Rethinking the Role of the Hatata of Zera Yaecob and the Hatata of Welda Heywat in Ethiopian Philosophy: A Critique of the Cartesian, Indigenous and Modernising Conceptions

Fasil Merawi[1]

Abstract

The attempt to situate the Hatata as a foundation of Ethiopian philosophy is part and parcel of a politicised debate that is more informed by nationalism and decolonial efforts rather than a quest to find the existence of a philosophical form of criticism in the Ethiopian soil. A critical examination of the different attempts that were made so far to position the treatises as a foundation of Ethiopian philosophy shows that there are three interrelated schools that see the Hatata of Zera Yaecob and the Hatata of Welda Heywat as the cornerstone of Ethiopian philosophy. These schools are represented by those who see the texts as hosting a Cartesian form of subjectivity, the ones who situate the texts as a foundation of an indigenous Ethiopian philosophy, and others who see the authors of the texts as laying the foundations for an Ethiopian modernization. Through a critical engagement with these three defences of the treatises, the paper argues that such three articulations of the texts failed to properly examine the colonial world of knowledge production and religious reformation that animated the texts in the first place. With such recognition, a new foundation of Ethiopian philosophy that is founded on the nation's complex historical and cultural heritage needs to be pursued.

---

[1] Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Addis Ababa University, email: fasil.merawi@aau.edu.et, Tel: +251911990423, P.O. Box 1176/ Addis Ababa

Introduction

The discourse on Ethiopian philosophy led into the development of four trends that are expressed by the hermeneutic, intercultural, indigenous and critical theory trends. In such a discourse that has the goal of determining whether or not philosophy exists in the Ethiopian soil, the study of two texts that are known as the Hatata of Zera Yaecob and the Hatata of Welda Heywat occupies a greater importance. In such a context, the task of understanding Ethiopian philosophy so far mainly presented itself in the form of studying these two texts which are both called Hatata. As a result of such an uncritical acceptance of these texts and their elevation into the main texts of Ethiopian philosophy, one failed to give attention to issues like who authored the texts and what is the main goal that is found behind them in the world of knowledge production. In a nation that is defined by a rich historical and cultural heritage and a complex linguistic landscape, attempts are being made in order to determine the existence of a philosophical culture of rational criticism (Aliye, 2020). Different attempts are being made to extract the philosophical wisdom that is found in different modalities, ranging from the study of written sources of philosophy into the texts that are creatively appropriated, all the way up to the study of the folk wisdom that is found in different societies. Although, there is an interest in studying the different philosophical texts and materials for reflection, still the one thing that occupies a unique place in the study of Ethiopian philosophy is the study of the treatises (Egid, 2024). The debate on these texts is still continuing to this day, with some focusing on the problem of authorship, whereas others are engaged in the attempt to identify the contemporary significance of these texts (Brooh, 2017).

The renewed interest in the Hatata of Zera Yaecob and the Hatata of Welda Heywat is not only limited to the Ethiopian context, and discussions of the texts are also taking place in the West. As part of such a renewed interest in the treatises in 2022 a conference was convened in Oxford University entitled "In Search of Zera Yacob: Philosophy in Early Modern Ethiopia" Debates concentrating on the authorship of the texts, their philosophical value as well as the need to situate the history if ideas within which the texts are located were carried out at the conference. Besides this a new translation and interpretation of the treatises was published by De Gruyter in 2023, and rich discussions are also being carried out on the contemporary value of the texts (Zara Yacob & Walda Heywat, 2023). The reason why the Hatata of Zera Yaecob and the Hatata of Welda Heywat continue to occupy such a place in the study of Ethiopian philosophy is because of a number of interrelated reasons. First of all, the texts are seen by the proponents of decolonization and African philosophy as a way of demonstrating the existence of

a written philosophy in the African soil (Sumner, 1996). This is seen as a way of refuting the Eurocentric bias that saw philosophy as an exclusive possession of the western world. Secondly, the interest in the treatises can be explained by the emergence of a political climate where the Ethiopianists are fascinated by the idea of an Ethiopian monk who was rebelling against tradition and established authority as a way of providing a new foundation for national unity. Thirdly, there are also those who are interested in the treatises as they believe that it introduces a new mode of cognition that is grounded on the unique place that is given to the human heart (Kiros, 2005). This is explored alongside the lines of the development of a new mode of human cognition that presents the human intellect not within the power of the human mind but within the heart which is seen not just as a seat of emotion but having a rational disposition.

