

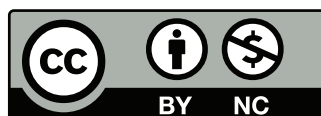
The Advent of “Modern State” in Ethiopia and the Dynamics of Personal Names and Naming Practices among the Gofa of Southwest Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes how the “modern state” in Ethiopia has played crucial roles in the dynamics of personal names and naming practices of the Gofa people through its ideology, institutions, and strategies of standardizing linguistic and personal naming practices. The double roles of the state, both as a fortification and change agent, are analyzed by categorizing the Ethiopian state into two periods: the imperial state (1890’s to 1974) and post-imperial state (1974 to present). Based on empirical data, I argue that the imperial state, through its persistence effort and perceived opportunities, significantly succeeded in converting the indigenous Gofa names and patterns to the state (Amhara) nomenclature. On the other hand, the post-imperial state policies have shown significant signs of restoring indigenous cultures but could not fully materialize the policies and their discourses due to the involvement of multiple actors that complicate the restoration process.

Keywords: Gofa, Ethiopia, modern state, personal naming practice, Amhara



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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the second half of the 19th century, there have been many failed attempts by the northern Christian kingdoms to incorporate the non-Christian southern and southwestern parts of the present day Ethiopia into their empires. However, through military control, the incorporation project became a reality in the late 20th century, especially during the period of Menelik II (1844-1913) (Filippini 2002). The incorporation brought convergence and often clash between the northern Amhara¹(or “state culture”) and the diverse cultures in the incorporated parts. The Gofa area is among the many incorporated regions that experienced massive cultural contacts with the imperial state with the aim of creating a united and stronger Amharanized empire.

Among the many elements of the cultural incorporation projects, linguistic standardization comes first since a separate language easily makes the inside world opaque to the outsider (i.e., the Imperial state). Along this line, Scott underlines that “the great cultural barrier imposed by a separate language is perhaps the most effective guarantee that a social world, easily accessible to the insiders, will remain opaque to outsiders ... [whereas] the imposition of single, official language may be the most powerful precondition of many other simplifications” (Scott 1998:72). So, soon after the incorporation of Gofa into the larger empire, Amharic² was declared an official language of communication between the state agents and the local people. This was followed by necessitating the use of Amharic in all state institutions such as the courts, schools, security posts, churches and so on. Later on, the linguistic centralization project was followed by changing the indigenous names and naming practices of the Gofa people.

The hidden narrative lurking behind such state imposition rests fundamentally on the complex indigenous naming patterns of Gofa. Like in many African communities (Bing 1993), the personal naming practices of Gofa are meaning-bounded, diverse and rich. The state authorities realized that the complexities of Gofa naming practices would create an administrative problem, and thus decided to reshape it. Reshaping the indigenous naming practices became one of the top policy instruments of the state authorities in the subjugated parts (for example, for the Konso case, see Ongaye 2015; for the Ari case, see Gebre 2010). As mentioned above, the key institutions that executed the imposition of the state naming project were schools, courts, churches and so forth. Indeed, the state imposition project was not without resistance.

The aim of this article is to examine the complexities and dynamics of personal naming practices of Gofa during the pre-1974 Imperial states, on the one hand, and the post-1974 efforts of the “back to culture” developments from actor-oriented perspective, on the other. Research on the practices and the dynamics of personal naming in Ethiopia has received very little attention (Zelalem 2003, Gebre 2010, and Ongaye 2015 among the few) although we find various researches in other parts of the world (see Zawawi 1998, Agyekum 2006). The point of departure in this article is that it treats the modern state, which comes at the center

¹ The term Amhara in Gofa land does not only refer to the descendants of the Amhara ethnic group but also to any migrant with a distinct cultural milieu (for example, dressing style, eating style, and so on) from outside Gofa save from the neighbor Omotic kingdoms.

² Amharic, a written native language of the Amhara ethnic group in Ethiopia, has become a lingua franca of Ethiopia since the late 19th century. And currently, it is spoken all over the country by around 30 million people (see also Zelalem 2003).

in the changing aspects of indigenous naming practices, and the responses of the local community. I draw on Scott’s (1998) concepts of “simplification” and “legibility”³ to show that standardizing naming practices is one of the Imperial state’s cultural incorporation projects that aim at making the indigenous naming practices of Gofa standardized (into Amharic), simple and legible for administration. On the other hand, by bringing empirical evidence from the Gofa land, I attempt to deconstruct Scott’s (1998) conclusion that family names are one of the state projects imposed on communities at the state margin to simplify local complexities for control. I argue that the indigenous Gofa family names are locally constructed to serve purely local purposes.

The article is organized into six sections: following this introduction, I present the methodology and the context of the study area in Section two. In Sections three and four, I lay emphasis on describing the indigenous Gofa naming practices and the influence of the imperial state on Gofa naming practices, respectively. In Section five, post-Imperial state developments are discussed. Finally, in Section six, I conclude my argument.

