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Identity, centralization and resistance in Ethiopia: The case of Nuer and Anuak

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The Anuak-Nuer resistance to centralization traced back to their incorporation in the last decade of the ninetieth century. It was a reaction against submission, and aggravated and shaped by the new developments in Ethiopia and British-ruled Sudan. The perspectives of local and ethnic groups and formation of local groups, identities and interests have been formed, dissolved and affected the political and social processes and changes along the Ethio-Sudanse borderlands since the 19th century. The purpose of this study is to examine center-periphery relations and the dynamics of shared identities. It also explains the key determinants of the resistance against the centralization processes on one hand and to some extent, the evolution and development of minority identity and politics in the political economy of the study area on the other. A multidisciplinary study emphasizes the anthropology, politics and history of the Nuer and Anuak in relation to the center.

Key words: Identity, resistance, centralization, Ethiopia ,Nuer and Anuak.

GENERAL BACKGROUND

Territorial incorporation, unification, centralization, identity politics and citizenship were the main historic processes of the 19th century history of Ethiopia. The process was attempted differently in different times and places. For Emperor Tewodros, for example, it was making of an absolutist and centralized state. In the words of Bahru "Tewodros once styled himself husband of Ethiopia and fiancé of Jerusalem, and he was to prove himself a jealous husband indeed" (Bahru, 1976:43). Yohannis IV, his successor, however, was more liberal and ready to decentralize power to his followers and regional lords. His approach helped him to be more successful than Tewodros in establishing a unitary state. In a parallel manner, the emperor weakened centrifugal forces, tendencies and powerful lords by creating and maintaining political, economic and military equilibrium.

The process of centralization and territorial incorporation reached its climax in the last quarter of the 19th century. This was during the reign of Emperor Menilik (r.1889-1913). In the process of making a centralized and modern Ethiopian state, more areas were conquered and incorporated (Bahru, 1976). These newly incorporated areas were at different stages of social evolution and development. Some were states; others were egalitarian societies, like Nuer and Anuak; and still others were in the process of transforming from egalitarian to state societies. In explaining the features of social stratification and state formation, Walter (1969) wrote the following:

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Tribes are larger communities integrating different bands by principles of descent (lineages). Chiefdoms are the first social forms to differentiate political roles: lineages are ranked in a hierarchy that sets the descent group of the chief above others to indicate authoritative leadership. The power of the chief is centralized and relatively stable, and the economic order is to some extent structured by chiefly rule (through the organization of labor and the redistribution of wealth). In states, government is highly centralized in a professional ruling body separated from kinship bonds and organized into specialized offices that handle political, economic, and legal matters. The legitimized monopoly of the use or threat of force is one of the salient features of states. There is little disagreement over the transition from bands to states (Service, 1975; Roth, 1968).

Still, others argue that the main feature of a state is that central authority turn into fully established, institutionalized and regulated offices. State controlled laws are formal. In addition, judicial offices are assigned to act as third parties. Unlike chiefdoms, the political structure is clearly differentiated and territorially bounded. States have power to use physical force, both internally as well as externally, by means of an organized and permanent army. This is done through a formalized judicial and punitive system of laws (Stevenson, 1968; Vengroff, 1976; Haas, 1982). This was a typical characteristic of the Ethiopian state in the center before or in the course of territorial incorporation and centralization of the 19th century.

True, for a people to become a state or part of a state, its political structure has to evolve in such a way that the authority of leadership is not only based on authority resting on a hierarchical relationship but also on a legal system to sanction the monopoly of force (Cohen, 1978; Keeley, 1988).

In the case of Nuer and Anuak, who were egalitarian societies (bands and tribes), reinforcement mechanisms operated within the traditional kinship structure. There were no formal laws to regulate behavior since the community was scattered and small enough to deal with matters in an informal structure and manner based on habits, custom, and domestic power. Here customary laws were an integral part of the social, political, and economic life of the community. Until the recent period, there were no modern legal procedures among the Nilo-Sahrans, including the Nuer and Anuak society (Dereje, 2010). Rather, it is customary laws that have played important role in the life of the community. The rules and legal mechanisms have been an integral part of the society. Their internalized nature has made them to have sense of right and wrong among the members of the community. As Cohen (1984) mentions customary laws have considerable legitimacy, though there is room for disagreement about particular legal outcomes. Among the Nilo-Sahrans in particular they are flexible and agreeable to change so that they ensure their continuation and legitimacy.