Those that are interested in practising Ethiopian philosophy from a universalist standpoint as well as those that believe that Ethiopian philosophy needs to be practised from a comparative perspective are interested in the treatises as both of these groups see the texts as the locus of philosophical wisdom that is comparable to the ideas of the western giants like Rene Descartes. Thus, among the different ways of practising Ethiopian philosophy represented by the hermeneutic, intercultural, indigenous and critical trends, the Hatata of Zera Yaecob and the Hatata of Welda Heywat occupied a special place as they were regarded as texts that hold the key to the analysis of core philosophical problems focusing on the nature of moral goodness, social justice and the nature of evil and the foundations of societal coexistence (Fasil, 2023). Throughout the different attempts to make sense of the place that is occupied by the Hatata of Zera Yaecob and the Hatata of Welda Heywat in the development of Ethiopian philosophy, three interrelated schools emerged.

The first school belongs to those who believed that within the treatises, one is able to identify a western form of subjectivity that is grounded on a process of realisation where the individual is able to rationally examine the power of custom and religious authority (Sumner, 1976). For this school, within the Hatata of Zera Yaecob and the Hatata of Welda Heywat one is able to locate the ideas of an African Descartes that looks at the world within a binary structure that is found between the subject and the object. The second school in return encompasses the ideas of those who believed that an indigenous Ethiopian philosophy is found in these texts. For the thinkers within this school, the treatises constitute original philosophical written texts whose value could be seen in different areas like moral values, national unity and societal coexistence (Brooh, 2017). Lastly, the third school includes those who believe that the treatises are profound texts that lay the

foundations for a discourse on modernization that is able to question the power of custom and tradition (Andreas, 2013).

Through a critical engagement with the three schools and their respective ways of mapping out a place for the Hatata of Zera Yaecob and the Hatata of Welda Heywat as a foundation of Ethiopian philosophy, the aim of this paper is twofold. The first one is to identify the limitations of the three ways of conceptualising the treatises as a foundation of Ethiopian philosophy while the second one is developing an alternative foundation for Ethiopian philosophy that overcomes the romanticising of the past as a foundation of a philosophical culture. After discussing the conceptual strategies that are employed by the three groups in their attempt to celebrate the treatises as a foundation of Ethiopian philosophy, in the coming three sections, the paper introduces the analysis of Ethiopia's rich historical and cultural heritage, as well as the examination of contemporary predicaments as an alternative material for reflection upon which the practice of Ethiopian philosophy could be instituted on. The analysis of the different efforts to appropriate the treatises from Cartesian, indigenous and modernising perspectives, ultimately paves way for a reconstructive analysis that concentrates on the need to extract the diverse and complex Ethiopian history as the terrain within which the practice and the study of Ethiopian philosophy is developed. This is an important step in broadening the conceptual space upon which the study of contemporary Ethiopian philosophy is founded on.

The Hatatas as hosting an African Descartes

The quest to find a strategy of countering the Eurocentric discourse that denied the existence of philosophy in the African context played a huge role in the popularisation of the Hatata of Zera Yaecob and the Hatata of Welda Heywat. Within the dominant discourse, by appealing to anthropological discourse and the colonial sciences, a binary structure was developed between modernity and tradition (Ciaffa, 2008). Western society in such a system was seen as the apex of civilization and a source of cultural refinement whereas non-western societies in general were depicted as the seats of emotion and a pre-logical and an effective modality of existence (Aliye, 2020). The proponents of African philosophy questioned such a world of knowledge production and celebrated the existence of a mode of rational criticism in Africa. Such an intellectual exercise took different forms like the study of the pre-colonial past, the analysis of the wisdom of the sages as well as the development of an ideological discourse that serves as a foundation of national liberation and decolonization (Kanu, 2013). This attempt to herald the existence of African philosophy was questioned by Paulin Hountondji

(1996) who advocated the practice of philosophy in a written form and as an individual exercise. Hountondji believed that the act of philosophising is an exercise that is being developed by the individual rather than the community as a whole and its pre-colonial wisdom that is static.

In the midst of this debate on the ways in which African philosophy needs to be practiced, the treatises of Zera Yaeqob and Welda Heywat were popularised by Claude Sumner who saw these texts as demonstrating the existence of philosophy in a written form in the form an autobiographical exercise carried out by a thinker who faced an existential crisis and later on by his disciple who further expounded upon the teachings of his master and also introduced new teachings as well (Sumner, 1978). This gave birth to Sumner's depiction of an Ethiopian philosophy that is made up of the treatises of Zera Yaeqob and Welda Heywat, foreign philosophical wisdom that is creatively appropriated into the Ethiopian soil and the study of oral wisdom found in sayings and proverbs (Sumner, 1995). Sumner believed that philosophical ideas dealing with the nature of questions like the nature of God and the problem of evil, the essence of truth, the foundations of moral goodness and societal existence and equality among the two sexes is among other things developed in the Hatata of Zera Yaecob and the Hatata of Welda Heywat.

