

A HISTORY OF WOMEN IN DAWRO, SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA

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Abstract

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In many patriarchate societies of Africa, women were highly dominated in every aspect of life. Even in our contemporary world, there are few public figures that traversed the male domination. In spite of such dominance, women have had a better socio-political and economic status in some medieval kingdoms like Dawro, and the role and wisdom of prominent women in such kingdoms needs further investigation. The oral history of Dawro explicitly reveals that women had almost equal status with men. They had the right to choose their own counterpart as well as hold public office by competing with men except the office of king which was an absolute power vested on men. On the other hand, there was a unique office for women to act as the head of the king's treasury. Similarly, in Dawro indigenous religion, every clan have their own male deities and Mariaminto is a 'female' deity for women. This kind of gender equity emanated from the unique Dawro socio-political system. It was introduced at the beginning of the 16th century by a famous King Adeto Erashu and it was further developed and reshaped by the active involvement and advice of the famous Dawro Queen Bale during the reign of her son, King Erashu Hallalla. In the Dawro indigenous political system, women had an equal chance to compete for political office, except the office of kingship. There was also a separate office, Tomosogenne (king's treasury officer) for women who spun cotton, Shalwua, the local currency and currency of other neighboring kingdoms. Hence many spinners under the leadership of Tomosogenne spun more cotton in order to boost the economic powers of various Dawro kings. It is reported that there were many female public officials in the Dawro political system including Genne Bale, Genne Shoshote and many others who worked more for the glory of the kingdom, while few of them added fuel for the decline and fall of the state. According to Dawro elders, the most prominent one was Genne Angelate Gabe, a female Worrabba (regional ruler) in Tocha. Above all her other pursuits, she was credited with separating her region from Dawro and finally peacefully surrendering it to the invading force of King Menelik (1889-1913) in the second half of nineteenth century.

Keywords: Indigenous administration, women, Dawro, Ethiopia

INTRODUCTION

The marginalization of women in the study of history is a global problem; Ethiopian history is not an exception to this. Particularly in the century-old Ethiopian historiography¹, the theme of gender in history² was and still is absolutely biased in favor of men despite attempts to reduce this trend. This bias requires special attention in academia in order to narrow the gap, at least, and integrate women into Ethiopian history. Although their history hardly saw the light of academic publications, women, even today, have many untold stories which require more attention. Ethiopia, as a state, was and still is the home of diverse cultures and people. They have had their own unique socio-economic, cultural, religious and gender histories. Particularly in the southern part of the country, women played a pivotal role in the socio-political life. In the study of the remote and unrecorded past of these people, oral tradition became the major source of history, including that of women. The Dawro and many other southern people's oral traditions, although requiring a very critical evaluation, explicitly dictated that the history of some prominent women in the society outshined their counterparts. Thus, the objective of this article is to shed light on the place of women in the traditional kingdom of Dawro.

Introducing Dawro

Dawro, dealt with in this paper, is both the name of the people and the area. It is one of the various zones of the Southern Regional State of Ethiopia. It was formerly known as the Kullo Konta *awrajja*, including the present day Konta. The Dawro Zone has a total area of more than 4,695 sq. km with almost a million-population size and Tercha became the capital of the zone which is 505 km away from Addis Ababa.³

For a long period of time, the Dawro people were known by different names. After 1991 the present name, Dawro, was officialized after a long debate in the society. The other names considered were

³The data from SNNPRS Bureau of Finance and Economic Development. *Regional Statistical Abstract 1999e.c/2006-7*. Hawassa, 2007 p.43; Central Statistics Authority. *The 1994 Population and housing Census of Ethiopia: Results for Southern Nation, Nationalities and peoples Region. Vol.1, part. IV*, Addis Ababa, 1996. *Showed us that it is nearly half a million, but the data from the zone indicates that the population is more than a million.*

Omate and Kullo. Currently the Dawro people call themselves Dawro⁴ and have rejected the other names. The Dawro people speak their own language locally known as *Dawro Donna* which belongs to the Central Omotic Language Group.⁵

The historical geography of the Dawro was hardly known in the past. It was beyond its present limits and demarcation of the Gojeb and Omo rivers. The Dawro people expressed their pre-eminence over the neighboring Omotic speaking people in the region. They claimed that they were the ‘first settlers’ in the region as they were born from the *Bitta* (earth).⁶Balsiky also affirmed that the Dawro people were the “first to give birth to the Omotic speaking people”⁷ along the Omo river valley.

