

Throne Names, Pen Names, Horse Names, and Field Names: A Look at the Significance of
Name Change in the Ethiopian Political Sphere

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ethiopia: Sacred Traditions and Visual
Culture, SIT Study Abroad, Spring Semester 2007

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Abstract

This study examines the motivations for name changes and the purposes the chosen names accomplish, specifically relating to the Ethiopian political sphere. Throne names and horse names were used solely by the emperors and the ruling class. Those name changes exalted the bearer by either stating his authority or connecting him to divine power. Pen names and field names were used by people not in power to hide their identity from people with the power to harm them. Although the purpose of those name changes was to disguise, the names that were chosen identified the bearer with another person or made a statement about the situation.

ISP Codes: Social Sciences

Social Sciences: General – 501

Regional Studies: Africa – 517

History – 524

Introduction

The name Sacred Traditions and Visual Culture is not an apt description for everything that this program encompasses. Over the past three months, we have taken a crash course in Amharic; we have become part of an Ethiopian family; we have learned the history of Ethiopia from Aksum to the downfall of the Derg; we have studied the effects of the Orthodox church and Islam on Ethiopian history, society, and culture; we have experienced the accomplishments of the north and atmosphere of Harar; we have talked about linguistic aspects of Ethiopian society; we have discussed the role of the Oromo in Ethiopia; and finally, we have listened to lectures on Ethiopian drama, literature, and contemporary art.

My topic directly relates to this past semester. It was inspired by the history and linguistics lectures we have had, and it touches on literature, politics, and culture. This paper will cover throne names of emperors and horse names as a background but will focus on pen names and field names. It will examine the motivation for and the process of name changing and the significance of the chosen names in order to better understand the purpose names serve in Ethiopian politics. Name changing is a tradition beginning with the Solomonic dynasty originally used to glorify the bearer, but during the imperial and Derg regimes, names were changed in order to disguise the identity of fighters and writers.

The Solomonic dynasty ended with Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974. The emperors of this dynasty traditionally chose a throne name at their coronation. These throne names are mentioned in histories of Ethiopia; I compiled a “*tarika negast*” (chronology of the kings) with their given names and throne names from *History of Ethiopia from the Reign of Libna-Dengel to the Reign of Tewodros* (the medieval kings) and *A History of Ethiopia* (the modern kings).¹ The

¹ This is included as an appendix.

medieval emperors are rarely referred to by their throne names. On the other hand, most of the modern emperors are known primarily by their throne names.

Along with their throne names, some emperors had horse names, as did the upper nobility.² Horse names are more thoroughly studied, with an in-depth article written on them by Mahtama-Sellase Walda-Masqal. These horse names, given to a ruler or nobleman because of his character,³ were associated with war and used in poetry.⁴

Throne names and horse names both ended with the establishment of the Derg in 1974. However, a new type of name change had already emerged. Authors wrote under pen names in beginning in the early twentieth century, when they started to comment on political and social issues.⁵ I have not found any written sources on pen names, most likely because pen names are still very much in use.⁶

Shortly before the fall of Emperor Haile Selassie, field names became a cultural phenomenon among clandestine organizations that waged guerrilla warfare. Field names were pseudonyms used by political activists fighting against the current regime. These names are retained by many of the politicians currently in power, since they participated in the struggle against the Derg regime. As far as I am aware, there are no articles on field names.

Methodology

This project was inspired during history lectures from Professor Bahru and Professor Shiferaw, both of whom mentioned the significance of different emperors' throne names. We attended a book launching of *The Perils of Face: Essays on Cultural Contact, Respect and Self-*

² Mahtama-Sellase Walda-Masqal. "A Study of the Ethiopian Culture of Horse-Names." *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, vo. 7, no. 2. Haile Sellasie I University. Institute of Ethiopian Studies. July 1969.

³ Mahtama-Sellase Walda-Masqal. *Ibid.* 195.

⁴ Bahru Zewde. Conversation. 23 April 2007.