In most of Nilo-Sahran society, leadership was not permanent. Rather, it is intermittent and could be accepted because of an individual's charismatic qualities, his sensitivity to public opinion, and his good advice, rather than his power to intervene as an executive third party. Power cloud be institutionalized to form a hierarchy of subsidiary offices. This could reduce the political significance of the kinship structure (Cohen, 1978). This was a typical political feature of Nuer and Anuak society during their incorporation by the central (Christian) state of Ethiopia. This process of incorporation and creating a modern and centralized was achieved by Menilek II who followed a tradition of territorial expansion that was started by Emperor Tewodros (i.e., Tewodros started it; Menilek completed it). This territorial expansion and creating a centralized and unified state was the result of a number of factors. To begin with, there was a need to control both the vertical (north-south) and the horizontal (west-east) trade routes (Marcus, 1975). In this regard, Gambela area, the territory of the Nuer and Anuak peoples, was rich in ivory and other trade items. Secondly, the need for extra land to increasing nobilities was becoming a pushing factor. Finally, and more importantly, there was French and British colonial expansion to the Horn of Africa. In 1890s when both the French and British colonialism were expanding and encroaching the Ethiopian state, Menilek reacted in two ways: diplomatically and militarily. In the case of the former, Menilek wrote a famous letter to European powers defining the boundary of the country in April 1891. Likewise, he was working on ground and paper in western area (Gambela) to expand his empire and maintain his interest. Things were made systematically to avoid conflict with France, Britain and the Mahdist Sudan (Bahru, 1976). With France, he secretly agreed to provide material support in its expedition to create a Trans-African Empire. The Emperor sent his military mission to western Ethiopia together with Marquis de Bonchamps, who led a French expedition from Djibouti. In the case of the Mahdist Sudan, he wrote letter of solidarity to Khalifa Abdullahi, the ruler, on one hand and agreed to put arms embargo to the same state in the 1897 Treaty of Friendship with Britain on the other.

All these processes and events helped him to incorporate the people and areas under discussion. Accordingly, one of Menilek's famous generals, *Dejjach* Tesema Nadew occupied Gore and Gambella areas. The Ethiopian authority was slowly but steadily established. Institutionalization of centralized rule was attempted to make the Nuer and the Anuak part of a centralized and unified state. But this met stiff resistance.

RESISTANCE AGAINST CENTRALIZATION

Both the Nuer and Anuak of Ethiopia lived in the lowlands

of Gambela region of Ethiopia. It is hot and tropical area. The area is rich, fertile, well-watered soil coming from the rivers originating in western and central highlands of the country where there is cooler climate (Bender, 1975). The Nuer and Anuak lived in the remotest and most inaccessible areas, in relation to the Ethiopian political center. They had no economic inter-dependence and social interaction with a wider social community. This made them not to have cultural and political ties with the center. The high land Ethiopians who considered the area as unfit and inhospitable for settlement did not affect them (Kurimoto, 1994). Both tribes were living based on very simple but self-sufficient material culture. This could be mentioned as contributory factor, among other things, in making of violence and development of violence behavior of tradition among the two communities (Kurimoto, 2002).

However, both the Nuer and the Anuak, who succeeded in pursuing more or less independence existence, were subjected to pressure from both the Ethiopian and Sudanese governments. The task of administrating peoples who did not have a centralized internal authority in their history would be very difficult. Seemingly, for this reason, the process of bringing the Anuak and the Nuer into a centralized form of political administration had been a gradual process in Ethiopian case (Kelly, 1987).

True, in 1897-98 the area was incorporated into the Ethiopian Empire, a turning point in the history of the Nuer and the Anuak. In 1898, with the imminent fall of the Mahdist state and the advance of the French Marchand Expedition, Emperor Minilek attempted to have an effective occupation of the region. But he was not successful because of resistance of the local people and shortage of provisions. According to many, it was not through campaigns of imperial conquest that the Nuer and the Anuak were incorporated into Menelik's empire. These areas were incorporated into Ethiopian imperial state as part of the raiding and tribute phase of Ethiopian expansion. Thus, it may be better to argue that Nuer-Anuak relations with Ethiopia were more of indirect, either confined to trade or being an extension of Nuer and Anuak relations with some of Ethiopia's subject peoples in the early years of the period (Baylegn, 1999; Paul J., Interview,8.9.2001,2).[1]

In 1902, the boundary delimitation of Ethiopia and the Sudan was made. This placed the majority of Nuer and Anuak inside the Sudan and Ethiopia respectively. Then after, the Sudanese government started to consolidate its control over the Nuer and Anuak communities. Accordingly, it advanced through military pressure and judicial regulation to obtain political submission. That is, the British colonial administration was characterized by a consistency of purpose (Jurimoto, 1996; *Addis Zemen*, 8. 25.1968).

