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Reimagining Ethiopian History: A Gadamerian Reading of Alemayehu Wassie's Miteralion

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Abstract
This study explores the reimagining of Ethiopian history in contemporary Amharic fiction, focusing on Alemayehu Wassie's Miteralion (2014), through the theoretical lens of historiographic metafiction and Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy. It analyses how the novel reimagines Ethiopian history as a narrative, interpretive, and ethically charged discourse rather than a fixed historical record. Through close textual analysis, the study explores key postmodern strategies, including mythic ancestry, symbolic naming, the reconstruction of sacred geography, and the tragic representation of Emperor Tewodros II within the context of colonial encounters. The findings demonstrate that Miteralion redefines Ethiopian national identity not through biological descent or imperial legitimacy, but through ethical inheritance grounded in wisdom, moral responsibility, and collective memory. By mobilising myth and history as critical tools rather than sources of political legitimation, the novel interrogates the moral failures of the present while reconfiguring the past as a dialogic space of interpretation. This study contributes to Ethiopian literary scholarship and postmodern historiography by highlighting the transformative role of historiographic metafiction in reshaping historical consciousness, national memory, and identity formation in contemporary Amharic fiction.

Keywords
Historiographic, Metafiction, Postmodernism, Amharic Novel, Cultural Memory

1. Introduction
Ethiopian history is preserved and transmitted through a rich layering of oral traditions, mythic accounts, and written chronicles developed over millennia. These narratives serve as frameworks for communities to interpret, remember, and negotiate collective identity. Following Ricoeur (1984), historical understanding is inseparable from narrative structures, suggesting that the Ethiopian past functions not as a fixed repository of events but as an interpretive field continuously rearticulated across generations.

Postmodern literary theory provides a critical lens for examining such reinterpretations of history. Central to postmodernism is the rejection of grand narratives and absolute truths, emphasizing instead plurality, fragmentation, and the socially constructed nature of meaning (Lyotard, 1984; Bertens, 1995). Postmodern literature employs these principles to destabilize conventional storytelling, often blending fact with fiction, historical events with imaginative reconstruction, and canonical authority with marginalised voices. In practice, postmodern narrative techniques such as temporal disruption, narrative fragmentation, intertextuality, self-reflexivity, and parody foreground the artificiality of narrative representation and expose the ideological assumptions embedded within historical discourse (Hutcheon, 1988; Nünning, 1997).

Metafiction, a key concept in postmodern literature, draws attention to the constructed nature of the text itself (Waugh, 1984). When applied to historical materials, it gives rise to historiographic metafiction, a term coined by Hutcheon (1988, 1989) to describe works that both depict the past and interrogate how historical knowledge is produced. Historiographic metafiction challenges the boundary between history and fiction, presenting historical events as discursively mediated rather than objectively given, while simultaneously engaging readers in reflective and interpretive processes.

In global postmodern literature, historiographic metafiction challenges dominant narratives, exposes the instability of historical truth, and highlights the interplay between memory, culture, and identity. Authors such as Toni Morrison (Beloved), Salman Rushdie (Midnight's Children), and Umberto Eco (The Name of the Rose) demonstrate how historical events can be reinterpreted through fictionalized accounts that question the authority of conventional historiography (Hutcheon, 1988; White, 1978). Morrison's Beloved, for instance, intertwines the factual history of slavery with supernatural elements, compelling readers to confront the subjectivity of historical memory and the silences in traditional accounts. Similarly, Rushdie and Eco use intertextuality, narrative disruption, and self-reflexive commentary to destabilize authoritative histories, foregrounding the multiplicity of perspectives inherent in historical experience.

Scholarly research further illustrates that historiographic metafiction interrogates not only historical events but also the processes through which history is produced and remembered. White (1978) emphasises that history is always mediated by narrative structures, making historical accounts inherently interpretive. Postmodern novels therefore employ metafictional techniques including self-reflexivity, temporal disruption, intertextuality, and narrative fragmentation to reveal the constructedness of historical knowledge and invite critical engagement with the uncertainties of the past (Genette, 1980; Hutcheon, 1988).

