

Interviewee: Feteche Tiyint Girma

Interviewer: Baiza Getabecha

Summary: Feteche has an Ethiopian ethnic background; he is married with one child and lives in Las Vegas. His middle name is his mother's first name and his last name is his father's first name. His child's last name is Girma which is Feteche's last name.

[Introduction, consent script] *So in whatever way you want, what's your last name story? Girma Aright, and your wife and child's? Their last names? Well, now my wife's last name is Girma and my son's last name is Girma. Ok and your full name? Feteche Tiyint Girma.*

*So what's the story behind your name? Um well, my last name or my full name? Uh, full name. Ok well, my first name was given to me by my mother and... She was heavily into politics when she lived in Ethiopia and then when she came to the U.S. she became more involved in politics and she was trying to basically offer Ethiopia a new way of thinking. I mean, she wanted to end I guess the imperialism that was going on there, and she became heavily involved in that and that was her passion in life. And once she found out she was pregnant with me she um, kind of, veered off the path of being as political and then finally she had me and she named me Feteche which means Justice. So she felt that she didn't get her justice in her political um, venture, she found her justice in me so she named me Justice. She hated the fact that you know the man's name was the only thing that was involved in the last name of the child, so she decided that her name, which is Tiyint, would also be my middle name, so that's where Tiyint came from. And my last name is Girma, traditionally in Ethiopia we do not take the last name of our fathers, we take the first name of our fathers, so that's why my last name is Girma. That about sums it up in a nutshell.*

*So, how you feel about, like, that difference, you know? Or how you think about that, like the Ethiopian traditional way as compared to... I don't care for it. That's why like, so my son has my last name. And, I mean, I've always kind of had a quarrel with it, because, you know your last name; it gives you kind of a sense of, of belonging to your family you know? And it kind of gets lost in translation when, you know, your father, I mean, gives you his first name because it's like, you know, you don't even know who your cousin is, you know, because, you know, you have your fathers first name and not his last name. There are no family names in the Ethiopian tradition so it's kind of hard to find out who your family is, you know? It's almost scary because when I went to Ethiopia, I mean you know, I was petrified of committing like, involuntary incest, because I didn't know who was my family. So, um, there it is, I didn't like it at all.*

*That makes sense, so do you see names as functioning kinda partly in that way? as like uh, as uh you know, you say that one is like family unity, like solidarity is, I feel, kinda what you were saying and then also in terms of being able to recognize... Yeah identify. Yeah, ok. Yeah it's really hard to identify because, I mean, we take, I guess the European way, which is, you know, I'm not familiar with the Asian and what not but as far as Europeans it's like, you know, you take the family name and that name is passed down from generation to generation. Whereas in Ethiopia, I mean, your first cousin has a different last name than you right? [...] you don't share the same last name as them, and it's just; you know, I found it odd. So.... I stuck with the European tradition. And so like, what are like the benefits you see in the tradition just like, in*

*having those names? Just to clarify.* Well, I mean I have two reasons: One is, I feel like my father's first name will live on forever from this point on right? Because I've had a child now and he'll carry that name and his kids will carry that name. So I feel like my dad's first name will be eternal, but also, you know, the fact that now there's a family name so when Jeremiah has a brother or sister they'll also have a last name and that name will be passed on. Well I guess not with his sister, but if he has any other brothers it would be.

*So you see like, a historical value in it? Not like historical like in past history but like in maintaining through time.* Yeah, I mean, I think that you know, it would be a lot easier for, you know, for fifth generation Girmas to trace their roots back as it falls to you know, having to, you know, having to go back to each person find out who their father was to see if they were related to them.

*So, like how do you feel about like the.. You know, the.. Like you mentioned like... If you had a sister it would be different. Like that fact of it, or like the presence or absence of of.. uh.. of female lines. Like, in that light, how do you feel about that aspect?* Um, I can't say I've, you know, I've really given it much thought. I mean, not until like, I just .. I don't know ...it works, like if you have a girl, then that's it, because she's going to take the man's [name] that she marries right? So it's kinda like, I don't know, that's odd, I mean, but what can you do, I mean?

*I mean, were you conscious about that in having, like, Tiyint as your, your, your, middle name, like her presence there, were you conscious of that, like, the reason behind it, growing up?* Yeah, yeah, from the beginning, you know. Because I recognized immediately that my middle name was her first name and I was like: Why is that? You know, that was the statement she made because, I guess, what you're talking about. She felt, you know, like: I don't want my name, you know, I don't want it to be just about him, I want it to be about her as well. So... that's why she put her name in my name. As my middle name.

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*I mean, do you remember how you felt about that? or how do you feel about that now also?* I think it's real cool, I like it a lot, I mean, I was young, you know, then, so I didn't really reflect on it, I can't remember the exact time where I did, but I know that there was a time where I did, you know, think about it and I thought that it was really cool.