Whereas, the Ethiopian government was moving in its flexible form. The administration of Ethiopia over the area was sporadic and seasonal. Therefore, effective administration was not energetically pursued and, in the long-term perspective, the mechanisms of Ethiopian administration became successful in extending its influence and authority. This was because the very flexibility of Ethiopian polities along the border areas allowed the communities to pursue more or less an independence existence together with their own spiritual and ritual leaders as well as their migratory habits. Until 1934, the kind of control that the Ethiopian government officials exercised over the Nuer and the Anuak was more of sending a few tribute gathering expeditions (Johnson, 1986).

Ethiopian administration in the newly incorporated areas of southern Ethiopia tended to tie its subjects to the land. Yet, this did not happen to either the Nuer or the Auak, two Nilote peoples living in different ecologies, with different economies, settlements and political systems. Instead, in addition to flexibility, the Ethiopian government tried to recognize the political autonomy of the Anuak headmen and nobles by giving promotions and rewards. In this process, Ethiopia rule was able to extend its impact even in the territory of the Sudan through nobles of both tribes.

There were a number of factors for the absence of strong government presences in the area under discussion. To begin with, there were rivalries between the Gore and Sayo Ethiopian authorities. Though it lacked power of administration, the area south of the bank of the Baro River was proposed to be administered from Gore while the northern part was put under Sayo. Secondly, the inability of the central government to deploy a strong force that would maintain law and order contributed for the absence of effective administration. Finally, the presence of precipitous escarpments and inhospitable climate scarcely attract the attention of government officials and made the establishment of strong and permanent administration impossible (Ibid; Interview, Alebachew Kassa, 3.6.2012).[2]

The presence of rivalries between the frontier authorities of the two governments (Ethiopia and the Sudan) had also its own impact on the psychology of the people in relation to the centralization processes of the period in the region. The Nuer and Anuak themselves manipulated these rivalries and political ambiguities to their own advantages (Triulzi 1994). Johnson wrote:

Throughout the early part of this century [the 20th C] the Nuer saw the Ethiopian state as an alternative to the Sudan, either as a threatening alternative that induced them to accept the Sudanese administration or as a refugee to Sudanese demands. It was always the comparative incompleteness of Ethiopian administration that was the most attractive inducement to live under

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[1] Paul is a *Woreda* administrator of Gambela region of today.

[2] He served as *awrajja* judge in the area until the fall of the imperial period.

Ethiopian Authority (Johnson 1986).

The Anuak also behaved in similar way. With the creation of the border and the alternative attractions of the two administrations, large number of persons moved from side to side as the opportunity arose or as occasion demanded. From both tribes, there was no great feeling of the permanent of allegiance to either of the governments. As one Anuak headman advised his son in the early 1930s, "he should give one hand to Ethiopia and the other to the Sudan" (Tippett, 1970).

In the early years of the twentieth century, both communities, being far from the center of the Ethiopian state, perceived themselves as outsiders and led more or less an independent existences. Thus, the Nuer and the Anuak viewed the various Ethiopian administrations as temporary intrusions. As the government tired to introduce its system of effective control, they reacted violently. For instance, one of the major sources of frictions between the Ethiopian government officials and the peoples of the region was the attempt of the government to maintain law and order by government interfering in traditional conflicts and disturbances. The Nuer and Anuak were irritated by government's interference to impose the rule of law by limiting freedom of actions and movement (Dereje, 2010; Donham, 2002).

In similar development, government's interference in traditional institutions aggravated the tension between the people and the government. To the local officials of the central government, the frequent change of chiefs was one of the reasons in destabilizing the area. At the same time, the deposed chiefs sought government help to be reinstated to their former positions. For example, an Ethiopian supported noble, Ulimi-wa-Agaaya, used his new power to murder his rivals. The interference of the government authorities to maintain chiefs were mostly unsuccessful as the people would either fight and prevent the imposition of the undesired chief or would wait and depose the imposed chief immediately after the government forces left the area. This continued even in the post-liberation periods (Evens-Prichard, 1940; Johnson, 1986; Flight, 1981).