Recent studies of global postmodern fiction provide further insights. Nayana and Manjula (2022) examine Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines, highlighting how temporal shifts, fragmented storytelling, and reflective narration destabilize fixed notions of nationhood and nationality. Ashraf and Farooq (2020) analyze Mohammad Hanif's Our Lady of Alice Bhatti, demonstrating how memory, parody, intertextuality, and self-reflexivity give voice to marginalized communities while challenging dominant historical accounts. Wang (2024) explores Robert Coover's The Public Burning, emphasizing the tension between historical preservation and fictional alteration, while Brown (1999) studies Julia Alvarez's In the Time of the Butterflies, showing how historiographic metafiction foregrounds marginalised female perspectives to contest official historical narratives. Similarly, Perumal and Varadharajan (2024) examine Louise Erdrich's The Plague of Doves, and Lamia and Rasheed (2021) investigate Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon, both highlighting how multiple perspectives, temporal disruptions, and mythic or folkloric elements reconstruct cultural memory and interrogate dominant historiography.

Collectively, these studies underscore historiographic metafiction as a narrative strategy that not only reinterprets history but also examines the processes through which historical knowledge is constructed, remembered, and transmitted. It foregrounds marginalised voices, destabilizes monolithic narratives, and challenges linear conceptions of time and historical truth. For contemporary Amharic literature, these studies provide valuable theoretical and methodological models, demonstrating that Ethiopian writers can similarly employ historiographic metafiction often alongside magical realism to reconstruct historical consciousness, interrogate collective memory, and engage critically with socio-political realities.

In the context of contemporary Amharic literature, these postmodern strategies facilitate critical engagement with Ethiopia's cultural memory and historical consciousness. The novel *Miteralion* exemplifies this engagement by incorporating postmodern narrative techniques and historiographic metafiction to reconstruct Ethiopian history as dynamic and interpretive. The novel employs narrative fragmentation, temporal dislocation, symbolic rebirth, and intertextual references to sacred and historical sites such as Israel, Nazareth, and Debre Tabor. In doing so, *Miteralion* fuses religious, political, and cultural narratives, illustrating how Ethiopian identity is negotiated through both imaginative and historical lenses. Through its integration of postmodern literary theory, postmodern narrative techniques, and historiographic metafiction, *Miteralion* reimagines Ethiopian history as an evolving discourse. It positions historical meaning not as a static inheritance but as a constantly reinterpreted field shaped by narrative experimentation, cultural memory, and interpretive engagement. This study analyzes these strategies to demonstrate how the selected novel *Miteralion* contributes to postmodern reconceptualization of Ethiopian historical identity, illustrating the transformative potential of contemporary Amharic literature.

In the Ethiopian literary context, historiographic metafiction has been adapted to explore local histories, cultural memory, and socio-political concerns. The novel *Miteralion* exemplifies this approach. It blend historical documentation, folklore, and political allegory to reconstruct Ethiopian history. Recent scholarship highlights the growing influence of postmodern strategies in Amharic literature. Likinaw Yirsaw (2024) examines narrative techniques in historical Amharic novels, emphasizing the construction of heroism through historiographic metafiction and Lacan's mirror stage, revealing the negotiation between individual subjectivity and collective memory. Tigistu Tiruneh (2014) explores postmodernism's influence on Amharic prose, focusing on themes of cultural imperialism and identity crisis, underscoring the socio-political implications of narrative experimentation. Additionally, Likinaw Yirsaw's (2020) dissertation extends postmodern analysis to Ethiopian novels written in English, identifying narrative techniques such as magical realism, irony, and intertextuality as tools for challenging historical and political norms. Collectively, these studies demonstrate how postmodern narrative strategies enable Ethiopian authors to question dominant historical discourses, reframe cultural identity, and subvert conventional narrative expectations.

Despite the growing body of research on Ethiopian literature, there remains limited scholarship specifically examining historiographic metafiction within contemporary Amharic novels. While postmodern narrative strategies have been extensively explored in Western literary traditions, their presence and function in Ethiopian fiction remain underexamined. Existing studies often focus on classical works, leaving contemporary Amharic novels, such as

Alemayehu's *Miteralion*, particularly in terms of their role in shaping national identity and collective memory, insufficiently analyzed. Moreover, research has rarely applied Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy to Ethiopian literature, which offers a framework for understanding how readers engage in interpretive dialogue between past and present.

