

**Addis Ababa University**  
**College of Humanities, Language Studies, Journalism and**  
**Communication**  
**Department of Foreign Languages and Literature**  
**(School of Graduate Studies)**

**The Theme of Alienation as Reflected in Dinaw Mengestu's Trilogy:**  
**A Sociological Perspective**

**By: Tsegaberhan Wodaj**

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## Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original work, has not been presented for a degree in any other university and that all sources of material used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

Name: Tsegaberhan Wodaj

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Place: Addis Ababa

Date of submission: April 25, 2021

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## **Acronyms**

**BT: The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears**

**HRA: How to Read the Air**

**AON: All Our Names**

## Abstract

*This study focuses on the three fictional works of Dinaw Mengestu; “The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears” (2007), “How to Read the Air” (2010), and “All Our Names” (2014). This research aims to investigate the causes of alienation that enumerates by extracting the influencing factors and the consequence of alienation in a way the fundamental concern that human being faces in the course of migration and immigration. This study reveals that the immigrant characters represented in the selected trilogy while confronting and challenging the various forms of alienation in their attempt to co-exist the new immigrant life since alienation has become words of such modern man’s everyday language. This study also deals with the major concerns and matters of the immigrant characters’ reactions of alienation regardless of their reasons for exile. The main reason for focusing on the concept of alienation in the selected novels is that this area of literary theme has not been given enough attention to be studied comprehensively in the context of African (Ethiopians) immigrants’ life. Besides, no other Ethiopian literary work has portrayed the themes of alienation better than the selected three novels which have dealt with the pain and sufferings of alienation in the lives of the. This study tried to explore the immigrants ‘sense of alienation in the hosting country and in the process of immigration where life as an immigrant was unbearable, forcing them to try towards the process of economic, social, and cultural adjustment. An attempt is made to explore the multiple dimensions of alienation and the alienating factors based on Melvin Seeman’s five aspects of alienation: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement. The selected three literary immigrant novels reveal the theme of the immigrants’ feelings of alienation as a central preoccupation of the author. The researcher has used textual analysis to explore the selected literary works and captured the portrayal of alienation of the African immigrants which allows us the understanding, processing, and witnessing of human suffering. The study summarizes that the selected trilogy explicitly or implicitly points out the various forms of alienation facing the African immigrants in the course of creating new life in the host land.*

**Keywords: Alienation, Dinaw, Seeman, and Immigration**

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of the Study

By their very nature, literary writers have deep feelings about the contribution of their literature as a tool of social, economic, and cultural understanding. In Ethiopian studies, however, the potential contribution of this genre of literature has not been reached as it is expected to address such fundamental issues in favor of the fields as politics and history. To specify this point, many fictional and literary characters have painfully perceived different glitches from the social institutions that surround them. Thus, various literary produces have their trend of movement and development to show such socio-economic realities. This study raises not only about the current and the past periods of a specific socio-economic society for that matter, but about the universal possibility of the human beings' history, and this study is a remark of the universal tendencies & situations. As a consequence, it should not be denied the substantial significance of literature for the overall reality of our history because it can enumerate the sociological aspects of many social aspects since it is considered as a multidisciplinary area of the subject.

In a sociological view, it can also be said that the human being in general lives in a group for various socio-economic advantages as a universal and basic behavioral characteristic of its nature. A person isn't created to live alone; he or she's designed to live in fellowship. First fellowship with God; then fellowship with other men. That's what the Bible tells us. This suggests that human beings cannot possibly live alone effectively to win a meaningful essence of life because they possibly entertain their lives in communion. According to the *Open Bible* (1985), human beings first fellowship with God, then fellowship with another man which advocates social and collective shares. The basic intention of such a sociological concept is a continuous and interdependent relationship among the individuals in a certain group of society. By its nature, taking man as a social animal is to mean human beings can never exclusively live themselves from society. In their attempt to live without interdependence of one another, they possibly show either a wild behavior or they should have a divinity power. The fundamental reason for labeling a human being as a social animal is because of his frequent characteristics of tendency and behavioral responses such

as: to play and work, to learn the language, to think, and to search are established in no living things except in human beings. In the course of fulfilling all the needs and necessities, a human being has to associate and participate in the social aspects of the society since the social behavior can determine the current personalities which may result in positive or negative progress. In the absence of communal participation, the social aspect of a specific society may no longer function properly origin significantly add value to the common benefit of the society. This could be one reason for conflict and an act of embarrassment in such a condition of dissociation from the social institution that shapes and guide the entire communal lives.

In the search for one's satisfaction, need, and ambition, human beings collide with an opposing force which could probably create a disparity between the social interest and the personal interests of these opposing bodies. The individual may start to challenge and resist the feelings of a predicament in the absence of success or when the expected goal fails to achieve. Concerning this, Hegel (1963) has said the world in which we live is largely a world we have created, and that is true when a man faces all possible challenges for the betterment of his life and his next generation. Therefore, human beings face and react to various forms of man-made and natural challenges in their attempt to find the pursuit of satisfaction. (Ibid) also expressed Social, political, and cultural institutions constitute what he calls "the social substance" which contributes to their role positively or negatively to influence the everyday challenges. So, in such institutions, a human being possibly strikes with another one in an attempt of confronting the challenges to fulfilling his interest in which either of the countering bodies exposes to various forms of problems when it fails the struggle to handle.

The undeniable truth about the impact of creating a personality through the attitudes, beliefs, morals, ideas and the overall conduct one has expected to be can be shaped by the influence of the community where s/he lives. All these are established through communication and interpersonal relationships with others. For some reasons, it can be difficult to function properly for some people when the social norms will not allow them to practice all those mentioned interactions because the natural or artificial forces influence them to live accompanying different from their inclined association. Hence, they may develop and experience various forms of alienation in such absence of natural interactions within the society or in their state of denial to access the natural and fundamental desires of fulfilling the primary human necessities. In such a situation, social

restrictions and specific inadequacies have pushed modern human beings into a despairing personal world that is not connected to those of others around them, and the result of such despondences may create different problems. In line with it, the social, political, and economic circumstances of a particular society have insightful effects on the literary preoccupation of writers who want to associate themselves with the reality of their communities.

Of all the genres of literature, it is believed that the novel presents a broader perspective and deeper insight into the social, political, and economic realities of a specific society in general and the feelings of alienation in particular. Though the concept of alienation prevails starting from the time people began to tell stories, the contemporary literary works are the main areas to explore because they can elicit various forms of emotion; however, the question that comes to the researcher's mind is how these emotions exist. As Abdul Saleem (2014) states, the concept of alienation has been a widespread theme in literature, but its increase to the highest level came most likely during the 20<sup>th</sup> century because humans start to move farther away from the world of nature. Novel writers are supposed to have a balanced mind and social responsibility and such writers must also be honest, simple, transparent, realistic, and innovative. He or she is expected to have personal and professional satisfaction. His or her writings should scale up society's lives.

The reason why alienation becomes a major preoccupation of human conditions in the modern world could be it is one of the greatest problems of the meaning and purpose of life on the planet and labeling this land as unreceptive. Alienation is widespread and can be seen in different forms portrayed in various genres of literature. One of the areas of literary genres that deal with this concept in the novel in general and the immigrant novel in particular. In line with this, a prominent Ethiopian American novelist, Dinaw Mengestu, has produced three immigrant novels which delineate the overall experiences a person can face as an immigrant in general and specifically the predicament of the African immigrants. There are certain life experiences of the African immigrant novels inspiring the researcher to give more attention to the issue of alienation to take it as a major subject of the study; furthermore, this concept is predominantly the concern of different international organizations that work on humanitarian and social affairs.

A dictionary of literary terms defined the word “alienation” as the state of being alienated or estranged from something or somebody; it is a condition of the mind”.

<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref>. Keniston (1965:20) also states it as, “the feelings of isolation from certain aspects of one’s environment”, in which the researcher takes the selected novels assuming and designing to demonstrate if the individual and social relations of the immigrant community are failed as a result of alienating factors. *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1968:264) came up with a very clear definition “... a concept of considerable antiquity, whose metaphysical origins have been veiled over time by the progressive secularization of Western thought”. Those extracts of definition imply alienation becomes the point of discussion as far back from the times of early civilization as Erich Fromm (1955:112) supports this assumption, “... the concept is a much older one; it is the same to which the prophets of the Old Testament referred to as idolatry”. Hence, religious institutions claim that human beings begin to obey and even to worship their creations that alienate one from another.

To introduce briefly the author of the novels of the target study, Dinaw Mengestu an Ethiopian American novelist is a journalist and writer who was born in 1978 in Addis Ababa and left to the United States at the age of two with his parents because of the political chaos and civil war of that time. He is a second-generation immigrant though his novels representatively illustrate the experience of the Ethiopian and other African immigrants in the multicultural country, USA. Dinaw, via the three novels, comprehensively illustrates the major painful experience and terrible things of the immigrant people. The three novels which are produced by Dinaw are very influential in which he labels them as a trilogy. In his interview with *DW*, he has cataloged his novels as a trilogy of immigrant fiction; “They are very closely related, not necessarily because the characters or the settings are the same, but because the ideas are similar and revolve around dislocation” (<https://p.dw.com/p/1DCHV>). He is right, immigrant novels rotate around the concerns of dislocation and relocation. After reading his three novels, the researcher has hypothesized these immigrant novels prioritize the problems of the global immigrants when facing all kinds of challenges in their struggle of searching for a better life far away from their original homeland. The same is true, those target novels also concern mainly the worldwide pressures between home and displacement of the African immigrant characters’ life experiences as presented in the fictional books.

As a rationale of this study, it can be considered the economic, political and social conditions of a specific society put its impact on the literary expressions of novelists who are interested to reflect

the reality of their communities. The novel is believed to give a larger viewpoint and profound insight into the social, political, and economic apparatus that operate actively in a given society. (Hawthorn, 1985:3) clarifies the reason because "... the fact that the novel is in prose helps to establish that sense of 'real life'-of recognizable everyday existence that is the preserve of the genre". The capacity of the novel is excelling its readers beyond what is expressed in it through language. In other words, a novel should not be taken as an experiment of language but as the experience of the real manifestation of situations.

To explore and see the terrible experiences of the African immigrant realities, the selected novels are a typical example to depict such challenges of struggle to adjust to the new culture and community of the hosting country. Millions of Ethiopians indeed left their country either running away from political persecution or looking for a better future life. However, it was very doubtful and uncertain about the success of the reason they left their country because it is unknown how many of them experienced the new life as they expected in their new home. Most likely, a significant number of them lead a very miserable life which could probably result in psychological and social isolation as the taste of alienation is one of the most propounding negative realities of universal human beings. The researcher has envisioned examining how far this problem is dominating the lives of the African immigrants in his effort to demonstrate this specific thematic concern in the selected trilogy.

The continuous overflow of displacement is proved in the regions of east and horn of Africa which have been severely scarred by various kinds of upheavals ranging from the man-made exodus to hostile physical and environmental nature like, pestilence, drought, and floods. For the last some decades, it frequently becomes the head of the international news corner and center to cover the issue of deace and deadly conflicts in most East and horn African countries including ethnic groups, individuals, and political conflicts. There have also been conflicts between individuals and communities resulting in an ultimate dislocation or physical and spatial expulsion from their origins. Due to its geographical location, the East and horn Africa is a strategic place that pays the attention of western countries to control the regional geopolitical and military power. This power struggle escalates to be created several conflicts of interests so that many citizens of this region evacuated from their original countries running away from the center of chaos and the conflict zone to the safest place such as the USA. The target novels represent the immigrant communities

who fled to the US are the primary concern of this work to be examined as to what causes the relocated groups to various forms of alienation since most of the represented characters are from this region.

Human lives in contemporary immigration are exposed to more challenging as a result of various influencing factors like anxiety, despair, and others, and specifically different conditions of experiences continuously make the dislocation of one's life more difficult. With the growth of superficiality, the individual and interpersonal relations become blurred; personal development and the pervasive existence of personality get restricted, and lack of a sense of meaninglessness in life and the disappearance of faith also frequently widespread. Since disenchantment and predicament are some of the basic features this modern generation faces off, they certainly seem to be the priority center of the struggle to identify the causes and results.

As an extension of the predicament, alienation can also be viewed as a theory, a concept, a philosophy, a pragmatic reality, and more importantly, it is a fictional state of mind to portray the undesirable reality of the human being. As a literary theme, the issue of alienation has been inscribed in literature from the time people began to express their feelings through creative writing. The theme of alienation has been addressed differently by different writers from different perceptive and points of view in various genres of literature. Globally, Various scholars tried to explore and study the multiple dimensions of alienation and the alienating factors, and the present work of study is a continuation of further exploration assuming alienation as a global burden.

In recent times, a great number of immigrant groups confront various problems, stress, and strains in their everyday strive to overcome the reason for their displacement, percussion, and uprooting. Such a group of individuals possibly could not reach a predetermined point, and outrageously they were no longer the master of their destiny after realizing there was an invisible force that threatened to destabilize all the joys and hopes they imagined. An instance of the psychological problem possibly faces them in the form of alienation, loneliness, rootlessness, withdrawal, and detachment which could be seen as the recurring themes in modern fictional works though it is not intensively researched how such forms of themes prevail.

Furthermore, the depiction of the protagonist's psyche or inner development is seen at its best in the novels of the post-modern novelists. Some of the influential novelists of this time are like D.H.

Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Youngman*, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory*, Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, and others. They have creatively portrayed the inner flow of the imaginative characters' sentiments particularly the predicament of alienation in their novels. Also, in modern African literature, some prominent writers have shown their potential skills of literary work, and they have proved themselves in portraying their best quality of composing novels which are acclaimed and praised world widely. To name specifically, those recognized and acclaimed Ethiopian origin writers, Dinaw is one of them who has produced three novels in which the researcher has praised his trilogy as they are presented in the best quality of literary creativity. The trilogy depicts the issues of African immigrants and specifically the matters of those Ethiopians in their hosting country.

The researcher, in his effort of study, fundamentally tries to scrutinize the novels as second-generation immigrant writing; further, the selected fictions have dealt with the issues of the African immigrants and to some extent, the concerning points of the Ethiopian immigrants in the US. The matters put and raise in the novels possibly can be taken as part of the Ethiopian literature in English. Though labeling of the novels as Ethiopian literature has raised certain controvert, the researcher confidently argues and sticks with the categorization based on the subjects they raise, the representation of the characters, the designed settings, and the origin of the author. In some areas of research, the researcher learns that Dinaw is also considered as an Ethiopian diaspora writer by the quality of its notable characteristics of Ethiopian diaspora literature.

About the major literary classification, the mainstream of the Ethiopian creative writings does not specifically characterize the colonial experiences of the European masters because of the unconquerable experiences and the non-colonized mentality and history of the country. The Ethiopian literature in English has significantly detailed a socio-political and cultural thematic preoccupation of the country. The writers of this region's sentiment try their best to cover fundamentally the quest of identity, the restoration of the country's early civilization, the experience of resistance to feudalism and imperialism; they also deal with the chronicles of their early leaders and national heroes and narrating the historical aspects of their ancestors. Ethiopian literature in English has traced its origins and has also flourishingly emerged as a literary version particularly in the mid of the twentieth century. As Debebe Seifu (1980) has explained in his MA

thesis, Ethiopian literature in English has come to the fore following a long tradition of Ethiopian oral folk and written pieces of literature in local languages. Scholars like Beer (1975) who has made an intensive study on the English literary works of this region also claimed that Ethiopian literature in English is an outcome of the mid-twentieth century which is also considered this period as the golden age of Ethiopian literature. By then, it has come across almost more than half a century since the beginning of English literature in Ethiopia.

Further to that, Huntsbeger (1973) in his *Anthology of Ethiopian Literature in English* has also explained the Ethiopian literature in English is a development of the nineteen sixties. The reason for frequent remark by various researchers and scholars to this period is because several literary works have significantly been produced by various writers on various issues. This literary tradition has got an important focus and encouragement partly for the reason that the English language has become the international language of the nation and a medium of instruction in secondary schools and higher education. Moreover, the Ethiopian scholars and writers use English as a medium for their literary pieces to reach the international audience through the quantity and quality of the creative works in English are very limited in comparison to some other African countries (Debebe, 1980). Some also use the English language as a medium of their literary pieces simply as a means to escape the imposition of censorship.

The other very crucial issue which has contributed greatly its part to scale up the Ethiopian literature in English is the role of the Ethiopian scholars and intellectuals who went to the Western countries for various reasons, especially for further scholarship studies. These Ethiopian expatriates have written the major concerns and issues of their respective societies of that time, and they are also named as the 'Diaspora' or the Ethiopian immigrants. The important point the researcher tries to associate this study with the Ethiopian immigrant literature is defined as a form of creative writings to be produced by Ethiopian immigrants. It is basically to tell the stories of the Ethiopian immigrants and their abroad lives irrespective of the writer's background or citizenship through the acceptance of the literary definition is very debatable. Fekade Azeze (1985) has named Debebe Seifu as one of the best researchers who conduct an extensive study on the major thematic areas of the early Ethiopian creative writings in English. Fekade has added that the beginning works of Ethiopian literature in English are preoccupied with the cultures of Ethiopian nationalities, political issues, social problems, dominant periods in Ethiopian history, and others.

Furthermore, Debebe's study shows, the mid-twentieth century produces of Ethiopian fiction in English novels are to be considered the golden literary period of that region. Some of the prominent and pioneer Ethiopian creative writers of that time who were used for further study by Debebe are Abe Gubegna, Dagnachew Worku, Sahleselassie Berhanemariam, and others. Fekade (1985: 38) concludes; "Debebe's thesis correctly concludes that Dagnachew, Tsegaye, and Sahle Sellassie....handle the language/English/ with commendable efficiency and ease while Abe Gubegna and Wolde Haile prove failures when it comes to using the language correctly, fittingly and beautifully".The present researcher believes that Debebe in his MA thesis underlines what issues Ethiopian creative writers in English insightfully focus and touch.

To support this issue, Nigistie (2016:4) also puts her effort to dig out the preoccupation level of the Ethiopian literature in English, and she finds out that it is different from other regional literary categories because the political history and socio-economic background of the country are exclusively marginalized and different at all. She attempts to stress the exceptional and peculiar characteristics of the region's literary culture which makes it exclusive in the ever-changing of African literature. (Ibid:2016: 4) has comprehended her idea as follows:

*Ethiopian Literature, having its unique characteristics, departs from that of the world and African literature; however, it falls in the same category in the continental divisions. The first unique character of Ethiopian Literature is the absence of colonial experience in the country. But here we can replace the term post-colonial by post-revolutionary to address the second concern- abuse of political power which was a case in Ethiopia too.*

As the history of African literature tells, writing in the English language is the basic inheritance of colonialism in many African countries; however, it has not worked that case in Ethiopia as the country has not ever been colonized by Europeans and the country has not experienced any burden of the English masters. But a group of some intelligentsia who went to the Western countries for further scholarship began to write in English out of the free will to reach a large audience since the English language is already used widely all over the world. As it is explained previously, there was also used as a mechanism of escaping the strict censorship of publishing politically affiliated materials, and some of them to share the cultural, historical, and social situations of the country to the rest of the world.

Generally speaking, the introduction of the immigrants' experience in the modern English novel of the selected trilogy has put a cornerstone for the opening of a new realm of understanding of the immigrants' challenges and their attempt at integration. This is very important because the theme of immigration, as a universal concept, has been a central and dominant reality of those who are dislocated and relocated to some aspects of social and cultural lives in their immigration experiences. Such realities inspire and motivate many researchers for further investigation of the realities and come up with possible solutions for tackling the burdens of immigration. Such realities of experiences are portrayed based on the fictions characters' responses and reactions in their interpersonal relationship around the environment and with his or her self as it is depicted in the literary works of contemporary immigrant Ethiopian literature.

A very few but influential Ethiopian-American immigrant writers ostensibly strive to foreground the basic experiences of the African immigrants in general and the Ethiopians in particular who relocated to US. As it is observed in the reality of the contemporary world, it can be said that the obsession with materialism and egoism of modern human beings may lead to various forms of disconnection and conflicts of interest. Such unlimited obsession may also create an unexpected collision and disagreement with other individuals in the struggle to pursuit the internal driving forces and to win the challenges of life. When a materialized engrossed society misplaces the prices of universal humanity, the ethical values of the world may lose their prices and then every individual begins not to care for one another. Further, people possibly prone to lose their sense of original identity in the modern world which could also confuse identity. Consequently, the attempt of the victims to recover from those desperation challenges of experience unsuccessfully creates another problem in a new world. Thus, the quest for identity could ultimately be failed. Literary works of this discipline serve as proof of presenting and showing such malaise of the dislocated and immigrant society.

### **1.2.Statement of the Problem**

A great deal of modern-day inquiry in alienation revolves around such important questions as what do we mean by alienation? In what forms does alienation appear in our lives? Is alienation a continuing human problem? Who is alienated in a specific society? How does alienation affect how people live? What are the causes of alienation? And so on. Even though the answers to these

questions could be more, extensive research requires us to answer these important questions. As Gavin Rae (2012) states, Hegel in his philosophical discourse states that the history of alienation in large part has become the history of man's attempt to find proper answers to these basic questions. The researcher has taken the theme of alienation as the framework for his discussion of contemporary immigrant literature not because it is the single most important theme of this literature, but because it is a productive topic and a highly revealing one. Productive subject because the alienation of which we speak is alienation from a variety of sources in which African immigrants have to be the major point of discussion. The study highly focuses on the outlines of alienation in the immigrant community that tells us in the US some important things about the attitude towards the African immigrants.

As it is explained in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* published (Aug30, 2018), alienation can be viewed as an aspect of theory, concept, philosophy, pragmatic reality, or may be considered as a fictional state of mind in which it is to be taken a multidisciplinary concept. It can be argued that alienation is one of the profound and central issues of immigrant literary works with specific references to contemporary novels though it needs an intensive study to identify its form of existence. in his interview with *DW* (15/9/2014), Dinaw said that he has written, as a second-generation African immigrant, the three novels with the intention of informing his experience of immigration as equal as the first-generation immigrant communities feel it.

As it is said in the previous section, some Ethiopian American writers are widely recognized in the international arena by their creative writings in general and by their literary novels in particular. However, these literary fictions have not been deeply and intensively put the widespread experiences and complaints of the Ethiopian immigrant groups as the selected trilogy has portrayed. The deep potential content of the African immigrant experiences depicted in the target trilogy is one of the fundamental reasons to be chosen for this study. The sociological perspective of alienation is to be part of this research by revealing the characters' intrapersonal and interpersonal clashes in the selected target novels. The experiences of the relocated African characters' disillusionment are investigated in line with the existing realities of their true manifestations. In such contemporary immigrant novels, the represented characters are examining while struggling to create a relationship within the society; consequently, they face various problems in the hosting country.

The frustration of estrangement, the confusion of identity, the cultural and tradition perplex, and the social discrepancy are some of the concerning dispositions of the immigrant community in which the researcher has tried to investigate the depth of such prevalence. The present researcher's firm hypothesis shows the immigrant novels incorporate those lists of realities as the central thematic preoccupations of the selected novels for this study. Due to the fractured existence of human beings, of man's challenge in a hosting country, and the predictability of dissatisfaction, the researcher decides to take the results of those messes as a very serious and concerning issue of this study. Another convincing reason for choosing the selected trilogy for this research is the burning subject matters of these novels which expose the disconnection inherent to the immigrant lives. The disconnection of modern immigration is one of the fundamental characteristics of alienation.

The selected three novels are immigrant novels with a propounding preoccupation of representing and raising the experiences of the immigrants as a central concern. The present researcher attempts to find studies conducted on the selected novels foregrounding and voicing such global burning concerns, but there are hardly any. The target trilogy has played a vigorous role in paying international attention after profoundly depicting issues of the African immigrants through the imaginative constant life personas of Ethiopians and other African identities. No Ethiopian writing other than the selected novels has tried to accentuate the challenges of relocation in a tiresome situation, struggling to change their future and confronting reality to create a safe shelter for their generation in the hosting country. This study is an effort to show the various feelings of alienation of Ethiopians and other African immigrant characters as a result of such dislocation.

In this study, the present researcher underscores the senses of human alienation as a general subject that has not been sufficiently studied how the woes of the African immigrants in US is reflected in the selected three novels. Since the publications of the novels are recent, the information of these novels is more relevant to the understanding of the theme of alienation in the contemporary world. Although the concept of alienation is one of the most recurrent concepts of the social and human discipline which prevails changing its forms for years, it is not comprehensively and studied in the immigrants' context of the selected trilogy. For this study, the researcher takes the sociological theory of the fundamental concept of Melvin Seeman's dimension of alienation.

In addition to the above, the insufficient attention that has been given to the concept of alienation in immigrant literature is another pushing factor of the researcher to dedicate himself to this area. As far as the researcher's knowledge is concerned, no research endeavor has been conducted to investigate the causing factors of alienation in the selected trilogy or other Ethiopian-American immigrant novels. Thus, it is the present researcher's commitment to making an intensive study upon the three novels to show the socio-economic and cultural life of the immigrant society. Alienation exists for many years but it changes its form as time and place go, and this can be also one of the reasons why it becomes difficult to come up with a globally accepted and precise research study about alienation. Thus, various scholars have been forwarding and conducting debates to explicit it based on the context of the existing reality and situation. Though the scope of alienation is multidisciplinary and wide by its nature, it has not been independently and adequately researched as a single entity in the trilogy. The main reason for fixing issue of alienation in the selected trilogy is because this area of literary theme has not been given enough attention to be investigated thoroughly in the context of the African (Ethiopian) immigrants' life. After making a preliminary presupposition on the target novels, the researcher has found a potential area of the unresearched gap concerning the theme of alienation.

Since alienation is a result of failure to understand and cope up with the environment, the researcher would like to fill a missing gap by investigating how the represented immigrant characters react to these problems and made a deal to contain such challenging feelings. Thus, this study is part of bridging such causes and effects of alienation as well as how it is portrayed in modern immigrant literature specifically in the selected trilogy. In this area of study, the researcher pays a significant emphasis to show the stories best quality of portrait specifically the thematic concern of alienation as a social and psychological phenomenon of the African immigrants in US. The researcher has found the selected three novels as appropriate materials to scrutinize the selected area of study since the present researcher has hypothesized the delineation of the modern-day immigrant lives in terms of specific and detailed thematic concerns in the target novels. The points that are mentioned in this section are the basic reasons of the present researcher to be inspired to take the subject of alienation and the selected trilogy as the central entities of this study. Thus, this study is committed to explore the sense of alienation of the African immigrants in US in their process of immigration where life as an immigrant was difficult to tolerate, forcing them to strive towards the process of economic, social, and cultural adjustment.

### **1.3.Objectives of the Study**

In a very broad sense, the main objective of this research is to investigate the state of alienation of the Ethiopian immigrants and how they were treated by various institutions in the selected literary texts. It also aims at showing the usefulness of Melvin Seema's theory of alienation in exploring the image of human being in the contexts of the given novels. Seaman's contribution to the betterment of man, specifically his concept of human relationship is among the most unnoticed ones despite its irrefutable importance to reveal the reality of human beings. Therefore, the research aims to throw some light on the views of Melvin that play important roles in the advancement of man's knowledge in general and social interaction in particular. Having this major objective in our mind, the research focuses on the following specific objectives, i.e., to:

- Identify the portraits of alienation in the selected trilogy.
- Show the major causes and effects of alienation in the selected novels.
- Show the dimensions of alienation as they are portrayed in the three novels based on Seaman's sociological category.

While the researcher attempts to explore and examine the reflection of alienation, certain significant questions require an answer:

- What forms of alienations are found in the contemporary African immigrant communities concerning the target novels?
- What are the fundamental causes of alienation as it is depicted in the selected novels?
- How is Seaman's sociological dimension of alienation applied in exploring the images of human beings in the context of the target novels?

### **1.4.Significance of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to acquaint students and teachers of English literature with the theme of alienation in modern literature. The study will help students, researchers, and teachers in enhancing interest and encourage them in their study, research and teaching. It could be used by teachers and students of literature in their teaching-learning process of the interdisciplinary nature of literature and the openness of literary pieces for all kinds of analyses. Examining the way human nature and human relation are revealed in a work of literature directs the attention of students to a critical contemplation of humanity in general and their society in particular. It might encourage

them to think about whether society and culture are obstacles to one's freedom. What is more, this kind of discussion will give a profound understanding of the meaning of a work of literature. Thus, the researcher believes, might benefit students of literature when trying to give a sound interpretation and evaluation of any literary piece.

Moreover, various researchers who are interested to conduct their studies on the issue of alienation may also find it helpful to access the concept of alienation for their study and see further gaps in researches. This study helps to contribute its role in a brief way to a better understanding of alienation through the lives of the immigrant people of the selected novels. Thus, this productive effort of the study could help to the understanding of the precise sources of alienation among different groups of society which would also allow us to plan a better social policy for alleviating the source of the problems. This research also creates certain awareness on the causes and consequences of immigration referring to the lives of the immigrant characters of the selected novels. It could further utilize in creating consciousness about the potential distraction of dislocation and relocation of human beings since the issue of migration becomes a global burden in which the international communities take as a common concern. Further to that, this study also significantly offers data to the stakeholders of the immigrant institutions while attempting to publicize the African immigrants' current conditions and to come up with a possible solution to the migration problems. Last but not least, this study could inspire various fields of social and humanity researches to integrate literature in their fields of study.

### **1.5.Scope of the Study**

The researcher restricts himself to three selected novels that he believes are competent to elaborate the concept under consideration: *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* (2007), *How to Read the Air* (2010), and *All Our Names* (2014). Such kind of limitation makes an exhaustive discussion of the texts in the light of the alienation concept. It is also found necessary to confine the study within the framework of Melvin Seeman's theory of alienation since the concepts of Melvin are taken as cornerstones that serve the concern of this research. During this study, the researcher has included important and detailed discussions of different views of alienation including concepts related to Melvin Seeman's sociological points of ideas. The present researcher specifically extracts scenarios of events and stories which help to the discussion and

analysis of alienation as it is depicted in the selected three novels. The researcher has provided these significant extracts from the three novels to foreground the sociological categories of alienation as it is proposed by Melvin Seeman since the theory of alienation is very broad and deep to deal with without delimiting a specific theory.

For this study, the researcher has selected Dinaw's trilogy after the preliminary premise should show a potential assurance of projecting the purpose of the study. The present researcher has selectively taken the most crucial data of scenario from the trilogy which specifically show the objective of the study. The present researcher has also limited himself with significant data and literature which are published in books, journals, and articles. Other literature of Dinaw which have a related and significant relationship to the present study are also included as part of the research. For example, Dinaw's interview and bibliographic data are taken as part of a discussion in the present work of study.

### **1.6. Methods and Procedures of the Study**

This section deals with methods and procedures which have been used in analyzing and classifying data for this study. Furthermore, it raises issues related to the selection of extracts using different methods. This study is a purely qualitative kind of study and presents a textual analysis of the approach based on the data collected from the selected novels. To achieve the objectives of this study, an attempt of collecting significant materials about alienation, its origin, aspect, or dimension is made from various sources. The first chapter includes the background of the study, the statement that is supposed to be investigated, and the objectives of the study. The second chapter presents the review of related works and concepts. The third chapter contains the theoretical frame of the study. The fourth chapter includes the analysis and discussion of alienation based on the theoretical frame in the selected novels. In the final chapter of the study, an attempt is made to summarize and conclude the main points of the discussion and analysis. The selection of the three novels has been accomplished by a proven hypothesis of appropriation according to the theoretical frame of Melvin's theory. This research is a qualitative attempt to present and discuss the given literary texts based on Melvin Seeman's theory of alienation. The descriptions of the term are presented in the literature review of this paper. The researcher finds this restriction of the concept useful since alienation has different meanings in different areas of study. It may be

true if Melvin's theory in question can only be explained within a restricted social setting. However, a universal concept like the selected theory of alienation helps to expose the human condition in any sphere of social relationships.

In this research, a library work of primary and secondary sources is used to strengthen the credibility and reliability of the study. The primary source includes an intensive reading, understanding, and analysis of the three selected novels. The secondary sources that are employed for this study are research works, books, journals, and articles which are related to the selected novels, the subject, and the theory used from various sources. The selection of the three novels has been accomplished by a proven hypothesis and appropriation of the selected novels rendering the theoretical frame of the study. It is also made a critical basis of argument following an intensive reading of the stories to get a deeper understanding of the subject of alienation by distinguishing and noticing the most important information from each novel. Thus, the researcher has exhaustively discussed identifying and scrutinize the stories which portray the reflections of alienation bearing Seeman's five domains of sociological alienation.

To investigate the thematic areas of alienation as it is portrayed and reflected in the target novels, the researcher has also used the sociological theory of alienation as proposed by Melvin Seeman in his Sociological article entitled *The Meanings of Alienation* (1959). The researcher has also focused on scrutinizing the major characters' experiences of alienation. Finally, major stories and extracts which portray the theme of alienation have been identified, classified, and analyzed according to this sociological point of view.

To conclude this section, the application of qualitative research passes through certain major procedures; such as selection, reading and rereading, analysis, and interpretation to bring out effective and successful work. Having stated the problem, determined the objectives, delimited the scope, identified the significance, the method, and procedure, and reviewed related literature, the researcher has undertaken the analysis and discussions of the theme of alienation according to the objectives of the study.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### 2.1. Review of Related Research

This chapter contains a review of related researches and concepts which are essential for the study. The purpose of this chapter is to support the study with a detailed basis of conceptual ideas by reviewing and discussing studies and critical concepts which are helpful to this research. In doing so, related works of researches, journals, and articles are briefly reviewed. As it is stated in the statement of the problem, the selected novels are among the English literary works written by an Ethiopian-born American writer who has attracted the interests of many researchers. For various fields of study, there are a significant number of researches which are conducted inside and outside of Ethiopia about the selected novels and the subject of alienation from various perspectives. The present researcher has reviewed M.A theses, Ph.D. dissertations, and papers presented for different literary periodicals. In parallel to the present study, the researcher has learned that there are some researches on progress which are conducted by other students for their Ph.D. based on the novels selected for this research. Therefore, one may ask if these works are examined by others, why it is focused on them again. No matter the number of studies that are conducted on the selected literary piece, it has also to be open to new exploration from various perspectives.

Theodros (2005) is another one who has conducted his M.A thesis on the area of alienation entitled “*Some Aspects of Alienation Reflected in V.S. Naipaul’s Half a Life*”. This study deals with the concept of alienation as it is reflected in the context of Caribbean immigrant characters. As Theodros states in his statement of the problem, the study focused on the question of identity in the colonial era based on the Marxist point of view which focuses mainly on political and economic perspectives of alienation. The focus that Theodros tries to pay on the aspects of alienation is different from the present researcher’s angle of perspective. Theodros (2005: 3) says, “My deep browsing and exploration have shown that it has often accompanied by to some extent with synonymous matters such as rootlessness, displacement, identity quest or the need for self-definition, isolation, and exile”. Thus, his area of focus is more on the Caribbean literary category specifically the experiences of the post-colonial point of view by far different from the Ethiopian immigrants’ experiences.

Theodros' area of focus stressed the experiences of colonial issues and the Marist theoretical framework which is entirely not addressed in the selected novel because of the nature of the contents of the novels. From the beginning, the experiences of the characters in the selected novel of Naipaul are different from the experiences of the characters in the target trilogy because the novels' socio-historical settings' background and alienating experiences are quite different. So, the senses of alienation in these two different novelists are different as well. Dinaw and Naipaul are known for their high quality of creative literary works; however, they have their distinct literary themes and mode of presenting their alienating experiences. Theodros's study is taken from Marx's and Hegel's political and economic theoretical frame which is not pertinent to make this theory more useful in the empirical study of the present research. His thesis tries to project the philosophical senses of understanding and arguing that alienation is an inevitable mode of experience for human beings.

The other research which is related to this study is conducted by (Haftu, 2012) on the topic of "Ideological Plane in selected Ethiopian Diasporic prose narratives in English" for his M.A. thesis. This study's main emphasis is on its political realities and reflections of the Ethiopian diaspora fictions. Also, Haftu tries to see the political ideologies which are reflected in the selected prose narratives concerning the existing political realities of that time. He has attempted to evaluate the texts simply based on the political reflections of the domestic issues it is portrayed in the Ethiopian diaspora novels. He has not examined the issue of alienation as a primary objective of his study in contrast to the present study's principal objective and concern of the major characters' of Dinaw's novels. The reason for reviewing this study as related literature is because he has taken Dinaw's debut novel as one part of his study.

Endalkachew (2008) is the other researcher who has also conducted his M.A. thesis in the areas of the predicament of Ethiopian diaspora as reflected in Ethiopian literature in English. His thesis also focuses on the Diaspora community's overall disillusionment as it is portrayed in two English novels written by Ethiopian-born novelists. That study aims at identifying and analyzing the various sorts of predicament and their effects as they are portrayed in two Ethiopian diaspora novels. This study has presented a thematic analysis of the major predicament in Dinaw's debut novel under the woes of the homeland, woes in the host land, subthemes, and divergent themes. His MA also elucidates the difficult faces of situations of the represented even though he has not

taken the aspects of alienation and the causes and effects of alienations as part of his study. The present study differs for his effort of dealing with the current status of the immigrants' experiences nature and their relationship based on the sociological concept of alienation that is not regarded in Endalkachew's study.

The other research conducted including Dinaw's and other Ethiopian diaspora novels and non-fiction is Mesfin's (2012) for his Ph.D. Dissertation dealing with a thematic analysis of the diasporic fictional and non-fictional writings. He raises discovering and critically assessing as key points of his research in the selected diasporic writings. He has put three objectives: *Critically analyzing the content to establish some commonalities and divergences; evaluating the extent to which the selected texts conform to or diverge from the post-colonial literary theory; and finding strategies for integrating the selected texts into the mainstream Ethiopian literature (P: 30-31).* Mesfin in his work has taken one of Dinaw's novel and other Ethiopian-born literary works with an insightful emphasis on the thematic contents but he has not explicitly seen how alienation is portrayed in a particular subject in those works. Both Endalkachew and Mesfin have taken only the first novel of Dinaw for the study of their theses. The above academic studies can be labeled as relevant related materials for this work simply because of their attempt to take Dinaw's debut novel in their research works.

Among the studies that are related to the present study is Misrak's (2002) MA thesis. She has focused on the theme of alienation in three Amharic novels. The central concern of this research is conducted based on the theoretical framework of Marx, and she has explored the economic and political realities of feudalism's bureaucracy as it is delineated in three Amharic novels. Even though the primary subject of her study is the theme of alienation, the mode of analysis that she has applied and the form of alienation that is existed in the selected are very different from the present researcher's approach. In her study, the social relationships are researched in a way of the political and economic structures affecting various reflections of alienation in the selected three Amharic novels. She has tried to show us the themes of alienation based on the perspective of Marx's theory of alienation. Of course, Marx's theory is the base of the later contemporary theories which are applied by different scholars for different fields of study; various scholars come up with new theories reinterpreting it for other fields of discipline. The Marx's theory of alienation focuses mainly on the economic and political conditions of the social structure of a given bureaucratic

system. Misrak's research has focused also on literary characters having the experiences and manifestations of alienation if we compare it with that of the characters of Dinaws' novels underlining different experiences of alienation. The selected novels and the novels selected by Misrak present different times and spaces of representations to show the experience of alienation because of the reasons that a lot has changed since the publications of her selected novels and the present researcher's target novels.

