

Yemeni Families in the Early History of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia ca. 1900-1950

A Revisionist Approach in Diasporic Historiography

For a long period of time Arab migrants from Yemen have played a major and a decisive role in the countries surrounding the Indian Ocean¹. In recent years some studies have documented the social adaptation of Yemenis in East Africa (Bang 2003; Le Gunnec-Coppens 1989; Manger 2006; Rouaud 1997). Yet only few has shown as to how Yemenis² have interacted and existed within a state administrative set ups. Given this gap, in this article, my first concern is to describe the interactions of Yemenis within the administrative and bureaucratic structure of the state by taking the case of Yemeni migrants to Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, in the first part of the 20th century³. Second, in this article, on the bases of family history and documents obtained from Arab families I will describe the history of notable Yemeni families who were residing in Addis Ababa. Thirdly, I would forward a methodological criticism on the way foreigners have been studied in Ethiopian historiography. Based on the discussion and findings of the

1. For an account regarding the role of Yemenis within the Indian Ocean world, see FREITAG & CLARENCE-SMITH (1997), MANGER (2010), ROUAUD (1982, 1984), SERJEANT (1988).
2. The standard scholarships within the Indian Ocean Studies divide Arabs from Yemen into two *i.e.* Yemeni and Hadramis, which refer to northern Yemenis and southern Yemenis from the region of Hadramout respectively. In the following description I will employ the term Yemenis, which, given the present day integration of the two areas, is not far from reality. The use of this term is also in light of the subsequent discussions which shows how making division between Yemenis and Hadramis is not in anyway superior from lamping the two terms together as people falling within these categories have been historically given various connotations which reflects the background of the namers and the existing political environment.
3. Although this article focus on the first part of the 20th century, the migration of Yemenis to Ethiopia is a long standing phenomenon. For an account of the long migration history of Yemenis to Ethiopia see AL-MAS'UDI (1861: 34-35), BRUCE (1813: 48), MARTIN (1973), TADESSE (1977: 126), TRIMINGHAM (1952: 139).

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research I would argue that Ethiopian historiography has concealed the history of Arabs as a result of following a conventional historical methodology that rely on source materials written by western travelers. I will conclude by asserting that the collection of family history and documents held in the hand of diaspora families are important sources for obtaining information regarding the history of diasporic groups who might otherwise be under represented in the historiography of foreigners.

Addis Ababa: A Background

Founded in 1987 by Emperor Menelik II, Addis Ababa, which is the setting for the present study, was from its foundation inhabited by scores of people who were not native to the country. Visiting the city in early 20th century, Paul Merab, the personal physician of Emperor Menelik II, tell us that out of the 60,000 inhabitants 1,905 were foreigners coming from various parts of the world. Among its residents the capital then counted 334 Greeks, 227 Arabs, 149 Indians, 146 Armenians, 63 French, 42 Italians, 20 Germans, 13 Hungarians, 15 Turks, 13 Swedes, 13 English, 11 Egyptians, 10 Syrians and Lebanese, 8 Afganis, 7 Portugese, 6 Russians and Bulgarians, 6 Cawkas, 5 Americans, 3 Australians, 2 Belgians and 1 Georgian (Merab 1922: 104).

With its wide-ranging citizens, then, Addis Ababa, which means *new flower*, was the first permanent city of Ethiopia during the modern period. Prior to its formation, Ethiopian cities, with the exception of two historical periods, were not permanent cities. They were shifting cities or as Horvath (1969) call them “roaming capitals” whose existence were linked with the movement of the Emperor. The trend was for the Emperor to reside in one place until the surrounding resources were not able to support his troops and the people linked to his court. Once the Emperor moved from the area, the place would cease to function as capital of the country as the function will be taken over by the new abode of the Emperor (*ibid.*).

Although stable and hence different from the roaming capitals, Addis Ababa, however, was not different from the previous capitals in terms of internal organization. As in the previous cities the heart of the new flower, so to say, was organized around the Emperor court and its compound, the *Gäbbi*. The Emperor quarter was surrounded by the camps of his military chiefs which were referred as *Säfär*; and were distinguished from each other by mentioning the names of the chief who were in the area. A *Säfär*, however, was not only composed or defined through the presence of military personals. It was also brought to life through the settlement of various functionaries, which were attached to the imperial house or to the various chiefs. Along with the chief's *Säfär*, Addis Ababa was therefore dotted with *Säfärs* which enclosed workers, military personals, etc. bearing as their name the tasks of their dwellers. Besides military personnel and servicemen, a *Säfär* was also designated after an ethnic group who occupy a similar

area. Following the same principles, these ethnic based neighborhoods were named after the occupying ethnic group resulting in the coinage of terms such as *Wärəği säfär* (neighborhood of the *wärəği*), *Aräb Säfär* (Arab neighborhood), etc. (Baheru 2005: 124-125).

Beside the *Gəbbi*, the other main node of the city was the market center which was referred as *Arada*. This center was located south of the imperial quarter around a newly built church, the Saint George Cathedral, and acted as an economic and social hub. In the market, trade was conducted through barter or by using a bar of salt, *'Ämole*, which served as a traditional currency in Ethiopia. The *Tägärä Bərə*, a currency that was issued under the name of Empress Maria Theresia of Austria was also used in the circulation of goods until it was substituted by the first modern Ethiopian currency (Zewdu 1995).

As a capital of the country, Addis Ababa was linked with various parts of the nation and was part of regional trade routes which crisscrossed Ethiopia. The trade routes passing through Addis Ababa were connected with the major port towns in the Eastern coast of Africa and served as a channel for transmitting both commodities and people in and out of the city. More specifically, through the trade routes, Addis Ababa was linked to the port of Massawa located in the northwest direction. The city was also linked eastwards to the port of Zeila by a trade route which passed through the old city of Härer. Latter on, following the construction of a railway line from Djibouti to Addis Ababa by *Compagnie de Chemin de Fer franco-éthiopien de Jibuti à Addis Abeba*⁴ the city became connected to the port of Djibouti.

The East African ports in turn, connected the city to the wider trade emporiums in the Indian Ocean. In the early part of the 20th century, this meant ports like Aden, Jeddah and Mumbai (Bombay). The connection also meant wider linkages with Empires and colonial powers dominating the Indian Ocean world. At the turn of the century, despite its modest status, Addis Ababa was therefore a major city and a point of destination which was embedded within an Indian Ocean world system. From the city, various commodities, including slaves were exported to destinations such as Aden and Mumbai. In return, ranges of manufactured goods were brought to the city from the various corners of the Indian Ocean and beyond.

4. *Compagnie de Chemin de Fer franco-éthiopien de Jibuti à Addis Abeba* was a firm which finished the construction of the railway line that start from Djibouti to Addis Ababa. It took over the work in 1908 from a semi private company owned by France, *Compagnie impériale des Chemins de Fer éthiopiens*, who was not able to finish the construction of the railway line. For a history of the railway line, see SHIFERAW (1982).

Yemenis in Addis Ababa

The trade routes, the railway line and the ports that connected Addis Ababa to the Indian Ocean world, however, were not only means of exchanging commodities. Along with the merchandises various foreign groups settled in the city. One of these foreign groups was the Yemenis whose presence I will try to document in this article. At the turn of 20th century, the people who are now referred as Yemenis were not however Yemenis in official terms. Known as *Arabian felik*, in ancient times, their homeland was, at the start of the 20th century, divided into two parts and was under the control of two contending powers. The northern half of the country was ruled for a period by the Ottoman Empire until it came under the effective rule of Imām Yahyā (1904-1948) and later on his son 'Ahmad (1948-1962) (Halliday 1974: 81-122). On the other hand, the southern part was put under the influence of the British Empire who first anchored themselves in Aden in 1838 to secure access to a safe coaling station (Gavin 1975). The British presence in Aden, however, was not effectively extended to the interior and two Sultanates, Qu'aiti and Kathīrī, of the Hadramout region were mostly left alone until they came under British protection in 1937 (Freitag 2003: 404-415).

