

**REFLECTIONS OF CULTURAL, IDEOLOGICAL, AND
PHILOSOPHICAL THEMES IN TIGRIGNA TRADITIONAL SONGS**

2008-2011 EC

EYOB MUSIE DEMAS

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ADVISOR

GETAHUN MESELE (PHD)

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*REFLECTIONS OF CULTURAL, IDEOLOGICAL, AND PHILOSOPHICAL
THEMES IN TIGRIGNA TRADITIONAL SONGS: 2008-2011 EC*

Submitted by:

Eyob Musie: Student

Signature

Date

Approved by: Thesis Advisor

Signature

Date

Internal Examiner

Signature

Date

External Examiner

Signature

Date

Chairman

Signature

Date

Department Head

DECLARATION

This is to certify that this thesis entitled “*The Reflections of Cultural, Ideological, and Philosophical themes in Tigray Tigrigna Traditional Songs: ca 2008–2011 EC*”, submitted to Mekelle University, College of Social Sciences and Languages, Department of Music and Visual Arts, for the granting of the degree of Master of Arts in Ethnomusicology, is carried out by Mr. Eyob Musie Demass, under my supervision and guidance. To the best of my knowledge, the material presented in this thesis has not been submitted, in whole or in part, for the award of any other degree, diploma, fellowship, or other similar titles at any other University or Institution.

Name of Student: Eyob Musie Demass _____

Date: June 2025

Place: Mekelle University

Glossary of local terms

Chra wata A string spike fiddle musical instrument.

Kebro A Percussion musical instrument played by beating with the hands.

kirar A bowl lyre-type chordophone with 5 or 6 strings,

embelta A wind instrument made from metal or horn, often producing a buzzing or trumpeting sound.

meleket A long metal trumpet-like wind instrument.

Shambeko A traditional wooden flute made from bamboo or reed.

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Abstract

This study explored the reflections of cultural, ideological, and philosophical themes embedded in traditional Tigrigna songs of Tigrai during the period 2008–2011 E.C. Employing a textual analysis methodology, the research draws on lyric analysis, in-depth interviews, and focused group discussions to uncover how these songs serve as repositories of communal memory, identity, and belief systems. The findings reveal those traditional songs prominently express nationalism and patriotism, reaffirming the significance of music in fostering unity and collective identity during times of sociopolitical upheaval. Philosophically, the songs convey deep spiritual convictions and moral teachings, revealing how musical expression becomes a conduit for articulating ethical principles and metaphysical perspectives. Culturally, symbolism is intricately woven into the lyrical narratives, using metaphor, allegory, and imagery to communicate complex meanings tied to both historical experience and communal values. These symbolic layers strengthen intergenerational knowledge transfer, reinforcing cultural consciousness and ideological coherence. The study concludes that Tigrigna traditional songs are not merely artistic expressions but vital cultural texts that bridge past and present, sustain identity, and inspire resilience. Their continued preservation and integration into educational and community frameworks are essential to safeguarding Tigrai's intangible heritage.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Traditional songs are predominantly performed using indigenous instruments and are deeply rooted in the cultural, historical, and social contexts of a community. These songs are deeply woven into the cultural identity of the community, expressing their values, convictions, and social traditions. The melodies, rhythms, and lyrics of traditional songs are shaped by a community's history and passed down through generations, serving as a means of preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge. In addition to their artistic significance, these songs serve an instructive purpose, promoting ethical lessons and fostering a sense of community unity.

In Tigray, Tigrigna traditional songs have been a vital component of the region's cultural heritage. Performed with instruments such as the kirar, chira, shambeko, kebero, embelta, and melket, these songs have been central to the daily lives and social rituals of the Tigray people. They are presented at rituals, community gatherings, and festive occasions, functioning beyond entertainment as a means of transmitting collective experiences, preserving history, and affirming cultural norms. The lyrics frequently draw on historical events, ethical teachings, the natural world, social responsibilities, and human relationships. Using poetic expression and symbolic imagery, these songs communicate emotions like grief, pride, and hope, providing a platform for both individual and communal expression.

The research explored how major themes such as nationalism, spirituality, and symbolism are represented in these songs. Nationalism emerged in the form of collective identity and pride, rooted in shared cultural memory and historical experience. Spirituality serves as the blueprint for a society's moral code. It weaves together threads of respect, metaphysical inquiry, and the enduring wisdom of the past. Symbolism, expressed through metaphors and allegories, conveyed deeper meanings about social and natural phenomena. These aspects reinforced the songs' educational and social roles, safeguarding the continuity of Tigray's cultural identity while conveying the community's shared values and perspectives.

The research leveraged the principles of nationalism theory to show how cultural expressions, like Tigrigna music, cultivate a collective sense of unity and historical consciousness. Symbolic interactionism provided a lens for analyzing the metaphors, allegories, and symbolic imagery through which complex cultural and philosophical ideas were communicated. Ethnomusicological theory supported the interpretation of these songs as cultural artifacts and social practices rooted in rituals and communal life. Drawing from aesthetic theory, the analysis showed how Tigrigna traditional songs transmit beauty, moral values, and emotional truths, thereby enhancing their expressive and ethical meaning.

From these theoretical foundations, the conceptual framework of the study was developed. Patriotism, framed as a form of cultural nationalism, encompassed the expression of collective pride and unity informed by the historical experiences of the Tigray people. Spiritual values and a connection to the divine were expressed in the lyrics of the songs, which also provided moral guidance and ethical standards derived from cultural beliefs. Symbolism involved the use of metaphors and allegories to communicate layered meanings, frequently drawing on elements from nature, objects, and animals to convey philosophical insights and collective memory. These three dimensions were closely interrelated: cultural values and symbolic expression often reinforced ideological notions such as patriotism, while spirituality intersected with both cultural and ideological aspects.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Tigrigna traditional songs of Tigrai play profoundly reflect the cultural, ideological, and philosophical identity of the Tigrai people. Although these songs hold considerable importance, their meanings and the societal changes they reflect have not been thoroughly examined. Much of the research on traditional music has concentrated on its musical structures and performance styles, often overlooking the ideological, symbolic, and philosophical messages conveyed through the lyrics. While some studies have examined the structure and instrumentation of traditional Tigrigna songs, their deeper symbolic and meaningful aspects have been largely ignored. (Gebremariam, 2015; Alemu, 2013), there has been relatively little attention given to their deeper symbolic dimensions and meanings. Spiritual reflections embedded in the lyrical content of Tigrigna traditional songs.

During the critical period of 2008-2011 EC, Tigray underwent significant social and political changes that profoundly impacted artistic expression. Aalen and Tronvoll (2009). Traditional songs from this period reflect themes of resilience, identity, and communal solidarity, yet little research has been conducted to analyze their role in shaping public consciousness and expressing nationalist sentiment. Despite their importance in contemporary discussions on culture, spirituality, identity, and social change, the symbolic and philosophical elements of these songs remain largely unexplored. Understanding the link between traditional music and evolving socio-political dynamics requires investigating these aspects. According to Tesfay (2017), traditional songs serve as both historical testimony and ideological commentary, particularly during periods of social upheaval. Nevertheless, existing research has overlooked the unique role of traditional Tigrigna songs in shaping cultural consciousness and preserving the philosophical and spiritual worldview of the people.

As song texts, Tigrigna traditional songs serves as cultural archives, preserving collective memory and transmitting philosophical and spiritual knowledge across generations (Hailu, 2012). In the face of increasing cultural erosion due to modernization and globalization, the absence of focused academic attention on these lyrical traditions poses a risk to their preservation. A critical examination of their thematic significance particularly their symbolic richness and ideological

depth during transitional periods is essential to ensure that these cultural expressions are not lost or misinterpreted over time.

This research was inspired by a personal and academic engagement with Tigrigna traditional songs and their enduring relevance. Having been raised in a setting where these songs were an integral part of daily life, communal gatherings, and ceremonies, the researcher cultivated a profound appreciation for their expressive, exploring these songs' deep symbolic and philosophical layers, which articulate complex ideas about national identity, history, and spiritual resilience, prompted this scholarly investigation. The emotional impact, metaphorical richness, and ideological importance of the songs were the main motivators for the researcher to contribute to their academic documentation and cultural preservation.

This study addresses a gap in existing scholarship by analyzing selected songs from this critical period, focusing on their cultural, ideological, and philosophical dimensions. By doing so, it provides a more profound understanding of how traditional music reflects the historical consciousness, spiritual values, and collective identity of the Tigrai people (Mekonnen, 2016).

1.3 Objective of the Study

1.3.1 General Objective

This research examines traditional songs from 2008 to 2011 EC to identify how they reflect the cultural, ideological, and philosophical elements of society.

1.3.2 Specific Objective of the Study

This study has the following specific objectives

1. Analyze the expression of nationalism in traditional song lyrics.
2. Analyze philosophical reflections on spirituality embedded in the songs.
3. Analyze the use of symbolism in conveying cultural meanings.

1.4. Significance of the Study

This research has significance in several areas related to the preservation and understanding of cultural heritage. This work helps document traditional songs that express cultural, ideological, and philosophical themes, thereby aiding in the preservation of intangible heritage. These results provide valuable guidance for schools, cultural and linguistic research centers, and anyone engaged with traditional music, literature, or cultural scholarship. The study also establishes a basis for future academic work, encouraging continued research and interdisciplinary engagement with the social functions of traditional arts.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study analyzes a selection of traditional Tigrigna songs from the 2008–2011 EC period, focusing on how their lyrics express cultural, ideological, and philosophical themes. The study specifically analyzes how these songs reflect nationalism, spirituality, and symbolism. The scope of the research is limited to songs performed by the Tigray people in the Tigrigna language. By narrowing the scope to these key dimensions, the research aims to provide a deeper understanding of how traditional songs function as expressions of collective identity, spiritual reflection, and the meaning conveyed through symbols within the socio-political context of that time.

1.6 Limitation of the Study

One key constraint of this research is the difficulty in accessing some materials, owing to the absence of a systematically organized collection of traditional songs, notably from Tigray TV, a primary source of such materials. Additionally, the lack of systematic documentation and preservation of traditional music presents challenges in obtaining a complete and representative selection of songs.

1.7 Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter introduces the study, outlining the background, problem statement, research questions, objectives, significance, scope, and theoretical and conceptual underpinnings. Chapter Two provides a review of related literature, discussing previous studies and scholarly perspectives relevant to the cultural, ideological, and

philosophical elements reflected in Tigrigna traditional songs. Chapter Three outlines the research methodology, detailing the research design, sampling techniques, data collection methods, and analytical approaches used in the study. Chapter Four presents the findings and analysis, examining how the selected songs from 2008–2011 EC reflect the identified thematic elements. Chapter Five offers the summary, conclusions, and recommendations based on the findings. References and appendices are placed at the end of the study to support the research content and offer additional information.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Philosophical, Cultural, and Ideological Dimensions of Traditional Songs

The philosophical dimension of traditional songs encompasses the articulation of values, beliefs, and conceptual worldviews through musical and lyrical expression. According to Agawu (2003), music operates as a mode of intellectual discourse, providing a medium for reflecting on existence, moral principles, and human experience. Nketia (1974) similarly notes that musical forms articulate abstract thought, enabling communities to encode ethical principles, existential reflections, and worldviews through song structures, rhythms, and lyrics. In many cultural settings, traditional songs embody themes of love, spirituality, and moral reasoning, showing that they convey philosophical depth by expressing the intellectual and ethical perspectives of their communities. The philosophical dimension in music thus refers to the underlying ideas and systems of thought encoded within musical expression, beyond its entertainment or functional purposes.

From a cultural perspective, songs mirror shared values, symbolic traditions, and aesthetic ideals. Merriam (1964) highlights that music is firmly embedded in cultural contexts, representing collective meanings and worldviews. Similarly, Shelemay (2001) underscores music's role in expressing cultural identity and heritage, functioning as a symbolic medium through which societies articulate their conceptual frameworks.

Traditional songs employ symbolic imagery, metaphor, and culturally significant motifs to represent concepts such as respect, communal solidarity, and historical consciousness. Culture in songs thus refers to the encoded collective knowledge, norms, and worldview of the community.

The ideological dimension relates to how music communicates belief systems, social norms, and collective consciousness. Frith (1996) notes that music embodies ideological content by expressing shared values, identity markers, and social order. Turino (2008) highlights that musical participation is intertwined with ideas of community, nationhood, and social identity, showing how music serves as a medium for articulating collective beliefs. In traditional songs, ideological elements are often expressed through themes such as nationalism, gender relations, and moral

values. The ideological dimension of music thus refers to the social and political viewpoints symbolically conveyed within musical expression, extending beyond its social or educational roles. traditional songs integrate philosophical insights, cultural concepts, and ideological frameworks within their musical and lyrical structures. Philosophy reflects abstract thought and ethical reflection, culture conveys collective identity and symbolic systems, and ideology expresses social beliefs and normative structures. Examining these dimensions highlights the intellectual depth of traditional music, demonstrating that songs function not only as entertainment but also as significant vessels of ideas, values, and collective knowledge within societies.

2.1.1. The Meaning of Traditional Songs

Traditional songs constitute an essential part of cultural heritage, preserving history, social values, and artistic expression. Scholars emphasize their oral transmission, collective character, and profound link to cultural identity.

Blacking (1973) characterizes traditional music as “humanly organized sound,” illustrating how it mirrors the social and cultural systems of the communities that produce it. He stresses that traditional songs transcend artistic expression, functioning as living traditions that adapt across generations while safeguarding essential cultural values.

Merriam (1964) outlines the ten functions of music, arguing that traditional songs play key roles in social integration, emotional expression, and cultural continuity. He notes that traditional songs function as carriers of knowledge, strengthen communal identity, and fulfill ritual roles. Building on this view,

Nettl (2005) highlights their oral transmission, stressing that they are not static creations but adaptable forms that shift in response to social and historical change. He asserts that traditional songs embody the values and ideologies of their communities, often blending myth, history, and moral teachings.

In ethnomusicology, Turino's (2008) framework identifies traditional songs as "participatory music," highlighting their role in bringing communities together through active involvement rather than being performed for passive audiences. This communal nature distinguishes traditional songs from commercial or art music.