⁵ Asfaw Damte. Personal interview. 25 April 2007.

⁶ Asfaw Damte. *Ibid.*

esteem in Southern Ethiopia, during which Professor Baye spoke briefly on his article, which focused on the significance of personal names. Through meetings with Professor Bahru and Dr. Heran, I chose my topic: name changes in the Ethiopian political scene.

At first I was afraid that this topic would be library-based as opposed to field-based, but as there is minimal written material on this topic, that fear was unfounded. My other fear, that I would not have enough, or enough quality, interviews was better founded. Though I was easily able to have interviews with people in the academic field, people with personal experience of name changes were much harder to contact, since they tend to be political figures. Fortunately, my father's friend, Ato Esayas, was able to connect me with people who had known of my grandfather.

My research is primarily based on interviews. Interviewing was the only way to conduct this research, since it is currently impossible to observe an Ethiopian coronation ceremony, since horse names and field names are no longer given, and since pen names are very private. I had known Professor Shiferaw, Professor Baye, and Ato Asfaw from the lectures they had given our class, so it was not difficult to contact them. I was introduced to Ato Tomas through Ato Esayas.

For the significance and use of throne names, my primary source was Professor Bahru, though I also consulted Professor Shiferaw, Professor Baye, and Ato Esayas. I talked to Professor Bahru and Professor Baye about horse names. My primary source for pen names was Ato Asfaw, a literary critic. I've talked to many people about field names; this part of my research interested people the most. My primary background sources for field names were Professor Bahru and Professor Shiferaw. Ato Tomas, a member of the EPRDF, described the process of attaining field names to me and gave me many examples of field names.

I started every interview by explaining the topic of my research, which usually began the flow of conversation. I didn't have a fixed set of questions that I asked everyone; instead, I knew what aspect of my topic I wanted to talk to them about, and from there I outlined the questions I wanted to ask them.

Throne names (*Sime Mengest*)

Emperors took throne names at their coronation beginning with the restoration of the Solomonic Dynasty. All of the throne names of the medieval period were compound names, most of them with *Seged* as the second name. *Seged* means to make someone bow before oneself, one who makes people kneel to him, or one to whom others show obeisance.⁷ Examples of medieval throne names are Anbessa Seged (lions bow before him), Alem Seged (the world bows before him), A'ilaf Seged (thousands bow before him), and Messih Seged (prophets bow before him). Most of these names are in Amharic and Ge'ez; the one exception is Libna-Dengel's throne name, Wenag Seged (lions bow before him), which is in the Somali language. This may have happened either to differentiate from his father's throne name, which has the same meaning but is in Amharic, or to send a message to the Somalis and Adals, who were challenging the supremacy of the Christian kingdom.⁸ The only medieval throne name of which I am aware that does not include the word *Seged* is Admas Mogessa, which means "the horizons praise him."⁹

All of these throne names serve the same general purpose: they are a statement of authority.¹⁰ These names are not necessarily aggressive; they ensure the submission of those

⁷ Bahru Zewde. Conversation. 16 April 2007.

Baye Yimam. Conversation. 26 April 2007.

⁸ Tekle Tsadik Mekuria. *History of Ethiopia from the Reign of Libna-Dengel to the Reign of Tewodros*. Addis Ababa: 1961 E.C. 22.

⁹ Bahru Zewde. Conversation. 23 April 2007.

¹⁰ Baye Yimam. *Ibid.*

who may not be completely loyal. Despite these descriptive and powerful throne names, all of the medieval kings were known and are still known by their given names, so that in books, lectures, and discussions Libna-Dengel is not known as Wenag Seged, and Fasil is not known as Alem Seged. The throne names were an indication of the coronation, but they were rarely used, except perhaps in literature.¹¹