Esmaeel and Hojjat (2012) are other researchers who have also conducted collaborative research on the themes of alienation with the title of "A Survey of Man's Alienation in Modern World". These researchers aim at recalling different modes of alienation in the modern world, and they look closely at contemporary alienations of the characters in Sam Shepard's *Buried Child* and *True West*. They also try their best to analyze the mentioned novels by applying Paul Sartre's ethical alienation and Heidegger's ontological alienation to these works. These scholars have attempted to realize their study precisely using Sartre's philosophy, and they elucidate that alienation occurs when human beings refuse to accept 'responsibility' for their freedom. Besides, Heidegger's notion of 'authenticity' is also part of their discussion as compared to the ideology of Sartre's alienation. Their paper, of course, deals with the concept of existential alienation, but the form of alienation and the mode of analysis is based on the philosophical perspective which is quite different from the perspective of the present researcher's point of view.

Abdul (2013) is another researcher who has studied a very relevant and significant work of research for this study. His major area of focus is the "Theme of Alienation in Modern Literature". He has selected modern European and American literary novels for his analysis of alienation. According to his study, the alienated characters of the novels that he has selected are recurrent figures in much of the post-modern American and European fictions. The represented personalities of the characters of the selected novels are immigrant communities that have different experiences of alienation in terms of form and content from Abdul's selected novels. In his research, Abdul Saleem tries to examine the various forms of alienation and themes of alienation in modern literature in general and Indo-English literature in particular from the existential point of the angle. In the selected literary works, the represented immigrant characters respond different experience of cultural perplex and social confusions of the African immigrants in the US.

Another related work of study is a Ph.D. dissertation conducted by Ahmed Abuzeid (1987) entitled as *The Theme of Alienation in the Major Novels of Thomas Hardy* which is one of the prominent researches on the subject of alienation. It mainly focuses on the theme of alienation in general and the causes of human isolation in particular, and it is analyzed in the selected novels of the wide trajectory of Victorian literature. Ahmed Abuzeid has taken six of Hardy's novels concerning the manifestations of alienation as central characteristics of the Victorian age. His study clearly shows how dynamic was the change of the world after the production of Hardy's novels. Yes, many things have changed since the production of those Hardy's novels including the experiences of human alienation due to the invention of various technologies and the surge of human displacement affects the forms of alienation also to be changed. The present research mainly centers on the dimensions of alienation which are quite different from that of the selected Victorian age novels which depict and focus the traumas of the world wars of the 'lost' and 'beat generation'.

The next two MA academic papers are also very pertinent to this study because these works of research have taken the trilogy for their research. One of them is Sylvia's (2015) thesis *Re/Creating History through the Persistence of Memory in How to Read the Air*, and she tries to explore the combination and relationship between the real experiences of the immigrant communities and the experiences of the present fictional characters. Sylvia's preliminary point of discussion is recreating narratives of the past and narratives of identity about time and space regarding *How to Read the Air* and other immigrant novels. The most interesting issue she has revealed is the portrayal of the narrator's experience in creating his family's history to fill the missing part of his life by an instance of blending fact and fiction. Despite Sylvia's attempt to foreground the experience of trauma simply to recreate falsehood history, it is not her primary issue to show us the characters' experience of alienation as it is portrayed in the stories. Her paper is devoted to show the specific personalities of the narrator of the selected novels for the purpose of creating a new history, and no explicit attempt is made to portray the reflection of alienation as an objective of her work. This work has not tried to depict the fundamental internal feelings and dilemma of displacement.

"*Negotiating Cultural Identity in Exile: A Study of Dinaw Mengestu's 'Children of the Revolution' and 'All Our Names'*" is the other thesis produced by Openda Ruth (2017). She tries to explore the narrators' cultural identities of the two novels of Dinaw Mengestu. This researcher's fundamental

objective is to investigate the novelist's critical understanding of portraying the exclusionary nature of fixed forms of identity. She underlined that the novels portray the false myth of the American dream with its promises of inclusion, equality, and democracy for all by accentuating the daily experiences of the African immigrant characters who are in constant search of their expectations that seem elusive to materialize. Ruth, in her research explicitly reveals the question of cultural identity and the experience of racial discrimination which could help the present researcher to inspect specific dimensions of alienation. The present researcher uses this issue as a very helpful material to deal with the study of alienation. What makes the present study different from her paper is the depth and scope of the area of the study in which the sociological view of alienations is to be considered and investigated in detail in the selected trilogy.

It is attempted to assess, to reviewed studies are taken as related and relevant to the current study because of their potential significance to this study directly or explicitly. Even if the subjects and the novels they are mentioned are similar to the present study, the approaches and theories these researchers have used to analyze their works are different from the way the present researcher's approach. Since the primary concern of this study is the portrayal of alienation, the researcher attempts to investigate how it is reflected in the selected literary texts in various ways from the reviewed ones to avoid any kind of duplication of components. Through the insightful analysis of the works that are done on these novels, the researcher has learned that the reviewed papers focus mainly on themes and characterizations from different perspectives, theories, and analysis of different economics and politics of Europeans and American literary works that do not significantly portray the immigrant African lives of the novels. The researcher has made an overview of his approach of perspective of the concepts in the next chapter.

## **2.2.Immigrant Literature**

Reasons for writing could vary from one person to another, society to society as well as generation to generation. For this case, African-American literary writers have specific and common rationale to produce their creative works. As Kehinde (2008:1) claims, African literature, predominantly the novel is "always handcuffed to history". It is undeniable to argue that African creative writings are dominated by history because the fundamental concerns of African history are all about the political, social, economic, cultural, and all aspects of the people's experiences. So, it is true to

say that African history and African Literature are like two faces of a coin, one being the backbone of the other. In the recent period, immigrant writings have attained wide room to be the point of discussion in the contemporary periods of the literary arena. In this literary category, the aspect of alienation is one of the propounding thematic areas that they have foregrounded as a global issue.

Though it is difficult to come up with a precise and consensus justification, it is important to present as much as it can adequately be the literature of a specific region as background information on the literary history of the area because it gives at least a glimpse of the entire work. The major thematic preoccupation of the specific region writers and the tone of their writings potentially reflect the geo-political realities, the socio-cultural background of the indigenous people, and the histories and injustices the regional people have endured. In his masterpiece, Fanon (1963:5) has made a remarkable point to the purpose of the writer: “who has decided to illustrate the truths of the nation turns paradoxically toward the past and away from actual events. What he ultimately intends to embrace are the cast-off thought, its shells, and corpses, a knowledge which has been stabilized once and for all”. Most immigrant writers have common multiple purposes for producing their pieces though they may differ from one another in the way they deliver or the style of their presentation. The immigrant writers’ main ideas and thoughts are only exactly knowing the reason behind why they pick up a pen or select that particular subject.

Immigrant writers strive themselves focusing on the frequent challenges of the dislocated people including the exodus from their original homes till they reach the hosting country. They also take as part of their work the construction of identities since immigration is part of human existence. Since the focus of the study is on the Ethiopian immigrants’ novels written in English, there have to be said some words on the nature and development of this region’s literary culture. The role of Ethiopian literature is very indispensable and complex because of its socio-political diversity and scope of the subject. As long as Ethiopia is a multilingual country and its diverse scope of language, it is a bit difficult to provide a brief story upon the overview of the literary culture. The thematic preoccupations of the Ethiopian writers in English are also unique by the subjects they raise which is a bit different from the rest of the other African writers as there have a different socio-political history of the regions.

It is not exaggerated to label the selected novels as the mouthpiece of the African immigrants as they paid a wide range of attention through the literary characters which presented the melancholy

of the immigrants' overall conditions and realities. These literary novels also specifically convey the lives of the Africans in general and the Ethiopian immigrants in particular who are relocated to the US besides their journey of immigration. To overemphasize the role of this particular type of writing, the immigrant novels try their best by putting an effort to take the quest for identity as one major concerning issue of their preoccupation. In immigrant fictions, some of the characters are painted to reflect the basic experiences of the absence of connection within the hosting community and culture. In immigrant fiction, there is a potential capability to echo and present the new life of the immigrants who struggle to cope up with the new culture.

Many Ethiopians left and abandon their homeland because of the recurrent political uncertainty. An immigrant is referred to as a dislocated individual who starts to lead a new life in the hosting country. Kehinde (2008:3) states the immigrants through the eyes of the immigrant writers, "...their leave ranges from voluntary migration to forced displacement, particularly many of African writers have been forced into exile and driven away by need, ambition, and persecution". This extract comprises the idea of the immigrant novelists' understanding of up-rootedness or deracination from their origin whereby the displacement and dislocation and the narrative of the ruthless journeys of the migrant fictions begin. One of the effects of the severe internal conflicts held in Ethiopia is a lot of people are forced to leave their homes and set up another home in the US or Europe. Emerging on the heels of these immigrations, a growing body of immigrant writings flourish with the preoccupies of violent conflicts and traumatic experiences urging authors to focus more on it how the compatriots out of their natal homes.

Defining the immigrant genre is an important task for the reasons of labeling the scope of this literary form and its literary history; it also renders us to proliferate an awareness to remark a clear and cut division of it with other kinds of novels. Since immigrant fiction is a contemporary outcome of written literature, defining universal literature can incorporate immigrant fiction as part of its explanation since the selected novels for this study are classified under this genre. All literary genres mirror and reflect the overall images of the human realities in all their varied forms and shapes; it also depicts the writers' empirical experience through his imaginative skill of angle. From time-to-time, writers have extended their endeavor of investigating the countless scopes of the relationships of man with his society and his environment to come up with a possible solution the solve the recurrent challenges that we face. The immigrant novelist's unique sensibility to see

the everyday activities we do; he let us show and pay in a very artistic way of depicting our real life, and this exploration has become one of the mainstreams of modern novels. The immigrant writers depict a glimpse of the social, political, and economic realities of the relocated society. In an interview with *Jane Paulick on 15 September 2014*, Dinaw once said on the immigrants' experiences of loss:

*We often think that the immigrant story is unique to people who have left their homes. But for me, it has increasingly become a story of people who have lost something essential to who they are and have to reinvent themselves and decide who they are in the wake of that loss. How do they find someone to love again? How do they find another home? How is this tied to the experience of violence? How does it reshape our sense of identity and how do we come to terms with it? (par. 3)*

Accordingly, the immigrant writers are also responsible to record and put to the next generation what their ancestors have lost and experienced in their exodus to find a harmless and peaceful place. They also should incorporate what the immigrant people have missed something essential like, their family, country, and friends who they cherished in their lives. The present researcher has found the quality of the trilogy for creating the represented immigrant characters, and the skill of inscribing the immigration and immigrant identities has also received the attention of local and international researchers. In the selected immigrant novels, it is tried to create connections and disconnections of names, identities, and relationships. Significant numbers of immigrant novels link their focal concerns between places and belonging, a shift of place, and identity which may probably a sign of loss or gain. This study is an attempt to examine how naming, identity, relationships, dislocation, and relocation become the causes of alienation; it is also tried to see if the challenges of the immigrant identities and how the immigrant communities are dehumanized.

Contemporary writers use various literary genres and practices to magnify and amplify the actual life of their respective societies. One of the common techniques that immigrant writers use to describe the existing situations of their environment is through novel; by its nature, it covers an extensive area of the subject and explores a detailed thought to scrutinize the critical insight and broader perspectives of human life particularly the entire lives of the immigrants. The immigrant genre specifically features not only the cross-cultural clashes but also considers the conflict

between constructed past and present realities of the immigrant groups. The stories of such creative fiction are expected to depict the cultural dislocation, the attempt of assimilation as an effort to suit themselves with the hosting societies to be part of them. Jhumpa Lahiri, one of the second-generation immigrants in the US and a Pulitzer winner, has made a successful exploration on themes related to immigration and exile in her fictions, *The Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and *The Namesake* (2003). She tries to explore the social conflicts, cultural dilemmas, and the issues of identities with great depth. The concern of immigrant writers with those themes of identity crisis, alienation, duality, and cultural clashes can be put as the chief issues of immigrant fiction. Within this physical and geographical demography, the characters in the immigrant fictions endlessly construct and reconstruct themselves in the process of redrawing the margins of self-accompanies.

Some immigrant writers including Dinaw Mengestu have found it difficult to abandon the themes of cultural identities and the personal connections of the immigrants to their countries of origin. An attempt of broadening and projecting the dilemmas of the identity of the African immigrants, and accompanying them in the presence of two worlds becomes challenging for them. So, the depiction of separation from their origins, their ethnicity, their past, and their upbringing is also the standard issues they raise in their literary pieces. Whether they are first- or second-generation immigrants, their current reaction and status of feeling make them who they are, and such immigration fictions spring forth from what they encounter and experience. Even though these writers make an unprecedented effort to show the immigrants' attempt of accommodation and adjustment to integrate with the new culture, some part of their past heritage and experiences clings to them from smoothing their long last effort of ambition, and this is what such kind of novels intimately tend to explore in their literary works. The new generations of immigrant writers might begin to write on the mainstream of the cultural perplex and challenging experiences. Boelhower (1980) describes the immigrant fiction that the macrostructure of the proposition can be formulated in his Fabula diagram. The specific areas an immigrant literary work incorporates:

*The poles of tension that ground the structuring of the Fabula are OW (Old World) and NW (New World), both as locations and sets of mental categories. Its three major moments are EXPECTATION (project, dream, possible world), CONTACT (experience, trials, contrasts), and RESOLUTION (assimilation, hyphenation, alienation). (P: 14-18)*

Though there is often a common and consistent over the flow of this structure in the immigrant novel, it is presented as a flashback or a digression, or inserted in the novel as a late narrative sequence. It is uncommon to follow a strict linear chronological order in the immigrant novels' mode of narration. Boelhower's concern is what major thematic preoccupations of the immigrant novels should include. The third point he proposes is an aspect of the immigrants' attempt to conform after realizing they accept their powerlessness and live with it.

Jarrett-Kerr (1986:27) has raised a similar point but in a different approach a strong statement supporting the relationship between displacement and alienation as in the following way: "Exile is a prime cause of alienation and alienation is (surely) something to be deplored". To answer questions related to alienation, one has to raise the intricate challenges of exile. For whatever reasons people leave their country, they face various forms of woes and tests in their new life of experiences. McClennen (2004:14) also argues exile as "both a painful separation and progress... one who has been forced to leave one's country". Based on her premise, exile can be regarded as a condition where immigrants haphazardly collide to a certain degree of damage and intense emotion. The use of exile in this study has a significant role in signifying the immigrants' experiences of loss and pain as the fundamental features of characters in universal immigrant fiction is supposed to prove in the selected literary works of this study.

To make the above point clearer, let's see how Salhi (2006:3) states exiles; "Keep an idealized image of home as a paradise they were forced to flee, and never manage to entirely adopt to their new dwellings. As such, they share feelings of solitude, estrangement, loss, and longing." It proves the blur demarcation of alienation as a typical manifestation of exile. This idealization of the home is one possible response to the experience of immigration which is more widespread in various literary works. It is also Edward Said who is the famous literary critique has dealt with the understanding of the concept of alienation. Said, in his various critiques, has tried to show the possible challenge of life in exile. In his essay *Reflections on Exile*, Edward Said (2001: 173) explains exile as an "unhealable rift forced...between the self and its true home". This is to mean that it is an act of facing a new environment to adjust to a new community. In this particular essay, Said specifies the term exile to those who long to but are powerless to return to their original countries. Accordingly, some force inhibits the exiled individual from returning home.

Further to pinpoint the issue of exile, Gikunda (2000:1-12) has stated five models of exile which are originally set by Anne Gagiano as a structural approach to the study of exile experience. Four of the five dimensions are so crucial and are shown clearly as they cause alienation for the exilic community. These are an ontological exile, political/colonial exile, social exile, and psychological exile. Based on these points, it is possible to conclude that the process of immigration in between the 'homeland and host land is the voyage undertaken in the whole process of alienation. The experiences of alienation have also revived and achieved great heights through the immigrant people in the second half of the twentieth century because of the intense and complex situation of the global politics and economy. As the diasporic writings increase to specifically focus on the displaced people, the theme of alienation has gained prominent attention in the international arena. Thus, it can be said that alienation and immigration are inter-connected and inter-related issues interchangeably affect each other.

In line with that idea, two developments deal with the exile of the individuals in general and the writers in particular, to mention them, the negative trend and the positive one. It is important to explain the negative trend as Ciocârlea (2013) has stated in her thesis:

*The separation from the home space is perceived by the individual either as a breaking pain, pathological alienation, a traumatic uprooting or as a constructive penalty, a mandatory step towards purification, a reward in the negative sense of something bad committed in the past, arguments found in the philosophy of most religions (P:2).*

In its comprehensive sense, the immigrant literature includes those works from which a thematic and aesthetic point of ideas are mostly dedicated to the cultural norms of the displaced people in comparison with the native habitats and their norms. It can be said exile literature and immigrant literature emphasis on the physical and spiritual beauty of everything connected to the time lived in the home. Ciocârlea (2013: 8) further states that "exile literature includes writings focused on the adoptive country, specific descriptions of everyday life in the new space or critical analysis of the social and cultural assimilation process". The present researcher deliberately discusses exile writing due to the fact it has a fundamental similarity of thematic preoccupation with immigrant writings. Issues such as the search for identity in a foreign environment or the meaning of life in exile, the failure to adapt to the new country, nostalgia for the homeland, etc. are the basic concerns of exile literature, and the researcher also believes such thematic prevalence should also be found

in the immigrant literature. In her discussion, Ciocîrlea (2013: 5) has observed a psychological level, "...during exile, in every individual, there is a crisis that manifests itself on five areas: space/location, time, language, culture, and identity". Thus, as a consequence of immigration, a significant number of people face different forms of psychological and sociological complications in which alienation to be one of the most painful effects leaving behind such psychological and sociological uncertainty.

In the modern era, a considerable number of writers including Dinaw come to the fore to share and introduce the experiences of the immigrant world and push the hosting governments and other international institutions to pay more attention to the situations and environments of the immigrant communities and reconsider their immigration policies. The various immigrant generations have put their possible exert of literary skills to cry out what they face and experience to persuade understand the world around them how they come across starting from the day they left their original homes. Their literary pieces are supposed to reflect not only their sentiments but also the overall feeling of the immigrant life. Shukla and Banerji (2012: 20) point out the fundamental points of the immigrant writers' concern; "These writers reflect, on one hand, their attachment to their motherland and on the other hand, their feeling of alienation and rootlessness". (Ibid: 2012) also remarks that what the major immigrant writings' main concern has to be: "Every immigrant experiences injustice, inequality, discrimination, biases, prejudices and a threat to cultural identity in the unfamiliar country.

The unexpected change in the lifestyle, culture, and status may affect the immigrant people to entire assimilation of the new home's life as a result of various pushing forces such as, as a means of escaping from the feelings of otherness or to integrate themselves with the existing culture. Pokhriyal, C. (2013:2) explains assimilation as "an approach towards incorporation and amalgamation, through which, not only immigrants but also other marginalized groups...". When regulating the changing situation of these marginalized or relocated lives is a challenge, their ultimate choice could probably be to assimilate themselves with the hosting culture. Such kind of assimilation experience can be one of the common themes of immigrant or diaspora literary writings.

It can be noted out that immigration novels directly address not only the experiences of immigrants; they also portray the changes in the shifting social, cultural, and political landscape

of the hosting countries. Immigrant novels also focus on how immigrants come up with the process and formation of national identities. Thus, the immigrant novels are expected to serve as vehicles to praise their struggle and to criticize the hosting society and its institutions' way of handling them, and its total culture of hospitality life. This idea specifies the overlapping of the experience of immigration and exile literature in which there is a process of change in both movements; it can also be said that one of the terms is to mean the other one.

As the central resource of this study is the selected trilogy, the Ethiopian immigrants have made a significant contribution to the development of immigrant fictional writing. In addition to Dinaw, we have immigrant writers like, Meaza Mengiste, Hama Tuma, Mazengia, Yitbarek, and others who significantly contribute their best effort to raise the names of their original country in their fictional or non-fictional masterpieces. These writers try to portray and reflect the thematic concerns of the Ethiopian culture, history, identity, and assets. Even some of them prioritize thematic concerns of the immigrant communities in their host country and they give voice to the traumatic experiences of these people when they face and clash two cultures or the racial discrimination they undergo. Many African immigrant writers have the same reason for producing novels, short stories, and poems to depict the situation of many immigrants' experiences of the feeling of being alien, and this feeling can be physical, mental, religious, spiritual, psychological, political, social, or economic. In the real lives of the immigrants, they experience a feeling of discomfort in various forms in a school, among family members, in religion, in their politics, and in social participation. Therefore, immigrant fictions are supposed to raise subjects related to the reactions of these marginalized and relocated people such as being isolated from one's surroundings, events, and activities.

The immigrant literature fundamentally manifests the breakdown of social norms and cultural dilemmas of the displaced communities. It is also supposed to show the confusion of identity (ethnic, sexual, social, and cultural) and its fight for legitimization in a deceiving society. Ammar Rezaei (2007) reviews the specific features of immigrant literature:

*...breaks away from all the rules and seeks alternative principles of composition conforming to their content ... accommodating the meaninglessness, purposelessness, and absurdity of human existence. ...various devices such as fragmentation, paradox, questionable narrators, Contradiction, Permutation, Discontinuity, Randomness, Excess,*

*Short Circuit, etc. which manifest chaotic conditions of the world in equally chaotic techniques and forms. (P:17)*

Undeniably, the immigrant literature raises thematic concerns of the unprivileged and marginalized groups inside the so-called modern and democratic societies. Accordingly, the contemporary immigrant literary category is basically about modern thought, modern characters, modern styles, or practices after the emergence of the changes that affected the nature of human life and relationships. Modernism in literature came up as a reaction against traditional literary styles. To extend the above issue, an anonymous reading module prepared by the National Open University of Nigeria (2014:14) states that: "...writers argue that modern life is not symmetrical but is characterized by restlessness, absurdity, alienation, gloom, sadness, and the disruption of the traditionally accepted way of living. Consequently, modernist style celebrates fragmentation and artistic freedom". Some immigrant novels including Dinaw's trilogy use various fragmented narrative techniques and forms of style to accommodate similar thematic areas. Writers in this area liberate themselves from the conventional and traditional forms and contents of storytelling despite their common areas of preoccupation.

Contemporary human lives become so complex and fragmented due to the proliferation and invention of technology and the overdose of information. These things probably force the immigrant literary writers to give more emphasis and pay special attention to the case of the immigrants' affected live experience in their literary quality. The recent immigrant creative writings are more interested in the consciousness of the individual characters rather than their physical environment and surrounding due to the high curiosity regarding and concerning the essence of humanity. Therefore, instead of describing a scene, a place or the weather, contemporary immigrant writings concentrate on the predominant lives of the individual characters and showing them as being more important than things that could be seen or touched. Writers who advocate such trends of experience share selected and relevant experiences of the past and present. While the fragments of the past life experience display themselves in memory, having no existence in reality, the present experiences and practices also reflect the sense of nothingness as the immigrant writers have shown us in their fictional works.

The thematic center of the immigrant writers, to a great extent, is available in their novels and contemporary writers of this aspect do not conform to the traditional pattern of writing fiction and nonfiction. Sangeeta Mahesh (2014:68-71) has stated for “V.S. Naipaul, Third World is nothing more than a theatre of absurdity and chaos. Disorganization, absurdity, cruelty, brutality, and insensitivity which threaten man’s existence have become the main characteristic of the new world”. As a post-colonial writer, Various forms of alienation are the dominant themes of Naipaul’s best novels. His novels show his obsession with a lot of the Caribbean people—their dislocation, relocation, withdrawal, alienation, and isolation.

### **2.3. Literary Alienation**

The term, ‘alienation’ is a concept with a wide range of definitions that need lengthy discussion. There is a rising feeling of alienation and rootlessness which prevails in the literary pieces of contemporary writers depicting the construction of identity and making pointless and meaningless life specifically following the two world wars. A great number of contemporary literary personas are embarrassingly alienated from the social organizations that surround them. Like Jake Barnes in Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, feel alienated from his community. Other fictional characters, like Caddy Compson in William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*, are isolated from his nearer associates including members of his family and the loved ones. Still others, like Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, feel alienated by the religious institution in which he has been raised; occasionally this form of alienation extends farther than the represented people feel alienated from God himself. Possibly a very severe type of alienation lies in characters such as Meursault in Albert Camus’s *The Stranger*, who feels withdrawn from all with which he comes into connection: his family, his society, and the entire of modern life.

The upsurge of literary characters who fight with alienation is a result of the real struggle many human beings have with feeling detached from, rejected by, and unrelated to other human beings and the societal institutions that shape and guide us. Alienation is a very influential power, one that moves humans toward the undesirable impulses of self-pity, vulnerability, and violence, but that can also result in the desired results of a profound self-examination and rational liberation. Some scholars try to associate alienation primarily with the 20th century and beyond, and indeed dated roughly from 1890 to 1950, the modernist movement which has one of its central themes

with its rise of dependence on science and technology, and the steady flow of the people from rural into urban isolation, the individual and society are at odds with one another. Modernism studies how our connections with each other and with social institutions such as the church, school, work, and family have decreased from time to time, leading the individual to be gradually individualistic in our thinking and thus, alienated. Of course, the fictional books listed above are all works in the modernist tradition. In addition to those novels and their alienated characters, modernism produced influential works such as T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* and *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. These two poems raise and assess at length the human beings' alienation from one another and the entire world around them.

Other 20th-century works of research try to investigate the overall situation of alienation by portraying alienated characters from one another despite familial connections or close daily proximity. In F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, for instance, the title character, Jay Gatsby, born Jay Gatz, has separated himself from his past, thus alienating himself from what might be called his natural place in the world. The main home of literature foregrounding the issues of alienation is believed to be the 20th century, though the thought is much older. For example, the biblical story of the golden calf displays the fellow people are alienated from God and themselves. In the Old Testament biblical story, Moses has left the Israelites for 40 days and 40 nights to climb Mount Sinai and receive the Ten Commandments. Since they are detached from Moses, they are also detached from the idea of God and instantly fear they are alone in the world and need an idol to worship their faiths. They, therefore, convince Moses' brother Aaron to forge a golden calf for them. As Erich Fromm points out that this story shows us how man is connected with himself only through the belief of the idols. This story, of course, comes from the Old Testament before the coming of Jesus Christ. One way to read the New Testament is that the arrival of the Messiah saves the world from its state of alienation from God.

The German philosopher Georg Hegel, in the 19th century, followed Rousseau's footsteps, announcing that humans "live in a world shaped by his work and his knowledge, but it is a world in which man feels alien, a world whose laws prevent basic need satisfaction" (qtd. in Khan 1995: 26). Hegel has outspread Rousseau's concept believing that contemporary man usually senses the fight between his desires and participation in society and that the outcome is a feeling of disconnection. Hegel centered on work as a key agent of this detachment, a move that was

resonated in the writing of Karl Marx, who expressed the concepts of alienation better than anyone had before and who is still supposed one of the most important influences on the concept. Marx articulated alienation as the feeling that prevails when things that must naturally go together are kept apart.

Marx (1888) frequently argued that the Industrial Revolution created workers who were alienated from their crucial humanity because they were treated as “machines” as contrasting to human beings. Further, they are isolated from one another because there is no social relationship involved in the production of a commodity. They are also alienated from the product they are producing, because it will be sold on the market with no relationship to the human that produced it, and from the act of work itself because there is no satisfaction or meeting of desire involved. Before the coming of the industrial, work did not have these attributes, as work was often made in a family setting, with concrete results and, for many, a clear sense of pride and satisfaction. For Marx, the farther society moves away from these more “natural” states, the more alienated we will become.

To conclude this issue, Israel argues (1971) that alienation refers to *Entäußerung* since the verb *entäußern* describes the disengagement or detachment of a part of man from himself. Israel’s argument is most probably derived from the works of Marx. In Marx’s works, *Entfremdung* tends to be rendered by “estrangement”, while *Entäußerung* is usually translated as “alienation” (quoted in Wallimann, 1981). In *Grundrisse* Marx uses the English word “alienation” to designate the term *Entäußerung*.

#### **2.4.Social functions of Novels**

Indispensably, literary writing is very crucial to vividly show the reality of an individual’s life or collectively the social aspects of a community. Concerning this, Wellek and Warren (1956:94) point out “literature represents life and life is a social reality and this world becomes the object of literary imitation”. Apart from its entertainment, fiction as an effort of art is an instrument to convey the real experience of the people using the imaginative people in the literary compositions. Hence, writers of novels attempt to uncover the hard truth of the human life with its challenging realities which alternatively creates an awareness on how to deal with the inevitable truths through their creative skills specifically using novel due to the fact of its high quality of portraying the

reality in a broader and deeper method. Henry James (1978:50) remarks the importance of fiction, “the only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life”. Fiction, for the writers, becomes one alternative of advocating to narrate their surroundings and environments experiences in a way creating a space which can be able to provide its pivotal lessons to all human beings.

Several novelists try to prioritize the various good and bad opportunities, experiences, and challenges of human beings and communities that potentially confront in their entire lives. The dreadful and distressful consequences and features of reality are supposed to be the major subjects in the pieces of those writers’ works. In addition to the magnification of the blessing lives of the world, the novels have also the purpose of incorporating the realities of underscoring the new decadence of morals and the varied problems of modern times lives. Significantly, it plays its role of portraying the created digressions in the lives of the different socio-cultural societies who have the experiences of facing problems in their social and cultural practices. Kuan-Hsing Chen (2010: 317) suggests, “The study of literature is to understand, share and sympathize with the material and mental conditions of people living in that specific nation”. That is a very important point in which the researcher inspires the selected trilogy to exhaustively investigate the lives of the specific group of the immigrant represented personas.

The trilogy, as immigrant literature, is exemplary pieces with better quality of epitomizing and reflecting the Ethiopian immigrants’ lives; as far as the researcher knows, no other writer has intensively and deeply vibrantly portrayed the Ethiopian immigrants that the selected trilogy. Those novels have shown us the realities of the Ethiopian immigrant society in the US. Novels with such universal thematic purposes have the opportunities of addressing issues that could also be a global concern and a center of discussion in the international arena including the issue of dislocation and relocation. Various novelists do give high priority to the social aspects of a particular community to introduce either the virtuous and exemplary cultural practices or to give lessons to others if their practices should not be encouraged. Similarly, different immigrant novelists have the functional purpose of raising and addressing the socio-cultural and socio-economic impacts of the immigrant groups. Such impacts have to be delineated in comparison with their original home and cultural settings besides the great challenge to co-exist with the hosting community. The present researcher takes a primary initiative to deal with the challenges

of the modern immigrants with a specific spot of the selected three fictional books; the reason is the novelist has endeavored to view life realistically, to investigate and explore the visible and the invisible aspects of the social values proving the function of a novel is the revelation of hidden life.

## **2.5.The Challenges of Modern Human beings**

In the current challenging world, the positive and optimistic attitudes given to the dislocated individuals and groups become less inspirational to be accepted as a progressive encouragement. Since the displacement and challenges of trouble have surged, it becomes the daily news of the international media outlets even though it needs independent research to speak confidently about the figurative data of the impacts. In the contemporary epoch, the modern human being is confronted with various problems and stresses while attempting to build a better future of life, family, and ultimately a country. To make it clear, a significant number of the second and third world immigrant generations reach a point of difficulty to handle and decide specifically their destiny, and they realize that there are internal and external forces that threatened the good hopes of tomorrow and the joys they yearn for so long. As a result of the recurrences of stresses and challenges, the modern person suffers from a deep sense of powerlessness and unfriendliness sense of alienation. Sharma (2015:1) remarks “Its corrosive impact can be seen in the form of a generation gap, the anti-war movement, the hippie phenomenon, the credibility gap, the compartmentalization of our life, the stunting of personal development, the conspicuous absence of a sense of meaningfulness of life, and so on”. Sharma has added that the feeling of alienation is also one of the greatest problems and challenges that modern man faces.

The expansion of modern technologies and globalization have put a great impact on the mutable lives of modern Human beings, and the powerful effect of the global movement can result in a positive as well as a negative gain. Globalization is a relatively new phenomenon of multidimensional nature that causes a variety of complex trends in the economic, political, social, and cultural structure of contemporary societies. These trends have presented an unprecedented and alarming influence possibly sending some people into a very difficult situation. More importantly, globalization can have the potential of shifting every conceivable aspect of human life. It has also created a smaller world which is prone to yield uncomfortable situation for people

to live with even though people have some significant privilege like the chance of reaching and crossing countries within a single day. Hence, meeting people from various places in the world is greatly possible in the era of globalization. When people of diverse backgrounds meet, they need to communicate using international languages which can also be considered as the blessing of globalization. The reverse is true with the expansion of misinformation, disinformation, and hatreds among different global views and cultural backgrounds which instigate higher levels of conflicts and mistrust in a very short period of time more importantly those dislocated and displaced may become the victims of such incidents.

Despite confronting and facing such feelings of illness and challenges, the modern human attempts to use numerous means of tactic to direct their lifestyles to cope up with the increasing complexities of the existing condition. Wurzburger (1964:42) justifies this complexity as, “paradoxically, the more control man is capable of exerting over his environment, the more he becomes enmeshed in a network of pressures and forces against which he feels too helpless to assert himself”. In this extract the pronoun ‘he’ seems to imply to all human beings without any sex difference. The human ambition of demanding freedom can determine the ultimate fate of his entire life in a situation where no one should interfere in the selection of his choices. In contrast, a person who fails and loses the accepted personality that we expect, there may cause some social and psychological problems which have exacerbated a meaningless of life. Neal & Collas (2000: 14) also note, “Yet, the human problem is that of dealing, in some way or another, with the realities socially constructed to serve as guidelines for everyday life. Selectivity and errors in the perceptual process stem from the cultural blinders imposed upon us”. It shows the importance of social values in a way that there is an independent truth that exists outside of our thought and perceptions. In such experience of challenges, a human being can never work properly with the condition of a dysfunctional relationship and in the essence of emptiness for a long period of time. To speak clearly, such predicament and disappointment are the fundamental thematic concerns of immigrant writers, and they should come to the fore with their influential creative works to articulate and show the most challenging conditions of the modern human in general and the immigrant communities in particular. The researcher has attempted to investigate the contemporary phenomenon realities and challenges of the immigration life based on the representation and depiction of the selected immigrant novels.

## CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

### 3.1.Sociological Perspective

Alienation, according to Kenneth Keniston (1965:1), is a “term used to describe the sense of growing distance between men and their former objects of affection”. Alienation, distancing, withdrawal, disconnection, departure, and nonintervention, and meaninglessness all these terms point to the sense of loss, a growing gap between human beings and their society. Regarding the theoretical frame of this study, the researcher takes Seeman’s (1959) sociological dimensions of alienation: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation, and self-estrangement. In the last few decades, many scholars including Geyer Felix have tried to rephrase and interpret Seeman’s theory of alienation in the contexts and fields of sociology and psychology since a lot of things have changed since the production of Seeman’s work. The present researcher has taken this framework comparing its visibility with the reinterpreted recent ones.

The fundamental disciplinary area of this study is to investigate the literary thematic issue; a significant effort has been made to bring such a sociological perspective to the context of literary study. The researcher has applied this sociological theoretical concept to the novels that stem from Dinaw’s immigrant trilogy to address the questions of the study and to come to a better understanding of how alienation is reflected in contemporary immigrant novels. Senekal (2010:7-8) further says, “*Melvin Seeman* was part of the surge in alienation research prominent in the middle of the 20th century when he published his paper *On the Meaning of Alienation*, in the *American Sociological Review*’ in 1959”. Many scholars have assured Seeman’s contribution to the proliferation of the concept of alienation.

One of the scholars, Senekal (2010:8), has said that the founding intellectuals of alienation are Karl Marx and Melvin Seema, prominently Marx with his theory of, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and *The German Ideology* (1846), and Seeman’s theory, *On the Meaning of Alienation* (1959). Wilden (1980) as cited in Senekal, (2010:15) remarks, “Marx identifies three aspects of alienation, namely private property, the commodity character of labor, and the division of labor in society”. These classifications are not as useful as the theory of Seeman’s to the present literary study because this study specifically focuses on a sociological point of analysis not underlining the economic and political aspects of the novels though Seeman has designed the new

aspects based on the traces of Marx's theory of alienation. Senekal (2010:25) says Seeman "identifies powerlessness and self-estrangement with Marxian notions of alienation", and "clearly relates self-estrangement to Marx's false consciousness". Seeman, thus builds some of his dimensions based on Marx's theory of alienation. After comparing Marx's theory of alienation with Seeman's theory, the researcher has found Seeman's concept more important as a methodological framework and it is more suitable to the analysis of alienation of the selected novels. To look at the feelings of alienation in the immigrant society, one must go beyond that of Marx's theory of alienation.

Melvin Seeman published his theory, *On the Meaning of Alienation* (1959), in the journal *American Sociological Review* as an attempt to identify the meaning of the concept of alienation. This theory is cherished by various areas of studies because it has comprehensively redefined the publication of Marx's manuscripts. In his piece, Seeman explains the duty as being to produce a specific and unique social aspect rather than a global indicator of the individual's feelings of pleasure or hopelessness, discomfort or dissatisfaction, uselessness or hopefulness. From a sociological field of perspective, Seeman's five separate dimensions to study alienation in his influential concept probably contest the old conceptualizations of alienation. The variation he has made, however, does not imply that these versions are found separately in each person; it is possible to observe more than one at the same time.

As it is said earlier, Seeman's introduction of those five dimensions of alienation indicates that the study specifically stresses how these dimensions of alienation are foregrounded in the lives of the Ethiopian Immigrants. Sociologists offer us various theories with different perspectives with which to see our social world. A perspective is simply a way of looking at the environments around us or a view to human behavior and its connection to society as a whole, and such principle can be a set of connected schemes or ideas designed to answer a particular question or define a specific occurrence. Sociological perspectives help us to clarify and foresee the social world in which we live. The three major theoretical perspectives of sociology that Mooney, Knox, and Schacht (2007: 2) propose are: "the functionalist perspective, the conflict perspective, and the symbolic interactionist perspective (sometimes called the interactionist perspective or simply the micro view)". Each perspective gives different clarifications about the social world and human behavior.

The present researcher focuses to study the human and social perspectives of the immigrant communities as a group or as an individual.

The Functionalist, the Conflict and the Interactionist have basic questions they want to answer, and they purposely strive to scale up the capital of the social well beings and the good of the social interactions in the day-to-day activities of the human environment. Thus, the three perspectives mentioned above are supposed to get a complete image of most of the social phenomena. Mooney et, al. (2007) say that the Functionalists deal with order and stability in society with social structure and how society's parts fit together. Conflict scholars' bas how the welfares of human social arrangements are distributed. Social Interactionists concern more on thematic-sociological level—on interactions between individuals and among small groups, and they ask what and how meanings are conveyed. Having the various perspectives into consideration, Melvin Seeman views his aspects of alienation based on the interactionist ones because the five types he proposes are very interrelated and prevailed based on the relationship one has with another or within a group.

### **3.2.Melvin Seeman's Dimensions of Alienation**

Melvin Seeman's theory of alienation has been studied by several scholars due to his extraordinary influence in the fields of socio-psychology with a special emphasis on alienation. Since the present research has specifically focused on Ethiopian immigrant writings, the number of studies conducted on this field is not as encouraging as it is expected as far as the researcher understands it. The present researcher has decided to undertake this theoretical concept to this literary field that stems from the immigrant community and individuals to address a better understanding of how alienation manifests in these marginalized people as it is depicted in contemporary immigrant novels. Seeman's theory *On the Meaning of Alienation* (1959) is perhaps more applicable to modern-day immigrant society though much contemporary and history of sociological thought stem from the Marxist theory of alienation. Seeman is a successor of prominent scholars, like *Marx, Durkheim* , and other prominent sociologists to construct what is often considered a model of alienation consisting of the five aspects: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement.

