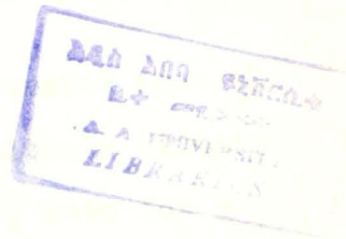


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THE ECONOMIC BASIS OF CONFLICT AMONG THE  
NUER AND ANUAK COMMUNITIES

by

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The Economic Basis of Conflict Among the  
Nuer and Anuak Communities

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The 1902 boundary agreement between Ethiopia and Great Britain brought the Anuak and the Nuer peoples living on both sides of the frontier under the rule of central government authority. However, the efforts to bring them into submission remained unsuccessful for several years.

Archival materials at the Ministry of Interior, the Illubabor Provincial Administration and the Gambella Awraja Administration testify to the preponderance of violence in the Nuer and the Anuak societies. The tradition of violence is so strongly marked in their social life that an investigation of the factors contributing to violence and the development of violent behavior may help to understand the subjects better.

The Anuak and the Nuer land which is separated from the plateau by precipitous escarpments and inhospitable climate scarcely attracted the attention of outsiders, save for a few slave raiders and elephant hunters. This naturally inhabited interaction between the Anuak and the Nuer and the highland Ethiopians, thereby, narrowing the social ties of the Anuak and the Nuer. Their self-sufficiency based on very simple material culture limited their horizon and discouraged the development of interdependence with a wider social community.

Violence Among the Nuer

The Nuer who are predominantly pastoral people had all their interests fixed on their herds. They lead a wandering life in

search of water and vegetation. Such a life nurtures qualities that enable the pastoralist to survive the hardship and the competition for grazing. Courage and skill in fighting are highly esteemed.<sup>1</sup>

One's status in a Nuer community is determined by the number of cattle he owns. Other than providing the means of livelihood, cattle is the sole means through which the Nuer pay dowry to get wives and to make other payments.

In a society where cattle plays such vital roles, the desire to acquire more of them becomes an overriding concern. As Evans - Pritchard remarked, "the Nuer fight on slight provocation and most willingly and frequently when a cow is at stake."<sup>2</sup> To cite one example among several, a dispute among Nuer clans in the district of Mor over an attempt to steal a cow had led to the death of sixteen men and the wounding of eight on May 1, 1946.<sup>3</sup>

The economic and social value attached to owning cattle greatly influence the Nuer's relationship towards each other and their neighbours. Desire for the possession of cattle led the Nuer to wage frequent warfare against neighbouring peoples and it was also a source of strife among themselves.

Nuer community regards cattle stealing as laudable. This gives rise to a chain of stealing and counter - stealing often leading to bloody conflicts even among members of the same clan. Unsettled debts, no matter how old, are claimed by the descendants

of the creditors, who in most instances take the law into their own hands and drive away with their clan.<sup>4</sup>

The decreasing of the cattle of the Nuer owing to rinderpest, especially since the late 19th century, further intensified the conflict as they attempted to make up for the loss by continual raiding.<sup>5</sup>

In the absence of firmly established institution of law and authority violence was bound to continue unchecked. Although there are mechanisms of settling disputes within the narrow confines of a tribe, such as curtailing feud by payment of cattle, there is no means of ending conflict between tribe and tribe or between a Nuer tribe and its non-Nuer neighbours. In the absence of a machinery of bringing together the parties to dispute, retribution usually took the form of **intertribal warfare**.

In the traditional institutions of the Nuer, there is no one with legislative or juridical functions. The chiefs are not invested with the authority to rule and judge. They only act as mediators, and even this, they can accomplish only when both parties to the dispute agree to end hostility.<sup>6</sup> This state of affair leaves little option for men to obtain redress except through force, thereby, increasing the incidence of violence in the society.

To cite a few of the reported cases of conflict among the Nuer: two men were killed in September 1950, in a fight between

the Nuer living on the border between Akobo and Jikao. In 1952 a clash between the Nuer in Lere, Jikao district, left six dead and sixteen men wounded,<sup>7</sup> and the Nuer of Let district killed five men from their neighbouring village that same year.<sup>8</sup>

A fight over land in Lere district in 1956 claimed the lives of thirteen men and twenty two men were wounded. Further casualty was only averted by the intervention of the police. Five men were killed in a fight over a girl in the same district in 1957.<sup>9</sup> The Shewawu and Chenchagn clans in Kuatgar district, Jikao Woreda were frequently fighting over land and several hundred men were reportedly killed in the clashes between 1956 and 1959. The chief of the Chenchagn clan, Fol Menchek, complained to government authorities on January 7, 1960, that his adversaries, the Shenwawu, were selling their cattle in the Sudan to buy arms with the aim of maintaining their supremacy in the conflict against his men.<sup>10</sup>

In 1960 a fight between the Nuer chiefs, Shol Gid of Kuatgar and Boot Wal of Wantwar (Akobo), resulted in the death of six men and the wounding of twelve before the police stopped the fight.<sup>11</sup> A similar incident was reported three years later.<sup>12</sup> Sixty-two men were killed and ninety one wounded in a big fight over land between the men of Kegnazmatch Mentob Koriom and Gelwak Rudkoch in 1965 in Jikao woreda.<sup>13</sup> A 1977 report by local officials mentioned intermitent feuds between members of thirteen clans in the districts of Kuatgar, Teilut and Jikao.<sup>14</sup>

## Violence Among the Anuak

Anuak society which is largely agricultural shows no lesser tendency towards violence. They live in large settlements along the valleys of the rivers of Baro, Aloro, Obela, Gibe, Akobo and Oboth where they scratch a living through cultivation and fishing. The Anuak are unable to keep cattle due to the inhospitable climate where the tse-tse fly is rampant. They entirely depend on the hoe for cultivation. Pack animals are unknown. The meagre rainfall and the extremely dry weather had made the Anuak entirely dependent on the few rivers in the region. There is fierce competition for control of land along the river beds, both for cultivation, fishing and settlement. These factors were responsible for much of the conflict between several Anuak villages.