For the purposes of this study, traditional songs are understood as musical compositions performed with traditional Tigrigna instruments, including the kirar, chira, and shambeko. These songs serve as crucial expressions of Tigrai's cultural and ideological identity, reflecting historical narratives, social structures, and philosophical ideas.

2.1.2. Concepts of Ethnomusicology

Ethnomusicology is an interdisciplinary field that explores the relationship between music, culture, and society. It is concerned with understanding how music functions within different cultural contexts and how music-making practices are deeply embedded in the values, beliefs, and social structures of a community. Ethnomusicology scholars stress that music should be understood not merely as an art form but also as a social, historical, and cultural phenomenon.

Merriam (1964) defines ethnomusicology as “the study of music in culture”, emphasizing the need to understand music within its cultural and social context. This perspective suggests that music cannot be understood in isolation but must be examined in relation to the people who create and perform it, as well as the society in which it exists. Merriam's perspective highlights the significance of viewing music as a form of cultural expression that conveys identity, values, and societal structures.

Building on Merriam's definition, Nettl (2005) underscores the importance of examining the role of music within cultural life. He further emphasizes that ethnomusicology encompasses the study of all musical traditions in their cultural contexts, rather than being limited to non-Western or traditional music. He also highlights the role of musical performance, rituals, and symbolism in shaping cultural identity. Nettl's approach aligns with the field's broader goal of exploring how music reflects and reinforces social, ideological, and philosophical values.

Turino (2008) offers a comprehensive framework for understanding music, distinguishing three principal modes of musical engagement: participatory, presentational, and community-based. In traditional Tigrigna music, performances predominantly follow the participatory mode, emphasizing collective involvement and shared experience rather than individual display. Instruments such as the kirar, chira, and shambeko play a central role in facilitating this communal musical interaction. They play a key role in facilitating social interaction, expressing emotions, and transmitting cultural knowledge.

According to Christopher Small (1998), music is fundamentally a social act—what he terms “musicking”—where participation in musical events strengthens social bonds and cultural identity. In the context of Tigrigna songs, this concept helps explain how music reinforces community cohesion and shared values. Similarly, Merriam (1964) emphasizes that music functions not only as an artistic medium but also as a social process that conveys cultural meanings and supports societal structures.

Catherine Bell (1997), who highlights how ritual practices maintain cultural continuity and reinforce collective memory. In Tigrigna traditional songs, ritual music is intimately connected to spirituality, social cohesion, and the promotion of communal harmony. This study adopts ethnomusicology as its methodological foundation to analyze traditional songs produced between 2008 and 2011 EC. Ethnomusicology provides a lens through which to explore the embedding of these songs in the social and cultural fabric of the Tigrai people, reflecting ideological, philosophical, and cultural dimensions. Scholars such as Bruno Nettl (2005) and Alan P. Merriam (1964) emphasize ethnomusicology’s ability to reveal music’s societal roles, particularly in processes of socialization, identity formation, and the transmission of cultural values.

2.1.3. Characteristics of Music

Music is a universal language used by people from all backgrounds to express emotions and reactions in various situations, such as celebrations, times of grief, periods of hardship, and even hunting love, and empathy. As a matter of fact, this music has its own exceptional and different characteristics.

Melody: Melody in music is primarily characterized by three elements: motives, phrases, and periods. Motives are the least music element that combines to framework phrases. A phrase represents the largest unit of a melody and is typically divided into two sections: the antecedent and the consequent. The antecedent phrase occurs first, followed by the consequent phrase. Both phrases should sound complete in themselves. Analogous to grammar, the antecedent phrase can be compared to the first part of a sentence that is separated by a semicolon.

Harmony: The characteristics of harmony break down into two types of chords and arpeggios. Chords consist of notes played simultaneously and are commonly found in rock, classical, and jazz

music. The classical music period emphasized clear melodic lines; a principle also evident in various forms of popular music. Chords can be separated into arpeggios, in which the notes are performed consecutively rather than at the same time.

Rhythm: Rhythm creates another three characteristics of music Mono rhythmic rhythms maintain the greatest rhythmic clarity, as only a single rhythm is performed at a time. In mono rhythmic music, the melody, harmony, and rhythm progress together. By contrast, polyrhythmic music incorporates several simultaneous rhythms, producing intricate rhythmic textures; this approach is prevalent, as melody, harmony, and rhythm seldom follow identical rhythmic patterns. Additionally, tempo governs the speed of a piece and can significantly influence how the music is perceived.

Timbre: Timbre constitutes a core element of music, determining the texture and sonic richness of a composition. It is generally classified into two categories: instrumental and orchestral. Instrumental timbre refers to the distinctive sound produced by a single instrument. For instance, a clarinet and an oboe, both have different timbres, or tone colours, that segregate each other. In orchestral or ensemble timbre, the focus shifts from individual tone colors to the collective sound produced by multiple instruments. For example, the sound of a cello and a baritone can be combined to produce a unique result that blends the specific qualities of each instrument. The potential for these combinations is vast.

Form: Form refers to the organizational aspect of music that arranges its elements into a coherent structure, enabling listeners to perceive musical objectives and progression. For instance, rock music often follows a simple ABA structure, where the first section introduces a specific melody, the second section presents a contrasting melody, and the final section returns to the original melody.

2.1.4. Symbolism in Traditional Songs

Symbolism plays a key communicative role in Tigrina traditional songs, functioning not only as artistic decoration but also as a significant cultural mechanism for conveying values, beliefs, and social experiences. These songs frequently utilize metaphors derived from nature, animals, and rural life symbols that carry deep cultural associations and shared meanings within the Tigrai

community. Mountains, for example, are not just geological formations but emblems of resilience, endurance, and ancestral rootedness, especially in a region historically associated with struggle and survival. Similarly, lions are emblematic of courage, leadership, and honor, often used to praise heroes, patriots, or strong leaders. Rivers in Tigrigna traditional songs symbolize the continuity of life, the flow of time, and generational progression, implying that joy and sorrow, like flowing water, are persistent, constantly evolving, and never stagnant.

These symbols function as cultural shorthand, transmitting communal values through succinct yet powerful imagery that engages both the emotions and intellect of the audience. By embedding complex meanings in everyday imagery, traditional songs make abstract or sensitive topics such as death, love, spiritual longing, or political resistance accessible to a wide audience, including those with limited formal education. In doing so, they also reinforce the oral tradition's mnemonic power, allowing these cultural teachings to be remembered, interpreted, and reinterpreted over generations.

Finnegan (1970), emphasizes that symbolism is not a decorative device but an integral part of meaning-making in African oral traditions. She notes that metaphors serve as a "coded language" one that invites multiple interpretations, depending on the listener's knowledge, experience, and context. This allows oral poetry and music to function on several levels at once: as entertainment, moral instruction, historical record, and spiritual expression. In the Tigrigna context, this interpretive openness enriches the listener's engagement, making each song not only a performance but a site of reflection and cultural negotiation.

2.1.5. Nationalism in Traditional Songs

Nationalism is a prevalent theme in Tigrigna traditional songs, particularly in the context of historical resistance and liberation movements. The songs often pay tribute to local heroes, recount the struggles of conflict, and reinforce a collective sense of identity and regional pride. They act as a vital means of preserving historical memory, maintaining the story of perseverance, solidarity, and collective resilience.

Turino (2008) explains that music is instrumental in constructing national identity, especially during times of social and political upheaval. He argues that music's communal and performative nature helps build a shared identity and preserve historical memory, a role that becomes especially important during times of social change or conflict. during times of resistance and social upheaval. Songs that recount the hardships of conflict or the triumphs of national heroes enable the community to maintain a sense of unity and pride, reinforcing their resistance against oppression.

Shelemay (2007) highlights the role of traditional songs in preserving historical memory, particularly during times of conflict and national struggle. Shelemay argues that music functions as a historical archive, recording the collective experiences and struggles of the people. Through songs, communities not only preserve their shared history but also cultivate a sense of national consciousness and collective resilience, which strengthens their resolve in the face of adversity.

2.1.6. Spirituality in Traditional Songs

Spirituality is a significant theme in Tigrigna traditional songs, reflecting the peoples deep religious, ethical, and philosophical worldview. These songs often explore themes like divine justice, destiny, human suffering, blessings, and the ethical order of the universe. Music becomes a spiritual mirror through which individuals and communities reflect on their lives in relation to both divine order and earthly realities. These songs are more than just performances; they serve as a way for the community to reflect, mourn, express gratitude, and pass on moral lessons.

Ashenafi (1971), in his influential work *Roots of Black Music*, emphasizes that traditional Ethiopian music—both sacred and secular—is profoundly shaped by a religious consciousness that penetrates daily life. He points out that Tigrigna songs, even outside the liturgical setting, often echo themes central to Ethiopian Orthodox spirituality, such as humility before God,

endurance through suffering, and the hope for divine justice. According to Kebede, these songs reflect a cultural worldview where the divine is not distant but intimately present in personal and communal experiences, making music a vital vehicle for both moral and spiritual expression.

Merriam (1964) further supports this understanding by suggesting that in many African cultures, traditional music serves as a bridge between the spiritual and material realms. Music serves not merely as entertainment but also as a way to engage with fundamental questions about life, destiny, suffering, and the unseen forces influencing human existence. In the Tigrigna tradition, the spiritual role of music becomes particularly clear during times of crisis, mourning, or celebration, when songs are used to communicate collective messages and emotions. express inner anguish, or reinforce moral responsibility within the community. These spiritual songs therefore fulfill a dual role: reinforcing communal beliefs while offering both emotional support and moral guidance.

2.2 Review of Related Studies Conducted So Far

Scholarly inquiry into traditional Ethiopian songs has uncovered rich intersections of cultural, ideological, and philosophical meanings. Within this body of work, several researchers have analyzed traditional music through the lenses of nationalism, spirituality, symbolism, and moral values, though studies focusing specifically on Tigrigna songs from 2008 to 2011 EC remain limited.

Ethiopian music scholarship has largely emphasized periods of political upheaval, particularly during the Ethiopian Revolution and the armed struggle led by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Berhanu's (2004) analysis provides a comprehensive look at how political songs were used as tools for mass mobilization during critical periods, highlighting their effective lyrical and performative strategies. Similarly, Demissie (2010) documents the role of music in constructing collective memory and reinforcing ideological narratives during the liberation era. However, these studies generally concentrate on earlier periods and broader national contexts, with limited attention to how nationalist themes evolved in Tigrigna music in the years following the armed struggle, particularly between 2008 and 2011 EC.

Kaplan (1994) presents a foundational study of Ethiopian religious music, exploring how theological and moral messages are conveyed through musical performance and lyrical

composition. His work highlights the didactic function of music in religious settings, especially within Ethiopian Orthodox traditions. A recent study by Tadesse (2012) explores the blend of secular and spiritual themes in regional musical traditions. However, the existing academic literature still lacks detailed studies on how spirituality is specifically expressed in Tigrigna traditional music from the 2008–2011 EC period.

Studies on metaphor and symbolism in Ethiopian music have identified a range of linguistic and cultural strategies that deepen emotional and philosophical meanings. Shelemay's (2006) work explains how Ethiopian musicians use metaphors from nature, history, and religion to communicate complex social and emotional experiences. Gebrehiwet (2011) provides a more regionally focused study on Tigrigna proverbs and metaphorical expressions, but his work does not extend specifically to song lyrics. There remains a lack of focused research on the symbolic structures used in Tigrigna songs during the late 2000s and early 2010s, particularly in the context of socio-political transformation.

Levine (1974) and Uhlig (2013) have shown how Ethiopian oral traditions—including music—function as vehicles for cultural preservation and moral education. Their work emphasizes the role of music in transmitting values such as humility, resilience, historical consciousness, and social responsibility across generations. Yet, the particular ways in which these values manifest through themes of nationalism, spirituality, and symbolic expression in Tigrigna traditional songs during the 2008–2011 EC period remain an underexplored area of scholarly attention.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach

This study is grounded in a textual analysis approach, which emphasizes close reading and interpretation of cultural texts in this case, Tigrigna traditional songs. This approach allows for a deep engagement with the symbolic, ideological, and philosophical content encoded in the lyrics and structure of songs. Textual analysis is a research technique that examines how meaning is shaped by language, metaphor, storytelling, and performance within a given social, cultural, and historical environment.

As Denzin and Lincoln (2011) have noted, these interpretive approaches are vital for uncovering the deeper, layered meanings found within expressive cultural forms. Applying this approach to songs allows for the exploration of how music mirrors and shapes Tigrai's collective identity, cultural norms, and historical consciousness. This approach avoids collecting broad, general data in favor of deep interpretation, making it especially effective for exploring how traditional music engages with themes such as nationalism, gender, spirituality, and morality.

3.2 Research Method

This study employed a qualitative research approach, specifically utilizing textual analysis to critically examine selected Tigrigna traditional songs composed between 2008 and 2011 EC. This method involves an in-depth analysis of lyrics, thematic elements, stylistic features, and symbolic representations to reveal the socio-cultural, ideological, and philosophical dimensions embedded in the songs. By treating these songs as texts, the analysis emphasizes their content, structure, and intertextual meanings.

Textual analysis offers a framework for understanding how songs convey values, beliefs, and social commentary, while also considering their role within wider political and cultural settings. This method is particularly fitting for examining oral traditions where meaning is influenced not just by the lyrics but also by context, tone, and audience reception. In the analysis of Tigrigna songs, researchers focus on identifying recurring motifs, metaphors, and cultural references to

understand how the music reflects the socio-political realities of its time. The method also accommodates the examination of both lyrical content and the cultural function of these songs in preserving memory, transmitting values, and negotiating identity within Tigraian society.

3.3 Data Sampling

This research uses purposive sampling, a non-probability method, to deliberately select a focused and representative sample of both songs and participants. This technique allows for the careful choice of cases that are most relevant to the study's goals. Are particularly rich in information and directly relevant to the study's core themes, such as nationalism, spirituality, and symbolism. This approach allows the researcher to focus on the most relevant materials and individuals, enhancing the depth and specific context of the study's findings.