Such classification bears a witness to argue alienation is not a single phenomenon, but it is the collective experiences of those various dimensions. It is true to consider Seeman's concept as an

important theory of alienation after he published his pioneering article, *On the Meaning of Alienation* (1959) in the *American Sociological Review*. These dimensions of alienation are purposefully used for the study of alienation by researchers like Neal & Collas (2000) and Geyer (1996) considering the change of time and innovation of many things, and these scholars have applied Seeman's theory after reinterpreting it for their purposes. Though Seeman has set out the forms and feelings of alienation, he has not tried to address the issues of why an individual feels alienated. The present researcher has made an effort to show why and how the major characters in the target novels encounter the dimensions of alienation proposed by Seeman.

### **3.2.1. Powerlessness**

Seeman (1959: 786) defines powerlessness as “the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his behavior cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcements, he seeks”. This definition slightly departs from the Marxian view in that Seeman's definition of powerlessness is not merely an objective fact caused by the organization of work, but shifts the focus to the perception or experience of the individual which refers to the original view of alienation. Marx has expressed it by the condition of the worker in the capitalist society when that worker lacks control over his work. Seeman (1959:784) states “the worker is alienated to the extent that the prerogative and means of decision are expropriated by the ruling entrepreneurs”. So, Seeman's definition of powerlessness is built based on the Marxian view of the worker's condition in capitalist society. Supporting this definition, Kalekin Fishman (1996:97) states it as: “the gap existing between what a person wants to do and what that person feels capable of doing”. This point implies that the inability, vulnerability, and dependency of a person to determine his fate in the challenges of the daily life. Shepard (1977:13) has also stated powerlessness as “the perceived lack of freedom and control on the job”. This definition is related to Marx's definition of the condition of the worker in the capitalist society in the core of freedom and job. Freedom and control are two divergent ideas that are common terms to be associated with powerlessness. In the modern lives of every society, the relationship of the individuals should be free of any impositions in the everyday interactions of the community. The common thing that prevails in the above scholars' discussion is that powerlessness is the incapability to influence one's fundamental needs.

Since the time differs considerably from the time Seeman has introduced the issue of powerlessness, other scholars of this area have also tried to come up with points as to what it

incorporates in the context of post-modernism. Felix Geyer (1996: xxiii) is one of the intellectuals who argues "...the core problem is no longer being unfree but being unable to select from among an over the choice of alternatives for action, whose consequences one often cannot even fathom". The overflow of information has led to a desperate delay in response. Geyer's argument shows the relationship between certain actions and its reaction becomes blurred due to the severe complexity of information in contemporary times.

In the case of literary areas, powerlessness can be seen when the fictional characters have portrayed the experiences and feelings of helplessness that are mentioned earlier in the categories of Seeman's definition. Johl (1992: 14) adds that "The antihero experiences his role and is usually characterized as a victim to whom everything happens". In this case, fictional Characters are unable to choose and decide on their subjective affairs or they are not free from second body interference in their choice of interest. When such fictional people are directly or indirectly influenced by others for the circumstances which impact their actions, and they are called powerless characters. Even the characters of the immigrant novels feel they cannot control what happens to them in their new lives though the reason for their feeling of helplessness differs one from another. So, it can be said that powerlessness in literary novels is portrayed when the characters' feeling of helplessness and losing control over their lives cannot positively influence their ultimate goals. It can also be stated the response of the protagonists is the vice versa of their expectations.

A very important point to speculate the manifestation of powerlessness is the portrayal of dehumanization in the fictional characters which made them the victims of emotional and physical agony when they are unable to fight against it. The possible choice of those dehumanized people is to accept what it offers them as an instrument of escaping from the unpleasant reality of life. Thus, in doing this, they accept alienation and live with it. This 'acceptance-due-to-powerlessness' brings another instance of powerlessness, dehumanization. This state of condition is an indication of *an* unsuccessful effort of the persons in their attempt to adjust themselves in the new homes. More specifically, it refers to the *inability* of the individual to react or how to react. As a result, dehumanization is often a sign when the alienated one has reached a point of experiencing the loss of one's human essence and lives with it. It similarly implies the process by which fictional characters have been exposed to the senses of inhuman acts like exploitation and

coercive actions. Thus; the present researcher has tried his best how powerlessness is depicted in the realities of the African immigrants without restricting the socio-political environments in the immigrant novels.

### **3.2.2. Meaninglessness**

Seeman (1959: 786) defines Meaninglessness as "the individual's sense of understanding events in which he is engaged". Meaningful relationships are those that allow individuals to express subjectively determining aspects of their personality, goals, and desires. Without a compatible meaning of the social-economic realities, it is so difficult for people to continue an enthusiastic social interaction. According to Mannheim (1940:59), meaninglessness occurs "when the individual is unclear as to what ought to believe or when the individual's minimum standards for clarity in decision making are not met". The individual's inability of realizing meaning is explained by Frankl (1985:30) that meaninglessness "is a mental condition of a person whose life is profoundly afflicted by the sense of loss, futility, and emptiness when the person is failed to fulfill the will to the meaning of life". The above argument builds up Seeman's definition of meaninglessness by providing further strength the contemporary world presents the individual with a vastly confusing world of opposing views and bewildering options.

While the present researcher inspects the specific view of meaninglessness, Seeman (1959: 786) says "Meaninglessness is characterized by a low expectancy that satisfactory predictions outcomes of behavior can be made". In his definition of powerlessness, Seeman forwards two important points; the first point refers to the sensed ability to control outcomes, and the second one refers basically to the sensed ability to predict behavioral outcomes. The relationship between powerlessness and meaninglessness shows that people who are unable to understand their environment feel they cannot predict the outcome of their behavior. As with powerlessness, meaninglessness is highly subjective and yet it is difficult to foresee a vast array of outcomes. The sociological understanding of meaningless is further supported by a philosophical opinion of Degenaar, J. (1955) as Burgert (2008:27) has cited it: "philosophical viewpoint in which man is confronted with the absurdity of life to which meaning can only be given if man succeeds in creating it himself". Such a point of philosophical perspective is consolidated by fictional writers who are endeavored to depict the lives of the marginalized or disadvantaged individuals' feeling that alienation is generated by a superficial or dehumanized structure.

Our life in the contemporary world has never been as connected as it is now because finding information is easier than it has ever been. It is not the constraints of information as the absence of meaning in our daily lives. Geyer (1996) has stated about the way we access information that the modern form of meaninglessness is the overload of information with which one is confronted. To relate such an overdose of information to this literary meaninglessness is by an over-emphasis of the difficulty of the fictional characters in their attempt of choosing appropriate information in their second country lives. Having into account this justification, the researcher has noticed that meaninglessness in novels and other fictional works can be portrayed as the uncertainty of the characters' beliefs, decisions, and actions as well as a dilemma of anticipating their future lives. Thus, observing the specified ideas of social attachments shed some light on the self's interaction with the environment. On the other hand, as Seeman (1959: 786) has said, meaninglessness refers to "... the individual's sense of understanding events in which he is engaged". The modern world presents the individual with a confusing world of opposing views, perplexing possibilities, and even history that exists to be constantly documented. As such, meaninglessness is directly related to control as it is said under powerlessness.

In a literary context, the form of meaninglessness can be identified based on the conditions where characters' lives are profoundly distressed by a sense of loss, pointlessness, and vacuum when they are unable to achieve the expected meaning of life. Writers in their fictional works can show their readers that alienation in its a positive manifestation in the growth of individual personality though it is uncommon in many writings. Contemporary immigrant writers have structurally tried to demonstrate the meaninglessness of the characters in a way of creating fragmented series of stories as an anonymous writer has expressed it in a teaching module provided by the National Open University of Nigeria (P: 17): "To show the meaninglessness and disjointed nature of life, they paid less attention to plot or the structural organization that would show cause and effect, beginning, middle or end of a text". Such traditional and classical narration of fictional stories is substituted by a discontinuous, fragmented, and complex narration to indicate the extent of lives of the modern human beings.

### **3.2.3. Normlessness**

The term normlessness is derived from the French sociologist, Durkheim's concept of *anomie*, used to denote "the situation in which the social norms regulating individual conduct have broken

down or are no longer effective as rules for behavior" (Seeman, 1959: 787). In this definition, Durkheim states that normlessness results from a loss of traditional values and moral codes, in contrast to the existentialists who, for their part, noted that alienation was inevitable because it was an intrinsic element of the human condition. It can be added that normlessness refers to a situation lacking effective norms or in which individuals assume that unacceptable behaviors are required for success.

Anomie can be seen as a subjective sense of having the characteristics of discomfort or anxiety, feeling of separation from the group standards, and feeling of futility, or an attempt to prevail without a set of goals. Seeman has specifically defined normlessness (1959: 788) as, "high expectancy that socially unapproved behaviors are required to achieve given goals". When the events of actions are developed out of the socially approved behavior as a means to attain the intended goals, it is violating the norms that regulate the individuals' conduct. Zurbugg's statement (1986: 27) is indicative of this stance, "The late twentieth century is an apocalyptic age in which all cultural practices have become superficial, weightless, static, vacuously objective, vacuously subjective, or vacuously obscene." He also explains such characteristics by "sexual promiscuity, youth violence, and the binge drinking culture" (P: 40). Zurbugg tells a set of qualities that has to be perceived as the normless individual or society.

Similarly, Geyer (1996:200) states that "the norm can be conceived as transformation rule for changing input into output which guidelines for actions or reactions under specific conditions." This social transformation for change is a purpose of attempt either to co-exist or a means of achieving the expected goal while a society's shared norms and values vanish or collapse. This sociological definition usually shows that the less privileged individuals feel unfortunate of being in that environment and they are also felt as if they are detached from their society. As an originator of the concept of anomie, Durkheim argued that the management and control of emotions play an important role in maintaining social order. In his *Division of Labor* (1893) and *Suicide* (1897), Durkheim has introduced the term "anomie" to specify a set of phenomena whereby the norms assuring social interconnection go in into crisis following a major extension of the division of labor.

Normlessness sometimes also may stem from changing gender roles and material circumstances. Neal & Collas (2000: 122) have tried to apply this situation of difficulty and complementary in their effort to show us the dimension of normlessness:

*Individuals become unclear about the composition and enforcement of social norms. Sudden and abrupt changes occur in life conditions, and the norms that usually operate may no longer seem adequate as guidelines for conduct. Normlessness derives partly from a condition of complexity and conflict in which individuals become unclear about...social norms. Sudden and abrupt changes occur in life conditions and the norm that usually operates may no longer seem adequate as a guideline for conduct.*

The point raised above denotes the inability of recognizing the main values of social aspects which are perceived to be the dominant assets of many societies. Accordingly, there has to be emphasized that the modern world is disreputable enough for the wellbeing of human because of the violation of commonly agreed social norms. When characters in literary fiction are prone to pangs of normlessness, their efforts to change themselves as a means of reaching likely goals are considered socially unaccepted behaviors.

#### **3.2.4. Social Isolation**

The other dimension of alienation which is proposed by Seeman is social isolation, and it is thought to be related to the malfunctioning of interpersonal relationships between or among people. The individual faces and experiences a social isolation form of alienation by giving low esteem to his or her goals. According to Seeman (1959: 789), social isolation is seen when people “who assign a low reward value to goals or beliefs that are typically highly valued in the given society”. It particularly refers to the individuals’ rejection of commonly held values in the society or group. This is to mean that assuming less value for socially and normally praised aims or beliefs leads one to be separated from a group or the society. This point is stressed by Seeman (1959:787) mainly it is “isolation from the goals or beliefs of one’s culture”. An affected of this aspect of alienation has no longer leads a healthy life without associates but is now somebody who creates connections holding little meaning of existence which is the ultimate challenge of modern human beings.

Schacht (1971:157) points out the term 'social' as a very ambiguous and to mean both interpersonal and societal connections; "social isolation can therefore be constructed from an absence of positive interpersonal relationships and as a dissociation from the norms or values of one's society." in its common meaning, social isolation refers to the inability to contact with the society or to distance from the society. To feel lonely in a crowd can be one of the painful experiences of social isolation and may harm the individual's next life. It can also mean the separation of the person mentally or physically or both from the anticipated and desirable relationships he or she longs for. Social isolation can also be presented as a state of being cut off from the common social networks which can be caused by factors such as the absence of movement, unemployment, or health issues. Isolation may include remaining at home for a long period of time, having no access to facilities or community participation, and little or no communication with friends and family.

Dean (1961: 755) also refers to social isolation as "a feeling of separation from the group or of isolation from group standards". This isolated individual has failed to make a meaningful relationship with others. Blauner (1964) combines both normlessness and isolation to refer to it as 'social alienation' resulting from an absence of integration in the society. It is from the community that meaning is constructed, and therefore social isolation will lead to powerlessness, meaninglessness, and normlessness. Senekal (20010:7) says that "social alienation is the loss or absence of identification with and participation in the form of life characteristics of one's society". This is an indication that the individual is disengaged from social intercourse by a feeling related to loss or marginality.

There is a link between the individual and the culture from which he is alienated with. Neal & Collas (2000: 95) describes isolation as "the unity of nearness and remoteness". The will to belong to some form of community is part of being human. Neal & Collas (2000:) note that the modern world faces the condition of isolation:

*While social isolation is typically experienced as a form of personal stress, its sources are deeply embedded in the social organization of the modern world. With increased isolation and atomization, much of our daily interactions are with those who are strangers to us and with whom we lack any ongoing social relationships (P: 114).*

In a similar way, (Lin 1986) as it is cited in (Biordi and Nicholson 2008) has stated the nature of isolation in a form of layers;

*Isolation can occur at four layers of the social concept. The outermost social layer is a community, where one feels integrated or isolated from the larger social structure. Next is the layer of the organization (work, school, church), followed by a layer closer to the person, that is, confidantes (friends, family, significant others). Finally, the innermost layer is that of the person, who has the personality, the intellectual ability, or the senses with which to apprehend and interpret relationships (P: 86).*

The reality of social isolation raises our awareness of the need for humans to associate with each other in a dependable cherished relationship. When we talk of social isolation, we think first of the affected individuals, and then we almost consider their social participation and relationships. Social isolation as a psychological state of alienation usually relates to one or more of the five dimensions of alienation because a socially isolated one may potentially face other forms of alienation. Isolation is considered by most as an experience of negative feeling in which scholars like Cacioppo (2008:217) explains as a “loneliness that diminishes the feeling of reward we get from interacting with other people”. He also affirms Seeman’s observation that isolation was not only a physical separation but also an emotional experience. Cacioppo (2008:241) extends his view “where one can feel isolated in the middle of a crowd if they do not authentically share the group’s cultural values, beliefs, and/or norms”. While communication was a means of breaking the difficulties of isolation, the lack of effective communication in decision-making brought the possibility of alienation.

In Seeman’s original view of alienation, social isolation is closely tied with normlessness as Kalekin-Fishman (1996: 97) refers to, Social isolation is the “... the feeling of being segregated from one’s community”. It is from the society that meaning is built, and therefore social isolation will lead to powerlessness, meaninglessness, and normlessness. According to Ulvinene (1998: 247), culture offers the background from which meaning is created “... experiences are always contextual, immediately connected to the interpretation of the world around us”. Social isolation, therefore, withdraws the individual from the social structure which results in meaninglessness, normlessness, and powerlessness. Since norms are constructed within the framework of a society, normlessness and social isolation are inextricably linked. The experience of social isolation is also

portrayed in the instances of self-estrangement. Neal & Collas (2000) have stated such experiences of alienation:

*The feeling of being separated or cut off from the type of rewards and lifestyles that prevail within one's society, the yearning for an authentic relatedness to others that goes unfulfilled, and the perception of being a solitary individual, alone and apart from others, yet needing to be wanted by others (P:95).*

In the context of a fictional world, the antihero is an umbrella term to describe the personality of characters under which Johl (1992: 13) includes “the fool, the clown, the criminal, the eccentric, the outsider, the scapegoat, the sinner, the rebel without a cause, and the hero in the dustbin”. Some of these literary personalities are to represent the kinds of characters who are socially isolated and alienated most likely by their respective communities. Burgert (2008:47) also notes that one of the distinguishing characteristics of the outsider is that “he belongs nowhere; he does not fit into any group or family. And when he is taken into a group, it is nearly always against his wishes and only a temporary situation”. (Ibid, P: 48) also contends that this literary issue has its roots in the reality of our contemporary world. “the outsider as a literary figure is a manifestation of man's increasing isolation in a mechanized world and a decrease in communication with others”. It can be understood that the representation of the outsider is to signify the socially isolated one. The present researcher is very aware to emphasize literary characters who are supposed to have such kinds of experiences in Dinaw’s trilogy.

### **3.2.5. Self-Estrangement**

Moving to a more individual form of Seeman's fifth sociological dimension of alienation is called self-estrangement in which Seeman (1959) states as the characteristics of the impoverishment of the relation to self and the world when a person experiences an uncertainty of self-sufficiency. Ibid (1959: 790) has quoted it, “To be self-alienated means to be something less than one might ideally be”. This form of deficiency is related to the condition of a person’s incompatibility with one’s personality when participation in various social affairs is not rewarding in itself. This aspect of alienation can also be referred to as the absence of self-awareness or a complete loss of it. The idea of Self-estrangement is also perceived by Karl Marx in his 1844 manuscript as cited by Easton Loyd D. (1960: 123), “the alienation of a person's essence, man's loss of objectivity and his loss

of realness as self-discovery, a manifestation of his nature, objectification, and realization”. Accordingly, self-estrangement can be described as a condition of being something less than what one might ideally be uncertain and incompatible with the common values of the social prospects. Furthermore, it can be deduced that alienation is a person’s inability to peruse the desired pleasure and ultimately yields a sense of discomfort.

To rephrase Shepard’s (1977) thought about self-estrangement is the condition of laborers’ work as a means to some other end instead of a means of personal self-fulfillment. Blauner (1964: 26) also proposes jobs that do not provide opportunities for expressing, “unique abilities, potentialities or personality of the workers encourage self-estrangement”. Accordingly, a worker is self-estranged from his/her inner self at work if the worker is unable to express him/herself through it and views work only as an instrumental. Thus, a person becomes self-estranged because he enjoys nothing for his own sake. It is acting without engaging in the self and losing oneself in the process. It can be said that self-estrangement is a disconnection between the actualized self and the ideal, or ought to be self; a state of losing the natural meaning of self. Based on the above scholars, self-estrangement can be presented as a discrepancy between one's actual condition and one's essential nature. The concept of cultural estrangement is also related to self-estrangement and social-isolation which necessarily become alienated from the other society because the identity of a self-alienated and the condition of the loss of self-awareness necessarily estranged him from the society stressing society as a place where the culture is practiced.

The extension of Seeman’s concept stems from a re-assessment of identity-formation processes within our modern period. According to Von Bertalanffy's (1951: 303–361), the self is dependent upon its environment for its existence, both as a biological organism and as a psychological construct. In his justification, interpersonal relations form an integral part of the ‘self’. As it is cited in Samuel Park (2017: 118), Kenneth J Gergen (1991) has made a remarkable point about the value of self; “In this era, self is redefined as no longer an essence in itself, but relational. In the post-modern world, selves may become the manifestations of relationship thus; placing relationships in the central position occupied by the individual self for the last several hundred years of Western history”. According to Keniston (1965:82), “Most usages of alienation share the assumption that some relationship or connection that once existed that is ‘natural, desirable or

good has been lost”. Alienation in the eyes of modern literature is a sound of hearing than having a connection with others.

It becomes a must as a way of wandering to find solutions to the isolated individual. Similar to the above idea, Sidney Finkelstein (1965: 174) sees alienation as; “a psychological phenomenon, an internal conflict, a hostility felt towards something seemingly outside oneself which is linked to oneself, a barrier erected which is no defense but an impoverishment of oneself”. Supporting Hegel’s philosophical perspective, Kalekin-Fishman (1998:173) has also made the following explanation; “Alienation is part of the process of self-creativity and self-discovery. Alienation arises due to man’s individuality or incompatibility in his personality and social substance and it comprises various extrinsic dimensions of human existence in socio-economic context”.

Scholars like Neal & Collas (2000: 22) omit self-estrangement from their discussion, for a specific reason. They argue that “self-estrangement is derived from the other forms of alienation”. On the same page, they defend that this aspect of alienation “... in part from the conceptual difficulty of specifying the nature of the ‘self’ from which one may be estranged”. This does not mean that the essence of self-estrangement has not prevailed in the works of immigrant novels. So, the sociological concept of self-estrangement is related to the other perspectives of disciplines in its possible manifestation of the alienated person. Self-estrangement is also described by the departure of it from an entire conception of human nature.

Viewing these dimensions of alienation in a general concept, they show the roots of powerlessness and meaninglessness during the relationship between the social structure and the individuals which results in an ultimate breakdown of such relationship. One can make a self-analysis to hypothesize the occurrence of alienation which also generates an intense state of powerlessness and meaninglessness. Any relationship can be evaluated based how on the individuals’ participation and association in the social system, how the social system allows the individuals to strive to pursue the goals of their own choice, and to what extent it permits the expression of individual identity. The present researcher believes that these five aspects of alienation proposed by Seeman are very necessary for the application of viewing the lives of the immigrant human beings as it is reflected in the literary category of immigrant novels. Thus, the researcher specifically has undertaken these dimensions of alienation to investigate the selected three fictional books.

To wind up the theoretical framework of this study, the influential sociologist Melvin Seeman has proposed five dimensions of alienation. As to him, the first is powerlessness when an individual believes that his action does not affect outcomes. The second type is meaninglessness which refers to an individual who is unable to understand his situation and does not know what to believe or expect. The third is normlessness when the individual feels disconnected from social norms and believes that socially unapproved behavior is necessary to achieve personal goals. Social isolation is the fourth type which refers to a person's perception of low values on the goals and beliefs of his given society. The last type is Self-estrangement refers to the disconnection of an individual from himself. These aspects of alienation are presented by Seeman (1959) as expectancy states held by the individual. Thus, alienation, as it is framed by him, undoubtedly comes within the scope of sociology.

### **3.3. Various Views on Alienation**

As it is mentioned earlier, there are significant changes in activities after the publication of Seeman's (1959) sociological work *On the Meaning of Alienation*. For instance, the rapid growth of various mass media, innovation of new technologies of transportation systems, the booming of world economies and political systems have had a profound impact on the world we live in. In this historical environment dynamics, it can have the chance to produce the specific experience of behaviors, and it can be expected different forms of the human beings' disenchantments that can be able to change and influence the meanings of their lifestyle. Despite the significant changes prevail for many years, a most modern study in alienation is still based on the types identified by Seeman (1959, 1967).

Lewis Feuer (1969:27) associates the early definition of alienation in the view of labor manipulation; "The concept of 'exploitation was the focus of most socialist and liberal political philosophy. Today, many scholars replace it with the concept of alienation". It is undeniable to argue the association of alienation with manipulation and exploitation. So, the common source of alienation is low status, and for many scholars including Marx, low status means the exploitation of labor. The great difficulties of present-day society have all been defined as arising from different types of alienation. Feuer (1969:14) has recapitulated his insight of alienation as; "The meaninglessness of his life is its lack of a social goal; his powerlessness reflects the intellectual's

self-description: we have no social class with which to work; his normlessness is the fact that his socialist ethic is gone and the recognition that it's all careerism". The terms meaninglessness, powerlessness and, normlessness, and other forms of alienation which are used to typify the extents of alienation have a special application to the experience of the contemporary intellectual. In his reinterpretation, Geyer (1996) has one more type of alienation and distinguished six dimensions of alienation in his sociological argument. The sixth form as pointed out by Geyer is cultural estrangement, but the present researcher has found that this sixth type can exist and confine under the forms of normlessness and self-estrangement. The researcher agrees with Geyer for the necessity of reinterpreting the dimensions to fit for the analysis of the contemporary human being due to *the upsurge of the modern society's environment complexity*.

Geyer and Schweitzer (1976) are other scholars who have interpreted the concept of alienation, and they compare and contrast Marxist's and Seeman's theories of alienation for their purpose of reinterpretation. In their discussion, they argue "Seeman concentrates on alienation itself while Marxists concentrate on the phenomenon itself or its cause" (Ibid: 11). They also stress that Seeman's presupposition of "alienation is to a conscious state of an individual" whereas for Marxists, "alienation is very often characterized precisely by the fact that it is unconscious" (Ibid: 12). The emphasis on alienation in the everyday languages of human beings shows the extent of the attempt to describe and to clarify the important manifestations of modern society's thought. The prominent sociologist, Schacht (1970:27) notes to clarify the concept of alienation: "The core meaning of the concept of alienation has also been identified with a dissociative state or a sense of separation about some other element in human being's environment". In this practical definition, alienation takes the supposition of some relationship or connection that once existed, expected, and anticipated has been lost. Though alienation is not an easy term to define, literally it is estrangement and separation. If it can be seen from various directions, the meanings that we attain can be different. In its simple meaning, it could imply a feeling of strangeness to oneself, loss of one's essence, or search of one's being.

Alienation, as a predominant theme, covers many areas and fields of study. Part of the difficulty of providing an adequate analysis of this concept is that the term occurs in such a wide variety of disciplines, including philosophy, sociology, psychology, existentialist philosophy, feminism, and

so on. Thus, it can be said that the area of alienation is widespread. Harold Bloom's (2009) extended view of alienation is evidence of its multidisciplinary concept:

*The term alienation has its simple meaning—a condition of being estranged from someone or something—but it also has technical meanings. For instance, in law, alienation refers to a conveyance of property; something is said to be “alienable” if it can be sold. Alternately, Thomas Jefferson’s famous rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are so tied to the essence of mankind as to be “inalienable” rights; no quantity of gold or silver can make a person relinquish them. In social psychology, alienation refers to a person’s psychological withdrawal from society. In this sense, the alienated individual is isolated from other people; taken to an extreme, such psychological isolation expresses itself in neurosis (P: 2).*

The same is true with the contemporary scholars that Bloom has come to redefine it based on the early definitions of Marx's and Seema's theory of alienation. It shows that alienation is the subject of various humanities and social science disciplines. In this definition, the term has a further sense of separating the individual from his or her self, a fragmenting of one's self through work. One also deduces that alienation has to be seen concerning the personality of an individual in response to a specific social context where there is a mismatch between the social structure and the characteristics of the individual persons. Bloom's extensive explanation implies that the depth of alienation is not limited to a single phenomenon, but it refers to the experiences of various characteristics.

In this study, the researcher has used the concept of alienation to analyze the immigrants' experiences of lives in the host country based on the selected immigrant novels. Derek Hook (2004:95) states the sense of alienation of a person as a “feeling of eruption-estrangement in the relationship between the individual and things, objects and people around him or her”. In the same sense, Jan Hadja (1961:757) states that “alienation is also an individual's sense of discomfort reflecting one's exclusion from the society's participation”. It is an illustration of the individual's non-belonging, an uncomfortable awareness of feeling unwanted or not welcome in comparison to others. To simplify the above idea, alienation is the fruit of the subjugated and disadvantaged individuals and societies when their very beings are discounted, nullified, and denied in their most attempt of finding a better position.

To recapitulate the various views of alienation in the context of this study, the issue of alienation has demonstrated its repeated influence in immigrant literature as a dominant entity. Whether it results from characters rupture, from their true selves, from their cultural heritage, or the society, the thematic concern has been used effectively by many contemporary immigrant fictional writers to introduce and show the relationship between an individual's true and false identities, between assimilation and cultural heritage, and between the individual and society. For some characters, the feeling of alienation is short-lived and for others, the feeling ruthlessly affects the rest of their lives when they unable to identify and resolve the source of the alienation. Here is an important point to conclude this section quoting Kalekin-Fishman's (2015) view of alienation:

*powerlessness, the feeling that one is incapable of dealing with problems that arise; meaninglessness, the feeling that one cannot know the outcome of one's actions; social isolation, the feeling of not being a part of any social group; self-estrangement, an inability to identify where one's true interests lie. Among these, anomie, normlessness, is identified as a particular type of alienation, a state of bewilderment about what norms are applicable in successive situations (P: 7).*

Based on the above idea, it can be recapped with a statement that sociological alienation is a process by which the fundamental relationship that has with the individual and oneself ones existed has become loose. Hence, the alienated people find themselves isolated, and they feel that the society they belong become alien. The affected communities and individuals come to believe that they cannot realize their hopes and desires any longer. They also struggle desperately to find enough meaning to validate their existence. In this study, the sociological perspective of alienation congregating with the contemporary scholars' view is put into practice to investigate the represented immigrant characters' experience in the selected novels.

## CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Reflection of Powerlessness in the Novels

#### 4.1.1. Powerlessness in *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* (BT)

Some forms of alienation have certain positive manifestation in the construction of one's personality though no character in (BT) shows such sign of motivation as a result of powerlessness. In contrast, the three African immigrant fellows in (BT) are suffered from the sagacity of nostalgia and the profound disillusionment after they terribly feel helplessness and loss their hopes. They frequently discuss the cruelty of the African leaders, and play a game in the order of an African dictator while the others state the year the dictator takes power and locate where the exact country at the world map is. In the previous section, the depiction of this game is discussed to show a state of hopelessness. This series of story too indicate that the characters' struggle to escape from the memories of their original home is linked with the feeling of powerlessness to change the existing situation. Stephanos explains the feeling: "So far we've named more than thirty different coups in Africa. It's become a game with us. Name a dictator and then guess the year and country. We've been playing the game for over a year now" (BT: 8). They are powerless to stop the atrocities of the local militants; rather it forces them to leave their country because they were not ready to accept and live with it. Consequently, they experience and face to different forms of alienation.

In a wide justification, these African immigrants in (BT) sympathetically and apparently accept their powerlessness because their effort to combat the pressure upon their lives further aggravates various forms of dehumanization. They frequently react on their helplessness by drinking alcohol so as not to remember the terrible bloody memories of the African leaders even distancing thousands of kilometers far away and decades of years from that haunting experience. A typical example of such haunting memory is shown (BT) when Stephanos guilty feeling after his father was killed in front of the family.

The relationship among the three immigrants and the game they play is a metaphor of their countries' blood-soaked past which continues to haunt their foreign lives. They could never work properly with such feelings of helplessness, meaninglessness and estrangement. The commitment of the novel (BT) to accentuate the immigrants' reactions in the cost of their manifestation of hopelessness is very encouraging. Joseph is one of the African immigrants who frequently feels a

state of emptiness for a long time because of the subjection to achieve his dream. Joseph explains it, “Our memories, are like a river cut off from the ocean. With time they will slowly dry out in the sun, and so we drink and drink and drink and we can never have our fill” (BT: 9). In addition to powerlessness, this extract overlays the complexities of normlessness feelings. Apparently, there are associations of the experience of excessive drinking with health problems and socioeconomic impacts of the immigrant communities; disregarding ones’ health and environment also indicates losing hope. The cause of these dissatisfactions and despondences is the immigrants’ inability to control their lives.

Here is another portrayal in (BT), where various types of feelings of helplessness prevail, when the characters are unconscious of what they like to do and what they are capable of doing. The three friends left their countries because they were powerless to what happened to them during the civil war. According to the narrator, human lives in Africa were in the hands African military officials, and many African youngsters including the characters in this novel fled to a stable country running away the perpetuated dehumanization. Stephanos describes the condition of his fleeing: “... at my mother’s insistence, I left home. I took nothing with me...” (BT: 130). He states his feelings of powerlessness in different contexts: “I did not come to America to find a better life. I came here running and screaming with the ghosts of an old firmly attached to my back” (BT: 71). The novel shows not only personal experiences for the causes of immigration, but it also reflects painful experiences of dehumanization of the Ethiopian civil war before Stephanos left to US. For example, after his father brutally killed, Stephanos’ mother forced him to leave his country. That is why he frequently feels helplessness for not be able to protect his father and lived safely at home, or he had not a better life in his second country.

It is discussed that even the narrator’s uncle, Berhane, was a very respected and rich person before he left his beloved country. Here, in the first world he is an uprooted third world immigrant; his alienation becomes tougher because he is not any much closer to the values and systems of the new society. Here is an overview of Berhane’s life: “Berhane Selassie is respected because of the money and power he once had in Ethiopia, because his name was once associated with the cabinet members and princes of the empire. He is also mocked now by some for exactly the same reason... He no longer has his money or his prestige” (BT: 116).

As he is uprooted socially after leaving his original social position, the new environment forces him to adjust to a new social role and occupation which could probably be taken as the fundamental destiny of many African lives in their immigration. He is confined in an isolated life, socially segregated with no meaning for his existence. Stephanos has not any chance to protect all the mess and pains except helplessly accepting and living with it. That is why the researcher argues powerlessness feeling of alienation may result in other aspects of alienation, like social isolation, self-estrangement and meaninglessness.

As Seeman (1959) states in his seminal article, powerlessness prevails when an individual feels frustrated as a consequence of the discrepancy between the control one may expect and the degree of control that he or she desires. The stories in (BT) attempt to show Stephanos's inability to materialize his dream of becoming successful in Logan Circle. However, his goal is less likely to be visualized after he recognizes that his store is in a very complex condition. His desire to make the store very worthy is unattainable since he has no strong financial and moral support. Desperately, he expresses his feeling of helplessness: "I have a small deli counter in the front, now empty, behind which used to lie wasted slabs of roast beef, ham, and turkey cut to look like the upper half of a cow's thigh, just before it becomes the ass. I spent two thousand dollars of borrowed money on it with the idea that perhaps my store could become a deli..." (BT: 3). However, all the dreams got spoiled since the environment was not conducive for the realization of his prosperity.

In addition, running his business around a black community waves Stephanos a parting from the frustrating, depressing jobs, non-materializing desires. But the reality and his ambition are two extreme incompatibles to visualize his dream. In the mid of the novel, he is optimistic to be a successful businessman. The names suggested to his shop are very promising: "A New Community Store. Logan's Market" (BT: 143). But his optimism is crashed when he receives a letter demanding him to pay an extended overdue rent: "This is not my store. This is not my counter, and that is not my register" (BT: 69). In such circumstances, the feeling of helplessness is tough in his attempt of association though.

Stephanos hopes for associating in the hosting society by keeping his store at the poor black community area. As it is described in the novel, "a departure from frustrating underpaying jobs, unrealized ambition" (BT: 145) is a means to cult his personality. Nevertheless, when his hope is

left suspended, he frustrates on the inconveniency of the environment. The same is true with the three immigrant fellows when they find their expectations complex to achieve. After many years of work, they still do not change, but continue to dream, suffering from a profound disillusionment.

Similarly, Stephanos shows us the false impression of the hosting community upon the immigrants by deceiving the international community as if everyone was treated equally. A typical example of such scenario is put in (BT) when Stephanos finds a subway poster for a local community college by introducing a group of happy and educated young people: “The liberal idea of America is at its best in advertising” (BT:9). In the poster, the colored ones are imaged as equal as the others which is not found entirely on the ground. Straight forwardly, it is depicted in BT, Americans construct an exaggerated image of their country while the reality is something quite different. However, the tragic cost of this overstated advertisement is demonstrated in those immigrants’ confrontations of economic hardship. Such type of cynical advertisement creates impractical expectations; this could possibly be why many immigrants feel hopelessness. This is related with the experience of Stephanos in his unending attempts to stop and maintain his store from failing though his attempts are affected by his powerlessness and his background.

In a different delineation of powerlessness (dehumanization), Stephanos leaves his country. Having fled his failing country in the wake of a military coup seventeen years ago, Stephanos still finds himself isolated in America, alone with tribulation and reminisce in his store: “I did not come to America to find a better life. I came here running and screaming with ghosts of an old one firmly attached to my back (BT: 41). His American life is haunted by the physical and psychological violation he faced at home. Some immigrants’ guilty feelings for leaving their families in the atrocities of the then regimes are also emphasized. In his young age in Addis Ababa, Stephanos innocently agrees to pass out leaflets of a meeting for the Students in the movement of a ‘Democratic Society’, an organization opposing the ‘Communist junta’. Soldiers discovered the leaflets in his house, and to protect his son, his father told them that the leaflets were his, but they took him to prison anyway, where he eventually killed. Frightened for his life, his mother helped him pack and he left for the Kenyan border the next day.

The researcher sees the novel (BT) as an important instrument of advocating the immigrants’ socio-economics by exposing their painful experiences, and it seems like the novel is devoted to

informing the international communities about African civil wars and political instabilities. Behind the intimidations and dehumanization, there were military equipment supply and political interferences of foreign countries in the affairs of many African states as a result of which civilians became victims of proxy conflicts and atrocities. Arguably, the military supply to African countries was from outside of the continent since no African country produced modern military machines at that time. So, various perpetuation of dehumanization and intimidation were plotted upon African youths, so civilians powerlessly fled to the safest places crossing thousands of kilometers, risking their lives. Similarly in their new home America, these forced immigrants struggle the trials and tribulations of social and economic environment.

In different scenes, the seventeen years of Stephanos's life in US is presented with a state of optimism, at times with a feeling of pessimism. At one time he would have a glimpse of hope to build a family, at another time he is unable to possess any amount of money that could buy even a single book. Here, he tells us his feeling of powerlessness after he bought cheap Christmas presents to Judith and Naomi: "Buying them meant skipping out on the month's gas and electric bills ..." (BT: 158). It is very despairing for him to save only two hundred dollars in the past seventeen years of his immigration life. He is also unfortunate to predict his life after realizing his incapability of controlling his surrounding and social capitals. Consequently, he feels a sense of powerlessness when he could not afford for Christmas presents: "I counted the money I had in the register and in the safe I kept under the counter. It wasn't much, just a couple of hundred dollars that I had been saving for some indeterminate event" (BT: 153).

This is exactly the portrait of the novel which demonstrates that the modern immigrant people frequently find it hard to control their environments. Thus, in the modern immigrant world, Stephanos can be symbolized as a universal immigrant who is challenged by the global economy and socio-cultural circumstances of the hosting country due to his overbalanced complication and expectation, he is less likely to control his surroundings.

#### **4.1.2. Powerlessness in *How to Read the Air* (HRA)**

When the individual's decision-making apparatus in the overall activities of social structure is disabled or excluded, that person can be labeled as powerless to impact his or her destiny. Such instance of powerlessness is portrayed in Mariam's profound feeling of disillusionment. The

researcher marks Mariam's disillusionment as a state of powerlessness because of unanticipated conditions she faces in the new home land and the breach of her boundless hope. The introspective immigrant characters, Mariam and Angela, are aware of their shortcomings; however, they know and understand little about their husbands, and they could not make efforts to acquire goal-relevant information to change the situations because they could not control the external environment such as Jonas' work places and Yosef's journey. Seeman (1959:361) describes that aspect of powerlessness, "those who are low in expectancy for control are not interested in and do not absorb control-relevant learning". An individual having a generalized expectancy to control his or her love relationship may develop a feeling of powerlessness. The two female characters develop no interests to know their husbands' realities because they could not relevantly control every bit of information regarding their family; thus, the way they react is an indication of their powerlessness.

In such situation, Yosef and Mariam reach the level of superficial relationship as they continue to mistreat and miscommunicate in their daily activities. Since they hope a better life, no one could imagine the viability of coercive confrontation between them. However, Mariam terribly feels helplessness to shield herself from her husband's coercive attack. No one is around or nowhere to go to stop him from biting her until a scar is left on her face. Jonas narrates the severe pain of his mother: "The last fight they had had before that morning left my mother with a deep black and purple bruise on her right arm, just below her shoulder" (HRA:9).

