

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

Construction of Self: Narrating Minds in Two Novels of Adam Retta

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Construction of Self: Narrating Minds in Two Novels of Adam Retta

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**A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Foreign Languages and
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Journalism & Communication
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This is to certify that the thesis submitted by Yewubdar Demissie entitled **Construction of Self: Narrating Minds in Two Novels of Adam Retta**, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature complies with the regulations of the university and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the construction of self in two Amharic novels of Adam Retta, “Yesinibit Keleamat” (2016) and “Merek” (2017). The main objective of the study then, is to examine the relationship between life story and construction of self, thereby understand and gain more insight into the processes of self construction in the context of fictional characters. In order to accomplish this objective, I tried to review relevant literature in relation to self, narrative and plot. Moreover, the social constructionists approach to narrative and self, together with a theory of plot structure, has laid the foundation for the study’s theoretical framework, which made it interdisciplinary by its nature as it draws concepts from literary theory and narrative identity theory in social psychology. Social constructionism contends that self is defined through a continuous process of narrative construction in social contexts. My research uses this premise as a starting point and asks how the character-narrators in these novels attempt to organize their life experiences into coherent self-narratives to define themselves. Then an attempt is made to perform a textual analysis on five selected self narratives from the two novels in accordance with the reviewed literature and theoretical framework by focusing on dominant stories constituted by important life events and their organization into a coherent life story in order to define the self. The findings indicate that dominant stories are frequently found to be problem-loaded with three recurring experiences, i.e., the physical body, suffering and relationships, which are found to be fertile grounds from which the characters draw a strong sense of selves. Beginnings of the narrative texts provided hints on specific points that the narrating subjects want to accentuate on, while chronological beginnings shed light on familial influences on identity. Multiple flashbacks also situate some of the self narratives with beginnings “in medias res”, which in most cases served as indicators of the following chaotic life story with conflicting selves and identity struggles. Endings, on the other hand, gave some of the self-narratives definite conclusions, while leaving others open, designating the ongoing nature of identity work. In addition to this, turning points in characters’ life involved surprising incidents which, usually, are followed by profound shifts in identity. Besides this, identity changes are mainly triggered by influences from significant others, followed by sudden and enlightening realizations about the self. In conclusion, the self narratives demonstrated how self-construction is an ongoing social narrative practice and not something to be settled once and for all.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

The study of narratives is of interest to disciplines as diverse as literary criticism, philosophy, anthropology, theology, linguistics, art, psychology, drama and history. The study of narrative has moved beyond the province of poetic, dramatic or fictional narrative to the exploration of the role of narrative in social and psychological formations. Hence, narrative inquiry has become a very wide field to navigate and is always in progress where the multi-dimensional theories regarding narrative are ever changing. (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001).

Storytelling has a long tradition, but the practice of carefully studying narratives emerged in the 1960s and flourished in the 1980s. According to Lieblich, et al., narrative research includes “any study that uses or analyzes narrative materials” (Lieblich, et. al., 1998:2). The centrality of narrative in current thought and discourse derives mainly from narratology, poststructuralist literary and cultural theory, and constructivist approaches in the social sciences. Although narrative research originated from literature, different fields of study including history, anthropology, sociology, sociolinguistics, and education, have adopted their own approaches and are engaged in the study of narratives. Hence, narrative research has many forms, uses a variety of analytic practices, and is rooted in different social and humanities disciplines. (Brockmeier & Harre, 2001).

In literary theory, narratology is a discipline devoted to the study of the narrative structure and its representation. Since the time of Plato narrative (*diegesis*) was distinguished from drama (*mimesis*) based on the notion that the first tells, while the second shows and literary theorists put emphasis on the story-telling aspect of narrative. Based on this, narrative has been systematically studied by literary theorists as a fundamental process of human understanding. It is important, though, to realize that narrative is not simply a literary genre, or merely a form of human discourse, but is a basic property of the human mind, rather rightly described by Hardy as “a primary act of mind transferred to art from life” (Hardy, 1977:12).

Literary study is the field that is closely related to narrative study, and where the first significant researches of narrative texts were carried out. In Russian formalism narratology is based on the idea of a common literary language, or a universal pattern of codes that operates within the

content of a work. The theory of narratology was further developed by mid-20th Century structuralism. Structural analysts adopted a method, with the application of language models to literature, which leads to the literary science called narratology. With the decline of structuralism post-structuralist perspectives of narratology have been developed and narrative became the subject matter of postmodern philosophy.

Narratology, as a branch of philosophical science, treats narrative as constituting "...the fundamental, psychological, linguistic, culturological and philosophical basis for our attempts to come to terms with nature and the living conditions, which in turn makes it possible to understand and create senses" (Brockmeier & Harre, 2001:40). Narrative serves as a form of our understanding of the world and ultimately ourselves. The link between narratives and exploration of self has traditions going back to Freudian psychoanalysis. Also, current scholarship views narrative discourse as "a privileged mode for self-construction" (Georgakopoulou, 2007:15). We use stories to tell our lives, and in turn, stories shape our lives. Thus, narratives prove to be a highly appropriate means for the exploration of the self, or the construction of selves in specific time and space. As such, most scholars of narrative believe that human identity is bound to the notion of narrative to the point that human identity could not exist without narrative construction. (Freeman & Brockmier, 2001; Sabrin, 2003; Bruner, 1990).

The self is frequently the subject of inquiry within the fields of social sciences and humanities. Moreover, these fields had come several times to the conclusion that narration is a very special feature of human nature, and therefore, it is a key to understanding humans. Especially, literature has always been concerned with the self and its workings.

All novels, of every age, are concerned with the enigma of the self. As soon as you create an imaginary being, a character, you are automatically confronted by the question: What is the self? How can the self be grasped? It is one of those fundamental questions on which the novel, as novel, is based. (Kundera, 1988:23).

In this process, narrative organization becomes a key element of human life. Recent narrative theory has been increasingly interested in the representation of consciousness in narratives. Some of these theories that redefined narratives in cognitive terms, have emphasized the centrality of mind for all narrative understanding. Literature enables the exploration of both actual and possible mind created worlds. "One of the essential functions of narrative as art is, thus, to

subjunctivize the world,...to open us up to the hypothetical, to the range of actual and possible perspectives that constitute the real life of the interpretive mind” (Brockmier, 1996:290).

The mind is the thinking part of the self, and hence, as Bruner puts it, is an "instrument for producing worlds" (1986:104). This production of worlds is done through the process of storytelling. The neuroscientist Antonio Damasio wrote, “Consciousness begins when brains acquire the power, the simple power, I must add, of telling a story.” (1999:10). Narrative thinking is, then, a particular frame of mind that leads individuals towards telling stories that have flow, connection and satisfaction.

The mental action of fictional minds within fictional worlds constitutes the core of the plot of the story. Alan Palmer (2004) has applied new aspects of this knowledge to construct the outlines of narrative theory that is concerned with the human mind, and how narratives can be understood in relation to that focal point. In *Fictional Minds*, Palmer has stated that “narrative fiction is, in essence, the presentation of fictional mental functioning”, and hence the study of the novel “is the study of fictional mental functioning” (2004:5). Similarly, Fludernik (1996: 28–30) argues that narrativity fundamentally involves the presentation of a consciousness, reflecting on and reacting to events and evaluating them. Moreover, she suggests that any extended piece of narrative relies on the experiential portrayal of event sequences and human consciousness.

On a related note, the idea that human life and mind are at the same time individual and social has been part of literary and narrative studies since their inception. The individual mind is inextricably interwoven with the discursive weave of the social world. Based on this, Palmer (2010:39-40) argues that fictional minds need to be approached not only from an “internalist” but also from an “externalist” perspective, as social fictional minds. Social constructionist approach contributes to the shift from understanding mind as an information processing tool to understanding it as a relational meaning-making process. This study, based on the social constructionists’ understanding of “the narrated self”, examines the relationship between narratives and self in Adam Retta’s two Amharic novels *Yesinibit Kelemat* (2016) and *Merek* (2015).

The novel is an extended generally fictional prose narrative, which adopted features of the old romance and became the object of literary criticism during the 18th century. When it comes to

our country, the genre of the novel was introduced at the beginning of twentieth century. This makes novel writing in Amharic a century-old practice in Ethiopia. There is a consensus among Amharic literary scholars that Afawarq Gabra Eyasus's *Lebb Wallad Tarik* published in 1908, marks the beginning of the novel in Amharic language (Gerard, 1968; Taye, 1986; Taye & Shiferaw, 2000). Despite the fact that it can hardly be recognized as a proper fiction by western standards, because of its "rather naive and, in some respects, almost Victorian story" (Gerard, 1968:44) nature, this novel is one of the first to have been written in any of the vernacular languages of Africa.

This novel paves the way for the history of modern Amharic literature. Following it, a number of novels have been produced in this language. Afawarq's successors, such as Heruy Walda Sellase and Germachaw Teklehawaryat further laid the foundation for Amharic novel with their prose fictions *Addis Alem* (1932) and *Araya* (1948) respectively. Unlike the rest of African literature, which is preoccupied with colonialism and its aftermath, Ethiopian literature has the luxury of entertaining various ideas. As such these early writers were predominantly occupied with issues of moral teaching, civilization and the glorification of the past. (Melakneh, 2005; Taye & Shiferaw, 2000).

The later generation of writers such as Haddis Alemayehu (1966) in *Fikir Eske Mekabir*, Berhanu Zerihun (1966) in *YeTewodros Enba*, Be'alu Girma (1970) in *Ke'admas Bashager* and Dagnachew Worku (1970) in *Adefris* generally shift their attention to contemporary social issues and focused on developing artistic effects through practicing innovative narrative techniques. Moreover, these novels are significantly influenced by the sociopolitical conditions of the period they were produced:

In spite of the difference in settings, subject matter, and techniques, these works have evident proximity in ideology, spirit, and in the moods and emotions they create in the reader. They are permeated by existentialist ideology where ignorance is blended with knowledge, the former stronger; death juxtaposed with life, death reigns; and despair is mixed with hope, despair dominates. Always constricted by existential dilemmas, they invariably ended up in disillusionment, futility, alienation, guilty conscience, and punishment. (Tewodros, 2013:21).

Contemporary Amharic literature is characterized by a proliferation of novels. There is also a significant change and development both in form and content of these novels from their predecessors. Whereas earlier Amharic writers were mainly preoccupied with religious,

moralistic and didactic themes, contemporary Amharic novelists have shown a marked shift from their predecessors by giving their works greater social significance and realism. Adam Retta is one of the contemporary Amharic novelists whose works, *Yesinibit kelemat* (2016) and *Merek* (2015), have been given attention in this study.

Adam Retta is a well known and highly acclaimed contemporary Amharic writer, whose works have received wide acceptance and admiration among Ethiopian literary circle. The author is known for his unique way of narrative representation. Moreover, elements unfamiliar to the Amharic novel, such as endnotes, footnotes, diagrams, tables, texts in colors, etc, are peculiar features of Adams works. He is also known for his tendency of taking an unusual event like the occurrence of miracle in the plot to formulate a change in the story. In this case the mention of dream worlds as rare extraordinary experiences has been taken as a support to develop the plot of his novels *Yesinibit kelemat* and *Merek*. Thus, Adam can be taken as a prominent figure in the history of Amharic literature.

The author began his literary journey as a short story writer and then after several years since his first short story collection *Mahlet* (1989), he came back with his first novel *Gracha Kachiloch* (2005), which is, later, followed by more of its kind. Since then he has secured popularity in Ethiopia as a favorite Amharic novelist. After he published his novel, Adam returned back to his earlier engagement with writing short stories. In this enterprise he produced five collections of short stories; *Alengana Misir* (2009), *Etemete Lomishita* (2009), *Kesemay Yewerede Firfir* (2010), *Yiwesidal Menged Yametal Menged* (2011) and *Himamatina Begena* (2012), before he published his second novel.

So far, Adam has published four novels. One of the hallmarks of Adam's novels is the self-construction of characters with self-conscious as well as innovative use of narrative technique. In particular, Adam is noted for frequently employing contemplative narrators. He adopts the technique of having the story told by the characters themselves without making his presence felt during the course of the narrative. This has enabled him to put forth his point of view and his comments without allowing the reader to feel his presence. *Yesinibit Kelemat* (Colors of Adios) (2016) is one of the recent ones with such characteristics. The novel is mapped in to eight chapters where each chapter is named after a specific color. These eight long chapters, in almost a thousand action-packed pages, rich in detail, are set in historically important period in which

the characters play key roles. It is a collection of interconnected stories, mainly self narratives, with over a dozen characters; humans, personified animals and mythical creatures.

Making self-observation the center of attention, *Yesinibet Kelemat* presents us with characters of various qualities and attitudes and each character's life story at length and with incredible details. The novel also stretches in several directions and quite a few stories within are overlapping. In this sense and in terms of the number of stories accommodated in, almost, a 1000 pages long novel, it can be taken as the bulkiest of all Adam's works. The novel chronicles the physical, psychological and spiritual journey of these characters from childhood innocence to adulthood awareness. It presents the complexity, depth, and richness of the life experiences of these characters, where, mostly, each narrates his/her own life story. Each self-narrative is further divided into smaller story parts concerned with a specific issue. These parts are separated from each other by similar parts from other characters' self-narratives. The interruptions sometimes put as many as four hundred pages between the parts of a single self-narrative.

The stories in *Yesinibit Kelemat* are told mainly by several homodiegetic narrators and occasionally a hetrodiegetic narrator steps in to tell the story of some of the characters. The homodiegetic narrators are the main characters, each relating his/her own or other characters' story from their own individual perspectives. If a character is presented as recounting story actions in some fashion (telling, recollecting, etc.), the novel possesses a character- narrator. Since these character-narrators are telling their story in the first person, focalization and voice is mainly theirs. In homodiegetic narratives, the narrator is perceived as a character within the story world, so that the act of narration also contributes to his/her self-construction, which makes this novel a perfect candidate for such analysis as this study is engaged with.

Yesinibit Kelemat is primarily a novel about human relations, the effect of personal choice on them, and their reciprocating impact. Menelik is unfaithful, because Fiameta had been mischievously brilliant and beautiful and impossible to get; for Bella her parents died when she was little and she had never seen her parents embrace and so on. The stories focus on how the various couples in the novel come together and their agonizing breakups. The complexity of human relations as depicted in these characters' interactions, their impact and consequences render the novel as an infinite source of human truths and possibilities. Through these interactions of characters the novel represents the image of current Ethiopia with all its

economic, social and political problems. Perhaps, the “farewell”, in the title phrase, suggests the departure of all these problems in the future. As the literary scholar Tewodros Gebre described, *Yesinibit Kelemat* might as well be a novel signaling “a new state formation” in the country.

Adam’s novel *Merek* (soup), on the other hand, is a six hundred and one pages novel published a few years before *Yesinibit Kelemat*. Adam divides this novel into three major sections, which he further separates into several subsections or chapters. The two novels are related to each other by several textual indicators. Similar to *Yesinibit Kelemat*, the novel *Merek* focuses on the day-to-day life experience of a group of people. Again, here too, the story is mainly presented by homodiegetic character-narrators who are obsessed with telling stories of their lives in which they experience the pleasures and agonies of love. Hence, the first person perspective runs through the narrative course of *Merek* too. Moreover, in dealing with their thematic content, the two novels consider the daily lives of individuals in past and present day Ethiopia over the broader canvass of the country’s socio-political issues.

Merek mainly deals with the pre-1990 image of Ethiopia with its social and political problems and seems to be a precursor to what was to come in *Yesinibit Kelemat*. Politics, as a favorite issue of most authors, is used as a background of these two novels. The author used socio-politics as an important element to develop the characters’ identities. These socio-political events associated with the characters are used as a solid ground to highlight the basic building blocks for the development of the plot which is the basic element of the characters’ self-narratives.

Moreover, some of the characters in *Merek* briefly appear in *Yesinibit Kelemat* just enough to show that the stories told in these two novels are closely related. These phenomenon goes as far as locating some of the textual beginnings of the self narratives in *Yesinibit Kelemat* in *Merek* and some of the endings of the self narratives in *Merek* in *Yesinibit Kelemat*. This fact encourages the consideration of how the identities of some of the characters evolve from text to text. But the connections between these two literary texts can be properly appreciated through the relationship of plot construction and character identity development. In the two novels the plots and the characters are aesthetically interconnected, where through the progression of the plot the character-narrators give the silent echoes of their narrative identities. The two novels are then, to a great degree, narratives that represent the process of narrative self-construction through showing journeys of the protagonists from childhood innocence to adult awareness. Put another

way, through both form and content, Adam's novels attempt to highlight the issue of identity construction.

These novels have also been read as typical examples of postmodern literature. (Tseday, 2015). An interesting aspect in the study of these novels from this perspective is the importance of narration for creating identity. The literary technique Adam employed in characterization, makes room in which it is possible to explore narration as a means of forming identities. The characters provide their autobiographies and their stories are presented in detail. The use of narration as a means of constructing identities is exploited here to the maximum.

In studies of the postmodern self, the narrated self has become a central theory, where it is natural to "think of the self in a narrative mode." (MacIntyre, 1982:206). In the case of the current study, this implies that the characters' self-perception relies on their concept of their narratives. One important feature of the subject novels in this study is the theme of "Self", which makes them convenient for an exploration of identity related issues in the postmodern age. These two novels touch upon life and portray the ordinary realities of average people. Both in their form and subject matter, the novels dramatize the characters' compulsion to tell their self-narratives and the desire to have them heard by others.

Self-construction, as I propose in this study, is a process where narratives can be helpful to bring out different and complex processes of identity construction. Thus, the study concentrates on the power and uses of narrative and its relation with self construction, which is presented through the two novels' self-reflective storytellers, who are engaged in an interpretative identity making enterprise. Adam's narrators tell their self narratives, addressing their supposed audience directly giving the sense that it is only by telling their narratives that they can come to a better self-understanding. By doing so they offer a particularly fruitful ground for an examination of an ongoing argument that personal identities are constructed through storytelling or the consideration of the close tie between narrative and self construction.

In this study I argue that philosophical and psychological narrative theories of self have relevance in the study of fictional identities. I have tried to show the importance of narratives for self-construction of the characters in these novels, applying narrative identity theory in social constructionism together with theory of plot in literature to analyze the function of narration. In

post-classical narratology, the relation of an actual mind to its literary representations has been a widely discussed topic. Moreover, literary scholars have drawn on ideas from interdisciplinary research including psychology, the philosophy of mind, and linguistics. Accordingly, this study is situated within narrative study and relies on a mixed theoretical framework pairing literary theory and the social constructionist approach to narrative identity, to analyze the subject novels. Hence, what is attempted in the study is engagement with self narratives as a process which is considered to be the construction of the individual narrative identity of characters in the two novels. Briefly, the research is an inquiry into the narrative construction of self.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The title of this study came through the researcher's mind while reading the novel *Yesinibit Kelemat* (2016) by one of Ethiopian novelists, Adam Retta, mainly because the characters are restlessly engaged in relating their life stories, through which they try to define who they are. Then, I noticed that this novel is quite similar to the author's previously published novel *Merek* (2015) in terms of the character's incessant engagement in telling life stories. Therefore, I made a decision to make the main concern of this study the exploration of how the characters in these novels employ self narratives to construct and sustain a sense of self or identity.

The importance of narratives in the process of self-construction has been given great emphasis in post-classical narratology, which stresses the need for a narrative-centered approach in self and identity-related studies. In addition to this, scholars argue that narrative is the best way, if not the only one that we have, to understand how people create their sense of self. Singer, (2004:438) highlights that "to understand the identity formation process is to understand how individuals craft narratives from experiences, tell these stories internally and to others, and ultimately apply these stories to knowledge of self, other and the world in general."

An initial review of critical literature (see section 2.4) indicated that, in the context of our country, there are previous researches that explored fictional characters focusing on identity. However, these studies are often carried out without explicit explanation of identity as a narrative construct. For example little or no consideration is given to the stories told by characters as a means by which the self is constructed. The limited body of critical research focused on self, and the lack of explicit reference to self as a narrative construct, then, led to the

development of objectives and research questions of this study, which examines the relationship between life story and construction of self, in the context of the fictional characters in the novels *Yesinibit Kelemat* and *Merek*. .

The research questions are, then, formulated following a literature review and consideration of the construction of self in narrative terms. The central question that has driven this research is, with particular focus on narratives, How is the self constructed? Three subsidiary questions contribute to answering this central question and serve as thematic strands to structure the presentation of data. These specific research questions are:

1. What important life events/experiences are selected to constitute the self in the case of each selected character narrator?
2. Is the process of self-construction through narration influenced or not by other selves existent in the fictional world?
3. How are identity changes reflected in the individual self-narratives in general and, in particular, in the causality construction of these self-narratives?

1.3. Objectives of the study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between life story and construction of self, and thereby to understand and gain more insight into the processes of self-construction in the context of the fictional characters in *Yesinibit Kelemat* and *Merek*. Therefore, the study aims to explore the experiences of five main characters who are the narrators of their own stories within the selected novels, by analyzing and interpreting their stories.

On the bases of the above general objective, the study attempts to address the following specific objectives:

1. To explore important life events/experiences that serve as narrative resources in the process of each character's identity construction.
2. To examine external influences that determine how characters construct their narrative identity.
3. To examine the change in characters' identities across time

1.4. Significance of the study

Adam Retta's novels *Yesinibit Kelemat* and *Merek* have accommodated several narratives regarding the main characters' life stories. Yet, they have not been explored from the perspective of narrative self construction. Existing research works treat narrative and self/identity separately. This study will serve as a bridge by bringing the two together. Thus, it is obvious that the need for such an investigation as this study is centered, is indispensable. Seen from this perspective the study may have the following benefits.

- ❖ It can help to catch a glimpse on the interplay of how the narratives we live by shape our sense of self and in turn we shape those very narratives, which may also have implications for real life individuals.
- ❖ Some of the self-related discussions in this study can be extended to facilitate conversations supportive of narrative self-construction.
- ❖ It may give insight into Ethiopian's postmodern conception of the self.
- ❖ It may contribute to the fictional identity research tradition of Amharic literature and provide a new understanding and appreciation of the novels *Yesinibit Kelemat* and *Merek*.

1.5. Scope of the Study

Though it is obvious that different literary studies can be performed on the novels *Yesinibit Kelemat* and *Merek*, in this study the interest is to investigate the process of self-construction via narratives told by and about the self, hence, it delimited within the following areas. First, when it comes to literary studies, addressing each and every thing written in the text may not be feasible. Therefore, though there are different stories included in the selected novels, only those narratives that focus on or are directly related to self-construction are considered. As such the study only focuses on the life stories of five selected characters, who happen to be the narrators of their own life stories in the two novels.

Second, the theoretical framework of the study is inspired by and draws on social constructionist narrative identity theory and literary theory of plot. Accordingly, concepts from the constructionist insights of Jerome Bruner and Kenneth Gergen, together with Richardson's theory of plot (see chapter 3) are applied to understand the novels. Moreover, narrative research allows prior theory to guide analysis but at the same time it also permits new theoretical

understandings to emerge from data. Based on this, the probability of including ideas that may emerge during the process of analysis and interpretation as supportive means of meaning making has become very high.

1.6. Methodology of the study

This section describes the method used to investigate how characters use narratives to construct their identities. The title of this study suggests a narrative approach as a method of inquiry; narrative in turn lends itself to a qualitative enquiry in order to capture the rich data within stories. Therefore, the research is embedded in the tradition of qualitative research.

An important assumption in narrative inquiry is the belief that narratives do not reflect reality but instead reality is constructed in the telling of narratives. Therefore, narratives have “enormous power to shape reality” (Spector-Mersel, 2010:208). Following this, the study is based on a narrative epistemological point of departure, implying that narratives are perceived to be fundamental for human sense-making and also legitimate for the construction of self (Polkinghorne, 1988; Bruner, 1990; Gergen, 1994).

As is true for qualitative research as a whole, narrative inquiry is guided by certain assumptions about the nature of reality and how people experience it. In this case, in order to investigate the how of the self-construction processes, the study relies on literary and identity theories, which guide the investigative process.

Narrative inquiry is also inherently multidisciplinary. Adding to this point, Herman remarks that postclassical narratology is “marked by a profusion of new methodologies and research hypotheses; the result is a host of new perspectives on the forms and functions of narrative itself” (Herman, 1999:2-3). Literary theorists have drawn on ideas from different disciplines, including psychology, philosophy and linguistics, hence, emphasizing the interdisciplinary nature of narrative inquiry. Among these, psychology has been an important part of various literary theories for decades. Moreover, literature has an exceptional quality that makes the study of it interdisciplinary by nature. It is “a laboratory in which possible human realities can be imagined and tested.” (Brockmeier & Harre, 2001:54).

In assessing such an issue as identity-construction in the context of fictional characters one has to employ theories belonging to social psychology and also to literary studies in a balanced way so as to effectively show the process of narrative identity construction. According to Palmer, “Fictional minds need to be approached not only from an “internalist,” but also from an “externalist” perspective: as “social fictional minds”. (Palmer, 2010: 40). Consequently, in this study, the focus is on postmodernist fictional mind presentation, by which the fictional consciousness is transformed into a narrative form by constructing everyday experiences. Accordingly, to complement the narrative focus of this research and data collection strategies, the study is theoretically grounded in the traditions of literary theory and constructionist narrative identity theory. Hence, theories are drawn from literary theory of plot and postmodern conceptualizations of self as a narrative construct. Particularly, the social constructionist theory of narrative identity is called forth to support the investigation of self-construction.

Crucial to understanding the role that narrative plays in the construction of identity is the distinction between the content of the story and the way in which it is being told, which is directly related to plot structure. I propose that this distinction between content and telling is particularly important with respect to narrative identity. Based on this, from the literary theory perspective, the study highlights one of the major pillars of a story: plot which is directly linked to narrative identity construction (see section 3.2).

Constructing identity through narratives cannot be done without the ability to construct the stories themselves. If a person wants to be understood by others and be accepted with his/her self-narrative, then he/she must certainly rely on plotting the story in some way. The power of narrative is to order events in logical sequence; hence, plot is important in narrative analysis. Most importantly, examining the plot construction or event selection and temporal organization process also helps to answer one of the research questions of the study. Hence, a concept of narrative plot construction from literary theory has become part of the frame of analysis. This gives the study an interdisciplinary stature since it also draws the theory of narrative identity from the field of narrative psychology and applies it in literature.

Regarding the self, the social constructionist research position indicates a shift from traditional psychology’s conceptualization of identity in terms of personality, needs and motivation, towards a narratively produced individual identity, which is a product of social processes. Thus,

attention is refocused on the structures of human interaction, and the concept of self is “... removed from the head and placed within the sphere of social discourse” (Gergen, 1985:271).

Social constructionist approaches are many and overlapping. In this study, I take a moderate social constructionist position particularly focusing on the insights of narrative psychologist Jerome Bruner and social psychologist Kenneth Gergen whose notions of the “narrative self” is basically constructionist. I take social constructionism as the research’s theoretical point of departure because it supports the explorative examination of the process of identity construction through narrative. The constructionist approach, when paired with literary theory, can offer interpretive clues to the narratives in question. The study, thus, amalgamates these methodological paradigms, acknowledging the literary underpinnings of the research, while embracing the equally important tradition of social constructionism in the development and analysis of the data.

In the analysis, Adam’s two novels are approached by examining the process of self-construction depending on how individual characters construct their life stories within themselves and in relation to other characters and their environment. Thus, the study operates from a narratological point of view and bases the analysis on one of the narratological elements, i.e. plot. The characters are studied as narratively constructed identities and their actions and role in formulation of the plots of their stories. The focus is then, on the characters’ habitual daily experiences, their consequences and the conclusions they draw from them.

The study deals with literary texts; consequently, the data collection instrument employed is textual analysis. The data collection process is done by taking notes and highlighting important information while reading. Accordingly, the initial analysis involves highlighting specific texts in the novels where the content appeared to be important in relation to self-construction. Another important point relating to data is the method of discerning narrative segments for analysis, and selecting which segments to analyze. In literary studies, determining the sample size may mean specifying the size of the texts to be studied. Riessman emphasizes that decisions have to be made about where a narrative starts and where it ends, while realizing that to place boundaries around narratives is very much a matter of choices, definitions and research decisions.(Riessman, 2008:699). In this regard, the study focuses on two Amharic novels by Adam Retta (*Yesinibit Kelemat* and *Merek*).

I have chosen these novels based on their structural and content similarity in relation to identity construction. I read through both novels in their entirety, and selected a smaller sample for a more focused analysis. As a result, from these novels I considered only narratives of first person perspectives or those parts of the novels where main characters tell their own stories. But even then, there are several such narratives in these selected novels; therefore, I purposely chose five self-narratives in general (two from *Merek* and three from *Yesinibit Kelemat*). This includes the stories of the characters Menelik, Bella, Mitik, Ezira and Makida.

These five characters are selected mainly to illustrate different individual identity formation and learn about the general from the particular. Moreover, three of these character-narrators, also, briefly appear as minor characters in either of the novels where they are not portrayed as full-fledged characters, i.e., the characters from *Merek* Ezra and Makida are mentioned in *Yesinibit Kelemat* while Bella from *Yesinibit Kelemat* momentarily appears in *Merek*. This character relation and story continuity across different novels, is also another reason for selecting the five characters' stories for analysis.

Following this, at the center of the general inquiry, I put these five characters who are the narrators of their own life stories. When a narrator (character) tells and interprets his/her self narrative, the character is simultaneously constructing one or several narrative identities. The narrator's personality, identity, and character are revealed through the self narrative presented by him/her. Hence, by providing entry into a character's inner world, self narratives convey a sense of his/her meaning-making and evolving self. Accordingly, high priority is given to extensive quotes from the selected novels so as to reveal the process of self-construction via narrating life stories. Therefore, in the analysis each of the characters' narratives is treated separately and in detail within the paired framework of social constructionist identity theory and literary theory of plot.

The analysis consists of two analytical steps:- a content analysis of identifying dominant stories and important life events and a temporal analysis of the narrative construction process. The first one focuses on analyzing the narratives content-wise in order to identify dominant and, according to Bruner, often problem loaded, storylines. This in turn facilitates the analytical tracking of important life events/experiences that have laid the foundation for different identity constructs.

The second one aims to further investigate the process of narrative self-construction, i.e. how character narrators turn various fragments of their life stories into coherent self-narratives. In order to explicate this process, I draw on few concepts of social constructionist identity theory (Jerome Bruner's and Kenneth Gergen's) such as dominant stories, turning points, identity changes and multiplicity of selves, together with Richardson's insights on narrative beginnings and endings, which are concepts directly related to plot construction (See section 3.1&3.2). The plot, specifically narrative beginnings and endings, is explored from the point of its significance in the process of self-construction of the characters.

In combination with the first phase of the analysis, this temporal analysis illuminates my understanding of how characters undergo through the process of constructing their sense of self via narratives. Moreover, by analyzing these narratives I also examine the change in characters' identities across time and social contexts. Here, the analysis is especially informed by Bruner's and Gergen's discussions of turning points and multiplicity of selves, respectively, both implying changes in identities. (See section 3.1).

One must choose events from a variety of options in self narratives which can serve as entry points into identity-seeking narratives. In order to point out important life experiences/events I have carefully selected dominant storylines under the first phase of the analysis. I considered only these selected dominant storylines from the general narrative of each self narrative in order to make the analysis focused and keep its manageable stature. These storylines are important in a sense that they allow me to go into more depth and provide insight into the process of narrative identity construction.

In this twofold analysis, I have attempted to reveal the complexity of the narrative self construction process and allow multiple and conflicting identity constructs to emerge. The analysis recognizes each individual character's self narrative in relation to self construction and explores how the social context influences this creative process. In the process of analyzing, all extracts taken from the selected texts are translated into English from the source language Amharic. Since the study has more to do with meaning than style, while translating, I have given less attention to stylistic features and focused more on the semantic aspects of the texts in focus. Finally, an attempt is made to relate the overall analyzed data and arrive at a general concept of self-construction in the selected novels.

1.7. Organization of the Study

This dissertation begins with an introductory chapter which incorporates background information background regarding the research, statement of the problem and the objectives, significance, scope and methods of the study. The background focuses on the study's scholarly context in which discussion regarding the field of narratology in general and its specific relation to literary study is made. Moreover, a short summary on the rise of Amharic novel and the works of contemporary novelist Adam Retta is given. This background information ends with a generalized remark that shows the study's strong conviction with the idea of self as a narrative construct.

Apart from the background the chapter also presents the problem that initiated the inquiry and the study's methodological issues are explicated. The rationale for the use of an interdisciplinary approach to study fictional identities as narrative constructs is outlined along with particulars related to the study's design and methodology. Accordingly, the study's problem statement with the research questions comes following the background of the study. The subsequent section presents the study's objectives that are developed based on the research questions. Then the study's significance, scope and methods are discussed, each under separate section.

The second chapter presents a review of concepts and studies related to this current research. While dealing with this review, I focused on defining major concepts applied in the study and studies directly or indirectly touching upon the issue raised in this research. Based on this, historically contextualized definitions of self, narrative and plot, and their relation to one another are discussed. The review also highlights key areas of debate such as the confusion created while using the terms "self" and "identity", and "story" and "narrative". The final section of this chapter attempts to unfold the knowledge gap that exists in this area of scholarship, which the present research endeavors to partially fill, by reviewing studies focusing on social constructionism, identity and works of Adam Retta.

The third chapter is dedicated to the theoretical foundation of the study. In this chapter I present the ontological and epistemological arguments for situating the study within an interdisciplinary framework of narrative identity theory within social constructionism and literary theory.

Concepts of social constructionism and plot structure are discussed as main foundations of the analytical procedure.

The analysis and interpretation of five selected self narratives, three of them from *Yesinibit Kelemat* and two of them from *Merek*, is presented in chapter four. Analysis is undertaken within each self narrative in order to thoroughly examine each individual story. In the final chapter I discuss the findings of the study in light of the analysis and explain them with explicit reference to self construction. Moreover, attempt is made to fuse findings into generalized conclusions and suggest some areas of related future researches based on the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This section aims to provide clarification regarding the central concepts that this study circumnavigates, which are self and narrative. The review is presented broadly so as to make evident the interdisciplinary range of theoretical contributions on narrative identity studies. Apart from this, previous critical studies that are found to be related to the concern of this study are also reviewed.

2.1. The Self

The intent of this condensed review is to bring to the surface important theoretical contributions to and movements in the conceptualization of “self” and also to illustrate how conceptualizations have changed over time. Historically, the concept of self has had a broad interdisciplinary foundation. The literature on the concept of self is also vast and disparate. The self is one of the most commonly studied concepts in the social sciences, and yet it is still an ambiguous and slippery term to define. Emphasizing the difficulty that arises when trying to define self, Bruner describes the concept as “a surprisingly quirky idea – intuitively obvious to common sense yet evasive to definition by the fastidious philosopher” (Bruner, 2002:63).

Usually, the attempts to define the self rely on self-representations or mental constructions about us as persons. People have ideas about the nature of the self, about the world, and about the interactions between the two. Flanagan writes that “the word self has many meanings; personality, character, an individual’s central character traits, the way(s) one carries oneself in the world, the way one represents oneself to oneself and to others ...” (Flanagan, 1996: vii). This view relies on the potential of one’s mind to make sense of or define oneself in terms of ideas that one conceives about him/herself.

Accordingly, people can consider themselves from a number of perspectives: “the individualistic “me” self or the collectivistic “us” self, the temporally near “now” self or the temporally distal “future” self, the immersed “mind’s eye” self or observer’s “eyes of others” self. (Mark & Tangney, 2012:73). Similarly, the attempt to understand the self by philosophers, psychologists and other social science scholars has been influenced by varieties of viewpoints. One of these viewpoints is to think the self as an indwelling presence, responsible of one’s experience in the world. (Campbell, 1957; Minsky, 1985).

From a different perspective, the self is viewed as something we care about. “One’s self is what one identifies oneself with, what a person cares most about, the loss of which amounts, for him, to self-destruction, either partial or total”(Abelson, 1977:91). What the person holds dear above everything else can be a number of things. One can identify with the idea that he/she holds about one’s own self, other selves, or even things. Here the self is equated with whatever one values most, a view that further complicates the attempt to define the self since there are a number of things that can be valued by a person at the same or in different times. In this view, a person can have as many selves as the number of things valued or identified with. This leads to the idea of conceiving the self as elusive and unknowable.

Perhaps, this can be one of the reasons why Harre thinks that the self can never be known. According to him, one’s self is that indescribable and unidentifiable private, inner being within one (Harre, 1984:26). This seems to put an end to the search, if we can never grasp it, then there is no point in trying to define or describe the self.

For Geertz the self is a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action, organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other wholes and against a social and natural background (Geertz, 1973:9). In this case the use of the term self incorporates the person who thinks about oneself and the object of thinking. The person is able to think and is aware of doing so, which is referred as “reflexive capacity” (Gecas, 1982; Mark & Tangney 2012). The beliefs and perceptions we have of ourselves and how we are seen and identified by others become the bases for self-definition.

The above wide ranging definitions show that defining the self is not an easy task. This may also be the reason why conceptualization of the term self has taken varied forms across different periods. Regardless of the difficulties of defining the term, a review of the early ideas of self seems necessary and essential to understand how the early ideas influence our thinking about the contemporary concept of self. Throughout human history, the questions of what or who we are have been a philosophical program.

Classical Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle defined the self as immaterial and spiritual soul. Following this, the self, as immaterial entity, is conceived to be separated from

the physical form. Both Plato and Aristotle argued that the soul and body are two different entities since the soul is immaterial and the body material.

Indeed Plato as well as Aristotle, ..., would agree that 'soul' mainly refers to the 'principle of life', so if the soul is present in the body, it makes it 'a living thing', i.e. it turns such body into the living being it is. Thus it is because of the soul that a body becomes a living body, endowed with vital functions (such as breathing, perceiving, thinking, and so forth) (Boeri & Kanayama, 2018:4).

This soul body dichotomy led to the subsequent mind and body duality, a conception of the self that also influenced the medieval period. Theologians such as Thomas Aquinas stressed the immortality and superiority of the soul to the body in which it dwelled. However, Aquinas emphasizes that the relationship between soul and body is not a mere power relation as Plato and Aristotle stressed, rather the two are united and operate as one.

As Aquinas puts it, people enjoy an intellectual life and they are things of the kind they are (rational animals) because of this. Aquinas calls that by virtue of which people are things of the kind they are their 'souls'. So he can say that human beings are bodily, but also that they are or have both body and soul. The two cannot be torn apart in any way that would leave what remained a human being. But they can be distinguished from each other and the soul of a human being can therefore be thought of as something subsisting immaterially. (Davies, 1998:258).

The Enlightenment in Europe was based on faith in human reason and rationalism. Hence, the self was established as a cognitively driven entity with the French philosopher Rene Descartes (1596-1650) famous statement "I think therefore I am". Descartes' idea of "the rational self" implies separating the mind from the body, hence, Cartesian duality.

The Cartesian view is that the distinction between mind and matter is a matter of ontology: the mind is a distinct entity in its own right, which operates, or can in principle operate, entirely independently of the material universe. This is the claim which has come to be known as Cartesian (or substantial) dualism: the mind is 'really distinct' from the body, a separate and independent substance (Cottingham, 1993:201).

