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Named and Lived: Identity, Memory, and the Domestic Slave Experience in Shäwa (Ethiopia), ca. 1830s to 1943

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Abstract

This article examines the historical background of domestic slavery in Ethiopia, offering a reconstruction of enslaved domestic life within the regional and local—history of Shäwa. Centering on the practice of renaming the enslaved individuals, the study explores the social implications of this phenomenon, and its significance within Ethiopia's broader historical context. The integration of oral narratives to achieve a nuanced analysis sheds light on how slave-naming practices have been preserved, transmitted, and embedded within the wider Ethiopian memory and the evolving field of slavery studies. Drawing on historical accounts from European travelers, oral testimonies from central and North-eastern Shawa particularly those of formerly enslaved such as Ato Zäwde Näsibu of Ankobär and the domestic slave life witness, Ǝmməḥoy Bəzunäš Təʾəzazu of Addis Aläm—the article illuminates key dimensions of domestic slavery. The 1830s are selected as a focal period because the available sources vividly reflect the lived realities of domestic slavery in the study area. Likewise, 1943 marks a critical point of reference, as it was the year in which the 1942 Imperial edict abolishing slavery began to be implemented across Ethiopia, including in the region understudy. Through this approach, the article aims to deepen understanding of Ethiopia's complex history of slavery and the long-term effects on the social dynamics of Ethiopia.

Keywords: Ethiopia, Shawa, domestic slavery, slave life

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Introduction

Ethiopia had exhibited a mosaic of slaving systems, prominently featuring domestic slavery and slave trade. The acquisition of slaves (Darkwah, 1975) involved raiding, kidnapping, war captives, the payment of tributes, or the gift of enslaved individuals. The practice varied across Ethiopian societies and times. Without an apologetic pattern of argumentation, that tends to relativize the cruelty intrinsic to enslavement practices, suffice to underline that the Ethiopian case presents different nuances: in particular, enslaved individuals within the realm of domestic slavery possessed certain rights not available in other forms of slavery.

In the Atlantic model, although it can be applied for different phenomena, including slavery and many others but keeping in mind our concern is the part dealing with slavery, the social death thesis (Paterson, 1982) often contrasted with the absorption thesis deployed for African societies as Lindsay (2020) and Miers and Kopytoff (1977) significantly underlined. The conventional notion of 'deprivation of freedom' demands a focused exploration, as the term 'freedom' according to Williams (1944) fails to encapsulate the complex kin-based expressions of slavery. While ostensibly bound by servitude within their masters' households, domestic slaves enjoyed certain liberties. They could construct individual tukuls (traditional houses), maintain personal property, and even exercise mobility rights, moving between villages with their children or family members. Furthermore, the relationship between enslaved individuals and their masters' households often used to sustain the claim that slavery in Africa in general as our informants recount was benign when compared to slavery in the Americas and the Atlantic world[2]. The degree of enslavement and cultural shifts experienced by enslaved individuals as noted by Ahmed (2020) determined by power dynamics: slavers and merchants held authority, while enslaved individuals had agency that could affect their situation. As a process Lindsay (2020) states that, enslavement depended on various steps and factors such as the loss of homeland and the agency of enslaved people, owners, and other actors. As a result, different outcomes emerged based on the opportunities and constraints involved in this process.

Of course, it is crucial as Darkwah (1975) noted that domestic slaves in Ethiopia were often highly esteemed within their households and rarely traded or sold to others unless under extraordinary circumstances. However, upon examining the Ethiopian case, the literature according to McCann's (1988) reveals on

[2]Discussions with *Ras* M. Semoir, a Jamaican f Ras Tefarian visited Addis Ababa in 1996. In France, discuss with Tunisian colleague, Mohammed Skab, a PhD candidate in 2006.

domestic slavery. Addressing this gap by exploring the practice of the naming of enslaved people helps to capture the experience of power and social alienation. This article surveys global and African experiences in naming enslaved people, and then turns to the distinctive aspects of naming practices in the Ethiopia Säyfu's (1972) partly addressed. Studying names that used to define enslaved people in different kinds of dependency has proved to be an important approach to reconstruct as much as possible, considering the limited number of sources written by those enslaved, and gain access to the actual experiences of enslavement. A key naming practice established itself in the process of erasing original names given by family, and attributing new names to domestic slaves. The article seeks to chart how and why original names were expunged and substituted with new slave names by slave-owners.

Methodological and theoretical perspectives

This is a micro-historical research on the domestic slave life in Shäwa in the range of times from about 1830s to 1943. It is a historical research at times thematic and at times chronological. It employs a historical method applying the techniques serving as a tool to undertake research and write about the past by analyzing and interpreting past evidences from available primary and secondary sources. Such a method helps to critically examining sources for their veracity and to avoid bias, and then to draw conclusions of historical narratives based on primary and secondary as well as oral sources. One of the rather crucial works on questions related to historical method, source analysis and directing trajectories of historical research is Tosh's work (2015). Martha et al. (2001) whose work provides a critical look into the historical research techniques to synthesize available sources is quite helpful.