THE DAWRO INDIGENOUS POLITICAL SYSTEM AND GENDER: A HISTORY BASED ON ORAL TRADITIONS

Unlike the male dominated patriarchy societies and states of Africa, and even other kingdoms in Ethiopia, the Dawro socio-cultural environment and indigenous political system had a better place and even almost equal status for women in both public as well as religious aspects. In the Dawro political and administrative system, except the male-dominated office of the king where the highest political power resides, women had an almost-equal chance of acquiring power in both the administrative and social spheres of the society. Even today, women actively participate in the general assembly. They also had an absolute right to recruit and lead their own army and owned large tracts of land for their army as well their family⁸, according to Dawro elders.

⁴ They defined the term Dawro as a brave and combatant citizen from the well-known verse of Abbo da daandan Gummiya Dawrowaw Naoow.

⁵ J. Edward Allan, “Omotic Overview,” in M.L. Bender (ed.) *The Non-Semitic languages of Ethiopia* (East Lansing: 1976), pp.299-323; _____, “Kullo,” in M.L. Bender (ed.), *The Non-Semitic languages of Ethiopia*, (East Lansing: 1976), pp.324-350; Harold C. Fleming, “Recent Research in Omotic Speaking Areas” in *The Proceedings of the First United States Conference on Ethiopian Studies* (East Lansing: 1973), pp.261-278.

⁶Informants: Erasha Bashu Malebo and Guda Makonnen Gambezo

⁷ P. Balisky, “Wolaita Evangelists: A Study of Religious Innovation in Southern Ethiopia, 1937-1975.” (PhD Thesis, University of Aberdeen: 1997), p.10.

⁸ Informants: Woraba later Qegnazmach Asrat Temesgen, Ato Bakalo Sappa, Ato Wondimu Lemma, Kawna Malla Uncho and Woraba Mitku Mitta

In the Dawro state structure, the king had his own advisors. They were locally known as *Atalacha*. They had an influential position in the state administration. The king chose his advisors from the dominant class who had influential hunting charisma and wealth. According to elders many Dawro kings had several female *Atalacha* in their palaces.⁹

It is reported that the king had a well-organized army. The troops were locally known as *Dachia* and were led by a well-known hero. The leader was widely known as *Zabarasha* who was accountable to the king. Most of the time, the king recruited his palace guard from the socially-despised Manna eunuchs as they were most trusted among Dawro kings. The eunuchs also managed the king's prisons (*Uqina*), and their weapon was a short stick (*Bekiya*).¹⁰

Unlike other male dominated states and kingdoms, the Dawro kingdom had a unique place and role given to them in their traditional political and socio-cultural system. For instance, in the Dawro politics of the time, women played a pivotal role in generating income for the state through the office of *Tomosogenne*. For the palace, the best Dawro spinner women were selected for spinning raw cotton for the Dawro kings. A woman who coordinated the spinning process in the king's palace was known by the name *Tomosogenne*. Similarly, women in Dawro also span cotton for their household use either for clothes or for state currency. In times of divorce, they took all family properties as their own. Similarly, in Dawro indigenous religion, every Dawro clan had their own deities and all male members believed in their clan's deities. However, *Mariaminto* was believed to be a female deity that belongs to women¹¹, and they had their own unique rituals attended by women only. In other words, women in the traditional kingdom of Dawro had become the dominant force of life in every aspect of life. Such legacies are still alive in the contemporary Dawro society.