This study addresses these gaps by analysing Alemayehu Wassie's *Miteralion* as a representative postmodern text that reconfigures the relationship between history, fiction, and cultural identity. Drawing on Hutcheon's theory of historiographic metafiction and Gadamerian hermeneutics, the research examines how the novel reconstructs Ethiopia's historical consciousness through imaginative reinterpretation, narrative fragmentation, and non-linear storytelling, ultimately redefining Ethiopian identity through memory, myth, and cultural resilience.

2. Methods

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive research methodology, grounded in literary textual analysis. The research is situated within the humanities tradition, where meaning is explored through close engagement with texts rather than through empirical measurement. The methodological approach integrates postmodern literary criticism, historiographic metafiction theory, and philosophical hermeneutics, allowing for a nuanced examination of how history, myth, and identity are narratively constructed in Alemayehu Wassie's *Miteralion*.

The analysis proceeds through close reading, focusing on narrative form, language, symbolism, and intertextual references. Particular attention is paid to how the novel self-consciously represents historical events, mythic figures, and sacred geographies while simultaneously questioning their historical authority. Guided by Linda Hutcheon's conception of historiographic metafiction and Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy, the study treats the text as a dialogic space where past and present, myth and history, and fiction and historiography intersect.

An interpretivist orientation (Geertz, 1973) underpins the study, recognizing that historical meaning in literature is not fixed but produced through narrative mediation and readerly interpretation. Rather than seeking to verify historical accuracy, the study examines how *Miteralion* reconstructs Ethiopian history as an imaginative, ethical, and ideological discourse.

2.1 Basis of Text Selection

The Amharic novel *Miteralion* was selected through purposive sampling due to its explicit engagement with Ethiopian history, mythic ancestry, and national identity, and its extensive use of postmodern narrative strategies. The novel integrates myth, religious symbolism, and historical chronicles while employing self-reflexivity, temporal disruption, and intertextuality, making it a representative example of historiographic metafiction in contemporary Amharic literature.

2.2 Data Sources

The primary source for this study is *Miteralion* (2014), analyzed in its original Amharic version, and with selected passages translated into English for analytical clarity. Secondary sources include scholarly works on historiographic metafiction, postmodernism, hermeneutics, cultural memory, and Ethiopian literary studies. These sources provide the theoretical and critical framework necessary for contextualizing the textual analysis.

2.3 Analysis Techniques

The analysis employs thematic and narratological techniques, focusing on metafictional strategies such as mythic reworking, ancestral invocation, symbolic naming, and non-linear temporality. Textual analysis is conducted through close reading of selected extracts from the original Amharic text, which are translated into English by the researcher using a contextual and interpretive translation method. This approach prioritizes the preservation of cultural nuance, symbolic meaning, and idiomatic expression rather than strict literal equivalence.

Guided by Hutcheon's theory of historiographic metafiction and Gadamer's concept of the fusion of horizons, the study examines how historical meaning is constructed through narrative mediation and readerly interpretation across linguistic and temporal boundaries. Translation is treated as an interpretive act that mediates between the sources texts and the analytical discourse, reinforcing the view of history in *Miteralion* not as fixed fact but as a discursive and ethical process shaped by memory, ideology, and imagination.

3. Analysis

The novel *Miteralion* reconstructs Ethiopian history through historiographic metafiction, presenting the past as a narrativized, interpretive, and ethically charged discourse rather than as a fixed historical record. By blending mythic ancestry, symbolic naming, and reflective narration, the novel foregrounds the constructedness of history and invites readers to participate in its reinterpretation. Before the analysis and interpretation made on the selected novel, synopses is briefly presented as follows.