Although history is not of theorized subject, in its entirety but rather method-oriented, there is always an exceptions for certain generalizations. Dealing with the world of inequality and that of notorious imbalance, as in the case of slavery studies, one may be forced to retreat under the umbrella of a given theoretical frame. Under such circumstance, dependency theory is on the table of choice. It is useful for historical research to maintain the imbalance of social setting and the economic mistreatment that confronted personal freedom. Scholars in the diverse fields of social sciences often use the concept of asymmetrical dependency to deal with coercive social settings, among others the cruel slavery and related traits. Among the solid works contributing for our understanding of the imbalance between dependent and the dominant bodies is the work of Williams (1944). It covers a historical study confronting the trade in slaves and how the

labor exploited from slaves had put a corner stone for the capital served the Great Britain's industrial revolution. Wallerstein (1974) had accomplished a scholarly task of solid work on the origins of the European world economy in the sixteenth century. This work is one of the primary ones dealing with dependency theory. Tomich (2004) has a rigorous work to understand the clear difference and relations between free and enslaved in the Caribbean. Works of such instances are guide lines to study slavery at micro level. To address the intents of this article, such indicated works are strong bridges to cross and slavery.

Ways into slavery: A reconstruction from multiple sources

The South-western Ethiopia served as a primary slaving zone. Ǝnnarya and the kingdom of Ǧimma served as a source of slave raiding and slave trading (Mohammed, 1990). The South-western region of Ethiopia intricately connected to trade networks leading towards the northern and north-eastern slave markets, such as Andodé, Roggé, and Abdul Räsul, catered to the Kingdom of Shewa and facilitated trade towards the coastal areas. Within Shäwa, enslaved individuals were engaged in serving the royal court and individuals of high social status[3].

There might be a political inclination to portray enslavement in Ethiopia as relatively benign compared to Harris's 'Horrors of West Indian Slavery'; it is crucial not to obscure the pervasive violence and power imbalances between owners and enslaved (Harris,1844, p. 309). Whether in domestic services or along trade routes, slaves endured physical abuse and psychological trauma. Their owners employed tactics within their household, traders used strategies during travel such as taking circuitous routes to disorient and prevent recognition of geographical locations. The act of covering faces with a veil was another way to hinder recognition of route directions. Upon reaching their owners' residences, slaves stripped of their original names and given names attributed by their owners. Renaming slaves imposed authority over the slave and emphasised ownership.

The contemporary dynamics of domestic slave life within 19th century Shewa captured the attention of European travellers by then visited Shäwa. Harris, documented the experiences of a slave named Súppa from Ǝnnarya, south-western Ethiopia, during his visit to the court of King Śahlä Śəllase (1813-1847)[4]. Súppa, had been himself involved in slave raids in the past. At the age of 20, while

[3]Informants: Ato Zäwde Näsibu (Ankbär) and Ato Habte Baykedagn (at Eltoké) near Aleyu Amba.

[4]Informants: Ato Zäwde Näsibu (Ankbär) and Ato Habte Baykedagn (at Eltoké) near Aleyu Amba.

herding his father's flocks, a group of Toma Oromo captured him. Subsequently, another Toma captured and acquired him for 40 pieces of amole (salt bar)[5]. He went through various slave markets of Nonno-Megira-Agumčo (in Southern Ethiopia) - Zəqwala, Andode-Roggé-Abdul Räsul-Aləyyu Amba-Ankobär all in Shewa. His price increased to 100 amole at Roggé, and in Abdul Räsul, he was purchased for a fixed price of 12 dollars. Eventually, Harris (1844, pp. 303-304) explains,

> I became the slave of the Negoos, which I still am, although permitted to reside with my family, and only called upon to plough, reap, and carry wood. Exclusive of halts, the journey from my native village took fifteen days. I was tolerably fed and not maltreated.

Harris emphasized the possibility that individuals enslaved in one location could find their way to distant areas. These rare first-hand narratives provide a glimpse into the lives of slaves in Ethiopia, complementing the descriptive nature of other sources.

Missionaries like Krapf (1860, p. 2002) documented slavery extensively. He observed a distressing pattern where individuals, including women, children, boys, and girls, forcibly separated from their families, and relegated to domestic servitude. Krapf recounted how kidnappers would stealthily break into homes during the night, swiftly snatching children while using cloth or other materials to stifle their cries. These unfortunate individuals would then become either domestic servants or exchanged in the long-distance slave trade.