As their kingdom was almost circumscribed by major rivers including Omo and Gojeb, the Dawro kings also had officials along the rivers. The officials were locally known as *Hatha Rasha* (kings of the water) and were selected from the best divers. The *Hatha Rasha* led a group of swimmers for transporting merchants and goods to and from Dawro. They also controlled bandits

⁹*Ibid*

¹⁰*Ibid*

¹¹*Ibid*

and imposed and collected tax for the king. The *Hatha Rasha* also played an important role in Dawro's war against the neighboring states.¹²

The kingdom of Dawro had a fixed capital at Gadow in Koysha. In fact, *Kati* Gadow was one of the three roving capitals, which included Gebra in Tocha and *Kati* Wombe in Maraqa. These capitals were located on strategically important mountain tops surrounded by deep gorges and cliffs.

Like other African states,¹³ the kingdom of Dawro was also known for its defensively-fortified stone walls. The Dawro fortifications have both big stone ramparts and deep ditches all along the frontiers of the state. This was as a result of the expansion of its neighboring states over Dawro territory. The trench, according to oral tradition, was constructed during the time of *Kati* Erashu Hallalla. This was because his state was sandwiched by the three powerful neighboring states of Wolaita to the West and Kaffa and Jimma to the East. The big stone wall that is found on the borders of the present-day Dawro Zone is locally known as Hallalla *Kella*. It extends along the borders of the kingdoms of Wolaita, Tembaro, Jimma, Kaffa, and Goffa.¹⁴ It is still standing in most parts of Dawro.



Photo.1. Partial view of Hallalla *Kella* along the Omo River (By Seid A.)

¹²*Ibid*

¹³T.M. Huffman, "The Rise and fall of Zimbabwe", *Journal of African History*, 1972, V.13, pp.355-366.

¹⁴ Informants: Woraba later Qegnasmach Asrat Temesgen, Ato Bakalo Sappa, Ato Wondimu Lemma, Kawna Malla Uncho and Woraba Mitku Mitta; Elias Aweto, et.al., pp.126-127; Hailu Zeleke, "Some notes on the "Great" Walls of Wolaita and Dawro"

The role of Dawro women in the construction of the defensive Hallalla Kella and in Dawro's incessant wars with neighboring states was immense. In war time, women led their army and fought bravely like their male counterparts. They also provided food and other necessities for the construction of the wall and took part in its construction, which took more than three generations.¹⁵ Currently Dawro women also play an important role in the conservation of the long defensive Hallalla *kella*, which is more than 175km in length, having two to seven rows¹⁶ in some areas, by teaching the historical significance of the wall to the new generation as well as by giving labor service in the reconstruction of the crumbled parts of the wall.

The Role and Wisdoms of *Genne Bale* in the Traditional Dawro Politics

Like Empress Eleni (mother of Libena Dingle (r.1508-1540)) and Mintwab (wife of Bakkaffa (r.1719-1730), mother of Iyasu II (r.1730-1755) and grandmother of Iyoas (r.1755-1769)) who played a critical role in the palace politics of the Solomonic Empire, *Genne Bale* also had her hand in Dawro politics. According to Dawro oral tradition Bale was the daughter of Kafa *Tato* (king) who married the Dawro *Kati*, Adeto Erashu. Up until the coming of Adeto Erashu to power, the kingdom of Dawro might have been too weak and perhaps subjected to external force, probably from the expanding Kaffa Kingdom. During the reign of *Tato* Galli Gafotch, Kaffa and his successor Galli Gnotsh, according to Max Gruhl, expanded its territory as far as Dawro.¹⁷ The Dawro kings suffered greatly from Kaffa's heavy taxation.

After the rise of *Kati* Adeto Erashu, Dawro once again began to face up to the powerful neighboring states like Kaffa and Jimma. In his shrewd politics, Adeto Erashu brought many mercenaries from the neighboring Omotic states like Goffa, Gamo, and Wolaita. Many combatant clans immigrated to Dawro from these areas. Some of the well-known war leaders, who are still found in the memory of Dawro elders, were Bolla Hance and Sheka Duqqa from the Gudareta

¹⁵ Informants: Woraba later Qegnazmach Asrat Temesgen, Ato Bakalo Sappa, Ato Wondimu Lemma, Kawna Malla Uncho and Woraba Mitku Mitta

¹⁶ Due to the construction of Gelgel Gebe III Dam most of the rows of the wall were currently submerged in the water of the Dam. The people are much worried about the loss of such historic wall.

