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**FEMALE ROLES AND SACRIFICE IN POLITICAL DRAMA  
AND FILM: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ‘*DEATH AND  
MAIDEN*’ AND ‘*THE FATHER*’ FROM A FEMINIST  
PERSPECTIVE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The growing interest in gender issues, relationships, family constructs etc can be seen in academia and elsewhere. The power of literary texts, plays, films and dramas in the formation and perception of women's images is immense. These perceptions change with time and ideology. Change in ideology, always mark a paradigm shift in the way we understand and interpret social, economic and political agendas. The introduction of Marxist ideology in a society is an example.

The theoretical feminist framework is established in the second chapter. It covers core issues like the concept of women as the 'other', the underlying mechanism of patriarchy inherent in society, and radical feminism. An emphasis is further made on Marxist as well as Black/African feminist thought. These two aspects of feminism add a class and race element to the issues raised.

Feminist literary criticism attempts to explain how representations in literary texts are at odds with women's experiences. The 'images of women' school of thought, by analyzing and dissecting literary works explains how the actual lives and experiences of women is lacking. Gynocriticism, on the other hand suggests that women's writing should be the central concern for critical analysis. Feminist film theory is also concerned with the contradictory representations of the actual lives of women versus what is presented in cinema. Psychological and Marxist feminist theory attempts an explanation to the how and why of this disparity.

This research focuses on two genres, a film and a play to show how they are used in the portrayal of men and women within a socialist setting. The film chosen is the 'Father' and the play is "Death and the Maiden'. A central issue in both of them is the issue of sexual abuse and rape. The power relationship between men and women as portrayed in the two media is examined. Using feminist as well as film theories as theoretical tools an attempt is made to examine, the roles and sacrifice of men and women in societies that are going through a transition.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

A study of Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism cannot be seen separately from the Feminist Movement. The basis and impetus for much of the theoretical foundation for Feminist Theory and Criticism, is the Feminist Movement.

In the first part of this paper, I will attempt to give a brief historical overview of organized feminist movement. Over the years, the impact of the movement is quite remarkable. Some of the rights of women which we take for granted now, were once denied to women in every social class, race, ethnicity and religion. The right to vote, to own property and capital, to inherit, to keep money earned, to go to college, to become professionals have all been the domain of men and not of women.

The second part of the paper tries to address the fundamental and varied views of the causes for the oppression of women and the different theories of Feminism that is the outcome of such examination. It is vast and complex, and to cover these theories in depth is beyond the scope of this paper; however, a cursory review is attempted. To add race and class analysis element, two features of Feminist thought have been given emphasis, Black/African and Marxist Feminism.

The perception and actual lives of women have been determined by the various media of communications. Literary Text is one of them. It is a powerful tool which produces gender representations at odds with women's experiences. Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism tries to examine this phenomenon. By deconstructing, examining, patriarchal

writing and its underlying conceptual framework, feminist literary criticism provides enormous and varied theories and critical analysis. A section in Chapter two will examine and highlight some of these theories.

Film, another medium is a powerful instrument which has audiovisual and narrative capabilities. Film's unique feature as a medium is its pleasure giving experience, accessibility to a broad mass, and its conciseness. Its power lies in the profound formation and effect it has on people's attitudes and beliefs. Female representations in film, just like literary texts have in its own right led to theorizing and feminist scholarship. An influential piece written by Mulvey has set the basis for most feminist film theory and criticism. This approach, grounded in Psychoanalysis is reviewed in Chapter two. However, as the editors of *Multiple voices in feminist film criticism* assert '...Psychoanalysis inappropriately imposes the demographically unrepresentative model of the white, middle-class, nuclear family on an array of social and familial arrangements it does not apply' (Carson, Dittmar, Welsch, 1994:8). An alternative, an approach focusing on the socio-economic forces as determinants in the representations of women is also forwarded in this paper. The approach which at its core espouses neo-Marxist ideology, does not necessarily and completely negate the psychoanalytic approach, but can also be used in conjunction with it.

One of the objectives of this paper is to examine the characteristics of these two genres, of film and literary texts. A comparative study is therefore essential. In chapter three, using the theoretical framework highlighted in this paper, the representations of women in these genres, is discussed by analyzing similarities and differences in the play 'Death and the Maiden' and the film 'The father'.

In the 1970's and 80's political movements in Africa and Central America, were heavily influenced by Marxist-Leninist ideology. They were mostly

grass-root movements, which involved the participation of the masses. Specially, the youth was vanguard in these movements.

Socialism, believed that the state must 'wither away' before real freedom from Patriarchy can be achieved. Capitalism and its economic system and the class differentiation it presupposes must be eradicated, because it is strongly believed the fundamental cause of oppression for women to be the system. Margaret Bengsten, a radical leftist feminist, defines women, "women in capitalist system are the group who are responsible for the production of simple use-values in those activities associated with home and family". (Bengsten, 1977:462). She continues,

"The material basis for the inferior status of women is to be found in just this definition of women. In a society in which money determines value, women are a group who work outside the money economy. Their work is not worth money, and it is therefore valueless, therefore, it is not even real work. And women themselves, who do this valueless work, can hardly be expected to be worth as much as men, who work for money." (Bengsten, 1977:462).

So, these political movements championed the equal status of men and women. But in reality was that the case? Were the women, who paid equal sacrifice in the struggle achieving their goal? These are the central issues this research attempts to examine and seek answers for.

## **1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this research is to do a comparative study of a play entitled 'Death and the Maiden' and the film 'The father' from a feminist perspective. They are both political, occurring one right after a dictatorship is deposed and the other during the dictatorship. 'Death and the Maiden' is set in a South American country while 'The father' is set in Ethiopia. The researcher has chosen these two particular works of art

because in both cases, they were related to socialist movements, and despite the geographical space, the roles and sacrifice of the women, in both the drama and the film are essentially the same. This shows how Patriarchy knows no boundaries and transcends culture and national identity. In addition to the above, these two works both raise fundamental issues of personal and social justice. 'Death and the Maiden', although based in a foreign land, very much reflect our situation. Of a situation where a dictatorship is deposed and a new government is in place, a country in transition. The victims, in both works are women, and therefore a central concern of this paper. With this in mind, the researcher states the specific objectives of the study as follows:

- to identify the role of women in political movements in particular socialist movements.
- to investigate whether the female characters became victims of patriarchal hegemony, despite the professed claim of socialist ideology of the equality of men and women.
- to uncover the patriarchy founded in the male characters and the subsequent impact on women.
- to examine the nature of the sacrifice paid by women and how different it is from their male counterparts.
- to examine female representations in the two media.

### **1.3 SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

This study is limited to a play and a film. It is also intended to see the nature of these artistic forms from a feminist perspective.

#### **1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Gender issue is becoming an increasingly dynamic area. Feminist theories, trying to understand and explain the patriarchy phenomena, have multiplied. This study will attempt to explain female roles and sacrifice, particularly in political dramas. The researcher believes this will be a significant addition to the existing literature in this field. Its focus in political dramas in the era of socialism gives it a unique perspective and will add to the knowledge base of Feminist studies.

#### **1.5 METHODOLOGY**

The researcher believes qualitative research method is ideal for this undertaking. The researcher will collect data and information through close readings of the play and critical viewing of the movie. I have held an interview with W/O Teruwork Wakoya, Central Committee Member of the Ethiopian Worker's Party and head of Women's affairs which administered the Ethiopian Women's Association (AESEMA). She has shed some light on the impact of organized women's movement in Ethiopia. The researcher will do a comparative study between a play and a film, two different genres. The frame of reference used is feminism. A parallel model of analysis is used to examine the similarities and differences.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Feminist Movement is a social movement which strives for raising the status of women. Feminist movement has a long and tattered history. It has come a long way in realizing its main objective of raising the status of women. Women had the legal status equivalent of children. They were economically dependent on either their father or husband.

#### **2.2 BRIEF REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCHES AT AAU**

Mekonnen Zegeye's MA thesis on 'Images of women and plot structure in the first four novels of Fikre Markos Desta' (June 2001), classifies the women portrayed in two categories, women who were depicted as 'strong and liberated' and women as victims of the patriarchal system. Mekonnen cites other research papers and thesis for his research. Notable are the Askal Lema's 'Images of Feudal Women Characters in seven novels' (1978 EC) and Yeshe Taddesse's 'Images of Women in Pre-revolution plays' (1978 EC), where in both works, the women were seen as cruel, shallow, and greedy. Yeshe, concludes that even though the plays did not give a genuine representation of the problems of Ethiopian women at the time, the plays tried to show how the culture was detrimental to women.

