



Imperfect Journey, Imperfect Cinema “A fast, ‘zinging’ shot scares the baboon!”

Tekletsadik Belachew*

Abstract

This article focusses on key themes in Haile Gerima's *Imperfect Journey*, which, despite being one of the most important African documentaries, is often neglected by film critics and historians.¹ Abba Gerima, the traditional playwright, dramatist, historian, and epic-poet, is discussed through selectively translated passages from two historical masterpieces that he originally wrote in Amharic and English translations. Abba Gerima's and Haile Gerima's historical and artistic texts are critically examined across history, aesthetics and the three mega themes of *Imperfect Journey* in order to understand how Abba Gerima's vision is carried forward in the cinematic works of Haile Gerima.

Résumé

Cet article porte sur les thèmes clés du *Voyage imparfait* de Haile Gerima, qui, bien qu'étant l'un des plus importants documentaires africains, est souvent négligé par les critiques de cinéma et les historiens. Abba Gerima, le dramaturge traditionnel, historien et poète épique, est décrit à travers des passages, traduits de manière sélective, de deux chefs-d'œuvre historiques initialement écrits en amharique et traduits en anglais. Les textes historiques et artistiques d'Abba Gerima et de Haile Gerima seront examinés de manière critique à travers l'histoire, l'esthétique et les trois méga thèmes du *Voyage imparfait* pour comprendre comment la vision d'Abba Gerima est reflétée dans les œuvres cinématographiques de Haile Gerima.

Prologue of *Imperfect Journey*

In the prologue of *Imperfect Journey* (1994), three skillfully blended artistic features grace the storytelling: the stained-glass art, griot's provocations, and the song of hope. Each feature illustrates a Pan-Africanist perspective as the prologue unlocks the universal message of

* PhD Student – Patristics / History of Exegesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis MO, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Email: teklebelachew@gmail.com

the documentary. The folkloric, iconic and hymnodic-poetic elements create symphonic unison. The first few minutes of the prologue alone, are worthy of the audience's meditation on the iconographic and poetic improvisations.

Stained-Glass Art: "The Total Liberation of Africa"

Maître Artist World Laureate Afewerk Tekle's (1932–2012) most famous iconic piece, "The Total Liberation of Africa," (1959) is the first visual landscape encountered by audiences of *Imperfect Journey*. Afewerk's creation of the struggle and aspiration of the African people 1959 – 1961 is a 150-square-meter stained-glass triptych covering an entire wall of Africa Hall, which houses the United Nations (UN) Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.



Figure 1: "The Total Liberation of Africa" by Maître Artist World Laureate Afewerk Tekle, Courtesy of Tekletsadik Belachew

The hovering demon in the triptych signifies the evils of colonial forces.² And the invisible faces of Africans represent those whose liberation is not yet fully realized. This piece of art also depicts how Africans slayed the dragon of colonial forces.³ In the context of *Imperfect Journey* and other cinematic works by Gerima, the concept of neo-colonialism or invisible colonialism, which belongs to the cultural and mental battlefield, manifests itself in the psychological realm.

Similarly, the theme of slaying the dragon is also central to another documentary by Gerima, *Adwa: An African Victory* (1999). Before marching to the battle of Adwa (1st March 1896), Emperor Menelik II (1844–1913) makes a vow to St. Gyorgis (George), who is believed to accompany the king to the battle of Adwa.⁴ In the prologue of *Adwa*, the griot's fading memory is reinvigorated in his telling the story of the warrior and the dragon. In the voiceover of the aged man, which signifies memory and the fact that the griot's memory is fading, the griot asks why they [the filmmaker and also the audience] did not come earlier. The griot then tells the folkloric story about a brutal dragon in a village and how a gallant and brave warrior killed the dragon, which evokes the return of his memory. Different iconographic elements solidify the narrative.

Returning to the stained-glass art of "The Total Liberation of Africa," each section of stained glass represents a major epoch of African history: past, present, and future. In his lecture titled "The State of Art in Ethiopia" that was delivered at the Library of Congress (2009), Afewerk Tekle, the creator of this art, stated that this stained-glass art has three panels representing three epochs of Africa. The first shows the Africa then or under the slavery of colonialism with the gloomy color of black and red showing the devil dancing. Second, Africa now is the progress but not complete and perfect liberation of Africans. Some are free but the other are not free yet. Those who are free gaze at the audience, but those who are not are in the corner and out there with the unbroken chains. The devilish bird is flying, a symbol of the evils of colonialism. This happens as the Africans throw them away. In the center an Ethiopian peasant and his wife who is pregnant, and a little child, holding the torch, the torch of the rising sun, of the *new dawn* of the *new day*. And behind them, there are the different African nations in their national costumes, who are already free.

One can observe a Pan-Africanist sensibility in this magnificent piece of art work. The paradox of liberation is also represented in the invisible faces. The colonial condition creates this sense of invisibility, including the cinematic invisibility of African humanity that results in actors of African descent being placed in the background or assigned subservient roles. Gerima's cinematic resistance (as a shield of culture) is exemplary. It embodies his desire to be remembered as a symbol of resistance, cinematically. The other aspect of the prologue along the stained-glass art is an elderly griot who narrates the challenges of Africans after independence.

The Griot's Provocations: "*What happened to us?*"

"The Total Liberation of Africa" is accompanied by the storytelling and provocations of a griot, an elderly storyteller. Gerima often opens his movies for example, *Adwa* (1999) *Sankofa* (1993) and *Teza* (2008) with a griot speaking.⁵ Across many cultures in Africa, the griot speaks boldly and chastises the hypocrites – the elites in power. As a "musician-cum-narrator," he/she is a social critic who prophetically speaks against the ills of social injustice.⁶ The elderly griot in *Imperfect Journey* claims he has been in the world for a long time – since the beginning – and has witnessed what has happened with the struggle for the liberation of Africa. He represents the consciousness of the society. The griot also expresses the frustrations and problems that Africans are facing (colonialism then and neocolonialism now, manifested as militarism). He also provokes the audience by asking questions about the huge problem of militarism and its devastating effects. The griot begins speaking in the African Hall facing the stained-glass art "The Total Liberation of Africa". The griot speaks:

We start having coup d'étas here, coup d'étas there. A lieutenant taking over power here. And then you say to yourself "What is going on?" A lieutenant, or a major or a colonel for that matter, replacing Tefari Bedewa; a colonel replacing Modibo Keita; or some General replacing Nkurumah. And then at the end we had a Major replacing Haile Selassie. *So, where did the vision go?*

And so, here we are. As if we have lost our compass, as if we have lost our objective, as if we have nothing to live for. And that is what really bothers a person like me, who was there at the beginning and who is still alive to witness to what depth of incertitude Africa has come to ... [...silence]. What happened?

The griot also represents memory that never dies. He is a witness, a consciousness of the community and the generation that may be gratified by the *status quo*. What comes next is the chanting of the song of hope.

Song of Hope: "*Ethiopia Shall Stretch Out Its Hands Unto God!*"

The griot in *Imperfect Journey* laments. Then, another person sings a morning song, a song of hope, in conjunction with the liturgical dance of the priest. This opening echo the same polarity exhibited by the "two beautiful daughters of hope" – anger and courage – to use an expression of St. Augustine. Anger's task as expression of indignation is to resist the status quo, whereas courage's role is to transform oppressive situations. An old man narrates – telling the stories, including the crisis under the military coup d'état, of many nations in "post-independent" Africa that hailed foreign iconographic figures.⁷ In *Teza*, Anberber's library bereft of works of African intellectuals. Later in the

story, Anberber holds the Amharic book titled *Fikir Eske-Mekabir*, which is translated as *Love Unto Crypt*.⁸ The novel has a striking similarity to the main character in *Harvest: 3,000 Years*, Kebebe, and his Malcolm X – like speech.⁹

The griot poses critical questions of neo-colonial miseducation that manifests itself in the form of militarism. He laments, “as if we lost our campus, as if we lost our vision.” Then, the sense of despair is traded for a song of hope and courage. In Ge’ez or Ethiopic, the song sounds “ኢትዮጵያ ታበፅህ እደዋሃ ሃበ እግዚአብሔር! ሃሌ ሉዎ!” The song renders Psalms chapter 68, verse 31, and uses “Ethiopia” to speak symbolically of and in solidarity with all people of African descent: “*Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God! Alleluia!*”

Standing in the Epic-Poetic Tradition: “My Father, my Strongest Inspiration”

As an “auteur” – that is, a screenwriter, director, and editor of a significant corps of cinematic works – Haile Gerima is an able artist whose films all convey his own signature vision. His familial – cultural initiation into folkloric storytelling provided him with significant inspirations. In many of his interviews, Gerima talks about his early childhood, cultural nurturing and early storytelling inspirations. Gerima’s philosophy of film “has not developed in a proverbial vacuum”;¹⁰ rather, his inspiration came from his family: his father, mother, and grandmother who all nurture his particular cultural aesthetic of storytelling.