Sumner in developing a comparison with the teachings that are found in the treatises and the ideas of philosophers like Rene Descartes believed that a form of individual existence that is expressive of the opposition that is found between the subject and the object is found in theses texts (Sumner, 1999). Sumner argued within the treatises, one is able to identify a form of individuation that takes as its starting point of analysis the questioning of received wisdom and the authority of religion. He also believed that this teaching was used as a foundation of a theory of social justice that is grounded on the equality of all the human beings that are found in the world. Teodros Kiros further expounded on the ideas of Sumner in order to celebrate the Hatatas as the locus of philosophical wisdom that is grounded on the rational pursuit of truth (Kiros, 1998). He also just like Sumner argued that the individual as it is found in these texts is able to map out a sphere of autonomy for its existence in the similar manner within which Descartes is able to question the role that is played by sensory experience and authority in the acquisition of knowledge.

The quest to identify a Cartesian mode of subjectivity in the Hatata of Zera Yaecob and the Hatata of Welda Heywat assumed that both within the Cartesian meditations and also within the treatises, we are presented with a mode of individual existence that separates the whole world into the realm of the human

subject that is identified with the power of reason and the outside world which exists as a material for reflection (Kiros, 2004). In the course of carrying out his philosophical investigations Zera Yaeqob is presented as a thinker who exists as an individuated self and is conscious of the place that he occupies in reference to the outside world. This interpretation that has been offered mainly by Sumner and Kiros contends that Zera Yaeqob was motivated by the quest to find one truth that withstands the power of reason just like Descartes was motivated by the attempt to find clear and distinct ideas (Sumner, 1996). Based on this both Descartes and Zera Yaeqob are presented as thinkers of solitary existence who have embarked on a process of systematic reflection as a way of overcoming their existential predicaments.

In the search for the African Descartes in the treatises, the interest was using the texts as a strategy of decolonizing the Eurocentric world of knowledge production that saw philosophy as a western cultural product. It was argued by Sumner, Kiros and others that the mode of individual existence that is found in the treatises starts out by individuating itself and then seeks for an ultimate unity in the absolute by questioning the existence of God, the reasons why evil exists in the world and the ways in which a society could be built based on moral excellence (Kiros, 1996). Just like Descartes invited God back into the metaphysical realm when he argued that God exists based on the idea of perfection and as a source of eternal truths, those who saw the treatises as hosting an African Descartes also argued that Zera Yaeqob questioned the existence of God only to inevitable arrive at the conclusion that God exists as the ultimate cause. This analysis was adopted by the different commentators of the texts who believed that a written philosophy that is the result of the mental pursuits of the individual is found in the texts and that Africans can also philosophise just like the rest of humanity (Girma, 2014).

The main problem with those who saw an African Descartes in the treatises is that they failed to explore the question of subjectivity and individual existence as it is found in the texts in reference to the principle of harmony. If there is one principle that serves as a foundation of every analysis in the Hatata of Zera Yaecob and the Hatata of Welda Heywat then it is the principle of harmony (Teshome, 2016). In order to get out of his existential dread, to celebrate the equality of human beings or to establish the underlying order that is found in the world, both treatises appeal to the principle of harmony. There is a continuity of thought between the two treatises and this is seen in the fact the principle of harmony is used to identify the existence of God, the nature of evil and the equality of human beings in the Hatata Zera Yaeqob whereas the same principle is being utilised in order to establish the nature of social justice and coexistence in Hatata Welda

Heywat. This principle of harmony shows us that there is an underlying order that expresses itself in the existence of the natural and the social worlds, and that all things including human beings are manifestations of such an order.

Contrarily to the development of a subject/object form of substance dualism that led into the liberation of the individual in the end, the aim of the treatises is the development of a form of religious reformation in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church under the appearance of an Ethiopian philosopher who is dissatisfied with the teachings of the established religions. In the Hatata of Zera Yaecob and the Hatata of Welda Heywat, rather than liberating oneself from the metaphysical order, the goal of the intellectual exercise is further consolidating the divine but showing which teachings are in contradiction with the principle of harmony. Without questioning the power of the absolute, the treatises engage in a criticism of practices like fasting, polygamy and monastic life. The human subject does not in a Cartesian manner see itself as a thinking thing that is searching for truth. On the contrary, the human subject in the treatises is casted as a finite being that must always submit itself to the principle of harmony and the existence of God. Although there is a room for reflection on religious beliefs and practices, still the goal of the reflection is the reforming of the existing practices rather than the declaration of the liberty of the human subject.

