

Is there an Ethiopian Philosophy? Rereading the Hatetas of Zara Yaacob and Walda Hewat in the Context of Knowledge Production

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Abstract

The hatetas of Zara Yaacob and Walda Hewat are widely regarded as the precursors of societal enlightenment and written philosophy in Ethiopia. Mainly taking a form of an autobiographical exercise that tries to reflect on inherited horizons and conventional authority, the hatetas are seen as philosophical treatises that establish the need for societal rationality. Earlier on debates existed on the originality of the hatetas and whether or not the idea found within the hatetas qualifies as a philosophy. Claude Summer could be regarded as the ardent advocate of the position which celebrates the hatetas as original works of Ethiopian philosophy. Based on an attempt to refute the originality of the hatetas initiated by the Italian orientalist Carlo Conti Rossini, Daniel Kibret recently argued that the whole idea of an Ethiopian philosophy founded on the works of Zara Yaacob and Walda Hewat is a Western fabrication. He proceeded to argue that it was an Italian Jesuit by the name of Giusto d'Urbino who wrote the hatetas and that the hatetas had a hidden motive of initiating a reformist movement within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. In this paper we will try to evaluate the credibility of such arguments by initiating a rereading of the hatetas.

Keywords: Ethiopian Philosophy, Eurocentrism, hatetas

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Introduction

Ethiopian philosophy is involved in an attempt to identify the existence of a philosophical culture in a nation that is characterized by cultural and linguistic diversity. Although significant attention is not paid to the different forms of Ethiopian philosophy, the Canadian philosopher who worked for decades in the Department of Philosophy of Addis Ababa University introduced a research project that aimed to unearth the different forms of Ethiopian philosophy. Sumner's conclusion is that there are three major modalities in which Ethiopian philosophy is expressed. The first one constitutes an account of a written philosophy that is expressed in the *hatetas* produced by Zara Yaacob and Walda Hewat. Sumner devoted volumes to the analysis of such written works of philosophy. Some of his works exploring the nature of Ethiopian philosophy include *Ethiopian Philosophy, vol. II: The Treatise of Zara Yaacob and Walda Hewat: Text and Authorship* (1976) and *Ethiopian Philosophy, vol. III: The Treatise of Zara Yaacob and Walda Hewat: An Analysis* (1978). Besides this, Sumner sought to understand the role of foreign philosophical literature in the constitution of Ethiopian philosophy. Here he arrived at the conclusion that such works from an alien source constitute another crucial component of Ethiopian philosophy since the way in which they signified a process of creative appropriation. Some of the works that Sumner produced in this regard include works like *Ethiopian Philosophy, vol. I: The Book of the Wise Philosophers* (1974), *Ethiopian Philosophy, vol. IV: The Life and Maxims of Skendes* (1974) and *Ethiopian Philosophy, vol. V: The Faisalgwos* (1976). Sumner also believed that oral wisdom and literature constitutes another major facet of Ethiopian philosophy and to this extent he produced works like *Oromo Wisdom Literature: Proverbs, Collection and Analysis* (1995) and *Proverbs, Songs, Folktales: An Anthology of Oromo Literature* (1996). In this paper our interest is to re-examine the implications of celebrating the *hatetas* as original written works of Ethiopian philosophy.

One of the major components of what has become to be known as Ethiopian philosophy in Sumner's oeuvre is an account of a written philosophy founded on the *hatetas* of Zara Yaacob and Walda Hewat. Previously inquiries have been made, examining the *hatetas* in the context of how Ethiopian philosophy helps to refute the colonial bias which assumes that there is no philosophical knowledge in the African continent. To this extent Mudimbe sought to identify the uniqueness of the *hatetas* and their organic texture in his *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (1988). Emmanuel Eze in his *On Reason: Rationality in a World of Cultural Conflict and Racism* (2008) tried to use

the hatetas in order to strengthen his argument that systems of rationality always emerge in a particular context that have their own color and essence. Richard H. Bell (2002) in *Understanding African Philosophy: A Cross-Cultural Approach to Classical and Contemporary Issues* further signified the role of the hatetas as unique components of African philosophy due to the fact that they appear in a rare written form and are also the results of a conscious reflection by individual thinkers. Tsenay Serequeberhan (1994) in *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy: Horizon and Discourse* affirmed the role of the hatetas in situating philosophy within existential predicaments that occurred in Africa.