My grandmother was a storyteller. Before I had a camera or even electricity, she taught me to ignite my imagination. I sat fireside countless nights, imagining the vivid details of the stories she told. And my father, a playwright, took me with him to theaters from province to province in Ethiopia. So I grew up around stories and songs that come out of my particular cultural aesthetic....¹¹

Gerima is greatly indebted to the ingrained cultural aesthetics of folkloric storytelling that he inherited from his family, particularly his father.

My romance with the stage began as a young man in Gondar, Ethiopia. *My father, my strongest inspiration*, is the great historian Abba Gerima Tafere of Gondar. He is the author of major historical works such as *Gondere Begashaw*, one of the most authoritative chronicles of anti-fascist uprisings during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia in World War II. His other book, *Abba Tateq Kasa Yequaraw Anbessa*, is, in my view, one of the most thoroughly researched books on the ascent to power and reign of Atse (Emperor) Tewodros II. To bring the life and times of *Atse* Yohannes [the IV] to the realm of common knowledge, Abba Gerima penned and staged the epic play *Yamakara Dawal*

[Bell of Torment]. He also wrote and directed *Yemaichew Tornet* [The War of Maichew], a play about the local and international struggle to assert Ethiopian sovereignty during the last Italian occupation. I could easily say that by the time I reached adolescence, history and storytelling was [sic] in my blood.¹²

Regarding his childhood aspirations, Gerima says, “I always aspired to become my own father’s protégé.”¹³ Here, the father–son inspiration is evident with regard to both history and the art of storytelling. Abba Gerima’s sense of history will be illustrated from his historical books originally written in Amharic and selectively translated passages in the following sections. The following translations from Amharic to English is mine.

Abba Gerima: Historian, Playwright, and Master-Poet

Abba Gerima (1912–1982) was a priest, theologian, patriot, historian, epic poet, playwright, teacher, administrator, and kin-dramatist who also ran mobile theatrical troops.¹⁴ His intellectual formation was rooted in two main sources: his family – particularly his father, Merigeta Tafere – and the traditional schools of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.¹⁵

Abba Gerima was highly trained in the rigorous traditional schools,¹⁶ where iconography, calligraphy and bookmaking, grammar, and poetry were taught in addition to theological studies.¹⁷ Learn *Qene*, which is a rhyming form of poetry that is extremely rich with hidden meanings, takes years of preparation.¹⁸ Abba Gerima was a Master-Poet, known in Amharic as *Bale-Qene*. In fact, in Gondar he embodied what was known as *Seme ena worq*, “Wax and Gold,” a multi-layered poetry with both surface and deeper meanings.¹⁹ It is beyond the space and purpose of this article to say much more about *Oene*, but it is important to highlight two of its defining aspects. First, like jazz, the oral poetic tradition requires improvisation of the actual composition of the *Qene* event. No *Bale-Qene* (master-poet) in the Ge’ez (also Amharic) *Qene* tradition would repeat the same poetic verses. Rather, they would orally improvise ever new poetry at the schools of poetry, feasts or liturgical services as well as social events including wedding and funerals.²⁰ Second, there are many functions of *Qene*, one is *Yaaimiro tifsihit* – which means “liberation of the mind.”²¹

Gerima on his part translated folkloric orality and poetry in his innovative cinematic storytelling. His visual poetics, slow motions, and repetitions all render the aesthetics of African folkloric orality, symbolism, and religious and cultural iconography. Gerima in his exploration of folkloric orality proposes a “Cinema of Silence.” A cinema of silence is against the enormous problem of noise that is

common in conventional cinema that often makes the audience passive spectators. The noise hinders the audience to dialogue with cinema and critical reflection.²² Decolonizing the filmic mind with the ultimate goal of liberation is his goal.²³

Father-Son Connections

Gerima was given a special opportunity for father-son collaboration, as Abba Gerima wrote and sang songs in Haile's *Harvest: 3000 Years* (1976). In that movie, Abba Gerima also appears in the *Tej-bet* (honey-wine place), where Kebebe plays his Begena (Ethiopian Harp) and tells stories of resistance against the fascist invaders.²⁴ Here again, drama is mixed with the real-life story of Abba Gerima and the generation who fought.



Figure 2: Abba Gerima Taffere – In *Adwa* (1999) reciting poetic lines from his play *Bell of Torment*. Courtesy of Haile Gerima

Abba Gerima was also present in one of Haile Gerima's documentaries, *Adwa: An African Victory* (1999), in which Gerima incorporated his father's image, voice, and a poem taken from Abba Gerima's drama የመከራ ደወል ከምጥዋ እስከ መተማ *Yemekera Dewel* (*Bell of Torment or Harbinger of Adversity from Massawa to Matamma*). In *Adwa*, Gerima connects the historic and aesthetic aspects of his father's influence on him by asserting that the stories his father told him became "lifetime pillars." Even after Abba Gerima passed away, Haile Gerima witnessed he was encouraged by the stories and the parables his father used to illustrate the story of *Adwa*. The memory of his

father and ancestors has powerful implications for storytelling, as it is best described in the song the audience hear in *Adwa*:

Past spirits summoned each-other
 From here and everywhere
 The congregated spirit of the dead gathered
 to counsel the worldly soul of the living.²⁵

Both in life and death, Abba Gerima encouraged Haile Gerima by the stories he told him. In terms of cultural aesthetics of symbols related to the history of resistance, both Abba Gerima and his son Haile Gerima have employed the spear and shield: Abba Gerima on the cover of his book *Gondere Begashaw* and the poster for his play *Yamakara Dawal* (Bell of Torment), and Gerima in the logo of his film production company, Negeod-Guad Productions, in which patriots holding spears and shields signify cinematic resistance against the conventional cinematic narrative. For the patriot Abba Gerima and his historical works, the spear and shield signifies patriotic resistance against colonialism and fascism that includes cultural and artistic resistance against Fascism as it is depicted in the stories told in *Gondere Begashaw*. The battle for the filmmaker Gerima has been against invisible colonialism, a war he wages via his alternative and truly independent cinematic resistance, counter-narratives, counter-images, and counter-stories.

History as a Beautiful Monument, and Monumental Cinema

Abba Gerima's view of history as dynamic, monumental, and iconic is best illustrated in the prefaces of his historical books. Here is the translation of a lengthy quotation from the preface of Abba Gerima's *Abba Tataq Kasa Yaquwraw Anbesa* አባ ታጠቅ ካሣ የቋራው አንበሳ፤ ዳግማዊ ቴዎድሮስ ንጉሠ ነገስት ዘኢትዮጵያ.²⁶ Here Abba is used as a horse name of a warrior or king. So, the horse name Abba Tataq implies readiness for war or great effort.

Abba *Tataq* is the horse name of Kassa who became Emperor Tewodros II (1820 – 1868), who unified the country and ending the era of princess as well as resist colonial attempts. As it is mentioned earlier, Abba Gerima's father was the secretary of Emperor Tewodros II. What follows is an extended translation from the preface of this book by Abba Gerima.

Monument, the History-Makers' Tribute

The author writes in Ge'ez [Ethiopic] "*Hintsu mewlude yeabyu seme.*" This implies that the building honors the builder; the son honors and venerates the father. A building can bring honor to its architect only when it is built on

solid rock, not on shaky sand. Let the wind blow, let the rivers overflow; it will remain and not be swept away. Its memory is eternal. It brings praise to the builder. Likewise, a child is a constant reminder of his father's legendary and heroic pursuits, not merely because of his physical resemblance that causes the observer to exclaim, "Look at him – he looks just like his father!" Also, and more importantly, the child may follow in the footsteps of his history-making father by striving to leave an even greater legacy than his father.

It is praiseworthy for a person to die for his forefathers' and foremothers' land. Being born from history and being a history-maker is possible only by offering a blood sacrifice, such as the sacrifices in the Old Testament. Without marching, without dying, without slaying, or without seizing [the enemy], to say that "I am born from such history" is vainglorious. It is considered vanity, like chasing after the wind, to try to capture the wind in one's hand – and is nothing more than a wishful (unsatisfying) dream. Therefore, those majestic monuments, erected in the cities and public spaces for history-makers, are undiminishing and undying relics (*aetsemte*); the commemoration (*mezekirenetachew*) of their subjects will remain forever. The construction of historical monuments should make us proud and be our shield.

In its earliest and immature stage, history is sour and even bitter. But when it has ripened, it is a canopy of grapevines. Its sweetness satisfies the spirit and pleases the mind.

History for humankind is a *hibest*, a sacred bread. History is also a deacon who rings the bell to summon those who are in the area so that they can be agents [of history who also resist colonizers]. Moreover, history serves as a close escort in the journey of life. When someone dies, history is a covenant-brother who will never forget.