Adverse weather and primitive tools of farming has kept the level of production of the Anuak society very low. Preoccupation with the daily supply of food, extreme and continuous hardship and the risks of hunger are characteristics of an Anuak community. Attempts to make up for the shortage of crops by raiding neighbouring villages are frequent.

The patterns of Anuak settlement is such that a community of tight kinship group usually numbering several hundred households live in one village. Any attack committed against a member of the village by an outsider is taken up by the whole community. A single incident between two members of different villages could spark off a protracted feud involving the whole members of villages on both sides.

This solidarity extends not only to mutual defence but also in times of aggression. All men in the community are mobilized for the frequent raids and expeditions of revenge on other villages.

Relations between Anuak communities are thus mostly characterized by mutual suspicion and antagonism. Each village looks for an opportunity to pounce on its neighbours. An assault from neighbouring villages is always expected that preemptive strikes are often taken against the expected adversary to disable it before it launched the attack. To cite one such instance among the reported cases, Ushala Arun, the chief of Shentewa village in Jor lived in constant anxiety of an imminent attack from Gnuwir, a neighbouring village. At last he decided to act first and carried an attack on Gruwer in 1957. The attackers killed six men, chased out the villagers and their chief from their homes and looted their property. In order to incapacitate their victims further they destroyed 127 fields of maize and burnt down the whole village.<sup>15</sup>

In the absence of cattle or any other surplus product and as a result of the very low level of exchange, necklaces of a particular brand of ancient beads known as the dimui had acquired a symbolic value among the Anuak society. They attach great significance to the possession of dimui. One's status in the community was determined by the amount of dimui that he owned. Almost all important transactions, including marriage, blood money and ransom were paid in dimui until very recently.

Young men who had no dimui of their own for dowry, or without relatives able to pay it for them had no hope of getting married until they procured some. Individuals or communities who were short of dimui could not settle feuds by paying compensation or get their captured folks released. Thus, in the Anuak society where the dimui played such a vital role, the desire to own as much of it as possible was very strong. Many young men who aspired to get married and to establish themselves in the community were only too eager to lay hands on some strings of dimui even if that meant getting it by force from others at considerable risks. It was not uncommon for groups of men and sometimes whole villagers to go out in force to raid other villages to plunder the much needed dimui.

Other than looting the dimui they could find in the possession of their victims, the raiding parties usually carried off large numbers of hostages mostly women and children, to be freed only on payment of certain amount of dimui per hostage.<sup>16</sup> The assaulted villages would not rest until they revenged the injury and humiliation inflicted upon them. A series of attacks and counter-attacks ensue as a result.

The political institution of the Anuak was also another factor which increased the magnitude of violence. Each Anuak village had its own headman, a quaaro or nyiya. These headmen were treated with great respect and attention. However, the respect they commanded was only external. In reality they were not bestowed with real authority. Because of the rudimentary technology which

severely limits productive capacity the society produces no surplus of wealth which could be concentrated in the hands of the chiefs to be used for consolidation of authority. Without their own independent resources to reward services, the Anuak chiefs were unable to maintain a more permanent following. Their orders were only accepted in as long as the villagers volunteered to accept them. Chiefs did not hear cases or made decisions. They could only act with the approval of the villagers. In short the Anuak chief was "a puppet moved by the fingers of popular will."<sup>17</sup>

The chief could only remain in office as long as the villagers saw advantages in his staying. His people would only find him worthwhile if he was able to entertain them with food and drinks frequently. Both the quaaro and the nyiya kept a large number of courtiers in their compounds. The guards of the quaaro were known as the jubura (meaning men of the palace), and those of the nyiya were called the juwod. These guards expected to be fed regularly at the expense of the chiefs and they had to be constantly rewarded with dimui and other gifts to remain loyal. Evans-Pritchard wrote in 1947 that an Anuak chief had already killed eighteen oxen from his small herd within the first few months of taking office.<sup>18</sup>

The moment a chief ceased to fulfil these onerous demands of his people and retainers or displeased them by going contrary to their wishes, they lose interest in him and would prepare for his removal. The quaaro who had lost the favour of his people would be beaten and expelled from his village.<sup>19</sup> A quaaro could easily be removed from office and be replaced by one of his kinsmen by a

direct action of the people. The practice of expelling unwanted chiefs and replacing them by new ones is known as the agem.