On the other hand, after the Zamana Masafent (the era of the princes; A.D. 1769-1855), the emperors were known primarily by their throne names. This was a tradition that started with Tewodros II, whose given name was Kasa, and ended with Haile Selassie, whose given name was Tafari. Kasa Haylu, Kasa Mercha, and Tafari Mekonnen needed throne names because they had ordinary names, and they were no longer ordinary people: they were extraordinary.¹² (Kas means compensatory; Tafari means one whose appearance/presence causes fear).¹³

Because of “the belief that their authority is elected by divine power,” they chose names that were connected to the divine or to previous kings.¹⁴ For example, Tewodros II carefully selected his name. The first Tewodros, though he had a short reign, left a lasting impression of saintliness and justice. In the fourteenth or fifteenth century, an apocalyptic book known as Fikare Eyesus prophesied that another Tewodros would come, and that he would bring peace and justice after a difficult time. Kasa saw himself as someone who was destined to implement change and to unify the country, so he chose this name.¹⁵ Kasa Mercha chose the name Yohannes IV, which was the name of three kings before him. It refers to John the Baptist, a prophet who was Jesus’ cousin and who baptized Jesus, which was the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. John was also the name of Jesus’ beloved disciple and friend, who wrote five of the

¹¹ Bahru Zewde. Conversation. 23 April 2007.

¹² Baye Yimam. Ibid.

¹³ Baye Yimam. Email correspondence. 7 May 2007.

¹⁴ Baye Yimam. Conversation. 26 April 2007.

¹⁵ Bahru Zewde. Conversation. 3 April 2007.

books of the New Testament. Ras Tafari chose the name Haile Selassie, which means power of the Trinity, showing that he was elected by the Trinity to serve as a vessel of God's authority.

The exception to this is Menelik II, who never took a throne name. Menelik had no need for a throne name because his given name is powerful enough. "What name is better than Menelik?"¹⁶ According to tradition, the first Menelik was the son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, the man who brought the Ark of the Covenant to Ethiopia. The dynasty legitimized itself by tracing its roots to Menelik I. If this wasn't powerful enough, a historian during Menelik II's reign, Afework Gebre-Yesus, wrote a biography about Menelik in which he wrote Menelik's name as Min Yilek, meaning, "What may God send." He explained that God sent Menelik to Ethiopia to relieve her from the hardships she endured during the reigns of previous emperors.¹⁷

The modern emperors were known by their throne names because their given names were not powerful, so perhaps the reason that the medieval kings were known by their given names was that their given names were powerful enough. The medieval kings' throne names were statements of their authority, but their given names tended to identify them with the divine or other powerful figures. Three of the medieval kings' names connected them to the Virgin Mary, the mother of God: Libna-Dengel, Sersa Dengel, and Ze Dengel. (Dengel means virgin, so the names mean perfume of the Virgin, sprout of the Virgin, and from the Virgin, respectively.)¹⁸ Zara Yaqob means the seed of Jacob, who was the last patriarch of Israel, the father of the twelve tribes. Yohannes has the previously mentioned implications. Tekle-Haimanot means the plant of religion, and it is also the name of a highly influential Ethiopian saint.

¹⁶ Baye Yimam. Ibid.

¹⁷ Bahru Zewde. Conversation. 3 April 2007.

¹⁸ Baye Yimam. Email correspondence. 7 May 2007.

These names are more powerful than their throne names because they don't merely state the kings' authority. Instead, they show the supernatural basis for the kings' authority. Of course, not all of the medieval kings' given names were power names. Gelawdewos, Minas, Susenyos, and others do not have any particular significance. The general tendency, however, is that the medieval kings' given names have some sort of spiritual or Biblical significance.

The names by which the medieval and modern kings are known connect them to the divine. Since the kings were not elected by the people, their power did not come from the public. They had to find some other way to legitimize their reign. Ethiopia has a long history of being a Christian country, so her rulers sought divine support and even claimed divine power.¹⁹ The Ethiopian kings believed that their authority was rooted in the divine, which is evidenced by their names.