Alemayehu Wassie *Miteralion* (2014) is a philosophically rich Amharic novel that employs allegory, mysticism, and political critique to reimagine Ethiopia's historical and spiritual condition. The central figure, *Miteralion*, symbolizes Ethiopia as a wounded yet nurturing mother whose persistent bleeding reflects centuries of internal betrayal, suffering, and endurance. The narrative unfolds through a symbolic pilgrimage across Ethiopian sacred geographies particularly the

Abay (Blue Nile) and extends to biblical sites, situating Ethiopia within a cosmic and theological framework. The Abay, identified with the biblical Gihon, functions as a metaphor for divine covenant, historical burden, and unrealized national promise. The novel sharply critiques ethnic politics, authoritarian leadership, and moral decay in modern Ethiopia, while envisioning renewal through ethical leadership, spiritual awakening, and collective responsibility. The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam emerges as a metaphor for rebirth, self-reliance, and illumination. Ultimately, *Miteralion* offers a prophetic vision of national redemption grounded in unity, faith, and historical consciousness.

3.1 Historiographic Metafiction and the Questioning of Historical Authority

The novel *Miteralion* explicitly acknowledges its historical sources while simultaneously reworking them through imaginative narration, a strategy that closely aligns with Linda Hutcheon's conception of historiographic metafiction as a mode that both installs and interrogates historical narratives. The novel's engagement with the Kebra Nagast tradition provides a clear illustration of this dual impulse:

> *'ክብረ ነገሥት' የተባለው ጥንታዊ መፃፍ እንደሚተርክልን በዚህ ዉሳኔ መሠረት ቀዳማዊ ምኒልክ በብዙ እስራኤላውያን በኩራት ታጅቦ፣ ታቦተ ጽዮንን በምስጢር ይዘው ወደ ኢትዮጵያ ተመለሱ። (አለማየሁ፣ 2014፣ ገፅ 17)*

> *"According to the ancient text Kebra Nagast, based on this decision, Menelik I returned to Ethiopia proudly accompanied by many Israelites, secretly bringing with him the Ark of Zion." (Alemayehu, Miteralion, 2014, p. 17)*

The statement above demonstrates explicitly naming the Kebra Nagast as its source; the narrative foregrounds the textual mediation of history. Menelik's journey is not presented as an unquestionable historical fact but as a story transmitted through sacred chronicles and collective memory. This self-reflexive gesture draws attention to the narrative processes through which historical knowledge is produced and legitimized.

From a postmodern perspective, such acknowledgment destabilizes traditional historiographic authority by exposing history as a discursive construction rather than an objective record. The authority of the past is shown to reside not in empirical verification but in narrative repetition, belief, and cultural transmission. In Hayden White's terms, historical meaning emerges through emplotment rather than factual accumulation.

Thus, *Miteralion* reframes Ethiopian foundational history as an interpretive narrative shaped by ideology, imagination, and ethical purpose. History, in this context, is not recovered or verified but retold and reimagined, reinforcing the novel's historiographic metafictional stance that historical truth is inseparable from the stories through which it is narrated.

Furthermore, In *Miteralion*, Alemayehu Wassie challenges conventional historiography by blending historical fact, myth, and imaginative reconstruction. The novel foregrounds the interpretive nature of history, showing that historical knowledge is always mediated through cultural memory, ideology, and narrative choice. This approach is particularly evident in the portrayal of the Israelites in northern Ethiopia as the following extract reflects:

> *እንዳልኩህ ቤተ-እስራኤላውያን ከጣና በስተሰሜን በደንቢያ፣ በወገራ፣ በበለሳ፣ በወልቃይት፣ በጠለምት፣ በአድዋ፣ በዋግ ከሌላው ህዝብ ጋር ተሰባጥረን ለሺ ዘመናት ኖረናል። የዋጓ 'እስራኤል' ከሁሉ ልቃ የጥበብና የፍልስፍና ማዕከል ነበረች። ከአባቶቻችን እንደተነገረን የተከዜ ወንዝ ዳርቻን ዐለትና አፈር በመጠቀም አፈር ማንጠር፣ ብረት ማቅለጥ፣ ማዕድናትን ማዳቀልና በእሳት መጥበስ የተካኑ ነበሩ። ከዚያ አልፎ በረድ እንዳይመጣ መከላከል፣ ዝናብ ሲጠፋ ደመና መሰብ ሁሉ ችለው ነበር። እርግጥ ይህ ሁሉ ጥበብ ከሰሎሞን ይዘውት ከመጡት በተጨማሪ ከጥንት ኢትዮጵውያን ጥበበኛች ጋር በማስተባበር ያደገ እንደነበር ግልጥ ነዉ። (አለማየሁ፣ 2014፣ ገፅ 133)*