Songs from 2008 to 2011 EC were chosen for this study based on their thematic relevance and cultural significance. This approach facilitates the inclusion of songs that reflect distinct ideological, spiritual, and symbolic perspectives within Tigrigna tradition. The focus is on works that explicitly convey philosophical reflections, national sentiment, and layered symbolic meanings, enabling a detailed and culturally grounded textual analysis. The selected songs were chosen because they not only have artistic merit but also convey themes of historical awareness, moral ideology, and cultural identity. To complement this, purposive sampling was also used to identify knowledgeable participants, such as traditional musicians, cultural experts, and songwriters. These individuals possess deep understanding of the historical and cultural contexts of the songs and provide valuable insights into their meanings and significance. Their perspectives enhance the interpretive dimension of the study by linking lyrical content to shared cultural experiences, thereby facilitating a deeper comprehension of how nationalism, spirituality, and symbolism are expressed and preserved in traditional Tigrigna music.

3.4 Data Collection Tools

The study uses several tools to collect meaningful, context-rich data for exploring the cultural, ideological, and philosophical dimensions of Tigrigna traditional songs

Semi-Structured Interviews The study used semi-structured interviews with traditional musicians, cultural specialists, elders, and community members. These interviews produced in-depth qualitative data focused on participants' experiences with the songs, their cultural importance, and the themes within them. The flexible design of the semi-structured interviews enabled participants to express their interpretations openly, yielding valuable insights into the nuanced and subjective aspects of traditional music. These interviews were particularly instrumental in examining themes of nationalism and spirituality, providing perspectives on how the songs convey collective memory, ethical worldviews, and expressions of national identity rooted in cultural and historical contexts. Historical and cultural consciousness.

Focus Group Discussions Focus group discussions fostered a dialogue among participants, allowing them to share interpretations, compare viewpoints, and explore culturally shared understandings of the music. The discussions were particularly effective for analyzing the songs' spiritual and symbolic dimensions. Furthermore, the communal nature of these sessions mirrored the social context of musical experiences in Tigrayan culture, creating a platform to capture nuanced perspectives on how songs convey communal values, emotional expression, and philosophical ideas essential to the community's shared consciousness.

Lyric Analysis formed the core of the textual investigation. Selected songs were carefully examined for recurring themes, symbols, and metaphors to uncover the cultural, ideological, and philosophical meanings expressed through their lyrics. This method provided a systematic way to trace how ideas such as nationalism, endurance, and moral strength are expressed through symbolic imagery, poetic construction, and allegorical references. Lyric analysis was especially instrumental in investigating the interplay between nationalism, spirituality, and symbolism, revealing how these elements are integrated into the songs to convey deeper philosophical and ideological meanings.

Document and Archival Research were consulted to provide contextual grounding and historical depth. Materials included prior ethnomusicological studies, academic literature on Ethiopian and Tigrigna music, as well as historical and cultural records relevant to the selected songs. This tool supported the examination of symbolism, spirituality, and nationalism by situating the songs within broader socio-historical and cultural frameworks.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in accordance with recognized ethical standards to ensure the integrity of the study and the protection of participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after clearly explaining the nature, purpose, and scope of the study. Confidentiality was strictly maintained by anonymizing identifying information, unless participants gave explicit permission for their names or identities to be included. Interactions with participants were approached with care and cultural awareness, acknowledging the deep symbolic and philosophical significance of the music. The research maintained academic integrity by ensuring all sources were accurately cited, findings were presented objectively, and data interpretation remained honest and unbiased.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In Tigrai, traditional songs are integral to the daily life and cultural identity of the community. Beyond mere artistic expressions, these songs serve as cultural texts that transmit beliefs, values, and shared experiences across generations. These songs are closely linked to major life events and rituals, including weddings, funerals, religious ceremonies, harvest celebrations, and communal gatherings. They help orally preserve knowledge and strengthen a sense of belonging and identity in both rural and urban areas.

The use of traditional musical instruments such as kirar, chira, shambeko, kebero, embelta, and melket, gives these songs their distinctive sound. These instruments are not only tools for musical expression but also carriers of tradition and heritage. They help convey the emotional tone and symbolic depth of the lyrics, which often deal with central aspects of social life including hardship, devotion, bravery, historical memory, and collective values.

This chapter analyzes and interprets a selection of traditional Tigrigna songs, grouping them into three main thematic categories: ideological, philosophical, and cultural. Each of these categories is examined through two key elements that emerged from the song texts and performance contexts. Under the ideological dimension, the songs are analyzed for their representation of nationalism (patriotism). This element reveals how songs convey social responsibility, historical identity, and collective unity, especially during periods of social and political change

The philosophical dimension focuses on spirituality. Here, the analysis explores how the songs express a moral worldview, religious consciousness, and the community's connection to the transcendent. Through poetic language and spiritual imagery, the songs convey deeply held beliefs and ethical orientations that inform communal and personal values.

The cultural dimension includes an examination of symbolism. This element reveals the figurative language, allegory, and imagery used in the songs to express complex ideas about life, society, and nature. The symbolic structures present in these songs offer insight into how cultural meanings are encoded in lyrical form and how they continue to resonate with audiences across generations.

Through a careful interpretation of these three key thematic elements nationalism, spirituality, and symbolism the study demonstrates that traditional songs in Tigrai are not only aesthetic expressions but also powerful songs analyzed in this chapter illustrate how music serves as a living archive for Tigrigna-speaking communities, shaping and reflecting their way of life. They function as tools for social knowledge, historical memory, and the formation of identity.

4.1 Ideological

4.1.1 Nationalism (Patriotism)

Nationalism is a primary ideological theme in traditional Tigrigna songs, particularly when the music emphasizes communal unity, identity, and territorial pride. In Tigrai, such songs often reflect a strong attachment to the land, people, and shared history. These songs are not only musical expressions but also historical records of resistance, loyalty, and the collective memory of struggle.

In songs like “Yeftweki Adey,” “Woynalem,” and “Tigrai Adey,” traditional artists use poetic language, repetition, and metaphor to celebrate heroes, honor sacrifices, and promote unity among the people. For example, “Yeftweki Adey” is a powerful patriotic song that pays tribute to the land of Tigrai and the sacrifices of its people. Through vivid imagery and passionate lyrics, the song underscores the pride and unity of Tigrayans as they face adversity. It's frequently performed at public celebrations of independence or to commemorate important historical events.

Similarly, the song “Woynalem” stirs strong feelings of connection to Tigray and its rich heritage. The song serves as both a call to action and a reflection on the enduring strength of the Tigrayan people in their struggle for self-determination. Its message of resilience and patriotism is reinforced by the powerful vocal performance and rhythmic patterns.

“Tigrai Adey” by Berihi Mehari is another important anthem that expresses the pride of Tigrayans for their homeland. The song portrays Tigrai as a motherland that has nurtured its people through generations of hardship. The emotional intensity of the song, accompanied by the *kebero* and *kirar*, amplifies the sentiments of pride and loyalty that Tigrayans feel for their land.

In the Tigrigna tradition, patriotic songs also serve as a form of moral education. They highlight the virtues of bravery, selflessness, and unity. The performers whether elders, farmers, or soldiers

use these songs to express gratitude for past generations and inspire future ones to protect their land and culture. In this way, music becomes a means of transmitting political and social ideals across generations.

The instruments used in these songs, such as the *kirar* and *kebero*, help to intensify the emotional power of the message, creating a strong bond between the singer and the audience. Rhythmic patterns and chants are carefully matched to the tone of the lyrics, especially in songs that call for action, remembrance, or pride in Tigray's identity.

"Fetweki Adey" by Gebru G. Mariam:

"እትዮጵያ ዓደይ ፣ ዓዲ ብዙሓት ብሄር የ"
Ethiopia, my mother land, a land of many nations/ethnicities.

"ብዘይ ብኣክዶ ኮሪዕኻ ይሕደርየ"
Without you, I'm not proud to stay overnight.

"እትዮጵያ ዓደይ ፣በዓልቲ ሰላም ዲሞክራሲ"
Ethiopia, my mother land, a land of peace and democracy.

"ተኸፊልኪ እዩ ፣ብዙሕ መስዋእቲ"
A lot of sacrifices have been paid for you.

"ትግራይ ዓደይ ፣ዓዲቶም ተኮስቲ"
Tigray, my mother land, the land of shooters.

"እትዮጵያ ዓደይ፣ ዓዲ ብዙሓት ብሄር የ"

Ethiopia, my mother land, a land of many nations/ethnicities.

The lyric highlights Ethiopia's ethnic pluralism, emphasizing the coexistence of its various ethnic groups. Emphasizing the coexistence of various ethnic groups within the nation. Ethiopia is often referred to as a land of diversity, with over 80 ethnic groups speaking more than 80 languages. By singing about Ethiopia as a "home country of many ethnic groups," the lyric underscores a foundational principle of Ethiopian identity: unity in diversity. In other words, Ethiopia's strength

lies not in the dominance of one group, but in its ability to foster cooperation and peaceful coexistence among its varied peoples. The use of "እትዮጵያ" (Ethiopia) rather than a specific ethnic name further emphasizes the collective, all-encompassing nature of the nation.

From a nationalistic perspective, this line calls for the celebration of diversity within the framework of national unity. Rather than weakening the country, this perspective argues that Ethiopia's national identity is strengthened by its diversity. The speaker is highlighting that even with various ethnic and linguistic groups, Ethiopia is a unified nation, and every group is a vital part of that identity. This view promotes a form of inclusive nationalism that encourages all citizens to identify with the nation as a whole, rather than excluding any particular group.

"ብዘይብኣኺ ዶ፣ ኮሪዕኻ ይሕደር የ"

Without you, I'm not proud to stay overnight.

This line evokes the emotional connection between the speaker and Ethiopia. The speaker tries to reflect how much he love and prouder of his country by say that he cannot live proud if his country his home land is not present. The speaker's pride is inseparable from the nation, which implies that their identity and self-worth are deeply intertwined with Ethiopia's fate and achievements. The speaker is not just expressing pride in Ethiopia as an abstract concept; rather, they feel personally fulfilled only in the context of Ethiopia's wellbeing.

In terms of nationalism, this line conveys the powerful bond between the citizen and the nation. It reflects the idea that national identity is not solely about history, geography, or politics but also about emotional and cultural ties for the speaker, Ethiopia is not just a land, but a source of pride, hope, and emotional fulfillment. This can be seen as a call for national solidarity, where the strength of the nation and the individual are mutually reinforcing. It underscores the importance of collective pride and the idea that one's sense of identity is significantly shaped by their connection to their country.

"እትዮጵያ ዓደይ ፣በዓልቲ ሰላም ዲሞክራሲ"

Ethiopia, my mother land, a land of peace and democracy.

This line portrays Ethiopia as a nation built on the ideals of peace and democracy by singing of Ethiopia as a “country of peace and democracy,” the lyric positions Ethiopia not only as a political entity but as a moral beacon for its citizens and the world. Given the political turmoil Ethiopia has faced in recent decades, referencing peace and democracy can be interpreted as either a nostalgic look back at past ideals or a hopeful aspiration to return to them. This lyric reinforces a vision of Ethiopia as a modern, forward-thinking nation that values peace and democracy as foundational components of its identity. From a nationalistic perspective, this line is not only about celebrating Ethiopia's current status but also about aspiring to these values. It speaks to a desire for continued progress and emphasizes the importance of peaceful governance and the active participation of citizens in a democratic society. This can be interpreted as an argument for a patriotism rooted in ideals specifically, peace, democracy, and justice that the nation continues to strive for. These principles are presented as a key part of Ethiopia's nationalistic narrative.

"ተኸፈልኪ እዩ ብዙስ ሙስዋእቲ"

A lot of sacrifices have been paid for you.

This line emphasizes sacrifice as an essential element of the national consciousness. Throughout its history, Ethiopians have endured wars, famine, and political strife to protect the nation's sovereignty and independence. By acknowledging these sacrifices, the speaker honors those who have contributed to the country's survival and growth. The word "ሙስዋእቲ" (sacrifices) signifies that this achievement has not been easy, and the speaker is reminded of the hard work and hardship endured by previous generations to bring Ethiopia to where it is today.

This line is deeply nationalistic, as it draws attention to the collective sacrifices made by Ethiopians in the past to ensure the nation's existence and future. It serves as a reminder to the current generation of Ethiopians of their responsibility to uphold the values and ideals fought for by those who came before them. By invoking the idea of sacrifice, the speaker calls for the nation to honor its historical struggles and keep the collective memory alive, ensuring that these sacrifices are not forgotten. This contributes to a sense of national unity where every citizen feels connected to the sacrifices made for the country's freedom and progress.

"ትግራይ ዓደይ ፣ዓዲቶም ተኮስቲ"

Tigray, my mother land, the land of shooters

This line specifically highlights Tigray, a significant region in northern Ethiopia, known for its historical and political importance. The word “ተኮስቲ” (shooters) likely refers to the military role of Tigrayans in protecting Ethiopia and fighting for its sovereignty. Tigray has played a pivotal role in various historical resistance movements (e.g., the fight against Italian colonization and the Dreg regime), and this lyric celebrates that legacy. The phrase "their homeland" suggests a sense of pride in the regional identity of Tigray and its contributions to the broader Ethiopian struggle.

From a nationalistic perspective, this line asserts the importance of regional pride as part of the larger national identity. It suggests that Tigray's contributions are inseparable from the overall Ethiopian story. The speaker celebrates not just their national identity but also the regional struggles and sacrifices that have shaped Ethiopia's past and present.

The song "**Fetweki Adey**" skillfully weaves nationalism into its lyrics, using Ethiopia's rich cultural and historical fabric to promote a sense of unity, pride, and collective responsibility. This fosters a sense of unity by calling on all Ethiopians to recognize that every region has played a role in the nation's collective success. The lyrics highlight Ethiopia's ethnic diversity, the sacrifices of its people, and the ongoing aspiration for peace and democracy. The speaker's emotional connection to the nation demonstrates how national pride is not just about politics or history, but about a deep, personal relationship with the country. Moreover, by emphasizing both national unity and regional contributions (particularly Tigray's role), the song invites Ethiopians to appreciate their shared heritage while celebrating the unique contributions of each region. This creates a powerful vision of inclusive nationalism that transcends ethnic and regional differences for the greater good of the nation.