Horse Names (*Ye Ferres Sim*)

Horse names were designations for the lower and upper nobility as well as for kings.²⁰ A horse name is one word that follows *Abba* (father or owner of). They were given by the military, minstrels, or even the nobleman himself.²¹ A horse name was a reflection of the owner's personality, especially in relationship to war. Horse names were used often in literature, especially poetry.²² Mahtama-Sellase divided horse names into five categories: administration and justice; kindness and generosity; integrity, religion, or cunning; anger, forcefulness, and bravery; and the color of the horse.²³

¹⁹ Baye Yimam. Ibid.

²⁰ Bahru Zewde. Conversation. 23 April 2007.

²¹ Mahtama-Sellase Walda-Masqal. "A Study of the Ethiopian Culture of Horse-Names." *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* vo. 7, no. 2. July 1969. Haile Selassie I University. Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 1969. 195.

²² Mahtama-Sellase Walda-Masqal. Ibid. 195.

²³ Mahtama-Sellase Walda-Masqal. Ibid. 196.

Even the modern emperors had them: Tewodros II's was Abba Tatek (gird yourself, be armed, watch over them without carelessness, forgetfulness, or wasting time);²⁴ Yohannes IV's was Abba Bezibiz Kasa (exploit, put everyone under control so that they pay tribute);²⁵ Menelik's was Abba Dañaw (you are lord of all, rule them unitedly);²⁶ and Haile Selassie's was Abba Takel (take over all, administer unitedly).²⁷ Tewodros II's and Yohannes IV's horse names are particularly aggressive, perhaps as a "reflection of the fragmented empire."²⁸

Horse names were given until the downfall of the imperial regime, when the nobility became irrelevant.²⁹ However, Tewodros's horse name, Tatek, was used until the late 1900s. Tatek is the most significant horse name, because future generations regarded Tewodros II as a romantic, heroic figure, since he committed suicide rather than submit to a foreign power. During the imperial regime, student radicals in Europe used Tatek as the name of their journal. When the Somalis invaded, Mengistu Haile-Mariam (leader of the Derg) needed to quickly mobilize the people for war, so he created a military training camp and called it Tatek.³⁰

These horse names are similar to the medieval kings' throne names in that they are an assertion of the emperors' authority. These emperor's horse names are in the command form, as opposed to the statement form of the medieval emperors' throne names. The command form makes the name more aggressive. Names with meanings like "take over all," "exploit," and "put everyone under control" serve a different purpose than names with meanings like "the whole

²⁴ Bahru Zewde. Conversation. 16 April 2007.

Baye Yimam. Ibid.

Mahtama-Sellase Walda-Masqal. Ibid. 196.

²⁵ Baye Yimam. Ibid.

²⁶ Mahtama-Sellase Walda-Masqal. Ibid. 196,

Bahru Zewde. Ibid.

²⁷ Bahru Zewde. Ibid.

Baye Yimam. Ibid.

²⁸ Baye Yimam. Ibid.

²⁹ Bahru Zewde. Ibid.

³⁰ Bahru Zewde. Ibid.

world bows to him.” These horse names are pessimistic, implying that the emperors did not have complete control of a united empire. The medieval throne names were confident and optimistic; according to their names, the emperors had the world underneath their feet.

Pen Names (*Ye Be'er Sim*)

Pen names are different from throne names and horse names in that there is no connection between the physical person and his or her pen name. Only the closest friends of the authors would know their pen names, and even then, the authors would never be addressed by them. Pseudonyms first began to be used by authors in Ethiopia in the early twentieth century, when writing became more social and political.³¹ Unlike throne names and horse names, they are very much in use. People write under pen names when, for some reason, they don't want their identity to be known.

Most of the time, they are afraid of repercussions.³² Because of the absence of freedom of expression, writing can be dangerous.³³ Phrases can be twisted or taken out of context to mean something completely different, even when the author isn't trying to make a political statement.³⁴ In that case, authors might simply use a location as part of their name. One man wrote under the name Ashenafe Zedebub, which means Ashenafe from the south.³⁵ Afework Gebre-Yesus, one of the first novelists, styled himself Afework Zebehirzege (native of Zege, a peninsula on the southeastern shores of Lake Tana).³⁶ Often people would use their first name followed by Ze and a place (meaning from that place), like Zepiazza or Zemarkato, whether or not they actually lived in those locations.³⁷

³¹ Asfaw Damte. Interview. 25 April 2007.