As such one research area that is not sufficiently explored in studies of the hateta and Ethiopian philosophy is the presence of Eurocentric discourse in such an intellectual tradition. There is a need to approach the hatetas from the point of view of knowledge production by Westerners and the ideological functions that such an intellectual edifice seeks to accomplish. Trying to understand the implications of the hatetas to the field of Ethiopian philosophy, the paper is organized around three major sections. In the first section, we will discuss the role that the hatetas play as a foundation of a written Ethiopian philosophy. In the second section a discussion of Claude Sumner's defense of the hatetas will be made. In the third section Daniel Kibret's critical stance will be discussed. Finally, there will be some concluding remarks on the import of such questioning.

The Hatetas as a Foundation of Written Ethiopian Philosophy

The field of Ethiopian philosophy is part of the larger debate on the existence and nature of African philosophy. Being involved on what Dismas Masolo (1994) calls the rationality debates, Ethiopian philosophy could be seen as one element of the attempts to demonstrate the existence of philosophy in Africa. Nevertheless, Ethiopian philosophy also occupies a unique status in being made up of traditions that range from written to unwritten, original to adaptive works of creative appropriation. Mudimbe recognizes such a special place occupied by Ethiopian philosophy when he argued that the different components of Ethiopian philosophy signify the emergence of a new space in the production of knowledge in Africa and question the Eurocentric paradigm (Mudimbe, 1988, p. 203).

In such an investigation into Ethiopian philosophy, Claude Sumner had made immense contributions. Teodros Kiros (1996) believes that Sumner succeeded in identifying two major modalities in Ethiopian philosophy. The first one is a written tradition being expressed in the original ideas of Zara Yaacob and Walda Hewat and, the Sapiential philosophical literature that finds expression in *The Book of the Wise Philosophers* and *The Life and Maxims of Skendes*.

Secondly, Sumner also studied oral wisdom as constituting another major component of Ethiopian philosophy (Teodros, p. 1996). Here we will focus on written Ethiopian philosophy developed in a form of the *hatetas*. The *hatetas* historically emerged in a context of religious controversy. The introduction of Catholicism as a state religion (albeit short-lived and unsuccessful) in the first half of the 17th century led into religious conflicts in Ethiopia and Sumner argues that it is in such a context that Zara Yaacob wrote his *hateta* trying to rationally articulate his existential predicaments. The *hatetas* were attempts to question existing views towards theodicy, moral goodness and social justice.

Teodros Kiros (1996) asserts that both theoretical and practical necessities dictated the development of the *hateta* as a philosophical method and a tool for interrogation. Teodros claims that at a more conceptual level the *hateta* was an attempt to resolve the theological disputes of the day on the nature of God and the problem of theodicy. Practically, the *hateta* could be regarded as an attempt to introduce a new social and political philosophy that can serve as a foundation of societal justice and equality. Teodros characterizes the method of the *hateta* as one of “methodically dismantling, layer by layer, piece by piece, the dominant prejudices of backward Ethiopia, specifically its religious practices and old customs” (1996, p. 50). For Claude Sumner the *hatetas* ought to be considered as works of philosophy since they contain teachings dealing with issues of existence, knowledge and human values that constitute the basic components of the discipline. Sumner sees Zara Yaacob grappled with the issue of the existence of God, values that should guide our relations with one another and also the cognitive faculties that we exercise in order to comprehend the nature of truth. Sumner does admit that a heavy influence of Christianity is present in the *hatetas*. Still he asserts that going beyond simply inheriting one’s traditions, Zara Yaacob and Walda Hewat were original thinkers who tried to reflect on the limitations of conventional views (Sumner, 1996, p. 10).

In his *hateta*, Zara Yaacob describes himself as someone who came from a religious background but was forced into exile because his views defied the teachings of the Orthodox Church. He described his time as one in which there was a fierce competition among men and also one in which religious disputes existed. He tells us: “while I was teaching in my district, many of my friends came to dislike me. During this period there was no real friendship and as a result men became jealous of one another” (Sumner, 1976, p. 4). Zara Yaacob believes that such envy emerged from the fact that as a person he was virtuous and also someone who has a superior intellect. He characterizes his daily life as one in which he was conversing with the

members of different religions in different matters like the nature of God, essence of spiritual life and differences that existed between the teachings of God and of men.