The nyiya, in theory, is not subject to dismissal by the people. However, the people have a way of getting rid of an undesired nyiya. One method employed against an unpopular nyiya is total boycott. The people would ignore the nyiya. They cease to visit him or to have anything to do with him. The isolated nyiya had no choice but to migrate to another village. If the nyiya refused to move, the people would invite one of his brothers who is entitled to the office to rise up against him. If this too fails to force down the nyiya the whole community would migrate and join a neighbouring nyiya, leaving the undesired nyiya in a deserted village. Such was the case in Piybago district where the people of a village abandoned their nyiya Kot and moved in mass to the next village where Kot's brother, Ugala, was a nyiya.<sup>20</sup>

The removal of chiefs by their "subjects" was so frequent that Evans-Pritchard found out by the end of the Second World War that almost all the villages along the Gilo river had a history of such experience.<sup>21</sup> Among the few cases reported by local government officials in the later years we find that in July 1960, a village in Itang chased out its chief and replaced him by another man of their choice.<sup>22</sup> In April 1962 a chief called Agule Akway appealed to the government that his younger brother, Gilo Akway, had forced him out of office and subjected him to humiliating treatment in front of the whole village.<sup>23</sup> The villagers of Abol drove out their chief Bekit Gilo, and replaced him by Utong Nyiguwo in August 1964.<sup>24</sup> Girazmach Oomed Away, a chief around Itang, appealed to government

authorities in Gambella in June 1972 that his retainers had aroused the people against him, looted his property, and had placed another chief in his house after driving out his family.<sup>25</sup> Of the twenty registered chiefs in Jikao in 1951 all of them had been in their posts for less than ten years, and half of this number had only been in the office for less than five years.<sup>26</sup>

The removal of chiefs was carried out smoothly only when there was a consensus among the people. However, there were times when the community was divided between supporters and opponents of the incumbent chief. Conflict between the rival groups was inevitable under such circumstances. Much bloodshed and sometimes whole destruction of villages were caused by bitter feuds between rival factions in a village. Evans-Pritchard mentions such conflicts in the 1930s where twelve men had been killed at the village of Lere, and the community was so bitterly divided that it split into two. There were also cases at Thony and Centhoa in which twelve men were killed in similar fightings. The whole villages of Ugin and Umiel were dispersed by such fights in 1935 and 1940 respectively.<sup>27</sup> Fighting broke out in the village of Fimili in Gambella woreda between supporters and opponents of the chief in June 1957, in which two people were killed and seventy three houses and thirty-four granaries full of grain were burnt. Members of the opposing group sought the aid of the neighbouring village of Finkiwo and there ensued a protracted conflict between the two factions.<sup>28</sup>



The chiefs whose positions were insecure tried to maintain their office by playing on internal division within the community.<sup>29</sup> A more divided village was less dangerous to the position of the chief and greater internal division would enable the chief to manipulate the various groups by posing as an arbiter.

A village that was involved in a deadly feud with other villages may not also concentrate on internal matters. Thus, it was to the advantages of chiefs to perpetuate conflicts with external 'enemies' to divert the attention of their people from internal problems.

The best guarantee for chiefs to stay in office was, of course, to keep their people contented with frequent feasts and to ensure the loyalty of his courtiers with generous presents. This entailed much expense which was beyond the means of most chiefs. Given the extremely impoverished state of the Anuak economy even the richest chief could not go on giving feasts of meat and distributing gifts for long. The chiefs would thus resort to raiding other villages for the acquisition of property which would enable them to meet their expenses. These raids would also provide opportunity for many young men who were desperate for dimui, to acquire some. The chief who led his men into successful raiding expeditions would increase his popularity and ensure his survival in office.<sup>30</sup>

All these factors kept the Anuak society in a state of continuous turmoil. To mention a few of the reported cases of feud between Anuak villages: the chiefs of Chinthua and Fingago in Jor led their people in a joint attack against the village of Abuwa in

Gog district in February 1950. They killed six men, captured fifty three men and over two hundred sheep and goats and burnt about one hundred huts. Further destruction was only averted by the arrival of one hundred troops from Gore. In April 1950 the chiefs of Kina and Uyalo attacked a neighbouring Sudanese village and killed five men, and captured ten men and four rifles. Violent conflicts between the villagers of Fignewo and Pino; between Abol and Fignewo; and between Powol and Pino, in Itang, were reported in 1953.<sup>31</sup>

The people of Finkiwo village in Gambella woreda made a surprise attack on the village of Fimili in 1958. They burnt the whole village and returned with much booty. An Anuak village on the Sudanese border carried a devastating raid on two villages in Jor and Gog woreda in 1966. They killed sixteen men, took forty four hostages, captured a large number of cattle and burnt three hundred sixty seven houses and one hundred nineteen granaries.<sup>32</sup>

The absence of a secure atmosphere which hindered productive activities and the enormous destructions of lives and property in these continuous conflicts left the already meagre Anuak production in an even more abysmal state, which in turn created a vicious circle by which more conflicts were generated in desperation to meet the food shortages. The impact of the turmoil on the Anuak economy could be discerned from some of the reports of the local authorities.

In July 1974 it was reported from the Itang Woreda Administration Office that several villages in the district were involved in deadly feuds against each other and the destruction was so great that they were unable to pay the government tax due for the year.<sup>33</sup> A few months later, the Woreda governor wrote to the Gambella Awraja Administration Office:

በኖሪና ፊኖ፣ ፍሪና ፈቋ፣ አሜያና ፊጃጃ፣ ፍክቶና  
ፈላይንግ፣ ፊጃጃና አጃጃጃ ቀበሌ ኦዘቦቸ ወካካል በየጊዜው ገጭት  
እየተፈጠረ የጠዘ ሰው ጎይወትና ንብረት ሲጠፋ በተፈጠረው የጭ በቀል  
እርስ በርስ ጥቂት ለጥፋት ስለሚከታተሉ የእርሻ ማሳጥ ላይ  
ጠጥተው እንደሰጧቸው ለማረስ ባለው ገላጭ በጠላት እየተሾሉ ስለሆኑ  
ወኖራቸው ይታያል<sup>34</sup>

The Anuak-Nuer Feud

In addition to the internecine conflict that raged within each of these communities, a much greater enmity characterized the relationship between the Nuer and the Anuak. Intermittent fighting had been going on between these two violent neighbours for several generations. The hostility between the two was such that no "Nuer dared to cross Anuak territory or vice-versa without risking his life".<sup>35</sup> Garkot Nuar, a Nuer chief who himself had led several battles against the Anuak, admitted to a government sponsored reconciliation committee in 1980 that they used to attack any Anuak they happened to see and that the Anuak also missed no opportunity to kill the Nuer.<sup>36</sup>

Given the slender means of political control in both of these neighbouring communities their boundaries were indefinite.