2. METHODOLOGY AND STUDY AREA CONTEXT

2.1 METHODOLOGY

Empirical data for this article were collected from *Sawla* town and *Demba Gofa* district of Gofa Zone during two fieldwork periods: August to October 2016, and April to June 2017. I have purposely focused on the town since it serves as a center for disseminating state culture to the surrounding local communities, and the district to incorporate remnant indigenous naming practices. While collecting empirical data, I tried to rely on multiple sources to ensure what Collins et al. (2006) call significance enhancement. Accordingly, research participants were purposively selected from different actor’s domains: age (youths, adults, elders and state officials) and sex (male and female) to see if any variation exists along such categories. The age category is contextually defined: people aged between 18 to 30 are categorized as youths, those aged between 31 to 50 as adults, and those above 50 as elders. The youths are born in the current government (since 1991), adults are those people with lived experiences of two successive governments: the Derg regime (1974–1991) and the incumbent government (1991 to present); elders are those with lived experience of three successive regimes including the Imperial state, the Derg regime and the incumbent government.

The primary data were collected through interviews with elders and three separate Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with elders, youths and state officials. A total of 32 participants (24 males and 8 females) were purposively selected. Out of the total participants, 10 were elders, 8 were adults, and 14 were youths. I have also used my insider perspectives as I am a native of Gofa.

After collecting the empirical data, I analyzed them thematically using the concepts of “leg-

³ Simplification of indigenous naming practices in this context refers to the various techniques designed and implemented by the state for grasping a rich and complex system of personal names and naming practices in order to allow officials to identify, unambiguously, the majority of its citizens. When such simplification projects become successful, they create “legible” people: a local community whose complex indigenous names and naming practices are simplified and have reached the level of uniformity as desired by its designer, the state. (Scott 1998: 65).

ibility” and “simplification” to show how the imperial state schemes have managed to attain their goal of standardizing the indigenous Gofa personal names and naming practices, on the one hand, and how perceived opportunities during the imperial regime coupled with the failure of Gofa people to use the post-1991 “back to culture” movements have complicated the situation, on the other.

2.2 THE CONTEXT OF THE GOFA PEOPLE

The Gofa are an Omotic-speaking people living in southwestern Ethiopia in Gofa Zone of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’ Region (SNNPR). Sawla, the main town of Gofa Zone, is located at 560kms from Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. The Gofa zone has five *woredas* (districts) and one town administration. The five *woredas* are *Demba-Gofa*, *Geze-Gofa*, *Melo-Koza*, *Zala*, and *Uba-Debre Tsehay*. The town administration is Sawla town administration (Sawula Town Truism and Government Communication Affairs Office 2007: 4). They also live in some *kebeles* (villages) in the Oyda district: *Uba Dama*, *Uba Yambala* and *Uba Ganchila* (personal knowledge). According to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Population Census Commission (FDREPC) report, there are 363009 *Gofatho* (Gofa language) speakers (FDRPCC 2008: 84).

The economy of the Gofa people is based on mixing crop cultivation with animal husbandry. The component of mixing varies following the ecological division of Gofa landscape. There are three ecological zones in Gofa: *gezze* ‘highland’, *doollo* ‘midland’, and *gadha*⁴ ‘lowland’ (see also Markose and Walelign 2011). When one goes from the highland to the lowland, one observes the increase in preference for crop (especially maize) cultivation to animal husbandry. In other word, we find more animals in the highlands and more crops in the lowlands.

Socially, the Gofa have kinship ties and residence-based groups. There are five kinship organizations: nuclear family (*aawa soo*), extended family (*aawa aawa soo*), several nuclear families residing together (*mayza soo*), lineage (*kochche*), and clan (*qommo*) (see also Esayas 2015). There are three social strata. At the apex of the pyramid is the royal family. The royal family constitutes the king (*kawo*), his family and his subsidiary officers (*erasha*, *sagga*, and *bittante*). The royal family assumes the highest position socially and economically. At the middle of the strata are farmers (*tsomma*). And, at the bottom of the pyramid are the socially outcast groups such as the *aylle* ‘slave’, *ottomana* ‘potters’, *gittamana* ‘tanners’, and *wogacce* ‘blacksmiths’. Marriage within patrilineage is prohibited. Within matrilineage, a Gofa boy is allowed to marry only after seven generations. Marriage within the same social class is acceptable.

Historically, from the 16th century to the late 19th century, the Gofa were administered under the *Kawo* (king) system. The system was hierarchical and centralized. As a result, the *Kawo* held the highest and supreme administrative position in the power hierarchy. However, the mass had the power to depose him from power when he abused power, and committed adultery, corruption and other socially unaccepted acts (see also Belayneh 2010). Like many indigenous governance systems in Africa, the *Kawo* of Gofa had both political and spiritual power. Moreover, field notes from the interview with state officials and experts show that such dual authority extends to the subsidiary officers who ran spiritual ceremonies (see also Esayas 2015). The spiritual power of the *Kawo* continued even after the kingdom had lost its political

⁴ In this article, I use the symbols in writing words in Gofa: **ʔ** for IPA /ʔ/, **q** for IPA /k/, **th** for IPA /t/, **c** for IPA /tʃ/, **cʼ** for IPA /tʃʼ/, **sh** for IPA /ʃ/, **dh** for IPA /dʃ/, and **x** for IPA /tʰ/.

power. In addition to the *Kawo*, there existed the *saga qommo* (clan) who are heritably vested with the authority to do ritual functions (see also Esayas 2015). The ritual functioning authority of the *Kawo* and *sagga* was believed to be given by *tsossa* (Sky God). The king and his religious leaders perform ritual functions in their most sacred religious shrines called *koora*.

