The Hermeneutics of Wax and Gold (*säm ena wärq* / ሰም ና ወርቅ) *

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In this text, I introduce one of the oldest but neglected Ethiopian intellectual tradition: *säm ena wärq* (ሰም ና ወርቅ) hermeneutics or the hermeneutics of "Wax and Gold." After a brief description of *qiné* as the framework of *säm ena wärq*, I discuss the process of *qiné* education to throw light on the place of *qiné* and *säm ena wärq* in traditional Ethiopia's intellectual life. I discuss the major concepts of *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics: *mälk* (መልክ / appearance), *ewen* (እውን / reality), *nägär* (ነገር / thing, phenomenon), *gädl* (ገድል / struggle), *zäybé* or *mängäd* (ዘይቤ, መንገድ / trope, way, symptom), *andem* (አንድም / and one), *tirgum* (ትርጉም / translation, interpretation), *ewnät* (እውነት / truth), *ewqät* (እውቀት / knowledge), *zäräfa* (ዘረፋ / overreading, *détournement*), *lissan* (ልሳን / emancipatory language), *qisäla* (ቅጸላ, meditation), *ena* (እና), *hiss,* (ሂስ / critique), *tichit* (ትችት / extended interpretations or "*commentaire de texte*"), *hatäta* (ሐተታ / dialectical reasoning) , *andemta* (አንድምታ / "fusion of horizons" of diverse understandings), and *arnät* (አርነት / emancipation). In the process, I unpack the *säm ena wärq* ideas of duality without dualism, incompleteness, emancipation, and surplus history. The text brings out the interpretative power of *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics and how it could enable Ethiopians to conduct (a) a critical internal journey into Ethiopian history, both vertically and horizontally, and to enucleate the emancipatory questions, aspiration and ideas that silently inhabit it, and (b) to conduct a critical external journey into the knowledge and practices of other civilizations, the West in contemporary Ethiopia, in light of the emancipatory questions disclosed in the critical internal journey. The text concludes with a critique of the mischaracterization of *säm ena wärq* in social science inspired studies.

Qiné (ቅኔ) and *säm ena wärq*

Qiné poetry, the source of *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics, is one of Ethiopia's oldest and important intellectual traditions. Between the 6th and 13th century, *qiné* was composed in Ge'ez, the liturgical language of the Ethiopian *Täwahedo* Orthodox church. It mainly dealt with the fallen condition of humanity and the consolation and salvation that awaits the faithful. With the emergence of Amharic as a trans-ethnic and trans-regional Ethiopian language in the 12th century, Amharic became the new language of *qiné* composition and interpretation. [1]

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*This text is an extended and revised version of "Towards *Qiné* (ቅኔ) Hermeneutics" that appeared in the *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol VII, 1&2, pp.1-50.

[1] My discussion leans heavily on the following works for unpacking and interpreting the *säm ena wärq* hermeneutical tradition. Alemayhu Mogess, ኢትዮጵያዊ ቅኔ, (Asmara: Graphic Printing Press, 1959); Alemayhu Mogess, ሰም ና ወርቅ. 2 vols. (Asmara, Graphic Printing Press, 1953); Balambaras Mahteme Selassie, አማርኛ ቅኔ, (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, 1955 E.C.); Kebede G/Medhin, ሳይንሳዊ የቅኔ አፈታት ስልት, (Addis Ababa: Birana Matëmia Bet, 1992); Alemayhu Mogess, መልክዐ ኢትዮጵያ (Asmara: Graphic Printing Press , undated); Alaka Imbakom Kalewold, ቅኔ ትምህርት ና ስለ ጥቅሙ, Proceedings of the Third International Conference of Ethiopian Studies (Addis Ababa, 1966); Melake Berhan Admasu Jembere, ዝክረ

Amharic *qiné* developed at the intersection of *Täwahedo* Church's Ge'ez sacred literature and the *däbtära*s' literary activities.[2] It progressively replaced the upward glance of Ge'ez *qiné* with a downward glace and immersed itself in critical reflection on the human condition in the here and now. Amharic *qiné* expresses a passion for questioning and interpreting earthly issues: social practices, ideas, ideals, institutions, norms, events, hope, joy, love, work, injustice, power, poverty, friendship, oppression, sorrow, death, and other aspects of human life. *Qiné* is a rich and complex literary practice.[3] There are different genres of *qiné* called *qiné bet* (ቅኔ ቤት). The *qiné* scholar Liqä Siltanat Habtä Mariam points out that there are seventeen kinds of *qiné bet*, each with its own sub-genres, for a total of seventy-eight.[4] Each *qiné bet* has its own style, structure, and rhetorical tropes.[5] *Säm ena wärq* (ሰም ና ወርቅ) or "wax and gold" is the dominant interpretative strategy of *qiné* hermeneutics and has a considerable influence in Ethiopia's intellectual tradition.

Säm (ሰም) means wax, and *wärq* (ወርቅ) means gold. At first sight, one may say that *qiné* articulates three elements: the *säm* or wax, the *wärq* or gold, and the *hibrä qal* (ህብረ ቃል) or "harmonizer" or bridge. The aim of *qiné* and its *säm ena wärq* is to construct and disclose the true meanings of human affairs through an exploration of the different layers of meanings, explicit and

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ሊቃውንት, (Addis Ababa: Tinsae Zegubae Printing Press, 1970); Liqä Siltanat Habtä Mariam Werqneh, ጥንታዊ የኢትዮጲያ ትምህርት (Addis Ababa, Berhan ena Selam Printing Press, 1963); Admasu Jembere, መጽሐፈ ቅኔ (Addis Ababa, Berhan ena Selam Printing Press, 1963); Menghestu Lemma, መጽሐፈ ትዝታ (Addis Ababa, Berhan ena Selam Printing Press, 1959); Alaka Imbakom Kalewold, *Traditional Ethiopian Church Education,* trans. Menghestu Lemma (New York: Teachers College Press, 1970); Sergew Hable Selassie, የአማርኛ የቤተ ክርስቲያን መዝገበ ቃላት ፥ ረቂቅ / Draft, 13 volumes (Addis Ababa, 1977 - 1990); Yitbarek Gidäy , የቅኔ ቤት ባህል ና የሕይወቴ ገጠመኝ (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, undated); Ngusse Nagaw Dagaga, የቅኔ አፈታት ዜዳዎች ና የምርጥ ቅኔዎች ስብስብ, Second edition (Addis Ababa: Mega, 1993); Birhanu Gebeyhu, የአማርኛ ስነ ግጥም, (Addis Ababa: Alfa Printing, 2003); Kebede Michael, የቅኔ ውበት (Addis Ababa, Mega printing, 1994); Mengestu Lemma, የአማርኛ ግጥም ዓይነቱ ሥረቱ ሥርዓቱ, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* I (2), pp. 133-51. For a bibliographical essay on Amharic poetry, consult Getie Gelaye, "Ethiopian Contributions to the Study of Amharic Oral Poetry," in Stefan Bruene and Heinrich Scholler, eds. *Auf dem Weg zum modernen Aethiopien, Festschrift fuer Bairu Tafla* (Muenster: Lit Verlag, 2005), pp. 95-109. Aba Dawit, የቅኔ ምስጢር, (Entoto: circa 1940). A handwritten monograph on the composition and interpretation of *qiné*. Moreover, I have drawn from my own observations and experience as a person who grew up in an extended family of *qiné* scholars.

[2] *Täwahedo* is the monophysite (some characterize it as miaphysite) branch of Christianity practiced in Ethiopia. *Ge'ez* is the language of church writings and services. *Däbtära*s are church affiliated lay intellectuals active in theological and secular debates, in writing chronicles, treatises on history and other secular matters, and composing and interpreting *qiné*. They also work as teachers in *qiné* schools.

[3] I treat *qiné* and all *qiné* associated Amharic terms as plural nouns.

[4] Liqä Siltanat Habtä Mariam Werqneh, ጥንታዊ የኢትዮጲያ ትምህርት, op.cit., note 1, pp. 176-183

[5] Alaka Imbakom Kalewold, *Traditional Ethiopian Church Education,* trans. Menghestu Lemma (New York: Teachers College Press, 1970), pp. 26-7. Liqä Siltanat Habtä Mariam Werqneh, ጥንታዊ የኢትዮጲያ ትምህርት, op.cit., note 1, gives a more detailed and exhaustive discussion of the various types and sub-types of *qiné*. Some of the well-known *qiné bet* are *gubae-qäna*, *zämlaqe, mibäzhu, wazema, selassie*, *zäyieze, sahlie, mäwädis,* and *itanä mogär.* I have retained his English transcriptions of the terms.

unstated, that inform and constitute actions, ideas, beliefs, and human affairs in general. For the Ethiopian intellectual tradition,

> The mind is a hidden good; it is the light of the soul, a fire producing many thoughts; it accomplishes actions; it commands language; it is rational; it controls secrete actions; it feeds and strengthens intelligence; it is the honor of the body, the adornment of wisdom, setting it up rightly.[6]

These are ideas that permeate the *qiné* intellectual tradition and have, as we shall see below, a profound impact on *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics. Composing *qiné* is a complex process. The composition of the *säm ena wärq* of a *qiné* varies with each *qiné bet.*[7] However, all *qiné bet* share the following procedures in the composition of a *qiné*. A period of meditation and reflection known as *qisäla* (ቅጸላ) precedes a *qiné* composition. During *qisäla*, the composer explores the subject matter of the *qiné* through ጥያቄ (*tiyaqé,* questioning), ምርመራ (*mirmära,* research), ሂስ (*hiss,* critique), ትችት (*tichit*, extended interpretations or "*commentaire de texte*"), ሐተታ (*hatäta*, dialectical reasoning or looking for and resolving contradictions), አንድም (*andem*, alternative interpretations), and ትርጉም (*tirgum*, translation or alternative meanings). He explores the tradition to find out if other *qiné* that bear on a similar subject matter exist.[8] If other composers have already treated the topic, the composer raises questions as to the adequacy of these *qiné* and their *säm ena wärq* in grasping the subject matter and explores new perspectives and new formulations of *säm ena wärq* in order to demarcate his *qiné* from the previous ones. The *qiné* composer does not limit his understanding of the subject matter to the contours it has in hegemonic knowledge. He investigates the issues pertinent to the subject matter from various perspectives (using *zäybé* / ዘይቤ, *andem* / አንድም, *tirgum* / ትርጉም, and *zäräfa* / ዘረፋ, as we shall see) and tries to grasp what escapes the hegemonic understanding of the subject matter or what the hegemonic understanding excludes or distorts. The effort to bring to light the unsaid, the unheard, the unseen, the unknown, the distorted, and the unexpected of the subject matter is what drives the cogitation (ቅጸላ, *qisäla*) that precedes *qiné* composition. The *qisäla* is a period of struggle (or *gädl* / ገድል, see below) against accepted ideas and interpretations. During *qisäla*, the *qiné* student or composer finds out how

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[6] Claude Sumner, *Classical Ethiopian Philosophy* (Los Angeles: Adey Publishing Company, 1994), p. 186. This is a quote from Sumner's translation of the writings of the seventeenth century Ethiopian philosopher, Zä*r*a Yacob.

[7] Liqä Siltanat Habtä Mariam Werqneh, ጥንታዊ የኢትዮጲያ ትምህርት, op.cit., note 1, p.208.

[8] I say "he", because, to my knowledge, composers of classical *qiné* are men. This is due to the exclusion of women from *qiné* schools. However, Menghestu Lemma writes, "in Gondar there have been poetesses [*qiné* composers] whose works are on record, they dealt with love—as might be expected (sic) perhaps—and with other themes. But women, as part of the general inequality between the sexes, were not allowed to take full part…." Menghestu Lemma, "Appendix: Ethiopian classical poetry" in Alaka Imbakom Kalewold, *Traditional Ethiopian Church Education,* trans. Menghestu Lemma (New York: Teachers College Press, 1970), p. 32.

difficult it is to strike out in a new direction and open a new furrow of interpretation, and he is often driven to desperation.[9] The *qisäla* period leads to new insights into the subject matter.

It is important to note that critical questioning and struggling with old and new meanings are central to the *qiné* tradition. Solomon Gebre Ghiorgis writes,

> In such a school [*qiné* school] discussion and *asking questions* is (*sic*) encouraged. Since the students in such an atmosphere throughout the Ethiopian tradition have been trained to think rather than believe, they have been dissenters more often than not. Since they tend to rely on reason rather than on mere faith, they tend to be more philosophical than their counterparts the priests are. Indeed, it can be said that Ethiopian philosophy in its true sense, i.e., philosophy based on primacy of reason, originated in the kine [*qiné*] school. This is not more so explicitly illustrated in any other book than in the Treatise of Zara Yaecob….[10]

Active questioning animates the *qiné* practice of composition and interpretation. The *qiné* tradition gives primacy to questioning over thinking. According to the *qiné* tradition, thinking does not necessarily lead to questioning, but questioning provokes critical thinking. In *qisäla*, raising the right question is crucial, for the right question is indispensable for composing a *säm ena wärq* that adequately articulates the subject matter. The *qiné* tradition of questioning involves transgressing the given, the accepted, and the boundaries of meanings that the hegemonic order establishes.

A process of linguistic experimentation accompanies the period of *qisäla*. Its purpose is to figure out the best way of expressing the insights the composer gains during *qisäla*. To accomplish this, the *qiné* composer explores the various possibilities that Amharic offers. The goal is to articulate the new insights in a way that grasps the uniqueness and richness of the subject matter as succinctly as possible. Consequently, both composition and interpretation of *qiné* require an awareness of the variation of meanings that emerge from differing uses of words and phrases and of the oscillations of meanings in different contexts. The fusing and splitting of words, the use of elisions and phonological contrasts, the etymology of a word, the inversion of words and statements, and the tensions that certain ways of connecting words or statements create, are all the focus of the attention of the *qiné* composer and interpreter.[11] As we shall see below, *zäybé* (ዘይቤ, rhetorical figures, logical categories, symptoms), *andem* (አንድም, alternative interpretations), *tirgum* (ትርጉም, translation or alternative meanings), and *zäräfa* (ዘረፋ, diversion of meanings) play crucial roles in the complex processes of *qiné* composition and interpretation.

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[9] Hiwot Teferra gives a wonderful description of the difficulties and despairs *qiné* students experience during *qisäla* in her novel ኅሰሳ. Hiwot Teferra, ኅሰሳ (Addis Ababa: Eclipse Printing Press, 2009).

[10] Quoted in Claude Sumner, *Classical Ethiopian Philosophy* (Los Angeles: Adey Publishing Company, 1994), p. 224. Italics added.

[11] Kebede G/Medhin, ሳይንሳዊ የቅኔ አፈታት ስልት (Addis Ababa: Birana Matëmia Bet, 1992), pp, 16-8. See also Birhanu Gebeyhu, የአማርኛ ስነ ግጥም, (Addis Ababa: Alfa Printing, 2003).

Hegemonic understandings of things are the sources of the *säm*. The *säm* is the raw material in the production of the *säm ena wärq* and of the *wärq* of the *qiné*. The *wärq* of the *qiné* is not accessible directly but through a labour of interpretation that transforms the *säm,* its subject matter, and the *säm ena wärq*, and discloses that which is in the *qiné* more than the *qiné*: the *wärq*. The *wärq* is *ewnät* (እውነት) the "the true and the good" that the *qiné* produces from its subject matter. *Wärq*—the "true and the good"—stands for emancipation (*arnät* / ኣርነት) in the *qiné* tradition, as we shall see in the discussion of the telos of *säm ena wärq* further on. Unlike the *säm*, which is circumstantial, the *wärq* is universal and rational because it is necessarily true and good. *Qiné* articulates *säm ena wärq* as a critical approach to social practices, beliefs, ideas, and experiences in order to distinguish between the universal (*wärq*) and the transient (*säm*), the true (*wärq*) and the false (*säm*), the right (*wärq*) and the wrong (*säm*), the just (*wärq*) and the unjust (*säm*), the good (*wärq*) and the bad (*säm*), goodness (*wärq*) and malevolence (*säm*). However, as we shall see, the terms in each pair are not mutually exclusive nor are they absolute; each pair signals something more than dualism. The *wärq*, once produced, retroactively throws light on the *säm*, brings out its limitations or distortions, reorders the relation of the *säm* (the particular) to the *wärq* (the universal), and serves as a regulative principle for re-interpreting the subject matter of the *qiné* in a way that brings out its universal aspect(s).

The uncritical Westernization of Ethiopian education in the name of modernization has generated among the educated a "cultural cringe" that has devalued and almost eliminated the *qiné* intellectual tradition.[12] However, the epideictic use of *säm ena wärq*— formulations that praise or condemn persons, generally those who are in authority—has survived as part of popular culture. *Säm ena wärq* now exists in the simplified form of "double entendre" or pun. In its simplified form, it has become a popular means for expressing hope, disappointment, sorrow, anguish, joy, desire, or critique in a way that makes listeners active participants in the subject matter the *säm ena wärq* articulates by forcing them to interpret it in order to understand it. Even in its simplified form, *säm ena wärq* retains its critical thrust, which is that authentic understanding and self-understanding arise only through active interpretative labor. The epideictic use of *säm ena wärq* is the stock in trade of the *azmari* (አዝማሪ)—popular singers who compose their own lyrics and sing them accompanied by a *kirrar* (ክራር, a six-string lyre) or *masinqo* (ማሲንቆ, a one-string bowed lute). I will call the epideictic use of *säm ena wärq* "circumstantial *qiné*." Circumstantial *qiné* has penetrated deeply the linguistic imagination of Ethiopians such that the use of puns to articulate and lubricate contradictory and critical meanings is a widely appreciated linguistic skill. It is an important popular channel for expressing subtly one's feelings. It also serves for making critical social commentary. Indeed, the *azmari* have often used *säm ena wärq* to criticize and speak truth to power. James Bruce, the eighteenth century Scottish traveller, wrote that he "witnessed the massacre of *azmariwoch* [plural of *azmari*] punished for their 'naughtiness' in 1770 during Ras

[12] On "cultural cringe," see Arthur Angel Phillips, *On the Cultural Cringe* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2005).

Michael Sihul's reign."[13] The power of *säm ena wärq* as a venue for criticism of and resistance to oppression is what one sees in the tragic case of the massacre of *azmaris* during the fascist occupation of Ethiopia (1936-41).

> A telegram of Graziani, dated 19 March 1937, declared that "among the most dangerous disruptors of public order are the *azmaris* […] seventy thousand hermits, magicians, soothsayers and *azmaris* were shot and the government prohibited all "verbal activities." This policy of execution and deportation was quickly implemented throughout the territory.[14]

Circumstantial *qiné* is, however, qualitatively different from what the poet and playwright Menghestu Lemma calls "classical *qiné*."[15] Classical *qiné* is speculative, reflective, meditative, critical, and universalizing. Unlike circumstantial *qiné*, which limits itself to specific or contingent issues and is dualistic in its approach to practices, ideas and values, classical *qiné* deals with universal issues and is non-dualistic in the sense that its apparent duality is a duality without dualism, as we shall see. Unlike circumstantial *qiné*, composing classical *qiné* is grounded in *qisäla* and its indispensable practices of questioning (ጥያቄ, *tiyaqé*), research (ምርመራ, *mirmära*), critique (ሂስ, *hiss*), *tichit* (ትችት, extended interpretations or "*commentaire de texte*"), *hatäta* (ሐተታ, dialectical reasoning), *andem* (አንድም, alternative interpretations), and *tirgum* (ትርጉም, alternative meanings). Classical *qiné* is, according to the renowned *qiné* scholar Liqä Siltanat Habtä Mariam, a "way of philosophizing" that "opens the mind" and "appropriates truth."[16] Alaka Imbakom Kalewold, the eminent *qiné* scholar, draws our attention to the depth, intensity, and complexity of classical *qiné* composition and interpretation by describing it as an intellectual activity that embraces "መማር መመራመር ማወቅ መራቀቅ መጥለቅ መውለድ መፍጠር መፈልሰፍ", (*mämar*, *mämäramär*, *mawäq*, *märaqäq*, *mättläq*, *mäwläd*, *mäftär*, *mäfälsäf*). [17] That is, classical *qiné* is an intellectual activity that embraces "learning, exploring, examining, knowing, abstracting, analyzing, questioning, critiquing, philosophizing, and gestating or giving birth to new ideas." The influential *qiné* scholar Kebede G/Medhin compares classical *qiné* composition and interpretation to the process of smelting, separating, hammering, purifying, and producing gold from ore.[18] Classical *qiné* uses *säm ena wärq* formulations that harbor questions and have multilayered and multi-dimensional meanings. Circumstantial *qiné* is a condensed narrative; classical *qiné* is a condensed

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[13] Simeneh Betreyohannes, "Ethiopian Music: Past, Present and Future Prospects," *African Study Monographs*, Suppl.41 (March 2010), pp.19-34, p. 20.

[14] Anne Bolay, "Les poètes-musiciens éthiopiens (azmari) et leurs constructions identitaires: Des marginaux qui aspirent à la normalité", *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 44, 176 (2004), pp. 815-839, p. 821.

[15] Menghestu Lemma, "Appendix: Ethiopian classical poetry", in Alaka Imbakom Kalewold, *Traditional Ethiopian Church Education*, op.cit., note 1, p. 33.

[16] Liqä Siltanat Habtä Mariam Werqneh, ጥንታዊ የኢትዮጲያ ትምህርት, op.cit., note 1, pp. 173, 299.

[17] Alaka Imbakom Kalewold, ቅኔ ትምህርት ና ስለ ጥቅሙ, Proceedings of the Third International Conference of Ethiopian Studies (Addis Ababa, 1966), p. 136.

[18] Kebede G/Medhin, ሳይንሳዊ የቅኔ አፈታት ስልት, op.cit., note 1, p.7.

theory or philosophy. In circumstantial *qiné*, the *säm – wärq* "dichotomy" refers to elements that are mutually exclusive, in that the "*ena*" of *säm ena wärq* in circumstantial *qiné* has the function of *wäyim* / ወይም (or), that is, of a disjunctive. In classical *qiné*, on the other hand, the *säm – wärq* "dichotomy" is not a mere dichotomy (*wäyim* / ወይም), but a way of formulating a question, a contradiction, an impasse, or a "mystery" (*mister* / ምስጢር); it is an invitation to think critically by going beyond the *säm – wärq* dichotomy.[19] It articulates dialogical or dialectical relations between the *säm* and the *wärq*, which require interpretation to elucidate the meanings that *ena* conjoins and puts in a relationship of a struggle (*gädl* / ገድል) of meanings. The "*ena*" in the *säm ena wärq* of classical *qiné* raises the necessity for critical reflection on and interpretation of the *säm ena wärq*, the *qiné* that articulates it, and the subject matter to which it refers. Often, the context of the subject matter of the *qiné* is brought into play in order to have a more comprehensive grasp in the composition or interpretation of a *qiné* and its *säm ena wärq*. In this article, I use the terms *qiné* and *säm ena wärq* to refer to classical *qiné* only.

Qiné education

A good grasp of the nature of *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics requires knowledge of the process of *qiné* education. In traditional Ethiopia, learning *qiné* is one of the last steps of a lengthy process of education. Traditional Ethiopian education starts between the age of four and five.[20] The first stage consists of reading and writing lessons and recitations of texts from the Bible. The overall curriculum of traditional education covers the following: *Biluy Kidan* (ብሉይ ኪዳን) or the Old Testament, consisting of forty six books, and *Addis Kidan* (አዲስ ኪዳን) or the New Testament, consisting of thirty five books; *säwasiw* (ሰዋስው, grammar); *zema,* (ዜማ, techniques and styles of religious chanting such as *Tsomä-dägwa* (ጾማ ደግዋ), *Dägwa Meiraf* (ደግዋ ምዕራፍ), *Qidassé* (ቅዳሴ), *and Zimaré,* (ዝማሬ); liturgical hymns, communion songs, and musical notations and religious chants based on the *mäwaseit* (መዋስዕት) of Saint Yared; *aquaquam* (አቋቋም, styles of religious dancing); the *Mätsahfä Mänäksot* (መጽሓፈ መነኮሳት, Book of Monks); *gädl* (ገድል) or hagiographies of Ethiopian saints, the *Mätsahfä Liqawint*; (መጽሓፈ ሊቃውንት) or writings of the church fathers; and *Märha Ewir* (መርሓ ዕውር, Guide to the Blind); *zämän aqoṭaṭär* (ዘመን አቆጣጠር) or the computation of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church calendar (the Coptic calendar) for figuring out the days of fasts and feasts; history (ክብረ ነገስት, *Kibrä Nägäst* and ታሪከ ነገስት, *Tarikä Nägäst,* the history of Ethiopian Kings); jurisprudence (ፍትሓ ነገስት, *Fetha Nägäst,* the Book of laws and judgments); the *andem* (አንድም) method of commentary; *tirgum* or the art of translation cum interpretation; and Amharic calligraphy or *qum sihuf* (ቁም ጽኑፍ).[21] To these one could add the

[19] Liqä Siltanat Habtä Mariam Werqneh, ጥንታዊ የኢትዮጲያ ትምህርት, op.cit., note 1, pp. 168-171, 219.

[20] Traditionally, the child is introduced to the Ge'ez / Amharic alphabet, (ፊደል, *fidäl*), at the age of four years, four months, and four days.

[21] Alaka Imbakom Kalewold, *Traditional Ethiopian Church Education* op.cit., note 1; Liqä Siltanat Habtä Mariam Werqneh, ጥንታዊ የኢትዮጲያ ትምህርት, op.cit., note 1, Cherenet Abebe. መሰርአዊ የመጽሐፍ ቅዱስ አጠናን ዘዴ , (Addis Ababa: Foundational Bible Study, 2011); E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *Ethiopia; A Cultural History* (London: Lalibela House, 1959); Girma Amare, "Aims and Purposes of Church Education in Ethiopia",

complimentary courses of *estwat* (ዕጽዋት, the knowledge of medicinal plants and the comportment of animals) and *kokäb qotära* (ኮከብ ቆጠራ, counting the stars or astrology).

There are four parts to the curriculum, organized in an ascending order of difficulty. The first three cover matters that concern the *Scriptures*, *zema* (ዜማ)*, the writings of the Church Fathers and Saints,* and the last consists of the, *Mätsehaft Bet* (መጽሐፍ ቤት) covering advanced studies of theological and secular writings, *andem* commentary and analysis, and the art of translation / interpretation (*tirgum*). *Qiné* education takes place at the "third of the four stages of the traditional hierarchy, sandwiched between religious music and theological philosophy."[22] Generally, students do not cover all the curriculum; they choose the field they would like to specialize in, such as *zema*, *qiné*, calligraphy, translation, history, jurisprudence, and so forth. [23]

Qiné learning has several pedagogical characteristics that one must take into consideration to understand how its core and driving element of questioning relates to creativity, reflexivity, immanent critique, distantiation, and transcending or resolving conflicting meanings. *Qiné* education has five major overlapping pedagogical moments. These are *qiné qotära* (ቅኔ ቆጠራ), *qisäla* (ቅጸላ), *qiné nätäqa* (ቅኔ ነጠቃ), *qiné zäräfa* (ቅኔ ዘረፋ), and *zäräfa mälash* (ዘረፋ መላሽ). While the first stage is propaedeutic, each of the last four stages involves a struggle with new and old subjects, questions, meanings, and with various interpretations.[24] They are also integral parts of the process of *qiné* composition. *Zäräfa* is the critical element of *qiné nätäqa* (ቅኔ ነጠቃ), *qiné zäräfa* (ቅኔ ዘረፋ), and *zäräfa mälash* (ዘረፋ መላሽ) is. The word *zäräfa* (ዘረፋ), which I will discuss more extensively further on, means "robbery, plunder, pillaging."[25] In the context of *qiné* composition, *zäräfa* means decentering, diverging, purging unnecessary ideas, and subjecting to "*détournement*" the *qiné* under consideration to produce a new and more comprehensive and compelling *säm ena wärq,* thereby opening up a new horizon for understanding and interpreting the subject matter, and for grasping more adequately its *wärq*.[26]

Ethiopian Journal of Education, 1, (1967), 1-11. For a list of canonical books included in the curriculum, see the Ethiopian Orthodox website. http://www.ethiopianorthodox.org/english/canonical/books.html. Accessed 27/02/2013.