This of course, gave room for conflicting claims over much desired territories.

Considering the Nuer attachment to cattle and the vast space that pastoral occupation requires, it is no wonder that they resort to extreme aggression for control of pasture. They have been pushing the Anuak towards the east through successive raids.<sup>37</sup> The conflict between these two neighbouring peoples started to grow worse when the Nuer were forced by poverty of their stock to supplement their pastoral livelihood with cultivation and fishing.<sup>38</sup> The Anuak who jealously guarded their cultivable fields and fishing grounds **fiercly** resisted the Nuer encroachment.

Unable to sustain themselves on their cattle alone and yet not fully used to cultivation, the Nuer most often opted to meet their needs by plundering Anuak crops. The Nuer's predominant preoccupation with pastoralism which emphasised on unlimited access to pasture for their herds was mostly met at the risk of destruction of the cultivated fields of the Anuak. An Anuak elder complained a few years ago:

አኝ ዋኮቸ በጣም አናርሳለን፡፡ እትክልተም እንተከላለን  
በኑዌርቸ በኩል ገን ከበረተ በሰተደርባ ብቻ ነው የሚቆሩት  
ሰለጣይሠሩ አይጠገሱም፡፡ በከረምት ሱዳን ከርጫው በኋላ በበገ  
ከብ ተቻቸውን ብቻ እየነዩ ይመጡና እኛ ያረሰነውን እየዘረፏ  
ያሳቸገሩናል፡፡ ከብ ተቻቸውንም በአሀላቸን ላይ ይለቁበታል፡፡<sup>39</sup>

Nuer violation of Anuak property were reciprocated by an equally serious Anuak threat on the Nuer's most important and sacred possessions - cattle. Much of the Anuak land is unsuitable for cattle breeding. Neither could they make up for this disadvantage through the market owing to their lack of the means to make purchases. Under these circumstances, most of the Anuak people almost entirely depended on what could be looted or stolen from the Nuer to satisfy their meat requirements. These mutual infringements on each others interests inevitably resulted in embittering the relationship between these two volatile neighbours.

Although the Nuer had been on the offensive at first, a sort of parity seem to have been established later.

With more and more firearms coming into their hands by the beginning of the 20th century, the Anuak were able to mount massive counter-attacks against them. The Anuak conducted serious raids against the Nuer in 1906, 1911 and 1931.<sup>40</sup> In 1906 alone four bands of raiders of between fifty and two hundred men attacked the Nuer.<sup>41</sup> The Anuak nyiya, Alimi, invaded the Nuer in 1910. The Nuer counterattacked and a big battle which lasted for three weeks took place at Jor in which Alimi was killed. His successor Akway Sham made similar ventures with three hundred followers armed with rifles in 1911.<sup>42</sup>

Among the more recent cases of Anuak and Nuer conflicts the following were reported. In 1946 the Anuak made a surprise attack against a Nuer village and killed thirteen men, captured

one hundred fifty cattle, and took hostage of several women and children.<sup>43</sup> In 1950 the Anuak in Jor ambushed a Nuer group who had come in search of pasture from Jikao. Fifteen men were killed in the fighting and a large herd of Nuer cattle and sheep was taken.<sup>44</sup> In March 1960/<sup>an</sup> Anuak group from Jor attacked the Nuer in Akobo and killed thirteen men, wounded four and looted their property. The Nuer retaliated a few weeks later and killed several Anuak. In spite of the warning that Ras Andargachew Mesai, the Minister of Interior, passed to the belligerents, the feud continued and a further twenty-two people were killed and over three hundred huts burnt in a two days battle on June 16 and 17, 1960.<sup>45</sup> Two men were killed and one wounded in a fight between the Nuer and the Anuak over a fishing ground in Jikao on December 23, 1960.<sup>46</sup> Four raids by the Nuer of the Lere district in Jikao on the Anuak of Berhanena Selam area were reported in 1974. Eight men were killed and eleven wounded in a fight between the Nuer and Anuak refugees from **Southern** Sudan living in Itang in September 1975.<sup>47</sup>

Forty-eight men were killed and 1515 cattle looted in an attack by the Nuer of Jikao and Akobo on the Anuak of Jor district in 1976. The Nuer made a similar raid a year later and plundered large numbers of cattle.<sup>48</sup> Another clash between the Nuer and the Anuak in Itang Woreda in January 1977 claimed the lives of at least fourteen men.<sup>49</sup> A long standing dispute between the Nuer and the Anuak over a particularly suitable land for cultivation at Angella, on the Gilo bank, led to a bitter fighting that lasted for three

days in 1972. The casualty on both sides was so heavy that Angella remained deserted for the next seven years. When the Nuer returned to this village in 1979 the Anuak made a devastating attack on them in which they killed thirty men, wounded twenty-three and captured five hundred forty seven cattle.<sup>50</sup>

### Resistance of the Nuer and the Anuak to Government Authority

The task of administering such turbulent people posed great difficulties to the Ethiopian government. The idea of government authority or any restraint which clashed with their own interests were alien to the fiercely independent minded Nuer and Anuak. Used to political institutions that did not demand too much sacrifice they considered government authority too irksome for their taste.