Song weynalem by Neguse abadi

"አዋይ ላለዋይ ፣ትሓበን ትግራዋይ"

Wow Laleway be proud Tigraian

"ጅግና ተጋዳላይ ፣ጨሚቱ ተኪሲ"

A heroic fighter, a sharpshooter with a steady aim

"ብ መሬት ብ ባሕሪ ፣ ሓራሲ ሓምባሲ"
By land and by sea, a tiller, a swimmer.

"ሸራሽ ምስ ጋምባላ ፣ ዕጥቂ ምስቲ ቁምጥ"
Shirak with Gambale armor with the quilt

"ጥይት ብግምባሩ ፣ ትበተኽ መዓንጥ"
A bullet through his forehead, you never afraid

"ኣጉረምርዮ ጎበዝ ኣጉረምርምዮ ኣሆሆ"
Grumbled, guy, grumbled, ahoho

"ኣዋይ ላለዋይ፣ ትሓበን ትግራዊይ"

Wow Laleway be proud Tigraian

This line is a bold expression of Tigraian identity. "Laleway" This can be seen as either a call to action or a moment of triumph, with a clear emphasis on Tigray's significance. The repeated emphasis on pride highlights the link between nationalism and ethnic pride.

The phrase can be viewed as a powerful proclamation of unity within the Tigraian community. It is more than just an expression of pride; it serves as a reminder of shared history and the strength of collective identity. This unity is essential in nationalism, where the strength of a community is seen in its ability to unite for common goals, whether political, social, or cultural. The repetition of pride demonstrates the continuous reinforcement of ethnic solidarity.

"ጅግና ተጋዳላይ ፣ ጨሚቱ ተኪሲ"

A heroic fighter, a sharpshooter with a steady aim

Here, the song narrates the image of a heroic fighter, someone who has chosen to fight for their people, regardless of the cost. The shot represents the ultimate sacrifice, a tragic but meaningful act. The image of someone "picked up and shot" reinforces the sense of martyrdom, a common theme in nationalist movements where individuals sacrifice their lives for a greater cause. The fighter is not just a soldier, but a symbol of the ideals that drive national pride freedom, justice, and sovereignty. The imagery of a martyr is used to evoke the selflessness and commitment to the

collective cause. In nationalism, individuals often put aside their personal interests to align with the nation's larger struggle. This reinforces the idea that the survival and identity of the nation are of the highest importance.

"ብመሬት ብባሕር ፣ ሓረሲ ሓምባሲ"

By land and by sea, a tiller, a swimmer

The dual identity of farmer and swimmer reflects the diverse skillsets and resilience of the people. Tigraians are depicted as people who thrive in both the physical and spiritual realms: cultivating the land and navigating challenges, whether on land or at sea. This symbolizes versatility and the capacity to survive in difficult environments. The image of farmers and swimmers highlights the working-class foundation of the Tigraian community. Farmers are traditionally seen as the backbone of society, while swimmers may represent adaptability and the ability to face challenges that go beyond the familiar. This suggests that the Tigrayan people embody a combination of foundational strength and flexible resilience. Are capable of overcoming adversity, no matter the circumstances. The two together symbolize the connection between hard labor (for land and country) and mental flexibility (to overcome obstacles and threats to their existence).

This duality also evokes a sense of self-sufficiency and resourcefulness, essential qualities in nationalism, where the people must depend on their own strengths and abilities to protect their land and maintain national pride.

"ሸራሽ ምስ ጋምባሌ፣ ዕጥቂ ምስቲ ቁምጥ"

Shirak with Gambale armor with the quilt

The imagery of Shirak, an important figure in Tigrai history, symbolizing protection and strength, alongside the Gambale armor, an ancient form of defense, reinforces the idea of preparedness and historical continuity in defending the homeland. The quilt symbolizes comfort and support, a stark contrast to the harshness of battle. This imagery brings together the warrior spirit with the soothing presence of home and heritage. The warrior is both prepared for conflict (armor) and grounded by the security and comfort of their traditions (quilt). This combination reflects the resilience of the Tigrayan people, where the difficulty of surviving in times of conflict is balanced by the support

of family, community, and tradition. This idea aligns with nationalism, which often relies on a combination of strength (to face external challenges) and roots (to stay connected to one's culture and identity).

"ጥይት ብግምባሩ ፣ ትበተክ መዓንጣ"

A bullet through his forehead, never afraid

The phrase "a bullet through his forehead" symbolizes the finality of sacrifice, but the statement "you never afraid" speaks to the unshakable courage of the people. There is a sense that despite facing ultimate danger, the individual embraces their role in the national struggle without fear. This line directly relates to the theme of self-sacrifice within nationalist movements. Nationalism often requires individuals to place their lives on the line for the greater good, and here, the lyric emphasizes that such a sacrifice is noble and fearless. The lack of fear is tied to a deep belief in the cause and a profound commitment to the nation's survival and freedom. It elevates the idea of martyrdom to the status of a national virtue, a concept central to many nationalist movements, where heroes are born from the sacrifices made for the community.

እንኳስ ተወለድና ፣ ካባኺ ትግራ ዮ

We are blessed and glad to be born of you, my homeland Tigray.

መላምል ሕብሮም፣ ከደራይ ዮ

they are slender with A graceful hue

በዓል ናይ በሃሎ፣ ብዓዶም መሓሎ

Those who claim our belonging, who swear by their homeland.

ዛ ዓበይ ሃገሮም ፣ መሬት ኢትዮጵያ

Their glorious country, the land of Ethiopia.

ወለደ ተበለት፣ ወሊዳቶም እያ

If she says, 'I gave birth Yes, she bore them with pride.

"እንኳስ ተወለድና ፣ ካባኺ ትግራ ዮ"

(We are blessed and glad to be born of you, my homeland Tigray)

This line serves as an expression of gratefulness and privilege to be born in Tigray. The word "እንኳስ" (lucky) conveys a deep appreciation for the land and its cultural importance. For the speaker, Tigray is more than just a birthplace; it's the source of their identity, a central part of who they are. The phrase suggests that Tigray acts as a nurturing force, shaping the people born there, rather than being just a physical place.

The reference to birth speaks to the primordial connection between the people and the land, where Tigray is both a mother and a sustainer, integral to the formation of one's identity. This line could also be interpreted as a broader comment on ethno-nationalism, the belief that a person's identity is intrinsically linked to the land. where one's identity is inseparable from the land. The pride of being born in Tigray is not just cultural but deeply spiritual, reflecting a divine blessing that ties the individual to the land and its history. In this sense, Tigray is more than just a place; it's a living entity that shapes and defines its people.

“መላምል ሕብሮም ከደራይ ዮ”
(They are slender with a graceful hue)

The imagery in this line conveys elegance, refinement, and cultural pride. The word “slender” suggests more than physical thinness; it evokes grace, delicacy, and poise, reflecting the dignified presence of the Tigraian people. This passage highlights how a blend of physical and metaphorical qualities creates a sense of refinement and aesthetic beauty. The phrase “with a graceful hue” emphasizes harmony, uniqueness, and subtle beauty. This blended, neutral tone symbolizes the diversity and balance within the Tigrayan identity, showing how different cultural influences, experiences, and traditions can merge to form a unified and elegant whole. Together, the line celebrates the Tigraian people as refined, resilient, and culturally proud, portraying their identity and heritage as something delicate yet strong, elegant yet enduring.

"በዓል ናይ በሃሎ ብዓዶም መሓሎ"
(Those who claim our belonging, who swear by their homeland)

The imagery in this line strongly emphasizes identity, loyalty, and patriotism. The phrase “those who claim our belonging” conveys a deep sense of connection to one's roots and community. It

suggests that belonging is not merely about physical presence but also about recognition, pride, and affirmation of one's place within the Tigraian society. The second phrase, "who swear by their homeland," amplifies this sentiment by portraying devotion, commitment, and moral responsibility. Swearing by one's homeland is a sign of deep respect for the land, its culture, and its people. This act suggests that the community's values, heritage, and collective identity are sacred, making their defense a matter of personal honor.

Overall, the lines celebrate national consciousness and cultural pride. They portray the Tigrayan people as deeply rooted, loyal, and committed to preserving their identity. The message is that true belonging comes not from a simple claim, but from active dedication and allegiance to one's homeland.

This lyric resonates with broader ideological elements in Tigrigna songs, where attachment to the homeland is often celebrated as both a personal and communal virtue, intertwining identity with moral and cultural duty.

"ዛ ዓበይ ሃገሮም መሬት ኢትዮጵያ"

(Their glorious country, the land of Ethiopia)

The imagery in this line conveys patriotism, reverence, and cultural pride. The phrase "their glorious country" emphasizes a deep emotional and collective attachment to Ethiopia, portraying the homeland as honored, noble, and worthy of respect. It reflects the pride of the people in their nation and highlights the homeland as a source of identity, unity, and historical significance. The second phrase, "the land of Ethiopia," reinforces this connection by grounding the lyric in a specific geographical and cultural context. It reminds listeners of the tangible homeland that nurtures traditions, heritage, and communal values. Together, the line celebrates national pride and shared identity, emphasizing Ethiopia not only as a physical space but also as a symbol of cultural strength, continuity, and collective belonging. The lyric portrays the people's homeland as both glorious and enduring, serving as a foundation for unity, loyalty, and patriotism.

"ወለደ ተበለት ወሊዳቶም እያ"

(If she says, 'I gave birth Yes, she bore them with pride)

This line returns to the powerful maternal metaphor. The land, in this case Ethiopia, is personified as a mother that gives birth to her children. This metaphor represents the nurturing and life-giving role of the homeland. The phrase “it is true!” emphasizes the certainty and authenticity of this bond. Ethiopia is not only a place of birth but also a source of nourishment, identity, and spiritual guidance.

The truth embedded in this statement further underlines the inviolable connection between the people and their land. It is a bond that is innate, indisputable, and unbreakable. The maternal metaphor also reinforces the idea that the people are the children of their land and are forever tied to it. This is a fundamental truth that shapes their sense of belonging and national identity.

In "Yewoynalem", the lyrics convey a deeply felt nationalistic pride and a profound connection to both Tigrai and Ethiopia. The song explores themes of identity, sacrifice, and loyalty that transcend individual experience and weave together a collective narrative. Through the use of maternal imagery, the Tigrai people are portrayed as being nurtured and shaped by their land, with this connection forming the core of their identity. The song reflects a powerful expression of territorial nationalism, where loyalty to the land and its traditions is seen as a sacred duty that demands both celebration and sacrifice. The line between individual identity and national identity is blurred, and the notion of sacrifice becomes central to the concept of patriotism. National loyalty is not portrayed as a passive emotion but an active, ongoing commitment, rooted in both historical experience and future aspirations. The imagery of rising tall and bright colors underscores the vibrancy and resilience of the Tigrai people, who continue to stand strong in the face of adversity.

Ultimately, the song serves as a testament to the unbreakable bond between the people of Tigrai, their homeland, and their shared identity as Ethiopians. It is a celebration of cultural vitality, the pride of belonging, and the sacrifice required to protect and nurture the homeland. The message is clear: the land is not only a birthplace but a mother, and the people will forever be connected to it committed, proud, and resilient.

Song "tigrai adey by berihu mehari"

ዓደድ ዓደድ መብቁል መንነት ክብረድ

My country, my country, the origin of my identity, my pride.

ዓደዮ ዓደዮ አለኹልኪ እንደ ባዕለዮ
My country, my country, I am here for you, by myself.

ትግራይ ዝዓደይ ክንደይ ይፆር ዝከብዳ
Tigray, my country, how much it endures and how much it bears.

ትግራይ ዝዓደይ ትምቸውኒ ዕቤትኪ የርእየኒ
Tigray, my country, you please me; show me your progress.

ብደቅኺ ዝተረኸበ ሰላም
Peace that has been found by your children.

ተረሰዖ ምስ ፀገበ ጠላም
He forgets when he is full, the betrayer.

ሓቂ ሒዝኺ ትሰግርዮ ኹሉ
Hold on to the truth and you will overcome everything.

ነቲ ዳህሪ ባርዕ ተፍስስሉ
You pour water on the burning embers.

ኣዝዝኒ እንደ ዝደለኹ
Tell me what you want.

ትግራይ ዝዓደይ ንመን ኢለዮ
Tigray, my country, to whom do I say this?

ንዓይ ንዓይ ኩልና ንብላልኪ
For me, for me, we all will say "for you."

ወላዲትና ኣይ ንስኪ እንዲኺ
Aren't you, our mother?

The song reflects a profound shift in nationalist sentiments, marking a significant departure from the unified Ethiopian nationalism of earlier times toward a distinct, Tigray-centric form of nationalism. This transformation aligns with the political climate following the 2011 period, which saw increasing tensions between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian government, culminating in later conflicts.

Before 2011, Ethiopian nationalism, especially in songs like *Neguse Abadi*, often embraced a sense of unity among Ethiopia's diverse ethnic groups, with a shared sense of pride in the country's

history, culture, and achievements. In these earlier songs, Tigrai's pride and identity were naturally embedded within the larger Ethiopian framework. Tigraians, like all Ethiopians, were united under the same flag and the same national narrative, where the shared experiences of struggle, triumph, and independence were emphasized.

However, after 2011, there was a notable shift in Tigrai's political stance and identity. This song, produced in 2011, reflects this shift, as the lyrics no longer speak to an Ethiopian identity that includes Tigrai. Instead, the nationalism in this song is exclusively regional and Tigraian. The key moments in the song express a deep-rooted pride in Tigrai's history, its struggles, and its cultural values, establishing Tigrai as an entity separate from the larger Ethiopian national narrative.

ዓደዮ ዓደዮ መበቁል መንነት ክብረዮ

“My country, my country, the origin of my identity, my pride.”

This line opens with a repetitive invocation of the homeland, establishing an emotional and spiritual tone. The phrase "መበቁል መንነት" (origin of my identity) underscores the foundational role of the land in shaping personal and collective identity. This is not just a physical location, but the spiritual birthplace of the self a core of belonging. By calling the country "my pride," the speaker elevates the nation to a symbol of dignity, linking personal worth with national history. The line demonstrates a profound intertwining of self and homeland, where the land is more than territory—it is the essence of who the speaker is. The repetition strengthens the emotional connection, showing that this relationship is not fleeting but deeply ingrained and revered across generations.