Since history is a major chapter of life that holds indispensable treasures, we shall never forget the times that pass by. Let us put their lyrics in books and monuments with the glorious theatrical cascade *kerse mekabir* (*Abba Tateq Kassa*, 9 – 10).

Abba Gerima in telling the stories of the struggle against colonialism and fascism and the heroic act of the forefathers who deserve monument as remembrance and gratitude. Humans as history-makers or historical memory is a very important theme in the works of Abba Gerima's books and theatrical works as well as in Gerima's cinematic corpus both in the documentaries and dramas. Monumental historical and artistic works as a representation of living memory enriches human flourishing. The following translation from Abba Gerima further elaborates historical memory in the form of resistance against the colonial invaders. As his subtitle tells, monument is the beauty of history.

Monument, the Beauty of History

The leprosy of colonialism infected Ethiopia, as well as its hands of freedom and feet of civilization that were stretched out from East to West and from North to South. This contagious disease was spread all over Africa. In resisting the widely disseminating disease that threatened to contaminate Ethiopia's whole body, her heroic children pulled out their long sword (*shotel*) and their formidable shield, and with the philosophy of heroism treated and healed her.

This happened because of the sure medication of history that has been half-full and half-empty, long and short, diminishing and flourishing. As a result, a shining marble was made into a monument depicting history's smile and beautiful countenance.

... [Our] national heroes sacrificed in the battlefield for the sake of their country. Such sacrificial actions of our forefathers became the lifeblood of the nation that enabled the nation to move forward with the dignity of freedom.

Our heroic fathers and mothers, with their sword and their double-pronged spears, shed their blood to keep the nation's borders tight. They are pillars of freedom. Moreover, their fallen bones and their shed blood kindle an unextinguished torch, igniting our beacon of freedom.

What, then, can we do in response to our forefathers who passed down to us an inheritance of freedom? How can we repay our debt? The only thing we can do in return to keep their memory alive, as has been done in our nation and other nations, is to construct monuments for our heroes (Abba Gerima's *Abba Tataq*, 10 – 12).

The sacrifice paid for freedom is too precious and dare not forgotten, Abba Gerima contends. And the purpose of monument is to keep the memory alive. But, when the attempt to remember history-makers through monuments fails, such persons may still be commemorated in historical books, such as Abba Gerima's, and in monumental documentaries and historical dramas, such as Haile Gerima's.²⁷ In the next section, we shall see how visible and invisible colonialism and fascism depicted in the historical and artistic works of Abba Gerima and his son Haile Gerima.

Historical–Artistic Resistance

Visible and Invisible Colonialism/Fascism

Here is a translation from the preface of Abba Gerima's another historical book *Gondare Bagashaw – The Gondarian in His Shield*.²⁸ 'The Gondare in His Shield' chronicles how Ethiopians in the districts and city of Gondar

that resisted the Italian Fascist occupation and struggle (1935 – 41). The shield imply the protection of the Almighty.

Victor, Conqueror, and Almighty God punishes the defiant, but shelters those who trust in Him. The oppressed who trust the Almighty will be protected under His *gasha* shield (on the left), and His *goradee* sword (on the right). His majesty panics the oppressors. Since He alone is victorious, we shall not fail to remember Him.

Whenever colonial predators attempt to put the yoke of slavery on people who were created free, and these people employ the natural horn of resistance to hit and overthrow the predators, a supernatural heroism – a weapon of God Almighty – is evident. And in His sight, the people's actions will be considered a sacrifice.

As for oppressors who intrude into someone's house to destroy it or to shed the blood of someone inside, God Himself opposes such tyrants and they shall never be victorious. Though they initially destroy, God does not allow them to ultimately prevail as if they are superiors to the people. First they are destroyers; later they will be destroyed, for they are accursed. It is right and fitting for any human to die in the act of resisting colonizers who instigate destruction. For sure, such a death has its rewards: history on earth and a crown in heaven. Remember!

Unless one tastes the sourness and even bitterness of suffering, a lasting legacy is not something he or she can obtain. In order to shine through the pages of history and be remembered by the next generation, one must fight for the freedom of his or her country and the honor of its king. (Gondare Bagashaw, 7).

The above translation from the two historical books of Abba Gerima briefly illustrates the sense of history or memory and the cultural aesthetics shared by his son Gerima, the filmmaker and the storyteller. It also helps to point out the historical background of the filmmaker that is available by studying historical books and dramas of Abba Gerima. Here time and space does not allow any further detail analysis to contrast the works of Abba Gerima and Haile Gerima. But in the future, this can be studied further by contrasting the father-son connections through their works and relations. Since, we have seen the place of monumental memory in the works of Abba Gerima, the next section will illustrate, how the films and production company of Gerima signify the value of memory through symbolism of names and icons.

Mypheduh: Shield of Memory, Shield of Culture

Gerima and his wife, Shikiriana Aina, who is also a film professor and producer, in 1997 created the production company Negod-Gwad (transliterated which means “thunder” or “thunderstorm” in Amharic), as well as Mypheduh Films, one of the largest African film distribution

companies in North America. They also run Sankofa Video and Books, which they call “a liberated territory for independent thinking,”²⁹ specializing in African and African American films.³⁰ Mypheduh ማዕፈድ means “sacred shield” for the holy bread in the Ge’ez (Ethiopic) language and ecclesiastical vocabulary, a nickname given to Haile Gerima by his father. Icons and names blended together.



Figures 3 & 4: The cover of Abba Gerima's book 'Gondere Begashaw' and the logo of Negod – Gwad Production, Courtesy of Tekletsadik Belachew

Names are powerful symbols in African societies. The following parable in Ge'ez (Ethiopic) illustrates this:

'Semu yemarreha haba gebru' (ሰሙ: ይመርሱ: ንብ: ግብሩ): 'One's name leads one to one's action.' This proverb links a word to a deed. The notion shows the spiritual, physical, or psychological influence of a name over the destiny of its bearer. The name represents parental aspirations and determines the future roles of its bearer.³¹

In addition to this being true of the characters' names in Gerima's films,³² he employed his own nickname as a powerful symbol in both his production company and his cultural cinematic storytelling. In naming and exploration of other cultural symbolisms he asserts that, "Culture is really a sacred shield."³³ It is important to note, though, that Gerima does not simply embrace every element of a given culture, but, rather, deals with each one critically. He maintains that the cultural war has been the longest war. Colonizers did not start with guns; they started with culture and education.

The conventional cinema contributes a lot to this war. "One of the most brutal and violent accomplishments of Eurocentric literature and mass media is the historic representation of Black men and women as outside the context of the human experience," Gerima explains.³⁴

Gerima's naming his production company "Negod-Gwad" has its own history. As the story goes in the Orthodox Church where his father belonged, there were two well-known spiritual criers or narrators. These were anti-materialist speakers who were also deacons, and resembles gypsies. What they did was "*Mebreq*" (lightening) and "Negod-Guwad" (thunder); that is, they took turns shouting out to reawaken people to the dangers of materialism and to urge them to become more spiritual. Aesthetics played a primary role in the delivery of their spiritual message, as their voices, and the personalities of their voices, were key components.³⁵

If Mypheduh implies a shield of memory and culture, then how can that contrast with the problem of militarism which is one of the theme of *Imperfect Journey*? The works of Gerima can be seen as memory films. And the relation between memory and militarism illustrated in a still image captured from *Sankofa* (1993).

Memory Versus Militarism

How can remembering the historical legacy of slavery, colonialism, and genocide help transform the present and the future? Gerima insists that the dichotomy in historical memory between good and bad is artificial and not helpful. He also rejects, in both his documentaries and dramas, the dichotomy between the past and the present. Without realistically dealing with the whole (time and everything that happened in time – past, present, and future), one cannot come to grips with creating a better and more humane society.³⁶ In *Imperfect Journey*, the documentarian poses rhetorical question, "Will the future break from the past?"

Gerima begins his *Imperfect Journey* narration by naming the places where the military armaments came from. Instead of importing constructive and humanizing technology, those who were in power built their security through militarism. Here, one can make connections between foreign icons (political, religious, or cinematic) that were imported and imposed at the expense of remembering indigenous history-makers; imported non-contextualized but westernized curricula; and imported weapons that enabled ruling over the people by terrorizing them. For example, in *Teza*, the political cadre preaching at the people had no history of the self to tell, yet they bombarded the villagers with foreign ideologies and monotonous repetitions saying "In China, in

Korea, in Russia, in Albania.” Repetitive monologues of naming foreign ideologies from the mouth of intellectuals in the Diaspora is a sound track of Anberber’s nightmare.