> *"As I said, the Israelites lived for thousands of years in the north of Tana, in Denbia, Wogera, Balsa, Wolkait, Tlemt, Adwa, and Wag, scattered among other peoples. Wagwa's 'Israel' was the greatest center of art and philosophy. As we were told by our ancestors, they were skilled in using the rocks and soil of the Tekeze River to grind soil, smelt iron, mix minerals, and roast them with fire. They were also able to prevent hail from coming, and to attract clouds when the rain stopped. Of course, it is clear that all this art, in addition to what they brought from Solomon, developed in collaboration with ancient Ethiopian sages." (Alemayehu, 2014, p.133)*

As the extract above mentioned from the outset, history is not merely a collection of objective facts but a dynamic and interpretive narrative. By citing ancestral testimony ("as we were told by our ancestors"), the text legitimizes oral tradition as a source of historical knowledge, directly challenging linear, Eurocentric, or archival accounts. Furthermore, the depiction of technological expertise alongside mythic abilities soil grinding, iron smelting, cloud summoning, and hail prevention blurs the boundary between factual and legendary, creating a hybrid historical account.

Moreover, the collaboration between Israelites and Ethiopian sages emphasizes a cultural and intellectual continuity, linking biblical narratives to indigenous Ethiopian wisdom. This interweaving of local and foreign traditions

not only enriches the historical narrative but also critiques the authority of official historiography by foregrounding collective memory and imaginative reconstruction.

In conclusion, this extract exemplifies how *Miteralion* uses historiographic metafiction to question historical authority, presenting history as an interpretive act shaped by memory, ideology, and narrative choices, rather than a neutral record of past events.

3.2 Mythic Ancestry and the Ethical Construction of National Identity

In *Miteralion*, mythic ancestry functions as a central narrative strategy through which Ethiopian national identity is ethically rather than biologically constructed. The invocation of Queen Makeda situates identity within a symbolic genealogy that foregrounds wisdom and moral responsibility over dynastic legitimacy:

> *የንግሥት ማክዳ ልጆች ነን፤ የጥበብ ፈላጊዋ የጥበብ አሳቿ። መቼ ይሆን ወደ ጥንት ክብራችን እንመለስ ብለን የምንነሰዉ፤ የሞራልና የደግነት፣ የአብሮነትና የታታሪነት፣ የጀግንነትና የነፃነት ልዕልና፣ የአልፋ ኦሜጋ ጥበብ ባለቤት ለመሆን በቁጭት የምንነሣዉ? (አለማየሁ፣ 2014፣ ገፅ 14)*
>
> *We are the children of Queen Makeda, the seeker of wisdom, the seducer of wisdom. When will we rise to return to our former glory morality and kindness, solidarity and diligence, bravery and freedom, the wisdom of alpha and omega?(Alemayehu, 2014, p. 14)*

As reflected in the extract above, the passage does not present ancestry as a matter of biological descent; rather, it reconceptualizes it as an ethical and epistemological inheritance. Makeda is portrayed foremost as a seeker of wisdom, a characterization that displaces national identity from imperial lineage or political authority and anchors it instead in moral values and intellectual tradition. Within the framework of historiographic metafiction, this reconfiguration of the past serves not to legitimize power but to critically interrogate the ethical condition of the present.

The narrative intensifies this ethical interrogation through a reflexive expansion of mythic lineage that incorporates Menelik I as reflected below:

> *እኛም የንግሥት ማክዳ ልጆች ነን፤ የጥበብ ፈላጊዋ፣ የጥበብ አሳቿ! አዎን የቀዳማዊ ምኒልክ ልጆች ነን፤ እናት ሀገራችንን ፍፁም ወዳጅ፣ ሥልጣን ምቾት የማይለዉጠን ታማኝ! ለማለት መቼ ይሆን የምንደፍረዉ! (አለማየሁ፣ 2014፣ ገፅ 16)*
>
> *And we are the children of Queen Makeda, the seeker of wisdom, the seducer of wisdom! Yes, we are the children of Menelik the First, a perfect friend of our motherland, faithful and uncorrupted by the comfort of power. When will we dare to say this? (Alemayehu, 2014, p. 16)*

As reflected in the extract above, the narrative deepens this ethical interrogation through a reflexive reworking of mythic lineage that incorporates Menelik I not as a mere dynastic ancestor but as a moral signifier. By proclaiming descent from Queen Makeda "the seeker of wisdom" and Menelik I as one who remains "faithful and uncorrupted by the comfort of power," the text deliberately redefines ancestry as a matter of ethical continuity rather than biological succession. Lineage here becomes aspirational and normative: to be a "child" of Makeda or Menelik is not to inherit blood or throne, but to embody wisdom, loyalty to the motherland, and resistance to the seductions of authority.