The Hatata as a foundation of an indigenous Ethiopian philosophy

The interest in the Hatata of Zera Yaecob and the Hatata of Welda Heywat is not just confined to the attempt to identify an African human subject that is able to embody the western form of subjectivity. It also expresses itself in the attempt to situate these texts as the foundation of an indigenous Ethiopian philosophy. The idea of introducing the Ethiopian philosophical landscape to the rest of the world was developed as an attempt to identify the different modalities within which Ethiopian philosophy is expressed within. In such an effort, different trends emerged trying to identify the object of analysis that need to be examined in the development of modern Ethiopian philosophy. The idea of identifying an indigenous Ethiopian philosophy dictated the ideas of thinkers like Sumner who believed that one is able to identify the existence of both written and also oral sources of Ethiopian philosophy (Sumner, 1995). Although Sumner believed that the value of philosophy needs to be explored in the sense of a comparative exercise that is immersed in the identification of similar structural patterns across different cultural backgrounds, still subsequent thinkers were interested in using the philosophy that is found in the treatises as a way of demonstrating the existence of

an indigenous philosophy in a nation within thousands of years of history and rich cultural interactions.

The Hatata of Zera Yaecob and the Hatata of Welda Heywat were seen under the second school that is interested in the development of an indigenous Ethiopian philosophy as ways of countering the colonial bias and as a stock of knowledge that is itself in terms of addressing contemporary Ethiopia's predicaments (Teshome, 2016). Those who believe that the treatises serve as a foundation of an indigenous Ethiopian philosophy like Brooh Alemneh (2017), Teshome Abera (2016) and Eyasu Berento (2019) share with the first school that approached the treatises from the perspective of identifying a European form of subjectivity, the fact that the Ethiopian authorship and the philosophical value of the texts is taken for granted. Whereas the first school reads the treatises with the aim of identifying a western conception of existence within the African soil, the second school in return is interested in spelling out the different components of the teachings that are found in the treatises as they are applicable to everyday human problems. Alongside these lines, there was an interest in showing that the teachings that are found in the texts can prove useful in terms of addressing the problems of contemporary societies, and specifically the Ethiopian nation that is being troubled by the politics of identity.

As part of the attempt to identify an indigenous Ethiopian philosophy in the Hatata of Zera Yaecob and the Hatata of Welda Heywat, Brooh Alemneh (2017) believed that the value of the texts should not only be confined to the interpretation of a philosophical wisdom from the past. He argued that one also needs to focus on the contemporary application of these texts in the diagnosis and the analysis of existing Ethiopian problems. Brooh argued that the critique of the monastic life and the ascetic form of existence that is found in the treatises is of a contemporary importance and that it shows the need to modernize the teachings of the church. Besides this, he also argued that the value of the texts could be seen in the creation of a social philosophy that is cognizant of diversity and is grounded on the equality of individuals. Teshome Abera (2016) was also interested in identifying the value of the treatises as a foundation of an Ethiopian philosophy. He argued that there is a unique ethical system that is found in these texts and that it is founded on the principle of harmony. It is a principle that is grounded on the existence of an underlying harmony that expresses itself in the natural world and also within the realm of intersubjective human relations. Teshome also argued that the value of the treatises needs to be identified in terms of the emergence of a counter-hegemonic philosophy that challenges Eurocentric perspectives. This is seen as a philosophy that is able to pay attention to the indigenous sources of knowledge that are found

in the Ethiopian context. Such an attempt is also expressed in the ideas of Eyasu who argues that there is a system of rational criticism that is found in the texts.

In the eyes of Eyasu (2019), the value of the Hatata of Zera Yaecob and the Hatata of Welda Heywat needs to be situated in the history of Ethiopian thought and mainly on the teachings that emerged within the bounds of the church. He argued that the existence of Ethiopian philosophy should not only be confined to the study of the treatises and also needs to be extended to the queen tradition as well. The texts in particular are of a greater importance for Eyasu since these texts exhibit a system of rationalist thinking that was used in order to show the limitations of existing beliefs and practices. One common thread that unifies the ideas of those who see the texts as a foundation of a written Ethiopian indigenous philosophy like Brooh, Teshome and Eyasu is that they all situate the origin of the reflection that is found within the treatises within the religious controversies that originated in modern Ethiopia with the introduction of Catholicism as a state religion. This image of the authors of the Hatata assumes that the texts emerged as an attempt to question the power of religious authority in a context where the followers of different religions proclaimed to have the truth even though in reality there is only one absolute truth that exists from the perspective of reason.

The proponents of the second school based on the interpretation of the texts that was offered by Sumner, believe that the two treatises are clearly written by different thinkers (Sumner, 1976). They argue that the first Hatata is written by Zera Yaeqob in his quarrels with the followers of different religions. Zera Yaeqob is depicted as someone that was brought up within the teachings of the church and that he is a rebel who has relied on the power of reason in order to identify the foundations of a rationalistic system of thinking (Egid, 2023). The second treatise is in return identified as the work of Welda Heywat who is the disciple of Zera Yaeqob who developed his own philosophy besides his attempt to reflect on the teachings of his master (Dawit, 2012). The thinkers in this school are based in the interpretation and the detailed analysis of the Hatata that is carried out. Sumner (1976) believed that the differences that were found between the two texts were seen in the style of writing as well as the problematic that were being explored in the texts. This defense of the Hatatas has been recently challenged by Anais Wion (2013) and Daniel Kibret (2019) who argued that the texts are works of forgery, and that they are written by the Italian Gusto d'Urbino. Daniel further argued that the texts are motivated by the attempt to lay the foundations of a reformist discourse within the Orthodox Church.