Mulumebet Zenebe in her Master's thesis entitled 'A comparative Analysis of the Images of Men and Women in the works of some Ethiopian women writers' (1988 E.C) contrasts the above two portrayal of women. She examines the images of women in Western, African and Ethiopian societies. She takes 5 female writers and does a comparative study on how

women are depicted. She throws a positive light on the women characters who try to lead their lives according to their freewill.

Jemanesh Solomon, in her paper 'Images of women in Ethiopian plays' explores different plays and comes to the conclusion that the women are not depicted in their own nature as themselves, but in relation to men. A woman who is submissive was named 'Idiot' while a woman who fights for her rights was labeled 'evil' (1980 EC).

Tigest Defaru, uses Laura Mulvey's canonical work in film theory to analyze two very popular Ethiopian movies. 'Kezkaza Welafen' and 'Semayawi Feres', two male authored films, are used in the psychological framework of Jacques Lacan's Mirror stage and Sigmund Freud's Fetishism theory to show how the male gaze objectifies the female characters. She tries to show how the spectator identifies with the masculine character (2006 GC).

Tigest's analysis is relevant to this research. It has given me an understanding of how she has utilized Mulvey's psychoanalytical feminist film theory. That is however her core and only theoretical framework for her analysis. This paper attempts at other alternative approaches to film analysis.

These theses have been helpful in understanding the multiple depictions of women. The transformative power of novels and plays, and the impact on the formation of perceptions is amply shown in them. So, they have given a good background in understanding the images in various plays and novels. This research differs from the above theses, in two fundamental ways, one it takes a particular time frame, the setting is in a socialist or a revolutionary era and second, there is not enough study using film as a medium to study the images of women and the role of patriarchy. The rapidly increasing popularity of movies in Ethiopia makes film an interesting medium to study. As a powerful medium, film and its

influence in shaping public perceptions is well known. The portrayal of women in film and drama, coupled with the time frame chosen, I believe would provide an interesting and a fresh look and will add to the existing research done in the area.

### **2.3 A BRIEF LOOK INTO THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF FEMINISM**

The first wave in feminist movement was in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The right to vote (suffrage) was its principal concern. Until 1919, women in the US were not allowed to vote. Many European countries gave women the right to vote after World War 1, in repayment for the contribution in the war effort. In France, Charles de Gaul granted women suffrage after the Second World War, for women's involvement in the underground war fighting Hitler!

In Russia and China, women were granted equal rights after the Bolshevick and Cultural revolutions. The focus was in socialism, the state is to provide for childcare, so the women can be both mothers and workers.

The colonized states in Africa & Asia gave women the right to vote after the colonial yoke was lifted after the Second World War. Incidentally, in Ethiopia, women were granted the right to vote and be elected for parliament in 1956. G.C. Some Muslim countries have not yet given their women citizens equal rights, denying them the right to vote, to drive cars, women cannot leave the home without their husband's permission etc..

The 'second wave' in Feminist Movement took off with Simon de Beauvoir's influential book "The Second Sex". Written in 1953, her book from the outset poses a fundamental question. "What is a woman? She questions the status quo and proceeds to outline her argument stating that there is nothing natural about femininity. Femininity is being

considered as the essence of a woman. The dominant sex, the male, dictates the standards and values. Women are the 'Other' or second sex, hence the title of her book. For de Beauvoir, this hierarchy of male domination and women's subordination is not a biological but a social creation. "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman... it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature... which is described as feminine". (de Beauvoir, 1953). That is how she answers the question.

In the 60's there was massive unrest and demonstrations against many of western society's values. Feminist movement during this time became an organized political force. Its theoretical backbone was 'Second Sex'. Since then, there have been vast improvements in the establishment of women's rights in the western world. But also in the third world, although there is much to be done, there have been vital and important struggles to further solidify women's rights.

Feminist theories developed in an attempt to explain the reasons why there is a pervasive gender inequality. The explanation that this inequality is God-given or necessary and that women give birth and men do not is not a satisfactory explanation. Kate Millet, author of *Sexual Politics* and a leading theoretician of the Women's Liberation movement coined the phrase 'Sexual Politics'. She elaborates on what she calls 'Theory of Patriarchy'. For her, the relationship between the sexes is a relationship of dominance and subordination. It is assumed that it is the birthright of men to be the dominant sex and have the higher status in the social hierarchy. So, it is basically a power relationship. This relationship is reinforced by the existing institutions.

"This is because our society, like all other historical civilizations, is a patriarchy. The fact is at once if one recalls that the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political office, and finance – in short, every avenue of power within the society, including the coercive force of the police, is entirely in male hands". (Millet, 1970:447)

This principle of Patriarchy is deeply entrenched in our religion, in our values and ethics, in our political, social and economic institutions. Its ideological basis rests in the categorizations of sex into 'masculine and feminine'. This categorization serves the needs and values of the dominant group and relishes in what it considers desirable such as aggression, intelligence, force in the male and passivity, docility, virtue in female. The roles assigned to women, domestic service, tending infants are limited as compared to the vast area left for men in human achievement, interest and ambition.

Our society is steeped in this categorization, and if we examine on how we raise our children, it gives ample example to what Kate Millet is trying to explain. The way we raise our boys and girls is different. Boys are rewarded for their sportsmanship, for their aggression and ambition, and punished if they show traits of passivity, or softness. On the other hand, our daughters are raised to be passive, subservient and punished if they are aggressive, and ambitious. Although, in these modern times, these practices are declining especially in the urban areas, it is still prevalent.

#### **2.4 ETHIOPIAN FEMINIST MOVEMENT**

The inferior status of women, in Ethiopian society is articulated in Levine's sociological study 'Wax and Gold' (1965). He stated "The peasant woman's lot is as hard as that of a slave. In the wealthier families, where domestic drudgery is relieved by servants, she must still be passive, reserved nonentity. Women are beaten as a matter of course for mistakes in their work or apparent flirtations with other men. As the proverb says: "Women and Donkeys need the stick" (Levine, 1965:79). Although, his main focus in his book, is the Amahra ethnic group, I believe, it represents other parts of the country as well.

Traditional organization of women centered in response to calls from their leaders to assist in the war effort. In the Adwa campaign as well as the Italian occupation in 1935 women assisted as cooks, nurses, even soldiers. Two organizations that played a major role in the Italian resistance movement between 1936 and 1941 were the Ethiopian Women Welfare Association and Ethiopian Women Volunteer Service Association. The leaders of these associations were mostly women from the Royal family.

At the University level, the number of women enrolled at Haile Selassie I university between the years 1955 and 1971 only grew from 2.9 to 7.9 %. (Central Statistical Office, 2005) In spite of the low representations of women, University Women's Club was formed to primarily improve the living conditions of the women at the University. In the politically charged atmosphere of the early 70's few women like Martha Mebratu, Tadelech Kidane Mariam and others were actively participating in the mostly male dominated anti-establishment activities.

After the 1974 revolution, the military government set up Revolutionary Ethiopia Women's Association (REWA). To get a better perspective on the actual achievements of the women's liberation movement in Ethiopia during that period, I interviewed W/O Teruwork Wakeyo, Central Committee Member of the Worker's Party of Ethiopia head of Women's affairs which supervised the Revolutionary Ethiopia Women's Association, in Amharic, AESEMA. Her involvement in Ethiopian women's movement dates back to her college days during Haile Selassie's government. She was very active in various women related activities.

Working from the deplorable and nearly non-existent women's rights platform, AESEMA had monumental hurdles to overcome. AESEMA'S main objective was in the education of women and creating awareness of their rights. One of the major contributing factors to reach this goal was the launching of a national literacy campaign by the government. This

literacy campaign benefitted both men and women. It was so impressive; UNESCO awarded the then Ethiopian government for its effort. The main beneficiaries of this initiative were women. Even in rural Ethiopia, the farmer-husband cannot deny his wife to attend meetings and go to school. They were protected by various institutions established in their areas at the grassroots level. Two of the most exciting moments for these women, as expressed by them to W/O Teruwork were their ability for the first time to sign their names and not use ink on their fingers as signature. Another one was their ability to read the Bible ('Dawit medgem'). In urban areas, it was the ability to recognize the number on the bus they want to board. This empowerment was a source of enormous personal pride, and on a national level a huge achievement.

AESEMA had a national active membership of 5 million women. It was highly structured and organized. There were more than 50 women parliamentarians representing all ethnic groups which participated in the National 'Shengo'.

## **2.5 LIBERAL AND RADICAL FEMINISM**

Liberal Feminists believe that this in-built system of inequality can be changed and freedom can be achieved if the system is altered. However, the radical theorists argue that the political system has to be overthrown. Radical feminists with leftist leanings believe that the state must 'wither away' before real freedom can be achieved.