Figure 5: Memory vs. Militarism from *Sankofa* (1993), Courtesy of Haile Gerima

The intertwined themes in *Imperfect Journey* represents the multifaceted problem of fascism that manifested itself both in colonial and neo-colonial epochs in the forms of militarism and miseducation. Miseducation as an expression of cultural displacement triggered a huge identity crisis, repeated memory erasures, and human loss – including the “Red Terror” that “eats its own children” under the military junta (1974-1991) and its subsequent repression.

In *Imperfect Journey*, Haile narrates:

Right after the fall of Mengistu’s Military Junta, I took a trip on the same highway that always takes me to my birthplace.

I remember miles and miles of abandoned armaments from the Soviet Union, the United States, East Germany and North Korea, littered along the road.

When I finally returned with a film crew,

I saw only a handful.

Where did they all go?

To where did they suddenly vanish?

Were they taken to a place to be melted and turned into ploughs, to farm the land and feed the people? [Isaiah 2:4]³⁷

I want to find out from the people: *How have they endured the turbulent years since the fall of the emperor? How did they survive the last two decades of repression under the military junta? How did they feel about the future under the new government?*

These questions were answered by soil-tilling peasants who chased pest-like birds and wild animals from their farms, as well as by students whom the documentarian and his crew encountered around the Gorge of Abay – the Blue Nile river. These students (like many others across the African continent) traveled three and four hours by foot to receive only two or three hours of schooling from, and by marginalized intellectuals discussing the dysfunctional educational systems. Survivors of the “Red Terror” and families still mourning the loss of their beloved also told their stories. Mothers and sisters still carrying the scars of loss of their beloved children and brothers, and hooded men out of fear disguised but speaks their grievances of the silence genocide committed, as well as demonstrators and intellectuals – all expressed their disappointments and continuing injustices committed in the new government known as Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) that ruled since 1991. Children also told stories about the struggles of peasant life, relayed their hunger for a better education and life, and recounted the war that claimed the lives of many. The documentarian listened to the suffering people; they were agents of their own stories and he stood in solidarity holding their hands to hear their pain, disappointment, and hope.

Scenes in *Imperfect Journey*, *Harvest*, and *Teza* capture children of peasant farmers being interrupted and snatched by exploiters while tilling the soil. Gerima’s films connects land and land issues with education in a random, yet organically coherent and logical manner. *Imperfect Journey*, *Harvest* and *Teza* are perfect examples of such connections. For instance, in *Harvest*, Kebebe challenges Berihun to obtain education so that he will not remain enslaved, but become truly liberated. This is more relevant now where land grabbing is a huge problem in Ethiopia and many places across the African continent.

Gerima’s interest in transgenerational storytelling or transmission is evident in his films. For example, children are part of the storytelling in both *Imperfect Journey* and *Adwa*, and elderly griots serve as custodians of history and memory. In *Adwa*, two young boys narrate the story of Adwa while gazing at a commemorative church painting that depicts the battle of Adwa.³⁸ Repetition of the slayed dragon imagery reminds us that this is a very important cultural and artistic symbol. These two friends hold hands, while one tells the other – who happens to be blind – the story of Adwa and

“shows” him the painting. When Gerima asks the sighted boy what he is doing, he replies that his friend’s eyes are a little impaired. He does not say he is blind; he says his friend cannot see, but he sees for him. And he explains what he is describing. “I tell him what I see. When he doesn’t understand, I tell him again.” One boy is a Muslim, and the other one is a Christian, yet, they are best friends. This is a powerful critique of contemporary Africa, where the despot in power who divides to rule following the footsteps of their colonial masters fuels neo-colonial religio-tribalism.³⁹

In *Imperfect Journey* the documentarian had a very interesting conversation with young people from a farming family including students and a 12 years old young girl that deserves attention for many reasons and the subtitle of this article comes out of this conversation.

“A fast, ‘Zinging’ Shot Scares the Baboon!”

Gerima asked a young girl (12 years old) why she needed to protect the harvest. The girl was multitasking, telling her stories while weaving a basket. Yet, was fully engaging in the conversation. With confidence, she tells that she protects the farm from the wild animals and the baboon is afraid of her.

Haile Gerima: How can you scare him since you’re so small?

Young Girl: It does not matter how small I am – it depends on the heart.

Haile Gerima: How?

Young Girl: Courage has nothing to do with [being] big or small.

The courage of this young girl amazes the documentarian and he further ask her questions.

Haile Gerima: You have a powerful sling?

Young Girl: Yes ... but – it depends on the throw. A fast, “*zinging*” shot scares the baboon; but a weak shot, with no “zing,” only encourages his boldness. He just sits and stares at you.

Thereafter, Gerima asks about the girl’s experience during the Civil War. She is the first in *Imperfect Journey* to tell how her uncles and villagers fared in the Civil War. Some returned home mutilated, some died, and others disappeared. All brought misery to their parents and the villagers.

Another striking feature of Gerima’s interview with the young girl is her astonishing courage to obtain an education before she dies. Such courage is like that of Beletech, the young daughter of a peasant, from *Harvest: 3,000 Years*. The gender disadvantage is vividly apparent in both works. The young girl’s courage and powerful “zinging” shot also remind us of

the biblical story of David, who slayed the giant Goliath with a slingshot. Metaphorically, her courage to keep the baboon away from the farm it has been destroying speaks of the courage of Africans who resist colonial forces and the victory of Adwa against Italian colonialism (1896) and the courage of Adwa's children forty years later resisting Italian fascism (1935-41). Emperor Haile Selassie I's in a recorded speech after exile and victory in the palace garden in Addis Ababa stated: "Even in the 20th century with faith, courage and a just cause, David will still beat Goliath!"⁴⁰ The Pan-Africanist vision and struggle scares the "baboon" – i.e., they ward off the colonial powers and the colonial mindset. *Adwa* is also another documentary that tells the legendary stories of *Itege*/Empress Taitu Bitul, Menelik II's wife and other heroines. Taitu was the first who identifies the craftiness of the Wuchale Treaty drawn up by the colonial agent "I am a woman and I do not love war, but rather than accepting this article XVII I prefer war" and when Antonelli express the honor issue from the Italian side to amend the Treaty she affirmed "we also have our honour to protect."⁴¹ Indeed, she greatly contributes to the permanent victory of Adwa. This victory illustrates "the symbolic importance of Adwa in the conception and development of pan-African solidarity and identity."⁴² In *Gondere Begashaw*, Abba Gerima chronicles the extraordinary contributions of Ethiopian women in resisting the Mussolini's Fascist invasion during the Second World War (1935-1941). As Abba Gerima chronicled "They [Ethiopian women] harassed the enemy forces by sending down avalanches of stones from hilltops and setting fire to their camps."⁴³ Gerima's forthcoming *Adwa II: The Children of Adwa Forty Years Later* profiles the same story. The main storyteller of *The Children of Adwa Forty Years Later* is Felekech, an Ethiopian female Azmari traditional singer whose cameo performance ends the story of *Adwa*.⁴⁴ In the next section, we shall look at the manifestation of invisible colonialism in the contexts of miseducation and cultural displacement.

Miseducation and Cultural Displacement

The Dysfunctional Education System and Westernized Curricula

It is only people who are historically disoriented who wonder about the contribution of colonialism to education and economic development. Colonial education is, in fact, miseducation. Fascists killed our intellectuals and even that their primitive instincts killed the children of our intellectuals.⁴⁵ Schooling was used as an instrument to further advance colonization. Solomon Getahun, in his *History of the City of Gondar*, states:

The Italians opened two schools (“asquaällās”), one for whites and the other for blacks, in the city. The “whites only” school was located in today’s Hibrat (the former Princess Tanāgnā Warq) school building. For the blacks, a building that served both as a prison and a school was opened in Gira Wanbar area or present-day ṣādiqū Yohannis School. There, students were taught up to fourth grade.⁴⁶

The Italian Fascists used the school as a prison and it functioned as a space of segregation by color. When contagious disease broke out among the prisoners, it also afflicted and sickened students and caused many deaths. Emperor Haile Selassie’s (1892-1975) modernization agenda did not include integration of the traditional school system, but the replacement of foreign curricula, Westernization, and even Japanization.⁴⁷ The primary agents of Westernization of education were missionaries and Peace Corps. SIM’s (Sudan Interior Mission, began in 1983 and in 1980 adopted a trade name or slogan ‘Serving in Mission’) missionary policy in Ethiopia was strikingly similar to the colonial fascist education policy. Both the colonial and missionary education policy limited Ethiopians’ educational level to the fourth grade. Those who transgressed the missionary policy used to be punished. They would be excommunicated from church membership and expelled from their job by the missionaries if they or a family member worked for the missionary institution.⁴⁸ In several interviews and writings, Gerima mentions how generations of Ethiopians were misplaced by Western education.