[22] Menghestu Lemma, "Appendix: Ethiopian classical poetry" in Alaka Imbakom Kalewold, *Traditional Ethiopian Church Education,* op.cit., note 1, p.34.

[23] Alaka Imbakom Kalewold, *Traditional Ethiopian Church Education*, op. cit., note 1*;* Liqä Siltanat Habtä Mariam Werqneh, ጥንታዊ የኢትዮጲያ ትምህርት, op.cit., note 1, These two books enumerate the various subjects that traditional Ethiopian education covers. An examination of the curriculum indicates that the Ethiopian intellectual tradition covers questions and matters that pertain to religious, human, social, and existential affairs, as well as to natural phenomena.

[24] I discuss these below.

[25] Wolf Leslau, *Concise Amharic Dictionary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 182.

[26] To use *qiné* vocabulary, *zäräfa* involves the use of a new *zäybé* or a new articulation of the already present *zäybé,* decentering, refracting, purging, deflecting, reworking and re-interpreting the given *qiné* and its subject matter, *andem*, *tirgum*, breaking through the "shackles" of the given, exercising a "four-eyed" view—for introducing, formulating, and articulating new ideas and directions. These terms are discussed below. *Détournement* is a term that Guy Debord defines as: "le contraire de la citation, [….] le détournement

Since *qiné* education is always adapted to the student's speed of learning, the propaedeutic period— *qiné qotära*—could last from one to two years. *Qiné* education includes sessions of discussion of and critical reflection on a *hibrä qiné* (ሕብረ ቅኔ, an old *qiné* that serves as an exemplar) or on a *qiné* that the *qiné* master or a student composes. There are distinctive styles of composition and interpretation associated with the major *qiné* schools in Gondar, Tigray, Gojjam, Wallo, and Shoa. The desire to have a comprehensive knowledge of the ensemble of *qiné* traditions is one of the motivations that drive *qiné* students to travel from one school to another. As Alaka Imbakom Kalewold comments,

> the serious student is not satisfied with merely graduating under one master in order to compare and contrast various ways of *kiné* [*qiné*]. For it is in the nature of things that not all teachers are identical twins in knowledge or ability. Consequently, it is quite possible to see *new lights* and *fresh angles*, to complement the teachings of one master with those of a second or third. The saying goes: "*the running stream goes farther than the stagnant pool.*"[27]

One must note in Alaka Imbakom Kalewold comments the intellectual openness and curiosity that characterize *qiné* education and practice. The understanding of knowledge as a "running stream," as the discovery of "new lights and fresh angles," and as a struggle against "stagnant" knowledge expresses the dynamic nature of *qiné* education and practice. Th *säm ena wärq* interpretative strategy expresses a struggle against "stagnant knowledge" and the search for "new lights and fresh angles in the understanding of the human condition. *Qiné* education develops a healthy, inquisitive, and open-minded approach to the world and to claims about the world. As the historian Bahru Zewde points out, during the crucial years of the transition from the 19th to the twentieth century, during which Ethiopia was confronted with European powers intent on imposing their interests and will on her, the graduates of the *qiné* schools of "St Mary and Raguél churches of Entoto… [rose] to prominent positions in the bureaucratic and the intellectual life of twentieth century Ethiopia" and coped admirably with the challenges of Ethio-Western relations, despite the fact that their education was "traditional": a testimony to the critical spirit, inquisitiveness, and open-mindedness to the world that *qiné* education bestows.[28] Certainly, *qiné* education accounts for the well-known questioning disposition of the *däbtära*, the lay intellectuals of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and their reputation of being a thorn in the side of the arrogant, the pretentious, and the

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est le langage fluide de l'anti-idéologie…Le détournement n'a fondé sa cause sur rien d'extérieur à sa propre vérité comme critique présente." Guy Debord, *La société du spectacle* (Paris: Buchet Chastel, 1967), sec.208. However, I subject Debord's term itself to a *détournement* from the perspective of *qiné* hermeneutics. One of the elements of *zäräfa* is *détournement*, the others are *andem* and *tirgum*. *Zäybé* also play an important role in *détournement*.

[27] Alaka Imbakom Kalewold, *Traditional Ethiopian Church Education,* op.cit., note 1, p.28. Emphasis added.

[28] Bahru Zewde, *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia: The Reformist Intellectuals of the early Twentieth Century* (Oxford: James Curry, 2002), pp.21-22

powerful. It is in recognition of the critical and iconoclastic spirit of the *däbtära* that a radical Ethiopian journal named itself *Debteraw*, also the penname of a radical student leader.[29]

Practicing *qiné* composition is both an individual and, in *qiné* sessions and *qiné* schools, a group activity. In *qiné* sessions, one composes a *qiné* (ጉባኤ ቅኔ, *gubae-qiné*), recites it to the *qiné* master or / and the members of the group. The *qiné* master invites the students to comment. Menghestu Lemma describes the activity:

> Comments, however, are only too readily given, critics remonstrate vociferously, the author of the poem under fire answers back, the master holds the ring. He may agree with one critique or other or he may agree with the author or he may differ from all, explaining their defects. Invariably, he is expected to make some corrections in the work reedited, for as a rule few compositions escape unmolested [….] A *single word* from him may *revolutionize* the whole poem and thus make for an incredible superiority of the corrected work over the original. This would spur the student to greater efforts. [30]

What is crucial in this pedagogical practice is its questioning, critical, non-dogmatic, and dialogical or dialectical approach to the issue at hand. The practice of *qiné* composition and interpretation calls upon and valorizes questioning, distantiation (አንጻር ዘይቤ, *antsar* argument), reflexivity (*hatäta*, ሐተታ), immanent critique (*hiss*, ሂስ), oppositional or contrarian thinking (*tänätsatsari* argument, ተነጻጻሪ ዘይቤ), *wistä wäyra* analysis (ውስጠ ወይራ ዘይቤ), i.e., enucleating the hidden questions and problematic of a *qiné*, explanation (ትንትና, *tintina*), extended interpretations or "*commentaire de texte*" (*tichit*, ትችት), resolving contradictions or *afrash* argument (አፍራሽ ዘይቤ), and other critical rhetorical and logical devices that I will discuss below. The goal is to elicit the *wärq*—the "true and the good"—of the subject matter through a critical interpretation of the *qiné* and its *säm ena wärq* on the subject.

The practice of *qiné* gives a meticulous attention to language. When Menghestu Lemma writes, "a *single word*… may *revolutionize* the whole poem," he brings out the importance the *qiné* tradition gives to language. The aphorism of *qiné* origin—አዲስ ቃል፣ አዲስ ዓለም / *Addis qal, addis aläm*, i.e., A new word; a new world—encapsulates the understanding of the constitutive, creative, critical, and performative power of language that informs *qiné* practice. In addition, the pedagogical practices of *qiné* education recognize and indeed put the emphasis on the heterogeneous nature of things (ነገር, *nägär*), the need for a struggle (*gädl,* ገድል) of meanings, a dialectical explanatory approach (*hatäta* / ሐተታ) and critique (*hiss* / ሂስ) to understand them. Does the *qiné* master's final word close this dialectic? No. On the contrary, it "spurs" the student to "greater efforts" to explore the possibility of a better composition or interpretation.[31] *Qiné* education inculcates in the student the idea that everything is a *nägär*, and that to elicit the *wärq*

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[29] http://www.debteraw.com/?cat=9.

[30] Menghestu Lemma, "Appendix: Ethiopian Classical Poetry," in Alaka Imbakom Kalewold, *Traditional Ethiopian Church Education* op.cit., note 1, pp. 34-5. Emphasis added.

[31] Ibid.

of a *nägär* one must engage in *gädl* or struggle against false ideas, beliefs, values, and wrong actions.

***Nägär* (ነገር) and *gädl* (ገድል)**

The Amharic word *nägär* (ነገር), derived from the Ge'ez ነገር (*nägär*), covers a wide semantic field. In Ge'ez, it means "speech, talk, language, saying, pronouncement, discourse, statement, thing, affair, subject, matter, account."[32] Leslau translates the Amharic term *nägär* as "word, thing, affair, matter, item, subject, fact."[33] The 1993 Amharic Dictionary of Addis Ababa University gives thirteen meanings that expand Leslau's translation.[34] Interestingly one of the meanings of *nägär* is, በስም ያልተጠቀሰ እቃን (*bäsim yältätäqäsä eqan*), which means the "unnamed."[35] *Nägär* is a semantically rich word that grasps experience in its complexity. One could call *nägär* a fact, a deed, an idea, a belief, an identity, an activity, an institution, an event, a relation, a conflict, something that has no name or is not nameable, and so forth. A discussion of two *qiné*-derived Amharic aphorisms could help us understand *nägär* as a concept that tries to grasp the internal tensions and contradictions that constitute *nägär*, events, processes, institutions, relations, structures, and things in general. These two aphorisms are:

(a) ነገሩ ነገር ነው ውስጡ ጥቅጥቅ ነው (*Nägäru nägär näw wustu tiqtiq näw*): That which is, is problematic; for it is internally crowded; or, a thing is a thing, but is internally dense.

(b) ነገሩ ነገር ነው ውስጡ ጉራንጉር ነው (*Nägäru nägär näw wustu gourangur näw*): That which is, is problematic; for it is diverse /of different colors inside; or, a thing is a thing, but is internally heterogeneous.

The Amharic word ጥቅጥቅ (*tiqtiq*) means, depending on the context, complexity, intensity, pressure, density, fullness, or crowdedness. The Amharic word ጉራንጉር (*gourangur*) means, depending on the context, internally heterogeneous, conflicting, or contradictory. The meaning of *nägär* combines *tiqtiq* and *gourangur.* Both aphorisms intimate that *nägär* is internally complex, heterogeneous, contradictory, tensioned, dynamic, non-transparent, and open-ended. Note how each line starts with "ነገሩ ነገር ነው / *Nägäru nägär näw*," i.e. "A thing is a thing." This seemingly tautological phrase intimates that the folding of the predicate *nägär* over the subject *nägär* indicates the silent presence of that which is in *nägär* more than *nägär*. It implies that *nägär* is problematic, that it is split internally and is non-identical with itself; the positive determination of *nägär*— "ነገሩ ነገር ነው / *Nägäru nägär näw*" / *nägär* is *nägär*—is a signal of the presence of absent or unsaid determinations of *nägär*. *Nägär* is *nägär* ("ነገሩ ነገር ነው / *Nägäru nägär näw*"); that is, it

[32] Wolf Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez* (*Classical Ethiopic*) (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1991), p.128.

[33] Wolf Leslau, *Concise Amharic Dictionary: Amharic-English, English-Amharic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p.115.

[34] የአማርኛ መዝገበ ቃላት, (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, 1993), p.284.

[35] Ibid.

has surplus meanings that are not apparent to and are different from what the hegemonic order determines or from what the agents who produced the *nägär* believe.

When we consider the manifest question(s) that gives rise to a *nägär* as its/their answer, *qiné* hermeneutics shows, by treating *nägär* as *säm ena wärq*, that the answer (the given *nägär*) does not exhaust the question (s) that gave rise to it, and that the given *nägär* intimates the existence of a question or questions that the manifest question represses or distorts. That is, the manifest question that leads to a particulate *nägär* as its answer could be the symptom (or the *zäybé*, ዛይቤ), as we shall see, of the presence of a non-articulated or repressed (*wistä wäyra*, ውስተ ወይራ, see below) question (s). The manifest question is open to questioning, unpacking (*hatäta,* ሐተታ), and critique (*hiss*, ሂስ) as much as the manifest *nägär* that is its answer. The aim of these procedures is, first, to shatter the hegemonic understanding that leads to the manifest question (s) and its manifest answer (the given *nägär*), and, second, to go beyond the manifest question and answer and disclose the repressed questions and alternative answers that are invisible from the standpoint of the hegemonic parameters of intelligibility and possibility. Such a process of questioning and critique (*hiss*) not only discloses the repressed questions and answers, it also questions the hegemonic parameters of interpretation and intelligibility that the dominant order applies to *nägär*. It thus contributes to the production of the *wärq* of *nägär* and to the generation of alternative coordinates of intelligibility and interpretation, of new concepts, and even of an alternative *nägär*.

The aphorisms on *nägär* point to the idea that no claim, no practice, no relation, no identity, no event, no entity, no fact, no action, no institution, and so forth, is monosemous, homogeneous, harmonious, closed, complete, self-identical, static, or transparent. Note that the concept of *nägär* denies the existence and indeed the possibility of "brute data" in the study of society—the existence of non-interpretable facts that the social sciences consider necessary for statistical manipulation and generation of law-like causal generalizations.[36] A *nägär* is the expression, outcome, and embodiment of its contradictory and tensioned internal and external contexts. It is thus historical, split internally, polysemous, and always contains its "other": its "unsaid" or "repressed" dimensions (በስም ያልተጠቀሰ እቃን */bäsim yältätäqäsä eqan*). For *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics, appearance (*mälk /*መልክ*)* and reality (*ewen /*እውን*)* are *nägär* or are composed of many *nägär.* Understanding a *nägär* requires unpacking its context and the social processes that produced it, disclosing its inner split and the tensions that gestate in it, unveiling the interests and the intentions that inhabit it, revealing its unsaid questions and unsaid possible answers. Every *nägär* is a *säm ena wärq* process. Interpreting *nägär* through the *säm ena wärq* strategy means struggling with the different meanings—manifest and non-manifest—that inform and articulate it. The name of this struggle in *qiné* hermeneutics is *gädl* (ገድል).

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[36] Anol Bhattacherjee, *Social Science Research: Principles, Methods, and Practices* (Tampa, Florida: University of South Florida, 2012); Alasdair MacIntyre," Is a Science of Comparative Politics Possible?", in Peter Laslett, W.G.Runciman, and Quentin Skinner, eds., *Philosophy, Politics and Society* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), pp. 8-26.

In Ge'ez, *gädl* means "strife, striving, conflict, contending, combat, mortification, spiritual battle, life of a saint."[37] It is a term that one finds in the title of the hagiographies of Ethiopian Orthodox saints. When one speaks of the *gädl* of saints or holy men (*Gädl Estifanos*, *Gädl Abew WeAhaw*, *Gädl AbeKerezun*, *and Gädl Abuna Ezra*, and so forth), one refers to their "struggle" against falsehoods, injustice, sinful acts, and evil temptations; to their ironclad discipline to follow the right path and accept all sufferings that arise from following it; to their striving to do good in the eyes of God and persuade people to follow the right path; and to their determination to stand up against earthly powers who transgress God's laws and commit injustices.

The Amharic term *gädl* has the same meaning as in Ge'ez.[38] However, given the passage from the other-worldly gaze of Ge'ez *qiné* to this-worldly concern of Amharic *qiné, gädl*'s meaning of struggle covers this-worldly issues. In its social and political manifestation, it refers to a refusal to accept injustice, wrongdoing, lies, corruption, oppression, falsehood, inequality, unfreedoms, false claims, wrong arguments, fallacies, misinterpretations, and so forth. In Amharic, the defiant aspect of *gädl* is partly expressed in the term *wäné* (ወኔ). A person who has *wäné* is one who lives by the conviction that nothing changes without struggle, that neither the good nor the true are available without combat, be it political, spiritual, intellectual, or material. The concept of *gädl* is deeply embedded in Ethiopian culture and one of its most popular expression is *muget* (ሙግት, litigation), which in Amharic combines two meanings: arguing and struggling. The core idea of *gädl* is active struggle for the sake of the "the true and the good." The concept of *gädl* holds an important place in the practice of *qiné* hermeneutics. The composition and interpretation of a *qiné* and of its *säm ena wärq* requires *gädl*, understood as a "struggle" for the true and right meaning (the *wärq*) of *nägär* or things. That is, *gädl*, which includes questioning, is a driving element of *qiné* hermeneutics, and when it is absent, *qiné* hermeneutics is also absent. When one neglects the central place that *gädl* or struggle plays in *qiné* composition and interpretation, one misunderstands *qiné* practice. One could say that without *gädl* neither the composition nor the interpretation of *qiné* could lead to the discovery of *wärq* (the true and the good). Without *gädl*, the apparent (*säm*) version of reality triumphs. Consider the following *qiné* and its *säm ena wärq* articulation of *gädl* as essential for understanding the world and one's relation to it and to others.

> መስታዋት አልገዛ እጇ ባዶ ነው / I do not buy a mirror, and my hand is empty.
> በሰው መስታወት ነው ፊቴን የማየው / I use the mirror of another person to look at my face. [39]

"Mirror" (መስታዋት, *mästawat*) is what *qiné* hermeneutics calls an *entsarawi gälätsa zäybé* (እንጻራዊ ገለጻ ዘይቤ[40] or a kind of metaphor), for knowledge. Were we to consider "mirror" (*mästawat*) as

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[37] Wolf Leslau, *Concise Dictionary of Ge'ez (Classical Ethiopic)* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2010), p.211.

[38] አማሪኛ መዝገበ ቃላት (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, 1993), p.509.

[39] Ngusse Nagaw Dagaga, የቅኔ አፈታት ዜዳዎች ና የምርጥ ቅኔዎች ስብስብ, Second edition (Addis Ababa: Mega, 1993). p. 31, no. 126; p. 156, no.126.

[40] See below.

something that creates a "distance" (what *qiné* practice calls አንጻር ዘይቤ , *antsar zäybé*[41]) that allows us to see ourselves in a way that we cannot see ourselves without the mirror, we could consider it as a source of knowledge of what we look like at a particular moment. Note that the word መስታወት (*mästawat,* mirror) is related to the word ማስታወሻ (*mastawäsha*) meaning that which "brings something to mind." The *qiné* tells us that though we could use a borrowed mirror to "look" at ourselves, we will not be able to "bring ourselves to ourselves" for the mirror is not of our making; that is, we cannot recognize and understand ourselves (ፊቴን, *fiten*, my face) as active subjects through the mirror (knowledge) that others produce. It separates us from ourselves and from the world. Not being the result of our *gädl* (ገድል)—since the *mästawat* (መስታዋት or mirror) is not the fruit of our intellectual and physical labor—, it is not part of our fund of knowledge and self-knowledge as creators. We may see "how we appear" at a specific moment—it freezes our identity as passive beings—but it does not enable us to see ourselves as active makers of the world, precisely because it (the mirror, knowledge) does not express the outcome of our struggle (*gädl* , ገድል) with the world and ourselves. The conjugation of "My hand is empty" and "I use the mirror of another person to look at my face" loads the *qiné* with the idea that borrowing knowledge ("mirror") signifies not only that my hand is empty but also that the borrowed mirror makes my hand empty; it subverts my agency. What I see in the borrowed mirror is my own incapacity to make something (the world) in which I could recognize myself as an active and creative subject. The *qiné* tells us that we truly know ourselves only through the works—the world we make as our mirror—we have already accomplished. To grasp fully the import of this *qiné* and its *wärq*, one must consider the meaning of hand (እጅ, *eje*) in Amharic. *Eje* is a highly polysemic word that weaves different social and political meanings. Consider the following *qiné*:

> አፄ ቴዎድሮስ እጅግ ተዋረዱ / Emperor Tewodros is humiliated
> የሸዋን መኳንንት እጅ ነስተው ሄዱ [42] / He had to bow and take leave of the nobles of Showa.

The expression "እጅ ነስተው (*eje nästäw*) / to bow and take leave of" means both bowing and depriving somebody of his hand. The literal meaning is that Tewodros took leave of the Shoan nobles after having bowed ("*eje nästäw*") to them. Its hidden meaning, mediated by the expression of "taking leave," is that he cut off the hands of the nobles—made them powerless—before he left. What is of interest here are the surplus meanings of "hand" (እጅ, *eje*) that the *säm ena wärq* mobilizes and articulates.

The Addis Ababa University Amharic dictionary has over seventy entries on *eje.*[43] In Ethiopian culture, the hand—an organ for farming, sowing, weeding, harvesting, grounding, making *injära*, eating, drinking, caressing, respecting, showing direction, and so forth—is also a medium for blessing, praying (the joints of the finger serve as a rosary bead among *Täwahedo* Christians), counting (using the joints of the fingers as an abacus), cursing, punishing, saluting,

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[41] See below.

[42] Ngusse Nagaw Dagaga, የቅኔ አፈታት ዜዳዎች ና የምርጥ ቅኔዎች ስብስብ, op.cit. note 1, p. 13.

[43] የአማርኛ መዝገበ ቃላት (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, 1993), pp. 365-7.

forbidding, threatening, fighting, touching, arguing, adoption of adults (which involves a ritual sucking of the thumb of the adult person who adopts an adolescent or another adult), and so forth. The hand is an agent of the soul, an instrument of action, a medium of communication, a vehicle of feelings and desires, a means for praying, a symbol of power and creativity. In Ethiopian culture, it is the most socialized member of the human body and the active embodiment of *gädl*, of one's character and state of being. Also consider the representation of the right hand as noble and honored among Ethiopian Muslims. In a sense, we could say that the hand knows the body more than the body knows itself, precisely because *eje* is always involved in the struggle (*gädl*) to make meaning.

Tewodros's practice of cutting the hands of his opponents could be read as a *säm ena wärq* rendition of the important and multiple expressive and instrumental roles the hand plays in Ethiopian culture. To deprive somebody of his hand is to deprive him of a vast range of *nägär* and the various powers associated with them. Whereas the legs are servile (ዜጋ, *zega* in old Amharic), encapsulated in the old Amharic aphorism, እግር ዜጋ ነው (*eger zega näw*, the leg is servile),[44] the hands are creative, productive, powerful, expressive and noble, an idea summarized in the highly polysemic aphorism, ሁሉ በእጄ ሁሉ በደጄ (*hulu bäjé hulu bädäjé*), whose principal meaning is, "an active hand owns all."

We can now see the importance of the line in the first *qiné*, "my hand is empty." In light of the understanding of hand in Ethiopian culture, the *qiné* on the mirror intimates that the hand that holds a borrowed mirror is not only an "inactive hand" but also an "impotent hand." The borrowed "mirror" it holds does not affirm the work and dignity of the person who holds it. Rather, it affirms the person's powerlessness. The *qiné*'s *wärq* is that to borrow knowledge from others for understanding ourselves and our conditions is to render ourselves "handless" or impotent; it is to reduce ourselves to *eger* or leg, that is, to a state of *zega* (ዜጋ in Old Amharic), which a state of servility is. That is, we do not understand ourselves through our own agency but through what the agency of the other tells us who we are. We lack both internal and external autonomy. Whatever self-understanding we gain through the "mirror" of the other is a false and systematically distorted understanding of the world and of ourselves.

Ethiopia's experience of 'development' illustrates the *wärq* of the above *qiné*. The "mirror" (knowledge) embodied in the 'development' discourse that social scientists and foreign experts produce on us has become the site from where we define the world, our actions and their worth, and the nature of our relations to ourselves and to the world. Consequently, it constitutes us as "moral patients" who need continuous intellectual, technical, economic, medical, and even food aid to maintain our existence in the world; it presents us as a people who do not make and own our time and have to borrow it—the linear and mechanical time of 'development' theory and practice—from the history of the West. The danger of Ethiopia becoming the *eger* of others, even if Ethiopia were to survive as an independent nation, was what Negadras Gebre Hiywet Baykedagn

[44] On the aphorism እግር ዜጋ ነው (*eger zega näw*, the leg is servile), see Habtamu Mengistie, *Lord, Zega and Peasants: A Study of Property and Agrarian Relations in Rural Eastern Gojjam* (Addis Ababa; Addis Ababa University, 2004), p. 20-33.

foresaw when he wrote at the dawn of the twentieth century, "ዕውቀት የሌለው ሕዝብ ሁሉ ለብቻው መንግሥት ቢኖረውም ዕውቀት ያላቸው ሕዝቦች ይገዙታል."[45] ("A people deprived of knowledge, even if it has an independent state, will be dominated by those who master knowledge"). Those who do not have the knowledge to make the world and do not act on it become *eger* and live in a world they do not understand. They are "handless."

Were we to espouse the *wärq* of the above *qiné,* we recognize that we must confront and study our history and *nägär* as the historical subjects who created them, and act as the *eje* (hand) that made them. When the knowledge and practices we have produced with our own *eje* become our "mirror," our "hands" are no longer empty; we become masters of our actions, and our actions gain transformative powers. We can then rightly say ሁሉ በእጄ ሁሉ በደጄ (*hulu bäjé hulu bädäjé*), or "our hands own all." In the *qiné* tradition, the primacy of the hand refers to the primacy of *gädl*; it signals the importance of making our world, critically reflecting and acting upon it. *Säm ena wärq* hermeneutics is driven by the desire to critically reflect upon our life conditions, history, actions, interests, aspirations, the world, and our relations to it

Zäybé (ዘይቤ) and *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics

Zäybé is indispensable in classical *qiné* composition. It has several interconnected meanings. It could be a figure of speech; it could function as a logical category; and it could also mean symptom. In the latter sense, *zäybé* is called *mängäd* (መንገድ, way), suggesting that rhetorical tropes function in *qiné* as symptoms of the unsaid, unrecognized, hidden, occluded, and repressed.[46] Understood as symptom, *zäybé* is a signal of the presence of more fundamental questions, processes, or meanings at another level. *Zäybé* is the way (መንገድ, *mängäd*) that leads to the discovery of the unsaid, unrecognized, unseen, unheard, hidden, occluded and repressed questions, meanings, or processes that produce the given without the agents being cognizant of it. The types of *zäybé* that could be part of *säm ena wärq* composition are numerous. Liqä Siltanat Habtä Mariam identifies more than a hundred *zäybé*.[47] Here, I will very briefly present the major ones. As there are no exact English equivalents, the English translations give only the approximate meanings of these *zäybé*. Though one could see a certain measure of homeomorphic equivalences between *zäybé* and English rhetorical tropes and logical categories, *zäybé* often have a different reach; they intersect with each other in diverse ways, and sometimes have meanings that do not have counterparts in English.[48]

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[45] Negadras Gebre Hiywet Baykedagn, ሥራዎች (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2007), p. 75.

[46] On *zäybé* as *mängäd* (መንገድ), see Liqä Siltanat Habtä Mariam Werqneh, ጥንታዊ የኢትዮጲያ ትምህርት, op.cit., note 1, pp 183ff. Sergew Hable Selassie, የአማርኛ የቤተ ክርስቲያን መዝገበ ቃላት ፥ ረቂቅ / *Amharic Church Dictionary* vol.3, op.cit., note 1, pp. 138-141.

[47] Liqä Siltanat Habtä Mariam Werqneh, ጥንታዊ የኢትዮጲያ ትምህርት, op.cit., note 1, pp. 183-205.