The logic in radical feminism lies in the argument on the biological differences between men and women. Simply put, if the physical strength of men versus women is to be attributed to childbearing thereby weakening women, then oppression is the likely outcome. To overcome this oppression and avoid the biological differences, technology must be used. By this, it is meant 'artificial reproduction' and contraception. Shulamith Firestone, the leading advocate of this thought believes that

liberation requires the abolition of the whole sex-role system, including marriage, family and childbearing. Firestone claims that “freedom from sexual classification altogether rather than merely and equalization of sex roles”. (Firestone, 1971:463)

If, indeed the basis for the oppression of women is their physical attribute and the weakness that arises from their childbearing, it is soundly refuted by other feminist activists. They convincingly argues that with the advent of technology and modern industry, the need for physical labour becomes increasingly less demanding and the argument of oppression because of men’s physical strength becomes invalid.

Feminism is a complex phenomenon and there is a multitude of various theories attempting to explain the sources and causes of gender inequality. Some of them, not dealt in this paper are, Development Feminism deals with the undercutting of women’s traditional economic base by colonialism (In Africa, Asia etc), Psychoanalytic Feminism explains gender inequality thru analysis of personality structures, phallic oriented ideas.

## **2.6 BLACK/AFRICAN FEMINISM**

A critical turning point to feminist thought was the inclusion of race and class as factors in the determination women’s inferior status.

“Most people in the world are yellow, black, brown, poor, female, non-christian and do not speak English” (Lorde, 1989:1)

Mainstream feminist thought reflected the hardship of white women and specifically middle to high income bracketed ones. This narrowly defined movement was dominated by white feminist thinkers whose main assertion was that there was equality in women’s oppression. But the

crucial point here is the extent of the oppression experienced by different women i.e. it did not include the issue of class, race, religion and sexual orientation. Although a black and a white woman are both victimized by the institutionalized form of sexism, a black woman has to live with the added complexity of class and race issue.

Bell Hooks in her book 'Feminist theory – From Margin to Center' recounts a debate in her classroom where she argued against her white classmates the most important determinant for the origin of domination, is skin color then follows gender.

She stresses her argument by attacking the women's liberation movement by claiming that the movement 'has not only been structured on a narrow platform, it primarily called attention to issues relevant primary to women (mostly white) with class privilege. We need a theory mapping thought and strategy for a mass based movement, theory that would examine our culture from a feminist standpoint rooted in understanding of gender, race and class (Hooks, 1984:xii)

The prevailing feminist theory has therefore, supported and furthered the struggle for the bourgeois women by helping them in their class struggle. The liberal individualism inherent in this ideology has undermined the comprehensive, wide reaching, all encompassing struggle of all women. This particular feminist ideology has been so pervasive and dominant that it has narrowed the possibility of a new and varied theory to mushroom.

The eventual side growth (outgrowth) of this theory was the creation of what is known as radical feminists. Their basic assumption is that all men are the enemies of all women; they went as far as suggesting a separate community and creating a utopian nation. This concentrated anger may have led to personal resistance and change but did not provide the basic understanding of the real feminist movement. The movement has in effect transferred the struggle from the home to the public arena. The liberal

feminist, although did not agree with the extreme position of the radical feminists, were not concerned with the widening of the movement.

“... They were not interested in convincing men or even other women that feminist movement was important for everyone. Narcistically, they focused solely on the primacy of feminism in their lives, universalizing their own experience. Building a mass-based women’s movement was not in their agenda. (Hooks, 1984:35)

Western and African Feminisms differ in a basic contradiction of what a woman means. ‘Western social categories are based on an ideology of biological determinism: the conception that biology provides the rationale for the organization of the social world.’ (Oyewumi, 1997:xiii). Oyewumi, in her book, ‘The Invention of women’, challenges the existing feminist framework that gender categories are ‘universal and timeless, that every society is bound by these categories, that inferior status of women is a given, that the category ‘woman’ is, and has been an antithesis of an opposing category ‘man’. She points out that because of colonialism and the hegemonic power of the West, African studies, have been heavily influenced by western thought. Feminism thought is not an exception, so the social categories ‘man’ and ‘woman’ have been imposed on African feminist scholarship. Her close examination of the Yoruba society in Nigeria, tries to show that in pre colonial Yoruba society, body type, was not the criterion for social standing. The social hierarchy was not gender based. “In no situation in Yoruba society was a male, by virtue of his body-type, inherently superior to female’. Other categories, like seniority was the basis for hierarchy. (Oyewumi, 1997:xiii)

Oyewumi, is convincing in her argument, when we look at Ethiopian history, a number of our leaders have been women, Empress Taitu, Zewditu, Yodit Gudit and the legendary Sheba. Elsewhere in other parts of Africa, we have Ellen Johnson Sirlaf, president of Liberia, Ms Phumzile

Mlamambo-Ngcuka, the Deputy President of South Africa, Ms. Luisa Diogo, Prime Minister of Mozambique.

### **2.6.1 MOTHERHOOD IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT**

To highlight the differing concepts of feminism between African and Western, I have used the issue of motherhood on how it is perceived and lived between the two. An integral part of feminist study and in particular African feminism is the issue of motherhood. It has been a foundation for social relationships, identity and society.

Motherhood is the cornerstone of the family, where nurturing, unconditional love and security are bestowed on the off springs. In the African context, it is even more highlighted. Motherhood is a life-long commitment. It goes way past the birthing, nurturing, but through marriage and having one's own children. It is a constant, lasting relationship.

If we take the Ethiopian as well as the African mother, she is the nurturer, the protector, the lover for life. In Ethiopia children live with their parents until they are married, thereby extending the shared lives, deepening their bond and interdependence. Even after marriage, the mother is ever present when the bride gets pregnant, taking care of her during her pregnancy and child birth. After birth, she nurses the mother for months. So, the responsibility of the mother extends to her adult children. The mother is not just restricted to her own children, but a mother role extends even to neighborhood children, and extended families. In Muslim families, where the husband can marry multiple wives, and there are multiple children from different mothers, the mothers' role is interchangeable, not restricted to her off springs. So, it is no surprise that the concept of motherhood enjoys mythical proportions in Ethiopian as well as other African societies.

“Centering African experiences of motherhood reveals that motherhood is not merely an earthly institution: it is pregestational, presocial, prenatal, postnatal, and lifelong. Precisely because there are no male equivalents of motherly responsibilities, motherhood transcends gender. Fatherhood is not its equivalent” (Oyewumi, 2003)

This compounded role of the mother is unique to the mother and does not include the father. That is why, in Ethiopia for example, motherhood is sacred, glorified and honored. Their death is a heartfelt loss. Because of the lengthy attachment and closeness throughout one’s life, their memories endure.

“From an African perspective, what is most troubling in many feminist theories of feminism is that the mother’s God-like power over the infant is not recognized as such. Instead the mother is seen as trapped by her role as primary caregiver; her god-like power over her child and the authority this gives her within society are not acknowledged. (Oyeronke 2003)

In western societies, the family construct is primarily nuclear. There is the husband, the dominant player and the subordinate wife and the children. This setup is diametrically opposed to the complex African, family/societal arrangement. The mother role is therefore a nuclear motherhood. We do not see the extended care and societal role exhibited in the African mother. The quest for individuality and self reliance which is a revered feature in western societies, denies the western mother the capacity to evolve beyond the restricted role of genderized motherhood.

## **2.7 FEMINISM AND MARXISM**

At the core of Feminism and Marxism thought there is the question of power and inequality. For feminism, the organization of society into two sexes: male and female is the defining element in creating social relations. For Marxism, work is the social process that is the defining element in creating and shaping social relations. “Marxism has been accused of not recognizing the oppression of women as sex. It is concerned with the oppression of women as workers.” (Waters, 1972:4)

The primary concern for Marxism regarding feminism is its focus on work and economic relations and not the issues of reproduction, family and sexuality. Three dominant feminist theories that developed were:

Radical feminism – For them the most important form of oppression was based on patriarchal sex dominance. They argue that the division of labour was primarily based on sex which later evolved to division of class and race. So taking it to its logical conclusion, the elimination of sex oppression would eventually eliminate all other forms of oppressions. This entails establishing women’s separate revolutionary groups and not working with men.