³² Baye Yimam. Ibid.

³³ Asfaw Damte. Ibid.

³⁴ Asfaw Damte. Ibid.

³⁵ Asfaw Damte. Ibid.

³⁶ Bahru Zewde. Conversation. 30 April 2007.

³⁷ Asfaw Damte. Ibid.

Frequently, however, the author is making a political statement, and he uses his pen name to emphasize that. A man whose given name was Bogale might write under the name Ewnetu Bogale, which means “the truth came out.”³⁸ Ewnetu is actually a theme among political pen names, with names like Ewnetu Zeleke (the truth prevailed, is still going strong) and Ewnetu Taye (the truth has become evident).³⁹ In this case, the pen name expresses the author’s aspiration for his writing. These names may be slightly ironic, because the author wants to reveal the true state of affairs to the public, but he cannot even state his name.⁴⁰

One man, Addis Zemen, grew up in the church and worked for the government, so he was highly attuned to intrigues in court and the church. He wrote commentaries for a newspaper in Addis Ababa under the name Zelele Zeginfile. Zelele is someone who jumps, and Zeginfile is the name of a small river in Addis. This name implies that he is a person who crosses barriers.⁴¹ Another man wrote under the name Demekech Tsehai, which means something like the glorious sun (*tsehai* means sun, rays, or sunshine, and *demekech* means strengthen or make more legible.)⁴² In this instance, Tsehai could refer to enlightenment.

In some cases, the author might be afraid that his name will detract from the writing, instead of simply being afraid of the government. For instance, if he is an engineer and decides to write a poem, he would write under a different name from fear that people might think, “He is an engineer—who does he think he is that he can write a poem?”⁴³ There is one example of a man who wrote a best-selling novel about commercial sex under a female pen name, Enau Agonafer, because he thought that it would be better appreciated under a woman’s name.⁴⁴

³⁸ Asfaw Damte. Ibid.

³⁹ Asfaw Damte. Ibid.

⁴⁰ Baye Yimam. Ibid.

⁴¹ Asfaw Damte. Ibid.

⁴² Asfaw Damte. Ibid.

⁴³ Asfaw Damte. Ibid.

⁴⁴ Bahru Zewde. Conversation. 3 April 2007.

Occasionally, people wrote under the names of people they respected or admired. The most well-known example of this is the pen name Tilahun Takele, under which Berhane Meskel Redda, a leader of the EPRP, wrote “The National Question in Ethiopia,” a controversial and influential article published during the imperial regime.⁴⁵ Tilahun Gizaw was the president of USUAA (University Students Union of Addis Ababa), who was killed for his radical views.⁴⁶ Takele Welde Hawariat was a patriot of the five year war and a staunch opponent of the emperor upon the emperor’s return to Ethiopia.⁴⁷ He was a romantic figure because, despite his feudal background, he fought for the removal of the imperial system.⁴⁸ More recently, in the magazine *Toby*, a man wrote under the name and father’s name of someone else, but changed the grandfather’s name. In this situation, the author wanted the writing to be associated with that person in the mind of the reader.⁴⁹ According to Ato Asfaw, this does not happen very often, as it is highly improper to try to put one’s writing under the mantle of another person.⁵⁰

Throne names and horse names exalt the bearer, bringing him closer to God or establishing his authority. Pen names, on the other hand, exalt the writing at the expense of the author, disguising the identity of the author, mostly due to fear of repercussions, but sometimes to enhance the writing.

Field names (*Ye Meda Sim*)

Field names were used by members of clandestine political organizations when they went “into the bush”—remote rural areas where they waged guerrilla warfare against the Derg.