Gerima’s generation of students, as well as those who preceded and followed him, are victims of foreign curricula who do not know anything about Ethiopian history or civilization. That lack of knowledge creates alienation. Given the additional lack of the privileges of informal education, education-around-the fire, cultural storytelling, and the generational transaction of history that was helpful to and evident in the cinematic works of Gerima, the crisis continues to prevail.

Miseducation as Invisible Colonialism and Cultural Displacement

Long before Gerima left his homeland, he had already experienced some forms of cultural dislocation. Such cultural alienation began through the medium of Euro-American-centric education and cinema. This is a symptom of “self-alienation,” the phenomenon of self-hate ushered in and through the exploitive *Tarzanic* film screen.⁴⁹ The Italian Fascists produced cinema that misrepresented Ethiopia and screened it in the theaters.⁵⁰ Even worse, the post-Fascist generations fell more deeply into the victimization pit. Gerima recounts his own personal unpleasant experience as the result of such victimization:

As kids, we tried to act out the things we had seen in the movies. We used to play cowboys and Indians in the mountains around Gondar ... identifying with cowboys conquering the Indians. ... Even in Tarzan movies ... whenever Africans sneaked up behind Tarzan, we would scream our heads off, trying to warn him that “they” were coming! It was [a] ... politically and psychologically damaging exploitation of my very being.⁵¹

Besides the exploitation cinema, missionaries and Peace Corps students serving as educators played a significant role in Gerima’s cultural displacement, as well as that of others in his generation and the one that followed it. Haile’s “miseducation” came through the American Peace Corps and “Western” missionaries who were present at the time when he was a student in Ethiopia. Gerima comments on the “Westernization” of education in Ethiopia and its effect on Ethiopians’ cultural and identity crisis as follows:

From the British design of the Ethiopian educational system in the 1940s, young people were contaminated by the false notion of Europeanizing themselves. “It was an invisible cultural colonialism teaching the children of Ethiopia to hate the past, to hate everything Ethiopian, to die and integrate the whole demented idea of modernization. The American Peace Corps were teaching us about the American Revolution. We were studying Kentucky and Chicago rather than Gojjam and Jimma.”⁵²

Although Ethiopia has never been colonized by a particular European colonial power apart from the five-year Italian Fascist occupation (1935 – 41), cultural (or invisible) colonization has had devastating effects. Ethiopians during the Haile Selassie I era faced the dilemmas of both “Westernization” and “Japanization” seeking otherness at the expense of the self. This was evident in the adoption of the Japanese Constitution, as if both Western education and the Japanese Constitution were synonymous with, rather than mere vehicles for, modernization.⁵³ In Gerima’s view, the elites in twentieth-century Ethiopia “came up breathing the air with somebody else’s lungs, not with their own lung.”⁵⁴ Ayele Bekerie maintains that the miseducation of Ethiopian historians, who bought the idea of the so-called “Ethiopianist” who wrote following the legacy of Hegel and other racist prejudiced intellectuals, completely denies the historical, cultural, and artistic contributions of Africa.⁵⁵ Another feature of the intellectual elites is that they do not create dialogue with the community but talk to themselves.

Gerima also presents a compelling case about the miseducation of Ethiopian intellectuals in both his interviews and cinematic works, particularly in *Imperfect Journey*. In a conversation that I had with Gerima, he mentioned the predicament of the intellectual elites in Ethiopia who looked

down on oral sources when they began writing history. What they neglected was not only the folkloric orality, oral-literature (orature), and oral history, but also the iconographic and even written texts. Gerima explained that, "Often Ethiopian historians borrowed from Europeans, the very Italians we defeated, the very British and French who collaborated with Italians for the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. Ethiopian historians go to them as sources, instead of researching from our own Ethiopian folkloric and oral traditions."⁵⁶ There are many examples of historians following such a path of elitists.⁵⁷ For now, it is suffice to mention a recent book that deals with the subject of miseducation by Yirga Gelaw Woldeyes, *Native Colonialism: Education and the Economy of Violence against Traditions in Ethiopia*, The Red Sea Press, 2017. The authors pause the following questions: Why did a country that was never colonized replace its government, legal system and educational institutions with foreign imitations? How did it come to have a European language as its medium of higher education and why was the rich philosophy, literature, history of the country replaced by western knowledge? What is the impact of this process in the identities and daily lives of contemporary Ethiopian students? Next, we shall see how an indigenous knowledge system namely storytelling or the fire-around-education represented and used in Gerima's works.

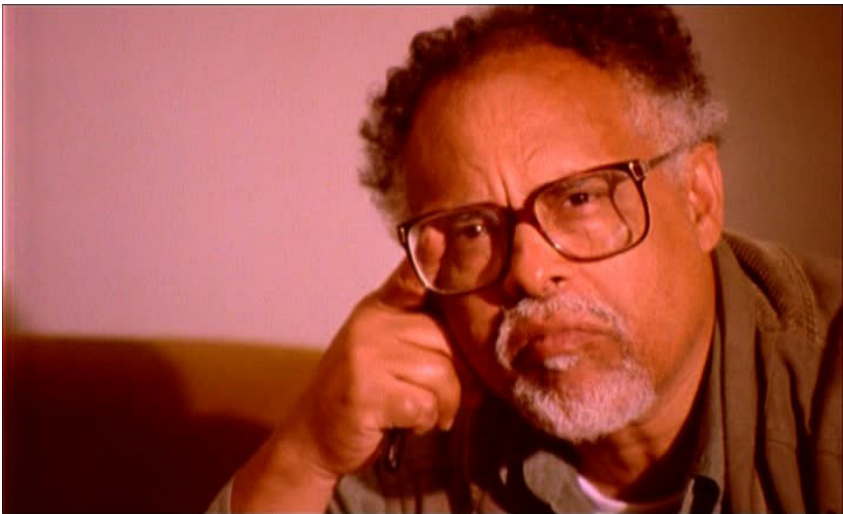


Figure 6: Invisible Colonialism – Haile Gerima in the documentary *Adwa* interviewing, courtesy of Haile Gerima

The Fire-Around-Education: “*I Tell Stories, Therefore I Exist!*”

Fire-around-education is an alternative and informal education that addresses the deficiencies of formal curricula. Such education is what sparked Gerima's imagination for his cinematic works. Similarly, Walter Rodney critic elitist education that serves primarily colonial purposes and alienates from the community.⁵⁸

In *Teza*, Anberber, the idealist doctor, had a dream in which he was struggling to prevent the massive pouring of grain out of the container by using pieces of paper. He was confused by this dream and had his dream interpreted by the elderly priest around the fire. *Yeneta*, the priest-teacher, interpreted Anberber's dream by telling him that the pieces of paper signified that his imported and foreign knowledge system was failing to solve local problems. Later, *tebel* (holy water) was used to exorcise Anberber's demons. For Gerima, culture is analogous to holy water. “We need to make films about our past because the past is like *tebel* (holy water).”⁵⁹ The twin problems of intellectuals are marginalization and elitism will be discussed next.

Marginalization of Intellectuals and Elitism

As one of the professors whom Gerima interviewed in *Imperfect Journey* mentioned,

the university in Addis Ababa has always been portrayed as a hotbed of opposition by each government: as a communist breeding ground by Haile Selassie; as reactionaries by the junta; as ethnic chauvinists by the present administration, which claims to embrace national unity.⁶⁰

The intellectuals always threaten the elites in power, and some of the professors Gerima interviewed relayed how they were even fired from their teaching positions from the universities. Forty-two university professors were expelled under the new government. The schoolteacher in *Teza* suddenly disappeared. This was not because the educators threatened with guns; rather, they presented ideas that could challenge and mobilize the people. Again, liberating ideas are more powerful than military might. At the end of *Imperfect Journey*, young peace-walkers are shown marching toward the creation of a new humanity.

Epilogue of Imperfect Cinema

***Imperfect Cinema as a Cultural Aesthetics*⁶¹**

What does Gerima's aesthetic concept of “imperfect cinema” entail? Does it reflect his philosophical outlook on life? And how does the concept positively affect his cinematic corpus? Interwoven cinematic concepts in Gerima's

films include accented cinema, cinema of silence, and triangular cinema. The notion of imperfect cinema rejects epistemological arrogance. In terms of vision, Frantz Fanon's famous quote captures this best: "Each generation must discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it, in relative opacity."⁶² As an independent filmmaker, Gerima embarked on a long journey, during which he refused to compromise the stories he listened to, but, rather, offered counter-narratives, counter-stories, and counter-images.