The later philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) also emphasized on the self being rational and its action directed by thinking. Similar to that of Descartes, separation between mind and body is also at the center of Locke's philosophy of the self (Bennett, 1994). Therefore, the mind body dualism can be taken as a typical characteristic and significant contribution of this period. In

summary, early philosophical conceptions of the self emphasize on the separation of the individual from the society and of body and from mind.

The Romantic era (late 18th and early 19th centuries), was developed in response to the over-reliance on reason by the previous age thinkers. The romantic age rejected reasoning and returned to celebrating nature by putting particular emphasis on extreme emotions (Berlin, 2000). By privileging feeling over thought the romantics considered man as a cultural being, with culture being related to nature as opposed to the construct of the Enlightenment era, where culture was considered to have been an intellectual endeavor (Lurie, 1992:195). Culture, in this view, was seen to provide the necessary aesthetic framework for expressing the life of man.

In the twentieth century, Western philosophical tradition developed narratives of the self in which the person is a being who is consistent and knowable by him or herself and others. “Psychological theories continued to depict a self that was coherent and persistent across time, despite the dispossession, empowerment, and secularization introduced in the early modern period, and despite the amplification of these trends throughout late modernity” (Hertler1, et. al., 2017:129). Moreover, the modern self concept, similar to that of the enlightenment period, was constituted by cognitive thinking and the ability to exercise rational thinking. Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud framed the self within the multiple aspects of human psyche which he structured in to three parts (id, ego, and superego) (Freud, 1923). Although most of his ideas have been neglected by modern psychology, his theory of multiple selves has become to be one of the most enduring one.

Other prominent theorists in psychology also wrote about the self in the early decades of the twentieth century. Mead emphasizes that “The essence of the self... is cognitive: it lies in the internalized conversation of gestures which constitutes thinking, or in terms of which thought or reflection proceeds” (Mead, 1934:140). This notion of self implies that there is something central, an essential core, to human beings. Moreover, the modernists were also influenced by Cartesian dualism that mind is a closed space and that mind and body are separate. In general, modern perspectives consider the self as a being consistent and knowable by him/herself and by others. Hence, the forms of identity in modernity remain for a long time relatively substantial and fixed. This independent individual self gave way to the social one when modern ideas of self were questioned at the dawn of postmodernism.

Postmodernism challenges and deconstructs the idea of a single, fixed core self and provide alternatives to reconstruct the modern self. In the postmodern era the self becomes a narrative self and can be described and understood in an infinite variety of ways as opposed to the modernists' single being. Moreover, postmodern views propose a self indistinct from culture and social context. "The concept of person that exists within a given culture is not some alien element of the culture, nor something external that has been tacked onto an otherwise finished fabric. ...This subject, not only emerges from the total societal fabric, but serves to sustain that very fabric" (Sampson, 1983:140). Therefore, self is a created concept, a created narrative, linguistically constructed and existing in dialogue and in relationship (Bruner, 1990).

Anthony Giddens also describes the postmodern self as a narrative of life told by the self to others: "The concept of individual identity is in itself a typical institution of "high modernity" and persists through an ability to narrate one's life, formulate it into a narrative composed of terms that will be accepted by a relevant audience" (1991:410). Adding to this point, Crites defines the self as "a kind of aesthetic construct, recollected in and with the life of experience in narrative fashion" (1986:162). Therefore, the postmodern gathers a movement away from personal orientation towards an interpersonal and relational concept of self. In this postmodern view, self concept is not understood anymore as a private cognitive structure but as a discourse about the self.

To sum up postmodernism rejects major tenets of modernity, such as a belief in one stable truth and a view that coherence is natural. As a contrast, the postmodernists conceive multiple perspectives rather than generalizations; and the self as fragmented or not having a coherent or fixed essence.

Conceptualization and understanding of the self is further complicated by its relationship with the equally complex and multifaceted concept of identity. Sometimes the terms self and identity are used interchangeably and that what they refer to may differ within and across different publications. There are also times that the two are considered as distinct terms, however, "scholars often use the terms self and identity as if they were synonyms" (Mark & Tangney, 2012:74). Some even believe that the distinction between "self" and "identity" is artificial. And this proves to be true when the various definitions and descriptions given to self and identity are considered.

After carefully analyzing and summarizing definitions and descriptions given by different scholars, Mark and Tangery define “identity” as:

... the traits and characteristics, social relations, roles, and social group memberships that define who one is. Identities can be focused on the past-what used to be true of one, the present-what is true of one now, or the future-the person one expects or wishes to become, the person one feels obligated to try to become, or the person one fears one may become. (2012:69).

In this view identity is always in the process of conversational becoming, constructed and reconstructed through continuous interactions and relationships. A similar type of description can also be made about the self. So it becomes very important to answer the question what really is the difference between self and identity or understand the relationship between the two.

The intricate nature of self is further complicated when one considers whether there is one self or multiple selves. In recent postmodernist understandings the self is assumed to be multiple and there is no core “I” that a person can be identified with. Following this, identities are understood to be manifestations of these multiple selves in different occasions. As Stryker puts it, "The self is seen as embracing multiple identities linked to the roles and role relationships that constitute significant elements of social structures."(1979:177). Stets and Burke (2000) also observed that the core of an identity is the categorization of the self as an occupant of a role, and incorporating, into the self, the meanings and expectations associated with the role and its performance. Consequently, identity becomes whatever role the self plays in a given social context where the role is demanded.

The term “role” typically refers to the behavioral expectations associated with a position or status in a social system. Stets and Burke (2000:112) considers that one of the primary means of identity formation is the one conveyed by the role (role identity). In this way, the role imposed by society or self imposed by the individual contributes to the construction of the identity of the characters. Therefore, the overall self is organized into multiple identities, each of which is tied to aspects of the social structure. One has an identity, an “internalized positional designation” for each of the different positions or role relationships the person holds in society (Stryker, 1980:60). As a result, self as father is an identity, as is self as colleague, self as friend, and self as any of the other myriad of possibilities corresponding to the various roles one may play. Hence, it is the multiple self manifesting itself in various contexts with various roles that becomes identity.

All in all, identities are in relationship to a perspective that is relative to one's purposes and what one values. Identities constitute one's self concept that is, what comes to mind when one thinks of oneself, and what one believes is true of oneself. Now, the self can be described in an infinite variety of ways as changing identities. And in this case, self and identity become inseparably one and it is also in this sense that the two terms are used throughout this study. This understanding is also sustained by postmodern self and identity theories, among which social constructionism belongs (see Chapter 3).

2.2. Narrative and the Self

The use of the term "narrative" has become rather broad since the genres and forms of narrative texts appear to be countless. In narrative research, narratives have been defined in very inclusive ways, referring to any spoken or written presentations (Polkinghorne, 1988:13). Moreover, narrative research has, to a large extent, used stories and narratives interchangeably and applied the concept of story as equivalent to narrative (Bruner, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riesman, 1993). For instance, Bruner, (1990), although, uses the term "narrative" frequently, the term is interchangeable with "story" in his writings. According to Rimmon-Kenan's definition, "a story is a construct created in a suitable format that describes a sequence of fictional or non-fictional events in the form of written, spoken, poetry, prose, images, song, theatre or dance gossip, newspaper, ballet, painting, etc" (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983:55-70). In the context of this study, I use the terms as synonymous in order to avoid further complications and facilitate the process of understanding the term.

In generalized sense narrative refers to a form of discourse, in which we organize and give structure to the events in our lives. It constructs our experiences and, in turn, is used to understand our experiences. A classic formulation of narrative is an account of peoples' life with a beginning, middle, and end (Aristotle, 1997). Narratives, thus, focus on past, present and future events, which may not, necessarily, be told in chronological order, but can include flash-backs and flash-forwards. Hence, narrative is characterized by sequence, which indicates causal connections of events. Bruner (2001) sums up this idea as follows:

Narrative accounts must have at least two characteristics. They should center upon people and their intentional states: their desires, beliefs, and so on; and they should focus on how these intentional states led to certain kinds of activities. Such

an account should also be or appear to be order preserving, in the sense of preserving or appearing to preserve sequence — the sequential properties of which life itself consists or is supposed to consist (Bruner, 2001:28).

Narratives are about events, experiences and actions of individuals. In other words, they are composed of events, events are their fundamental unit. Narratives are created, experienced, and shared by individuals in conversation and action with one another and with the self. Narratives are the “stories that serve as communal resources that people use in ongoing relationships”. (Gergen, 1994:189). Similarly, Bruner holds that “Narrative deals with the vicissitudes of human intention” (Bruner, 1990:16). Bruner, further, suggests, “people frame moment by moment events in larger structures, the larger structures being narratives, provide an interpretive context for the components they encompass” (Bruner, 1990:64). We share ourselves and our lives with others by assembling the bits and pieces of our narratives into possible storied versions. Therefore, as far as human affairs are concerned, it is above all through narrative that we make sense of our experiences.

The presence of narrative is everywhere and in every corner of the world and is famously described by Roland Barthes:

The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances – as though any material were fit to receive man’s stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting, stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor have been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing, cultural backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself (Barthes, 1975:237-272).

The study of narratives is not confined in literary studies. An interest in narratives also has a long history in other disciplines too. Social science disciplines such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, education, and so on, have long had an interest in narrative as a human cognitive device for sense making and ordering life experiences. The underlying assumption, here, is that narratives are social products produced by people within the context of specific social, historical

and cultural locations in order to understand reality. Narratives are the "stories that serve as communal resources that people use in ongoing relationships" (Gergen, 1994:189).

Therefore, the link between identity and narrative, i.e., the idea that people create identity through constructing stories about their lives, is a common conception in both the humanities and the social sciences. Psychologists have all emphasized the importance of life story for understanding personality. The renowned psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, in the first decades of the 20th century, saw how the stories that clients brought to therapy could reveal the hidden depths of personality. Long after Freud, in the 1980s, "the narrative turn" began putting at its center the notion of the self as storyteller.

Theodore Sarbin's edited book, *Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct* (1986) is considered to introduce the notion of the self as the narrator or storyteller. Sabrin argued that to understand human action, a new approach that is based on narratives was needed. Following Sabrin prominent scholars of the field, such as Bruner (1986) and Polkinghome (1988) added their own contributions to the field and established the narrative turn in narrative psychology.

One of the basic claims that are repeatedly being made in narrative psychology is that narrative has a primary role in construction of self. (McAdams, 1993; Schafer, 1992; Shotter & Gergen 1989). Schafer (1992) briefly puts this case as follows:

It is especially important to emphasize that narrative is not an alternative to truth or reality, rather, it is the mode in which, inevitably, truth and reality are presented. We have only versions of the true and the real. Narratively unmediated, definitive access to truth and reality cannot be demonstrated. In this respect, therefore, there can be no absolute foundation on which observer or thinker stands; each must choose his or her narrative. (Schafer, 1992:xiv-xv).

Since our understanding of reality depends on it, needless to say that narrative also plays an important function in the formation and understanding of self. People use diverse means to craft their identities, for example the way they talk, dress and personal style signal who they are. Self narratives form an important part of this process of identity crafting. Self narratives are narratives that provide specific information about the narrator or explain his/her identity and lay. "Our self-making stories accumulate over time; even pattern themselves on conventional genres" (Bruner, 2002:65). In this narrative view the self is considered as a narrative construct, through

the storytelling process, the self is being formed. Polkinghorne eloquently speaks of this narrative dimension of our identity stating that “The self is that temporal order of human existence whose story begins with birth, has as its middle the episodes of a lifespan, and ends with death . . . The whole of an individual human existence is articulated in the narrative plot” (Polkinghorne, 1988:152). Hence, the primary motive for the construction of personal narratives is to create identity as people attempt to answer the question of who they are.

Narrative constructs our experiences and, in turn, is used to understand our experiences. In this practice of sense making language serves as a vehicle through which the process unfolds. We use language to construct, to organize, and to attribute meaning to our stories. “Selves we construct are the outcomes of this [narrative, storytelling, and language] process of meaning construction” (Bruner, 1990:138).

The postmodern self is, thus, considered to be a product of language expressed in the form of story-telling. By telling his/her narrative to others, the narrator is at the same time defining who he/she is. As Ricoeur (1992:158) explains, “How, indeed, could a subject of action give an ethical character to his or her own life taken as a whole if this life were not gathered together in some way, and how could this occur if not, precisely, in the form of a narrative?” And since the construction of identity is expressed in language by telling stories to others, narratives can be understood as the socially shared part of identity. This implies that, narratives are a way of understanding self in the context of a social reality where narratives are products of social interaction.

Over time, as humans point out who they are to themselves and to others, they come to develop a concept of who they are. We construct our own identities, and it seems that we can do this in a major way through narrative, i.e. through the stories we construct to define who we are. “The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character” (Ricoeur, 1981:186).

Narratives are at the core of our very conceptualization of identity as it is ingrained and unfolded in the narrative expression of a personal life story. We come to know ourselves through the stories we construct. We need a life story in order to be able to exist in the social world; it is

through telling about the self that a sense of self develops. In the end the self becomes the story of one's life. Whatever life is experienced by the self it is revealed and made known by the stories told about it. Because of this, selfhood and narrative are inextricably interlinked. In fact, "... there is no life apart from the stories told about it ..." (Freeman and Brockmeier, 2001:97). Without the stories we have nothing, no self to define or talk about. As McAdams elegantly puts it, "If you want to know me, you must know my story, for my story defines who I am. And if I want to know myself, to gain insights in to the meaning of my own life, then I, too, must come to know my own story" (McAdams, 1993:11).

If the self is a narrative construct, then it is reasonable to assume that the best possible avenue to self understanding will be provided by those very narratives. To know what it means to be a self, one should look closely at the stories told by the self. Viewing one's self as a narrative, in which life events are configured and made meaningful, emphasizes the constructive and interpretative nature of the self. The self, thus, becomes a narrative identity which an individual forms to make sense and meaning out of his/her life.

In summary, narratives dominate human life, and are foundational to the processes that organize and structure human experience. They offer a sense making process that is fundamental to understand human reality and enable human experiences to be seen as coherent unfolding of life. Therefore, the approach I take to explore the self emphasizes the active role narratives take in constructing our identities.

2.3. Plot as a Fundamental Element of Narrative

The classic account of plot postulates a distinct beginning followed by series of events that form a reasonably firm causal chain. Aristotle in his *Poetics* defines "mythos", usually translated as "plot" in English, as the arrangement of events. (Poetics, 1996:13). And when he lists the features of tragedy, he gives plot the most important role. Plot allows characters to come to the fore through their actions, brings about the emotional involvement of readers through reversal and recognition and generally constitutes the soul and source of tragedy. The neoclassical criticism of Italy and France in the 16th and 17th centuries demotes plot from the single governing principle of narrative to one of the features which authors need to master in order to achieve verisimilitude. Later in the course of the 19th century, character begins to gain

precedence over plot as the most important feature of narrative. The formalist tradition presents “plot” as a “skeletal story”, corresponding to a fully formed fabula inscribed in the text, while the structuralist legacy associate the concept of “plot” with the structure of the events told (the fabula).

In a more recent theory of narrative, plot is understood as the causal relation of events in a story. Brooks (1984:12) defines plot as “the design and intention of narrative, a structure for those meanings that are developed through temporal succession, or perhaps better: a structuring operation elicited by and made necessary by, those meanings that develop through succession and time”. Similarly, Ricoeur states that plot is “the intelligible whole that governs a succession of events in a story ... A story is made out of events to the extent that plot makes events in to a story” (1981:167). It is the carrier of the structure and that the plot is the series of actions and episodes arranged in order and proportion.

Simply put, plot is the sequence of causally related events in a story as the author chooses to arrange them; causality is an important feature of plot. Therefore, the term plot designates the ways in which the events and actions in a story are arranged. It is the actions and events of the story related to one another with cause and effect. Following this, there is a “considerable agreement on the basic task of plot: to tie the collection of events in to a seemingly organic whole” (Richardson 2019:60).

A narrative is analyzed from the point of view of its constituent components. One such component is the causal connectivity between the events in narrative or plot. Plot is said to be the most important part of narrative since causal connections, whether loose or strong, are necessary for narrative to exist. Strong plots make the story powerful and effective and “A narrative without a plot is a logical impossibility.” (Chatman, 1978:48). The same can be said about the temporal feature of narratives, which can be defined by the recreation of the temporal succession of events in the narrative sequence in which these events are causally connected. Sequencing, which is a distinguishing feature of narratives, has been emphasized by many researchers as necessary and important for defining narratives.

This is also why Cohn (1999:12), gives a closely related definition of narrative as that of plot, “a series of statements that deal with a causally related sequence of events that concern human (or

human-like) beings”. Similarly, Richardson in his book *A Poetics of Plot for the Twenty-First Century*, defines narrative as “a representation of a causally related series of events” (2019:28). Plot focuses attention on the important characters and their roles in the story. It motivates the characters to affect the story, and connect the events in an orderly manner. Forster explains the role of plot in a narrative as a “sort of higher government official” (1953:81) who constantly calls up on characters to explain themselves. So when the plot changes so does the characters, implying the significant influence of plot on the path a narrative ultimately takes.

Plot is also recognized as the action element in narrative. The actions are performed by particular characters in a work; plot and character are therefore interdependent critical concepts. The plot justifies the choices that characters make. Character generates plot and plot results from and is dependent upon character. The progression of the plot is also based on how the characters are made to react to a particular situation.

“Plot is the principle of interconnectedness and intention which we cannot do without in moving through the discrete elements-incidents, episodes, actions-of a narrative.” (Brooks, 1984: 5). The plot is, hence, the centre of the narrative structure. We get the plot of a narrative by particularly describing its content. This description identifies the main events of the narrative and shows how they are causally connected. Hence, the task of establishing the plot of a narrative involves establishing the temporal order of main events and their connection. Following this, the construction of one’s identity entails positioning oneself through a time dimension.

In general, plot is a constant of all written and oral narratives; it is the principle of interconnectedness. The fact that we structure our conceptions of identity and personality in the form of a narrated story makes the relation between narration and fiction more ambiguous. Narrative offers us the capacity to organize our experience, actions and self by relating successive parts to the whole. Using our capacity to narrate, we participate in the construction of our own identities. The telling of personal experiences, then, shapes personality by contributing to the continual reconstruction of the life story.

2.4. Review of Previous Studies

In this section previous critical studies that are found to be related to the current study are reviewed. One doctoral dissertation and a few Master’s theses are written on the works of Adam

Retta. Despite this fact, so far, no researcher has dealt with the writer's works with respect to the issue of self-construction through narratives which is the concern of the current critical study. On the other hand, these critical works are indirectly related to the current study hence, they deserve to be included in this review.

Tsedey's PhD dissertation entitled "Space-Time Realities in Ethiopian Postmodernist Literature: Convergence of Postmodernist Literary Theory, Physics and Mysticism" (2015) commence this review, since it is a study governed by constructive postmodernism which urges dialogue among different disciplines. Moreover, the study takes a couple of Adam's works (*Gracha Qachiloch* and *Etemete Lomi Shita*) as part of the subject texts that are analyzed. In this study Tsedey has attempted to identify a point of convergence, which is space-time reality, among literary theory, physics and mysticism. In her findings she states that representations of realities which are different from the everyday empirical world are evident in the texts analyzed. This is so because the texts have applied concepts from physics and mysticism. Tsedey's study is related to the current study in a sense that she has attempted to examine Adam's work even if it is from a different perspective.

After Tsedey's work Demeke's PhD dissertation entitled "Narrative Strategies in Selected Amharic Novels from 2000 until 2010" (2014), has received due attention in this review. The aim of his research was to shed light on the relationship among form, meaning (content) and social milieu in establishing the textual and contextual features of fictional narratives. It mainly focuses on the possibility of unraveling the textual and contextual qualities of contemporary Amharic novels by studying form as a narrative strategy and applying post-classical conceptions of narratology as guidelines for its discussion. My interest in this dissertation is its treatment of Adam Retta's novel *Gracha Qachiloch (Grey Bells)* as one of the subject novels of the study.

In the fourth chapter of Demeke's dissertation, Adam Retta's *Gracha Qachiloch (Grey Bells)* is treated in relation to focalization as a narrative strategy. In this analysis focalization in the novel is discussed with respect to its perceptual, psychological and ideological facets. Moreover, the researcher has related the ideological facet of focalization with the recent three regimes of Ethiopia. In his analysis, Demeke has observed that the protagonist at his childhood was too critical and full-fledged observer of societal issues more than expected at his age. In addition to this, the focalization in the novel at the perceptual and psychological facets becomes more

concerned to personal issues when the story goes to its end; and this is caused as a result of the looseness of the narrator.

By the end of his analysis, Demeke concludes that the author has adopted a comparative tone to evaluate the state of personal freedom and personal intent of the protagonist towards the socio-political issues in each of the three political periods. Apart from the social issues he criticizes through the eyes of the protagonist, the textual structure of the perceptual, psychological and ideological facets serve as a clue to guess the author's belief in the better state of personal freedom in the monarchical system than what existed in its successors. He has also pointed out that the influence of this reality on the author has affected the textual architecture of the novel. Therefore, Demeke concludes that there is strong relationship, visible in the novel, among form, content and social milieu.

Adam's novel *Gracha Qachiloch* is likewise found to be the concern of Hiwot's MA thesis entitled "Narrative Technique of Adam Reta's *Gracha Qachiloch*: Stream of Consciousness in Focus" (2012). Hiwot attempted to explore the narrative techniques used in the subject novel giving special attention to stream of consciousness. The study concludes that the chief narrative mode used in the novel is interior monologue and that stream of consciousness technique is experimented as well.

Another preoccupation with Adam's *Gracha Qachiloch* can be found in Assefa's MA Thesis entitled "A study of Narrative Technique in *Adefris* and *Gracha Kacheloch*: Point of View and Speech and Thought Presentation in Focus" (2009). In this thesis Assefa attempted two specific narrative techniques, point of view and speech and thought presentation in two Amharic novels. Clearly my interest in this thesis is its preoccupation with one of Adam's novels, *Gracha Qachiloch*. After a detailed analysis of the novel, Assefa concludes that the major character is unreliable subjective 'I-narrator who foregrounds objects and actions of other characters from his own biased perspective. Through this, he claims, the character is engaged in creating "amusing artistic effects". Therefore, the way this character perceives his environment became more important than the thing perceived.

Next is Aklilu's MA thesis entitled "Existentialism in the Selected Creative Works of Adam Retta" (2010). In this study Aklilu has discussed the tenets of existentialism found in the creative

works of Adam Reta, in an attempt to elucidate his overall existentialist philosophical thinking. Accordingly, concepts of existential philosophy are employed to analyze few selected works of the author; his novel, *Giracha Kachiloch*, and six other narratives from his anthologies. In the end Aklilu concluded that Adam has shared basic tenets of existentialism in his writings; therefore, is a literary existentialist.

“A psychoanalytic interpretation of Adam Retta’s novel *Gracha Qachiloch*” by Emebet Bekele (2011) is another M.A. thesis that took Adam’s work as a subject of study. Emebet’s work is purely psychoanalytic, which introduces Lacanian and Klienian concepts of psychoanalysis into the study. As such the study is mainly concerned with the characters’ inner world or individual psyche. As a finding of her inquiry, she mentioned that Adam has used stream of consciousness as a narrative technique which gives access to the main character’s feelings and emotions.

As can be seen from what is presented above, even though there are few theoretical and methodological relationships between the papers reviewed and the current study, particularly in relation to postmodernism and textual analysis, none of these local researchers has raised or come close to the issue of self-construction through narratives. Moreover, other studies related to Adam’s works and not included in this review, are also found to be similar to the above reviewed ones, since each research goes farther away from the central topic of the current study. Therefore, in what follows, studies that focus on narrative construction of self and are preoccupied with analyzing literary works, other than Adam’s, are reviewed.

Kirsi Marjo’s PhD dissertation “The construction of Self in Finnish First-Person Supernatural Encounter Narratives” (2009) is the closest study to the current study of all the studies reviewed hear after, in a sense that it examines construction of self through narratives and uses social constructionist theory as a framework. In this dissertation Marjo examines the narrative construction of self in the concerned narratives. The study asks how narrators attempt to organize their experiences through narrative for themselves and others. The research is interdisciplinary by its nature and draws its theoretical sources from folklore studies, cultural studies, narrative studies and social psychology. It follows the “narrative turn” in social sciences and humanities, and applies the social constructionist approach to narrative and self. At the end of the study Marjo has observed that the narrators construct rational, yet emotional, and social, yet independent selves through their supernatural encounter narratives.

“Unraveling Identity in Ian McEwan’s *Enduring Love*” (2012) is an article published in *Journal of Studies in Literature and Language*. The researchers, Zohreh and Seyyed, focus on the relationship between narrative and human identity, especially the process of identity construction in McEwan’s *Enduring Love*. The study heavily relies on Bruner’s notion of the narratively constructed self and attempts to follow the procedure involved in self-construction and the ultimate result of such narratively constructed identities. Accordingly, the study aims to show how the process of identity construction found to be one that is both relational and strongly dependent upon expression.

In their analysis of *Enduring Love*, Zohreh and Seyyed observed that the novel presents three different perspectives regarding a similar incident and the author provides a space in which all three collide. Moreover, the fact that these three character-narrators of the novel recall fragments of incidents shows an attempt to put together the bits and pieces of their story thereby constructing their own identity.

“Narrative Identities: Self -Construction in Joseph Conrad’s Marlow Fictions”(2013) is a PhD dissertation by Balázs Csizmadia. This study takes, as a major objective, exploring Marlow’s function as a personified storyteller who allows Conrad to reveal different forms of identity construction through narration. Moreover, the study examines Marlow’s crucial role in Conrad’s negotiation of his own literary identity. Csizmadia’s reading of Conrad’s texts is also informed by narrative identity theory, especially the works of Ricoeur, Kerby, Sarbin and other theorists.

In his discussion of the “Marlovian narratives” Csizmadia argues that Conrad’s storytellers are often engaged in an interpretative enterprise that concerns not only certain events in the past but also themselves. Thus, it seems that it is only by telling their narratives to their listeners that these narrators can come to a better self understanding. Thus, in his conclusion Csizmadia remarks that what makes the figure of Marlow especially interesting is that he not only allows Conrad to dramatize identity construction in the fiction; it is also partly through Marlow that Conrad creates his own literary identity. In other words, the Marlovian narratives show identity in the making.

Unlike the indigenous researches these foreign studies are better related to the current study since they are all are attempts to unravel the complexities of identity formation by operating within

social constructionist theoretical framework. By way of concluding this review, the point made at the beginning of it should be reaffirmed. Though important are all the above works in their own particular respect, none of them treat Adam's novels *Yesinibit Kelemat* and *Merek* from the social constructionist perspective of self-construction, which is the issue that this study aims to address. There is then a need for a treatment of self construction in the subject novels and it is this task that the study sets itself to accomplish.

CHAPTER THREE: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This section is a brief theoretical excursion of the analytical framework that is used in the study while investigating the selected novels in relation to narrative construction of self. The aim is to clarify relevant theoretical concepts to approach the construction of self. The fundamental theoretical foundation of the study is one of the most renowned theories of postmodern period, social constructionism and its new development in the area of narrative theory. Moreover, the framework has incorporated literary theory particularly focusing on narrative plot construction. Following this, the analytical framework is inspired by two theoretical foundations: the substantial work on narrative identity by cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner and social psychologist Kenneth Gergen's insights of the socially constructed self (both belonging to the theories and conceptualizations of social constructionism) and theory of plot from the field of literary theory. I have applied a few concepts from social constructionist theory and literary theory to emphasize the social and narrative aspects of the self construction process, and to make interpretative explorations into how people rely on narratives and social circumstances while constructing narrative identities.

3.1. Social Constructionism

Social constructionism draws from a number of disciplines, including philosophy, sociology and linguistics (Burr, 2003:2). Since its introduction to the social sciences, the term "social construction" has been adopted by diverse academic communities for different reasons. As such no single author has been given credit for originating the concept of social constructionism. However, most credit Berger and Luckmann's book, *The Social Construction of Reality* in sociology and scholars with postmodern perspectives in social psychology such as Gergen, as the source from which social constructionism sprang (Hruby, 2001; Burr, 2003). It is, therefore, among the social psychologists and social construction theorists in particular that the notion of the social construction of the self fully emerged.

Today, social constructionism has many forms and depending on the positions they take social constructionists can be more or less radical. Virtually all those who identify themselves as social constructionists favor using the term "constructionism" rather than "constructivism". (Gergen, 1985:266). Gergen uses the phrase "social constructionism" to avoid the confusion that the term

“constructivism” causes, as it can be used to refer to Jean Piaget’s development in psychology. This distinction reflects the social constructionist’s aversion to the notion of an isolated knower. Traditionally, psychology has looked for explanations of social phenomena inside the individual, social constructionism relocates problems from the inner psychological disposition and turns to social processes. (Burr, 2003:9).

“Radical constructionism”, mainly advocated by constructivists, emphasizes the ability of human beings to use the understandings they create to help them navigate life, regardless of whether or not there is an external reality that matches their understandings. “Reality is wheeled on stage, not as an independently existing source of validation” (Kenny & Gardner, 1988:17). Even though, there are exceptions among the theorists, who neither deny external reality nor accept its existence, radical constructionism claims no external reality exists apart from the mind that constructed it in the first place. “...in so far as we know them, both the world and the others are models that we ourselves construct” (von Glaserfeld, 1995:137).

On the other hand, social constructionists maintain a moderate constructionist position by recognizing the existence of objective reality even though we don’t have any direct access to it. In other words, we cannot know exactly what is out there; rather what we know is our mental construction of it. Consequently, social constructionists believe that reality “lies beyond the reach of our most ambitious theories, whether personal or scientific, forever denying us as human beings the security of justifying our beliefs, faiths, and ideologies by simple recourse to ‘objective circumstances’ outside ourselves” (Neimeyer, 1995:3). Therefore, none of the ways of understanding reality that people develop can provide objective view of the world other than being a perspective.

Intertwined with this ontological position is the question of epistemology. Social constructionism focuses on the process by which meanings are created, negotiated, sustained and modified. Its emphasis is on investigating the processes of how people make sense of actions and events and create meaning in their life. Put another way, “social constructionist inquiry is principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live” (Gergen 1985:266).

Constructionists advocate the basic epistemological assumption that reality is not revealed to us but reached through a process of construction. As a result, the realist essentialist ideals, to represent the world as it is, are rejected. In a realist essentialist position, the world is believed to exist regardless of the human perception of it, and it is assumed that reality can be approached and investigated as it is – that it is possible to produce true knowledge about humans and reality through scientific rigor and procedures. This position exemplifies an understanding of knowledge as objectively representing the reality with which it is concerned. Social constructionists challenge the idea of objectivism and realism and question prevalent assumptions about what the world appears to be and what we take for granted (Burr, 2003:3).

Within a constructionist position, the world cannot be captured as it is, independent of human subjectivity and interpretation. In this view knowledge is constructed rather than discovered by the mind and so reality is assumed to be a construction. “The terms in which the world is understood are social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people. From the constructionists perspective the process of understanding is not automatically driven by the forces of nature, but is the result of an active, cooperative of persons in relationship” (Gergen, 1985:267). Reality does not exist already being meaningful; rather it is given meaning as we relate and engage in the conversations with each other. This understanding implies that any knowledge is subjective and dependent on social interaction and contexts. In this constructionist view, we do not necessarily view things as they are but in fact contribute to their being as they are. Gergen (1985:268) further explains that:

The degree to which a given form of understanding prevails or is sustained across time is not fundamentally dependent on the empirical validity of the perspective in question, but on the vicissitudes of social processes (e.g., communication, negotiation, conflict, rhetoric). ... the rules for ‘what counts as what’ are inherently ambiguous, continuously evolving and free to vary with the predilection of those who use them.

The notion that meaning is the product of a relational process further leads to the assumption that there is no direct link between knowledge and the perception of reality as reality needs to be interpreted to make sense. This construction of reality also happens to be discursive. Burr (2003), stresses that language is not a mere vehicle of transmitting thought, but rather, makes thought possible by constructing concepts. Therefore, the two main tenets of constructionism are that

knowledge is communal and socially constructed and that the instruments with which it is constructed are discursive.

In this study I positioned my research on moderate constructionist ontological assumptions and epistemological point of departure, advocating that objective reality exists independent of our understanding of it and knowledge is generally understood to be socially constructed. By doing so, I turn back from radical constructionism so as not to dissolve reality into a mere human construct and investigate the human meaning creating process in an attempt to understand objective reality. Therefore, the following discussion is strictly concerned with moderate social constructionism.

Scholars such as Jonathan Potter, John Shotter, Rom Harré and Kenneth Gergen take priority in their contribution to the development and popularization of social constructionism. Among these, Kenneth Gergen is the best known for pioneering the social constructionist movement in the field of social psychology. Gergen began his scholarly quest in social constructionism as a result of his dissatisfaction in the research methods of social psychology. His critique of social psychology begins with the observation that traditional social psychological theory is largely irrelevant to our understanding of everyday life. Our understanding of social behavior is never neutral or value-free, but always stands in relation to the values and goals of a particular society:

As scientists of human interaction, we are engaged in a peculiar duality. On the one hand, we value dispassionate comportment in scientific matters. We are well aware of the biasing effects of strong value commitments. On the other hand, as socialized human beings, we harbor numerous values about social relations. It is the rare social psychologist whose values do not influence the subject of his research, his methods of observation, or the terms of description. In generating knowledge about social interaction, we also communicate our personal values. (Gergen, 1973:311).

Therefore, Gergen urges social psychologists to abandon the traditional idea of theoretical accuracy and to embrace a type of practice which focuses on the creation of innovative accounts of human behavior. He further set out the main tenets of constructionism: questioning the generally accepted truths, taking into account the historical and cultural specificity of knowledge, assuming that knowledge and social action are inseparable, and assuming that social processes underlie knowledge construction (1985). Based on this idea he develops his new paradigm of approaching human behavior as social constructionism.

Bruner's insights on the narratively constructed self are also considered in developing this conceptual framework. Jerome Bruner is initially a cognitive psychologist whose later works focused on the construction of self and in particular the role of narrative in forming one's identity. Similar to Gergen, Bruner seeks a new (constructionist) approach in order to explore the self because he was also dissatisfied with the methods of inquiry in traditional psychology.

Bruner's ideas of the narrative self are discussed under this section for the reason that most of his conceptions of self are similar to that of the social constructionists. In fact Bruner himself admits that the approach that he takes to narrative is "a constructivist one—a view that takes as its central premise that 'world making' is the principal function of mind, whether in the sciences or in the arts" (Bruner, 2004:691). Some even go to the extent of saying that his position is more of a radical one "representing a full-bodied constructivism where everything 'real' is, in a sense, an artifact of our modes of interpretation and categorization" (David, 2001:187). However, he never officially denied the existence of physical reality and even questions the views of radical constructivists:

But the moment one applies a constructivist view of narrative to the self-narrative, to the autobiography, one is faced with dilemmas. Take, for example, the constructivist view that "stories" do not "happen" in the real world but, rather, are constructed in people's heads. ... Does that mean that our autobiographies are constructed, that they had better be viewed not as a record of what happened (which is in any case a nonexistent record) but rather as a continuing interpretation and reinterpretation of our experience? Just as the philosopher Nelson Goodman argues that physics or painting or history are "ways of world making" (Goodman, 1978), so autobiography (formal or informal) should be viewed as a set of procedures for "life making." (Bruner, 2004:691-692).

The two theorists converge in their conception of the self as a socially situated narrative construct and my discussion of constructionism is mainly guided by their insights.

According to Gergen (1985), social constructionism is an attempt to "articulate common forms of understanding as they now exist, as they have existed in prior historical periods and as they might exist, should creative attention be so directed" (Gergen, 1985:266). Hence, social constructionism usually views reality as dependent on how groups of people collectively elaborate their ideas. "Social constructionist inquiry is principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world

(including themselves) in which they live” (Gergen, 1985:266). As a result, there are an infinite variety of socially constructed realities and “the degree to which a given form of understanding prevails or is sustained across time is not fundamentally dependent on the empirical validity of the perspective in question, but on the vicissitudes of social processes” (Gergen, 1985:268). To claim to know something is also to take a stance within a society.

Social constructionism encourages a move away from the traditional psychological focus on the individual as locus of knowledge, to social relations which make knowledge and understanding possible. “... the self concept is removed from the head and placed within the sphere of social discourse” (Gergen 1985:271). Therefore, all forms of knowledge, including our understanding of ourselves, are results of social processes. In all this social interaction the role of language is critical. Language is seen as a carrier of subjective meaning constructed in interaction with others. It is the core of any construction of identity, as it connects the individual with other people.

In traditional psychology language is regarded as a passive vehicle for expressing thoughts and emotions. In contrast, from the social constructionist perspective language is conceived as a constructive resource and a form of social action, through which the world is constructed and made to make sense (Burr, 2003:8). Here, the constructive nature of meaning making and the centrality of language in this process is stressed. Using language, we construct and produce reality rather than describe it. Consequently, when a person tells his/her story, it is an act of interpreting the past through stories rather than reproducing it as it was.

Language is, therefore, not conceived as a mere tool for representing reality but rather as constructing reality and constituting the individual. Berger and Luckmann (1991), argue that conversation is the most important means of constructing subjective reality. How people talk about themselves and their world determines the nature of their experiences. When we tell stories about our lives we are at the same time constructing our narrative identities, which constitute us. We construct our narrative identities in the light of the narratives available to us in our culture. Therefore, everyday social interaction also becomes the arena for the construction of identity. From this perspective social constructionist paradigm is also connected to postmodern thought, which regards individuals as a locus of opposing social forces that continue to exert an

influence on their sense of identity. The self then, becomes a matter of how people talk about themselves and are talked about by others.

In this regard Bruner (2004), argues that the self is the person we become as a result of “the autobiographical narratives by which we tell about our lives” (Bruner, 2004:694). For Bruner narrative is “one of the crowning achievements of human development” (Bruner, 1990:67). In his view we are always telling stories about who we are to ourselves and others. Narrative is the way that we create our Self. “A life as led is inseparable from a life as told. . . a life is not how it was, but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold” (Bruner, 2004:699). Furthermore, Gergen (1994), elaborates on the relationship between self narratives and identity construction as follows:

Our present identity is not a sudden and mysterious event but a sensible result of a life story. ... Such creations of narrative order may be essential in giving life a sense of meaning and direction. ... The term ‘self-narrative’ will refer to an individual’s account of the relationship among self-relevant events across time. In developing a self-narrative we establish coherent connections among life events. (Gergen, 1994:187).

According to social constructionists, the self is not an entity, closed off from the world, rather, it is extended toward the society. “Selves are not isolated nuclei of consciousness locked in the head but are ‘distributed’ interpersonally. Nor do selves arise rootlessly in response only to the present; they take meaning as well from the historical circumstances that gave shape to the culture of which they are an expression” (Bruner, 1990:138). People acquire and develop discursive elements for their narrative repertoires directly, through interactions with others. Hence, the self is constructed in a process by which people communicate with one another and inform one another’s self.