*How did you feel about like, the, the, you know the process, or the way that it... in the Ethiopian and you middle name like that in comparison to people around you as having, like, a different system for adding names. As, when you were younger, did you have a different outlook on that? What do you mean like, on what? On the way of inheriting names* Um. No I mean, it never really dawned on me *That your way was like, that* At a young age, yeah it didn't really, you know, I didn't really think about it. I mean, now being a father, is where, you know, it comes more into play and I have thought about it. You know, I mean, it's... just a way of life. *Now or ever did you think of the uniqueness or in like, you know, the artistic value of it, or in some way the, the quality of the name or of the ...* Yeah, well you know, like when I found out what I noticed and

what I liked, what I love about Ethiopian names, or most other names for that matter, with the exception of European names is that, I mean, all the names have meanings. You know? Like Fetehe means Justice, you know, Misrake means (which is my sister) means Eastern Star you know? I mean, they all have meaning. Whereas, you know, you go to most Europeans and they're like: 'Bill' and 'Bob' and you know, there's no real meaning behind them, you know? So yeah, I appreciate that. I love that, you know, the fact that my name means something, you know? And most Ethiopians when they're named, they're named out of some type of passion that the um, that the parent has, or... something that... they felt the child encompassed is why they named that child that. And I think that's cool as opposed to just going "Oh, you know, 'Tabitha sounds pretty, let's do that'[laughs].

*Have there been any unforeseen consequences in uh, you choosing to adopt like this naming practice? Or like that tradition, this tradition in particular? Has there been any what?*  
*Unforeseen consequences* Unforeseen of what? Following the tradition or being Fetehe? [laughs]  
*In you having chosen this particular tradition of naming.* Um, no. Not as of yet, I mean... No.  
*Are there times you were called by names other than your main last name? That I've been called? What do you mean? Called out? No nononono have you ever been called anything besides your main last name is what the question is.* Ok, um yeah, I mean when it's mispronounced. I mean, other than that no. Yeah, that's about it.

Like even with my son, I mean, I didn't name him, I mean I named him something because I liked the message behind it. I mean, Jeremiah, you know, was considered the chosen one, I read a passage, it said that God spoke to Jeremiah and said 'I have plans for you, plans to do you no harm.' Right, it's passage 29:11 and that's why, you know, we decided to name him Jeremiah. Which in Ethiopian or Amharic is Ermias so it translates in Amharic as well. It's a biblical name.

[Caveat into issues of pronunciation (family pronouncing name correctly vs. strangers pausing on name and mispronouncing name. The choice to use Justice as name for business instead of Fetehe]

*In the way that people choose names nowadays, like, could you comment on where you think, like, it, like, naming practices are going? You know, like, in the future, how you think, you feel it's going to be, and whether you think that's... How you feel about the way that these practices are going.* I mean, it depends, I mean, I'd say like, American culturally it's all about uniqueness, I mean, everyone wants to have unique names. That's where you come up with the you know the 'Boklishes' and the 'Sally-Johns' and the... you know, it's just all about uniqueness. I don't think there's much thought put behind names anymore in American culture. Whereas, I can speak for Ethiopia, like, in Ethiopian culture I think it's been the same since the beginning of time, where, you know, you're something that is a passion to the person giving the name or the person receiving a name because that's what they embodied, you know? *How about female names in particular, or you know feminist trends of keeping names or you know, here and in Ethiopia do you feel that there are more feminist influences changing the way that names are...* No not really. I think, I mean, when you say... Where? Like here? *I mean here it is happening, like to some extent, at least a lot more women are choosing to keep their names and such like that. In Ethiopia it is different I assume but there still probably is a change, but yeah in comparing...* Yeah, here I've noticed that a lot. I mean, even, um, shucks, I mean, a couple of my friends, you know, who have gotten married and have either kept or hyphenated their last names, so it's like, whatever their last name was, hyphen, the man's name. So the man's name is generally involved

and I think it's because, you know, every guy that I've known.... Most of the girls that's I've know, I should say, have had a hard time getting the guy to agree to it because it's so, like, insulting to the man. Like, my wife asked me, you know, whether or not, how I would feel about her keeping her last name and hyphenating it and putting my name in. And I'm like 'absolutely not', you know? Cus, it's like; you feel like you're giving your name to somebody, you know? And... I don't know, I took pride in it. I felt that, you know, if you're marrying me then you should want my name. You know what I mean? *Yeah, it kind of symbolizes... like a... like a coming inta... well what does that symbolize... ?* I just think, you know, acceptance of the whole thing, you know? Of marriage, of the fundamental, of everything that involves marriage. It's like, I think that if you do it any other way then you're kind of half assing what it is, you know? If you're going to do something different then call it something different. Don't call it marriage, call it unity. *Yeah* But if you're going to call it marriage then do it, you know, as marriage is done traditionally. *So in talking with your wife, that's how that was resolved? Did she accept that kind of...* Yeah, she accepted it except for facebook [laughs] *Not on the facebook?* Yeah not on the facebook because, you know, all of her old friends still know her as Driver, so, you know, on facebook it reads Nia Driver-Girma *Ok, so she agreed with the traditional part of it, but for people being able to keep in touch with her for practical reasons she wanted to keep it like that on facebook.* Yeah. *Ok that's it. That's the interview* Cool beans.