[48] For a brief and selective modern discussion of *zäybé*, see Ngusse Nagaw Dagaga, የቅኔ አፈታት ዜዳዎች ና የምርጥ ቅኔዎች ስብስብ, *Yeqiné Afatat Zedawochina Yemert qinéwotch Senseb*, op.cit., note 1, pp.4-6; Birhanu

Täläwach zäybé (ተለዋጭ ዘይቤ) alludes to indirect meanings; *misät zäybé* (ምጻት ዘይቤ) refers to contraries. *Antsar zäybé* (አንጻር ዘይቤ) refers to distantiation in order to have a wider vision, and *tänätsatsari zäybé* (ተነጻጻሪ ዘይቤ) refers to expressions where each is in opposition to the other or becomes the mirror of the other. *Afrash zäybé* (አፍራሽ ዘይቤ) means contradiction or negation.[49] *Tässalqo zäybé* (ተሳልቆ ዘይቤ) conjoins opposing terms or expressions and looks for meanings in the crack between the two. It covers contraries and, also, refers to the category of "non," as for example in "non-religious." For example, Amharic *qiné* is neither religious nor anti-religious; it is non-religious. *Säwigna zäybé* (ሰውኛ ዘይቤ) denotes the anthropomorphic characterization of animals or objects; it also refers to what is specific to human beings. *Mäsiya zäybé* (ምስያ ዘይቤ) signifies the virtual or hidden dimension of reality— the unsaid, the unseen, and the unheard. The understanding of the virtual here is different from the understanding of the virtual that one finds in the expression "virtual reality." The virtual that *mäsiya zäybé* (ምስያ ዘይቤ) refers to is as real as the actual. *Tämssalit zäybé* (ተምሳሊት ዘይቤ) compares similarities and dissimilarities, and *entsarawi gälätsa zäybé* (እንጻራዊ ገለጻ ዘይቤ) is comparable to metaphor; it also covers "double entendre" and catachresis. *Afla zäybé* (አፍላ ዘይቤ) is comparable to metonymy. *Qulqul zäybé* (ቁልቁል ዘይቤ) designates something like synecdoche. Given the role of polysemy and homonyms in *qiné* composition, the *afla zäybé* and the *qulqul zäybé* have a wide range of use, mainly to express ideas economically. *Gädlo madän zäybé* (ገድሎ ማደን ዘይቤ) expresses an affirmative by negating or denying its opposite. *Gädlo madän zäybé* intimates the idea of the negation of the negation. *Wistä wäyra zäybé* (ውስጠ ወይራ ዘይቤ) alludes to the idea that there is an invisible discourse embedded in the visible discourse. It intimates the idea of symptomatic reading.

Related to *wistä wäyra zäybé* are *säm läbäs zäybé* (ሰም ለበስ ዘይቤ)*, wärqa wärq zäybé* (ወርቃ ወርቅ ዘይቤ)*,* and *libsä wärq zäybé* (ልብሰ ወርቅ ዘይቤ). They form a class of their own. *Säm läbäs zäybé* (ሰም ለበስ ዘይቤ) refers to statements that appear to be *säm* in that their meanings appear to be transparent. Consequently, understanding or interpreting them requires formulating a framework of interpretation that discloses how the transparency of the *säm* functions as a hiding or repressive mechanism. *Wärqa wärq zäybé* (ወርቃ ወርቅ ዘይቤ) indicates a *qiné* that seems composed of *wärq* only. *Wärqa wärq* (ወርቃ ወርቅ) gives the impression that the *wärq* (the true and the good) is there in the open for everybody to see. This *zäybé* points to the necessity of conducting a critique of spontaneous consciousness, of the practice of accepting the given and the actual as the only possible, or as the true and good. The idea behind this *zäybé* is that what appears to be self-evident may not after all be self-evident once we release ourselves from its power to enchant, fascinate, or blind us. *Libsä wärq* (ልብሰ ወርቅ) is a *zäybé* that one finds in a *qiné* where the *säm* is disguised as *wärq,* requiring therefore a process of unmasking or debunking what appears as *wärq*. *Wistä wäyra zäybé, wärqa wärq zäybé, libsä wärq zäybé,* and *säm läbäs zäybé* play a significant role in the analysis of beliefs, symbols, *nägär*, and dreams. Crucially, they point to the idea of unveiling.

Gebeyhu, የአማርኛ ስነ ግጥም, *Yä Amariña Sinä gitim,* op.cit., note 1, pp. 88-151. Alemayhu Mogess, መልክዐ ኢትዮጵያ, *Mälkea Ethiopia,* op.cit., note 1, pp.7-35.

[49] አፍራሽ is derived from the verb ማፍረስ which means to destroy.

In contemporary vocabulary, they have meanings akin to demystification, de-reification, de-fetishization, and they intimate the notion of ideology critique.

Zimd zäybé (ዝምድ ዘይቤ) is like analogy and requires unveiling the similarities and dissimilarities of the compared as well as eliciting whether these similarities and dissimilarities are trivial or essential. *Zimd* is a derivative of *zämäd* / ዘመድ, which means relative or family member. It requires elucidating the origin, strength, and weakness of similarities and dissimilarities in order to evaluate the comparison. *Filatsa zäybé* (ፍላጻ ዘይቤ) (*filatsa* means arrow) is comparable to an allegory and requires developing a framework of interpretation to deliver its meanings. Though Biblical stories are usually the source of allegories in *qiné*, the conundrums of development provide a fertile ground for new *filatsa zäybé*, the most famous of which is Mamo Qilo in the story with the same title.[50] *Mäkäda zäybé* (መከዳ ዘይቤ) refers to *qiné* lines (*sineñ,* ስንኝ) that constitute the *säm ena wärq* through a reversal of meanings when we move from one line to the other. Residing in the gap between the lines of the *qiné* is a repressed or hidden meaning. Working out the *wärq* then requires eliciting this repressed or hidden meaning. *Säm gäfi zäybé* (ሰም ገፊ ዘይቤ), meaning pushing the *säm,* is a *zäybé* that one finds in a *qiné* where the first line (*sineñ*) pulls in one direction and the second in the opposite direction, with the meaning residing in the tension between the contradictory *säm* of the two lines.[51] It is important to note that two *zäybé*, namely, *antsar zäybé* (አንጻር ዘይቤ) and *wistä wäyra zäybé* (ውስጠ ወይራ ዘይቤ), are indispensable elements of all *zäybé*. As such, they serve as strategies of reading and as the site for the articulation of other *zäybé* in the process of *säm ena wärq* composition and interpretation.

The above is a very brief presentation of *zäybé.* It is not exhaustive but illustrative. The *zäybé* signal the gaps, the absences, the tensions, the contradictions, the repressed questions and meanings, and the hidden dimensions that articulate the form and the content of *säm ena wärq,* the *qiné* and its subject matter. They point to the presence of invisible or new questions and meanings that require digging out. *Qiné* composers use *zäybé* for creating an economy of expression—a highly valued characteristic of *qiné. Zäybé* give the composer and the interpreter the means for grasping the complexity and richness of the subject matter of the *qiné* in the most succinct manner. Kebede G/Medhin, the *qiné* scholar, points out that the role of *zäybé* in *qiné* composition and interpretation is so important that one could describe it as "limitless" (ወሰን የለሀ, *wäsän yäläh*).[52] *Zäybé* enable the composer and the interpreter to question, transgress, explore, circumscribe, overcome, deconstruct, reassemble, and articulate the multiple, contradictory, opposing, intertwined, repressed, overlapping, hidden, and evolving questions and meanings of discourses, *nägär*, and experiences. It thus offers the composer the means to compose *säm ena wärq* that break through the conventional boundaries of significations to grasp the *wärq* of the subject matter of the *qiné*. The *zäybé* is indicative of the linguistic subtlety required for the composition and interpretation of *säm ena wärq*.

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[50] "A *qiné* hermeneutical reading of Mamo Qilo." Forthcoming.

[51] Alemayhu Mogess, መልከዐ ኢትዮጵያ, *Mälkea Ethiopia*, op.cit., note 1, pp.7-35.

[52] Kebede G/Medhin, ሳይንሳዊ የቅኔ አፈታት ስልት, op.cit., note 1, p.6; Berhanu Gebeyhu also draws our attention to the same point, የአማርኛ ስነ ግጥም, op.cit., note 1, pp. 88-151.

Composing or interpreting a *säm ena wärq* is as much a rhetorical activity as a hermeneutical achievement. To interpret correctly a *qiné* and its *säm ena wärq*, one must discern the kind of *zäybé* relations that the composer articulates explicitly or implicitly, directly or indirectly, between, and, often, in the polysemy of the terms of the *qiné* to produce the *wärq* of the *qiné*. To bring out the powerful and creative interpretative potential of *säm ena wärq*, one must conjoin *zäybé* with two powerful and creative practices in the arsenal of *qiné* hermeneutics, to wit, *andem* and *tirgum.*

Andem* and *tirgum

Abba Paulos Tzadua gives a succinct description of the *andem* (አንድም) approach. He writes,

> Where a sentence is complicated or its meaning was equivocal or unintelligible, as happens very often, the professor would resort to the famous አንድም [*andem*] system, interpreting the *equivocal or obscure passage or sentence in two, three, or even more different ways*. These interpretations might be made by *inserting words*, by *dropping words*, by *changing a sentence from the negative to the affirmative or vice versa*, by *changing the syntax* of the sentence.[53]

Andem means "and one." It precedes each new interpretation of the same text, instead of saying, second, third, fourth, and so forth. Cowley writes,

> The interpretation called the *andem* interpretation is that in which, after the text has been interpreted once, a chain of successive comments is given, as many as 10 or 15, each one being introduced by '*andem'* ('and one'). …This is equivalent to saying that in addition to this meaning, there is a commentary like this, and presenting the reader with a choice. But in Amharic, it does not say 'secondly' or 'thirdly' but goes on saying 'and one' [*andem*], as many as 16 times.[54]

Note the active and creative role the interpreter plays in *andem*. What we discover in the *andem* tradition is a practice that one could call "overreading."[55] What strikes one is the non-dogmatic nature of *andem* practice. The interpreter develops "*two, three, or even more different*" interpretations of the text. It suggests a practice where the interpreter tests or struggles (*gädl*) with different interpretations of the subject matter to provide the best possible intelligibility or meaningfulness to "*equivocal or unintelligible…or obscure*" texts. The interpretative process in

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[53] Abba Paulos Tzadua, "Foreword", *The Fetha Nägäst: The Law of the Kings,* Trans. Abba Paulos Tzadua, ed. Peter L. Strauss (Addis Ababa: Haile Selassie I University, 1968), Abba Paulos Tzadua, p. xx. Emphasis added.

[54] Roger W. Cowley, "Old Testament Introduction in the Andemta Commentary Tradition", *Journal of Ethiopian Studies,* vol.12, 1 (1974), pp. 169-170.

[55] On "overreading," see Colin Davis, *Critical excess: overreading in Derrida, Deleuze, Levinas, Žižek and Cavell* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

the *andem* tradition is radical, for it does not shun "*inserting words*, … *dropping words*, … *changing a sentence from the negative to the affirmative or vice versa*, … *changing the syntax* of the sentence." The outcome could be a text that "*is transformed beyond recognition,"* to use Sumner's words.[56] According to the *andem* tradition, the interpreter of a text introduces his first interpretation and each of the subsequent interpretation by saying "*andem"* ("and one").

The practice of referring to each commentary as *andem* ("and one") indicates that each new commentary or interpretation has an autonomous standing that projects an alternative horizon of meaning. Each interpretation requires a new count, i.e., "and one" or *andem*, because it opens a new perspective. The practice of *andem* introduces the necessity of considering and weighing differing and contradictory interpretations before one makes the judgement as to which interpretation adequately grasps the matter at hand. Moreover, the practice of *andem* ("and one") intimates that there is no final interpretation, that grasping the matter at hand in its totality is not possible, and that a new *andem* is always possible, making every interpretation necessarily incomplete. As we shall see, the idea of incompleteness is central to *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics. The *andem* tradition bears within itself several critical ideas. Cowley points out that a text on the *andem* commentary states,

> the disciple is accounted (sic) a genuine one if he breathes from the air his master breathes, if he rests where he rests, and if he is found to preserve the teaching as he has received it, without the slightest change, or difference of opinion. People call him a heretic if he interpreted the passage according to the *andem* tradition, and then, with much explanation, marshalled sufficient evidence and brought out what was *concealed* in the passage; they would give him a bad name; and rather than praise for his scholarship, they would denigrate him… ."[57]

This interesting passage juxtaposes two situations. It tells us that the student who is unquestioningly faithful to the master's teaching, who "breathes from the air his master breathes," is a "genuine" disciple. Conversely, some consider the interpreter or the student who practices "*andem*" a "heretic," give him a "bad name" and "denigrate" him, even if his interpretation is accompanied "with much explanation, marshalled sufficient evidence and brought out what was *concealed* in the passage." Whom to choose? The faithful disciple or the practitioner of *andem*?

The *andem* tradition gives a non-equivocal answer to the question, "Whom to choose?" The text on *andem* says, "The certification of being a scholar is ምርመራ, *mirmära* (research), not መመማር, *mämar* (learning) by itself."[58] The distinction that the *andem* tradition makes between "research" (*mirmära*) and "learning" (*mämar*) and the primacy it gives to the former as the

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[56] Claude Sumner, *Classical Ethiopian Philosophy* (Los Angeles: Adey Publishing Company, 1994), p.51. Emphasis added.

[57] Roger W. Cowley, "Old Testament Introduction in the Andemta Commentary Tradition", *Journal of Ethiopian Studies,* vol.12, 1 (1974), p.170. Emphasis added.

[58] Ibid., p.165.

criterion for "being a scholar" gives us the answer. Whereas "learning" (መማር, *mämar*) refers to mastering a given knowledge as if it were complete, "research" (ምርመራ, *mirmära*) refers to questioning, searching, and critically examining the subject matter at hand, thus conceiving knowledge as a dynamic and critical process, and the produced knowledge as always incomplete, for another *andem* is always possible, because there is always something that is "*concealed*," as the text puts it. In other words, the tradition calls a "scholar" the one who practices *andem* and whose interpretation is accompanied "with much explanation, […] sufficient evidence and [who brings] out what [is] *concealed* in the passage." It does not consider a scholar the faithful disciple who "breathes from the air his master breathes, [who] he rests where he rests, and [who]… is found to preserve the teaching as he has received it, without the slightest change, or difference of opinion." Such a disciple limits himself to "learning" what the master teaches him.

The *qiné* hermeneutical tradition considers the practice of *andem* an activity that liberates one from the "shackles of tradition" and enables one to "strike off in various directions." Thus, the text says,

> While this is so, the reason that certain scholars were highly esteemed and their fame duly noted, was that they were found to have *burst these shackles of tradition*. They give their interpretation, while keeping the grammatical form of the *andem* interpretation, or they leave that and merely keep to the Ge'ez text, or they just follow the meaning; if they do this, it means that they can *strike off in various directions*; similarly, when they interpret *independently of the grammatical form* of the original, when they want to separate out *esmä* (because) and *kämä* (as), they interpret *in an individual way*. Furthermore, some *interpret by following the general, rather than the literal meanings*. Alongside this, they interpret by telling stories, giving examples and adding explanations. *They give a reason for the utterance of each sentence*; they quote verses as evidence for this; all in all, they make *careful comparisons*, *give each idea its proper place*, *reveal what is obscure, explain similes, and so offer an explanation*. This is what the *andem* interpretation is like.[59]

The italicized terms in the above text indicate the presence in the *andem* tradition of a path-breaking, non-dogmatic, original, rational, and critical practice of interpretation. In the above passage, we see the importance of the claim that "The certification of being a scholar is research, not learning by itself." The passage notes that the scholars "were highly esteemed and their fame duly noted" because they "*burst* [the] *shackles of tradition*" through their research by providing interpretations backed by "sufficient evidence" and "much explanation." "*They give a reason for the utterance of each sentence*," distinguish between "*esmä* (because) and *kämä* (as)," and thus ground the practice of *andem* on rational arguments.

One of the crucial outcomes of the practice of *andem* is breaking the "*shackles of tradition.*" In pointing out that the scholars were esteemed because they "have *burst* [the] *shackles of*

[59] Roger W. Cowley, "Old Testament Introduction in the Andemta Commentary Tradition", op.cit., note 57, p. 170. Emphasis added.

tradition," the *qiné* tradition clearly shows that the critical labor of *andem* is more important than mere "learning." The practice of *andem* liberates the knower and knowledge from what the text calls the "*shackles of tradition*" affirming the idea that being a "scholar" requires going beyond mere learning and hegemonic knowledge; it requires opening a new path, a new direction, and a new horizon. In "*strik[ing] off in various directions*," in transgressing "*the grammatical form* of the original" and established "*literal meanings,*" the *andem* practitioner opens parallax views, critical alternatives, unforeseen options, novel meanings, and possibilities of a new or more comprehensive understanding. It is precisely the presence of such qualitative differences between the various interpretations that the practice of prefacing each interpretation with *andem* ("and one") grasps. The practice of *andem* and of "*strik[ing] off in various directions*" calls upon conceptual innovations.

The *andem* tradition has complex exegetical methods that Cowley presents quite exhaustively.[60] He draws a parallel between the Ethiopian interpretative practice of *andem* and the Jewish interpretative practice of *middot* and notes that the "Jewish" and "Ethiopian rules" of interpretation are "generalizations arising from actual engagement in exegetical debate, rather than expressions of a philosophical interpretative system."[61] Cowley's comment that the practice of *andem* is not an "expression of a philosophical system" is right. Nevertheless, it does not follow that such a philosophical system cannot be the "unsaid" (the *wistä wäyra*, ውስጠ ወይራ) of the practice of *andem.* However, Cowley`s comment is helpful if one reflexively operates an *andem* on it. It leads one to an observation that brings out the specificity of *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics regarding the issue of "method."

The Western intellectual tradition puts a lot of emphasis on method, whose iconic text is Descartes's *Discourse on Method.*[62] The *qiné* tradition does not have a comparable text for it has a radically different understanding of "method." In the social sciences practiced in Ethiopian Studies, method determines the "scientificity" or the truth of "findings." Unlike the primacy of method in the social sciences, *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics puts the emphasis on the idea that to understand a subject matter we need to use an approach that is appropriate to the *qiné's* subject matter. This approach is the *säm ena wärq*, and its formulation must grasp the specificity and complexity—its *nägär* quality—of the subject matter it studies. Method in the social sciences is claimed to be a standardized value-free, neutral, and universal tool for breaking down human behavior and *nägär* into discrete and monosemous data with the purpose of generating empirical

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[60] R.W. Cowley, *The Traditional Interpretation of the Apocalypse of St John in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp.46-53; Roger W. Cowley, *Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation: A Study in Exegetical Tradition and Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). As of now, these two books are the most interesting and original study of *andemta* commentary.

[61]Robert W. Cowley, *Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation: A study in exegetical tradition and hermeneutics*, op cit., note 60, p.374.

[62] Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998).

generalizations that are assumed to have universal applicability. The *säm ena wärq* approach eschews this understanding of method. For *qiné* hermeneutics, method is something that unfolds in the *säm ena wärq* treatment of a subject matter and not something that one could detach and use to manipulate a subject matter externally. The *qiné* student learns how to compose and interpret *säm ena wärq* through the practice of composition and interpretation of *qiné* bearing on a specific subject matter during which he learns how to formulate, using *zäybé*, *andem*, *tirgum* and *zäräfa,* a *säm ena wärq* formulation that grasps the specificity and individuality of the subject matter.[63]

From the perspective of *säm ena wärq,* to understand a subject matter is to understand it in terms of its *wärq*—the truth and the good that the *säm ena wärq* enucleates from its subject matter—and not in terms of a putatively objective, value-free, and universal method that subsumes the meaning of the subject matter to the horizon of the method and the generalization worked out through the method. For *qiné* hermeneutics, *wärq* is immanent to the subject matter and the "method" to produce it cannot be externally imposed on the subject matter if we are to comprehend the subject matter in its specificity. For *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics, universality is embedded in the specificity of the subject matter and not in a generalization that floats above it. Indeed, to grasp the specificity of a subject matter, "interpretations might be made by *inserting words*, by *dropping words*, by *changing a sentence from the negative to the affirmative or vice versa*, by *changing the syntax* of the sentence."[64] *Säm ena wärq* as "a method" is neither neutral to the subject matter, nor to the interpreter, nor to the specific conditions of the world in which both exist. It does not separate the understanding of the world from the understanding of the self engaged in understanding the world. Consequently, *säm ena wärq* intimates that interpretation is an activity that engages the moral responsibility of the interpreter for the meanings and consequences of his/her interpretations. From the perspective of *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics, the social science understanding of method as a "scientific" procedure that is neutral and external to the subject matter transforms the student into one who, to use the language of the *Andemta* Commentary, "breathes from the air his master breathes, … rests where he [his master] rests, and … preserve[s] the teaching as he has received it, without the slightest change, or difference of opinion."[65] The practice of such a method leads to denying one's responsibility for the interpretation one produces and for their consequences.

Finally, as Liqä Siltanat Habtä Mariam points out, we need to conjoin the discussion of *andem* with that of *tirgum* (ትርጉም), which one may consider, in some respects, as the equivalent of translation.[66] However, *tirgum* has a wider range of meaning than the English term "translation." *Tirgum* is, in important ways, a process of interpretation and composition and is intimately associated with the practice of *andem*. *Tirgum* means translation of obscure, difficult, or foreign texts, and clarification of "equivocal or unintelligible…or obscure" meanings. The

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[63] See below the discussion of *tirgum* and *zäräfa*. I have briefly defined *zäräfa* above.

[64] Abba Paulos Tzadua*,* "Foreword", *The Fetha Nägäst. The Law of the Kings,* Trans. Abba Paulos Tzadua, ed. Peter L. Strauss (Addis Ababa: Haile Selassie I University, 1968), Abba Paulos Tzadua, p. xx. Emphasis added.

[65] Ibid., p.170. Emphasis added.

[66] Liqä Siltanat Habtä Mariam Werqneh, ጥንታዊ የኢትዮጲያ ትምህርት, op.cit., note 1, p. 212-222

andem tradition identifies two kinds of *tirgum* or translation: "direct translation of what is read," and the "interpretation of the meaning," that is, "translation which preserves the meaning only, without needing the text or keeping to its grammatical form."[67] Recall here once again the *andem* process: interpretation … by *inserting words*, by *dropping words*, by *changing a sentence from the negative to the affirmative or vice versa*, by *changing the syntax* of the sentence." The practice of "translation which preserves the meaning only, without needing the text or keeping to its grammatical form" requires conceptual innovations making possible the broadening of the limits of the translated. It makes possible to "*burst* [through the] *shackles of tradition*" or of established knowledge. The practice of *tirgum* thus has *andem* dimensions.

It is crucial to understand that *tirgum* is, unlike the Western understanding of translation, neither a metaphoric substitute nor a mere reflection of the original, for the result of *tirgum* could function as a supplement that "strikes out," in *andem* fashion, in a new direction. It could thus situate us in a new horizon of understanding that discloses a new understanding—a "secret" (ምስጢር, *misteer*), as Liqä Siltanat Habtä Mariam calls it—that goes beyond the original.[68] The *andem* tradition of "translation," which works "*independently of the grammatical form* of the original" or "*interpret[s] by following the general, rather than the literal meanings*," suggests that the outcome of *tirgum* could break through the "shackles of tradition," lead to the creation of new concepts, and generate a completely new meaning. Where such is the case, the new text created through *tirgum* has the same status as the original and expands it beyond its literal translation.

Zäybé, andem, *tirgum*, and *zäräfa* (*ZATZ*, henceforth) are important in *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics.[69] The interpretative openings made possible by the practices of *ZATZ* are of crucial importance for *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics in order to cope adequately with the unarticulated, hidden, unquestioned, unexamined, and repressed questions, ideas, ideals, and possibilities of *nägär*. Moreover, the dialectic between fidelity to and transgression of established knowledge, or the fidelity to and transgression of tradition in the practices of *ZATZ* overcome the duality between fidelity and transgression, between tradition and anti-tradition, and consequently, between tradition and modernity. What *ZATZ* show is that transgressions of Ethiopian traditions could arise from within fidelity to Ethiopian traditions and that one could go beyond Ethiopian traditions without deleting them. The practices of *ZATZ* offer a critique of tradition internal to tradition, thus belying the conventional belief that Ethiopian traditions are stuck in an inertia of rest and that *säm ena wärq* is inimical to change.[70] *Säm ena wärq* neither excludes submitting Ethiopian history and traditions to a withering critique or *hiss* that liberates them from the "shackles" of the hegemonic coordinates of interpretation and evaluation, nor does it annul our bond to Ethiopian

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[67] Roger W. Cowley, "Old Testament Introduction in the Andemta Commentary …", op.cit., note 57, p. 171.

[68] Liqä Siltanat Habtä Mariam Werqneh, ጥንታዊ የኢትዮጲያ ትምህርት, op.cit., note 1, pp. 168-171, 219.

[69] Since *zäybé, andem*, *tirgum*, and *zäräfa* play an important role in the composition and interpretation of *säm ena wärq* in classical *qiné*. I will henceforth refer to them collectively as *ZATZ.*

[70] "Mohammed Girma, "Whose Meaning? The wax and Gold Tradition as a Philosophical Foundation for an Ethiopian Hermeneutic" *Sophia,* 50 (2011), pp 175-187, 180.

history and traditions. *Säm ena wärq* hermeneutics offers an approach to Ethiopian traditions, history, and *nägär* that enable us to develop an immanent critique of Ethiopian society.

Speaking of an *andem* practicing scholar, Cowley translates a text on the *Andemta* commentary,

> As we have explained above, this man, although he was *blind*, was known as "four-eyed" because of the depth of his knowledge and the extent of his researches. The certification of being a scholar is research, not learning by itself. To do research it is necessary to read, and because of this he felt himself constrained to read so many books.[71]

Traditionally, calling a scholar "four-eyed" means that he knows The Old Testament, The New Testament, The Books of the Scholars (*Fetha Nägäst Qerellas, Yoahnnes Afä Wärq, Haymanotä Abäw, Mäsheftä Qeddaséeyat*), and The Book of Monks. "[T]hose who knew all four departments used to be called 'four-eyed' out of sheer amazement."[72] According to the *andem* tradition, "the teachers of former times [those who practice *andem*] were all 'four-eyed', the reason for this is that the scholars "*never felt that they had learned enough*."[73] The association of "four-eyed" with blindness, scholarship, and the incompleteness of knowledge ("…*the scholars never felt that they had learned enough*….") leads to the idea that a comprehensive understanding, though still incomplete, requires more than "two eyes." That is, nominalism simplifies reality. Being "four-eyed" means that reality has dimensions that cannot be reduced to empirical observations; it is a *säm ena wärq* process. That is, reality (*ewen,* እውን) is not fully given and is in some sense always incomplete, and that knowledge of reality is always incomplete, and further research (ምርመራ, *mirmära*) is always indispensable. The claim that a "blind man" reads "many books" treats blindness as *afrash zäybé* for incompleteness; it translates (*tirgum*) blindness as a positive constructive force that drives *andem* in the sense that it is the limit of what we know (blindness as *afrash zäybé*) and not what we know (the two-eyed vision) that is the engine of questions, *andem*, *tirgum*, interpretations, and knowledge-production. It points to the importance of recognizing the incompleteness of reality and knowledge and of engaging in a critique of the given reality and knowledge if one is to escape the "shackles" of what one could call "two-eyed" knowledge, which is, from the perspective of *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics, characteristic of hegemonic knowledge.

When we take into account the roles that *ZATZ*, and the positivization of "blindness" play in *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics, we can see how it offers possibilities of interpreting *nägär* in ways that enable us to "burst" through the "shackles" of hegemonic knowledge and "strike out" in new directions and produce the *wärq* ("the rue and the good") that gestate in *nägär*. *ZATZ* and the positivization of "blindness" point to the necessity of recognizing the complexity, many-sidedness, and opacity of *nägär*. They bring out the significance of examining various and contradictory

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[71] Roger W. Cowley, "Old Testament Introduction in the Andemta Commentary…", op.cit., note 57, p. 165.

[72] Ibid., pp. 168-9.