Self narrative, defined as, “an individual’s account of the relationship among self-relevant events across time” (Gergen, 1994:187), even if personal, is always extensively coauthored by relevant others, so the development of this self defining narrative takes place in a social context. “The perception of oneself by others plays a significant role in one’s own self-determination, and as such the (re)shaping of one’s personality” (Burr, 2002:95). Moreover, as Bruner emphasizes, “...Narrative acts of self-making are usually guided by unspoken, implicit cultural models of

what selfhood should be - and, of course, shouldn't be" (Bruner, 2002:65). Moreover, as narrative identity is developed in interaction with social and cultural contexts, our views of ourselves also change according to our social environment. Hence, "identity work" as a social process can show how a person's identity is being claimed or granted in social interaction.

Therefore, self-narratives, not only communicating the distinctive story of the individual, but are also a resource for examining present cultural and societal conditions, which makes them useful to explore social conventions. In this perspective the narrator is actively constructing and being constructed by prevalent contemporary discourses about identity and society (Riessman, 2002). From childhood on, we become expressions of the relations and culture that nurture us, and we make and remake ourselves in the culturally provided frame of imagined possible future selves (Bruner, 2002:87).

The social constructionist approach implies that identities are developed in an ongoing construction process. Self-narratives are located in historical time, and they are situated in social relations in concrete situations and experiences (Bruner; 1986, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988). "Rather than see our life as simply 'one damned thing after another', we formulate a story in which life events are systematically related, rendered intelligible by their place in a sequence or unfolding process" (Gergen, 1994:187). This account stresses the notion that "identity work" is an activity people engage in to achieve a sense of coherence in their identities. Individuals link various fragments of their life stories into coherent narratives of self/identity. Understanding the world and creating its interpretation is a constant activity of the mind. "The mind," as Bruner puts it, is an "instrument for producing worlds." (1986:104). Our worlds are the products of our minds, and of course, the world made by mind processes is the world of our stories.

In order to explicate this process, Bruner (1986, 1990) introduces the idea of the "*Landscape of Mind*", which is stretched between two dimensions: a landscape of action and a landscape of consciousness. The former outlines the actions and the actors, the latter outlines their mental states (goals, beliefs, emotions). The two are related in a dynamic and interdependent relation, and together they make up the individual landscape of mind. This double landscape of mind is a prerequisite for narrative thinking or story making:

stories are like doppelgangers, operating in two realms, one a landscape of action in the world, the other a landscape of consciousness where the protagonists'

thoughts and feelings and secrets play themselves out... it is part of the magic of well wrought stories that they keep these two landscapes intertwined, making the knower and the known inseparable. (Bruner, 2002:94)

The landscape of action is composed of events and experiences linked in a sequence through time and forming a plot. The plot (or the storyline) shows how the part contributes to the whole, or the construction of the overall self narrative. In this sense, the organizing storyline theme identifies the significance and role of single events in the construction of identity (Polkinghorne, 1988:18). The landscape of consciousness is composed by the interpretive conclusions the individual makes in order to make sense of experiences, actions and events. Identity conclusions take the form of stories in which individuals create meaning about who they think they are.

People give meaning to their experiences of the events of life through intelligible mental processing and the resulting conclusion in the form of stories provides the principle for acts of meaning making in everyday life. These stories are about what one has learned in life, what he aspires to be, which are also shaped by contemporary society and culture (Bruner; 1986a). Therefore, the mental landscape (landscape of consciousness), lies alongside the physical landscape of actions and events; as such to give meaning to actions and events, we must uncover the mental level, the narrative self. A fictional self is thus composed of attitudes, emotions and values, which he/she projects in the form of intentions, motivations and internal conflicts.

Experiences and events are always interpreted and made sense through selection, imagination, in which cultural voices and social interactions play a significant role. The result of this selection process is dominant story. Self-narratives can be dominated by one dominant story, which usually is loaded with problems. The term “dominant story” implies that individual identity can be dominated by particular stories about who we are. However, dominant stories do not sufficiently represent the entire lived experience. And no matter how dominant one story may be, “... there are always feelings and lived experience not fully encompassed by the dominant story” (Bruner, 1986:143). Gaps are inevitable, and no story will tell every aspect of an individual’s life. Thus, the very choosing of what to narrate and what to leave out is a major building block of a narrator’s projected identity.

Based on a social constructionist approach, identity is not static; rather it is an evolving process throughout an individual’s life course and through social interaction with others. Hence, people’s

selves and the stories they tell about themselves vary in relation to the social context and conversations with other individuals in that context. This external influence, redefine the narrative by bringing shifts in its organization and forcing the person to make readjustments in his/her personality. Because of this, rather than emphasizing enduring qualities of the self, social constructionists speak of “identity” implying multiplicity of selves. (Gergen 1991). Consequently, they deconstruct the very idea of a fixed core self and argue that each of us has multiple, selves.

Bruner (1990) suggests that “narrative identity construction is virtually a process of change” as every narration is a new version of a story told and potentially creates new insights into the overall life story of the narrator. People have not one but many coexisting self narratives that can be alternatively presented according to the social circumstances that the individual is in. They engage in a dynamic process of crafting stories about new events and reinterpreting them. This is why self-narratives are dynamic entities that evolve according to new circumstances people encounter in their lives.

Narratives may also need to be revised because the current explanation of the self is unsatisfactory, or because the goals which have structured the life story are no longer achievable. People draw from personal narrative repertoires to accomplish their identity goals in the social interactions. Over time, adding, subtracting, and revising stories alters the repertoire. So it is well established that people actively engage in “identity work” to claim, revise, and alter their various identities. This makes narrative identity construction a continuous process of becoming where people are not considered to have any sort of stable and essential personality. So, what constitutes the self one day may change the next, based on shifts in social surroundings. The self is thus engaged in a continuous creation and recreation of self defining stories. In this regard Polkinghorne claims that:

We achieve our personal identities and self-concept through the use of the narrative configuration, and make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story. We are in the middle of our stories and cannot be sure how they will end; we are constantly having to revise the plot as new events are added to our lives. Self, then, is not a static thing or a substance, but a configuring of personal events into an historical unity which includes not only what one has been but also anticipations of what one will be. (1988:150).

The narrative construct of experience keeps changing, so that what once seemed significant may become obscure or irrelevant and as the old ones are fading the new accounts begin to take control of the lives we lead. Through personal narrative construction we expand our self-concept (identity) which is constantly being reinterpreted in the narrative process and our narrative identity constantly evolving creating a new sense of our self. “We constantly construct and reconstruct ourselves to meet the needs of the situations we encounter, and we do so with the guidance of our memories of the past and our hopes and fears for the future” (Bruner, 2002:64).

Self-narratives help people revise and reconstruct identities. And it is by such continuous shifts and reformations that identity construction unfolds. “Those who do not have power over the stories that dominate their lives, power to retell them, rethink them, deconstruct them, joke about them, and change them as times change, truly are powerless because they cannot think new thoughts” (Rushdie, 1992:432). Our self-narratives, then, become a matter of forming and performing the “I” that we are always telling ourselves and others that we are, have been, and will be. The self becomes the person or persons our stories demand (Gergen, 1994).

Moreover, identity changes are linked to turning points or significant events in one’s self narrative. Bruner defines a turning point as “... those episodes in which, as if to underline the power of the agent’s intentional states, the narrator attributes a crucial change or stance in the protagonist’s story to a belief, a conviction, a thought” (Bruner, 2001:31). Turning points acquire the form of climax, end, and subsequently possibility of new beginning in the biographical narratives of the individual. Different life transitions and disrupting life events can cause tensions in one’s personal narratives. The affected person feels that his/her experiences do not make any sense, the future and goals related to life become fuzzy and the person finds his/her social roles unsuitable. In this situation a narrative reorientation is needed because the person’s old narrative does not fit his/her new life circumstances.

In situations of turning points the need arises to describe the self with new defining narratives, as we have altered our self and need to reconstruct our narratives. As a result, self-narratives become dynamic entities that evolve as people encounter new circumstances and construct provisional identities. Turning points reframe personal hardship or doubt as a meaningful part of a personal journey. In this sense, the self is “... an amalgam of loosely coupled identities, and

that the popular notion of the self-concept as a unified, consistent, or perceptually “whole” psychological structure is possibly ill-conceived” (Gergen, 1968:306).

A narrative never represents a single voice. We are always as many selves and potential selves as are embedded in our conversations and our relationships. These selves, who we are or who we believe ourselves to be, "are not personal impulses made social, but social processes realized on the site of the personal." (Gergen, 1994:210). We live in a society where concepts of self, community and "what is right and wrong" are constantly changing. This makes it particularly challenging for people to construct a sense of self and to identify their most cherished values. In relation to fictional characters Egri (1960) pointed out that “Every human being is in a state of constant fluctuation and change. Nothing is static in nature, least of all men. ... A character is the sum total of her physical make-up and the influences her environment exerts upon [her] at that particular moment” (Egri, 1960:49).

Understandings of self are also framed by ideas about its stability versus its malleability: that is, to what extent the self is context-specific and dynamically constructed in the moment of interaction. In a postmodern world, people meet in an increasingly complex array of circumstances, which results in making selves “manifestations of relationship” (Gergen, 1991:146). In this process people acquire and develop discursive elements for their narrative repertoires directly, through interactions with others and indirectly, through their participation in a range of cultural activities. Meanwhile, the self accumulates the knowledge that enables it to act in a variety of situations by simply participating in a society. Gergen describes this increasing relational knowledge as a “population of the self” (Gergen, 1991:68). As the self becomes increasingly engaged in social relations, the roles played or the identities manifested in different social contexts also increase in variety. As a result, selves continuously participate in varieties of relationships making it impossible to possess any dependable identity since in everyday life they confront with new and various demands of relationships.

As relationships multiply the image of enduring self is lost causing a condition which Gergen described as ‘multiphrenia’, “generally referring to the splitting of the individual into a multiplicity of self-investments” (Gergen, 1991:73). Gergen further writes:

Social saturation furnished us with a multiplicity of incoherent and unrelated languages of the self. For everything we know “to be true” about ourselves, other

voices within respond with doubt and even derision. This fragmentation of the self-conception corresponds to a multiplicity of incoherent and disconnected relationships. These relationships pull us in myriad directions, inviting us to play such a variety of roles that the very concept of an "authentic self" with knowable characteristics recedes from view (Gergen, 1991:6-7).

Following this, the self occupies many positions, and has many voices or tells many and varying self narratives allowing a multiphrenic condition to emerge "in which one swims in ever-shifting, concatenating and contentious currents of being" (Gergen, 1991:80). In this constructionist perspective, identity is something to be performed hence; coherence is under maximal pressure since identities are temporary and fragmented, i.e. developed in an ongoing construction process. The self is, thus, no longer an essence. Finally, the self becomes what Gergen metaphorically described as

... a social chameleon constantly borrowing bits and pieces of identity from whatever sources are available and constructing them as useful or desirable in a given situation. If one's identity is properly managed, the rewards can be substantial-the devotion of one's intimates, happy children, professional success, the achievement of community goals, personal popularity, and so on. (Gergen, 1991:150).

This makes the coherence of the stories we tell about ourselves, the only way that the postmodern self can maintaining coherence and continuity. The functions of a character relate to the progression of the story, which has both causal and temporal features. When these elements are scarce it points directly at the identity crises of the individual, through the breakdown of his/her narrated self. Coherence is important in self-narratives in a sense that for a story to be meaningful, it must be coherent; a criterion for the story's meaningfulness is that the different parts of the story fit together in some consistent way. Moreover, this will be used as a criterion to some extent to evaluate whether the individual life story is meaningful when compared to what is culturally considered a positively valued identity. Narratives, then, make sense of our lack of coherence with both our identities and the chaos of life. In this respect a concept of identity as narrative is especially critical for our understanding of identity dynamics, to instate a sense of continuity between who we have been and who we are becoming, as well as to obtain validation from relevant others. This is also why Giddens claims that a person's identity can be found "in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going" (1991:54). In this view "identity work" is understood as an attempt to maintain narrative coherence.

To sum up the notion that identity is the life story is shared by both the theorists whose constructionist ideas are discussed above. Gergen's main concern in his constructionist theory is the loss of an identifiable coherence of self, which is experienced as multiphrenia, which emerges out of the self's inability to cope with the social saturation. The self is, then burdened by the multiplication of relationships and the demands placed upon it. In this sense the self is multiple, mutable, and socially constructed. As the above discussion shows, Bruner also maintains this idea of changing identities as a result of important turning points though they are get coherence through narratives.

The main criticisms against social constructionism are focused on its perceived conceptualization of realism and relativism as it is accused of being anti-realist, relativist in denying that knowledge is a direct perception of reality. The critics' claim is that social constructionism poses the risk of relativism by dissolving knowledge in to a grey zone where everything is equally important or valuable. "The problem then becomes that of suggesting how there can be 'fixity' to be able to say anything coherent at all. If any such point is suggested it can be deconstructed immediately, leaving us on a constant and eventually meaningless slide of meaning..." (Craib, 1997:10). They suggest that without a single, stable reality on which to rely, people tend to feel lost and ungrounded. This gives rise to the further criticism that research using social constructionist framework lacks any ability to change things because there is nothing against which to judge the findings of research. (Bury, 1986).

Social constructionists have argued the reverse position, that this relativism is one of the strongest assets of the postmodern perspective, generating a less dogmatic society that is more open and flexible to various ideas. Gergen has been defending the relativism of social constructionism, contending that, because social constructionism offers no basic rules of validity and is in this sense relativistic, social constructionist research must be evaluated legitimized and judged in social settings. (Gergen, 1985:273).

Another critique of social constructionism is that the view of socially constructed multiple selves results in a fragmented self. Craib (1997:5), claims that in these view the individual is lost or loses individual rights and is no longer personally responsible. The response of Hermans et al. (1992) to this concern is that "the multiplicity of the self does not result in fragmentation, because it is the same I that is moving back and for between several positions. Thanks to this

identity, ... variance and invariance, or continuity and discontinuity, coexist in the functioning self” (1992:60). Therefore, in this constructionist view the question of continuity of the self is answered by maintaining coherence and continuity in the stories we tell about ourselves.

Clearly, social constructionism confronts strong resistance from critics of this theory. However, for researchers in social sciences and humanities it paves the way for a shift in research traditions by shifting the process of explaining the self from the interior region of the mind to human interaction and meaning-making process. In the end all that social constructionism concern is with how knowledge is constructed and understood, hence criticisms are results of misunderstanding and misinterpreting this central idea.

3.2. Plot Structure: Narrative Beginnings and Endings

Narrative beginnings and endings are critical points for the examination of plot. Beginnings and ends are issues that belong to the category of literary structure. Structure is the framework of a novel. It is the way; the plot is arranged in both a logical and a dramatic manner to create maximum suspense. So, here I’m using the phrase ‘plot structure’ to refer to the way in which the narrative is patterned. Based on theory of narratology, I view narrative as a complex object with three main dimensions; the fabula or the chain of events narrated, the syuzhet or the textual narration of these events and the association between the narrated events and the narrating text.

Richardson (2019) contends that in all cases the plot of a novel consists of a beginning, middle, and an end. The beginning and the end can be said to be important or significant points within a narrative sequence. Richardson (2019) further elaborates that the way one could introduce the fictional world, at the beginning, indicates what it is we are to expect later in the story; while the way that fictional universe is closed underlines the tone in which the text is thought over.

In his founding text, *Poetics*, Aristotle offers definitions of beginning, middle and end of tragedy. According to him, “A beginning is that which does not necessarily come after something else, although something else exists or comes after it” (Prince, 1997:28). Similarly, Gerald Prince also defines beginning of story as “the incident initiating the process of change in a plot or action. This incident does not necessarily follow but is necessarily followed by other incidents” (2003:10). However, postmodernist fictions, such as the subject novels of this study, do not obey this traditional convention and feel free to set aside these conventions. Thus, narrative beginning

no longer legitimizes itself as an origin by evoking a starting point. In a more functional dimension, Edward Said defines beginnings as “the first step in the intentional production of meaning” (Said, 1975:5)

In their basic form, narratives follow the sequence of events as they happened in life. However, this linear temporal order can be disrupted in literary works. Deviations from a linear temporal order may occur, predominantly, to bring about aesthetic mode of narrating; the orderly fabula is disordered in the *syuzhet* for the sake of aesthetic "making strange". “To qualify for art, chronology needs to undergo such deformation in the telling as to be only gradually reformed or reconstructed in the reading, trial- and-error fashion, with appropriate delays and twists and surprises en route, if not pockets of darkness and ambiguity to the end” (Sternberg, 1990:904).

Abrupt beginnings naturally raise the notion of “*in medias res*” (into the middle of things), which is a Latin phrase denoting the literary and artistic narrative technique where the narrative starts in the middle of the story instead of from its beginning. The story is then introduced through a series of flashbacks or through characters relating past events. Such abrupt textual beginnings open the story world without supplying preliminary information necessary for its understanding. Such trend of beginning in *medias res* is also the case with three of the subject narratives of this study.

Locating the point of beginning is often somewhat complex or problematic. Beginnings are unstable in a sense that they exist only in condition that some events happen at present or beforehand, which lay a foundation for the development of the story. Again the events happening beforehand should still have events ahead. In this sense “... beginnings are part of an infinitely larger process, and something must precede even what seems to be an ideal beginning” (Buchleander, 2008:24), or in Miller’s words “there is no beginning in narrative literature” (1998: 103). Therefore, it is hard to tell if a narrative actually begins with its very first words; or commences with the beginning of the fabula (which is the logical-chronological succession of the textual events, according to the Russian formalists).

The Russians’ crucial distinction between *fibula*, which is defined as “the order of events referred to by the narrative,” and *sjuzet*, “the order of events presented in the narrative discourse” (Brooks, 1984:12), may go back to Aristotle and is indispensable to a theory of narration. The

fabula embodies the action as chronological, cause and effect chain of events occurring within a given time and a special field. The sjuzet (usually translated as “plot”) is the actual arrangement and presentation of the fabula in the text. It arranges components of the story according to specific principles. The sjuzet also provides context with respect to the events being related, selects what fabula events to be presented and combines them in particular ways. The selection and arrangement of events used to construct the narrative shape, gives insight into the constructive activities of the narrator.

One possibility of identifying beginnings is to take the first incident that is causally connected to those that follow; such a choice would correspond well to a number of different accounts, including Aristotle’s definition as well as the statement made by Prince (2003) regarding beginnings. The exposition is also particularly intriguing in the context of narrative beginnings since by definition it always constitutes the beginning of the chronologically ordered sequence of motifs as reconstructed by the reader. But it is not necessarily located at the beginning of the textual sequence.

Buchleander (2003), on the other hand, argues that in order to decide where a story begins we have to establish a description of beginnings and operate from that platform:

... a beginning is an event under a certain description that needs to be established. ... In other words, a beginning requires a supporting narrative, which can describe the beginning as event. ... When undertaking a beginning, we must therefore begin, not at “the beginning,” but by the description under which we wish to place the event. (2008:19).

After a thorough discussion of beginnings, another literary theorist, Richardson (2008) concludes that:

...there is no ready formula for ascertaining the actual beginning of a story; instead, we must select a principle that will lead us in the direction we want to go. We need to critically sift through the various possibilities, whether dramatized, narrated by a character, or otherwise alluded to, until we arrive at the first significant event of the story. Our most accurate concept will thus be a avowedly shifting one, and one that thereby points to the elusive and often arbitrary nature of beginnings. (2008:117).

However, Richardson in his recent book *A Poetics of Plot for the Twenty-First Century* suggests that to determine the beginning of a narrative, it is best to “identify three distinct kinds of

beginnings: one in the narrative text (syuzhet), one in the story as reconstructed from the text (fabula), and one in the prefatory and framing material provided by the author that circumscribes the narrative proper (authorial antetext).” (2019: 43). However he gives priority to the sjuzet by stating that “It is perhaps the very fixity of the syuzhet that is the ground for play with beginnings in the other two areas.” (2019: 43-44). The beginning of the fabula is the earliest event in the story; while the beginning of the sjuzet coincides with the beginning of the first chapter. Richardson further explains the complication of identifying these beginning points, especially with the fabula.

In nearly all cases there is no ambiguity concerning the beginning of the sjuzhet: in written narratives it is the first page of the narrative proper. ... The important question of exactly where the story or fabula begins is, by contrast, a difficult one to determine with precision. Is it the chronologically first dramatized scene, narrated incident, mentioned act, or inferable event? (Richardson, 2019:43-44).

On the other hand, Sternberg (1978, 1990) gives signal importance to the first scene represented in a narrative’s “fictive present” when dealing with narrative beginnings. According to Stenberg, every work establishes a certain scenic norm of its own, in which the duration of the (textual) representational time approximates that of the (mimetic) represented time, and all temporally prior material belongs to the exposition, regardless of where it appears in the text.

Narrative end on the other hand refers to the text’s termination point, which is an inevitable phenomenon in the sense that every text has to end somewhere. Aristotle (1997) defines end as “that which naturally follows something else either as a necessary or as a usual consequence, and is not itself followed by anything” (1997:28). Since the end follows everything else in the text, understanding it depend to a large extent on what has preceded it. Therefore, the end is not the textual termination point itself but rather a certain effect of ending or feeling of finality, produced by the text as all the questions posed by the narrative are answered. In line with this explanation, Abbott (2002), expresses ending as the narrative effect which “has to do with a broad range of expectations and uncertainties that arise during the course of a narrative and that part of us, at least, hopes to resolve, or close” (2002: 53).

The end is also a very important narrative point where the entire story is wrapped up to make a certain point. The act of narrative closure, then, can be seen as the narrative sealing itself into a complete and understandable whole, because with closure comes fullness and completion. As

Marianna Torgovnick observes, “An ending is the single place where an author most pressingly desires to make his points—whether those points are aesthetic, moral, social, political, epistemological, or even the determination not to make any point at all” (1981: 19). Narrative endings, then, are what shed light on the text as a whole, allowing it to mean something and resonate.

Similar questions emerge as with beginnings when determining endings of narratives. Does the end consist of the very last words of the text? Or is it rather the end of the fabula? In traditional fiction the plot is mostly organized in such a way that it leads to a proper ending so the narrative movement always ends with a closure, where mystery is explained and fortunes are settled. Davidson (1984), argues that “the ending cannot be evaluated by itself but must be weighed in relationship to the whole work, which necessarily means evaluating the whole work” (1984:57). However, because of the length of novels it is extremely difficult to recall all of a work after a completed reading.

On the other hand, some texts may fail to create closure or intentionally refrain from creating it; and in this case, we will have open-ended narratives. In open endings, the dialogue and action continue to the end, actions are left suspended and conflicts are left unresolved. The notion of endings is made more complicated by the multiplication of narrative endings in postmodern fictions, which are characterized by never ending patterns reflecting the main feature of postmodern world daily life.

Richardson (2019), identifies five different kinds of narrative endings (fixed, loose, covert, absent and unnatural). By an ending that is fixed Richardson is referring “to event sequences that seem to resolve major instabilities in the story”, while putting loose endings, which may “seem minimally connected, adventitious, or arbitrary” at the opposite end of the spectrum from fixed endings (2019:150-154). In covert endings the writer will avoid the expressive qualities of strong ending while securing, in various ways, the reader’s sense of the story’s closure. According to Richardson, “A full, fixed resolution may also be opposed for reasons of verisimilitude” (2019: 154).

Absent endings are related to “narratives that will not or cannot conclude, as the works build toward resolutions that are deliberately withheld or that cannot be written”. This kind of refusal

of resolution leaves the story in medias res, where events will not attain any sense of closure. Finally, unnatural endings refer to those narratives that either refuse closure or provide a powerful sense of an ending. Despite the five distinct kinds of endings enumerated above, Richardson suggests that “The ending of the story is best viewed not as part of a binary opposition of open or closed, fixed or unfixed, but rather as part of a spectrum ranging from the fairly fixed through the hidden to the lax to the unwritten” (2019:168).

The way a narrators introduce their stories, indicates, what is to be expected in the unfolding and its ending sheds light on how the entire text is supposed to be understood:

A number of scholars ... have shown how the beginning is always characterized by a certain tension, a lack, a negative quality, or at least by a stasis which has to be broken, and how the ending is always the place where the equilibrium is re-established, the lack removed, the negative abolished (Adamo, 2000:50).

This makes beginning and ending two significant moments of narratives that serve important functions. In Meir Sternberg’s major study of exposition, the function of beginning is described as “introducing the reader into an unfamiliar world, the fictive world of the story, by providing him with the general and specific antecedents indispensable to the understanding of what happens in it.” (1978:37). It helps to carry us over from the world we inhabit to the world the author has imagined. Beginning often sets the scene in some way, it is a strong indicator of the whole story’s mood and tone.

If the beginning is an entry point in to the world of a story, it goes without saying that one of its most important potential functions is to draw readers’ attention. “The inherent significance of the beginning, then, is the influence it must have for the narrative that follows it” (Laccetti, 2008:181). Beginning, then, is particularly effective in setting off the reader’s mind in a certain direction and influencing his/her entire reception of the work.

Endings are critical points for the examination of plot. As the text’s termination point the ending obviously plays a crucial role with regard to determining the nature of the story’s closure. Torgovnick (1981), emphasizes on the importance of endings as a doorway to understand stories in better clarity. “Endings, closures reveal the essences of novels with particular clarity; to study closure is to re-create and re-experience fiction with an unusual vividness” (1981: 6-7).

Therefore, endings serve the important function of scaffolding our retrospective interpretation of the narrative.

Regarding where beginnings and endings of the subject narratives should be marked, I take as the beginning of each subject narrative the beginning of the *syuzhet* as well as the *fabula*. My reason for choosing the first one is that the subject narratives exhibit, interesting textual beginnings or beginning of *sjuzet*, which also, according to Richardson (2019), should receive due attention when determining the beginning of a narrative. What makes these beginnings interesting is that in most cases they happen to be the points where the character-narrators of the subject narratives begin to draw attention towards their identities and even sometimes question them. This also goes in line with Richardson's statement on beginnings as marking "a distinct break from that which precedes them" (Richardson, 2019:41).

Moreover, I considered the chronological beginning to be another possible beginning point because since the subject narratives are self narratives their chronological beginnings are most likely to be stories of origin, family or birth stories. Family plays a significant role in our lives as well as determines our identity and providing a story surrounding one's family and birth is a device for foreshadowing a personality to come. Hence, stories of origin (familial, national, class) are indispensable in this discussion of socially constructed narrative identity.

I have also chosen as the end, the last event of the textual representation of the narrative that puts an open or closed end to the plot. Moreover, I draw on concepts of the five types of endings discussed above whenever I found them useful for the analysis. Besides them being critical points for the examination of plot, analyzing beginnings and endings helps to understand how the narrators begin and end their stories and their reasons of starting and ending them that way. My delineation of beginnings and endings seeks to better facilitate an exploration of the relationships among story beginnings, endings, chronology and causality so as to foster a discussion of the many narratological functions they can serve within narrative construction of identity.

By way of concluding this discussion of the study's theoretical foundations, I would like to stress the convenience of pairing social constructionist identity theory with literary theory as a combined tool for revealing the process of self construction through narration. Based on Bruner's conceptualization of narrative identity and Richardson's theory of plot discussed above, I argue

that only when life narratives are constructed with clear causal connections of important life events, may life narratives reveal their specific information about the narrator's identity. In this regard Bruner's theory of identity narratives can be viewed in light of theory of plot.

The main exploration of narrative identity construction is strongly related with the concept of plot since one of the major ways of building narrative coherence is plot structure. Plot enables the meaning-making process: events are given coherence, put in to a deliberate order and begin to make sense to us as a part of our life story. Ricoeur claims that in this way, events can be seen as more than mere incidents, as having an effect on the construction of the story, and the story is seen as a synthesis of events that the plot organizes in to an intelligible whole (Ricoeur 1984:65). A person's life story synthesizes episodic memories creating a coherent account of identity in time. Through coherent narratives, people convey to themselves and to others who they are now, how they came to be, and where they think their lives may be going in the future.

Stressing this point, Bruner adds that any "narrative comprises an ensemble of ways of constructing and representing the sequential, diachronic order of human events" (1991:6). Narrative coherence, which is one of the major concepts raised by Bruner while discussing narrative identity, largely depends on the extent to which the narrative demonstrates causality. Causality in turn, is established when the reasons used to describe the protagonist's trajectory is perceived as sufficient or understandable. Causal connections relate events and the character's development by providing biographical causes and consequences as well as reasons and aims for the individual's actions, and decisions. Causal connections lead to constructing life narratives by creating links between important life events. As the process of narrating personal story unfolds, plot progresses and the character's personality evolve. Hence, plot is a significant meeting ground between narrative identity theory and literary theory.

Moreover, causal connections help bridge changes in the individual's life and personality, thereby creating personal continuity in the midst of change. Stories help individuals articulate provisional selves, link the past and the future into a harmonious, continuous sense of self. A good self narrative hangs together coherently from one episode to the next so that the turns of events are plausibly accounted for and the narrator acts consistently and deliberately from beginning to end. Stories are coherent to the extent that they establish adequate causality for their

events and continuity of their protagonist. Implicit here is that all human actions are closely tied with the cohering powers of the plot within which the living unfolds.

A shift in the attitude of a character marks a turning point in a narrative plot which also, in essence, coincides with Bruner's conceptions of turning points. This further helps develop the plot, helping to bring about a revolutionary change in its structure. Bruner (2002) emphasizes that a story needs a plot; plots need obstacles to goals; and obstacles make people reconsider. As a result of the circumstance in which characters find themselves throughout the course of the story their nature is modified and we are finally confronted with a different person from the one we met at the beginning. Based on this, in this study, I take the narrative plot structure as an essential formal characteristic of life stories and use them to reveal the process of narrative identity construction.

Selection of major life events that lay the foundation for narrative construction for each character is another point where the two theories meet. These events include information, such as high- and low-points in a life, turning points, consequential experiences and experiences that have formed one's personality.

In the process of constructing a narrative identity, the art of storytelling is indispensable. This requires the ability to see connections, relations between different elements, to structure details and understand causality. In this process an element of plot is always required to structure the story with beginning, middle and end, and create a sense of time and causality. By using the device of plot people link events and attempt to explain those events. Well formed beginnings and endings contribute to temporal orientation. Peter Brooks argues that for anything to be narratable, it must "in some sense be plotted, display a design and logic" (1984, 5).

Beginnings and endings anchor life narratives in the past and in the present. Beginnings lead to endings, and endings determine how we understand beginnings. Alasdair MacIntyre explains the "concept of selfhood, a concept of a self whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death as a narrative beginning to middle to end" (205, 1981). A temporal structure of life narratives involves an initial foreshadowing of later events and a concluding outlook based on a retrospective evaluation of life. Hence, the process of identity construction of

a fictional character unfolds in various points throughout the narrative, revealing its constituent parts along the way, reforming and evolving until the conclusion of the story.

The above discussion, more or less, demonstrates how an analysis of self narratives may benefit from the synthesis of these two disciplines. Therefore, my discussion regarding the construction of self in *Yesinibit Kelemat* (2016) and *Merek* (2015) relies much on these theories in order to explore how the human mind actually create the self through narratives, presupposing the concepts formulated by the theorists discussed above. I specifically focus on concepts such as, making sense of self, multiplicity of self and changing identity. I used the ideas of these theorists as an overarching conceptual framework. Their thoughts created support for the inquiry in ways that shape how I view self in relation to narratives.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS

4.1. Introduction

Under this chapter attempt is made to investigate the narrative identity construction of some selected characters; more specifically to analyze how narrative resources of dominant stories, narrative actions and conclusions are used by these characters to construct specific identities. Each narrative starts with some kind of narrative beginning and develops a larger view of the story out of that beginning. These narratives usually begin with well defined identities constructed through references to birth, parents, family, home, religion, and subsequently go on to describe confusion and loss of identity, and the small but significant ways in which identity could be deconstructed and reconstructed. The common denominator in the foregoing analyses is then a motion from innocence to self-awareness.

Despite the fact that self-narratives usually begin with birth or earlier, the subject narrators in both novels usually open their narratives with an orientation, which announces what is to come and sets the stage for the main events to follow. Based on this each character begins his/her story with a prefatory remark about the story to be told, why it is told, how it is told and a strong invocation sometimes even compulsion to get the reader's attention. It is a text that precedes, initiates, and influences the reader's experience of the subsequent narrative. I quote a selected statement from this prefatory remark at the beginning of each narrative's analysis. However, in the analysis, instead of these prefatory remarks, I take the opening paragraphs of the self narrative proper as the beginning, for it is the part of the text that is directly related to the subject of the study.

Following this prefatory remarks, instead of starting the story at the beginning of life, that is, with birth or childhood memories as the setting for one's life, most of the subject narratives begin in medias res with the exception of the character Makida who, for some reason chose to follow, more or less, a linear plot to tell her story. Hence, the plots are not arranged in the old chronological order, rather they are often broken up and the continuity of the developing plot ceases in order to describe another story that may or may not be logically relevant to the current one both in time and spatial order.

All the characters studied here claim that they are the narrators of their own story by directly calling up on the reader to be read. Each character in this analysis tries to construct and reconstruct him or herself, related to the encounters with different life experiences which challenge the character's previous view of him or herself. And the palimpsest identity that replaces autonomous identity, and the importance of narration for a concept of self, are here explored through literary texts. The analytical strategy has two analytical steps focusing on the content, form and change of the subject narratives. I started the analytical process by analyzing the individual self narratives so as to come up with short summaries of the stories and to identify dominant stories. This analysis illuminates the themes or the content level of what characters are struggling with in their identity work.

In the second and broader step, I analyzed these dominant stories, the focus of analysis being on important life events that constitute it. I examine how each character temporally sequences his/her specific story and analyze the processes by which he/she connects major life events/experiences in order to construct significant meaning structures of identity. Making sense of self and identity change are central for this analytical step and guide the investigation process of identity construction. What follows is the application of the analytical framework discussed in the previous chapter to the empirical data collected from the novels. The first three narratives are taken from *Yesinibit Kelemat* (2016) and the last two from *Merek* (2015). Analysis of each self narrative begins with a quote from the novels, where the narrator makes a special point about him/herself.

4.2. Bella- The story of the Double Faced Girl

The character Bella, tries to narrate her life story, which covers her entire life-span, by consciously selecting and summarizing events in order to present them concisely. Thus, emphasizing this point, she preceded her self-narrative by the following pretext.

ታሪኬ ወርዶ ሰፊ ስለሆነ፣ (የማምሰውስ በሆነ) አጠቃሎ ማገር ግዴ ነው። ... የአርባ አሳታ ህይወትን እኩል አርባ አሳታ አላወረወም። ቆሞ ለሚዳምኝ ወይም ተቀምጦ ለሚገባኝ ብቻ ሳይሆን ለእኔ ለተረካቸው አደካሚ ትርጉም የለሽ ይሆናል። ... ለማክበር ማደግ ከማለትም ያለፈ ነው። የተቀናበረ ክህደት ነው። ... ለእኔ (አንባባዎም ደረዳኛል) እንግዲህ የማረክ ደርጊት የሚኖረኝ ሂደት ለሆነኝ ነው። ትንሽ እውቅና ብዙውን ሁኔታ ይሄዳል ... (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 74).

Since my story is wide (so is every one's) summarizing is inevitable. ... I don't narrate my forty years story for forty years. It will be tiresome and meaningless, not only for the one who stands and listens to me or sits and reads me, but even for me the narrator. ... Choosing contents to summarize is more than partiality. It is a systematic treachery. Well then, for me, (also the reader will understand me) the act of narrating will become a process of treachery. Here is my little truth and vast treachery...

4.2.1. Story Synopsis

Bella is a half-cast woman in her forties. Born from an Italian priest and an Eritrean nun, she labels her story as a story of shame and embarrassment starting from the beginning. Shortly after her birth, she was adopted by an Eritrean family, so, does not remember neither of her birth parents. Finding herself among a family with whom she is not biologically related and have little in common with, Bella had a very difficult childhood. Her adoptive parents and their children treated her as an outsider. Powerless and small, Bella had to submit to every suffering that came into her life. Her parents' absence and her need for physical affection lead to further struggles. Desperate to escape her antagonizing life situation she seeks comfort in her male guardian Tesfaye who molests and rapes her at the age of thirteen.

As a half-cast woman, Bella always felt affiliation both to Eritrean and Italian people. She grew up among the Eritreans, her adopting parents being among those she experienced closely. However, her intense suffering from discrimination and bad treatment in the hands of her fellow Eritrean people together with the sexual abuse made her miss her Italian ancestors whom she never had a chance to get close to. Therefore, suffering, especially psychological one, is an integral part of Bella's life story.

When she got older, she learned to engage in fake social relations, which, to some extent, helped her deal with her psychological sufferings. She played along with the problems of her life, learned pretending to be friends with the people who ridiculed her and began enjoying sexual intimacies with her abuser. As her new mechanism of easing suffering took root in her mind, her heart grow colder and she was unable to engage in any kind of genuine social relation. This became her way of paying back the society, whom she held responsible for all the bad

experiences she went through in her life, despite her knowledge that she is hurting people who truly loved and respected her in the process.

In the end, Bella had an epiphany which made her realize that she was the most responsible party in creating her problematic life and that she wasted the greater part of her life blaming others. At first, this realization created confusion in her as her life time belief of holding others responsible for her problems falls away leaving a big void inside her. The story ends with Bella regretting her wrongdoings and seeking for redemption.

4.2.2. Dominant Storyline and Important Life Events

As Bella has remarked in her pretext that she will not narrate the whole story but some selected events in a form of summery, the following are the events she deemed important to play significant role in her life. Bella gives considerable emphasis to her birth and childhood narrative and also accompany it by comments as she is trying to form part of her identity through it. Hence, as one of the most important events in her life, Bella tells the story of how she was born and named “Bella”, a name given to her by her birth mother. This name has a significant value for her; it tells her where she comes from and who she is (her identity). It is her sole connection to her birthparents, especially her mother, so she loved it dearly. Unfortunately, her adopting parents decided to rename her as Meaza.

ስሜቤላ ነበር፡ እንደ ወላጅ እናቴ ፈቃድ፡ አሳዲዎቹ ጋሼ ገዳዩና ሞቲቱ አግዳለ ማዘ ካላደረግው ሞትን እንገኛለን አሉ፡ በቃ ማዘ የሚለው ተሞረጦ፡ አያበሳጭም? ... ይሄ ስም አያስጠለም?
(Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 79).

My name was Bella according to my birth mother’s will. However, the people who raised me, Mr. Tesfaye and his wife Amsale, insisted in changing it to Meaza. That’s it, Meaza was chosen. Isn’t that annoying?... Isn’t this name disgusting?

From Bella’s point of view, their action is taken as a move towards covering and ultimately erasing what she believes to be her true identity. This incident marks the beginning of her identity crises which grew stronger as the story progresses. Next to her familial displacement, her physical appearance is a major point where Bella further complicates her identity related problems and tries to construct her sense of self.

After the death of her mother, Bella was taken in by a family of sexually abusive father, discriminating mother and hateful children. As she ventured into the society to attend school and socialize with her age mates, she encountered growling racism and brutal verbal abuse. As a child she was mocked and insulted, by friends and family alike, for her foreign looks that made her appear ill-favored in their eyes. Boys of her age show the least interest to be engaged in any kind of sexual affair with her. This makes her feel unattractive, unwanted and inferior to her friends. This phase of her life put a permanent scar in her psyche and prepared her for a more conspicuous awareness of her society.