Although he was identified by outsiders as the follower of a particular religion, he tells us that he didn't accept the teachings of any established religion. Looking at the radical differences that existed in the name of religion, Zara Yaacob argues, "and I do not say, "this is good, that is bad", but... "all these things are good if we ourselves are good" (Sumner, 1976, p. 5). In his theological pursuits, Zara Yaacob tries to ponder why differences existed among religions. Meditating in exile he arrived at three major conclusions. The first one is that there is an absolute God who is responsible for the whole of creation. Secondly, he also observes that faith is not a process of unconditional surrender but a rational inquiry into the nature of truth. Thirdly, he concludes that conflicts existed in the interpretation of religious truth because men did not fully exercise their rational abilities that are given to them by God.

Believing that our rational faculty is given to us by God, Zara Yaacob argues that, "this creator who endowed us with the gifts of intelligence and reason cannot he himself be without them" (Sumner, 1976, p. 6). Applying the principle of rationality, he arrives at the conclusion that polygamy, fasting and monastic life are unnatural and that all humans are equal to one another. He also defies the idea that God only serves the chosen ones by arguing that this contradicts the nature of God as a being that is all loving and all just. This further arises from the failure to distinguish between the laws of God and of men.

Compared to Zara Yaacob's, the hateta of Walda Hewat begins by the author declaring that if the right opportunity is found then a wise person could disseminate his views to others. Walda Hewat here assumes that it is God who gives us knowledge and also creates the right opportunities for us to teach others. In speaking of his hateta he states, "This book serves as a guide in the counseling and the teaching of science to our children" (Sumner, 1976, p. 27). Walda Hewat believes that truth cannot come from convention, custom and tradition. It is only by exercising our innate rational potential that the nature of truth will be revealed. The same criticism is also employed by Walda Hewat towards texts when he argued that not everything else that is found in books is true. Here he exhorts, "do not believe what is written in books until you have examined it and found it to be right" (Sumner, 1976, p. 28). It is only through the light of reason that the nature of truth can be ascertained.

For Walda Hewat the foundation of all epistemic pursuits is the recognition that all truth emanates from the will of an all knowing God. Since individuals are finite and limited, there must be an ultimate source that is

responsible for all of creation. He argues: “for each creature is finite and weak, it has no power to create from nothing” (Sumner, 1976, p. 29). One other issue that Walda Hewat tries to grapple with is the nature of the human soul. Employing a dichotomizing structure, he speaks of the existence of two natures: One is material and the other spiritual. He also relates the soul with the capacity to reason and contends that we are not able to detect the presence of such an inner principle of movement in other animals.

In his theory of knowledge, Walda Hewat introduced a hierarchical relation between opinion and knowledge. Opinion is a result of simply inheriting custom and tradition. Knowledge on the contrary is what stands the test of rationality. Regarding the limits of conventional authority he establishes, “as far as the other doctrines of men and of their children are concerned, it is not fitting that we believe them hastily without inquiry” (Sumner, 1976, p. 31). In his social philosophy, Walda Hewat emphasizes the value of work and carrying out one’s activities in unison with others. Using a teleological argument he argues that we are created by God to carry out specific functions and also that we should use our labor daily. He assumes “God ordered me to serve with me” (Sumner, 1976, p. 33). He also thinks that evil exists in the world because human beings violate the will of God.

Based on what we had seen so far it would therefore become obvious that the hatetas are seen as crucial foundations of Ethiopian philosophy. Being grounded on such texts several attempts are made to identify the implications of the hatetas to today’s world and their role in solving our current problems. Among others Teshome Abera (2016) tried to identify the need to utilize the ethical teachings that are found in the hatetas. He focused on such an analysis on the principle of harmony that he believes is central to any reading of the hatetas. Brooh Alemneh (2017) tried to identify the role of the hatetas in overcoming ethnic federalism and also their significance in developing a theory of social justice. For Andreas Eshete (2012), alongside the contributions of emperor Tewodros, the Dekike Estifanos and Gebrehiwot Baykedagn, one could regard the hatetas as one of the precursors of modernity in Ethiopia (Andreas, 2012, p. 10). What Andreas does not explore in such an analysis is, if there was a philosophical tradition before the hatetas and if the hatetas could be taken as Ethiopian. We could ask: given such a background (if there was any), why is it that they didn’t serve as a foundation for an elaborated philosophical discourse? Why is it that today we don’t have schools of thought which have emerged out of the teachings found in the hatetas? Again why is it that the teachings found in the hatetas didn’t lead into the emergence of normative ethical theories and conceptions of justice and equality?