Within the logic of historiographic metafiction, this invocation of mythic origins simultaneously affirms and destabilizes foundational national narratives. While the Makeda–Menelik genealogy has traditionally functioned to legitimize imperial rule and political continuity, *Miteralion* re-appropriates this genealogy to question the moral legitimacy of the present. The rhetorical question "When will we dare to say this?" introduces a self-reflexive pause that exposes a rupture between the ethical ideals symbolized by these ancestral figures and contemporary political realities. Rather than celebrating inherited greatness, the passage challenges the present generation to measure itself against an unfulfilled moral inheritance.

Through this strategy, the novel mobilizes the past not as a static source of authority but as a critical mirror. Myth and history are intertwined to produce a discourse of ethical accountability, where national identity is constructed through values such as wisdom, integrity, and fidelity to the collective good. In this sense, *Miteralion* transforms mythic lineage into a tool of critique, using historiographic metafiction to interrogate how far the nation has drifted from the ethical foundations it continues to invoke. In addition, *Miteralion* constructs Ethiopian national identity through mythic ancestry and ethical reflection, emphasizing the interdependence of country, religion, and moral responsibility. The novel explicitly links spiritual and national heritage, as in the following passage:

> *ሃይማኖትህን ያለ ሀገር ሆነህ የትም ልታከብረው ትችል ይሆናል፤ ሀገር ስታጣ ግን ሁሉን ታጣለህ። ኦርቶዶክስን ግብፅ፣ እስልምናን መካ መዲና፣ ካቶሊክን ቫቲካን፣ ፕሮቴስታንትን ጀርመን ታገኝ ይሆናል። ኢትዮጵያ ግን የትም የለችም።*

ሃይማኖታችን የምንወደው ኢትዮጵያን ቀድሶ ስለሰጠን ነው፤ ኢትዮጵያን የምንወዳት ሃይማኖታችንን እጅግ መንፈሳዊና ከፈጣሪ ጋር የሚያገናኘን ንፁህ መንገድ ስላደረገችልን ነዉ። (አለማየሁ፣ 2014፣ ገፅ 16)

You may practice your religion regardless of your country. But when you lose a country, you lose everything. You may find Orthodox Egypt, Islam Mecca and Medina, Catholic Vatican, Protestant Germany. But Ethiopia is nowhere. We love our religion because it sanctified Ethiopia. We love Ethiopia because it has made our religion very spiritual and a pure way that connects us with the Creator. (Alemayehu, 2014, p.16)

In this passage, ancestry and national identity are framed through the ethical and spiritual symbiosis between Ethiopia and its religion. The text asserts that religion alone is insufficient without the territorial and cultural grounding of Ethiopia, highlighting the inseparability of spiritual and national inheritance. Ethiopia's mythic past and sacred geography are portrayed as central to the ethical and moral formation of the people, with national identity understood as a living ethical responsibility rather than a static political or genealogical claim.

From a historiographic metafiction perspective, the narrative both recalls historical and religious memory and invites reflection on contemporary ethical obligations. The juxtaposition of global religious centers with the absence of Ethiopia emphasizes the unique intertwining of Ethiopian national and spiritual heritage. By portraying Ethiopia as the locus through which religion achieves its full moral and spiritual expression, the text transforms ancestry into a framework for ethical and cultural self-understanding, reinforcing postmodern skepticism toward linear or solely political constructions of history and identity.

3.3 Symbolic Naming and the Reconstruction of Sacred Geography

In *Miteralion*, naming functions as a historiographic strategy through which history and geography are imaginatively reconfigured. The novel presents naming not as a neutral act of designation but as a culturally charged practice that embeds Ethiopian space within sacred and historical narratives. Through this strategy, the author reclaims geographical meaning from dominant historiographies and reasserts Ethiopian historical centrality.