Taxation was another cause of hostility between the two parties-the government, and the Nuer and the Anuak. This could be exemplified by the 1912 incident when a tribute gathering expedition from Sayo was met with a fierce Nuer resistance. There, about two hundred fifty men were killed from the government side and Nuer lost more than one hundred men and one hundred men were captured (Dermont, 1969). Confined to their natural environment, both the Nuer and the Anuak fiercely resisted attempts of tax collection.

With their hostile attitude towards external authority and having very little experience of government impositions, they regarded no reason why they should pay tax to the Ethiopian government. To them, paying tax was more or less similar to being robbed. For a number of factors, I have mentioned, the government authorities themselves also did not show commitment to bring them under a strict central political administration nor hardly collected any tax except occasional raids where by local officials might loot their cattle, probably for personal benefit.[3]

In this period, both communities had been loosely coordinated with the central Ethiopia political administrative system. Government authorities themselves lacked the means of control and thereby they (the Nuer and the Anuak), for the most part, had been far from the immediate impact of the central political system. The central institutional systems were less exercised as one moved territorially from Addis Ababa to periphery, the Nuer and Anuak territories.

Arms in the hands of the local communities enabled them to resist external interference. In those days, the Nuer and the Anuak involved in arms trade more actively than before. Trade in arms in western frontier of Ethiopia was facilitated by the presence of fluid borders between the two countries. By selling ivory to Ethiopian highlanders, they were able to buy rifles. The main centers in the supply of fire arms, particularly to the Nuer, were Assossa and Bela Shangul. The ascendancy of Khojali al-Hassan's in 1908 and his competition with Jote escalated the arms trade (2131/2200: A letter to the Ministry of Interior, 1941).[4] The Ethiopian government became so reluctant to control the arms trade along the frontier. In 1910s, it was reported that there were about 10,000-25,000 rifles under the possession of the Anuak.

Until 1935, it seems more probable that this number must have greatly increased as supplies of firearms were continuing to the Nuer and the Anuak from the highland Ethiopians. Government officials themselves reported that the increasing number of firearms in the hands of the people threatened the security of the area. They (the officials) recommended that in order to maintain law and order in that politically troubled and volatile area the government should take measures to disarm them (Johnson, 1986). However, there were no such strong attempts of disarming the people by the central government despite open revolts of the people against local officials.

In 1911, for example, there was a serious uprising led by Nyiya Akwei who succeeded in bringing most of the Anuak along the Baro and Gilo rivers to his side. To suppress the rebellion in May-June 1912 the Governor of Ganame marched against the Anuak but he was repulsed by the Gaajok. The next year, the Governor of Gore Kebede Tesema and Jote of Sayo (who was deposed and reinstated in 1908) were ordered to subdue the Anuak on the Baro (Evans-Pritchard 1940). The force sent by Kebede suffered heavy casualty near Gambela and made a hasty retreat. The Sayo force numbering

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[3] For details regarding the theoretical foundation of the hostile attitude of peripheral societies towards the central authority and value systems, see Edward Shills, "center and Periphery" in Potter..etals (eds.) *Society and the Social Sciences: an Introduction* (London: Open Unversity,1981).
[4] Ethiopian National Archives and Library Agency,6.08.007

about five thousand was also met and defeated by a strong Anuak force at Fukumu, near Gambela, the main center of the Anuak population. Because of the continuance of the resistance, in 1914   Kebede was ordered to make another campaign on the Anuak. His men refused to move down to the lowland on the pretext that the rainy season was approaching (Levine, 1974).

The next year, Iyasu sent Majid Abdu, a Syrian Christian, who came to Ethiopia in 1906, with the task of subduing the Anuak along the Baro. He attacked the rebel chief, Akwie, with a force from the Gore and Anfillo but dissensions within his force crippled him. Burayo, who was sent to reinforce Majid, lost one hundred thirty-six men in one single engagement against Akwei's men near Itang. Majid was finally able to defeat Akwei at the battle of Itang on 21 March, 1916. Majid himself lost some fifty men. Akwei and other Anuak leaders escaped to the Sudan and continued rebellion. Majid's attempt to pursue Akwei was discontinued as he was replaced in June 1916 by Fenta, the Deputy of Ganame, Kebede's successor. Akwei died inside the Sudan in 1920 and the Ethiopian government tried a more conciliatory approach towards the Anuak and the Nuer for some time (Evans-Prichard, 1940; Johnson, 1986; Flight, 1981).