As a consequence of such physical abuses by her husband, she loses basic human rights and hope. In the contemporary world, life has become so complex; the relationship between husband and wife becomes obscured. Mariam's description of her body which her husband attacks as "a rotten plum" is the sarcastic part of the story. She mocks at the dysfunctional relationship she builds with her husband which also creates further feelings of helplessness and hopelessness:

*The bruise had a rotting plum color and that was how she thought of it, as a rotten plum, one pressed so fast and hard into her skin that it had broken through the surface and flattened itself out underneath. She found it almost beautiful. That the body could turn so many different shades amazed her, made her believe that there was more lurking under the surface of our skin than a mess of blood and tissue (HRA: 9).*

As a scholar of English creative writing, Jonas illustratively describes his mother's frustration and powerlessness using ironic languages. The bond between the first generation immigrant husband and wife was neither intimate nor functional as they lived not caring to one another for years. They could not experience the secret of love a man and a woman intrinsically feel because they violate the traditional family values of respecting one another.

The above extract also portrays the absence of meaning in the couple's lives. Since alienation has a recurrent power to certain society, many marriages fall apart due to the inability of having equal commitments. In (HRA), the lives of the immigrant characters are shown facing failing marriages as Mariam who finds no hope in her later life. The hopeless life she experiences is the result of her helpless state of mind. Enduring all these problems, Mariam exerts all she could to keep her marriage from falling apart though there is no sign of redemption. Jonas narrates the exasperating sign of his mother's attempts: "Despite my mother's best efforts to resist fall, she found herself taken by the season more and more each day. The sun set earlier, and soon she learned..." (HRA: 12). She experiences a state of alienation resulted from her true self. Her words clearly express the despondence of her effort to stay with her husband. Her feeling of destitute or vacuity shot up when she reacts hopelessly and helplessly. Accordingly, this deep sense of despair makes her feel powerless to manage her immigration life.

Jonas sticks in dilemma realizing his inability to integrate the memory of his parent's distressing experience. He states the state of internal suffering: "...I'm going in order to submit to the confusion of time and memory carried in by the breeze. Within a single breath I can jump across decades" (HRA: 116). This is why the researcher strongly argues that (HRA) deals with the power of imagination revealing the relationship between his true and false identities as a helpless African immigrant. Additionally, the immigrants' feeling of despair are foregrounded by contemporary literary works, and HRA particularly exemplifies Jonas as a typical character who becomes so helpless to control and manipulate his mental freedom. Thus, Jonas is in a critical state of limbo with his identity because he frequently finds himself in a terrible state of identity confusion as a result of his parent's disconcerted lives and his destitute relationship with his wife.

Retracing his parents' honeymoon, Jonas is really uncertain to how the relationship between his mother and father is severely deteriorated. He could not understand why and how his parents' life

in exile is ended after attempting to compare the situation of his desperate parents with the history of Fort Laconte. He speculates the finale of his parents in comparison with the Laconte battle as an expression of frustration upon their fate. Thus, the feeling of alienation as a result of self-estrangement is ineluctable as his parents fail to reconcile as wife and husband.

*What happened here between my parents late on a September afternoon thirty years earlier is, I have to admit, largely a matter of wild and perhaps even errant speculation.... I don't think it would be wrong to say that I can see clearer the causes and effect of a battle more than three hundred years old, along with the lives that fought and died in it, than I can understand my parents, who for their part always remained strangers to me (HRA: 76).*

Fundamentally, this extract shows the family's feeling of vulnerability and hollowness. Based on Seeman's definition of powerlessness as the inability to yield results someone seeks; Jonas is still unable to access the right information about his parents to retrace what exactly happens during their honeymoon journey.

In (HRA), special emphasis is paid to the core issues of universal immigrants and how far their lives are negatively portrayed in the process of immigration. In the contemporary time, a significant number of Ethiopians have taken dangerous risks of exodus to escape the existing political turmoil of their country for better life. Probably, as a child of a victim family, Dinaw has used his literary quality to disclose the experiences of violation similar with immigrant parents and challenges in US.

Yosef one of the immigrant characters of (HRA) experienced terrible challenges in the Port of Sudan. According to Jonas' semi-fictitious narration, his father came across life-threatening risks and dangers. The Sudanese friend of Yosef who saved his life once said, "...It's easy to die around here and have no one notice" (HRA: 192). This point amplifies the bitter experience of powerlessness and sense of invisibility when Yosef faced various physical and mental coercion in his journey to America. He left his home and roamed from place to place in an attempt to escape the political reality and to took refuge in places that reminded him of the past. In this context, dehumanization is characterized as the inability to protect the individual when means of decision making is expropriated. In a different expression, when Yosef was not in control over what

happened to him so that he experienced the feeling of alienation that affected his entire life. Ultimately, his life in USA was completely resonated by the condition of the Port of Sudan.

The researcher has identified the severity of the immigrant characters' state of alienation; unable to fight against the reality of their destiny, their only option is to accept their powerlessness. They accept alienation, and such acceptance creates the other form of alienation, dehumanization due to failure to control the challenges of immigration.

As Jonas narrates, the relation of his father with the illegal smuggler, Ibrahim, portrays his father's acceptance of powerlessness: "...my father spent his afternoon with him (Abraham) learning to fit in at the dusty port town in which he had found himself...when it came strangers" (HRA:208). More specifically, Yosef could not possibly react to all forms of abuses, understanding he had no any chance to change the misery. The acceptance of his inability to feel good that Yosef felt shows the incompatibility between the results he expected and the degree of managing his ambition, or he could accept his helplessness understanding its consequences whatever the context.

In relation to this point, Yosef was not as such optimistic about his future right after he encountered an experience of helplessness at the Port of Sudan. Any of his later relationship with his wife or anyone else was affected by the woes of the port. If someone's relationship abruptly fails at an unexpected time and place, he or she will probably react in frustration, and even threatening of losing one's life. The same was true with Yosef's attempt of action in his final decision to end the unhappy life of the Port of Sudan. Jonas explains Yosef's painful feelings: "And if that was to fail, then he'd stuff himself into a box, hurl himself into the water and drift until he reached a foreign shore or died trying. Even that, he thought, would be better than a lifetime of this" (HRA: 211). The author has vividly stated the immigrant characters are portrayed in the port of Sudan to mark the risk of illegal exodus even though individuals left their countries for ontological and political reasons. The researcher argues that Yosef's broken life represents those first-generation immigrants who carry a life time of traumatized experience not strong enough to face their own problems in the course of exodus besides of severely affecting their children. Yosef's powerless state of mind left him with psychological scar and agonizing memories with the rest of his life.

In a related concept, an interesting and striking narration can be observed in (HRA) by the reaction of Mariam when she loses hope after car accident. The feeling of defenselessness and helplessness

of this immigrant woman is an evidence of the ongoing reality in which a significant number of immigrants are exposed to the inability of integrating the memories of trauma into their conscious experiences of the existing reality. Such trauma nonetheless acts out the injury in her failed attempt of interactions with the new environment, thousands of kilometers away from her relatives not knowing her destination.

This is the point where (HRA) shows how immigrants are trapped by the state of powerless mentality. Mariam tells Jonas the incident of the post car-accident after three decades: "...after she left the car she walked in the general direction of the scattered lights for close to an hour in search of help." She added that, "I didn't know what else to do...It wasn't in her nature to do so" (HRA: 275). Even though she was not physically put in a prison cell, she believed that her movement by that time in the world around her was stifling.

Anyone can imagine the condition of Mariam having a baby in her womb in the middle of dark and abandoned road. She recounts her helplessness: "I didn't have much energy, you know. I was pregnant with you and always tired" (P: 276). The entire trip was marked by her husband's physical and mental abuse besides her traumatic past. The turning point of their journey started when Mariam grabbed and suddenly turned the steering wheel and drive the car into a ditch in a desperate attempt to escape her abusive husband. Even after three decades, she feels the distressing situation of that horrible night. Her psychological state of powerless condition could not able her to cut off from the hallucinating past. This is why the researcher strongly argues that the two events which left Mariam traumatized were the abusive behavior of her husband and the contrasting socio-cultural differences between her life in Ethiopia and her life in the US.

*How to Read the Air* draws the readers' attention towards the modern Ethiopian immigrants' real-life experiences through its characters. It comes with the representations of characters to capture the irrational, unpredictable and darker sides of the Ethiopian immigrant communities while staggering to cop up with the environment of their hosting country. One such quality is that the powerless characters well portray the immigrants' inability of influencing their fates. For instance, no one in (HRA) is portrayed as powerless as Mariam within the circle of challenging the new culture; her sense of helplessness led her to a total state of withdrawal from the reality. Jonas

describes her emotional withdrawal: "...my mother, after a fleeting burst of relief, was confronted by a host of doubts and worries" (HRA: 276).

The immigrants in this novel are also prone to other forms of malaises. Meaninglessness, purposelessness and absurdity are observed in the struggle of their fundamental existence. Unexpected side of many immigrants' dreams and imaginations is also shown, as a preliminary point. Mariam's frustration is typical manifestation: "...she had a dream of a house that resembled the one she had grown up in..." (HRA: 279). Her life in America is not better than her previous life though she encounters quite different experience in her second country. For such reasons, immigration for Yosef and Mariam is an exodus from unescapable reality while trying to search for prosperity in their dream land.

As it is mentioned in the earlier section, dehumanization can be expressed by the feelings of powerlessness when an individual is forced to a state of denial of being human. Though international communities are reforming their immigration policies, designing mechanisms, allocating huge finances, and working with the migrating nations, a state of denial of being human is commonly seen during illegal displacement. The youths of the third world countries are increasingly flooding to the western countries, considering them as the safest places. Attempts to stop the Africans exodus are not promising as the number surges from day to day. The continuation of illegal migration is also evidenced by the international media's daily tragic news of the deaths of African youths when they try to cross borders. Millions of third world human lives become victims to human smugglers.

As a postmodern literary piece, *How to Read the Air* is concerned with such important and timely issue, paying the necessary attention and urging countries to make fundamental reform in their immigration and migration policy. The blending of factual historical events with fictional events without visibly describing what is factual and what is fictional is its typical quality as a post-modern literary work. The author, as previously said, has received various international prizes and recognitions from different organizations for his relentless efforts.

The spectacular scenes of Yosef in Sudan and the typical illegal human trafficker Abraham, for example, show the pain of dislocation; Yosef symbolizes those victims of illegal migration. Jonas

states the pains of his father on the boat and his stay in Italy in a blended style of narrating the factual and fictitious:

*...somewhere in the final three days when he was reduced to drinking his urine for water and could no longer feel his hands or feet and was certain that if death came to him he would welcome it without the slightest hesitation. He spent six months afterward in a detention camp on an island off the coast of Italy. (HRA: 288)*

Basically, Jonas' attempt to narrate the agony of his father is very exaggerated. Jonas also recounts about Yosef and other detainees who were treated inhumanly there in the port of Sudan and Italy. Thus, dehumanization became an everyday social phenomenon of the African migrants unexpectedly to their expectations. Mikola (2011) says dehumanization is treating others in such a way as to erode, obstruct or extinguish some of their distinctively human attributes. Little attention is given to the spirit of protecting human lives especially the uncertainty and insecurity of the young African migrants because the story contradicts our most cherished common understandings of the immigrants. As Jonas tells us, the same was true to the life of Yosef, "they (the guards) often yelled at him and the other prisoners. The guards spat at their feet and made vague, animal sounds when they looked at them confused (HRA: 288). Some of the sufferings of the migrants are depicted through the representation of Yosef who was treated harshly. His helplessness personality had forced him to accept physical and mental sufferings like a subhuman creature.

#### **4.1.3. Powerlessness in *All Our Names* (AON)**

The powerlessness of alienation frequently exhibits the experience of dehumanization in the immigrant community. Dehumanization is not simply a private belief but a cause and consequence of the importance of social group boundaries. It is also the process of making the groups or the individuals less human either by defying or denying the basic rights. Dehumanization is basically an extension of powerlessness to show the inability of controlling the environment in times of making a decision and influence on one's fate. The consequence of such incapability is refraining from exercising the fundamental rights of the individual as a human being. An interesting feature of the post-colonial practice is its attempt not only to expose its peculiarities but also to discuss what an independent nation makes itself even after colonialism has officially demised.

When we see dehumanization in (AON) through the perspective of the African narrator who tells us about post independent Uganda, many Africans had hope to access better services; however, local leaders could not institutionalize the services not better than the era of the colonial masters. Instead, they continued to terrorize, torture and kill their own people as a result of political differences so as to stay in power for an extended period of time. The narrator describes how far the Ugandan people were oppressed by their own people. Isaac narrates the internal political conflict in Uganda when an old man was too terrified not to lose his daughter after the civil war snatched four of his beloved children: “This is his fifth child.... two are dead, and two he hasn’t heard from in years. This one, he says, he hopes God will let him keep” (AON.173). As a result of the internal political struggle between the revolutionaries and the reactionaries, civilians were powerlessly dehumanized and physically abused in which the novel provides a real viewpoint of African political reality after independence from colonialism.

In the final section of part I in (AON), the reality of the post-independent Ugandan socio-politics is specifically stressed; the particular time that could not allow Africans to give valuable credit and entertain their natural rights is displayed. Isaac’s destitute life, a result of immigration, degraded his natural rights. As a result of the internal political upheaval in the cities of Uganda, Isaac was denied free movement, instead, jolted by security forces and hospitalized for a crime he did not commit. The security apparatus was given all possible rights to calm the revolutionary movements; consequently, Isaac was degraded and treated like animal.

A foreigner would be labeled as an alien and an agent of the anti-government movement, and Isaac was incriminated by the tyranny regime and severely received physical harassment. Following painful dehumanization, he was kept in detention. Isaac retrospectively narrates such flagrant situation when they brutalized him: “There’s a coin-sized circle in the back of my head where no hair will ever grow again...When I regained consciousness two days later, I was in a hospital run by a Catholic charity...” (AON: 90).

This is typical manifestation of denying self-prerogative and a typical dispossession of basic human rights. Leaving his country (Ethiopia), Isaac unexpectedly confronted an absence of help even in his mother continent to run his higher education and ambition of becoming a writer. When an individual’s hope is deprived or restricted, that person may lose the sentiment of functioning properly and healthily; it exacerbates his behavior of social functioning, self-understanding and

self-esteem. For Isaac kind of immigrants, such experience is not appropriate to cross the finishing line of their ultimate objectives.

The Ethiopian Isaac was an immigrant who came across various experiences of disdain, feelings of isolation, despair, anguish and gradually retreated from social realities through the influence of depressing situations and social constructions of the hosting country.

The researcher has identified that psychological and social alienation aggravated the facets of dehumanization and further destroyed the immigrants' conscience with eventual cynicism. In the final section of (AON) part one, the author also tries to demonstrate the frustration (meaninglessness) of the people in a multicultural Uganda illustrated through social divisions. This situation and the inter-clan killing which rock Uganda during the revolutionary war marginalize some of the individuals. As an immigrant writing, AON acts as a voice of the anguish of the civilians who live far from their original land and become victims of the reality because of identity differences. The life of Isaac in Uganda and US was very complex to put plainly, full of mess in the context of his main purpose of dislocation.

## **4.2. Reflection of Normlessness in the Novels**

### **4.2.1. Normlessness in *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* (BT)**

Normlessness is one of the dimensions of alienation proposed by Seeman. As it is said briefly in the previous chapter, the social norms regulating the individuals' behavior have been smashed down. Geertz (1973: 36) states "socially unapproved behaviors are required to achieve the given goals". In (BT), the three African immigrants have the binge of drinking as it is depicted in various parts of the novel. Such unacceptable and unrecommended manifestation indicates that they are stuck between the social obligations expected of them and the freedom they want to practice. Such behavior may also be serving them as an instrument of escaping from their terrifying past experiences; they unexpectedly perceive such an ill-treatment in the hosting country, which also forces them to behave out of the societal and communal norm. The narrator, Stephanos, tells us that these African immigrants frequently indulge in excessive drinking of alcohol every night meetings; he says, "He (Kenneth) pulls out a bottle of Johnnie Walker Black from his bag and places it on the table" (BT: 4). Being a first-generation immigrant and leading a very low life status are indicators of their frustration which would force them to act differently.

These African immigrants continue to display their undesirable behavior; in a statement Stephanos explains it, “Joseph’s already drunk when he comes into the store (Kenneth) pours a little scotch into a Styrofoam cup he stole from his office and hands it to me” (BT:5). The worst experience of this character is he frequently goes to his work place taking excessive liquor, and he steals it from his work and brings to his group. This behavior may erode the social capital of the new home resulting in a disparity of the behavior expected of the immigrants and the action they undertake. Regardless of the immigrants’ background, their experience of drinking could create some problem in their struggle to co-exist within the new community; such behavior may also show their level of frustration by the situation of the new country.

Stephanos along with his immigrant friends continues fighting to challenge the distressing feelings in the new environment by drinking alcohol. It is believed that frustration and psychological disorder are very serious problems that immigrants try to neutralize by extreme drinking of beverages; excessive drinking is one mechanism of responding to their incapability to cope up with the host country. The forms of alienation can affect one another; a single event of action may reflect two or more of the forms of alienation. Anyone can imagine how normless it would be to drink recurrently and meaninglessly when someone is not familiar with the culture of the hosting country. Such repeated behavior is not accepted to any conventional codes of conduct. The novel tries to present how Stephanos and his friends are forced to leave their country for a safe place running their crack-downed mother country and expecting a better life. The characters’ action and reaction in the hosting country is quite contrasting to their primary vision and to what they are expected to do. Yes, in many social aspects, getting extra drunk is considered to violating the social systems set in a particular society which results the separating of the individual from the social element. That is what the immigrant characters do.

To over emphasis the damaging side of frequent drinking of alcohol for years, the immigrants’ behavior is out of what they should have done. After they drink the stolen whisky, they sing desperately loudly, mock bluntly on the political and economic condition of their continent, counting the number of coups in Africa. The very sever result of taking excessive alcohol is misbehaving and acting in a different manner. Seeman (1959: 787) refers normlessness “a situation lacking effective norms or in which individuals assume that unacceptable behaviors are required

for success”. Accordingly, Joseph used to take excessive liquor as a means of escaping himself from the unsuccessful exile life, but it could hardly help him to forget the trauma of his past.

Those immigrant friends in their every meeting, sticking themselves in and hiding from the isolated and stranded life while taking the stolen alcohol talk about African dictators. Desperately, the three fellow immigrants try to create an alternate little family around Stephanos’ store to salvage the good time of memory in a situation they are isolated. This kind of normless is the only possible way of forgetting the social participation they lost in the hosting country. Stephanos describes an act of normlessness of his friend, “He (Joseph) is now a waiter at an expensive down town restaurant, and after he cleans each table, he downs whatever alcohol is still left in the glass before bringing them to the kitchen” (BT: 5). This unfamiliar experience could exacerbate Joseph’s effort of integration as member of the new community, but for those first-generation immigrants like him, it is one way of tackling the stressful experiences they face in the new chapter of their lives. In this scenario of stories, the tension between the immigrants’ personal freedom and their daily job and the bonds of their friendship is portrayed as a central problem of alienation.

The immigrants are also displayed while practicing the act of theft which is no longer effective as there is no social structure that encourages the act of stealing. The alcohol in which the immigrant friends frequently consume is a very cheap kind, one of them steals from the place where he works. Stephanos describes the bad habit of his friend: “The three of us were sitting... and drinking a cheap bottle of wine Joseph had stolen from his restaurant” (BT: 219). This behavior is undesirable and unacceptable by the time the hosting society understands their frequent habit of stealing only to quench their alcoholic desires, and this could lead them to an entire social alienation.

To elucidate such acts of normlessness, Neal and Collas (2000: 122) state “...the norms that usually operate may no longer seem adequate as guidelines for conduct”. The act of Joseph is a way to close the distance between the current lives of the group and the reality of their past. It also indicates that the immigrants’ financial status in their new home is not better than their previous income; they are unable even to afford for their drinks. Consequently, they violate the commonly accepted behavior by stealing. Stealing is forbidden, and no social norm supports it even if it is because they are unable to bear the cost of their wine. Having such financial problem, they frequently and excessively took alcohol as a means of hiding from the pain of their ugly past life

and running away from the unexpected messes their current lives could not free them from alienating factors.

This debut novel presents series of stories which could help us to speculate the natural quality of personalizing the problems of class difference. It also attempts to show another normlessness in the form of absurd language in a dialogue between the characters, Judith and Stephanos. Such act of absurdity is one of the unusual personalities and characteristics of the immigrants' everyday lives. The researcher believes it is normlessness to use ridiculous language in everyday dialogue. In the characters' mode of communications, some of the normal and usual way of conversations are violated. The protagonist characters are emotionally and psychologically distressed by the impolite conversations they exchange in one of their exceptional and interpersonal communications. The characters' dialogues, in this novel, are considered to be an anti-social discourse due to their likelihood of absurdity to mutual understanding internal feelings. This kind of conversation (for example between Judith and Stephanos) is an indication of hopelessness beyond that of an anomalous in communication.

*Judith: I prefer simple and elegant*

*Stephanos: I like small and cheap*

*Judith: that is too bad. It looks like you've gone and picked the wrong family. (BT: 134)*

This simple extract shows that there is no mutual respect between Stephanos and Judith in their dialogue about their experiences of presenting and receiving a Christmas gift. The language they use is absurd, which deviates from the normal standards of an everyday interpersonal communication. Besides, in many immigrant writings, the use of such absurd dialogue is an instrument to explore the validity of meaning in the immigrants' lives. In this conversation, the situation the characters face sheds light how unusual miscommunication which is labeled as an absurdity and an ethical limitation of human beings to stick together. For Stephanos, that undesirable dialogue leads him to a more feeling of personal disintegration from the society; it also makes feel unfriendly towards the new society and the culture it carries. Through such absurd dialogues, the stories in (BT) also display how material value pollutes interpersonal relationships of the immigrant community.

Stephanos could not get a constant meaning of life as part of the hosting society and such absent of meaning is also affected by Judith's prioritization of materialism and because of that absurd conversation. Judith's typical personality can also be taken as a representation of those people from the hosting country who display the reality of socio-economic disparity and inequality. Stephanos is distracted by lack of genuine connection from Judith and the people around him because of the absurd language Judith uses to explain her choice of gift. That piece of dialogue is the manifestation of the immigrants' reality, showing how friendship is important in preventing any form of alienation by providing a purpose in life and a sense of companionship. In her act of response, Judith crosses the boundary of moral values and indulges into the obsessive values of materialism, greed and decadent.

Stephanos's failure of his serious relationship with Judith is another form of a discontenting experience of feeling which shadows more than one dimension of alienation. After his hope to own Judith unsuccessfully ends, he frustratingly violates the norm that governs our social aspects. As the expense of his frequent failure, he brings a prostitute to his home simply to gratify his internal drive after understanding his attempt to get Judith is impossible. He describes the situation, "...I wanted to see myself fully and honestly, naked in my bed with a woman whose real name I would never know. I took pleasure in feeling another body under me and on top of me" (BT: 163). Stephanos realizes that Judith and Naomi are unlikely to be part of his dreaming family; he feels that his future becomes gloomy and directionless, and this explicitly forces him to respond by normless action. The way he reacted her because of his frustration to get Judith shows the crises of his moral values. As Seeman (1959) has elucidated, the concept of normlessness and meaninglessness are ambiguous as to what the individual ought to rely on or the individual's minimal standards for clarity in decision making are not met. Stephanos, as a victim of the new life, challenges an enormous state of dissatisfaction in the form of meaninglessness and normlessness.

#### **4.2.2. Normlessness in *How to Read the Air* (HRA)**

The other aspect of alienation proposed by Seeman is normlessness, a situation in which an individual is forced to act in socially unaccepted way to achieve the intended objective or social condition in which there is disintegration or disappearance of societal values. In (HRA), there is

an attempt of showing the experience of anomie in the lives of African immigrants, specifically Yosef's act of changing his religion. At the beginning of the story, we learn that the first-generation immigrant, Yosef's, original religion is Christianity; "...he (Yosef) had married on a sunny summer afternoon at St. Stephanos church in Addis" (HRA: 44). When Jonas explains the undefined and undetermined life of his father, it can also be understood that converting to more than two sacred beliefs at various periods cannot be only the result of an identity mix-up; it is also considered as an act of denying the original norm for temporary results. After Yosef crosses the tedious deserts and arrives at Sudan, he converts to Islam. He accepts Catholicism in Italy, and finally he claims himself a Protestant in his final destination. The situation is depicted, "In Italy he had been a Catholic and in Sudan a third generation Muslim, and now here in America he was a Protestant..." (HRA: 40). Religion can play a crucial part in the conservation of social order, social change, social disorder and so on. Thus, it can be said that accepting a new religion at various places is as an attempt of imposed assimilation for the sake of co-existence. This scenario also depicts the immigrants' state of anomie since religion is part of cultural manifestations. However, the misfortunate condition is Yosef's frequent changing of faith is not successful to help him attain his ultimate goal.

The researcher takes the effort of such cultural alteration as an attempt of promoting social and cultural dilemma. The immigrants' deliberate effort of declining the pervious religion and attaining a new faith could be considered as one mechanism of attempt to adjust themselves in the new culture. This could probably be that they are entrapped between two cultural values can be one of the reasons of violating the common and existing realities. Yosef's alteration of religion, of course suggests an attempt of integrating with the environment he encounters. Such determination of religious conversion is an entire normlessness for fear of social isolation. The sociological definition of anomie or normlessness specifically prevails when people believe they feel lack of belonging to and disconnection from their society. Seeman's (1959:788) delineation of normlessness is conceived as a "high expectancy that socially unapproved behaviors are required to achieve the given goal". Yosef's frequent change of religious belief, denouncing his previous faith, is an example of normlessness in which many immigrants do it in their process of immigration, assuming they can instrumentalize it easily to integrate with the new community.

Fundamentally, the previous extract of discussion reflects not only Yosef's personal sentiments and experiences, but it also shows the overall socio-economic realities of the global predicament of immigration as a universal literary promotion. Whether they are first- or second-generation immigrants, the immigrants experience social and cultural challenges between the home and the hosting country; they are also challenged by various social and economic decadences in their world of adoption. Mariam, the mother of the narrator, had an unprecedented ambition to be an American citizen before she arrived at the USA. She developed such dream following a friend of her father who repeatedly promotes a lot of blessing opportunities in the USA. She recalls how the old man misinforms her about the US culture: "The first step to being an American is to act as if you know everything" (HRA:181). This extract specifically portrays an attempt of dropping the original culture and assimilating another, as a source of psychic energy to integration. She wrongly imagines the sentiment of Americanization by acting as if she knows everything about the new society, but the reality of the misperception is treated as she is a racial minority in the new hosting community. Thus, such big ambition is supposed to attain through a socially unapproved behavior, and that social norm regulating the individual conduct is broken down.

The immigrants' dilemma of keeping their original values can be the source of basic problems of their self-confusion or identity crises. Mariam, is from the third world country, Ethiopia, who goes to USA, and she eagerly fantasizes for incorporation in the mainstream of the American culture. Similarly, in (BT) there is a literary character Kenneth having the same feelings of Americanization as Mariam dreams. The reason of their fancied curiosity is thought to be unaccepted behavior of fulfilling their social adjustment. Neal and Collas (2000:122) have explained the outcome of this short mechanism as, "normlessness derives partly from condition of complexity and conflict in which individuals become unclear about...social norms. Sudden and abrupt changes occur in life condition...". So, the wish for an abrupt change of culture and identity is normlessness.

As it has been said earlier, the emotional feelings of alienation are the responses to a particular socio-economic dissatisfaction when there is disparity between the socio-economic structure and the personal experience of the individual. Within this circumstance, the sense of normlessness or anomie can be prevailed in the form of sociological and psychological problems, such as personal disorder, cultural failure, mutual distrust and others. Jonas's behavior of insincerity for his wife

and boss specifically shows such types of normlessness. *How to Read the Air* plainly displays certain distresses of anomie when immigrants lack social norms. Jonas tries to deceive Andrew, the man who provides him with a supportive recommendation to get a job at the American high school. Angela reveals his lie: "I'm promoted. I'm going to be teaching some of the more senior-level English classes..." (HRA: 227). In fact, he is not promoted. Jonas again denies when the dean of the school asks him for the confirmation of the information coming out, "I never spoke to anyone about teaching here.... I didn't say anything else about the school. You can ask my wife. She was there." (HRA: 248). Following the resentful behavior, he admits that the school decides to fire him from his job. The deception behavior Jonas frequently displays may be attributed to his upbringing in what is said to be "not an exemplary family". The personality he exhibits can be labeled as an unaccepted behavior of reaching the desire goal; sociologists call such kind of reflection a state of normlessness. His personality is the reason for the demise and end of his marriage besides not safeguarding his job. By any means, his actions can be assumed as an inappropriate social norm, which is not any longer effective to secure his work and to rescue his relationship with Angela.

Such absurd personality can also be seen in terms of what one should not be acting in various situations of relationships. Neal and Collas (2002:122) define normlessness as "sudden and abrupt changes occur in life conditions, and the norms that usually operate may no longer seem adequate as guidelines for conduct." In their winter vacation, Angela confesses to Jonas that she is unfaithful to their conjugal relationship because she sleeps with Andrew before they legally end their marriage. Her confession is, "I began sleeping with someone else...I hardly even cared about, just because I thought it might make me feel better. Less alone" (HRA: 254). In any social norm, infidelity is prohibited and should not be tolerated as a choice to solve what so ever personal problem anyone has faced. In fact, her misconduct comes after their relationship deteriorates, to avoid isolations though it accelerates the falling of their relationship. Breaking the existing norms, to Angela, is a means of avoiding personal estrangement; she thinks going out with other person gives her a feeling of association. But this is unethical to the conservative society; it even makes her prone to the exposition of social alienation. Such anomie may prevail as a result of personal syndrome; it may also create self-estrangement, meaninglessness and social isolation in the context of various social reactions whereby there is discrepancy between the social structure and the individual's personality.

*How to Rea the Air* sheds light on the fact that social and personal disturbances certainly affect the smooth functioning of any person's life. Within this sense, anyone can never be happy in the expense of another person's death or hurt. If so, it is an implication of the collapse and decadence of social and human values as a whole. In this regard, Seeman (1959) explains normlessness as an individual's feelings of socially unacknowledged behavior and an instrument of attaining the desired objectives. Such form of social corruption, for example, is portrayed in Mariam's devilish wish for her husband's death after they experience a car accident. Jonas remembers what his mother told him after the situation: "If he died while she was gone, then she would be free to do as she pleased. She could find a job as a nurse, or even if need to be a maid until her son or daughter was born" (HRA: 268). The relationship between Yosef and Mariam deteriorates from bad to worse in the absence of caring to each other, to save their crumbling marriage.

Mariam's strong wish for the death of her husband, just to claim her freedom, is an instance of moral corruption, and the social relationships of human beings is basically violated simply for temporary satisfaction. Such act of self-indulgence may create further alienation of the individual's social participation. Mariam violates the social norm as a means accommodating her freedom. Such violation of accepted morality contributes to the rapid deterioration of social ethical values. In her final sentimental sense of relief, she describes the death of her husband as, "A great weight had been lifted off my shoulders" (HRA: 280). To speak frankly, this excerpt shows the dark side and the harsh reality of unplanned immigration lives. By the time they stay together, Mariam's physical body is never far away from her husband though she is psychologically far away from him. Since she has found no real meaning in her marriage, she is entirely withdrawn and isolated, in which no one could understand her problem; she even has no real friendship with anyone in her neighborhood in the new home. Ultimately, she internally demands the unconditional death of her husband realizing it as the only option of liberating her from the coercive action of her husband. However, she is emotional to imagine the wrong way of attempting to resolve her psychological disturbance. After the death of her husband, she continues with the bad memories of harassment by her husband and the yearning of the good days of her home country which affects her not to begin a better life entirely out of her expectation.

Alienation, as a universal state of disorder and one of the preoccupations of the immigrant novels, has been the main challenging experience the immigrant communities face in their course of

existence. The researcher has frequently labeled *How to Read the Air* as the mouthpiece of the immigrant communities since the thematic preoccupation of the novel is portrayed through the role of a family in the formation of the generations' identity. As it is said previously, Jonas is obsessed with telling cooked stories to his wife and others around him because he grows up from a family experiencing psychological and social negligence. In his childhood's memory, Jonas describes how often his mother tried to hide the prevailing challenges of her life which was in the due process of plummeting her marriage: "she herself had been exceptionally gifted in the stories she told .... she escorted me to school in order to explain to teachers and principals that my recent absences were the result of family losses back in Ethiopia" (HRA:298). Later on, the behavior she shows is an expression of disregarding the truth that creates severe consequences for his marriage and job. Jonas's narration about his parents has certain truth though he tries to reconstruct by creating side stories of his own. His imaginary stories become attempts of creating suspense to his students. Consequently, his haphazard effort of reconstructing the story of his parents leads him to a pointless direction. Nonetheless, his paralyzed and hopeless life and the other problems he encountered are embedded with lack of resolution to bring the readers up against the stark realities and the traditional ending of the story. The devious attempt of lying to fill the missing part of his parents' life through creating new stories are by any means an act of normlessness.

### **4.3. Reflection of Social Isolation in the Novels**

#### **4.3.1. Social Isolation in *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* (BT)**

Social alienation is one prominent concept of social thought. In, *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* (BT), there are stories that show the disconnection of the characters' experiences leading them into certain forms of alienation or to certain feeling of negative reaction. The story in (BT) presents the life of immigrant characters who suffer and leave their country due to political uncertainty. In (BT) we are given a very graphic presentation of each and every character to show the real-life of the immigrant community. In Seeman's sociological theory of alienation, normlessness is related with social isolation. In (BT), the immigrant characters' reformation of the norms of the host society is closely linked with social isolation. As it is said in the previous section, Seeman has proposed the forms of alienation without noting the causes and reasons behind those kinds of alienation. The immigrants' cause of isolation is implicitly or explicitly shown via their action. According to Kalekin-Fishman (1996:97), social isolation refers to "... the feeling of being

segregated from one's community". Social isolation may lead to powerlessness, meaninglessness and normlessness since human beings can no longer prevail without communal participation.

As an internal first-person narrator and protagonist, Stephanos tells the overall experiences of social alienation of his own life and other people around him. As a typical immigrant character, Stephanos repeatedly confronts the challenge of isolation and speaks all about the miserable social problems in his environment. Readers can understand Stephanos' sentiment of social isolation and how he reacts the feelings and causes of it through the entire mode of interactions and relationships he has with his neighbors. The African friends who vividly manifest the severe portrait of distraught in his immigration life are also one indication of social isolation. The things these people expect from their new homeland is disillusioned by the presence of an overall pointless life in the new home which results to an entire hysterical of social isolation. As it is described in (BT), Stephanos is socially isolated from getting exact information about that mysterious family; "... no mystery left in any of those buildings for us, and at time I wonder how there ever could have been" (BT: 42). The inability of accessing information about the parents' challenges of experience could hinder him from entertaining the meaning of his current life.

That shadowy situation and the staggering life of this pity boy (Stephanos) is exacerbated by Judith's systematic attempt of decaying his long dream of integrating to the hosting society. Here, the social isolation aspect of hostility is portrayed in various incidents of Stephanos' disordered acts as well as the disillusion he encounters because of his inability to fulfill his desire of getting the white woman, Judith. He wants to love and to be loved; he makes multiple visits to show his love for her, yet social status permanently disconnects him from realizing his hope of a full man. In a materialistic society, one may feel low self-esteem as Stephanos experiences, following the failed attempt of romantic relationship with Judith. He explains his failed attempt of getting Judith as "case of mistaken identity" (BT: 80). Undoubtedly, this is an implication where there is a relationship between social alienation and identity because identity can be formed spontaneously in a society.

Let us briefly see Stephanos' isolation as a result of a socio-economic difference by displaying the reality of the immigrant communities' limited participation at various social phenomena. To magnify such issue, a state of low self-esteem can be described by a restricted activity of the individuals or groups of people so as to reflect the social illnesses and anxieties in the attempt of

interpersonal relationship. And such kind of social problem can also result in the condition of self-estrangement or social isolation. Stephanos realizes that he is not the right person to be the husband of such a materialist woman who always expects ostentatious gifts from her husband. He comes to that conclusion when he finds out that her former husband, an Economics professor from Mauritania, used to present her very expensive tokens during Christmas holidays. His financial constraints let him feel that life is nothing to him in such economic differences.

In *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*, Stephanos is symbolized and presented as a poor immigrant who is socially isolated and who also lives in a rundown apartment because of his economic and social status. Stephanos describes his condition as: “all it would take was one fleeting moment of skepticism on her end to confirm all my inadequacies, validate all my doubts, and send me running back to the corner I came from” (BT:135). Such confession is an implication of his frustration in coping up with the American community he could not attain as a result of his identity and economic problem. Such entire mode of social isolation lets him to feel the meaninglessness of life and his inability to stop the situation.

Color-based alienation is also depicted in (BT) to portray the desperate experiences of many African immigrants. In his prolepsis narration, Stephanos dreadfully states a car dealer’s arrogant and bigoted reaction towards him and his immigrant friend in their initial attempt to buy a car from the dealer’s compound. Though his Kenyan friend, Kenneth, wears a suit and rents a car to look good and to hide his background for that occasion, the white dealer does not serve them properly as equal as other customers are served. The car dealer refuses the immigrant friends to serve because they are black and immigrants who are very vulnerable for racial segregation by such kind of racist people. To make it clear, the American men do not even consider and treat them like other customers though the immigrants try with their best clothes to be recognized as other customers do and waiting patiently for twenty minutes to get the service. Stephanos describes that chilling scene of social isolation:

*As we stood there and waited against the hood of the car, middle-aged American men... came in and out of the main office... and never once passed anything more than a brief, one-eyed glance in our direction. We waited ten and twenty minutes before we finally*

*realized no one was coming to us, regardless of what we wore and how long we stood there. (BT: 12)*

Two important scenarios are seen in the above extract: the mistreatment of these African immigrants because of their skin color, and the immigrants' attempt of covering their natural identity by wearing differently to attract the car dealer. The reaction they face at the dealership signposts the social isolation of the African immigrants in the land of their hope (US). Because of their skin color, the immigrants are disgraced and disrespected by the hosting people while they toil their best to cohabit with the new home society. This was a remarkable reverse of the immigrants' reality from the dreams they wish in US and what their parents and families expect from them. Such social isolation prevails as a result of the immigrants' inability to discover themselves or the loss of the reality. It is described the prohibition of good treatment and being recognized as part of the host society which reflects there is a conflictual relationship between the immigrants and the hosting community. In such condition of partiality, the African characters in (BT) are repeatedly treated inhumanly and disrespected differently.