Rochet d'Héricourt (1846, pp. 208-209) witnessed, between 1839 and 1841, the hardships faced by individuals in domestic servitude and along the trade route. He made an impassioned plea to King Śahlä Śəllase of Shäwa, to cease the sale of enslaved people by his soldiers and the injustice of subjecting innocent war captives. In response to Rochet's appeal, the king expressed his intention to return the captives to their home countries, although it remains uncertain if this was done. These accounts offer insights into the practices of slavery in Ethiopia, delving into the origins of slaves, varied experiences in different contexts, the underlying dynamics of power and violence that defined their lives. While these narratives often carry a sensational tone, they too often lack the direct voices of enslaved

[5]*Amole* are salt bars, widely used as currency across Ethiopia before the introduction of Maria-Theresa.

people, and provide images and narratives interpreted through the prism of foreign visitors.

A comprehensive understanding of the complexities and consequences of domestic slavery in Ethiopian history achieves a better picture by oral memories of descendants of enslaved people. The consideration of both travellers and the voices of those directly impacted by enslavement seem to be the way to reconstruct the experiences and practices of enslavement.

While there is a prevailing consensus that slavery in Ethiopia predominantly targeted women and children for domestic labour, a reflection on the role that gender plays still lacks consideration. While Fernyhough (2007) provides the only treatment of gender and slavery in Ethiopia, there exists dearth of scholarship addressing the different roles of the enslaved female and male individuals. It is crucial to acknowledge that domestic chores encompassed a wide range of tasks, and significant numbers of men were actively involved in many of them. In fact, men held various roles in the domestic sphere as caterers, coolies, butlers, and labour as, for instance, herders and field guards. Oral history can provide a significant means for accessing the lived experiences of domestic slaves in interwoven nature of their lives within the domestic realm.

A Brief survey of slave naming in Africa and beyond

Naming is an important aspect of cultural expression, a tool of ethnic integration and acculturation. Among the Amhara society, personal names frequently refer to events occurring before or after a child's birth. Mezgebu has carefully noted that names can convey concepts of masculinity to encourage boys to exhibit corresponding behaviour. Similarly, boys might be given names associated with revenge, bravery of a family member (Mezgebu, 2018). Names are also a symbol of national and ethnic pride and in recent history of Ethiopia, non-Christian groups often changed their names to Christian names for access to social spheres and create alliances (Yetebarek, 2019).

The naming of slaves remains a globally poorly understood phenomenon. In ancient Rome, slaves often identified by derivations of their masters' names. For example, the name Marcipor seems derived from (slave of) Marcus, and Lucipor similarly stems from (slave of) Lucius, etc. They functioned like labels rather than genuine names, possessing an archaic quality reflective of the legal view of slaves as chattel (Cheesman, 2009, p. 511).

Regarding the eighteenth-century Atlantic world, scholars have identified a distinct name pool for slaves, but debates persist over those names and their significance. The question of agency in naming lacks a definitive answer regarding

the significance of names, particularly those of African origin, with some viewing them as an indication of slaves named themselves and preserving their African ancestral culture, yet others proposes that slaves and owners eventually viewed African names primarily as symbols of slave status rather than pride (Álvarez López, 2015; Williamson, 2017). The social power of naming and its capacity to shape the life of the person named, becomes most evident when it has the opposite intent to sever connections. Naming in slave society was primarily practical, an essential step being changed into commodity so they were once and for all removed from their roots, bought, sold and mortgaged (Abel et al., 2019).

The Sudanese experience being an example shedding light on the Islamic dimension in broader context, Sharkey highlights how the Islamic world had not reserved unique names for slaves exclusively. In pre-Islamic Arabia, it was common to name children based on intimidating or intense concepts, such as using 'Murra' to denote sullenness or 'Harb' for war (Sharkey, 1992). Based on the travel accounts from the Sudan, Sharkey's examination of slave nomenclature indicates the varied slave names, carrying honorary distinctions but typically diverging from mainstream cultural names. Walz's (2010, pp. 53-54) analysis of Sudanese slaves in Egypt shows that naming practices involved associating slaves with scents, fruits, flowers, jewels, animals, Quranic personalities, or descriptors suggesting a positive service disposition or appealing physical appearance. Miran's (2013, p. 132) study on the then Egyptian Red Sea coast then governed by *khedival* Egypt; his study based on 239 manumission acts registered in the 1870s and the 1800s in the court records of Massawa seems to confirm these findings (Miran, 2013, p. 136). In many of these acts, slaves' names clearly heralded by terms like 'al-ādamī' or 'al-ādamiyya' for 'the human' and 'human being.' Female slaves mostly designated as 'al-jāriya,' (female slave), while the term 'mamlūk/mamlūka' (the one who is possessed), used for both genders. The manumitted slaves separately indicated in association with their geographic provenance and ethnicity. These manumission acts sometimes included physical descriptions, their gender age. Coming to names, Miran points out that "names of flowers, gems, precious substances and aesthetic features were given to men and women", and also that "some of these names were commonly given to slaves, explaining why there were shared by the different ethnic groups'. In fact, many of them 'had typical Muslim names", and in some cases the names were changed or given new names. Miran suggests that: "it was perhaps the case that a slave could ask for a name change upon liberation". In some cases, they took the family name of their former owners, suggesting a strong link of "proximity and dependency that might have existed between owners and their slaves" (Miran, 2013, pp. 144-148).