After the inclusion of the Gofa land into the Ethiopian Christian kingdom, an unfamiliar form of administration was introduced to the land. This event brought new titles such as *balabat* (landlord) and *melkegna* that substituted the hereditary king and his sub-structures (Markose & Walelign 2011). It is important to remind that although the office tenures of the *Kawo* and his subsidiary officers were restricted with the formation of the Ethiopian Empire, the ritual function still remains (Esayas 2015).

3. GOFA INDIGENOUS PERSONAL NAMES

Indigenous personal naming practices in Gofa were, and in rural areas are still, manifold. The indigenous personal names of Gofa reflect the cultural values, philosophies and physical environment of the Gofa society. By studying the typical Gofa personal names, one can easily understand, for example, the social class of the bearer, parental conditions during the time of child delivery, the body size of the baby, day of birth, season of birth, and other crucial social aspects related to childbirth. Excluding many other informal names like nicknames, a Gofa person may have up to five names depending on the stage of life and other socio-cultural conditions. These names include outdoor name (*kare sunthi*), home name (*saphotho sunthi*), coronation name (*kawotetha sunthi*), parental name (*na'ara xegiya sunthi*) and family name (*so' o as'a sunthi*). Except for the official and family names, which are ceremonial, the rest three are private business of the family in which the father, or, in his absence, an immediate senior member of the lineage, enjoys the privilege of name giving. In this practice, it is not only the existence of a ceremony that marks a difference among the name typologies, but also the philosophies behind name giving. Below, I discuss the typologies of personal names among the Gofa in detail.

3.1 TYPOLOGIES OF GOFA PERSONAL NAMES

3.1.1 Kawotetha Sunthi (coronation names)

According to the key cultural consultants, Gofa kings come to power from the royal clan, the *Goshana*, and it is mandatory for the incoming king to drop his given name, and acquire a new coronation name, *Kawotetha sunthi* (Focus Group Discussion, August 10, 2016). Giving names to kings is the job of kingmakers, the *kalata*. In selecting a name for the king, the *kalata* give a great emphasis to the meaning of the name. The concern is that the name should encode the main mandates of the king. For example, if the purpose of the king is fighting enemies, his name might be one of these: *Xonna* ‘win them’, *Ola* ‘fight them’, *Naqqa* ‘overwhelm’ or *Goobba* ‘be brave’. If the purpose is maintaining food security, names like *Kalsa* ‘provide us with enough to eat’, *Kuma* ‘be full’, *Kunsa* ‘make us full’, and so forth are assigned. If the purpose is finishing activities initiated by his predecessor, then, his name can be *Polla* ‘finish it’, *Kansa* ‘cross it’ or *Piino* ‘let him pass’.

One typical characteristic of official names in Gofa is that they precede hereditary⁵ or honorific⁶ titles, which, in turn, are always preceded by place names within or outside the kingdom. The place names, which need to have alliteration effect with the titles, do not imply the bearer’s authority or political power over the place. For example, one of my key cultural consultants was *Kanko*, who has a title *Danna* since he is from the *Goshana* clan, and a place called *Kamba* to alliterate with his name (*Kanko*). Thus, his official name is *Kamba Danna Kanko*. However, this is not true in the case of *sagga* and *bitante* who have the power to lead spiritual practices in their designated places. The wife of the [somewhere’s] *Irasha/Danna* follows the same line in the title but the title *Danna* changes into *Geni* and then wife’s name follows. Official names carry social and economic value for the bearer. For instance, individuals with the official name were given priority when public opinion is needed. Moreover, it is expected from the bearer to be a vanguard of the local community economically in conditions of hardship and turmoil (interview with Kanko, July 17, 2016).

3.1.2 Kare Sunthi (outdoor names)

Outdoor names are considered formal names through which the bearer is known in the local communities. Unlike the official names which are attached to the *Goshana* clan and socio-economically vanguard individuals, every Gofa child gets an outdoor name automatically, something like birthday names in the Akan community of Ghana (Agyekum 2006). The assignment of outdoor names is not ceremonial, but rather completely a private business and privilege enjoyed by the father or, in the absence of him, by other senior members of the patrilineal descent. As some oral accounts show, centuries ago, outdoor names in Gofa were derived from fauna as illustrated in (1), and from flora as shown in (2). Fauna names were exclusively given to males whereas those from flora were given mainly to females and sometimes to males. The assignment of fauna names to males and flora names mainly to female is linked to the patriarchal nature of the Gofa society (FGD with elders, October 2016, *Demba-Gofa*).