However, the Nuer and the Anuak resistance to central government continued and remained a serious problem. Still, being reluctant, the Ethiopian government stationed a few officials that were not adequate enough to force the population to submit to the rules and regulations of the central government and to end the perpetual disturbance that continuously threatened the peace and security of the regime. The officials could not establish close relations between them and local population. They were confined to their military garrison towns such as Gore. It seems probable that the central state had lost the hope of getting the people to be ruled under the centralized political administration. In 1966, the chief of the Jakao District police lamented, "... To hope that these people would be persuaded peaceful life through civil an administration is like expecting the dead to rise from the grave" (Johnson, 1986). Rather, he suggested, these districts should be placed under martial law.

After 1920, both the Sudanese and Ethiopian govern-ments began to tighten their control over their respective sides of the border. Nevertheless, the way they approach over the Nuer and Anuak was again drastically dissimilar. The British believed that because most Nuer were settled in the Sudan, all Nuer wee Sudanese. Thus throughout the 1920s the British District Commissioner at Nasir freely crossed the frontier to follow the Jikany to their cattle camps.

In 1929, the British Colonial Administration in Khartoum prohibited these unauthorized border crossings. In 1931, under the pressure of the Ethiopian government, the Sudanese government admitted Ethiopia's right to tax those Nuer settled permanently in Ethiopia (Johnson, 1986; Kymlicka, 1995; Mohmood, 1996; Flight, 1981).

At the same time, constant complaints from the British

(who claimed that absence of law and order on the Ethiopian side was also affecting their colony) forced the Ethiopian government to pay a serious attention. Finally, both governments accepted a strict observation of the border. Under such conditions, Majid Abud was reappointed with full authority over the whole of Gambela region and Illubabor provinces. The jurisdiction given to Majid included those Nuer in the ambiguous position of living in the past years.

To assert Ethiopian authority over the Nuer, Majid followed the precedent of Biru, who appointed several Nuer agents in the Sudan in order to assert Ethiopian claims to the Daga valley. In this way, Majid was able to impose some degree of government authority from 1932-34 among the Nuer and Anuak communities. He made one Nuer a *Fitawarari* and another one a *Kegnazmach*.[5] He also handed out Ethiopian clothes to other Nuer chiefs who came to settle in Ethiopia. Many Nuer wished to escape unpopular British appointed chiefs and thus they came to Ethiopia where their ambitions were satisfied (Johnson, 1986; Flight, 1981).

This process of Ethiopianization of the two communities was accompanied by cultural influence. In early 1935, the Nuer Chief of Giet Gong, who had already declared his allegiance to the Ethiopian authority, visited the British District Commissioner at Nasir dressed in an Ethiopian high landers' dress (Bahru, 1976). This made the Khartoum government to look with growing concern. Majid encouraged more and more Nuer to build permanent villages in Ethiopian territory.[6]

In such a way, Majid was able to attract and influence both communities by both military and peaceful means. The increased contact with government authorities led to the decline of conflict between the two communities and local government officials. The noblemen and others who involved, directly or indirectly, in the central institutional and value systems started to feel closer the Ethiopian authority than their forbears had ever done in the early 1930s.

Majid made series of campaigns in 1932-34 so as to assert the Ethiopian government authority over the local peoples. In the words of Bahru, "if Menilik was the colonialist bargaining peoples and lands on a conference table, Majid was the soldier who did the dirty work of giving life and substance to those claims." His vigorous attempts to achieve the integration of the Nuer and the Anuak, however, interrupted by the Italian invasion of the country in 1935 (Bahru, 1976; Johnson, 1986).

New trends, identity and dynamisms of center-periphery relations

In Ethiopia, we have a long history of establishing centers

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[5] Commander of the right wing

[6] In 1933, for example, the Sudan government proposed a grazing rights treaty placing all Nuer under Sudanese authority. In 1935, the grazing rights were ratified but shortly after the Italians occupied the entire border.

where we see the continuation of culture and civilization till today. The process of making such centers has been shaped by the history and geography of the country. In most cases, centers have been seat of power and state. Centers have been dominant in the political economy of a country. The concept of centre-periphery relations signifies inequality existing in geographical space (Shills, 1981; Stevenson, 1968; Coakley, 1992: 344; Hannerza, 2001: 1611). Centre-periphery relations remain one important facet of Ethiopian history.