Traveling to Addis Ababa at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century the Yemenis therefore did not come to Ethiopia as Yemeni citizens. They came under a citizenship other than Yemen. They were British subjects, subjects of the Imām or that of the Sultanate of Qu'aiti and Kathīrī. Entering Addis Ababa in the early stage of its development the Yemenis however, were received and considered as an Arab and a foreigner or in Amharic *yāwəč agär zegočə*. This classification categorized the Yemenis along with all other foreigners, which, as the list of Paul Merab (1922) indicates includes people from twenty three countries. Nevertheless, at the initial stage, this label did not have any legal bearing. Almost for the first decade of their migration Yemenis moved in and out of the country indiscriminately without being put into any formal legal category. In other words, in the late 19th and early 20th century, Yemenis along with other foreigners, traveled to Addis Ababa undeterred by a formal system of control. They came mainly through the ports of Massawa and *Zeila* and went inland via the existing caravan trade routes. Once the railway line that run from Djibouti to Addis Ababa was finished, Yemenis, switched from *Zeila* to Djibouti and started to enter the country from this point⁵.

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5. Informant: 'Abd al-Hāmīd *Shaykh* Sa'īd Bā Zar'a (Addis Ababa, August 11, 2007). He is the son of *Shaykh* Sa'īd Bā Zar'a who as we are going to see in the following pages was a leading Yemeni trader and one of the early settlers of Addis Ababa. 'Abd al-Hāmīd was born in Hadramout but came to Ethiopia with his father. Along with the first settlers 'Abd al-Hāmīd was actively engaged as traders and use to travel outside Ethiopia mainly to the port of Aden. Now diseased 'Abd al-Hāmīd was 98 years old during the time of the interview.

In the early years, their stay in Addis Ababa was also uncomplicated. Yemenis lived and traded freely until a decree regulating the entry and settlement of foreigners was issued by Emperor Menelik II on May 16, 1913. The decree, which was the first of its kind in Ethiopia, gave a one year ultimatum to foreigners to register themselves to their respective legations. Those who didn't have a legation were asked to register themselves as Ethiopian citizen within a three month period. Those who failed to register in either of the mentioned system were asked to return to their country of origin (Paulos 1996). The British being the major administrator of Aden Yemenis from the southern part of Yemen registered themselves under the British legation⁶. On the other hand Yemenis from the north become the "protégé" of the Ethiopian foreign Ministry (Merab 1922: 492). Although full archival research is yet to be undertaken to determine the number of Yemenis in Ethiopia at the time, the record of the British Foreign Office tell us that in the middle of the 1920s Yemenis ranging from 700 up to 800 were registered under the British legation in Addis Ababa⁷.

Since the 1913 declaration, their movement in and out of the country also changed from that of free access to a controlled system. Yemenis were increasingly required to have a special pass which was used for traveling on the railway. Issued from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and lasting for a period of one year, these rail passes were issued for all foreigners who frequently traveled from Addis Ababa to Djibouti. In addition to traveling, bringing relatives and staying out of the country for an extended period of time also came to require a special permit from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or later from the Ministry of Interior. Yemenis who stayed more than six months outside the country were also required to ask for an extension or apply in advance for staying outside the country⁸.

A case in point that shows the development that occurred since 1913 are the permits and correspondences of *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a* who was a leading Yemeni trader in Addis Ababa. *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a* came to Ethiopia in the last part of the 19th century and is said to be among one of the first migrants from Hadramout⁹. In a letter he wrote in 1955 *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a* stated that he had been in Addis

6. Informant: 'Abd al-Hāmīd *Shaykh Sa'īd Bā Zar'a* (Addis Ababa, August 11, 2007).

7. As I have not myself looked at the Foreign Office Records this information was obtained from the work of HUSSEIN (1997: 340).

8. Informants: 'Abd al-Hāmīd *Shaykh Sa'īd Bā Zar'a* (Addis Ababa, September 1, 2007); Mustafā (Addis Ababa, July 30, 2007). Mustafā is from the *wārəġii* ethnic group who had a close link with the Yemenis. He personally new the first generation of Yemeni migrants as he was employed in their business establishments as a shop assistant. At the time of interview Mustafā claimed to be 102 years old.

9. HUSSEIN (1997) basing himself on a thesis produced at Addis Ababa University assert that 'Abd al-Rahmān Bā Zar'a was among the first man who come to establish himself in Addis Ababa. The Bā Zar'a family as well as other Yemenis however consider this as being a wrong information.

Ababa for fifty two years. If one subtracts these fifty two years, assuming that the years are correct, from the date the letter is written *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a* was in Addis Ababa as early as 1903¹⁰. *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a* arrived via the trade route from Zeila together with his four brothers and eventually established himself as a trader in *Arada*. According to his son Abd al-Hāmīd who was among the first generation of migrants, *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a* movement and settlement within the country was not hindered by any bureaucratic obstacles. Along with other Yemenis *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a* was allowed to enter the city and establish a business for himself without being asked about his origin or national affiliation. This state of affair, however, changed for *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a* and his brothers since the 1913 declaration. By the middle part of the 20th century *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a* needed to have all sort of permit related from the relevant authorities¹¹.

One request for residency from *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a* has been kept by his family who are still residing in Addis Ababa. Written in a headed paper which bears his company name, the correspondence was addressed to the permit issuing ministry which at the time was the Ministry of Interior. In this communiqué, *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a* stated that he had been in the country for fifty two years and that his family and properties are in Ethiopia. After mentioning the condition of his children *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a* commented on his failing health and the recommendation of his doctor to go and stay in a hot country. To be able to do so he requested an extension of one year from that usually given to him. He put his request by saying:

“[...] kāzihə qādāmə länə 'ənədə 'ämätə fəqadə nābərə yamis'ätāñə ahune gənə 'ädəmeje bəzu bāmāhonu bāšətayemə bəzy bāmāhonu hākimə fərofesərə rozāti yāmibalāwu muqātə 'ägərə 'ənədə 'ämätə məqoyätə yasəfələgalə səlalāñə kəburə fəqadəwo hono hākimu 'ənedazāzāñə 'ənədə 'ämätə qoyəçə 'ənedəmāta bāməkəbərə fəqadə 'əlāmənālāhu [...]”

“[...] Previously, in my case, I was granted a one year permit. But now because I am too old and because my illnesses are too many the Doctor by the name of Professor Rozati has told me that I should spend one year in a hot country. If it is the willingness of your honor, I would like to beg you for a permit of one year so that I can go and stay for one year as the doctor has recommended [...]”¹².

By the middle of the 20th century, *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a* therefore required a permission to enter the country from the bureaucratic machinery that was not yet set up by the time of his arrival. While in Addis Ababa, *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a* was also issued a special pass

10. *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a* to Ministry of Interior, Typescript, March 13, 1955, Addis Ababa.

11. Informant: 'Abd al-Hāmīd *Shaykh Sa'īd Bā Zar'a* (Addis Ababa, September 1, 2007).

12. *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a* to Ministry of Interior, Typescript, March 13, 1955, Addis Ababa.

that allowed him to travel from Addis Ababa to Djibouti via the newly established rail line. Headed as, “The Ethiopian Government Ministry of Foreign Affairs” the permit carried a lengthy subtitle which read as “Passing Permit for Foreigners who Travel Frequently from Addis Ababa to Djibouti for Trade or other Purposes using Rail Road”. The document was issued on July 27, 1928 by Bəlaten Geta Heruyə Wolədəsəläse and was valid for a period of one year. In the permit *Shaykh Sa’id Ahmad Bā Zar’a* was referred as being a trader resident in Addis Ababa. His country of origin was referred as “Duan Arab Country”. Moreover, under an entry that says “The legation or consulate which bears witness” the British legation was put as being the one responsible for *Shaykh Sa’id Ahmad Bā Zar’a*¹³. In addition to this document, *Shaykh Sa’id Bā Zar’a* was also required to carry a movement control permit which was issued for him by the Ethiopian police¹⁴.