Hager Salomon (1994, p. 77) reports on a ritual inclusion of slaves among the Betä Ǝsraʾel in North-western Ethiopia:

> In the final stage of the ceremony, the slaves were given names. Those slaves received names peculiar to the *barya*, denoting their enslaved status. The names alluded both philologically and semantically to a perception by which the *barya* were slaves through the very essence of their being, and by which the entire system received divine sanction.

As slaves had new names to signify their status, it was typical for slaves to receive new names upon being freed. For the late nineteenth-century in Dar Masalit of Western Sudan, Kapteijns discusses slave-naming customs. She dedicates a section to the procedures of manumission and social integration for both male and female slaves. Kapteijns describes this process that manumission was a straightforward ceremony in which the *fātiḥa* (the opening chapter of the Koran) was recited, and then "the slave, as, was given a suitable Muslim name, goat or ram was sacrificed as others offered their congratulations" (Kapteijans based on Sharkey, 1992, p. 134). The naming and renaming, occurring during enslavement and manumission, were public events signifying the inclusion of a manumitted slave into a community. Examining these various contexts provide an understanding of general trends and exceptions in the practice of naming, providing a general framework to make sense of local sources in Ethiopia on the practice naming of slaves in their owners' homes.

Slavery and slave names in Ethiopia: A glimpse at domestic slave life based on oral accounts

The practice of assigning new names to slaves served to erase their past identities and provide them with new ones. The social experience, personal capacity, behaviour, and achievements were factors that influenced the determination of a new slave names (Säyfu 1972, p. 162). His analysis regarding the Amhara culture, the original family-related slave names quickly replaced by newly devised imposed by slave owners for domestic slaves, while those intended for long-distance trade often remained unnamed or kept their original names. In fact, Säyfu's (1972, pp. 152-155) attention covers names attributed by Ethiopian cultures as in the case of Somali and Hadiya.

The creation of slave names was done by the domestic slave owners. These names often carried philosophical connotations about the inevitability of death and other existential realities. The names also exhibited a poetic quality, with verses

rhyming in a unique way where vowel sounds fully rhymed while consonants were well grouped phonetically. Each name was a single sentence broken into a couplet: the first part used by the master to call the slave, and the second part used by the slave in response.

The use of these names provides insight into the relationships between masters and slaves in Amhara culture, highlighting a mix of encouragement, resilience, and hope. Many names assigned to slaves had positive and paternalistic connotations, reflecting the master's desire to instil certain values or qualities in slaves. Names such as **አይዞህ** (*ʾAyzoh*), - 'be strong,' with the response **'አይዞዎት'** (*ʾAyzowot*) - 'I am strong,' and **እንኳን ደህና መጣህ** (*ʾEnkwan Däḥna Mäṭṭah*)-'Welcome, you have come safely,' with the response-**ደህና መጣሁ'** (*Däḥna Mäṭṭahu*) - 'I have arrived safely,' illustrate this dynamic. Other examples include **ይባርክህ** (*Yəbäräkh* 'let be blessed,' with the response **'ይባርኩዎት***(Yəbarkwo*t) - 'let you too be blessed,' and **አትተኛ** (*ʾAṭitägnna*), -'do not sleep,' with the response **'አልተኛሁም'** (*ʾAltägnnhum*) - 'I am not sleeping,' **አስቀድመህ** (ʾAsqädmäh) - -in advance,' with the response **'አስቀድሜ ተዘጋጀሁ'** (*ʾAsqädimmé täzäggäjäku*) - 'I am already prepared,' further demonstrates how these names meant to encourage slaves, reminding them to be strong, resilient, and hopeful despite the circumstances.[6] Some slave names were derogatory, intended to demean and dehumanize. For example, **ቀጣፊ ሆንክ** (*Ketafihonk*),- 'you are liar' required the response '**አልሆንኩም'** (*ʾAlhonkum)* - 'I am not a liar,' reinforcing the slave's inferior status. Similarly, animal names like **ጅብ** (Ǧəb, meaning 'Hyena'), **እባብ** (*ʾəbab*, meaning 'Snake'), and **ዋርዳ** (*ʾWarda*), meaning 'a Mule') were used to attribute negative characteristics to slaves, such as predatory behaviour, deceitfulness, and stubbornness[7].

In Ethiopian culture, these names highlighted the complex interplay among religion, status, and identity reminding the slaves' subjugation and servitude. This dual use of names—celebratory for free individuals and demeaning for slaves—demonstrates the changing social hierarchies and power dynamics within the society. The positive and paternalistic nature of names aimed to instil desired qualities, showing a more nuanced and complex relationship between master and

[6]Personal Diary of *Ato* Habte Baykedagn consulted at his home, Eltokké, near Aleyu Amba, December 2003.