In looking at the attempts of those who see the Hatata as a foundation of an indigenous Ethiopian philosophy, there are a number of limitations that need to be

identified. First of all, the arguments of the thinkers that are found in this school are highly dictated by decolonization and the need to counter colonial bias and as a result of this, the unique historical trajectory within which the history of thought developed within the Ethiopian context is not given due consideration. The binary structure that is found between the western and non-western forms of thought is maintained and as a result of this, an attempt is not made to develop a characterization of Ethiopian philosophy that identifies the relations of entanglements within local, alien, religious and secular origins that gave birth to the history of thought. Secondly, the different thinkers in this school did not properly solve the problem of authorship of the treatises and whether or not they are written by an Italian monk or an Ethiopian thinker (Wion, 2013). Thirdly, the nature of the teachings that are found in the texts is not properly analysed and the mere attempt to reflect the teachings of the dominant religions is identified with the development of a philosophical culture of criticism.

The treatises as a precursor to Ethiopian modernization

Whereas the first school is interested in the Hatata of Zera Yaecob and the Hatata of Welda Heywat from the perspective of the emergence of a Cartesian mode of subjectivity in the African soil, and the second school is aimed at the development of an indigenous Ethiopian philosophy that is grounded on the treatises, the third school in return is motivated by the attempt to use the texts as a foundation of an Ethiopian modernization. The third school is grounded on the need to identify an Ethiopian path to modernization that is not founded on the binary structure that is found between modernity and tradition (Andreas, 2013). It is born out of the attempt to explore the foundations and the precursors of rationalistic thinking and criticism in the Ethiopian soil. In this sense the interest in the texts is aimed at the exploration of the basic themes and problematic in the texts that are focused on the critique of authority, the attempt to show the limitations of religious authority and the effort to lay down the foundations of a culture of public criticism. In the eyes of the thinkers that are found in this third school like Andreas Eshete (2013), Messay Kebede (1988), Bahru Zewde (2008) and Maimire Mennasemay (2010), the value of the treatises needs to be seen in terms of setting the foundations for modernization.

There is no coherent and a unified conception of modernization that runs throughout the ideas of the groups of thinkers that are interested in the Hatata of Zera Yaecob and the Hatata of Welda Heywat as a precursor to modernization. Modernization is still loosely understood in the sense of attaining material progress in a way that is also able to preserve the values of the nation. For those like

Andreas, modernity is a universal quest for progress that is solidified in the values of the enlightenment and the French revolution and the reformation whereas Messay leaned towards the development of a discourse on modernization that shows the presence of Eurocentric epistemic constructs within the minds of Ethiopians (Andreas, 2013). For Bahru in return the nature of modernity could be seen both in terms of the critique of authority as well as the role that is played by intellectuals in realising radical progress within a given society. Maimire in return criticised what he saw as the imposition of empty concepts in the name of realising modern progress in the minds of Ethiopians and sought to extract the unexplored meaning that is found in historical moments like the Battle of Adwa, and the surplus meaning that can serve as a foundation of a commonly shared meaning (Maimire, 2005).

In the attempt to situate the Hatatas as a precursor to modernization, Andreas argued that the thoughts of Zera Yaeqob alongside the mode of criticism that is found in the Dekika Estifanos could serve as a foundation of societal progress. He argued that the treatises laid the ground for a system of rationalistic thinking that is able to show the limitations of existing practices. Andreas explored the value of the treatises as part of his explorations of the Ethiopian discourse on modernity that he saw as Zamanawi-Seletane and the pathways in the Ethiopian discourse on modernity that are expressed by the Ethiopian students movement and the aesthetic movement of modernism (Andreas, 2013). Messay in return argued that the aim of the treatises was providing a new foundation of national unity through the criticism of established authority (Messay, 1988). Accepting the Ethiopian authorship of the texts, Messay argued that the aim of the authors of the Hatata is introducing a new foundation for national unity.