Claude Sumner's Defense of the Hatetas

Claude Sumner characterizes Zara Yaacob's hateta as being characterized by two major features. First of all, it is developed as an autobiography. It is an attempt to detail the life of a thinker who is dissatisfied with existing beliefs. Secondly, the hateta method employed by Zara Yaacob gives the text a unique texture. Recognizing this Sumner contends that the hateta "develops according to an inner dialectical process whose principal moments can be singled out" (Sumner, 1976, p. 61). For Sumner, the ideas that Zara Yaacob tried to introduce in the hateta can strictly qualify as a work of philosophy since it employs a rational method; is carried out by an individual; and examines all aspects of inherited wisdom. This leads Sumner to further claim: "Zara Yaacob is a real philosopher in the strictest sense of the word" (Sumner, 1976, p. 61). Sumner compares the originality of the hateta with other components of Ethiopian philosophy like *The Book of the Wise Philosophers* which he believes is written by a foreign author. The hatetas are developed as organic reflections on indigenous realities, whereas the sapiential aspects of Ethiopian philosophy are characterized by a process of creative adaptation.

Sumner believes that it was Antonio D'Abadie - a person who has an interest in Ethiopian texts - who was responsible for the popularization of the hatetas in Western literature. It was based on the collections of D'Abadie that other commentators on Ethiopian studies like Boris A. Turayev and Enno Littman produced texts debating the originality and uniqueness of Zara Yaacob's philosophy. Questions begun to be raised about the originality of the hatetas, if they constitute works of Ethiopian philosophy after a paper was published by Carlo Conti Rossini reflecting on his conversations with "Takla Haymanot, an Ethiopian priest of the 19th century, which concerned the activities of the Catholic missions" (Sumner, 1976, pp. 64-65). Takla Haymanot had told Rossini of an Italian Jesuit in Ethiopia by the name of Giusto d'Urbino who authored several works using pseudonyms. Rossini subsequently raised skepticism towards the originality of the hatetas and contemplated whether the hatetas were actually written by d'Urbino.

Sumner does not agree with such reservations made by Rossini since he believes that "Conti Rossini bases his argumentation exclusively on extrinsic evidence" (Sumner, 1976, p. 66). Nonetheless, still even Sumner himself in trying to determine whether or not d'Urbino was the author of the hatetas chose to employ a psychological method rather than looking for historical evidence. He tried to reflect on the life of d'Urbino based on the accounts of his masters and the correspondences that he had with his friends. Sumner, based on such accounts,

describes d'Urbino as someone who joined the religious life out of the tragedies he had faced earlier in life. d'Urbino was someone who was interested in Ethiopian texts and was expelled eventually from Ethiopia for being engaged in extra religious activities. Sumner generally describes d'Urbino as having “an enthusiastic attachment to Ethiopia and a passionate love for its language” (Sumner, 1976, p. 69). Sumner also observes that it was d'Urbino that sent a copy of the hatetas to D'Abadie.

Looking at the similarities exhibited between Zara Yaacob and d'Urbino towards the criticism of established religion, tragedies in life that are experienced and the style of writing that is pursued, Rossini finally arrives at the “conclusion that Zara Yaacob is a literary creation of Giusto d'Urbino” (Sumner, 1976, p. 73). The arguments by Rossini were accepted by the major commentators on Ethiopian literature except by I. Krackovskii who believed that the two hatetas were written by different authors. Mittwoch further strengthens Rossini's arguments in highlighting the fact that both Zara Yaacob and d'Urbino were born on the same date. Using historical factors and an analysis of the language that is employed in the texts Mittwoch concludes that “they have been written by a European with eminent knowledge of Ethiopic who lived in the middle of the 19th century, P. Giusto d'Urbino” (Sumner, 1976, p. 77).