The narrative recounts how ancestral Ethiopian communities' appropriated biblical names while establishing settlements and spreading wisdom and faith:

አየህ የኔ ልጅ! አባቶቻችን በኢትዮጵያ በኖሩበት ዘመን መንደር መሥርተው፣ ከተማ ቆርቁረዉ፣ ጥበብና እምነት ሲያስፋፉ አልፎ አልፎ ከተስፋ ሀገራቸው እስራኤል ስም እየወሰዱ ይሰይሙ ነበር። ... 'እስራኤል'፣ 'ሰይዳ'፣ 'ቃና'... 'ደብረ ታቦር'፣ 'ገሊላ'፣ 'ናዝሬት'፣ 'ደብረ ዘይት' የሚባሉ ስሞችን ወስደው ሰይመዋል። (አለማየሁ፣ 2014፣ ገፅ 132)

You see, my son! When our ancestors lived in Ethiopia, they founded villages, built cities, and spread wisdom and faith. At times, they took names from their land of hope, Israel. Names such as 'Israel,' 'Seyda,' and 'Kana' were adopted. Even as Christians, they named places 'Debre Tabor,' 'Galilee,' 'Nazareth,' and 'Mount of Olives.'" (Alemayehu, 2014, p. 132)

According to the statement above, these names operate as acts of cultural reinterpretation rather than imitation. By inscribing Ethiopian landscapes with biblical toponyms, the novel repositions Ethiopia as an active participant in sacred history, not a peripheral recipient of external religious traditions. This narrative move challenges Eurocentric historiographies that spatially marginalize Africa and deny it a central role in civilizational and sacred geographies.

Within the framework of historiographic metafiction, such naming practices reveal history as a narrative construction shaped by belief and cultural memory. Sacred geography, in *Miteralion*, is not inherited passively but actively reimagined, demonstrating how space itself becomes a site of historical interpretation and ideological assertion.

The novel further emphasizes the fluidity and mediation of historical meaning through language, as illustrated by the transformation of place names over time:

በአባታችን በያዕቆብ ስም 'እስራኤል' ብለው ሰይመዋት ነበር። በዘመን ሂደት 'እስራኤል' የሚለው ስም 'ስርኤል' እየተባለ እንደሚጠራ ስምቻለሁ። ዋናው ስሟ ግን 'እስራኤል' ነዉ። (አለማየሁ፣ 2014፣ ገፅ 132)

Our forefathers, who were centers of wisdom and philosophy, called her 'Israel.' Over time, the name 'Israel' came to be pronounced as 'Sireel.' Yet her principal name remains 'Israel.' (Alemayehu, 2014, p. 132)

Here, the above quote indicates that linguistic evolution underscores the novel's postmodern conception of history as mutable and mediated. While phonetic shifts occur, symbolic meaning endures, suggesting that cultural memory is sustained through reinterpretation rather than rigid preservation. The persistence of the "main name" affirms continuity amid transformation, reinforcing the idea that history survives not as static fact but as a living narrative.

Through symbolic naming, *Miteralion* transforms geography into a textual and ideological space where history, faith, and identity converge. In doing so, the novel exemplifies historiographic metafiction's capacity to rewrite spatial history, revealing how places like histories are narratively produced, culturally negotiated, and ethically charged.

3.4 Tewodros II in *Miteralion*: Tragedy, Colonial Encounters, and National Memory

In *Miteralion*, Emperor Tewodros II is reimagined as a tragic historical figure whose pursuit of self-reliance and modernization is deeply entangled with Ethiopia's long civilizational memory and its encounter with colonial power. As the extract describes below:

> *ከሁለት ሺ አመታት በኋላ የሰርኤልን ጥበብ ለማስቀጠል በፖሊስ ደረጃ የሞከሩት አጤ ቴዎድሮስ ነበሩ ። ንጉሱ ሀገርን በስልጣኔና በራስ አቅም ለማነፅ አፈር አንጥሮ፣ ብረት አቅልጦ መድፋና መንኮራኩር ለመስራት በጋፋት ሞክረው ነበር። (አለማየሁ፣ 2014፣ ገፅ 126)*
>
> *After two thousand years, it was Ate Theodore who tried to continue the art of Sirel at the police level. In order to build the country with civilization and self-sufficiency, the king tried hard to make clay, melt iron and make cannons and wheels. (Alemayehu, 2014, p.126)*