Peripheries in Ethiopia are historical and geographical constructs. Their inclusion in the traditional polity was spearheaded by Menelik II's territorial expansion and incorporation. Mostly, they are the geographical outer limits of the country. Owing to the structural weakness of the centre, successive Ethiopian governments did not command effective control over the peripheries. They used indirect rule and loose administrative means for control and regulation.

Areas, where the Nuer and Anuak live were peripheral in relation to the Ethiopian state. They have been also politically unstable and sparsely populated. They have been also characterized by under development, absence of dominant religion, lowland, hot climate and traditional life.

Until the fall of the Derg, they were not well integrated to the political economy of the central state. That is, until recent times, the Nuer and Anuak were peripheral in relation to the Ethiopian state. At the same time, like any society of the Horn, they had their own centers. Yet, in the region, some centers were more powerful than others were.

In the history of center-periphery relations of Ethiopia and the Horn, there have been cooperation, confrontation, integration and conflict. Confrontations have been varied and complex. This includes, for example, localists and elites, between owners and non-owners of the means of production and trade routes.

The history of resistance of the periphery against the center has become an outstanding issue in the political history of the area under consideration. This was because, among other factors, the central state was under capacity to deal with, for example, with nomads like the Nuer (Stark, 1986; Stevenson, 1968; Tippet, 1970). In this regard, despite its economic significance and strategic location of the Gambella region and its population (Nuer and Anuak), the government of post-liberation imperial Ethiopia (1941-74) put little effort in carrying out an integrative revolution.

Imperial officials in Gambella lived their lives in a kind of exile, the discomforts of which they tried to compensate for through predatory practices. Economically, in postwar period, the highlanders replaced the expatriate traders. Infrastructure and social services were virtually non-existent, except for limited efforts by missionaries, from the 1950s, to provide education and health facilities. Mission centers were perceived as de facto organs of the state (Markakis, 2003).

In 1974 the Haile-Sellase's government was replaced by the Military Administrative Council (PMAC) also known as the *Derg*. The new government adopted socialism and embarked on radical changes in southwestern Ethiopia. The *Derg* pledged to redress imbalances between the center and the periphery. Some practical measures were taken to enhance a sense of national belonging among the Nuer and the Anuak. Social services were expanded. Attempts were also made to promote both local languages, through the literacy campaign, and the representation of locals in the regional administration. In 1978 an Anuak and a Nuer were appointed vice administrators of the Gambella District.[7]

Such efforts at local empowerment, however, were overshadowed by the regime's project of control and its modernist zeal (Donham, 2002). As in other parts of the country, the so-called Cultural Revolution violently uprooted local culture. In an attempt to weaken traditional bases of power that were perceived as delegitimizing the central government at the grass-roots level, village chiefs and influential elders were dishonored and the local culture defined as 'backward'.[8]

Thus, the political encroachment and stigmatization experienced by the border people during the imperial period was followed by the cultural encroachment of the *Derg* Regime. The political alienation of the people became more pronounced in the second half of the 1980s, when the area assumed a new strategic significance. By the second half of the 1980s, the border areas and their inhabitants became center of conflict between Ethiopia and Sudan. The Sudan peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA) launched its military campaigns against the government of Sudan from its bases in Ethiopia, whereas the various Eritrean liberation movements were supported by the successive regimes in Sudan (Johnson, 2003).

This situation resulted in the rise of the refugee phenomenon, with its massively adverse effects on the economic and political life of the people. All of the refugee camps were established in Anuak areas. Apart from the ecological costs of such a huge influx, the refugee establishment greatly undermined the local economy. Imported grains to feed the refugees had the effect of depressing the local market (Kurimoto, 1996).

Above all, the presence of armed groups facilitated the ultimate militarization of both the Nuer and Anuak society. Nothing illustrates the failure of the Derg's attempt at national integration in the region more than the irony that, by the mid-1980s, it was more rewarding to be a southern Sudanese refugee than an Ethiopian citizen was. Local

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[7]Such attempts at integration, as well as the patrimonial nature of the Derg, expressed in frequent visits to the periphery, had earned the head of state Mengistu Haile-Mariam an affective Anywaa name, Wora Ariat, 'the son of a firs born Anywaa woman', local symbolic attempt to further connect with the center.