In (BT), the mockery of the African immigrants' overall reality by the hosting people is also shown through the misunderstanding of the historical reality of their origin which also forced them to further social alienation. Some Americans in (BT) try to misjudge the African immigrants' personality simply by a wrong historical assumption of the African community's identity; the story begins with a harsh description and humiliating sentiment up on the African immigrant workers by an American manager at a DC hotel. Remembering back his time as a hotel porter, Stephanos describes the manager's misconception: "I was skinnier than I am now, and as our manager said, I didn't need a nickname to remind him I was Ethiopian" (BT: 1). His boss mistakenly uses a stereotype of a hungry Ethiopian to humiliate and ostracize Stephanos because the manager misperceives Stephanos's physical body relating to the 1985 disastrous drought of his country. This remarkable and infamous time in the history of his mother country predisposes the manager to mistreating the individual immigrant in a situation which does not have any connection. Thus, Stephanos becomes the victim of a wrong perception when the manager interviews to recruit labor workers for the valet position. While visiting the manager's office with his uncle, Stephanos describes the misunderstanding of the Hotel manager to the African immigrants as follows:

*The manager... didn't believe I could speak English. He pointed to my skinny arms and asked my uncle if I had any problems lifting heavy objects... if I could be trusted not to steal from the hotel or clients... squeezed my right bicep for good measure, and then held out his hand for me to shake. I remember wishing I had the courage and strength to crush every bone in his hand (BT: 25).*

The manager erroneously takes Stephanos as a physically and mentally incapable boy to work as a normal person; he misperceived Stephanos as an African having unreliable personality not based on his personal experience but simply because of the false perception the manager had upon the African immigrants. From this extract, two things can be observed based on the reaction of the victim: the first feeling of alienation is his powerlessness to respond the manager's comment for hoping that job; secondly Stephanos feels that he is unfaithful in the eyes of his employer realizing he is overlooked in front of his uncle. The frequent misconception towards the African immigrants results in social isolation because the victims are not treated according to their productivity, but they are viewed as untrustworthy, unskilled and weak because of their origin. This is one of the reasons why the present researcher labels the author of this novel as the mouthpiece of the African immigrant communities.

Furthermore, the white manager's method of measuring Stephanos's strength is suggestive of a manipulative power rather than a job interview. Stephanos' anger at these cautious abuses deep-rooted in stereotypes and cultural superiority portray that many immigrants face the challenging experiences of cultural arrogance. As it is depicted in (BT), The African immigrants' offenses are because of the wrong perceptions of the hosting communities; these hosting communities incorrectly labeled the immigrants stereotypes of stealing, associated with crimes and cruelty. This piece of narration allows us to imagine the unhealthy relationship between the immigrant characters and the social structures of their new home. It has also been described in (BT) the persistent of social isolation so as to create an awareness on how the it should be built a corridor to cultural and social equality. It is, thus, vital to extend consciousness of the diversity of African identities to improve and disregard offensive misconceptions of the African immigrants in US.

In addition to that of social isolation, the immigrants possibly develop a feeling of powerlessness as a result of other instances of social isolation as it is reflected in this novel. Part of abusing the

immigrants by the hosting community is also portrayed in (BT) when the African cultures are devastatingly misperceived as uncivilized. When the African American, Mrs. Davis, protests against Judith for residing in their neighborhood, Stephanos suggests: “It’s a free country, Mrs. Davis. People can live where they want” (BT: 23). Mrs. Davis impassionedly counters Stephanos:

*What do you know about free countries? You didn’t even know what that was till you came here last week, and now you’re telling me people can live where they like. This isn’t like living in a hut, you know. People around here can’t just put their houses on their backs and move on (BT: 23).*

Stephanos’ suggestive comment is part of attempting to take part in the hosting society affairs; however, disregarding his concern, the woman humiliates him as if he knows nothing about the US. Mrs. Davis sees the renewal of the urban as a threat of her social life and as a possibility of losing her home when the wealthy white communities reside in that place. Her reaction to Stephanos indulges in the misunderstanding of African immigrants who enter the US. She wrongly considers that Stephanos comes from a poor, isolated and uncivilized world. This kind of misconception towards Stephanos shows the African immigrants are also encountered various forms of social isolation in their struggle to be part of the new community and to be recognized with their identity and culture. This story also shows that it is a wrong perception to consider the African descendants as uncivilized and primitive. The Americans’ perception up on the immigrants mistakenly reflects and views the nature of the African culture. As a consequence, a significant number of African Americans establish an invisible lack of understanding the why the African immigrants leave their original countries. Such kind of blind judgment (prejudice) over the African immigrants causes them to develop feelings of cultural or social isolation.

In flashback, Stephanos frequently expresses his unlikely optimism when he decides to quit working in the Capitol Hotel and to open his own store. He remembers the reaction of one of his immigrant friends towards his desire to own a personal business center, “This is the beginning,” Joseph said. “Today, right here with Stephanos’s store. We begin new lives. No more of this bullshit.” (BT: 144). These immigrants have an overrated expectation to opportunities and the working conditions of their new country. They use to consider life in US as easy as they are told before they leave their mother homes. While Stephanos is opening the store, he once said, “our

store, as we referred to it that night- was supposed to signal a departure from frustration, underpaying jobs and unrealized ambitions” (BT: 145). After laboring for more than two decades, Stephanos realizes that success in those days and in that land is not as easy as he expects since everything there does not have equal platform for them to compete with the hosting community. Consequently, the working environment was on the opposite of their awaiting dream as long as they are considered second citizens, treated differently and made to settle in an isolated place.

An attempt of portraying the immigrants’ assimilation can also be considered as one of the experiences of continuing withdrawal of their original culture and personality in order to integrate with the hosting community. Kenneth’s practice of assimilating is part of his action to integrate with the American society realizing that such withdrawal from his original identity could be a failed option of joining to the hosting community. Thus, immigrants could probably begin to adopt a new culture through assimilation or acculturation which is severely challenged by social isolation. Kenneth, in (BT) is presented as an immigrant who is described having trying for cultural transformation; he believed such transformation was a way to be an American as an option to materialize his long dream of Americanization. Meticulously, the stories in (BT) present and depict the exploration the immigrants’ experience of assimilation in US where life as an immigrant becomes unbearable. Thus, the assimilation process is undertaken by those immigrants purposely to develop as an effort for economic, social and cultural adjustment. Some of these immigrant characters try to embrace the culture of the host country for their effort of integration, and ultimately, they dispose to the final choice of acculturation. To act like an American is a dream and an expression of civilization for some of the African immigrants like Kenneth. For example, he always fantasizes to go back to his motherland with a style of American dress and speech as the Americans act and do. Such cultural assimilation is an intention of invalidating his original identity so as to adjust to the new culture as a means of fighting his low self-esteem.

To clarify the fundamental purpose of assimilation, Johnston R. (1969: 2) explains it as an “integration or adjustment”. As a mechanism to escape any form of social isolation, the personality that Kenneth displays is a typical experience; he realizes that resolving his financial problem could make his life simple which is entirely affected by the material obsession of the hosting country. Thus, he imitates the American styles of dress and manners of communication deliberately in his frequent attempt of pretending to be American; he is infected by the sentiment of Americanization.

He decides to make physical transformation over his dressing and language simply to fulfill his dream of financial constraint without social alienation. Such type of dilemma of belongingness is the fundamental problem of identity confusion which comes as an ultimate result of social isolation. Melvin Seeman (1959) calls such kind of dilemma as cultural estrangement which is related to social isolation. This scenario shows how the individual immigrants drop their original traces and identities through the process of assimilation in a long time due to economic constraints or when their home countries are in a state of political chaos.

The other important story in (BT) is the isolated life of Berhane, the narrator's (Stephanos') uncle. In his uncle's apartment, Stephanos notices the twenty-eight-story building of which twenty-six floors are exclusively held by Ethiopian immigrant community. The narrator describes this place as "the building insular" (BT: 115). In that apartment, the Ethiopians do not speak English whose parents also restrict their children with whom they are going to make friendships in order to preserve their original culture though their effort was not as successful as they wanted. As Stephanos explains the situation, these confined immigrant families who held this building considered themselves like a village with all relatives, "living within shouting distances of one another" (BT: 116). The building and the Ethiopian community who live in that place symbolize the fragile and failed struggle to resist any kind of cultural assimilation. They strive to maintain their identity in order to challenge the problems of social isolation which marginalizes them from the hosting country's dominant culture. Despite the parents' tireless effort to combat the threat of cultural mix up, they find their children immersing in the state of unfaithful personalities and drug abuse. Their children continued practicing undesirable behaviors which led them develop cultures in which they do not want to inherent to their children. After the parents find out that their children adopt unwanted practices, they begin to worry by the moral decadence of their families. They could not also celebrate their cultural and identity roots by giving voice to where silence reigns. Ultimately, they are prone to lose their confidence since their attempt to define their relation with the hosting society leads them to social alienation from their true identity.

Consequently, perilous normlessness and decadence of culture is an indication of the over occurrence of aspects of alienation. Sustaining and preserving Ethiopian tradition in America meant a lot to the immigrants because they can fight any form of discrimination or other threatening of their existence. Due to this despondent condition, they repeatedly fight to maintain

the sentiment of their identity and elevate their original culture. Desperately, their resistance to the new culture could not bring a tangible result; rather it exacerbates their miseries because of “time, distance and nostalgia” (BT: 118). As it is comparatively depicted, the Ethiopian immigrant community’s original home is ideal; all is ethically decent though they leave their country because of civil war and political uncertainty.

More importantly, the false promises of freedom which engrave the immigrants’ long waiting dreams of new lives is explicitly shown in (BT). Stephanos and his African friends leave their homelands hoping there would be freedom in the hosting country in which every human being wishes because freedom and identity should be thought alongside one another. Despite living there for almost two decades, the characters in (BT) remain strangers, unaccepted and restricted. In this novel, America rather is presented as a screen grid to the African immigrants from achieving their ultimate dreams. These people face various social isolation prohibited from their primary choices. Stephanos narrates the perception of Berhane towards America; “Everything that is in this apartment belongs to you as much as it does to me. Outside of this apartment, though, you have nothing. Nothing is yours. Nothing belongs to you, take nothing for granted” (BT: 139). This extract suggests that America is nothing but temporary shelter for the African immigrants whereby they live as a second citizen, socially isolated and differently treated. They also realize they are forcefully uprooted from their original homes to a place where they are not regarded and treated equally as human beings should be treated.

The place where those African immigrants live is also economically marginalized and disregarded from the basic services. Here, we have an extract to exemplify that they are forgotten by the principal administration; no proper service is supplied for their living places. Therefore, social isolation deprives them from meaningful socio-economic participation in their surroundings. These immigrants experienced different challenges of powerlessness and meaninglessness realities which resulted to further violation of social norms and institutional exclusion. Here it is how Stephanos describes that challenge:

*White people come to that particular place to report the condition of its aging buildings, to determine where they are in need of repair or demolishment. These were the only reasons*

*white people had ever come into the neighborhood: to deliver official notices, investigate crimes and check up on the children of negligent parents. (BT: 18)*

The African immigrants' challenge of social exclusion based on their color and identity is a very embarrassing experience. And such experience of social alienation emerges as a consequence of existential predicament as no white people comes, visits or associates with their place except for rare bureaucratic businesses.

In (BT), there are marginalized characters who represent, introduce and tell the world all about the experiences of racial discrimination and social isolation of the African immigrants in America. The anxiety that develops as a result of social isolation gives a realistic image of the immigrants' experiences. The characters' enthusiasm of integrating in the host country is unharmonious because the social system is oppressive and incompatible with their long awaiting hopes. The hosting community's social institutions show the ironic discourse of the reality, as shown sarcastically in a school advertisement: "Four students- one white, one black, one Asian, one Hispanic which a school motto: Taking You Where You Want To Be" (BT: 97-98). This expression is an ironic account of the reality in which the immigrants face. Such antagonistic motto to the practice of the hosting nation is the fundamental message the (BT) inspires to project as a primary subject. What is told about the promising land of USA is an ideal many perceive it as a systematic perpetuation and segregation of the non-white communities. Thus, immigrants' hopes become blurred. The discrimination African immigrants face on the reality and what is posted on the billboard reminds them that they are treated as aliens or others.

Furthermore, Logan Circle is an isolated place where Stephanos runs his life with his friends; it is not given equitable resources like what the government provides to other places in US. It is in fact remarkable when Judith decides to live in Logan Circle as the first white American, as depicted in the novel; "Before Judith, these were the only reasons white people had ever come into the neighborhood: to deliver official notices, investigate crimes and check up on the children of negligent parents" (BT: 18) This situation is also a sign of racial discrimination as the place is specifically restricted only to those people who are supposed to come from African backgrounds. Socially isolated, the African immigrants are relocated in a very confined socio-demography which

is not conducive for the immigrants' process of integration. This systematic discrimination deteriorates their social skills and prohibits them from economic affluence.

As a dilapidated immigrant character in, Stephanos' otherness deprives him from participating in the social affairs of the host country community. This is portrayed during protests down the city street because a black family is being evicted from their home. As it is mentioned previously, the controversial issue of his gentrifying neighborhood; Stephanos concerns but observes from a distance. He narrates his observation: "I stepped outside of my store once to see what was happening, but I knew my place. It was behind the counter, not in the middle of a dispute in which I had no part to play" (BT: 192). His friends and neighbors participate in the rally, and the continuing urban renewal is a direct threat to Stephanos and other immigrants, yet he experiences enough cultural pressure to know that he is an African immigrant. His role as an immigrant is not only to take part in certain social activities, but also to keep working quietly to visualize his failed dream.

To foreground vividly the realities of the immigrants, it is also best to see the quality of characterization of the people in the novel because readers can recognize the characters' struggle to win the challenges of the hosting life and their shock of isolation. Such an instance is portrayed in the case of Stephanos' scrutiny of the reality. Spotting his inner speech, Stephanos comes through the toughest life experience which forbids him from important community commitment. More importantly, the US receives African immigrants disregarding their cultures and isolates them from fully participating in its social institutions. Stephanos has no material things that he possesses there although he works tirelessly for decades. Consequently, he is withdrawn and dissociated from every participation of social aspects.

Stephanos also considers himself as undeserving to love and to be loved. Right after the dinner's incident at Judith's house, he does not back to his store for some days realizing Judith does not want him because he is different in many ways from her. He thinks "I thought I saw the situation now clearly for what it was-a case of mistaken identity. I had forgotten who I was, with my shabby apartment and run-down store, and like any great fool..." (BT: 80). He begins to dissociate himself due to the prejudice of his African identity; because of this, his hope of associating in the hosting

society through relationship with the white woman fails. This is so likely to many immigrants' journey in their short cut attempt to materialize the unlikely mission of becoming Americans.

Another serious scenario of social isolation is portrayed in (BT), which is one of the critical difficulties of the African immigrants whereby they experience the prejudice of race as a result of their skin color. Many of the residents of the marginalized place fear they would be evicted because some members of the privileged classes come to take back the old houses just as Judith does. Mrs. Davis, who struggles to maintain the community's lands during the gentrification, repeatedly complains her concern of losing her residence. She explains her fear, "These people coming in like that and forcing us out" (BT: 189). Such urbanization is meant they could not be able to afford the cost of their lives for long. This old woman sees Judith as a representative of this urban renewal expansionism, and she begins to target Judith and her entire family. The very concern of the isolated people is psychological and social trauma no one understands. Thus, they feel they are not considered as citizens in the multicultural society; they also feel they have deprived of the basic rights of US citizens. As a result, they suffer (social isolation), they develop another dimension of alienation such as meaninglessness or self-estrangement.

Seeman (1959) suggests that cultural estrangement is one of the forms of alienation; many African immigrants are believed to be prone to such alienations, as society is the place where culture is practiced. In the context of BT, Stephanos feels he becomes the victim of cultural estrangement at his early immigrant life. In his imaginary dialogue with his father about America, he says, "I explained to him the parts of American culture that I had never heard of before. There is no respect here." (BT: 176) This aura of the problem comes as a result of his pessimism. Bicultural life entraps Stephanos in dilemma because adopting the tradition of the hosting society becomes unbearable. One of the main outcomes of cultural blend is acculturation that directs one to leave it behind the affection of mother country's culture. Thus, the persecution at home land and the detachment at host land is the sign of Stephanos' cultural alienation.

A usual display amongst the immigrant characters' lives in (BT) is the limbo attachments they have with the Americans. Such limbo prevails in their attempts to meaningful relationship since a meaningful relationship for them brings mutual benefit they yearn for years. Conversely, it forces them into a deserted place as outsiders, making co-exist with the American culture even more

difficult. As the story implies, the struggle of maintaining original identity can be viewed by comparing the divergent pathways of the characters like Stephanos. The immigrants' attempt of creating a better relationship with others in their second home is a deliberate effort of revealing that the social structure prohibits them from integration. This circumstance further prevents them from entertaining their new life to overcome the dynamics of alienation. Stephanos' and his immigrant friends' life epitomize the exclusivity of the American culture in tangible situation of marginalized groups.

In addition, these characters' failed attempt to take part in the affairs of the hosting community is very shocking because they feel otherness to the world they are living. The novel depicts the struggle to win the new life and to cope up with American values. Characters find out that the new life in US is unfitting to immigrants because they are portrayed encountering challenges of social isolation. As a manifestation of social isolation, depression could be the result of an intense social alienation which is also commonly seen in the three fellow immigrants. The important thing that has to be noted in the case of the immigrant literary works is the overemphasis of racial, national and regional concerns.

In a further state of social isolation, it is underscored in (BT) the unprecedented personality of the immigrants so as to achieve what they expect in their new lives through the voice of the protagonist. At the final section of the novel, Stephanos is shown while attempting to improve his life. His father's imaginative voice is overheard to show that Stephanos is stuck between Ethiopian and American culture. In the intent of this story, Stephanos dreadfully expresses his frustration through the soul of his father. Infuriatingly, he narrates his feeling of identity dilemma: "What was my father used to say? A bird stuck between two branches gets bitten on both wings. I would like to add my own saying to the list now, father: a man stuck between two worlds lives and dies alone. I have dangled and been suspended long enough" (BT: 228).

This is typical manifestation of African immigrants' challenge in their attempt of co-existing with in the hosting community. Another peculiar quality of this novel is its effort of depicting the immigrants' cultural limbo and their reactions. In this scene, Stephanos is jammed between the Ethiopian and American identities; he is also obsessed with the idealized sentiment of Americanization as a means of confronting his poverty. As his tireless effort to look like as

American fails, he understands that it does not work as a way of fighting social alienation and as an ultimate response against the cultural estrangement. He sometimes forgets who he is, how and why he comes to America because no one can evidently represent the severe suffering of the African immigrant communities. It is the same destiny to many that he leaves his beloved country running away from persecutions of the 1970s. However, he does not escape from other challenges in the new home. However, the hopes Stephanos and his friends yearning for are not totally lost although they have to challenge the wave of the traumatic memories so as to begin an entirely different experience of reality.

#### **4.3.2. Social Isolation in *How to Read the Air* (HRA)**

Social-isolation is a person's state of feeling when he or she is not meaningfully connected to his or her community through common values, beliefs and practices, or when a person does not have a substantial relationship with other people. A socially isolated person does not work properly, and other related dimensions of alienation may prevail following this critical social dissatisfaction specially in the immigrant society. A socially isolated individual or group are mechanically excluded from any decision-making apparatus of the existing major social institutions. In the novel, HRA the immigrant characters are presented to show the African immigrants' pain and suffering of social isolation. Human communication is a social process, and it is an essential part of our daily life since it is a process of creating, exchanging, sharing ideas, information, feelings, and experiences.

As it is depicted in (HRA), Mariam, for instance, frequently experiences a lot of suffering as a result of intense subjective feeling of social isolation. She encounters with the hosting society labeling it as a state of cultural alienation. She expresses her worrisome with the existing language barrier and communication breakdown which result in developing communication gap and feeling of otherness. Every generation has its values and beliefs, often influenced by experiences including the immigrant communities. One of those influences is how generations communicate at work and around their environment to proceed their daily activities.

Language barriers are the root causes of many problems, the negative impact of it is seen in immigrant communities. Jonas narrates his mother's early feelings of social isolation because of a restricted social network and communication channels: "Learning a new language was, in the end,

not so different from learning to fall in love with your husband again” (HRA: 3). Both the new language and her husband become the sources of her disenchantment and dissatisfaction to her new life because they are equally strangers to her. She could not properly manage such challenges as a fundamental amenity of her existence. She hardly adjusts to the new face of social make ups dominated by a foreign culture. Mariam compares her husband’s new personality with learning a new language, and this shows they both negatively impact her life. This is to mean implicitly she is isolated from participating in social organizations as far as everything around her new environment becomes alien and her effort to adjust is influenced by language. This point suggests how far African immigrants are exposed to social alienations since the adoption of the cultural values of the hosting society involves a fundamental disruption of the immigrants’ native culture. However, Jonas, born and brought up as a second-generation immigrant, is severely affects his personal relationship with others due to the abusive family. Consequently, he is socially alienated, though he has no other culture and country that he knows more than his US.

Due to the complexity of the post-modern life, Mariam is dissociated from the overall social structure of the hosting community. The portrayal of this social alienation that Mariam encounters is very painful. Kalekin-Fishman (1996:97) has remarked the feeling of social alienation with the denial of one’s ambition; “The psychological state of denying one’s own interests – of seeking out extrinsically satisfying, rather than intrinsically satisfying activities”. Fishman’s statement specifically describes how and why an individual chooses to dissociate while there is an opportunity of taking part at a certain social affair. Of course, this problem may create other forms of alienation like self-estrangement and meaninglessness besides social alienation. Mariam is very worried after realizing she is socially isolated because of her inability to command the hosting country’s language. She also understands she is excluded from the new community and feels lack of sense of belongingness as she could not be able to freely communicate with and participate in the new community. Eventually, she experiences and senses a state of deprivation of continuing link of some sort, the absence of participation and identification.

One of the main concerns raised in (HRA) is the serious challenges of the African immigrant characters who face and react to the cultural differences and dilemmas of their immigration lives. In this novel, it is attempted to delineate the characters’ internal sentiments and absence of self-awareness which frequently clash with their original culture. Yosef’s cultural mix-up in his stay at

the port of Sudan is an example of such cultural perplex. Jonas narrates his father's act of cultural transformation as follows: "My father went to great lengths to disguise his origins; he bought himself two white djellabas and grew a small beard. When asked where he was from, he said he was a Muslim from Asmara..." (HRA: 210). In this scene, it is delineated Yosef's curiosity of concealing his true identity and assimilating into the main streams of the Sudanese Arabs is for fear of social isolation and discrimination. His cultural transformation is an attempt of adjusting and conforming to the new environment by adopting the dominant religion which clearly portrays the dynamics of alienation. Why Yosef hides himself and attempts to assimilate to the new culture is simply to escape from any hazard of his life.

Adjustment of oneself with the existing environment can be considered as a manifestation of post-modern scenario since immigrants by nature are vulnerable to some forms of cultural transformation. Living and working in a country of new culture can create a cultural transformation. The act of haphazard adopting a new practice can be a result of the ongoing psychological uncertainty of the immigrants' painful estrangement and the blurred distinction of true and false identities. It can also be said that Yosef and the likes of immigrant people cannot escape from social alienation so long as they are not free from physical and mental imposition. They would also be powerless to maintain their original identity unless they are allowed to choose freely. Such cultural mess could bring a breakdown of the psych-physical problem of the immigrants' social structure. Fearing social alienation, Yosef tries to adopt the new cultural practice after dropping his original religion in which it can be labelled as an identity confusion.

The other striking point in (HRA) is the portrayal of the immigrants' challenge to keep their original identity in the second country. The very challenging time Jonas finds a part-time work in a school through the unprecedented effort of his wife after he loses his first job in the center of immigration. The very challenge of getting the job is his distinct name in the context of the employer. Retrospectively, Jonas remembers how he comes across because of his Ethiopic name and root: "... a name like mine, Jonas Woldemariam, often failed to inspire linguistic confidence in others" (HRA: 54). The interviewer blindly imagines Jonas' skill and knowledge less valuable. Seeman has labeled such kind of alienation as an isolation of the individual from the dominant value of the society. Thus, such experience of action forces Jonas to feel a state of exclusion and unskilled based on the origin of his name though he was born and raised there in US. Judged

blindly, he is prone to an entire social isolation. Such kind discrimination in the contemporary world could intensify certain degree of social and psychological problems, and it may further create an absence of meaning in the life of the victim. Anyone can imagine how far Jonas's internal feeling is hurt realizing he is treated just based on who he is and where he comes from.

Furthermore, the issue of the immigrants' identity is meticulously over emphasized in (HRA). The color of the skin or the type of race may severely confine the relationship of the African immigrants to their hosting community. In the mainstream media and various talk-shows, American politicians and civic societies repeatedly promote a discourse that every human being is treated equally though many perceive the fact as a paradox of this narration. Here is an extract from (HRA) regarding the identity-based social isolation in a way of revealing the reality of the democratic and liberal country (USA). Jonas remembers the painful experience of racial segregation in a restaurant: "Don't look now," Angela said, "but we're the only black people here." She pretended to whisper to me from behind her menu. "Don't worry," I told her. I covered the left side of my face with the menu. "I don't think anyone's noticed" (HRA: 73).

As it is shown in the couple's conversation, the incident is a socially imposed self-isolation, but reflects the black immigrants' feeling of discrimination because of their color. On this issue, Frantz Fanon (1991:90) suggests, "Ontology does not allow us to understand the being of the black man...The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man". Fanon's argument is tantamount to the incident at the restaurant. Such social isolation is a typical reflection of the reality of the host community by far worsened in the absence of positive interaction with social institutions. It can be said that the African immigrants state of social isolation renders their psychological withdrawal from the center of their social participation.

Having the above extract, the novel specifically shows that the first- and second-generation immigrants are victims of unexpected social alienation because they are descended from Africa. Imagine the way Jonas and Angela are seen by the unwelcoming reaction of the people around them during their visit to a small restaurant after realizing the reason of such reaction was their color or race black. In a normal condition, it can be considered that Jonas and Angela could probably be happy in their association with the white people; they instead are embarrassed because of the hostile reaction they received from everyone, from the servants to the customers.

It has to be perceived from the above event that the United States of America is not always comfortable and compatible to certain black immigrants even in this contemporary epoch. Jonas and his wife were born and raised in US who perceive US as their only home and can have no other country, but they are labeled as others and become victim of racial discrimination because their parents are first-generation black immigrants. Their only choice against such humiliation is accepting and adjusting with it or excluding themselves. By then, they assume they are not part of the community whom they are deracinated and displaced. They are intimidated to hate their national community. Both Jonas and Angela are in search of a place they would be able to be accepted as citizens. Such kind of confusion also leads to self-estrangement since the self can only exist in relation to its environment, and thus a misidentification of their identity also dissociates them from others with the feeling of otherness.

Yosef finds the new life in US as difficult as he would not anticipate it which intimidates him to make an effort towards the process of social and cultural adjustment though his attempt is not positive. An attempt of cultural assimilation is portrayed in HRA. Dinaw's second novel, when Yosef makes an inspection to the historical landmarks to Nashville. Jonas explains his father's frustration of cultural assimilation: "Since arriving in America, he had tried to come up with a series of standards by which he could judge his assimilation" (HRA: 86). This kind of attempt to cultural adjustment emerges once the immigrants feel they have a sentiment of otherness and fall in the dilemma of their natural identity whereby they accelerate the process of alteration. As it is put in (HRA), the immigrant characters experience to an entire challenges of identity confusion.

Yosef, as a first-generation immigrant, has an intention to be an American for a long period as he understands the best option to avoid social prejudices and to take part in the affairs of the society. Jonas remarks the desperate ambition of his father's long cultural adjustment, "It would take time and patience to become the kind of man he dreamed of" (HRA: 88). This extract is a witness of Yosef's ultimate curiosity of his basic socio-cultural transformation; he realizes that an Ethiopian/African personality could not bring the prosperity he wants. Thus, he is in a state of dilemma between his natural identity and the new world of adoption. It is the uncertainty of identity and the basic cultural differences of many immigrants that may create a state of alienation in their life. The future Yosef hopes to build and the past he cannot escape become his destine in the

hosting country. It can be inferred that the greatest challenge of the immigrant community is how and when to adjust the changing scenarios in their lives.

The very unbridgeable crack between the first and second-generation immigrants displayed in (HRA) is the powerful impact of their background in their immigration lives. The author of the target novel is, of course, a second-generation American immigrant who knows more about United States of America than Ethiopia. He repeatedly states in his interview to the media, including *DW* and *Frace24*, there are some fictional characters having some connection with his real-life family experiences could become the immediate reason of writing his second novel. Similarly, Jonas' father encounters a serious confusion of identity and social alienation in his working environment, and he describes such state of fear of social isolation by creating a linguistic mistake because of his parents' vernacular influence. Jonas narrates the fear of familial influence as follows: "Having grown up in the shadows of my parents' high-pitched accent and broken grammar, I had always hesitated before I spoke and often whispered my words in case, they failed to properly impress whatever audience was before me" (HRA:96). His suspicion to be ostracized by his workmate is one of the critical issues about immigrants' social alienation. Non-American accent is neither a crime nor a source of social alienation even though his fear emerges from his parent's experience.

Jonas's feeling of dissatisfaction on the reality of his country is not groundless, but he is so worried because of the social reactions to his liability to articulating and using formal and grammatically correct American English. To show specifically, such unreasonable perception voiced the haunting emotional depiction of the modern immigrants' doubt and source of identity in their attempt to co-exist and adjust themselves. In contrary, it results in the loss of their social status. Such disenchantment comes as a result of their isolation from social institutions, and due to the fact that the immigrants come from Africa. As it is shown in (HRA), one of the reasons of the immigrant community's inclination to acculturation or assimilation is the inferiority complex of their basic identity. The previous extract epitomizes the cultural intrusion of the narrator which is preliminary for fear of losing his job. For him, nothing is worthwhile than keeping his job; he has no other option of escaping this social alienation except running away from his parent's linguistic influence and sticking to total integration and adjustment to the host country.

In a similar point, Jonas admits his confusion finding a comfortable environment to understand what basic differences he has with his wife and how to fix it. He further compares himself with an untouchable abstract object to describe the maximum feeling of social alienation. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) conveys his readers about the painful feeling of the protagonist's invisibility. The same is true with the feeling of invisibility Jonas perceives living in this world; he tells us his depressing pain of invisibility when he tries to find the natural meaning of self:

*I may not have had a solid definition of who I was, but that was only because for so long I had concerned my efforts on trying to appear to be almost nothing at all- neither nameless nor invisible, just obscure enough to blend into the background and be quickly forgotten.... I thought of my obscurity as being essential to my survival. Whoever can't see you can't hurt you (HRA: 101).*

Accordingly, the major concern of invisibility and obscurity is to underline the basic challenges of the immigrant generations by specifying that their original culture is dramatically affected by the new life of their second country. It also indicates that namelessness and invisibility become the reflective manifestations of exiles and immigrants, the attempt of the dislocated and relocated individuals for obtaining new identity to suite the new lives. In the meantime, they encounter social challenges in the form of cultural mingling and hostile relationship.

Some of the immigrants leave their homelands empty-handed but having only abundant of emotional baggage for their children similar with what Jonas inherits from his immigrant parents. His father is forced to leave Ethiopia, and Jonas has the remnants of his parents which is haunting him the rest of his life. As a result, Jonas collides with crisis of isolation in his attempt to make sense of his life in USA. Comparing the author of this novel with his fictional narrator, Jonas Woldemariam, they both come through similar life experiences and challenges of the American institutional reaction, but they respond to and manage them differently. From this comparison, the researcher comes to the supposition that immigrant writings have certain reflections of the writers. Both the author and the narrator have deep sense of otherness though the narrator fails to manage the social dispositioning of his participation. In his various interviews with media, the author has expressed the race-based prejudice he has experienced in different social institutions as a result of his ethnicity in his profound effort to increase his social integration.

Jonas has also similar feeling of frustration in his job of teaching English in spite of the fact that he has no problem in the subject matter. Jonas describes his disconformable sense of social reaction: “I used to wonder if that was how my students and the other teachers, even with all their liberal, cultured learning, saw me- as a monkey trying to teach their language back to them” (HRA:167). As a second-generation immigrant, Jonas knows he was born and raised in US, the so called liberal cultured society, but he is considered by his students and workmates as an alien from different culture. Such feeling of social alienation is also interrelated with Seeman’s definition of social isolation since Neal & Collas (2000:95) opine their interpretation of the conceptual definition: “Isolation is also experienced in the sense of estrangement from activities in which one is engaged; the feeling of being separated or cut off from the type of rewards and lifestyles that prevail within one's own society”. This is also a description of sentimental and socio-psychological misperception of the minorities; it is one of the most striking problems of the immigrant community which also creates other forms of alienation. In the real world, when a person experiences a social form of alienation, undoubtedly self-estrangement will follow as a response of escaping that reality. Equally to Jonas, some immigrants are considered as rootless, as coming from a non-US based family. Thus, they are deprived from taking part in every social aspect in the host society. Jonas is the son of first-generation immigrant family; he was unable to fill his ambition of social participation and not functioning properly due to the existing social segregation. He fails of positive interpersonal relationship in the institutional structure of the US.

Jonas argues for the indispensability of revising history to understand his existence and to move forward in life. It is remarkably shown in the novel that creating of a new history can help to fill the missing part of the immigrants’ lives. While working as a teacher, Jonas tells his students the reconstructed history of his father. He imagines the story of his father as, “I needed a history more complete than the strangled bits that he (his father) had owned and passed on to me... (HRA: 169-70). Such dedication of creating a story comes as a result of inferiority over one’s true story. It can also be deduced how history gets transformed and reinterpreted to suit the present purposes. The point which is depicted about Jonas is the literary quality of presenting the fundamental feature of contemporary literary works; the presentation of blending the fictional with factual history is also another spectacular scene of the novel.

Jonas is not interested to come up with the exact views of his father instead he reconstructs it because he fears institutional rejection for being the son of such immigrant father. For this reason, he created a father with a new social capital and a different history to fill the missing part of his life. Jonas explains why he recreates the story: “And so I continued with my father’s story, knowing that I could make up the missing details as I went, just as I had once done for Bill and his brood of migrants at the center” (HRA:170). In this narration, Jonas admits his dishonesty since working at the refuge center. Her repeatedly lies because his life experience is not good as he was raised by a disturbed and a disconnected family where no one taught him the moral values of social make up or individual conduct. This is typical example of Jonas’s personality who behaves socially and individually unacceptably to achieve a meaningful life. This behavior is also a reflection of his normlessness.

#### **4.3.3. Social Isolation in *All Our Names* (AON)**

As one dimension of alienation proposed by Seeman, social isolation is the isolation of the individual from the central values of the society. In this novel, the immigrant characters experience a feeling they could not test appropriate social relationship in their attempt to take part in the dominant social structures of the community. When the social norms guiding the individual are transgressed, many people may be prone to different forms of social isolation. One of the major issues underscored in (AON) is the immigrants’ state of social bigotry because of their low economic status. The immigrants have to use whatever means necessary to make good living; hence, they easily fall prey to the powerful people who exploit their current conditions. By the time Helen and Isaac visits the Bill Restaurant for lunch, the reaction they receive from the restaurant’s staff and customers are out of the expected social norm. Isaac is treated and served not as equal as his girlfriend. A vigorous social relationship can be explained by the fact of its stable and peaceful social interaction. It also plays a leading role in avoiding or minimizing the social seclusion in social participations because a meaningful social relationship bridges the gap between the individual entity and the social participation in a structurally integrated manner.

Human relationships are raised in (AON) as the basic issue and the fundamental portrait of the modern humanity or inhumanity. Social stereotype based on individuals’ skin color is treated differently. An extract to show the immigrants’ painful social isolation because of identity is described by Helen when they visit a local restaurant: “Isaac’s omelet was on a stack of thin paper

plates barely large enough to hold the food. A plastic fork and knife had been wrapped in a napkin and placed on top, a strangely delicate touch that she (waitress) must have been responsible for” (AON: 38). Despite laws like the Civil Rights Acts, Isaac faces with an inordinate amount of discrimination in a restaurant. In support of this point, Fanon (1990) considers the challenge of skin color discrimination as a procedure by which the assumption of the majority upon the self becomes a racialized objectification of the subject. Therefore, race is a form of social alienation. Hence, Fanon observes how the immigrant individuals lose their fundamental essence through confrontation with the white domination for their existence. Isaac is living in a world where social connections require considerable investment of individual differences. The issue of racial discrimination within the restaurant has centered on the unjust treatment by the personnel. Skin color-based discrimination in restaurants is a systemic problem of the immigrants. One source of this problem is a social psychological process involving the diffusion and reinforcement of racial stereotypes when the employee uses to inform the nature of their interactions with customers.

The above extract shows a complementary action of the staff of the restaurant who is supposed to serve all customers equally; the hotel servant deliberately humiliates and indifferently treats Isaac. Right after Helen and Isaac get into the restaurant, the white patrons’ hostile reaction is unwelcoming. Isaac describes their uncaring treatment: “...the whole diner fell silent as all eyes turned towards them” (AON:36). It is very painful to the couple to see such kind of race-based stereotype from a country that promotes democracy as its primary moto in the global socio-political arena. In the novel, the optimism and ambition are described to see an equitable world and to avoid the supposedly inhuman and social ills which are perpetrated by fellow human beings. In (AON), violence and war in Uganda and USA are demonstrated to display that there is much agony and misery in life due to race-based discrimination, but the malaises of life cause them to lose their social participation, creating great emotional and psychological impact upon them.

The unexpected and undesirable experience mentioned previously could be the reason why (AON) prioritizes to amplify the reality of the African immigrants through characters like Isaac who is treated indifferently. He could not be treated as equal as Helen. The above extract is an elucidation of a complete social isolation because Isaac painfully becomes a victim of that racial discrimination while living in the middle of the diversified American people. Of course, as a common human being he should have been get an appropriate service at the restaurant; however, the servants and

the customers gave him and his white wife inhuman treatment. How normless and cynical is also the waitress when the two take their seats and places their orders. The waitress who handles their orders comes back empty hand and underrating asks them if they would like to have takeaways, but they politely decline the request.

Furthermore, the most serious problem the immigrants in (AON) face is pervasive discrimination and racism in the form of verbal abuse and physical reaction. Helen witnesses herself the disdainful race-based alienation when she observes the injustice service Isaac receives in the hotel. She describes the ugly situation of the restaurant, "...by the time my (Helen's) order arrived on the standard cream-colored plates used for everyone other than Isaac" (AON.38). Such an ugly bias let Isaac feels as an outsider. Devah Pager and Hana Shepherd (2008: 209) have expressed the challenges of discrimination based on the individual's race: "Racial discrimination refers to unequal treatment of persons or groups on the basis of their race or ethnicity". This definition specifically describes Isaac's experience of segregation how he is treated by service providers, by some supremacist individuals.

Following the above maltreatment, Helen was very disappointed and felt a state of otherness in response to the situation of the restaurant's environment. She reacts her dissidence by cancelling the remaining order: "tell Bill that I don't want to eat here" (AON: 39). Such act of racial segregation is a systematic and historical legacy of the American society. There's nothing noteworthy about it, but that kind of phenomenon could show how the lives of the immigrant community based in US were affected even their next generation which was a frequent manifestation of those African immigrants and other third world countries. Through the couple's love affairs, the unequal and unfair service they experience different from their expectation of a sense of optimism of promoting the co-existence of healthy relationships regardless of color and race is stressed. A sequence of flashpoints around the Western world uncovers a profound racial discrimination. The novel also overemphasizes and shows the immigrants act of social strata.

Isaac is labeled as an alien by the community around his hosting country simply because of his ethnicity. It can be observed, there is a systematic racism in US, and it may take some time to free the country from such kind of segregation.

The researcher has attempted to accentuate the interrelation between the social isolation and the identity of particular group or individuals. Here is another challenge of racial prejudice or an extreme level of social isolation when the reaction of the immigrant's identity is echoed in a restaurant as it is told by the narrator. After travelling for some time, Helen and Isaac agree to branch off for lunch, but the feedback they receive from the white customers is very unfriendly and chilly. Social alienation is one of the undesirable conspicuous of social thoughts, and some intellectuals call it as a phenomenon of modern societies. Helen describes that social isolation:

*When we stopped for lunch at a restaurant off the highway, it was impossible not to notice the hostile glares of many of the men dining there alone. They were deaf and blind to the world until we entered; once they saw us, all they could do was glare over their coffee cups and from under the brims of their hats. No one said anything to us.... We did our best not to be bothered. We didn't hold hands, we didn't touch, but we kept our eyes focused exclusively on each other as we ate our lunch and drank our coffee (AON: 224-25).*

Isaac and Helen were very shocked by the outrageous reaction of the people after they realize the reason of the hostile face of the people in that room is race-based segregation. The reaction of the white people showed the systematic inequality and exclusion of the immigrant community.