The weapons of storytelling, and the shields of culture and memory, are aimed at bringing cinematic resistance, transformation and liberation from neo-colonial oppressions. Gerima's *Imperfect Journey* and four decades of producing eleven cinematic corpuses, plus more than fifteen manuscripts waiting in the wings, have gifted us with a visual poetics packed with mystery and brimming with "Wax and Gold" – the deep meanings of the ups and downs of people of African descent. In terms of historical consciousness and aesthetics, Haile Gerima has fulfilled his aspiration to become a "protégé" of his historian father, Abba Gerima. Like his father, Gerima is a filmmaker whose documentaries and dramas reveal *symbolic reality* – and who uses monumental cinema as a weapon of resistance and a means to heal the self. *Aluta Continua!* "The struggle continues; victory is certain!"

Notes

1. Haile Gerima and the Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski collaborated to make a documentary in which Africans speak for themselves. Gerima agreed to partner with the journalist, and the BBC that commissioned *Imperfect Journey*, without compromising his stories. Only two brief notes on/reviews of *Imperfect Journey* are available. Michael Dembrow, "Imperfect Journey." CFAF 14, "Notes and Resources." <http://spot.pcc.edu/~mdembrow/imperfectjourney.htm> and also Sharon Hutchinson and Bruce Wiegard's, "Gerima's *Imperfect Journey*: No End in Sight." *American Anthropologists*, n.s. 100, no. 1 (1989): 169–71. For further bibliographic work, see Tekletsadik Belachew, "Close Up: The Genius of an African Storyteller: A Selectively Annotated Bibliography of Work by and on Haile Gerima," *Black Camera: An International Film Journal* 4:2 (Spring 2013):144–62. Film critics and scholars ignore the documentaries of Haile Gerima, including his *Adwa: An African Victory*. Scholars who wrote about *Adwa* did not interact with this documentary. See, for instance, Paulos Milkias and Getachew Mekuria, *The Battle of Adwa* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2005). See also a non-African writer: Raymond Jonas, *The Battle of Adwa: African Victory in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011). Note the later title resembles the documentary title and yet not mentioned at all.
2. Afewerk Tekle. "The State of Art in Ethiopia." Library of Congress. http://www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/feature_wdesc.php?rec=5509
3. Ibid.

4. The victory of Adwa happened on the feast day of Gyorgis.
5. In *Teza*, the opening voiceover is that of the griots, known in Ethiopia as Amina or *Lalibela*. In their morning song, they sing their messages and thereby awaken the society.
6. Chineweizu, *Voices from Twentieth-Century Africa* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), xxxiv – xxxv.
7. For example, when Marx, Engles, and Lenin were captured in Teza, Anberber jokingly inquired, “*Who are these trinities?*”.
8. See Haddis Alemayehu’s *Fikir-Eske Mekabir. Love Unto Crypt*. Translated by Sisay Ayenew (Bloomington: Authorhouse, 2005). The central character is Gudu Kassa (a nickname that literally means “Weird Kassa”). His revolutionary ideas and speeches against the corrupted and oppressive system resemble Kebebe’s ideas and speech in *Harvest*. See also a commentary on *Fikir-Eske Meakabir (Love Unto Crypt)* by Fikre Tolossa, “Realism in Haddis Alemayehu” in *Silence is Not Golden: A Critical Anthology of Ethiopian Literature*, 123-134, edited by Taddese Adera and Ali Jimale Ahmed, Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1995.
9. See Greg Thomas, “Haile Gerima’s Pan-African ‘Message to the Grassroots’: Hearing Malcolm X in Amharic– or *Harvest: 3,000 Years*” in *Film in African Literature Today*. 55-72, Ibadan, Nigeria: HEBN Publishers, 2010.
10. Diane D. Turner and Muata Kamdibe, “Haile Gerima: In Search of an Africana Cinema,” *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 6 (2008): 969.
11. See Haile Gerima, “Close-Up: Director’s Note,” *Black Camera*, An International Film Journal, 4:2 (Spring 2013), 47.
12. Haile Gerima, “On Film,” <http://seleda.tripod.com/Nov/jebdu.html>
13. Ibid.
14. For a brief encyclopedia entry on Gerima Tafere, see LaVerle B. Berry, “Gärima Taffärä” in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, edited by Siegbert Uhlig, 706, Vol. 2 D-Ha (Harassowitz Verlag: Wiesbaden, 2005), 706.
15. Ayele Bekerie, Ethiopic, *An African Writing System: Its History and Principles* (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1997).
16. See Imbakom Kalewold, *Traditional Ethiopian Church Education*, translated by Mengistu Lemma (New York: Teachers College Press, 1970).
17. See Ayele Bekerie, Ethiopic, *An African Writing System: Its History and Principles* (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1997), 35-40. This book is written from a gripping Pan-Africanist perspective.
18. Alaka Imbakom Kalewold. *Traditional Ethiopian Church Education*. Translated by Mengistu Lema. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1970), 27. Chapter V is about the Kine (Qene) School. See also Bekerie, *Ethiopic*. 128-130.
19. Haile Gerima, “Who is Haile Gerima?” An Interview. *Focus Magazine* (January-February 2009), 11.
20. Gerima also improvises in his numerous interviews. In his filmmaking, he also improvises in collaboration with the actual space of shooting and even allows actors who are in line with the story to improvise (both are betrayals of the script and dynamic relation with the script).
21. Bekerie, *Ethiopic*. 130.

22. Haile Gerima's lecture "Noise, Silence and Memory: Towards a Cinema of Silence against the Noise!" at the University of Chicago, IL, May 10, 2013. My personal note taken from the lecture. He also said, "There is no music without silence. No light, without shadow. Now sound without silence. A cinema of silence is a therapeutic exercise."
23. John L. Jackson Jr., "Decolonizing the Filmic Mind: An Interview with Haile Gerima." *Callaloo* 33, no. 1 (2010): 25–36. Gerima speaks about his journey, including his experience of colonization and decolonization, and how he is using cinema as a weapon to find himself. He says, "I don't think I sacrifice aesthetics for politics, but cultural expressions don't come out of a vacuum" (33).
24. See Ashenafi Kebede, *Roots of Black Music: The Vocal, Instrumental & Dance Heritage of Africa and Black America* (Trenton, N.J. Africa World Press, 1995), 20–35.
25. For further elaboration of alternative but not contradictory meaning of 'the dead speaks to the living', see Belachew. *The Dead Speaking to the Living*, 85 – 87.
26. All translations from Amharic to English particularly the works of Abba Gerima in this article are mine. ገሪማ ታፈረ። አባ ታጠቅ ካሣ የቋራው አንበሳ፤ ዳግማዊ ቴዎድሮስ ንጉሠ ነገስት ዘኢትዮጵያ። 1961 ዓ. ም. ሁለተኛ እትም።
ፊንፊኔ ማተሚያቤት። Gerima Tafere, *Abba Tataq Kassa Yequwaraw Anbessa Dagmawi Tewodros Niguse Negest Zethiopia* (Abba Tateq Kassa, the Lion of Quara: Tewodros II, King of Kings), Addis Ababa: Finfine Printing & Publishing, 1969. This is a 256 pages book in Amharic. See Elias Yemane, Amharic and Ethiopic Onomastics. 174 -181. Abba Tateq or Kassa who later become Tewodros II is known for unifying the nation and fighting several attempts of colonial powers. As it is mentioned earlier, the history of Tewodros II (1820-1868) chronicled by Abba Gerima's father, Merigeta Tafere who was the secretary of emperor Tewodros II. See Gerima Tafere, Abba Tateq, 13.
27. In 2012, a memorial monument of Rudolfo Graziani was erected in a village south of Rome in Italy. Graziani was responsible for the massacre of 30,000 Ethiopians in Addis Ababa and using poisonous and chemical weapon. See Sarah E. Lewis and Dagmawi Woubshet, moderated by GerShun Avilez, "Love Visual: A Conversation with Haile Gerima," *Callaloo* 36.3 (2013): 655.
28. ገሪማ ታፈረ (ዘብሔረ ጎንደር)፣ጎንደራ በጋሻው (አዲስ አበባ፣ በተስፋ ገብረ ሥላሴ ማተሚያ ቤት 1949 ዓ.አ.ም)7-9. Gerima Tafere (of Gondar). *Gondare Bagashaw (The Gondare with His Shield)*, Addis Ababa: Tesfa Gebre Selassie Publisher,
29. Haile Gerima, "A Moment with ... Haile Gerima," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4ZmNdDqFw>. For similar phraseology, see Kwame Nkurumah, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964), 103.
30. www.sankofa.com
31. Elias Yemane, *Amharic and Ethiopic Onomastics: A Classic Ethiopian Legacy, Concept, and Ingenuity* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), 88.
32. For example, in Harvest, the faithful servant of the oppressive master is named Kentu (Vanity). This name implies his being in a subservient role, serving the exploitative master and hoping to be given his shoes when they become worn out. Blinded by the propaganda, Kentu even hopes to become a servant of the master's son, Tenku, when he returns from abroad.