In addition, one must also keep in mind that the Nuer and the Anuak lived in closed communities where a very low level of technology had practically limited exchange to an insignificant level. Hostile climate discouraged Ethiopians from the highlands, or Arabs from northern Sudan from venturing into Anuak and Nuer lands. This seclusion from the broader societies, and their experience of perpetual enmity with their immediate neighbours, was probably responsible for the hostile attitude that the Nuer and Anuak communities had developed towards outsiders.

Attempts to exercise some degree of political control over the Gambella region were made following the 1902 Anglo-Ethiopian Agreement for the delimitation of the Ethio-Sudanese boundary.

The area south of the bank of the Baro river was being administered from Gore, while the northern part was put under Sayo. The kind of control that government officials exercised over the Nuer and the Anuak until 1934, however, did not go beyond the sending of a few tribute gathering expeditions that were no different from raids.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to the Anuak and the Nuer resistance to submit to government authority; the rivalry between the Gore and Sayo authorities, the inability of the government to deploy a strong force that would ensure its control, the general political instability that prevailed in Ethiopia following the end of Menlik's reign and the disinclination of government officials to venture into the malaria-infested plains, made the establishment of strong and permanent administration impossible. Kagnazmach Mejid Abud claimed that as late as the 1930s no government official knew anything about the people and the area. "They were not reached by officials. No one in the government knew where the place was or what the people were as if it was a foreign land." On the condition of the border area, Mejid wrote: "...The people did not know the existence of an Ethiopian government or its flag... when I went there I was regarded a simple stranger"<sup>52</sup> Walker, the British Consul at Gore, wrote in 1919 that "...no responsible Abyssinian official has any conception of the conditions prevailing there and where all are ignorant all are indifferent."<sup>53</sup>

Ethiopian presence was made to be felt only through periodic raids that were carried out from Gore and Sayo. These raids and punitive expeditions were however, ineffective in pacifying

the Anuak and the Nuer who constantly defied Ethiopian authority. A tribute gathering expedition from Sayo was met with a fierce Nuer resistance in 1912: over two hundred fifty men were killed from the government's side and the Nuer lost more than one hundred men killed and another one hundred captured.<sup>54</sup>

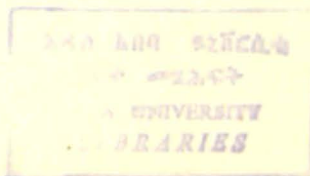
A particularly serious uprising flared up in 1911, when nyiya Akway Sham succeeded in rallying most of the Anuak along the Baro and Gilo rivers to his side. He stopped paying tribute to the Ethiopian government and made commercial activity between the highland and the Gambella station Dejazmach Kebede Tessemaof Gore and Dejazmach Jote of Sayo were ordered in 1913 to suppress the rebellion. The expedition sent by Dejazmach Kebede suffered heavy casualty near Gambella station and made a hasty retreat to Burye. The Sayo force numbering about five thousand which was led by Jote's son Solomon, was met by a strong Anuak force at Fukumu, about 40 kms. from Gambella. Solomon was defeated and one of Jote's brothers was killed at the battle. In March 1914, Dejazmach Kebede the governor of Gore 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.<sup>55</sup>

In 1915, Lij Iyasu sent Mejid Abud to the Anuak country to suppress the rebellion. Although Mejid was able to win the support of some of the Abobo Anuak including the important nyiya, Udial (also known as Aba Chale), to his side, the rest of the Anuak under the rebel chief Akway Sham put up stiff resistance. Fitawrari Burayu who was sent to reinforce Mejid lost one hundred thirty-six men in one singel engagment against Akway's men around Itang. Mejid was finally able to defeat Akway Sham at the battle of Itang

on March 21, 1916. According to Mejid's account the castrated bodies of five hundred and thirty-one Anuak were counted at the end of the battle. Mejid himself lost some fifty men. Akway Sham fled to Akobo and continued with the rebellion. Mejid's attempt to pursue the rebel was discontinued because he was relieved of his post and ordered to place authority to Fitawrari Fanta the deputy of Dejazmach Ganame.<sup>56</sup>

The condition remained unsettled during the following years. Constant complaints from the British who claimed that the absence of law and order on the Ethiopian side was also affecting their colony, finally forced the government to pay serious attention. Full authority over the whole of Gambella region was given to Kagnazmach Mejid Abud, thus ending the Gore - Sayo rivalry. In the campaigns that he conducted from 1932 to 1934, he was able to impose some degree of government authority,<sup>57</sup> This vigerous attempt to achieve the integration of the Nuer and the Anuak was, however, cut short by the Italian invasion of 1935-1941.

A relatively more serious effort was made in the post-liberation period. Through a reorganization of the administrative structure, Gambella was made first into a woreda and later an awraja administrative unit with officials of the various departments posted permanently in the region. However, the Anuak and Nuer defiance to central authority still remained a serious problem. The government forces stationed in the area were not adequate enough to force the population to submit to government rule and to end the perpetual disturbance that continuously threatened the peace and security



of the region. There was still no close contact between government officials and the population. Government representatives largely remained confined to the town of Gambella and the few other woreda posts. Whatever attempts were made to impose government authority were most of the time successfully challenged.