¹⁷ Max Gruhl, *The Citadel of Ethiopia, the Empire of Devine Emperor* (London: 1932), p.175.

clan, Ayana Qajjella from Quca and the Gadiye Dimo from Gezzo Malla clan.¹⁸ With the help of these cavalry warriors, *Kati* Erashu expanded his territory as far as Kaffa and Jimma.

The territorial encroachment of Erashu together with the desertion of his annual tribute forced the Kaffa *Tato* to wage war against his vassal state of Dawro. Erashu was victorious over the strong army of Kaffa at the Battle of Madda in Dawro. This victory ultimately ended Dawro's dependence on Kaffa. This kind of animosity between Dawro and Kaffa came to its end in the establishment of a royal marriage alliance between *Kati* Erashu of Dawro and the daughter of Kaffa *Tato*, *Genne Bale*,¹⁹ which ultimately brought the liberation of Dawro from Kaffa's domination.

At the end of his reign, probably in the last seven years, *Kati* Adeto Erashu became the most despotic ruler over Dawro. This may have been due to the strong support from his father-in-law, Kaffa *Tato*. During that time, Erashu greatly undermined the role of various clan leaders in state politics. To make matters even worse, drought rapidly engulfed Dawro, even though the king had the traditional power of rain-making for the fertility of the land as well as the fecundity of women. This event slowly brought on strong popular discontent from various clans in Dawro. An uprising was led by the native Hiziya clan leader Qesa Akko. Akko easily rallied many clan leaders against Erashu in lowland Loma and in most of Ushaye and Tocha.²⁰

Like other societies, the Dawro people had their own system of maintaining social order, the most prominent one being the *Ya'a*, which was held under a big tree, *Barpata Walla*. Here they would discuss various social problems and would perform religious rituals. On the *Ya'a*, Akko and other clan leaders discussed the despotism of *Kati* Erashu and the problem of drought in the society as well as the marginalization of the native clans in Dawro politics. At the end of the *Ya'a*, they agreed to refuse his overlordship and to stop their annual tribute by killing the *worabas* in their domain. At the same time, they conspired to kill the king. Unfortunately, the Hiziya-led popular uprising was easily kept under control by the famous Dawro queen, *Genne Bale* Erashu. Bale disposed of her enemies one by one. The queen poisoned some of the uprising's leaders by giving

¹⁸ Informants: Kawna Getachew Botore, Kawna Megaro Tona and Gudda Makonen Ganbezo.

¹⁹ Max Gruhl, p.175; Informants: Erasha Gubla Kehamo and Erasha Taddesse Golu.

²⁰ Informants: Kawna Getachew Botore, Kawna Megaro Tona and Gudda Makonen Ganbezo

them poisoned food. She also gave money to and promoted some of her foes and few of them were appointed as district rulers until they had surrendered and were ultimately executed by her strong army. This uprising finally ended when Qesta Akko was executed in the Omo River.²¹

Under such circumstance, the old *Kati*, Erashu, was succeeded by his eldest son Hallalla under Balle's regency. In the early periods of Hallalla, *Genne Bale* played a pivotal role in shaping Dawro politics. It was by following her advice that *Kati* Hallalla was able to manage the clan intrigues in Dawro. To solve this problem, *Kati* Hallalla introduced a new system of administration which ultimately distributed power and prestige among various clans.