33. Francoise Pfaff, "From Africa to the Americas..." Interviews with Haile Gerima (1976-2001), in *Focus on African Films*, ed, Francoise Pfaff (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 209. See also Steve Howard, "A Cinema of Transformation: The Films of Haile Gerima," *Cineaste* 14 (1985): 39.
34. Diane D. Turner and Muata Kamdibe, "Haile Gerima: In Search of an Africana Cinema," *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 6 (2008): 968.
35. Haile Gerima. Who is Haile Gerima? *Focus Magazine* (January-February 2009), 13. Amina or Lalibela are like gypsies, or town criers, who speak to the society in the morning. Legend has it that King Lalibela unleashed them. In Teza, the opening voice is the voice of Amina or Lalibela.
36. 'An interview with Haile Gerima.' Tekletsadik Belachew, *Representation of the Self: Theological Reflections on Haile Gerima's Cinematic Storytelling*, MA Thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (2012): 140-161. Available <http://1.1.1.1/#http://thesisbank.jhia.ac.ke/>
37. This query echoes the eschatological vision of Isaiah 2:4: "They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore."
38. See Girma Fisseha, "Ethiopian Paintings on Adwa" in *Adwa: Victory Centenary Conference*, 26 February – 2 March 1996, edited by Abdussamad H. Ahmad and Richard Pankhurst (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, Institute of Ethiopian Studies), 691-698.
39. Haile Gerima, "New film 'Adwa' by director Haile Gerima," an interview with Jacki Lyden. "All Things Considered" Weekend Edition (NPR). 11/21/1999.
40. Available on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Y9txgoiHrU> See also Jeff Pearce, *Prevail: The Inspiring Story of Ethiopia's Victory over Mussolini's Invasion: 1935 – 1941*, (Skyhorse Publishing, 2014).
41. Minale Adugna, "Women and Warfare in Ethiopia. A Case Study of their Role During the Campaign of Adwa, 1995/6, and the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935-41", in *Gender Issues Research Report Series*. No. 13. (Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa. 2001), 16. No place of publication mentioned. During the war times women participated "in the mobilization of troops, organization and transportation of supplies and provisions, raising the morale of fighters, gathering intelligence information, nursing the wounded, and in the actual fighting. Women that did not go to battlefields had to carry the burden of men's work at the home front." For a collection of essays, poetries, novel and paintings, see Pamela S. Brown and Fassil Yirgu, ed., *One House: The Battle of Adwa 1896 – 100 Years* (Chicago: Nyaala Publishing, 1996).
42. Ayele Bekerie, "The 1896 Battle of Adwa and the Forging of the Ethiopian Nation" in *Themes in Modern African History and Culture*, edited by Lars Berge and Irma Taddia (Padova, Italy: Libreriauniversitaria, 2013), 178. This essay also depicts the role of Empress Taitu in Adwa and beyond.
43. Quoted from Adugna. "Women and Warfare in Ethiopia." 25. The original source is Abba Gerima's Gondere Begashaw.

44. On March 1, 2014, The Ethiopian Community Association of Chicago hosted the event at the Northeastern Illinois University, in Illinois. On the accession of the celebration of Adwa victory (118th) Gerima introduced and screened a musical video "Felekech Celebrating Adwa" by a female Azmari (traditional musician-singer). Felekech who had a brief appearance in Adwa and became the main storyteller in Adwa II: "The Children of Adwa Forty Years Later."
45. See Bahru Zewde, *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia: The Reformist Intellectuals of the Early Twentieth Century* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2002).
46. Solomon Getahun. *History of the City of Gondar* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2005), 146.
47. See Bahru Zewde. "The Concept of Japanization in the Intellectual History of Modern Ethiopia" in *Society, State and History* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2008), 189-214.
48. Getachew Belete, Elohi and Halleluya: YeEthiopia Kale Hiwot Bete-Kirstiane Tarik. (Agonies and Halleluias The Story of the Kale Hiwot Church in Ethiopia. Vol. 3, 1974-2000 E.C). (Addis Ababa: The Ethiopian Kale Hiwot Church Literature Department, 2000), 26-27. Getachew interviewed Peter Cotterell a long time missionary in Ethiopia, was the leader of SIM Ethiopia and the first director of the Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology who replied the missionary policy was right at that time. This missionary defended the rightness of this oppressive education policy invented by his predecessors. This is just one example of unrepentant missionaries who served more the colonial purposes and continued the legacy of miseducation. For an Afro-pessimistic missionary view of education see Paul D. Fueter, "Theological Education in Africa." *The International Review of Missions* (1956): 377-395
49. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. from French by Richard Philcox (New York: Grover Press, 1952), 17, 119.
50. AnneMarie Tamis-Nasello, "Italian Colonial Cinema: Nationalism and Notions of Alterity" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2008), 209-210.
51. Quoted by Francoise Pfaff, "Haile Gerima (1946-), Ethiopia," in *Twenty-Five Black African Filmmakers: A Critical Study, with Filmography and Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 138.
52. Haile Gerima, "Ethiopians should find their own medicine," <http://arefe.wordpress.com/2009/03/02/ethiopians-should-find-thier-own-medicinehaile/>
53. Bahru Zewde, *Society, State, and History* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2008). The Japanese Constitution was adopted at the expense of the Ethiopian Constitution, known as Fetha Negest, which was thereby neglected.
54. Haile Gerima, "Who is Haile Gerima?" An Interview. *Focus Magazine* (January-February 2009), 11.
55. Ayele Bekerie. *Ethiopic, An African Writing System: Its History and Principles* (Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1977), 35-52. See Maimire Mennasemay, "Ethiopian History and Critical Theory: The Case of Adwa," in *The Battle of Adwa: Reflections on Ethiopia's Historic Victory Against European Colonialism* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2005), 297

56. See Belachew, "Representation of the Self: Theological Reflections on Haile Gerima's Cinematic Storytelling," 144-45.
57. For example, after hearing allegations that Ethiopians' stories were exaggerated, the popular Ethiopian journalist and writer Paulos Gnogno completely rejected Ethiopian sources and wrote a book on the history of the Ethiopian-Italian war based solely on Italian sources – as if that was a better and neutral perspective. See Paulos Gnogno, *YeEtyopia Ena Yeltalia Torennet* [The War Between Ethiopia and Italy] (Addis Ababa: Bole Printing Press, 1980 E.C.), 5. Such rupture from the self and Ethiopian sources has been a predominant mark even among Ethiopian scholars that is best combated in Haile Gerima's *Adwa* and the forthcoming *Adwa II: The Children of Adwa After Forty Years*. He uses iconographic church paintings, oral history, and folkloric orality such as *fukera* and *shilela* (war songs) in these films.
58. See Walter Rodney, "Education in Africa and Contemporary Tanzania," in *Education and Black Struggle: Notes from the Colonized World*, edited by *The Institute of the Black World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Educational Review, 1974), 82-99. See also Carter G. Woodson, "The Miseducation of the Negro," *Crisis* 38:8 (August 1931), 266-267.
59. See Gerima, *Focus Magazine*, 12.
60. See the cover page of *Imperfect Journey's* VHS.
61. Interwoven cinematic concepts in Haile Gerima's films include accented cinema, cinema of silence, and triangular cinema. See Haile Gerima, "Triangular Cinema, Breaking Toys, and Dinkesh vs Lucy." In *Questions of Third Cinema*, edited by Jim Pines and Paul Willemen (London: BFI Publishing, 1989), 71.
62. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans from French by Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963). 132

Selected Filmography by Haile Gerima

- Harvest: 3,000 Years* (Mirt Sost Shi Amet). 16mm, black and white, 150min. Washington, DC: Mypheduh Films, 1976.
- Sankofa*: 35mm, color, 125 min. Washington, DC: Mypheduh Films, 1993.
- Imperfect Journey*: 16mm, color, 96 min. Washington, DC: Mypheduh Films in coproduction with BBC, 1994.
- Adwa: An African Victory*. Color, 97 min. Washington, DC: Mypheduh Films, 1999, Teza. 35mm, color, 140 min. Washington, DC: Mypheduh Films, 2008.

References

- Alemayehu, Haddis, 2005, *ፍቅር ለሙሉ ፍቅር Fikir Iske-Mekabir/Love Unto Crypt*. Translated by Sisay Ayenew. Bloomington: Authorhouse.
- Adugna, Minale, 2001, *Women and Warfare in Ethiopia. A Case Study of Their Role During the Campaign of Adwa, 1995/6, and the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935-41*. Gender Issues Research Report Series, 2001, No. 13, Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa.