⁴⁵ Shiferaw Bekele. Interview. 17 April 2007.

Bahru Zewde. Conversation. 3 April 2007.

⁴⁶ Kiflu Tadesse. *The Generation: The History of the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party, Part 1, From the Early Beginnings to 1975*. Silver Spring, MD: K&S Distributors, 1993.

⁴⁷ Bahru Zewde. *Ibid.*

Shiferaw Bekele. *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Shiferaw Bekele. *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Asfaw Damte. *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Asfaw Damte. *Ibid.*

Because of the political situation, if the Derg discovered that a person was a member of a political movement, it would punish the family of that person, so a different name was necessary in order to protect loved ones. Two particular organizations that used field names were the EPRP (the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party), which disbanded during the Red Terror, though a small group remained, and the TPLF (the Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front), a dynamic party that was crucial in the downfall of the Derg and which is the core member of the EPRDF (the Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front), the coalition currently in power.

The process of joining one of these organizations was complicated. The first stage was when people shared ideas, learned about the organization, and decided if they wanted to join. Then, for the EPRP, the new recruits joined a study circle, in which one of the members was in the leadership, and they became involved in activities, where they would be tested to see if their character was strong enough for them to join the movement. Following that, they became full members, and they were assigned to different spheres depending on their training and expertise.⁵¹ This process was similar to that of the TPLF, in which they would first register, then have training, and finally be assigned to different spheres—the military, propaganda, publicity, or other sectors.⁵² The name change would often come when the new recruit was assigned to a different location or when he or she went into the bush.⁵³

Sometimes the name change was formal, with a small group of leaders giving names to new recruits. In a statement in 1996, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi told the public that his name was given to him by the leadership of the TPLF when he went into the field, and that he had no

⁵¹ Shiferaw Bekele. *Ibid.*

⁵² Tomas Gebre-Mariam. Interview. 2 May 2007.

⁵³ Shiferaw Bekele. *Ibid.*

choice in the decision.⁵⁴ Meles Tekle, after whom he was named, was his fellow student, hero, and friend.⁵⁵ He was executed by the Derg on the charge of planting a bomb, but there was no due process or trial.⁵⁶ In the EPRP, the philosophy behind the name change was explained to the fighter; for instance, when the fighters were given new names, they were told that they were no longer the old person. Instead, they were a new person fighting for the masses. The leadership even took away the fighter's personal belongings. The purpose was to “detach from primordial identity to establish a more universal identity.”⁵⁷

In the TPLF, when a fighter was sent to a nearby Muslim country like Sudan or Saudi Arabia to mobilize the Diaspora, they were given Muslim names by the leadership and their names were legally changed so that their new names would appear on their passports. Everything was easier in the Middle East with Muslim names. This was a highly successful strategy, and the movement gained money and support from large populations of the Diaspora.⁵⁸ In that situation, when the fighters returned home, they reverted to their given names.

Later on, when these organizations became mass movements, fighters were given mass names, like Getachew and Kebede.⁵⁹ The fighters might be given a choice, and in that case they might choose family names or something significant only to them.⁶⁰ For example, one man, named Berhane, had a mother named Medhin, so he called himself Wodi-Medhin (child of Medhin). A man named Yohannes's had a father named Abate, so he called himself Wodi-Abate. One woman called herself Gualitirota (*tirota* means retired), because she joined the movement shortly after her father, a policeman, retired.

⁵⁴ Shiferaw Bekele. Ibid.

⁵⁵ Tomas Gebre-Mariam. Ibid.

⁵⁶ Bahru Zewde. Conversation. 3 May 2007.

⁵⁷ Shiferaw Bekele. Ibid.

⁵⁸ Tomas Gebre-Mariam. Ibid.

⁵⁹ Shiferaw Bekele. Ibid.

⁶⁰ Shiferaw Bekele. Ibid.