[7]Personal Diary of Ato Habte Baykedagn consulted at his home, Eltokké, near Aleyu Amba, December 2003.

slave. Yonas's (2022) treatment Säyfu's work being a commendable way to understand the dynamics related to slavery. There is a parameter in which Säyfu's work may not align with this study as his work is not a micro study but wider Amhara culture. This article is, however, a micro level additional input to Säyfu's (1972) seminal piece. Säyfu had dealt with the whole Amhara culture at macro level. He largely depended on the general informants as opposed to the specific names listed in this article collected from direct living contacts including *Ato* Zäwde Näsibu and *Ǝmməḥoy* Bəzunäš T'ezazu. We could not find domestic slave names of diverse communities (Cf. Säyfu 1972, pp. 1152-155) except two cultures namely that of Hadiya and Somali.

Table 1: Selected names attributed to domestic slaves

Amharic	Transliteration	Direct Translation	Contextual translation
ዓለም አታላይ	'Āläm 'Atalay	The world is tricky	You are as tricky as the time of opportunity is subjective to that of adversity
አውቆ መተው	'Awqo Mätäw	To knowingly let it be	We knowingly keep your presence here
የምድር ዓለም	Yä Midr 'Āläm	You are for earthly life	You belong to the earthly realm
ይክፈለው ጌታ	Yikfäläw Géta	Let God reward him	May Lord reward him
ዓባይ ነው እጅዋ	'Ābbay Näw 'Ejewa	She is generous	Her hand is great like Abay river
ኮሩብን ዘንድሮ	Korrubin Zändäro	They have looked down upon us	They scorn us nowadays
ድንገቴ	Dïngäté	You had come suddenly	You are here by chance
እንዳምላክ	'Ëndämläk	You are like God	I consider you like God.
እንደፈጣሪ	'Ëndäfätari	You are like the creator	You resemble the creator

የሸዋ ማተቡ	Yä Šäwa Mätäbu	Serve only in Shäwa	You decided or service in Shäwa
ጊዜ መንገድ ነው	Gizé Mängäd Näw	Time is a path	Time guides
ሞት ይቀጣ	Mot Yïqäta	Death should be punished	Death be punished than you die
ከዳኝ ኑሮ	Kädañ Nuro	Life abandoned me	Life forsaken me
አዱኛ ዋሸቶ	'Adüña Wäšto	Wealth cheated me	Wealth deceived me
ጉዋዳን ንዳ	Guwädannïnda	She destroys the house yard	She destroys the house yard and escaped
ሺህ አመት ያኑራት	Šihamät Yanurat	Live for thousand years	May she lives thousand years
መዳልጪ	Mädalčči	Deliverer	One who rescues
ልክየለሽ	Lïkyäleš	You have no bounds	You limitless
ሰጠኝ መርቆ	Sätañ Märïqo	God offered and blessed for me	He/she is God's gift
ወላንሳ	Wälansa	You a symbol	You symbol of royalty
ወንዙን አምና	Wänzun Amna	She believes in the river	She overlooked and crossed the river to escape

These names represent contextual designations for domestic slaves applied to family members based on particular merits. The merits seem integrity, loyalty and the quality of domestic services accomplished by the domestic slaves. Such merits encompassed visible accomplishments within the family or at the broader rural levels. This indicates that some slaves used to be assigned by their owner to perform tasks outside of the owner's compound for some slaves assumed merits either in the army or as commercial agents.[8]

It is essential to consider the relationship between written sources and oral tradition though they may not always align with each other. For instance, the content presented by Säyfu could not correlate with the oral sources gathered from Abdul Räsul, Alәyyu Amba, Ankobär, Addis Abäba, and Addis Aläm. Conversely,

[8]Field notes of *Ato* Yamral Mekonnenen, Arba Minch, February 2023

oral tradition that pertains to this study did not appear in previous published references. Therefore, suffice to assert that the existing literature and oral tradition offer valuable insights, though not always convergent, enhancing our understanding of naming practices for domestic slavery in Ethiopia. The domestic slave owner used to call (Säyfu, 1972) his/her slave by the new name attributed once entered domestic service. Instances are male slave when he called him as **ሽኮኮ** (*Shikoko*)[9] to mean an active wild animal in a hidden move across rocky places or in compound buildings to reach at a non-expected site, the domestic male used to quickly react **አለሁ እኮ** (*Alehu ekko*) to mean here I am. The female domestic her master called as **ወለቱ** (*Weletu*)[10] (loanword from Ge'ez to mean daughter), the domestic female used to react **የጥዋትቱ** (*Ytiwatitu*) assuring that she is a pioneer to arrive in the owner's compound and used to wake up early for her tasks.