As a third additional factor to the above two Bella’s opinion regarding her racial background also plays an important role in the process of her identity construction. Despite her insecurities regarding her foreign looks, she strongly believes that she is superior in race to the Habesha people, who found her European looks unattractive. “... በትንሹም ቢሆን ዘሬ አወጅታት እንዳለህት በሞጭ ከራት ይሰማል።” (“I am proud to know that I have a European gene even if it is in its smallest scale”). (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 80).

These three important areas of Bella’s life are at the center of the story she tells, which makes them constituents of the dominant storyline. As can be seen in what is presented above, this Dominant Story, in line with Bruner’s description of the concept, is loaded with problems. Therefore, although many analytical dissections can be made regarding Bella’s self-narrative, I have only identified and analyzed the most significant areas in her narrative in relation to self construction. The analytical focus here is the process through which she connects important life experiences to the conclusions she draws from them in order to construct her identity.

4.2.3. Construction of Self in Bella’s Self-narrative

Bella begins her narrative abruptly “in medias res” (in the middle of things) by dropping series of information that need prior information to be properly understood as quoted herewith:

ነገ ጠየት ለዩኒቨርሲቲ የግጥም ተጽዕኖ ገረገላል የሚል ግንደ ለጠናቅቅ ማድረስ ስላላቸው ከስራ ባልደረቡና ከጓደኞቹ ከፈቃድ ጋር ለግል እንከፍን ሳንወጣ እስከ ዘጠኝ ሰዓት ስንሰራ ቆይቻ። ... የቀረው ስራ አጠናቆ የሚገኝ ሃላፊ ትክክል እኔ ማከኳት ትኩረት ላይ አረፈ። (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 74).

We have to complete the final draft of the project proposal that we will present to UNICEF tomorrow morning, so together with my friend and colleague Fiameta, we worked until nine o'clock, without even taking a lunch break. ... The responsibility to finalizing the rest of the work rested on the shoulders of me, the hapless.

This statement is taken from the opening paragraph of Bella's narrative. As such it is taken as the textual beginning point of Bella's self-narrative. This beginning paragraph invites the reader to pose identity related questions such as: "who is the narrator", "what does she do", "who is her Friend Fiameta and why does she seem to consider herself inferior to her", "why does she identify herself as 'hapless', and "how does she find herself in her current life situation"? Perhaps, it also gives clue about what the story is going to be, which is a story of suffering and sorrow, and the character is a victim of very inconvenient life situation. In this sense, this opening paragraph, the beginning of Bella's narrative, is very important in providing clues that can help in understanding her identity construction process. Even though Bella starts answering these questions four pages later, it takes reading the entire story to understand them fully.

This textual beginning is followed by a chronological presentation of the rest of the story. So, four pages later, the narrator starts telling her expositional story, the beginning of the story in its chronological order, in a series of flashbacks until she reaches the present story time. Haunted by her displacement from her biological parents, Bella immediately introduces herself as a woman of mixed racial background, as a half Italian and half Eritrean woman who must struggle with her role of a hybrid person. The brief description of her biological parents acts as an initial point for the beginning of her identity construction. It is an attempt of a search for origin which she desperately seeks to recover and understand. But instead of arriving at a point of clarification as to who she is, she ends up with fragmentary accounts of her corrupt family history, such as she is a product of impure birth, born from a nun and a priest:

አባቴም እናቴም ማከሰሞች ነበሩ፡ እውቴን ነው፡ ... ወላጅ እናቴ ማግዳለና ትባላለች፡ የተወለደችበትን የሀበሻ ስሜም ይህን የአባቴን ስም አላውቅም፡ ፎኛዋን ትንሽ ሳለሁም ካደክም በኋላ ደጋግሞ አይቻለሁ፡ አይኖኛ የጩዳ ማከሶ አይሆኑለሁም፡ አይኖኛ የሚሆኑ አለሚሆኑ ነገር አላቸው፡ ... አባቴ ስሙ ፍራንኮ ይባላል፡ ... ስለ ፍራንኮ ብዙ ስለማውቅ (የሚቆይው ከሱ አሳፋሪ ደርጊት የተወለደኩ

ጭን ብቻ ስለሆነ) የራሴን የሚዋኝን ልባድ ጭናብር ነበረብኝ፡፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 79).

My father and mother were monk and nun. I am serious. ... My biological mother is called Magdalena. I don't know where she was born, her Habesha name or her father's name. I saw her picture repeatedly when I was little as well as after I grew up. There is something about her eyes that is mesmerizing and worldly. ... My father is called Franco. ... Since I don't know much about Franco (because all I know is that I was born as a result of his dishonorable deeds) I had to come up with my own convenient fiction.

This humiliating family history was not a good place to start looking for the origin of one's identity. So Bella “had to make up her own stories of her origin” in order to construct a self with acceptable values by the society. On top of this shameful family history, she was given to adoption when she was very young so she never got the chance to know her parents. This familial displacement created a big gap in Bella's life. Looking back at her childhood experiences Bella notes that she fell victim to the displacement at birth from her biological parents.

ተከፋይና አምላክ ከእኔ ለሌላ የራሳቸው-ሀላት ሴቶችና አንድ ወንድ ልጆች አለላቸው፡፡ እንደልጅህ አሳይንት ተብሎ አደራ ብስጥኛሁም እነሱም ተስማሙ በእግዚአብሔር ቃል ምላው የተቀበሉኝ በሆነም ... ከልጆቻቸው እንደአንዱ ሳልሆን እንደ ባዕድ ይቆጥሩኝ ነበር፡፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 80).

Apart from me Tesfaye and Amsale have their own two daughters and a son. Even though I was trusted to them for them to raise me as their own ... they used to treat me not as one of their children but as a stranger.

This early separation from her biological parents leaves her feeling rootless for most of her childhood. Her constant awareness of this displacement and the fact that she did not have a sense of belonging associated with anyone around her becomes an identity burden that she must deal with at such a young age. Over the course of her narrative Bella details numerous negative effects of such displacement, including her susceptibility to her adoptive parent Tesfaye's sexual assault. It also forced her to look for moral grounds in her biological parents whom she barely

have information about let alone know them. The mother, for example, is mentioned as the moral center of Bella’s later life. She associates her reserved, solitary and secretive life style, which is instigated by her adoptive parents’ ill treatment, with her mother’s similar behavior which she believes had went as far as becoming a nun: “..የእናቴ ጸባይ በእኔ ውስጥ አለ፡ = ... እሷ ማክሌ የሆነችው ከወጣቱ ከሙሴላ ሀብቱ ከተባሉ ነገሮች ለሙሴላ ፈልጋ ሳይሆን በሰዎች ስራ ተሟ ... ለሆነ ይችላል፡ = ” (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 80). (“... My mother’s manner is also in me. ... The reason she became a nun is not to hide from sex similar things that are deemed sin, rather it may be because she is sick of people’s actions”).

As she grew up, this feeling of displacement becomes stronger and she starts tracing her racial origins to define who she is, even through her effort only resulted in emphasizing the instability of her racial identity. The following three quotes clearly show this idea. “በጣሊያኛ ቋንቋ ችሎታ በጣሊያን ስኬል ስሜ የተጠራ የሆነከት የግዛብ አባቴን ፍራንኮ ኔሮን ለማህደሰት በሞጫ ሳይሆን አይቀርም፡ = ” (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 79). (“Perhaps, the reason behind my best performance in Italian language at Italian school is my effort to make my imaginary father Franco Nero proud.”)

... በትንሽም ቢሆን ዘሬ አወጃግ ት እንዳለሰት በሞጫ ከራት ይሰማል፡ = ... በግዛልና በደም ማኔ ውስጥ ናት፡ = አደጌም ይህን ትንሽ ሆኔ ... ከማኛችው ሐበሾች የበለጠ ለግጭራቱ ለግጭራብ ስልጣኔ ቅርብ እንደሆነኩ አወቃለሁ፡ = የሮም አታሞ ነጋ ጠባ በደም ስሬ ይማል ልበል? (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 80).

... I am proud to know that I have a European gene even if in its smallest scale. Through its image and blood Milano is inside me. As a child and even a grown up ... I know that I am closer to Europe and European civilization than any of the Habesha people I see every day. Should I say Rome’s drum beats in my vein every day?

ጅግሳ ማጥፍን ለረር ማገድ ለፈልገኝ ማጣ፡ = እንዲህ ሲያደርግ ሀለት ተቃራኒ ስሜች ተሰማኛ፡ = ማጃጃያ ደስ አለኝ አለ አይደል እንደዘ የሚለገት ልጅ በቃ የዛን ጊዜ ከል ናችው፡ = ሀለተኛ የኦርቲራ ሰው አለሙት አስፈራኝ፡ = ... ከሞየሮስ ከሞረው ስለተሟ ልጄ የጅግሳ ልጅ ረሰን የሚሞረው እንደ አርቲራዊ ነው፡ = ትንሽ ባጠፋ ቁጥር፣ ትንሽ በተሰሳተ ቁጥር በልቤ ይህ የጅግሳ ደም ነው እላለሁ፡ = ጎጠዝ ተሟ የሆነበት ግዝንያት ደሞየ እኔ ደም ስለሆነ ነው እላለሁ፡ = (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 89).

Jigsa came to the Duke of Harar road looking for me. When he did this I felt two conflicting feelings. First, I felt happy, you know, at that time girls that are pursued like that are considered cool. Second, the fact that he is not an Eritrean man scared me. ... My son, Jigsa's son, considers himself as an Eritrean because he has learned enough from what I say and do. Whenever he makes a mistake even in its smallest scale, in my heart I say this is Jigsa's blood. But I say the reason that he is a smart student is because he is my blood.

The implications of this charged descriptive language directly ties into construction of self. Consequently, Bella's perception of her racial identity is split into two opposite directions. However, no matter how hard Bella tries to identify herself with both races, finding a stable position with either race was not an easy task. Especially when race plays a role, Bella was out of place, living very far away from her Italian ancestors and not being taken as one of them by the Eritreans because she is a half-caste and physically unattractive. Bella describes general difficulties associated with growing up among a prejudiced society as a big gap in her life on top of her familial displacement as in:

የ66 አብዮት ተነስቶ 'ተሳተፎ' ብለው ሲሞሉ ስንገላቱን ተያዘኝ ወይንም ፍንገገቴ ጠፋ። ለዎቶቻችን ለሰዎችና ለወዳጆችን ያልተማችን እንደሞላላችው ፈለገ። ... ማሞጃችን ማላጋቸው ከሞላላላችን ሃሳብ ሀገር ከጠርዘት ላይ የምላላላችን ባለጌ ስርዓትና አጃባቢያቸው የፈጠሩን ዕይል-ባስ ነበርኩ። ስፈለግ የምላላ ስፈልጉ የሚሰኝ። (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 85).

When they recruit me to participate in the event of the 1966 revolution, my ugliness disappeared in to the political theatre. Those, who had no desire to hold, kiss and be with me; wanted me to die for them. I was an unlucky one, who shuttles on the margins of the imaginary nation where my recruiters and their likes live and who is shaped by a corrupted system and the followers. One who is called when needed and when they wish forgotten by them.

Bella is a biracial hybrid child of an Italian father and Eritrean mother. The force of this racial background is evident in the identity crisis of Bella as she tries to identify herself with both the Italian and Eritrean. She celebrates her mixed origin by privileging Europeanness and after that Eritreanness. However, Bella is not really Italian or Eritrean or Ethiopian for that matter. She

defines herself through both races to the extent that she is neither Italian nor Eritrean but somewhere in the middle. She is a hybrid woman, who combines two points of origin and arrives at a completely paradoxical relationship to the notion of national legitimacy. This is why, in the above quote, she describes herself as a “boarder woman”. Her status sparks her desire to position herself in a place of stability, which she never achieved. This instability, thus, calls attention to the way Bella acts out her disappointment in her later life.

Neither nation, therefore, stands in as a goal or as an authentic cultural origin to which she returns in order to establish wholeness. It is also true that many of the problems Bella encountered in her life and later shaped her identity stem from the racial prejudice of her Eritrean fellows who treated her with blatant contempt. Bella’s racial origin serves, here, to highlight the importance of racial background to the development of her sense of self. One of the major areas where her identity construction is influenced by her racial background is her physical appearance.

Bella had a physical feature that was not appreciated by the Habesha people around her. As a child and young adult, boys and girls of her age called her names, mocking her body. People frequently remind her that she was physically different in a not appreciable way. Her fair skin and, tall and fat body structure were always a point of criticism. Her age mates constantly eroded her mood. They upset her always particularly about her unattractive physical appearance. In the end she developed a very low self esteem and came to know herself as the one who is unattractive:

በጣም ቀይ፣ ደብልቤል ፊት፣ በርጫጭ አንገተ አጫ፣ ቀይ ድድ ያለኝና በዚህም ግጥንያት የሚወቃው ሰዎች ፊት ማቅ የሚሰፍረኝ ነበርኩ። ከንፈሮቼ ደቃቶች ናቸው። ... በዚህ ላይ ደሞረቸኞች። ... ለቅርብ ወደጅንት የሚሰበኝ ጥቂት ያወም የሚፈልጋቸው ነበሩ። ... በዚህ የተነሳ የገቡትንንት ስሜንና ፍርሃቴን ለማግለጥ አድማጭ ለማገኘት የግዝለለው ፈያሜን ነበር። (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 84-85).

I have fair skin with fat round face, big belly, short neck, red gum because of which I was embarrassed to laugh in front of people that I don't know. My leaps are very thin. ... To add to the problem I am tall. ... Only those few, that I was not interested in, thought of

getting close to me. For this reason, I used to take Fiameta as a shield to face my feeling of inferiority and fear, and to draw attention.

Bella is the ugly girl in her neighborhood and when she looks herself in the mirror she only sees ugliness. However, there is no clear and definite perspective on beauty, and it remains to be indecisive. Bella experiences it by taking the standards of beauty and equating physical beauty with her identity, hence developing self contempt. Her ugliness mostly exists from the society's conviction to it as the normal is defined by the majority. At times she also recognizes the society to be wrong and criticizes it for being so blind and illogical to deny her beauty. For example, she is conscious that they celebrate fairness of skin when they see it among their own people (Habesha), but refuse to appreciate it when it comes to her. Yet, she constructs a clear causal relation between this particular experience and her developing low self-esteem, hence the "I am ugly" identity construct.

After this the feeling of not being enough was well established in her mind as a great constituent of her sense of self. This is a good illustration of one of the social constructionists' basic concepts; the societies place in the process of individual identity makings. Perhaps, Bella may not experience herself as an ugly girl if she was not continuously reminded by the society that she is so. Thus, this identity construct, "I am ugly", is reflective of the troubling expectations of the society about what the female body should look like.

Bella's feeling of inferiority is an identity attribute that proves to be a very important narrative function of her Self-construction process. Following this the painful experience of being identified as an ugly girl has become a turning point in Bella's narrative and the start of an identity construction process in which she constructed legitimacy about not being good enough by herself. Bella re-constructs her sense of self to include and emphasize the significance of Fiameta in her identity as the above quote indicates. Even in her adulthood, Bella continues to be identified through Fiameta: **“ታዲያ እስከ ቅርብ ጊዜ ድረስ በተገኘው አጋጣሚዎቼት (እንደ ልጅነቴ ጊዜ አፍ ተከፍቶ በግልጽ ባይነገረኝም)፣ ወይም ‘ካኔነት’ የእኔና የፊያሜታ ግንኙነት ማለጫ ወይም ማቆሻ ነው። ”** (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 85). (“So, until recently (though I am not told overtly as was the case in my childhood) the fact that I am being considered as a dog, is a typical feature of my relationship with Fiameta.”).

She tried to reduce the psychological suffering that comes with the feeling of inferiority by being friends with a beautiful girl, whom she thought would cover her ugliness with her beauty and help her better relate with others in the face of her unattractiveness. This implies that being identified as ugly has become a more prevailing experience, which was not limited to childhood resentment. The society's ill treatment made Bella very bitter and become a significant experience in her Self-construction. This phase of her life prepares her for a more conspicuous awareness of her society and further caused her to initially start out as a cunning girl. This is also a major part of Bella's narrative where her Self-construction is clearly marked. Bella emotionally detached herself when the racist pressure and societal prejudice regarding her physical appearance began to affect her negatively, as in:

ከፍ ስል ብዙዎች በሚረዱት ስልት በዘመናዊ በጎፈር ማር ጆሮኩ፡ ዘመዴ ለፈጻሚና ለሌሎች፡ ጎፈር ደግሞ ያው-ለግሌ ደስታ፡ የዘመዴ ወዳጆች ጆላ አራዳ የሚሉ ነበሩ፡ ... የጎፈር ወዳጆች አስራ ሁለተኛ ወደቀው ስራ የያዙ ትንንሽ ነገር የሚገኙ ደህና ቤተሰብ ያላቸው በእድሜ (ትንሽ) ከእኔ ከፍ ያሉ ተናቂዎች ነበሩ፡ ... እውነት ወሻትን ደባልቄ አልነበረም፡ ሁለቱም ወሻቸው ነበሩ፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 85-86)

When I get older, by a means many wouldn't understand, I started living with high and low regard selves. The high regard Self was for Fiameta and her kinds. And the low regard Self, for my own happiness. Friends of my high regard self were kind of smart... Friends of my low regard self were despicable people who fell their high school leaving exams and entered the work force, has small businesses, have well to do family, and are older than me. ... I was not mixing up truth and lie. They both were lies.

Low self-esteem and the feeling of being estranged made Bella grow emotionally distant and cold. As a way of easing this agonizing life situation, she thought herself how to live in fake social relations, a kind of role play that helped her relate with others with a minimum risk of emotional damage. She hides herself in fake identities so that no weight of mockery from the outside unsettles her. This defense mechanism is used here as a psychological cover for what could rattle her sense of self. When faced with difficulties of creating and sustaining genuine social relations, Bella depended on these dual identities to achieve some semblance of stability

and continuity in her life. And she also enters adulthood with her duality as a primary defining feature of her identity.

She lived by two identities where each is practiced depending on the social circumstances she finds herself in. She became what Gergen termed as a “social chameleon”, changing her identity according to the situation she found herself in. Moreover, Bella’s observation that there are two key personae constituting her sense of self is a clear example of the constructionists’ theory of “Self” where, during interaction the individual is expected to possess certain attributes and information that fit together into a self that is at once coherently unified and appropriate for the occasion.

This dichotomy is revealed by Bella’s acting in her interaction with different kinds of people. One basic example of this split can be found in her relationship with her boyfriend Jigsa and her best friend Fiameta. The self she activates when she is with her best friend needs Fiameta as a shield to escape her feeling of inferiority, while when she is with Jigsa, the self that is interacting with him swims in freedom, joy and the realm of innocence and love. Here, the social constructionists’ understanding of the self is instantiated in Bella’s experience, where her performance of Self is clearly different according to different audiences and contexts. She went so far as to describe herself as having ‘two different personalities’, with the shift in physical context functioning as an important indicator of multiple identities.

The selves that both group of people have actually encountered are not the self that Bella believes to be her true self, rather they are identity constructs that came into play depending on the demands of social contexts, which according to Gergen is typical characteristic of postmodern selves. Hence, despite the fact that the above quote reveals two distinct identities, one may also glean insight into a third one, which is held by Bella as her true self. Bella also recognized that, apart from the subject positions she occupies based on varying social circumstances and relationships, there is also one aspect of herself that she identified as her ‘private self’. In this regard it is possible to say that she oscillates among three separate identities. She also sought to articulate the existence of this “private self” distinctly separate from her previously mentioned selves. She described this private self as more solitary and secret from the world: “የእኔን ልብ ከፍተው ቢያዩኣት እወስጥዎ በረሷ ስርዐት አሳምሁ ትረ ትር የግዳ ለሌ ትንሽ ልብ ነበረች፡ በልቤ ወስጥ ልብ ይብደዋሉ፡” (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 85) (“If my heart was to be

opened and seen, inside there is another small heart that beats beautifully in its own rhythm. I have hidden a heart within my heart.”)

One way in which one can see that this self is considered as true by Bella is that she uses it to express emotions and thoughts that she would not reveal through the other selves. The following extract may best express how, according to her, the fake and the true identities coexist in Bella as constituents of her Self. “... **ጀግሳን እየወደደከትም እዛው ዐልጋ ላይ ከደክኳለሁ፡ ... ፍቅር እውነት ቢሆንም ወሻት ነው፡ እያንዳንዳን ከእሱ ጋር የተደሰኩበትን ቀን በሞቺጥለው ቀን አጠፋለሁ፡”** (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 89) (“... Even when I was in love with him I have betrayed Jigsa right there in bed. ... Though it’s a true love it’s a lie. Each day that I have fun with him, I erase the next day.”)

This description represents the voices of, on the one hand, the fake selves that pretends to love him so as to satisfy her desires as well as despises him because he is not an Eritrean and on the other, what she considers to be her true self that loves him as a man who loves her the way no one has loved her before. However, her true feeling of attraction towards Jigsa was something unacceptable to her fake selves, and neither was the true self ever meant to be revealed to others. So their relationship was doomed to failure from the beginning.

While Bella’s assertion of her “private self” can be understood as evidence of her autonomy, this autonomy is still framed by constraining and restrictive assumptions that she has internalized because of her subject position as a hybrid woman. Therefore, these multiple identity constructs served as a kind of loophole that helps her temporarily escape her emotional drama and later became the basic principle of her life. It made her feel emotionally stable and enables her to bare the difficulties of social relations. She plays between selves so that no weight of mockery from the outside unsettles her. This defense mechanism is cultivated here as a psychological cover for what could disturb her ego.

Experiencing hurtful judgments of her personality resulted in the identity conclusion that social relationships should be carried out in multiple and at times, even fake identities. Hence, Bella primarily identifies herself as a smart and cunning woman who consciously lives between identities. In her narrative she has highlighted the importance of constructing her identity in this particular way. She described the ways in which occupying multiple subject positions can be a great weapon in dealing with problematic social relations: “**ከዚህ የሕይወት ፍላጎት የተሞከረት ቁልፍ**

ዕውነት ሁለት ገንጠል ለኔ ነው።” (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 86) (“What I learned from my life journey is that double identity is my power.”)

This part of Bella’s narrative traces the start of her self-development into an independent, cunning and smart woman. She also seems to be comfortable to live in between selves with minimum conflict or discontinuities for many years. This ability to live in harmony with many and sometimes contradicting selves is in contrast to the experience of other characters analyzed in this study, such as Mitik who experienced clear tension between her different subject positions.

As can be seen in the above discussion, at the beginning of her narrative, Bella was a young girl suffering not just from the typical childhood trauma associated with being displaced from her biological parents but also from trauma of being hybrid. Therefore, she anchored her dual identity and gave it the power to be a defining feature of her sense of self. This identity construct then guides every aspect of her life and as the plot progresses it takes a stronger root. She emotionally distanced herself from everyone and everything, including the most emotional experiences of her life. In spite of her need for family and social strength, she continues to maintain aloof individuality in a bid to craft a new social position for herself.

As she finds herself being engaged in more and more social relations, her ability to manipulate others by playing her double identity card became sharper. She perfected herself to be a true “social chameleon”. This seems to be the reason that she never conveyed one coherent narrative about who she aspires to be. Rather her act of presenting problems and their perceived consequences dominate her identity construction process. She was convinced that identity switching served her best to ease the challenges of everyday life. Hence, Bella never recognized living in between identities as a problem. In fact she takes it to be a unique and functional feature of her personality. It took her almost her entire life to realize, in a particular occasion, that people around her operate with as many functional selves as hers. A turning point in Bella’s narrative occurs when Bella unexpectedly learn that she has been equally, if not more, played by others as she has played with them. This sudden realization caused disruption in Bella’s developing narrative identity and forced the plot to move fast-forward into its ending.

Bella views herself as a woman of impulse and sorrow, while cultivating an increasing hatred for the society among which she grew up. She places herself not in juxtaposition with the society, but in direct contrast to it. However, Bella was forced to re-examine her past beliefs and deviate from them, by what seems to be a revelatory experience she had in her adulthood. This experience is temporally located by Bella to the time when she found out that her best friend and business partner Fiameta was going behind her back. She anchors the incident in her identity as an Eritrean freedom fighter explaining how she gave up many of her desires for the sake of the mission while her friend Fiameta, whom she looked up to as a forerunner, was secretly pursuing all of hers. This makes Bella feel like a fool and loser, who spent her entire life in an illusory world. This incident became a turning point in Bella's narrative forcing her to question her entire life as in the following quote:

... ሰዓዳዎን ደግሞ አየሁት፡ ፀጋ ነው፡ አልጠፋኝም፡ ... ለምን ፈጥሟል እንደተገናኘ አልነገረኝም? ... ካለሁበት በትክክል ባይታዩኝም ፈጣሪ ፀጋ እጅ ለእጅ እንደተያያዙ ይታወቃል፡ ሀላጭ ተቀጣጠል፡ ..ከእኔ ት ጀምሮ የገነባሁት ስላረሴ የነበረኝ ግጭት ብቻ ሳይሆን ብዙ ብዙ ነገር ሰፈርክ ይሰማል፡ ... ጀግን ከግብርብ የተሞቀለ የዘረበት ሁኔታ ተነጥሎ ወጥቶ በዐይን ሕሊናዬ ትክ አለኝ ... እኔ ነኝ የበለጠ ወሻጋም ወይስ ፈጥሟል? ማው ቁልፍ? አይ አምዘ ፉል፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 845-846)

... I looked at the man again. It is Tsega. I haven't forgotten him. ... Why hasn't Fiameta told me that they met? ... Even though I couldn't see clearly from where I stand, it is obvious that Femi and Tsega are holding hands. My entire body became inflamed. ... I can feel that not only my sense of self, which I built since childhood, but a lot more things crumble. ... Jigsa came to the front of my mind out of my chaotic and mixed up situation. Am I the bigger liar or Fiameta? Who is the fool? I am the fool.

Bella has always been conscious of the society's contribution in creating the person she is now, i.e., as the social constructionists argue, her identity is considerably influenced and co-created by significant others. In her narrative she clearly states that her identity is molded by the society; “ያሳደጉኝ እንደፈጠሩኝ ይረሰታል፡ ” (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 86). (“They forget that the ones who raised me created me”). This is also why she spent most of her life blaming people around her for her psychological sufferings and identity crisis. In other words, she traces the roots of her identity back to the society's way of life that she was brought up in. Nonetheless, standing at this turning point in her life, her initial narrative regarding the source of her problems is relocated

from outside to inside. Though, at first, she blamed Fiameta for her suffering, later she recognizes herself as part of the cause and finds herself to be equally responsible for most of her sufferings in her life:

የፈለግኩት ያህል ዘመን ምድር ላይ ብዙ ፍቅራችንንና ጥላቻችንን ማለት ሀላማ ፀባዮችንን የሚልፀጉ ሞና ሞና ገብጻችንን ቁጥረው ጥቂት ነው። አንድ ጥፋ (በጠለቅም ባይጠለቅም) ልምድ ዓለም እንደናወደነ ሊያደርገን ይችላል። በአንድ ክፉ ልምድ ወጭ ስናልፍ ስለ ዓለም ያለን ተስፋፋ አሞክክት ለጭም ወይም ለገረጥ ይችላል። በትክክል ልናገር ካልነው ያስከፍኝ ልምቶች በሌሎች ሰዎችና ተቋማት ብቻ ሳይሆን በራሴም እየተቀሰቀሱ የሚሉናቸው። (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 664).

No matter how long we live on earth our love and hatred which are, our major experiences that define us, are limited in number. A good experience can make us appreciate the world. When we go through a bad experience our optimistic world outlook can become gloomy or pessimistic. If I am to tell the truth, my bad life experiences are instigated not only by other people and institutions but also by myself.

This refocusing of problems brings unexpected openings into her life through which she was able to scrutinize her life and make significant shifts in her identity constructs. In other words, for the first time, she was willing to look through the stories she lived by to understand the error in her old identity and to make room for self-reconstruction.

This experience changed Bella’s thought patterns upside down and out of this chaos emerges her new sense of self. This shows that understanding what surrounds our life can be the first step to know ourselves. When her identification with the idea of a cunning woman falls apart Bella starts questioning her life choices and realizing that she has been equally played by others as she tried to do to them, made her think that she is not as smart and cunning as she thought she was. So she says, “... **ጅግን እንደሚልጠኝ ማቴና ፈረምታ ከእኔ የተሻላች የግዳፈልገውን የግምጃ ማህደ ልቤን በአሙኑ ሞላው። ... ወገ ወረደ ልቤ ግን እንደተገለልኩ ይገምጃል።**” (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 847). (“... Realizing that Jigsa is better than me and Fiameta is a person who knows what she wants, filled my heart with ashes.... Whatever the case might be, my heart feels that I’ve been manipulated.”)

This moment of enlightenment reveals the truth and complements the identity construction process. With this surprise and irony, Bella transforms drastically in favor of people that she has always thought manipulated. She now realized that she was wrong to think that other people are

not capable of constructing the same cunning self as she herself was. Learning that the people around her can equally be shrewd or even smarter than her greatly diminished her sense of self and also forced her to re-evaluate her life choices and decisions. This changed understanding of the world around her based on the lesson from her shattered past also necessitates an investigation into the nature of her identity as can be seen in the following quote:

ያሳለፍኩት የብልህነት ዘመን በእርግጥ የብልህነት አልነበረም፡ ... ሁሉ ነገር እየተናደ በላይ ላይ የሆኑ ማለፊያ፡ ... ብልህ ስላሰኝኝ ሕይወቴ ከሚቆይ እስከ ማጠቃለያ እያለፍኩ እያለፍኩ አሰብኩ፡ ..እዚህ ማደግ ላይ ሆኜ (አዎ ማደግ ላይ ነኝ) የኖርኩት ክህደቴ እንደ ጥላሽት ልቤ ደረት ላይ ተቀብቻ፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 852).

All the time that I thought I was being smart, I was not in actuality. ... I feel like everything is collapsing and falling up on me. ... I thought about my life, which made me appear clever, quickly looking through it from the beginning to the end. Standing at this final point (it is true, I am at the final point), my life of betrayal is smeared over my heart like soot.

The re-evaluation of one’s attitude is not a universal remedy to everyone, but only facing the truth about oneself can bring redemption. Bella recognized her old self to be dishonest, disloyal, treacherous and most of all, fool as opposed to cunning. This indicates that she will inevitably undergo changes in an attempt to create a new self. Thus, in the following quote we see her further challenging herself, scrutinizing the stories she lived by her entire life, criticizing her actions and taking responsibility for her present state. The life she led so far fell to make sense anymore and what she knows to be true about herself, until now, turned out to be an illusion. As a consequence of this happening, a feeling of anxiety and emptiness shrouds her: “**ልክ ዛሬ እዚህ ሀገር የገባሁ አይነት ባይተዋርኝት ስደተኛ ወይ ተራሽት ሳልሆን ቢቃ ዛሬ እዚህ ወንበር ላይ ተፈጥሮ ለሚቆይ ጊዜ አይኖሩን የገለጻኩ ማለፊያ፡**” (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 851). (“As if I just entered this country today, I felt strangenessnot as an immigrant or tourist but like I was just created on this chair today and opened my eyes for the first time.”)

This sentiment of feeling a sense of emptiness or having difficulty to define the self is driven by a sudden collapse of a life time constructed identity. As the stories that gave rise to her sense of self crumple in a blink of an eye, Bella was no longer able to find herself through them. Every

story she has been telling to define herself suddenly became nonsense. No story of the past was good enough to define her now, and everything she knew about herself and defined her identity so far turned to be a source of confusion and regret. Therefore, she feels forcefully detached from the roles she used to play. After this incident she was no longer part of her narrative. The “I” that is devoid of meaning becomes totally unproductive.

Usually, when characters encounter some sort of identity crisis, they are torn between multiple identities, struggling to figure out which one they belong to and which one suits them better. It is a long and harsh internal crisis. As such it opens the doorway into the possibilities of identity reconstruction or creating new ones as the olds fade away. Following this experience everything Bella does seems to be driven by a feeling of openness and love, something that indicates a shift in her identity. This switch of identity is motivated by the lack of meaningfulness associated to her initial role as a smart and canning woman. Hence, she submits herself to new character traits which were not features of her identity before. She reconstructs her identity to include compassion, forgiveness and genuineness.

In her new self-narratives, Bella describes a series of changes in her thought pattern such as the followings. **“... ጅግላን እንዳገኘው እየፀለዘኩ ሰፈሩ ጎዳና ገባሁ፡ ... ጅግላን ዛሬ ባገኘላሁም ባላገኘላሁም በአካልምሆነ በደማግነ፣ ብቻ በተገኘው ይቅርታ የግዝግብጥም ብዬ ነወ?”** (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 846-847). (“... I take the road to Jigsa’s neighborhood praying for him to be there. ... Whether I see Jigsa today or not, whether it is through body or spirit; how is it that I am going to ask for his forgiveness?”). **“አንዳንድ የደብረ ታሪክ ጸሐፊዎች በሂአሞች ጎጃሞች ናቸው ስለኝ (እንደሆነ እያወቅሁ) ደሜ ይፈላ ነበር፡፡ አሁን እንዲህ ሳየው ግን ግድ አልሰጠኝም፡፡”** (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 851). (“When I heard some traditional historians say the Beniamirs are from Gojam (even though I knew it was true), I used to get furious. But now, I couldn’t care less.”). **“ሰጅሮም ከዛክ አብረው አልነበርኩም፡ በልቤ እየወደድኩት በአካል ግን ሽሽቼዋለሁ፡ ለጥቂት አመፅት አፍሬብታለሁ፡ አደን አሻሞጫጫ በዛነገኝም እሱን ማቅ ለምብኝ በትክክል እንደ እናት አልደረሰኩትም፡፡”** (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 851). (“I was never with Zak in the first place. I have physically distanced myself from him when I loved him in my heart. I was embarrassed by him for a few years. ... I was never there for him as a mother.”).

The above three quotes briefly capture Bella’s evolution and progress toward a kind of mental recovery. These quotes also implicitly include an important remark, which indicates Bella’s

transition into new personality. What was held at most importance before has little or no value now, and what was taken as a right action, is reevaluated as wrong and has become a source of regret. Even actions such as apologizing, which would have been seen as a diminishment of her ego before, now bring peace and comfort into her life. She abandons her illusory beliefs and hopes invested in her old sense of self in order to replace them with a healthy and realistic world outlook which had been perturbed and shredded to bits by her conviction to her fake identities and finally recognized as impotent.

I read this as Bella finding major cracks in her old identity constructs and trying to construct new self-defining stories that can serve as building blocks for a better and preferred identity. Her choice to occupy this new subject position of a genuine and compassionate woman is also reflective of Bruner’s idea of a changing identity where the self is not regarded as homogeneous and therefore cannot be the same at all given times. Hence, Bella continuously challenges herself in an attempt to get away or even get rid of her previously held thoughts, feelings and desires in pursuit of a new identity and hope of finding redemption:

ለአርባ አመታት ይህን ለመቶ አመታት እዘሁ አልጋ ላይ ረሰን ስኛ ማኛት ተመኝታ፡ ከአልጋዬ ተነስኛ ስቆም ወሳጤ ባይነት ይሰማኛል፡ ... ሆይን ዳበስኩ፡ ዘካርያስን አስታወስኩ፡ ልጄ አርጎራ የወሻቸውን ባዶ ቦታ አይሞገግም ወይስ በአንድ አደጋውን ይቅርባይነት ወይ ዘንጊነት ወይ ቀሽግግት ልመክ? (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 854).

I wished to pass out and sleep on this very bed for forty or hundred years. When I get out of my bed and stand I feel emptiness inside. ... I touched my belly. I remembered Zekarias. Won't my son be enough to fill the void left as Eritrea moved out? Or shall I trust in Ethiopians forgiveness, forgetfulness or foolishness?

These new experiences are also entangled with a feeling of anxiety regarding the changes she was going through and their consequences in her relations with other people. Bella’s emerging self was somewhat fraught with anxiety because of her difficulty in her apprehending a means for this new self to harmoniously co-exist alongside her current life situation. So she wished to put her soul to rest so that this turbulence can pass. But exactly how this healing will be materialized in Bella’s life is a crucial point that remained unresolved in her narrative. “... ስልክ ተደውሎ፡ ፈገግኝ ነኝ፡ ላናግራት አልፈለክም፡ ግን ምንም ማረጋገጫ አልኸለም፡ ... ይህኛን ሀገር በህገ ማገድ

እስከላቅ እንዲህ ማን አለብኝ፡፡” (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 855). (“... The phone rang. It is Fiameta. I didn’t want to talk to her. But there is nothing I can do about it. ... Until I leave this country in some way, I have to live in this way. My life might continue in pretence.”).

In this statement, Bella reveals a sense of change and newness that she certainly does not translate into action. Her life situations remain the same but, her sense of self seems to change. She is still operating as Bella the cunning girl, but she is now also potentially a new Bella who finds her old self to be fool. She stands on the threshold of an uncertain but challenging future after enduring a life time crisis. Quite cautiously, the newly emerging self is kept dormant until Bella insures some, supposedly convenient, future life condition. However, it is uncertain whether this convenient time will ever come. This uncertainty is further strengthened by the story’s ending:

ልብሽን ለብሽ ልወጣ ስለ አይኖቼ አንድ ፎቶ ላይ አረፍ፡፡ ከፊልሚጋር ድር ፒዮሳ ፎቶ ጁሮ የተነሳነው ነው፡፡ እየሳቅን ነው የተነሳነው፡፡ ... ቲዮንሩ ለሙሉ እየሰፋ ነው እየጠበበ? እያሟበት ነው እያስጠጠ? ወደ ሀዋላ ተሞልኦ በፊቱ ደፋሁት፡፡ (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 856).

When I was just about to go out all dressed up my eyes got fixated on a photo. It was a picture of me and Femi taken at Photo Jiro, Piazza long time ago. We are laughing in the photo. ... By the way, is the theatre getting prolonged or cut short? Is it getting appealing or gruesome? I turned back and put it face down.

Bella’s negative reaction to her sight of the photo while she remains in touch with the person in it, is a clear indication of her ambivalence, which signifies her fragmentation, no authentic self to which she may return. This final paragraph then signifies that for Bella the future is forever uncertain as she spends her days waiting for better opportunities to fully embrace the change in her identity. Because Bella is suspended in stasis, the lack of closure has become the only possible ending for her narrative and the progression of the plot is cut short and left open. Therefore, the narrative stays open and unsolvable and the status of Bella’s identity remains in a constant state of negotiation and her possible salvation lies ahead, in the future.

To sum up Bella’s self narrative is a compelling instance of Gergen’s explanation of the individual with varying selves and how they are formed into coherent self narratives. In sharp

contrast to the experiences of rest of the characters analyzed in this study, Bella did not see herself separate from the society among which she grew up. In fact she was always conscious and believed that her identity make up is influenced by and dependent on the norms and values of the society. This makes her a bit peculiar from the rest of the characters discussed here. It is also interesting that, in a way, Fiameta is a common factor of the beginning and the ending of Bella's story which puts this woman at the center of her narrative.

The society presents Bella with several impediments, which significantly influenced her identity formation. In this regard, her identity is narratively constructed on strong hatred for the society with serious and convincing justifications, which is an important platform for her story's events and actions. Nonetheless, the end of the story is characterized by its sharp reversal, in which there is a shift that helps to foster her positive feelings and reactions. However, this shift in identity introduced in to her prevailing life situations is managed to unfold smoothly so as not to cause disruption in her old way of life until a convenient condition is created in some future time. In this perspective Bella's story can be interpreted as a systematic management of identity change.