From the middle of the seventeenth century onwards, the kingdom of Dawro became the most powerful state in southwestern Ethiopia. Although we have a shortage of information about the state, it is reported that *Kati* Erashu Hallalla was one of the most charismatic kings in Dawro history. It was during this time that the kingdom of Dawro experienced a new political innovation. Some of his achievements were avoiding a succession problem, the introduction of a new system of administration over Dawro, and the completion of Hallalla *Kella* along the boundaries of Dawro.²²

Before Hallalla, the succession problem was a frequent phenomenon in Dawro. It is believed that a king could succeed to the throne by wearing the royal insignia, a golden ring and a silver bracelet on his right wrist. The new king took the throne by scarifying a bull for his deities and by enduring a swarm of honey bees over his head.²³ In Dawro and other southern states and kingdoms, honey bees played an important role as they were considered royal animals.

Like other Omotic states, the king was succeeded by his first son from his principal wife in Dawro. The Dawro kingship only belonged to the royal Kawka clan. When a new king took the throne, the royal families, locally called Bushasha, lived together with the king. Among them, there had been a succession problem in Dawro as they took part in Dawro politics. However, the famous *Kati*, Erashu Hallalla, systematically kept the Bushasha away from his palace by

²¹*Ibid.*

²²*Ibid.*

²³*Ibid.*

assembling his royal garrisons in the Genna Mountain top. These garrisons were kept by his own trusted Manna eunuchs.²⁴ It was similar to the medieval Amba Gishen of the Christian Highland Kingdom²⁵, where the royal families were kept to be taught hunting and other activities which brought personal prestige. When a king died without a son, the councilors appointed one of the most eloquent Bushasha to the throne.

It is obvious that the *Sharechos* contributed a lot to solving the succession problem in Dawro. *Genne* Bale and *Kati* Erashu Hallalla, however, systematically paralyzed the role of the Bushashas in Dawro politics. As a result, there was no succession problem in post-Hallalla's Dawro. Even very young kings were appointed on behalf of their guardian in the later years. A good example might be the last Dawro king, *Kati* Kansa, who was not yet seven years old when he took the Dawro throne under the regency of his mother, *Genne* Shashote.²⁶

In the Hallalla administration system which included *Atalacha*, *Zabarasha*, *Tomosso* *Genne*, and *Hatha*, *Rasha* was restricted to his palace and became subordinate to the new system of administration. It was intended to control his provinces, penetrating as deep as the village level, causing the kingdom to become a highly centralized state in southwest Ethiopia. The system was also organized rigidly and hierarchically, having seven political offices, *Kati*, *Worrabba*, *Erasha*, *Gudda*, *Danna*, *Huduga* and *Dugha*.²⁷

The new administrative system was intended to devote special care and attention to the defense of the kingdom. The new system also helped in the construction of large stone wall and deep trench fortifications all along the boundaries of Dawro. The kingdom was also locked in by its seven gates which were always controlled by the guards who were appointed by the king himself. The royal guards took sentry duty in the royal palace and patrolled by day and night throughout the entire kingdom.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵Tadesse Tamrta, *Church and state in Ethiopia*. (Oxford, 1972) pp.275-276

²⁶Informants: Kawna Getachew Botore, Kawna Megaro Tona and Gudda Makonen Ganbezo

²⁷*Ibid.* See also Seid Ahmed, "A Historical Survey of Dawro, Southwest Ethiopia, up to 1974", MA Thesis, (AAU, 2007), p.27

Administratively, the kingdom was divided into seven regions which were headed by powerful regional leaders. The leaders were locally known by the name *Worrabba*. They had a character of petty kings who were eligible from the Kawka and the Tigre clan. The duty and rights of the *Worrabbas* were to implement the orders of the king by passing them to the lower officials. The seven Dawro *Worrabba*, *Lapuna Worabethata*, were Koysa, Maraqa, Loma, Genna, Bossa, Tocha and Ushaye.²⁸ Sometimes Konta was considered as the eighth *Worrabba* in Dawro. This office became hereditarily based on the necessary criteria. The basic criteria were not gender; rather, the nominee was required to be i.) of middle age, ii.) rich and iii.) politically and socially prominent among the contenders except the despised group. They were appointed by the king after sacrificing for their *Awa Tossa*.²⁹ The king also appointed *Worrabba* for the socially marginalized groups in order to collect tribute from them.