From naming to living: Enslaved individuals at home

This part treats the nineteenth century slave life in Shäwa (Ethiopia), in the urban and royal centres such as Ankobär, where slaves traded and settled. Despite the limitation of sources, it covers the period circa 1839 to 1943 for a thorough understanding the domestic slavery, through a preliminary examination of the naming process (Darkwah, 1975; Ahmed, 2020). Enslaved individuals assigned to various households to fetch water, firewood, grinding grains, shepherd, and engaging in market activities. Slaves, acquired through various means, were under the control of their owners, leading to maximum exploitation of their capabilities. Male slaves as in Hussein (2010) used to serve in the masters' compounds and fields, based on physical strength, whereas females took on tasks like cooking, washing, brewing, spinning, and assisting other domestic activities. In some cases, female slaves would accompany young brides to their new homes, to initiate into married life.

The information from oral testimonies sheds light on the practice of replacing slaves' original names with new ones once they integrated themselves into their owners' households. Oral history provides insights into the daily lives and dynamics of domestic slavery, enabling an exploration of the intersections of gender, labour, and power[11]. By viewing enslaved men and women as active

[9] Informant: *Ato* Zäwde Näsibu

[10] Informant: *Ǝmməḥoy* Bəzunäš T'ezazu

[11]Informant: *Ato* Habte Baykedagn

participants in the domestic sphere, it is possible to develop a more comprehensive understanding slavery's social, economic, and cultural dimensions in Shäwa.

The notable source of insight into domestic slavery in Shäwa is *Ato* Zäwde Näsibu, a resident of Ankobär in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Despite more than 40 years of blindness, his memory remained vivid. Born in 1882, he spent his entire life in Ankobär, much of it as a domestic slave belonging to the elite military class, making his experience unique among ordinary domestic slaves. He recalled serving as one of the 45 guards appointed by Mənilək for the palace at Ankobär. In 2003, at 121, he remained the sole survivor among his peers. In 2010, as in Ahmed (2020), he was 128 years old but passed away in December of the same year, leaving behind a rich historical legacy as a witness to the major developments in Ethiopian history over long period in particular the experience of domestic slaves in Shäwa. His great fortune in living over a century blessed him with the opportunity to know leading Ethiopian political personages of his time. Among such legacies was how he had been a skilful informant in resolving confusing historical issues. One such issue was whether or not domestic slave names existed in the list of 330 names of liberated slaves submitted by the Delegate of the Ethiopia to the League of Nations in September 1930.[12]

Ato Zäwde Näsibu realized that some of these names of domestic slaves: Figa, originally from Sidamo (liberated on October 18, 1930), Sewmamen, a female from Wälaytta (liberated on June 3, 1930), Agafari, a male from Gofa, and Asressa also a male from Gofa (liberated on March 3, 1930). He argued that some of the names belonged to recently enslaved people and those escaped from slave dealers, and managed to reach Addis Abäba. He explained that by then, slave owners-particularly in Shäwa-were unwilling to liberate their slaves and kept them for domestic use. As the window for openly enslaving people was closing, enslavers employed tactics to acquire slaves, either by capturing them or from illicit markets, as last opportunity. They attempted to disguise their actions pretending that the newly acquired individuals were long-serving domestic slaves while in reality these individuals were kept hidden in their residences, secretly continuing for domestic tasks. Essentially, only the newly captured or recently purchased slaves put forward for liberation, while those hidden in each owners' homes remained enslaved. Wealthy household heads were brought to court and punished for this concealment. As discovered, in the 1930 League Report 213,

[12]League of Nations Slavery Convention, Annual Report by the Council, 15. September 1930, Periodic Report: Abyssinia, R2354-6B-7093-4880, by the League of Nations Archive in Geneva

people appeared before the court and condemned for such acts lending material weight to Zäwde's narrative.[13]

Another informant, *Ǝmməḥoy* Bəzunäš T'ezazu possesses rich knowledge for the 1920s up to the abolition of slavery in 1943. She was from the Shäwa Bulga district and later moved to Addis Ababa, finally entering monastic life in Addis Aläm, on the way to Ambo. She is a distinctive informant for areas of Abd Rasul, Aleyyu Amba, Ankobär, Entotto, and Addis Aläm. Her narrative complements that of *Ato* Zäwde Näsibu. Her contribution uncovered the female domestic life of slaves at Ankobär and elsewhere in central Ethiopia. By contrast, she could not testify for the late 19th and early twentieth-century domestic slave life and her experience was limited to the environments and village networks in which she was active, whereas Zäwde covered a wider central Ethiopian space.

Ato Zäwde Näsibu recounted that many enslaved individuals from Ǧimma entered the court's domestic service under Menelik as guardians and for court banquet services. He recounted how his father, Näsibu, not to be confused with the Šäwan Näsibu Menelik's right-hand man, Minister of Justice and veteran of Adwa, *Afänegus* Näsibu Mäsqälo as in Ahmed (2020, pp. 176-177). Zäwde's father was the once enslaved but held the position of chief butcher at the Ankobär palace. His mother, a domestic slave, became his father's concubine (Ahmed, 2020, pp. 176-177). The child was given the name Zäwde, meaning 'my crown,' which he jokingly remarked that the 'crown was within reach yet elusive'. He emphasized that being a slave was intolerable and a blessing in disguise. They were burdened with household duties. Zäwde preferred to identify himself as an ex-slave, having gone on to participate in the Shäwa army when he grew up. He preferred this identification because he was born in the kitchen and grew up without access to his father's environment. Their testimonies reveal that the renaming was a common practice contingent on an individual slave's efficiency and energy. Oral sources unanimously confirm that slaves were compelled to accept the names attributed by their owners. Zäwde Näsibu's comprehensive memories provide examples of names for both genders, while *Ǝmməḥoy* Bəzunäš T'ezazu specifically addresses female names.