Needless to say, *Shaykh Sa’id Bā Zar’a* was not the only Yemeni required to carry these passes. A number of Yemeni families that I have interviewed in Addis Ababa have a collection of these passes which are used as links to the past. In the post 1913 period, *Shaykh Sa’id Ahmad Bā Zar’a* and other Yemenis like him, were therefore men bearing all the legal forms that came with modernization and the bureaucratization of the Ethiopian Empire. They were correct men holding the required passes and a “proper” citizens who had been placed under the protection of the British legation. Their “correctness” is not only limited to that. They were also residents who had to ask for permission to leave an area that was increasingly being demarcated. In another words, the Yemenis were transformed into a disciplined group under effective state surveillance.

Yemenis During and After the Italian Colonial Occupation

In 1935, the “surveillance” and movement of Yemenis in the city of Addis Ababa and Ethiopia took another turn. The year heralded a period of Italian occupation of Addis Ababa and Ethiopia which lasted for five years. Among other things, the Italian colonial power put up a new urban plan for Addis Ababa and envisioned to make it the capital of East African Italian colony. Reflecting a fascist ideology, the Italians envisioned to divide the city into two parts. The first half of the city which centered on the *Arada*, was made to be reserved for the Italian officials and other white Europeans. The white only area also included the *Gəbbi* that at the time of the occupation started to serve as headquarter of the fascist government. As compared to

13. Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to *Shaykh Sa’id Ahmad Bā Zar’a*, Passing Permit for Foreigners who Travel Frequently from Addis Ababa to Djibouti for Trade or other Purposes using Rail Road, 27 July 1928 Ethiopian Calendar.

14. Ethiopian Police to *Shaykh Sa’id Ahmad Bā Zar’a*, Movement Permit Pass.

the only white area, the Italian colonial powers designated a new market place for the native which by implication meant all non Europeans. Referred to as *Merkato Indigino* this area was envisioned to be a place where not only natives but all people categorized as racially inferior such as Arabs and Indians would be placed¹⁵.

For Yemenis who settled in Addis Ababa, the new boundary, which was marked by a color bar, meant a new dynamics. Like most indigenous people, Yemenis residing in the pre Italian period were mainly stationed in *Arada* as their livelihood revolved around trade. With the introduction of the “colonial system” they were however turned into an *Indigino* (Italian for native) who are of lesser category because of their skin color. As a result, along with the native people, the Yemenis were asked to relocate themselves to the indigenous quarters as the market moved from the old *Arada* to the new colonially built *Merkato*¹⁶. With the implementation of this racially motivated spacial movement Yemenis became not only, foreigners *i.e* *yāwāč agār zegočə*, or member of a certain legation. In addition to all this, they were *Indiginos* who were considered inferior by the white Italians that came to colonize the country. Thus, as their nationality had been an issue in previous time, by the 1930s their color became the most important criteria for their existence in Addis Ababa.

In addition, the Italian colonial occupation also had a bearing on the actual migration of Yemenis to Addis Ababa. On the eve of the Italian

15. The master plan that divided the city was formulated by Valle and Gudi in 1937 and was based by an earlier idea which was developed by the Swiss French Architect Le Corbusier which was requested by Benito Mussolini himself. The implementation of the plan resulted in the dislocation of 10,000 natives/Indiginos. At the start of the relocation the fascist Italian government built houses for the natives each costing around 11,000 lire (SBACCHI 1975: 295-297). Latter on they gave a subsidy of 400 lire to any *Indigino* who was willing to build his house in the native quarter. Despite the formation of the quarter, SBACCHI (*ibid.*) in his PhD thesis entitled as *Italian Colonialism in Ethiopia* tells us that the plan was not effective and was not strictly implemented. Indeed this might have been the case. In this study what I want to explore is not as such whether the Yemenis were strictly put in one place or not. I am not after that. Rather than that, I am interested in showing the emergences of a new idea a new definition based on racial ideology and understanding this through a historical perspective that take in to account previous definitions. The use of cases like Sheikh Seyid Ba Zara and his family through time is therefore to meet the end of illustrating the flux in definition and perspective that is easy to ignore.

16. It should be noted that this is not typical of Addis Ababa. In major Ethiopian cities Yemenis were also exposed to this kind of quarterisation not only by Italian colonial power but also by other European powers who somehow got foothold in Ethiopia. This is the case for example for Yemenis in the eastern city of Dire Dawa. Yemenis were placed in the native quarter both during the Italian period and during the French administration of the city. The French who came to administer the city, as a result of a railway concession, required a special permits for natives including Yemenis. Those who trespass passed without the permit were often flogged and punished through other meanness. On the special structuring of Yemenis in Dire Dawa, see SAMSON (2004).

occupation, fearing the disastrous effect of war, many Yemenis who were in Addis Ababa moved out of the city and went back to their country of origin and places like Aden. One trader who experienced the new dynamics was *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a*. During the pre Italian years of Addis Ababa *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a* was stationed in *Arada* and was mainly engaged in buying and exporting of hides and skin¹⁷.

In the eve of the occupation, *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a*, however, went back to his home country and returned when the Italians effectively controlled the city. Once in Ethiopia, a free pass that enabled him to travel to other parts of the country was issued for him by the colonial administration¹⁸. In this period, his son¹⁹ who left with him during the eve of the occupation returned to Addis Ababa by identifying himself a Qu'aiti subject. Issued in 1937, his passport was entitled as "Passport of the State of Sheher and Mukalla (Arabia)". The passport was valid for two years and was issued on 3, April 1937. It categorizes the holder Abd al-Hāmīd *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a* as being born in Addis Ababa but resident of the country of Reshid in South Yemen. Identified by a respected person, *Shaykh Salim Ahmad Bā Zar'a* of Mukalla, who also happened to be his uncle, 'Abd al-Hāmīd in this pass was identified as a Qu'aiti subject and was granted a permit to proceed from Mukalla to Addis Ababa via Aden²⁰. In Addis Ababa, the British legation being closed as a result of the war, 'Abd al-Hāmīd was not a subject protected by the British legation but a Qu'aiti subject who is in the official context an *Indigino* Qu'aiti subject who was born in Addis Ababa²¹.

In the years after the first occupation, however, the Italian presence in Ethiopia meant an increase in the number of Yemenis in Ethiopia including Addis Ababa²². The major reason for this was the extensive construction project that was undertaken by the colonial government. Within the five years period the Italians built 4,421 kilometers of road and 8,334 bridges by spending 2,967,300,000 lira. The laborers for the construction were recruited both from the indigenous population and foreigners. In this context Yemenis arrived in great numbers as part of the foreign laborers²³.

17. Informants: 'Abd al-Hāmīd *Shaykh Sa'īd Bā Zar'a* (Addis Ababa, September 17, 2007); Mustefa (Addis Ababa; September 18, 2007).

18. Informant: 'Abd al-Hāmīd *Shaykh Sa'īd Bā Zar'a* (Addis Ababa, September 18, 2007).

19. His son is my key informant *i.e.* 'Abd al-Hāmīd *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a*.

20. Passport of 'Abd al-Hāmīd *Shaykh Sa'īd Bā Zar'a*, April 3, 1937, Mukalla.

21. Passport of the State of Sheher and Mukalla, 3 April, 1937.

22. Informant: 'Abd al-Hāmīd *Shaykh Sa'īd Bā Zar'a* (Addis Ababa, September 18, 2007).

23. According to PANKHURST (1981: 36). The Italian recruited 10,500 Yemenis and Sudanese for their road building project in East Africa. Although we don't know the exact number of Yemenis who were brought to Addis Ababa for road construction TRIMINGHAM (1952: 221) tells us that in Addis Ababa in 1938 the number of Arabs was 1563.