(1)	Dangarssa (m)	‘elephant’
	Gammo (m)	‘lion’
	Gel’o (m)	‘monkey’
	Mahe (m)	‘leopard’
	Mentha (m)	‘deer’
	Shodhe (m)	‘toad’

⁵ Every man and woman belonging to the *Goshana* clan, except the king who uses the title *Kawo*, is identified as *Danna* and *Mallo*, respectively. This title, *Danna* and *Mallo*, also holds true for sons and daughters of the king. People from certain clans, with significant spiritual power, are provided with titles like *Sagga* and *Bittante*.

⁶ The title which is given by the king for few socially, economically and/or politically influential individuals, regardless of his racial background, is *Irasha*. *Irashaship* is also an administrative structure below the king. When the title *Irasha* preceded by the word *Woraba* (i.e. *Woraba Irasha*) it means head/ruler of *Irashas* (see also Ta’dala, 2015).

(2)	Cisha (m/f)	‘flower’
	Pudhe (m) / Pudho (f)	‘bloom’
	Zomara (m) / Zomaro (f)	‘bur-reed’
	Sura (m) / Suro (f)	‘short grass’
	Gatta (m/f)	‘long grass’
	Woso (m/f)	‘reed’

Outdoor names may also be originated from a social and economic landscape. As an agriculturalist community, it is common to find personal names derived from farm tools. Since farming is an exclusive labor division of males, such names are given only to males, (3).

(3)	Kaddo (m)	‘plow’
	Qambara (m)	‘yoke’
	Mirara (m)	‘body’
	Kalche (m)	‘shoe’
	Wofalo (m)	‘beam’

Outdoor names can also be derived from days of the week. Friday, Saturday, and Sunday are thought of as holy, and children born on these weekdays often retain these personal names as shown in (4).

(4)	Arba (m) / Arbe (f)	‘Friday’
	Qera (m) / Qere (f)	‘Saturday’
	Woga (m) / Woge (f)	‘Sunday’

Some outdoor names are derived from place names in and around Gofa. I have no idea how these place names have been incorporated into personal naming practices of Gofa, but I suspect they might be birthplace or workplace names for the bearers or their parents. Illustrative examples are provided in (5).

(5)	Boreda (m)	‘Boreda’
	Wolayto (m) / Wolayte (f)	‘Wolayta’
	Malo (m/f)	‘Malo district’
	Shiraro ⁷ (m)	‘Shiraro’

3.1.3. Saphotho Sunthi (home names)

The home names are reserved for home use, and they indicate endearment and affection. Such names are often derived from animals or objects small in size. Some even do not have meanings at all. Illustrative examples are given in (6).

⁷ Shiraro is located around Ethiopia-Kenya border.

(6)	Quxxare (m/f)	‘porcupine’
	Mumale (m/f)	‘chickpea’
	Bubbe (m/f)	‘weaving bird’
	Bikole (m/f)	‘small bottle’
	Churqo (m) / Churqe (f)	‘piece of cloth’
	Kano (m) / Kane (f)	‘pup’
	Mun’o (f)	(no meaning)

3.1.4 Na’ara Xegiya Sunthi (parental names)

In Gofa, it is taboo to address parents with their name. Soon after the delivery of the first child, the local community starts to call the parents by the parental name. Parental names are derived by using the outdoor name of the elder sibling with the suffix *aawa* (literary, father) when addressing the father, and the suffix *aayo* (literary, mother) when addressing the mother. The possessive marker in male sex is not observed at all, but in the case of female, the last syllable changes into an ‘i’ sound. Illustrative examples are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Derivation of parental name from the name of firstborn child

Name of child	Sex	Parental name	
		Father	Mother
Takka	M	Takka aawa ‘Takka’s father’	Takka aayo ‘Takka’s mother’
Uffayse	F	Uffayse aawa ‘Uffayse’s father’	Uffaysi aayo ‘Uffayse’s mother’
Utta	M	Utta aawa ‘Utta’s father’	Uttaa ayo ‘Utta’s mother’
Naqete	F	Naqqeti aawa ‘Naqqeti’s father’	Naqqeti aayo ‘Naqqeti’s mother’

When the name of the elder sibling is a polysyllabic word, people may reduce some of the final syllables when addressing parents. For example, I am the first-born son to my parents, and my name is *Yetebarek*. And when people address my father, they address him as *Yetu aawa* ‘Yetu’s father’, and my mother as *Yetuaayo* ‘Yetu’s mother’. Naming the parents after the name of the eldest child continues even after the death of the eldest child.

3.1.5 So’o As’a Sunthi (family names)

In Gofa, a family name is given in a ceremonial event. The applicant, first of all, secures the king with a gift, often a bull, and then the king orders the *Kalata* clan members to offer him, always a head of the family a family name. Upon returning home, the bearer’s family name is recognized by the local community in a ceremonial way organized by the bearer’s family. Family names are, indeed, given only to a ‘freeman’. A ‘freeman’, in the local context, refers to a man who is neither a slave nor a member of the outcast social class like *otto-mana* (potter), *gita-mana* (tanner) and *wogacce* (blacksmith). Moreover, migrant settlers are not recognized as

free people and do not have the right to be given family names.