The following could be cited among the reported cases of rebellion in the post liberation period. In December 1950, the Akobo Nuer attacked the police station there. Four Nuer were killed and thirty-five houses burnt in the fighting.<sup>58</sup> The awraja governor of Gambella wrote to the provincial governor in August 1951, that there were sixteen rebel chiefs with eight hundred thirty followers armed with rifles in Jor district and that they were spreading the rebellion into the Akobo area as well.<sup>59</sup>

Six chiefs in Gog district mobilized their people and attacked the police station on July, 1952. The police-men were forced to retreat to Gambella town after fighting for four days. The rebels burnt sixty-eight houses and captured fourteen government rifles and other property. An attempt by a larger force from Gambella town was also defeated. The rebellion was only calmed after a reinforcement of one hundred troops were sent from Gore. The chief of the Illubabor police wrote during this time that the whole of the Anuak would have risen in rebellion had the reinforcement from Gore not been sent in time.<sup>60</sup>

The Anuak of Fukumu district in Itang rose up in rebellion in 1955. They were soon joined by most of the other Anuak in Itang.

The rebels cut off government communication between Gambella and Jikao. They disregarded the amnesty proclamation from the Ministry of Interior in 1960, and the situation was only brought under control in 1961, after two hundred troops were sent from Gore. Even then some of the rebels remained at large and continued to harass government forces.<sup>61</sup>

The chief of Filmello in Itang, attacked the police station at Itang in 1964. Reinforcement was flown from Addis Ababa to repulse the attack. The rebel chief escaped and joined other rebels in Fukumu and continued to threaten the security of Itang and Gambella districts. These rebels were freely operating within 10 kms. of Gambella town.<sup>62</sup> About thirty young men were being recruited from each village by their chiefs and sent to join the rebels.<sup>63</sup>

Two Nuer chiefs, Kegnazmach Lual Ret of Shewawu and Fol Shay of Chenchagn reported to government officials in 1965 that the whole district was in a state of rebellion. The latter admitted that he was unable to dissuade his people from rebelling.<sup>64</sup> Thirteen policemen sent to enforce tax payment were killed on February 24, 1966 at Diar in Jikao by the Shewawu clan of the Nuer.<sup>65</sup> The situation had so deteriorated that year that the people of Jikao, Jor and Gog districts refused to pay taxes.<sup>66</sup> The chief of the Jikao woreda police lamented "... To hope that these people would be persuaded, peaceful life through civilian administration is like expecting the dead to rise from the grave". He suggested that these districts be placed under martial law.<sup>67</sup> The secretary of the Akobo woreda administration office reported on December 7, 1967, that he was unable to collect taxes in his

area because, "... all the people had taken to the bush."<sup>68</sup> Similar conditions were reported in Itang in 1969, and in Shentewa district in Gog and Jor woreda, in 1971.<sup>70</sup>

One major source of friction between the government and the people was the government's attempt to maintain law and order by interfering in traditional feuds and disturbances. The Nuer and the Anuak who were used to having their way were irritated by government interference to impose the rule of law by limiting their freedom of action. Policemen were frequently shot at by whole villagers while attempting to stop fightings among the people or when trying to apprehend criminals.<sup>71</sup> Seventeen policemen were killed between 1950 and 1959 while on such duties. Police demands for food and the labour of the local population to carry their goods and row boats ended in violent disagreements. When asked to stop their hostility towards the police, the Anuak were reported to have replied "... let them not come to us and we won't go after them"

Government interference in traditional institutions exasperated the tension between the people and the government. Local officials saw the frequent changes of chiefs as a disstablizing factor. The removal of chiefs with whom they had established good working relationship, some of whom were also already given titles by the Emperor, was particularly annoying to the officials. The appeal of deposed chiefs seeking government help to be reinstated was overwhelming. Above all, the government officials were worried by the magnitude of violence that the removal of chiefs caused. Thus, they interferred to maintain chiefs in their positions. These

attempts were almost always 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.

Attempts to collect taxes were most of the time resisted. In fact, no taxes were collected from the Nuer and the Anuak in the post-liberation period until 1960, save for a few cattle that were collected by local officials in the form of tribute. Attempt to introduce the zelan gibir (nomad tax) in 1955 was abandoned because the Nuer refused to have their cattle counted.<sup>73</sup> The 3 birr per adult tax that was instituted in 1960 was more often rejected in spite of the twenty per cent commission that the government paid to the chiefs that helped in the collection.

With their hostile attitude towards authority and having very little experience of government impositions, the Nuer and the Anuak saw no reason why they should pay taxes. They considered paying taxes no different, from being robbed. The woreda governor of Gog and Jor mentioned an interesting incident in June 1972, at Ujalo district. He wrote that he went to Ujalo and told the people that they had not paid taxes for the last eight years and that they must pay at least what is due for three years. They refused and the woreda governor lowered his demand to a payment for two years, and when this was again refused he went down to a one year's payment. One of the men stood up and shaking his spear asked the woreda governor, "have you given us your daughter in marriage? What kind of dowry are you demanding from us?" After this the whole crowd turned hostile and the woreda governor and his men were dishonorably driven out of the village.<sup>74</sup>

The availability of large quantities of firearms in the hands of the Anuak and the Nuer enabled them to easily defy government authority. As early as 1911, it was reported that between 10,000 and 25,000 rifles were in the possession of the Anuak.<sup>75</sup> This number must have greatly increased in later days, particularly after the Italian invasion when large quantities of arms were left behind by the Italians. Fresh supplies of arms were also reaching the Anuak and the Nuer from the highlands. The chief of the police force in Illubabor Province reported in September 1952, that arms were reaching the Anuak from Kelem in Wollega, through Anfillo and Gidamo.<sup>76</sup> The governor of Gambella awraja wrote in July 1951 that sixteen rebel chiefs in Jor district had eight hundred thirty rifles between them.<sup>77</sup> Government authorities repeatedly complained that the people were able to continually threaten the security of the area because they were armed, and suggested that the government take measures to disarm them.<sup>78</sup>