Bahru explored the value of the treatises in terms of the development of a rationalistic system of thinking in modern Ethiopia. In a nation where religion occupies a greater place in the minds of the people, the treatises tried to introduce a new system of thinking that is antithetical to established authority, and is dependent on the power of reason as a way of discovering the place that is occupied by the individual in the societal realm (Bahru, 2008). Maimire in return believed that the emancipatory intent that is found in the mode of criticism that is found in the Hatatas alongside the critical moments that are found in the Dekike Estifanos and historical moments like the battle of Adwa could serve as a foundation of an Ethiopian critical theory (Maimire, 2005). This shows that for all Andreas, Messay, Bahru and Maimire the main value of the Hatatas is not to be approached from the perspective of an Ethiopian philosophy that is measured either in terms of its ability to host a Cartesian mode of existence, or in terms of

its ability to demonstrate the existence of philosophy in the Ethiopian soil. For these thinkers, it is the value of the texts in the attempt to modernise the nation and develop a process of social progress that is of a greater importance.

The third school that approached the Hatata from the perspective of modernization was not interested in the problem of authorship of the treatises. It did not concern itself with the world of knowledge production and the Italian system of oriental thinking that had the aim of exploring the minds and the body of Ethiopian subjects. Taking the Ethiopian authorship of the Hatata for granted, the third school concentrated on the teachings that are found in the texts in terms of the criticism of given authority. It is founded on the idea that there is a need to delineate a space through which a given nation could modernise itself, and here texts like the Hatata could be seen as precursors of a system of rationalistic thinking that is dissatisfied with the power of established authority. The role of the texts is also explored in terms of the themes of critique and emancipation and the attempt to identify texts that were critical of religion and established practices.

The main limitation of the third school and its advocacy of the Hatata of Zera Yaecob and the Hatata of Welda Heywat is that it did not situate the texts in the context of the creation of the Other. There is a need to explore the value of the treatises in terms of the creation of a science of the Other. Rather than simply celebrating the texts as texts that identified the limitations of the teachings and the practices of the time, there is a need to identify where or not the Hatata are part and parcel of a colonial discourse that has the goal of controlling the way in which knowledge is being produced (Fasil & Setargew, 2019). In this regard, it is not just whether or not the treatises are works of forgery that is of a greater importance. The main issue that needs to be explored is what the goal behind forging a philosophical text is and laying the foundations for a reformist discourse that is critical towards the teachings of the church. the attempt to explore the conceptual resources for an Ethiopian discourse on modernization should not only be immersed in the reconstruction of the past but also needs to be attentive towards the complex relations that gave birth to the Ethiopian discourse on modernity and the relations of entanglements a result of this it is continually being reconfigured.

A new foundation for Ethiopian philosophy
The study of Ethiopian philosophy is so far mainly grounded on the attempt to make sense of the role that is occupied by the Hatata of Zera Yaecob and the Hatata of Welda Heywat in the development of a rational exercise in the Ethiopian soil. When the treatises were popularised to the rest of the world, they were seen as unique texts that defy the logic of colonialism as to demonstrate the existence of an

individual written philosophy in the African soil (Fasil, 2019). Sumner sought to show that these texts are not the only sources of Ethiopian philosophy, and that there is also a need to introduce the traditional wisdom and the oral sources of Ethiopian philosophy (Sumner, 1996). Being fascinated by the texts, three schools originated and these interrelated attempts concentrated on the attempt to find an African Descartes in the treatises, the efforts that were made to use theses texts as the ground for an indigenous philosophy, and also the different attempts that saw the treatises as an origin of Ethiopian modernization. All of such attempts to popularise the Hatata were mainly motivated by a strategy of de-colonial affirmation that sought to show the limitations of Eurocentric philosophy. The three schools in these attempts to situate the texts a cornerstone of a rationalistic system of Ethiopian thinking assumed that there is a critical teaching that is found in these texts and that its application needs to be further explicated.

Besides the failures to address the problems of authorship, and the need to ask are the texts motivated by the development of a religiously reformist discourse or a philosophical form of criticism, the focus on the treatises as the main sources of philosophy led into the little attention that is given to the need to situate Ethiopia's rich historical and cultural facets as the proper objects of philosophical reflection. Ethiopian philosophy just like African philosophy is still trapped in the question of existence devoting much of the analysis to second level questions on the existence of philosophical texts rather than developing a mode of rational criticism in order to explore the different aspects of existence.

Ethiopian philosophy should not be developed either as a pop philosophy that is being sold to the masses as a quick fix to problems. In the search for a unique identity for Ethiopian philosophy, there is a need to concentrate on the multidimensional entanglements that have resulted in Ethiopia's troubled present (Fasil, 2024). Ethiopian philosophy, just like the rest of African philosophy, should not be trapped in the study of the past that is seen as the source of perfection or the development of a discourse that fails to make sense of the interconnections that are found between Ethiopia and other African nations. On the opposite, there is a need to develop a philosophical articulation that is able to make sense of the unique historical trajectory within which the nation is founded.