[73] Ibid.", p.169. Emphasis added.

perspectives, and of developing a more comprehensive framework of understanding that grasps the hidden, the invisible and the inaudible in the actual, while at the same time acknowledging that the *wärq* thus attained is always incomplete. *Säm ena wärq* hermeneutics affirms the necessity of developing unorthodox directions and multiple perspectives to map out more adequately the various dimensions—the different and the contradictory, the familiar and the unfamiliar, the new and the old, the visible and invisible, the given and the repressed—of the issue at hand. It reminds us that the hidden, the contradictory, the different, the unsaid, the repressed, the marginalized, the abandoned, the invisible and the inaudible could be the site of new and important questions and ideas, of the "hidden good," in the words of a seventeenth century Ethiopian text.[74]

The practice of *ZATZ* and the notion of the "four-eyed" scholar have given birth to a sophisticated understanding of "understanding" in *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics. Liqä Siltanat Habtä Mariam identifies four kinds of "understanding" (አገባብ, *agäbab*) : first, ጠቅላላ አገባብ (*täqlala agäbab*) refers to comprehensive or synthetic understanding; second, ዓቢይ አገባብ (*abiy agäbab*) refers to contradictory or subversive or reflexive understanding; third, ደቂቅ አገባብ (*däqiq agäbab*) refers to analytical or detailed or hair-splitting or inferential understanding; and fourth, ንዑስ አገባብ (*n'oos agäbab*) refers to reductive or subtractive understanding.[75]

The intellectual roots of Amharic *qiné*

The origin of Amharic *qiné* is difficult to date. Written secular poetry or *qiné* in Old Amharic appears to have begun during the reign of Emperor Amdä Seyon I (1314–1344).[76] By the fifteenth century, the writing of *qiné* in Old Amharic becomes quite sophisticated, in that its composition shows more emphasis on its "structural aspect."[77] The writing of *qiné* in Ge'ez, however, predates the writing of *qiné* in Old Amharic by centuries and is associated with the composition of religious hymns and verses and theological commentaries. In the Ge'ez tradition, one could trace the systematic practice of *qiné* composition to at least the beginning of the sixth century.[78] Yared (505-571 AD), the Ethiopian saint who developed a system of nine notations and three melodies for the sacred chants (ዜማ, *zema*) of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, is credited also for systemizing the rules of *qiné* composition, which suggests that *qiné* was already being practiced. The fifteenth

[74] Claude Sumner, *Classical Ethiopian Philosophy*, op.cit., note 56, p. 186

[75] Liqä Siltanat Habtä Mariam Werqneh, ጥንታዊ የኢትዮጲያ ትምህርት, op.cit., note 1, pp. 210-1

[76] Aleksander Ferenc, "Writing and Literature in Classical Ethiopic" in B.W. Andrzejewski, S. Pilaszewicz, W. Tyloch, eds. *Literatures in African languages: theoretical issues and sample surveys* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 255-300.

[77] Aleksander Ferenc, "Writing and Literature in Classical Ethiopic," Ibid, p.273;

[78] Ephraim Isaac, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Täwahedo Church,* (Trenton: The Red Sea Press, 2012), p.95 fn. 10.

century, considered by many as the "golden age" of Ethiopian Medieval literature, saw a great flourishing of both Ge'ez and Amharic *qiné*.[79]

The Ge'ez *qiné* tradition considers its subject matters from theological and religious perspectives. Amharic *qiné* gradually discards the theological and religious dimensions that characterize the Ge'ez *qiné* tradition and concentrates on earthly matters: personal, political, and social. Already, by the seventeenth century Amharic *qiné* demarcated itself from religious issues, became non-religious without being anti-religious, and shifted its focus from salvation in the afterlife to the questions of injustice and emancipation in the here and now.[80] Amharic *qiné* harbors critical ideas on language, knowledge, history, truth, and reality from a this-worldly perspective. To elicit and develop eventually the secular and theoretical ideas that implicitly inform the practice of Amharic *qiné*, it is necessary to unpack its history and practice. To embark on this task, one needs to step back and briefly examine the theological debates and interpretative practices that marked the intellectual life of Ethiopian Christianity out of which Amharic *qiné* and its practices of questioning, argumentation, critique (*hiss*), *ZATZ*, and interpretation emerge.[81]

From at least the rise of the order of St Ewostatewos (1273-1352) to the Council of Boru-Meda (1878), major heretic movements and theological debates marked Ethiopian Christianity. For example, the *Stephanites*, a fifteenth century religious movement known as the *Däqiqä Estifanos,* refused to acknowledge the absolutism of the power of the Emperor, opposed the state's intervention in the internal affairs of the Church, and criticized what they called the cults of Mary and of the Cross.[82] The *Michaelites*, another fifteenth century religious movement, cultivated skepticism. They "held that the human mind could not get to know God" and developed views that manifest Gnostic motifs.[83] Out of the various and multiple theological cum philosophical

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[79] Aleksander Ferenc, "Writing and Literature in Classical Ethiopic, op.cit., note 76, p.268; Lanfranco Ricci, "Ethiopian Christian Literature", in Atiya S Aziz, ed., *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, vol. 3 (New York: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 975-9.

[80] Aleksander Ferenc, "Writing and Literature in Classical Ethiopic" op.cit., note 76*,* p.286.

[81] In exploring the intellectual roots of Amharic *qiné* in the Ethiopian Church intellectual practices, I draw on the unpublished hand-written 13 volume work of Sergew Hable Selassie, የአማርኛ የቤተ ክርስቲያን መዝገበ ቃላት ፥ ረቂቅ / *Amharic Church Dictionary,* Draft, 13 volumes (Addis Ababa, 1977-1990). Other works are cited below. In tracing the secular ideas of Amharic *qiné* to its roots in *Täwahedo* Christianity, I lean on the Hegelian idea that the thought content of religion has implicitly an objective theoretical drive. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel*, Lectures on the philosophy of religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

[82] Getatchew Haile, trans., ደቂቀ እስጢፋኖስ በጎግ አምላክ, trans. from Ge'ez by Dr. Getatchew Haile (Collegeville, MN. 2004); Getatchew Haile, "Religious Controversies and the Growth of Ethiopian Literature in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," *Oriens Christainus* 65 (1981), pp. 102-136. See chapter 8 below on the *Däqiqä Estifanos*.

[83] Krzysztof Piotr Blasewicz, "Ethiopian Monasticism" *Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne*, XII, 2 (1999), pp. 31-46. Available at http://pwtw.pl/wp-content/uploads/wst/12-2/B%C5%82a%C5%BCewicz.pdf. Accessed2/6/2012.

reflections of Medieval Ethiopia emerged eventually various doctrinal schools among whom took place intense theological debates on the nature of Christ. Adepts of the Unction (*Qibat*, ቅባት), the Grace (*Tsägga*, ጸጋ), Two Births (*Hulät Lidät,* ሁለት ልደት), and Three Births (*Sost Lidät*, ሶስት ልደት) discussed the relationship between the divine and the human in Christ with a great deal of logical sophistication, *ZATZ, hiss, hatäta, tintina,* and *tichit.*[84] Does Christ have two natures: divine and human? Alternatively, does he have only one nature? What are the relations between the divine and the human in Christ? Is he divine from eternity or thorough grace? How many times is he born? Important Christological debates took place under the reigns of Gelawdewos (1540-1559), ZäDengel (1603-1604), and Fasil (1632-1167). At the Council of Boru-Meda (1878), the *Täwahedo* (meaning "unity") position was triumphant.[85] According to the Very Rev. Liqä Siltanat Habtä Mariam Werqneh, Dean of Holy Trinity Cathedral of Addis Ababa, the *Täwahedo* doctrine of "the Ethiopian Church maintains that Christ is perfect God and perfect man…the divinity and the humanity continuing in Him *without mixture or separation, confusion or change*."[86]

Aleksander Ferenc, "Writing and Literature in Classical Ethiopic, op.cit., note 76, p.268; Getatchew Haile, "Religious Controversies and the Growth of Ethiopian Literature in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," op.cit., note 82, p. 102.

[84] The discussion in the following sections partly draws on Abba Hailemariam Melese Ayenew*, Influence of Cyrillian Christology in the Ethiopian Orthodox Anaphora*, Doctoral Thesis, The University Of South Africa (2009); Getatchew Haile, "Materials on the Theology of Qab'at or Unction," *Ethiopian Studies: Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference* 6, (1996), pp 205-250; Getatchew Haile, "Religious Controversies and the Growth of Ethiopian Literature in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," *Oriens Christainus* 65, (1981), pp. 102-136; Donald Crummey, *Priests and Politicians: Protestant and Catholic Missions in Orthodox Ethiopia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp.14-27; Aymro Wondmagegneuh & Joachm Motovu, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Church* (Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam, 1970).

[85] For a brief discussion of the term *Täwahedo*, see Sergew Hable Selassie, የአማርኛ የቤተ ክርስቲያን መዝገበ ቃላት ፥ ረቂቅ vol.4. op.cit., note 1, pp.135-8.

[86] Archbishop Mekarios *et al*., eds., *the Ethiopian Orthodox Täwahedo Church Faith, Order of Worship and Ecumenical Relations* (Addis Ababa: Tinsae ZeGubae Printing Press, 1996); Archbishop Gabriel, ትምህርተ ሃይማኖት አርቶዶክሳዊ, *(*Addis Ababa: Addis Printers, 2001*);* Mebratu Kiros Gebru*, Miaphysite Christology: An Ethiopian Perspective* (*Piscataway*, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010). According to Liqä Siltanat Habtä Mariam Werqneh, "the Ethiopian Church maintains that Christ is perfect God and perfect man, at once Unsubstantial with the Father and with us; the divinity and the humanity continuing in Him *without mixture or separation*, confusion or change. He is one and the same person both in his eternal pre-existence and also in the economy, in which he performs the redeeming work of God on behalf of man, from the indivisible state of union of Godhead and manhood". *Doctrine of the Ethiopian Orthodox Täwahedo Church* (undated manuscript). Also available at http://www.dskmariam.org/artsandlitreature/litreature/pdf/doctorinoftheethiopianorthodoxchurch.pdf. Accessed 21/5/2013*;* Abba Hailemariam Melese Ayenew*, Influence of Cyrillian Christology in the Ethiopian Orthodox Anaphora* (Pretoria: The University of South Africa, 2009), pp. 255-300; Italics added.

I will not consider the above debates from a theological perspective, for I am not equipped to discuss them.[87] Rather, I will focus on the secular impact of some of the ideas that emerged from these debates. Notable in this respect is the formulation of the concept of "unity" as "*without mixture or separation*." The secular perspective of Amharic *qiné* jettisons the religious conception of "unity" as a "mystery" and adopts a secular conception of unity that recognizes unity (or the unity of a thing or a state of affairs) as a state of existence of internal tensions arising from the relations of its constituent elements as being "*without mixture or separation*" or diversity-in-unity.[88] That is, any unity, be it the "unity" of an idea, a norm, an action, a social practice, a social institution, and so forth, is fraught with constitutive tensions arising from the "*without mixture or separation*" relations of its parts. Every *nägär* is a unity. It is a unity of the same ("without separation") and the different "without mixture"): a diversity-in-unity and not a unity-in-diversity. The latter is diversity-centric and exists only at the level of *säm* and on the brink of disintegration. Since every entity is a *nägär*, it is inevitably internally split, does not coincide with itself, and its parts form a unity through the tensions and contradictions that mediate them. The *säm ena wärq* articulates these tensions and contradictions.

Tracing the secular ideas of Amharic *qiné* to its roots in *Täwahedo* Christianity must also consider the culture of argumentation that flourished in the theological debates that impassioned Ethiopian Christianity from the 13th to the 19th century (the last Council being that of Boru-Meda, 1878). The debates exhibited sophisticated forms of reasoning on and subtle interpretations of the meanings, differences, contradictions, interconnections, and implications of ባሕርይ (*bahriy*, nature, substance, personality), አካል (*akal,* person or body), ሕላዊ (*hilawi,* essence, mental, mind), ሥጋ (*siga,* flesh, associated with desire and transgression, and with the human condition), ነፍስ (*näfs*, soul), ውልደት (*wildät*, birth), ጸጋ (*tsäga*, grace), እውነት (*ewnät,* truth), እውቀት (*ewqät*, knowledge), and ዕውን (*ewen,* reality).[89] Note that these theological debates are often part of *gädl* (hagiographic writings on the saints, martyrs, and renowned monks of the *Täwahedo* Church).

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[87] For a discussion of the theological aspect of this statement, see Abba Hailemariam Melese Ayenew, *Influence of Cyrillian Christology in the Ethiopian Orthodox Anaphora,* He writes, "the Christological position of the Ethiopian Orthodox Täwahedo Church (EOTC) should rather be termed as miaphysite Christology", p.11.See also pp. 178-217, 264-9.

[88] The *Tabot*—an important symbol of *Täwahedo* Christianity—expresses the idea of "without mixture or separation" or "diversity-in-unity," in that the empirical diversity (the *säm*) that characterizes the *Tabot*, to wit, the various materials out of which it is made, the various skills that go into making it, and the social process that constitute it as a *Tabot* are unified by that which is immanent to it but transcends it: its *wärq* that makes the *Tabot* a Covenant of Salvation between God and Ethiopians. The unity of the *wärq* gives new meaning to its diverse empirical elements (the *säm*) that made it possible and unifies them at a higher level: the Covenant of Salvation.

[89] Abba Hailemariam Melese Ayenew, *Influence of Cyrillian Christology in the Ethiopian Orthodox Anaphora*, op.cit. note 87*;* Getatchew Haile, "Materials on the Theology of Qab'at or Unction", op.cit., note 84, Harry Middleton Hyatt, *The Church of Abyssinia* (London: Luzac & Co, 1928)*;* Atiya S Aziz, *The Coptic Encyclopedia* (New York: Macmillan, 1991).

The theological and religious debates and practices of critical interpretations from at least the 13th century onwards gave a boost to the art of questioning, analysis, synthesis, critique, and opened an intellectual space for the emergence and development of critical and dialectical forms of argumentation and interpretation in Amharic. The practices of questioning, critique, reflexivity, hair-splitting subtlety, and "rubbing" the subject matter until "blood spurts out of it" and "arrive[s] at the life [*wärq*] it conceals" have permeated Ethiopia's secular culture and have given rise to different terms describing different modes of secular argumentation.[90] Thus emerged various types of argumentation such as ክርክር, *qirqir* (debate); ጭቅጭቅ, *chikchik* (abusive argumentation); ሙግት, *muget* (litigation); and among the learned, ሂስ, *hiss* (critique); ትችት, *tichit* (extended interpretations or "*commentaire de texte*"); ሐተታ, *hatäta* (/ dialectical interpretation), and ትንትና, *tintina* (analytical interpretation, exposition, demonstration).[91] The various type of argumentations led to the formulation of different types of understanding: ጠቅላላ አገባብ (*täqlala agäbab*), ዓቢይ አገባብ (*abiy agäbab*), ደቂቅ አገባብ (*däqiq agäbab*), and ንዑስ አገባብ (*n'oos agäbab*).[92] However, each type of understanding is an incomplete understanding, and thus open to further argumentation.

This tradition of subtle reasoning shows itself in the Ethiopian love of argumentation and litigation that many observers consider a deeply ingrained characteristic of Ethiopian culture, "the national sport of Abyssinia," as Donald D. Levine puts it correctly. Unfortunately, due to his

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[90] That is what *ZATZ* try to do: rub the subject matter until "blood spurts out of it" and "arrive at the life [*wärq*] it conceals." I conduct a *zäräfa* of Emmanuel Lévinas's characterization of the Talmudic practice of interpretation with which *qiné* interpretation has in some respects a family resemblance. He describes it as "… frotter pour que le sang en jaillisse est peut-être la manière dont il faut 'frotter' le texte pour arriver à la vie qu'il dissimule…" Emmanuel Lévinas, *Quatre lectures talmudiques* (Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1968/2005), p.102. Given the family resemblance between *andem* and *middot*, such a *zäräfa* is justifiable. Robert W. Cowley, *Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation: A study in exegetical tradition and hermeneutics*, op cit., note 60, p.374.

[91] A telling example is the *Fetha Nägäst*—the Law of Kings—which gets its "prestige and force from its religious sources" Adopted it as the law of the land since 1563, it served as a source of judicial principles and rules for the next five centuries, i.e., up to the regime of Emperor Haile Selassie (1930-1974). According to the *Fetha Nägäst*, a judge must have "intelligence, together with knowledge", he must be "subtle enough to solve difficult and obscure cases"; also, he must be a freeman "because he who has no power over himself has no power over others". He must "speak clearly…must "strive to think for himself on the disputed questions". The *Fetha Nägäst* thus uses secular and rational criteria to specify the qualities of a good judge and the kind of evidence that is acceptable. Despite its theological and religious roots and content, a rational conception of interpretation and argumentation informs the *Fetha Nägäst.* The practice of *Fetha Nägäst* is an aspect of the secular intellectual and cultural milieu within which Amharic *qiné* developed. The internal link between the two arises from the fact that the practitioners of Amharic *qiné* and the interpreters of the *Fetha Nägäst* shared the same intellectual background: a church-based scholarly setting which has been for centuries the locus of the transmission of *qiné* composition and interpretation. Abba Paulos Tzadua*, The Fetha Nägäst. The Law of the Kings,* trans. Abba Paulos Tzadua, ed. Peter L. Strauss (Addis Ababa: Haile Selassie I University, 1968), pp. xxi-xxix, pp. 249-51, 258-69.

[92] Liqä Siltanat Habtä Mariam Werqneh, ጥንታዊ የኢትዮጲያ ትምህርት, op.cit., note 1, pp. 210-1

disregard of the historical and intellectual roots of argumentation in Ethiopia, he explains it by resorting to a psychological reductionism—"oral aggression"—that assumes that the Western individual's psychological ontogenesis is universal.[93] One could see the deficiency of dehistoricizing and psychologizing and the importance of considering the historical and intellectual roots of argumentation in Ethiopia when one compares the fascinating historically informed interpretation Amartya Sen gives of the "Argumentative Indian" to Levine's ahistorical, reductive, psychologizing, and negative interpretation of the Argumentative Ethiopian.[94] The *säm ena wärq* tradition sees argumentation as a *nägär* that requires a *säm ena wärq* approach for understanding it.

***Säm ena wärq:* duality without dualism**

Unlike the commonsensical realist ontology that opposes appearance to reality, the *qiné* understanding of "unity" as "*without mixture or separation*" affirms that reality (*ewen*) and appearance (*mälk*) form a "unity" that is internally complex. Tensions, frictions, and contradictory meanings mediate this "unity." *Qiné* hermeneutics neither dichotomizes nor homogenizes appearance and reality, which suggests that appearance is not an epiphenomenon.

Qiné practice rejects a static conception of *säm* and *wärq.* A change in one of them changes the internal relations of each and the relations between the two. It is crucial to understand that the *säm* and the *wärq* are not mutually exclusive. The "*ena*" in *säm ena wärq* does not separate categorically the *säm* from the *wärq*. Rather, it intimates a reciprocal determination between the two. It signals the presence of an "epistemic friction" internal to the *säm ena wärq*, generated by the *zäybé* that articulate the *qiné*. *Säm* and *wärq* constitute a duality without dualism: an inclusive duality where each, in some sense, requires the other for its existence. The concept of "ex-timate"—the idea that the center of a social practice is inside and outside it, breaking down the interior / exterior dualism—comes close to catching the idea of duality without dualism that informs *qiné* hermeneutics.[95] *Säm ena wärq* (ሰም ና ወርቅ), *säm* and *wärq*, is not *säm wäyim wärq*

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[93] Donald D. Levine, *Wax and Gold* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p.230-1. Litigation is also an American "national sport" and one wonders if "oral aggression" would be a satisfactory explanation for its omnipresence in American culture.

[94] Amartya Sen, The *Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity* (London: Allen Kane, 2005).

[95] Extimate, extimacy: Lacanian terms. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), pp. 165-171. According to Lacan, the unconscious is not only an interior psychic system, it is also out there as an intersubjective structure, thus negating the interior / exterior dualism. "(extimité) Lacan coins the term extimité by applying the prefix ex (from exterieur, 'exterior') to the French word intimité ('intimacy'). The resulting neologism, which may be rendered 'extimacy' in English, neatly expresses the way in which psychoanalysis problematises the opposition between inside and outside, between container and contained [….] For example, the real is just as much inside as outside, and the unconscious is not a purely interior psychic system but an intersubjective structure ('the unconscious is outside'). Again, the Other is 'something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me' [….]Furthermore, the centre of the subject is outside; the subject is ex-centric [….]" Dylan Evans, *An*

(ሰም ወይም ወርቅ), meaning "wax *or* gold." In *qiné* practice, '*wäyim'* differs from '*ena*'; the former refers to a disjunctive term that sets up mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive relations and is associated with dualism. This is not what '*ena'* does in *säm ena wärq*. The English word "and" used to translate "*ena*" is somewhat misleading, because "and" in English describes a conjunction or a juxtaposition, whereas "*ena*" points to the idea that the *säm* and the *wärq* are "intertwined" or "interinvolved" and tensioned.[96] The way to *wärq* passes through the *säm* in the sense that the way to the truth often passes through miscognition and mistakes.[97] The '*ena*' in *säm ena wärq* rejects both dualism and monism. It articulates the "*mixture*" and the "*separation*," the tensions and contradictions of the constituent elements that mediate the internal relations of the "unity" of the *qiné* and of its subject matter. In *säm ena wärq,* we are dealing with an *ena* that intimates that *säm* and *wärq,* reality and appearance interpenetrate each other, and are in a tensioned dialogue with each other.

For the *qiné* tradition, the difference between *mälk* (appearance) and *ewen* (reality) is internal to *mälk* (appearance) in that reality (*ewen*) appears as reality only through its appearance. The *säm ena wärq* approach suggests that if appearance (*mälk*) and reality (*ewen*) are identical, interpretation will not be necessary; and if appearance (*mälk*) and reality (*ewen*) are mutually exclusive (*wäyim,* ወይም), interpretation is no more than registering their disjunction or incompatibility. The relationship between appearance (*mälk*) and reality (*ewen*)—what appears as appearance and as reality—is asymmetrical and extimate, and this asymmetry and extimacy makes possible the production of the *wärq* of the subject matter of the *qiné*. The *wärq* emerges from within the tensions constitutive of the internal split of the subject matter that the *säm ena wärq* articulates, that is, from what appears as appearance and as reality in the internally conflicted "unity" of the subject matter that *säm ena wärq* articulates.

The Ge'ez tradition out of which emerges Amharic *qiné* throws light on the asymmetrical and extimate relation between appearance (*mälk*) and reality (*ewen*). The root verb መለከ (*mäläkä*, meaning to rule or govern) spawns a number of nouns such as አምላክ (*amlak*, God), መለኮት (*mäläkot*, meaning the nature of God), አምላኪ (*amlaki*, a worshipper), and መልክ (appearance, *mälk*).[98] This association between the reality of God and the appearance of God intimates that the reality of God

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Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 50. I "overread" these terms in order to make them productive for *qiné* hermeneutics.

[96] "Interinvolved": An "overreading" of Merleau Ponty's concept of interinvolvement that he uses to explain embodied knowledge for the purpose of *qiné* hermeneutics. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968). Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (New York: Routledge, 1998).

[97] On the idea that the way to the truth often passes through mistakes, see Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel And the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso,2013), pp. 28, 526ff.

[98] የአማርኛ መዝገበ ቃላት, *Amariña Mäzgäbä Qalat* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, 1993), pp. 40, 42; Getatchew Haile, ግዕዝ በቀላሉ, *Ge'ez Bäqälalu* (New York: Kilsna Yetsfafa Etim, 2015), p.237; Wolf Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez (Classical Ethiopic)*, (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1991), p.29.

appears in the appearance of God. Prayer and praise books to saints and angels are described as መልከአ (*mälkea*) or as the "appearance of." For example, the title of Abba Bahrey's prayer and praise composition on St. Gabriel is መልከአ ገብርኤል (*mälkea Gäbriel*), meaning the appearance of St. Gabriel. The reality of Saint Gabriel appears in the appearance of Saint Gabriel. One must bear in mind the simultaneously internal / external or extimate relations between reality and appearance in the Ge'ez tradition to grasp the *qiné* tradition's *säm ena wärq* approach to reality and its rejection of dualism and monism. Amharic *qiné* inherits this understanding of the dialectical relation between *mälk* (appearance) and *ewen* (reality) as one could see in one of the most important classical *qiné* composition in Amharic, መልከዐ ኢትዮጵያ, *Mälkea Ethiopia* (*The Appearance of Ethiopia*), that Alemayhu Mogess published in 1952 (E.C.).[99] The reality of Ethiopia appears in the appearance of Ethiopia, which, however, does not mean that we cannot make a distinction between appearance and reality. This distinction is not, however, pregiven. The distinction between appearance and reality is retroactively established only after our interpretation of the *qiné* (and its *säm ena wärq*) has produced the *wärq*.

The *qiné* approach to reality (*ewen*) implies that reality has *säm ena wärq* characteristics; it does not fully coincide with itself. For the *qiné* tradition *ewen*, *mälk*, *säm*, and *wärq* are never fully transparent, and thus one cannot grasp them fully. Hence, there can never be a final *säm ena wärq*, a complete *säm*, or a complete *wärq*. We have then in *säm ena wärq* something more complex than simple duality and naïve realism. It "unites" reality and appearance and yet distinguishes reality from appearance, and questions both appearance and reality. *Zäybé, andem, tirgum,* and *zäräfa* (*ZATZ*) try to articulate this complexity, interpenetration, and heterogeneity of appearance and reality. *ZATZ* show that appearance and reality do not simply appear, but they also appear to appear as appearance or as reality, necessitating therefore questioning, interpretation, and immanent critique for producing the *wärq*. From the perspective of *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics and its conception of unity as "without mixture or separation," the binary classifications in Ethiopian studies, particularly in political, economic, and cultural development, such as agency/structure, local/global, modernization/tradition, Ethiopian/Western, and so forth, would not grasp the complexity and richness of the conflicted "unity" of appearance (*mälk*) and reality (*ewen*) of these phenomena.

Säm ena wärq hermeneutics repudiates the fetish of pure meaning and of completeness. Neither the *säm* nor the *wärq* is fully transparent; neither the *säm* nor the *wärq* is identical to itself. There is an internal split in the *säm* between what it is and what exceeds it: its prefiguration of *wärq* as its surplus meaning. Similarly, there is an internal split in the *wärq* between what it expresses (the true and the good) and that which escapes it in its incompleteness. The *wärq's* incompleteness manifests its contamination with the *säm,* thus registering its potential for becoming a new *säm.* True, the *wärq* has universality, a quality that the *säm* does not possess. However, the universality of the *wärq* is a dynamic and "situated universality."[100] In a sense, the

[99] Alemayhu Mogess, መልከዐ ኢትዮጵያ, *Mälkea Ethiopia* (Asmara: Graphic Printing Press, 1952 E.C.)

[100] In the sense Badiou describes "situated universality," Alain Badiou's "Eight Theses on the Universal" in *Theoretical Writings*, ed and trans. R. Brassier and A. Toscano (London: Continuum, 2005), p.143.

wärq is the outcome of the interpretative struggle or *gädl* against the *säm*. The *säm* is tensioned internally for it is, one could say, a particular struggling against its particularization. The *wärq* is as tensioned internally as the *säm* is for it bears the inevitable burden of its incompleteness. The *wärq* is not something that is already there, fully formed, independent of the *säm*, and waiting for somebody to find it. One could use here a *zimd zäybé* to illustrate the point—an example I once heard a *qiné* master give in a discussion of a *qiné* while the discussants were enjoying the *täla* / ጠላ (Ethiopian beer) the host offered. The *täla* is not hiding in the *gäbs* / ገበስ (barley) and *gesho* / ጌሾ (hops), which are the raw material for making the *täla*. That is, the *wärq* (gold) is not hiding in the *säm* (wax). The work on the *gabs* and *gesho* produces the *täla.* The work on the *säm* produces the *wärq*. However, the *täla* does not abolish all the traces of *gabs* and *gesho.* Moreover, the *täla* could, overtime, become *atäla* / አተላ (lose its *wärq* or *täla* quality) and could serve as raw material—as *säm*— (as a base) in the preparation of new *täla*. The *wärq* or aspects of it could thus over time or due to changing questions or circumstances become a *säm* and thus an element in a new *säm ena wärq.*

Wärq differs from *säm* because, unlike *säm*, it challenges the hegemonic coordinates of intelligibility, evaluation, and possibilities that articulate the *säm.* The *säm* is part of the hegemonic order and of the possibilities it harbors, which are real possibilities in that they could realize themselves within the coordinates of possibility and intelligibility of the hegemonic order. The *wärq* is a possibility that is out of sight of the *säm* and the hegemonic order that makes the *säm* meaningful. As such, the *wärq* is beyond the real possibilities of the hegemonic order; it is a heterogenous possibility unforeseeable in terms of the parameters of interpretation of the existing order, which generate the meaningfulness of the *säm* and of what counts as possible or as a potentiality. To see the point, we need to make a distinction between "heterogeneous" and "real" possibilities. A "real" possibility is calculable and empirical. It limits itself to the "available set of rule governed procedures, methods, accessible approaches."[101] A possibility is "real" in the sense that it is already present in the hegemonic order's coordinates of what is possible. A "heterogeneous" possibility, on the other hand, implies that there is a possibility that is not knowable within the coordinates of actions, meanings, intelligibility, and evaluation of the Ethiopian hegemonic order. Like the *wärq* that appears to be impossible in terms of the parameters of the *säm*, a heterogeneous possibility is an alternative social practice, an act, a policy, a project, a vision, or a future that appears to be impossible in terms of the parameters of possibility of the hegemonic order of discourse and practice. It expresses a historical *andem* that not only breaks through the actual and its "real possible" in a new and different direction but also shatters the hegemonic order's coordinates of the actual and of the "real possible", and creates its own parameters of possibility, evaluation, and intelligibility. The *wärq* is in the realm of heterogeneous possibilities that go beyond the real possibility (potentiality) that the *säm* projects. If we understand potentiality (real possibility) as a directional power whose goal is to actualize itself, potentiality is a teleological process. Unlike potentiality, a heterogenous possibility is anti-teleological. It could

[101] Jacques Derrida, *Psyche: Inventions of the other,* I, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), p.15.

be the materialization of something new that is invisible to the parameters of potentiality internal to the hegemonic order. In its actualization, the *wärq* ruptures the coordinates of the impossible and of the unintelligible that the hegemonic order posits and creates its own coordinates of intelligibility, possibility, and evaluation. According to *qiné* practice, the *wärq* is not a pre-existing possibility lodged in the *säm*. If it were so, the *wärq* would be simply one of the sets of meanings already given in the *säm* either as something actual or as a potential. As such, the criteria of intelligibility, evaluation, and possibility of the hegemonic order could predict it, which means that they would constrain it. That is, it would not be *wärq*.