The end, which is left open, then implies the downfall of Bella's old identity and the uncertainty of her future. She puts an end to her narrative account without closure and without resolution for her major dilemma regarding whether she will fully embrace the shift in her identity. Yet the end marks an end to Bella's lifelong illusory sense of self. It also emphasizes the inevitability of a supplemental narrative of identity in which she tells she is not who she thought she was and that she is other than that. In this regard, the ending of the story signifies two important points; it closes an old door and opens a new one onto unknown space in Bella's narrative identity. So the reader must speculate whether Bella will fully liberate her emerging self or if she remains trapped in her old illusory sense of self.

In conclusion, Bella is the center of a remarkable plot whose action contains a change for the better caused by a lifelong suffering. Based on the analysis and in line with the social constructionists' idea of "the socially constructed narrative self", I argue that Bella's story is a dramatization of the larger structure of society from which an individual evolves. In other words, for the individual identity to emerge, the collective is crucial. Moreover, Bella's identity construction process is a good illustration of the social constructionist view of self as dynamic,

multi-faceted and evolving; particularly, Gergen’s emphasis on identity aspects activated in different social settings at different times are at the center of her narrative.

4.3. Menelik- The Story of A Dead Man

This story of a dead man, Menelik, is located in the novel’s third chapter, labeled after the color “black”, alluding to the age old human’s understanding of death as a journey through darkness. The character makes a strong case of justifying his death in his pretext before passing on to the self-narrative proper:

‘ሞት’ የተባልኩት (ሞገዱ የጀመደኩት) ከአስራ አምስት ቀናት በፊት ግንቦት 5/1987 በዕለተ ቅዳሜ ነው። ዛሬ ግንቦት 22 ማኅሰኞ 1987 ነው። ...

‘አንድ ሰው የሚሞትው ምን ሰዓት ነው?’ እያልኩ በሃሳቤ ሳሳላሽል፣ የሚመኝ ... ለሌላ ቀዳሚ ጥያቄ ነው እዚህ ‘እንዴት ይረስኩ?’

ምን ይመስላል? እንዴት ነው የአመጣጥ ጭብጥ እንዲህ ‘ምንም ደርዝ ላይ ማቆም’

አፈን ከፍቼ እላለሁ ማወቁን የጀመደው ምን ነው? አንድ ዛፍ ላይ የተንጠለጠለች ፍሬ ዝምብል ተብሎ አትወደቅም። በማወቁ ላይ ነው። ሰሞኑ ማወቁን የጀመደኩት ገና አስረሰብኩት ምን ስይዘብ ባፈቀርኩት ፈያሜ የተባለች ከደ ስለከፍ ነው። (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 281-282).

I was officially considered dead fifteen days ago on Saturday May 5/1987. Today, it is Tuesday May 22, 1987. ... ‘When does a person die?’ When I think about this, what comes to my senses is ... another prior question. How did I end up here?What is it like, to stand like this, at the edge of ‘nothingness’ and how is it that it comes to be? I open my mouth and say, when did my withering begin? A fruit hanging on a tree doesn’t just come of and fall. First it loosens up by wilting. I think I begin to wither at the age of seventeen when I was possessed by a girl named Fiameta, whom I fell in love with.

4.3.1. Story Synopsis

The character Menelik is a middle class married man with two children. He remembers growing up in a home dominated by silence with his younger sister and their parents. As a young boy he

was often cheerful and chatty around his friends. However, he changed when he fell in love with a girl named Fiameta when he was a in high school. After this incident he managed to get close to her and expressed his love but didn't get the response he was looking for. Unlike him the only reason that Fiameta did let him get close to her was to use him so he can run her political agenda. When it comes to what he really wanted from her she always systematically avoided him making it confusing for him to know what he did wrong. The fact that his love was unreciprocated brought great distress into his life. To make matters worse, a few years later she fled the country and started living in North America without even saying goodbye to him. After this incident Menelik became a lifelong sufferer of this unreciprocated love.

Despite being a victim of one-sided love, Menelik tried to be with other women. He even got married and had children, but all his relationships were unsuccessful because he was still helplessly in love with Fiameta. He moved from one relationship to the next in a hope to find the love he couldn't get from Fiameta. However, none of the women (including his wife) he has been with were good enough to replace her. In his futile struggle of finding his lost love, Menelik became unfaithful to his wife and cheated on her several times. At this point Fiameta returned to her home country after many years. Menelik went to her office to see her hoping that, this time, things might work out between them. Unfortunately, Fiameta broke his heart for the second time, by deliberately denying that she even knew him.

In the end Menelik realized that Fiameta has never cared for him and that he wasted most of his life chasing something he couldn't have. This realization made him regret his futile struggle to win Fiameta's love and all the people he hurt in the process. Finally, he died letting go of Fiameta and making peace with himself.

4.3.2. Dominant Storyline and Important Life Events

Menelik tells his life story using the incident of falling in love as a main point of reference. Following this every significant experience of his life mentioned in his narrative is somehow related to this major incident. Later in his life Menelik managed to make money and become one of the rich people in his neighborhood. This money gave him the opportunity to do whatever he wanted and to be whoever he wanted:

... ከቅርብ ጊዜ ወዲህ ጠቅላላ ንፋስ ስልክ ‘ሁሉ ነገር ተሳካለት’፣ ‘ቀን አለፈለት’ እያለ ከሚኖሩት አዳጎች ሁጥሞች አንዱ ነበርኩ። ብዙም ሳይቆይ ከሃብት ጋር ተያይዞ የሚዋግ ስወላድ ያልነበረኝ ማህላብኝን ሰፈረኝ። ... ሚጅት ስጅግ በረቀቅ የታሪክ ሰራ፣ በረገበ ማፈገፍ በሙሴ የገዢዎች አደሞቶች አፍረተብስ ዘልዘላ ሆነኩ.....(Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 281).

... recently, I was one of the new rich people whom the entire Nifas Silk dwellers were jealous of, saying ‘he has become successful in everything’, ‘his rainy days are behind him’. ... After a while, arrogance, which I didn’t have at birth but one that comes with money, befalls up on me. ... When I get older I become a shameless brat by a mysterious conspiracy of history, low spiritedness and other allies of evolution.

These “allies” are the changes created in him after he fell for Fiameta and came to the surface triggered by his new riches. Despite all the changes in his life, Menelik continued loving and missing Fiameta until he realized that she has no romantic interest in him when they met after she returned back to Ethiopia many years later. Heartbroken by her actions, he was finally able to convince himself that she was not worthy of his love, which consequently led him to discard every bit of memory he had with her. This failed love story is the dominant story Menelik tells and plays a significant role in the construction of his narrative identity, thus has become the focus of the analysis.

In his narration Menelik describes and emphasizes some of his major experiences in life. For instance, he strongly believes that his first encounter with Fiameta was the beginning of his agonizing life situation and almost all personality changes that he experienced in his life time followed this important event: “ፈያሜን እንዳየሁላት ብዙ ነገራ ተለወጡ። ... ቀለም የለላው ጠፍጣፋ አየር ላይ አፈጣለሁ። ... በፍጥነት እለዋወጣለሁ። ” (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 287). (“The minute I saw Fiameta many things changed in me. ... I stare at the colorless flat air. ... I change every now and then”).

The fact that his love for Fiameta was not reciprocated by her has caused great suffering in his life. This great suffering is another important event that received considerable attention in his life story. No matter how hard he tried to be with Fiameta she kept avoiding him for reasons he could not understand at the time. For most part of his life, he continuously asked himself what he has

done wrong, though he could not come up with any sensible answer. Having no control over the situation, he was forced to spend most of his life in confusion and agony.

Besides the above two, Menelik points out having wealth as the other important happening in his life. He believes that his riches led him astray and made him do bad things that he wouldn't do otherwise. He describes his act of abusing money as "arrogance", to become insensitive to others and only focus on satisfying his needs; the needs being looking for Fiameta in other women's body. The fact that he takes this experience to be negative indicates that he has identified it as a problem story, which, based on Bruner's discussion of narrative identity construction, is a typical characteristic of dominant stories.

Menelik's sudden and surprising death is also a significant experience upon which he puts strong emphasis. When he was sick at the end of his life, he was deeply shocked by how fast his body was dying starting from his legs and working its way up to his brain. What was more surprising was that there were no visible symptoms of any kind of disease identified by his doctor. This shock made him extensively reflect on each part of his body and all the good and bad things (mainly in relation to Fiameta) he accomplished through them. By telling "the tells" (as he call it) of his body parts, Menelik tries to construct a strong sense of self. He kept on his reflection day after day until there was no part of his body left that he could feel and tell about. Finally, his brain died and he was officially declared dead. Although his body was laying dead, some part of him (perhaps his soul) kept narrating his journey into the unknown, until he was given a second chance and came back to life just when he was about to be buried.

After his shocking return, Menelik stayed alive for a couple of weeks before his second and final death took him away for good. During this time, he chose to do nothing but lock himself in his bedroom and record his life story putting the above four major events of his life (especially his experience of unreciprocated love and its devastating consequences) are at the center of his narrative. By the time he told his story, everything had ended for him, he was practically dead but was back only for a few days. Therefore, everything that is discussed in what follows is based on Menelik's reflection of his entire life at the event of his return from death.

4.3.3. Construction of Self in Menelik's Self-narrative

The above dominant story and the important life events that it is composed of show which experiences of his life significantly influence Menelik so as to shape his identity. Following this, the dominant story he tells seems to be his love life and the lifelong complications that came with it. Thus, in this section, the analytical focus is to see how Menelik constructs his identity through these important life events by causally linking them to certain areas of his life. The analysis is led by the plot structure of the narrative mainly focusing on its beginning and ending strategies and the causal connection of the story events to reveal the identity construction process.

Menelik’s narrative is partially set in the time after his death, so its plot formation is linked to the afterlife involving a dead narrator, a talking spirit who is not completely confined in death and speaks from his silenced position. So, Menelik’s story begins with an absurd opening plot and stunning description of his death. At the beginning of his narrative he declares his death, in fact, the very first sentence he utters is about his death. “‘ዋዩ’ የተባልኩት (መጥፋት ጀመርኩት) ከአስረአምስት ቀን በፊት ግንቦት 5/1987 በዕለተቅዳሜው፡፡ ዛሬ ግንቦት 22 ግንቦት 1987 ነው፡፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 281). (“I was officially considered ‘dead’ fifteen days ago on Saturday May 5/1987. Today, it is Tuesday May 22, 1987”).

This opening sentence problematizes the act of beginning, and seemingly announces the narrative conclusion or ending. This problem is solved when we learn that Menelik’s narrative is developed using a story-within-a-story narrative technique, where one of the characters in the novel, Worku, listens Menelik’s recordings and Menelik narrates his story through these recordings. The recordings are means of constructing his identity, of trying to render the experiences he had in his life time.

Then the narrator wobbles through a lifetime of memory before coming back to the beginning of the narrative text which is also its end. Following this the story unfolds in two complementary directions, as a retrospective account of his life and the new plot of life after death. This narrative process is possible as he comes back to life once more and tells his story until the plot is concluded with his second and final death. In this sense his first death is the cause of the life story that follows it.

As can be clearly seen in the above quote, Menelik begins his narrative by telling his paranormal story with the assertion that he is a dead man. Instead of the usual move of narratives as a march towards death, here death is taken as a point of departure to examine a full life time experience. His death however, was a temporary one which lasted only for a few hours. As a result Menelik strongly believes that he has gone through the experience of death and comes back to life in order to record his life story.

Menelik's story opens with the above seemingly senseless statement that makes his death official and ends with his death as well. In between are narrated the events leading up to and immediately following his death. In the act of reconstructing these events he shows how his entire life conspires to pave the way that led to his death. The plot offers series of causally connected events happening before and after the death, whereby the process of his self construction unfolds. Retrospection being the chief mechanism of narration, Menelik walks us through his past. The story consists, for the most part, long narrations of his life events, implying a constant compulsion to tell and explain why he is who he is through narration. There is an incessant attempt to recover the past and reconstruct it. And it is this promise of uncovering the past and the meaning that results from reconstructing it that keeps the reader in tuned to a dead man's story.

Menelik gives a strong sense of structuring his narrative in such a way that it can give a glimpse of his identity make up. He foreshadows the point he want to make in his narrative at the beginning as he described when his long and agonizing death actually started. So the fact that he begins his narrative with a declaration of his death shows that he is a man whose sense of self is lost forever. Yet this feeling of losing himself, which he equated with death, began long before his physical death.

In his narrative, Menelik frequently puts emphasis on his strong love for Fiameta making it a crucial part of his life. He even recognizes it as the beginning of the consecutive loses of sense of self he encountered in his life. In relation to this major incident Menelik identifies a specific period of time in his life that has been foundational in shaping who he is now. Looking back at his life, Menelik narrates that the most decisive event in his life happened when he was seventeen. This event, which happened the day that he first saw Fiameta, is described as the

event that changed every aspect of his life. He identified this specific period of time in his life as foundational in shaping who he is now.

የጀመሩን እንዲህ ነው ... ፈረምያን አየሁት፡ ተጠግኜት ... ለምን ብዬ ተጠግኜት? ሊያት... ... አየሁት፣ ወደደካት፡ ... ፈረምያን ካየሁ ከዛን ቀን በሀዋላ ያጣሁት ልቤን ብቻ ሳይሆን፣ የየቀኑ የጎደውን ስርዓት ነበር፡፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 282-283).

This is how it started, ... I saw Fiameta. I get close to her. ... Why did I get close to her? So I can see her ... I saw her, I liked her. ... Since the day I first saw Fiameta it is not only my heart that I lost but also the blue print of my everyday life.

Menelik's failed attempt to make this love reciprocated is a central point he made throughout his story; and intense period of upheaval is a reference point for Menelik when reflecting on his life. His failed romantic life then, became an avenue for constructing his sense of self. Therefore, the unsuccessful love story is taken here as the core narrative construct for understanding his identity. As such, my analysis of this dominant story focuses on Menelik's experience of falling in love and the consecutive events that followed it that shaped his identity.

Menelik is convinced that falling in love represents the biggest change in his life, something that resembles Bruner's turning point. As Bruner argues when a person faces an event or experience significant enough to shake the foundations of his/her sense of self, he/she tends to undergo identity change. The first attempt by Menelik to balance his former self and the change that is happening to it was to establish a love relationship with Fiameta. Somehow, he believed that this will put him in control of the situation, and for a while he thought so too. However, later on he comes to realize that he was the only one interested to be in the relationship:

ታዲያ እንዲያ ቆመን በእግረሰንደባላለቅ የፍቅር ቁምፅላፍ እየተከተከን ማለጃ ነበር ... ፈቷን ማለስ አደርጋ እንኳን ሳታየኝ ገባች፡ ያልጠፋው ደስታዬ ላይ የወንጀለኛነት ስሜት ገመገመ ይዞ ማየት አረበቡ፡፡ .. በሞቃጣው ጊዜ ትግግርት በጅት አግኝቼ ይቅርታ ጠየቅሁት፡ ለምን ጠየቅሁት? ስለዘረብክ፡ ለምን ዘረብክ? ጅል ስለሆነኩ፡፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 289-290).

When we were kissing passionately standing there like that, I thought we were scribing the calligraphy of love. ... She went in to her house without even looking back at me. A feeling of guilt dragged its mist and clouded over my still warm happiness. ... The next

time I saw her at school, I apologized to her. Why did I apologize? Because I am confused. Why am I confused? Because I am a fool.

Clearly, Menelik has noticed a diminishment of his sense of self when he identified himself as “a fool” following his action of apologizing to Fiameta for the way she reacted when he kissed her. This can be interpreted as a deconstruction of his identity as a smart and confident guy. Before the experience of falling in love, Menelik was a confident young man, who would never regret such action as kissing a girl or be embarrassed by it. He describes his former self as confident and more direct: “በሰፈራ አራዎች የተደገቀ ደርቅናዬ እግርቼ ስር ኮረኮገች ላይ ወደቀ።” (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 282). (“*My shamelessness, which was admired by smart boys of my neighborhood, fell beneath her feet.*”)

This realization leads him to conclude that it is not only his everyday activity that has changed, but also who he is as a person. He takes his former identity to be a positive and desirable one and links it to the story of his present shy and fearful identity which placed him at the mercy of Fiameta. As a result we see Menelik creating a strong connection between his sense of who he and the biggest experience of his life, falling in love. So in the above quote he points out that this incident has paved the way for him to lose his confidence only to end up with making him a fool. His identity change came with the demands of his everyday life situation and the social context he was in.

As time passes this victim identity construct only got stronger affecting more parts of his established sense of self. Despite, realizing that falling for Fiameta is changing him undesirably, he could not stop pursuing her love, at the cost of further diminishment of his identity. Menelik’s narrative construction of who he is becoming, i.e. his changing identity story, becomes more concrete during his visit to Fiameta’s house.

እንደታወቀ ሰዎች ልብደታት በቷ ሄደኩ። ... የበቷን አጥር በር ሳንከፋከፍ እሁቷ። ... ከፈተኛልኝ። ከዛ መጣት የሚገኝ ሰው መሆኔን ለማየቅና ፈቃድ ለማግኘት መሆን አለበት ‘ግባ’ ሳትለኝ እንኳን እውጭ እንደቆይኩ በሩን ዘግታለኝ ተላለሰኝ። ... ገና ስገባ ሳለግ ... ወደ ሰባት የሚገቡ ሰዎች ተደርደረው ልዩ ፍጠሬ ወይም ወረራ እንደሆነኩ ሁሉ ሃያ አይኖች አፍጠው ያዩኛል። ... ባለጠፋም የሆነ የወንጀለኛነት ስሜት ተሰማኝ። ግራ ባይገባኝም ግራ አጋብኝ። በትክክል ምን እንደሆነ ባለውም እንደተሳሳትኩ ቆጠርኩት። ... ለሰላምም አንገቴን ደፋሁ። ... ሻይ ላፍላ ብለ በለ ለሚድ ስትነቃቅ ... ፈሚ መገዛን አይቻል እንደ

ታመሳይህን እንደተቆጠ ወታደር ተከሰተረኛ፡ ... በላ ... ብተ ሳንቆይ ... ሻይ ይዛ ማቸ፡ ... ሻይ ከእኔ ረቅ ብሎ ነው የተቀመጠው፡ ወንጀ ለማጠናከር ከሚመጡ ማሳት አለብኝ፡ ... የተገረበው በር በፍጥነት ተከፈተና እንደ እኔ እዛ እንደሌላው ሁሉ ፈጥሞ ብቻ እያዩ ምውታላች አልነበርም እንደ አታረፈም? አሉ በቁጣ፡ ... በሰሶ ፈታቸው ሰጋረምኝ አየሁ፡ ... ከዚህ የበለጠ ምልክት አልጠቅሟል፡ ያኔው ተነሳሁ፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 296-298).

I heard that she was sick and went to her house to visit her. ... When I knocked at her door, her sister ... opened it for me. Then she went back inside closing the door while I was still standing outside and without even bothering to say ‘come in’, I assume, to check and get permission if I am a person who should be allowed in. ... When I entered the living room ... about seven people sitting in line stared at me with twenty eyes as if I am an alien or invader. Although I didn’t do anything wrong I felt a sense of guilt. Though I was not confused they made me confused. I didn’t know what exactly my mistake was, but I generally assumed that I was mistaken. ... When Bella moved to make tea for me ... Femi looked at Meaza (Bella) and got furious, not as a sick person but as a soldier. ... A little later Bella came back with the tea. ... The tea was placed a bit far from me. If I am to take and drink it I will have to get up. ... The door, which was left ajar, quickly opened and her mother looking at Fiameta only, as if I was not there, angrily said “Haven’t you been sick? Why don’t you rest?” ... I saw her (the mother) leering at me. ... I didn’t wait for more clues. I got up immediately.

He was treated as less of a person by “significant others” and made to feel like he has lost his dignity. This feeling is further strengthened by his second encounter with Fiameta’s parents. Once again he finds himself in such a position that would compromise and threaten his identity. They acted as if they don’t know him, which reminded him of his previous encounter with them and how they had treated him.

ስንየዋን አተኬ አየሁቸው ‘ሚላክ ተፈቶ ማኻ ኸረ እግዚአብሔር ይሞክንን ... አንተ ለሙሉ ይህ ነህ?’ የሚሉ ማለጃ ነበር ... ሁለቱም ደር ያወቁኛል፣ ተለማጭ ሆኜ ከግቢያቸው እንደወጃ ስባረርና ሲያባረሩኝ፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 301).

I looked at the woman with intense attention, I thought she would say ‘oh thank God Menelik is freed and he is here ... How are you doing anyway?’ ... They both (her

parents) know me from older times, while I was wheedling, when I was kicked out, when they kicked me out, of their house like a dog.

The fact that Menelik compared himself to a dog is an indication that his older defiant and confident sense of self has slowly faded away and a new subservient identity construct has emerged. In this way, he found himself in an irrefutable position where he clearly accepts that he has lost his dignity and become less of what he used to be. Therefore, in his narrative Menelik holds a strong belief that when a person helplessly falls for someone he/she loses pride and dignity and become a beggar, which was exactly what happened to him. This belief is in alignment with the social constructionists' conviction that identity is not only the making of the individual but is co-created by the influences and contributions made by significant others.

Menelik's story progresses while we witness further shifts in his narrative identity. As a soul yearning for the satisfaction of having a romantic relationship, Menelik tries to fill the gap created in his life with series of unsuccessful relationships he has with other women. However, he was not able to feel at home with any of them. Thus, whenever he is intimate with another woman, including his wife, he imagined that she was Fiameta. He became a cheater who would deceive every woman who fell for him into thinking that he was a faithful partner. Below are four illustrative quotes from the novel:

“... እኔና እሷ እንደዚህ እያንሸካሸክን በቀስታ ስንወረጭ... የፖፖላሪዎችን ፊያሜታ አስታውሳለሁ ... የሚስጠው የፖፖላሪዎችን ፊያሜታን ነበር።” (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 286). (“... When she (Tsedenya) and I move slowly like that while whispering ... I remember Fiameta of Popolare. ... What I thought about was Fiameta of Popolare”). **“ፊያሜታ የፈለከትን ስትነጭኝ የግደግደው ወይዘት ነበር።”** (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 290). (“Whenever Fiameta refused to give me what I wanted, it was Tsedenya that I used to run to”). **“ለስራ ፈልጎ ወጥቼ ስሜጢ. በጨማሪ ስትጠብቅ የግዳግኘው ብዙኛ ልጅ እሷ (ንጋት) ናት። የሚስጠው ግን እኔ የቆዳዎቼ ፊያሜታ እንደትሆን ነበር።”** (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 294). (“When I return from field work ... She (Nigat) is the only person who was there waiting for me in the darkness. But what I used to think was for the girl who stood there to be Fiameta”). **“ዝፋን የተከናወነችውን አንሶላ ገፍሬ ከአእምሮቼ ካርታ ፊያሜታ ሳትጠፋ በቸኩላ። ... ዋሽ ነኝና ... ተስጋኝ ማሳሰቢያ ... አይኖቼ በጥርጫ ሰቀለጠጠው አያታለሁ።”** (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016:304). (“I strip of the bed sheet that Zufan (his wife) robed herself with and then before Fiameta fades away from the map of my

mind, quickly ... Because I am a liar ... when I avidly penetrate her ... I see her eyes rolling in suspicion”).

‘I become a cheat because of my failed love story’ seems to be what Minelik is saying. And so, he used these women to imaginatively experience the romantic intimacy he has always been seeking to have with Fiameta. Menelik was always conscious about what is missing in his life and the gap created in his sense of self. Therefore, he looks for ways to retrieve and reclaim his sense of self by deceiving these women, including his wife Zufan, pretending to love them, he used the relationships to reassure his victim identity. Nonetheless, after his unsatisfying experience with these three different women, he came to realize that he, as a person, can never be whole without Fiameta by his side:

... ከዘፋን ጋር ተጋባኝ፡ ... ስጋዬን ቢደላትም ነፍሴን ግን ትገረቱ፡ የእግዚአብሔርን ነፍሴን አደደለሁ፡ ፈጽሞ ትዝ ባለችን ቁጥር ከባድ የብዙኝነት ጉዳይ ወስጥ እወድቃለሁ፡ ... ነፃ ለመጣት ስለፋ ለዘፋን ቃል የገባሁትን የማመጣ ቃልኪዳን ደጋግሜ አፈረስኩ፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 303-304).

... Zufan and I got married. ... Though my body was soothed, my soul was troubled, but not the soul that belonged to God. ... Whenever Fiameta comes to my mind, I fall in to the depth of loneliness. ... In my struggle to become free, I repeatedly broke the promise I made to stay faithful to Zufan.

Menelik’s affirmation of his unsatisfactory life echoes his fundamental conviction that “the blue print of his everyday life is lost since the day he first saw Fiameta” and later on lost her as a lover. The reflection exposes the intensity of the experience; one by one, his sense of self was at risk of being effaced under the weight of intense unreciprocated love. Menelik believed that his experience of falling in love with Fiameta had not only fundamentally changed his way of life, but it had imperiled his sense of self in general. So he used this narrative resource to explain why a sense of being a cheat is incorporated in his identity construct. Structuring these narrative resources with such strong causal connection, on the one hand, helped the plot progress and on the other paints a vivid picture of raw experiences turning into identity constructs, to show Menelik’s identity in the making.

As the experience of falling in love is a major life event that gives rise to almost every major action in the story, it continues to affect his life in one way or another till it is concluded by his death. Hence all the significant turning points in his life are, in some way, related to this major event. After spending most of his life imprisoned by lost love, something happened in Menelik's life that was significant enough to reverse his great fall for Fiameta. This incident turned his life upside down once again and helped him realize the futility or even absurdity of his love for her. In all the years Fiameta, was away, though they were not communicating, his love for her remained intact in his heart. So when Menelik heard about Fiameta's return to Ethiopia, he went to meet her full of hope that things will turn out great. However, what happened was the exact opposite of what he had hoped and expected-Fiameta denied their acquaintance:

-ማ? ...

-ሚላክ? ...

-እንጂ አለች ፊቷን ጨምሮ አድጋ ለማታወስ ለፍታ ለፍታ እንዳቃት ሁሉ፡ ...

-ተደው! አልኳት ሳላውቅ ጭ ብዬ፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 316).

-Who? ...

-Menelik? ...

-I'm not sure' she said, contorting her face as if she tried so hard to remember but wasn't able to do so.

-forget it!' I said to her, raising my voice unintentionally.

The incident opened Menelik's eyes to see and realize the reality that has been right before him covered by love the entire time, i.e. he wasted half his life loving a girl who doesn't even want to be with him. The subtle expressive cold treatment he received from Fiameta helped him to arrive at self understanding. In the light of this realization he began to scrutinize and question his life choices: **“የሃያ ግግግ አመት ቁልጥ ጭቅላቴ ውስጥ እንደ በሰበሰበ ኮምፒውትር ሰሜት ... ደርብ ህይወት ነው የኖርከት፡ ... ፈጻሚን ልፍረደሰት? እኔ ብዬያ ሃላፊነቱ የእሷ ነው?”** (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 317). (“I heard my twenty something years foolishness bursting like a spoiled acetic in my head. ... I led a double life. ... Should I blame Fiameta? Is it her fault if I am besotted?”)

In this process of questioning his life choices Menelik becomes aware of the meaninglessness of his existence. He expressed a feeling of ‘loss’ of his sense of self as a consequence of the

termination of his role identity as a victim man. His abiding feeling of loss of sense of self can be traced back to his inability to use opportunities to develop a sense of self apart from being Fiameta's lover. For instance, he had a chance to recreate himself as a loving father and husband, which compared to the role of being Fiameta's lover, was an inferior subject position for him.

Although he felt, quite forcefully, the loss of his sense of self, Menelik, as the same time, emphasized the emergence of a new sense of self that will allow him to reconnect with dimensions of himself that he neglected for so long. His second meeting with Fiameta and her deliberate denial of their acquaintance served as another turning point for him. The questions in the above quote function as a navigating device for Menelik by which he evaluates his past and seeks guidance regarding his future. Answering these questions made him realize that he is standing on a very decisive point of his life, where making a decision and moving forward is inevitable.

This decisive point in Menelik's life is something that Bruner calls a turning point, where an individual comes to a point of his/her life where their sense of self changes and takes a new turn. And so, Menelik chooses to make shifts in his identity by letting go of the past. He decided to relinquish every feeling that tied him with Fiameta and let go of her for good. I interpret this decision as a second turning point in Menelik's life story, the first one being his fall and the identity changes that followed it. After this turning point Menelik introduces new experiences in to his life while he lets go of his past. In the following two quotes we see a new sense of self emerging in Menelik's narrative:

አንድ ቀን ማኑ ... በቴሌቪዥን ስለደርጅቷና ስለስራው ጋዜጠኛ ሰጠዎት ... ስጋው ሆድን ጋማጡ፡ ማዕጠያ በት ገብቼ አስማለኩ፡ ደር ላፈቀርኳት ዛሬ የትወቅት ስጋጃ አነጠፍላት፡ በዚህ ትፋቴ ... የልቤንና የአንጅቴን ማዕከቶች አነጠጡ.. ልጅቴን ወደ ሞት ያቀረጠሰት አጅንዳ የእነ እንደአሲ አይነት ቴሌቪዥኖች ማጠቃለያ እንደሆነ ቆይቶ አየሁ፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 326).

One evening ... on television, I saw a journalist interviewing her about her organization and work, ... her talking made me sick. I went to the bathroom and threw up. For her that I used to love formerly, today I spread a tapestry of vomit. Through this vomit ... I read the messages of my heart and gut. ... After a while, I saw that the agenda, through which I drove my youth closer to death, was something that players like her benefited from.

... ማሞቅ በጀሚቸ ፀሐይ ወግን ፎካማ አየሁት፡ ገፋስሰልክ ሀለተኛ ደረጃ ትግግርንበት ግቢ የተነሳነው አንድ ጥቁርና ገጭፎቹ ገበር፡፡ ... ማሰት ከፍቼ ፎካው በአጭካች ጥቅና በአውራጭ ተደዞ በነፋስ እየተርገፈገፈ፤ ለቀቅሁት፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 328-329).

... I saw the photo in a fading sun light. It was a black and white picture of us taken at the compound of Nifas Silk Secondary School. ... I opened a window and the photo fluttering in between my thumb and index finger, I let it go.

One way that Menelik chose to deal with this critical point in his life was to free himself from his subject position of a victim identity, particularly through removing Fiameta and her memories out of his consciousness. At last, Menelik came across the real deal with his love dilemma and realizes that he has been betrayed. The renunciation of his love for Fiameta was his way of retrieving and reclaiming his sense of self from before this experience. His act of vomiting at the sight of Fiameta is vividly symbolic of the extent to which he is repulsed by his old identity that had been constructed on the bases of Fiameta’s love. Menelik explains that he, now, realizes how much playing the role of victim has cost him by shutting him off from life. He saw this turning point in his life as a chance to recreate himself anew. Therefore, he struggles to reconstruct a new identity in which he can exercise a better side of his personality. He starts the process by revising the time that he wasted believing that his life cannot be whole without Fiameta, as in:

አንገሌ በዘነጋሁት፣ እስከ በደማሰሰሽው የጥፋት ትወሳይ እየተወረረ ነው፡ አየሁ ያሁሁን ወይም የሰረገዘትን፣ ወይም የናቅሁትን፡ “እሷ ከሌላች” ብዬ ያጠልከትን፡ ... እንደ ከረማ የሚጠጥሩ ጠዋቶችን ... በአሰደንጋጭ ወጣታቸው እንደባሰ ትን ያሰኙን ማግኘትን ... (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 330).

My mind is being invaded by my old forgotten memory which she obliterated (deleted). I saw what I lost or canceled or disdained (despised). What I had despised saying “what’s the point without her”. ... Mornings as sweet as candies ... Evenings that surprised us with their startling beauty ...

In retrospect, Menelik realizes that all the time he spent ignoring the blessings in his life, because Fiameta was not there, is a great loss. He, now, can pay attention even to simple experiences such as the beauty of morning and evening. Hence, he becomes briefly free of his problem

burdened identity. It is obvious that, here, Menelik’s sense of self takes a positive turn as he finally becomes aware of the realities in his life. His deployment of the awareness of his surrounding and the awe-inspiring adjectives he used to express this experience, all suggest his delight and sense of accomplishment. What this serves to suggest is that the scale of unawareness has fallen off his eyes and the resultant effect is a vision of beauty in objects surrounding him. All the masks of dejection and solitudes as a result of sustaining a victim identity come off with this piece of finding. So we see him being engaged in the idea of temporary self-orchestration.

This new conscious and contemplative self enables him to make room for new and desirable experiences roam in his life once again. In his contrast between his past and present life Menelik supports the identity conclusion he is making, i.e. his sense of self should no more be defined by a victim identity construct. This I interpret as a significant identity shift describing how letting go of the past was an essential experience for Menelik to create himself anew.

So far Menelik’s identity construction has been centered on the one hand, on the experience of falling in love and constructing a victim identity and on the other, letting go of that very love and creating himself anew. After this great shift Menelik was able to enjoy a brief time of peace and tranquility. His brief happiness, however, soon turned sour when he caught the deadly disease that put him fast in his grave. There comes with this, a twist in the plot structure of Menelik’s self-narrative. This incident put the plot of the narrative on the wheel as it hastily drove Menelik to his death and put an end to his story. The death of Menelik therefore remarks a swift alteration in the plot of the narrative. He dies at the moment of pleasurable self-realization, a unique victory in his long torturous life. The tale of his death, therefore, brings us to the end of his narrative.

The ending of Menelik’s narrative provides a snapshot of his entire life and reveals significant aspects of Menelik’s identity construction process. It is also charged it with a “sense of an ending”. The fact that the word (“Finally”) referring to the story’s termination point is included in the following quote is an indication that the end is approaching:

በጭረሽ የሞቀበረያ ሳጥኔ ወሳጥ ስለከተኝ ነገር ላውራ። ... ልክ ከአሰራ አገዥት ቀናት በፊት አዳክ ተሌቨከና ሽዳድ ማወቅ ለመዘት ጊዮሳ ስዞር ማገድ ላይ ቀበጠኛ ወዳጄን ቸቹን አገኘሁ። ... ዞር ብዬ ግንባሩን እንደሰጥኩ በአሳሳሜ ሰቡብ የተቀሰቀሰ ዐይነት ከማጭ እስከ እግሬ አውራ ጣት ድን

ቆጠቆጠኝ፡ ደንግጩሰሰሰሰውስል እንደ ብረት ከቢድኝ፡ ግራ ተጋብኜ ብርድ ልብስ ገፍሬ ሳይ ከላለው ገላይ ባልተለወጠ ማልክ ጠቂሯ፡ ደንገጥኩ፡... ልነሳ ብዘክር አልቻልኩም፡ ... ኛቼ ድግግኝ ማግጥ ወሰጥ አስገባኝና በአንዱ እግራ ብቻ እየነዳሁ ቤቴ ገባሁ፡ ቶሎ የሚላኝ ማለጃ ነበር፡ ... ጥሩ እንቅልፍ ተኝቼ አይሬ ጠየት አስራ ሀላት ሰዓት ላይ ባነገኩ፡ ግራ እግራ እንግዳ በሀገ ማልክ ከቢድኝ፡ ለማግኘት ብዘክር አልቻልኩም፡ ..ሐድሞበሀለተኛውቀን ሲሆኑ... ባለውዕውቀቱ ግጥ ይህ ዐይነት በሽታ ብዙ ጊዜ የሚከሰት በስነ ልቦና ጭቀት ሰብብ የሚከሰት የነርቭ አሰረር ማዕከል ነው አለን፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 331-333).

Finally, let me talk about the thing that puts me in my casket. ... Exactly fifteen days ago, I run in to my brat mistress Chuchu on the road while I was moving around Piasa to buy a new television and video player. ... Right when I turned and kissed Chuchu on her forehead, as if it was caused by the art of my kissing, I felt tingling from my hip down to my toe. Shocked by what happened, when I tried to pull it up it felt as heavy as metal. When I strip of the blanket in confusion and take a look, compared to the rest of my body, it has grown darker in an unusually way. I got shocked. ... I tried to get out of bed but I couldn't. ... Chuchu helped me in to my car and I went home driving using only one of my legs. I thought it would heal soon. ... I slept well and woke up at six in the morning. My left leg felt heavy in an unusual way. I tried to move it but I wasn't able to do so. ...When the doctor came on the second day he told us that ... as far as his knowledge is concerned, this type of disease is caused by a disorder of the nervous system as a result of stress.

Even though Menelik had started a family life with Zufan, in this marriage he felt the unwelcoming air of loneliness and repeatedly cheated on his wife in order to overcome this feeling. He became increasingly self-destructive when he failed in his efforts at self-retrieval and recreation through his marriage, where his journey to attain a definite selfhood remained aborted. So he began cheating on his wife with different women who were willing to sleep with him for money so as to escape from his unhappy self and temporarily feel good about himself. He went through this self-repairing mechanism until he suddenly fell sick while he was on the act of cheating with one of his mistresses.

Menelik takes his illness to be the result of his act of cheating and actually believes that it is caused by it. This is also why he connects this experience of illness with his failed love story. He

considered his illness as the end of his dying process which he mentioned at the beginning of his narrative and has begun “the day he first saw Fiameta”. It is because of the disease he caught that Menelik dies, yet in reality his death is the outcome of his life-long suffering and complicated relationships. The end of his story is then, really the return to the beginning, creating the feeling that the ending has returned in some sense to the original point of departure with circular chain of cause and effect relationships. And so, Menelik contemplates that every death has its own cause and his was Fiameta or his limitless love for her: “አንድ ዛፍ ላይ የተንጠለጠለች ፍሬ ዝም ብለ ተባብሶ አትወደድም፡ በጣዕና ላይ ነው፡ ሲጠለጠል ጣዕና የጀመረች ገና አስረሰባት ዓመቱን ስይዘ ባፈቀርቷት ፈጣሪ የተባለች ከደ ስለከፍ ነው፡ ” (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 282). (“A fruit hanging on a tree doesn’t just come off and fall. First it loosens up through wilting. I think I begun to wither at the age of seventeen when I was possessed by a girl named Fiameta, whom I fell in love with”).

In this narrative of illness and death, Menelik introduces stories of each part of his body as the foundation of his dying self. And since his sense of self is very much drawn from his failed love story, he describes how each part of his body was abused or blessed because of this great love:

... በሰባተኛው ቀን -- ቀኝ ክንዴ በአረተኛው ቀን -- ግራ ክንዴ ደነዙ፡ ... ቀኝ እጄ ፈጣሪ የነካባት እስከሁኔታ ዕለት ድረስ እንደ ጠጅሶ ሰሸት፡ ... በአጭተኛው ቀን -- ገፍረቴ ሰለላ፡ ... በፈጣሪ ጭደስ ያመለጠው፡ ... በስድስተኛው ቀን ጠዋት ላይ ከእንቅልፌ ስነቃ አፌ ማል ምላሱን ጥቆ አገኘሁት፡ ... በሰባተኛው ቀን ከዐንገቴ ቢታች ያለው ገላጭ ሰለላ፡ ... የፈጣሪ ጠቆች ደረቴ ላይ የተወቅ ጠያም የግርፍት ሰንበር አለ፡ ... ሚሊክ የተባለው ሰው የተረፈው ምላስ የጎደለው አናት ብቻ ነበር፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 333-335).