Each *Worrabba* jurisdiction was also divided into three or four districts based on the size of the *Worrabba*. The districts were locally called *Erasha*. Members of the dominant clan cluster, *Qomo*, were eligible to hold this office, irrespective of their wealth, power and prestige or social status; this included women. The main duties of each *Erasha* were implementing the orders of the *Worrabba* in their district as well as maintaining peace and stability in their domain. The terms of service of the *Erasha* could not be terminated unless the office holder resigned voluntarily or the people called for the transfer of power to other clans.³⁰

Below the *Erasha*, three or four villages, or more specifically sub districts, were run by the office of *Gudda*. With the exception of the despised group, all able-bodied men or women could compete for power. It is believed that there were more than one hundred *Guddas* in Dawro. Each village and sub-village in Dawro politics was also run by the offices of *Danna* and *Huduga*, respectively. As they had intimate contact with the society, both the *Danna* and *Huduga* facilitated a fast collection of tax and tribute for the king. They also recruited soldiers from among the villagers for their king. In addition, they mobilized the society to work on the king's farm, *Madda*

²⁸*Ibid*

²⁹*Ibid*

³⁰*Ibid*

Osua, every Wednesday and Friday. They also played an important role in the construction of the defensive Hallalla *Kella* by mobilizing the society.

The last political office in the Dawro indigenous administration system was the office of *Dugha*. Unlike other offices, *Dugha* was unique in many ways. First of all, it had short terms of office of less than two years. And sometimes it was not considered as a politically-powerful position as the *Dughas* were nominated from the marginalized group of society. Secondly, their main duty was testing the food afforded to guests in a village as well as providing accommodation until their departure from the village. The other duty of a *Dugha* was playing the indigenous musical instrument, *Hititta*, in times of mourning and crisis. When an enemy approached the *Kella* or village, the *Dugha* played the *Hititta* to inform the nearby *Dugha* so that within a relatively short period of time the whole Dawro were alerted of the danger. Soon all able-bodied men and women would convene at the king's court.³¹

Generally speaking, the new centralized system of administration enabled Hallalla and his successors to wield power over the people and boosted the economic power of the kings. It also brought sharing of power for women and for other clan members including the minorities which ultimately blocked the clan-based maneuverings like the Qesta Akko in later years. Lastly, it systematically mobilized society for the construction of the Hallalla *Kella* and for resistance against any external danger.

The Decline of the State and Genne Angalate Gabe

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the kingdom of Dawro began to lose some territories. Particularly, Konta, one of the eight *Worrabba* of Dawro, claimed its independence by *Kati* Lamago. It blocked the most lucrative trade route that linked it to Kaffa. At home, the society became insecure due to wars and slave raiding in the area. It is obvious that the main targets were both women and youth. The slave trade also contributed a lot to the decline of the state as many organized groups of slave raiders fought among each other. Even worse, the *Worrabbas* also

³¹*Ibid.*

engaged in the warfare. In the meantime, the society abandoned the over lordship of the Dawro kings and began to rally under the powerful warlords irrespective of their fief.³²

It is also reported that there had been palace intrigues in Dawro. The most powerful one was *Genne Shashote Misso*, wife of *Kati Dadu* and mother of *Kati Kansa*. On the eve of incorporation, Shashote's administration was more violent than ever before. During that time, she was believed to have killed many *Atalacha* and drove others out of the palace. This was because of her fear of conspiracy and mutiny against her and her son for the Dawro kingship. Immediately she lost most of her strong army except a few trusted Manna eunuch soldiers to protect her palace.³³ Such factors gave way to the emergence of the most powerful provincial governors in Dawro who ruled their respective provinces on their own. In other words, the *Worrabbas* began to declare their 'independence' against the Dawro king. Although my informants lacked some information about the other *Worrabbas*, they still remembered the glory of one of the most powerful contenders against the Dawro kings, *Genne Angelate Gabe*, a female *Worrabba* from a place called Tocha district in Dawro.³⁴ It should be noted that unlike others, the Dawro political office was open to both female and male without any gender discrimination.