ዓደዮ ዓደዮ ኣለኹልኪ እንዶ ባዕለዮ

“My country, my country, I am here for you, by myself.”

This line expresses a deep sense of personal responsibility and loyalty to the nation. The speaker's statement “I am here for you, by myself” signals a willingness to stand alone in defense of their homeland. It suggests a kind of sacred duty, where one's identity is fulfilled through service and sacrifice. The tone is solemn and almost spiritual, resembling a vow or oath. This reinforces

nationalism as a deeply internalized belief, not just a political stance but a lived experience of devotion. Symbolically, the image of a lone figure standing for their country evokes themes of heroism, resilience, and unwavering love for the land, even in solitude.

ትግራይ ዝዓደይ ክንደይ ይፀር ዝከብዳ

“Tigray, my country, how much it endures and how much it weighs on her.”

Here, the homeland is personified as a being that suffers and endures burdens. The use of emotional language suggests that the country is not just land, but a living, breathing entity that feels pain and carries weight. This portrayal brings a spiritual dimension to the nation's struggle, linking collective hardship with moral strength. The line invites listeners to reflect on the historical and political suffering of Tigray, positioning it as both a victim and a pillar of endurance. It draws on nationalistic sentiments that honor resilience as a source of pride. Symbolically, the "weight" and "endurance" speak to the people's history of resistance, sacrifice, and survival against adversity.

ትግራይ ዝዓደይ ትምቐዚ ዕቤትኪ የርእየኒ

“Tigray, my country, you please me; show me your progress.”

This line reveals a tender and hopeful relationship between the speaker and the homeland. Despite past suffering, the speaker finds joy and beauty in Tigray, expressing satisfaction in what the country represents. The request to "show me your progress" carries both a yearning for development and a belief in the land's potential. It is a deeply spiritual plea, reflecting faith not only in physical recovery but also in moral and cultural growth. Nationalism here is linked with optimism and an active hope that the homeland will thrive. The symbolic relationship between the speaker and country takes the form of a dialogue, where the land is expected to respond, to rise, and to fulfill its promise.

ብደቅኺ ዝተረኽበ ሰላም

“Peace that has been found by your children.”

This line celebrates peace not as a gift from above, but as the fruit of sacrifice and struggle by the people the "children" of the land. It acknowledges the active role of citizens in securing tranquility, emphasizing peace as a national achievement rooted in unity and commitment. The mention of

"children" strengthens the familial bond between the people and the homeland, portraying the nation as a nurturing mother. Spiritually, peace achieved by sacrifice is sacred—it reflects reconciliation, redemption, and healing. In nationalistic terms, this line is an ode to those who labored, fought, or even died for the country's stability. The symbolism of peace is enriched by its connection to generational responsibility and collective victory.

ተረሰፖ ምስ ፀገበ ጠላም

“He forgets when he is full, the betrayer.”

sharp contrast appears in this line, introducing a moral critique of ingratitude and betrayal. The one who forgets his homeland once satisfied—symbolized here by fullness—is labeled a betrayer. This warns of the dangers of disconnection from roots and the moral decline that follows comfort without responsibility. Nationalism here takes the form of accountability; loyalty is not conditional on need but remains through abundance. Spiritually, this betrayal echoes religious themes of sin—forgetting one's origin is equated with moral fall. The symbolism of “fullness” versus “betrayal” paints a vivid image: those who abandon the homeland in prosperity have lost their soul's anchor.

ሓቂ ሊዝኺ ትሰግርዮ ኹሉ

“Holding on to the truth, you will overcome everything.”

This line carries a strong philosophical and spiritual message. Truth is portrayed as a guiding force, capable of helping one overcome any challenge. It reflects a worldview in which moral clarity and honesty are the ultimate weapons against adversity. For the nation, this is a call to integrity—a foundation for collective resilience. Nationalism here is ethical, tied to principles rather than mere passion. Spiritually, the truth is transcendent; it connects the people to a higher moral order. Symbolically, truth is like a torch or anchor, a stabilizing force in the turbulence of history and struggle.

ነቲ ጓህረ ባርዕ ተፍስስሉ

“You pour water on the burning embers.”

This poetic line uses vivid imagery to describe acts of healing and peace-making. The “burning embers” suggest lingering conflict or pain, while “pouring water” symbolizes relief, compassion,

or reconciliation. Spiritually, water is a powerful element—it purifies, calms, and gives life. This line elevates such actions to a sacred level, highlighting the nobility of peace-making. Nationalistically, the metaphor may refer to efforts to cool political or social tensions for the greater good. It is also a symbolic image of restoration and transformation, showing that even in pain, healing is possible with the right moral action.

አዝዝ እንዴ ዝደለኸዮ

“Tell me what you want.”

This line is humble and open, presenting a posture of service to the homeland. It reveals a deep commitment, where the speaker sees the country not as something to take from, but to give to. The line reflects a dialogue of respect—a sacred interaction between person and nation. Spiritually, it feels like a prayer, seeking guidance on how best to serve. From a nationalist perspective, it emphasizes citizenship as a duty, not a right. Symbolically, the speaker becomes a vessel, ready to fulfill the unspoken needs of the land, echoing traditions of selflessness and moral obligation.

ትግራይ ዝዓደይ ንሙን ኢለዮ

“Tigray, my country, to whom do I say this?”

This line communicates loneliness, confusion, or even frustration, as if the speaker’s devotion is unheard or unshared. It raises the question of collective memory and engagement—whether others feel the same passion or have forgotten. Nationalism here becomes introspective; the speaker questions the solidarity of their community. Spiritually, it can be read as lament—a sacred cry into the silence, reminiscent of prayers unanswered. Symbolically, the speaker may represent a generation or group whose values are fading or neglected. The line invites reflection on collective responsibility and the importance of unity in preserving national values.

ንዓይ ንዓይ ኩልና ንብለልኪ

“For me, for me, we all will say ‘for you’.”

This powerful shift from individual to collective voice reinforces the idea that national service and loyalty are shared responsibilities. The repetition of “for me” emphasizes personal commitment, while the transition to “we all” shows solidarity. Nationalism here is both private and public, rooted

in shared values and actions. It echoes a spiritual chorus, where each voice joins a greater whole in a sacred pledge to the land. Symbolically, the line functions as an anthem of unity—a chorus of dedication from the many to the one, from the people to the land.

ወለዲትና አይ ንስኪ እንዲኸ

“Aren’t you, our mother?”

The song ends with a deeply symbolic and emotional question, affirming the land as the ultimate source of life, identity, and nurture. Referring to the country as a mother transforms the political into the personal and the spiritual. It evokes unconditional love, sacrifice, and belonging. Nationalism is here framed through the lens of familial devotion not out of duty but deep, emotional connection. Spiritually, the mother figure carries sacred overtones, often associated with divine compassion and strength. This final image powerfully sums up the entire piece, portraying Tigray as the mother of all—wounded yet nurturing, burdened yet beautiful, a source of pain and pride.

Almost all participants agreed that nationalism was a dominant theme in traditional Tigrigna songs. Many pointed specifically to the period between 2008 and 2011 EC as a time when songs carried heightened nationalist sentiment, functioning as both cultural affirmations and political commentaries. According to respondents, these songs became vital expressions of the Tigray people’s enduring identity, struggle, and hope for justice.

Participants reported that during this time, traditional songs used lyrics to celebrate Tigray’s resilience. They did this by mentioning historical victories, honoring martyrs, and expressing a shared feeling of sacrifice. The sociopolitical transformations occurring in Ethiopia—particularly increasing tensions between regional and federal governance intensified the tone of traditional songs. Many were shaped by a defensive and proud articulation of identity. As one participant observed: “In those years, the songs didn’t just tell stories; they became shields for our values.” This metaphor illustrates the protective and unifying function of music as a cultural weapon during times of crisis.

These insights are supported by scholarly literature. Berhanu (2004) asserts that traditional music in Ethiopia, particularly during periods of political unrest, has functioned as an ideological tool for

mass mobilization and the preservation of cultural integrity. Similarly, Demissie (2010) notes that during moments of collective threat or transformation, song lyrics become carriers of collective memory, often shaping political consciousness more effectively than formal discourse. While most of this research focuses on earlier revolutionary eras, the findings resonate with the nationalist surge observed in Tigrigna songs of the late 2000s and early 2010s.

The convergence of participant testimony, academic literature, and lyrical evidence confirms that nationalism is not only a recurrent theme but a defining ideological foundation in traditional Tigrigna songs during the 2008–2011 EC period. Songs functioned as cultural texts that embodied the political, historical, and emotional landscapes of Tigray society. They promoted unity in the face of external pressure, reaffirmed collective memory, and offered moral strength to communities facing political uncertainty. Thus, nationalism in these songs emerges as a multidimensional force emotional, historical, and strategic deeply woven into the cultural consciousness of the people.

The Nationalism Shift in Context

The period around 2011 was a critical time for both Tigray and Ethiopia. The political changes and rising tensions between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian government created an environment where Tigrayan identity became a significant point of discussion and focus.

In this context, the song reflects a shift toward a more exclusive, Tigraian nationalism. The speaker's emotional attachment to Tigray as a land and people separate from the broader Ethiopian identity is a direct reaction to the political upheavals that altered the relationship between Tigray and the central Ethiopian state. The sentiments of pride and protection of Tigray are expressed in a way that doesn't simply contribute to Ethiopian nationalism but rather asserts a separate, self-sustaining regional identity.

The nationalism expressed in this song goes beyond simple regional pride. It is about asserting Tigray's autonomy, its distinct cultural, moral, and historical identity, and its unique place within the national landscape in the Ethiopian political landscape. The lyrics, with their focus on Tigray as a source of personal and collective pride, emphasize a shift from a broad Ethiopian nationalism

to one that is exclusively Tigraian. This shift reflects the changing political landscape of the time, where Tigray's relationship with Ethiopia was being redefined and reasserted. This ultimately led to the conflict and the current geopolitical situation in the region.

As a result, the song acts as a cultural marker of the changing tides of nationalism, offering a window into Tigray's emotional and political landscape after 2011. The music serves as a declaration of Tigray's identity and sovereignty, reinforcing the idea that the Tigrayan people are now forging their own path rather than being part of a shared national story.

4.2 Philosophical

Traditional Tigrigna songs are a powerful medium through which the people of Tigray express their deepest thoughts about life, human nature, and the unseen forces that guide existence. These songs are not merely forms of entertainment they serve as carriers of philosophy, teaching, and emotional wisdom passed down through generations.

Philosophical ideas in Tigrigna music are often conveyed through poetic storytelling, metaphor, and symbolic imagery. They touch on timeless human questions: What is the purpose of life? How do we understand suffering? Where does our strength come from? What is our connection to the divine? These songs offer listeners more than just beauty and rhythm; they also provide insights that help them understand the world and their place within it.

This section explores spirituality as a central theme that reflects the philosophical mindset of Tigrayan society. These reflections show how traditional artists use music to discuss the sacred, the moral, and the transcendent.

Whether sung during communal gatherings, private moments, or ceremonial events, these songs reveal the inner life of a people whose identity is shaped by shared beliefs, historical memory, and a deep sense of cultural belonging. The message of these songs is enhanced by the use of traditional instruments such as the kirar, kebero, embelta, and melket. The sound, rhythm, and tone of the instruments often mirror the mood of the lyrics whether solemn and meditative or bold and reverent bringing the spiritual and philosophical content of the song to life.

4.2.1 Spirituality

Spirituality is a central theme in traditional Tigrigna songs, reflecting the deep connection between the Tigrayan people and the divine. These songs carry profound spiritual messages that transcend the physical world, offering guidance and comfort in times of joy and hardship. Through music, individuals express their beliefs, their faith, and their understanding of life's mysteries, often calling upon divine forces for strength, protection, and clarity. The selected songs for analysis in this section are "Awde Amet" by Feseha Hailay, "Tsehay Berika" by Berhane Gebru, and "Zomay" by Neguse Abdi. These songs all touch on spiritual themes like divine guidance, moral teachings, and the relationship between humans and the divine. They speak to the Tigraian belief in the presence and influence of higher powers in daily life and in moments of personal or communal reflection.

These songs are sung with reverence and are often accompanied by traditional instruments like the kebero and kirar, which serve to heighten the spiritual atmosphere of the performance. The melodies, rhythms, and instruments work together to create an environment where listeners can connect with the divine and reflect on the deeper meaning of life. Through these songs, spirituality becomes a shared experience that strengthens the cultural and moral fabric of the community. The messages conveyed are not only individual expressions of faith but also collective affirmations of belief, hope, and resilience.

Song rehus awde amet by feseha hailay

ፀላል ሓድሽ ዓመት ተዘርጊሑ	"The shadow of the new year has spread."
ዕድሙ ስኪ ይሃበና አፃኒሑ	"May He grant us a long life."
ካብ ሰማይ ንእሽተይ ደመና	"A small cloud from the sky."
ካብ መሬት ንእሽተይ ጥዕና	"A little bit of health from the earth."
ሙስሊም ክርስቲያን ከይ ፈለና	"Without differentiating between Muslim and Christian."
አፋቂሩ ኣየፃልኡና ኣፋቂሩ ኣየፃልኡና	"May the one who made us love each other not separate us."

ፅላል ሓድሽ ዓመት ተዘርጋሉ

"The shadow of the new year has spread."

The opening line presents the New Year as more than a chronological change. In traditional Tigrigna cosmology, time is cyclical and sacred, not linear and secular. The arrival of a new year marks a spiritual threshold, a moment where individuals and communities reconnect with the divine for renewal and protection.

This invocation reflects an understanding that time is a divine gift, and longevity is a reflection of spiritual alignment. A “stretched” year suggests not just long life, but life lived in fullness, free from disruption, filled with meaning and peace.

In the rural Ethiopian worldview, the start of a new year is also tied to agricultural cycles and seasonal change, reaffirming the connection between spiritual time and environmental rhythms. The song, therefore, is both a hymn and a calendar one that marks spiritual and ecological transitions simultaneously.

ዕድሜ ስኪ ይሃበና አፃኒሉ

"May He grant us a long life."