Besides such arguments among major commentators on the nature of the hatetas, Ullendorf tried to raise some gaps in the criticisms that are mounted against the originality of the texts. He believed that no sufficient evidence was presented in order to refute the originality of the hatetas. Strengthening such an argument Tesfaye Debesay in an *Ethiopian Herald* article published in 1970 argued that the fact that d'Urbino denied that he was the author of the hatetas shows that he is not the author. Amsalu Aklilu further contributed to such a debate in arguing that the accounts of Takla Haymanot on d'Urbino are not based on firsthand accounts. Amsalu also contends that the reason why the hatetas are not known in Ethiopian literature amount to the fact that such works, “contained questions and reasoning which led to doubtful conclusions about the certainty of religious beliefs” (Sumner, 1976, p. 85). Aklilu Amsalu further tries to show that the style of writing that is found in the hateta is common in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church tradition.

As Sumner sees it, further argumentation on the originality of the hatetas as original works of Ethiopian philosophy is made by Alemayehu Moges. Alemayehu argues that a careful reading of the hatetas demonstrates that they belong to Ethiopian intellectual tradition. Alemayehu also believes that Zara Yaacob's reading of the bible shows that he grew up in the Ethiopian church tradition. Based

on such considerations “Alemayehu Moges claims that the language of the Hatatas is pure qane ga’az , and that it shows no foreign influence, Latin, French or Italian” (Sumner, 1976, p. 93). Alemayehu believes that it requires knowledge of qenie to write the hatetas and this was what d’Urbino did not have.

Sumner also analyzes the differences that are found between the two hatetas by exploring the method employed and teachings that are developed in the areas of theodicy, ethics, individual ethics, social ethics and psychology. In terms of method, Zara Yaacob clearly employs a method that seeks to analyze the object of analysis layer by layer. In Walda Hewat one does not see “dialectical development” (Sumner, 1976, p. 264). In his teachings in theodicy, Zara Yaacob directly grapples with the problem of evil. Walda Hewat in turn deals with the nature of God and evil in the most general terms. In their ethical teachings, Zara Yaacob emphasizes the need for a proportion between crimes committed and punishments given while Walda Hewat emphasizes the wisdom of God and the need not to question the injustice that is found in the world. Psychology is intensively treated in Walda Hewat’s hateta whereas it does not emerge as an object of inquiry in Zara Yaacob’s work. Based on all such comparisons, Sumner tells us “if these conclusions are valid, then it follows that modern philosophy began in Ethiopia at the same time as in England and France” (Sumner, 1976, p. 275).

As part of his efforts to prove that Ethiopians are the authors of the hateta, Sumner tries to engage in a comparison of the number of sentences used per chapter and number of words used per sentence by Zara Yaacob and Walda Hewat. Based on this he concludes that “Zara Yaacob’s chapters are clearly longer. He develops a thought unit; he organically expounds it from within. His sentences however are relatively short, concise, succinct” (Sumner, 1976, p. 114). One also observes that the hateta of Zara Yaacob stands out in terms of following a writing style that clearly describes the life of the author, whereas Walda Hewat’s work does not. In terms of style of writing, Zara Yaacob invites the readers into his world while “Walda Hewat remains impersonal and pedagogical” (Sumner, 1976, p. 115). Sumner using the arguments of Amsalu also tries to demonstrate the validity of the hatetas by situating the author in the historical realities of the time in which the works were written. Based on this it is religious conflict that animated the production of the hatetas. Analyzing the letters and correspondence that d’Urbino has written, Sumner concludes that d’Urbino had always remained a devoted Christian whereas what we see in the hatetas is a rationalist philosophy. Furthermore d’Urbino described God in theological terms whereas Zara Yaacob

chose to pursue a rationalist approach. One also sees that d'Urbino celebrated asceticism whereas Zara Yaacob was against it.