Most of the time, the name of the bearer becomes the family name and followed by the word *na'yta* ‘children’ or *na'a* ‘child’. For example, if *Goba* is a family name, members of the family are identified as *Goba na'yta* ‘Goba’s children’, and a single member as *Goba na'a* ‘Goba’s child’. However, sometimes, prominent physical structures like mountains, rivers and valleys can grow into a family name as long as it is selected in consultation with the applicant. For example, *Yoshi na'yta* is a name derived from Mt. Yoshi in the Mela Carco district. Likewise, *Alsoo na'yta* is derived from the Alsoo River in Uba district. Thus, the purpose of selecting a family name is not the name per se but the social value it carries.

Another distinct feature of family names is that they are bound to space. Put differently, family names function as long as the bearers live in the Gofa Kingdom and generations that know bearers with that family name. For instance, when someone with a family name leaves the Gofa kingdom and, let us say, moves to a neighboring Omotic kingdom with family name, their family name does not work in the new kingdom because it is detached from the social environment in which people recognize the family name. Thus, the fellow has to adopt a new family name, continue to use his previous family name, or stay without a family name. The use of the previous family name in the new kingdom (social setting) is granted after the council of elders from the new kingdom approves that the newcomer was using a family name in the Gofa kingdom. If the council of elders fails to prove that the newcomer was using a family name, then, the fellow is allowed to adopt a new family name or lives without a family name. Kanko’s case is very interesting in this respect:

My (Kanko’s) family line from bottom to top patrilineal chronological order goes like this: Kanko → Goma → Gozo → Decha → Mego → Malo → Zingo → Dusso → Alsoo → Shosho → Shodhe. I (Kanko) and others in our family are identified as *Shodhe na'yta* ‘Shodhe’s children’. However, during the time of Alsoo, Alsoo left Gofa and moved to the neighboring *Uba* kingdom for personal reasons. There, he acquired a new name which then became his family name which his descendants have continued to use as their family name. However, descendants in Gofa, including me, have continued to use *Shodhe* as our family name (Interview with Kanko, September 1, 2016).

As can be easily understood from Kanko’s case, a given family may have two or more names depending on how many family heads left the Kingdom and adopted new family names.

The other important factor that plays a crucial role in the family naming tradition in Gofa is generation count: a family name changes after eight successive generations in a lineage in order to mark a new line of descents.

Family names have great social values among the Gofa. According to the information of the study participants, there are three local purposes of family names. First, family names serve as a point of demarcation between the slave (*ayle*) and a freeman. In Gofa, slaves have no right to assume family names. A slave can be identified simply as *ura* ‘a man’ or *asiew* ‘a lady’. Addressing a free person as *la uraw* ‘hey man’ or *nate assete* ‘hey lady’ may result in violent responses since such addressing is recognized as a mark for slaves. For visitors, it is recommended that a socially productive way to get to know the status of someone (i.e., whether the person is a slave or free man) whom you do not know before is asking: *ne sunthay o'ne?* ‘what is your name?’ or *ne so'o as'a sunthay o'ne?* ‘which family are you from?’. This, however, does

not mean that slaves have no chance at all to acquire family names even though it is extremely difficult. For a slave to get free, he, or someone on behalf of him, has to pay all his debts. The process of making a slave a free man is called *wozo* (literally ‘redemption’).

Second, as is with slaves, family names serve as a boundary between migrants and natives. In Gofa tradition, new settlers are not allowed to acquire family names unless after long time residence and integration into Gofaland culture. The third purpose of a family name is its role in identifying marriage mate. Marital and sexual relationships within the same lineage (*qommo*) are considered taboo (see also Markos & Walelign 2011). Given a dynamic and complex social world in which people, like the Gofa, move around and work in places other than their own, it is not easy to arrange socially recognized marriage outside the same kin group. However, we find it interesting among the Gofa that family names play a crucial role in identifying one’s own lineage even in a place different from one’s place of birth.

The empirical evidence from Gofa is against Scott (1998) who argues that family names serve only state simplification role. Thus, I argue that family names in Gofa were, and still in some remote margins are, locally originated to serve purely local purposes.

3.2 NAMES, LYRICS, AND ALLITERATION

Alliterations are one of the central features to Gofa names, particularly to outdoor and official names. Alliteration seems to have developed in songs, and in different lyrical verses, *gereres* and *saba*. *Gerers* is a lyrical verse in which a man conveys a message to people around him about his courage, bravery, achievements, and wonders, whereas in *saba*, people appreciate or demote a certain individual for good or bad performance in the war, farming, and hunting through poems with alliteration (FGD, October 3, 2016). Accordingly, personal names in Gofa have alliteration to fit into the oral literature: name givers give children names with identical initial syllables to their fathers and grandfathers as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Alliteration in Gofa personal names

Given name	Father’s name	Grandfather’s name
Manaye (m)	Mande	Mamacca
Kulo (m)	Kunko	Kuma
Bullache (f)	Bukka	Bundure
Monoshe (f)	Mono	Morgama

Alliteration in names is not only practiced in Gofa; rather, it is a common feature among the Omotic speaking peoples (Eliyas, Shiferaw and Abebech 1997). Moreover, there are other Cushitic communities in southwestern Ethiopia employing alliteration in their customary personal naming tradition. For example, in Konso, alliteration in personal naming minimally takes place between the child and father, between grandchild, father, and grandfather, or still between grandchild and founding grandfather (Ongaye 2015).