For male domestic slaves, Zäwdé mentions names such as 'Attahu Wärrota (**አጣሁ ወሮታ**)- 'I have not found compensation for such a God-given gift.' When

[13]See 'Liste des delinquants condamnés', League of Nations Slavery Convention, Annual Report by the Council, 15. September 1930, Periodic Report: Abyssinia, R2354-6B-7093-4880, League of Nations Archive, Geneva; Informant*, Ato* Zäwde Näsibu, informant *Ato* Yamral Mekonnen.

addressed, this slave would respond with 'Allähu Tewat Mata' (**አለሁ ጥዋት ማታ**), signifying availability throughout the day. *Ato* Zäwde Näsibu also recalled male slaves with both kin-based and domestic names, such as 'Aman' (**ዓማን**) denoting peacefulness, and 'Däjjunbärsu' (**ደጁንበርሱ**) signifying responsibility for the main gate. Other names include 'Biräda' (**ቢረዳ**) indicating helpfulness, 'Kabt bäbétu' (**ካብት በቤቱ**) signifying domestic wealth is due to his role. Zäwde knew of 'Feleha' (**ፈለሃ**) from Gamo who was also named 'Hubecchisaa,' representing a reminder of tasks. A reason why those names sound so different from those listed by Säyfu Mätaferia is probably that Säyfu's informants were not from lower class or formerly enslaved like Zäwde but were descendants of the Amhara regional elite with whom he was in close contact.[14]

Zäwde Näsibu recalls three female slaves in the court of Menelik at Däbrä Berhan and Entotto in the course of the 1870s and 1880s. He mentioned Walansa (ወላንሳ literally to mean a royal symbol) and originally from Käfa had been renamed as Alämbanchi (ዓለምባንቺ[15] to literally denote I lived in this world thanks to you,) and Medalchi (Mädalčʼi) from Wäläytta being renamed as Šumätbanchi (ሹምባንቺ-to literally means my promotion has been possible because of your service [16] and Likélesh (ልኬለሽ - literally pinpointing no abounds your service) originlly from Guragéland, renamed as Nurobanchi (ኑሮባንቺ[17]- literally means 'comfort is because of your service). According to *Ato* Zäwde Näsibu, this term again denoted 'promotion due to her role' as she used to make *ənǧära* (Ethiopian flat bread), *wät* (sauce) and *ṭäǧ* (hydromel) and *ṭällä (*homemade beer*).* Zäwde recounted that domestic slaves' names were quite widespread in central Ethiopia, having a positive appreciation of enslaved individual's quality. According to *Ǝmməḥoy* Bəzunäš T'ezazu, some female domestic slaves' names were widely used, such as 'Sättañ Märrko' (ሰጠኝ ሞርቆ), -God gave and blessed (you) for me.[18] There were, however, rare instances of male slaves also referred to as 'Sättañ

[14]I am grateful to the late Dr. Akalu Getaneh (Department of Linguistics at Addis Ababa University).

[15]Informant: *Ato* Zäwde Näsibu

[16]Informant: Ato Zäwde Näsibu; aside from Medalchi (ሞ ዳ ል ጪ), all names mentioned are in Amharic.

[17]Informant: Ato Zäwde Näsibu

[18] Informants: Taddesse Dagne, resident of Abdul Räsul in 2002; Negede Lemma, resident of Ankobär in 2002, resident of Ankobär in 2003; Ahmed Bilal a resident of Aleyyu Amba.

Märrko'-[19] which signifies: 'it is God who blessed and offered an addition for me.' When an owner called a female slave 'Sättäñ Märrko,' the slave's response was 'Gudatén Awuqo' (ጉዳቴን አውቆ)- 'Yes, it is after God understood my suffering that you have become my owner mentioned in Säyfu (1972, pp. 132-133)!'

In contrast to *Ato* Zäwdé Näsibu, *Ǝmməḥoy* Bəzunäš T'ezazu possessed profound knowledge of names given to slaves who had escaped their masters in the 1920s and 1930s. She provided examples of new domestic names assigned after the slaves had escaped and been recaptured. For female slaves, she mentioned Wanzunamna (ወንዙንአምና)- she escaped by hopping across a torrential river, and Gwadaneda (ጓዳንዳ)- she escaped breaking the wall of the *tukul.* For male slaves, Atirtiso (አጥርጥሶ)-he escaped after dismantling the enclosure compound, and Bärunsebro (በሩንሰብሮ)-he escaped breaking the gate of the *tukul to escape*. In 2003, the informant, *Ato* Gizaw Bäyyänää from Shemmagirdo (Yifat) affirmed the abundant reminiscences of *Ǝmməḥoy* Bəzunäš T'ezazu.