[8]Anywaa village headmen (*kwaros*) were deposed, their blue bride wealth beads (*dimui*) were thrown into the river and bride wealth was forcibly monetized.

dissatisfaction resulted in the formation of a liberation movement, the Gambella Peoples' Liberation Movement (GPLM), which adopted the cause of a rebellious periphery against a national charter that had initially promised so much by way of an integrative revolution.

Lack of integration between the center and periphery, among other factors, in Ethiopian past urged the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which came to power in 1991, to introduce ethnic federalism. After this, highlanders' influence gradually declined. The political economy and administration of the region assumed to have equal and uniform status with the center that had never been in history.

The implementation of ethnic federalism has created a new political space and institutional design to further promote local empowerment among the Nuer and the Anuak. Accordingly, Gambella Peoples' National Regional States (GPRS) that constitutes mainly Nuer and Anuak appears to have been one of the most visible political steps ever taken by the Ethiopian state to integrate Nuer and Anuak into the Ethiopian state (Merera, 2003).

In such a way, Gambella was transformed from an obscure district to a regional state, resulting in a tremendous flow of financial resources from the federal government to the GPNRS, to meet the demands of the new political reality. This was reflected, above all, in a construction boom and in the expansion of social services. Local empowerment was also reflected in the redistribution of administrative power.

In post-1991 period, on the social scene, measures have also been taken to promote local languages, although, for practical reasons, Amharic is retained as the language of the new regional government (Perner, 1994). The three major languages of the region (Anuak, Nuer and Manjangir) are used in the schools as a medium of instruction and as a subject. The regional bureau of education has supported popular culture through printing folkloristic literature. Although developing the local culture has a long way to go.

As part of local empowerment, affirmative action has also been taken, especially in education and in the job market. As a result, educational facilities in Gambella have shown remarkable growth. The number of secondary schools rose and the capacity of the Teacher Training Institute increased. In 1997 the institute was upgraded to include junior secondary school teacher training and in 2001 it was promoted to the status of a college, with a diploma program in education and health (Dereje, 2010).

Regrettably, the successes of the federal experiment have been over shadowed by some conceptual flaws and problems of implementation. In the context of Gambella, this conceptual flaw is compounded by the failure to institutionalize and mediate competing and conflicting interests. Preoccupation with sectional interests in a multi-ethnic regional state like Gambella has precluded the evolution of a regional political community that could effectively connect, and negotiate its interests, with the

federal government (Ibid).

Finally, the main weakness of the federal experiment in the GPNRS has been the failure to form a workable political community that articulates its interest at the regional level. Unless serious efforts are made to address the legitimate claims of both the Nuer and Anuak and to rebuild trust amongst them, the viability of the regional state is likely to be further undermined and, with it, the moral and political legitimacy of the entire federal experiment.

Conclusion

The Nuer and the Anuak were incorporated into the Ethiopian state at the turn of the twentieth century, specifically after the 1902 boundary agreement between British colonial Sudan and imperial Ethiopia. At the time of incorporation, the area was inhabited by various Nilotic-speaking communities built around different modes of governance and pursuing different livelihood strategies. The agrarian Anuak had developed a more centralized political system, consisting of village states, whereas the pastoral Nuer are shifting cultivators and were more egalitarian society.

Living in a very inhospitable climate and separated from the center by precipitous escarpments, the Nuer and the Anuak scarcely attracted the attention of the outsiders. Confined to a very simple but self-sufficient material culture, the Nuer and the Anuak limited their horizon of interaction. In both communities, the tradition of violence was so high in their life that it might not be surprising if the Nuer and the Anuak had conflict with each other on one hand, and used every opportunity to resist centralization effort of the Ethiopian government on the other.

In 1941, Italian occupation ended. Imperial Ethiopia Government (1941-74) had a vital economic interest in the Gambella region but put little effort into carrying out an integrative revolution. The military-socialist regime (the Derg) that replaced the imperial regime had pledged to redress the imbalances between the center and the periphery. Some practical measures were taken to enhance a sense of national belonging among the Nuer and the Anuak communities. Yet, it is the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) that has taken more steps to integrate Nuer and Anuak into the Ethiopian state.

Conflict of Interests

The author(s) have not declared any conflict of interests.

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