For Marxist feminist, their paramount concern was women as workers and not as women. Class oppression by capitalist patriarchal system should be the focus and not be too subjective. Mary Alice-Waters quotes from the Communist Manifesto “On what foundation is the present family, the bourgeoisie based? On capital, on private gain.... The bourgeois sees in his wife a mere instrument of production. He hears that the instruments of production are to be exploited in common and naturally, can come to no other conclusion that the lot being common, to all will likewise fall to women. (Waters, 1972:6)

Marxism explained the roots of oppression by analyzing the system of production, whereby the bourgeois class owns the means of production, and wealth, while the oppressed proletariat was the producer of the wealth. Within this class analysis, the role and function of the family were defined and the oppression of women analyzed. For Marx, the liberation of women accordingly would be achieved when private property is eliminated and all the social responsibilities like care of children, of the elderly etc would be transferred to the society. Citing, Marx, Mary Alice Waters, states “that relieved of these burdens the masses of women would be able to exercise their full capacities as creative and productive – not just reproductive members of society. Freed from the economic compulsion on which it necessarily rests, the bourgeoisie family would disappear. Human relations would be transferred into free relations of free people.” (Waters, 1972:7)

Marxists criticize feminism as the theory and practice of the bourgeois and works in the interest of the ruling class. Feminism focuses on the sex analysis of society ignores the class divisions amongst women and therefore weakens the position of the proletariat. Feminist analysis is seen as liberal individualistic and not concerned with larger societal issues. The composition of the women’s movement of mostly middle class educated women is seen as opportunistic and narrow.

Feminists on the other hand claim that Marxism is a male defined theory and practice that its core philosophy is within the worldview which is inherently male oriented. Marxism because of its obsession with class analysis ignores the unique experiences of women in society thereby undermining women’s unity. Marxist’s aspiration and goals could be met without altering the inequality of the sexes. Feminists accuse Marxists of belittling the attitudes and feelings of women. In practice, feminists claim the role of women in socialist struggles has not improved at all.

“The basic feminist criticism is that these countries do not make a priority of working to change women’s status relative to men that distinguishes them from non-socialist societies in the way that their pursuit of other goals distinguishes them. Capitalist countries value women in terms of their ‘merit’ by male standards, in socialist countries women seem ‘invisible except in their capacity as ‘workers’.” (Mac Kinnon, 1989: 10)

Socialist feminism attempted to create a synthesis between these two opposing theories. They attempted to incorporate core feminist issues as sexuality, personal life etc into the existing Marxist analysis. In practice, it was not mostly successful, because, they leaned either to the Marxist or feminist viewpoints.

## **2.8 FEMINIST REPRESENTATIONS**

### **2.8.1 FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM**

Feminist Literary Criticism has developed in conjunction with the Feminist movement. Women have been considered inferior and of lesser intellect in all traditions. In a cross section of different eras, cultures, religions, men have played a dominant role in shaping the images of women. To this end, literature and language have provided a powerful and pivotal role in the perception and stereotyping of men and women. This long and deep rooted gender biased literary texts have contributed to the reinforcement of existing conceptions and misconceptions about the sexes. In countries like Ethiopia where the literacy rate is low, the strong oral traditions as opposed to literature play a major role in establishing the perception of women by men and by women themselves. Some examples from Ethiopian oral literature seem to attest this.

ምን ሴት ብታወቅ በወንድ ያልቅ

However a woman knows, the man finishes the job.

ሴት ባለኛ ባመት ወንድ ባለ በዕለት

It takes a woman a year whereas it takes a man a day to do something

ሴት በዛ ጎመን ጠነዛ

Too many women spoil the cabbage

ሴት ያመነ ጉም የዘገነ

Trusting a woman is like trying to scoop the clouds

When we look at feminist literary criticism, the dominant stereotyped images of female fictional characters were set as far back as Aristotle where he declared “The female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities” and St. Aquinas’s belief that woman is an “imperfect man”. There are many examples of this sort in the history of literary criticism.

The ‘images of women’ school of feminist critics focused on how far criticism of a certain literature reconciled with feminist ideology. Josephine Donovan, one of the leading exponents of this school of thought feels that there should be no separation between the aesthetic and the moral aspects of the literary text. Her core belief is summarized as follows:

“Feminist Criticism is rooted in the fundamental a priori intuition that women are seats of consciousness: are selves, not others... Women in Literature written by men are for the most part seen as 'Other', as objects of interest only insofar as they serve or detract from the goals for the male protagonist. Such literature is alien from a female point of view because it denies her essential selfhood....” (Donovan, 1983)

She cites examples like the Odyssey and Faust, major works in the western civilization where she adversely criticizes them for they ‘do not present the inside of a women’s experience’. According to her, they serve one purpose, for the exaltation of the male protagonist. So, these works remain foreign to women readers.

In contrast to the 'images of women' school, Elaine Showalter, advocates 'gynocriticism' in which the concern of the woman as a writer plays a central role. She argues that the images of women school which she calls 'feminist critique' is limiting because its major concern is the male view of women, it is revisionist. It focuses on the images and stereotype of women in literature. As consumers of these literatures, women are exploited and manipulated. This approach (feminist critique) borrows from Marxist theories and aesthetics. But gynocriticism is 'self-contained and experimental'. She elaborates

"As we see in this analysis, one of the problems of the feminist critique is that it is male-oriented. If we study stereotypes of women, the sexism of male critics, and the limited roles women play in literary history, we are not learning what women have felt and experienced, but only what men have thought women should be." (Showalter, 1979)

She suggests the construction of a female framework for the analysis of women's literature in contrast to the male model and theories prevalent. She starts with examining the multitude of literary works by female authors to set a certain pattern and establish a tradition of female writing that could be studied. She is critical of the different theoretical approaches especially Marxist aesthetics and structuralism to understand these complex permutations of the female traditions. She quotes John Stuart Mill who wrote about women's literature it needs to 'emancipate itself from the influences of accepted models, and guide itself by its own impulses. She believes gynocritics is doing exactly that. She believes the task of feminist critics is to 'find a new language, a new way of reading that can integrate our intelligence and our experience, or reason and our suffering, our skepticism and our vision'. (Showalter, 1979)

Elizabeth E Meese disagrees with Showalter, Meese, believes that feminist literary criticism should make use of the theoretical foundations built by thinkers like Foucault and others in challenging the underlying structures of authority in the male dominated critical world. Toril Moi, agrees with Meese, she believes:

“Given the feminist insistence on the dominant and all-pervasive nature of patriarchal power so far in history, feminists have to be pluralists: there is no pure feminist or female space from which we can speak. So basically, she is advocating that because an idea or an approach is male dominated, it should not be discarded. (Toril, 1991)

An important and influential Feminist theorist, Helen Cixous, believes that language plays a crucial role in resisting the ‘phallogentrism’ or intrinsic male dominated culture. Phallogentrism as defined by Toril Moi denotes a system that privileges the phallus as the symbol or source of power. She is heavily influenced by Derrida; therefore her analysis on the concept ‘feminine writing’ or in French ‘écriture féminine’ is mostly psychoanalytical. This form of writing is derived from the mother rather than the father. For Cixous, it is illogical to ignore male writing and theory. But female body and language being different, it allows women a whole new dimension for expression from men.

Feminist Literary Theory and Criticism, as the Feminist movement which it sprang out of is rich with a multitude of criticisms. Myth, Marxist, French Feminist, Psychoanalytic, Postcolonialism/Deconstruction, Black, Lesbian, Third world criticisms are all approaches which have helped in a deeper understanding of texts from a feminist perspective. It is dynamic where increasingly new thoughts and ideas are adding to the field. It has transformed education, publishing and public discourse on feminism.

## **2.8.2 FEMINIST FILM THEORY**

A central concern of feminist film criticism is the issue of representation. “Women as woman” are not represented in cinema. The female point of view is not shown. Although, women have participated since its inception, the roles they have been assigned has been stereotypical, mothers, secretary, whore, bitch, wife etc.... These portrayals are not multi-dimensional and lack a fully complex human form.

The concept of fetishism which is excessive attachment to an object is introduced into this argument by stating that:

“Within a sexist ideology and a male-dominated cinema, woman is presented as what she represents for man... The fetishistic image portrayed relates only to male narcissism. Woman represents not herself, but a process of displacement, the male phallus. It is probably true to say that despite the enormous emphasis placed on woman as spectacle in the cinema, woman as woman is largely absent.”  
(Johnson, 1999:252)

The issue in this line of thought is how and why, when it comes to representation in film, the lives of women get distorted. The social reality of women as seen in their daily life and the representation in cinema lacks congruence. This phenomenon is at the core of what feminist film criticism is trying to understand and explain.

An influential article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” by Laura Mulvey uses psychoanalysis to explain this distortion. Mulvey uses the Freudian notion of scopophilia which means the desire to see. As in most Freudian analysis the desire to see is sexually oriented and it has a voyeuristic and narcissistic element to it. The character or the situation is objectified in essence giving pleasure to the viewer. Narcissism further intensifies the viewing pleasure by enabling the viewer to identify himself with the character.