The process fabricated new family trees for enslaved individuals through the adoption of specific names designating kinship and domestic genealogies. This did not include children of mixed parentage but was exclusive to line of slaves. Informants[20] agreed on the veracity of such practice. Indeed, the first generation of slaves born in the owner's residence was named *wəllağ* (ውላጅ) - a home-born individual from a slave family background. *Ato* Zäwde Näsibu confirmed that he could not join this genealogical order as he was born of a free father and a domestic slave mother. He referred to himself repeatedly as semi- *wəllağ* (**ውላጅ**)[21]-(semi home born) that his position within the family could not remain underestimated in spite of his semi- *wəllağ* (**ውላጅ**) and semi-Šäwan status born of a free father and a slave mother. He further argued that though not present on the genealogical list, he had no hesitation considering himself a slave, as his father had not taken care of him and he had grown up being treated like all domestic slaves of the time. The second generation born to *wəllağ* were called *ǰənnağ* (ፍናጅ), the third generation *qənnağ* (ቅናጅ), the fourth generation *asälläṭ* (አሰለጥ), the fifth generation *amälläṭ* (አመለጥ), the sixth generation *manbété* (ማንቤቴ), and the seventh *däräbabété* (ደረባ ቤቴ). These terms designated the kinship lines in the

[19]The name 'Sättäñ' appeared on page 25 of the League of Nations list but does not stand for Sättäñ Märrko as a domestic slave name, but it is actually an ordinary name.

[20]Informant: *Ato* Gizaw Bäyyänä helped for the clarification about Zäwde Näsibu's narration.

[21]Informant *Ato* Zäwde Näsibu

genealogical order of domestic slaves. In fact, these names appear in our sources[22] only due to the existence of domestic slavery. They show how domestic slavery practiced a form of naming different from that used in non-slave Ethiopian genealogy.[23] When discussing his then position in the hierarchy, *Ato* Zäwde Näsibu assured he was not *fənnağ* (ፍናጅ), a term used for ordinary slaves. One should also note that slave descendants continued these kinship lines until liberation in 1943 and beyond Tesemma (1951 E.C./1957/58AD, p. 195). These naming practices erased the true family identities of slaves and replaced by the names their owners attributed. They endured hardships, displacement, captivity, and joined a different domestic slave genealogy. This local Ethiopian practice according to Molvaer (1995, p. 284) ensured the disappearance of ancestral social identities within the culture.

Concluding remarks

Throughout Ethiopian history, domestic slavery remained a pervasive aspect, particularly evident within highland communities and royal courts. This article, taking into consideration the period between the years 1839 and 1943, examines the processes related to domestic slavery particularly at the royal centres such as Ankobär, Šäwa. The enslavement in Ethiopia typically began with the capture of individuals through warfare, transactions, gifts, or inheritance. At their destination, enslaved individuals were separated from everything of their past. Their previous lives and social environments were gone, leaving them devoid of individual freedom. A dehumanizing aspect was the renaming of slaves upon arrival, forcing them to abandon their identities and adopt names chosen by their owners and reinforcing their subordinated status.

This article contributes to the literature on the acquisition of slaves for domestic service in Ethiopia. Interviews with *Ato* Zäwde Näsibu and

[22]Informant: *Ato* Gizaw Bäyyänä

[23]The name ዱር ቤቱ (*durbet*e) is partly denoting a slave born in domestic owner's compound but used to grow up in the forest nearby or in *tukuls* built in the forest nearby. In this case it was part of the new genealogies. On another side, it denotes the slave one who lived in the forest to fetch wood and hunt wild animals for domestic purpose. *Ato* Zäwde Näsibu mentioned those in the Dans forest situated to the northeast of Ankobär before the Italian Occupation (1936-1941).

Ǝmməḥoy Bəzunäš T'ezazu offer invaluable perspectives, enriching our understanding of enslaved individuals' experiences during the period under consideration. The practice of naming, renaming, and transforming the genealogical order of slaves is crucial in comprehending their lives and trajectories over time. The testimonies of these two informants play a pivotal role in capturing grassroots experiences, offering unparalleled insights into male and female perspectives within the domestic sphere. *Ato* Zäwde Näsibu's position as an elite military slave and *Ǝmməḥoy* Bəzunäš T'ezazu's observations from a socially rooted family provide a balanced perspective on domestic slavery in Ethiopia. Their oral narratives demonstrate a keen sense of observation and a deep understanding of social relationships, hierarchies, and domestic responsibilities, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the diverse roles and experiences of enslaved individuals in Ethiopia.

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