While the difficulties of imposing central authority over the Nuer and the Anuak were understandable, the weakness on the part of the central government were also no less responsible for keeping the area in a perpetual state of disorder. The difficulties of living in the inhospitable climate of Gambella scarcely attracted competent civil servants. Those that were forced to take up assignments in the area spent most of their time either in Addis Ababa or in Gore, appealing to be transferred to more suitable places. Little attention was paid to maintaining law and order and to administering the area properly.

Communication in Gambella was extremely poor that government authorities rarely went out of their posts. The hazards of wading through the malaria infested marshy land covered with tall grass was so great that security forces sent to calm rebellions were often unable to reach the area in time. The police force deployed to enforce the law was, in any case, so inadequate compared to <sup>the</sup> magnitude of the unrest that they rarely dared to move out of their posts.

The inability of the government to expand the infrastructure and to make other efforts to develop the region made all attempts at exercising control fruitless. The government's expectation to integrate the Nuer and the Anuak would have been easily achieved by changing their mode of living. Their hostile attitude towards government and towards a broader social community could have been changed, among other things, by developing interdependence through an increased level of production and exchange. Gambella town remained the only centre of market for the whole awraja. It would thus be naive to expect a change in the attitude of a people so confined to their natural environment. It was not therefore surprising if the Nuer and the Anuak saw no use in a government and used every opportunity to challenge it.

NOTES

1. E.E. Evans-Pritchard, "The Nuer of the Southern Sudan", in M. Fortes and E.E. Evans - Pritchard (eds.), African Political Systems (London: OUP, 1940), p.291; E.E. Evans-Pritchard, The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People (London, O.U.P., 1940), pp.25-6.
2. Ibid., p.49.
3. Illubabor Province Administration Office Archive (hereafter Metu), 3/17, letter of the Gambella Security Office to Illubabor Province Administrative Office, 1/7/1946.
4. Interview: Jikao, 14/2/1983.
5. Evans-Pritchard, The Nuer..., p.69; Daryll Forde and Mary Douglas "Primitive Economies" in George Dalton (ed.) Tribal and Peasant Economies. New York, 1967, p.16.
6. Evans-Pritchard, "The Nuer of the Southern Sudan", pp.278-293.
7. Metu, 3/3 Report of the Gambella Administration Meeting, 20 November, 1959.
8. Metu, 2/240.
9. Metu, 3/3.
10. Gambella Awraja Administration Office Archive (hereafter Gambella), 3/17; Metu, 2/240.
11. Metu, 3/3.
12. Metu, /10.
13. Gambella, 3/17.
14. Ibid., 3/1/1977.
15. Ibid., 22/2/1957.
16. Interview: Ukello Ugotu, Abobo 13.2.1983. He said that three strings of dimui were the usual amount demanded to free a hostage.
17. Evans-Pritchard, "Further Observations on the Political System of the Anuak", Sudan Notes and Records, v.28 (1947), p.95.
18. Ibid., p.78; It had been suggested that this system of redistribution served as a leveling mechanism by distroying the possibilities of accumulation. See for instance, Manning Nash, "The Organization of Economic Life", in George Dalton (ed.) Tribal and Peasant Economies, New York,

- 1967, p.9, who states "Most peasant and primitive societies have a way of scrambling wealth to inhibit reinvestment in technical advance, and this prevents crystallization of class lines on economic base."
19. Interview Kidanemariam Woldemariam, Zewde Debale and Amente Multum, 1983.
  20. Interview: Ukello Ugotu.
  21. Evans-Pritchard, "Further Observations...", p.12.
  22. Gambella, 3/17, letter of the Gambella Awraja Administration Office to Illubabor Administrative Office July 13, 1970.
  23. Ibid., May 7, 1962.
  24. Ibid., Appeal by Bekit Gillo on 2 October 1964, to Gambella Woreda Administrative Office.
  25. Metu, 1/2 Ye Gambella Awraja Gizat Balabatoch,
  26. Ibid.
  27. Evans-Pritchard, "Further Observations...", pp.92-3.
  28. Gambella, 3/17, Gambella Awraja Administrative Office to the Ministry of Interior.
  29. Evans-Pritchard, "Further Observations...", p.77.
  30. Interview: Amente Multum.
  31. Metu, 3/3.
  32. Metu, 3/17, Report on 19/3/1966.
  33. Gambella, 79/Itang, The secretary of Itang Woreda to Gambella Awraja Office, 7/7/1974.
  34. Ibid., Itang Woreda governor's report, 7/11/1974; The longstanding feud between the people of Fol and Fino, Fol and Fukidi, Emedo and Fragnmawo, Foktok and Fuldeng, Fignmagn and Agnwagn has already claimed the lives of several people and caused the destruction of much property. They seek each other for destruction. The conflict has now reached such a stage that they are unable to go out in the open and cultivate their fields. They are thus forced to live in hiding from each other.