The opening of the interior that followed these road constructions also meant new migration patterns. Yemenis from the Italian controlled port of Massawa moved into the inner part of Ethiopia including Addis Ababa²⁴.

After the colonial era, Yemenis were placed again under Ethiopian imperial administration which was reestablished after the victory of the Ethiopian patriotic forces and the British army who were involved in ending the Italian occupation. Now aged 90 'Abd al-Hāmīd the son of *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a* recall the reestablishment of the imperial administration vividly: "I was standing in front of this door. I was a little boy. Passers-by who knew my father came and kissed me saying your father has met Emperor Haile-Sellassie. They were very happy."

This event, which was recorded in the national Arabic news paper *Al-'Alam* mention that the Yemeni communities were among those who went out to greet the Emperor during a celebration to mark his return from exile. In an issue which was dated as May 6, 1942 *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a* along with his fellow Hadrami Ahmad al-Mihdār, Bā Hārūn, Aqil and Bā ubaysh greeted the Emperor. From Northern Yemen people like Alī Mahmūd al-Nusayrī, 'Abd al-Hād ī, 'Abd al-Qawiyy al-Khurbāsh were present during the ceremony²⁵.

Besides the ceremony, for the Yemenis, the return of the Ethiopian regime meant the removal of the Italian color bar. It also entailed a new influx of migrants who came to the country following the establishment of peace or linked with the British army who along with Ethiopian forces were liberating the country²⁶. Now as before, the movements of the Yemenis were controlled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who was responsible for issuing permits for staying in the country or bringing relatives from abroad. In the post Italian period Yemenis appeared as British subjects holding British passports and being linked to the British Embassy in Addis Ababa²⁷.

Despite their links to the British some Yemenis, however, decided to become Ethiopian. Among those who become Ethiopian was the daughter of *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a*, Shifa *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a*. Shifa applied to become a citizen of the Ethiopian Empire on April 20, 1960. She was granted citizenship by the Ethiopian Imperial government Ministry of Foreign Affairs on March 21, 1962. To attest this, Shifa was given an Ethiopian citizenship identification card which was signed by Vice Minister Kebede Gebre Welde. The pass which mentions Shifa's application

24. Informants: 'Abd al-Hāmīd *Shaykh Sa'īd Bā Zar'a* (Addis Ababa, September 18, 2007); 'Abd al-Rahmān al- Habeshi (October 1, 2007) 'Abd al-Rahmān is one of the leading Yemeni traders of Addis Ababa. He is old year.

25. *Al-Alam*, 6 May, 1942.

26. Yemenis were involved as soldiers during in the British army that came to liberate Ethiopia. The British soldiers cemetery in the town of Dire Dawa especially hold the graves of Yemeni soldiers who died fighting for the liberation of Ethiopia from fascist Italia.

27. Informant: 'Abdallāh Imad (Addis Ababa, August 1, 2007).

asserted that the Ministry witness that Shifa was written in the Ethiopian Nationality Journal number 16 on page 70,037²⁸.

Those who became citizen, however, were not only individuals like Shifa whose parents have been, by this time, a long-term dwellers of Addis Ababa. New comers who had arrived later also became Ethiopian citizens. One example in this regard is Ahmad Imad Al Din who came from northern Yemen in the 1940s. Like Shifa, Ahmad applied for an Ethiopian citizenship and was given the accompanying citizenship identification card which was duly signed by the ministre d'État Doctor Tesfaye Gebrezgi. Subsequently, Ahmed was also given an Ethiopian passport²⁹.

Notable Yemeni Families in Addis Ababa

Despite the bureaucratic set ups, a number of Yemeni families managed to establish themselves as prominent personalities during the first part of the 20th century. Bellow I will try to recount the history of some of the families³⁰. As I have mentioned above one of the early arrivals were the Bā Zar'a family. Let me start with their story which is marked by prominence and success. Members of this family who are still residing in Addis Ababa assert that *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a* came through the port of Zaila³¹. As most migrants of the time, *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a* settled briefly around the city of Hārer and moved on to Addis Ababa following the trade route that link the city to the eastern region. During the initial period of his stay in Addis Ababa *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a*, by basing himself in *Arada* market was engaged mainly in the collecting of hides and skin. Most of his business was undertaken by hiring local people who would collect the hides through barter.

The modest business that he started through the sale of hide and skin was later on diversified into importing and exporting wide range of commodities³². During the growing phase of his business *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad*

28. Identification card of Shifa *Shaykh Sa'īd Bā Zar'a*, Typescript, Addis Ababa, 21 March 1962.

29. Identification card and passport of Ahmad Imad (original document is with 'Abdallāh Imad son of Ahmed Immad al Dine).

30. This article is not meant to be a complete account of all important Yemeni families in Addis Ababa. Doing so will require more space than this short article.

31. Information regarding *Shaykh Sa'īd Bā Zar'a* is obtained from 'Abd al-Hāmīd *Shaykh Sa'īd Bā Zar'a* and Sa'īd Abubeker 'Abd al-Hāmīd Bā Zar'a (his great grand son).

32. Like *Shaykh Sa'īd Bā Zar'a*, as we are going to see subsequently many Yemenis were engaged in the selling of coffee and hide and skin. Their involvement in this economic niche however was not accidental. Rather, it reflects the broader economic situation of the country which was marked by the decline of demand for traditional export item *i.e.* ivory and slave. Yemenis also evolved themselves in the niche because Emperor Haile Sellassie who came to power in the 1920s

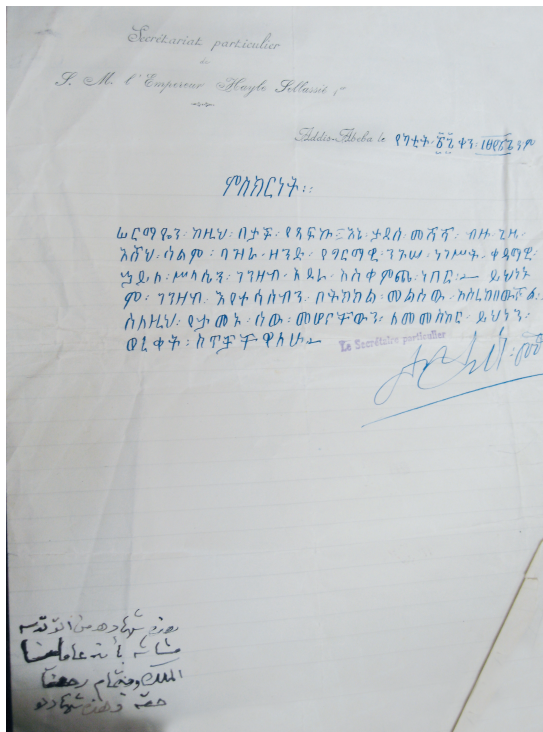
Bā Zar'a business was undertaken and controlled mainly by his brothers who followed his foot steps to Addis Ababa. In the first part of the century *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a*, along with his brothers was able to establish a trading houses in the town of ḡamma, which was a major source of raw material; Asmara, the present day capital of Eritrea which was a key center for the trade that goes through the port of Massewa; as well as the port of Djibouti. He mainly exported hide and skins, and various spices to the ports of Aden, Jeddah, Bombay and Mombasa. The Bā Zar'a were also engaged modestly in the selling of slaves³³.