This line expresses a collective prayer for life that is both prolonged and meaningful. In traditional Tigrigna spirituality, life is not viewed merely as a biological experience but as a gift from God, shaped by divine will. The people do not claim life through effort or merit — they humbly ask that it be *granted* (ይሃበና), signaling a deep belief that existence itself is sacred and dependent on higher power.

This appeal is also communal rather than individual. The use of “us” shows that the blessing is meant to extend to everyone family, neighbors, and society at large. It reflects a worldview where personal wellbeing cannot be separated from collective wellbeing, and where individual survival only has meaning within the context of community life and divine relationship.

Finally, the tone of the lyric prayerful and respectful exemplifies the traditional Ethiopian spiritual ethic of humility before God. Rather than demanding outcomes, people *request* with reverence. This posture of humility is embedded in many aspects of cultural life: fasting seasons, ritual songs, shared meals, and seasonal prayers all of which reaffirm that human beings are dependent on God's grace for life, health, and protection.

ካብ ሰማይ ንእሽተይ ደመና – "A small cloud from the sky."

ካብ መሬት ንእሽተይ ጥዕና – "A little bit of health from the earth."

These lines offer a poetic reflection of cosmic harmony. In this worldview, sky and earth are not separate realities, but cooperating forces under divine command. The sky represents divine authority, providence, and judgment — from which rain, a symbol of mercy and provision, descends. The earth, in turn, is a maternal force that responds to the rain, giving rise to health, food, and vitality.

By singing this, the community expresses its desire for balance between spiritual and material realms. It implies that health and wellbeing are not merely biological — they are cosmic gifts, emerging from a world rightly ordered by spiritual law. In traditional settings, drought, disease, or crop failure are seen not just as natural misfortunes, but as signs of spiritual disconnection — thus calling for music, prayer, and ritual to restore balance.

ሙስሊም ክርስቲያን ከይ ፈለና

"Without differentiating between Muslim and Christian."

This lyric reveals a deeply philosophical and spiritual understanding of unity. In the Ethiopian context, where religious diversity exists alongside historical tensions, this song promotes interreligious peace not just as a political necessity, but as a spiritual virtue. The appeal to prevent division (*key felena*) is both moral and metaphysical: division weakens the spiritual fabric of society.

In traditional culture, harmony among religious groups is often expressed through shared rituals, communal celebrations, and mutual respect. The lyric echoes the belief that human difference

should not contradict divine unity. True spirituality is thus marked by inclusion, empathy, and peace, not conflict or superiority.

አፋቂሩ አዋልኦና

"May the one who made us love each other not separate us."

The phrase "አፋቂሩ አዋልኦና" (pronounced *Afakiru Ayets'ala'na*), which translates to "Give us love and never hate each other," carries profound philosophical and spiritual meaning. It is a plea for unity, peace, and harmony, which are central values in Tigraian culture and spirituality. The line embodies a deep prayer for compassion and understanding, encouraging people to focus on love rather than division or hatred.

In the context of Tigrigna songs, this plea is more than just a rhetorical or poetic expression—it is a call for collective well-being, a desire to heal any societal rifts and foster social cohesion. The repetition of love as the key message signifies its importance as a guiding principle. It suggests that, despite the hardships or challenges that may arise, love should always prevail as the force that unites individuals and communities.

The spiritual undertone of this line highlights the idea that true peace comes when individuals overcome their differences and embrace each other with kindness and mutual respect. It reflects a core belief in the interconnectedness of humanity, where personal growth is tied to the well-being of the collective. In many Tigrigna songs, this sense of interconnectedness is central, as music serves as both a reflection of individual emotion and a call to a greater, communal spirit.

In summary, "አፋቂሩ አዋልኦና" conveys a heartfelt and spiritual plea for love, emphasizing the importance of unity and compassion in a world where division and hatred can easily take root. It aligns with the broader philosophical themes in Tigrigna songs, where personal and social harmony is often intertwined with spiritual values.

This New Year song is more than festive art; it is a sacred utterance, a communal offering of prayer, hope, and renewal. It reflects a worldview in which spirituality is inseparable from ecology,

morality, health, and harmony. It also embodies the oral theological imagination of the Tigrigna people an imagination shaped by traditional wisdom, Christian theology, and lived experience. The song performs multiple roles: it is prayer, prophecy, ethical reminder, and collective affirmation. Through it, we see that spirituality in Tigrigna traditional music is not abstract it is lived, sung, and shared. The values it expresses renewal, divine blessing, cosmic harmony, religious unity, and social justice are core to the spiritual identity of the community.

Lyrics of the Song ብርሃነ ገብሩ

ተፈሲህ ሓገሰይ ዓቲረ	"I am joyful, having gathered my happiness."
ተጋሂዱ ሕልሚ ዝነበረ	"The dream that was, has become a reality."
ሳላ ጎይታ ታይ ኣሎ ተሳእነ	With the Lord beside me, what could I possibly lack?
ኣሰይ ኣሰይ መረዓ ፌስታ ኮነ	" It's a time of celebration, a wedding, and a festival!".

Joy as a Manifestation of Divine Grace

The opening line, “ተፈሲህ ሓገሰይ ዓቲረ” — “My joy has blossomed and overflowed” — is a reflection of a deep spiritual truth that is embedded in many Ethiopian religious and cultural beliefs: true joy cannot be manufactured or achieved through material means alone. It is a gift from God. In Tigrigna culture, joy, or ‘hagosay’ (happiness), is seen as a state of spiritual wholeness, a sign that the individual has been favored by the divine. This joy isn't just from human effort; it's a divine response to a faithful and hopeful heart, even during difficult times.

The imagery of overflowing joy suggests that this happiness isn't fleeting, but a deep fulfillment that goes beyond temporary circumstances. It's an experience of spiritual abundance, where one realizes that joy isn't just personal satisfaction, but a divine sufficiency. In the Tigrigna worldview, true joy is seen as a form of spiritual healing that affects both the individual and the community. When one person is blessed, their joy is shared among all, creating a communal celebration of divine mercy.

Dream Fulfilled Through Divine Timing and Grace

The second line, “ተጋሩ ሕልሜ ዝነበረ” — “The dream I once carried has now come true” — highlights the idea that God’s will and timing transcend human understanding. In Tigrigna spiritual thought, personal dreams and aspirations are considered divinely guided. The process of waiting, praying, and trusting in God's timing is seen as just as important as the dream's fulfillment itself. In this light, the “dream” is not a mere goal, but a spiritual journey that is undertaken with the belief that everything happens according to divine purpose.

In Ethiopian Christianity and Islam alike, there is the understanding that life’s events are written by God, and human efforts are in partnership with divine will. As such, the dream that is fulfilled is not seen as a mere human achievement but as a spiritual reward, a manifestation of God’s favor that results from faith, patience, and prayer. When the dream is realized, it is not just the result of personal struggle, but the culmination of a spiritual journey that aligns with God’s divine plan.

God as the Source of All Sufficiency

The third line, “ሳለ ጎይታ ታይ ኣሎ ተሳእኑ” — “With the Lord beside me, what could I possibly lack?” — embodies the essence of spiritual sufficiency. In the Tigrayan worldview, God is the center of all life, and nothing exists outside of divine will. This expresses the core belief that when God is present, material possessions and human achievements become secondary. God’s presence is the ultimate source of peace, contentment, and abundance. The speaker reflects a common sentiment in many Ethiopian traditions, where one’s relationship with the Creator is viewed as the root of all good things.

This line also underscores the spiritual concept of contentment. Tigrayan people are taught that material wealth and worldly success are temporary, and that true satisfaction comes from a spiritual alignment with God. “God provides all needs; nothing is lacking when He is near.” The individual who walks with God feels complete, regardless of external circumstances.

The Transformation of Sorrow into Joy

Finally, the line “ኣሰይ ኣሰይ መረዓ ፌስታ ኮነ” — “Oh my — the bitter path has turned into a celebration” — speaks to the transformative power of divine intervention. The journey from

suffering to joy is a common theme in Ethiopian spiritual music, where the trials of life are acknowledged but are always viewed through the lens of divine purpose.

In Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity and Islam, suffering is often viewed as a form of spiritual testing, and it is believed that divine mercy can lead to the transformation of suffering into something beautiful and celebratory. The speaker’s declaration that the “bitter path” has turned into “a feast” is a powerful statement of faith in the idea that God’s intervention can heal the soul and transform pain into spiritual growth. This resonates with the biblical and Quranic concept that “suffering endures for a night, but joy comes in the morning.”

This song has a communal dimension in addition to its individual experience. Spiritual fulfillment is never seen as isolated; it is a shared experience that resonates through the entire community. When one person’s dream is fulfilled, the entire community celebrates. The shift from sorrow to joy represents a form of communal healing that transcends individual experience. This is why many traditional songs are performed at weddings, feasts, and public celebrations. They serve as shared testimonies to the power of divine grace in both personal and collective lives.

Song rehus awde amet by feseha hailay

አጪደአመትና ሽሻይ ዓሱሉ	"Our New Year has flourished like a beautiful harvest."
አጪደአመትና ፍሰስ ተፍሰስ	"May our New Year flow with abundance."
አጪደአመትና ሙስሊም ክርስትያን	Our New Year embraces Muslims and Christians alike.
አጪደአመትና ኩሉ ይትሐጎስ	Our New Year is for everyone to rejoice.

Divine Sweetness in Celebration

The first line, “አጪደአመትና ሽሻይ ዓሱሉ” — “Our New Year has flourished like a beautiful harvest” — reflects a sense of spiritual and communal abundance. In traditional Ethiopian culture, harvest is not only a symbol of agricultural prosperity but also a metaphor for divine blessing and renewal. The flourishing of the New Year like a harvest suggests a year that brings both spiritual fulfillment

and material wellbeing. This aligns with the broader cultural understanding that when the land prospers, so does the soul. Such imagery conveys gratitude for the completion of a seasonal cycle and hope for continued divine favor.

Divine Peace and Happiness

The second line, “አዉደ አመትና ፍሰስ ተፍሰስ” “May our New Year flow with abundance” expresses a prayerful longing for overflowing blessings. The repetition of the word “ፍሰስ” (flow) highlights the continuous and generous nature of these blessings. Flowing abundance” here has two meanings: it literally refers to food, rain, and resources, while also symbolically representing an overflow of peace, joy, and communal harmony. The line reinforces the idea that abundance, in its truest form, is not only physical but spiritual, and it must reach all members of society for the New Year to be truly sweet.

Unity Across Faiths: A Shared Spiritual Celebration

The third line, “አዉደ አመትና ሙስሊም ክርስቲያን” — “Our New Year embraces Muslims and Christians alike” is a powerful declaration of interfaith unity. Ethiopia embraces both Muslim and Christian communities, whose centuries of coexistence are reflected in traditional celebrations. This underscores the inclusive nature of the New Year’s blessings, which extend beyond religious boundaries. It reflects a deep spiritual and cultural truth: that divine grace and communal joy are shared among all, and that peace among faiths is a sign of a healthy, morally grounded society.

A Call for Collective Rejoicing

The fourth line, “አዉደአመትና ኩሉ ይትላጎስ” — “Our New Year is for everyone to rejoice” — broadens the scope of celebration to all members of the community, regardless of status, background, or belief. The use of “ኩሉ” (everyone) underscores the communal nature of the event. It affirms that rejoicing is a collective spiritual act—one that is enhanced by unity and shared participation. In this context, the New Year transcends the mere marking of time, functioning instead as a spiritual and cultural arena for reaffirming solidarity, generosity, and gratitude to the divine. Collectively, these expressions provide a profound poetic articulation of Ethiopian religiosity and communal ethos. They highlight abundance, unity, inclusivity, and joy as blessings

bestowed rather than achievements attained. The symbolic use of harvest, flowing blessings, interreligious harmony, and collective festivity illustrates a society deeply committed to moral order, mutual respect, and spiritual renewal. The song does not simply mark the passing of a calendar year it affirms a worldview in which joy is sacred, peace is a shared responsibility, and divine grace is the foundation of community life.

Song zemay by Neguse abadi

ቲ እመት ክሳዳ ቁፅይፅይ በሃላይ

"The one with the long, graceful neck, a swaying beauty."

ጉልሕምሕም የዒንታ ተምሳሌት ንቃላይ

"The glimmer in her eyes is a metaphor for a lake."

ፈረሐላ ኣነስ ዓይኒ ሰብ መሳላይ

"I was afraid of her, that human-like gaze."

ሃብኒ ስሞም ትእምንዮም ታቦታትኪ ክልምኖም

"Give me their names, the Tabots /Arks you believe in, so I may pray to them."

The singer begins with admiration describing the woman's neck as beautifully curved and her eyes as reflective like a lake. In tigray poetry, physical beauty is often used as a metaphor for deeper qualities like grace, emotional depth, and inner peace. For example, a lake symbolizes stillness and spiritual reflection. The singer, captivated by her presence, is not interested in her affection but is instead overwhelmed by a sense of spiritual awe and submission.

"Give me their names, the Tabots /Arks you believe in, so I may pray to them."

Symbolism of “Arks” (ታቦታትኪ):

In Tigray spiritual tradition, the *tabot* (ark) is sacred — it represents the Ark of the Covenant, the dwelling place of divine presence in Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. By referring to her *trusted*

arks, the singer elevates the woman to a spiritually revered status, akin to a saintly figure or divine intercessor. He is not simply asking for her attention — rather, he seeks to intercede through the sacred vessels she reveres, acknowledging her spiritual depth. This reflects:

Spirituality as Respect and Submission:

This plea shows that, in Tigrai traditional culture, love is not only emotional — it is profoundly spiritual. The singer implicitly communicates a sense of unworthiness, suggesting that direct address is inappropriate. Instead, he inquires about the spiritual intermediaries in whom the beloved places trust, so that he might seek their blessing before approaching her. This reflects a worldview in which relationships are regarded as sacred commitments, necessitating spiritual sanction and reverence. Not just emotion but spiritual preparation, family blessings, and cultural respect.

In saying “*Give me the names of your trusted arks to plead with,*” the singer reveals that love is not earned by strength or words alone — it must be granted through the divine. This reflects the Tigrai worldview where affection, courtship, and marriage are bound by sacred traditions, intercessory rituals, and respect for spiritual order. Furthermore, spiritual intermediaries are not merely religious figures or objects; they embody cultural values, elders, rituals, and collective beliefs. The singer’s message implies that to love someone authentically, one must first respect the sacred principles that shape her identity.