This extract situates Emperor Tewodros II as both a historical and symbolic figure, portraying him as a custodian of Ethiopia's enduring cultural and technological heritage. By "continuing the art of Sirel," Tewodros is linked to a millennia-long tradition of innovation, framing his nation-building initiatives as part of a continuous civilizational lineage. His engagement with clay, iron, cannons, and wheels underscores practical modernization while simultaneously symbolizing resilience, progress, and self-reliance. The temporal framing of "two thousand years" emphasizes historical continuity, reflecting historiographic metafiction's blending of fact, myth, and cultural imagination to construct national memory and identity.

The following extract further illustrates how *Miteralion* constructs Emperor Tewodros II as a tragic figure shaped by the collapse of visionary self-reliance and the deceit embedded in colonial diplomacy. Although Tewodros sought friendship and cooperation with Britain and Queen Victoria, the novel exposes the profound asymmetry of this encounter: the so-called "gift of friendship," the revolver, ultimately becomes the instrument of his death. This symbolic irony transforms the weapon into a powerful metaphor for colonial betrayal, where gestures of diplomacy conceal abandonment and indifference.

> *ራስን ለመቻል ትልቅ ራዕይ የነበራቸው አጤ ቴዎድሮስ ሁሉ ነገር ከእጃቸው ሲያመልጥ ራሳቸውን ያጠፉበትን ሪቮልቨር ሽጉጥ ንግስት ቪክቶሪያ ለወዳጅነት ቀደም ብለዉ የላኩላቸው ስጦታ ነበር። (አለማየሁ፣ 2014፣ ገፅ 127)*
>
> *Ate Theodore, who had a great vision of self-reliance, used to kill himself when everything got out of hand. Queen Victoria sent him a gift of friendship. Ate Theodore tried for the friendship of the English people and Queen Victoria, but the only help they got was the gun that was their last weapon. (Alemayehu, 2014, p.127)*

The above extract portrays Tewodros as a tragic hero whose vision of national self-reliance conflicted with imperial power. The revolver gifted by Queen Victoria, intended as a gesture of friendship, becomes a symbol of profound irony, ultimately serving as the instrument of his death. The object highlights the complexities of colonial engagement, revealing the vulnerability of leaders navigating a world dominated by imperial powers. Through historiographic metafiction, the text merges historical fact with symbolic meaning, emphasizing how Tewodros's technological ambitions, political reforms, and tragic end are interpreted within Ethiopia's broader narratives of sovereignty, resilience, and national identity. His story illustrates the interplay of personal agency, structural constraints, and colonial power dynamics, solidifying his legacy as both historical figure and enduring national symbol.

4. Conclusion

This study has explored Alemayehu Wassie's *Miteralion* as a powerful work of historiographic metafiction that revisits Ethiopian history and identity through a postmodern lens. By weaving together myth, historical figures, sacred landscapes, and symbolic storytelling, the novel questions the authority of official histories and invites readers to see the past as something interpreted, remembered, and ethically meaningful rather than fixed.

The analysis shows that *Miteralion* reshapes Ethiopian identity not through bloodlines or imperial claims, but through ethical inheritance. Figures such as Queen Makeda and Menelik I are reimagined as moral reference points, urging wisdom and responsibility in the present. The novel's reworking of sacred geography further restores Ethiopia as a center of historical and spiritual agency, challenging narratives that have long marginalized African histories.

The portrayal of Emperor Tewodros II adds an emotional and political depth to this reimagining of the past. His unrealized vision of self-reliance and modernization, marked by betrayal and colonial imbalance, turns his death into a

shared historical wound. Drawing on Hutcheon's and Gadamer's ideas, the study concludes that *Miteralion* uses history not to justify power, but to prompt ethical reflection. In doing so, the novel highlights the enduring relevance of historiographic metafiction in contemporary Amharic literature.

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