- Belachew, Tekletsadik, 2012, "Representation of the Self: Theological Reflections on Haile Gerima's Cinematic Storytelling," Master's thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.
- Belachew, Tekletsadik, 2013, "Close-Up: The Genius of an African Storyteller: A Selectively Annotated Bibliography of Work on and by Haile Gerima." *Black Camera* 4, no. 2: 144-162.
- Belachew, Tekletsadik, 2018, "The Dead Speaking to the Living: Religio-Cultural Symbolisms in the Amharic Films of Haile Gerim," 67 – 91. In *Cine-Ethiopia: The History and Politics of Film in the Horn of Africa*, Michigan State University Press.
- Belete, Getachew, 2000, ኤሌዚና ሃሌሉያ: የኢትዮጵያ ቃለ ስዩወት ቤተክርስቲያን ታሪክ *Elohi ena Haleluya: YeEthiopia Kale Hiwot Bete-Kirstiane Tarik. (Agonies and Halleluiahs The Story of the Kale Hiwot Church in Ethiopia*. Vol. 3, 1974-2000 E.C. (Addis Ababa: The Ethiopian Kale Hiwot Church Literature Department.
- Bekerie, Ayele, 1997, *Ethiopic, An African Writing System: Its History and Principles*. Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press.
- Bekerie, Ayele, 2013, "The 1896 Battle of Adwa and the Forging of Ethiopian Nation". In *Themes in Modern African History and Culture*, 177-192, Edited by Lars Berge and Irma Taddia, Padova, Italy: Libreriauniversitaria.
- Berry, LaVerle B., 2005, "Gäräma Taffärä" In *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, edited by Siegbert Uhlig, Vol 2 D-Ha, Harassowitz Verlag: Wiesbaden.
- Brown Pamela S., and Yirgu, Fassi, ed., 1996, *One House: The Battle of Adwa 1896 – 100 Years*, Chicago, Nyala Publishing.
- Chineweizu, 1988, *Voices from Twentieth – Century Africa*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Dembrow, Michael, *Imperfect Journey*, CFAF 14, "Notes and Resources," <http://spot.pcc.edu/~mdembrow/imperfectjourney.htm>.
- Fanon, Frantz, 1952, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. from French by Richard Philcox, New York: Grover Press.
- Fanon, Frantz, 1963, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. from French by Constance Farrington, New York: Grove Press.
- Fikre, Tollosa, 1995, "Realism in Haddis Alemayehu," In *Silence is not Golden: A Critical Anthology of Ethiopian Literature*, 123-134. Edited by Tadesse Adera & Ali Jimale Ahmed, Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press Inc.
- Fueter, Paul D., 1956 "Theological Education in Africa," *The International Review of Missions* (pp. 377-395).
- Gerima, Haile, "A Moment With ... Haile Gerima." Research Channel / University of Maryland at College Park Television (UMTV). <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4ZmNclDqFw>. Interview with Lee Thornton.
- Gerima, Haile, 1989 "Triangular Cinema, Breaking Toys, and Dinknesh vs. Lucy." In *Questions of Third Cinema*, edited by Jim Pines and Paul Willemen, 65–89. London: BFI Publishing.
- Gerima, Haile, 1999, "New film 'Adwa' by director Haile Gerima." An interview with Jacki Lyden, "All Things Considered" Weekend Edition (NPR), 11/21/1999.
- Gerima, Haile, 2009, "Ethiopians Should Find thier [sic] Own Medicine," Addis Journal: A Weblog on Arts & Culture, Life & Society. March 2, <http://arefe.wordpress.com/2009/03/02/ethiopians-should-find-thier-own-medicinehaile/>

- Gerima, Haile, 2009, "Who is Haile Gerima?" Focus Magazine 1:10 (January-February) 10-13.
- Gerima, Haile, 2013, "Close-Up: Director's Note," *Black Camera, 2 An International Film Journal*, Vol. 4 No. 2 (Spring 2013), 47-48.
- Getahun, Solomon, 2005, *History of the City of Gondar*, Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- Girma, Fisseha, 1996, "Ethiopian Paintings on Adwa" In *Adwa: Victory Centenary Conference, 26 February – 2 March*, edited by Abdussamad H. Ahmad and Richard Pankhurst. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 691-698.
- Gnagno, Paulos, 1980, *YeEtyopia Ena YeItalia Torennet*, (The War Between Ethiopia and Italy), Addis Ababa: Bole Printing Press, E.C. In Amharic.
- Haile, Getachew, 1995, "Highlighting Ethiopian Traditional Literature." In *Silence is not Golden: A Critical Anthology of Ethiopian Literature*. 39-58, Edited by Tadesse Adera & Ali Jemale Ahmed. Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press Inc.
- Howard, Steve, 1985, "A Cinema of Transformation: The Films of Haile Gerima." *Cineaste* 14 (1985): 28, 29, 39.
- Hutchinson, Sharon, and Bruce Wiegard., 1989 "Gerima's Imperfect Journey: No End in Sight." *American Anthropologists*, n.s. 100, no. 1 (1989): 169-71.
- Imbakom Kalewold (Alaka). *Traditional Ethiopian Church Education*. Translated by Mengistu Lema. New York: Teachers College Press, 1970.
- Jackson, John L., Jr., 2010, "Decolonizing the Filmic Mind: An Interview with Haile Gerima." *Callaloo* 33, no. 1 (2010): 25-36.
- Jonas, Raymond, 2011 *The Battle of Adwa: African Victory in the Age of Empire*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Kebede, Ashenafi, 1995, *Roots of Black Music: The Vocal, Instrumental & Dance Heritage of Africa and Black America*. Trenton, N.J. Africa World Press.
- Lewis, Sarah E. and Dagmawi Woubshet moderated by GerShun Avilez, 2013 "Love Visual: A Conversation with Haile Gerima." *Callaloo* 36.3 (2013): 636-657.
- Mennasemay, Maimire., 2005 "Ethiopian History and Critical Theory: The Case of Adwa," In *The Battle of Adwa: Reflections on Ethiopia's Historic Victory against European Colonialism*. New York: Algora Publishing.
- Milkias, Paulos and Getachew Mekuria, ed., 2005, *The Battle of Adwa*. New York: Algora Publishing.
- Pearce, Jeff, 2014, *Prevail: The Inspiring Story of Ethiopia's Victory over Mussolini's Invasion: 1935 – 1941*, Skyhorse Publishing.
- Pfaff, Françoise, 2004, "From Africa to the Americas: Interviews with Haile Gerima (1976-2001)." In *Focus on African Films*. 203-220, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Rodney, Walter., 2008, "Education in Africa and Contemporary Tanzania," In *Education and Black Struggle: Notes from the Colonized World*, edited by The Institute of the Black World. 82-99. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Educational Review.
- Tamis-Nasello, Anne Marie, 2008, "Italian Colonial Cinema: Nationalism and Notions of Alterity" Ph.D. diss., New York University.

- Tafere, Gerima, 1969, *አባ ታጠቅ ካሣ የቋራው አንበሳ፤ ዳግማዊ ቴዎድሮስ ንጉሠ ነገስት ዘኢትዮጵያ። Abba Tateq Kassa Yequaraw Anbessa: Dagmawi Tewodros Niguse Negest ZeEthiopia*, (Abba Tateq the Lion of Quwara: Tewodros II, King of Kings), Addis Ababa: Finfine Printing & Publishing, in Amharic.
- Tafere, Gerima, (of Gondar), 1956, *Gondare ba Gashaw*, (The Gondare with His Shield), Addis Ababa: Tesfa Gebre Selassie Publisher, in Amharic.
- Tafere, Gerima, 1971, *Yamakana dawal : Kamesewa aska Matamma* (*Bell of Torment or Harbinger of Adversity from Massawa to Matamma*), Asmara: Kokebe Tsibah Printing Press.
- Tekle, Afewerk, 2009, "The State of Art in Ethiopia," Library of Congress, http://www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/feature_wdesc.php?rec=5509
- Thomas, Greg, 2010, "Haile Gerima's Pan-African 'Message to the Grassroots': Hearing Malcolm X in Amharic— or Harvest: 3,000 Years," *In Film in African Literature Today*. 55-72, Ibadan, Nigeria: HEBN Publishers.
- Tekle, Afewerk. "The State of Art in Ethiopia." Library of Congress. 2009. http://www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/feature_wdesc.php?rec=5509
- Turner, Diane D., and Muata Kamdibe. "Haile Gerima: In Search of an Africana Cinema." *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 6 (July 2008): 968–991.
- Woldeyes, Yirga Gelaw, 2017, *Native Colonialism: Education and the Economy of Violence Against Traditions in Ethiopia*, The Red Sea Press.
- Yemane, Elias, 2004, *Amharic and Ethiopic Onomastics: A Classic Ethiopian Legacy, Concept and Ingenuity*. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press.
- Zewde, Bahru, 2002, *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia: The Reformist Intellectuals of the Early Twentieth Century* Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press.
- Zewde, Bahru, 2008, "The Concept of Japanization in the Intellectual History of Modern Ethiopia" *In Society, State and History, Selected Essays*. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press.