By virtue of their trade the Bā Zar'a became one of the richest and most prominent Yemeni families in early day of Addis Ababa and they were leaders of their community. In the first part of the 20th century the Bā Zar'a were especially linked with the royal court of Ethiopia. *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a* was said to be in touch with Emperor Menelik II. *Shaykh Sa'īd Ahmad Bā Zar'a* was also given a free land in the town of ḡamma by ḡamma abba ḡifarə, who at the time was the King of the area, for the service that he has provided to his court³⁴. His brother, *Shaykh Salīm Bā Zar'a* who was one of his business partners also acted as the financial manager of Emperor Haile-Sellassie³⁵. Sheik Salīm Bā Zar'a was entrusted with the Emperor's money for up keeping on several occasion as a letter of testimony provided to him by the imperial court attest (see fig. I)³⁶.

encouraged the export of coffee and hide, which are items whose demand have risen in the post World War I Europe. For an interesting discussion on the economic reorganization of Ethiopia, see EDWARD (1982: 4-6).

33. Apart from the oral information supplied by Yemeni community one source that proves and indicate the involvement of the Bā Zar'a in the sailing of slaves is the interview of freed slaves made by British officials in Aden. In an undated memorandum which is entitles as *Addenda to Case of Slavery Previously Reported* (in Hadramout) we find for example the case of an Abyssinian slaves from Addis Ababa who was sold out by the Bā Zar'a. Named as Nassib Mubarek the freed slave account reported by the British authority read as follow: "I am an Abyssinian and was born in Addis Ababa. When I was two years old I was taken to Du'an by one of the Ba Zara family who sold me to Ba Surra. I remained with Ba Surra from that time and two year ago he freed me. I told him I would like to go to my own country and he gladly gave me permission, but I will go first to Aden and work there" (Memorandum, undated, *Addenda to Cases of Slavery Previously Reported* [in Hadramout] CO732/78/1).
34. Informant: 'Abd al-Hāmīd *Shaykh Sa'īd Bā Zar'a* (September 1, 2007).
35. The fact that *Shaykh Salīm Bā Zar'a* was Emperor Haile Sellasie financial manager is hardly surprising. In Ethiopian history Arabs were considered as being trustworthy when it comes to financial matter. As noted by James BRUCE (1813: 48) in the economic history of Ethiopia they were also engaged as creditors who were financing native Muslim traders.
36. Tādāsā Māšāša (Emperor Haile-Sellassie Secretary), Testimony, Hand written, Addis Ababa, December 5, 1933. (Ali Bā Zar'a, *Shaykh Salīm Bā Zar'a* grand son, is in possession of the documents.)

FIG. I. — TESTIMONY OF EMPEROR HAILE-SELLASSIE SECRETARY CONCERNING THEREPUTATION OF SHAYKH SALĪM BĀ ZAR'A



The letter which was written by Tādāsā Māšāša, the Emperor Secretary, attests the service of Sheik Salīm Bā Zar’a as follow:

“Firəmayenə kāzihə bātačə yāsafeku ’āne Tādāsā Māšāša bəzu gəze’ āšehə saləmə bazaar zānədə yāgərəmwawi nəgusā nəgəsətə qādāmawi həyələsələsenənə gānəzābə ’ādārā ’āsəqāməčə nəbərə yəhənənəmə gānəzābə ’ayätāsasəbənə bātekəkəlu’ āsərəkəbəwuñalə sələzihə yätāmānu sāwu māhonačəwunə lāmāmāsəkärə yehənənə wäräqätə sätəčəwālähü.”

“I the undersigned, Tādāsā Māšāša, have on many occasion entrusted the money of the Kings of Kings, Emperor Haile-Seallasie I to Sheikh Salim Ba Zara. He has returned the money after we have mutually considered the situation. In order to bear witness that he is a trustworthy person I have issued with the present testimony the following paper.”

Salīm Bā Zar’a was also given the fourth honorary medal of Ethiopia from the Emperor Haile-Selassie five years after the Emperor coronation (see fig. II)³⁷.

37. Certificate for the fourth Honorary Medallion of Ethiopia Awarded to *Shaykh* Salīm Bā Zar’a. (The original is in the hand of Ali Ba Za, Addis Ababa).

FIG. II. — AWARD CERTIFICATE OF *SHAYKH SALĪM BĀ ZAR’A*



Apart from Salīm another brother of *Shaykh Sa’id Ahmad Bā Zar’a*, Abd al-Kāder Bā Zar’a, was also given the fourth honorary medal for his outstanding trade activity and his loyalty to the country³⁸.

The Bā Zar’a family, however, was not the only prominent Yemeni family. Beside *Shaykh Sa’id Ahmad Bā Zar’a*, another important name in this period is Bā Hajrī. Like the Bā Zar’a family and most Hadrami Yemenis that we find in Addis Ababa Bā Hajrī’s original home was in Wādī Du’ān in Hadramout. According to his sons who are still running his business in Addis Ababa he arrived in the first part of the 20th century to improve his living. To come to Ethiopia he first moved to the port of Mukalla and

38. Informant: Rukiya Bā Zar’a (Addis Ababa, August 6, 2007). Rukiya is the grand daughter of ‘Abd al-Rahmān Ba Zara.

then onwards to Aden. From there, Bā Hajrī moved to Massawa using the small boats operating in the area. Before moving to Addis Ababa he settled in the city of Asmara which at the time was part of the Italian colony in East Africa. Once he got himself to Addis Ababa Bā Hajrī engaged himself in the buying and selling of hide and skin. Latter on, he switched his business to the export of oil seed, pulses and paper. The commodities were first exported to Aden where he had an Indian business partner. Latter on, Bā Hajrī managed to export oil seeds and pulses to Belgium, Germany, Holland, France and United States of America³⁹.

In the first part of the 20th century another successful Yemeni migrant was Muhammad Yūsuf Bā Najī. Like the Bā Zar'a and Bā Hajrī, Muhammad Yūsuf Bā Najī came from Wādī Du''ān in Hadramout. According to his family who are now residing in Addis Ababa, he arrived to improve his economic situation. The family does not specifically remember the port that he came through or the inland routes that he has followed in order to reach Addis Ababa. They however remember that Muhammad Yūsuf Bā Najī was sponsored and helped by *Shaykh* Sa'id Ahmad Bā Zar'a, a connection which eventually resulted in the formation of marriage alliance between the two family. In Addis Ababa, *Shaykh* Sa'id Ahmad Bā Zar'a managed to find him a job in the company of Antonin Bess⁴⁰. In 1940, after working as a secretary in the Bess Company, Muhammad Yūsuf Bā Najī managed to open his own modest hide and skin business.

When his business developed, he bought a vast tract of land and started operating his business in what is now referred as *Tākälähüyēmanotə* area. Muhammad Yūsuf Bā Najī was mainly a supplier of hide and skin to expatriate hide exporting companies as well as shoe factories which were owned by Greeks and Frenchmen. In addition to his hide and skin business Muhammad Yūsuf Bā Najī also sold cereals, tea leafs and incense for the local market⁴¹. As a result of his commercial activities, Muhammad Yūsuf Bā Najī was able to build eighty three houses in Addis Ababa⁴². He also held property in the towns of *Šāno* and *Bišofətu* as well as in his original home town Wādī Du''ān⁴³. In Aden Yūsuf Bā Najī was also able to build three buildings and one shop. In the first part of the 20th century Muhammad Yūsuf Bā Najī was one of the richest men in Addis Ababa. He was privileged and looked upon as the representative of the Arabs by Emperor Haile-Sellassie⁴⁴.

39. Informant: Ali and Ahmed Bā Hajrī (Addis Ababa, September 6, 2007).

40. Antonin Bess was a financial magnet who was operating mainly by basing his company in the port of Aden. For a Biography of Bess, see FOOTMAN (1986).

41. This information apart from oral testimony of the family and was corroborated by the various trade documents which is held by the Bā Najī family in Addis Ababa.