... On the third day my right arm and on the fourth day my left arm became numb. ... My right arm, because it touched Fiameta, smelled like perfume till recently. ... On the fifth day my penis wasted away. ... the one that didn’t get the opportunity to be praised by Fiameta. ... On the sixth day when I wake up early in the morning, I found my tongue dead in the middle of my mouth. ... On the seventh day my body below my neck wasted away. ... The bruise from the lashes that Fiameta’s fingers left on my chest is still there. ... The man called Menelik was only left with a head without tongue.

The above quote also shows that the body is another area where Menelik draws his sense of self. The way he described the death of his body in relation to Fiameta gives the impression that his memory of life, his narrative self was anchored by each part of his body and as it fades away so does his identity. The last statement “The man called Menelik was only left with a head without tongue” also supports this interpretation.

Experiencing the death of each part of his body made Menelik look back at his entire life, evaluate and reflect; one of the typical features of narrative endings. This evaluative and reflective thinking has a function of clearing the way for observing the “love-caused” absurdities in his life and lead the way to new identity conclusions. On the other hand, it has facilitated the progress of the plot and driving it to its ending by providing Menelik with a sense of hopelessness. His approaching death rendered him powerless and became another turning point in his narrative identity. In this evaluation Menelik regrets most of the decisions he made in relation to his love life. Hence, standing at this end point in his life, he expresses a wish to change and reconstruct his identity once more, as in:

(ዙፋን) ልቤን ስታንኳኪ ከፍቼላታሁ፡ ለፊያምታ የተነገረ ነበር፡፡ እግርቼ ወላላን ማቆጣጠፍ አይችልም፡፡ በፊት በር ገብታ እየተንሸራተተኝ በኋላ በር ትወጣለች፡፡ ለአስራ ስንት አማት እንዳይ አደርጌአታለሁ? ..ያዛገ የገለጫ ትዝታ ለአፍታ ቢሆንም ይህው ተዘርጎ ይወጣል፡፡ ልቤን በባጭ አይይ እጥፍላለሁ፡፡ በባጭምጠፍ፡፡ ለአፍታ ቢሆንምዘይ እንከ። (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 335).

When she (Zufan) knocked my heart I have opened it for her. It was prepared for Fiameta. ... Her (Zufan) feet cannot hold on tight to the floor. She enters through the front door and slip out through the back. I did this to her for thirty something years? ... Even if it is for a moment, a rusty stinky memory can be swiped out. I will fill my heart with yellow butter cup (flower), with yellow tapestry. Even if its for a moment, here, I give it for you Zu (Zufan).

Then, he continues: **“ለባይልካት ሁሉ ይቅርታ ልባይቅት አስብኛል ማግረፊያው ስለሌለኝ እጠቅሳታለሁ፡፡”** (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 336). (“I think about asking for her forgiveness for everything I did to her, but since I don’t have a mouth to speak with I just beckon her”).

The experience of dying makes it easier for Menelik to re-evaluate his life decisions and conclude that valuing what is at hand is important in life. Losing everything in the form of death

then becomes the precondition or cause for new identity to emerge. He, now, is determined to be a loving and faithful husband that his wife deserved. Even in death beds identity making remains to be an active process. The self keeps being born in to different identity constructs as long as social contexts are there to demand the rebirth. Menelik’s act of letting go of his past beliefs and convictions related to Fiameta’s love and his recent realization caused by the death of his physical body, dynamically interact because they both are expressions of detachment from and dissolving of former identity constructs.

Finally the gradual paralysis is completed with a sudden closing of his eyes and Menelik died in the middle of this unresolved issue with his wife and remained dead for almost a day. During the brief time of his death, the narrator travels through the dark shadows of death and as a soul begins his journey to the unknown. On his way he meets a demigod who forced him to go back to earth claiming that he has unfinished business, a burden to his soul. This unfinished business turns out to be a confession to be made in the form of Menelik’s life story. Narrating his life is presented as a cleansing means. Moreover, the fact that Menelik tipped someone to publish his recordings shows that he wants his name to linger through his self narratives in an attempt to make a portion of his self-survive after death. So his second chance on life is another transitional moment for him.

Menelik never tells his “after death” stories on earth, rather we read in his wife, Zufan’s life narrative that he spent those days locking himself in his bedroom, until his second and final death, recording things she does not know about. These recordings turned out to be his life story, which has become the subject of the above analysis. The past story is reconstructed in the present plot. The last paragraph in Menelik’s narrative describes his burial right before his great scream that heralded his return to life. In one of his final statements in this paragraph he emphasizes and reaffirms how much a person’s life can be affected and determined by the influence of “significant others”: **“የጎርታ የግዢያተውናገፎ ብዙቱ ... ምን አይነት እልፍ ናት ያቺ ፈላጊያ ይህን ሁሉ ሀዘብ የሚገባበትን ቦታ የያዘችው?”** (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 340). (“How great is the number of people that I should apologize to ... how great is that girl, Fiameta to occupy the space that I could fit in all these people?”).

With this deep reflection on his life Menelik ends his story. He began his story with his death and its cause Fiameta, put her at the center of the middle part and ended it with evaluation of her

effect on his life. The fact that the ending of his story circles back to the beginning shows the circular path his identity formation took. No matter how many turning points came to his life, Menelik never used any of them to change himself for the better except enjoying brief moments of relief from his agonizing life situation. So, in reality, each identity change he went through accelerated his dying process, which he mentioned at the beginning of his narrative, as well as helped the plot progress driving it to its end. He never managed to get out of the vicious circle of his victim identity construct as he wasted every opportunity life presented him with, such as his wife and children, to create himself anew. Therefore, the story in general can be interpreted as positioning Menelik in a very unhappy and deadly life situation. In this light the story is a story of futile identity struggle characterized by continuous falling towards death.

Menelik's story is unusual amongst the five narratives analyzed here in this study. It begins with his death, proceeds through the accumulation of events leading up to his death and ends with his death. Events occurring after the death are attempts to recount what happened, to repeat past events in the present, and make them narratives. Thus, Menelik describes, discusses, analyses and judges his childhood, adulthood, relationships, decisions in life and their consequences; and ultimately how his sense of self is influenced by all these.

Drawing on Bruner's theory of narrative identity, it is possible to say that Menelik's sense of self is mainly constituted by a victim identity construct as a consequence of the great unreciprocated love he lived with for most of his life. As can be understood from the above analysis the way Menelik managed his grief over his lost love clearly influenced how he constructed his identity. Consequently his narrative is dominated by his own incapability to have a decent life, especially in the area of his love life. He sustained stories of his inabilities till the very end of his life, which kept him from constructing anything different. He was unable to be a good lover, husband, father, faithful, happy, free and live with his dignity. Therefore, even though Menelik defines himself as an individual through various identity constructs, he strongly embraced a victim identity construct with his failed romantic life affording him a powerful relation with it.

At the close of his narrative, an ending that is also a beginning, Menelik revisits the haunting memory of Fiameta. This circular structure implies an unbreakable connection between the beginning and ending of his story, the connection being Fiameta. Similar to Bella's case, Fiameta can rightly be described as the center of Menelik's identity construction process. Here, she is

almost completely brought to the foreground of the story. The fact that she exerts significant influence in both Bella and Menelik's identity construction process makes her a very important character, who is not directly narrated but indirectly talked about by other characters.

Beginning and ending his narrative with death, Menelik is permanently stuck in a death loop. Already fallen under the tight grip of death, had no other choice than to tie the events of his life together in a manner of unity that is oriented towards an end. Death has put an end to his life and narrative, and hence can have no other end. Since his story is concluded with death, it can be said that Menelik's story ends with a state of stability that comes with death and providing the narrative with a sense of definite ending. He both begins with and returns to a non-narratable state of equilibrium. In this sense Menelik is the only narrator whose self narrative is a story encumbered with a certain measure of finality.

4.4. Mitik- The Story of Make Over

The character Mitik narrates a very colorful life story filled with many extraordinary events and supernatural encounters. As such she preceded her self-narrative with the following pretext, signaling that it may fail to make sense in terms of the trends in ordinary life and questions of believability may be raised.

ብይዳዎ ስለሆነኝም ባልሆነኝም እናገረዋለሁ፡ ... ስለመደገጥ ይህን ስለመደገም ከእኔ ይህንን አዳግጡ፡ አረንፍ ልሰናዩን ከፍቼ እንዲህ እላቸኋለሁ፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 93).

Whether I am trusted or not, I will tell it. ... Whether it is about being chosen or cursed, hear this from me. I will open my mouth and my heart and tell you this.

4.4.1. Story Synopsis

Mitik is a teenage girl, who lived with her widowed mother in one of Nifas Silk's poorest neighborhoods. As an eighteen year old girl, she is the youngest of all the characters whose narratives are discussed in this analysis. Spending most of her childhood hanging with boys and acting like them, she is considered as a tomboy by people who knew her, including her mother. Mitik explains that she had a very difficult childhood. She was born into a poor family, lost her father when she was just an infant and her mother was always miserable because she was

continuously mourning her son who died before Mitik was even born. This made her life depressing all together.

As a teenage girl, Mitik struggled to make a living by selling fruits and vegetables with her mother. Helping her mother with the business and house chores became her daily routine. Besides her neediness, the insults and criticisms that came with her boyish behavior were major sources of psychological suffering for her. And the problem only got worse as she grew older. It was at this very difficult point of her life that she received a surprising help from a lady in her neighborhood. This lady, Zufan, provided her with an opportunity to pursue college education. She also helped her overcome her emotional insecurities regarding her boyish appearance.

Then Mitik describes a special dream she had in her late teens-a phenomenon that changed her life for good. In this dream she met a tiny man with special powers. In her dream this man gave her plenty of gold which miraculously manifested in the real world after she woke up. She also miraculously conceived from this tiny man, while she was still a virgin, from the sexual intercourse they had in her dreams. This incident brought the opportunity for Mitik to meet with Dr. Yoseph, who was curious about her unusual pregnancy and offered her free treatment in his private clinic. Later on the two of them got close to each other and became lovers. The story ends with Mitik being extremely joyful holding her extraordinary newborn and having her new boyfriend, Yoseph, by her side.

4.4.2. Dominant Storyline and Important Life Events

As a young girl with limited life experiences Mitik has touched almost every area of her life in this self-narrative. However, she has put more emphasis on specific events of her life that can be taken as constituents of the dominant story. One such event is her birth. Mitik’s parents had her when they were at a dark place in their life as their son was murdered by the military government of the time period. So they took her as a reassuring gift, a replacement of their lost child. **“በተስፋይ ማፍት ሰቡብ እንደተወለደኩ ሳይሆን ሳያደር ስሜ ምናክ ተባለ፡፡ ... ባለጠቅላላም በዐይኔ ስጋ ባለየሁም የጻፍው ወንድሜ እወደዋለሁ፡፡ ብዥላም እንደምቻቸው እተካዋለሁ፡፡”** (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 95). (“When I was born because of Tesfaye’s death, I was immediately named Mitik. ... Although I never saw him alive, I love my deceased brother. And if I can, I will be his substitute according to their wish”).

This wish which is also carried by her name profoundly influenced her gender orientation. As a young girl she was not interested in even the simplest qualities of women, such as wearing a dress or getting her hair. Instead she behaved in a manner that is considered boyish among the society, which also made her feel good: “... ቀጣኝ ጭበስና ጸጉር ማረዘም ምጥም ይድብረኛል፡፡ የወንድ ስድቆች አፈ ላይ እንደረላኩ ይመስለኛል፡፡ ... ገዋደኞቹ ለሌሎች ይህን ለጭታ ከቤ ይለኝ ነበር፡፡ ይስ ይለኛል፡፡ የሆነ ጉልበት ይሰጣል፡፡” (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 119). (“... I don’t like wearing a dress and growing hair, and things like that. Swearwords that are frequented by boys come to my mouth effortlessly. ... I don’t know if it is to mock me or just for fun, my friends used to call me Kebie. It makes me happy. I feel like I am powerful”).

Nonetheless, when she passed through the changes that came with puberty, she was forced, in many ways, to find her way back to her original gender group (female). This transition was one of the most profound struggles of her life. As a result this area of her life has become part of the dominant story she tells.

Poverty is another and very important experience in Mitik’s life that has significantly influenced her sense of self. A general observation of her narrative shows that she had no expectation of her poor life condition to change any time soon. This is especially evident in her assessment of her life, as in: “የቅንድብ ላይ ፀጉር ነኝ ብናር ባልናር ግድ የሚጠቀሙ አለ? ግን እንዲህ ሆኖ አለማየት በልቶ ከሞገጥብ የበለጠ ይስ ሰል ...” (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 101). (“I am a hair on a brow, is there anyone who would care if I live or not? But to be invisible like this is more joyous than to be satisfied with food.”)

She has adapted herself and became ok with her current existence which puts her in a very low position with no hope for any betterment of life. However, a change in this condition would be initiated following two important events in Mitik’s life. First, she became pregnant without having intercourse and second she was miraculously blessed with riches that reversed her story of poverty. These two incidents brought dramatic change in Mitik’s life, consequently, are considered as important life events in her narrative. The following analysis is an attempt to illustrate how the process of Mitik’s narrative identity construction unfolds in the face of the dominant story, which focuses on narrating the above identified important life events.

4.4.3. Construction of Self in Mitik’s Self-narrative

እርግጥጥጥጥ ጅና ጋሼ ሚሊክ ጥጥ ሰባል ስቅስቅታዊ አለቀስኩ፡ ... በዚህ ላይ ተደርጎ ሃዘገዥ ያደረገኝና ያስነሳኝ ወንድሜ ተስፋዬ በስርዓት ጥቆ እንዲህ እንደሚላክ የሚወጡ ዘመቻዎቼ ወደጅቼ አልቅሰወለት ስላልተቀበረ ነው፡ ... ሰሰተኛ ደረጃም አለ፡፡ ነፍሰጤ ነኝ፡ ... ለሌላም ግንኙነት አይጠፋም፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 93).

I am kind of tenderhearted so, I sobbed deeply when I heard that Menelik is dead... what makes me cry and grieve on top of this is that my brother Tsefaye didn't have a proper burial, like Menelik, with his friends and relatives crying for him. ... There is also a third reason. I am pregnant. ... There might also be another reason.

Opening to the above statement we find Mitik's self-narrative well advanced in the story world and the beginning plunges into the middle of action. The fact that she opens her story in the middle of her escalating problems gives a sense of the beginning of her story as a moment of absolute chaos in her life. It is a beginning that exposes plenty of conflicts in Mitik's life and promises a problematic life situation to unfold as the narrative's prospect. The reader is thus, forced to go through multiple flashbacks to situate this beginning and know the life that has been in process in a prior time. It demands the patience of reading three chapters worth of narrative to find the story behind this opening line.

This beginning paragraph is temporally located to the time of a significant turning point in Mitik's life, a distinct break from her established past. As can be understood from the above opening line, the main drama in the beginning of Mitik's narrative is her sadness as a consequence of her proliferating problems. This first scene influences the evolution of the story in certain ways. As Mitik has indicated, there are more problems that can be mentioned as contributors to her emotional drama, but the above mentioned are the ones she chose to tell. In fact, two of the important life events, identified in the previous section, are mentioned in this opening passage. Through the lens of this beginning passage, Mitik foregrounds her entire life story.

After opening her narrative by introducing instabilities and tensions in her life, the narrator immediately presents, in the next page, her interesting family and birth story, which is also the beginning of her story in its chronological order. Her birth has been a consequence of the death

of her brother Tesfaye; a desperate attempt in her depressed parents' part to replace their deceased son with another child. This birth story is one of the events at the center of her narrative identity construction process:

ታላቅ ወንድሜተስፋዬ ከሞት በሀዋላ ነው-አሉ የሞረደ ቤታችን ደብቡ ትኩዜ የሆነው። ... በተስፋዬ ሞት ሰብብ እንደተወለድኩ ሳይሆን ሳያደር ስሜ ምናክ ተባለ። ... ባለቤቱም በዐይኑ ስጋ ባለየውም የሞተው ወንድሜ እወደዋለሁ። ብዙም እንደምታወቅ-እተከባለሁ። (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 95).

They say that it is after the death of my big brother Tesfaye that the mood in our home became depressing. ... When I was born because of Tesfaye's death, I was immediately named Mitik. ... Although I never saw him alive, I love my deceased brother. And if I can, I will be his substitute according to their wish.

The idea of naming is very interestingly brought up here. Mitik herself analyzes the significance of her name and how it has affected her personality. She firmly establishes her sense of self in the stories of her birth and the consequent naming, which she relates with her brother's death. So the one reason she mentions for submitting for this influence is the void left by her deceased brother in their family and her duty to fill it by taking his place and replacing him. Illuminating on the ways her parents' naming influenced her sense of self, she tells the story of her childhood:

ወንድሜተስፋዬ የሌለበትን ይህን ባዶ ቦታ ለመሙላት ማለጃ ከልጅቴ ጀምሮ ሀይለኛ ነበርኩ። የወንድሜ ቦታ ለመሙላት ወይም ለማሞት ሳይሆን አይቀርም ብዙ ጊዜ የምጠቀሙ ከወንዶች ጋር ነበር። ... ከከፍተኛ ጭታ በፊትና በሀዋላ ከወንዶች ጋር ቆሜ ማረጋገጥ የጀመርኩት ገና ትንሽ እያለሁ ነው። ቋንቋዬ አካሄዴ አለባብሴ ምናም በሞኩ ከእነሱ የተገለበጠ ነበር። በዚህም ቀጠሎ ጭብጥና ጸጉር ማረጋገጥ ምናም ይደብረኛል። የወንድ ስደቦች አፈላይ እንደሌሎች ይሞክራላል። ሴቶችን በዚህ ስልት ስለይዘኩት ሰብረግግ-ያዘኩኛል። ... ጉሞደኞቹ ለሞኩ ይህን ለጭታ ከቤ ደላኝ ነበር። ደስ ደላኛል። የሆነ ጉልበት ይሰጣል። (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 119).

I think it is to fill this empty space left by my brother I was domineering since I was little. It must have been trying to fill or share my brother's place, most of the time I used to play with boys. It was when I was so little that I started mocking and being mocked by others before and after playing football with boys. My language, walking and dressing style was, to some extent, copied from them. Because of this I don't like wearing a dress and growing hair and things like that. Swearwords that are frequented by boys come to my

mouth effortlessly. It amuses me when I insult girls using these swearwords and they are shocked... I don't know if it is to mock me or just for fun, my friends used to call me Kebie. It makes me happy. I feel like I am powerful.

The proper name acted for Mitik as a point of reference and self-determination and became a thing that sort of encapsulates her characteristics, flaws, physicality and tendencies. The duty carried in her name made her completely neglect her feminine quality and become a tomboy. As can be inferred in the above quote Mitik does not even consider herself as a girl. On the contrary, as a child, she was not aware of the negative impact of her boyish behavior on her femininity. She lived in a patriarchal society where gender rules are clearly marked. However, Mitik was too young to realize this and her awakening didn't happen until it was too late and she was already identified as a tomboy by the society.

This is especially evident on the two occasions, described in the following quotes, where she got her period for the first time and she was looking forward to be hired as a waitress but was rejected because of her boyish acts and dressing style: **“የወር አበባዬን ሳይ ነው-የጾታ ቦታዬ በትክክል የገባኝ፡፡”** (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 119). (“It was when I got my period that I exactly understood my gender.”). **“... ሀላጭ አባን ነው-የሞላለው፡ የይህ ስልጠኔ ያሳፈረኝና የናቀኝ አባን ስለሞላለ ማለኝ፡፡”** (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 118). (“... My entire body looks like papa. I assume that Drake’s sophisticated man embarrassed and despised me because I look like papa”). She further elaborate on the societies feedback to her tomboy features as in: **“... በክፍሉ ሴቶችም ‘ውንዳማድ’ ተባልኩ፡ ሴቶቹ እናሃይሉን ለማለት ከእኔ ከሞላሃደዋ በማለል ወንዶች ያወጣልኝን ስድብ እኔ ላይ ተከተዋቸው፡፡”** (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 557). (“... I was also called ‘tomboy’ by my classmates. The girls, to identify themselves as beautiful, they seclude themselves from me, the unattractive one, and used on me the insulting name that boys gave me”). After these incidents she realizes her exact place in the society as she states in the following quote:

ከዘይህ ካፌ ጀርባ አሸናፊን ተሳይኜ በእሱ ተሳይኜ ከወጡ በሀዋላ ወንዶች ከቤ ደላኝ የነበረው ከጭታ በላይ ከሞኛ በላይ ማህ ሳያወላጁ ገባኝ፡፡ ... ሃይሉ ተነኳኩ በሀላጭ ፍርሃት ሰርጾ ወደ ጉልቴ ተሞላኩ፡፡” (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 120).

After I left from the back of The Drake Café, insulting Ashenafi and being insulted by him, I clearly understood that when boys used to call me Kebie, it was more than playing,

more than teasing. ... I get back to my small business with my wrecked self image and fear surging through my entirety.

Mitik is a free girl who doesn't understand her rightful feminine place among the society. It is not a coincidence that her first awakening into her femininity is linked to her first period; menstrual cycle, which is seen as not just a natural phenomenon, but also as an expression of gender, usually experienced by women in a private way. This incident was in direct opposition with Mitik's way of life in which she enjoys the freedom of speaking, dressing and acting like a boy. The hotel manager's opinion of her physical appearance also symbolizes a wider community's rejection of a woman who looks and acts like a man. But what increases even more her trauma is her friends and schoolmates' negative reaction to her masculine features. In the above quote the girls' hatred towards Mitik is an indication that her unchallenged presence among them is a powerful treat to their feminine beauty.

Clearly, gender, a social construct of male and female roles, is a key point in this society. Mitik's recount of the way she is referred to as "tomboy" indicates the ways in which significant others' perceptions of the self mediate in one's identity, underlining the importance of society's input when constructing a sense of self. The fact that she drew on perceptions of others to articulate her identity also reflects the social constructionists' relational understandings of self. Mitik is not what is expected from her by her patriarchal society. And this socially unacceptable behavior can only be corrected either by debasing or ennobling and feminizing her. Mitik receives both and this drives the plot fast forward to its climax, turning an innocent free girl into a socially acceptable, properly behaved young woman.

As the narrative develops chronologically Mitik tells, in juxtaposition with her gender conflicted identity story, the story of how her life is one big exhausting struggle for survival. She was born in to a very poor family, so she had to fight each day for a crust of bread and drop of water. In her narrative she describes the severity of her neediness and how her life is engulfed by everyday struggle for survival:

ጥቁርሻ ማል አይኩ፡ የቁርሴ ዝርዝር፡ አንድ ዳቦ በሽይ፡ የይስት እረራ፡ ጥፍሬን በጥርሴ እየቆረጥኩ ሰሳጥኛ እያሞገጠ ሆኜ የሚባው አጥፋት፡ የፃዳዬ ዝርዝር፡ አንድ ዳቦ፣ የይስት እረራና ጥፍሬን በጥርሴ

ሰላሳ ጊዜ ጊዜ ላይ የሚባው ዓገዳት፡ የራሱ ገርገር፡ አንድ ዳቦ በሻይ የደነት እረራና ጥፍሬን በጥፍሬ ሰላሳ ጊዜ ጊዜ ላይ የሚባው ዓገዳት፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 97).

I grew up surrounded by soot. The menu of my breakfast:- bread with tea, the scrap of burned sauce, the bone that slips in to my stomach while I trim my finger nail using my teeth. The menu of my lunch:- bread, the bone that slips in to my stomach while I trim my finger nail using my teeth. The menu of my dinner:- bread with tea, the scrap of burned sauce, the bone that slips in to my stomach while I trim my finger nail using my teeth.

Mitik’s description of her daily meal reflects how keenly she observes and internalizes her life situation. This is more than a simple description of her daily life; it signifies the extent of the adversity she is facing. Moreover, it can also be seen as her way of expressing her identification with her neediness, the ‘I am poor’ identity construct. She made this idea more evident while further describing her needy life situation as in:

የምስጋናው ማለፊያ በትኩረት ‘ማለፊያ’ ብሎ ለማለፊያ ገና ብዙ የሚረዱት ናት፡ የቆረቆሮ ጫዳ በፍራትም በካፊያ ቀን ወጣ በላዎችን ላይ ይንጠባጠባል፡ ... በከሰል ጥላሽት ያበደ በረባሪ ቀጭን ለብሼ በብርድ የፈዘዘ እግሮቹ ቶሎ እንደጥፋሽ እየጠለቀኩ እቀጥላለሁ፡ ልጅ ነኝ ግን ስታይሌ የአረገኝው፡ ... ፀጉራ አልተበጠረም እግሮቹ ንፁህ አይደሉም ከንፈሮቹ አልተቀበሉም እርካሽ ልብኛ ከዘህምብ ግራ ቀኝ ላይ ታች በሚፈጠሩ ስፈት የተያያዙ ናቸው፡ ... ለሌላ ሰው አፈን ከፍቼ ባልናገረውም የዕድሜ እኩልነት ላይ ያለሁበት ሁኔታ ያሳፍረኛል፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 98).

The shed where we do our business is far from actually being called ‘a shed’. Although it has a tin roof, on drizzly days water drips up on us. ... I put on my dress, which is spotted with charcoal soot, and sit praying that my coldly numb feet would warm quickly. I am young but I have the style of an old woman. ... My hair is not styled, my feet are not clean, nothing is applied on my lips, and my cheap garments are patched on their sides to make the matter worse. Though I don’t talk about it openly, but when I see girls of my age, I am embarrassed by my situation.

The following quote further elaborates on and a solid evidence of the idea of equating herself with her life situation: “ለሞግባብ ስለ ኑሮ አላውጣም፡ ‘ምን አገብቻለሁ’ ልባል እንጂ ስለሞግባብ ነው፡ አለ አይደል ያሳፍራል፡ ‘ያሳፍራል’ አልልም አለ አይደለ ‘ህይወቴን ያሳፍራል’ ስል ረባሪ እንደሞግባብ ነው አይደል?” (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 555). (“I don’t talk about my life for those who don’t know me. I may

tell them 'it is none of your businesses', but it is because I am embarrassed by it. You know, it is embarrassing. I don't officially say 'it is embarrassing' you know, when I say 'my life is embarrassing' it is like hating myself, isn't it?")

Obviously, Mitik felt that she could not separate herself from her needy life situation since her passions were all rolled up in being a poor girl. Therefore, Mitik equates her identity with her needy life situation, and by doing so identifies with it. Experiencing extreme poverty has led her to consider herself inferior to others and identify with her humiliating life situation. This identification is further strengthened by her everyday life situation and people around her. Consequently, she is not only suffering from the actual poverty but also from the identity she has constructed out of it. She identified herself in parallel to her neediness. Then Mitik narrates the most miraculous, partly dream partly real, experience she had one night. What made this semi-dream experience extraordinary is that almost everything she experienced in her dream manifested in her real life. This was possible because her dream was caused by a tiny demigod called Menkobiaw who is also responsible for Menelik's resurrection. So, what happened, when she wake up the next morning, was absolutely shocking that turned out to be a life changing episode, a turning point in her needy life situation. The following quotes better describe the case:

ያን ለሊት ግን ልረሰው የሚችል፣ የሚገርለት ህልም አለግቶ፡ ... ፊት ለፊት የሚታ በቴ ማኮት ተከፍቶ በረዶ የሚለ ጸዳል ይገባል፡ ... በማኮት ተርሃን በከል አንድ አሻንገላት የሚለ ሰው-አየሁ፡ ቁሜ በጣም ትንሽ ነው፡ እተኛህበት ሲያየኝ ቆይቶ በጭረጃ ጩቅ ላይ ተንሸራቶ ወደ ክፍሌ ወጥቶ ወረደ፡ ... ቀጥሎ ከአላጋይ ግርን የሚኮሻኮሻ ነገር ሰሜ፡ ቀና ተዬ ያየሁ ይሚለኛል፡ ግን ምንም አይታየኝም፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 563).

That night, I dreamt an outstanding, unforgettable dream. ... My bedroom window opened right in front of me and a pure light entered. ... Through the light from the window I saw a man who looked like a doll. He is so short. He looked at me for a while from where I lie and then climbed down in to my room using the window curtain....Then I heard something crunching underneath my bed. I think I have raised myself a bit and looked. But I see nothing.

ከአገሪቱ በላይ ተነሳሪ ሆኖ፡... ጭንቀት ላይ ሲሰጥ ... ጭንቀት ላይ ሲሰጥ ተዘርጋል፡ ...
በደንጋጤ ስር ላይ ምንም ሳልገኘ አያለሁ፡ ... ጭንቀት ከአገሪቱ ይዘው ወደ ወጭ ስንት ተዘርጋል
ወርቅ ይዞ ወጣ፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 566).

Cautiously I got up from my bed. ... When I bend over to get my shoe (from under her bed) ... There was plenty of gold heaped on my shoes. ... I stepped back in shock and keep looking in silence. ... When I pulled my shoes by its tip, it came out with the gold that it was loaded with.

As Mitik led a very exhausting, depressing and desperate life for a long time, this life-changing event was of immense importance for her. It can function as a turning point by initiating changes in her poor life condition. She can now immediately reverse her needy life situation. In these dreams she became everything that she is not in her real life so far as in the following quotes: “..በሙሉም ዜማ በሙሉ ደም፣ እጅጅን ወደ ሀዋላ አጣጥሮ ወይም ስሜ በርቶ ሰላም እልላለሁ አለኝ፡ ከወጣቱ ታገድ አጎንበሱ፡ ... የበለጠ ባሙ ወፍረሞ ለስላሳ ደም ‘ነይ የእኔ እሳት የነበርኩትን አለሜ ለሳይሽ’ አለኝ፡” (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 563-565). (“... He folded his hands behind him, closed his eyes and with a beautiful melodious voice he called my name and said ‘I salute you’. He bowed bending from his waist. ... With more beautiful, bass and soft voice he said to me ‘Come my lady let me show you the world I had been’.”).

ግድር ላይ ከሆሀዋዎሳዎች የበለጠ አስገረመኝ፡ ጨማወ ማለ የላኝ ደን ወሳደኝ እንደ ደማ የሙሉል እንደ ነበረባል የሚቀለቀል ሐር አለበሰኝ ማላዎን ጭት ላይ አስተኝቶ ከግንባሬ እስከ ተረካቤ ድረስ ሳሜ ኮረብታ ላይ የቆሙሽማ የለበሱ ወይከደት ፈታኝ ወደ እኛ ጭሰው ሰዘገገ አየሁ ሰሙ እጆቻችን ወደ እኔ ዘርግተው ሰሙ በርተው አላገኙን አንቺ የተደረሰኝ ነሽ! አንቺ እሳት ነሽ! አንቺ ደፋር ነሽ! አንቺ ትህትና ነሽ! ሀላማሽ የተባረከ ነው! (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 571-572).

He amazes me more than anyone I know on earth. He took me to a dark ancient forest. ... He clothed me a blazing silk, which rolls like cloud. He made me lie naked on the ground and kissed me from my brow to my heels. ... I saw and heard a group of ladies dressed in Shema singing while standing on a hill and facing us. ... They spread out their hands towards me and calling my name they praised me. ‘You are a chosen one! You are a Lady! You are brave! You are humble! You are blessed in your entirety!’

Girls live under the attention of boys, and particularly their boyfriends. And, in a society that worships beauty, Mitik as the socially rejected is gazed by a demigod, as the ultimate fulfillment of his existence. She was no longer Mitik the invisible, poor ugly girl but Mitik the loved and praised one and this made her very happy. However, the tiny demigod's praise in his rare visits, which only happens in her dream, was not good enough for Mitik to establish her identity a young appreciable girl among her society that she needed the approval of her own kinds. This leads Mitik to undergo series of personality changes in order to assume the proper gender position among the society.

The lesson she took about her gender position from the above few experiences was an ice breaker for Mitik. After her enlightening experiences Mitik's preference to identify with behaviors that are clearly established as boyish by the society, became more and more difficult to sustain. It was insulting and in opposition to her femininity since she has begun to recognize herself, although full understanding does not come until much later, as a girl. In recognizing this fact Mitik was torn apart between two conflicting selves. It became apparent to her that her sense of self, which is mainly constructed on the bases of masculine qualities, has been shaken from its foundation. This is a major turning point in Mitik's life story. Following this turning point, Mitik went through a series of identity struggles as making shifts in her established identity construct presented quite a challenge for her. Her ambivalence between her desires to play masculine role and her social role as girl of patriarchal values is expressed in the following quotes.

...ጅግግርቅ የሰት ነገር ታወቃለች፡ በጣጣጣ ከንፈርሽ ትልቅቱ ለላገሱት ይሆናል ምናም ብለ ቀለም ልቀብሽ ስትል ጠያቂ እንዳትሰኝ አልከላከልከዋለሁ፡ ላጥ ላጥ አይርጋ ስትቀጥኝ በእፍረት ሳቅሁ፡ እማ ጣጣም የሰፈራ ሴቶች እንዳያዩኝ አልፈላከም፡ ፈረሁ፡ ... ከእሷ ተለይቼ አወቅብሽ ከሞላፈራ በፊት ግን በሽግግ እጅታ አጠፋሁት፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 558).

Jimmawork is knowledgeable in femininity. At first ... when she asked me to apply lipstick on my lips, I didn't stop her so she won't think of me as old fashioned. When she applied it on me, I laughed in shame. I didn't want mom or the women in my neighborhood to see me. I got scared. ... When I departed from her and before I took the bus, I wiped it away with the sleeve of my sweater.

ለሙያዎች ፀገራን የሰረቸኝ ዘላለምነበረች፡ ደስ ባይላኝም አለ አይደለ የሰረር ጎረግጥ አተኩሮ ያየኝ ጀምሮ፡ ... ከሀላት ቀን በኋላ በሻሽ አሰርኩት፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 558).

It was Zelalem who braided my hair for the first time. Although I was not happy about it, boys of my neighborhood began to pay attention to me. ... After two days I covered it with a scarf.

... ቀጣጥን ለተሽ ግቢ ወሳጥ ወዳዩ ወዳጅ ስል፣ ... ሳኖሮን ከዐልጋዎ ተነስታ አለንበት ማለት፡ ... ምክክ እንዴት ታግረደላለሽ!! ስትላኝ በአፍረት ማት፡ አወልቁ ልገላገል ወደ ሰርሽስ ስርጭ ... እንዲታወቁት ብላኝ በቃ እዛ ግቢ ወሳጥ እየበረድኝ፣ ምግባቸውና ሀላቱም እንደ ወንድ ሲሆኑኝ ዋሉ፡ ብቻ አልተሞኝም፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 559).

... When I was fiddling around wearing her (Zelalem) dress, ... Safron got up from her bed and came to where we were. ... I was so embarrassed when she said ‘Mitik how beautiful you look!!’. When I began running to the spare room to get rid of it, she told me not to take it off and I just spent the day there feeling cold and with the two of them looking at me as a man would. Anyway, I was just not comfortable.

The above quotes illustrate how much Mitik was resistant towards this identity change. She felt pressured in to every feminine quality introduced to her that she struggled so hard to avoid it. The changes made her feel uncomfortable and she was forced to fall back in to her old identity construct every now and then. The reaction of people around her towards her emerging identity was also a source of frustration and embarrassment. She deployed ideas of how others perceive her in order to articulate and affirm her identity. She found difficulty in situating herself within the subject position of ‘a girl’, while also within the subject position of someone who has affiliations for boyish qualities. She attempted to unite these two subject positions as a means of creating continuity in her sense of self. Bruner emphasizes on the complexity of identity formation and the conflicts that can occur between two selves. Mitik’s experiences exemplify this conflict and her own strategies of adjusting the two extremes in order to construct a coherent sense of self.

The challenge Mitik experienced here is also reflective of Gergen’s split identity. She experienced tension and identity struggle when she is pushed to do things that do not feel natural to her previous (tomboy) identity construct. The intersection of these two identities is quite

interesting particularly as Mitik struggles to reconcile her sense of self with both. These struggles on the other hand provided opportunities for shifts in Mitik’s self and her insecurities regarding her physical appearance further influenced the direction of change towards femininity. This shows how tensions can allow for shifts to happen in individual’s sense of self.

On top of the above struggle Mitik also encounters another kind of identity conflict as a result of her extraordinary pregnancy, which happened while she is still a virgin. Her first guess was that she might have been raped her knowledge. But, the fact that she was still a virgin revealed to her the extraordinary nature of her situation. Ordinariness was no longer to be taken as a for granted identity construct. Her reality coupled with her dream experiences made her suspect that she might have been something more than she thought she was, a chosen one. In her narrative we see Mitik simultaneously entertaining the idea of being special and rejecting the opportunity to become one as an expression of identity struggle:

ረሴን ሳፅናና ከሙእክት ነው ያረገዝት እላላሁ፡ ማክሌል ገብርኤል ይሁኑ አላውቅም፡ ... ይህ ዐይነት ታምዶ እርግዥ የሚታወቅቅደንና በበዘበት ዘመና ክፋት በበዘበት ዘመን ነው፡ ... ግን ቅዱስም ይህን እርገም የዚያ ዐይነት ሴት ማን አልፈለከም፡ ማን የጻፈገው ቢቃ የንፋስ ስልኪን፣ ገፊት ተቀምጦ የግምዛጋዋን፣ ተሳይቦ በዘበኛ የግዳባረረዋን፣ ማራ ኑሮዋን በባልት ሸፍና የግዳባልና የግምዛጋዋን ግዳክ ነው፡ ስፈራ ስቸርስ፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 749-750).

I would like to think that I conceived from angels, so as to reassure myself. I don't know whether it is Michael or Gabriel. ... This kind of miraculous pregnancy happens in the age of righteousness or the age of vice. ... However, whether it is holy or wicked, I don't want to be that kind of woman. What I want to be is just Mitik of Nifas Silk, who would yawn sitting under a shed, say swearwords and get chased by a guard, pass the day and night covering her bitter life with joke. Can I help it if I am scared.

Mitik expresses a wish that she never wants to change, in this case, staying the same means keeping her status of being an ordinary poor invisible girl. However, understanding the changes that are already happening in her sense of self she tries hard to reconcile the two selves despite the fact that they are extreme opposites. The tension created here is an evidence of the paradoxes of multiple personalities in one individual which points to the complex and conflicted nature of self-construction process. Bringing these two identity constructs together provoked an eruption

of anxiety. The potential collision of these two identity constructs is reflective of the lack of a specific sense of self at this specific time. So she is left situated between what she considers as her genuine self and what her new world offers her. This in turn imposes a new pressure of identity work to the already existing one and perhaps facilitates the reconstruction of Mitik’s identity.

This encounter brings to light another interesting piece of constructionist theory – the construction of a new identity construct in juxtaposition with the existing one. The dichotomy between two selves pushes Mitik to take action and the plot fast-forward to its makeover ending. Mitik analyzes her situation and make a decision in both directions of her identity struggles. On the one hand, to find her rightful place in her patriarchal society and conform to the personality that is expected from her, and on the other, to accept the extraordinary nature of her condition and adapt herself with her new reality.