Analyzing, classical cinema within these frameworks, she further adds that the design of the narrative of the male characters makes them powerful and central, therefore commanding the attention and gaze of the viewer. The male character is the originator of activity and the dramatic action revolves around him. The female on the other hand is weak and passive. She is objectified and is the passive recipient of this desire. (Mulvey, 1999)

Male spectator voyeurism is therefore effected through the viewpoint or eye of the male character who in turn is gazing at the female character. The visual technique, narrative and character are male centered. Mulvey further strengthens her thesis by employing Lacan's theory of ego formation and mirror stage. A child's first awareness of his body and the eventual ego formation is derived from observing its own body in a mirror. This image is idealized. Mulvey draws a parallel to this by comparing it to the spectator's. Anneke Smelik says it as follows:

The way in which the child derives pleasure from the identification with a perfect mirror image and forms its ego ideal on the basis of this idealized image, is analogous to the way in which the film spectator derives narcissistic pleasure from identifying with the perfected image of a human figure on the screen. In both cases, however, during the mirror stage and in cinema, identifications are not a lucid form of self-knowledge or awareness. They are rather based on what Lacan calls 'méconnaissance' (a 'mis-recognition'), that is to say they are blinded by the very narcissistic forces that structure them in the first place. Ego formation is structurally characterized by imaginary functions. And so is cinema. (Smelik, 1999)

Mulvey's psychoanalytic theory uses the castration anxiety in the male to formulate her argument that because the male is threatened by the lack of a penis in woman, and has an underlying fear of castration, and in cinema representation to overcome this fear, the female character is to be found guilty or uses fetishism by a reassuring figure of beauty.

Mulvey's analysis of the male gaze which incorporates these structures like voyeurism, narcissism and fetishism has been emulated and used as a theoretical tool by many feminist critics. Cinema, at its core is patriarchal and if it is to be progressive, it has to accommodate a female point of view.

In the 1980's Mulvey's analysis was critically challenged. According to the opposing views, her analysis did not incorporate the female spectator or female gaze. This omission, failed to acknowledge the fact that women did identify with male point of views and even derived pleasure from it.

### **2.8.3 MARXIST FEMINIST FILM THEORY**

A Marxist perspective of feminist film theory basic philosophy is expressed by Johnston

“All films and all works of art are products: products of an existing system of economic relations, in the final analysis. Film is also an ideological product—the product of bourgeois ideology. The idea that art is universal and thus potentially androgynous is basically an idealist notion: art can only be defined as a discourse within a particular conjuncture—for the purpose of women's cinema, the bourgeois, sexist ideology of male dominated capitalism.” (1993: 28).

### **2.9 SOME FEATURES OF FILM VS LITERARY TEXTS**

Although film presentation gives us a vast amount of detailed information, the viewer cannot possibly absorb all of it. The internal story structure and pace of the film is too fast, and the viewer is preoccupied with what is going to happen in the film to notice them. These details are not emphasized, just presented; therefore, the viewer does not dwell on them.

The only time, a detail is noted is when the camera highlights that detail and thereby brings it into focus and attention of the viewer.

The central difference between film and the literary text is the existence of an abstract idea or thought that is presented in literary text and not in film. A character's mental posture or interior monologue is very difficult or even impossible to be visual. So in reading, a more complete picture of the story is presented. Our imagination, which is triggered by the descriptive narrative of a novel, immensely leads to a pleasurable and a more fulfilling feeling. That is why sometimes film adaptation of a literary texts fall short. It lacks the inherent richness imagined in literary texts.

Furthermore, literary texts allow us to pause and ponder at certain juncture, this allows the reader to reflect on what has been read and more effectively internalize the idea and experience. Film, by its nature does not allow us this luxury.

As opposed to reading literary texts film is a fast medium. Most films are consumed between one to two hours. These characteristics in film, gives it a mass appeal. In addition, film because of its powerful visual attribute is very influential not only on influencing social attitudes and beliefs but has also been instrumental as a propaganda tool to further ideologies. Literary texts do that too, but the speed is much slower, although the impact could be argued that it is more profound.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF 'DEATH AND MAIDEN' AND 'THE FATHER'**

#### **3.1 BRIEF HISTORY OF FILM IN ETHIOPIA**

The first film screening in Ethiopia occurred during Emperor Minelik II reign at the palace. The clergy, who were, very powerful and influential, vehemently opposed to this new medium. They associated cinema to the devil's work. This is attested by, the naming of the first cinema as 'Yeseytan Bet' (the Devil's house). During the Italian occupation in the years between 1936 and 1941, the Italians exploited the power of films in the glorification and promotion of their culture. They built movie houses in Addis Ababa, Dessie, Gondar, Dire Dawa and Jimma. In the early 60's, the first feature film, "Hirut Abatewa Manew" was produced. 'Gumma' followed shortly after. Foreign movies, especially from India, dominated the film scene. With the advent of VCR and the establishment of Ethiopian Television, film viewing was greatly popularized. Original and indigenous film making was, however, missing. Two notable exceptions are 'Behiwot Zuria' and 'Aster'. (Lakew, 2006)

After a long absence, film production by Ethiopians has flourished. Currently, a film, it seems is released every 15 days. The number of the movie going public has consequently exploded.

#### **3.2 DEATH AND THE MAIDEN - SYNOPSIS**

Death and the Maiden is a play written by Ariel Dorfman in 1991. It seems appropriate to give a short synopsis of the story before a discussion from a feminist perspective is attempted.

'Death and the Maiden', is a story taking place where a brutal dictator has been deposed and a new government has taken over. It is a story of three people Gerardo, Paulina and Roberto.

Gerardo, Paulina's husband is a lawyer and has recently been elected to head the much coveted post on the Commission which will investigate human rights violation from the past regime. His wife, Paulina, a rape victim from the past regime, questions her husband why the Commission is only investigating human rights violations ending in death. Why other crimes are not also given priorities. For her, the survivors of the trauma of rape are worse off.

On a rainy night, Gerardo has a flat tire while driving home. He is helped by a person passing by. This person is Dr Roberto Miranda. After helping him fix the tire, the two men separate, and Gerardo extends an invitation to the Doctor to visit him the next Sunday for a drink. However, late that same evening after Gerardo has arrived home and gone to sleep, Dr. Miranda shows up at door of his house, explaining that it he was passing by that night and he figured that Gerardo will not be sleeping but celebrating his newly appointed post and he came to congratulate him.

Careful not to wake his sleeping wife, Gerardo gets his guest a drink and they sit in the living room and get into a discussion about the role of the Commission. As the night progresses, Gerardo convinces Dr Miranda to sleep over in the guest room. Gerardo goes back to his bed. His wife, however, although pretending to be asleep, is awake.

The next morning, we see that Doctor Miranda is tied to a chair in the living room, Paulina's underwear stuffed into his mouth. She has a gun in her hands and she is talking to him... telling him how when she was a young girl she had a friend called Miranda, and how smart she was and that she had a bright future...she speculated that she might have finished her studies and became a doctor, but how she could not have done what

her friend did, because of things that happened to her. She asks him a rhetorical question, you know why, don't you? But obviously, he could not respond since his mouth is stuffed.

Gerardo, who walks in this drama, is shocked and perplexed. He demands to know what Paulina is doing. She explains to him that, this was the man, the doctor that has repeatedly raped her in the interrogation room fifteen years ago. He does not believe her because she had told him she was blindfolded when the rape occurred. She is however, convinced that this was the man, and recognized his voice, the way he smells, even his skin.

This is where the central and challenging issue of the story commences. Paulina has the gun and therefore the power, but she reasons with her skeptical husband that she wants justice and that justice will have to come in the form of a confession from the Doctor. The court is their living room, Paulina the judge, the Doctor the accused, and the husband the witness.

She wants a detailed recount of the rape incident which she intends to tape for her own collection. In a scene where Dr Miranda who is still tied but his mouth is free and Gerardo are alone, they devise a plan for Gerardo to get a detailed account from his wife and that he would relate to the Doctor to which the doctor will repeat to Paulina and he would be set free.

The relationship amongst these three people is complex. Paulina went to jail and suffered the trauma of rape because she would not give up Gerardo's name who was active in the underground movement. Ironically because he was 'saved' he was later appointed to the Investigating Commission. When she was released from captivity, she found him with another woman. Hurt by the betrayal, especially after the high price she paid for concealing his identity, she still forgave him and stayed with him.

But the trauma of rape is powerful and it has transformed her. She has become less sure of herself; she has lost her earlier adventurism and has become a docile, fearful woman confined mostly to her house. By confronting the past, this is the moment when she can set herself free.

### **3.3 THE FATHER – SYNOPSIS**

The father is a 30 minute film shot in 35 mm camera. It is written by Manyazewal Endeshaw and directed by Ermias W/Amlak. It is a film set in Addis Ababa, depicting the era of the Red Terror during the Dergue regime. It reflects the then existing mayhem faced by the youth in the revolutionary period. In this general background, the film's central focus is on a couple's turbulent relationships.