42. Informant: Salah Ba Naji (Addis Ababa, July 10, 2007).

43. Last will of Muhammad Yūsuf Bā Najī, typescript, Addis Ababa, July 16, 1971.

44. Informant: Salah Bā Naji (Addis Ababa, July 10, 2007).

Along with the Ba Najī, Bā Zar'a and Bā Hajrī another prominent personality was 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Habshī. Also from the province of Wādī Du''ān in Hadramout, 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Habshī settled first in Sāno province of Ethiopia. In Sāno he started to operate a small shop and then switched to the supply of grain to the market of Addis Ababa. Later on, Abd al-Rahmān moved to Addis Ababa and seeing that the export of coffee was more profitable than supplying grain he started to export coffee to Aden. He also became engaged in selling coffee to the local market, which enabled him to earn a good reputation in Addis Ababa. Like the Bā Najī they were one of the richest families in the city and were able to have the largest coffee storing magazine in the capital⁴⁵.

During of the first part of the 20th century the other important and well connected Yemeni was *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī. *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī came to Ethiopia in the first part of the 20th century from the town of *Redea* in northern Yemen. *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī was a very important personality not only in Ethiopia but throughout the region. He was engaged in the recruiting of laborers from Yemen to Ethiopia for the railway company for work on the line from Djibouti to Addis Ababa. His involvement with the railway dates from the initial period of construction when he supplied labor that he had recruited from Yemen. Later on when the line reached Addis Ababa and the train started to operate, *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī was able to obtain contracts for loading and offloading cargo in the railway stations from the body that was administering the railway line. *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī also supplied men for loading and offloading goods for ships that were docking in Djibouti. In addition to this, *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī was also engaged in transporting imported goods from the railway station to the warehouses of the traders. In the early days, he did this using mule, donkeys and camels. During the post-Italian period, *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī substituted the pack animal with trucks. For the purpose, he is said to have bought forty trucks that were left behind by the Italians⁴⁶.

Although there were other small Yemeni labor recruiters who were importing labor to Ethiopia and to Addis Ababa, *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī monopolized the business of cargo loading and offloading cargo for a long period. In line with the attitude of the French and other colonial powers toward Yemeni laborers⁴⁷, *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī's men

45. Informant: 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Habshī (Addis Ababa, October 1, 2007).

46. Informant: Ahmed Hassen *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī, grand son of *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī (Addis Ababa, December 11, 2007). His oral information was supplemented with a very large collection of document that is in the hand of the family.

47. The British and French colonial powers considered the Yemenis as being very hard worker and preferred them over natives. As a result, Yemenis were engaged in many construction activities. For an account of how Yemenis were viewed by the colonial powers, see PERKINS (1993) and KILLION (1985).

were regarded as being hard workers and efficient in their activity. The traffic manager of the Franco-Ethiopian railway during the British administration, Major Thomson, and the General Manager of the railway line, Lieutenant Colonel Collier, commented the contribution of *Shaykh Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī* in these terms:

“*Shaykh Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī* has been the contractor to this administration for the loading and off loading of all merchandise at the Addis Ababa railway station throughout the entire period of this administration, *i.e.* from June 1941 to July 1946. This Administration wishes to place on record that *Shaykh Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī* and his staff and workers have given us entire and complete satisfaction and have at all time worked cheerfully and tirelessly and have in no small measure contributed to the rapid turnaround of wagons, which is so vital to the efficient operation of a railway”⁴⁸.

The work force under *Shaykh Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī* was mainly recruited from his own native area. The workers were people who were recruited actively but also individuals who just came and got employed under him as a result of being a Yemeni or coming from the same area. In Addis Ababa, *Shaykh Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī*'s men stayed in the neighborhood called *Sengatera* area as it was close to the main railway station. Their work was carried out in gangs composed of twenty up to thirty people. For his services, *Shaykh Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī* charged the importing and exporting merchant/companies a commission⁴⁹.

Shaykh Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī provided his service to all the merchants residing in Addis Ababa, including the important Yemeni traders I have previously mentioned. As *Shaykh Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī* was not actually an employee of the railway company but an independent subcontractor, all traders residing in Addis Ababa who wanted to send goods abroad were supposed to come together and sign a service with him⁵⁰. *Shaykh Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī* and his many gangs of workers, therefore, were faced with the need to satisfy two masters. As Thomson mentioned, the swift movement of goods and the general rail system traffic was dependent on them. This responsibility was indeed great given the single-track system of the railway line. On the other hand, *Shaykh Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī* and his men had to take the responsibility of carefully loading the exported and imported goods and supervise their destination.

48. Major Broughton Thompson and Lieutenant Collier. Letter of Recommendation to *Shaykh Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī*, Type script, Addis Ababa, 30 June 1946. (The original letter is in the hand of his grandson, Ahmed Hasesn *Shaykh Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī*).

49. Informant: Mustafā (Addis Ababa, December 12, 2007).

50. Letter of contract between *Shaykh Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī* and Merchants of Addis Ababa, typescript, January 1, 1950. (Original document is with his grandson Ahmed Hussein *Shaykh Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī*).

Shaykh Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī and the Yemeni laborers under him seem to have carried out this task swiftly. They were also able to win the confidence of the entire merchant community in Addis Ababa, renewing their agreements with them every five years. An enlightening document in this regard is a contractual agreement between him and Addis Ababa traders. The document, which is signed by more than twenty merchants, tells us that *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī had entered into a contractual agreement with leading French capital based companies that were dominating the trade in Ethiopia. Among these, *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī had signed an agreement with the Aden based Antonin Bess, who was dominant in the regional economy⁵¹. The contractual agreement of *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī is remarkable given the enormous importance of Antonin Bess Company in the Ethiopian economy. Antonin Bess was the sole agent of Shell in the region and one of the financiers of the railway line and dominated 75% of the Ethiopian region external trade (Killion 1985: 48).

Besides Bess, *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī also engaged with the Aden based, British backed Arabian Trading Company. *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī contractual agreement was also extended to companies that were not financially backed by the British or French states. In this regard *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī had contracts with the leading Yemeni traders including, the Ba Zara, T. Sherian, al-Habshī, Bā Ubad. His involvement also included other expatriate companies that were owned by Jewish, Armenians, Greeks, Indians and Italians. From this group Ahmed was able to get a contract with such leading companies as Gelattely Hankey and George Kaloyopulos. During the Imperial period, fifty export and import firms had signed agreements with *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī. Stating the terms and condition of the contracts the merchants maintained that the agreement would last for a five year period and was given due to the satisfactory undertaking of *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī and his Yemeni laborers⁵².

Shaykh Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī labor brokerage business, however, was not limited to the east African ports and to Addis Ababa. He also exported Yemeni and Somali sea men to the French port of Marseille as early as the 1920s. The seamen *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī exported were employed by the *Messageries Maritimes*, the French based company founded in 1851⁵³. *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī's business undertakings were facilitated by the French policy of encouraging Yemenis to be linked with France so that

51. Letter of contract between *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī and Merchants of Addis Ababa, typescript, January 1, 1950. (Original document is with his grandson Ahmed Hasesn *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī).

52. Letter of contract between *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī and Merchants of Addis Ababa, typescript, January 1, 1950. (Original document is with his grandson Ahmed Hasesn *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī).

53. Informant: Ahmed Hasesn *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī (Addis Ababa, December 11, 2007). The supplying of sea men to Marseille was also briefly mentioned by KILLION (1985: 210) whose main concern was to describe the organization of workers in Ethiopia Djibouti Railway line.

they could establish a presence in Yemen. *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī seems to have exploited and effectively used this “colonial will” by becoming a French citizen, a fact, which according to his identity card, continued well into the 1940s.