Often people took the name of their hero or of a friend who died in action. Samora Yunus, the chief of staff of armed forces, took his name after Samora Machel, the leader of the Mozambiquan liberation movement from the Portuguese, a hero of all African youth.⁶¹ Another man took the name of Sekou Toure, a former president of Equatorial Guinea, the only leader of a francophone state in West Africa who refused to join a French community under the umbrella of France and opted for independence (1958).⁶² At least two women took the name of Marta after Marta Mebratu, a student leader killed during the time of Haile Selassie.⁶³ Bereket Simeon, the advisor regarding press to the prime minister and a member of the TPLF, took the name Bereket after a fighter in the EPRP. After his first hijacking, Ammanuel Yohannes took the name Belai Tadesse.⁶⁴ Belai Zeleke was one of the most important patriotic leaders against the fascist Italians and a martyr for democracy, killed by Haile Selassie. He had a legendary, larger-than-life status.⁶⁵

Sometimes the process was very informal and developed similarly to a nickname. Ato Tomas mentioned one man whose name was Abraham, but they called him Quarter. He couldn't remember how or why it changed; it just happened. He also knows four people called Wodi-Alla (child of Alla), because they were fighting by the Alla River close to the Eritrean border. Tefera Walwa, a former member of the EPRP and now a senior EPRDF minister, had Tefera as his field name. When he was fighting around a mountain called Walwa, he fought very bravely, but he was seriously injured and almost died. He survived, surprising everyone, and so they called him Tefera Walwa.⁶⁶ One woman, who had been living in Sudan before she joined the movement,

⁶¹ Shiferaw Bekele. Ibid.

⁶² Asfaw Damte. Ibid.

⁶³ Shiferaw Bekele. Ibid.

⁶⁴ Kiflu Tadesse. Ibid.

⁶⁵ Shiferaw Bekele. Ibid.

⁶⁶ Shiferaw Bekele. Ibid.

called herself Gualnumery, after the former president of Sudan, Gaafar Numery. The field name of the first EPRDF prime minister (1991-1995) was Tamrat Layine, which means “a miracle for my eye.”⁶⁷ One lady told me of her brother-in-law, Raswork, who died fighting. He had graduated with a degree in public health, so when he went into the bush, he performed first aid for the other fighters. Because of that, they called him Doctor Atakelty. (Atakely means vegetation; she wasn’t sure why they called him that). When he died, most people did not even know his names was Raswork. “Only his family remembers that,” she said.⁶⁸

Some people retained their field names after the end of the armed struggle—the famous examples are Meles Zenawi, Bereket Simeon, Tefera Walwa, and Aboy Sibhat⁶⁹ (the Minister of Foreign Affairs). Perhaps they kept their field names because they became famous under them.⁷⁰ They may also have kept their field names out of respect and love for the people after whom they are named. Men have even passed their field names onto their children, so that their child’s last name would be their father’s field name.⁷¹ People have dropped their field names if they defected during the course of the struggle or for practical reasons, since their legal name is their given name.⁷² However, it is still the case that even if they are officially known by their given names, their friends will call them by their field names.⁷³

Field names were used primarily to protect the family of the fighter, and in some instances were very similar to nicknames. Sometimes, however, they were used to respect their heroes or fallen friends, sacrificing one’s own identity for the movement. This was a form of justification as well, like modern throne names, by connecting the fighters to martyrs and heroes.

⁶⁷ Asfaw Damte. Ibid.

⁶⁸ Jerusalem Tefara. Conversation. 29 April 2007.

⁶⁹ Jerusalem Tefara. Ibid.

⁷⁰ Shiferaw Bekele. Ibid.

⁷¹ Tomas Gebre-Mariam. Ibid.

⁷² Shiferaw Bekele. Ibid.

⁷³ Tomas Gebre-Mariam. Ibid.

Through taking on the names of other revolutionaries, they established a solid, commendable base for their movement.

Conclusion

Throne names and horse names both exalt the bearer by bringing him close to God or by stating his authority over others. The modern emperors' throne names were names of previous kings or connected them to the divine. The medieval emperors' given names tended to associate themselves with Biblical figures. The throne names of medieval emperors, on the other hand, stated their authority. In that, their throne names were similar to the modern emperors' horse names, slightly more aggressive assurances of others' submission to them.