It is a story of an artist, Alazar who is wrongly accused, tortured and imprisoned by the military junta. His crime is being at the wrong place at the wrong time. Yonas, his very close friend whom Alazar has picked as his best man for his wedding is an active member of the EPRP (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party). Members of EPRP, an arch enemy of the state are relentlessly being pursued by the government. Most of them were to be imprisoned and killed. One evening, Yonas was wounded and runs into Alazar's place to take refuge and hide from the military that were in hot pursuit. Alazar readily hides him.

The soldiers barge into the house and demand that he gives up Yonas who they have seen running into the house. A damning evidence was the presence of paint, particularly red paint that was present in the house. Alazar being an artist had an assortment of paints lying around the house. The significance of the red paint was that it was the trademark color of EPRP's propaganda instruments. Slogans, denouncing the military junta were painted in red on walls and public buildings all throughout the

city. This form of defiance infuriated the Dergue the ruling junta, and because of its power of galvanizing the public and building up a resistance movement. So it was top priority for the government to pursue and destroy EPRP members.

Alazar and Yonas were captured and were to be executed by a firing squad. At the critical moment of execution, Major Belachew forces Alazar to execute Yonas. Alazar was forced to make the choice of sparing his own life by executing Yonas. So reluctantly he did. Alazar's life was spared because of the 'bribe' given to the Major. That bribe constituted giving money and providing sexual favor by Alazar's girlfriend.

Seven years later, after being released from prison, we see that Yonas is married to his girlfriend and a father of a six-year old girl, Emmuye. Alazar and his family's life has somewhat achieved normalcy, even though he was still commissioned to paint the portrait of Mengistu, Chairman of the Dergue. He has grudgingly accepted the project, because refusal would mean defiance and entail serious punishment.

This seemingly normalcy was shattered by the return of Tigist, Yonas's sister after a seven year absence Tigist's presence seems to make Alazar upset and disturbed. Her penetrating inquiry of how her brother was killed, where he was buried and most importantly how Alazar was still alive and her brother was killed.

In a chilling scene set at the execution site of her brother, Tigist demands answers to her questions. Alazar's, pain, in re-living the horrific memories of the past, is written all over his face. His guilt is twofold, one for killing his best friend, and secondly for being alive and leading a tormented life because of it.

He confesses completely, the confession process bring much anguish to him. In explaining why his life was spared, he told Tigist that a bribe was

given to the major. The nature of the bribe which has never been clear to him was raised by Tigist. Having sowed the seed of doubt in his mind, he questions his wife what exactly she had to do to guarantee that his life be spared. His wife told him that she had to sleep with the major. He continued to ask her who the father of their daughter is... To that she does not respond.

In the next scene, we see Alazar in a bus disguised as a farmer, leaving town. He had left a farewell letter to his daughter. Then the movie ends.

### **3.4 THE CINEMATIC APPARATUS**

In film, the camera plays an important role. It is the metaphor of the eye. The camera eye which directs the gaze of the spectator selects and focuses on particular things, therefore it plays a controlling role in emphasizing what is deemed important and de-emphasizing what is not.

From her first appearance, Rachel is shown as a spectacle. In the opening scene of the 'Father', Alazar is painting her naked body. The camera is lingering on the upper part of the body and brings into focus her breasts. She is objectified for the active gaze of the spectator; this action constitutes a male gaze and patriarchal one. The spectator is viewing the female body via the eyes of the male character. Woman as image, posed as the object of the spectators gaze.

In the critical confrontation scene between Rachel and Alazar, the director, deliberately uses a particular 'angle of view'. A high angle shot is used to frame Rachel sitting. Alazar is standing, therefore from his perspective she is dwarfed. On the contrary, a long angle shot is employed to frame Alazar from Rachel's perspective as he is towering over her, demanding to know the truth. This shows the role of visual language in film to depict the

dramatic element as well as the dominance of the male, and the submission of the female.

Another instance to illustrate the camera's versatility in creating meaning is the close-up shot of Rahel's face during the rape scene. Her upper body lying on the table of the Major's office, she is being raped from behind. The camera zooms from a medium angle shot to a close up shot of the anguished face of Rahel. Facial expressions are powerful manifestations of feelings and thoughts. It is said that our true feelings inside us can be revealed by our face. In the close up of Rahel's face, we see her tears roll down her face, and a look of defeated resignation to her fate is seen on it. The close-up forces the viewer to be drawn into this emotional scene. It has managed to show us from the general to the particular, thereby deepening our vision. The intended effect, in this scene is to make the viewer sympathetic to Rahel. The viewer's empathy to Rahel vice versa magnifies the hatred and contempt for the Major who is the cause of her anguish.

The depiction of the Major, in its ultimate aura of authority and power is established from the first time we see him on screen. In his military uniform, we see him in Alazar's house searching for Yonas. In the process, he sees the semi-nude portrait of Rahel. The camera does a close up shot of the Major's face, lustfully gazing at the portrait. It is therefore, establishing the background for the impending rape later. Again, the Major, in another scene, is seen in a silhouette form, menacingly walking slowly towards the execution site. It is dark and the only light that is shown is the headlights of a car.

Related to the rape scene, there is no background music. It is deliberate. The director's intention, it seems, is to magnify the dramatic scene without any peripheral distraction and such presentation narrows the focus on the event. So, in effect, the only disturbance to the silence is the sound of the body's movement and Rahel's tormented sobbing.

The major's office is painted red. This is not an accident; it signifies a number of meanings. Red is the official color of communism. The major, who is a communist, and represents the state, has to have his office painted in red. He has also displayed conspicuously Mengistu's photo in the middle of the wall. Red also means danger and sexuality. In the film, the rape scene occurs in the Major's office. In the initial shot of the office, the viewer, will undoubtedly register the overwhelming red color and therefore anticipate the impending danger.

The power of film is in its creation of background attributes, such as sound, color, framing and shots to relay its message. This complex configuration widens as well as deepens the dramatic element and will be effective in creating the intended response from the viewer.

### **3.5 DOUBLE STANDARD**

The issue of gender inequality is evident in the movie, Equality of the sexes, although it can officially be legislated, in the private domain of the household, it cannot be effectively enforced. It is very difficult to legislate private life. The 'Father' minimizes the scale of the national campaign to a single couple at the same time taking into consideration the larger social context they lived in. This context was grounded in the ideological framework of socialism.

The double standard in patriarchal society is evident in this film. This double standard is, while it is socially accepted by the man to have multiple partners and even enjoys bragging rights while a woman is expected to be loyal to one man. A woman who dares to have multiple partners is punished by the society, ostracized and labeled as a whore. This double standard is aptly portrayed in the 'Father'. Despite the fact that Rahel (Alazar's wife) had sex with the Major to save Alazar's life and

she conceived a child, he still left her. What triggered this action is not very clear in the film, that is whether he left her because he knew that she slept with the Major or the child is not his, or he is overwhelmed by the guilt of executing his friend. Nevertheless, the wife is punished by his abandonment. Not only does he leave his wife, he also leaves behind the child he raised. How psychologically damaging for the child he left behind even did not deter him from his action. It even seems to suggest that he rather be executed than his wife has sex to save his life. That is the extent of his anger and shame in what she did.

In the patriarchal framework of what society has defined, his dignity, his manhood has been challenged and he cannot live with that, so he opts to leave. This is not too far removed from the sentiment of most men in patriarchal system. So, in effect, his wife is hurt twice, she had to endure the sexual violence she went through and again, in spite of it all; she was abandoned by her husband. So it was a double blow for her. Her initial portrait was a loving, committed lover, full of life. The framing of the shot, in the early stages of the film, between Alazar and Rahel, showed their equal status in the relationship. However, eventually at the end of the movie, we see Rahel stripped of her romantic aura and reduced to a conniving, secretive, and evil woman.

Another angle from this double standard, in the Ethiopian context, is the well established practice of men having children outside their marriage construct. Children born outside of the marriage bond are socially frowned upon. In most cases, the identity of these children, who had to endure the painful experience of being an outsider and not enjoying the presence of the father, is exposed when the biological parent passes away. But even if the wife is aware, because of her economic dependence and society's pressure, she quietly accepts it. Besides, the obvious damage of an absent father, these children are ostracized from society and labeled 'dikala' or bastards. The social stigma of a 'dikala' does immeasurable damage to the child's personality development.

Furthermore, in the aftermath of the father's death, there is usually a costly and exhausting legal battle over the inheritance between the legitimate children and the illegitimate ones. Even the newly discovered siblings cannot enjoy and bond with their newly found brothers and sisters because of the rivalry. So, here is the irony, the 'dikalas' neglected during the father's lifetime, are legitimized and recognized by the state and the remaining family members when the biological parent dies.