Genne Angelate Gabe became one of the seven regional rulers in Dawro. In her early days, Gabe married a *Sharecho* called Marso. Marso was an *Erasha* in one of the districts in Tocha. Having no son, Gabe assumed her husband's position after his death. Later, because of her organizational strength, she was able to win the *Worrabba* office. With the help of her own army, Gabe rebelled against *Kati Dadu*. She refused Dadu's overlordship and established a deep trench fence on her frontiers which had two gates or *Kellas* over her territory. The checkpoints were highly guarded by her standing army. The trench fence was intended to prevent any kind of surprise attack from the king. Gabe also prevented other clan leaders and officials who crossed her territory from paying their tribute to the king. This ambitious woman *Worrabba* also had a platform on which she adjudicated cases. This meant that *Genne Angelate Gabe* was the ruler of the land unto

³²*Ibid*

³³*Ibid*

³⁴*Ibid*

herself.³⁵ *Genne Angelate Gabe*'s platform is still in existence in Botori village in the nearby Tocha town.

Genne Angelate Gabe was also widely known for providing a festival twice a year for her people. She prepared her own local food, *Silisuwa*, for the ceremony. On the occasion of one of her annual festivals, Gabe wanted to marry as she was a longtime widow. Informants recounted that Gabe said the following to the attendants:

“In the name of St. Mary, my people tell me my gender? I, Angelate Gabe, was male or female? I’m a ruler [*Worrabba*] over my territory; I’ve the power of rain- making for the fertility of the land, for the fecundity of cattle, and women. I’ve an army to keep peace and stability unto you. Hence, tell me my gender whether I’m male or female?”³⁶

As the palace was guarded by her powerful cavalry as well as its trenches, all of the participants, except one man, swore that ‘she was a male’. Bola Hancke, the last to participate, declared that ‘she was a female’ and escaped Tocha on horseback as Gabe’s powerful army was ready to kill him. Her army followed him but was unable to capture and bring him back to her court. Soon after, Gabe laughed at them and insulted the liars of the ceremony and finally married Bola Hancke.³⁷

Genne Angelate Gabe was one of the most powerful *Worrabba* in Dawro, particularly on the eve of Menelik’s incorporation of Dawro. At that time when *Kati Dadu* was succeeded by his son *Kati Kansa*. *Kati Kansa* was less than seven when he took the throne. When the army of Menelik under the command of *Dejjazmch*, later *Ras*, Wolde-Giorgis invaded Dawro from Jimma via Hanchano by crossing the Gojeb River; Gabe and her forces submitted peacefully by stretching a white cloth, locally called *Bulukouwa*, on a large bamboo tree and by chanting “*Hebbo Woozze Hebbo Woozze*”.³⁸ This action symbolized the peaceful submission of Gabe to Menelik’s force at Abba Garga in Tocha. She also took part in the campaigns for the surrender of the Dawro and

³⁵*Ibid*

³⁶*Ibid*

³⁷*Ibid*

³⁸*Ibid* “we are peaceful, we are peaceful”

Konta *Katis*.³⁹ Finally the two kings were easily defeated by the powerful Menelik army in May 1889 and Dawro became part and parcel of what Donald Levine later called the “Greater Ethiopian Empire State.”⁴⁰

CONCLUSIONS

In general, one can easily deduce from the above that women had a better socio-political and economic position in the politics of Dawro, as opposed to the Christian Highland Kingdom. It also implies that in the male-dominated world of the time, women like Gabe married their own choice in Dawro. The legacy of the past gender equity is clearly witnessed in the participation of women in different decision-making roles and in different public assemblies in contemporary Dawro. This was remarkable and perhaps unique in the male-dominated history of Ethiopia in particular and of the world in general.

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³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰*See for more information Donald N. Levine. Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multi-ethnic state. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974.*

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