Säm ena wärq, wärq* (*ewnät*) and *ewqät

It is important to elucidate what one understands by knowledge or *ewqät* (እውቀት) in the *qiné* tradition to grasp more adequately the relationships between *säm* and *wärq.* Though translated as "knowledge" in English, *ewqät* has a wider and more complex meaning in *qiné* tradition. First, *ewqät* has a double meaning in Amharic, which the English term knowledge does not fully grasp. We could better circumscribe the meaning of *ewqät* if we consider it by referring to the French terms of "savoir" and "connaissance." *Ewqät* combines knowledge as "savoir" or "knowing that" and knowledge as "connaissance" or "knowing by acquaintance."[102] *Ewqät* does not limit knowledge to the mind, as the Cartesian understanding does. The Amharic *qiné* tradition emerges from the Ge'ez *qiné* tradition, which has an embodied conception of knowledge or *ewqät.*

When one understands something, one says "*gäbañ* (ገባኝ)" in Amharic. The Amharic verb *mägbat* (መግባት) means to enter, as when one enters a house or goes through a door. It is therefore a physical experience. *Agäbab* (አገባብ) means a way of entering, which also means a way of understanding. To say *gäbañ* (ገባኝ) means I understand in the sense that what I understand "has entered" me both affectively and cognitively; as such; it enlightens me. We could say that in the *qiné* tradition, knowledge / *ewqät* covers cognition, affects, and bodily experiences. For *qiné* hermeneutics, knowledge (*ewqät*) "enters" one physically, affectively, and mentally. Thus, the production of the *wärq* from the *qiné* and its *säm ena wärq* mobilizes *ewqät* as both cognition and affect; it is both descriptive and normative. The *qiné* understanding of knowledge as an embodied cognitive process implies that all knowledge / *ewqät* is value loaded, and that all who produce knowledge are responsible for what they hold as knowledge. For the *qiné* tradition, this responsibility expresses itself, as we shall see below, in the submission of knowledge to *wärq*, making the latter the guide to the production and use of knowledge / *ewqät*.

The embodied conception of *ewqät* in Amharic has its source in *Täwahedo* theology, mainly in the claim that "ቃል ሥጋ ሆነ" (*qal siga honä*, the word became flesh, a statement drawn from John 1:14), and the expression of "የሥጋ አምላክ" (*yäsiga amlak*) which refers to God as the God of the flesh, reinforcing the idea that the body participates in the creation of the "word" or

[102] The terms "knowing that" and "knowing by acquaintance" are Bertrand Russell's. Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy (*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), Chapter 5.

knowledge.[103] In this intellectual tradition, *siga* feels and knows, and the mind (ዓእምሮ, *aemero*) knows and feels. It suggests the idea that knowledge is more than what the disembodied and isolated mind could consciously comprehend. This is an understanding of *ewqät* that one also finds in Zära Yacob, the seventeenth century Ethiopian philosopher steeped in *qiné* culture, who wrote, "The mind is the honor of the body." [104] The *qiné* conception of "unity," which eschews a sharp distinction between "flesh" (*siga*), and mind (*aemero*), suggests that the body is the flesh of the mind and the mind is the *aemero* of the body. The body as *siga* and the mind as *aemero* are in "unity," "without mixture or separation."[105] The *qiné* tradition thus posits an active extimacy or relation "without mixture or separation," between the body/flesh on the one hand, and the soul/mind on the other. Consider the following *qiné*:

> ነፍሴ ያለዋል ደንግጣ / My soul is anxious/frightened
> ከግድግዳ ሥር ተሸጉጣ / Hiding furtively under a wall
> አወጣትም ብል ቸገረኝ / I could not expel her
> ተሥጋ እንቢ አለችኝ.[106] / Worried /being flesh, she resists.

The *qiné* speaks of a soul frightened out of its wits in coping with the demands of the body (*siga*). Amharic makes a distinction between soul (ነፍስ, *näfs*) and mind (ዓእምሮ, *aemero*), but it also considers the mind as the embodied expression of the soul (*näfs*). To say of a person "ነፍስ ነው" (*näfs näw,* "he is a soul") means "he is a good person," referring to his character, intelligence, and looks. Consider the Amharic expression for a murderer, "ነፍስ ገዳይ," *näfs gädy*. It literally means the "killer of a soul." That is, the *siga*/body and the *näfs*/*aemero* are in "unity" in the *qiné* sense. The above *qiné* develops the idea that the *siga*/body and *näfs/aemero* are interinvolved, that their unity is tumultuous, and that the climax of the struggle, or *gädl*, between the *näfs*/*aemero* and the body/*siga* is the realization that one needs the other for its existence. Indeed, there is no place for the *näfs*/*aemero* to hide from body/*siga* (*kägedgda sir tshäguta* / ከግድግዳ ሥር ተሸጉጣ), even if one tries to detach its from the body/*siga* (*awtatim bil chägäräñ* / አወጣትም ብል ቸገረኝ). Not surprisingly, the last line intimates, through its *täläwach zäybé,* the refusal (*täsiga enbi alächiñ* / ተሥጋ እንቢ አለችኝ) of the *näfs*/*aemero* to leave body/*siga* for fear (ተሥጋ, *täsiga*) of losing itself. In the *qiné* lurks the idea that neither *näfs*/*aemero* nor body/*siga* could exist without the other and yet they are engaged in a struggle (*gädl*) with each other. *Ena* mediates the struggle or *gädl* between the two (body/*siga* and *näfs*/*aemero*) that the *säm ena wärq* articulates in the *qiné*. The *qiné* here rejects

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[103] Sergew Hable Selassie, የአማርኛ የቤተ ክርስቲያን መዝገበ ቃላት ፥ ረቂቅ / Amharic *Church Dictionary,* vol.3, (Addis Ababa, 1977 - 1990), p. 27.

[104] Claude Sumner, *Classical Ethiopian Philosophy* (Los Angeles: Adey Publishing Company, 1994) p. 240.

[105] The *qiné* understanding of *ewqät* intimates something on the line of Merleau Pony's conception of embodied knowledge. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 58 – 94, 141- 146.

[106] Balambaras Mahteme Selassie, አማርኛ ቅኔ (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, 1955 E.C.), p.49 #118.

the mind-body dualism and the monopoly of the mind over knowledge and says that for better or worse, *näfs*/*aemero* and body/*siga* need each other to know the world and themselves even if it is the case, as the *qiné* points out, that the communion between the two is turbulent. They are in a *säm ena wärq* relation.

The prominent place fasting plays in the *Täwahedo* religion—250 days in a year, which is almost 69% of the days of a year — also suggests an understanding that indicates *näfs/aemero* and body/*siga*, are actively interinvolved with each other. The purpose of fasting is not to weaken the body/*siga* as the mechanical interpretation has it. Rather, fasting allows the body/*siga* and the *näfs*/*aemero* to "distance" themselves (fasting understood as *antsar zäybé*) from the anesthetizing grasp of the hegemonic dualistic understanding that separates them from each other. The fasting creates the condition that enables one to conduct a *wistä wäyra zäybé* understanding of oneself and the world and thus disclose, recognize and experience the "unity" of *näfs*/*aemero* with body/*siga.*

In the *qiné* tradition, *wärq* (እውነት, *ewnät*) stands above *ewqät* (እውቀት, knowledge). *Wärq* is *ewnät*: the true and the good. However, for its production, *wärq* requires knowledge/*ewqät. Ewqät* has an amphibolous status in *qiné* practice. In *qiné* hermeneutics, knowledge could function as *säm*, *hibrä qal*, or *zäybé.* As *säm*, knowledge/*ewqät* embodies the conventional or hegemonic understanding of things; as *hibrä qal*, knowledge could serve to hide, repress, or paper over tensions and contradictions; as *zäybé*, knowledge unveils the tensions and contradictions that articulate the *qiné* and its subject matter and thus plays a crucial role in the production of the *säm ena wärq* and the *wärq*. Insofar as it imparts an effective understanding of the world and gives us an effective grasp on it, knowledge/*ewqät* is crucial in the formulation and interpretation of *säm ena wärq* and in the understanding of the subject matter that the *qiné* treats. However, the relation between *ewnät* (*wärq*) and *ewqät* is not a relationship of similarity or equivalence. Knowledge/*ewqät* could become part of *säm* as well as of *wärq*. However, it becomes part of *wärq* only if *wärq* (the true and the good) guides it. The relation between *ewqät* and *wärq* is asymmetrical, unstable, and is always incomplete.

From the *säm ena wärq* hermeneutical perspective, without *wärq* to guide it, *ewqät* / knowledge deteriorates to *libsä wärq* or *wärqa wärq* practice. It has no means to defend itself from or has no internal resources that immunize it against being captured by the interests of domination and becoming an instrument of oppression, manipulation, and exploitation. The lack of an emancipatory logic internal to knowledge/*ewqät* is visible in the fact that one may know something is false and nevertheless resort to acting as if it were not false. For example, during the Meles Zenawi regime (1991-2012-2018), many educated Ethiopians knew that "*abiyotawi* democracy" in Ethiopia was a political mechanism of ethnic-divide-and-rule for the exploitation and oppression of Ethiopians. Nevertheless, they continued to act as if they did not believe what they knew and asserted that Ethiopia had a "democratic" regime.[107] This is what Octave Mannoni calls a fetishist

[107] Meles Zenawi passed away in 2012. However, his successor, Hailemariam Desalegn, maintained the regime until Abiy Ahmed ousted him in 2018 and brought important democratic reforms.

disavowal— "I know very well [the regime is oppressive] but all the same [it is democratic]."[108] As the Ethiopian experience shows, cynicism, oppression, and *ewqät* are compatible. *Ewqät* is not *wärq* and becomes part of *wärq* only when the latter guides it.

When *ewqät* subsumes itself to *wärq*, there is unity (in the *qiné* sense) between *ewqät* and *wärq*. This unity embraces both factual truth and moral rightness and mobilizes *ewqät* in the interest of *wärq* or emancipation (*arnät* / ኣረነት). *Wärq* discloses the emancipatory potential of *ewqät*—that which *ewqät* (knowledge), under the influence of the hegemonic order, conceals, distorts, or ignores. It liberates *ewqät* from the systematic distortion with which the hegemonic order orients and shapes it. Unlike *ewqät*, which often becomes part of the language of power—consider the appropriation of evolutionary theory, genetics, psychology, economics, and so forth, to justify oppression, exploitation, racism, and social exclusions— *wärq* is always already critical of the world as is. For the *säm ena wärq* hermeneutical tradition, *wärq* is transformative and liberating and sets its own standards; that is, it discards the established coordinates by which we understand, define and measure the world and that sustain oppression and exploitation, and creates new coordinates for defining and understanding the world with the aim of bringing about the *arnät*/emancipation of the world and of the knowledge we have of it.

From the perspective of *säm ena wärq*, *wärq* is an objective category in that it is the objective embodiment of the unity of the "true and the good". *Wärq* is a kind of "an ethical surplus power" that breaks with the context of the established life and founds and justifies new actions whose consequences break through the hegemonic parameters of the possible. Compared to *ewqät*, *wärq* is *ewnät* in revolt; it is not thinkable in terms of the coordinates of *ewqät*. *Wärq* stands for the necessity of breaking through the shackles of the hegemonic order and of thinking differently and against it. *Wärq* invents a new epistemic and political space: its own coordinates of intelligibility and possibility, of knowing, feeling, conviction, evaluation, intervention, and action committed to *arnät*. When *ewqät* submits to *wärq*, the coordinates of *wärq* shape and guide *ewqät's* coordinates of intelligibility and possibility. Thus, in *qiné* hermeneutics, the goal of *wärq* is to open a new horizon that makes visible to knowledge/*ewqät* the possibilities that go beyond the real possibilities that exist within the hegemonic parameters of knowledge and intelligibility of the existing order. For instance, the knowledge (*ewqät*) that the Imperial regime was an arbitrary and corrupt regime was not new to Ethiopians. It was available to political scientists, economists, sociologists, and indeed, to the public, especially since the failed coup d'état of 1960. However, knowledge (*ewqät*) without *wärq*—for it makes possible the emergence of subjects committed to emancipation capable of carrying out the decisive emancipatory refusal of the norms and rules of the regime—is impotent. No amount of knowledge (*ewqät*) of the arbitrariness of the regime could bring it down. No amount of knowledge (*ewqät*) of the existence of enormous wealth inequalities necessarily leads to actions that effectively and permanently reduce inequalities. It is proper to *wärq* (*ewnät*) to produce an understanding that enables one to look at practices, beliefs, ideas, and one's world in ways that provoke critical understandings that "burst" through the shackles of

[108] Octave Mannoni, *Clefs pour l'imaginaire ou l'autre scène* (Paris : Seuil, 1969), pp.12-13, 32. "*je sais bien, mais quand même . . .*" ("I know very well, but all the same…").

hegemonic knowledge and practices and make possible the emergence of subjects committed to emancipation / *arnät* and to the "act" that makes it possible.[109]

It is important to note that *wärq* does not reject *ewqät*. Rather, it tries to enucleate and develop *ewqät's* emancipatory potential by reworking, redirecting, or transforming it in terms of the emancipatory criteria of intelligibility, evaluation, and possibility that *wärq* identifies. In doing so, *wärq* rescues *ewqät* from the distortions it suffers in being part of the hegemonic order of meanings. Skendes, one of the founders of Ethiopian classical philosophy, writes, "Wisdom is the light that fills the soul. It is everywhere; it has no end and it cannot be found…. It calls knowledge conscience."[110] For the *qiné* tradition, knowledge without conscience is *säm*. Knowledge is part of *wärq* ("wisdom," to use Skendes's term) only when "conscience"— "the true and the good"— guides it. The crucial point here is that knowledge/*ewqät* that submits to *wärq* frees us from pessimism. skepticism, and cynicism of the kind, "I know very well…but all the same..." fetishist disavowal. It saves knowledge from being an instrument of domination.

Säm ena Wärq and incompleteness

The composition and interpretation of *säm ena wärq* is a demanding art that requires a highly developed sense of questioning and critique, a deep knowledge of the Amharic language, a proficiency in *ZATZ,* a thorough knowledge of the *qiné's* subject matter, and a mastery of the knowledge in constructing, unpacking, and re-constructing *qiné.* The *qiné* composer experiments with various *säm ena wärq*, *zäybé*, *andem*, *tirgum*, and *zäräfa* to produce a *qiné* that expresses as adequately as possible the insights achieved during the incubation period (ቅጸላ, *qisäla*): the period that the *andem* tradition calls *mirmära* (ምርምራ, research). Inevitably, the interpreter who does not master the art and knowledge that *qiné* composition requires will fail to grasp the questions that drive the *qiné*, the *zäybé*, *andem*, *tirgum*, and *zäräfa* that articulate it, and the richness and complexity of the *säm ena wärq* that he is interpreting. He falls back on the simplifications that mechanistic readings offer and treats all *qiné* as circumstantial *qiné*, which is currently the case in social science inspired studies of *säm ena wärq*. (See below).

It is difficult to understand all the subtleties of the practice of *qiné* and its *säm ena wärq* if one does not recognize its driving spirit—the passion for asking questions. For the *qiné* tradition, no answer can exhaust a question; the question always overflows the answer. Both question and answer are always incomplete and have virtual dimensions (in the *mäsiya zäybé* sense) that one must disclose, excavate, and explore to gain a more adequate grasp of the question and answer. *Qiné* practice assumes that we can understand the given only if we know the question that gave rise to it as an answer, and then question both the question and the answer to ferret out the hidden questions and possible answers that gestate in the given but are invisible or repressed in the manifest questions and answers. The manifest question and answer function *as qulqul zäybé.* To

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[109] The problem here is that of subjectivization. Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum Books, 2007), pp. 392-400. Alan Badiou, *Theory of the Subject* (New York: Continuum Books, 2009).

[110] Claude Sumner, *Classical Ethiopian Philosophy,* op.cit., note 104, p.198.

unpack and go beyond the manifest question requires what the *qiné* tradition calls *antsar* (አንጻር) reading and *wistä wäyra* (ውስጠ ወይራ) reading.[111] The propensity to question the given, to struggle against the conventional, to render visible the invisible has made Amharic *qiné* the intellectual medium of *gädl.*

The *qiné* tradition assumes that the composer is in an important sense the person through whose interpretative labor the *wärq* realizes itself. One cannot grasp this idea unless one considers *qiné*'s origin in Ge'ez religious literature, wherein *qiné* composition is associated with divine inspiration and not only with the intention of the composer. To grasp the meaning of *qiné*, we need to refer to its etymology. Some see its origin in the Ge'ez verb ተቀነየ (*täqänäyä*) meaning praising God; others see its origin in the verb ቆነቆነ (*qonäqonä*), which means to bore through, analogically (*zimd zäybé*) comparing it to ቁንቁን (*qunqun*), an insect that bores through wood.[112] That is, *qiné* would be like *qunqun* in that it bores through hegemonic questions, meanings, ideas and beliefs, and disquiets, taunts, provokes or questions one's mind (ዓእምሮ, *aemero*), traditions, and hegemonic knowledge. Others derive it from the Ge'ez verb ቀነየ (*qänäyä*) which has multiple meanings such as "subjugate, dominate, rule, subdue, render service, serve, attend worship, perform religious services, be subject, pay allegiance."[113] The central idea of ቀነየ (*qänäyä*) is that the *qiné* composer or the *täqänay* (ተቀናይ, the nominative derived from the verb ቀነየ, *qänäyä*), "submits himself to God."[114] It is a submission that imposes on the *qiné* composer or the *täqänay* the obligation to engage in *gädl* against false questions, answers, beliefs, ideas, and practices. The idea of divine inspiration splits the person from within, in that the composer not only receives divine inspiration but also engages in a self-struggle or *gädl* against all temptations that divert him from the divine inspiration; it transforms the composer-in-the-person into a divine instrument of the production of *wärq* through *qiné* composition as well as into a combatant for *wärq*. However, according to the Ge'ez *qiné* tradition, the composer, being human, cannot embody completely divine inspiration. The Ge'ez *qiné* tradition sees man's knowledge and the reality (*ewen*) it

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[111] *Antsar* reading practices "distanciation" from manifest meanings and spontaneous understandings; *wistä wäyra* reading resembles symptomatic reading. *Wistä* means interior. *Wäyra* refers to the wood of the wild olive tree, found in Northern and Central Ethiopia, which is hard to work upon but whose interior delivers precious wood if extracted without being splintered. Reaching its interior without fragmenting it requires interpreting and traversing skillfully the different layers and knots of the wood, its *zäybé*, as it were. This is a task that necessitates a great deal of art in reading correctly the texture and knots of the different layers of the wood as symptoms of what is inside—the hidden—in order to follow the right *mängäd* (the way indicated by the symptoms or *zäybé*) to reach its core without fragmenting it. *Wistä wäyra* reading thus intimates a process of reading that amounts to interpreting symptoms to disclose that which is not immediately visible but nevertheless generates the symptoms.

[112] Liqä Siltanat Habtä Mariam Werqneh, ጥንታዊ የኢትዮጲያ ትምህርት (*Traditional Ethiopian Education*), (Addis Ababa, Berhan ena Selam Printing Press, 1962), pp. 172-211

[113] Wolf Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez (Classical Ethiopic),* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1991), 437.

[114] Edemariam Tsega, *The Life History of Liqe Kahnat Alaka Tsega*, First edition in Amharic – 2003 [EC]. Unpaginated. Forthcoming, Tsehai Publishers.

accesses as always incomplete because of man's incompleteness. For the *qiné* tradition, only God has a complete access to reality, knowledge, language, and truth, and to their incompleteness. Thus, a *qiné,* an expression of a human effort to enucleate the "true and the good" cannot but confront reality as something incomplete, and the *wärq* it elicits as always incomplete. Precisely because it is incomplete, it is always open-ended and productive, an idea that *qiné* practices such as *qiné nätäqa, qiné zäräfa,* and *zäräfa mälash* embody, as we shall see below.

Amharic *qiné* and *säm ena wärq* draw their meanings from the various etymological sources given above, secularize them, and reorient them to issues in the here and now. Amharic *qiné*, which is a non-religious hermeneutics, discards the notion of "divine inspiration," replaces it with questioning and critique (*hiss*), and commits itself to struggling with false ideas and beliefs, injustices, inequalities, and unfreedoms. It inherits and secularizes the idea of incompleteness in its practice of *säm ena wärq* and applies it to *nägär* and to our understanding of *nägär*. However, the *qiné* hermeneutical idea of incompleteness does not mean that the world cannot be known. Rather, it means an unending *gädl* in the pursuit of *wärq.* For the *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics, incompleteness is not a deficiency; it is, like the "blindness" of the "four-eyed scholar," a source of questioning, of motivation to know more, and of critical and productive inquiry. Consider the following *qiné* that intimates the *qiné* hermeneutical idea that incompleteness is ontological:

> ቸሩ ወልደ እግዚአብሔር ሸማኔ ነህ አሉ / *Benevolent God, it is said that you are a cloth weaver*
> ያንተ ሸማኔነት ምኑ ይደነቃል / *But who could admire your skill?*
> ካንድ ወገን ስትሠራ ካንዱ ወገን ያልቃል[115] /*While you are weaving the cloth at one end, it comes undone at the other end.*

This *qiné* has multiple meanings, which point to the secular and critical spirit that informs Amharic *qiné*. The *qiné* compares the "Son of God" to a weaver whose work does not merit praise, because while he is weaving the cloth at one end it comes undone at the other end. The three lines of the *qiné* articulate the *säm ena wärq* in terms of three *zäybé* that function as virtual *andems*. The first line articulates two *zäybé*: an *entsarawi gälätsa zäybé* that compares God to a weaver and a *tänätsatsari zäybé* that praises God as benevolent or *chäru*. The second line introduces a critical idea that questions the omnipotence of God through an *afrash zäybé* that culminates in the third line with a statement that conjugates two contradictory processes—the weaving of the cloth and the undoing of the cloth—that point to the perpetually repeated incompleteness of the work. The *qiné* intimates that God's work is forever incomplete, a condition that He bequeaths to man. In this *qiné* lurks the idea of ontological incompleteness of reality (*ewen*) in the *zäybé* that refers to God's work as always "unfinished." The articulation of the *säm ena wärq* through these three *zäybé* lead to the *wärq*: that the works of power, divine or secular, be it benevolent (*chäru*) or legitimate (Son of God, *wäldä egzi-abher*), are inherently incomplete and must be subject to critique (*hiss*) and struggle (*gädl*). *Qiné* hermeneutics thus gestates the idea of ontological incompleteness and openness, demanding the practice of questioning, critique (*hiss*), struggle (*gädl*), and *ZATZ*. The

[115]Balambaras Mahtëmë Selassie, አማርኛ ቅኔ, op.cit., note 1, p156, no.400.

goal is not to overcome incompleteness, which is necessarily impossible given the *qiné* assumption of the limitedness of a human's knowledge of *wärq* and *ewen*, but, rather, the goal is reaching a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter and a better understanding of the incompleteness of this comprehensive understanding.

The *wärq* of the *säm ena wärq* in this *qiné* illustrates several crucial elements of *qiné* practice. First, the question (the second line or *sineñ* of the *qiné*) and not the answer is the focus of a *qiné*. Second, the struggle against falsehood and critique of authority play a crucial role in *qiné* tradition. A streak of critical irreverence runs through the Amharic *qiné* tradition that usually targets both heavenly and earthly authorities. Such critical irreverence was already widespread in *qiné* composition in the 17th century and considered "incompatible with the canons of religion and morality" by the secular and religious authorities.[116] Third, the *wärq* reveals new issues and questions that reflexively challenge the "completeness" that the *säm* attributes to itself and to things. At the same time, it shows the incompleteness of the *wärq* and the necessity of raising new questions and engaging in *hiss* and *gädl* to generate a more comprehensive *qiné, säm ena wärq,* and *wärq*, aware all along that these are always incomplete and require further *ZATZ*, critique (*hiss*), struggle (*gädl*).

For the *qiné* tradition, incompleteness marks the universality of *qiné*; it affirms its openness to the world, to the future, and to new thinking. The *wärq* of the *qiné* is universal but it is a situated universality that, though incomplete, nevertheless transcends its time and place and speaks to future issues in new ways. According to the Ge'ez *qiné* tradition, only God could know the universal in its completeness, including its incompleteness. From the *säm ena wärq* perspective, man, being incomplete, could never grasp the universal in its completeness, which means that the conditions, questions, and interpretation that give the *wärq* a universal quality at the time of its composition could not be the same as those that make it universal in another epoch and for a different audience. The interpreter engages in asking critical questions that were unasked or could not even be asked at the time of the original composition. The new conditions and the new questions disclose new dimensions or new limits of the universality of the *wärq* that were not visible under the original conditions and questions of the *qiné*'s composition, which does not mean that one has now apprehended all its dimensions. Or, the old *wärq* could, due to new questions and circumstances, become *säm.* The distinct types of understanding they give rise to (the four types of understanding referred to in the last section: *täqlala agäbab*, *abiy agäbab*, *däqiq agäbab*, *n'oos agäbab*) are each a type of an incomplete understanding of the subject matter.

Säm ena wärq hermeneutics points to a radical difference between the incompleteness of *wärq* and of *ewqät*. Unlike the incompleteness of *wärq* that opens the door to the possibility of a more comprehensive universality, understanding, and emancipation, the incompleteness of *ewqät* or knowledge makes possible its mobilization for exploitive and oppressive purposes, even when

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[116] Aleksander Ferenc, "Writing and Literature in Classical Ethiopic" in B.W. Andrzejewski, S. Pilaszewicz, W. Tyloch, eds. *Literatures in African languages: theoretical issues and sample surveys* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.286.

it claims to be a set of propositions that are value-neutral.[117] Contrary to *ewqät* (knowledge) which is compatible with cynicism and could coexist with and even serve as an instrument of the political, epistemic and economic oppression and exploitation of Ethiopians, *wärq* is objectively and constitutively incompatible with oppression, exploitation, and ignorance. For the *qiné* tradition, *ewqät*/knowledge finds its truth and goodness—its emancipatory potential—only when it accepts the guidance of *wärq.*

The *qiné* tradition's idea of incompleteness has deep roots in Ethiopia's intellectual tradition. As the seventeenth century thinker Zära Yacob put it, "We cannot, however, reach truth through the doctrine of men, for all men are liars."[118] Zära Yacob is not making a moral judgement in saying "all men are liars." Rather, he is also referring to the fact that *wärq* and *ewqät*— "the doctrine of men"—are always incomplete and should therefore be subject to questioning, *hiss* and *gädl*; to think otherwise leads to "lies." We see in his claim an echo of the critique of the "wisdom of men" in the 15th century Royal Chronicles of Lalibela.[119] If the "doctrine of men" is a source of distortion, as Zära Yacob states, then one must question all *wärq* and *ewqät*, for they are all part of the "doctrine of men" and thus incomplete. Being always incomplete, *wärq* and *ewqät* are subject to questioning, *hiss* and *gädl*, and therefore to revision or even transformation into something qualitatively new. However, as we have seen above, the incompleteness of *wärq* and of *ewqät* are qualitatively different.

