers the summary that the Beni-Shangul Gumuz Regional State for a decade (1991–2001) had come to exhibit vulnerability in its multi-ethnic composition. The predominant Berta and Gumuz ethnic group politicians demonstrated fear-inspiring political competition. The Berta education elites succeeded to form the Beni-Shangul People's Liberation Movement together with the Mao and Komo. Some of the Gumuz, who had received modern education in the elementary and secondary levels, were able to establish the Gumuz People's Liberation Movement. During this period of a decade (1991-2001), there had been inter-ethnic clashes between the native Berta and the settlers, mainly, from Amharic speaking groups surrounding the town of Asossa. The fierce political competition between the politicians of the Berta and Gumuz had continued as an everlasting menace to bring peace in the Beni-Shangul Gumuz Regional State.

Takele Merid makes an attempt to demonstrate the socio-economic attachment of the Berta people to their semi-arid environment on the Ethiopian-Sudanese border. The Berta people are multilingual. They do speak Rutani as a mother tongue, a language belonging to the Nilo-Saharan language family. Most of the Berta people speak Arabic as a second language. Some of them also speak Afaan Oromo and Amharic.

Generally, the Berta people depend on agriculture, gold mining and handicraft production. These livelihoods of the Berta began to decline in the mid 1990s.

This was because capital intensive investors from Addis Ababa started to seize the traditional land holdings of the Berta under the new investment policy of the now Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. These seizures of the lands of the Berta by the economic elites of Ethiopia had come to make the Berta vulnerable to socio-economic dislocation. The expansion of large-scale investment projects in the Berta lands brought about the cutting down of trees, which in turn led to deforestation processes of the environment. Consequently, many of the Berta people came to face massive displacement from their original settlement areas.

Historically, the Berta were used to consider their land holdings as the mother of all resources. They exploited their land holding resources to produce sorghum, bamboo, rubber, incense, sesame, niger seeds, maize, mango, banana, avocado, lemon, to collect wild honey, and to obtain gold. Moreover, the Berta utilized their lands as sources of plants for medication purposes. Some Berta merchants took gold from Asossa through the main customs post of Kurmuk to Wad Medane in the Sudan. They paid taxes for the commodities they exported and imported via Kurmuk.

Investors in Berta lands set out to plant and produce sesame. In addition to this, investors extracted marble from Berta lands. In the final analysis, investors from Addis Ababa succeeded to transfer the huge amount of Berta land resources for themselves. As a result, the Berta youth had become laborers to investors and settlers from other regional states in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. For example, the big town, like Asossa, has now become the residential place of settlers from mainly Amhara Regional State.

These settlers, investors, and those Takele Merid refers to as “migrants” arrogated several hectares of the lands of the Berta. They had come to acquire investment lands for crop production. Practically, these settlers had come to control most of the livelihoods, natural resources and social assets of the Berta people. The settlers had now even become the controllers of the Berta political developments. Amharic has now become the official working language of the Beni-Shangul Gumuz Regional State.

Investors in the farms did not properly use machinery to produce cash crops. Instead, they employed human laborers either individuals among the settlers as the first choice or able-bodied Berta men to work on their farms. The Berta, who had been snatched of their land possessions and whose natural resources had been jeopardized, referred to settlers as well as soldier-settlers from

elsewhere in Ethiopia with disgust as "alien" people. Moreover, investors employed some Berta individuals as laborers in their gold mining and marble producing companies.

Girma Mengistu Desta gives, by way of conclusion that the Omotic Mao refers to a group of languages comprising four mutually unintelligible languages. These Omotic Mao languages tend to show considerable differences as well as similarities in their pronominal system. These languages belong to different sub-groups of the Omotic language family.

Taddesse Berisso sums by providing due attention to the establishment of cooperative villages and agricultural collectivization projects under the *Dãrg* military government (1974-91) and the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (1991-2018). The *Dãrg* set out with its planned resettlement programs of moving people from one region, mainly, the north to other new locations in the south to bring about what it termed as "rapid rural transformation." The villagization processes helped the government to effectively control farmers in their new resettlement areas. A few months before 1991, the time the *Dãrg* lost its political power to the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic front (EPRDF), many farmers in the various resettlement areas in the south dismantled their poorly constructed huts in many villages and proceeded to the north to reconstruct their homes in their previous sites.

As soon as EPRDF took power from the *Dãrg* in 1991, it began to vehemently oppose the villagization programs of the latter. EPRDF officials came to believe that the villagization programs of the previous regime had had flaws and its hasty designs had brought about untold suffering to the farmer. EPRDF also deemed the villagization programs as inhuman to the displaced farmers. Moreover, the programs resulted in bringing grave political, economic, social, and cultural losses to many farmers from the south, where farmers in the north took their tracts of lands.

Some two decades later, sometime in 2010, EPRDF came up with a change of attitude to the villagization programs of its precursor *Dãrg* regime and began to implement its own fresh villagization programs among the pastoral and peripheral peoples in Ethiopia. EPRDF set out to install its revised villagization programs in the following four regional states: Afar, Beni-Shangul Gumuz, Gambella, and Somali. In due course, EPRDF had come to resettle some one and a half million people by 2013. The government also carried out villagization programs in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and

Peoples Regional State. The purposes of the government were to establish healthy villages in new locations on voluntary bases in order to help to transform the sustenance of pastoral peoples in the peripheries. The government also hoped to improve food security, to diversify the sources of income and to be able to deliver better social services like schools and clinics to the diverse pastoral peoples in the peripheries.

The *Dãrg* regime in earnest started the implementation of villagization programs among the Guji-Oromo in Jam Jam district in January 1986. Whereas, the enactment process of villagization programs among the Mao-Komo special sub-district in the Beni-Shangul Gumuz Regional State under EPRDF began in 2011.

The two consequent regimes, the *Dãrg* and EPRDF envisaged to introduce a systematic land-use, by moving diverse peoples into the new villages and to be able to provide social services like schools, clinics, police stations, water supplies, rural roads, electric power, and flour-mills. Both regimes set out to reshape and change the subsistence of the farming and pastoral peoples. They had had the expectation to transform the living conditions of the farming and pastoral peoples.

Among the Guji-Oromo, many of the villages in several locations began to disintegrate following the takeover of political power by EPRDF in 1991. This was because the formation of villages among the Guji-Oromo had not been on voluntary bases. The execution of the villagization projects had had a top-down approach and as a result, the involuntary resettlements led to the disintegration of many villages. By contrast, the villagization programs in the Mao-Komo special district were voluntary. Many of the Mao-Komo people had been consulted by government authorities prior to the construction of huts in the new different locations.

Nevertheless, the villagization processes of the two subsequent regimes, the *Dãrg* and EPRDF had come to record poor performance to bring about economic and environmental transformation to the intended farming groups and pastoral peoples in the peripheries. In the final analysis, the Guji-Oromo do have corresponding relationship with the Mao-Komo, historically Omotic Mao, many of whom to-day speak Afaan Oromo as a mother tongue, a language belonging to the Cushitic language family.

It is worth noting that the past generation of the empire of Ethiopia in the period 1897-1935 raided the Gumuz, Mao and Komo numerous villages to

fetch child slaves. The political and economic elites of the period 1991-2018 also used the occasion to take command of the large tracts of lands of the Berta, Mao, Komo, and Gumuz in what is now Beni-Shangul Gumuz Regional State. The present generation of the twenty-first century must find ways to include the Berta, Mao, Komo, and Gumuz into the upcoming free citizenry of Ethiopia. We all are in need of this healthy, comprehensive as well as indispensable totality of making all the diverse peoples equable Ethiopians.