To strengthen the lyrical interpretation, evidence was drawn from interviews and focus group discussions, which provided deeper insight into community perspectives. Spirituality consistently emerged as a central theme in these dialogues. Nearly all participants emphasized that traditional songs frequently embed messages of faith, moral responsibility, and gratitude to the divine. According to respondents, such songs play a vital role in reinforcing core values, including honesty, humility, and communal harmony. A recurring idea was that even during times of hardship such as displacement or loss music serves as a spiritual anchor. Participants emphasized that these songs often reference God, divine justice, and the centrality of prayer. As one elder observed, even moments of grief are accompanied by songs of gratitude to God, reflecting the deep intertwining of culture and faith. This perspective was widely shared, with many respondents

viewing traditional songs as a medium through which cultural identity and spiritual devotion are simultaneously expressed.

4.3 Cultural

Traditional Tigrigna songs reflect the cultural identity, social consciousness, and spiritual worldview of the Tigrai people. Through their melodies and lyrics, these songs offer insights into the collective memory, emotional depth, and symbolic imagination of the community. They serve not only as forms of artistic expression but also as cultural documents that preserve the historical experiences and social fabric of Tigrai society.

Songs often highlight shared labor and social rituals—such as farming, festivals, and religious gatherings—emphasizing unity, mutual responsibility, and social solidarity. These themes underscore the significance of interdependence in Tigraian cultural life and reflect how music reinforces communal bonds across generations.

Symbolism plays a central role in expressing cultural meanings. Rich in metaphors, allegories, and imagery drawn from nature, history, and spiritual belief, Tigrigna songs use symbolic language to convey layered messages about identity, resilience, and moral consciousness. These symbolic elements allow listeners to connect personal experiences with broader cultural and philosophical concepts, deepening their emotional and intellectual engagement with the music. Spirituality also figures prominently in these cultural expressions, with many songs reflecting a deep connection to the divine, moral reflection, and religious devotion. By invoking sacred values, divine justice, and the essence of the human soul, these songs articulate the spiritual foundations of Tigray's cultural heritage while simultaneously serving as vehicles for ethical instruction and moral education within the community.

Overall, traditional Tigrigna songs function as vital cultural resources that transmit core beliefs and social ideals. They serve as living expressions of Tigrai's historical consciousness and spiritual imagination, linking the past with the present and nurturing a strong sense of cultural continuity.

4.3.1 Symbolism in Traditional Tigrigna Songs

Symbolism plays a central role in traditional Tigrigna songs, allowing complex emotions and ideas to be expressed in a way that resonates deeply with the listener. In these songs, symbolism frequently employs imagery from nature, daily life, and cultural traditions as metaphoric devices to communicate abstract concepts such as love, struggle, and unity. In the selected songs “Newah Qumet” by Desta Gebregirgis and “Zenay” by Neguse Abadi, the use of symbolism enhances the emotional depth and spiritual resonance of the music for instance, natural imagery such as the sun, mountains, and the earth often functions as symbolic representations of enduring strength, resilience, and the profound bond with the homeland. These symbols reflect not only personal experiences but also collective values, giving the songs a sense of cultural identity and shared history.

The metaphors used in the lyrics allow listeners to reflect on their own lives while fostering a deeper understanding of the values that define Tigrai society. Ultimately, the symbolic content in Tigrigna songs enriches the cultural narrative and helps preserve the traditions, wisdom, and beliefs of the Tigrai people across generations.

Song "newah qumet " by desta gebregrgs

"ነዋሕ ቁመት ከም ተክሊ ሸባኸ"

"A tall stature like a young palm tree." (shibaka)

"ሸዊት ነብሳ ሳዕሪ ሰቲ ሻኸ"

"Her delicate body, fed on grass and branches."

"ተዓዲፋ በዚያ ሓሊፋ"

"Has she gone by, having bent down this way?"

"ተዓዲፋስ ኣበዩ ምዕራፋ"

"Having bent down, where is her resting place?"

"ሸታ ቦኸሪ ለሚኔ"

Like it has the aroma of bukri lemon

"ልዑይ ከምስ ተበለት ከንደይ ተወናዉ ኔ"

When she turned and smiled, how could I not be enchanted?

The lyrics utilize rich symbolism and metaphor to express notions of feminine beauty, elegance, and cultural identity. Beyond describing physical traits, each line carries profound cultural,

emotional, and philosophical significance. Below is a detailed, expanded interpretation of the lines from the song:

"ነዋሕ ቁመት ከምተክሊ ሸባኸ"

"A tall stature like a young palm tree." (shibaka)

The metaphor comparing the woman to the shibaka plant is multi-layered, conveying meanings that extend well beyond mere physical stature. The shibaka plant is a symbol of strength, resilience, and deep connection to the land. The metaphor does not simply refer to the woman's tall stature but emphasizes her rootedness in her culture and identity. In the Tigrigna context, plants hold significant symbolic value, representing growth, fertility, and endurance. By likening the woman to shibaka, the lyric paints her as someone whose beauty is grounded in her heritage and cultural soil strong and unyielding, yet gracefully integrated into the fabric of her community. In agrarian societies like Ethiopia, where the land provides sustenance and continuity, plants often symbolize life itself, and by extension, the woman is portrayed as a life-giving, sustaining force.

Moreover, the reference to her physical height described as tall signals not just a visual trait but a metaphorical one. Height in this context represents pride, visibility, and prominence. This metaphor implies that the woman is not only physically striking but also holds emotional and cultural significance, symbolically standing prominent within the traditions that define her identity. This metaphor also links her to the broader idea of feminine strength; her stature is not just a physical attribute but a symbol of inner resilience, power, and connection to her environment.

"ሸዊት ነብሳ ሳዕረ ሰቲ ሻኸ"

"Her delicate body, fed on grass and branches."

This line shifts from the strength and rootedness of the previous metaphor to a more subtle, elegant beauty. Grass is often seen as soft, gentle, and undemanding, yet it is resilient, ubiquitous, and nourishing. By likening the woman to grass in the field, the lyrics emphasize a subtle and modest beauty—one that commands respect without seeking overt attention. Grass grows silently in the background, yet it forms the foundation of many ecosystems, just as the woman, though perhaps not as outwardly commanding as the shibaka plant, still exudes quiet power and significance.

In numerous cultures, grass symbolizes modesty, spiritual grace, and nurturing qualities. In this context, the comparison portrays the woman as embodying a humble yet essential beauty that contributes meaningfully to her community and environment. This form of femininity highlights inner strength—an influence that may not be openly displayed but is evident through her demeanor, actions, and interactions.

Within Ethiopian and Tigrigna traditions, women frequently assume nurturing and sustaining roles, analogous to the life-giving function of grass in nature. This metaphor also ties the woman to nature and the environment, making her part of a continuous cycle of life and survival. Her grace is natural, coming from her connection to both her environment and the people she cares for.

"ኸታ ቦኽሪ ለሚኔ"

"Like it has the aroma of bukri lemon"

This line draws on the sense of smell, which is often linked to memory and emotion, and it metaphorically connects the woman's presence to the refreshing, invigorating aroma of the bukri lemon. The bukri lemon, recognized for its intense and refreshing scent, serves as a symbol of purity, freshness, and vitality. The comparison suggests that the woman is not only physically appealing but also deeply refreshing and revitalizing, leaving an imprint on those she encounters. Her presence is more than just visual; it is an experience that touches the senses and the soul.

In Tigrigna culture, scents and fragrances are imbued with important cultural significance. It is associated with purity, refinement, and spiritual depth. The scent of bukri lemon becomes a metaphor for the lasting effect she has on others. When she passes by, her essence lingers in the memory, like the aroma of a powerful, pleasant fragrance that continues to resonate even after the moment has passed. The lyric thus suggests that the woman's true beauty is felt in a deeper, almost intangible way, not just through her appearance but through the emotional and sensory impact she leaves behind.

"ልዑይ ክምስ ተበለት ክንደይ ተወናዉ ኔ"

When she turned and smiled, how could I not be enchanted?

In this concluding line, the lyric transitions from tangible, sensory imagery to themes that are emotional and spiritual in nature. The act of the woman passing by gracefully carries a powerful

symbolic charge. The grace with which she moves evokes an inner serenity, elegance, and dignity. The singer's reflection of being touched sings a deep emotional response to her. This reaction extends beyond mere appreciation of physical beauty, highlighting the transformative effect she has on those who experience her.

The expression "how could I not be touched?" conveys that the woman's grace extends beyond outward appearance, reflecting her inner spirit and emotional depth. Her capacity to create a lasting impact reveals that authentic beauty is multifaceted, extending beyond mere physical appearance to touch the emotions and inner lives of others. The lyric underscores that true grace involves not only outward elegance but also the power to inspire and affect people through one's character and personal presence. The symbols and metaphors used throughout these lines work together to paint a picture of a woman who is strong, graceful, and deeply connected to her roots and community. The metaphors of the shibaka and grass highlight her resilience, humility, and harmonious relationship with the natural world. Likewise, references to her fragrance and the profound effect she has on others underscore the notion that genuine beauty transcends physical appearance, encompassing emotional and spiritual dimensions. The woman described in the song is not just an object of admiration; she is a force of nature, whose presence enriches and transforms those around her. The metaphors are deeply tied to Ethiopian cultural values of strength, modesty, and connection to both land and community, illustrating a feminine ideal rooted in cultural and spiritual depth.

Song "zemay" by segues abadi

ሽምጢ ለቀይ ለቀይ

"Her waist bends and sways, over and over again."

ከምቲ ቀጢን ዓፄና

"She is as straight and graceful as a stick."

አጅቦ ዝመስል ፀባ ደርጊ ስና

"Her neat white teeth resemble ajibo soft and pure."

አፃብዕታ ረቦ ሸኾና ብተየ

"Her fingers like calf heels."

" አጅቦ ዝሞስል ፀባ ደረጊ ስና"

"Her neat white teeth resemble ajibo soft and pure."

The whiteness of the woman's teeth being compared to milk invokes ideas of nourishment, purity, and vitality. Milk serves not only as an essential and foundational nourishment for a child's development but also functions symbolically as a representation of life and sustenance across many cultures. When applied to her teeth, this metaphor elevates her smile to a symbol of nurturing and life-affirming energy. It's as if her smile itself has the power to sustain and comfort those who see it. The whiteness of her teeth is also symbolic of innocence and unblemished beauty, further underlining her perfection and allure.

In Ethiopian culture, as in many others, a smile can convey a powerful message, often considered an expression of warmth and hospitality. Milk, In Ethiopian society, milk holds cultural significance, symbolizing both sustenance and purity. By likening the woman's teeth to milk, the song suggests that her beauty is more than superficial it is life-affirming and connected to something deeper and more nourishing.

"አፃብዕታ ረቦ ሸኾና ብተየ"

"Her fingers like calf heels."

The comparison of the woman's fingers to calf heels takes on a layer of strength and vitality, rooted in natural imagery. Calf heels are often seen as symbols of energy, movement, and growth. In this metaphor, her fingers are not just delicate, as one might expect, but are imbued with power and purpose. Her fingers embody a refined grace that is not merely decorative but purposeful, carrying both delicacy and quiet power. Just as the heel of a young calf anchors its movements and signals resilience and potential, her hands convey an energy connected to action and vitality. The image of the calf evokes freshness and youthful drive, underscoring that her beauty is animated alive, moving, and constantly unfolding. Within Ethiopian cultural settings, where farming shapes much of daily existence, animals are not only practical companions but also living emblems of strength, perseverance, and life-giving force.

The calf is an important symbol in farming communities, often associated with youth, power, and the potential for the future. By drawing this comparison, the song places the woman in a position of both elegance and strength, emphasizing that her beauty is not just physical but rooted in a deeper, active form of vitality.

To complement the lyrical analysis, insights were gathered from interviews and focus group discussions, offering deeper understanding of how this theme is perceived by the community

Participants emphasized the abundant use of symbols and metaphors in Tigrigna songs. Both elders and musicians noted that traditional music frequently draws on imagery from the natural world, historical events, and daily life to communicate profound meanings. Animals such as lions or doves, landscapes like mountains and rivers, and everyday items like the shash (headscarf) or mekenet (walking stick) often symbolize qualities such as bravery, tranquility, honor, or wisdom. Respondents agreed that these symbolic devices not only enhance the songs' aesthetic appeal but also function as carriers of cultural knowledge and social values. A cultural expert explained, "When you hear a mountain in a song, it's not just a mountain it's resilience, history, or a person's strength.

Summary of Findings

This study reveals that traditional Tigrigna songs produced between 2008 and 2011 EC function as rich cultural texts that go beyond entertainment to encapsulate the ideological, philosophical, and cultural identity of the Tigrai people. Through a combination of lyrical analysis, interviews, and focus group discussions, it becomes evident that these songs are living repositories of collective memory and evolving social values. A major finding is the central role of nationalism, which is prominently expressed in the lyrics and widely affirmed by community members and cultural experts. During this period of political upheaval—marked by rising tensions between the Tigrai regional government and the federal state—traditional songs became tools for promoting unity, pride, and cultural resilience. Instead of just mirroring historical events, these songs actively molded political identity and confirmed Tigray's unique position within Ethiopia.

Participants emphasized that many of the songs from this era celebrated historical victories, honored fallen heroes, and articulated a shared sense of sacrifice. This nationalist sentiment was not abstract but emotionally charged and grounded in the lived experiences of the community. As tensions intensified, the music took on a protective role—safeguarding Tigraian identity from perceived threats and fostering solidarity among listeners. This aligns with scholarly insights suggesting that traditional music, particularly in Ethiopia, has historically served as a form of ideological mobilization during times of social unrest. The lyrics from this period thus reflect a shift from broader Ethiopian nationalism to a more exclusive and self-assertive Tigraian nationalism, expressing regional pride and autonomy.