The first step she took to interpret these decisions in to action was to learn from those who know best. She had to learn how to walk on the road to femininity from those who already are at the end. Her second step was to reintroduce herself to the society with a female awareness of her body and facilitate the process of change voluntarily, which also helped her reduce the identity struggle to some extent and grow more confident in her femininity. The third step was to make this role permanent and identify with it as a source of her sense of self. The fourth and final step was to affirm her specialness, which not only changes her ordinariness but also put her above all ordinary women.

What follows further elaborates this process of identity change: “በዚህ የግዥት የትምህርት ቤት ጉዞ ላይ ከግራፊክስ አፕሊኬሽን ግጥም ብቻ ሳይሆን ሴት መሆንን እየተሞከርኩ ነበር። የሚገባውን ጀምርቅና የሳፍራን ዘመድ ዘላለም ነበሩ።” (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 558). (“In my night school journey, I was not only studying computer application but also how to be a woman. It was Jimmawork and Safron’s relative Zelalem who were teaching me.”). Then she goes on saying:

አንድ ቀን እስኪ የሚባል ልዩ ብዬ የዘላለም ቀጣሪ ለገሼ ወደ ትምህርት ቤት ሄድኩ። ... ግን ራቄቴን የሆነኩ ማለጃ። የክፍል ተሜ ገላጭኝ። ... ከዚህ ትምህርት ቤት ማለግ አቆምኩና ቤት ወጥቶ ብቻ ማለግ ጀመርኩ። የሰሪ ልምድምላሽ አልቻልኩም። ይከብሩ። (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 559).

One day, I went to school wearing Zelalem's dress to see what would happen. ... But I felt like I am naked. My classmates glared at me. ... Then I stopped wearing it to school and began to do it only at home, I haven't been able to let go of my habit of wearing pants. It is hard.

የትምህርት ቤቱ ብቻ በቂ ስላልሆነ፣ አንድ ቀን ... ቀመስ ለሸፊ ያለጉዳይ ከተማውጣሁ፡ ... ብዙ ሰዎች ግድ አልሰጡኝም፡ ... ሲያዩኝ ትንሽ ልብ ይለኛል ግን ያልፋኛል፡... አንዳንዴ ዝም ብለው ሲያተኩሱ ሲያልፉኝ አልሚከባቸውም ማለት ነው? እላለሁ፡ ‘ማፂ’ በሌለው ማግኘት እንደሆነ ማቅቅ ያሳፍራል፡... ግን ... ሁሉ ሰዘጉኝ እልህ ያዘኝ፡ ማለት አላፈርከም፡ ... በስገር ባር ፊት ለፊት ሳልፍ ግንግል ስር አብሮ አድጌ የሰፈር ልጆች ታደምኩ ግን ተቀምጠው አገኘኝ፡ በሁብረት አፍጠው አዩኝ፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 559).

Because it is not enough to do it only at school, ... one day I put on a dress and went down town without any reason. ... Many people didn't care. ... When they see me, they pay attention a little but then pass me. ... Sometimes when they pass by without paying attention to me, I say 'so does it mean I haven't attracted them?' Its embarrassing to know that 'to look nice' means to be evaluated by others. ... But I become mad when they all ignored me. I mean I was not embarrassed.... When I was passing by Sport Bar, I run in to boys from my neighborhood, Tadewos and Moges, whom I grew up with, sitting under an umbrella. They both stared at me.

Mitik is reconstructing her identity based on not only her thoughts and opinions about herself but also by using other peoples' thoughts and opinions of her as inputs. Moreover, her actions stressed the needed to establish and promote her identity as a girl highlighting the significance of the thought and opinions of others in the process of constructing one's identity. It is true that she is also struggling to find meaning in her emerging identity with feminine qualities because for years she had known herself as Kebe and defined by it. This clear dichotomy between “before” and “after” dressing like a girl or the equivalent of becoming beautiful is further intensified by significant others who plant seeds of doubt and confusion in Mitik's mind, forcing her to continue her quest until the last image of her-a beautiful girl is attained.

Previously, Mitik focused on staying invisible emphasizing that there is nothing in her that deserves attention. In contrast with this, now, at the outset of her experiment her goal was to be a

center of attention and appreciation. She was trying to recognize herself as an individualized subject with clear defining traits but was not able to sustain this without the approval of significant others. She relied on the opinions of her family and friends in order to construct and define herself. As much as the society's disapproval initiated the deconstruction of her old identity, the approval was also important in constructing the new one. In this case, it is possible to say that the change in Mitik's identity was very much driven by external pressure than internal desire. In other words the society has played a significant role in the process of Mitik's identity construction.

Mitik has made significant shifts in her identity and these shifts have not gone unnoticed by the society. For example, the same boys, who used to tease her for her boyish behavior, now looked at her with sexual interest, at the occasion of which she played the role of a girl for the first time. Encouraged by her achievements, the following quote shows how far Mitik would stretch her experiences in order to naturalize and define herself through them.

... ፀገር በፍት ቀጠሮ አለኝ፡ ወርቁን ሸጠሁት ቀይ ጠፍጣፋ ተረከዝ ያለው ቆዳ ጫፍ ፎቅ ሻሽ፣ ቀጠሮ ሸረብ ገዝቼአለሁ፡ የሰፍ እምህ ሁሉ ያገድብኛል ብለዋል፡ ቁርጫፍጭፍ የሚርስ ባለ ቀይ ቀጭ ጥለት የሀገር ባሕል ቀጠሮ ለብኛለሁ፡..ጦራ ትከሻ ላይ ሀልጊዜ የሚገለጹን የቆዳ ቦርሳዬን አንጠለጠልኩ፡ የየሰፍ ስጦታ ናት፡ ሁለት ክፍላች አሏት፡ አንዱ ክፍል የሚጠፋለንኝ የሆነው እያዎቹ ... የሚቀጥብኝ ነው፡ (Yesinibit Kelemat, 2016: 901).

... I have a salon appointment. I have sold my gold and bought new red shoes with flat heel, towel, scarf, dress and sweater. Yoseph, mom and all the others have told me that I looked nice in them. I wore a traditional dress with red fringes which covered me up to my ankles. ... I sling over my leather hand bag, which I always keep with me. It is a gift from Yoseph. It has two partitions. One of them is where I keep all the lady stuffs I need. (901)

Mitik tried to separate her role as a tomboy from her sense of self, and referred to her femininity, extraordinary pregnancy and her love affair with Yoseph to construct her new self. This new self is characterized by independence, confidence and control. It is also important to mention here that the change in her economic status after the gold given to her by the tiny demigod has played a part in facilitating her change. The following quotes can best express this idea as in: “ወርቁን ሸጠሁት

አዳክ ቀይ ጠፍጣፋ ተረከዝ ያለው ቆዳ ጫጭ ፎቅ ሻሽ፣ ቀጫና ሽራብ ገገቱላሁ፡... አሁን የቀረሽን ጠገዝብ ተግኔ ጠል የቀረኝ ወርቅ ማኖ ሃያና ማኖ ሰላሳ ሺህ ብር ያወጣል፡፡” (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 901). (“I have sold my gold and bought new red shoes with flat heel, towel, scarf, dress and sweater. ... If I were to estimate the price of the remaining gold that I possess now, it can sell around a hundred and twenty or thirty thousand birr”). Or when she expresses the change in her perception saying: “ለጥቂት ሳምንታት የኖርከት በሙክሩ የተሞኘኩ ሕይወት አካባቢዎን የበለጠ ጎስቋላ ሆኖ እንዳየው አደረገኝ ማለጥ፡፡ ... ጎረግጥቼ ዞር ብለው አዩኝ፡፡ ከላይ እስከታች አዩኝ፡፡ እንደ ደርግ ሰፈራ፣ ለቦታው አቻ የሆነ ልብ እንዳለብኩት ገባኝ፡፡” (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 911). (“I assume that the relatively comfortable life I led for a few weeks made the place appear to me more penurious. ... The young boys turned and looked at me. They looked at me top to bottom. I realized that what I wear was not fitting to the place, my old neighborhood”).

In the face of such a life-changing incident, Mitik’s abrupt metamorphosis was inevitable. The feeling of inferiority was no longer an attribute of her sense of self, instead she became a center of attention and she was happy with it. She considered herself not only different from but also better than what she was before. Hence, the experience of having more money has led to a betterment of self-esteem. However, as can be seen in the above quote, the disjunction between the two dimensions of her life required continuous balancing of her new riches and her old neediness.

In the final pages of her story Mitik turns the narrative focus to her pregnancy. She settles her struggle and doubt and fully embrace the miracle in her life and by implication her specialness. The supernatural has finally become her world: “እኔ እንዲህ እንደገጠኝ ዓይነት ስንት ተአጭ እዚህ ምድር ላይ ይፈጠር ይሆን? የሙሉው ቦታ ሰሜን ወይን ይሆናል፣ ወት ለጠቁርም ይኖራል፣ ፀሐይ በምግብ በኩል ብቅ ልትል ትችላለች ...” (*Yesinibit Kelemat*, 2016: 748). (“How many miracles may have been created here on earth like the one that happened to me? May be the sky has fallen somewhere I don’t see, milk may have turned black, the sun might rise in the west ...”).

This emerging identity facilitated the process of self-construction by making her feel important and fitting for such greatness. The story ends with Mitik giving birth to a tiny baby just like his demigod father. In many ways, Mitik’s story marks a more traditional narrative ending than the previously discussed narratives. The majority of its major storylines find some form of closure.

Mitik finds love with Yoseph, become economically independent and her stressful pregnancy comes to an end. This indicates that the beginning of the narrative text is temporally situated near the ending as the story ends three months after the beginning, cramming in flashbacks of a life time story in between. But these three months made a world of difference in the narrator's life.

To sum up Mitik's story is presented in an eventful plot. By contrast to the other characters' narratives, a sense of abruptness prevails in the beginning of Mitik's story as the reader is directly confronted with an ongoing action without being supplied preliminary information necessary for its understanding. This beginning normally depends for its full meaning on previous information but appears without this information. Structurally, the story begins in medias res, with excitement and suspense, as the narrator reveals her chaotic life situation. This attitude initially arouses our curiosity to find out the reason of this chaos and its consequences. Then events and actions exponentially succeed to reveal Mitik as a highly troubled young girl.

Mitik's self-narrative clearly depicts her progressive transformation from an innocent teenager with questionable behaviors to a fully matured socially acceptable young woman. She gradually takes a feminine life style, but the fact that she becomes ashamed of her boyish looks as soon as they were pointed out to her by the society shows the power of societal influence on individual self-making. Moreover, Identity struggle is particularly important in Mitik's identity construction process. She had to be pushed and kicked by all sorts of external forces, to go through changes in her identity. Here we see identity struggles because of the society's fixed ideas about who people are, or should be. Therefore, the identity changes that Mitik went through are salient reminders of the immense impact that society can have on individual's identity make up.

4.5. Ezra- The Story of Temptation

Whether it is ordinary or extraordinary, everyone has a story to tell about him/her life. The character Ezra also believes that, despite its ordinariness, his story deserves to be told as well. So he prepares his audience beforehand to the self-narrative to be unfolded saying:

እኔ እገራ ወልደ ሰራክ ... ወልደ ታዘና.....

የሚባ ታሪክ ያላቸው ጥቂት ናቸው ቢሉንም ከፋም ለማም ያሳለፍን ወይ ከሞገር አንቆጠም፡ ከአላታ አንድ ቀን በህይወታችን፣ ከለሚኑው ወደ አለሚኑው ከግጥሙ ወደ ማወቅው በትንሹ ከተረጎነው

ግጥምዎ አልተረዳው የሚሉን አጋጣሚዎቻል፡ ... ከእሊታ አንድ ቀን እያንዳንዳችን ተረጎና ታሪክ እንጠይቃለን፡ እኔም ያ ከእሊታ አንድ ቀን የደረሰ ጠላቻልና ... ወደ ታዳሚቹ ታሪክን እጠብቃለሁ። (Merek, 2017: 333).

I Ezra son of Sirak ... son of Tazina.....

Even though they tell us that those who have a story worthy of telling are few, worthy or not we will not refrain from telling what we have experienced. ... At some point in our life there will come an incident that will drive us from what we are familiar with to what we are unfamiliar, from what we know to what we don't know, from what we understood a little to what we don't understand at all. ... One day in our life each one of us will produce a tale and a story. I feel like that day has come for me ...my dear audience let me bizzzzz (tell) you my story ...

4.5.1. Story Synopsis

Ezra is a man in his thirties who has attended both traditional and modern education. As a young man, he has served as a deacon in the house of God and led a very strict spiritual life. Even though his imperfect physical appearance made him feel very insecure around people, Ezra was a bright young man. He makes his living working in his small hotel, which he inherited from his father. Recently, he came across an incident that made him reinvent his old hotel to include new delicious dishes and fancy drinks and dining rooms. The incident also made him grow to be very interested in the foods and drinks he is serving that he became an expert in creating complex recipes of delicious foods and drinks. A great deal of his narrative is also filled with elaborate explanation of these recipes.

Later in his adulthood, he became rich as a result of reshaping his little hotel. People who used to despise him, because of his physical appearance, finally, began to respect and pay attention to him. But Ezra remained the same humble, spiritual man he has always been. His story of spirituality, however, changed when he was first tempted by and fell in love with a beautiful young girl in his neighborhood-Makida. After these two incidents Ezra was never the same again. He defiled his body and soul by surrendering to sexual temptation. He considered his situation as falling from grace. Thus, he prayed so hard to reverse his situation, but his desires were so powerful to the extent that they cannot be broken with prayer. Finally, Ezra learned to

live in harmony with his sinful acts believing that God would understand the difficult situation he is in and will forgive him.

4.5.2. Dominant Storyline and Important Life Events

When reading Ezra’s self-narrative one can easily identify one area of focus that he wanted to highlight from the general story. This focus area has to do with his dilemma with his spirituality and sexuality. This dilemma has its root in one of the most important events of his life-his first vision of a naked woman body: (“... የብርሃንና የፅንፈት ጠቅላይ ቤት በር ገርቦብ ብሎ ነበርና ሳልገባ በቀስታ ገፋሁት፡ እዛ ወሰጥ ያየሁት ነገር እንደ እግዚር ጭዕኑት እንደ አዳክ ዘመን ራዕይ በአንጅቴ ገባ፡ የአላዛር እናት ርዛ ወሰጥ ልብሷን እየለበሰች ነበር፡፡” (Merek, 2017: 385). (“... Birhan and Tsige’s bedroom door was left ajar and I slowly pushed it without entering the room. What I saw in there got through me like God’s message, like a new age revelation. Alazar’s mother Roza was putting on her under garment”).

After this incident Ezra went through series of disturbing changes that threatened his seemingly unshakable spiritual identity. Thus, this incident and the identity crisis that followed it are the dominating theme of tension that Ezira chose to build his self narrative around.

Apart from this, his birth into a religious family and his inconvenience with his physical appearance also receive special attention as preliminary and supporting important life events for the above one. On the one hand, the fact that Ezra was born from a priest father paved the path of spirituality for him. And on the other Ezra has always felt unfortunate because of his looks. This in turn contributed to his fear of getting close to women:

ጭዕኑን በቀስታ የሚገር አቅም ያሳነ ሰኝ ከሃይማኖት ትምህርቴ የሚጠይቀው አይናፋርነቴ ብቻ አልነበረም፡ እስከ አሁን ያለውሁትና ለውሁት ብልም ራሴን የሚጠይቀውና የሚሰፍረኝ ሌሎች ምክንያቶችም አሉ፡ አንደኛው ምክንያት ጥርሶቼ ለፀዳ በሚጠጥሩ እርጉም ልማም ማፈናቸው ነበር፡፡ (Merek, 2017: 354).

What incapacitated me to talk to Makida directly was not only my shyness which is a result of my religious studies. There are other reasons that I haven’t talked about so far, and that frustrates and humiliates me even if I am to talk about it. The first reason is that my teeth were covered by a detestable tartar (mark left by minerals) which can’t be cleaned.

Strict spiritual life coupled with his unattractive appearance put Ezra in a very frustrating position when it comes to relating with women. For these reasons he has never been with a girl for most of his life. Everything in Ezra's life, including himself, start to change when his sexual appetite, which he ignored his entire life, was stirred up by his unavoidable two encounters with two different women.

4.5.3. Construction of Self in Ezra's Self-narrative

Ezra begins his narrative with deceptively unremarkable opening paragraph dense with submerged meaning. He begins his story with his wrath on his customers who he has found to be corrupt. This opening passage seems to have little or nothing to do with the personal story to be unfolded. However, as the story progresses it becomes apparent that this opening passage foreshadows Makida's (the young woman who has significant place in his life) fate which fell in the hands of this corrupt society. Several pages after this beginning Ezra frankly states why he is enraged with his customers:

...ጭዳ ምሳዋን ወይም ራቲን ለማለት በተለያዩ ሰዎች እየተጎተተች ስትሆን በዓይኔ በብሉኛ ማቴ አልቀረም፡ እነዚህ ሰዎች የሚላና የሚጠጡ ከጋብዘዋት በሀዋላ ... ለአሰኛችው የሐሰድ ስራ ለወጡ ሰሰናዳ፤ ... ቀደም ተቤ ወደ ማና ማዳሚውቦታ ሄጄ ጨማተከናንቤ ... አንጅቴ እየተቃጠለ አብራሃም፡፡ (Merek, 2017:353).

... It was unavoidable for me to see, with my own eyes, Makida being dragged here by different people to eat her lunch or dinner. I would go to the parking lot before them, hide in the darkness ... and see her with rage ... when they prepare to go out for the sinful deed they desire ... after these people entertain her with food and drink.

This wrath signals the beginning of emotional upheaval in Ezra's life and provides insights into a number of crucial issues connected with the selfhood of the narrator. We encounter a similarly unexceptional beginning in the chronological story as well.

The earliest event that Ezra mentioned about his life is the fact that he was sent to traditional school when he was four. So, instead of narrating the story of his birth and childhood Ezra tells, pages after pages, the life story of his father and the last advice he gave him before he died. Again here too this seemingly insignificant story is placed there for a reason. Ezra inherited two

things from his father that play significant role his life- his spirituality and his hotel. One led him on the road of righteousness and the other brought him riches. It is also true that individuals' identity construction begins at an early age with the relations they have with their families. Therefore, investing pages of narrative at the beginning of his narrative to tell the story of his father can be taken as a useful tool for laying the foundation for his identity construction process. It is Ezra's way of showing how much his sense of self is influenced by his father.

Based on this, self-construction in Ezra's narrative can be analyzed using the above two beginning points and their significance in the narrator's life as a reference point. At the beginning of his narrative Ezra firmly establishes his identity as a strict spiritual man. For Ezra, his subject position as a deacon was an important way of claiming a sense of self as a spiritual man with plenty of religious rules to live by. He depicted his character as everything sinners are not. The most outstanding difference is seen in Ezra's consistency of his loyalty to God, since he steadfastly clings to his religious obligations. He was defined by an unshakable faith in God and his loyalty to his religion: “እኔ እገራ ታዚና ከአስርቱ ቃላተ ኦሪት እስከ ሀዳስ ማፈሰጭ ያለትን ጥና ጥና ትግፀርቶቹን ሀጋዳትን በነቁስ እከተላቸው እንደነበር አብሮኝ የኖረ ሁሉ ይሞክካለሁ።” (Merek, 2017:346). (“Anyone who knows me would confirm that I Ezira Tazina used to keep each core teachings and laws, from the ten commandments of the Old Testament to the New Testament”).

However, this firmly constructed spiritual identity was shaken from its foundation on two important occasions that can be summarized as temptation in the form of sexual desire. The first occasion was his first exposure to a naked woman's body; in this case his best friend's mother Roza's body. As a man who has never been with a woman before, Ezra was obviously overwhelmed by this experience:

... ስለሴት ምንም የማይውቅ ሴት ቀና ብዬ የማይሰው በሃይማኖቴ በእምነቴ ተሰብኤ ፍትሔን ችላ ብዬ የኖርኩ ጎረግጥ፣ ከወሳኤ የሆነ ነገር ተፈቶ ሰለቀኝ ተሰማኝ። ልቤ እዛ የሸክላ ወላል ላይ በፍትሔ ተዘረረኝ። ርዳን ያየኝት ለጥቂት ሰከንዶች በሆነም ምልክት እንደ ሸሞክ አእምሯዬ ስብ ላይ ታተመ። ... ማንም ለጋምወ-የማይችል ለራሱም የማይሰፈራኝ ስዩታ አደረብኝ። ... ራሴ ዞረ። (Merek, 2017:384-385).

... I, the young man who knows nothing about women, never stared at women, and ignored sex my entire life preached by my religion, felt something inside me loosened and

set free. My heart prostrated (fall down) in lust on that ceramic floor. Although I saw Rosa for a few seconds, her image got printed at the core of my mind. Extreme lust that no one can imagine and that frightened even my own self possessed me. ... My head spins.

Ezra himself speaks of this incident and his subsequent dreams in which he had sex with Rosa, as the most significant experiences that left deep mark in his life. It is considered significant in two respects; first it led him astray from his godly life and second it introduces him to the new world of sexuality. The second occasion is his encounter with Makida, a seductively attractive young lady whom Ezra met at his father's memorial service and immediately falls in love with.

...ይሄ አቋሜ እምቴ የአባቴ የሞት አሞት እለት በ1974 አ.ም. ግንቦት 14 እሁድ ጥያቄ ወትላግባ ወይም ልዩ ሪዕይ በሞላ አጋጣሚ ተፈተነ። ከዚህ በሀዋላ ሰይጣን በልቦናዬ አደረ ... ፈቷን አየሁ። አይኖቼ ከአይኖቿ ላይ ማሳት ተሳናቸው እግራቼ ተሳሰሩ። ... በዚያች ትንሽ ሳሌናችን ቆማስትረሰድ..... የሲጋ ፍላጎቴ በደም ስሬ እሳት ለቀቁ። ... ከዛ ቀን ሰአት ደቂቃና ሰከንድ ጀምሮ ማዳን ከሀላናዬ ልሰርዛት አቅሞአልን በረኝም። (Merek, 2017:346-47).

... this stand and belief of mine was questioned or tempted by an incident which appeared like a vision on my father's memorial day, Sunday May 14, 1974. After this, Saitan entered my mind. ... I saw her face. My eyes were unable to look away from hers; my legs were interlocked with one another. ... When she walks in that small living room of ours, ... my lustful desire rushed like a fire through my veins. ... Since that day, hour, minute and second, I couldn't find the power to erase Makida from my mind.

These two events remark certain disequilibrium in the plot of Ezra narrative because following them Ezra's understanding of himself underwent enormous transformation. This instability, a distinct break from his previous life, sets the plot in motion. After these incidents he went through an intensive period marked by identity struggle or conflict between his old and newly emerging selves. Although Ezra had earlier emphasized the importance of his role as a spiritual man in shaping his sense of self, in the extract above he provided a poignant example of a key moment of change, a turning point, induced by the incident of his encounter with Makida.

Nonetheless, Ezra interpreted the general experience as negative, i.e. he finds his lustful desires inappropriate and in opposition to his spiritual identity. The tension between his spiritual identity

and the demands of his recently awakened sexual desires forces him to act out and suppress his sexual desires so as to remain pure as Ezra the righteous: **“እንደ ልግጁ ፈጣሪ ሐብድን ይቅር እንዳለኝ ነጋ ጠባ ተንበርክኮ እሷን እንዳያሞግኝ ... ለአግዳክ ፀለይኩ፡** (Merek, 2017:387). (“As usual I prayed hard ... kneeling every day and night so that God will forgive my sin and remove her from my dreams”).

Prayer has been advised to Ezra by his father as a significant weapon to fight sin. The above quote shows how much his personality is influenced by his father. Moreover, as Ezra has stated earlier he is recognized by everyone who knows him as a spiritual man, hence the struggle here, in one way, is also to keep this social self image intact. It is indeed this pious quality of himself that Ezra wishes to stress the most in his identity conflict. In this regard Bruner has stressed that it is important that individuals maintain coherence in narrative identities that are valued by the society in order to avoid being a point of criticism. Here, Ezra’s identity struggle underlines this point.

Notable here also is Ezra’s framing of his sense of self in terms of binaries; spiritual/worldly, holly/sinner, and strong/weak, exposing two distinct competing selves. Ezra reflected on the profound and irreversible ways in which being tempted by sexual desires, especially his strong love for Makida, had changed him. Therefore, while Ezra inhabited his life of conflicting selves these selves were intricately related, complex, and required continuous negotiation. His approach to navigate through these competing selves relied on self awareness and the capacity to tolerate internal conflict.

After a while, though, Ezra’s sexual desires grew stronger in him to the extent that they can dominate his spirituality. His prayers were also powerless in the face of emotion of such magnitude. As the emotional stress became unbearable, he even involved his God in his love/spirituality dilemma: **“... የጨቀኝና የጠበቅኝ አፍቃሪ ማህን እግዚር ራሱ ያወቃል፡ በእውነት ስሜ የወደደኳትን ልጅ ደፍረት ሰጥቶ እንዳናግራት ያልገፋፋኝንና ያላበረታታኝን ፀለቴን በግጥም ችሎታ ጠብኩ ስህተት ይኖረዋል?”** (Merek, 2017:399). (“God himself knows that I am an anxious lover. Would it be a mistake if I replace my prayer, which doesn’t push and give me the courage to talk to the girl I truly love, with my own earthly skill?”)

right after my 'Amen' I said: I am Makida's servant as a concluding remark. ... Since that day the new life of Hotel Tazina began.

Out of his sinful experience came his revelatory idea of new recipe for the best roasted beef that has ever been served in his hotel. His sinful experience is thus, positioned both as a deconstructive agent of his spiritual identity and a baseline for the construction of his emerging identity as a chef. By concluding his prayer with devotion to Makida (who inspires the brown roasted beef) and not God, Ezira is stressing on his transition from a deacon to a chef identity construct.

As a result of his newly created delicious dish, Ezira attracted many customers to his hotel. His famous roasted beef dish, which is inspired by Makida's skin color lead to his ascension in wealth. This special brown roasted beef and the improvement of the hotel was a great achievement for Ezra that both his father and grandfather worked so hard to get to but did not. The idea of being the first in his family line to make their small family business successful in turn enhances his sense of self.

Despite how much Ezra was happy and satisfied with his success, he always felt ashamed about the incident that led him to it. “**ጥቡ እንዴት እንዲህ አሟልህ? ስለኝ** የግግግግግ-አእምሮ ወሳጥ ገናና ስለሆነው-የሙሉ የጭ ቀለም ከእሱ ጋር የተያያዘው ሞኝና በስነ-ቴን አይደለም።” (Merek, 2017:357). (“When they ask me “How did your roasted beef become so delicious?” what I tell them is not about the color of Makid's thigh, that is, illustrious in my mind, and my related dissipatedness”).

The feeling of guilt remains in place whether the sexual temptation leads to positive or negative results. The sinful act of looking and desiring a woman's body is positioned in the narrative as the core destructive incident in Ezra's life. Despite this fact, from one day to the next, Ezra's spiritual identity had to be juxtaposed with his sexual desires. The strict religious rules he has lived by began to slowly fall apart in his heart and his reincarnation in to a sinful self was complete when he slept with Makida.

Ezira's description of his feelings right after he slept with Makida for the first time indicates the extent of the shift that occurred in his spiritual identity. “**..ከሙሉ ሰዓት በፊት ወይ ከአንድ ሰዓት በፊት የነበረው ከወሳኝ የፈለቀው ደማኛነት ከተደበቀበት ወጥ ወይህ ማሰ እንዳጠራኝ ተማሁ...ሃሳቤን ፈለካት....**

(Merek, 2017:406). (“...I wished for my instinct that gushed out from within me and was here half or an hour ago to pop out from where it is hiding and lead me to her again. I wanted more of my sin”).

He took this pleasurable moment as an opportunity to realize how, until now; he has been enchained by spirituality to turn his back on such a pleasant experience. He unwittingly questions the spiritual institution of religion as disrupting the natural flow of human desire. As a result religion is conceived as a prison of self-will, self discovery and fulfillment. The act of making love proved to be a liberating moment for Ezra who was trapped in spirituality. The pure spiritual man has now officially declared that he is a “sinner”. The fact that Ezra previously mentioned Satan entering his mind the day he saw Makida, was a precursor in the process of deconstructing his spiritual identity. This incident resulted in a shift in Ezra's sense of self; he felt that fear and guilt has left his heart and a new sense of freedom and happiness was roaming in his life.

However, once this moment of joy and satisfaction passed and that he was diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease, which he recognized as his punishment, Ezra continued to experience the previous identity conflict. This incident also put an end to his relationship with Makida. At this point Ezra re-evaluates his life choices and understands his new state of life.

አወቃለሁ፣ ከአባቴ ቃል እጅግ በረቀና በሞገስተኝ ረግረግ ወስጥ እስከ ወገኔ እንደገባሁ፡ ... አባቴ እንደ ምቹ ጠቅራ የበከረ ልጅ የለወም፡ የልጅ ልጅም አይኖረወም፡ በዚህ ተልካሽጉ ብረብ ፈለፈለው በሞገ ደድቼ ረስ ወዳድ፣ ሰሰኝ፣ እንቅፋት፣ ምቹ፣ በረሱ የሚታወቅ፣ ነፈቱ ቁል፣ እንደሚገኝ አልገረገርም፡ ዘር ማዘሬ የሰሰኝን የግድት ገጭ በግል ስሜ የለወኩ የዘመኑ ልጅ ሆኛለሁ፡ አባቴን ደጋሚያገደልኩት ይሞላለኛል፡ (Merek, 2017:414).

I know that I have plunged, up to my waist, in to a swamp that is far from my father's word and will mess me up. ... Unlike his wish my father didn't get a strong first born. And he also won't have grandchild. If I procreate with my weak identity, I have no doubt that all the offspring will be stupid, selfish, promiscuous (have sex with many), obstacle, malignant (jealous), insecure, obtuse (dull), fool. I have become the new generation who changed my pure blood line with my selfish desires.

Ezra analyzed the impact of submitting to his worldly desires has had on his life, and articulated a deep awareness of the negative influences as well as the ways in which these influences had fired up and changed the way he perceived himself. He failed not only as a spiritual man but also as a son. In contrast to the righteous identity he constructed, which he introduced earlier, now Ezra identified himself as a weak son and worthless man just like the rest of his generation. So what become of him as a result of his transition can be taken as an antitype of his previous self. This new self is in fact an opponent, an obstruction to the initial quest and plot of Ezra's narrative. Even though Ezra's main purpose in life was to remain pure and holly, his life took an acute turn in the opposite direction: “የሆነ ቦታ ጋ፣ የሆኑ ቦታዎች ጋ እኔን የሞገሰ ለውጥ ያደባ ይሆናል ጠይምባይነቱን እንጂ እየቆረቆረኝ ነው። ” (Merek, 2017:422). (“At some place, at some places, a change that will swallow me might be skulking..... or it is already munching me, even though I am not aware of it”).

The type of change that Ezra describes in the above quote represents the constructionists' notion of transformative and transient nature of self in opposition to one enduring self. This change affected most areas of his life. He lost interest in many things, and was burdened by a feeling of vengeance. His job seized to be satisfying and became a source of fatigue and boredom. He felt like he has become extremely weak and so thinks of changing place until his soul recuperates. In comparison with his previous vibrant life, his current situation was a descent in to depression and hopelessness. But in the mean time Ezra also considers what is important for the betterment of his life and tries to renegotiate his subject position as a spiritual man. For instance, despite what Makida did to him, he struggled to overcome his feelings of vengeance and tried to offer her some help. This can be interpreted as a desire to reassume his old spiritual identity. He was yearning for self restitution.

This attempt of renegotiating subject positions put Ezra on a crossroad as it triggers the question whether he will find the courage to repent and reassume his former identity as a righteous man or keep on his current path. This question is left unanswered in the novel. At the story's conclusion Ezra sits in his bed in darkness confused by a sound he thought he has heard (Makida's voice calling his name). As he lies back on his bed failing to hear the sound again, he thinks of his lost love Makida, coming to no conclusion about his fate with her. Ezra ends his narrative calling

Makida’s name in the darkness and asking for her whereabouts. “**ጣዳ የትነሽ?** (Merek, 2017:437). (“Where are you Makida?”).

It remains unsaid whether he gets back with Makida, and more saliently his desire to see her again, despite her unfaithfulness to him, does not guarantee a happy ending. The story, then, ends with the central concerns of the narrator unresolved. The final fate of his affair with Makida or his spiritual identity is unknown. The narrative is left without any closure as it ceases in mid point. The lack of definite closure in Ezra’s narrative points to the instability and uncertainty of existence and the impossibility of true closure within human experience. On the other hand, this ending can be interpreted as Ezra choosing Makida and his sexual freedom over God and his spirituality by repeatedly calling on Makida’s name for salvation instead of his God’s.

In general, compared to the other characters, Ezra didn’t face so much adversity in his life so his life story is not as colorful as the rest. Even his unattractive physical appearance never initiated him to make changes in his life like Mitik and Bella, but instead forever remain invisible. It is quite in his interaction with Makida that he undergoes through any significant change at all. Clearly, Ezra was exposed to temptations because of his young age and he was responsive to these temptations, and Makida is the price of this responsiveness. His encounter with this girl inspired him to bring great change to his economic status and spiritual views. Hence, the flow of his identity construction mostly remained passive as opposed to the dynamic nature of the process seen in the narratives of the rest of the characters.

4.6. Makida- The Story of Beauty and the Beast

Similar to Ezra the character Makida believes that her story should be told as long as there is someone to listen. So she paves the way for her self-narrative by posing a rhetorical question targeted to normalize the case:

እንደተማት ደረስኩላችዎ፣ሆ! አሉ፣ ሆ! ብለውጡሆ! ብለውጡዳ አለች ብለው:....

እንዳሳላሳሉት ሆነ ላችዎ:.....

ፃፃለ ያሳለፍኩትን ለማጣጣኝ ከ ‘ሀ’ እስከግግትክ በአጭ እንሆ ብል?.... (Merek, 2017:442).

*I reached puberty as they have wished and they gathered! They come gathered!
They come gathered assuming Makida is there.....*

And so it came to pass for them as they have contemplated.....

What's the problem if I tell my story from 'A' to whatever for the one who would listen to me?.....

4.6.1. Story Synopsis

Makida was born into a very poor family who struggles for survival on a daily basis. As such she grew up in poverty-stricken environment. Despite the limitation of her parents to fulfill her basic needs, Makida had a very happy childhood playing with all the children in her neighborhood in their beautiful natural environment. Her happiness was complete until she reached puberty and became a center of attention for men.

On one rainy day, while she was walking on the road, she met with Almaz, a rich hotel owner in her neighborhood, who offered her a ride home. This woman puts Makida's life journey on a new and unexpected track. After their first meeting on which Almaz offered some cloth for Makida just to get her out of her wet cloth, their relationship become stronger. Makida was happy to be able to fulfill her basic needs with all the free gifts she was receiving from Almaz, while Almaz was interested in Makida's beauty, which was a potential source of money. It was not long after their seeming friendship started that Almaz manipulated Makida and get her raped by a rich old man.

After that day Makida was trapped in a life she never imagined she would have. At such a young age, she started going out with different men, including the old man who raped her, for money, which slowly dragged and drowned her in this life. She even joined a group of girls who were on the same path as she is and become a prostitute with regular clients. Despite what is going on in her life when she went out, she remained to be the same innocent girl to her parents and at home.

Most times she had to do things she did not want to do in a bid to find meaning in a supposedly meaningless and suffering fraught life. It was when she was entrapped in this life that an opportunity to find new meaning to her life presented itself for her in the form of her encounter with Ezra. She was deep in to this life when she began seeing Ezra who unlike her clients truly

loved her and restored peace and love in her life. After her experience with Ezra, she decided to abandon her old habits and change her life for the better.

However, she was still seeing some of her clients and one day, she discovered that she has a sexually transmitted disease and realized that she has given it to Ezra too. This put an end to their relationship and forced Makida to change her way of life and look back on her simple childhood. Inspired by the memories of her innocent childhood, Makida became determined to change herself. She decided to peruse her education and even engage in small businesses so that she can earn her own money. Not long after this incident Makida moves to a new neighborhood with her parents and this puts an even bigger distance between her and Ezra. The story ends with Ezra trying to hint his desire for them to get back together by sending her a bed, while Makida remained unresponsive, at least in action, which makes their breakup somewhat, appear permanent.

4.6.2. Dominant Storyline and Important Life Events

Generally looking at Makida’s self-narrative it seems like she wanted to foreground a specific period in her life and what happened in it, i.e. her transitional time from childhood to puberty and her life as a young adult. She also strongly associates this part of her life with the values of the society and its undeniable influence on her. Compared to other areas of her life, such as her childhood, this part of her life has been given strong emphasis that it can clearly be taken as the dominant story of her narrative.

This dominant story is constituted by three important life events that are powerful enough to guide the path of Makida’s life and by implication her sense of self as well. The first one is her birth into a poor family, which become the source of her rough childhood: “**ኛግር አይቼለሁ፡ ... በላጋ እድሜ ... ግድግዳኝ ... ያለቀስከባት ጊዜ አለ፡፡**” (Merek, 2017:443). (“I have seen hardships in life. ... At a young ... there is a time that I have cried from hunger.”)

These difficulties to fulfill basic needs affected Makida even more as a young girl. Her neediness would force her to fall under a trap that led her to unexpected consequences. It was through this crack of her life that Almazie entered to change the course of her life. “**’... ይህን ነገር አወልቄ እኔ የሚጠግኝን አሞላሻለሁ’ አለች፡ ..ከአስር ደቂቃ በኋላ አንድ ካፍቴራ አንድ ሽራብ፣ አንድ የሚገደድ ገርድ**

ቀጣይ ይዞ ጠጥኛ፡ ” (Merek, 2017:451). (“... take this thing off, I will bring you something that fits you’ she said. ... Ten minutes after she came back with a t-shirt a sweater and beautiful skirt.”

Makida’s first meeting with Almazie is the second important event in her life because it was almost immediately followed by a turning point that marked significant shift in her life-her transition from an innocent little girl to a sex worker. She would have passed several months in this rough road before the third important event unfolded in her life-her encounter with Ezra. **“እግሬም ሳለስቦት ታዘና በት ጠይቅኝና ስደጄን የለጠኝሁን አረፍተ ነገር ተናገርኩ ‘እነራ አለ?’ ”** (Merek, 2017:489). (“Accidentally, my foot took me to Tazina house and I spoke the sentence that changed my life: ‘Is Ezra around?’”).

Her life took once again, an acute turn through the love affair she would have with Ezra. In the following analysis, Makida’s self construction which is inseparable from her story then, unfolds in line with these three important life events under the dominant story.

4.6.3. Construction of Self in Makida’s Self-narrative

Unlike the other character-narrators whose self narratives are analyzed above, the pretext given by Makida to her story is a bit longer and alludes to the self narrative to be unfolded. Because of this I found it worthwhile to invest a couple of paragraphs discussing it as an exception to the rest of the self narratives’ pretexts, from which I quote catching statements as openings for the analysis to follow but do not discuss in detail.

This pretext cruises around the natural environment she grew up and the strong relation she had with nature as a child. The opening paragraph is a peculiar mythological narrative about her birth place Shiromeda. In this narrative the plants, animals and even the landmass of this place are said to originate straight from paradise; as such they are both pure and beautiful: **“... አላቁን ጣሉ በአረንጓዴ የተሸፈነች ... እንደጣቱትም ብዙላክ ቅር የሚል..”** (Merek, 2017:440). (“... it is green all year round ... reasonable enough even if it is worshiped like an idol...”).