In many instances, the family structure disintegrates when the father dies or leaves. The wife and children are kept in the dark of the financial status as well as the wealth accumulated by the father. The bank account is solely in his name, what he owes or is owed, nobody except him knows. It is selfishness and narcissism that eventually exposes the remaining family to chaos. It's a primary patriarchal notion that the wife and children are mere extensions, part of the accumulated wealth, and not worth sharing the business or knowledge, or be an integral part of the family structure. They are like second class citizens. The father is the decision maker regarding the fate of the family.

This role and practice, inbuilt in the patriarchy system is accepted by society. In a reverse scenario, when a woman, as in the case of Rahel in the film has a child from another man, in spite of the forced nature, she and her child will be punished. Her punishment does not end with the husband abandoning her, but as a single mother whose child is begotten from a rape, she is being shunned from society. This is a different angle on the creation of double standard in a patriarchal society favoring men, a phenomenon not unique to Ethiopia.

### 3.6 SEXUAL ABUSE AND RAPE

A common feature of both the film and the play is the issue of rape. The setting is also similar, both rapes happened during military regimes under the socialist ideology.

Two incidents in the film, The Father, one of the 'rapes' by the Major and the other the body search by the guard indicate one basic extension of the patriarchal system. First of all, a woman, should do the body search to another woman, not a man, so that in itself is a violation, secondly, the manner of how he searched her goes way beyond the mode of acceptable search. His hand caresses and squeezes her breasts, in an obvious sexual violation. In both these sexual abuses, it is not just the individual males who perform it, but it is also the state that allows such abuses to continue. The major objectifies Rahel not only because she is a woman, but also because she is a 'wife of an anarchist'.

'Do you know what we do with the wife of anarchists?' He asks a question which he answers himself. "We embrace them". Embrace is of course a mockery, because it entails affection. His sick sense of humor equates affection and rape.

This state sanctioned display of power, gives the Major and the guard an unlimited power to do whatever they want with women like Rahel, even to execute them. Similarly, in the play, Death and the Maiden, the Doctor, who represents the state, violates Miranda repeatedly.

My curiosity was partly morbid, partly scientific...How much can this woman take? More than the other one? How is her sex? Does her sex dry up when you put the current through her?... She is entirely under your power, you can carry out all your fantasies, you can do what you want with her. (Dorfman, 1981: 59)

It is dual show of power by virtue of their sex as well as their particular position as representatives of the state. This magnifies the helplessness of the two women, they cannot go anywhere to lodge a complaint, because the state, which is the highest power, has given the men unlimited authority. It is this objectification, this 'otherness' that defines the patriarchal system. This system, even cuts across class boundary, the guard whose job is simply to search and secure the building, and presumably a lower class than Rahel, sexually abuses her by simple fact of his maleness.

Male sexuality is a function of power. The hierarchy established in the social relations between the males and females, of a dominant/subordinate and superior/inferior is the basis for male sexuality. The rationale for the rape, for Dr. Miranda and Major Belachew, it seems, is the absolute access and power over the women. It was not a question of desire, but of control. Doing whatever they wants to do with them.

Sexual abuse which constitutes sexual transgression be it in the form of, fondling or rape is the manifestation of the inbuilt male dominance established in the patriarchal world we live in. It is basically a male demand to what he wants. Sexual abuse is, therefore, not just limited to sexual intercourse. McKinnon puts it succinctly as follows:

“... What is called sexuality is the dynamic of control by which male dominance in forms that range from the intimate to the institutional, from a look to a rape – eroticizes and this defines man and woman, gender identity and sexual pleasure. It is also that which maintains and defines male supremacy as a political system. (Mac Kinnon, 1989:137).

Even in everyday language use, we see the inherent inclination to use words with violent connotations metaphorically to describe sex. Here is an example from the play 'Death and the Maiden'

Gerardo: "...How many times did you **screw** her?"

The verb screw means to twist, to rotate. It means to bolt something down so that it does not move. But that is not what is meant here, it is referring to the sexual intercourse. In its sexual context, it is invariably used by men. Why the use of such violent word to describe male sexuality? According to Mac Kinnon,

‘Male sexuality is apparently activated by violence against women and expresses itself in violence against women to a significant extent. If violence is seen as occupying the most fully achieved end of a dehumanizing continuum on which objectification occupies the least express end, then, hierarchy, the dynamic of the continuum - is currently essential for male sexuality to experience itself.’ (Mac Kinnon, 1989:145)

This power over women is, therefore, the arousal factor in male. In verbal discourse, the above expression is widely used. To rape, we need to dehumanize; we need to see the female as the ‘other’.

In ‘Death and the Maiden’, the play shows the patriarchal dismissal and distrust of rape victims. Repeatedly, the two male characters privately refer to Pualina as crazy, sick. Even the husband tends to bond with another male who he just met in minimizing the impact and how important the incident is for Paulina. The irony is that here is a man (the Doctor) who has raped Gerardo’s wife, and fully cognizant that his wife went through that traumatic event to protect him, yet he finds solidarity with the accused.

The trauma of rape and its long lasting effects are well documented. Herman writes:

“Traumatized people suffer damage to the basic structures of the self. They lose their trust in themselves, in other people

and in God. Their self-esteem is assaulted by experiences of humiliation, guilt and helplessness. Their capacity for intimacy is compromised by intense and contradictory feelings of need and fear. The identity they have formed prior to the trauma is irrevocably destroyed” (Herman, 1992: 56)

The rape has transformed her from a self-assured, strong woman, to what she is now, docile, fearful and introverted. The rape has ‘domesticated’ her. Deep down, does Gerardo want that? Does he represent the universal man? It further strengthens what feminist thinkers like Kate Millet believe to be a male dominated Patriarchal society and the inherent gender bias.

It is a sad testament of male power over women. Can we as men, understand what it really means to be violated? Paulina, at one time, is tempted to challenge this. She proposes to her husband that she uses a broom to make Miranda feel what she felt, the feeling of violation and ultimate humiliation. But she decided against it.

What makes this play challenging in this regard is that Gerardo is portrayed as a nice guy; he obviously loves his wife and is committed to her. He has protected her and provided her with a safe haven, consoling her when she feels fearful and alienated. But, yet, when for a fleeting moment she feels powerful and could reverse the trauma, when she embarks on the healing path, he seems to be reluctant and distrustful to her. Not only has he betrayed her by being with another woman when she was in jail, but by creating bondage, the two male characters, he has marginalized her, betraying her again. This is a classic example of what in feminist movement has been called, the female being the ‘Other’. She is an outsider; she is only wanted in her traditional role as defined by the male dominated social formula.

Likewise, the main male character in the Father, film, Alazar, is portrayed as a pleasant guy, loving to his wife and daughter. He is reserved in a

pleasant way. He does not want to join the struggle because he does not believe in violence. The fact that he is an artist, paints him to be an idealist, a sensitive person who would understand issues. Yet, in the decisive moment, when he discovers that his wife has been raped and paternal identity of the daughter is in question, his reaction was defeatist and his form of retaliation was to leave. In both cases, be it a high level commissioner or a liberal artist, they could not go against their nature. The patriarchal mind set is too strong to defy.

One point of divergence in the two stories is that the male character in the play 'Death and the Maiden', actually never leaves his wife. While Alazar, in the film, 'The Father', leaves his wife in much the same scenario; their wives being raped.

A second point of divergence is that, in the play, Paulina's rape was never a hidden fact from him, on the contrary, she incessantly reminded him of it. For Alazar, in 'The Father', the rape was a sudden and unexpected surprise. Rahel has kept it a secret until she was confronted by her husband near the end of the film. Here, one could speculate if the two different cultures play a role in these instances. Are the Ethiopian males less tolerant or to put in other words more 'macho', more deeply entrenched in the patriarchy than their counterparts in other countries?

Are Ethiopian women more inclined to hide their rape than their counterparts in other parts of the world? Assuming that the social stigma attached to rape victims being the same all over the world, the very fact that the legal recourse for a rape victim in Ethiopia is very slim, I would be inclined to believe that Ethiopian women who have been sexually abused would be more secretive about it.

Paulina, feels powerful because even for a short time she has reversed the hierarchy. In the symbolic gesture where she stuffs her underwear in her rapist mouth, I understand it to be, a declaration of the power of her

femininity. She could have used socks or any other piece of clothing, but she preferred to use her underwear, her most intimate piece of clothing which covers her womanhood. The doctor is symbolically castrated because of this and of course because of his powerlessness. She has turned the table.