Daniel Kibret's Refutation of the Hatetas

As we have seen in the previous section, a strong defense of the hatetas was developed by Claude Sumner. This shows that in Ethiopian philosophy, the hatetas of Zara Yaacob and Walda Hewat occupy a special place in a number of ways. First of all, they are used to celebrate the emergence of a written philosophical tradition against the background of the teachings of Orthodox Christianity and a society that is dictated by custom and tradition. To this extent, the hatetas are seen as the precursors to the Ethiopian discourse on modernity and the foundation of societal enlightenment. Secondly, the hatetas have a unique significance in the attempts to develop a philosophy of resistance in African philosophy. Arguing that philosophy could only be practiced in an individual level, the critics allege that the existence of a written culture is a precondition for the practice of philosophy. Here the hatetas are unique since they appear in a written form developed by individual thinkers who were critical of their inherited traditions. Drawing on Sumner, Teodros Kiros (1996) even goes on to argue that Zara Yaacob's work is comparable to the ideas of Western thinkers like Descartes and Kant (Teodros, p. 1996). What such an argument seems to take for granted is the idea that Zara Yaacob and Walda Hewat are the authors of the hatetas and imply that before the hatetas no written and original philosophical tradition existed in Ethiopia.

Recently Daniel Kibret in his work የሌለውን ፈላስፋ ፍላጎት እና ሌሎች¹ (2011 E.C., 2018/19) tried to situate the place of the hatetas in light of their ideological functions and raised the issue of authorship anew. Previously attempts have been made to question the originality of the hatetas and also to determine whether the ideas found within such works deserve a philosophical status. What's different in Daniel's approach is the fact that his analysis is organized in such a way that would enable readers to situate the hatetas in the world of knowledge production. In introducing the aim of his inquiry into the hatetas, Daniel tells us "this research deviates from the usual inquiries that are made on the hatetas of Zara Yaacob and Walda Hewat" (Daniel, 2011 E.C., p. 180) (authors' translation²). Daniel asks, what functions do the hatetas serve as a work of Ethiopian philosophy and how do they obscure our understanding of Ethiopian philosophy? One could therefore ask,

¹ Roughly put, the title of this book can be translated as "The Search for a Non-Existent Philosopher..."

² Similar translations hereafter from the same source were done by the authors.

is the idea that Zara Yaacob was an Ethiopian philosopher part of a conspiracy of the Jesuits against the Ethiopian knowledge tradition?

In this work, Daniel discusses a range of issues dealing with the nature of spirituality and ethical issues. Daniel starts his analysis by situating the relevance of the hatetas in a historical context. According to him the works of Zara Yaacob and Walda Hewat came to be known to the world because they were sent to Europe by an Italian monk living in Ethiopia. The Europeans gave a special attention to these works since they believed that they have a unique content. Daniel further tells us: “While Antonio D’Abadie was based in the city of Paris, one of the people who used to send books to him told him that he had come across a book with a unique content” (Daniel, 2011 E.C., p. 181). As already pointed out above, the books were actually sent to Antonio d’Abadie by an Italian monk in Ethiopia who was interested in studying ancient religious texts. The person who sent the books was Giusto d’Urbino, a Jesuit who lived in Ethiopia between 1846 and 1855, who was more interested in collecting ancient religious texts more than carrying out religious duties.

Daniel reiterates that d’Urbino sent d’Abadie a book entitled “Hateta Yacob.” Gusto d’Urbino had told d’Abadie that the book contained a unique substance compared to other writings in Ethiopia. d’Urbino described the book as a philosophical treatise written by an Ethiopian monk and one dealing with debates among major religions, especially on the nature of truth. It had also been told that the manuscript was trying to prove the existence of God by a process of rational argumentation. According to Daniel, d’Urbino tells us “the book looks like a fiction or an autobiography. The author is a philosopher who lived at the time of the Portuguese. He is a religious person from Aksum. He was exiled into the world after being persecuted for his religious beliefs. Thinking in solitude, he undermined the teachings of the dominant religions” (Daniel, 2011 E.C., p. 182). Looking at such assertions regarding the nature of the alleged manuscript Daniel raises two basic questions. First of all, he asks, in what possible manner was d’Urbino able to translate the hatetas? Related to this, was the process of translation characterized by distortions and alterations? Secondly, he wonders, why did d’Urbino call the texts as hateta Yacob?