Then she continues narrating specific moments of her childhood where she associated with and enjoyed this natural environment. By creating strong connection between herself and the natural environment, Makida is establishing her sense of self as part of it-pure and beautiful. However,

this relationship was interrupted by her puberty and following that those who are said to be determined to destroy this innocence and beauty, as in:

..በጤፍታ የሚኖሩ ምናን ያሳዩቸው ቀይ ዳማ ልጃገረዶች ነበሩ። እንዲህ ሳያኖው እነሱን ለሞት ተሞክሮ። ..ስሞና ስቀና ... አስራ አምስት ያልሞሉት ደረቴን ተባዕቶች ሽተው የግዝግብን ቀን ላለላላት... አሰሩ ... (Merek, 2017:442).

... there were girls that I would glance at and are fair and pretty as a result of their comfortable life. When I see them like this, I wished to become them. ... While I was wishing and being jealous ... men desired my immature chest and conspired not to forget the day that I would be ripening ...

Unlike Bella and Mitik, Makida is attractive, outgoing and charming. She possesses innately those qualities that Mitik only gains through an intense personal struggle. According to her narrative she appears to be something of a rarity of beauty. However her beauty becomes a trap and forced her life to take unexpected and dangerous turn. Now, I made this pretext part of the analysis because later in her story Makida reinforced it by her account of Almazie’s malignant deeds and after that the ill treatment of all the men she went out with.

The self narrative per se opens with the sentence: **“እንግዲህ እራሳቸው ሰነዳኝ ነው”** (Merek, 2017:443). (“It is how they themselves told me:”) followed by a summary of her parents’ story: their meeting, marriage and unfortunate straggle to better their life: **“አባቴ ... እና ... እናቴ ... ትዳር ማረፊያ። ... ደሰራሉ ከሁድ አያልፍም። ... እኔ ከተስፋቸው ዘመን ነው የተወለድኩት። እንደገናም... ተስፋቸው እኔ ላይ ነበር የሚሉት።”** (Merek, 2017:443). (“My father ... and ... my mother ... got married. ... They work but what they earn does not cover more than food. ... I was born in the promising years of their life. Again ... I was their hope.”). Then Makida goes on to provide some vital information about herself and her parents, summarizing the first fifteen years of her life in order to present them in an overview.

... እድሜ ከፍ ሰል ... አፋቸው ተባዕኝ። “የት ሂደኝ?” “እስከ አሁን የት ነበርኝ?” “ማውያ አብረኝ የነበረው?” ... አንድ ቀን እንደተለሰሰው እሞግ እኔ ጉልት ተቀምጠኝ ስንሸጥ ወንዶች በሞሉ ወደ እኔ እንደሚጠሉ አየኝ። ... ደግሞ ገዥ አደርጋ ከገ ጆሮ እሷ ቻቻ ቁጣ እንደሚሰጥ ነገረኝ። (Merek, 2017:444).

... When I get older, ... their controlling critic towards me became sharp. ... “Where did you go?” “Where have you been?” “Who was that guy with you?” ... one day when mom and I were working as usual on our small retailing business, she noticed that all the men come to me. ... She lowered her voice and told me that starting from tomorrow, only she will sell the bread.

This introductory section strongly signals an acknowledgment of the need to guide and orient the reader while introducing him/her to an unfamiliar world. In this sense the story has a narrative quality of tight chronological plot; hence in the case of Makida’s self narrative the beginning of the narrative text (sjuzet) and the beginning of the chronological story (fabula) become similar. The sub-title given to this introductory section “የጀመርኩ” (how I began) also points to the fact that it is the beginning of the self-narrative.

This beginning, which briefly shows the family’s life situation, alludes to the significant role that their poverty will play in the yet unknown important event of Makida’s life. So Makida gives strong emphasis to her birth in to a poor family and also mark it as a significant event of her life. It is where her first sense of self originated; she recognized herself as a poor girl, as in: **‘ከ’ሙሉድ’ የበለጠ ቀልፍ ጉዳይ የለም፡ ሕይወቴ የጀመረው ከወንድሰንና ከሙሉድ ስወላድ ነው፡ ... አዎ ደንገት የረሷ ጉዳት አላት፡**” (Merek, 2017:447). (“There is nothing more decisive thing in life than ‘lineage’. My life started when I was born from Wondoson and Maldeya. ... Yeah, poverty has its own down side.”).

This down side of poverty was expressed in Makida’s life as her parents’ failure to fulfill her basic needs such as food and cloth, which led to her desire for a better life just as the girls she mentioned in her pretext. She aspired to be them. This is the place where Almazie steps in to fulfill the role of a mother as provider and comforter, something Makida's mother could not afford. This interference disrupts the harmonious plot of her poverty-struck life story and pushes it forward through the creation of identity conflicts fueled by tense events and moments. It became one of the most important events and turning point of her life followed by significant shifts in her identity: **“አልሜ ፲፮ ለአፍታ ቆየኩና ፲ ዳቦይ ተለወጠ፡**” (Merek, 2017:455). (“I stood besides Almazie for a moment and my path changed”).

She was raped and descended into the cheap road of prostitution, forever destroying her childhood innocence. She then discussed the difficulties of inhabiting this new path of her life as a conflict between two selves. She described feeling an increasing degree of disgust at what she was becoming, as in: **“ግን ሁሉ ሆኖ ቤቴ ተጨሽ ለብዬን የጣላላኝ፣ ..ስሜ ነበር፣ ... የሆነ ነገር ከወሰጡ የተሰደደ ጣላላኝ፣ ”** (Merek, 2017:442). (“But there was something I felt ... when I am back at home after it’s all done. ... I felt like something left from within me.”). And also : **“... የሆነ የባዳት ስሜ እየነዳኝ ስድ የጣላላኝ የሆኑ ነገሮቹን ወደዬ፣ ”** (Merek, 2017:481). (“... driven by some feeling of emptiness I grew to be fond of things that seems and are insolent.”).

Despite the fact that she joined this path against her will, now she clearly identifies herself as a helper, and joined the men in their quest for sexual satisfaction. This change in attitude shows her break from her childhood innocence and marks the emergence of a new identity construct. The fact that she “felt like something left from within her” distinctly indicates the shift that has taken place in her sense of self. Not long ago, Makida identified herself as a little innocent girl under her parents’ control. But now she stepped up into her own right as a free woman and started to see herself as Makida the sex-worker. This shift in identity powerfully reinforces the constructionist assumption of the transient nature of the self.

Standing at this point of her life, Makida felt like she is far from meeting the expectations of the role of the ‘good girl’. What she has become as a result of playing the role of a sex-worker may have brought in-to her life the comfort she once desired, but simultaneously created two conflicting selves in her, as in: **“ግንም የተጠቀሱት ሆኜ ነው የሚገኘኝ፣ ... ግንም የተጠቀሱኝ ግንም ጣላላኝ እኔን ግን ይከብሩልኛል፣ ”** (Merek, 2017:482). (““The one everyone toyed with’, that is what they find me to be. ... But the fact that I am nothing, the one everyone toyed with, is hard for me.”).

For Makida her role as a sex-worker was an important way of claiming her sense of self. At this point, this identity is recognized above all other identities. Therefore, playing this role occupies a heightened significance in Makida’s sense of self. In the above quote, there are two distinct selves; one who is nothing and a toy and the other who conflicts with this self and recognizes it as inappropriate. These two selves exist in juxtaposition and are conflicting. This reflection on

her sense of self, in turn serves to crystallize the tension between hegemonic images of women and what she has actually become.

It is also worth noting here that Makida's anxiety with imagined judgment of others' of her sexual behavior, represents the powerful impact that the society have on her life and sense of self. She posed this description of herself in opposition to the socially constructed good girl image. By doing so Makida interestingly reveals the identity she does not want to be defined by. So when she engaged with this description of herself she was searching for a path that would enable her to reconfigure and reassert a desired identity. The following quote further illustrates this point: **“ከላላውነት አልበርጎ ምክንያት እየሮኘኩ ምክንያት እየለቀሰኩ ወጣሁ፡ ቆላይን በልቼ እየግታለሁ ..የልብ ሰጠሁ ይኼ ቤት ጀርባ ያለ የጉድገዋድ ሽንት ቤት ገባሁ፡ እንደዛ ታገብ አላወቅም...”** (Merek, 2017:495). (“I went out of the motel I frequented, half running and half crying. I would rather die eating my roasted grain ... I grab soap and went to a toilet at the back of my house. I have never showered like that before...”).

Here, there is an eruption of stored energies of dissatisfaction with her life. Her tears express a bitter disappointment with the way she has turned out to be. To leave the place in this manner can be a way of trying to find her own way in life and ultimately herself. After this incident, Makida began to progressively recognize the futility and absurdity of her life. This is especially noticeable in Makida's reassessment of her previous expectations and the current status of her life; stressing the contrast between what was imagined and what happened in reality: **“ካብ ማገዶ በዘወትር ጥላን አወጃች ተቀዳሳ ያልሆነ ቦታ የቆየኩ ይሆናለኛል፡፡** (Merek, 2017:486). (“Somehow, it seems to me that my path has been engineered by some engineers and now I am standing at the wrong place.”).

Notable in this statement is Makida's awareness of the influence she has received from her surrounding environment-the society. She does recognize that those significant people in her life shaped her into who she is today and that they are also inseparable from what they have created, as she clearly states: **“በትኩረት ግን እኔ ቆሻሻ ከሆንኩ እኔ ነኝ ቆሻሻ?”** (Merek, 2017:566). (“But if I am really trash, am I the one who is trash?”).

In this sense, her narrative does not only explore the story of her life but also focuses on the more resounding intention of the community, who, as she claimed in her pretext, have conspired

against her and seeks to destroy the fragile innocence of her childhood. The society is the beast that destroyed the beauty of her childhood innocence. Based on this realization Makida came to a decision that she must honor her individual complexity and reconfigure what she thought to be her true self without caring what everyone else thinks about her. This decision was followed by withdrawal from her role as a sex-worker in order to reassume the identity role of a pure girl, as in: “... እግግታዬን በአፈ ስሰጭ እርካታ ሰጥኛል፡ ረቤን ልክ እነሱ እንዳይኝ እንግዳ አደርጌ አየሁ፡፡” (Merek, 2017:526). (“... hearing my refusal from my own mouth has brought me satisfaction. Just like they saw me, I saw myself as strange.”).

This refusal was given as answer to a sex proposal by one of her clients. This furious action was the beginning of Makida’s struggle for self restitution and recreation. The fact that Makida observed this resistant self as “strange” is an indication of how much she has identified with her identity role of a sex-worker and turning her back on it brings doubt regarding her sense of self. This is a good illustration of Gergen’s claim of how the self cannot be ultimately known because “For everything we know ‘to be true’ about ourselves, other voices within respond with doubt”.

It is also worth noting here that she has grown stronger to be able to take control of her life, thereby indicating that she is not a mere puppet, but fully capable of thinking for herself. But her internal struggle of competing identities, which is hinted in the above quote, was not as easy as the external struggle she had with her clients.

... ያን ማታ ወንድ አሰኘኝ፡ ሀላት እንደሆኑ አልጋ ላይ ነበር፤ እንቅልፍ ሊጥላችው፡ የተለከፈው አንዱ አልጋ ላይ አንሰላ አቅፎ ሰቀር ፣ ለላው ገፀሀ ለጦህን የሚጠረው ደሞ ወደ ሕልም አለም ተነሳ፡፡ (Merek, 2017:533).

...That night, I craved for a man. There were two of me on bed, right about to fell asleep. While the one who is possessed remained on bed grabbing bed sheet, the other who tries to be pure rose up to the world of dream.

This two competing selves have become a source of identity struggle for Makida. She is torn apart by the opposing desires of these conflicting selves. Notable here is that the clear recognition of two distinct selves, which emphasizes constructionists’ view of competing identities as opposed to a core enduring self. Moreover, Gergen’s idea of ‘multiplicity of selves’

is particularly reinforced in the following self observation of Makida: “**ራሴን ብዩረው ስንት ሺህ እሆናለሁ?**” (Merek, 2017:556). (“If I count myself, how many thousands would I account for?”).

An opportunity opens for Makida when she was in the middle of this identity struggle and that would push these conflicting selves further apart. She met Ezra who, unlike Almazie, inspired her to change herself for the better. Her encounter with Ezra led to a discovery, which made her further reassess her past, as in: “**... የግዛጠማ እንደሆነኩ የገባኝ እገራን ሳገኝ ነው።**” (Merek, 2017:559-560). (“It was when I met Ezra that I realized that I have become what I hate.”). Then she says: “**እገራ ሲያጠቅኝ የሌላ አለም ልግጅ ወሰጥ ያለሁ ጠላጅ፣ እንግዳነቱ ሳበኝ፣ ሌላ ጣዳ የሆነኩ ጠላጅ፣ ሌላ ሴት፣**” (Merek, 2017:522). (“When Ezra amused me, I felt like I am in another worldly experience. Its unusualness draws me in. I felt like I have become another Makida. Another woman.”).

By the time Makida met with Ezra Makida’s sense of self was predominantly aligned with her position as a sex worker. So Ezra plays the role of a savior as her sense of self has been deeply influenced and changed after their meeting. Her relationship with Ezra created possibilities of transformation for her after the devastating experiences she had in her life. Therefore, Makida's encounter with Ezra is a new transitional moment, a turning point for her to be followed by identity work.

The reconstruction of her identity, as she further hinted, came from her experience of pure love with Ezra. The beautiful girl falls for the ugly man, the beast, and he redeems her. He puts her on this path of self retrieval and she recreates herself through this experience of pure love. This brings a resolution to the conflict Makida felt from within regarding her journey away from her childhood innocence. At the verge of destruction she regained control, which enabled her to start a new life. The strength she found from this experience helped her not to look back and reassume her other self-“the possessed one”. So even after her relationship with Ezra ended she continued with her new path of reconstructing her sense of self.

ለጥቂት ሳምንታት ከእገራ ጋር ወጣሁ፣ ደስተኛ ነበርኩ ግን፣ ... ከእሱ ጋር ያለፍኩትው ስሌታት ለዘላለም የሚታይ ምልክት ለሌላም፣ አልተደገመም፣ በባክቴሪያ ተለከፍኩ፣ (Merek, 2017:543).

I went out with Ezra for few weeks. I was happy but, ... I does not seem like the hours I spent with him are going to be repeated for forever. They were not. ... I got infected with bacteria.

This breakup puts the plot on fast wheels to accelerate towards its end. After her breakup with Ezra on the event of her being diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease, Makida remained on track of her new life and identity work and this was possible because Ezra's love was there in her heart to influence her and she was not short of hope like the first time she encountered crisis in her life. Ezra served as an important motivational force for the shift created in Makida's identity.

The ending paragraphs of Makida's self-narrative show that she has found some kind of peace in the environment of her parents' new house as well as in herself. Her fresh surrounding and new plan she has for her life through the college education she started depict the change and the phasing off of the old self for the present awareness of the new transformed self. In this final part of her narrative a new individual with a definite, concrete self comes out. This closure, however, only works on the narrative's surface level. On a deeper level, she is left to negotiate the story of her former identity.

There are also some questions left unanswered in the end. For example the reason why she remained passive for Ezra's implicit request for remedial of their relationship is not clear. Thus, the narrative ends with no indication if Makida would ever see Ezra again and whether their relationship would continue. The narrative ends with the following two significant statements of the last two paragraphs that indicate Makida's desire to be with Ezra and her hope in the future.

However, as is the case with Ezra's narrative ending, desire does not guarantee a happy ending. “**ግጥም ያግኘኛል፡ በዛ ጨግአፊን እስከሞገሻው ከፍቼ እገራ!** (Merek, 2017:583). (“I desire to scream. In that darkness, with my mouth wide open, Ezra!”). and then finally she says: “**ፀሐይን ጠቃ ቀን እስከጨምዶረስ፣ ነገም ለሌ ቀን ነው**” (Merek, 2017:583). (“Until the sun sets and darkness falls, ‘tomorrow is another day’”).

To sum up, taking a glance at the beginning of Makida's life story, her identity seems to be not very complex at all, since she is an innocent happy little girl. But this changes when one pays attention to the clues she left in her pretext. In her story, Makida clearly sought to construct a

meaningful and unified narrative of the self by locating continuities in the roles of little girl (daughter), sex worker and finally lover. She relates her journey from infantile innocence to adult awareness and the transmutability of her identity unfolding through these phases is resonant.

By way of summarizing this analysis, I have presented my observation of the ways these five character-narrators relate to their stories as follows. Bella is the extreme version. She identifies too much with her problems, and gets lost in them creating multiple personalities. When she tries to put the fragments of these multiple identities together, she ends up being nobody. Mitik, on the other hand, has little understanding of who she is, as well as limited insight into the mystery of her future, but she becomes aware of herself for the first time through the mirror reflection of the society which leads to a process of self-reconstruction. Through confrontation with her problematic identity, some self-understanding is achieved, and not stagnation and dissolution as is the case with Bella.

The case is somewhat different for Menelik whose story of unsuccessful love affair is so intertwined with his sense of self. This identification with the past as the source of his sense of self is ended with Menelik vomiting out of disgust, at the sight of Fiameta on television. This action enables him to let go of his obsession and thus return to the world of other experiences, represented by his natural surrounding and family. He began to move away from his isolation, and relate to other people and the outside world again.

Ezra's strong cling to spirituality is embodied by the presence of religious belief, both at a personal and familial level. However, he failed to lend his life to pure spirituality, as he was imbued with a sensation of worldly desires. His transition unfolded through his relationship with Makida but returned to an ambivalent state of two opposing subject positions. Makida on the other hand, returned to something meaningful with the help of Ezra. Her encounter with Ezra changed her views of herself, and she was able to break free out of her problematic past identity. The importance of relationships in determining one's sense of self is especially shown through Makida, whose contact with Ezra became an important factor in her development, unlike Bella, who failed at relationships, and Menelik, who only returned to his wife after his identity crisis was over.

CHARTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Summary

This dissertation began by introducing a problem, that if narratives are believed to contribute to the construction of self, then how do they do so? Taking self to be a socially situated narrative construct, the self narratives told by selected characters from Adam Retta's two novels *Yesinibit Kelemat* and *Merek* were used as a means to investigate this question.

Self was introduced as a complex concept in the literature review, and its relationship with narrative was discussed. This relationship provided a basis for the methodological approach used in the research, working within a social constructionist epistemology. Moreover, plot as a fundamental element of narrative and a very important factor to organize life stories has received due attention and reviewed. The review is completed by showing the difference between the current study and previous studies done in the area, which diverge from this study with regards to either the theory applied or the texts analyzed, or in general the concept of self is approached. This gap led me to this study as an initial insight to explore self as a narrative construct.

The theoretical framework of the study is developed based on recent theoretical developments in narrative identity studies, with a departure in social constructionist perspectives, where self is conceived as a narrative construct embedded in social practices and contexts. Based on this, the framework is designed to investigate the emergence of fictional selves as processes of identity work in particular contexts, privileging the use of language. At the same time, attention was paid to the broader socio-cultural systems influencing the construction of characters' identities. In addition to this, the framework incorporates plot construction as an important means of organizing self narratives, specifically focusing on narrative beginnings and endings. Therefore, the analytical framework is built integrating literary theory and identity theory from the

perspective of constructionism, in order to investigate fictional characters' identity construction processes.

The analysis has featured five character-narrators, who are predominantly preoccupied with relating their life stories. The self-narratives are analyzed within the above mentioned theoretical and methodological framework inspired by a combination of social constructionist identity theory and literary theory. The analysis proceeded focusing on concepts such as narrative beginnings and endings, important life events, turning points and identity changes that are important in narrative identity construction process. Analyzing these self-narratives has allowed the complexity of the self to be revealed, whilst being explored for its various aspects, such as its social and transient nature. The analysis also adds to the knowledge of narrative identity by providing textual evidences to illustrate the idea that self is narratively constructed in social contexts. The study is concluded with the research findings, limitations and implications for future studies in the area.

I sought to answer the research questions I have asked at the beginning of this study by examining selected self-narratives focusing on important life events. Following this and based on the analysis in the previous chapter, I was able to come up with the following findings. First, dominant stories are frequently found to be problem-loaded, i.e., the important life events that characters choose to focus on when they tell their story are usually problematic. This is also in line with Bruner's conception of dominant stories as "problem-loaded" areas of self narratives. Menelik, for instance, tells, in an incredible detail, how much he has suffered from unreciprocated love, which finally puts him in his grave while Bella invested much of her narrative to explain how the society's ill treatment forced her to live shifting in between fake identities.

Narrative beginnings and endings are structured in such a way that they can give significant clues regarding where important life events are located in the overall self-narratives and their role in shaping characters' identities. Beginnings of the narrative texts, on the one hand, provided valuable information regarding the points that the narrating subject wants to accentuate on in the narrative to be unfolded. On the other hand, beginnings of the chronological story shade light on familial influences on the identity of the narrating subject.

In addition to this, multiple flashbacks situate three of the self-narratives with beginnings “in medias res”, which in most cases served as indicator of the following chaotic life story with conflicting selves and identity struggles. The fact that Bella begins and ends her story complaining about Fiameta puts this woman at the center of her narrative, whereas Menelik begins and ends his narrative with his death, which is caused by Fiameta, is illustrative of the influence that significant other’s can exert in the construction of one’s narrative identity.

Regarding endings, Mitik and Makida, by the end of theirself narratives, made clear choices to reconstruct their identities and dive into new sense of selves, whereas Bella and Ezra remain trapped in the web of doubt as they face alternating choices whether to remain as they are or embrace the changes in their sense of self and reconfigure their new identities. Menelik stands unique among these five characters as his story is concluded with a definite end (death). The open endings of two of the self-narratives prove to designate the ongoing nature of identity work.

Moreover, in relation to these important life events, three specific experiences recur as fertile grounds from which characters draw strong sense of self. One of these experiences is perception of the physical body. Apparently how the physical body is organized structurally matters in shaping the characters’ identity. For instance, Mitik, Ezira and Bella were told by people around them (significant others) that they were physically unattractive. These experiences are used by these characters as important narrative resources to construct a diminished sense of self in their self-narratives; the “I am ugly” identity construct, which is characterized by low self-esteem, insecurity, fear and negativity.

Suffering proves to be the other common ground of the characters in their use of narrative resources to construct their identities. Almost all the character-narrators whose stories are analyzed in this study put suffering at the center of their self narratives. Menelik’s deprivation of love, Bella’s familial displacement, Mitik’s and Makida’s poverty and Ezra’s sexual temptation are all considered as important life experiences where the respective characters’ sense of selves are invested. Suffering thus, has become an emergence point of identities characterized by the feelings of incompleteness, unhappiness, shame and pessimism.

The other such recurring experience that characters draw their identities from is relationship. The characters’ stories are profoundly relationship stories, i.e., stories about themselves as relational

beings. Relations with others are central not only to the formation of the narrators' identity, but also to sustaining it in a secured way. Lack or loss of these relationship ties are at the heart of some of the characters' crises, while for others new relationships have become important anchors in their new life situations. Menelik's incompleteness was the result of absence of such relationship in his life while its presence in Makida's life became an important factor in the reconfiguration of her identity. The subject narratives, therefore, exhibit the way that the interplay with other human beings influences how a person defines who he/she is. In general, the analysis has illustrated how important life experiences, which constitute dominant stories, become narrative resources where characters rely on when constructing their identity.

Second, turning points are characterized by surprising incidents powerful enough to shake the foundation of characters' established identities followed by brief moments of confusion or emptiness as to how to define the self. This can be seen in the individual emotions that followed when characters confronted unexpected situations, difficulties and problems and find themselves being unable to articulate these experiences. The case is best illustrated in the narrative of Bella who, at some point in her life met with an incident that led to the collapse of her narrative identity. All the narratives she has been using to define herself suddenly stopped making sense and she was unable to tell who she is anymore. She had to go through a brief moment of emptiness or not knowing who she is before coming up with new narratives to define the self. Menelik has also passed through a similar path when he faced the greatest delusion of his life. Ezra ended up questioning his religious views that he was defined by, while Makida was overwhelmed by the sudden slip up of her childhood innocence. Turning points also involved profound shifts in the narrators' identity. These shifts in turn accelerate the plot's progress by bringing characters' transformation.

Third, identity changes are mainly triggered by influences from significant others (society), followed by sudden and enlightening realizations about the self. For instance it was the society that first pointed out for Mitik that her boyish behaviors were in opposition with her gender identity and later she realized that she can be better appreciated with an identity constituting more feminine qualities. Bella and Menelik started questioning the stories they had lived by the minute they learned that they both have been manipulated by her best friend her entire life. This

incident was followed by a sudden realization that she can no longer be defined by her old stories and that there is a need for alternative narratives to define the self.

In addition to this identity changes are met with resistance or dilemma when the change is undesired and is accepted with open heart when it is desirable. Mitik had a very hard time changing her boyish behaviors, which the society pointed out as inappropriate, because she favored masculine qualities rather than feminine ones. So the entire process of identity change is characterized by resisting the pull of significant others (society). Ezra's transition from being a true worshiper to a sexually corrupted sinner, on the other hand, was dilemmatic. Menelik and Bella are more open to identity change mainly because it heralded the end of a suffering identity and the emergence of a new desirable sense of self. In all these processes of identity construction the way the characters' identities develop and continuously change shows the nature of self in its volatility and transformation. To sum up, the common denominator in the five self-narratives analyzed in the previous chapter is identity change; a motion from childhood innocence to adulthood self awareness.

5.2. Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to contribute to the understanding of the narrative construction of self, as representing the interplay between self and narrative. Based on this, the study approached fictional selves, as narrative constructs, with heavy reliance on conceptualizations of narrative identity theory from a constructionist perspective and theory of plot in literary criticism. The application of social constructionist theory of narrative self-construction in conjunction with literary theory of plot, narrative beginnings and endings, to Adam Retta's two Amharic novels *Yesinibit Kelemat* and *Merek* has been an extremely useful tool for understanding the process of narrative self-construction of the five characters analyzed in this study. Furthermore, the use of this combined framework to analyze literary texts, has given new inspirational perspectives and provided alternative ways of studying fictional identity making, as well as inspire new models with which to build literary analytical frameworks.

Throughout this study, I have argued that a preoccupation with the power of narrative to create identities is a defining feature of Adam's novels, *Yesinibit Kelemat* and *Merek*. The five character-narrators whose life stories are analyzed in this study, developed coherent self-

narratives with ascending plots and a central dominant story around which the trajectories of important life events revolved to construct their identities. As a result each narrative has become an attempt by the narrator to participate in his/her own self-construction, making the recurring theme of identity present throughout both these novels. Hence, the narrative technique Adam employed in these novels provided an arena in which it was possible to deal with the complexity of narration as a means of forming identities. What is seen in the analysis presented in chapter four was all five self-narratives coincide in the notable emphasis placed on the fact that humans have a natural tendency to give narrative shape to their lives.

The research findings, presented in section 5.1., revealed that these character-narrators were actively engaged in sense-making of their experiences and in the production of narrative identities where they construct social, yet independent, selves. The narrators' self-presentation offers the invaluable advantage to display identities by recounting events and actions which are indicative of the claimed identities. Each narrative alternates between the experiences of important life events and their consequences, slowly building up an intertwining sense of causes and effects and the interconnections of seemingly disparate events and people. The stories, then, can be read as arenas of identity making, where the plot functions as a description of self-formation.

One of the trends seen in this process of self-construction is to contextualize one's life by embedding it in the family history for the purpose of gaining insight into the past and direction for the future. As such, early parts of life such as birth and pre-birth narratives are integrated into the self. Integrating these narratives into the life story enabled the narrators to understand and also question parental views of themselves. By including information about the early personal history, the characters also indicate the familial and social influences on their identity development.

Insecurity related to physical unattractiveness is a recurrent identity motif in the subject narratives and envelops most of the characters' narrative identity construction. It appears to be one of the most striking similarities among these narrators as they all perceive the physical body as the most defining attribute of the self. It is evident, then, that a person's physical appearance is a strong element of his/her identity, and as such can work as a useful tool in self-construction. As

Egri (1960) puts it, “A character is the sum total of her physical make-up and the influences her environment exerts upon her at that particular moment” (1960:49).

The struggle and strife as a recurrent motif in the subject narratives reveal the identity construction process of each character and the plot lays bare the thread of each character as each chronicles his/her story critically and in detail. Alterations of most of characters’ identity took place not subtly and smoothly but suddenly and drastically. For instance, Menelik and Bella’s instant transformation is all but unexpected. However, these identity changes have occurred by contextually justified causes in the self-narratives.

The struggles with identity formation that characters go through in the five self-narratives, have different outcomes depending on how well the protagonists are able to create and sustain the narratives of their own selves, as well as learn from their past. Notable here is that, not all characters align themselves with the shifts taking place in their identity; nonetheless, such struggles came to be an integral part of their identity construction process. The many identity changes that these character-narrators have gone through in their lifetimes emphasize the social constructionists’ conviction to multiple and ever changing identities rather than one enduring self. Moreover, transitional moments are located in the climax and end of the self-narratives, signaling subsequently possibility of new beginning in the life of the characters, thus attaining a narratological functions at well.

Some of the self-narratives analyzed begin unexpectedly and some end without definite conclusion. Multiple flashbacks situate these narratives with beginnings in medias res, while delaying the chronological starting point. The sudden openings of these narratives emphasize that in our postmodern world, each moment is potentially capable of bringing dramatic change in individual’s life. On the other hand, by undermining the traditional rules of closure, these self-narratives also highlight the importance of continued negotiation and necessary in self-construction. The open-ended closures therefore, reflect the postmodern vision of the world as constituted by ongoing choices, a world without comforting finality. In this sense, the self-narratives endings resemble more the unpredictable entanglement of real life than the usual orderliness of fiction. Through these character-narrators we realize the human nature and its aspects, mainly in our postmodern life and its complexities.

In general, this dissertation illustrates how self-construction is an ongoing social and narrative practice. Thus, constructing one's identity is not a task to be solved or something to be settled once and for all. Narrative construction of identity emphasizes how individuals manage and balance everyday life experiences through the force of narrative reconstruction in social contexts. Individuals emerge from and are embedded in social interaction and context.

The characters' journey to self-construction reveals that consistency is not something to be expected from humans, in the sense that our identities depend on change more than our stable qualities. We have the ability to identify with many different identities and it is through this continuous process of defining ourselves that we realize who we are. In this case, Adam certainly has suggested that there is no ultimate truth about the self. His novels depict the individual's struggle at finding out who he/she is and highlight the problematic nature of identity formation.

Before concluding this final chapter of the study it is important to reflect up on some of the limitations and future research directions of the study. Undertaking a research project entails a long range of decisions, and many choices have to be made. These choices, which specify the research field and framework, make some investigations possible and limit others. Accordingly, one limitation and consideration for future research concerns that can be mentioned in this study is the criteria used to select the subject narratives of the study and methods of data collection. I used only first person narratives for the analysis because the self-construction process can be better illustrated when the narratives are presented by their owners. Moreover, due to the research object being narrative identity and the positioning of the research within a framework of narrative study, the method of data collection was through textual excerpts in order to bring forth important life story accounts. This small sample size, which is caused by time and space constraints, and the researcher's choice of purposeful selection of text excerpts have limited the study's potential to explore a wider sample size of textual excerpts.

Moreover, "identity work" can also take place through characters "dialogues" and "monologues" and other ways of narrative techniques in the third person perspective narratives. However, the selection of narratives in this study has excluded such third person narrator stories which may have also provided a new perspective in relation to characters' narrative identity construction. Future research into characters' narrative identity construction perhaps then should focus on the selection of a wider range of narrative perspectives within fictional texts. In addition to this, the

focus on few selected important life events in the subject self-narratives may have limited the research by allowing the selected segments to be part of the analysis and leaving the rest. Future research may consider incorporating other parts of the narratives; such as stories other than the dominant ones, in order to enable more accurate generalizations about the novels.

An additional limitation is related to the researches analytical framework designed to uncover the complex process of narrative self-construction. The analysis relied on very few concepts of narrative identity theory from the perspective of social constructionism and a single fictional element from literary theory. This potentially delimits very clear cut conclusions and perhaps makes the findings relatively complex. Future inquiry frameworks could incorporate more insights of identity theory concepts of literary theory to enable a more wide-ranging investigation of identity construction processes. A further limitation of the research is reliance on translation. As translation is a process during which inevitably something is lost and subtle changes in the meanings of phrases and words occur, this limitation was inevitable.

With the above mentioned limitations in mind, to further validate or revise the findings of this study, researches, using larger samples of the two novels (*Yesinibit Kelemat* and *Merek*) and better interdisciplinary frameworks, are called forth. Research on this topic could also include theories other than constructionism in order to unravel the complexities of self construction. Since this study focused on fictional texts a similar study on non-fictional narratives; such as biography, autobiography and memoir, might reveal important similarities between real life individuals and fictional characters' identity-making.

In conclusion, the aim of the study has been met to the extent that a greater understanding has been gained of the ways in which narratives contribute to identity. It is anticipated that the findings reported here go some way towards directing attention to and extending our understanding of the self. While the research process has some limitations, this dissertation is believed to have made a contribution, which develops this understanding. It has shown that the analysis of narratives in the context of identity construction can indeed be a fruitful exercise in the quest to understand the self. Hopefully this minor contribution will be of use in other efforts to understand this highly sophisticated subject.

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APPENDIX A: Story Synopsis of *Yesinibit Kelemat*

Tekola, a middle-age man, who is married to Jimmawork, a girl young enough to be his daughter, sat in his car thinking about his recent suspicion of his wife's infidelity. He is sure that he saw her talking to another man on her way home from her night school class, when the fact is that the man he thought he saw is Jimmawork's classmate, a girl, who dresses and acts like a boy. He could not understand why she would see other men when they have love that most people wish for and now he is worried by the way that this case is affecting their marriage. Their relationship has taken an unexpected turn splashing their warm marriage with coldness, and now they barely talk to each other. He was immersed in this thought when his age old friend, Bella, who was passing by, knocked at his car's window to say hi, and get him out of his misery for a moment.

Bella is a half-cast woman in her forties, who is born from an Italian priest and an Eritrean nun, and adopted shortly after her birth by an Eritrean family. She grew up in the middle of intense suffering caused by familial displacement, discriminating society and sexually abusive male guardian. Because of her "unattractive" half-cast physical appearance she suffered from insults and humiliating remarks and none of the boys of her age were interested in any kind of romantic relationships with her. This made her lose trust and interest in the society among which she grew up and become cold and bitter. So, as she gets older she tries to take cover in fake social relations one of which being her friendship with her school mate Fiameta, who remained to be her friend even in her adulthood. Fiameta's exceptional beauty affords her the attention of all kinds of boys and Bella uses this as a shield to hide from brutal criticisms by diverting attention to her friend as she stands next to her.

Menelik was one of these boys who fell for Fiameta's beauty. In contrast to her reluctance and shrewdness in ignoring him, Menelik kept Fiameta in his love-struck heart for most of his life. After completing high school Fiameta left for USA putting a great time and space gap between them. This unreciprocated love ruined most part of Menelik's life, including his unfaithfulness to his marriage with Zufan and his inability to be a good father to his children. He died in the middle of this life after being infected by a mysterious disease, which puts him in his grave in less than a week. However, he was given a second chance on life by a demigod called Menkobiaw and returned to life right before his grave was closed on him.

Menkobiaw is a thumb-sized tiny demigod, who is born from a god and a princess some few thousand years ago. He is imbued with a supernatural power that enables him to stay alive on earth through the ages and perform other extraordinary things such as communicating with animals, sleeping for hundreds of years and appearing in people's dreams. However, his extended life on earth came to an end after meeting with a young girl called Mitik, whom he thought is the ultimate fulfillment of his existence on earth.

Mitik, a good family friend of Menelik and Zufan, is a teenage girl living in absolute poverty with her widowed mother. She struggles to fulfill her basic needs by working with her mother in their small business, where they sell fruits and vegetables. Her life is further complicated by her extraordinary pregnancy, as she has conceived from the demigod, Menkobiaw, while she is still a virgin. It was at this point she met with Yoseph, the physician, who grew fond of her as he was trying to explain her mysterious pregnancy.

Yoseph, a young doctor, who has led a lonely life for quite some time, has recently found love with a pharmacist called Hibist, who loved him back and agreed to live with him under a marriage. Their marriage was blessed with a son named Ibsa and led a happy family life until it was interrupted by Hibist's best friend Salayish, who was jealous of them and destroyed their marriage by employing a very effective method she designed to make Hibist think that her husband is unfaithful. Their marriage was concluded with a divorce after their child Ibsa died with a cause that can be traced back to their severe marital problems.

In the end Tekola realizes his mistakes and returned to being the loving husband he has always been to his wife Jimmawork. Bella, on the other hand encountered a sudden moment of realization that made her understand that the life she has led so far with fake social relations has cost her a lot and that she needs to change and open her heart for love and kindness. While Minilik's second chance on life gave him a space to realize what he has missed in life, regret his past and repent, Menkobiaw procreated with Mitik to replace himself with an exact same tiny demigod as himself, a son, and vanished in thin air once and for all. Mitik found peace with her mysterious pregnancy coming to an end with the birth of a supernatural being, a tiny demigod, and her financial problems solved with the miraculous riches brought to her by Menkobiaw, whereas, Yoseph finds love with Mitik and becomes happy once again.

APPENDIX B: Story Synopsis of *Merek*

Born in to a middle class family, Alazar grew up in a relatively comfortable life situation. As a child he was spoiled by his mother, grandmother and nanny, and led a happy childhood with the children in his neighborhood. When he was a teenager, he fell in love with a girl, Tebareki, who lived in the same village as his. They loved each other in innocence and enjoyed some romantic days together before the period's political conditions (the revolution and its aftermath) start to affect them. Tebareki had to join a political party (an opposition) and became seriously engaged in the party's agendas, which created a big gap in their relationship. Alazar was also affected, in his own way, by the chaos of this specific period. He had no option but to flee the country in darkness so as to escape the unavoidable national duty of participating in the civil war that the country was in at the time. But before their relationship ended with Alazar's departure, Tebareki conceived from Alazar, who went abroad right after and without being aware of the incident.

Ezra, a best friend and age mate of Alazar, is a man who leads a spiritual life with his priest father. As a child he attended both the traditional and modern education in the country and has served as a deacon in one of the churches in Addis Ababa, which contributed to his strict spirituality. When his father died, he inherited the hotel, which was the source of income for the life he led with his father. After the hotel became his, he made several changes and created it anew, which made it the best hotel in the area. Ezra become rich and gets recognition of others for his effort. Then a moment came in his life that changed his path, he fell in love with a young, beautiful girl, Makida. He was forced to break away from the path of his spirituality and sinning and disgracing his body was inevitable in the face of this powerful love. Though he managed to express his love and be with this girl, their relationship did not stayed for long because of Makida's unfaithfulness, which caused them both to be infected with a Sexually Transmitted Disease.

In the end, Tebareki, after having Alazar's child, married another guy and settled her life with him, despite her deep love for Alazar. Whereas, Alazar went abroad and never returned to his home land again, and this left him unaware of the existence of his child. Ezra and Makida breakup, and though there are some clues that they both wish to get back together and resume their relationship, the story ends without this happening.