Though alliteration serves as one of the defining features of Gofa personal names, it does

not mean that there are no contexts in which this general rule fails. For example, whenever some exceptional conditions happen during childbirth, the father may give a name associated with the conditions which may not alliterate as in (7). Such conditions might be prosperity, war and so forth. It is also possible to find children assuming the names of special guests who happen to be there when the child is delivered.

- (7) a. Prosperity
- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Colsha (m) | ‘plenty’ |
| Kuma (m) | ‘be full’ |
| Kalsa (m) | ‘make us full’ |
| Uffaysse (f) | ‘make us happy’ |
| Naqete (f) | ‘overflow’ |
| Balo (m) / Baloto (f) | ‘abundance’ |
- b. War
- | | |
|--------------------|--------------|
| Ola (m) | ‘fight’ |
| Oleta (m) | ‘fight them’ |
| Olancho (m) | ‘warrior’ |
| Xona (m) | ‘overcome’ |

In addition to naming children with the conditions of birth, the rule of alliteration in naming is violated when the children possess exceptional physical appearances like aesthetic value, body size (too long or short), skin color (too light-skinned or black) and so on. These are exemplified in (8).

- (8) a. Aesthetic value
- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|
| Yegelso (f) | ‘beautiful’ |
| Lo’o (m) | ‘handsome’ |
| Barana (m) / Barano (f) | ‘shiny’ |
| Elilo (m) / Elile (f) | ‘honey’ |
- b. Skin color
- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Botho (m) / Bothe (f) | ‘white’ |
| Shano (m) / Shanqo (f) | ‘dark man’/‘dark woman’ |
- c. Body size
- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| Bakano (m/f) | ‘0.5 cent’ |
| Bube (m/f) | ‘honeybird’ |
| Dange (m) / Dango (f) | ‘short grass’ |
| Gere (m) | ‘long man’ |

Furthermore, children delivered after many preceding deaths may be given ‘weird’ names. The intention is that death would not touch the new child with the weird name simply because the child’s name is not appealing to the ghosts. Such names include *Urqato* (m) ‘Let it be mud’, *Kano* (m) / *Kane* (f) ‘dog’, *Churqo* (m) / *Churqe* (f) ‘piece of old cloth’, and so forth. Such a naming strategy has also been reported from many African communities. For example, speak-

ing of the Akan tradition, Agyekum (2006) has stated that the Akans (Ghana) give a child nasty names that might be derived from dangerous animals, migrant laborers, nasty objects and so on in order to prevent the unfortunate situation behind constant child mortality. Moreover, among the Konso (Ethiopia), Ongaye reports that “the death of the first male sibling before the birth of the second baby boy may result in the assignment of a female name for the second baby boy. This practice is based on the belief that a female name would not be attractive to the ghosts who ‘killed the first male sibling’, and as a result, enhance the chances of the baby boy to stay” (Ongaye 2015: 146).

The diverse naming typologies and practices discussed above are now on the verge of extinction except in some remote rural villages of Gofa. Given many other factors, the Imperial state’s cultural incorporation projects, on the one hand, and the failure of Gofa people to use the post-1974 back-to-culture reforms to their own advantage, on the other hand, have played crucial roles in the decline of the Gofa indigenous personal names and naming practices. Below, the massive influence of the imperial state is discussed in detail.

4. THE INFLUENCE OF THE IMPERIAL STATE

The impact of the state on Gofa naming culture can be seen in two ways: changing indigenous personal names, and imposing exogenous naming tradition of Amharic naming systems and state family name traditions. Below, I will discuss each of these strategies in detail.

4.1 REPLACING PERSONAL NAMES

As mentioned in the introduction, state-induced institutions like schools and religious institutions have played crucial roles in replacing indigenous names with exogenous names. Imperial schools were not only difficult for students with indigenous Gofa names but also forced many schoolers to change their original name to Amharic name. The change is not only within the meaning of the name alone, but also a break in the alteration. A study participant from Sawla recalls the frantic school moments that forced him to change his name:

Before I went to primary school during the imperial regime, my name was (*Malla* (given name) → *Massa* (father’s name) → *Malile* (grandfather’s name)). And the meaning of *Malla* is ‘symbol’. My first few months in school were full of discomfort because of my name. School teachers and some students deliberately modified my name and started to call me *Balla* ‘Y-shape’. *Balla* in Amharic also has a negative connotation, which means someone with cross-eyes. The school community insisted on calling me with the modified name, the name I didn’t want to hear. Finally, I changed my name to a typical Amharic name: *Mesele* ‘He resembled’, and got relief from distress and secured my stay in school (Interview with Mesele, July 17, 2016).