According to Daniel, based on the correspondence that existed between d’Urbino and d’Abadie one could see that there are three versions of the hatetas. The first one is a text that d’Urbino found in the hands of a traditional healer. The second one is a handwritten copy of the hateta made by d’Urbino. The third one is a copy of the hatetas found in a *brana* (parchment) Ethiopic form of writing.

Daniel believes that we need to situate the relevance and originality of the *hatetas* by situating them in the intellectual history of literary productions in Ethiopia. Here he argues that no mention of the *hatetas* is found in either sacred books or other texts in Ethiopia. Subsequently he asks, “even if we cannot find additional copies of the text, why is it that the name of the book or the author is not mentioned in other texts?” (Daniel, 2011, p. 184R). He goes on to argue that even texts that are condemned by the church are mentioned in literary productions. But what is special about the *hatetas* is the fact that no attempts were made to either critique them or draw certain lessons in the Ethiopian literary tradition. Daniel also argues that significant differences exist between the different copies of the text and that this leads to the emergence of further skepticism.

Daniel thus tries to approach the question of the originality of the *hatetas* by inquiring as to whether the author is the Italian Jesuit d’Urbino. Here he gives us a glimpse of the life of d’Urbino based on the testimony of an Ethiopian Jesuit called Aba Ayele Teklehaymanot. Being a contemporary of d’Urbino, Aba Ayele Teklehaimant describes d’Urbino as a Jesuit who never chose to disclose his identity and very much adept at using pseudonyms in order to disseminate his ideas. Aba Taklahaymanot tells us that “d’Urbino had written many books, even though he was only employing pseudonyms” (Daniel, 2011 E.C., p. 188). The suggestion is that d’Urbino was someone who was well versed in Geez and the teachings of Ethiopian orthodox Christianity and using such a background he authored the *hatetas*.

Daniel believes that the work by Carl Conti Rossini beyond any doubt established that d’Urbino is the author of the *hatetas*. Based on Rossini’s studies Daniel raises further doubts about the nature of the *hateta*. There are eight major points of criticism that are raised by Rossini and Daniel believes that these challenges are still unanswered. First of all, Rossini sees a parallel between the way Zara Yaacob asks for a material assistance from his master and d’Urbino seeks support from d’Abadie in order to pursue his literary goals. Secondly, looking at the semantics that is employed in the letters of d’Urbino and the *hatetas*, one sees similar words being employed. Thirdly, both d’Urbino and Zara Yaacob use the idea that the poor could only contribute through their labor. According to Daniel, in the letter that he wrote in 1852 requesting financial support, d’Urbino employed the phrase “the wealthy through their cattle and the poor through their labor.” The *hateta* uses almost the same description (Daniel, 2011E.C., p. 190). Fourthly, one observes that d’Urbino saw himself more as a writer rather than a Jesuit. Fifthly, one sees that both Zara Yaacob and d’Urbino were born on the same date. Sixthly, both personalities have “Werke” as their Christian names.

Seventhly, there is the observation that the way d'Urbino describes his maid and Zara Yaacob describes his wife are quite similar. Eighthly, both authors describe their journeys from Aksum to Gonder in similar manners and with exactly the same details. Using such points of analysis, Daniel provides us with sufficient reason to doubt that Zara Yaacob and Walda Hewat are the authors of the hatetas (Daniel, 2011 E.C., p. 195-196).

Based on such observations into the hatetas, Daniel finally arrives at the conclusion that there is no Ethiopian philosopher called Zara Yaacob. He contends: "based on the evidence presented, I find it difficult to accept that there was an Ethiopian philosopher called Zara Yaacob" (Daniel, 2011 E.C., p. 218). He mainly cites the fact that there is conflicting evidence on the nature of the texts and also the striking similarity between the lives of d'Urbino and Zara Yaacob to show that the whole idea of Zara Yaacob as an Ethiopian philosopher is a hoax.

Daniel further adds that the main goal of d'Urbino was to disguise his criticism of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church under the mask of an Ethiopian monk who introduced original philosophical ideas. And yet Daniel still didn't show how the ideas that are found within the hatetas are systematically developed so as to attack the teachings of the Ethiopian Orthodox church.