Pen names and field names served a different purpose, because they were intended to disguise the identity of the user. Pen names, like horse names and medieval throne names, tended to be statements. Instead of stating the author's authority, however, they stated their goal for their writing. This displaced the emphasis from the person to the writing, since the purpose of the pen name was to honor the writing, not the writer.

The most memorable field names identified the fighter with a person they admired. Instead of associating themselves with Biblical, spiritual, or supernatural figures, as did the modern emperors, they associated themselves with radicals, revolutionaries, and martyrs for the cause. The power source changed. Field names and modern throne names were both used as legitimization tools, but as the emperors tried to legitimize themselves through the divine, the fighters legitimized themselves by the people who had gone before them, who had sacrificed themselves for the masses. Unlike modern throne names, carrying that person's name was to honor the other person, not the fighter himself. It was an unselfish act, though rooted in practicality, which allowed the other person to live on in the movement.

These name changes were rooted in different causes, either to elevate or to protect the bearer, and served different purposes, identifying the bearer with a person or a place or commenting on a situation, but they all make a significant statement about the people who used them.

Much more research needs to be done about field names in particular. Field names are a cultural phenomenon among the leaders of TPLF, which is the core member of the EPRDF. Thus, many of the current top officials are known by their field names. Further research will perhaps give the public a deeper understanding of what the TPLF values. Personal accounts of people who changed their names and who gave names to others are vital to further research. Why people retained their field names or when they reverted to their given names is also of interest. Also, a more in-depth exploration of the organizations that used field names and the differences between how field names were given is required. Organizations like the OLF (the Oromo Liberation Front) may or may not have had a similar experience of field names to the EPRP and the TPLF.

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Appendices

Table 1. *Tarika Negest* (History of the Kings).⁷⁴ Because I drew this list from two different sources, the medieval kings' reigns are dated with the Ethiopian Calendar, while the modern kings are dated with the standard calendar.

Given Name (Reign)	Throne Name	Meaning of Throne Name
Naod (1487-1500)	Anbessa Seged	Lions bow before him
Libna-Dengel (1500-1533)	Wenag Seged	Lions bow before him (Somali language)
Gelawdewos (1533-1552)	Atsnaf Seged	Horizons bow before him
Minas (1552-1556)	Admas Mogessa	The horizons praise him
Sersa Dengel (1556-1590)	Melek Seged	Kings bow before him
Zara Yaqob		
Ze Dengel	Atnaf Seged	Horizons bow before him
Susenyos (1597/8-1625)	Siltan Seged	Authorities bow before him
Fasil (1625-1660)	Alem Seged	The world bows before him
Yohannes (1660-1674)	A'ilaf Seged	Thousands bow before him
Iyasu (1674-1706)	Adiam Seged	Territories bow before him
Tekle Haimanot		
Tewoflos		
Yostos		
Dawit III		
Bekaffa (1713-1723)	Messih Seged	Prophets bow before him
Iyasu II (1723-1747)	Berhan Seged	The light (maybe sun, moon, stars) bows before him
Iyoas (1747-1761)		
ZAMANA MASAFENT	1761 E.C. to A.D. 1855	
Kasa Haylu (1855-1868)	Tewodros II	
Kasa Mercha (1872-1889)	Yohannes IV	
Menelik (1889-1910/1)	N/A	
Lij Iyasu (1911-1916)		
Zawditu (1916-1926)		
Tafari Mekonnen (1926-1974)	Haile Selassie	Power of the Trinity

⁷⁴ Tekle Tsadik Mekuria. *History of Ethiopia from the Reign of Libna-Dengel to the Reign of Tewodros*. Addis Ababa: 1961 E.C. In Amharic. Read with the help of Bahru Zewde and Esayas Abeba, both of whom provided some meanings.

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