In (OAN), the main concerning issue is the human relationships as an important image of contemporary humanity or inhumanity, and it has a potential of revealing how the African immigrants are treated. It is also about the social isolation and the ways the African immigrants become racially traumatized. This is mostly reflected in the America section of the novel narrated by Helen. In one of the sensitive scenes regarding the issue of race, Isaac is advised to behave accordingly and to accept his segregation when he faces white people throughout his stay in US. Isaac's profound disillusionment is; "Later that evening, [Henry] gave me advice about how-to live-in America. He told me not to stare at white people, to say 'sir' if I was stopped by the police, and to live as quietly as possible. This is a hard part of the country to have come to,' he said. 'You might wish you hadn't'" (AON: 177). The white man's advice to accept what soever hostile reaction shows the systematic racism has rooted for many years in every social institutions of the hosting country. Thus, the immigrants were systematically discriminated as it is described in the novel.

In this third novel, the narrator and the revolutionary Isaac are presented from the lower-class who are prone to various forms of alienation; they are also symbolized the down looked individuals outside the mainstream. As a consequence of this terrible isolation, the two Isaacs develop further states of alienation like, normlessness, with the intention to win their long-awaited dreams. As Seeman (1959) explains normlessness can happen as a result of great optimism in which socially unaccepted actions are used to obtain a given goal. Accordingly, the narrator and his Ugandan friend no longer care about what is morally acceptable or not in their daily activity. They frequently tell wrong stories to the people around them about the identity and the reason why they were at the Uganda university campus. The narrator describes the situation: "...we were both liars and frauds, poorly equipped to play the role we had chosen..." (AON: 7). He admits the undesirable nature of deceiving the campus community to meet his desire.

As the narrator describes, he goes to Uganda dreaming to fulfill his ambition of becoming a good writer though he is reluctant to uncover his true destiny: "I tried to think of myself as a revolutionary in the making, though I had come to the capital with other ambition" (AON: 4). The Ethiopian Isaac's life in Uganda is noticeably characterized by an entire feeling of isolation, and no one notices him at the university or at the periphery where he lives. Isaac conveys his pain of alienation in Kampala through physical and mental coercion and intimidation. Hence, the literary quality of presenting the immigrant character's overall situation shows the prevailing class strata and the violation of social standards which could regulate individuals' laws as human being. The depiction of the social anomie can be put as the manifestation of social isolation.

Helen further expresses her delusion of identity in her intrapersonal conflict and interracial relation she has built with Isaac since she is a member of the Laurel Town community, an extremely racist area. She describes her social fear: "What was worse than being alone in public and, for reasons you were reluctant to admit, feeling frightened because your lover held your arms" (AON: 113). This is an account of internal emptiness when she tries to hug or touch the man she loves. Her lasting disenchantment is also as a consequence of the stereotypical white-black relationship she builds with Isaac in the place where she lives and works. In addition of social isolation, this extract shows a state of powerlessness after realizing the prejudice is deep-rooted. To the worst extent of alienating portrait, Helen is labeled as an outcast even by her nearest community as long as she continues associating with the black immigrant, Isaac. Helen's workmate drops her a piece of

advice to show the magnitude of her relationship with Isaac from the perspective of work mates: “You would come to the office and find them whispering, and after a few days, you’d begin to think that it was about you. After a week, you would start to think that people all over the town were looking at you strangely” (AON: 191). The advice is purposely to humiliate the intimate relationship she has with the black immigrant. As a member of the hosting community, she is reluctant to consider the bit of advice given by her workmate. Of course, the reason of her reluctance implies that she would not isolate socially from her community.

The dialogue Helen held with her officemate is a very frustrating which exacerbates her state of social prejudice to proceed the love affair with Isaac. This terrible racial discrimination on the African immigrants is one of the prominent issues that is specifically attempted to be foregrounded in the target novel. This issue can be considered as a reflection of the global immigrants’ overall image of the hosting countries to give a better lesson that immigrant writers should loudly and boldly raise in their literary pieces. This portrait of the immigrant’s lives in their second country had also become a mainstream of preoccupation on the modern immigrant novels. From the beginning, Helen is reluctantly forced to accept Isaac’s request of love after understanding the society’s disrespectful reaction.

To the worst, Helen accepts the declining of association with her husband in public places since she could not resist such type of social fear: “...I assumed after that lunch that if there was any relationship left, it would live on in the strictest privacy” (AON:49). It becomes increasingly ludicrous for Helen to act differently at home and outside even to talk about her affair with Isaac in front of her workmates. This extract shows that Helen is socially withdrawn because of a fault she does not commit. She loves Isaac, but the society could not commit further sacrifice for her. In the novel, Laurel town is symbolized as the imaginary setting of hell to the black immigrants. This is a remark of social barring to Helen and racial prejudice to Isaac, creating self-estrangement aspect of alienation on them. Thus, the idea of isolation denotes lack of social interaction with others in which the social fragmentations play a role in increasing the social isolation.

The very remarkable issue stressed in *All Our Names* is the matters of unnamings, naming and renaming of characters to make up their identity. At the beginning of the story, the Ethiopian Isaac describes how he transforms his entire identity: “On the bus ride to the capital, I gave up all the names my parents had given me” (AON: 3). He uses the documents of his Ugandan friend to get

out of Uganda including his passport name. The Ethiopian narrator “became Isaac as soon as [he] stepped on the plane to America” (AON: 175). The reason why he drops his former name and claims a new name is frightening of social alienation at his new home. Mahmood Arai and Peter Skogman (2009: 127-147) make a remarkable point on such social prejudices based on local names: “...individuals are treated differently in their new country depending on their names”. In the development of the novel’s story, the African narrator drops his name and picks different names to conceal his identity in various places and times not to be alienated in his new environments; such withdrawal of an original name could possibly help to integrate easily in the social affairs of the hosting communities. In *All Our Names*, the identity of the names is much layered and the individuals acquire all kinds of names to create a new identity. All the efforts of dropping old names are part of an identity formation and reconstruction as an apparatus of escaping various aspects of social alienation.

Many contemporary immigrant creative writings are frequently attempting to capitulate the immigrants’ naming and unnamings as a means of reconciling the identity dilemma of the characters’ role as a consequence of the political persecution of their original belongingness. Such inclination of reconstructing names can be taken as a typical manifestation of immigrants’ efforts of co-existence. Immigrant writers often use the technique of changing characters’ names in an attempt of showing how the immigrants are scared of the entire reaction of the hosting people’s social seclusion. The employment of namelessness characters becomes a common index in the immigrant fictions to display immigrants’ fights to acquire new identities to suit with the new lives. In this third target novel, we are introduced with a specific method in framing the connection between naming and unnamings to rebuild an identity when the characters are striving to cop up with the socio-economic of the accommodating society. Leaving the original and rebranding a new one can be linked to the displacement and relocation of the immigrants’ belonging, and this process of uprooting is an implication of downplaying the original identity and belonging. The practice of dropping his names is part of Isaac’s persistent attempt of reconstructing a new identity, and he is in the wake of that loss. Thus, from the experience of the represented immigrant, it can be said that the condition of social alienation is put as an immigrant writing due to the fact of exploring the quest of the individuals’ identity and the overall confusion.

Moreover, Namelessness in (AON) is presented as an important shade to visibly display the immigrants' dilemma of identity in the course of their new home. In many ways, the personality of the African narrator as a nameless figure makes him feel a state of social isolation, and he builds a new identity. This point leads the researcher to strongly argue (AON) shows not only the disturbing sense of identity of the immigrants, but also it portrays and narrates an align of a tradition of prioritizing and labeling immigrants' namelessness. Indeed, foregrounding the various aspects of alienation examining frustrations of the immigrants are the high qualities of the novel to be considered as an immigrant category. As described in the synopsis, the novel's story rotates on a young Ethiopian man whose real identity could not significantly help his entire life for socio-economic accommodation and integration.

Sometimes a person may drop the first name at some point of time with a personal aspiration of certain privilege. The Ethiopian Isaac expresses his optimism of acquiring some advantage by dropping his name in Uganda: "That city belonged to Uganda, but the capital, as long as it was nameless, had no such allegiances. Like me, it belonged to no one, and anyone could claim it" (AON: 4). This suggests an unusual way of attempting to achieve one's goal, and is considered an anomie; it is a sign that shows Isaac was in a clear state of identity reconstruction following his confusion. Isaac left his original home and gave up his original name and took new name so that to recreate a new identity at different circumstances. Thus, the overall concern of this novel revolves around the question of identity of the immigrant community in their fight to co-exist peacefully.

The researcher recognizes that the immigrants change their names in order to ease their hope of assimilation or deter discrimination in their new homeland or else to escape from a threat of social isolation. The Ethiopian Isaac decides to begin new life and for the purpose of fulfilling his dream, he throws down all his names given by his parents. For the persistence of Isaac's vision of constructing new identity, the author has not revealed the original name of the Ethiopian Isaac. Identity can be put as a peculiar quality of identifying the immigrants' fundamental background. Naming is also part of that struggle for socio-political co-existence. Social, economic and political pressures may harm the reinstallation of a new identity, and it may result in lack of confidence, stability, insecurity and further social isolation. So, it can be said that alienation and identity confusion are presented as interdependent complications of the immigrant communities.

The peculiar characteristic of an immigrant novel strongly reveals the portraits of the cyclical displacement and relocation in the process of materializing the immigrants' new lives. There is a firm connection between social isolation and identity whereby identity can be one of the chief reasons of unconscious reactions of physical and mental withdrawal in everyday experiences of the individual or the society. Let us see a similar story about changing one's names. Change of names has fundamental motives like what is elicited in the immigrant literature:

*Stories about changing names are often associated with the experience of migration. A new name for a new identity in a new land. Some newcomers feel that by changing their own names they might be able to integrate into a new society more easily or face less discrimination based their foreign sounding names.*  
*([https://reimaginingmigration.org/names-identity-and-immigration/.](https://reimaginingmigration.org/names-identity-and-immigration/))*

In a very clear justification, *All Our Names* mirrors one of the post-modern preoccupations of the African socio-political realities since the immigrant literature and post-colonial literature raise the matters of dislocation and re-locations of individuals or groups. To support this point, post-colonial theorists such as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin try to relate alienation with the feelings of dislocation or immigration. (AON) also explores the feelings of different aspects of alienation and other predicaments which prevail in the social, political and economic changes in the original country of the immigrants. Some of the facts of labeling *All Our Names* as a post-colonial-literature are the preoccupations of dislocation and immigration.

The use of namelessness characters in the creative works of most writers is part of the attempt of making a sense of frustrating awareness of the immigrants' lives. Sam Sacks (2014) suggests an important issue to support the existing feature of naming and unnamings in the literary works of immigrants: "namelessness has become an increasingly familiar trait in the fiction of exile in which immigrants acquire new titles to suit new lives" qtd in Tembo, Nick Mдика Hubert (2017: 158). Thus, dropping the original name and picking a new one is part of the process of identity building. The causes and results of the complexities of isolation and frustration of the immigrants is powerfully delineated in (AON).

In (AON), the Ethiopian Isaac comes across various confrontations of harassment, violence and racism in Africa and in his final destination. Throughout the novel, the dilemma of his identity is

presented as a characteristic of his recurrent changing names. In addition to his name, ‘D,’ he is given the names of Professor, Langston, Ali and Daniel in his dislocated and wandering life to his friends in Uganda. Later, he becomes ‘Isaac’ to his American friends, besides the thirteen names his parents given him as a child back in Ethiopia. Before leaving his home, his father used to name him a “Bird” when he was a youngster considering him “lived high in the sky, far above everyone else” (AON:179). The father used to refer the bird to symbolize the trope of not belonging in their socio-political arena.

The atmosphere surrounding the life of Isaac is very difficult and this is an expression of struggle with his internal emotion and longing for his freedom, but his dream is shadowed by unexpected trauma. In one way, the symbol of the bird climbing into the sky represents the freedom the narrator yearns for when he leaves his home village. In another way, the bird signifies the forecast of the narrator’s undetermined journey, a foreshadowing of a disillusioned life. Sometimes, as a human being, we try to live up to our names, and sometimes we try to run away from our names to escape from social isolation. But all the options in between our names is a crucial factor in developing our identity, and it helps to push us forward to confront challenges of life and career. The original name really determines the immigrants’ future career.

The narrator describes that his revolutionary friend was shot dead by soldiers in the Ugandan civil war after which Isaac unlawfully possesses a new passport with no picture in it, a plane ticket and a visa to the US (AON:254). Using the documents of his dead revolutionary friend, Isaac gets out of Africa and here after he takes his friend’s name as an official name: “became Isaac as soon as [he] stepped on the plane” to America (AON: 175).

The series of stories in *All Our Names* is thus shaped by two forms of dislocation and displacement: one cross-border and the other intercontinental. The two crossings dislocate the narrator’s identity and lead him to the feelings of not belonging to the host country and to relocate himself to suit to his new life. Thus, the kinds of dropping names and renaming at various circumstances indicate a practical process of compromising with the immigrants’ identity. One of the means of impositions of racial isolation of the immigrants is the systematic perception of these less privileged people who become victims of alienation based on their names.

Ruth Kwamboka (2014: 84) has given further explanation about the issue of naming in (AON). In her clarification, *All Our Names* “illustrates that a name is not enough to answer the question ‘who are you?’ because an individual is made up of stories and experiences”. The altering of names cannot only bring the psychological and socio-economic change of the immigrants; it also includes their historical and cultural backgrounds. This point supports strongly the argument that identity is much embedded by various invisible factors, and all the names Isaac acquires in his immigration life help him make up new personality as a means of shielding from social alienation. As the title of the novel, *All Our Names*, suggests, the interrelated impact of names and identities of the immigrant individuals is much emphasized. Technically, the immigrant protagonist is designed to get a new name as an instrument of confrontation the failed attempt of overcoming various forms of social isolation in his process of relocation. This immigrant, in *All Our Names*, is intimidated to get new names, and at certain times he is also forced to abandon his original names simply to construct a new identity.

As it is said previously, social alienation is a practice of social illness when people react to that experience differently; its sources are deep-rooted in the social institutions of the modern world. In this novel, Helen’s mother has a terrible fear of social segregation and stated her state of dilemma about the relationship her daughter has built with Isaac. Helen expresses the distress of her mother: “Helen be careful who sees you. If not for yourself, then for his sake” (AON.206). Since Isaac is a black African, Helen’s mother worries about the interracial relationship of her daughter with Isaac. The mother’s concern is social withdrawal by the neighbors if they find out this love affair, and there could be a painful consequence to Helen and her black husband. Her family fears the social prejudice from their community. In such situation, there develops an absence of meaningful relationship in Helen and Isaac’s love affairs, as the systematic social structure could not allow them to freely do what they want, determine their goals, and in general their entire life. Consequently, Helen fell in an entire state of limbo over the decision of her relationship with Isaac.

#### **4.4. Reflection of Meaninglessness in the Novels**

##### **4.4.1. Meaninglessness in *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* (BT)**

In his *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl (1985:137) has made a remarkable point about the meaning of life: "once an individual's search for meaning is successful, it not only renders him happy but also gives him the capability to cope with suffering". This description of life is also verified in (BT) in the manifestation of the African immigrants' search for meaningful life. To show the futility of their lives, they play a desperate memory game in front of an old map of Africa at the fading shop. In their game, one asks the other, "Name a dictator and then guess the year and country" (BT: 8). As it is depicted in the novel, the group expanded the game after they had played question and answer game for more than a year, "failed coups, rebellions, minor insurrections, guerilla leaders, and the acronyms of as many rebel groups as they can find" (BT: 8). These Africans absurdly ask and respond questions and answers like conversation to foreground the painful history of their continent. Their recent play of game is satirically cursing their past as it still haunts them to spoil their lives, they long for in the hosting country.

The novel the definitely depicts the degree of pain and the saga of agony to show the immigrants' experience of meaningless. The immigrant friends in (BT) are not like the African immigrants of the 1960s and 70s whose fundamental reason of leaving their country was for scholarship contribute in nation-building after they returned from abroad. Sepha Stephanos and his African fellow are portrayed with harrowing of frustration of the new lives and the people around them. These immigrant characters are taken as part of the more recent wave of the African immigrants who are largely refugees and asylum seekers running from civil wars and political chaos. They leave their countries after they experience various forms of dehumanization by their governments ultimately forces them to immigrate significantly. In those situations, due to the recurrent problems in the country where they hope to access relief, however, they experience futile and meaningless lives. Such state of meaningless feeling also prevails because of the experiences of the immigrants' inability to understand the current living environment.

The limbo of identity in the narrator's sentiment of immigration also aggravates the social and psychological confusions of the immigrants resulting in the absence of meaning in life. (BT) shows Stephanos' pointless and terrible condition of his childhood memory comparing with the recent

failed attempt of immigrant life. Let's see Stephanos's tribulation to find the meaning of his existence:

*Let alone behind the counter, I was hit with the sudden terrible and frightening realization that everything I had cared for and loved was lost or living on without me seven thousand miles away, and that what I had here was not a life, but a poorly constructed substitution made up of one uncle, two friends, a grim store, and a cheap apartment. (BT: 41)*

This extract is a typical instance to show a manifestation of story carrying and describing a state of meaninglessness and self-estrangement. Stephanos cuts himself from his past to commence a new life though his mission of original life is not very smooth as he expects; instead, he finds everything there is a reverse of his vision. Consequently, he finds out that everything is unworthwhile because of the unexpected life he encounters and the problems he faces to adjust himself with the new life. This extract also indicates that Stephanos could not verify the test of an optimistic life which automatically leaves him to hopelessness. Thus, he does not feel comfortable with the American life and with his separation from his family which results in a self-estrangement. In a retrospect narration, Stephanos shares his state of frustration after missing the loving family in his mother country. The researcher has identified that the stories of the novel are an extension of magnifying the immigrants' disconnection from modern lives, and these immigrants become desperate assuming they feel ignored in the new life.

On a different series of story (BT) depicts Stephanos' attempt to deceive his mother and brother who live in Ethiopia in his letters and phone calls. He said, "I tell them only I own my own business, and that business is okay" (BT: 41). This piece reflectively describes the reality of the African immigrants' personalities of hiding their new lives. Stephanos knows that his life is full of confusion, frustration, disintegration and meaninglessness. The real life and the ideal life are two extreme realities, and one can find the pangs of the African immigrants in their search for meaningful of life. Stephanos is a symbol of the immigrant people as he is flogged, frustrated and disappointed because of the unprecedented challenges. Thus, the target novel can be labeled as a very conscious depiction of the immigrant life in USA.

As it is mentioned in the previous chapter, contemporary immigrant literary novels usually employ fragmentation of stories to show the meaninglessness of modern human lives. The various stories

in (BT) are presented with spatial and chronological techniques, shifting forward and backward between present and past experiences of the immigrants to display the meaninglessness of their new lives. Sometimes it goes back to times in Africa; at other times the fragments capture the first years of the characters in America. For example, in the beginning part of the novel, the series of stories take place in May after the departure of Judith and Naomi from Logan Circle. The next chapter takes us eight months back to September to show the previous year around the time Judith moves into Logan Circle. This moving back and forth deliberately shows the disjointed and meaninglessness nature of life. Such fragmentation underlines the futility of the immigrants' search for a meaningful life and the predicaments of modern times.

The departure of Judith and Naomi from Logan Circle in that critical condition is a very painful loss of hope to Stephanos. The accidental separation of Stephanos from his dreaming family makes him trigger again the traumatic loss of his father and home land seventeen years ago during the 'Red Terror' in Ethiopia. The failure of making a cherished relationship with Judith and his failed attempt of forgetting the miserable past become the reasons for him to develop certain frustrating consciousness about life in US. To display the condition, Stephanos said, "There are already too many hours in the day; to worry about any one in particular is pointless" (BT: 35). His inclination to pursue an essential value in life seems unachievable; tackling any problem for purposeful life apparently becomes useless. In his narration about Christmas, Stephanos expresses his frustration after he realizes his dream of making a family with Judith becomes unattainable. Next to that excruciating night, he joins with his two immigrant friends laughing sarcastically at their isolation, mocking one another until, "the night faded into a blurry, indistinguishable memory" (BT: 180). This also illustrates the three friends' freedom of movements are restricted after realizing their hope of success in American society fails. As it is said earlier, various aspects of alienation can overlap in a single series, and the above abstract may describe a feeling of estrangement beside to the feeling of meaninglessness because of the interdependence of various modes of alienation. Consequently, African immigrants are victims of various difficulties that result in the ultimate state of meaningless.

As an extension of Stephanos's frustration, Judith is presented as a very materialistic type from the hosting society. Such unnatural communication jeopardizes Stephano's hope of presenting a gift and strengthening their relationship. The above extract also indicates the severe deterioration

of their relationship because of their financial and class differences when Stephanos tells Judith he prefers cheap gifts on Christmas. Unintentionally, Judith damages Stephanos's emotion, letting him feel shame and humiliation. As it is depicted in the novel, Judith represents a very materialist woman by far he could not achieve his desire to get her; thereby, the situation prevents him from maintaining a fulfilled relationship with such a materialist white American woman.

Sepha Stephanos struggles to reconcile the contradictory feelings of achieving his ultimate dream of becoming a successful settler though his dream is promising. Such hopelessness and helplessness are also presented in the story when his uncle has a strong promise to make Stephanos an engineer or a doctor. The uncle's dream for nephew is American education before returning home to contribute to the tasks of nation-building. Stephanos remembers his uncle's unfulfilled hope: "He used the grandest ambitions for me when I first arrived from Ethiopia.... You will be an engineer or a doctor.... Here in Logan Circle, though, I didn't have to be anything greater than what I already was." (BT: 41). This is what Berhane wishes for his nephew, but the fact Stephanos finds is different from Berhane's long time promise. Because of the dreadful experiences of his past and the melancholic reality of his present, Stephanos freezes in time, unable to make any promising steps to make a sensational life in US.

Furthermore, every bit of ambition that Stephanos would like to reach is rotten because of his economic constraints. He and his uncle encounter financial crises and moral humiliation by far worse than the condition in their home of origin. In this instance, the feelings of powerlessness is portrayed in the foreign experiences of the two relatives' lives of US. Berhane's repeated responses of desperation in his letters to US officials is an instance of exile despondence when every part of survival effort becomes meaningless. One of the letters he writes to the President of the US, Mr. Carter is a plea to stop the bloody war in Ethiopia. The letter sent to President Carter that Stephanos had finds from his uncle's closet reads: "... I have come here from Ethiopia, where I'm sure you know there is currently a bloody war happening. I am one of those people for whom nothing is left of their home country. Everything I have has been taken away from me...." (BT: 123). Berhane was severely haunted and frustrated by his hallucination of losing his families and close friends before he came to the US. So, Berhane's meaninglessness feeling of alienation is enumerated by his inability to entertain the immigration life and feeling of despair and loneliness. Hope has to be the first step of a meaningful life though Berhane could not test a meaningful life.

Berhane was not only frustrated and disappointed by the bloody civil war of his country after the 1974 revolution; he also lost the essence of life right after his separation from his society despite his patriotic sense. Stephanos tries to describe his uncle as a symbol of a nationalist person who never compromises his Ethiopian identity despite desperate conditions. The narrator states the patriotism of his uncle: “Berhane is not, in fact, a citizen- only a permanent resident, which he will remain until he dies, because in his heart, he will always be in Ethiopia” (BT: 122). The fundamental inference of this idea is Berhane’s sense of forced exile from his belonging was looking for safety to his life and his life would be endangered if he would not leave his country. This is a specific symbol of those immigrants who forcefully leave their beloved countries for safe places. As it is said in different historical narrations, the 1950s’ of Ethiopian youngsters and youths who left were hopefully anticipated to come back home after a peace prevailed. From the narrator’s description, it is observed that Berhane was a well-to-do and very respected person when he was in Ethiopia, but he works as a taxi driver hardly earning enough money to save and send back home. This may result in a psychological problem, and he goes through meaninglessness where he does not have any hope of having prosperity.

The very critical and recurrent sense of meaninglessness which prevails in (BT) is specifically described when Berhane, who is the only relative of the narrator in the United States, was forced to flee from his affluent lifestyle in Ethiopia. He was also winded up coming to America and forced to work for low wages as a cab driver. Living in a heavily populated Ethiopian community apartment complex, he is extremely nostalgic as evident by the collection of letters he kept carefully tucked away and his reminiscing of the past. In (BT), dissatisfaction of his life is also shown through comparison of his previous high-level job and education with his current status. It seems an irony to see a man who was once an important politician in Ethiopia, who always had a driver, now is driving customers for a living in America. Berhane supports his life by driving taxis though his profession is enough for a good merit-based job. However, such lack of opportunities are some of the reasons that magnify undesirable feelings of unequal treatment.

Similarly, the narrator tries to show us the depth of his uncle’s frustration. Such hopeless life makes Berhane confine himself in small apartment. At one instance, Stephanos shows us the unsatisfying condition of his uncle: “My uncle at the end of the red train line in one of the poorer suburbs of Maryland. In Ethiopia, my uncle barely ever figured into my family’s life. A powerful, wealthy

man, he lived just outside of Addis Ababa on a sprawling ranch that I visited only once as a child” (BT: 96).

In spite of his hard work to be as successful, Berhane could not visualize his dream because of social, economic and racial inequalities in US. So, lives for Stephanos and the likes of his uncle become extremely erratic because of the inadequate treatment of the hosting communities. Berhane’s ultimate meaningful life collapses when he could not achieve the taste of money, love, children marriage or enjoyment. Ultimately, he is denied prosperity, equality, freedom and opportunity the Americans provide to their citizens; consequently, he is extremely frustrated.

In a similar story, Stephanos’s mother had a long-lasting hope to see the financial progress of child in his immigration life. However, his life in US is not as successful as she wants him to be; in his new home land Stephanos barely makes money to support himself. Paradoxically, during one Christmas holiday he admits the money his mother sends him is more than the money he sends to her. Thus, he frequently tries to conceal his actual life. The researcher has also identified that (BT) portrays the immigrants’ unfulfilled dream of success as challenged by the unexpected circumstances.

More importantly, the immigrants’ hope of prosperity is presented with false promise of economic opportunity due to the general lack of recognition of the African immigrants’ contribution to the building of American society. The narrator describes such figment of promises to conceal the real challenges of his life and to make his parents ease of him: “To my mother in Ethiopia, I was the penultimate accomplishment of a long-awaited dream. The first aim of the refugee is to survive, and having done that, initial goal is quickly replaced by the general ambitions of life” (BT: 98). Based on this extract, it can be said that the postmodern world grants the individual an enormously puzzling world of opposing sights, confusing views and even a history that appears to be constantly dictated. It also shows that the contemporary meaninglessness type of alienation differs, in its form and context, from that of the previous because it has apparently transformed to a more complex broader and ultimately into a prevalent trend. Seeman has supported this idea by directly relating meaninglessness to control (powerlessness) when there is a feeling of helplessness; it inevitably results in the loss of meaningful substance in the victim’s life. This scenario shows Stephanos’

struggles to make sense of his memories and his role in the society, but he questions the validity of his life in US.

Viewing through the lens of the fiction, the researcher proves that the immigration life is horrendous in the prevalence of social and cultural alienation, racial stereotype and disconnection from the environment. Most importantly, the title of the novel vividly illustrates the rejection of the immigrants' participation by way of systematic prejudice. The title of the novel portrays some parts of the contemporary and global issues of immigration. The title, which is extracted from Dante's *Inferno*, resonates how terrible is to be uprooted. The narrator, in his implicit scenario, repeatedly tells us what it means to be displaced from one's community, from a distant mother nation, from the beloved persons. As depicted in the novel, the immigrant characters struggle to bear the unreachable economic wealth and equality (*the beautiful things that heaven bears*) in US. Kenneth, the Kenyan immigrant imagines the US as a land of happiness and wealth.

Immigrant writers vividly express the hard reality of the immigrants' embarrassment in their hosting countries through the personalities of various literary personas. It is Dinaw who has devoted the title of the novel based on what Joseph, the Congolese, justifies his sarcastic frustration of immigration life: "...some of the beautiful things that heaven bears.' It's perfect, I tell you. Simply perfect. I told my teacher that no one can understand that line like an African because that is what we lived through. Hell every day with only glimpses of heaven in between" (BT: 100). Such stories prove the immediate disillusionment of immigrants' experiences upon arriving to the US and setting unattainable dreams. To Joseph, the phrase, some of the beautiful things that heaven bears is an exact metaphoric allegory of the experiences they have in US. This extract, therefore, reflects the reality of American hospitality to African immigrants in contrast to the political discourse of US as exemplary to democracy, availability of equality and opportunities.

Many Americans consider their country as a place of tolerance and diversity for its residents; however, the reality of the immigrant characters disproves such narratives. As it is shown in the earlier discussion, African immigrant characters' dream of prosperity is challenged by the country's unwelcoming and inhospitable reality. In the ironic delineation of the title and through the narrative mouth of his characters, the novel severely criticizes the hosting society for their treatment of the immigrants and the black minorities. The title addresses the delusion of the

immigrants' dream by recognizing the pre-arrival expectations from the US, and the post-arrival shock at the US's lack of opportunity and the trouble of expounding these problems to families back home.

The series of stories in (BT) implicitly and explicitly describe the apparent lives of the immigrants while trying to mask the hard fact of their overall immigration environment. The immigrant characters know how far they could realize the American dream as families back home perceive them as successful as what they wanted. The tense relationship they have with their country families develops a state of confusion on their American dreams. Stephanos' fabricated story is what his mother wants to hear about his US life. "I tell them only that I own my own business, and that business is okay. Never good. Never bad" (BT: 41). However, the truth is Stephanos is not able to pay his store's rent and utility bills in several months and is on the verge of expulsion. Stephanos tries to convey the intense pressure of his US life to be successful in America where the country is believed to guarantee wealth and fortune for all human beings.

As it is said earlier, Stephanos' life in US is predominantly described by the pretexts of prosperity. His mother and brother consider his life would come true in the destination of many immigrants' dream country, USA. But, in contrast to the imagination of many third world generations, American streets are not paved with gold. The novel delineates such false perceptions to overemphasize the real-life of the immigrants because they know what their parents and relatives wrongly perceive about the hosting country. There is a deliberate foregrounding of issues as the world learn about ambitious parents who expect an unlimited fortune after sending their children to the so-called "land of promises". Hence, the immigrant friends in (BT) feel shame and anger by their failure to achieve their parents' dreams. This probably gives Stephanos relief for some time but as time goes on, frustration and hopelessness prevail on him after realizing his attempt is futile.

The fact is that the three friends' painful life continues more miserable even after seventeen years of immigration. Their hope to change their exile life is on the verge of collapsing. Thus, Stephanos is not happy when he understands his financial constraints after living for decades in US. He speaks desperately to himself: "Where is the grand narrative of my life? The one spread out and read for signs and clues as to what to expect next" (BT: 147). He loses his entire hope of affluence after realizing his life is not showing any progress as his age gets runs fast. He desperately runs the store

as it could not bring any tangible change in his life, not adding any value. He has no power to control or change what is happening around him. More importantly, life becomes meaningless. Ultimately, he tries to hide his state of purposelessness in the communication he makes with his parents. The novel shows us such the huge disappointment of the immigrant's reality on the one hand and the humanistic concern about the immigration on the other hand.

#### **4.4.2. Meaninglessness in *How to Read the Air* (HRA)**

As it is stated in the conceptual section, meaninglessness can be described by the individual's sense of disregarding the events in which he or she is engaged, or when the individual's minimal standards for clarity in decision-making are not met. HRA tries to show the feeling of understanding the experience of the immigrant characters. Before Mariam leaves her mother land, she has a better expectation to her hosting country; she imagines the streets of the new home paving with gold. However, the reality on the ground was quite the reverse, her life stretches by socio-economic challenges. Jonas narrates what his mother used to realize about her husband before she arrived at US: "...pictures of him standing in front of a large house with a yard; picture of him in a suit with a briefcase in hand..." (HRA: 6). The prosperous life she dreamed could not be gained even after three decades. Similar to Mariam, many African people have wrong perception to the immigrated fellows' experience in their journey and how they integrate with the hosting society. Many Africans misperceive that life is easy in US as long as they have no any confirmed information, and Mariam's thought about her husband as successful was quite unrealistic. She was not able to make sense of the event, and it became difficult to predict the result of her imagination. Seeman explains such failure of expectation as a meaninglessness form of alienation. Despite the fact that the immigrants come to US with full of optimism and boundless hopes, sometimes the reality appears to be totally the opposite. This feeling of meaninglessness creates a vastly confusing and bewildering emotion.

The magnitudes of the difficulties among the immigrant communities are also be identified in this novel. For example, Mariam who ineffectively adjusts the new social roles also takes part in relatively restricted social networks. This experience is also disrupted by a desperate internal sentiment to materialize her ambition about her husband. Jonas describes her desperate sentiment after she unexpectedly encounters with the reality: "What she wanted was to see him somehow

fully alive in a picture, breathing, walking, laughing, and living his life without her” (HRA:7). The fact she learnt about the life of her husband was very miserable. Besides, she had no power to control or change incidents around her; consequently, she could not test the meaning of life as she had imagined. Mariam tries to confront the absurdity of the condition of the immigration in which life could only be meaningful if and only if she succeeds in realizing the kind of life that she imagined decades ago. This scenario portrays that she was not able to acquire relevant information to predict the reality of the hosting home. Thus, the relevant information she could not access was a prerequisite for a sense of control. Such availability of information could have allowed her to predict the outcomes of her behavior: information access and the resulting sense of meaninglessness are tied directly with powerlessness.

Furthermore, Jonas narrates his parents’ ungrateful condition about Mariam’s unconscious use of terms ‘fall’ and ‘agony’ in her effort to justify the immigration life so as to protect her decaying marriage. As a result, at some point of her life, Mariam gives up the persistent strive of improving her family: “Fall was the repose that made both possible and bearable, and now here she was with her husband next to her, heading headlong into an early-fall afternoon with only the vaguest ideas of who they were becoming and what came next” (HRA: 13). Yosef does not make an effort equally to protect their marriage from falling apart because his traumatic life in US makes him hopeless to understand his wife and the decadence of his family. Their relationship is bounded with emotion of uncertainty and lack of open and meaningful discussion as long as they don’t understand the events in which they take part. Both of them frequently express a discomforting blame of each another which eventually create the ultimate result of downhearted and abandoned forms of feelings.

Related to the above, Jonas reflects his hopelessness of the three years serious relationship he had built with his wife; however, they do not show respect each other as husband and wife. Let’s see what Jonas tells his wife regarding their relationship: “We had been married for three years, but we had spent much of the past six months hardly talking except to exchange pointed attacks at each other” (HRA:15). Such poor and undesirable communication is a desperate manifestation of life without long term principle. This state of despondency about their future is an implication of their disregarded value of their lives. Even they could not make any attempt to discuss and avoid

their problems as husband and wife. They live together without caring for one another because they lost hope to reconstruct their relationship.

As it is depicted in (HRA), the turning point for Jonas is when he understands his relationship with Angela flattens to the lowest after he lost his job at the immigration center. To save their failing marriage, Angela gets him a part-time job for teaching at a school. However, he knows it is unlikely to be fruitful in spite of her efforts. Jonas hopelessly reacts of the crumbling relationship: “Even had I wanted to, I couldn’t have said to Angela. While she claimed to have forgiven me for lying to her, the damage remained. Her trust in me, and our relationship, was far from repaired” (HRA: 53). Had Jonas surmounted and handled the circumstance as equal as Angela, their relationship would not have ended. Rather, he accelerates the end despite Angela’s positive mentality and persistent. He is frustrated by his unwelcoming personal experience which produces an absence of meaning in his relationship with Angela. Human beings by nature are social creatures striving to fulfill a meaningful social co-ordination and relationship. As social creatures, we seek pleasure from our lives as long as we share emotion, passion and love.

Because of the reluctant and powerless personality Jonas develops with Angela, he is very frustrated with his life which brought him dissociation and isolation: “...I had begun to sense that my place in the world was rapidly shrinking...” (HRA: 53). Such kind of desperation could possibly prevail as a result of his helpless sentiment which might lead him to self-estrangement and ultimately, his entire life may become futile. In the novel, African immigrants are portrayed psychologically haunted which could be labeled it as a feeling of insecurity and striving to fit in while mourning the loss of their cultural heritage and social status. The culture of the hosting community is systematically imposed upon the immigrants. As such, variables such as cultural differences, economic low status and non-proximity to family and friends all play their role to worsen the couple’s life; such variables which make some parts of the immigrant’s lives preferable differ from one person to the next.

More spectacularly, there has a similitude of commitment to the portrait of the psychological makeup of the immigrants while facing challenges to reach to their final destination. Jonas retrospectively re-counts his father’s state of traumatic memory: “My father, Yosef Getachew Woldemariam, dreamed of boxes until the last days of his life (P: 42). This portrait of

psychological trauma to the first-generation immigrant disturbs the rest of his family and till the day of his life. The presentation of Yosef's life with the power of reviewing the past suggests that a significant number of immigrants' journey affect the second and third immigrant generations in their attempt to integrate with the hosting people. Thus, the novel dedicates vast coverage to the immigrants' trauma and psychological disturbances, symbolizing their terrible journey by 'box'. Such traumatic experience haunts Yosef until his death; it also affects the whole of his family.

Seeman (1959: 789) has argued about meaninglessness when "the individual is unclear as to what he ought to believe...". In the post-modern literary works, characters are denoted when their daily experiences create some difficulties to them to predict the outcomes of their actions. As a contemporary literary piece, the target novel vividly presents such a confusion as outcome of the difficult situation through Angela's life experience and the way she loses her job as a lawyer. She describes the moment: "when a judge handed down the second defeat two months later, Angela was fully convinced that she was going to be fired" (HRA:79).

Angela's financial source stalls, and this economic crisis deteriorates her relationship with Jonas, fueling their uncertainty of rapprochement. This complicated environment suggests that a meaningless relationship is built by materialism; the decline of financial provision also ruins the constructed relationship. Both Jonas and Angela are unfortunate for facing the same destiny of losing their jobs. And this incident is to be labeled as a meaninglessness aspect of alienation because Jonas and Angela are intensely suffered from loss, futility and emptiness.

The researcher repeatedly labeled HRA as a contemporary literary work based on the style and the thematic pre-occupation concerns of the immigrant people. It intensely highlights the overall reality of the immigrants quite different from the traditional novels which concern that the thematic subject has to be as it should be. Because of the discordancy of expectation, depression and reality, many immigrants fail to enjoy their lives. As depicted in (HRA), Mariam's perception to her new life clashes with the reaction of her husband. Jonas also explains his parent's state of incompatibility from the early stage of their companionship: "Take one town, one man, one apartment, and one unborn child and them all up together and what do you have if not the definition of a life?" (HRA: 89). In this scenario, Mariam is very exhausted with the exile life while challenging new culture, language and faces. Such feeling of desperation creates an ungrateful

state of reaction. Also, she is unable to integrate with the new life due to the overall experiences; her husband's unwelcoming treatment and the entire cultural mix up of new and old exacerbate the fragmentation of her marriage. Jonas describes his childhood memory by way of his mother's severe social reaction when she takes him to his first day school: "It wasn't until we arrived at the school that her mood changed. It was almost possible at that moment to breathe in the confusion and anxiety that came with her seeing herself surrounded by women as young as or younger than she was, but without the bruises and uncertainty of language she carried (HRA: 91). Her dream is uncertain after she realizes everything in the new country is an incompatibility of her wish.