The aim of *säm ena wärq* is not to bring about completeness and full transparency, which *qiné* recognizes is impossible in human affairs, but to expand continuously the circle of intelligibility, possibility, and universality. For *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics, this is an endless task. It is precisely the incompleteness of *säm, wärq,* appearance (*mälk*) and reality (*ewen*) that makes possible and necessary the practice of *zäräfa*, making *säm ena wärq* an open-ended practice of interpretation, always in pursuit of a more comprehensive *wärq*, and thus of a more comprehensive understanding.

Zäräfa

Qiné zäräfa is a crucial process in the quest for a more comprehensive *qiné*, *säm ena wärq*, and *wärq*. As indicated earlier, *zäräfa* (ዘረፋ) means decentering, purging unnecessary ideas, and subjecting to *andem*, *tirgum*, and *détournement* the *qiné* under consideration to produce a new and more comprehensive and compelling *säm ena wärq,* thereby opening a new horizon for understanding and interpreting the subject matter, and for grasping more adequately its *wärq*. Historically, *zäräfa* is practiced as a way of contesting an already composed *qiné* and its *säm ena wärq*. Hence, its original name of *qiné zäräfa*. The incompleteness of *säm*, *wärq*, *ewqät*, *ewnät*,

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[117] According to the contemporary Western conception, truth is a property of a statement that is neutral to its substantive claims. L. T. F. Damut, *Logic, Language, and Meaning: Introduction to Logic* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp.28-64.

[118] Claude Sumner, *Classical Ethiopian Philosophy*, op. cit. note 104, p.240.

[119] Maimire Mennasemay, "Utopia and Ethiopia: The Chronicles of Lalibela as Critical Reflection," *Northeast African Studies,* Vol. 12, 2, pp 95-122.

mälk (appearance), *ewen* (reality) is the condition for and an invitation to practice *qiné zäräfa* in order to generate a more comprehensive *qiné*, a more comprehensive *säm ena wärq*, and a more comprehensive *wärq*. In conducting a *zäräfa* on the original *qiné*, the *zäräfa* practitioner tries to seize that which is in the original *qiné* more than the original *qiné,* but which was not visible from the perspective of its *säm ena wärq*. The idea of incompleteness in *qiné* hermeneutics imposes on the *qiné* practitioner a constant critique (*hiss*) and struggle (*gädl*) to reduce the incompleteness of the *wärq* through the production of a more comprehensive *qiné* and *säm ena wärq*, though he could never overcome its incompleteness.

In *qiné* schools and meetings, *qiné* composition takes place in *viva voce.* During this process, one sees the critical, reflective, and dialogical nature of *qiné* practice. While a participant is composing a *qiné*, a member of the group could "snatch" (ነጠቃ, *nätäqa*) the *qiné* before the composer completes it, subject it to a decentering and *détournement*, and propose a line or lines (*sineñ,* ስንኝ) to conclude the *qiné* in an unexpected way. *Qiné nätäqa* (ቅኔ ነጠቃ) is the name of this process. A *qiné nätäqa* formulates a *säm ena wärq* that leads the snatched line(s) in a new direction. It is an *andem* and *tirgum* move and calls upon a new *zäybé*. This endeavor is successful and has both an intellectual and aesthetic appeal only if the *nätäqa* proposes a *säm ena wärq* that redirects the snatched line (s) in a direction that opens an original perspective that was not predictable in terms of the meanings articulated at the beginning of the *qiné* composition.

Qiné zäräfa (ቅኔ ዘረፋ) is the composition of a counter-*qiné* as a response to a fully formed *qiné.* A *qiné zäräfa* snatches the subject matter of the proposed *qiné,* brings in a new *zäybé*, makes *andem* and *tirgum* moves that involve the decentering, the purging, and *détournement* of the original *qiné,* and constructs a counter-*qiné* that offers an alternative *säm ena wärq* bearing on the subject matter of the *qiné*. The new *qiné* has the status of *qiné zäräfa* only if it is more comprehensive, more potent, more economical in its expression than the original *qiné* and opens a new horizon or points to a new direction. *Qiné zäräfa* goes beyond *qiné nätäqa* in that it introduces more forcefully immanent critique, the struggle for a new meaning, and reflexivity in the process of *qiné* composition. An additional step is the *zäräfa mälash* (ዘረፋ መላሽ), which is a critical response to the *qiné zäräfa*. The goal of a *zäräfa mälash* is to construct a new *säm ena wärq* that goes beyond the original *säm ena wärq* and the new *säm ena wärq* of the *zäräfa* and disclose a new meaning that was unforeseeable from the perspectives of the previous two *qiné*. The response (*mäls*, መልስ) of the *zäräfa mälash* introduces a crucial step in that it opens the door for unpacking the different layers of meanings in the preceding two *qiné* through *zäybé*, *andem*, *tirgum*, decentering, purging of irrelevant or superfluous ideas, and a double *détournement* of the original *qiné* and of the *qiné* of the *qiné zäräfa* that points to a different horizon of meanings. The aim is to produce a new more compelling and comprehensive *säm ena wärq,* a more comprehensive *wärq,* and a more extensive and intensive understanding of the subject matter. In the process, it retroactively makes the two *qiné* subjected to the *zäräfa mälash* necessary conditions for the possibility of the *zäräfa mälash* and its power to go beyond them and open a new horizon. The *zäräfa mälash* is successful only if it offers a more potent *qiné* whose *säm ena wärq* succeeds in bringing to light new, novel, and unexpected meanings that transcend and expand the range and

depth of the previous two *qiné* and produces a *wärq* that is more far-reaching and more intensive than the previous ones. The *zäräfa mälash* thus adds one more critical screw turn that intensifies the process of immanent critique and reflexivity in *qiné* composition.[120]

Note that *qiné nätäqa, qiné zäräfa, and zäräfa mälash* are possible precisely because of the incompleteness of *qiné, säm, wärq*, *ewen* or the subject matter of the *qiné*. Given the *qiné* notion of incompleteness, one could say that *zäräfa* is an endless process. One could operate a *zäräfa* on the *qiné* of the *zäräfa mälash*, and the process could continue indefinitely. Commenting on the well-known Wadla school of classical *qiné*, whose practice of *zäräfa* is highly developed, Menghestu Lemma writes, "A Wadla poem [*qiné*] is reputed for being fraught with difficulties and pitfalls, a poetic puzzle, the decoding of which may take hours, even days."[121] The Wadla School is known for its extended practice and dialectical interpretation of *qiné, qiné nätäqa, qiné zäräfa,* and *zäräfa mälash*, which leaves no *zäybé* unturned, no *andem* uncounted, no *tirgum* uninterpreted, no decentering uncentered, and no *détournement* unexplored.[122] One understands then why the interpretation of a single *qiné* could take days, though the result is still open for further *zäräfa*.

Zäräfa opens new spaces for introducing, formulating, and articulating new questions, new ideas, and new directions. It makes possible the production of new concepts and expressions, the generation of new meanings for already existing concepts, and the production and development of *lissan* (see below) or emancipatory language. The practice of *zäräfa* is a critical, non-doctrinaire process that treats the *qiné* and its subject matter as an open construction site or as a site of creativity. *Zäräfa* intimates that the way we use concepts is also the way we make and understand the world as the *qiné* line quoted earlier— አዲስ ቃል፣ አዲስ ዓለም (*Addis qal*, *addis aläm*; a new word, a new world)—formulates it. Thus, the practice of *zäräfa* and the quest for the most adequate *säm ena wärq* for grasping the subject matter that the *qiné* articulates make the issue of language, especially the creation of concepts, central to *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics.

In addition, one could see in the practice of *zäräfa* the presence of the *andem* tradition of the "four-eyed scholar" at work. Since there is no end-point that allows those participating in *zäräfa* to claim an end to interpretation, a complete grasp of the *wärq* of the subject matter, and a complete understanding of its subject matter is always yet to be achieved. The composer and the

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[120] The evaluation of a *qiné nätäqa*, *qiné zäräfa*, and *zäräfa mälash* takes into account the existence of other *qiné* on the subject matter and how the *zäräfa* goes beyond these. This means excavating and evaluating the *qiné* within a historical context. I refer collectively to *qiné nätäqa, qiné zäräfa, and zäräfa mälash* as *zäräfa*, because they all involve decentering, refracting, purging, deflecting, reworking, re-interpreting, *détournement*, *andem*, and *tirgum* with the aim of developing a more comprehensive *qiné*, a more comprehensive *säm ena wärq*, and eventually a more comprehensive *wärq* and therefore a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

[121] Menghestu Lemma, "Appendix: Ethiopian Classical Poetry" in Aläka Imbakom Kalewold, *Traditional Ethiopian Church Education,* trans. Menghestu Lemma (New York: Teachers College Press, 1970), p.37.

[122] I take the practice of the Wadla School of *qiné* as the ideal type of *qiné* hermeneutics.

interpreter advance towards the *wärq* asymptotically with each new *zäräfa.* The practice of *zäräfa* enables us to sidestep the issue of relativism versus absolutism. Although *wärq* is always incomplete, the practice of *zäräfa* embodies the idea that the arc of undertaking leads towards increasingly comprehensive *wärq* without however ever reaching completeness. *Wärq* is always a situated, incomplete, and open universality.

One could see in the dialectic of the three moments of *qiné*, *qiné zäräfa*, and the *zäräfa mälash* the recurrent process of going beyond, mediated by formulations of new *säm ena wärq*, articulating at each step the known and the unknown, the said and the unsaid, the old and the new, the actual and the virtual (in the *mäsiya zäybé* sense), and the possible and the impossible. There is an important logic that is active in the practice of *zäräfa.* The *qiné* hermeneutical practice that tells us that to understand a subject matter is to understand it in terms of its *wärq* introduces the important idea of retroactive logic. Since the *wärq* is the outcome of our interpretation of the *säm ena wärq*, to say that we understand the *säm* and the subject matter of the *qiné* after having produced the *wärq* implies that we gain the real meaning of the *säm*, the *säm ena wärq*, and its subject retroactively. *Zäräfa* illustrates and reinforces this logic of retroactivity. The *qiné* that results from a *zäräfa* is not the linear outcome of the previous *qiné.* The *qiné* of the *zäräfa* creates its own preconditions by transforming the meaning and direction of the *qiné* it subjects to *zäräfa* and making it retroactively its necessary antecedent, which it was not before the *zäräfa* took place. That is, it transforms the original *qiné* from a contingent to a necessary condition of the new *qiné* of the *zäräfa*, which means that the new *säm ena wärq* of the *zäräfa* is not the unfolding of the previous *säm ena wärq* or of the *säm ena wärq* it has subjected to *zäräfa*. In fact, one could see the two *säm ena wärq* —the old and the new—as incommensurable. The logic that operates in the practice of *zäräfa* is critical of linear causality and of a teleological account of the passage from first to the second (*zäräfa*) *säm ena wärq*.

There is, therefore, in *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics a logic of "retroactive causality" that is critical of teleological interpretations of events.[123] The *wärq* is not the unfolding of pre-existing meaning. The *säm* is not present as a necessary or a sufficient cause for the *wärq*; it is our production of the *wärq* that retroactively activates it as a set of meanings necessary to produce the *wärq*. We could say this because the production of the *wärq* discards the parameters of intelligibility and possibility of the *säm* and creates its own criteria of intelligibility and possibility and subjects the *säm* and its subject matter to these new criteria. The logic of retroactive causality that informs the practice of *zäräfa* is central to critical *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics. Ethiopian history, understood as *nägär* or as a web of *säm ena wärq* gives us an example of this retroactive

[123] There is something akin to the Hegelian logic of retroactive causality in the operation and outcome of *zäräfa*. On retroactive causality, see Zizek , "The key philosophical implication of Hegelian retroactivity is that it undermines the reign of the Principle of Sufficient Reason: this principle only holds in the condition of linear causality where the sum of past causes determines a future event— retroactivity means that the set of (past, given) reasons is never complete and "sufficient," since the past reasons are retroactively activated by what is, within the linear order, their effect." Slavoj Zizek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel And The Shadow Of Dialectical Materialism* (London: Verso; 2013), p. 213.

logic of *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics. The Grañ Wars (1529-1543), conducted by a Muslim leader from the periphery of Christian Ethiopia, devastated the Christian regions of Ethiopia. [124] The wars, though experienced as a catastrophe, rendered ethnic and religious barriers porous, eventually "leading" to the creation of a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Ethiopia by the Christian Emperors that followed Grañ and who treated him as an "invader" and "destroyer" of Christian Ethiopia despite the fact that his action was retrospectively the necessary condition for their successful creation of the ethnically complex Ethiopia as a united political entity. We could say his actions "led to" their success only retroactively. We cannot consider Grañ's war as a sufficient condition that deterministically led in a linear fashion to the Ethiopia we know now. However, the present historical situation of Ethiopia retroactively transforms Grañ's contingent actions into necessary ones for the spatial and cultural configurations of what we now know as Ethiopia. Thus, we could say that Emperor Menelik's victory over Emir Abdullahi of Harar at the battle of Chälenko in January 1887 was the completion of the complex process that Imam Ahmad b. Ibrahim initiated with his victory over Emperor Läbnä Dengel at the battle of Shimbra Kure in 1529, making Grañ a necessary precursor of the diversity in unity and the identity that characterize modern Ethiopia.[125] We could make this claim only retroactively. If Grañ had not existed, the political space we now call Ethiopia might have not materialized.

Another important issue that relates to *zäräfa* is "argumentation. Composing and interpreting *qiné* and producing *zäräfa* are processes that involve making either explicit or implicit arguments. These processes require questioning the conventional arguments, beliefs, and opinions associated with the subject matter. They necessitate providing arguments for rejecting the *säm* as a "false *wärq*" and, in case of a *zäräfa*, for rejecting the original *säm ena wärq* and the *wärq* it generates as inadequately comprehensive, weak, or non-economical. One needs to produce arguments in support of the superior comprehensiveness of the alternative *säm ena wärq* and the *wärq* one produces through *zäräfa.* The reason given in these arguments must be in accord with the elaborate "formal rules" and strict "canons" of *qiné* composition.[126]

However, it is important to bear in mind that the *qiné* understanding of argument is not adversarial. Rather, in *qiné* practice, argumentation is a collaborative exercise and a responsive

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[124] Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ʻAbd al-Qādir Arabfaqīh*, The Conquest of Abyssinia*: *16th Century* (Los Angeles: Tsehai Publishers, 2003); John Spencer Trimingham. *Islam in Ethiopia* (London: Frank Cass, 1965); Joseph Cuoq, *L'Islam en Ethiopie* : *des origines au XVI siècle* (Paris : Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1981).

[125] Harold G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 83-4.

[126] Aleksander Ferenc, "Writing and Literature in Classical Ethiopia," in B.W. Andrzejewski, S. Pilaszewicz, W. Tyloch, eds. *Literatures in African languages: theoretical issues and sample surveys* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 285. The rules and canons deal with the distinctions of the various *qiné bet*, the use of *zäybé* and *hibrä qal.* As we have already seen, there are different genres of *qiné* called *qiné bet* (ቅኔ ቤት). Liqä Siltanat Habtä Mariam points out that there are seventeen kinds of *qiné bet*, each with its own sub- genres, for a total of seventy-eight. Each *qiné bet* has its own style, structure, and rhetorical tropes. Liqä Siltanat Habtä Mariam Werqneh, ጥንታዊ የኢትዮጲያ ትምህርት (*Traditional Ethiopian Education*), (Addis Ababa, Berhan ena Selam Printing Press, 1962)*,* pp. 176-183.

engagement with and reciprocal attunement of the *qiné* participants to each other's ideas and to the subject matter of the *qiné*. It is a process of constructing a shared space of questioning, inquiry, critique, and understanding, based on the careful and caring listening to each other. The *qiné* tradition calls this practice of careful and caring listening to each other *mädämamät / መደማመጥ*. The aim is to create a shared framework of discussion and interpretation or a shared "hermeneutical circle."[127] It is within this framework that deductions and inferences take place. The *wärq* of the *säm ena wärq* emerges in the process of the individual and collective—the participants in the various stages of the *zäräfa,* and unknown others of other places and times that re-compose and re-interpret the *säm ena wärq* —construction of the *qiné*'s discursive and epistemic space.

Lissan, quanqua,* and *säm ena wärq

"In what language did God say, 'let there be light'?" asks an *andemta* commentary.[128] In this question, we see the importance the *qiné* tradition gives to the relations between language and *wärq/ewnät*, language and reality, language and power, language and action, language and knowledge/*ewqät*, and language and creativity. The *qiné* tradition makes a distinction between language as *quanqua* (ቋንቋ), and language as *lissan* (ልሳን). An understanding of this distinction and its implications are crucial for understanding the *säm ena wärq* hermeneutical process.

Language as *quanqua* is the language of everyday life. It is a tool of designation, the symbolic medium of the political, economic, and social powers that structure, articulate, and animate Ethiopian society. The relations and culture of domination establish *quanqua*'s coordinates of meanings. As such, *quanqua* is the language of the hegemonic order. As *quanqua,* language functions as if it were a neutral frame for communication; it occludes the distortions that historical, social, and political forces inflict on it. It describes and articulates the Ethiopian world in a way that deprives Ethiopians of the possibility to develop an immanent critique of Ethiopian society and disclose an alternative emancipatory socio-political regime. As the language of the hegemonic order, it exists as a spontaneous "linguistic habitus" that limits one's political horizon to the already given: the horizon of meanings of the hegemonic order.[129]

Unlike *quanqua*, which takes social reality as a given and describes it in terms of the hegemonic parameters of intelligibility and normativity, language as *lissan* considers the given as something Ethiopians have created and could question and, if necessary, undo and change. Language as *lissan* is the outcome of the problematization of *quanqua* and of an unremitting critique (*hiss*) of and struggle (*gädl*) against its uses by the hegemonic order to naturalize the existing system of domination. To problematize *quanqua* is to subvert and reject the instrumentalization of language in the service of power; it is to subject its practices and meanings

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[127] On the hermeneutical circle, see Jean Grondin, "What is a Hermeneutical circle?" in N. Keane and C. Lawn, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Hermeneutics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2016), pp. 299-303.

[128] Roger W Cowley, *Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation: A Study in Exegetical Tradition and Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 245

[129] On "linguistic habitus," see Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2912), pp. 46-65.

to *ZATZ*, destabilize and subvert its accepted meanings, strip it of its anaesthetizing properties, and invent new concepts and expressions that point to an alternative way of being: socially, politically, economically, and culturally. *Lissan* subverts *quanqua*'s systematic distortion of meanings in the service of oppression—the divinization of power (the *quanqua* of the imperial era), the normalization of violence (the *quanqua* of the DERG era), or the ethnicization of life (the *quanqua* of the Meles Zenawi era) by mobilizing the hidden, repressed, marginalized, neglected, derided, shunned, forgotten, scorned emancipatory aspirations, ideas and norms as weapons against *quanqua*. This involves subjecting language as *quanqua* to *ZATZ* and purging it of the distortions that the interests of domination inflict on it.

Subjecting *quanqua* to the operations of *ZATZ* produces a *lissan* that enables us to create new concepts and expressions that articulate appearance and reality in ways that de-fetishize, de-naturalize, and de-reify the existing order and its practices. Language as *lissan* enables us to think critically about the existing order, to elicit its economic, political, social, and cultural pathologies, break through its pacifying descriptions and anesthetizing justifications of the hegemonic order, develop emancipatory-oriented parameters of interpretation, intelligibility, and evaluation. *Lissan* discloses the constitutive power and performativity of language and its force as a world-making activity. The *qiné* dictum—አዲስ ቃል፣ አዲስ ዓለም (*Addis qal, addis aläm /* a new word, a new world)—precisely expresses the world-constituting power of *lissan*. It makes possible the creation of the concepts, vocabularies, and expressions we need to name correctly our unfreedoms, inequalities, and injustices, and to enucleate the emancipatory possibilities, ideas, values, aspirations, and actions that incubate in our *nägär*, past and present. It is in language as *lissan* that Ethiopians discover the "constitutive," "expressive," and "performative" power of language.[130]

Ethiopian history itself provides a practice that affirms the constitutive and performative power of language as *lissan*. Historically, one refers to the language of the king as *lissanä-Negus* or as the *lissan* of the King and not as *quanqua.* The association of *lissan* and imperial power brings out its performative and constitutive force. The rejection of the term *quanqua* to characterize the king's use of language intimates that *quanqua,* understood as a tool of designation, is a language of obedience, fit for domination and for the dominated, but unfit for the King. Only language as *lissan* gives the King full freedom to make and interpret the world as an active historical subject.

What is of interest here is not the power of the King and how he exercises it, but the historical distinction between *quanqua* and *lissan* and the way this distinction discloses the creative power of language as *lissan.* The distinction between *quanqua* as language for the dominated and *lissan* as the language of the King (*lissanä-Negus*) is rooted in the idea that the freedom to name

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[130] A *zäräfa* of Austin's and Taylor's reflection on language based on the *qiné*-derived aphorism, "—አዲስ ቃል፣ አዲስ ዓለም (*Addis qal, addis aläm /* a new word, a new world). On the constitutive and expressive nature of language, see Charles Taylor, *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016). On performative utterances and the power of language "to do things", John Austin, *How to do things with words,* New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.

the world is a necessary condition to create and interpret the world as a free historical subject: The King in the Ethiopian historical context. The unbounded and independent power attributed to the sovereign describes his power to do things that his subjects cannot do: his power to change social and political reality. The use of the king's power as an *entsarawi gälätsa zäybé*, for *lissan* points to the legislative, executive and judiciary capabilities of *lissan* and its capacity to transgress hegemonic meanings, to create new meanings and realities, and to make visible new possibilities. For *lissan*, words do not simply describe the world; they have the sovereign power to create a new human world through the creation of concepts and expressions that open new possibilities of actions that transform the world. The notion of language as *lissan*, of language as having a constitutive, expressive, and performative power is central to *qiné* practice. It is encapsulated in the *qiné*-derived aphorism: አዲስ ቃል፣ አዲስ ዓለም (*Addis qal, addis aläm /* a new word, a new world).

The understanding of language as *lissan* implies that *quanqua* is not and cannot be the language of freedom, equality, solidarity, and responsibility. To free oneself from *quanqua* is to free oneself from the language of unfreedoms, inequalities, and "voluntary servitude."[131] It is to become sovereign. To paraphrase *Gudu* Kassa, one of the main characters in Addis Alemayhu's *Fiqer eskä Mäqaber* (ፍቅር እስከ መቃብር) and whom one of his principal interlocutors, Bezabih, calls *Alaka* (አለቃ)—one who has mastered traditional education including *qiné*—asks, "Why do people prefer to believe what those in power tell them rather what they themselves see and experience?" he is precisely raising the issue of freeing ourselves from *quanqua* and the voluntary servitude it cultivates.[132] *Lissan* is necessary for disclosing our unfreedoms, inequalities, and voluntary servitude, and for reflecting on how to overcome them.

Every *qiné* composer and interpreter tries to appropriate the constitutive, expressive, and performative power of language as *lissan*. Through *lissan*, he tries to create a new *säm ena wärq* that grasps the singularity of the subject matter and the universality (the *wärq*) that incubates in it. However, the composer knows all along that something escapes the *qiné* and *säm ena wärq* he creates, and the interpreter knows that something escapes the *qiné* and *säm ena wärq* he interprets. The composer and interpreter know that this incompleteness is unavoidable. However, they know that from the perspective of *lissan*, this incompleteness is also the force that makes possible the creation of ever-newer *säm ena wärq* through ever-newer *ZATZ.* Unlike *quanqua* that asserts the completeness of meanings, *lissan* recognizes and embraces incompleteness, "blindness" (as in the *andemta* tradition of the "four-eyed" scholar), and positivizes it. For *lissan*, incompleteness is an open-ended productive limit; it is openness to the world and to creativity; it is not a defect. *Lissan* acknowledges that knowing the limits that incompleteness makes visible is also knowing another *wärq*: the imperative need for the creation of new questions and new concepts for going beyond the uncovered limits to discover new realities and new limits that must be overcome: a process

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[131] Etienne de la Boétie, *Discours on voluntary servitude,* trans. James B. Atkinson and David Sices (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2012). De la Boétie asks why people accept voluntarily to make the interests of their exploiters and oppressors as their own interests. According to him, if exploiters and oppressors continue to pillage the people it is because the people voluntarily allow them to do so.

[132] Addis Alemayhu, ፍቅር እስከ መቃብር (Addis Ababa: Mega, 1992, first published in 1965), pp. 370-2.

with no end-point. *Lissan* makes us realize that there is something yet to be articulated, yet to be known, yet to be understood, and, indeed, yet to be created. For *lissan*, the future and reality (*ewen*, ዕውን) are always open-ended and a realm of heterogeneous possibilities; and Ethiopians are the active subjects that give expression, form, and content to these possibilities and the future that bears them. To the question of the *Andemta* Commentary "In what language did God say, 'let there be light'?"—the answer is then *lissan*. That is, God created "light" (*wärq*) and therefore the visibility, knowability, and transformation of the world through *lissan.*

Säm ena wärq hermeneutics draws several ideas from the *andemta* passage, "In what language did God say, 'let there be light'?" First, in this question, the *qiné* tradition sees in *lissan* the power to disclose the transformability of the world. Unlike *quanqua*, *lissan* does not make language the prison-house of life. Second, the *qiné* tradition interprets the very pithiness of the question, "In what language did God say 'let there be light'?" as an indication that the productive "light" of language as *lissan* resides in the economical rather than in the inflationary use of language. A sign that a *qiné* composition has achieved its goal of coming close to the *wärq* of the subject matter is its linguistic economy. The composer's effort to grasp his material through a condensed expression makes the condensed form itself part of the emancipatory content of the productivity of *qiné*. *Säm ena wärq* is precisely the most favored economical or condensed form in *qiné* composition. Amharic *qiné* assumes that one achieves a more comprehensive *wärq* by purging the *qiné* of the *quanqua* characteristics of words and expressions. One sees this in the distinctive austereness of *lissan* in *qiné* as opposed to the pedestrian volubility of *quanqua* in hegemonic discourse. Unlike *quanqua* that thrives on the inflationary use of language to anaesthetize questioning and keep Ethiopians within the parameters of intelligibility and normativity of the extant order, *lissan* strips *quanqua* of its anesthetizing use of words that fetishize reality and describe it as something that is self-evident, complete, and static. Note the anesthetizing and inflationary use of terms such as democracy, development, nationalities, participation, civil society, ethnic identity, and so forth, in contemporary Ethiopia. These terms exist as *quanqua* and therefore obscure rather than bring light to Ethiopian conditions. The austere linguistic formulation of *qiné* maximizes the uniqueness and universality of the *wärq* that the *säm ena wärq* articulates. A *qiné* rarely has more than four *sineñ* (ስንኞች, lines) and many powerful *qiné* have only two *sineñ*. For *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics, the exemplar of this economical, creative, productive, and comprehensive formulation is the expression, "Let there be light."