35. A report by Major Wondirad Bayene, the Awraja administrator to a reconciliation committee, 30 January 1980.
36. Statement of Garkot Nuar to the Reconciliation Committee, 30 January 1980.
37. Bahru Zewde, "Relations Between Ethiopia and the Sudan on the Western Ethiopian Frontier, 1898-1935", Phd. Thesis, (University of London, 1976), p.11; Evans-Pritchard, The Nuer..., p.133.
38. Evans-Pritchard, "Economic Life of the Nuer Cattle", Sudan Notes and Records, Vol. XX (1937), p.209.
39. Akugn Abella (an Akuak representative), speech to the Reconciliation Committee Meeting, Gambella, 30 January 1980. We farm very much. But the Nuer scratch only a few plots at the back of their kraal. Since they do not work hard they usually are short of food. They spend the rainy season in the Sudan and return in the dry season to plunder what we have produced. They also let their cattle graze over our crops.
40. Majid Abud, "The Legal Settlement of Western Ethiopian Boundary (Gambella)", (translated and Annotated by Zerai Bocuregion in 1971), pp.3-10 (in the Amharic text).
41. U.K. FO. 401/9, Cromer to Grey, Cairo, April 28, 1906, Cited in ibid.
42. Majid, p.7.
43. Gambella, 3/17, Gambella woreda office to Illubabor provincial office, 2/7/1946.
44. Metu, 3/3.
45. Gambella, 3/17, telegram from Akobo Police to the Ministry of Interior.
46. Gambells, 3/17, 12/1/1960.
47. 79/Itang.
48. Report by the Gog and Jor Youth Association, 16/4/1978.
49. 39/Itang, report by Itang Woreda Office, 17/1/1977.
50. Report by Major Wondirad Beyene, 30,1,1980.
51. Bahru Zewde, p, 111.
52. Majid Abud, p.11 and 14.

53. Quoted in Bahru Zewde, p.256.
54. Ibid., p.147.
55. Ibid., pp.134-5; Majid Abud, pp.10.11.
56. Ibid., pp.17-28; Bahru Zewde, pp.140-4.
57. Majid Abud, p.12 (Anharic text).; Bahru Zewde, pp.164-5.
58. Metu, 3/3.
59. Ministry of Interior Archive (hereafter M.I.), /42/467, letter of Kignazmach Asfaw Abeje (Awraja Governor) to Dejazmach Tassew Wallellu, 3/8/1951.
60. Ibid., Report by the Provincial Police chief to Police Headquarter, 26 September, 1952 and October 1952.
61. Gambella, 23/3, Report on the Security situation in Gambella by a study group of the Ministry of Interior.
62. Ibid.
63. Metu, 2/13, letter of Colonel Lemma G/Mariam (Awraja governor), to the Ministry of Interior, 8/1/1965.
64. Gambella, 23/3.
65. Gambella, 17/3, Jikao Woreda governor to Gambella Police Chief, 22/3/1966.
66. Ibid., Gambella governor to the provincial office, 20/4/1966. Gambella, 79 Gibir Assebaseb-Zelan, Awraja governor to Provincial office, 19/4/1966.
67. Gambella, 17/3, Jikao Woreda police to Gambella Awraja Police Chief, 15/4/1966.
68. Ibid., Akobo Woreda secretary to Gambella Awraja office, 7.12.1967.
69. Gambella, 7/79 Gibir Assebaseb-Zelan Itang Woreda governor to the Woreda police chief, 23.4.1969.
70. Gambella, 7/79 Gibir Assebaseb-Gog and Jor, Report by the Woreda governor, 7.7.1972.
71. Metu, 3/3.
72. Report by the Illubabor police chief, 14/1/1960.

73. Metu, 318/3, Report to a meeting held at the Provincial Administrative Office on 30.1.1956.
74. Gambella, 71/79 Tax Collection - Gog and Jor, Report by the Woreda governor, 7.7.1972.
75. Cited in Bahru Zewde, p.112.
76. M.I., 42/467, Report by the Illutabor Province Police Chief, 26.9.1951.
77. Ibid., Kegnazmach Asfaw Abeje to Dejazmach Tassew Wallelum 3.8.1951.
78. Ibid., Report by the Illubabor Province Police chief, 26.9.1952; Metu, 3/3, Colonel Tekeste Habte (Illubabor Police Chief) to the Commander of the Imperial Police Force, 10.8.1959.

73. Metu, 318/3, Report to a meeting held at the Provincial Administrative Office on 30.1.1956.
74. Gambella, 71/79 Tax Collection - Gog and Jor, Report by the Woreda governor, 7.7.1972.
75. Cited in Bahru Zewde, p.112.
76. M.I., 427467, Report by the Illutabor Province Police Chief, 26.9.1951.
77. Ibid., Kegnasmach Asfaw Abeje to Dejazmach Tassew Wallelum 3.8.1951.
78. Ibid., Report by the Illubabor Province Police chief, 26.9.1952; Metu, 3/3, Colonel Tekeste Habte (Illubabor Police Chief) to the Commander of the Imperial Police Force, 10.8.1959.

73. Metu, 318/3, Report to a meeting held at the Provincial Administrative Office on 30.1.1956.
74. Gambella, 71/79 Tax Collection - Gog and Jor, Report by the Woreda governor, 7.7.1972.
75. Cited in Bahru Zewde, p.112.
76. M.I., 42/467, Report by the Illutabor Province Police Chief, 26.9.1951.
77. Ibid., Kegnazmach Asfaw Abeje to Dejazmach Tassew Wallelum 3.8.1951.
78. Ibid., Report by the Illubabor Province Police chief, 26.9.1952; Metu, 3/3, Colonel Tekeste Habte (Illubabor Police Chief) to the Commander of the Imperial Police Force, 10.8.1959.