Mariam is very frustrated and ashamed for associating herself with a group of women who speak language she could not understand; she considers herself as an entity of otherness. Jonas describes the seemingly uncontrollable aggression of his father over his mother where by Mariam represents those immigrant women who are painfully treated by their husbands. This is typically seen in the contrast between Mariam's attitudes before and after arriving at the school. She compares herself with American mothers, and the relationship they have reveals a visible discrepancy. Desperately, she also imagines the physical and psychological mishandlings by her husband. In the novel, this situation of social differences is portrayed to show the fundamental social and cultural incongruity which could possibly create frustration and hopelessness in the immigrants. It is possible to suggest that a meaningless aspect of alienation is well portrayed whereby Mariam becomes foreign to the world she is living.

The experiences of the immigrants are used in (HRA as an instrument to explore the preoccupation of the immigrant family and the reaction of the hosting people by virtue of the reality. The real life of the African communities in USA is widely proliferated. Putting the reality in an immigrant writing is a means of exploiting and propagating the fact the immigrant community experiences. To vividly explicit the situation of the immigrants, the immigrant communities are delineated specifically in a way of emphasizing their lack of clear understanding of the events they take part. When a person is unable to feel what happens or the reason why, there is an instance of alienation in the form of meaninglessness. Jonas realizes the confusion about his future when his wife reminds him that he loses himself. He narrates it from the perspective of his wife: "A few weeks later Angela told me I lacked a clear sense of identity.... you don't have any idea who you are, do you, Jonas" (HRA: 100).

The life he led was haphazard and without positive vision and where he could destine. It is described that Jonas' sense of confusion from the traumatic experience of his parents' uncontrollable aggression is one of the reasons of his frustration. As it is discussed earlier, his life is prone by the situation of his parent's failing relationship. Thus, Angela expresses her frustration on upholding her marriage after understanding she could not derive meaning from the things she is engaged. His wife's complaint marks the moment of Jonas's identity confusion when his parents' marriage fails. The fracture between his parents after the road trip is also one important remark of his childhood memories.

The role of a family in shaping and influencing who the children are going to be is highly significant. When parents are unable to mold their children positively as useful to themselves and their communities and make them mentally strong to keep the prosperity of the next generation, the children could possibly loss the meaning of their existence. Because of poor follow up of irresponsible parents, youngsters may lose and vanish their dreams. The role and responsibility of family determines the quality and the later personalities of the children. In a similar manner, Jonas grew experiencing such unblessed parents as a victim of a broken home. His life is severely hampered because of lack of his parent's experience of attachment and good personality:

*By the end of their life together my mother and father were no longer able to stand being in the same room with each other for more than a few minutes. If one walked into the living room, the other soon left for the kitchen.... I used to wonder if there was a space large enough on earth for them to inhabit at the same time (HRA: 105).*

It is hard fact to suggest parents are models to their children either to achieve what they desire in their lives or to the other way. Jonas' parents are not good example to him; they expect a better new condition than that of the war tormented homeland but continue miserable life. Understanding the reality of his parent's, Jonas could not bear confidence in a meaningful life. Ultimately, he begins to hide every bit of information about his parents, rather keeps telling lies to his wife, students, workmates and boss. He further deteriorates the situation of his work and the relationship that he has built with his Angela by his behavior of prevarication, and their marriage is exposed to be superficial. This extract is a continuation of the post-modern literary quality since it shows a

blurred and conflating the reality with fiction or the line between the fact and the fiction is not clear.

As it is said frequently, the very remarkable idea presented in (HRA) is Jonas's journey to retrace his parents' life. He describes his mother as a desperate immigrant mother who lost all the possible ways of visualizing her life in the so-called dream country: "... my mother just before she gave this land up for good and headed out east for the modern city and apartment of her dreams" (HRA:115). Mariam has an unprecedented optimism of the fundamental amenities of life whereby she does not get what she hopes from her immigration home. Mariam's despondency is the manifestation of meaninglessness of her new life; her understanding of events she engages in is unsuccessful. Yosef's untimely death is also an expression of meaninglessness in line with Seeman's contextualization as a state of futility and the condition of frustration about the future.

In his imaginative monologue, Yosef foreshadows failure and the overall condition of his life in the host country, US. Jonas takes the irony of his father's fate as, "I can see now that death was only the start of the terror- the first and easiest thing to name. Better than to move slowly, to brace yourself for the final fall" (HRA: 147). By any circumstance, death can and will never be the beginning of terror unless for the sake of exaggerating the pain and agony of the immigrants before the final days of their lives or unless the dead one has a natural mode of revivification. Before he dies miserably, Yosef is so confused to foresee any glimpse of hope; rather, he praises death as the ultimate choice. Running for his life from death and looking for a better life, he comes across various challenging borders though his life ends without showing any progress. In literary works, meaninglessness can be depicted as how difficult it can be to predict the outcomes of the characters' actions. Unexpectedly, the hero falls not accomplishing his dream of prosperous life.

In (HRA), characters are artistically presented as what they should represent and how they should display real-like lives of the African immigrants. As it has been said repeatedly in this best literary work, the life of the first-generation immigrants who suffer from various experiences of challenges in their honeymoon time is shown. One of the stressful feelings that Mariam faces in her journey is delineated as pointless scenario relating it with the inability to clearly identify the mission. The couple's recreational journey also shows a despairing and haphazard act of time because their memory is distorted and could not test the purpose of a valuable life. As Jonas painfully describes

his mother and father decide to take their honeymoon pointlessly: “That the direction they were heading in was the opposite of what was intended only made it better. It was like being thrown to the wind, flung aimless into the sky with only a breeze to steer you in whatever direction it chose...” (HRA:220). This excerpt explicitly shows one of the fundamental features of directionless and hopeless family since it clearly illustrates our understanding of the phenomenon of alienation in the form of meaninglessness. Imagine the pleasure of a family marriage trip, but the way they take the trip is an expression of discontentment. Mariam and Yosef dreadfully struggle to find meaning and to validate their existence despite their unfortunate wedlock ends because of the husband’s abusive behavior on his wife. They could not drive meaning from their honeymoon journey as a healthy couple.

Explicit and implicit strategy is used to depict each and every fictional character’s personality so as to convince the readers that this fictional work is the reflection of the real world. The represented fictional immigrants come to their second home with optimism of better life even though the reality appears to be totally the opposite of their expectation. Nobel, P. (1988) has made an important remark as the root cause of those third world dislocated and relocated individuals:

*The overwhelming majority of the refugees originate in the Third World. The direct causes of their flight are conflicts kept alive mostly by super-power politics and by weapons forged and manufactured at bargain prices in the rich countries, who export death and destruction, and import the natural and partly processed products of the poor countries.*  
(P :23)

It is no doubt to agree with Nobel on the fundamental causes of displacements for Africans to leave their sweet homes not realizing what they will face in the host country. Predominantly, (HRA) concerns with basic issues, which the third target novel as well is preoccupied on. These voluntarily or forcefully displaced Africans were seeking safer places to their life since their countries were in great state of political turmoil. In (HRA), it has been shown that the immigrants hope to adopting the new home. This novel is a witness to such processes, and the consequences they face is a state of alienation in a very complicated world. The narrator repeatedly states how Yosef feels upon the cold bloodedness of his country. The situation in the port of Sudan is also another threatening experience he comes across to arrive his dream land.

Realistically, Yosef portrays the hard life of African immigrants as Jonas describes: “To be a refugee once was hard enough-you abandon home and family in order to start all over again in a foreign country with nothing. To be one again, before you had even settled, was pointless. After that, one had to accept that you could never run far enough; God or devil would always find you” (HRA: 231-32).

This extract vividly explains the preliminary reason of frustration Yosef unexpectedly experiences in his immigration life. The time he spends at the refuge center is an expression of desperation, reacting at the placement in the refuge center whereby his minimal standards for clarity of decision making are not met. In the real world, displaced and refuge-camped people are considered widely as helpless who need a global support regardless of their identity, color and political ideology since they have lost many aspects of the fundamental human rights and basic values. So, based on Seeman’s premise, the form of alienation he perceived in the center is considered as meaninglessness and powerlessness, and Yosef’s fortune is pointless and futile, unable to escape from such situations.

#### **4.4.3. Meaninglessness in *All Our Names* (AON)**

The fragmented presentation of narratives in (AON) also mirrors the predicament and disconnection realities of the lives of the immigrants in the modern world. The confusions of immigrants when confronting challenges in the US are also disclosed. In AON, similar to other target novels, the disconnected fragmentation of stories can be considered as manifestation of a meaningless lives of the people. The narrative strategy of interweaving disconnected and nonlinear fragments are initially to convey and to disorient the readers besides portraying the characters’ chaotic lives. Fragmentation of developing stories illustrates a shallow sensibility by developing countless details with no central purpose. Without a unifying meaning, these fragments of stories overwhelm something identifiable in any aspect of contemporary life.

Further, it is very rewarding to love someone who is different from you in terms of race, culture, identity, religion, and more. When we are open with each other, we can broaden each other’s perspectives, approach the world in different ways, and even find that there is a connection in our differences. Interracial relationship is the other global issue in which (AON) raises as a very concerning subject. Interracial couples may also conflict when asserting their values if they differ

from each other's, based on racial or cultural identity. There are strategies to help you better handle what comes your way when you are in an interracial marriage. Such mixed-race relationships have reached to the peak of the height in the US though the social attitude has not completely changed the old tradition of perspective.

In AON, certain form of alienation is shown through the endangered love affair of Helen and Isaac. After the stereotypical incident at the restaurant, Helen is frustrated to maintain her relation with Isaac as before holding each other their hands in public areas. She explains her relationship with Isaac:

*What I feared most for Isaac and me happened that afternoon in the diner. It seemed impossible now for us to move forward, and I assumed after that lunch that if there was any relationship left it would live on the strictest privacy, late at night and exclusively in his apartment, with all the blinds closed and the lights off (AON:49).*

Unfortunately, interracial couples still experience difficulties, for the fact that racism exists in our society on a deep level. Ideally, love should have no bounds in this regard. A mixed-race couple can sometimes also be the source of meaningless sentiment in addition to the tough reality of the social prejudice and discrimination in our day to day lives. Speaking ideally, love should have no bounds because of color differences. However, the love interference between Isaac and Helen dealt with the challenge of hopelessness others could harbor pessimism about their relationship. As far as the race-based isolation continues, the victim of the prejudice is not only the Ethiopian (Isaac), it is also the white American (Helen). As interracial couple, Helen and Isaac possibly confront extra challenges outside of their marriage. The reactions and challenges emerge from the social perspective that make their lives futile and hopeless. This frustration prevails because of the social isolation which in turn causes them to lose hope and which sociological researchers of alienation label as meaninglessness. Since meaninglessness is a failure to apprehend the reality, the individuals may unable to find a substantial and significant meaning from their lives. Immigrant novels by their nature conflate the real experiences of the human daily lives through the creativity of fictional stories. Thus, characters in (AON) are presented as desperate and empty of hope to show how exactly the immigrants face the American community.

In spite of his unprecedented optimism of his parents and country, Isaac is frustrated after realizing that his father could not allow him to go to school and his country is in civil war. He frequently articulates his desperation and the vainness of life. This aura of alienation exacerbates his desperation since he could not attain the meaning of life. A metaphorical simile is used to emphasize the deep sense of futility of the immigrants, depicting Isaac as a person detained behind a cell. Isaac states it: "I felt as if I had been into a prison" (AON.178). Isaac convinces himself that living in such circumstance is like being confined in prison with no basic human rights.

This is one of the complementary reasons why Isaac decides to go far from his home where there might be any fortune to bring him to new life. Bill Ashcroft and et al. (2000:9) have raised a point that strengthens this point, "A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation resulting from migration". Life is not as easy as many have expected in the metropolitan cities as long as that person continues confronting the experience of the immigration. African immigrants may not have freedom as others due to the existence of unbalanced attitudes of the hosting countries towards the African culture. Isaac and other immigrants set goals and dream big to make a better future, but they realize their dream is meaningless. Meaninglessness aspect of alienation is fundamentally an existential issue that reflects the life of the immigrants.

Dislocation and relocation have become increasingly familiar traits in the immigrant novels in which immigrants acquire new places to suit new lives. In the same manner, the Ethiopian Isaac is very optimistic in the environment where he struggles with the future escaping the trauma of the past. In (AON), his unsuccessful efforts of making meaningful life is portrayed through the views of the narrator; when Helen wishes to meet his mother and to call her as mother, he reacts a desperately. Helen describes the condition: "He became silent. What I had said bothered him. I didn't know him well enough yet to understand why, but I felt the distance expanding between us. ... 'it doesn't do us any good to talk about things that will never happen', he said" (AON: 32). This part typically shows his unprecedented ambition to be part of the American society leaving all his original traces behind and reconstructing new identity, but it ultimately is the feeling of self-estrangement. Observing his reaction, Helen promises herself not to ask him about his family again. They have a lot of miseries, and they could not even treat one another as husband and wife.

This novel tries to show the immigrants' struggle to survive the basic challenges in the hosting country. The delineation of the critical state of the immigrants' alienation is the portrayal of the

endangered love affair of Helen and Isaac. After the stereotypical incident at the restaurant, Helen desperately decides to uphold and reconsider the relationship that she has with Isaac as before. But she is insecure upon her future with Isaac; she could not be confident for significant, purposeful and meaningful conjugal life. She despondently narrates her confusion upon the future of her relationship with Isaac as is quoted previously the extract from (AON: 49). It is important to become intimate with your partner and share your vulnerabilities in any romantic relationship. This is especially true for interracial couples, as one partner may experience hardships that the other has not had to face.

The racial and cultural differences in an interracial marriage may not necessarily cause the relationship to fail. What can cause an interracial marriage to fall apart is the inability of a couple to handle their differences and failure to talk about the stresses one or both of them are experiencing. It is part of the novel to see people experiencing a potential cost of lose the one you love because of a social prejudice at this twenty-first century. As a consequence of such undesirable experience, a state of frustration and hopelessness prevail through the inequality perception, the systematic dehumanization and the social stratification the modern immigrants. The above extract literally elucidates the reality of the immigrants' predicaments in the eyes of the victim community. labeling fiction as an asset of sociological evidence can render to magnify the immigrants' act of confrontation to the various forms of alienation in the place of their hosting country.

#### **4.5. Reflection of Self-estrangement in the Novels**

##### **4.5.1. Self-estrangement in *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* (BT)**

If the concept of alienation related with immigration is similar with the issues of the outsider individual or with the feelings of otherness, the alienation entities shown in (BT) are the senses of self-estrangement based on interpersonal relations of the imaginative characters. The portrayal of self-estrangement in most of the story is conflated with and derived from the other dimensions of alienation. For example, the narrator's uncle, Berhane Selassie does not possess significant private property; neither he has a family in his long time in the USA. He estranges himself in a single rental room and spends the rest of his single life hallucinating the traumatic incidents of his past

and the political uncertainty of his beloved country. He is lonely but not alone. The negative effects of alienation can be depression and inferiority complex, which many immigrants experience.

Here is a portrayal of Berhane's ironic feeling when Stephanos visits him after a long time: "That he is only one man, with no wife, mother, or children, gives him an independence and peculiarity that no one here is comfortable with" (BT: 116). The narrator uses paradoxical expression of his uncle's discomfort because the novel does not show us in any of its parts portraying any interest of embracing the immigrants by the hosting society. Berhane excludes himself from social and cultural participations of the society as he is very disappointed by the way they perceive him; he does not show any interest of association understanding his life is terribly affected by the painful experiences in US. As a result, his ultimate life is entirely absurd, solitary and isolated in contrast to what people imagine about immigrants in US. His immigrant life reminds him of his otherness, that he is from a different socio-cultural society, and his dissociation is not only because his effort to meaningful socialization with others is unsuccessful; he also chooses to live dissociating from anyone around after desperately realizing he could not change his destiny. Self-estrangement is a consequence of various aspects of alienation in which post-modern society is believed to be prone to.

Moreover, it has been shown in (BT) that the immigrants failed their attempt of recreating a new identity after they recognized a socio-economic difference in their hosting communities. The situation causes them to ruin the strong relationship they imagine for so long. Stephanos is depicted as an isolated immigrant in his attempt to act and pretend how difficult the situation is due to identity differences. He states such state of difficulty: "I thought I saw the situation now clearly for what it was- a case of mistaken identity. I had forgotten who I was, with my shabby apartment and run-down store... (BT: 80). For the Stephanos kinds of immigrants, life could be a bit threatening to build friendship if the socio-economic gap is visibly incompatible. As a result, African immigrants become victims of social isolation. Stephanos estranges himself since he feels that low self-esteem and socio-economic status prevents him from materializing his conjugate intimacy with Judith. Self-estrangement is a way to balance his inferiority and to distance himself from the reality. The realization of the disparity between his actual condition and his inner nature becomes superficial and void of morality because the tension between his personal freedom and

his relationship with Judith is the central problem of his dissociation. After such frustration, he stops to visualize the impossible, and determines to accept the reality.

In addition, here is an estrangement form of alienation that is frequently portrayed by modernist writers to reflect the persistent characterization of a superficial relationship. The premises of this discussion are based on the fact literary modernism is basically about modern thought, modern characters or practices which powerfully affect human surroundings and their entire relationships. One of the dispositions which causes Stephanos to estrangement is the superficial relationship he builds in his unprecedented ambition. In (BT), it is described that the relationship between Stephanos and Judith is unpredictable and unattainable. At the beginning, he learns from Judith that her husband left her, and he is very hopeful to strengthen his emotional relationship with her and her daughter with. One time, Stephanos finds Judith's husband sleeping in her house, and she introduces them: "Sepha, this is Ayad. Ayad, Sepha. He's my next-door neighbor" (BT: 207). Stephanos is her next-door neighborhood. And this is an entire instance of scorn to Stephanos. This scenario is very absurd for breaking the natural relationship. Judith's materialistic personality would not allow her to accept Stephano, as she realizes he could never fulfill her worldly expectations. This ridiculous way of introducing her husband to Stephanos is an indication of giving no credit to their unprecedented intimacy. And such scorn leads Stephanos to further self-estrangement for his inability to fulfill her materialistic sentiment and intrusion.

It is noted (BT), a turning point of Stephanos's disposition is his highest experience of self-estrangement. Stephanos shows strong interest to take part in the Christmas ceremony to notice his attachment into the American society, but when Judith leaves him a shocking note, his interest disappears, experiences aloneness, dejection and anger, and ultimately dissociates from everything he loves. He desperately recounts his feeling of ultimate thwarting: "Judith and Naomi had gone to Connecticut. I had nothing to lose." (BT: 163). When he learns from Judith's letter that she and Naomi are going to her family to celebrate Christmas, he is crushed. Losing his hope of getting married the white woman, he hires a prostitute; he offers the presents to the sex worker telling her to give the gifts to someone she cares for. Such emotional incident causes him to further withdrawal, isolation or dissociation. Alongside to that, Stephanos remains distant from others and even to some extent from himself when he understands the failure of his entire immigration life, especially when he realizes his life in US is not showing progress to his dream. He describes his

experience of consciousness to his painful feeling of solitude even after toiling for a long period of time:

*... there is no mystery left in any of those buildings for us, and at time I wonder how there ever could have been... Left alone behind the counter, I was hit with the sudden terrible and frightening realization that everything I had cared for and loved was either lost or living on without me... what I had have was not a life, but a poorly constructed substitution made up of one uncle, two friends, a grim store, and a cheap apartment (BT: 40-48).*

This section reveals Stephanos' inability to feel the value of real connection to anything in his new life. He lives in a slow motion in his crumbling neighborhood contemplating a state of dissociation and loneliness. Even after a significant year, Stephanos tells us that his ambition of becoming a full man collapses because he is not significantly accepted as equal as others in the host country. So, such feeling of estrangement develops a state of powerlessness and meaninglessness. Therefore, it can be inferred that Stephanos' American vision is a failure. Stephanos is typical to represent the multidimensional disconnected lives of immigrants in modern times whereby self-estrangement deprives them from participations, which possibly result in meaninglessness, normlessness and powerlessness forms of alienation.

There is also a moment of alienation behind the counter which reveals immigrants are distracted by homesickness and lack of connection to the American people. The situation may prevail and become critical when the feelings are more amplified in the place where immigrants are in the middle of the community who do not understand their severe feelings. Stephanos notices a similar experience: "I thought about how years from now I would remember this with a crushing, heartbreaking nostalgia, because of course I knew even then that I would eventually find myself standing here alone" (BT:103). Really, Stephanos frustrated and unsatisfied with his life and most of the people around him. After two decades of immigration, he still feels as alien and as a new descendant contemplating his failure and nostalgic memories of his original home. One of the critical issues the theory of alienation raises is the confusion of the prejudicial identity of the immigrants. Salman Akhatar (1995: 105) says "Immigration from one country to another is a complex psychosocial process with lasting effects on an individual's identity... emergence of a hybrid identity". This could probably be why the issue of identity is often times controversial and

puzzling particularly for those who are culturally and physically uprooted, or who grow up in two worlds simultaneously.

When we come back to BT, Stephanos and his immigrant friends are trapped in between who they are and who they were in their struggle to make their dream true; they face difficulties as both Africans and Americans. BT projects the internally reflective voice of the narrator to reveal his recurrent isolation. Stephanos's search for himself indicates the harsh loneliness and desire of association in the hosting community on which many immigrants are challenged. He once said, "How was I supposed to live in America when I had never really left Ethiopia?"(BT: 140). This extract seems to notify a failed journey toward realizing his immigration goal because of the discrepancy between his future and the past he could not escape. After crushing personal and financial crisis, he walks out of his store, leaving the door wide open which is an implication of the situation he desperately accepts. The extract also indicates how attempts to cultural adjustment cause identity misperception for many immigrants. Though Stephanos tries to assimilate into American culture, he finally becomes conscious to sense the US is not as welcoming as its rhetoric.

As an immigrant character, Stephanos lets most of his immigration life in silent observation of the world around him. His estrangement is sharply noticed in his recurrently failed attempt to imitate to the socio-economics of the Americans. Many times, he takes evening walks around the Logan city alone observing the elegant houses, getting glimpses at the American luxurious and classy lives. He calls his viewing of beautiful houses "window shopping" (BT: 53). The main intention of the novel about Stephanos' views of these very expensive houses is not to introduce the beauty of the city but to portray relatively the immigrants' low economic status which could probably be the reason of their self-estrangement.

In a different occasion, Stephanos follows an older tourist couple out of his store onto the G2 bus all the way to Dupont Circle and exits behind them. He even waves goodbye to them, despite the fact that they are unaware of his presence (BT: 74-78). The tourists even do not notice him, which would allow him to label his invisibility. He perceives this as he is nothing and insignificant to others, and this self-misperception is another burden of his estrangement. By portraying Stephanos as a lone wander, the novel shows us that immigrants in the US are suffering from the feelings of painful loneliness. The modern African perspective is also disclosed and delineated to reveal how

the American culture and policy of inclusiveness is systematically designed to deny accessibility for the immigrants. Despite the fact that Stephanos lived in America for about two decades of years, he still continues searching for his place. Thus, this scenario creates a sense of desperation and loneliness after he observes the absurdity of the American culture.

Recurrent feelings of African immigrants' dissatisfaction in US, as it is put in (BT), are challenged by terrible psychological alienations by way of shifting the blame of their disillusioned destiny to themselves. Being Africans, their identity prevents them from fully assimilating into US society, thereby subduing the construction of multiculturalism in the US. Such experiences of dissatisfaction come in the form of color prejudice, social rejection and general anti-immigrant sentiments. As it is shown in (BT), the cause of the social alienation which inhibit these immigrants from feeling US as home is the continuous refusal of the hosting society. To strengthen this argument, Stephanos is presented in state of severe accusation when a white man asks him how he feels about his home country. Here comes an extract:

*When pressed for a response, all I could do was shake my head and agree that yes, what was happening in Ethiopia was indeed a tragedy. But what did I know about any of this? I was a student, studying engineering. All I wanted was to tuck my books under my arm and stroll across the campus lawn with that permanent grin stretched across my face (BT: 98).*

Stephanos is disappointed by the perception of the international communities, associating Ethiopia and Ethiopians with hunger. He painfully reacts by estrangement, establishes no contact with others, and hides his true identity. After some time, he feels lonely and longs for the companionship of others, but the fact is his own choice of estrangement builds a state of isolation, a peculiar personality. As it is mentioned previously, he perpetually feels guilty for leaving his family in the middle of political turmoil; however, his immigrant life brings unanticipated disillusion which further exacerbates his disconnection from social participation. He is seen trying to push forward, concealing the traumatic feeling of guilt with superficial smile. The previous extract of scene is an indication of a puzzling consciousness for Americans to reconsider the challenges facing African immigrants in their efforts to be accepted in the socio-economic culture and to take part in every aspect of nation building campaigns of the country called "the land of equality". As portrayed in (BT), both options of acceptance and rejection are incredibly difficult for African immigrants since

they are prone to various threats from both sides; with this particular circumstance, the US is a country of tougher loneliness and rejection for African immigrants.

Another incident of self-estrangement is Naomi's visit to Stephanos' failing shop after school; Stephanos feels comfortable about her coming and begins to dream they might all be a family someday. But the relationship he imagines for so long fades when he sees the mountain of Christmas gifts to Naomi by her father from Germany where he lives teaching economics. These expensive gifts make Stephanos abruptly leave her house realizing his dream of intimate relation with Judith is wrong. He remains alone in the middle of his friends dealing with his inability to replace her father. Stephanos describes his sense of self-isolation: "If what Judith wanted was another African to substitute for her the one who had left her, then she was right, she had chosen poorly. I was not that man" (BT: 135). As an immigrant writing, BT precisely depicts some of the causes of self-estrangements of African immigrants such as inferiority complex and low self-esteem. It also portrays that these estrangements develop through time in the dream land, USA. This extract explores that the immigrants' sense of alienation is unbearable which happens as a result of the unsuccessful process of economic adjustment. Since the immigrants' economic status could not improve, their ambitions to make family also fail like the fortune of the narrator who finally builds a state of self-estrangement.

It can also be said that isolation is a silent response to the reality of the immigrant people as their social bonds are vulnerable to be disconnected due to various reasons. When these people are unable to understand their environment, their continuous efforts of integration in the hosting society could not be achieved due to lack of harmonious and shared orders. Here is typical instance of Stephanos' painful feeling of homelessness while confining himself alone in a small apartment: "The entire place was shabbier, smaller, and desolate than I remembered..." (BT: 59). Ultimately, Stephanos develops the desire of ending his association for the rest of his life: "A man, I told myself, is defined not by his possessions but by the company he keeps" (BT: 60). His frustration also causes him to lose his hope of prosperity. Thus, he reaches the climax of self-estrangement, refraining from contacting any of his close-mates even from entertainment as before. Except with his African fellows, he terminates his entire contacts, reduces his social role understanding that he has no hope of better future.

Furthermore, to his self-estrangement, Stephanos' serious disappointment of making a family is develops when he notices that Judith would not want him because he could not afford any valuable present. His hope of marrying Judith is no more than daydream because he is not the kind of man she wants. This is more of projecting a self-isolation condition since his frequent attempts of building relationship with Judith would not hit its target. This complexity ultimately results in his severe feeling of self-isolation:

*I hate every word I said. Even if I spoke them I began the long process- One that would continue throughout the rest of the evening- of creating a series of different scenarios, ones that had me drinking tea on the couch and kissing Judith in the hallway. I couldn't bear being in that living room any longer (BT: 136).*

This extract demonstrates one of the unsuccessful efforts of African for materializing their dream of mixing with the hosting people. The other issue raised in (BT) is the immigrants' big curiosity but unachievable ambition while attempting to behave according to the life styles of the American people. The immigrants' internal feeling and strong burden to maintain their identities apparently have common background in the lives of their second country. Reviewing the stories of the African immigrants in (BT), their emotional and psychological decadences are closely highlighted while extremely influenced by the unreserved temptation of assimilating and conforming to the hosting community. Some characters of *BT* are pushed to change radically their physical and psychological feelings to be welcomed into the American culture. Cautious imitations of the practice and culture of the hosting country are some of the experiences of a complete change in the sentiment of Kenneth's dress, habit and attitude towards the Americans' people. Stephanos describes Kenneth's behavior, specifically his wearing of American style clothes as, "believes in the power of a well-tailored suit to command the attention and respect of those who..." (BT: 2). However, Kenneth's attempt to imitate the American culture is unsuccessful as his life at the district is noticeable by low-income pressure of solitude and estrangement. The narrator describes Kenneth as "sitting on a frozen lawn chair laughing hysterically to himself drinking beer" (BT: 145) which portrays the failed attempt to assimilate results in estrangement. Though it is not as such significant to the present study, Kenneth's desire and failure to be recognized by the American society and its culture could be analyzed using Bacanian psychoanalysis.

Another important issue that is delineated in (*BT*) as an experience of self-alienation is the frustration that comes as a result of a long-awaited dream which gets spoiled. Life for the narrator and his friend, Kenneth, is very deplorable after their frequent attempt of integration fails. At the beginning, Kenneth was very optimistic and ambitious to go back to his birth place so that he could show them he had changed. His boundless of hope is like "...I will go back to Africa. I will go to Nairobi in the finest suit and everyone will say, 'look at him. That is someone important. That is someone special.' I will build them buildings that will blow them away. No one will have seen anything like them" (*BT*: 146). But his grand hope decomposes as he is not significantly endeavoring to change his economic status. His attempt of physical transformation is to address his dream of showing at home that he belongs in US. If living and working for decades in a dream-land cannot change the visions of the immigrants, meaninglessness in life is inevitable, resulting in the ultimate feelings of self-estrangement.

As it is shown in various scenarios of *BT*, Stephanos' disgruntlement reaches its highest point; his getting out of his genuine self and his love relationships is an implication of his ultimate frustration. It is also shown that he develops a feeling of otherness because of his different identity. His haphazard ambition to build a family is not encouraging because of the wrong anticipation of the American society which leads him to a severe feeling of self-estrangement. As an immigrant, Stephanos is psychologically distracted by his lack of connection to the American culture, and is aggravated to lose the main part of his identity. Presenting vividly and loudly personal experiences and overall doubts and challenges of the immigrants and their unprecedented efforts of integrating to the American culture, *BT* can be taken as an immigrant novel that dictates the self-estrangement concerns of the African immigrants.

#### **4.5.2. Self-estrangement in *How to Read the Air* (HRA)**

The self-estrangement aspect of alienation is a state of dissociation when people are uncomfortably reacted about their lives and goal of rewards in their day-to-day activities. Seeman also tries to extend our understanding of the concept based on the individual behaviors of the expected rewards. Self-estrangement is one of the major themes of (*HRA*) since it elicits deep emotions of the African immigrants. Alienated characters create a sense of intrigue with personal reliance they are faced with since accessing help from others is not easy to these people. *HRA* begins with the narrator's parents,

Yosef and Mariam, preparing for a trip of their honeymoon. The novel depicts husband and wife as if they do not know each other in spite of their long period of relationship. They married some years before they reunite in their hosting country after some years of separation.

The narrator tells us that his first-generation immigrant parents are not optimistic about the new home because they encounter breakdowns in their struggle of rebuilding a meaningful relationship. Fromm (1961:44) explains such personal challenges and feelings as, “essentially experiencing the world and oneself passively, receptively as the subject separated from the object”. The narrator describes such experiences of separation and strangeness of his parents: “They spoke to each other in whispers, half in Amharic, half in English as if any one word uttered too loudly could reveal to both of them that, in fact, they had never understood each other; they had never really known who the other person was at all” (HRA:3).

Of course, disagreement could happen between a husband and a wife, but the case of the narrator’s parents is more than the normal incongruity of a couple. This typical discontentment is an emotional expression of isolation; by far they perceive themselves as a couple living together but dissatisfying one another. Two quiet different people absurdly living in one house. A self-alienated person lacks the proper sense of realizing one’s activity, and these immigrant husband and wife could not manage their behaviors since they are very weak and uncommitted to deal with their problems and the cause of their miscommunication. The condition is an implication of their self-denial of their inability to look into their problems and please one another as husband and wife should have supposed to do. This is also related to the feeling of frustration upon their current lives as they could not find what they expect and entertain their immigration environment.

Yosef and Mariam could not get value and even the minimum feelings of marriage from their renewed relationship. They lost their self-consciousness after they meet in US; rather, they try to conceal their internal emotions from every aspect of social engagements. They never share what they face and think as a wife and a husband. They are also uncertain and suspicious to one over the other; they do not try to understand each other. Being in the unacquainted culture and staring into unknown faces, Mariam builds a sense of otherness, rudderless and anchorless which is a

reflective of psychological predicament. They portray their estrangement by labeling themselves as alien to everything around them; they could not partake in social activities.

Another portrayal of self-estrangement in (HRA) is presented through Yosef's mistreatment of his wife, and such behavior fuels their mounting disparity. The narrator, Jonas, remembers his mother's terrible state: "Since arriving in America six months earlier, she had pushed herself to learn new things about her husband, like why, for example, he spoke to himself when no one seemed to be looking...(HRA:4)". Yosef's misanthropic behavior is probably because of the socio-economic difficulty which always worries him. Mariam observes that her husband frequently speaks to himself like an anxious person. His self-estrangement prevails in this morbid relationship, unable to find comfort due to lack of commitment to save his failing marriage. Eventually, he decides to run away from his wife without knowing his destination.

Marriam's confusion starts from the day they met again in the hosting country, from his strange behavior besides the cultural mix up of the home-land and host-land. These self-alienated couple has a dissatisfied feeling, and their act of self-realization could not work properly similar with what Marx has named it as 'false consciousness'. Striving to mutual understanding is encouraging for anything important for the couple, though it may not maintain their crumbling marriage. Their recurrent acts show that they are in a state of illusion; they could not do what they want as a result of lack of self-realization, loss of satisfaction, misunderstanding and helplessness.

In such incompatible relationship, Yosef and Mariam spend their time searching a reason for being not together even though they are legally married and physically living in one home. Jonas tells the distraught life of his parents: "At this point in their marriage they had spent more time apart than together" (HRA: 5). Unable to deal with the new life, they space out in one-bedroom apartment and continue their distressed life until they eventually develop an internally disconcerted time. Their disaffection comes due to the traumatic disturbance of what happened to Yosef in his home-land and on his journey, crossing borders of different countries. These immigrant characters are consistently alienated and prone to self-isolation because of social and economic decadence, and it further exacerbates their psychological disorders.

One of the fundamental issues *How to Read the Air*, as an immigration writing, deals with is the manifestation of various problems to the immigrant people, and the novel preliminarily depicts

such thematic concerns through the central characters. The series of stories in (HRA) show us the traumatic scenes to foreground the painful lives of African immigrants. By far, these literary characters are exposed to estrangements from their close connections, including family members and loved ones, which can be described as a result of emotional isolation or dissociation. One of the heart-touching scenes of the novel is Yosef's exhaustive journey from Ethiopia to Europe. Later in the story, Jonas flashbacks the trauma of his father's journey when he traces in his father's property: "Of the hundreds of pieces of loose paper floating around the bottom of the box, almost all contained sketches of boats of various shapes and sizes that he had made" (HRA:150).

In his entire immigrant life, Yosef could not be free from a mental strife of the box and the boat he was sealed inside to cross the border. His journey across the water was very cautious but painful as it is explained in the synopsis. Such extreme distressing journey leaves him a psychological wound and forces him to draw an imaginative box; he remains psychologically wounded until the end of his life. As Jonas' narration shows the drawing signifies his father's failed attempt to free from trauma. That trauma leads him to distance from his wife, which is also an outcome of his inability to liberate from the past in his search for the fundamental amenities of life.

Yosef's overall life is full of frustration, failure, an irredeemable sense of loneliness and a self-imposed alienation. As it is mentioned previously, he is terribly distressed by items which look like box or boat, for they remind him of his journey from Ethiopia through Sudan to Italy. Jonas tells us repeatedly that his father's act of gathering pictures and drawings is an expression of his mental disturbance. In his collections, he includes the places he crossed and the boat and the box he used. The selected pictures are related to that horrific journey, which results in his physical and mental trauma. To his wife's curiosity of knowing about his travel, he absurdly and abruptly responds: "I went to Sudan.... Then I took a boat to Europe" (HRA: 268). His short response is part of his effort to hide the overall challenges he faced in the course of his journey. People around him could not understand why Yosef wants to be alone in his new country, where he lives thousands of kilometers away from his caring relatives. Though his wife is near, he could not feel comfortable as she does not understand his internal problem; the care-free relationship he builds with her shows that they have no interest to fix their marriage through their blessing culture of resolving threats. The hosting societies are also depicted by their uncaring culture, by their insignificant regards to millions of diversified immigrant people.

As a second-generation immigrant character in *How to Read the Air*, Jonas starts to risk his relationship with his wife, Angela, after he decides to retrace how and why his parents' trip to Nashville was full of chaos. He describes his repeating of his family's journey: "Six months before I left my wife, Angela, and began retracing my parents' route through the Midwest..." (HRA: 14). His attempt is part of the investigation of the reason behind his parent's delicate marriage. As much as his parents' life is complicated as doomed, his identity and existence are in limbo. Such self-confusion is what Seeman (1959) describes self-estrangement as disconnection between actualized self and the ideal or a state of losing natural meaning of self.

Immigrants often flee their homelands empty-handed having emotional problems for their children. The same was true with Jonas' parents who were forced to leave Ethiopia following the civil war, carrying undesirable emotions, and such emotions left a severe scar to their son. Jonas, their son, is in a state of identity crisis though he tries to make life in US. It can reasonable be argued that Jonas' relentless action to retrace his parents' disastrous honeymoon trip evidently shows Yosef's anomalous personality. In the deliberately fragmented presentation of stories in (HRA), the honeymoon trip to Nashville is an indication of the couple's disjointed life in US because they are basically fighting to escape from the haunting trauma of the dangerous journey. Jonas describes his father's association of the box with the uncomfortable travel on ship: "My father had been dreaming of boxes since coming to America, and he hoped that this trip might end those dreams, which despite his best efforts had continued to haunt him. He saw the boxes folded and flat, stacked one on top of another in long, endless, elegant rows" (HRA:39).

Of course, it is very painful to be illegally sealed inside a box for days inside the hot ship. That exhaustive travel left an unforgettable internal scar in Yosef's memory. No one knows exactly how many years it could take to heal the wounds of his suffering, and his agony also affects his successor, Jonas. Indeed, Seeman's (1959) explanation of self-estrangement can be put to show the interruption between Yosef's real self and the ideal ought to be himself. Many immigrants including Yosef forcefully left their countries with a boundless of hopes their lives would be better. The stories in (HRA) underline the indefinite destinies of these African immigrants. There are psychological hauntings on immigrants in addition to their feelings of insecurity after coming across very painful experiences. Yosef's estrangement because of his social irreconcilability and financial constraint further affects Jonas' relationship with Angela. So, it can definitely be said the

immigrant society's economic constraints and psychological problems are some of the main reasons of self-estrangements. It can be understood from Jonas' recurrent narration that the current economic status of his parents is not better than their lives in Ethiopia though they migrated looking for peace and prosperity.