Shaykh Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī however was not only a trader but also like *Shaykh* Sa’īd Ahmad Bā Zar’a a personality connected to the royal courts of Ethiopia. In fact he was one of the Yemenis who were highly connected to the imperial court of Ethiopia especially that of Emperor Haile-Sellassie. Like the Bā Zar’a family, *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī acted as a main link between the Yemeni community and the imperial court. He was also one of the merchant capitalist who were instrumental in consolidating Emperor Haile-Sellassie rise to power⁵⁴. *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī also acted as a diplomatic agent for Emperor Haile-Sellassie in Arab countries. He especially served as an intermediary between Emperor Haile-Sellassie and the ruler of Yemen. *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī was also the diplomatic envoy of Emperor Haile-Sellassie when war was about to break out between Yemen and Saudi Arabia because of a border conflict between the two countries. In the diplomatic field he was also part of the two diplomatic missions that was sent in 1933 and 1934 by Emperor Haile-Sellassie to Yemen⁵⁵. *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī in particular played a big role when the Fascist Italian government invaded the country⁵⁶. Oral history tells us that *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī was one of the people who planned the successful escape of the Emperor from Addis Ababa to Djibouti by train.

During the war with the Italians, according to a letter he himself wrote to Emperor Haile-Sellassie, *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī was involved in transporting arms and explosives by camel from East African port towns to Ethiopian soldiers. He was also able to import arms to the Ethiopian government from Yemen by going there and negotiating with the Yemeni rulers. This act was especially crucial for the patriotic movement against the colonial Italian government, as arms was not allowed to be imported

54. During Emperor Haile-Selassie rise to power there were a number of foreign merchants in Addis Ababa who facilitated his ascent to power by forming an informal banking system that was instrumental in stimulating the coffee trade in southern Ethiopia whom Emperor Haile-Selassie controlled through the appointing of his own men. In this context *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī was one of these foreigners who were engaged in providing financial support to Haile-Selassie south Ethiopian appointees. For a discussion of the role of Addis Ababa merchants in the rise of Haile-Selassie, see EDWARD (1982: 7).

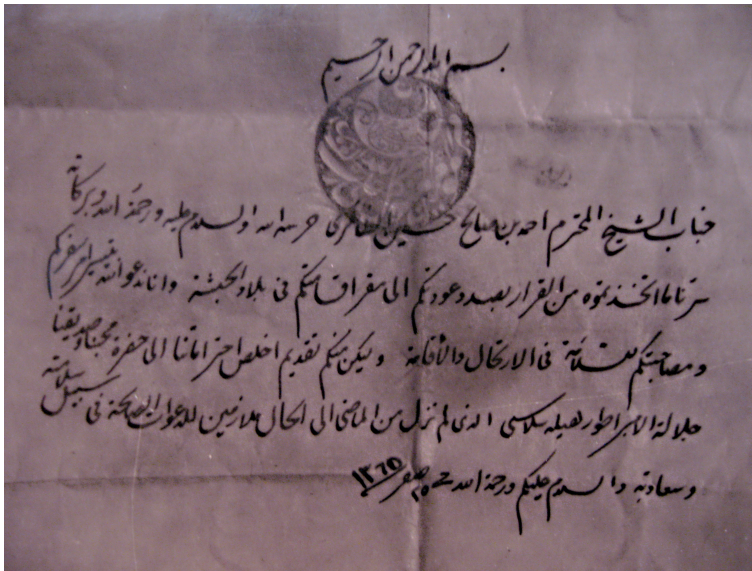
55. MERAB (1922: 492) tells us that the 1934 mission was composed of *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī, Ato Kassa Maru and Mr Haile. It was sent to Sanna in June 1934 and led to the exchange of communication between the two countries.

56. *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī to Emperor Haile-Sellassie, Typescript, November 10, 1959, Addis Ababa. The subsequent information regarding the role of *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī during the war with Italy was also obtained from this letter. (The original letter is in the hand of his grandson Ahmed Hasesn *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī).

to Ethiopia as a result of an arm embargo that was sanctioned by the League of Nations on both Italy and Ethiopia. In his letter to the Emperor, Ahmed tells us that he was able to move beyond this embargo through negotiations that he had with the Yemenis ruler. Through these negotiations, the Yemen government allowed airplanes to come and transport arms to the Ethiopian patriots. In addition to this, during the Italian occupation he also served as a representative of Emperor Haile-Sellassie in the Middle East, where he also lobbied against the Italian occupation by going to different Arab countries as well through extensive communication⁵⁷.

An illustrating document, which shows the position of *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī, his role and connections, consists of two communiqués bearing the seal of Imam Yahya regime and forwarded to him by King Ahmed bin Hamid Al Nasir⁵⁸. From the two communiqués, the first one was directly addressed to Ahmed himself following a trip that he made to Europe for medical reasons (see fig. III).

FIG. III. — LETTER OF KING AHMED BIN HAMID AL-NASIR
TO SHAYKH AHMAD SĀLIH AL-ZĀHIRI

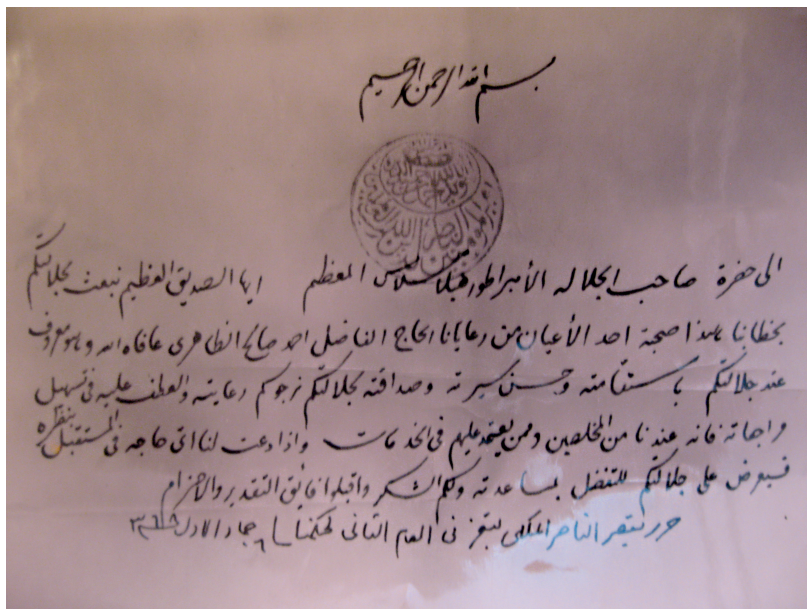


57. *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī to Emperor Haile-Sellassie, Typescript, November 10, 1959, Addis Ababa.

58. According to informants as well as a personal communication with Dr Shelagh Weir at the School of Oriental and African Studies at University of London the name King Ahmed bin Hamid Al Nasir in all probability refer to Ahmed the son of Imam Yahya. In 1948 power has been delegated to Ahmed by his father and latter on he has taken the honorific title of Al Nazir.

The letter, after a formal greeting, wishes *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī a safe return to Ethiopia. It also asks *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī to transmit the King's greeting to Emperor Haile-Sellassie⁵⁹. On the other hand, the second letter directly addressed to Emperor Haile-Sellassie describes the standing of Ahmed Salah in Yemen and request the Emperor to facilitate the duties of *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī (see fig. IV)⁶⁰.

FIG. IV. — LETTER OF KING AHMED BIN HAMID AL-NASIR TO EMPEROR HAILE-SELLASSIE



In addition to these documents, *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī high standing was also attested by a letter of appreciation that was issued for him by the Ethiopian Ministry of War. The letter briefly thanks *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī for the service that he has given to the department of Arms Depot and Property⁶¹.

59. King Ahmed bin Hamid Al-Nasir to *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī, 25 Safir, 1365. (Original document is in the hand of Ahmed Hasesn *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī). According Ahmed Hasesn *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī the letter was written when *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī returned from France a medical treatment.