Third, "Let there be light" serves as an injunction that unendingly repeats itself in the practice of *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics, because, for humans, there can never be a light that reveals all. Coping with each new endeavor, with each new situation or condition, with each new problem and question must obey the demand of "Let there be light," again and again, and acknowledge that there is no final light, there is no final *qiné,* no final *säm ena wärq,* no final interpretation, and no final *wärq*. To believe otherwise is to reduce *lissan* to *quanqua* and integrate it into the hegemonic power's coordinates of intelligibility and possibility. *Quanqua* is what enables the hegemonic power to represent itself as something permanent and without a beyond.

It is important to note that the *qiné* tradition does not see *quanqua* and *lissan* in a binary manner. Rather, language is a *säm ena wärq* phenomenon whose *wärq—lissan*—the hegemonic order's material conditions and discursive practices repress. *Lissan*, as the repressed of *quanqua*, gestates in *quanqua* as an alternative possibility that comes to existence through the operations of *säm ena wärq, ZATZ, hiss* and *gädl*. *Quanqua* and *lissan* are thus internally related. The problematization and critique of *quanqua* through *säm ena wärq, ZATZ, hiss* and *gädl* makes possible the production of *lissan* as the immanent critique of the forms and contents of *quanqua* and its function as the instrument of power, oppression, and exploitation. *Lissan's* struggle with *quanqua* is an endless process, because the two are intertwined such that what is part of *lissan* at one moment could evolve into part of *quanqua*, requiring a permanent subversion of *quanqua* to maintain *lissan's* critical, productive, constitutive, and performative power.

Crucial to note here is the unique understanding of "thinking" that *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics articulates in its cultivation of *lissan*. To comprehend this unique understanding of "thinking", one must see the constitutive role that *ZATZ, hiss* and *gädl* play in the production of *lissan* out of and against *quanqua*. *Säm ena wärq* hermeneutics understands thinking as a process that is not linear, as a process that is discontinuous and always incomplete. Take the case of *ZATZ* to make the point. In *zäybé*, thinking tries to enucleate, the hidden, the repressed, the forgotten and thus break the linearity and obviousness of the given; in *andem*, thinking is engaged in sideways reflections, leapfrogging, and breaking through the shackles of the given; in *tirgum*, thinking proceeds through translation, "without needing the text or keeping to its grammatical form," thus requiring conceptual innovations and making possible the production of new meanings and the broadening of the limits of the translated to an extent that allows the translation to break away from the translated and stand in its own right as an original text[133]; in *zäräfa*, thinking is engaged in decentering, purging, *détournement,* reworking, and taking ideas into new territories. In all these practices, thinking is not a linear process but a discontinuous, recursive, and tortuous process. *Lissan* constitutes thinking as a non-linear activity, as sideways reflection, as leapfrogging, as inventing concepts, and as a process of discovering the hidden, the repressed, and the unexpected, and naming them. Language as *lissan* eschews the idea of thinking as a linear and continuous process that *quanqua* assumes.

Lissan, with its power to create new concepts and expressions, renders feasible a triple crossing of meaning boundaries for the purpose of enucleating and developing new and alternative ideas. First, it enables us to cross the boundaries between the Ethiopian past and present horizons of experiences and understandings, and empowers us to formulate the concepts and expressions we need to establish a critical dialogue between the emancipatory ideas, norms, values, and practices that connect the past, the present and the future. In doing so, *lissan* enables us to produce new concepts. Moreover, it discloses our past as a *säm ena wärq* or a web of *säm ena wärq* that is receptive to the emancipatory actions we implement now, thus opening unexpected or new horizons, invisible to the official past of the hegemonic order but existing as its repressed or virtual

[133] Roger W. Cowley, "Old Testament Introduction in the Andemta Commentary", Journal *of Ethiopian Studies,* 12, 1 (1974), p. 171.

(in the *mäsiya zäybé* sense) dimensions, which we could mobilize to nourish, motivate and advance the pursuit of emancipation in the present. The hegemonic *quanqua* prevents such an emancipatory crossing of temporal boundaries by reducing the relation between the past and the present to a one-dimensional and one-directional narrative of events that simply follow each other.

Second, *lissan* also makes possible the creation and development of the vocabularies—concepts and expressions—that enable us to cross the boundaries between the diverse Ethiopian traditions and cultures, discover the incompleteness of each and therefore their openness to each other, and engage them in a critical dialogue in order to enucleate, develop and expand the shared desires, interests, understandings and practices of emancipation they incubate. Such an operation gives the diverse Ethiopian traditions and cultures a pan-Ethiopian emancipatory horizon and depth. The hegemonic *quanqua*'s parameters of communication affirm the extant social order as if it were a natural and monochromatic order, which means that *quanqua* prevents a critical and dialogical crossing of the various traditional and cultural boundaries internal to Ethiopia. It thus precludes a critical dialogue among these traditions and cultures that could render visible, audible, and intelligible the common trans-cultural or trans-ethnic emancipatory aspirations and interests and the shared desire for an alternative Ethiopia.

Third, *lissan* also enables us to create concepts and expressions to articulate the Ethiopian and Western (or other) horizons of understanding through a critical dialogue, and to engage in the *ZATZ* of Western (other) ideas and Ethiopianize them from the perspective of the emancipatory needs, questions, interests, and aspirations that we disclose through the first and second crossings: the critical dialogue between the past and present, and the critical dialogue between Ethiopia's diverse traditions and cultures. We could thus say that *säm ena wärq* and its practices of *ZATZ* produce a *lissan* that makes it possible to cross meaning boundaries and conduct a double critical journey: (a) a critical internal journey into the vertical and horizontal dimensions of Ethiopian history, and (b) a critical external journey into the ideas and practices of other cultures and civilizations.

Säm ena wärq, critical internal journey, and surplus history

A *lissan* based critical internal journey into our past treats the past as a web of *säm ena wärq* or *nägär* and aims to produce the *wärq* the past has gestated and haunt contemporary Ethiopia as unfulfilled aspirations. A critical internal journey into our past de-mythifies and de-fetishizes it, and enables us, in the words of Foucault, "to separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are [exploited and oppressed Ethiopians], the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think."[134] That is, what guides the critical internal journey is our present interest in no longer being the oppressed and exploited people we were in the past and still are in the present. A critical internal journey into our past is important not only for the vertical but

[134] I conduct a *zäräfa* of some of the ideas of Foucault in this and following arguments. I draw on Michel Foucault for some aspects of my arguments: "What is critique?" in J. Schmidt, ed., *What is Enlightenment*? (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p.384; Michel Foucault, *Ethics,* ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Harley *et al*. (New York: New Press, 1994), pp. 315-6;

also for the horizontal dimension of Ethiopia's history. Due to the ethnic and religious plurality of its population, Ethiopia has multiple traditions, cultures, and diverse *nägär* that are active within the overarching history of Ethiopia. A *säm ena wärq* approach based on the *säm ena wärq* conception of unity—without mixture or separation—to the ethnic or cultural diversities that characterize Ethiopia could elicit the common *wärq*—the emancipatory aspirations—they share and make possible concerted actions for an alternative Ethiopia. The *säm ena wärq* driven critical internal journey establishes a critical dialogue between the unanswered questions of both the temporal and lateral dimensions of Ethiopia. The aim is to produce a commonly shared framework of understanding and of emancipatory ideas and norms that embrace the vertical and horizontal dimensions of Ethiopian society and history and make possible diversity-in-unity. I call the outcome of this process "surplus history."

Surplus history—the outcome of our critical internal journey—is the ensemble of critical surplus meanings of past and present *nägär*, including the lateral dimension, that express and articulate emancipatory ideas, norms, practices, visions, latencies, tendencies, possibilities, and utopian impulses and energies. It is the reservoir and incubator of utopian desires and energies, and a generator of *lissan* and new concepts; it brews an immanent critique of Ethiopian society, prefigures an alternative way of being, alludes to possible emancipatory paths and actions, and foreshadows an alternative Ethiopia. Surplus history exposes the unfinishedness and open-endedness of the Ethiopian past, of the undecidedness of Ethiopian history, and thus points to the heterogeneous possibilities that simmer in the present and makes the future radically dependent on what we Ethiopians do. Ethiopia's surplus history is the realm of "heterogeneous possibilities": the ensemble of *wärq* of the *nägär* of Ethiopia history past and present (vertically and horizontally). These are possibilities that the hegemonic order considers impossible in terms of its criteria of legitimation, evaluation, and possibilities.

Because manifest history adopts a mono-logical and linear narrative, it fails to grasp that which surplus history discloses: the presence of political, economic, and social "non-synchronicity" and social and political *andems* within Ethiopian history, and the possibility of an alternative Ethiopia that could have existed but has been repressed and is nevertheless present as the specter of a deferred emancipatory possibility that haunts contemporary Ethiopia. Surplus history expresses the multiple intermeshing and "non-synchronous" and *andem* temporalities in which heterogeneous possibilities articulate themselves.[135] Surplus history, as the womb of heterogeneous possibilities, affirms the possibility of historical leapfrogging and sidestepping, of historical *andems* and sideways moves, and of new paths of social transformation. It is the space where the "subjugated knowledge"—"knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naive knowledges, hierarchically inferior

[135] On non-synchronicity, see Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, trans. Neville and Stephen Plaice (London: Polity Press, 1991), pp. 97-116.

knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity"[136]—that has driven the resistance and emancipatory aspirations of exploited and oppressed Ethiopians simmers. Surplus history embodies "utopianism without utopia."

One could say, subjecting some of Ricoeur's ideas to *ZATZ*, that surplus history is an "extra-territorial" space that has "no place" in the hegemonic narrative of Ethiopian history.[137] The use of the *säm ena wärq* approach enables us to "suspends our beliefs" in the hegemonic order's desire, capacity and will to bring about emancipatory social transformations, and "suspends our disbelief" that another Ethiopia is possible.[138] We could then say, "From this 'no place' [surplus history] an exterior glance is cast on our reality, which suddenly looks strange, nothing more being taken for granted. The field of the possible is now beyond that of the actual; it is a field, therefore, for an alternative way of being."[139] As an extra-territorial site, surplus history provides the epistemic, cognitive, and affective space for the emergence of new parameters of intelligibility, evaluation, description, affect, interpretation, and commitments. It nurtures the possibility of conceiving a politics that changes things at the root. It fosters a critical historical consciousness that makes possible political judgments that are receptive to and promote the emancipatory aspirations and interests of Ethiopians. Unlike the linear temporality that structures the narrative of the hegemonic discourse, surplus history has a triple temporality that only the *säm ena wärq* approach and its *lissan* could grasp. A *ZATZ* of Ricoeur's reflection on temporality could help us articulate the *andem* temporalities that surplus history articulates as the alternative present of the past, the alternative present of the future, and the alternative present of the present.[140] As the bearer of the "not-yet" realized future, surplus history moves "backwards and forwards" and articulates the Ethiopian past, present, and future as open-ended and unfinished bearers of non-synchronous social times and processes that incubate emancipatory possibilities and an alternative Ethiopia. It awakens Ethiopians to their historical capacity to become the conceivers and makers of an Ethiopian society that expresses their emancipatory aspirations. Surplus history has no truck with the narratives that *quanqua*—be it popular, official, or scientific—produces. It gestates and articulates the *lissan*—the concepts, vocabularies, and expressions—adequate for conceptualizing unfreedoms and injustices in ways that enable us to envision the actions necessary to overcome them; it projects an alternative way of being.

Surplus history eschews the idea of teleology. From the perspective of surplus history, our future is determined neither by what we were in the past nor by what we are now. The reflexive

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[136] On "subjugated knowledge" see Michel Foucault, *Society must be defended*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), p.7; Michel Foucault, Power/*Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings,* 1972-1977, Colin Gordon, ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), pp.81-2.

[137] Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia,* ed. G.H. Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 16

[138] Ibid.

[139] Ibid.

[140] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 7-30.

säm ena wärq treatment of our present context in light of our desired "emancipated future" discloses what we have failed to become, what we could have become, and what we could become by rendering visible the heterogeneous possibilities that are invisible and inaudible to the linear narrative of history. Surplus history intimates that Ethiopians could enucleate and put to work the *wärq* of their history to bring about historical *andem*—a lateral move, a historical skipping and leapfrogging, a historical acceleration, and so forth—and break away from the kind of future that the hegemonic order projects.

Surplus history is indispensable for grasping what we could do and could become. Subjecting Milton Friedman's idea to *ZATZ*, we could say that surplus history keeps past and present emancipatory ideas, desires, and aspirations "alive and available *until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable*."[141] If as Goethe says, "Only humankind can do the impossible", we could say that Ethiopians can do the impossible when they appropriate their surplus history precisely because they are "humankind" in their surplus history, whereas they exist in their manifest history as oppressed and exploited beings, shut out from "the impossible."[142] Only as "humankind" could Ethiopians transform "*the politically impossible*" into the "*politically inevitable*." From the perspective of surplus history, Ethiopia is, to use Ernst Bloch's concept, a "not yet," because the Ethiopia that existed and exists is not the Ethiopia that our surplus history gestates. In this sense, Ethiopians are yet to "become Ethiopians". From the perspective of surplus history, history is made as the history of the future. Since the future does not yet have definite form and content, its very unpredictability requires engaged subjects who intervene and give the future form and content and render possible that which the hegemonic order, its 'development' discourse, and its linear and teleological narratives consider impossible.

An important idea that informs surplus history is that Ethiopians are, as subjects, *säm ena wärq* beings or *nägär.* As a *säm ena wärq* being, the Ethiopian subject is internally conflicted and articulates within itself a non-synchronicity expressive of heterogeneous possibilities. Emancipation requires that we engage in a *zäräfa* of ourselves that breaks the hegemonic order's static identities (the "official self": Ethiopians as ethnic beings under the Meles Zenawi regime, and so forth) and teleological shackles, and liberate that which is in us more than us, our *wärq*: the "surplus self" that is non-synchronous with the "official self." The surplus self is committed to

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[141] I am conducting a *zäräfa* of Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982), p. ix. He writes,

> Only a crisis—actual or perceived—produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on *the ideas that are lying around*. That, I believe, is our basic function: *to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable*. (emphasis added).

Milton Friedman is an ardent defender of capitalism, but one can divert his idea of "to keep them [alternatives] alive and available until the politically impossible becomes politically inevitable" for purposes other than the ones he defends.

[142] "Nur allein der Mensch / Vermag das Unmögliche", ("Only humankind / Can do the impossible") Goethe, *Das Göttliche* (*On the Divine*) (1783).

emancipation/*arnät* and engages in *hiss* and *gädl* to actualize it. What matters then is "what we *do*" and not "who we are." For surplus history, what we could be—free, equal, and just beings—and not who we are or were, is the focus of our reflection and actions, of our emancipatory aspirations and struggles. What we could be is an open question whose answers depend on what we *do* and not on who we were or are. Surplus history considers the question of "who are we?" a *säm* question, that congeals identity as destiny. From the perspective of surplus history, the question is not, "Are we Ethiopians?" but "Are we becoming Ethiopians?"—a people that constructs a context of life wherein every Ethiopian could freely and equally exercise his / her powers in ways that politically, economically, socially, and culturally enhance Ethiopian lives individually and collectively.

Surplus history has diagnostic and normative functions. It provides the basis for developing descriptive and normative-evaluative criteria for distinguishing between the immanent emancipatory possibilities and the empirical existence of Ethiopian society as well as for identifying, evaluating, and creating and implementing alternatives to those Ethiopian structures and relations that are embodiments of oppression, exploitation, inequalities, and unfreedoms. Surplus history, however, does not have causal powers of its own, although it provides the ethical, intellectual, and affective criteria and resources to grasp and enthuse subjects to act in ways that promote *arnät* / emancipation. It is graspable only from the site of a subjectivity that recognizes itself as *säm ena wärq* and engages in *hiss* and *gädl* to liberate its surplus self and to struggle thus for the emancipatory transformation of Ethiopia.

Säm ena wärq, critical external journey, and *Addis Andemta*

A *lissan* based critical external journey is the second dimension of crossing meaning-boundaries that *säm ena wärq* makes possible. This is a practice that has deep roots in Ethiopia's intellectual tradition. Ethiopia has a "manuscript culture"—writing, copying, interpreting, and translating—that has practiced for centuries the *ZATZ* of ideas and beliefs of external origin.[143] It is a practice that has enabled Ethiopians to express universal ideas and beliefs in uniquely Ethiopian ways. Claude Sumner notes in his study of Ethiopian philosophical texts from the Axumite period (The *Fisalgwos* or The *Physiologue*) and from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,

> Ethiopians never translate literally: they adapt, modify, add, subtract. A translation therefore bears a typically Ethiopian stamp: although the nucleus of what is translated is foreign to Ethiopia, the way it is assimilated and transferred into an indigenous reality is typically Ethiopian. [ ] *it is transformed beyond recognition*.[144]

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[143] Alessandro Bausi, "Writing, Copying, Translating: Ethiopia as a Manuscript Culture," in Jörg B. Quenzer, Dmitry Bondarev and Jan-Ulrich Sobisch, eds., *Manuscript Cultures: Mapping the Field* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), pp. 37-77.

[144] Claude Sumner, *Classical Ethiopian Philosophy* (Los Angeles: Adey Publishing Company, 1994), p.51. Emphasis added.

Säm ena wärq hermeneutics has always practiced a critical approach to foreign texts and ideas. It sought to traverse their *säm* and produce their *wärq*. In the process, foreign ideas and texts were "*transformed beyond recognition.*" We see here a hermeneutical tradition that practices what Oswald de Andrade calls a "trans-civilizational anthropophagi": the practice of "devouring, mastication, deglutition" of foreign ideas, and altering them "*beyond recognition*."[145] What appears to be *beyond recognition* from the perspective of those who produced the original knowledge is nevertheless recognizable from the perspective of the questions, needs, interests, and aspirations of Ethiopians. An Amharic word, "አንድምታ (*andemta*), derived from *andem*, refers to the knowledge produced through the activity of critical external journey. Negussie Andre Dominic notes in his study on *The Fetha Nägäst and its Ecclesiology*

> [The] word [*andem*] introduces an alternative meaning to a word or concept that needs more than an explanation. This word is notable for having skillfully integrated whatever element it has borrowed from outside into the local culture, frame of mind and language. The አንድምታ [*andemta,* i.e., the texts that result from andem interpretations of the thoughts of other cultures] is an excellent example of *interculturating texts written in foreign languages and in distant contexts into one's own Sitz im Leben* [life setting].[146]

Andemta, an interpretative practice "notable for having skillfully integrated whatever element it has borrowed from outside into the local culture, frame of mind and language" offers an example and a way for Ethiopians to engage in "trans-civilizational anthropophagi" of the social sciences and philosophies of the West—the West is currently the main source of these in Ethiopia—and others and avoid the fatal dangers of merely copying the ideas and theories of others and becoming drowned in "cultural cringe."[147] In the contemporary Ethiopian context, Ethiopia depends heavily on borrowed Western theories (the social sciences) to understand herself, her 'development', and her place in the world. Western social sciences present themselves as value neutral, rational, objective scientific theories that have universal authority, and, to use the language of the *Andemta* Commentary, the modern Ethiopian social scientist "breathes from the air his master [Western social science] breathes, … he rests where he rests, and … is found to preserve the teaching as he

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[145] Oswald de Andrade calls this process "trans-civilizational anthropophagi." Oswald de Andrade. "Manifesto Antropófago," http://www.ccgsm.gob.ar/areas/educacion/cepa/manifiesto_antropofago.pdf. Accessed on: 02/03/2014.

[146] Negussie Andre Dominic, *The Fetha Nägäst and its Ecclesiology* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), p.13, fn. 2. Emphasis added.

[147] On the place and meaning of *andemta* in the Ethiopian intellectual tradition, see R.W. Cowley, *The Traditional Interpretation of the Apocalypse of St John in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp.46-53; Roger W. Cowley, *Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation: A Study in Exegetical Tradition and Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). On "cultural cringe," see Arthur Angel Phillips, *On the Cultural Cringe, op.cit.*

has received it, without the slightest change, or difference of opinion."[148] The *säm ena wärq* approach rejects the practice of this uncritical borrowing that reigns in Ethiopian Studies, especially in the areas of political, economic, social and cultural development. The *säm ena wärq* approach sees Western theories as *nägär* or *säm ena wärq* and subjects them to the operations of *ZATZ* and in light of the questions, emancipatory interests and aspirations that Ethiopia's surplus history unveils. The critical external journey into Western knowledge conducted in terms of *säm ena wärq* and its strategies of *ZATZ* will transform them "beyond recognition". The outcome is the de-Westernization of Ethiopian Studies and the recognition of Ethiopians as the authors, thinkers, imaginers, and actors of what Ethiopia should become. This means the skillful transformation of whatever knowledge Ethiopians borrow from the West, in light of the emancipatory interests and aspirations elicited through the critical internal journey, and the integration of the results into Ethiopian "culture, frame of mind and language." I will call the outcome of this articulation of and critical dialogue between the critical internal and external journeys *Addis Andemta* (The *New Andemta*).

Addis Andemta fosters a language of social transformation that opens the path for Ethiopians to conceive alternative approaches for organizing Ethiopian political, economic, and social modernization in ways that respond to their emancipatory aspirations and interests. The production of *Addis Andemta* is rooted in the questions, aspirations, interests and needs that Ethiopia's surplus history articulates. As such, it listens attentively to the historically existing Ethiopian people and to their self-experiences, and pays attention to their emancipatory self-understandings, actions, practices, needs, hopes, interests, and aspirations for a better life. It affirms their agency, develops new coordinates of intelligibility, normativity, and evaluation consistent with their emancipatory interests and hopes, and opens the doors for ideas, norms and actions that transform emancipatory possibilities into necessity. Its goal is to provide the cognitive, descriptive, and normative categories that grasp the new historical experiences from an emancipatory perspective and that give a theoretical and normative foundation to a politics that changes Ethiopian conditions at the root.

Addis Andemta does not mean that the knowledge created in the West (or elsewhere) is irrelevant to Ethiopians. *Addis Andemta* recognizes the fact that one cannot understand Ethiopian conditions in ways conducive to thinking critically about the emancipatory social transformation of Ethiopia if one does not consider her multi-dimensional integration as a subaltern state into the capitalist global, political, economic, academic, and cultural structures and relations. *Addis Andemta* does not mean neglecting the emancipatory achievements that have become part of the struggle for human dignity, particularly since the "Radical Enlightenment"—the various forward-looking revolutions that have marked the history of humanity in the quest for emancipation from political oppression, economic exploitation, and cultural immiserization. It is incontestable that the emancipatory aspects of the knowledge that the West has produced are in some sense relevant to Ethiopia. However, the question is in what sense are they relevant and how could we purge them

[148] Roger W. Cowley, "Old Testament Introduction in the Andemta Commentary Tradition", *Journal of Ethiopian Studies,* vol.12, 1 (1974), p.170.

of their oppressive and exploitive dimensions and appropriate them to serve positively our specific emancipatory interests. *Addis Andemta* works on the basis that Western knowledge is productively available to us only if we force-march and transform it through *ZATZ*, mediated by the interrogations, emancipatory aspirations, needs, interests, and practices that Ethiopia's surplus history articulates.

S*äm ena wärq* and its *ZATZ* approach are necessary because the history that gave rise to Western social science is also the history of the imposition of Western power on the rest of the world through colonialism, imperialism, neo-colonialism, liberalism, and neo-liberalism. Consider how in the very process of proclaiming freedom and equality, the American Revolution (1775) and the French Revolution (1789) excluded slaves and the colonized from the "right to have rights."[149] In addition, consider how, even in the 21st century, the West promotes and finances the expansion of sweatshops or "industrial parks" in contemporary Ethiopia (and other "poor" countries) and provides the tools, methods, and weapons of repression to Ethiopian (and others) governments, despite its incessant "defense" of human rights.[150] The modernity that Western social science concepts of "development" express is the offspring of "coloniality"—the material (political and economic) and epistemological power of domination that is the context of the emergence of the concepts of the social sciences.[151] From the *säm ena wärq* perspective, we could say that the knowledge relation between Ethiopia and the West is articulated through a triple domination, to wit, economic, political, and epistemic. Consequently, the claims that the concepts of the social sciences express universality, objectivity, and value-neutrality are indissociable from the West's exercise of triple domination, because the claims are integral to the West's quest to understand itself and the others it controls and exploits, perched on its historical site of planetary supremacy and from the perspective of its political, economic, and intellectual powers and horizons.[152] Once we accept that Western knowledge is a *säm ena wärq* phenomenon, its relevance to Ethiopia cannot be a given, nor something that imposes itself on Ethiopians irrespective of their

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[149] Nick Nesbit, *The Haitian Revolution and the Radical Enlightenment*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008); Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009). "The right to have rights" is Hannah Arendt's formulation.

[150] Theodore H. Moran, *Beyond Sweatshops: Foreign Direct Investment and Globalization in Developing Countries* (Washington: The Brookings Institute, 2002). "UK tenders to train Ethiopian paramilitaries accused of abuses," *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jan/10/ethiopia-forces-human-rights-funding. Accessed 2014/06/25.

[151]Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000). Coloniality forms not only the social sciences but also Western philosophy. Justin E.H. Smith, *Nature, Human Nature, and Human Difference: race in early Modern Philosophy,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997).

[152]Immanuel Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism with Capitalist Civilization* (London: Verso, 2011); Enrique Dussel, ''Beyond Eurocentrism: The World-System and the Limits of Modernity,'' in *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. F. Jameson and M. Miyoshi (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 3-31.

emancipatory aspirations, interests, and needs. One could gauge the relevance of Western knowledge to Ethiopians only after one has "decentered" it from its forms and contents that are expressive of the triple domination that mediates the relations between Ethiopia and the West and subjected it to a process of a *säm ena wärq* driven "trans-civilizational anthropophagi."

The emancipatory questions and aspirations, the interests and needs that inform Ethiopian history, *nägär*, and intellectual traditions are nowhere present in the development of Western social science concepts, methodologies, and teleological models. Ethiopian questions, aspirations, needs, and interests are external to the West's parameters of universality. Consequently, we need, as Mignolo puts it, to forge "an epistemic space [free] from the colonial difference." [153] The *säm ena wärq* approach makes possible the creation of an epistemic space free from the distortions that West's political, economic, and intellectual domination inflict on our self-understanding, the world, and our relation to the world. This should not mean, however, that the *säm ena wärq* approach assumes that there is a pristine Ethiopian reality, identity, or culture to be retrieved. There is no such thing. Ethiopian history is not a history of isolation. It has long-standing relations with the Levant and beyond. Moreover, Western interests have directly or indirectly influenced Ethiopia, at least since the 16th century, politically, economically, and culturally.[154] *Addis Andemta* is not a search for authenticity or a quest for a putatively uncontaminated Ethiopian culture or identity, for there is no such entity.

One may argue that the *säm ena wärq* driven de-Westernization of the social sciences in Ethiopian studies will lead to a "misunderstanding" of the social sciences, thus emptying them of their usefulness. One may even argue, as Emmanuel Lévinas does, that de-Westernization would lead to disorientation.[155] However, several reasons neutralize these objections. First, the "misunderstanding" objection assumes that Western knowledge and practices do not have *säm ena wärq* characteristics. Given the historicity of *nägär*, which Western knowledge is from the perspective of *säm ena wärq*, one cannot accept this claim at face value. From the *säm ena wärq* hermeneutical perspective, *nägär* could have meanings that the authors of the *nägär* and the social scientists studying them may not perceive. Given that one cannot totally sever and insulate the process of knowledge production from the historical and sociological context in which it is produced, one cannot exclude that the process of knowledge production and the knowledge it generates could bear within themselves not only multiple meanings but also blind spots and elements of misidentification and misunderstanding of the *nägär* whose meanings they claim to

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[153] Walter D. Mignolo, "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*101:1, (Winter 2002), pp. 57-96, p. 80; Walter D. Mignolo, op.cit. note 151.

[154] C.F. Beckingham *The Prester John of the Indies: A True Relation of the Lands of the Prester John, being the narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Ethiopia in 1520, written by Father Francisco Alvares. Volumes I-II* (London: Routledge, 2010); Leonardo Cohen, *The Missionary Strategies of the Jesuits in Ethiopia (1555-1632) (*Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009).