In a similar circumstance, Angela is distressed by her childhood experience which is dreadfully affecting her relationship with Jonas. Her delicate bond with Jonas reaches to a precarious level. As a result, she develops a very gutted feelings comparing her life to her parents. She sees her crumbling house with her father's treatment of her mother. She compares Jonas with her father: "That's the same thing my father said just before he left us" (HRA: 49). Her father was very odd to her mother, very secretive about why and where he left the family. This association of her husband's reaction and her father's conduct in the family relationship helps her foresee her ultimate fate. Comparing the two generations' marriages recalls her that irrespective of whatever efforts her relationship with Jonas would inevitably fall down. Comprehending the coming challenges, she quits her efforts of solving their disagreements and saving their marriage. Through the entire story of the novel, Jonas and Angela do nothing to understand each other and to solve their problem, to the extent of developing negative personalities and isolating from each other.

In some instances of *How to Read the Air*, certain aspects of alienation overlap; one form of alienation may prevail as a result of another. For instance, self-estrangement prevails when African immigrants are presented in the absence of clear understanding of the events of their relationships which also becomes the cause of meaninglessness. Most importantly, there is a significant similarity between Angela's father and Jonas' self-indulgence by their habits of concealing their problems. They both are characterized by their behaviors of not sharing problems they face in the courses of the relationships with their partners. Jonas hides from her he was fired from his job; the same is true of her father for not showing up after work.

In addition to Jonas' overall act of conduct, Angela is haunted by the memory of her parents, trying to make sense of her traumatized childhood experiences. Jonas narrates her situation: "I tried to detect a pattern in the stories, one that would say more about who Angela was and what she had gone through, but the obfuscation was too great; all I could see were hints of an injury that she had yet to let go of" (HRA:47). Memory by its very nature is fragmented because any ordinary person

has limited mental ability to recite all the details of past events. Craig & Michael (2009: 226) suggest, “People are often unable to capture their original experiences because they cannot remember details. People sometimes recall only a few aspects of an episode; they may use their current knowledge and preferences to fill in gaps and resolve ambiguities in their memories”. At various parts of *How to Read the Air*, the disjointed experiences of the narrator’s life are presented radiating on his memories. It is also the narrator who tells much of the story of the novel as far as his memory could recite. Thus, one way of understanding the phenomenon of memory is clearly in an elusive cohesion though a very fragmented foundation of story prevails in this novel. Self-estrangement kind of alienation itself is experienced by individuals primarily as a cognitive–affective sentiment. Self-estrangement as its key constituent emotion is portrayed through the manifestation of despair. Loss of memory and despair affect the character’s social relations, social identity and cognition as they are related to the wholeness and the uniqueness of the immigrant community.

Indeed, Jonas’ self-estrangements and his sluggish participations are due to lack of proper affection and his parent’s inability to offer him the expected care and responsibility. He experiences a sense of distraught and being a victim of a broken home as his father and mother could not share what couples share. One of the stories Angela frequently complains about Jonas’ inability to disclose his previous life is when he responds her: “Which means I can hardly remember. That while time seems like one big gray fog in the back of my mind so I never think about it” (HRA: 175).

Jonas apparently tries to cover the real challenges of his migration, as much as he is very ashamed of disclosing the obscure life of his parents. The fundamental problem is his inability to recite the past properly because rewinding the frequent fight of Yosef and Mariam creates shocking feelings. Jonas assumes, “I failed to notice most of what was happening around me, and grew to believe that there was some culturally important film that I failed to watch at the right age...(HRA:173). As the extract denotes, Jonas is estranged because he could not entertain his new home and he blames his parents for being undesirable role models of his life. As Seeman (1959) has remarked, isolation is an estrangement of the individual from the dominant cultures and the values of a specific society.

A self-estranged person experiences frustration upon perceiving failure from fulfilling basic human needs, inability to participate in activities that are essentially rewarding, and loss of true self. The researcher has raised a condition of self-estrangement which is prevailed as a consequence of the scary and tedious journey of the immigrants. The terrifying crossing of the border affects the later lives of the father and his son, creating an entire feeling of alienation. Yosef perceives a traumatic experience repeatedly haunted by the memory of his prison. His feeling of inability to escape from his reminiscences of those days is affecting him to self-estrangement. Jonas' typical figment below shows Yosef's severe trauma:

*If asked what exactly he was thinking of, he would have said that he was remembering the names of every border he had crossed throughout his life, and that there was a time when he imagined that was precisely what he was going to do for the rest of his days, cross and recross different lines on a map until he had touched and memorized them all (HRA: 216).*

The above extract explicitly shows loss of memory that Jonas apparently describes his anticipation of Yosef's frequent distress of internal feeling. Such sense of false self also reveals his attempt to settle his immigration life and his inclination to withdraw from the social structure of the hosting community. Felix, G. (1996: 26) has strengthened the above sense of alienation: "Self-estrangement... can be viewed as denoting a lack of internal communication within the system... loss of contact with the real self".

The researcher has found out that African immigrants represented in (HRA) increasingly expose to disillusionment following their unexpected socio-economic failures, and, consequently, they develop a specific form of estrangement out of the post-modern world. These manifestations and expositions to psychological and physical estrangements are the ultimate disenchantments the immigrants receive. The state of trauma is also depicted as the cause of various aspects of alienation including self-estrangement and social isolation, as seen in Yosef's inability to realize his intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships. Anyone can not cut himself from his past if not alienated from what might be called the natural personalities and places in the world. The same is true with Yosef who was forcefully prone to various challenges before his final arrival in US, which further aggravates his withdrawal from every participation of the social structure.

The immigrants' individual difference is also one of the common problems underscored as causes of self-isolation in *How to Read the Air*. The immigrant characters are not accompanied in the overall interpersonal relationships of their new lives because of the existing sentimental breach between the self and the others. As Jonas narrates, his parents stopped to care each other in USA as a consequence of Yosef's frequent traumatic hallucination of his illegal journey and at the Port of Sudan, and Mariam's failure to know how her husband arrived at US. She explains how she feels of Yosef's reaction to her inquiries: "I asked him several times to tell me, but he refused. After a short time of knowing him, I didn't care" (HRA: 268). As a result of their desperation when the two immigrants realize their life is meaningless, a non-reciprocated communication and relationship prevails. Thus, they respond to the reality with further self-estrangement, and their broken relationship can be seen in the eventual reaction of their self-estrangement. It can be said that this is an entire coincidence with the advent of the post-modern literary prevalence in the dissatisfied generations of the immigrant society.

#### **4.5.3. Self-Estrangement in *All Our Names* (AON)**

As a socio-historical novel which combines the factual and the fictional, (AON) provides a realistic representation of the socio-politics of Ethiopians and Ugandans of the mid of the twenty's century. In this novel, the fundamental thoughts of the immigrants is accentuated in a prototypical portrait of their suppression by all systems; thus, their dissatisfaction results in an entire estrangement. As such, (AON) echoes one of Africa's postcolonial truths: exile is caused by external pressure. Crucially, the novel lets us oversee the persistent lack of belongingness or identity of the dislocated people. African immigrants presented in this novel shift their identity which ultimately creates a feeling of aloneness, and the portrait is an awareness of such loss and rootlessness.

*AON* reflects the internal feelings, despondency and social isolation of the two Isaacs in Uganda, specifically underlining their miserable lives in the periphery of the capital city. The narrator, the Ethiopian Isaac, describes their marginal lives in their home continent, when they were systematically estranged into ghettos: "We had taken up residence in the eastern quarters of the city, in the harder-to-reach, hill-rich region prone to mudslides... who had agreed to house him on the floor in their living room" (AON: 6). Such systematic impositions by their own people possibly result in loss of their hopes for prosperity and fair distribution of resources after Africans have disillusioned their ambitions of managing their fortunes in the post-colonial epoch.

Presenting these estranged characters is by far painstaking and wise. African youngsters were under the incompetent and brutal political leaders, completely isolated from the socio-economic affairs of their communities. The chain of stories in *AON* shows the problems of the dislocated individuals of the second and third world countries who dreamed USA. The novel further explores the immigrants' estrangements and homelessness through fragmented and disarrayed stories. Imagine how a person feels when no one looks after him when admitted to hospital. The same was true with the Ethiopian Isaac in Uganda when he could not find a family next to him in the hospital after bumped at a demonstration; he presents his loneliness by comparing himself with patients sleeping next to him: "The other patients in the hospital were fed and had their wounds dressed cleaned by their family... While a few other men, who, like myself, had no one to tend to them, looked on in longing" (AON: 102).

The above scenario of yearning for a family is a fundamental sign of absolute or fragmented sense of loneliness as a result of dislocation. It happened to the Ethiopian Isaac while living in the middle of a community, but could not get enough care or feel at home. He describes the environment: "... even if I have a place to sleep it was hardly a home..." (AON: 102). His self-estrangement was associated with a feeling of not accompanying because he remoted himself as homeless, though his Ugandan friend supplied him what he wanted.

He unconditionally dissociated from the people around him because of his experiences of otherness during his travel throughout Uganda for the revolution: "It was a beautiful sight, even more so because I was the only one deliberately noticing it. I was in the war, but I no longer belonged to it" (AON.193). His main interest was not to be a revolutionary in a country that could not allow him to take part in its national affairs. He went to Kampala to materialize his dream of becoming a writer. So, when he travelled with the revolutionary Isaac, he did not pretend to be a revolutionary. They had no common mission. Thus, self-estrangement became the power he faced following the loss of his self-realization. He himself and his daily activities in Uganda were like something not belonging to him. It was his despondency that made his Uganda's life difficult; even his travel to Kampala could not be valuable as he had expected.

## CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The selected immigrant novels for the purpose of the study have magnificent pictures of the various forms of alienation and disenchantment whereby immigrants experience in various situations. In Dinaw's debut novel, the presentation of the stories is so special in its literary quality of portraying the African immigrants' inability to influence their boundless desires and to access to the values of the American culture. The researcher strongly argues that *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* can be taken as an extraordinary immigrant masterpiece by its exceptional graphic and experimental presentation of each and every immigrant with interesting narration. It implicitly or explicitly limns the aspects of alienation to show the overall nature of immigration. The five aspects of alienation proposed by Melvin Seeman (1959) are very important to oversee the real-like experiences of African immigrants portrayed in the novel. The novel also shows the African immigrants who are suffering from deeper feelings of alienation as a result of leaving their countries; the alienation is experienced by almost all immigrant characters though differently. The author realistically demonstrates the immigrants' alienations to amplify immigration as a global concern, depicting real-like stories with special focus on the contemporary epoch.

In this novel, there is also something of despairing about the immigrant community and the multileveled views of the hosting country. The stories reveal the long period of American culture of systematic alienations in which African immigrants are prone to identity crises, and this clearly challenges their multicultural co-existences. *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* underlines such predicaments by reflective techniques of visible narrator. Further, it shows various forms of alienation through the immigrants' efforts and confrontations to win their lives.

The USA, a country said to be built on the achievements of immigrants, is presented in *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* as an epicenter of challenging the incorporation of foreign cultures into its community, and such situation obstructs opportunities to fulfill its efforts for tolerance, equality and inclusivity. It is through the novel that the author reveals the immigrants' confusions, that he conveys the tragic influences of an illusorily bigoted American culture, ultimately entrapping the immigrants in bicultural identity dilemma.

Most of the characters in *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* are African immigrants who left their countries carrying with them various perspectives on race and identity. The novel portrays the relationships between African immigrants and the hosting community as difficult and opposite of their imagination because of differences in racial and cultural histories. In this novel, African immigrants encounter alienation and rejection from the hosting society. By underlining the complexities of race relations, the novel further stresses the need for Americans to reconsider and reform their systemic racial discriminations, acknowledging diversity within the multi-ethnic communities. One of the dominant issues raised in *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* is the spare of human bonds because of materialist state of mind and affiliation.

The mishandlings and misunderstandings of African immigrants in their hosting societies are also demonstrated in this novel. African culture is wrongly perceived as devastatingly uncivilized and irrelevant, a further confirmation of the prejudice treatment of the immigrants. As a result, the African immigrants are exposed to various psychological challenges of isolation, to the extent of blaming themselves for misconceptions by the hosting country. Thus, their alienation results and prevails into various forms of racial discrimination, social rejection, and reinforces a generally anti-immigrant- attitude, which in turn obstructs the immigrants from feeling at home in USA.

While alienation of the immigrants in the US has been a longstanding problem, the over emphasis on African immigrants by African-born American authors like Dinaw predominantly makes international researchers pay attention to the concept of alienation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The harsh criticism of the American traditions of mocking at others indicates an entire reconsideration and a shift in global attitudes upon the actual treatments of the African immigrants by the hosting societies.

The immigrant characters of *BT* are emotionally alienated or forced to shed their subjective identity in their attempt of integrating to the American society. As an immigrant writing, *BT* passionately tries to show readers that the Americans perceive race as a regulating and central factor of identity reconstruction, thereby creating an awkward division between themselves and African Americans who share race but greatly differ in culture. The characters' frequent exposure of stereotypes based on their skin color also reveals that the Americans practice this social alienation to maintain their cultural superiority.

*The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* foregrounds best the manifestation of alienation of African immigrants in US as a universal predicament. With the sole of creative intensity, it has certain number of imaginative characters who are alienated from themselves, from others, and from their host society because of cultural differences, identity, economic differences and so on. Further, the novel clearly accentuates the African agony showing the Americans reality through its narratives and delivering an aspect of egalitarianism and inclusiveness. While some of the stories are based on the real experiences of the author, the novel puts imaginative settings and persona that can fully appeal to the emotionality of the author, thereby assisting readers to develop a feeling of understanding its characters. Most of the stories and themes powerfully reveal the challenges of the characters in an act of encounter or in a narrative mode. By understanding these moments in a narrative form, the audience can deeply commiserate those experiences of alienation affecting the character's internal consciousness and psychological emotions.

*BT* is specifically significant to create sensational awareness to the fact that the African immigrants are largely denied their basic human rights and that they are struggling against the misconception of their identity. The series of stories are vividly presented in the novel creating personal connection between the narrator and the immigrant characters. The harsh alienation and dehumanization of those African immigrants suggest that the social and individual predispositions have penetrated into the US society to the extent that the privileged Americans undermine the malaise of the immigrants.

The researcher suggested that the immigrant characters of *BT* could represent the universal state of immigration and the overall reaction of the hosting countries. This novel also denotes those people who look for a better future, but, unfortunately, encounter unexpected challenges of various forms of alienation in the so-called land of promise. It conveys strong feelings of disenchantment, disillusion and emptiness through the story of the immigrant characters and the narrator's internal mode of descriptive and attractive narration. The narrator's experiences and personae of alienation portray all the gutted and miserable situations around the African immigrant community. Throughout the entire novel, readers understand Stephanos along with his African friends and how they perceive and react to the feelings of alienations. The narrator's expectation from his new

home is disillusioned as a result of his disintegrated and despairing spirit, so that he and his immigrant friends are prone to various forms of alienation and powerlessness.

As depicted in (*BT*), African immigrants for the last seventeen years were bounded with a state of emptiness, rootlessness and social alienation. These aspects of alienation create convolutions for Stephanos and his friends resulting in meaninglessness, frustration and loneliness. Stephanos is so disenchanted and disillusioned with his exile life because he could not bring any sense and unable to foresee any optimistic sign of his future life.

Fundamentally, *BT* accentuates the personalities of Stephanos labeling him the narrator to convey the immigrants' possibility of not genuinely accepted in the US socio-economy. As an immigrant fiction writing, it brings a global shift towards condemning the American treatment and misperception of African immigrants. As demonstrated in the novel, Americans ostracize and dehumanize immigrants, mortifying them to various external and internal frustrations.

The researcher has made an extensive effort to show the dilemma of alienation, and how the decisive factors had affected the lives of the African immigrant community by considering the impact of alienation as a worldwide problem. The researcher has selected *BT* for this study since the question of the immigrants' identity and their lives become the foremost leitmotif in the primary concerns of this fiction. The researcher has identified the manifestation of alienation as an indispensable condition in which the African immigrants could not easily materialize their dreams of success and prosperity because of the alienating factors proposed by Melvin Seeman.

*How to Read the Air* (*HRA*) deals with the first-and second-generation African immigrants' shambles and portrays their fundamentally distorted and troubled past searching for purpose and meaning in life. The characters were prone to various states of trauma in their pasts, and they fail their efforts for better life because they could not be unsuccessful in their hosting country. It can be concluded that the characters are futile to attachments in their new home as a result of their traumatic pasts. In such tedious struggle, they are prone to various forms of alienation.

The spectacular scene displayed in (*HRA*) is the literary and technical revolution of rejecting the traditional form of narration in portraying the lives of the represented people. The epicenter of the novel are the Ethiopian immigrants while the challenges they encounter are seen from different

angles. The immigrants' absence of self-awareness, identity confusion and feeling of otherness are specifically portrayed. *How to Read the Air* underlines the themes of various forms of alienation and search for original and compatible identity. Ultimately, therefore, this study has tried to foreground the tensions between truth and fiction, healing and tragedy, remembrance and forgetting as implicitly and explicitly delineated in the novel which render the plot to go forward.

In *How to Read the Air*, the researcher has identified traces produced by the displacement of Africans immigrants and how the past shadows their present. For example, Mariam and Yosef are characterized by their experiences and absence of social morality as a mechanism of satisfying the narrator's basic curiosity. The novel creates a distance between the ideal likelihood of the fictional story and the seemingly reality of their nostalgia. The differences of socialization experiences broaden the gap between husband and wife, further depreciating instead of improving their future in the new soil. In such situation, the immigrants are sensitively alienated fail to keep their conjugal relationships. In their attachments to the American community, they fail to act and react because of their previous background at their original country. The novel generally reveals the immigrants' dilemma of belongingness, nationality, identity and history. Coup

The study has revealed, some of the characters in (HRA) are prone to the five mainstreams of Melvin Seeman's aspects of alienation. It has also revealed this novel over emphasizes the theme of tension in its narration of the relationship between Yosef and Mariam and Jonas and Angela being husbands and wives. The various modes of alienation up on the African immigrants prevail when their attempt to economic, social and cultural adjustments are not successful.

The other important point of this study is the first and second-generation immigrants' desperate struggles to validate their inclusive existence. These immigrants are presented striving to discover and rediscover value in their new home through inappropriate means. However, they face an entire state of dilemma and confusion. (HRA) depicts the continuation of the scary past of those characters resulting in an overall state of futility. Loss, frustration, scare and miserable life exacerbate their pain of alienation even more agonizing in difficult times, as a result of the discrepancy between the control they expect and the degree of control they desire.

The lives of the characters in (HRA) symbolize the journey of the African immigrant communities: being deceived, thwarted, humiliated, disappointed and frightened and in general exposed to

different forms of alienation. As a consequence of their unsecured condition of lives, they decided to dissociate themselves as responses. *How to Read the Air* depicts a theme of alienation upon the failed family relationship in general and the African immigrants' feelings of failure, frustration, futility, and absurdity in particular. It pervades the deserted lives of the immigrant protagonists by overpowering sense of loneliness and isolation.

Based on Melvin Seeman's dimensions of alienation, the researcher has tried to expose the disconnection and confusion which are inherent to the concept of alienation in the contemporary condition of immigrants. Through advanced literary techniques, *How to Read the Air* discloses the disconnections of the immigrant individuals who experience various forms of alienations. Thus, this study's recommendations to interested researchers is to exert their efforts on the impacts of social rejection and other aspects of alienation as positive growth of individual personalities of immigrants and to see further alienations which can increase productivity.

To deepening the deduction of this section, the study has mainly focused on the black African immigrants who left their country for further education. In the course of exodus, the young black persons encountered and faced different experiences of alienating challenges starting from the day they left their original home to the destination in their hosting countries. The researcher has also investigated the alienating stories and factors of the white persons who met and fell in love with these African immigrants. However, their loves were stalled most importantly by racial alienation which resulted the historical and cultural dislocation in their entire relationship.

The researcher has also investigated that the major characters in *How to Read the Air* are physically, emotionally and psychologically distraught by the reality of the socio-political confusion of the hosting environments. Falsefully regarded as antisocial, they stay in the gloom of their minds as mere observers, unable to associate with or communicate their feelings to anyone around them. Such lack of communication creates on them unprecedented feelings of alienation and states of physical and psychological detachments.

Similar to the previous two novels, *AON* characterizes the immigrants' lives by disjointedness, absurdity and gloomy underlying through various manifestations of alienation. The traditionally accepted way of living goes to the worst in the fragmented stories of the novel. Thus, the researcher

has tried to underline alienation and its impacts on the immigrant communities and how they experience the challenges.

The study has also displayed the ways in which the course of immigration should be paid in the global arena for the best possible minimization of its consequences. The immigrant characters in (AON) are shown as oblivious to the socio-political realities of the contemporary world. They forcefully left their country and lived in the world they did not choose. Moreover, the novel portrays them as usually afraid of and angered by disturbances or interruptions of the hosting society. Consequently, various alienating causes and factors in different forms have been identified in this novel. There prevail some forms of forced alienation due to pressurized situations or while the immigrants are in dilemma of their identities.

Significantly, (AON) also uses the discourse of namelessness as one best narrative strategy of underscoring the global challenges of the immigrant community, specifically in describing the dislocated and relocated African immigrants who are exposed to various alienating experiences. The immigrants are seen striving to maintain their identities for co-existence though they are not as successful as they want.

This study has also examined the question of political immigration in the process of constructing new identity or personality. Hence, hopelessness and helplessness to socio-economic integration are shown as the basic thematic preoccupations of (AON) unsuccessfully used by immigrants as means to escape from their traumatic past. The study simply scrutinizes the depiction of alienation of the immigrant characters as it is represented in the stories of the novel.

This research has attempted to critically analyze the experiences of alienation as a sociological point of view. As it is shown in (AON), African immigrants are confronting terrible situations and transcending the overall aspects of their immigration lives. Thus, the researcher has identified that *AON* vividly portrays alienation as a theme which frequently occurs in the immigrants' daily activities, presenting its various states as the results of dislocation and estrangement.

The manifestations of alienation are the basic thematic preoccupation the study has identified in *AON* by tracing the recurrent depictions and the perspectives of African immigrants. The study has elaborately analyzed the experiences of Isaac and Helen while suffering from trauma and

dilemma of race, color and class-based discriminations which in turn result in various forms of social, political or cultural malaises.

Similar to the first and second target novels, the stories in (AON), deal with the immigrant communities, portray a range of characters who are strong but ostracized by social ills and resentments. This study mainly summarizes alienation aspects that stem from social realities of the immigration lives such as race, color and class.

A remarkable conclusion of this section is the very important manifestation of alienation in (AON) is the presentation of unnamed the real name of the dominant narrator (Isaac). He recurrently lost his names at various circumstances and in transit like a misplaced luggage. The very striking scenario of alienating experience is shown that it has never described the birth name of the narrator throughout the entire novel. This is a crystal reason to argue that namelessness and renaming are the major expression and variable manifestation of the immigrant literature, and it has been used such technique of namelessness to employ the causes and results of the immigrants' social ills by considering alienation as a literary theme.

It can be summarized the sociological concept of Melvin Seeman's theory of alienation is applied to the understanding of alienation and its manifestation. The present researcher wants to forward a feasible recommendation upon the target trilogy is that scholars can have to approach the presentation of the narrations from the perspective of a solitary subjectivity in the post-colonial world because the narrators in those target novels were seen while facing and experiencing the personal resentment and distraught being victims of a broken home and family.

The display of alienating experiences has largely established the persistent and frequent experiences of the dislocated and relocated characters of the selected trilogy as they project the realities of the African immigrants. Whether alienation results from characters' personal exposure, from their real selves, from their ethnic tradition or from the host society's misconception, the thematic concern has been effectively applied in the trilogy. It is exhaustively endeavored to probe and show the connection between the immigrants' true and false identities, assimilation and cultural heritage, and the individuals and their societal interaction through his magnificent literary skill. For some characters of the selected immigrant novels, the feeling of alienation is brief; for others, tragedy becomes unavoidable when they fail to reconcile or who they are with who they

are meant to be. As it is depicted, tagging the selected novels can witness and explicit a fixation on the past which is preoccupied by a feeling of nostalgia while portraying the protagonists in their struggle of asserting the original identities.

Furthermore, the present study has comprehensively dedicated to portray the possible challenges of the African immigrants' lives whereby they failed to overcome the effort to visualize their dreams; failure, obstruction, unrest, isolation, and meaninglessness are some of the challenging things the immigrant characters experienced in the literary context of the selected contemporary immigrant novels. The researcher has taken the selected trilogy for this study purpose since the reality of the African immigrants in US were not extensively explored until the researcher has taken the courage to do so in this research. There are a significant numbers of immigrant fictions which depict the fundamental concerning issues of the global immigrants thought they are not easily accessible and available in the third world to be researched and suggested their possible mode of importance.

In the three novels, it has been presented the portrait of human lives as an everlasting of attempt to fight for the good of humanity which ends only in suffering and death of the immigrant protagonists. It is of no avail to fight such encounter for survival, where the immigrants were reduced to a pitiful figure by forces of both internal and external factors of their socio-psychological boundary. The eventual failure of the represented immigrant characters relied on the way they challenged the environment of the hosting community. In a world of pain and failure, the immigrants have their own defense to assert the dignity of their existence though it ends by an unexpected outcome of disaster. To speak frankly, the individual has the freedom of will to create his own values and ideals of reality. In order to overcome such confrontation, he has to carry on a consistent battle against the social and the environmental barriers of this world by which the researcher has tried to investigate it in the present study.

Speaking broadly, any attempt to quantify the feelings of alienation is very complex though it is possible to feel its prevalence because part of the subject's characteristics emerges from defining it based on an attitudinal perspective since the concept is regarded as a multidisciplinary subject. It has been, in the three novels, dealt with the implicit and explicit attempt of emerging the multiple identity of the immigrant characters' cultures who experience the one they have left behind in their

original home and the new culture they accommodate in their new home. In such dilemma and confrontation of identity and in their effort of taking part in every aspect social activity, the represented immigrants faced to various challenges of alienation. Through such complicated process of movements and the interrelationships portrayed in the target novels, the researcher has identified the effort of presenting the reality is very successful to trace the intersection of displacement and the African solidarity. It has further used to uncover the alienating factors of the immigrant communities while striving to make a better life of their present and future dream.

The study has also identified that Diaw has powerfully and repeatedly overemphasized the numerous portraits of the exile life of the immigrants in his trilogy to debunk the assumption that life is full of blessing for the African immigrants specifically for those who are relocated in US. His debut immigrant novel, *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*, draws the immigrant experiences of various African youths in the United States. Sepha Stephanos, the novel's protagonist, has left his home country and prone to many challenges because of his mother land's political persecution. The country where Stephanos left behind is described in the novel as full of "hell every day with only glimpses of heaven in between" (BT: 100). The point Stephanos characterized about his life in US suggests the unsuccessful effort of the immigrants' attempt of making better life than the original homes; as certain instances, the immigrants could not find heaven in America because of the social and economic impact they frequently experienced and faced in the land of the 'dream land'. Thus, it can be said that the selected novels ironically describe the themes of loss and the impossibility of accessing a sense homeness which could be the causes of some forms of alienation.

*How to Read the Air*, the second target novel of this study, raises similar preoccupation and themes of the previous novel; the two-alternating flow of the immigrants' stories of this novel weaved and underlined that Jonas Woldemariam was as an alienated second-generation African immigrant in the US besides to the difficult and tiring early years of his Ethiopian parents' lives in the US. The novel examines the challenges that the immigrants face as they attempt to integrate with the hosting community. These challenges are held back with socio-economic and racial fault lines. For example, Jonas was constantly asked to explain himself where he really came from even when he responded his interlocutors that he was from Illinois. Inherently, they labeled him not to be belonged to the Americans because of his skin color and his indigenous name.

Jonas's parents were constantly taking road trips which signaled to their inability to settle in one place for so long because they were very disenchanted by the environment of the new home where by they felt they didn't really belong to the place. Through the characters of the protagonists, it has been depicted the long journey of the immigration to maintain the immigrants' limbo of identities and the challenges they faced; such as, the feelings of alienation and the state of detachment they perceived by the hosting country.

By the technical quality of narration, the novels can be put as the revolutionary and contemporary novels in proliferating the realities of the African immigrant writing because it has been applied the best possible narration of presenting the plot of the novels switching the narrators of the stories. It is also applied the modern technique of story development and the rejection of the traditional forms of narration while depicting the contemporary immigrant lives in their hosting country. It has specifically been pointed and focused to the very important issues in which the African immigrants were deprived of the chance to achieve their dream of self-awareness though the process of immigration was not as simple and significant as it was intended.

In a general summary, the immigrant characters which are represented in those selected novels are displayed while they are systematically excluded and alienated from the decision-making apparatus of the hosting society's social institution. The Ethiopian Stephanos, the Congolese Joseph, and the Kenyan Kenneth in (BT) implicitly and explicitly are portrayed with such painful experiences of alienation. They played non-significant role in various social and economic affairs of the hosting society. Mariam and Yosef in (HRA) are the other represented personas who failed to meet the desire of participation in various movements and protests as a manifestation of their social isolation or identity crisis similar to Isaac in (AON).

Those represented African immigrants in the selected trilogy hopelessly and helplessly prone and frustrated by racism, stereotyping and a general lack of recognition of their contribution to the building of American society. Further, it has been tried to show the white supremacists were not ready to embrace and accept the African American immigrants and their identities as legitimate constituents in the American socio-political activities, (Sepha Stephanos at the car dealer), (Jonas Woldemariam at the restaurant), and (Isaac at the restaurant and at his workplace).

The newly arrived (first generation) immigrants which are presented in the selected three novels strive for better life, but they are shown as an exemplary of failure and further resulted to a severity of alienation. So, it can be said that the first generation are more likely to have problems of adjusting to new social roles than the second generation.

It can also be deduced those three target novels depict a strong relationship between alienation and cultural conflicts because the disparity between the original cultural norms of the immigrants and those of the hosting societies which created an entire state of anomie in the lives of the immigrant protagonists such as Mariam's whole immigration life as shown in (HRA).

Stephanos in (BT), Jonas in (HRA), and Isaac in (AON) were not only the most important fictional characters of the novels; they also narrated the overall painful alienating stories and what had happened from their point of view.

The study has also concluded that the target novels vividly display continuous and much pain of disillusionment and suffering of alienation in the lives of the African immigrants. Berhane and Stephanos in (BT) disconnected themselves from their past and alienated from what might be called their natural place in the world. Yosef, Mariam and Jonas in (HRA) were frustrated and treated each other with suspicious which resulted their immigration lives was severe and in contrast of their expectation. Isaac's life was marked with an absolute index of social isolation; thus, no one noticed him as an individual in Uganda and US where he lived.

The present study has made a comprehensive analysis of alienation in the three novels that are selected for this study with reference the five dimensions of sociological alienation. It is also investigated that the causes of alienation which are enumerated by extracting the influencing factors like discrimination, frustration, loneliness etc., and the consequences of alienation are projected as part of the present study.

The three novels have accentuated that there was much pain and suffering of alienation in the lives of the African immigrants in US. Thus, the fundamental sources of alienation are enumerated by extracting the influencing factors like anxiety, despair, loneliness, race and color differences and etc. it has been, in the trilogy, presented the immigrant human lives as a perpetual struggle which concluded only in various forms of alienation. Anguish even a deeper state of alienation is the anti-

hero of the selected trilogy. There is also something of the novels to show the despairing view of the African immigrants and the multileveled view of the reality of the hosting society.

It has been tried to show all the challenging feeling of the contemporary immigrants during and after the exodus. In the trilogy, it is used the painful experiences of the imaginative characters' lives and places them in the novels. The main characters of the novels are created based on the personal experiences of immigrants. Their personal pain enables him to describe their feeling to a great amount of detail. He profoundly shows the aspect of disillusionment and alienation in many different occasions in the novel.

The researcher has also identified the captivating of realization of various feelings of alienation through the protagonists' and narrators' eyes. Portraying from their own observation and experiences, they tried to show the psychological damage of alienation through the demolition of human lives, uncommitted relationships, and lack of confidence. The various dimensions of alienation proposed are the basic obstacles for achieving and leading a conscious, purpose-driven, and value-laden existence.

Based on the analysis of the present research, it can also be concluded that the immigrants grieve not only from war, oppression, starvation and ruin, but from the internal and external approaches of problems as a conviction of various alienation in their struggle for existence.

Lastly but not least, the researcher strongly recommends senior researchers to see and investigate that alienation can increase creativity if the immigrants are alienated and rejected enough, and be it a powerful force in the positive results of deep introspection and intellectual independence.

As per the study, it can also conclude that the adverse effects of alienation can be depression, inferiority complexes, self-hatred, hatred of others and so on. The cause why such effects are so wide-ranging is because while a person is alienated, his or her perception of others has also changed.

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## APPENDIX 1

### **Synopsis of: *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears* (BT)**

The novel, *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* (2007) is about an Ethiopian immigrant, Sepha Stephanos, who owns a small grocery store and confines between two identities that of his Ethiopian origins, and that of his American immigration status. The novel is told in a haunting powerful first- person narrative point of view setting the streets of Washington, D.C. and Addis Ababa through Stephanos's eyes. This novel is a deeply affecting and unforgettable debut fictional book about what it means to lose a family and a country and what it takes to create a new home. The Ethiopian immigrant protagonist, Stephanos who lost his father in an atrocious way by the military junta left his home country to the USA to escape from the red and white terror of the late 1970's. Trapped by the terrible memories of home, Stephanos began his life as a storekeeper in a place where low-income black people live. He has two African friends, Joseph (Congolese) and Kenneth (Kenyan) who shares his bitter nostalgia and longing for the home continent. Kenneth is a most successful of the three; Joseph is a waiter at a classy restaurant and spends his free time getting drunk and writing an endless epic poem about his homeland. The novel's narrator, Stephanos, lives in Logan Circle, where he moves few yards between his house and his failing grocery store surrounded by Washington's black poor. Most customers of his shop are schoolchildren, drunks, and prostitutes.

The relationship among the three men and the game they used to play become a metaphor for their lives in the United States, where they are haunted by their countries' blood-soaked memories at their new multicultural home. Soon Stephanos's neighborhood begins to change and hope comes in the form of new neighbor, Judith. This white woman with her biracial daughter becomes his friends and feels like having a family for the first time in years of his US life. This opportunity creates a chance for him to realize a dream of building a family and overcoming his feeling of alienation since he is getting older without conjugal. However, his hope to make a family is failed because of his low socio-economic status. When Stephanos's long instability continues as an economic failure which added to his desperate life, he then went to his uncle's house symbolically to retell about his life and his father's death and his half – hearted presence in the new land as a means of encouraging himself out of his delusional existence. *The Beautiful*

*Things that Heaven Bears* (BT) could probably be the first work of fiction written in English about the Ethiopian immigrant experience in the USA.

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Synopsis of *How to Read the Air* (HRA)**

*How to Read the Air* (HRA) is the second novel of Dinaw Mengestu which is published in 2010 to tell the story of a small Ethiopian immigrant family in US. That family faces various challenges and complexities in its socio-economic interactions due to the heavy air of displacement following the day-to-day live experience of the family. The story is told and recited from the perspective of the second generation young Ethiopian American, Jonas Woldemariam, a child of a first-generation immigrant parents. Jonas's crumbling marriage forced him to go back over the traces of his parents, Yosef and Miriam about their complex honeymoon journey. This novel consists of three parts which is organized into twenty-seven chapters with absence of the conventional and traditional structure of the plot of the events. In other words, the story is not narrated in a linear way, rather it moves backwards and forwards, with flashbacks and memories going back into time and space. As such, the fragmented narrative mirrors the fragmented lives and views of the represented characters.

One early September afternoon, Yosef and Mariam, young Ethiopian immigrants who spent their first year of marriage apart, set off on a road trip from their new home in Peoria, Illinois, to Nashville, Tennessee, in search of a new identity as an American couple. The narrative loosely tracks the lives of the immigrants though the story developed through the multiple fragmentations of their relationships. Despite the fact of having various details of lives, the main point of their inability to make stable relationships vibrate through the individual's narrative. Yosef died following a miserable Thirty years of marriage, and Jonas needed to make sense of the volatile generational and cultural ties that had forged him. Leaving behind his marriage and job in New York, Jonas set out to retrace his mother and father's trip and weave together a family history that took him from the chaotic center of his parents' home, Ethiopia to his life in the America of today; a story that holds the possibility of reconciliation and redemption the reality and the invented. In peculiar, Jonas might intend to be closer to understand his own failures from his past life.

## APPENDIX 3

### Synopsis of *All Our Names* (AON)

*All Our Names* is the story of a strong human relationship between two young African men who joined in a time of complaint in Africa, and the life of a woman whom one of them met in America. A young man from Ethiopia dropped his original name and went to the capital of Uganda, Kampala, with a mega dream to study literature. He made friends with a Ugandan Isaac and the couple became essentially intimate friends. Isaac's vision was to be a politician as the country was in a state of unstable position. Fundamentally, *All Our Names* tells the story of two Isaacs and Helen of the 1970s. The story, which took place in both Uganda, and a Midwestern U.S. town called Laurel, is told partly by Isaac, whose real name isn't really Isaac (he was also called Langston, Professor, and Dickens at different times and by different people). Partly of the novel is narrated by Helen, the white American social worker assigned to help him after he came to the US to study at university. Shortly after his arrival, the pair fell in love which was supposed not acceptable in a community still overwhelmed by bigotry.

The stories of Helen and Isaac intertwined to foreground the epicenter of the events portrayed in the historical novel as one form of devotion, change, and the true meaning of identity. The narrator of the African sections is an Ethiopian who has travelled down to US through Uganda, having shed the thirteen inherited names his father gave him. Readers know him briefly and intermittently only as Langston or the Professor, both names were given to him by his militant friend Isaac. The other narrator, Helen, worked for the Lutheran Relief Services in a Midwestern town called Laurel, a place where prejudice and racism prevail as a threat for the immigrants. For their love to display, the couple must fight the bigotries of the town, and those of her family and colleagues. The love affair between Helen and Isaac makes up the second half of the story. The chapters bounce between Uganda and America, depending on who is narrating, and Isaac is at the center of both narratives—he told us one side of the story in Uganda, and on the other side, we have Helen telling the reader about Isaac's arrival in her town of Laurel. The dual narratives are supposed to compare and contrast his life in these two worlds: the complications and challenges of his past and present lives, his motivations, heart, and soul.

Isaac (who has not yet been identified and described the original name and went by for the rest of the story) befriends the original Isaac, another pretend-student whose revolutionary spark was unsatisfied by the courtyard protests. In America, Helen and Isaac secretly begin a relationship made difficult by small-town racism and the silence surrounding Isaac's past. In alternating chapters, we have Isaac and Helen narrating the story development. In alternating chapters, Isaac recalled his life before meeting Helen. He had left his family and his small village behind to go to the university in the capital, where most students dream of being revolutionary and politics was the only subject worthy of study. Unlike the others, Isaac aspires to become a writer, though he was aware of the dangers of this profession. The novel begins with the faux Isaac, almost twenty-five, leaving his village in Ethiopia to "claim his share," i.e., to become a famous writer, surrounded by like-minded men. There, he met the other Ugandan Isaac at the university, though neither of them was student. Their relationship and involvement with the revolution against Idi Amin makes up Isaac's share of the narrative. The unnamed black narrator is told by his father to leave the country after rumors of soldiers revolting in the south and of university students going into the countryside to persuade youths to join the revolutionary movement reach the countryside. It is presented Isaac to role the underclass living of the immigrants in misery and invisible in their own hosting country.