60. King Ahmed bin Hamid Al-Nasir to Emperor Haile-Sellassie. Al Nasir Royal Court, Jumadi al Awal, 1368.

61. Ministry of War to *Shaykh* Ahmad Sālih al-Zāhirī. Typescript, letter number 3/2564, Addis Ababa, February 4, 1994.

In the 19th and early 20th century Addis Ababa Yemenis were not only traders, laborer or brokers in the system of thing. They were also involved in the religious affair of Addis Ababa Muslim community. Apart from the major trading families that we have seen so far, Addis Ababa also saw the presence of the Sāda family, descendents of the Prophet Muhammad, who were engaged in the propagation of Islam. Indeed the coming of the Sāda in to Addis Ababa was not a new phenomenon and was a logical extension of the migration of Sāda from Yemen to East African port town which were directly connected to Addis Ababa. For example Richard Burton (1856: 33) traveling in the middle of the 19th century tells us that the one time governor of the port of Zeyla, whom he has met personally during his time of stay, was a *Sayyid* by the name of *Sayyid* Muhammad al-Bār.

Although a complete list of family name is hard to come by, the Hadrami *Sayyids* who migrated and established themselves in Addis Ababa include families like al-Bār, al-Segaf, al-Habshī and al-Farege⁶². Among the *Sayyids* in Addis Ababa, the most popular and venerated was *Sayyid* ‘Abdallāh al-Bār. He originally came from Wadi Du’ān in Hadramout in the first decade of the 20th century. Tāha al-Bār who is his great grandson informed me that in Wadi Du’ān *Sayyid* ‘Abdallāh al-Bār used to own a mosque. In the first part of the 20th century *Sayyid* ‘Abdallāh al-Bār came directly to Addis Ababa for unknown reasons. In Addis Ababa *Sayyid* ‘Abdallāh al-Bār married the daughter (her name is Zeyneba) of a Turkish man, Zekeria Hussein, who was one of the tailor of Emperor Menelik II, a connection which gave him an easy access to the ruling class of Ethiopia.

In Ethiopia *Sayyid* ‘Abdallāh al-Bār was venerated by local people as a result of his decent. He earned respect among other from *Shaykh* Qātābāri who was the leading religious personality among the Gurage ethnic group⁶³. *Sayyid* ‘Abdallāh al-Bār was the first Imām of the second mosque to be built in the city *i.e.* al-Nur Mosque. His family members and other informants credit him for playing a leading role during the construction of the mosque which was achieved through the financial contribution of Yemeni Arabs who were residing in Addis Ababa⁶⁴.

The story told in this regard affirms that the land where the mosque was built was granted to Zekeria Hussein by Emperor Menelik II⁶⁵. The construction of the mosque started after his death during the reign Emperor

62. Informant: Mustafā (Addis Ababa, November 4, 2007).

63. *Shaykh* Qātābāri has given Seyid Abdella land and other properties in the Gurage area. This property is still in the hand of the al-Bar family.

64. Information regarding *Sayyid* ‘Abdallāh al-Bār was provided by his grandson *Sayyid* Tāha al-Bār (Addis Ababa, July 5, 2006).

65. HUSSEIN (1999) quoting a Bachelor of Art essay asserts that the land for the construction of the mosque has been given by a wealthy Hadrami merchant by the name of ‘Abdallāh Bā Wāzīr. This assertion is not supported by the Yemenis and the al-Bār family I interviewed in the field.

Haile-Sellassie but there were difficulties finishing it and construction stopped at one time due to the opposition of Orthodox Christian priest who were influential within the Ethiopian state system. When things got rough, *Sayyid* ‘Abdallāh al-Bār is said to have gone directly to Emperor Haile-Sellassie to persuade him to allow the Muslim community to have a mosque where they could pray. After his death his sons Mustafā ‘Abdallāh al-Bār, Abdo ‘Abdallāh al-Bār, Umar ‘Abdallāh al-Bār and Ahmed ‘Abdallāh al-Bār also involved themselves in the mosque. For a number of years they were the only one who acted as the Imām during the *terawi saulat* in the month of Ramadān⁶⁶.



The above story of Yemenis in the first part of the 20th century has a bearing on the way Arabs and other foreign migrants to Ethiopia have been studied. Although the study of foreigners in Ethiopian studies is very scant, available studies have concentrated only on foreigners from the western part of the globe. The accounts given focus mainly on the links that Armenians, Greeks, British and Swedes had with Ethiopian rulers (see for example, Pankhurst 1966, Baheru 2005: 97-98). Although taking in to account and describing the relations of these groups is essential it has however been achieved at the cost of ignoring the history of Arabs and the connection that Arab communities had with Ethiopian rulers. Arabs, in almost all scholarship that relate to foreigners have been described as small shop owners who were in no way near to the Emperors of Ethiopia (see for example, Pankhurst 1968: 448). One reason for this, I believe, has been the reliance of scholars on western sources particularly accounts of western travelers, who, given their backgrounds, might not have been in touch with Arabs residing in the capital⁶⁷. One way of redressing this problem I believe is to look into Arabic sources which have taken into account the history of Arab communities in modern period. Given the rarity of this option for the modern period, collecting family histories from Arabs living in present day Ethiopia and consulting documents which are held by them, hold the key in redressing the imbalance that is created not due to the absence of historical sources but due to methodological shortcomings. This article by

66. Informant: *Sayyid* Tāha al-Bār (Addis Ababa, July 5, 2006).

67. The only exception in Ethiopia historiography of foreigners who does not excessively rely on western sources is Hussein Ahmed. Writing on Yemenis HUSSEIN (1997, 2000) rely mainly on archival sources and essays produced by Bachelor level students at Addis Ababa University. Although his move has been important the fact that he does not rely on family history has led to some factual errors which could have been easily avoided. It has also made him miss some of the interesting documents which are held by Arab community themselves.

following an unconventional or marginal historical/anthropological methodology has been able to show the experience of the Arab families in Addis Ababa as well as their linkages to the royal courts. Given the article limited scope, however, it is my wish that more historical research based on the collection of family histories and the gathering of family documents need to be undertaken to further increase our knowledge not only of Arabs but other non European groups.

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to bring into attention the hitherto undocumented history of Yemeni migration to Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia. Taking in to account a period which amount to half a century the article describes how the status of the Yemeni migrants have changed within the Ethiopian state structure. More specifically, the article traces how the framework for migration and settlement of Yemenis in Addis Ababa has changed over a period of time. It also tries to show how the Yemenis have progressively integrated themselves within the economic and social life of the Ethiopian state. In its explication the study rely on family history as well as documents which are held by members of the Yemeni diaspora community. It also argues for the necessity of employing the methodological strategy the paper has followed in order to explain not only the history of Yemeni migrants but also other diasporic families.

RÉSUMÉ

Familles yéménites dans l'histoire des débuts de Addis Abeba, Éthiopie, 1900-1950. Une approche révisionniste dans l'historiographie des diasporas. — Cet article porte sur l'histoire non documentée de la migration yéménite vers Addis Abeba, capitale de l'Éthiopie. Il décrit l'évolution du statut des migrants yéménites au sein de l'État éthiopien sur une période d'un demi-siècle. Plus spécifiquement, l'article décrit les changements dans le temps du cadre de migration et d'installation des Yéménites à Addis Abeba. Il tente en outre de montrer comment les Yéménites se sont progressivement intégrés dans l'économie et la vie sociale de l'État éthiopien. L'interprétation s'appuie sur des histoires familiales ainsi que sur des documents détenus par des membres de la communauté yéménite de la diaspora. L'article plaide pour l'utilisation de la stratégie méthodologique afin d'expliquer non seulement l'histoire des migrants yéménites mais également celle d'autres familles de la diaspora.

Keywords/*Mots-clés*: Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, Yemenis, family history, migration/*Éthiopie, Addis Abeba, Yéménites, histoire familiale, migration.*