[155] Lévinas writes, "Mais la sarabande des cultures innombrables et équivalentes, chacune se justifiant dans son propre contexte, crée un monde, certes, dés-occidentalisé, mais aussi un monde désorienté." Emmanuel Lévinas, *Humanisme de l'autre homme* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1978), p. 60.

disclose. From the *säm ena wärq* hermeneutical perspective, *nägär* is polysemous and open to interpretations and misinterpretations. It is a *säm ena wärq* phenomenon and the knowledge we have of *nägär* must be subject to *ZATZ* in order to elicit its *wärq* or emancipatory possibilities.

A second response to the objection that de-Westernizing knowledge in Ethiopian studies leads to "misunderstanding" of the social sciences relates to the distinction between productive and non-productive misunderstanding. From the perspective of *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics, an unproductive misunderstanding is one that does not subvert and disqualify oppressive and exploitive relations or perpetuates them in other forms. Such a misunderstanding renders the produced knowledge inimical to the emancipatory aspirations of Ethiopians and must be rejected. There is, on the other hand, what one could call "productive misreading," "productive misunderstanding," or "overreading."[156] An overreading, a productive misreading, or a productive misunderstanding, is one that promotes the emancipatory interests and aspirations of Ethiopians. To quote Foucault from a *ZATZ* perspective, we could say that when we read Western knowledge, the only way we could pay "tribute" to it "is precisely to use it, to deform it, to make it groan and protest", and "if commentators then say that [we are] being faithful or unfaithful [to the work we subject to *ZATZ*], that is of absolutely no interest."[157] That is to say, what is important is not the misreading but the productivity of the misreading. If the misreading is a source of a more comprehensive understanding that enables us to pursue and actualize the emancipatory interests of Ethiopians, it is not a misreading from the perspective of the latter, even if our reading transforms what is read "*beyond recognition*," to use Sumner's characterization of the Ethiopian tradition of appropriating foreign texts.[158] Productive misunderstandings reorient our quest of understanding

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[156] Žižek makes a similar point. According to him, productive misreading is the engine that transforms theories and takes them into new territories. He writes, "in the history of philosophy were…many cases of misunderstanding: Aristotle misunderstood Plato, Thomas Aquinas misunderstood Aristotle, Hegel misunderstood Kant and Shelling, Marx misunderstood Hegel, Nietzsche misunderstood Christ, Heidegger misunderstood Hegel…" Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies: Deleuze and Consequences* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. ix. One may add to this history of productive misreading Mao's productive misreading of Marx that transformed a theory whose object was social transformation in the advanced capitalist societies of Western Europe into a theory of revolution in agrarian societies, and Fanon's productive misreading of Hegel's master-slave dialectic to develop a powerful critique of racism. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. C. L. Markman (London: Pluto Press 1986). One may consider as "overreading" these productive mis-readings. Such over-readings are productive for they open new horizons of reflection and new understandings. See Colin Davis, *Critical excess: overreading in Derrida, Deleuze, Levinas, Žižek and Cavell* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

[157] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon Press, 1980), pp.53-4. He writes, "The only valid tribute to thought such as Nietzsche's is precisely to use it, to deform it, to make it groan and protest. And if commentators then say that I am being faithful or unfaithful to Nietzsche, that is of absolutely no interest."

[158] Claude Sumner, *Classical Ethiopian Philosophy* (Los Angeles: Adey Publishing Company, 1994), p.51. Emphasis added.

Ethiopian conditions from the dominant questions and aims of Western social science, and particularly 'development' theories, towards new questions, directions, domains, goals, and theories rooted in Ethiopian questions, interests, and aspirations. To cite Mannheim, "productive misunderstanding is often a condition of continuing life."[159]

Lévinas's objection that de-Westernization leads to disorientation assumes that the universal resides only in the West, and de-Westernization of knowledge leads then to a loss of the universal. Lévinas wrongly assumes that to reject the "universal" and the "rational" as the historical West conceives them is to reject the universal and the rational *per se* or to reject universality and rationality; it is to assume that everything worthwhile for human life has already been achieved in the West, and that there is nothing new for the rest of us to discover about the universal and the rational. These are questionable assumptions.

The telos of *säm ena wärq*

We can now raise the question that modern studies of *qiné* and *säm ena wärq* hardly raise: what is the telos of *säm ena wärq*? To rephrase it in *qiné* vocabulary, what is the *wärq* of *säm ena wärq*? What changes in Ethiopian conditions made possible the emergence of *säm ena wärq* as a way of questioning, formulating, and understanding the world and personal and social life? Why did this questioning take the form of *säm ena wärq*? Answering these questions requires that we conduct an archeology of *qiné* and disclose *qiné*'s memory of its historical gestation.

Qiné develops within an Ethiopian history marked by political conflicts and fragmentation, economic crises, dynastic struggles, wars, territorial expansion, the oppression and exploitation of the peasantry, peasant resistance and uprisings, and various local rebellions. Consider some of the historical contexts in which *qiné* developed**:** the turbulent period between the epoch of Saint Yared (505-571 AD) and the rise and fall of the Zagwe dynasty (1150-1270 AD), the re-emergence of the Solomonian dynasty in 1270, and, with it, the formation of Medieval Ethiopia characterized by endless wars and struggles for power, the fusion of church and state, and the emergence of heretic movements such as the *Ewostatewos,* the *Michaelites,* and the *Däqiqä Estifanos.* Medieval Ethiopia was an era of despotism, of "great terror and fear among all the people of Ethiopia."[160] The Grañ war, the disintegration of Medieval Ethiopia, the spread of Islam, the fragmentation of imperial rule during the *Zämänä Mäsafint* (1706-1855), the chaotic failure of the first effort at "modernizing" Ethiopia under Emperor Tewodros (1855-68), the mobilization and the war against Italy in 1896, the Italian fascist invasion, its defeat, and the return of the monarchy (1935-41), and

[159] Kurt H. Wolff, ed., *From Karl Mannheim,* (New Brunswick: Transition Publishers, 1993), p.380.

[160] Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopian Royal Chronicles* (Los Angeles: Tsehai Publishers, 2010), p. 25; Taddesse Tamrat writes of Zära Yaqob, the 15th century emperor, that he "was a despot." Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270-1527* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 240; Sergew Hable Sellassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History* (Addis Ababa: United Printers, 1972).

the various regional resistances and peasant uprisings that punctuate Ethiopian history, all contributed to the opacity and complexity of the Ethiopian context of life.[161]

One could hypothesize that during these turbulent times, Ethiopians confronted bewildering and painful burdens and arbitrariness in their daily lives. They experienced the interminable abuses of their rulers and the incomprehensible workings of power and were victims of the incessant economic and political violence of the ruling elites. The experiences of arbitrary rule and violence are encapsulated in the medieval appeal of the people to *BäHig Amlak* (በኅግ አምላክ, meaning the God of Law) whenever they addressed their rulers in quest of justice, implying that the "law of man" is arbitrary and divorced from justice and that justice could be done only through the "Law of God."[162] The entreaty "May God enlighten you" (እግዜአብሔር ያሳይዎ, *egzi-abher ya'sayewo*) that the people addressed to the ruler, hoping that he would be able to rise above the confusion and injustices of the times, accompanied the appeal to the *BäHig Amlak*. The unrelenting exploitation of the peasantry and the ceaseless political conflicts among the ruling nobilities created widespread social and personal sufferings and made experiences increasingly opaque and unpredictable, giving rise to doubts and questions about the true meaning of events and of what people do and say. The emergence of *säm ena wärq* appears to indicate a realization of the contingency, opacity, insecurity, ambiguity and contradictions of meanings, social relations and practices, and of the emergence of suspicion and of skepticism regarding the reality of "reality" (*ewen*) and of "appearance" (*mälk*), of the claims of knowledge regarding both, and of the assertions about the true and the good. The birth and development of *säm ena wärq* signals the increasing belief in the impenetrable aporias of social existence, in the realization that appearance and reality are complex and ambiguous, and the true meaning of a situation is different from what it appears to be and from what one first believes it is, and that eliciting it requires *gädl* or struggle. For the *säm ena wärq* approach, to accept something in its immediacy is to surrender to the *quanqua* of the hegemonic order. *Säm ena wärq* has thus a multifaceted historical and conceptual profile. One could see it as an intellectual response to the experience that the world is more like a material whose appearance and reality terrestrial and church authorities mold and remold as if it were *säm* or wax, according to motivations, needs and interests that are often obscure not only to the ruled but also perhaps even to the rulers themselves. These conditions seem to have led to the recognition that polysemy, ambiguity, misunderstandings, distortions, misconstructions, confusions, illusions, deceptions, and falsehoods permeate social life and communication. One of the important questions with which history confronted Ethiopians could be summarised as follows: How do we emancipate ourselves from the distortions that prevent us from understanding our conditions so that we could differentiate the true from the false, the good from the malevolent, and change life for the better? The historically emerging answer to this question seems to have been

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[161] Harold G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Abir Mordechai, *Ethiopia: The Era of the Princes* (Los Angeles: Tsehai Publishers, 2011). Gebru Tareke, *Ethiopia: Power and Protest* (Cambridge University Press, New York 1991).

[162]Getatchew Haile, ደቂቀ እስጢፋኖስ በኅግ አምላክ, trans. from Ge'ez by Dr. Getatchew Haile (Collegeville, MN. 2004).

an approach that requires questioning, unpacking, critiquing, and interpreting experiences and all *nägär* as *säm ena wärq* phenomena in order to reconstruct the "true and the good" out of the distortions, opacities, and confusions of the time.

One could thus reasonably assume that *säm ena wärq* expresses an intellectual response to the question on how to comprehend and evaluate *nägär* in the complex, conflict-pervaded, and suffering-suffused Ethiopian context of existence. *Säm ena wärq* is about the capacity to recognize and formulate the problems that confront us in terms of their complexity. It is about enucleating or developing new principles or *wärq* from within and through the *säm* of Ethiopian life, society, and history for the understanding of Ethiopian life, society, and history. *Säm ena wärq* formulates new ways to look at old and unfamiliar problems; it enables us to raise new questions and develop new concepts for understanding *nägär* in the complex, oppression-ridden Ethiopian conditions of life. It transgresses the hegemonic language of domination or *quanqua*, problematizes and subverts it, and contributes to the development of *lissan*—new concepts, vocabularies, and expressions—that could grasp the nature and mechanisms of the unfreedoms that afflict Ethiopians and point to the ways of overcoming these unfreedoms. As the practice of *ZATZ* shows, *qiné* gives primacy to processes and practices and puts in motion even that which is "stagnant", to use Alaka Imbakom Kalewold's vocabulary.[163] In an Ethiopian society marked by widespread social sufferings, the *säm ena wärq* of Amharic *qiné* marks the transition from the Ge'ez religious discourse on "The Fall of Man" and salvation to a non-religious discourse on social sufferings and the possibilities of understanding their causes and of overcoming them in the here and now. Thus, one sees in Amharic *qiné* the pervasive presence of the themes of powerlessness, injustice, sorrow, distress, pain, misery, *hazzan* (ሐዘን)*, tikäza* (ትካዛ), and utopian aspirations, (ተስፋ, *täsfa*) sometimes expressed as a remembered "future-in-the-past" (ትዝታ, *tizita*).

This brings us to our question: what is the *wärq* of *säm ena wärq* in Amharic *qiné*? The emergence of *säm ena wärq* as a search for *wärq*— "the true and the good"—in the middle of an Ethiopian context of life riddled with oppression, exploitation, and the opacity of power suggests a quest for an emancipation from the social sufferings, political violence, obscurity, and despair that blanketed Ethiopia. The *säm ena wärq* tradition harbors the critical idea that *wärq* is emancipation / *arnät* (ኣርነት) from the distortions of *nägär*, of its appearances and reality, and from the injustices and social sufferings that the hegemonic order inflicts on Ethiopians. Amharic *qiné* liberates itself from the idea of otherworldly redemption and intimates that there is *wärq* in the here and now; that there are emancipatory possibilities in society, and that our understanding could grasp these if we were to articulate them in a "way" that allows critical formulations and interpretation of *nägär*: experiences, relations, events, and so forth. The "way" the Ethiopian productive cultural imagination invented to pursue this task is the *säm ena wärq* mode of conceptualizing and interpreting *nägär*.

The quest for *wärq* through the *säm ena wärq* approach is then a quest for an understanding of the tensions and contradictions that inhabit Ethiopian *nägär* in terms of their potential and

[163] Alaka Imbakom Kalewold, *Traditional Ethiopian Church Education*, trans. Menghestu Lemma (New York: Teachers College Press, 1970), p.28.

possibilities as sources of emancipation from the *säm* of Ethiopian life. It is a struggle for a language that grasps the social sufferings of Ethiopians in ways that open possibilities and paths for emancipation. Considered in terms of its historical contexts of emergence, one could say that Amharic *qiné* and its main trope, *säm ena wärq*, are, in an important sense, the voice of suffering Ethiopians, the poetic rendition of a philosophy of struggle / *gädl,* a critique of a wrong way of life, and the expression of the hope that another Ethiopia is possible.

Säm ena wärq introduces the idea that the production of emancipation / *arnät* (ኦርነት) requires breaking through the "shackles," to use the *andemta* word, of the given. From the perspective of the hegemonic order, the *qiné* practice of bursting through the frontiers of the given often appears as an exaggeration. However, from the *qiné* hermeneutical perspective, what appears as an exaggeration is an overreading of the given that subverts *quanqua* and enables us to disclose what it represses and hides and enucleate the emancipatory possibilities that inhabit and articulate *nägär*. Thus, one must note the importance of what appears to be an exaggeration in the formulation of *säm ena wärq*, brought about by the practices of *ZATZ*. As Comay puts it in her study of Hegel and the French Revolution, "exaggeration reveals uncomfortable features of experience that would otherwise be invisible."[164] The same is true in *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics. *Säm ena wärq* formulations and *ZATZ* resort to overreading of *nägär* in ways that generate "exaggerations" in order to break through the barriers of *quanqua* and its frontiers of appearance and reality, of possibility and impossibility. The point is to render visible, audible, and thinkable the possibilities of emancipation / *arnät* (ኦርነት) that the hegemonic discourse and practice render unthinkable, invisible, and inaudible. Only then, could we disclose the *wärq*—the possibilities of emancipation / *arnät* (ኦርነት)— signaled by what appear as "exaggerations" in the practice of *säm ena wärq* and *ZATZ*.

The *säm ena wärq* quest for *wärq* through the understanding of the emancipatory content of what Ethiopians do and say and of the social structures and relations that articulate their lives presupposes an objectively good society. This presupposition is the tacit or non-articulated ground for generating *säm ena wärq* concepts that identify, explain, and help Ethiopians understand the unfreedoms, inequalities and injustices that afflict Ethiopia, and for developing a normative social alternative: an Ethiopian society that is free from oppression, exploitation, exclusion, and ignorance. The *säm ena wärq* practice thus bears within itself the idea that the conceptual tools necessary for theorizing and implementing emancipation/*arnät* are immanent to Ethiopian society. The distinction between *wärq* and *säm*, between that which is immanent in an object and its empirical, or *säm*, existence, and the immanent critique that the *qiné* practice of *ZATZ* deploys, all presuppose the idea that another way of life—*arnät* (ኦርነት)—free from the sufferings and impenetrability of Ethiopian society is possible. *Säm ena wärq* hermeneutics aims to disclose the processes that produce the *säm* of the Ethiopian context of life, and how the processes that generate the *säm* block, frustrate, and repress the actualization of that which is immanent in Ethiopian conditions and *nägär*, to wit, *arnät* (ኦርነት). For *qiné* hermeneutics, not only the telos or *wärq* of

[164] Rebecca Comay, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution"* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), p.96.

säm ena wärq is emancipation / *arnät*, but also the activity of producing *wärq* through a critical interpretation of Ethiopian *nägär* considered as *säm ena wärq* is itself an emancipatory activity that contributes to the emergence of emancipatory social consciousness, and thus to the advent of subjects committed to emancipation / *arnät*. The historical event, discussed earlier, of the massacre of *azmaris* during the Italian occupation (1936-41), ordered by Graziani in 1937, because he found them to be "among the most dangerous disruptors of public order," attests to the power of *säm ena wärq* to generate emancipatory social consciousness.[165] In the context of contemporary Ethiopia, the idea that the *wärq* of *säm ena wärq* is emancipation/*arnät* offers a productive and critical way of understanding and overcoming the continual confounding of 'development' theories and policies, and of the various reforms and revolutions by Ethiopian realities.

From the *qiné* perspective, Ethiopians must recognize not only that all *nägär* are *säm ena wärq* phenomena, but that they themselves are also *säm ena wärq* beings. Who they are is not circumscribed by the parameters of identity and actions that the hegemonic order establishes. They are not only beings socialized without a remainder into the hegemonic values and practices such that they experience the existing order as if it were a natural order, self-sufficient and without a beyond. which is precisely what the hegemonic order would like them to believe.[166] They are also other than what the hegemonic order conceives them to be. As *säm ena wärq* beings, they are a "unity" of their identification with the social order ("without separation") as well as of their opposition to it ("without mixture"). There is an "*ena*" in every Ethiopian subject that articulates a friction between subservience (*säm*) and resistance (*wärq*) to the hegemonic order. The implication then is that Ethiopians must subject themselves to *ZATZ,* emancipate themselves from their *säm* selves, and actualize their *wärq*: their "surplus self"—the subjectivity committed to emancipation/*arnät*.

Mischaracterizing *säm ena wärq*

The above explorations of *säm ena wärq* provide us with the context necessary to discuss the errors of the mechanistic and dualist misinterpretations of *säm ena wärq* that is hegemonic in Ethiopian Studies. One could trace the errors of these interpretations to the uncritical borrowing of the perspectives, methods, and categories of Western social science in Ethiopian studies, which has led to the neglect of the history and practice of *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics and its concepts of *ena*, *zäybé*, *hibrä qal*, *andem*, *tirgum*, *qisäla*, *qiné nätäqa*, *qiné zäräfa*, *zäräfa mälash*, *hiss*, *ewen*, *ewnät*, *ewqät*, *tintina*, *tichit, hatäta*, *lissan*, and *gädl.* One of the consequences of the neglect of the *säm ena wärq* hermeneutical tradition is the conflation of circumstantial and classical *qiné*.

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[165] Anne Bolay, "Les poètes-musiciens éthiopiens (azmari) et leurs constructions identitaires: Des marginaux qui aspirent à la normalité", *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 44, 176 (2004), pp. 815-839, p. 821. See below also.

[166] The *Däqiqä Estifanos* are the first in the history of Ethiopian political thought to point out the relation between society, politics, and human nature. Getatchew Getatchew Haile, trans., ደቂቀ እስጢፋኖስ በጎግ አምላክ, trans. from Ge'ez by Dr. Getatchew Haile (Collegeville, MN. 2004)

The mechanical interpretation of *qiné*, hegemonic in Ethiopian studies misrepresents the *säm ena wärq* in classical *qiné* as a method of wrapping in a pre-given "wax" (*säm*) a pre-given "gold" (*wärq*). It assumes external and mechanical relations between the *säm* and the *wärq*. According to Donald Levine, *säm ena wärq* would be "a form built of two semantic layers. The apparent, figurative meaning of the words is called wax; their more or less hidden actual significance is the "gold."[167] Levine, like all those who consider *säm ena wärq* from the Western social science perspective, gives no consideration to any of the *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics concepts mentioned above. Levine's characterization may be true for circumstantial *qiné* but not for classical *qiné*.

Consider the following circumstantial *qiné*: እናት አባት ንቃ ወጥታ ከፈቃድ (*scorning her parents and disobeying them) /* እያት ይህችን ልጅ ባልጋ ስትሄድ (*behold the disobedient girl running away from home*)[168] This is a circumstantial *qiné* in that, once we know its context—the unexpected death of a young girl—it delivers its *wärq* promptly: the anguish her parents feel. A circumstantial *qiné* treats a specific topic, located in a specific time, and refers to specific conditions, events and persons. In circumstantial *qiné*, the *ena* of *säm ena wärq* does not interduce an epistemic friction that requires that we go beyond the information given in the circumstantial *qiné* to elicit a meaning that eludes it. Its meaning is strictly bounded by what we observe and has no significance for issues external to these observations. Circumstantial *qiné* is a condensed narrative of an event.

Classical *qiné* requires that we go beyond observables and unveil the conditions and the processes that generate the *säm* in its interconnections with its internal and external contexts for eliciting its repressed dimensions and virtual (in the *mäsiya zäybé* sense) surplus meanings for grasping the *wärq* of *nägär*: the situation, the social practice, the event, and so forth. The composition and interpretation of classical *qiné* brings into play *ZATZ*, *hiss*, *tintina*, *tichit*, *hatäta*, gäd, and *lissan.* In classical *qiné*, "*ena*" does not simply juxtapose the *säm* and the *wärq.* It does not signify the wrapping of a pre-given *wärq* by a pre-given *säm*, as Levine claims. It embodies the contradictory "unity" (in the *qiné* sense) of the *säm* and it's "other," and the epistemic frictions expressed in the internal tensions and contradictions of the *qiné*. *Ena* in classical *qiné* thus calls for a critical interpretation that often requires the creation of concepts for an adequate understanding of the *qiné*, its *säm ena wärq*, and its subject matter. Classical *qiné* is a condensed theory or philosophy. It is wrong then to consider *säm ena wärq* as a mere conjunction "of two semantic layers" when one deals with classical *qiné*. Unlike circumstantial *qiné*, the *wärq* is not "more or less hidden" in the *säm*, as Levine writes. To paraphrase a *qiné* master, the *wärq* is no more hidden in the *säm* than a *gäbäta* (ገበታ, a three-legged stool common in Ethiopia) is hidden in the wood out of which it is made. One produces the *wärq* through a critical interpretative labor on the *säm ena wärq,* its *qiné,* and its subject matter, as one produces, metaphorically speaking, the *gäbäta* from the wood by first imagining the kind of *gäbäta* one wants, acquiring the knowledge, skill, and tools necessary to give form to that which one has imagined or formulated in thought,

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[167] Donald D. Levine, *Wax and Gold,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 5.

[168] Ngusse Nagaw Dagaga, የቅኔ አፈታት ዜዳዎች ና የምርጥ ቅኔዎች ስብስብ, Second edition (Addis Ababa: Mega, 1993), p. 85 #707.

working on the wood using the imagination, knowledge and skills appropriate for completing the project, thus transforming and giving the piece of wood a new form and a social meaning it never had. Reducing the whole tradition of *qiné* to its popular variety, i.e., circumstantial *qiné*, is like reducing all English poetry to doggerels. The conflation of circumstantial and classical *qiné* is a social science inspired semantic *coup d'état* that overthrows and banishes classical *qiné* in the name of modernization or "the rationalistic aspects of modern culture," as Donald Levine puts it.[169]

The second type of mischaracterization emerges from the depiction of *säm ena wärq* as dualistic, in the Platonic sense. Mohammed Girma claims "The wax and gold paradigm shares a cosmological framework with Platonic dualism."[170] Based on his conception of *säm ena wärq* as dualistic, he states that it functions as a method for avoiding change. He writes**,**

> Interestingly, the wax and gold paradigm *does not leave new ideas unaccounted for*; it rather seems to be dealing with them in two ways: *domestication and excommunication.* Domestication, as it were, does not presuppose any significant change on the part of the 'domesticator.' Its main intention nevertheless *is cutting and tailoring the incoming ideas to fit the already existing conceptions*. Therefore, any move to change in the wax and gold paradigm aims at anything but *avoiding inherent change.* If somebody, or some entity, for that matter, insists on demanding a particular change from the paradigm itself, it faces *excommunication*, *or even extinction.*[171] [Emphases added]

The claims made (see added emphasis) in the paragraph are staggering in that they run counter to the whole tradition of the composition and interpretation of classical *qiné* and its *säm ena wärq*. It ignores the history of the emergence of *säm ena wärq* as a way of questioning the world. It discounts the dynamic and transformative roles that *ena*, *ZATZ*, *hiss*, *tintina*, *tichit*, *hatäta*, *lissan*, and *gädl* play in the composition and interpretation of classical *qiné* and *säm ena wärq.* Despite the complex nature of *säm ena wärq* in classical *qiné* composition and interpretation, Mohammed asserts that the dualism of the *säm ena wärq* is exhaustive, dogmatic, and neither novelty nor change would be conceivable in its light.

In light of the history and practice of *säm ena wärq* in classical *qiné*, it is a mischaracterization to say that *säm ena wärq* is dualistic. Rather, as argued earlier, *säm ena wärq* embodies a duality without dualism that expresses an extimate relation between the *säm* and the *wärq* and generates a non-dualistic mode of reflection, making duality a *zäybé* that requires critical

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[169] Donald D. Levine, *Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972)*,* pp.10-11

[170] Mohammed Girma, *Understanding Religion and Social Change in Ethiopia: Toward a hermeneutic of Covenant* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 30. Messay Kebede also holds a similar view. Messay Kebede, *Survival and Modernization Ethiopia's Enigmatic Present: A Philosophical Discourse* (Lawrenceville: The Red Sea Press, 1999), p.182, 190-1.

[171] "Mohammed Girma, "Whose Meaning? The wax and Gold Tradition as a Philosophical Foundation for an Ethiopian Hermeneutic" *Sophia,* 50 (2011), pp 175-187, 180.

interpretation. The role of incompleteness in *qiné* hermeneutics and the practices of *ZATZ* that transform a *wärq* into *säm*, or produces a *wärq* out of *säm*, belie Mohammed's claim that "the wax and gold paradigm shares a cosmological framework with Platonic dualism." *Qiné* practices indicate that applying the Platonic idea, which identifies being with self-identity and permanence, to *säm ena wärq*, ignores the incompleteness and the processual nature that is inherent to *säm ena wärq* hermeneutics. For Plato, not only substance remains self-identical, it is also what remains permanent when it changes. This is in direct contradiction to the *qiné* hermeneutical practice that considers the *ena* as the articulator of tensions that traverse both *säm* and *wärq*, signalling that not only the *säm* but the *wärq* also is incomplete and open to transformation.

Mohammed's dualistic interpretation of *säm ena wärq* tacitly replaces the "*ena*" (and) of *säm ena wärq* with the disjunctive *wäyim* (or), changing furtively *säm ena wärq* (ሰም እና ወርቅ) to *säm wäyim wärq* (ሰም ወይም ወርቅ), i.e., *säm* or *wärq*. He thus reduces *säm ena wärq* to a dichotomy where the two terms—*säm, wärq*—are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive. He obliterates the epistemological friction that "*ena*" introduces in the *säm ena wärq*, leaving no space for the tensions and contradictions that articulate the *säm ena wärq*. No wonder then that Mohammed Girma claims that the *säm ena wärq* squashes all "new ideas" through "domestication and excommunication" and that it embodies resistance to change.

Consider Alaka Inbakom Kalewold's characterization of *qiné* education, quoted earlier, as a dynamic process that enables the student "to see new lights and fresh angles," as "a running stream," and as a way of going beyond "the stagnant pool" of settled knowledge. [172] Consider also the practice of *andem* that breaks through the "shackles of tradition," and the *zäräfa*, *zäybé*, and *tirgum* interpretative practices that transform the given, be it Ethiopian or foreign, "beyond recognition," to use Sumner's words.[173] Mohammed treats *säm ena wärq* as a "stagnant pool"; he handles "*säm*" and "*wärq*" as self-contained, static, and mutually exclusive categories that offer no "new lights and fresh angles" on *nägär*. He fails to consider the assumption of incompleteness of *säm* and *wärq*, of *ewqät* and *ewnät*, of appearance and reality (of *mälk* and *ewen*) and of their "interinvolvement" with each other. Consequently, he fails to see that *säm ena wärq* is an open-ended approach for questioning and understanding the world.

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[172] Alaka Imbakom Kalewold, *Traditional Ethiopian Church Education,* trans. Menghestu Lemma (New York: Teachers College Press, 1970), p.28.

[173] Claude Sumner, *Classical Ethiopian Philosophy* (Los Angeles: Adey Publishing Company, 1994), p.51.