### **3.7 FEMALE SACRIFICE IN THE FILM AND THE PLAY**

In both the film and the play, the two central female characters, opt to endure a dehumanizing subjugation to rape and in the case of Paulina of torture too. The price of choosing the alternative would result in dire consequences. In the case of Rahel, she allowed the Major to rape her to save her lover's life. Paulina, in the play, refused to give up the name of her lover to the interrogators thereby forfeiting the chance of being released from jail. Both women sacrificed their honor and dignity to rescue their respective lovers from certain death. Their sacrifice goes beyond just honor and dignity, especially in Paulina's case, the systematic rape and torture has left a lasting psychological scar.

Female sacrifice as seen in these two fictional works may seem extreme examples, but it is an extension of the patriarchal categorization of what is 'masculine' and what is 'feminine'. For example, in most family settings, the wife sacrifices her own aspirations for the sake of maintaining the household as well as raising the children. This falls in what is expected from a woman, i.e. a feminine role. The husband on the other hand, with these responsibilities taken care of, he can focus on building his career and fulfilling his ambitions. This is a masculine role expected from a man. These sacrifice and role of women is an inherent and deeply entrenched feature of patriarchy.

### **3.8 PORTRAYAL OF MEN AND WOMEN IN THE FILM AND PLAY**

Tigist, Yonas's sister, openly flirts with Alazar and makes a direct pass at him. This is an unusual reversal of the male/female role. It contradicts the double standard where the man is usually the initiator and the woman is the passive receptor. So, we see in Tigist, a strong-willed assertive woman who goes after what she wants. This is indeed positive. However, her assertiveness is undermined by the fact that she is interested in a man who is already in love with another woman (Rahel). And she is fully cognizant of that fact. So we are at the end, given a mixed portrayal of Tigist, one of a self-confident, assertive woman and the other of a predator trying to steal somebody else's lover.

Seven years later, after her return from America, we see her coming out of the Hilton swimming pool, to meet Alazar. Apparently, she is financially secure and confident. She is studying journalism and it seems a bright future awaits her. So again, positive portrayal of a woman, a woman that can be a role model for others.

But again, the film casts shadow over her, in the subsequent scene, we see Tigist, in a very contrived scene put the seed of doubt in Alazar's unsuspecting mind.

Tigist: How come you were spared?

Alazar: One of the officers was willing to take a bribe.

Tigist: What kind? There are many kinds of bribes, even sex can be used as a bribe.

The fact that his wife could have used sex to guarantee the safety of his life has never occurred in Alazar's mind. It is Tigist who has put the possibility of sex as bribe in his mind. Again, the positive portrayal of Tigist earlier is weakened. She can be seen as being the evil person

instrumental in destroying Alazar's marriage, which actually occurs later in the film, although all she did is point out the possibilities.

Although, the setting in both the film and the play is during the struggle in their respective countries, all three women, except Paulina, and that is marginally, are not portrayed as active members of the underground movement. They are not revolutionaries, and do not play any significant role in the resistance. The men on the other hand, played central roles in the movement. In 'The Father', Yonas was portrayed as a brave, young man willing to risk his life for the cause he believed in. Alazar, who initially was reluctant to join the struggle because of his aversion to violence, in the end leaves town. It is understood that he is going to the North, to the countryside, to join the resistance, where they are headquartered. The men are principled and brave, and therefore heroic. In the play, Gerardo is portrayed as a man of reason, a tolerant, principled, and fair person. He is chosen by the Prime Minister to head the Commission which will investigate the atrocities of the past. So, he is a reconciler, an important man.

In very similar context, the two rapists in the film and the play do have interesting dissimilarities. Dr. Miranda is a man of medicine, dedicated his life to healing people. He is a respectful citizen. Major Belachew, on the other hand, is a military man, a loyal cadre, probably not highly educated, and it seems will do anything for the military junta he represents. He is also an opportunist. When we examine the circumstances of the rapes we see that Dr. Miranda is actually scarier than Major Belachew. A rape is a rape, but there is a certain level of cruelty with Dr. Miranda. He not only raped Miranda but tortured her, repeatedly. He raped a woman tied, blindfolded to a bed, completely helpless. And she was not the only one. Considering that he is a doctor, a life saver, someone to be trusted, his cruelty is hard to conceive. Major Belachew on the other hand, a soldier, he raped as part of a deal to spare Alazar's life.

In light of the above, the trauma of rape for Rahel and Paulina, cannot be at the same level. Paulina, had endured a systematic torture and rape over a long period of time. The scar that is left from her ordeal cannot heal that easily, if it heals at all. She has become sexually frigid, scared of new people, she never leaves the house; she has succumbed to cooking Gerardo's meal, supporting his career and waiting for him. She has given up on life. The rape has killed her ambitions and crushed her. Her reduction to a full time obedient, traditional wife at least has fulfilled the patriarchal ideal of a subservient woman.

Gerardo: Yes, look at you...you still a prisoner, you stayed there behind within them, locked in that basement. For 15 years you have done nothing with your life. Not a thing. Isn't it time you..."

Paulina: Forget? You are asking me to forget?

Rahel's trauma on the other hand is not fully examined in the film. As central as her role is in the movie, her screen time is limited. She does not command the spectator's gaze. We don't know what she felt, since her feelings are not fully explored. The impact of the rape on her is not addressed. At the critical time when Alazar asks her what else she did to secure his life, she replies "Yes, I did it". It is a bit perplexing. She did not even use the word rape. 'I did it', implies volunteering.

Paulina's portrayal overall is however, empowering. She is in the process of healing. She is the one holding the gun; she is the one who has gagged the prisoner. She is demanding a confession, and justice. She commands the stage, the reader identifies and sympathies with her. She has condemned patriarchy and at least on this stage she has won the battle. This process of confronting her rapist, confronting her horrific past, is the path to her healing, to being fully human, to mix with people again, to listen to music, to love again.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **CONCLUSION**

Much feminist theorizing has developed in an attempt to understand the roots of gender inequality. Core concepts like 'women as the other', theory of patriarchy, radical feminist thought have deepened our understanding for underlying causes for the inferior status of women in society. Marxism, with its developed class analysis has provided feminist theory an added dimension. These theories have mostly originated from Anglo-American feminist theoreticians. Black/African feminist thought has challenged the existing mainstream feminist theories by questioning the lack of racial, historical and cultural specificity in the analysis.

The focus of Feminist Literary Criticism has evolved through the years. The initial concern with how women were portrayed in literature especially in the analysis of works by male and female writers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was prevalent. The female characters' in this literary works primary concern was the choice of marriage partners which was a determinant factor in her ultimate social position and therefore her happiness. Thus, most feminist literary criticism exposed the mechanisms of patriarchy. Later, the focus of feminist criticism evolved by drawing into its arsenal, the different approaches, Marxism, structuralism, linguistics and so on, to understand and evaluate literary works. The combative mood changed from attacking male versions of the world to exploring the female version and outlook of the world.

As far as female representations are concerned African women writing still has a long way to go. The output is still inadequate. The most realistic presentation of the women's case and profound change in the perceptions of women can be done by the contribution by women themselves. The woman's voice, the woman's perspective has to be heard.

Is the Principle of the Patriarchy, the cornerstone of Western Feminist thought applicable to the male-female relationship in the African context? The western feminist construct, does not seem to take into consideration the socio-historical reality of the African life. As shown earlier, the women of Africa had a revered place in their community, and the role of motherhood is empowerment in itself. Blind acceptance of the western feminist concept, without adjusting to the specific cultural and historical context could be misleading and even dangerous.

By the very nature of the two genres, the treatment of the two stories, develop certain features. The 'Death and the Maiden' is able to give us a much deeper and well developed profiles of the characters. Their thoughts, actions and the descriptive scenes enabled us to develop multi-layered and profound understanding of the story. And the fact that we can re-read part or the whole play again and again strengthens our understanding and insight into it.

The 'Father', on the other hand, is done in a concise manner, squeezing a longer period of time into compressed framework. Because of the film's limitations, certain issues were not explored enough. For example Rahel's feelings about the rape was not touched. The father was a particularly short film; it is only 30 minutes, as opposed to the standard feature film of one to two hours. Film because of its inability to go beyond into the thoughts of the characters, it mostly remains a visual presentation. It is a however, a powerful medium. With the proliferation of film in the Ethiopian market, it is important that women film makers participate in it. They should be encouraged to express their views and use this powerful medium to portray the reality and also possibly to create women role models which are so absent and needed now.

'Death and the Maiden' and 'The father', are multi dimensional. Throughout my reading and viewing of this play and film, I cannot help

but visualize it from Ethiopia's perspective. Although, the focus of this research narrowed the research because it analyzed it from a feminist perspective, a wider issue still persists. What happens to the silent victims of Red and White Terror? Will they ever get justice? Does a nation ignore past injustices, not to disturb the still water? Don't we need reconciliations and forgiveness if not forgetting something like what South Africa did? How about the cases that did not end up in fatalities, meaning the victims of rape, a question, Paulina asks her husband.

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