Next to schools, religious institutions have played a significant role in influencing the locals to abandon customary naming practices. During the advent of the imperial state, Orthodox Christianity did not only remake the psychological makeup of local communities in order not to resist

the oppressive imperial state but also changed personal names. Along this line, Ta’dala, a study participant, states that initially local leaders and later local community members were baptized and given Christian names like *Woldemariam* ‘Son of Mary’, *Hailemariam* ‘Power of Mary’, *Gebremariam* ‘Servant of Mary’, *Wolde Eyesus* ‘Son of Jesus’ that created confusion among the victims (Ta’dala 2015). The confusion continued for two decades, up to early 1920s, in which another version of Christianity, Protestant Christianity, arrived in Gofa by Sudan International Mission (SIM) from its base in neighboring Wolayta. Protestant Christianity has affected, and still continues to affect, the local culture in general and the naming practices in particular more than the Orthodox Christianity. Like in Gofa, Shako (2004), cited in Ongaye (2015: 153), states that “the new charismatic movement has been aggressive and intolerant with cultural and naming practices and values by their philosophy of ‘setting people free from the bondage of Satan and cultural practices’”. Accordingly, biblical names – the Amharic version of Hebrew names – like *Yohannis* (m) ‘John’, *Dawit* (m) ‘David’, *Matewos* (m) ‘Matthew’, *Eyerusalem* (f) ‘Jerusalem’, *Hewan* (f) ‘Eve’, *Mihrät* (f) ‘Mercy’ and so forth emerged at the expense of the indigenous names.

4.2 STRUCTURAL INFLUENCE

Structural influence is the second type of state impact on the local community in that the state imposed new naming tradition through its legal instruments, dismantling local naming practices. In this case, I found two developments very impressive: the imposition of state family name and reversing the customary naming pattern through the legal institution. Each of these is further discussed in the following sub-sections.

4.2.1 Imposition of State Family Name and Emerging Confusions

The history of a permanent surname in the west is the history of strong states per se⁸. And it is completely different from the African context in that it is highly related to modern statecraft. As Scott (1998) has clearly stated, the invention of permanent, inherited patronyms in the west was the last step in establishing the necessary precondition of modern statecraft designed to allow officials to unambiguously identify the majority of its citizens and make them legible for state control. Even in contexts where permanent family names were reported, for example 15th century Tuscany and England, such names were confined to certain segments of the population like a few powerful, property-owning lineages and wealthy aristocrats as a way of achieving social recognition and claiming the backing of influential lineage (Herlihy & Klapisch 1985). It is due to the increased state power that almost all Tuscans and English citizens have permanent family names today.

In the context of Ethiopia, in contrast to the west, there are ethnic groups in which family names are practiced in their indigenous naming long before the advent of the modern state. The Konso of southwestern Ethiopia is a good example in this regard. In Konso, as Ongaye (2015) has stated, family names exist in the form of founding fathers of the residential compounds.

⁸ One can be surprised given that permanent state surnames were experimented with in the 4th century BC in China (Scott 1998).

Family names also have a local purpose of helping in the identification of a certain member of the community with identical personal names but with different founding fathers. Moreover, the Konso’s family names are significantly different from the state-induced family names in that family names are not confined to patrilineal lineage. Thus, women keep their own paternal names even when they get married.

Among the Gofa, the issue of family name is similar to that of Konso. In the Gofa kingdom, local communities hold family names, save the outcast bottom stratum and migrants for the purpose of helping in the identification of the social stratum of a given individual and arranging marriage mate. Regardless of this fact, state-induced permanent family names, with completely different objectives, were imposed on the local community members in Gofa and other cultures of the incorporated parts of the country. The imposition has also got legal ground as clearly depicted in the Emperor Hailesilassie’s 960 Civil Code, Article 32, sub-articles 1 and 2:

Article 32 (1): Every individual has a family name, one or more first names and patronymic.

Article 32 (2): He shall be designated in administrative documents by his family name followed by his first name and by his patronymic.

The practice of assigning permanent surnames in Ethiopia in general and in Gofa in particular was not fully materialized because it remained outside the local context (Aregga 2010). Regardless of the failure of the experiment, the imposition of the permanent surnames has continued in the official documents of the successive governments. For example, recently in the Ethiopian identity documents (e.g. passport), grandfathers are depicted as surnames. Such a trend doesn’t fulfill the concept of permanency in the western or Ethiopian contexts. Thus, adopting a single naming model and applying it to a multi-cultural country always creates confusion. When Ethiopians move to the west, particularly women, they are highly confused because they are identified by their patrilineal grandfather as their surname (Mesfin 2005: 60-61). Moreover, Ethiopian author names are wrongly treated in most reference sources as though they were western names⁹.

4.2.2 Reversing the Indigenous Naming Patterns and Local Responses

The Gofa use a top-bottom naming pattern in which family names come first, followed by fathers names and finally the name of a child: (family name+*na’a* ‘child’ → father-name → child-name). In the absence of a family name, the pattern simply looks like this: father’s name → child name with possession of the father’s name (father name + *na’a* ‘child’) → child name. For example, a man named *Decha Dorba* can be addressed as *Dorba-na’a Decha*, or simply

⁹ Ethiopians use the naming pattern where the first (given) name comes first, followed by the middle (father’s) name and lastly surname (grandfather’s name) though there are exceptions to this naming style in such societies as Gofa and Silt’e. For example, Ongaye Oda Orkaydo as an Ethiopian name means that Ongaye is the son of Oda, and Oda is the son of Orkaydo. However, currently, we commonly witness many Ethiopians using their father’s names or surnames as their given names in published papers. This violates the social norms in many societies (see also Zelalem 2012: ix, Bahru 2002: 280). Thus, in this article, the naming pattern where the given name precedes the middle name (father’s name) or surname is used without a comma for Ethiopian authors.