Ethiopian philosophy needs to study the historical trajectory and the rich interactions that gave birth to the Ethiopian state. It needs to concentrate on the subjectivities and multi-layered meanings that emerged as a result of the entanglements between Ethiopian, Western and non-western sources of knowledge. It needs to be engaged in the study of the rich meaning that is created as a result of the interactions that are developed among Ethiopians. It needs to

account for the unique sense of selfhood that is developed as a result of the nation's interactions and entanglements with Christianity, Islam, Judaism and local religions as well as the relations that were established with colonial modernity, Africa, Eastern and Arabic civilizations (Teshale, 1996). It is not the perfect past or the mere present but the complex relations that led into the constitution of the modern Ethiopian human subject that needs to occupy a centre stage in the study of Ethiopian philosophy.

The renewed interest in the Hatata of Zera Yaecob and the Hatata of Welda Heywat provides the opportunity to introduce the idea of an Ethiopian philosophy to the rest of the world. It invites a discussion into the different modalities within which Ethiopian philosophy is expressed within as well as the ways in which one could develop a conception of philosophy that is founded on the relation of learning that exists between different cultural backgrounds. The study of the texts will continue to occupy a greater place since the study of the Hatata and their place in Ethiopian philosophy is not limited to the mere existence of a philosophical culture but also the interest in showing the limitations of Eurocentric thinking and demonstrating that there are different precursors of modernization in the Ethiopian soil. The space, within which the study of Ethiopian philosophy is founded on, needs to be expanded. It needs to make sense of the temporal space and the existential predicaments within which the life of Ethiopian human subjects is grounded on.

There is a need to rethink the place that is given by the treatises in Ethiopian philosophy since the unique status that is given to these texts undermines other sources of Ethiopian philosophy, and the need to position the study of the modern Ethiopian human subject in the study of philosophy in the Ethiopian context. As a discourse that is still searching for an identity, Ethiopian philosophy should separate itself from a cultural revivalism and a politicised debate that is more content in using philosophy as a tool of cultural affirmation rather than planting the seeds for the development of a culture of rational criticism in the Ethiopian context (Fasil, 2023).A broader conception of Ethiopian philosophy that is founded on complex historical relations, a human subject that is created by relations of entanglements and the failure of programs of modernization that are only aimed at the realisation of material progress, needs to emerge.

Conclusion

The attempt to use the Hatata of Zera Yaecob and the Hatata of Welda Heywat as a foundation of Ethiopian philosophy is expressed in the emergence of three schools and groups of thinkers who have their own programs and goals in relation to the

utilisation of the texts. The first school constitutes those who argue that the Hatata contain a form of subjectivity that is similar to the Cartesian conception of substance dualism. The second school includes those who use the treatises as a way of developing an indigenous philosophy that is founded on the religious disputes and conflicts that emerged in modern Ethiopia whereas the third school's interest in return is in terms of the development of a discourse on modernization. Being pursued as a result of such an interest in developing a mode of subjectivity that posits an position between the subject and the object, a form of wisdom that is grounded in local realities and a resource to modernization that is founded on the criticism of authority and religion, the texts came to occupy centre stage in the study of Ethiopian philosophy.

The attempt to popularise the treatises is a discourse that is haunted by the problems of authorship, the imitation of a Eurocentric discourse on otherness and an intellectual engagement that equates all forms of criticisms with philosophical exercise. It is also an effort that does not make sense of the real goal of the texts which is the development of a religiously reformist discourse. Most importantly, the attention that is given to the Hatata led into the creation of a limited conceptual space within which the study of Ethiopian philosophy is founded on. Ethiopian philosophy came to be intertwined with Ethiopianism and cultural revivalism and the attempt to use philosophy as an ideological tool that can serve as a foundation of national development, and as a result of this the practice of Ethiopian philosophy failed to give an attention to the rich material that presents itself in the form of entangled histories and modernities, written and oral traditions, the modern human subject and the quest for a commonly shared sense of meaning in a nation that is being defined by the experimentation with a system of ethnic federalism. Ethiopian philosophy needs to play an immense role in the development of a discourse that is able to diagnose our existing problems and also posit a vision of a better future.

References

Aliye, A. A. (2020). African indigenous leadership philosophy and democratic governance system: Gada's intersectionality with Ubuntu. *Journal of Black Studies*, *51*(7), 727-759.

Andreas Eshete. (2013). Modernity: Its title to uniqueness and its advent in Ethiopia: From the lecture what is "Zemenawinet"?: Perspectives on Ethiopian modernity. *Northeast African Studies, 13*(1), 1–18. https://doi.org/10. 1353/nas.2013.0004

Bahru Zewde. (2008). The challenge of the new millennium: Renaissance or reappraisal? *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies, 3*(2), 33–47. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27828891

Brooh Alemneh. (2017). የኢትዮጵያ ፍልስፍና (Ethiopian Philosophy). Agios Printing Press.

Ciaffa, J. A. (2008). Tradition and modernity in postcolonial African philosophy. *Humanitas*, *21*(1/2), 121-145.