Daniel all the same invites us to question the premises upon which the very idea of Ethiopian philosophy is founded. He also shows us that the aim of the hatetas is not to spark a culture of rationality and societal enlightenment but to destroy the established authority of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Such an insistence serves as a way of questioning the presence of Eurocentric paradigm in Ethiopian philosophy. What are the consequences of such an undertaking? Isn't it the case that celebrating Zara Yaacob and Walda Hewat as the only two Ethiopian philosophers diminishes the conceptual space upon which Ethiopian philosophy is grounded? Doesn't it diminish the value of ancient and medieval writings that possesses a philosophical significance? Also doesn't it serve as a foundation of a reformist discourse in the name of celebrating an organic indigenous philosophy? To this extent the attempt of Daniel serves as a foundation of a critique of Eurocentric discourse in Ethiopian philosophy.

Despite such an importance, Daniel needs to situate his analysis of the hatetas in a broader platform. The idea of the hatetas as works of Ethiopian philosophy could be better approached had it been explored from the perspective of the limitations of anti-Eurocentric discourse. As thinkers like Mudimbe pointed out, most attempts to develop a criticism of the colonial matrix end up being Eurocentric in their nature. In studies of the hatetas we see that many critics are quick to point out the relevance of the hatetas in refuting the claims of the

Eurocentric paradigm which denied the existence of philosophy in the African soil. What is neglected is the need to examine the Eurocentric motifs that informed the idea of the hateta as an indigenous work of Ethiopian philosophy.

It is true that in his work, *Ethiopian Philosophy, Vol III, The Treatise of Zera yacob and Welda heyawt : An Analysis*, Claude Sumner tries to present a strong argument for the originality of the hatetas. Sumner used the differences found in style of writing employed by Zara Yaacob, Walda Hewat and d'Urbino and also the contexts in which such works are grounded to prove their difference. Sumner also situates the hatetas within the context of *qenie* writing and also cultural values in order to demonstrate their uniqueness. Sumner believes that the hatetas are works of Ethiopian philosophy that can serve as a foundation of a discourse on ethics, justice and societal coexistence. Still three things are lacking in Sumner's approach. First of all, a proper refutation of Rossini's treatment of the similarities that are found between d'Urbino and Zara Yaacob was not made. Secondly, the idea of the hatetas as works of philosophy is not approached from the perspective of a critique of a colonial discourse that seeks to destroy the knowledge systems of non-western societies. Thirdly, Sumner did not clearly demonstrate how the ideas found within the hatetas merit a philosophical status. At best they look like attempts to reform the teachings of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

Conclusion

The hatetas are seen as the foundations of a written Ethiopian philosophy that is founded on the practice of individual rational exercise. Seeing the very concept of hatetas as a scrutiny and a detailed examination into perceived truth, a picture of Zara Yaacob was developed as the first Ethiopian philosopher who developed his ideas in a form of an autobiography. It was further assumed that his disciple Walda Hewat also continued such philosophical pursuits in his approach that mainly focuses on issue of ethics and moral conduct. Several studies have been made mostly focusing on the implications of the hatetas to the critique of Eurocentric philosophy.

Our investigation revealed that the field of Ethiopian philosophy is founded on two unquestioned premises. The first one is the idea that the authors of the hatetas are Ethiopian authors. The second one is that the ideas that are found within the hatetas merit a philosophical status. Our analysis has also shown that there are three major areas of investigation that need to emerge regarding the place that the hatetas must occupy in Ethiopian philosophy. The first one is the need to investigate the presence of a Eurocentric paradigm in Ethiopian philosophy. The

second one is the degree to which the celebration of the hatetas as the only written works of Ethiopian philosophy has an impact on the attempt to find philosophical wisdom in ancient and medieval writings in Ethiopia. Thirdly, the nature of the hatetas also needs to be explored against the claim that there has been an effort to implant the seeds of a reform within the teachings of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Daniel Kibret's analysis of the hatetas might therefore be a helpful call for rekindling a systematic inquiry into the originality of the hatetas and their ramifications for the process of knowledge production in Ethiopian philosophy in general. This can further encourage the investigation of ancient and medieval Ethiopian manuscripts whose importance as possible sources of authentic philosophical reflections might have otherwise been overshadowed by the effort to attach the name "Ethiopian philosophy" exclusively to the hatetas.

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