Dorba Decha. And let us say, *Dorba*’s family name is *Dangarassa*. The full name pattern now becomes *Dangarassa-na’ a Dorba Decha*.

The philosophy of addressing father first emanates from the great value of Gofa for *bayratethi* ‘seniority’. In other words, the father was there before the child came into being; thus, the senior should come first (see also Esayas 2015). However, nowadays, such a naming pattern in Gofa has been seriously threatened, and only practiced in a few local ritual settings. The pattern of naming that prevails in contemporary Gofa is a child first and father next pattern, a typical example of the influence of Amhara culture on indigenous Gofa naming pattern. Authors like Zelalem (2003) stated that child-first and father-second full name pattern is a well-known feature of Ethiopian languages and cultures. Zelalem’s generalization does not hold true. For instance, a personal discussion with Ongaye, my colleague, shows that among the Silte, the arrangement is father first and child second. The reversing strategy has become effective because the new pattern became a prerequisite during the registration on different official documents: school registers, salary payroll, marriage certificates, censuses, tax records, property ownership certificates and so on.

5. END OF THE IMPERIAL STATE: A SIGNAL FOR BACK TO CULTURE?

Amhara hegemony in Gofa and other southern parts came to an end with the 1974 revolution that succeeded in demolishing the Imperial regime and establishing the Socialist Military Derg regime (1974-1991). The Derg regime made many reforms aimed at abolishing the oppressor-oppressed relationship between the north (Amhara) and southern kingdoms. For instance, by adopting The National Democratic Revolutionary Programme (NDRP), the Derg declared that no nationality is superior to another on the basis of its history, culture, language, and religion. Accordingly, cultural incorporation was replaced by a pluralistic approach of advocating respect for the multicultural character of the country (NDRP 1976, as cited in Filippini 2002). Moreover, with regard to personal naming, in contrast to the imposition of Amharic/Christian-centered names, the socialist centered names like *Abiyot* (m) ‘revolution’ *Milisha* (m) ‘soldier’, *Gizachew* (m) ‘You rule them!’, *Mengistu* ‘his government’ and so on were dominant in the early period of post-Amhara domination.

After the overthrow of the Derg regime in 1991 by the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), new geopolitical structures aimed at revitalizing the cultures of nations and nationalities of the country. Such developments are also backed by constitutional grants (see Article 39 of the 1995 Constitution). These reforms actually have made some people move back to culture. For example, one of my informants has changed his Amharic name *Tadele* (given name) → *Tufa* (father’s name) → *Azaze* (grandfather’s name) to typical Gofa name *Woraba irasha* (honorific title) → *Gotena* (family name) → *Tufa* (fathers name) → *Ta’dala* (given name) in a court ruling. My informant has also made modification to his name in terms of the sound patterns and the meaning of his given name: *Tadele* (literally ‘the lucky one’ in Amharic) was changed to *Ta’dala* which means ‘like myself’ in the Gofa language (interview with Ta’dala, April 2017, Sawla). Moreover, as a native Gofa, I have observed the same fact when some members of the Gofa gave native names to newborns in the post-1991 era. However, except these trifling changes at certain individual and family levels, genuine restoration of Gofa names and naming practices has still remained a tiresome job. One of the

challenges has been the century-long prestige and opportunities enjoyed through holding Amharic names and speaking the Amharic language which significantly molded local community's attitude to follow the then state culture in spite of the end of the imperial regime (see also Gebre 2000). Added to this is the development of sophisticated social media and distance-demolishing technologies that increased the global connectivity which in turn affect local community naming traditions by increasing cultural contact. I will not further discuss the impact of the global connectivity on the local communities' naming practices. However, I would like to point out that the intensity of the influence of increased global connectivity on local names and naming traditions needs further research.

6. CONCLUSION

Migrant culture is often dominated and shaped by the culture of the hosting community. However, the case of Gofa and other communities in Southwestern Ethiopia is contradictory. The indigenous culture of Gofa is significantly shaped by the migrant northern culture because the latter came to Gofa as a state culture. Moreover, the state culture is systematically propagated by carefully designed cultural centralization strategies of the imperial state. Accordingly, standardizing language and personal naming practices served as an instrument for incorporating non-state cultures. After the end of Amhara hegemony, and given diverse strategies and declaration for revitalizing local cultures in the post-1974 period, one can expect the restoration of local cultures to their original status. However, the reality on the ground is completely different. The prestige of Amharic as a state language and Amhara naming tradition as a state-naming practice during the periods of incorporation have significantly molded the indigenous Gofa culture still today. The new development in the post-1991 period has shown a signal of back-to-indigenous naming practice but not yet fully realized due to the failure of the Gofa people to systematically grab the post-imperial positive institutional developments at the national level.

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