Daniel Kibret. (2019). የሌለውን ፈላስፋ ፍለጋ እና ሌሎች (In search of the non-existing philosopher and others). Agios Printers.

Dawit Worku. (2012). *The ethics of Zär'aYa'eqob: A reply to the historical and religious violence in the seventeenth century Ethiopia* .Gregorian Biblical BookShop.

Egid, J. J. (2023). How does philosophy learn to speak a new language?. *Perspectives*, *31*(1), 104-118. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0907676X.2022.2145908

Egid, J. (2024). Hegel and the Hatäta Zär'aYaʕ əqob: Africa in the philosophy of history and the history of philosophy. *Hegel Bulletin*, 1-24.

Eyasu Berento. (2019). What is good or evil? A philosophical reflection on the problem of moral responsibility. *Journal of Citizenship and Morality*, *2*(1), 21-39.

Fasil Merawi. (2019). Claude Sumner and the Quest for an Ethiopian philosophy. *Ethiopian Journal of the Social Sciences and Humanities*, *15*(1), 11-24.

Fasil Merawi & Setargew Kenaw. (2019). Is there an Ethiopian philosophy? Rereading the Hatetas of Zara Yaecob and Walda Hewat in the context of knowledge production. *Ethiopian Journal of the Social Sciences and Humanities*, *15*(1), 59-75.

Fasil Merawi. (2023). The search for identity: Exploring four trends in Ethiopian philosophy. *International Philosophical Quarterly, 63*(2), 191-204.

Fasil Merawi. (2024). Overcoming Eurocentrism: Exploring Ethiopian modernity through entangled histories and coloniality. *Social Epistemology, 38*(2), 222-234, DOI: 10.1080/02691728.2024.2308872

Hountondji, Paulin. J. (1996). *African philosophy: Myth and reality*. Indiana University Press.

Kanu, I. A. (2013). Trends in African philosophy: A case for eclectism. *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions*, 2(1), 275-288.

Kiros, T. (1996). Claude Sumner's classical Ethiopian philosophy. *Northeast African Studies, 3*(2), 39-52.
https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/26/article/399062/summary

Kiros, T. (1998).The Meditations of Zara Yaquob. In *The Paideia Archive: Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy.* Vol. 23, pp. 24-33.

Kiros, T. (2004). Caliban's reason and East African philosophy. *The CLR James Journal*, *10*(1),   1-12.https://www.pdcnet.org/clrjames/content/clrjames_2004_0010_0001_0001_0012

Kiros, T. (2005). *Zara Yacob: Rationality of the human heart*. Red Sea Press.

Maimire Mennasemay. (2005). Ethiopian political theory, democracy, and surplus history. *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies,2*(1/2), 1–32.

Maimire Mennasemay. (2010). A critical dialogue between fifteenth and twenty first century Ethiopia. *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 1-37.

Messay Kebede. (1988). *Africa and philosophy: The case of Ethiopia*. Unpublished Manuscript. Addis Abba University, Department of Philosophy.

Mohammed Girma. (2014). Negotiating indigenous metaphysics as educational philosophy in Ethiopia. *Sophia*, *53*(1), 81-97.

Sumner, C. (1976). *Ethiopian philosophy: The treatise of Zara Ya'aqob and of Walda Heywat: Text and authorship* (Vol. 2). Commercial Printing Press.

Sumner, C. (1978). *Ethiopian philosophy: The treatise of Zara Yaecob and Walda Hewat: An analysis* (Vol. 3). Commercial Printing Press.

Sumner, C. (1995). *Oromo wisdom literature*: *Proverbs, collection and analysis* (Vol. 1). Gudina Tumsa Foundation.

Sumner, C. (1996). The significance of Ethiopian philosophy for the problematics of an African philosophy. In Claude Sumner & Samuel Wolde Yohannes (Eds.), *perspectives in African philosophy* (pp. 90). Addis Ababa University Press.

Sumner, C. (1999). The significance of ZeraYacob's philosophy. *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*, *22*(3), 172-188.
https://www.utpjournals.press/doi/pdf/10.3138/uram.22.3.172

Teshale Tibebu. (1996). Ethiopia: The" anomaly" and" paradox" of Africa. *Journal of Black Studies*, *26*(4), 414-430.

Teshome Abera. (2016). Rationality and ethics in Zara Yacob's Hatata. *Imperial Journal of Interdisciplinary Research, 2*(2), 431-439.

Wion, A, & Aïssatou M. (2013).The History of a genuine fake philosophical treatise (Ḥatatā Zar'a Yā 'eqob and Ḥatatā Walda Ḥeywat). *Africas: debates, methods and historical grounds*.
https://journals.openedition.org/afriques/3154

Zara Yacob & Walda Heywat. (2023). *The Hatata inquiries*. Berlin: De Gruyter.