Along with nationalism, spirituality emerged as a deeply rooted theme in traditional songs. Participants frequently spoke about how music in Tigray serves as a spiritual anchor during times of hardship, loss, or displacement. Songs often include references to divine justice, gratitude to God, and the moral responsibilities of individuals within the community. This spiritual dimension is closely tied to the cultural worldview of the people, where religious faith and artistic expression are interwoven. Music not only provides emotional comfort but also reinforces ethical values such as humility, honesty, and communal harmony, making it a powerful medium for both spiritual reflection and moral instruction.

Another key finding is that traditional Tigrigna song lyrics heavily use symbolism and metaphor. Respondents highlighted that musicians draw on natural elements, historical references, and everyday objects to convey complex social messages and cultural values. Symbols such as lions, mountains, rivers, and household items like the shash or mekenet were commonly interpreted as representations of courage, endurance, peace, and wisdom. This symbolic language not only improves the songs' artistic quality but also creates deeper, more layered meanings that connect strongly with listeners. Especially during the politically sensitive 2008–2011 EC period, symbolism became a subtle yet powerful tool for expressing political emotions, cultural identity, and collective resilience. Overall, the findings demonstrate that traditional Tigrigna songs are dynamic cultural artifacts that bridge generations, preserve heritage, and guide both ideological and moral thought within Tigray society.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

The analysis of traditional Tigrigna songs from the 2008–2011 EC period reveals that these musical expressions are deeply interwoven with the cultural and philosophical identity of the Tigrai people. A key conclusion drawn from the study is the powerful role of nationalism and patriotism embedded in the lyrical content of the songs. The repeated emphasis on unity, sacrifice, and devotion to the homeland speaks to a strong collective consciousness that values national identity and resilience. This thematic presence is not abstract; it is rooted in the lived experiences and historical struggles of the Tigrai people. These songs act as expressions of communal unity, capturing the emotional and psychological essence of a people committed to safeguarding their cultural identity and autonomy. Intertwined with this is the way the songs convey spiritual and ethical principles, which form a core part of the social perspective in Tigrai. Invocations of divine presence, ethical conduct, and spiritual endurance reveal that these songs operate as more than artistic or nationalistic tools; they are also moral instruments that guide behavior, reinforce communal ethics, and offer comfort in the face of adversity. This spiritual dimension highlights the inseparable link between music, faith, and communal resilience in Tigrai society.

Another major conclusion is the songs' symbolic and pedagogical power. Traditional songs use rich metaphors, allegorical storytelling, and striking imagery frequently inspired by the natural world, historical events, and everyday experiences to convey complex messages that express societal values, cultural insights, and philosophical ideas. These symbols are not esoteric; they are deeply understood and interpreted by the community, making the songs accessible yet intellectually and emotionally rich. These symbolic elements do more than enhance the aesthetic appeal of the music; they strengthen its instructive purpose, enabling songs to carry knowledge, collective memory, and cultural identity from one generation to the next. Taken together, these observations suggest a broader insight: traditional Tigrigna songs are essential cultural tools, fulfilling multiple intertwined functions: they express ideological values, safeguard historical awareness, nurture spiritual life, and uphold the continuity of cultural identity. They are dynamic tools that adapt to the realities of their time while anchoring the community in its values and

traditions During times of challenge, change, or festivity, these songs provide more than contemplation they offer guidance, shaping ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving that are distinctively Tigrai. Consequently, the preservation and promotion of these songs goes beyond mere cultural admiration; it is an effort to protect a worldview, a philosophy, and a collective sense of identity. The continued vitality of Tigrai's musical heritage will depend on recognizing these songs as active agents of cultural continuity and renewal, capable of nurturing both memory and modernity in a rapidly changing world.

5.2 Recommendations

This study concentrated on the ideological, philosophical, and cultural aspects reflected in traditional Tigrigna songs. The findings offer valuable insight into how these songs help preserve the cultural identity of the Tigrayan people.

First, further studies should be conducted to explore regional variations within Tigrigna music, especially in areas outside of those studied, such as rural districts and communities where the musical practices may differ. Documenting the full range of traditional songs, including those that are performed during specific cultural or religious rituals, will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural diversity within Tigray. greater efforts should be made to preserve and archive these songs through the establishment of systematic documentation processes. Collaboration among ethnomusicologists, cultural institutions, and local communities is essential to record these songs, ensuring they are not lost to time. Educational institutions, such as Mekelle University, should also prioritize integrating Tigrigna music into their curriculum, offering students the opportunity to engage with and study these traditions.

Additionally, the Tigray Regional Tourism and Culture Bureau should actively promote the cultural importance of Tigrigna music. By incorporating the music into cultural tourism initiatives, the bureau can create sustainable income opportunities for local communities and artists while also raising awareness about Tigray's rich cultural heritage. By combining research, preservation, and cultural promotion, the region can ensure the continuity and vitality of its traditional music for future generations. In conclusion, by preserving and promoting traditional Tigrigna music, Tigray can safeguard its cultural heritage, deepen the understanding of its people's identity, and create avenues for its future growth and development.

6. References

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Appendix 1 lyrics of songs

"Fetweki Adey" by Gebru G. Mariam:

"እትዮጵያ ዓደይ ፣ ዓዲ ብዙሓት ብሄር ዮ"
Ethiopia, my mother land, a land of many nations/ethnicities.

"ብዘይ ብኣኪ ዶ ኮሪዕኻ ይሕደርዮ"
Without you, I'm not proud to stay overnight.

"እትዮጵያ ዓደይ ፣ በዓልቲ ሰላም ዲሞክራሲ"
Ethiopia, my mother land, a land of peace and democracy.

"ተከፊልኪ እዩ ፣ ብዙሕ መስዋእት"
A lot of sacrifices have been paid for you.

"ትግራይ ዓደይ ፣ ዓዲቶም ተኮስቲ"
Tigray, my mother land, the land of shooters.

Song weynalem by Neguse abadi

"ኣዋይ ላለዋይ ፣ ትሓበን ትግራዊ"
Wow Laleway be proud Tigraian

"ጅግና ተጋዳላይ ፣ ጨሚቱ ተኪሲ"
A heroic fighter, a sharpshooter with a steady aim

"ብ መሬት ብ ባሕር ፣ ሓራሲ ሓምባሲ"
By land and by sea, a tiller, a swimmer.

"ሸራሽ ምስ ጋምባላ ፣ ዕጥቂ ምስቲ ቁምጣ"
Shirak with Gambale armor with the quilt

"ጥይት ብግምባሩ ፣ ትበተኽ መዓንጣ"
A bullet through his forehead, you never afraid

"ኣጉረምርዮ ጎበዝ ኣጉረምርምዮ ኣሆሆ"
Grumbled, guy, grumbled, ahoho

እንኳን ተወለድና ፣ ካብኪ ትግራይ ዮ

We are blessed and glad to be born of you, my homeland Tigray.

መላምል ሕብሮም ፣ ከደራዮ

they are slender with A graceful hue

በዓል ናይ በሃሎ፣ ብዓይኖም መሓሎ

Those who claim our belonging, who swear by their homeland.

ዛ ዓበይ ሃገሮም ፣መሬት ኢትዮጵያ

Their glorious country, the land of Ethiopia.

ወለደ ተበለት፣ ወሊዳቶም እያ

If she says, 'I gave birth Yes, she bore them with pride.

Song "tigray adey by berihu mehari"

ዓደዋ ዓደዋ መበቁል መንነት ክብረዋ

My country, my country, the origin of my identity, my pride.

ዓደዋ ዓደዋ ኣለኹልኪ እንዶ ባዕለዋ

My country, my country, I am here for you, by myself.

ትግራይ ዝዓደይ ክንደይ ይጾር ዝክብዳ

Tigray, my country, how much it endures and how much it bears.

ትግራይ ዝዓደይ ትምቸውኒ ዕቤትኪ የርእየኒ

Tigray, my country, you please me; show me your progress.

ብደቕኺ ዝተረኸበ ሰላም

Peace that has been found by your children.

ተረሰዎ ምስ ፀገበ ጠላም

He forgets when he is full, the betrayer.

ሓቂ ሓዘኺ ትሰግርዎ ኹሉ

Hold on to the truth and you will overcome everything.

ነቲ ጓህሪ ባርዕ ተፍስስሉ

You pour water on the burning embers.

ኣዝዝኒ እንዶ ዝደለኹ

Tell me what you want.

ትግራይ ዝዓደይ ንመን ኣለዎ

Tigray, my country, to whom do I say this?

ንዓይ ንዓይ ኩልና ንብለልኪ
For me, for me, we all will say "for you."

ወላዳትና አይ ንስኪ እንዳኸ
Aren't you, our mother?

Song ረሑስ አዉደአመት by **ፍስሃ ሃይለይ**

ፅላል ሓድሽ ዓመት ተዘርጊሑ	<i>"The shadow of the new year has spread."</i>
ዕድመ ስኪ ይሃበና አፃኒሑ	<i>"May He grant us a long life."</i>
ካብ ሰማይ ንእሽተይ ደመና	<i>"A small cloud from the sky."</i>
ካብ መሬት ንእሽተይ ጥዕና	<i>"A little bit of health from the earth."</i>
ሙስሊም ክርስቲያን ከይ ፈለና	<i>"Without differentiating between Muslim and Christian."</i>
አፋቂሩ አዋግልኡና አፋቂሩ አዋግልኡና	<i>"May the one who made us love each other not separate us."</i>

Lyrics of the Song ብርሃነ ንብሩ

ተፈሲህ ሓገሰይ ዓቲረ	<i>"I am joyful, having gathered my happiness."</i>
ተጋሂዱ ሕልሜ ዝነበረ	<i>"The dream that was, has become a reality."</i>
ሳላ ጎይታ ታይ ኣሎ ተሳእነ	<i>With the Lord beside me, what could I possibly lack?</i>
ኣሰይ ኣሰይ መረዓ ፌስታ ኮነ	<i>" It's a time of celebration, a wedding, and a festival! ".</i>

Song rehus awde amet by feseha hailay

አዉደአመትና ሽሻይ ዓሱሉ	<i>"Our New Year has flourished like a beautiful harvest."</i>
አዉደአመትና ፍሰስ ተፍሰስ	<i>"May our New Year flow with abundance."</i>

አዉደአመትና ሽሻይ ዓሱሉ

"Our New Year has flourished like a beautiful harvest."

አዉደአመትና ሙስሊም ክርስትያን

Our New Year embraces Muslims and Christians alike.

አዉደአመትና ኩሉ ይትሓገስ

Our New Year is for everyone to rejoice.

Song zemay by Neguse abadi

ቲ እመት ክሳዳ ቁፅይፅይ በሃላይ

"The one with the long, graceful neck, a swaying beauty."

ጉልሕምሕም የዒንታ ተምሳሌት ንቃላይ

"The glimmer in her eyes is a metaphor for a lake."

ፈረሐላ አነስ ዓይኒ ሰብ መሳላይ

"I was afraid of her, that human-like gaze."

ሃብኒ ስሞም ትአምንዮም ታቦታትኪ ክልምኖም

"Give me their names, the Tabots /Arks you believe in, so I may pray to them."

Song "newah qumet " by desta gebregrgs

"ነዋሕ ቁመት ከምተክሊ ሽባኸ"

"A tall stature like a young palm tree." (shibaka)

"ሸዊት ነብሳ ሳዕሪ ሰቲ ሻኸ"

"Her delicate body, fed on grass and branches."

"ተዓዲፋ በዚያ ሓሊፋ"

"Has she gone by, having bent down this way?"

"ተዓዲፋስ አበዩ ምዕራፋ"

"Having bent down, where is her resting place?"

"ሽታ ቦኸሪ ለሚኔ"

Like it has the aroma of bukri lemon

"ልዉይ ክምስ ተበለት ክንደይ ተወናዉኔ"

When she turned and smiled, how could I not be enchanted?

Song "zemay" by segues abadi

ሽምጢ ለቀይ ለቀይ

"Her waist bends and sways, over and over again."

ከምቲ ቀጢን ዓፄና

"She is as straight and graceful as a stick."

አጅቦ ዝመስል ፀባ ደርጊ ስና

"Her neat white teeth resemble ajibo soft and pure."

አፃብዕታ ረቦ ሸኾና ብተየ

"Her fingers like calf heels."

Appendix 2 Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Questions

1. How is nationalism reflected in the traditional Tigrigna songs of 2008–2011 EC?
2. What lyrical phrases or expressions show a strong connection to homeland and identity?
3. How did these songs portray the struggle, sacrifice, or pride of the Tigrayan people?
4. Do you see differences in how men and women were represented in patriotic songs of that time?
5. How do melodies, rhythms, or performance styles also reflect a nationalist spirit?
6. How is spirituality expressed in the songs of 2008–2011 EC?
7. Which songs emphasize devotion, prayer, or moral lessons?
8. How do the lyrics reflect belief in a higher power or divine guidance?
9. Are there songs where spirituality is blended with daily struggles and hopes?
10. How do performers use voice, instruments, or style to reinforce spiritual meaning?
11. How is symbolism reflected in the songs of 2008–2011 EC?
12. What natural images (mountains, rivers, land, sky) were used symbolically in songs of that time?
13. What cultural symbols (mother, family, cattle, war tools, etc.) appeared repeatedly?
14. How do symbolic expressions strengthen the message of the song beyond literal meaning?
15. Can you give examples where one symbol carried multiple meanings depending on context?

Appendix 3 Informant Interview Questions

1. In what ways did songs of 2008–2011 EC reflect patriotic or nationalist ideology?
2. How did the songs link national identity with sacrifice and struggle?
3. Which musical or poetic techniques made the nationalist message more powerful?
4. How were heroes, martyrs, or the homeland represented in these songs?
5. How do the songs of 2008–2011 EC reflect spiritual devotion or moral values?
6. How did singers use religious language or imagery in these songs?
7. Which songs connect spirituality with social responsibility or ethical living?
8. Do you think spirituality was presented more as personal faith or collective guidance?
9. How did spiritual themes affect the tone and mood of the songs?
10. How is symbolism reflected in the lyrics and performance of 2008–2011 EC songs?
11. Which cultural or natural symbols appeared most often, and what did they represent?
12. How did audiences at that time understand these symbols—literally or metaphorically?
13. In what ways did symbolism make the songs powerful tools of communication?
14. Can you explain one or two powerful symbolic references from that period and their meanings?